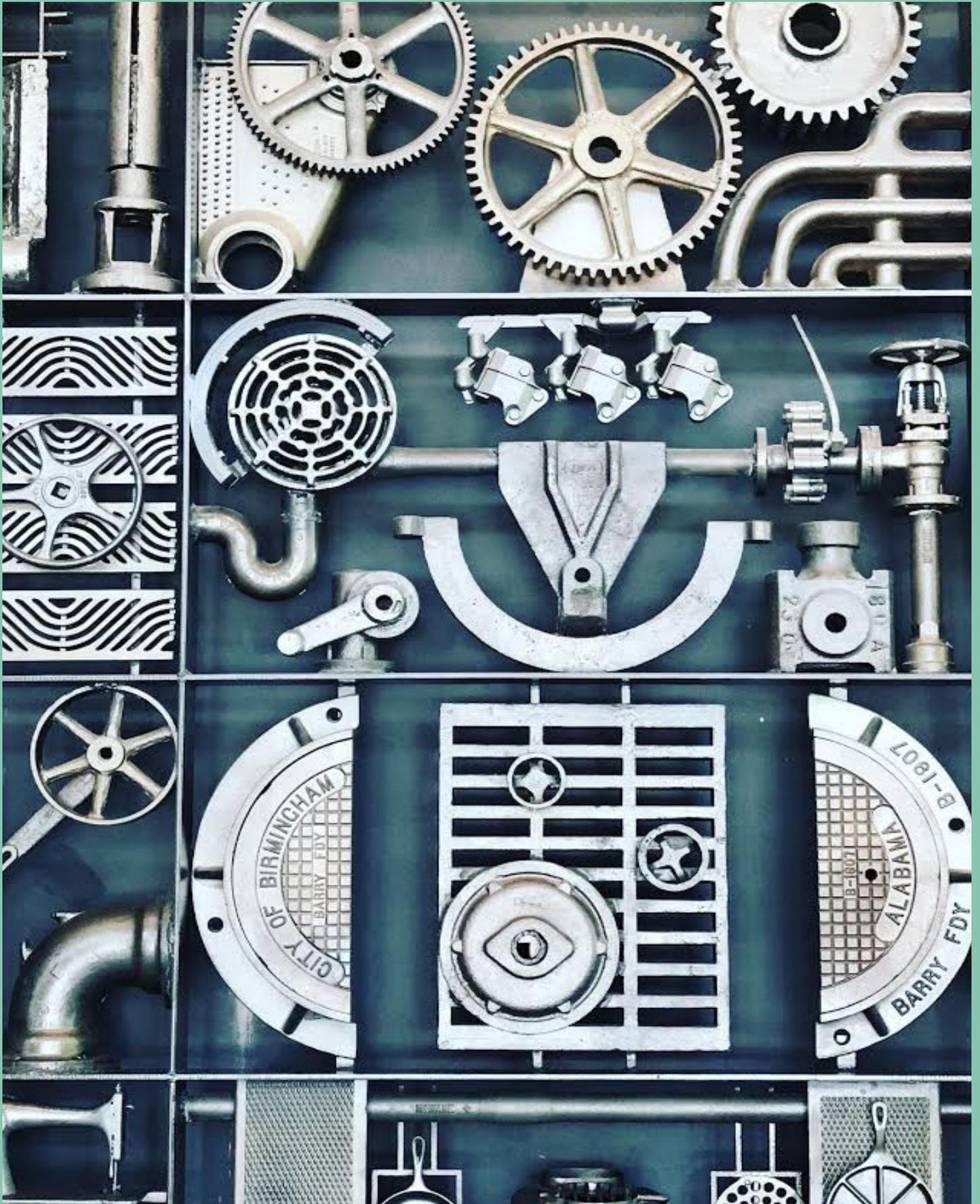


THE WRITERS' BLOCK



THE WRITER'S BLOCK

The Ada Long Creative Writing Workshop Anthology

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Colophon

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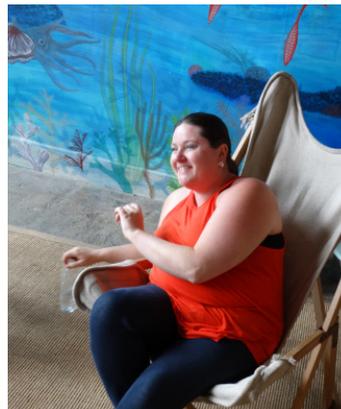
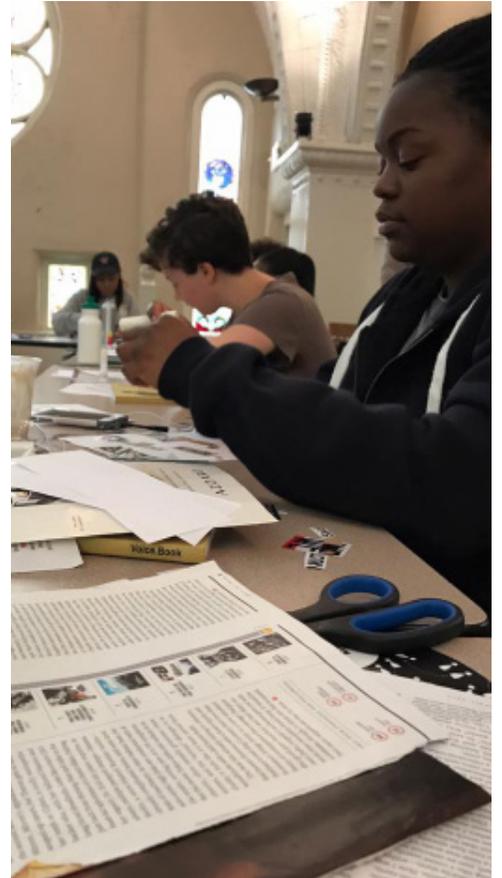


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FIREFLY

Samika Lewis-Jefferson

Now my life doesn't suck so bad
that I'd wish to be a firefly,
But it would be nice
To spend a warm summer evening with the lightening bugs.
Maybe it would be like
having a late picnic dinner with the family
But minus all the sibling and in-laws
Bickering.
It would just be me
and my
Luminescent friends
Flying around above me.
I would curiously ask them
"Where are you flying to?"
and they would shrug
their non-existent shoulders
"Wherever the night takes us,
My friend." And I
would begin to think
How nice it would be to fly
Freely
like a
Firefly
That my only worry would be
Where the night would take me
That maybe life could pause
For a mere second
So I could
Appreciate the beauty
Always surrounding me
That
I
One day
Could be free from all of life's
Worries
That I, too,
Could drift freely

