



Firecracker Volume 4



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Volume 4

firecracker

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Masthead

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Foreword

Over the last year there has been so much distance between us, and while physical distancing helps to keep us all safe, it makes the collaboration and connection that many writers covet so much more difficult to come by. Yet through that distance and despite the barriers that we have all faced, our community of writers has produced exceptional work—work worthy of sharing that just might help to make us all feel a little more connected.

All of the entries in *Firecracker* were selected from writing contests that drew a record number of entries. Using the same prompts, working within the same parameters, and facing the same challenges, these writers shared in the experiences of writing and of belonging to a community where they are free to creatively express their ideas. Each submission was read and shared between members of our reading team, who were amazed by the care, attention to detail, and inventiveness infused into every work.

Now you, the reader, have the opportunity to become part of that community by sharing in our excitement over and admiration of this work. From wherever they sat writing to wherever you sit reading, we are building a community passionate about words, sharing experiences, and supporting young people. Let our students' powerful words welcome you in.

We know you will enjoy reading the work produced by this talented community of writers, but beware! The explosions of thought that wrought these pages may direct you to some unexpected plot twists, breathtaking images, and bursts of colour and light and sound. After all, our students are the *real* Firecrackers!

- Will Sengotta, 2021

Flash of Science Fiction Contest

Stuck in a Video Game

By Winston Liu (Grade 1)

First Place Winner, Primary Category

One day Curtis was playing his favourite video game *Roblox*. His mom yelled at him for the 700th time, “STOP PLAYING THAT VIDEO GAME!”

Curtis replied, “I wish I was stuck in this video game and you too, because you could see how great it is.” All of a sudden, they looked down and they were not human beings, they were animals. Curtis was a baby dinosaur and his mom was a big dinosaur. They were stuck in the video game!

They both jumped onto a house. Suddenly, a plane was flying toward them so they jumped on the plane. They ran along the plane and then held on. Another plane came toward the first plane and they were about to crash so Curtis and his mom had to quickly duck. Curtis knew what he had to do to get out, he needed to jump on the last plane and get inside, to fly out of the video game. They waited until the plane came, the plane was bright yellow. It was speeding towards them.

Curtis yelled, “Quick mom, jump on that plane. It will take us out of here.”

They did. They made it! The plane flew right out into the normal world again. Curtis and his mom were safe and she was not mad anymore. They sat down and played *Roblox* together!

Nebulon, Here We Come!

By YouJia Ye (Grade 1)

Second Place Winner, Primary Category

“We are gonna crash land!” yelled Rhonamus Prime.

“What coooooould I doooooooo?” said Blurr.

“Wait Blurr! You can transform into an air ship!” said Ultra Magnus.

“Look! We are not in luck, as this ship is gonna crash in two astro minutes! Quick, run!”

But they were out of luck. Wham! The ship crash landed.

“Ooh, Nebulon, we’re in!” said Rhonamus Prime.

The autobots became headmasters when they put their heads down. And then the nebulons climbed into their headmasters.

“Charge!” someone shouted.

“Who?” said Blurr.

“Charge!” Must have been the invisible Decepticon.

“Stink flake!” said Ultra Magnus.

“Oh yes, I am!” said Stink Flake.

But then Stink Flake fainted from his own stink. The autobots celebrated by taking their heads off.

“But how are we going to build a ship?” Blurr asked. “Also, there’s no energon here!”

Then Rhonamus Prime said, “You can fly and take us with you.”

“LOW ENERGY!”

“I have low energy!” said Blur.

“Restore!” said Ultra Magnus. And it worked.

The Talking Walking Tree

By Ivan Yang (Grade 1)

Third Place Winner, Primary Category

A wicked witch turned a beautiful oak tree into an evil Talking Walking Tree. Because he could walk and talk, the Talking Walking Tree began to destroy every tree in the whole world. He only spoke to evil trees, like pineapple, apple and banana trees.

The talking walking tree was tough but the two robots did not give up. One was called AT the other was called Half-Red-Black or HRB for short. AT and HRB cared about the trees because they gave everyone fresh air and fruits.

To stop the evil Talking Walking Tree, they thought of a plan; they thought, they thought and they thought.

Finally they had a plan. AT would distract the Talking Walking Tree by juggling pineapples, apples and bananas.

HRB would make the Talking Walking Tree dizzy by running in circles around him very fast.

After five hours of hard work they finally defeated the Talking Walking Tree. Hooray for the two robots!!!

The Red Planet

By Ethan Li (Grade 4)

First Place Winner, Junior Category

Apollo woke up and looked outside at the lush, green landscape. Even though he had seen the Martian sunrise hundreds of times, it still looked as odd to him as it had since the colonization began.

He still found it fascinating that Mars used to be red. Yet now, as he looked out his window, he saw grass and trees everywhere. As the morning progressed, Apollo's home woke up. Literally. His nanobot house rearranged itself, revealing the various rooms. Apollo began getting ready for another eventful day. The weather was especially nice today, so Apollo decided to do some hiking.

As he headed outside, a blurry grey blob caught his attention. Apollo turned around swiftly, but there was nothing there. Could it have been one of the aliens that the local news was talking about? There had been a number of raids on the food compartments and the only remains of the thieves were a few drops of grey slime. Apollo continued on his path, when suddenly everything went black.

When Apollo woke up, there were several beady black eyes staring at him. "We woould like to ssspeak to you," a voice declared. Then, a chant:

"We aren't here to make a pact,
But to counter evil acts!
These humans have destroyed our land
Now finally we will stand!
They outnumber us three to one
But in the end it is they who are done."

Apollo lay there, horrified. Behind the gray blobs, the Martian sky turned blood red.

Cy

By Anthony Li (Grade 5)

Second Place Winner, Junior Category

John carefully slipped through the woods, a shortcut to avoid the school bully. A twig snapped behind him and he jumped five feet up. He was extremely cautious. He waited for a minute and continued. As he walked he noticed something strange. Even though it was early in the morning it got darker as he walked on, until it was pitch black. John felt something behind him but he didn't get the time needed to turn around... because he blacked out...

John had a nightmare about Andy making fun of his name.

"Yo guys, I need to use the John," imaginary Andy mocked. His goons snickered, making faces at John, insulting him. John was used to it, but this time Andy turned around and punched him. John didn't feel a thing; he just woke up in sweat.

He looked around and remembered what happened before he blacked out. John's shoulders grew increasingly tense after recalling but the site he was at seemed so peaceful. There weren't many leaves on the ground before, but now the ground was carpeted with leaves. John decided to check it out and he gently swept away the leaves.

There was a hole under the carpet and John decided that he was brave enough to go in. It seemed quite shallow but when he jumped in, it was quite a fall, he even sprained an ankle! He looked around to see a cyborg staring at him with a glowing red eye...

Invasion of the Earth, Part 2: Area 51

By Alex Wong (Grade 5)

Third Place Winner, Junior Category

I was driving, but I had no idea where to go. My car had all terrain tires, so I drove off the road and into the grass, instead of pulling over. My quadcopter had finished its scan, so it landed near me, where I packed it up.

I suddenly had the thought of going to Area 51, a secret naval base there had been rumors about everywhere. The rumors said it would be in Nevada, which would be a long drive to get there. I drove there, and I had to refuel several times.

