

SPECTRUM

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FRESNO STATE

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LETTER FROM THE DEAN

Dear Young Writers' Conference Participants,

Writing is the cornerstone of the formation of the individual — it's an expression of the self that is reflective, philosophical, and transcendent. In the act of writing, we affirm a thought produced by the confluence of space and time — a thought, and a moment in time, which will not ever repeat again. The act of writing an idea simultaneously provides us the opportunity to create a thought that evolves with time — every time we read a poem, a novel, or short story, a new element arises, along with a new perspective on life.

As young writers, you have the opportunity to work with the best creative writing faculty. After all the lessons and discussions, though, it is your own personal insight into our world that will appear on the page; it is this insight, this unique experience, that has produced your very own consciousness and that will fuel your literary production. Tap into this vision, be proud of who you are as young writers, and enjoy the art of writing your thoughts.

Your English teachers are instrumental to this process of emotional and academic growth, because their energy, time, and dedication to their noble profession facilitate the genesis of your inspiration.

This conference is one of Fresno State's prized partnerships with our region's secondary schools. It is a model of how university and high school faculty can collaborate to promote writing as an art form that impacts and enhances every single professional field.

I wish every one of you a fun and exciting day full of learning and creativity. I am very pleased that the College of Arts and Humanities is a collaborative partner in your educational journey of self-discovery.

Here's to your bright future!

Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval
Dean, College of Arts and Humanities
California State University, Fresno

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome, Student Writers, to our 38th Annual Young Writers' Conference.

As essayists, poets, playwrights, and short story writers, you may claim a place in a community of Central Valley authors. Today you will interact with some of the English Department's outstanding faculty members and most accomplished graduate students. Our faculty members routinely publish in some of America's finest journals, so I hope you will make the most of this chance to talk with them and imagine the way that you, too, will contribute to making Fresno a place with a continuing reputation for creativity and social engagement.

I would like to extend a special welcome as well to the dedicated and accomplished high school teachers joining us here today. Your energy and enthusiasm have been essential in developing and nurturing the talented young people we see here. I and my fellow faculty members owe you special thanks for preparing these talented writers for their future careers, careers we hope will include their return to our University classrooms in years to come.

The Young Writers' Conference presents us all with a yearly reminder of how vibrant the diverse culture of our Central Valley can be. Welcome, then, to this celebration of what you have already accomplished. Seize the opportunity this day will afford you to challenge yourself and thereby develop your talents and your dreams.

Dr. Lisa M.C. Weston
Chair, Department of English
California State University, Fresno

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AWARDS

PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Jasleen Gill, University High School: 1984

HENRY MADDEN LIBRARY AWARDS

Felicia Zhornitsky, University City High School: La Guelaguetza

Kane Sjoberg, Edison High School: The Visitor

DEAN'S AWARD

Siul Anthony Maduena Tafoya, Riverdale High School:

My First Language is Tortillas

WILD ABOUT BOOKS AWARD

Kerry McClure, Fowler High School: Country Life

WILLIAM SAROYAN AWARD

Timothy Mercuri, King City High School: Dio e sangue

CHAIR'S AWARD

Maya Vannini, Edison High School: Home

FRESNO POETS' ASSOCIATION AWARD

Vivian Aila Dela Cruz, Kerman High School: Maybe I've Got a
Brain Tumor Making Me So Loving

AWARDS

THE NORMAL SCHOOL AWARD

Juliet R. Hernandez, King City High School: Breaking Roots

PHILIP LEVINE PRIZE AWARD

Hannah Padron, Los Banos High School: reverie

HMONG AMERICAN WRITERS' CIRCLE AWARD

Lisa Lee, Hoover High School: The Sound of the Jingling Coins

FACET AWARDS

Justin Borba, Mission Oak High School: Mother

Cadence Spencer, Sycamore Valley Academy: Father Poem

MFA AWARD

Hannah Sutton, University High School: Untitled

SAN JOAQUIN LITERARY ASSOCIATION AWARDS

Martin Mijares, Dos Palos High School: The Three Brothers

Faith Zako, Los Banos High School: Dear Fellow Dandelion

CHICANO WRITERS AND ARTISTS ASSOCIATION AWARD

Jaime Flores, King City High School: 1 o'clock

DRAMATIC ARTS AWARD

Vepsy Trejo-Saucedo, Sanger High School: A Corrupt Bargain

AWARDS

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Rosy Vue, Hoover High School: Kuv yog Hmoob (I Am Hmong)

Ivana Matias Perez, Selma High School: Life Lessons of a Field Worker

Ivana Matias Perez, Selma High School: Lecciones de la vida de un trabajador de campo

Manjot Dhandra, Fowler High School: The Truth About Today

Yisel Tapia, Dos Palos High School: Run, Rabbit

Stella Velez, Sierra High School: And All the Stars Have Fallen

Yahaira Plancarte Barragan, Roosevelt High School: Eucatastrophe

Samantha Park, Liberty High School: Crystalized

Paulo Campos, Los Banos High School: Flowers

Juliet R. Hernandez, King City High School: Steal His Life. Break Mine.

Isabelle Kramer, Mission Oak High School: The Clock

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY WRITING PROJECT TEACHER AWARDS

Ashley Russ, King City High School

Peggy Nemeth, Riverdale High School

1984

JASLEEN GILL, from University High School

President's Award

Amritsar, Punjab is on lockdown. Curfew is established, media is blocked, electricity is cut off. The city is isolated. Operation Blue Star is underway. 1984.

Tire tracks dirty the ground, a child screams for his mother. Sacred buildings have been blown to the ground, the echo of gunfire is the only sound. 1984.

Blood stains the marble, rubble catches on bare feet, the prayers have gone quiet and been replaced by a suffocating silence. The child is dead. 1984.

From June 1st to June 8th, the Indian army, under orders of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, marched on the sacred Sikh gurdwara, the Golden Temple, in pursuit of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a perceived militant and religious extremist. Though "Operation Blue Star" was successful in killing Bhindranwale and his supporters, when the dust settled the amount of destruction, death and carnage caused by both sides was catastrophic. Gunfire and shells rained down like poison from both sides, killing men, women and children, pilgrims who had come to this place of worship to pay their respects. But instead of praying to their God, they prayed for their lives. 1984.

157 military dead. 500 militants dead. Over 1000 innocent civilians dead. 1984.

Why was Bhindranwale in that temple? If he was such a spiritual man why did he turn a holy place into a fort, a battle ground, a cemetery? Why did the army attack on this day, the anniversary of the martyr of the temple's founder, a day they should have known the gurdwara would be crowded with pilgrims? Why didn't those soldiers warn innocent people? Why did they shoot at them? Why did anyone shoot at them? 1984.

Indira Gandhi is dead, assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards in retaliation for the attack of the Golden Temple. As she lay dead in a hospital bed on October 31st, the capital of India broke out into chaos. Delhi, India's capital, became a mob ground, Hindus turning on their Sikh neighbors, their friends. Sikh men were dragged out of buses, out of trains. Their turbans were ripped off, their long hair and beards cut, robbed of symbols of their faith. Beaten by metal rods and doused in kerosene, these innocent people were burned alive. Smoke and hatred clouded the morality of the people of Delhi. 1984.

“Blood for blood” they screamed. Well isn't that how this started? Blood of Indira Gandhi for the blood of innocent lives, the blood of innocent lives for the blood of Indira Gandhi. “For the mother of India!” What about the mothers who saw their sons burned? Daughters who saw their father's beaten? Families who lost generations of men because of the senseless hatred of a group of people. But it wasn't just a group of people. 1984.

As the violence and mobs moved outwards from Delhi, it wasn't just civilians participating in the executions. Government information had been leaked to rioters, aiding in their search for Sikh homes, businesses, families, rosters, voting lists, of Sikh people everywhere. Police turned a blind eye as shops, restaurants, homes and gurdwaras were burned. Politicians handed out 100 rupee notes and bottle of liquor to the mobs, the burning tires thrown around a man's neck still smoldering. It was no longer Hindus against Sikhs, it was India against Sikhs. 1984.

Protests broke out all over the world as news of the mass murder of Sikhs in India spread. Once a quiet, unnoticed minority, Sikhs in America, Britain, Canada and all over the world spoke out against the threat to their people in their home country. But the government would not admit any involvement and the killing went on and on. 1984.

A daughter watches on in confusion as her mother braids her brother's long hair into plaits, watches in fear and as a blood covered man with a rabid look in his black eyes grabs her mother's arm and violently yanks her away from the door where her father is hiding, doesn't understand why her grandmother covers her face with her *duputa*, doesn't understand until years later why her father, her grandfather, her uncle, never came home. She cries when the remnants of her family boards a plane bound to America. She looks around with terrified eyes at the shiny, antiseptic airport and follows without words because her mother's hand is tight and her gaze sharp. The girl yells at her brother for asking about their lost family in the day, cries for them at night. 1984.

Anti-Sikh riots. Riots? Riots? Is it a riot when police participate and

incite men? Is it a riot when it has been over 30 years and out of the official 2,733 admitted murders, only nine cases have led to the conviction of 20 people, a rate of less than 1%? Is it a riot when the Indian Government has launched multiple investigations into the killings but none have led to the arrest of any police or government officials despite eyewitnesses placing them at the scene either aiding or ignoring murderers. Is it a riot when politicians hand out information and rewards, when the murder is systematic and organized? Is it a riot when it's happening all over the country, when nearly 3,000 innocent people died in 3 days? Is it a riot when people are being murdered at a rate of 1 person per minute? This is no longer a riot, it's a genocide, a law enforcement and government aided genocide, and someone needs to be held accountable. We as a people, united not by race or religion but by humanity, need to hold someone accountable. 1984.

La Guelaguetza

FELICIA ZHORNITSKY, from University High School

Henry Madden Library Award

the prettiest girl I have ever seen
was in el parque de calwa
on the day that the september sun
wielded its final summer beams,
determined that we yield to its terrible glory
before the season turned.
as I stood there blinking in concession,
I saw her by the pan dulce vendor
with her head upturned to the sky:
a white rose worshipping the light.
minutes before, I'd been wondering
what I was doing there
in this unfamiliar park three highways from home
but now, I stood in awe
at the melodious wit of her conversation,
at the red ruffles adorning her swaying skirt,
at the ribbons bouncing from her sleeves
as she adjusted the basket of flowers
upon her ebony bun
as precise as an eye on a butterfly wing.
she was ethereal. and she was looking my way.
when her eyes met mine
she smiled, sweeter than helado de chicle,
and I realized that the
five boxes of pan dulce that I had bought
would not be enough.

The Visitor

KANE SJOBERG, from Edison High School

Henry Madden Library Award

“What do you mean you’ve never been to Alpha Centauri? Oh, for heaven’s sake, mankind, it’s only four light years away, you know.”

— *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*

Prologue

It all began on a quiet night, the sun long gone, the stars shining brightly on the cold night. The Schmidt telescope, just north of Tucson, Arizona, was working its way through its automated routine of scanning the night sky. It was halfway through, only detecting the usual comets and asteroids.

The whole telescope rotated slightly, and the enormous shutter clicked open, continuing to move to match the dance of the stars, then snapped shut 30 seconds later. Then it took another picture three minutes later.

The telescope’s computer proceeded to analyze the two images, overlaying the hundreds of millions-of-pixels images. It was almost done scanning, noting the changes, and cross-referencing NASA’s celestial object database, when the computer caught 51, just 51 pixels that were different.

So it queried the database, and got an “*unknown object*” message. The telescope halted and focused on the unknown object. It contacted its two companion telescopes in Hawaii and New Mexico, sent the coordinates, and waited.

When the other images from the telescopes came in, the computer triangulated the distance and relative size of the object. They then waited briefly, and all three telescopes took another round of pictures, triangulated the distance, and calculated a trajectory for the unknown object.

What they found would change history.

The object was far out beyond our solar system, it was slightly larger than the state of California, and it was headed almost directly at Earth.

Chapter 1

It was 3:36 in the morning. Stephen “Steve” Vardawski, 43 years old, was working at his desk in NASA’s Center for Near Earth Object Studies, drinking a large steaming cup of coffee and listening to Kashmir(Led Zeppelin, 1975), his favorite high school song. Typical night shift.

“Steve, you got the orbital trajecs for the asteroid 48cDe? It’s an S-type out past Saturn.” Mark said, leaning over and studying his screen.

“Yeah, it’s further down the list, number 4,308.”

“Man you’re quick,” Mark said, scrolling down the enormous database list of asteroids and comets in the solar system. “Did you memorize the whole thing?”

Stephen replied, “Well, when you have a few hours and nothing but a long list that doesn’t change very often, you sort of get to know it intimately.”

The list was constantly being updated, asteroids and comets being logged and checked to ensure that they were not on a path to smash into Earth in a destructive and world-rending fireball.

Yup, pretty normal night, Stephen thought, sipping his coffee.

As if some celestial being heard this and decided to make Steve’s day rather more interesting, red banners simultaneously popped up on every screen in the control room.

Steve whipped off his earbuds, choked on his coffee slightly, and looked up at the big screens.

“Holy *shit*,” Mark muttered under his breath.

One showed all of the data on the object, the other had a chart of the orbital path of the asteroid. A third screen showed images of the object taken by the telescopes that discovered it.

Then the size estimation came up: the object was larger than the state of California, and would pass extremely close to Earth, within the moon’s orbit.

All around the room, the night shift broke into a flurry of activity as everybody realized how monumental this event was. Calls were made, emails were sent, information diffused out, and the world learned as the news broke like an overflowing dam onto the press.

Chapter 2

“... early NASA estimates indicate that this object is larger than the state of California ...”

Flink.

“... Astronomers from all over the world are turning their eyes to the sky to observe this historical event ...”

Flink.

