



14TH ANNUAL
MEMORIAL
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TEEN POETRY
CONTEST
AWARD-WINNING
POEMS



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14th Annual MHL Teen Poetry Contest Results

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Middle School Honorable Mentions

“Who are you?” by Rishika Agarwal

They say what's on the inside matters the most
But that's the part I can't see
Bright colors, the zing, and bling
But not the part that matters to me
The smile that brightens your face
The glint in your eyes
The hair that is never quite straight
Your nose twitches when you lie
Only knowing what's on the outside
Only know what's skin deep
Beyond that there is nothing
I'm blind to the secrets you keep
Who are you?
The world may never know
Because your dreams, wishes, and hopes
Are hidden beneath a curtain only you can show
Lift it up, step past the night and into light
People will love you no matter who you are
Because the blocks that were put together to form you are beautiful
With the things that make you real, the fears and the scars

“Math Rules from Every Direction” by Shabhavi Jayakumar

From rounding to ratios, there is so much more
As the numbers dance around the page with much glorie
After Some time, the numbers make sense
Just like fraction to decimal to percent

Let's learn some math with claps

Algebraic expressions are so much fun,
Cross Multiplication can be easily done
To evaluate expressions,
You need to use your brain
So, let's find a way to make it into a fun game

Some subjects can be boring but not with math
Let's explore the wonders with math like that
With the powers of 10
It can be positive or negative
But learning how to use it you can benefit from it

Multiplying and dividing fractions can be finished with ease
Like other math rules can be done in a breeze
Rates and ratios are kind of the same
And fractions are kind of like their middle name
The math has an interesting path

Now I have to wrap this up
Then you can follow up
Math is a cool subject
If you understand the concept,
You won't get questions incorrect

**“She is Jealous, In Love, Dissolving and Hold Onto the Clouds and Her Pearls” by
Evelyn Lewis**

THE MOST OF LOVE

Love,
The emotion that annoys her the most,
Kills her the most,
more than any cut or wound
Made from a knife,
A pair of scissors,
A block of cement,
It hurts her the most,
Drives her the most insane,
Makes her the most negative but,

It's all the most positive.
It makes her smile the most,
Laugh the most,
Blush the most.
It makes her want to find every possible moment to talk to the person,
No matter what they do
or what people think of them
Or where they come from.

But if it's broken,
It'll break her down and make her fall apart.
It'll make her cry the most,
Sob the most,
Unlimited tears,
Making her confused on the amount of water her body can contain,

It is the most powerful.

HER JEALOUSY

She is jealous of the sun's beauty,
 how it glows in the distance,
 untouchable.

She is jealous of the girl, that you're working on a project with.

She is jealous that you're there

And she's here,

Sitting at her desk,

In a frenzy of people,

Though she feels alone

And in darkness.

She is jealous of your other friends you sit next to on the bus,

That you never told her about.

She is jealous that you're happy,

That you have a smile on your face everyday,

That she can't provide you with.

DISSOLVING

The flicker of joy that had survived in her body for so long was rapidly dissolving,

Slipping out of her hands,

Out of touch,

Out of reach.

Her eyes full of flowing water,

Hope melted away,

Into a pit of sorrow and confusion.

She started thinking,

Thinking dark thoughts,

Thinking heavy thoughts.

She felt scared,

Useless,
 Alone.
 The loss of hope filled her up with tears
 And drowned her.
 Her screams pierced her own ears.
 She felt destroyed.
 Into thousands of pieces of shattered glass.
 She was nothing.
 She was ruined,
 and the flicker of joy that had survived in her body for so long was rapidly dissolving.

DON'T JUDGE A CLOUD BY ITS SHAPE

Clouds,
 Beautiful fluffy substances
 That evolve into its next identity everyday.
 She called to her mother with a confused but strong voice.
 “Mom, that one's bigger than the others.”
 “Why is that so different to you?” She says, calmly.
 Her words pierce her mind like a needle,
 Trying to prevent thoughts from escaping as they pour out.
 The subtle aroma of blackberries from the garden emanate into the air,
 Filling her nose as she inhales.
 Clouds change everyday,
 From the smallest to largest.
 Each just beautiful, fluffy substances.

HER PEARLS

I rest upon ears.
 My pearlescent sphere of shimmering memories represents 3 generations of women,
 Each incredibly diverse from the next.
 I stand tall on a slender rod, hold me higher.
 I've seen thousands of moments,

I've been so close to all of them,
But yet so far.
I've seen everything from being first bought in the store by Mary,
Having campfire nights with Gretchen,
And making scrumptious banana bread with Janelle and her children.
I've seen her daughters grow and become the people they are today.
I now see her oldest daughter,
Holding me in her hand,
As the fourth generation.
Tears fall from her face
And I know she's sad
But she knows I'm there.
She knows she will be happier,
As she wipes the tears off her face,
and I believe in her.

