

INK 2018



The East Harlem School
AT EXODUS HOUSE

Artwork featured in this magazine was created in the 2017-2018 Visual Arts course. The Art curriculum is designed to have students see the world as it is – the play of light against shadow, the spectrums of color and shape - and then with the formal techniques of drawing - to render them on paper.



East Harlem School Poetry Film Shoot in Partnership with the Frick Collection

Cover Art: Shelby, Grade 8, "Myself"
Back Cover: Brian, Grade 7, "A Day Worth"

INK 2018

A Student Literary Arts Magazine



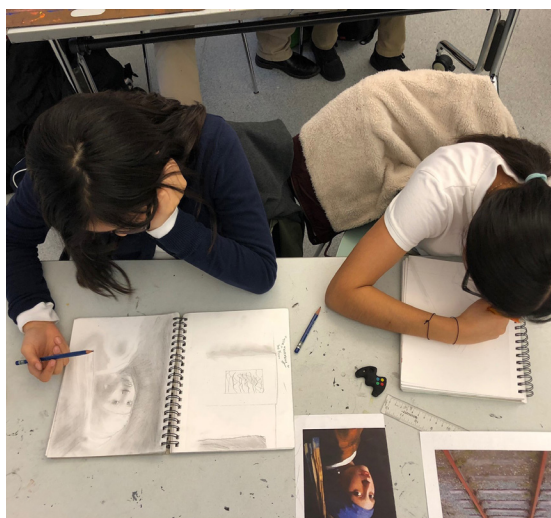
By: Geraldine, Grade 8, "Self Portrait"

The East Harlem School

A T E X O D U S H O U S E

Our mission: The East Harlem School challenges students to develop a balanced physical, moral, and intellectual strength that they will use to adapt to change - and for the final purpose of creating and sharing lives of deep meaning, dynamic virtue, and transcendent joy. We are a middle school (grades 4-8) that recruits children from families with low income and the highest values, and we give preference to those who keep to the traditional belief that creative flight can only be sustained by grounded discipline.

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 their parents to the East Harlem community, the couple's sons, Hans and Ivan, opened a year-round independent 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.



The EHS Poetry Slam makes manifest our mission - *to create and share lives of deep meaning, dynamic virtue and transcendent joy*. We ask our students to look at the world, words, and themselves with the hard gaze of disciplined inquiry – and we ask them to allow the hard gaze to be softened by a love and awe for what they examine. On the night of the Slam our students, through their poetry and dynamic oratory, move adults to empathy, understanding, laughter, tears, and a new awareness. What the children share on that night seems equal parts alchemy, sorcery, and revelation - but what our students reveal to the listener is quietly born in the patient and persistent search for the truth here on 103rd Street.



Photo credit: Michael Priest Photograph

“The Slam is what we do.”



Student poets with Slam Judges Mayra Cajamarca, Jane Foley Fried, Lauren Sandler, and MC Jordin Ruderman at the 2018 Spring Poetry Slam on May 3, 2018 at MIST Harlem.

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Lies

Alexander, Grade 6

In Mexico it was a time of the year
When the winds were filled with
Anger trying to shove us around
Trying to make us crumble
To the ground

In America it was a time of the year
When the city was covered
In snow like a cold white
Blanket letting us go
Letting us be free.

But it was all a lie the
Snow just made it harder to
Walk around and find a job
But it was with a small restaurant
Where I helped prepare the meals that
Rich white men would eat.
But also the ones who did
Not have much so they just
Asked for any leftovers
We had.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Rita Crotty, Evan Guillemin, Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan, Charlie Ortiz,
and Sara Zilkha*

Thursday Nights

Allison, Grade 5

On Thursday nights,
My sister babysits coats
At the fancy restaurant on the Upper East Side,
Where my father cooks.
Dressed all in black,
She stands at the top of a staircase
Accepting jacket after jacket
From white people and famous people.
“Don’t lose my coat,” they say.
“It’s expensive.”
She carries coats carefully
Down the stairs to where they hang,
Like empty bodies,
While their owners eat interesting Italian food
Prepped by my dad.
Up and down, up and down
My sister goes—from 5pm to midnight,
Hoping for good tips
To save for college.
My sister who carries coats carefully
Will be the first woman in our family to go to college.
My sister who smiles big on Thursday nights
Will one day walk up and down, up and down
The halls of a hospital
In her white coat.

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Barbara Silverman, Philip Vasan, Nona Ventry, Abigail Young, and Sara Zilkha*

Belong

Amy, Grade 8

But what about history?
The billions of deaths
Just because a group of people decided
That you weren't perfect through their eyes,
They would play the role of God.
Native people being taken away from their homes,
Jews hunted like mice.
Where was He?
What if we made it all up?
So we could hang on to hope,
Hang on to humanity,
Find justice in an unjust world?

My family is Catholic,
And I belong to my family,
And what I am - sometimes I just don't know.
I belong to the tribe of history lovers.
And to the tribe of Spanish speakers.
And to the tribe of wonderers.
Point is - I belong to a lot of groups of people.