“... NASA said in a statement today that it will be passing close enough to the Earth to be visible to the sky, directly over Sweden, Poland, Czechia, Austria, Italy, Libya, Chad, Congo, and the Central African Republic, causing an unexpected eclipse in certain areas ...”

It's 11 o'clock on a nice Saturday morning, and the world is already losing their marbles, thought Stephen. He continued to browse the newsfeeds, eating his cereal and drinking some strong coffee.

The night before, he didn't get back to his apartment until four AM, where he blearily thought, *I wonder if the asteroid will plow into any satellites,* before promptly falling asleep facedown on his bed.

Back at NASA, every telescope able to was trained on the unexpected visitor, which had become an overnight celebrity to the world press. Spacecraft within range of the asteroid were studying it to glean more information from it, and bit by bit, the realization that this was not just any normal asteroid built up and became real.

First of all, the asteroid-that-wasn't-just-an-asteroid was larger than is normal for these celestial objects, and elongated. Second, data from different probes already out in space showed that there was some kind of energy or heat source in the center of the asteroid. Third, the asteroid was hollow.

The visitor had humanity's complete attention, and it was observing them right back.

Stephen finished his cereal, cleaned up, and spent the rest of his

Saturday morning watching the news, reading the newspaper, and generally being unproductive, as a 43-year old guy with nothing to do and a rather sheltered social life will be, especially after a long night at the job.

Stephen then went and played a game of golf at the local course, and then came home to clean up before going to back to work.

Little did he know that this would be his last normal day for quite a while...

Chapter 3

Stephen opened the door to the command center at the Center for Near Earth Object Studies, and walked over to his desk.

Mark was there, looking crazed and sleep deprived.

“Steve, where the heck have you been? You’re missing out on so much important information, like the asteroid might be inhabited by aliens, and Russia is going to launch nuclear missiles at it, and -”

“*What?!* Mark, slow down and explain to me what is going on,” Stephen anxiously said.

Mark took a deep breath and said, “Okay, so essentially what is happening is that this asteroid originated from the Andromeda Galaxy, it’s hollow in the center, there is a heat source inside of it, and Russia announced just an hour ago that they are going to launch 132 modified nuclear missiles at the asteroid as it passes us to knock it into an orbit so they can study it.”

Stephen was speechless for a moment, looking like he swallowed something bad, then replied in a conversational tone, “So you’re telling me that by tomorrow we might have started a war with an alien race by sending over one hundred nuclear warheads at them.”

Mark said in a that’s-about-all-we-know tone, “That’s about right.”

Stephen ran his hands through his hair wearily, taking a moment to come to terms that humanity, in a feat of pure genius, was going to launch 132 machines able to burn entire cities at the biggest scientific discovery possibly in human history.

Great.

Up on one of the big screens was a large countdown timer, with hours,

minutes, and seconds. It said 11:46:13.

12.

11.

10.

9 ...

Chapter 4

Well, now it's past Mars, on the home stretch. In three hours I will witness possibly the biggest event in human history, Stephen thought. He was more than a little uneasy, since after Russia made its announcement, multiple countries, including the United States, had warned Russia not to launch its nuclear missiles because doing so would be considered tantamount to an act of war, in which case many countries would be inclined to respond forcefully. Russia had no response.

And now, the wait was on. Stephen was excited, and yet he dreaded it.

Minute by minute, the clock ticked away, the timer ran down, and the Visitor, as the newspaper coined it, steadily and unceasingly approached Earth.

Finally, the time came. Stephen was on top of his apartment building with his telescope, waiting for the show to start.

At first, nothing.

Then suddenly, a small, small speck of light appeared in the sky above the horizon to the northeast, which gradually grew larger and larger. It slowly resolved itself into a vaguely pill-shaped cylinder. It appeared to be heading almost directly south of Stephen and parallel to him, though he knew logically that it wouldn't even touch the Earth's atmosphere. It slowly appeared to speed up, inching across the sky and appearing slightly larger than a pencil eraser. Then, little trails of light, hundreds of them, began to line up to intercept the object, and inch by inch came closer to colliding with it.

Stephen watched and felt a surreal sense of calm wash over him, dousing his shock. He felt insignificant; small.

That feeling was washed away quickly when he heard a faint rumbling, glanced up, and saw that now a missile was flying directly over him,

heading towards the rapidly developing situation in the sky. Then another, and another, and three more from the west, and then more than he could count all arcing towards the Russian missiles in the sky, all converging like moths to a flame.

Well, this should be interesting, thought Stephen, before all hell broke loose

He heard multiple staccato pops, faintly at first, then getting louder, as though approaching him. Then the transformers on the power pole at the end of his block simultaneously exploded, sending sparks flying and explaining the popping noises. The hairs on Stephen's arms began to rise, and then they stood stock straight while the hair on his head began to get excited, too. The air felt charged, as though there was an impending thunderstorm. Small sparks started to crawl on the TV dish to the left of him.

What the h—? Stephen thought, but then it was gone. He got out his phone to take pictures, but found that his battery was dead, and that the phone was warm.

Well that's odd, I thought I had just plugged it in earlier! He thought.

Then he noticed that the stop lights were out at the end of his block, the cars that had been driving down the street were gradually rolling to a stop, the AC on the same roof he was currently on had shut down, and everything was dead silent. The birds were long gone.

And to top it off, an odd sheen was forming over the asteroid, the thing starting from the front and back tips of the asteroid, and carefully coming around it on all sides in an unnatural curve to meet at the asteroid's equator. When this happened, the shield blazed into color, every shade and hue of color one could possibly think of and then some new colors humanity had never seen before, and began to shimmer.

My god, it's a real extraterrestrial visitor, was all Stephen thought dazedly, when he noticed that a very bright light was forming in the Eastern horizon, with no real origin; it looked like the light pollution you see in big cities at night, except Stephen noted that 1. It was the middle of the day, 2. He could tell that this light was coming from a long way away, and 3. It probably had something to do with the Easter Egg currently flying across the sky. At this point, Stephen did nothing but sit down and observe, because his brain was still thoroughly locked in shock, as were about 7 billion other humans' brains.

The light got brighter and brighter as the nuclear missiles got closer and closer, and then all of a sudden, massive pillars of light blazed from the earth out to every single missile in the sky, which proceeded to

incinerate in an unbelievably enormous series of explosions that lit the sky like God had turned on the world's largest Christmas lights, like *hey humanity, whaddya think of THESE?*

Stephen barely had time to register all of this before he almost went deaf from the largest, loudest crack of thunder in the history of humanity, his ears ringing and his chest vibrating as the massive sound wave passed through him. Then the shockwave slammed him over like a domino before a hurricane. It was so powerful his telescope flew backwards, and trees bent and leaves blew off.

Then, as if all of this pandemonium wasn't enough, the visitor in the sky decided to disappear in the second brightest flash of light he had ever seen. Well, he didn't really see it because he had his head in his hands, recovering from the shockwave, but he felt it on his skin.

And that was about it. The nuclear missiles were gone, the visitor was gone, the sky went back to a normal blue, the nuclear blasts were now little more than expanding circular clouds in space which nobody could see because it was still daytime throughout all of this, and it was quiet, not because Stephen's ears were still recovering, but because the whole world had ground to a stop. The world stayed like this for a while, almost frozen in time, until slowly, backup generators started up, electricity began to flow again, and the world started to resume functioning.

And as if in a celestial encore, satellites fell from the sky, burning up in the atmosphere like shooting stars.

Epilogue

3 months later.

Stephen was okay now, his ears were healing, and in general the world was getting back on its feet. The internet was all but nonexistent for two months, many places still had no power, and through pure luck, when the world's electricity came together to form massive lightning bolts, they did so in the Mediterranean, so no countries were partially smoking craters. Thousands of tons of ocean had boiled though, and so there was a fog shroud over the Middle East and Africa, from Turkey to Egypt.

Nobody had taken pictures of the event or recorded it because the entire world had lost power, except for one guy in Austria that took five pictures with his old 1960 Polaroid Land Camera, which is a metal brick and doesn't require any power to operate. So the only physical records

of the biggest event in human history were five successive Polaroid pictures. These became known as the Final Five, and are now world famous. Humanity proceeded to rebuild itself, and from then on, there was much more interest and support for the fields of science, especially astronomy.

We became aware that we are not alone in this universe on January 8, 2019, and now, being the curious apes we are, we want to know what's out there. And so life continues, and as a species, we progress.

My First Language is Tortillas

SIUL ANTHONY MADUENA TAFOYA, from Riverdale High School

Dean's Award

Hues of orange trying to wake me from my slumber as I tossed in bed wanting to stay asleep. The window smiled, a stream of blinding yellow light escaping past its lips and illuminating the baby blue room. The door crawled open like a worm trying to stay alive.

“Levantate te hice huevos,” mother said joyfully. *Wake up, I made you eggs.*

“OK, ahorita voy” I replied. *Okay mom, In a bit okay?* I turned to the brown shorts and faded red shirt that were hanging on the dresser. Clean and spiffy Converse waited on the right corner of my bed. I put my foot in, laced it up and continued with the other. It was 7 am sharp, and the sounds of the TV grew stronger as I walked down the hall to the kitchen, past the living room. “Arthur” was blaring on the TV set at this time, and I decided to watch as I ate the hot, over-medium eggs. Wisps of steam rose off and disappeared into the ceiling of the kitchen. Smashed frijoles decorated my plate and turned it into a masterpiece of Mexican cuisine. The only thing missing to make this breakfast complete was the TORTILLA!

“Mom are there any tortillas?” I asked with a hint of hope.

“No hay tortillas, pero voy a hacer un poco mañana,” she replied. *No there are none, but I'll make some tomorrow.*

“Ok mommy,” I sadly replied.

“Estás listo para ir a la escuela de verano?” Mother asked me minutes later. *Are you ready to go to summer school?*

“Yes, mommy, but do I have to go?” I replied.

Mother turned at said, “Mira, apenas llegamos desde Mexico hace unos días pero eso no es excusa para que no vayas a la escuela.” *Look, we barely*

got here from Mexico a few days ago, but that's no excuse not to go to school.

Mother and I went to the front of the house to get in the car as distant barks from the annoying hairy quadrupeds shook the silence. The sun's rays hugged my cheeks with a soft warm tone of tangerine as the moisture in the air danced and flowed around my body. I closed my eyes as the sun shined brightly and slowly opened them to see our black Geo Tracker beckoning us to get in. An unfiltered putrid stench of cows rose into the air and bit my nose as I got into the car. The Tracker was smaller than most cars but served its purpose. The car's exterior and interior was the tint of a worn-out black shirt after being washed too many times, but in contrast, it was my home away from home. The seats were so overused that the padding sank down before I even decided to sit. In between the seats was the trash that I collected: unfinished lollipops, spare change, and a couple of pencils were shoved in the nooks and crannies of my hoarder space. Mother turned the key, and the little Geo roared to life as if it knew it had a mission to complete. The three-minute drive was uneventful except for the few high school students that could be seen making their way to school down the weed-infested pavement, each isolated by the accompaniment of sound entering their ears through thin strings. Some waddled, others faltered, few lumbered, and there was the rare occasion of encountering a saunterer, depending on the day. The sun crescendoed, making it further noticeable as it radiated its rich honeycomb color. The Tracker came to a screeching halt as my mother slammed on the brakes in front of the primary school.

The white-roofed entrance to the school greeted me with its openness. We stepped inside and a little blue building could be spotted to the right of me. I walked to the building and went inside to discover a sweet scent and chairs lined up against the wall. Huge windows that reached from the ceiling to the floor decorated this room. They allowed the sun to continue saying hi to me as if it were my guardian for the day. The lady at the front desk told my mother to leave me in one of the seats.

"Ya me voy mijo, quedate aqui," Mother said. *I'm leaving, stay here.*

"Okay, Mommy," I told her.

It had only been a few minutes since my mom had left, but it felt like an eternity. From the corridor, a skinny blonde lady with overwhelming amount of perfume signaled me with her index finger. She looked as if she was trying to get me to do something. Her body language was the only thing that I understood. I walked to the lady and into the room that she pointed to. She put her right hand out as she pointed with all her fingers to the chair. On the desk in front of me was a packet of five papers, a weird machine with headphones, and a pencil. She said

something in a strange language, but it was just gibberish to me. Her intonation and facial expression, however, spoke volumes. From the light tone and smile, I figured out that she was trying to greet me. After about an hour of work, my task seemed never ending. The packet of papers sprung to life and grew into a beast that haunted me and would not let me be. Its words felt like fangs digging into my brain, confusing and killing any chance of understanding. The whole while, its trainer just sat and smiled at me with those yellowish fangs of hers. Finishing that packet was like wrestling a bear in the nude. When I thought my torture had ended, “the trainer” signaled for me to put on a truly foreign ear covering device.

All of a sudden, I heard a high pitched scream and thought those words had turned my brain to mush. One wail after another, the machine made my ears feel like they were being stung by the vibrations of nature. Luckily, the screams turned into talking and then into whispers as the lady with the yellow teeth adjusted the knobs on the contraption that I would later find out was for checking my hearing. I don’t know what was worse, the constant barrage of sound or the incessant need of the operator to have me raise my hand to let her know which ear was being tortured. This went on for a little while, but eventually ended. I was then sent to a classroom with a bunch of other children, who were all the same age as me. A little disoriented, I confidently walked over to a couple of kids directly in front of me.

“Hola, como estas?” I said to them.

They turned around, looked at me, and started to whisper among themselves in a tongue unknown to me. A shock of fear ate at my confidence, and slowly withered my body’s ability to react. My feelings and social existence drifted away as an iceberg chipped off of a glacier in the cold climate of loneliness. Many of my actions were not customary to them. Calling the teacher “maestro or profe” would make them turn their heads in curiosity. I felt their eyes boring into me, as they analyzed my every move so that they could later openly judge me among themselves. I couldn’t handle this pressure that had built up in the class and made my heart race for home. The feeling of being tiny for using my native language had attached itself to me, but I had no other means of communication and had to keep going. I tried to enunciate their vowels, their sounds, but my tongue had a mind of its own that would not obey my commands. It slurred and gave up halfway like a defeatist.

