



# StoneSoup

FEBRUARY 2023

VOLUME 51 / ISSUE 2





# StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

## Editor's Note

"Snow-sleet coming down / Like alabaster flowers raining / down on me."

"Seagulls struggled to fly against the wind. They were like kites getting flung around, as flimsy as rag dolls."

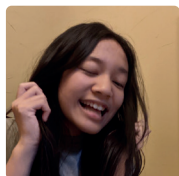
"Realization sets over me, / Like the winter sun over the countryside."

"I climbed up the ladder then paused, positioning myself as if I were a famous actor making an entrance on stage."

This issue of *Stone Soup* is full of breathtaking metaphors—metaphors that suggest an image of such beauty that they make me literally catch my breath ("Like alabaster flowers raining / down on me"!), metaphors that make me smile, metaphors that seem just right. Yes, I think. *How could that be described in any other way?* The metaphor is one of my favorite craft elements in writing because of that feeling of "just-rightness" it can elicit deep inside me.

But metaphors need to be wielded wisely! Using too many metaphors, or using them carelessly, can result in what we call "mixed metaphors," which create confusion—and even comical results. Think: "Flying like a bird, the cloud sailed above my head and then stopped, floating serenely like an innertube." I have three separate metaphors in that sentence, making it impossible for one image to settle in my mind—is the cloud like a bird or a boat or an innertube? (Of course, as with all things artistic, you *can* use mixed metaphors—just do so intentionally!)

I encourage you to sit down and think up some of your own metaphors. Save your favorites and put them into your next piece of writing.



Cover:  
*The Eye in the Dark*  
(Colored pencil)  
Tutu Lin, 13  
Texas

Editor in Chief  
**Emma Wood**

Director  
**William Rubel**

Operations  
**Sophia Opitz**

Typesetter  
**Jeff Piekarz**

Production Coordinator  
**Carmela Furio**

Blog Editor  
**Caleb Berg**

Customer Service  
**Tayleigh Greene**

Refugee Project  
**Laura Moran**

*Stone Soup* (ISSN 0094 579X) is published eleven times per year—monthly, with a combined July/August summer issue. Copyright © 2022 by the Children's Art Foundation–Stone Soup Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Santa Cruz, California. All rights reserved.

Thirty-five percent of our subscription price is tax-deductible. Make a donation at [stonesoup.com/donate](https://stonesoup.com/donate), and support us by choosing Children's Art Foundation as your Amazon Smile charity.

To request the braille edition of *Stone Soup* from the National Library of Congress, call +1 800-424-8567. To request access to the audio edition via the National Federation of the Blind's NFB-NEWSLINE®, call +1 866-504-7300, or visit [Nfbnewsline.org](https://Nfbnewsline.org).

# Stone Soup Contents

## STORIES

- 13 **The Violin Lady**  
Eleazar Reiner
- 33 **Escape from  
Manzular**  
Cecilia Hodgman
- 5 **Precious Snow**  
Mia Xu
- 18 **Never Stop  
Imagining**  
Rachel Jess Bueker
- 28 **The Apartment**  
Viviana Perez
- 40 **Slip, Crash, Boom**  
Eloïse de Larquier

## POETRY

- 7 **Fun in Winter**  
John Dubinsky
- 10 **Two Poems**  
Teagan Browne
- 16 **Simplicity**  
Satya Villacorta
- 24 **Running Down  
the Bishop Ford  
Bridge**  
Ian Maduff
- 27 **Sounds of My  
Street**  
Madeleine Palter
- 31 **The Pathway**  
Jasmine Manderson-Arnott
- 39 **Evergreen**  
Oisín Stephens
- 42 **Wish Upon**  
Anna Weinberg



## ART

- Cover:  
The Eye in the Dark  
Tutu Lin
- 4 Sunrise Sword  
Karuna Yang
- 8 Lemon and Flower Pot  
Elsa Altschuler
- 9 Grand View  
Analise Braddock
- 12 Duet  
Nora Giuffrida
- 15 Keys of Wandering Souls  
Sabrina Lu
- 17 Clouds through the Trees  
Tatum Lovely
- 19 Ship Up  
Analise Braddock
- 23 Shipwreck  
Sage Millen
- 26 Journey  
Audrey Li
- 30 Space Mushrooms  
Delilah Prager
- 32 Soaring Away  
Sabrina Lu
- 37 Red Galaxy  
Ahaana Gangwal
- 38 The Great Underneath  
Sabrina Lu
- 44 Two Paintings  
Aspen Clayton
- 46 Highlight from Stonesoup.com
- 47 Honor Roll



*Sunrise Sword* (OPPO Find X2 Lite)  
Karuna Yang, 11  
New Zealand

# Precious Snow

The narrator relishes the first snow of the year



By Mia Xu, 11  
China

When the snow first fell this year, it was in the night. I gazed at it, mesmerized.<sup>1</sup> But because it was too dark, I couldn't go out, so I could only hope to find knee-high snow the next morning.

Early the next morning, I jumped up from my bed, flinging open the blinds. The snow was like thick butter spread on every surface. I thought, *This year I can finally go outside in the snow!*

Last year, the snow was light, not even enough to make a snowball. But I loved snow, no matter how much. Just when I was stepping out to play, my mom had yanked me back.

"What are you doing?! We're leaving for the ski resort in ten minutes! Did you even pack your things?"

Somewhere in the middle of the ride to the resort, I fell asleep. When I woke up, we had stopped for a break, and I shot out of the car. I shut my eyes, waiting for the snowflakes to land on my face.

But the snow never came. There was no more snow that year.

I remember a saying in Chinese—物以稀为贵 (wù yǐ xī wéi guì): the less of something, the more precious it is.

I once read a short story by Ray Bradbury, "All Summer in a Day." One girl missed the few hours of sun.

I tried to forget all this. Instead, I ran downstairs into the empty living room. The only sound I could hear was my dog, Fly, nudging the door, trying to get inside from the yard. I let him in and fastened his leash. Ignoring my growling belly, I grabbed my coat and my gloves and scampered out the front door.

I twirled in the snow. Fly danced with me. He was like the sun, yellow fur against white snow. I kicked the snow, flinging a handful over my head, relishing the moment. Fly nudged me, reminding me of my excuse for coming out. I dusted the snow off my coat and tugged on Fly's leash. The morning was peaceful and quiet. I skipped the entire loop around the block.

In the middle of the road, I stroked the snow with my bare hands. It was very cold, but I held on, afraid it might disappear if I let go. I walked as slowly as I could, enjoying the scenery. I stopped worrying about homework, school,

---

<sup>1</sup> To gaze: to look steadily and intently, especially in admiration, surprise, or thought



people . . . but it had to come to an end.

When I came back to my house, I reluctantly went inside, sighing.<sup>2</sup>

Snow only falls a few times a year and goes away so soon. That is what makes it so precious, 贵. I have realized this: when something is less, cherish it. Make it special, and wait for it to come again.

