



The Fundamental Elements

A Collection of Writing by Cleveland Teens

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The Fundamental Elements: A Collection of Writing by Cleveland
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The writing and artwork published in this anthology is original to
each individual author. The opinions and ideas expressed in each
piece are the individual author's and are not necessarily the opinions
of the publisher.

We dedicate this book to those whose lives have been
affected by COVID-19.

This book is also dedicated to our readers. By reading this book,
you are a fundamental element in supporting youth voices.

Table of Contents

An Introduction from Lake Erie Ink's Teen Editorial Board....	011
Foreword by Philip Metres.....	013
	011

Chapter 1: The Fundamental Elements of Nature

<i>Laura's Elements</i> by Laura Hobe	016
<i>The Earth and Everything in Between</i> by Camille Boyer.....	017
<i>Global Warning</i> by Nareus Hardin.....	018
<i>Fire</i> by Karley Johnson.....	019
<i>Untitled</i> by Maya Peroune	020
<i>Tragedy</i> by Kristina Hanks.....	021
<i>The Rain</i> by De'Sean Jackson	022
<i>One More Step</i> by Nina Serna.....	023
<i>Karma</i> by Laila Shotwell.....	024
<i>Air</i> by Karley Johnson	025
<i>Untitled</i> by Sarai Murdock.....	026
<i>Caeli, Terra, Ignis, Aqua</i> by Elana Pitts	027
<i>Volcano</i> by Katie Davis	028
<i>The Earth Calls For Me</i> by Hayden Connor-Kuntz.....	029
<i>Untitled</i> by Aine Fagan.....	030
<i>Spring Showers</i> by Emma Hubbard.....	031
<i>Self-Portrait of Air</i> by Anijah Wright	032
<i>Clouded Vision</i> by Nina Serna.....	033
<i>Child of the Creek</i> by Julie Larick	034
<i>Air</i> by Karlel Hixon	035
<i>The Forest</i> by Azareah Rice.....	036
<i>From Me and Back</i> by Camille Boyer	037
<i>Fundamental Elements</i> by Yimo Cao.....	038

Chapter 2: The Fundamental Elements of Self

<i>I Remember</i> by Nina Serna	042
<i>Lucky One</i> by Emma Hubbard.....	043
<i>I Am Me</i> by Daquann Taylor.....	044
<i>Crepuscularis</i> by Jessica Chang.....	045
<i>I Know No Peace</i> by Nayona Traywick	048
<i>Look into the Reflection</i> by Tevyah Hanley.....	049
<i>Imagination</i> by Naomi Hardin	050
<i>Competitive Victory</i> by Nina Peyrat	051

<i>I Am</i> by Richard Hort	052
<i>Untitled</i> by Willow Rosser	053
<i>Mama Says</i> by Shanana Hawkins	054
<i>Imagine</i> by Nora Nathan	055
<i>I'm More</i> by Donte Byrd	056
<i>Head in the Clouds</i> by Tevyah Hanley	057
<i>The Pink Thing</i> By Chyann Jeff	058
<i>Procrasti—</i> by Sanjanasri Vedavyas	059
<i>We Good?</i> By Damonte Henderson	060
<i>Untitled</i> by Shawn Wilson	061
<i>You Cannot Sway Me</i> by Antonio Peacock	062
<i>Scenes from Forest Hill Park</i> by Adele Metres	063
<i>Black Inside</i> by Jendaya Floyd	065
<i>My Paradise</i> by Tiana Jolly	066

Chapter 3: The Fundamental Elements of Life

<i>Untitled</i> by Aine Fagain	068
<i>To Thrive</i> by Stephanie Yen	069
<i>The New Court</i> by Maurice Banks	070
<i>The Fundamental Elements of Leaving</i> by Emily Stanciu	071
<i>Bare Necessities</i> by Nareus Hardin	072
<i>Building Up the Glass</i> by Snigdha Cingireddi	073
<i>I Have A Bee</i> by Maya Serna	074
<i>Air, Earth, Fire, Water</i> by Elana Pitts	075
<i>The Elements of Influencing</i> by Richard Horton	077
<i>Agony</i> by Snigdha Cingireddi	078
<i>Untitled</i> by Jasmine Neumann	079
<i>Under the Skin</i> by Jessica Chang	080
<i>22:02</i> by Samaure Fuller	082
<i>Human vs. Grief</i> by Ayelet Travis	083
<i>2017—2018</i> by Jeante Johnson	084
<i>All of the Fire of a Dying Star</i> by Nareus Hardin	085
<i>trying to blossom</i> by Deonta Steele	086
<i>Sensation</i> by Naomi Hardin	087
<i>Ember</i> by Ryan Lawson	088

Chapter 4: The Fundamental Elements of Society

<i>Untitled</i> by Willow Rosser	090
<i>When I Stare Out Into Space</i> by Clara Orland	091
<i>Elements of Danger</i> by Brian Ford	095

<i>Untitled</i> by Anijah Wright	096
<i>Guns Down</i> by Christian Smith	097
<i>Untitled</i> by Maya Peroune	098
<i>They Called Him The Gypsy</i> by Julie Larick	099
<i>Lifeless</i> by Allan Brown	101
<i>Home</i> by Halle Preneta	102
<i>Centaur Story</i> by Nora Nathan	103
<i>I Am Who I Am</i> by Traeshawn Broadnax	104
<i>Everyday Life in Cleveland</i> by Armani Kirts	105
<i>Supernova</i> by Nareus Hardin	107
<i>Hanging Trees</i> by Nayona Traywick	108
<i>The Puddle</i> by Dashawn Watson	109
<i>Cleveland</i> by Morgan Kennedy	110
<i>Not Like Everyone Else</i> by Jeremiah Buford	111
<i>Ode to the One I Trust</i> by Leila Metres	112
<i>The Definition of Art</i> by Stephanie Yen	113
<i>Haiku</i> by Jacob Goldman	114
 Acknowledgments	 115
Contributors	117
Meet the Teen Editorial Board	123
About Lake Erie Ink: a writing space for youth	125

An Introduction from Lake Erie Ink's Teen Editorial Board

Throughout the 2019–2020 school year, Lake Erie Ink's Teen Editorial Board met to plan this book from start to finish. Teen editors Ayelet, Henry, Julie, Maple, and Sanjana worked together under the guidance of Lake Erie Ink's Teen Coordinator, Cordelia Eddy, to carefully read, discuss, and hand-edit submissions for this anthology. Below is a bit about the experience from their perspectives.

New years bring many new things: a new book, new editors, new perspectives, and new obstacles. As we huddled around a table at this year's first editorial meeting, many of us were unprepared for the work ahead. Fundamentally, we knew what we were supposed to do: select pieces, edit errors, and compile the fourth edition of Lake Erie Ink's anthology of Cleveland teen writing. The devil is always in the details though.

As time went on, our bond as editors got stronger as our obstacles became bigger. We spent several weeks around a dimly lit table discussing work and carefully choosing submissions that we felt best exemplified the theme. Popcorn was eaten, Google Translate was abused, and babies (namely Cordelia's lovely Colette) were ogled at. By late January, we had all of our submissions down and were prepared to go full steam ahead into editing to whittle down our anthology until it was publishing-ready. However, as all of you know, January 2020 is when disaster struck. During the thick of our editing, the COVID-19 pandemic made our sessions grind to a sudden halt. Social distancing became an important yet crippling reality as the fundamental elements of our society were torn apart. Businesses closed, economies crashed, people lost their livelihoods, and thousands lost their lives.

In the face of this tragic and unprecedented crisis, our goal to share teen voices remained unabashed. This crisis drew us together when we were so suddenly torn apart. The last edits to this book were conducted through several short email chains and last-minute calls to action, but we managed to come together, just as our world has in this trying time. In the midst of this chaos and sadness, hope is fundamental, and we find that hope in our

youth. Our determination, compassion, and voices always lead our world in a brighter direction. Through this book, our voices can act as a guiding ray of hope for tomorrow, which helps us survive these difficult times today.

We hope from the bottom of our hearts that by the time you read this, the crisis will have passed and that you and your loved ones are safe. During these grueling times, the fundamental elements of humanity, like community and love, are needed more than ever. After all, each one of us is fundamental to the world and we must treat each other that way.

Foreword by Philip Metres

When I first heard the title of this Lake Erie anthology, I instantly thought of Pablo Neruda's *Odas Elementales*. Usually it's translated as Elementary Odes, but it could also be translated as Elemental Odes. He was in his fifties when he began to write ode after ode, hundreds of oddly delightful poems of praise. After a life of writing poems, he returned to a more youthful way of seeing—where the entire world suddenly appears as wondrous and strange: bicycles and onions, salt and socks, tomatoes and books, oceans and wind. Almost everything, suddenly, seemed worthy of praise.

Just about everything, seen through the eyes of a child, is worthy of a long look. "The world is charged," Hopkins once wrote, "with the grandeur of God"—meaning, there is a force of beauty pulsing through life—and to be young is to feel that electrical charge in and around you, between you and the universe.

Yet, to be a teen is to live in between this childlike wonder and the adult awareness of the complexity and difficulty of things. When we find ourselves in the woods between youth and adulthood, our emotions inside and the world outside can wallop and welcome us—with awe and terror, confusion and ecstasy. Writing can help shape that inner and outer anarchy, cast a spell on it and forge it into beauty.

That's when poetry struck me like a knock to the head, waking me up when I experienced my first crush-loves and deaths. Love and death are, after all, the two most elemental themes of all literature, asking why we die and how shall we live. I began writing furiously, joyfully, as if in a fever. As a professor teaching creative writing, I've had the good fortune to feed my own fever with kindling and branches and whole stumps, while showing my students how to feed their own fires, and stoke them into a new height and heat.

Reading this anthology, I'm struck by the elemental themes and metaphors—about the fire and light inside, the power of the air and spirit, the need to reclaim the clay of the body as paradise, as worthy of respect and dignity and justice—that run like a current through the work. These

writers may have left elementary school, but not the elemental school. They have not forgotten, in the wisdom of youth, what is fundamental to a human living.

