

THE ALLIANCE FOR YOUNG ARTISTS & WRITERS presents

A collection of award-winning art and writing
by America's most creative and original
middle school students.

Cover: **Sarah Waligura**, Age 13, TX
All in a Summer's Day, Photography

Sparking Creativity and Confidence

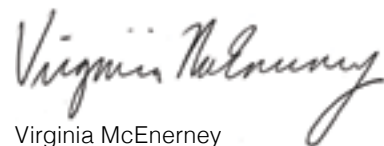
For nearly 90 years, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards have invited young people to create. Across the country, students in grades 7 through 12 write, draw, paint, photograph, and design, and they submit their individual creative choices to be judged—first locally, then, for the top students, at the national level. All work is submitted to the Awards online, and comes pre-populated with excitement, hope, and trepidation.

A great deal goes into creating each poem, painting, essay, photograph, or video game. And for our youngest students, in grades 7 and 8, competing can be especially daunting. Teachers and parents play an enormous role, by encouraging students as well as guiding them through the process of submitting their work. But in the end, students have to take the risk of allowing their work to be judged by others.

This year we received more than 200,000 submissions from creative and talented young people who put themselves out there for the world to see. Equally staggering is that over 20,000 of these visionary students were in the seventh and eighth grades. Their work is featured here in *SPARK*, and in spite of their youth, it holds its own.

At the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, we know that the first submission leads to others. This year's seventh and eighth grade students are thoughtful, original, and technically skilled, and charged with the creative fire you'd expect from young minds and hearts.

I invite you to join me at what just may be the beginning, the *SPARK*, of some promising careers.



Virginia McEnerney
Executive Director
Alliance for Young Artists & Writers

the Alliance

The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, a nonprofit organization, presents the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Launched in 1923 by Scholastic founder Maurice R. Robinson, the Awards are the largest and longest-running recognition program for creative teens in grades 7 through 12. Award winners join such company as Andy Warhol, Richard Avedon, Truman Capote, Sylvia Plath, John Baldessari, and Zac Posen—all of whom won Scholastic Awards as teenagers.

In 2012 the Alliance received over 200,000 submissions, and more than 60,000 teens were recognized regionally with Gold Key, Silver Key, and Honorable Mention awards. Of these, 13,000 went on to compete nationally. More than 1,600 students received national medals and were invited to join our annual ceremony at Carnegie Hall.

More than 400 Gold Medal works appear in the ART.WRITE.NOW national exhibition at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center at Parsons The New School for Design in New York City. In Washington, DC, the U.S. Department of Education and the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities each host a yearlong exhibition of selected work. Additionally, the ART.WRITE.NOW traveling exhibition will visit Detroit, Virginia Beach, and Kansas City, MO, in the coming year. The 2012 national exhibition and accompanying public programs are co-sponsored by the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center at Parsons The New School for Design.

The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers annually features National Award-winning works of both art and writing in our *National Catalog*, *SPARK*, and *The Best Teen Writing*. These publications are distributed free of charge.

The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers provides nearly a quarter of a million dollars in scholarships annually to National Award-winning students. Over 50 universities, colleges, and art schools earmark more than \$5 million collectively in additional scholarships for our top award recipients. The Alliance Summer Arts Program (ASAP) grants scholarships to high-need Scholastic Award winners in grades 7–11 to attend summer arts programs.

Hannah Schumacher

Felonious Flash Fiction

Grade 8, Age 13

Lusher Charter School

New Orleans, LA

Eric Flynt and Brad Richard, Teachers

Greater New Orleans Writing Project, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

In a more perfect world, a slightly different god could be seen on the red carpet. No longer should the masses bend their attention spans to the musical styles of so-and-so, or the new film by Johan Van Actionhero. True power lies in the hands and blades of those with the courage to claim their own divinity, those who deliver the greatest gift of all to the meek and ungrateful. Gather for me your demented and twisted, your killers, so that I may crown them accordingly.

And so here, in my holy house, there rang the blasphemous tones. Now I am no music expert, so I have no clue whatsoever as to which musical god, dead centuries ago, these notes belonged to. The sooner I forget the music, the sooner I forget the musician, and the sooner the man finds peace.

Then a point of interest from the satanic organ. The old woman at the helm played something any radio audience would hear on a daily basis. The final chord changes rang through the hall, and then again, and again, and once more, each time diminishing in volume. A simple instruction described this action, and described much more than that in fact.

You see, I spend my time with the dead. I breathe death, I consume death, digest death. In all my deep, dark, romantic obsessions with my sweet love requiem, I comprehend death—to a point. I do not know the full truths lest the



system is broken, but I understand enough of death to attempt a simple answer. The purpose of life is death. That has to be it, for as I've explained, what could be a more beautiful reward than the warm release of death? ■

Eli Freeman, *Abandoned Bridge* Photography, Grade 7, Age 13, Victory Christian School, Tulsa, OK

Judy McIntosh, Teacher, Tulsa Community College Liberal Arts Department, *Affiliate Silver Medal*



DJ Cleavinger, Mixed Media, Grade 7, Age 12, Schain Studios, Cincinnati, OH, **Merlene Schain**,
Teacher, Art Machine, Inc., Affiliate **Gold Medal**



Charles Gould

Personal Essay/Memoir
Grade 8, Age 14
Oyster River Middle School
Durham, NH

Susie Renner, Teacher
National Writing Project in
New Hampshire, Affiliate
Silver Medal

“One!”

The anguished voice of our coxswain breaks the clattery skittering of the feathered oars, gliding quickly across the rough, storm-tossed, polluted surface of the Merrimac River. In front of me, my knees charge out of the eight’s hull, like pistons, pushing the boat and me forward with the rest of the crew. The backsplash from Seat 6 soaks through my spandex shirt, twining and burrowing through the nylon, and soaking into my chilled skin.

“Two!”

The cox’s furious shriek, demanding more effort on the part of the rowers, pushes us deeper toward the towering rail trestle, reeking of diesel exhaust and the remains of whatever could not survive the toxic discharges of the old textile mills. The back of Seat 5’s head charges back and forth, pounding the ever-beating pulse of the boat deeper through my being. The soft but vehement cursing of my fellow crew members is nearly inaudible over the roaring shuffle of our slide boards and the windy rushing of feedback over our onboard intercom.

“Three!”

With a silent but agonizing scrape, a blister, one of many covering my right hand, bursts. At first only the soft, warm pus, burning the inner coating of soft skin, emerges. I grind my teeth together, grimacing in the face of the blinding pain. Our boat is nearly under the bridge now, and though we are exerting ourselves too much to see it, I feel the weighty rumble of a freight train passing by course through my body, loosening the grinding pain in my tense calves. A freezing, foggy drizzle begins to fall from the sky, reflecting the desolate pain of our laborious exertions. A startlingly bracing breeze shoots out from somewhere off our bow.