I belong to the tribe of people who aren't 100% sure
Of what they believe.
And that's okay, because I know that I'm not truly
Alone in my loneliness.

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Day of the Dead

Andrea, Grade 6

In Pueblo, the cemetery is full of life:
The sweet fragrance of the ginger *cempasuchil* flowers
Whispers to the dead.
They smell like candy.
The pollen, like sugar,
Sweetens the mist above the graves.
The flickering flames
Make the *virgens de Guadalupe* dance,
Dozens of them,
Dreaming over the dead.

But in New York, far from these graves,
We cannot visit the dead.
We speak to them in our heads,
In our prayers,
At the altar outside my bedroom.
We breathe in the same saffron *cempasuchils*
That my grandmother bought at the market.
My whispered prayers echo all the way to Mexico
And purr to the dead like a bed time story.
Our stories and songs and sweet *cempasuchils*
Stack up to heaven so my mother's baby sister
Can slide down to us again.

I don't know which types of candies she likes,
So I leave *Bocadins*, *Pulparindos*, and *Coco Banderas*,
Hoping she will come to eat them.
I dream of having my aunt with me in the park.
She mumbles something, and I understand:
Gracias, mi sobrina, gracias por los dulces.
The kiss from her *cempasuchil* sugary-stained lips
Lingers on my cheek, and her weight is still heavy
In my arms, even as she retreats into the mist
On this Day of the Dead.

*Sponsored by Anonymous,
Carol Brown, Mayra Cajamarca,
Rita Crotty, Melissa Garza,
Roanne Goldfein,
Evan Guillemín, Charlie Kaplan,
Charlie Ortiz, Jon Patricof,
The Richmond Family,
Vincent Urban, Nona Ventry,
and Sara Zilkha*

Nothing I Can Do

Anthony, Grade 5

I lie in my bed at night
And wonder what job I could get
To get rid of the feeling that
There is nothing I can do.
To get rid of the feeling
That two good people –
Two stars who never stop shining –
Spend all their time
Cooking and cleaning
For other people.

I hear them –
Up late when they should be sleeping,
When I should be sleeping,
Worrying, worrying about money.
They work every hour they can,
Doing everything they can,
But we barely have enough.
I am like a volcano full of the desire to help,
But I cannot figure out how to erupt.

I could give soccer lessons,
Or sell my drawings.
I have a good one of a fist,
A pretty charcoal moon.
I can't babysit – I'm only ten!
I'm not great with dogs.
But I have the feeling that
I would do anything
To help my parents shine.

Don't worry about us, they say.
Don't worry.
When you worry, we worry!
I guess we are worriers in our family.
Worriers and warriors!
Fighting for a good life,
A great life!

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So Much Different, So Much the Same

Breanna, Grade 5

In the days after Ms. Michelle's death,
It was hard for me to believe
So much was still the same.
The trains were still running,
One after the other like a herd of zebras.
I still had homework to do,
My mom still had to work hard at her job.
The sun still rose and the sun still set.
But one person was missing from this planet.
A twenty-eight year old woman.
Passionate about teaching science to girls
At Figure Skating in Harlem.
A twenty-eight year old teacher,
Who took her own time
To bake us treats.
Something different each week,
Made with love,
For us, her *smart cookies*, she said!

In the days after Ms. Michelle's death,
It was so hard for me to believe she was gone.
So quickly she went from here to not here.
So much was different.
So much was the same.
In the days after Ms. Michelle's death,
I thought the city would be gray.
I thought the sun would not rise in the morning.
But it did. And it still does,
Even on the days when it feels like everything is a dark tunnel.
Even when I miss Ms. Michelle so much.

*Sponsored by Cynthia Bacall, Carol Brown, Hetty Chang, David Cunningham, Roanne Goldfein,
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Eve Stuart, Vincent Urban, Nona Ventry, and Sara Zilkha*

The Butterfly and The Border

Brittany, Grade 7

The waves and the rocks crashed together.
My grandmother sat next to me
With her head on my shoulder.
Yo deseo ser una mariposa.
I wish I was a butterfly.
Because a butterfly, it has
Libertad.
A Butterfly has freedom.
She could fly across the border without any weight
On her shoulders.

Seeing the vast ocean
With nothing blocking our view,
That is how she wanted life and
The world to be.
We heard the waves, the wind, and the birds flying.
We sat there as the world rotated through space.
As people and life passed us by.
As if time didn't matter.

As the sun was preparing to sleep,
And the moon and stars arranged themselves
To light up the darkness,
I said,
Tú eres la mariposa que cruza todas las fronteras de tu vida.
Y yo soy una oruga que se está preparando que
Todavía necesita enfrentar mis
Fronteras.

You are a butterfly that has already crossed
All the borders in your life.
And I am a caterpillar still getting ready,
With many borders ahead of me.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown,
Hetty Chang, Evan Guillemin,
Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan,
Charlie Ortiz, The Richmond Family,
Eve Stuart, Nona Ventry, Ingrid Wong,
and Sara Zilkha*

Dreams

Bryan, Grade 6

Dreams. What a wonderful thing in your head.
It's happening when you're sleeping in bed.
What makes you want to keep dreaming?
Does it end when you hear someone screaming?