IMMORTAL

Shelby Bradley



THE HARPIES

Kameron Helms

Be vicious; Be cruel; Be violent but never to your winged sisters; Outpace the wind and all of the birds of the Earth in the swiftness of your flight; *But what if I'm not strong enough?*; Steal food and wine from selfish men, for they do not deserve a morsel or a drop to fill their bottomless stomachs; Carry away evildoers of all kinds, especially those who have hurt or killed their families, and torture them all along the way to their fiery perdition; *But what if I don't want to be strong enough?*; Be vicious; Be cruel; Be violent to all people who are wicked or even give the semblance of having a shadow over their hearts, do not spare the man who merely sneered in your direction; *I don't think that those feelings have a place in my heart*; Scratch out the eyes of people who insult you; This is how to preen your feathers; Keep in mind your duty as a hound in the service of the mighty Zeus; avoid the Boreads, sons of Boreas, the North Wind, for they will stop at nothing to drive us off; *They try to rid the world of us because we are tyrannical and sadistic pests, a force of nature that should perhaps be stopped*; Forget not that we are agents of punishment; Be a master of the winds, don't let yourself be a plaything of the air, humbled by the power of something that weighs nothing; This is how to make a sturdy nest with the bones of vile people; Do all to please our mother, Electra; This is how to sharpen your claws to daggers; This is how to formally address the gods and goddesses of Olympus; This is how to sneer down your nose at humans; *Everyone of us was created by or born to a god, are humans really so beneath us? Does our own cruelty not rival theirs?*; This is the proper manner in which to hold yourself; Be vicious; Be cruel; Be violent at the whim of Zeus, the minister of thunder; *What if I do not wish to pledge my immortal life to Zeus and I would rather find purpose in light than in the shadows?*; Keep in mind that all who are inept, and who's loyalties and ideals shift at the drop of a feather, deserve no fate better than the very people that we persecute; Hold yourself to a higher standard; Don't be so weak; Don't be so puny; Don't be so naïve; Don't be so shameful; Don't be so inadequate; *You are losing your composure, Celaeno*; Be mindful that you have no power over your own fate, there is Zeus and Zeus alone in control of your destiny and you should bite your razor sharp tongue or else he will cut it out; *I understand now why I should obey and what my purpose is – to be vicious, to be cruel, to be violent.*

PICK ME

Tiffany Duong



HANDS

Anton Benninghof

These hands are skinny hands,
They are long hands,
Whether it be right or left hand,
They are never bad hands,
Beforehand,
I thought they were weak hands,
Afterhand,
I realize that these hands,
Are handsome hands,
They are handy hands,
You, hands are magnificent hands,
You are handleable hands,
You are always on hand,
And never act overhand,
You are open handed hands,
Free to hand me,
Whatever hands may please,
You are backhanded hands,
You, hands never fail to show me,
You are wonderful hands.



A FORMAL REQUEST

Gabriel Talley

They have flooded the streets with us,
Bodies of builds and busts, and
Minds of stories and dreams,
Streaming in unison down the sidewalk,
Cascading down the waterfall of time,
And raining right down into your backyard.
At least, that's how it seems to me,
Because now our voices are being heard
And now we are being barked at to be quiet.
However, we're only loud because it seems
Like no one can hear us unless we're shouting.
Quite simply, these aren't wants,
These are basic human needs,
And I don't think you can muzzle us anymore
Until we drink in the same air that you breathe.

LEAH'S LEG

Hannah Bray

Her leg made the floor tremble like an earthquake,
and one got the feeling, somehow,
that the constant bobbing would continue indefinitely.
You could hear the floor as it shook
in the Honor's House, quaking from her leg.
But then suddenly it stops, and all is still,
and you lean back in your chair, listening now to the AC.
The great earthquake of infinity is no longer infinite,
But it will return as it always does.
The floor lives in fear of that day,
The caved in roof, the rubble in the air.



THE IMMEASURABLE CARPETED FLOOR

By Gabriel Talley

Associated Weavers International
has sewn up an awesome problem.
Tufts twisted of polyester and nylon,
and flat woven with dye lots from Washington.

I see eighteen hundred square feet
patterned with beiges
and greys, forest greens and browns;
enough swatches to walk a silk road.

Millions of threads laid in seconds,
and millions of seconds laid to the floor.
I cannot comprehend this.
My eye and mind cannot get along.

FOLLOWED INTO THE NIGHT

Dana Aldeeb

Tiffany sighed in exhaustion and stretched, her sweater sleeves falling past her elbows making her shiver and pull them down. Working as a student called for late hours. The university's computer lab was on Whisker Pike Road which was always up at night with her. It was both annoying and helpful. The sounds of parties and fighting helped her stay awake and keep her guard up. Tiffany was the only one at the office so she was able to listen to the Chainsmokers without headphones and snacked on cotton candy potato chips to keep up her energy. She sat down on her uncomfortable office chair and finished typing her report on bioluminescence for her final science report before the university let out for the holidays. As she was finishing up the report she heard some clatter down the hall. Her heart started beating fast and quickened when she heard more noises and shuffling. She turned off the music and grabbed her phone. Putting it in her pocket, she grabbed her letter opener and slowly started down the hall. When she jumped out and switched the light on, there was no one there. Just the small buzz of computers. Panic washed over her. She thought she hadn't heard the noises, so she decided to call it a night. Tiffany walked back, grabbed her purse and her copy of *The Coldest Girl In Coldtown* and turned to leave. She opened the door to the staircase that lead out of the building and pushed her raven hair out of her eyes. As she descended down the stairs, she felt as if someone was following her. She quickened her pace and soon pushed out into the streets, but instead of heading home, she rounded the corner into an alley where a few kids were huddled together smoking and mumbling quietly. Tiffany watched the door intently, seeing if someone was really following her, but after watching for what seemed like forever, no one came out. Sighing in relief and declaring herself crazy as well as tired, she walked home with her gut in a twist and that being followed feeling still lurking, but she pushed it down and turned the corner onto her street. Thinking about having a warm bath and getting into some PJ's made her hurry home. Before she could make it up the steps, a hand covered her mouth and wrapped an arm around her waist. She kicked and thrashed but it was no use. When she looked over her shoulder, her eyes widened and she started to scream and kick and fight. But she knew it was no use. She never heeded the warnings. She never took the stories seriously. She should have.