“Four!”

Now under the shade of the towering trestle, I have to scrap my prayers for sunlight, for none will reach us down here. The harsh, relentless wind gnaws voraciously at the back of my head, spraying me with cold sleet, which squirms restlessly down my spine. My thighs feel like they are bursting, tearing at the seams against the tense pressure within them. With the bunching contraction of my body, my core temperature boils over. I wonder distantly whether the sleek sheen covering my face is of sweat or water. ■



Renée Dembo, *Ocean Cave* Drawing, Grade 8, Age 14, Archer School for Girls, Los Angeles, CA
Chad Attie, Teacher, Armory Center for the Arts, Affiliate Silver Medal

Carly Sorenson

V Boulevard Personal Essay/Memoir

Grade 8, Age 13

Writopia Lab

New York, NY

Courtney Sheinmel, Teacher

Casita Maria Center for

Arts and Education, *Affiliate*

Gold Medal

Bulevar-Ve is, as the name suggests, shaped like a V, defying the norm of the neatly gridded rectangular city block. It's a small, crummy, close-knit Latino neighborhood, and it's also my home. I like to compare it to the Flatiron in Manhattan, because even though it's shorter and made up of multiple buildings instead of one, it's got that same weird two-dimensional effect. If I'm in a poetic mood, I might compare it to a flock of winter geese. Not that we see many flocks of geese in the city, but still. I read once that the geese take turns flying at the tip of the V, because that's where the force of the wind is strongest and most tiring. It's nice how they take care of each other.

I wonder sometimes if the geese ever look up from their flight and notice each other as they switch positions. *Bulevar-Ve* is like that. Two streets intersect, and people are caught off guard as they suddenly stumble upon each other, because no matter how many years you live here you never get used to the sudden V. I would know; I'm a product of *Bulevar* collisions, in more ways than one.

My parents moved here from some all-white town in upstate New York after getting hitched, [and] adjusted pretty quickly: learned passable Spanish, got jobs, had me. I grew up speaking Spanglish, the language of immigrants' children. English words snuck into our conversations even when we meant to use Spanish. We called *edificios* "buildings" and grey hairs "*canas*." Sometimes Mom and Dad were *Mami* and *Papi*. We only refrained from using Spanglish in front of our teachers, who expected us to bring only proper English or Spanish inside the school doors, not our hybrid slang...

We graduated fifth grade together and went to the even-bigger district middle school, and although we didn't always see each other in class, it didn't seem to matter. Life never changed much. It was only in eighth grade that Catalina moved in, and that I noticed, for the first time, how different I was. ■

Johanna Bear

Blueberry Whispers Personal Essay/Memoir

Grade 8, Age 13

Lamberton Middle School

Carlisle, PA

Jason Griffith, Teacher

South Central Pennsylvania

Writing Region, *Affiliate*

New York Life Award

During the car ride home, my mind floats to the house, my house, my sanctuary, and my life away from home, Yellow Shutters, the reason that my anger at Granny exploded. Her daughters, my great-aunts, decided that Granny needed money to support her in her decline, for health care, and to pay the nursing home. They sold my place, my friend, the house where I have gone every summer that I could remember, the cottage of dreams, hopes, crystal clear water, and blueberry bushes, intertwined with the beautiful mossy trees that led down to the wooden dock, bouncing along the gentle waves.

Now, every night I spend with the sweet, salt-tinged smell in my nose, cuddling against the cold in the warm blue blankets around me, feels like an absurd luxury. My mind wanders, wondering how many more nights I will have here before it gets taken away, just as Great-Granny will inevitably be. Another friend who is abandoning me. I feel the gentle quaking of the old cottage, almost as if it were turning in its sleep alongside me, mimicking my movements, as though trying to reassure me that everything would work out. The truth, though, is in my mind. The cold, hard, unforgiving facts that can never tell a lie, the facts that say that the end is coming. The for-sale sign is being manufactured, and a realtor will come, treating this magical place as

just another job when it deserves so much more. It deserves owners who know how to preserve its forest of trees, and the fairy houses that I had created all those years ago.

I almost wished I could join the fairies in those miniature houses, to escape from the conversations everyone thinks I cannot hear. The talks of moving, selling, tearing down, and renting. Stripping the cottage of its owners and all the beauty and memories it once represented. They talk in low whispers, believing I have drifted into sleep, but I lay awake, trying to shut out the words from my ears, trying to believe it isn't happening. Trying to keep the gullibility and innocence of childhood, when I know I must grow up to deal with this problem. A problem I have no control over, because who listens to the child? Nobody. Not even when they know best.

The day is coming, the salty air whispers as it caresses my ears gently, more gently than the truth. The day is coming, murmur the blueberry bushes, chuckling at the blue stains on my face, but there is no humor at this prospect. Leaving. Be ready, sing the waves, dancing over my toes as lightly as the prancing of a doe in the forest. I'll always be here for you, sighs the cottage, shifting, as though trying to move closer to me in spirit. It cannot, though. It is permanently entrenched in my heart. ■



Stefanie Suarez, *Distancia Eterna/Extranjero* Painting, Grade 8, Age 13, Westminster Christian School, Palmetto Bay, FL, **Eric Heerspink, Teacher**, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, *Affiliate Silver Medal*



Masha Yazlovsky, *Don't Mess With Me* Photography, Grade 8, Age 14, Green Acres School, Rockville, MD, **Victor Stekoll, *Teacher***, Northeast Art Region at Large, *Affiliate* **Gold Medal**

Alex Goodisman

Preparing Mushrooms Poetry

Grade 8, Age 13
Carlisle School
Carlisle, MA

Marcella Pixley, *Teacher*

New England Art Education Conference
and The Boston Globe, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

A mushroom, lined up perfectly with his brethren
on the rough surface of a chopping board,
progressing evenly toward the edge.

A nondescript brown lump from above,
but from below, an eye.

An eye, just awakened from a too-short slumber,
brown and blurred with fatigue,
glistening with the tears that
build up during a long night.

The feathery lines crossing the iris
wave gently, as if the pupil is held
in the highest respect and care,
like a king, supported and raised,
fanned, in a time of need, bracing,
preparing to observe the horrific spectacle.

It seems too dastardly to even consider,
a perfect, beautiful, deadly cut
from head to toe, leaving only
a half to twitch and scream
before lapsing into silence.