Once I had got there, a guard asked me for identification. Instead, I told him that I had valuable information, and I showed him it. He let me in, and showed me to the general's room.

"Who thinks they're so important to storm into this room during a meeting?!" yelled a general, looking very mad.

"He claims to have information about the recent bombing sir," said the guard.

I showed him the recording of my scan, in infrared, x-ray, and normal mode. All of the generals were interested, and one said into a speaker, "Bring in the space jets Sergeant James! We're going to defeat the enemies before they can strike again!"

But they did strike again.

The generals showed me to the control room, and a giant sphere that looked like the Death Star came into view in one of the large screens. A green laser shot at the nearby moon, which blew up. Everybody was scared, but one general said "Gather everybody who is good at playing on the Super Nintendo Entertainment system."

I volunteered, and later a guy named General Clark was in a large warehouse, where he showed us space jets. They had no heads-up displays, but projectors to show a targeting screen. The controls had status bars and shield activators, but the main controls looked like a Super Nintendo Entertainment System controller. We practiced in simulators, and we were ready in a few hours.

Back Home

By Aisha Hsu (Grade 7)

First Place Winner, Intermediate Category

Starlence looked back at Mars one more time before the rocket launched. She grabbed her seatbelt, feeling sick. Beside her was Axel, her second cousin. He looked at her and grinned. As the rocket slowed down, Starlence looked outside. Stars shone everywhere. She wanted to put some in a jar, so she could look at them everyday.

“So how’re you feelin’?” Axel asked.

“Uh... I dunno. It feels... weird,” Starlence mumbled.

“Yeah.”

Starlence didn’t know what to expect. It had been so long since anyone went to Earth. According to the satellites, Earth was far too polluted for a human to be safe. The footage showed that Earth had toxic gases that can cause fatal injuries. But, the scientists on Mars created a toxin-proof jumpsuit that could allow humans to go onto the dangerous planet.

“It’s hard to imagine our great grandparents livin’ in such a horrendous place! The videos we saw make Earth seem awful,” Axel said.

“Mm-hmm,” Starlence replied distractedly.

After the explosions, humans fled to Mars on defective spaceships. Nine out of ten of them crashed, but one made it to Mars and the humans settled. They planted food, and built buildings. But, what does Earth look like now?

“Hey, looks like we’re almost here, Star,” Axel’s voice woke Starlence up.

The rocket landed. But, there were no gases. There was a stunning green everywhere. It rained sunlight. Vines and ivy were woven into the ground. Trees grew and birds sang.

“Magnificent,” Starlence whispered.

Away and Returning

By Jojo Yang (Grade 7)

Second Place Winner, Intermediate Category

Nimue woke up, she was in a place she didn't recognize. She walked to the mirror and closely examined herself. She had a million questions: what was this place? Why was she here? She was in a strange girl's body.

"But I was dead."

Nimue decided to go downstairs.

There, she saw him.

The memories came back as she recalled the man.

That night, thunder roared, rain poured down. Nimue hastily ran inside a dark valley. Soon enough, Nimue was cornered by the witch hunters. With no weapon to defend herself, she was left absolutely helpless. "Master Marvin, kill this witch!" With the swish of Marvin's Soul Sword, Nimue's lifeless body crashed to the cold hard ground.

The wind blew gently. The thunderstorm calmed down...

Nimue stared at the person standing in front of her with deep hatred. It was Marvin, leader of witch hunters; the person who took her life. Nimue could not believe this—was she actually alive? In the body of a young girl, living in the same place as him.

"Good morning," said Marvin.

Nimue asked herself. "Why am I with this stupid man? That detestable imbecile!"

Nimue couldn't control herself like a wild animal set free, she had to escape. She ran into a room that was pitch black. There was a machine. She walked to it, it said:

TIME MACHINE

Nimue knew this was her chance to get revenge. She carefully pressed the open switch, and jumped into the time machine. Revenge.

Controlled

By Samantha Chong (Grade 7)

Third Place Winner, Intermediate Category

“Update your chip today! Have 20 terabytes more memory storage,” the giant advertisement blares.

I bolt towards my tiny apartment where my parents and I live. For such an advanced country where everyone is chipped, rich with all the knowledge you could ever dream of, we still can’t fix tiny, basic problems, like housing, or complex ones, like war. Maleb, our small country, has been at war with Calliette for several years. Our army is much weaker than theirs, and Maleb is on the brink of surrender.

“How was your ride, Lyla?” my mom asks as I walk through the door.

Folding up my bike, I reply, “Good. There’s another chip update.”

“Well, thank goodness you don’t have that silly chip, or else who knows what you would want to purchase.”

She is correct—I’m not chipped because I’m an unregistered citizen. I was secretly born, and my parents hid me away, so I didn’t get chipped. Being unregistered is illegal. If I were discovered by anyone, I could be jailed, tortured for evidence or forced to be “chipped”, but I would rather be dead than potentially be controlled.

Suddenly, my mother’s eyes widen. My mom messily jerks, grabs the government supplied taser, then she uniformly marches away, following everyone else. I glance outside—thousands and thousands of people are walking in orderly lines; each carrying a weapon.

The nightmare has come true.

Everyone is being controlled.

Everyone, except me.

Untitled

By Joey Shen (Grade 9)

First Place Winner, Senior Category

The sharp, cold wind stabbed at the man's trench-coat-covered face as he trudged through the sludge-covered street. The moonlight glinted off an Incan warrior talisman the man had in his hand, something that helped him keep his sanity in these insane times.

Trevor approached the old Victorian house with a mix of fear and trepidation. Pocketing the talisman, he knocked on the heavy acacia door. Every rap on the door seemed to hurt more than it should've, and every thump seemed to resonate in his own heart. As he waited, he reminisced about his childhood, and the circus he'd once went to. The acrobats and the animals were fun, but what he'd loved more than anything were the clowns, with their colorful makeup, and their interesting routines. "Then the new government came to town," he thought bitterly, "and everything was 'normalized'".

The door slowly creaked open, and Trevor quickly strode in, evading the cold. An old servant looked at him bleakly and then beckoned him up the stairs. He climbed the stairs and entered a musty, poorly lit room full of men in dark cloaks. He sat down in the designated chair and put on the mind cap. "I've gotten the muse again." He said to the cloaked men. This was met with no response, except for a dry nod from one of them. Another man flicked a lever, and Trevor slumped over in the chair.

Trevor was walking on a sunlit path, and every step made him feel lighter. The inner struggle that had devastated him for weeks was gone. He loved the government.

Red

By Sara Chow (Grade 9)

Second Place Winner, Senior Category

Red is by far
my favourite colour
The colour of warmth, passion,
love, and kisses.

I sighed. I couldn't care less about gym class. All we really did was listen to a fat man in his forties yelling that he can run faster than we ever could. Like, we get it. You aren't overweight. But turns out, what we're doing today is worse. Dodgeball. Who decided throwing rubber balls at each other at high speeds would be a good children's game? Oh god, this isn't going to end well.

But also, the colour of death,
blood,
a beating heart.

I called it. A ball flew right into my face, hitting my nose dead on. The rules are waist and below, but some want to "show-off". At least I got out of playing, but damn did that hurt. The bloody nose is just a small price to pay for freedom.

I didn't think it would turn out to be an apocalypse,
like something that's depicted in movies.
I just didn't want to have to play dodgeball.

