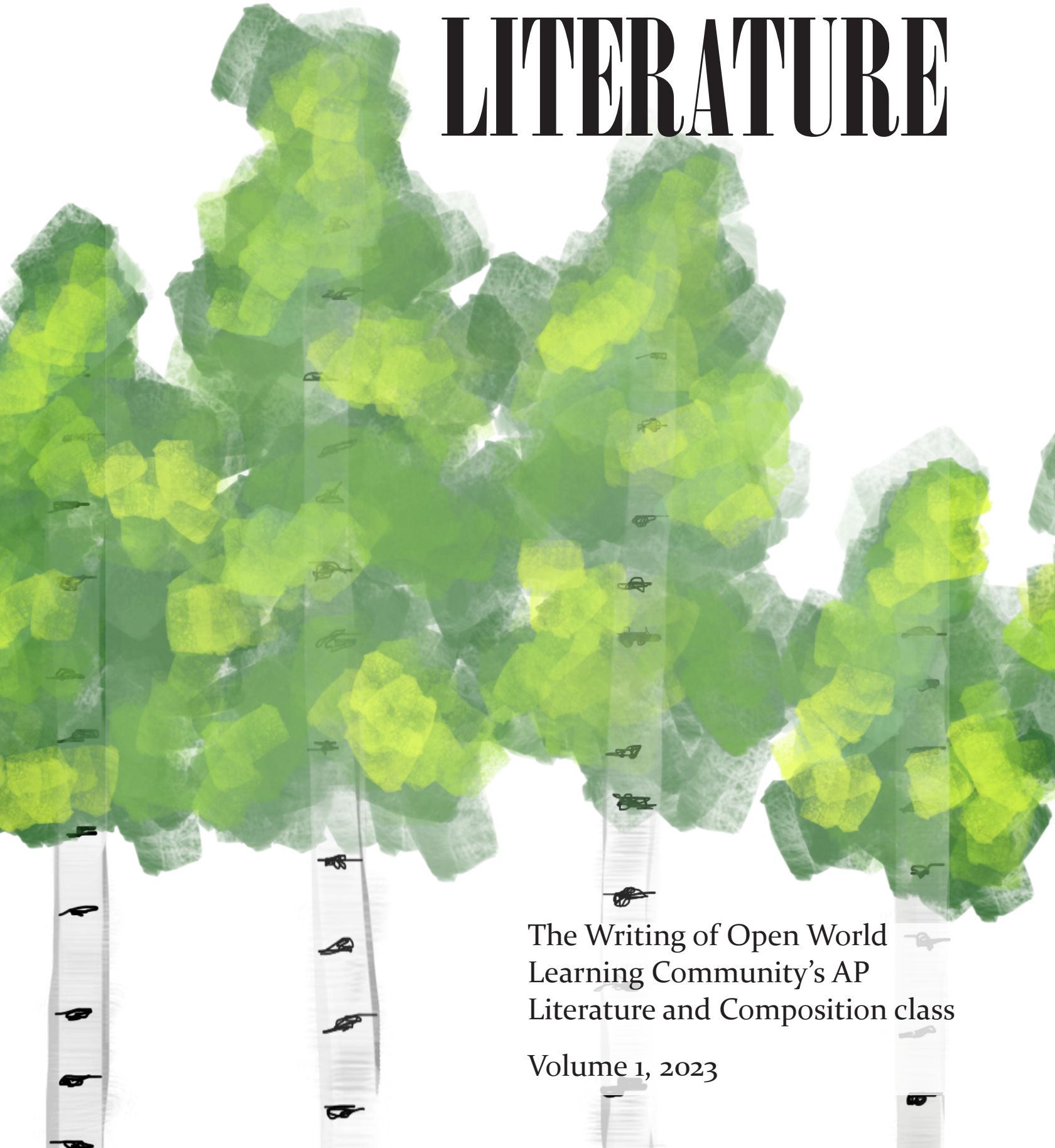
OPEN WORLD LITERATURE



The Writing of Open World Learning Community's AP Literature and Composition class

Volume 1, 2023

FOREWORD

The AP Literature and Composition class demands a lot from students. The looming prospect of the exam in May drives us to spend a great deal of time analyzing dense passages of literature and poetry, then developing the skills necessary to write coherent on demand essays to the tune of three essays in two hours. The essay section is preceded by a one-hour multiple choice section that I have described as the MCA on steroids. There is a lot of emphasis on close reading as a skill, a lot of discussion, and much emphasis on using outlines to make efficient use of one's writing time.

That isn't to say, however, that we are always frowning in the AP classroom. One of my favorite ways to help students think about and analyze elements like style and narrative voice is to have them experiment with it themselves. This publication is a showcase of the writing of AP students as they explored their own talents in poetry and prose. I have always enjoyed reading the work they produce, and this publication is my attempt to share this joy with the wider community.

In the fall we focused on the concept of narrative voice. Narrative voice is a focus on not what is said, but how it is said. To experiment with narrative voice, one must be very intentional about how the writing sounds. They must "listen" carefully to find the rhythms of the language. We focused on two very famous pieces – The Odyssey and The Tell Tale Heart – as well as one lesser-known piece of writing called The Kiss of the Fur Queen. Students selected one of the three and wrote about themselves in that specific voice.

In the winter we spent an entire quarter studying poetry, from old English sonnets to contemporary American fare. After we finished writing on demand essays about poems, we worked to create a portfolio of original poetry inspired by the works we read. The poetry read aloud sessions were one of the highlights of the year for me.

Once the exam was done, we dove into a creative writing unit that highlighted authors that play with style in interesting ways. Students experimented with point of view, inner monologue, and perspective to create an original piece of short fiction.

Overall, this publication provides a cross section of student skill and creativity that I get to witness on a regular basis. Hopefully other readers will enjoy the pieces as much as I did. Special thanks to Violet Wright, who devoted her interim to gathering all this writing, locating artwork, and putting it all together using design software. Her editing and design talents made it possible for me to share this with the OWL community.

Leo Bickelhaupt

Open World Learning Community

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Imitative Writing Pieces 1

Baked Potatoes *Henry Plaman* 2
An Epic Quest *Jack Cheatham* 3
Pressing the Q Button *Brodie Olmstead* 4
Tardy Pass *Ted Dobbins* 5
Get Up *Bea Lloyd* 5
Cursed River *Sofia Maldonado* 7
Swim Meet Stress *Avery Erb* 8
Unstoppable *Daniel Meekin* 8
How Efficient *Aidan Jewell* 9
Just Keep Going *Maria Imholte* 10
Suddenly, Saturday *Violet Wright* 11
Time Crunch *Maya Reynolds* 12
Villainous Deadlines *Willa Campion* 13
COVID Consequences *Gabby Her* 14
Solver of Equations *Tess Campion* 14
Schoology Tells All *Oliver Plaman* 15
News Bulletin *Olivia Bilek* 16

Poetry

Am I Really Smart? *Elena Davis* 18
One Twenty *Alex Cowles* 19
"Faith" *Eli Berg* 20
This Is Just To Say *Antonio Rosell* 20
This Is Just To Say *Endale Witt* 21
Bo Bo *Nora Crosby* 22
Jack's Bean Stock *Ian St Louis* 23
Daylight Savings *Isaac Stender* 24

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From Jeffrey, With Love *Joe Gorton* 25
Twitterdotcom *Ian Rosenberg-Scholl* 26
Roe v. Wade *Anja Gundale* 27
Intact Ladder *Krista Hines* 28
Because 60% Of Americans Live Paycheck to Paycheck *Mintesinot Sturm* 29
Dude to Little Dude *Leo Mousseaux* 30
Things I've Seen In The School Bathrooms *Elizabeth Hallanger* 31
Shakespeare Wrote This *Hazel Carroll* 32

Style Writing Pieces

Summer Dreams *Mira Iwaszek* 34
Like A Ninja *Orathai Hang* 36
Certain Types of Email *Cooper Peterson Antin* 37
Worth Writing About *Ian Brooks* 38
The Wire *Calvin Defoster* 39
The Big Hill *Abe Baer-Benson* 41
Teen Wolf *Gideon Zupfer* 42
Broken Truth *Elle Galbreath* 43
Yard Bird Life *Owen Vaughan-Fier* 43
Invisibility *Chanida Xiong* 44
Real Estate Dreams *Nick Streng* 45
Abominable Snowman *Annika Lofgren* 47
Dream Job *Mae Heeringa* 48
Xinara *Hazel Wright* 49

IMITATIVE WRITING PIECES

Baked Potatoes

Henry Plaman

"Potatoes," Dave said in a grave voice. Leaning over his ruthless wooden cutting board in his bustling kitchen, he gripped his unforgiving stone cold knife. This would be the last time Dave made baked potatoes.

"Potatoes!" he cried. He couldn't find them, even though he had just purchased some the other day, they were lost in the wasteland that is his pantry. Ever since he promised his wife he would make baked potatoes for dinner, on pain of hunger and mild annoyance, unthinkable for a potato eating person in the year of our lord 2022.

"Potatoes," he muttered, "Potatoes why?!" He surprised himself with the desperation in his voice. Even his potatoes must know how much he needs to find them. He looked once more to the seemingly infinite pantry for his elusive ingredient.

"Potatoes, where are you, potatoes?!?" he screamed, his voice giving out as he dug through mountains of seemingly endless boxes of La Croix. He had cooked baked potatoes before, just a month earlier, and had no issues with finding potatoes then; why now?

"Potatoes..." he uttered, as he saw the crumpled empty potato bag in the corner of the pantry. Dave shuddered. He understood the gravity of the situation. How could he complete the baked potatoes before 6:00 PM without the key ingredient?

"Potatoes," he questioned, "Where are you sold?" he quizzed as he searched his phone for local grocery stores open at the ungodly hour of 5:00 PM. He navigated the glaring electronic map, desperately searching for the seemingly nonexistent item.

"Potatoes?!" he screamed, "Have I found you?!" He had found a store located just across the perilous street which sold the critical and delicious ingredient. This gave him reinvigorated hope for completing the upcoming feast.

"Potatoes, I'd like to buy potatoes!" shouted Dave as he ran through the entrance of the small corner store, demanding the cashier give him potatoes. The cashier would give Dave his potatoes after he paid the labeled price, but Dave would not be so easily deterred, for he had a savings account set aside just for this purpose.

"Ten dollars please. For the potatoes," said the cashier. Dave threw twenty at him, for he needed his potatoes posthaste. With his potatoes in hand and returning to his vast kitchen, he only had one thought in mind: will my wife like these potatoes?



An Epic Quest
Jack Cheatham

While young Jack sat in his hallowed chamber, a voice called to complete an important task. King Jereb remarked on the excess of filth compiling in the garbage, and disposing of it would bring peace to the kitchen. Jack walked down the royal hall of Jereb's palace, reaching the trash. The weight and smell were that of a dying god, with bits of uneaten meals, rotten avocados, and eggshells layered the bag, a drip leaking out the bottom. As Jack grabbed the bag, his fingers grazed the overflowing grime and the feeling of slime on his hands gave him goosebumps, as if a cyclops used him as a tissue. His stomach felt weak, but his will to prevail was stronger. He held his nose and lifted the bag, ready for the task ahead.

He walked across the kitchen, making careful steps not to slip on the smooth tile. Upon opening the palace gate, the royal hound, Ozzy, darted past, flying toward a distant squirrel. The dark grip of the west seeped into the sky, blurring Jack's vision as he walked along the cement path. He reached the outskirts of the realm, crossing past the fence and into the unknown reaches of the alley. First, he must cross the Stone Stairs of Tripping, a place where many have fallen. Men had a saying about this forsaken land, "When crossing the stairs hold tight to the wall, or on your butt, you'll surely fall." Young Jack was careless, however, and didn't follow this advice, instead hurrying down the steps to rush the process. He went down the first step, the second, and the third. All seemed well when suddenly, Jack felt his foot fly from under him. In a desperate attempt to balance, Jack grabbed the railing and held tight. His eyes shut as he concentrated on not dropping the bag, as falling here would mean inevitable failure. Though the fall was strong, Jack was stronger and slowly regained his composure, finishing the perilous trek.