This horrific specter
represents more than
just sadness,
it is also a threat,
for the king has his throne
only while he still has his head. ■

Elizabeth Cogan

Only Reminders Personal Essay/Memoir

Grade 7, Age 12
Alcuin Montessori School
Oak Park, IL

Megan O'Sullivan and

Phillip McFarlane, *Teachers*

Chicago Area Writing Project, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

I see a young cat as he pads through the
nighttime streets of Los Angeles. He is thin
but strong, his paws making little noise as he
stalks through the darkness. I sense his sad-
ness as he watches the other cats being fed.
His eyes follow the hands of a young boy as he
strokes a tabby's head, and I know how des-
perately he wants that to be him. He then turns
and walks closer to a small house, swiftly en-
tering the backyard. He curls up and tucks his
nose underneath his forepaws. I watch again
as he slowly deteriorates, and envision that
which will never be certain, his last paw steps.

I watch as he moves quietly toward
his favorite place, the couch, where he has
curled up so many times, sometimes alone
and sometimes seeking human comfort. But
his paws will not bear his weight, and he curls
up on the floor. His green eyes find mine as they
close for the last time.

I stroke his cold fur, unable to find the
warmth that had once come from it. He had
watched me grow up, giving me affection and
silent advice that I had never truly realized was
advice. And so it was only fitting that I let him go
just when I am about to leave all the ways of life
that I had known behind. ■

Madison Brown

Kaleidoscope Short Story

Grade 7, Age 13
Lancaster Country Day School
Lancaster, PA

Genevieve Munson, Teacher
Lancaster Public Library, *Affiliate*

American Voices Medal, Gold Medal

When I woke up that day, the world was red. Red like the color of maraschino cherries, of sunsets with ribbons of purple. That's just the kind of thing that everyone says when you ask them what is red. They say it is the color of hearts and love, of romance.

But I've seen it enough times to say that my theory actually has weight. It is the color of your cheeks when you run a mile in nine minutes. It is the color of your skin when you bite your nails before a test. It's nervousness and exertion, stress and uneasiness. Just seeing it makes my heart beat faster.

So, naturally, I awoke in total panic that morning. My sheets were wrapped around me like a spider web, and I could feel my heart pumping my red blood through my body—alarmed. Red. It takes me a little to register the colors, but then I see them. It is not the veins of sunrise I see streaming through my window. It is plain light, tinted a mild ruby color. Everything is.

It isn't always red. But it is today, and that's all that matters.

In the shower, the water is scalding hot, too hot to wash the waking terror off of me. It only urges my pulse faster, like a cattle prod shocking me. I scowl and turn the cold almost all the way up. For a moment, the water is tepid before becoming so cold that it burns my already raw skin.

I don't like this, I think. ■

Ashley Huang

Still Winter Comes Poetry

Grade 8, Age 14
Doerre Intermediate School
Klein, TX

Mike Keimig, Teacher
Harris County Department

of Education, *Affiliate*

Gold Medal

Quantum theory states:

We are all earthbound matter, and yet
We act as dreamlike waves
Two bundles of ignorant energy: us
Felt not on skin, but deep in our souls
Those protons bombarding our half-solid forms
And yet we remain the same.

You and I were science-children:

Our mouths followed the Bohr, and yet
Your head already drifting to clouds
Parents and science: our covalence
But perhaps you were more ready than I
You shed your shells, that calm winter
And yet I remain the same.

Quantum and Schrödinger and us:

We are all earthbound matter, and yet
We act as dreamlike waves
One or the other or both: my question
Left unanswered, in your half-life trail
I pursued that cat with determination
And yet nothing is the same.

I tried to hold on to those slippery quarks
I tried to hold on to you, and yet
Those neutrinos pass me by. ■



Neha Patel, Oh-Oh Ah-Ah Painting, Grade 8, Age 13, Brownsburg East Middle School, Brownsburg, IN, **Scott Hofer, Teacher**, Clowes Memorial Hall of Butler University, *Affiliate* **Gold Medal**



Elena Kahn, *Half-n-Half* Photography, Grade 8, Age 13, Amos & Celia Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School, Minneapolis, MN, **Victoria Thor, *Teacher***, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, *Affiliate* **Gold Medal**

Isabella Nilsson

Analysis Flash Fiction

Grade 8, Age 13

Hathaway Brown Middle School

Shaker Heights, OH

Susan Levitan, *Teacher*

Cleveland Institute of Art, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

“What does that mean, Doctor?”

“There could be several interpretations. What do you think your dream means, Miss Donahue?”

“What do you think I come to you for? I don’t know.”

“Shall we break it down?”

“Yes, I’d like that.” Jane Donahue stared at the ceiling, the leather of the couch sticking to her skin. She found it easier to confess difficult things to her analyst on the couch, where all she had to do was say what came to mind and look up at the ceiling.

“In your dream, you have—correct me if I am wrong—‘locked your heart in a casket and swallowed the key.’ Do you feel out of touch with your emotions, Miss Donahue?”

“Obviously.”

“Then we must find the root. The casket, of course, represents death. Perhaps you had given your heart away to someone close to you, and with their death you feel you no longer have the ‘key’ to access it again?”

“My mother died when I was 5.” Dr. Jensen made a note.

“Excellent. So in the absence of this ‘key,’ you use brutal force to break it open. Tell me, Miss Donahue—”

“Jane, please.”

“Jane, then. Tell me, how did you deal with your mother’s death?” Jane ran a hand through her hair.

“My father tells me that shortly after she... passed, I began having my cardiac problems. I went into arrest, I’m told.”

“Ah! Too good to be true, I think. You must see the connection.”

“Yeah, I do, but it’s a coincidence. I just have a chronic illness. I’ve had it all my life.”

“You didn’t while your mother was still alive. You are a very intelligent young woman, Miss Donahue, surely you can understand that if the mind refuses to accept things, then the body will cope with them in its own way. We are very mysterious creatures in that respect. But I digress. Shall we continue?” The tip of her pen tapped against the cover of her leather notebook as the doctor perched in the edge her chair, feet dangling inches above the floor.

“Yes.” ■

Kathryn Elms***The River*** Science Fiction/Fantasy

Grade 7, Age 12

Gull Lake Middle School

Richland, MI

Ashley Copp, *Teacher*Midwest Writing Region at Large, *Affiliate***Gold Medal**

One day in spring, a boy from a riverside village took ill with the bane of every small settlement: ash fever. The only cure for ash fever is a poultice of reed fibers and scorched fire-flowers. Reeds grow abundantly by the side of every small pond and stream. But the fire-flower can only be found on a small island the river flows around—the river that has claimed the lives of 50 village men, though most died of their own stupidity and arrogance.