The rest of the day dragged on with the later events of recess, lunch, and waiting for mother to come pick me up. Recess was fun; I made a new friend named Jose Arias, who could understand what was saying. We swung from the swings the whole time that we were outside. The

sweltering heat from the ball of fire staring right down at me melted my insides. The longer the day dragged on, the more I turned to a liquid consistency. My legs began feeling like spaghetti noodles boiling in a pot of water. My head began to feel as if tossed in a dryer on high, and my lips became chapped and cracked like the Mojave Desert in summer. My whole body yelled for the nourishment that could only come from a sweaty glass of ice-cold water, dry from the long hours out in the sun, and from trying hard to enunciate vowels and sounds in class. At the end of the day, I was to wait in the office for my mother to pick me up.

My mother picked me up from the office, and the car ride was full of questions.

“Hi mom,” I told her with excitement.

“Hola chulo,” she said with a sunray of a smile on her face. *Hi Son.*

“Como te fue en tu nueva escuela mijo?” Mother asked happily. *How did it go at your new school, son?*

“It was okay, mom,” I said, as I downcast my head and brooded at the events that occurred at school.

“No me eches mentiras, que paso?” Mother said as she put her hand on her hip and raised one eyebrow in curiosity. *Do not lie to me; what happened?*

“The kids at school were making fun of me for trying to speak English.” I replied, as I felt tears burst forward as if released from a water dam. Mother’s expression softened and touched my cheek.

“Sé que va a ser difícil aquí, pero sé que tienes lo que se necesita para aprender aquí. ¿Sabes por qué? Porque creo en ti. Mira, no tuve la oportunidad de terminar la escuela, y es por eso que quiero que tengas una vida mejor que yo a tu edad. Quiero que lo hagas mejor que yo. Una vida donde puedes disfrutar de lo que quieres hacer y amar lo que haces.” *I know it is going to be hard here, but I know that you have what it takes to learn here. Do you know why? Because I believe in you. Look, I didn’t have the chance to finish school, and that is why I want you to have a better life than I did at your age. I want you to do better than me. A life where you can enjoy what you want to do and love what you do.*

I wiped my tears and smiled the clouds of sorrow away. “I made a new friend mami.”

“Mira, tu primer día no fue mal en el primer grado” mother said serenely. *Look, your first day of 1st grade wasn’t bad.* “Te hice una sorpresa, pero tienes que tener los ojos cerrados,” *I made you a surprise, but you*

need to have your eyes closed.

With my eyes closed, my head filled with the possibilities of what the surprise could hold for me. A toy, a dog, food, and my mind even went to the extreme thinking that she could have bought me a real monkey. We pulled up to the house and my mother helped me get out of the Tracker. We got to the door, and she put a sapphire blue bandana over my eyes. The sound of the door opening reached my ears but the sledgehammer of a smell caught me off guard. It was a peculiar smell that I knew could only come from the aroma of homemade tortillas. I took off the blindfold and ran to the kitchen. The kitchen had all the right ingredients: flour, water, baking powder, and salt. Most of the white dough was in a red bowl next to the stove. A piece of dough was all ready rolled out, waiting to be put on the flat smooth comal, or griddle, as I later found it to be called. Sudden sizzling occurred from the dough as soon as it touched the hot comal. My mouth started salivating as I imagined the warm butter-filled taco reaching my lips and slowly disintegrating past my teeth.

As the charcoal-black apron wrapped itself around mom, I impatiently placed a chair to view the creation. The wooden pin stretched the dough as it was pressed on the marble slab. Laid flat, her hands picked up the fragile work and placed it on the griddle. Freckles of light brown revealed themselves as the tortilla was being ever so slowly heated and flipped. She carefully continued with the dough and rolled up another ball. The ball was soft and squishy as she handed it over to me, instructing me to make a tortilla. I continued to help make tortillas that afternoon as the living room window glowed with the last goodbyes of orange. The greetings of the dark blue and soon to come welcomes of the rosy scarlet morning held my heart in anticipation of a new day. I looked forward to when I would be enjoying my breakfast with my favourite Mexican staple, the tortilla.

Country Life

KERRY McCLURE, from Fowler High School

Wild About Books Award

Something changes when you leave the city. Instead of this bustling, and boisterous crowd of people pushing and shoving their way through the human tide to get where they need to be, there is this laid-backness that covers the land. Farmers on old John Deere tractors stir up fine dust as they meander through the rows of Thompson grapevines. There are birds that dart through the tall telephone wires, trying to catch one another like children playing at tag. Water courses through the ditch like an ever-pumping heart, its flow dangerous and unknown. If one were to wait until nightfall, packs of coyotes would roam free, traversing the land shrouded in darkness. This is only the beginning, and only what I see on the mile journey to my grandparent's house, a place of childhood memories and perfect quiet.

I sit at the base of a crescent of land, the soil piling high above my head and housing eucalyptus trees that droop to say 'hello'. The air is cool and stagnant, somewhat humid from the nearby pond. The pine trees stand tall and reach their branches out like the arms of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, protecting me from the sun's rays. I can feel the rough fabric of the chair I'm sitting on crack and split because of the weather that it has endured over the years. When I close my eyes, I can hear the soft hum of the hummingbird's wings as they hover over the red feeders adorned with plastic yellow flowers. If I sat here for hours, the red sugar-water would go down an inch, and then two, and then three until the liquid dropped so far down, that it could no longer be seen.

I hear a small *plop* and open my eyes to the small pond that sits in front of me. A white goldfish with orange and black spots mimicking a calico design struck the surface of the water, claiming a flake of the fish food I had laid out. The lily pads block the rest of the fish from my view, but I know that there is one fish all black, one fish all white, three fish all orange, and my favorite fish all black with four spots of orange below its

fins, and one white spot on the tip of it's nose. At the discovery of food, the pond comes alive with ripples and small *plops* as the fish all rush to get their share.

My gaze lifts upwards and I look to the yard that is now beautifully trimmed, but if I think hard enough, I can almost see the giant fruitless mulberry tree that used to stand tall and in the center of the yard. I can almost hear the giggles of past-me and past-Duncan as we climb all over the tree. I can almost hear past-Ethan as he tells us that "We better not fall." I can almost feel the jarring feeling in my feet as I jump from a branch and land suddenly on the cracked sidewalk. I can almost taste the blood in my mouth because I had bit my tongue. I can almost. But I can't. Not completely at least.

Beyond the not-really-not-there-tree stands the glimmering steel shop. Wonderful things have happened inside that shop when the welder wakes and merges two separate pieces into one. Machinery comes alive with the sounds of power, airhoses, saws, drills. This is not a place for delicate precision; this is a place for raw, unrestrained brawn. Sparks will fly, sawdust will fall, and oil will drip. Inside, the air is always different, sometimes it stinks like smoke, other times it will smell like cedar or birch, and even other times, it will smell like cut metal. The sounds are unique as well, sometimes metal will scream and screech as the teeth of a blade dig into a pipe, air will *whoosh* through the entire building when the sawdust needs to be cleared. However, the shop doors are closed tight now, the insides silent.

If I look to my right, there is a grove of 37 eucalyptus trees. I know there's 37 because I counted them. Several times. The detritus from the trees used to rise up past my knees, making traversing the grove next to impossible. But now, when I've grown to be 5'4", it barely hinders me. I make my way slowly through the grove, my every footstep creating a cacophony of cracking and crinkling. Every now and then, I almost lose my balance, but I'm able to catch myself on the white trunk of number 23.

Just ahead of me is the orchard that I was able to prune back in March. The pomegranate trees are green with their leaves, the red fruits just beginning to develop. There's a distant screech of metal on metal and I turn to the shop, looking to see if the doors are open. Instead, I hear the crackling of the eucalyptus debris and two balls of fur come bounding towards me: Molly on the left, and Peggy on the right. They're Australian Shepherds and used to being outside. Molly's coat is thick and caked in dirt, but through the layer, her white fur speckled with spots of black can be seen. Peggy looks much the same, aside from her naturally regal look. Where Peggy is tall and thin, Molly is short and

round, the shape earning her numerous nicknames, the least of which are: Potato, Bowling Ball, and the ever infamous Horse Pill.

They run through the orchard ahead of me, yipping and barking at each other, and stirring up copious amounts of fine dust that gets caught in my throat and eyes. My eyes start to water, and I start to cough, turning away from the cloud, and through bleary eyes I am able to see my grandparents' house.

The house is a simple one-story building painted white, but if you look hard enough you can see the wood peeking through its white cover. Hummingbird feeders hang from the roof and there are ten or so birds fighting over eight seats. A large black fence extends around the house, enclosing the backyard from the rest of the world. I remember that they only put that fence in to keep the coyotes away from Molly and Peggy despite the fact that they have had several dogs in the past including Max, Zipper, Spud, Frisky, Bear, Tater, Buddy, Bert, and Ernie. But for the girls, they got a fence. They were special like that.

I start back towards the house because the girls are kicking up more dust than I thought possible, and my shoes are filling with fine dirt. My stomach grumbles and I know that I'm already going to make a ham sandwich because for some reason those always taste the best here. When I get inside, I move to the pantry where I see seven bottles of unopened catsup because Grandma always thought that they were low. I grab the bread (whole wheat and this is the only place I'll have it) and move to the refrigerator that has a single comic strip taped to it and nothing else

With my sandwich in hand, I return to my chair by the pond, close my eyes, and listen to the sounds of nature that the city shouts over.

Dio e sangue

TIMOTHY MERCURI, from King City High School

William Saroyan Award

“It means just what I said. I’ve lost faith. I don’t believe anymore.” A long silence. “Dad, I’m sorry ... but I need to be honest to who I am.” Finally, Leon’s father mustered a response.

“Bambino ... it’s like you’ve torn cuore mio from my body ... how would your mother have felt about this? Have you given even a moment’s thought to what she would’ve said?” Roberto’s voice grew more forlorn with every word.

“Babbo, she would’ve wanted me to be honest to how I feel, not to how I’m told to feel,” Leon whispered, nervously twiddling the crucifix that his father gave to him as a child. His father still calling him bambino? *God, he really does still see me as just a child ...* The misty-eyed boy thought to himself. Somehow, the tears gathering in his eyes made him appear a gentle ghost, his lithe frame bare enough to mistake for a corpse, the ever-tussled black hair lazily brushed back in a desperate attempt to combat its uncanny knack for intruding onto his face.

“Babbo?” *Uh oh*, Leon thought to himself.

“I’m sorry, Leon. You’ve broken my heart. Don’t call me again.” Dial tone.

“Dad ... Dad ... Dad ...” Leon repeated, a mixture of astonishment and gut-wrenching pain splattered across his face. Finally, after god knows how long, Leon managed to set the phone back down. His head rose, and his normally rosy cheeks were replaced with a marble pallor. Even that small action was too much for him at the moment, as his eyes darted throughout his dorm room, landing for mere fractions of a second on all that he had brought from home; now just empty shells of what was lost. Upon seeing the open bible resting beside his bed, nausea overtook him. Head pounding, his peripherals began to slim. His breathing

quicken, but that couldn't satiate the starving hounds that his lungs became. Blackness.

An intense ringing woke the poor boy. Leon's head pounded like a bass drum. With his usual response to waking up, his hand drifted to his phone. The light buzz felt like a drill on his recently revived senses. After a time of just feeling it, Leon finally managed to swipe the greenlit bar and raise the device to his ear. "Hello? Who is this?"

"Leon, you know exactly who it is. What in the world were you thinking?" The voice said, an anger beginning to rise within it.

"Oh, Maria. So, sis, what's the reason for your call—" Leon managed to inquire, before he was cut off.

"You know exactly why I'm calling you. Dad called me. With how fragile you are, you think that during finals stress that you should just come right out to our father? How could you be so stupid?" Maria spluttered.

"I'm sorry, I just couldn't do it anymore, I couldn't keep up this façade any longer, especially not for his sake." His voice beginning to tremble as he began to choke up.

Maria sighed, "Listen. I'm not mad at you, I agree that you needed to, just ... your timing needs some work." She knew that he wouldn't respond, he never did when she was right. "You can't allow him to hurt you this badly. You knew this would happen, you knew how it would go. You've gotta be able to handle it."

"My own father just told me that I tore his heart out and you tell me to 'handle it'?" Leon managed to splutter.

"No that's not what I mean—" She tried to say, but Leon had snapped. Maria could tell what he was going to do, but he was deaf to her pleas. His finger gravitated to the red button upon the glass screen in front of him, silencing his sister with the push of a button.

Hours passed. Leon had plugged himself into his computer, and was forcing himself to look at the digital scrapbooks his family had on Facebook. If his sister hadn't left earlier, she sure wasn't around now. A peculiar thought crept into Leon's mind. All the pictures that made him smile came from a prior time, when his mother still lived to hold him close. After she passed ... the pictures changed. They brought up feelings of anger. Resentment. His father had taken her place in them, just as hate had filled the picture where love had once been. Leon realized

his mother wasn't the only one that the sickness killed. That loving father he once knew? He died along with her. He was nothing but a husk of what he once was. And who cared what in hell a husk thought of him? Maybe it really was time to let go of what his father thought. Closing the browser, he began to sob.

Bam. Bam. Bam. "Leon, open up! I know you're in there!"

Maria? What's she doing here? She lives all the way across town ... Leon's thoughts ran wild with thoughts of the verbal beatdown his sister was here to administer. Wiping the mess off his face, he managed to utter, behind a wall of tears and mucus, "Hold up, I'll be there in a sec."

