

Athena's Quill



Spring, 2022

Welcome to Athena's Quill!

Dear Athena's Community,

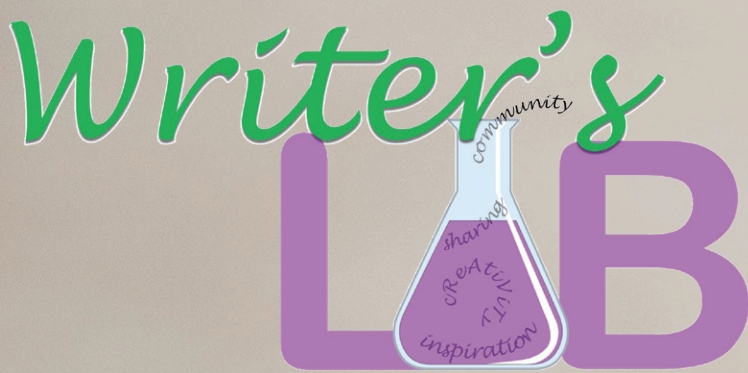
Every semester, students in Athena's creative writing classes submit work they have done that semester to Athena's Quill. Some of this writing was labored over for months; some of it is spontaneous and lightly edited.

I love the variety and imagination here, the love of words and the spirit of exploration and sharing. It's amazing to see where students go with just a seed of an idea.

I hope you also enjoy the writing and art our students have shared with you this semester!

~Professor Suki

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Writer's LAB

Writer's Lab is a creative "laboratory" workshop where avid writers can experiment. We examine and discuss reactions to both published work and writing shared by students. Short, free-flowing pieces produced in class may be "practice" or the catalysts for something new.

Over the semester, students have shown so much originality, insight, and passion for writing as they developed their projects!

- Prof. Lisa

In This Section

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SHATTERED MIRRORS:

Chapter Ten Point Five (Narrator: Aleksei Kholodov)

by Sarah Gwinup

What is a utopia if it is only for the rich? Who takes care of those pretending to be the god-emperors? Has anyone ever wanted to resist? In this society of hundreds of years after the year 2000, has anyone decided to revert to English Common Law? Has anyone considered these ancient and likely forgotten ideas? This society has thrown off the past and all of its wrongdoings and great things. All it has retained from long ago are languages and the blurry difference between good and evil.

SHATTERED MIRRORS is the story, not of a revolutionary, but of an intellectual living in poverty—Aleksei Kholodov—and his escape from this real world.

CHAPTER TEN POINT FIVE (ALEKSEI)

The bus I am on is heading towards the scrapyard I often run away from dark reality to. I quietly get off near it and walk to the old house where Boris Yevgenievich runs his business. The lights are out. I should have known that he requires sleep to live. Sometimes he is asleep when I come to get scraps. I often wait for him to wake up.

He reminds me of the father I would have wanted to have as a child. No matter. I stopped thinking about that years ago. It is not important.

I curl up in an alley separating the house and the one next to it. I accidentally hit the wall of the house with my backpack. The door opens and I close my eyes to brace myself for an angry shout.

A kind voice says “Kid, are you okay? It’s not like you to stay out late and to come here of all places.” Boris Yevgenievich’s voice is soft. He sounds like he misses someone.

I open one eye. Boris Yevgenievich is shining an absurdly bright flashlight into my face.

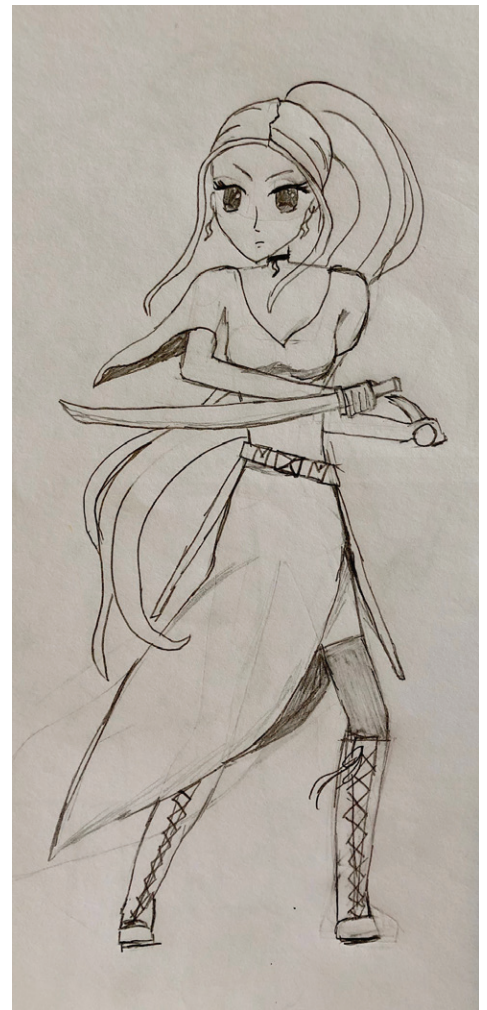
“Sorry...” I stutter. “I did not mean to wake you up...please forgive me...I can leave now...”

“Kid, you don’t ever have to ask permission before coming here.” Boris Yevgenievich says, and laughs. “You can stay the night if you have to,” he says. How does he trust me? “If you aren’t trustworthy, I can always just force you to leave. Nothing much.”

“You do not have to provide for me; I am just one of your customers. You should not care about me,” I say. “Do you even know my name? No. Do you even know where I live? No.”

Boris Yevgenievich laughs. “Before my son died—ten years ago—he acted almost exactly like you, blunt and down-to-earth,” he says. “Sleeping in alleys is dangerous. Come in.”

He takes my backpack and helps me get to my feet. We walk into the shop. When there are no lights, it looks menacing in his office. He leads me through a door and closes it behind me. There is a small room at the top of the stairs. There is not much in it, but I can tell that Boris Yevgenievich spent time making it livable.



Artwork by Xan

The Moon Dragon, Astra

by Cate Gordon

Chapter 1

Astra the Moon Dragon was bored. She knew every dragon on Diana would love, love, love to be the legendary Moon Dragon for even a day. But actually? It wasn't so great. She would much rather be a normal dragon hanging out with her friends (not that she *had* friends anymore) than be famous but alone on the moon.

I was so wrong, Astra thought.

When she was younger, Astra had dreamed of being the Moon Dragon. She had known that her mother would pass down full Moon Dragon responsibility to her on her 100th birthday, and couldn't have been more excited. She had imagined herself sitting on the moon, the sole force that let plants and dragons thrive on Diana, the one dragon who everyone admired more than any other.

Then one day, when she was only ten years old, something terrible had happened. The moon went dark. This had never hap-

pened before in Moon Dragon history, and Astra and her family were terrified. Astra had flown up to the moon to see if her mother was okay, but when she got there, her mother was nowhere to be seen. Astra had looked everywhere she could think of, but had found nothing. It was like her mother had just vanished.

As she looked down at the dark planet, Astra had realized what she had to do. *I'm the only female left in my family*, she thought. *I'm the only one with Moon Dragon power. I don't know if I'm ready for this, but it's my duty to bring light to Diana.*

So Astra became the youngest Moon Dragon in the history of Diana. And at first, it was great. Of course she missed her mother, but she was looked up to and worshipped, and this was what she had been wanting to do her whole life. The first few weeks she felt happy and free! She had the whole place to herself and could do whatever she wanted. But now, two years later... well, to put it lightly, it was the most boring thing in the world.

Astra sighed as she stared across the vast nothingness of space at her beloved planet Diana. It was so lonely and boring here on the moon, and more than anything, she wished that something interesting would happen...



Artwork by Cate

Ordinary Blossoms

Part 1: The First Adventures.

by Juli Allen

Chapter 1- The New School (Haruto)

When I wake up, I see it's almost time for school. I grab my phone and message my best friend Satoshi, "Hey dude, it's time to get ready, for the first day." I type. Satoshi is deaf so he can't hear his alarm, so I have to text him. I wait for a minute or two, eventually, he responds with "Ok! Just woke up. Thanks, getting ready now." I walk to my closet, grab my school outfit, and go to my bathroom to change. After I walk out, I go downstairs to eat breakfast. My mom made eggs. I grab a glass of orange juice. Soon after, I grab my backpack, and start walking towards school. I'm quite interested to see what high school has in store for me. Usually it's a fifteen minute walk, but there is lots of traffic, putting me about 5 minutes behind. When I finally get there, I see Satoshi, who waves at me. We both grab our phones and start typing.

"I'm gonna go explore the school until class time." Satoshi types.

"Ok, I'm gonna meet some other students." I type. I wave at Satoshi while walking away. I see a girl looking at a poster of some kind. I walk over, hoping to introduce myself. "Kon'nichi-wa" I say to her, yet she doesn't even notice. Then I step backwards and she jumps up like someone had just scared her, which was probably me. She slowly creaks her head backwards like she's an owl or something. When she finally notices me she freezes like ice. When I tap her to see if she's ok, she just stares at me coldly. Without saying a word, she immediately walks in the opposite direction of me, making me feel like I did something wrong. What is up with her? I have that weird feeling in the pit of my stomach that tells me that I'm gonna find out soon enough. Lucky me, I'm in the same class as Satoshi, and that girl. For some odd reason, everybody is staring at her, just staring. The teacher is calling names so they can introduce themselves to the class.

Then she says "Nuzuruki, Satoshi "

Artwork by Juli



He just stays in his seat, smiling. Then I whack my face and pull out my phone. "Dude, she's calling your name!" I sent. "Yamamoto-kun! No phones in class!" She says loudly.

"I'm sorry." I say with my head lowered. I feel a buzzing noise, so I secretly check my phone. Satoshi has messaged me, "Why is she calling my name?"

I type back "So you can introduce yourself." He looks at his phone, and just nods his head. He walks up to the blackboard and starts writing down words. It reads, "Hello, I am Satoshi Nuzuruki, I am 15 years old. I like video games, and I am deaf." The teacher puts her hand over her mouth and apologizes to me instantly. Then she calls my name.

I walk up to the front of class and say "Kon'nichiwa! I'm Haruto Yamamoto, I am 15 years old. I am best friends with Satoshi, and also his interpreter." I walk back to my seat after I finish.

