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Denotes Edgewood High School Writing Contest Winner

# AN EPIC Ode OF Epic-NESS

Words by Vivian Burnette and Steven Underwood, rhymes by  
Samuel McLaughlin, uncomfortable adjectives by Ms. West-Lentz

## I. A Marshalling of Forces

Samuel the Obnoxious-Arrogant-Tactless-Ignored-Tyrant-Brown-nosing-Drone,  
Sitting like a foolish king upon a crumbling throne,  
grabs his Meat-Tenderizer,  
and calls his insolent minions to attention while waving his Culinary Scepter.  
The warriors proceed into the chamber,  
Bearing their weapons of syntax and searing angst and grammar.  
Claire the Punctual is already present and petting her pet hare,  
While Peter the Wise shuffles toward a chair,  
Martha the Impaler, first of the Peanut Gallery, glides in amidst a cloud of venomous smoke,  
Furbie the Shredder drags his heels, seeming an unenthusiastic bloke,  
Finally the rest of the Gallery enters: Vivian the Valiant gallops upon a gallant white steed,  
And Rachel the Pale, knitting with bloodstained needles, enters indeed,  
Towing Sarah the Small, who bawls for foodstuffs.

## II. An Unworthy Sacrifice

Samuel the Obnoxious, etc., offers up a gift  
To the God-Moderator, but in a space of time most swift  
A murmur breaks out amongst the council and Sarah in agitation taps her feet —  
It's a found poem from *The House on Mango Street!*  
Much to the chagrin of her oppressive leader,  
Vivian the Valiant is not paying attention;  
In an effort to remind her of her place,  
Samuel hurls his meat-tenderizer, aiming at her face.  
The cudgel spins through the smarmy air,  
But due to Vivian's astounding kung-fu reflexes,  
Her face is spared,  
Furbie's face, however, was utterly impaired.  
An uproar ensues amongst the Peanut Gallery;  
Samuel the Obnoxious, etc., bemoans this new outbreak of insubordinate devilry.  
Peter the Wise, attempting to rally around his king,  
Slides a desk along the carpeted floor, skiing  
It towards Martha the Impaler who wears a skeleton mask.

A fatal carpet-bump upturns the perilous desk,  
Sends it twirling towards the Impaler's eye.  
The room is flooded with the viscous pop of an eyeball that squirts fluid toward the sky.

### **III. A Valiant Defense**

Amidst the turmoil of their fallen comrade,  
The tyrant makes a bold proclamation that drives the minions mad:  
"I support this sacrifice to the God-Moderator."  
This is the pretext for revolt needed by the Samuel the Obnoxious, etc., Hater:  
The room goes wild as each minion raises her weapon:  
Sarah throws her paper shuriken,  
Slashing through Peter the Wise's jugular vein,  
The walls his Machiavellian blood does stain.  
Caught up in the berserker rage,  
The Pale One stealthily approaches the tyrant like an insidious macrophage,  
Raising to the sobbing heavens her Brick of British Literature, a massive tome of hate  
She brings it crashing like a meteor upon Samuel's pate.  
A sudden silence engulfs the room  
But inwardly the Peanut Gallery rejoices at their oppressor's doom.  
Finally, stepping atop the deads' broken bodies, Valiant Vivian  
Crowns with fists raised high in Falstaffian fashion,  
"I have crushed me foes and take my righteous place in the Editor's Chair,  
Look upon the devastation I have wrought, ye mortals, and despair!"

# JOURNEY OF A COOKIE

Sam McLaughlin (12)

**T**wenty minutes ago, I walked through airport security with Chap Stick in my pocket. Last I checked, that constituted a gel and an immediate threat to national security that could only be resolved with the 3-1-1 plastic bag policy. More worrying, the guy ahead of me was stopped and had his bag searched because he had a Game Boy in it; nobody noticed the lighter he had tossed on top of his coat as it rolled down the x-ray conveyor belt. I suppose the illusion of safety is nice, but when we can't even maintain that illusion, something is wrong with the system. Or is there?

Almost every aspect of air travel is absurd. My iPod will in no way ever endanger the operation of the plane. Emergency exit procedures are more or less a joke. The fact that airlines keep up the pretense that flying is an isolated act of enjoyment is hilarious. But it's not just air travel, not as a singular system; the absurdity is endemic. Why on earth is the internet littered with ads that I don't process, let alone acknowledge the existence of? More worryingly, why do enough people pay attention to those ads to make them worthwhile? Why do we, as a country, spend money fighting terrorism when far, far more people die in traffic accidents every year? The whole world is utterly absurd, illogical (and who would have thought my favorite subject would be an attempt to systematize the fundamental chaos of the universe? Yeah, I love chemistry. And if you want more ammo

for the absurdity argument – well, there you go).

Alright, so we've established that nothing really makes sense, but why? Surely we could regulate and modulate every aspect of human reality. Take love, for example; so messy and awkward, so many false starts and hurt feelings – all for the sake of making babies. Come on, we could build factories to do that. Of course there's more to love than that – but that's all gravy from an efficiency/evolutionary standpoint. Dead weight, really. Absurdity. But it's more fun that way. Why be grumpy about what is intrinsic to your very existence? No, I prefer to just chuckle quietly at the absurdity of these nonsensical constructs we call society and reality. I pretend that I take airport security as seriously as the guy who vigilantly operates the x-ray machine while reading *Candide*. On the inside I'm amused, but I play along and pretend not to see anything. And occasionally, I'm rewarded and run into someone with a similar outlook.

As we strapped ourselves in and got ready to take off (as I began this essay, in fact), our flight attendant announced: "In the unlikely event that we land in the Arctic Ocean instead of Omaha, your seat cushion may be used as a flotation device. After you have paddled to shore, you may keep it, compliments of Midwest Airlines, the best care in the air." Okay, but what about my chocolate chip cookies?

# Accordion Hero

Kaite Kuecker (10)

**M**y grandmother isn't perfect, but I see beyond the bent nose, uneven teeth, outdated eyeglasses, and stooped back, instead noticing warm and affectionate hazel eyes, marshmallow-puff hair, faded rosy cheeks, and surprisingly youthful skin, missing the typical road map of wrinkles. My grandmother, Lucille, is unique, with a penchant for saving money and foisting the accordion on anyone who will listen or learn to play it.

I stand at the flower-lined entryway and give the doorbell a double ring so that she knows it is me. Admiring Grandma's carefully tended, orange day-lilies, neatly surrounded by cocoa-bean mulch, I wait patiently with the heavy brown case resting on the stoop. I rub from my hand the impression the worn handle has made while hauling it up the cracked walkway from the car. Despite the signal, she first moves the white lace curtain aside and peers through the window, then unlocks the door and swings it open, smiling broadly. "Hi, Grandma," I say as I stumble up the step, bumping the case over the threshold.

Walking into the foyer, I carefully plunk the instrument case and my backpack down on the blue-green slate tiles. She wants me to

marvel at her latest deal: "Guess what I paid for this?" she asks while gesturing to her bargain-basement outfit. She never pays full-price for anything and proudly shows off her new navy-blue polyester slacks and coordinated blue-flowered top, like a "Garanimals" set for grandmas. She has just arrived home from helping serve another funeral luncheon at church, clutching a wrinkled, brown paper grocery bag half-filled with recycled cottage cheese and yogurt containers. She begins to stock her refrigerator with the leftovers while offering me some to take home, explaining, "They were just going to throw it out; it's a shame to waste perfectly good mashed potatoes and pasta salad." After folding up the paper bag to reuse, she hands me a birthday card. I already know what's inside as I smile and put the 59-cent card with its one-dollar bill on top of my backpack by the front door. Mom explained long ago that my thrifty grandparents deposit money into my college savings account instead of buying a gift that's played with once and forgotten, like Christmas presents after New Year's Day.

