

StoneSoup



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StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

Editor's Note

Ah, spring! Or as Grace Zhuang writes in her poem "Spring" in this issue:

Winds are running around
Telling everyone the good news,
"Spring is coming!"
"Spring is coming!"

That stanza captures the atmosphere I tried to create in this issue—one of lightness, whimsy, excitement, and happiness. The writing and art here bubbles (sometimes literally—as in Enzo Moscola's photograph!) with smiles and imagination, even when dealing with difficult experiences—like breaking an arm, or, you know, saving the world from a cloud of doom.

One of my poetry teachers once gave us this assignment in the spring: to go out and listen to a flower growing, then write a poem about it. This month, I ask you to do the same. Although, depending on where you live, it may admittedly be a bit early to hear the flowers, you can go out and *listen* to the plants and the Earth—then document it in art, in whichever medium you prefer.

Till next month,



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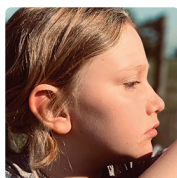
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Middle School (iPhone 6)
Anna Weinberg, 11
Washington, DC

Room 105

It's the first day of sixth-grade math, and unlike his peers, Alexander can't wait to get started



By Judy Chen, 13
Albany, CA

Alexander looked up at the clock. It was 8:35 a.m., and the teacher was still not present. He sighed, wondering if his sixth-grade teacher would ever come.

Alexander Gerald Louis was tall and thin and had curly black hair and blue eyes. Despite being tall for his age, Alexander was never considered a jock, due to his lack of burliness. Instead, he was constantly called a “nerd” at school. Alexander took an interest in science, and dreamed of building high-technology airplanes, which was why his room was full of posters of the Wright brothers. In his spare time, he drew airplane models, or played soldier with his buddies. He got straight A's during his elementary school years because his mother drilled him with algebra, properties, and even trigonometry—yes, even at the age of eleven. Every single grade he was in, the teachers praised him for his intelligence, mainly in mathematics and science.

You could tell that he was desperate to learn, because he looked up at the clock and checked his watch every few seconds. A few other students were thinking the same,

but most of them were glad that they had a few minutes of freedom. One of them suggested an airplane fight, to which everyone but Alexander agreed.

“No! I don't think it's appropriate to—” But it was too late. Everyone grabbed printed paper from their desks and started folding the way they were taught to in kindergarten, which was part of the reason why Alexander believed that there should not have been a thing called “kindergarten.” He was obedient and righteous, and he didn't want to cause any trouble in the class. Unfortunately, that's not what most of the kids in Room 105 thought.

“AIRPLANE FIGHT!” one screamed. Everyone started throwing their paper airplanes up, down, left, and right. A lot of them hit students, but a few flew off.

“VROOOOOMM!” Another kid who sat near Alexander made what he thought of as airplane sounds. As much as Alexander loved to make airplanes, he absolutely despised aiming those airplanes at kids and landing them on who-knows-whose head, and just at that moment, someone's paper airplane made a

perfect landing on Alexander's head. Alexander was furious, so annoyed that he started to make an airplane himself. That's what happens when an airplane hits someone as sensitive as Alexander. Just when he flew his airplane across the classroom, a voice came in.

"Pardon me for being late, but I was just showing Lena around." It was the teacher. "She's new to California, you see."

The teacher, Mr. Joseph Navin, was a middle-aged man with black hair, a couple of hairs turning gray, and warm hazel eyes. He had a neat mustache, and his navy suit was just as organized. Alexander wanted to be like Mr. Navin, just by his appearance. In fact, Alexander observed that his own bedroom was tidy, like Mr. Navin's outfit.

Alexander's paper airplane missed the teacher by inches, and instead, it hit the new girl, Lena, who stumbled back. Once his airplane landed on the ground, Mr. Navin picked it up, looked at it, then, much to Alexander's surprise, laughed out loud. He showed Lena her seat, which was at the back.

"Hello, sixth graders!" Mr. Navin walked up to the front of the classroom. "Welcome to Rosewood Middle School. I am Mr. Navin, and I will be your teacher for math and science. I have been teaching at Rosewood as a sixth-grade math and science teacher for eight years. I have been at Rosewood as a teacher for fourteen years, and I have been at Rosewood for seventeen years. I have to point that out because I myself attended Rosewood." Mr. Navin chuckled at his own joke. Only

Alexander, Lena, and a boy named Sandeep Agarwal chortled along.

Mr. Navin went over the homework assignment, which was just a form for the parents to fill out, but then added, "But, if you want extra credit, then I have a stack of multiplication problems for you to calculate, which is easy enough."

Then he went on to discuss what topics to expect in math: distribution rules, probability, and negative numbers, just to name a few. Alexander heard a few groans and whispers in the class. A redhead girl who sat behind Alexander grumbled, "School sucks." But Alexander thought that it wasn't too bad. In fact, Alexander loved homework. It was like "knowledge pouring down and you must catch it before it crashes on the ground and never comes back," as his mother always told him and his sister when they were younger.

There was an awkward silence after the commotion. Mr. Navin laughed heartily, and the ice was broken.

"Come on, students. It isn't too bad!" Mr. Navin said while still laughing. "Back in my day, we had a quiz almost every single day, not to mention a test at the end of the week! Compared to that, I'm being nice to you!" The students still looked skeptical about it, so Mr. Navin changed the topic.

"Well, since my original plan turned into paper airplanes"—Mr. Navin looked down at all the airplanes strewn across the floor—"we will just have to think of a plan B." The students looked up from the ground, because it meant that they didn't have

to do the classic get-to-know-you game. “How about this: we’re going to play twenty questions, but with math.” The ruckus came back, as almost half of the students in Room 105 moaned.

“Do we have to?” one of the boys who sat near Alexander whined. Mr. Navin, who still kept his friendly smile on, winked at the student.

“Will this count for our grades?” a girl who wore her hair in pigtails asked.

“Ah, good question. No it won’t,” said Mr. Navin. “I just want to see where you guys are in math. This is me as a teacher trying to get to know about you.”

Finally, when everyone had finished their muttering of complaints, Mr. Navin continued.

“I have assigned partners for all of you in advance. You guys will work together to answer these questions.” Mr. Navin pulled out a sheet of folded paper from the pocket in his jacket. He unfolded the paper. “Here we go. So Lydia and Adam, Emilia and Rupert, Grace and Sebastian—” Grace and her best friend, who wanted to be partners, groaned. “Sophia and Jacob, Lena and Alexander—” Alexander looked over at the other side of the classroom, where Lena sat. Lena, who was fiddling with her hair, looked around to see who in the world Alexander was. “—Rainer, Marley, and Caleb, you three will be a trio, since there’s an odd number. Now, go find your partner. And you may sit wherever you like.”

Alexander got up from his seat and walked to Lena.

