



# Youth Writing Competition

In collaboration with the  
National Writing Project of Acadiana

Winners' Anthology

Fall 2019

## Acknowledgments

The National Writing Project of Acadiana would like to thank all of the students who submitted such high-quality creative writing for this contest, the parents and guardians who supported these students in their work, and the teachers and administrators who provided the educational environment in which such work is valued and encouraged. Finally, thanks to Patrice Melnick, Executive Director of The Festival of Words, and her amazing Executive Board, for supporting not only this contest, but also a world-class literary festival year after year.

This anthology is dedicated to Steve Domingue, whose support over the last several years has allowed us to not only survive, but thrive, in difficult financial times.

Sincerely,

Toby Daspit  
Co-Director  
National Writing Project of Acadiana

H. Michelle Kreamer  
Director of Research Initiatives and Youth Programming  
National Writing Project of Acadiana

# Table of Contents

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

### Poetry

- 1<sup>st</sup> — Jamonie Brown, S.J. Montgomery Elementary, “Halloween,” p. 4
- 2<sup>nd</sup> — Greta Schexnayder, Myrtle Place Elementary, “Hallway of Death,” p. 5

## MIDDLE SCHOOL

### Poetry

- 1<sup>st</sup> — Salha Abdul, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “Pink,” p. 6
- 2<sup>nd</sup> — Jade Richard, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “I’m Okay,” p. 7-8
- 3<sup>rd</sup> — Bethany Johnston, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “Jr. High Stereotype,” p. 9-10

### Creative Non-Fiction

- 1<sup>st</sup> — Paloma Quiroz, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “Wrong Turn,” p. 11-12
- 2<sup>nd</sup> — Julia Slavich, Academy of the Sacred Heart, “Maddi,” p. 13-14
- 3<sup>rd</sup> — Bethany Johnston, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “Friday Nights,” p. 15-16

### Fiction

- 1<sup>st</sup> — Shayna Chevis, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “What it Takes to Love,” p. 17
- 2<sup>nd</sup> — Jedesia Joseph, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “The Earth’s Split,” p. 18

## HIGH SCHOOL

### Poetry

- 1<sup>st</sup> — Carmen Lopez, Comeaux High School, “Red,” “Mustard,” and “Crepe Myrtle in the Lungs of the Fool,” p. 19-21
- 2<sup>nd</sup> — Eliana Lopez, Comeaux High School, “Where You Walk,” p. 22
- 3<sup>rd</sup> — Ravyn Johnlouis and Daija Ware, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “Girl, Get Up,” p. 23-24

### Creative Non-Fiction

- 1<sup>st</sup> — Savion Siner, Carencro High School, “Reading Between the Code,” p. 25-27
- 2<sup>nd</sup> — Natalie Richenberger, Lafayette High School, “The Canyon,” p. 28-29
- 3<sup>rd</sup> — Hossein Senati, Carencro High School, “People Can Change,” p. 30-31

### Fiction

- 1<sup>st</sup> — Lacey Auzenne, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “The Trigger,” p. 32-35
- 2<sup>nd</sup> — Saniyah Jenkins, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “The Extenuation of Nirvana, a City in the Middle of Nowhere,” p. 36-37
- 3<sup>rd</sup> — Collin Stelly, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “For the Sake of Memory,” p. 38-39

*Elementary School Division (Grades 3-5)*

1<sup>st</sup> place Poetry—Elementary School Division

By: **Jamonie Brown**

S. J. Montgomery Elementary

**Halloween**

Halloween Halloween with witches that are green

With Spooky haunted houses full of goblins that are mean

And ghosts who are shouting peek a boo

With wolves that are shouting wooooo

Children jumping out the door ready to explore

If they cry I will ask why

If they don't I will say goodbye

2<sup>nd</sup> place Poetry—Elementary School Division  
By: **Greta Schexnayder**  
Myrtle Place Elementary

# HALLWAY OF DEATH

Ghouls looked at me as I walked in the hall  
I saw the numbers 666 on the wall  
A little girl was playing with a ball  
Boy, am I afraid of this hall!

Zombies talked about their brains  
I saw bodies in chains  
I saw human remains  
There were a bunch of bloodstains!

*Middle School Division (Grades 6-8)*

1<sup>st</sup> place Poetry—Middle School Division

By: **Salha Abdul**

Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

**Pink**

She is constantly in pain,  
She's fighting for her life.  
Breast cancer is not a game,  
She might actually die.

She doesn't want to leave her kids,  
She still wants to be their mom.  
She wants to hide what can't be hid,  
And watch her daughters grow up and go to prom.

And yet, she constantly feels pain in her chest,  
But she hides it with a smile.  
She wants her daughters to have a mom like the rest,  
But her battle has been going on for a while.

She hasn't got the money to pay a medical bill,  
So she moves on without the chemo.  
She sits there, waits, and takes a pill,  
Counting down her time to go.

But there is hope for her,  
If she raises some money.  
She'll donate the money to find a cure,  
And pray that one day her battle will be more sunny.

It's the month of October,  
The month of pink.  
The month to fight for a cure,  
It's time for us to think.

Let's think of ways to help the women,  
Who are fighting for their lives.  
Who are wondering if and when,  
They might actually die.

2<sup>nd</sup> place Poetry—Middle School Division  
By: **Jade Richard**  
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### **I'm Okay**

You smile and tease.  
You laugh and giggle.  
Doing all with ease.  
They ask "Are you okay?"  
That one ignorant question.

"Better than any ordinary day."  
Better?  
Giggles from someone of madness.  
You look around.  
And find the giggles are coming from you.

You look with a face of joy.  
Hiding the pain.  
Being so strong.  
Yet, they're so stupid.

I'd rather be hit.  
By a bat.  
Repeatedly swung at.  
Hit multiple, multiple times.  
Yes, that would be better.

"Are you sure?"  
Stupid, small minded, dumb founded people.  
Stop asking.  
Stop bothering me.  
Let me not be aware in peace.  
Let me deal with this through the face of the unknown.  
Put earplugs in my ears.  
A blanket over my face.  
Unknown is blinding me.  
By someone's fate.

Why do you care.  
You didn't care before.  
But, yet I smile.

The smile taking over.  
Over any other emotion I may have.

You look past it all.  
Appear as if nothing is wrong.  
Just a regular day with a pinch of death.  
You hear the cries.  
The looks of tears and strong hugs.

But you're strong.  
You have to be.  
Strong enough to lie straight to your mothers' face.  
By saying all but two words.  
All by saying "I'm okay."