I walk from the foyer into the family room and wrestle my case onto the blue plaid couch. Lined up neatly on the linoleum floor by the

fireplace is Grandma's collection; she has an accordion for every day of the week, rescued from garage sales and mothballed attics, brought back to life by her nimble fingers and collection of polka music. The best-loved one she bought in high school. She earned enough money for it from teaching younger kids, who were subjected to mandatory lessons in the 1940s. She opens her case, and the black lacquer shines in complement to the pearly white keys. It is labeled vertically with her name, LUCILLE, in bold silver letters. I struggle to heave my accordion out of its case, and then Grandma helps me fasten the

shoulder straps. I place my black music binder on the stand, as we both sit down to begin practicing our duet. Smiling, I recall how proud she was at last year's Accordion Jamboree, when we performed together for the Hearing-Aid Generation. She wore her neat, black dress pants and white blouse with embroidered accordion keys. I agreed to wear her ridiculous, marching band-style red cap, complete with chin strap and white feathers sprouting from the flat top in an unruly clump.

My fingers miss a key, and a discordant whine escapes from the bellows. "That's alright; we can start over," she says as she smiles gently with encouragement. I'm trying my best to carry on her legacy as the Accordion Hero.

# Time

Freddy Frusher (12)

Painted oak leaves crumble to dust  
Silver automobile yields to rust  
Lonely lover sighs of bygone lust  
Cool air wisps away Indian summer  
In the distance, beat of Christmas drummer  
Once a smooth velvet face  
So hard to keep up in this race –

**Of life,  
Of time  
Of things sublime**

A Parody of  
**Amadeus**

Jack Nee (12)

This is meant to be a comedic parody of the play, *Amadeus*, by Peter Shaffer. Throughout this play, alterations and imitations of the original are used, such as the Little Fans replacing the Little Winds, the use of a shadowy figure, and the basic plot itself. This does require the reader to be somewhat familiar with *Amadeus* in order to understand the material and to find it funny. I have chosen composers Andrew Lloyd Webber and Stephen Sondheim to serve as mediocrity and his talented rival. At times, dialogue from the original play is used, and *Amadeus* is even mentioned.

I have included on whom the characters are based, with the exception of Antonio Salieri at the end.

ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER — Jealous mediocrity; he hopes to gain fame and rid himself of his rival, Stephen Sondheim. Based on Antonio Salieri.

LITTLE FANS -- Bribed suck-ups to Webber and avid theater-goers of New York City; they are familiar with the gossip of the day. Based on the Little Winds (Venticelli).

STEPHEN SONDDHEIM — Genius composer and rival of Webber. Based on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

HAROLD PRINCE -- Highly successful collaborator with both Webber and Sondheim. Based on Emperor Joseph II.

ANTONIO SALIERI -- The Patron Saint of Mediocrities.

**SETTING:** This play takes place in the houses, theatres, and streets of New York City, in both the present and in Webber's memory.

*Darkness. We see two men run on stage. They are the Little Fans. They speak quickly, full of excitement, and in a rhythm as though they are the first to hear gossip. This scene takes place on a street below ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER'S home.*

FAN 1: I don't believe it.

FAN 2: I don't believe it.

FAN 1: I don't believe it.

FAN 2: I don't believe it.

FAN 1: Have you heard it?

FAN 2: You hear it all over.

FAN 1: The streets are talking.

FAN 2: The buildings are talking.

FAN 1: New York is talking.

FAN 2: About him.

BOTH: Andrew Lloyd Webber.

FAN 1: The composer of musicals.

FAN 2: He had some successes.

FAN 1: And now he stays locked up.

FAN 2: He never comes out.

FAN 1: Webber was well-liked at one point.

FAN 2: I don't remember. He is not mentioned much today.

FAN 1: His work has been reconsidered. He is now thought a mediocre composer.

FAN 2: I don't believe it!

BOTH: What is going on up there? *ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER enters above but is silhouetted.*

FAN 1: There he is.

FAN 2: Andrew Lloyd Webber.

FAN 1: He's alone in his house.

FAN 2: The old fellow, the recluse.

FAN 1: What exactly does he shout?

FAN 2: What horrors have you heard?

FAN 1: Tell us!

FAN 2: Tell us!

BOTH: Tell us at once!

WEBBER: SONDDHEIM! *A pause.*

FAN 1: He shouts of Sondheim.

FAN 2: Stephen Sondheim?

FAN 1: Webber was once compared to Stephen Sondheim. Back when he was popular.

FAN 2: Sondheim? I don't believe it!

FAN 1: What do you think?

FAN 2: What do you think?

FAN 1: I don't believe it.

FAN 2: I don't believe it. *They run off.*

*ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER enters into the light.*

*Throughout the play, he interacts with both the other characters and the audience. Can you hear them? New York is the city of slander. And theatre. Everyone tells tales here. Even my Little Fans. They come back on. I keep them*

*around to tell me what the gossip is in town. What are people saying about me? I pay them to praise me. He hands both of them money. I*

*have them praise me, for no one else does anymore. They only remember him. Stephen*

*around to tell me what the gossip is in town. What are people saying about me? I pay them to praise me. He hands both of them money. I*

*have them praise me, for no one else does anymore. They only remember him. Stephen*

Sondheim. Stephen Joshua Sondheim.

**FAN 1:** Joshua?

**WEBBER:** His middle name.

**FAN 2:** Why call him that?

**WEBBER:** It sounded good at the time, when I first had thought I might kill him.

**BOTH:** Murder? I don't believe it! *They leave.*

**WEBBER:** Sondheim. He was my idol. I cannot think of a time that I did not know his work as a fellow composer. I always knew he was there and that he was brilliant. But I thought I was better. I released my work upon his domain.

Broadway soon saw *Evita*. *Cats!* That ridiculous train musical of mine, *Starlight Express*. Yet I still listened to his musicals all the time. His five shows of the 1970s. They were bold, breathtaking, astounding. Yet few lasted long on Broadway. Eventually, I assumed that he was gone for good. Then I fully triumphed with *The Phantom of the Opera*. I thought that I might finally be done hearing about Sondheim. I had his former collaborator, Harold Prince, working on my shows.

And they ran and ran and ran. They no longer play...at all. No one likes them anymore. But at the time, what did I care? Hal Prince was directing my musicals. *Enter HAROLD PRINCE.*

**PRINCE:** So Andy, ready for a new show? I know I am.

**WEBBER:** He would always end his conversations in the same way.

**PRINCE:** Well...there it is.

**WEBBER:** I thought it was too good to be true. Then the revivals of Sondheim's work came. The two of us were now considered equal in success. At times, he was considered

more equal than me. Worst of all, we were being invited to the same parties. I knew that he would have to be stopped, or soon he would surpass me and become more renowned than ever. You see, only I understood how brilliant his work was. All original. I was forced to borrow from T.S. Eliot and other figures. Yet I knew that he never stole material for his masterpieces. I was jealous, and I knew I couldn't avoid him forever. My meeting with him one night changed my life. *The room is lit up. A party for New York theater-goers is being thrown. The FANS, PRINCE, and WEBBER are guests. WEBBER now speaks to the other characters.* So Hal, how are my shows going?

