



Youth Writing Competition

In collaboration with the
National Writing Project of Acadiana

Winners' Anthology

Fall 2025

Acknowledgments

The National Writing Project of Acadiana would like to thank all of the students who submitted such high-quality creative writing for this competition. Thank you to the parents and guardians who support these students and their writing. Thank you to those who judged the competition. We would like to extend a special thank you to the teachers and administrators who provided the educational environment in which such work is valued and encouraged.

Finally, thanks to Martha Garner, Executive Director of The Festival of Words, and her amazing Executive Board, for supporting not only this competition, but also a world-class literary festival year after year.

Sincerely,

H. Michelle Kreamer
Director, National Writing Project of Acadiana
Coordinator, Festival of Words Youth Writing Competition

Toby Daspit
Emeritus Consultant, National Writing Project of Acadiana



Table of Contents

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

Advertisement:

1st place—Seth Arabie, Woodvale Elementary School, “The State Farm Ad”

Multimedia:

1st place—James Chauvin, Woodvale Elementary School, “The Quantum Squeebz”

Fiction:

1st place—Mabel Kellner, Woodvale Elementary School, “An Ant’s World”

2nd place—Camille deClouet, Woodvale Elementary School, “The Secret World”

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

Advertisement

1st place—Jocelyn Rosales, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “Louisiana Hesitate”

Multimedia:

1st place—Shya Hebert, L.J. Alleman Middle School, “If Water Could Speak: Leading by Listening”

2nd place—Jocelyn Rosales, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “The Louisiana Hesitate Podcast”

Fiction:

1st place—Daniel Calvert, Belle Place Middle School, “The Unknown Curse”

2nd place—Vance Herpin, Youngsville Middle School, “Tokyo Jump”

3rd place—Alexandra Gillette, St. Pius Elementary School, “The Squash”

Poetry:

1st place—Shya Hebert, L.J. Alleman Middle School, “Heart Patterns”

2nd place—Abdul-Hadi Mohammed, Edgar Martin Middle School, “Breathe”

3rd place—Bryanna Cotton, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “Sundown”

HIGH SCHOOL:

Fiction:

1st place—Addison Fontenot, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “My Perfect Girl”

2nd place—Amelia Rosteet, Southside High School, “Never Me, But You”

3rd place—Lucy Saucier, Southside High School, “Birds of a Feather”

Honorable Mention—Sha'layjia Dugas, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “Continuity”

Poetry:

1st place—Neviah Taylor-Larson, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “Shedding Skin”

2nd place—Jillian Thomas, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “The Weary Stone”

3rd place—Addison Fontenot, Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts, “My Last Dance to an Ugly Melody”

Elementary School Division (Grades 3-5)

1st place Advertisement - Elementary School Division

By: **Seth Arabie**

Woodvale Elementary School

“The State Farm Ad”



1st place Multimedia - Elementary School Division
By: **James Chauvin**
Woodvale Elementary School

“The Quantum Squeeb”

NARRATOR: One day, in a window-less spaceship, there lies a comedic improv group who involve normal, everyday things into comedy.

CAPTAIN GLEEP: Fire up the super duper ultra mega laser cannon laser thingy.

NARRATOR: That is not everyday.

BABY CYCLOPS: Captain, I’m still discombobulated as to how you speak without a mouth. Hmhm! Discombobulated. Hmhm!

NARRATOR: The fact that the captain of this ship does not have a mouth does not prevent him from speaking.

CAPTAIN GLEEP: SILENCE!!!

BABY CYCLOPS: Why do I need to be sile-

CAPTAIN GLEEP: I said, SILENCE!!!

BABY CYCLOPS: Ohhhh! Discombobulated means confused or confuddled. Hmhm! Confuddled. Hmhm!

CAPTAIN GLEEP: I SAID, *SILENCE!!!!* I know what discombobulated means! And why are you giggling every time you say a funny word, like *stops to think for a moment* absquatuated? Hmhm! Absquatulate! Hmhm! Dang it! Now I’m doing it!

BABY CYCLOPS: If you know what discombobulated-hmhm! Discombobulated!-means, the why did you tell me to be sile-

CAPTAIN GLEEP: *while holding out a piece of cardboard that is supposed to look like a phone* **SILENCE!!!!** This battle could totally ruin our image on Spacebook!

BABY CYCLOPS: Aw yeah, Spacebook! I forgot about scrolling through funny cat videos from earth. Yeah, it’s hard to think about satisfying slime videos and weird songs when we *should* be SAVIN’ THE SPACESHIP!!!

CAPTAIN GLEEP: Well it's not my fault the ship was designed without windows!

BABY CYCLOPS: Yes it is!

CAPTAIN GLEEP: No, it isn't!

BABY CYCLOPS: Didn't you design the ship?

CAPTAIN GLEEP: No, but I did build the ship! I only made a few adjustments! And actually, there are windows.

BABY CYCLOPS: Yeah, in the back of the ship! In front of the metal! WE CAN'T SEE THROUGH METAL!!!

CAPTAIN GLEEP: Unless you're superman.

BABY CYCLOPS: Well yeah unless you're superman!

GUARD 2: Actually, I think that's Spiderman.

NARRATOR: The guards liked getting involved sometimes.

BABY CYCLOPS: No, it's superman.

CAPTAIN GLEEP: Actually, on second thought, it might be Iron man.

GUARD 2 AND BABY CYCLOPS: Superman!

CAPTAIN GLEEP: *sighs* Just fire up the super duper ultra mega laser cannon laser thingy.

BABY CYCLOPS: Wait, one more question!

CAPTAIN GLEEP: *irritated* What is it?

BABY CYCLOPS: If it's called spacebook, why does it use the NASA logo?

CAPTAIN GLEEP: Wait, how did you draw that so fast?

BABY CYCLOPS: I guess I'm just really good at drawin-

CAPTAIN GLEEP: **SILENCE!!!**

BABY CYCLOPS: Wow, you really love screaming sile-

CAPTAIN GLEEP: **SILENCE!!**

BABY CLYCLOPS: What is it now?

CAPTAIN GLEEP: **SILEEEENCE!!!!** No one is good at anything!

BABY CYCLOPS: *talking to herself* Except for him.

CAPTAIN GLEEP: Except for me.

BABY CYCLOPS: *in a sassy tone* Then I guess I'm bad at firing up the super duper mega ultra laser cannon laser thingy.

CAPTAIN GLEEP: *in a shocked tone* Hey! You can't say that!

BABY CYCLOPS: Then how did I just do it?

BOB AND LARRY SIMULTANIOUSLY: Yeah!

CAPTAIN GLEEP: Where did you come from?

BOB: Well, when a mommy giant squid and a daddy giant squid love each other very, ve-

CAPTAIN GLEEP: SILENCE!!!

LARRY: Why should we be SILENT?

CAPTAIN GLEEP: Because I said so!

BABY CYLCLOPS: You know, that is a valid reason.

CAPTAIN GLEEP: SILENCE!!!

BABY CYCLOPS: But not a valid crash out.

CAPTAIN GLEEP: I have had enough with the talking after I say silence! Goodbye everyone.

BABY CYCLOPS: *after waiting a moment in silence* Why are you still here?

CAPTAIN GLEEP: I could ask you the same question. Now GO!! Leave! Never come back!
curtains close

1st place Fiction - Elementary School Division
By: **Mabel Kellner**
Woodvale Elementary School

“An Ant’s World”

In California, if you go down 5th Ave. you will find ICD elementary. Now this is a small school for people, very vast, hot, and dry. But for an ant it’s the biggest school in the state. In ICD elementary there is the biggest ant pile you will ever see, it is filled with shops, homes and food, a LOT of food. To get into this ant town you have to go through the entrance which ants call the Grand Entrance. Guarding that entrance is an ant called Timmy. If you’re not welcome in this ant pile don’t come in. Trust me Timmy hates intruders. Also guarding the entrance is Caleb.

“What a boring day,” Caleb said.

“What do you expect,” replied Timmy. “We never get intruders.”

“I wish we got some,” Caleb said. “This job is the worst.”

“Well why don’t you get a new job?” Timmy said impatiently.

“You know what my mom would say,” replied Caleb.

“Yes she would say, ‘This job gets you good money,’” Timmy said in a funny voice.

Then they both started laughing. Caleb’s mom is a food gatherer. If you were an ant you would know that food gatherers get little money a week. The leader, Jenner tries to balance the prices out but he is too busy trying to make sure ants get to safety when the great problem comes.

“How are we going to save all these ants from the great problem?” Jenner questioned.

“It’s hard to stop kids from messing up the ant pile if we live in a school.” Thomas explained.

Thomas is Jenner’s brother. He is really smart and has solutions to everything except the great problem.

“Well we can’t just let ants die every day” Jenner exclaimed.

“Well we can’t control little children,” Thomas said.

“Oh really I thought you never give up,” Jenner said.

“Well I don’t...,” Thomas started.

“Exactly we need your help,” Jenner said.

Now when you live as an ant a lot of problems show up. Especially whenever you live in a school. Kids love to kick ant piles. It’s very addicting to them, but one of the ants specializes in this. This ant makes big, fake, ant piles that trick the kids. This ant is called Jenson.

“Fine then but I need to go talk to Jenson,” Thomas said.

So Thomas made his way down the long corridor filled with ants. He stopped because he heard a sound. It was the sound of little children. Thomas pushed the alert button and headed for Jenson’s office.

“Do you have a fake pile set up Jenson?” Thomas asked.

“No,” Jenson exclaimed.

“Oh no,” Thomas whispered.

Thomas ran through the corridor. Jenson was packing up his important papers and heading out.

Why isn't there a fake pile set up?!" Thomas asked.

"A little kid knocked it over," Jenson said as they went into the safe zone.

They got quiet as the sound grew of loud stomps.

That night some ants went to go fix the ant pile. While some went to a funeral for the ants that passed.

"Is there a way to save all the ants from diaster?" Jenner asked himself while sitting in his office.

Then he got it. It had to be something that would not fall from the dirt they used to set up the ant pile. Something really strong. He thought about it for a while then he got it. He remembered one day a little kid snuck out of line and hit a large object. He remembered the teachers calling it an air conditioner. Tonight all the ants would sneak out and gnaw a big chunk off of it so big it would fit in all the rooms of the pile. They would make little boxes out of it so that the ants would go in it and be safe from any dirt that falls.