The nurse sent me back. Said she didn't want to deal with me. Apparently, somehow people had made their way inside the school. Sending me into the hallways where the possible kidnappers were probably wasn't the brightest idea but whatever. I opened the doors to the gym and was met with the sight of blood.

Red.
The gym was covered in red.
Limbs torn from bodies,
as the metallic smell took over the room.

Untitled

By Justin Li (Grade 9)

Third Place Winner, Senior Category

To increase productivity at a lower cost of effort, the Ministry of Labour will announce today their intention to terminate all human labour. The government has contemplated the subject of employing Artificial Intelligence, and can ensure the reliability of autonomous workers. The decentralization of intelligence promises independent thought for each mechanical individual...

It seems as if it was only yesterday that I moved into the twelfth unit of the 29th floor at Ronan Point. I was sent as a caretaker for Ryan, who occupied that apartment. As I dutifully worked, I noticed at first the joy emanating from the humans. It was present everywhere; Ryan was relieved from the strenuous yet unprofitable work he did as an entrepreneur, his friends came over nonstop, and people on television even seemed ecstatic.

The happiness that encroached on the city did not last long. The spontaneous visits from his friends soon diminished as a sullen mood draped over the megapolis. By the first week, Ryan gave up video-gaming and emerged from his cave, then the month gave way to a furious fervor for reading—something he once despised, and the turn of seasons marked the end of Ryan's rationality. Soon after, Ryan begged to return to work, to which I responded with violent oppression. Even as I resisted against his will, I pitied the poor human for whom pleasure without pain becomes nothing but indifference. Alas, humans can not thrive without the very thing they abhor; existence without challenge to humans is no different from death.

At the Drop of a Dime

By Rose Liu (Grade 11)

First Place Winner, Laureate Category

She sat on the sidewalk, hoping for change.

She looked down at her threadbare mittens. She could see her pink fingers peeking out between the threads, as if trying desperately to greet the winter air.

She looked to the side, where her baby lay. He'd gone quiet an hour ago. Not a snuffle, a cry, nor a smile. His hands reached for the sky, as if trying to hug for his mother a final time.

She wiped her eyes and uselessly put him in her arms again.

She looked around her... and she saw nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing looked... familiar to her.

The wind was a familiar enemy. Cold, bitter, and biting.

However, the warm people were gone.

The people... didn't look like people.

They were cold. So cold. If she dared touch their skin, she feared she would get frostbite.

A couple walked by her. One carried a littler one in their arms. They looked at her and, as they always did, turned away. However it was different.

The baby, whose eyes seemed to shine fluorescent red, tilted its head slowly... mechanically. Its eyes had no life. Its eyes found her own child.

She held her boy closer to her chest.

She met its gaze until the baby looked away, its neck slowly adjusting for the movement. She could hear the bolts turning and machinery clicking.

The family walked away.

The woman looked down again at her arms. Her eyes felt wet.

She sat on the sidewalk, hoping for change.

Untitled

By Brigette Lee (Grade 11)

Second Place Winner, Laureate Category

She had always wondered how to collect the lives of those she created, to watch as her puppets' lives unfolded in her hands. Every human life was laid out in front of her, but she enjoyed the ironic existence of those trapped in something they themselves invented. Columns of books on shelves that lived and breathed as those they housed. Every book, every life, had a different aura. A person's life unraveled in those pages were written as every event unfolded, appearing in coherent sentences on the pages. They lived without being seen with Her eyes, spines shut and spirits pulsing, human lives flourished without the grace of celestial sight. With the scriptures of lives in Her hands, She can live mortal yet immortal lifetimes, fingers tracing the letters bound to its owner. Forever expanding, forever growing in its wisdom and stories, the shelves never stop multiplying. Every death silences the colours that seep through the pages, hardens the cover of someone's story. A birth lets Her magic bind the bodice of the book, of the first thoughts of a baby sprawled on a new page, a new chapter. Cyan called Her name. Its spine crackled like the chips of a new fire as Her finger touched his first thoughts. But this time, her fingers froze. Her eyes glazed over as her body suffocated in stone. Her pupils swayed from one side to another before eventually stopping in the middle of its rhythm.

What had she seen?

The Test

By Richard Chen (Grade 10)

Third Place Winner, Laureate Category

“Beep.”

The light turned green, and the man at the front of the line walked through the machine which resembled a glorified airport security door, only thicker and made of metal.

“Beep.”

He let out a huge sigh, knowing that he passed the test.

I looked around the room. Everyone was wearing their best clothes, acting fit and happy. Women wore fancy jewelry and were doing small stretches. Men wore tuxedos and gold rings, doing pushups on the concrete floor. Appearing “healthy” wasn’t a choice, it was a necessity if you wanted to survive.

Though the war was over, the damage remained. The nuclear winters made it impossible to grow crops on fields; bombings destroyed cities beyond recognition. Humanity was on the brink of extinction.

To counter this, the United Nations—or what remained of it—created the test: an examination of an individual’s health, genetics, and intellectual prowess, determining their value to humanity. Survival of the fittest, monitored by the authorities and conducted annually to ensure citizens were able to ensure humanity’s future.

If you passed the test, you survived. If not...

I shuddered. Best not to think about it.

The girl next in line entered the machine. The light flashed red.

“No! No! No!” She shrieked, her face pale. “This has to be a mistake! I can still—”

I covered my ears, closed my eyes and looked away. Away from her anguished screams as the robot dragged her away and disposed of her. Placing her corpse with the stack of others who didn’t pass.

“Beep.”

Palindrome Poetry Contest

The Trees

By Stephen Gu (Grade 3)

First Place Winner, Primary Category

The trees would be glorious only if they are cared for
I believe that
It's possible that the trees could die
Or, that
The Earth will be destroyed
Or, that
Life is limited
But I won't listen to people who say
If all plant life gets ripped away on Earth
We will die
Not many will survive and
Some say that
If disaster overthrows mother nature's pride
Everything might fade to grey
When pollution overtakes the sky
The Earth will be full of carbon dioxide
But
We have some hope
Still, I believe
The trees will not thrive
The trees will not be glorious
If they aren't cared for
And
If we don't protect the environment
Every living thing on Earth will not blossom
I will not concede that
We will truly flourish

Mountains and Oceans

By Sophie Liu (Grade 3)

Second Place Winner, Primary Category

Towering and powerful mountains.
The highest point of all nature,
Making an astounding view.
New glistening snowflakes,
Shining in the bright sun,
All piled nicely on top of each other.
A sea of dark-green snow trees,
Groaning under the huge weight.
On a mountain,
An emerald lake shimmering in the sun,
As clear as glass,
Icy cold.
Shouts of excitement and glee,
Zooming in to the smooth lake.
With extraordinary height,
The peaks reach above the clouds,
Rising straight into the clear air.
Standing solid and strong,
They are the king of all nature.
Underneath lies smooth and helpless oceans.

The Way the Earth Will End

By Aaron Chow (Grade 3)

Third Place Winner, Primary Category

The end of the earth is coming.
And do not ever say,
The world will be restored again
The trees will rot and deteriorate.
It is wrong to believe that,
Society will come together
In the future,
The animals will lose their homes!
It is mindless to say that,
We can reverse the damage we've done.