**PRINCE:** I don't know. I'm busy working with Steve on some new material.

**WEBBER:** New material by Stephen Joshua Sondheim?

**PRINCE:** Yes. Why do you use his middle name?

**WEBBER:** No reason.

*SONDHEIM enters and joins the group.*

**SONDHEIM:** Hi there, Hal. Is this your new project that you talk about? Andy Webber in the flesh. You told me that he needs some help in originality. Pleased to meet you. I'm Stephen Sondheim, by the way. You may have heard my original lyrics from *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, or my full compositions from *Follies* or *Pacific Overtures*. *WEBBER begins to weep*

**WEBBER:** At that point, I knew it was hopeless. Prince just considered me another composer. My idol had improved my best effort, a mediocre piece compared to his. I knew I had to triumph over him. I dove back to work. No more parties at which to be humiliated. I would earn some real respect. *The other characters leave, and the party switches back to a dark apartment.* I worked and conceived *Aspects of Love* and another musical, adapted from *Sunset Boulevard*. They ended soon, though. Much sooner than I expected. I

**My reputation was failing. I had only one show still running, *The Phantom of the Opera*. I went to it every night in secret.**

*hysterically.* Now what is that about? I was only gloating.

**WEBBER:** I'm sorry. I was just overtaken by excitement from meeting you.

**PRINCE:** Andrew here has heard everything of yours, Steve. He likes it. A lot.

**SONDHEIM:** Oh, and I'm a fan of his. I composed some variations on his music for some of my own work recently.

**WEBBER:** *To audience.* Here I thought I had outdone him.

**PRINCE:** Oh, that's not true. All you did was add to Andy's music. It at least sounds playable now. We all know that if I hadn't been involved in his shows, they would have failed. Right, Andy? You know your music is awful, right? Right? Oh. Well...there it is.

only had bribed Fans. Sometimes. *The FANS rush on.*

**FAN 1:** Your work is marvelous.

**FAN 2:** It always closes too soon.

**FAN 1:** You are, without a doubt, better than Stephen Sondheim.

**FAN 2:** Really? I don't believe THAT. *They leave.*

**WEBBER:** My reputation was failing. I had only one show still running, *The Phantom of the Opera*. I went to it every night in secret. All to gain back some shred of self-confidence, as the world began to realize what I always have known about Sondheim. How his music is perfect and mine is nauseating. Then, as I looked at my show one night, I began to see

a way. *The shadowy figure of the phantom appears above.* A terrible way. A way that I could triumph. A way to frighten Sondheim to death. And no one could prevent it! I sent out my Fans to pick up a package. *The FANS come on with a bundle of clothing and begin to dress WEBBER.* It holds the costume of my own haunting phantom. And now, I go to Sondheim's home...and he will not live another day. *He places the mask of the phantom over his face and slips back into the shadows. The set changes to SONDHEIM'S home. He is talking on the phone.*

**SONDHEIM:** Alright, Hal. *Passion* is all ready to go? Okay, see you tomorrow. *Hangs up.*

**WEBBER:** *Appearing out of the shadows and speaking in a fake, deep voice.* Stephen Joshua Sondheim.

**SONDHEIM:** Why did you use my middle name? No one uses my middle name. *Realizing who it is.* Oh. Hi there, Andy. Why are you dressed like that?

**WEBBER:** I am a messenger. I'm in your dream. Ten years of my hate have poisoned you to death.

**SONDHEIM:** What hate?

**WEBBER:** All you can do now is die! Die, Joshua, die! I beg of you. Leave me alone.

**SONDHEIM:** Andy, I met you once a few years ago. We haven't seen each other since. You were invited to parties. I even invited you to my new shows. I offered to write something with you. I never heard back, not once. You left me alone.

**WEBBER:** *Long pause.* No I didn't.

**SONDHEIM:** Yes you did. Hal was just telling me about how you are seen walking around in the middle of the night in a phantom costume. Now here you are, hoping to kill me. You even call me by my middle name. Have you noticed

how this is exactly like the end of *Amadeus*? Except I'm not dying, and you're the crazy one. It is true that you can't come up with anything original, not even an attempted murder. Go away before you embarrass yourself even more.

**WEBBER:** No. I was supposed to scare you to death! DIE! DIE! DIE!

**SONHEIM:** You are scaring me, only not the way you hoped. You're just nuts. Now get out of here before I call the police. Go on, Mr. Phantom. I'm sure you have more atrocious music you could be writing. *Stunned, WEBBER leaves. The set changes back to WEBBER'S home. The FANS come back. They read from magazines.*

**FAN 1:** *Playbill.* The magazine for theatre.

**FAN 2:** "Overrated composer Andrew Lloyd Webber is being treated for insanity."

**FAN 1:** *Playbill.* The magazine for theatre.

**FAN 2:** "Lloyd Webber is still insisting that Stephen Sondheim must die for Webber's work to be respected. He forgets that no one likes his musicals anymore."

**FAN 1:** *Playbill.* The magazine for theatre.

**FAN 2:** "Lloyd Webber now accuses himself of Sondheim's murder despite the fact that Sondheim is alive and well and still composing. Webber is clearly deluded, pacing around his home in a phantom's costume under police guard. Oddly enough, he still thinks of himself as being an important composer."

**FAN 1:** I don't believe it.

**FAN 2:** I don't believe it.

**FAN 1:** I don't believe it.

**FAN 2:** I don't believe it.

**BOTH:** No one believes it in the world! *They exit as WEBBER comes back on stage.*

**WEBBER:** Mediocrities everywhere, now and

to come, I absolve you. I absolve you all. Amen!  
*He folds his arms across his breast. A man enters, dressed as the statue of Don Pedro from Don Giovanni. He removes his helmet and begins to eat a sugar roll. He is ANTONIO SALIERI from the play, Amadeus.*

**SALIERI:** Wait one minute! *He finishes the roll.*  
That's what I'm supposed to say. I'm the Patron Saint of Mediocrities. Only I can absolve.

**WEBBER:** Why not me? I'm a modern mediocrity.

**SALIERI:** Yes, but I'm a mediocrity compared to a composer who was used by God, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. I even wrote over forty operas that no one has ever heard of.

**WEBBER:** I still think I'm more mediocre than you. I've written over fifteen musicals, all of them overrated. I'm clearly the better choice to represent mediocrities!

**SALIERI:** No, I'm the better mediocrity! *The two composers, still dressed as their respective ghosts, begin to fight. The FANS run on, dressed as The Little Winds (Venticelli) from Amadeus.*

*SONDHEIM also enters, dressed as Mozart.*

**FAN 1:** I don't believe it.

**FAN 2:** I don't believe it.

**FAN 1:** I don't believe it.

**FAN 2:** I don't believe it.

**SONDHEIM:** *Pauses as he observes the two pairs of men. He turns to the audience. Well I believe it!*

*He gives a high-pitched laugh as Mozart would. The mediocrities continue to struggle as the FANS continue to disbelieve.*

BABY  
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Y  
!**

Sarah Allen (12)

Baby seals are flopping  
Along the Jagged Ice.  
The sky is blue and picturesque,  
the clouds are shedding rice.

I've brought my club for bopping,  
and the weather seems ideal.  
So grab your Mace and join the club,  
Let's club some baby seal!

Their heads will soon be popping,  
their vitals raw and blubbery.  
It's all good fun, our national sport—  
Icelandic Baby Seal Clubbery!

# The Anatomy Of GREATNESS

Vivian Burnette (12)

A warped floor, a stained ceiling, four yellowed walls, and a distinct lack of fresh air--welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the standard high school classroom. A woman in an uncomfortable-looking pantsuit is lecturing a handful of seemingly inert adolescents. The subject is history, the ideal is to inspire a love for and an understanding of one's past, and the effect is plain, merciless boredom. For some reason, the significance of the Treaty of Utrecht in eighteenth-century Spain does not evoke much enthusiasm.

