

When I am lonely, I go the birdcage, in the bright corner of the kitchen. Two parakeets fly like superheroes. One is rainforest green, One is taxicab yellow. Both are beautiful as the morning sun. I speak to them softly, reminding them to eat their seeds, asking them to do their tricks. And they listen. They eat and they twirl. Sometimes I feel sad, because they cannot be free, but if they were free, they would not be safe. They are too small. When I am lonely, I go to the birdcage, in the bright corner of the kitchen. I touch the wire. Sometimes I wish to be one of them.

The East Harlem School presents

The 2010 Spring

# Poetry Slam

Happy every day, safe in their cage. Never lonely, because there are two. When I am lonely, I go the birdcage, in the bright corner of the kitchen. Two parakeets fly like superheroes. One is rainforest green, One is taxicab yellow. Both are beautiful as the morning sun. I speak to them softly reminding them to eat their seeds, asking them to do their tricks. And they listen. They eat and they twirl. Sometimes I feel sad, because they cannot be free, but if they were free, they would not be safe. They are too small. When I am lonely, I go to the birdcage, in the bright corner of the kitchen. I touch the wire. Sometimes I wish to be one of them.

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May 4, 2010

The Highline Ballroom

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The East Harlem School  
**Spring Poetry Slam**

May 4, 2010  
The Highline Ballroom

**Schedule**

6:00p Cocktail Reception  
7:00p Student Poetry — Act 1  
7:50p Intermission  
8:00p Student Poetry — Act 2  
8:45p Slam Winners Announced

Jordin Ruderman MC

Kevin "Sugar" Shand DJ

**Act 1**

Frank *Ode to Dreams*  
Yadira *My Snow Globe*  
Sebastian *The Sea*  
Karen *The Seasonal Changes of My Block*  
Donaldo *The Dream of My Dreams*  
Anthony *My Fallen Soldier*  
Sofia *The Missing Donut*  
Alejandro *My Daily Journey*  
Brianna *Am I Invisible?*  
Eduardo *Imagination Land*  
Lorayne *The Wind Whispers Harlem*  
Gregory *Where I'm From*  
Ayana *The Value of A Penny*  
Raphael *How Will I Know My Mother?*  
Danielle *Ode to Drumsticks*  
Maki *In Praise of the Pigeon*

**Act 2**

Angel *Ode to Space*  
Meliza *Grounded*  
Leonel *Superheroes*  
Iliana *Action Movies*  
Tyler *Graffiti*  
Evelyn *The First Crazy World*  
Isaac *Darkened Evil*  
Graciela *My First Confession*  
Kevin *Family*  
Vanessa *Don't Forget Me*  
Everardo *Ode to My Lovely Life*  
Victoria *A World Split in Two*  
Isaiah *Life is Like A Mystery Novel*  
Gabrielle *A lesson To Remember*

# The East Harlem School at Exodus House

## Small school. BIG impact.

**Our mission:** The East Harlem School at Exodus House is an independent middle school that serves students in grades 5-8 from low-income families in Harlem who exhibit an earnest desire to rise to their academic potential. EHS targets children from underserved families and then helps them develop academic excellence, moral integrity, courtesy, and an unshakeable commitment to their future and the fate of their community. EHS provides an intensive year-round academic program over an extended school day (8:00AM-5:00PM) and offers a comprehensive learning experience for students through a stimulating menu of academic, extracurricular, summer, travel, and alumni programs.

**Our history:** Exodus House has been an anchoring and iconic institution in Harlem since its founding in 1963 by Reverend Dr. Lynn and Mrs. Leola Hageman as a drug rehabilitation center. Due to a heightened concern for the welfare and well-**being of the community's many underserved, at-risk** children, Exodus House was converted in 1984 to an after-school and summer program facility. Then, in the fall of 1993, inspired by the steadfast commitment of the Hagemans to the East Harlem community, the couple's sons, Hans and Ivan, opened an independent year-round middle school on the original Exodus House site to better address the critical needs of these children and their families. Today, EHS is chartered by the New York State Department of Education and accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. The East Harlem School is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