The entire village was distraught. No one had ever braved the rushing spring rapids and lived to tell about it. But the little boy could ill afford to wait until winter. So the wise-women screeched charms that made the hair of every villager rise like a cat's. But the river had a strong current and laughed at their foolish rhymes. The

people begged and pleaded, screamed and promised the river many riches if only it would let them cross. Then the hunters threw the parts of meat they saved for their gods into the life-blood of the country. But the river laughed again. It was not some god to be appeased by the sufferings of fleetingly beautiful creatures now dead! Likewise did all the women cast their gems and silver chains into the flow. This time the river grew impatient with the inferior beings. What right did they have to cast their foolish mortal trophies into its azure-golden rippling glory? They clogged up the smaller though no less important, tributaries and caused as much trouble as a clan of beavers. ■



Jessica Beck, *Untitled* Sculpture, Grade 8, Age 13, Lied Middle School, Las Vegas, NV
Sierra Slentz, *Teacher*, Springs Preserve, *Affiliate* **Gold Medal**

Aurelyn Van Kirk

Into the Night Poetry

Grade 7, Age 12

Charleston County School of the Arts
Charleston, SC

Rene Miles, Teacher

South Region at Large, *Affiliate*

Gold Medal

A whiskered screech owl,
in the grip of humans' ire
and their war, blazes a one-
eyed glare at the light
that flamed arrows
make. Of sixty-three, ten

nestle through his ten-
der flesh. He lets out a howl
piercing even the marrow,
white as skulls, of man's bones. Fire
singes bark as animals flit
past. The owl's corpse alone

falls, burned to a rare then done
like a piglet on a spit ten-
ded by none. Wind along the ground alights
then bounds up and prowls
up to the trees flaked spires,
then plunges down trunks. Where sparrows

once hummed at dawn to the burrows
of cottontail hares, now they are gone.

Fight no more for the oaks have tired
and joined the sycamores, ten-
hundred or more fouled
from the tribe's embers left in earthlight.

Flames emit deadly light
and torch the heads of arrows
soon to strike a snowy owl,
challenge her to a duel, won
by the heartless unten-
ded red-flowered fire.

Plundered forests become quagmires
of cut maple tepees. Like a cockfight
tomahawks plummet, no harbor for ten-
der thoughts, like sparrows
they flock with a one
eyed raven at the lead. Prowl

the air one spear that ends all. A howl full of dire
pleading echoes the flight of all who have gone,
swooped away by barrows of a few saved ten. ■

Walker Caplan

Coaches Humor

Grade 8, Age 13

Lakeside School Middle School
Seattle, WA

Susie Mortensen, Teacher

West Writing Region at Large, *Affiliate*

Gold Medal

COACH: (*calling offstage*) Be tough out there, boys! You are the Marauding Magpies—peck their freaking eyes out! Phillips, what the hell is goin' on out there? You're playin' like my grandmother! Now don't get me wrong, she's a good woman, makes a mighty fine peach pie—oh, my grandmama's peach pie! But that's not the point. The point is, she's 94 and has Alzheimer's. The last time I saw her she called me Savannah, and damn it, that's my sister's name! Do I look like a Savannah to you, boy? The point is, she just wanders around confused and messin' up people's gender identities, and you—you, Phillips—played that first half like my grandmother. Do you understand what I'm sayin' here? (*to Steve, who is staring blankly into space*) Are you listening to me?

(*Oscar and Albert enter room wearing magpie costumes. They strut around the room making quiet squawking noises. Steve watches them, looking confused, while the coach takes no notice of them.*)

STEVE: Yes, Coach.

COACH: I'm sayin' 94-year-old ladies—no matter how good their peach pie—don't win

football games, and they don't get a full ride to Eastern Nebraska State College. You get my meaning, Phillips?

(*Oscar and Steve stand on either side of the coach, strike birdlike poses, and cock their heads.*)

STEVE: I think so, Coach.

COACH: My meaning: Don't be like my grandmother. And if you are, you better make one hell of a peach pie.

STEVE: Coach, I've been thinking—

COACH: Thinking? That's your trouble. Did I say to do any thinking? No! As the great Vince Lombardi once said, "I think, therefore I am!"—no, no, that wasn't him—"I think, therefore I am in charge!" I'm in charge so I'll do the thinking. You get out there and run the plays like I tell ya.

STEVE: Yes, Coach.

COACH: Okay, then. Take a minute to get your head together, then come out ready to win! If you want to do some thinking, join the damn debate club. (*exits*) ■



Sarah Waligura, *All in a Summer's Day* Photography, Grade 8, Age 13, Smith Middle School
Cypress, TX, **Savannah Nichols, *Teacher***, Harris County Department of Education, *Affiliate*
Gold Medal

Sydney Pardo

The Invisible Poem Poetry

Grade 7, Age 12

Magic Pen Kids

Laguna Hills, CA

Clarissa Ngo, *Teacher*

West Writing Region at Large, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

I once wrote a poem with invisible ink

So that when you saw it, you wouldn't think

it stinks

You see, I couldn't think of anything to write

Nor any images to delight or excite

And so here is my sad little ditty:

I hope you think it is pretty. ■



Mayzie Allswede

Malaria Science Fiction/Fantasy

Grade 8, Age 13

Cheyenne Middle School

Edmond, OK

Jeni Milam, Teacher

Tulsa Community College, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

After the biggest breakfast I had ever had (it was an actual full meal that was hot), I was told to report back to my bunk. It was amazing walking through parts of the Roxoi Home for Foreign Girls that I had never seen. The library was huge, filled with books that cascaded down over each other. I thought that every book written must have been there, but even better than that, they had the whole Harry Potter series on all the old iPads. Then there were all the offices. They needed so many robots and people to govern just one girls' home, I began to wonder how many people were running the society I lived in. After that we entered the Hall of Scriptures, which was filled with saints and gods and all sorts of religious artifacts from almost all religions. The art inside that hall was beautiful enough to take one's heart away. A few girls who were over the age sat in there praying or performing religious

stuff before whatever god they believed in.

But best of all was the garden. There was every type of plant under the sun in that garden. I couldn't take my eyes off of it. The plexiglass dome scattered the light so that in the mini-waterfalls you could see rainbows appear and disappear. Forests of every kind of tree were surrounded with flowers of all colors. I wanted to run off and get lost in it and never come out. Then I saw a pair of gold orbs, almost like eyes, stare at me from behind a screen of smoke.