Upon leaving the stairs, Jack saw his final destination in the distance, the black can highlighted beneath the warm glow of the streetlight. He approached it carefully, raising the lid and peeking inside at the pile of filth. The odor slithered like a snake from the top, entering Jack's nostrils and clouding his thoughts. He began to feel faint, as if a powerful curse had been set upon him. Before collapsing, he remembered the glory he would earn from the task's completion and regained consciousness. With the power of Zeus, Jack performed a mighty heave, tossing the garbage over his shoulder and sending the waste into the abyss of the can. He closed the lid, abruptly stopping the odor as if it were a snake that had retreated to its cage, waiting to strike its next victim.

A sense of triumph filled Jack, and he could feel the gods praising his name. He held his head high, walking back, a sense of newfound pride filling him like a bowl of warm stew. He returned to the palace as the Champion of Garbage, completing what was thought to be an impossible task. As he approached King Jereb, he spoke of his journey, his challenges, and the eventual disposal of the waste. Jereb remarked indifferently with a mere "Thanks, Jack. Now can you empty the dishwasher?" Although Jereb may not have cared, Jack did, and the journey that taking out the garbage brought him on is one he will never forget.

Pressing the Q Button
Brodie Olmstead

"Just five more," he cried towards the screen of his computer. The mountain dragon emerging from its cave, along with it coming all five enemies, highlighted in red. He pushed down once again into his mouse, hearing it creak, urging Darius forward towards the five.

"Just five more." He knew that this was the turning point that his team had needed all game. He knew that this would make the fourth dragon of the game for the enemy, making this the most important one yet. An inting Garen top lane had allowed him to come this far and he could feel it in his nerves. He could feel the excitement building, ready to 1v9 the game. He knew that this was a fight he could win.

And so he pushed on, despite his team being completely and utterly dead. Brodie's desk had begun to crack and crumble under the pressure of his fists repeatedly crashing down throughout the entire day.

"Just four more," he said, and as he became in range of the enemy Brand, he started pressing the Q button on his keyboard faster than he ever had before. He knew that all it would take was five. Five simple stacks of bleed and one ultimate to finish the fight and win the game for his team. He knew that no matter how much his Sion fed, he was capable enough to utilize his charge and finish the game.

There was more than just fifteen LP to be lost if this didn't go his way. He suddenly remembered all of the messages that he had sent his team in the twenty-five minutes of game that had gone by. He knew full well that losing the game would mean multiple reports and likely a ban, resulting in the end of Brodie's league career.

"Just three more." Brodie auto attacked the Gragas and watched his cleaver smack the man's belly. Immediately, Brodie queued his W ability to animation cancel the ultimate. He drew a short breath as the hit landed.

"Just two more." It was so close and Brodie knew. He could taste the double hit, knowing that all it would take was one pull of his axe. He quickly pressed the worn-down E key and watched as his character threw out his metal, hooking two members of the enemy team. This was it. His account was saved.

As he landed the final two stacks of bleed, Brodie instantly threw out his ultimate ability and wiped out the entire team. He heaved a sigh of relief and could feel his muscles ease as his team took the dragon and won the game.



Tardy Pass
Ted Dobbins

You might say I am late to this class, but I - a very timely and scheduled Brodie Olmstead - am certainly not! How could someone so cool and calculated be late. You might blame my tardiness on the fact that I left home twenty minutes late, but this only quickened my journey to school. Leaving twenty minutes late means that I have beaten the rush.

This morning I woke up at 7:30 sharp, proceeded to prepare myself - such a simple task and an appropriate time, for I knew I would be ready to leave by 8:00 - and ate a quick breakfast. At 7:55, I had finished breakfast five minutes before I planned to leave - and a very timely man like myself knew with the snowy roads it would take roughly 25 minutes to get to school - so Ihad time to spare. I opened TikTok, knowing that I had time for approximately 12 TikToks and still make it to school by 8:29 - Ha! How would someone lazy and untimely know this! - and so I began watching them. I left the house by 8:03, and to my dismay, the traffic was worse than my very experienced observations of snowy roads.

So here I am, standing in the middle of AP Lit at 8:36, hearing slanderous claims of tardiness - after I had just explained my perfect reasons for why I am not late - but sure, claim I watched more than 12 TikToks when clearly I would be extremely late if that were the case. But do you hear that dinging? Getting louder? Coming from my phone? Louder - louder - louder! The TikTok notification coming from my phone tucked away in my pocket, ringing without reaction from the class, can they not hear it? TikTok beckoning me ? Notifications ringing louder - louder - LOUDER. “Fine!” I yell. “You want satisfaction! You want proof! Here! I admit it!” I tear out my beating phone. “Here! Here!” as I showed my phone, and how I had watched not 12 TikToks, but 27!

Get Up
Bea Lloyd

“Get up.” The reoccurring tone ringing through her ears. It’s deafening. The shrill tone of the alarm that plays in repetition so loudly that it seeps into her brain. The sound isn’t the worst part, it's the realization that comes with the sound. Being awakened from the nothingness of sleep, it’s so quiet there.

“Get up.” You would assume after 95 consecutive days of the sound playing at the same time each day she would get used to it, and maybe it would even become more effective at getting her out of bed.

“Get up.” The sound continues to play. The loud ringing, that she initially tells herself she’s dreaming. Her senses begin to adjust, as she realizes the ringing is not just in her head, but sounding throughout her room. It echoes loudly telling her it’s a new day she must face, and it’s time to get up. She does this everyday, the redundant ringing fades in and out, getting louder as she begins to gain consciousness. She knows the dreadful sound won't stop until she musters the strength to grab the phone from her side and turn it off.

With her eyes still shut she has just enough awareness to move her hand from up from beneath the warmth of the blankets, to find the phone and turn the sound off. The sense of panic leaves her head as the room goes quiet. For a second it's almost serene. Maybe she could go back to sleep for just a few minutes?

“Get up.” The voice in her head echoes the sound telling her it’s time. Although her eyes remain shut, the room remains silent, and the curtains remain closed, she knows the meaning of the sound and what it brings with it. She can’t avoid the alarm taunting her, “Get up.” A new day.

Even before she opens her eyes she dreads it. Everyday is so achingly repetitive. The sound that mocks her everyday at the same time, acting as a reminder of what is ahead. She can't remember the last time she felt excited to wake up. Although she anticipates the sound as she falls asleep every night, it never fails to jolt her every morning. How peaceful it would be if all she could do was sleep. She refuses to open her eyes, as an attempt at protesting at the obligations that lies ahead.

"Get up." The sound repeats. The insufferable cycle of ringing blares in her ears for a second time. Every replay is less kind than the last. Snatching the phone from her bedside she turns off the sound once again. The persistence in what the alarm is screaming at her to do forces her eyes open. She stares drowsily up at her ceiling, as her consciousness begins to awaken with the rest of her body. She glances at the alarm clock across from her, the only source of dim light in the room. The stiff red numbers reading "7:04". She grabs her phone from her bedside and brings it close to her face. She's aware of what she's doing, it's been part of her routine, every morning, for 95 days. She knows how agonizing the bright light will be, but it will get the job done. She taps the screen and suddenly the painfully bright white light of her phone screen illuminates her eyes and all of the darkness that once surrounded the room. Instinctually shutting her eyes at the startling light, she opens them once more to check the time. 7:05am.

The bright light makes it impossible to feel at peace, inducing a headache immediately. She hopes it will be enough to keep her awake. She has time, she could stand to shut her eyes for just a moment. The thought of rising from her bed from under the soft warmth of the blankets weighing her down seems impossible. It's so cold, but so warm right here. She knows she doesn't have to leave for an hour, but at the pace she's moving now, and the pace she moves every morning, she knows that's not enough time to doze off even for just a second.

"Get up." She jolts awake to the sound. Immediately sitting up, she reads the clock, 7:42. How does this happen every time? She doesn't even remember falling asleep again but somehow every day she does, and somehow the same dreadful cycle repeats itself. She springs out of bed, and the warmth from her blankets dissipates and is replaced by the cold air hitting her skin. Goosebumps appear as she rushes to find a sweatshirt to keep the cold air out. Still groggy, she grabs one off the floor. The same sweatshirt she's worn all week. She cleaned her room just a few days ago but somehow it's managed to fall right back into the same state it was in. She stumbles over the pile of clothes on her floor, she doesn't remember how they got there, but she ignores it and sits down anyway. She reaches for the tube of concealer to cover the dark circles under her eyes, ensuring that only she knows how tired she is.

"Get up!" Her dad yells from downstairs, it's 7:50 now. She sits in the chair and stares at herself in the mirror, not quite awake enough to even recognize herself. Every morning is the same cycle. It's only been 95 days, but she can't remember how she would wake up before this cycle began. 181 days left of this cycle, hearing that dreaded sound, every morning, at 7:00am, 181 more times, telling her to "Get up."



Riley Sheffield

Cursed River
Sofia Maldonado

She had walked this path many times before, braving the cold and ice. She shone brighter than the snow, and stood taller than the trees. She had her hound on a centaur leather leash, as big as a horse and mighty as an ogre. Each time she walked it was as if the gods placed the clouds in just the right places and melted the icy paths before her. The branches reached up to greet her, their scratchy branches combed through her hair. She did not mind, it was how they greeted her. The adventurous Sofia decided to walk a new path that day. The path began to narrow and the trees began to tower over Sofia. The brave Sofia continued on, she did not care that the sun had begun to set. The sky had gone from blue to a light orange, it would be another hour before it was dark.

She valiantly crossed many streams and finally came upon a river. The water was as blue as the sky when the sun was at its highest point. The water looked calm but Sofia had been warned of such rivers, they could not be trusted. She turned around to head back home but the path she had come on had disappeared and she faced a dense and dark forest. She remembered a story she'd heard about a forest filled with angry giants and no way out. The story had mentioned that in the middle of the forest a blue river ran through. It looked calm and shallow but it was the most dangerous river known to man. Sofia thought that surely this was not that forest, and she would just go back the way she had come. She tried going through the trees but the trees were so tightly packed like the braids her mother would give her when she was a child.

Her dog had begun sniffing around the river and was going to drink from the shimmering water. Sofia pulled her hound back with all her might, the story she had heard has also mentioned the river was made of poison. She looked across the river, she tried looking into the trees on the other side but they were packed together even tighter. The sky had filled with clouds, it was gray all around. Sofia began walking down the river, she was determined to find a way out. The trees were black and as the wind hit the trees, they sounded like bones clanging against each other.

Sofia had traveled all over, to islands with angry ogres and had faced cruel gods jealous of her bravery. She was born a goddess but had been cursed with mortality by vengeful gods. Sofia knew that the gods who favored her outnumbered those who did not. She had never had to ask them for help. She looked down the river, it narrowed and went into the dense forest. She knew alone she could not defeat what lived in the forest. She called on the gods, she promised them a sacrifice if they helped her out of the forest. She looked around hoping for a path or a weapon but didn't see anything. It had gotten dark, so she decided to sit against a tree.

She woke up to the rising sun, its orange face meeting hers. She realized it was shining through a path, a path home. She got up and this time she towered over all the trees. She was mighty and walked to the path knowing it was the way back home. The gods had proved their loyalty to her, she started thinking of the goat she would have to sacrifice. Her thoughts were interrupted by the leash in her hand, it was loose. Her hound was gone.



Swim Meet Stress
Avery Erb

"I got this," she says to herself as she steps onto the block. "20 milliseconds. That's it." She shakes her hands out and cracks her neck. "Take your mark..." a loud voice is present, but she can barely hear. Her cap is pulling on her hair and her goggles feel loose. What if she's not ready for this? She has to try. "Stand please," the voice says. They can see her shaking. They're going to disqualify her. She almost wishes they would. Spare her the embarrassment of being last. Her coach always told her that it's not about being first, but about making yourself proud. She doesn't understand that they go hand in hand. "Why would I be proud if I'm not first?"

"Take your mark" the voice says again. Here we go. There and back. Faster than you've ever done it. Beat the girl next to you...and all the others. She hears a loud buzzer that sends her into the pool. Her hands hit the water. It's cold. Her elbows. Head. Shoulders. Waist. Legs. She's in. She kicks her legs as hard as she can, counting in her head. 1...2...3... go faster 4...5...6... kick harder 7...8...9 shes beating you. This can't happen. She swings herself around and does her turn. She's getting tired now. Losing count. 12...13...14? She's almost there. Don't breathe. She already used her last breath. Coach will be mad if she takes another one. Control. Slamming herself into the wall, hearing it crunch. First place.