"Next, uh...Saito, Chiyo." I faintly see a girl stand up. When she is finally in view, I notice that it is the girl from earlier! She stands in front of the class, but says nothing. We all wait for her to say something, but she says nothing.

Soon enough, she quietly speaks, "H-hi...I'm Chiyo Saito...I'm 15 years old, and I like purple..." everyone is just watching her, as if she has a target on her head. I look down, because it's rude to stare at people. Then while walking back to her seat, Chiyo trips on a pencil and drops everything that was in her hands, including a small plush toy. From what I see, it is

quite small, fuzzy, and it is supposed to be some kind of...dog? Her face immediately goes red and she grabs it and stuffs it back into her backpack as fast as she can, and sits back in her seat. Once the bell rings she bolts out of class. Even while running out of class, the whole class is still staring at her like judges in a game show. Satoshi just sits in his seat, still smiling. I send him a message that says, "The bell rang, we can go now." He looks at his phone and nods, then gets up out of his seat and starts walking. We walk around the neighborhood a couple of times, then he waves at me and walks home, I do the same. Once I get home I go straight to my room and throw myself on my bed. Why did Chiyo stuff her plush back in her bag so quickly? What is going on with her?

From Your Perspective

by Alexa Alisse Gordon Mellema

You are tired; it is night and you have not brushed your teeth or anything, but your name is Elsie and you do not surrender. You must finish this drawing before school tomorrow. All your sort-of-friends-sort-of-annoying-people-who-won't-leave-you-alone made you promise to show them. You wish you had never told them you liked to draw. You used to just be their sarcastic friend; now you can draw, and they are interested. It really isn't that annoying—you kind of like having people who like to look at it. They compare it to your other work and tell you you are the next great artist, even though it is really only a hobby.

Before you mentioned it in passing, there had been no one who cared about your art. Your dad and mom were both too busy with work to do much more than smile and say they liked your drawings. These people actually discuss your art. They talk about it. They care about it. Your art teacher sure doesn't; all she seems to care about is teaching everyone in the class how to follow specific instructions in how to do perspective correctly. You yawn, looking down at your work.

It is a picture of the sun setting over the ocean. There is also a dock with a small boat by it. You used pastels to make it—they are fun—but they make your hands feel greasy. You finish up the drawing and stare at it. You think it is good, but you are so tired you don't trust your own opinion. It could look like fried garbage for all you know.

You look at your phone to check the time—it isn't super late, but you should get some sleep. You drag yourself out of your chair feeling like a droopy piece of asparagus. You wonder why it is so hard to do the simplest things when you are tired. You get into your favorite pajamas, the ones with the green stripes, and brush your teeth before turning off the light. Even though you felt so tired a second ago, now that you are in your bed, alone, all your worries decide to visit you.

You try to silence the thoughts by mashing your head into the pillow, but as usual it doesn't work. Instead, you are forced to listen to them tell you things. They tell you that since you stayed up so late you will be too tired to do your best at school, then you will fail everything. You want to turn on loud music to blast them out, but you know that your parents wouldn't like that. They have to go to work in the morning; they need their rest just as much as you do. Instead, you just wait them out, and at some point—you can't remember when as it always is with these things—you dive gratefully into sleep.

As usual, morning comes far too soon and you curse school for forcing you to get up this early. If it was up to you, kids wouldn't have to get out of bed till ten a.m rolled around. However it, like so many other things, is not up to you. You somehow manage to muster the strength to get out of bed and get ready. It takes a long time for your zombie body to do what you tell it, though, so as usual you are rushing out the door. After finishing up the last of your cereal, you get in the car as your mom gets on a phone call. Your mom's phone calls tend to be important, so you keep your mouth shut the entire drive to your school.

You run over to the kids waiting by the entrance, thankful you are not late. You wait impatiently for the bell to signal you it is time to head to morning recess. Maybe running around a bit will help your mood. When the bell does ring you join the large crowd of kids ignoring the 'No running down the ramp' rule. You guess the fact that your school is outdoors with stationary trailers acting as classrooms is a bit odd, but it is all you ever knew.

[\[Click to continue reading\]](#)

Diary of a Booger

by Nikita Bashkatov

Narrator: Boog

I'm back! Wait, you don't remember me? Aw. Well then, let's start again! I'm Boog, the main booger in the story. And I'll be telling you about my adventures! Here we go!

I don't understand this, but people call me the narrator. What the heck is a narrator? Anyway, back to the story, the boy is turning 10 in less than 30 days! AND he has actually stopped wiping us on the wall (probably because he got punished for it 2 weeks ago...) Aside from that all us boogers we're able to rescue all the boogers who were left on the wall! Some of them actually talked! It was great rescuing boogers. Wait- what's this? Wait— no way—

WERE HAVING A BARBECUE!!!!!!

I love barbecues! It's a very good thing I overheard THAT.

Anyway, time to roll over to the backyard! What? We roll instead of run. Don't question it.

3 minutes of really fast rolling to the backyard later..

Phew! That was fun! *ding dong*! Wait, was that the doorbell? The boy's mom has the keys to the door so she can just open the doo—oh no! THERE ARE GUESTS!!!

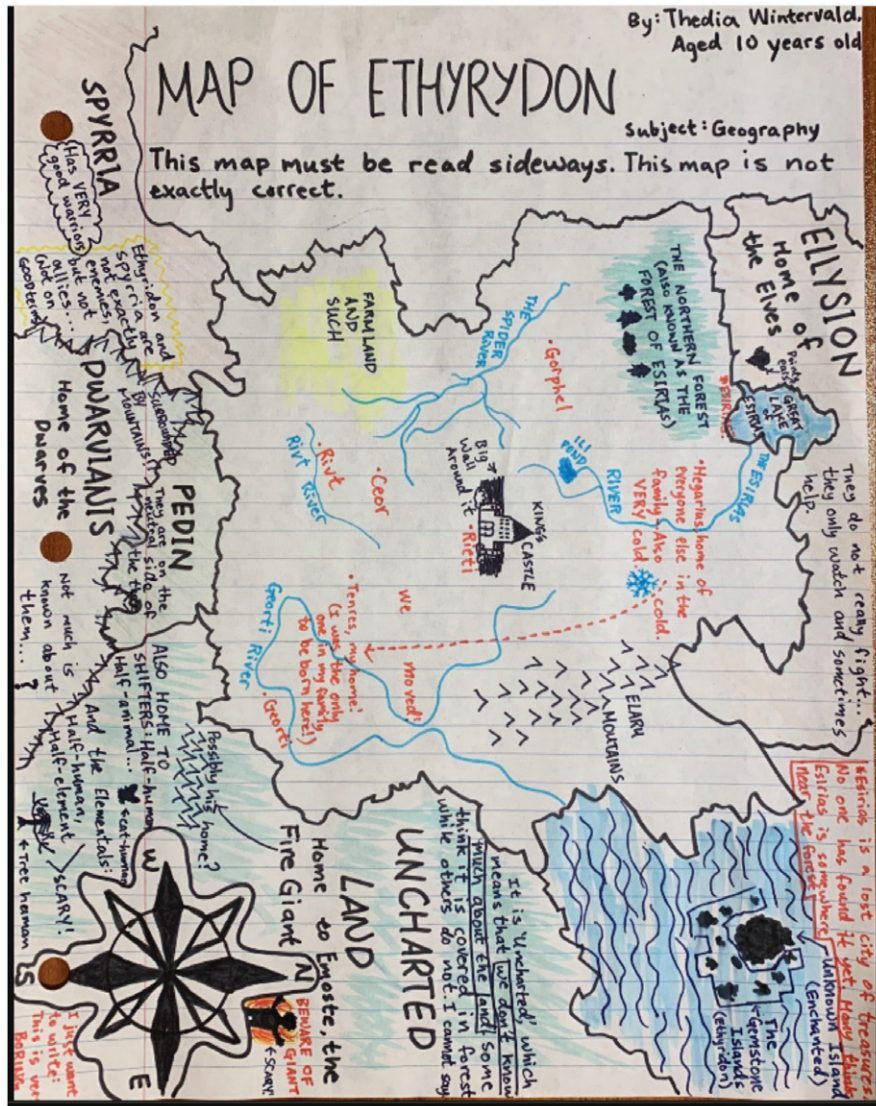
Oh god, oh god OH GOD!! I'm literally running for my life right now. These shoes are not very clean AND they are gonna see me! Jump over the fence jump over the fence I got this, Boog!

HEYYYYAHHHH!

Nice! Over the fence and into the neighbor's yard. Wait- is that a-a-a- A BULLDOG?

HEEEEEELLPPP!





Map of Ethrydon, by Jolene the Seer of Stories

When the Hourglass Runs Out

Chapter One: In Which Another is Exiled and Finds Himself Lost

by Jolene the Seer of Stories

Once, a young, bright, naïve prince climbed trees, caught butterflies, swam in lakes, and spilled drinks on noblemen's acceptable attire, but he disappeared. Nobody knew why or how. Everybody liked that cheerful prince (except, perhaps, the nobles whose clothes were stained permanently because of him), and people never expected the prince of Ethrydon to change so suddenly, so much.

Some suspected that his father had killed King Edgard's mother and siblings, so the prince killed his father in revenge and killed his siblings who survived, but that was nonsense. Lies are often mixed with the truth, resulting in a simple rumor - a hybrid between the two. Nevertheless, people believed those rumors, and so forth began the exchange of gossip, set up like dominoes, ready to tip for the king's descent.

Many people exchanged conversations on this day, but most were about how the king had put a girl, Thedia, into exile.

Cedrick shivered unconsciously.

If it wasn't for his sister, Lune, who heard almost every rumor and always notified Cedrick about it, he might not have thought much about the girl's exile.

Instead, he might have thought about the weather today. In the region of Hileon, it was mainly snowing. Today, however, the sun was bright, and all the snow had melted, making Cedrick's journey to the city of Hegarius easier.

But Cedrick's mind was occupied by the frightening imagery of the girl, Thedia, being dragged out of her own home, crying, her parents screaming and shouting in protest, onlookers avoiding their pleading gaze—

Cedrick shook his head. It was unbearable, sending shivers up his spine, wondering if his fate would be the same.

