



15th Annual MHL Teen Poetry Contest



**Sponsored by
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Library**



**Award Ceremony
and Reception
May 7, 2019
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, the teens of the MHL Teen Room for selecting the Teen’s Choice Award winners, the Friends of the Library for sponsoring this event, and all the friends and family of our poets for their support.

Middle School Honorable Mentions

“Courage” by Rishika Agarwal

Courage is not jumping off a cliff
It's catching a whiff
Of dangers below and trusting
That the wind won't be gusting

Courage is not the man with the gun
But the soldier that marches on
The frontlines adorned with fight
For what is right

Courage is not standing up to the bully
It's looking at them fully
Choosing to be yourself
Even though it's not as easy as being their elf

Courage is not running into a burning building
But knowing all the harm it may bring
And still rushing in to save a life in the door
Even though it may mean losing yours

Courage is not living with your mistakes
It's advancing past the ache
Being right isn't always strong
Sometimes it's enough to admit that you were wrong

Courage is conquering the unknown
It's going on when times get rough
Deep within yourself, it's not the scars
But the moral meaning behind it all

“Speed” by Henry Aude

Speed

The fire is furious

The blood is boiling

The bottles are brewing

We share a power now

The time is draining

Let fear be upon us

What is coming?

In desert and doom I ask is there room

He can't tell

We are coming to the end

The wind is coming

The storm is fighting

Their hate is scary

Who are they?

It is not fair

The end is coming

Coming

Coming

Coming

Gone

“Apples” by Ava Hudgins

Grandpa always kept

A bunch of

Apples on our marble counters.

The wrinkled hands, clattering bones,

Loose, sagging parchment paper

Skin of his arm

Would reach for one

Every morning. Sitting at

The table with

Rough, yellowing cores

Laying before him, slowly chewing, chewing,

C
H
E
W
I
N
G

staring out
The picture window to
Greet the day. He always said
That the clouds were his
Best friends, that he and Lucy
(She was always Lucy, never
Grandma) would stare
At these friends for hours. "It was
Our favorite pastime." He'd say. Once
Lucy was gone, the clouds
Were the only thing left.
He'd break off
Tiny bits for me, but like
Most children, I was
Insatiable, asking for
Moremoremoremore.
One day I came downstairs during
The morning hours that belonged
Just to us. I declared that
His little pieces were not
Enough for me
Any more.
He just smiled with his
Dusty sunshine smile and offered
One to me.
It was red and ripe, and I
Thought I was
Ready. I grabbed the twiggy
Stem and tried
To bite. Brow furrowed, I tried again
To crunch my teeth

in, open up the world
Of mealy crisp, sunrises, but
I couldn't. I glared at
Grandpa, as if my impertinence was
His fault. He just cracked his smile
Wider, laughed quietly, and scooped me into
His lap. I pretended to be mad
For only a couple seconds - he knew
That I loved when he laughed
Too much to
Hold a grudge. He whispered,
"Apples are for old geezers
And nutty health food

People. You don't want to eat
That."
Something swelled inside me
That I didn't understand.

Standing on his grave
Years later, I swore I
Could hear his warm laugh.
I felt the corners of
My mouth twitch.
Grandpa, I can
Eat apples now.

“I Am Sorry” by Addison Glavin

I have wasted
the time
that was in the world

and which
you were probably
saving
for your life

Forgive me
it was delicate
so long
and so short

“Worries” by Addison Glavin

Green grass tickles me,
I feel so alive and free!
I look toward the sky,
And then I sigh.
All my worries flow through my brain,
I feel like there's a ball and chain.

I try to get rid of it,
But it will not quite.
I see the moon and the stars,
I hear no more cars.
I worried too much, there is no more day,
The sun is gone, so I must stay.
There is no more time to go back,
I look up again and it's pitch black!
I hear a howl,
Maybe it's an owl?
Then I'm in my bed,
It was just in my head.

“Oh no, my Avocado” by Alex Liu

Oh no, my avocado went bad
Now my avocado and I are sad
But I was really hungry
But there was no more food in the country
So I did what I had to do
And I ate the avocado
It tasted like Bill Nye
With a side of fish eye
Now, I will hide in a corner and cry

But wait
I have to find food
It is my fate
Then, I saw it
In the middle of the highway
Was a thicc pickle
It looked as though it cost a nickel

So I went to grab it
But I was run over by a car being driven by a 4-year old having a fit
The end!