My support has been lost over the years,
But I still stand tall,
Through the thousands of moments,
The 3 generations,
And the shimmering memories.

“Blood” by Saisha Prabhakar

My hands are red and sticky from trying too hard, I can feel them losing grip around your wrists. Dripping on the concrete, Swirling down the drain, Staining our souls. Blood, thick or thin Red or blue But that is not what blood believes in It believes in you and I. We look at each other and see layers of skin But never do we realize that our blood coincides Our complexions seem to differ But somehow yours is the price of gold Whilst I live amongst the inferior Isn't it all because of genetics? I cry, as tears sting my eyes As our veins are sliced, they reveal our blood Seeping out of our bodies, flowing as one Colors similar to one another Blood the same. We share the same connection Yet imprisoned because of blood's fortune. This is my pain, my passion, and my hope Be the generation that ceases discrimination For aren't we all connected by blood? Bound together by centuries of pain and joy Coexisting in harmony.

“Invisible Stories” by Isabel Tu, Prajusha Reddy, and Saima Rahman

There are so many stories
 to be heard
 But we only know
 Very few
 Never heard, Never seen
 They exist
 But they are invisible
 the stories
 They are extraordinary,
 Sad, happy
 Very different
 But they are rare
 They are hidden
 floating,
 In the ocean
 Of stories
 They are invisible
 I am invisible
 With my friends
 I am invisible

my story is
Covered by words
I hear whispers
I hide
In the memories
The world is black and white
Hidden, for even being different can mean being invisible
Invisibility

“My Life is a Flowing River” by Abhay Yajurvedi

My life is a flowing river
with twists and turns,
ups and downs,
with enough grit to not quit.

I shimmer like silk,
in the glistening sun
and meet fellow rivers,
to form everlasting bonds.

During rocky times,
I gush with force
yet still maintain,
my outer grace

Guided by mother nature
to show me the right way,
I forge on ahead
learning everyday.

I am so fortunate,
to flow where I am
for millions of miles,
with the rivers of my time

“A Tongue is a Blade” by Abhay Yajurvedi

Foolishness is quick to speak
And says what's on its mind
It often comes out haphazardly
And always stays unkind.

Someone may ask you a favor
When you're thinking really hard
Your words can swiftly slip out
And show some disregard.

Watch your tone
Watch your tude
Watch your mouth
And always stay shrewd.

Sharp tongues can inflict great damage
Faster than a blade
Cover it with all your care
So others don't feel betrayed.

God's given us a grand mind and soul
With the intelligence to think
Use it before you speak

Or it'll all be gone in a blink.

“Cosmic Dust by Alexandra Zetea

I want to live among the nebulae
with the stars held in my eyes
Dance within the cosmos
and become one with the skies

But I'm content with seeing the clouds laid bare
From behind circular glass
So, I gaze out of the airplane window
and watch the world pass

“Oceanic” by Alexandra Zetea

I know a girl like the ocean
At first glance, she is shallow
bright and sparkling in the sunlight
Her personality ebbs and flows
She remains fickle, able to bounce back within the instant,
armed with a smile that never quite reaches her eyes.

But, if you look beyond the turquoise shallows,
where the playful waves give way to shadowed uncertainty,
a world awaits beneath the surface

And, it is clear in the forgotten moments
where her static smile falters and the mask slips away,
if only temporarily

When you are left gazing into her endless waters below,
realizing

she contains multitudes more
than passing glances would bequeath her

It once entranced me, the ocean within her eyes,
until I realized how easy it is to drown in its depths

“The Closet” by Scarlett

Even though
i am not quite gay
The closet still constricts me

Still
I am not quite straight
So the closet still chokes me

I feel i have to stay
I am never shir why

Maybe I hide from my friends
In fear if them leaving me
For who i am
Or maybe i dread people teasing
Or name calling

Some people like me
can just walk out of the closet
and into the light

But some, like me
stay in the safety of the closet

Even though it is restricting
If no one sees
If no one know

I stay safe in the closet

Middle School Winners

First Place: “Dad” by Claire Cahill

He is a busy man, say the spiral bound briefs strewn across the living room table. Bright red pen markings shout loudly about his hatred of the passive voice, or his irritation at a disorganized paragraph or his suggestions for an introduction that has yet to be written. The bag of mismatched pens taken from various hotel rooms and lobbies laugh about how they are only temporary replacements for an office supply that is always running low. The book on the nightstand ‘Winning the Oral Argument’ or something along the lines of that whispers its gentle speech that he is not an image of perfection, but a man.