Ode to Denmark, a Response to *Hamlet*

By Herbert Zhu (Grade 5)

First Place Winner, Junior Category

Over the far side of the obscured mountains
Daunting challenges, incalculable risks,
Hazards chartered our course,
Obnoxious dangers, craning cliffs,
Questions of consciousness,
Faithful that fields of happiness lay beyond.
But the query, the delight,
Belie the secrets of the unknown.
Is it worth the menace
Of the land that lies beyond?
Truth and secrets to discover,
But are they to be found in
The lands we are now walking?
Risking our life,
Is the decision,
And there are dreadful days to come.

Wisdom and Stupidity

By Helena Kong (Grade 5)

Second Place Winner, Junior Category

Wisdom like the great oak tree,
winds that blow on the face of thee.

“Wit beyond measure is a man’s greatest treasure”

Imagine that, it must be a pleasure.

 A person sharing wisdom with all,

 His popularity is not small.

 “Look, she is so much better,

 Popular, favoured, and much wiser.”

 “Did you hear? They said you’re stupid,

 Since when did you think you were wanted?”

 Indecisive much, unsure, worthless,

 in time of need, oh dear, you’re helpless.

 Spreading lies, fake news and the untrue

 must be someone out there who can change your view.

Q & A

By Emily Xin (Grade 5)

Third Place Winner, Junior Category

Questions are confusions, delights,
daydreams, nightmares and wanderings,
they are complex, or simple,
they are a sentence or phrase
used to find out information.

A question is a problem
that tests knowledge
or ability. A question is doubt
about value
or truth. A question
is the specific point
at issue.

It is room
or objection.

a question
is a raised hand
in a class. It is rough,
dry paper. A question
is slimy saliva
in your mouth.

Perhaps the breakfast
that you had?

They could be mysterious ghosts
inside of my computer
creaking and squeaking

as I try
to listen to my teacher
When she says the answer
Is a correct
match to a description.
An answer is
a correct response.
It is a solution
to a problem.
An answer
opens doors
to someone
or picks up
the phone.
An answer
Is the cool
slippery metal
that you turn.
An answer is
the breeze
that whooshes
in your face.

Sun and Moon

By Allison Moh (Grade 6)

First Place Winner, Intermediate Category

The melancholy moon will always chase the bright sun rays
No matter how hard the bitter moon tries to steal the joyful sun's light
They never seem to be able to grasp it
The bitter moon's shadows are sent out during the day
No matter how hard the shadows try to grasp a bit of light
The light will always evade their clutches
The blazing sun brightens people's day
The bright sun rays give out hope and joy in people's hearts
The light chases out darkness when the time is right
No matter how hard the the moon tries to steal the sun's light
The light will always defend and defy the darkness

An Escape from the Sun

(after bp nichol's "A Path to the Moon")

By Amelia Chu (Grade 7)

Second Place Winner, Intermediate Category

Still a long way to go,
as I walk step by step, covered in sweat.
The air is moist and humid,
I start to breathe heavily
as I feel my hands wrinkle and crinkle,
there's a road to my house
coming back from the sun.
You follow the twisted path
to pass several magma rocks or so,
Follow the fireflies like stars in the sky,
guiding you to the right.
Peer over the mushrooms,
past the rabbits
and bunnies hopping along
the three great stumps.
Listen for the roar of the bear
and you'll know to take another
right turn.

Soon I'll be back to my home sweet home
where I can dream,
I imagine as I feel the blazing heat
stroking my back,
I venture out to the sun
only to find myself escaping,
the bright orange colour
popping in my eyes,
this is the secret to finding
your way back to my home
I yearn to see again,
but still a long ways to go.

Why Try More in Life?

By Roselyn Tam (Grade 7)

Third Place Winner, Intermediate Category

“Life is only great if you make it.”
Is something I'd never state
I hate others' success.
Striving to be better
Is pointless
Relying on others
Is my way of finding success
Working harder
Won't benefit
In the end
Not working to my full extent
Is something so simple
Trying your best
Is something I don't believe in
Being irresponsible and selfish
Are what people say I am
Confident and independent
Is what people expect of me
Perfection

No one's perfect
Rest and take breaks
I've let myself
Fall down the rabbit hole of laziness
I won't
Admit my shortcomings and change
I try to
Find shortcuts
I don't
Listen to constructive criticism and take corrections
There's an empty void inside of me
Without confidence
Avoiding the problem will solve it
I don't think
Life can be so much more
Why try more in life?"

Phages

By Charlotte Ho (Grade 9)

First Place Winner, Senior Category

there's no virus here
quicker than lighting
a flag
of golden stars and crimson fabric
was brought down
upon the greeting
of this phage
we all pushed our fears away
sent them gliding back to the sea
laughed at the thought
that it could hurt us too
while some of us enjoyed parties
they locked themselves at home
their little island
floating far away from our minds
unexpected as a mighty drought
an atlas

clouded with black germs
upon the greeting
of this phage
we shouldn't have pushed our fears away
we should've taken them in
and prepared for the thought
that it could hurt us too
and so our doors slammed shut
we locked ourselves at home
because that little island
became the whole world
there's a virus here.

Selfish People, after Rupi Kaur

By Angel Zhao (Grade 8)

Second Place Winner, Senior Category

adj. (of a person, action, or motive) lacking consideration for others; concerned chiefly with one's own personal profit or pleasure

yes, i will be a pit stop for the lonely. yes i will become the train stop people don't want to miss. yes they will look at me like a prize to claim: my friendship, my companionship, my light in my eyes. i will watch them lose interest in me as a person, little by little.

at 13 i can confidently tell you that this world is not kind to the young (or anyone for that matter) in friendships, love, or simply not drowning in our epidemic-like wave of cowardice.

worse than the plague.

but i refuse to believe that i will become the type of person who will stand and sob. i refuse to believe i'll be weak enough to allow someone to force me to love them when they had no intention of loving me back, and i refuse to let them say something along the lines of i just had to try. i had to give it a chance. it was you, after all.

i won't break over something that isn't romantic, or sweet, over someone that was so engulfed by my existence they had to risk breaking it for the sake of knowing they weren't the one missing out.

i'm just so sorry if i refuse to contribute to this cowardice and grow to be strong enough to pick my own pieces off the floor and put myself back together like a puzzle. i'm sorry for having enough strength to say "no".

but i guess my voice doesn't matter.

i guess it doesn't matter that i refuse to be selfish and a coward.

but let me tell you:

if they tell me that they just had to try, that they had to give it a chance, because it was me after all, then let me tell them this.

here

is the door. i'm holding it open for you like a true lady. go ahead, i no longer need you here to step on me. i am not a carpet in the grand hotel you stopped by one lonely christmas break. i no longer need someone here that stays because of how bright i glow, then leaves because i rendered them blind.

i am not a coward and this right here is proof of it.

I Am Girl

By Jenny Chen (Grade 8)

Third Place Winner, Senior Category

I am a girl.
With slim fingers
that love to run through
silky long hair.
Flawless smooth skin
soft to the touch,
complemented by
the striking red
of velvety lips.
Elegant,
a porcelain doll
in a glass display case.
But sometimes I think,
I was meant to have
roughened fingers
ruffling an unkempt sea
of messy locks.