“Boundary Line” by Ayda McClellan

They told her
no more.
So she stopped.
You can't
So she couldn't.
The flurries of wasps,
hanging thick in the air.
Their words are stuck floating, just hanging there.
But she shoves the words
Down
Lets them burn in her throat.
They hurt less to choke up.
It hurts less to face them,
To face the truth.
And she's bubbling and bioling and bursting
'Bout to break.
She threw hard,
Then harder still,
Shattered glass,
Like scattered thoughts.
Crossed the line,
faces anger, and faced with shame.
These words drift,
And she tries to forget.
But the the things scarred in your mind,
Stay permanent.

“Sacrifice” by Diya Munshi

Sacrifice is the orange sunset
The sun setting over the land
Leaving, to another world

It sounds like the wave of honor when a soldier enters a room
The whole nation singing in tune to our soldiers' rhythm
Giving up our world for somebody else's
Like someone who would die for our nation
Suffering, only to save loved ones

It tastes like family losing everything they had ever known
The need to feel comfort only to see their world crashing before their eyes

It feels like letting go of your favorite possessions
Leaving a person-sized hole in their hearts
Longing for something good to happen, when life has never been worse

“Top of the World” by Diya Munshi

The world is full of ups and downs
Some of them you cannot pass, I was told

But then one day I had a thought
I knew it'll only come true if I fought

So I closed my eyes
Held my breath
And look where I am
I'm on the top of the world
So forget what they say
Your life is untold

Until you tell it

If I were you I'd be the lion
I'd pounce on every opportunity I get
And soon I'll be the king of the jungle

It doesn't matter your race or age
Or where you grew up
Because I believe that we can get to the top
So don't hold back
Fight, until you can't fight anymore

“The World Today” by Elisabeth Shin

Is it scary to admit
That much of our world is in trouble?
For all that our leaders so try to commit
It only ends with their adamant foundations crumbling into rubble.

How callous and unseemly are we,
Blind to all the human despair that is crying out.
And when our leaders call to the people that they have the key
All they really want is the clout.

Poverty lines the street wherever I go
And the little necessities they keep by
Then those so-called “heroes” proclaim they have rid of the low
But we all know how much a lie that is.

Drugs litter the street in abundant piles
While shards of beer bottles lie strewn across the road
This problem is prevalent enough that it could go miles

How sad it is that it could be fixed in one load

Dying marine animals cling onto the tiny life rope

As their coral reefs die off as we humans look away and gloat

And those turtles? How do they cope?

With plastic shards cutting their throat?

Bombing of streets where innocents gather

And the constant strife in the Middle East

As terrorism slowly climbs up the global ladder

And it has already become a menacing beast

The constant turmoil of politics here in the United States

Have led to much unrest in this beautiful place

All these protests as of late

Show how little civility we have in this case.

Say what you want about the issues

Say what you want about how current issues are going

But I'm just bringing out the tissues

And not listing the good things the world is showing

There are programs around this world to help the environment

Democracy is thriving in areas that have never seen it

And aid is being distributed more by the shipment

We are getting better, bit by bit!

Listen to the world rejoicing in jubilation

Over the scientific and literacy advancements they accrue every day.

More countries are becoming more tolerant

And medical technology is getting more innovative, they say.

So don't think we are all in doom

Yeah, it's true we can mess up a thing or two
Yeah we are often in gloom

But in the end, we can solve these problems, and stay cool.

Middle School Winners

First Place: "The Difference in Being the Same" by Rishika Agarwal

Different is scary
And so
To be safe
We separate ourselves
From fat
From ugly
From dumb
By colors
And gender
Because there is no compassion
Empathy found in few
Love in fewer
We forget
That in reality
No two people
Can ever be the same
Siblings may try
And twins will get close
But the birthmark on their lid
The scar on their knee
The warmth and pity
The cold indifference
That will always separate
Us
From

Them

But that in itself is a problem

Because we dehumanize

Those who we think are lesser

Even though

We are no better

Second Place: “The Girl Who Cries in Gym Class” by Ava Hudgins

The girl hunched in the corner -

That one, there, the one

With the raw, red, beautiful face,

The one with the crumpled tears -

Poses questions.

Dirt eyes ask

Have you ever held a stranger close,

Curled your arms around them, held

The wet pearl

Of their sadness?

Have you ever felt

Their tears fill you

Soil you,

Christen you,

Drip down your ruddy arms,

Burn your hear until

Your skin is yellowing parchment soaked

With ink

And their heart is an

Infant's, wrinkly and red?

Has your voice ever

Torn across a room and

Ripped open a burning scar, leaving

Them writhing in pain
 And hurt?
 Have you ever
 Loved?
 Head turned, you dart your eyes
 Away from her, something
 Like thick mud swelling in
 Your throat.
 Dirt burns, boils, dies.
 Fear looks stunning
 On you, she spits.