Lena stood up. She was a pretty but petite girl with soft black hair

styled in a bob, and brown eyes that were as bright as heaven. Everything about her seemed friendly. She wore a pink T-shirt and gray pants. Unlike other girls Alexander knew very well, including his sister, Lena didn’t seem to mind about whether her outfits were stylish or not. They were simple and comfortable, and that’s how Alexander liked it.

“Hi. Are you Alexander?” Lena asked shyly.

“Yes, I am,” Alexander said boldly. “Let’s sit at your table.”

Lena sat back down in her seat, while Alexander plopped into the seat next to her. Then Mr. Navin said, “Okay students, before we start, I want you to talk to your partner. Get to know them. Bond. Starting now!” Alexander turned to Lena.

“I can start,” Alexander said. He waited for his partner to nod. “Hello, I’m Alexander Gerald Louis. I really like transportation-related things, especially airplanes—”

“Airplanes? Lena asked. “I bet they’re really fun to learn about!”

“Yes! Of course they are!” Alexander exclaimed. “I hope to build high-technology airplanes to improve the transportation industry! My parents recommended that MIT would be a good place to study about them more, which is why I’m hoping to pursue my dream to go there.” He then added so Lena wouldn’t think that he was a complete nerd, “Not that I think about my future all the time.” But surprisingly, Lena was nice about it. She patted Alexander on the shoulder and said, “That’s alright. I think about my future all the time. I really like animals, so maybe a zoologist. A

A few students looked up in interest at the reward. Alexander didn't.

biologist would be cool as well, or a marine biologist. Oh, yeah, marine biologist sounds fun, but I don't think that I have the talent to snorkel."

Lena laughed nervously. "But for a second choice, I'd do something with computer science." Alexander smiled. Finally there was someone besides his buddies who wasn't afraid to talk about their dreams for the future. And it was a girl. And it wasn't his mom! Before he could say any more to his partner, Mr. Navin closed all the conversations by clearing his throat.

"I believe that this has been a good enough time for you to get to know each other," said Mr. Navin, as he paced around the classroom. He went to a shelf and got out a stack of whiteboards. He passed them around. Both Lena and Alexander said politely to Mr. Navin, "Thank you." Mr. Navin smiled in response.

"I will be asking you twenty questions," Mr. Navin said after he went around with the whiteboards. "For each question you get right, add a point to your scoreboard. In the end, I will check your scores. And the winner, or winners, will get a surprise reward! It may come in handy!" A few students looked up in interest at the reward. Alexander didn't. He felt that understanding the questions was the reward, not a cute eraser or cheap pencils.

"First question." The teacher cleared his throat. "An easy one. What is $3\frac{1}{3} \cdot 2\frac{2}{3}$? You have a minute to solve this."

"I can do this one," Lena whispered. She calculated the

problem, Alexander believed, in five seconds. She swiftly multiplied and then simplified the fraction.

"Done." Lena held up the whiteboard. She was the first one. After many more seconds of scribbling, the others held up their boards.

"Good . . . hm, calculate it again . . . nice answer, but make it a mixed number, will you please?" Mr. Navin went around the class, looking at the whiteboards. He stopped at Alexander and Lena's table. "Very nice method. Good job." He walked away. Alexander's heart leapt. He high-fived Lena with all his might and then added a tally on their scoreboard.

"Question number two," Mr. Navin said after the students did or didn't add a tally. "Use the distribution rule to solve $2(10+15)$. You have a minute to solve this." Alexander heard a few students, including a girl named Riley, who sat in front of him with Sandeep, mutter in dismay, "What's the distribution rule?" But his team was not one of them. Alexander grabbed the board from Lena and solved the problem.

" $2 \cdot 10 \dots$ plus \dots DONE!" He held up his board high and proud. A lot of students shot him dirty looks. Even Mr. Navin looked surprised.

The minute passed. This time, not everyone's boards were filled with calculations. And there were even fewer teams that got the answer correct.

"Hm, that was a tricky question," Mr. Navin said after he went to the tables and saw everyone's answers.

"But don't worry. We're going to go over it this year." The next five questions were about mean, median, and mode. Some of the students were puzzled with the words, and wondered why the word "mean" was even related to math. But not that smart duo, Alexander and Lena.

"Correct . . . good . . . very nice . . ."

Mr. Navin muttered as he passed by to look at Alexander and Lena's answer for each of the questions. Then ten questions passed, with negative numbers, ratios, and inequalities being in the topic. The inequalities were a real struggle for most of the kids.

"What's this line thingy on the bottom?"

"What's the difference between a shaded dot and a non-shaded dot?"

"We haven't even learned about this! So unfair!" Riley complained when she and her team got the results.

"Now kids, please do not take it too seriously. You will not be graded," Mr. Navin cheerfully reminded the class after complaints went on and on, and after eighteen questions had been done.

Alexander and Lena looked at each other and smiled. They had been nailing every single question that Mr. Navin had asked them. It just felt great.

Finally, they were at the last question. The previous question had been about a triangle's area. Everyone in the class knew about the rectangle or square's area, but for the triangle, it was a different story. The question Alexander, Lena, and the others were now facing was about the surface area of a triangular prism. Mr. Navin had been nice enough to give them an extra four minutes to solve it, since it

involved a long process of thinking and calculating. Alexander and Lena worked this together. The easiest way for them was to draw the surface area of the prism.

"So if there was no 3D for this triangular prism, then it would look like this," Alexander explained, as he pointed to his surface area model with the whiteboard marker. Lena nodded in agreement. "Now, we can separately solve these areas for the rectangles. Lena, do you want to do it, since you're really fast at calculating?" Alexander held out the marker. She took it, and next thing you knew, Lena was holding up the whiteboard. From below, Alexander looked up and checked the calculation over and over again with pride. *A dream team*, he thought.

"Well, it looks like we have a winner here," Mr. Navin said as he went from table to table to look at the scoreboards. "The winner is . . . Alexander and Lena!"

The duo grinned and high-fived each other. Only a few cheered along.

"For your reward, you both get golden pencils!" Mr. Navin went to his desk drawer and took out two golden pencils. "And just to clarify, they're not real gold." Mr. Navin chuckled as he gave them to Lena and Alexander, who were grinning from ear to ear.

As Alexander was on his way to his seat, he heard Riley tell Sandeep in indignation, "I knew we should've done the distribution rule my way. It's all your fault that we lost."

"Hey! You didn't even know how to do it!" Sandeep protested.

"Hmph. Smart for you to say, since all you can do is to blame it on other people," Riley scoffed. "I thought you

“Ohoooo! You’re a teacher now? Last time I checked, you were just a teacher’s pet!”

Indians were *smart*.”

“Whoa, whoa! That’s racist!”