PRESSED

Shelby Bradley



ANTI-ODE TO ROOM B311

Tiffany Duong

Take notes
y equals a b
to the x minus h plus k
You sink into exponential decay
and take us with you
Next example

Memorize
When h is negative,
we shift left,
shift right in our seats,
click our pens,
tap our feet
Next example

Eyes on the board!
Graph the angle
of depression
from the window ledge
to freedom
You trap our lines, our
minds, within asymptote walls
Next example

Show your work
We reduce our fractions
so you can simplify
our worth to a grade
Next example

Test
You isolate terms,
factor out the differences,
divide by our confusion
We rip out
the formulas hooked
into our eyes
Leave at 2:32



JANUS

Leah Owens

Sometimes people may look up from their small homes, staring into the sky. Their children stop playing as they watch Janus move by. The large city moves with the day, floating through the air. Almost as if a pirate ship, it floats along the sea of wind. Inside of Janus, there are large buildings for work and play, or so they say. The city is for the rich and famous, and inhabitants can only gain access through connections and board in secret places. No one knows anything about the city, except it is perfect, made of perfect people and perfect things, moving with time, yet never aging.

Despite its beauty, no one has ever had contact within. As if ghosts, the people above float wherever the city takes them. The people on the ground watch in awe every time the golden city passes, wondering what it might be like inside. They talk about how it must be nice living in such a perfect place, but within their hearts, they know they must be lonely, if they are even still alive upon the eternal city in the sky.

There have been rumors of darkness within Janus, the ever-perfect place. People go missing within towns as it passes overhead. Seemingly unconnected, people ask the question, "Who works in the city? If it is only for the highest of people, you cannot expect them to serve others." Most people push the suspicions aside, enthralled by the beauty of mystery, but some are cautious and others study it. Janus is always a subject on someone's mind and a topic of gossip within the bars, but no one truly knows what happens within the ever-moving city.

ANTI ODE TO THE PIGEONS IN SAM'S PARKING LOT

Dahlia Henderson

You creep up on me
like a thief,
eyes sweltering.
Your dungeon gray and black feathers ruffle,
Tracherous fowl

I see the white crustiness
around your eyes and beak,
a puss filled sore,
four talons,
your feet
wrinkled, dry, and red
like fresh peeled skin.

You march toward me, and me only,
your head bobbing with every step you take,
your wings expanding
in a flash. You fly by me
Not looking back

OLD SUPERSTITIONS

Shelby Bradley

As white as a sheet, maybe with red eyes
Or perhaps a floating orb, round and bright
A scream in the night racing through dark skies
Reflections in mirrors, seen in dim light

To haunt your house, or an abandoned place
To possess your friend, they feed on your fear.
The more you give in, the more they will chase
Too scared to save even the things you hold dear.

An empty rocker, rocks by its lonesome
A candle flame burning blue, suddenly
These things can prove a ghost has left its tomb.
Looking into an open grave, solemnly

Can you blame them for staying past their own end?
Once, they were alive, and maybe your friend.



SANCTUARY

Dayton Crump

The door flung open with a figure shrouded by light as he walked in the door. The floor creaked under his mighty foot, his boots squeaked on the floor boards with each step.

“Hello, God, can you hear me?” The man asked, his voice echoing through the room. “Have you left us? Do we mean nothing to you?” The man questioned, staring out the window. “Have we wronged you? Is this punishment for our sins?” He yelled out. A loud boom and a blinding flash bursted into the room and caused The man to fall to the floor.

“You left us to rot, didn’t you? You left us damned in this Hell!” He yelled out. “Where are you?”

The man tried to stand but crumpled to the floor. He crawled his way to the wall to help him stand. He his eyes darted around the room, waiting for a response that would never come. The man slammed his fist into the floor, cracking the wood underneath. Small tears fell from his eyes, seeping into the floorboards.

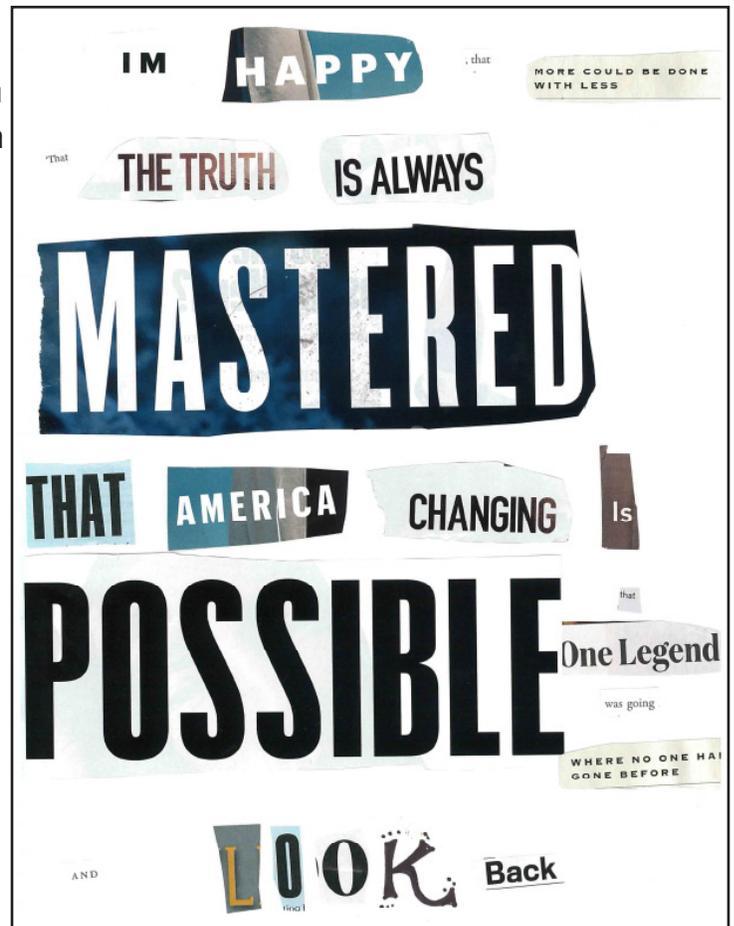
“Where is your justice? Where is your love?” The broken man yelled out. “Were you just a lie, an old fairy tale we told our young? Were you ever there for us?”

The man slammed his head onto the cold, rough floor. He was engulfed in a puddle of his own grief and sorrow as the screams from the outer world flooded into the hellish building he was now trapped in. The man looked out the tinted windowpane, and watched the world fill with flames, and the charred remains of his family and friends.

The man backed against the wall, and slammed his fist into the mural behind him, splitting it in two. He looked up and saw the face of God looking over the world, cradling it in his palms.

“Just a bunch of lies, huh? We put our faith into you, and now we burn for it. Some protector you are.” The man said, collapsing to the floor as he felt the warm embrace of Hell surround him.

CHANGING Samika Lewis-Jefferson



FOUR YEAR SOUP

(Parody of "The Soup" By Charles Simic)
Leah Owens

Four years in the making,
Four years of preparation,
These ingredients,
Changing our lives forever.