## About the Poetry Slam

Poetry, prose, and public speaking are key features of the EHS curriculum. Every year, students (grades 5-8) at The East Harlem School share their original works of poetry at a school-wide contest before the entire School community. Faculty and friends of EHS critique both poetic content and **performance and select a handful of finalists to advance to the School's** annual spring Poetry Slam. At the Slam, a panel of special guests and celebrity judges then chooses the ultimate winner from among the 30 finalists. For over a decade, The East Harlem School has hosted this annual spring fundraising event to celebrate the fantastic poetic achievements of its students. In the words of EHS co-founder and Head of School, Ivan Hageman, **"the Slam is what we do."**

## Meet the Judges

We've assembled an all-star panel of special guests and celebrity judges to select the Slam winner tonight. We're beyond thankful for their support **and participation in this year's Slam!**

Major *snaps* for this year's judges...



Lisa Cortés  
Executive Producer  
*Precious*

Film credits include  
*Tennessee, Sangam,*  
*The Woodsman,* and  
*Shadowboxer.*

Carmen de Lavallade

Famed Dancer &  
Choreographer



Co-headlined a  
tour with the  
*Alvin Ailey Dance*  
*Company* in the  
1960s.

Maurice DuBois

News Anchor  
*CBS2 News This Morning*



Has won several  
journalism and  
community awards,  
including 4 Emmys.

Emily Ford

Marketing Consultant &  
Celebrity Fashion Stylist



Worked for Nina Ricci &  
Caroline Herrera labels.  
Married to Former TN  
Senator, Harold Ford, Jr.

Kevin Liles

Former President  
*Def Jam Records*



Began working at  
*Def Jam Music*  
*Group* as an unpaid  
intern in 1991.

Pascal Louis

**EHS Alumnus '06**  
**Cornell University '14**



Was named one of  
the 2009 top high  
school soccer players  
to watch by *ESPN*.

Ed Lover

Hip-Hop Pioneer *Yo! MTV Raps*  
Radio Personality *The Ed Lover Show*



Was 1/2 of the  
infamous *Ed Lover*  
*and Doctor Dre*  
*Morning Show.*

Michael Olajide, Jr.

World Champion Boxer & Co-  
Founder *Aerospace*



Former #1 ranked  
middleweight boxer.  
Developed the *AERO*  
workout program.

**Cheryl "Salt" Wray**

Member of legendary hip-hop group  
*Salt N' Pepa*



Won the first  
Grammy awarded  
to a female hip-hop  
group in 1995 with  
*Salt N' Pepa*.



## Student Poetry

### *Ode to Dreams*

By Frank, Grade 8

My dream is to become the dreams of many,  
To be as immortal as the Roman gods,  
To be an inspiration to many others in the world.

I want to become the Zeus of soccer,  
As fast as lightning, as fierce as thunder,  
The King of Gods.

Like the warrior Achilles, I want to be  
Printed on the walls of heroes,  
A permanent fixture in the  
Minds of the masses.

I want to become the  
Fastest, strongest, and wisest  
Warrior on the field of legends,  
Overwhelming my opponents into ashes.

Eventually, when my strong and spirited body  
Turns into a lonely carcass,  
I will have reached Mount Olympus,  
Finally fulfilling my dogged dreams.

### *My Snow Globe*

By Yadira, Grade 5

Shake, shake, shake.  
But nothing came out.  
No snow in my globe,  
From Mexico.

Instead of snow,  
Dogs, sheep and horses.  
A small farm house made of wood.  
Water as blue as the sky.

White, green and red,  
At the bottom of the globe.  
The flag of Mexico,  
An eagle in the center.

Brought back by my aunt  
When she went to Mexico.  
My grandmother found it  
In my mom's favorite park,  
When she was a young girl.

I have never been to Mexico.  
I have never seen this park,  
That they say is as  
Beautiful  
As a dark, red rose.

My globe shows me  
A piece of my family,  
My country,  
My grandmother.

*The Sea*

By Sebastian, Grade 8

Some think your waves are soothing  
and delightful,  
But not to me.  
To me, when your waves crash  
against the coastline,  
It's as if nails were scraping against  
A shiny, smooth table of marble,  
Rampaging the rocks,  
Pounding against the mollusks,  
Pulling them away from their coral  
home.

Some think your voice is soothing and  
delightful,  
But not to me.  
To me, your fortress of water ravages  
the sand  
Into little grains of crumpled rock,  
Making a thick layer of muck.