Sandeep put his hands up as if he were being investigated by the cops. Alexander slowly turned around. Even though Riley was only a few inches taller, she bent forward, trying to tower over Sandeep.

“I don’t care,” she sneered. “All I know is that you suck at math.” Alexander went in between Riley and Sandeep, whose faces were both red by now, Riley in anger and Sandeep in humiliation. He had to make this right.

“Whoa whoa whoa, okay. Please stop—both of you,” Alexander said in his calm voice. Then he thought, *What would Mr. Navin say?* “Let’s fix this. We need to be friends. Sandeep, you go first.” Sandeep was blinking in confusion. Riley glared at Alexander.

“You’re not my dad, nor my teacher, so act your age,” Riley said. Alexander was dumbstruck. He managed to sputter out, “What? I’m trying to help, can’t you see that?”

“Well, we don’t need help, so mind your business.”

“Ohoooo! You’re a teacher now? Last time I checked, you were just a teacher’s pet!” A boy from Alexander’s elementary school, Jacob, who just got back to his seat next to Lena, clapped his hands together and howled with laughter. Riley snickered at the remark. Alexander hoped that Lena didn’t hear that, because the roast burned him a lot. Luckily, Lena was merely minding her own business and sharpening her new golden pencil—or was she?

Jacob Peterson was one of the troublemaking boys who were obsessed with basketball and the Lakers. Alexander didn’t like him. Jacob called him names, and treated the teachers terribly. One time, Jacob attempted to climb a fence out of the schoolyard! Alexander could never imagine himself doing that, even when he was furious.

Alexander knew he had to fire back, or the guys would just keep on roasting him, so he did what he could to make things right. “Hey, Jacob! Stop bullying me! You crossed the line!”

Jacob leaned against his chair and said, “What about that, *Skinny Alex*?” Skinny Alex was just one of the names Jacob called him to make him angry. It made sense to call him that, and Alexander knew that just as much as everyone else did, but he never admitted it. He hated that nickname so much that he completely lost his temper.

He gripped his golden pencil tighter.

“Will you STOP IT?” Alexander shouted and he stamped his foot. “I HATE IT WHEN YOU CALL ME SKINNY ALEX! I HAVE TOLD YOU SO MANY—”

“Excuse me, may I ask what’s going on?” said a voice that didn’t belong to Jacob, or Riley, or any of the students in the classroom. Alexander snapped back into reality, where Mr. Navin stood beside him. The students stared at Alexander in shock, and even Lena stopped sharpening her pencil to see who got mad. Riley looked worried

when Mr. Navin's eyes fell on her.

"May I ask what's going on?" Mr. Navin repeated. Finally, the words came back to Alexander.

"Sir, Riley and Jacob were bullying Sandeep and me!" Alexander pointed his pencil at them.

Jacob, who couldn't control himself, muttered, "Teacher's pet." Sandeep looked down at his sneakers.

Alexander nodded his head toward Jacob and said, "See?"

Mr. Navin looked around and said crisply, "Riley, Jacob, can you apologize?"

"Why should I apologize when Sandeep failed?" Riley complained.

Mr. Navin simply said, "Maybe you need some practice with apologies, Riley." Riley grudgingly obeyed, and so did Jacob.

"Sorry," Jacob said through his teeth.

Then it came to Alexander that no matter how calmly he tried to solve a problem in a fight, they just wouldn't listen to him. How stupid, he thought, that he was good at math and yet not at this.

Once the bell rang, the students packed up to head to the next class, English with Ms. Ricci. Alexander zipped his pencil case, which was full of pencils, pens, highlighters, an eraser, a pencil sharpener, and his newest addition, the golden pencil from Mr. Navin. He slung the backpack across his shoulder and walked out. There, in the crowded hallway, Lena caught up with him.

"Hi, Alexander!" Lena said. "We meet again!"

"You did great in math!" Alexander complimented her through all the

loud noises. Seventh and eighth graders pushed past the sixth graders, swearing in all letters and muttering, "Little sixth graders." Alexander and Lena zigzagged through the crowd, trying not to bump into any of the big guys.

"Thanks! I practice for things like these," Lena said as loud as she could, as she and Alexander parted ways to let a six-foot-tall eighth grader come through.

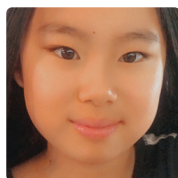
Once they reached the doorway of Ms. Ricci's classroom, Lena turned and said, "You know, it was nice of you to defend Sandeep from the bullies."

Alexander tried to be modest. "I failed anyway," he said while stuffing his hands in his pockets.

Lena smiled warmly. Alexander's heart started beating fast. He didn't know what to say next. It was strange, because he was always a talkative person. He talked a lot, whether it was with his family, or his friends, or even with his foes. But with Lena, it was different.

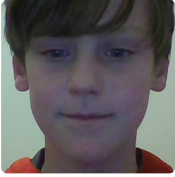
"Not everyone has the courage to do that." Lena slipped into the classroom with a satisfying smile on her face. Alexander stood there, dazed about what just happened.

His feelings about Lena felt different than before. Alexander had only met her today, but he knew that there was some chemistry going on between them. For the first time, his thoughts weren't just about math and airplanes. It was exciting for Alexander to even think about girls, but at the same time he felt confused, and maybe even terrified.



Neon Gears (iPhone 8+)
Angela Tang, 12
Mason, OH

Three Poems



By Woody Szydlik, 12
San Francisco, CA

The Window of Possibility

9:39.

The sun has already been elevated high above my street, and I stand up.

The birds have long since left to be replaced by pedestrians,

Some sauntering past, some rushing to get to heaven knows what.

But my brain is filled with calculations.

Can I brush my teeth in time?

Perhaps eat an apple?

Class is in six minutes,

A year ago meaning such a different thing.

But now six minutes is nine times more than two, especially before math.

Filled with an hour-long list of minute possibilities, each taking a minute,

Pushing me to pick them,

My brain scrolls through them, looking for the correct ones.

I click on the meeting link when I find it.

9:45.

Time for math.

Impure

Quiet.

Still.

The thick air seems to push down,

Weighing more than any real thing.

Ill-perceived by my thoughts, it groans under me

With the cushion, bowl shaped by my perennial existence.

Somehow their lives are more perceivable than my own.

Sterile, premade, they make no decisions in their pixelated world.

All problems resolved within a third of an hour,

All questions answered in that time.

Why not substitute these impurities for my own?

Impurities that will be destroyed in 22 minutes.

Impurities that define us.

I get up, walk outside

Into the fresh, impure air.

Continental Divide

A strip of gray, perforated by yellow lines, cutting through the grasses, trees,
rocks.

It appeals to me,

The surveying, engineering, construction,

All to conquer this one point of the barrier

Between oceans, watersheds, counties, states.

The peak of the path,

Barrier of waters,

Somehow excites me.