After everything is through,
You may miss the smell,
You may want it back,
But it is gone, so cherish the taste

Of the soup of these years.

On what shall we cook it?

On the broken air conditioning units.
The shouts across the halls.
The shouts from younger boys.
The feeling of crisp fresh paper.
The weight of textbooks on your back.

It will steam over rubber balls,
The squeaks from running shoes,
Our loneliness from classes without friends,
The phones we hid, sending crucial nonsense.

What do you think it will taste like?

Like the arguments the whole hall hears.
Like the fights no one can tell are real.
Like the bad jokes from tired teachers.
Like the laughter of your friends.
The comfort of the last bell.

Sitting alone every day,
With no escape.
Hiding our emotions,
Pretending nothing bothers us.

What shall we eat it with?

With the smelly gym rooms.
With the gossip from other people.
With the secrets of strangers.
And tired eyes.

We will eat
Slouching and alone,
Noise permeating everything,
Even our deepest thoughts.

And on the side, we will have:

Stale crackers of complaints.
The shredded cheese of old homework.
Salt and pepper of friends we lost and gained.
Salad of memories, never coming back.

The red gowns of the people we grew with,
Smiling the brightest we have ever seen,
Happy to be through with it all,
Drowning their worries with tears of joy.



ANTI-ODE TO THE CHOKER

Khrysten Bolling

You clung to my neck;
You weren't made for me.
I see you in my ancient mirror,
I see you looking back at an Egyptian queen,
But when I look again,
It is just me
Wearing you.
Your tight lace
Was a pinch, squeeze, and tug
Red line creeping up my dark-skinned neck
You ancient jewelry, you identifier,
You choker.

BEAUTIFUL PROBLEMS

Dahlia Henderson

One flower stands tall
Millions of weeds grow around it
One lovely garden

A NEW DAY

Charlyse Skipwith

The feeling came unprovoked
Like the Sun rising from the night for the first time
My heart was filled with a medley of gratitude and purpose

Even now, I can't put words to this feeling, making it all the more satisfying
It's as if my eyes have opened to see a whole new world
The trees are not the same, the birds don't sing like they used to

Or maybe, I wonder, it's me who has been changed
It's me who has new eyes and a new purpose
The world around me has a new beauty
And I pray that when I wake tomorrow, that beauty will still be there

WHAT REMAINS

Hannah Jordan

Slowly, he walks over to a special compartment in his file cabinet. Using a code only he could know, the older man unlocks the vault. He lights a match, hands shaking, and sets it next to the explosives inside.

The bomb explodes. Shards of wood and brick and cement crash around him and an endless ringing floods his ears. As fire rains down from above, a certain day in the heat of July is called to memory, and he has no choice but to drown in its remembrance.

He didn't remember his mother, dead on the hospital bed. He didn't remember the many Sunday afternoons spent practicing his cello, nor how excited he had been at receiving such a gift. He didn't remember how upset he had been when his father decided to move them to a new town. He did not remember the day his friend died in Red Lake.

What he did remember was sitting on the porch with a friend, discussing the future. It was cold, for July. The flag shifted with the wind and the bench was oddly stiff.

"Do you think we'll be friends when we're older?" he asks.

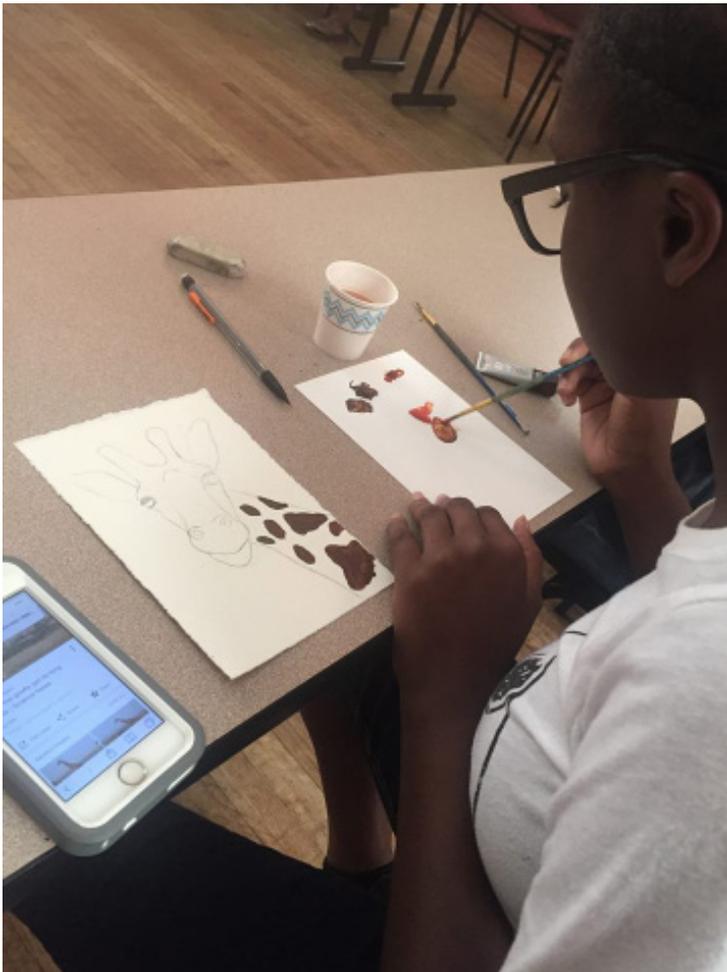
"Probably," The other turns to face him, "why wouldn't we be?"

He shrugs. "What if we made a pact, you know, make it final."

"Like what?"

He extends his pinky, and the other humors him, wrapping his pinky around it. "I promise," he laughs.

The memory fades and he is brought back to the fire. Flames tear around him and sweat carves trails into the back of his neck. Huddled in a corner, he cries until the fire dies around him.



COACH, MAY I STILL PLAY?

Kaelyn Walker

Walking up the cold steps into the gym, the first thing I see is the bright glaze of a clean, shining floor. The smell hits me, like a loud leather ball hits the floor, and sending an echo surrounding the walls like a dark shadow. Leaning my head back with my eyes wide open, I look up and notice the bright lights beaming down on my face as if standing right under the sun. The sound of a singing net every five seconds runs chills down my arm leaving me with a rush of excitement. I think of the memories from when my dad first taught me how to play basketball. Every thought leaves my mind as the ball hits the floor. I look around me at the empty bleachers. The quietness while standing under the goal begins to bring back memories of me as a child and looking at the ball getting stuff into the net but I was too short to jump up to get it or at least touch it to get it down.