The students stare at their teacher with a mixture of prolonged agony, dwindling patience, and mounting rage--the perfect ingredients for a popular revolution. Fingers start to drum, legs begin to bounce, chairs creak with anxiety, and a low, almost undetectable murmur of disapproval rises in the room. Unaware of the increasingly hostile atmosphere, as well as the growing possibility of a riot, the teacher continues to lumber on about the war that developed over the succession of the Spanish throne.

There is only one student oblivious to the potential uprising. Sitting in the back of the classroom and barely listening to what his teacher is saying, sixteen-year-old Henry Yang silently adds the finishing touches to his drawing of Wonder Woman, copied lovingly from his geometry notebook onto the off-white, uneven surface of his desk. He flexes his calloused, ink-stained fingers and blows his disheveled hair out of his eyes. For five minutes, the pungent, high-inducing smell of permanent black marker hovers over the entire back row. Gazing down at the completion of his latest work (there are six others located in various classrooms around the school), Henry feels satisfied.

And then something strange happens. Unconsciously, Henry hears the following words sound from his teacher's lips, entirely distinct and immovable in his ears: "And that is why history is so important." The class has heard this phrase approximately 113 times before and no longer regards it as anything more than insignificant white noise. Therefore, it is difficult to fathom the profound effect that these words have on young Henry; perhaps it is simply because he is only listening to them

for the first time today.

For whatever reason, Henry is suddenly aware of an inexplicable desire within himself to say something. He does not want to say just anything, though; Henry desires--lusts, in fact--to say something incredible. The only trouble is, Henry does not yet know what this Incredible Something is. The previous feeling of satisfaction withers away in seconds. His drawing now completely forgotten, Henry folds his hands in front of him and begins to think.

The bell rings, a sound of absolute jubilation. Students begin to file out of the room; the riot will be postponed until tomorrow, it seems. To Henry, the bell sounds hollow and distant. As he shuffles out of the classroom, Henry decides that he is destined to discover this Incredible Something--surely it is locked somewhere within the recesses of his mind, just waiting to be uncovered. Certain of his hidden brilliance, Henry decides that once he has found the Incredible Something, he will do nothing less than jump onto the roof of the school and shout his wondrous words at the top of his lungs, simultaneously inspiring awe in all who hear him and committing himself to

Henry is suddenly aware of

AN INEXPLICABLE DESIRE

within himself to say something...

to say something incredible.

eternal high school infamy. Henry smiles, imagining the giddy sensations of height and pure, unadulterated greatness.

The vision proves to be almost as intoxicating as the real thing. Henry Yang is determined now. It is as if he has been saving his voice for this moment alone.

\* \* \*

A screen door swings shut, weary on its rusty hinges. Mary Yang stumbles into her modest, suburban home, throws her briefcase onto the floor, and slumps into a nearby chair. Resting her head on the cool leather, she closes her eyes and tries not to think about what to make for dinner. She hears the tentative sound of her son's footsteps, and her eyes are startled open by Henry's voice.

"Mom."

Mary's back stiffens. That voice! How long has it been, Mary wonders--eight weeks, five months, a year? It might as well have been a millennium; silence has the tendency to obliterate one's sense of time altogether. For the moment, Mary can only stare up at her son, quietly appraising his gangly, awkward form. She takes in Henry's bad skin, drooping eyelids, and flat nose--all rather pitiful traits that Mary readily attributes to her husband. Eyeing Henry's shaggy black hair, she blurts out the first thing that comes into her mind.

"You need a haircut, Henry."

Somehow, she cannot bring herself to condemn him for his silence these past few months. A part of her sighs in relief; Mary is willing to brush this little stint of adolescent angst under the carpet, so long as Henry does not choose to retrieve it again.

Henry ignores his mother's criticism. "Mom," he says again, his voice cracking

slightly, "I have a question."

The implied undertones of Henry's words are not lost on Mary. "I have a question" has always been Henry's preferred prelude to an appeal for money and other material goods. How predictable of him, Mary thinks, clicking her tongue in disapproval. After months of giving both his mother and father the cold shoulder, the first thing that comes out of Henry's mouth is a request. Her brows furrow in further disappointment, but Mary cannot help but relish in the sound of her son's voice for a few moments longer.

"What is it?"

Before answering, Henry pauses to assess the situation unfolding before him. Contrary to what his mother believes, Henry wants something far greater than a few crumpled dollar bills; he wants inspiration. He grapples with how to pose such an abnormal question.

"Do you--I mean, have you ever..." He trails off unsuccessfully, looking away and struggling to ask for some catchy revelation--any smidge of wisdom that might stimulate his own profound thoughts--without sounding like a complete fool. Mary Yang stares at her son incredulously, and Henry flushes at the absurdity of it all.

Less than a week ago, something was born in Henry, and he has continued to do everything in his power to keep it alive and well. His desire to find the Incredible Something has turned urgent; ever since he imagined himself standing on the school's rooftop, Henry has racked his brain mercilessly for strains of greatness. In fact, for the past four days, Henry has taken to plunging headfirst into the swirl of his thoughts, diving for morsels of ingenuity, only

He breathes in

## THE RICH, RANK AIR

and waits for something astonishing  
to well up within him.

to resurface empty-handed and out of breath each time.

“Yes?” Mary prods uncertainly. Her voice pulls Henry down from the ceiling.

He tries again. “I don’t really know how to say this--”

A sharp, sudden intake of breath cuts him off.

“Dear Lord,” Mary gasps, her hand jumping to her lips. “Are you in love?”

Oblivious to the stupefied look on her son’s face, Mary blunders on. “Who is it, Henry? It is a girl, right? Perhaps Michelle, that girl next door? Whoever it is, Henry, don’t worry, your feelings are completely nat--”

“I’m not in love, Mom!” Henry cries, suddenly realizing that no matter how he phrases his question, his mother will never understand.

“Nevermind,” he mutters sullenly, blatantly disregarding the hurt look on his mother’s face and walking resolutely away.

\* \* \*

Henry steps out into the street, and for the first time in his life, he lets the sights and sounds settle on his shoulders. His eyes are stinging with colors; a thousand voices are thumping in his ears. He breathes in the rich,

rank air and waits for something astonishing to well up within him. But, as always, his mind is blank, devoid of any unique wisdom, great or small.

“Why can’t I think of anything?” he whispers.

Henry is beginning to doubt himself; perhaps he does not possess any secret knowledge. Perhaps he has nothing to say, after all. At a certain level, Henry acknowledges the foolishness of his quest. Somehow, though, silence is no longer appealing.

\* \* \*

The students are fidgeting again; it seems humanly impossible for them to sit still in their seats. The clock is beginning to labor with the weight of twenty pairs of eager, demanding eyes. Consciously denying freedom, the last fourteen minutes of class drag their heels.

There is only one student still paying attention. Henry Yang sits in the back of the classroom, staring intently at his teacher as she wades confidently through the Reign of Terror. Remarkably, Henry’s hands are still, no longer itching to deface public property and stave off boredom. His eyes are full of guillotines and severed heads. He shudders, both revolted and

curious, and wonders what he would say if he were faced with a crowd of howling people, all waiting to revel in the spectacle of his death.

Henry decides that he will never know-- unless, of course, his classmates finally riot and execute all teachers and any defiant students. More importantly, though, Henry realizes that he does not need to know. Over the past few days, Henry has come to the rather painful conclusion that profundity is spontaneous; seeking to contrive wisdom will only end in disaster and frustration.