Is it truly my cartographic desire

Or just a mind wandering?

Or crossing the line between Atlantic and Pacific,

Or just of finding a thought to dwell on?

Me and the Dripping AC

A malfunctioning air conditioner provides an unexpected opportunity for imaginative play



By Anusha Ranjan, 7
Mumbai, India

One day, I was watching my tablet in my study room, and I heard a strange sound. I looked where the sound was coming from, and I saw the AC dripping some cold water.

I switched the AC off. I then brought a bowl to keep water from spilling on the floor. Soon the bowl got filled up with water.

Then I brought a bigger bowl. The bowl was a glass bowl. I liked the dripping sound of water in this glass bowl. I started to sing along with the music of dripping water. Later it got filled up too. I brought a large blue bucket.

I made one paper boat and some paper people. When the bucket was full, I put paper people in the boat and pretended they were sailing in the bucket sea. I then made up a story out of it.

It was about two brothers sailing in the deep sea. The brothers decided to dive into the sea. They had full diving suits and oxygen with them. They met a shark there. One of the brothers was scared, but the other understood that it was a baby shark who was hurt. So, the big brother helped the baby shark. The baby shark thanked him by

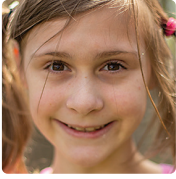
swimming around him. They got back to the boat, feeling happy.

By this time, the water had flowed over the bucket and spilled all over the floor. I quickly threw the water out of the bucket and brought a wiper to wipe the floor. My father saw me doing this. I told him to call the AC repair person. Then the mechanic came and fixed the AC. The AC stopped dripping water.



Playing with Bubbles (Canon PowerShot S5 IS)
Enzo Moscola, 11
San Diego, CA

Two Poems



By Brooke Callan, 10
Deerfield, IL

Fairy Tale

I sit beneath the tall, shady tree
One hot summer day.
I read, and I read,
Treasuring this moment,
This day.
Just my book and me.
I am in my own world,
The scene beside me is not there.
Neither am I.
I am a knight
Fighting a dragon.
I am a princess,
Letting down my hair.
I am a troll,
Eating a sheep.
Though I myself am soon fast asleep.

Light Star

Blue night sky above me,
Holding me in,
Staggering every moment I try to break free.
Holding in the sunlight,
Holding in the day.
It feels as morning might not come.
So I don't wait,
I bring in the sun.



Balcony (Watercolor, pastel)
 Linzi Cai, 7
 Cherrybrook, Australia



Happy Bee (Pencil, pastel, watercolor)

Home

When Chocolate's owner disappears, she sets out on a mission to find them



By Lily Yagi, 11
Irvine, CA

Chocolate licked her brown fur twice as her owner petted her and made some sounds with her mouth. Her owner made unusual sounds; humans made sounds Chocolate couldn't make. Chocolate guessed humans made those sounds so the other humans could know how he or she felt. Today, the sounds sounded sad.

Chocolate wondered why, but she usually guessed it was something like her owner had found out that her favorite coffee wasn't on sale, but this was mega sad, like someone died. She wondered why, but guessed it was nothing really important. She buried her face in her owner's replaceable fur so she didn't have to look at the bright, orange sun, which was half hidden in the land and trees. She closed her eyes and rested her head on her paws. She fell sound asleep.

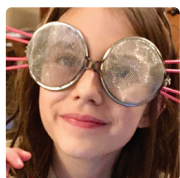
When Chocolate woke up, she saw a wall. She stood up and yawned and saw the blue sky. She was outside! She jumped up in excitement, only to find her head banging on her cage roof. Why was she in a cage?! She glanced around looking for her owner. She wanted to run! When she realized that her owner was not nearby, she

thrashed at the cage door. When she finally opened it, the sun was high in the sky.

She wandered around looking for her owner's scent. She then found it behind a tree. It led to the right, where the path was wide. *Wide means happy!* she thought and grabbed her favorite toy from the cage, and she ran, following the scent.

Chocolate ran for a couple minutes. The scent led to her house! She clawed at the door, hoping her owner would answer. After a few minutes of clawing at the door, she realized that her owner wasn't in the house or was ignoring her. She knew her owner wouldn't ignore her, so she guessed it was because her owner wasn't in the house.

She looked around for her owner. Maybe they were playing hide and seek! She started looking for her owner. After a while, she sighed and wondered if they weren't playing hide-and-seek. "I give up!" she called, and that is when she noticed a big truck. It was gray with lots of scratch marks on it. She neared and the door on the other side slammed shut and her owner's scent wafted over to her



Serenity (iPhone 6s)
Amity Doyle, 11
Katonah, NY

She traveled for days. She got chased by humans and other dogs. She had to find food, water, and shelter for herself.

nose. She barked happily and ran to the other side and saw her owner in the truck. She barked. But her owner didn't hear her. The truck with her owner rolled away, leaving Chocolate alone.

After exactly five minutes of staring at where her owner used to be, she whimpered in protest. "Don't leave me!" She then wandered to a nearby forest. The thick green leaves covered her from the sun, and she was grateful, but after a while she began to feel cold. She stopped when she heard rustling from a nearby bush. She ran, but she ended up falling in front of a cave with . . . other dogs!

"Hi!" Chocolate said, and stood up.

"Who you?" one of the dogs said.

"You come where?"

"Name what?"

"Where come?"

They asked a lot of questions.

"I am Chocolate," Chocolate said and resisted the urge to say, "You talk weird."

The dogs burst out laughing.

"What's wrong?" Chocolate asked, but Chocolate could pretty much guess why.

Before they could answer, a big muscular dog fell on Chocolate.

"Gotcha!" the dog said.

"Umm . . . will you please get off?" Chocolate asked, trying to sound polite, but it was hard to hide the frustration when someone was on top of you.

"We wolves! Eat you!" the wolf said.

"You eat me? You are a wolf? You are a Wild Dog?" Chocolate asked.

Wolves were called "Wild Dogs" in the dog world.

"WE NOT DOGS!" the wolf on top of her roared, but it was more of a howl.

Chocolate squeezed out of the wolf's grasp.

The wolves all gasped for some reason. They started saying things like:

"She escaped from the Master!"

"She is the leader now."

"Master Chocolate?"

"That is a weird name."

"But she did escape!"

"Yeah!" They huddled close and did some whispering, and Chocolate could only pick up some parts, like "leader," "dog," "wolf," and "rules." After a while the wolves said, "You are now our leader!" in unison. Chocolate asked them what that meant, and they all said, "You became the leader." From that moment on, she was brought food and treated with respect. She didn't like how the food looked, so she closed her eyes and ate it or ate fruit. She always had her favorite toy by her side, which was nice. But something about this place was unsettling. So she set off for her owner again.