Dreams are there to help you escape real life.
But they can be weird and harsh like a knife.
Do you dream of a dragon soaring through the sky?
Or telling your friend a last good bye?

To me, dreams are simply a treasure.
They're a decadent pleasure.
In your dreams, it often feels real,
So go to sleep for a pretty good deal.

Do dreams come back or do they die?
Or sometimes fly away like a butterfly?
We all dream, we are all dreamers, too.
I will dream tonight. Will you?

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Janice Murchison, Charlie Ortiz, Nona Ventry, and Sara Zilkha*

The Fear of Silence

Camilla, Grade 7

I used think the world was simple.
I used to think all fears could be overcome.
All problems could be solved.
That there would always be another chance,
Always a way out.
But we cannot go back in time.
I am 13.
This is my one chance to be 13.
I know I will face shame and doubt and fear.
They will stare me in the face, wanting to attack.
I will have some dark, dark days.
But the person I am at 13
Will affect the person I am at 14.
14 affects 15,
15 affects 16.
I am done hiding in black shadows.
I will say when I see injustice.
I will think before I act.
No one will walk my path for me.
I will walk it myself.
In the light.

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Charlie Ortiz, Philip Vasan, Nona Ventry, and Sara Zilkha*

The Quiet Hurts

Carlos, Grade 6

My father is a quiet man.
I decide to give him poetry: to wrap it in a bow.
I want to show him the way it moves,
The way it lingers,
The permission it provides to process
So many thoughts with
A
Few
Little
Words.
I want to give him the gift of words
To fill our hollow house.
I want to fill the three years that he's been gone
With similes like bags full of sweets
And hyperboles as big as the world
And alliterative assertions to alleviate our fears.

So early one morning, he wrote poetry at my school.
I thought he'd write about me and about my sister,
About the way we are apart and how he misses us.
Maybe he'd build a bridge of lines and meter
To hurdle over all the trouble he's caused.
I wanted to give him the words to say sorry,
Since he can't say it on his own.
I wanted him to write a ticket back into my heart.

The memories he shared are foggy,
Like the pieces in a puzzle that are lost.
There's joy coming back into our lives,
But I'm still confused and wonder why
The beautiful poem he wrote for me
Can still
Be
So
Disappointing.

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Bill and Eileen Glaser,
Evan Guillemín, Peter Hildenbrand,
Charlie Kaplan, Sarah Lopez Low,
Charlie Ortiz, and Sara Zilkha*

Like Father, Like Son

Corey, Grade 5

My grandfather drove gigantic trucks
Full of Coca-Cola
From Queens to Texas.
My father drives gigantic trucks
Full of Coca-Cola
From Queens to California.
All they ever did was talk trucks.
Talk road snacks, sleep stops, routes.
Proud, brave, grateful men.
Happy to have the same job as the other.
Like father. Like son.

The day my Grandpa Bentley died
Was the saddest day of them all.
My dad drove us in his Dodge
Over the Brooklyn Bridge.
The funeral was Coca-Cola truck drivers
In black and white suits
Surrounding the coffin
My father's world was darkness.
Diamonds being broken.
The only thing I could do was
Say to my sad dad,
"Grandpa was proud of you."

I don't want to be a truck driver,
But I want to be like my dad.
A proud, brave, grateful man.

Sponsored by Corey Boyce Sr., Shequan Boyce, Carol Brown, Hetty Chang, Bill and Eileen Glaser, Evan Guillemín, Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan, Janice Murchison, Douglas Neuman, Charlie Ortiz, Barbara Silverman, Daniel Singer, Michael Tang, Philip Vasan, Natalie Walston, and Sara Zilkha

Masons

Daniel, Grade 6

Masons, like fathers,
Fill frames and make molds.
With their strong hands and tough arms,
They mix the concrete and
Watch it turn dry.

Fathers, like masons,
Lay the foundation for their families.
Generations grow over time,
Expanding and strengthening
Like concrete slabs.

My father is a mason, and
His father a mason, too.
Maybe one day,
I will be as strong as they.
I can be a strong mason,
Or a senator,
A teacher,
A police officer,
Or a painter.
Each of these paths paved by the
Laid by my father.

Bricks of bravery,
Bricks of hope,
Tactical bricks
To show how everything works.
Different paths,
Same bricks:
This is what my father taught me.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Rita Crotty, Juan Diaz, Evan Guillemin, Charlie Kaplan,
Charlie Ortiz, and Sara Zilkha*

Don't Go Easy

Edwin, Grade 8

Before every wrestling tournament,
My coach and I talk strategy,
About who will be there and
Whether or not I know them.
As my coach drops me off before the match,
He always tells me,
“Even if you know that person,
Don't go easy on them.”
And then he says, rolling his window up,
“Good luck.”

My coach always tells me
To have my hips up,
To have my chest up,
And to have my head up.
When I am on the mat,
I switch my mood from playful to mat madness.
Laced up in my shoes, I'm as fast as the Flash.
My opponent doesn't know which leg I'm going for.
Even if I know them, I don't go easy on them.