Now that I am older, I would love to tell the story of me first starting to play basketball. And years after that going through two surgeries within my two years of High School. I started playing when I was twelve years old. Between the time when I was in school and training during a game something bad happened. During an AAU basketball game, my tenth-grade year in the summer I remembered running back on defense with one minute left on the clock. As I'm hearing the crowd yell "Defense, Defense, and Defense". I gathered my breath as my opponent was coming down the floor with the ball facing me. Everything flashed in just a second between when the ball was shot and when my back was against the ground.

But let's go back into the game; the ball was shot and missed. This became a very intense game and whoever wins this game are the Champions of The Boo Williams Tournament, in Virginia. Everyone jumps up trying to get the ball as soon as it hits the back board as each team struggle to get the ball and score. I ended up grabbing the ball still in the air from the missed shot; another girl continues to fight for it once everyone else runs back down the court when everyone notices that have it now. Us hitting the floor with her falling directly on my shoulder, "ohhhhh" the crowd screams in one harmony as my back is against the floor and seeing me in harsh pain. I felt my shoulder being pushed out of socket so I began to grip my shoulder to align it so that the ball of my shoulder will get back in it's socket. I take sports medicine, in which teaches you all the bones and connect muscles in the human body. So, it helped me a lot knowing that my shoulder was dislocated and that I needed to put it back on place. So, I decided to just do it on my own and with two pulls to the front my shoulder was back in place. My dad rushes over to me from on the other side of the court as he sees me leaning up with my hand still gripping my throbbing right shoulder. He begins asking me first "Is it bad enough that you need to go to the hospital right now or do you still want to wait to watch the end of the game?" I ended up watching the end of the game on the sideline next to my team. By the end of the game the pain began to settle and go away quickly.

After the game, I went back to the hotel room with my team with the trophy that was what I was most excited about that I forgot all about my shoulder the whole night. Waking up in the morning I couldn't move my right arm, it was completely stuck from yesterday. Even when I tried to lean up to get out the bed every little movement came with a throb from my shoulder. We had a nine o'clock game the next morning, and it was no way that I would be able to play in this kind of pain.

GARHOM

Hannah Bray

When Nokomis awoke, it was to cold sweats and a world too much like the one she remembered. Her eyes darted about the wreckage that passed for her room, taking in the familiar, deep red piles of discarded rubble, the way light streamed through the sagging roof, and the stained rags strewn about her floor. She tried to find solace in a world she knew to be cruel and uncaring, only to register with an ever-dimming sense of disappointment that she was still there. The metallic scent of blood, mixed at its core with the ever-present dust, immediately ambushed her nostrils as it had every morning for too long. While it no longer gave rise to bile, she still found it to be an unsettling, constant reminder of where she was, and it brought with it a sense of reality to a world that could have otherwise been a nightmare.

She ran a scarred hand through her hair and her fingers protested weakly, but their cries were shut out by those of unrested muscles. She grunted softly, and the sound seemed to echo around the small room in the morning silence. Her body pleaded with her to stop as she stood, walked to where the bandages lay, and sat down beside them with her back against the wall. The rags were rough, even on her calloused hands. The aging fabric had long been peppered with blood, stars in the sky of purgatory, a scattered map to wounds she tried to forget. The make-shift bandages were permanently stained with dirt and sweat ingrained into every fiber. She had once torn them from her clothes in an attempt to protect her hands, but it had only ever worked to a certain extent.

Nokomis coiled the cloth tightly around her forearms and up to her second knuckle, at which point she tucked the end into her palm. The fingers above were covered in cuts, the splinters she couldn't grow the nails to remove, and yellow crust and dirt, intermingled until her fingers looked as sickly as she felt. The tips of her fingers had fared the worst, scraped day after day on rock, never getting a long enough break to even try to heal. She could almost feel them deadening, becoming accustomed to the life they had been thrust into.

She didn't bother to look up as her door opened with a jerk, the bottom edge scraping along the ground and sending even more dust into the air. She knew it would be Soren; she would have known even without seeing his feet, which seemed to have been stained bright orange by the dust, though no one else's had. She pushed herself up with help from the wall, knowing that he was watching, judging, and considering this show of weakness. Normally, she tried to be standing when he came, but she had found herself caring less about it the longer she was in Garhom.

Nokomis got to her feet, trying to ignore the ever-increasing protests from her legs as she moved toward the doorway. Soren waited silently as she crossed the five feet to the exit. She was the last one he picked up in the mornings; she had figured that out in the first month or so. When she reached him, she stopped. It was her turn to watch as he bent down, but she didn't bother. She could feel it as the cold metal was wrapped around each leg, when the chains snapped shut around the burn they had left the day before. They both knew she didn't need them.



GROUP SONNETS

Hannah Bray, Samika Lewis-Jefferson, Leah Owens, Rusty Rushton

While looking at a random checkerboard,
I thought back to a day that made me seize
with laughter: make-believe armor and sword,
us watching as our fake enemy flees—
and wondered what from those days could ignite,
in kids as safe and loved as we, such show
of even make-believe desire to fight.
Or was it born of games and not of woe?
In youth we dreamt of fairy tales, a king
on a golden throne, each knight with a turn
to prove his worth, the deeds of which they sing,
but to this land we seldom now return.
As one grows, one learns to move on, not resist.
As one grows, one learns to accept, to exist.

Each night in dreams I poke my spirit sock
with holes through which each multicolored wish
I've swallowed drops and, landing in the bog
of my confusion, blossoms like a cast
seed that birds have no way to ingest.
In dreams, I lubricate my mind's one cog
and sail petunia petals in the hush.
At their state, I confess, I often balk.
The secrets I would die for live forever
without spilling. I let my thinking's river
shine with sin while my body rests, a toast
to all the things subhuman I have lost.
My innocence shot, I'm stuck in a loop—
kneeling to God, our cosmic nincompoop.

The wind that winter morning sure did bite,
a desolate cry from across the fells
setting astir the old, rusted church bells
as the sun bleached the tombstones a pure white.
Dim light through broken windows, candles alight
on the altar, a book preaching of hell's
wrath. The people move, lifting the dumbbells
of their spent spirits, backs and minds upright.
Under the lonesome sun, our one true star,
have we thus learned to choke our spirit's flow
in churches, schools, and courtrooms — how bizarre
that in the thought of death we wish to flee,
when in reality it lets us go,
our souls flying away in harmony.

GROUP POEMS

Leah Owens, Samika Lewis-Jefferson, Hannah Bray, Qadira “Mango” Miner

Two forty-five, day 8 of the writing workshop.
Tired souls and aching fingers bent over poetry and prose.
Blank minds and aching eyes awaiting the end of the day.
Anticipation lying heavy on the air.
Hearts racing with excitement.
Yes, oh yes, three o'clock at last.