3<sup>rd</sup> place Poetry—Middle School Division  
By: **Bethany Johnston**  
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### **Jr. High Stereotype**

Hello everyone  
Welcome to Junior High school  
I will be your guide

There are a few things  
You will definitely need  
To survive this trip

First, you need AirPods  
Even though you won't use them  
You'll still show them off

Second, you need Vans  
But of course they have to be  
The ones with checkers

Third, you need a straw  
And not some regular straw  
But a metal straw

Fourth, obviously  
You need forty plus scrunchies  
DON'T forget scrunchies

Fifth, shell necklaces  
Yes, they're uncomfortable  
That doesn't matter

Sixth, you need TikTok  
You need to learn the dances  
Or else, you'll stand out

Seventh, big sweatshirts  
Wear your boyfriends if you can  
You must be trendy

Eighth, there is this phrase  
After every sentence  
You say "And I Oop-"

Ninth, you say “peppa”  
Don’t just say it, but shout it  
As loud as you can

Tenth, a Hydroflask  
Hydroflasks are a must have  
But please don’t drop them

Eleventh, skin care  
Not sure why this is a trend  
But still, just do it

Twelfth, “sksksksk”  
It might sound like 6-6-6  
But they all say it

To be like the rest  
You have to follow the trends  
Or you’ll get bullied

It might be a lot  
But you still have to keep up  
Goodluck everyone

1<sup>st</sup> place Creative Nonfiction—Middle School Division  
By: **Paloma Quiroz**  
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### **Wrong Turn**

In the back of my mind I knew my life would never be the same after that tragic night, the night my life changed forever, and not for the better...

\*\*\*\*\*

I lay my head back peacefully, resting my arm on my thigh. The air is cool and comforting. Only the sound of the truck's engine can be heard through the silence. My aunt's birthday was today, New Year's Eve. Such a joyful time of the year. I start to flutter my eyelids shut at the thought of Christmas, but in that instant and earsplitting scream comes from the front. My eyes peel open and I look towards the front of the car, and that's when I see the bright and fluorescent headlights heading dead for us.

Goosebumps erupt on my skin as another scream escapes from my older brother in the passenger seat. I feel the truck brake drastically, and then shortly after, the impact. My body gets jerked back and forth several times, then the seatbelt finally works and I get tugged into place. The belt digs into my chest, making it difficult to breathe. Smoke erupts out of the air bags, making my eyes tear up and my nose to run. I begin to cough hysterically and wave my arms in front of my face.

I finally open my teary eyes back up. I look to my right, and see my little brother laying in his seat motionless. I scream until my throat is raw and I have no energy left in me. I unbuckle my seatbelt and see my older brother continuously hitting his window.

I throw myself to the front of the car to see my mom hyperventilating. I put my hands to my face, trying to hold back inevitable tears. Finally, I hear glass break and waves of cold air drift in and vent the smoky atmosphere inside. I try and breathe deeply, but I start coughing immediately. I feel the door to the right of me get yanked open, but I can't tell anymore. My vision is blurry and I'm lightheaded. When I finally come back to my five senses, all I see are flashing lights and tons of blurry faces surrounding me. I get on all fours and start to cough up metallic tasting blood. I feel gentle pats on my back as I continue to spit out blood.

I finally stop and wipe my mouth clean with the back of my hand. I'm drained of all energy, but I stumble to my feet and tumble myself to the front of our truck---or at least what was left of it. I throw my hand to my mouth in horror as I stare at what's left of our Lincoln Navigator. I yelped out and felt someone pull me to the ground. I comply, as I'm too shocked to move or even think straight. I look around desperately to find my family, but all I see are strangers surrounding me and telling me that "everything's going to be okay."

I close my eyes and tell myself that this is just a nightmare, a very painful and realistic nightmare. I start to hyperventilate uncontrollably. My hands are shaking and there's drops of cold sweat pouring down the side of my face. I open my eyes to see the other car completely demolished, with the driver still stuck inside. I turn to my left to see my mom bawling next to my unmoving little brother. I scream until I don't have the strength to anymore and sob uncontrollably.

Fury suddenly invades my vision. Why did he have to wreck us?! Why tonight?! Sirens break into my thoughts, and my eyes go wide and I look around. I see my older brother trying to get the driver out of his crushed car to beat him. I try and run over to him, but I trip over remains of our truck and I end up falling on glass pieces.

I bring my hand up to my eye level and see my palm cut open and blood going down to my arm. I bite my lip to not let out anymore screams. I close my eyes to try and distract me from the stabbing pain.

An ambulance appears by my left and they immediately get out. They open the back of the ambulance and take out a stretcher. A woman appears by my side and lifts me from my arm and takes me to the stretcher and helps me on. I close my eyes as they put a breathing mask on my face. I finally give up, and let the darkness consume me...

2<sup>nd</sup> place Creative Nonfiction—Middle School Division  
By: **Julia Slavich**  
Academy of the Sacred Heart

### **Maddi**

The date is February 25, 2016. I am eating dinner at the counter when my dad comes in and says, “Julia get in the car.”

I notice that my dog Maddi is in his arms and my gut tells me that something is wrong. Again, my dad says, “Julia get in the car.”

I know that something is wrong so I quickly grab my iPad and get in the car.

My dad puts Maddi in her kennel, on top of her white blanket with elephants and gets in the car. My dad turns around and tells me that Maddi is having stomach problems so we are taking her to the vet. The car ride is quiet except for Maddi’s occasional whimpering. *Is she going to make it? What if she doesn't make it, what will I do without her?*

When we get to the vet’s office, Maddi is sounding even worse than at the beginning of the car ride, her breathing is a lot heavier and she will not stop whimpering. Before we get out of the car my dad says, “Maddi might not make it”.

When we get out of the car my dad wraps Maddi in her soft white blanket and we walk inside. My mom is already there and she looks like she had been crying. My dad tells me to find a spot to sit down. While I am sitting, I can only hear bits and pieces of their conversation, but I can make out that Maddi had eaten some type of nut and apparently dogs can die from digesting nuts. I try to look on the bright side, but it is so hard. *Why is this happening to her why can't it happen to me?* My mom and dad come and sit with me and they ask me about my day. I tell them it was good.

A few minutes later a vet with brown hair and brown eyes comes and tells us that they are ready to take Maddi. I remember my dad saying that Maddi might not make it so I give her one last loving hug.

The vet takes Maddi from my dad and says, “If one of you would like to come into the room with me you may.”

Somehow, my mom and dad decide that my mom would go with the vet. I always wonder how my parents decided who would go with the vet, they both love Maddi so much I think that neither of them could bare to lose her.

The vet, whose name I found out later was Dr. Lilian, leads my parents over to a table where they have to sign some paperwork. Once the vet and my mom leave, I ask my dad what he just signed and he says that he signed a form so that if anything goes wrong during the surgery

they have permission to put Maddi down. I did not know what “put down” meant, so I just nod my head. *What are they going to do to her? What will I do without her?* At the time I thought it meant

I remember it like it was yesterday...

*We had just gotten home from school on my first day of third grade and I had had the worst day in my whole life. The people who I thought were my friends completely turned on me, they started calling me really mean names and teasing me. I hadn't told the teacher about it because they threatened me that they would tell the teacher that I was bullying them. I did not want to get in trouble, so I kept my mouth shut. I thought that if I told my mom she would tell the teacher and I would get bullied more. I locked myself in my room and cried. I heard scratching on my door so I opened it to find Maddi standing right outside my door. She walked into my room, jumped on my bed and layed down. I layed down right by her and snuggled with her until I fell asleep.*

*To this day I know that Maddi helped me through one of the toughest times in my life. Somehow she always knew when I needed her the most.*

My dad and I do not talk much while my mom is in the back room, but we had the occasional conversation of “How was your day?” And, “It was good how was yours?”