Unstoppable
Daniel Meekin

Time! I still have so much time. The assignment is easy, but you say it is long. Years have sharpened my skills. Essays upon essays have been written in shorter periods; I still have time. You take me for a fool; fools waste time, I have used mine. Hearken! and learn of the things I have done–see how much time is left.

I cannot say when the piece was assigned, but once it was I began research; hours online scrolling through sources: videos on videos and tweets upon tweets. Knowledge there was much and I pored through all of it. The things I've learned. Time well spent. I now know the use of a sticker press, how to cut an onion, and how to survive the desert. I have the knowledge and when it is required I will be prepared.

Now you say I have wasted my time. You say that these aren't important uses of an extension. But knowing what I know, how could I not be able to write an essay so quickly? I sat down the other day. Time slowed as I opened Docs. I was never more productive than in the days before this deadline. A new paper and a title. Oh, to see the speeds at which I wrote this title. Ha!--could one as fast as me be low on time? And then, I began to get hungry. It's impossible to write on an empty stomach, any person with knowledge of the world could tell you this; so to the kitchen, I retired.

The food was finished in record time, onions were cut unlike I had done before; with the things I learned from research, I was unstoppable. However! I began to feel sheepish. My mind began to slow, thoughts began to dull, and my eyes begged for a detour to the dark. One knows that a meal makes you tired, and writing on a brain that longs for sleep is the least effective thing. I wasted no time though, while in bed I performed more

research: video essays for inspiration, song recommendations for writing, the history of the Donkey Kong series; all important information trinkets I took to rest.

I awoke late the next day; time was not a problem, it was more important to be well-rested for the work ahead. One cannot launch themselves into a day of work though, they must ease into it. I woke my brain: puzzle solving, reflex training, and hand exercises; video games would help wake a worker's brain. However, waking a brain takes a long time, so no work was achieved that day.

The next day I did nothing, my depression made it hard to get out of bed, so I just kinda sat around all day, it wasn't fun.

The final day required rest, what had I to fear, I still had hours before the assignment was due, the equivalent of infinite time to a writer of my caliber. However, as I sat down to rest, I was sent to my feet by a sound. A ringing sounded from somewhere below me. I ignored it at first, but the noise was unbearable, why would no one turn it off? It became louder and faster, and even louder! Wouldn't someone turn off that irritable racket?! I could take it no more!--I stood running into the other room, but it only followed me–louder than ever! I stopped and searched the floor, desperate to end the insufferable noise! I looked in my pockets and heard the ring grow louder as I pulled out my phone.

I looked at the screen:

11:55 pm

Alarm

"Essay due @11:59"

How Efficient

Aidan Jewell

YES! I am behind, very behind but I most certainly am not procrastinating in fact I've never been getting more done - not ignoring my work - not denying to give time to them. In fact, I was just checking my emails, they were emails from teachers!

So how, may I ask you, am I procrastinating? Now listen, I will tell you just why my work is not in. Now you may fancy me a procrastinator BUT procrastinators get nothing done. They finish nothing as they laze around all day. And I have gotten so much done.

Oh, how you would eat your words if you had seen me spending hours of time putting together a lego set with precision, drive, and determination. Oh and don't you know I finished the overwatch battle pass and with what fervor I worked on it? Checking each and every day for new challenges, waiting for them to be refreshed, waiting till the middle of the night to complete them for the next day, how efficient! Now I ask you, would a procrastinator be so cunning to concoct such a plan?

Just Keep Going
Maria Imholte

"Just. Keep. Going," the girl whispers to herself. She stares blankly at the empty modules homework she's supposed to have completed by the morning, and kicks herself for putting it off so long. Slouched over at her desk with nothing but her mountain of a to do list and a headache keeping her company, with textbooks scattered everywhere and no motivation remaining, the student talks herself through homework that she knows she has hours left of. Why, why, why did she put this off so long? How, how, HOW did this get put off so long? With only slivers of patience remaining, she keeps reminding herself of how great an empty to do list would be.

"Just. Keep. Going," she says as she completes the first module of 7 she has to do. The progress continues ever so slowly, but she persists. She had finished all other work from her other classes already, with no escapes or distractions from the hundreds of questions left unanswered. Finishing modules 18, 19 and 20... time continues to pass. Motivation continues to deplete.

"Just. Keep. Going." She didn't even know how she had put off this immense amount of work for so long, being that it is important work to complete and only benefits her with many challenges she may face with the rest of the challenging course and on the looming AP test in May. She continues to make slow progress through the long list of missing questions.

When the clock finally hits 11PM, with no end in sight, the girl's eyelids begin to get heavier and heavier. Everyone else in her house is asleep, and she only has the light from her lamp and her stress and guilt surrounding her missing and incomplete work keeps her awake. She knows that in 5 hours, she will kick herself for forcing herself to stay up this late, but wonders if maybe she won't mind the tiredness as much if the work is finally finished. This question is what keeps her awake and working. What would it be like if she had this work completed? How nice would that be? What a relief would it be if this was finally all over with? Nothing else to put off?

"Just. Keep. Going." She feels like she is working while practically asleep now, with the overtiredness really setting in. She then wishes she had set better times for it at an earlier time, when she could've gotten it done earlier and prevented all of the stress that followed. With much progress since the beginning of the night, she feels proud of all the work she has done so far, and gets a sudden burst of motivation to finish off the job in one night. Just as she's beginning to feel very confident in her abilities to finally complete all of her work in one night, she wakes up. It then sets in that she had fallen asleep. She hadn't even realized it. She hadn't gotten them done. She fell asleep after 9PM, but being that these modules were heavily on her mind when she fell asleep, her brain conducted a dream that totally set her off. After she wakes up, she realizes that not only is she extremely exhausted from the long night, but on top of that she is also disappointed because she didn't even turn anything in after all.

Suddenly, Saturday
Violet Wright

Yes, fine, I was not being proactive -- but I assure you, swear to you -- I was not procrastinating working on the long essay question for APUSH. I have had a plan for the realization of this onerous task since it was assigned -- my strategy is well defined and written in pen, at least, if not in stone.

How long ago was this assigned? Why do you ask? Is it not more important, the method I have devised for the timely completion - the swift execution and dispatch - of this exalted piece of writing? Hark to my tale, and I will tell you of my brilliance - nay, my genius!

It is due in large part to the upcoming winter break, that this essay has been assigned to do at home -- in the comforts of a bedroom, full of distractions, alas! -- rather than in the period of time devoted in the school day to the advanced study of United States history. Thus, this endeavor must be completed at home, on my own time. As if the students of the class do not have enough else to do! And because of my other commitments, my other obligations, you will come to understand that this strategy and method was and is, indeed, the best method to complete this essay, and that I am in no way procrastinating the writing of it.

The essay isn't due for another three days, which is plenty of time! There are far more assignments due within the week that are a higher priority than an essay due on Monday - Monday! Plenty far away to deal with later. I will write it on Saturday morning, when I have time to devote to undisturbed essay writing without worry or concern about the precarious state of other requirements.

Besides, on top of that I have a lab report to write for APES, and if I work on that today there won't be enough time to finish the LEQ uninterrupted. I have homework to do and an instrument to practice tonight as well!

You see? You fancy I am procrastinating, but I am merely delaying the work for a time that will be better suited to achieving my goals. You cannot denounce such a thing when you have done it yourself, time and again - you cannot criticize me, censure me so without saying the same of yourself.

What's that? It's Saturday? You must be jesting -- I do not find the idea entertaining or funny! You cannot say something like that without... proof...



Time Crunch
Maya Reynolds

"Stay awake, just stay awake," the girl pleaded desperately. It was 11:49 PM on Sunday night, and Maya had yet to open her math homework. It had been sitting there all day, untouched, while she spent her Sunday reading and painting. Now, she realized, would be the perfect time to begin: ten minutes before it was due. It was pitch-black outside, her lamp glowed with mellow orange-gold light. The covered windows and the gentle hum of her fan muffled the sound of wind whistling through frost-covered trees. Maya sat cross-legged on her bed, with her iPad open in front of her.

She practically had to pry open her eyes with her own fingers as she peered at the tiny words on the screen. It was a review. Not too difficult, but time consuming. And she only had... ten—no—nine minutes.

"Just stay awake," she repeated. She desperately wanted to get this done, but her motivation was quickly deteriorating . The exhaustion was seeping into her bones and reducing her comprehension ability. She began the first problem, it was 11:54. She realized, with dismay, that there was not even the slightest possibility that she would turn this in on time. By the twenty-fifth question it would be well into 12:00. What should it matter if she slept now,

she reasoned, if the assignment would be late either way?

She squinted at the mildly distressing quadratic functions beaming into her face. Questions one-through-ten were all confusing, eleven through twenty-three would take two long, and the last two were word problems, which was quite self explanatory. If she slept then, she got six hours of sleep, and would have twenty-four late math problems tomorrow. If she slept later, she'd still have twenty-four late math problems, but only about five hours of sleep. Yet, she had promised herself to get this done by tonight, and she had accomplished almost nothing.

Question number five demanded her undivided attention, and then she moved on to questions six, seven, and eight. It was now 11:58. She was suddenly aware of the soothing glow of her lamp, the gentle white noise emitted by her fan, the softness of her pillow... Stay awake.

She wanted to stay awake, yet the amount of work that remained to be done was too much to bear. She paused, and shut the iPad. She reached out and turned out the lamp with a light tap, cloaking the room in darkness. She snuggled herself up in her sheets, closing her eyes. But she still couldn't shake an uncomfortable, unsatisfied feeling. She promised herself she would finish this, she promised herself she would have one less homework assignment tomorrow. Still, even if she forced herself awake and pushed herself through the assignment, it would still be late.

"Stay awake anyway," she urged herself. She pulled a warm, fuzzy blanket from the floor onto her bed and tugged it over her shoulders; reached over and tapped the lamp on again. Resolved. She wasn't going to make that deadline, but she was going to finish this tonight.



Beatrice Cosgrove

Villainous Deadlines
Willa Campion

Stop! Late—very late—am I once again, but, have you, I am not a procrastinator. I may have a Machiavellian mind but surely I am not a procrastinator—how dare you suggest I may be! I simply just prefer to take my time. It is a conscious choice you see, I am choosing to wait until the last minute not because I have put an assignment off but because this is when I get my best work done. Silly, silly, are you to for a second believe that I would ever turn something in late—I am not a visceral person, I am a realist and you see I keep myself down to earth. Maybe, on occasion, there have been times when I have quite possibly missed a deadline, but aren't deadlines theoretical anyways? I work, I work, I work, until I have completed something and never leave a project unfinished, unless, of course I have something more important to do or perhaps, on occasion of course, just simply because something else has piqued my interest—again, this is very rare.

So let me set the scene for you. It was a Saturday afternoon—oh wait—; maybe it was Monday but that is of no matter. I don't know how it came about my senses to decide to wait until the last minute to finish my AP Literature narrative voice piece but I soon realized it was a brilliant plan. The writing piece was supposed to imitate the narrative style of Edgar Allen Poe's A Tell Tale Heart. What a silly little story! And oh my the circumlocution of it. Get to the point already—what is the author on about? It isn't even long—at least very lengthy—enough to be considered a real story! But completing the Lit homework wasn't the worry. In fact, I love reading and writing. I think it was the deadline perhaps. Yes!—it was that silly deadline! Gray, gloomy, hanging over my head, resembling a storm cloud. Whenever I thought about it my blood ran cold and so—with much thought of course—I developed a plan. Ha!—See? I was more than organized. Would a procrastinator have been this methodized you ask?

You should have been there to see how precisely I followed my plan. The shrewdness of it! Every day that week I carefully opened my iPad and accessed the application Schoology. With not a stray hair out of place I stared intently at the AP Lit homepage until slowly—very, very slowly, I tapped the summative assessments folder. To feel the intensity. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, I practiced, but inspiration never fell upon me so still I waited, counting the minutes go by. Oh but it was Friday already—how could it be I didn't, simply didn't, at all know. A sigh of exasperation filled the room—you could feel the nervousness. But you see I was not nervous! Not one bit. I envisioned The Deadline and I heard the clock ticking—and no! It was becoming dark but—yes it was ok. All was ok because I would have it written and submitted before the morning would come and—

Oh but you have caught me!—it is eleven fifty eight and I must submit my piece in one minute but now I will be late and how could this have ever happened and I am not a procrastinator and I—villain! Villain you are for turning me into a procrastinator, *you*!