Writers, never forget that your mere scratching ink on a blank page can create a space of beauty, and, in the words of one of my students, let your soul breathe. In the process, you might let somebody else breathe an air that they've never breathed before, waking them into themselves, into that common humanity that we share—striving like water downstream, rising like fire, restless like the air, yet steady and abiding as the earth.

Philip Metres is the author of ten books, including Shrapnel Maps (2020), The Sound of Listening: Poetry as Refuge and Resistance (2018), Pictures at an Exhibition (2016), and Sand Opera (2015). His work has garnered a Lannan fellowship, two NEAs, six Ohio Arts Council Grants, the Hunt Prize, the Adrienne Rich Award, three Arab American Book Awards, and the Cleveland Arts Prize. Metres has been called “one of the essential poets of our time,” whose work is “beautiful, powerful, magnetically original.” His poems have been translated into Arabic, Farsi, Polish, Russian, and Tamil. He is professor of English and director of the John Carroll University Youth Writers Workshop, a summer writing camp for teens.

Chapter I

The Fundamental Elements of Nature



Laura's Elements by *Laura Hobe*

The Earth and Everything in Between

by Camille Boyer

Life works in a balanced circle.
The elements thrive in a circle.
Fire cannot live without air.
Air cannot live without water.
Water cannot live without earth
Earth cannot live without balance.

Global Warning *by Nareus Hardin*

Crying tears of acid rain,
collapsing heart, bursting veins.
Iron cores pulsing in pain.
It really is such a shame.
Tumbleweeds in traffic lanes.
Plasma burning in our brains.
Forecast danger,
weathervane.
Pretending it's not all in vain.
Global warming,
global warning.
Mother Nature going into
mourning.
Rowans falling,
willows weeping.
Life is crumbling
while we're sleeping.
Global warming,
global warning,
Mother Earth's blood
is pouring.
Arctic melting, oceans rising.
Home is dying.
Home is
dying.

Fire *by Karley Johnson*

Passionate with every trace.
Illuminating so bright,
glowing red and orange
like she has a fiery ember for a heart.
She's not dangerous unless you come too close.
So why put out the fire in her heart?



Untitled by *Maya Peroune*

Tragedy by *Kristina Hanks*

It knocks at the door
with all the fire around it,
burning,
burning,
burning
down my home,
my world.
What an arsonist.
Why the hell did it have to do that?
As the rest of my house burns down in flames,
I drown in the sparks, too.
Because it can't keep its actions stable, and keeps burning up.
It's as if Hell raises off the ground,
picking up the pieces with the fire and burning them,
trying to take my favorite things and setting them ablaze.
So, eventually I drift out of consciousness,
seeing no hope in trying to escape the firestorm,
the burning forest that was once a beautiful green world...

It.

The Rain *by De'Sean Jackson*

The rain was flowing like a shower
when I got caught in it.

It was a hot, muggy day
with a summer breeze.

The rain rolled down my arm
as I stormed up the hill to my house.

The puddles looked like deep buckets of water.

The sun glared off of the water like the water was a mirror
as the water inside me kept me calm.

One More Step *by Nina Serna*

Help.

Help me.

It's too hot.

I can't breathe.

Why would you help me?

Why should you save me?

You like the heat.

But can you breathe?

You gave me a flame,

a kind orange flame to ignite my change,

letting that flame spread around my body,

engulfing my cool waves,

helping me grow to change.

Help me.

I am trapped.

You are holding me down.

You have gone one step too far

but only a million times over.

What's one more step?

Karma *by Laila Shotwell*

If trees could speak,
endless profanities would plague our oxygen.
Curses upon our lungs would chop our hearts down as we do their thick
trunks,
terminating our breath by poisoning our trust, just as we do to them.
Everybody wants to live but without the love from what birthed us,
we are but particles of dust that continuously build up, fueling forest fires.

Mother Nature birthed us and we are playing Judas with her everlasting love.
Though, when we least expect it,
deluding us with fortune as we devour her blighted fruit,
she will revoke her misplaced kindness
and bite the hand that was atrocious to her love,
her peaceful and beautiful nature, all destroyed.
If only we'd respected the home that she gave us.
What comes around goes around.
Mother Nature will fight back.

Air by *Karley Johnson*

So light but untouchable,
so clear but invisible.

You can see me in different forms but
never alone.

You can feel me, but you can't grasp me.

I'm the invisible man who whistles.

I am air.



Untitled by Sarai Murdock

Caeli, Terra, Ignis, Aqua *by Elana Pitts*

A fire so blazing, it can devastate a nation
A tsunami so powerful that it can wipe out an entire town
Earthquakes so harmful
that they break towns apart like divorces do families
Hurricanes that sweep you up like Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz
landing you in a new place or leaving you dead somewhere

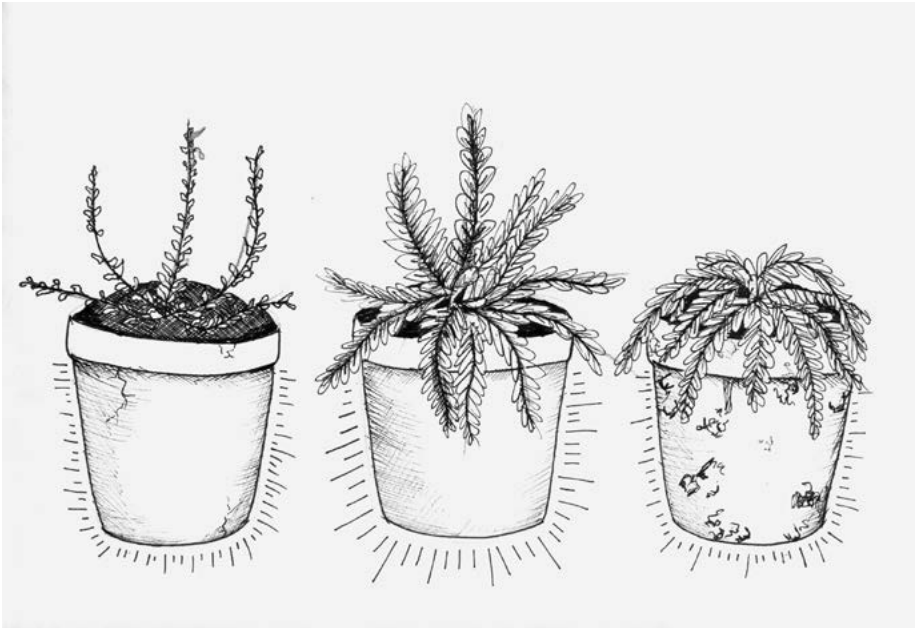
Earth, wind, fire and water
are what make and what break our world
Earth, wind, fire and water
Caeli, terra, ignis, aqua

Volcano *by Katie Davis*

Look into a volcano, blazing within, waiting to erupt.
It churns the Earth's rusty core, but it is a lost endeavor.
The mound of stone is submerged deep underwater.
Scarlet magma cools as it
bleeds from the cool, rocky veins.
It eternally seals itself away,
leaving ghosts of heat and fervor
and dusky mineral clouds
to be swallowed by the teal depths.
A sea of thoughts, a volcanic heart.
Its heat is searing;
its smoke intoxicating.
But until something reaches down and fractures the sea floor,
the ocean will subdue the flames.

The Earth Calls For Me *by Hayden Connor-Kuntz*

the earth calls for me
and I know the time has come
when the hollow tone of her
ethereal tongue
shakes leaves from oak trees
and sends the birds flying
south,
like I
and
I will walk
across the land
searching for the beginning,
middle and end to the tone
until my feet no longer ache
and I fall to my knees
somewhere between worlds.
I will crawl
following the melodic din
deep into the woods
until soil envelops my flesh
only to find
there was no beginning at all.



Untitled by Aine Fagan

Spring Showers *by Emma Hubbard*

Maggots landing all around me
like they know something's up.
Am I dead or am I dreaming?
This is a pebble dropped in water—
there aren't even any waves so it'll be okay.
I'm not that kid anymore
but was I ever, really?
There's a fine line between being happy
and learning to smile to make your mother be.
Long hair with longer split ends—
pretend to be pretty and feel it too.
Hot summers make for messy buns worn by hot messes.

Dirty room and I'm out of control.
Leave me in the dust, please, and let me be small.
There's a little trail to take skittish steps,
and you have to watch out for the mud and ticks
and stay calm if it happens,
just pick it off and move on,
don't aggravate the wound.
Let the scab heal.
Maybe the scar will remind you of the memories
and what not to do next time.

It's hard to feel lonely when I'm feeling so warm
and above all else scared.
It's not raspberry season but I like to think it is.
Fresh fruit makes up for the rotting inside,
dirty and hot, left to decompose.
Break down all that's there and see what you can salvage.

Goodbye, I guess, until summer comes again.
Wide stretch marks next to wider scars,
growth and destruction.
Why plant a forest just to cut it down?
Maybe it makes the soil fresher.
Better luck next time.

Self-Portrait of Air *by Anijah Wright*

I have prayed but not been prayed for.
Always swayed.
Orchestrated to breathe only over melodic chords.

Doves in the wind, my mind is adjacent.
Love, I expected to see is not as complacent
as I thought it'd be.

Like cranes in the sky,
all my inhibitions masquerade themselves
as clouds to evade plight
while my soul yearns to transcend new heights.

I feel it now,
that surge of breeze
that urge to breathe—
I am now who I once yearned to be.



