

# ECHOES

## Magazine

*Poetry, Art, Fiction, and Must-Read from City's Literary Minds*

**2023: The Pursuit of Perseverance**



Dear Collegians,

We are excited to announce another publication of the Echoes Literary Magazine!

This magazine is designed to give students an outlet where they can freely express themselves about significant issues, whether it be through poems, short stories, or artwork. While these past few years have been mentally and physically challenging for everyone, everyone has been able to change and grow through these difficult times. That is why we've decided that the theme of this year's magazine is **The Pursuit of Perseverance**. This magazine consists of writing and artwork that depict obstacles and perseverance and remind us that we all have a story. Echoes is here to provide students the chance to publish and share those stories for the world and each other to see. These students have channeled their inner artist, poet, songwriter, and have told their stories in a healthy way and we are fortunate to have a chance to celebrate them. Like these students, we encourage you to be bold and inspire others in your everyday life.

We hope that you take the time to read and enjoy this year's edition of the magazine!

Please feel free to DM us, email us, or contact your friends in the Writing Center with any questions, comments, or feedback.

Stay Safe and Be Well,

The Writing Center

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***Cut and Paste***  
**Farrell Annasong Beard (SongtheUniverse)**

I'm not no cut and paste girl  
I said, I'm not no cut and paste girl  
because when I step out the house just know  
I aim to shock the whole world  
the same world that tries to tear me down  
the same world that tells me I'm too much already  
just because I'm brown  
the same world that tries to dilute me like  
that soap in that dispenser in your bathroom  
that's half empty, or half full because  
I am an optimist after all  
but the world ain't a fan of optimism  
the world ain't a fan of my smile  
that's as bright as a million suns  
the world ain't a fan of my personality  
that's as bubbly as that good champagne  
that folks are so eager to pop  
the world ain't a fan that  
I take up space and I attempt to fill it with a love  
that I had to search for myself  
the world ain't a fan of that  
I'm so comfortable with nonconformity  
the world ain't a fan that  
being unconventional is how I feel pretty

the world ain't a fan  
that I'm not who they tell me I'm supposed to be  
because  
I'm not no cut and paste girl  
I said, I'm not no cut and paste girl  
because when I step out the house just know  
I aim to shock the whole world

**Balloons and Bears**  
**Na'Sear Traynham**

Balloons that once reached for the sky now deflated  
Dragging across the cement in the wind

A life over before it could begin  
Mothers burying a son like his father before him  
Her brown eyes now blue  
The grasses and flowers are more familiar with the teary rains of sorrow  
Then they are the rains of the spring  
Tears of grief form blackwater rivers  
As they run and overflow the streets like the Ganges

Stuffed bears whose joyous smiles once lit rooms  
An ephemeral smile  
Now soaked and stained and tattered  
Their smiles have drooped into a bare sullen gaze  
As if they understand the gravitas of their situation

That there will be  
More mothers who lose their sons  
More glib promises of change  
More balloons  
More bears.



Devin Allen

**All Black Boy's**  
**Kyara Maddox**

They say all black boys are blue in the moonlight  
Under sparkling stars they talk all smooth like  
Dipper mouth blues, got that beautifully cold rhythm  
And a whole lotta sexy jazz tone it was just in em'  
It was just in em' to make a paper dude look small  
That black boy ova' there in that moonlight  
You got all that history in your veins  
I ain't playing no games  
I can see it in your eyes  
Like a swarm of dark and lovely butterflies  
Did you know you're the calm after the storm  
Black boy...ova' there in the moonlight  
Skin just glistening all cool like  
And I'll be damned if you ain't the one that started it  
You're the weight you keep us grounded,  
you're a black man so majestic,  
You understand my struggle just as much as I understand yours so when u hold me I can be...  
A beautiful... black woman

And they say all black boys are blue in the moonlight  
Under sparkling stars they walk all true like  
Like the sweeties of Harlem it's evident you catch my eye  
I cannot begin to fathom  
You're so damn fly.

**Her**  
**Timera Tillery**

Her body, My Art  
She had the aura of a palette.  
For yellow, blasting out of her like a bright sunshine on a cloudy day. Beautiful  
Green, as she loved the world. I don't know what for but I suspect nature.  
Black for being dark inside, she's always had black in her but no one could see  
And for red, as the silver blades dug into her skin until her blood ran in streams down her  
arm.  
My canvas and color.



**Star**  
**Raphael McFadden**

I am a star, blazing, alluring, and gargantuan  
I am Radiance and opulence  
I am what you wake for in the morning  
I am the gravitational pull that you can't resist  
I am the airless and scorching heat that suffocates you, leaving you breathless.  
You can not live without me  
I am the luminescence in a void of darkness  
You are nothing without me  
I am the presence that occupies a room, a planet, a solar system, and a galaxy.  
I am one of a kind  
I am the manifestation of creation  
I am a primordial being made for the ether of the universe  
I am Life incarnate  
I am also lonely

**My City**  
**Sophia Renzi**



***The Battle of the Broken City***  
**Jaden Taylor**

Cracked streets  
Broken homes  
Even more broken families

Dad's gone  
Guns Drawn  
Someone's son is lost

Black on Black crimes  
White cops lying  
Happy children now depressed  
Everyone's oppressed

Beauty in the day  
Ghost town by night  
Sirens keep wailing  
Is this alright?

The silent projects.  
No one DDH  
Downtowns empty  
The city stands cold

The subway screeches  
The people weeping  
Our faith is seeping  
We all stand alone

Blue skies by 8  
Red by 6  
Black by 9  
No lights are lit



This city is dark  
Our faith can't rebuild anymore  
The people here are scared  
This is Bmore

We burned the city down  
When we were ignored  
We once stood together  
Alone  
In Bmore

Now we're fighting  
Something more,  
Something we can't see,  
Something we can't read,  
Something disturbing our peace,  
Something that isn't like you or like me,  
In our Bmore



Devin Allen

**Silenced**  
**Aysia (AJ) Jenkins**



**Take Control Or just ...Drown**  
**Aniya Gathings**

Out on this river, drowning in your own oppressed reality.  
When will you ever come up for air,  
When will you ever come to your senses that those tears are meaningless if you don't  
try to swim against those waves.  
It is you against the people  
who have never swam in that river  
or ever fought on that battlefield.  
No matter how hard you have to fight against adversity,  
Take control of your own destiny  
Because the wounds are only left with you  
in the end.



**Lonely**  
**Amna Kahn**

Leaves blowing  
Laughter fills the air  
Couples kiss without a care  
Alone, I am  
Around is many  
Yet I'm Lonely  
The sun is dimming  
Soon it's dark  
Hours passed  
Yet I'm the last  
Pitch black, Sitting alone  
It's snowing  
Wishing to be  
Hoping I'll be  
Loner is what I see  
It's not what I wish to be.

## ***Happy Mistake***

**Julia Sanchez**

I wished I had given her a tighter hug before I left, wishing I knew that I wouldn't see her again. A moment in my life where I thought I would regret, but it was just a happy mistake. At 8 years old having to start working to help my family, duties of being the oldest sister. I loved helping out my mom. She was my best friend and I loved always seeing that bright smile, she had the most beautiful eyes ever. Mi mama, she was the sun of our pueblo; Everyone loved her; Everyone knew her; And always wanted to be with her, "Doña Mari!" That is what everyone would call her, my pueblo was small so everyone was like family. Once I got a little older around 17, I would work 9 hours away from home and would come back every six months. I worked for rich people, I would take care of their kids, clean, cook, etc. I had to learn to be independent at a really young age, but I'm happy I did because I wouldn't be where I'm at today. After that job, I got offered a better opportunity. They were offering me to work in the United States. "¿Cómo le digo a mi mama?" How can I tell my mom I said; I had so many mixed emotions, but excitement more than anything. "Should I tell her?" I thought about it and I ended up telling her I needed her help in deciding what to do. "Mama!" I yielded, and she rushed in and I told her. I think she was more excited than me, she wanted me to go. She told me how it's a great opportunity and would help the family out a lot more. I thought about it; \$1 in the United States is 9 Mexican pesos; That was a lot! I agreed to go, it was only 3 months. I made sure I had all the paperwork and to have my visa; my mom was by my side the whole time. As the day got closer I was more and more nervous. Those 3 days waiting at the bus station was a nightmare. They checked my