One of our conversations, however, is about how our lives would be without Maddi. This topic is so out of the blue that I am shocked at first, but it is normal for anyone to think that when someone they love is dying. I keep hearing a dog whimpering then nothing, I think I am imagining things so I don't think much of it at first, but then I hear it again, and know it is real. I say a quick, silent prayer for whatever animal made that noise.

A few minutes later, the vet comes out followed by my mom. I notice that my hands are sweaty and fidgety. I try to not look at them because I know that something is wrong because the vet has a frown on her face and my mom looks like she was about to cry. My mom was just holding Maddi's blanket and at that moment I knew that Maddi was gone.

3<sup>rd</sup> place Creative Nonfiction—Middle School Division  
By: **Bethany Johnston**  
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### **Friday Night**

When I was little, I used to go to my grandparents' house every Friday night. My whole family would be there. I'd get to play with my cousins and spend time with my grandparents. I have a large family, so every few weeks, someone would have a birthday party. Even if there wasn't a party, we'd still get together. My grandma would buy Popeyes fried chicken, and pizza from Pizza Hut. My grandpa loved orange Crush soda, so the refrigerator would be full of that.

I remember the last Friday night. It was nine days before my ninth birthday, and eight days before my brother, Luke's eleventh birthday. We wouldn't be able to get together during those few days, so my grandparents threw an early birthday party for the two of us. My cousins Kallie, Elijah, Logan, Annabelle, and Cloee were there. My two younger brothers, Ben and Samuel, came too. My parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunts were all there, too.

At the time, I loved WWE, and Luke loved The Titanic. My grandma made a square cake that looked like a wrestling ring for me, and a boat shaped cake for Luke. She bought fried chicken and pizza, just like every Friday night. There were balloons and decorations everywhere. Most importantly, my whole family was there.

My grandpa was acting different, and none of us knew why.

"Are you okay?" my grandma asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he answered.

We assumed he just wasn't feeling well. My family sang "Happy Birthday" to my brother and I. We opened gifts, then we all did whatever. My cousins and I decided to play hide and seek.

"Ready or not, here I come!," my cousin Kallie said.

"Dang it, I didn't find a place to hide, yet," my little cousin, Logan said. He sat on the couch and whined for the rest of the game. Kallie found everyone else, and I was the only one left. They all began looking for me. After they all searched for about twenty minutes, I finally revealed myself and jumped out of the closet, scaring all of them.

My grandpa then came inside and asked Luke and I if we wanted to go in the woods with him. We said yes and he took us on his off-road vehicle, into the woods. We drove around for a while and he told us that he loved us, and talked to us about random things, like school and friends. I eventually got scared because I had watched horror movies before, and the woods scared me. I asked him to take us back to the house. I wish I wouldn't have asked that.

We went back home and our whole family was in the living room. We talked about the most random things. There was an argument about the way either was pronounced. Kallie and my Uncle Bobby argued about it for what felt like forever. They finally came to an agreement.

“Fine, you’re right,” my uncle said.

“Obviously,” Kallie replied. Everyone laughed at that. After a while of enjoying each other's company Luke, Kallie, Elijah, and I went outside. There was this thing that was kind of like half of a box. It was a few feet high, but it didn’t have a cover. We noticed that there were some sheets of metal in the barn nearby. We decided we should make a clubhouse. We started moving the metal sheets to the box and setting them on top. A breeze of wind came through while I was carrying one. At the time, I was very light, and the wind picked me up into the air.

“Bethany!,” my cousin Kallie screamed. I started slowly coming back down.

“I got here!” my Uncle Billy yelled. He caught me. I started laughing.

“That was so fun,” I said.

We went back inside and my little brothers were watching a movie called Howard The Duck. I didn’t really like it, but I watched it anyway.

“It’s time to go,” my dad told us. My cousins were leaving, too. All nine of us gathered around my grandpa. He was sitting in his leather recliner that he loved. We all gave him a group hug, which we had never done before.

I didn’t know why, but I cried on the way home. I had a feeling that I would never see my grandpa again. I was right.

On Sunday, February 1, 2015, just two days after our last Friday night, my grandpa went hunting. He shot two ducks. He went down to get them and was struggling to catch his breath. He had a heart attack while hunting, and passed away in the woods.

One year later, my parents divorced.

Two years after that, my grandma died of Pancreatic Cancer.

I hardly see my cousins anymore, and a lot of people in our family aren’t too happy with each other.

Things aren’t the same anymore.

I’d do anything for just one more Friday night.



1<sup>st</sup> place Fiction—Middle School Division  
By: **Shayna Chevis**  
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### **What It Takes to Love**

The skies were once beautiful just as her mother's long, black, silky hair. Now it seemed to only reflect the emptiness and darkness which was within her. Voices from her past became louder and louder, causing her to miss the warmth of her mother hugs. Autumn, fourteen year old Autumn, had to move in with her abusive auntie and three cousins. She always got the last of everything and was forced to sleep in their rat infested basement. Love. What was it? She hasn't felt it ever since her mom died four years ago. One cold winter night Autumn decided she wanted to end her life. Put an end to her misery.

“No one will even miss me.” she repeated as her voice trembled.

Slowly opening the squeaky medicine cabinet, a river of thoughts began to flow through her mind. She looked into the mirror and raised her palm to lay it against her smooth, dark face. Autumn seen her mom's features in her brown eyes and midnight curls. She remembered the time they sat around the dinner table talking about their favorite seasons.

“Fall” she said while smiling

“My mom loved fall. That's how I got my name, Autumn.”

A sudden chill passed through her body as she remembered the lifeless women whom she loved, laying on their bathroom floor with an empty bottles of pills. One tear rolled down her eye, then another, until her face was like an overflowing pool. The same way her mom left this earth was the same way she was leaving behind her legacy. She studied the white small pills then ate them. Love. She never felt it in a while, but today, this day, she has found what she was looking for. A white gleam of light spoke to her saying

“Your work on earth is not yet done. I love you. Accept me into your life and i will free you from your pain.”

Autumn later woke up in a hospital room surrounded by doctors. They found out about the abuse and placed her an amazing Christian family that took her in despite her age. It took Autumn the pain she has felt to learn how to love not only herself, but others.

2<sup>nd</sup> place Fiction—Middle School Division

By: **Jedesia Joseph**

Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### **The Earth's Split**

Hello, my name is Charlotte Green. I'm a geologist. In the summer of 2019, I made a shocking discovery. The earth was in half. I did not want to tell anyone because they'd think I'm crazy. Even worse, I could be killed. When studying geography there is evidence for everything you do. My evidence was remarkable, our earth had so much air pollution it simply split. Since gravity exists we were still were in outer space. Everything was normal but I was the only human on earth who knew about the split, or was I?