The sound of the bell shrieks in Henry's ears. The other students spill into the hallway, but Henry takes his time rising from his seat,

his head still spinning with the French Revolution. Before he ventures out into the perilous hallway, his eyes happen to collide with those of his teacher. She smiles at him, and to his great surprise, Henry smiles back. Never before has he acknowledged her.

It takes Henry a moment to identify the strange, alien feeling that has lodged itself in his chest--genuine appreciation. He trips into the hallway, quickly swept along the raging current between classes. Though no words were spoken aloud, Henry is seized with the bizarre notion that he has just partaken in something incredible.

# Hail Mary

Mario Minnaert (12)

Hail Mary, spinning,  
Eyes frozen on your flight  
Full of hopes,  
The spiral with thee  
Blessed among receptions,  
And blessed is the fruit of thy celebration.  
Holy Mary,  
Mother of God,  
Pray for us players  
Now and during the final seconds of the game.  
Amen.

# Menagerie

Kate Stein (9)

In the menagerie  
live multitudes of creatures  
of all sizes, from all continents,  
not of flesh and bone  
but of brass and wood.

In the menagerie  
breathy flutes twitter and trill,  
their hummingbird melody borne by the thin, reedy voices  
of sparrow-like clarinets.  
Lumbering, deep-throated double basses like great brown bears  
chase these birds  
up and down the scales  
through forests of pitches and dynamics.

Playful triangles,  
buzzing violins and violas,  
like monkeys and bees,  
chatter and hum and play tag,  
each sting of the triangle drawing a shriek from one of the violins.

The snake-like oboe twists and twines,  
a cobra slithering among the rest.  
The rattlesnake maraca shakes ominously  
as the great bass drum and tuba thunder like two elephants,  
providing steady footstep beats for the menagerie.

Woodpecker snares rat-a-tat,  
dolphin cymbals crash-crash-splash!  
The bassoon moans,  
long and low,  
a two-ton whale in the depths of a cold sea.

Trumpets whinny like horses  
spurred steadily by the crack of the whip.  
Saxophones crawl and croak like ravens or frogs,  
and majestic trombones glide on eagle wings.

French horns emerge as cooing pigeons,  
tinkling glockenspiels spread the dust of fairies.  
The marimba slinks along, panther-like,  
then explodes into a flurry of flying mallets.

This is the menagerie,  
a wild circus of colors and sounds.  
And above the frenzy stands the ringmaster,  
conductor of the orchestra.

# Sap in the Veins

Sam Rothrock (10)

**W**hen looking  
at him, one's  
thoughts  
hearken back to Medieval  
Europe, with the  
enigmatic keepers of the  
forest – that is, the druids

They were outcasts, rejected by both urban society and the Church and ostracized by royalty. They were sturdy, hardy folk, living in the forests for their entire lives. They held a wealth of knowledge, passed down teacher-to-pupil for generations, but were rarely listened to. They were burdened by their responsibility, by the path they chose for themselves. It was they who originally spoke for and, in many senses, were the trees. And now it's Tim who takes their mantle here at Edgewood.

Tim is the groundskeeper of Edgewood College, where he teaches an environmental course, as well. He is short, thick, and burly, with a strong trunk and stiff limbs. A walker of the northern woods, he is a Saint Francis with a measured gait, holding a shovel in place of a stave. With a straight back, no hunch or slump to his shoulders, he walks and rarely sits with upright posture, unyielding, like the tough bur oaks of the prairie he tends. His roots embrace the ground, steadfast.

His bark is almost always a bright, cherry red, not only from his own blood but from his most common companion, the ever-present sun. Its beating rays have hardened and blasted his bark for decades, imprinting upon it an indelible mark. Criss-crossing his face are wrinkles and smile lines, etched by rain, wind, and joy. Thick lichen hair – wild, curly white, defying gravity and comb – still vaguely follows a wavy pattern

and clings to his head and chin. Beneath thick, curly white eyebrows and hidden behind tortoise-shell glasses, his sparkling eyes often shine, particularly when he gives his lectures and holds court with impromptu teaching moments. Deeply inset, these eyes glint with ageless wisdom, empathy, and experience.

A lonely experience, though. It is an uncommon path, one that frequently puts him at odds with many of those around him. But still, the path is his. And his path is not

A walker of the  
northern woods,  
Tim is a Saint  
Francis with a  
measured gait,  
holding a shovel in  
place of a stave.

without its demons: the dormitory that will last perhaps a score of years before becoming outdated intrudes upon the gentle hill and open air that were there before; the alien species that invade and choke out the natives, mindlessly destroying the habitat. They are the bane of his existence and haunt him, because he holds the

druid knowledge of the woods, and he makes the conscious choice to care, to not give up to eventuality, to conformity. Protecting and nurturing the environment will never be easy, but for Tim, it is the natural thing to do.

And so, our modern druid strolls down his avenue of trees, watching limbed shadows criss-cross over the path. There's a tune in his head, a shovel on his shoulder, and a world of time and problems to fix. Tim will be there, taking one tree and one path at a time and passing on his wood-spirit wisdom.

# Kabalevsky's

Vivian Burnette (12)

First chords beckon:

Hands glide  
Over black and white,  
Shaking memories,  
Forcing flowers from distant beds  
In mid-January.

Hands trace stories,  
Devour shadows.  
Children flutter after colors  
Streaming from the walls.

## Ghost

Hands turn us  
Dumb, beautiful--  
We stare into the  
Sun's eyes, notes swirling  
Over our heads.

Last crescendo erupts:

Hands release us  
Nearly blind, gasping for air--  
The room darkens, shudders  
With silence. We are alone  
Once more.

*Based on "Improvisation" by  
Dmitri Kabalevsky*

# Caliban

Sarah Allen (12)

Albert stared forth through the opaque walls that composed his house. Always moving in nervous bobs and anxious zigzags, he paced and buoyed himself to better observe the passersby.

There were four of them; four regulars — two males and two females — who Albert would witness strolling, sauntering, or running past, depending on the time of day. Albert supposed they were neighbors — why else would they pass by so often? He had never spoken to them, so he could not be quite sure. Sometimes they would pause and shout something to him — he could see their lips contorting to expel words, at least — but he never understood what they were saying — loud, clumsy jargon, it seemed. He found that if he ignored them or skirted away from the glass pane, they would eventually shrug their shoulders or crease their cheeks with laughter and abandon the effort.

It was a lonely life Albert lived — the life of a hermit. His dwelling was furnished with only the starkest commodities. In fact, he hardly possessed more than four household items and absolutely no clothes. Had Albert ever the desire to associate with any of the four neighbors or host a proper luncheon at his

house, this might serve as a slight difficulty. However, since Albert sought no company and was never very partial to midday meals, he found his austere lifestyle satisfactory, comforting.

Albert let a sigh float toward the ceiling. It wasn't always like this, he thought.

And indeed, it wasn't. Less than a year ago, Albert had shared his modest abode with his dearest friend and life-long companion, Einstein. Although Einstein could be rather overbearing and aggressive, the two of them had lived happily, frolicking and minnowing about as they pleased. Since Einstein's death, however, Albert found he preferred the solitude.

Albert's eyes bulged, and his heart froze as an approaching figure distracted him and came into focus from the haze of Einstein's memory. Albert sunk into the farthest corner of his rectangular residence and released a swarm of relieved breaths as he recognized the form.

Twice daily, one of the neighbors, a plump, middle-aged woman, would drop off a meal for Albert, pre-processed and ready to eat. She had been doing this for as long as Albert and Einstein had resided in the neighborhood, although now she simply peered through the

window and departed. Every so often, too, she'd sneak in and clean his house on the rare occasion that Albert was not in it. At first, Albert had been offended and frightened by the trespassing, but more recently, he'd grown rather accustomed to and appreciative of the service.