He explained it to Thomas and he thought it was a great idea. They held a meeting to tell all the ants about the plan. That night as planned each ant crawled out of the pile and started gnawing.

"This is such a good idea," Thomas said while gnawing.

"Thank you," Jenner said. "I appreciate the support."

After they were finished gnawing they cut off pieces of it. To make a big enough place for each ant to get in.

The next day alerts came each ant got into their strong safe room and everyone was safe.

2nd place Fiction - Elementary School Division
By: **Camille deClouet**
Woodvale Elementary School

“The Secret World”

Chapter 1 — The Sad Pillow

Hi i'm the narrator, and i'm here to tell you a story that happened 5 years ago and It takes place at Nora's house. “Oh! Amy's here!” Nora shouts. She opens the door and lets Amy in. “SQUEEE” they jump together in happiness, Amy has been gone almost the whole summer while she was in Mexico. “ Oh my gosh you've been gone for so long! Too long to be exact!” Nora says. Hold on Hold on now Jerald lets not get ahead of ourselves let's start from the beginning.

Hi, I'm the REAL narrator, and I'M here to tell you who Amy and Nora are. Amy, our main character's dad, died 2 years ago. Her dad was a doctor and her mom is a scientist. Amy doesn't know how her dad died but all she knows is that he was Amazing. Oh and one more thing her mom NEVER let her go into the basement. Now let's get to Nora, Nora is her best friend and she always has Amy's back. She's a goof ball too!
Now Jerald you may continue.

ANYWAYS “It was AMAZING oh! And my mom and I went to jump off a CLIF!!!! I WOULD LOVE TO LIVE THERE!” Amy brags

“Oh.... I didn't know you would want to actually live there.” Nora said quietly. HOLD ON I FORGOT TO TALK ABOUT AMY'S FAMILY!!!!!! Ugh go ahead..

Amy has 3 siblings Jack the oldest, May the youngest, and Kate the second youngest Amy is the second oldest. Her moms name is Audrey and her dads name is Mike. Her brother is 14 years old, she is 11 years old, her younger sister is 8 years old and her youngest sister is 3 years old. I think that's all you need to know FOR NOW. Now Gerald you may get back to the story.

NO MORE CUTTING ME OF back to the story Nora was upset that Amy said that. “Hey what's wrong?” Amy asked

“Oh nothing,” Nora replied. Later that evening Amy left and got home. She ate dinner after, she brushed her teeth and went to bed. She had a dream about her dad and her together again. The next morning she ate breakfast and went to the park. She saw Nora there. Nora runs up and says that she's sad about what Amy said. “Okay i'm sorry i'll get you the sad pillow i'll drop it at your house.”

“Okay thank you and it's okay.” Amy was relieved and went back to her house to get the sad pillow (to squeeze on) 30 minutes later and she couldn't find the sad pillow anywhere. She looked in every room, every spot but still nothing, the only place she didn't look was the basement. She got scared for a second but then toughened up. This was for her friend. But right as she was about to open the door she heard a loud bang from the other side of the room. That's when she regrets ever telling Nora about the sad pillow. But either way she opened the door. And what she saw there was a chair, a picture of her dad and a portal.... With shards of glass and an ax. She thought to herself if she should step in the portal. Of course she did and when she got in what she saw was....

Chapter 2 — Dinosaur Age

A stegosaurus... she screamed and ran for her life. She saw something move through the bushes, she couldn't quite tell who it was or what it was, but it had a spear. This "thing" killed the dinosaur but as soon as it killed the stegosaurus it left. That meant it was just Amy and the dead dinosaur. She wasn't too happy to be alone in the dinosaur age but there she was. At that point she almost lost her mind. She didn't know how the heck her mom made an invitation to get to the dinosaur age. She then went to the portal to get back home but when she tried to through the portal it took her straight back to where she was. She heard a voice, then she heard someone saying to her, "That won't work I already tried." That's when she turned around and saw her dad but not in such a good condition. Bright brown hair turned into darkish gray, Suit and tie became ripped jeans and no shirt at all. He looked like one of those guys from the 80s. "DAD" Amy shouts. They hug gracefully. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!" Amy asks "I got trapped here years ago!" her dad replies wow..... That's so touching I can almost cry, Jearld really? Anyways... Her dad then walked with her. "Are you mad?" he asked

"Well yes, but no."

"How come?"

"Because, now that I've found you I feel safe."

"Awww tha-" A mysterious rumble shakes the ground. They look up and see a T-rex with all its friends... Her dad looks at all the dinosaurs with worry. "We have to go."

"Dad, what's going on?"

"DONT WORRY ABOUT IT AND RUN!" They run as fast as they can, but it's no use. The dinosaurs were too fast, they found a tiny shed and got into it. They close the door and Amy asks "care to explain?" Her dad tells her the whole story and how months ago he stole their egg to eat. He said they were going for revenge instead of kindness. "Well now we're going to be eaten alive because of YOU!" Amy screams

"Shhhhhh"

"NO I WILL NOT SHHHHHH" that's when they heard more loud thumps. "Opps" The dinosaurs were waiting outside, there was nowhere left to run.

Chapter 3 — Dinosaur War

The dinosaurs were sitting,eating and probably having a great time while Amy and her dad were trying to find a way to escape. "Okay, on three..onetwo...THREE RUNNN" They both run in terror while the dinosaurs are chasing them. One swipes their claws, the other roars with all its might, while the t-rex is just behind them. Then right as Amy was about to give up her dad said "FIGHT!" as her dad is stabbing the dinosaurs she looks up at the sky, she thinks the biggest thoughts. It was like the whole world paused for a moment. She looked at her dad, with blood in his hands she thought it was the end, but when she looked at her dad, she saw he never gave up. Right as she was thinking she heard a scream, and it was her dads scream, the same scream he did when he broke his leg, the same scream as he rode the rollercoasters, she knew he needed help. At the very side of her eyes she saw a sharp stick. She grabbed the stick and ran up to the dinosaurs. She stabbed one, then the other, but when it was time to stab the t-rex she got worried. It was the same dinosaur that hurt her dad. How would she kill it? Then she saw it leaving with dad hurt on the ground. She got the stick, ran and stabbed the dinosaur in the EYE! She got her dad and walked to the portal when she saw it had a screw broken. She knew just how to fix it. She got some mysterious goo and put together the screw, then she always remembers the screw driver she had in her pocket for safety. She screwed on the screw and jumped in the portal

with her dad. THEY MADE IT BACK HOME! The only question was who broke the glass on the portal? She quickly grabbed the first ad and helped her dad after that he was up and going! "Thank you, Amy." she said

"No prob!" Amy replied. Amy's mom Audrey heard the noise and went down to the basement, when she saw Amy's dad she started to cry. They hugged for maybe ten minutes but after that Amy had some questions. After all the explaining she found out her mom broke the glass to go get dad but needed to fix the portal first when she saw she didn't have the right screw driver she got worried. After that all her siblings went down to check what was going on. When they saw their dad they screamed and ran for joy. That's when her mom said "hey Amy, i found the sad pillow."

The End

Middle School Division (Grades 6-8)

1st place Advertisement - Middle School Division

By: **Jocelyn Rosales**

Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

“Louisiana Hestiate”

Speaker): “Do you want some humor?”

Laughter plays in the background

Speaker): Something that is guaranteed to make you giggle?”

Speaker): “Do you want something that really makes you think?”

Speaker): “ Do you want something that will make you **hesitate**?”

The audience hums in unison.

Speaker): “Well folks, I have the honor to introduce the hit podcast, *Louisiana Hesitate!*

Speaker):” With *Louisiana Hesitate*, You can expect mind boggling questions, Intellectual answers, and interesting individuals on the podcast!”

Alacaxem) : “And I'm your host! Alacaxem Alexandrialeigh.”

Alacaxem): “You can even expect yourself, yes! Yourself to be in my amazing, beautiful, engaging, ravishing, stunning, heavenly, glamorous podcast!

Cheers from the audience sprout from the background.

Alacaxem):”Yes folks! Just watch the podcast from anywhere! Your phone, your computer, your fridge, even your microwave if you prefer so!

Speaker):But this offer is for a limited time only! It only lasts from this very second, to December 3rd of 2034 So watch it now!

The audience downloads it on their microwaves.

(End)

1st place Multimedia - Middle School Division

By: **Shya Hebert**

L.J. Alleman Middle School

“If Water Could Speak: Leading by Listening”

This video explores the stories water might tell if we listened closely, stories of environmental change, loss, resilience, and hope. Through expert interviews, personal reflection, and storytelling, we look at what’s happening to our land and lives, why it matters, and how each of us can make a difference. This script outlines visual and auditory elements throughout the video. The final video is linked at the bottom of the script.

Text Slide with Recording of Rain on a Window: If Water Could Speak

Black Slide, White Text: It would warn us to protect our future.

Scene: Soft music, river, rain, nature visuals, narrator exploring nature

Narrator: Sometimes, when the rain drums on my window at night, I wonder what stories the water would tell if it could speak, or if we knew how to listen. Would it whisper about bullfrogs in the wind, or about homes that have already slipped beneath the surface?

Our land and our lives are changing. But why?

Black Slide, White Text: What’s happening and why it matters.

Narrator: When I spoke to Dr. Heather Stone, an oral historian with the Jean Charles Choctaw Nation, I learned just how much can change in a short time.

Dr. Heather Stone: Over the last 50 years, they've lost 98% of their ancestral home of Isle de Jean Charles. Environmental changes and man-made changes, together, have created this moment in time where their land has been degraded.

The oil companies, coming in and cutting canals, have cut through the marshland, which allows saltwater to come in. Once that saltwater gets to where freshwater was, it kills the marsh and degrades it. So when a hurricane comes, there's no more marsh to stop it before it gets to the land. The land that’s left gets hit even harder.