I had hidden my evidence I had written in plain site, where no one would expect. Under a plant in our office. No one ever moves or touches it . About a week later I was waiting for the bus then suddenly everything went black. Right then and there I found out I was not alone. I woke up in a dark room barely any light. A dark shadow approached me. I heard them say "How do you know about the earth's split". In my mind I thought how had they known ,who were they, why were they doing this. I replied by saying one simple word "what". I had to play stupid. They said "I know you know what happened, and you're not leaving until you confess".

I'm being held hostage for a discovery I thought. Insane! Never in all of my 15 years of studies this has ever happened. I yelled " figure it out by yourself"! They replied by saying "guess you'll never go home". A shriek of panic suddenly came upon me. What will my family think? They might think I'm dead. I'm never leaving here I thought to myself. This is prison and I'm the prisoner. The person brought me food and water each for a week, then they said I can get one note home. I wrote to my family in French because I was convinced this person didn't know French. The note said "Mom and dad I am safe and will return soon". The next week I got a note also in French that said " If you're safe that's all that matters". I smiled while reading this. That's when I knew I had to spill the beans.

The next day when they brought my meal I said " I'll tell you". They immediately turned towards me and listened. I said " It's our fault we polluted the earth until it couldn't handle it anymore". They said " How can we fix this". "Time" I said, "If we take good care of earth for a couple years it will naturally come together again". They said "you can go home tomorrow". I realized this was a big problem. I knew how to fix it and I hope I have that information to the right people. I went home not knowing who even kidnapped me. It was all over, which showed nothing bad had happened so the information I shared was trusted.

There's always hope in every single situation. Even if you don't see it it's always there. Look at me I thought I was going to die. I'm still here doing what I love studying earth. No one else really knows what happened or where I was, and I hope they never find out. Life is like a card game choose what cards you want to put down but keep the cards you want to keep a secret. You never know what card you have to put down, but you should choose wisely.

*High School Division (Grades 9-12)*

1<sup>st</sup> place Poetry—High School Division

By: **Carmen Lopez**

Comeaux High School

**Multiple Poems**

**Red**

Red

Undergoes metamorphosis

In the light of the sun

Baby pink

A metallic-tasting hatred fills my senses

    The surface of my skin burns

        My blood ferments

I wish not to be

    Changeable

What

    Am I valued for?

Is it my beauty?

I resent all that I am

On the outside

    Foolishly wishing

        I could be lucky

            Enough to be ugly

    Wishing I was born

Baby pink

**Mustard**

Hollow sounds  
Glass and wood  
    Impact  
I looked down at my cup,  
Nearly empty  
(Nearly-half-full?)  
I contemplated  
The hideous colors of the walls  
Two mustard yellow  
One red  
Like a fast food joint  
Tinted blue from the lack of light in the room  
    Hideous  
Mocking me  
I poured more water into my broken cup

**Crepe Myrtle in the Lungs of the Fool**

I'm holding sickness  
Between my thumb and forefinger  
I press it onto the brick  
And cure myself  
I'm holding crepe myrtle  
Between my thumb and forefinger  
I press it onto the brick  
And reclaim death  
The wind cries as it slips through the grass  
And I cry as I look at the moon  
The moon herself crying at the lack of companionship  
Due to the thick layer of clouds  
I almost feel sorry for my mom  
But she was the same  
The concrete beneath my thighs  
Leaves imprints on my flesh  
I remove the clips from my hair  
So that I can run my fingers through it  
I ponder the consequences of my actions  
Promise me  
When I die  
So as not to break my mother's heart  
Don't let them perform an autopsy on me

2<sup>nd</sup> place Poetry—High School Division  
By: **Eliana Lopez**  
Comeaux High School

**where you walk**

i wish i hadn't emptied out my head onto the pavement  
because when the wind blew  
and people walked along the sidewalk  
my thoughts were scattered all over  
and i haven't seen them since.

3<sup>rd</sup> place Poetry—High School Division  
By: **Ravyn Johnlouis and Daija Ware**  
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### **Girl, Get Up**

Girl, get the hell up

You're sitting here wasting your time  
Drowning in your own insecurities  
Allowing others' opinions  
To affect your confidence

Truth is, you are what you feel  
And baby girl you're cracking

You let a simple disappointment  
Lead you down a road of depression  
And a simple failure  
Makes you even question

If you're good enough for anything  
Do better, work harder  
And stop caring about what he thinks  
Girl, quit slacking

Others accepting you is not the problem  
It's the fact that you can't accept yourself  
You don't have to be ashamed

But be confident, not cocky  
In arrogance, just relaxing  
Like you've never known what it felt like  
To be down and out with low self-esteem

Stop trying to reach unrealistic goals  
And letting social media control  
How you view the body you have

Girl, stop crying  
Your knees aching, huh?  
Can't you see you're breaking?

Open your eyes and see where your beauty lies  
On the inside and the out  
Hasn't your mother told you  
You're beautiful because it's true?

Get it together, sis  
You're not too tall or too short  
Those Cs and Ds don't define you

Because you're capable of doing great things  
You're not the way your enemies make you seem  
So, stop thinking you owe someone an explanation

The most important thing you need  
In this world is an education  
Worrying about what the next one says  
Won't get you anywhere

Your beauty shall not be belittled  
Your knowledge shall not be mistakened  
And your confidence shall be existent

Eliminate all negativity  
Empower and encourage other ladies to do so

And girl, stay the hell up!



1<sup>st</sup> place Creative Nonfiction—High School Division  
By: **Savion Siner**  
Carencro High School

### **Reading Between the Code**

I received my first gaming console when I was 9: the original Xbox. I remember ripping open the wrapping paper on Christmas morning and seeing the black and green patterns of the box being slowly revealed. I remember setting it up with my dad and hearing the start-up chime for the first time. I remember feeling the weight of the controller in my hand and the strange sensation I got in my fingers when it vibrated. The original Xbox was loud and clunky, and the graphics capabilities were laughable by today's standards. The small CRT television in my room that I used as a monitor only washed out the already unsaturated colors the console was capable of producing. Looking back now, I find it funny how awed I was by it. But 9-year-old me was easily impressed. And 9-year-old me loved playing on his Xbox.

Some people believe that video games are bad for children— that they cultivate violence or misogyny or what have you in adolescence. In the past, when mindless killing and damsels in distress were mainstream, this may have been true. But now, with this new “woke” culture sweeping the globe, this could not be further from reality. While video games are still made widely for entertainment, it is becoming more common to see titles with gripping stories that attempt to highlight critical socioeconomic issues. The world is striving toward becoming more inclusive, and video games have evolved into a catalyst for this movement. But even before the maturity of the industry, through the stories they tell, video games have had the power to inspire players and give them the courage to overcome adversities in their lives.

