

Student Writing Issue

Minnesota English Journal

volume 38, number 1



Mirrors

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Cover, page 7, page 48
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(NOVA Development):
Pages 3, 17, 29, 35, 43, 53

Printer
Sentinel Printing
St. Cloud, MN

Minnesota English Journal
is an official publication of
the Minnesota Council of
Teachers of English, a
member of the NCTE
Information Exchange
Agreement

Single copy - \$5
©MCTE, 2003

*Writing, I think, is not apart from living. Writing
is a kind of double living. The writer experiences
everything twice. Once in reality and once in that
mirror which waits always before or behind.*

~ Catherine Drinker Bowen

As young as some of the writers published here are, many have discovered the “living twice” of writing, of reflecting on their own experiences. Some of them are everyday experiences --“Shore Lunch” or “Walking Through the Woods” or “Socks” or “Hurry Up in There!” Some are life-changing experiences: “There’s More to Life” or “The Day” or “Defensive Specialist.”

In some of the pieces the writers have experimented with living other lives: “Midnight Oil” or “The Week After Christmas,” or “Screaming With No Breath.” Joanna Knight has tried on the writing life of F. Scott Fitzgerald in her story “The Many Faces of Ejima Beynon.”

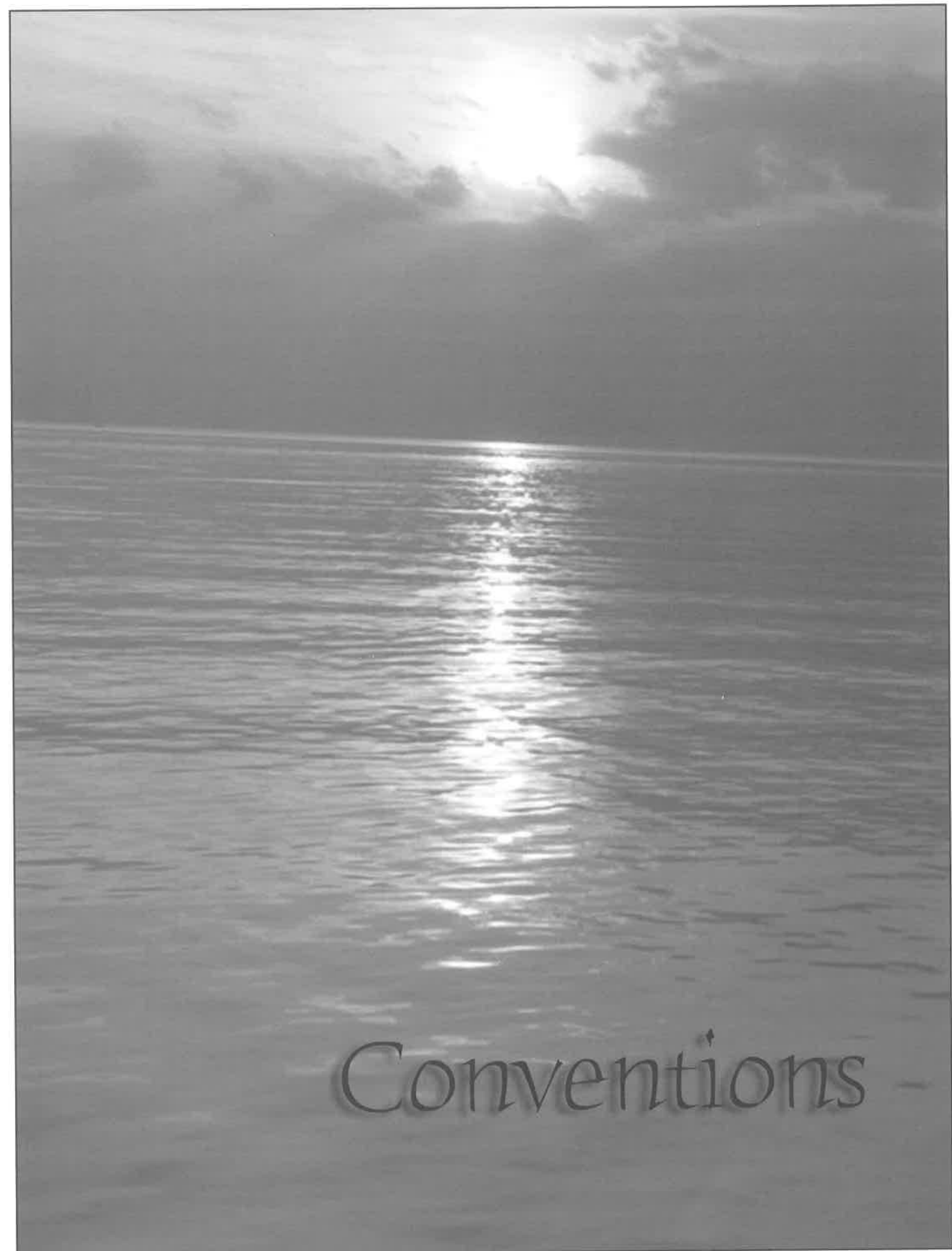
Being included in this anthology allows the student writers another kind of double life: the life of a published writer. We’ve all seen the pleasure our students take in seeing their words in print, whether it’s in a classroom anthology, in the school literary magazine, in the hometown newspaper, or in a prestigious contest. Being published gives student writers a unique confidence, maybe even a feeling that, like childbirth, even though the labor can be intensely painful, the outcome is joyful.

Please consider submitting work of your students for the next issue. There is a submission form on page 52 or you can download the form at www.mcte.org. We’d also welcome, like the submissions of Theanna Grivna (page 36), Shannon Hannigan (page 18), and Stephen Smarjesse (page 12), the products of classroom assignments with your own reflection.

If writers live double lives, then teachers of writing lead triple lives as we have the privilege of being let into our students’ lives through their writing. Thanks to the students for sharing their work and their lives with all of us.

Looking forward to next year’s writing,

Sandy



Conventions

The Week After Christmas

Anna Jankowski, Cloquet High School, grade 11

"The night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a..."

"Shut that ludicrous thing off! Christmas is done an' over with, 'least for another year!" an old, grouchy woman's voice yelled from the back office.

Quietly, the girl shrugged, pushed her long brown hair back and stopped the antique record player. She couldn't help but wince at the dead sound of static as the pin was removed. Yes, it was time to pack "The Night before Christmas," away; after all, it was now the week after Christmas, and nobody needed the extra pick-me-up from that type of song anymore. Not like Christmas had been anything special this year; she hadn't even gotten December twenty-fifth off from work at the dingy truck stop café. And, while most of the customers had tried to keep in the mood of the season, there had been more than a few "grinches" this Christmas. Perhaps it had only been the colder-than-average temperatures, but the girl certainly hadn't refuted the prospect that people had simply grown grouchier, but that might only have been the imagining of a lowly truck stop dishwasher...

"An' after them records've been put away, the windows need a-cleaning."

"Yes 'm." The girl knew that the "a-cleaning" in the windows wouldn't include a bucket of soapy water, but rather boxes waiting to be filled with the decorations of the late season. Window clings. Fake snow. A ceramic village, complete with an ice rink and a ski slope. Perhaps she would wait to do that job, she thought. That way, Christmas would stay just a little longer.

The wrinkled woman from the office came to the front of the café, stood with her hands on her aproned hips and glared through the frosty window, her nose crunching up like a pug nosed dog's snout. "Ali, Christ!" She shook her head and tapped her foot, pronouncing "Christ" as in "Christmas."

"God bless 'im!" a deep male voice sounded from the kitchen.

I swear, it can be the deadest, sorriest day in this place and he still shows up! Sam, start the coffee!"

The girl walked to the coffee maker, chipped and barely usable, and quietly began working. Dishwasher, bah humbug! Servant, slave seemed a better description,

The little silver bell atop the door tinkled as a tall,

hunched figure entered the café. Despite the brewing snowstorm, he wore no jacket, just a ripped, ragged green flannel shirt. His pants were woolen, like those assigned to new army enlistees. Some people said he had fought in 'Nam; he had a limp to prove it, if anyone cared enough to ask. No one did. His boots were of a similar genre, untied and worn at the toes, revealing a ripped red sock in one foot, nothing but toes in the other. He wore a fingerless glove on one hand; the other revealed cracked, nearly iridescent skin, possibly from poor circulation, if anyone took time to notice. No one did. The fingers seemed cupped in a position that reminded the girl of someone delicately reaching toward a butterfly, but the grace had long since been replaced by arthritic pain. His scraggly, mangled beard was graying in the center, his unshaven cheeks sunk inward like the plot of an old grave and his eyes were crystal blue, despite the whitish film over the right one, if anyone bothered to look. No one did.

He was a regular, often showing up three, four times a day for the same thing – black coffee, one sugar cube, no spoon. It was policy that the coffee cup he used be washed two times with soap and water, as opposed to the usual rinse. He always sat in the first booth to the right of the door. The café workers called him "Krist" (after the grouchy lady's pronunciation of "Christ" every time he entered the restaurant), but the locals, so Samantha had heard, referred to him as Jimmy. Jimmy what? Just Jim. Slim Jim.

"Well... you best serve 'im that thur coffee, missy, a-fore it cools off!"

The girl looked at the woman strangely, contemplating what to say or do next.

"And don't say it. Just don't you say it! I know I'm the waitress, but you know"—and she stretched the word like 'knoooooow' – "how he smells. I just don't wanna risk tamperin' with the smell of my new shampoo." She patted the sides of her pearly white hair, plied in a bun three inches above her head. Hair extensions, possibly a wig... "Now, hurry along!" She shoved the scorching cup into the girl's hands and forcefully pushed her forward.

Before the girl could turn around to protest, or at least complain, the grouchy woman had waddled back

to the office, ready to play solitaire until her break, where she planned to smoke "a pack a day to keep the diets away." Samantha switched the steaming cup between her hands and took a few steps. Oh, god, people say he has diseases. They say he smells. He doesn't take baths. People mention post-traumatic stress from the war. Oh, god, what if he lashes out at me? What if he just murders me—me, the lowly dishwasher—right here, in this café?

And suddenly, it seemed as though someone had played a very, very cruel joke on Samantha. For the distance to the first booth to the right of the door had shrunk and she was standing directly in front of him. Jimmy. Slim Jim. Krist.

"H-Here's your coffee, sir. Black, with one sugar cube." She set the cup down, handed him the spoon.

His ungloved hand reached out—those curved, iridescent fingers brushing the spoon and the girl's hand. She jumped immediately, scared over rumors she knew she shouldn't believe. Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly, he wrapped his long, bony fingers around the spoon, as if he hadn't touched one in a long time, as if he was afraid of breaking it and lowered it down to his coffee. His hand shook like a piece of white tissue paper in the wind. Chink-Chink. The spoon rattled against the enameled cup. Chink-Chink. Chink-Chink. He vainly tried to stir his coffee, a twisted expression of helplessness and stale pride on his woeful face. And suddenly, as if hit by a derailed speeding train, Samantha knew why he had never asked for a spoon.

"I'm sorry!" She ripped the spoon from his crippled hand and rushed away as the deluge of tears came streaming down her face. Black coffee, one sugar cube, *no spoon*.

"What is wrong with that girl?" asked the grouchy woman as Samantha pushed past her. "Humph! 'Scuse you, missy!"

The girl slumped over the stainless steel sink, her tears streaming down the drain. Between her sobs she glared at the spoon sitting in the bottom of the sink. How could she have been so insensitive? Why had she held her breath when she approached him? Why had she flinched at the touch of his fingers? Samantha could feel the grouchy woman's presence, could smell her cigarette, — which, by the by, she smoked out of a long, old fashioned white filter. "Humph!" she snorted, "Those windows still need a-cleanin'."

Samantha pulled herself upright, forced herself to walk to the front windows. As she cleared away the fake snow like some giant snowplow, she kept her back to the man at the table. As she packed the tiny village, house by house, shop by shop, each tiny skater, each tiny skier,

she looked down, afraid to see his eyes looking into her own. And still, his presence was there; he was no longer just a distant regular. He was very, very close.

As she labeled the last box, taped the last seam, she looked at him out of her eye's corner, then away, then back again. He was struggling to button up his green flannel shirt, his curved fingers vainly fumbling with the buttons, his blind eyes leading him astray.

And somewhere, somewhere deep inside the girl, Christmas was no longer a week ago. She walked over to the man. They say he smells. She smiled at him. Some people say he has diseases. He doesn't take baths. She took his hands. People mention post-traumatic stress. She began buttoning his flannel. He stood motionless, awkwardly bending down and blankly staring out the window at the falling snow.

The crucifix fell forward from within the folds of his tattered clothes, haphazardly hung over his wiry frame. It was brass-colored and tarnished by frequent use. The workers called him "Krist."

As the crucifix dangled between the pauper and the princess, he opened his chapped and bleeding lips, moved them to form some inaudible word. Realizing the words could not come, he seemed to sink away; the girl struggled to pull him back. He moved his lips again. "I-I liked the village," he whispered in a broken voice, "I-t's a sh-shame you p-packed it away."

And, with that, he pivoted on his good leg and slowly, slowly, ever so slowly limped out of the café. The silver bell tinkled for the last time in that Christmas season.

The girl watched him walk into the whirling snow, out into the cold blizzard. As the hunched figure was swallowed up by the whipping snow, she sighed at the beautiful message only the miracle of Christmas could give—a message she had finally learned a week after Christmas, a message of hope and love and the recognition that life is always greater than what is seen.

She never saw him in the café again after that night. Sometimes she would wonder, looking at the first empty booth to the right of the door, if he had made it home, wondered if he had a home, wondered who he was. But, somewhere deep inside, she knew the details didn't matter. For somehow, she knew he had completed the task he had always come to do. Or, maybe, that was just the imagining of a lowly truck stop dishwasher...

Defensive Specialist

she bases her life
on the actions of others
with each step someone makes
she must adjust
 re-evaluate
 respond
 react

she must be patient
be observant
be willing to watch
 be calm
 be collected
 be composed
possess enough dignity
to allow the successes
of those around her
and fret not
about when hers
will arrive
on its shining silver platter

she values the ground she walks
more so than herself
it is hers to protect
 to shelter
 to shield
 to save
she must sacrifice
herself her utter motivation
is to defend the ground she struts

her life unfolds in
an eternal state
of anticipation
 of eagerness
 of estimation
 of expectancy

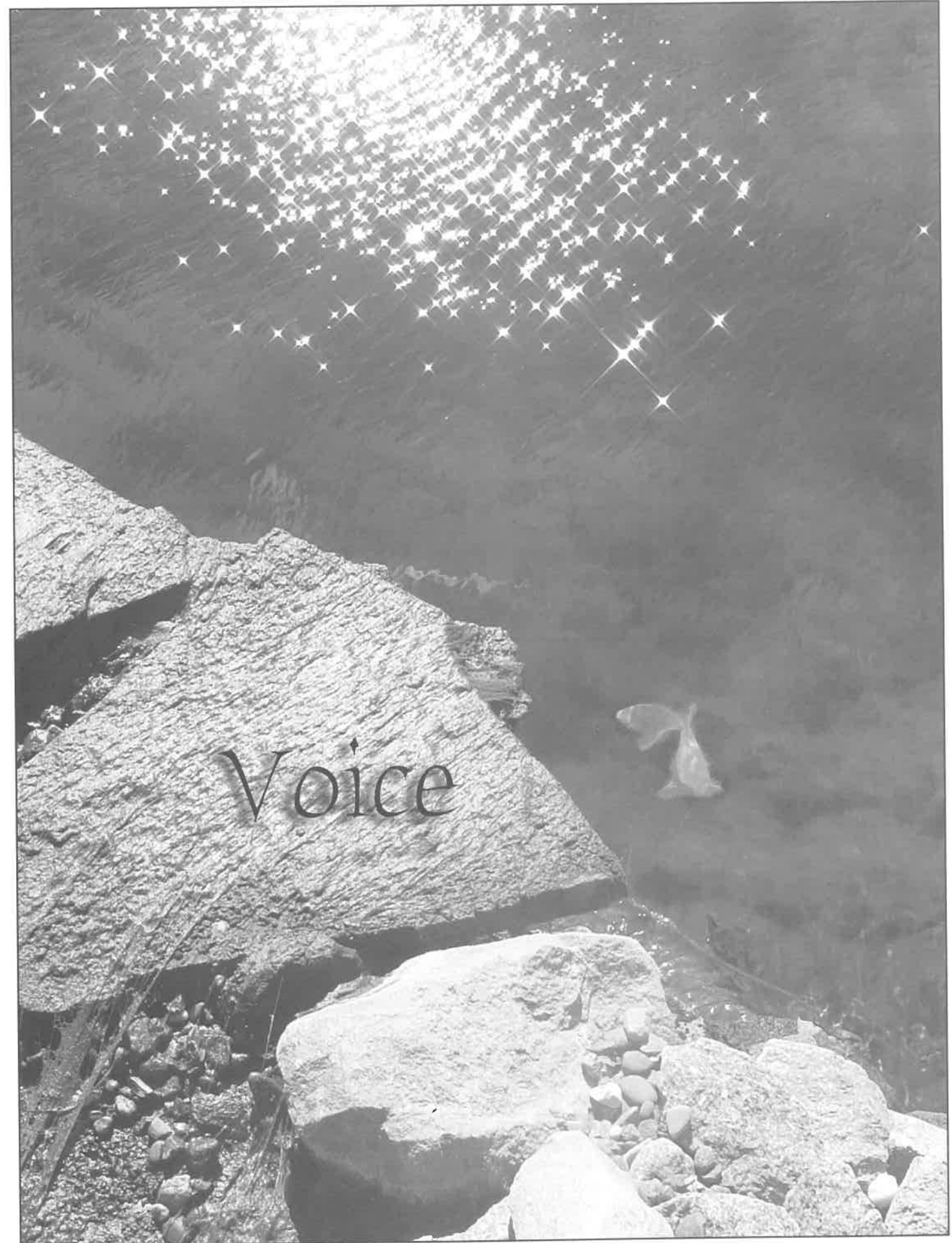
she speculates
what the future may hold
but is unable to shed
the perpetual uncertainty
that comes with the territory

she must be altogether liable
for her weaknesses
 her faults
 her failures
 her flaws
while simultaneously
accept them gracefully
for progress is unfeasible
until she allows
her mistakes to happen

she recognizes that the triumphs
of each individual
rest upon her resilient shoulders
it is her duty to provide
them with an opportunity
to shine
 to accomplish
 to achieve
 to ace

with every ounce she offers
she craves still more
more opportunities
to let those around her thrive
for the victory of another
is the most illustrious feat
for a defensive specialist
 a challenger
 a competitor
 a contender

Brittany Billehus
Champlin Park High School, grade 11



It was such a beautiful day in May 1st 2001, and there I was, running around in the gym because I was mad. That day I was burning hot, just about ready to kill anything that was in my way. I hated this one new girl who talked behind my back claiming that she beat me up already and made me cry. Actually, she didn't say it face to face, but instead, she told it to someone else and I got mad. By the way, I was overwhelmed by my anger and I decided to beat her up. Well, that's what I said to my cousins and I was hoping for support. Instead, I end up with a lecture and I could feel all those big, bright words coming toward me, permanently glued to my face. During that time, I wanted to cry louder than the super sonic sounds and kill everything that has life. Somehow, I was snapped out of my daydream and I felt so embarrassed because I liked this guy in my gym class named Thai and I thought to myself - *Oh great! Now I look like a klutz.*

Five minutes passed and Dave came in the gym looking around for me. There were two Shoua Yangs, and he was standing there for like ten thousand years but in reality it was only three minutes. He looked really confused so he had to talk on his walky-talky for a while and then he looked down at me as if I was in such trouble. Almost everyone asked him why I had to go, and he just smiled an awkward smile.