She traveled for days. She got chased by humans and other dogs. She had to find food, water, and shelter for herself. She had never really done that, so it was hard.

First day. She got chased by people.

Second day. She was chased by dogs.

Third day. She couldn't find food.

Fourth day. She was almost hit by a car.

Fifth day. A person caught her and brought her in and fed her. The feeding part wasn't bad, but the owner had another big dog.

Sixth day. She overslept.

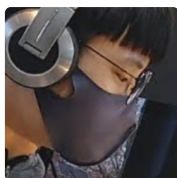
A week.

A month. Finally. On the forty-ninth day. Finally—she smelled her owner. It led to a blue house. She clawed at the door. And the door peeked open, and she saw her owner. Her owner stared at her in shock. Chocolate could feel the shock waves. Then her owner smiled and picked Chocolate up. And for the first time, Chocolate understood what her owner said: "Thank you for coming all the way here for me. I didn't realize you cared about me this much. Dogs are loyal. They do say, 'Man's best friend.'"

And then and there, Chocolate knew this was her home. Her home was not with wolves, not in a bush, not in a wild city, not with another owner, but with this owner.

The Flight of the Fatal Arrow

The author, also known as “the Misfortunate One,” learns an important lesson from the Vile Tree



By Roy Kim, 13
Suwon-si, South Korea

The story you are about to read is a story of idiocy, disaster; it includes attempts and confession, and a lesson. It is a story of a Fatal Arrow, a Vile Tree, the Use, the Mode, and the Means, and it is a story of a Misfortunate One. The story you are about to read is the story of the Flight of the Fatal Arrow, but more importantly, it is a story of how a little boy learned to think first. It is my wish that you will also learn wisdom from this tale.

It was a nice summer day when the event occurred. It was hot, it was sunny; it was like any other summer day. It would have been impossible to guess that such a disaster was in wait.

I, my brother, and two of my friends had all signed up for a hands-on activity making bows. We went to the Museum of Traditional Bows and sat down in front of a table. The instructor gave everyone a long wooden bow. Under the instructor's guidance, and with our moms' help, we tied the elastic bowstring to the bow and wound colored strings around the wood as decoration and

support. When we were all finished, we were each given an arrow with a blunt, Styrofoam head. We were eager to shoot it outside in the park near the museum, so after we finished our bows, we ran outside to play.

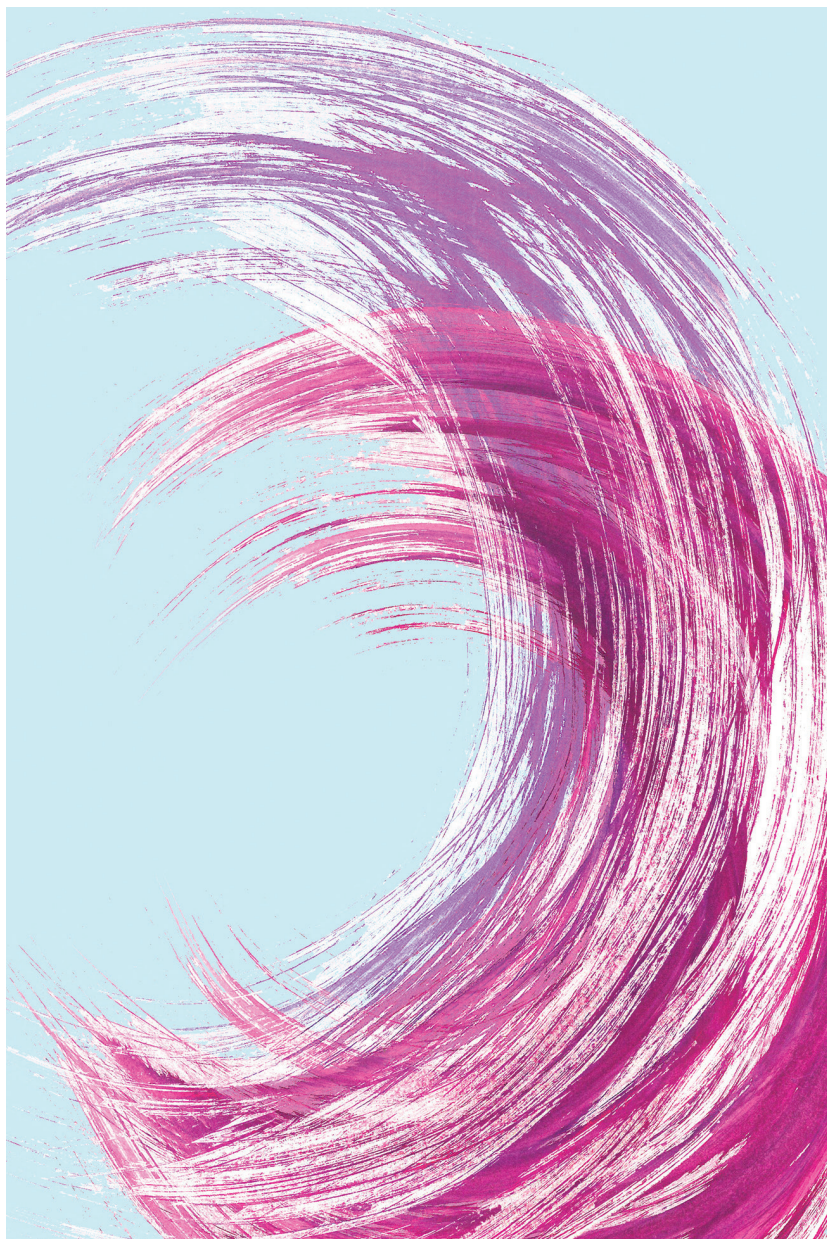
The arrows flew very well, and it was so fun watching them fly off far away. We launched the arrows at a low angle, and the moment we let go, the arrows whizzed away, flying parallel to the ground, and after a few seconds, they either hit something or dropped to the Earth. Then we would run to the arrow and shoot it back. But watching us play, Mom warned us to be careful, because the arrows could hit not something, but someone. It was then that the Accursed Idea came to mind.

“Hey, since we can't shoot arrows forward, let's shoot them upward!”

“Great idea!” the others all agreed.

And so we, the stupid children who did not know the consequences of the decision we'd made, began shooting arrows up at the clear blue sky.

At first, it seemed as if my suggestion was a brilliant one. Shooting into the sky couldn't harm



Chaos (Watercolor)
Ashley Jun, 13
Shorthills, NJ

anyone, and we didn't have to waste energy in running back and forth to get the arrows. Also, the arrows could soar very high up into the air. We were having great fun watching how far they could go, pulling the long bowstring as far back as our short arms would allow and letting the string go, listening to the soft elastic twang. No one observed the ominous shadows of the trees surrounding us.