I stopped, sucked air between my teeth, and was frozen. What type of flower was that? Whatever was hiding back there spoke in my head. Nowadays there are gadgets that allow you to do that, but I didn't hear static that was said to occur. All I heard was a voice like hot iron whisper in my head clear like water, "Don't spread the disease of rebellion, girl." ■



Scan to see Arcade Action played!

Dante Hin-Gasco, Arcade Action, Video Games, Grade 7, Age 11, La Scuola D'Italia Guglielmo Marconi, New York, NY, **Keledy Kenkel, Teacher**, Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education *Affiliate*
Gold Medal



Madison Sims, Soda Experiment Photography, Grade 7, Age 12, Ridge Road Middle School
Charlotte, NC, **Glenda Cauble, Teacher**, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, *Affiliate Gold Medal*

Jake Moody

Puber-me Humor

Grade 7, Age 12

Deer Park Junior High School

Deer Park, TX

Diane Gordon, Teacher

Harris County Department

of Education, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

According to my parents, I have a new attitude and a new smell. The change is happening as we speak. A year ago it started. My mom took me to the doctor and she confirmed it. It is medically diagnosed so it must be official. I am going through puberty. It is not newsworthy, and the paparazzi will not be beating my door down for a picture, but it is important to me.

A year ago I started sixth grade and entered the planet called junior high school. Aside from the normal worries about school, like getting stuffed in a locker by an eighth grader and being tripped in the cafeteria, I was pretty excited. I made it through the first week alive. However, by the end of the week I noticed the first sign of change. In PE class, something was definitely different. After we took a few laps around the school, we all returned to the locker

room. The smell was unreal. It smelled like a mixture of feet, moldy cheese, and wet dog. It made me want to puke. Was that me? It couldn't be, so naturally I blamed it on my best friend. "Cameron! You rank, dude. You need to put some Axe deodorant on, man. That is nasty." Of course, he blamed the smell on me as any immature sixth-grade boy would do, but I know the truth. It was him. After that, I was sure I didn't want to smell like Cameron, so I started putting deodorant on every day, not just when I thought about it, as I had done before. Eventually I think all the boys discovered they smelled as bad as Cameron had that day, so most of them started lathering up too. I made sure I smelled like a mixture of Febreze and whatever cheap cologne I could buy at Walgreens when I left the locker room after that. ■

Jiwon Yun

Personal Essay/Memoir

Grade 7, Age 12

Detroit Country Day Middle School

Beverly Hills, MI

Cheryl Duggan, *Teacher*Midwest Region at Large, *Affiliate***Gold Medal**

When I asked my mother what color I was, she answered in a confident tone, “You are white like the frosting on your first birthday cake, which ended up more on your face than in your mouth.”

“Is that all?” I asked, and she replied, “Oh, no. You are red like the blood from the worst cut you’ve ever gotten, and black like the dress you wore to my cousin’s wedding. You are gray like the sky on the day we went fishing for the very first time, when the only person who caught a fish was your dad.” She paused then, and I leaned forward, wanting to hear more.

“What else?” I asked eagerly.

“You are blue like the blanket your baby brother was wrapped in the day he was born, and clear like the tears we all spilled when he became very sick. And you are orange and brown like the leaves in fall, which we always rake up together and jump in when we’re done. You’re green like the ocean we went to last summer, where you found the biggest seashell I have ever seen.” Her caramel brown eyes settled on mine, warm and loving. “But most of all, you are pink, the color of love, to signify just how much I love you. No matter what color you choose to be, though, I am sure that it will be the best color there ever was.”

As she showed me pictures—me carefully cradling my newborn brother, me holding up a huge conch shell with my wet hair plastered to my grinning face, and me beaming at the camera with leaves stuck in my hair—I knew that the colors that were a part of my life were also part of me. Blues, greens, and reds all show who I am because they represent the life I live.

All my life, I have been ashamed of the color I am. Wherever I go, I have always felt different and foreign. When I look in a mirror and see my dull, yellow skin reflected back at me, it seems fake and plastic, like I’m a piece of art displayed in a museum—a new, creative idea someone has modeled to resemble everybody else, but with a clever little twist. People over the years have made up a single genuine rule: that Asians are yellow, African-Americans are black, Indians are brown, and Americans are white. Those who are different are analyzed and named for their differences by others, and for that reason I have always felt insecure and self-conscious about my skin color. But as I have been told many times, and have learned through my own experiences, people are colors other than the one of their skin. In that way, I am not just one color, but really many. ■



Victoria Wirkijowski, *Nowhere Man* Digital Art, Grade 8, Age 13, Holicong Middle School, Doylestown, PA, **Kristin Ritter**, *Teacher*, Philadelphia Arts in Education Partnership, *Affiliate* **Gold Medal**

Gregory Hesse

Science Fiction/Fantasy

Grade 7, Age 13

Greenhill School, Addison, TX

Peggy Turlington and Blake Harkey, Teachers

South Writing Region at Large, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

“I’ve got something to show you, Austin.”

“What do you want to show me?”

“Something that will make you never want to smoke again.”

And at that word Mr. Smith took out from under his desk a single cigarette. *Filthy hypocrite*, Austin thought.

But the man didn’t light the cigarette. He didn’t even take out a lighter. Instead, he plunked an open jar on the table between them, the cap beside it. He dropped the cigarette into the jar and fastened the lid.

“What are you doing?” Austin asked, but before Mr. Smith could answer, something started to occur in the jar that made Austin’s spine tingle.

The cigarette, completely of its own accord, began to shake vigorously. Writhing black smoke began to seep out of it like blood from a wound. Soon the entire jar was filled with it.

Austin tried to see through the thick smog inside the jar, but he couldn’t see the cigarette. Suddenly something flew right up to the glass, staring malevolently up at him. Austin nearly jumped out of his chair from the shock.

The thing was small, with a humanoid body that was pitch-black in color. Its 12 spindly toes and 12 spindly fingers each ended in a long, pointed yellow nail. Its lipless mouth was full of razor-sharp teeth that could have easily snapped off one of Austin’s fingers if it had been given half a chance. Its bloodshot eyes bulged out of their sockets as if the creature were being strangled. But what frightened Austin the most was that the creature appeared to be floating.

“Wh-what is that?” Austin stuttered.

“That,” Mr. Smith said, “is your everyday cigarette. It would be much more impressive if it was a drug like, say, heroin. It’s showing us its true form in hopes that in our terror we will let it out. Drugs don’t like to be confined.” ■



Estella Donis, *She Rested* Photography, Grade 8, Age 13, Concord Junior High School, Elkhart, IN,
Mary Amador, Teacher, The Friends of the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, *Affiliate* **American
Visions Medal**

Jessica Zheng

Having Hope Short Story

Grade 8, Age 13

Moody Middle School

Richmond, VA

Patricia Walker, Teacher

South Writing Region at Large, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

Not once in my life have I questioned what it's like to be arrested by my own father. Nor have I wondered what it's like being convicted of a felony at age 18. Guess I should start asking myself those questions now, because those are the circumstances for me.

