

INSPIRATION



by

St Mary's Creative Writing Scholars, 2022

Featuring artwork by St Mary's Art and Photography students

Foreword

During the academic year 2021-2022, St Mary's creative writing scholars worked with the theme 'Inspiration'. Each term, they attended a workshop run by our Year 12 Ambassadors for Writing, Amelie and Emma. In the Autumn Term, the scholars explored music as a form of inspiration and each scholar produced a piece of writing inspired by a piece of music of their choice. With responses to Persian music, Vivaldi, Billie Eilish, and much more, the scholars have created a symphony of styles, bringing narratives and experiences to life through both poetry and prose.

The second workshop was held during Children's Mental Health week, in the Spring Term, with each scholar investigating the role of writing in understanding our mental health and exploring an array of emotions. In this second section of our magazine, you can dive into a range of emotions, from love to despair.

Each piece of writing in these first two sections of the collection features incredible artwork by St Mary's Art and Photography students. We hope you enjoy exploring the links between the writing and the art. A huge thank you to Sofia A, Masha I, Olivia B, Daria S, Irina E, Albany G, Laura C, Julia M, Frankie R and Ms Conroy!

The Summer Term saw the scholars delve deeper into the links between the visual and verbal: in their third workshop, our scholars considered art as inspiration. Each scholar chose a piece of art to consider, and, using this artwork as inspiration, they either produced poetry and prose in a descriptive style, or they used the artwork as a springboard for a narrative perspective. As the workshop developed, several scholars decided to see what would transpire if they all chose the same painting, and they have selected this collaborative approach to writing as a focus for next year's endeavours.

Our scholars have also had great success in recent competitions. Imogen C (Year 7) entered her poem 'The White Daffodils' in the Stepping into Stories competition 'Bouncing Back'; she was awarded third prize in the 8-11 category and received a £10 National Book token. Grace P (Year 9) received Highly Commended in the HART Prize for Human Rights competition, for her piece of writing 'Dead White Man's Clothes', which explored the impact of fast fashion mountains in Ghana. Eloise S (Year 9) was awarded Highly Commended in the GSA national competition 'Dear Earth', using her creative voice to address environmental issues. Furthermore, Emma B (Year 12) and Eloise S (Year 9) were awarded first and second place respectively in the CISC National competition 'Growing up', Emma for her poem 'Not Yet', and Eloise for her poem 'Growing up'. Both received book tokens and certificates from CISC. All these winning pieces of work can be read on our website. Emma has also had several poems selected for publication in magazines, such as 'We Are' and 'The Beginning', which were both published with Wingless Dreamer in January; her poem 'My Ability' was selected by the Young Writer's competition. Internally, Eva G (Year 8) won our Autumn Term *Evolution* competition, and Niamh C (Year 10) won the Spring Term *Revolution* competition. In addition, Karla C (Year 10) was awarded Highly Commended in the Eco Committee's *World Ocean Day* competition.

Whether it be matters connected to inclusion, politics, diversity, wellbeing, the environment or relationships, our scholars have shown how powerful the creative voice can be in tackling a range of challenging issues, both personal and political. We hope you enjoy reading their work.

Ms Cottingham

Inspiration 1: music

Never Mind About Us

Inspired by 'Back to Black', by Amy Winehouse

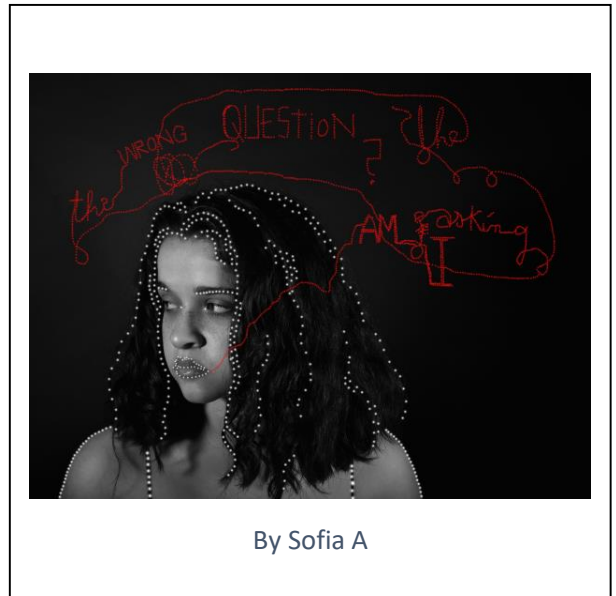
Never mind about us.
Maybe if you keep yourself busy enough
You could try to forget
Maybe you will.
I hope you will.
You know you can't regret
What you forget.

Back to abiding familiar arms
Patiently waiting, never giving up hope.
They would never forget.

Go on,
I dare you,
Try.
Replace up your
Twisted ugly Empty heart
With a fresh page.
Maybe if you fill up your existence
With clean pages till you have a whole unwritten book
You could forget.

Let me slip into smudgy shadows.
You can banish me back into the inky depths of your conscience.
Can't you?
I won't tell anyone what you did.

But I know.
That you know, with whatever pathetic scrap of soul you have left,
That you could never forget.



By Solveig S (Year 9)

She was captivating

Inspired by 'Heaven is a place on Earth', by Belinda Carlisle

She was captivating,
Elegant.
Every word she spoke sounded like a piece of heaven.
I loved her,
Everything about her made the bugs in my stomach become butterflies,
But she didn't even know I existed,
I preferred it that way,
I could observe in peace,
The way she smiled,
The way she walked,
The way she slept,
I loved her,
I loved watching her.

By Angie A (Year 8)



Happier Than Ever

Inspired by 'Happier Than Ever', by Billie Eilish

Ironing moves slowly across the board from the creased pile to the smooth.

Shirts,

His shirts,

Gloating up at the weary eyes that have to straighten out every crinkle and crease earned after an evening spent playing cards.

They must be laundered, pressed, and hung dutifully back in the closet.

In the corner a small radio plays,

It puts out an awful, tinny tune.

The mid-morning sun strikes the worn floral ironing-board cover feebly,

Outside the faint sounds of city life can be heard.

Cadillacs rumble casually over the saturated concrete,

Tinting the air with the faint aroma of gasoline and capitalism.

Inside, the noise is suppressed, as if distorted underwater.

The apartment stinks of stale cigarette smoke and cologne -

The stench seems to fall out of every pore of washed-out wallpaper, seeps from every atom of brown stitching to be found in the pallid curtains.

New fabric for drapes had been a request dismissed.

Instead, the polished chestnut liquor cabinet stands proudly in the corner,

Each vial of caramel liquid catching the 11am news.

The iron hisses and gasps for water, the traffic recedes.

The air all around is still and oppressive.

Midday heat rises through the block and feels its way under the door.

In the bedroom the sheets are changed,

Duvet cover replaced,

Pillows plumped diligently.

Cufflinks are arranged neatly on the bedside cabinet,

A dress and underwear picked out for that evening -

Red, his favourite.

In the kitchen marigolds are donned.

Linoleum and mophead meet,

Back and forth, back and forth,

Until every inch of the surface is covered with hot soapy water,

Is scrubbed clean.

On the kitchen table, a magazine is perused,

The glossy pages filled with handsomeness and hairspray.

The 12 o'clock news.

Flick.

Flick.

Flick.

In the kitchen, dirty dishes smirk gleefully,
The circular, rhythmic rasp of Brillo pad on porcelain.

Scratch.

Scratch.

Scratch.

Scratch.

An advertisement for bleach.

A backfired exhaust.

The tick of the clock in the hall.

Tick,

Scratch,

Flick.

Over, and over, and over again.

An aching lower back,

Tight shoulders,

Discontented mind.

Tick,

Scratch,

Flick.

The clank of a plate in the sink.

Marigolds dropped to the countertop.

Magazine tossed in the trash.

Groceries, Laundry, Hairspray, Lipstick, Cufflinks, Whiskey, *Ironing.*

Leaning against the countertop,

Head bowed,

A deep exhale,

A pause.

Tick.

The smash of china against plaster,

The clattering of steel cutlery on the floor,

A radio hurled against the wall,

Liquor cabinet thrown onto its side,

Broken glass,

Carpet fibres drowning in single malt,

Curtain rail torn down,

Brown material slashed.

Rage.

A rush to the bedroom,

Cufflinks strewn across the floor,

Bedding ripped from the mattress,

Dress torn,
Cigarette sought,
Nightstand tipped,
Lighter seized,
Coat snatched.
Ironing board overturned.

Door slammed.
Silence.

Shirts,
His shirts,
Left to quietly sing in this godforsaken, airless box.
The faint rumble of traffic outside.
Tick, tick, tick.

By Amelie A (Year 12)



By Masha I

ROAR

Inspired by 'Roar', by Katy Perry

In the back of the classroom
A young girl sat
Her opinions never spoken
Scared she'd be laughed at

Scared she would cause trouble
Or make a mess
Too frightened to speak up
Or confess

One day she realised she had a choice
She didn't have to be pushed around
She would make people hear her voice,
Hear her opinion loud and strong
Say what she thought
Even if she got it wrong

The people who tried to hold her back
She would resist
She wouldn't let them see her slack
Make them hear her, loud and true
Because the only person that can hold you back
Is you

By Imogen C (Year 7)



By Olivia B

Now, I fall (excerpt)

Inspired by 'Oblivion' by Halfy & Winks

Benjamin gasped, his breath catching in his throat as he peered through the cracks in his fingers covering his face. The blood dripped methodically from his father's slit neck, and Benjamin couldn't seem to grasp the terrible, terrible idea that the only person he had left to care for him was dead, and that he was completely, utterly, alone. The screams don't stop, but Benjamin thinks vaguely in the back of his head, that they should. His father held importance; he knew that much. After all, Aldasair Dalton is the King of the Aerean Lands. *Was.*

The soldier towering over his father either didn't know or didn't care, as with a flick of his hands and the sharp turn of his heel, he slid his palm across the flat of his silver sword, letting his father's scarlet blood splatter to the floor. Benjamin felt himself freeze, tears blurring his vision as he tried to make out the body of his father amidst the clump of flesh and limbs tangled together on the floor. Some tried to desperately push themselves out of the mound of bodies, but they were shoved down, screams silenced with one fell swoop of rusted metal.

Dead.

Benjamin wasn't quick enough to fall back from the window before the white mask turned, flecked with red from his father's heart, to face him. The soldier lifted a white gloved hand and waved, a sharp flick back and forth of his wrist, perfect white teeth frothing with blood, smiling. The very same smile from the posters that haunted his dreams.