Third place: “Where I’m From” by Ava Pecora

I am from the purple pony sitting in the crib of a little girl,
 From the old, dusty children's books that sit on the shelf.
 Mary’s face staring down, her stand still marked by
 the woman I once hugged.
 I am from the metal scooter that holds
 the memories of a whole neighborhood.
 The laugh of the girl I would visit every day, the park
 that holds our best memories.

I’m from family dinners and hair dye,
 From Alicia and Joseph
 I’m from the world of
 “You’re way too negative” and
 “I don’t think you could be more positive”
 From the tower of books that sits on the shelf,
 To the lazy days that I stay in bed.

I’m from late night card games,

Pasta dinners and Starbucks Coffee.
From loud voices and memories of
All-nighters that I pulled with my cousins.
I'm from my great grandmother's jewelry box
that holds my most prized possessions.

I am from the old memories,
the new memories waiting to be made.
I am not a leaf from the family tree,
I am a seed, ready to create a new beginning.

Middle School Teens' Choice Award: "Welcome to Society" by Sergey Bielecki

Welcome to society,
We hope you enjoy your stay,
And one more rule now that you're here,
You can't ever get away
Also everyone belongs
Just kidding if you are different you are an out cast .
We love society and so do you
And if you don't we will make you.
Society is beautiful in every way
We just hide all the filth and grime just a big illusion
The government is always right
And if you say different we will kick you to the ground
And please feel free to be yourself,

As long as it's in the right way

High School Honorable Mentions

“The Strength of a mother” by Madison Branco

I'm done hearing about hard working fathers,
When all I got was a hard working mother,
A single mother of 3 working 12 hour shifts everyday,
A mother who put our issues and hurt before her own,
A mother who would work until her feet are tingling and ready to fall off yet still asks about my day,
A mother who could be completely exhausted yet still hold me when the salty tears ran down my face,
A mother who bottles her feelings up inside until she's alone so then she doesn't have us worry,
A mother who never stops until we have everything and anything we need,
A mother who could have a million things to do but makes sure we have fun along the way,
And lastly a mother who never stops being my inspiration and strength,
So I'm done with hearing about hard working fathers,
When all I got and ever needed was a hard working mother.

“Rewriting fairy tales” by Madison Branco

When I was little I would always read fairy tales,
They always would make me feel safe,
Safe because even though there may be an issue,
Like a fire breathing dragon taking the princess hostage in a huge beautiful castle,
In the end she's saved by the knight and shining armor.

When I grew up I realized fairy tales are just stories,
Not reality but stories,
Because when hard times came I had no prince to save me,
Instead I had to deal with it,
Even if it hurt,
Even if it tore me apart,
So I put a brave face on,
And I pushed through it.

So why do we read these fairy tales to young girls,
 When we know they need to go through tough times,
 Why not prepare them and give them the advice they need.

So here's what we need to tell them,
 Hard times come and go,
 Some may knock you down,
 But you get back up and you take a deep breath in and push through it,
 And if you push far enough you will achieve anything you dream,
 Because you don't need a prince to save you,
 When you have yourself.

“cross me out” by Claire Cahill

My words spill
 out of my fingertips
 like the waves roll up
 on the sand of my
 favorite beach
~~but waves can be blocked~~

and I always take the
 waves
 and fill up my little
 cup of confidence
~~but like water,~~
 confidence isn't pure
 that comes with me
 wherever I go
 like a good luck charm
~~even though charms are nothing~~
~~more than superstition,~~

~~really.~~

Drinking from
 those Nantucket waves
 makes me feel like
 I can conquer ~~almost~~
 anything
 even the waves
 towering over me every summer
~~until the undertow is too much~~
~~to fight against~~
 no one except my friends
 can take me down
~~until they decide to hear me talk~~
~~and cross me out.~~

“Poppy Fields” by Claire Cahill

8:14am:
 he sat in class
 at a small wooden desk
 he sat in class
 thinking about what he was going to do when he got home that day
 he sat in class-

8:15am:
 -when the bomb went off.

The building that had been his life had been reduced to
 a sea of distorted orange fingers clawing at his body
 that pinched him if he got too close.

Red poppies bloomed across
 the remains of his school clothes
 as he ran in the only direction he knew.

He ran into a friend
 who was left dragging himself across the
 God-forsaken street
 because the Americans and their bomb
 had torn everything off his legs that made them recognizable.