Clouded Vision *by Nina Serna*

Child of the Creek *by Julie Larick*

The muddied stream ebbs past,
meeting at a trickle after leaving the sewer's agape mouth.
It breaks at each pebble pill and grass blade and hanged flower.
Bushes and baby trees,
luminescent and green, line the creek.
They peer down past the side of the bed
wilting as they kiss the timid water.
Seeping past, the creek water finally disappears
into a tunnel buried in the grass: another sewer.
No one knows if it's ever the same water.
On rainy days, the water isn't shy as
the gray sky coaxes out its hidden torment.
The muddy water roars with every raindrop,
drowning the plants, who sway and moan,
their fearful cries drowned by the creek's ferocious howl.
Sometimes when I walk in the rain,
I see a jagged rock perched by the creek's edge.
It has no face, no joy, no sorrow.
Nothing other than its weight,
and its piercing, jagged edges.
I never notice it in the sun.
Every time I walk by that rock in the rain,
I want to reach my fingers out to its edges,
to scrape my skin across its hard surface,
to see blood, as thin as the creek's muddy water.
To see it fall down my palm in droplets,
and the specks of black rock that flake off.
But I only wince, and continue to wander in the rain.
And then the rock is gone.
As I walk, I wonder how the water changes
everytime it leaves the mouth of the sewer.
I look to the luminescent green
bushes and baby trees,
to the pebble pills and grass blades and flowers hanged,
and see how sadly they weep with longing and pain.
They wilt to kiss the creek's fingers everyday,
its blood on their lips.
I feel a jolt in my stomach, a tug, and regret,
as I have seen that desperation before.

Air by *Karrel Hixon*

Cool as a cave
or as strong as a train.
Usually considered a wonder,
sometimes, a beast that can't be tamed.
Air is amazing
even in bad ways.
Rapid tornados,
soft rains.
You need it to breathe;
blessing from the trees.

The Forest *by Azareah Rice*

The sun rises and falls upon the hilltop
glazing over the flowers and trees of the forest,
the wind brushing over the trees,
touching them gently.
Shivering-cold water streams down the river,
unknowingly knowing
where it's going.
The calling of animals creates harmony.
Smoke puffs from the chimneys of cabins nearby,
flowing through the wind.

The forest is a home for all.

From Me and Back *by Camille Boyer*

In the beginning, I was already there.
In the earth, I wandered
trying to connect a fate,
learning of ideas.
Through fire, I saw the future
of things I could only imagine happening.
Water would flow around my body,
imagination becoming real
and touchable.
Somewhere, air gave the first breath
but never a last.
This real imagination taking action.
From this center grew the elements
that expanded from nothing
taking shape as something new.
From earth,
fire,
water
and air.

From me and back.

Fundamental Elements *by Yimo Cao*

Water.

Clear and serene
as a spring stream.
Powerful and vast
as an ocean.
A graceful spirit.
Flowing
water.

Fire.

Sly as a fox.
Agile and sharp.
It lies patient
like a snake
waiting
to strike its prey.
Burning.
Taunting.
It devours everything
in its path,
Fire.

Air.

Free
to flow
everywhere it wants to go.
Graceful
but powerful.
A small breeze
or an immense hurricane.
A teller of stories.
Gossips.
Whispers.
Carefree and dancing
as it flies.
Air.

Rock.
Strong.
Boastful
in its power
and wisdom.
A pebble.
A boulder.
A leader.
Rock.

Chapter 2

The Fundamental Elements of Self



I Remember *by Nina Serna*

Lucky One *by Emma Hubbard*

Will I make it, shining?
Got sweat on my forehead and in the crease of my knees.
Movie stars don't sweat,
pretty girls don't cry,
scream into a pillow to muffle your noise, it's business.
Do you have any idea how lucky you are?
Don't break, and don't look down,
it gets real at night on your roof.
Everything is small and warm,
be careful not to slip.

And remember your roots,
remember to dye them
blonde to brown to blonde to
back and forth,
swinging like a pendulum.
Will I let go of the rope this time?
Splash into the water, cold and dark,
no sweat this time.

I Am Me *by Daquann Taylor*

My body is strong but I am short
My body is dark but inside there's light
My body is simple but my clothes are complex
My skin is smooth but my past is rough
My eyes are brown but my eyes carry pain and lust
My hands are small but carry big problems
My feet are long but are as fast as small bunnies
This is what I hear and this is what I believe
but none of this matters
because out of all that is said,
I am me.

Crepusculāris *by Jessica Chang*

3.01.15

it is only 4:00 pm
but already,
cotton candy
clouds
begin to
stripe
the vast
expanse of the sky,
stretchmarks
on her blue
body.
she is gorgeous.

9.23.15

the night
tastes like fizzy
lemonade
in a
mason jar.
the sugary
taste of
the deep
pink lingers
into the
morning.

8.17.16

iridescent streaks
the color of
Polaroids and the
idea of Paris and
blue frost,
this sunset reminds me

of shaved ice and
string lights on the
river.
I drink it all in.

4.06.17

not all
sunsets are beautiful.
the flames
consume everything as the
last
glowing
sliver of steel
slips
below the horizon.
a clementine
stretches
its fingers
across the sky like a
thirsty cancer.
if god had a hangover, this
is what her eyes would look like.

5.31.17

I watch the
horizon dissolve into
pastel
confetti
from a Toyota
traveling to where
a beautiful star
fell
and made
an ugly pit.

12.30.18

If last night was jazz,

tonight is Satie, an Impressionist's
dream,
feet
on the dashboard,
feasting
on the colors
that seem to

hang

over
the hills
forever,
saturating
the sky with
matte pink orange yellow blue brushstrokes.

06.17.19

It looks like
a painting
of a sunset done
by an amateur—
the colors are right,
hazy orange
and cornflower blue,
but it is
too crude, too obvious, too dense
to be real.

I Know No Peace *by Nayona Traywick*

I am fire.

Short-fused.

Uncontrollable.

Unforgiving.

Malicious.

I act without concern for others.

Unnoticeable until lit,

I am contained like a lighter.

I won't let myself out.

For me, a small spark for me can cause great destruction.

I know no peace.

I am constantly moving.

I burn away the memories of those who use me.

leaving no knowledge of who they were.

I leave marks on those who play with me

but I calm those who understand me.

I do not wish to be understood.

I am fire.



Look into the Reflection *by Tevyah Hanley*

Imagination *by Naomi Hardin*

I have no real friends
I love talking to strangers
Lemme rephrase that
The stranger is the paper

I bleed through the pen
In a way, the words have been murdered
Ditched the crime scene
The culprit? They don't know her

Eyes ooze sunshine
Shining on my 4C hair
The wind blows through it
Into the water, I stare
In the nighttime I metamorphose
Leaving fire everywhere

The earth begins to crumble
My elements took them by surprise
The people start to gaze
Faces riddled with fright
Cause if we're being honest
Don't nobody really understand the things she writes

Tethers don't feel the energy, pain or frustration
All is well, though
For once the stanzas hit the paper,
Emotions were just my imagination.

Competitive Victory *by Nina Peyrat*

I stand there in victory,
fist bumps all around,
reimagining the game:

Pass! Come on!
Reverse stick, Pull left.
She shoots,
she scores!
In the zone.
Mine, mine, mine!
Bump,
I got it!
Set.
Ready, over here!
Spike.

Sports make me sweaty and tired,
yet I'm on fire.
Teamwork is key,
my weapon you see.

Name the sport,
I'll play it and win it.
To a degree,
competitive me.

I Am by *Richard Horton*

I am not the enemy

I am a soldier on all ten toes

I am not a young black male headed to a cell

I am a young black male headed to success

I am not a hater

I am a person who lets people live how they live

I am not a stereotype

I am a teen in school completing my work

I am not your enemy

I like everyone the same and don't judge anybody

I am not who you think I am

I am me



Untitled by Willow Rosser

Mama Says *by Shanana Hawkins*

I'm light skinned, yet still black.
I carry this load on my back.
But the color of my skin doesn't define
who I am, it's what's inside.
So when people talk about me I don't listen.
I just continue to do me; that's what they're missing.

"Hold ya head up. Don't listen to what people say.
Black and beautiful is what you are," Mama says.

For so long I let people get to me,
their words stabbing me like a sword.
Mama says words don't hurt but I felt otherwise.

"Ugly,"
"Fat."
"Stupid."

"Ya man wasn't saying that," I would say.
Their mean glares were bright as day.
You could see how mad they'd get when they looked my way.

Black and beautiful is what I believe I am.
I hold my head high,
because that's what Mama says.

Imagine *by Nora Nathan*

Swing sets are ships,
treehouses are castles,
climbing walls are moats needing to be crossed.
Sticks are staffs and wands,
pets are mythical beings,
the backyard is a battlefield.
The woods are filled with endless possibilities.

Later it became card games,
role playing and geekdom,
collectibles and more books,
competitions and creativity
and still, imagination.
Running around,
trying new things,
being picky
but always,
imagination.

Always reading,
playing,
geeking out.

Always imagining
creating,
thinking,
learning.

Always being,
always loving,
always laughing.
Always living
life.

I'm More *by Donte Byrd*

I'm more than an athlete
I'm more than a student
I'm more than a son
I'm more than a brother
I'm more than a black person
I'm more than a boyfriend
I'm more than average
I'm more than a grandson
I'm more than a friend
I'm more than a basketball player
I'm more than a hard worker

I'm a superstar
I'm a scholar
I'm a beautiful black son
I'm an awesome brother
I'm a strong black young man
I'm great to the person I love
I can do well in all things in life
I'm blessed to have my grandparents
I'm that friend who would do anything and everything
I'm an expert in the game of basketball
I'd put anything on the line to be great.



Head in the Clouds *by Tevyah Hanley*

The Pink Thing *by Chyann Jeff*

I was five or six when I found a box in my grandma's bathroom. I found different items inside, and one of them caught my attention. It was pink and had a silver blade. It looked very interesting, something I had never seen before.

Not knowing what it was, I explored it. Little did I know... that was one of the worst decisions of my life. I put the pink thing to my face and moved it across my forehead.

Little hairs fell into the sink.

I looked up. I couldn't really tell how I was feeling. I didn't know if I was excited or scared. I decided to show my dad and he was in complete shock as he asked why I shaved my eyebrows off. I told him that I was bored. After that, I covered up the right side of my face for a week.