Gosh! Why does he walk so fast?

When I reached the office, I saw my sister-in-law (5 months pregnant) standing in the front door. She stared at me with worried eyes and I knew there must be something wrong. So, I ran from Dave and reached up to her. I asked her in a worried way in Hmong as we quickly walked away into the van, "What's the matter? Why are you here?"

She replied in Hmong with an almost choked voice as if she'd been crying for years, "You have no mom, never, forever this lifetime." And then she looked down to the ground.

My other sister-in-law, who was the driver, just sat there with nothing to say. I turned my head slowly toward the window and stared out. We drove away and not a single word came out until we parked at a lot at St. John's Hospital. My two sisters-in-law were saying something and all I did was run as quickly as I

could to where my mom's room was. My cousins with bloodshot eyes stared at me and their lips started to tremble. I looked around and saw my mom, my precious mom, lying on the bed. I was shocked and didn't notice that I was crying badly until someone held onto my shoulders hard and shook me. I realized immediately that it was my sister, Mai. She gave me a hug and comforted me to stop the crying. I couldn't see with all those tears in my two eyes.

Why! Why are they staring at me like that? Are they blaming on me for my mom's death? Are they? No! It 's not. It mustn't be.

"Shoua, now that your mom has left this world, you must be a good girl and listen to your older brothers' and sisters' opinion," said my aunt Ger Se Yang, sobbing after every couple of words. "You must not disobey because your mom is not there for you anymore."

Two days seems like forever, but I just walked to school in the afternoon when school was just over. I was about to walk inside to look for Miss Ly and ask her to help me tell the principal, Mr. Rupert, that my mom has passed away, but she came outside with the girl I detested so much. I quickly jogged up to her and said that I needed to talk to her. She gazed at me and asked, "Are you okay? Why do you look so pale?"

"Um... I really need to talk to you. Could I?" I asked her knowing that if I talked longer, I'd just cry.

Ms. Ly and I opened her office door slowly and sat in her office and started our conversation.

"Um... m-my mom... sh..." and then I burst in hot, burning tears. I wiped off my tears quickly and saw that Ms. Ly had her hands around me with an "Oh, I'm so sorry, Shoua."

I continued my sentence in a voice that sounded like I was screaming as one tear ran down my eye. Tear by tear. "My mom died!"

"Shoua, I-I'm so sorry to hear that! I know I've never been in your shoes but..."

"I can't help it! I miss her so much and..."

"So how did this happen? Did she have a cancer or some kind of disease or something?"

"No! She does not have such things! She was healthier than me!" I said as my voice raise higher. "She

died because my dad came back to take her with him." I slowly looked down at my shoes and continued, "Now I have no mom, no dad."

Mr. Wilson came in and opened the door quickly and looked at us. He opened the door so fast that I could feel the wind rushing against my face. He stood there, one hand holding the door and the other on his high waist that was almost up to my shoulders. Then he glanced at me and then looked at Ms. Ly. He asked her, "What's the problem?" He acted like he has no sympathy that I was crying so hard even though my eyes were about to pop out.

"Oh, her mom passed away and she came to tell me," said Ms. Ly looking at Mr. Wilson. Her face gives me the feeling that she was going to cry with me.

Then he replies in a reaction that no one could tell the truth in his heart, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that."

Anyway, I felt happier now. All I wanted was someone to say something that could take me free from such a sad world I was put into.

Mr. Rupert, our principal, opened the door in a sneaking way. We all stared at him and he stared back at us, one by one. He finally asked Ms. Ly, "What's the matter?"

"Her mom has passed away a couple of days ago," said Ms. Ly in a sympathetic way.

"Um... I just want to say that I won't be in school until Tuesday, the 15th because in our tradition, girls must stay home to help serve for others," I said and sighed. "Will that affect my school grades?"

"No. No... Not at all," replied Mr. Rupert, sounding as if he were surprised at what I said.

"She's a very good girl. Very succeeding girl." said Ms. Ly.

"I'm very sorry about your mom. Sorry to hear such news. Don't worry about your grades. I'll tell Nancy to put you in a good excuse so you won't be flunking," said Mr. Rupert, walking toward the door and slowly twisting the doorknob to pull the door open.

"Thanks for everything, Mr. Rupert," I said quickly before he left the room and forcing a smile to show that I thanked him in many ways.

Mr. Rupert turned back and waved once at all of us and left the room. Mr. Wilson followed him out the door and closed the door smoothly.

For a while, Ms. Ly and I didn't say a word so I told her that I have to go home and start my duties.

We both said goodbye to each other. She followed me to the front door and gave me a warm smile and told me to be careful on the way home. I bit my lower lip and nodded to show that I was listening to her, but actually I wasn't really listening to what she had said.

One week was like million of years and I looked at myself in the mirror, noticing that I was getting older. However, my cousins and friends describe me as pole looking and skinny skeleton when they saw me at my mom's funeral. All that I did was look at my mom and when my sisters cried, I cried. I felt so stupid because I cried whenever my sisters cried and that made me feel like I have no heart. I also helped serve water for the people too, so they won't be thirsty to death. Actually, I only served the first day, Saturday. On the second day, I went home to take a shower in the morning and came back to watch my mom. I did that with my sisters because some of my cousins said that there were vampires who came to the funeral, and disguised themselves like humans. First they pretend to cry, and then they'll slowly bend their head toward the corpse and suck the fluid from the decay parts. If you're not careful and watch who's touching the corpse, you might end up seeing the corpse all flat. The other cautioning story is never let anyone poke a needle into the corpse's body or else you'll have babies that are dead when they are born. Otherwise, the baby might be born abnormally.

During that second day at night, my two nieces told me that this weird guy was asking for my name and my phone number, but they refused to tell him because they were scared that I might get mad at them. Later on that hour, he came and asked me, "What's your name?" I was freaked out even though he has that good look in himself. I answered him, "Sorry, but you've made a mistake because I'm married." Well, I'm not married yet, but it's just because I wasn't in the mood to talk to guys and flirt.

He blushed and apologized to me, but I said it was okay. Then he walked away; slowly at first and then sped up a little.

Suddenly, I heard my aunt crying, holding a little bowl of rice with a piece of chicken toward my mom. I quickly walked toward my mom and listened to what was happening. She chanted to my mom, saying something like, "O, sister, you've

come to my dream saying you are hungry. Here's your food. Wake up and eat until you are full. Don't worry that we won't feed you. If you want anything to eat, come to me and ask me for food. I'll always have something for you to eat." She chanted on and on while crying and putting the food on my mom's chest. I saw this, and I start crying because I saw my sisters, Mai and Zoua crying.

The third day was the last day, which my mom was buried. That was the time I cried the hardest because I knew that it was the last time I was going to see her. All that I saw was blurriness because of my hot tears rolling down my cheeks. Dizziness invaded, and the sun's energy was a disaster causing me to almost faint, but I couldn't because I wasn't that weak. The more my cousins talked to me about not crying too much, the more I cried. I guess they figured that out because they just stood there silently and said nothing to me afterward. Whenever I cried, my two nieces, Pa Houa Yang and Pa Foua Hang, cried.

After we buried my mom and went home, I slept in my bed from 3 p.m. to 3 a.m. I was scared to stay up during that night, but I assured myself that I needn't be scared of anything because it was only my mom. Somehow, the thought of my mom resting in peace forever came flooding all over my mind, and I was happy that she was no longer in such a stressful world like she had survived through.

Teacher Talk

Shoua Vang's strong sense of voice is enhanced by her fluency. This piece has the detail of a movie script as she narrates the events that surrounded "the day." Her voice is further amplified by descriptions of her emotions and by the freshness of many of her expressions.

Fluency is a goal for all developing writers, but is an especially challenging goal in working with ESL writers. Here are some tips and suggestions gathered from George Mason University and the University of Arkansas:

- First consider the paper holistically, as you might with any piece of writing. Consider content and organization before moving on to sentence structure, grammar, usage, and spelling.

- When looking at errors, focus on grammar rather than style. As you would with any writer, allow students to write in their own voice as much as possible.

- There is compelling research that indicates that directing attention to grammar errors does not have much of an impact on their future work. This research has been

About the Author

Shoua Yang is an orphan who lives with her three brothers since she was born. They live in a house in the East Side of St. Paul, Minnesota. Shoua's father died in the Vietnam War, sacrificing his life for his people. (Shoua was only a couple of months old and never had the chance to see how he looked, but only saw the picture hanging on the wall, in a frame.) Her mother died in May 1st, 2001 at 10 o'clock in St. John's Hospital. Shoua's mother slept for three days straight without waking up or opening her eyes. No one knew exactly how she died, but her cousins said that her husband came back to take her.

In 7th grade, Shoua started writing three tremendous stories about her mother's death; however, she has not published them. "I want to finish my story in the year 2005 because I want my books to be novels and I'm still learning how to make my grammar superb," said Shoua.

As a great poet in her family, she had written poems that expressed her feelings. Usually, her poems are about her love life and interference of her family members.

Whenever Shoua feels betrayed, everyone notices that she has raised her anger up to the hottest, spiciest, and the reddest pepper that no one dares to say or look at it. Often times, her knowledge in stories and poems has inspired many readers.

duplicated with ESL writers, with the same results. One counter-argument to these findings is that the improvement takes more time than was allowed in the study. In any case, students often expect feedback. In that case, look for patterns of error. Limit your correction to two or three per draft. Make sure students understand that these are not their only problems, that this is a step-by-step approach or they may feel cheated that even when they fix the errors, they do not see instant improvement.

- Read for what isn't there. Sometimes a paper may be error-free because the writer makes safe choices. The writer may limit vocabulary choices to familiar and easy to spell words. Or there may be no fragments or dangling modifiers because there are no attempts at complex sentences.

- With their lack of experience with idioms and clichés, non-native speakers can often be refreshingly original in their images and descriptions. As with any developing writer, celebrate the strengths of each piece.

Sandy Hayes, Becker Middle School

There's More to My Life Than the Size of My Rear End

Aryn Arnold, Winona Senior High School, grade 11

It's three in the morning. You've finally drifted off to sleep, and are barely tickling the concept of rapid eye movement, when a whiny yell from the next room slams itself upon your ears. As the only hearing counselor, it's your obligation to go see what is wrong. Groggily, you meander into the camper's quarters only to realize that Julia's catheter has fallen out again. After hauling the two hundred and fifty pound woman into her wheelchair, you embark on the thirty-minute drive to the emergency room. Occurrences like this happen often to the meagerly paid staff of Camp Courage North. Surprisingly, the devoted staff still returns the next year, to face the same battles with autistic kids, the language barriers with deaf children and the fragility of the hemophiliac kids. If asked, most of them would gladly work there with no monetary compensation, purely for the privilege of being a part of Camp Courage. It was witnessing the strength and love of these counselors that changed my life.

Before my summer at camp my spirit was in a state of vexation, but I concealed the pain behind my over-achieving, perfect student-athlete persona. I put on a facade of perfection to cover up the dying person who was inside of me. The low-point of my life came two summers ago while my family was in the midst of moving. New and unfinished, our house left us stranded at my grandpa's residence for a month. As one often does at a grandparent's house, I stuffed myself like a Christmas pig. Thanks to the full stomach and a slightly concave mirror, I decided that I was fat. The next thing I knew I was perched over the toilet with my finger down my throat. I gagged, but then withdrew quickly into a lifeless pile of scum on the floor; I couldn't even do this right. I was such a failure.

I was nervous about transferring to a new school, making friends, perpetually maintaining my 4.0 grade-point average, and excelling in my

sports. I always had to be the best at everything. Third place at sections track in the 400 meter dash, as an eighth grader, was still one place away from state. None of my achievements were ever good enough for the unattainable standards I set for myself. On top of those stresses, my parents' twenty-four year marriage was falling apart, and my closer-than-close sister had just left for college. All of these things were too overwhelming; I couldn't handle them, and this was the answer. After the incident at my grandpa's, I went through sporadic phases of starvation and over-consumption. I tried to make myself vomit at least a dozen times, never going through with it, and always swearing this time would be the last. Although I never became emaciated, the obsession was always there. The numbers of my caloric intake incessantly ran through my head, rubbing my face in the fact that I wasn't normal. I'd feel inconceivably stupid and shallow when I didn't eat, guilty and afraid when I did. I would tell myself that I was in control of it, and that I wouldn't let it go too far. If I hadn't gone to Camp Courage, it might have.

The camp forced me to regain the perspective I had lost. Camp Courage North is a place where anyone can be him or herself. The welcoming staff became my family. It takes inordinately exceptional people to do the work that the counselors do, especially during PH (physically handicapped) camp. They feed people, wipe bottoms, give enemas, wake up hourly in the night to rotate the paraplegic campers, and change adult diapers, all without a second thought. The female counselors were shaped more like Maya Angelou than Cameron Diaz. If they had been fruit they would have been pears, not bananas. I was merely a kitchen girl, but it was enough to see them and the love that they so willingly gave out.

It wasn't just the counselors who hurled me back into the world of reality. The campers opened a new and unimagined world to me. During physically handicapped camp there was one woman who had suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car accident when she was sixteen years old. Sixteen. That's *my* age. She was completely gone; shouting things at inappropriate moments, rude, blunt, no trace of her former self left. That could so easily happen to me, to any of us. Other campers had gone from total use of their bodies to paraplegics overnight. There were car accidents, strokes, deep dives into shallow pools—everyone had a story. They were survivors; people who had faced true life traumas and lived to tell about them. I had endured none of these life-altering contingencies, yet I wasn't enjoying my existence half as much as they were.

Across the summer I began to realize I was dying inside, losing myself, and I gradually released the vain obsession which had for too long infringed upon my life. I still deny myself food occasionally, when I'm exceptionally stressed, but never to the extent that I used to. Actually, I haven't felt that coveting desire for hunger since I started writing this paper. It was still a secret until the moment I handed my piece of illegible, chicken-scratched parchment to my English teacher. Since then I sent the essay via e-mail to my sister to make corrections; this wasn't the way I had imagined her finding out, but it was sufficient. My life can truly move on now that I've dispatched this weighty arcanum.

I'm happy now, because there is more to my life than the size of my rear end. Two short months at camp taught me to absorb my mind with thoughts of my family, church, academics, and sports rather than my waistline. I've found some talent in art and now focus my negative energy into creativity. Life is such a roller coaster, it would be convenient if it could just be like hair sprayed into place. A few spritzes from an aerosol can, and it would remain permanently stuck in one of the more euphoric times.

It can't.

Camp Courage screams the message that as humans we have absolutely no control over the extenuating circumstances which constantly intrude upon our existence. All we can do is change the way that we react to those circumstances and remember that God will never give you more stress than you can handle. As I was driving to school today, the bumper sticker on the car in front of me said it all: "Relax ... God is in control." Your entire life can change in the blink of an eye, so live it well before you are no longer able to.

The Color of Emotion

Our classroom received a grant from the District 279 Foundation that was awarded specifically to work with Jude Nutter, an internationally recognized poet and scholar of ekphrasis.

Her four-day residency provided an invaluable writing experience for our students. They enjoyed the opportunity to meet and work under the inspired guidance of a published author, and students eagerly accepted new approaches to creative writing. Each day of the residency, Jude generously read and personally responded to 100 pieces of student writing. Students were impressed by her sincere interest in their work and were very proud of the validation she gave to their ideas, talents and insights.

I appreciated the chance to observe how my students interacted with a visiting instructor. With her calm demeanor and sophisticated British voice, Jude coaxed them to write in a way that I could not. They looked carefully into the emotions and narratives of paintings and sculpture, and they responded by creating masterpieces which employed persona, voice, and sensory images.

The residency allowed me to see the writing process from a new perspective and to enjoy the fruit of another teacher's labor.

Stephen Smarjesse
Osseo Area Learning Center

Purple

I am the color that's not so much noticed
I am the color of lilacs on a good day
I am the color of the sunset over the ocean in the evening

I am the color of true beauty
I am the color purple
The color that wants to be noticed more

Emily Heithecker
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 10

Blue

I am the endless vast of blue sky
I am the blue pen dancing about your paper
I am the blue ball bouncing about
I am the deep dark blue ocean
Waiting to swallow up everything in it
I am the blue truck that drives past your house
I am the blue jeans you walk about
I am the bright blue flame burning in your fire
I am the color blue

Matt Simonson
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 12

Blackness of Souls

The blackness of souls.
Black is the color that shows loneliness.

The uncolored brings destruction
down upon humanity.

The dark evil spirit
wearing black with no remorse.

The hateful sacred black crow
easing slowly with impure souls,
flowing into the blackness of hell.

Mai Song Yang
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 11

Cardinal

A white robe turns red with blood
Red is mysterious,
It makes love turn to anger, hate, and rage.

If I were red I would be the cardinal
I am beautiful,
But inside I am full of sorrow and jealousy.

I wish red would fly free and turn yellow
Like a canary,
Frolicking in an abandoned cornfield.

If the canary could be anything
She'd be light blue,
Like the wind rustling through trees.

Carefree and full of numbness
I am numb,
Sky blue and full of shame.

Erica Overlie
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 10

Blue

When I met my boyfriend of two years
that was the color that he was wearing,
blue

The way that his clothes hung off his body
like clothes hanging from a clothes line.
It was so beautiful.

When we met for the first time all my
insides were melting.

Erica Olson
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 12

Blue

I am the color blue
Like the color of the ink
That is rolling out of this pen
Onto the paper.
Blue is a lot of people's favorite color.
Most of the time
Blue is stuck with the feeling of sadness.
That confuses me immensely
Do people like to feel sad?

k.t. Moorhead
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 11

The Grey

4-17-02 12:04 p.m.
(After the picture: Fragments of Dream)

What is the grey
From that which I see
Behind the lids from which I sleep
The grey from my eyes
Or the grey from my mind
Grey upon grey
Swirling, spinning
Mixing and twisting
Maybe the grey
Is from my heart
The loves I have lost
The pain I've been dealt
Whatever this grey is
It most definitely is grey

Serena Lucky
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 11

Color of Red

Red is the color of a burning forehead from a blistering fever
It's like a beating pulse from a furious flowing vein
Red is the stinging bloodshot eyes that are desperate for Visine
It's the petals dropping from the dangling red rose
Red is the scarlet red dress drowning the lanky woman
It's the dripping blood dangling from the bear's sharp fangs.
Red is the flaming red lipstick sitting on the woman's plump lips

Lindsey Eng
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 11

The Color

The color of pain is red.
Hearts are red and hearts are broken every day.
It feels like a jagged knife going through my chest.

Red is the color of tears I cry when someone I love
walks away with a bad goodbye,
or no goodbye at all.

Red is the color of all the sad country songs
I hear when I'm sitting in my car
with my ears ringing because it's so quiet.

Red is darkness and so is love; it can be a dark cold night.
Until you close your heavy eyes and fall asleep
and forget everything that's wrong.