"Leon for god's sake, hurry up! People are giving me weird looks, I don't like it." Maria was impatient as always.

Leon smirked. If anything, he could rely on his sister being frustrated with him. Stumbling, he made his way to the door, collapsing a mere foot away. Dragging himself forwards, he slumped against the wall. "Sorry sis, but this seems to be the best I can do right now."

Maria sighed and Leon could hear her slide down and sit against the wall next to the door. "Leon, talk to me. You aren't okay, I can tell that much over the phone. I'm worried about you."

Leon's eyes started to water, he felt horrid. His sister had always been there for him, and now here he was, having hurt her. "I'm sorry sis ..." The words felt like boulders being forced through his throat. He hated apologizing, but there was one thing he hated more. Admitting that his big sister was right. Summoning up all the strength the small, exhausted boy could muster, he reached up, yanking on the door handle. The door flung open and he landed with a thump next to his sister, who was visibly startled.

"Leon! Are you okay?" Within a second's breadth, Maria had Leon's head cradled in her arms.

"Sis ... I'm so sorry." Leon's throat and eyes burned, the boiling water draining down his pale cheeks, as he unclasped the crucifix, releasing himself from the chokehold his father had placed on him. "Maria?"

"Yes, Leon?"

"You were right."

Home

MAYA VANNINI, from Edison High School

Chair's Award

In Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, shelter is considered one of the basic needs that must be met before a human being can begin to satisfy psychological or self-fulfilling needs. The definition of shelter is straightforward: "a place giving temporary protection from bad weather or danger." We can understand why Maslow considered shelter a basic need, but what about a home? Google lists one of the definitions of home as "a place where something flourishes, is most typically found, or from which it originates." A shelter, on the other hand, does not provide the same emotional attachment that a home does, yet a home is not included in the Hierarchy of Needs. Perhaps some consider a home synonymous with shelter, but I don't believe they are one and the same.

In my family, we've been privileged and blessed to have shelter always available. Though the conditions have varied, there's always been some roof to shield us. The path of home, on the other hand, has been convoluted, littered with twists and turns and obstacles. For generations in my family, home has been shakily defined. Where have we flourished? From which place did we originate—or rather, which place can be credited with raising us?

The Partition of India in 1947 forced my mother's parents to participate in the largest mass migration of humans in the history of the world. As borders were drawn, millions abandoned childhood homes. My grandmother's family left Patna, India, and went to Chittagong, in what was then East Pakistan. Although she remembers Patna, she speaks so fondly of her memories in Chittagong, tales of adventures rolling off her tongue and into the ears of eager grandchildren. Her mother, however, had left her entire family behind when they left for Chittagong. She longed for Patna, her home, for the rest of her life. My grandmother, Suraiya, was whisked away to Karachi, Pakistan, to be with a man she had never before met, my grandfather. Her journey paused for only a

few years, long enough to have my mother and uncle, before they were all on their way to England, longing for upward mobility. She transplanted her children one last time back to Karachi, where my aunt was born and the children were raised until they set off on their own migrations to America. My grandmother then briefly jetted off to the United Arab Emirates before she came to settle down in the States to live with my aunt. Her lifetime has been consumed by migrations, new lands, and shelters.

I asked her once, “Where is your true home?” expecting Karachi to be her answer, as my childhood romanticization of Pakistan led me to believe Karachi to be the seat of my mother’s family. To my surprise, she said, “I don’t have one,” and being the free spirit she is, she was completely at peace with that. Despite her apparent contentment, I want her to have a land she feels is her own, to have a place to look upon and think that she belongs there. I hope she can find this place now, in America, with generations of love surrounding her.

My mother spent most of her childhood searching for a land to call her home. Carted around by her parents’ migrations in which she had no say, she was pushed and pulled during her most formative years. Right when her conscious memory began, the family relocated to Greenford, England, where she was met with a wall of nativism and prejudice. The increasing popularity of the National Front, combined with their status as “black Britons,” made her first home a hostile place. Despite this, she allowed her roots to take hold in the English soil, only to have them torn from the earth as her family moved back to Pakistan once again. I found a photo album she kept as a teenager in Pakistan, and to my surprise the initial pages were filled with pictures of her English classmates. A foot in each world, where was her home? Where did she belong? The majority of her years in America were spent in Massachusetts before we moved to California. I don’t know if my mother truly knows where her home is, but I hope it is with me.

Fresno, California, is my home. I may have lived in Taunton, Massachusetts until the age of six, but there is no doubt in my mind that Fresno has raised me. I don’t have any family here except for my mom, my dad, and my younger brother. But Fresno is my home, a home that I am about to leave. Is home static? I’m on the cusp of adulthood, not knowing how many, if any, places will become home in my future. As I experience one college interview after another, excitement and worry play a game of Tetris inside of me. Will whatever college I attend become a place in which I feel I belong? Or will I be in a four-year limbo, never quite creating the emotional attachments I need to transform a school into a home?

Shelter may be a basic need, but a home should be, too. Not everyone

likes to be tied down to property, as my grandmother has loved her nomadic life, and I understand that. But I believe that everyone should have available the right to cultivate the emotional bonds to places, people and things that turn shelters into homes. It may be an endeavor that spans a lifetime, or even generations, as I've seen in my family. But the cliché says that home is where the heart is, and that's true. Everyone deserves to know where their heart is.

Maybe I've Got a Brain Tumor Making Me So Loving

VIVIAN AILA DELA CRUZ, from Kerman High School

Fresno Poets' Association Award

i'm loving the strangers of the world today at first sight,

the birthing place of this adoration: the hospital.

even the woman with cancer, with no hair but a beanie,

the smoothness of her ivory scalp as mesmerizing as thick, fine locks
of actual gold.

even the old cowboy in crutches, deep wrinkles of his once-young
caramel face, cracks like the ones earthquakes deem in the pitch black
road.

even the two twin coffee-colored old ladies, elegant in their wisdom
and trendy in their matching straw fedoras.

even the seemingly cocky pretty boy with a sharp nose, much more
physically fit and put together than i.

especially the beautiful baby boy who sleeps in his stroller, no
recognition of the death and disease that lingers within the foundation
of this hospital, no knowledge of the beauty of a saved soul or the
torment of a lost love.

stranger, if yours meet my eyes, I will smile at you,

and you may think in the midst of certain hysteria that I pity you,

but I just love you,

and today no needle dug into my skin, prying or vying for my blood
will stop me, nor

any chronic pain, or ill happenings.

all of your crooked teeth,

and annoying laughs

all of the unique markings and paint God or an iron placed on you like
a pin on a map.

all the shades of skin I see in a sea of people, or radicalism in their
beliefs;

the shapes or damage of their vessels or permanent spite in their
glares.

i love it all,

and i love you all.

Breaking Roots

JULIET R. HERNANDEZ, from King City High school

The Normal School Award

Around me, the trees sway with the breath of the sky, laying their roots into the rocky soil, and befriending each insect that crawls on the textured bark. These trees, unable to move, fixed with the same bugs and birds that create a home within. If the tree were to move it would be easy to cut off its roots, and leave the many creatures on it behind. When the roots shrivel, growth would stop. The limbs that once outstretched towards the sun would begin to wilt, burying themselves in unfamiliar soil, being devoured by unacquainted beings. Easiest is if the trees were to stay where its roots grow, not able to see the different life that grows outside of its waving, but having the assurance that it would live long and grow to reach the sky. It is hardest to keep the roots as it moves, having to slow down as the weight of each wooden leg is to be lifted and dropped in each different area. They must remember to uproot each time they move on, after absorbing nutrients from each stop.

I have subsisted in many different places, seen different creatures of the cities and small towns of California, uprooting each time I move. I see the neatly placed items, the clean dishes, the deer prancing on 250 acres of land, the silence of absent neighbors, and the ability to purchase items of want, but my roots originated in the 2-bedroom duplex with one bathroom, the flowering dishes on the counters, the hoarder style home, across the street a man yelling, “Hey! Yo, Peaches!”, and the times where we ate mainly Spam and rice. Living where I am now, it is easy to forget where I sprouted, but my roots remain, attached to me, absorbing the new experiences and situations, adding to my roots. Hauling them with me, they can get snagged on rocks in this new soil, slowing me, keeping from moving forward, tempting me to cut them, stop learning, stop absorbing this new environment. My roots did not bud here. They are not adapted, but time has made my roots sturdy before. Roots that have carried me past broken glass and razor blades that dig into my bark, Roots that could not grow like these words flowing from my finger, Roots that

took my lifetime to nurture like a mother does, Roots to grow stronger.
Each small thread of a root will turn into its own trunk, like the single
cell that grew into an army to create the functioning body. Threads that
break down the rock holding me back and growing until my arms can
be thrown around the moon.

reverie

HANNAH PADRON, from Los Banos High School

Philip Levine Prize Award

When we were grown
We would have bought a home
And painted the walls yellow

The rooms would smell of roses and jasmine
we'd hang our photos in the halls
Can't you imagine?
Memories upon memories displayed on our walls

The kitchen would be white
the dogs would nap in the sun's light
And the stove's warmth would envelop us

The backyard would be home to fruit trees
The lavender would be home to bees
And the humming birds that remind us of our grandmothers

Our shelves would be filled with knowledge
Even with a few things that didn't matter
Like movies with futile amounts of violence
And book titles that begin boring chatter

A steinway would sit in the corner
Covered with dust waiting to be played
But fear not
The talents and wisdom of Cliburn and Chopin would be your aid

But instead, I'd grab the turntable and play a jazzy tune
While the children slept in till' noon
And you would have tapped your foot to the melody

I'd make the espresso
You'd set the table
And we'd enjoy the quiet while we were able

I'd open the french windows
Letting the breeze billow through our home
Releasing the aromas of the coffee we'd bought in Rome

The children would wake
Complaining of their bones and how they ache
And our quiet bliss would meet its end

But as usual, we wouldn't mind
For we were children once,
And had learned ourselves that sometimes parents can be blind

We'd listen to our children
Cherishing their voices
And thinking that unlike their predecessors,
They'd have choices

Together, we would have taught them to cherish everything
I can promise you that.
From the cream in the fridge
To the seams that held together their hats

From the wood floors
To the lavender that houses the bees
The baby blue doors
And the peaches on top of trees

But now that you've left,
All I can do is imagine

Imagine walks in the moonlight that will never take place
Thoughts of yours that I'll never know
Radiant expressions that I'll never again see on your face
Our first interaction so many years ago

When we were grown
We should have bought a home
And lived our lives together.

But now
The wood has since rotted
The milk has soured
The skies have turned grey
The china has shattered
But the worst part
is that
we can go on with our lives
as if none of it ever mattered

*Inspired by "Love's Sorron," a composition by Fritz Kreisler, rendition by
Rutsuko Yamagishi*

The Sound of the Jingling Coins

LISA LEE, from Hoover High School

Hmong American Writers' Circle Award

The sound of the jingling coins
On our colorful skirts that look like the rainbow
Our shining silver necklace around our necks
Our pink and green wraps around our waists
Our Hmong lived in villages near one another
With farms full of crops
And fields full of pigs, chickens, and oxen.

But everything changed in the blink of an eye:

Something small, something dark
Fell straight at us,
Like a bird without wings
It hit the ground,
Exploding with a loud *Boom!*

Covering our ears
Looking for cover,
We ran, hiding
Among the green tall trees.
When we open our eyes,
Every blade of grass
Every tree was cleared away.
Only smoke drifted across the horizon.

The sound of the jingling coins
Went silent across the land.

We ran from the mountaintops
Down the hills,
Communists as shot at our people.
We fought to protect what was left.
Reaching the Mekong River,
Our people tried to escape certain death.
The rocks were slippery
The water was pushing fast,
The wind was blowing hard.
The lucky used Bamboo boats
To cross the river.
The sound of the jingling coins
Flowed across the land.

We lost our home and many of our people
On our way to Thailand, where we built
A new home, waiting in the refugee camp
For the arrival of our surviving relatives and people.
We settled there, but never forgot the war
That made us lose so much.
The burning tears and pain live forever in our memories.
The sound of the jingling coins
Will always stay in our hearts.

After the war, the U.S. Government welcomed Hmong
Into their land of the free.
The sound of jingling coins is still loud enough
For us to hear, but not others.
As many times I have described our Hmong background
To our fellow Americans,
I fear the sound of the jingling coins
Will never be heard by them.

Mother

JUSTIN BORBA, from Mission Oak High School

FACET Award

August 22, 1944

Dear Mother,

I once argued with a friend of mine that death did not have a smell, and it was merely a concept of a smell. I realize now that he was right. Death does have a smell. Death is a combination of smells, all of which I have experienced in this great struggle. Death is the smell of corpses rotting under the summer sun. Death is the smell of rats crawling around the dead. Death is the smell of fresh blood mixing with mud. Death is the smell of the pus coming from the wound of a mortally wounded soldier. Death is the smell of fear. It's funny, how you think you understand fear until the bullets start flying. That is a different feeling, one that can instill terror in even the bravest of souls.

The fighting has been nonstop. The bodies of my brothers litter the earth, as well as the bodies of the Krauts. I am only allowed to write this because we have arranged a temporary ceasefire to collect the dead and send them back. I gave my rifle to a Marine who lost his because I haven't even had a chance to use it; I have been going from wounded man to wounded man ever since the shooting began. I write this with my hands coated in the blood of my brothers. So many of my friends have died. So many were lost on the first day. We thought we could overpower the Krauts with numbers. We were wrong.

We tried running through the forest to where they were dug in but they opened fire with MG nests. American men began dropping all around me. Many died, and many wounded had to be left behind as we treated. I still think about those men a lot. I wish there was something to be done, it pains everyone in our company to leave a wounded man. Now

we have our own trenches to hide in.