Procrasti— *by Sanjanasri Vedavyas*

Sitting up at night,
blank homework lying on my desk,
eyes drooping with sleeplessness
but my pencil is nowhere to be seen.

My brain tries to reason with me.
“Sleep now!” it begs.
But if I do, I’ll get in trouble
so I pinch my eyes and shake my head.

My fingers grasp the pencil
but other thoughts run wild within.
Staring longingly at my screen
“One last one,” I ration.

Opening the rabbit hole with wonders to behold
I commence my hunt for “the one.”
“I build a shelf with my feet” intrigues me.
My ten-minute timer has now begun.

Five minutes in, wisdom strikes from above.
“This is a dumb video,” I confess.
I return to the homepage to try again
with my timer on reset.

Two in the morning and I decide to cave.
I’ll just do it at six.
Closing my laptop at long last
I scramble for my four hours of bliss.

Looking at my watch after waking,
a sense of doom imminent,
ten minutes til the bus shows up—
Homework? Guess I’m not giving it.

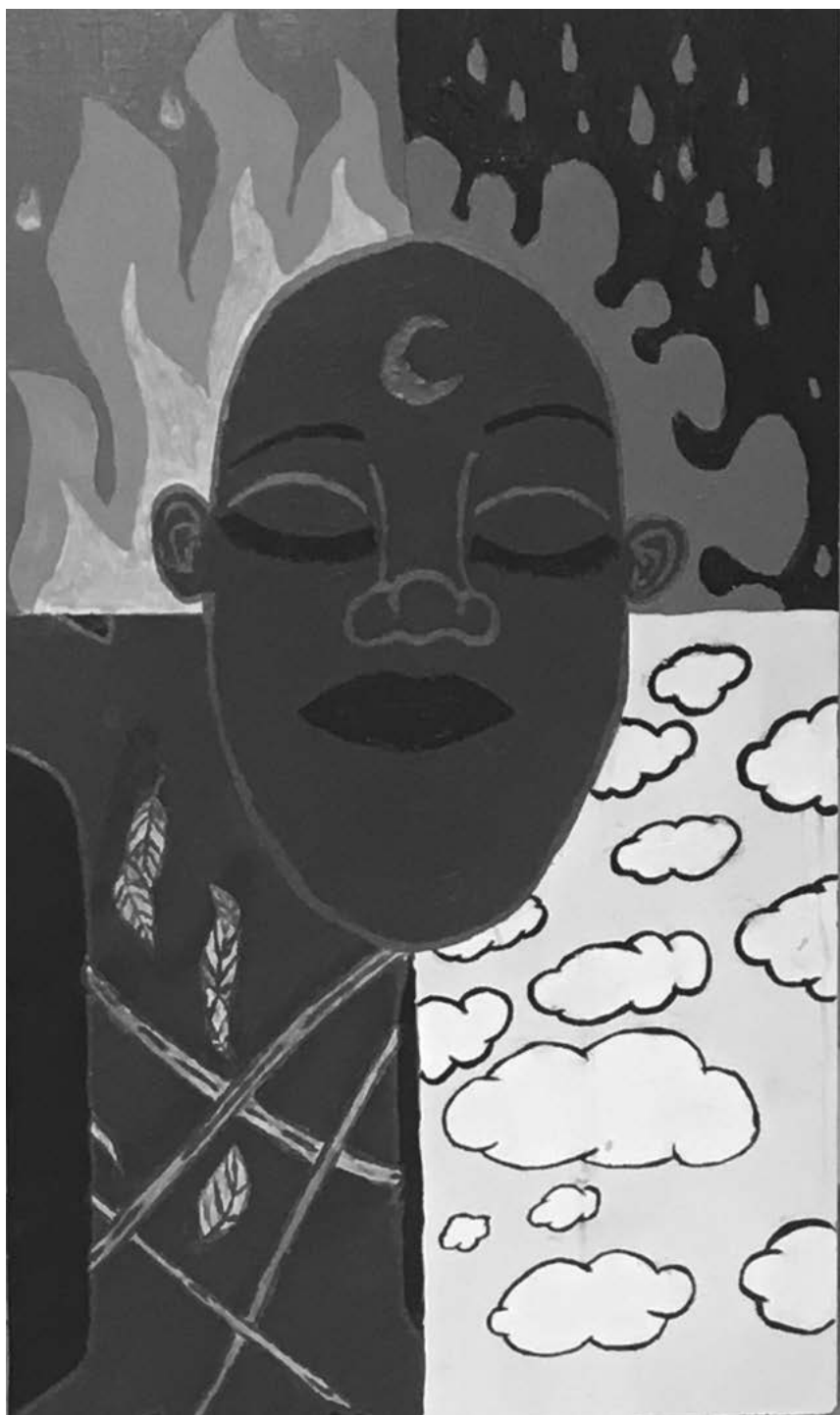
And again I’m sitting late at night
But this time will be different.
To my surprise, I made progress this time
Asleep with two unfinished sheets instead of one.

We Good? *by Damonte Henderson*

I love myself a lot
I know when to be a leader
when to play around and
when to be for real

When it comes to school
there are a lot of good things about me
and a lot of bad things
I don't do my work most of the time
I don't listen to anybody
I'm working on that...
I can get along with anyone
as long as they don't say anything
or do me wrong

We good?



Untitled by Shawn Wilson

You Cannot Sway Me *by Antonio Peacock*

I am special, unique
You cannot sway me
I am strong, outstanding
You cannot stop me

I hold my head high, proudly
proclaiming my happiness
I hold my pace, continuing forward
through the hurt
I am proud of my culture, my future
I am confident that I will achieve my every goal
I am becoming all that I can be
I am black
a black child
a child under God

I am special, unique
You cannot sway me
I am strong, outstanding
You cannot stop me

Scenes from Forest Hill Park *by Adele Metres*

I. Her son would be the quarterback again this year, like every other year. He'd joined a summer camp, practiced every day. She'd made sure of that. Her yellow plastic stopwatch was cracked around the edges from clenching her sweaty fingers. At first, her son groaned when he saw the schedule she'd outlined for the summer, a full month of football camp, sprints, sit-ups, snap practice. Mid-June, when his six pack appeared, she heard he finally asked the girl next door out to a movie. The girl said yes, and you'd be crazy to think she would've said that if he hadn't been training every day! He should plan a party at the park after one of his football games and invite the girl and some friends, she decided. She'd make burgers on the grill and bring popsicles. She looked up as he was walking on the field. His shoulders slouched under his thick pads just a bit too much for her taste. "C'mon baby!" she hollered. "You got this, my baby boy."

II. She always cheered a little louder when the runners passed, especially the girls. They needed it as much as the football team. Probably more. It hurts more to push yourself to go faster than it does to be hit by someone else. She knew that from watching what looked like cathartic pain wash over the runners' faces day after day. One day, years ago, she told her mom she wanted to run with a team too. Her mother sighed deeply like she sometimes did, got those sad lines between her eyebrows. "Don't you like cheerleading?" She did like cheerleading. Clap, clap, clap. Kick, spin. Clap, clap, clap. And the girls kept running by, ponytails swishing back and forth, back and forth. Sinewy legs pushing the ground away, clenched hands reaching forward. She cheered even louder. She stayed late after practice with some of the football guys and cheer girls. After everyone else had left, she decided, for the first time, to run. It was getting dark. She knew her mother wouldn't want her out alone, the sun sliding away over the steep hill and city spires in the distance. She began to push the ground away behind her, reaching forward like she'd seen the runners do. She lifted her head toward the sky for the first time that day.

III. It used to hurt to watch the eighth grade boys run. Their laughter, their heavy breathing, their legs spinning like the wheels of bikes, heads tilted upward toward the sky. He used to run like that. Now, he could almost feel the adrenaline rush of one boy slowly overtaking the other as they raced around the pond, dodging goose poop with each step. He bellowed, "Let's go! If it doesn't hurt like hell you're not going fast enough!" More than anything, he wanted to tell the fastest to be careful, to take running more seriously. But his coaches never gave him that kind of advice. Yelling was familiar, and it would work just fine. Some of the runners' parents had complained about the park, saying it was "too dangerous" because some neighborhood kids had sent off a couple BB gun shots. They're so overprotective, they just need to let their kids grow up, he thought. What he couldn't bring himself to say out loud was that leaving the park would mean leaving something behind of his own. Only at the park could he close his eyes and run again.

