

MHL TEEN POETRY CONTEST



20th Annual Teen Poetry Contest
Reception and Reading:
Monday, May 6 at 7:00 pm

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We wish to thank: Gayle Heney for serving as the judge of MHL’s Teen Poetry Contest and the Friends of the Library for sponsoring this event.

Middle School Winners

First Place: “Beware of My Heart” by Abhilasha Sarkar, West Middle School

If you buy me flowers, don't get me roses
 Then I'll know that I'm breaking your heart
 Unrequited love is the worst kind there is
 Sweet in your dreams, yet sharp like a knife

If you do anything on the 14th, don't ask me to be your valentine
 I'll warn you that love is a treacherous trap
 That there was always caution tape wrapped around me, suffocating me
 But you were always the risk taker

If you dream of anything tonight, don't dream of me
 You know deep down that it's too unreal
 You imagine a model who looks at you with devotion
 But all I see is a girl who's make-believe

If you go anywhere today, don't come to my place
 You would come in search of solace, and more
 What I can give you is a shoulder to cry on, and peace
 But I can't give the dotting eyes you look for

If you have to go out tonight, don't go out with me
 You'll take me to a restaurant, look into my eyes
 You'll find the false love that you look for
 But I'll pray that it stays in your dreams

I'll give you five full stanzas of warnings
 I don't want a broken heart on the résumé of our relationship
 I want things to stay, not to change
 But you always say that change is for the better.

Second Place: “The Mast” by Carmel Kojokaro, Doherty Middle School

A dark room
 Painted in black.
 I stumble in the darkness,
 Trying to stay on track.

What is this world,
 Where does it lead?
 Where am I going?
Please help me, I plead.

Trust me, they say.

A whisper in the wind.
A brush below my ear,
A scrape across my shins.

I twist my head back,
But of course nothing's there.
I look at the darkness ahead,
The void engulfing me everywhere.

I am pulled by an invisible force,
An ideation imprinted in my mind.
I follow the predetermined course,
Unsure what I will find.

Money, riches?
Happiness perhaps?
That's what they assure me,
So it's best to stay on track.

My stomach begins to rumble,
My feet start to ache.
My hope begins to crumble.
Oh, how much longer to wait?

I continue down the path
As it's the only way.
How could I survive
If I choose to go astray?

Suddenly, my heart begins to lurch.
My feet keep moving forward,
But I begin to be unsure.

What are these empty promises?
These half-hearted lies?
I continue to walk
Licking the tears streaming down my eyes.

Just a little further, they urge.
Soon you will be there.
The air turns sinister,
Something sharp strokes my hair.

I feel the bumps on my shoulders,
The shivers down my spine.
I search for my flashlight,
But what I don't have, I can't find.

Make it stop! I shout.
Something must be wrong!
 But no words come out,
 My voice has gone.

I try to speak
 But my throat is too sore.
Water, water...
 I search the empty floor.

Suddenly, I see something bright.
 Shiny, sharp,
 A beacon of light.

It burns my eyes
 To see an image so white.
 I reach to hold it,
 I squeeze my fists tight.

It twists and turns,
 But I have it in my grasp.
 My fingers burn

But I now have the mast.

Third Place: “Lost and Found” by Abhilasha Sarkar, West Middle School

Sometimes, I feel lost
 Like there’s nothing in the world to keep me company
 Except for a big sweater
 I wear it almost everyday, but no one sees it
 They see the smiles and laughs and manners I muster

Everybody else is found
 They seem to have everything in the world at their fingertips
 All the friends in the world
 Hoodies that they painstakingly cut collars off of in the name of fashion

They look at me and all they see is another friend
 Another option to hang out with at lunch
 Another asset to keep at their fingertips
 At their fingertips, but never closer
 Never close enough to touch their hearts

I look at them and I taste the feeling of lonesomeness
 Bittersweet at the tip of my tongue, threatening to flood my senses

I imagine what they taste
 The flavor of luxury? The flavor of ignorance?
 Whatever, I guess it doesn't matter
 But there's a certain freedom in knowing that you're lost
 Knowing that you're a dandelion, floating in the wind
 Clinging to a cliff
 Not confined to flower pots in meticulous rows

I know that if I'm lost now, I'll be found later
 Through the people that I'll grow old with
 So I wear that big sweater
 Smile my faint smile
 And grow used to tasting bittersweet.