Thus, some may conclude  
That you are harsh and vengeful,  
But not to me.  
To me, you sing a lullaby to the  
minnows in the whirlpool.  
The serenity of the coastline at night  
is  
The breath of angels on Christmas  
Eve.

Or some may say that you are vast  
and terrifying,  
But not to me.  
To me, you are compact with a  
lustrous orb  
Filled with jubilee and majesty,  
Brimming over with wonder and  
discovery.

Our conception of good and evil  
Unravels within the sea,  
A ball, a pulse of confusion,  
Just waiting to be explored.

*The Seasonal Changes of My Block*

By Karen, Grade 8

As I wander down my street in spring,  
The splish splash of the rain pounds  
my umbrella,  
As the treacherous wind blows it  
away.  
The sight of blooming flowers and  
buds is calming,  
Dew dripping to the moist ground.  
The birds return from their exile.

As I walk down further, the sun rises,  
Its gallant rays covering  
The people's sweating faces.  
The days slowly lengthen,  
Reaching full limit.  
Fluffy ice cream is a soothing  
massage.

As I continue my travels, the crisp  
wind flies about.  
An aurora of crunching leaves  
appears,  
Some the color of rusting iron and  
volcanic flames,  
Others the color of pumpkins.  
The jubilant children catapult  
themselves into a pile of leaves,  
And rustling paper is heard in the  
distance.

When I am finished walking down the  
block,  
The autumn rain turns into whispering  
winter snow.  
As storms stretch far away,  
People find logs to burn.  
The flaming inferno emanates warmth  
As children make snowmen, tall as the  
trees.

*The Dream of My Dreams*

By Donaldo, Grade 5

I will today  
Get high grades,  
Stay focused,  
Do all my homework  
And behave.

I will one day  
Go to law school,  
Be a passionate student,  
Give anything for my dream  
And graduate.

I dream one day  
I get a diploma  
Sand-colored and signed  
Donaldo Reyes Rodrigez  
An official Immigration Lawyer.

I dream one day  
I will stop  
The deportation of parents  
Whose children were born here  
But don't have the choice  
To stay as a family.

*My Fallen Soldier*

By Anthony, Grade 8

Life is never an eternity,  
Feeling of a bullet  
Straight through me.  
As if I were in a small, dark world,  
Wondering where I went wrong,  
The most important part of my soul,  
destroyed.

As I walk in the world alone,  
reminiscing,  
I think about the history I miss.  
My sunshine in the morning,  
My lullaby at night.  
The warm feeling while I sat on your  
lap  
Rocked me to sleep.  
The only soldier I looked up to.  
Your warmth, like the sun, radiated  
life.  
Your embrace, like a blanket, covered  
me from danger.

As daylight breaks, I know you're  
gone for now,  
But not for long, because someday  
soon,  
I will feel your tender touch  
Once again.

*The Missing Donut*

By Sofia, Grade 5

Mama, this is just to say,  
That when you thought  
You lost your donut,  
I ate it.  
I was the one who ate it.

You thought that  
Aunt Gira ate it.  
And I said, yes, yes, she did. It was  
her.  
Didn't you see, I was trying not to  
laugh?

That dark chocolate O,  
With colorful, shiny sprinkles.  
It tasted like the food of an angel.  
So sweet.

Mmm, Mmm,  
It smelled like toasted bread.  
It felt in my hands like the soft clouds  
in the sky.

I'll always remember my first bite.  
I was only going to have one bite.  
I already had eaten my own!  
I didn't plan to be so greedy,  
But it was irresistible.

So I took my second bite,  
Then my third one and my fourth one  
And then it was finished.

My heart was beating quick as a  
baby's.  
It all happened so fast.  
My donut and then your donut.  
And I still wanted more!

I am sorry, Mama.  
Because I know that Sunday donuts  
Are supposed to be shared.  
You should have woken up earlier!

*My Daily Journey*

By Alejandro, Grade 8

The arduous journey through the  
jungle of concrete  
Is anything but easy.  
My backpack is as heavy as a  
blistering boulder,  
The rain pelts my umbrella like  
bullets of water.