---

<sup>2</sup> To sigh: to emit a long, deep, audible breath expressing sadness, relief, tiredness, or a similar feeling

# Fun in Winter



By John Dubinsky, 8  
Maryland

It's snowing

OMG Yes!

Look. Snowman

Frozen river

Stuck fish

Let's skate

Also ski

Too cold

Too cold

For me



*Lemon and Flower Pot* (Charcoal on tinted paper)  
 Elsa Altschuler, 10  
 Maryland





*Grand View (Pencil)*  
Analise Braddock, 11  
New York

# Two Poems



By Teagan Browne, 13  
Indiana

## Snow-Sleet

Snow-sleet coming down  
I hear the howl of the hound

Snow-sleet coming down  
Like alabaster flowers raining  
down on me

# Ghost I Saw

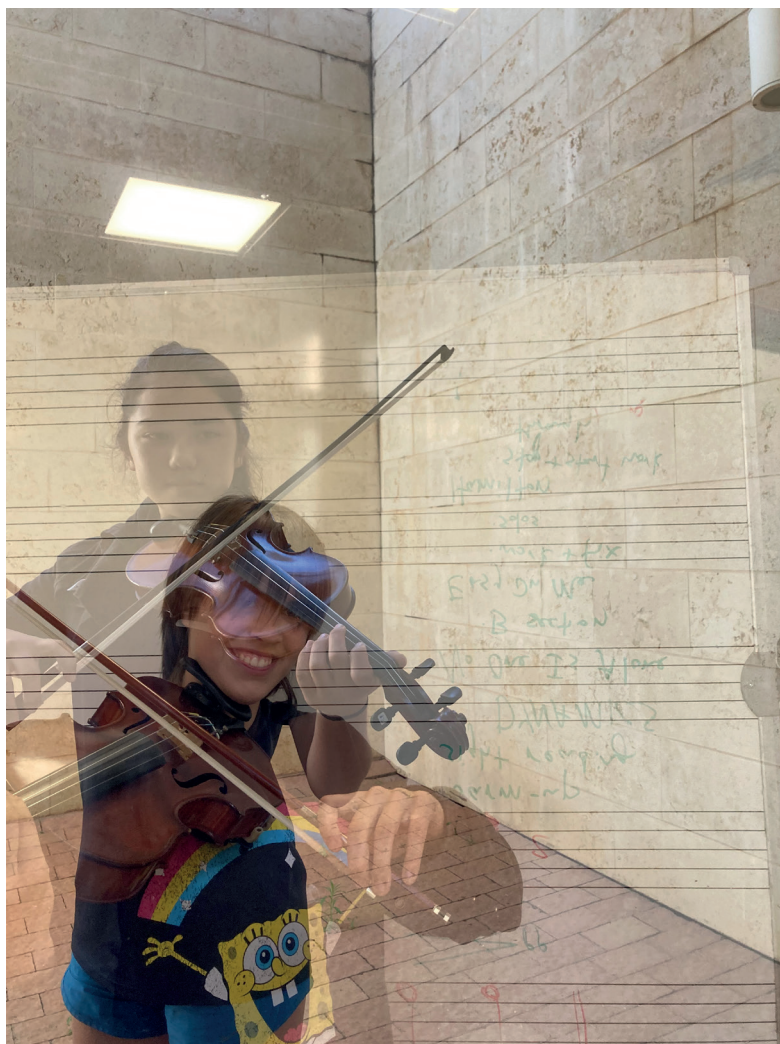
The ghost I saw not  
Was a soul

The mist I saw not  
Was a ghost

The ghost I saw not  
was mist not

Was a soul  
Not was a ghost

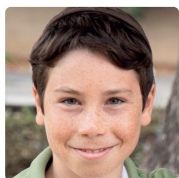




*Duet* (iPhone SE)  
Nora Giuffrida, 13  
Washington, DC

# The Violin Lady

Hoa wonders about the mysterious lady who is always playing the violin



By Eleazar Reiner, 12  
California

The woman had always been there, it seemed from the beginning of eternity, or at least as long as my eight years of memory could recall. Though Mama said she remembered her from when she was my age. But that's hard to imagine, because my mama has a timeless face. Sometimes I say, "Mama, what is the name of the lady with the violin?" and every time she just smiles and says, "Find out for yourself, *menina*."

My name isn't *menina*, it's Hoa. At bedtime, Mama tells me it means "flower."

School comes and goes. The lady with the violin keeps smiling. One day the lady's violin is covered in snow, only to have it blown away the next day by spring winds. Her music blooms and flowers. The day after, her music is thick and slow like a hot summer morning. Come fall, her violin plays the sharp winds and crisp apples of autumn.

Winter.

Spring.

Summer.

Fall.

The pattern repeats, and I am twelve.

As I walked to school that day, the violin lady was slouching and not smiling as she usually did, but I didn't notice anything severely wrong until I passed her again on the way home from school. She was lying on the ground under her usual spot. Her music was rich and soft, but I detected a hint of sadness.

"Are you okay?" I asked, my first words to her my entire life.

She smiled as I helped her up. "You're sweet, *menina*." How did she know the gravity of those words?

Touched, I asked again, "Are you okay?"

"That's the problem, my sweet. I have little time left on this earth," she said peacefully. "I see you're the one to carry on my position as orchestrator of the seasons, the sun, and the moon. It means more than simply that—it means you can begin to understand what life means to you. At first it seems internal, but without knowing it, you will affect others—similar to how I am changing you, slowly. Write," she said.

## “Years passed, and without reason”

I couldn't say anything, and she didn't either. She just looked at me, eyes full of knowledge, as the music—playing the wise, soft, spring winds, soft, soft, soft—slowly faded. And her eyes shut with her last breath as the last breeze of spring left. And suddenly, it was as still and silent as a summer day. I never did ask her name.

Years passed, and without seasons. I had children who grew. Every once in a while I would tell them about the violin lady, and how she had told me strange things and passed on her legacy to me. Even though I never admitted it, twenty years of possessing the violin lady's legacy hadn't changed me or the people around me. I was starting to wonder what this legacy was really about.