Mortar fire never stops, and I'm not sure that my ears will ever stop ringing. The explosions are so numerous and so fierce that a thick cloud of dust, ash, and smoke hangs above the battlefield at all times, blocking natural light. Every now and then, between artillery barrages, the sun will break through the smoke and light up the surroundings. When this happens, for a second, just a second, it feels like you are home again. It feels peaceful and relatively quiet, and you almost forget that a war is in progress. Then the next mortar slams down and smashes the illusion.

There were trees here at one time, and this forest was beautiful on the day we arrived. I could see James and I hiking through it in a different lifetime. God, I miss James. I remember before I left, we were walking around on the farm. We were playing in the creek and he suddenly turned to me and asked if I was going to die. I didn't know what to say. I wish I could have promised him that his big brother would be playing in the creek with him in a few months. I have seen too much here to know that those promises are hard to keep.

Many men that died deserved death the least. There are better men here than me, but still every day more and more fade away from our mortal existence. Everything about this damned war seems unfair. We are running low on food and medical supplies, and we have resorted to finding ammunition on the corpses of our fallen brethren. For days we have been told that reinforcements are on the way. If they don't hurry up and get here, they won't have anyone to reinforce.

The oddest thing about war is the abruptness. Death in war isn't dragged out like an old man laying on his deathbed surrounded by his loved ones. One minute you can be looking into the eyes of a friend, and the next that same friend's head is being sprayed onto your lap. It is the most horrific thing, dying here. A man dying here knows he is dying for a stalemate battle. He knows he is separated by his loved ones by hundreds of miles and an ocean. He knows that he is surrounded by men he has only known for a few weeks.

As a medic, I haven't had to take a man's life, but I have had the displeasure of having a man die under my hands. The worst feeling is having to skip over a man screaming for help because I know from his injury that he cannot be saved. Men scream for medics everywhere around me, trying to get help for themselves or for their dying comrade. I wish I could help them all, but it is simply not possible.

I just can't wait for the war to be over. They say the war is winding down, but the old timers say that they've been saying that for months.

I desperately want to see my family again. You, father, James. I think of you all everyday. I also look forward to seeing Liz again. I think that if I make it back from this Hell, I want to marry her. I had better wrap this up, the wounded still require attention. Tell everyone that I said hello.

With love,
Your Son

Father Poem

CADENCE SPENCER, from *Sycamore Valley Academy*

FACET Award

I can still remember going to the airport with my grandmother

Walking in feeling the heat of the over head lights looming brightly
over the two of us feeling the rushed breeze made by the people beside
us

Pushing through to see those automatic glass doors

Those doors that were the final barrier between him and I

With caution symbols warning those not to enter as if trying to warn
me about what was to come

Because it was watching him burst out of those doors

That felt like breaking open a snow globe

The impact shocking but the water and glitter washing my heart

Cooling my body in its aroma of supposed safety

Finally restoring the scratches and drowning the dust that thickened
over the top after being left on the shelf for too long

Because with him there were just too many things to feel in those
moments of wondering where he's been

Before rushing towards him with open arms so big they could fit the
world that he would never he leave inside.

My father is a man I choose to never write about specifically, except
occasionally the idea of him

Because i've found it's hard to write about ghosts.

When you've only ever seen glimpses and heard whispers
I only ever saw glimpses and heard whispers of this man
This man will always be a ghost that follows me around everyday
I've spent my whole life trying to replace him
I've tried to lie to myself and say I'm only filling his slot
Even though he's silently standing next to me deteriorating slow
I've realized the reason this is all failing
Is because no one can replace a man that's never left my side
No one could ever replace my father.
And to me that's why I believe in ghosts
I believe that's why they can never leave this earth.
They cannot be replaced so condemned here alone watching as
everything they love dies off
While they are following in their footsteps walking along side like
a flashlight with low battery just flickering half heartedly trying to
make sure nothing they hold dear will get hurt but inevitably failing
considering they are almost always the cause
Resembling beauty
I remember my father who lives
In glimpses of memories I never want to be taken away
Because as much as it hurts to say
I love him
That phrase used to burn brighter but I've learned the closer you get to
the fire the deeper the scars go
I love him because I remember the glimpses
Like when we went to disneyland
That night wasn't filled with overrated costume character but with the
night sky speckled with stars like mini spot lights lighting up your face
as we ran around the empty theme park not daring getting on a ride

In fear that waiting in a line would take this moment containing just us
two away faster than the way those stars dimmed forever

Yet I still play this second on repeat in the back of my mind on the
rickety old projector that only plays film and glows in the brownish
orange color that reminds me of you

Hearing the hum while it runs sounds exactly like the

Hours we spent perching over a lake resembling the amount of tears I
shed over you, with delicate waves crashing against the rock we sat on
like the recurring anger hitting the back of my heart like a dagger

But with soothing dense breaths I heard your voice promising future
plans and past experiences

like clockwork time shifted and everything questioning this potency
why would he lie to me

Evaporated quickly leaving the dry earth bare

Leaving nothing but

Whispers

Of him reading Poe with the heat of the firefly glow clinging to the
both of us begging to fade

Our backs created shadows of monsters in the camping tent we bought
together

Never to be used again worried those monsters we created out of fear
of one another would come back

His voice was the host of the disease

His words held onto infecting everyone he spoke to

I've been told the way you wrote sounds so much like the way I speak

The way my name literally means rhythm always reminds me of you

The fact that you were a poet makes me hate how proud you would be
of me

Because your whispers circle in my head constantly sparking new
inspiration that I wish I could live without

But I thrive through your glimpses and whispers like fuel only it's hard
breathing through the smoke of my burning flesh everytime I get too
close

My father will always be the ghost of the man who left me and

the man I can never please no matter how hard I try even I
only know of him by the ghost trailing behind me but not literally just
figuratively

I can hear him in this rhythm he made for me, because he made me
and I am every little piece of him

Untitled

HANNAH SUTTON, from University High School

MFA Award

Eyes glowing in the night, born from inner turmoil and a twisted sense of curiosity, add two more fires that light up the darkness. Sleep isn't easy right now, in fact it has never been and the dust that covers what I long to see, only pushes oblivion further away.

It's strange, for someone so scared of the dark, to find yourself among the stars. What a paradox this is. If I gaze too long at the sky, I fear getting pulled into the abyss.

And maybe I don't know exactly how to describe those stars. A collection of silver souls set upon vivid shades of blue, all cast along the universe. And I don't know what my fears completely contain. To be invisible and lost, devoured by my demons that come out in the absence of the light. Being dragged away by the wolves, my leg mangled by bloody teeth- a fruitless chance to escape.

My lucid dreams have changed over time. Growing. Evolving. Adapting. The demons have hurried me away into the madness that I know I possess, letting me hysterically laugh at my sins, which only further carries me along. I do not know if there is peace here. I can only feel satisfaction from guilty pleasures, cloaking me in barbed wire and roses, whose thorns are still quite sharp.

Throughout this all, I long to find my soul. There is music that dwells within, asking an exploration and begging a question. I fear to acknowledge them, and I fear even more that I do not know how to answer them. The pond sometimes seems deeper than the ocean. An inner wolf is howling and yet I do not believe I know how to scream.

I resent being weak, and I fear that's what I really am. I hate being powerless in the unknown. So many misconceptions, so many layers. I long to know myself. Yet, I'm scared of who I might really be.

Layer upon layers warp my soul, the illusion of disillusion. Running away from myself, I have hidden with saviors in mind, furiously hoping to see light, ignorant of powerful dark. I have feared what I cannot see nor understand- when the illusion of reality is lost, insanity is proclaimed. Ropes are clasped with weak trembling hands clutching onto the barren ideas of living.

Eventually wind has come, clearing away the dust from the starlit nights, giving me sight of my soul. When everything is gone, and nothing is real, all I can do is laugh, laugh with the sky.

The Three Brothers

MARTIN MIJARES, from Dos Palos High School

San Joaquin Literary Association Award

There once was an old man who lived with his three sons in a hut in the woods, living the last of his years in peace and serenity. His sons grew not knowing too serious of conflicts, sharing with their father the peace that nestled itself in their home. The time came that the old man saw his sons were of age, and he told them they must go off into the world and find their own land to build their own homesteads. The three brothers listened to their father closely, nodding at his every word. They packed their belongings, loading their bags with bread and wine and began to leave the hut, only to be stopped by their father. Before they left his hut forever, the old man whispered, he would gift each one a power to aid them on their journey. To the eldest son, he gifted the power of destruction; to the second, the power of knowledge; and to the last, the power of creation. Saying their goodbyes to their father, the three brothers headed off, in search for a land for themselves.

After many moons passed, the three brothers finally came to the land they searched for. They set up camp, overlooking the valleys and mountain ranges that lay before them. In the days that followed, the brothers went off separately, exploring their land, searching for a place to build their own homes. Each brother found a place that suited their likings and claimed the land as theirs. Immediately, they began their attempts in construction. Unfortunately, once they had returned to their shared encampment, all brothers heard of the other's failure. The eldest had managed to clear his area, but found that any attempt in building or creating was futile. Again and again, the walls he built would collapse around him, and he ended where he began; with an open area of rubble and ruin. The second brother had been able to organize and plan his work, but had not been capable of constructing more than a shoddy little hut from the materials he had found. The youngest brother, however, told his brothers of his case. He had brought forth an impressive palace-like creation, glorious in its imperfections and inexpert construction. He

offered his brothers aid in all problems they may face with construction

Upon hearing this, the eldest brother grew angry, accusing his youngest brother of being their father's favorite. A fight broke out after the petty insult, the pride of the eldest not allowing him to accept his brother's hand. Finally, the eldest brother stormed off, vowing to always wreck havoc on his youngest brother's creations as long as he lived. Fearful, the youngest brother turned to the second brother, who hung his head in despair. "The eldest pride," he muttered. "Will be the death of us all. This I know, and I tell you, do try to keep him at bay, for now I see he is your only true equal."

The second brother stood then, apologizing to his brother for the eldest behavior. With great sorrow, he told his brother that he would be heading off, far far away, for as long as their eldest brother remained angry, the second was at risk. Accepting his brother's decision, the youngest brother aided the second with transport, bading him good tidings on his journey to find a safe home, away from the first brother's wrath.

The youngest brother continued settling his land, creating more and more things to decorate his future home. To his great enjoyment, he discovered a concept completely new to him: the creation of life. He found an ability to conjure up plants, animals, beauty he had never imagined. Soon the world around the third brother was full of life, so vibrant and abstract even he could not understand how he had imagined them. He found love and pride in his creations, seeing them thrive and prosper throughout his entire land.

But, it didn't take long for the first brother to notice all the life and prosperity teeming from the third brother's land. Jealousy enraging him, the first brother charged to his brother's land, slaughtering all the creations in his wake. The first brother confronted the third, bringing death and destruction with him. A fantastic battle broke out between the brothers, and the eldest struck the youngest with a blow so hard it knocked the brother to the ground. Before the final blow was delivered, the third brother released from within him one last creation, willing all his power into it. What came forth was a creature neither of the brothers could have imagined. It was a creature of two legs, capable of creating and destroying as it pleased. Appalled by his brother's last creation, the eldest brother brought down the fatal blow, silencing the third brother forever. With fear, the first brother tried to destroy the hideous creation of his brother, but after every attempt, it would return, unscathed and nerveless. The first brother retreated once more, leaving his brother lying where he died.

Time passed, and the first brother could not rid the land of the third

brother's final creation. They spread throughout the lands, even entering the land of the first brother and reaching the second brother's new realms in the arctic north. The first brother grew to despise the creatures even more, becoming obsessed with finding a way to exterminate them from all the lands. In a moment of malicious genius, the eldest brother found his method—pestilence. He breathed the want of destruction into some of the animals the youngest brother had created, forcing them to become harbingers of destruction. The beasts scourged the land, growing, evolving, feeding from the havoc and chaos they themselves created. The first brother was overjoyed, for he had finally found a way to decimate his brother's creations, and rein superior. The power corrupted him, and he began to generate more and more monsters, each more fearful and hellish than the last. With each beast however, the first brother grew weaker and weaker, his life force fading. But, blinded by the bloodlust to obliterate all of the youngest brother's creations, he cared nothing about it. And the day came that he finally delivered all of himself into his monsters, killing himself with the final corruption.

The beasts continued their work, slaughtering almost all of the third brother's creations. Just as it seemed all would be lost, the second and last remaining brother returned from the north, completely capable of understanding his own power, and what was needed. He saw the last two legged creatures of his murdered brother and took them with him, sheltering them from the dangers of destruction. The second brother protected the two legged creatures for as long as he could, but he knew that one day, they must fend for themselves. So, he did the last thing he could; he blessed them with sentience, the power of free will. He felt time finally catching up to him soon after, and he took the form of the third brother's two legged creatures.

The Second brother retreated to a small hut in the middle of his frozen land, where he watched the two legged creatures prosper, grow, spread once again across the lands and rid them of the monsters that had brought destruction for so long. The brother smiled, admiring the work of his brothers, knowing their father would have wanted it so. And so, surrounded by the creatures of the third brother, the Second brother closed his eyes, and he too joined his brothers, in peace and serenity.

Dear Fellow Dandelion

FAITH ZAKO, from Los Banos High School

San Joaquin Literary Association Award

Dear Fellow Dandelion,

You already know this, but the world is a harsh and cruel place where no one stands out, and no one fits in.

Like blades of grass, we are all part of the vast field, yet we feel ourselves stand out. The urge to fit in burns within us stronger than any other feeling, yet very few of us succeed in calming it.

Everyone is different, yet we are all part of the same story. A story that intertwines all of our lives, connecting them, rolling them into a ball of yarn that may never be used.

You can walk anywhere you please, do anything you wish, but that will not make you feel at ease. You always feel nervous when people are around you, you feel like their eyes are burning into your soul and baring all your secrets for everyone to see.