It was all set last week that I was to begin community service at an orphanage. I only remembered because my dad reminded me 10 times the night before. Even though community service is a better option than the slammer, it is still a menacing choice compared to my familiar days of not getting caught. Maybe it is karma getting back at me for being a high school dropout or the odd bean in the family. Whatever the reason, it is supposed to end my criminal ways for a good two months. All I can say to that is a sympathetic "good luck" to whoever is in charge of me and my own darn self.

My dad storms into my room at 5:30 a.m. and tells me to get up and ready.

On the ride to the orphanage, he begins lecturing me about being respectful and representing the family. I already know I am a big disappointment to our family and never will be able to fit in the mold they set for me. It is pointless to hear something I've already been told, so I turn on the radio.

"Emma," my dad almost yells above the radio, "turn that off right now."

"Why?" I ask, even though I know why.

"Emma Elizabeth Dillard, you know what?" my dad lectures. "To the public, an 18-year-old is an adult. But the public clearly hasn't met you," he sighs. ■



Avery Tutt, Tufted Mixed Media, Grade 8, Age 14, Woodward Academy Middle School, College Park, GA
Paul Vogt, Teacher, Georgia State University, Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design, *Affiliate* **Silver Medal**



Yixin Jiao, *The Back* Drawing, Grade 8, Age 13, Princeton Art Institute, Kendall Park, NJ, **Yong Zhou, Teacher**, Montclair Art Museum, *Affiliate Silver Medal*



Nathan Robison, *Under Construction* Sculpture, Grade 7, Age 13, Cab Calloway School of the Arts, Wilmington, DE, **Toniann DeGregory, Teacher**, Delaware State University, *Affiliate Silver Medal*

Katherine Mansfield

The Color of Hunger Flash Fiction

Grade 8, Age 13

Keystone School

San Antonio, TX

Cynthia Tyroff, *Teacher*

South Writing Region at Large, *Affiliate*

Gold Medal

Hunger is the cracked brown dust of the ground under my feet: gritty, parched earth. It is the withered brown of my people, our faces downturned in our submission to the greater powers that have ordained food shall never touch our land. We are many, and many of us are hopeless. And the brown of our hunger—it is everywhere. It is on the ground we walk, in the water we drink, in our eyes, in our souls. Our souls, which hunger for a way out of here and cling to the hope that help will come. I think that even on our insides we are brown.

But I know we aren't the only ones who are hungry. Maybe in our portion of the world more people are afflicted with it, but this demon does not devour only us. There must be other children somewhere, hiding in alleys or living on the streets, who feel as we do. So maybe hunger is not just brown. Maybe hunger is similar to a faded photograph: black and white, and washed out, only a faded representation of what it should be; or maybe shades of gray, wisps and wraiths, resembling skeletons rather than people.

That is what the people in our village are. They are skin and bones, their ribs visible. They

don't deserve their fate. They should be people with rosy cheeks, lush hair, and laughing eyes.

When I look at the eyes of the rest of the children of our village, they are always sad. Even the young ones, who shouldn't know so much about hopelessness, have tired dark-brown eyes sunken deep in their features. I'd do anything to take those sad brown eyes away.

I look out the window of our one-room hut and see Jahan, a small boy of 5, sitting in the dirt.

Jahan has his arms around his knees and hugs them to his frail chest. He rocks slightly, and his eyes look down at the ground, as if searching for something.

Little ants crawl out of the dust, delighting us as they make their stately march across the sand. Maybe that is what Jahan is searching for now. An ant perhaps, or maybe a blade of grass.

That is the story of our people. We are the green blades poking up despite harsh surroundings, desperate to live. Our land is the color of hunger, but I never stop praying that one day it will be the color of hope: green, new, and fresh. ■



Ritapa Neogi, *Igor's Big Adventure* Comic Art, Grade 8, Age 13, Stoller Middle School, Portland, OR, **Randy Emberlin**, *Teacher*, Oregon Art Education Association, *Affiliate Gold Medal*



Kathryn Grace Wallace, *Elephant Gate* Photography, Grade 8, Age 13, Presbyterian School
Houston, TX, **Bonnie Berler, Teacher**, Harris County Department of Education, *Affiliate Gold Medal*

Deryn Mierlak

My Native Land Poetry

Grade 8, Age 13

Mount Hebron Middle School

Upper Montclair, NJ

Michele Kinnas, Teacher

Northeast Writing Region at Large, *Affiliate*

Gold Medal

There is a place
Where you can buy moonshine and dragon's teeth
In ebony boxes.
And rivers made of silver cut through the earth
Like a knife through stone.
And gold is for fools
While coal is for rich.
And you can love without fear
And happiness blooms like a flower.
This is my native land. ■

Lucas Jemison

The Art Contest Flash Fiction

Grade 8, Age 14

Lancaster Mennonite School

Lancaster, PA

Alice Lauver, *Teacher*

Lancaster Public Library, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

“Dylan, get out of my room.”

I try to say it with an unsettling calm, but I think my brother is too young to understand that. My paintings usually last about five days before being utterly demolished. The black paint stain he made represented the black hole my life had been sucked into for the past two months. Moving to Manhattan was not my idea.

Having seven people crammed into a New York City apartment is not cool.

I look at my calendar. My eyes drift to the day circled in red ink. My mind erupts in a volcano of frustration. It's the 27th! A month ago the school art contest was announced. It's going to happen today. I have to create a masterpiece in a little under seven hours. I shove my art supplies in my backpack, jump on my bike, and race to Bax's house.

Bax's house is the most magnificent sight. Built into the corner, it's ancient and

looks haunted. It seems like a hurricane of stairs and art. As I reach the apex of the house, where Bax's room is located, I look out at the sprawl of the city below me. That's one thing I appreciate about New York: the sights.

I open the door to find Bax, or Baxter as his parents call him, finishing the art on our first graphic novel. I wrote it, and we were co-artists. The lenses of his glasses don't even turn toward me.

“Let me guess, you forgot today was the art contest?” Bax is a nice guy, but he can really tick me off. “Where's your canvas, Bax?” I ask with frustration.

“Closet, on the top shelf. I had a feeling you'd be dropping by today, Kenny.”