Middle School Honorable Mentions

“An Ode to Movies” by Reut Cohen-Yashar, Doherty Middle School

When we get stressed
 And go into full distress
 And life becomes bear
 And not at all fair

We need a place to escape
 Some kind of dreamscape
 Where the world is oh so perfect
 And reality gets rewritten

Movies are what I love
 They are a door to a world
 Where worries are nonexistent
 And life is amazing in an instant

They take away all anger and sadness
 And leave me content knowing
 That reality can be rewritten
 Even if it can seem hidden

“Love’s Presence” by Hayley Fan, West Middle School

Love does not
 announce her presence.
 Not like anger,
 with his weapons,
 words whittled to a point,

sharp enough to carve out
the heart
of any creature.
Not like sadness,
with her weighted blanket,
suffocating you
until you can't
think
or speak.
It condenses into
salty droplets,
ever-flowing.
Love does not
announce her presence.
Not like disgust,
with her megaphone,
amplifying the whispers,
making them get to you
until you are
gray with shame.
Not like envy,
with her poker.
Its red-hot iron
stokes the coals of
friendship,
makes them
crackle and pop,
until they are no more.
Love does not
announce her presence.
Instead she appears through
a mother's touch,
a fleeting glance,
a caring hug.
Love does not need
a weapon
or prop,
for she is within us all.

“The Truth” by Hayley Fan, West Middle School

I look Asian.
But that
doesn't mean I speak
with an accent.
Doesn't mean I'm
good at math.

Doesn't mean that
I'm from
the other side of
the Earth.
I live,
I breathe,
I feel.
Just like
every human
on this planet.
I am a girl.
But that
doesn't mean I
always complain.
Doesn't mean that I
only like pink.
Doesn't mean that I
can't do anything challenging.
I can do
what I set my mind to,
just as well
as anybody else.
Through this we see
the assumptions,
the lies.
Can't you see
what we have to face?
The soul-draining veil
that stereotypes are.
Relentlessly
chewing us through,
spitting us out.
Repeating this cycle
until
individuality is
nothing.

“This Universal Pie” by Hayley Fan, West Middle School

I want to take
a slice,
of the foggy morning sky.
Taste dew like sugar,
sprinkled about,
and rays of warmth
like spice.

I want to take
 a slice,
 of the blood-red setting sun.
 On a backdrop of
 cotton candy skies,
 signaling that the day is done.
 I want to take
 a slice,
 of the stars twinkling bright.
 High up in the fields of midnight,
 giving off their light.
 Their radiance smooth and sweet
 on my tongue
 I enjoy until twilight.
 Now at last,
 dawn is nigh.
 The final piece to this
 universal pie.
 Warm toned icing
 lights up the sky,
 a symbol of hope
 for those far and wide.
 We see each other
 in reddish tint,
 through sugar glass
 and caramelized skin.
 We savor
 the sweet,
 the salty,
 the spice.
 We'll savor it all
 for the rest of our lives.

“Ode to Dust Bunnies” by Sophia Fang, Doherty Middle School

Beneath the couch
 you sit still
 time your only torture
 In the green fields,
 bunnies take flight
 while you sit still
 a stranger to sunlight
 Your only dream in life
 is to be swept away,
 forgotten like nothing
 But it doesn't phase you
 After all,

you sit still
 day after day after day
 But sometimes you wish
 people would look closer
 people would see
 that each dust speck
 tells the magnificent
 story of time
 But too bad
 you sit still
 and your days pass
 as nothing more than a

dust bunny

“A Parallel Universe” by Ineshi Jayasekara, North Andover Middle School

The buzz of leisurely bugs
 And the twitter of gleeful birds,
 Content in their quiet, leafy green world
 Away from all the havoc and distress,
 A parallel universe

Worlds away from disaster,
 A peaceful retreat,
 No worries or doubts,
 Just the rustle of leaves
 And the sweet scent of pine in the air

Tranquility envelopes the forest
 The absence of unease and anxiety leaves happiness in its wake
 From the smallest plants to the tallest trees
 And lily pads floating placidly on the lake

Boulders sit among dried leaves and twigs
 A blanket of moss draped over it,
 Not a notion of apprehension or concern
 As it rests atop the forest floor

Shafts of emerald green light spray across the woods
 Dabs of greens and golds,
 Like vibrant stars
 In a parallel universe

“Jealousy, Jealousy” by Aarav Kadambala, Pike School

It consumes me
 A bright cast of green
 The smokey lime cloud envelopes me
 As I am thrust into feelings of hatred
 Every word cuts deep
 Like a knife piercing my skin
 My mind is devoured by mischievous thoughts
 And I stand the only one to blame
 My blood is pumping
 I am fuming
 A dark red begins to take hold of me
 My heart of gold now turns to rust as it cracks and fades
 The shadows call out to me
 He approaches me with a smile
 For tis only he and I that know
 What lies ahead
 He is beaming with pride
 From sea of green
 A monster rises
 The water goes red
 My enemy spotted
 Before I leave
 This state of revenge
 The monster reaches out to me
 To a final calling
 In his dark green eyes
 The world turns to chaos
 From the cries of the dead
 A deep voice whispers
 Inside my head

“The Green Eyed Monster
 that stalks the lowly man
 shall have its next victim
 by that of your hand”

The earth shakes
 The wind howls
 The air is full of poison
 The thoughts of retribution posses me
 As the monster takes its leave
 I am left alone
 With the thoughts that I fight
 Forever on my own
 One last moment

Before the monster leaves
 I question him for his motives
 He seems to be pleased

Then through the hollow earth
 And through the divine trees
 The monster replies
 “This is your jealousy”