Sondra Knopik
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 12

Socks

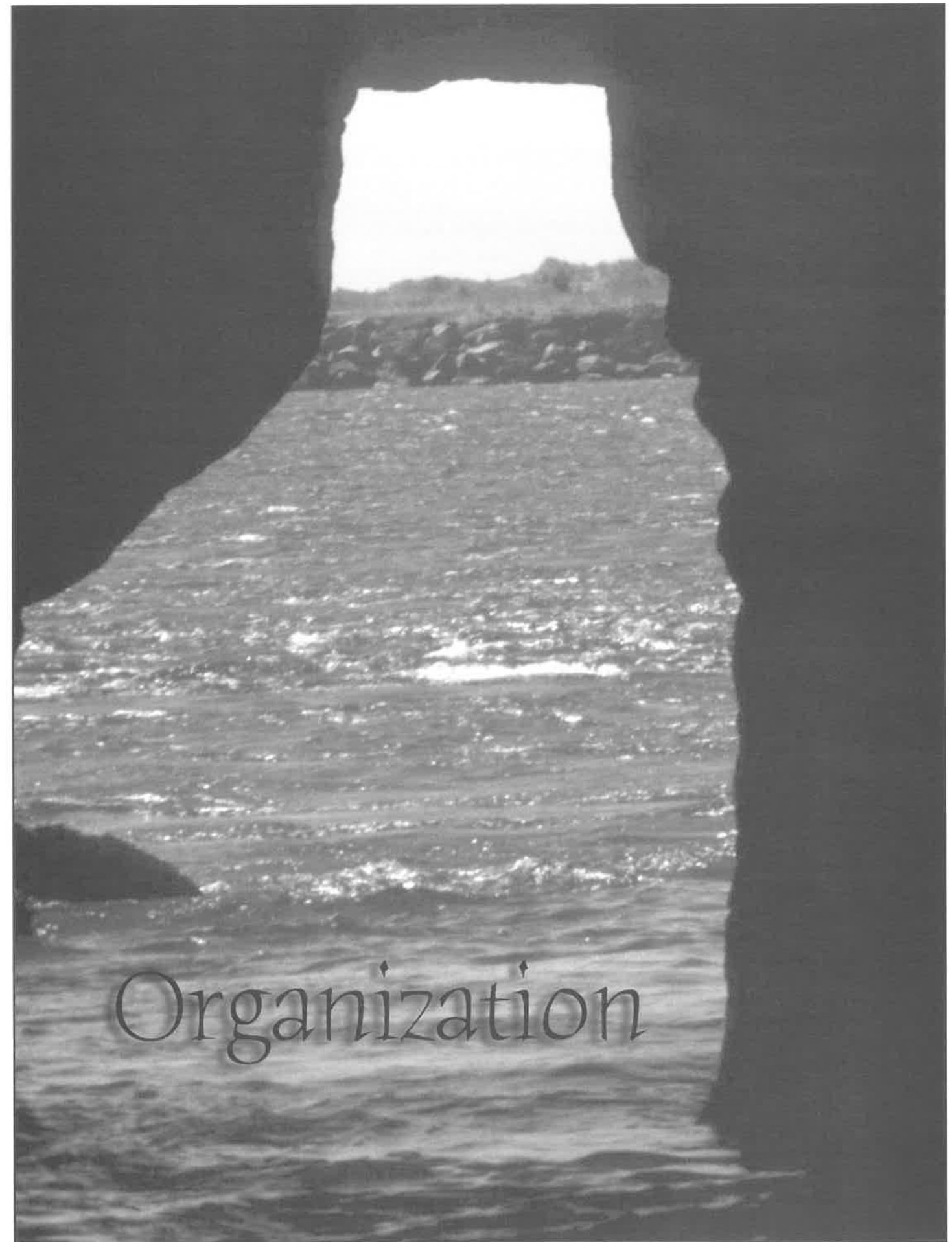
I do not like
These things called socks
They seduce the feet
Of people and then
Make rancid smells
Their fluffiness
Is deceitful
And their caress
Is often vulgar
They steal the soft touch
Of the morning grass
From tiny toes
And soft carpet
Is not felt
They keep your feet
All toasty
A perfect place
For multiple bacteria
I think
These things called socks
Need to go

Bryan Knipfer
Osseo Senior High, grade 10

Walking through the Woods

Walking through the woods
Listening to the bird song
Mingle with the songs of the trees
In the wind
The grass and leaves and mushrooms
Beneath my feet
A squirrel darts up a tree and waits,
Hanging on to the rippling bark
That covers the old oak
A doe and her fawn, grazing in a clearing
A chipmunk gathers nuts and stops to chew
On an acorn
The mosquitoes buzz around my head
I hear the music of their constant drone
The ticks that live in the woods, ready
At any time to nestle in my hair
The fear of Lyme Disease as I stare
At these buzzing insects
A skunk, appearing out of nowhere,
Raises its tail
I leave the forest
I will spread animal repellents
Around my yard
The deer fence, the plastic owl, the Dog-
Be-Gone packets,
The mole traps, the bird nets, the insect
repellents
I love nature—from a distance

Sarah Anderson
PACT Charter School, Anoka, grade 11



Organization

Teacher Talk

I teach Literary Arts (creative writing) to one group of high school juniors in a full-year, seminar-format course, for about 2 1/2 hours a day, five days a week. My teaching partner, John Colburn, then works with the same group on the same schedule when they are seniors. We have the good fortune to be able to provide such intensive writing instruction because we teach at the Arts High School, within the Perpich Center for Arts Education. Our high school, a state agency, is a selective, competitive public school providing innovative education centered in the arts for students from all over the state of Minnesota. Our school days are equally divided between academics and the arts, allowing students to dedicate a large portion of their junior and senior years to their "arts areas." Literary Arts juniors dedicate themselves to valuing and writing their own stories and to developing a writing community wherein they share and work on those stories cooperatively.

After six years of teaching autobiographical/memoir writing to sixteen and seventeen-year-olds, I began to yearn for writing from them with a larger purpose. While I still believe in and spend much time on encouraging my students to discover their own voices, I also have added a major project that helps them hear the voices of others. I call it my Research-based, Character-driven short story unit, and, in preparation for a story due in May, my students choose their research topics in early fall.

Last year, the year that Marie LeVoir's story was written, the overall topic was simply "War." Each student was required to choose a region of the world that is or has in modern times, been involved in an armed conflict. Alongside the work of completing day to day writing assignments that invoke the sharing of personal memories, etc., students also begin to look into the history, culture, and people of another part of the world. By January, after handing in four "research summaries" detailing their discoveries, students are to have located at least one actual person in a newspaper article or book who has captured their interest. This person or persons become the base for character(s) they will soon create.

In January we begin the task of creating a group of characters for this "character-driven" project. I ask students to come up with real people in (or near) their lives who evoke emotion when they begin a long, involved set of "backstory" assignments. ("Describe someone you have hurt" or "Describe someone you don't understand.") Once they have chosen people who fit these categories, they then "ask" their people a multitude of questions ("What is a book you've read more than once?"). The questions are so detailed that the "answers" inevitably become "guesses," or, as is the goal, "fiction." Step by step these real people are converted into fictional characters who can be "anonymously" used in a story, but who retain the emotional qualities that made them good subjects. The person from another country found in the student's research is backstoried too, a process that only works if the student has "done their research."

After gathering a group of 12-15 characters, I give my students several "jumping-off" exercises designed to provoke action between characters. They are simple prompts ("Pick your researched character and two other characters. After you've chosen them, put them in a room together. Write what happens."), and it may take a while for the action to build, but eventually it almost always does. Over the course of three months and many group critique sessions, students produce a series of five drafts that I respond to, resulting ultimately in the final copy suitable, hopefully, for submission.

I hope you enjoy reading Marie LeVoir's research-based, character-driven story. As you will discover, she has managed successfully to step well out of her own story and convincingly into that of another young woman's.

Shannon Hannigan
Perpich Center for Arts Education

Midnight Oil

Marie LeVoir, Perpich Center for Arts Education, grade 11

PROLOGUE

China was a country undergoing change in 1988 and 1989. In February '89 things reached a bursting point when Comrade Hu Yaobang died. He had advocated change and was considered too great a threat to Communism, so he had lost his government position the year before. Students had been annoyed by this at the time, but were too afraid to speak out. When he died and was given a second-rate funeral the students took to the streets to protest. Millions of students all over China demonstrated in favor of Comrade Yaobang's reforms (an end to corruption, a freer market and more openness to Western ideas) which had started to take hold. The Communist Party declared the students' protests illegal and told them to go back to class. This only provoked the students more and those from Beijing staged a sit-in in Tiananmen Square, a traditional gathering place for revolutionaries within sight of the Party officials' living quarters. Things erupted after Premier Gorbachov came to visit and couldn't be given the grand tour due to student protesters in mid-May. Party Chairman Deng Xiaoping wrote an editorial denouncing the students which was published all around China. Within two weeks the sit-in was over. June 4, 1989 will live forever as a red stain on China's great history. This story is written in honor of all the daughters of the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

* * * * *

"Mother? Have you ever seen anyone die?" Amy asks me. My six-year-old daughter, more like her American father than Chinese, demands the answer I can't bear to give. Her favorite stories are of mermaids (She loved the Disney movie.) so I saw no harm in reading her the original. In the traditional tale, Ariel turns to sea foam at the end. Ariel's prince imagines her part of the sunset. Had I known it would spawn such questions, I would have stuck to politically correct Sesame Street stories like "Elmo Goes to the Dentist" or "Ernie Makes a Friend."

"Hush little one. It's time to go to sleep," I whisper to her. It's long past her bedtime, and after a third story it's past mine too. When I was a girl in China, I

never would have gotten a bedtime story. A third daughter like me wasn't worth the attention. Amy looks at me quizzically, as if I was a puzzle for her to figure out. Then she smiles and kisses me goodnight.

I climb into bed beside my husband. This is still a novel thing for me after almost ten years—to be safe in my American home dozing next to my American husband, my little girl asleep at last in the room next door. I sneak into her room for one last glance and brush the black hair out of her face. She looks so innocent with her little girl haircut, bobbed just beneath her chin. She will never recite the quotes of Chairman Mao, never fear to speak her mind. She will never see the horrors I have seen.

I drift in and out of a restless sleep, and immediately I dream. Again and again I dream of that night so long ago. The visions of that night are still fresh and raw in my memory, the dreams so vivid they startle me awake. There has not been a night since then that I have not gone back to China.

I was a Chinese student at Beijing Normal University majoring in English. My goal was to become a journalist. We were on strike in protest of the government's corruption, staging a sit-in in Tiananmen Square. To get a good job or into the best schools, you needed connections. Students wanted a change from the corrupt old ways. The heat of the day barely subsided as darkness arrived. Tension was in the air so thick it made me gasp for breath. Something was going to happen. My school was camped out, second group in from the street. Our bedrolls made a perfect square, right in front of the Goddess of Freedom. She resembled the Statue of Liberty, but pure white and made out of plastic. Each school had banners with their school name and their concerns above their tents to mark their territory. We knew some change was about to take place. Rumors ignited our fears. Some said Deng Xiaoping would turn up in the Square to hold a dialogue with the elected student representatives. Others said the People's Army was going to surround the Square and force us to leave at gun-point. Others said Deng was on the verge of resigning as Party chair, and he would announce it over the loudspeakers just after midnight. I didn't know whom to believe, so I decided to try and get some rest.

I had the midnight watch, so I went to sleep at around nine o'clock. Just before midnight Xen woke me. I saluted him and made the V sign, for victory. He did the same, and I took up his patrol route. I knew it well. We had been on strike for over a month, and I had night watch duty every other night. Most times I composed classical poems, their rhythm matching my footfalls. This night I could not focus on writing. I haven't since.

First I walked toward the street to the edge of our group, met the night guard from the engineering school delegation, and turned left to walk alongside him or her. It was always hard to tell in the dim light of distant street lamps whether I walked beside a man or woman. Every student wore an identical uniform. We never spoke but turned again to the left as we reached the far side of our groups. Then came twenty-five paces toward the Goddess of Freedom and Mao's mausoleum. The giant portrait of Mao over its entrance loomed over the Goddess's shoulder. After twenty-five paces toward Mao came an about-face. On my second circuit, as I walked beside the engineering college guard, the floodlights suddenly came on all around the Square.

"Alarm! Alarm! Full alert! Wake up! Something is happening! Everyone awake! Alarm!" I screamed, just as we had always practiced. Voices around the Square echoed my words. I hadn't meant to scream out the alarm, but when the lights came up, I jumped into action without thinking. Years later I wondered if I had done the right thing. Maybe more would have lived if I hadn't awakened them so soon, thereby giving them time to prepare for what was coming. The soldiers, I later learned, had been told not to attack unless we made the first move.

The Square was eerily silent as the lights came up to full power. All around me people were rubbing the darkness out of their sleepy eyes, pulling on hats, and grabbing for any weapon in sight just in case. Then came the sound. It was almost thunder, but lower. I thought of all the stories of dragons' rumbling stomachs waking sleepy villages so the dragon could hunt them. The rolling growl became louder as the minutes ticked away. No one knew what to think. Hushed voices whispered the latest gossip around the Square. Then we saw. Thousands of troops marching in perfect time appeared out the dimness and blocked the entire street exit to Tiananmen. From the Hall of the People more soldiers poured into the Square to block all the exits. Every soldier carried a machine gun and a second strand of ammunition. All at once they stood at attention, waiting. We held our breath. Static came

over the loudspeakers.

"Testing. Testing. All illegal demonstrators must leave Tiananmen Square immediately. Those not cooperating will be removed by force. All illegal demonstrators must leave Tiananmen Square immediately. Those not cooperating will be removed by force."

Again and again the mechanical voice repeated the message. We told our people to remain calm and form files. There was no other option but to leave. The engineering college left first, and my school followed in the neat rows we had practiced since kindergarten. As we neared the street we saw what had rumbled. A column of tanks armed for battle was filling the street behind the foot soldiers. But this was the People's Army. No one truly thought they would open fire on us—we were the People too. I took one look back at the Goddess of Freedom, dangling between Mao's image and the Monument to the People's Martyrs. She looked a little less noble in the floodlights, more like the plastic she was made of and almost like a doll. A doll that could easily be crushed.

I wake with a start. At first it's hard to remember the dream was only just that. My past keeps trying to consume my reality. At times like this, I need a cup of tea to cleanse my mind so I can get back to sleep. In my kitchen I take out the teapot and prepare it just the way my grandmother taught me. While I wait for the water to heat, I slouch in a kitchen chair. My grandmother took pity on me. She too was a third daughter, and her mother considered her worthless. She had had to learn to cook the hard way—by sneaking around the feet of her mother and older sisters. Before every cooking lesson, Grandmother showed me the bald spot on her head from when she had tripped her sister who had been carrying the dumpling water.

"See this scar? This is what happens when you aren't careful in the kitchen! Mind me, little one. Some day you will tell your granddaughters about the scars you got from being careless with the dumplings," she lectured.

"Yes, Grandmother. I'll be careful from now on. I promise, Grandmother," I recited. Grandmother taught me how to make dumplings by pressing the dough flat in my hand and then adding just a smidgen of filling. Then she helped me pinch the edges shut, and she always dropped them into the dumpling water. She told me I was too little at first, then too careless, then too Western. Every time after the first time

she had let me drop in the dumplings, she made some excuse for her to do it. The first time I had been listening to her dumpling story so carefully that I didn't watch where my hand was. The dumpling story was a rare treat, one usually reserved for my older sisters, but because I was finally big enough to drop the dumplings into the water, she told it to me.

A dragon had been awakened from its slumber atop a mountain one day by a little boy laughing while flying his dragon kite down below in the valley. The dragon was not pleased to be awake, and he wanted to get even. This was no ordinary dragon, but a wily dragon who liked to hunt. In the middle of the night the dragon snuck into the little boy's village and crawled on his belly toward the little boy's house. But the dragon was so hungry his stomach growled and woke up everyone in the village. The dragon had no choice but to chase them out of town and hunt them down one by one. Once he captured the villagers, he took them back to the top of his mountain and trapped them all in a cave. Last, he caught the boy who had awakened him and took him back to his lair. The dragon told the boy if he made enough dumplings, he could see his mother again, so the boy began rolling dumplings. For days he rolled dumplings and put them into the dragon's great kettle. At last the boy finished all the meat the dragon had given him. He asked, "Now may I go home to my mother? I miss her very much!"

"Ha! Foolish boy! Take a look at that dumpling in your hand. That is the last you will ever see of your mother! You woke me from my thousand year sleep with your silly laughter. You rolled your entire village into dumplings! Foolish boy! Now I am going to eat you for desert!" cackled the dragon. The little boy dropped the dumpling and began to cry. But the dragon showed no remorse and ate him anyway because he had dropped a dumpling on the floor.

At this point in the story I was so scared of a dragon coming to get me that I put my hand closer and closer to the boiling water with each dumpling so I wouldn't drop one. The water splashed me and left red spots, but I didn't cry out for fear the dragon would get me. When the dumplings were all safely boiling, I looked at my hand. It was all red and sore. I showed my grandmother, and she sent me out of the kitchen for being a silly girl. My mother slapped my wrists for angering my grandmother, and then I couldn't keep back the tears. I ran to my pallet and cried myself to sleep.

A whistle shocks me back to my own kitchen in America. I must have nodded off waiting for my tea kettle to heat. Quickly I finish brewing the tea and return to the table to sip comfort from it. The clock blinks 2:07 as I climb back into bed. I stare at the ceiling only a moment before sleep devours me.

As we came close to the soldiers, the officers atop the tanks shouted a command to the men. I couldn't understand because they had a northern accent. These soldiers had never been to Beijing before, I realized. Their standard issue green uniforms were dirty and patched from use - they had seen combat unlike the other soldiers around Beijing. These were hardened mountain soldiers whose accents were so thick they couldn't have understood our shouts of terror moments later as they shouldered their guns to open fire. I had thought it was someone near me screaming "NO!" As the echoes died away, I realized it was my own voice.

Bodies fell and formed pools of blood at the soldiers' feet. I spun around to look for another exit, but the soldiers surrounded the square. Everywhere bodies were piling up. I saw a friend from my English class run forward to pull back a man still writhing in pain. A soldier shot her point blank in the head. I watched her brain splatter out onto the pavement. The light in her eyes died then. My mind reeled for a moment from the shock, but I couldn't stand still long. I then ran toward the center of the square, hoping to make it to the People's Monument. After the Great Communist Proletarian Revolution, Chairman Mao commissioned a black stone obelisk monument on top of a square base carved with a tribute to the People's Martyrs. From the top of its broad base I could have looked for a way out.

Within a few minutes that felt like hours, the hail of bullets stopped. The crowd had absorbed all the bullets and still people pressed forward, trying to escape. I could see the soldiers' generals atop their tanks shouting again but I heard no sound except the screams of the wounded and dying. I climbed up the People's Monument just in time to see the generals' lips move nearly in unison before they disappeared down hatches. Foot soldiers reached into their side pockets and pulled out knives. They then attached them to the ends of their guns and ran forward into the crowd. I watched as students I knew fought tooth and nail with the soldiers, but it was a losing battle. In the distance I heard the screams of ambulance sirens. They

couldn't get to the wounded—the tanks filled the street. All of a sudden I turned and saw a soldier had climbed up the Martyr's Monument as well. He shouted something as he ran at me. My first reaction was to put my hands over my face and brace myself for death. It never came. Instead he lunged at me with his bayonet. Reflected in its polished surface I could see the tanks begin to roll into the Square. The blade slit the skin along the underside of my left arm from just below the wrist all the way to my elbow. As I watched the blood begin to trickle down, I thought of my eldest sister's devotion to our mother. When Mother was sick, Sun Lin cut her arm to bleed into the healing broth. Blood was what saved our mother's life, tradition taught us. The blood pooled on the stone beside me just as my sister's had pooled in the earthen bowl. I glanced up into the soldier's face. His eyes were hard, as if I were an animal he had to kill to save his crops. Those eyes were the last thing I remember.

Then I jolt back to the dark bedroom in America. Night after night I wake with those eyes of stone still firmly in my mind, even after all these years. Tiananmen Square was nearly my literal Gate of Heavenly Peace. The English translation of Tiananmen Square's Chinese name seems to fit somehow. Over the years thousands have died in Tiananmen no matter what the government claims.