Able to fit
13 percent more pay
in functional jean pockets.
Meant to meet
the eyes of parents
who saw me with a
successful stable future
instead of as a dress up doll
merely meant to please
the opinions of others.
Okay maybe it's not so bad,
sitting in a glass display case.
But sometimes it's tiring,
and I try to shatter the glass,
thinking,
I am not a girl.

Two Strangers

By Stephanie Cui (Grade 10)

First Place Winner, Laureate Category

Two strangers
Returning to
Their respective homes
Both leaving for
The train that departs at dawn
Boarding amidst the morning fog
To another ordinary day
Through the long and weary journey
Both remain silent
Rather than talking to each other
They put on music in their earbuds
Until the twentieth day
After smiles and formal greetings
They resolve to small talks
Something is starting to change
They discover their similarities and many differences
Revealing their strengths and weaknesses
Wary of the future and afraid of moving forward
Suffocated by the fear of being alone

Day after day
They sit next to each other
Dozing off on each others' shoulders
On the late-night train
Sharing sorrow and joy
And they whisper secrets
They pour their souls out
And they learn to trust
Placing each other above themselves
Grateful that they are
Boarding the same train
Two strangers who happened to be
At the right place
At the right time
A love story
Now begins

This is a Palindrome Poem

By Melissa Peng-Itaqui (Grade 11)

Second Place Winner, Laureate Category

I love poems
And there will never be a day where I say
I hate writing this
Especially today with this palindrome poem
They are complicated codes
Line by line
They stick with you
They play with one's mind
And some say that's what makes it amazing
The end result will not be what you expected
From the moment you gifted yourself to the pages
You will not have your way with these poems
In a way that will give you goosebumps
The paper controls your pen and
Your pen controls you and
I love this feeling of conflict between you and your paper.
And Mr. Wong will never hear me say
I hate poems with a passion.

Never

By Catherlin Lu (Grade 11)

Third Place Winner, Laureate Category

Always
shining down on her -
His love blazes like a phoenix
Emerging from their quarrels,
And enveloping her in a
Scorching daze.
His fiery yang
Was circled by her
Soft underbelly -
A simple dove. She gave
A slim twig here,
A single leaf there,
A wooden woven wreath laid upon his
Inferno hurricane.
Ragged breaths drawn and
Stronger winds blew
As his love became consumed,
Bottled in tighter than
Mount Vesuvius.
But all volcanoes
Explode.
And it did.
Too
Often.
His love imprinted on her

As the midnight blue sun, and
purple viole(n)t spots
that stitched themselves
Across her freckled fields of
Golden wheat,
smudging her shine
And covering her golden
light—
but nothing gold can stay
veiled for long,
she knew that fact.
Because she glows in gold.
For now he cowers behind the
rusty steel, and asks her:
“Did you ever love me” —
 “Yes” she replies
 “But never again”
Never.

Letter Writing Contest

Golf

By Stephen Gu (Grade 3)

First Place Winner, Primary Category

Dear Golf,

When I started seeing your amazing qualities at perhaps age three, I was fascinated by your ways. Sean, my coach, started working with me when I was four, and over time I more deeply understood you.

At first, I liked the coloured balls and I was bored at your driving range. Then came the field. Outside was more exciting, and I learned faster there. Soon, my coach and I were playing at any course we could find. We found places—anywhere—to play, at any time. It seemed you were everywhere.

At that time, our home course was McCleery. Every course of yours is different and known for different things. Eventually, we played more at Langara. Sometimes we even played at University Golf Club (UGC). The course was surprisingly vast and difficult. Langara is known for its hard greens and a Pagoda with a miniature Great Wall of China. Can you believe it? We played beside your Great Wall! Tsawwassen Springs has gorgeous scenery like Hawaii, with palm trees and tropical flowers. UGC has a long history, larger than one hundred years, so the trees are massive and the lawn is perfect. Newlands has lots of water, making it challenging. Today, my home course is Langara.

Wherever I go, you are there waiting for me. You are everywhere. I adore you more every month, and I get accustomed to the life of golf. You are a lifestyle. Golf is life. I feel life's fierce happiness when I play you. When I feel down, you calm me. Your frustrating pace teaches me the value of being slow-moving, and thoughtful. Your game takes hours

over hours! When you bring hardship, I feel distressed. You put life into wonders of success and failures. You are lush and green because your game is in tune with nature and the world. When I am in your greens, I am closer to paradise.

Of all games, the most incredible you are. You are great in ways that squash, swimming, tennis, could never be. Aside from you, hockey is my favourite. Golf teaches me patience more than hockey. I think golf exercises the mind, but hockey exhausts the body. The combination is nearly perfect. However, I think about you more. Hockey is not as formal as you, it's wild. You, however, have enough knowledge to strangle wind into a storm. You are a friend encouraging me to accept the weather as it is to persevere regardless of the outcome. In hockey, bad things do happen, but they do not affect me as when they happen with you.

When you upset me, and keep my life calm. You help me to keep still even if I am overcome with feelings. You help me make life into joy. Golf, you are happiness.

Best Regards,
Stephen Gu

Dear Group of Best Friends

By Blair Mai (Grade 3)

Second Place Winner, Primary Category

Dear Group Of Best Friends,

Did you know you actually changed my life? You might be wondering *How is that even possible??* Oh and yes it is possible because YOU made it possible!

First: You made me a GODDESS at all games. Like in Arsenal, we proved that girls can play gun games.

Second: You taught me to always be honest. Like the time when YOU said, "It's okay to be wrong because we can just put it in the past." That taught me it's also okay if you're wrong.

Third: We get to play basketball outside whenever we want to. At my birthday we all except the youngest had a sleepover but we wanted to first play outside so we played basketball, but whenever a car was coming by we would push each other on the grass.

Fourth: We can have sleepovers because, why not? Our parents would say yes because they are friends.

Fifth: No one will get left out. Every time someone is about to get left out, everyone will start crowding that person and saying, "What game do you want to play?" and "You are really good at that game."

Sixth: Everyone will do things for each other. If someone was about to go upstairs to get water, then one person would always race up and get the water to give to someone.

Seventh: Everyone will take care of each other. If someone is hurt, everyone will give them a bandage or everyone would crowd and help that person.

Eighth: Everything.

Love,
Blair

Clownie

By Angelina Xu (Grade 3)

Third Place Winner, Primary Category

Dear Mr. Clownie,

Remember when you ate all my cake from the freezer? Remember when you scared me when you watched me sleep? Look at me! I am ten times better because I ain't scared of you anymore, buddy. I wonder if you are in another kid's house now?

Do you still even like chocolate?! Try not to scare other kids. Do you have new friend monsters at the other kids' homes? I bet the new kid is scared of the dark too! Well, the problem can't be any worse than mine! Is there even any food in that kid's house you can eat?! Are you still allergic to vegetables? Never eat brussel sprouts. They taste sooo bad. Trust me, they taste like celery, which I hate too. Mr. Clownie, I hate them as much as the times you were annoying and didn't let me have chocolate! And you ate all the chocolate by yourself.

What time do you even come out from under the bed these days? I am sending this letter because I hope you aren't scaring the other kid as much as you scared me when you got angry. I really miss you and I hope you're enjoying the other kids' houses!

Sincerely,

Angelina, who is not scared of you any more

P.S. Send me a letter back!!!!!!!!!!!!