Take a deep breath, Cedrick thought. Take a deep breath, Cedrick. Fate never repeats itself, can it? The same thing couldn't happen to him. The king wouldn't!

After all, Cedrick's father was Duke Variel, the only advisor to King Edgar, but still, would His Majesty exile Cedrick? He shook his head vigorously. Maybe King Edgard only meant to exile the girl. Why am I even thinking about being exiled?

He stared into the sky, the sun shining brightly with wispy cirrus clouds. The cobblestone roads made the trip on carriage rather bumpy, although it was much warmer without all the snow. Merchants were standing near their stalls on either side of the white carriage with golden engravings and a two-headed snake hood ornament, shouting out their goods, hoping that Cedrick would notice one of them and buy something.

Cedrick did not, for he planned to go to the Training Grounds of the First Knights, as always. Although perhaps he might check a few of the stalls on the way back—

The carriage suddenly jerked back with a start as the coachman yelled, "Rabbits, rabbits, why are those varmints here? They ruined my garden, and now they block the road—" the carriage shook a bit as the coachman jumped off and started shooing the furry hairballs off the road, but they would not budge.

Cedrick opened the door and chuckled at sight. The coachman waved his hands around like a mad man, trying to get the undisturbed rabbits out of the way, shouting about how terrible they are.

A hand lightly tapped Cedrick's tense shoulder, and he whirled around to see the Imperial Guards.

"What is your purpose here?" the leader demanded.

"Who—" Cedrick suddenly grinned as he recognized the guards and patted the leader on the back. "Eluard! Why are you here?" he asked.

The Imperial Guards looked at Eluard. He nodded. Two of the most muscular guards grabbed Cedrick's slightly scrawny arms.

"What are you doing?" Cedrick looked around at the two guards, then at Eluard. "Why- what are..." he trailed off.

"Orders from His Majesty, King Edgard the Great," Eluard said gruffly, but he avoided Cedrick's gaze.

There was not much that happened during the hour-long carriage ride to the border of Ethryrydon. Two Imperial Guards sat next to Cedrick, squeezing him until he felt like bursting.

Even though he was unable to look outside the windows, he had an odd sensation of being followed.

Cedrick leaned forward just enough to stare outside. There was this falcon following his carriage.

Oh, Cedrick thought. Just a falcon. Nobody is following you, Cedrick. Why do you keep on feeling as if someone really is?

Everything went by in a flash, stunning Cedrick, and it wasn't long before he found himself exiled, banned from entering Ethryrydon again.

Cedrick looked up at the towering wall that bordered Ethryrydon. He was outside it while everyone else was inside.

What about that girl, Thedia? Was she out too? Was she also wandering outside the wall, wondering what she did wrong, or did she—

Crack!

Writer's TEEN LAB

Teen Writer's Lab is a community of 13+ writers who support each other in writing, editing, studying, and life in general. We tried something new this semester. Along with original student work, we spent the semester generating, rethinking, and editing work in class. These "seeds" pieces are wonderful! Many of the students flexed new writing muscles and discovered new voices while they developed their work.

- Prof. Suki

Original Work

Writing Resources compiled by Molly Rain Torinus

"Important History" by Xan Tardis Traveler

"Arcane Arkham" by Robert Ekstrand

"A Walk in the Forest" by Maddie

"Doorbell" by Sasha C.

"Seeds"

Xan, Molly, Maddie, Meg, Ved, Odelle, Sasha, Devon

Writing Resources

By Molly Rain Torinus

These are some of my favorite blogs/articles on writing! This covers both technical writing stuff, writing inclusively, and other cool things.

[Now Novel Blog](#)

This blog has a lot of great advice, mostly from published authors, on good writing. The feel is very supportive for new writers, including a lot of tips for getting started with your novel and generating ideas.

[Reedsy Blog](#)

This blog is focused on publishing and editing, and if you're into self-publishing, Reedsy is your savvy best friend who's annoyingly knowledgeable about publishing.

[Reedsy Live](#)

Reedsy's live webinars offer perspectives from writers on publishing and all that good stuff. Some even let you submit your first line (or book cover, or something else) to be critiqued!

[Jessica Brody Blog](#)

This author has great advice on writing (oh, and her books are cool too). If you need help with plot in particular, these articles are great!

[English Grammar Rules by Grammarly](#)

Ever had problems with grammar, punctuation, or spelling? This resource page is a godsend.

[Writing The Other](#)

Writing someone with marginalizations that you don't share? This blog is a great clearinghouse for resources.

[We Need Diverse Books](#)

Writing characters who are part of marginalized groups? This blog will not only help you do so sensitively, but show you other authors who've done the same.

[Writing Trans Men - Tumblr](#)

An entire blog about sensitively writing transmasculine characters! If you have specific questions, there's a form on the website—and they'll actually write back.

[The Writers' Playlist](#)

Great songs about books and writing, available on Spotify.



Important History

Xan Tardis Traveler

Right before the start of summer break Everly, Gem, Viv, and Clara were approached by their teacher, Dr. Kly. Kly gave them a book page about a future-telling AI and a note saying he was about to die. The next day they found out Kly had been killed. Gem, Viv, and Clara went to the police station and were attacked by the police. Everly was chased and eventually ended up in Kly's office where she took some books she hoped might tell them what was going on. She met up with her friends only to be chased again. The four teens are now hiding in an empty house belonging to Gem's family, struggling to understand what is happening to them.

Everly retrieved her backpack and they cleared off the coffee table in the family room. Everly unzipped it and dumped the entire contents onto the table. In between the school binders and books and loose change, they could see everything that Everly had collected. Government files, maps, the book, and the journal. There was a long pause, no one moved.

I had no idea I had so much loose change, thought Everly, then picked up the book. It was Kly's history book; she flipped to a part where a page had been torn out. Gem picked the note out of the stuff and passed it to her.

"The glass slipper of pages fits," said Clara when Everly

held up the book page.

The pages around it had other stuff about AIs, but nothing relevant. Viv opened one of the government files.

"Redacted," they said, "redacted, and oh look! Redacted." Clara moved to look over their shoulder and scowled at the pages of inked out text.

"It says here that future telling AI's computers didn't seem to be working before they destroyed them," said Gem, glancing at another file.

"So what?" gumbled Viv, still sulking about all the redacted files. "They glitched."

"It might be important!" Gem snarled back.



"Oh yeah? Computers glitch all the time! There's no need to make sure we all know that one little thing was weird with it."

"Then why say 'redacted redacted redacted!'"

"Guys! Why are you acting like this?" said Clara.

"Oh I don't know," snapped Viv, "Maybe it's because we've just been chased and nearly killed and—"

"STOP!" shouted Everly. "Please just stop."

"Sorry," Viv and Gem mumbled at the same time.

Clara reached over Viv and picked up a map. "Is there anything in the files?"

Viv and Gem shrugged and reached for the others.

"I wonder where he even got these," said Gem.

"Maybe he stole them," said Viv in a bored voice, resting their chin on their hand.

"Viv!" Clara scolded looking over the top of the map.

"You can't just accuse people of stealing!"

"What's your explanation?" Viv shot back, raising their hands defensively.

Clara hesitated, "Ok so he probably stole them, but maybe he has a contact in the government or something."

"Very James Bond," mumbled Viv.

"Have you ever even seen James Bond?" asked Clara.

"No. Have you?"

"Well no but..." Clara trailed off when she realized Everly and Gem were staring at them.

"Anyway..." she said, and went back to her map.

Everly flicked open the journal, skimming the entries. It was research for chapters of Kly's book, interviews, observations. She skimmed, looking for any mention of Bermuda Short and his fortune-telling AI. She finally spotted an interview of someone who apparently studied AI crimes. The interview seemed pretty basic, questions about Short, his theories, and the destruction of the AI. She spotted some notes by Kly at the end of the interview.

'Many discrepancies in one interview alone. Major ones between interview, files, and primary sources. Further investigation needed. Secret? Poor filing? GOVERNMENT CONSPIRACY!!!!? Probably not but still...'

She tried to read the interview but he had obviously been writing fast and his handwriting was illegible to her. Only

the odd word stood out, 'gang', 'fire', 'dangerous', 'warning'.

Everly sighed then moved on to the next page and stared. **'No AI. Can't put that in book. Find more. Person? Sister? Why? Map? Burned the journal. Burned the letter. They're looking. Must find her.'**

Everly's hands started to shake. She flipped through the rest of the notebook. All the pages were blank except the next one. She stared at the final written-on page, not understanding, understanding, not wanting to understand.

YOU MUST FIND HER. Please, Everly, I don't know who else she could mean. Everly. FIND HER.

She closed the book and squeezed her eyes shut, trying to focus on the inside of her lids and the sound of her blood pounding in her ears.

...to be continued.



Artwork by Xan

Arcane Arkham

By Robert Ekstrand

Several weeks ago I set out on a project to write something that explained a story's world of my own creation. This project has evolved and changed as I worked on it. It has now become a website that explains it from a perspective of those who live and have lived within the world itself. It is simple and small in scale, but I am proud and satisfied with the work I put into it. I currently use it as a backdrop and guide for a group of friends that I am running a TTRPG (Table Top Roleplaying Game) for. The mechanical system that acts as the rules of the game, are akin to famous games like Dungeons & Dragons, but the world the game takes place in, is of my own design.

<https://arkanenewsandmore.squarespace.com/>



A Walk in the Forest

by Maddie

A figure walked along a mossy stone trail. Wrought iron lampposts struggled to stay lit in the harsh winds. The sun had set a long time ago, along with the burnt orange and pink skies, and made room for the moon, the darkness, and terrible things. The cold was bitter, reaching out to anyone who dared step outside. Something was in the huge redwood trees surrounding the path, lurking in the shadows, waiting for the storm to subside, waiting to attack. The figure had to walk faster. But their destination was in sight, and soon their worries would disappear. Ahead of them was a town, guarded by a large, ornate metal gate.