My coach always tells me
“You break mentally
Before you break physically,”
Or he tells me, “Don't give up on the third period -
I know you, buddy.”
My coach always tells me
To keep my head up after I lose a match.

My coach is my coach on the mat and off the mat.
He's my friend, but he doesn't go easy on me.

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The Richmond Family, and Sara Zilkha*

Kushid Khan

Eram, Grade 8

You ever slapped a buffalo?

In Bangladesh,
I slapped a water buffalo.
It wasn't the best decision of my life,
But at least I didn't die.
It started to chase me
While it was tied and
It knocked down a pillar and
Everyone came and asked me what
happened,
And I said, "You ever slapped a buffalo?"

They laughed.
No one showed that they were mad -
not even my uncle, and
It was his water buffalo.
I wondered if he was mad on the inside.

Buffalos aren't for slapping.
They're for milk.
And also to scare away the ducks, because:
1. Ducks are annoying and
2. They bully the chickens
So the buffalos look out for the little ones.

In Bangladesh,
Everyone drank water buffalo milk
Except for me.
I couldn't do it.
It looked like water if you
Dipped a paintbrush with grey paint into it.
It was chunky.
Think about it -
Chunky milk!

In Bangladesh,
Everyone compared me to my grandpa
Even though he died three days after I was born.
I wasn't even out of the hospital yet!
My aunts say that he was stubborn and
light-hearted like me
And my grandma says that I'm as tall and
strong as he was.
Everyone called me by my grandfather's name.
Everyone called me Kushid.

Kushid means happiness in Bengali.
My mom says that's what my grandfather
brought with him
Wherever he went.
He always had happiness in his suitcase.

So in Bangladesh, I learned that I don't
always act like the sharpest crayon in
the crayon box,
But I've also learned that
To become the buffalo that protects chickens,
You have to do more than just being
A hyperactive knucklehead American 14-year-old.
You have to be a kid that knows
The difference between
Living here and there
And you can be the
Kushid Khan everyone tells you you are

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Ingrid Wong, and Sara Zilkha*

Summer Nights

Evelyn, Grade 7

One summer night I sensed
A strange feeling in the room.
I walked rustling through the curtains,
I saw men, big as beasts,
Tall as the wall,
Just how she had said they would be.
All of her joy that made me happy,
All of the love she made me feel,
Could soon be taken away.

I saw her red, watery eyes
Pouring soft, tender tears.
I could feel her sadness, taste the cold,
But I looked into her eyes and found no regrets.
I complain about my “miserable” life.
She leaves when the moon glows in the darkness
And arrives when the sun is a burning orange.
She sleeps so little on these summer nights.

She came here for a better life, but
What if I’m preventing that?
All the regrets she might have had, the ones
I thought she had
Are instead in my eyes.
I didn’t wish to bother her, with her
Piles and piles of problems.
But now I wish to tell her,
Mami, no puedo hacer esto sola.
Mom, I can’t do this alone.

He is trying to build this evil wall,
He is trying to build me into something
I don’t want to become.
The border he made, the border she
crossed—
My difficulties can’t compare.
Mami, por favor perdóname.
Mom, please forgive me.
Forgive me for all the dark summer nights,
For all the soft tender tears you shouldn’t
have cried.
I need to face my wall,
I need to be the one who tears it down.

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Daniel Singer, Denise Spillane, Vincent Urban, Nona Ventry, and Sara Zilkha*

On Being Latina
Geraldine, Grade 8

On being a young Latina
You grow alongside
Expectations.
And then people ask you the question,
“Where are you from?”
I’m an American, a Mexican-American girl.
They stare at me up and down
As if I were a product.
My skin is as smooth as peaches.
“No, where are you really from?”
I tilt my head in confusion
As my tamarind hair falls to one side.
Can I speak Spanish?
Sí, puedo hablar español, but my R’s aren’t perfect.
Which country do I prefer?
If I can’t prefer both,
I’d rather have none.

People tend to tell me my skin is too white
For a Mexican,
That my culture is too Mexican
For an American.
But what makes an American?
What makes a Mexican?
How does one act a color?
No, I don’t have toasty, caramel skin.
No, my hair isn’t as dark as the outer shells of avocados.
No, my hips aren’t as wide as the
Thick,
Handmade baskets,
Filled with juicy mangos and spicy sweets,
And no, I don’t have vanilla skin.
No, my hair isn’t as blonde as amber waves of grain.
No, my eyes aren’t the grey blues of the
Flowing
Susquehanna.
Let’s get one thing straight:
My looks do not define who I am.
My race is not my identity.

continued on next page...

My skin is as smooth as my agility.
My hair is as straight as my dignity and posture.
The tamarind in my hair is as vibrant as my voice.
My eyes are as deep as my limitless actions,
And yet so clear, as my rights and abilities.
My tongue may struggle to roll R's
The way my *primos* lay out cards,
But it can spit out truths
About forgotten scars.
My hips aren't as wide as my
Self-esteem,
But they carry me as I walk with pride.