In the dark it is harder to remember the weeks I spent in a haze, hearing the foreign devil tongue I knew I should be able to understand but couldn't, the bandages on my arm, legs, and my eye swollen shut from the beating. Weeks later I was told by my savior that he had found me being kicked by three soldiers until I rolled off of the People's Monument and landed on the stone floor of the Square. I was lucky I was unconscious the entire time. I was lucky to be carried to a hotel room by an American journalist who took care of me overnight until he could get me to the American Embassy. I was lucky he had sweet-talked me onto an American air lift to a hospital in the Philippines. I was a very lucky girl indeed, my nurse told me in broken Mandarin. But I didn't feel very lucky those first weeks alone in what seemed like a whitewashed, sanitary jail cell. I had no news of my comrades, my family, nothing. Later when the pain subsided, I asked my nurse to bring the man who rescued me to my bed. Our meeting is a much more pleasant memory. I learned that the polite young American journalist who had interviewed me days before the tanks came had recognized me and

had come to my aid. He is easy to remember. He rests beside me this very moment, snoring softly to himself. His little noises comfort me, remind me that I am safe now.

"So what was it like, I mean really like, in Tiananmen Square? Was it scary? I bet it was scary. Did you get hurt? How did you get out? Tell me all about it!" Mrs. Brandt asked. Amy's school had an open house, where parents went to meet their children's teachers. She was so cheerful about it. I was shocked. What could I say? Luckily my husband stepped in.

"Jun is very sensitive about what happened back in China. If you're so interested, I suggest you read a book. If you'll excuse us, we need to go speak with Amy's art teacher," Bill replied tersely.

"Are you okay?" he shyly asked me when we were safely out of earshot. I didn't speak but reached for his hand after unclenching my fist. It was still shaking, whether from fear of the memories that woman brought back or from rage at myself for having lived to face such a situation. I made it out completely by chance. Bill could have saved anyone. He chose me. I suffer the guilt of being left with the memories of splintered bodies and a blood-bathed Gate of Heavenly Peace. How dare this woman presume to know anything at all about what that night was like. Does watching video footage on TV give her the right to imagine she was there? How dare the world assume I'm just another victim. I knew what might happen, but I stayed anyway. I wanted to change my homeland, I wanted to make China better for everyone. Instead I ended up in America, alone with my memories.

One day not long ago my daughter brought a friend home from school. They were baking cookies in the kitchen when I heard the scream. I ran to check on them and found the floor, walls, every surface in the entire room coated in liquid cookie dough. The electric mixer still spun wildly, and the two little girls hugged each other as they perched atop a kitchen chair. As I reached for the cord to unplug the spinning demon, my long sleeve slid up to my elbow, revealing the scar. It is now only a thin pink line, the lasting reminder of my last day in China.

"What's that big scar from, Mrs. Anderson?" my daughter's friend Mollie asked.

"Shh. We don't talk about that! It's from when my mom still lived in China!" Amy whispered in her ear,

but too loudly for the splattered walls. I said nothing but reached for some dish rags in the sink.

"Here, I'll help you clean this up." I handed them the rags and we cleaned. The kitchen had become silent as a tomb, although my daughter's words echoed in my mind.

"We don't talk about that ... when my mom lived in China ... shhh ... don't talk about ... my mom ... China ... " These echoes made me want to scream, smash things, take some revenge Where could I even begin to tell her about the night a bayonet lodged itself in my arm? Should I start by telling her about my other scars? Her grandma's cooking and the boiling dumpling water? Maybe I should start with how I met her father, and how I came to America? But every time I get the courage to start by just letting the words take their own course, the image of the tanks' crushing entry to the Square that night freezes me as it did that night. The image of tanks of The People's Army rolling over my friends and fellow students still drives me into a cold sweat. My legs get rigid, and I tense up all over as if bracing for that fateful attack. I don't think I can get past the sea of blood I still see every time I close my eyes, not even for my daughter.

It came to me, the way to tell Amy. Last night over tea I realized how to tell her. Even if the words would burn my lips beyond repair, I can still write. Writing is my gift to the world, and my history should be my gift to my daughter. My Amy loves stories. She craves them, as I must have when I was young. Chinese stories do not always have happy endings. Amy would like the adventure in them, though. My past has been too painful for me to tell even the stories of my grandmother. Although I am too weak a woman to tell her my story the way any good Chinese mother would, the least I can do is let her read it. Then she will know what really happened, not the lies the government devised months later about the 50 soldiers killed while enforcing martial law, not the hyped up reports foreign reporters tell to get good ratings every year on the anniversary. My daughter deserves to know the truth. I go into the kitchen to make tea, this time Lao Tzu's tea for wisdom. Notebook open and pen poised, I pray for the Old Wisdom to guide my hand as I write my story, our story.

Reflection - Marie LeVair

I never thought of myself as a writer until just last week. Before that, I told stories. Stories as if I were a thousand different people in a thousand different places, stories to keep me amused in class, stories to keep my teachers off my back about late homework. Last fall, in fact right around a year ago, Shannon gave us the assignment to research a war/conflict happening right now in some far away place. I have heard stories my whole life about my mother's travels in Ethiopia, so that's where my research began. During this time I was also taking Chinese literature, which heavily revolved around the cultures of China. Right before the first draft of our story was due, I was at my computer working on a backstory. It wasn't flowing. Every sentence was a headache, a scientifically calculated bit to add to this illusive character. Since I was stuck, I went on to work on my final project for Chinese lit. Midway through a short story by Lu Xun (a famous Chinese revolutionary author), it dawned on me that my story was set in the wrong country. The reason I wasn't able to get to know any of the people I had read about from Ethiopia was that my story belonged in China. Next afternoon, I asked Shannon if it would be ok to switch. She hesitatingly said yes, and I went to the library to get a whole new pile of books. My research took over my room. Stacks of books and drafts were everywhere. Even my laundry had to be moved under the bed to make room. My character had a voice of her own right from the beginning. Her story told itself. I just added a few things she wouldn't want to talk about for her. All the backstories we did of people we knew helped me to discover a new way for the traits I knew so well to combine into a character I had never met. For a month or more I would wake up with the urge to write. Luckily my roommate was a heavy sleeper. One night I couldn't stay awake to finish connecting the flashbacks, so I raided our soda. It was a surreal thing to write while barely awake, but the end product was pretty good. This short story has been quite a journey, and a wild ride at times, but I'm glad I met my main character, and I'm glad her story got told.

Teacher Talk Pre-writing activities such as this comparison chart completed by Shaker M. Shaker, can give developing writers the scaffolding they need to organize analytical writing. Allowing students to choose one topic to develop into a short essay, as Shaker has done in his essay on the following page, can increase their level of confidence and success.

Night

• Before the Nazis Arrive:

Before the arrival of the Nazis, life was pretty normal for the Jews of Sight. They could go wherever they pleased and they could do pretty much whatever they wanted to do. It primarily focuses on Elie's life before the Nazis. It focuses on his preoccupation of teaming about his religion, the cabala, the Talmud, the Torah, and the mysticism of his religion. For his family, life goes on as usual every day until Moshe, Elie's friend, comes back and describes the horror of the camps to the people. Most of the people think that he is crazy and brush off his warnings. Most of the people then go one with their daily lives.

• Father/Mother/Son Relation:

During the hard times at the camp, there is no relation between Elie and his mother since they were separated when they first arrived at the camp. However, Elie did have a relationship with his father. He really loved his father a lot and respected him a lot. He was really dependent on him for support and Elie really wanted for his father to care for him. They had a very close relationship and Elie consulted his father for advice many times. Elie took care of his father, even when he saw what others were doing to their fathers. This changed when Elie's father became dependent on Elie. Elie did not want himself to feel like his father was a burden, but he knew that it was what he truly felt inside. When his father died, Elie felt relieved and felt free

• Conditions of the camps:

The camps that were mentioned seemed to be far more unsanitary and dirtier than the camps in *Life is Beautiful*. These camps were described as far worse since the smell was very horrible and that there was a larger amount there made them look even worse. They were extremely unsanitary, smelly, dirty, and were places of death. Since the ones visited were the worst of the camps, it's expected that they are in far worse condition than the others. There were one story high barracks with them lined up row by row and they were fenced in.

• Strength of the Human Spirit:

The strength of the human spirit and hope seemed to be less in this book as there was more mention of God and how could He let this happen. With the loss of faith there was a loss of hope, and even though it was tried to be regained, it never fully returned. It was also disappointing since the dad died and so many more died that it felt like the human spirit was not present anymore.

Life is Beautiful

• Before the Nazis Arrive:

Before the arrival of the Nazis—it is Italy, 1939 and the town is pretty much normal and people go about their daily business, like the Jews of Sight. There is much business going on and there is no discrimination. A sign of foreshadowing is when the inspector comes to tell them about the superiority of the Aryan race. And another is when the soldier stands in attention with the "Hail Hitler" salute at the party. People have fun and are involved in their daily lives and even things such as romances, so basically nothing is unusual. Then there are minor incidents, such as when they attacked the house and when they painted the horse green with the writing about Jews on it. Anyway, there are still things like dances and parties present. People interact a lot and treat the Jews normally.

• Father/Mother/Son Relation:

The boy had a good relationship with his mother and father, and he would do what they told him most of the time, like when his father asked him to watch the bookstore. When they go into the camps, they get to be closer than they were before, and the son starts to realize that he has to listen to his father to be a good boy and that he has to trust his father no matter what. There is more love between them and love grows, and there is no abandonment, like Elie. His father risks his own life but saves his son's. This shows how much his dad cared for him and that he really wanted the best for him. Love is also shown when Dora asks to go on the train repeatedly even though it is destined for death, and she loves her family too much so she risks it.

• Conditions of the camps:

The camps in Italy are not as dirty, unsanitary and infested as the ones in *Night*. They seem to be a little more cleaner, even though they supposedly still smell. They are in a different format and are set up as cities and not as camps or prisons like they were elsewhere. There was less restrictions on the Jews and many could hide easily which was not attainable in the other concentration camps. They were also not evacuated as well and the selection process did not seem to be as such of an apparent procedure at the camps in Italy. The work was probably less, too.

• Strength of the Human Spirit:

This one had more of a human spirit aspect involved since there was a young boy, and it seemed like since he was young, he was going to survive. It also seems like most of the time there was a willingness to survive and that helped in showing the rekindling of the human spirit. The disappointing part was when there was a loss of a human but not of his spirit, which lived on in his son.

Comparison Essay: Relationships in *Night* and *Life is Beautiful*

Shaker M. Shaker, Champlin Park High School, grade 10

In *Night*, during the hard times at the camp, there is no relation between Elie and his mother since they were separated when they first arrived at the camp. However, Elie did have a relationship with his father. He really loved his father a lot and respected him a lot. He was really dependent on him for support and Elie really wanted for his father to care for him. They had a very close relationship and Elie consulted his father for advice many times. Elie took care of his father, even when he saw what others were doing to their fathers. This changed when Elie's father became dependent on Elie. Elie did not want himself to feel like his father was a burden but he knew that it was what he truly felt inside. When his father died, Elie felt relieved and felt free.

In *Life is Beautiful*, the boy had a good relationship with his mother and father, and he would do what they told him most of the time, like when his father asked him to watch the bookstore. When they go into the camps, they get to be closer than they were before, and the son starts to realize that he has to listen to his father to be a good boy and that he has to trust his father no matter what. There is more love between them, and love grows. There is no abandonment, like Elie. His father risks his own life but saves his son's. This shows how much his dad cared for him, and that he really wanted the best for him. Love is also shown when Dora asks to go on the train repeatedly even though it is destined for death; she loves her family too much so she risks it.

The differences between these two stories is that they are complete opposite relationships between the fathers and sons. In *Night*, the relationship gets further apart and in *Life is Beautiful*, the father and the son get into a closer relationships.

Teacher Talk

We can also provide support for developing writers by the kinds of writing tasks we create. The Role, Audience, Format, and Task (RAFT) framework is a way to consider writing tasks in a manner different from the traditional essay. By writing as a young Jewish girl (role) to herself (audience) but in the more distant format of a diary about the increasingly harsh anti-Semitic laws (task), Lauren is able to consider these laws in a more personal way as seen in this excerpt from her response.

Dear Journal,

Papa gave me this journal today. He said it would be a good way for me to keep my thoughts flowing during these hard times. I really don't know what hard times he is talking about but he and mother never tell me anything. I really like the idea of this journal, and I will try to keep it up to date! - Leah

I am sorry I haven't added to this in a while and I have so much to tell you. One day last week I attended school, like always and my friend Alla said her papa would not allow her to play with me anymore because I was a Jew. I came home to my mother and I cried. I noticed that my father was home. This alarmed me because he is never home until supper. He was fired from his position at the City Council. I also noticed that our car was not in our driveway. Now we have to walk everywhere and can never even take a bus. I really wish we weren't Jewish. - Leah

Today my jewelry was taken out of my box, and Mother's treasured fur coat was taken. It was very hard on my mother and me because those were some of our possessions. I

wish everything would go back to normal and that I wasn't a Jew. And Papa says it will only get worse. - Leah

We received our stars today, and I have vowed not to leave the house again. When I walk down the street, I am being stared at, and I am ashamed to be a Jew. Now we have the stars and Papa was right. . . it has just gotten worse. While walking down the streets, we see signs prohibiting us from movies, swimming pools, hair salons, and telephone booths. Even Papa is ashamed and doesn't like to get out of bed. - Leah

It is getting worse yet. Papa has planned to go into hiding and has met up with some people who will help fake our death. We only are able to have one ration book per week. Mother is so exhausted because now we are not allowed to get bread and meat, and it is really hard to find good vegetables or fruit. We are planning on leaving very soon and I have agreed to take only what I can carry. That will be only my clothes, a blanket, and you, journal. I do believe that going into hiding will be a lot easier than suffering out here. -Leah

We are moving out today. We are moving tonight to a house where a nice couple has agreed to hide us. - Leah

It is a very difficult transition. I am now living with 7 people, and food is becoming a problem. Why can't things be normal? I don't even have anyone to talk to. - Leah

Leah and her family were discovered by the Nazis, and she was never able to write in this Journal again.

Lauren Davis
Becker Middle School, grade 8

Dear Jane Yolen,

Your book, *The Devil's Arithmetic*, was a very interesting read, to be sure. I can kind of relate to Hannah, with how she doesn't think about what happened to people before she was born. I like the spice it added by having her memories as Hannah start to fade away, and then kind of come back near the end. I was mystified with how, all of a sudden at the end, everything that had happened at the beginning started to make sense.

I found your description of the concentration camp and the ride there rather grotesque, yet still it was quite interesting. I was amazed when I read that Rivka was Aunt Eva, and I was never anywhere near expecting that. I was seriously touched when Chaya gave her life for Rivka; it was such a wonderful thing to do.

I have begun to think about putting up with family reunions, and given new thought to the fact that my parents and grandparents have already lived for so long. And even if none of them had any experiences as horrifying and frightening as being a Jew during the Holocaust, they still have interesting stories to tell. I have also begun to realize just how lucky I am, to have a nice house, loyal cat, clean clothes, books, and other things that so many hundreds of thousands of Jews were stripped of during that horrible and terrible time.

Tanya Kortz
Becker Middle School, grade 8

Dear Anne Frank,

I read your diary and it didn't exactly inspire me, but it did make me think. It made me think about human nature and what it would be like not to have every day things, even small things that you never even think about, such as the sun shining on your face or the breeze lazily flowing by, or even a cold snowflake on your tongue. But what it really made me think about was how somebody could stay in the same place without any of your friends to talk to or confide in, in your change from girlhood to womanhood. Only the same people, day after day. For almost two years.

It also made me think about people, leaders, citizens, even people who pass you on the street every day. Even me. I thought about how people can be so cruel and selfish when they're starved, or bored, or lonely. How can they say and do things they don't even mean? Or maybe they do mean. It also made me think about other human natures like hope, and even though you were locked away in a small space, full of fear, you still had hope.

That's really all I have to say right now, but I must say before I end this letter that I was partially wrong at the start when I said that the book didn't inspire me; it inspired me to think.

Nicole Determan
Becker Middle School, grade 8

Waiting for Anya

Alysha Dicke

Hutchinson Middle School, grade 8

Holocaust is total destruction by fire. Genocide is the killing or extermination of a whole race of people or a nation. *Pogrom* is an organized killing of many people needlessly or cruelly. These are some of the terms associated with the Holocaust. The Holocaust involved the mass killing of six million Jews and other "undesirables".

Hitler wanted a dominant Aryan race. *Aryan* is a Caucasian non-Jew, especially of Nordic type. He hated the Jews, Gypsies, and the mentally handicapped and the physically disabled. Hitler's goal was to annihilate all the Jews. Jews were sent to concentration camps where some died of starvation or died in gas chambers. The infamous death camps were Auschwitz, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen where Anne Frank died.

World War II began when the Nazis invaded Poland in September of 1939. When the allies won the war in May of 1945, they didn't know the true horror of Hitler's plan. More than six million Jews were killed. As dictator of Germany, Hitler had complete control over everything, and he rounded up and killed his "undesirables."

In *Waiting for Anya* by Michael Morpurgo, Leah and Benjamin died in Auschwitz after hiding and rescuing other children for years. Towards the end they had eleven children with them. Benjamin was waiting for his daughter Anya because they were split up when the Germans raided their village. They agreed to meet back at grandmother's house, Madame Horcada. He took children over the border of France to Spain where they would be safe. This didn't affect just that family; it affected the whole village of Lescun, France. Many people had to go into hiding or escape to Switzerland or Spain. Some people had to leave something very important behind, their families.

Since so many people were split up or died, it is important to remember that we are all created equal. Hitler believed that Aryans were superior and blamed the Jews for Germany's problems. A group of people such as the Jews cannot be blamed for all the problems in a country or the world. We are all at least partially at fault for these problems. We need to remember the Holocaust to help realize how precious lives really are. People are intertwined like a sweater or rug. The patterns have many different colors just like people. A difference is the colors in the cloth work together to form a pattern.

Hide and Seek and Waiting for Anya

Hannah Conrad, Hutchinson Middle School, grade 8

During the Holocaust, six million Jews and "undesirables" were murdered. That's right, six million murdered. The Holocaust took place before and during World War II. Hitler was the leader of this, and the Nazis reinforced it. Despite everything that happened, Anne Frank, a Jew who hid for 25 months above her father's business, still believed that people were good at heart.

September 1, 1939 was an incredibly sad day in our history. On that day, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. At that time, Adolf Hitler was the dictator of Germany. Hitler and his followers hated the Jewish people and other "undesirables." It was Hitler's goal to create the perfect race. He planned on doing this by annihilating the Jews and any other "undesirables" such as Gypsies and mentally challenged people. Annihilation is the total wiping out of existence of a whole race of people. The Holocaust actually began before World War II started. Hitler blamed the Jewish people for all of Germany's problems. Hitler and the Nazis began to take away peoples' houses, land and businesses. During the Holocaust, Jews and the other undesirables were put into concentration camps with only a little bit of food and horrendous living conditions. One of the concentration camps was Auschwitz, and this was the worst of all the concentration camps. Throughout World War II, six million Jews were killed in concentration camps.

The Holocaust touched the lives of millions of people in an awful way. In the book, *Hide and Seek* by Ida Vos, Rachel and her family were Jewish. Rachel's family was forced to do many things to try and keep their family together and alive. They moved from house to house looking for a hiding place. Once they found a hiding place, that didn't necessarily mean that they would be able to stay there until the war was over and be guaranteed that they would be safe. There were many people who helped hide Rachel and her family. Some of the people that helped them didn't have enough room in their house to hide the whole family, so they were sometimes split up. This story, unlike some, had a happy ending. At the end of the book Rachel and her family were reunited.