“Why” by Eleanor (Ella) McQuade, Doherty Middle School

Loving someone is like the soft breeze of summer
 Losing someone is like harsh bitter words
 But then what are we
 Why do we feel the winds
 Why do we hear those words
 Why do we want to hide and yet throw ourselves out there
 Why are we not enough
 Why do we go to bed hungry
 And only when we are truly happy we feel full
 Why is it when the sun is out we feel like there's a cloud over our head
 Why is it that we are not the same and yet are compared
 Why is it that we feel best when we feel like someone else
 Why is it that we always want to change
 Why does it feel like the world has given up on us
 When really we have given up on the world
 Why does it feel like we are alone
 When we are going through the same thing

Why do we feel separated when we are always there for each other
 Be yourself
 And know that you are different
 But know that everyone else is too.

“ode to sunlight” by Romy Obbard, Doherty Middle School

once, you drove me mad
 almost to the edge
 because i thought you wouldn't ever come through
 but there you were – how beautiful!
 i acknowledged your colors and grinned from ear-to-ear
 “how lovely you look today”

i was younger then, with more time
 my bike was new and i didn't burn as easily
 now i don't look at you the same
 (for you were prettier through my glasses)

sunday brings rain that won't cease
my father gets seasonal depression
i remain indoors – it's quiet here
i think of you and feel unfamiliar longing

still, i hardly ever go outside
this annoys my mother
i tell her it's because i like four walls better
but really it's because you and i can never agree to play the same game
“won't you come and play today?”

besides, i can see you from my window
(i've always preferred television to live theater)
what point is there in shaking your hand
when i can save energy with a tiny wave?

“you will have to be patient with me” i write on the sidewalk in chalk
“for i struggle to adapt”
“come and see what i have to offer” you reply in earnest
but i pull the shades and turn my back.

High School Winners

First Place: “It’s Life” by Ashley Suero, Greater Lawrence Technical School

Oh, if I can go back,
back to when smiles were real,
when not having enough tokens
in the arcade was my biggest fear,
going to school only worrying if nap time
was still happening
When family dinners were a
full table,

Now the table is
a desert with quicksand that separates us slowly,
School, gym, sports, home
Just dragging me through the first, waking up
takes too much energy.
I’m a puppet who
Switches masks when doors are closed-
The smile is gone.

What happened
To the promise I made myself as a kid
To see the sunrise with a grin
and become the
first female president?
Now i'm on a train that does
not stop,
a race I can not stop
to catch my breath

Can I get piece of advice
so I can see light?
What I get is

“Its life deal with it”

Second Place: “Soul-etry” by Jerelis Rodriguez, Greater Lawrence Technical School

This poetry, This floetry
Has potency
Enough to make you wanna see
This dichotomy
Honestly
I’m behind bars

Like I committed a robbery
 Softly spoken or loud when I speak
 Exposed are my words like i'm standing nakedly
 In front of an audience
 It's obvious
 That poetry is my autonomy
 It made me so fortunate like I won the lottery
 And luckily it's up to me to continue
 To string words that show what I've been through
 Boom
 I spit rhymes like I shoot bullets out a gun
 I may not be a lyrical messiah but
 I can write a ton
 Because
 This poetry, this floetry
 Has me applying . pressure like it's Cole's season
 Aspirations have me creating changes likes its my only reason
 To continue living
 To continue giving
 Let's take it back to the beginning
 So you can really see
 How this poetry, this floetry
 Is how I cope
 Scope out the room, I'm looking for hope
 in the next generation
 My words are gonna be a great foundation
 So I drop my head down low
 Confiding in my phone
 Typing away I'm more ambitious
 What's that sound ? Each tap is vicious
 Nothing is more aggressive than this
 These words are notable,
 As strong as bombs they're explodable
 This tongue is uncontrollable
 I'll make it known

Third Place: “boston hotels” by Ava Shu, Phillips Academy

it starts—

*seeing {you}, crescent eyes
 peeking (l)over
 your mask and your words
 invade me
 with the thought of*

and ends—

{us},

*but instead we sit in thick
pungent silence*

in boston.

*and it begins a
gain in
an other person*

every story

*on the train,
"look"
out the window;*

starts

sta

*ending again, with
{who?} hol
*ding**

on

and ends

to "feel"

*-ings that do (not)
EXIST.*

in boston.