Second Place: “Fireplace” by Claire Cahill

Tendrils of bright orange paint splatter across the blackened bricks of its cage. It leaves its embers to die on a burning bed of ash as it reaches up with spindly orange fingers, trying to grab something just out of its reach. Its wide mouth opens - teeth and tongue shaped by an invisible paintbrush - gasping for a breath of oxygen in its small charred brick prison, suffocated by its own hot breaths of smoke. It laps against the mesh doors of its cell, the only things escaping being the heat of its anger and the smoky smell of a midsummer barbecue. As its fiery grandeur diminishes, its frail neck cranes back one last time to observe the smoke with jealousy before it escapes through the chimney.

Third Place: “A light in the darkness” by Larry Liu

A tree falls in a forest.

And a jungle,

And a wetland.

Smoke rises from a car.

And a factory,

And a fire.

Dirt turns to dust on a farm.

And a field,

And a lawn.

The Earth watches in despair.

Heating up,

Cooling down.

But there is a light in the darkness.

A seed planted here,

A tap turned off there.

Little things help.

But not from just a few people,

We need everyone.

From the mountains.

The plains,

And the forests.

Maybe then, united, we stand a chance.
Of saving our home,
And our stories.

Maybe.

Middle School Teens' Choice Award: "A Mirror" by Rishika Agarwal

I'm made up of glass and maybe a frame
Light shines and my smooth surface reflects it back
You see it gawking at your reflection
Without a regard to me because I don't matter
I've been through hundreds of dances, weddings, and parties
Dresses, hair, makeup, and jewelry
Anything thing you put in front will be shown on me
Everything from the sky to the sea, but
What if there was nothing
What if the world went blank
What would be seen then
Maybe me in my true skin
Not the glass, not the frame
Someone pretty with ebony hair and fair skin
Like those endless girls who've dressed in front
But for that everything in the universe would have to go away

Middle School Poet Laureate's Award: "Dad," by Claire Cahill

He is a busy man, say the spiral bound briefs strewn across the living room table. Bright red pen markings shout loudly about his hatred of the passive voice, or his irritation at a disorganized paragraph or his suggestions for an introduction that has yet to be written. The bag of mismatched pens taken from various hotel rooms and lobbies laugh about how they are only temporary replacements for an office supply that is always running low. The book on the nightstand 'Winning the Oral Argument' or something along the lines of that whispers its gentle speech that he is not an image of perfection, but a man.

High School Honorable Mentions

"Lost and Found" by Joanna Archambault

Lost in the moment, I skated, carving elegant patterns along the ice, passing my time.

Lost in the music, I sang the sweet melodies of a song, the choir silently listening.

Lost in the attack, I fled the only home I ever knew, many memories left behind in the dust.

Lost in the journey, my energy from within plunged as low as the ground beneath me.

Lost in the ghetto, my freedom was bound up, with that of locks and chains.

Lost in the hands of an authority, my family disappeared behind me, never to be seen again.

Lost in the labor, 2,489 prisoners had fallen before me, piles of bodies formed mountains.

Lost in words, 1942 was the year I told a lie, unable to tell the truth.

Lost in the church, 4,000 were sent away to die a terrible death.

Lost in the showers, children that once surrounded me had their breath taken away.

Lost in the factory, pieces of cotton were all I came to know.

Lost in fear, soldiers once again dug up my roots and planted me elsewhere.

Lost in the crowd, robes of stripes served as our solitary layer of protection.

Lost in identity, names were no longer, for I was now B-7608.

Lost in the fire, pieces of bone that once belonged to a body now sprinkled the dirt.

Lost in white noise, I was forced to walk a march of death.

Lost in white snow, I watched my feet make imprints, ones that would leave a mark on this earth forever.

Lost in white faces, I traveled for 30 days in the presence of both life and death.

Lost in the battle, a helping hand finally sprouted in a sea of despair.

Lost in amazement, a world full of wonders began to bloom.

No longer lost, I started a new life, one that planted seeds of a new hope.

“Two Truths and a Lie” by Adi Briskin

I asked my sister the other day,

Whether she thought snowflakes were lonely

She said no,

And I asked why not,

And she told me that

There's so many of them, and they're all so close together.

She asked,

Why would they be lonely?

And I wondered about that too.

I asked my sister today,

Whether she thought people were lonely

She said that some people are

And I asked her which ones,

And she told me that

Those are the people who don't feel important, who don't think they matter.

She explained,
They don't feel loved.

And I wondered how, if I know I am loved, how can I be lonely?

I will ask my sister tomorrow
Whether she thinks she is lonely
She will say she is not,
And I'll ask her how come
And she'll tell me that
She is one of a crowd, that she fits in.
She will admit,
She doesn't know how to explain it.

“The City Rush” by Noah Coyle

Finding a way through the Back Bay,
I felt and saw the city rush.
The city rush: a thing of play,
My suburb mind dreamed with a gush
On lonely existential nights,
In which I felt the panging need
For licks and kicks, for lights and fights,
To yell and tell, to breed and feed.