He couldn't carry him home.

He wanted to believe it was a dream and his shirt was just a poppy field and his home had been tucked safely into the orange petals of a tiger lily and the cries of the injured were just the chirps of birds

and he was running through a flowery field

as the warmth of the sun wrapped him in a blanket more comfortable than his tattered school clothes.

I stood in silence as
the story of the boy continued, illustrated by his childish drawings
that should have been innocent,
telling stories of
superheroes
or dragons
not the story of a child
trying to survive a war between
grown men,
not the story of a child with poppy fields blooming on his shirt.

I couldn't read any more.

The old Japanese man
standing next to me had his teeth
clenched together in a gesture that reminded me of stone.
the only thing rendering him something
other than a statue was the
warm drop of emotion
crawling down his wrinkled cheek.

I looked away.

The pride in my country that I wear
as blatantly as an American flag
draped across my shoulders dissolved in that moment into the set of marbles,
the tattered school uniform,
and the little boy's drawings,
evidence of the lives lost
when the Americans ended the war.

It must have been a strange image
when the old local
turned to the young American with her mother and said a few simple words
before walking away.

"We live and we learn."

"It All Repeats" by Janneris Caro

Months, weeks, years have passed

Depression, weakness, anorexic, awful mental health Bad grades, isolated, no friends, heavy-hearted

I'm starting to feel like someone else has your full attention

Butterflies fly away

Heart feels empty

Head is constantly pounding

My smile was as low and as dim as possible

No one liked seeing me this way

No one wanted to be my friends cause they were afraid

They were afraid due to the fact that he would always say

"If you ever think of replacing me or having other people in your life, I'll put a bullet through them"

It came to the point where I had no one to talk to

Not even you .. my boyfriend, my everything

My mother and brothers started to see the difference in my attitude

They didn't like who I've become

They started noticing that I wasn't happy anymore

It was at a point where they couldn't bare to see my skinny face & pale skin

My pasty lips

My skinnier legs

My sad smile

Just Me

You damaged me to where I didn't know who I was anymore

I couldn't think straight anymore

My mental and physical health was so bad

I couldn't concentrate in school due to the fact that you hurt me in ways I couldn't even explain to my own mother

Didn't do any type of sports cause I always had to be focused on you

Coaches always told me

"Stop slacking and get back to the games that you love and admire the most"

I didn't listen

“Shut the fuck up, you ain’t doin it cause I said so”

Cause everything was always your way or the highway and you never listened to the words that I myself had to say

We broke up

I started focusing on myself and getting back on track

I started to see a difference in myself

Got back to my sports

Got my grades back up to average like I always had them

I started to do volunteer work in any place I can

I like the new me

Family and friends started to see the changes as well

My smile started to get bigger than before

I started to gain some kind of weight

I’m no longer anorexic but still pretty skinny

I love myself in ways no one else can

This relationship taught me to never let my guard down

Never let a bum nigga ruin you mentally and physically

Do you always no matter what relationship or situation you’re in

Love yourself

Now im happier than ever

Ive moved onto bigger and better things

Got a new person in my life that actually values me for me

A person I can say “I love you” to and actually mean it

Vice versa

Listening to your words makes me think you really mean what you say

It makes me feel like I’m the only girl in the world

It makes me sense like I’m the only girl that matters

Being wrapped in your arms makes me feel protected, secure, guarded, safe

Being with you every second I can, makes me admire you each and every day
 Feeling your presence, your kisses, your hugs; just you in general makes me think I'm not alone
 in this world of sin
 Maybe everyone isn't how they come off to be
 Who would've thought you were a gentle, humble, peaceful, calm person
 Instead of a hard, gangsta, thug, drug dealing wannabe
 You showed me that not everyone is there for you in the long run
 You showed me how to love myself
 You showed me how to be confident in my own skin
 You showed me how life itself works
 You showed me that I don't always have to be independent upon myself but that someone is
 always there for you even if you don't feel or think it
 Instead of you running game on me, you taught and showed me how to play it
 Having you as my lover and sweetheart has my heart skipping beats, my stomach feeling
 butterflies, my head spinning
 You have my smile brighter and bigger than ever
 No person has ever made me feel this way
 And for that I adore you
 And cherish every moment I can get with you

 I love you
 That "i love you" turned into things i never imagined could happen
 it all repeats ...

“After the Poet 김수영 (Kim Soo-Young)” by Angelreana Choi

Under the lamppost, the white flakes
 of chalk on a deep wallpaper.
 Fumes, dust, smoke jumping from
 the strict shapes tailored to a large man's red body.
 The calla lilies hum, contrary to muted
 humanity. A thwarting layer like the
 heavy blue under a powder-coated oil stain.