Benjamin backed away from the widow, his hand clamped around his mouth, his teeth sinking into the soft flesh of his palm to keep himself from screaming. His entire body trembled, the thoughts in his head rushing, whirling, tangling themselves in his head like a ball of yarn, his fingers desperately fumbling to sort them out into smooth, neat bundles, but it's all falling apart, the yarn slipping through his clumsy hands, and he is falling away, falling-

"Ben?"

Benjamin turned away from the window, forcing his hands to fall to his sides. Tears still slipped down his face, but he tried to hide them, anyway. His little brother Theodore stood just a foot away, his small face scrunched with worry. His lower lip trembled uncontrollably, and a filthy, torn fabric dangled from the ends of his fingertips. Even through war, that toy would never separate itself from the boy's hands.

"Theo." Benjamin rushed to his brother, wrapping his thin arms around his trembling figure. He noticed the dampness spreading on his shoulder, but Benjamin still couldn't stop the shaking of his tired limbs. He didn't know what to do. He had just lost one of the people he had loved most in the world, and the tightness in his chest and the unevenness of his breaths didn't seem to want to go away. But he needed to be strong for his family, the ones he had left. He could forget about golden afternoons with the sweet music of his father's guitar, and flowers gently braided into his hair, and the breathless, exhilarating races through the palace gardens with his brother Theo. He needed to be strong for him, for Tobias. It was just them now.

"Ben, what's going to happen? Where's dad? When can we leave here?" Theodore managed to make out thin words through his shuddering breaths, his voice muffled on Benjamin's shoulder.

"Don't think about that now, Theo. Go back to Toby, don't leave him alone." Benjamin smoothed the back of his head, gently dragging his shaking hands through Theodore's hair. They sat there together as the shrieks and thundering footsteps of a couple thousand soldiers bled their pain-filled tune through the stone walls.

"I'm scared," Theodore whispered, voice thick and slurred.

"Me too."

A loud crash echoed through the castle, temporarily silencing the terrifying chaos outside. Benjamin leaped to his feet the same time Theodore shrieked, his shrill five-year-old's voice reverberating around the room, bouncing off the walls. Benjamin clapped his palm around his brother's mouth, his heart beating at a thousand miles per hour. He strained his ears, trying to ignore the soft whimpers coming from his brother's mouth underneath his hand.

"Shh, Theo," Benjamin whispered, his eyes wide. They stayed still for two moments, though the time seemed to stretch on and on and on. Just as Benjamin let himself relax, he heard it. Amidst the noise bleeding through the walls, he heard it. The thud, thud, thud, of heavy metal boots on crooked stairs.

It took everything for him not to scream. Instead, he took Theo's hand and pulled him up from the floor, ignoring his sharp exhale of pain.

"Theo, Theo, come back to the wardrobe- no, stop crying! You can't make any noise," he muttered harshly, pulling his brother's wrist towards the direction of the wardrobe, a tall, imposing thing that took up almost half of the space of the turret attic. With shaking fingers, he unlocked the rusted golden clasp, pulling the door open. He swept aside the pile of fur coats stacked messily on their smooth mahogany hangers, and with a last tug he forced the doors closed. He slid down the wooden inside of the wardrobe, reaching over to gently pick up Tobias in his arms. The little baby was sleeping peacefully, his fingers curled into fists. Benjamin studied his face, looking at the small curl of his lips, a half-smile lighting up his sleeping face. A sudden, fleeting thought of hatred gripped his heart in a terrible, crushing weight. How could he lay there, sleeping, happy, when their father was dead? Gone? Succumbed to the earth, damp with blood?

Once, he had been told, in a room half obscured with shadows, that it was a stupid idea to close the door of the wardrobe once you were inside. But Benjamin couldn't find it in him to care. If the wardrobe ended up being the thing that tightened the noose around his neck and watched him swing, then so be it. The thought of the tip of a silver sword pressed against his chest, and his slippery blood joining the flowing rivers made up of the thousands of bodies piled, stacked against each other outside, the dull eyes of his father peering up at the sky without seeing-

Theo's half sob brings him back to the dust tickling his nose and the very real rush of the blood pounding through his veins, beating the song of life. Benjamin wanted to slap himself. He couldn't space out now, not when it mattered the most. He tugged Theo's sleeve, shaking his head wildly at him, his finger pressed tightly to his lips.

"Theo, *please...*"

The creaking sound of floorboards slowly began to cut through the noise outside, the slam of the boots on the wooden stairs seemed to pound in time with his heart. He reached one of his hands held onto Tobias towards Theo, interlocking their fingers together. Tears pricked at the corners of his eyes, and his breathing began to pick up, and he wanted to sob, he wanted to inhale the dusty air into his lungs because he couldn't breathe, and they were going to die-

The footsteps reached outside the door to the attic, creaking the loose floorboard Benjamin had long since remembered to avoid. The unmistakable groan of the heavy iron cast door being pulled open, the weight of a human body creeping along the floor rang deep in his ears. Benjamin yanked his hand out of Theo's grip, pressing it hard against his mouth to muffle the whimper caught in his throat. Benjamin hated himself for it, but he began to cry. His tears dripped hot and fast from the corners of his eyes, his breaths deep and shuddering and painful, his fingernails digging into the soft skin of his cheeks to contain the pitiful sound as much as he could. He felt Theo trembling by his side, saw Toby held tightly in his shaking hands. 'Please don't find us,' Benjamin thinks desperately, grip tightening around Theo and Toby. 'They aren't even six yet.'

Suddenly the footsteps stopped. Benjamin could feel their presence right on the other side of the door. It was too late; they had been found. He closed his eyes, holding on to his last hope before-

The golden lock rattled as it was hooked open, impossibly loud in his ears.

As the door opened and brown eyes locked with red, Tobias began to cry.

The moment of silence in between dragged for far too long, all hitched breaths and terrible, terrible fear.

"You're so young," the soldier finally stated in a flat, monotone voice, his scarlet eyes sweeping across the tangle of trembling limbs. Small trails of silver hair were pulled out from a long, intricate plait snaking down his back, and wet mud and dried blood streaked down his metal armour.

"Are you going to kill us?" Benjamin whispered, looking up at the axe gripped in his pale hand, choosing to ignore the blood dripping rhythmically from the sharpened edge.

"No, Ben. Your father, Aldasair? I owed him a favour. I'm here to save you."

And Benjamin, with the adrenaline still pumping fiercely in his veins, his eyes blurry with tears, and each hand weakly holding on to his two brothers, looked up at his red eyes and saw honesty. He was tired, incredibly tired, and he wanted to feel safe again.

He hoped he wouldn't end up with a knife in the back.



By Masha I

Before My Eyes

Inspired by 'Never Tear Us Apart' by INXS and 'Take Me to Church' by Hozier.

"As long as gay people don't have their rights all across America, there's no reason for celebration."

- Marsha P Johnson, she/her

Mx Eduardo Independa, he/him

Children, it is time we celebrate. My life is not and therefore shall not be represented by a number on a sheet, by a plot in a field, by an unknown story excluded from the textbooks that impress my great grandchildren. I am here with the rest of you. But laying in this hospital bed will not be the last time I am seen.

Margaret looms above me, her porcelain skin paler than the ghost mocking me but her aura glowing the vivacious pink mine lacks. She reminds me of my daughter for her fragile soul and tenderness. Tandra, the cardinal of the four children I bore, whose first word regifted me the life sabotaged with stretch marks and milked breasts that repaired the glass ceiling separating society and me. *Daddy*.

She reminds me of my first Child, who was exterminated from her home for dancing until her heart's content to the chagrin of her former mother's actual daughters. Charity Independa's spirit elongated lives by more years than you can count on all your fingers and toes and only God knows my mind would be too jumbled today to remember the Children from my earliest years as a Father - especially those who began their own Houses and have since blessed me with Grandchildren - had it not been for the peace of mind she provided by calling me *him* from the very start of my journey as a mere spectator at a ball. Never again did I feel like a nuisance with her shield of confidence protecting me to the grave nearly eight years after our paths employed different directions.

Margaret's temper reminds me of the smile lines I am cursed with from the streets being devoured by pride flags every month of the year, the ropes they were secured with dry-rotting before the era of love reached its completion. By the end of my life, there is no such thing as inequality. Black lives are accepted and trans men are men. My children go to school and my husband welcomes me home at the end of a good day's work from the accounting firm. My doctor need not correct himself for he made no mistake, and my surgery costs are covered. Each morning, in this eightieth year of my life, a grin reappears on my face and the average day is no longer despicably average.

This nurse reminds me of my second son - a successful and integral member of our community, like my boy, whose go-lucky spirit sparked a fire in other children's eyes second and in my kitchen first. She never leaves my eyesight as she paces to and fro in the room, as if waiting for my cessation, like an inmate awaiting their sentence.

These gray hairs are not the only thing that timelines my adventurous life and its bittersweet end, but they are the main site for my grandchildren and Grandchildren standing besides Margaret and the doctors. Beautiful, happy, passing people I am proud to celebrate for existing. Educated, opinionated, progressing people that I am regretful for being born too early to see live out their time on this Earth. Today is Margaret's birthday, she said, and the children chant *happy birthday* on an endless loop. As they giggle and tease I join in, eager to leave this world a different way than I entered.

The light has never shined as bright as the memories that flash before my eyes.

And before the darkness.

RN Margaret Gossle, she/they

Her number: 2516247.

“Any family?”

I scribble “none associated” without receiving the unnecessary response.

“Any possessions?”

I indicate her “beaten rucksack” without need for further investigation.

Her plot: *unspecified pneumonia ward* on Hart Island.

My eyes wander from the toe I tag beneath my gloved fingers to her face.

The last beads of sweat escape from her ice-hot and Blackened skin, hiding the phlegm stains on the bedsheets of her predecessors. It is a sight to see, the artistry lain in my possession.

Another day, another twenty-two-year-old lost to the system, another smile defeated by the light and another story confused with another’s and another’s.

“I won’t forget your story, Lucille de León,” I whisper.

A sheet covers her body but nothing keeps her from being seen.

I won’t let AIDs keep you from living the life you would’ve. The days you dreamt of. A part of the society you worked so hard to make.

Today is my birthday and a cake is being baked for pick-up as I stand in awe of the bodiless soul I encounter here. But there is nothing to celebrate.