I walked along Newbury Street,
Where I saw the fruits of the world
In restaurants and haute boutiques,
About which aroused shoppers whirled.
It was a lively buyer's feast

For those cut of affluent cloth,
Though some with less — but not the least —
Were found mixed nicely in the broth.

My shopping bags and stomach full,
I wished to satisfy the mind.
Feeling the grand library's pull,
I left the moneyed streets behind
To copulate with poems and tomes
And all that could bear my intrigue;
Yet I could not quite make it home
As did the book and lamplight league.

I thought that — as a man of God —
Trinity Church would be my hearth;
So shocked was I to find a bawd,
A servant only of the earth.
Regardless if they're right or wrong,
If goals antithesize the Book,
Why must they be sung in the songs
The Holy Author overlooks?

To rest my unrelenting zeal,
I gave my body to the grass.
As I embraced her pristine feel,
A generation seemed to pass:
And with it, all its hopes and fears
Were born and killed and born again.

I saw men rambling, far and near,
 Like bear cubs searching 'round their den.

I somehow became one with them,
 And lived according to the tide
 Of credit cards and pertly femmes;
 Of business suits and T-train rides;
 Of strangers right outside my door,
 And all around me in the street;
 Of life itself and all its chores;
 Of people just trying to eat.

And thus I realized, with a jerk:
 The city rush is mostly work.

“Footprints in the Snow” by David Frykenberg

I open my eyes
 And once again I find myself in our sanctuary
 A pond frozen shore to shore
 It is snowing

Once this was our haven
 Soft summer winds and golden light played with us here
 Then it was only Time that froze
 And gave us an eon in a single afternoon

Now seasons mark our tree-lined pool
 And separate us

The grey sky watches as I step onto the ice
I make my way to the place
Where once we capsized our canoe and laughed

I stare at healed cracks in the solid surface
Frozen trails leading to depths I cannot fathom

I hear the soft groaning of a January thaw
The trickle of water beneath
Are you whispering, too?

I drop to my knees
Desperate to hear your voice
I place my ear against the frosted plane
But it is only the gurgle of pond-melt
Nothing more

I stand and turn back
I need to leave this place behind

Icy shards soften into white particles as I approach the shore
I step into craters my boots formed not so long ago
And suddenly there are no footprints to retrace

Fresh snow has unmade my path

“The dinosaurs’ prayer” by Charlotte Guterman

For valentines I bought small plastic dinosaurs
They clamored in their clear plastic bucket
Twenty a piece in the bargain bin,
A tangle of ancient ribs and footprints long extinct.
The best was Triceratops
with his ribbed crown and stubborn jaw
I affixed him to a heart shaped rock
Thought of loneliness and reptiles,
and imagined my driveway in a time before meteors.
Later I learned to classify soil layers
and trace linear tears down theoretical mountains.
So it is February.
The snow melted weeks ago
and still no one has invented time travel.
Before I am fossilized in some underground horizon
I ask the sky one favor
I say:
I am in love
with this idea of forever
But understand only so much can fit
under a clear plastic atmosphere for so long
So please,
O Lord of creaky limbs and practiced infinity,
know I will be satisfied with just a little bit more time.

“sister memories” by Charlotte Guterman

you are

the taller one

Growing despite my stares

Growing into your mouth and how dare

you talk

like that while wearing my face

Shutupshutup

Don't correct me don't

you try

i know exactly how this works cuz

i've seen it inside your head

Your pinkies are hooked in mine

you pull

at my hair till my ears come loose

i can hear you already

Shutupshutup

your voice

is stuck under my tongue

your knees knock me outta my skin

Count our freckles and i win

Count each day and you get older

Shutupshutup

i don't wanna hear it

Count each year and you get taller

But still

you borrow
 my dresses and yes
 you may wear my smile
 i just wanna bite your head off
 just lemme braid your hair

“why my mother thinks Hebrew is sexy” by Charlotte Guterman

Because she was sixteen
 Because she gathered eggs on the kibbutz
 Because all the men wore white T-shirts and
 Because their hair was short the way she likes it
 Because she could not speak it
 Because she learned to speak it yet
 Never taught it to her daughters
 Because it was 1978 and they were winning
 Because they are still warring
 Because she married a man
 Whose father was a pacifist
 Because her father was alive
 Because she is *American* and therefore
 Only knows she is beautiful in other countries
 Because she keeps meaning to go back and
 Her daughters have never been
 Because she could not eat chicken for months
 Because of the flavor of death
 Because all the boys had machine guns
 And her daughters are almost sixteen