I start to work furiously. My paintbrush is an unstoppable juggernaut as it flies across the canvas. ■



Natalee Merola, *Self Portrait, Monotype* Printmaking, Grade 7, Age 12, Pembroke Hill School Ward Parkway, Kansas City, MO **Amanda Stockman**, *Teacher*, Midwest Art Region at Large, *Affiliate* **Gold Medal**



Ruby Blackman, Painting, Grade 7, Age 13, University School of Nashville, Nashville, TN **Peg Williams**, *Teacher*, Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art, *Affiliate Gold Medal*



Khalil Green, *Toy Monster* Sculpture, Grade 8, Age 12, Highland Middle School, Louisville, KY
Tammy Podbelsek, *Teacher*, Jefferson County Public Schools, *Affiliate Gold Medal*

Stefan Schmidt**U-Boat** Short Story

Grade 8, Age 13

Northwest Junior High School

Coralville, IA

Andrea Keech, *Teacher*

Belin-Blank Center for Gifted

Education, *Affiliate***Gold Medal**

I woke to a sound that had not been present in our steel prison for many weeks now, not since our last encounter with American ships. We were the predators; we stalked our prey and played out the situation the way we wanted. We were crusaders for Germany's cause, the unsung soldiers who served the fatherland. Men on the front lines fought our enemies head-on, while we volunteered to serve time in a filthy U-boat consumed by the smell of unwashed bodies, urine, and blood for weeks at a time. Absent our aid, Germany's ground forces would crumble like a card house in the wind. Not a chance would they stand had their foes been supplied with all the food and munitions they were meant to receive from America, Canada, and Great Britain.

Today was not among our more glorious days. As I woke, I heard a normally absent sound. Silence. After a few seconds, all I picked up was the faint ping of the sonar headphones. I sat up slowly, wondering whether I was dreaming or whether something else was amiss. I hesitated to move my curtain, for if I had assumed correctly, any sound could truly mean our death. But the silence did not last forever.

"Scheisse!" whispered the sonar operator in a panicked tone, as the faint pings grew more and more frequent. "They have detected us!"

Nein! This could not be happening to us. Everything was different. Now we were the hunted. We were not in control anymore. It was an alien feeling, knowing we no longer had the upper hand.

Then the man in front of the sonar system broke the prolonged silence.

"Achtung! Wasserbombe!" A few seconds passed as we waited for the chaos and roaring noise of the depth charge...BOOM! A low, monstrous, rumbling explosion like thunder engulfed us and rendered us momentarily deaf. Then the entire ship vibrated and shook violently. Sailors fell out of their bunks, and various cans or lights rolled around on the dirty, brine-encrusted floor. A few seconds passed before another barrage of depth charges rocked the ship and its occupants. ■



Dayln Gillentine, *The Baguette Murderers* Painting, Grade 7, Age 13, The Portfolio Studio Austin, TX, **Nancy Hoover**, *Teacher*, St. Stephen's School, *Affiliate American Visions Medal, Best in Grade, and Gold Medal*

Morgan Elkins

The Key Personal Essay/Memoir

Grade 8, Age 14

Center for Teaching and Learning

Edgecomb, ME

Nancie Atwell, *Teacher*

New England Art Education Conference

and The Boston Globe, *Affiliate*

American Voices Medal

I remember standing barefoot in the garden. It was November, and the fallen leaves were crusted with frost. I had on my lilac wings and the shimmering dress I'd worn for Halloween. As the first car pulled into our driveway, Parker darted down the long walkway to inform the adults already waiting inside. I stood completely still, hidden behind a birch. Only when the mile-long driveway was choked with sedans did I come in, trailing behind the mink throws and silk scarves.

The parties my great-grandma threw were never quiet or simple. This one, in honor of the Scottish poet Bobby Burns, was annual—like Christmas. There were always bagpipes, several men dressed in kilts, and haggis. Throughout the night, guests would spout lines in Scottish accents—all leading up to her own rendition of “To a Mouse.”

I remember weaving through legs sheathed in cocktail dresses and khakis, champagne flutes dangling from fingers. There were so many people—the women with their sensible heels or stilettos, the men in gray dress shoes. Feet overlapped feet until I felt there was no room for me to stand, and the crush of bodies was stifling. Desperate, I pushed my way through the throngs of people clogging the porches and dining room and escaped to an abandoned hall.

The bagpipes had started up again. Sitting with my back against the wall, cross-legged in the dark, the lull of voices didn't sound as imposing. The hall was empty except for a sagging cardboard box tucked in the corner behind the door. I fingered the satin hem of my dress, unready to return to the mass of poets, neighbors, and foreign diplomats. I searched for an excuse to delay my return. ■

Asher Feldman

The Bird, the House, and the Man

Science Fiction/Fantasy

Grade 8, Age 14

P.S. duPont Middle School

Wilmington, DE

Tracy Selekman, *Teacher*

Delaware State University, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

In the distance the man saw a house just before the mountains that encircled him. It was white and made of stone, with a mournful look like that of a widow thinking of her dear departed.

This was a strange place, thought he. Sounds seemed dampened, and the dust he shifted while moving seemed to move too slowly to be normal. The air was thick with the reek of an open grave, and somehow the man had the feeling that he and Bird were not actually alone.

Wind—forceful, powerful—swept about his ankles. With a prickling feeling he spun to find Bird staring at him with a look of only...

Only what? That face, the face that looked like a skeleton from a long-buried casket, looked at him with an unidentifiable expression. Was it hunger? Hate? Dare he say...loathing? No, it was...something else.

“Come,” said Bird powerfully, setting off with a brisk stride toward the house that was the color of the cloth that goes over a corpse's face. “Now,” said Bird, even more forcefully when she saw that he was not following. Without willing them to, the man's legs began to move in pursuit of Bird. He did not resist. Instinctually, he knew that he could do nothing. ■



Seanna Harris, *Monks* Photography, Grade 7, Age 12, Bak Middle School of the Arts, West Palm Beach, FL, **Joseph Barefoot, Stephanie Chesler, and Patrick Fallon, *Teachers***, Educational Gallery Group (Eg²), *Affiliate Gold Medal*

Liana Wang

Science Fiction/Fantasy
Grade 8, Age 13
T.H. Rogers Secondary School
Houston, TX

Andrea Gomez, *Teacher*
Harris County Department
of Education, *Affiliate*

Gold Medal

The bed creaked familiarly as she got up. She folded her worn blanket, traces of once-vivid stitching from her youth barely visible, and she almost smiled—no blanket could remain perfect for that long. No, she revised, no blanket should. The rest of humanity preferred a coverlet of plastic fibers. It was a “once in eternity” buy, staying immaculately flawless throughout the years. But plastic could never hold memories the way each crease and fading color could in fabric. She set the frayed cloth upon the foot of her bed while walking slowly toward the kitchen for breakfast.