Joseph Sierra

COVID Consequences

Gabby Her

I can't! As I push through the 20 missing assignments I have missed due to COVID. My skin is on fire with every move I make feels like my bones are glass about to shatter, *I can't!* I tell myself as every assignment I finish I feel as if my brain is on fire.

I can't! Every assignment that I do I know it's bringing me closer to the end, but I know I still have a long way to go. Getting COVID during one of my most crucial points in my school year was hard. I had gotten it during winter break going back to school after quarter 2 was over, pushing through, trying to pass all my junior year classes. *I can't!*

The sky has fallen, now I'm 6 years old under my darked out sheets crying because I can't do long division. 20, 15, 10, I have 10 more assignments left *I can't!* I tell myself over and over again because I know I can do it. My mouth feels like a desert. 10,9,8,7. 7 more assignments. *I can't!* I go to bed. *I can't.* Waking up with the sun beaming on me it's like the spotlights on me, I have to get this done I can't! 6,5,4,3,2. One more assignment I can't, my wrists are in agonizing pain, I'm dying of thirst. I look at the clock. It's 4 A.M. I haven't eaten all day, I hear *gurrgle gurrgle* as my stomach roars louder than a male lion himself. *I can't, I can't* *submit* done. I'm done. *I can't.*

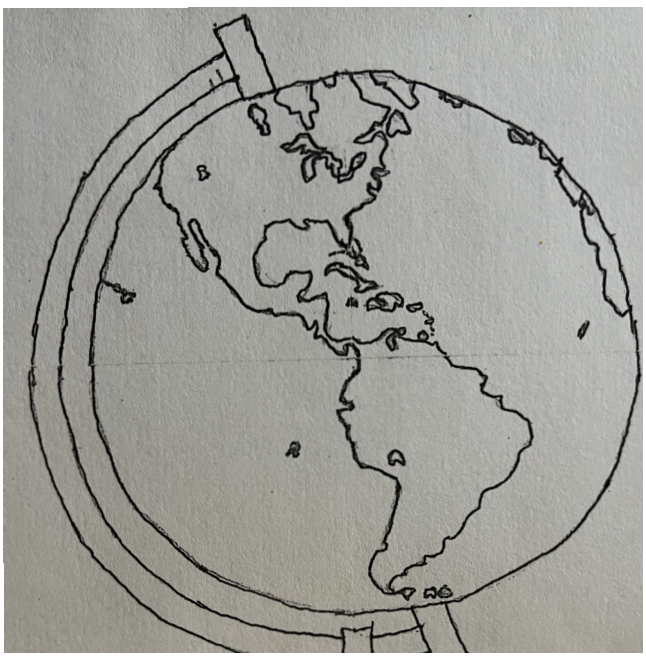
Solver of Equations

Tess Campion

Young twilight with her dark black fingers streaked the sky, and Tess, the solver of all equations, rose too and pulled from the caverns of her backpack the dark blue folder of problems. With the sheet in front of her, and surrounded by the long beams of light from the great almighty IKEA lamp, she started her work. Attacking the first problem as a predator may attack their prey, she dove in with pencil in hand, as many had done before her.

She derives the limit and moves onto the next sea of numbers scrambled on the page. She looks at the seemingly impossible equation and she feels the gods lead her pencil across the paper and the numbers fall into place. Now, young twilight grasps the whole sky and the great wood door behind her is thrown open and Willa, the creator of all problems, enters.

Stolen from her train of thought, Tess whips her head around as fast as a rocket may traverse the universe, though the stars, towards the moon, and sees Willa towering above her. She speaks and Tess rises, on to tackle the next great epic of the day, dinner.



Schoology Tells All

Oliver Plaman

FALSE! This essay can't have been turned in late; that would mean that I had procrastinated on my work; this is ludicrous! I may not have utilized my time the most effectively, but turning in late work? Unbelievable! Please allow me to explain how diligently and effectively I work, and how late work couldn't possibly have been produced in this instance.

It all began last week, when, while I sat in class - diligently paying attention, mind you - I realized that an essay must be written by Friday. I took time to mark a slot in my calendar to complete the aforementioned essay, and I ran ideas through my head on how this assignment could be completed. I promptly went on with the rest of my day, but my mind continually returned to the assignment. Days passed, and the due date approached with great speed. Now, as I realized that time was quickly running out, I decided that I shan't procrastinate on this project.

This is very important. You think that I am a procrastinator. This is quite impossible, as procrastinators often put very little effort into their projects. But look over this magnificent essay. This essay isn't - couldn't - be the product of a procrastinator. If only you could have witnessed the intensity of my work ethic - my unceasing will to complete this project - then you would surely be convinced of the absurdity of your claims. I had completed the prerequisite assignments, I had reviewed the material with my very own brother, and I had spent hours crafting the essay itself. Now, does that sound like the product of a procrastinator? I think not! Now, here is quite a damning piece of evidence against your incessant claims, during the first quarter, there had been a fishbowl in this very class. I worked tirelessly to complete the reading, craft the notes and participate in the discussion. My additions to the fishbowl were quite informative, and I continued to participate in the conversation (even if I had met the requirements). After the fishbowl was graded, I even submitted the e-work option. Now you might say that this was a fluke - but you'd be wrong. I had submitted multiple e-work options to many classes last quarter, now does that sound like the bare minimum?

As I reflect upon my academic history, I can barely contain my feelings of triumph. The idea that I have spent so much time and effort on all of these projects, fills me with a sense of pride. I can barely hold back the temptation to laugh at these accusations, for they are so blatantly false and so misguided that it's hard not to just ignore them altogether.

ven though the assignment may have been turned in "past due" in a literal sense, this hardly makes it late. Think of all of the great accomplishments mankind has achieved throughout its existence. How many of these were constrained by due dates? It's preposterous to think that this essay shouldn't be held to a similar standard! The idea of this product being considered as late is ridiculous.

But the red hue of the late lettering refuses to escape my mind. It consumes my senses and refuses to leave. A ringing in my ears can be heard, and the word "late" is unceasingly and inexplicably playing. A sense of panic begins to take over my senses, I clench my teeth, hoping my teacher can't hear the noises, but they are too loud! The teacher doesn't believe me! They think me a fool! They're mocking my insistence with their nods and fake smiles! I can't keep the truth back any longer! The red fills my vision, and I can scarcely see anything but the dark hue.

"You've caught me!" I screamed, "This is the work of a procrastinator! I admit it! The evidence is in Schoology! There you will find the truth!"

News Bulletin
Olivia Bilek

The overhead lights of the large concert venue slowly dim, and the sight of an ocean of fans crammed shoulder to shoulder fades to black. A voice is heard from the loud speakers. “Now introducing… the band's bassist, Olivia and the band!” Thousands of fans erupt with excitement and applause. The audience begins chanting her name. “Olivia! Olivia! Olivia…”

“Olivia?” The teacher, Mr. Bickelhaupt calls out, attendance is being taken. “Here.” she says, shaken back to reality. She sits in the large Journalism class, the sound of keyboards clicking and light conversation can be heard throughout the classroom. She begins to write an article on her favorite bassist, Cliff Burton of Metallica. One of the many musicians to die tragically young.

…Rock music booms throughout the venue, heavy guitar riffs and snare drums fill the room. The music fades. Applause and cheers from the crowd fill the silence. The band is ready to start a new song, Olivia begins to play the opening of their cover of Anesthesia (Pulling Teeth) by Metallica. The unique sound of the bass guitar fills the room. Da na na da na na na da na na na da na na na…

“Hey,” Johnny, one of her table mates says, pulling her out of her daydream and pausing the music coming from her headphones. “Could you proofread this? He asks, breaking the silence of the table. “I want to make sure everything makes sense.” He continued. “Sure.” She agrees, grabbing his iPad and proofreading his article, an article on the American poet Sylvia Plath. She hits play on her music and the sound of chatter and typing fades as the music begins to play.

…The sound of rain hitting the windshield of the 1957 Bel Air is heard from the driver's seat. The date is February 3 1959. Music by Dion and The Belmonts fills the car. The sound of static begins to come from the car radio. “We interrupt this program for a special news bulletin. Three young singers who soared to the heights of show business on the current rock’n’roll craze were killed today in the crash of a life plane in an Iowa snow flurry. The singers were identified as Richie Valens, 17, Buddy Holly, 22, and J.P. Richardson, known professionally as The Big Bopper…” the voice from the radio becomes a blur as she tries to process the news. “The pilot, Roger Peterson of Clear Lake, Iowa was also killed…” Olivia pulls the car over immediately and looks over to her friend in shock. “I can’t believe it! We just saw them last night at the Surf Ballroom,” her friend River says with a shocked look on his face. After several long moments of silence, apart from the crackling of the now untuned radio, the two friends get back on the road and drive into the wet Iowa snow. Suddenly a 1955 Porsche Spyder driven by a young man by the name of Jim speeds down the road. BANG!…

Abruptly, Olivia is shaken awake by Mr. Bickelhaupt. “Time for lunch.” He says. She rubs her eyes, packs up her things and leaves for lunch. On her way to lunch she thinks to herself “I gotta stop writing newspaper articles about people who die.”

POETRY

Am I Really Smart?

Elena Davis

Today, I take the test to find out if I'm smart
It will truly mean every bit of my heart
I stand excitedly outside the exam room
This is the opposite of walking into my doom

Only two portions of the test left
My brain is really starting to feel possessed
I hope my dream college will accept me
If they don't, I have a lot of money

My pencil placed as I finish with little timing
The person next to me is literally crying
I exit, nervous, but with a smile on my face
My heart beating at an abnormal pace

Only five weeks to wait
This event is really so great
I hope I'm gonna fit the part
I will then know if I really am smart

One Twenty

Alex Cowles

When it was last 1:20
Megan said to me
Do your prep a plenty
Cuz a fishbowl there will be
You can have some time free
But don't forget your work
Or when it's next 1:20
You will look like a dork

Now again it's 1:20
And she says pull out your notes
But we know we don't have any
just a lump in all our throats
We all made a plea
but it was my stick she did take
When it was 1:20
A fool of myself I did make

“Faith”
Eli Berg

“Tomorrow”’s a great motto
For those who delay
But when time or comes a knocking
What will you say?

This Is Just To Say
Antonio Rosell

I have spent
Some time
Wandering
Around Duluth

And I should
Have gone
With some
Friends
Forgive me

I saw some
Pretty amazing
Architecture myself

This Is Just To Say

Endale Witt

I have turned
in my assignment
two weeks
late

I know
that creates
a lot of
work for you

Forgive me
But the
NBA playoffs
Were on

Bo Bo

Nora Crosby

Bo Bo
Ski
Waten Taten
A game before
The ballet
A circle of dancers
Of young women
Of old women
Sweaty hands
Beating hearts
Smiling heads

The excitement is rising
And Miss Zachari is
calling
Ladies
It's time to
Begin
Bo Bo
Ski
Waten Taten

Jack's Bean Stock

Ian St Louis

Jack had it rough
Low on money
No job
Very hungry
Old man met him
Said "Hey kid I have what you need"
"Plant these seeds and you'll get riches"
Jack took them
"Why not?" he thought
Buried them in the yard

When the next morning came
His yard was taken over by a large plant
He went outside and checked the plant
It was very tall and full of beans
He climbed up and brought some down
Finally having a good meal

He spent the day bringing more beans down
Some to eat and some to sell
He nurtured the plant, and collected the beans
His collection grew more
Now he had food and a job
All because of his stock of beans
Jack and his bean stock

Daylight Savings

Isaac Stender

An hour lost for minimal benefit
The yearly tradition, Daylight Savings
Waking in darkness, how we all hate it
It inconveniences many things.

Who wanted to change the clock's little hand?
A bug collector thought clocks were amiss
George Hudson of Wellington, New Zealand
He is the reason we go through all of this.

Though lack of sleep makes the populace mad
Less productive, all for some "correction"
He encouraged this, we hope he is glad
He's able to grow his bug collection

For this, we mess with our chronology
All for the sake of entomology

From Jeffrey, With Love

Joe Gorton

I stomped out
All attempts to
Unionize within
My workforce

So that I could
Heavily exploit
The lower class
With horrible working
Conditions.

My condolences,
It made building
Factories and
Undercutting
Competitors
Much easier.