High School Honorable Mentions

“Lady” by Jaelah Fernandez, Lynn Vocational Technical Institute

Every word I said was scratched and sold as a ticket
 The words I said were never mine
 Just pure fiction
 Italic or bold
 They were never mine
 Edited to sound nice and gracious
 But I wanted to be rude and rowdy
 But that is just not suitable for a “young, nice girl”
 Must I say words of kindness and make you smile?
 Because all I want too say are words of hatred that make you cry and foul
 Stop holding me to a standard
 An unreachable standard that shatters my bones
 I think you can almost see my ribs as they collapse when I scream
 Will there be a day when demands are no longer barked at me?
 For now, I will continue to be copyrighted by words that were never mine
 I will plagiarizes the words of “young, nice ladies”
 Just for now

“This is America” by Jaelah Fernandez, Lynn Vocational Technical Institute

This is America, where they trade our life for economy
 We no longer have a right to autonomy, they just care about the quantity
 White and blue with lines of red, a flag disfigured to match our rep
 The policy is clear, don’t see, don’t speak
 If you speak you might as well not be free
 The American dream?
 Nah, that’s just a cliché
 We believe that we are exceeding, changing the way they see us
 But yet, they make fun of us, call us names
 Say that we steal the same jobs that they’ll never take
 Millions of us, just living to provide for our families
 But in their eyes, we will always be thieves and dealers with no reason to be healed
 This is America, don’t be deceived by the sugar coated stories
 We are still corrupt, choosing money before lives
 Chemicals that kill our rights
 Science, right?
 We are still at war, it never ends
 A country filled with corrupt heroes
 Don’t misinterpret this, it’s patriotic
 “United” we claim
 But divided we stand
 Yet this is America.
 Don’t let the walls hide our reality

Our shouts of taken freedom will echo
 In pursuits of a sellout “American” dream

“A Lifetime Book” by Nicole Gonzalez, Central Catholic High School

My tia had a book
 Filled to the brim, they said,
 Of recipes and pride
 Of meals and a living

My tia had a friend
 Who loved the recipes and the pride
 And the story goes she borrowed the book
 Borrowed it so long
 That no one ever saw it again

My tia *had* a book
 Had a book ‘til it was gone
 She tried to start a new one with a book from America
 But before she could finish
 She entered *los manos de Dios*
 And never again did the pages fill
 With her cursive Spanish
 E’s that look like C’s
 English words Tia tried to include
 All misspelled yet spelled right
 With desserts in the breakfast section
 And soups in the salads
 No more recipes
 No more living
 A quiet book left
 With blank pages
 Unfinished ones
 Recipes that followed her
 All the way to the grave
 A book soaked
 With *lagrimas* that never quite went away

Then the book found its way back to America
 And I got the chance to read it
 Flipping through the pages
 I skimmed through what Tia had left
 Then I placed the book inside a drawer
 And forgot it had ever even existed.

Until one day, I decided to look through the book again
 A recipe for *hamburguesas*

That Tia sold at a stand so she could get by
 Another for *galletas de nuez*
 That Mami and Tia and their Mami made every year for Christmas
 One for *caldo de res*
 That was just the name and nothing else
Pure de papas
 That was exactly how I had been making my own
Galletas, pasteles, sopas, ensaladas
 A fraction of a lifetime from Tia
 A small piece of a whole I will never get to see

I knew my Tia for a week
 Some phone calls
 Then never again
 A life shrouded in mystery
 That I would've loved to know
 But here, 2532 miles away
 In a zebra-printed, half-completed, Mexican, American book
 I think we've found a connection

So after reading
 And testing
 And trying
 The pieces of a puzzle
 That'll never be finished
 I find a blank page
 One Tia left behind
 Next to *Galletas de Limon*
 I write *New York Cheesecake*

2532 miles and a lifetime of distance
 Doesn't seem so far anymore.

“Notes App Gods” by Annabelle Luff, Andover High School

Notes App Gods, show me an idea
 I wrote when the day was near.
 For if you do not
 What shall I do?
 Come up with an original thought?
 And why would I do that
 When I was so wise
 Two years ago with barely opened eyes?

Oh please, oh please
 Notes App Gods!
 Show me a sign!

Show me a fraud!
 For I must write a poem
 With some kind of substance
 To show evidence
 For my intelligence.

What shall I do otherwise?
 Scrutinize my eyes
 For a hint of creativity?
 Possibly some levity?
 No, no that will not do.
 Give me a notion
 That I can pursue!

Notes App Gods, I fear
 I'm losing my touch
 So I lend you my ear.
 Keep your judgment for another day.
 I'll leave offerings of groceries lists and horrid dreams
 And I'll pray,

If you would just do as I say.

“the girl” by Julie Mahoney, Andover High School

i'm still that girl
 that covered her room with pictures
 trying to inspire her
 to fill her room up with her future
 because she thought her past wasn't
 worth it

i'm still that girl that didn't care
 how she laughed
 or how she looked crying
 how she smiled
 how she loved so much

i'm still that girl that tries
 so hard
 sometimes too much

i'm still that girl i thought was good
 innocent and pure
 beautiful and kind
 hopeful and true

i'm still that girl who loved music
swimming and dancing
loved makeup and how it made me feel
snow days and sledding

i'm still that girl that had big dreams
no fears
infinite realities to live
however she wanted

except i'm not
no longer that girl

instead i'm the girl who
tries to speak less everyday
bites at her cheeks and hurts

i'm the girl who holds the blade
to her skin to release
whatever she is holding inside
that she can't get out

the girl that knows better but doesn't
want to stop
doesn't know how to feel better

the girl who gives advice
better than she ever accepts it
never listening to people who
try to help her