People hate on the skin our mothers
Gave us.
People hate what they can't define.
And I'm sorry I'm not sorry about not being
Your
Perfect Mexican Girl.
But I will love my smooth, peachy skin,
I will love my straight, tamarind hair,
I will love my small hips,
I will love my perfectly imperfect R's
If Frida Kahlo can paint without fear,
If Salma Hayek can put an end to silence,
And if Juana Inès Can fight religious dogma.
Imagine what I can do.
I will not let stereotypes shape who I am.
I will not let society tell me who I am.
I'll be the Latina everyone has warned you about.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Mayra Cajamarca, Spencer Campbell, Kristen Chae, Hetty Chang,
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Alison Pena, The Richmond Family, Daniel Singer, Dorman Steinberg, Carter Simonds, Philip Vasan,
Nona Ventry, Ingrid Wong, and Sara Zilkha*

Oaxaca Means to Listen

Giovanny, Grade 6

My mother and I speak different languages.
Our voices separate in *enyas* and *tildes*,
Our clasped hands slowly slip away
At the fingertips of her accent.

My mother sits in an English class,
So that she can answer the phone,
So that she can order her food,
So that she can understand
The announcements on the subway.

I know I can help my sister with math,
But I let my mom help her, because
That's a language she speaks
So my mom can add and subtract with her in Spanish,
And I listen to them work.

It is hard to translate for my mother,
There are words I don't know how to say.
But I relish listening to her Spanish,
The way she rolls her r's,
The way she inflects her voice,
The way she speaks from her heart.

I learned, the other day, that my mother
Wrote poetry when she lived in Oaxaca.
Oaxaca means to listen.
And so, I will listen for her voice,
The voice I haven't yet known.
The voice she wants me to meet.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Hetty Chang, Rita Crotty, Bill and Eileen Glaser, Roanne Goldfein,
Evan Guillemin, Peter Hildenbrand, Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan, Charlie Ortiz, Lindsey Utrata,
Nona Ventry, and Sara Zilkha*



“Self Portrait”
By Amy, Grade 8



"2018"
By Jorge, Grade 8



“Self Portrait”
By Katelyn, Grade 8



"Sunset"
By Camilla, Grade 7



"Samuru M. Shigami"
By Abigail, Grade 8



“My Girl with a Pearl Earring”
By Ana Rosa, Grade 7



“Self Portrait”
By Kristine, Grade 8



“Portrait with Geraldine”
By Sarah, Grade 8

All She Needs

Gracia, Grade 7

All she needs is a place to breathe
Like a flower in a garden.
Where there isn't a border dividing her family.
Knowing that she had a bud to give birth to
Giving her a name *para darle gracias a diosito*,
Giving thanks to God.

All she needs is a place to breathe
Where she can be a bright flower
Where she can fight *por lo que ella quiere*,
Where there won't be problems to worry about.
Where she knows that she will be safe with her petals,
Tied together like a bright bouquet.

All she needs is a place to breathe,
Where she will forget the past.
Cuando cruzó conmigo a los tres meses
When she crossed with me at three months old
And left behind her other stems in Mexico,
Squished beneath a truck driver's knees
Holding onto me tightly,
No place to breathe.
Knowing that her dreams
One day
Would come true.

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Global Citizen

Heriberto, Grade 8

What papers does it take
To make a person a
Global citizen?

What passport, what visa
What special stamp do you need
To get that honor?

How many borders
Must you have crossed?
And how many times?
And how often must you tell the story
To your fearfully proud children?

Is it enough
To have crossed the same border twice
On foot and in stealth?
Is it enough to believe they
Will kill you if you don't move,
But you can't be completely sure
Since they're shouting in English,
A language you don't understand?

Is it enough to think
You have lost your son - my brother
In the middle of the desert
The sun boiling over you both,
Yelling at him to run
When they tell you to stop?

Is it enough for your tears to come down like
The waterfalls in Mexico
When you finally make it here?
Or must you endure more?
When will it be
Enough?

When my mom tells me her stories,
I know that she and all other immigrants
Are truly global citizens
And they
Have had
Enough.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Mayra Cajamarca, Evan Guillemin, Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan,
Sarah Lopez Low, Inga Masjule, Charlie Ortiz, Dorman Steinberg, Ingrid Wong, and Sara Zilkha*

Why Steal Our Dreams?

Itzel, Grade 7

Behind every child is a dream.

We came to this nation
Because of our parents.
They were looking for a better future.
And with the passage of time,
We drew our dreams here.
Instead of giving them up,
Crumpling them like a piece of paper.

Our mothers and fathers sacrificed
To get us to this unfamiliar country
And we adapted to this new reality.
We learned a new language,
Managed a foreign currency,
And here we are:
Studying to become lawyers, doctors, and
teachers.
And yet we can still hear the people
Screaming in silence
To be heard
To be freed from the oppression.

Every day we improve this nation that is now ours.
Fulfilling the promise of Emma Lazarus.