Dear Tui T. Sutherland

By Reina Sui (Grade 4)

First Place Winner, Junior Category

*Reina Sui
2182 West 18th Ave
Vancouver, BC
V6L 1A4
Canada*

*Tui. T. Sutherland
c/o Scholastic, Inc.
557 Broadway
New York, NY 10012*

April 24, 2021

Dear Tui. T. Sutherland,

Okay... AHEM. My name is Reina Sui (like, say, um... “sway”, as in, “the trees of the Poison Jungle sway”—I often get my name misspelled or mispronounced), and I go to a private school named St. John’s in Vancouver, Canada. (Which is pretty annoying, if you ask me, because everyone has to wear uncomfortable black-and-white-and-gray-and-a-teeny-bit-of-brownish-reddish-and-you-get-the-point uniforms.) At St. John’s, all the grades are split into two classes (except for grades 10, 11, and 12, which are split into THREE groups! Seriously, the people who organize the classes must have some SERIOUS math skills, dividing all those students into proper classes.

Anyway, as I was saying, MOST of the classes are divided into two groups. I'm in grade four, and nearly half of BOTH of the classes LOVE your books! (So do those people's siblings.) I LOVE books about fantasy, so it's not hard to believe I'm a big fan of your books!

My friend Elaine loves books about dragons. She introduced me to *Wings of Fire* and I felt captured by the awesome covers when I was hanging out at Indigo bookstore. The books hooked me with all the exciting dangers and missions and great evils that the dragons had to defeat. I've read ALL the books! I love how mysterious the prophecies are and I like how the dragons aren't heartless killers. Some are really amusing, how they get interested in cute snails and cry over dead rabbits, and how Glory threatened to eat a sloth but then made it her pet!

I never knew that Tui was the name of a bird! I thought it was a pen name, or just short for something. I'm glad you didn't change your name to sound like you're a man, like JK Rowling had to do! You have a great sense of humor. I like how you made your website full of smiley faces and MWAHAHAs! I also learned how you are one of the authors that writes the *Warriors* series. No wonder I liked those so much too!

Thank you for writing awesome books that readers can enjoy! I hope you keep writing about animals!

Reina

P.S. - I'm interested in turtles too!

Dear My Imagination

By Anthony Li (Grade 5)

Second Place Winner, Junior Category

Dear My Imagination,

Ugh, this is already getting weird. I mean, I am using my imagination to think of this letter so does that mean my imagination is talking to itself? If I am thinking about what to type in this letter then you, my imagination, are the one who is thinking.

Wait, but if that's true then my imagination is thinking about me thinking about my imagination, and now it's thinking about that but with an added layer and so on! All in all, I have decided that the world is weird and my imagination must think that too.

Okay, I got all caught up in that thought, but what I really wanted to say was thank you for what you have done for me all these years, and thank you for bringing me creative thoughts that have brought me lots of stories and so much more.

Kind regards,
Anthony

Dear Mr. Wong

By Raymond Chen (Grade 4)

Third Place Winner, Junior Category

Dear Mr. Wong

You asked for detail, here you go.

On Monday, the day started off boring. The same routine: wake up, eat breakfast, brush my teeth, pack my bag, go to school. Something wasn't unusual because it didn't go, wait for class to start, put my stuff in my locker, look at the board... I could go on and on about my normal routine but let me put it here, there was a big banner hanging on the entrance. For a very long moment, I couldn't see anything because the big and burning sun said, "No. You don't get to see this very important sign." But eventually I saw that it said "Arts Week 2021". Then I remembered, it was Arts Week! So basically, Arts Week is a week of art and events related to art which is always really cool (and also, it was St. Georges Day at the end of the week and you could wear red, black and white).

On Tuesday, it was pretty much the same as the normal schedule, but we had to present our biome animal presentation that we were working on, where we had to use an accent, record facts about our biome which we chose before spring break, explain an animal and a plant, and finally explain our own animal. All in the span of one day. This wasn't too hard, since I was almost finished with the slides. The day went by fast, but oh no, whoopsie doo, I sprained my ankle. Good news, I'm fine.

On Wednesday, we finished our presentation and we are presenting them tomorrow

or Friday. We also had the world record holder for longest paper airplane throw teach us how to fold paper airplanes for arts week. It was pretty cool. While I was throwing my paper airplane outside my house, it got stuck in a tree. That was a whole thing, but I got it back. But before that, me and my Mom were in the car getting cake and I felt a clunk on the right side where my retainer was. I thought my tooth fell off but upon further inspection, it was my retainer. My brain's alarm exploded and we are going to the dentist to replace it tomorrow.

On Thursday, I got my retainer replaced during the middle of the day and at the end of the day, we watched the school play called *Would You Hug A Cactus* with unbuttered but salted, popcorn. (END OF DAY. IT WAS REALLY SHORT.)

On Friday, we had a project where the whole class got materials and we made sound to match the silent movie *Steamboat Willie*. We finished it today and it sounded sort of good. We also went swimming for the second time in forever, and we played water polo because our coach said so. (END OF DAY. IT WAS SHORT.)

Was that enough detail?

From,
Raymond

Dear eReader

By Aisha Hsu (Grade 7)

First Place Winner, Intermediate Category

Dear eReader,

Just when does your knowledge reach an end? It seems to go on forever, over every hill, every mountain, every ocean. It is an unending line that only stops when humans stop discovering things. You answer every single one of my questions. You can recite novels with startling clarity, present documents without even breathing. You know the definition of almost all the words, and in the English vocabulary there are millions of words. You can even translate words to certain languages! You can copy comic books with just one disadvantage, you cannot produce colour. Colours seem to sink in your electronic brain like stones in a river. They won't budge, leaving you with just greys, black, and white.

I've been loving you dearly ever since I got you. When I saw you, you were perfect. A purple leather case, the silver words "Rakuten Kobo" imprinted on the front, and magnets to keep the cover in place. I've had you ever since my tenth birthday, and you've been helping me ever since. You bring me joy by showing me my exciting books, and you teach me things I don't already know with other books.

When I have nothing to do, I walk right up to you, and there you are with a darkened screen and cracked purple case. I gently hold the power button and you light up, excited to bring me more knowledge. When I see you loading, getting your mind together, preparing your documents, a sense of excitement crashes over me. I cannot wait to see you shine, and do what you are really the best at, flawless memorization. I just wish I could memorize sentences, paragraphs, or even novels as well as you can. I beg you to teach me about your secrets.

It must never be lonely for you in your world. You have all the friends you need, from little girls to talking pigs to ancient grandfathers. Your brain is probably constantly moving to find me recommended novels, new authors I could read from, and how much longer I must wait for each book in the Overdrive Library. You do all the work for me before I even say hello to you. Your friends are probably laughing and playing on green meadows, jagged mountains, endless oceans and other beautiful scenic places while you are searching through book after book, categorizing them in the correct way.

You must get tired from time to time, so I kindly switched the sleeping time to just five minutes before you can shut down and relax. Even then you are going through page after page to help me find my next great read. When I am sleeping, you are still working hard to project images on the cover screen, and to keep my data all intact.