Black Inside *by Jendaya Floyd*

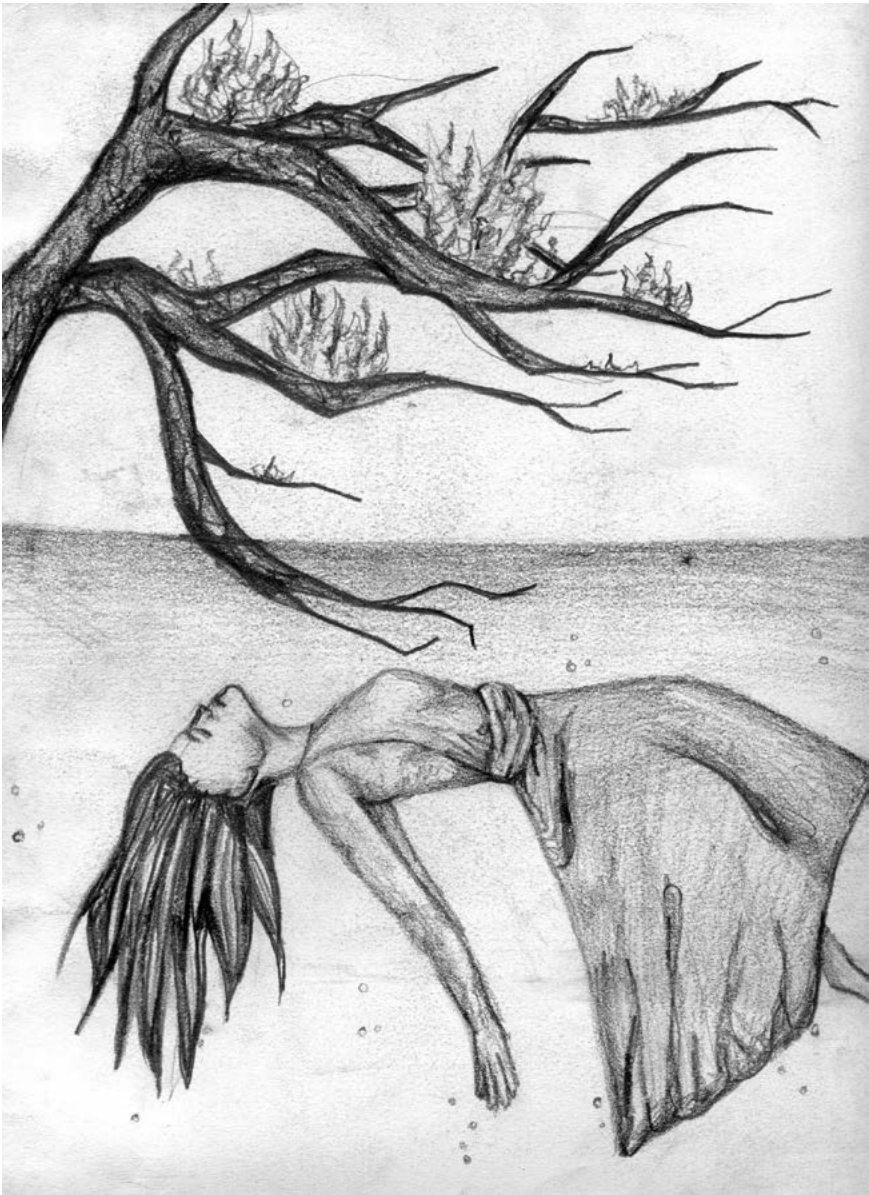
Her hair is different, full of color.
Her skin is neither dark nor white.
She is light, and it fits her just right.
In case you didn't know she's still black inside.
Her face is my face, just as unique.
Her lips might be bigger than others.
They're my favorite feature;
They're the piece that determines who she is.
Her size is okay!
She's not too big, and she's not too small.
She is not what they expect.
But she's still black inside.

My Paradise *by Tiana Jolly*

My body is a paradise,
not too big or too small, just right for me.
No matter the size, my paradise is still just right for me.
Yes, there are rumors but I don't care.
Yes, it's hard for me to get in the clothes I wear.
Hair always done differently, I wear no makeup
to cover the eczema that others would be ashamed of.
Yes, my feet and hands are little and yes I'm not tall.
I'm fine with all those things
because this is my paradise and I like it.

Chapter 3

The Fundamental Elements of Life



Untitled by Aine Fagain

To Thrive *by Stephanie Yen*

We are the choir / sing hymns of toffee summers
with our blueberry-coated tongues. We
cut our hair under the sun, sharp and ragged. We
unspool, hands dripping with mud / stash and savor
fleeting laughs underneath our molars for fear
of drowning them in the pool. This is how we
unwind / let our morning coffee latch onto our
lips until they are limned with bronze. Our
days sleep with chapped mouths and our
nights wake with simmering fever, so we
keep burning / soak in oceans and
dive into potholes of sand. We
live off of nature / dance on our
Earth's heavenly soil. This is how we
thrive.

The New Court *by Maurice Banks*

I love that sound.

Our new gym is so clean. Every time we run our plays, the only sounds I hear are voices and squeaking shoes. Years ago, we had an old filthy basketball court where you couldn't hear players' shoes. The court was dark and ugly. Now, the court is bright and clean. We get a lot of fans at our games because of our new court and our team.

I really love that sound.

The Fundamental Elements of Leaving

by Emily Stanciu

You must have scissors,
little brass or plastic shears
to cut the cord, soft and gummy,
the flatline whine, a beckoning call.
You trim the death off of the trees the same.
Poised five stories up,
bouncing on unsteady knees
like a dancer, spinning, plodding on the edge
or a walker, wavering between sand and sea foam,
the far out depth which can't be seen.
You must have the will to dive
and you must be able to swim.
Thrown by rain without an umbrella,
a fruit on a tree inches past the fingertips,
ripe and red, like a floating, cherry balloon
popped between your teeth, stained scarlett with pride.
Mostly, you must keep a light,
a wailing baby, a full vase
to lead the way a step at a time
and let it swallow you like the whale mouth of a church
with all four walls lined with wheels
with divinity woven into the foot.



Bare Necessities by Nareus Hardin

Building Up the Glass *by Snigdha Cingireddi*

Love is priceless.

But if you were to put a price on it

handing over your heart is like giving someone a glass
that overflows with
euphoria.

Infatuation.

Fondness.

Enchanted by these feelings,

you have faith that the person holding the glass will not drop it.

So, what do you do if the glass shatters?

Do you lay upon the remains of shattered glass?

No.

Instead, you let the fragments soak in.

The pain of the glass shards is temporary.

The memories

will strengthen you for a lifetime.

One day, the glass will appear again.

This time, the brim-filled glass will be in your bruised hands.

Tell me,

will you break it?

I Have A Bee *by Maya Serna*

Every morning she comes to visit me.
Outside my window she calls my name,
her voice, as delicate as the mist that touches her wings.
And I answer her.

Here we sit, on either side of a window,
her looking in and me looking out.
And we share our knowledge.
How strange she says my life is. How simple I say hers is.
Different worlds, we agree.
And yet here we are.
Sometimes, we cry.
Because someday we will both die.
We know this.
And yet, and yet.

She tells me of the flowers. Once beautiful in the sun.
My people came and built a town, she says.
Machines and factories and buildings and children.
Beautiful from far away. As a burning fire looks beautiful from far away.
We're both choking, she tells me.
You and me. I know, I say.

As they build their city, they build their death, she says.
We both remember the words of the philosopher.
"The last capitalist we hang will be the one who sold us the rope."
Old words, older than you and me.
Are they true?, we ask.
But maybe we can make it better, we think. We think and dream.
Can a dream save us? We wonder, like the philosopher.
Two different worlds.
Both in danger of death, we agree.
And there we sit, the two friends.
Me and the bee.

Air, Earth, Fire, Water by *Elana Pitts*

You're the air that I breathe
You're the earth that I walk on
You're the fire that warms me
You're the water I need to survive

You are everything I need and more
You are there when no one else is
You are the touch I crave time and time again in my loneliness
You are the one that slips through the cracks of the shell that I hold so dear
You are the one I will forever love

You're the air that I breathe
You're the earth that I walk on
You're the fire that warms me
You're the water I need to survive

You are the one I see in my dreams
The one who holds me close when I push everyone away
You stay when I wished you'd go
You kiss me after each fight
Your voice whispers that
it is okay to feel the way I do
and reassures me that I am
perfectly imperfect

You're the air that suffocates me
You're the earth that renders me still
You're the fire that burns me
You're the water that fills my lungs

Your touch feels like a million bee stings
Your eyes glare at me when I cry
Your arms squeeze me until I can't take another breath
Your hands yank my hair
Your legs leave me stranded

You're the air that suffocates me
You're the earth that renders me still
You're the fire that burns me
You're the water that fill my lungs

My tears are my only water
My air is gone
The earth crumpled beneath me and is now a wasteland
The fire still burns within me
and my wounds remind me of all the pain you put me through

The Elements of Influencing *by Richard Horton*

Three friends take a journey to a place no one knows of.

The first stop they make is to the store to grab some snacks, a pack of dutches, and a beezles. They get to the secret place and start to influence. After the session, they laugh and joke. They feel like they're on the clouds, the highest clouds at that.

See, the three friends all go to a school where baking is the main subject so throughout the whole session they laugh and bake until they can't breathe.

Later, they're moving but it feels like they are in slow motion. After they leave the secret location the boys start walking to the bus stop. They walk as fast as they can but they still manage to be on the same square of concrete. At the same time.

Agony by *Snigdha Cingireddi*

Agony was desperate for revenge.
The loyalty she once knew was gone.
There was only one longing she had.
The only thing she wished for was
to fill the void of her heart that was at a loss for love.
The journey to fill it would be hard and would cost her honor.
She was
nostalgic.
Needy.
All she could do was gaze out at the piercing azure sky and
yellow shattered gold sand
to the depths of the wine dark sea.
She could never rejoice in revelry.
For she was far too busy turning men into dogs and lions
who could not see for their vision was cloudy with tears of
sorrow.
Despair.
Misery.
That void in her heart could not be filled
but it could be covered by the dreams she turned into reality.
Her euphoria was waiting for her.
Not gone.
Just waiting.



Untitled by *Jasmine Neumann*

Under the Skin *by Jessica Chang*

Day 1

you fit so perfectly into the hollow of me that I didn't even notice
when we stopped being two and became
one.

Day 2

you were an unwanted body-sharer.
I didn't want
your extra pounds of flesh
weighing me down.

Day 7

slowly, our hearts beat as one,
blood vessels fused, like soldered iron, into one tendrilled map.

Day 35

you had one lung and I had the other.
I hated
not being able to breathe without you.
my ribs expanded to make space for your innards,
expanded until they cracked.

Day 156

your fingers were so slender, spidery, almost.
they were manipulative, with a mind of their own.
once, they tried to strangle us in our sleep.
we would have been dead
if my windpipe hadn't been so damn strong.

Day 438

it was the small changes.
food tasted like sand,
arms and legs all covered in small, silvery marks.

Day 760

sometimes I got hives, my body's small way
of rejecting you.
red, angry welts speckle my skin.
I tried to claw you
out of me.

Day 1156

we were all over the place,
liver where the pancreas should be,
an extra appendix there,
a missing spleen,
kidneys smashed, intestines spilling over,
and abscesses blooming in the
s p a c e s
in between.