Twitterdotcom

Ian Rosenberg-Scholl

Twitter.com
Washed

It was once
Popular and cool

And tweet onertwothreefourfive postsjustlikethat

Jesus

It was a social media
                And what I want to know is

How do you like your tweets
Elon Musk

Roe v. Wade

Anja Gundale

I was only 15 when men started to stare
They looked at me like i was rare
My mother said “don’t draw attention
Or else you’ll need an abortion”

The victim gets blamed
While the assailant gets fame
Even the government turns their backs
While women lie like sacks

But don't worry they tell us
There’s no reason to discuss
There’s no reason to be mad
Roe V Wade shouldn’t withstand

Your voices are heard
But your words are slurred
The laws are made to protect
But the ones broken leave effect

Women's rights don't matter
We should just sit there and be flattered
When men give us attention
That should bring us satisfaction

Intact Ladder

Krista Hines

Dear Krista
Life won't be an intact ladder
One with all the rungs and padding
One that's stable, being held by someone else at the base
It's been shaken
Knocked over
Broken and snapped
You've fixed it yourself
Learned to ask for an extra hand
Used duct tape and gorilla glue to hold the pieces together
Skipped a few rungs to get to the next part when you couldn't find them
The hole is dark with so much force weighing on you
But don't you let it discourage your ways
Don't you let that ladder fall with you on it
If it does, you'll find a new one
No biggie
No worries
You're still here
Still climbing that broken and patched up ladder
Still climbing to new heights
Because life won't be a brand new ladder

Because 60% of Americans Live Paycheck to Paycheck

Mintesinot Sturm

"Please, sir!" He said, as I hide my wallet away
I haven't time, and he'd use it for drugs anyway
So I went home to my family, and thought nothing of it all
For my life, my success could never take a fall.

That was five years ago
And now I stand here waiting
For that empathetic person
To show the generosity that I had never given

So let this be a lesson, folks
Suffering is not far away
So help those who need it
It could be you someday

Dude to Little Dude

Leo Mousseaux

Let me tell you something, dude:
Life for me's been like I had a lifetime fast pass
If I wanted to go to one ride, I could
When there was a wait, it wasn't long
And the rides didn't cost me a cent
Nothing.

So I've been using this to my advantage, yo
Going from ride to ride,
Attraction to attraction,
All the way into the night.
So listen little dude,
Don't be cringe and let me give you a fast pass as well
Get all the rides you'd ever want
And some of the most bussin' food.

Because I'm still using my pass, yo
And I'm having the sickest time right now
All because life for me's been like I had a lifetime fast pass.

Things I've Seen In The School Bathrooms

Elizabeth Hallanger

Tis a site of not much action, tiled walls
Dirty sinks, and rows of porcelain thrones
Though, students hide there while teachers roam halls
They've brought with them a stolen orange cone

Upside down, it's placed inside a white bowl
And so, they must add to the construction
They toss books, towels, pens into the hole
Then, it's left there, a pile of destruction

Tis true, a school bathroom will feel abuse
Students steal soap machines, destroy the sinks
I pity the janitor, when refuse
And garbage are left as students don't think

Though destroyed bathrooms are less than sunny
A cone in the toilet is quite funny

Shakespeare Wrote This

Hazel Carroll

I almost see the sand run through the glass,
Little grains suffocating me below
As I am buried by things yet to pass,
I will never live up to great Rousseau.

O, the wind and fog have swept me off course
And thy light I have lost in the endless
Tempest of my wishes, my throat is hoarse
From screaming in despair I am restless.

For holy stars are looking down from their
Seat at the beginning, my world is null,
Despite expectations I am no heir,
And all my thoughts hereon are simple, dull.

For I will never live up to The Bard,
Writing poetry is too f***ing hard.

STYLE WRITING PIECES

Summer Dreams
Mira Iwaszek

"Can I get a kiss?" "Can IIIII..." "And can you make it last forever?" "Can youuuu..." Mira and her best friend Elle screamed the chorus of Tyler The Creator's See You Again as they (very safely) sped down the highway. The two girls were headed home after a long day filled with adventure. Mira glanced down at the car's clock just as the numbers changed to reveal a perfect string of four ones. "11:11!" Mira shouted excitedly, "Make a wish!" The song was still playing, but the girls went quiet as they made their wishes. Mira had her eyes shut tightly because she believed that this would somehow increase the chances of the wish coming true. Flashes of light flitted by as they passed strip malls and gas stations. The windows were down and the warm summer wind was blowing her hair every which way, but she didn't mind. She stuck an arm out the window and moved it in a waving motion to the beat of the music. She felt free...

"Mira, what are your plans for this weekend?" Mira blinked a couple of times, bringing herself back to reality. She took out an AirPod so she could hear better. "Uhh, I have rehearsal until eight tonight and then I have another till' twelve tomorrow, and after that, I'll probably just spend the rest of it doing homework." There were three months left of the school year and Mira could not be more burnt out. Four AP tests were looming ahead of her and despite this, her teachers were not going any lighter on homework assignments. She supposed that the lack of energy was partially her fault, for signing up for so many advanced classes in the first place. She sighed after deciding not to dwell on it for too long, put the AirPod back in her ear, and pressed play. "She comes in colors everywhere, she combs her hair, she's like a rainbow." Music blasted from the portable speaker Mira's friend had brought to the beach with them. Mira was standing at the edge of a cliff overlooking a lake, about to jump in. She built up the courage that activities like this required, took a breath, and plunged in. The much-appreciated cold water hit her body and even though Mira knew what was coming, she was still surprised by the temperature. She gasped for air as her head bobbed up past the surface of the water, and grinned like a fool in love.

"Give my water bottle back!" Mira sat up in the gray seat of the bus, taking her head away from the window she was leaning it on. "Don't give it back, dude" a middle schooler yelled from the back of the vehicle. Mira's headphones could only block out so much of the noise coming from the boys. She would rather be anywhere else but the bus, on the way to school. She didn't mind waking up early. However, she did mind the rowdy atmosphere of the bus, and the idea of then having to sit through eight hours of lectures with the expectation of being engaged was not very appealing. Luckily, she found plenty of times throughout the day where she could tune out reality by listening to her music.

..."Future heartbreak! future headaches! wide-eyed nights lying awake" Mira jumped up and down singing along to the song Future Me Hates Me at a concert of one of her favorite bands, The Beths. She moved her head back and forth to the beat of the music. She had been looking forward to this concert for what felt like ages, and even though she had seen them in concert many times before, she still adored hearing the songs live. She had gone to the show with her father, as the venue did not allow people under the age of eighteen in without the accompaniment of a parent. Mira was unbothered by this rule because her dad was one of her favorite concert buddies. A flood of fuschia light poured over the audience. And with that, the song ended...

"Bam! Clang!" Mira stood, dazed for a second, realizing that she had zoned out listening to

music while standing in a hallway of lockers. She checked the clock on her phone. 8:20. Mira ound that the time before the first bell rang to indicate that there were five minutes left before the start of the first period was always very awkward. She often found herself deciding to roam around the halls aimlessly. Sometimes, during this in-between time, she'd make a trip to the bathroom in order to fix her bangs or to touch up her mascara. This morning, Mira decided to just go up to her first-hour class a little early, in hopes that maybe she'd run into a friend to chat with. If there wasn't someone to talk to, it wasn't a big deal because Mira could continue to listen to her music. Maybe she'd pretend to busy herself on her phone when in reality she was just refreshing her email and checking the weather app.

..."There's a wind that blows in from the north, and it says that loving takes its course" the dulcet tones of Kath Bloom came from the speakers of Mira's laptop. It was around 2:30 am, and Mira was watching her very favorite movie, Before Sunrise. Although Mira watches the movie all throughout the year, there was always something extra special about watching it late at night, during the summer. Being awake this late always made Mira feel as if she was the only person in the world. She had her window open, and the night sounds coming from outside only added to the wonderful soundtrack of the movie. She had the fairy lights strung around the ceiling of her room turned on to create a perfectly magical atmosphere. It was her favorite part of the movie. The two leads are in a vintage listening booth. As they listen to the song, they steal longing glances at each other, only before looking away quickly when the other catches them. It's beautiful, and heartwarming, and never fails to give a hopeless romantic like Mira butterflies. Mira beamed as a single tear rolled down her cheek...

"Mira?" Mira felt a little tap on her shoulder, only to realize that it had come from her friend Hazel. She was sitting in Leo's English class, absentmindedly doodling flowers on a worksheet he had given her. "Leo picked your stick, Mira," Hazel whispered, with a hint of a giggle behind the words. "Ahh! Sorry!," Mira said, looking up, now noticing all of the faces of classmates staring at her. After the class laughed at the embarrassing moment, Leo said; "It's okay, Mira. I had just asked what your table thought of the second paragraph of the Walter Mitty short story."



Like A Ninja
Orathai Hang

"Ding! Ding!" The sharp sound of the bell rings into Julia's ears. Facing her, a kangaroo, with a puffy vibrant red boxing glove on and it has got a loose shirt on. She stares into the bulging pitch black orbs of the animal, but not for long until the kangaroo thrusts its fist right at her face. Julia jerks her head to the side and like the pro boxer she is, dodges the quick jab like a ninja, swift and smooth. "Take this!" She shoots her hands up the chin of the kangaroo, and its head knocks back. The kangaroo didn't stand a chance, because no reflex will be quick enough to even come close to dodging the sharp and effective punch of the gifted pro boxer like Julia. She hears the cheers from the thousands of fans circling through the whole stadium. They are so loud, they sound almost as if...

"x equals 5. Am I right Julia!?" Julia looks up into the number-filled board. Oh my god, she thinks and mentally rolls her eyes. "Well? I want an answer, missy." Mr. Graham says with sass. Julia didn't do anything more than let out a sigh. She wanted to show to Mr. Graham that she cared a lot about his lecture, so she simply averted her eyes outside and stared deep into the lush green forest outside of her school. Her chin rested on her hand, "And I was about to win too," she muttered under her breath.

"What did you say missy, something you need to tell the class!?" He yells in annoyance.

"No." Was all Julia could say to prevent any more troubles.

"Well, pay attention." He grumbles. Julia sighs, and this time with a visible eye roll, she finally musters up the courage to turn her head to the board. After a while, Mr. Graham passes out a math worksheet holding onto the hope that his students will care enough to work on it. "Julia, I don't expect much from you. Just do this, it's easy. I'm not asking for much, okay?" He tells Julia, and not with a voice of concern; rather, he sounds like he's about done with her attitude. This time in response from Julia, a long sigh. She'd rather watch the trees wave their fluffy leaves in the wind for an hour straight than do any of his work. "Well?" He questions her. "Hello? Not much going in that head of yours is there?" He scoffs and walks away. Curse him. So annoying, and for what? Julia thinks to herself. After a couple minutes of cursing her teacher out in her head, her eyes begin to wander outside into the trees waving in the wind.

The cool breeze brushes across her face, and Julia smiles feeling refreshed as she picks up the beautiful scent of pine. "Wow." She thinks to herself looking down on the town from above the cliff she's on. Julia at the moment is about to start a race and it's not just any race. It's one with obstacle courses containing many components: giant birds, rings of fire, swimming, and mountain climbing. Everyone is buckled onto their giant bird and ready to take off. Their eyes furrowing forward and body low with their ears perking up ready for the sound of the starting whistle. "Fweet!" The starter blows the whistle.

Everyone takes off as soon as they hear the pitch of the whistle. The ground grumbling as the bird jumps up into the air. Unfortunately, Julia lacks a bit in the start of the race; she lands herself in 4th place out of 7 total racers. However, it's not for long that the great pro racer Julia remains in 4th place. She leans low and her eyes focused on the first few fire rings ahead of her. This bird isn't a horse, so Julia doesn't slap its behind to get it going; instead she simply taps the side of the bird's neck. Just like that, the professional and skilled Julia darts through the sky so fast her bird burns through the fire on the rings itself, blowing the fire right off. "WOAH! She's insane!" The other racers murmur. Julia looks back at the others who are bound to lose and gives them a smirk.

With her flying course completed, Julia is ready to swim across a lake full of sharks. Being the skilled swimmer she is, her arms and legs propels the water like a hot knife cutting through butter. Before anyone can even blink their eyes Julia has already almost made it out of the water. She sees land which encourages her to swim just a little faster. “Almost.” She thinks as she reaches her hands over to land...

“Hey!” A boy says with a grip on Julia’s ankles.

“Let go!” Julia yells, yanking her strong ankles away from the weak grip.