The people rushing like swarms of  
bees,  
The puddles are like giant seas.  
The people chit chatter like groups of  
children,  
Everyone talks but no one listens.

The hill is a mountain.  
I trudge up the tortuous Mount  
Everest;  
My feet ache due to the rocky terrain.

I get to the crossing light,  
I wait for eternity.  
The sign finally changes,  
Only to race against people I've never  
even met.

I finally get to my safe zone,  
Quiet solitude.  
What a day I've had!  
I crossed seas, trod mountains.  
As I reflect on my tumultuous day, I  
rest,  
Preparing for the perils that tomorrow  
may bring.

*Am I Invisible?*

By Brianna, Grade 6

Oh, Mirror!  
I cannot see.  
I thought you were  
Supposed to reflect me!  
When I blink, I should see  
My eyelids begin to shut.  
When I'm sad,  
I should see my lips upside down.  
But, mirror, you're not working.

Are you broken, mirror?  
Are you plastic?  
Is it you  
That cannot reflect me,  
Or is it me  
Who does not know who I am?

It's as if I'm looking  
In a river  
And I see my reflection,  
But a fallen leaf  
Just plucks it away.

I thought I was just a girl,  
But I must be more than that.  
There must be a spark in me that  
I can't find.

Oh, Mirror!  
Am I invisible?

*Imagination Land*

By Eduardo, Grade 5

Sitting on the bus,  
I feel dizzy in the crowd.  
The chaos makes me crazy.  
I try to travel to Imagination Land.

There, I can make the air quiet as a  
slithering worm.

There I can make space.  
There I won't be squished,  
I'll be calm.

I close my eyes  
And look into my mind.  
I see knights fighting nice.  
I see dragons baking bread  
With their flames,  
And skyscrapers waving hello  
To the clouds.

I see trees that grow chocolate,  
And enough houses for everyone.  
Imagination Land is a place  
Where people can be who they really  
are.

I hear a ring.  
I think it is a bird  
Singing to me,  
In Imagination Land.  
But oh no, oh no.  
I'm back to the bus.  
And I have missed my stop.

*The Wind Whispers Harlem*

By Lorayne, Grade 8

The trees rustle the words  
Silent streets cannot,  
And reveal the fairytale hidden behind  
every door.

From tears of joy to tears of sadness,  
Tender words and virulent screams,  
The wind whispers Harlem.

Harlem, that surprising land of chaotic  
calm.

Louder than New Years at Times  
Square,  
Yet as quiet as a sleeping night,  
The wind whispers Harlem.

From the smell of homemade rice and  
chicken  
Bringing us together,  
To the hateful disputes breaking us  
apart,  
The wind whispers Harlem.

Children chasing chaotically,  
The smiles gallantly growing  
From every window as the afternoon  
approaches.  
And through it all, the feeling of joy  
and pride  
Spilling into the streets,  
The wind whispers Harlem.

*Where I'm From*

By Gregory, Grade 5

I am from a broken white dryer,  
And matched clothes hanging in the  
living room.

I am from dust in the corners  
That attracts ravenous ants searching  
for food.

I am from the strong, green tree on  
Admiral Lane

That greets me as I open the front  
door,

And seems to stand there to protect  
me,  
As I long live.

I am from my mother's cheesecakes,  
Sweet as strawberries,  
And from caramelized roast pork,  
Bought on Canal Street.

I am from old albums  
At my grandmother's house,  
Lined on straight shelves,  
And full of memories,  
New and old.

In one photo I play happily  
With my sister in a park in the Bronx.  
In another, my grandparents pose  
By a river in China.

I am from Guan Zhou.

I am from New York.

I am from loud and calm,  
Frustrating and still,

The deep hearted and the caring.

I am from the unhappy accidents,  
And angry arguments that made me  
stronger.

I am from my grandparents' house,  
Happy, spacious, full of memories,  
Where my family gathers all together.

*The Value of A Penny*

By Ayana, Grade 7

Every dollar,  
Every quarter,  
Every dime,  
Every nickel,  
And, of course,  
Every penny.

As I explore Mom's world of the  
penny,  
I smell your rusty sadness;  
I feel your frown of despair.

To me, you are an abandoned pop-  
star,  
Cast aside  
In the ninety-nine cent bin on 125th  
street.