They could see it, even from a distance—the town was bright and busy, a nice contrast to the perilous forests that surrounded it. Homes were built around trees and even along the treetops, shops balanced on large branches, and most buildings had various plants—they recognized shooting stars, azaleas, lilies, and ghost pipes—growing on the roofs.

They admired the growing detail as they walked, busy and bustling streets getting enticingly closer with every step.

Huge leaves, that were big enough to sustain a town of their own, held greenhouses balanced precariously, bursting with plants of all colors. The townsfolk seemed to have tried their best to keep foreign species inside the greenhouses, but that plan had clearly failed; invasive plants were everywhere, sprouting up around tree stumps and in dead-end alleyways. (Although it did make for quite an extensive array of flora, which contributed to the vibrance of the town.)

It was an illusion—the figure knew that much as they focused on the shh, shh, shh of the gravel beneath them as they walked. How a town could survive for this long, here, surely wasn't the work of cold metal gates and locked doors. Something else was at play.

They pushed open the gates and stepped inside.

It was loud. *How could all this noise not be heard from the outside*, they wondered.

Cars and bikes were everywhere, people were talking, someone was playing the guitar, and it seemed colder than it had been out on the gravel path in the forest. It was a perfect place for them to hide. Until the monsters caught up with them.

Then they'd have to run again.



Artwork by Xan

Doorbell

By Sasha C.

Our doorbell is going to start ringing any minute. Normally I would be excited for someone to come over (I would go on a cleaning spree prior), but I was dreading the stereotypical “ding dong”. I sit on my small bright orange couch, pulling on a loose string.

“It’ll be okay, George.” Tabitha says, trying to reassure me. It sounds like she’s trying to convince herself of the same thing. Tabitha’s usual sunny and cheerful demeanor dissipates as she thinks of the task ahead. I can tell by the way she looks down at our peach-colored rug.

Finally I get restless and shoot up off the couch to start pacing.

“You’re giving me anxiety, sit down,” Tabitha says after I’ve paced for a couple of minutes.

“You know what’s giving me anxiety?!” I fall back onto the couch. “Him not coming, that’s what.”

“I understand that, and I know he’s late, but don’t stress me out more!” Tabitha squeezes her pink stress ball harder.

“I know...I’m just a mess right now, T.” Tabitha laughs, but not how she normally does. This laugh sounds forced. An awkward silence looms over us again. The only thing that isn’t holding its breath is the giant clock, ticking loudly in the quiet, reminding us how our father is late.

I wish Mom would come downstairs and tell us goodbye again. If I had time to go upstairs and hug her I would. She just didn’t want us to see her cry.

“D-Do you think he’ll come?” I look up at Tabitha to see her reaction to my question. She just smiles sadly.

“No idea. I do know that—” Ding dong. Tabitha and I lock eyes. We both stand up quickly and grab our overnight bags and head to the door.

“You open it,” Tabitha tells me, nodding her head towards the door. I wipe off my sweaty, clammy hands and unlock the door. I take a deep breath and hesitantly turn the knob on the door, revealing the face of the father I haven’t seen for a year.



Artwork by Xan



Seeds

Where do ideas come from? How can you make someone else's idea your own? In Teen Writer's Lab we explored these questions with our "seeds"—pieces written in a short time during class in response to a prompt. The first writing was just a start. We kept trying to reimagine the piece, rewrite and hone. What you see here is the end product!

Having a Word

by Devon J. Scott

He bolts upright. His apartment is still swamped with shade; his alarm clock reads 4:02. It's completely silent, save for the soft buzzing of an air cleaner, though the window is plastered with leftover rainwater. Outside, fourteen stories down, even the highways are barren.

Are you kidding me?

He debates getting up, maybe refilling his water, then decides against it. The ceiling is just so much more interesting, free of the rest of the clutter that's started to gang up in his studio---even more than normal. In fact, if he keeps looking up, he can ignore just about everything, except the knotted turtle vine shelved at the end of his bed and the corkboard hanging on his right. And the fact that he's awake.

He should really pare the whole board thing down. That letter-sized pastiche of a vintage world map, the first thing he put up there, is all but invisible under hoards of scribbled sticky notes and irrelevant fortune cookie slips. Fine. Tomorrow, he tells himself, he'll clear off the movie tickets, at least. Or maybe the completed shopping lists should be the first to go?

A precariously-pinned string of instant photos, him and Vanya lazing in the booth at the mall, shifts on the wall and nearly tumbles off. He flinches and curses it quietly. Why was he up, anyways?

Whatever. He rolls over onto his side and pulls the sheets back up, only now realizing he's gotten chilly. Jeez, maybe it *is* more practical to wear a shirt to bed when it's toeing 40 degrees. Then again, sometimes checking the weather at all makes him feel like Einstein.

Unfortunate. Resigned, he sighs and shuts his eyes.

Then he hears it again.

Quietly, still, but with purpose, coming in short, soft gasps. Once, then twice. He can't quite put his finger on where it's coming from, but it sounded as mellow as ever outside. It was too distinct to be room ambiance—and as much as he dislikes the idea, something about the noise was almost familiar.

Why does he want to call it “whispering”?

He pulls himself further into bed. Nope! Nope! It's...sleep deprivation or something, somehow, despite his mostly acceptable schedule, and he's not bothering with it, and it will deal with itself, by itself. Whatever.

Actually, he notes to himself, if he brought his feet further up under the sheets, it'd get warm pretty quickly. Then he wouldn't have to get another blanket, then he wouldn't have to get out of bed, and then he's maybe found a way around all of his problems, so he does. He curls up on himself, tucking one poor, cold foot behind his other calf. Oblivious, Luna chirps from her tank on the coffee table, a slightly louder click than he's used to.

Shoot. There it was again, though. Not really clearer—whatever “human” quality it had was still garbled---but somewhat more pointed now, maybe louder, maybe...closer? No, definitely not, what even makes that kind of noise, let alone roams around doing it? Nothing in his apartment, that was for sure---so it was the wind, then, wasn't it? It was wind, right? Of course it was. Of course. Stupid, stupid, stupid. He *was* tired. He rolls over, inches closer to burying his face in a pillow and spitefully snoring until noon.

Something brushes off his bare shoulder, slow and feather-light. His upper arm jolts like it's been shocked. *It's the blanket. Please, please let that be the blanket.*

“You missed business hours,” he snarks, trying to force some confidence back into his voice. Then he slaps the corkboard far harder than intended, inhales through his teeth, mutters “leave a note or...buzz off”, and clamps the covers back over his head.

The sunlight wakes him up again the next morning; he had forgotten to shut the blinds, of course. His alarm clock beeps 8:48. The breeze outside has picked up again, in a sweet autumn chill sense, not the previous day's steady rain. He was too high up to hear either birds or bugs, but the semi-muted passing of cars on the road below was more than soothing enough.

He stretches and rolls onto his back, prepares to shower, get dressed, water all the plants. He'd be out on the town that evening, he remembers, since Vanya had a noodle place he wanted to go to after his shift. Jeez, he needs noodles. Good noodles. Oh, right, and to clean the board off. Lost in thought, he tilts his head over.

Pinned cleanly overtop everything else, something new. He blinks. It's a single piece of lined paper, written on with broad, casual handwriting.

63 Monument Ave. Three days, 7PM.

The original prompt was to freewrite about a character dealing with inclement weather. I have changed it by fleshing out the character more, adding imagery, and adding more humor.

Spamming and Weather: A Cautionary Tale

Molly Torinus (she/her)

As the sun shines bright through my open window, I log onto my first class of the day. Of course, I don't listen or pay attention. Don't even care what ancient novel or relic of a poem my teacher's going on about. Somebody probably finds it interesting, but I'd sooner die than be interested. I'm too cool (and possibly too queer) for that, right?

My eyes head for the emoji menu. I find one I like enough, today the smiley-face—it's almost the sun out my window, I realize with a start. Yellow and glowing, golden like the universe. Taking a deep breath, I post it in the chat.

Another teen emoji-smiles back as the sun reflects on my face. I groan. This is supposed to be a pain in the ass for everyone but me. This is the reason why grrls don't like me—but in ten years they'll remember the lady who spammed the chat and fall in love with her. This is the meaning of life. So I copy and paste the emoji a thousand times over. Turn down the class volume. Turn on a fast-paced EDM song—something by Kygo, who probably spammed the chat as a teen. Copy-paste-return over and over (and over and over) to the beat of the music. I realize the smiley-face is almost a smirk as I cut and paste incessantly. Happy to annoy, kind of like me.

A few people type stop repeatedly, like hypocrites. I let their incessant stop-spamming-the-chat-stop-spamming-the-chat-stop-spamming-the-chat wash over me like starlight. The teacher's shouts of "SIT ON YOUR HANDS" are comets in the sky, rare but memorable anyway. (I don't sit on my hands.) My fingers burn with anticipation and queer joy and rage, doing something meaningless, feeling like the center of the Earth and the talk of the Internet. My teacher's probably saying something useful, but I get to make everyone's day worse.

Then, out of the blue, the computer freezes. The chat ceases to be a living thing—it's a photograph I created, my teacher's face a still life. Like a goddess hit a cosmic pause button, the computer stopped being a tool. Became visual art, frozen in time forever. And the worst part is, my fingers stop, too.

As usual, I look around the room, expecting to see my decor (houseplants, photos of my friends, posters of inspirational quotes). Expecting the computer to start working. But as the EDM grows louder through my headphones, I see a sheet of ice expand over the room—first creeping into my computer keys, then turning the glass of the windows to more sheets of ice. It's bluer than the frowny emoji, ocean blue you'd drown in like the time I spammed the wave emoji. The chat's a frozen image, my last emojis a mask on a frozen screen. The ice expands toward my eyes. Like a tragic heroine, I feel the strength leaving my body. A wind rushing out of my lungs, an emoji vacating my internal chat. (If I wasn't melodramatic, I'd just be like, I fainted.) I like to think the world hears my last words: Maybe I won't spam the chat next time?



The following two pieces were written in response to the same prompt and flow nicely together!