Albert knew that it was ultimately the dependence on this woman that had killed Einstein. However, he found himself unable to fault her; after all, the poor neighbor inflicted no more harm than motherly compassion. And, he reminded himself, it was Einstein's gluttony that had packed his belly, bloated him like a bulbous onion, and left him floating lop-sided like a hollow log.

Actually, in a way, Einstein had saved Albert. In his constant hunger, Einstein had always attacked their meals the instant the woman dropped them off, eating until he quenched the ache in his paunch and leaving close to nothing to soothe Albert's palette. Yes, at the time Albert had felt resentful and passive, watching Einstein devour from a distance, but now – oh, now...

Albert was inflated by a sudden revelation – Einstein's death was a warning to him! Since Einstein's death, Albert had not had to contend for a bitter morsel but had the entire neighbor's offering to sate him. Although Albert owned no mirrors, he could feel his swollen stomach sag every time he

moved, making even menial travel a trial; these days he mostly just wilted hours on the pebbled floor, no longer flitting or darting as he had with Einstein.

Now that he considered it, Albert's fitness had steadily declined since Einstein had died, and Albert saw that he was slowly succumbing to Einstein's fate – death by excess and dependence.

Quickly, Albert thought, something must be done. He could not bear to suffer – with his current enlightenment – the same tragic destiny as his friend. Albert had often thought of suicide after Einstein's passing. It would not be so hard. All it would require was a forceful leap to propel himself just over the roof's ledge, and then – well, then it was out of his hands.

Albert gulped and gazed up. He could do it. He had jumped before – nothing so daring, but he had done it – and could do it again. Just with more force this time.

OK. Albert blew a few final breaths, sealing his resolution, wriggled backwards to give himself a faster start, and thrust himself forth like a slingshot through the barrier that protected him from the outside world.

And then he was airborne.

For a second – no, less than that – Albert felt a relief so sharp it seemed to pierce his

*Albert saw that he  
was slowly  
succumbing to  
Einstein's fate—  
death by excess and  
dependence.*

entire being as he flew over everything he knew towards the world that he was accustomed to seeing only through a window. Then the shock set in as a wave of frigid, foreign air encompassed his body, and Albert panicked.

What am I doing?

Albert hyperventilated, gasping alien oxygen where it abraded the seams of his tender skin. Eyes burning with unknown elements, he saw the nearing ledge—a few more centimeters and he would clear his roof. It would be over.

I don't want to die, I don't want to die,  
I don't want to die, I don't want to die--  
SPLASH.

Familiar warmth surrounded Albert. He opened his eyes, blinking to clear the stinging from them, and recognized the confines of his dwelling. Yes, those were the four great windows through which he was now safely seeing the outside. How provident! He hadn't jumped far enough! His weight had reduced his agility, and he had fallen just short of his target.

Albert's glance floated up with the bubbles emanating from his relieved laughter, and he swam under his favorite propped-up spoon and closed his eyes.



I watched as you reached for your fourteenth wineglass  
and tripped,  
tumbled right in.  
And the serving girl and I wondered whether  
the sense bubbling from your wine-soaked lungs  
or the circling sharks of Miss Simmons and Mrs. Waters  
would finish you first  
as we fetched Mr. Adams' and Mr. Waters' coats.

~Sam McLaughlin (12)

# Hourglass

Taylor Behnke (12)

Trickling ice so clear and strong  
Seen from the window, hanging long,  
Conjuring up a shining sword  
Carried to childhood battle songs

Shimmering ice so pure and white  
My siren song into the night  
To strap on my skates, glide away  
Into pools of reflected light

Meddling ice so black, unshown,  
Sending a shiver through my bones  
Knuckles white, I grip the wheel  
Hope I'll make it safely home

# Young Goodman Gone

Angeline Juan (11)

**I**n 1933, playwright Eugene O'Neill stunned America with his comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!* This play occurs on the Fourth of July, 1906, and centers around the Miller family. While the main plot focuses on the middle son, 17-year-old Richard, and his coming of age, readers get a glimpse into American life during the early 1900s. One year after writing the successful comedy, O'Neill began to write character descriptions of the Miller family for a sequel. He was going to use these notes to present a tragic view of family life in the post-World War I period. Unfortunately, O'Neill never wrote the sequel. The following, however, is a possible scene for the tragic play.

*It is around midnight in the Miller household. The only light on is the fan light above the kitchen table. Outside the windows of the kitchen, the fog creeps in, becoming denser as every minute passes. As the curtain rises, the sound of the refrigerator is heard. Seated at the dining table is RICHARD, with five empty bottles of beer scattered on the table. His tie hangs loosely around his neck, and a few buttons of his shirt are open. He looks scruffy, with a beard that has just started to grow. Even though he is only thirty-one years old, the lines on his face show signs of premature disintegration. His eyes display a loss of innocence; the only sign of youthfulness is a faint, boyish smile. He is intoxicated and shows it in the way he holds a cigarette in his left hand. He leans against his chair, sloppily propping up his right leg on the table in an attempt to dry the loose, dirty bandages wrapped around it. A pair of crutches lies on the floor, forgotten by its owner.*

**RICHARD:** *Twirls cigarette in his hand, unsure whether or not to light it. A hollow laugh resounds in the air, remembering a happy past. General Harold never did like cigarettes...never did like seeing me smoke one, either. Always threw them away, the idiot. We only have one life; he should've had one while he had the chance. Then again, it was his fault for staying to help the other injured soldiers. Sighs deeply, eyes looking off to the windows. That damned fog has followed me here all the way from Germany. You couldn't see your way when fighting against the Germans, nor the way back to the camp...and not even to the canteen! Now this fog's preventing me from seeing outside. If I went out there, I wouldn't be able to discern my hand in front of my nose. Eyes narrow. Cigarette drops to the floor as he grabs a nearby bottle to take another drink. Smoking is bad for you, though. And Muriel —*

*Body stiffens. Muriel wouldn't give a damn at this point what I do. TOMMY silently enters the kitchen in matching plaid pajama pants and shirt, sleepily making his way to the refrigerator. He is now twenty-five years old, yet looks the same as he did fourteen years ago — friendly, curious, and holding a youthful spark. Unlike his brother, his brown hair bears no gray roots — it's only slightly messy — and there is no beard in sight. He stares at RICHARD in disbelief for a few seconds before breaking the silence and noting his presence to his brother.*

**TOMMY:** Dick! It's almost quarter past midnight! What in blazes are you doing up so late?

**RICHARD:** *Drunkenly grins at TOMMY, waving his bottle at his brother. Oh, nothing. Just enjoying the fog outside. Ain't it lovely? Takes another sip.*

**TOMMY:** *Disgusted at his brother's choice of drink. What the hell is that? Is that — Sniffs. It — it is alcohol! What're you doing with a bottle of beer, Dick? I thought Uncle Sid got rid of all the bloody stuff from the fridge! How'd you find one?*

**RICHARD:** *Laughs, eyes unfocused on TOMMY. Silly boy, I know that already. Smiles widely. I got a couple drinks down by the harbor on my way home fro — from Muriel's.*

**TOMMY:** *Surprised. Muriel's? I thought you were going to stay at her place for the night.*

**RICHARD:** *Laughs again, cynically, giving TOMMY another half-hearted smile. She... she broke off the engagement. Don't like me no more. Chuckles. Muriel said I've changed, and it wasn't for the better. Says she doesn't recognize me anymore. But I look at myself in the mirror, and I don't see anything changed about me. Right, Tom? I haven't changed one bit. I'm still the same old Richard Miller.*

*Pretends there is an imaginary mirror before him, scratching his beard. I've a beard. Back in Germany, my boys and I were making bets on who could shave 'em cleanly. Only won a couple of times, but I still looked damned handsome. Attempts to take another sip, but TOMMY grabs the bottle away.*

**TOMMY:** *Glares disapprovingly.* What would Ma say if she ever saw you like this? Or Uncle Sid? Or Pa? What about them? You'd be whipped good, if I knew any better –

**RICHARD:** *Glares and ignores his brother's comments.* You idiot, I'm not a kid anymore. *Tries to grab the bottle back, but it is out of reach.* Goddammit, Tommy. Give me that bottle back! I haven't finished it all, see? There's still...still a quarter left in that thing... gimme...