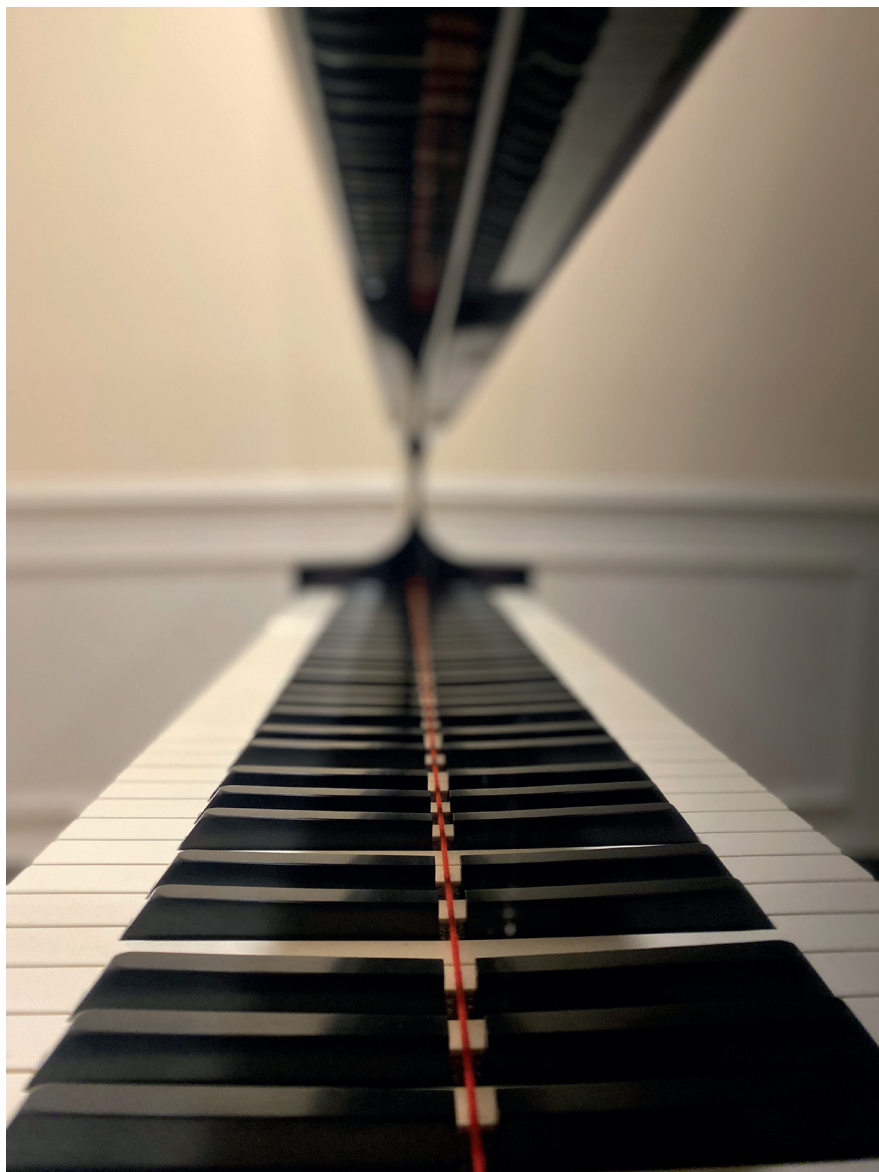
One day my son asked me what I had done with the gift the violin lady had given me. For that, I was at a loss for words. I couldn't recall a single thing I had done. So, that day, I picked up a pen and put it to paper—nothing came. But as the days continued to come and go, I began to remember the way the seasons had made me feel, and soon I found myself with a pen to paper once more. I wrote about the orchestra of the seasons, and how they reflected anger and happiness, love and loss, life and death.

And slowly, through writing, I began to change myself, and soon the seasons were back, and so was the music!

I wrote and grew, so—

Now I knew what it was like to be the orchestrator of seasons, to tell my children what I had done with my legacy. Now it wasn't the violin lady's legacy. It was mine. And even though I never played a single note, I realized that her music and my writing were the same thing. Both kept the music alive.





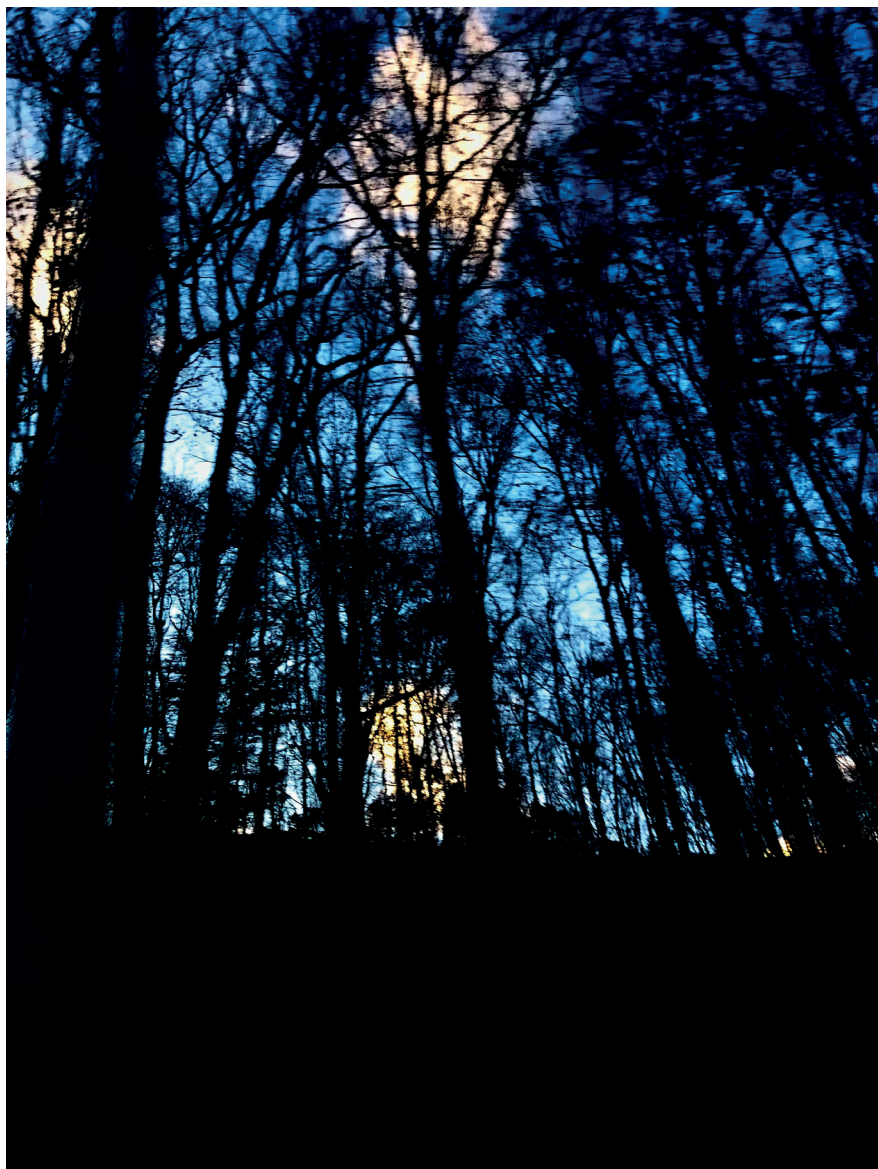
*Keys of Wandering Souls* (iPhone 11 Pro)  
Sabrina Lu, 13  
Virginia

# Simplicity



By Satya Villacorta, 12  
Colorado

The rock on the cliff  
watches the forest from up high.  
The canopy is still,  
quiet, with the soft sound  
of the breeze through the piney brush.  
Any one movement is  
like a shooting star in the vast sky,  
hardly noticed.  
As the day rolls on,  
not much happens.  
The rock enjoys the quiet.  
It's one of those small things  
that makes life rich.  
The hot sun beats down,  
but the cool surface of the rock  
makes the heat slip away.  
As the sun lies down  
beyond the horizon,  
rays of orange, yellows, and  
pinks paint themselves across the sky,  
making the forest canopy  
a mystical gold.  
If the rock could smile,  
it would.  
The dark spreads across the wood,  
the trees casting shadows upon  
the moonlit earth.  
The rock is now a dark shape,  
pressed against the mountain  
full of simplicity  
as the human world bustles on.