Throughout most of elementary school, I was a victim of bullying. I was the weird kid— no one wanted to talk to me, not even the other weird kids. On some days, after a bad day at school, I would rush to my bedroom with tears streaming down my eyes and bury my face into my pillow, sobbing quietly so my parents wouldn't hear. I cried a lot while I was in elementary school. But the time I didn't spend crying, I spent it playing on my Xbox.

During my childhood, video games provided me with an outlet to safely deal with my emotions. I was never good at expressing how I felt or analyzing the feelings of others. I was never a conversationalist or charismatic. I was clumsy and geeky and awkward. I struggled with making friends, which is to say I didn't have any. I sat in class alone, ate lunch alone, and went to recess alone.

Conversely, everyone else had their friend groups or best buddies. I remember seeing girls on the playground, engaging in the sacred ritual of fantasizing about their futures. It was a common sight: two of them would sit on the ground with their legs crossed, facing each other with their eyes intensely fixated on the other. They would talk about how big their houses would be, how handsome their husbands would be, how much money they would make. At first glance, this might seem like a silly schoolgirl game— it was— but there was a deeper meaning to it. No matter how extravagant the girls imagined their lives to be, it was always understood that their

friendship would remain constant. The ritual would always end with the same closing message: “And we’ll be best friends forever.” This little game seemed to solidify their bond. Most of the kids at my elementary school had someone to play games like this with, but not me. I would sit nearby, listening to their stories, and wondering why I couldn’t have what they have. Every day I would go home and ask myself that question. I didn’t understand what was wrong with me. I spent several nights in bed looking up at the ceiling and wondering if I would ever have any friends. My school life was rough, and it was only getting worse.

One day, a group of kids dropped a trash can over me while I was in a bathroom stall. Fortunately, it was empty, but I was humiliated. I could hear the other kids snickering outside the door. I lifted the bin off of me and set it aside. It was one of the worst moments of my life. I tried my best to keep my composure. I managed to get through the rest of the school day, but after I ran home crying.

I felt worthless. School was miserable for me, and I began to resent going at all. I thought about dropping out and running away. I felt as though no one wanted me around. My outlook on life was pretty bleak then, that was until my dad introduced me to what would become one of my favorite games: Just Cause 2. It was about a secret government agent named Rico tasked with overthrowing the tyrannical dictator of a small island nation. I fell in love with it immediately. I remember spending hours playing during the weekend and after school. I became fascinated with Rico’s persona and began to look up to him.

Rico was brave, strong, and, most importantly, a loner— like me. I related to him as best as a young middle schooler could relate to a fictional international spy. I tried to act like him, be as tough as him. Whenever I’d get teased at school, I’d think to myself: “A few mean words never hurt Rico. Why should it hurt me?”

This game was my personal savior throughout elementary school. On some days, I would come home feeling broken and defeated, but all that went away when I turned on my Xbox, plugged it into my old TV, and watched the game’s logo appear slowly on the screen.

I began to live my life by a new motto: What would Rico do? As foolish as it may sound, this mentality got me through my tween years. I started to care less about what others thought of me and more about what I thought of myself. I became more confident than I was before. I ignored what the bullies said about me and continued to work hard in class. It became easier for me to go to school every day. I learned to focus on the better parts of my life and continue to improve myself. I was not as shy and insecure as I was in the past. Seeing strong protagonists, like Rico, in video games take on bullies gave me something to aspire to. Characters like him became my role models.

My tween years were a transformation period for me. It was the point in my life where I was starting to figure out whom I wanted to be. I was very impressionable then, and luckily it was also around the time that the gaming industry started to shift away from repetitive violence and focus more on creating titles that told meaningful stories.

Tomb Raider, Battlefield, Injustice— titles like these created characters that were the embodiment of perseverance, integrity, and courage. Video game streaming was also becoming popular, so I was able to experience even more of what the industry had to offer. Games like The Last of Us and Until Dawn captivated me. These titles told stories about characters overcoming the most impossible of challenges through sheer force of will and self-determination. Even after I left elementary school and the bullying stopped, the influence of video games over my life was still strong and unyielding. I went beyond just playing them for entertainment and began to learn from their stories and the characters I interacted with.

Video games are not just for passing the time. They allow players to experience a whole new world; video games teach lessons. We can learn from the characters and the trials they face. From playing Just Cause 2, I learned that one could triumph in a world of hostility and hatred just by having the courage to stand up for himself. At first glance, video games may seem like mind-numbing wastes of time, but if you were to read between the lines— or the code, in this case— you would see that they open up a world of inspiration and possibilities. You would see how even a small team of writers, designers, and programmers can empower millions of people. You would see why 9-year-old me loved playing on his Xbox.

2<sup>nd</sup> place Creative Nonfiction—High School Division  
By: **Natalie Richenberger**  
Lafayette High School

## The Canyon

After 68 years, the residence of my great-grandmother had been given up to a younger, more capable couple.

The property now looked far older than it did even a year ago, for a year ago there at least existed love. A year ago, the old metal workshop still stood and the wooden shed that housed their farming equipment for 30 years had not yet been demolished. Now, only a concrete slab and a patch of infertile dirt projected the apparitions where these buildings once stood. Even the trees surrounding the pasture that I would walk through every day now towered over the property, not with curiosity, but as if they were staring down into a coffin, forever mourning their loss.

As I stood facing the same pasture, I shifted my eyes towards the stout mulberry in the middle of their gargantuan yard and saw the ghost of the past awaken before me, along with it all the deceased and forgotten memories that escaped me years ago. I gazed at the spirits of all those I knew and as well as those I could have never known from a glass window somewhere deep in my body. My great-grandmother's three dead boys were all chasing each other in the yard, their clothes filthy and their screams of joy bouncing off the walls of my mind. They were otherworldly, being faded and golden, and no one else could see them. The grass was also golden and compressed under their feet, almost as if their spirit was contagious. As I was caught up observing these figures, the old screen door opened and my great-grandmother's young, stunning image strode upon the porch with a metal rod to ring the dinnerbell. As it rang, I knew from my own childhood this meant that supper was ready and, just as I would have, her three boys all sprinted to the house. My great uncle's smile was incredibly crooked and my grandfather's delighted face was all bruised and cut from the day to day labor of working on the farm. As for my Uncle Gary, he simply tagged behind the two older boys in his overalls as they raced through the door and inside. My beaming great-grandmother soon followed them, letting the cool wind slam the door behind them. I knew that this wordless interaction would be the last time I would see any of them that vividly. I felt myself silently drowning in my own trauma as my wrinkled, defeated great-grandmother then walked through the door and into the reality of the situation. I found myself wondering if she remembered that day with her boys or if that day had even happened at all. Even so, the memory of my great-grandmother had been more vibrant than the one I now saw before me.