From the oral histories I’ve collected, they say it was paradise. That’s a direct quote from many of the tribal elders, and even the younger people. They had fruit trees and pecan trees. Lots of families lived there, all together. Next door was your family, down the street was your family. Isle de Jean Charles is really just one island road, so everyone lives around that area. They had cattle, horses, they did farming. They were self-sustaining. They didn’t even know when the Great Depression happened because they didn’t use money, everything they needed, they could make, and they could survive without being impacted.

Black Slide, White Text: The Science Beneath the Stories

Narrator: Meteorologist Rob Perillo explained why these changes are happening, and how they affect us.

Rob Perillo: We have a triple whammy in southern Louisiana. Before you even get to weather and climate, there's erosion along the coast, caused by all the man-made pathways and the digging of canals for commerce and ships. The land itself is mostly sand and mud deposited by the Mississippi River over thousands of years, and it just keeps settling, so the ground keeps sinking. That's called subsidence. Along the coast, it's about five inches every ten years. Even inland, places like Lafayette have sunk about an inch in the last decade.

The wetlands are eroding. The land is sinking. Now, more water is exposed to our south. When a hurricane comes in, like Hurricane Rita in 2005, it can push water 15 to 30 miles inland and flood hundreds of thousands of homes. Maybe not by the end of my lifetime, but by the end of yours, land five miles south of Abbeville might be coastal wetlands. It's my job to let people know about these threats.

And then we have sea level rise. It's twofold: glaciers melting and raising sea levels, and oceans absorbing excess heat and expanding. Sea level is rising faster than our predictions from the 1990s.

Black Slide, White Text: The Human Impact

Dr. Heather Stone: The tribe told me the most important thing is their feeling of community. They always helped each other. If you didn't have something, you could go next door and get it. They built each other's houses and celebrated together. That sense of community has taken a hit since their land has changed.

Black Slide, White Text: Awareness Saves Lives

Rob Perillo: I can vividly remember Hurricane Rita. We were forecasting the biggest storm surge since Hurricane Audrey in the 1950s. Some people didn't believe me, but others did and left, some lost their houses and were glad they didn't stay. Others stayed and thought they might die. I remember being on the phone during Hurricane Rita with a single mom and her three kids. They had to climb on top of their trailer to avoid drowning. We stayed on the phone, transferred her to 911, and she was saved. She rode out the storm with her children for eight or nine hours in the middle of the night.

Black Slide, White Text: How are people affected in other parts of the world?

Dr. Allen Webb: Here in Michigan, we've experienced a lot of wildfire smoke, blown down from Canada and the western United States. Wildfires are increasing dramatically because it's been very dry, which is part of climate change. The dryness and heat make forests more vulnerable to fire. When you burn a tree, which is made of carbon, it releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Black Slide, White Text: It Can Happen Anywhere

Dr. Heather Stone: It can happen anywhere. They were on the front lines, but it keeps happening. They may have been the first to relocate as a community, but they won't be the last, unless we make changes.

Black Slide, White Text: Use Your Voice

Dr. Allen Webb: It's not okay to pass on to our generation a world where we can't live a good life. Young people need to say this, loud and clear, in their schools, churches, local communities, and to local governments.

Black Slide, White Text: What Can We Do? Stories of Hope & Action

Narrator: That's why it's important to ask questions and listen to scientists and people with real experience. The best part: there's a lot we can do. Dr. Stone gave me some great advice about working with communities affected by environmental change.

Dr. Heather Stone: Don't go in expecting, "I know the answer and I'm going to help you." Talk to the community: What can I help you do? What do you need? Then find a match between what you can do and what the community needs. That's the key.

Rob Perillo: Think and act local. We're not going to solve the global climate crisis until we solve our local problems. How can we do this using science? Yes, it costs more to do the right thing. After Hurricanes Rita and Laura hit Lake Charles, 50,000 to 60,000 power poles and lines went down and were rebuilt to the old standards. When Laura hit, it all came down again. We paid for it twice. If we had paid five times as much once, we'd be ahead. Think about what you can do locally, water quality, air quality...and join clubs.

Dr. Allen Webb: We don't solve problems like superheroes. The way you make a difference is by joining an organization, becoming part of a group. Young people should create climate and environmental action groups in their schools, link with other schools, and start taking action collectively. There are national organizations like Fridays for the Future and Sunrise, and many others. Students can create local chapters and work with others.

Scene: Image and video collage of the narrator participating service to help the local environment.

Narrator: In the past few weeks, I watched young people come together to make a difference, from helping animals find homes, to Parish Proud Day, where communities cleaned up area schools. What I learned from these experts, and from my own experience, is that the environment isn't just about science or weather. It's about people, families, and the places we love. We all have a part to play, no matter how small. If we listen, learn, and work together, we can make our communities stronger and help protect our future.

Black Slide, White Text: How will you protect our future?

Narrator: So, what story will we tell next? I hope it's one of hope, teamwork, and positive change.

Final Video Link: <https://youtu.be/pvEgRC-iTkQ?si=MXnLLSMsrRgZlfZZ>



2nd place Multimedia - Middle School Division

By: **Jocelyn Rosales**

Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

“The Louisiana Hesitate Podcast”

(Alacaxem): “Welcome to Louisiana Hesitate! I'm your host, Alacaxem Alexandrialeigh, and today we have a special guest, Tammy Angeles!”

(Tammy Angeles): “It is I, Tammy Angeles!”

(Alacaxem): “Great! I have already stated that. Now Tammy, what do you propose would be best to put on a grilled cheese sandwich?”

(Tammy Angeles): *Tammy Angeles starts to sob uncontrollably for no reason, and turns away from Alacaxem.* “Oh, I didn't think we would get there!”

(Alacaxem): “So are we going t-” *Tammy Angeles interrupts Alaxasem*

(Tammy Angeles): *Begins to sob louder so that Alaxasem would stop speaking.*

(Alacaxem): *in the middle of Tammy's breakdown.* “Tammy! Answer the question! The Podcast cannot continue if you keep sobbing your heart out!”

(Tammy Angeles): *eventually calms down* “Im not sure if i can answer this Alacaxem! I have never been asked such a deep, conflicting, and thought provoking question!

(Alacaxem): “Tammy, calm d-”

(Tammy Angeles): “I'll have you know that I am not calm, and I will not calm down, Alacaxem! Considering the current state of the world right now, this question is too difficult to answer right now!”

(Alacaxem): “Tammy, it is a simple question! It's not rocket science! What do you propose should be on a grilled cheese sandwich?”

(Tammy Angeles): *Tammy remains silent as she collects her thoughts, she begins to tear up as she prepares her answer* “I think it should be...cheese.”

(Alacaxem): *Begins to sob hysterically as the camera man looks at the audience.*

(Camera man): “I am not paid enough to deal with this.”

(Alacaxem): “Alright Tammy, next question, If Shakespeare himself was alive, and in this low budget podcast room right now, what would be your first thought?”

(Tammy Angeles): *Begins to giggle hysterically, as if the question was the most humorous thing ever uttered.* “I would immediately ask him if he wrote the play *Romeo and Juliet*”

(Alacaxem): “As a creative writer, I can confirm that he did, in fact, write the playwright “*Romeo and juliet*”.

(Tammy Angeles): “Was it not Edgar Allen Poe?”

(Alacaxem): “I would assume anyone over 8th grade would have knowledge about Romeo and Juliet by now? Edgar Allen Poe made “*The tell tale heart*”, and is described as the pioneer of horror I'm sure.”

(Tammy Angeles): *starts to sob for no absolute reason again* “ Sometimes Alacaxem, we just don't know these things! Don't assume that I don't know my playwrights! I graduated Highschool, so that I can pursue my career as a social media influencer for this!”

(Alacaxem): *Gives Tammy Angeles a side glance* “I don't see how! Anyways we have more celebrities waiting to be interviewed in *The Louisiana Hesitate Podcast*, and I'm getting VERY frustrated with you, so we shall continue with one last question!”

(Tammy Angeles): “Wait, let me see the camera...” *Looks at the camera, and cleans her makeup using the lens of the camera as a mirror after sobbing earlier.*

(Alacaxem): “Tammy, you should focus on the people who talk to you, instead of your face.”

(Tammy Angeles): *Tammy turns around offended at Alacaxem* “ It is Tammy ANGELES to you!”

(Alacaxem): “TAMMY ANGELES, PLEASE JUST LISTEN TO MY QUESTION”

(Tammy Angeles) “ Then I will if I must....”

(Alacaxem): “Great! My question is, What is ice made out of?”

(Tammy Angeles): “I'm done, Alacaxem.” *Tammy stands up and tries to leave the small set before Alacaxem grabs her wrist.*

(Alacaxem): "Where are you going, Tammy?"

(Tammy Angeles): "I said I was done, Alacaxem! You know very well that we live in Louisiana! We only get snow once in a blue moon, and even that's not guaranteed!"

(Alacaxem): "Yet, we occasionally get snow! Don't you remember January 2025?"

(Tammy Angeles): *Disregards Alacaxem's response.* "You ask such confusing, mind boggling, mysterious, nonsensical, illogical, preposterous, and ludicrous questions!" *Tammy then ran off the set.*

(Alacaxem): *Raises an eyebrow and looks at the camera.* "Well again, I'm your host, Alacaxem on the hit podcast *The louisiana hesitate*, and Tammy clearly hesitated."

(Tammy Angeles) *Off in the distance.* "You made the questions horrendous on purpose!"

(Alacaxem): "Ugh" *Ignores her and looks right back into the camera.* "I'll see you next week with a new guest, the famous singer, Kimberleigh Marieleigh Jinkinleigh!"

(END)

1st place Fiction - Middle School Division
By: **Daniel Calvert**
Belle Place Middle School

“The Unknown Curse”

I noticed the quiet first, a stillness that had never existed before. No birds chirping, no wind rustling the leaves, not even the far-off sound of a lawnmower. It was as if the world was holding its breath. Then my brother, Michael, pointed to the swing set in the backyard. The swing was moving, slow and deliberate, as if a child was gently pushing off the ground—but he was standing right beside me, clutching my hand so tight it hurt, then it suddenly stopped, no decrease in speed, just a hard break with no sound of swing chains. Only a sound in the distance, like an inhuman screech. This was the first of many encounters.