*Clouds through the Trees* (iPhone 8)  
Tatum Lovely, 12  
Pennsylvania

# Never Stop Imagining

The writer's imagination turns a pile of driftwood into a pirate ship



By Rachel Jess Bueker, 12  
Massachusetts

Whoosh, whoosh! The wind whipped my hair. Seagulls struggled to fly against the wind. They were like kites getting flung around, as flimsy as rag dolls. I lay on my back in the cool sand, looking up at the clouds. They looked like gray grandmother curls. The waves restlessly crashed the shore, gliding over the sand, making it smooth and sleek.

No one was there except me, my mom, my brother Michael, and a single lifeguard. People may have turned away from the beach today because it wasn't sunny. That, I thought, was strange. Or maybe I was strange. In my opinion it was beautiful in its own way. Sometimes gray days are better than sunny ones. Sometimes one thing is better than another at the right moment. And the perfect thing to do right now was to go for a beach walk.

Whoosh, whoosh! The wind was blowing in huge gusts. I felt like I was going to sail up like a piece of paper! Not the best day to swim. A perfect day for a beach walk, though. You would never know what you would find.

I pushed myself up from the sand. Then I brushed some of the grains off my knees and stomach. It was bright. I rubbed my eyes and stretched.

"Mommy, would you wanna go on a beach walk?" I asked.

"That would be nice, honey," she said.

Mom was wrapped in a beach blanket, like a shawl. Shae was wearing a Red Sox cap on her head. She had on sunglasses that reminded me of butterflies, even though it wasn't sunny. She had on the pink cover-up she always wore. She sat in a beach chair reading *The New Yorker*. This was such a Mom image.

"Michael, honey, would you like to come with us?" Mom asked my brother.

"Sure, I guess I will come with you," he replied.

He was lying facedown on the ground. Classic weirdo Michael. He got up and brushed off some sand, even though most of it still clung on to him.

Then we started our walk.

Whoosh, whoosh! We made our way down the beach, only occasionally passing a dog walker or couple. It was windy out, and the dunes would blow off little dry clay pebbles that would explode when they hit the sand. When there was a big gust of wind, sand would hit the back of my legs. It reminded me of a classic western movie with tumbleweeds and dramatic wind.





*Ship Up* (Pencil)  
Analise Braddock, 11  
New York



**I laughed in my head, and my thoughts started drifting away as if they were sitting on a barge on the giant lake of my brain.**

Whoosh, whoosh! I was deeply absorbed in my own thoughts when I stepped on something hard and grainy. Rocks! I looked down, and millions of little rocks lay before me. Every shape and size, color and texture. It was beautiful. I loved to beachcomb. When I was not swimming, I was staring down and walking along the beach, looking for one that I truly loved. Then I would take it home and add it to my collection. My mom and I slowed down and started sifting through the sand. You never knew what you would find.

Whoosh, Whoosh! My hair went this way and that while I was staring down. It reminded me of the golden color on a lion's mane. I laughed in my head, and my thoughts started drifting away as if they were sitting on a barge on the giant lake of my brain. I shook my head, trying to regain my focus. *Daydreaming is good for you*, I thought. And I was good at daydreaming.

Whoosh, whoosh! Then something glinted light blue in the faint sun that was trying to peek through the clouds. It was mostly unsuccessful. I picked through carefully not to move the glimmer of color. *That is pretty, and a bit odd. I wonder what is there?* The excitement and curiosity was building inside, like a glass slowly filling up to the top. I returned my attention back to the shine in the sand. Cautiously, I scooped it up and popped it in my palm. Cool and clear like the ocean. A rare treasure. Something that was worthy enough to put on a queen's crown and wear. It was a beautiful piece of transparent, turquoise-colored sea glass.

I showed it to Mommy and she took it from me and slipped it in her pocket. Tap, tap, tap. She patted it affectionately.

"I'll keep it safe for you. I promise, Rach, honey."

We made our way onto where the tidal pool usually was. Right now it was dried up. It had crevices and dips, passages and pools. I ran down to it and galloped along the smoothed-over sand. Michael was behind us.

"I am going to stop here," he called.

He sat down and then reclined until he was fully lying down. I looked back at him. He was comfortable and relaxed in his own space. Peaceful, like the day.

Mommy and I continued on. We walked quietly. Until she broke the silence.

"Watch out, Ladybug. There are some big sticks and driftwood."

"Where?" I asked.

"Right in front of you, silly," she told me, with a quiet chuckle in her voice.

I looked down. In front of me were big wooden boards and sticks and pallets strewn on the beachy ground. Like a ship had crashed here. But not enough boards. *Hey, that gives me an idea. A pallet for a deck. A stick for a mast. A bushel of leaves for the sail. A board for a plank. Perfect.*

I would clean up the beach and let my imagination skitter away.

"Mommy, I am a pirate. Shiver me timbers!"

"Where's your ship, Miss Pirate?"

"I shall be making it with this wood," I said in my best pirate voice.

I thought about Michael. He would be a good pirate, my sidekick. But right now he was half asleep. But a more exciting thing would be to say that he was out on a mission, finding treasure.

I took the pallet and dragged it to a nice soft, smooth spot. This would serve as the deck of the ship. Then I went back to look at more wood that would be useful in building the pirate ship. I examined some string tangled together. I picked it apart carefully. That would be useful to tie on the sail.

I looked through sticks for the mast until I found a good one. It was tall, probably about two-and-a-half feet. It was straight. At the top it split into a Y. This was where I would stick and tie the leaves in between the two poking-up branches.

I picked it up and planted it through a pallet slot. I stood on the pallet and twisted the stick in as deep as the sand, and my light weight, would let me. Then I got the leaves that had fallen off a stick's branches. They were dry and wrinkled like oversized raisins. I firmly situated the leaves and took the old rope in my hand. I swung it around the leaves and split branches and then knotted it to make sure it kept in place.

