

# INK 2017



The East Harlem School  
A T E X O D U S H O U S E

Artwork featured in this magazine was created in the 2016-2017 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.



Cover Art: Joshua, Grade 8, "Self Portrait"  
Back Cover: Julisa, Grade 5, "Sun Night"

# INK 2017

A Student Literary Arts Magazine



By: Jaell, Grade 5, "Line Contour of the Hands"

**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 actions, 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.



## “Poetry is about manner as much as it is about matter.”

From Armitage’s preface to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

The poetic enterprise on 103rd Street imbues all of our work. Every day we ask our students to engage the world, words, and themselves with the hard gaze of disciplined inquiry – and we demand that hard gaze be softened by a love and awe for what they examine. This process occurs in the mathematics classroom, the science lab, and on the soccer pitch.

With poetry specifically, our students closely observe their own interior and our shared exterior worlds – the **matter**. Then students, while learning the templates and structures of great poetry, carefully craft language and develop dynamic oratory – the **manner** of expression. With matter and manner in balance, students seek to move themselves and others to active empathy, deep understanding, laughter, tears, and hope.

Ivan M. Hageman  
Head of School



Photo credit: Laura Massa/Michael Priest Photograph

# “The Slam is what we do.”



Student poets with Slam Judges Perla Figuereo, Rupert Friend, Aimee Mullins, James Waterston, Jane Foley Fried, and MC Jordin Ruderman at the 2017 Spring Poetry Slam on April 27, 2017 at B.B. King Blues Club & Grill.

Photo credit: Laura Massa/Michael Priest Photography

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## Honor This Name

Alexander, Grade 5

As the plane lifts into the sky,  
I became Alexander.  
A name that is rusty and hard, but strong.  
You have to be strong, to start out in a  
new country.

Alejandro was my great grandfather.  
Alejandro is the sound  
Of my grandmother's voice,  
Calling me to pick coffee beans.  
It is the bright green hills,  
It is a boy riding  
On top of the logs  
Piled on a donkey's back.  
Alejandro was curious.  
His knees were always skinned.  
Alejandro hardly ever went inside.

Alexander—Alex—is a New York City kid.  
He rides on the buses, the trains,  
He lives in a too-small apartment.  
He stops for delicious doughnuts  
On the way home from soccer.  
He scores goals, high fives his friends.  
Alexander is who the teachers call on in class.  
Alexander is even what my parents call me now,  
Unless I am being scolded.  
Then Alejandro makes a visit.

I am proud to be Alexander.  
Proud to be American.  
I am proud to be Alejandro.  
Proud to be Mexican.  
Both names mean "Protector of Men."  
And I will honor this name.

*Sponsored by Angelina Vieira Barocas, Dawn & Andy Eig, Charlie Kaplan, Hali McClelland,  
Lorre Snyder, Philip & Tina Vasan, and Maia Wechsler*

## Coming Home

Ana Rosa, Grade 6

As I come home from school,  
My mother prepares her tea.  
Her spoon clinks on the side  
Of her mug after she slides

The hissing kettle off the heat.  
She sits on her brown,  
Night sky couch  
To rest her feet and wait.

She waits for me to turn the door's knob  
To tell her what I have done at school.  
To show her what she has made in me.

We live above a grocery store,  
Where people brew and stew.  
I pass the store and hear the bell  
Jingle as customers leave with their plastic bags.

Upstairs, her sandy-colored skin  
Mixes with the warmth of her soft-light  
Green tea made from leaves  
That touched the sun  
To grow.

I love my mother  
With her sandy-colored skin  
And eyes that match  
Her green, warm tea.

She huddles it in her fists,  
Legs curled under her.  
But when the knob turns,  
She'll make me feel loved,  
Warm and joyful,  
Cupped in her arms,  
Once the knob turns.

## Here

Andre, Grade 4

Every morning Daddy takes me here  
To this beautiful building filled with cheer.  
We leave early, so on the train we sleep,  
Then I start math, and he goes to sweep.

Daddy likes to take me to cut my poufy hair,  
Or trim it at home, either way he's always there,  
And after we have the same new look  
He'll stay with me and read my book.

Daddy takes me to the park on Saturdays  
In the heat of summer haze  
Playing games or sometimes just a chase  
Anything with him puts this smile on my face.

Daddy makes sure to always be near  
If I'm feeling down or shedding a tear,  
With a joke or a nudge  
I think he gives the best hugs.