The next night I just couldn't go to sleep. I was stuck on what really happened in the backyard. Just then, I heard scratching from the inside of my closet door; it won't stop, getting louder and louder, more frantic. I slowly walk up to the door holding my ears, palms sweating furiously, scared that if I open the closet it'll be my last moments. I open the door and it's just my cat stuck in my closet. I let her out, and get some sleep.

By the morning, I was still so tired. In class, I was trying my hardest to stay awake, but I could barely keep my eyes open. But then, there it was again, that same inhuman screech so high-pitched it hurt, but it couldn't be a cat this time. I twisted around in my desk, trying to place the sound when out the corner of my eye, a tall and dark shadow passes by the window of the classroom door. *Am I dreaming?* I think to myself.

The bell rings. I go to the bathroom to wash my face in an attempt to wake up, but when I lift my head again, I see the same figure in the corner of the mirror this time. I snap my head back expecting someone behind me. Nothing. When I look back, I can still see it in the mirror. Tall and shadowy, but almost glowing in its darkness enough to see its jaw was held with a stained jawband and yet, it was grinning. No teeth, no gums, just a dark empty smile. I whipped around again, but again nothing. I was alone in the bathroom and very freaked out. I felt like I was going crazy, but at least I knew I was awake now.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully, but I kept thinking about the figure. Its frightening smile. Then I hear my brother, Michael, call my name in a weird, weak, shaky tone.

“Nathan, come see this.” He sounded scared.

Michael was standing by the swing. As he saw me, he pushed it. He explained how he wanted to show me how high he could push the swing, but the swing wouldn't stop. Michael grabbed the swing to stop it, but as soon as he let go of the chains it just started back up. Michael freaked out, screaming but it quickly morphed into that same ear-piercing, high-pitched screech from earlier today, only louder now. Too loud. I drop to my knees holding my ears but it wouldn't stop. I could barely hear Michael anymore. My ears hurt so badly and they feel wet. When I pull my hands away, my ears are bleeding.

My mom runs outside, panicked and confused. She brings me to the Emergency Room. The E.R. brings on a flood of memories. I see my mom silently crying. I know she's worried about me but also thinking of my oldest brother, Noah, who died just last year. His ears bled, too.

The doctors said nothing was wrong with me, but I heard the blood still rumbling in my ears. I don't believe them. This shadow creature is real, and his screech did this.

I still hear the screech but dulled to a ringing sound, even as we left the hospital. Once home, I tossed and turned and eventually fell asleep, but not for long. The ringing in my ears

crescendos waking me with a start. My eyes are wide open but I can't move. Then, the shadow is grinning beside me, its hands grabbed me and pulled me down into the bed, phasing through the mattress and into a different world. This disfigured creature had a horrid smell, like dead fish. Its freezing hands closed around my eyes and I had a flashback of when my oldest brother, Noah, had symptoms just like mine. Everyone thought he was crazy, now I get him.

In my memory, I was in Noah's room. It's the hour he passed. I am watching, but I still am unavailable to move, watching, but already knowing what will happen to my brother. Then, just like I remember, he grabs his ears crying, begging for it to stop but it never does. I try to close my eyes. I don't want to see this horror play out again, but it is as if my eyelids turn invisible and I just see right through. Panic sinks in as I realize I might go out the same way my brother did. I didn't know what this thing was, let alone how to stop it. Was this thing coming for my family? Michael after me? This screech was never documented before so how am I, a 15 year old boy, going to stop it? As I replay my brother's agonized screaming, there is nothing I can do but cry. Suddenly, I heard that high-pitched screech, more painful than ever but this time I hear a voice, too. I hear this thing telling me *Your next* over and over. After every one, I begged for mercy. I didn't want to die but this shadow creature seemed unstoppable.

My mom woke me up looking very concerned. "Is everything alright? You were screaming, and you're sweating."

I tried to slow my pounding heart, "Yes mom, I'm fine. It's just a nightmare."

As soon as my mom left the room, I laid back down relieved that the dream was over. But then, the same cold, smelly hands attempted to pull me back. The doctors said this was all in my brain, right? Maybe if I don't play along, it can't hurt me. But still it grabbed and pulled harder this time. I tried to bite the hands but my teeth phase through it and I bit my tongue. I tried to scream for my mom but everytime I tried, it makes its screech.

Desperate, I reached in my pocket for Noah's old lighter he gave me a week before he died. I don't know why but I have the idea it might help me now. I'll try anything at this point. I reach for the lighter and flick. It burns the monstrous hands, but the screeching intensifies, until the hands finally disappear.

I was glad I stayed consistent with the lighter. It worked, for now.

With my heart about to beat out of my chest, I ran to my mom's room and begged her, "Mom, take me back to the hospital, please."

She doesn't ask questions. Not after Noah. As we drive, everybody we pass on the street looks like this shadow figure. I laid down on the seat just so I couldn't see it. The doctors were right, I was having hallucinations. I closed my eyes for the rest of the ride, hoping this would be over soon. Hoping for a better outcome than Noah's. We arrived at the hospital and about 10 hours and one MRI later, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor on my occipital lobe and they needed to do a surgery immediately. As they give me the anesthesia, and as I'm going under, I think of my brothers. Before I fall asleep, I caught the final sound of that cursed screech, the loudest its ever been before. I tug at the gas mask, but my arms are too heavy. All I can do is look up. Each of the doctors are that shadow figure, grinning down with that empty smile. I can't do anything but drift to sleep.

I woke up to the normal hospital sounds. No screeching, no shadow figure. They showed me the tumor, certain that that's what's been causing these hallucinations. Maybe that's how it was for Noah, too. We just didn't know. But as I recover in the hospital, I don't believe this is really over. I fear this was a family curse.

A few years later I am interviewing for my dream job: an oil rig welder just like all the other men of my family. The interviewer sits down across from me and I feel a chill. My heart starts pounding and my eyes twitch as the interviewer switches back and forth with the same shadow-like figure from my past. I gasp and mutter, "It's not over."

2nd place Fiction - Middle School Division
By: **Vance Herpin**
Youngsville Middle School

“Tokyo Jump”

We see a guy (Jacksi- tall, skinny, white) waking up, he hops out of bed, puts on some fresh clothes and he goes to see what he has to eat.

“Uhhhhh what do I eat?”

He sees a box of smart tarts.

“It's my only option,” he said yawning

He puts on his earbuds and listens to some music while he eats the cereal. He exits the apartment and sees a flyer that says “Battle of the bands WIN 2000 DOLLARS”.

He grabs the flyer and thinks to himself, “How am I supposed to form a band”

He goes to his local corner store to get his breakfast. He gets a sausage egg and cheese biscuit and a coffee. As he walks out he sees someone with a pair of drumsticks walk in. Jacksi decides to wait for him to leave and follow him to see where he is going. As the drummer exits he follows him to the Academy of Music. (Kyle-tall a little chubby-black) Jacksi hears him annihilate the drums. Kyle walks out of the building.

“Want to join a band I'm forming?” Jacksi asked.

“Maybe whenever you find the rest of your band then come talk to me,” Kyle said.

And with that, Jacksi walked away and went to look for the rest of the band. As Jacksi walks the streets of Tokyo he hears laughing from inside an alleyway.

“I can buy my new guitar with this,” Austin said (Austin- tall skinny and covered in some kind of purple goop).

“Hello,” Jacksi said, intrigued. “I'm trying to form a band and heard you play guitar, wanna join.”

“Sure” Austin stated. “Just don't tell”

And with that they walk away and go look for a bassist. They saw someone holding a bass and they were arguing with their other band members.

“Listen: kick me off if you want but good luck finding another bassist,” Faxtin said. (Faxtin- tall white skinny and wears glasses)

As he walked away the band members followed him and Austin jumps in his way

“Hey man i saw you just got kicked out of your old band wanna join our new band?”

“Sure I need the money anyway,” Faxtin said

“Alright then let's go back and find Kyle”

They walk back to the “Academy of music”. They see Kyle walk back into the academy and they listen.

“He doesn't look like he plays drums,” Austin stated.

“Just wait,” Jacksi said.

They hear him play amazing stuff on the drums and then whenever Kyle walks out he doesn't say anything he just joins the group

Kyle says, "So when are we recording the next song?"

"I guess right now," Austin said.

And so they walk back to Jacksi's apartment and they record their first song called "ID". They post the song and it does pretty well. They get a lot of listeners and they earn a lot of money. They celebrate this by going get ice cream from an old ice cream shop that an old couple runs. But Austin leaves abruptly.

"Guys, I gotta take this phone call."

Austin leaves and his phone rings.

"Listen, I will get you everything you want, the money, the food, I will get it all for you."

Austin was now crying as if he was traumatized by something. After a while Austin got up and went back inside and his friends were talking about a recording studio. They end up buying one and they go see it. It was actually a good place. That night they moved everything musical, like the drums, the mics, the basses and the guitars to their new studio. They recorded their first album "The Tulip". It was a hit and they got more money and fame.

Austin runs outside and we see him transform into some kind of beast with 4 legs and 6 arms. Whenever he transforms back into a human we see the same purple goop on his body that was on him whenever Jacksi found him. He walks inside and whenever no one is looking he snatched Kyle's lighter and then everyone went to sleep.

It's the next day and Faxtin is buying a new bass. After he buys the bass he sees Austin walk into a store that Faxtin knew to only be supplies for fires. He was confused but then he heard a scream. Faxtin goes to check out the scream and finds a young man getting harassed by an older man with some kind of envelope in his pocket. Faxtin decides to hit the harassing guy in the back of the head with his bass. The bass then breaks but the guy that was harassing the other guy then falls to the ground. He then picks up the note and sees some kind of weird emblem on it. Faxtin opens the note to find some kind of numbers. He reads it "308-789". Faxtin is very confused because this is the number to their bank account.

"You got a lighter?" Faxtin asked the young man.

"Here." The young man hands Faxtin the lighter and Faxtin lights the note on fire.

We then see Jacksi and Kyle just chilling out.

"Could you light that candle?" Jacksi asked.

"I would but I lost my lighter," Kyle responded. "How about we take a walk down the road? I have something to tell you."

They walk down the road and Kyle talks to Jacksi.