the girl that carries shame in her
back pocket and ties her hair back
to get rid of the feeling
of it poking her

the girl that never cries
masks her emotions for others
reads to live but still lacks
those emotions

the girl that gives all of herself
to everyone else
and is left with nothing but
scraps to put back together

the girl that needs a hug and someone

to care the way she always does

the girl that isn't a girl anymore
there isn't an ounce of childhood left in her

“Like I Did, And Do” by Julie Mahoney, Andover High School

Cry
Like I did
Hurt
Like I did
Crawl up into a ball
Like I did

Cover up the dripping tears
And pretty snot cascading your face
Shake in your bed where you wished you cease to exist
Hold your legs close in fetal position
Wishing you were young and careless still basking in your mothers warmth

Feel what I do
Shivers down your spine
And a tense jaw when you remember
A fiery hatred
Bursting pain and action to be taken

I need you to know, that its not easy
To receive
To listen
All the time

I have words too
I have a voice too
I just don't use it as often as you

Sometimes you should shut up like me
Be quiet and observe
The world as you see it

Maybe then you wouldn't hurt people
Maybe then you could be nice
Maybe then you wouldn't have said those things
And made me cry, and made me wish you weren't my hero

But you still are
And thats the worst part

“Hope?” by Julie Mahoney, Andover High School

Hope is a four letter word
Bound in shackles
Steeped in blood
And hung from a noose

Hope is resilience and tears
Fighting and fear
Protests and perseverance

Hope is silent and kind.
A bird taking flight
The sun setting
Clouds shifting

Hope is eternal
It is life and death
It is pure and honest

Hope is what we dream when we sleep
When we fear and wish
When we grieve and question
Hope is the love we hold for each other
Humanity and equality
It's the binding of people for centuries
Advocacy of truth

Hope is the foundation
The background of living
Art and music submerged in it
Books and words spreading its message

Hope is water flowing down a hill
A quiet day where only the wind is heard
A perception of the world

In full vivid color

“Santo Domingo” by Armando Rodriguez, Greater Lawrence Technical School

Santo Domingo
A place of dreams
But don't be a fool, it's not what it seems
She's just as beautiful as any woman
But she hides her flaws just like one

Always covering her imperfections when it's said and done
 She's trying to fix her beaches and make them shine
 Only to cover her own behind
 Just so she may have peace of mind

"no sabes de lo que hablas este lugar es un lugar donde los sueños se hacen realidad"

But then why do you hold so much pride when you cover your broken down towns?
 Why do you have to carry all these responsibilities on your shoulders?
 Why do you straighten your hair to appeal to others outside of your borders?
 Why do you try to widen your curves instead of your own eyes?
 Why must you fill the heads of the people who live on your land with lies?
 Visual lies of prosperity, and peace of mind never meant to appease to them
 Why do all this if you belong to them
 Yet it seems you belong to people who use you instead of the people who nurtured you

“Soldiers” by Jerelis Rodriguez, Greater Lawrence Technical School

My parents never had any sons
 So instead they raised their daughters
 To become soldiers
 As I got older
 I realized how the weight of my fathers words
 Felt as heavy as boulders
 Slung across my back
 A rifle of words in case I had to attack
 Since I know physical strength is what
 I lack

My parents never had any sons
 So instead they raised their daughters
 To be independent
 So our descendants
 Can have strong role models
 No need to be dependent
 It's such a nice feeling
 To prove people wrong
 They say minds like ours are strong

My parents never had any sons
 So instead they raised their daughters
 With tough love
 With discipline coming through
 When push comes to shove
 I look up above
 A small prayer leaving these lips
 Hoping things will get better

Now here's a tip

When you have parents
 That wanted sons
 But ended up with daughters
 Life might be a little harder
 Only because they want their daughters
 To be strong incase
 Their babies lose their fathers
 Only because they want their daughters
 To thrive and become successful

To live life without feeling regretful

“Aren’t Y’all Already Free?” by Jerelis Rodriguez, Greater Lawrence Technical School

I can give you a path
 If you give me a flow
 Row by row
 Together
 We’re waiting,
 Congregating
 Deep down we are
 Excavating
 The pieces of ourselves that we were forced to ignore
 To you it is a bore
 Seeing bodies of every shade
 We are taught
 We are made
 We are molded
 We are enslaved
 To the desire of freedom
 I look up at our flag
 So true America you are with your red, white and blue
 We are still bound to discrimination
 You are eating our children by the numbers
 And soon taking care of you will no longer be our occupation
 “Aren’t y’all already free ?”
 They love to cry out
 How long did it take for my rights to become considered ?
 How long did it take for you to stop marginalizing me
 And my people ?
 What are we free from ?
 We’re still seen as bums
 Run your pocket scums
 Shoot your brother in the chest

Let god almighty do the rest
 What are we free from ?
 We're still run by poverty
 So tell me honestly
 Why these addictions are still running us
 Why is putting food on the table so hard for us
 Why aren't we free yet ?
 America you tell me