**TOMMY:** *Walks over to sink and dumps bottle's contents down the drain.* I think you've had enough for the night, Dick – you're soused as is. C'mon, let's get you to bed. Okay?

**RICHARD:** *Eyes narrow at TOMMY's tone of voice.* Didn't you hear me? I'm not a kid anymore! I can do whatever the hell I want, you hear? If I want to drink, then let me have the drink, damn it!

**TOMMY:** *Looks down upon RICHARD, heartbroken.* Dick, you aren't yourself at all. What happened to you reading all those fancy books? You didn't lose 'em while overseas, did ya?

**RICHARD:** *Laughs, just as hollow as the last time.* The ones I took to Germany? I lost all seven of them in a bet. I had a pair of kings and queens, while the other man had all four aces. It's no worries – I've got it all in here, Tommy. *Flicks brother's head and begins to recite "To Sleep" by John Keats.*

O soft embalmer of the still midnight!  
Shutting, with careful fingers and benign,  
Our gloom-pleasèd eyes, embowered from the light,  
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine;  
O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close,  
In midst of this thine hymn, my willing eyes,  
Or wait the amen, ere thy poppy throws  
Around my bed its lulling charities;  
Then save me, or the passed day will shine  
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes;  
Save me from curious conscience, that still lords  
Its strength, for darkness burrowing like a mole;  
Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,  
And seal the hushèd casket of my soul.

*Smirks, feeling accomplished.* See? You don't have to worry about the books. I never knew you were such a reader, though! Just like your older brother, right? Just before the ripe age of losing innocence! Any more pieces you'd like me to deliver? How 'bout some monologues?

**TOMMY:** *Sarcastically.* Your prayers, Dick.

You can recite famous pieces of poetry, but what about prayers? You obviously need a couple to fix you up. *Eyes soften, looking sadly at RICHARD.* Dick, you've changed. More'n I thought you had. You never drank, never gambled, never smoked. *Looks at the ground and picks up the cigarette.* Hell, I didn't even smoke when I was away! What's happened to you? Where's the brother who could recite love poetry like he wrote it himself and could edit fifteen newspaper articles in two hours?

**RICHARD:** *Shakes head furiously.* I'm still the same, Tommy. Don't you see? You're blind. I've been the same! *Smiles, looking out the window.* That fog sure is pretty, don't you think? Makes you feel like you can hide from everything in the world, including the war. The fog's like a big, gray blanket, shielding you from the world. You can't see the people around you, the changes that happen around the world, nothing. Nothing but whatever's a couple feet away, to the front and back of you. Ever notice that?

**TOMMY:** *Pulls up a chair and sits across from RICHARD.* Dick, you've become a twisted poet.

**RICHARD:** *Laughs.* Me? A poet? I'm no poet. I just describe my surroundings: Uncle Sid's a "reformed man"; Father's always out on the porch alone; Aunt Lily's trying her hardest to keep everyone together; and our poor sister can't find love. But I suppose that's life. We've been destined to be one of the most twisted families ever to live in the twentieth century. *Looks at TOMMY wearily.* Cut it out, you're looking at me like I've gone crazy. I'm no Macbeth, who craved power. I don't crave anything. I'm no Romeo, who killed himself for the sake of love. I'm none of that. I'm just a

worn soul with a leg that's about to be amputated in a few hours, and it's my only prop on the Road of Life. No one else is there for me but me. *Shakes his head.* You know what? Muriel's a stupid girl—the bloody, virgin prude! And she's afraid to look life in the eyes and defy it back! What did I ever see in her, Tom? She's beautiful, charming, and has the brains to do whatever she wants, yet she doesn't have the eyes to look at me. Now look what she's done—I'm as drunk as Uncle Sid on the Fourth of July! *Looks at Tommy, almost fatherly.* You're still fresh, Tom. Full of innocence. Keep it. Try to stay in the realm of ignorance, okay? And make sure that you never fall in love with women. They bring nothing but trouble! You lose what's yours—your heart, your sanity, and everything else but your name...

**TOMMY:** *Ignores comments. Gently pulls RICHARD up, who obliges.* C'mon Dick. Let's get you to bed.

**RICHARD:** *Recites from Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Love's Philosophy" as TOMMY slowly takes him upstairs, leaving the crutches and the bottles of beer behind.*

See the mountains kiss high heaven,  
And the waves clasp one another;  
No sister-flower could be forgiven  
If it disdained its brother;  
The sunlight clasps the earth,  
And the moonbeams kiss the sea—  
What are all these kissings worth,  
If thou kiss not me?

*He laughs cynically as both men exit offstage.*

# *The Great Conundrum*

Claire McLaughlin (10)

**O**n the quest for true happiness, man often confronts a myriad of complications. No obstacle, however, is more troubling than the impossible need for both home and adventure—the incompatible desires of the heart and the soul. One might argue that the heart and the soul are essentially the same thing—synonymous terms that always stroll hand-in-hand and the needs of which must also intertwine. Certainly, they are comparable—like oil and water, the heart and the soul are similar in both appearance and consistency. Yet they are profoundly separate things, and, like oil and water, they do not mix. Oftentimes, the desires of one leave the other in agony and discontent, thereby cursing man to exist in an eternal state of longing, always craving the satisfaction he can never have.

The heart grows around the home, plunging its roots into the luxuries of familiarity. And, ever-faithful to his heart, man is fed, nourished, and thrives by the senses of home: the soft embrace of well-loved linens as one settles into slumber; the calm of cherry logs crackling in the fireplace; the methodic rhythm of a father's footsteps down a wooden hall; the subtle kiss of a mother. These are the sensations that so fill a man's heart with the warm and tranquil blood that only home can provide. These are the sights, the sounds, and the smells that man has grown into, and they into him, each sense nestling into the previously empty pockets of his person. Together, man and these lovely sensations have blossomed; they have become intertwined with one another in coiling vines and twisting stems, a web of memories and familiarity. For man to untangle himself from

this motherly embrace, to leave behind his home—the place where all things began for man—would be to abandon his heart and, subsequently, himself.

Yet man is courted by the desires of another, equally powerful piece of his person: the burning passion that is his soul. The soul, unlike the gentle heart, grows wild and uncultivated, a reflection of one's true nature. And it is this wild soul that yearns to tear its roots from native soil, to tumble through untamed territories, to press its virgin ears against the ground and discover the secrets that foreign earth has to tell. It is the soul that harbors the deep, seductive dreams to seek exotic corners of the Earth; to uncover the

*Such opposite,  
impossible desires are  
these, the wishes of the  
heart and the soul.*

mysteries of the vast and endless cosmos; to escape the constricting atmosphere, race into infinity, and conquer constellations. The love of adventure, the addiction to adrenaline, the desire for great things—all fuel the energy of the eager soul. These are the wondrous dreams that man lusts after, that man so craves—the desires that leave man discontented as he falls asleep under the draperies of his own bed. To only dream and never seek would be to deny the adventure, the possibilities, the journeys for which his soul is so desperate and without which man is left empty and unfulfilled.