blood, to make sure I'm not pregnant or had a virus. After those 3 days, I hugged my mom and grandma. I got on that bus and teared up because I was going to miss them so much. After traveling for a couple of days I arrived in Texas, everything was so different here, just like those movies I bought. I got there and by the next day I got to work, I worked harder than ever. I wanted the best for my family. Then after those 3 months, I knew I couldn't go back, my mom got sick. It wasn't anything major but I was the only one that could pay off her medicine, so I couldn't go back. After a year of sending my mom her medicine she wasn't getting better, it only stayed the same, so I looked for a better job that paid more, and that's what I did. Not knowing English was such a struggle, I was in a place where I felt I didn't belong; I stayed for her. I started sending all my money to her. I needed her to feel better, so I could go back, but that never happened. After some time I met this guy and I ended up falling for him; He was everything I wanted and in my eyes, he was the one. He helped me a lot with my mom and I loved him more for it. Years passed and she only got worse. Her sickness was growing, I felt like my world was collapsing. I knew my mom was strong, she was the strongest woman I knew. When my daughter started to go to school she would learn English songs and would sing to my mom. November 1, 2013, the best mother I could ever ask for had left me. I remember walking down the street of my house with my daughter and son and receiving the message, I fainted. Luckily there were two women behind me that caught me on time before I hit my head on the floor. I burst into tears. At that moment I just wanted to go back and just see her one last time, but I couldn't. 2023, almost nine years ago that my beautiful mother left me. This would be the last

year that people would pray for her. A tradition in my country where every year for nine years they prayed nine days for their loved one, this is called a "Novenario". I miss you mom.

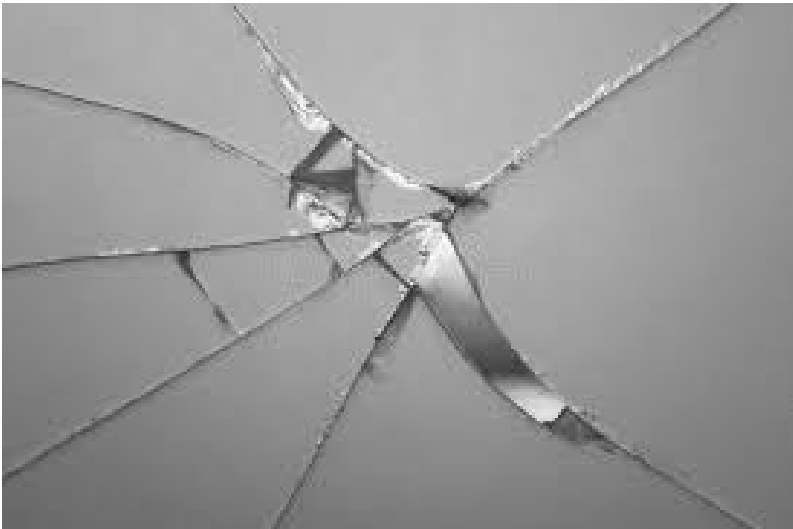


***Unpleasant Remembrance***  
**Aysia (AJ) Jenkins**

The walls of this room;  
So quiet;  
So faint;  
The air thick with a sweet yet familiar smell;  
It haunts me;  
The never-ending walls moan and groan at me;  
I have been here before;  
The bright sun;  
The taste of ice cream in my hospital bed;  
The four big doors opening as I start grade school;  
The filth of my past home;  
It's projected onto the walls constantly;  
I have been here before;  
A sweet yet sour place;  
A heaven and hell;  
I have been here before;  
The eye from which I observe never blinking;  
Always remembering.

**Mirror**  
**Anonymous**

the broken mirror stares back at me  
their face fragmented from my fist  
anyone else would be mad, but they understand  
they understand like no one else  
how their appearance alone can anger me –  
how they look just like me but something's off,  
they must be bent somehow,  
or I'm seeing them at an angle,  
I don't know what it is but they just look so wrong –  
and that morning, it really angered me  
they have no choice but to understand,  
they're me, aren't they?  
me, but just a little off  
not quite a funhouse mirror, but not a perfect one either.  
so they endured my abuse until i swung my fist –  
so tired of their distorted reflection  
so frustrated at seeing them every morning –  
and then they finally struck back,  
finally shattered and left me bloody  
with seven years of bad luck.



**All I Have**  
**Theo Porter**

All I have is fear.

I fear for all the trans kids that disappear without a single memory

For the lost future of Hope Verbeek, and Avery Schurlock

I fear for all the young girls who believe they're not enough

To be strong enough against a man in their world

All I have is fear for the youth

All I have is fear for my people.

All I have is love.

I love how beautiful the earth is

Mother nature is truly the perfect artist.

I love the movement of the water

And how it dances with my body.

All I have is love for the stars

Who I believed granted my greatest desires.

All I have is love for the human body

Details in our fingerprints match the patterns of a single tree.

All I have is hate.

I hate the adults who decide my life for me

Don't worry I won't ruin your conservative lives by living to be myself

I hate that the world has taught me to hate myself before loving others

All I have is hate for these small minds

All I have is hate for what I could become.

All I have is love.

I love how we connect to every living thing

From the people we love, to the soil and the wind that travels across our skin

I love the smell of the flowers

And how they attract the bees

All I have is love for the stars

Who I told all about you.

All I have is love for the human body



That is strong enough to connect with the earth  
And that is weak enough to depend on it.



***Daughters of Artemis***  
**Leniah Robinson**

We women are the moon and like the moon we come in all different colors. We women are the moon. We are dainty yet strong by allowing our gentle light to glow instead of burn allowing people to see without being blinded by our magnificent light. We women are the moon because we have perfectly deep and small craters and scars that make us unique. We women are the moon we are unlike any other yet we are exactly the same. We women are the moon and the sun tries to dim our light only for us to turn it into the most beautiful show they've ever seen our light becomes red like the blood that flows through our veins and anger and yet we are the only ones to be seen. We women are the moon making our opposite the sun. We women are the moon and we've let the sun shine for long enough. I believe it's time for a Solar Eclipse to let the sun know that they can't and won't shine for hate and unjustified violence. We women are the moon, we have the power but won't use it in the ways they expect us to because we are the moon.

**Miles Anderson**  
***A Dream Preferred***  
**(Award Winning Essay)**

The thought-provoking poem titled "A Dream Deferred" written by Langston Hughes explores the disastrous reality of an unfulfilled dream. Rather than this being an analysis of every line and stanza, I'm taking its larger implication to form my own dream for a better world. I've come to a realization that the only way we as a species can provide material change is to hope. The realization that hope has been *Deferred* out of the minds of our youth and population in general, scares me. Without the desire or a *Dream* for a better future, hopelessness becomes one of the most damning and destructive mentalities one can align themselves under. Hopeless youth will become unproductive adults and inevitability sets back all of the progress we've already achieved. Our lack of hope leads to a nihilistic destruction of our own minds and entraps us in an endless cycle of unproductivity. Obviously easier said than done, nevertheless, our ability to be optimistic and hopeful is key to bringing a better social and literal environment into the world. Behind every progressive speech and protest was the idea that together we can make reform possible, thus my idea for a better future aligns with similar principles.

Dr. King spoke at the nation's capital 60 years ago, and broadcasted his dreams for an improved society in which we can all properly co-exist, believing that his broadcast would eventually become a *dream preferred*. In essence, my dream would be a world where people can still have hopes and aspirations and aren't suppressed by opposing ideologies. Nonetheless, we must encourage each other to allow the continuation of hope to survive so that one day we can reflect upon our progress and see that all of our efforts have finally led to a better world.

***When Flower Petals Crumble***  
**Moriah Goodman**

Things Blooming like a flower,  
With one bad leaf  
Should the whole thing die?  
Or should we continue rolling the dice until something changes  
When the person you should really blame is  
You...

Did you water it and cherish it,  
like you appreciate your new jordan 4's,  
You let the rotten leaf spoil the entire pot  
There were flowers thriving  
the pot you were depriving of nurturing  
yet you ignored that

Each petal was different.  
But the spoiled ones you claimed you helped...  
Were ignored  
The ones striving and thriving  
Are put under a microscope.  
You won't ask questions like,  
How did this happen?  
Where did I go wrong because...  
In your eyes  
Not watering the flowers is fine  
It's normalized

This is a ceaseless cycle  
While the petals are peaceless  
When will things change

**Adventurous**  
**Jael Haney**

Maggie sat in her high school classroom, staring out the window at the bright blue sky. The sun was shining, and she could see the leaves of the trees rustling in the wind. It was a beautiful day, and she couldn't help but feel a pang of jealousy towards the birds flying freely outside. She let out a sigh and turned her attention back to the teacher, who was droning on about the history of the Roman Empire. Maggie had always been a good student, but lately, she found herself daydreaming more and more during class. She just couldn't seem to focus on anything the teacher was saying.