Day 1461

when we went to the doctor's, they told me
I was going to die early.
epigenetic changes, they said.
probably cancer, but maybe also
heart disease or a stroke.
serves you right.

22:02 *by Samaure Fuller*

Dr. Silver was one of the best trauma surgeons. She was so dedicated, and she had never lost a patient.

One Sunday night, she was on call. She didn't get much sleep the night before. A patient came in all alone. She had glass in her face. Blood was gushing from her carotid artery.

Doctor Silver's heart dropped. She rushed to get a crash cart. Blood was everywhere—too much. It was the most blood she had ever seen. The patient started to crash and the nurse gave Dr. Silver a crash cart. They rushed to resuscitate her. After a while, the nurse told Dr. Silver to stop. Desperate, she kept trying for another two minutes.

Then, the nurse removed Dr. Silver's hands and called the time of death: 22:02. This was the first patient Dr. Silver had ever lost. She was devastated—knowing she couldn't save that poor girl's life.

Human vs. Grief *by Ayelet Travis*

sometimes
i think my tears may break me

they cut down my cheeks
blur my optimism
eat away at my skin
until my face is red with the blood underneath it
they pound at my skull
and stuff my nose
until i feel defeated, exhausted, and cold
then the tear tracks
that feel like knives head for my throat

but still,
i wipe my eyes
so the tracks become less flooded
then i look in the mirror expecting destruction
but instead,
looking back at me
no wreckage to be seen
hints of red
but otherwise,
my face is whole and clean

i thought the tears would break me and the sobs would overtake me
until i shook myself apart into soggy human rubble
but in my grief i forgot,
that flesh and bones do not crumble
when met with a waterfall of fear and sorrow

next time
i will remember,
humans are not water-soluble

2017—2018 *by Jeante Johnson*

Walking, full of fear,
school is near.
This is new, I want to undo.
Time for a new beginning, a chance to start over.
I walk through the door
ready to explore.
but the bright colors everywhere
feel like a nightmare.
But things get better
day after day.
I just have to take it one day at a time.

When the second semester comes
my life goes down the drain.
My grades go down and I have to pay a fine.
My brother is mean and my mother yells at me.
I get injured and someone I love passes.
I have so many problems
coming at me left and right like I am stuck in a crossfire.
I swear to myself I will move past my struggles,
so that's what I do.

Summer comes and it's time to start grinding.
The whole summer I work out,
But I also eat donuts and get fat
and my gut holds me back,
but that is my motivation to keep moving forward.
I'm almost there.
The goal is near.
Now is the time to overcome my fears.

All of the Fire of a Dying Star *by Nareus Hardin*

I am watching him spark
under
his eyelids, watching his skin
blacken like soot.
He thinks he will be an
exception,
that nothing could use all his
flame,
that he's too strong.
The story of a mortal god
is a tragic one.

trying to blossom *by Deonta Steele*

I feel the petal fall
dropping to the ground

crushed by steps
your steps
my steps
our steps

seeping in the dirt.
it was once full of life
and alive with color.

it was once a part of me,
a growing tumor
from the constant photosynthesis
of life.

I motion for the petal.
The winds bring it back to me,
twirl it between their fingers
then flick it to the ground.

this petal will not be anymore.
this petal must be undone,
used over and over again
as blackmail
as if I am not aware of my own petals,
I cast it out
only for you to pick it back up
and try to re-attach it to my stem,
I got rid of that petal for a reason,

all because you'd rather look at the wilting petal
neglecting the flourishing flower.

Sensation *by Naomi Hardin*

I had a wind sensation
It just blew through my mind
It was godly
It was worldly
It erased all the time
The time I'd been alive
and viewed things through two eyes
The times I'd cried
and my soul had died

Thoughts are just rocks in a river
waiting to be swept away
by big tides
Emotions are just fire
swallowing the Earth
in great strides
Love is a wind
floating through the sky
To be or not to be is the only question
once we all die

Ember *by Ryan Lawson*

You are fire creating light but hurting everything in sight;
and me, I'm the fuel adding onto you.

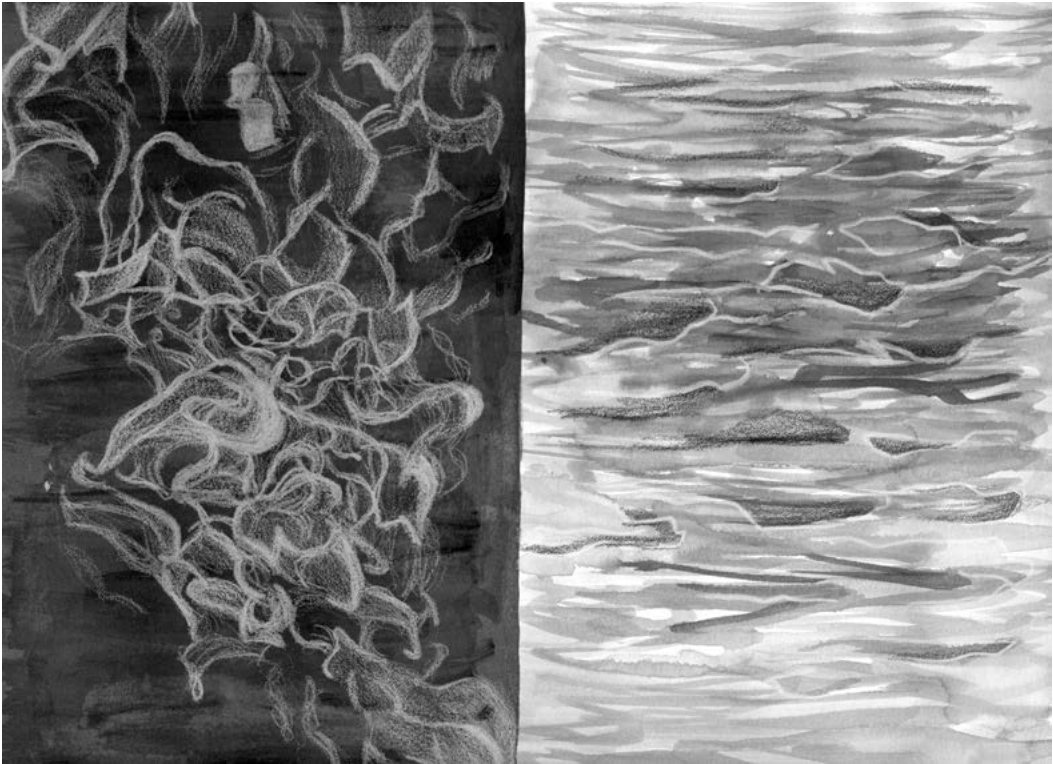
We create the problems we need to solve
just so we have something to do.

I'm probably too young to be thinking about love
but you're on my mind so often I barely sleep without you.

Your love is fire;
the closer I get, the more I get burned,
but your flame cures my bitterness.

Chapter 4

The Fundamental Elements of Society



Untitled by Willow Rosser

When I Stare Out Into Space *by Clara Orland*

When I stare out into space
I'm not looking for a new comet or race.
I'm not looking for a way to say that I didn't finish my homework
or a dream to start unwinding and ticking like clockwork.
I simply am just there in the moment
not thinking about my past relationship and
the inability I have to grip onto a guy for more than four months.
It seems skeletal of the life we all live once
and yet only so many years can be engineered into one life
that if lived wrong brings strife,
a knife, piercing a dying soul.
What a cruel existence,
what a cruel life goal.
There are people who are arrogant and have a resistance
to allow an outlandish and invasive perspective,
unable to see what's in front of them:
a dying life, a closing sentence.
And then there are those who are dumbstruck at the freedom death brings.
I know it's strange how that might look
but they have more sanity then the rest of us.
At least they accept and have the ability to discuss
such a disturbing topic.
Because not only does depression kill so many people
but those who survive, give them something microscopic
and yet, so very there and therapeutic.
It's a new song, a new genre of music,
like finally being able to look into a mirror
It's a property that is amazingly specular
but still counting every tile on the classroom ceiling,
I can't imagine a world of nothing after such vibrance.
My mind has the inability to comprehend such a space of being silent.
Inevitably, we all will experience the same fate
whether that be ending early or late
It's tragedy, but something we all need to grasp
and the more time wasted ignoring that fact
is more time you waste unable to open the hasp
that gives you the ability to understand completely that death

isn't just necessary... but a new life you must face with a new breath.
But I don't want to think about that.

Get out of my head.

Get out of my head.

Get out of my head.

Look at the teacher, the board,
show a smile and aim your direction toward
another person—think about something else.
Don't think.

Start thinking about how small you are
in relation to the neverending universe afar.

But no, that idea rides away
because there's something keeping me concerned,
a thought bugging me till I become astray.
In my thoughts, the idea is spurned,
the thought that my life could be over in an instant,
a split second.

I notice the little things
like how skinny she's getting,
the way she walks as if she's dragging broken wings,
her humour hiding the anorexia and bulimia ripping at her mind.
She can see beautifully, but she's blind—
her mind unable to understand
that what she's doing is unkind.
It breaks me to watch,
to see her throw stones at her own flesh.
If only she could see that she's not the only one
that doesn't think she's beautiful.

I talk to him everyday,
his voice here but his soul so far away and distant.
He drives a blade to his wrist, his intentions persistent.
He doesn't believe that anyone loves him
so he walks the halls, his scars matching his hymn.
He cries out for help and yet no one is listening,
his eyes glossed with tears glistening.
He only knows the loneliness he feels.
Stop thinking.
Let them fall by themselves.
You can't help them from sinking.