But, to her,  
You are a golden ticket to a sold out  
Prince concert,  
All dressed up in your classy copper  
coat.

I see you as faded and outdated,  
But you are her shiny reminder of a  
better day,  
A better tomorrow.

She always says,  
"Save, save, save."  
"Spend in reason!"  
"Do you have a job?"

In her eyes,  
The penny is my beginnings  
And my future:

My afternoon snack at the corner deli,  
Two peppermint candies, please.  
Enough tanks of gas  
To look at all the boarding schools I  
want to attend.  
The trip to London,  
A perfect graduation present before  
college.  
Pennies take me to graduate school,  
Disciplining me to detect the  
dangerous drives of delinquents.

So, I guess, Mom, you're right.  
There is the value of a penny.

*How Will I Know My Mother?*

By Raphael, Grade 5

Her voice is light as seawater.  
I talk to her on the white phone.  
I feel in my heart that she is good.  
She in New York, I in Mexico.  
After three years apart, I cannot  
picture her.  
Her face is a lost memory.  
But I know her voice, light as  
seawater.

On the plane, big as a building,  
I ask myself, how will I know my  
mother?  
Will she be tall as the Statue of  
Liberty  
Or short as a fence post?  
Will she look pale as sand  
Or dark like me?  
How will my mother wear her hair?  
Everything is a mystery,  
Except for her voice, light as  
seawater.

LaGuardia Airport, full of people.  
All sizes, all shapes, all colors.  
I ask myself, how will I know my  
mother?  
English all around me, how will I find  
her?  
An old man points at a woman in  
jeans.  
She is short as a fencepost, dark like  
me.  
She squeezes me, squeezes me, cries  
and cries.  
Then I hear her voice,  
and it is light as seawater.

*Ode to Drumsticks*

By Danielle, Grade 8

Wooden, metal, they're every kind,  
People search from store to store just  
to find  
The right one because to me you're all  
I need  
To win any competition with angelic  
ease.

When I use you to hit every tom-tom  
and snare,  
I feel liberated, like a tortoise finally  
catching its hare.  
The music we make together is like  
none other,  
It unites all people, no matter their  
color.

It's amazing how someone could craft  
Something so smooth and unique,  
You help me to minister to souls  
With each and every beat.  
You travel from church to church,  
rock star to rock star,  
With love, devotion, and sweat you  
are marred.

The sticks guide me to express and  
play  
Those words that no human can say.  
Through you I find escape,  
Calm as the sea,  
Through you I reveal my story: me.

*In Praise of the Pigeon*

By Maki, Grade 7

The putrid pigeon  
Drifts in smog abundant skies.  
Its cousin,  
The seraphic dove,  
The cherub of the azure heavens,  
Soars under the crimson evening  
cosmos.

The ravenous pigeon chows on  
The slop of the crudest cities,  
Guzzles the most aphotic water  
That even the rats are too proud  
To drink.  
The dove dines on the most piquant  
worms  
In the most preserved patch of the  
woods.

The pigeon soars  
Through rows of cement trees,  
Crafted by supply and demand.  
While the dove glides  
On gusts of infinite breeze  
And pillars of light  
From every blind spot in the great  
tree's shade  
Radiate the sheen of its aura.

The dove,  
Ashamed of its grotesque cousin,  
Shunned by all of avian kind.  
The pigeon,  
Sad for its adored cousin,  
Who has never had its taste buds  
touch  
Reality.

*Ode to Space*

By Angel, Grade 8

Space, a blackout like no other.

Wondrous discoveries  
Just waiting to be uncovered,  
Comets soaring like hawks  
In the night-time sky.  
Planets, like new doors to creation,  
Revolving around  
The one miracle light,  
The Sun,  
The shining star singing so softly,  
Like heavenly hours of harmony,  
Giving and granting gratification so  
generously.

Yet, one day its beauty will fade,  
Exploding like fire crackers on the  
Fourth of July.  
Slowly, eternally, the catastrophe  
expands,  
Reaching the farthest corners  
Of the yet-unseen universe,  
Filling the heavenly skies with its  
unraveling mysteries.

*Grounded*

By Meliza, Grade 7

I'm locked inside a pink flowered  
prison  
For the crime I did not commit.  
Trapped by rose-lined bars and sun  
flowered gates,  
Flowers of desperation.