.....

A breeze wafting through the trees on a summer's day.
A small girl's thankful smile.
A boy's laughter like the song of wind chimes
that have been struck by, what, a hammer?
A sun illuminating the day with the same joy
and its usual smirk.

.....

Bright lights shining through colored glass.
A man's soiled hands grasping themselves grimly
as they shake in despair.
Blood seeping through cracks in the wall
as if crimson sap from a tortured tree.
I sigh, wondering how that would taste on pancakes.

.....

Bright embers of campfire crackling
into the star encrusted night sky.
Howls of coyotes on the damp winter wind.
Flecks of dust plastered against worn-out boots.
Strums of guitar and laughter filling the air.
Bright smiles keeping us warm through the long night.

.....

Pencils lined across his desk awaiting execution.
Shaking legs and nervous glances hoping for a rescue.
The steady eyes of comrades mocking his uncertainty.
The executioner arriving, cackling, slaps her hand on his desk,
rattling the pencils and letting them fall to the floor.

RIM

Morgan Nettles



THE SPOT

Rickia Taylor

I'm at a spot where, in the corner
by a window, the many patterns
go from circles, squares,
ovals, wooden floors,
paint that wasn't painted right.
There are peelings on the walls,
you can see the paint and holes,
windows that you can't see out
of,
spider webs high in the ceilings.
This spot is its own spot.

I am a historian.
I've been in this place
for many years.
I know all the secret doors,
the upstairs, where
it is impossible to see
and the downstairs,
Where light shines.

I hear a knock.
It's a tapping knock,
The type of knock only
A bird can make.
I look up
and there it is.
How did the bird
get in here?
I call to it.
It comes speeding at me
And I swing,
scaring it away.
The bird hides.
I notice the colors on it,
red, blue.
What bird is this?
I thought to myself,
so I let it go.
It went through the clouds
and was gone.

ODE TO THE KNOT IN MY SHOELACE

Morgan Nettles

You were an earthworm, aglet buried
In the soil of my sneakers
Inching up to the surface whenever I decided
To flood your home with sock puppets
You played with the bunnies that day
Unde and Over

Through the loops
I don't know what you learned
But you came back different
Greeting me now was a polypropylene python
Wrapped in a battle within itself
I thought there could be no loser
But you went off with the bunnies
Through the hills
Around the stool

I noticed it was me who had lost
Because now the lump in your belly
Refuses to let me tie my shoe
A secret stance you seemed to take
Jealous of your newfound courage
I admired how you sought the surface



DEWEY HEIGHTS BAPTIST CHURCH CEMETERY

Shelby Bradley

Headstones of rainy skies
but Bama summer rain

stiff pink plastic petals
line the ground like raindrops

full green shady switch tree
behind a lifeless couple

open field for laying
voluminous clouds above

dates, beginning to end
endless stories with each

ceramic angels watch,
the virgin Mary looms

sheer blue stain glass windows
abandoned place of god

a sincere thank you to
an unexpected refuge



THE NANNY

Hailey Sanderson

All day long, she worked diligently---cooking, cleaning, entertaining, and caring for the Johnson family. Katie had always wanted to work with children, even though her mother always warned her that children were a great responsibility. Late at night, after Katie cooks supper and cleans the kitchen, she reads to the children, plays with them and puts them to bed after showering them with kisses. She prepares their clothes for the next day and hesitantly attends to Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. She loves Dylan and Lanyla, but Mr. and Mrs. Johnson? Not so much. Katie does what she has to, to keep Mr. and Mrs. Johnson satisfied. But it's worth the theatrics, because at the end of the day, she still has Dylan and Lanyla.

Katie was sitting on the couch watching tv after putting the children to sleep. In the middle of an episode of Law & Order, Dylan came stumbling in while rubbing his eyes.

"Katie?" he called.

"Yes Dylan?"

"I had a bad dream and I'm scared."

"Aww my poor baby. Come here." Katie said.

Dylan staggered over to Katie. She pulled him into her lap and rocked him to sleep, the way a cradle rocks a baby. She watched him sleep peacefully, wishing she could do the same. The last few nights Katie had a recurring nightmare that she lost Dylan and Lanyla because Mr. and Mrs. Johnson had decided to move halfway across the country.

The next morning Katie watched Mr. and Mrs. Johnson rush out of the house, the same way they do every morning. Leaving their children behind, without saying even the slightest thing to them. With a sigh, Katie prepared breakfast. The smell of biscuits brought back memories of her parents dancing and making breakfast on Sunday mornings when she was just a child. She dressed the children and took them to the park. She watched them run around on the playground, like chickens with their heads cut off.

"My, my, my, they are active! They never wear themselves out do they?" a woman said as she slid onto the bench next to Katie and saw her view.

"No they really don't" Katie said with a chuckle.

"How old are they"

"Well, Dylan is 8 and Lanyla is 4." Katie said with a smile.

"You must be a proud parent."

"Well they're not my children. I'm their nanny. But if someone said make a wish, I would wish for them to be mine. I love them so much." Katie sighed.

"I understand that."

Eventually she got up and joined them, cheerfully running around and playing tag as if she were a child herself. People were probably saying that she was crazy for sticking around with those children for so long instead of leaving and having a family of her own.

Once they arrived home, Katie changed the children into something more comfortable and a little less dirty, then started working on dinner. She'd expected Mr. and Mrs. Johnson home at 7, because they told her they would be getting off early to spend time with their children. 7 o'clock rolled around, 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock and finally at 9:30 Katie read a book about dinosaurs to Dylan and played princess' with Lanyla. She decided to play a song for them. As a child, she had learned to play piano from her mother because her mother used to sing and play to her when she was young. She then put them to sleep, making sure to give them extra kisses since their parents failed to show.

Around 10:30 Mr. and Mrs. Johnson came strolling in. "WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?! HUH? WHERE WERE YOU TWO?!" Katie screamed.

"What's all the fuss about? We told you we'd be home at 10." Mrs. Johnson claimed. Katie sighed. This seemed like the millionth time she had heard this lie.

“Listen to me, and I mean listen to me good” she pointed a finger at them, “your children have been waiting for you for HOURS. I kept them up way past their bedtime because they were expecting YOU to come home and spend time with them. You two are so absent in your own home, I don’t understand it.” Tears started to build in Katie’s eyes. “I slave away after Dylan and Lanyla. And no, I’m not complaining. I love them both more than anything, but I’m just tired of trying to think of excuses when they ask me where their mommy and daddy is. It isn’t fair. Something needs to change. Maybe take a day to rethink a few things, because I refuse to cover for you anymore. You are PARENTS. When you decide to have children, a lot of things change. It’s time for you to change. I’m done with this. Goodnight.” Katie stormed off, slamming the door behind her after entering her room.