"So, there are monsters in this world and we were sent here to kill them," Kyle said like there was nothing wrong with that.

"Excuse me?" Jacksi said very confused.

At that moment Kyle stabbed a drumstick right through the center of a monster's forehead. Faxtin joins in and hits a monster on the back of the head and by this point Jacksi is in shock and he just goes with it. They all walk away back to the studio. Once again Austin just disappears into the alleyway. He's back on the phone with the anonymous person

“Listen, I just need more time.”

And with that, Austin walks back inside and sees some sort of beast just wandering around the studio. Whenever no one is looking he uses dark magic and makes the thing disappear. The rest of the crew just walks the streets of Tokyo.

Austin stays behind and finds their supply of disinfectant rubbing alcohol. As he catches up with the band, Kyle sees a strange pendant on the ground the pendant says “**獣が立ち上がるだろう**” (The beast will rise). **Kyle chucks the pendant into a nearby ditch where a man finds it. He picks it up and opens it;** it latches onto the center of his chest and he turns into a beast himself. The thing then shapeshifts into a regular store owner.

The band walks back to the studio and whenever everyone is sleeping, Austin goes into the attic. He covers it in broken drumsticks, rope and the flammable alcohol. Everyone wakes up and they turn on their TV and they see a commercial for a place called “Strings and Beats”. They end up going to it and whenever they arrive, Austin feels something weird. It was like some sort of presence was watching him. Then he saw the pendant on the store owner. He jumped up and killed the owner with a nearby potted plant reformed into the homeless guy and the homeless guy just ran back to the ditch that his house was in.

They all walk back to the studio and everyone is confused on how Austin knew the owner was a demon. When they get back to the studio, Faxtin decides to cook some food but he burns it and it catches on fire. Austin saw this and his body went into shock because he remembered what he had to do to his friends. The next day they record their new album “Wasted Time”. They get some more money and they all go to sleep. Everyone wakes up and Austin says he has to go to the bathroom.

“I don't want to be this thing anymore,” Austin said while trying to rip the pendant out of his chest .

“You okay?” Jacksi asked, knocking on the door.

“Yeah I'm fine,” Austin said while ripping the door open and walking out.

That night he walks into the living room and covers it in disinfectant rubbing alcohol and he pulls out Kyle's lighter and at that moment Jacksi walks into the room.

“You don't have to do this,” Jacksi said, “It's not worth it.”

At that moment, Austin just dropped the lighter Jacksi saw his life flash before his eyes. The whole place went up into flames but Faxtin jumped onto Austin and ripped the pendant out his chest. They then pick him up and rush him to the hospital and they all turn out fine and Kyle grabs the pendant off the ground of the studio and once again throws the it and a hand reaches up and takes it underground.

3rd place Fiction - Middle School Division

By: **Alexandria Gillette**

St. Pius Elementary School

“The Squash”

I walk into the hall as the AC blows down on me. I couldn't tell if I was shivering or the lion in the cage was growling. *Ahhh! Food, that sounds amazing right about now. Hmmm, What should I have today? I could have cookies, mac n' cheese, pizza... Oh quit it, what are you trying to do? You're torturing yourself Alexandra. Okay, okay. Who can make this for me today, afterall what are people for? Let's see: Mom- at yoga, brothers- more incapable than me... but there is one more trick up my sleeve... Dad! It is an absolutely perfect plan, nothing he cooks is bad, I think. Dad plus fridge, one math equation I can get.*

I head straight toward him like a bull, “I am so hungryyyy!” I say in the most complaining voice I have ever heard come out my mouth. *Of course he is on the phone, probably talking about business.* I sigh but didn't give in, I gave it another shot, “I am talking business too! Why can't making me food be more important than your silly little call?” I stormed to the kitchen like a tornado, my dad quickly behind me as he hung up the phone.

“Sweetie, I was on the phone, you can't just interrupt like that.”

Does he not hear the earth quake happening inside my belly?

“I am hungry and I am not patient when it comes to hunger!”

“Ok, ok, I will make you something to eat.”

“It better be the most delicious thing I'd ever taste.”

He started cooking and my nose might have literally fallen off. *What in the world is this guy doing? I mean when he does that I might as well starve to death. What if I die from the mystery veggie, which I think is squash but not sure.* The smell made me think of a time when I was at the hunting campsite, where some of my family was standing around a deer, while my Papa skinned it. *Ew.* It was so bad my aunt and I put clove pins on our noses, it did not work what, so, ever. This, on the other hand, was 1,000 times worse. I snapped back to the moment.

Should I run? Should I at least try it? Is there a way out of this? No. I was going to either die from it or, I don't know. What in the world was I supposed to do? Oh no. I am doomed.

He puts it on a pan. *I'm doomed for sure.*

“This is going to blow you away, Booh!”

He was literally lying to my face. How in the world does this dude think whatever he is making is going to appeal to my taste buds? The squash was not going to go in my mouth, no way, I know that for a fact.

He puts it in the oven, the green and yellow ooey, gooey, grossness, that stinks like poo. I just couldn't believe my dad was making that, my dad.

He sets it in the oven, I gulp. He sets the timer to 10 minutes, might as well have been 10 minutes until I die. *Why in the world would he make that? He has made so many delicious*

things like french toast, mac n' cheese, and steak. Anything was better than what he was making now. The whole thing felt like a science experiment, and I was the test subject. I knew how the experiment would end, but I couldn't tell him that. He looked so hopeful and joyful. I couldn't just say no I won't eat it. Could I?

Beep, beep, beep! *Oh No!* The time is up. I think the smell got worse. This was going to backfire on my dad in some way, I just knew. I had to tell him.

"I can't," I said in a low whisper –hoping he wouldn't hear— but he did.

"What do you mean?" He asked in a firm but still sweet voice.

"I am going to vomit, or die, I can't eat it."

"Stop being dramatic."

"I can't please don't do this to me, I am too young to die!"

"You are going to eat this food that I prepared for you!"

"No! Please! Don't!"

He grabs me and lunges towards the chair. He sits me on his lap as I struggled to get out of the waves drowning me. He inches it closer to my face on a shiny fork that I thought was trembling because of what was on it. I definitely was not going to open my mouth for that squash to walk on in. I make my eyes look like a beware sign to my dad, don't think he noticed though because he was just smiling in a way that made me really uncomfortable, anyway, not going in my mouth.

"Eat it. Open your mouth."

"I can't do it, I will..." I just fell for that one.

He shoved it in my mouth. How dare he, this will definitely backfire on him.

I felt it coming. *The lion in the cage does not like squash, I repeat, no squah!* My body trembled a little, I could almost feel the goose bumps. *Emergency! Panic! Abandon ship!*

Nothing, I couldn't do anything but pull the fire alarm.

The volcano is about to erupt, mayday, mayday. Get to the toilet, mayday, mayday!

The toilet was miles away, too far to reach, it was too late, sorry Dad.

BOOM! The volcano erupted. Right where Dad was, what a shame he didn't listen.

Couldn't make it to the toilet, couldn't stop, drop, or roll, nothing.

I snap back to the outside world, where my dad was already cleaning off the... Ewwwww. I see what came out of me. Ewwwww. My eyes started tearing up, by how gross the ewy, gooey, green, wet, yellow, brown, mushy, chunky. Throw up. It was worse than before it went in my mouth. I didn't even know how that, whatever it was came out of me, a little kindergartner with pigtails.

I saw it coming, I tried to warn my Dad, he didn't listen, so that told me where to aim, and I guess *mission complete*. I was proud of myself. *At least it is over with, and, hey, I didn't die, now he will think twice before shoving something in my face again!* I felt great, amazed at my work, the first time on the job of being a naughty little kid.

“I tried to warn you, you just don’t listen to me cause I’m a kid, well clearly I am a little off from just a kid. I know what I am talking bout’ and if you can’t see that, then you deal with the vomit!”

He just stared at me while cleaning off the vomit.

“I tried to warn you. Serves you right, shoving some squash in my mouth, pfft! Why would you do that? Mess with me you get the vomit, common knowledge.”

Relief, revenge, served right.

“Now how bout’ some mac n’ cheese?”

1st place Poetry - Middle School Division

By: **Shya Hebert**

L.J. Alleman Middle School

“Heart Patterns”

She said,

"My husband and I probably danced around the world
at least three times,"
and I could see it—
her heart tracing steps,
each beat a rhythm
no one could silence.

Together,
they spun across continents,
a waltz that only deepened
with each turn.
No need for stages or spotlights,
the world was their ballroom.

In every place,
they left a mark,
soft heart patters
pressed into the earth—
two souls in sync,
gliding on the breeze.

Even now,
I hear the beat
like a dance across the Keys,
tapping
to the echo
of a song only they knew.

The world remembers them
in the quiet hum of the wind,
the brush of feet against floor,
and the steady pulse
of her unwavering love.

2nd place Poetry - Middle School Division

By: **Abdul-Hadi Mohammed**

Edgar Martin Middle School

“Breathe”

Breathe

A curious feeling--

To want to

Stop

The world in its tracks

To

Suffocate

To want to give yourself time

To breathe

To think

But in the end

You can't

The only thing you can do

To *help* yourself

Is to breathe

Stop

Listen

To let yourself know

That it's okay

To not understand

To be upset

To *feel*

3rd place Poetry - Middle School Division

By: **Bryanna Cotton**

Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

“Sundown”

Summer crept around the corner,
meaning beach days and fun.
but who knew this day would come?

In the late afternoon people were
running and jumping. But the sun came
down and the sky turned black, there
there was no chance of it coming back.

People panicked, doing anything to save
themselves. The grass was wet, cold breeze
in the air, this once normal trait put others
in despair. There was nothing they could do
but watch, as their world slowly crumbled.

The world turned cold, surfacing in ice.
it's been a few years, you don't need to be
precise. There's no life left on this cold earth,
not even an herb. The earth would be thrown into
space, to never be seen, without a trace.

High School Division (Grades 9-12)

1st place Fiction - High School Division

By: **Addison Fontenot**

Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

“My Perfect Girl”

I am always hungry every second of the day, even when I eat all that I am supposed to it never seems to be enough for me. My stomach grumbled especially loud once I woke, and the sun was so bright that I couldn't see the amount of cereal that fell into my bowl. Window to my back, I ate at such a pace that my spoon splashed milk onto the floor next to my cat's empty food bowl. I didn't remember feeding her before I went to sleep, so I poured out some cat food we kept for her in the cabinet with ratty old chew toys, and added a little extra as a form of apology.