My cot of coral concrete  
Offers me no comfort  
During my thirty minute term.  
The tiny window behind lace curtains  
Isolates me from the temptations  
Of monkey bars and tire swings.  
The raspberry perfumed air  
Now poisons me with its phony prom-  
ises of pleasure.  
The Kit-Kat stashed away during my  
last sentence  
Is the contraband I must hide  
From the warden's wondering eye.  
Barbie's left hand counts the seconds  
Until I am free,  
While her right reminds me  
Of the last hour of freedom.

Thump, thump, thump,  
She finally reports to release me,  
"Have you learned your lesson,  
Melly?"

"I'm sorry, Mommy, I'll never touch  
the valuable vase again."

*Superheroes*

By Leonel, Grade 5

When I am lonely,  
I go to the birdcage,  
In the bright corner of the kitchen.  
Two parakeets fly like superheroes.  
One is rainforest green.  
One is taxicab yellow.  
Both are as beautiful as the morning  
sun.

I speak to them softly,  
Reminding them to eat their seeds,  
Asking them to do their tricks.  
And they listen.  
They eat and they twirl.  
Sometimes I feel sad,  
Because they cannot be free,  
But if they were free,  
They would not be safe.  
They are too small.

When I am lonely,  
I go to the birdcage,  
In the bright corner of the kitchen.  
I touch the wire.  
Sometimes I wish to be one of them.  
Happy every day, safe in their cage.  
Never lonely,  
Because there are two.

*Action Movies*

By Illiana, Grade 7

When my father told me the story of  
action movies -  
The only entertainment for the poor,  
I rubbed his rough-as-a-rugby-ball  
hands.  
As I felt the pulse of his palms, I  
thought  
of the people who made these hands  
possible.

From the Blue Mountain Coffee  
drinkers,  
Who savor their three pounds of  
pleasure,  
While ordinary people trudge from the  
country to work in Kingston,  
To the people who thought they  
would never get out of the  
neighborhoods,  
And only escaped perdition by  
relishing the roundhouse kicks of the  
Drunken Master.

Who would have thought Bruce Lee  
would equal happiness?

*Graffiti*

By Tyler, Grade 8

The winter day is bleak and cold,  
Brown brick buildings chipped and  
old.  
Sidewalk dirty, slush and grime,  
Where is the beauty I once knew in  
time?

Scrawled on the crumbling wall,  
Those images that yet fresh additions  
renew.

The words so powerful, raw and bold,  
Spray paint or brush, a story is told.

A colorful scene on that fading wall  
Illuminates the drudgery of the bleak,  
concrete city.

A myriad of colors, bright and dark,  
Some call it criminal;  
I call it art.

The masterpiece from an artist's heart  
Evokes hidden passions that lie  
within.

As he paints his talent, the art, ever  
gallant,  
Remains forever.

*The First Crazy World*

By Evelyn, Grade 5

The pink, polka dotted sky  
Is upside-down,  
Orange peacocks walk  
While carrying bows,  
Red-faced people  
Are flying off the ground,  
Zebra striped trees  
Fight for space,  
While the cinnamon wind blows.

Roofs are made out of snow shoes,  
The ocean is a juicy, yellow lemon,  
So sour,  
Turtle tennis teams never lose,  
Messy pigs and kids can't wait  
To take a very cold shower.

Policemen run backwards for fun,  
Lawyers go to court and act shy,  
Ants swim to the blue and green  
striped sun,  
Macaroni and cheese comes alive  
And tries to touch the sky.

Chihuahuas cook spaghetti and  
meatballs,  
Everyone takes the magenta  
motorcycle to school,  
Spotted mice go to malls,  
The queen's servants sit on thrones  
And wear her jewels.

Wake up! Yells my sister.  
Oh no! I am late for school today.  
Until I notice, it was only Saturday!

*Darkened Evil*

By Isaac, Grade 8

Darkened evil will envelop the  
unfulfilled life.  
So to avoid the eternal abyss,  
One must stare deep into the darkness.

A moment to think twice,  
To be a lone wolf howling at the  
moon until it fades,  
To stand on both feet and never  
cower,  
To spurn the gambler's bid to throw  
his life away,  
To try hard and live and fight for  
another day,  
To push through the muck and grime  
And accept the glow of defeat.