“Why haven’t you done a single page?!” He says.

“What?” Julia replies in confusion...

“Julia!” Mr. Graham says. “Your first page is completely empty!” He adds in frustration. Another sigh from Julia. She rests her chin on her hands again, I didn’t even get to win yet, she thinks. Julia looks down on her paper and picks up her pencil. Julia begins to scribble away, but she is not doing math problems, she is writing her real and true grand adventures. Mr. Graham is none the wiser. He's quite proud of Julia. Finally she’s doing something, some work, he thinks, laughing to himself.



Abby Horton

Certain Types of Email

Cooper Peterson Antin

You are about to start reading an email by Cooper Antin. You are sitting in your home, surrounded by the chaos of your child running around. Perhaps sometimes you wish you could pick him up and shake him, but you remember what you learned in anatomy class, babies cannot be shaken. You are wary to open this email and it’s possible you already have a guess on what it discloses. You have received many emails from Cooper of a certain nature. Usually they are delightful little messages about a misspelled or incorrect test answer, that leave you chuckling to yourself. The subject lines are often misleading to the actual contents of the message. Not unlike a peacock's misleading colors - in reality they are a vicious and cruel member of the animal kingdom. So entitled to the throne, they have become corrupt. It’s entirely possible that you may be dreading opening this email. In the prospect that you might have to do more work and correct a mistake, you become timid and elusive. Nonetheless, you glide your finger across the mousepad and hover on the unread email.

Just as you’re bracing yourself for this intake of knowledge, your small child attacks you and leaps onto your legs. The attack jolts you and knocks the laptop from its perch on your lap. The laptop tumbles to the ground and snaps shut. A wave of rage rushes over you and your face reddens. It feels like the steam of a freight train is puffing from your ears. While a lesser being would allow their anger to escape, your years of teaching middle school boys have trained you well. You inhale deeply and let out an audible sigh of disapproval. You are now in a deep internal debate if it’s worth your energy to get up and move to a new location, or if you should bear out the tornado of chaos that is wreaking havoc on your living room. After intense contemplation, you decide to have a

change of scenery.

Upstairs in your bedroom is much quieter. You settle onto your bed and immediately feel at ease on your memory foam mattress. Just as you've summoned the strength to reach for your laptop you feel a headache creep in. This is the third time this week and you're tired of it. You massage your temples and close your eyes. Now, you must make the trek to the medicine cabinet and retrieve the coveted ibuprofen.

Once in the bathroom, you open the medicine cabinet and grab the ibuprofen. You unscrew the lid and peer in. There are 50 identical pills nestled in the container. You begin to feel discontent, confused, and unsettled. Each pill like the last, all doing the same job, sitting in the same jar everyday. You relate to these pills, a pawn in a corporate scheme of capitalism. Why do you work everyday, why do you come to school just to teach the same content to new kids year after year? Ruminating on the meaning of life is only making your headache worse, so you toss back 2 pills and return to your bed.

The task is now unavoidable. You feel drained, but alas, duty calls. You rest the laptop on your lap and find yourself face to face with the screen. The email is glaring back at you, you hear Cooper's voice telling you to open it. You click on it. You can't believe it. Your head fills with thoughts of confusion, relief, anger, and bliss. The email is blank. All of that for nothing, for an email that was accidentally sent. You throw your laptop aside and decide you need some rest. You drift into a slumber that rivals a hibernating grizzly bear. You can't wait to do it all again tomorrow.

Worth Writing About

Ian Brooks

It must be interesting grading all these papers. You're reading more performative, meticulously-edited pieces than most people would want to read in a lifetime, and you've got to stay sharp. That means to keep track of your coffee supply (or any other source of energy) throughout this process, and to please take a sip or two before reading my essay. Aren't you excited to hear what insights I have about the world? Channel the placebo energy from your sip into enthusiasm for my writing. Yes, I know. You're sat in your office, maybe with some relaxing music that won't distract you, and you're reluctantly preparing to read yet another attempt at wisdom from a young person who probably hasn't seen much in life. Or maybe you haven't just been reading attempts at wisdom. Maybe they've been descriptions of inspiring perseverance or fascinating ingenuity. You haven't exactly been moved by those essays about playing the flute as a metaphor for life, or the deep hardship Charles faced when he was injured during the Iowa state soccer semifinals, or the way Lilly thought outside the box to get a great score on her engineering project.

But you are intrigued by some of these essays. Every once in a while you read something that feels real—something that didn't take hours of brainstorming, but rather seemed like the only thing worth writing about. You'll find the occasional illustration of true hardship or fundamental motivation and self-awareness, and suddenly you're refreshed. You sink a little deeper into your rolling chair, but you also forget for a moment about how heavy gravity feels on five and a half hours of sleep. When you finish, you probably take a longer moment to reflect before placing them in your pile of good writing. Of course, the rest of the time you feel that all-too-familiar heaviness that comes with tiredness and instead focus on

maintaining your posture and your spirit despite it. You try your best to see the good qualities in every paper because that's the type of person you are, but you can tell when you're being messed with.

That's the funny part of this whole thing. You know we as students are only partially truthful—not necessarily about the experiences we've had or the realizations we've made, but about their extent and importance to us. And we know you're biased, and you know you're biased, and your goal (because you're one of the good ones) is to account for our distortions, your personal biases, and your current mood. But don't worry, you're doing great with the help of your controlled state of mind and self-awareness. And no, it's not just you. You definitely are getting a little hungry. You should probably go make a sandwich in the break room and avoid tossing away a wonderful applicant (such as myself) in your irritability. And that trusty self- awareness does know of your irritability. Why is this kid talking to you anyways? What's with this pretentious "essay"? You should probably just reject me at this point, but you're obligated to keep reading—maybe not technically, but you want to at least see where this goes. And who knows, maybe I have some deep wisdom that makes me a perfect applicant and also makes me want to ramble on to whatever exhausted soul is reading. Have you forgotten about your sandwich? Surely you have the respect to give me the consideration of a nourished mind.



The Wire
Calvin Defoster

You're about to watch The final episode of "The Wire". Sit down, get comfy, but not too comfy, I know for a fact you only have so much water left in that bottle by your feet. Remember to go and shoo your brothers away from the television. Announce your presence by going as formally as possible: "I am about to watch peak television, anyone who is not me should leave the premises quickly in a single file line." Now that you've done that, well, assuming you're not lazy enough to just not do it at all. I mean, I've seen you spend basically whole days just sitting here! Watching all this garbage, does it ever get old? Maybe sometimes you'll go and get some food from the fridge. Usually the same old type of things. A sandwich you like for really no particular reason other than it's easy to make. A ham, bologna, turkey, American cheese, and lettuce sandwich. With the crusts shaved off of course. In fact you're eating it now! I can see you eating it now, but I can't stop you. I'm merely a figment of your imagination.

Don't forget to dim the TV a bit, your brothers always complain that you have it set too low. To the point where they say you can "barely even see the tv," and "it is just weird to do," when your eyes merely work differently. Not that they would really understand of course. But that's besides the point, right now it's just you and soon to be the final episode of one of your favorite shows. I can see just how excited you are to watch this show. Attempting to skip past all the commercials you know you can't skip on this network anyway. Advertisements are just such a pain anyway. Imagine how many more minutes of your life you could spend watching shows if advertisements about whatever a "gravity ball" is weren't in your way. That's at least a couple hours of your life you're able to get back to simply watch more television.

I know you've been meaning to catch up on a

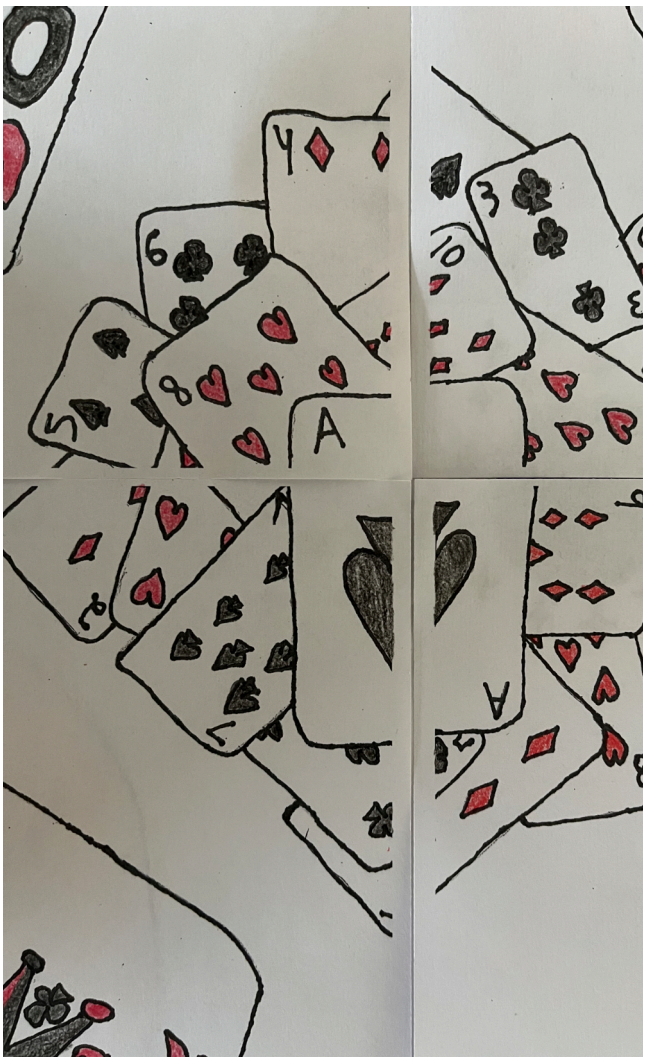
bunch of shows like Better Call Saul, Lost, or The Last Of Us. None of them are as good as The Wire, however, with its peak character developments. I know how much you love seeing characters develop. You were obsessed with that one character for a while, what was his name? Bodie? Seeing him grow into a whole fleshed out character really made you love this show. You weren't really big on rule sticklers like Prezobo or Marlo. But they are annoying for that purpose. To be annoying! And then you somehow managed to actually like Prezbo after he helped all those kids. Oh, you just love a good bit of television.

But why The Wire anyway? Like does it really matter that much? You saw it from, ironically enough, an advertisement of other shows on this network. You had a near limitless amount of options for you to pick from: Shows You Want To Watch But Are Too Long To Grasp Your Attention Fully, Shows You Know You Won't Be Watching, Shows That Aren't Cool Enough For You, Shows That Are Too Cool For You, Shows That One Can Only Watch On A Strange VHS Tape That Might Kill You, Shows That Really Should Have Been A Movie, Crime Drama Number One, Crime Drama Number Two, Crime Drama Number Three, NCIS.

But you picked The Wire from a great array of shows that would have done you good. You almost wanted to watch all those great crime dramas available on this network. You even talked to all your friends about this great show and how much they must watch it. But your friends are not like you. They got bored after 1 episode. They hated season two oh so much, saying that the weird switch to the port doesn't make sense. But you, you have some sort of pleasure out of new plot twists and new characters being added left and right.

But right now all that truly matters is you and the television. Remember about earlier? All those steps we talked about? I hope you're doing them right now. You toss and turn trying to lay down in just the right spot for maximum enjoyment. You got it? Perfect. I hope you're ready for some peak television. As you watch the final episode you should understand more about you, your character, what your purpose in life truly is. I hope you are simply prepared for sheer thrills for an hour and a half.

Let's get started, you have much to take in.



The Big Hill
Abe Baer-Benson

It was 2:00 in the afternoon and Jesse Black and his best friend Natalie were going out on a scooter ride. It was the first time Jesse's parents had given him permission to go on a ride since a week earlier he had turned nine and was officially a big boy. “Stop making that noise like your scooter has a turbo jet on it,” said Natalie catching up to Jesse, out of breath, “You're not little anymore you're a big boy you don't make silly noises.” Jesse ignored Natalie’s complaints and kept cruising on his scooter. He knew his scooter had jets and that he was a big boy so he did not worry about what Natalie said.

Jesse turned and started going down the big hill. Kids called it The Big Hill because it was the steepest hill in the town. It wasn't very tall or very long to ride down but it was very steep. Jesse didn't mind the steepness though because he was a big boy and big boys can handle a steep hill. Natalie called to Jesse as he started bombing down the hill but he did not hear he was focused on making it to the bottom of this hill. As he neared the bottom of the hill he shifted his course like his hands when being moved by the scooter and he was headed directly for a tree. Right when he was about to hit the tree a passage opened up in the side of the tree and he went right through it and down a slide.