As the bell rang to signal the end of class, Maggie packed up her things and headed out into the hallway. She glanced at the clock and groaned when she saw that she still had three more classes before the end of the day. It felt like an eternity.

Maggie's mind wandered as she walked to her next class. She thought about all the things she could be doing instead of sitting in a classroom all day. She could be hiking in the mountains, exploring a new city, or even just lounging on the beach.

It was then that she realized what she really wanted: freedom. Maggie was tired of being stuck in a classroom all day, every day. She wanted to be out in the world, experiencing new things and living life to the fullest.

The rest of the day dragged on, and Maggie could hardly wait for the final bell to ring. As soon as it did, she grabbed her backpack and bolted out the door. She couldn't wait to get home and start planning her escape from school.

Over the next few weeks, Maggie spent all her spare time researching and planning. She read books about travel and adventure, researched different countries and cultures, and even started learning a few new languages.

As her plans started to come together, Maggie began to feel a sense of excitement and freedom she had never experienced before. She realized that for the first time in her life, she was truly in control of her own destiny.

One day, Maggie finally mustered up the courage to tell her parents about her plans. They were hesitant at first, but after seeing how passionate and determined she was, they eventually came around. They knew that Maggie was smart and capable, and they trusted her to make good decisions.

And so, the summer after Maggie's senior year of high school, she set out on the adventure of a lifetime. She traveled all over the world, experiencing new cultures and meeting new people.

She hiked in the mountains, explored ancient ruins, and even tried her hand at surfing.

Maggie was happy, truly happy, for the first time in her life. She felt alive, free, and in control of her own destiny. She knew that she would never be able to go back to the life she had before.

As Maggie sat on a remote beach in Thailand, watching the sun dip below the horizon, she thought about all the people back home. She knew that most of them would never understand why she had left school and set out on this adventure. But for Maggie, it was the only way she could truly be free. And as the stars twinkled overhead, Maggie felt a sense of peace and contentment that she had never experienced before. She knew that she had made the right choice, and that no matter where life took her next, she would always be free.

***Desire To Stop Time***  
**Gertrude Smith**



**Music Class**  
**Aysia (AJ) Jenkins**

Tick, tick, tick.  
There goes the metronome.  
Tick, tick, tick.  
The chatter becomes louder.  
Tick, tick, tick.  
My feet become static.  
Tick, tick, tick.  
The screeches and screams from  
their instruments become unbearable.  
Tick, tick, tick.  
My ears begin to lose their purpose.

Suddenly there's Silence.  
I feel like I'm floating.  
My soul disconnected from it's  
meister.  
My mind being transported to that  
lovely place called "Dream."

But as they say,  
There's always quiet before  
the storm.

TICK, TICK.  
My leg starts bouncing.  
TICK, TICK.  
My thoughts suddenly leave me.  
TICK, TICK.  
My soul returns to its meister  
and begins twirling.  
TICK, TICK.  
There's daggers piercing through  
my eardrums. I can't take it

anymore.  
TICK, TICK.  
Dear god, help me.  
TICK, TICK.  
Someone, anyone. Help me.  
TICK, TICK.  
Let me out. Let me out. LET ME OUT!

TICK.  
Please –  
TICK.  
May I –  
TICK.  
Go to the bathroom?

~

***They're Just Guts***  
**Gertrude Smith**





**Isolation**  
**Amir Atkins**

*3 years*

*1200 days*

*28800 hours*

*172800 minutes*

*103,680,000 seconds*

*I've been to several schools throughout my life but none quite like this*

*This school lacking melanin*

*Everyone there was one in the same but very few stood out*

*I was one of the few*

*From the styling of my crown to the way i enunciate my words or*

*Lack thereof*

*I tried my best to be like the rest*

*I had very little success*

*I destroyed myself*

*To please those who could care less*



Devin Allen

**Little One**  
**Janeya Wilkerson**

Our ancestors migrated in hopes of great change  
Not knowing later on their same people would decide their fate.  
Violence, bloodshed, killings  
Is that all you know little one?

When you look outside what do you see?  
Do you see a future of hope or a catastrophe.  
Hungry for change  
Hungry for power  
Hungry for a time when hunger would not consume you anymore.  
Do you understand what I mean little one?

Violence takes over you, it consumes you and eats you alive.  
Tearing your brown flesh and spitting it on the concrete ground  
Someone who doesn't look like you determines what you do.  
and oh, don't be in the wrong place at the "wrong time"  
that may be your last breath in sight  
Please little one, i'm trying to save you

Violence is all that you know  
and sometimes, I wonder if it'll prohibit your growth.  
Don't entertain this violence, or spread it more  
But, change it.  
Do you see what I mean little one?

You're the future.  
To help stop the bloodshed in the streets and rampage killings that we see  
You scream "Cease fire" but we fight for a future where firing will no longer be.  
Little one I need you to pay attention, please.

Listen to what your pops told you.  
Stay in school, get an education  
I promise in the end it'll reward you.

Then build that knowledge and grow  
And come back to this place you've once known to help rebuild it  
so that future generations don't have to watch the killings and the fear that you went through,  
Please,  
Little one don't you see?  
You're the future for the betterment of our city.



Devin Allen

***Finding My Voice***  
**Blanca Rosalez**

The airplane landed  
and  
WELCOME TO BALTIMORE  
the board said.  
looking out the window  
same cars  
yet no bursting Bachata  
same bodegas yet no beers or street dancing  
with the loud music playing outside  
Same schools  
Not the same language  
7AM- 3PM  
all the day long of words without meaning  
Countless nights of sleep translating  
English To Spanish  
Spanish to English  
Going to City College was a goal  
And So was getting out of ESOL.  
I had made it!  
Fluent in English  
Yet  
Not enough

More had to be done  
SOMOS,  
Bill testimonies,  
Students Strikes,  
Peer tutoring,  
Had become what gave me joy the most  
My Baltimore community had  
become my greatest gift  
And for that I thank  
Finding my voice

Is part of all the good things  
Baltimore brought to me.



**te amo**

**Liernelis Diaz Casado**

i'm scared of you,  
How do you do this?

you say you love me but,  
Much love?

if you cared-  
-More lies?

you try to fix me, forget it  
Do you even care?

we're grown now.  
You wish I was different?

loved the way you yelled at me  
Want me to yell back?

***Livin Ain't Free***  
**Maurice Cornish Jr.**

I still remember that day  
Embedded in my brain  
From the day I arrived  
To the day we died

I still remember the sound of the leaky faucet  
That left behind stains in the sink  
And the delaminated walls  
To the dim lights that would always blink

I still remember the sound of fireworks  
That left shirts stained of rose pink  
And the 911 calls  
Followed by sirens that rang in sync

Mama held me tight, but I still caught a glimpse  
Through the glass is seen Belair Road  
My reflection lay still  
And my innocence with him



Devin Allen

## ***The Civil Rights Trip***

### **Julian Koulish**

When 32 high school students from two public and one private school in the Baltimore area decided to embark on a Civil Rights Trip of the South, none of us could have imagined the lasting impact this week-long trip would have on our everyday lives. For weeks and months leading up to the trip, students from Baltimore City College High School, Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women, and The Park School of Baltimore met in small groups to raise money for our expensive adventure down south. To make our trip successful, we had to raise around \$900 per student attending the trip, so every member of the trip earned their spot. We raised money through leaf raking, bake sales, and rallying donations. Additionally, we frequently convened to discuss and better understand the historical significance of the sites we planned to visit.

On a cold and dark January morning, just prior to Martin Luther King day, our cohort of 32 conscientious high school students, along with our eight committed and caring chaperones, set off on our journey. Our excursion commenced as we crammed ourselves into a coach bus that traversed us through five southern states.

Our journey began in Greensboro, North Carolina, where we stopped at the former Woolworth lunch counter, which has since been converted into the International Civil Rights Center and Museum. While learning the history of the Woolworth lunch counter sit-ins, we came to the realization that a significant aspect of this trip was to place ourselves into the shoes of those who came before us. Our diverse group of high school students consisting of

White, African American, Jewish, and Latino students, closely resembled the courageous students who, in solidarity with the Greensboro Four, sat in those same chairs generations before us. The Greensboro Four inspired a movement in which local, diverse students sat in and protested the segregated Woolworth's lunch counter. The parallel between us and those brave students inspired our group to begin turning inward to ponder what differences we can make through the power of nonviolent protest.