“All of Me” by Olivia Hauser

I haven't met all of me yet
I am grateful for this phenomenon
I have no desire to meet my completed self
I don't want to see those small cracks spackled over
Those lacerations sewn up
Creating scars that will last longer than their memories
I want to feel everything from start to finish
That thrills me to the point of elation
I get to see myself grow
I get the privilege of witnessing myself flourish
Painfully slowly
Then all at once
Inch by inch my nose will get further away from my toes
Layer by layer
My skin will span my body
It will stretch for miles
I'll break. I'll melt. I'll fall apart. I'll redefine
Hundreds and hundreds of times
A butterfly constantly metamorphosing
Those scars turning from red to purple to blending effortlessly with my skin
I haven't met all of me
Small things I'm certain of
I'm certain the crossroads sketched into my fingertips will never change
That the brown spot shooting through my eye will never dissipate
And that half moon carved into my wrist will always overflow with memory
I haven't met all of myself
I wake up everyday having to reintroduce myself to me
To my body. My thoughts. My life

I somehow find infinite beauty in that
 My fingers run over the body I've occupied for years like a newborn discovering its feet
 Rubs the eyes that have seen far too much but also barely enough
 Scrunch the hair that's reaching for the sun each day
 Those few moments after waking up are my favorite
 They are intensely personal
 The most vulnerable
 Most honest
 I'm all mine for a few seconds
 Truly my own to view
 To feel
 To sit with
 To love
 I haven't met all of me
 But I meet her every morning
 With a gentle heart
 And critical eyes
 I hope I never meet all of me
 That would mean I've ceased to grow

“The Mysterious Man’s Picture Book” by Emily Huang

A mysterious man once was he,
 a mysterious man he remained.
 residing in my heart.
 Yet, suddenly,
 a single book, wrinkled and aged —
 And, suddenly,
 the mysterious man has a story.

Pictures are worth a thousand words,
 and are a thousand memories.

His picture book is Time.
 With my very own fingers,
 I feel it perfectly preserved,
 sense it, taste it.

With my very own eyes,
I see flickers of resemblance.

His eyes,
my eyes.
His nose,
my nose.
His smile...mine...

The mysterious man remains just so.

His picture book,
it's Memory.
Not one, not two,
but hundreds,
thousands,
millions of memories
contained within every photograph.
Some bittersweet, some heartbreaking, some beautiful,
but then there are some...

And the mysterious man is a mere child,
a child no older than I.
A toddler, an infant,
a whole life captured within these pages.

How are memories measured?

And now I am at a loss,
trying but failing to answer my own question —

Was the mysterious man's life at all
like mine?

All of us have our own picture books,
Some unfinished, some just beginning.

The pages of the mysterious man whisper their secrets.

Delicate, silent, glorious,
the photographs reach out to me,
and I feel myself wrapped up in a time
so long ago, so mysterious...

But the mysterious man
isn't quite so mysterious anymore.

A single teardrop falls,
splattering onto the open book.
A firework of tiny droplets
snake outward like the veins that hold my blood,
his blood,

within me,
connecting me to the photographs
in my father's picture book.

“The Phantom Watchman, or The Ghost of Prim Point” by Mia Imperato

In the Prim Point Lighthouse, at quarter past nine,
The lantern was dimming and losing its shine.
The oil it craved was becoming quite scant,
And it cried for its keeper in mechanical chant.

But sick in his bed was where the keeper abided,
And he knew, as he choked, that his fate was decided.
For as time stretched on, and the clock passed ten,
He passed on, never to keep watch again

A new keeper was found, and the lamp was relit.
But it now held a shadow that never would quit.
Till one stormy night, as the watchman stood guard,
He looked up to a sight that left his mind scarred.

For there on the stair, the second one down,
Stood the ghost of the keeper, all haggard and brown.
The new watchman started and fell faint to the floor.
When he awoke, the phantom had vanished once more.

The shade never came back, but the tale is still told,
And today, even now, if one is so bold,
They can stand on the step where the ghost keeper stood,
And, if unlucky, remained haunted for good.

“Sunlit Dream” by Serena Li

I stole time
I stole greatness and heartbreak and heartbeats and time
I stole pity and looks of kindness and
for what it was worth, I stole his heart.

A quick little thing, but
he told me I was worth it
and I believed him.
We spent hours in the sunlight
him and I,
half asleep and half convinced it was a dream.

And it was.
I told him to go and he stayed.
That boy, I swear to god
he knew I was the dream,

I told him to go and he stayed.

He knew
I was misty as the clouds
fleeting as the rain,
That in a flash of lighting I'd be gone.

I knew
There was nothing less permanent than
Sweet smiles and daydreams,
That in a flash of lighting he'd be gone.

But
we still sit, lazing, dazing in the sunlight
He crowns my forehead with a kiss

I feel myself solidifying into reality
and during those hours,
my heart melts a little further.