Get back to school, the teacher called on you.
 Look near the shelves
 back at him.
 Ask if he can ask the question again
 Look for an answer, at one of your friends overflowing on the rim
 of answers to say
 I don't have all the answers.
 No one does.
 They waltz around the subject like dancers.
 And it's hard to say, but even professors can't tell you
 the equation for depression times the inability to stand on your own two feet.
 As long as you're neat and stay in your seat
 and don't you dare cheat ...
 Stop thinking.
 You can't think about anything controversial.
 Don't comment about advertisement and commercials.
 Stop thinking.
 Don't give anyone time to process what you're screaming.
 The sky is beautiful today.
 It's the color of when my dog crossed life's archway.
 His eyes serious and body chilled.
 We were unskilled to comprehend such a place
 where he was in pain and suffering.
 The only way was for him to be killed.
 Stop thinking.
 It will only enhance the memory,
 the reality of everything else compacting and shrinking.
 My mind is engulfed in the fury of how everything pans out in the end.
 Reacting, my body tends to bend
 at the very trend that we are all in a sea of life and death without the
 need for acceptance.

When I stare out into space...
 To me I see that life isn't such a disgrace.
 Yes, it's short and burns out with a snap
 but along with that fills a gap,
 one we all have
 Whether it be a yearning for love
 or a destiny for greatness from above.
 The point is we all have fate—

one that can be bad or great.

The only factor is how you act and react to every attack life throws at you.

But you have to be fast in the way you act

because if you don't, things in life will seem arbitrary.

Things in life will only ever be ordinary.

They pick up their bags with such ease, the ignorance of not knowing,
not trying to understand.

To know that we must accept will always ever be unknown,
the mystery growing, bursting at the seams.

They need to remember you not by the tragic
dissected and questioned under beams

but by the loyalty you assume to own

by the love planted to one day be grown

Look up at the furious clock,

ticking, tocking

Tick, tock, tick, tock.

How repetitive and yet so complicated,
waiting for the day to end as I stand at my seat—
the bell rings.

Time for me to get my things.

Elements of Danger *by Brian Ford*

Danger walks around everywhere
thinking he can control anyone,
snatch you when you least expect it.
You cannot run or hide from danger.
It's not easy to escape him.
He creeps up on you.
When you see him, you better run for your life.
Danger wears all black and has red eyes.
Even his skin is pitch black.
Danger tells you to run or hide.
Danger is everywhere and you can never get away from him.

Untitled *by Anijah Wright*

The renaissance that lives in the fingertips of those you hold close like Black Wall Streets connected by the essence of what all our hearts beat—the very African drum taken from us by necessity. The true and pure essence of tarnished memory hanging on the thread that once burned sun-kissed skin on Sunday. Like trees we band together as our footsteps, our blood, becomes scattered—Basquiat the unblinking the unclinking of the shackles weighing us down in moon rivers. Transparency showing the unconsciousness of fear, adrenaline unflappable resilience.

An uprising

A surge of new beginnings

Deeper than any form of healing.

Guns Down *by Christian Smith*

I see young people on the corner
and a drug dealer by the gas station
and I think to myself as I walk home,
What is happening to my community?

People dying before the age of twenty-one.
I don't understand
why they are killing kids over nothing.
You really got to be smarter—
put down the gun.
You're not a real man.
You don't know whose son or daughter you shot.

Maybe there's another way.
Take that anger in your body and throw it away.
Moms crying, dads crying,
so put that gun down
and let me lead your pathway to a better side.
Let them see your good side.
But with all my blessings
I can't show you how to be a man because I'm not you.
Only you can.



Untitled by *Maya Peroune*

They Called Him The Gypsy *by Julie Larick*

The fountain splashes both of us,
its droplets flying through the air
suspended in the dusty rays of sunlight before they
hit our skin.
He smiles slightly and
extends his arm
to peer at the fountain's gift to him.
Our feet caress the fountain's water
toes dipped into the pool that surrounds its marble.
His shirt is mottled with flecks of dirt;
torn at the sleeves with shorts that do not fit
around his spindly legs.
I ask him his name.
He does not understand.
My mother's wary eye is on the two of us
resting our worn feet in the pool.
The yellowing walls of the Serbian square are a fortress,
and we are its center.
Buildings surround us on all sides,
and the sun seeps everywhere
even on us.
We are there
and the sounds of the square are nothing;
they are drowned by the lapping water
only we can hear.
The boy does not speak,
but lifts his face
to the spew of droplets that do not
interrupt the words that are not said.
He merely sits next to me
and I feel a pang as he closes his eyes,
his eyes which are not bright or young,
but that are wells of longing
like he has been here
and he has seen here
and is proud of that fact.
Suddenly

the wells are open.

His hand is in the water and
he is splashing me with the
fountain droplets.

I shriek, waving my hands through the pool
frantically to soak
his clothes.

He lets out a cry of laughter
and appreciates the shower.

“Draga, time to go...”

My mother’s words are the cymbal
reverberating through the town.

The boy turns those knowing proud eyes to me,
and I think he understands.

I watch his face,
his shirt that is still mottled and dirty
and see the dust settle from the ray of sun,
drifting through the air
and scatter across the ground.

“Zbogom pazi...”

His voice is too little for him.

My hand in my mother’s,
we hoist our possessions and finally
leave the square that chatters and stares.

Eyes trail to the place I once sat
until it is out of sight.

The clothes dry and stiff,
no remnants of the splash.

As we trudge from the suddenly grim square
onto the highway,

the unveiled fury of the sun striking us,
past the town and past the water,

I see the boy.

My mother does not.

He is perched on an island of lush trees by the side of the road,
alone and staring into the sky.

I still wonder if he saw me,
if he could see the dust in my eyes.

Lifeless *by Allan Brown*

The boy is lying lifeless on the corner
Sirens wailing from a distance
Momma crying over a frozen corpse
Children screaming from the porch
Tires screeching from the street
Bullets bursting through his skin
Blood gushing from an artery
A flock of people looking shocked
An angry family looking for revenge
Funeral on a Saturday.

Home *by Halle Preneta*

Theatre is my home.

The red velvet seats.

The big stage awaiting my presence.

The community that is a cast.

Always having your back, making sure you're okay.

Hyping you up for the show.

Accepting everyone for who they are.

It's a place to fall to when you're having troubles.

A place to forget reality

and just be immersed

in whatever you're watching or performing.

This is my comfort place.

This is my home.

Centaur Story by *Nora Nathan*

One day, a young centaur wanted to learn about the world she lived in. She and her brother wandered around playing with magic, trying to become all-knowing. She saw through books and he saw through devices. She read of beasts and warriors, of people and life. She read about science and math. She took it all in and wanted to learn more. She played games and made friends. She imagined and created. She learned and she taught. She made friends with many beings and continued to read on. She came up with recipes for trouble and for fun. She made more and more interesting things and read more and more complex things. She learned every day and kept on going.

In the end, she learned that it is ok to be different and good to be weird. She grew smarter, kinder, more mature, and she made more friends. She learned that mean teens are actually caring and that wants are not always needs. She learned that whether tired or not she has to persevere through life's hardships and deal with everything. She learned to be a warrior and keep going through the teasing. She learned that love really is all you need and to be thankful and she learned how much she truly loves her annoying brother and her adoring parents. Above all, she learned that her family and friends will always be there for her and she learned how to be there for them.

I Am Who I Am *by Traeshawn Broadnax*

Do my looks upset you?
We all grew up in a place
where people are judged by their looks.
Does my shape upset you?
Everyone can get bullied
because of their size or height.
Does my attire upset you?
Not everyone has the best clothes,
so people are bullied because of what they wear.

I am who I am and nobody can tell me otherwise.

Everyday Life in Cleveland *by Armani Kirts*

I'm from Cleveland
but I ain't neva been on a block a day in my life.

Selling drugs was never my way of life.
The same block where I was riding a bike
I seen them ni**as lose they lives.

I'm from Cleveland where lil girls get shot
just for playing hopscotch.
You'll be in the passenger seat and see yo
momma die in a drive-by.

These ni**as crucial, they don't give a fuck
about who they hit.
They shoot they own brother and run away
and act like some other ni**a came to hit a lick.

I'm from Cleveland –
Kids in the hood playing
and in the corner of they eye
they see a big-ass body bag.
In their minds they know someone's mother or daddy died.

But they use to it,
this shit ain't right.
These kids traumatized because of the way
these folks choose to live they lives.

I'm from Cleveland –
where you'll be at the bus stop
and get yo pants pulled down
because some lil ass boys was trying to be something they're not.

I'm from Cleveland –
We see so many bodies dropping
throughout the week.
Seeing ni**as on the remembrance page

make my knees feel weak.

This shit makes me feel like I can't breathe.

But when you shot that kid's dad in the heart

not only is the father dead but that lil child lost all the hope he had.

I'm from Cleveland

and it's time to change.



Supernova by Nareus Hardin

Hanging Trees *by Nayona Traywick*

They hang, swaying with the wind
tied by the neck, no chance of life
decorating trees like Christmas lights
but it's the summer.

Bodies of different shades of brown
hang from the trees as if that's their purpose,
the smell of rotting flesh all through the air like
your grandmother's famous sweet-smelling
apple pies,
looks of distress stretched across the faces as if
they were permanent smiles,
cries left lingering in the air
like the wind's greatest secret.

They hang, tied up to the trees that were once used for shade
from the harsh sun.

Distorted figures of these people still live within the shadows,
once alive, now dead and food for the crows.

The Puddle *by Dashawn Watson*

As the colors black and white take over the light
I'm staring into a puddle that may be life,
but the reflection? I don't know if it's mine.
Where I am I don't know, but time is still.
The rain is floating.
A black human figure is hitting the shore.
As the pieces come together,
I remember that I'm a pretender.
I died in the slammer.
A man named—death?
Comes and shows me who is in the puddle.
It is a man obsessed with murder.

Cleveland *by Morgan Kennedy*

On the outside looking in it seems like an amazing city,
Tall buildings, bright lights... around Christmas it looks so pretty,
Truth is, almost everybody who lives here wants out.
Everybody wants to be a rapper, comedian, or even a bully for clout.
The essential elements of Cleveland—
tragedy, hope and mostly talent
but to have a taste for Cleveland is to have an extended palate.