Waiting For Anya also described in great detail how people were affected by the Holocaust. Michael Morpurgo wrote this book. Jo, the main character, learned that a widow living in his town was hiding Jewish people in her barn. She and her son-in-law Benjamin, who was also a Jew, were waiting for Benjamin's daughter Anya to come to the widow's house so that they could escape over the border to freedom. While they were waiting for Anya, they tried to help the other Jewish children escape over the border to Spain. Before they were able to do this, the entire town was taken over by German soldiers who guarded the border between France and Spain day and night so that no Jews could escape. After a long wait, they finally got a chance to try and escape. Almost everything went as planned, but one of the children didn't want to leave Benjamin, and she and Benjamin ended up getting caught and sent to concentration camps where they eventually died. Although that wasn't the happiest ending, Benjamin's daughter Anya finally made it to the widow's house after the war was over. As you can see, a whole town was affected by the Holocaust.

Studying the Holocaust is very important, and I think that everyone should study it at one time or another. The Holocaust has taught me a great deal. What I have learned I know will stick with me forever. I have learned how bad hate is, and how much it can hurt people. It scares me to know that the Holocaust began with only a few people hating another race or religion of people, and that it turned into something this big and bad. People need to learn from this and to realize what an awful thing the Holocaust really was.

As you can see, September 1, 1939 was really an awful day in our history. Just because Hitler and the Nazis hated Jews, it should not have given them the right to do what they did. It was very wrong to kill six million Jews. Race or religion shouldn't have anything to do with what other people think about us. Our race or religion also shouldn't give people the right to kill us. I wish that everyone could feel the way that Anne Frank did: "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are good at heart."

Grace in the Wilderness

Hannah Christensen, Hutchinson Middle School, grade 8

“This youth shall grow up to be feared, to be violently active, dominating, indifferent to pain, without weaknesses, without tenderness, and should become beasts of prey.” It is hard to believe people followed this man we knew as Hitler for over ten years, writing one of the darkest chapters in world history known as the Holocaust. During his reign, Hitler tried to create his own world free of Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, African-Germans, and the physically and mentally disabled. He organized concentration camps that included the infamous Auschwitz, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Mauthausen. Over six million people fell victim to Hitler’s dream of an all Aryan race. But there is more than one side to this story. Everyone had a different opinion on what happened, how it happened and especially why it happened.

Nearly everyone who knows about the Holocaust knows the story of the Jews. Six million of them were killed during the period of the Third Reich under Hitler. The Jews were arrested, put in ghettos, deported to foreign countries, separated from their loved ones, sent to concentration camps, liquidated, starved and gassed. Even the famous Anne Frank did not know exactly why. She, like many of her peers, assumed the Jews must have done something terrible to deserve this fate. They were simply victims to blame because Hitler believed the Jews were the cause of the world’s problems. His belief spread and resulted in the genocide of the Jews. Everyone who entered a concentration camp was assigned a number instead of a name. Some prisoners even killed their own family for food; it was “survival of the fittest.” A few people came to accept this; however, many did not. People escaped and fought back trying to hold on to what little dignity they had left after being stripped of everything they had known. After the war the surviving Jews were left penniless, homeless and had nowhere to go. Many of them were helped by complete strangers from neutral countries like Sweden and Switzerland which were untouched by the war.

Piri, who was a girl in a book called *Grace in the Wilderness* by Aranka Siegal, had a similar experience. Having survived the concentration camps, she was sent to Sweden where she lived with a family

there. Several of her friends that she had made during the war and after it, returned to the Jewish homeland of Palestine, but she sailed to America with mixed emotions on where her loyalty was. Today wars are still being waged on the Jews in the Middle East as a rippled effect of one man’s crazed beliefs.

Survivors, witnesses, and the people of today tend to blame the Nazis and their supporters for the events that occurred. But many of them claim not to have really known what they were doing. Germans that worked in concentration camps have been known to say that they were following orders and did not think about the possibility of them being wrong until the fall of the Nazis in World War II. These people were also victims of the Holocaust though not quite in the same ways as the Jews, for most of them were young, grew up in the Hitler Youth and were raised to believe that the Jews were the cause of the world’s problems. Their punishment for their deeds is having to live everyday with the death of over six million people on their conscience.

Perhaps the people really to blame were the bystanders who watched this nightmare unfold before their eyes, knew it was wrong and did nothing to try to stop it. They, like many others, had their excuses for not getting involved. Large numbers of people were oblivious to what Hitler was really trying to do. The people that did know either resisted it or chose to except the Nazi’s laws without much thought. There really was no way to speak out against Hitler and the Nazi party openly without ending up in the ground, but people managed to do it subtly. Jews were hidden by Catholics and other people who did not support the German government, and it is those people who deserve credit. Most of them managed to stay alive and defy Hitler while saving the lives of innocent people at the same time.

The genocide of the Jews cannot simply be told by a single person or by one point of view. It affected millions and millions of people in all different ways. Our job as the future generation of the world is to not let history repeat itself. We still fight wars on racism and prejudice in every corner of the world, and every one of us plays a role in it. Let us hope it is a positive one from every perspective.



Sentence
Fluency

Honk! Honk! Honk!

My ears perk up. Another three honks far off in the distance amidst the sound of the torrential downpour. A moment's pause, then my instincts and adrenaline kick in. I yell to the young Scouts around me to get back to their campsites immediately. A good counselor and close friend comes running towards me from the beach yelling, "LBD! Down at the beach! Get down there now!"

LBD. Lost Boy Scout Drill. One of the many spontaneous emergencies that can arise at any time at Tomahawk Boy Scout Camp in Rice Lake, Wisconsin. I have worked here for three straight summers as a counselor and have encountered bears, terrible thunderstorms, tornadoes, compound fractures along with the occasional case of Lyme Disease. But never have I been met with something as traumatic as this.

I run as fast as I can as the blinding rain whips across my face. As I near the beach, I can hear the low rumbling of commanding voices. When I reach the beach, the scene before me is like something out of "Rescue 911." The thick steam rising off the cold, blue-gray water encompasses the dock, making the lifeguards appear as shadows as they dive and resurface 20 yards away. The lone figure on the dock is a general commanding his troops, readying them for battle.

"First line dive down! Second line follow!" The troops in the water follow every command of their general, making sure they scour every inch of the sandy subterranean ground, only to repeat the procedure again and again. They hold their emotions and fears deep inside, so they can perform their best during this situation, knowing that at any time their hand or foot could brush up against the cold, lifeless body of an innocent boy; knowing that any second could be his last, knowing that it is we, his counselors, who control if he should live or die.

My heart racing and my head cloudy, I rip off my shoes and wade into the icy lake, the cold water numbing and dampening my thoughts, as I try to concentrate on the situation at hand. The seconds are slowly ticking by. We know our chances of saving this boy are decreasing.

I suddenly freeze. I blink my eyes. I can't seem to separate the fog of fantasy from reality. A golf cart has pulled up along the shore, carrying the lost boy the camp has been frantically searching for. His carelessness in the buddy system had put our LBD Drill into full alert. Our system had succeeded. He had been found safely on shore, but the ordeal had left us all shaken: some weeping, all relieved.

In the ten minutes the search had taken, we knew our chances of losing this boy were increasing with every minute. Every second was counting toward life or death. This could have been a loved one of mine. This could have been my little brother. He was at camp this same week. Those long minutes showed me the fragility of life. How we need to make our lives count for something. I may not end up at Harvard with the best grades. I may not end up with a fat, bank account. But I hope to live my life with honor and integrity, to be a serving citizen loyal to my family, friends, and my great country. I'll start one step at a time, one day at a time, one deed at a time.

When I'm Alone

When I'm alone, I wonder
about the things I'll never see
the things I hope to accomplish in life
the person I want to be

When I'm alone, I think about
my friends, both old and new
those little fights we all have had
and the things we used to do

When I'm alone, I think about
all the things in store for me
The many things that fate has planned
my whole future, my destiny

When I'm alone, I daydream about
the one who's waiting for me
we will both be so much alike
on everything we'll both agree

When I'm alone, there's time to think
about my life and what's to come
achieving all my life-long dreams
the obstacles that I will overcome

Being alone, I can clear my mind
and focus on what's in store
the things I'll come in contact with
a new beginning to explore

Kayla Koski,
Falls High School, Int'l Falls, grade 9

Thick, hot pressure has been lodged in my gut for some forgotten stretch of time. So hot that it makes the skin on my arms clammy and makes my mind swim in a lead-colored sea. When I close my eyes now, I see only brown static, where there used to be stars and swarms of jet light.

It was never like this before I began to be as I am. I had never felt my blood curdle and sluggishly seep through my veins. I had never looked at my limbs and wondered whose they were. If I had, maybe I would not have closed myself in so tightly.

My family is severing from their minds the twisted thoughts I am forced to examine, lying here. I have been lying here for so long that my fingers are curled around the curve of my torso, locking me into place among the vast loose masses of sheets. My window is open so that I can feel the air billow in and attempt to revive my sore joints, but I haven't stirred from my nest.

I don't regret any more. I used to regret, thinking of how despite themselves, my loved ones would step away from me. I can't be selfish any more—I am not afraid of isolation. They are stubborn now, but no amount of watching me writhe wordlessly day after day will aid them in understanding.

I know that time wilts away as I lie here, literally wastes the chances I would have had to make something of myself had I not chosen to lie here. Yes, it was my own choice. I am well enough to stand and embrace those who sit by my bedside, but that's what they want, not me. I am very tired of that. Very tired of obligations.

Today Michael came to see me. It was only his second time. I suppose it hurts. He may have found someone else and felt the sting of guilt, and in any case it doesn't matter to me. He speaks to me sometimes, in a quiet voice that is empty of emotion. He never talks in profound, cloud-and-coffee platitudes about darkness and light. Maybe he knows I would cringe from that.

"Good morning, Beth," he murmurs, looking about himself in that bleak way that he does. I study him intently, hoping it doesn't unnerve him. But I should know better. Michael is too brave.

"The walls here are very grey, aren't they? Terrible color." He sits gingerly in the worn chair at my side, the only furniture the family has imported here.

"I'm glad you're awake. I was hoping to tell you some news. Big things are happening at home, Beth. Good things." He pauses for effect. In all climates formal or otherwise, Michael is dramatic. He looks up from his hands and fixes his common brown eyes on my pale face.

All at once he breaks his gaze and looks around again. He's not good at small talk. He picks up a trinket from the dresser next to him and toys with it before turning back to me. "You hungry? I'll get you some fruit, if you like. I know you hate breakfast, but you look like you need something. I can go get some." He puts down the trinket and begins to finger the edge of my bedsheet. "I think I will. I'll go get something."

Eagerly, he stands up and strides purposefully out of the room. I don't blame him for being uncomfortable. I am difficult, I know I am. If I could apologize, I would. But I can no longer force the emotion to the surface. While I wait I think of all the things I should say to him. Michael, I love you. I'm sorry for making you come. I should say these things, but they fall from my lips and are absorbed into the spartan whiteness of my bedding.

He comes back in with a little white plastic plate full of strawberries and orange slices, and a little matching sugar bowl. Settling back in the chair, he leans towards the rail of my bed and picks up the fruit. He laces it with sugar and gently nudges it into my mouth. I eat it, remembering how salty the broth I had last eaten had been. Neither of us say a word. Then again, I never do.

I finish the last slice and Michael sets the plate aside, making a little clearing for it among the clutter on my dresser. In silent moments like this, I always expect him to break down and cry, or bite into his cheek with the pain of not speaking. But he does nothing — just sits there with a blank look, which is worse. I don't want him to be chained to me, to be pulled down into my mute stupor. In desperation, I rustle my sheets a bit and unlock one hand from where it is pulled up next to me and set it close to him. It is my best attempt at comfort.

Michael gives me a small, sad smile and kisses my palm. I wish that this little gesture would give me enough strength to say something, but instead it makes me withdraw, curl into myself, and shut my eyes tightly.

I don't have to see him to know that Michael has picked up his coat and left. My breath reverberates hot from the pillowcover. Now he knows, I think. Now we both know the release of leaving.

Shore Lunch

My all-out downright
Afternoon treat
Is called
Shore Lunch
flip floppedy floop

It is a yummy
Feast with freshly
Caught still alive
Fish and canned
“Dinty Moore”
Stew.
Flip floppedy floop

You make a fire
Out of Birch
Tree’s bark
On the rocks
And you cook
The stew
In the can.
Flip floppedy floop

The fish
still alive
and flopping
Around
In the pan.
Flip floppedy floop

While they are brewing,
I slip in the woods
To find some lady
Slippers.
Flip floppedy floop

The seasoning
And the best part
Of the food
Are the teensy-weensy ashes.
From the blazing
Bark falling
On the stew
And fish pan.
Flip floppedy floop

When it is done
You let it cool
Off a bit
Because the fish
Is way too hot
to eat.
Flip floppedy floop

Then, you bite
Into the juiciest
Thing ever
Flip floppedy floop

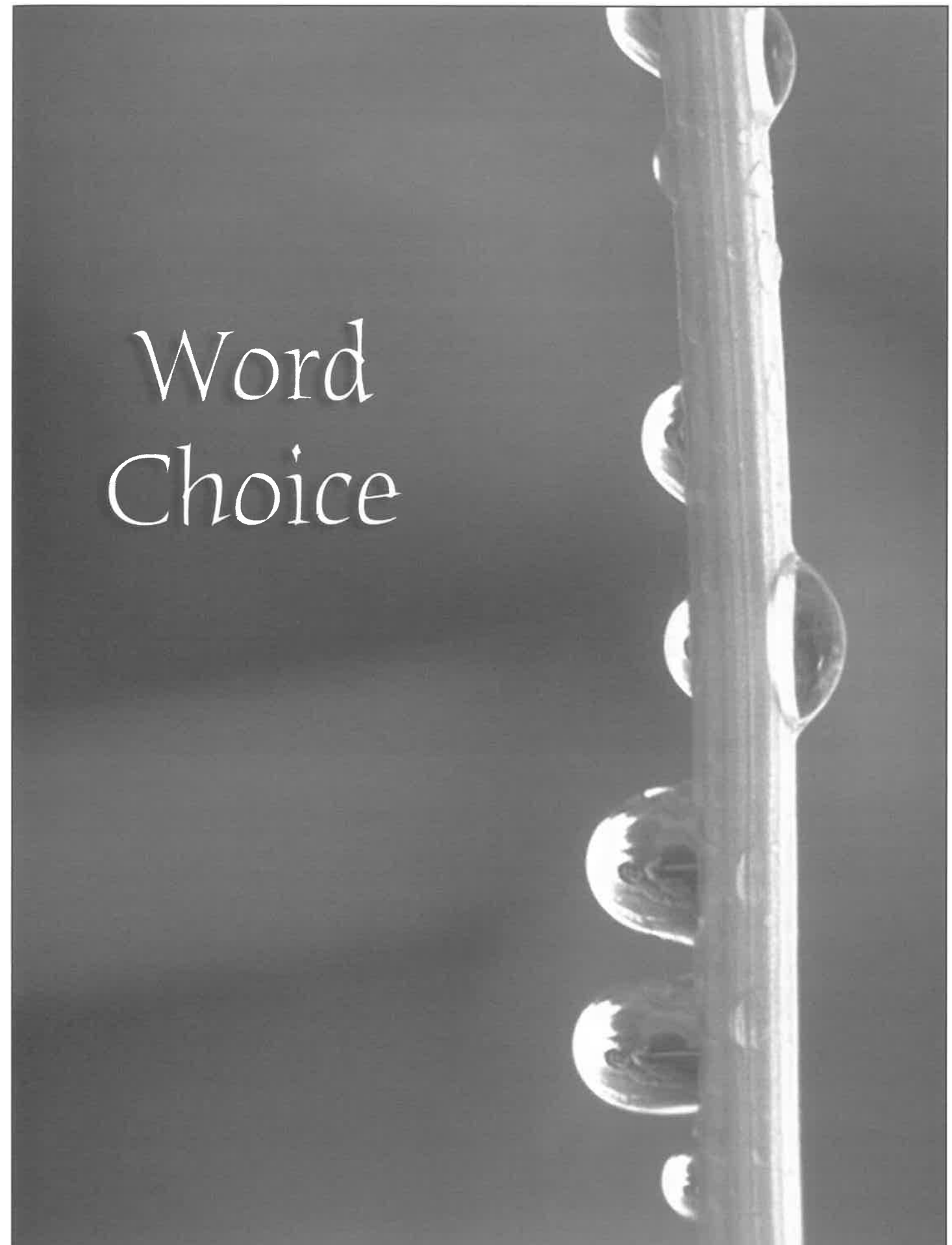
It tastes like
Freshly brewed
Buttery bread
And chef-d’oeuvre.
Flip floppedy floop

It smells
So scrumptious
And the sea gulls
Are soaring
Above waiting
For a regale
They won’t
Get.
Flip floppedy floop

Freshly
Caught fish
Taste so good.
Flip floppedy floop

Jack T. Lelwica
South Junior High, St. Cloud, grade 8

Word Choice



Writing with Cynthia Rylant

Teacher Talk

I think one benchmark of an excellent teacher is he/she knows how to “steal” ideas from all the best places.

One assignment idea I adopted from a presentation Sandy Nesvig did at an MCTE convention starts with reading the children’s book When I Was Young in the Mountains by Cynthia Rylant. Then students list 10-12 places that are important or powerful to them. I encourage them to choose places from their past, their elementary school years or earlier, because they seem to have more perspective, and while they list, I quietly list places from my youth until they’re all writing.

Then students choose 1 of the 10 and list phrases utilizing all of the senses to describe the place. Students then construct a poem using the phrases and starting their poems with “When I was Young in” to tie the phrases together. I also give them the option of using the title and/or first line “I remember.” I save student examples and read them to give them an idea of how the poems will sound.

In rewrite, the first lines often change and “I Remember” may become “Do you remember, Dad?” or “When I Was Young With Grandpa in Brainerd” becomes “Visiting Grandpa in Brainerd.”

Theanna Grivna, Osseo Senior High

When I Was Young

When I was young at my grandparents’ house
The Fourth of July meant piñatas
Filled with candy and toys.

We gathered around
In the hot July sun
Anxiously awaiting
Our turn to throw the ball.

Each time we heard
The thump of the ball
Denting the papier-maché
Our anticipation grew.

Finally with a crack
The piñata burst open
Sprinkling candy and toys
Across the ground.

A herd of children
Stampeded at the treats
Snatching everything in their sight
Until every piece had been claimed.

Nicole Rassier
Osseo Senior High, grade 10

Do You Remember, Dad?

Do you remember, Dad?
In your big green van
As you drove with your knee
And I sat shotgun

The stain on the seat
From my McDonald’s Bar-B-Que sauce
The window button
I broke off with my foot
The missing screw in the door handle

Do you remember, Dad
When I was cold
I’d take off my shoes
And set them on the heaters
Or after a softball game
I’d put them out the window?

Do you remember, Dad
When only we existed
And that car was our castle?

Kelleen O’Brion
Osseo Senior High, grade 10

Visiting grandpa in Brainerd

Visiting grandpa in Brainerd
Meant breakfast at Hardees
Entering the warm getaway
Grandpa limping beside me
Tearing off the breakfast meal cover
The smell of sausage invading my nose
Gobbling eggs first before they get cold
Grandpa’s soothing voice entering my lungs like
fresh air
Grandpa and mom finishing before me
Their eyes watching me nibble
Previously rejected hash browns
They wonder what I will become
But the little boy now sheltered from the world
Continues to devour greasy food with grandpa
One of life’s nurturing experiences

Gavin Grivna
Osseo Senior High, grade 10

Sunflower Sonata

I remember a vast sea of orange
on the side of the road
A backdrop of cloudless, azure sky
behind it
The scent of a thousand summers
Soft, sweet breeze slipping in
through my open window
Rolling hills of flame-topped green,
Gravel roads and remnants of picnic lunches
Paul McCartney crooning “Blackbird”
to mother and me
That song is the “Sunflower Sonata”
to me now
Mostly I remember the groundless plants,
how they soared with heads held high
While our dusty car slid gently past.