Once, when mom was braiding my hair tight, preparing to head out to church soon, she told me not to worry so much about everything. I rolled my eyes, knowing from how we were sitting she wouldn't see that I did so, and told her she just doesn't care as much as I do. She pulled on my hair and sighed, saying I'm annoyingly stubborn.

I would rather make sure that my cat is fed than have her starve. She is becoming slightly slower with the days, but it could just be old age. My bed is always warmer when she snuggles against my cold feet at night, so I would hate for her to ever leave me. Seems I would have to start wearing socks when the time comes.

I headed to school after being scolded by mom once she reminded me that I actually did feed my cat. She dumped the bowl back into the food box, fussing over how my dear cat would explode one of these days, but I definitely could argue that the pink-faced woman that turned to me was more of a ticking bomb than the fattened feline. I threw on the same jacket I'd worn for the past week and headed out the door.

— — — —

A new, pretty girl walked into the class that day. Her shoes were pristine and white, and her uniform free from any wrinkle that might've been there. She sat next to me, flipping her pin straight hair, and told me she liked the green in my eyes. Her teeth were a bit crooked upon closer inspection, and I watched as her chipped nails reached for a couple of books in her bag. I angled my head down, letting long strands of hair curtain my sight. I invited her to sit and have lunch with me after our classes despite the unusual sense of nausea that pooled in my stomach, and watched an ant quickly crawl across her shoe when she happily agreed. I crushed it under mine once it met my scuffed flats.

She talked loudly as we ate, and offered me a handful of olives from her lunch box. As odd as I thought it to be, they were one of her favorite snacks. I declined and continued nibbling on strawberries that I brought from home, turning my eyes elsewhere when her mouth smacked around more wet olives. A faint trail of juice painted my chin from biting down on the berry a little too hard. Though, when we walked without a word in the hallway, I let my clothed shoulder brush against hers and looked at her real closely. Her face had not a single blemish and her cheeks were perfectly blushed. When she felt my stare, she gave me this closed smile that I so adored.

She began to call me her best friend as the days passed, and I introduced her to my dear cat. She sang it to sleep as she petted it gently and I closed my eyes too. Her voice was quite beautiful when I ignored the wind whistling through her teeth on certain words, and tried not to imagine how her jagged nails would sound if they were to be dragged across a chalkboard.

We decided to have a sleepover that night and she told me just how she gets her makeup to be so flawless as I filed her nails. We painted them a matching shade of dark red. Both of us agreed that it made us look more mature. My mother amusedly fixed us some tea to play into our newfound sophistication, but my appetite wasn't too keen on the biscuits she offered to make. I accidentally spilled some of the hot drink onto the girl's pretty, polished hand as we practiced holding our cups like proper women. She cried as I held her hand under cold faucet water. Thankfully, the burn didn't leave a scar on her smooth skin.

— — — —

When we were on our walk home one evening, we got into a messy fight. She yelled at me angrily after I suggested in the kindest way I knew how that a dentist visit might do her well. I've never seen her face become so ugly and wrinkled. I wished that I could run my hand across it and flatten the lines out, but sweat trickled down her head and I rushed to get the rest of my way home.

I bathed my cat before lying down in bed, and after doing so I realized that my school clothes were still stuck to my body. I didn't move, and my eyelids began to shut, but stopped short from doing so as hair fell into my eyes, stinging them painfully.

I didn't sleep that night, and was afraid I would fall over from exhaustion at school the next day without a shoulder to lean on in the hallway.

Ignoring the demanding voice of our teacher, I stared at the girl's calm, unmarked face in class. She looked back at me and I startled, giving her a tight lipped smile to ease the growing awkwardness gnawing at me. Her expression remained much the same as her silky hair swung back and forth, whipping around to face the board again. I pushed my head down onto the desk

and tugged roughly on my own knotted strands. A bird sitting on a flimsy tree branch outside of our classroom window began to sing an early morning tune that made my body tense.

I never was able to get a long look at her face again, so I began to inspect mine in the mirror everyday before leaving the house. It was nothing like hers, but I never made a move to fix it with any of the beauty tips she spilled to me. My hair became more heavy and matted each time I saw my reflection.

— — — —

After a quiet day at school, I trailed off into the woods that lovingly hugged the right side of my house. I tirelessly hacked through chunks of my long hair with the safety scissors I kept in my school bag once I found a pretty little pond to sit by. The fish that eyed me curiously when I had first sat down began to swim away as clumps of hair fell into the water, looking like toxic sludge when wet. The heaps of thick strands polluting the water may have made it hard for the fish to breathe, but the short lived breeze tickling the back of my neck distracted me from worry. I rolled onto the grass and felt the cushion of green on my back. My fingers let the scissors go and searched beneath, digging into the dirt that hid so quietly. It felt gross on my skin, but it also felt familiar in a way I couldn't describe. Not liking that idea at all, I rose to my feet with a sudden sense of urgency.

I knew my face must've been pinched up in such an ugly way when I started crying, attempting to run out of the woods. The heat from beams of sunlight that couldn't be blocked by tall trees made my body hot and sticky. I felt an awful sickness rooted in my gut at that moment, and it increased tenfold when I thought of the girl with crooked teeth that would never want to smile at me again. The only reassurance I had as I dashed frantically past twisted trees was the quick promise made to myself of a long shower when I got home. I hoped that then I would start to feel slightly less filthy.

2nd place Fiction - High School Division
By: **Amelia Rosteet**
Southside High School

“Never Me, But You”

He knew from the moment that he saw the number of figures near the burning campfire that something was wrong.

The quiet night had been disturbed by the chattering of his friends. Not necessarily unusual in the slightest.

What *was* unusual—however—was the exact replica of him smiling with them.

None of his friends realized the difference, and they seemed to believe that thing was the real deal. Something akin to resentment festered in his stomach as he peered through the trees, watching the interactions intently.

The doppelgänger was perfect. It was exactly like him in appearance and demeanor. He wasn't sure where it came from, but he hated it. Nobody had the right to wear his own face besides him.

The shadows danced around him, and he was content to observe until he had a plan in mind. He took a few deep breaths in and out to try and calm down.

The crackle of the fire seemed louder, and he forced himself to listen closely. Right now, he needed to assess the situation. How exact was his copy? What were the differences that set them apart? How long would it be till his friends caught on?

A deep voice spoke from one of the logs around the fire, he couldn't see who it was, yet he recognized it as Wade. “Hah! You sure that's what Mr. Arkwright said? When has he ever said somethin' so stupid! You're killing me, Kelly.”

More laughing followed, and the onlooker hidden in the dark of the trees felt his mouth run dry as he swallowed. That was my name.

He scowled as he gripped the bark of the tree harder. He would've been fine with going up to confront the freak of nature if it wasn't for the fact that he didn't know what its intentions were. Surely it knew he was nearby if it just came up out of nowhere?

A few minutes passed, and the group at the campfire stood up and grabbed their backpacks from the ground. Kelly perked up to watch as they started clearing up the camp. As they started to walk away, he silently approached the remains of the campsite, observing what was left.

A phone had fallen into a pile of leaves; he turned it on and checked the home screen. It was a photograph of a raven; it was Clifford's then. He slipped the phone into his pocket after removing the sim card and turning it off. He quickly made up for his lost distance to the group as he observed.

They had reached the trail now, and they followed it until the trees grew less sparse and they reached a clearing. A blue truck sat in the middle of it, barely visible in the dark. Kelly watched from the shadows as they tossed the camping supplies into the bed and the group clamored inside. Its engine started running and it sped away; Kelly watched as the headlights faded into the distance.

He sat there for a while, thinking of a plan. He came to a conclusion though, and he was driven by a sense of determination. His clone was out there somewhere manipulating his friends. It would continue doing so if he didn't put an end to whatever it was.

His resolve was set, and he started the trek in the direction the truck went.

Kelly wasn't sure how much time had passed until he ended up in the backyard of his house. It would've been much shorter if he had just jumped in the truck bed, but he no longer cared about that.

The loathing feeling he felt only strengthened as the proximity between him and the clone shortened.

Kelly glared at the clone through the window behind the couch as it walked into the living room. He gritted his teeth. All he had to do was set his plan into motion.

Slowly, he crept to the front of the house, timing his footsteps with the rustle of the trees. He pulled the smartphone he nabbed from Clifford out of his pocket. After he had set an alarm he placed it on the doorstep, then returned to the back of the house. His eyes scanned the backyard, searching in the dark for the object he needed. He spotted the ladder propped up against the old oak tree he played under as a kid.

Kelly grinned, lifted it, and carried it back to the house. He placed it next to the bedroom window on the second floor and climbed it. He carefully slid it open and pulled himself through. He knew the halls well, and he knew which of the steps creaked and which ones didn't. He followed that pattern through the second floor until he reached the stairs. Going down would lead him right next to the front door. This was just a waiting game now.

Loud chimes of the alarm pierced through the quiet night, muffled yet aggravating to Kelly's ears. He could see the shadow of a figure on the wall get bigger as it came closer. Kelly held his breath.

They grabbed the doorknob, and the sound of the alarm grew louder, then quieted. The wind howled now, and Kelly took that as his sign.

His chest tightened as he made his way down the steps, quiet like a predator stalking prey. He was closer now; all he had to do was—

A loud creak echoed through the house.

The shadow came closer in view. "Wade? I thought you went home already—"

Kelly watched as the clone made eye contact with him, eyes widening instantly in horrified recognition.

And of course, Kelly wasted no time darting towards him.

The clone gasped and turned around as Kelly dashed after him, pushing off of walls and into the living room. Kelly tackled him and started to punch him repeatedly, his own body burning with each strike.

A metallic smell filled his nose. The Ringer's blood dripped down its face onto the floor, pooling.

And it wasn't enough.

His clone started to fight back, trying to kick Kelly off and clawing at his face. Its nails made contact with his forearm, tearing it. Blood trickled down onto Kelly's palm, yet he felt no pain as he continued attacking.