Not Like Everyone Else *by Jeremiah Buford*

Roger's head was spinning as he thought about whether he wanted the Jordans or the Nikes.

Just before the worker grabbed the Jordans, Roger decided to get the Nikes, but as he went to the counter to check out the shoes, he said he wanted to get the Jordans because they were more popular and black and white.

"The Nikes are plain!" he said. His friend Rufus had that type of Nikes. The Jordans were exclusive so people wouldn't say he was just trying to be like his friend Rufus. He was being himself, not like anyone else.

On the first day of school he threw those bad babies on. At school everyone said, "Them boys fire," and he responded telling them that he got them "from Payless."

They all laughed and said, "No—Footlocker, you mean."

At the end of the day he felt good that nobody was talking about him. He had confidence about himself in the end.

Ode to the One I Trust by Leila Metres

Trust means that
I can open up,
expose my scars,
my secrets
and I know you
will stay with me
through the darkest parts.
You're the lifeline
I can hold onto
to keep from drowning
in the unknown of being alone.
I always forget
how you could take advantage of me
with all you know about me
because trust is knowing
you never will.
I can feel our connection,
the safety
in our devotion,
the consistency
of your presence
and your heartbeat
that rhymes with mine.
In letting go of my shell,
I am letting go of fear
and freely being
with you.

The Definition of Art *by Stephanie Yen*

art is the soul of our world:

the nonliving that evolves into life,

the thought that mutates into emotion,

the physical that transforms into the abstract.

art is creation:

of proud messages,

of raw stories,

of new worlds.

art is the heart of community:

the embodiment of inclusivity,

the promotion of diversity,

the celebration of identity.

art is limitless:

it can be as alluring as it is atrocious,

as mysterious as it is blunt,

as grounded as it is extreme.

art is a creature:

one that exemplifies harmony as much as it exemplifies chaos,

one that represents who we are,

one that lives in all of us.

one that shamelessly forces people to think deeply,

to see, hear, and feel with more intention.

art is human.

Haiku *by Jacob Goldman*

Water, air, earth, fire

Life and electricity

Problems and ethics

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Thank you to all those who have helped give someone a voice in this book, and to you, writer, who have found your voice.

Contributors

Maurice Banks, New Tech East

I love playing basketball every day.

Camille Boyer, Birchwood School of Hawken

A poem with too many words

Traeshawn Broadnax, New Tech East

Allan Brown, New Tech East

Jeremiah Buford, New Tech East

Rapping brings light out of me.

Donte Byrd, New Tech East

Smart, kind, hardworking, loves family, basketball.

Yimo Cao, Ballard Brady Middle School

A flame that can't be extinguished

Jessica Chang, Hathaway Brown School

A collection of cells and microbes

Snigdha Cingireddi, Hathaway Brown School

Writing helped me find a voice

Hayden Connor-Kuntz, Cleveland Heights High School

Just trying my best every day

Katie Davis, Cuyahoga Heights High School

Creating feelings from nothing; just imagination.

Aine Fagan, Lakewood High School

A child learning about the world

Jendaya Floyd, New Tech East

My Mouth Determines Who I Am

Brian Ford, New Tech East

Samaure Fuller, New Tech East

Always cheerful; look mean, but nice

Jacob Goldman, Beachwood Middle School

Wake up, school, sports, homework, bed

Kristina Hanks, Cleveland School of the Arts

Growing strength in somewhat new numbers.

Tevyah Hanley, One Way Academy

Bringing Color into A Mundane World

Naomi Hardin, Cleveland Heights High School

drunken on poetry, forever and always.

Nareus Hardin, Cleveland Heights High School

Rain never last forever, dry together

Shanana Hawkins, New Tech East

Helpful, smart, creative; likes reading, tacos.

Damonte Henderson, New Tech East

Good friend, plays basketball, family guy

Karlel Hixon, New Tech East

An intelligent kid with big dreams

Laura Hobe, Cleveland School of the Arts

Awkwardly aware thoughts fed to birds

Richard Horton, New Tech East

Get in, get out, get gone.

Emma Hubbard, Cleveland Heights High School

Flowers growing in the winter snow

De'Sean Jackson, New Tech East

I am cooler than the wind.

Chyann Jeff, New Tech East

Kind, intelligent, outgoing, happy, and anxious

Jeante Johnson, New Tech East

Hard-working athlete and best Libra.

Karley Johnson, Monticello Middle School

Overthinker but she is absolutely brilliant

Tiana Jolly, New Tech East

Quiet but dark; brings out light

Morgan Kennedy, New Tech East

Morgan Kennedy is an introverted senior.

Julie Larick, Shaker Heights High School

Editor and writer all at once.

Ryan Lawson, Cleveland School of the Arts

Introvert who processes life through writing.

Adele Metres, Hawken School

Lost in the woods at 4:00 am

Leila Metres, St. Dominic School

A human person with some emotions

Armani Kirts, New Tech East

I like to tell the truth.

Sarai Murdock, Cleveland School of the Arts

I am passionate about my talents.

Nora Nathan, Hathaway Brown School

Centaur always reading and warring dragons

Jasmine Neumann, Hathaway Brown School

Still waiting for the zombie apocalypse.

Clara Orland, Cuyahoga Heights High School

Quirky girl with an awkward smile.

Antonio Peacock, New Tech East

I love working and I still do.

Maya Peroune, Shaker Heights High School

Always room to improve and grow.

Nina Peyrat, Hathaway Brown School

A competitive frog eager to learn

Elana Pitts, Shaw High School

A thriving butterfly that needs wings

Halle Preneta, Kenston High School

Always singing, always writing, always learning

Azareah Rice, New Tech East

I am reaching for my dreams.

Willow Rosser, Lakewood High School

inquisitive individual attempting to be altruistic

Maya Serna, homeschool

A dancing queen with(out) a dream

Nina Serna, homeschool

My vision is clouded by stars.

Laila Shotwell, Cleveland School of the Arts

A curious being exploring forbidden boundaries.

Christian Smith, New Tech East

I'm kind, like sports, play games.

Emily Stanciu, Rocky River High School

a polarized moon; a dangling question

Deonta Steele, Cleveland School of the Arts

Shaping my future through each page

Daquann Taylor, New Tech East

I am very talented and mean.

Ayelet Travis

Questioning everything, my life choices included.

Nayona Traywick, Cleveland School of the Arts

A flame unable to be extinguished

Sanjanasri Vedavyas, Solon High School

Reading, late night procrastination, and cocoa

Dashawn Watson, New Tech East

Shawn Wilson, Cleveland School of the Arts

Always shine brighter than a Starr

Anijah Wright, Cleveland School of the Arts

Grateful. Astonished. The name is Anijah!

Stephanie Yen, Beachwood High School

Hufflepuff powered by laughter and lattes

Meet the Teen Editorial Board

Lake Erie Ink's Teen Editorial Board is responsible for choosing a theme, collecting submissions of original teen writing and compiling and editing them into a professional publication. The editorial board learns about the editing process and publishing industry firsthand while giving voice to youth from across the region.

Maple Buescher, Cleveland Heights High School

Maple Buescher is a junior at Cleveland Heights High School and is thrilled to be back on the editorial board for the third year. When she's not procrastinating her homework or stressing about all the homework she's procrastinated, you can find Maple reading, writing, or scraping dead horsehair against animal gut strings stretched across an empty wooden box (a pastime also known as playing the violin). Maple enjoys reading and writing all types of prose, but particularly loves fiction of varying shapes and sizes. She has been known to spend extended time talking aloud to her characters in the bathroom mirror until her sister kicks her out.

Henry Campbell, homeschool

Henry Campbell is 13 years old and lives in Cleveland Heights. He started his first Ink Spot session in September of 2016 and has been participating in Lake Erie Ink programs ever since. In his spare time, he likes to collect and play retro video games. He also enjoys creating music.

Julie Larick, Shaker Heights High School

Julie Larick is a senior at Shaker Heights High School with a passion for writing, editing, cartooning, and girl bands. She is editor-in-chief of her school's creative arts magazine, tutors at a writing center, and is published in a poetry anthology. Julie has won statewide awards in speed writing and recently attended a creative writing studio.

Ayelet Travis, Cleveland Heights High School graduate

Ayelet Travis is a high school graduate and senior editor who has worked on Lake Erie Ink's previous two creative writing anthologies.

She has participated in Lake Erie Ink programs for the past three years and is a passionate slam poet who uses spoken word to loudly advocate for social justice and marginalized identities. Ayelet enjoys the simple pleasures of laughing, becoming engrossed in a good book, and petting every dog she sees.

Sanjanasri Vedavyas, Solon High School

Sanjanasri Vedavyas is a sophomore at Solon High School who enjoys writing short stories and reading. She loves k-pop and has been learning Indian classical dance for six years. She moved back to the United States from India after five years and is enjoying participating in Lake Erie Ink programs no longer as a fourth grader.

About Lake Erie Ink: a writing space for youth

Lake Erie Ink: a writing space for youth provides creative expression opportunities and academic support to youth in the Greater Cleveland community. By facilitating high quality creative writing programs, Lake Erie Ink improves youth access to the arts, literacy, and life skills.

To achieve this, Lake Erie Ink partners with schools, using project-based creative writing programs to help students meet academic standards. We also provide professional development for educators to become better teachers of writing. Additionally, during out-of-school time, Lake Erie Ink facilitates after school, weekend, evening, and summer programs where youth of all ages put pencil to paper to create their own literary art, including poetry, plays, fiction and creative nonfiction. Annually, Lake Erie Ink reaches 4,000 youth.

At Lake Erie Ink, the voices of youth are at the center of everything that we do. We believe in the transformative power of creative expression and envision a community where youth discover their voices, share their ideas, and inspire each other.

If you are a parent or guardian, a teen, an educator, or a community member looking for more information on how to get involved with Lake Erie Ink, visit our website at lakeerieink.org or call at 216.320.4757.

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