**“Educated Sonnet” by Leona Rogers, Greater Lawrence Technical School
 and Danny Resendiz, Andover High School**

A - I spent all my life with my family
 B - I've always fantasized of bigger things
 A - I don't want to stay, feels like blasphemy
 B - But I feel my father pulling the strings
 C - I talk of dreams for university
 D - My father tried to persuade me to stay
 C - All I wanted was freedom; a degree
 D - And so my ambitions pulled me away
 E - My brother caused me pain, it wasn't his fault
 F - I need to leave him for my own welfare
 E - It feels as if I'm falling on asphalt
 F - Moving on will free me from my despair
 G - In order to succeed, one must let go
 G - Relinquishing will allow you to grow

**“Of the sea and the salt (Del mar y la sal)” by Natalia Salinas, Phillips
 Academy**

I almost definitely won't have children
 and my dad's sisters gave *sus hijos* their husbands' surnames
 so *mi apellido* dies with me.
 With every breath that slips from my lungs,
 my family's legacy decomposes a little bit more.

How can *bonita* mean pretty when I can't find the beauty in our bones?
 I wish I could paint my skeleton
 the way Pedro Linares paints *alebrijes*
 but tattoos can't touch anything past surfaces
 and my flesh is rotting away anyway.
 Nothing is permanent, least of all skin,
 but I've grown wary of the same old same old,
 of my classmate saying his family loves their Mexican maid
 the way they love their dog,
 of my neighbors asking if my dad's the gardener,
 of that lady at Plaza Azteca mistaking my dad for her waiter,

and trying to hand him her check.

My dad's always reminded me of Buzz Lightyear,
to infinity and beyond
the border.

Maybe this makes me part of the problem,
but I think *mi bisabuela* look like Imelda from *Coco*
in the black-and-white photograph on the front of *Sin rima ni medida*
and we're going to ignore Disney's attempts at trademarking "day of the dead,"
"día de los muertos"
because that was their *día de los tontos*,
day of the fools
and I am so tired of being disappointed in them.

I am so tired,
but I still wake up from a nightmare
because I ate cheese after 10 pm
(what kind of Latino is lactose intolerant? a Lack-tino)
and I see a woman in the corner of my room
with long dark hair braided back,
and something like a sweater or poncho on her shoulders
and I wonder if my blue cat *alebrije* brought her here
and then she's standing by the end of my bed.
Her face is a little blurry but her presence is reassuring
be not afraid.

Then I'm asleep,
but she's in my dreams
and her *papá* is teaching her how to ride a bike
and she's laughing,
and *sonrisa* should mean sunrise,
but then she's my age,
banging on an invisible barrier between us and crying
because I can't
 understand
 her.

But I do understand her—
we both reference Greek mythology in our writings
and maybe this is another language we can share
beyond the blood singing in our veins,
la canción de nuestra sangre.
Well, my veins
because she is dead and buried somewhere
(like my dad's accent)
but I am alive.

Does she recognize me as hers?

God, I sure hope so
because I had a crystal phase and bought tarot cards
and now my family jokes that it's *brujería*
whenever anything goes my way,
and I think *mi bisabuela* would appreciate that.
She lit candles and laid marigolds on altars and wrote about wars—
I think she was a genius.

I want to learn more about her,
but the Dead Sea Scrolls are still waterlogged
and I fear they'll never dry.
Even if they did, they'd crumble at my touch
because God said everything will return to the dust it's made from
and when has He ever lied?
(we don't talk about Job)
He perdido el cuento de su vida.

We are all desert creatures
and I am dehydrated,
trying to find my way back to the water,
and I know the ocean on the horizon is a mirage
because I am far from the ports
so I guess I'm Icarus
and this is how I'll
fly
toocloseto
the sun.

But Icarus falls,
so down I'll go, like Juan Escutia,
the last of *los Niños Héroes*
who wrapped himself in the Mexican flag
and plummeted from the Chapultepec Catle's edge rather than surrender his country's
pride
to U.S. forces.
The Mexican-American War claimed Juan's life
(did his parents still find God gracious?)
and I wonder if my Mexican-American existence dishonors his memory.

He may not appreciate this simile.
Lo siento, Juan.

That's okay, though. There's *sol* in solace, and I can make peace with my fate
because Icarus' body is claimed by the sea and the salt

por el mar y la sal–

and that death will engulf me like an *abuela*'s warm embrace,
and that demise sounds like home.