"See, Mommy Pirate, I do have a ship. You can join me on it when I am done working. But if you are not a useful crew member, then you shall walk the plank, matey. I will test you by putting you in the crow's nest while I steer," I said in my pirate voice.

"Well, that is harsh. I think you still need a tiller to steer and a crow's nest. I am not sure that you will be able to fit me in your crow's nest. Or that your mast will hold me up."

I picked up two bent sticks. They both looked like U's. I used the remaining string and tied them together. Then I bound them on to the mast. This would serve as the crow's nest. I think Mommy was right. She would not be able to fit in the nest up top, high, searching the great seas. Handy deck member, though.

Next I went to the pile of remnants. I examined the sizable, chunky stick that I had been eyeing the whole time. It was a good enough tiller, if you looked at it that way. I heaved the significant piece of wood over and stuck it right through and under the pallet's notches. To finish it off, I stuck a little twig at the end of the tiller. Almost done with the ship! Just the steering wheel now. I took a crossed stick and put it through a hole in the deck. Perfect. Finished.

The ship made me think of the whale we saw the other day. Bulky but smooth in the water. I would call my ship *The Whale*.

Now I could sail the seven seas. I could explore and think, dream and imagine. I let my mind unfurl. There were whole stories to create. I imagined I was sailing next to dolphins that could save me from evil pirates. I was finding treasure. I was saving remote villages in the middle of nowhere. I felt invincible! And I was!

Neither words nor feelings could explain it. I was golden. Imagination is indescribable. Nothing can stop it.

I let my hand skim the mast one last time. I knew I would never see it again, but I would imagine it. I would let my mind recall sailing across the stormy waters and finding treasure. And remember that not just gold or jewels are treasure—anything that matters to you is treasure.

“Ready?” Mom called.

I didn’t really want to go, but there was no point protesting. I wasn’t ready to leave and stop imagining. But I knew I would never stop imagining. Not ever.

“Mommy.” I slid my hand into hers. “Never stop imagining.”

She kissed the top of my head.

“That’s right, Ladybug. That’s right.”



*Shipwreck* (Panasonic Lumix DC-ZS200)  
Sage Millen, 13  
British Columbia, Canada

# Running Down the Bishop Ford Bridge



By Ian Maduff, 10  
Illinois

Running down  
The Bishop Ford bridge  
Across the sky.  
Cars on roads keep going  
Trains on tracks keep slowing.

Headed down the Bishop Ford  
Pink water tower  
Will devour  
Another tower  
With its smiley face.

Down over the bridge  
Bishop Ford bridge  
Going round the bend  
Exit to Wisconsin  
Exit to Indiana  
Time to go right  
The sun is bright  
Rev it up  
Speed up  
Across the rocks

Towards the quarry  
This deathly giant pit.  
If you fell  
You'd fall for  
More than a minute.

Trees cover the rocks.  
Looks



Like  
The pit  
Was never there.

Exit 2B  
To Homewood.



*Journey* (Watercolor)  
Audrey Li, 12  
New York

# Sounds of My Street



By Madeleine Palter, 13  
Massachusetts

The wind blows  
soft but loud  
enough to make your hair whip  
in your face  
like you're in a convertible  
in a film.

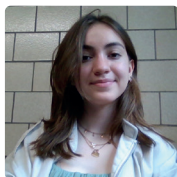
Cars race  
down the road  
passing all life  
leaving it all in its dust  
behind.

The crunch of leaves  
under high schoolers' feet  
as the gossip pours out of their mouths  
like a child  
whooshes down a slide.

The lights beat down  
and flicker  
occasionally on the  
joggers, walkers, strollers  
on the road below it.

# The Apartment

The narrator says goodbye to her great-grandmother's apartment



By Viviana Perez, 12  
Illinois

Sunday, Feb. 20, 2022

I'm going to miss Gram's apartment a lot. I wish we could stay longer. There are so many memories there. I remember when I brought Apples, my guinea pig, and Gram was a little nervous because we couldn't have pets in the apartment. One time Porsche, my aunt, came to the apartment. She brought her big dog (who has since passed away), and the owner of Gram's apartment told her that dogs were not allowed.

Today, when my mom and I went to clean and throw away some stuff in the apartment, it was so emotionally draining. Even my mom said it was; Gram is her grandmother. It felt like a part of me was pulled away. At first, I was like, *Oh, yeah—this is sad that we won't have Gram's apartment anymore.* But then it hit me that we won't have a family place either.

Gram's apartment was like a summer house, a family house. It is in Michigan and you can walk to the lake from it. You walk down the path until there is a house on the right-hand side, and then the path curves, after which there are berry bushes on the left side. The berries look like blackberries, but tinier. The grownups told us we should try the berries because when they were kids, they would pick the berries and eat them, so then we started to pick and eat the berries too. It used to be that you could walk down some stairs and go to the beach. But now it's blocked off because the water has covered the sand and there's no more beach.

My family, aunts, uncles, and I would meet up at Gram's apartment and have Thanksgiving, Easter, and Valentine's Day. Lots of times, we would just stop by to get a little vacation and get away from real life. It was relaxing and cozy. One time, we came like we usually did, and we found bags lying on the floor. Ended up, my uncle and his kids had come to rest there for the weekend too and we didn't even know. We ended up having a fun time and going to the beach.

I've realized there will be no more talking with Uncle Jesse, Aunt Candace, Aunt Amber, Aunt Porsche, my mom, Lennon, Abby, and Dad while we make sandwiches in the kitchen. No more brushing teeth while hearing the dripping

of the bathtub faucet. No more racing up and down the hallway with my cousins Lennon and Owen. And no more having breakfast out on the fake, green, grass patio with the big pink ball statue and the hummingbird feeder that would hang on a pole. I've always wondered what that big pink ball was. Probably decoration.

I'm really going to miss it all. I feel like it's going to take years until we have another family home, and I think that is what scares me the most.

It's 11:11 p.m., and out of all the things I could be doing on a weeknight while my parents are sleeping, I chose to write about this. Writing this down is making me feel better. It gives me hope that I will have that fun, adrenaline-tired, happy feeling again. It feels like this: sneaking in quietly at 9 p.m. while your cousins are asleep. You brought pizza and your uncle gets all excited. The lights are dimmed low while you listen to the stories of your aunts' and uncles' childhoods, all huddled around by the kitchen counter with pizza boxes opened and out on the table. Soda and beer bottles spread around. Toasting with glass cups and beer cans.

So sad. I'll miss you, apartment.

We want to end things nicely, so next weekend we are going to go to the apartment one last time. There is going to be an ice show, and the carousel is open again. It's been closed for a while because of Covid. Hopefully, we can go and Jesse, Abby, Owen, and Lennon can meet us there. I want to invite Amber, but my mom says that it will be too crazy—we *know* how *Amb* is—but I just want to feel that feeling again. When the whole family is together it is hectic, Lennon and Owen following me around, food everywhere, everyone talking and laughing. Eating around the glass table, some sitting on the stools, some sitting around the big table.