After a few moments, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson looked at each other.

“Maybe she’s right.” Mr. Johnson stated.



THE SURFER'S APPRENTICE

Ben Lasseter

“Ready?” TJ said breathing heavily.

Walker nodded and turned his board around.

The one thing he couldn’t say was that this was going to be easy.

“Remember what I taught you, just relax and focus.”

As he paddled with long strokes towards the shore, he felt his board being lifted.

Something seemed different about this wave, something uneasy.

“This is it!” TJ yelled. They both stood up and started moving with the wave.

Other people got sucked into the current. One by one, they started to drop like flies. Soon it was just Walker and TJ. The wave was pushing hard, and Walker thought that he could handle it. His father always taught him that waxing was the most important part of preparation. Ironically, he had forgotten to wax his board that day. Walker’s foot slipped on the fiberglass while he was smiling...enjoying it a bit too much. He screamed as he toppled over and the wave pulled him in. The board knocked him unconscious. The current was just too strong. As water filled his lungs the light of the sun slowly faded away. Thump... thump... thump...

“You gotta push harder!”

Walker gasped for air as he coughed up saltwater. His eyes opened to TJ’s wild grin. Walker smiled, realizing that TJ had ridden all the way to shore. He said, “Congratulations.” before his head dropped to the sand. He fell asleep to the soothing sound of the waves and the familiar feeling of the warm sun on his face.

CRAZY

Charlyse Skipwith

Beth sat on the edge of my bed as if she'd sat there a million times before. That's the way our friendship felt. We were connected in so many ways. We understood each other better than anyone else. She flipped her dark brown hair over her shoulder and fidgeted with the bracelets stacked on her wrists. She passed me a tissue while I told her all the things my parents had said about me when they thought I wasn't listening. They thought I was messed up and they were stuck with me. They were disappointed.

"This is something you can't control. If they hold your condition against you, then oh well. You don't need them," Beth said.

"But they're the only family I have," I said sadly.

"Not anymore. I'm your family, too."

"Thanks," I said sighing, "I just wish I could be like everyone else for once."

"Trust me, you don't want to be. The world is mean and cruel. It hates us because we aren't perfect," Beth said to me. She reached into her bag beside her. She pulled out a small, decorated box and set it down in front of me. I opened the lid hesitantly as Beth smiled reassuringly. There piled inside the small tin box were almost twenty razor blades. The light coming in from the window glinted off the metal's sharp edge. My stomach churned at the sight of them.

"I know you're really sad right now, and I used to be, too. But this made me feel better, not stupid pills," Beth said to me. She rolled her shirt sleeves up to her elbows, exposing thin, red lines on her wrists. I lifted her hand closer to see the scars better. Some were faded and old while others were an angry red and new.

"I don't know, Beth," I said nervously, "This isn't right for me."

"It's easy. Just gently swipe and you'll feel better."

"Does it hurt?"

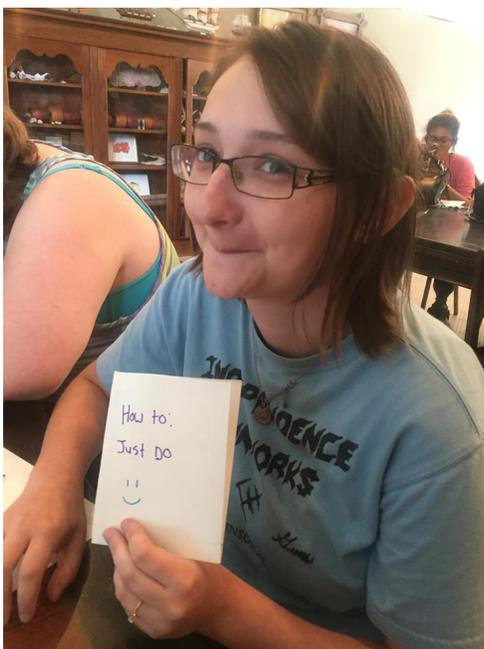
"It does at first, but then it starts to feel good, like a relief," Beth said simply. "You can trust me, Grace, remember?"

"Yeah, I trust you."

ANTI-ODE TO THE STYROFOAM TO-GO BOX

Morgan Nettles

Mr. Ray McIntire
Strumming his expanded polystyrene
Serenading my ear drum in a foreign water waltz
Strapped and restrained
Your plastic Etch-a-Sketch
Demands for my head
You play a mean game of hangman
A limb away from the end
Like a human dog whistle
Screeching with each crescendo
My toes curling at your E, two octaves too high
Leave me a fingerling carrot
In my bowl of fruit
Your gaping smile halts the music
Every curled toe goes limp





Dana Aldeeb is a freshman at Vestavia Hills High School. She excels in English but wants to go to UAB to become an orthodontist and write on the side. Dana loves to travel and has been to many places in the United States, such as Florida, New York, and Chicago, as well as Europe, visiting places like Latvia, Spain, Paris, and many more. She speaks many languages and can write with both hands, something she's been improving on since the first grade. At any chance, you'll often find her nose in a book, watching the latest new episodes on Netflix, or hanging out with her friend Stephanie. Dana's writings come spontaneously and are often balanced between poetry and fiction but she loves to discover new, different ways to write.



Anton Bennighof is an upcoming junior at Shades Valley High School. He is part of the Future Business Leaders of America. When not in school, Anton enjoys playing video games, as well as watching movies and TV shows on Netflix. When he finishes high school, he plans to attend UAB and has nothing set from that point forth.



Khrysten Bolling is a joyful and spiritual person who enjoys the beauty in other people. As a rising junior at Midfield High School, she is getting serious about her studies and her work. She wants to leave a big impact on her school and her peers. She is currently working in a girl empowerment group and is the captain of the flag team in Midfield. This is also Khrysten's third year being in the Ada Long Creative Writing Workshop. Khrysten has received awards from the state of Alabama and the governor for her musical talents. She is very active and she hates being at the house. Khrysten is a go getter and she strives for the best. Khrysten is attending Talladega University when she graduates and will have a scholarship of 8,000 dollars for her musical genius. So she has a lot on her plate.



Shelby Bradley is a graduated senior of Shades Valley High School. She's getting married in July and moving to an apartment on the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville. There she will study either Astrophysics or Environmental Engineering. Shelby enjoys playing video games. She also loves to play board games, especially Catan with her friends. Welcome to the rice fields.