No matter what we wear, what we do, what we eat, we feel those eyes watching us, speaking in our minds that we are not the same, that we are different.

It controls us. It takes charge of our minds and we let it. We let it change our views and make us see that we cannot fit in, but it clouds the other side, it doesn't let us see that no one fits in.

We feel like weeds on a beautiful, luscious green lawn. Where everything is trimmed and trained according to a higher beings' preference, and yet, somehow, we are still here. A lone weed in that lawn. You want out, but you find yourself incapable of removing yourself.

You can feel as pained as you wish, you can try to fit in until your skin is tight, your body is all bone, and your head is hollow, yet you won't fit in,

because you would feel that you stand out even more. Because you have added more secrets to your string, more secrets for everyone to unravel.

You don't realize, however, that you are beautiful and you are perfect. You give hope to someone that stumbles upon you. You aren't a weed, but a flower that is mistaken for one. You are perfect and so many people think of you that way. You can't see their thoughts and feelings, but they are there, and no one wants you to change.

You are the flower that a child finds joy in when finding you on the lawn. They pick you up and hold you tight, then they take a deep breath and blow. They set you free of all your worries and your doubts, and you go off to conquer the world on your own.

You may think yourself imperfect, but everyone is the same way.

You live not in a beautiful, luscious green lawn, but rather, a beautiful garden filled with so many just like you. You don't fit in, and you don't stand out, because surrounding you are other beautiful flowers, all mistaken for weeds. You each look slightly different, but you are one and the same, and they won't pry into your life without asking you first.

It may seem terrible when you first realize it. You may even want to disappear. However, in the end, is it really so bad to be a dandelion?

1 o'clock

JAIME FLORES, from King City High School

Chicano Writers and Artists Association Award

Skills in the form of knives overflow in the drawer of our spirit. None are sharp enough. We grind away the rust, smoothing out our imperfections, sanding down the nicks and dents. Though we never hone a single one on the sweating stone. The others must be run along the abrasive surface of our scrutiny. Why would we have them if they are not to be used? The only thing to sharpen is our breath, hastily scurrying from our lungs, as if they themselves feel dull, not fast enough, inexperienced. There aren't enough of them. In our search for more, the sun peers over the mountains, lightening the once dark sky. Inside, it's still night, clouds brew in our minds, an endless cycle of darkness. We close our eyes for an escape, if only for a moment, when they open, its midnight. We are too slow, our only solace lies in the soft scratching of the blade, trailing the dead stone.

A Corrupt Bargain

VEPSY TREJO-SAUCEDO, from Sanger High School

Dramatic Arts Award

In case you didn't know:

1824 — The Corrupt Bargain of 1824 is a term used to refer to the secret meeting between Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams after not one single candidate was able to capture the majority electoral vote. Though no one really knows what was discussed, rumors were spread about, and Andrew Jackson—a candidate alongside Clay and Adams—was able to use the doubt to turn the still relatively new America against the two, ruining their political careers and the rest of their lives in the process. The following script is a speculation of what must have been.

Cast:

ANDREW JACKSON — He killed a man. And got shot in the chest. Jackson was the first “democratic” president—seventh president of the United States. He’s currently on the twenty dollar bill. He pushed the idea of democracy in his campaign, calling himself a man of the people. He managed to gain popularity through his heroic acts of war, but despite his passion, he hadn’t the class to win over the House of Representatives.

JACKSONIAN SUPPORTER — Jacksonian supporters were as dramatic and passionate as Jackson himself. However, as Jackson is portrayed as extremely extra to make a point, the Jacksonian is used more to even everything out. After all—it was a time where hidden meetings and dueling for one’s honor were considered fine, and at times, honorable (as implied).

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS — John Quincy Adams was the son of the second president of the United States. He was the sixth president of the United States. He was well-prepared for the role, as he was a well-educated leader, but came off as cold and aloof to many.

HENRY CLAY — The Speaker of the House during the controversial election, Henry Clay was one of the most influential people in all of America. Despite his charm, he would never become president. Even so, Clay is inspiring—notice the subtle bias that presents itself through the script—and was able to lead the nation away from sensitive issues while leading it towards a greater cause. He considered Jackson a man of war and not fit for politics.

*[A chair and table are set near the right stage. **ANDREW JACKSON** enters, taking a stand in the middle of the stage. As he reads from a set of papers, a **JACKSONIAN** supporter rushes in from the right stage. He appears to be out of breath.]*

SCENE ONE: Jackson receives bad news

JACKSONIAN: Si-Sir? You called upon me?

*(Not paying him any attention, **JACKSON** crumples the papers, clutching onto them tightly)*

JACKSON: Those dogs ...

JACKSONIAN: Sir?

JACKSON: Those bloody cheats! *(he turns to the **JACKSONIAN**)* Have you read this?

JACKSONIAN: I don't ... know how to read, sir. Not very well, at lea—

JACKSON: Clay and Adams—they look to destroy my good name! Ooo, I knew they were up to something ... you cannot trust men like that, men who speak behind closed doors. *(he glares at the papers, scanning them over)* They may lie to cover up their sins, but it is as clear as day! They're awful. They want to destroy me, only in a desperate attempt to make themselves look better.

JACKSONIAN: *(he shifts, obviously uncomfortable)* I have no doubt they do, but how have you come upon that idea?

JACKSON: This!! *(he shakes the papers in the air before throwing them on the ground)* This is proof enough!

JACKSONIAN: *(he winces, looking to the papers rather than to JACKSON)* Please, sir ... Calm down! You make no sense ...

JACKSON: *(taking a deep breath, he speaks lowly, motioning to the papers on the floor)* This anonymous letter that tells that Clay and Adams have entered into a harsh bargain. They plan to ruin my legacy, I know it be so! What did I tell you? I am an honest man, a true man of the people. *(he buffs, crossing his arms over his chest with a pout, like some sort of giant child)* What do they have to hide?

JACKSONIAN: *(looks to JACKSON)* A word of anonymity? Well ... uh, sir, I mean not to challenge your word, but that does not make it clear. What bargain have they—

JACKSON: *(softly)* You doubt me? They plan to harm my reputation, I know it be true! They claim to be friendly—

JACKSONIAN: *(hesitantly raising a hand)* Actually, sir, Clay and Adams haven't attempted to disguise their unkind feelings towards you. They're just polite, Adams especially-

JACKSON: *(louder)* -But they make plans together. Clay has thrown his support behind Adams, so he may win the presidency. Adams will make Clay his Secretary of State to ensure his rise to president be a swift one. They mean to take my title from me! *(he takes a deep breath, having to close his eyes)* You may not say his heart has not turned sour from seeing what I have that he does not. I am much more liked than he ever will be or ever has been. I will not stand for this. *(he opens his eyes, making a sweeping motion with his arms)* Go, go spread the word-- Jackson WILL NOT go down easily!

(JACKSON storms out left stage as the JACKSONIAN sighs, kneeling down and picking up the papers)

JACKSONIAN: Well, with that logic, who could argue? *(shaky laugh)* Jackson might be ... rough around the edges, but ... he's passionate. Adams and Clay may try to rise together, but they will certainly fall together. Of course, my dear Jackson ... now that I have almost gone deaf, may I just say ... what a beautiful government it is that we live under.

(exit JACKSONIAN, stage left)

[END SCENE ONE]

SCENE TWO: Jackson explains what must have happened during Clay's and Adam's secret meeting.

(Enter JACKSON and the JACKSONIAN left stage. JACKSON stomps his feet as the JACKSONIAN watches him with concern, clutching the papers close to his chest)

JACKSONIAN: *(nervously)* Sir? If I may ask, where are we going?

JACKSON: *(quickly turns to face him)* To inform the public, of course!

JACKSONIAN: *(blinks, an eyebrow raised)* Inform them about what? *(he tilts his head, nose scrunches up)* You are not suggesting we help spread these rumors you've come across?

JACKSON: Rumors? *(marches towards the JACKSONIAN, eyes narrowed)* No. We are not spreading any rumors. Imagine this, if you will.

(JACKSON wraps an arm around the JACKSONIAN'S shoulders, keeping a straight face as he motions towards the right stage, Enter JOHN QUINCY ADAMS stage right, standing stupidly near the table, staring directly to the audience. A knock is heard. HENRY CLAY marches in, acting a bit like a drunken mess.)

CLAY: *(grinning like an idiot)* Aye, Adams, I have something to talk to you about.

ADAMS: *(without turning to CLAY)* Oh, what do you want now? Can't you see I'm busy crying in the corner about my inevitable loss in the election? *(he turns to CLAY with a pout)* Surely those Jacksonians have a plan, as they always do, to share with others how wonderful their presidential candidate truly is.

CLAY: *(scoffs)* Wonderful? Why, not even the dogs would care to lay with that man in fear of gaining fleas!

(CLAY gives an obnoxious laugh as he drags the chair rather loudly from under the table)

CLAY: *(sits, cross-legged)* No, Adams, I have a better plan that would put Jackson to shame. That is, if you prove to be well at keeping secrets and lies close to you.

ADAMS: *(he moves towards the table, nose scrunched up)* What are you babbling about? You make about as much sense as your own fans!

CLAY: (*scoffing*) First of all ... that was really mean. Secondly (*he holds up two fingers*), I have a plan to make YOU (*he motions to ADAMS*) president and I would, but of course, be your Secretary of State. (*with a grin, he tips his chair back slightly, his gaze to the sky*) If I may choose my words carefully, we may take the votes of Jackson from him and ruin his name. As your Secretary of State, I would see to make sure Jackson never gets his turn in the spotlight. I would take President after you, and that *man*—if you can even call him that—will *never* have a chance. We'll put Jackson out like the dog he is! (*he laughs before looking to ADAMS, hand outstretched*) So ... what do you say, *old friend*?

ADAMS: ... Henry, I believe you've gone absolutely mad, but ... I must admit, your plan seems better than mine of crying in a corner and hoping that people change their mind and see my pathetic state as the one of a sensitive and strong leader who would do anything for his people. Though I still think this country would fall straight into Hell with you as president, I must agree. (*clenches fist*) Together ... we must get rid of Jackson.

(**CLAY and ADAMS** exit right stage)

JACKSON: (*proud*) And that, my dear ... (*looks to JACKSONIAN*) what's your name again? Phil? May I call you Phil? (*laughs*) That, my dear Phil, is what those cowards must have planned behind my back, and the backs of the American people! And I (*motions to himself*), as History will show, was the hero who uncovered it all.

(Exit **JACKSON** left stage)

JACKSONIAN: (*looking to the side*) Phil? I ... what? Besides that ... I can't imagine Adams speaking... (*looks left stage, confused*) Mr. Jackson? Where are you go—Mr. Jackson, sir! (*stretches out his hands with a concerned look on his face before pulling them back, bringing them close to his chest*) I don't think ... uh ... (*laughs awkwardly, looking to the audience*) Ha, there's no changing his mind now, is there?

(**JACKSONIAN** rushes off left stage, calling out to **JACKSON**)

[END SCENE TWO]

SCENE THREE: A more truer, romanticized, scene of what must have happened behind those “closed doors”

(Enter **ADAMS**, right stage, pacing. A knock is then heard, and **ADAMS** seems to open a door offstage)

ADAMS: Clay? What brings you—

CLAY: (*softly*) Please, do forgive me for interrupting, my dear Adams, but, may I enter?

ADAMS: (*hesitantly*) Uh ... But of course, Clay ... Henry?

(**CLAY** mutters his thanks as he makes his way to the table)

CLAY: (*looking away from ADAMS*) John, I hope I do not disturb you at this time.

ADAMS: Ha ... of course not, Cl— Henry. There is nothing that can bring me more disturbance than this whole election does. (*smiles softly as he shoves his hands into his coat pockets*) But ... then again, one would not want to underestimate Mr. Jackson.

CLAY: (*chuckles*) Oh, heaven knows it so. No, my dear friend, I believe I come with news that may take some of that discomfort and cause you a bit of interest.

ADAMS: (*he scrunches up his nose*) Dear friend? I cannot say I have not been interested with those words alone. Tell me, Clay, what will you gain from sharing such information with me?

CLAY: What shall I gain? (*he looks to the audience with a serious expression, resting a hand on the table*) Well, John ... may I sit?

ADAMS: ... (*gives a patient smile*) However you wish, my ... dear friend.

(**CLAY** chuckles another thanks as he pulls the chair out and takes a seat)

CLAY: (*hesitantly*) As you could see, my dear friend, I fear I am, once and for all ... out of the race.

ADAMS: (*he stares at CLAY for a few moments before speaking, his voice low and emotional*) I have heard the rumors, Clay, but I pray you do not let yourself be overcome by something so minor. (*he moves closer to CLAY, head tilted*) My dear rival, I have watched you lead the men of this great nation through much worse than Mister Jackson and his followers.

CLAY: (*chuckles, looking back to the audience*) Aye, but the American people do not seem to share your views. They flock to the sensation of a hero of war as brought to them by the media, a man for the common men! They do not look twice to the man who prances around sensitive issues by the tip of his toes in search for a fragile solution.

ADAMS: (*softly*) Henry ...

CLAY: (*looks to ADAMS, grinning*) As much as I wish to trouble you for a drink, I fear this a serious situation I find myself in. I came to you, Adams, for I have decided to put my trust in you. I will throw my vote to you. You have my voice, my way with words—my gift is yours to use, dear John Quincy Adams. In return, you ... (*he laughs softly, looking at his hands*) Aha, we could come back to that. I wish to inform you that I do intend to run again! I'll take the time to examine ... to build ... a strong base, as this country needs. I'll pick up my quill and—

ADAMS: (*sternly*) What is it that you came for, Clay?