Porsche ended up taking the big table to her place. Amb took the glass table and most of the mirrors. I almost forgot what the apartment looked like with all the furniture back inside it. I miss it already.

Now, truly bye-bye and have a happy time with your new owner. Maybe when I'm older I can come back and visit you and see what you look like.





*Space Mushrooms* (Acrylic)  
 Delilah Prager, 10  
 California

# The Pathway



By Jasmine Manderson-Arnott, 12  
Australia

As the rain began the river ran, past the emerald trees, past the rubbery shrub and into the crystal clear creek, as you walk past the river you take a moment to take in the rainforest, you look below yourself and see the rough rocky ground, you look over and spot the muddy moss, the beautiful trees, and the saturated colors all around, when you continue down the rough, beaten path you find a huge old tree, then past you flies a yellow bee, when you finally reach the creek you look into the water and see the perfect reflection of yourself, just everyday you, when you look around it is revealed that you are surrounded by rubbery shrubbery, muddy moss, and tranquil trees, you think you should stay a bit because you haven't felt this at peace in years, you sit down, breathe, and become lost in your peaceful place.



*Soaring Away* (iPhone 11)  
Sabrina Lu, 13  
Virginia

# Escape from Manzular

Pearl dreams of escaping Manzular, a once-peaceful world controlled by an evil witch



By Cecilia Hodgman, 13  
Georgia

Walking through our kingdom at night is usually dangerous, but now it is dangerous times four hundred. It has been a long time since a witch named Madame Lazora took over our peaceful kingdom with an army of fire at her side. Madame Lazora is kind of like a fairytale witch, but way more powerful. I don't know how she became that powerful, but I have a couple theories.

I probably should introduce myself. My name is Pearl. I'm fifteen, and I don't want to brag, but I'm probably the world's biggest brainiac. And I live in a world that is said to have magic, but not the magic that you're born with and you can do cool spells with when you're a baby (but that would be great). It's more like no one has been able to harness the magic and use it as their own—magic's just always been there. We know it through the ancient texts written by our founders. No one in our history has ever been known to harness the magic. Until Madame Lazora.

---

It was a beautifully boring day the day that Madame Lazora came to take over the kingdom. I was just coming home from school like normal. My mom was home but about to leave for her next shift at work as normal.

"Hey, Mom," I said.

"Hello, Pearl. How was school?"

"Great! We got our report card!"

"Let me guess—you got all A's?"

"That's right!" I exclaimed, hoping to get her more into a conversation, but, like normal, it was a disappointment.

"That's cool! Now I've got to go to work. Bye, darling."

This is how our normal conversations go; there is a hi, then something about my school, and then she says bye and then she's gone. *Poof*—just like magic.

So, like normal, I went up to my room (well, the attic—our house is very small) to start on my homework, and that was when the first attack happened. Then it became a whole battle which lasted for three whole years. Then we lost. The king was dead and so was all of the royal family—the queen, the five princes and the

three princesses. And that is how our kingdom came under the rule of Madame Lazora. Now her flag waves in the castle and there is only one ruler—her.

I've got a feeling that the idea for the "citizens'" new house design came from our house, because soon all the houses magically became very similar to our house, one story with an attic and two rooms. Madame Lazora believes that everyone benefits from being the same. But I really felt bad for the families that had lots of children. After all, the reason that my mom and I have such a small house is that there are only the two of us. No dad, no brothers or sisters. Just me and Mom.

I go to the school that Madame Lazora makes us go to, where we learn her curriculum and what she expects us to learn. She wants us to think that her kingdom is the best and perfect so we never think of leaving, so we believe this is where our life is meant to be. I think I am the first to think of seeing past the kingdom walls. Well, maybe not. A month ago two kids disappeared from school—Mary and Matthew Johnson. Some people say that they escaped. No one knows if that's actually true. But it got me wondering if escape was possible.

"Storytime's over," as my father would have said. "Get your head out of the past, and get control over the present."

So that's what I'm doing, silently walking through the kingdom, not thinking about the past, trying to think about my future. The bleak weather doesn't help my mood. The weather never changes. It is always what Madame Lazora likes: black clouds covering the whole sky so that you can't tell what time of day it is. The ground is so dry that there is no soil fertile enough to harvest crops. You can see the cracks in the ground. As I walk down the shadowy alleyway, I hear footsteps coming closer that sound like those of the guards Madame Lazora has patrolling the castle. Soon there are so many guards in the alleyway I can't count them. Then I start to worry.

*Do they know about my plan to escape?* Normally there would be patrols around the kingdom, but only in groups of two to five. Now there are about fifty, and there are more coming. Then someone walks through and I finally understand why there are so many guards. It isn't that I have been caught escaping—it is that Madame Lazora is standing right in front of me.

At school we learn that it is an honor to be in the presence of Madame Lazora. I had only seen her once before, from a distance, at school when she came to check to make sure people were following her standards.

"Hello. It's Pearl, right?" she says with her cold, smooth voice. Now that she is standing right in front of me, I can see what she looks like: she has fire-red eyes with robes made of pure flame that wind up and down her body. She's looking right at me.

"Hello, Madame Lazora. And you are right. That is my name," I say, trying to keep my voice from shaking.

"I see you are on a little walk. Rather late, isn't it? Lucky for me, you are the person that I am looking for," she says.

"Oh, really? Me?"



**“Good thing I won’t have to give that witch an answer,” I mumble under my breath. “Because I will escape tonight.”**

“Yes. I believe you are the smartest, most talented, and most connected to magic of any person I’ve seen.”

“Me, Madame?”

“Yes, I’ve watched you through your whole life as my citizen, and I am here to offer you the chance of a lifetime,” she says with a cold smile. “I want to ask you to become my *apprentice*.”

*Silence.* I couldn’t speak or even breathe. In school we learn that being asked to be her apprentice is, like she said, the biggest honor of a lifetime. It’s a pretty big honor just to see or speak to her, or that’s what we learned. But this is, like, crazy. Of course, if I said yes, I would get to live in her castle and my mom would never have to work again. On the other hand, if I said yes, I would be devoting myself to the darkest magic. I couldn’t make myself do that. If I said no, though, I would probably get sentenced to death or be shamed all my life. And trust me, it is not a good thing to be shamed.

“I am feeling that you are conflicted,” Madame Lazora says. “I am feeling generous. I will give you three days to decide. Oh, aren’t I so nice? Ta ta!”

She disappears, and the guards with her. “Good thing I won’t have to give that witch an answer,” I mumble under my breath. “Because I will escape tonight.”

I walk silently through the kingdom thinking of how many families I will be leaving behind. Including my own mother. But for my escape to be successful, I have to do it on my own.

As I walk through the alleyway, I pull up a mental map of our kingdom, including places where the guards would be.