“A Sense of Safety” by Elissa Lonie

I sit in fear,
Tapping my fingers on my desk.
I wonder what is to come,
What might happen today.
I live in a world of paranoia,
But it's defined by rationality.
I see what's going on in the world around me,
And it makes me afraid.
How can I feel safe in a school
When the death toll for shootings in others,
Continue to climb.
The scariest part in all of this,
Is the reactions from the adults.
We're meant to respect them,
But does age overrule stupidity?
We fight for change,
And they respond with jokes at our expense.
They claim that our age invalidates our opinions,
But did they have to go to school every day,

Wondering what might happen to them.

Wondering who is going to be walking through the door next.

Wondering if they'll be making it home that afternoon.

“Empathy: The Unspoken Chaos” by Zoe Maver

Empathy.

Putting yourself in their shoes

Sounds pretty cool right?

Connecting through emotions

Sure, It has advantages;

When you're able to choose to use it.

But what happens when empathy doesn't give you a choice?

When you think what you feel belongs to you

But it's not just yours, It's theirs too.

Tear stained faces,

Young and old,

Shaky voices,

Crumpled tissues,

Crowded room,

Shrouds of sadness,

Overwhelming sadness,

I feel it all,

And it breaks me.

Silent tears stream down my face.

I want to stop, but I know I can't.
Not while I'm in this room,
Not with all these people,
I've never met half of them,
But It doesn't matter.
Their despair feeds into me.
I feel it all,
And the tears keep falling.

A week later, I go back to school,
Still broken, but there's no time to waste.
I need to catch up on my work,
So I shut down all feelings,
And try to push through it.

New year, new mess,
We rush to the car,
Just me and her,
No words.
She's trying to stay calm,
But her anxiety adds to mine,
Heart racing,
Whole body shaking,
We pull into the parking lot.
Another room,
Another loss,
Another break.

Not long after, comes more news,
And I'm taken out of school
For the third and final death.
Three rooms,
Three lost loved ones,
Three.
Times.
Broken.

“Found Poem: Soldier’s Memory” by Nina McKone

A broken hourglass is eternity
where after so long
nothing before begins to matter.
Only a matter of time before
that time no longer exists.
Once you release
yourself from the clock
it is freeing
albeit open-ended.
Question our purpose
the sporadic eruptions of war
when eventually we'll all
be engulfed in a single
rage of fire.
Bottling the flames in an hourglass
only lets the pressure develop.
But a broken container is no better;
free-flowing, destruction is our own.

Whose fault but that
of the individual?
A pawn still has Purpose
Influence and Duty.
Huts with families
devoured by inferno
harvested from instinct
from fear.
Cringe away
from the pleas
The *Please*,
help me;
the flames mirror
the village girl's morbid dance.
The past too easily
burned at the stake.

“Expression” by Jayden Pena

Let's draw together
I have the pens
And you have the paper
Together we make art
But what's art in your eye's compared to mine

I start off blank
And look for inspiration
I look to you and draw
I draw a heart
That is my art

My heart is filled with color
Red, outlined in purple, and butterflies
In the middle
They flutter
What I see as art is complete

I turn again to you
And see your art
And what I see is beautiful
Art that is truthful
And speaks no lies
And I sigh, for what I think is art

But what I soon realize
Is that your art is dark
Not one picture
But many, parts
What I thought was flattering
Ended up flattening
But that was your art

So you take your picture
And you take mine
You glue them together
Mines behind
And you say
That's art
And my heart
Falls apart

“Halo” by Jayden Pena

Holy holy holy
Should not be your only vocabulary
You press holiness on my life
And just flatten what freedom I have
But I won't allow it
To be my only vocabulary.

You tell me to believe,
For years I was shown miracles
But those miracles were forced on me
For so long they no longer feel magical
Just annoying.

And I want to believe
And believe I do
But I don't believe in being so radical
To the point where one's own life is impossible
Where everything is called into question
And given different definitions
Where everything is a sign of something evil
And anything considered evil is the key to hell
Where one must segregate themselves
From those who aren't committed to believing
Where one's innocence is judged based on holiness
And if holiness isn't radiating off someone
They are considered demonized
And not human

I believe in the cause
But don't believe in the execution
In how love is shared
In how love is represented
And pictured as perfect
I believe in the teachings
But not the instructors
Who mix their opinions with Truth
And falsify it
Giving instructions that stop corruption
But poisoning the minds who follow it.

People seek to be holy as an antidote to their suffering
But those who radicalize it risk damaging what life they had before
And I refuse to let it damage mine.

“m&m” by Jayden Pena

I'm following an empty map
Distraction as my guide
Why do I walk when it clearly says fly
Don't know what i'm doing
Can't even speak fluently
I'm trying my hardest to stay true to me

Pragmatic goals are nothing but tolls
Allowing you to proceed to the next one
Until you reach your final destination
You've overcome temptation, congratulations
But why don't my goals feel so simple

I should be doing fine
There's nothing wrong with me
And if there was I had plenty of time
To fix it.