Such opposite, impossible desires are these, the wishes of the heart and the soul. They are

needs that man cannot truly deny but that he can never truly satisfy. And so, his life becomes a kind of balancing act, trying to fulfill the dreams of his soul without abandoning his heart, his home. Oftentimes, man is simply left divided. For while his heart delights in observing the growth of the saplings planted outside his window, whose delicate roots he, himself, nestled in the earth, his soul itches to run its fingers down the smooth bark of mysterious jungle trees, to feel the prickly desert cactus on its palms. As man's heart warms itself beneath a quilted blanket, beside a popping fire, his soul yearns for the heat of a burning African sun, the sound of the wind through the long savannah grass. But as man's soul excitedly extends its voice to mingle with the foreign tongues of yet unfamiliar lands, his heart pounds with desire for the soft coo of a mother's lullaby. When the soul sings in ecstasy from the peaks of distant, lofty mountaintops, the heart is lost and lonely, an aching chasm in man's chest.

Man has tried to find means by which to incorporate his two innermost, conflicting desires, but all efforts have been in vain. For man knows not what he wants – only that he longs for both, for what he knows he cannot have. Because in order to quench the thirst of the adventurous soul, the heart must be left grumbling with a hunger for home; and if the heart is comfortable and pleased, the soul yearns for something more, tossing and turning in its empty, restless sleep. The heart anchors the impatient soul in native soil; the soul tugs desperately, relentlessly at the strings of the heart until it moans, until it screams, until it bleeds for the love and the home that it

knows – the ultimate, impossible, unsolvable conundrum. Meanwhile, man is stranded somewhere in between, wandering the deserts of discontent until he surrenders himself to the cruelty of human nature and feigns satisfaction as he buries his head in the sand.

# Willy Street

Sarah Allen (12)

Gnarled  
Knotted fingers  
Plucked too many withered strings  
Pierced and calloused by frayed wires

Faded  
Wind-worn tangles  
Like clumps of dead grass

Grisly bristles  
On his chin  
Warding off  
Those hooligan kids and  
Their crazy camera phones

Emaciated  
Whittled and wasted

# Snow Day

Kate Stein (9)

Alarm goes off at six-thirty on the dot.  
Fumble for glasses.  
Throw covers back onto the bed.  
Yawn, stretch  
Slippers, robe over Bears pajamas  
Downstairs. Coffee  
Turn on the news  
No school today.  
Maybe drive in anyway?  
Roads don't seem too bad.

Toast. More news.  
Armed robbery on the East Side.  
More coffee.

Later – essays. Eighty of them.  
Then shoveling.  
Not going in to school after all.  
Getting colder.

Nap.

Dinner – leftover lasagna and a glass of Merlot.  
Review freshman novel for tomorrow.

Two chapters from Chernow's *Hamilton*.  
More news. More snow.  
Pajamas. Climb into bed.  
Another chapter of *Hamilton*  
Glasses off, lights off.  
School tomorrow.

# HABIBI

Emily Sharata (10)

There seemed to be more than the usual smog clogging the gray Cairo sky the day I saw her. About eleven miles from the Pyramids of Giza and the Great Sphinx, we were in the center of the city, in streets that had not felt rain in weeks. Cars all around us, inches apart from each other, stalled in the early morning traffic, baking in the sunrays that managed to filter through the overcast clouds. On the side of the road, a man on a donkey passed, earnestly selling figs. In the distance, a baby screamed over the voices of men arguing swiftly and sharply in Arabic. Lining the street were the overbuilt, uniform tan apartment buildings that the traffic had been following for miles and miles. The same scenery, the same noise, the same chaos, with no end in sight. The entire mood of the morning rush could be captured in the metamorphosis of Habibi, a woman in the car neighboring mine, whose changed spirit, from sadness to equanimity, reflected the struggle and perseverance of the city.

She was the only woman in a microbus carrying twenty men, who perhaps were off to work. Squished into the very back row, her shoulders hunched, and her forehead pressed against the window. Tears were slowly and steadily streaming out of her dark, tired eyes, deep and full. Thick, shaped eyebrows formed a frown. Her lips were pressed together hard, chapped and dry. Tears continued to drip down her slender, triangular nose, and she raised a thin hand to wipe them away and

prevent them from traveling farther. Long, curly hair draped over most of her upper body, nearly consuming her petite figure. She might have been beautiful had it not been for her misery.

The man next to her tried to offer comfort. “*Habibi*,” he might have been saying in Arabic, placing a hand on her shoulder. “Darling...” Yet Habibi ignored him and continued to stare out the window at the dust-covered road, which wasn’t moving. Her hands shook as she pulled her black cardigan more tightly around her body. A small tug at her sleeve revealed a tiny, black cross tattooed on the inside of her wrist; it was tough enough being a minority. The discrimination in a mostly Islamic society was hard to deal with. “*Habibi*, don’t cry...” Maybe all she could do was cry. Perhaps there had been a funeral or an accident or a mishap, or maybe she was even trapped in the bedlam of the city. Maybe there was no room to live, no room to breathe. No one could ever know for certain.

It was some time later when the traffic decided to slowly move again. And slowly, Habibi’s tears began to clear. She blinked her dark, curled lashes, and her ink-colored eyes dried. The man selling figs on a donkey passed on the side of the highway again, clearly unaffected by the morning mayhem. His calm face suggested a content disposition, and he wore a simple, white gallabeya and a hat to match. Serenely, he approached car by car, selling his fruit. The donkey moved steadily

The man next to her tried to offer comfort.

“*Habibi,*” he might have been saying in Arabic,  
placing a hand on her shoulder.  
“Darling...”

along with an awkward rhythm, as if dancing to a beat. It certainly was a strange sight, the pair; captive to the surrounding commotion, they were still making a go at it. Maybe *Habibi* thought so, too, because her lips curled upwards slightly at the sight of him. The traffic picked up more speed.

Perhaps she had realized life wasn't that bad after all. There were only people living, surviving, always someone in a worse situation, though still getting by. The sky could still clear someday. The noise might silence, and the people could prosper despite the sandy soil. The man and the donkey would pull through. I imagined *Habibi* pondering these thoughts as I watched her thoughtful smile as our car passed her microbus for the last time.

# Social Frost

Sam McLaughlin (12)

A barn is choked by icicles,  
and fields are cut by a lonely bell  
as children roll by on red bicycles.

Soap operas become receptacles  
for dreams of cars and sleek hotels,  
and a future is choked by icicles.

Snow falls and builds in piles,  
town hall voices anger and swell  
as children roll by on red bicycles.

TV gods sell pharmaceuticals,  
and scripture becomes an exploitable shell  
like a barn is. Choked by icicles,

women toil in tiny cubicles,  
and husbands condemn their neighbors to Hell  
as children roll by on red bicycles.

Men in bars ache for minor miracles,  
and wives share secrets they shouldn't tell.  
A dream is choked by icicles  
as children roll by on red bicycles.

# *Journey* *of a* *Tear*

You drag me further  
Into my soul's dark abyss--  
Down rotten halls,  
Through wrecked ballrooms,  
Cruel words ricocheting  
Off crumbling walls.

Don't comfort me--  
My heart's silent shrieking  
Strangles any other sound,  
Heaves my world headfirst  
Into a gory, writhing sea.

A single, bloody tear  
Trips down my cheek,  
Charting melancholy,  
Exposing anguish.

My face drips crimson now,  
Leaving a desolate, red trail  
as I wade through life.

I won't wipe my tears--  
You will know my angst--

Now, forevermore.

~Vivian Burnette (12)