“tick, tock” by Satabhisha Sarkar, Phillips Academy

tick, tock, tick, tock
Gold chain, pocket watch
Leather strap, wrist watch
Time flies, and we watch

tick, tock, tick, tock
White wall, black clock
Bell tower, turret clock
Time sings and time talks

tick, tock, tick, tock
Sundial, hours pass
Sand shifts in an hourglass
Time is slow and time is fast

tick, tock, tick, tock
Phone screen, glowing clock
Wake up, alarm clock
Time is everywhere, never stops

tick, tock, tick, tock
I have a gold watch
I bought it so I could watch
Time pass, *tick, tock*

“Catharsis” by Satabhisha Sarkar, Phillips Academy

The sound of violins blossoms in the room
Vibrant and beautiful, and she can finally breathe
Tension builds, grows, and bubbles over harmoniously
If she closes her eyes, she can almost see the music unfolding

The patter of her feet beneath her, the smell of fresh grass
Wind blowing in her face, cool and comforting
Summer dreams, so distant from the freezing snow
There are traces of mischief in the air, light and playful

Then, the undercurrents of something ominous
So light as of present that they could be dismissed as the coming of nightfall
Perhaps these low notes simply signify the end of this day
Rather than something more, something sinister

But no, that would be an incorrect assumption
 For something truly terrible has happened now
 The strings are crying out, begging for help, for justice
 There has been an incident of utmost and irreversible tragedy--

Silence

So profound that the sound of a single instrument,
 A violin with a slender neck and a smooth voice
 Rises easily over the racing hearts of the crowd
 Its vibrations drip with sorrow, its song filling the room
 Telling the tale of heartbreak, loss and grief

More voices join the melody, for the first to sing was not the only one to suffer
 Their pain is beautiful in the way only pain can be
 Unattainable yet so easily accessible
 So widely acknowledged yet so purposefully kept out of reach

The music builds, layers of stories on top of each other
 The grassy landscape of spring, now seen through filtered lenses
 Has begun to warm up, to curl with the heat of expectation
 The music almost reaches a glorious moment of triumph, magnificent in completion

But it doesn't, as it fades away without offering its audience a conclusion
 The people arrive at this moment of triumph alone, after all
 Stand to their feet and clap as the tears spill from their eyes
 Sliding past awed expressions and wide smiles

She stands up with the crowd, clapping until her hands grow numb
 The sound joins the last echoes of the violins in the high-ceilinged hall
 And as the tears flow gloriously and effortlessly down her face,
 She can finally breathe

“He saw the greatest minds of his generation” by Maddie Soong, Phillips Academy

He saw the greatest minds of his generation
 and i knew, for an instant, who mine could have been, and then who we were:
 Hysterical, a teeming mass of hurt so intertwined trying desperately to grasp pull closer
 comfort and
 only growing more desperate when our desperation intercedes.
 She wants help- wants me to give to her-- but though I do not know it yet, or perhaps
 this is a truth which is not yet my truth but will become true very, very soon (Breathe
 now)--

I am not a vessel for my own good intent.

I am not the beautiful thing through which goodness flows.
 I am not a vessel, just a container from which i wring comfort to toss onto the pile, and I
 am not broken, but sometimes windows or cracks in nested facades or walls or dolls
 align, and I catch a glimpse of his howl in my own in a 2nd-story IKEA bedroom.

When I close my mouth and rejoin downstairs
 the feeling beats about me,
 but still too raw for open air---
 his howl's painstakingly crafted, (I know, I know,)
 but the body only strains to know what the mind understands
 and though I see how carefully he pruned I knew then and still know now that my
 dreaded truth has become true- though it may or may not be, very very soon---

I breathe

and i write, *i care about you!!1 please dont go!! i'm here you can talk to me*

and i switch tabs and I stare into the eager, imploring textbox and I recoil, disgusted,
 from the nothing that lurches out of me like sludge into its page.

ASSIGNMENT GRADED

NEW COMMENT posted 12:31 PM Sunday

“*****, you have potential. You clearly understand the English coursework. If there's
 any support I can offer you, I'm always here to talk.”

“Steps of Looking Into the Heart And Brain” by Lily Townsend, Andover High School

Step 1: New fact

A shrimp's heart is in its head.
 Its heart and brain are effectively one organ, fused. The brain continues down into the
 spine, the heart is small.
 Logic and love, circulation and circuitry, making the animal run.

Step 2: Interpret the fact

They're the colorful, flashy cousin of the rollie-pollie.
 They're the small, undervalued sibling of the Lobster.
 They are detritivores, cleaning up rivers, pond and sea.

They have feelings and friends, and their hearts beat to make neurons fire.
 Their brains extend into their spine, their heart is in their head.

Step 3: Relate to the fact.

Sometimes, I too feel like my heart and my brain are one.
 I feel deeply, happiness, joy, but also sadness and anger.
 My heart beats strong, and my brain works hard.
 My heart and my brain feel like one,
 My heart does the thinking and my brain does the circulations.

I am like a small, colorful shrimp.
 They're colorful, but not as a warning of poison or fangs; like a painted poison dart frog.
 They are painted like the colors in the sky after rain, shiny or matted under water.
 They're high visibility, in eternal neon and stripes, even when they're fragile and small.
 They're emotive, showing pain or upset; when other fish can see and make them a snack.

They're brave, even though they are small. They can work together to eat bigger fish.
 I want to be brave, even when I feel small, when I feel fragile. I want to work together for something bigger than myself.

Even when I watch them in my nightstand fish tank, in a safe captivity:
 Their heart and brain are one, and they think with their friends.