Jesse fell and landed in a soft comfortable chair. The room around him was dark but in front of him a screen flickered on. “Jesse we need to stop the evil scientist Gus,” said a bald man whose face had appeared on the screen. “He is trying to turn all the rock candy into real rocks,” said the man on the screen. “Find him and stop him, whatever it takes.” Jesse felt the ground drop out from beneath him as he was propelled down another slide and launched back up onto a street a couple blocks away from the big hill.

Jesse got on the scooter which had changed after he got his mission briefing and now had a big red button on the handlebars. The man on the screen never told Jesse where to go to stop the evil scientist Gus, but Jesse somehow knew and he knew the fastest way you could get there was by pressing that button so he pressed it. Jesse's scooter shook as four jets came out of the back of it, propelling him forward faster than even the big hill could.

Then Jesse started to slow down. He clicked the button again and again but he kept slowing down. Something was terribly wrong. Jesse turned around and saw his jets had all burnt out. They were all charred and would not boost him anymore. Jesse was confused his jets had never failed him but then he remembered something he remembered something he never even knew. Jesse opened a flap on the side of one of the jets to check on the fuel but there was none left. Scooter jets run on rock candy, but Jesse's had been turned into real rocks; this was the work of the evil scientist Gus.

Fifteen minutes later Jesse pulled up to the door of an abandoned bowling alley but it wasn't really abandoned, it was the secret laboratory of the evil scientist Gus. Drenched in sweat from running as fast as he could Jesse kicked open the door to the bowling alley but the lobby was empty except for a little plastic ball rolling in an endless circle on the floor. Jesse went to pick up the ball but as soon as his hands touched it he realized what it was. A trap, one of evil scientist Gus's famous traps, sleep bombs.

Jesse woke up with a pounding headache. His head hurt like he had just rammed it as hard as he could into a tree. When he opened his eyes he didn't see the cage he was expecting to be trapped in. Instead he saw his best friend Natalie looking down at him next to his perfectly fine scooter without any buttons or rocket jets.

Teen Wolf
Gideon Zupfer

This life ain't easy. I've never experienced normalcy. It's impossible for someone in my situation. You won't believe the things I tell you, but this is the truth. It's not my problem whether you believe me or not.

I grew up with my father. I never met my mother. My father was a very strange man. When I was a child, I never realized his strange habits, not until I was in my teen years. In high school, I would stay up late doing my homework or scrolling through TikTok. During these late nights, my father would disappear. I wouldn't see him until he came back from work the next day. I wouldn't ask him why he was gone. Perhaps he was involved in some criminal activity, or maybe he was sleeping with someone. Either way, I didn't want to know.

Then, one night, I saw him. I was in the kitchen having a late night snack, and I watched him as he stumbled down the stairs. He tripped and writhed ferociously on the kitchen floor as I watched in horror and intrigue. His body slowly morphed into a disgusting, hairy creature. A hideous wolf.

Then he got up onto his four legs, sniffed the air and looked around. His eyes landed on me. I was petrified. He seemed shocked as well. We stared into each other's eyes for a few seconds as I cycled through every emotion, until my father- the wolf- dashed out the door. I didn't know what to say to him the next day. Neither of us spoke. A few days later, he told me everything. His strange condition was a curse upon his family, he said. His father, his father's father, and his father's father's father were all the same as him. It took me a little while to wrap my head around it. Then I asked what this means for me. Then my dad ranted about puberty until he got to the point that, very soon, I will experience my first transformation. I was devastated.

The night it happened was the strangest night of my life. It was far less painful than I expected it to be, but it was so, so uncomfortable. And then it was over as soon as it had begun. After a few months, I had gotten used to my strange condition. I even told some of my friends. "I'm a werewolf! I'm serious! I transform every night!" They didn't believe me. I would tell them again and again that it was true. Then they started to make fun of me. "You're a furry! Go back to watching Twilight! Where's your fursuit?" Eventually, all of my friends left me. They didn't want to be associated with a "furry." I was alone. So very alone. And then I became the very thing that my former friends thought I was- a furry. Soon after, I found a haven. The only place where I truly felt accepted. Furry conventions.

I would attend furry conventions multiple times a week, sometimes even in my wolf form. All of my newfound furry friends would compliment me on my magnificent fur suit. "You look like a real wolf!" I decided to tell them that I was, indeed, a real wolf. When I told them about my condition, they believed me without a single doubt. Not only did they accept me, but they praised me for who I was. Finally, I had found my home.



Broken Truth
Elle Galbreath

I have always thought that honesty is the best policy and that you should let others know precisely what they are like. For the better and the worse, I don't really care. People go about their day making choices, I am just there to give some perspective, show them what those decisions mean. People don't always like knowing the truth, I don't really care though. If they didn't want me to share, they shouldn't have come near me.

And hey, telling the truth can be hard work, sometimes when I tell them the truth they cry and as an empath, I always cry too. They get angry and I respond in kind, don't they want to know the truth? But I also tell the truth in kind ways. I'm the first to notice a new haircut that perfectly frames a face, or a new pair of jewelry. I mimic the excitement of those close to me when something good happens to them.

I stay strong, always there to support others, putting them before myself. But one time I broke down, I couldn't do it anymore. When I broke I made it everyone's problem, if I had to suffer why not them? The truths I used to give with nothing but honesty became sharp as glass. Sharp with actual glass. As they looked at their reflection they saw a broken image of the truth. No longer mirroring their emotions.

Yard Bird Life
Owen Vaughan-Fier

Ah summer, it truly is the best time of year. The constant sunlight, the colorful surroundings, all the interesting people passing by and I just get to sit here and take it all in. I love watching Mr. Smith mow his lawn next door and Mrs. Godfried's flower beds are absolutely gorgeous. It's truly a blessing that I get to spend my time here in my spot watching the world go by. Oh look, it's my family back from their errands, oh how I've missed them so. Well, that excitement has passed, now back to getting my tan on, oh yeah. I hear a faint barking in the distance but I'd recognize it anywhere, its Mrs. Schumer and her rabid beast. I turn in the direction of the noise praying it ain't so, but no, they are coming down the block. I steel myself, ready to stand my ground, I won't be afraid of this animal any more. Now they are one house over and about to reach me. I close my eyes allowing one last moment of fear. As I open them I see the beast barrelling toward me and Mrs. Schumer off balance from losing control. The beast is now on top of me, its jaws open wide, claws outstretched. I lose my composure and let out an inaudible scream of terror...

A brisk wind tickles my back as it blows through the front yard. It picks up the neatly raked pile of leaves and sends them all over. Today the winds have been strong so no one is outside. The scenery is desolate, the trees have lost all their leaves, it hasn't rained in weeks so everything is dry, and the temperature seems to drop even more everyday. All signs point towards the coming winter. Even with the inevitable change in season just over the horizon, I'm enjoying the peace and quiet of the empty block. Suddenly out of nowhere a fierce wind whips down the street hitting me and almost knocking me over. I collect myself from the surprise just in time to be hit by another harsh wind making me even more unstable. Now I'm worried, where is all this

wind coming from, why is it so strong, will I be blown away? The third wind comes stronger than both the previous put together and I'm in the air. As I'm panicking and flailing around in the air, I manage to turn and see a rapidly approaching house in front of me. Im scream for help as loud as I can, knowing no one will hear me, and brace for impact...

Here I am, in my same old spot, looking out at the same old street SHIVERING MY FREAKING BUTT OFF. I mean come on, it's winter, why am I out here, why is there snow everywhere, why is life so freaking hard, why why why WHY! The first snow hit about two days ago and it hasn't stopped snowing. It just keeps piling up more and more. If this extreme weather keeps going, I might be buried alive. Oh no, there I go again with my negative thoughts. I always jinx it everytime, no matter what you can count on me to see the worst possibility. What else am I supposed to do while I sit here suffering? My only other option is to hibernate. There's no one out here to keep me company during these difficult times. Well, this is it for me, I don't think I can take much more of this. So cold and sleepy, must persevere, can't let them win...

Splash, Splash, Splash. It's spring now and I'm still here. Everything has melted and now the yard is sopping wet. I woke up from my hypothermia induced sleep a few days ago to a thunderstorm. What an experience, you think you died and then you wake up completely soaked combined with a high chance of getting struck by lightning. Now the fam has come out to play and ruined any chance of me getting dry as they splash around in the mud pit that is now our front yard. They continue to loosen up the soil with their constant movement and spread of mud and water. It won't matter if I slip and fall, I already look the part from just standing here. Oh, how this world tests me so, woe is me. Tis the eternal struggle of the life of a plastic flamingo.

Invisibility

Chanida Xiong

The day that I realized that I was invisible, it broke my heart. The truth was that I didn't want to accept it. I thought at first that I was dead. My childhood was full of sadness. All my friends ignored me, they glued me to a wall and left me to swallow my sorrow. It wasn't easy. It's not something that I wanted. I wanted to be like the other kids who played outside or had something interesting about them. It was no use, it was baseless dreams. I lived with being stuck to the wall.

As I grew older, I learned a bit more about friends, you have to be there for them. So I did that, I let them lean on me, let them cry and confide in me. How can a friend get better? That was my mistake. Being used and only used is not fun. They don't care for my feelings nor do they care of my benefit in this relationship we have. Friendship is supposed to be a two way street, and not a one way street. They just open me up and slam me away to their own benefit. How saddening.

I officially learned that I can't do much about it, after all I am a wise person. Being old for this long was worthy of being bragged about. If you just count on me, the lines of my wisdom and age. I used to talk to myself a lot, when they would come and use me to vent their emotions. I still have a puncture on my leg, and a bruise on my eye. It's nothing new, it'll get patched up again.

The moment I decided to play with this, is how it all changed. My job as the invisible listener. I keep things hidden from others, like a blockage, a wall. Time ticks slowly each time and sometimes I would fall asleep, which is not very professional of me. But they didn't care, like I said, I was invisible. It doesn't matter if they cared, it was another thing for me to pass time. Plus the drama in their lives is so

fascinating.

Minutes go by and suddenly turn into years. I am old but healthy as a horse, they want to replace me. They don't think I am special anymore, I cry and cry and beg and plead. They cannot hear me, I am invisible.

Now here I am. In a dump yard, it's quite nice. I didn't know I'd like this silence. The lights in the dark skies are beautiful, and the big circular white bulb sucks me into sleep. Although the flies may bother me, they do not care for me but for the rotting food beside me, I would think of myself as rotting too, but I guess I am not worthy for them to eat me as well.

The morning wakes me with a loud grinding sound, I look and scream for help as the shredder comes near me. Blood blood! But all I can see is white and tan specks of needles and tears coming from me. What am I? I feel no pain. I don't even have eyes yet I can see. I don't even have hands and I can feel. I don't even have a mouth. What am I?

I go through a lot of machinery, it tickles. I collect my thoughts and once I do, a new friend is in front of me. He takes a look at me as if I'm a finished product. With a red cap covering his gray hairs, his shirt spelled with letters and his hands dirty. He tells me that he'll make me pretty again. I didn't believe him at first, he grabbed his hammer and started stabbing me with little nails and cutting me up with a huge grin on his face. He calls me "precious" and "his little baby". Quite creepy if you ask me. I just closed my eyes and let it pass.

There is no pain. Am I weird? Maybe It's just me, that is what ran through my mind. The moment I opened my eyes, his grin turned to a smile. He looks satisfied. He begins to speak to me or someone, "A new product, a transom". A door.

Real Estate Dreams

Nick Streng

The house is so big and beautiful.

I've been inside it so many times and yet it still blows me away whenever I explore it because I'm used to spending my time outside. I haven't had a home ever since I lost my mom. I've just kept moving from one place to another. But this house...man, I think I could stay here for the rest of my life. Everything's perfect.

One day I took my brother to see the house. It was risky, but I wanted him to see it. We snuck in through the back door and the second my brother was inside, he was overwhelmed. We wandered about for hours, gazing at the furniture, walking up and down the stairs, and eventually we'd just run through the halls whooping with joy. This was the happiest both of us had felt in a long time.

"This place is amazing!" he cried as he vaulted down the hall yet again, his legs a blur. I raced along with him, but he was faster. Eventually we stopped to take a break. My brother turned to me and said, "I want to stay here." And so did I.