It was then that the Misfortunate One picked up the Fatal Arrow. He fitted the Fatal Arrow to his bow and pulled the bowstring back. The wooden bow formed a perfect arch, ready to send the missile up into the clear blue sky. Then the string was set loose.

The Fatal Arrow was now in flight, soaring up toward the shining sun. It pushed back all the air molecules that hindered its advance; there were none to block its path. The unsuspecting Misfortunate One looked up at the Arrow, admiring its flight. Up, up, and up the Shaft flew, but then it met the turning point. The Arrow stopped for a split moment, and then the weight of the head pulled it down, and, since the force of gravity was relentless and inescapable, the Arrow began its course of descent.

The Fatal Arrow was plunging down to the Earth, but the Vile Tree had no wish for that to occur, and so it stuck out its Vile Branch and stopped the Arrow midair. The Arrow halted; the Tree's normal force collided with the Earth's gravitational force; the Arrow's velocity was zero. In other words, the Fatal Arrow got stuck in a tree.

Oh, reader—do try to imagine the

horror of the Misfortunate One who had shot the Fatal Arrow! His only, brand-new arrow had gone to a place he could not reach. Was this to be their parting forever? Would he have to go home with a bow without an arrow? How much would he get scolded for his action? And alas, who was the Misfortunate One? It was me. It was me who had shot the Fatal Arrow, watched it reach its maximum height, observed its descent, and with terrible horror, saw it get stopped by the Vile Tree. It was me who had proposed the Accursed Idea, and it was me who was suffering the consequences. And what did I, the Misfortunate One, say?

“Oops.”

My brother Jay looked up the Vile Tree. “Hmm, I think we can get it out somehow . . .”

Thus began our attempts to retrieve the Fatal Arrow from the Vile Tree.

Our First Attempt was the Use of the Stick. The Stick is a very special instrument, and it is useful in many ways. It is used to play with, pretend with, hit with, fight with, attack with, defend with, swish with, swoosh with, poke with, jab with, push with, pull with, dig with, attempt to pole-vault with, and to reach things unreachable with. The Stick can be found almost anywhere, and, as we were standing near trees, Stick was of abundance.

My brother picked up a long stick. He held it up and tried to poke at the Fatal Arrow. He couldn't reach it, and since he was the tallest of us, it was evident that the omnipotent Stick would not be giving us any aid in our endeavors to retrieve the Fatal Arrow.

Yet my brother's creative mind

had another plan forming, which was the Mode of Climbing. The Mode of Climbing is practiced by many creatures in the world, starting from the smallest spider to the fearsome leopard, from the winding ivy to the brachiating monkey; countless creatures great and small practice this art.

My brother put his foot on the Tree. Pushing himself up, he grabbed a branch overhead. But so vile was the Vile Tree, it held its branches up high, and any further climbing seemed impossible. Thus our second attempt was also discouraged.

Now the circumstances left only one choice: the Means of Confession and Looking Very Sorry. How the Misfortunate One wished to reach the solution before matters came to this! Nevertheless, the conditions gave him no choice.

I walked up to Mom.

"Um, Mom?"

Mom looked at me. "Yes, Roy?"

"I, uh, got my arrow stuck up on a tree . . ." I mumbled.

"What?"

"I got my, um, arrow stuck in a tree."

Mom looked at me, sighed, and then followed me to where the Vile Tree stood tall and haughty.

She looked up and saw the silhouette of the Fatal Arrow.

"How did you get that thing up there?" she asked.

"We were shooting arrows at the sky, because you said they might hit someone . . ."

Mom sighed again.

Thus began the moms' attempts to retrieve the Fatal Arrow.

I do not remember clearly what happened next. Perhaps the memory was erased from my brain because I did not want to remember the scolding I got. But I do remember that in the end, the Vile Tree relented to my friend Tim's mom. She succeeded in overpowering the Vile Tree's opposition and got my Fatal Arrow back to Earth by climbing.

"Thank you," I said, glad to have my only arrow back.

"Don't mention it," she answered.

After that we all went home, and now the incident is almost forgotten. What happened to my Fatal Arrow? It later got broken and now only its head is left, and it is used as a pretend microphone (which is quite handy when doing skits). The bow was thrown away several months ago. Now only the Styrofoam head tells the story of the Flight of the Fatal Arrow.

However, I will never forget that disastrous episode, for it taught me a valuable lesson. The incident showed me why you have to "think before you act." If I had thought before I spoke out the Accursed Idea, the Fatal Arrow would have never flown, and the Fatal Arrow would have never have gotten stuck in the Vile Tree, and I, the Misfortunate One, would not have been so misfortunate. But I spoke before considering the consequences, and I paid the price. I didn't know this truth at the time, but now I do. Thinking first can save you a whole lot of trouble.

Perhaps the Vile Tree was not so vile after all. Perhaps it was there to teach me to think first. Perhaps it was not the Vile Tree, but the Wise Tree.

I guess no one will ever know.



Gray and Yellow (iPhone XR)
Yueling Qian, 9
Chicago, IL

The Tree of Life

A group of friends sets out to save Mother Nature from the Eternal Cloud of Doom



By Lydia Young, 11
Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada

It was June 11, 2021 when my friends Abbie, Ella, Tucker, and I were bored at school. Suddenly, I looked out the window and saw the Eternal Cloud of Doom! There were no birds in the sky at all and I said, “That can’t be good.”

I told my friends to follow as I ran out the door toward home. I grabbed the essentials: food, water, first aid, a sword, and an extra pair of clothes. I also grabbed my hiking boots and told my friends to do the same. I met my friends at the entrance of Star Forest, and we set off on a journey to the tree of life.

After about two hours we saw a manticore (a manticore is part lion, part scorpion, and part dragon), and a very mean one indeed. As Ella took out her sword, I stopped her and said, “There’s no need to fight—look!” I pointed to the manticore; there was a branch poking out of the manticore’s neck. “That’s making the manticore mad,” I said as I slowly walked toward the manticore. I started pulling the branch out as the manticore roared at me. However, when I was done, it purred.

I smiled and said, “There you go, buddy,” and I patted him on the head.

My friend Abbie’s jaw dropped as she said, “How did you do that?”

“I just knew the problem and wasn’t afraid,” I said, and we carried on.

Suddenly, we looked up and saw the dark Eternal Cloud of Doom spreading faster, and we picked up the pace.

After an hour, I pulled out my research journal and wrote,

On June 11, 2021, I saw the Eternal Cloud of Doom. We don’t know where it came from or why it came to my city, but I have a sneaking suspicion that I’ll find out soon.

I closed my journal for the day and continued walking.

A little while later we were at Animal Meadow, but there were no animals, so I asked, “Where are all the animals?” Then I realized what had happened and I broke down crying, and Tuck said, “Come on, pull yourself together! We need to save the forest, or all the animals will be gone.”