Sidewalk, sidewalk, sidewalk.

My tongue loves the tinted skeleton of the
solemn sky. As my Mother likes to whisper,
Cough. Cough out the broken strips of
soul and breathe in the fallen heavens.

자연이 살아있다.

“This is what you left” by Paula Anabel Cordero

If life is pain I buried mine
a long time ago, but it's still alive-
and it's taking over, where am I?
why is existence so unjustified?
why is time so minimized?
I wish I could feel but I'm numb inside,
almost as if I were paralyzed.
why did you leave me here to die?
to slowly rot inside and agonize?
This is What You Left.

Your sister plays the violin with her veins
she knows you're gone, she feels the pain
she says she's at the bottom of hell,
her pain is a prison, and we can't get her out of her cell.
we still see her image, she sees our reflection,
but running from her own mind is like a maze with no direction.
This is What You Left.

Your mom cries when she sees my face,
I know she's hurt, I sense the pain.
she puts herself through deny

we know she's strong, but she's lost a couple fights.
she tries to move on with her life, but your memory haunts her
It's everywhere in sight.
This is What You Left.

My sister picked up a pen with her hand,
she wrote stories only to escape the pain in advance.
She doesn't remember you, but she still cries,
I hear her sobbing in bed at night.
she tries her best to hide it, but she can't keep up,
when she holds in emotions everything erupts.
This is What You Left.

My mom she misses you, I can tell,
even though she's never taken your pictures out of their shell.
she's never talked about you, but I did hear her cry once if I can recall,
Her cries filled with sorrow and convulsive gasps, that's all.
I saw her suffer, I heard her cry, she was deep in that despondency
but you weren't there to wipe her eyes.
This is What You Left.

You left me to deal with everyone's despair
I had to get your sister out of bed and brush her hair
I had to tell your mom it was still undeclared
I had to tell my sister why you weren't there
I had to hold my mom while her mind repaired
I wiped my own tears cause I was scared
I didn't have time to grieve, I had to be aware
I don't blame you for the pain we shared,
but you should know we're still recovering from this nightmare
And This is What You Left.

“Dear younger self” by Mimi Cung

Dear younger self

You wish you could be a princess

You wish you could be an astronaut

You wish you could be a ballerina

I wish you still believed you could

Dear younger self

You wish you tried harder

You wish you studied more

You wish you didn't fail every exam

I wish you didn't define yourself as letters on a piece of paper

Dear younger self

You wish you had perfect skin

You wish you had straight teeth

You wish you had longer eyelashes

I wish you didn't spend all your time creating a mask

Dear younger self

You wish you weren't ugly

You wish you weren't fat

You wish you weren't unpopular

I wish you didn't believe your distorted perception

Dear younger self

You wish you weren't so useless

You wish you weren't such a waste

You wish you weren't so messed up

I wish you knew your worth

Dear younger self

You wish it would get better
You wish the pain would go away
You wish it worked
I wish the thought never crossed your mind

Dear younger self
I wish you looked in the mirror and saw your true beauty
I wish you knew your imperfections are your perfections
I wish you had more faith in yourself
I wish you knew what you know now

“Nothing is happening” by Mimi Cung

Bang bang
2 shots fired, 2 bodies dropped
Bang bang
4 shots fired, 4 bodies dropped

We are protesting, but nothing is happening
We are standing our ground, but nothing is happening
We are not safe, but nothing is happening
We are scared for our lives, but nothing is happening

The number of guns have gone up
The population has gone down
But the laws have yet to changed

Despite getting told we're safe
Despite the alarms and announcements that inform us it is "just a drill"
We live everyday knowing that at any second something tragic could happen
It haunts our every move
We cannot focus when it's all that is invading our minds

Being told to lock all the doors
Being told to hide in the corner of the classroom
Being told to tell our families we love them
None that matters if we aren't alive to do it

“Nymphs of Spring” by Rory Haltmaier

The swarm rises,
their womb of dirt left behind,
clumsy wings churn
against the dawn
leaving ripples on the clouds,
they hum a melody
only they can understand,
lulling the fearful to embrace the sky,
echoes rumble through a meadow of poppies,
awakening a scarlet sea,
chambered eyes take in the waves,
and for months, the distant storm
seethes just out of sight,
until the summer air
becomes tinged with the bite
of the bleakest months--
they fall,
husks strewn among the leaves,
their chorus quelled until
the breeze softens again
and the hardened world begins to melt.