But deep down, I knew we couldn't. I knew that people lived here, and I knew they would kill us if they found us. We'd have to keep moving. I'd eventually have to break it to my brother, tell him that this was only temporary, but for now, all I could do was stare up at the ceiling in wonder.

A loud bang suddenly rang through the house. My brother and I sprang up in alarm as we heard heavy footfalls on the other end of the room. We immediately sprinted deeper into the house, looking for a place to hide. They were home!

"Kayla, can you close the garage door? I'm going to take a shower," called a man's voice

from somewhere in the kitchen. My brother and I exchanged frantic looks. We couldn't get to the back door. What were we going to do?

The footsteps grew louder and louder. There was only one way left to go. We scampered up the stairs as fast as we could, but to no avail. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the man step into the living room. My brother and I were only halfway up the steps. Why did they have to be so big?

The man began rummaging around in a bag at the other side of the room, but I knew he would see us the second he started up the stairs. Turning back, I saw my brother reach the second floor and began to breathe a sigh of relief, but that relief quickly faded to terror when I saw where he was headed. "No, you idiot! Get out of the bathroom!" I hissed, but he didn't hear me. With no other choice I bounded after him, and a loud creak came from below. The man was coming upstairs.

"Where are you? Where are you??" I screamed as I rushed into the bathroom. My brother was perched on the shower curtain, looking mighty pleased with himself. "Don't worry!" he called down cheerfully. "They won't find us up here!"

"He's coming up to take a -" I began, when an enormous shadow loomed behind me and a colossal THUD shook the floor. The man stood in the doorway, glancing around blankly. Crouched right below him, I almost forgot how to breathe. For a moment, all was silent. Then my brother lost his grip on the metal bar of the shower curtain, sliding down the curtain and onto the floor. The man bellowed in surprise, then rushed to the sink; I narrowly avoided his foot as I ran behind the toilet in fear. My brother was scrambling about, eventually sprinting to the wall on the opposite end of the room. But as he started climbing, the man raised a great white cloth and thrust it against the spot of the wall where he was.

There was a horrific, soft squelch. The cloth came away from the wall. And my brother, my poor sweet brother, was smashed into a clump of yellowish goop and his hundred stringy legs sticking in all directions. The man gave a sniff of disgust, then raised the cloth again, wiping his remains off the wall. I inched behind the toilet even further, sobbing silently in despair, unable to think, unable to process what had just happened. The man threw the cloth into a large metal trash can, then walked out of the room, calling, "Honey, are you sure you've been keeping the windows closed? I just found another centipede in here..."



Abominable Snowman

Annika Lofgren

Since the beginning of my time, they have looked over me and loved me like I was their younger brother. We played and had fun together, creating memories that can last a lifetime. We jumped and ran and threw things. We skated and rolled and laid. It was the perfect childhood. One that I would remember for years and years.

Had that day not come, it might've been like that forever. Had that day not come, we would have been okay. But as she was rushed away, I knew the ache in her head had created a void that may never be repaired. The two girls didn't speak to each other or to me, and it felt like everything around me melted away. We were all trapped in our own way, I felt unable to move. Without them, I was nothing, just a guy in a room.

After many years, her secret was revealed. Her secret made her run away, to me. She had not meant to harm her sister, she had just lost control. She hadn't meant to hurt me either, but I don't think my feelings had been taken into consideration during those dark days. The older girl found me and left me again, without even a word. Without any acknowledgment. But the younger one found me. She comforted me and let me sing to her about my dreams. I told her of my dreams of laying in the hot sand, despite us being in a snowstorm in June. She and this other guy were so happy to see me, they even brought some strange animal!

But the girl wanted to see her sister, and, honestly, so did I, despite her ignoring me. I did my best to lead them to her new residency, the one she had built from the ground up. The girl made me wait outside, but I heard her slipping on the ice as I counted to 60. There was some yelling, I think. I rushed in after my minute of waiting was up. This time, the older girl addressed me. She was excited to see me after so long! But I was brushed off again as they started arguing more. As we were leaving, the older girl, the girl I had grown up with, sent someone after us. The younger girl and the guy were screaming at what they understood to be a monster. He was scary-looking, sure, but he wasn't a monster. I felt a little insulted. He was just like me, only bigger! He threw giant snowballs at us, but I think he was just in a bad mood. His giant coal eyes were pleading to me, I think. His snowy arms picked us up over the cliff, and I lost all hope in him. He dropped us, and my body dismembered. The girl pieced me back together, and I was happy to be with her.

Dream Job
Mae Heeringa

Hi there, find everything okay?

I hate working here, I only got a job to have an income, and of course it had to be at a stupid grocery store. I hate this place with all my heart. I hate the little black baskets for produce, I hate the maze-like setup of the store but most importantly, I hate the customers. They all have this stupid friendly look on their face when they approach me. They'll say something like, Do you know where the mayonnaise is? Or even better, My in store code doesn't work, why is that? I hate that question. Why doesn't my in store code work? I don't know, maybe because you're surrounded by thick concrete pillars as well as sitting under multiple apartment complexes.

That's great to hear.

I could care less about if you found everything and more. I think a part of these people think it's funny to say that to a cashier. I don't care that you found the heirloom tomatoes okay, and I don't care that while you were looking for those tomatoes you also found a bag of avocados that you forgot to put on your grocery list. People are so insufferable. And it's my job to deal with them. I don't know you and don't care about you. They all pity me and I hate them for that. They think that I NEED this job I bet. I don't, I could quit at any time if I liked, they just pay well.

Are you an Amazon Prime member by chance?

Of course you are an Amazon Prime member. Who isn't, the only people who don't use Amazon Prime are pretentious losers who think that they are better than others just because they don't support one of the biggest businesses in the world. That's probably why they shop here, at Whole Foods. Little do they know that they are supporting Amazon since they literally own Whole Foods. God I wish people would leave me alone at work. I hate them, all of them and their stupid little pitiful faces.

Have a great rest of your day!

I hope they never return to this store. I hope that the milk they bought goes stale the second they leave this store and that the food they bought goes bad. They only deserve it for being so polite to me. I hate this store and everything it stands for. The corporate environment is like a plague, sickening this store.



Xinara
Hazel Wright

I don't know where it all went wrong. I don't know where it all went right. I didn't know I would love them this much when they found me, started bothering their teachers to let them come play with me. Me! Me, the baby of the family, the least accomplished, the one who didn't know what they were doing. And now they're gone. And I'm alone.

Kits was the first one. She worked her way up from a tiny cadet touring the huge ships all the way up to Captain, and she dragged Junie up with her. But she dragged me with her too. Kits was the first one to sit down next to me and introduce herself, instead of just walking past me, who was huddled pathetically in the corner of the huge room. She walked past my older siblings, and all their laughing friends, and she just plopped herself down on the floor next to me. And she kept doing it, every day, even when I took two months to actually say anything back to her. I was really shy when I was younger.

Anyway. Kits just sat right down and ate her lunch and talked all about how she was going to be the best captain in the galaxy. I figured she had joined me in my corner to get away from the clamor and she'd go back to her routine the next day. But no, she sat by me the next day. And the next, and the day after that, and the day after that. The day after that she wasn't there, but she told me the previous day that she wouldn't be, because she had an appointment. What was I supposed to do with that? It was the first time someone had cared enough about me to say something like that, and I still hadn't said a word to her.

Then there was Junie, another cadet. She eventually became Kits's best friend, but when they started Junie was new at the Academy and they'd hit it off in their previous class. Kits brought Junie over to sit by me, and since they were laughing together when they came to find me, I expected that I would once again fade into the background. You'd be surprised how many people think I don't pay any attention to them, just because I'm small and quiet and I do my job well without complaining about it. But Kits wasn't even the first one to say anything to me that day. It was Junie. She didn't even ask Kits about me, she just started talking. My Junie was kind like that. She dragged us into more trouble than Kits and Bey combined just by being kind to people.

Eventually the two of them brought Bey to me. Bey was a year older than them, they were both year 2 cadets and he was year 3, and they'd found him in their engineering class. I was just old enough to have been there for a year or so by then, so even though I wasn't taking classes I wouldn't have known him anyway. It was really nice meeting someone new. Bey was funny, was the thing. He was a really good engineer, and he made them both laugh, and he was a loner by choice. Except Kits is persistent, and after a semester and a half of nagging him to try eating lunch with them instead of alone in the cafeteria, it had paid off. Junie introduced him to me and the first thing out of his mouth was a joke. The three of us all thought he was amazing, this year 3 boy who made us all laugh and let us befriend him.

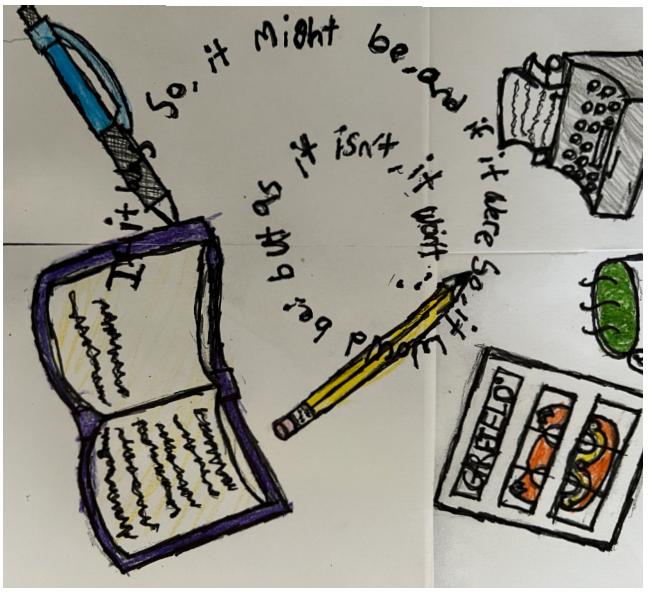
They were my crew. They worked their way through the academy and got promoted. Bey declined other offers to stick with us for the year it took Junie and Kits to graduate, and then they started exploring the galaxy without me. It hurt. I wasn't surprised, but it hurt. But then Kits came back one day after a meeting with the Board of Officers, the ones in charge of the Academy. And she said they'd all been working, very hard, in order to be able to choose their own ship. And I let down my ramp and she settled in the pilot's chair and she brought me to the spaceport, and they all moved in and off we went.

They were my crew. Kits and Junie and Bey, Captain and Navigator and Engineer. My crew. I kept them safe inside my walls and I took them around the universe and they were mine. I kept them safe.

You can't save your crew from getting old. None of them wanted to live forever. They just wanted to have their adventures and make sure I was happy without them. I'm not, yet. They're all gone, my Kits and Junie and Bey.

They left me laughter and memories and Junie's grandniece to travel with me. Someday Ekki will leave me someone too. But for now I cradle her close, my new Captain, and I wonder who she will find to bring with her.

This is an excerpt from the logs of the ship Xinara, which was found drifting, powerless, in the Reaches. This excerpt was the least corrupted segment of the ship's logs.





Orathai Hang

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Proofreading Leo Bickelhaupt, Olivia Bilek, Violet Wright

Design and Layout Violet Wright

Cover Orathai Hang

Art Beatrice Cosgrove, Orathai Hang,Riley Sheffield, Joseph Sierra, OWL Art Classes

Adult To Blame Leo Bickelhaupt

Writing Abe Baer-Benson, Eli Berg, Olivia Bilek, Ian Brooks, Willa Campion, Tess Campion, Hazel Carroll, Jack Cheatham, Alex Cowles, Nora Crosby, Elena Davis, Calvin Defoster, Ted Dobbins, Avery Erb, Elle Galbreath, Joe Gorton, Anja Gundale, Elizabeth Hallanger, Orathai Hang, Mae Heeringa, Gabby Her, Krista Hines, Maria Imholte, Mira Iwaszek, Aidan Jewell, Bea Lloyd, Annika Lofgren, Sofia Maldonado, Daniel Meekin, Leo Mousseaux, Brodie Olmstead, Cooper Peterson Antin, Henry Plaman, Oliver Plaman, Maya Reynolds, Antonio Rosell, Ian Rosenberg-Scholl, Ian St Louis, Isaac Stender, Nick Streng, Mintesinot Sturm, Owen Vaughan-Fier, Endale Witt, Violet Wright, Hazel Wright, Chanida Xiong, Gideon Zupfer