The Thief

by Maddie

Atara woke up in a panic in the middle of the night. The fan was whirring too loudly, their heart was beating too quickly. Something was off, they could feel it. First, their door was closed. Atara never slept with their door closed—a strange habit they couldn't seem to shake. They threw off the blankets, cringing at the cold air that surrounded them as they got out of bed. Wishing nothing was wrong, and they could go back to sleep, and put this off until the morning, and get upset about whatever had happened then. They opened the door, and ran downstairs, footsteps instinctively silent on the old and creaky steps. At first glance, nothing was wrong. But then they saw the bookshelf. The tall wooden bookshelf was ruined. Books had been swept off of the shelves and plants were on the floor, dirt spilling out of their pots and ruining the rug.

And the box was missing.

The one thing Atara had sworn to protect, that had been sitting by itself on the middle shelf (which Atara realized had been way too obvious), was gone. And whoever took it didn't leave a trace.

But one thing was for certain; they were going to get it back.

Atara crept into the room. Their plan was simple: take back what was theirs, and get out. They hesitated at the door. It's here somewhere, right? It must be.

Their eyes searched the room quickly, landing on a wooden box on a table. They hurried across the room to it, as quietly as possible, hoping their mission was this easy. They reached for the box, tracing the detailed carvings with one finger, admiring every scratch in the wood. It was wrapped in a green ribbon, delicately tied in a bow. Atara snapped out of their trance and shook the box. It rattled with a hollow sound, and it was too light in their hands. Empty.

"No, that's not it," Atara mumbled to nobody in particular. (They really needed to stop talking out loud.)

They looked over the small, gray-painted room again. Nothing stood out. A worn couch wore an indent in the faded orange fabric where the inhabitant sat to watch movies. (Judging by the DVDs on the floor, they enjoyed *Wall-E* and *Beetlejuice*.) Atara's eyes drifted to a sage green mug on the side table with long forgotten chamomile tea. A blanket messily strewn across one side of the couch was covered in orange fur, most likely from the resident's feline companion.

An overflowing shelf displayed various books, including science textbooks and horror themes. Some looked like they had been used every day for years, some were covered in dust from top to bottom. A large coffee table with a lid was in front of the couch. Atara saw that the lid was propped open slightly by whatever was inside. That must have been it.

Atara tip-toed over to the table and lifted the lid, cringing at the loud creak the hinges made.

"Ah, yes, there it is," they whispered to themselves again.

Inside was a blue box, smaller, visibly older, and somehow more detailed than the green box, which Atara didn't think was possible. It had no ribbon, just a keyhole which served no functional purpose. It sat by itself, perhaps deliberately placed in the left corner. Whatever was inside lit up, sparkling a familiar soft yellow, when Atara reached for it.

At that moment, the front door handle rattled and Atara heard the sound of keys turning. In a panic and at a loss of options, they closed the lid and jumped behind the coffee table, hoping the owner of the house wouldn't sit down on the couch. Atara watched a man with glasses and scuffed, muddy boots (most likely from the storm outside) stumble into the room, muttering something about how he hated his job, dropping the keys on the table. Atara had never had a stroke of luck before. This might have been it. The man walked into his room, shut the door, and, judging by the time of night, probably went to sleep. Atara ran out of the door the man had forgotten to close, taking the blue box with them.

Atara traveled the streets quickly, navigating sidewalks and alleyways without a second thought. It was second nature, something they could do in their sleep. Rain poured down, and they kept the little box close to them. Protecting

it. Wishing they had an umbrella. The shining golden light from inside was asking, waiting, to be opened, but the wood could be ruined by a storm like this. As they walked, Atara realized they didn't actually know what was in the box. They had a vague idea, of course—it had been theirs in the first place. But the contents were a mystery, and so was how its previous owner acquired it.

Atara avoided puddles on their way to the library. The city, usually bustling with people and cars and energy and excitement, was completely silent. Not even a car drove by, blinding headlights and loud engine. Nobody walking their dog. Atara was used to silence. But this felt different.

Atara walked up the steep white steps to the library, footsteps echoing. They felt as if their quiet, hurried breaths could wake up the whole city. They pulled on the large brass door handle. It was cold. It didn't open. Then they pushed it. It didn't open.

"Open up!" Atara whispered to the building, their voice hushed but firm.

The doors opened reluctantly, with a loud creak of the hinges (like the coffee table, Atara thought) that made them uneasy.

Libraries didn't like opening at night. (Or being shouted at.) It was sleeping. The box rattled, impatient.

Fine, I'm going." Atara said to the box. And now they were talking to a box.

Atara and the Box

by Meg the Moon Knight

Atara crept into the room. Hesitating on the chestnut threshold, they scanned the cluttered room until their eyes stared at a green box on the table, vibrant against the beige of the walls. They glanced around again at each dilapidated door and window, then darted across the room to the table. They gingerly held up the box and shook it. The box rattled the rattle of a jack-in-the-box, mechanical parts sliding against each other in a manufactured symphony.

"No, that won't do," Atara whispered, their voice landing on exactly #c2 on "do".

They scanned the room again. There seemed nothing extraordinary about the room or its contents. Rusty lamps scattered the walls, never-touched. A worn leather couch had lost most of its color where its owner lounged and nursed their tea every evening. A blanket next to that spot housed a circle of fur that indicated that the inhabitant's cat lounged there, a fuzzy monarch lording over the empty kingdom of disrepair.

An overfull mahogany bookshelf revealed the inhabitant's reading material, mostly science fiction and home maintenance books with a space where a worn copy of HomeEc for Beginners should rest. Instead, it sat on a bench in front of the couch, which had been modified into a coffee table/container combo. The contents of the box glimmered under the lid.

Atara set the green box back on the table and tiptoed to the bench, throwing back the lid, hinges creaking with disuse.

"Ah, yes, there it is," they breathed.

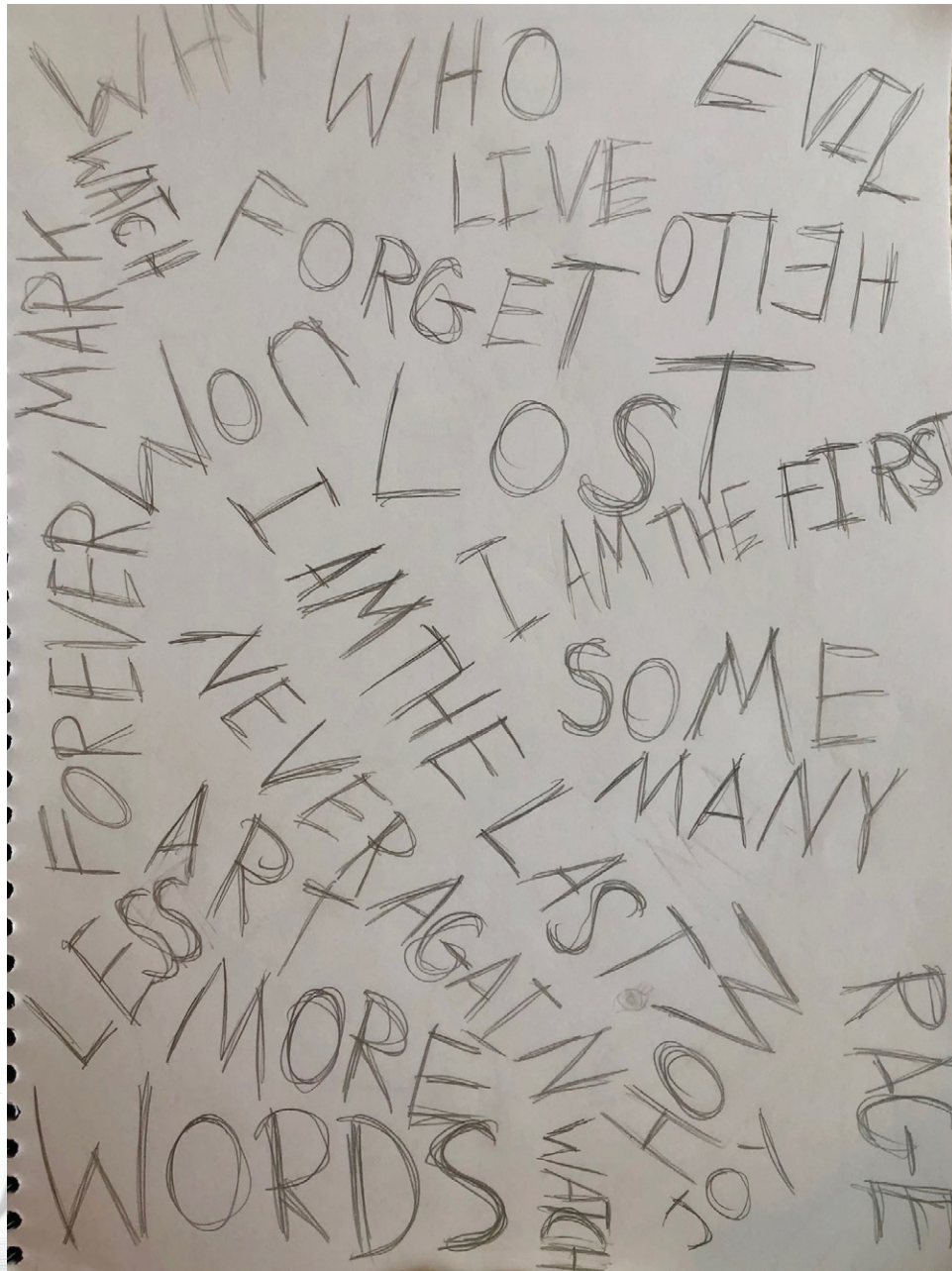
They greedily grabbed at a blue box, smaller and older than the green. It glistened.

A noise outside the window chilled their soul and shattered the quiet perfection of the scene. The easy part was over. Now they had to find some way to get the box out of here without being discovered. They replaced the lid as carefully as humanly possible and dashed for the open door, making sure to grab the green box on their way out. The boxes hummed with anticipation as Atara pushed them against one another.

Whisper

by Ved Chandra

As I walked by I could hear everybody whispering. Every once in a while somebody would laugh. I wondered what everyone was talking about. Was it about me? I thought about that as I walked to my class. On the way there, I saw some of my friends whispering to each other. I walked up and asked, Hey, what's going on? They quickly whispered to each other and then one of them said, today is national whisper hour. Ohh I said, remembering to whisper. After that we walked to class, ignoring the beaver on my head.