There were so many things she was missing more and more, she realized, as she searched in the KeepFreeze for milk the fourth time that month. Dairy products had disappeared more than 80 years ago, along with so many other

things—produce, houses, animals, beds, toys, happiness—all replaced by supposedly better items. Slim fingers probing quickly, she came upon a small air-sealed bag of Flakes, opened them, and dumped them into a white bowl.

I used to eat Flakes...cereal...with milk, she thought, pouring in Nutrientia, the sweet and creamy synthesized liquid her daughter bought her every month. And I’m drinking Nutrientia more and more. That was all everyone ever had, Nutrientia and Nutrientia only, which was convenient—no refrigeration, no spoiling. She was probably the last owner of a KeepFreeze, she realized. The younger children drank something else to keep them growing, but once they reached their golden years, all they had to do was drink Nutrientia—and stop aging. ■



Jacquelyn Nader, *Silent Protest* Painting, Grade 8, Age 14, Darrell C. Swope Middle School Reno, NV, **Mary Killian, Teacher**, The Nevada Museum of Art, *Affiliate Silver Medal*

Rachel Page

Lost Short Story

Grade 8, Age 13

Writopia DC

Washington, DC

Kathy Crutcher, Teacher

Writopia Lab, *Affiliate*

Best in Grade, Gold Medal

She made her way through the brush that separated the patch of trees and her shed from the rest of the world. When she closed her eyes, something tightened in her stomach. A familiar feeling, one she could never get rid of. Not just a feeling, a command. Something lost. Find now. She had never learned how to disobey.

Her feet took her down a narrow alley and through a back gate into someone's backyard. A plastic ball lay in a puddle of rainwater next to the grill. And a naked baby doll, missing a foot, hidden under hard green tomatoes. She bent and picked it up hesitantly, fingers curling around the small plastic neck. It fell with a quiet thud into an empty jar. The nakedness of the doll seemed odd, almost disrespectful, as if it had been stripped of all pride before being forgotten. Its eyes were half-closed, as if ashamed. She stood.

"Hey."

A man's voice. Her head whipped up. He stood on the steps leading up to the house, a cigarette dying slowly in his hands. She had not heard the door open.

"Hey!" His voice was harsh and deep. "What are you doing in my garden?"

The girl took a step back, hands tightening around the cord of her jars. They clanged with the step, and she jumped like a dog frightened by his own tail. She could not think.

The girl could have done many things. Like apologize. Or tell him the truth and hope that maybe, just maybe he would believe it. Or cry. But she didn't do any of these things. Instead, she turned and ran.

Her heart echoed the pounding of her feet. Behind her she could hear the crunch of gravel as he followed. She ran faster. Her jars clanked with each step, a chaos of noises. If she had stopped to think, maybe she would have realized that she was leading the man to her secret home, to her one safe place. But she didn't stop to think. Not about anything. She ran to the one place she knew. (Or remembered. Or wanted to remember.)

For a long time she hid there, in her shed, heart pounding, curled up between the wall and the cobwebs that hung between the shelves. She did not want to move. In her head she imagined the man walking around her shed, peering through the windows, kicking at the dust outside the door. ■

Brian Schmitt

Changing Hearts Poetry

Grade 8, Age 14

Hackley School

Tarrytown, NY

Nicole Butterfield, *Teacher*

Southern Maine Writing Project at the

University of Southern Maine and

the Betterment Fund, *Affiliate*

Silver Medal

I am the boy with the golden heart
cradled gently in my mother's arms.
Dreaming of playground slides, and the bright
blue sky,
of dandelions roaring and fly fishermen soaring.
I am the boy with small teeth glowing in the
sunlight.
My contagious smile spreads through a crowd.
I am the boy who wouldn't harm a fly,
everything so perfect to my beautiful eyes.
I am the boy they thought would never change.

I am the teen with the broken heart
kicking up dirt alone on the street
with sagging eyes filled with solemn contempt.
I am the boy who yells at his mother,
when all she does is try to comfort and care,
The one who loved his girlfriend and hated
his teacher,
used words like spears to all who felt them,
the kid they prayed would go away.

I am the soldier with the callused heart
mindlessly killing like a rabid dog,
following orders and longing for a purpose,
with morality endangered and hate in surplus.
I am the one banned from my heritage,
and disregarded as society's miscarriage,
the one who showed so much potential.

I am the veteran with a tattoo of the world on fire,
of burning hearts and hungry tigers,
the one who saw too much to handle,
squeezing a stress ball when not a trigger.
I am the vet who served six times,
and came home to nothing but angry stares,
and got sent away when anger flared.

I am the prisoner with the blackened heart.
A dirty zebra-striped man,
using a toothbrush only to sharpen the end,
ready to kill without a second thought,
never veering from the crash course he sought.
I am the prisoner who screams in his sleep,
dreaming of wounded men and waters of red.
I am the prisoner who wants it all out of his head.

I am the old man with barely a heart,
cold, crumbling, and withered as my body has
become.

I am the old man with the hickory cane,
and the blood-speckled handkerchief
I cough in again and again.

I am the old man who sits on his porch
watching the golden-hearted children run by
my house,

and seeing they can never last.

I am the old man who knows
we are all born with hearts of gold. ■



Margie Stutzman, *Wild Burst* Painting, Grade 8, Age 13, Fairfield Junior-Senior High School
Goshen, IN, **Wendi Sparks**, *Teacher*, The Friends of Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, *Affiliate*
Gold Medal

The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers gratefully acknowledges the vision of our donors.

The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers gratefully acknowledges the ongoing generosity of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. Its support has been instrumental in our ability to reach and recognize creative young students through the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and share their remarkable work and talent with a national audience.

Assistance from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation allows the Alliance to produce this publication to celebrate the work of seventh and eighth graders. Now in its sixth year, *SPARK* showcases a selection of the most outstanding art and writing from middle school students across the nation. *SPARK* shines the spotlight on the exceptional creative talents and skill of the Awards' youngest participants, which also serves as validation of the superb instruction and encouragement they receive from their middle school teachers.

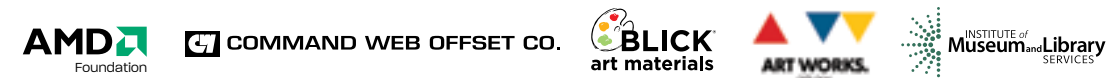
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We are especially grateful for the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's continued partnership and the added value its support affords us and our students.

Alliance for Young Artists & Writers
557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012
tel: 212.343.6892 fax: 212.389.3939
www.artandwriting.org

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