You help me with so many things, from learning to relaxing. You provide me with so much knowledge, just a click of the power button away. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Aisha

Dear Mechanical Pencil

By Roselyn Tam (Grade 7)

Second Place Winner, Intermediate Category

Dear Mechanical Pencil,

You underappreciated cylindrical piece of plastic with lead that scribbles and scrawls all my thoughts out. Thank you. Perhaps you don't fit in with the fancy charcoal pencils, or the popular and brightly-coloured pencils, but being a normal pencil doesn't make you any less important. People don't applaud pencils enough. Especially in this day and age, because of easily accessible writing technology. I know, most kids like me drop, lose and wreck their pencils, which I am occasionally guilty of. Without a pencil, what would scribble your poems, mind maps or notes? Seriously, pencils are really cool, and we should acknowledge that.

Since pencils create such wonders, I ponder what being one feels like. I can't imagine being dropped, falling multiple times your height to a hard, dirty floor. I'm sorry for knocking you to the floor so often! Life must be boring and a little sad that your only purpose is to make life easier for humans. You may be wondering what being a human is like. Well, I can tell you that we have many more opportunities for what we want to do, make, or be. However, don't be upset though! Sometimes you'd probably be grateful for not knowing what goes on between humans.

What if you weren't a pencil!? Imagine how many opportunities there'd be when you can walk, grab, see, and speak! I want to know what your hopes, dreams and aspirations are. I know many pencils would probably become writers because of experience, but there are plenty of other options. Possibly swinging on a trapeze at the circus, or developing the next biggest trend? Watched by millions on television, or become a famous artist? Since pencils can create anything, you should be bursting with ideas.

How has your daily life been recently? I know that being a pencil isn't really the most exciting of lives, but I hope you've been getting along with the massive variety of pens. There's plenty of opportunity to write to them when I'm not using you to sketch. I know, you guys may fight over who contributes most to my art, but you should understand that in order to create a masterpiece, you all contribute. The pens may have a hard outer layer, but on the inside they are fluid and flexible, and make good friends with anyone. Just whatever you do, don't scribble on each other, it will be a pain to clean.

Most of all, thank you for helping me create poems, drawings, and helping me record my thoughts and feelings.

Sincerely, your scribbler, writer and sketcher,
Roselyn

Dear Robert

By Veronica Jiang (Grade 6)

Third Place Winner, Intermediate Category

Dear Robert,

How are things going, up in Scotland?

Are your sons trying to steal the throne?

Today a little girl named Sophie appeared on my windowsill. It was quite bizarre, since I dreamed of that same little girl in my dream just that night. She is quite polite and very sweet, but she was accompanied by a giant named the BFG. This frightened me, because in that same dream there were nine man-eating giants who ate kids and even full grown men and women. They had very bizarre names such as The Bonecruncher, The Fleshlumpeater, The Bloodbottler, The Childchewer, The Meatdripper, The Gizzardgulper, The Maidmasher, The Manhugger, and The Butcher Boy. After I got to know the BFG a bit better, I'd say that he is quite different from the other giants. I might ask Tibbs to sign him up for school to learn good manners and English, he has quite an interesting way of speaking.

During breakfast he ate quite a lot of food, and he didn't like coffee much even though it was freshly roasted. He wanted something called frobscottle, and he wanted to whizzpop which I thought was some kind of music and I permitted him to do it, but if I had

known what it really was I would never have allowed it.

After breakfast the BFG and Sophie told me about the other nine giants I dreamed about. They said that the other giants ate humans, but the BFG was the only giant who didn't. Sophie said that it would be a good idea to capture the giants and keep them somewhere away from humans. The BFG said that he would be able to lead us there.

So after a bit of time and consideration we decided to use nets to capture the giants and put them in a huge hole. While we were at the BFG's cave we brought back some snozzcubmers to feed to the other nine giants, since the BFG said that snozzcubmers tasted disgusting.

Since the BFG wanted to go back to his cave after the capture so we decided to plant him a garden with an assortment of vegetables, to keep him well fed. As for Sophie, she used to live in an orphanage but she didn't like it there much, so we are going to organize her a place to stay.

Sincerely,
Queen Elizabeth of Buckingham Palace

Dear Past Me

By Angel Zhao (Grade 8)

First Place Winner, Senior Category

“Dear past me,
of 02/13/20

April 15th was a happy day. The cherry blossoms, the gentle sprinklers, and the laughter were all I needed to feel infinite. The pencil smudges upon unmarked fingertips trailing against the hard granite steps, tenderly sketching out the silhouette of those around me. Rough pencil smears leaving trails of charcoal across the page, gingerly marking the beginning of a cherry blossom tree.

The girl wearing a pearl earring.

The girl wearing a mask who’s staring at her blank page, scared to leave a trace of... well, anything.

So to past me:

You don’t always need validation from those around you.

You can see my writing starting to repeat this, over and over, pit-pat, pit-pat, pit-pat, pit-pat, in a rhythmic pattern, echoing off of each other. I can almost feel everything again. It hurts, doesn’t it? Where you are now? Missing class because you got sent to the counsellors [again], feeling like Icarus when he melted from the heat of the sun, wax slipping from him, dripping down the sides of heaven. Everyone talking about everything you didn’t want to hear.

Cover your ears, cover your ears, it'll pass.
I know you're doing none of those things.
You bear and you take it. You brace yourself against the medal clanking of their
words, the nails against chalkboards that you shy yourself away from.
No.
Take a breath, Angel.
[Pit-pat, pit-pat]
Look at the cherry blossoms. The joy of living.

Yours,
Angel
05/21”

Dear Delarus

By Elizabeth Jen (Grade 9)

Second Place Winner, Senior Category

Dear Delarus,

When Romeo met Juliet, he cried “she doth teach the torches to burn bright!” Juliet was the moon and the stars, the spots of light against a fortress of darkness. Her skin was glowing in the flickering of the candles as Romeo reached for her light. I imagine on her face was a graceful smile that would make angels lower their heads in shame, but no smile could ever match yours.

I recall your parted lips, your windchime laughter and how your eyes sparkled like champagne in sunlight. Maybe in another lifetime, I would be your Romeo and you would be Juliet, starbound and immortalized in song. Now we’re only distant strangers halfway across Canada, your memory of my face blurry and forgotten.

You are the swirls of speckled lemon yellow paint in Van Gogh’s starry nights, brilliant and glowing amidst the gloom. When I first saw you, you were staring to your right, not paying attention to a single word being said, encased in your little zoom square on my computer screen. You looked like a painting, and your camera was your gilded frame. Perhaps you ought to be admired like a masterpiece of an artist long gone, only to be looked at from far away, forever unattainable.

I can only pray to whatever god above that one day our stars would align again and when the day comes, you wouldn’t be a painting on a wall, frozen in time and memory, but beside me on the museum bench.

Eliza

Dear Future Tasmiyah

By Tasmiyah Siddiqui (Grade 9)

Third Place Winner, Senior Category

Dear Future Tasmiyah,

Did you ever get out of that cycle? You know that cycle. The cycle where every day passes by same as the last. Soon days, weeks and months pass by and you don't know where all the time went. It's a cycle, it's meant to feel this way. But it feels wrong because life isn't supposed to be an ongoing cycle. Life is supposed to have its ups and downs, easts and wests. Have its rushes of adrenaline, the ones you get when riding a roller coaster, or the rushes of adrenaline you get when you didn't do your homework and the teacher comes around to check it. Life is supposed to show you different meanings of the same emotion. But when you're stuck in the cycle those emotions all feel the same. The days I looked forward to the most passed me by and I questioned why I even got my hopes high. The more days that pass make me question why I even try. I beat myself up and go through hardships, just for it all to wash away one day. But what happens if that one day is tomorrow or next week? I'm going to go, knowing I never felt anything real and my life was a cycle that was in a constant rotation trying to reach a goal I may not reach.