Artwork by Xan

Note: This story is based off of a story I wrote when I was four. The seed exercise inspired me to write in a way that I usually would not.

The Dragon and the Parrot

A Story for Children.

by Odelle

It was a day like any other. The Dragon was late for a very important party and she was flying so fast that she looked like a green blur. Her mind was racing so quickly that she didn't notice the tree right in front of her! She crashed into it with a bang!

"AWWWK!" someone screamed. The "someone" was a parrot with blue eyes and a curved beak.

"Oh no! I'm so sorry!" the Dragon cried. Her head throbbed and her limbs ached.

"It's ok, but you nearly knocked me off of my perch!" the Parrot exclaimed.

"Is there any way I can make it up to you?" she asked. The Parrot thought for a moment.

"Well, some pizza would be nice," the Parrot admitted.

"You can come with me to the party! There is probably some pizza there."

"That sounds great!" the Parrot exclaimed.

While they flew to the party, the two new friends talked about everything they could think of. The Dragon learned that the Parrot was a lawyer who enjoyed collecting shiny blue marbles, and the Parrot learned that the Dragon was a kindergarten teacher who loved to sing and dance.

They arrived at the party a few minutes late, but it didn't really matter because they had had so much fun!

The party was crowded. Loud music filled the air and everyone was dancing. The lights transitioned from color to color in a dazzling display. After the Parrot was properly introduced to the other guests, the Dragon headed to the dance floor and started dancing herself.

The only animal who wasn't dancing was the Parrot. She was SO hungry from flying and was desperate for food. When she saw the delicious-looking pizza, she lost all control of herself. She ate and ate and ate and ate. The Parrot had

never eaten such a delicious thing before. Before she knew it, the whole entire pizza was gone.

The Parrot slumped back to her seat with great discomfort. She was very full, but she was also very itchy. She felt like a thousand ants were crawling up her legs. Her breathing became raspy and her body became weak. The Dragon noticed what was happening and let out a cry of surprise. The Parrot was clearly having a very bad allergic reaction.

Suddenly, the Dragon pulled out an Epi-pen from her purse and injected the needle into the Parrot's thigh. The Parrot let out a squawk, and then quickly started to feel better.

"What happened?" the Parrot asked

"You were having an allergic reaction. On our flight here we were talking about how we are both extremely allergic to olives, so I figured that you accidentally ate an olive."

"There must have been olives on the pizza! I was just too hungry to notice," the Parrot cried.

"Well, I'm glad you're ok," the Dragon said.

From that day on, the Dragon and the Parrot became best friends. They married after three years and adopted two wonderful children. The parrot always carries an Epi-pen now, and has learned to be more careful around pizzas.



Artwork by Odelle

The original prompt was "Take a sentence from a book and write something with that sentence." I have done the following things to alter the original: Make things more specific, rewrite some pieces to make them easier to understand, add more.

I can't

by Sasha C.

Her heart was still broken but her head was floating and flying, making it impossible to be sad. She could feel deep inside her that something was wrong. She could feel the cool metal of the chair she was sitting in. It made her arms tense up, and the hair on her arms raise. The cold was the only thing she could feel. Her whole body felt like collapsing, the only thing that was holding her up was the metal chair. She couldn't feel the rest of her body, the only thing she could focus on was her breathing. Her breath was heavy and uneven, making her feel lightheaded. Her fingers were restless and twitching. The hairs on her arms stood on end. She never felt like this before, and it was excruciatingly gut-wrenching.

He was talking to her, but she couldn't understand anything he said. It felt like she was underwater, and he couldn't reach her. He tapped her in hopes it would bring her back to the present, but it was no use. She was lost, and she couldn't come back. She wanted to hear his voice, but her brain wouldn't let her. She was too consumed in her thoughts to listen to anything else. All she could hear were her thoughts going, *Don't think about it, and it won't happen.*

Don't think about it, and it won't happen.

But what if it does?

What if it happens and everything goes wrong?

It won't if you don't think about it.

Everything was fine until this happened!

You can get over it.

No I can't, it's so hard!

YES you CAN!

I-I-I can't...

Do it for him, he needs you.

H-He does?

Yes, do it for him!

No...

Yes!

No...

Yes!

....Yes

She had to let go. She had to be strong for him, and more importantly, strong for herself. If she wasn't strong, he would be broken too.

She took her first fulfilling breath. Her head felt inviting and warm again. She noticed the cold chair turned warm under her body heat. Her shoulders relaxed, and her fingers were now holding his face softly. She wiped the tears from his face and gazed into his beautiful dark brown eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said, sadness starting to wrap her body again.

"I'm sorry too." He hugged her, pushing away the sadness.

"I love you."

He slowly knelt in front of her, and tapped her in hopes she would listen to him. In hopes she would come out of her deep state.

"You'll be okay, it'll be okay. Calm down please. I need you." He begged her, but speaking was rendered useless. It felt like time slowed as he watched her breathing go back to normal, and her shoulders relaxed. She was back.

She took his face in her hands and wiped the tears from his cheeks.

"I'm sorry," she told him.

"I'm sorry too." He hugged her, never wanting to let her go.

"I love you."

The original prompt was one where there were a bunch of random words and you had to include as many as possible in your writing. I added a few more details to it and added line breaks to make it more poem-like. I added a few lines and broke up some longer sentences at the end to make it flow.

The Sea Doesn't Have Lights

by Xan

The sea doesn't have lights.
 That was what her spineless teacher said every day
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Aria knew better, infatuated with how the sea moved and blurred, and how the lights shone up
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 She thrilled in the crashing chatter of the white-capped waves glowing from beneath
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 On calmer nights she sat enchanted, watching the waves sway and bubbles of light tumble
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Aria lay on the dock every night and watched the swirling mania of their bright dance
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 She was mesmerized by their twirling
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Aria watched wistfully, wishing she could dive in and swim with them
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Her spineless teacher said she was confused
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 He told her to focus on her books and the chalkboard
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 He wouldn't let her out at night, out of the comfort of the house
 down to the sea
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Aria did not care, she brushed off the arbitrary rules
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Aria knew she was arrogant
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Knew better than to slip away from safety
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Knew, but brushed it all aside, the lights were everything
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 The house could not hold her, her books held no sway
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 She watched the spectral lights frolic, she believed in ghosts
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Every time Aria turned from the sea she felt like she shattered herself
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 She was inadequate without the lights in the sea, just a little
 girl in a teal dress

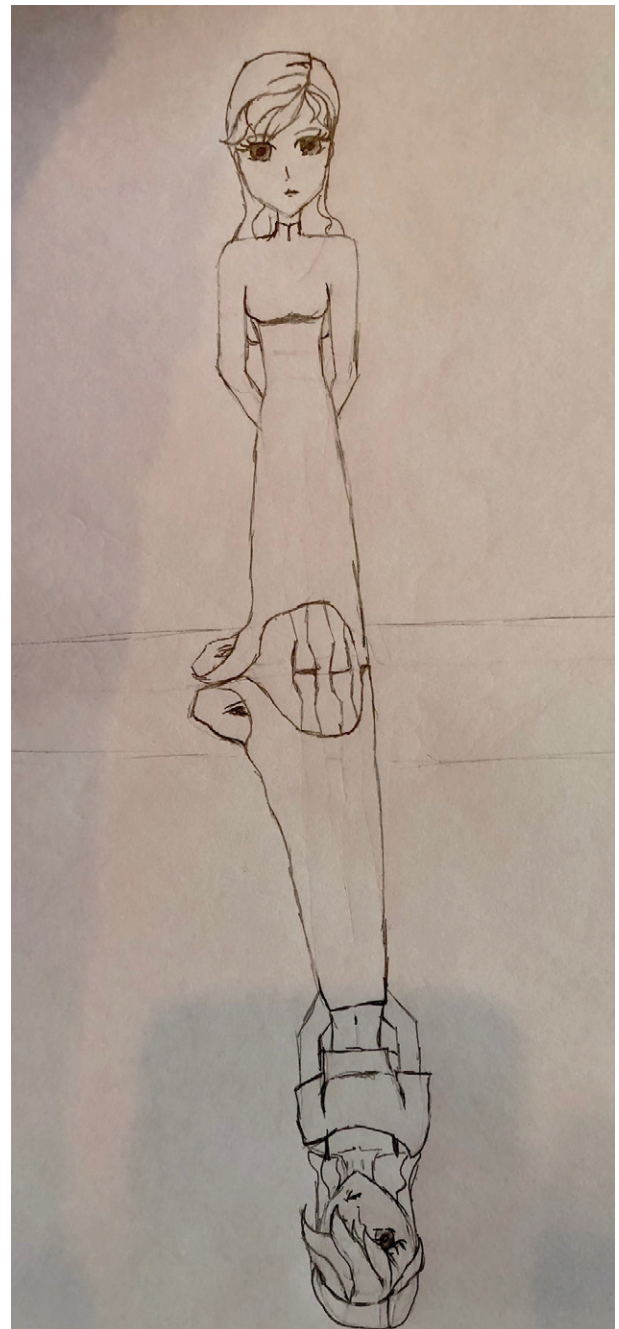
Artwork by Xan



The sea doesn't have lights.
But when she saw the lights she knew everything she needed
The sea doesn't have lights.
Her spineless teacher told her to watch out for strange things.
The sea doesn't have lights.
He was manipulative
The sea doesn't have lights.
He was a liar, she was reminded of it every time she crept down to the sea
The sea doesn't have lights.
She refused to let him sway her from her truth
The sea doesn't have lights.
She felt the pain of something lost every time she stared into their blazing sway
The sea doesn't have lights.
She watched each conflagration with awe, every time the lights whirled
The sea doesn't have lights.
She watched from the dock, unbeknownst to them
The sea doesn't have lights.
She knew them so well, those strangers
The sea doesn't have lights.
She had watched for years, they were essential to her being now
The sea doesn't have lights.
She longed to see them closer
The sea doesn't have lights.
She missed them every time the sun rose and the ocean dimmed
The sea doesn't have lights.
Some nights she would dip her fingers into the water, but the lights were too far down
The sea doesn't have lights.
She would watch the ripples from her fingers flutter away into the dark, away from her lights
The sea doesn't have lights.
She wished to grasp them in her hands
The sea doesn't have lights.
To hold their burning wonder
The sea doesn't have lights
She felt the momentum building in her
The sea doesn't have lights.
She would jump in soon
The sea has lights.
The sea doesn't have lights.
That was what her spineless teacher said everyday.
The sea doesn't have lights.
Aria knew better; infatuated with how the sea moved and blurred, and how the lights shone up.
The sea doesn't have lights.
Thrilled in the crashing chatter of the white capped waves glowing from beneath.
The sea doesn't have lights.
On calmer nights she sat enchanted on the dock, watching the ripple like waves sway and bubbles of light dance.