By Emma B (Year 12)

The Remembering

Inspired by 'Happier Than Ever' (instrumental), by Billie Eilish

He wasn't like that when I met him. It's funny to think there was a time I loved him for the right reasons. The twisted appreciation of him when he wasn't hurting me. My stupid praising of him when he stayed sober for long enough where we could have the shortest conversation with no screaming.

No one taught me what love was supposed to feel like. Before I met him, I would have loved anyone who showed me the smallest bit of affection. The gifts and the kisses after our fights fooled me for too long. Him buying me that same vase he smashed over my head was like covering a bullet wound with a plaster. It was never going to last, and in the end, it was still going to kill us.

You wasted so much of my time. Time I didn't have. To think I was carving hours out of my life just so I could spend them with you. It's not like you ever showed up anyway. All those candlelit dinners I planned. The special things I did just to try and make you happy.

Everything was about you. Never me. The amount of time I spent worrying over you- knowing you were driving home to me drunk. That's what hurts the most. I knew you were the cause of so much of the sadness in my life- and I still had it in my head that I loved you. At some point, it had to have stopped, but looking back- my love for you should have faded long before it did.

I guess that's the thing about love. It blinds you to the point you have no awareness of what's going on around you. With him, I was so trapped. I was being abused, and the craziest part is I never even realised it. When I finally confronted everything, it was like opening a door to a tsunami on the other side. Everything I had shut out came flooding inside- and what was worse is I was still drowning. Only this time, I had a way to the surface.

For my sake, I hope I learn to love again. Trusting another person with your heart isn't easy when you've only just stolen it back from somebody who neglected it so much. I'm not in a rush, not like I was when I met him. I always thought that once you and another person fell in love, you had to prove it with rings and a white dress. The problem with two people loving each other- is it never seems to last. You can never go back to that perfect, beautiful time when you first fell for each other. Once that first stage of infatuation wears off- you get a few choices. You can evolve with that love- creating a beautiful life with that other person. You could let it go- realising you could never work in the real world. Or you could do the foolish thing I once did- and change nothing, because you thought if you did- you'd never find anyone as good ever again.

I'll never get back the people I had to let go of to please him. But I can hold the people I have left even closer to me.

I wish I could say I hope you'll find happiness. I really do. That seems like the kind of thing you should always end a marriage with. That ounce of closure might have been what we both needed to stay the hell out of each other's lives. I hope one day I can look back at my life with you as nothing more than a dream. My mother says you made me grow as a person- but I can't say I'm grateful.

I suppose what I'm really wishing for you is that you find a woman who you can appreciate. I hope you dote on her, and never lay a hand on her. Unlike what you did for me, I hope you make her happy. The truth is- we were never bad people. At the end of the world, we'll both still just be two young idiots who were stupid enough to believe that true love was real. As Armageddon approaches, I'm willing to bet you'd still have a drink in your hand.

*So good luck, is all I can say to you. You'll need it if you think you'll ever be happy. Saying you weren't the bad guy was my final kind act towards you. You are kidding yourself if you think you'll ever be anything but the villain in this chapter of my life. Just **this** chapter though. Because if you think for a second- you'll play any part in any of my chapters to come- you are sorely mistaken.*

Here's your last name back, I hated it anyway.

∞

*I'd like to imagine there's a happy ending for her somewhere in one of those last chapters-
-but I suppose that's not for us to know.*

By Niamh C (Year 10)



Porcelain

Inspired by 'Porcelain', by Lambert

As I sit across from her,
Rain taps the window
Pencil taps the tax papers
We sit
In dim lighting

Traces of her breath
Exhale winter
Traces of joy, in our tracks
As we'd collide on the ice
Fingertips numb and the trees'd sway around us
Our stadium

Her sunglasses reflect
My joyous mood
We'd skip the pebbles across the shore
No occasion
And no persuasion

As I sit across from her,
The coal sits cold and waiting
For a spark
I kick the dust
Under the sofa,
Then put the kettle on.



By Daria S

By Eva G (Year 8)

Storm

Inspired by 'Storm' by Vivaldi

Calm. Peace between the sea and the sky. Harmony uniting the rippling waves and rough jagged rocks. The eye of the tempest. Before the storm. A silver crack through the ebony sky, closely followed by the earth trembling rumble of thunder, signaling the beginning of a new era. An age of war.

What started in silence was now raging in battle as the heavens opened, lashing the rough waves with hail and sleet, a howling gale whips the trees while sand is thrust into the tumultuous whirlwind. Nothing is still or silent and looks as if it never had been. Everything was twisting and twirling, whistling and wailing; blurring together the sea, sky and sand until everything was unrecognizable. Far away in the distance, a beam of light shines steadily through the sea spray, like a ray of hope desperately trying to disperse the darkness. Shouts and hollers from people in the town nearby can be heard over the crashing of waves as people desperately try to find shelter from the unforgiving weather. Sea spray collides with the jagged rocks, which stood like warriors, rising above the wrathful waters. Creek... A tree which stands as a line of first defense sways dangerously, leaning, reaching for support from its fellow soldiers which stood tall and proud, struggling but holding its own courageously against storm which seemed to have calmed ever so slightly.

With a final crack of lightning which forked through the starless night, the howling of the wind abruptly halted. As if deterred by the lightning which seemed to be sent to bring peace once again to the battered sea front. Waves still crashed against the rocks and cliff face but with less severity, as if it had lost all will power and energy within the space of seconds.

Once again it was calm, as if nothing ever happened. Something did happen however and that was shown by the fallen branches, leaf covered sand littered with fish and seaweed. I know I should end with a full stop but I want to end with a semicolon instead, in hopes that this is not the end and just the start of new times. Times where peace can once again be found and hope can rule anew.



By Irina E

By Abigail H (Year 10)

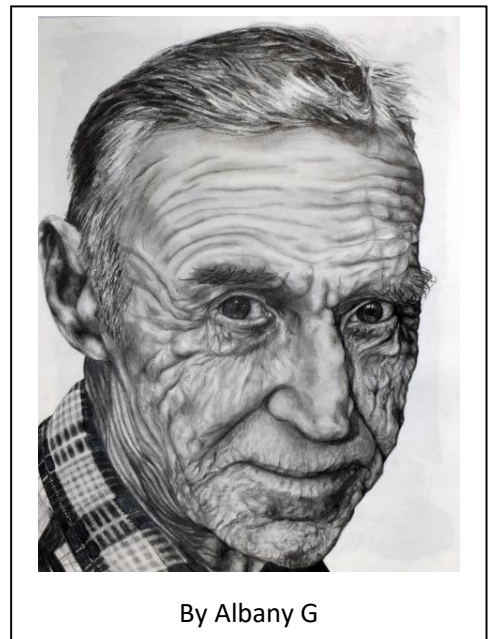
Persia

Inspired by Persian Music

Turmeric and paprika piled up in copper dishes, on display for those who pass, every once in a while, a sweltering gush of summer wind knocks over the perfect pyramid of the spices as the top topples down like rockfalls. Shimmering metals: pots, pans and cutlery hang from twisted twine ropes which abrade your skin with a stroke- they hang loosely with a pendulum swing. The eclectic mixtures of the rich edibles ignited an insatiable fire for my appetite, their vibrant hues so luminous that their tastes evolved in my mouth. Eden-red apples stacked perfectly tall and neat, high enough to catch the highest glimpse of sunlight from outside this cave market as the shy rays nosily peak through the hundred-year-old cracks in the ceiling to observe the parade of customers. Shopkeepers stand tall, guarding their stacks of herbs and jars of syrups like a Queen's crown jewels while maintaining a guise of stoic calm; yet harmony of the jingle of coins and rustling of chalky cash summon up a rare smirk of delight upon their faces.

In a peculiar corner filled with a potent aroma of oak wood and sawdust, an old man sat in tranquillity amongst the chaotic hubbub selling nothing but rosary beads and treen objects. His back was hunched, so severely curved, and his clothes lazily draped around his antique self. He sat on a creaky wooden chair, and in front of him sat an intricate marble chess board on an equally creaky wooden table. His aged fingers- scattered with a network of lines and spots- hovered around the chess pieces as he contemplated his next move. A thousand thoughts floated behind his wizened mask, and he perused the game with his heavily lidded eyes, glazed with a lifetime's worth of wisdom. His concentration was beguiling.

I was redirected from the old man's stall by my mother's tugging hand. As afternoon ripened into evening, warm, amber rays fell low, and an eerie nothingness layered outside but the hustling reigned on inside- perpetuated conversations of bargaining and promotions. The cool winds washed over me and- although refreshing from the suffocating torrid afternoon- it signalled the hour of departure as nightfall awakened. We traced our steps back to the entrance, walking along the stone path now slippery from the bucketful of splashes that cleansed and prepared the bazaar for the tomorrow. We passed more vendors who boasted their goods; every so often I would espy tiled signs in elegant cursive on cracked, teal backgrounds. And to think that those same antique signs, so long ago, served the function as they did now: to lead us out and release us into civilisation.



By Hana (Year 11)

Renya

Inspired by 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' by Malia J

The court was deadly silent, barely concealed dislike hanging like a gas in the apathetic, stagnant air. The room dripped with embellishments and jewels, giving off a scent of luxury. The thrones at the furthest end of the room glittered in the shadows from the overhang. However, the room was coated in dust. It didn't help that the air was so thick with the daggers that everyone was glaring that it was like walking through a battlefield. On the left, the door to the war room was ajar, giving everyone a glimpse of the green baize table, heaped with maps and tiny figures of battalions. The aroma of war was in the air. The king sat stiffly, the queen at his right-hand side. One of the advisors diligently ignored them, studiously reading a casualty list that was horribly long, hanging at his feet.

Staring listlessly at the ceiling, Princess Renya De Castell picked apart the embroidered edge of her seat. Her parents glared out at the assembled court. The advisor coughed awkwardly. Ladies in jewels and swathes of silk yawned petulantly, as if the war council was nothing more than a dull summer party. Scuffing her slippered feet on the floor, Renya listened to the rain slapping down on the roof of the palace, and watched it trickle down the glass. Conversation stuttered, fluttered like a dying butterfly, took a feeble breath, and died.