Maybe I missed it
Had a misfit
Nothing but mischief
Years go by
Seventeen going on eighteen
I don't know what to do with my life
Someone, please save me

I look for inspiration for my dull imagination
Blank coloring page needs pigmentation
Pictures of obligation
What to do with those obligations is what makes me contemplate
Is this what I really want
What do I really want, concentrate.

I'll leave this for another day
My mind is in dismay
Why is life so hard
Like a complicated version of monopoly
It's not a game with friends
It's independent
No one to fight for me
But me

“A Ghetto Tale” by Vinny Schmidt

You know my name but not my history
You've seen the fake smiles to hide all of my misery
You don't know my past or present
Or the cold nights sleeping on the floor with no heat
Or the dreams and expectations I will never meet
I'll never suffer defeat
As long as I can get back on two feet
I can still remember all the times
Where all I had was my rhymes
I only had a pen and a page
And this ghetto dream stage
So as I write with this pencil
To get away from the thoughts in my mental
I make sure to be everything but lyrically genital
I remember when I was hungry for a night's meal
So it was time for another honey bun to steal
Now I'm hungry for success
And my past won't let me rest
Now I gotta provide for my family
So I'm back to writing this poetry
Each word intertwined is another ghetto symphony
So I'ma do me til I die
And keep it real so I don't live a lie
I'll fight for what's mine
With each and every line
Because I know what I bring to the table
I ain't afraid to eat alone
But I still wish I was able
To go home and sit on a throne

Therefore I'll keep my head up until my siblings are all grown
And still make it all on my own
For the months I had no home

“Mask On” by Sheila Tejada

Every day is the same
Today is no different
I wake up and I put on my face
To my friends
that means I'm putting on my makeup,
But that really isn't it.
When I say that I am putting on my face
what I really mean is that I'm putting on the mask
no one can see me through.
I am not one to talk about my feelings,
I never liked to seem weak
But I have my days.
I have my days where I want someone to see me.
I have my days where I want someone to comfort me.
I have my days where I pray for someone to tell me
'everything will be okay.'
Every day is the same
Today is no different

I wake up and put on my face.

“A Letter to My First Love” by Sheila Tejada

I loved the way the sun wrapped around you, like a suit woven from strands of light.

I loved the way you stayed close to me, as we held hands walking the empty streets at night.

I loved the way your eyes glimmered with hope, like a diamond pulled from the earth and polished for the first time, or the way your smile could break through the eyes of the blind, I loved your innocence, untainted by time and unbound by fate. I loved your curiosity, and how you were cautious enough to know what's at stake.

The only problem was, I was too used to heartbreak. I became best friends with disappointment and I lost my belief in fate. So familiar with bad timing, I was always at the wrong place, until I realized that I couldn't go on seeing you as just a friend; I got so good at telling lies that even I started to believe them.

So now I'm gonna put my heart on the line and speak from my soul to let you know that your touch...is really the only thing I can feel anymore. The glister in your eyes, the only thing I can see anymore. I want to bring you close and whisper in your ear like lovers do, these soft spoken words weighed down heavy with truth:

“Because honestly, all I want is to hold you as the sun goes down and not let go until it comes back up. I want to be that warm connection that you crave whenever you feel a certain touch, I want to be that rush of adrenaline then envelops you as you get to that climactic peak of a moment you've never felt before, that heavenly moment when you can't take it anymore, then I want to be the arms that you fall into as you slip into a peaceful sleep, relieved of all that tension; let your guard down, I'll be your wall of protection. I want to be the ship to steer you in the right direction, and if ever you should hit an iceberg and feel like you're about to drown, I'll be the cocoon of oxygen that surrounds you; breathe me into your dreams, I want to be the seams that bind all your emotions together, I want to be your fantasy, your idea of forever, I want to be the roof over your head to shelter you from the rough weather, I want to be that girl you decided to sweep off her feet; I want to be the pair of eyes that you suddenly meet in a crowded place, I want to be the face of everything you've ever thought you didn't deserve, the voice of everything they said you couldn't achieve, because the truth is... you can be anything you dare to believe.

But most importantly, I want you to know that even though this love of ours might not have lasted. I would still walk with you to the end of the world...and then past it.

High School Winners

First Place: "Construction Zone," by Zoe Maver

My legs are wrecking balls
Swinging back and forth
Everyone focuses on their work
I make contact with the chair
The *crash* occurs
And the attention turns to me.

My feet are jackhammers
Bouncing up and down
In endless energy it spreads
The table shakes with each vibration
Pencils roll off the edge
Falling with a *thud*
And the attention turns to me.

My hands are cranes
Grabbing and Lifting
Eventually letting go
Objects fly across the room
Whizzing past a head
Into the wall with a *smack*
And the attention turns to me.

My eyes are cameras
Surveying every action
Flitting around the room

No one distracts me from my work
But I've already tainted theirs
Their attention is on me.