Throughout our week-long journey, we witnessed the stark socioeconomic disparities throughout the southern United States as we traveled through modern, wealthy Atlanta, Georgia, and the deserted, poverty-ridden Mississippi Delta. While in Atlanta, we visited the Ebenezer Baptist Church during the Martin Luther King Day service, where we were lucky enough to see Senator Raphael Warnock preach. Senator Warnock not only preached the word of God but also explained the legacy Dr. King left on his childhood church. Following our captivating Martin Luther King Day, we continued our journey further south. By Wednesday, we reached the Mississippi Delta where we visited the Rosedale Freedom Project. The Rosedale Freedom Project supports "the Mississippi Delta's young leaders to develop critical consciousness and the practice of justice through community building". While there, we learned about the lack of educational opportunities in the poverty-stricken Mississippi Delta. Rosedale, one of the poorest towns in Mississippi, serves as the home for the Rosedale Freedom Project. Rosedale's average household income in 2019 was just under \$35,000 a year. Our group recognized how fortunate we all were when seeing how the students living in this area of the country had to live. Experiencing this extreme poverty first-hand motivated our



whole group to reflect on the opportunities we are lucky enough to have living in a city like Baltimore.

Following our drive through the Mississippi Delta, we stopped at Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas, the birthplace of public-school integration in America. Little Rock Central High School was where the Little Rock Nine became the first group of African American children to integrate into an all white public school. After hearing a moving information session about the history of the Little Rock Nine and the history of Central High School, we met with Dr. Sybil Jordan Hampton. Dr. Hampton was a successor to the original Little Rock Nine who attended Central High school as an African American woman in 1959. Dr. Hampton entered the newly reopened Little Rock school system after it was shut down due to the backlash the Little Rock Nine created. Dr. Hampton was one of many brave young people who helped pioneer the continuation of integration in the American Public School System. Dr Hampton not only helped us recognize how recent this history was, but also what our lives would look like if brave young people like her never took a stand against segregated education.

After our 19 hour bus ride, I returned home inspired, motivated, and tired from our week long adventure. After much deliberation, our smaller group of ten Baltimore City College High School Students reconvened back in school, to plan a presentation of our experiences on the trip. We presented to small groups in our school once a week during the four weeks of Black History Month. We educated our classmates briefly about the civil rights history we had learned in hopes to inspire some to go on the trip next year.

**My City**  
**Sophia Renzi**



**Changing For The Better**  
**Xavier Hughes**

Growing up and becoming a better me  
Leaving behind my childish tendencies  
Moving on in the world  
Changing for the better  
Not everyone gonna like it but that's whatever  
Watching my growth through my story roll  
Seeing the progress I made and it's shown  
I'm not where I used to be  
Changing to become the better me

See you walking away  
Distancing yourself away from me  
Changing how you feel  
Out of comfortability  
Because you were scared of change happening to me

Changing myself for the better  
Ignoring my insecurities and flourishing  
In my element  
Confident in the room I'm stepping in  
Proud of the person I'm becoming  
Change ain't always bad  
When you make progress instead of running

**What Is Real**  
**Xiang Gao**

It was a cool December night, the window was open blowing a cool breeze into my room. I was getting ready to fall asleep, and feeling the breeze on my face I fell deeper and deeper into slumber. It wasn't long from the time I fell asleep I woke up to my father calling me downstairs "Danny, Danny! If you don't come down here you're in big trouble." I was half asleep and checked my phone, it was 2:32 AM. While getting out of bed I mumbled why was he calling me this late. Is he crazy? While I walked down the hall I peeked into my parent's room. My parents always sleep with the door cracked so the cat can come in and out of their room. When I walked by, my eyes widened and my soul had left me. There lay my mom, and right next to her, my dad was fast asleep.

Thoughts ran through my head adrenalin seeped through my veins then I heard it again "Danny! Come downstairs" with the same exact voice as my dad but my dad was sleeping right there. I began to climb downstairs trying to be as quiet as possible with two hands on the railing, my hands were trembling with every step. My heart beats faster and faster; it feels like Mike Tyson is using my heart as a punching bag. When I got to the bottom I looked down the hall pitch black, I tried to turn on the lights but the switch seemed to not work then I heard the voice again but now in the direction of the kitchen "DANNY~" I ran to the kitchen through my living room I turned on the light in the kitchen the bright light blinded my eyes, then I heard it again but now it was much closer, It was behind me "DANNY there you are, come help ME with MY Dinner." When I turned around, no one was there, only the light that seeped into the living room

from the kitchen lights. When I looked up, sweat came down from the side of my face and my breath became heavier and my gaze became stronger. I came face to face with it. It had long and skinny limbs, its flesh was gray and stretchy, and its eyes were pitch black. His face was my neighbor's face but it was just the flesh. The thing was wearing his face like a mask then he grinned at me like a cartoon character, stretching what was left of my neighbor's face.

I have no time to ponder why this thing is in my house. I ran under it and past it, and the smell of rotten flesh seeped into my nose like a worm wiggling into the dirt. When I looked behind me it was still looking at me, still on the ceiling. Still, smiling. I quickly fled up the steps, my breath became heavier, each exhale my breath became louder. I got to the top of the stairs I looked back again praying he wasn't there, and nothing, no noise, not even crickets. I waited a bit for something to make sure I wasn't dreaming then I heard a low pitch scratching and it was getting closer as it was like carving with wood. Then it peered around the corner with the skin still on its head now drooping sideways, its eyes infinitely staring into my fear-filled eyes. I walked backward keeping my eyes on it when it left my sight, I bolted to my room.

I quickly locked my door and then grabbed a baseball bat ready to defend myself. I stood in the middle of the room waiting for the door to break open. I waited for a good 10 minutes then a knock at my door I yelled "who is it" from the other side of my door. I heard my dad's voice "what's all the commotion" I replied "you're not my dad go away" "what is going on" he replied, then I heard my mother's voice "sweety are you ok, do you want to come out to talk about it" I was confused can it use two voice at the same time? I yelled with a questioning tone "Mom?" she replied "yes sweety" I slowly walked to the door and unlocked it I then stepped back still

holding my bat I yelled "OK you can open the door now" The door started to creep open there standing there were my parents. I quickly dropped my bat and ran to them to hug them. I told them what happened while still embracing them. I felt my parents' hands on my back when they hugged me back then I felt their fingernails digging into my back. I cried out "OW!". I looked up at them, they were still staring at the middle of the room, my face turned pale when I saw it standing behind my parents, the thing's arm was in my parents' back, it was controlling them like a sick puppet. I tried to push myself loose but it was no use. Their arm wasn't budging, then from the back of my mom's back he pulled out its hand, its hand had the color of tar and a texture of cement. It reached out and grabbed my head then with a quick motion snap. I woke up with a cold sweat and my bed was covered in sweat. It was all a dream. Then I got up to brush my teeth. While I was brushing my teeth, I glanced at the mirror and saw that I had a strange scratch on my face. I just shrugged it off and got ready for school.

***The Stop of My Breath, When at The Bus Stop***  
**Juan Amaro**

Mindin my business at the bus stop  
when talked to  
surprised.  
gun drawn on me  
scared.  
give the phone to me  
or else  
ok here while shaking  
please don't do nothing to me  
The many thoughts rushing to my head  
Scared. Nervous.  
Anxious. Helplessness.  
Head empty just doing what is being told  
Someone calls his name  
They look away and he knows he has been caught  
What should I do? Do I try to run?  
I can't, my feet are stuck to the floor  
Run Juan Run  
So many thoughts running through the head  
Time is going slow while thoughts are rushing  
Everyone is mindin their business while you are here trying to get help  
Nothing comes out of your mouth even when you try to  
Nothing.  
Back to the present time  
He is gone but without your phone?  
First thought is to go into the first bus you see  
Don't look at anybody or talk to anybody even if you know them  
Just RUN, Finally you get home  
Tears start running down the face and that's when your thoughts stop  
Never take the bus ever again even if you have to, DON'T.

## ***Death's Curse: A Letter to my beloved sister***

**Kelssey Rivera**

I don't wish this upon you little sis but I can't help it and predict that you just might experience it, just a bit more than I. Momma mentioned it a few times but I didn't think it'd happen so soon. Just know that; I would've done anything in my power to stop it all, stop your pain, stop it all. Momma mentioned that it'd get better, but If I'm being honest with you it hasn't. As much as I'd want to protect you from it I don't think I'll be able to. Because to me you're worth living for. I love you little one and there isn't anything that could stop me from doing so. Please sister of mine, above all else guard your heart, for from it flow springs of life. Remember the teachings mother and father taught us as children living in a world of endless outcomes all that would eventually lead us back to the start; a reunion with the creator of the universe.