Darkened evil, so I can reflect  
And ponder on life's beginnings,  
Ones we need to protect.

*My First Confession*  
By Graciela, Grade 5

In front of St. Cecilia's,  
I stand next to my mother,  
Covered in goose bumps, crying.  
I am afraid of the priest,  
Waiting to hear my sins.  
Dim yellowed light,  
Makes the room even scarier.

I practice in my head the telling of my sins:  
I made my pregnant mother angry.  
I laughed when my cousin said my sister is fat as an elephant.  
I gave my friend a gum wrapper,  
with no gum inside,  
and I laughed again when she opened it.

Sister Gina puts her arm around me,  
And walked me to Father Peter.  
It is her first confession, she says.  
His handshake is friendly.  
I tell him my sins, then I read from my little white paper.  
The Act of Contrition.

*Oh my God, I am sorry for my sins.  
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good.  
I have sinned against you whom I should love  
Above all things.*

My penance is five Hail Marys.  
I go to the altar.  
I see the angels  
And the red flowers.  
I see the choir singing.  
I look at the Virgin Mary  
And I tell her:

*Santa Maria, Madre de Dios  
Ruega por nuestros pecadores,  
Ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte.*

*Family*  
By Kevin, Grade 5

Family, family,  
Running around.  
Family, family,  
All over the ground.  
Family, family,  
On the walls.  
Family, family,  
Crowding the halls.  
Family, family  
It feels like a zoo.  
Family, family,  
What can you do?

My brother, a playful monkey,  
Swinging from tree to tree.  
My sister, a strong zebra,  
Running away from me.  
My dad, a fierce tiger,  
Hunting for food,  
Never, ever in a good mood.  
My mother, a loving panda,  
Who comforts us all day.  
And me a young bear cub,  
Just trying to find my way.

Oh, family, family,  
Running around.  
Family, family,  
All over the ground.  
Family family,  
You give me the blues.  
Family, family,  
Oh why can't we choose?

*Don't Forget Me*

By Vanessa, Grade 7

Please don't forget me.  
Don't forget me,  
Even when you can no longer be there  
To listen to my bedroom ballads.  
Don't forget me,  
Even when you can no longer help  
Me fold the laundry  
After we've washed Luis' ketchup  
stains  
Off of his t-shirts.  
Don't forget me,  
Even when you can no longer  
Be there to study my homework.

And, I won't forget you,  
Even when I no longer give you  
Your daily doses of medicine,  
Even when I'm the only one  
To comfort Luis after he falls  
And calls your name.  
Promise me  
You'll always remember me,  
Even when your body and soul  
Are completely gone.

If you don't,  
I'll be lost  
When I try to fill your place.

*Ode to My Lovely Life*

By Everardo, Grade 8

I lost my father,  
He and I don't talk or even bother.  
I try to forgive him,  
But the pain threaded through my  
mom's heart is a sin.

My mom and brother are the fire in  
me that never burns out,  
For them I'll make my name in life  
without a doubt.  
I'll make them shine like a star,  
Shine so much,  
You'll see us from afar.

I like my life because  
It didn't go from bad to worse,  
Because I'm now a better person,  
That's how I'll reimburse  
My mom, who works day and night  
To give me opportunities in life.

I'll have happiness  
As long as I'm alive,  
More wonders will come,  
And into them I'll dive.  
Know this Father, whom I still dearly  
love,  
I'll die happy because I made it for  
my family and Him up above.

*A World Split in Two*  
By Victoria, Grade 7

She awakens to crisp crimson sheets  
Hugging her silk pajamas.  
He awakens to a policeman's baton  
And drenched in hot coffee,  
Acid to his wind burned face.  
"Get off the sidewalk, you bum!"

A feast awaits her:  
Oysters, omelets and exotic fruits,  
Of which she only nibbles at an apple.  
He searches for a pair of golden  
arches,  
The only gold he's seen in years,  
And forcefully liberates two rusted  
quarters  
From his squalid palms  
To buy one, single apple pie.

Two housekeepers, a dog walker, and  
a chef,  
But no one to sit on the other end  
Of her ebony table.  
And he who should be lonely,  
Shares his only meal  
With a coat of unemployed bodies to  
keep him warm.