Second Place: "The Real Me" by Vinny Schmidt

I am from playing playstation everyday
From picking apples off the family tree
I am from the happiest family on the street

All that was a lie, this is me
The kid who actually writes poetry
The kid who doesn't have a definition of positivity
Cause the negative is all he can see
My name is Vinny

I'm from the struggle
And only getting in trouble
Cause I've never known the good
Ever since living in the "Misunderstood Hood"

I'm from food stamps and E.B.T.
From trying to provide for my family
I am from no-name brand food
From that negative attitude
Eating Fruity Dyno-Bites
Every other night

I am from no food in the fridge
Not enough for all 4 kids

Going to sleep instead of eating
Winters without any heating

The house with no traditions, but only a mission
Telling myself “you’ll make it out one day”
And also “nobody can get in your way”

I am from faking a smile to get by
From a house that looked like a pigsty
From the street with a dead end
Reminiscing when the house got condemned

Sleeping on relatives floors for months straight
Thinking the devil got me on checkmate
When I carried me and my siblings weight
All this happened, not sure why probably fate

I am from a new house every night
But never giving up on the fight
The city where tomorrow is just a might
I am from praying that everything will always be alright

Third Place: “She is in Us All” by Nina McKone

She is in us all;
the “type” of girl
condemned under
the influence.
Betrays the beauty
of humanity.
Individuality.
Where has it
been thrown away?
Control commanded by
tangible substance.
Life in a joint, a powder,
a needle, an
unwelcome boy.
Galactical bruise;
endless.
Muted richness
pulsing, bloody gore.
Patient hand reaching but
limited beneath
its membrane.
Collecting ...
bruising.

Attack of the plague,
drum of the ache.
Dishonest subtlety
tricks a girl into

a glance, unarmed.
Entangled in that
attractive swirl of colors.
Appeal of its galaxy;
mysterious void,
entitative.
Rebels against
what's comfortable.
Anomalous existence
... Was that not power?

Black in mystery
brings beautiful Blue ...
But when was Green
invited in envy?
Purple was not always
the burden of fatigue
beneath her eyes.
Blend of hues
now distinguished for
a proper introduction.
What distinguishes
Her from Us?
We are *not* distinguished.

Where the melody went
Where it goes
everytime
was predicted for
every girl before.

Infatuation with
a filthy escape.
Unforgiving dull throb
of dopamine, abuse.
Where does it go?

She is in us all.

High School Teens' Choice Award: "Body Image" by Elissa Lonie

I was always told
To ignore the models on magazine covers
That inner beauty was what mattered
And I shouldn't let them get to me

I always agreed,
Nodded my head and went on with my day
As I walked by magazine stands
I would pay no attention to the half naked girls
Plastered across almost every cover
With perfectly toned bodies

I'd look into my mirror picking apart every piece of my body
Pulling at any spot with fat
Overanalyzing every inch until there was nothing left
But it was never those magazine covers that got to me
Not even the girls that would sit next to me in school
Or the models I would see on my laptop screen
They never caused the way I looked at myself to be distorted
They never made me pick apart every inch of myself

And I don't think you'd ever realize it,
But it was always you

You took your pickaxe and began hacking at my body
One day it would be my thighs
The next day my stomach
Or how about my arms
Maybe you'd tell me that there was something off about how I looked
I needed to take better care of my skin
I needed to eat less
I needed to dress better those close aren't flattering for my body type

You saw me crumble and you'd smile as I fell
You got joy out of my suffering
Knowing the exact spots to hit
And even after they had all been broken down
You'd go back and hit them once again
Targeting them that so that the wound would never heal
Peeling back every scab just to watch me bleed
And then you'd ask me why I was so upset

High School Poet Laureate Award: “Footprints in the Snow” by David Frykenberg

I open my eyes
And once again I find myself in our sanctuary
A pond frozen shore to shore
It is snowing

Once this was our haven
Soft summer winds and golden light played with us here
Then it was only Time that froze
And gave us an eon in a single afternoon

Now seasons mark our tree-lined pool
And separate us

The grey sky watches as I step onto the ice
I make my way to the place
Where once we capsized our canoe and laughed

I stare at healed cracks in the solid surface
Frozen trails leading to depths I cannot fathom

I hear the soft groaning of a January thaw
The trickle of water beneath
Are you whispering, too?

I drop to my knees
Desperate to hear your voice
I place my ear against the frosted plane
But it is only the gurgle of pond-melt
Nothing more

I stand and turn back
I need to leave this place behind

Icy shards soften into white particles as I approach the shore
I step into craters my boots formed not so long ago
And suddenly there are no footprints to retrace

Fresh snow has unmade my path

Thank you to our judge, Gayle Heney and to Andover Poet Laureate, Linda Flaherty Haltmaier.

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