These conspiracies reign the world, it's almost as if the idea of a world's end has been written down in a book. The Revelations of an end were well taught in history, and just like that, there's a day you're born and an end that everyone regrets meeting, but by then it's too late. Oh, darling, I don't think there is a better way to say this but there comes an end. There comes a moment where death presents herself and comes to claim what belongs to her.

Shall I be bluntly honest with you dear, in fact, I'd say that I couldn't bear to lie to you. I feel so exhausted and tired of this stereotypical idea of end. I've gotten tired of lies and mishaps of how the outcome could change if only you had so much time to do so. To be truthful with you... I just didn't think she'd be first. To be truthful with you. I didn't think she'd be last



either. It has come to my attention dear that you have yet to experience the closeness yet connectedness of a person just like I did with Grandma.

She was my everything. Even though her scoldings and echoes recapped within my mind and her words stabbed like an ax on a tree. Grandma was just meant to be like that. I remember when she held you and cried with you when you got hurt. I remember observing from a distance and hearing both of you guys laughing about something so simple. It'd been like that for me. It's just a matter of time before you realize it's too late. You've questioned me a few times and it's come the time for me to tell you...

Mom got a call on December 31st around 3 am, we rushed to the hospital as soon as we could. There she lay peacefully, she looked so beautiful with her brown and white speckled hair. Her hand looked so fragile yet so strange. I'd never seen her so still in my life. Around her hand was a black hair tie; She always carried one just in case. To be honest dear; it's like she felt her coming all along because in a sense she always said "Goodbye" when she walked out the door she'd mention "I'm not sure when I'll see you again". But, you know what hurts the most; Grandma called me a day before and I didn't reply; in fact, I thought she bothered me too much and I didn't have time for her. Guilt; that specifically kills any desire, becomes a burden to me and to the people around me. I'd begun to hate myself and there she came knocking at my door.

See little one, Death is inevitable; it'll come when you least expect so. Now hold fast to what you have, so that no one will take your crown of eternal life. But to be truthful; all of these are what can be known as the beginnings of sorrows. Every so often you'll reminisce about the what-ifs and could haves. But there comes a point where even lamenting sounds selfish.

Listen; hear the sound from afar, in the midst of the darkness. Here comes who so many call for. Here she comes little one; I hear her from a distance, I hear the chains that she drags behind. I hear her; I hear the laughter she proclaims as she comes to pick the next victim up like an uber ride. Now I want you to understand that these end of times are truthfully the designated times meant to occur sooner or later. The times we were spoken of ever since I can remember. The signs have begun to happen.

~

***Deterioration***  
**Aysia (AJ) Jenkins**



***This Seat is Taken***  
**Sakari Greene**

Black Lives Matter  
The Internet yells  
Their cries heard from across the world  
Yet days later  
Their cries go silent  
Like an uninterrupted river  
Then they swoop in  
Like loud, obnoxious crows  
Picking at the dead carcass  
Of a beautiful city  
Creating stories  
On their way out  
Causing outlookers  
To be hypnotized  
By these false stories  
Thus they spread  
Like disease and wildfire  
However  
On 2801 Sisson St  
Lies a remedy  
In the unlikeliest of places  
Where the White only  
Is washed away  
And replaced with Colored only  
This cure is the only remedy  
So let's squash this shit  
One wildfire after another  
Create a racket while you're at it  
So your voice is heard  
For all to see and hear

**Dear You**  
**Yahnique Heggie**

Dear You

I don't want you, as a white person, to forget  
All the black people who suffered  
All the tears, screams, and riots  
I don't want you to forget the people who fought for their rights

You nor I can ever experience the pain  
my people went through to get here.  
The long fights for freedom  
The aching feet and the bleeding backs of my ancestors

We stand tall  
And yes, we are not perfect; we don't try to be.  
We are not untouchable. You are just afraid.  
You think we are sensitive, but we can take a punch  
You know we've taken many

This world caters to the white man  
You are so high but act like you are not  
White privilege is something that can never leave your lineage  
You don't see the unfairness. Your supremacy blinds you  
We see the cops, and white superiors treat us differently  
then someone who looks just like them  
We live in a world where you are better than us  
We live in a world where we need to be shaped into you  
We lose our individuality to look professional  
Get your hair tamed and wear nice clothes  
Have to change your vernacular and sound proper with no slang  
The injustice has been the same year after year  
Will it ever stop

Now, I want you to remember this

Your pain is valid but will never compare  
You have a habit of playing the victim  
Your little cut is nowhere near a gunshot or seeing your loved one hanging  
in a tree in the middle of the town for everyone to see

Sincerely, Me



***The Girl***  
**Chloe Watkins**

As a girl I'm told to be funny but not too funny  
Sit and be comfortable but not slouch  
Tell a man what u want but never look easy  
But I'm not like them  
I'm The girl in her room  
sits and wonders  
The girl in her room  
sits and wonders  
Why not me  
Why is she not good enough for him  
Why can't she give him the world  
The girl in her room sits and wonders why she cares for him so much  
Yet he barely looks her way  
Whether it's his goofiness or bluntness  
She can't help but be fond  
The girl in her room sits  
and hopes for a chance  
A chance to change his mind  
A chance to show him what he's missing  
The girl in her room  
sits and wonders

***Forever In My Heart***  
**Jaden Fleet**

Mom when you passed away in 2018 my heart was broken  
I was crying for days because I knew that no one was joking.  
I couldn't stop crying because I knew that was your number 2  
These last 4 years were really hard without you  
Even though that I know that we will never be far apart  
I know that you will be Forever in my Heart.

Mom when you were here we would go  
Out and have some fun.  
We would go to the movies and watch  
Marvel movies like Avengers.  
I would get nachos and an  
orange Fanta. You would get  
Popcorn with an orange Fanta as well.  
We would go to red lobster, one  
Of our favorite restaurants. I  
Would get popcorn shrimp and fries  
With a fruit punch and brownies.  
You would get a baked potato with shrimp  
And strawberry lemonade. I just miss  
Spending time with you and all  
The fun things we did together.

Mom after u left I didn't know what to  
Do without you. In December 2018  
It was my 14th birthday and that was  
My first time spending my birthday without  
You. I went to my room and I started to cry for  
A while because you left me too soon. I wasn't happy during  
That time. Instead of dwelling the entire day, I picked myself up  
And I went to Urban Air for my party. Then I went out to  
Red Robin for dinner. I had ordered Chicken tenders and Fries  
For my meal and a chocolate cake for dessert. I went home to

I opened my gifts and I received a lot of money. I don't remember  
How much money I received but I started to feel happy again. Later  
That night my friends and I started to play Fortnite all night. Playing my  
Game with my family and friends made me feel good because  
They are always there for me. I realized that  
You are my guardian angel and you are watching over me. I have a family who loves  
Me and takes care of me.

Mom when you were home we  
Would always watch movies or tv shows  
Together.  
We would make popcorn and drink some soda.  
I remember this one time You, Mariah, and I were  
At the kitchen table playing Uno and I made you draw  
8 cards. Your reaction was so funny because you didn't  
Know what to do next and your facial expression was funny  
As well. When it was time for dinner we went to go grab  
Some pizza for everyone to eat. When we got back home  
We were sitting at the table just talking about the uno game that was played earlier  
And we were talking about our favorite tv shows and movies.  
We ended the night by watching a Disney movie Called Descendants 2 and a Disney  
Show called Ravens Home  
I felt warm that night because I got to spend the entire day with you and my sister.  
I would want that same feeling with them every day

**Stay in your nest**  
**C. Howard**

"Defend the nest"

Leaving the nest can be exciting!  
Not knowing what comes next can be the scariest.  
a city full of hungry people who are just willing to eat and take  
Makes you unsure of the next move  
So, stay in your nest  
Guard it, Patrol it, Protect it , and don't let anyone invade it  
Zi just posted his new car on Instagram  
that new Infinity? I wish that were me!  
Zi was killed last night and the car was stolen  
I guess it was his time to go.  
my mom used to tell me she used to walk all the way from cherry hill to Greenmount  
She would meet up with friends on the way there and stay out from 9A- 7P  
Oh, how I wish I could go back to her days.  
When Instagram wasn't even a thing  
When It was safe to go out and play all day!  
When all your worries was planted deep into being in the real world instead of technology  
When you had no troubles traveling to the now labeled "bad areas"  
What happened to women and kids being off-limits?  
The kids are getting killed more and more nowadays  
Kids robbing, killing, shooting  
Now here I am at home barricaded.  
She's too scared for me to become another statistic  
You can agree this place is beautiful  
But it's trashy, filthy, and dirty  
Oh! You thought I was talking about the harbor?  
Where do they dump the bodies of the innocent?  
Where do they throw the electric scooters at?  
Where its so much trash being dumped, that the water isn't even clear anymore?  
They make it hard for us to get what we need  
So we hunt, kill, and feast on the ones who live off of the bare minimum  
And let's not even begin to talk about the education system!