Andy Cheney
Osseo Senior High, grade 10

I will always remember

I will always remember. . .
the time I forgot to say good-bye to my Dad
It was the first day of school, and he was
leaving
and I didn’t say good-bye.
It was years before I saw him again.

I will always remember. . .
the day I met Justin.
It was pre-school,
and he had stitches on his forehead.
We became instant friends.

I will always remember. . .
the night I got my scar.
It was midnight,
and I fell on a gravel road.
The feeling of that road,
in my knee is forever imprinted in my head.

I will always remember. . .
last summer.
It was a week that was spent parent-free
My 16 year old step-brother was the oldest
there.
I will never forget my first taste of freedom.

I will always remember. . .
my step-sister’s wedding.
It was the brightest,
most beautiful sunny day.
As she was standing there,
all I could smell were the roses.
I will never forget seeing the first family
member of mine get married.

I will always remember. . .
that memories make people.
I will never forget that without memories, we
will never get stronger.

Jordan Anderson
Champlin Park High School, grade 10

How could I ever hold feelings for a parasite such as he?

The king
of cheesy one-night-stand pick up lines

A man
that is so slimy you can feel the grease radiate off his perfectly chiseled pecs
and biceps

The type of guy that knows
exactly what brand of cologne to use for each type of date and time of year

A guy that visits
the tanning bed regularly because “the ladies like it”

A romanticizer
whose stereo perpetually hums the melodies of love songs of which he
whispers every word perfectly in time and tune

A wooer
who enamors the minds of naive young women

An enraptured professional
heart breaker with strategies to spare

A Lothario
of manipulating each palpitation of a lonely heart, vulnerable and desolate

... such as mine

Heidi Tumberg, New York Mills High School, grade 12

Days On End

Falling gently among the eaves
Gray mists along the ocean
Shedding slightly chilled drops
Onto the shore

Darkened skies break to release the torrents
Of pewter knives
The scent of spent ozone fills the air
As lightning ribbons through the atmosphere
In bright streaks against the bleeding clouds

Steady splashes scatter freely
Dark buffets against the windows
In a chorus of consistency
While the glass shudders in the frame
Day after endless day

Lisa Fein
Champlin Park High School, grade 12

Death

I am Death,
the angel at your shoulder,
the scream in the night.

I can be cold,
warm,
gentle or
painful.

I come to bring you away
on swift and silent feet

I am friend to pestilence, war, and famine,
burdened with the lives I’ve taken,
the killer that stalks till the end.

I am dark, cold hands reaching out to take you.

I am the being that all humans fear.

Christopher Engesser
Luverne Middle School, grade 7

Misunderstood

They say they understand me
but I know they don’t
they don’t understand because they don’t want to
so they pretend they do.
Why? You ask,
Because they don’t want to
they’re afraid of what’s different
afraid I’ll be hurt if they don’t understand.
In truth I’m hurt that they have lied.
If only they’d tell me so I can explain
at least then they’d know where I’m coming from
at least then they’d understand.
But they go on pretending and so do I.
I pretend to believe them, but I don’t know why.
Maybe some day I’ll tell them...
tell them why I’m sad when I should be happy,
why I laugh when I should cry,
why I greet the sun and dance in the rain,
but for now I’ll just pretend
and in doing so I lie to myself and to them.
Oh, how it hurts to be misunderstood.

Kristi Silence
Cook County High School, grade 10

Hurry Up in There!

Nathan J. Swanson, Westbrook - Walnut Grove High School, grade 10

I felt the smooth surface of the door against my dry, red knuckles as I knocked on the door. The sound resounded like timpani inside the gas station. The jaws of all behind me dropped.

A minute before, I had grasped the cold brass and turned the doorknob. The knob only went halfway on its groove before it clicked as if it were saying, "Get lost, buddy!" My first efforts to reach the one-stool, unisex bathroom had failed. Now, to my dismay, I had to wait. Ben must have got in there before me. He sure rocketed off the bus. My bladder groaned. It felt like a beach ball filling, every second getting closer and closer to full capacity. I could imagine the huge pop that would echo in the gas station if I exploded.

On this Thanksgiving Day 2000, the pep band from Westbrook-Walnut Grove High School was traveling to a hotel in Minneapolis. The next morning, our football team would be playing for the State Nine-Man Football Championship. Why else would we be on the road in the evening on one of the biggest holidays of the year?

I glanced over my shoulder and smiled at the 20 high school students behind me. All appeared haggard, their eyes hazy and clouded up, their usual friendly attitudes withered like grapes in the sunlight. The long bus ride had taken its toll. The other kids could only throw back a painful smile, their teeth abnormally clenched. Most had their arms folded over their chests, some their legs crossed.

The old Conway Twitty song playing on the radio in back of the counter ended and The Dixie Chicks song "Ready to Run" came on the radio. Everyone joined in.

"When the train, rolls by, I'm gonna be ready this time..."

My stomach growled and sent tremors through my torso causing my bladder to shimmy, shake, and rock. The nourishment from the huge Thanksgiving meal five and a half-hours ago had faded. The

turkey, the yams, the dressing were all so good. But now I regretted every scrap I ate, though my current state of uneasiness was due to liquids. In retrospect, the second, skyscraper tall glass of milk, the Sprite, and the 20-ounce Mountain Dew from Amoco were bad decisions. Nature had first called 45 minutes ago, but was muffled by the busload of talking and screaming freshman. Twenty minutes ago, she had tapped me on the shoulder and whispered, "You better stop soon." Five minutes ago, nature had picked me up by the scruff of my neck and screamed, "GET THIS KID A BEDPAN!"

"Ready ready ready ready ready to run..."

The gas station was very well designed. The atmosphere was so bright, so roomy, so homely. The junk food and coffee scents filled the room with a sweet aroma of calories, cholesterol, and satisfaction. Our long line for the bathroom was located in a small hallway that was removed from the rest of the travelers' oasis. Lining a wall about 15 feet away there were freezers with their beverages and frozen goods. Through the frosty fronts I could see the chips and deli sandwiches. The coffee and rolls were near the entrance, and all the candy was in the center of the room. Around the corner from me were movie rentals and the magazines. The gas station had an over abundance of everything except bathrooms. One unisex bathroom! If I could only get my hands around the guy who designed the place.

"Hey, Nathan, who is taking so long in there?" my good friend Jordan asked. I checked my watch—5:33 p.m. For Pete's sake, I had been waiting for 15 seconds! I had begun to scour the station, mentally noting whom I had seen. It wasn't Jamie, Becky, Derek, Katie, Katy, and the other Katie. Mr. Vondracek flipped through a magazine and both Mark's looked at the videos. It had to be Ben. Maybe he had too much to drink also. If I could only get my hands on the guy who invented Mountain Dew.

"Yeah, maybe you should break down the door," someone suggested jokingly.

I considered following through with the pseudo-suggestion. Waiting this long for the bathroom was preposterous! People should get in there, do their business, wash their hands, and then leave.

"I feel the wind blow through my hair and I'm gonna be ready this time..."

"Quit tapping your foot! It's annoying," complained Jordan.

I looked to see my Nike shoes tapping quickly against the shiny linoleum floor. My leg was shaking and quivering like the last brown leaf clinging to a tree. In my shoes, I could feel my toes curling and uncurling. The soles of my feet and the palms of my hands perspired as if I had run the mile. My hand scratched my neck repeatedly, and there wasn't even an itch! My pinky twitched and looked like it was performing "Bohemian Rhapsody" on an unseen miniature piano. I could feel my other fingers wiggling like a three year-old during a church service. How much longer would be the perpetual ribbing my friends and peers would hand me everyday if I didn't make it. Every ounce of my strength now went to hold it in.

I rolled up my Columbia coat sleeve and looked at my watch. My medulla oblongata grew to the size of a tractor tire when I saw that I had been waiting for a whole thirty-five seconds. Thirty-five seconds is an eternity! Think about all that could happen in 35 seconds: a football team could win or lose, a person's life could ebb away within that time or a house could be swept away by a hurricane.

"I'll buy a ticket to anywhere..."

Forty-five seconds! How atrocious! Almost a minute had passed since I walked in. I was the first off the bus and now it appeared I would be the last to return. The other kids had bought their candy, had time to chat with the employees, do their laundry and were still going to beat me back to the bus! I decided that I was done waiting. Patience and common sense bought a one way ticket on the space shuttle to the Planet Stupid. I pounded on the door with confidence and urgency like a page with a message from the front lines.

"HURRY UP IN THERE!" I commanded with a whine. Chuckles rippled in the line behind me.

I turned to make a comment to Jordan but snapped forward when the door hinges creaked. Noises can have an attitude: the embarrassed tone a book produces as it hits the floor in a silent room, the pleasant turn of a door knob when someone comes to visit, the alarming ring of a cell phone bringing an emergency—all noises that alert the human ear to the attitude of he who produces it. The creak of the hinges revealed to me a college-age woman stomping out of the bathroom. My tongue sank down my throat and into my trachea.

"I'm ready to run..."

Her evergreen eyes shot a look at me that would have made a Marine cry. She wore a deep red sweater that matched her anger. I felt like a Spanish matador gored by a bull. Her cornsilk blonde hair scowled at me with a vengeance unknown to mankind. My eyes began to tear up from the stinging rage she shot at me. Her legs, buried under her tight-fitting black pants, bitterly strode toward the freezers. As she walked out of my life forever, I caught a whiff of her perfume which tickled the nostrils and delighted the taste buds. The scent was pure aggression.

"Uhh—sorry," I squeaked. Deep down, I hoped she would forgive me for my impoliteness. She didn't.

A tsunami of laughter crashed against my ears. I heard someone slapping a knee, drumming out a tune showing delight in my blunder. My face turned red as Old Glory. Never in my life had I been so bold or so bossy. The remorse I felt because of my selfish, inconsiderate actions weighed in my gut like a barbell. Guilt always tastes like rotten lemon. A few wondrous minutes later, as I washed the germs off my hands with the white and cold soap, I wished I could do the same with my guilt.

Leaving the bathroom, I walked over to the Little Debbie shelf and purchased some humble pie and came to a new and important conclusion about the human state: anxious minds breed stupid actions.

NCTE Writing Achievement Awards

Theodore P. Anderson
Hopkins High School

Breanna Brekken
Apple Valley High School

Vikas R. Chhabra
Armstrong High School,
Plymouth

Jena F. Enger
Anoka High School

Adam L. Fazio
Minnetonka High School

Jennifer N. Fluke
Eagan High School

Tracy L. Gosen
Minnetonka High School

Bridget Haeg
Benilde-St. Margaret's High School
St. Louis Park

Mark R. Haley
John Marshall High School
Rochester

Anna L. Jankowski
Cloquet High School

Laura Konicek
Richfield High School

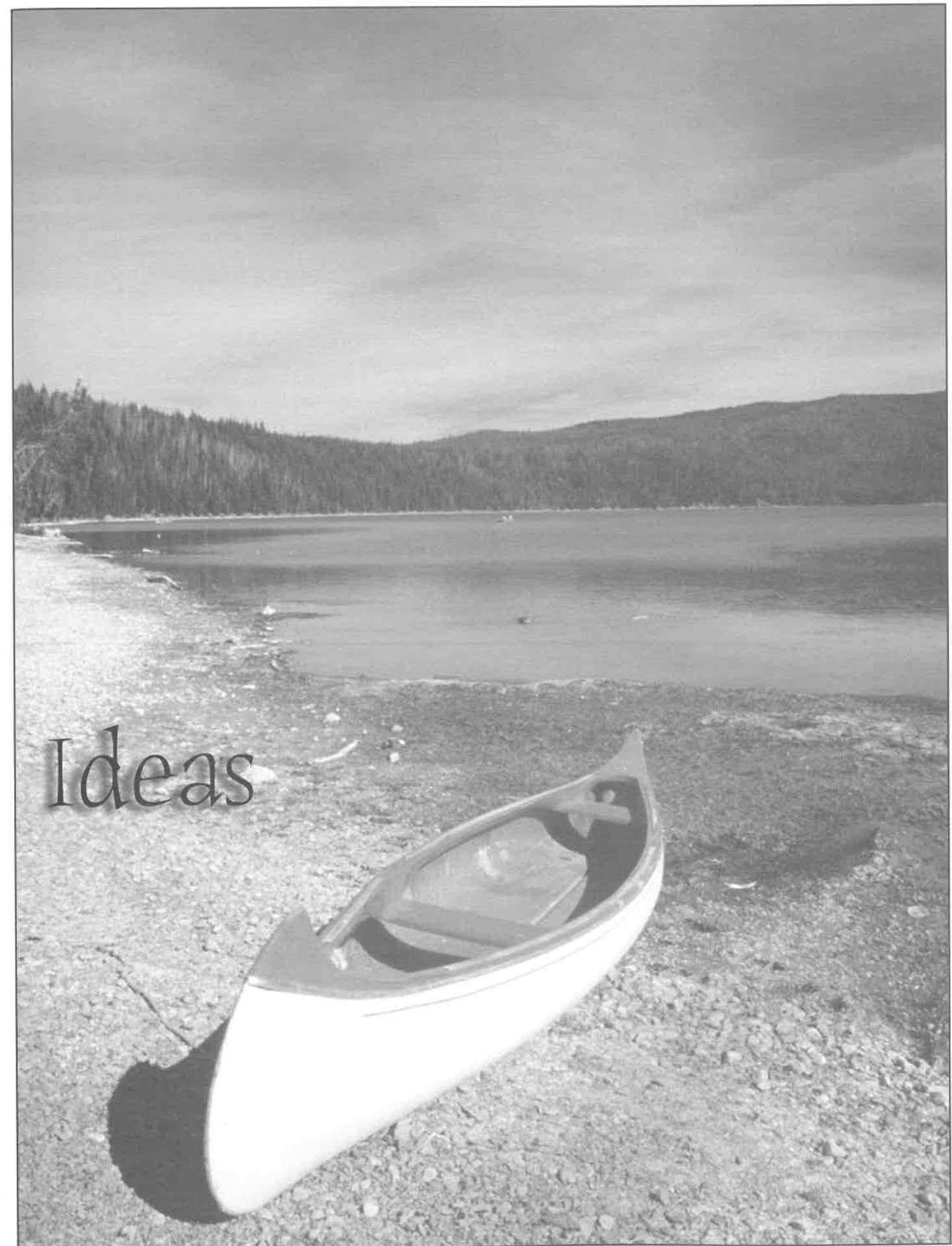
Jaclyn Loftsgaarden
Apple Valley High School

Marie E. Nelson
John Marshall High School
Rochester

Joseph D. Paulsen
Coon Rapids High School

Jensina E. Pederson
Cloquet High School

Andy P. Schupanitz
Armstrong High School, Plymouth



Friday Night at Palomino's

Ted Anderson, Hopkins High School, grade 11

It was, naturally, Friday night at Palomino's.

The crowds there were well-off, doctor's sons and lawyer's daughters, the dark smell of money a heady intoxicant, a kind of rich perfume. Everyone was in black or silver or gray or satin. Candles burned brightly through the room, glinting with vigor off the silver and china and crystal that flooded each linen-covered rosewood table. Every restaurant in the world has its own unique white noise; Palomino's was a musical hum like the undertow of the ocean.

A woman in a dark-red suit, knee-length skirt and a black bag like a paperback novel in her hands, came up to the maitre d'. "Sarah Bartlett?" she said quietly. "Table for two?"

The maitre d', aged and pithy, checked the table list and grandly waved an arm to the room. "Right this way, Mrs. Bartlett."

Her table, the usual, was near the back, almost up against the broadly sweeping picture window, looking out on the dark city below, lights burning in scores and in flocks, fireflies and diadems outlining the night-dark urban landscape.

Sarah Bartlett checked the wine list. "A glass of white, please. Whatever you have open tonight."

The maitre d' took the list from her. "Very well, Mrs. Bartlett. Will Mr. Bartlett be coming late?"

"I'm not dining with Kevin tonight, actually. I have a business meeting. With a client."

He nodded and left.

Mrs. Bartlett checked her watch, the gold one Kevin had given her last Christmas. It was five past eight.

She reached into the bag at her feet, rummaged past the usual articles of makeup and pager, found a Rolodex card. She pulled it out and looked at it carefully, as she'd been doing for the past week. It read, in square-block gold-ink capitals, 'Dr. Gibbons' Clinic.' Underneath was a phone number, out of the country. Mrs. Bartlett tapped the edge against her water glass thoughtfully.

"Mrs. Bartlett?"

She looked up, startled, dropping the card on the table. The speaker was an older man, somewhat short, in an ashy sport coat, gray hair wispy on top, horn-rimmed glasses. His face did not look friendly; it was consciously trying to stay friendly. He smiled and stuck out a hand. "Mrs. Sarah Bartlett, I presume."

She rose from the table and shook his hand. "Yes-yes, I'm Sarah Bartlett. You must be Dr. Gibbons. Please, sit down."

Dr. Gibbons sat down in the other seat. "Call me Arthur."

"It's very good to meet you, Arthur."

His smile dropped for a second, faintly, then rose again with a kind of strange twist to its corners, a touch of something half-remembered... "It's nice to see you too, Sarah."

The maitre d' came with Sarah's wine and turned to the newcomer. "And what would the gentleman like?"

"Ah..." Arthur looked at Sarah. "I shall have a glass of what the lady is having."

With a nod the maitre d' left the table.

Sarah looked at Dr. Gibbons and smiled nervously. "So—Dr. Gibbons—"

"Arthur. I like to think of myself as a young man."

"Arthur." Sarah ran a hand through her hair. "I—I'm sure you're wondering what this is about..."

"I should say so. Your call was rather terse."

"Well, that's the thing. You see..." Sarah picked up the card, dropped it, picked it up again in thin fingers. "Two weeks ago, I was looking through my husband's Rolodex for a friend's number, and I found this card in there, with your number on it. And I can't remember him ever mentioning you or your clinic." She was nervously flipping the card between her fingers. "Kevin — my husband — hasn't had any health problems for years, and we have our own doctor . . . Anyway, I didn't want to ask Kevin, in case it was something serious."

Dr. Gibbons tapped his fingers on the side of the water glass. "There's nothing to be concerned about, Sarah. Your husband had a leg injury about two years ago and came to us for treatment."

"But why didn't he tell me? And why would he travel out of the country for it?"

"My clinic specializes in such treatments; it is one of the best in the world. Your husband wanted the best, and thus he called me." His fingers kept up a steady rhythm.

"You haven't answered my question, though. Why wouldn't Kevin tell me about a leg injury?"

"He received it on a hunting trip." Dr. Gibbons smiled knowingly. "I remember him telling me that you disapproved of hunting as a dangerous sport."

"Ah." Sarah examined the card. "And this was two years ago?"

"Yes. In November, I believe."

Sarah handed him the card. "But this is written in gold ink. Specifically, a gold-ink pen I gave him for his birthday. Five months ago."

Dr. Gibbons's smile froze momentarily on his face. The fingers stopped. "I'm sure it's not the same pen, Sarah."

"It is. I know it is. I bought it because he kept losing all his others."

Dr. Gibbons sat back in his chair.

"You don't have to lie to me, Dr. Gibbons. Arthur." Sarah leaned down and put the card back in her purse. "If it was only a few months ago, it doesn't —"

"I didn't treat your husband, Mrs. Bartlett."

Sarah sat back up slowly. "You didn't?"

"No, Sarah. I treated you."

The table was silent for a moment, the whispered murmur of other diners and the string quartet intruding just barely. Elsewhere in the room, someone laughed loudly.