*Life is Like a Mystery Novel*  
By Isaiah, Grade 5

Life is like a mystery novel,  
You don't know what is going to  
happen,  
But you want to find out.

Chapter One is  
Mysterious as bats.  
And something is missing,  
A valuable object is gone.

There are good people who tell the  
truth.  
There are bad people who lie.  
There are heroes who are as  
courageous as firefighters.  
There are villains who are as devious  
as tigers hunting.

But who can you trust?

In Chapter Five  
Some clues have come out,  
But the object is still missing.  
The object is still out there.

Some people are innocent.  
And some people are guilty.  
There are heroes as adventurous as  
wolves.  
There are villains like dirty, little rats.

But who can you trust?

In Chapter Ten  
The object is finally found!  
The mystery novel is solved.

Life is like a mystery novel,  
Just waiting to be  
Cracked open like an egg.  
Hopefully you pick a good one.

*A Lesson to Remember*

By Gabrielle, Grade 7

Hush, hush,  
She is coming.  
Today is the day,  
Today is the day,  
We learn about our land and our people.

Once beautiful  
With high mountains reaching the heavens,  
Low valleys covered with white sand like the ashes of hell,  
Lush vegetation covering the mountain sides like a green canopy,  
Bubbling waterfalls and blue shores.

Hispaniola,  
An island divided by the stroke of a pen.  
The Spanish controlled Santo Domingo, "The Dominican Republic."  
The French controlled Saint Dominique, "The Republic of Haiti."  
Side by Side.

It's a revolution!  
1804  
The West African slaves rose up like the archangel Michael  
And overthrew their French oppressors as if they were Lucifer.  
"L'union fait la force,"  
In unity, there is strength.

Saint Dominique ceased to exist,  
The first black republic was born.  
Haiti,  
Independent,  
But isolated by slave holding nations.

Haiti,  
Plagued by  
Violence, corruption, and poverty,  
Embargoes and a multimillion dollar indemnity.

Ah! What's going on?  
Shaking,  
Rumbling,  
Crumbling,  
And crashing.

Huge dust clouds rolling down the street,  
White ash rising to the heavens.  
Ha, Ha,  
Barely able to breathe,  
Gasping for every breath,  
The cries of the people,  
"Help me, help me."

The people,  
Shocked,  
What happened to the structure that once stood?  
Devastated,  
Filled with disbelief and grief.  
Wounded, wandering, staggering, and crawling,  
Dead, lifeless, twisted, and broken.

Rubble and debris  
As far as the eye can see.  
Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!  
Deliver your children again!  
How much more must we or can we endure?

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When I am lonely, I go the birdcage, in the bright corner of the kitchen. Two parakeets fly like superheroes. One is rainforest green, One is taxicab yellow. Both are beautiful as the morning sun. I speak to them softly, reminding them to eat their seeds, asking them to do their tricks. And they listen. They eat and they twirl. Sometimes I feel sad, because they cannot be free, but if they were free, they would not be safe. They are too small. When I am lonely, I go to the birdcage, in the bright corner of the kitchen. I touch the wire. Sometimes I wish to be one of them. Happy every day, safe in their cage. Never lonely, because there are two. When I am lonely, I go the birdcage, in the bright corner of the kitchen. Two parakeets fly like superheroes. One is rainforest green, One is taxicab yellow. Both are beautiful as the morning sun. I speak to them softly, reminding them to eat their seeds, asking them to do their tricks. And they twirl. Sometimes I feel sad, because they cannot be free, but if they were free, they would not be safe. They are too small. When I am lonely, I go to the birdcage, in the bright corner of the kitchen. I touch the wire. Sometimes I wish to be one of them. Happy every day, safe in their cage. Never lonely, because there are two. When I am lonely, I go the birdcage, in the bright corner of the kitchen. Two parakeets fly like superheroes. One is rainforest green, One is taxicab yellow. Both are beautiful as the morning sun. I speak to them softly, reminding them to eat their seeds, asking them to do their tricks. And they twirl. Sometimes I feel sad, because they cannot be free, but if they were free, they would not be safe. They are too small.

## Want to get involved?

**We'd love to hear from you!**

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