With a crash, the vast bejewelled doors flew open. A cloaked man strode in, shaking water from his clothes. Snapping at his heels were wisps of shadow that broke free and paced around the room. Someone gave a little scream. Lord Malachys flattened his dark hair, flecked with grey, and bowed low before the king and queen. Soldiers streamed in behind him from the open doors, bowing to their monarchs. Renya noticed the soldiers were bloodied, their weapons damaged, and clothes charred. Whispers of *shadow puppeteer* danced around the hall, the title that followed Malachys wherever he went.

"Mon *Korol*, mon *Koroleva*."

Malachys never took his hand from his staff, Renya noticed. Yana had once said there was a sword hidden inside, that he slid it out to kill people. Yana was an idiot, but the image of the shadower gutting a traitor with a walking-stick sword had never left Renya's mind.

"Lord Malachys," replied the queen. "What is going on? You are an hour late."

An hour late to a three-year-late meeting. Malachys had been fighting on the front lines for three years.

Malachys tapped the cane on the ground, eyeing the battered regiment lined up in the throne room. The shadow animals bared their teeth at the queen. "We were attacked, mon *Koroleva*."

Whispers whirled like sparks in the wind in the stuffy room. *Attacked? By whom? Drjstjen soldiers would never dare attack Arcelia's shadow puppeteer.* The whispers spread like wildfire, but Malachys slammed his cane to the ground with a crash and the room fell silent. Malachys commanded a room like no-one else. Every eye was on him.

"A Kasa battalion. They were waiting for us."

"Does this mean Kasa-Khys has sided with Drjsja?" The king's voice was level, but his eyes were wide.

Blurring out of the conversation, Renya stared into the Malachys's collection of soldiers and servants. The shadows made it hard to see, but...

With a jolt of recognition, she felt the shock lance through her. Kay. He stood with the servants, wearing his father's colours. Only Malachys wore *total* black like that, inky garments like light had been sucked from them. Renya shivered. She hadn't seen Kay since they were... oh, twelve, thirteen. The last time she had seen him, Malachys had been pulling them apart. She could still remember it.

"I don't want to go!"

The front lines were no place for children. Malachys knew it. Biting down on her fear of the shadower, Renya had run to her friend, dodging Malachys's servants. She'd been so angry. Eventually, the shadow puppeteer had caught them. It was the first time anyone had hit her.

"Act your age!"

Three years had changed her best friend. His smile was gone, for one. Renya wondered if he'd even recognise her. But it was the shadow creatures snarling at his feet, massive dark shapes that bared their fangs and pawed at the ground with smoky claws, that made Renya's blood run cold.

Malachys's voice dragged her back into the present. The commander knelt before the monarchs, fingers gripping his cane so tightly his knuckles turned white.

"I beg you, mon *Korol*. Let me teach the soldiers. Arcelia could have an army of shadowers. We wouldn't have to send our sons and daughters to die at the hands of Drjstjen armies."

"No."

"Mon *Korol*, how low is the conscription age? Fifteen? Give me a chance."

"No." the king's voice reverberated around the room. "What happened *last* time you tried to teach your *gift*?" the king sneered the last word. *Not so much a gift as a curse*, Renya thought.

Malachys stared down at the floor as if he could burn a hole in it with his eyes.

"Mon *Korol*-"

One of the advisors stood up and glared haughtily at Malachys.

"The king said no. It wasn't long ago that shadowers were hunted like the witches you are, was it, shadow puppeteer?"

Malachys froze at the diminutive name. The shadower stood up very slowly. The shadow animals slunk towards the crowd, and shadows coiled in the corners of the room. The lights flickered. Rain lashed the windows, and the whole room seemed to grow dark as shadows crept across the lanterns. The darkness swelled, twining round the ankles of the crowd. Soldiers gripped their weapons. A young officer swiped her musket through a shadow creature, but it simply turned to smoke.

"I beg your pardon?" Malachys's voice was deadly quiet. Renya noticed Kay stiffen as more of his father's shadow creatures burst into being, snapping at the advisors. Someone cried out in fear, and the queen's icy features grew hard.

"Shadower!"

As soon as it had started, the onslaught stopped. Malachys dragged his features into a terrifying approximation of a smile.

"Mon *Koroleva*. Mon *Korol*. I hope we can... *discuss* this matter in due course?" Only the shadow puppeteer would be able to sound polite and murderous at the same time. The king and queen exchanged an angry glance. Renya stared around at the terrified crowd, at the battered soldiers, at the resentful monarchs, at the grimacing shadower, at her former friend. The king drew in a long breath.

"Yes, shadower. We will *certainly discuss* this later."

And with that, it was over. The whole room let out a breath they hadn't realised they'd been holding. The monarchs stood up and stalked from the room, followed by their entourage of servants and soldiers. Malachys was left fuming in the centre of the room wearing a crown of whispers. The crowd ambled out and streamed through the passageways of the palace. Renya cast a glance at Kay, wishing to talk to her former best friend. But Malachys dragged his son from the room in a whirl of black silk, and his soldiers rushed after him. Trying hard to walk regally, Renya burst from the throne room, mind whirring. She heard snatches of conversations in the corridors, but she walked too fast to catch more than .

Shadow puppeteer... threatened the king... unnatural witch... Kasa-Khys joined the war...



By Sofia A

Striding into her chambers, Renya slammed the doors behind her and let out a long sigh, Malachys's performance burned into her mind. Long skeins of shadow curled from her fingertips, breaking free and whirling into shadow creatures at her feet. One pawed at her leg as she stared out at the rain-streaked windows, shadow drifting from her hands. No-one could know that their princess was blessed- or cursed- with the same gift as their shadow puppeteer. No-one could know.

By Grace P (Year 9)

COMFORTABLY NUMB

Inspired by 'Comfortably Numb', by Pink Floyd

She plays on a rooftop
A rooftop she knows well
Power ledge she called it
10 years ago, when she,
Had never seen power before.

Its hers, the rooftop and the city.
She plays but they can't hear,
She doesn't want them to.
She is on top, she is winning.
The sky, the chimneys, the pigeons are all hers

As red and yellow fade to pink,
They stain the clouds with them,
Falling to below the horizon,
Tired from fighting gravity
But she's not tied by gravity.
She's just flying.

By Eloise S (Year 9)



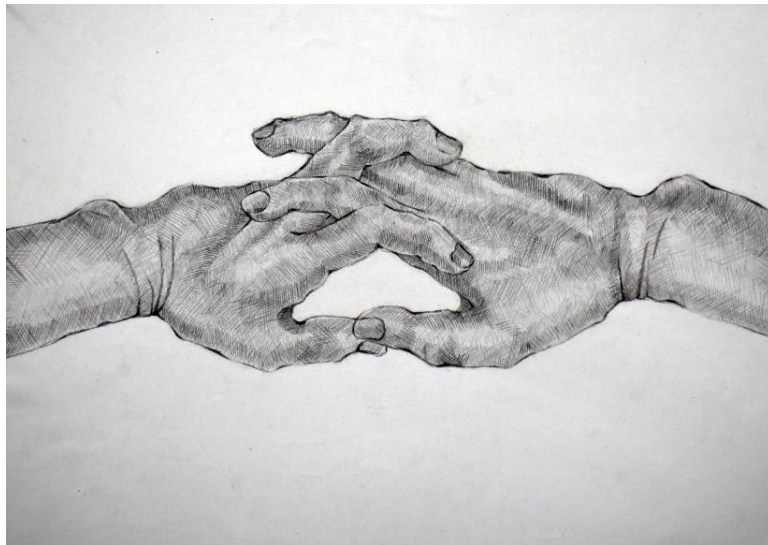
By Laura C

Inspiration 2: The emotions

Comfort, Nowhere

The misery drenched me
down deep,
down deep,
where I froze in the quiet
of my self-pity,
weeping on the shoulder
of a pillow's 'comfort',
when my friend lay beside
the door I have shut,
with a picture we took in happy times.
Holding their hand is a return of our rhyme.

By Eva G (Year 8)



By Daria S

April Hibiscus (Infatuation)

I tried writing this a thousand times. I was ready to tell you everything I love about you. And then I realised that everything that is happening right now is absolutely terrifying to me- or maybe it is exciting, and I am just incapable of separating the two emotions. I am nervous when I'm around you- but in the best way possible. You make me realise that butterflies in my stomach aren't always a bad thing. And after I talk to you- I hate myself for being anxious- because it's not even related to you. It's the fact that everything is always worse at night and I don't know how to change that. Because right now you are the most perfect and amazing part of my life and I don't want to mess things up between us. When I have a bad day- your smile makes me feel better. When I am sad- instantly the melancholy melts away when you text me. And maybe that's why I am listening to sad music right now- because the bad feelings were just waiting for you to leave so they could swallow me whole. My parents have always told me I can't handle change- but never has that been more apparent than now. I cope by relying on the constants. The things incapable of changing. With you- everything is always changing. But always for the better. Each day we make progress, and as happy as it makes me in the moment- the night anxiety is always ready to tear apart my joy.

I cannot count the times I have stressed over you- during that awkward back and forth stage when we were both too shy to say how we felt. But somehow, even though you are as clueless as me sometimes, you know exactly what to do.

The first time I ever properly complimented you was your eyes. I always noticed them- the lighting when we talk on the train is perfect. They are green- properly green. I have a photo of you lying on the grass- and I could swear your eyes are the same colour as the grass. And I am sorry for ruining your sleep schedule- but I would argue that if anything that's really your fault. You knew what you were getting you were getting yourself into. But you've never complained. So I shouldn't really hold you accountable when you never blamed me in the first place. Maybe I'm rambling a bit now- yet somehow these sentences strung together still make more sense than half the stuff I say on a daily basis.

If any of this sounds like a goodbye- don't think you are escaping me that easily. Think of this as... my love letter to you for hopes of only the best things to come for you and me. So please be gentle with my heart, because I am trusting you with it. And in return- I will take great care with yours.

By Niamh C (Year 10)



By Sofia A

Regret

Kicking curbs when the ticking clocks,
Hurling mad for night has topped,
and it's too late
to clip the ends, fraying fabrics
of a work's no end
These, the means to my end.

My undertow is thee:
gulping a mass - the pit sinking low,
where all hopes drop
and I know no stop.
For I left stones unturned,
skin still lining,
numbing the doubt of trips spent hiding
Missing the pieces to, perhaps,
a bittersweet end.



By Daria S

By Eva G (Year 9)

Mixed Emotions

“Guilty...guilty...guilty...guilty...” I peeked at Jem: his hands were white from gripping the balcony rail, and his shoulders jerked as if each ‘guilty’ was a separate stab between them.”