I thought about it for a moment and said, “You’re right. We need to save the forest now!” I ran up the meadow as fast as I could, panting for air as I ran.

At last, we got to the tree of life,
and it did not sparkle like it used to.
A whirling black tornado of forest
animals was twirling up to the clouds.
I said, "I know what to do." I jumped
into the tornado and braced myself, as
this was going to get messy.

At the top of the clouds, I looked
around and I saw a girl in a black
cloak, and I asked her, "Why are you
up here?"

"I'm really sad."

I crawled over to her and said,
"But, why are you really sad?"

"All the people in the world keep
throwing trash everywhere and
harming the animals."

I realized who this girl was—it was
Mother Nature! I said, "Well, maybe
we can make a difference together
and then people will stop throwing
trash everywhere."

She smiled and took off her hood
and said, "Thank you for trying to
help me!" and together we stopped the
tornado and put posters up all over
the city and when we all got home, we
were grounded for a week, but it was
worth it!

The Spirits of the Forest



By Lily Kasius, 10
Troy, NY

Go outside

Go to a forest

Find a place where you can sit down

Listen to the sweet sounds of the birds chirping

Feel the soil grasp you and bring you down into its domain

Listen to the rushing water of the stream

Feel the moss grow on you and chain you against the tree next to you

Open your eyes

You now feel all tingly inside

You have just met

The Spirits of the Forest

Truth or Dare

Zoe never turns down a dare—even a really dangerous one



By Zoe Kijak, 11
Laguna Hills, CA

My name is Zoe. I am ten years old. I will tell you what I remember.

I met with my friend Taylor outside my house after school. Taylor is my goofy friend who likes wearing Baby Yoda T-shirts and doing weird T-Rex dances where she holds her arms up as if she has tiny T-Rex arms. We kicked a soccer ball back and forth in the street. We are both good ball handlers and never let the ball fly into anyone's car. We continued this for about thirty minutes, until we got bored. We sat on the curb, trying to think of what to do next while taking turns braiding each other's hair. Taylor has long blonde hair. I have long black hair. Suddenly, Taylor stood up and said, "Let's play Truth or Dare!"

I was about to answer with an enthusiastic "yes" when I remembered the family rule. The thing is, I never give up and I never lose a game without giving it all I got. But this can be a problem in Truth or Dare, because my parents say sometimes the responsible or safest thing to do is to refuse the challenge. But there are no pass turns in Truth or Dare; the first person to decline a

challenge loses.

My parents had said that I was never ever allowed to play Truth or Dare again after the Bowl Incident. I was playing the game with friends at a sleepover at my house, and the dare was that I had to balance six glass bowls from our kitchen cabinet on my head for three seconds. I did it, but then they all came crashing down, and that's how the family rule became No Truth or Dare for Zoe, Ever. But, then again, I do not always follow the rules. I considered it all for a minute and then agreed to play.

My friend Taylor said, "Great. Do you want to go first, or can I?"

I volunteered to go first.

"Sounds good," Taylor answered.

I smiled and said, "Truth or dare?"

I was secretly hoping she would pick dare so I could get her to put her whole hand into our smelly compost pile. But luck was not on my side today.

"Truth," she answered.

I sighed and then blurted out, "Have you ever had a crush?"

"Yes," Taylor answered.

Maybe luck was on my side today after all. Maybe I would finally get to

know who Taylor's secret crush was.

"Who was your crush?" I asked.

Taylor smiled slyly and replied, "I answered the question. I don't have to answer another one."

I did my best Baby-Yoda-eyes impression and begged, "Please?" My Baby Yoda eyes unfortunately did not work this time.

Taylor smiled and said, "My turn!"

I nodded.

"Truth or dare?" she asked.

"Dare," I answered.

She laughed and exclaimed, "I dare you to climb the tallest tree in our neighborhood."

I gasped. She didn't mean the monster tree, did she? All the kids in our neighborhood called it the monster tree. For a bunch of kids aged ten and younger, the monster tree was basically the tallest tree in the world. It felt like it was as tall as my Uncle Nick times ten, and my Uncle Nick is six foot two inches.

"You don't mean the monster tree?" I stammered.

She smiled and said, "Of course I do. Do you give up?"

"Never," I answered.

Taylor knows as well as I do that I never give up on a challenge, which, I acknowledged to myself in that moment, can be something of a disadvantage.

She stood up and I did too, and we began to walk to the monster tree. We talked as we walked.

"Please tell me who your secret crush is," I begged her.

"Never," she answered.

I moaned in exasperation. As we got closer to the monster tree, I began fidgeting with my hair, which I only

do when I am nervous. But I was not going to give up.

When we got to the monster tree, I reached for the first branch, grabbed it, and pulled myself up. After that, climbing from one branch to the next was easy. I quickly scampered up the branches until I was about a third of the way up the tree. I stopped to catch my breath and looked down. Taylor's eyes were wide, and her jaw dropped.

"You don't have to do this, Zoe. I didn't think you would actually climb it. It doesn't matter if you win or lose. Come down!"

Feeling energized and reckless, I yelled back in a loud, fake British accent, "I will emerge victorious!"

The next branch was slightly skinnier. But I continued the climb.

Don't look down, don't look down, I thought to myself as I got even higher. But even as I was feeling nervous, I was also curious what everything around me would look like from this grand height. I stopped again to look around. I could see the chimney on my house and the tops of smaller trees. Taylor seemed tiny, way down there on the ground. I looked up, and I could see the top of the tree!

I reached for the next branch and CRACK! The branch broke. I was able to slow my fall a bit by grabbing onto a few branches on the way down, but I couldn't get a good handhold and the green grass hit me in an instant. In my imagination, I always thought a big fall would feel slow, like the epic slow motion catastrophes in movies. Boy, was I wrong.

And now I sit here telling, you, my doctor, how I broke my arm playing Truth or Dare.



Spring (Acrylic)
 Rebecca Wu, 9
 Medina, WA

Six Poems



By Grace Zhuang, 6
Vienna, VA

Spring

Butterflies are delphiniums' spring.
Waves are oceans' spring.
Sprouts are gardens' spring.

I looked up in the sky,
I saw my little kite.
"You are my spring."

Spring

Winds are running around
Telling everyone the good news,
“Spring is coming!”
“Spring is coming!”

The little delphinium
Looking around
Looking for spring.

She did not know that
She herself is the spring.

Summer

Bees are sunflowers' summer.

Waves are oceans' summer.

Daisies are gardens' summer.

I lay down on the sand.

It is so warm.

Touching my face,

"You are my summer."



Imaginary Bird (Marker)
Rebecca Wu, 9
Medina, WA

Summer

Grows in the mud,
Lotus flower,
Blooming.

Her petals flying around,
Telling everyone the good news.
“Summer is coming!”
“Summer is coming!”