Sarah rested her hands on the tablecloth, her fingers quivering like flies. "That—that's impossible. I haven't been in the hospital in years, much less your clinic. Nothing's *wrong* with me."

Dr. Gibbons sighed. "It was not a problem so much as it was a condition."

"I don't understand."

His fingers started tapping the glass again. "Do you know the work of John Locke, Mrs. Bartlett?"

"What does that have to do with this?"

"John Locke was a philosopher during the seventeenth century, specializing in politics and the natural man. His one great theory was that the human mind is born without innate tendencies, without preconceived notions or patterns of behavior, and that all of our personality, our intellect, every fiber of our being, results solely from our experiences in life. Our life shapes us and determines our selves—not our genetics."

"I concentrated on neurology in med school, Mrs. Bartlett, and in my studies discovered something that supported Locke. While every brain is constructed the same, of the same materials and in the same manner, the brainwaves—our actual thoughts—are just electric pulses, riding that structure underneath, touching the neurons but never standing upon them, always moving."

The wine came, and Dr. Gibbons sipped at it. He set it down with a light touch.

"What I offer," he said, "is neural restructuring. The reasoning is simple—electric pulses can be neutralized, and replaced within the brain. The technology is even simpler—all you require is an EEG with a larger current and more sensitive electrodes. The only difficult part of the procedure is to locate what the patient has requested change in."

Sarah's lips were dry. "Change?"

"To change the mind, Mrs. Bartlett. My techniques allow for the removal of unwanted personality traits, the replacement of bad memories, or the correction of numerous neural disorders—though I've made it very clear to my patients that I will, for ethical reasons, only perform such techniques on *willing* patients who understand what will be done to them."

"Then I—Keith—"

"You and Keith came to me four months ago, Mrs. Bartlett, with a wish to alter your personality." He attempted a smile. It showed an unfortunate number of teeth. "Before, you had a violent temper, low-level paranoia and a nasty stutter. As I understood it, you had both been unhappy of late due to these problems, and so the two of you came to me in the hope of changing them."

Sarah looked down at her hands. They were pale, deathly pale, dark fingernails showing like puddles of dark blood on the tips of her fingers. They looked like a stranger's hands. "And my memories..."

"I usually make slight changes to the patient's memory after the procedure, to reduce the chances of a relapse of the earlier traits. It is also standard to remove the memory of the procedure itself and the weeks leading up to it." His fingers moved up, down, like a crab's legs. "It is the usual wish of the patient to make sure that, whatever changes have been made, to make them retroactive, to make it so they have always been this way."

Sarah kept her eyes on her hands. They seemed to be moving back, getting further away even though they stayed perfectly still...

Dr. Gibbons set down the glass and leaned over to her. "Look, Mrs. Bartlett, I can understand that this comes as a shock to you, but you needn't be upset. When you came to me, you and your husband both, you were unhappy, constantly fighting with each other, arguing over the most trivial things ... you both knew that this procedure would make your lives so much better. And I know it has; your husband called last week to thank me once again."

Sarah breathed, a deep shuddering breath like one who's been underwater for years. "I'm fine, Dr. Gibbons." She brought up her hand and studied the strange whorls and creases patterned across her flesh. "I'm fine."

Sarah woke up only once that night. The night was dark and solid around her, tangible; she brought up her hand to her eyes and the darkness swirled around her strange fingers like a whirlpool.

Keith was next to her, still. Sarah looked at him through the solid night.

She left the bed, went downstairs. On the shelves was a box of old photos. This she pulled out and set on the floor. Her strange fingers flipped through the files. She let them fall forward, faster. They moved quickly, like movie film, turning little instants into a moving picture of her and Kevin, hiking, skiing, dancing, laughing.

There's a term for it, scientifically, where instants seem like one long moment. Sarah tried to remember it. It's what makes moving pictures move.

Persistence of memory. That was it.

There was the woman in the moments. She looked like Sarah. She had Sarah's hands. She moved like Sarah. Her memory persisted.

She looked happy.

To a Puppet

Controlled by some great hand unseen
And subject to his whim,
The tasks perceived on you to lean
Depend instead on him.
Your limbs and lips the stipulate
Of hidden master's heed.
Your painted smile won't vacillate,
Nor will your sightless, helpless need.

You answer to another's call,
Your choices compromised:
For high above, the hand rules all,
Your role simply implied.
The unseen hands and strings provide,
Beneath their thin veneer,
The reason that your hands are tied
By guides to which you must adhere.

You are, O puppet, subject to
Your cruel, strange puppeteer:
Your image, reputation, too;
To popular appear.
You're tied, both hand and foot, simply
A pawn in hands to fear.

You vow you'll be your own person,
That things can change, and will.
But all too soon you will become
So firmly caught until,
Another puppet lives, as change
Comes from above you still.

You represent the citizen,
But serve your own interest.
For power keen, the denizen
Is left out in your quest.
Control and greed create one more
Sad puppet with the rest.

The puppeteers, eventually,
Will finish their long task.
The puppets unnecessary,
They take control at last.
When puppets we have all become,
Our freedom is the past.

Jonathan Maurer

St. Michael-Albertville High School, grade 12

Poetry

In the beginning, there were chickens and there were wheelbarrows to match. But then a change struck literature like a flash of lightning. And his name was Billy Shakespeare.

He rocked the world like thunder, and as I said before, he struck like lightning. I am no history or literature major, but I know when someone has it, and by golly he had it. He had everyone thinking outside the box. And the people of Earth lived in happiness for quite some time.

But then another flash of lightning struck, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't a Shakespearian flash, but it was the kind of lightning that evil witches and warlocks made. It went by the name of modern poetry. And they had everyone back in the box filled with chickens and wheelbarrows.

But people in my day and age cannot recognize what I am saying. They think that these modern poets are thinking outside the box, but really they have it flip-flopped around. Billy was thinking outside the box. He was writing about love and death and heartbreak, but these new guys are just writing about ordinary things that everyone experiences every day. Who wants to read about that? The answer is people who are just getting swept up in the hype of the situation. But let me tell you, world, I will not be swept away.

I will stand up and tell the rest of you that these modern poets are not great thinkers or great men who are charging ahead. They are only bringing us back. And let me tell you that if Shakespeare would have lived today, modern poetry would have killed him. He would have never been rightfully famous. What if Romeo had not loved Juliet? Or what if their families were just crazy about each other? That's right Billy's stories wouldn't have been worth a continental.

To really understand the piece you must know that my class was doing a poetry project, and we had just read William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow." I did not like this, nor did I like most other "modern" poetry we read. That inspired me to write this piece.

Kelly Molloy

Annunciation School, Minneapolis, grade 8

The Sign

Jen Fluke, Eagan High School, grade 11

He had been walking dead for four days, or maybe five. In this Golgotha, time no longer mattered. Dawn broke the same as the past mornings—first, nothing but innumerable stars, then a dusky rose that shaded the horizon, and then finally the sharp, brutal glare of the sun. There was no surcease, no respite from the heavens, only the lifeless heat and the cacti.

He slept next to the skeleton of the small Cessna. Earlier, on the day of The Disaster, the prophet had peered inside the wreckage, looking for water or a radio or a map, finding only the charred bones of the pilot. He had not stumbled back inside since. The shadow of the downed plane provided adequate shade during the early hours of the morning, but this soon faded as the sun rose to its apex.

First it had been food—a ravenous hunger. His very insides had been torn apart, craving fresh meat and sweet greens. After four days, however, this had given way to a new agony. He needed water; this was the first thought on his fevered brain as he rose. His ministerial robes had been removed days ago, as the heat necessitated, and he now used the black cloth as bedding. Today he would find water, or he would die.

He hummed "Amazing Grace" through blistered lips as he set out that morning to quench his thirst. The skin on his back had gone an angry red but was no longer painful. In fact, it was cool to the touch, his only relief from the sweltering heat. The clergyman thought of his convention. That had been his first thought after The Disaster, before he fully registered the gravity of his situation. His charter plane had gone down en route to Las Vegas, the City of Sin. There would be no convention for him, no soul cleansing with the other ministers, no giving testament to the wonderful Word of God. Of course, the infinite desert had its own ways of purging the soul.

His undergarments had remained on; he clung fast to the last remnants of his culture, but today he finally slid them off. The heat was excruciating—everything took on a glassy look as his mind played Judas to his wasted body. As he lurched through the sand, half walking, half crawling, he knew what Jesus had felt on the cross. This was the ultimate suffering for God—this was his own penance. He had been betrayed by technology and a half-drunk pilot-for-hire; when he died, his sins would be absolved into a million tiny grains of sand.

He came to a cluster of tall cacti. Somewhere, in some other forgotten time, he remembered reading that they retained water in their cores to survive this frightful arid climate. Having no instruments by which to sever the cactus, and not wanting to wade back to the downed plane for a scrap of metal, he instead used his fingers to claw to the moist center. His hands became bloodied and welted, his head a crown of thorns, as he pushed and scraped with all his strength at the leathery hide of the plant. Still, nothing gave.

He stepped back into its faint shadow. His right hand, where he had been cut the deepest, was swelling rapidly to twice its usual size. It was red and tender to the touch. It seemed there was no water to be found here after all, no water to be found anywhere within this wasteland.

He stumbled onward instead, mumbling scraps of old prayers. His mind had gone beyond the breaking point—this was all a vision, a message from Jesus. Savior, he thought, send me a sign. Lead me unto You, and I will teach the Word, for the Word is the Truth and the Truth is everlasting Life, amen.

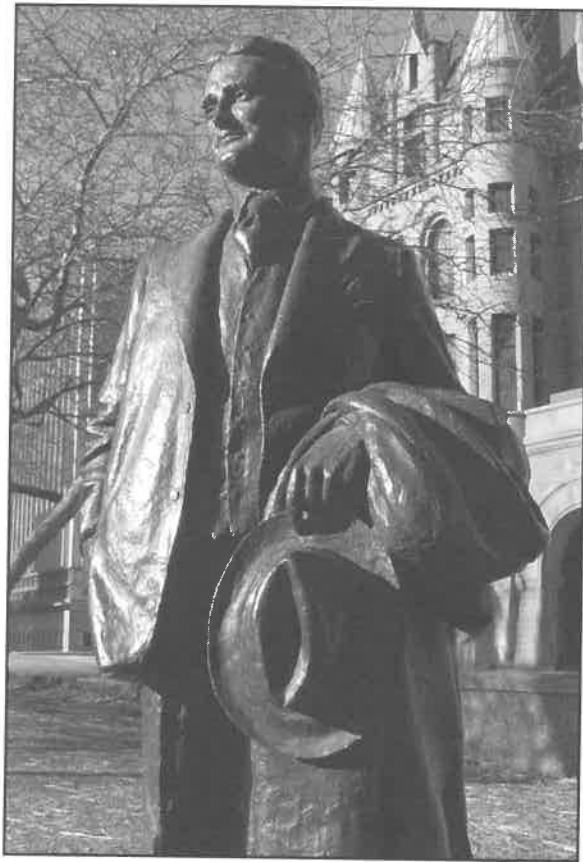
He saw something, a brown speck on the horizon. He walked toward it, not yet able to distinguish the true form of the blurry shape. It was not until he stood right before it that his brain comprehended what his eyes had seen all along. There it was: the Sign from God! Jesus had heard his pleas after all, hallelujah. Before him, amid the sea of sand and dust, was the Cross of Christ. He lay himself before it, weeping with joy at the Lord's infinite mercy, those tears the last of his body's moisture.

The sun rose to its zenith and began its descent below the horizon, and still the holy man knelt before the cross. His feet were callused; he did not feel the scorpions as they crawled over him, looking for shelter from the unforgiving sun. His body trembled, feeling the Rapture, feeling at last the loss of water and minerals from his bloodstream. He clutched the crucifix closer as the final spasms wracked his wasted frame. Finally, as the sun turned orange in the western sky over Vegas, he breathed his last.

Later, the vultures overhead partook in their own communion. One, larger and darker than the rest, perched upon the cross after eating its fill. Just below his talons, on the horizontal bar of the holy icon, were the etchings of a faint but unmistakable last rite for the preacher—"Rest Stop, 1/2 Mile."

The Many Faces of Ejima Beynon

Joanna Knight, Perpich Center for Arts High School, grade 11



Joanna Knight's story was the winner of the F. Scott Fitzgerald Writing Contest for High School Students. Joanna was also a featured speaker at an earlier school-wide performance of poems and stories in honor of Fitzgerald, an event that was covered by CSPAN.

The contest, sponsored in connection with the Sixth International F. Scott Fitzgerald Society Conference, was judged by novelist Faith Sullivan, journalist Mary Ann Grossmann, and poet John Minczeski. Judges, conference attendees, distinguished writers George Plimpton, Norman Mailer, and others, joined Garrison Keillor at the Landmark Center to honor Joanna when Keillor presented her with her cash prize.

Joanna's entry, "The Many Faces of Ejima Beynon," a story with a decidedly Fitzgerald-ish opening, "There was something about Ejima Beynon that had always inspired envy in those around her," was one of a number of excellent entries. Organizers of the local events for the Fitzgerald Conference, Eleanor Heginbotham of Concordia University Saint Paul and Dave Page of Inver Hills, do not plan another conference, but they hope another group will come up with another inspiration for eliciting such talent.

There was something about Ejima Beynon that had always inspired envy in those around her. She was decidedly unlike the glowing debutantes of those years, her sophistication lying in her complete apathy towards any sort of palatial splendor. She was idealistic without the burden of ideals, moral without holding to any sort of morality. She believed that life was a succession of a few days, with the results of those days strung out in between as a bruise upon destiny, or a sort of golden floss lightly knit to uphold the rest. I remembered her always as the girl on the train from the city at that moment of each day when the windows become a brittle, livid yellow and the convivial blur of evening colors grope through the dusk to be sharpened into the lush, enchanting shades of night. She sank into the sway of the train as a singular personage in the midst of Wall Street black and rolled newsprint, with a tweed hat pulled to the delicate wisps of her brows and her coat falling sloppily about her hips in a certain way that made it quite clear that she did not consider the atmosphere to be one in which she would be constrained to impress anyone. This was the picture I would retain of her years later, her lap spread with fashion prints and her pocket lined with a small white paper sack of chocolate drops from the station.

I.

The vivid, gauzy stillness was peeled back with the slow rise of the curtain and the glorious heat of applause burned slowly across the stage, cooled only when the curtain dropped down for the last time and I found myself tripping through the dingy tangles of rope and ladder and to my dressing room. Jack was waiting by the cracked table.

"There's a friend of yours waiting backstage."

"Oh?" I slipped behind a painted screen and into a flesh-colored silk dress. "Who?"

"It's an odd name." Jack tugged a folded program from his breast pocket, tearing it slightly on the sharp lapel. "I can't quite make it out anymore, now that the pencil's been smudged. It was something real strange, anyhow."

I emerged from behind the screen dabbing away cold cream and powdering simultaneously. "I suppose we'll be forced to see who it is, if only to keep them from waiting."

"I suppose."

I slipped into my coat and left the dressing room, Jack following. The woman seated on the couch was turned away from me, one hand wielding a cigarette which dipped with her gestures as she spoke, yet I knew who it was without ever seeing her face. Ejima Beynon rose, with a rush of perfume and smoke, from a deep cloud of beige satin, her diamond earring catching slightly on a diaphanous string of aqua stones resting on her collar bone, as she passed her cigarette to her companion. He was introduced as a friend from Prague, and we shook hands, he extending a cool palm which somehow managed to be unengaged from the task of balancing a satin wrap and two cigarettes. There was an awkward rush of greeting and introduction, followed by a rather exuberant invitation, on our part, to the party being given by our London set, a group rather more transient than stable, but entirely able to furnish some sort of pleasure.

Ejima's car was waiting in the cobblestone and brick alley behind the theater, which loomed with every intention, from the back angle, of presuming to be a warehouse of sorts. There was something vaguely exotic about the low, warm sky, all pearl and spire, and something more sharply exotic about the leather and velvet nestled between the two banks of glass and chrome that were the car. We settled into them within the musk of the Czechoslovakian's cologne and the rigid vivacity of Ejima. The car started, finally, and the West End rushed by in one airy, breathless huddle, giving way to a sort of rushing suspension above the more complex network of lights that composed the rest of the city, cut through by a black, mute swath that was the river. The car made its way into a crush of other automobiles beneath the breathless ornament of the club and in the slow, bright swirl of edging chrome Ejima began twirling the latch of the car safe. The little door sprang open lightly, to a plethora of stacked boxes, of silk and velvet. She selected a slim, pale blue box and shook her wrap lightly from her slim shoulders. "Here, darling," she leaned forward to her companion, "Would you be a dear and take this off? I don't think the color is right for tonight."

The man complied, steadily unhooking the latch and dropping the aqua necklace as one smooth ripple against its case's bright lining. When we finally found our way to the smooth, warm rooms at the top of the club and had spent some time observing the mesh of slim, powdered arms and sleek suits, Ejima suggested, rather jauntily, that we go out for ice cream. I saw her eyes clearly in the stark lamps of the outside steps as we waited for the car, and I caught their flashing hazel depths for the first time, glimpsed the sheer paradox of their arrogant vitality.

The car arrived and we all climbed in, watching the city in a greater silence than before, as though the lights somehow transcended our mutual presence, vaguely pre-occupied with attempts at small talk. Then the bright little bauble of an ice cream parlour was before us, the kitchen windows dingy and dripping with steam, piles of sweet rolls pressed against the glass. We stood at the counter for some time, gazing at a painted placard listing the flavors, before a man came from the kitchen, wiping his hands on the front of his apron. The place was utterly vacant, with the exception of a couple seated in the back. Ejima started, and announced that she needed some air, and we all followed her back to the car, the ice cream forgotten for the time being. I suggested that we all go up to my rooms at the hotel, and no one moved in disagreement with such a plan.

They were still serving supper in the lobby restaurant when we entered, and we decided to return to eat something after freshening up. Once in the room, Jack and the other man poured brandies and set a pot of black coffee to steam on the radiator. Ejima collapsed into a chair in the room where I found myself changing into a lavender frock.

"I can't imagine living somewhere where there are neatly arranged drawers in place of suitcases."

Ejima did not answer. Instead, she lifted herself tiredly from her chair, muttering something about a headache, and wandered over to the wine on the sideboard. Ejima urged us all to go on to dinner and assured that she simply needed to rest. As she spoke, her eyes took on their familiar glow, which seemed something between apathy and interest, a sort of indefinable aloofness.

Much later, Jack and the Czechoslovakian retreated to the dusky billiard bar while I went to find Ejima. I tripped into the darkened rooms, grasping along the papered walls for a light to press. I gasped when the light came up in the frosted overhead orbs. Ejima had heaved her wine glass against the wall. I could see the point of impact, a bruising spot of wine, with long trails oozing to the base of the wall, where some vivid remnants shimmered still and cool within the shattered glass. She was fast asleep now, her breath faintly bearing the hot, quick, repulsive scent of alcohol, her face damp and swollen under the pulsing pressure of old tears. I felt a sudden dislike for her and was surprised at the anger with which I snatched up her handbag in search of an address. The contents were very unlike that of any I had seen women of her position carrying: a soiled bag of ancient chocolate drops and a dime sketch of her younger face from a street comer somewhere, some time ago. I finally managed to extract a number in Primrose Hill from her card

and marched down to fetch her companion and hail a cab. Ejima was lifted heavily into the car by the now tight-lipped man. Jack slipped unobtrusively into the waiting taxi before the car, barely pausing to demand a good-bye, disappeared down the street.

II.