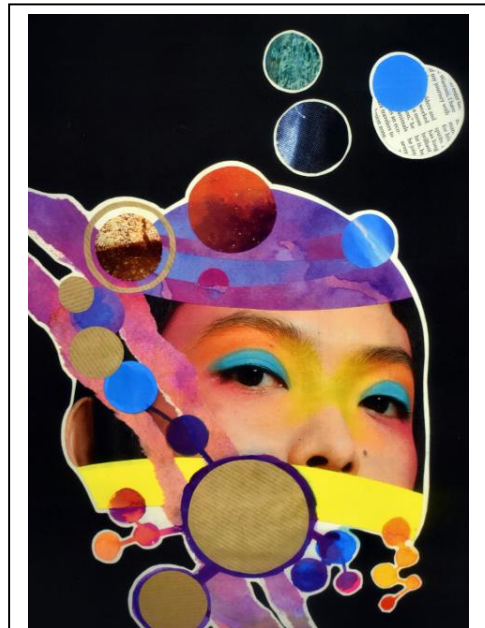
Scout Finch, To Kill a Mockingbird

I am not one of the primary emotions that people are born with. I am one that people meet at various points in their lives. I meet Scout now, and I know I will again. I make her confused, shocked, and I know that it will take her a long time to figure out what I am. To realise that what Jem is feeling is in fact the same emotion because I come in many forms. It is wrong is what I tell her, it's not just. I yell that it should have taken 5 minutes to come to the right answer, a child can see the truth, so why can't the adults. I make her feel scared, I keep her from really taking in what happened. As a child her heart is constantly seeking the truth and this lie that is causing an innocent man a sentence means that I am running through her blood like a virus, I will not leave until she faces me. I will leave a scar, but also a lesson and a cause to fight for. I am pain.

“Remember, Mia had said: sometimes you need to scorch everything to the ground and start over. After the burning the soil is richer, and new things can grow. People are like that, too. They start over. They find a way. She thought of Mia now and her eyes began to burn and she scraped the first match against the side of the box.

Izzy Richardson, Little Fires Everywhere

I have visited her often. I have always been there, hidden in her fear. I have exploded in her stomach when her mother locks her in her room, I have taken over her head when the whole world seems to come crashing down against her. But never have I taken over her so completely like in this moment. I am the throbbing in her head, I am the itching in her fingers, I am the fireworks in her stomach, the urgency in her legs; to run, to go, to escape. I am the voice in her head whispering those words. Those fears. I am reminding her of the bars of the cage that close in. I am reminding her of the ocean of hate she swims through every day and I am telling her that there is no other way. Because that is what I do. I don't always like myself for it. But sometimes Mia is right, people need to start over, and I am the thing that pushes people to change, so I do not regret my actions, I am pushing her to change her life. I am desperation.



By Daria S

*“Once out there, she was living in a tree. No one upstairs, downstairs or across the way could see her.
But she could look out through the leaves and see everything.”*

Francie Nolan, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn

She has such a heart, the kind of heart that her father had, that her mother and her aunts have, a heart that won't tire from me. I am in all her thoughts of life. When she sees her world which some might call poor, as a world of answers I am with her. When she delves into books she falls into the love of another world, when she hears her father singing, she forgives his sins and worships him as the most loving father in the world I am there. I am found in every part of her, there is not an inch that would turn from me. I am love.

*“It looked like a cascade of miniature umbrellas. Lifting it with both hands he considered it's beauty.
Then, in gratitude, Neftalí gazed up at the great tree that had bestowed such a treasure. “Thank you,”
he whispered.”*

Neftalí Reyes, The Dreamer

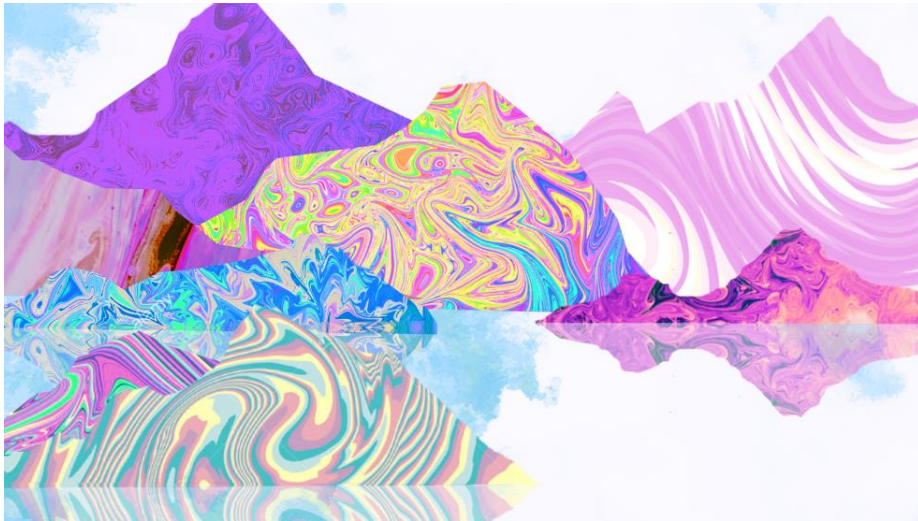
I am a constant in his tiny, fragile body. He is awed by all that he sees, he finds beauty in the most unexpected of places. I flow through him at the sight of a beetle or at the sound of the word locomotive. I listen with him when the rain patters on the roof or the sea crashes at his feet. When someone else walks past a single lost boot they see nothing, when Neftalí walks past I am present immediately and he takes the lonely shoe for his own. I turn his world often from a normal, boring and even irritating one, to a treasure trove, a map where around every corner there is an x marking the spot. It is seldom that I am not there with him, in the back of his mind, even when fear takes over, because his connection with me will be there forever. He is a wonderer, curious in every way, he bothers to ask where the unfinished staircase leads, he is astonished by the unknown. I am rapture.

By Eloise S (Year 9)

Enchanted

Lemony lavender bubbles float down the glistening stream. Sunlight pours through a lacy tangle of ancient trees, showering the damp lime coloured grass in dappled light. Tiny daisies and marigolds peek through mounds of spongy emerald moss, like sparkling jewels nestled in the dirt. The cheerful, bright cheeping of bluebirds cuts through the soft, gloopy plop of water from the dew glazed scarlet toadstools. As I lie there, leaning against the cool hard wood of an oak tree, I feel relaxed and calm, yet with a niggling sense of anticipation. There is a bush next to me, one willowy branch extending out towards my fingers. Strangely, it is adorned with both juicy purple blackberries and plump greengages. I feel myself reaching out, to pluck one of the fruits, the forest seems to hold its breath... almost... like it's enchanted...

By Solveig S (Year 9)



By Daria S

Grief

A deep black hole awaits us.

We are falling and we don't know how to stop.

A pain in our hearts that will never go.

Why should the flowers still bloom bright?

Why should people smile and laugh?

Why should trees still grow?

Why should life still go on?

Why do people tell me there is light in this dark when I can't see it?

A deep black hole awaits us.

By Lily S (Year 7)



By Frankie R

Freedom of the Trapped Heartbeat

(Love)

A friendly glint of colour blooms over a simple bud nestled in the cold earth
A new, wakened feeling spreads warmth and a wild curiosity of wandering minds and
Soft little butterflies that flutter in the early morning mist of hopeful dreams.

A glistening field of green, the tender flower shivers in the bitter cold
The sun, mellow and kind and so familiar
Need is what takes over, a desperate reach for that soft warmth of the heart.

Perfection unwillingly gives way to imperfection, and so the vile weeds begin to subtly grow
A pungent eyesore from the gentle humility and joyfulness of the alluring blossom
Which happily thrives in the warming light of love and blissful ignorance.

A docile bloom, a soft hue of red that colours the wet dirt
Innocence and tenderness swallowed by the raging stream
A flood of emotions, love the gentle flower drowned by envy, the crushing weight of hurt.

But the clouds thicken and surge forward in a fierce, unfeeling army of
Unspoken whispers and harboured thoughts, corrosive feelings, and weathered love
A bond so perfect, such beauty in subtle colours of spring, quietly perishing.

The once glowing petals wither and drown in a torrent of odd words
Slashing and slaughtering and dying until coloured blossoms
Struggle for breath under the angry earth and vengeful winds of weathered insults.

A quiet drip, drip, drip of blue, sunken drops escapes a canopy of deep grey
A shadowed filter dulling the quivering leaves from the lightness hidden
Just above the sombre, suppressed rumbling of the sky of sadness.

A hidden shiver hunches the weakened stem, shying hatefully away
From familiarity, from warmth, from the beautiful lullaby of safety
Because each hateful drop of acid stings in an agonising pattern of disgusting slander.

The pattering of resentment sluggishly parts to a lighter grey, a quiet in-between of simple listening
It is calm, it is hushed, and it is almost as perfect as the wild, wonderful beginning
The tired, weakened flower feels the warmth once again in a peaceful sobriety of acknowledgment.

And softened colours of a rainbow emerge from beneath those hateful thorns
The compromise, a sought-after comfort from the storm
Long and tiresome though it was, fresh and brightened colours wave once again from under the wet dirt.

By Karla C (Year 10)

Despair

In stories or in novels, or movies on the screen
In tragic times of sorrow, the sun is never seen
It's always dark and raining whenever people cry
When foundations are breaking, storms scream across the sky

But what if it's not raining when your soul is torn apart?
What if the sun is shining as you grasp your aching heart?
As your world caves in and tears fall, what if the sun decides
To shine across a cobalt slate and mock you as you cry?

It just seems like an insult, to be sunny when you weep
Warm sunbeams stroke your skin as sorrow drags you down so deep
I guess what I'm trying to say, now it's the final line,
How can you be drowning in your grief when the sun decides to shine?

By Grace P (Year 9)



By Masha I

Song of the Future

(Helplessness)

It's frustratingly far away, like a song she can hear through a thousand doors lined closed in a never-ending, melancholy maze, a faint and distant murmur.

It is endless. For her, at least. An idea so far away from the grasp of her fingers that it is almost stupid.

It is barely a simple tune, but it reaches into her and lights her up with something just out of reach, but something hopeful, nonetheless. She is too far away to hear the lyrics. It's sweet, that much she can tell, with lilting highs and soothing lows. She revels in not knowing, in acknowledging her peacefulness and the accompanying tune that never left her side. It's safe, she thinks. It's familiar. It can't hurt me.