(*A few moments of silence pass, followed by CLAY moving out of his chair*)

CLAY: (*deep breath*) Adams, I throw my support behind you because I'd like to believe we are of a similar state of mind. In a government under you, I could ... move forward.

ADAMS: (*he presses his lips into a thin line*) You're not that simple of a person, Clay.

CLAY: (*he shrugs, taking a few steps towards the audience*) Fair enough. (*takes a deep breath, closing his eyes*) I wish I had asked for that drink. (*smiles slightly, opening his eyes again*) I am not satisfied with what I have. I know I could do much more, John, if I was only given the chance. I want what every man wants—to make something that will outlive him. (*takes a deep breath, shoving his hands into his coat pockets*) I will not beg. I will make my mark, and, when a chance presents itself, I will move on. I will become president, John. (*he looks to ADAMS*) I will participate in the shaping of this grand nation. (*he gives a wide grin*) So, what do you say?

ADAMS: (*staring at the ground*) Clay ... I wish to support you, but I fear what may be said if your plan falls apart, and at the feet of Mister Jackson, no less!

CLAY: (*looks to the side, his tone cold*) Adams, if you are not ready to make a choice in a time like this, how do you expect to be president anytime soon? I have made you an offer. No—it was a suggestion. My voice is lent to you free of charge until the final elections come to their end. After that, the burden rest on you. That is all.

(*CLAY exits right stage. ADAMS paces for a moment before kicking the chair, muttering a curse under his breath before marching out right stage as well*)

[THE END]

Kuv yog Hmoob (I am Hmong)

ROSY VUE, from Hoover High School

Honorable Mention

My teacher assigned me a math problem.
Out of all people, why did he choose me?
I went up to the board that was the color of the skin
Of the people who discovered this country first
And while my nerves moved my muscles
To solve this math problem, my brain blanked out.
I gave up on the problem and my teacher told me to call my mother.

All of my years going to school,
Kids were never pressured to get straight A's like me.
I was always that little girl with China bangs and long hair,
The color of Barack Obama.
My eyes seem as thin as my papers,
My grades on my report card defining me
As a disgrace or a success.

I was so afraid to call my mother that afternoon
and shaking, my fingers shook dialed the numbers
of a refugee who never finished the years of college.
All I could think of was being a disgrace as her daughter.
As soon as my mother answered,
My mouth trembled like a newborn baby trying to speak.
My mother struggled to understand me, like how some Americans
Struggle to understand her Asian accent, and how her story
Can't ever be understood by those Americans.

Later that night my mother told me this:

I woke up to the smell of steaming rice,
The roosters awakened us from our nightmares.
Everyday, I walked a trail to reach our crops and animals.
We walked back to our place called home, on a land in the mountains.
Our eyes saw these people who were Communist destroy our place
called home,
Who tore our families apart with the sounds of gunshots,
Everyone scattered into the jungle.
We kept running until the stars hit the sky,
And I slept alone without my mother holding me,
While trying to bear the breeze.
It felt like a minute,
And I woke up to explosions and we had to leave.
We ran until we reached the Mekong River,
Crossing it to a better future for our children
so they can blend in with the American culture,
Crossing it to make new families because ours was left behind.

These nightmares you have about being a disgrace, my daughter,
Don't be afraid.

Mom, how can I not be afraid
when I come to school wearing the fragrance of noodles,
And people thinking I'm Chinese,
defined as A+ , a twin, and paper eyes.
Mom, I'm tired of hearing these statements they set upon us.

My *ntxbais*, open your eyes and prove to them
That you're not just paper eyes, but paper worthy,
That you're not just a twin, but a best friend,
And that you're not an A+ but you're an A+
for being an Asian in my eyes.

Life Lessons of a Field Worker

IVANA MATIAS PEREZ, from Selma High School

Honorable Mention

Field work. It's what feeds California and is a big part of California's economy. Field work has often been frowned upon by society. It is seen as dirty work that is done by foreigners. However, people don't realize how rich the life of a field worker can be. It's full of different experiences that you don't get often with jobs. It teaches you a little more about the life you live and about the world around you. It's a cycle that helps you secure a successful life, it gives you the motivation to strive for something better in life.

The stages of life are just like the season stages of the vineyards where I have grown up. The end is considered the beginning and a step closer to a beautiful product. Everything you do to a vine has a purpose and you do it in an effort to improve the quality of the grapes.

The fields teach you how to prune in the winter, the season which is dead and cold. Pruning consists of getting rid of old and useless branches of the vine in order to let the new and productive branches a chance to grow without being overcrowded. Essentially the fields teach you to get rid of that which weakens your life, so that you can start on a new opportunity. Any high school student feels pressured, but I have learned to overcome those circumstances. Pruning away negative parts of life makes me stay away from drugs, teenage pregnancy, alcohol, and bad grades, because those things only bring you down in life. The hard days of pruning make you realize that you choose what to keep and throw away in life. You either get more fruit or kill the grape vine in its entirety.

Spring comes around and workers get ready for leaf pulling, otherwise known as the most producing season of the year. During this time we get paid for taking leaves off the plant in order to let sunlight through and let the grapes grow in. When I think of leaf pulling I think about all the times that I have gone out of my comfort zone to experience something bright that seems promising, like the light of the sun. In the

end I realize that something positive was born out of it. I gave myself to writing and now I have a new way to express my ideas and emotions. I gave myself to a performing art and it resulted in an acceptance letter to an international marching group. I now take any chance that will light up my future in any way. I'm not scared of failure, because there will always be another leaf to pull off.

The summer and autumn are probably the hardest seasons of work; it's the season for grape picking and paper rolling. This is the final stage where you cut all the grapes and then lay them onto trays so they can transform into raisins. In the fall you roll up the paper trays and let them sit for others to pick them up and get them ready for them to be sold. The days are hot and long, you are completely covered to protect from the sun, and you work no matter the temperature. However, the satisfaction of completing something so difficult—like finishing a row of 520 trays at five o'clock covered in sweat and dirt—is something you have to live to believe. It's as if you just won a war against nature and finally have enough to feed a family and treat them with new things like new clothes or a trip to a fast food dinner. You learn that hard work literally pays off, and after completing something that seems impossible you will naturally be drawn to wanting to do it over again. You will be taught and you will be rich with something more valuable than money.

The power of the fields is very underestimated, but even if I was given the chance to change my lifestyle, I wouldn't change it. It gives you the desire to value everything in your life, regardless of what anyone thinks. You comprehend what it is to work hard, and you feel happy when you accomplish your goal. A field worker has no limits. I've learned to be more independent and use my bare hands and support from my back to survive and help those around me. I've learned community, because those who work with you will always help you finish a row without asking for anything, but ask for the same help when they need it.

Now I am fifteen. I can say I work in the fields. I have skills and knowledge to prepare myself and take care of my siblings if one day my parents no longer can.

Lecciones de la vida de un trabajador de campo

IVANA MATIAS PEREZ, from Selma High School

Honorable Mention

El trabajo en el campo. Es lo que alimenta California y es una parte importante de la economía de California. El trabajo de campo ha sido a menudo mal visto por la sociedad. Se ve como el trabajo sucio que se realiza por parte de extranjeros. Sin embargo, las personas no se dan cuenta de lo rico que puede ser la vida de un trabajador de campo. Está lleno de diferentes experiencias que usted no consigue a menudo con otros trabajos. Te enseña un poco más sobre la vida y sobre el mundo que te rodea. Es un ciclo que te ayuda a asegurar una vida exitosa, se le da la motivación para luchar por algo mejor en la vida.

Las etapas de la vida son como las etapas de la temporada de los viñedos en los que he crecido. Al final se considera el comienzo y un paso más cerca de un producto hermoso. Todo lo que haces con una planta de uva tiene un propósito y que lo haga en un esfuerzo por mejorar la calidad de las uvas.

Los campos te enseñan cómo podar en el invierno, la temporada donde todo está muerto y frío. La poda consiste en la eliminación de las ramas viejas e inútiles de la planta con el fin de permitir que las nuevas y productivas ramas tengan oportunidad de crecer. Esencialmente los campos enseñan a deshacerse de lo que debilita la vida, de modo que usted puede comenzar en una nueva oportunidad. Cualquier estudiante de secundaria se siente presionado, pero he aprendido a superar esas circunstancias. La poda te aleja de las partes negativas de la vida. Hace que me quede lejos de las drogas, el embarazo de adolescentes, el alcohol y malas notas, porque esas cosas solo te perjudican la vida. Los duros días de poda hará darse cuenta de que elija qué guardar y qué tirar en mi vida. En el final tu decides si quieres obtener más fruta o matar la planta de uva en su totalidad.

Llega la primavera y los trabajadores se preparan para tirar la hoja, también conocida como la estación más productoras del año. Durante este tiempo nos pagan para la toma de las hojas de la planta con el fin de permitir que la luz del sol puede atravesar y dejar que las uvas crezcan. Cuando pienso en el deshoje pienso en todas las veces que he ido fuera de mi zona de confort para experimentar algo brillante que parece prometedor, como la luz del sol. Al final me doy cuenta de que algo positivo nació fuera de él. Me entregué a la escritura y ahora tengo una nueva manera de expresar mis ideas y emociones. Me entregué a un arte escénico y resultó en una carta de aceptación a un grupo que marcha internacional. Ahora tomo todas mis oportunidades que me encenderá mi futuro de cualquier manera. No tengo miedo al fracaso, porque siempre habrá otra hoja para quitar.

El verano y el otoño son probablemente las temporadas más duras de trabajo; que es la temporada de cosecha de uva y el laminado de papel. Esta es la etapa final en la que se corta toda la uva y luego las ponen en bandejas para que puedan transformarse en pasas. En el otoño enrollar las bandejas de papel y dejar que repose durante otros para recogerlos y prepararlos para que puedan ser vendidos. Los días son calientes y largos, y estamos completamente cubiertos para protegerse del sol, y trabajamos sin tomar en cuenta el calor. Sin embargo, la satisfacción de completar algo tan difícil- como terminar una fila de 520 bandejas a las cinco cubierta de sudor y la suciedad es algo que tienes que vivir para creer. Es como si usted acaba de ganar una guerra contra la naturaleza y finalmente tener lo suficiente para alimentar a una familia y tratarlos con cosas nuevas como ropa nueva o un viaje a una cena de comida rápida. Se aprende que el trabajo duro tiene su recompensa, literalmente, fuera, y después de completar algo que parece imposible que, naturalmente, serán atraídos a querer hacerlo de nuevo. Te enseñarán y serás rico con algo más valioso que el dinero.

El poder de los campos está muy subestimado, pero incluso si se me dio la oportunidad de cambiar mi estilo de vida, yo no lo cambiaría. Se me da el deseo de valorar todo en su vida, independientemente de lo que piensen los demás. Usted comprende lo que es trabajar duro, y se siente feliz cuando logras tu objetivo. Un trabajador de campo no tiene límites. He aprendido a ser más independiente y usar las manos desnudas y el apoyo de la espalda para sobrevivir y ayudar a los que me rodean. He aprendido comunidad, porque las personas que trabajan con usted siempre le ayudará a completar una fila sin pedir nada, únicamente por la misma ayuda cuando la necesiten.

Ahora tengo quince. Puedo decir que trabajo en los campos. Tengo habilidades y conocimientos para prepararse y cuidar de mis hermanos, si un día mis padres ya no pueden.

The Truth About Today

MANJOT DHANDA, from Fowler High School

Honorable Mention

Feminism by definition is “the advocacy of women’s right on the basis of the equality of the sexes”. Before you starting saying that feminist is only for women, let me remind you that the entire human race is called mankind. Feminism does not favor women over men, feminism is about the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. We aren’t bringing men down. we are raising women up. why does everyone think it’s their responsibility to belittle feminists? Feminists are fighting for equality for both sexes so tell me why you are challenging that?

The fact of the matter is girls don’t mature faster than boys, girls are punished from an early age for the same behavior that boys are allowed to indulge in well into adulthood. puberty/physical maturity isn’t the same as emotional/social maturity. “boys will be boys” how about “boys will be held accountable”. while it’s true that boys are forced to hide their emotions, it has nothing to do with the fact that boys are allowed to be childish for much longer, so what you’re saying is just another another piece of evidence about how hurtful sexism can be.

“Slut” is attacking a women for their simple right to say yes. “Prude” is attacking a woman for their simple right to say no. We shouldn’t slut-shame and body-police and assume a woman’s purpose is to fulfill a man’s preferences. My outfit is not consent. touching a girl without her consent doesn’t make you a man. it makes you a coward. We refuse to believe that we are to blame for this.

If you pick up any schools hand book and flip to the dress code section, there are many more rules for girls than their are boys. “Dress must be this length, shirt must be this length, straps must be this length, shorts must be this length etc. etc. etc.” How are yoga pants banned when muscle tees are still allowed? Same concept, same material. I’ll tell you

why because dress code promotes rape culture and sexism.

If “she’s too young to be wearing that” then she is definitely too young to be sexualized. Do not ever tell a child to cover up because an adult male is around. If you are so worried, then get the predeceous make out of the workplace. If a grown man is sexualizing a girl for what she is wearing, he is the problem, not her. A man who would get “distracted” by a girls shoulders or knees is the problem, and should not be working with kids. Who gave you permission to tell a girl she is “too young to be wearing that” when she is just trying to dress in a way where she feels confident?

The size of our features is out of our control so why are you punishing us for something that isn’t our fault. We are taught from the very beginning it be ashamed of our figure and our features. we are taught to be modest and cover ourselves up in fear that the males will say something provocative to us. We are taught that males have no self control and they will become preoccupied with the way we look to carry on with their lives. But tell me why men can brag about the size of their features but woman who do that are seen as a “whore” or “slut.” Explain to me why it is accepted by society to gloat about the size of a man’s junk but a woman is told to hush and stay modest. same concept but different consequences.