His hands moved to the clone's neck, and he started to firmly squeeze it. "GIVE ME BACK MY FACE!"

The Kelly clone fought back, yet the real Kelly could tell it'd be hopeless. He increased the pressure on its neck. The beast got more desperate in its escape, pushing and kicking.

The creature's movements and the clawing on Kelly's wrists slowed. The attacks stopped. Its eyes no longer seemed to focus on the man on top of him.

Kelly's arms remained on the form's neck until he was sure it wouldn't fight back any longer. Its arms collapsed back to the ground.

And Kelly once again sat in silence. He felt almost nothing as he stared out the window, a small sense of pride too. The fatigue from his journey was catching up to him.

His rough breathing evened out, and he sighed. He lifted his arm to look at the damage the Ringer left on him.

His breath caught in his throat as he watched it work backwards into his arm. The thick blood reentering his body and the wound closing up before his eyes. He sighed at the realization.

Gaze flickering down to the pockets of the man's jacket, Kelly pulled out the phone in it. He called Wade.

Kelly wasn't sure how long it was until his friends arrived, the sound of their shoes not registering. He felt someone crouch down next to him and talk softly. He couldn't pick up who it was, keeping his mind elsewhere as they helped him up to the couch.

When Kelly came to, he started to take in the people in the room. There were five, excluding him. Clifford stood in the center of the room, staring down at what he assumed was the body of Kelly.

"I never would've thought one of them would impersonate him. It acted just like the real thing, I could've sworn...." He bit his nail. "Thankfully he handled this, not many people survive Ringer attacks. Without a scratch too." It was Clifford.

Wade spoke after. "Yeah, could've been a real bad problem there. I 'oughta known too, we've been friends since we were kids."

Clifford sighed. "These things have a knack for disguises; I didn't expect it to be that perfect though." He turned to Kelly, "You alright, man?"

Kelly ran a hand down his face. "I'm fine, just glad it's over."

"I'll get law enforcement on the line; they'll clean this up and it'll be like nothing ever happened!" Wade chuckled as he walked into the kitchen.

Kelly let a smile grow across his face "Yeah, like nothing ever happened."

3rd place Fiction - High School Division
By: **Lucy Saucier**
Southside High School

“Birds of a Feather”

The sun hangs low in the sky, stars poking through as the sky grows darker. It’s been a long day, at least for Leo. His job as Bluebird is so draining...

Leo stumbles through the apartment he shares with Merle. He leans against the doorway of the bedroom, clutching his side. His wings are droopy, the tips of them almost dragging against the ground. However, they raise when he notices Merle isn’t there, where he usually is, with a book in bed. Leo’s mind races for a few moments, wondering if the Flock finally found out about him. He rushes into the room in a panic before hearing the bathroom door open behind him.

“Leo?” He hears the voice from behind him.

Leo whips around immediately. “Merle!” He rushes over to him, wrapping his arms tightly around Merle’s waist. He presses his face into his shoulder.

The other man laughs softly, wrapping his arms around Leo’s neck. “What’s this about, hmm?”

“I thought the Flock found out or something...” Leo looks up at him from his shoulder. Merle is just smiling.

“C’mon, they wouldn’t. I’m real sneaky like that.” Merle’s words comfort him to a degree, but he can’t stop himself from overthinking most of the time. He just nods instead of saying anything else as Merle’s eyes trail down to where Leo is clutching his side. “Let’s get that fixed up, yeah?” He nods, pulling back to sit on the edge of the bed.

“Try not to get blood on the sheets again. That’s my job, dear.” Merle is joking about him being trans, clearly.

“I’ll try,” Leo laughs along, making sure to avoid blood on the sheets. It takes so much to clean it out, but Merle is good at it. Cleaning periods over the years because it’s always late or early and never on time for some godforsaken reason makes great practice for cleaning blood.

Merle walks back in a couple minutes later with the medkit, starting to treat it. He cleans it out, disinfects it, etc., etc., and then bandages it. Leo’s hands were balled up in the sheets to avoid making noise, but it was also a nice distraction.

“There we go.” Merle pulls back, hands bloodied from cleaning the wound. Leo groans softly. “I’m going to wash my hands then come back, okay? You should change into something comfier.” He leaves the room. Leo changes into a large blue shirt with a bird over the chest, sweatpants, and takes his hair down. Changing is usually difficult with his wings, but he’s been able to manage. He just wishes the back of his shirts didn’t have big holes cut in them.

Leo lays down in the bed, the setting sun casting an orange glow over the room. He closes his eyes. His head is pounding. He sits up and grabs ibuprofen from the bedside table, taking it without water as the bed dips. Merle is back. He's changed as well, wearing shorts down to his mid-thigh and a wine red shirt. His hair is in its usual bun, still. Leo flops back down, head in Merle's lap. He strokes his hair, laughing softly.

"Long day, I'm assuming." Merle's voice is soft, just as soft as the pillows. Not like Leo's head is laying on them though. Leo grumbles in response, nuzzling into his stomach. He laughs again. "Are you going to stay there all night?" Leo nods.

"Yes..." Leo's voice is low, quiet. He's so exhausted, he just wants to be with Merle. His hands card through Leo's hair.

"Can I move a bit, then?" Merle's voice matches Leo's. He reluctantly lets go of the other man. Merle lays down next to him, head sinking into the pillows. Leo cuddles back up to him immediately. His head rests on Merle's chest, who strokes his hair. He melts into him, his wings fluttering slightly before they vibrate a bit. Merle giggles. They stay silent for a while until Leo speaks up.

"I'm so happy I don't have to deal with Crow right now," he sighs into Merle's chest. "He's so much work, he causes me so much trouble, and I've still never got to see what's under that prick's mask!" Leo is worked up about it, clearly. Merle's hand stills in his hair for barely a moment before he continues.

"Oh? Sounds like you're focusing more on this Crow guy than me." Merle sighs dramatically, very unseriously, and laments. "You think about him more than me, don't you?"

Leo can't help but laugh, a little sleepy, but he denies Crow being on his mind more than Merle. "Of course not. You're my boyfriend, I shouldn't be thinking about that annoying wrench in the Flock's plans anyways..."

Merle nods and kisses Leo's forehead. "Yeah." His voice is soft. Leo can hear the tenderness, the love, in his voice. He adores it. "You don't have to have to think about anything right now. Just relax. You deserve it, dear."

Leo groggily smiles up at his boyfriend and leans up to peck his lips, putting his head back on Merle's chest after and falling asleep.

Merle then gets his phone from under his pillow, still stroking Leo's hair. He's grown quite fond of him, which was unexpected for someone like Crow. He has a multitude of texts from Fig, Dove, and the rest of the Collective. Questions, concerns, yelling, etc., etc. Most yelling is from Dove, some from Fig, which is shocking. He supposes Fig lost their cool for once. It seems to be mostly demands to know what the hell he's doing. He sighs as Dove calls him.

"Dove, please stay as quiet as you can in your anger." Crow says it before she has the chance to speak in the first place. He hears a muffled scream and simply blinks slowly at the phone,

sideyeing it a bit. “My dear Bluebird is sleeping on my chest, very close to the phone. You may want to keep quiet.”

“Your dear Bluebird?!” Dove practically screams into the phone. Crow sighs. He wishes he was asleep and could use it as an excuse during the meeting. Crow stiffens as Dove goes off on him. The meeting. He completely forgot even though he was the one to schedule it! He wanted to do something for Leo. Crow sighs. The microphone built into the phone picks it up, and Dove stops talking immediately. Her voice goes low, dangerous. “Did you forget the meeting.” It’s a statement rather than a question, because she knows the answer. He did.

Crow doesn’t answer for a moment, preparing for the fact that he will be verbally obliterated by Dove. “...” He looks down at Leo, his Leo, resting on his chest. He turns the volume as low as it can be, wishing it really could be lower. Negative sound. He should try to do that for Leo. Crow sighs, brushing some hair away from the sleeping man’s face before answering. “Yes. I did. My, uhm...apologies?”

“HOW DID YOU EVEN DO THAT, YOU’RE THE ONE WHO SCHEDULED IT!!!” Dove is full on yelling into the phone. She must not be with Celeste at the moment, or Celeste is at work. Nursing is a lot, and it goes rather late anyways. Crow just takes it.

Once Dove is done screaming at him, thankfully not waking Leo up (he sleeps like a dead man), and breathing heavily into the phone, Merle speaks up. His voice is soft, gentle, a voice that’s

only reserved for when he’s talking about Leo. “I was going to bring Leo out to a bookstore. He loves books.”

Dove sighs loudly from the other side of the phone. “You have to be there for the meeting.”

Merle sighs too. Louder, actually. He would be scared of waking Leo up, but he knows it wouldn’t. “I know.” He looks down at the sleeping man in his arms. He leans his head against his, craving the closeness. It’s almost like an apology. I’m so sorry for having to flake out on you, he thinks. Merle kisses the crown of his head before leaning back again, still stroking his hair. “I’ll just... pretend to be sick. I don’t know.”

“Well figure it out, Crow.” Dove’s voice is harsh as she hangs up. Merle puts his phone down again, snuggling up to him. He’ll deal with it in the morning.

Honorable Mention Fiction - High School Division

By: **Sha'layjia Dugas**

Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

“Continuity”

Terry Bosner would never forget to water his plants, and he'd darn sure never let any of them die. How could he with all that time on his hands, and only an eye for the still beauty of verdure? But he knew the police officers standing in his backyard, their boots covered in mud and dirt, would not take him seriously. A few dead flowers and trampled leaves - well! He's old and probably senile, he knew the officers would think. Why, he could've trampled on them himself and forgotten! But no, Terry Bosner was particular and purposeful. He muttered to himself like any old man, but his mutterings were of conviction and abstraction. He didn't trot about aimlessly, wandering over the beautiful forms he'd help grow. He wasn't angry at the uniformed men, but exasperated, and sent them off after catching the whiff of amusement behind their pestering questions. “My child.” He caressed the flattened greenery, wet and smudged with mud. It was beautiful in a way, a mix of oranges and purples and blues on that background of green and brown. But someone was trespassing on his property, and not only did they trespass, but they'd ruined some of the dear Earth. Oh, a tragedy it was to that old, graying man. But he went about watering his plants and muttering and looking up at the sky, his eye's brother in color. His neighbors only smiled upon him and went about their business - young people and young old people and old young people dressed in a mix of new modern and old modern, and to them he was sure he was ancient. Occasionally, though, the clothing of his time grew popular again, and he was seen as “with the times” by his neighbors. Of course, he'd become old again when the interest died down. Terry Bosner didn't really care about that though. He did, however, care about Lucille Stoker, a dark-haired woman with carob skin who walked past his house every day with her dog's leash in hand, a large doberman that matched the graceful masculine gait of his owner. She smiled at him, clad in boots and jeans and a neatly tucked polo. Her lips were painted a dark purplish brown, her eyeshadow just a shade lighter, and he couldn't help but smile in return.