When we were young, and before Madame Lazora took over our kingdom, we learned that there was another kingdom out there. We were told that the citizens in this land could use magic, that they were born with magic and that it was not evil magic like the kind Madame Lazora possessed. It was natural magic. But this kingdom was lost and no one could find it. Maybe I would be the one to rediscover this land.

I am surprised that there aren’t many guards out tonight. *Is she letting me escape?* I think, worried. But then I remember that the elite guards are still out searching on the other side of the wall for the missing kids who disappeared a month ago.

My breath catches as I see the grand wall that keeps all citizens inside the kingdom. It’s huge. I scan the area for the landmark I made so I can find the tunnel. When I find it, I hurry over and move aside pieces of debris.

Two months ago, I discovered this tunnel while spying on two random kids (not coincidentally the two kids who disappeared). I watched them sneak around the wall, time guards, and dig the tunnel. I made sure that no one was watching and crawled through their tunnel. The tunnel wasn’t for luxury

travel. Dug completely out of dirt, it tore my tunic as I crawled through. Midway through, I heard rustling from above the tunnel and started to panic.

*Is it going to collapse on me?* I worried, crawling faster. Soon, it became so dark that I could see nothing, so I trusted my instincts and the tunnel to lead me through. Eventually, I saw light ahead from a flickering flame. Crawling to the end of the tunnel, I peeked out to find a magical border of pure flame surrounding the grand wall. *Why didn't I think of this?!* I groaned.

I heard voices up ahead. With a quick dash, I jumped behind a log.

"Your majesty, it does not seem like we need this border. No one would ever think of escaping," said an unfamiliar voice.

"I know that, but I have learned to trust my instincts, after your mistake." I recognized that voice as Madame Lazora's.

"Ah, so then you have not found the children who escaped?"

"No, but we are on their trail."

"What's your plan of action?"

Madame Lazora heaved a sigh. "I suspect that they are taking the valley way. It's the only way a couple of kids could make it."

I was positive they were talking about Mary and Matthew. I could definitely see both of them escaping together. Mary was the younger sister and on the nicer side. She could make anyone's day but was terrible at keeping secrets, so if they escaped, her brother probably would have revealed his plan to her at the last minute. Matthew was her older brother and was way tougher than his sister, and a very good swordsman. I could imagine them being a great escape team.

"But no one can cross the border now. Only people with magic in their blood will be able to cross. But trust me, no one will even try."

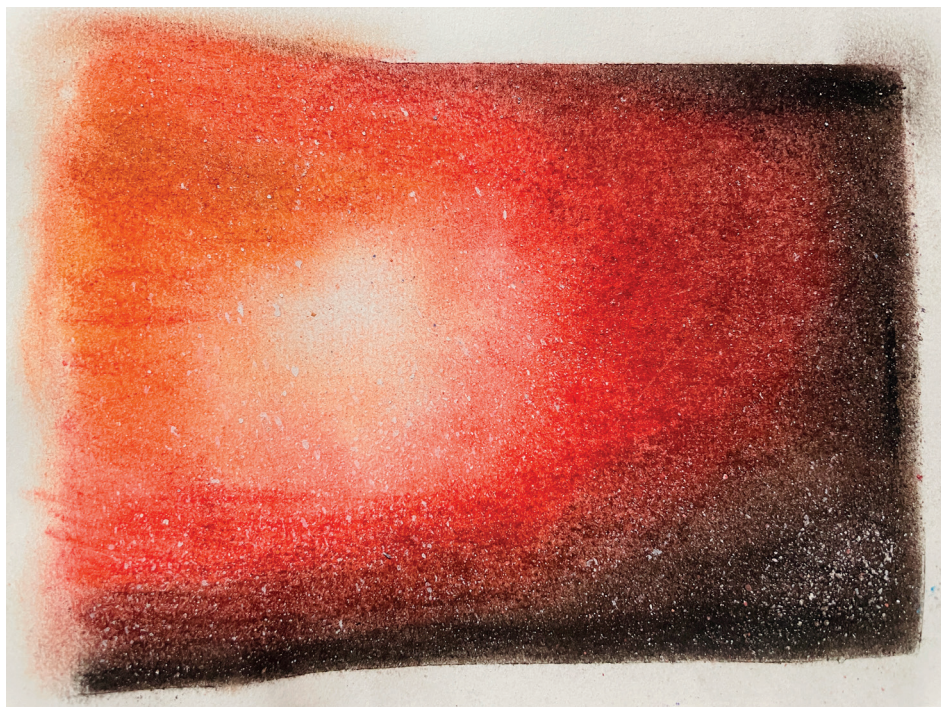
"Alright then," said the mysterious voice, with a hint of doubt, "I'll see you in the morning."

After that conversation and the sound of Madame Lazora vaporizing, there are no more voices, not a sound. I cautiously move out from my hiding spot and see no one. I walk up to the shield.

"Well, it's worth a try," I say, taking a deep breath. I hesitate a second before walking through the magical boundary.

Afterward, I could never explain what happened except that it felt like all my insides turned into wispy air and time sped up. With a flash, I saw a smoky figure with glowing eyes, and other scenes I couldn't quite identify. I felt something tickle in my hands and strange words started to flood my brain. After what felt like forever, I was on the other side. But the strange feeling and strange words hadn't left my mind.

For the first time in ten years I had freedom.



*Red Galaxy* (Chalk pastels)  
Ahaana Gangwal, 8  
California



*The Great Underneath* (iPhone 11 Pro)  
Sabrina Lu, 13  
Virginia

# Evergreen



By Oisín Stephens, 12  
Massachusetts

Trees gain new fay-looking  
Cloaks when autumn comes

As if they were on fire  
The trees' beauty decorates the forest

Envy evergreens  
They don't know the  
Uncomfortable burden of beauty.



# Slip, Crash, Boom

**A fun backyard play session with friends takes a turn when Eloïse falls off the monkey bars**



By Eloïse de Larquier, 10  
Oregon

*This story is dedicated to my Nana for helping me throughout this.*

“Go! Go! Go!” my friend Addie and I shouted. Olivia, my neighbor, was showing us how fast she could run, zipping around my backyard, sprinting past the flowerbeds and back like a cheetah, her brown hair swaying as she picked up speed, moving in a blur.

“Your turn!” Olivia gasped in between two heavy breaths when she finished.

What could I do? A somersault? No! Maybe a cartwheel. Oh! Just then an idea popped into my head: I should do the monkey bars as fast as I could.

I climbed up the ladder then paused, positioning myself as if I were a famous actor making an entrance on stage, and grabbed the first bar as fast as I could, focusing on speed.

*Quicker! Quicker!* my mind screamed. My eyes homed in on the treehouse door.

“Almost there!” I mumbled through my gritted teeth.