“Nets” by Emily Huang

I have always been fascinated by nets
The way their ropes cling to one another

Building a network of mutual support
The way their pattern forms a beehive
A splatter of veins reaching outward
Only to end in a final outer edge
I wondered if I would ever
Be as strong as those nets
As resilient
Or as firm
Yet still remain flexible
Because nets still bend
They are still moldable
I suppose I
Worked so hard to be a net
That I succeeded
But not in the way I intended
Uncertainty created
A yielding bend in me
A hairline fracture
That cracked into a fissure
And I began to bend down to others
At the slightest instruction
Because somehow
My net worth attracts them
So they use me as their net
Trying to catch their messes
With my hands
At times like those I
Feel so much like a net
Filled with holes
Weak
Wobbling
Other hands clinging onto me

As they pull me down
To pull themselves up
But if there is a net gain
Maybe I should let them continue
Let them net their goal
Though I am never netted
For the footholds I provide
Their grip is relentless
Smothering me with my own netting
Fishing for my most-wants
Pulling the rope tight so it bleeds
But telling me I'm being saved
I want my throat to open
I want the beehive to buzz and awaken
I want to rebuild the tenacity
I tried so hard to garner
But every time I try to
The net gags me harder

“Worn Boards” by Michael Inero

God
lives in worn
boards, in worn
pews, and for
whom the bell
tolls.

His name is writ
in blood on walls
in caves in which
I grew.

In caves I chewed

on thoughts of pews,
 on skin beat black
 and blue.
 I chewed in pews
 on thoughts of you,
 of Him, beat black
 and blue.

God
 lives in worn
 boards, and in
 soft wooden
 echoes and
 you,
 through and
 through.

“Amber Eyes” by Nina McKone

To tarnish the amber you
 dove into amidst the pepper of autumn.
 A shame, as for you, it was
 effortless to sink into twin pools
 speaking everything golden under the
 sun’s gentle light. A trees’ veil of vivacious hues
 an intoxicating blend of dancing flame,
 overflowing and uncommitted to the
 boughs waving coyly above.

These were the lovely days of
 adoration, to relish in the playful,
 lighthearted carelessness of it all;

a rare breath of something fleeting but
 lively. No promises were made
 and this was acknowledged at the reminder,
We are but a period of transition.
 given by the swallows' eager goodbyes
 to find a new grotto where, it sounded,
 the sun might reflect all too harshly.
 And perhaps that explained the absence of
 worry, even when the light began to fade
 and the leaves divorced their tree companions,
 before losing their being altogether.

A shame even so, that Eden is not everlasting.
 To let those matching pools dull with a frozen seal,
 entrapping the life within come winter
 was perhaps the most devastating part:
 as within those twin pools
 held by the forest
 was where it all began.

“Happify” by Kiana Park

A buttery, saffron, golden shade
 A bright, glowing sheen
 Treasured, cherished, personal
 Beloved, precious, intimate

The color of
 Sunshine and warm summer days
 When the light is long
 and the leisure longer
 Sitting in cooling driveways

swapping stories and secrets
with melting treats
and stained mouths
Sunsets and silhouettes
Golden skies and golden petals
The feeling of deep laughter and
the bubbling taste of joy

A murmuring morning on the weekend
spent with E, my E
Kneading and mixing and spreading
The oven huffing and puffing
The kitchen windows large
but my mouth open larger
to catch fractals of sugar
Butter sunshine and buttercream
'Til the late of the day
When the eye of Heaven hangs
low and lazy from the sky

Bright skies and crispy fall days
spent at an orchard
Picking fat, red fruits
For eating and for pie (always for pie)
With the sun in my eye
and the smile coming easy
stretching, stretching wide across my face
And golden hour strikes
so we all stop and look
as nature proudly shows us her newest painting
And that golden orb can finally
kiss his lover, the horizon

That buttery, saffron, golden shade
 So present and so perfect
 It makes me happy
 Need it do more?

“Shell of an hourglass” by Brianna Preston

Cold bites at a body too thin to warm itself. Constant hunger erodes her body, but it’s always justified. Nausea comes at the smell of food, the taste of it on her tongue. Fatigue frays her soul, keeping her on edge and ready to snap.

This was all her choice. Yet it doesn’t feel that way. Her grip on life has slipped away; she is now a puppet on hunger’s string. Hatred burns within, finding every imperfection, telling her starvation is the only way to be happy. Fear torments her day in and day out, reminding her that she can never be loved the way she is.