Now, all around the property, memories were beginning to awaken and replay themselves like an old VHS tape. The image of my 5 year old mother appeared by the deserted chicken pens, way over yonder, and could be seen running circles around the empty pen in some unknown effort to have fun. Beside her, her deceased father—now much older than the previous memory he was part of—was staring at her with his hands on his hips. A handsome resemblance of Billy Ray Cyrus staring down at his one pride and joy, not yet knowing the ultimate fate he would

decide for himself. Then, almost as if on cue, a slightly older version of the same man stumbled in front of the oak tree nearby the pens and collapsed, heaving and grasping for his throat. His face was heavy with regret and his eyes held the immeasurable sorrow of committing the act he just did and I felt nothing.

Memories like these, happy and sorrowful alike, were now replaying everywhere. All I could do was simply watch them emerge and then dissipate back into nothingness. This was the legacy of my great-grandparents and their property. It was all they ever wanted—to make memories with the people they loved the most. Even memories that I had forgotten about years ago were now replaying before me and made it seem more so like I was watching an old home video. These memories were all a shimmering jewel amongst what they property had now become. Those memories were all the property had now.

Despite the corruption this day had on my fragile teenage mind, I had no tears to shed as I stood in the middle of my grandmother's ghastly yard. As the golden figures started to lessen in numbers, I realized that this place was now void of all the joy it once harbored. Echoing my sentiments, my great-grandmother, getting ready for her new life in the city, said, "This house is no longer a home." With this place would also go my innocence.

It didn't take long for my family members who were situated behind me to break me from my imagination. Their incomprehensible words and cries rode on the warm summer wind and echoed all throughout my mind. Each and every one of them had something to remember about the property and what it had to offer. In a way, some smidgen of innocence had also been stolen from them. Even now, I can still feel it—that same sorrowful echo—resonating throughout the fruitless canyon my old spirit once was, forever fading in sound, but never in meaning.

3<sup>rd</sup> place Creative Nonfiction—High School Division  
By: **Hossein Senati**  
Carencro High School

### **People Can Change**

For many years my aunt served in the U.S military. She was an army woman which made her top of the list for getting stationed to a foreign country. The first country she was stationed in was Afghanistan. Now Afghanistan is a country comprised of several little towns, the town my aunt was stationed to was called Harir. It was a small town that only consisted of about 30,000 people at that time. The people in the town were mean and rude to all Americans due to their past beliefs about what type of people they thought Americans were.

Now my aunt's squad and a few others were stationed to the little town of Harir. So, whenever my aunt arrived she had hundreds of people just glaring at her with hate and resentment, quietly murmuring all around her. Now there were a few people who didn't frown or smile, whose faces remained neutral. Of course, this was a selected few, but there stood my aunt with unease. The hate and rage that reflected in the citizens' eyes made her walk to the base with caution. She felt as though everyone hated not just her but her whole crew, she had the feeling of rejection and unsought.

Soon enough my aunt had gotten settled in and she began her life as a U.S army woman in Harir. She began doing her duties such as routes, though she was still being abhorred by the majority of the people. One day my aunt was doing her daily route and she noticed one of the ladies' market carts had fallen over and all of the fruits, herbs, and spices were on the ground. She hurried to the area to help pick up the food because it seemed as though the elderly lady was struggling. After helping pick up all of the fruits my aunt looked up and recognized her face. She was one of the minorities that were in the crowd that had neither a happy nor upset face.

After my aunt helped her pick up her belongings the marketeer thanked her for the help and also for her service. This took my aunt by surprise because first off she thanked her secondly, she thanked her for her service even though she wasn't American. So, my aunt being the impulsive person that she is decided to ask why would she do that, why thank her. The lady responded in a way that changed the whole viewpoint of my aunt, she said she believed that both of them are people they just lived in two different countries, as they began to talk they started to understand one another, they understood that they are still people living in one world.

As the days passed they grew closer and closer, eventually, although it took some time, they became close friends. As time flew by the merchant would share her culture with my aunt, she would show her how they lived, and in return, my aunt shared a piece of her world with her showing her pictures of America and how Americans live. Soon enough people in that village started to ease up on the American troops. In time the troops and the citizens became friends, they became so fascinated with one another they forgot they were enemies.

The time came when my aunt was restationed, her time had come and it was time to say goodbyes. It wasn't easy letting go, someone, you gotten so close to in the past few months but they got through it. As my aunt and her team loaded up there bags the merchant ran up to her. She wanted to give my aunt a gift or something she could be remembered by. The merchant had given her a handcrafted jewelry box with a few gems in the box. My aunt began to welt with tears knowing she would probably never see the merchant again. She hugged her and said their goodbyes for the last time, as she boarded the helicopter she realized that people can change, that although she went there with a hundred enemies she left with a thousand friends.

As my aunt told this story her eyes began to swell with tears of joy. She went to Harir thinking she was just there to do her job and make sure there was no conflict. But in the end, she left with thousands of friends and with an understanding that people can change. She told us that she didn't want to change anything for the world.

1st place Fiction—High School Division  
By: **Lacey Auzenne**  
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### The Trigger

I walked back to my apartment on a dark, October's night. I was attending a community college near my hometown at the time, and couldn't be happier. The wind whistled past my ears as I made my way to the complex, and, for the first time in a while, I was at peace. Between all my homework and studying, I rarely had time to relax. When I stopped to admire the night's cloudless, obsidian sky, my cell phone rang. It was my younger brother, Eli. It wasn't uncommon for him to call me late at night, so I assumed nothing of it. I picked up the phone, and my heart dropped when I heard Eli's shaky voice.

"C-Carter? Carter you need to get home. *Now.*" he sounded terrified. My stomach leapt into my throat. I took a deep breath before I answered him.

"What's wrong?" I asked. There was silence for a moment, then he responded.

"Uncle Ralph is here." he whispered. My Uncle Ralph was notorious for picking fights with my father. I let out a small sigh of relief. These arguments were enough to shake Eli up, but they rarely got physical.

"I'll catch a taxi and get there ASAP; I'm not too far away. Just don't stress yourself too much, alright? Stay safe-" Eli cut me off.

"Please hurry. Things are bad this time, Carter. And I mean, *really* bad." Eli said. I assured him I'd be there soon, and, as promised, caught a taxi. Eli was a dramatic kid, sure, but I'd never heard him sound so helpless. I spent the ride telling myself Eli would be okay. I'd break up whatever fight Ralph and Dad got into, make sure everyone was okay, and head back to my apartment. If only it was that simple.

I paid the taxi driver upon our arrival, and hastily walked to the front door. My heart thundered in my chest when I turned the doorknob. The door was *never* unlocked this late at night.

"Eli! I'm home!" I exclaimed. My concern grew with every passing second... Why wasn't he answering me? On trembling legs, I walked into the kitchen. Everything seemed normal, until I looked towards the dining room. My vision grew blurry when I saw two slumped figures on either side of the table.

"Mom? Dad?" I asked. No response. I approached my parents and let out a sigh of relief when I saw their chests rising up and down. They were alive. I tried yelling their names a few times, but they didn't stir. Had they been drugged or something? I should have called the cops then and there, but I was stupid. I needed to make sure Eli was alright, so I ran up the stairs and



knocked on his room door. When he didn't answer, I opened it. There, my Uncle Ralph laid in a pool of blood. One look at his face, and it was clear he was dead. I whipped out my cell phone to call the police, but I didn't have service.