--

The glint of a mirror shines in her watery eyes, and small, untrained fingers fumble stupidly at the buttons stuck stubbornly on her shirt. When her mother comes, a flurry of silks and warmth, zipping up the scratchy dress and strapping on the Velcro of blindingly polished shoes, she suddenly feels it. A pit in her stomach, a scratch in the comfort. With her one of her small hands held lovingly in her mother's, the other in her father's, she walks through the wide doors into the classroom. Something new, something unfamiliar.

--

She stands in front of one of the doors and watches patiently as her mother twists the doorknob carefully, slowly. Her father stands protectively at the door, watching them walk through into a room just the same as the other, but with that pit settling stubbornly in her stomach. Her father follows them through. And the song is closer, but only just. Only Just.

Endless, the doors are endless still.

The next few times are the same, same as before. She walks through, hands held tightly by people who she trusts, who she loves. People who have heard the song before and who promise it's beauty. Each room is the same, yet slightly different. With each experience comes memories, lessons learnt, and adventures had. It's exciting, and somewhat daunting, and unfamiliar. The song is growing ever so slightly louder, ever so slightly nearer, but it doesn't seem as sweet as she remembered. Not anymore.

The next few times were the same, until it wasn't.

--

The sun is hard and unforgiving, small pools of glittering silver gathering on the hard concrete floor. With the school looming up towards the sky, brick and grey mortar stretching high as if infinite, the eagle staring down from the flag waving lazily in the sky, it's the first time she feels it. Truly helpless. She walks through the corridors of people with faces so twisted, grim, and unfamiliar, they could be aliens. This isn't home. This isn't safety. This isn't what they said it would be. As she walks through the

crowds of people who take one look at her and turn away, lips curled and faces soured by disgust, she realises she can't feel the familiar pressure of someone holding her hand. She realises just how heavy it is to walk down the corridors alone.

--

The next time that she walks through the doors, there is a terrible panic that comes over her as she realises that the fingers curled around the metal are her own. 'Where', she thinks, 'Where in this maze did I get lost? When did I become alone?' Here is the first time she finds the crack in the ceiling, a quiet drip, drip, drip, of water falling rhythmically to the floor. Here is the first time she sits down, alone, and cries. The song is closer now, she thinks. But she's never hated it more.

And so it goes on. Each door in the endless maze pulled and a lone figure steps through, into the next room, the next adventure. All the time, she can hear it getting closer-

and closer, and closer, and closer.

It won't stop. It never will. Every time she opens one of the doors, there is more water. More and more until, with a jolt, she realises her socks are wet. When did that happen? She ponders this quietly as she moves, slowly, into the next room. And the next. And the next.

--

When she came home, she thought it would get better. It didn't. It took a long time to find someone else. And even then, they went anyway.

The cursor on her screen blinks accusingly at her. The screen shows her the list of tests that are coming up, but somehow, she can't find the strength in herself to pick up her pen, type a word, do anything. Blink, Blink, Blink. The cursor flashes in her eyes as she tries to keep her breathing under control. She tries to stop the feelings of guilt as the clock hits 00:00 and the page in front of her remains infuriatingly empty. She tries everything, but nothing seems to work, and everything she needs to know seems to slip away beneath her fingers like quicksand.

When she stares at the paper in front of her, the questions muddled and mixed in her brain, there is that panic, once again. Helpless. Stupid. She depends on the quickening of her heart, the twitch in her hand and the shake in her leg to write down something coherent, give the paper away and walk out the door. Sometimes she thinks she is crazy, because people tell her she's doing well, that what she is doing works. She doesn't believe them. She is a fraud, a cheat. Because what she does doesn't work. It destroys her.

--

It's routine, definitely. It's familiar, yes. But is it safe? With the song as close as it ever has been, now she is scared. She used to think it was safe. She used to think it would never hurt her. She used to think it was far away, so absurdly far away it was stupid. But it's close now, so close that the same feeling

she felt all those rooms ago, begins to creep up her throat like some vile flower. Fear. Pure, unrelenting fear that breaks away to reveal-

Helpless.

She is helpless.

As she grasps stupidly for the handle of the next room, she realises the water is up to her neck now, and she is struggling, fumbling with limbs as heavy as lead, as useless as a feather anchor, fighting half-heartedly against the water; calm and still and beautiful, yet crushing. She can hear the song now, properly. It sings to her with angelic harmony, sings her name mockingly; sickeningly beautiful while she tries not to drown.

It suddenly occurs to her that no-one ever taught her how to swim.

--

The future is as close as it's ever been now, and she has never felt so helpless in her life.

By Karla C-C (Year 10)



Hate

My eyes stung with fire, my head caught up in blaze of fury, my stomach lurched. A pool of lava sat in my stomach and my heart felt as if it had shrivelled up into stone. An icy chill ran through my veins like blood, my hands clenched into fists and my teeth rammed together. All I could think was, '*How dare they?*'. It was like this phrase was tattooed onto my mind. A haze of red wrapped me in an embrace, singing a melancholy tune. Mam had always told me to forgive and forget but I couldn't ever forget this; it would always be heavy in my heart, a writhing black ball of spite. How could someone do that? How could someone stoop that low? But no one knew, no one would believe me. A cloud of grey had momentarily blocked my sun.



By Julia M

Shame

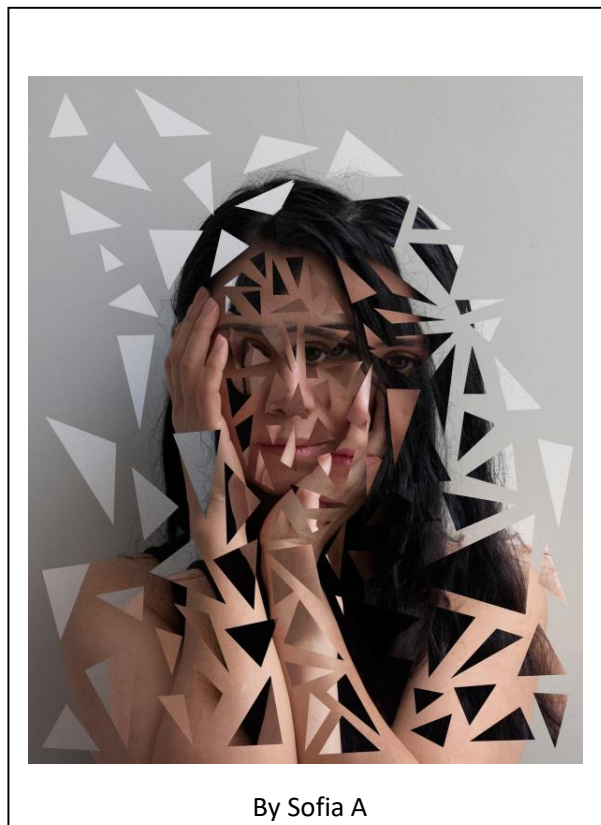
“Shame” is a thing that eats you from the inside
“Shame” is a thing that eats you from the inside,
we ruin lives,
And devour souls,
We have no mercy-none at all-

We adore munching away on your feelings,
And replacing them with ugliness and guilt,
Do not bother trying to fix it,
It will stay alike this forever.

You cannot run, nor hide away
From the unworthy character that you are,
You cannot change.

How does it feel?-living the walk of shame every day?
You say that the past is behind you, but we are always
one step ahead.

By Angie A (Year 8)



Russian Doll: (loosely inspired by the emotion of love)

I have stripped away
every part of myself
in the hope that then there'll be
nothing left for you to mourn.

as a Russian doll I have hollowed
from the inside out,
a gloss layer concealing the cracked paintwork you'd see
if I let you too close.

at first I thought for your benefit,
though now I cannot claim
it was for anything other
than My own
Self
preservation.

so gradual, precise
Pathological
has the change been
that I cannot even account for all parts
Missing.

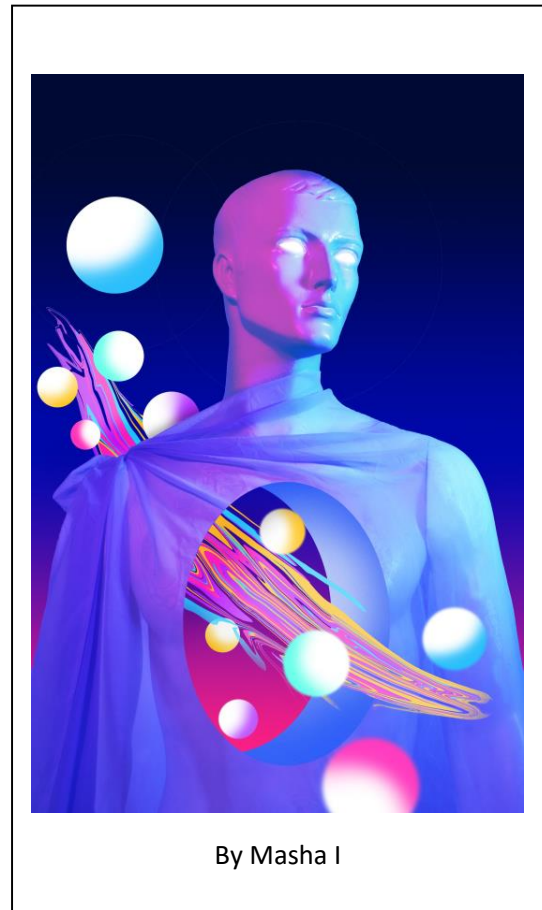
I'll always be sorry
inadequate as that word happens to be

for the day you go to look,
to collect me from my place amongst the other
Relics
and realise
that half of me is gone.

I had this notion
that I would be unrecognisable; faded and worn so much so
that then maybe you
you could be happy
Elsewhere
with someone New.

i see now that that
was child's folly
that
if you were ever to come knocking
empty air would be the only thing greeting you with a
Sickening thump.

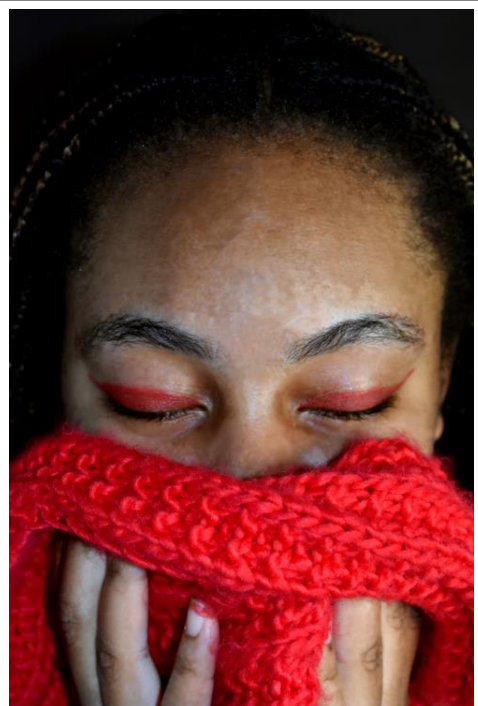
this
my act of love;
the most Selfish thing imaginable.