“Monsters” by Sadira Vega-Crawford, Greater Lawrence Technical School

When i was younger i would always ask my father to check under my bed for monsters
 He pushed it off saying there was no such thing as “*monsters*”, they were nothing but a
 myth and a legend
 Something that would be told to younger kids to make them listen
 I lost sleep because i always felt eyes on me
 As i grew older nothing changed
 The monsters under my bed turned into the “*monsters*” i saw on the street
 Cat calling and whistling at little 12 year old me
 Asking “*Ma where you going*” or “*damnn you fine as fuck shorty*”
 I went through puberty earlier than most people would so i always looked older than i
 was
 Whenever i told them my age they would continue to persist
 “*You’re too developed to be a kid*” or “*you look so much more mature than half of the
 females out here*”
 They expected me to take it as a compliment but i never really did
 I was old enough to understand the words and what they meant
 I felt my skin crawl and my throat close up everytime
 It was like i was in a nightmare without a way to awaken myself
 Walking down the street to the bodega trying to get candy and fulfill my childish desire
 I felt eyes devouring me like i was the candy instead
 With every step i took i sunk into myself like a crab does to its shell
 I would fasten my pace just to hurry and get home
 I’ve grown and i’m older now yet the stares haven't gone down
 “*Monsters*” were supposed to be a myth and a legend

And yet my mind knows otherwise
Because i see them all the time

“canines” by Vivian, Greater Lawrence Technical School

I swear i dont bite,
I only bark.
As you tied me to a pole
Outside kicking dirt In my face.
I bare my canines, to protect myself.

But I realize I still love you no matter what you do to me.

“Parents” by August Whitton, Greater Lawrence Technical School

Baby me not even walking
Dad and moms love unpeeling like layer of an onion
The mess left on their hands
I'm now 1
Mommy and daddy don't love each other anymore
Dressed up with Backyardigans
Hair left free like water crashing off a mountain
Sitting on my dad's lap
Babbling, laughing, drooling
Is there still that imaginary line between my parents?

I'm now 2
Some man now in my life
A new baby in my life
Daddy living alone
Mommy in a crappy house
My parents still aren't together?

I'm now 4
That man's always drunk
Daddy has a new girlfriend
I don't think my parents are very happy without each other
I'm 4
Screaming not for them to call the cops
Scared to lose my family
Watching my mommy cry at the kitchen table
Protecting the harm from my toddler brother
I'm still 4
My mommy calling
“She can't come home tonight”
Maturing faster than little me could ever catch up to

I'm now 7
 There's daddy's new girlfriend
 My little brother now without his parents together
 Being dropped off at the man's "new house"
 He's in a peculiar drunk state
 The smell of old yeast
 His eyes punctured in
 He screams over and over and over and over
 Until the noise becomes a never ending cycle
 His mom frightened
 Me and my brother hugging Beanie Babies
 So I distract his young mind
 He looks at us
 A smile trickles from one side of his face to the other
 Terror ran over me
 Anxiety ran through my body like a jolt of lightning
 A feeling I will never ever forget
 My parents are not getting together

I'm now 9
 A boyfriend for my mom
 A man who finally cares for my mom
 A smile on her face I never thought I'd see
 Dad and his girlfriend are now getting married
 She makes me happy
 And makes him happy too
 My mom and dad are happy with other people
 The man trying to end his life
 I can't lose him

I'm now 14
 I see the gray hair on my mom and dad
 In relationships I strive to end up with
 Still reminiscing of those very nights
 Where maybe life wasn't the easy
 But we all did it together
 No, my parents didn't end up together
 But I still imagine their happy ever after

“Shells” by Christina Zhang, Waring School

The patterns on the shells spiraled round and round.
 Retrieved one from the rugged ground, nestled it near my ear.
 Salty, earthy scent, and callings of the sea all carried on a breeze, they compound;
 Frothy foam meets golden grains, tides draw ever near.
 Retrieved one from the rugged ground, nestled it near my ear.
 Ocean's whispering tickled like bubbles popping atop chilled soda.

Frothy foam meets golden grains, tides draw ever near.
A half-finished sand palace, now crushed.

Ocean's murmurs faded like bubbles fizzling atop chilled soda.
The refreshing elixir I quaffed, sweltering no more.
A half-finished sand palace, now crushed.
Waves of nostalgia crashed upon the shore.

The refreshing elixir I imbibed, sweltering no more.
Sank my feet into sand's damp embrace.
Waves of nostalgia crashed upon the shore.
Seawaters moistened the hem of my trousers, déjà vu traced.

Sank my feet into sand's damp embrace.
Hot wind brushed against my hairline.
Seawaters moistened the hem of my trousers, déjà vu traced.
Seagulls circled along the coastline, a scene so fine.

Hot wind brushed against my hairline.
Salty, earthy scent, and callings of the sea all carried on a breeze, they compound;
Seagulls circled along the coastline, a scene so fine.

The patterns on the shells spiraled round and round.