This morning my Daddy took me here  
To this beautiful building filled with cheer.  
We left early and fell asleep on the PATH,  
Then he went to sweep, and I started math.

*Sponsored by Jennifer Feierman & William de Lannoy, James & Lisa Freedman,  
Charlie Kaplan, Ellen Masseur, and Philip & Tina Vasan*

## One Last Envelope

Ashly, Grade 6

I'd watch her lick the envelopes,  
Sweet and bitter glue on her tongue.  
She'd peel the stamps off one by one.  
American flags on tattered corners,  
Sending Christmas cash to Mexico.

Every month, more envelopes,  
Western Union Moneygrams.  
Lick, peel, stick, stamp.  
Liberty Bells on leftover pink envelopes,  
Sending Valentine's cash to Mexico.

I wish that I could fold  
Myself into an envelope,  
To bring Grandma pennies myself.  
Fold up my legs and crease my arms,  
Stamp on my hand to send me to Mexico.

But Mom was nervous to send us there.  
She wouldn't let us go alone,  
She wouldn't let us take a plane,  
And she didn't have the right stamps  
To send herself to Mexico.

On a Sunday, Mom was sweeping  
In the kitchen, latest envelope  
By the door, ready to be sent.  
But then, Uncle called to tell her  
Grandma died.  
She cried. And cried. And cried.

Now, seventy-five sparkling American dollars  
Sit still unsent. That money never spent.  
The envelope gathers dust  
On the table by the door.  
We don't send envelopes anymore.

*Sponsored by Abigail Browarsky, Dawn & Andy Eig, Peter Hildenbrand, Charlie Kaplan, Jean Rolphe,  
Cindy Ruskin, and Philip & Tina Vasan*

## Society's Definitions

Brianna, Grade 8

Brown, brittle, broken  
Holding nothing but lackadaisical limbs  
Swinging side to side in the summer breeze  
Yet staying still as the dreamless sky goes by

Confined by the chains  
Telling us to stay in our lanes  
"Separate but equal" is what they say

Nowadays we are confined  
By the hoods we wear  
Telling the Zimmermans we're hoodlums

Unjust laws, a wall or being detained  
The same thing separates us no matter the sort  
In order to be free of  
The definitions  
We must change the conditions  
Instilled in us

To rise above the fountains of hate  
That Trumps love  
We must write our own fate

We are black but we are not broken  
We will not stay still  
We will not be confined by anyone's chains  
With no one holding us back  
No one will hold us back!

*Sponsored by Angelina Vieira Barocas, Dawn & Andy Eig, Peter Hildenbrand, Tonia Kaminsky, Charlie Kaplan, The Leonhart Family, Ellen Masseur, Jean Rolphe, Pegeen & David Rubinstein, Dan Singer, Paul Ullman, Philip & Tina Vasan, Geraldine & Austin Walker, and Ingrid Wong & Russel DeLaCour*

## **Below My Dream Rests**

Brittany, Grade 8

My dream rests below but  
Above the world my dream stands.

I was only 7 years old when she told me,  
Nuh cry because yuh yeye a di ongle way  
yuh yeye dem cah tak wen yuh mout cah tak.  
Do not cry because your eyes are the only way.  
Your eyes can talk when your mouth cannot.

My mother ran to America for her kids -  
Not for her but for us.  
She ran through the heartbreaks and  
She swam through her tears.  
My mother ran with bravery and  
Most of all she ran with love.

But when I run,  
I run leaving all the losses and tears behind.  
I run with my knees up,  
Elbows in,  
Back straight and head up.  
Because the most important key to my dream is my form.

My dream rests below but  
Above the world my dream stands.

*Sponsored by Kathleen Alexander, Angelina Vieira Barocas, Carol Brown, David Brown, Dawn & Andy Eig, Jennifer Feerman & William de Lannoy, Peter Hildenbrand, Tonia Kaminsky, Charlie Kaplan, Bethia Liu, Brittany Maltby, Hali McClelland, Diana McKeage, Pegeen & David Rubinstein, Dan Singer, Barbara & David Solit, Paul Ullman, Bronson van Wyck, and Philip & Tina Vasan*

## Flower Power

Bryan, Grade 5

Twelve people,  
One dog,  
One bathroom,  
One red flower,  
Watching everyone wait in line for the shower.