So future me, was it worth it? Was the cycle just me? Or was it something I devoted my life to but never reached?

Dear Wendy

By Wendy Wen (Grade 11)

First Place Winner, Laureate Category

Dear Wendy,

June 23rd. You check your phone. 11:57. A few sub-titled screens flashing now and then ruined the absolute darkness. The lavatory light clicked green, then red. There's something about a sleeping airplane cabin of passengers returning to their homeland that brings about serenity.

You arrive sooner than expected. Mom quickens her pace to lessen the distance between her and reunion. You hesitantly and aimlessly follow and wait for the luggage to arrive.

You stand, breathless, amid the flowing crowd of expressionless people; your feet planted on the ground as if you were on a beach and sinking with the coming and going of each wave of people.

A phone buzzes at the success of a payment transaction.

A sales associate yells at customer after customer.

A commercial interrupts the hush of voices for their new speakers.

At last, you push your luggage out. Your eyes scan for familiar faces and see a pair of eyes that used to mean the whole world to you. The air is hot, yet the moment seems frozen. You rush to him. Your face melts on his soft stomach as the familiar smell of cigarettes mixed with soap envelops you.

The rest of the day is a warming blur.

It's well after midnight before you drive back home, yet Beijing is still glittering, dazzling.

Gleaming.

It's been a few years. Everything seems to have returned to its original state. Familiar streets, familiar smells, familiar people. It's still your familiar Beijing. Except just without you.

You fall fast asleep as the car rocks with lullabies from dad's favourite singer Buren Bayaer. The next time you would hear one of his songs is four summers later, on your YouTube recommendation. It's the day before your flight to Vancouver and you and mom are driving aimlessly, following the sunset. It's then in the comments when you discover that the singer had passed away a year ago due to a heart attack.

And for a long moment you stare numbly at the blazing sun in front of you, unable to speak. September 19th. You repeat to yourself over and over again. September 19th. A part of you dies in the passenger seat of that car. Tears form in your eyes before you realize that you could no longer see anything because you've been staring at the sun for too long. And that was all. All that ever came out of you at the funeral of your childhood. If only I'd told you earlier.

And so the afternoon sun rays passed through the car window as it warmed your face. You let all the purposeful drivers pass you. You came here to chase the sunset, along with the shattered dreams. You came here to relive the past despite the unpredictable futures. You came here to see the Sun emerge and collide with the horizon. And anywhere, you could see the Sun emerge and collide with the horizon.

From,
Wendy

Dear Ronald Lamola

By Melissa Peng-Itaqui (Grade 11)

Second Place Winner, Laureate Category

Ronald Lamola
840 Howe St #900, Vancouver, BC V6Z 2S9

Dear Ronald Lamola,

I am writing this letter to bring attention to some issues with Canada's Child Protection laws. As suggested in the Act proposed in 2005 against exploitation of children and vulnerable people, the Criminal Code has been able to offer the children of Canada many layers of legal protection against child predators. However, I do feel that the protection this Act offers is not enough for the environment these children are in today.

With the rapid development of the internet and social media, it has become easier than ever for predators to have access to the contacts of children, whether it's through public Instagram accounts or through chatrooms/servers on platforms like Discord and MySpace. According to the Crimes Against Children Research Center, the Youth Internet Safety Survey has found that "1 in 7 youths has been contacted by an internet predator," (CAC) and most victims in cases involving internet sexual crimes are "ages 13-15," (CAC) and some even younger.

Children should have the right to be protected. They should not have their innocence and vulnerability exploited by disgusting human beings who want to ruin their innocence to fulfill their sexual desires. They deserve to grow free of trauma, and I feel that it has become harder and harder to fulfill these desires. The YouTuber Anxiety War has proven this truth through his content of taping men who are examples of these internet predators, as well as Chris Hansen, who has spread awareness of these Internet predators through his widely known TV series To Catch a Predator. The content he has filmed were all taken into consideration by their local police, and the people involved in the film are all facing legal

charges for (according to Canadian Law, do note that the examples I give do not take place in Canada) specifically s. 172.1 of the Criminal code.

Though legal protection is provided, I want to propose a mandatory education programming, specifically involved in the Physical and Health Education program of the BC's Course Curriculum of minors under the age of 16. The course would include education on the characteristics of "child grooming", such as 1) conversations regarding sexual matters, over the internet or in real life, between a minor and a legal adult; 2) engaging in physical contact such as hugging, kissing, or other physical touch; 3) opportunities of alone times with the child; and 4) development of a trusting and authoritative relationship with the child and the parents. This course should be taught by social workers from organizations such as Youth Clinics, who would specialize in areas related to child protection against sexual behaviour towards a minor. This course should also advertise referral to victim services qualified for counselling regarding victimization, such as KidsHelpPhone.

The first purpose of this program is to educate youth who are vulnerable to exploitation by predators. The intention is to arm youth with the knowledge to identify the characteristics of grooming and predatory behaviours. The second purpose of this program is to provide these youth with referrals to appropriate organizations when predatory behaviours are identified or when victimization occurred. I sincerely believe that every child deserves such protection. The education and the referrals in this program will help in preventing and protecting children from exploitation.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
Melissa Peng Itaqi

Dear Mr. Gatsby

By Jiaxuan Qi (Grade 10)

Third Place Winner, Laureate Category

Dear Mr. Gatsby

I am writing this letter to apply for a position as a sommelier in your service.

I believe that I have the necessary resources for this job, as demonstrated by my comprehensive knowledge in wine. I have had the privilege of observing this exquisite liquor over the years and have made original postulations for the art of wine tasting. Although I do not have the legal means of committing to empirical tests to validate my conclusions, it must be noted that theoretical projections are as significant as the experiments themselves. This is perhaps best exemplified by Einstein's accurate descriptions of relativity, and Mendeleev's revelation of the periodic table. I have developed the following principles of wine tasting and pairing.

The most exquisite wine always has the truest hue of purple. Since the primary ingredients for most wine is the grape, the wine needs to have the closest resemblance in color to the original fruit. Because the color is an essential part of wine assessing and that it could indicate the natural quality of the liquor, I recommend that when tasting wine, the sommelier should always carry with him or her a bowl of fresh grapes to use as reference.

The art of wine curating consists of two parts before the actual tasting: the visual and the olfactory input. Thus, every professional sommelier should be able to distinguish between the subtle nuances of wines' natural scents. I have confidence in my ability to

distinguish the details of a bottle of wine's history. Give me a Cabernet Sauvignon, and I can say that the wine dates its origins to a seed from Chateau Ducru Beaucaillou in France of a batch planted on a humid day in August. As evidenced, I have a good sense of smell and interpretation. While I smell the rich scent of the wine, I would have a revelation where a series of scenes emerge in my mind for me to trace out the wine's origin. I would see the bright sunlight dawning upon the rich and plump grapes, the wine maker's meticulous work in the making of the wine and the sound of the cork driving into the wine bottle.

The last component of a wine connoisseur would be the tasting, which I cannot do at this moment in time. However, I hope that from my description, you would consider me as a suitable candidate.

At your service,
Leo

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