Today I ask the president
Why do you threaten the future of
young people?
Why expel them from this place?
We do not defile this land,
We define it.
Let's join forces!
Do not destroy our dreams!
We have strong beating hearts,
We are brave.
We will dare
To find a solution.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Kristen Chae, Lindsay Deraris, Evan Guillemin, Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan,
Sarah Lopez Low, Michael Macrides, Charlie Ortiz, Lindsey Utrata, and Sara Zilkha*

Why I Write Poetry

Jaden, Grade 7

I write poetry because
A poem is like a cake,
It gets better
With each layer.
Because writing too much is better than
Talking too much.

I write poetry so I can make statements like this:
People who don't like chocolate have
No soul.
Because you can use words like *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*
To describe something amazing.
Because poetry is *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*.

Because I'm pretty sure I don't have a line
Pattern here.
Because I didn't add I write poetry to the first
Line of this stanza
Because it didn't seem to fit.
Because you don't think about writing,
But you think when you write.
Because I can make this sentence go on, and on,
And on, and on, and on, and people will say "How creative,"
Even though normally that's terrible grammar.

I write poetry because even though roses are red,
Violets are violet.
That's why they're called "violets."
Because we read a poem about a guy who loves pot roast.
If pot roast is your only joy,
You need to reevaluate your life choices.
Because you can play with words, that's why
They call it "word play."

I write poetry because
Not every poet has to be
Edgar Allen Poe.
I write poetry because
Every kind of voice
Needs to be heard.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Hetty Chang, Lindsay Deraris,
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Paper Cut

Jaell, Grade 6

I know things about slaves.
I know it in my blood.
In my blood there are
Slaves working all day
In the blistering sun
And in the arctic cold,
And nights plagued
By vile antagonists.

My blood is your blood,
You, my mothers, grandmothers and aunts.
All the way back is your blood,
You who got whipped and beaten,
You whose dark skin was pressed
Beneath alabaster weight.

So my blood is his blood, too.
He who treated little girls like toys.
He who lacks true virtue.
But you, you who tore through those furious
And all-consuming nights like bullets,
You are my beautiful blood,
You are my ravishing people.

When I learn about what you endured,
My mind goes blank like an unused,
Sharp-edged piece of paper.
And when I cut my finger on its whiteness,
The blood bleeds brighter than my skin.
I will not bleed for them.

*Sponsored by Anonymous, Carol Brown, Rita Crotty, Evan Guillemin, Tonia Kaminsky, Charlie Kaplan,
Charlie Ortiz, The Richmond Family, Daniel Singer, and Sara Zilkha*

Stray

Jeylisse, Grade 5

If I could,
I would,
Save the stray cats in my yard.
They are important.
They did not choose their lonely life,
But they accept it.
They do not know the feeling of sitting on a human lap,
A warm, soft hand stroking under their chin,
An endless bowl of food,
A beautiful leather couch, a fluffy blanket,
Home.

I check on them out my window.
I worry about them in snow, rain, cold.
I worry mean people will hurt them.
People who say they are smelly and evil and treat them like trash.
I know they are just terrified.
The stars do not shine on them,
But instead cry for them, dripping into a bucket of sorrow.
But I think they are amazing!
I admire them and how strong they are.

Each their own character.
The black one, greedy.
The gray one, afraid.
The mother, the watcher.
The tuxedo, the protector.
All of them bony and wide eyed.

I want to be the one who shines a crack of light
Into their dark nights.
I want them to know I see them,
If they need help I'm there.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown,
Evan Guillemín, Tonia Kaminsky,
Charlie Kaplan, Janice Murchison,
Charlie Ortiz, and Sara Zilkha*

She Was In Love

Kelly, Grade 8

She didn't have to show any tears,
But when she did shed tears,
Her own fingers would wipe them off her cheek.
Her own tears dried on her own fingertips.

She lived in fear.
She didn't have a hand to hold,
And her fears started taking over.

She was in love with eyes that caused her pain
Those eyes that sparkled for everything
But her.

She was in love with the fire
She was living through.
She was in love and didn't let go.
She was in love with the silence
She forced herself to have.

And when she was in love,
She asked to get out.
Nobody helped her,
So she had to be her own hero.

And once she started raising the love of her life
The love she felt for pain and mistakes disappeared.
She realized she was falling in love differently.
She fell in love with letting go
And the memories she had hit the floor and
Slowly started dissolving.

She fell in love with change.
She fell in love with forgiveness
But she never fell in love with pain again.

Sponsored by Carol Brown, Melissa Garza, Bill and Eileen Glaser, Roanne Goldfein, Evan Guillemin, Stephanie Guest, Charlie Kaplan, Janice Murchison, Charlie Ortiz, Michael Tang, and Sara Zilkha

Lost Cities

Kristine, Grade 8

You can't get good *cuy* in Nueva York.
And even if you could, it'd be too expensive.
I love to eat it in Peru, though.
You can steam it,
Grill it,
Bake it in the oven
Or make it extra crispy.
I prefer crispy,
The brown skin cooked to perfection.
If you haven't tried *cuy*, then you're missing out.
And by the way, if you don't know what *cuy* is, let me translate it for you.
It's guinea pig.
It might sound weird, but don't judge.
It's *delicious*.

I know I am American
Because I was born in the United States.
But I am also Peruvian
Even though I spent most of my time here.
The memory of home has faded
And worn out as if it was tired
Of constantly being on my mind.