Flowers are expensive, my mother says.  
But one a week, we can afford.  
Always on the kitchen table,  
Always red,  
Always watching us all get fed.

I call it the dazzling, gleaming,  
Guardian of the loud house.  
That red flower inspires us to care for our home.  
It seems wrong,  
For the beautiful being,  
To be surrounded by mess.  
Clean, she tells us, clean, clean clean.  
Not to listen, would be mean.

So even though,  
There are twelve people,  
One dog,  
And only one bathroom,  
Our home is spic-and-span,  
Which must have been my mother's flower-power-plan.

*Sponsored by David Aguirre, Angelina Vieira Barocas, Rita Crotty, Dawn & Andy Eig,  
James & Lisa Freedman, Julie Gamboa, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Kelly Hammond, Juan P. Hernandez,  
Charlie Kaplan, Lisa Knowlton, The Leonhart Family, Ellen Massen, Jean Rolphe,  
Pegeen & David Rubinstein, Cindy Ruskin, Carter & Talbott Simonds, Dan Singer, Edward Skounk,  
Barbara & David Solit, Bronson van Wyck, Philip & Tina Vasan, and Geraldine & Austin Walker,  
Ingrid Wong & Russel DeLaCour*

## **Infinity Blue**

Camilla, Grade 6

My father crossed a wire fence.  
In an unmarked van, hushed in shadows,  
He curved his legs beneath his hips  
And did not breathe for miles.

My father crossed a wire fence.  
He quietly huddled in that crumbled car.  
They made him walk the last few miles,  
And when he crossed, he certainly smiled.

But on the other side of the wire fence,  
The smile soon faded.  
Trapped in America, with no one by his side.  
No going back, and no goodbyes.

My father crossed a wire fence,  
Whose wires wrapped around him every day,  
Because in this land of contradiction,  
Freedom is just a word on parchment.

But this time, we all passed over the wire fence in a plane  
And returned to the land of tall green mountains,  
The land of sweet bitter maracuya cracked and sprinkled with salt,  
The land of the tropical days and cool dark nights.

We alighted from the infinity blue sky  
To a room full of bright smiles  
To the land on the other side of the wire fence.  
My father will not have to cross a wire fence twice.

## Our Beauty

Camille, Grade 8

The past:

The history that defines us all.

Our beauty

Was suppressed.

Our eyes

Made blue.

Our hair

Made blonde

And straight.

I'd sit silently

Doubting my actions

And filled with self-hate.

The melodies

Kept me strong,

When I had nothing

To keep me going.

Because to them

We were never

Beautiful

Anyway.

The present:

A momentary gift,

That can so easily slip away.

In this transition

From middle school

To high school.

My mom

Has constantly

Reminded me to,

"Sit up straight

Make eye contact

And smile."

Because those

Who are higher up

Will put you

13

D

O

W

N.

Because I am

Black.

Because I am

A young woman.

Because MY

Intelligence

Poses a threat.

The future:

The mystery of tomorrow,

&

The hope for change.

Soon,

We will fight

Together

To preserve

Our beauty.

To make

Our voice

Heard.

To sing

Our song.

And if

You can see the

Beauty

I hope

You will sing

Along.

*Sponsored by Angelina Vieira Barocas, David Brown,  
James & Lisa Freedman, Martin Joffe, Tonia Kaminsky,  
Charlie Kaplan, The Leonhart Family, Brittany Maltby,  
Hali McClelland, Dan Singer, and Edward Skouk*

## Lessons from Mexico

Carlos, Grade 5

“Always pick the limes  
Closest to the bottom of the tree,” Grandpa says.  
“Chop the wood at a 130 degree angle  
Or you’ll hurt yourself, Carlitos!”  
“To grab a hen, be very quiet,  
Make sure the hen is alone,  
And swoop at its legs!”  
One hundred lessons are thrown at me -  
Trips to Mexico are like trips to college lectures.  
Grandpa teaches me skills from his farm,  
My sharp eyes and ears teach me about society.

There’s so much to see in Mexico:  
Cacti, donkeys, hens, lizards, bats.  
But there’s more:  
There is the kid who can’t get a good education,  
The lady who has to sell ice cream just to get by,  
My uncle who struggles to care for cows ,  
And there’s my mom who had to care for her brother  
Before she was old enough to care for herself.

Struggle, struggle, struggle  
All around.  
But people have wonderful smiles on their faces  
And surprising kindness in their hearts.