The sea doesn't have lights.
 Sat on the dock every night and watched the swirling mania of their
 bright dance.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Mesmerized by their twirling.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Watched wistfully, wishing she could dive in and swim with them.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 The spineless teacher said she was confused.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 He wouldn't let her out at night, out of the comfort of the house down
 to the sea.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Aria did not care, she brushed off the arbitrary rules.
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 Knew she was arrogant.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Knew better than to slip away from safety.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 knew, but brushed everything else aside.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Watched the spectral lights frolic, believed in ghosts.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Every time Aria turned from the sea she felt like she shattered herself.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Inadequate without the lights in the sea, just a little girl in a teal dress.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 But when she saw the lights she knew everything needed.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Her spineless teacher told to watch out for strange things, but he was
 manipulative.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 He was a liar, she was reminded of it every time she crept down to the
 sea.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Refused to let him sway her from her truth.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Felt the pain of something lost every time she stared into their blazing
 sway.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Watched each conflagration with awe, every time the lights whirled.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Watched from the dock, unbeknownst to them, knew them so well, but
 they were strangers.
 The sea doesn't have lights.

Had watched for years, they were essential to her being now.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Some nights she would dip her fingers into the water, but the lights
 were too far down.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Would watch the ripples from her fingers flutter away into the dark,
 away from her lights.
 The sea doesn't have lights.
 Felt the momentum building, she would jump in soon.
 The sea has lights.



Artwork by Xan

WRITE·NOW workshop

*In WriteNOW Workshop,
everything is "write"!*

In WriteNOW Workshop, students write quick pieces inspired by short readings or group prompts. These spontaneous fragments of writing can lead to poems or stories, and it's exciting to see them grow in the classroom forum!

- Prof. Lisa

In This Section

"I am" poems

"Just for fun" experiments

"Interesting words"

Selections from the writenow workshop classroom forum



Some of these poems starting with "I am" or "I am not" are realistic, some are imaginative or humorous, and all are uniquely individual!

I am quiet, half-silent
 I wonder what the stars would sound like, if they could speak.
 I hear the silent sound of the shadows singing, during the
 nighttime
 I see the shimmers of rain, the silhouette of a face in the clouds
 I want to know what the birds think, seeing us in the daytime
 I am quiet, half-silent.
 -Adeline

I am donut lover and donut eater.
 I wonder if I can have a donut?
 I hear a donut crackling in the deep fryer.
 I see a freshly glazed donut.
 I want a donut.
 I am donut lover, donut eater, and donut craver.
 -Reece

I am a girl and a sister.
 I wonder when I'll get a phone.
 I hear fire flies gossip.
 I see an ant-sized castle.
 I want a hammock.
 I am a sister and a girl.
 -Elaina

I am happy and hungry.
 I wonder why oranges are called oranges but bananas are not
 called yellows?
 I hear the sputtering motor of a flying car.
 I see the purple grass under my feet.
 I want a cookie.
 I am still happy and hungry.
 -Zoe

I Am, I Am Not

I am not the main character of anyone else's story
 (Only mine)
 I am not a terrible person
 (I just make mistakes)
 I am not a perfect sheet of glass
 (Some questions shouldn't be answered)
 I am not the type of person to put on a pedestal
 (I'm made of fool's gold)
 I am not adventurous
 (If only I had the chance)
 I am not the person who's singing up front
 (I'm just a stagehand)
 I am not the main character of anyone else's story
 (Just the side character)
 -Adeline

I am artistic and joyful.
 I wonder when time started?
 I hear whispering calls of lightning.
 I see swirls of magic floating above me.
 I want candy and my very own car and money. Lots of money.
 I am still artistic and joyful.
 -Avery

I am no ant,
 But I am no God either.
 There are the conquerors and the conquered.
 There are the helpers and the helped.
 I am none of those.
 For I am Balance, the middle ground, the good and the bad.
 I am neutral to all, no bias, no inequality.
 For I am Balance, searching for any reason one's karma de-
 serves life, or death.
 -Evan

The Haze

I am not reality,
I do not graze mortality.
Yet I am not a dream,
Not the smallest technicality.
I am not a sky king,
Nor a sea queen.
I am not a soul,
But the world is inside me.
-Alisa

I am not a walking talking candy cane
Or a lion with a mane
I am not jumping to the clouds
Instead I bowed
I am not going to Ireland
Ireland is coming to me
I am not taking a dance class that makes me dance 14 hours a
week
Obviously
I am not covered in rainbow scales
Instead I have skin
I am not able to remember
My past lives
And souls
And I am definitely not
A three centimeter kitten with blue fur who yawns every time
you say...
"Yawning fox moose cat with a hankering for some walnuts"
-Avery

Agriculture Poem

I am not a tree, I do not have roots that stretch to the sea. I am
not a seed, I do not sprout quickly as a weed. I am not a vest,
I do not squeeze warm to keep out pests. I am not a deck, I
do not shelter and protect. I am not a lake, I do not measure
to rake.
-Pippa

I am not.
Not 1 thing
Not anything at all.
I hide away
-In Eden
Behind the garden wall.

I am not.
A stolen breath
Not what was,
But what we forget.

I am not.
Not 1 thing.
You can't put me in a box:
I am everything.
-Lili



In this webinar, students viewed an image of a coral reef, then started writing. Their group pieces feature description, figurative language, and unexpected combinations- and also highlight students' knowledge of marine life!

Serenity (or Marine Mayhem)

by Alisa, Avery, Lili, Matteo, McKenzie, Pippa, and Zion

In the clear blue water, the bright blue fish seem to glow-
flashing colors dance among the blue,
like a flash of wonder and mischief
just waiting to find a calming bed of coral.

Sunlight ripples through the waves
in the pelagic quietude.

The fish, the rays, the coral
lie all in thalassal solitude.

The coral lies; dead but alive.
This is the epipelagic zone- light, airy,
peaceful, and dangerous- gills breathing,
fish dancing, predators prowling.

Blue to white white to yellow yellow to rainbow;
the anemones do not eat the clown fish;
splashes of light seem to make a different world
as colors dance in the waves.

The regal marine cities with swaying pink,
dabbed on orange, strings of yellow,
blue ever so placid, greyish-purple aqua caves,
a whirl of colors, an abyss of shapes-

this makes the ever so blue sea.

In an arc of sunlight the coral shelter,
bright and right, protects the careful
balance of life. The world is blue

but their hearts are still bright red.

The blue waves beckon to me.

I dive into the sea; sea stories.

The water wraps around me.

What's to Sea?

by Adeline, Delphine, Evan, Genevieve, Jack, Jeremy, Joshua, Reece, Phoebe, and Zoe

A fish in the background- barely a shadow;
A spiky anemone, like a morning star
Or the spears of an ancient army;
Clownfish, immune to the anemone's sting.
Fish are near and fish are far—
All of the fish in all of the bliss.
A painting for just few eyes.
Sea urchin city, sunlit water,
White-tipped reef shark,
Pink and yellow anemones
With sunlit reef tangs,
Vibrant fish, casting lazy
Shadows in the coral—
An underwater world.
The shark is not hungry.



These pieces begin with a student-generated list of "interesting words" like "evergreen" or "shimmering," and take very different directions for some fantastic story settings!

Setting: A forest by the coast. The forest had a lot of trees, but the evergreen trees were towering over the others. Vermillion and orange leaves fell from most of the trees. A shallow cerulean-colored ocean was next to it.

-Jack

The looming evergreen had an aura of loss, for in the shadows of this tree lay the remains of a city. A small one, yes; an invisible one, yes; but why does that mean it was any less important, especially to the people living there? A few years ago I was in this city- the same year that it went ablaze. The same year my life went ablaze.

-Delphine

The shimmering overhang of the trees swayed back and forth, casting a shadow over Raeb's wings and cooling them immensely. The blaze of the afternoon sun shifted the meadow into uncomfortable heat, enough so that Raeb hauled himself to his talons and trotted into the woods, away from the clearing.

-Pippa

The children peered down the steep side of the stairway. The air was cold and seemed to draft up from the bottom. Harsh cerulean light beamed out of a floor so far down they could hardly see it. Where the floor tiles had once been a dull grey, they transitioned to shimmery white that glistened as if wet.

-Zoe

Librarian work was the most inspiring time of day, even if it was the busiest. Imber took it as an opportunity to scour the building for intellectual sustenance. The six homelike wooden walls towered seventy feet into the air, all supporting the domed roof of shimmering glass and crystal, all set at different angles in various colors. The rainbow beams emanating from the prismic panes illuminated the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, all piled with books on history, nature, power, soul, and ancient lore. Some of them were spilling out haphazardly, and all the journals and whatnot that couldn't fit were stacked like the city towers.

-Alisa

On a massive cliff of a steep mountain side lies a serene forest full of towering evergreens. The forest hides a swirling portal transporting those who step inside to a mystical dimension, far, far from home...

-Evan

Evergreen: Long, long ago a single drop of the Aurora Borealis fell to Earth. As soon as it hit the frost-encased ground a powerful emerald energy spread through the ice, transforming it into lush soil. Gigantic mountains and beautiful green temperate forests rose from what had once been a desolate, frozen wasteland. After that came the people and animals, who appeared in flashes of blinding, meadow-green light. In the center of this new land grew the tallest tree of all, the Evergreen. It was the start of Akaran, The Kingdom of The Northern Lights.