My City, My City, My City

They wonder why the youth don't want to defend our city

It's a blessing to make it past 20 in Baltimore.

& still my advice to you always

Is to stay in your nest.



Devin Allen

### **The Key**

**Joshua Johnson**

I want to flourish.

I want to succeed.

I want to spread my wings as if I were a butterfly leaving my cocoon. Soaring high in the sky.

Being

able to show the world my beauty.

As I wonder "what's the point". The point is I'm scared. Afraid. Not ready to leave my cocoon.

Feeling tired. Feeling Hopeless. Feeling drained. Wanting to shine even in the darkness but not feeling bright. Feeling dim, burning out over time.

Wanting to shine. Knowing there is greatness waiting to be unlocked. But not knowing how to unlock this greatness without a key.

Learning how to feel again. Learning to allow yourself to feel human. Learning to realize your existence is extraordinary, impactful, and a beauty within itself.

Learning to unlock your greatness.

Learning to flourish.

Learning the key is patience.

**My City**  
**Sophia Renzi**



~

**Anonymous**

Running away from where I'm from  
I never could stay with someone  
Loving you almost felt like something  
When no one was around me  
You lost and found me  
I was surrounded with open arms  
Guess I liked being hopeless  
Choking on insecurity  
I know all this is bad  
So I'm taking the leash off of me today  
Cause I need self esteem everyday

## **A Game of Charades**

**Aysia (AJ) Jenkins**

I approach someone and ask  
If they'd like to play  
Charades.

"Sure, why not?"

I start by pacing around them,  
Observing them.

"Is it a cat?"  
I shake my head.

I then open my palms,  
Letting them touch the window  
To my soul.

"Is it a dog?"  
I shake my head.

I then contort and bend  
My body like an abused  
Doll.

"Is it a snake?"  
I shake my head.

I then tear out my larynx  
And sacrifice it.

"Is it a lizard?"  
I shake my head.

I then pour out today's,  
Yesterday's, last week's, last month's,  
And last year's meals.

"Is it a bird?"  
I shake my head.

Finally I tear life from my  
Chest and I crush it.

"Is it a whale?"  
I shake my head one last time.

"You know, you're really bad at  
Charades."

No, you're just bad at guessing.



***Baltimore's kindness outlooked by crime***  
**Erickson Abrego-Hernandez**

Before arriving here, I was tainted with fear  
Like my final moments were coming closer every minute that passed  
Being muttered the same 2 words  
"Good Luck."  
As they found out where I was going  
Baltimore, a city known for its crime  
But little old me wasn't caught up with the times  
The vessel of violence and robberies  
Each corner you passed, could be someone's next lottery  
After some time I finally made it to the city  
Holding tightly to my bag on the bus  
Not knowing who might sit next to me  
About to shout and cuss or cause a fuss  
You look out the window  
And see homeless people asking for change  
and squeegee boys driving people insane  
So far no crime no hate  
I started making my way home  
It was a gloomy day

Standing across was a man who was kept unphased  
With every look back he would seem to get closer  
As soon as I looked once more  
He was next to me at the door  
He reached into his pocket  
No knife or weapon or nothing  
20 dollars  
Was all he pulled out  
And pointed to my shirt as he handed it to me  
"city college was my school too"  
And walked away saying, "Continue what you're doing"



***Sol Dea Dare***  
**Leniah Robinson**

She looks out at the city she once called home watching as the sun's golden rays and milky blue sky turn into a beautiful canvas tainted with lilac purples and soft baby pinks highlighted by the now fiery orange flames from the distant sun, and when that perfect amount of golden light hits her skin it shows all the beauty of her melanin from a different view. Nature stops its noisy business just to admire her as the distant lights of the city start to flicker on like lightning bugs after the quick and large downpour of summer rains.

A cool autumn breeze sweeps past her just to get tangled in thick and beautiful natural curls which she adorns proudly on her head like a crown. There were pots full of withering plants whose colors dulled long after the peaceful spring rains and the blistering heat that

summer brings, staying lifeless on top of the old inner city apartment building yet they still wait for the next cool rains that give them life. Just like the plants, She is waiting till she feels the cool water of life to be brought back.

Even though she's home, home is like a weed that leeches off of the sugar-filled happiness she receives from the cool water of her soul and the golden heat of her intelligence. When home she's seen as the weed who takes cool waters poisoning them and turns them into sharp icy daggers of hate. She takes the sugary happiness and twists it to become bitter, salty, and sour anger. The golden rays and flames become the smoke and ashes of stupidity all because they don't see her as a beautiful flower but as a weed that is only taking and dimming their beautiful perfect world not knowing they are destroying the world itself.

For too long people like Her have been trampled on like simple blades of grass not knowing that She is the trees that they require for their oh so precious oxygen which She created the breath of life from the toxic gasses they let out into the world. She is the wheat that feeds them and only grows from the fertilizer they have given to Her since birth. She is the sunflowers that make them able to live by only cleaning up their toxic radiation yet She is still seen as weeds. She is the creator of making something out of nothing yet She is treated as the trash that She found and turned it into diamonds. Only when She is gone will they finally understand that She helped them only using her blood, sweat, tears, and the little amount of resources given to her.

**My Color Is Rare**  
**Amerah Hawkins**

My color is rare

My Barbie doll,

I have played with you countless hours  
I have made your outfits to perfection even when mine weren't  
I have brushed and combed your hair  
Even though my shine and jam didn't lay my thick hair down

When I look at you, I don't see me  
When I see you on tv  
When I see you on the shelves  
Where is me

My color is rare  
For I am not shown on shelves  
For I am shown on tv with straightened hair  
For my color is so rare, it is feared

I move you in unique ways  
The same way my life has been decided for me because of my rare color

One day I will be seen on the shelves  
One day my thick hair will show on tv screens

For I have lied  
My color is not rare  
I have been hidden by your porcelain skin  
But my color will leave beauty and power in your absence

**Nonsense Speaker**  
**Aysia (AJ) Jenkins**

I do not care whether  
or not you pick those  
flowers, I will not be  
near them.  
“...”

Nonsense,  
Nonsense,  
Absolute Nonsense.

“They are nice flowers.  
Why don’t you pick them  
too?”

All that has been said,  
Nonsense.

I used to but I decided  
that it is not best for  
me.  
“...”

Are you listening to my  
Nonsense?  
Will you make sense  
of my Nonsense?

“But everyone else likes  
them. Be like them.”

If Nonsense is all I  
say,  
Then why must I  
obey?

“Or maybe you’re too  
sensitive. Grow up.”

Why must I listen and  
stay?



I am a Nonsense  
speaker, so why must I  
obey?

No one can comprehend  
this Nonsense speaker.  
No one but themselves.

Please listen to my  
Nonsense  
It will make sense in  
the end.  
Listen and make sense  
of this Nonsense speaker.

I feel uncomfortable.  
"The past is the past, move  
on."

I am not stopping you  
from picking those flowers.  
"..."  
I will be your friend.  
"..."  
But I will not be near  
those flowers.  
"Well then you are no longer  
my friend."  
I respect your decision and  
I wish you well.

***I write because***  
**Mariangelic rodriguez**

I write because paper cannot judge me like a person can. It's easier to write on a piece of paper than to speak to another human being. I write because it's calming, my thoughts flow through these thin pieces of paper and most things I write may not make sense to others but they do to me. I write because others have told me that keeping things bottled up can be really stressful and overwhelming. Speaking to others and letting them listen to what is going on in your head will make you feel a thousand times better. But I've never been the type to talk, I've always felt that others wouldn't listen. Silence is like a shield for me, if I take that shield away then others have the chance to hurt me. But sometimes shields can be bad because if I'm always shielded then I would never get hurt meaning I would never learn, sometimes to be a better person you must get hurt by another. Letting go of anything and everything floating around in my head. Hoping that writing down my feelings and emotions would make me closer to others and less afraid to be silent all the time.

I write because I can.

***We Had Different Plans***  
**Maria Monterosa**

I was only 9.

Out of nowhere, my parents told me we were going to sell our house to my cousin.

I didn't understand.

I started crying to my mom because I loved our house in El Salvador.

Next, they told me we were moving to the United States.

I had always wanted to fly on a plane, but not for this reason.

As we were walking through the mall, a billboard was advertising plane tickets.

My parents tried to cheer me up.