By Anon

The Grass is Always Greener
(Loss and Sorrow)

I've never seen the sky glow as bright as the day you took your last breath. My son, my only one, where has your energy departed to? No longer is it utilised for smiling, no longer for running, no longer for creating. Your energy was exploited on working for no future and it is wasted fueling a world that doesn't deserve you, on illuminating a place nobody can see you. Six feet underground decomposing in a wooden home like long-lived creatures of our past. But you were not long-lived and you are not of my past. You are here, enveloping me in sweat like a hug, burning my skin with your love, shining in my eyes to ask for attention. The television loads our nightly episode of *Jeopardy!* within seconds without your phone snatching the internet and the grass grows greener without your feet stomping through it to chase a ball. The kettle boils faster for one cup instead of two and the budget surpluses with fewer trips to school. Fewer trips, but still multiple, mind you. It took four days to collect your belongings from teachers. It is in your former place of education that I learned the classrooms are calmer without your laugh and the hallways are less crowded with your books no longer spilled across the floor. The newly reincarnated dirt from your place of rest has been used to plant a lemon tree in Grandma's front yard and the flower in front of your headstone has begun to sprout. Life is faster, calmer, easier without you. Errands are run with less haste and meals produce fewer dishes to wash. But your absence has made everything meaningless. Eating has no purpose with only a body to survive for. A career is an endless road to a dream I must escape from without you here. My son, my only one, the space you took up in this world is more than a five-by-two foot box resting six feet beneath me. You kept this planet spinning and I cannot bear the world that exists without you. The sun burns. I have too much time and nobody to distract me from the pain. I have no answers to *Jeopardy!* questions and I have no recollection of our town without daily trips to collect you. You are no longer here and the world is a darker place.



By Olivia B

By Emma B (Year 12)

A Revolution Against Hate

Revolution:

rɛvəˈluːʃ(ə)n

noun

A forcible overthrow of a government or social order, in favour of a new system.

A dramatic and wide-reaching change in conditions, attitudes, or operation.

In the hurricane of the angry world we are all dust specks
All isolated by the anger that is ours,
and that is against us,
But hurricanes move dust far from its original place
And to brave new worlds.

We are tied, through the dark in our hearts,
into the dark of a swarm, that is coming back. Together.
We fight for what we think is right, and so it becomes
That it is no longer the loudest voice that is heard,
But the most desperate, strong and hopeful.

A revolution against and with anger, a revolution for what this world needs.
There is so much hate that cannot be fought alone.
Face up is what we're shouting, come to terms with yourself
Look inside and act outside, change the world
By not hating it.
Acceptance will bring us to the future and understanding will keep us there.

This is a world where people feel like they can't deal with living,
Where families hate their children and people kill for land

Where we watch perfect people on a TV screen and hate ourselves for not being 'perfect'

Where people fight to be normal and hide from being seen because they are scared of what others will see them as

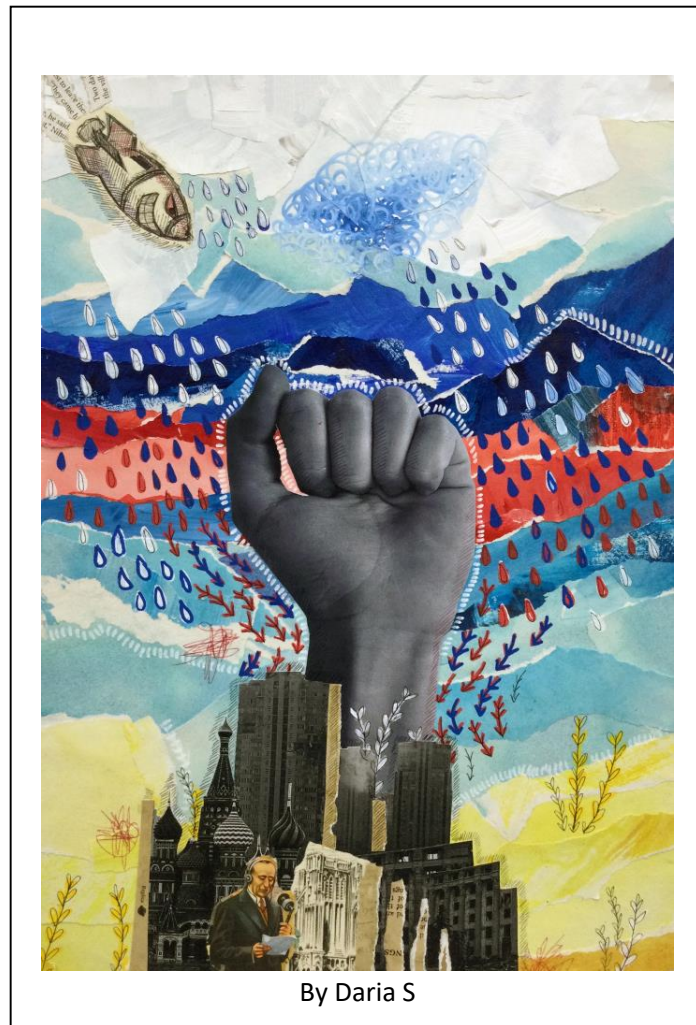
The only way we change this is, to fight it, to come together.

This hate is laced within our society like arsenic in tea.

We have to notice it, to extract it, to fight it with every part of ourselves.

We need a revolution.

By Eloise S (Year 9)



By Daria S

Inspiration 3: art



Twilight Lovers

The music poured out of the small violin. The lamp's light dancing off the shining red wood. The lovers swayed by the water's edge, waves lapping, frogs croaking, birds tweeting, crickets chirping and leaves rustling, adding to the symphony of sound. The sun was setting, painting the horizon with apricot, peach, strawberry, heather and cream. Their little boat bobbed in the water, a sturdy rope tied around the hull keeping it from drifting away. Her scarf was dangling over the water, just grazing the surface with its tassels. The boat itself white-washed and peeling. Her dress was covered in feathers that trailed behind her and when she twirled her dress skimmed the surface of the water, sending diamond tear drops flying. Their reflections in the water were one, as they danced in the twilight.

By Imogen C (Year 7)

A Blackout Poem

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God **He created him;** male and female **He created them;** Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Then the Lord God formed man **of dust** from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils **the breath of life;** and man became a living **being.** Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the **grace** that is in Christ Jesus. So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became **a living soul.**" The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. For it was Adam who was first created, and **then Eve.** The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. Out of the ground the Lord God formed **every beast of the field and every bird of the sky,** and brought them to the man to see **what he would call them;** and whatever the man called a living creature, **that was its name.** Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. Therefore, judge **nothing before** the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh **intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.** He will bring to light what is **hidden in darkness** and **will expose the motives of the heart.** At that time each will receive their praise from God. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Just as **people are destined to die once,** and after that to face judgment 'He will wipe **every tear from their eyes.** There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for **the old order of things** has passed away. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. **"Doom has come upon you, upon you who dwell in the land. The time has come! The day is near! There is panic, not joy, on the mountains. I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices.**

By Amelie A (Year 12)



The 12 tasks of the Nemean Lion

I was killed by him, I was trapped and slaughtered by a man repenting the killing of his family, he killed them and repented, he killed me and rejoiced. I thought I was to be done with him and his swaggering, rotten hide but no, some hateful god saddled me with him, gave me a first-hand view of his glorious life of fame and I even became a defining feature of him, my fame and glory and the fact that he had killed it, doubled the attention I ever got, all I became was a skin, parading the victory of my enemy. If you hadn't guessed by now, that man is Heracles, and I am the Nemean lion.

His second task was to slay the hydra, now as you know I hated Heracles with all of my heart and soul, but there was one man I hated worst in the entire world, even above Heracles, and that, was Eurystheus. He, after all, was the one who ordered me to be killed, but he was also a coward, and not just a coward, a coward with power. They were the kind of people I actually enjoyed eating. Usually, a hunt was just fun, and I needed the meal, but I genuinely enjoyed hunting down men like Eurystheus and seeing the terror on their faces, hearing their yellow-bellied, pig-like squeals. So, you can guarantee that had I been alive, that man would have been bacon. Killing the hydra too, that was a low blow, especially considering he'd already killed me, so this was just becoming a gladiator fight of the gods. Anyway, my second least favourite person in the world actually went out and bloody killed it, with me swinging from his back! Gods, I'm telling you the things humans do to guarantee to a decent afterlife! I mean, I soon found out that the afterlife was all Heracles was living for, but still he didn't get it and it goes to show how you can spend your whole life planning for something and end up with the opposite of what you wanted.

Next, he had to capture the golden hind; I can tell you first-hand that that man sweats more than is natural. Then it was the boar and those stables, ugh I tell you never get cows, followed by all those birds, it was actually me that did most of the work then, he'd be pecked to death without my impenetrable hide, honestly, taking all my good work for his own. The Cretan bull was basic, just another monster thrown into the ring, child's play really.

Next it was the mares of Diomedes, honestly, I thought I was vicious, but these were next level, I mean they're horses, what kind of horse eats humans! I have to say, Heracles surprised me here, he's not all the boring goody two shoes he seems. I think he was so vicious because Diomedes reminded him of Eurystheus, they could have been twins they were so similar, except Diomedes got the backbone and Eurystheus got the hair, honestly, Diomedes's hair could've been grass trimmings for all I knew. I'm surprised one of the mares didn't choke on it, although they did leave his feet which I thought was a good call.

Hippolyta's belt was an awfully tragic tale, all that good warrior flesh left to rot! The moral of that story of course is never trust anyone because they will stab you to death and kill you all, or Heracles sucks the life out of everywhere he goes, or maybe even killing is the only way forward? Plato would probably have argued that the moral was something like don't jump to conclusions and trust every man but tie your camel first, perfectly sappy and do-gooder, but you tell me how he found that answer from a beach full of dead people.