She did not know that,
She herself is the summer.

Summer

Summer is what I grow in my garden.
Summer is what I wear on the beach.
Summer is what I sing in my song

Laughing, with the charming daisies
Flying, with my rainbow dress
Crying, with the waves in the ocean.

How I wished you could stay.

The Sun

The sun is a gigantic orange
Waiting to be eaten by the night.

Bar Harbor

Saying goodbye to her sister for the summer, the author wrestles with sadness, anger, and confusion



By Lila Carpenter, 11
Weston, MA

All the boxes were in the apartment, and we got a good look at it for the first time. It was small but cute, with its baby-blue wallpaper and overstuffed crimson armchair. Alex cast delighted glances around the room, barely able to stand still. "Oh my god, Mom, it's so cute!" She ran across the small apartment and hugged her.

No one seemed to notice I was there, or that I glared at both of them. Shrouded in frustration, I sank heavily into the armchair. *Why is my own sister, who I won't be seeing for at least a couple months, refusing to acknowledge my existence?!* I didn't notice my sister and mom leaving the room as I sat in a stew of misery. They were just meeting with the landlord, but I didn't know that. I pulled out my iPhone and tried to busy myself, but even *Tiny Wings* couldn't distract me from my pit of loneliness.

My thoughts were wandering as I halfheartedly glanced at the bright flashing screen in my hand. *Why does feeling sad feel so wrong? Every person has the right to be sad.* My thoughts lodged themselves in a memory from the summer. Alex and I were poring over poems, inhaling the smell of

books and dusty summer air. A slant of golden sunlight poured onto the poem we were reading, "When I Am Among the Trees." I had to read that poem and explain it to Alex, who was pretending to be a younger child who didn't know anything about it.

"I'm bored. Can we do something else?" she asked, playing her part. I had given her a sharp flick on the shoulder for this, but it had only made me care for her more. She had giggled and patted me on the back. *And now that can't ever happen again*, I thought in misery, sinking deeper into the armchair.

My sister and mom came tramping up the stairs, laughing and joking loudly. *Finally*, I thought sourly.

"Who wants to explore Bar Harbor?" my sister belted.

"Yeah, let's do that!" I quickly said, jumping to my feet.

The frustration felt like a rock in my stomach, but the last thing I wanted was to have Mom and Alex question me.

We galloped out of the small apartment and set off on one of the streets. Mom and Alex wouldn't stop chattering about her new life. "I guess

I'll go to the grocery store about once a week," Alex was saying. My sense of frustration came rushing back like a wave. *I finally managed to get Alex leaving out of my mind.* I kicked a pebble as I plodded down the streets, my teeth gritted. I hung back a little bit as we left the town and went down to the seashore, but my sense of frustration still clung to me like glue.

I jogged to keep up with Alex and Mom as we came in sight of the crashing stormy waves of the ocean. The ceaseless chatter of Alex's voice was still there, like a constantly bubbling stream. I looked out at the ocean, how the waves pulled in and out, furiously splashing on the rocks. They were strong enough to bear the weight of the ocean's fury. Wow, I thought. *These rocks aren't distracted by petty squabbles or emotions. They're just living.*

Just as suddenly as the strongest wave of frustration hit me, it went away. I hopped down from the ledge down onto the rocks. I needed time to think. The ocean seemed to be tugging me to a memory, like I had been tugged to that poem, "When I Am Among the Trees." I glanced out at the cold salty ocean and got yanked into it: Alex and I were padding up the familiar streets of Yiayia's neighborhood, our steps intertwined. "I'll miss you, and I know you'll miss me," Alex was saying. "But sometimes we can't be kept in the same place for too long, and I think this is one of those times."

"I know," I said miserably, "But I'll miss you."

As I slowly slid out of the memory, I sank deeper into thought. I was lost

in the rhythmic roaring and bubbling of the ocean. Each lap of the salty tide against the boulders seemed to be gently saying, *you'll miss her, you'll miss her.*

I sat on that rock for a long time, thinking as the waves crashed around me, the chiding of the ocean ringing in my ears. *I'll miss her.* The realization came to me like a shock of icy water. I stood up abruptly, shaking off the frustration. Sprinting up across the rocks, I noticed Alex and Mom were shooting me anxious looks, but I didn't care.

As we started off again, I could see confusion in Alex's and Mom's eyes, and they fell silent. I drew nearer to Alex, prodding her gently on the shoulder. "Alex, I'll miss you when you're in Bar Harbor. I hope you have a good time." She took my hand and we looked into each other's eyes.

"So will I," she whispered. We continued our walk around Bar Harbor, trodding past generations of footsteps together.

Highlight from Stonesoup.com

From Stone Soup Writing Workshop #15, with Conner Bassett: Veering

The Challenge: Write a poem or story that veers off its intended path. Change direction. Change your mind. And use the object that you chose at the beginning of class.



A Rosy Carpet

By Ethan Zhang, 9
McLean, VA

Outside my window
A rosy carpet hovered.
It was unreal
Absurd
And even insane
Was what I told
Myself.
Yet
I was convinced
It was anything
But a fantasy.
Carefully
I stepped on it
Into the misty clouds I rose.
The wind brushed my face
And I flew, high, high
Up and over
The steely house
The buzzing town

About the Stone Soup Writing Workshop

The Stone Soup Writing Workshop began in March 2020 during the COVID-19-related school closures. In every session, a *Stone Soup* team member gives a short presentation, and then we all spend half an hour writing something inspired by the week's topic or theme. We leave our sound on so we feel as though we are in a virtual café, writing together in companionable semi-silence! Then, participants are invited to read their work to the group and afterward submit what they wrote to a special Writing Workshop submissions category. Those submissions are published as part of the workshop report on our blog every week. You can read more workshop pieces, and find information on how to register and join the workshop, at <https://stonesoup.com/stone-soup-writing-workshop>.

Honor Roll

Welcome to the Stone Soup Honor Roll. Every month, we receive submissions from hundreds of kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

STORIES

Mabel Eimicke, 10
Charlie Halliday, 8
Sarah Iwanaga, 10
Aditi Koppal, 10

POETRY

Elaine Elizabeth Jinto, 11
Lily Liu, 8
Ariana Gutiérrez Weiss, 6

ART

Oliver DeFrancesco, 8
Sophia Li, 10
Lily Liu, 9
Eliana X. Matasar, 10
Caroline Percival, 12

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Gavin Wang, 11

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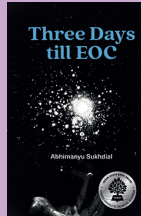
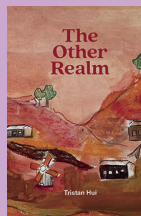
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- Our growing collection of books by young authors, as well as themed anthologies and the *Stone Soup Annual*
- High-quality prints from our collection of children's art
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