My parents look at Peru with longing eyes
As wide as mine get when my mouth dreams of *cuy*
When my ears twitch with the mention of Machu Picchu.
They never wanted to leave,
But they did it for us.

continued on next page...

I love it when we listen to our music.
The songs full of emotion
En inglés y español.
Sometimes we play songs from Peru
The sad huaynos from the mountains
The passionate vibrations
Crooning, bellowing the words:
“Lejos de ti.”
Far from you.
Our food writes our culture
Our songs paint our stories.
Together, we decide the paths we take
Which make us who we are.

I have two cultures, two homes
Because of you, my parents.
You left your home, our home to come here.
You didn't know how different life would be,
But still, you took the path.
And you have given me a path back,
To the *tienda de mi abuela*,
My grandmother's store,
To my *primos, primas, tíos, tías*,
All surrounding me with smiles.
Reminding me that I haven't changed.
I am still that child who grew up
With two cultures,
Not afraid to show my Peruvian side with everyone, everywhere.
Because although New York City has almost everything, it doesn't have good *cuy*.
It *doesn't* have magical mountains holding lost cities.

Sponsored by Carol Brown, Evan Guillemin, Charlie Kaplan, Inga Masjule, Charlie Ortiz, and Sara Zilkha

Same Stars Somewhere

Marlon, Grade 5

I know my mom is not a perfect person.
But I still wish she would visit me.
And I wish I didn't wish it,
Because it makes my dad sad,
Because it's hard to miss and miss a
person,
Because it's hard to wish and wish for
what you cannot control.
There is a video of her holding baby me,
Dancing to Mexican music.
I haven't watched it in a while.
Everyone is too busy to sit around
thinking about the past.

The home in my heart is Harlem.
The home in my mom's heart is Mexico.
But we are in her heart too.
Her home could be with us,
But she stays there.
Obstacles keep us apart.
Her health, not enough money, the border.
Something always stops her,
From visiting when she says she will.

When we lived together,
We always looked at the stars.
They twinkle bright in dark Mexico.
They open your imagination, teach
you things.
I always felt happy standing quietly
in the night
With my mom.
Before we separated, she said,
The stars will keep us connected.
But it's hard for me to see them here.
The city is too bright.

When I walk down the crowded
streets alone,
I look beneath my feet
And try to find sparkles in the pavement.
I try to imagine the stars,
And I wish my mom's face
Would emerge out ahead.

*Sponsored by Laura Baker-Finch, Carol Brown, Hetty Chang, Sara Ciabocchi, Melissa Garza,
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The Tree Outside

Miguel, Grade 5

There is a tree outside my home.
It is small but strong.
It grows between its
Cement prison blocks.
I know it will survive more than
A thousand years.

In the wind, I see the tree
With its crooked branches
Dancing in the wind.
They greet me and wave hello
Whenever I go by.

The tree remains tall and regal despite
The plastic bags tangled in between its leaves.
It still grows despite the passing parade of smokers.

No matter the environment
The tree persists.
The tree remains strong.
The tree outside my home.

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and Sara Zilkha*

Our Island, Our World

Ryana, Grade 8

Tourists come from all over the world
Just to visit our cruel and beautiful island.

In Jamaica,
We cheer Usain Bolt at the Olympics and
Proudly say, "He's old, but
Still got his speed."
We move from Halfway Tree
To Spanishtown, and
Stop to eat
Ackee and saltfish.

The gardens in front of the house
Where I helped my grandparents.
We'd water our tomatoes and
Peppers to eat and the
Sunflowers
That stretched high to the sky
To bring joy to our day.

It is the mango trees
That men would climb
To hide from the bullets
That peppered the sky
As my cousin and I played outside.

The black and yellow
Ackee that can kill you
If not cooked right.
The days that my grandfather lived
in happiness.
I remember we would
Go to the river
Or just simply
Go to the store together.
Now he can barely walk
With that bag attached to his stomach and
I am so, so far away
From both him and my island.

Cruise ships line Montego Bay.
While back on Morgan Lane,
We change out of our school kits
To run the hill.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Evan Guillemin, Charlie Kaplan, Charlie Ortiz, The Richmond Family,
Denise Spillane, Abigail Young, and Sara Zilkha*

In Seclusion I Rest

Sarah, Grade 8

From the singing
Swaying mango trees in Puerto Rico

From the clear blue
Lively ocean of the Dominican Republic

From the footsteps
Of my ancestors
Who were tied down
Chained up

Who found hope
And took comfort
In the glistening and gleaming
Stars in the sky
That gave them faith

Courage to dream
Beyond those mango trees
Or that ocean
To a better place
A place where I would thrive

I am not one or the other
I am a beautifully tragic mixture
Of love
Loss
And legacies
Of those who came before

My skin is a map that shows
Where we've been
My words are reminders
Of who we are

Sometimes, I feel weighed down
by responsibility
The hopes of those who came before me
on my back
Their dreams for the future on my shoulders
But every so often
I get tired

In seclusion
I rest

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Bill and Eileen Glaser, Evan Guillemin, Charlie Kaplan, Charlie Ortiz,
Sharon Smith, Denise Spillane, Lindsey Utrata, and Sara Zilkha*

Seven Small Brown Clay Pots

Shelby, Grade 8

Our home may be small, but it has space.
Each room has its own personality.
It tells a story.