"Carter?" a small voice asked quietly. I turned around quickly. Eli? I followed the voice to the basement, abandoning any thoughts of escape. I flung open the basement door, and ran inside. As dim as the lights were, I could see my younger brother. He was obviously shaken up, but he was safe. I hurried to his side and placed a firm hand on his shoulder.

"What's going on? What's wrong with Mom and Dad? Why is-" He cut me off.

"Be quiet. I'm just as confused as you are right now," he whispered. "But whatever killed Ralph is still here."

We spent the next few minutes in silence, both unsure as to what we should do next. I broke the silence with a small cough.

"Maybe I can buy you some time. Wanna try to sneak out the window?" I suggested. Eli shook his head quickly. That was when I noticed his pajamas were covered in blood. For the umpteenth time that night, my heart sunk.

"Are you okay?" I asked quickly. Eli mumbled in response.

"What did you say? If you're hurt I can-"

"It isn't mine." He said a little louder. My mind started swimming with possibilities. He sighed.

"Look, while I was in my room waiting for you, things suddenly went quiet downstairs, and stayed that way for a while. I hoped Uncle Ralph and Dad had stopped fighting, but of course things couldn't have been that easy. I heard a loud scream, and panicked. I hid under my bed. Uncle Ralph ran into my room. There was someone behind him..." He stopped talking there and let me put two and two together.

"I had to worm my way out from under the bed, and my clothes got dirty during the process." he muttered. I still had questions, but I figured I'd let them wait-- Eli had seen a lot.

"Let's just hide here for now, okay?" I said. I rummaged around the basement, and eventually found the spare key. (Yes, our spare basement key was kept in the basement. Weird, I know.) I locked the door, and dug around some more, and eventually found dad's old handguns. He always kept them well hidden for emergencies, and told Eli and I about them as soon as we were old enough. I loaded two, and handed one to Eli. We sat for a while, hearing only the pounding of our own heartbeats.

"Maybe he left?" Eli said quietly. I stood up.

“I’m gonna see if the coast is clear. Stay here, and keep that gun on you, okay?” I walked to the basement door, unlocked it, and briefly went back to place the key in Eli’s shaky hands.

“Lock it back up as soon as I’m out. I’ll knock five times to let you know things are safe, okay?” I said. Eli hugged me.

“Be safe, bro.” he mumbled under his breath. I smiled to myself and ruffled his hair.

“I’ll be back soon.” I promised. I left the basement and heard the door quickly locking behind me. I crept back into the dining room, only keeping myself calm by tightening my grip on dad’s gun. I froze for a second. Dad was still unconscious, but Mom’s body was gone. I heard the sound of something being dragged down the stairs. I ducked behind the counter. I peered around the corner, and nearly choked. Mom was dragging Uncle Ralph’s body down the stairs with tears in her eyes. I took my opportunity. I got out from my hiding place, and, with trembling hands, pointed my gun at her. She froze.

“Why?” I asked her. She shook her head.

“I didn’t do this. It was-” I ignored her.

“You’re literally *dragging the body*.” I said.

“Listen to me, Dear. I can clear this up, okay?” she said. I stepped closer to her, gun still raised.

“Then clear things up!” I exclaimed as I held back tears. She let out another shaky sob, then began.

“Your father, Eli, and I were eating dinner when the doorbell rang. Your father got up to answer it, then I heard yelling. I ran to the door, and left Eli alone in the kitchen. I broke them up, then invited Ralph in for dinner. I-I wanted to at least *try* to make things right between them. After a while, Ralph told us that Eli had invited him over tonight. Before I could react, I started feeling dizzy. I think that Eli might have...” She looked off to the side. I noticed her half empty glass of wine, and Dad’s completely empty one. Had Eli really drugged them? It would explain why Mom was awake before dad. My chest felt heavy.

“W-What happened next?” I asked quietly. She continued.

“Everything was fuzzy, but I heard Ralph scream. Then I heard two pairs of footsteps running up the stairs before I blacked out. As soon as I came to, I saw that one of the kitchen knives were missing. I pulled myself up, and got upstairs as quickly as I could. I hate to say it but...” She broke down into sobs.

“Eli was the only one who could have done this. I don’t know why, but I’m covering things up for him. I know this isn’t right, but-” she stopped and gasped, her eyes fixed on

something behind me. I turned around to see Eli, his gun pointed directly at me. Tears ran down his face.

“I’m so sorry.” he sobbed as he pulled the trigger.

2<sup>nd</sup> place Fiction—High School Division  
By: **Saniyah Jenkins**  
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### **The Extenuation of Nirvana, A City in the Middle of Nowhere**

There was once a city in the middle of nowhere. Rightly named Nirvana, it was the ideal place to live. Though it lay in the desert, the land the city rested upon harbored greenery, trees, and flowering plants that flourished in spite of the aridity of everything else around it. There was no veil of magic, at least none of which anyone could see, that allowed the prairie-like land to exist in a desert. There was just a massive portion of prospering grass and soil and then it slowly frayed on the edges until it was just the nothingness of sand again. There was grass and then there just wasn't. Despite its isolation, the atmosphere around it was magical. The wind, playful and light, gave out the faintest sounds of ringing bells, trilling harps, and happiness. The sun shone bright, filtering everything in a glowing amber. The moon was iridescent and looked over the city at night, emanating a soft glow. The air was sweet, cool, and crisp, breathed in by the townspeople in a manner that whispered contentment.

The people of this city in the middle of nowhere were dreamers. They were scholars, believers, and nonconformists. Nonconforming to what, nobody knew. Maybe just the simple thought of sitting idle. They were fighters, warriors, honorable men and women. Allies that sometimes made dangerous treks to help developing cities from being overrun at their weakened states. There was stuff of fairytales amidst the city. Great winged birds flew both high and low. At night, great hordes of moths flutter about in the sky, spreading patterns across Nirvana. Then, when you'd think they could not become any more elusive, they disperse, breaking away from each other and perching themselves on window ledges and atop the great spires that adorned the city's structures of formality and grandeur. Like their scholarly institutes, libraries, and their guildhall. Both night and day, the moths fluttered and flew playfully among the townspeople. Sometimes perching on random spots, watching, guarding. And as they sensed the people fall into a serene state that could only be sleep, they slipped into homes, silent, and rested upon sleeping forms, projecting good vibes, assuaging nightmares, bringing peace as still as the night air.

There was a great sense of morality that ran deep within the people. Virtues of kindness, goodwill, faith, and a connection to their fellow citizens were the basis of their cores. Core principles that did not waver with age or the seeking of any personal gain. These people didn't really kill or steal or vandalize. They were a goodhearted people that enjoyed life and what it had to offer and worked for what they wanted. Families stuck together, visited, and went out together almost every day. There were no police, and money was just a ruse, just a means to the ideal of order and equality, a fair opportunity for everyone. There was only a council. The city wasn't a part of a bigger state or country or district, so the council consisted of prominent, highly accomplished citizens. Great great great grandsons and daughters of the wanderers that had first claimed the mass thicket of greenery that had somehow survived the desert's harsh, dry weather. Three women, three men.