Similarly, if a girls shoulders or kneecaps is distracted a young boy from learning, it is his problem. There is no circumstance where a girls shoulders or legs should distance a boy from learning. Telling a girl to “cover up” because some boy cannot control themselves is the very essence of blaming the victim and rape culture.

What is rape culture? Rape culture is essentially that rape has become so normal and accepted in society that nobody questions it. Behaviors associated with rape culture include blaming the victim, slut shaming, sexual objections, trivializing rape, denial of widespread rape, refusing to acknowledge the visible or mental harm caused by some forms of sexual violence and their are so many more not on this list. Instead of teaching girls not to get raped, teach boys not to rape. “men are raped too” and it is very serious but if the only time you talk about male survivors is when you are interrupting a woman talking about her experience with sexual assault. Do not pretend to give a damn about male survivors.

Because what men fear most about going to jail, is what women fear most when walking home alone. We wish that men actually understood what is like when women try to talk about feminism and sexism. It is

not a political conversation or being a “social justice warrior.” It is actually our lives being shaped by misogyny since our childhood. Its may be your precious ego at stake but it is our lives at stake.

We aren't born sexist. Sexism is learned. Modernize you mind. Manhood should not depend on putting outs down but for standing for basic human rights for all sexes.

Run, Rabbit

YISEL TAPIA, from Dos Palos High School

Honorable Mention

A lucky foot does
As much as it can, but still,
The rabbit must run.

And All the Stars Have Fallen

STELLA VELEZ, from Sierra High School

Honorable Mention

Tonight the sun
Bruises the evening
As it falls and the night
Gleams empty of stars

Tonight I
Am a girl with a black hole
Buried in her rib cage
And bones lined with lead

And tonight the heights
Are calling
And the ground
Is singing
And I dance heavy
And reckless
Round the fire pit
Hoping to get burned

And I want to fall
And break
And be caught
To fall
And learn to fly
On the way down

But this
Is not that story

So I will keep my feet planted
In the topsoil
Where green things grow

And though the sun is set
I've got a candle
From home goods
And it smells like honey
And I've got a perfume
Called All Good Things
Because we could all use
More good things

And tonight
All the stars have fallen
And the sky gleams empty
But the earth-
Oh this earth is shining

Somewhere this earth is shining
And I've got a candle
And good things

And I've got a black hole
Buried in my rib cage
And lead lined bones

And the heights are calling
And the ground is singing
And I dance heavy
And reckless

But all the stars have fallen too
So they have landed
So they are lost too
So maybe
I can find them

All the fallen stars
That make the earth shine

Eucatastrophe

YAHAIRA PLANCARTE BARRAGAN, from Roosevelt High School

Honorable Mention

She is from the water, flickering like glitter on the surface,
from the ashes on the staircase

from the nicotine

from the terrifying dried red plasma on the porch.

She is from dirt mountains and bloody knees,
from Anayeli and Crystal

from curious hands and wandering lips
from breathy moans and light hearted giggles.

She is from rainbow colored flags,

from the smell of lavender laced in novels

from the secret lovers and broken hearts

from the mean words that convinced her she was no longer beautiful

She is from the definition of beauty; a porcelain doll; thin, tall, milky
white skin and big, blue dreamy eyes.

She is from the dull little girl who stared at herself, wishing she was
someone else. Someone who had a flat stomach, a fuller chest, smaller
thighs and a rounder bottom. Someone who didn't have stereotypes
engraved onto their forehead like she did. Someone who didn't know
the pain that she knew.

She is from the rope burns and sleepless nights
from the icy chill that ran up and down her spine
from the monsters that lurked in the shadows
from black and blue bodies, and beer stained breath.

She is from the innocence stolen,
From the heart wrenching screams
From the silent sobs.

She is from the whispers, the long conversations and the lengthy pep talks

from Don't be afraid, this is okay. If you want to be a grown up, you have to do this because that's what grown ups do. But here's the thing, you can't tell anyone. Why not? Because grown ups keep secrets. If you want to be a grown up, you have to keep secrets. This is our little secret, our game, okay? This is okay, it's fun! But remember don't tell anyone.

She is from *I love you spanish girl, I love you Spanish girl.*
from *I'll never hurt you Spanish girl, it's okay come inside Spanish girl.*
Pretty Spanish girl. Soft Spanish girl. Young Spanish girl.

She is from his vice like grip attached onto her. His hands curling around her throat like vines, vines that wrapped around her arms, her legs, her everything
from torn stitches and a world full of hurt

from the scene that laid before her innocent eyes that had yet to discover cruelty

from the pale lifeless cheek that lathered in an ocean of tears, both hers,

And mine.

We're from the Hello Kitty box sitting on top of our closest spilling old pictures, purple, pink, blue, grey, black and white.

Black and white memories.
Black and white like those memories.

We are from those moments,
But we are also from the ones we have yet to experience.

Crystalized

SAMANTHA PARK, from Liberty High School

Honorable Mention

My gaze stumbles upon the serrated edge of the mirror
reflecting pristine white mountain ranges.

A serpent tonged body sniffs
its way through the terrain – a maze
of rigid bumps and euphoric depressions.

The fluorescent sun glistens off the jagged cliffs.

It slithers upwards with a climbing heart rate,
scales clattering onto the upturned soil.

Dilated eyes abruptly droop downwards, ricocheting
steadfast towards the bottom of a tar crater.

Unseeing, the forked tongue flickers, scours the dark,
its tantalizing body tinted black.

Plastered in dandruff flakes of snow
the scaly skin sheds.

Leaving the carcass behind,

the snake descends
in affliction.

Flowers

PAULO CAMPOS, from Los Banos High School

Honorable Mention

The Flower petals wilt, we take longer
What beauty it brings, sometimes shadowed
These stems were made, built to be stronger
Yet the water drowns us, shallow

Let not the glove frighten!
It does give life or death!
But do not let fear brighten
As the soil and seeds mesh

Grab hold of the ground
It holds you back
Don't let the weeds surround
Otherwise the petals pile with the stack

It is okay to sprout and die,
Regardless any petals drop
There is your roots that lie
And the seeds which grow and never stop

Steal His Life. Break Mine.

JULIET R. HERNANDEZ, from King City High School

Honorable Mention

“Raven,” wind carried Charlie’s voice through the window, opening my sleep crusted eyes.

“Not now.”

“Yes now.”

“Just let me sleep a little longer.”

“No time, sleeping beauty.”

I pulled the covers over my head, but he yanked them off, turning them into a sarsen like heap on the floor. Every Friday, he convinced me with the sentence, “If you don’t come with me, I won’t bring you back anything.”

My stomach roared in protest. Forcing my arms from the paper pillow, I followed him out the open window, being sure not to wake my roommate in the next bed.

November air nipped my fingertips as our strides crunched the autumn leaves. The oleander bush behind the group home was the only plant large enough to engulf a 12-year-old and 16-year-old-brother. We slithered through branches, grabbing two black hoodies hidden within. Our bodies emerged from the other side, clad in black.

Charlie bumped my shoulder, while his hand took a pencil out from his hoodie pocket, “Don’t forget the wallet this time.”

My hand traveled to my pocket to feel the leather lump, “I won’t.”

Proceeding toward the ball of lights, we entered the nearby market. The lone clerk’s eyes trailed us as we disappeared into the aisles. Charlie broke away from me into the refrigerated section. My eyes, still blurred

from slumber, sorted through the cheapest canned food. I grabbed fifty cent sausages, keeping them in plain sight. Two more went into my hoodie pocket.

Charlie clicked his tongue and I advanced up to the clerk. By the automatic door, Charlie twirled his pencil. The clerk's crow's feet extended to his greying side burns as he scowled at my brother. I placed the can onto the counter with a small clank. Snatching up the sausages, the clerk examined them for a barcode. *Beep*. Gliding them across the scanner broke the silent doubt hanging in the air.

"Fifty cents." His hand extended.

I pulled the beaten, leather wallet from my pocket and dumped out its change into my palm. My fingers picked out a quarter, two dimes, and five pennies. I released the change into the clerk's hand and he sorted through each coin twice. He stared into my eyes as he positioned the can at the end of the counter. I grabbed the can, thanked him, and he gave a shallow "mmm hmm."

As I strode past him, small "tit tat" sounded behind me. Stopping, I turned to see my brother reaching for his fallen pencil. A bottle fell out of his pocket, shattering and leaving a foamy, amber liquid on the ground.

"I knew it! You little thieves!" gripping the phone, the clerk dialed.

Charlie shoved me out of the door, onto the sidewalk. Our feet slammed against the pavement, as sirens crept closer. Squealing behind us signaled cops. Rough hands gripped the sleeve of my hoodie. I tore free, but halted, seeing another officer holding Charlie in cuffs. I reached toward the cop's baton, but instead rough hands slammed against the hood of the cop car. After being cuffed and thrown into the caged seat, my brother was tossed in, still in cuffs.

"Your parents must be worried sick," said the cop.

My heart fell from my ribcage, and my shivering was ceaseless.

The officers plopped on their seats when Charlie bumped my shoulder, "Just a quick trip."

Those cold metal bars held us for about an hour, before Miss Jackson's snout appeared behind an officer. I shot up to my feet with Charlie, clutching his arm. The bars were removed. *Our trip's over*. I stepped out of the cage.

“Sorry boy, ya gotta stay. Ya got too many strikes,” I stopped, already out of the cage, as the officer’s arm stationed my brother.

Charlie was ripped from my arms and forced back into the cell. My heart sank back into my stomach. I tore past the officer to return to the cell, but Miss Jackson gripped my arm, leaving a red ring.

“Forget it. He’s a bad influence,” she dragged me from the cell.

I kicked and shrieked. My throat scorched with each hair-raising scream. My eyes swelled until they burst with a never-ending lake of tears. As the doors slammed to the room of cells, I saw Charlie’s hands reaching out and being swatted until they were a bright maroon. His face enflamed with tears when I left that Friday night.

Sir Mark’s Home felt baron, even with the tantrums from the Glegly twins, the rapping from the group that was going to “make it big,” or my roommate, who rambled nonsense. I let my stomach rumble most nights. I haven’t stolen food since that night. The only thing I looked forward to was occasional letters that my brother would write from Juvy, but one Friday night, a family, with the name The Turrets, decided I was good enough to take in and didn’t allow my brother their address.

Their style of life involved me getting up at 6 a.m. and finishing homework before dinner. Fanny Turret was the type of woman that expected the children to do work while she would sit on the porch, sipping a glass of wine. Her children, Brian and Hailey, were both in sports and Fanny expected that much from me. When I refused, I was forced to learn an instrument. Piano recital, homework, chores, dinner: this was day to day life.

Although my stomach no longer kept me awake, sleep seemed unreachable. As my eyes closed, a casket of pictures of my brother and I sneaking into the oleander bush to share our stolen snacks flashed, but the colors slowly faded into an aged grey. The pictures started moving. Bars dropped in front of him. Then, that night with the store, the officers, and the cell jolted me awake. I scanned the lifeless room for a sign that he was here, and that night never happened. The room didn’t change. Those memories haunt the wisp of I mind that remains.

The Clock

ISABELLE KRAMER, from Mission Oak High School

Honorable Mention

Most people see a clock and think of all the time that has been lost, or they think of how much time there is left for them to use until it stops. In our day and age, our time revolves around a clock on our wrists. It counts down to what people think of the most important moment in our lives; the moment we meet our soulmate for the first time. It is what everyone fantasizes about as children and sometimes into adulthood.

Some meet theirs as children, others during the workplace. Then there are the few we call The Cursed, their clocks are for whatever reason either stopped working, or they don't have a clock. Some people have a superstition that they were cursed without one because of crimes they committed in their past life. The others, who's clocks stopped working, they are the most miserable. To show you this misery, I will tell you a story.

It started out as an average day; no events at work, no incidents to report. I was on my way home I started to look down at my clock absentmindedly, that is until I saw that it had 2 minutes remaining. I was ecstatic, everything around me began to speed into a blur, I began to look at my surroundings to try and spot her. My thoughts wandered to who she could be, an accountant, a psychologist, a student? My thoughts came to a screeching halt when I focused on a blond head across the street, she was waiting to cross. I started for the other end of the street so I could meet her halfway. I look down to my clock.

15 seconds.

My breathing became more uneven as I grew impatient for the light to turn red and the cars to stop. My mind busy with scattering thoughts of her.

10 seconds.

The light turns to yellow, and the cars begin to slow. The crosswalk is safe even though the light has not turned. Beads of sweat begin to form on my browline as my anticipation for this moment consumes me.

5 seconds.

I can't wait any longer, I run through the crowd and freeze once I see her, I can't look away. That is until the world turns black.

So now I bet you might be confused, like "What just happened, why did it turn black?". Well you will know, but I won't be the one to tell you. She will.

It was an aggravating day. First a guy I work with was being extra unproductive today and was drinking on the job, then a customer was being difficult with us and tried to get free merchandise from the company. It had not been a good day, but that changed the moment I looked down at my clock. It was set for 10 seconds.

I look around and try to find him that is until I see a man running across the crosswalk, just to stop in the middle of it. My heart flutters at the sight of him, he's everything I've dreamed of. Only then I am crushed at the sight of him on the ground, bloodied. Then a car just speeds away as I run towards the forming crowd. I drop down to my knees at the sight, he's dead. I look at his wrist to see that it matched with mine,

0 Days, 0 Hours, 1 Second.

I could hear the sound of my heart breaking and my blood pounding. Then the only thing I felt for the rest of my days was grief and unspeakable sorrow.

You see, it is not the ones born without the clocks who are cursed, it is those whose clock dies along with their partner who are cursed the most. Because not only do they die, our spirit dies with them. That is the true curse of this clock. It is a punishment, not a blessing. It is to punish us of crimes we may only know of in the afterlife, and only then will we find peace.