The kitchen is where everyone goes.
It's the first room when you walk in the door.
My mom painted the walls bright yellow,
And from these cheerful walls hang
From invisible threads
Seven small brown clay pots,
Handmade by a relative in Mexico.
There's one for all seven of us who have lived here.
We place our treasured objects inside.

The bedroom is the sunniest dark room in the house.
Its walls are grey, and the room turns to dark when we close the shades.
But in the mornings when my mom wakes up early and
Turns the stick to move the hard fabric up, up, up,
The sun shines so bright I wish I never slept in that room.
The rooms holds memories of board games with my siblings.
My brother and sister have since left home,
But their clay pots still hang from the kitchen wall,
Waiting for them.

The living room is my uncles' room.
It's the best room in the house - in my opinion -
Because when my uncles are working,
Thirteen hour days, six days a week,
I stay there, sleeping or drawing.
It is also the quietest room.
In the quiet, I think of the secret items I have hidden inside
My own clay pot that hangs from the kitchen wall.

Our home may be small, but it has space.
In the summer I can hear the kids in the park screaming and playing.
In the winter, it gets cold and lonely.
But always, my family and I find a way to spend time together
In our small, loving home that hangs from the wall of the large, loud city.

*Sponsored by
Carol Brown,
Evan Guillemin,
Charlie Kaplan,
Charlie Ortiz,
The Richmond
Family, and
Sara Zilkha*

Wrestling

Vanessa, Grade 7

I've wrestled with bravery.
I've strived to make my family proud.
I've fought until the whistle blew.
I've bled until there was nothing left.

I've cried with tears of courage.
I've grappled with what moves to make.

I've tried to make the best grades.
I've beat on my head against the wall,
I've failed to find the right answers.

I've cried when friends turned their backs on me.
I've struggled to remember not to do the same.
I've tried to hide myself away.
I've tried to find myself.

But

I've never run from my opponent.
I've always had to face my fears.
I've stayed strong and stood tall.
I've kept my head up.

Day after day
I've staggered back to the mat
Fallen to my knees
Sweat pouring from my face,
Blood streaking down my cheek,
Ready for another fight.

Holding My Heart

Yesenia, Grade 8

When I was 8 my grandfather had to
Hold a rope around the horse
And I would ride the gorgeous creature.
He kept me safe.
I felt bad because he walked and
I just sat there, him and the horse
Doing all the work, as if I was the queen and they were the servants.
We went from pueblo to pueblo.
When the sun would set, we'd still be out.
Sometimes we'd climb a hill to get a better glimpse of the sun tucking itself to bed.

When I was 11 I rode alone for the first time.
I made the horse run, felt the movement of its body,
Its milk chocolate coat with the small strip of white.
The wild wind blew in my hair.
It ran fast, and my body jolted up and down.
I was uncomfortable. I turned back.
But when my grandpa saw me, he had "happy" written all over his face.
I hadn't seen his face like that since my grandma got sick.
Even his teeth were showing.
I had forgotten that smile.

It's more than horses at *el rancho*.
When I arrive in the sweltering summer,
I'm greeted by fluffy rabbits,
The chickens that leave their feathers everywhere,
And the bull my father used to ride.
But I'm no longer greeted by my grandfather.

Without him, *el rancho* is a ghost town to my eyes.
But in my heart I will always remember the way he held the rope,
The sunsets we shared together.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Evan Guillemin, Charlie Kaplan, Charlie Ortiz, The Richmond Family,
and Sara Zilkha*

Piece by Piece

Yuritz, Grade 5

I am an only child.
I spend a lot of time alone,
Putting together puzzles.
I spread out the pieces,
Like an explosion of cardboard confetti.
I search for the four corners,
For all the edges.
Puzzling, puzzling, puzzling.
It's like reuniting a family.
Putting the pieces of a story together.
Making order from disorder.

First the border.
Calm and satisfying to find a frame.
Then I sort by color.
My mom interrupts me with a chore to do.
I'm so mad to leave my unfinished work.
I rush back.
I block out my noisy neighbor, the
city streets, the banging radiators.

At peace with my puzzle.
Piece by piece.

There are many puzzles in my life.
Why I've had to move seven times in ten years.
How to help my parents with their worries.
Why I get headaches,
How to choose a best friend.
What book will I read next?
What will happen to me in my life?
How to be at the right place at the right time,
And what does that even mean?!

Piece by piece, like a puzzle.
My meditation,
Sorting and sifting and putting things in
their place.
One piece is confusing
But all the pieces together are inspiring!
Puzzling, puzzling, puzzling.
Finding beautiful order
From beautiful disorder.

*Sponsored by Carol Brown, Evan Guillemain, Martin Joffe, Tonia Kaminsky, Charlie Kaplan, Sarah Lopez Low,
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