The council served as judges sometimes. Nothing ever too criminal or violent. Mostly small, domestic endeavors. A divorce. Who gets the dog?

They avoided unnecessary conflict and trivial squabbles. Though not entirely, they were still human even if they were slightly more evolved. And it was because of this that there was only so much that could harm the city in a way that would be detrimental to its core. Small portions of the most famous fables and legends, written as guidance for the townspeople by the Wanderers who had built the town, mentioned the de-evolution of Nirvana. Or rather, de-evolution of its people.

But the town was magic. So it wouldn't be a spearhead or any projectile contraption. Nothing too archaic or crude, too uncivilized. And yet the text read that a spiteful, evil creature could taint the people's cores.

Spiteful, evil creatures. Not too specific, was it. Prophets and scholars pined over it. Trying to decipher what creature was spiteful and evil. It would not be any monstrous animals. Animals were not spiteful or evil. They were just animals, they followed their natural urges and basic needs and stayed true to their nature and genetic code.

But humans, the slightly less evolved ones that lived some thousand miles away from Nirvana, across the great expanse of the desert and a big, but small ocean when compared to others. They were spiteful and evil, reeking of self-importance and writhing with jealousy. They, too, by some big tragedy, some small misfortune, had gotten a whiff of that text. Unbeknownst to the people, this was what could ruin Nirvana. The sheer presence of humans.

And that's what they did. They took one small step into the city in the middle of nowhere, and tainted it with their malice. They infected the city and its people. They slowly became like their lesser evolved kin. Made them like them. Selfish and unwavering in their shortcomings, never failing to disappoint. They had come all that way, traversed all those many miles just to wreck the city in the middle of nowhere. Just to make them just like them, willing to bring down others so they could feel better about themselves.

3<sup>rd</sup> place Fiction—High School Division  
By: **Collin Stelly**  
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

### **For the Sake of Memory**

It was a cold, windy, winter. It was foggy and the sun seemed to hide from the world under a blanket of ice and snow. The war started out of conflict (just like any other war) during one of the harshest winters in history. It was a tough winter and temperatures were frigid and unpleasant. The winter showed no mercy and everyone could feel it in their bones. The air burned your lungs as if you were breathing in icy flames. One did not simply live. One got by and prayed to stay another day, for then one did not live. The war went by slowly and raged on for twelve long years. New technological advancements erupted and created a new kind of war. New computer system advancements have allowed pilots to avoid hitting objects while going extraordinary speeds. Much like the F-35 autopilot systems, the Fe-38 was built with autopilot systems, along with dual rocket propulsion engines. Invisible, flexible, lightweight armor replaced older outdated models. Advancements in weaponry and vehicles were also made. It was a new kind of war in a developing age. The war was still very real.

The war went by fast, and there was always work that was needed to be done. The war ended in the year 2122 after a ceasefire was issued. The war was scheduled to end at one O'clock p.m. and this brought joy to soldiers on both sides of the war. They had only to stay alive another day and the war would be over. We had the same objective. Soon the war would be ending, and this was thrilling. My battle buddies and I, we were comrades. We fought together through and through.

“What do you want when the war ends?” Colt inquired. “I want to see my son. I want to see my boy grow and become a man one day.” Stanly replied. “And what about you Brix?” he asked. “Me?” I replied. “Yes, your name is Brix correct?” he smirked. “Hmm... What do I want...? I guess I want to see the world change. I want to see the world make peace even after all of the death that has occurred.” I replied. “Is that all?” Colt asked. “Yes, and a nice meal and hot bath.” I replied with a laugh. “And you Alexander?” he asked curiously. “What if I don't want to see anything at all? Huh? I don't want to see another war. I am so sick of war. War this, war that. When shall it truly end? I feel as though my head shall explode if this war must persist any longer.” Alexander spat. “And it shall soon. Stay calm, and keep your head steady and your mind well.” I ensured him.

The sounds of war were still very much alive. You could hear gunfire reigning all around us, and the sounds of grenades and other explosives could continue to be heard. Ahead of us we could hear the roaring sounds of enemies approaching. They were charging to take our fortifications. “Stay low!” I commanded. Quickly looking over the wall I took out the first of the group with my plasma rifle. Stanly was hit with a large blast that knocked him backwards. It boomed like thunder and hit like hell. “Stanly!” Colt yelled. Running to his side, Colt assessed his injuries. “The blast bent his visor in!” he exclaimed. I saw the blast through my own display screen, warping into various colors to minimize the effects on my view. The blast had bent his

shoulder armor in as well as his helmet. “He’s.... He’s dead!” Colt spat in a roar of rage. Men all around us continued to fight. The blast that had hit Stanly killed him. He would not get the chance to see his son and his family. Next to me a large boom echoed, followed by a rocket blast that took out multiple enemy troops. Colt, enraged, unsheathed and now brandished a golden, white sword. He glared at the man who had shot his friend moments before. Their eyes locked. “Colt No!” I yelled as he threw himself into battle.

Slashing through enemy troops in blind rage, Colt cut down man after man. His speed and determination was unexpected but soon gauged and countered. Colt charged at the man who had just killed his friend. The gun was jammed, and this worked to his advantage. Quickly, staggering frantically, the man raced to reload his gun as his target approached at alarming speeds. As if as one, the gun roared as the sword penetrated armor and flesh, blasting a whole through Colt’s chest, destroying his heart completely. Both Colt and the Unknown Soldier fell. I watched them fall, and the smile and tears in Colt’s eyes seemed as though they would stay for an eternity, and not for a moment. I was struck in the chest with a large blast at roughly 12:58 p.m. As if in slow motion, the blast threw me backwards and I fell onto my back. I remembered staring at the sky as tears began covering my eyes. I began to hear cheering as I faded deeper and deeper, as a smile spread across my face.

Beep.....Beep.....Beep.....Beep.....Beep..... I woke up in a hospital room one fine morning. I awoke to the sound of my monitor beeping. The sun was shining through the windows beautifully, and the wind was cool and lovely. The birds chirped and sang a joyous symphony outside. “ He’s awake!” chimed one of the nurses nearby. “I’ll inform the doctor.” she said. “Hello. Mr. Reinhardt. You have sustained various injuries. You have sustained pulmonary contusions as well as chest contusions. You have a Pneumothorax and have six broken ribs. You were sent into a state of unconsciousness due to sudden trauma. I say that you are lucky to be alive.” the doctor stated before leaving.

The war is over and I have made it. All of my friends have died, but one. We pledged to sacrifice and pay a price. What shall I do now? I will continue living. I’ll continue living this life that has been saved. I don’t understand the reasons of why I was spared, but I was. So I say to Colt, to Stanley, and to all of the allies that have fought alongside myself, I shall continue to live for their sake, and for their memory.