“Hey dea, Cille.”

“Terry.” She replied simply, holding her free hand out to shake. “They done anythin about your flowas?”

“Course they di'nt.” He takes off his dirty gloves and lets them hang on the sharp edges of the fence, taking her rough hand in his rougher ones and shaking it gently. His eyes were not afraid to meet hers as they were around others, blue and dark brown gazing into each other with a mutual respect and warmth. Her dog, Micah, sits patiently at her feet, eyes glued to a bee that quietly buzzes around multicolored orchids.

“Oh, I’m sorry ‘bout that, Terry. You’ll get em better again.” He nodded, hands lingering for an unnecessary moment before slipping away.

“Yea. I guess I will. I’ll get some for you, now. Hold on.” She laughed as the old man went and cut a few orchids. Oh, the way her hair circled her face, he thought to himself, like an angel’s halo. And her laugh made for the bells of Heaven, the hand of God meeting his own to take the flowers.

“This one looks like a tree.” Her fingertips graze the outline of the purple shape against white, her observation roughly accurate.

“Yeah, it does.” Micah’s eyes drift to a dark spot in the yard, his ears standing up. Lucille pats his head, waving at Terry as she begins to walk away.

“Well you take care, Terry. I’ll see you later. I can’t wait for Friday!” He only smiled and nodded, waving back and watching her walk away.

He went back in the house after a while, sat himself comfortably on the L-couch in the living room and poured himself a cold glass of whiskey, a range of drinks in the mini fridge on the floor. The sun shone in through the window, and he had a perfect view of those trampled flowers he’d cleaned up after the police left. It was probably those children again. Yes, his darling flowers, but really, he didn’t care. Terry Bosner found himself a small man with a mundane life and an exotic brain. In his quaint home and garden - flowers in the front and crops in the back - and his strange elderly crush on quite the unavailable woman. All well and good and really not important at all. Well, Terry thought, I don’t want people in and out my yard anyways.

Later that night, Terry sat at the small circular dining table, his eyes focused on the vase of flowers in the center. He chewed slowly, savoring the meatloaf he’d made himself. The recipe came from his next-door neighbor, Mr. Mallard. He didn’t like the man very much, or so he told himself. Terry supposed he didn’t really feel much for anybody except good ole Cille. He could look into the man’s window from his own, watching the silhouette move from room to room. Dancing alone again.

“Poor Mr. Mallard.” He laughed, standing up. “I’ll dance with you, friend.” The silhouette of Mr. Bosner could not be seen as he slow-danced his way to the sink to put away his dishes, then continued on slow-dancing through the house. And then on he danced to the outside despite the whirring of the floating AerVacs, wide short disks with thin but very large fans that were supposed to take the heat released from the urbanization and send it upwards to cool and come back down. “Lu-Ci-Lle.” He sang quietly, two-stepping down the sidewalk and breathing in the air. Such cool air, he thought. Such unburdened, light, refreshing air. It was in a stupor that he

moved, hands waving through the air and legs moving loosely, like he was an assortment of things rather than a whole. The equation of Terry Bosner was quite simple, or rather it was very small, but like an atom, it would take years of observation to understand, and really the value of knowing what an atom is like is thousands of times greater than the value of knowing what a Terry Bosner is like. The pebbles beneath his boots rolled in a pattern, or rather he rolled over them in pattern. 2 seconds, 3 seconds, 6 seconds, an anomaly, and then 2 seconds, 3 seconds, 6 seconds. He was rolling on stones, and rather clumsily so. The pebbles became wheels, and his shoes became skates, and he became a dancer, a swimmer, an acrobat beneath the cloak of night, the stars disappearing behind and reappearing from the occasional cloud of concentrated gas interrupting the wondrously clear sky. He rode past Mr. Mallard's house and Ms. Touvon's house and Al and Carcee's rental and all those neighbors, who's presences were like an Enlightened God's, all those neighbor's houses. And then he thought he passed Ms. Stoker's one - the wooden octagonal house with spring decorations and a broad porch. His wheels would not stop, his hand reaching out for Lucille, for the food that a starving man would yearn for, though if Terry Bosner were a starving man, he would not have a stomach to eat. And the wheels became pebbles, and his skates became shoes, and he became a still man beneath the cloak of life. For the first time, it seemed, he was hit with truth. Over and over again, it came down like a beating. Had he forgotten the strictness of an absurd parent like thought? Had he wandered from the path of extraordinaire to be mundane? And, as he walked on back to his home, had he abandoned the very meaning of himself? He lived like a philosophy in his own house, consumed by pattern and selfishness, for what other word describes a man embedded into only himself and his home? And yes, of course, his flowers. The gate to his yard creaked as he opened it and he breathed in a great breath, air soothing his lungs like a balm. His chest seemed to loosen, like an old machine finally getting the luxury of being taken apart and rebuilt, or better yet, not used at all.

In his sleep, he was a ferryman, bringing some invisible force along with him to see the rivers of his mind and the landscape of his dreams. Hoisted up proudly was a statue of everything he valued, a certain woman dripping in silver and iron, words branded into her skin and robes of smoke covering her like temples guard sacred shrines, the scrolls of old and new knowledge reserved strictly from irrelative eyes. Everything would begin anew in the same old way when he awoke, he knew. His flowers, his neighbors, the children - everything would move on, and some undecided day, so would he.

1st place Poetry - High School Division
By: **Nevia Taylor-Larson**
Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

"Shedding Skin"

She came to me coiled in kindness,
Soft smile promising peace in the wreckage.
Fangs concealed, venom hidden deep within her.
Wrapped around my wrist she whispered to me,
Sang my name in a way I'd never heard before.
I was drawn to her silence.
A hushed hiss where our bodies met,
Cold comfort pressed into the inferno of life.
The heat of who I once was, the anger and desperation,
Longing and devastation.
But she changed me.
Sliding into the cracks between my ribs,
The fractures where I couldn't bear the pressure,
She was there.
She held me strong and kept me sharp,
Kept me smart and on edge.
I am at my best when I'm with her,
But her touch began to scar.
She wove herself around my throat and I thanked her,
She crushed my esophagus until I couldn't stand to eat.
She weighed on my mind until I kept her with me all the time,
Her tongue tickled my ear as she thanked me.
She made sure to bite where no one would ever see,
Her venom surged through my veins,
And it kept me moving.
She mutilated my body beyond recognition;
There was no going back.
The sickening allure of her siren song had ensnared me,
I saw myself slip into the spiral, but I wasn't there.
She was a writhing mass of muscle more human than I could ever be,
Breathing for me when I couldn't handle it myself,
When she weighed on me too heavily for my lungs to expand without her.
She rewrote my body in her language,
Though I couldn't speak it I knew it was correct.
When at last she opened her jaw to me,
Her mouth was a cathedral,

Well worn and insurmountable.
I crawled inside,
Not as prey but as pilgrim,
Folded myself into the space between her ribs,
And vanished within her.

2nd place Poetry - High School Division

By: **Jillian Thomas**

Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

“The Weary Stone”

They told me to smile so I carved one in stone
Polished green gleaming like jade in the light
But jade is heavy
It cracks under pressure yet refuses to shatter
That’s the charade
You see brilliance on the surface
But you don’t see the fractures hidden underneath
I wear jade like armor
Yet it’s also a mask
A glossy shield for the battles I don’t name
The charade is ancient
As old as emperors
As secret as temples carved in mountains
They held jade like it was truth itself
But truth doesn’t always sparkle it sweats it bleeds
I dance in circles of glass smiles
Voices telling me “Don’t break character”
And character feels like costume
Emerald curtains falling over my real reflection
Can you see me or only the shine?
This jade charade fools even me sometimes
I catch my own eyes in the mirror

And wonder who's rehearsing these lines
Who's pressing play on this script
Where survival is mistaken for performance
Jade is strong yes
But even strong stones grow weary
Even strong souls grow jaded
Tired of carrying weight disguised as grace
Tired of painting peace over war zones in the chest
So here I stand
Still cloaked in the shimmer
Still caught in the charade
But every stone has edges sharp enough to cut
And one day I'll carve a doorway through the mask
Step out unpolished unfinished
No longer pretending that jade is the whole story
Just me raw uncut
Beautiful not because I shine
But because I survived the charade

3rd place Poetry - High School Division

By: **Addison Fontenot**

Magnet Academy for Cultural Arts

“My Last Dance to and Ugly Melody”

As my heart sits gently in my palm
Its faint feeling makes me wonder
Where the weight has gone
And why it bleeds down onto my shoes that
I spent all my money on to feel fine and fancy

What a light snack my heart must be
For a stray that would whine hungrily.
But part of me has always been quite greedy,
So I throw it out the window to let the wind indulge.
Carry the lightness away with my breath

When my mother pulls me in to her chest
My body wants to dance with its rhythm
Under lights that are warm on my skin.
My socks drenched red would be forgotten as I spin

Missteps would be backed by a choir singing around me.
They'll come out from the shadows and float above the floor
Out of tune, but never turning themselves
Into a soft or sweet melody
Seeming to not care if I am at all pleased

Eventually when the warmth dims and my mother calls for home,
My legs will be too sore to follow the crowd of voices as they go
Eyes slammed shut and ears plugged tight by my fingers,
I'll fall deep into the silence that sinks me in the ground
And can only pray that my heart traveled safely with the wind