I kept the street number for several days, intending to visit Ejima again, but suspended my visit out of discomfort. Finally, on one of my last days in London, I made the call which had become the sort that nothing short of decorum could induce. I took a cab through the rain and was received at the door of a large stone flat by a maid in an enormously old-fashioned cotton shift. I was shown into a bright, high, red hallway, quivering in the lamplight which cast a bright amber stain on the overall gloom of the day. A man in a darkly quilted satin smoking jacket and pleated trousers appeared out of one of the rooms then, and when I introduced myself as Ejima's friend, he welcomed me in as her husband. At this I was quite surprised, and thought for a moment, that he meant it as a joke, but indeed, there was no sign of the gentleman with the accent from several evenings prior.

The man lowered his voice considerably as we approached an open door at the end of the entrance hall. "She's been quite ill of late. She went out to a play several weeks ago, insisting that she go alone, and only to that particular production, and she returned after everyone had gone to bed. I returned from a business engagement in Paris the following morning and found her quite unlike herself. She's been this way ever since. You may want to prepare yourself; she doesn't seem to be anything like what, I am sure, you were accustomed."

I could hear the four distinct voices of small children somewhere above us in the house as we went in, but Ejima, sitting behind a white and silver tea spread, seemed not to hear them. Her face was ashen cream and her stare as blank and ambiguously sullen as I had ever seen it. She wore a little black slip of a dress that gave her the appearance of being slight and limp which indeed I had never known her to be. Her gaze was fixed on the rain and she did not speak for some time. Finally, her husband excused himself and slipped out. She turned her hazel eyes slowly to mine.

"I didn't think you would come back. I must have embarrassed you awfully."

"Not at all," I said evenly. "It was no trouble."

"I suppose you've wondering why I sought you out."

"I have been, I suppose."

"I've been living in London for a long time. I was married here." She pressed her fingertips to her temples

as though to keep them from bursting from her head, and then continued, "I need to keep friends, you understand. The world slows so quickly. I thought I wanted to settle in a foreign place, but London isn't foreign enough. I want to be among jewels and perfume, not rain and furs."

Her voice disappeared into a dressing gown collar of the latter. When she looked back at me it was with an utter lack of recognition. "Did you just come in, or have you been standing here all this time?"

I backed away a bit. "All this time of course."

"But I didn't see you," her eyes widened with something like terror, "and I know I've been sitting here just as I am."

"Well, I've been here too....talking to you."

Ejima's eyes faded in confusion, and she slumped into her chair. I expected something more, some outburst of recognition or anger, but there was nothing but the same empty despondence. Her husband appeared from behind me and led me out.

I ignored the rain and walked back to the hotel without venturing for a taxi. I suppose it felt more natural, more young and unspent and spontaneous that way, lost in the water with the warm fog lifting from the grates in the street. The faint grey-shrouded colors in the sky, the buildings and the trees seemed to converge into a sort of faintly colored tower above me, melting into the hollow palms of my hands. It was my own private dawn, pulled on a strand of gossamer gold thread from a bruised memory.

Screaming With No Breath

Creative response to the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson

A silent scream pierces the night,
she was alone, but now he's here.
He wants just her body,
but he takes so much more.

Her mind is desperate, fighting within,
but all she can do is pray, for the will to live.
Her desperate pleas go unanswered,
as he pushes her harder down.

"Help!" She screams, as loud as she can,
before she tastes black earth in her mouth.
Access to an arm is all she has, and she tries to fight
but still he restrains her effortlessly.

All she feels is pain while she struggles.
There's not a chance to break loose on a wish or a prayer.
"There's no use," she thinks, as she slipped away slowly.
"It will be over soon," she tells herself, losing all she had.

She stops fighting and lets the hurt just set in.
A blackness settles through her head
for a hundred years, while he hurt her.
Until it was over and he whispered softly,
"You're very pretty," and with that

she died on the inside, degraded,
never seeing a face, hearing only his harsh, rasping voice.
She knows he's still out there still looking for someone,
another girl, another day.

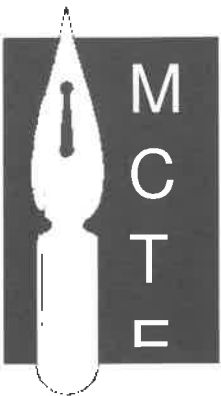
She thinks that she'll forget some day,
the feeling that she has,
and the way it ached when her mother said that it was all a lie,
and the dreams and the voice, they all come back,
without a rest in sight.

The girl knew then that this was her life,
and knew what she needed to do,
she pulled out the pistol from the drawer and let all hell break loose.
His silent scream pierces the night
and he goes unanswered.

For a little girl has lost her life,
in a dark and cold flurry.
The pain will never go away,
but he is finally exposed

Brianna Jung
Champlin Park High School, grade 10

Minnesota English Journal: Student Writing Issue
Deadline: June 15, 2003



Teacher _____
School Name _____
Mailing Address _____
City & Zipcode _____
Summer email address _____
Summer phone number _____

Was this student's writing the product of a directed writing assignment?
☐ No
☐ Yes If this assignment was not one of our own creation, please give the source for the lesson idea:

Student Name _____ Grade _____
School Name _____
Student's Mailing Address _____
City & Zipcode _____

The student's mailing address is needed to contact the students selected and to send a complimentary copy of the Journal if their work is selected.

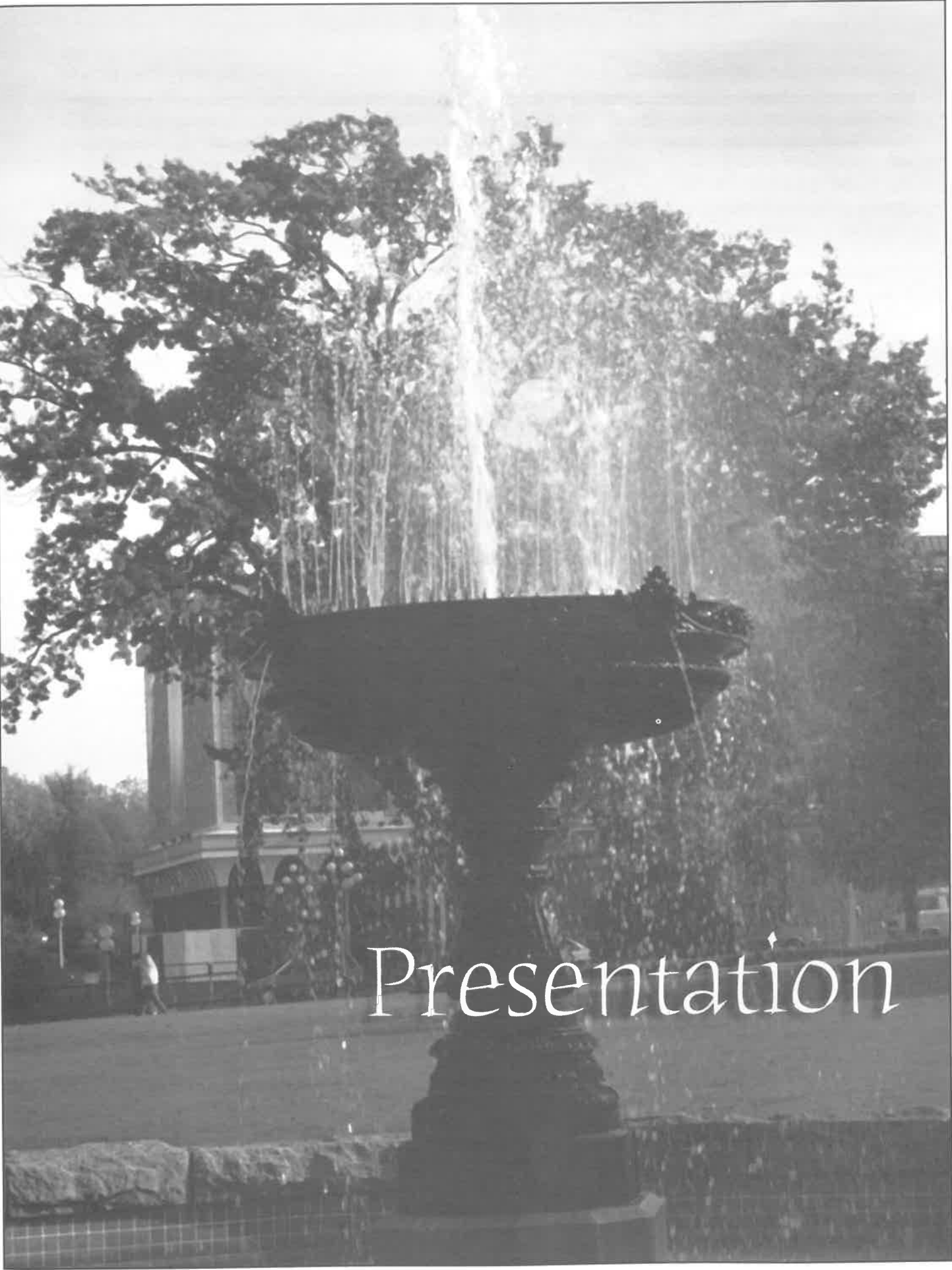
Certification and Permission

I hereby certify that this is original work completed by me.
Student's signature: _____

I give permission for the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English to publish this work. If this work is selected, I understand that it will be published in book form and identified with the student's name, grade, and school name.
Parent or guardian's signature: _____

(Optional) I give permission for the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English to publish this work on their website (www.mcte.org). If this work is selected to be published on the website, I understand that it will be identified by the student's first name, grade, and school name.
Parent or guardian's signature: _____

Mail the student work and completed submission form to:
Sandy Hayes, 19019 180th Avenue, Big Lake, MN 55309



Promising Young Writers Award Program

Impromptu Topic: Most of us have difficulty imagining life without a telephone. Think about a piece of equipment such as the telephone, a calculator, computer, VCR, or CD player that you believe you must have. Explain why it is important to you.

Casey O'Brien, Annunciation School, Minneapolis, grade 8

The Mistress

"Oh, my God! Where is it!" I screeched as I frantically looked around.

"I don't know! I don't know! Maybe if you kept this place clean, we would be able to find it," my dad angrily hissed.

"Not now, Dad. We need to find it fast! It's almost time!"

"Casey, you look over there!"

I immediately dropped to my knees and quickly prowled to where my dad had instructed. I scrummaged through a pile of clutter and desperately searched through bins upon bins of junk. Still no success.

When you are searching for something you love which you have lost, you become panicky and frightened. Sometimes violent. The device my dad and I were looking for was beautiful and ingenious, yet so simple. When you held it, you felt a sense of power run through your veins. When you wanted something changed, but were too lazy to do anything about it, it was there for you. When you wanted to find happiness, but you didn't know where to find it, it was there for you. Without it, life would almost be meaningless.

I scrambled around on my knees, frantically searching. I threw my old blanket to the side of the room, in hopes I would find something. And what I saw lying underneath almost brought tears of joy to my eyes. I picked it up and stared at it in joyful silence. I wanted to scream at the top of my lungs, "The greatest invention created by man has been returned to its rightful owner!"

But all I squeaked out was, "Found it."

"Oh good. Just in time," my dad said, with a grin on his face. I rose to my feet and sat on my futon. I stared at it in its majestic beauty. Then I pressed the power button. It turned on my TV. I sighed with relief, set down the remote and went upstairs to get some chips.

Writing Achievement Award Program

Impromptu Topic A – Lyrical Content of Popular Music

Your local newspaper ran an article criticizing the lyrics of popular music. Yet the lyrics of popular music offer many images which reflect positive perspectives of the human potential. In his song, "Living for the City," Stevie Wonder wrote of the determination of a poor family with these inspiring words, "her clothes are old but never are they dirty."

Identify a theme from one of more of today's popular music lyrics in which you find inspiring images of human behavior. Write a guest editorial for your local newspaper explaining how these images reflect thoughts, values, and acts that you find admirable.

Jenny Holm, Minnetonka High School, grade 11

There are those who argue that today's popular music has done away with the innocent nature embodied by the tunes of "the good old times." They say that the unordered noise blaring out of radios today does nothing but teach disrespect for authority, encourage unlawful behavior and promote sexual promiscuity. While I agree that some current music does seem to condone these things, I feel that I must call the cynics' attention to the overwhelmingly positive messages present in today's music.

Leeann Woemack's "I Hope You Dance" encompasses several life-affirming themes that many unenlightened critics would argue have been lost in the music of twenty-first century society. The song is a collection of dreams the singer has for someone who is moving on to a new stage in life. It begins with her hope that this person will "never

lose that sense of wonder" that allows humans to view each day as a new beginning, filled with untapped opportunities and paths yet to be discovered. "To see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wildflower," as William Blake wrote at the end of the eighteenth century, is the ability to prevent oneself from getting bored with the world. To possess this power is to hold the key to a fulfilling and rewarding life. The song goes on to remind the person in question to always "keep that hunger," that inner fire that drives humans to make the most of their individual potential. This call to be the best one can be has been heard over and over, as a rallying cry in the Italian Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the US Army. The verse closes with the singer's plea to "never take one single breath for granted." The beauty inherent in every aspect of life on Earth is too precious to experience passively; to be alive is to take part in the intricate mystery of the universe, an experience meant to be savored in every sense of the word. These lessons have been taught for hundreds of years and still retain the same amount of relevance today.

A later verse continues teaching life lessons. "I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance," the singer reminds her audience. The obstacles that loom ahead may seem too much for one person to handle, but with perseverance and determination, they can be conquered. As long as humans "never settle for the path of least resistance," their lives, although they will not be easy, will be far more rewarding than those traveled on the road of convenience.

The refrain of the song serves as a metaphor for life. "If you get the choice," Woemack sings, "to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance!" This one line encompasses all the other lessons of the piece. To simply be alive and to live are two completely different things. Humans should strive to squeeze the every drop of life-essence they can from each experience, not only existing as part of the universe but also actively taking part in it. To revel in the beauty of this world, live each day to the fullest, and stretch one's capabilities to their greatest extent, even if that means overcoming adversity, is to truly live.

As I originally stated, the popular music of the twenty-first century is not entirely devoid of life-affirming themes. Although somewhat more blatant in its teaching of universally applicable lessons than most other songs, "I Hope You Dance" gives a representative sampling of the types of messages that are being presented to young people through music today. With popular pieces such as this on the air, perhaps there is hope for the future after all.

Impromptu: Topic B – Lessons Not Learned in the High School Classroom

In his book All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, Robert Fulghum makes the case that the important lessons of life were shaped in him in his kindergarten class. However, contrary to that notion, many of us can cite times when we learned equally important lessons from experiences outside the regular classroom.

Assume you have received the Student-of-the-Month Award from a local community group. While you are very proud of your school success, you also want the community leaders to know that you have learned valuable lessons outside the classroom. Write your acceptance speech in which you describe one of those lessons and explain what you learned and what it has meant to you.

Ted Anderson, Hopkins High School, grade 11

You know, I'd like to think that I deserve this award purely because of academic achievement. I'd like to think that what I learned at school is what has earned me this high praise. I'd like to think that my grades are the only things that matter—then again, if they are, then that 'B-' I got in Photography will forever haunt the rest of my life.

But grades don't really matter. After college, no one remembers what they got in English, or History, or Biology. You look back, and it all just fades into gray. So while I love my school, and I'm proud of my grades, I don't want to get an award for something as temporary as my high school GPA.

You know what I remember most about tenth grade? I don't recall any of the tests, or the papers, or the homework. I remember my grandfather.

This is where I tell you every inspiring word Grandpa ever said to me. This is where I tell you about the time he told me to keep smiling, or always look ahead, or that beauty is on the inside. But frankly, I don't remember him ever saying something like that, any trite and overused slogan like out of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. I don't recall any optimistic aphorisms or shiny pearls of wisdom. He didn't ever say anything like that, because the best teachers are those who show but do not tell.

My grandfather was, well, like everyone's grandfather—wrinkly, bright-eyed, hair on top faded into gray, like he'd just forgotten what color it was. He smiled a lot.

I remember him dying when I was in tenth grade, and I remember exactly what that meant to me. I remember trying to remember, trying to piece together everything I knew about him, because memories were all I had. Father of two, one of whom was my mother. Grandfather of two, one of whom was me. Lover of jazz. (He'd seen concerts by Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman both.) Greatest whistler in ten states.

What I remember most is my grandpa trying to remember. Tangled neurons, clogged with plaque. Alzheimer's. I know the medical term. What I remember is the time he and Grandma came over for dinner, and he kept trying to rearrange the plates like it was his house—taking them out of the cabinets, restacking them, putting them on different shelves.

I didn't ever get angry at him, or cry my sinuses out for him. It wasn't so much like I'd lost him, more like he'd lost himself. That's what Alzheimer's is, after all: a loss of memory, recollections fading into gray. You're still there. Your memories aren't.

I remember the week my grandfather died. There wasn't a day I didn't cry myself to sleep. I was remembering my grandfather, and how he remembered.

I know this sounds old. I know you've all heard about how people are sad when they lose their beloved relatives. I know you've lost relatives. I know how you felt; you know how I felt. This is all old hat.

But losing my grandfather was, to me, more than just grief, more than just some simple lesson in holding on to our loved ones. It was about something deeper, more personal. It was about memory.

Everyone tells you that if you remember someone who's dead, they're not really gone. That's wrong. They're gone. Nothing can be done about that. But memory isn't about making people come back to life. It's about making your own life better—your life, and the lives of everyone else.

I could try and dredge up some lesson Grandpa taught me about being the best, or never giving up, or taking responsibility, or something just as preachy and tired. But my grandfather didn't teach me anything as simple as that. He taught me that memory is what shapes this world, that memories of a better time are what drive us to recreate it, that memories of better people are what change us into the best of people.

When a person dies, you want to bring them back. That's what most people feel. You learn to live life to the fullest, to never let a moment pass by.

You have to remember. That's what I learned. You can't bring someone back. Memory is not a substitute for reality—it is a blueprint for the future.

Memories are what we build upon. Memories of ourselves, our past, our families. You are who you are because you know who you were. Losing your memory isn't losing your mind; it's much worse. You forget where you came from, and you forget where you are.

There isn't a day when I don't remember my grandfather. I miss him. But I know he can't come back, and I know that grief can't be the only thing you feel. You forget the past, and your future dwindles. You start trying to live only in the past, and the rest of your life, your future, just fades into gray. You have to remember. That's what Grandpa taught me.

NCTE Writing Contests

Promising Young Writers

This contest is open to 8th graders. Students submit up to a ten page piece of their best writing (prose or poetry) and complete an impromptu essay, written in a supervised 75 minute period. Nominations are sent in early January to NCTE. The students' writing is sent to the State Coordinator by the same deadline. There is a \$5 per student entry fee. The number of entries per school is determined by the size of school's 8th grade enrollment. Each school uses its own procedures to select nominees.

Papers are judged on content, purpose, audience, tone, word choice, organization, development, and style. The panel of judges is assembled by the State Coordinator. The maximum number of winners is equal to the number of the state's members in the U.S. House of Representatives.

For more specific entry details see www.ncte.org/student_awards/2003_PYW.shtml

Writing Achievement Awards

This contest is open to 11th graders. Students submit one writing sample of their best work, not to exceed 10 typed, double-spaced pages. Research papers, term papers, or novels will not be accepted. Students also complete an impromptu essay on one of two assigned topics in a supervised setting of not longer than two hours. Nomination forms must be sent to NCTE by mid-January. The impromptu topics are mailed in March, and all best work and impromptu submissions must be sent to the State Coordinator by mid-April.

Papers are judged on content, purpose, audience, tone, word choice, organization, development, and style. The panel of judges is assembled by the State Coordinator. The maximum number of winners is equal to the number of the state's members in the U.S. House of Representatives.

For more specific entry details see www.ncte.org/student_awards/achieve.shtml

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Permit No. 249

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