"Look! We're going to go on a plane just like that!"

But it only made me cry more.

My cousin and I had different plans.

We needed to stop my parents.

We decided to tell them that

I couldn't move.

I would be too depressed if we moved.

But of course we couldn't stop it from happening.

Even the day before,

we were still trying.

While I was getting on the airplane, the flight attendant noticed me crying.

She put a wide smile on her face to cheer me up.

But it only made me cry more.

I tried listening to the Disney Channel music  
that I loved as a kid.  
But that made me cry more.

It reminded me of watching tv  
at home in El Salvador.

PS: This poem represents a huge change in my life. It felt like the end of my childhood. Children  
don't have control in the adult world.

~

**Crochet Bouquets**  
**Stella Perez**



Crocheted flowers gifted to loved ones.

**Who Am I**  
**Arianna Fields**

I was raised in Baltimore City  
But that's not a good representation of who  
I am  
I was made to be different  
But I never knew it would be this hard  
Write out my feelings before working them  
out  
Express my emotions using rhymes  
And it works sometimes  
Other times it doesn't  
Stuck in this unnatural riddle  
Which is life  
Can never find my place because not one  
person is the same  
Nobody else is like me  
Nobody else is me  
Had to work my way through the maze of all  
of the backlash and backfire of bad  
All of the sown seeds coming back for me to  
reap  
And not only the good kind  
Somehow I'm still making it  
The story of who I am is complicated  
But my story revolves around God  
He shaped me  
And gave me the right signs  
So I could be free from the captivity of my  
mind

***I think I love you***  
**Si'Quoya Briscoe**

I honestly do hate you and never want to talk to you ever again.  
But every time I think about you I just bubble up and smile.  
I want to be around you 24/7 because you are my comfort zone.  
I truly do hate you I swear.  
But every time you call I'm going to answer and talk to you for hours.  
I love hearing you say my name and all the cute names you call me.  
I hate you with all my soul.  
But when you tell me to get dressed you're coming to get me, I rush to look my best.  
I can't stop thinking about you sometimes, everything you do is perfect.  
No, I know for sure I hate you.  
It's just when you tell me how perfect I am I can't help but to blush.  
I see you as my other half.  
Hate isn't strong enough for how I feel about you.  
But when you tell me you're going to marry me I just can't help but to imagine it.  
You have this hold on me that I can't explain.  
I despise you.  
But when we lock eyes it just does something to me.  
I just wanna melt into you.  
I don't hate you, I think I love you.  
I love you so much I can't think of a world without you.  
I love you so much I put you before myself.  
I love you so much I forgot to love myself.  
I love you so much cause I hate myself.  
I hate you cause I was too consumed in loving you.  
I hate you cause loving you drains everything in me.

## **Existing**

**Dyshay Davis**

As I awaken out my sleep  
It's midnight, very dark out  
Hearing the wind blow  
Feeling Cold  
Wondering where do I belong  
Where do I go?  
I feel so alone.

Remembering my world crashing down  
Thoughts are spiraling in and out of my head  
That moment where I knew  
You were really gone  
Never could imagine you not being here  
How will I make it?  
Why must this be?

Heart As cold as Ice  
If I breathe I might  
Turn into ice  
Soul is cold  
It must freeze  
Why am I here  
Why must I Be

A lonely place is all I see  
Left alone that's all I can be  
Cold and dark remains here still  
But my heart is cold as ice  
Breathing I stay still.

Breaking slowly I dare not try  
But really deep down I really want to cry  
Why do I feel like this

Is it something I missed?

Caught in a trap within my mind  
This feeling I can't bare to hide  
But still, I say "It'll be okay"  
But No, it always ends up this way.



***Inside Out***  
***Abrianna Purnell***

I want to take my body  
And rinse it inside out.  
If only I could just put a patch on the pain,  
Wash it every day,  
And heal it.  
The bumps fading  
And breakouts becoming minimal  
To none at all.  
I wish I could train my naivety.  
Every time it's the same thing.  
I wish I could listen to my gut,  
It would save me the pain that I've felt endlessly.  
I hate feeling so unclean.  
So giving.  
So discarded.  
I want to rub my skin until I bleed  
So I can finally feel renewed.



***An Evening in a Far-Away Field***  
**Elsa Graf**

Somewhere far away, there is a field.

It's a wide expanse of shoulder-height grass, with several paths cutting through it. The field is surrounded on all sides by dense forest, dark and intimidating. At the center of the field is a tree, nearly a hundred feet tall, its tangled branches reaching out as if to say "Come in, you are welcome here."

It was a bitter February evening when I swear I saw a cult roaming the field.

I wasn't in the field for any particular reason, I'd just needed to go somewhere that my problems wouldn't hang over me, and I knew that the field is the perfect place to escape.

The field was the same field as always, even with no leaves on the trees and most of the grass being dead. And the sky was painted with the purple and red and orange streaks of the sunset. Now that I think about it, the field looked very different that evening.

What really caught my eye, though, was the man in the dark crimson robe at the base of the tree. He had a sign next to him that I couldn't quite read- maybe it was the lighting, maybe it was just written so that it couldn't be understood by outsiders. In the man's hands was a small device with a red light. At first, I thought it was a camera. But now that I think about it more, I'm not so sure.

All of a sudden, I saw people's heads popping out of the dead grass. Not just a few people- it must have been at least 60- all wearing robes in various shades of red. I watched as

they all stood up and walked onto the nearby paths, their faces occasionally being illuminated by the warm light from the sunset streaming through the tree branches.

I stood at the edge of the field observing what was going on for what felt like hours (although it was probably only a few minutes), trying to take in every detail. I can't say I understood what was going on, but it seemed like a peaceful ceremony. Perhaps a tradition to welcome a beautiful and plentiful spring.

As the last traces of daylight faded away, I slipped back into the forest undetected, still processing what I had just seen.

Maybe I was too quick to call them a cult. Maybe they were just a religious sect conducting a ceremony. Maybe they were filming a movie. Maybe they were just big fans of the occult. Maybe I was dreaming. I guess I'll never know.

All I know is that I saw something happen at the faraway field that evening, something that I am not likely to ever see again.

**Life**  
**Kwon Johnson**

Once upon a time, there was a young boy named Malik who lived in Baltimore. He was a talented basketball player and dreamed of playing professionally someday. Every day, he would practice shooting hoops in the park near his house, hoping to improve his skills.

One afternoon, Malik was shooting hoops with some friends when suddenly, a group of police officers arrived. The officers were aggressive and confrontational, accusing the boys of loitering and causing a disturbance. Malik tried to explain that they were just playing basketball, but the officers refused to listen.

Suddenly, one of the officers grabbed Malik's arm and shoved him against a nearby wall. Malik was terrified and didn't know what to do. The officer continued to be rough with him, even though he had done nothing wrong. Malik was traumatized by the experience and felt helpless and powerless.

After that incident, Malik began to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He had nightmares and flashbacks of the police officers grabbing him and shoving him against the wall. He became anxious and paranoid, constantly worried about encountering police officers again.

Malik's basketball performance began to suffer, as he found it increasingly difficult to focus on the game. He stopped going to the park to play with his friends and instead stayed indoors, isolated and afraid.

Malik's family and friends noticed a change in him and encouraged him to seek help. With the support of a therapist, Malik began to work through his PTSD symptoms and learn coping strategies to manage his anxiety.

Despite the trauma he had experienced, Malik refused to let it stop him from pursuing his dreams. He continued to practice basketball and eventually earned a scholarship to play at a college in another city.

Through his experience, Malik learned the importance of speaking out against police brutality and fighting for justice. He became an advocate for change in his community and worked to raise awareness about the need for police reform.

Malik had always been a natural on the basketball court. As a kid growing up in Baltimore, he spent hours every day practicing his moves, dreaming of the day when he would make it to the big leagues. When he was offered a scholarship to play college basketball at a school in another city, he jumped at the chance.

But despite his talent and success on the court, Malik was haunted by a traumatic experience from his past. A few years earlier, he had been the victim of police brutality in his hometown. The experience left him with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition that made him anxious, irritable, and prone to flashbacks and nightmares.

At first, Malik tried to ignore his symptoms and push through the anxiety and fear that gripped him. But as the stress of college life and the demands of basketball began to mount, he found it increasingly difficult to cope.

He would wake up in the middle of the night, sweating and shaking, reliving the moment when the police officers had grabbed him and shoved him against the wall. He became paranoid and anxious, constantly worried about encountering police officers again.