I was on the second-to-last bar when my hand reached out, brushed the last metal bar, and—slip, crash, boom! I sailed through the air as fear took root in my head. I landed on a mound of bark chips with a soft thump. For a split second, my friends just stared at me and I stared at them. Then, burning pain erupted from my arm, blurring my mind, making me barely hear their rapid talking. I couldn’t think. All I could do was cry. Warm tears damped my cheeks. I stayed there paralyzed for a minute or two.

“Eloïse, are you okay? Here, I think you should go see your grandma,” Olivia said with a hint of worry in her voice. I reached out for her to help me up, but that just sent another jolt of pain down my arm. Addie managed to help me up the porch stairs to the back door. My grandmother, Nana, was there in three seconds with an ice pack.

“Honey, what happened?” she cried while escorting me to the kitchen. Since I didn’t answer, she poured me a glass of water. It tasted cool going down my throat but didn’t help the continuous pain up my arm. After my friends finished explaining what happened, my Nana asked me to bend my arm. I tried, but it was too much.

“Ow!” I cried.



“Maybe you should go take a nap, sweetie,” my Nana said, not sure what to do. So, I went downstairs and went to bed.

I woke up sweating. My arm still hurt. I must have slept a long time because my mom was back from work and was waiting for me on the couch. “You look pale. Can I see your arm?” she asked in a soothing voice. Since I couldn’t stretch my arm, I sat next to her and took a deep breath, slowly, steadily bending my elbow and gritting my teeth, making my eyes burn. After reflecting a minute, my mom helped me up and told me that we were going to the hospital.

In the car, I could tell my mom was worried from the way she was frowning.

“Mom, what’s going to happen?” I asked, imagining my arm falling off.

“Well, you’ll probably get an X-ray to know if your arm is actually fractured. Then, if it is, you will get a cast and wear it for a few weeks.”

My mind raced. *WHAT! I won’t be able to do anything fun! Not a cast!* I thought to myself. After taking three deep breaths to clear my head, I said, “Okay” and pretended everything was fine.

Once we got to the hospital, which did not look as intimidating as I thought it would, I relaxed a little. A kind man led us to a room that looked nice and cheery. What if a cast wasn’t that bad of an idea after all? Besides, it was only going to be for a month.

Finally, just then, the word that I said to my mom in the car became true: “okay”—this was going to be okay. Something inside of me clicked. I don’t know what did it, but I wasn’t scared anymore because I knew this was the right thing for my arm.

# Wish Upon



By Anna Weinberg, 11  
Washington, DC

I stare up  
Up, up, up.  
Into the deep, dark sky.  
The moon is up there,  
Almost full,  
Not quite.  
I ignore it.  
Tonight I'm looking for something else.  
I rest my chin on the windowsill,  
Searching.  
There!  
My gaze lands on a single bright light.  
A star.  
Beautiful and pure.  
I smile.  
I stare at it, and close my eyes.  
Please, please, please,  
I whisper.  
I make my wish,  
Blowing it out through the open window.  
I open my eyes again.  
But my star is gone.

I search, frantic.  
It has disappeared,  
Taking my wish with it.  
Or ... There!  
I find it and exhale.

But then it blinks.  
Realization sets over me,  
Like the winter sun over the countryside.  
It's an airplane.  
And it will carry my wish across the world.



*Carrots (Watercolor)*  
Aspen Clayton, 11  
Illinois



*Power and Beauty* (Watercolor on paper)



# Highlight from Stonesoup.com

## From the Book Club

An update from the thirty-fifth meeting on the Stone Soup Book Club for Writers



By Maya Mahoney  
Book Club Facilitator

This month we discussed *A Wish in the Dark* by Christina Soontornvat, a suspenseful and moving novel set in a magical version of Thailand. The book follows Pong, who is born in Namwon Prison because his mom was imprisoned for stealing. He escapes the prison and hides in a monastery, where he is guided spiritually by the wise Father Cham. But, he's still in danger! Nok, the daughter of the warden of Namwon Prison, is determined to capture Pong and bring him to justice, hoping that doing so will help her gain glory and acceptance. Pong flees Nok back to Chattana, a beautiful but very crowded and unequal city, which floats on canals and is lit by colorful magical lights, all controlled by the Governor. There, he reunites with his old best friend from prison, Somkit, and gets involved in a community made up of the city's poorest people, who are organizing to make their city a fairer place. Pong has to decide whether to join in on the organizing or whether he should flee Chattana (and Nok, who is still hunting him down), while he can still escape.

This book had so much drama and suspense, so many larger-than-life characters, and so many interesting and important themes to talk about. Students joined us from all over the country, hailing from different states, and in different grades of school. We had a lively discussion. Everyone agreed that they enjoyed the book, and talked about their different favorite characters. Some people loved Pong for his fierce sense of justice; others loved Ampai for her courageous organizing. Some loved Father Cham for his gentle wisdom, and one person's favorite character was Nok, who has such impressive fighting skills and changes so much over the course of the book.

Next we got into a discussion about the major themes of the book: justice, law, right, wrong, prison, punishment. We talked about the unfair way that children are punished for their parents' crimes in Chattana, and that prison tattoos prevent people from finding work, even after they have served their sentences. We discussed different proverbs that are said in the society in the novel, such as "Light only shines on the worthy," and "The tree drops its fruit straight down," and how we disagreed with these proverbs. One student mentioned that although it would be very nice if good people always had good things happen to them, and vice versa, this is not how the world works, and so it is not fair to say that if someone is poor or otherwise struggling, it must be because they are a bad person.

You can read the rest of the report at <https://stonesoup.com/stone-soup-book-club-2/>

### About the Stone Soup Book Club

The Stone Soup Book Club is open to all Stone Soup readers ages 9–13. We started the book club for our readers during the COVID-19-related school closures, and it has been running ever since—currently once a month, usually on the last Saturday of the month (depending on holidays). You can find out more, including how to sign up, here: <https://stonesoup.com/stone-soup-writing-and-art-classes/>

# 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

Austin Loewy, 12  
Maya Raffaele, 12

## POETRY

Ethan Liu, 10  
Eliana Ojeda, 8  
Vatsla Pandey, 12  
Leucine Peck, 8  
Brook Taintor, 11

## ART

Charlene Cho, 10  
Kate Fullem, 9  
Yanling Lin, 12  
Patrick Nguyen, 7

## Visit the Stone Soup Store at [Stonesoupstore.com](http://Stonesoupstore.com)

### At our store, you will find . . .

- Current and back issues of *Stone Soup*
- 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
- Journals and sketchbooks

. . . and more!

### Finally, don't forget to visit [Stonesoup.com](http://Stonesoup.com) to browse our bonus materials. There you will find:

- More information about our writing workshops and book club
- Monthly flash contests and weekly creativity prompts
- Blog posts from our young bloggers on everything from sports to sewing
- Video interviews with *Stone Soup* authors

. . . and more content by young creators!