She is lost in the misery, alone. Angry tears come when she stares in the mirror, only to dissipate and leave her hopeless and staring blankly at her reflection. She is the shell of an hourglass, hidden in baggy clothes.

A hand reaches out, waiting for her to grab it. She hesitates; is there really a way to get through all of this and leave it behind? She fingers the hand, testing its strength, before grasping it and letting herself be pulled out of the salty sea she drowned in.

Light breaks through, shining in her darkness. Crystal tears dry on her porcelain face as the person shows a way out. It’s a long, dark tunnel to travel through, but the light at the end burns bright with hope.

The girl who used to be the shell of an hourglass looks back. All the misery, all the pain is but a memory. Sometimes the memory comes back and wants a place in the present. On those days the hand always returns to rescue her. She is joyous and her smile is radiant and pure, not forced and glued on in broken fragments. Hope has reappeared.

“Three-Four” by Vinny Schmidt

34 days
 34 days
 I’ve been full of pain
 34 days that’s I haven’t been the same
 34 days I’ve been going insane
 34 days where I wanna put a bullet in my brain
 34 days in which it’s too hard to maintain
 But let’s take it back real quick

After that game I said I did it for you
 But in that moment ma I had no clue
 That my nightmares would soon turn true
 First it started with me bouncing house to house , but that's nothing just deja vu
 Then back to me sleeping in the streets back to having nobody
 Just me and my two feet
 First few weeks I thought It was me being stubborn
 But those two weeks really hurt not talking to my mother
 Two weeks later and we still haven't talked
 All because after work one night I went for a walk
 If it wasn't for my siblings I would've killed myself
 Take all the pain and put it on the shelf
 But it would've been carried on to them three
 Sometimes I cry and ask god why me ?
 Life's getting tougher and it's starting to bother me
 All because it started off as poverty
 Poverty turned me suicidal, but I still try to be my siblings ideal
 Can't give up now time is too crucial it's vital
 At this point i'm use to the streets
 But why can't i get use to a home w hot water and heat
 I got no answer dog, god's got me beat
 I said ill never quit
 But lately i've been feeling real hesitant
 Ma I miss you more than anything ,
 I didn't know how else to tell you
 It's been 34 days but ma I still love you

“In Captivity” by Maddie Tjalsma

There is a blindfold over her eyes
 She can't see her potential
 Too many times she had been told
 That's not possible

There is rope around her hands
 She can't climb higher and higher
 She is stuck in one place

There is duct tape over her mouth
 She can't speak her mind
 No one knows her opinion
 No one will listen

But she is strong
 She will tear through the rope
 She will rip off the tape
 She will soon see

All the places she can go
 Far away from her captors
 Into the sky with no limit

Out of her own head's handcuffs
 And the skeptics of other's grip
 Out of society's chokehold
 Out of captivity

“Fallen Angel” by Emma Willard

the love of your life was the angel who fell from grace (sometimes you think just your graces). he said it hurt him just to look at you, coiled rough around the edges with sin (but he knew it was not your fault he knew he knew). the dirt under your fingernails left marks on his skin, zinc slicing through limestone. you cut your lip when you kissed him, and the blood tasted like the first class you failed (algebra) and your first sip of wine (on the floor of your best friend's basement) and everything you never knew you needed all at once. the first time you undress him, flowers bloom between his ribs, nightshade and hemlock and lily of the valley (he whispers witch in between your thighs). the next day your fingertips are violet like that time in kindergarten a marker burst and ruined the washing machine. what he drinks is stronger than liquor. shots of regret burn on their way down (do not mix them with the flask at his hip). he stumbles over his wings one night and looks up at you, blood coursing down his face. it is the only time you see him laugh (deep and throaty like a tiger stalking its prey). halo dimmed under the fluorescent lights of a drugstore, he watched (with amusement or pride or expectation) as you slipped a lipstick into your pocket. later, when you reached back, it was gone (those jeans still smell like him). you held your breath just long enough underwater that you heard his voice, open eyes shot through with chlorine virulent affection and hurricane love through a silk screen of cyanuric acid (it was the sting of the door closing behind him). he whispered in your ear that night and you turned the color of summer, and it took you three weeks to realize the date on your phone hadn't changed (you tell yourself it's just the glare). there is silver in your veins from loving the boy with stardust in his lungs cobwebs in your hair from tearing after the impossible stains on your lips from using your body to say what words cannot. you have my whole heart, you tell him. no, he whispers. do not trust that precious thing in my shaky hands. (or maybe he did not respond. time dulls memory and still he is gone gone gone.)