His coaches and teammates noticed that something was wrong, but Malik was too ashamed to talk about his struggles. He felt like he was letting everyone down by not being able to perform at his best, and he was afraid that they would judge him if they knew what was really going on inside his head.

It wasn't until one night, after a particularly vivid nightmare, that Malik finally opened up to his roommate. His roommate listened patiently as Malik shared his story, and then encouraged him to seek help.

With the support of a therapist, Malik began to work through his PTSD symptoms and learn coping strategies to manage his anxiety. It was a slow and difficult process, but with time and patience, he began to feel like himself again.

He started to talk more openly with his coaches and teammates about what he was going through, and to his surprise, they were all incredibly supportive. They encouraged him to take things at his own pace and to focus on his well-being first and foremost.

Malik began to regain his confidence on the court, too. His skills were as sharp as ever, but more importantly, he had developed a newfound sense of resilience and determination. He knew that he could overcome any obstacle, on or off the court, as long as he had the right support system in place.

As he looked back on his journey, Malik realized that he had learned a valuable lesson about the power of vulnerability and connection. He had always thought that he had to be strong and self-sufficient to succeed, but he now understood that it was okay to ask for help when he needed it.

And with that realization, Malik felt like he was ready to take on whatever challenges lay ahead. Whether it was in basketball or in life, he knew that he had the strength and resilience to keep moving forward, one step at a time.



***Reinventing Feelings***  
**Kyndahl Fortune**

Nobody understands  
What's truly going through my head  
There's no point in trying to share  
So I'll suppress those feelings instead

I push them all the way down  
I pretend they don't exist  
I tell myself it's for the best  
Keeping them locked away like this

Feelings are like seeds you sow  
They constantly grow  
Although I try hiding them  
They find a way to flow

We must learn to be more real  
And share our true feelings  
It's how we deal with things  
That'll determine how we truly heal

***I'm her eyes***  
**Naja Brown**

There was a woman named Komi whose life had been consumed by the humdrum of modern existence in New York City. Every day, she rose to the existence of honking taxis, screeching trains, and her neighbors' quarrels; she walked the same crowded streets, numb to their ceaseless activity. But unbeknownst to her, Komi was destined to uncover a hidden world that lay beneath the surface of her city.

One fateful evening, as Komi walked home from her unfulfilling job at a large corporation, she stumbled upon an antique shop, tucked away in a narrow alley she had never noticed before. The shop's weathered wooden door creaked open, beckoning her in. As Komi entered, the muted sounds of the bustling city were replaced by the soft whispers of a thousand untold stories. The shop was dimly lit and filled with dust-covered curiosities that seemed to dance in the flickering candlelight.

Komi's eyes were drawn to a glass display case, where a single item caught her attention: a shimmering, silver locket. The locket was intricately engraved with the image of a phoenix, its wings outstretched, encircling a deep blue gem that appeared to hold the vastness of the night sky within its depths. It was as if the locket had been waiting for her, and she was powerless to resist its allure.

As she reached out to touch the locket, the store's enigmatic owner, an elderly woman with silver hair and piercing blue eyes, appeared beside her. "Ah, my dear," she said in a voice that seemed to echo through time, "that locket is one of the last remnants of a forgotten world.

It carries a magic that has long since vanished from this earth. Are you prepared to bear the responsibility of its power?"

Komi hesitated for a moment, then nodded. The old woman gently placed the locket around Komi's neck, and it immediately felt warm against her skin, pulsating with an energy she could not comprehend. With a knowing smile, the shop owner bid her farewell, and Komi found herself back on the bustling streets of New York City.

That night, as Komi lay in bed, she could not shake the feeling that the locket was somehow alive. In her dreams, she saw the phoenix rise from its own ashes, wings unfurling in a brilliant blaze of light. And when she awoke, she was no longer in her cramped apartment but in a fantastical world hidden just beneath the city's surface. The streets of New York now buzzed with magic and wonder, and she was at its very heart.

In this enchanted version of her city, Komi discovered that her locket granted her the ability to communicate with the creatures that inhabited this realm. She met talking rats who told tales of the underworld, wise pigeons who shared the secrets of the skies, and stoic dogs who guarded the city's hidden entrances. As she wandered the streets, she encountered shimmering portals that led to other realms, nestled between the familiar brownstones and skyscrapers.

One day, while exploring a cobblestone alley, Komi discovered a secret garden hidden behind a wrought-iron gate, its rusty hinges protesting as she pushed it open. Inside, she found an oasis of lush greenery and vibrant, fragrant flowers. At the center of the garden stood an ancient, gnarled tree with thick roots snaking through the ground like veins. As she



approached, she felt the locket's warmth intensify, and she knew that she had found the heart of this magical world.

Beneath the tree, Komi met Elara, a guardian of the garden and a protector of the city's hidden magic. Elara was a radiant, ethereal being with hair that flowed like a waterfall and eyes that sparkled like the stars in the night sky. She was fierce, and she welcomed Komi into the garden with a warm smile.

"You have found your way here, Komi, because you were chosen," Elara said, her voice melodious and enchanting. "The locket you wear is a key, an ancient relic that connects you to the magic of this world. You are now the Keeper of the Locket, a guardian who will help to preserve and protect this hidden realm."

Komi was both humbled and overjoyed by her newfound purpose, and she pledged to do everything in her power to safeguard the magical world beneath the city streets. She spent her days learning from Elara, mastering spells, and exploring the enchanted realms that lay hidden within New York City.

As the days turned to months, Komi's bond with the locket and the city's magic grew stronger. She could now harness the locket's power to heal wounded creatures, see through the eyes of animals, and even manipulate the elements to her will. But with great power came great responsibility, and she soon found herself facing a new challenge.

A dark force had risen, seeking to harness the energy of the magical world for its own nefarious purposes. Shadows crept through the city, and the once-lively streets began to feel

oppressive and sinister. Komi, with the help of Elara and her newfound friends from the magical realm, prepared to confront this darkness and protect the city she loved.

The battle that followed was fierce and brutal. Komi and her allies fought valiantly against the darkness, their magic illuminating the night with a kaleidoscope of colors. The locket around her neck blazed with a fire as fierce as the phoenix engraved upon it, granting her the strength to face the malevolent force that threatened her world.

In the heat of the battle, Komi unleashed the full power of the locket, summoning the phoenix from its ashes. The magnificent bird took flight, its wings a tapestry of golden flames, and dove toward the heart of the darkness. The brilliant fire consumed the shadows, banishing the darkness from the city and restoring balance to the magical world.



***Glass***  
**Peyton Scott**

When I wake up every morning, I put on a facade. A facade that entails my being is not my own free will. When I wake up every morning, I stare at “myself” in the mirror. My reflection is nonexistent. Instead lies a man with the prettiest blue eyes, like a river flowing through a valley. His hair is always stuffy and as straight as the blades of grass I see in my backyard. He would never admit this, but his stature and style make him stand out well, at least in my eyes. I devote my days to waking up and seeing him stare at me. My hands, sweaty and nervous, differed from my cold expression. It’s been a long time since I’ve honestly looked at myself.

As the months went by, the glass began to crack, I would run my fingers around the edges- being sure not to cut myself, yet I always got hurt. I would mend his broken figure; it wasn't his fault; I could only hope for a brighter future. His face would shift among the cracks. The reflections made me the light of his life and defined him as cold and bitter. I shouldn't be the one to decipher his mood, yet I devote myself to this imposter of a reflection. Where did he even come from? We're so similar, him and I. Perhaps he sees a window in his reflection where I see a mirror; that's what makes us different, him and I. He sees himself, and I see him too. I don't know why he is the light of my life.

My passion and ambition rule over reason; it was always something; my voice, his temper, his impatience, my attitude- my unrealistic standards and perfectionism created a false sense of security in what was supposed to be my path to self-discovery and worth. I wanted so badly to be seen with the same effort I put into that mirror. That's impractical. He wouldn't understand the pain it causes me, and I don't owe him an explanation for my suffering. I panicked. The bleeding expression on my face did not reflect him, yet we exhibited some connection every time he placed his hand on the glass. "He needs me," I thought. The glass was so cold, and I could barely see his face. I missed his eyes. I understood that it was time to move on.

For my good, I closed my eyes. If I couldn't see myself, I'd rather not see at all. But something remarkable happened when I closed my eyes. It was quiet. I could hear every breath I took and the heartbeat that enabled my sight in the first place. The sound of pure bliss embraced me. It felt like an eternity before I opened my eyes, and when I did, I was met with the

mirror shattered on the floor. I kneeled to examine the glass and saw my face, crying and swollen, but It was me. Broken as I was, I was happy to find myself again.

~

**My City**  
**Sophia Renzi**