-Joshua

The air was full of the smell of evergreens, the haze settled over the shallow hole. She stood that minute, transfixed at the sight; for the evergreens were a beautiful green.

Like a portal, the hole started spinning. There was a small creek, its waters rushing over the rocks next to the trees. The banks a shadowy green. She stepped into the shadows, the haze seemed to swallow her whole. The branches drooped over the banks of the creek.

-McKenzie

The training grounds were boring to Zach. An air of age filled the brown sky. Long forgotten benches filled the edges. The ground was just dirt, and had an odious smell. Stone pillars held up a grey roof that was so bedraggled that it made one gag. Broken glass doors were behind the pillars, with a long hallway of armor and weapons. It was an old arena.

But there, right next to the door, was something that caught the eye. It was a tree, a prodigiously tall tree, that was a blaze of evergreen leaves with a golden aura that made one stare at it until they were transfixed.

-Zion

The winds whipped around his face as he walked, the air was filled with a pungent haze that smelled strongly of car exhaust. Cars and minivans zipped past on the road, and tenements towered above him. Tennar quickened his pace as he heard a rumble of thunder. The clouds above him were gray shadows; just threatening to start a downpour. But after his encounter with the vexing Raina Teer, how could storm clouds scare him?

-Lili

The towering trees loomed over the sandy grounds. Though a battle took place long ago, the place was serene, with precarious bricks just barely balanced on each other. It was then that the peculiar smell vexed the prodigious nostrils. His face shook as the smell importuned him and his hands shook with fury.

-Matteo

SHAKE SHAKE SHAKE!!! Hm. No more cereal. But I know what that means! Amy thought, "MO-OM! We're out of CEREAL! And you've gotta feed your hungry kid! You know what this means!"

"Ok, Ok, I'll make waffles!" Amy's mom said.

SCORE! Amy thought, throwing away the empty cereal box. Suddenly, a shadowy evergreen glow flickered in the morning breeze. Transfixed by the light, Amy started to stare at the sweet nature green haze. She took a step closer. But not on purpose. It was like some sort of...energy...was drawing her in. She couldn't stop! She frantically tried to bat at the air, as if there was someone invisible pulling her closer. Until she saw the source of it. A glowing green portal. And the energy pulled her in.

-Avery

WriteNOW webinars include "just for fun" writing experiments. Here students re-invent a well-known poem and in the process consider style, form, and language.

"Love" is the Thing with Rubies

by Adeline, Delphine, Evan, Genevieve, Jack, Jeremy, Joshua, Phoebe, and Zoe (with thanks to Emily Dickinson)

"Love" is the thing with rubies
That shines in the heart
And skips the pot without the flower
And never speaks at all,
And greatest in the storm is heard;
And glowing must be the rain
That could dance the little fox
That kept so many lowly.

And here's a second version!

"Anger" is the Thing with Ice

by Alisa, Avery, Lili, Matteo, McKenzie, Pippa, Reece, and Zion (with thanks to Emily Dickinson)

"Anger" is the thing with ice
That crushes in the happiness
And leaps the fence without the mangos
And never sings at all,

And purplest in the rain is heard;
And kind must be the rainbow
That could eat the little lizard
That kept so many sparky.

I've left it in the largest land
And on the preeminent popcorn,
Yet never in a million years
It asked a pencil of me.

Selections from the writenow workshop classroom forum

Cloud 6

By Lili R.L.

I've got airborne vertigo,
From going up too fast.
Ship rocking in the clouds;
Clinging to the mast.

The deck is wet from swabbing,
The anchor rusted through;
My Trust is but a fragment-
Of this almighty crew.

The hull's a maiden fair,
A maiden of the air,
Glancing off the sunshine
Shining in her hair.

This could be The Heavens
--if it weren't so dry.
This could be Uncertainty
--if I weren't sure to die.

Queen

By Lili R.L.

Quiet all these voices,
Make them go away.
Bring back birds of focus-
I need not this bluejay!
I call upon my Mother;
Wise in all her pain,
For I believe I may concede-
I am not fit to reign.

Moderately tasty

by Genevieve O.

I'm shopping in the store. There's a fruit on sale. It's a fancy looking fruit. It reminds me of a peach. It has an exotic name. It's fifty percent off. It says 'pick of the month'. It's from some exotic fancy place. It's expensive. It's pretty. I choose the biggest. I see it's soft. I take it home. It smells so good. I cut it open. It drips juice all over the cutting board. I cut a piece. I hold it up to my nose. Oh, the aroma! I take a bite. It's soft and sweet. It's so juicy it drips a gorgeous pink liquid. It's...moderately tasty.

Shark

by Genevieve O.

Would you think it's entertaining
If you went out when it's raining
And a large and happy shark
Chased you through your favorite park
Ran you up the swings and then
Followed you a mile or ten
Saw you to the ocean and
Introduced you to his band
Yes quite fun it was for me
How I love the ice cold sea
No, if I were you I'd rather not
Go outside until it's hot.

The Pale Forest

by Alisa the Aqua Fay

Isabel's eyes opened slowly, adjusting, focusing.

She was standing in the middle of nowhere—and by nowhere, a circular clearing surrounded on all sides by skeletal elm trees with dark leaves like sandpaper.

Wispy grass and plants, like the souls of a destroyed woodland, stood still in the ground, which was illuminated by the full moon above like a wraith.

The space around her was clear, but in front several feet away, a dark curtain of shadows seemed to cover whatever was ahead, like a hazy veil separating her from the rest of the disturbingly silent woods.

Isabel felt a shiver run down her spine, but not just from the cold.

The place just seemed too quiet and deserted. What had Nist said? Have fun.

She felt the fear rise in her throat.

It seemed like all the blue had been bleached out of the sky, leaving only black endlessness and several thin clouds weaving around the moon and above the tops of the trees.

Isabel glanced around, feeling colder than this zone's climate itself.

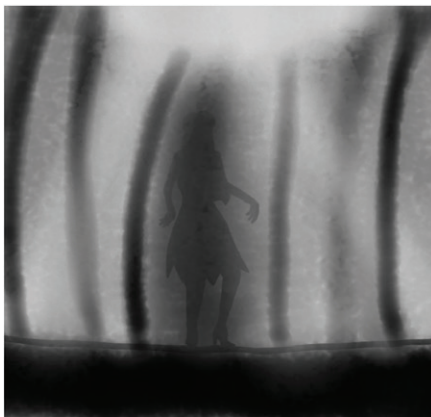
There was no sound to be heard. Not a single tweet from a bird, no buzzing from an insect's wings. No scurrying creatures, not even any wind to rustle the leaves.

Just stepping on a twig seemed too loud in such a noiseless environment.

And yet, the woods seemed to be respiring with the breath of a quiet monster.

Isabel, after taking one last look at the pallid moon, stared in front of her once again—and that was when her heart completely stopped.

She wasn't alone.



THE BIRCH FOREST

by Hatori Futujima

The forest sits

Waiting

The growth

Growing

The birch

Watching

The passerby

Wondering

Wandering

Thinking

As paths ware

And new paths

Emerge

The eyes

In the birch

Watch all

Know all

See all

New seeds

Sprout

The circle

Returns

Golden Sands of Life

by Hatori Futujima

Time always moves.

Like the endless waves,

On the sandy beach of life

Marigold, Chapter One: Suspicious

by Zoe Paul

It was on my walk home from school that I saw the mysterious girl for the first time.

Her tan, freckled skin. Her oddly colorful dress. Her deep brown hair tipped with more colors than I thought there was on the visible spectrum. Everything about her stuck out like a sore thumb, though she was beautiful in a striking way. As she turned to face me, I got a good look at her chocolate-brown eyes, which had flecks of different colors scattered around the irises.

“So, Marigold, what did you do in school today? I learned multiplication tables and how to write reports! I have a book report this week. And I’m going to... Marigold, are you even listening to me? Marigold...?”

I looked around and realized that I had been staring so intensely at the girl across the street that I hadn’t been paying any attention to what my younger sister Emily was saying. But the girl was so peculiar-looking that it was hard not to stare at her. I’d never seen her before, and our neighborhood was so small that we knew everyone who lived in it. And yet here was this new girl, looking around like a tourist, but with the air of someone who was searching for something. She seemed suspicious, like a shady undercover sleuth, but if she wanted to blend in she was clearly failing. I watched her walk a few more steps, then whip around and scan the area behind her, before I turned to Emily.

“Sorry, I just got distracted. You see that girl?” I tried to subtly point her out to Emily, even though her bright clothing clearly made her the subject of attention. Emily nodded after a quick look, then turned back to me.

“Yeah, I’m not sure who she is. She wasn’t at school, so I’m sure she doesn’t live around here... maybe she’s just visiting someone? Like, a relative of one of the neighbors?” It seemed like a reasonable thought, but it failed to weaken my suspicion of her. If she was visiting a neighbor, then why wouldn’t she be hanging around them instead of combing the neighborhood like this? More importantly, what was she looking for? She turned toward us again, as if sensing my thoughts towards her, and we made eye contact. Her speckled irises flowed with life, pulsing with an almost hypnotic glow, but they shrank with alarm after a few seconds of studying my face. She sized me up in a way that didn’t seem rude or judging, more... confirming. Like she knew who I was and was making sure I was really that person, the way you would act if you saw a celebrity on the street. After a few tense moments, her eyes pulled away from me and she hurried away toward the end of the street. I kept watching her as she turned the street corner. When she reached the fourth house down she broke into a run, not stopping until she reached the park at our street corner. She kept running though... past the playground equipment and the dog park, toward the tree line that separated our neighborhood from the old oak forest that surrounded it. She didn’t stop until she was deep into the trees where we couldn’t see her. So she wasn’t visiting a neighbor. She was heading for the forest...

Emily glanced up at me, puzzled. “What was all that?” She asked, curious. I shrugged and grabbed her hand.

“Come on, Emily. Let’s just get home.” She smiled and skipped towards our street, not bothered by the strange encounter, but I couldn’t help staring back at where she had disappeared.

I could still feel the force of those eyes as if they were still watching me, hidden in the forest behind us.