High School Winners

First Place: “Eden” by Emma Willard

i. once, I slit my wrist with a kitchen knife, standing at the wooden chopping block,
and hissed with satisfaction like the tea kettle.

leaves of thyme fell from my hands to dust the floor,
the water boiled over,
and we both pretended it was an accident-

ii. blood ran golden down my hands and crusted the trout,
bubbled over the splintered corpse to form crisp skin.
you remarked that it was quite exquisite for cooked fish to bleed,
yet it tasted sinful and I whispered between bites that
you have not known sin until your own life has flowed past milk white teeth-

iii. I took the vase from the counter in the hall,
flowers brown and painted with neglect,
and I counted the petals into the trash but
somewhere between lonely nights and cold sheets I lost count,
and now I can't remember if
you love me or you love me not-

iv. sometimes I think maybe my hurt shrouds me
like an infant's fleece blanket,
mahogany doors etched with the solitude silhouette of the baby that never came.
i wish I told you I tried so hard to love you it hurt in the way roots strike dirt, dull and hollow.
icarus fell to the waves with a smile and I sank into heartbreak
with an easy familiarity-

v. adam planted eve a garden
and I slithered amongst rhododendron and roses,
because godforsaken love is better than desolate sanctity.
i handed eve an apple and let the core turn the golden brown of childhood summers,
of innocence, without ever leaving my front porch.
once, I slit my wrist with a kitchen knife, and watched the gold blood rust.

Second Place: “aSIaN” by Angelreana Choi

you say the word with such bitterness, such hatred,
with spit frothing at your lips,
eyes black and blue

gook.

The Korean sounds as wrong on your lips as it does on mine.

Give me back my people, my heritage.
 Free them from the pressed margins and into
 the entirety of the eight-and-a-half by eleven.

chink.

(n. \ 'chɪŋk\ : A patch of light admitted by a narrow opening or crack.)

Don't believe what other people say about yourself.
 Remove your blinds, breathe in the haphazard complexion
 of the modern world, and fight.
 Question, converse, think, believe,
 because our umbilical cords are buried in this earth, this country.

Peels of a persimmon,
 the fruit is ours.

Third Place: “Advances – A WW1 poem” by Katie Budinger

Another cry from the officers, still safe behind the line
 Artillery raining down, without warning, rhythm or time
 A man without a hand stands up, insisting he is fine
 And all of us charge forward, fear banished from my mind

Deadly drums of enemy guns, the screams of dying men
 Don't bother me anymore, like they used to way back when
 Dark staccato sounds help me breathe and count to ten
 Despite the fact a bullet has torn through my arm again

Victory will never come, at least it feels that way
 Vain leaders sit in cushy rooms, many miles from the fray
 Vague orders are what they send to either go or stay
 Very rarely do they seem to think their goals the costs outweigh

All started by a man with a gun, who shot another dead
 An archduke, or so they say, took a bullet to the head
 And now to pay for his life, millions more have bled
 A bullet or a piece of shrapnel, is through flesh that they both shred

Not a man among us has won the glory he once sought
 No one asks us if it's worth it, because we all know it was not
 Never will I forget the face of one that I have shot
 Nasty wounds, trench foot, and all that we have wrought

Come run across the dead with me, in the face of certain doom
 Cease wasting time and don that mask to avoid a deadly fume
 Cry out for Mother as you die, the ground will be your tomb
 Caked with death in front of me, rows of barbed wire loom

Eastern Front or Western Front, it's all just the same thing
 Endless walls of flame and dirt and bullets pass that zing
 Even as we fall and die, machine guns in our ears do ring
 Eager boys all sent to die for Tsar, Kaiser or King

Silence all across the front, nothing left to hear
 Somber feelings all around, no shouting and no cheer
 Sallow faces prepared to leave, wounded bringing up the rear
 Scars and visions all we have, to prove us there four score year

High School Teens' Choice Award: "Answer" by Livia Iwanicki

i'm trapped inside of myself
 your arms pull me in and i am rigid, small, a wooden artist's mannequin
 arms buckle at hinges and i lean in just enough so i don't lose balance
 falling into you

people aren't answers, they're questions

and i am too petrified of trying
of coaxing my pin-pricked tongue back from my throat and asking

my thin lips have a way of sinking down, inwards folding
when they mean to bloom, petals furled
upwards to your freckled cheeks

i mean to
some say to me, wait, let it be
while others say go for it , what's the harm
what is the harm?
they don't know how much it would hurt
that question of a statement
a mosaic of feeling
the rising and falling to come afterwards
the ensuing change of the blue green tides
the collision of rock on water, silence on skin