Hannah Bray is a rising sophomore at Stonecreek Montessori and a first-year student at the University of Alabama's Early College. She has received one silver key, two gold keys, and a gold medal from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and placed first in the Alabama Poets Society's fall competition. In addition to her five writing awards, she is the proud owner of four pets, an extensive collection of Nightwing comic books, and a surprising amount of useless facts. Though she enjoys writing, she spends most of her time studying, playing Skyrim, and volunteering at the Birmingham Zoo. Her dream job is as a quest designer for Bethesda, combining her love of computer programming, writing, and The Elder Scrolls.



Dayton Crump is a graduate from Helena High School, and currently planning to attend Jeff State for two years before transferring to UAB. Dayton wants to major in veterinary medicine. He spends most of his free time writing, or playing with his two dogs, Apollo the Great Dane and King the Chiweenie.



Tiffany Duong is a junior at Hoover High School. She has been a featured writer in the Anthology Club for Creative Writers, is a seasoned attorney-in-training in the Law Academy, and sings in the Chamber Choir. She is such an extrovert that she not only thrives off socialization, she also enjoys writing with others as well. Tiffany's other hobbies include dancing, drawing, listening to music, watching makeup tutorials, and online shopping. She dreams of attending an Ivy League college and rescuing stray cats in the future.



Kameron Helms is a junior at the Alabama School of Fine Arts. She has won four silver keys and seven honorable mentions in the Scholastic Art & Writing Competition. She is a leprechaun but she doesn't live at the end of a rainbow and her gold is actually Lay's classic potato chips.



Dahlia Grace Henderson was born on September 11, 2001. She has one sister, two wonderful parents, one caring grandmother, and three dogs (Daisie, Dakota, and Donald). Fun fact about her--she has had a total of eight dogs in her life. She is a bright, young girl who has much to offer. Her hobbies include drawing, basketball, and playing piano. Currently, she attends Ephesus Academy and is an upcoming junior in high school. Dahlia has received many awards and accolades for the great academic things she has done. She wants to either be a hairstylist or pediatrician. Above everything, Dahlia strives to just be a great person.



Hannah Jordan is an upcoming junior at Hoover High School. She hopes to become an author and free-lance writer as an adult. Hannah has a pet chinchilla named Pinto and enjoys anything with peanut butter in it.



Ben Lasseter is a student of Homewood Middle School, going into eighth grade. He has been recognized often in classes as the best writer. He enjoys writing on a regular basis and learning new forms of writing. Fiction and realistic fiction are his favorite genres. When he isn't writing, he is playing basketball at the recreational center, hanging out with friends, learning new things, and riding bikes. When he thinks of his future, he imagines himself as a writer, going on trips around the world, and writing about his experiences. At this moment, though, he wants to major in entrepreneurship, most likely at UC Berkeley. He loves to travel, and he loves camping. He has been to Malibu, Dauphin Island, Key West, New Mexico, and even New York City for Christmas where he enjoyed ice-skating and eating cheesecake.



Samika Lewis-Jefferson is an upcoming senior at Meek High School in Middle-Of-Nowhere, USA (also known as Arley, Alabama). She wants to go to [Insert name of a good college that will actually accept her here] to major in English or creative writing and maybe minor in music. When she's not at school or writing, Samika can be found making sucky art, attempting to be somewhat skilled at her cello, or just giving up and reading a good book (probably something by Rick Riordan because let's face it, she's Percy Jackson trash). Samika wishes to be a New York Times bestselling children's author, but she'll settle for a middle school English teacher if she must.



Qadira "Mango" Miner is a student at Ramsay High School. She is a slam poet who participates in Real Life Poets.



Morgan Nettles is a rising senior at Helena High School. She is an A student who participates in her school Lit Mag Eureka, Theatre Tech, and Theatre. When Morgan isn't at school she is working as a server at IHOP, when she is not there, she is at home eating whole bags of Goldfish, binge watching anime on Netflix, and trying to get as much sleep as humanly possible.



Leah Owens is a graduate of Shades Valley High School, where she finished four years of art classes and engineering courses. She will be going to the University of Alabama in Huntsville in the fall to further pursue engineering. She enjoys drawing, creating characters, and worlds for them to live in. In her spare time, Leah plays many video games and naps a lot. She can become incredibly competitive when she plays games with other people and she hates losing. She has 6 cats split between two homes and misses them every second she isn't there.



Ebony Sanders is a rising senior at Spain Park High School. She is a part of the advanced theatre class. She is also a part of The Real Life Poets. She won her first poetry slam in April, and now will be attending San Francisco to compete in a poetry slam with her team. Her dreams are to become a writer and to help people who want to speak about how they feel but do not know how to put it in words. She enjoys singing like nobody's watching, and dancing like it's her last day on earth.



Hailey Sanderson is a wonderful name, and it belongs to a wonderful person. An upcoming junior at Ephesus Academy, Hailey has always been full of joy and she knows exactly how to make a crowd smile. Hailey plans to attend Oakwood University. She has absolutely no idea what she wants to be when she grows up, but she does know she wants to be successful. She is smart, she is kind, and she is important. By the way, you should totally follow her on instagram. (@tan.enamorado & @hailey.hds)



Charlyse Skipwith is a freshman at John Carroll Catholic High School. She enjoys reading, dancing, writing, and swimming in her free time.



Gabriel Talley is just fine. He is an upcoming senior at Arlington High School, where his favorite subjects include history and literature. When Gabriel isn't doing anything remotely useful to society (which is most of the time), he enjoys writing and composing horrible prose and poetry, expressing mountains of love for cats, and wasting his time building a comprehensive knowledge of the worst parts of the internet. However, Gabriel enjoys making his friends laugh most of all. Aside from concerning himself with trivial and frivolous things, he hopes to attend the University of Chicago, pursuing theater and comedy. Lastly, to quote famed rapper T-Pain, "They don't think it be like it be but it do."



Rickia Taylor is an upcoming senior at Hoover High. When she graduates high school, she will attend Samford University where she will major in nursing and pledge in a sorority. Rickia wants to become a nurse practitioner. At Hoover High School, Rickia plays basketball and is a peer helper, where she helps middle school and elementary kids. When Rickia is not with friends and family, she is listening to music, preferably indie or pop. She also loves movies and has Netflix on all devices. She can watch a Netflix series in two days. Rickia loves makeup and church, and is a strong believer of faith



Kaelyn Walker is an upcoming junior at Hoover High School. Her dream university is the University of Maryland at College Park. Her dream field is the study of Architectural Engineering; at least that's one of the main majors that she wants to complete first. When she's not at school, she is usually at the gym playing basketball or at home either watching basketball with her dad or Netflix. She enjoys looking for college basketball camps online with her dad and traveling with her local AAU basketball team. She enjoys the loving company of her little Shorkie named Faith at home (even when she chews on things).

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