I don't think I can face talking about the second cattle trip, that was just painful too watch, if those stables didn't make me hate cows enough then this sure finished the job. If I got another chance at life, I would make it my mission to kill all the cattle in this world for ever after.

Guess what happened when we got back, that old frog just went and ordered Heracles to do two more tasks because some of them didn't count! What does he mean didn't count! He did them, didn't he! Apparently, he had help on some or something, I mean he had help on all of them, help from me! As you can tell, I was just thrilled to spend some more quality bonding time with my best bro Heracles.

The apples of the Hesperides were a half decent task, I mean travelling the world aimlessly for a year on the back of a fuming, overly sweaty and bullish cretin is the way everyone would choose to spend their sabbaticals, right? (Did I mention he was super sweaty?). Blood, pain, tears and buckets of sweat later we found Atlas, I mean there was a very dull conversation with Prometheus first but that's not worth mentioning. Atlas is hideous, I know that sounds mean, but it's the honest to gods truth that that titan is so ugly I couldn't bear to look at him, but, at the same time I couldn't look away. Bastard almost stole our apples too, but Heracles tricked him. Actually, I tricked him, but I sort of skimmed that bit so let me rewind. So, to get these apples you had to be a titan or god or something, a special person which Heracles was not, and Atlas was. Basically, Atlas's job is to hold the sky, so Heracles offered to hold the sky while Atlas got the apples for him. Then, as I said Atlas was all "don't worry I'll take the apples back for you as well" proper gaslight he was, but Heracles was like "oh dude thanks so much, but could you just hold the sky for a moment while I adjust my cloak (me)" and Atlas, the dumbass he was agreed, and we ran off, we made quite a good team I have to say (but I do take full credit).

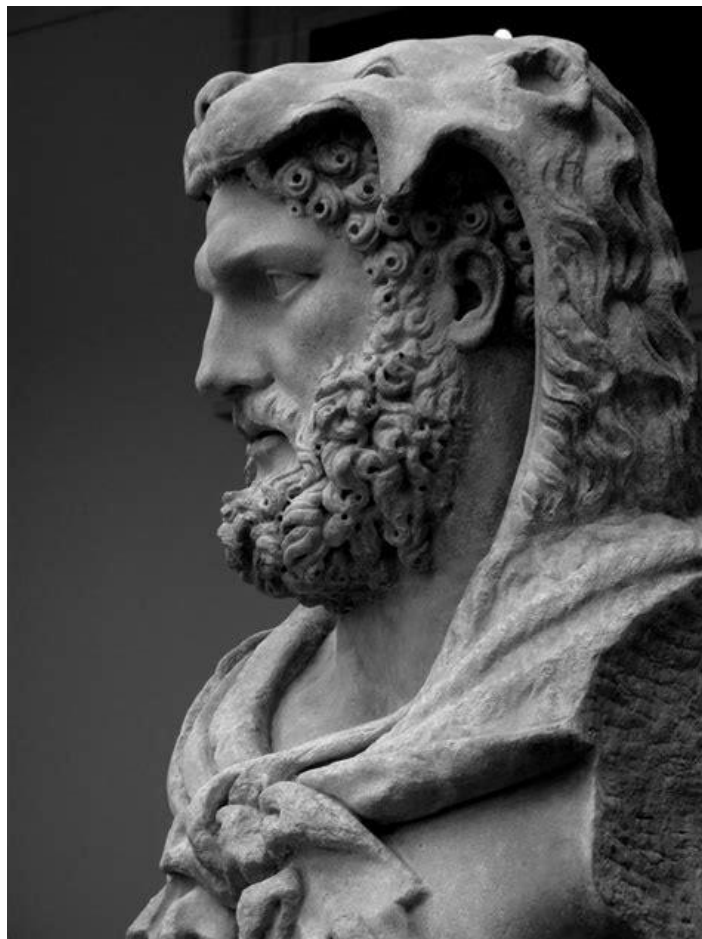
Task 12 was another fun trip, the underworld's actually very scenic you know (just kidding, it's a literal hell hole, ha ha, get it, I'm quite proud of that one). Cerberus is quite cute, but he must be a pain to feed and exercise, I'm surprised that's not one of Hades' never-ending tasks. The whole time I could tell Heracles was thinking that it was our last task together, the indomitable Nemean lion and cute sidekick Heracles, well alright, I know, it's Heracles he's super egoistic and will probably call himself the hero.

When we arrive back at you're-a-sissy-theus's big boy palace for the final time he, true to form hid in that big old pot again, (I swear he has it there for that exact purpose) and sends Cerberus back to the underworld. He's scared so shitless he doesn't even bother to talk about how we missed some other fine print and have to do more pointless tasks, he just sends us out as free people, I mean I'm kind of dead, but still gotta appreciate the sentiment.

We remained free, free for all time in fact, living in the land of the gods. I know, I know, how could we afford that kind of real-estate, I mean the space, the garden, the location, when we're just two, poor, good-looking bachelors. Well, I'll tell you, the residents had a bit of a debt to Heracles because he saved them or something and there was a free room. Also, his daddy put in a good word for us cos he's king of the gods and all. Honestly, it's not all it's hyped up to be, the neighbours are so annoying, they're either fighting, partying or trying to wreck humans' lives, such children.

And that is the end to a glorious coming of age story, a tale of friendship, loyalty, and modesty. I am sure that your life has been improved by just hearing this tale and that you are inspired to shoot for Olympus and try to be more like the Nemean Lion, or if that's too difficult, maybe Heracles.

By Eloise S (Year 9)



School Days

I am from summertime picnics,
From wintertime snows,
From rushing, late, through halls
Which echo with our youth
Now silent.

I am from April showers
Outrunning the sky on sodden tarmac
From November mathematics,
Profound moments against the blackened heavens.

I am from drowsy assemblies
Heavy with our boredom
Clock ticking steadily into stale air
Foreshadowing our flight.

I am from this place,
Not a place at all;
A moment,
A brief window of simple childhood
Of uncomplicated understanding
Before we went our separate ways.

The bricks crumble now.



By Anon

Darwin

England, 1813

“Charley!” came a cry from across the grove. The sunlight cast dappled golden beams from between the trees that spread their leaves in canopy over the earthy green grass. A little boy, no more than four, crouched amid the ferns, lost in a world of dirt and flowers and bugs and wonder.

“Charles!” the voice called again “Charles!”, and the child sat up, tiny hands cradling something that the girl striding across the lawn couldn’t see. “Charley, you need to come in now.”

Charley murmured something, not wanting to be torn away from this fascinating landscape of which he knew so little. The trees towered over him like skyscrapers, the grass tickled his hands and feet, and the curious hues of the insects and flowers kindled a deep curiosity inside him. The girl reached him and knelt down to where Charley thrust his hands forward to show off his find.

“Linny, look at this!” he smiled. Caroline bent to inspect her brother’s prize. Clutched in his hands was a shimmering ladybird, its wings the deep ruby-red of expensive wine, speckled with black spots. It scuttled to and fro in the prison of his hands. Most four-year-old would have crushed the tiny creature, whether by accident, not realising how fragile and small a ladybird could be, or on purpose, afraid of the way the insect roamed over their hands. Charley simply watched, enthralled by even the ordinary. Caroline rolled her eyes, used to her little brother wandering off to find some creepy-crawly. Yesterday he had come wandering back to the house with a beautiful flower petal. Their mother had been delighted. Last week, however, it had been a snail grasped in his muddy hands, which had elicited shrieks from his mother and sisters.



“Come on Charley, Mama wants us, and Marianne’s made a cake.” Charley stood up, finally relinquishing the ladybird and letting it fly off into the bushes. Linny brushed the mud off Charley’s shirt, and they began making their way back up the hill to The Mount, a comfortable Georgian house where the children had all been born. Drawn in from the garden by the sweet smell of cake that drifted from the open windows of the house, their siblings Eras and Susan were already inside. They made their way to the conservatory, which was warm and bright in the summer sun. Marianne, the eldest, came in with a Victoria sponge, the scent of vanilla following her like a delectable cloud. Curls sparkling golden in the light that filtered through the glass, their sister Emily Catherine sucked her thumb and looked out at the sprawling gardens as she perched atop an ottoman, her little feet sticking out straight in front of her. The dusty, cake-scented air paired with the spell of warm weather created a sleepy atmosphere that was universally associated with those hot summer days, so rare in England, where everyone feels it would take far too much effort to do anything at all.

Their mother entered in a swirl of lace and red silk, smiling at her children. Marianne placed the sponge in its pretty glass cake stand on the table and began to cut it as Caroline smoothed down her skirts, eyeing one of her

mother's thick books on botany. Charley's mother let out a squeak as she beheld his muddied trousers and dirt-blackened hands, a stray fern leaf caught in his unbrushed hair.

"Oh Charley, not again."

Ignoring his mother's sighs (he was quite used to it by now), Charley went over to where Susan played with the daisies she had picked from the lawn, her tongue poking out the corner of her mouth as her brow furrowed in concentration. Charley tugged on her sleeve.

"Susan, can you read for me?" the little boy asked, adding hopefully as he remembered his manners "Please?"

"Maybe later, Charley." was his sister's terse reply. Charley's eyebrows plummeted downwards, his bottom lip wobbling.

"Charley I'm busy. Go play with Eras or something."

The little boy wandered over to the window and pressed his face up to the glass, longing to be out there in the garden ankle-deep in grass- desperate to be free to discover again. He was not the sort of boy who was made for sitting still. Certainly not for stuffy parlours and antique furniture. Charley was a boy who was built for discovery, for voyagers, and changing the world.

By Grace P (Year 9)

Competition Winners 2022

Emma Brown, First Prize, CISC National Competition, *Growing up*

Eloise Scotland, Second Prize, CISC National Competition, *Growing up*

Grace Poole, Highly Commended, National HART Prize for Human Rights, *Dead White Man's Clothes*

Eloise Scotland, Highly Commended, GSA National Competition, *Dear Earth*

Imogen Clements, Third Prize, National Competition Bouncing Back, *The White Daffodils*

Eva Green, First Prize, St Mary's *Evolution* competition, Autumn Term

Niamh Collery, First Prize, St Mary's *Revolution* competition, Spring Term

Eloise Scotland, Highly Commended, St Mary's *Revolution* competition, Spring Term

Karla Cordero Centeno, Runner-up, St Mary's *World Ocean Day* competition, Summer Term



With thanks to St Mary's Art and Photography Students

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