On the New York City bus,  
Busy grownups push and shove for seats.  
Clean clothes, a nice family,  
Some even have a Ferrari.  
They have it all,  
All except for satisfied looks on their faces,  
And that seat on the bus that they so desperately need.

The Mexico that I know would  
teach them,  
And can teach us all,  
That it is so simple to see the  
best in life.

*Sponsored by Angelina Vieira  
Barocas, Dawn & Andy Eig,  
Bill & Eileen Glaser,  
Charlie Kaplan, Diana McKeage,  
Mark R. Philips, Roberts Capital  
Advisors, Jean Rolphe, Edward  
Skounk, Lorre Snyder,  
Paul Ullman, Philip & Tina Vasan,  
Maia Wechsler, and  
Denise Whitbeck*

## A Day Without Books

Catherine, Grade 5

What good is a day without books?  
Just school and eating,  
Just riding the train, brushing my teeth,  
feeding the dogs.

A day without books is a day of misery.  
It is listening to the squealing, screeching  
Stampede of siblings,  
With no escape into the pages  
That inspire my imagination.  
And without books,  
How would all those wild horses  
transform into  
Sleeping angels at night?

A day without books is a day  
without adventure!  
No trips to magic forests,  
No talking cats or mermaid mothers,  
No getting to read other people's diaries.

A day without books is a day that is dull.  
It is a day that my bathtub is simply  
a bathtub,  
Not a cozy, clothes-on reading spot.  
It is a day that I am stuck in the city,  
Not walking through gardens with rich  
green leaves,  
Not picking bright red flowers,  
blooming, blooming,  
Not tasting honey dripping from  
bee hives on branches,  
Not taking time to appreciate  
The rays of sun that pour down,  
The way trees defend gardens.  
What good is a day without books?

A day without books  
Is a day with a dark tomorrow.  
A day without books is a small day.  
A day without lessons,  
That help you understand your world.

But a day full of books,  
A day full of reading—in my bathtub, on  
the subway, in my bed,  
Is a day of adventure,  
A day when all of my ideas are set free.  
A day full of books—a life full of books,  
Is a day—a life—  
Of joy!

*Sponsored by Elena Hurst, Charlie Kaplan, Lisa Knowlton, Ellen Massen, Carter & Talbott Simonds,  
Barbara & David Solit, and Philip & Tina Vasan*

## President Khan

Eram, Grade 7

Everyone calls me President Khan,  
Which makes me smile.

I used to say  
That if I were president  
Americans would get  
A different colored popsicle  
Every day of the week.  
Green apple Mondays,  
Lemon yellow Thursdays,  
Chocolate Sundays.

I used to say  
That if I were president  
Americans would get  
The car of their dreams,  
No taxes,  
And a small loan  
Of one million dollars.

But now I'm older,  
And now I know  
That wishing to be  
The free world's leader  
Is more than a kid's dream  
That might never come true.

So my platform has changed,  
My campaign promises new.

If I were president,  
Millions of hard-working people  
Would have more money  
Than the eight elites  
On Park Avenue.

If I were president,  
Countries like Russia and China  
Would be our allies,  
But can somebody tell me what to do  
About North Korea?

If I were president,  
Those who are tired and  
Poor and huddled in masses  
Would be free,  
Welcomed by the promise  
Of our city's torch.

I'll make sure we won't ever  
Have another president that  
Opens his arms to racism.  
I'll make sure we won't ever  
Have another president that  
Demoralizes immigrants.

So, remember my name,  
And don't give up hope.  
I'll be in the White House  
In just a few years.

I'm President Khan,  
And I approve this message.

*Sponsored by Angelina Vieira Barocas, David Brown,  
Dawn & Andy Eig, Jennifer Feierman & William de Lannoy,  
James & Lisa Freedman, Julie Gamboa, Marcia Gerlick,  
Bill & Eileen Glaser, Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan,  
The Leonhart Family, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Macrides,  
Brittany Maltby, Ellen Masseur, Hali McClelland, Daniel  
Ovelar, The Nangle Family, Roberts Capital Advisors, Corrine  
Rodriguez, Pegeen & David Rubinstein, Carter & Talbott  
Simonds, Dan Singer, Paul Ullman, Bronson van Wyck,  
Philip & Tina Vasan, and Geraldine & Austin Walker*



“Expressive Self Portrait Study”  
By Skylar, Grade 8



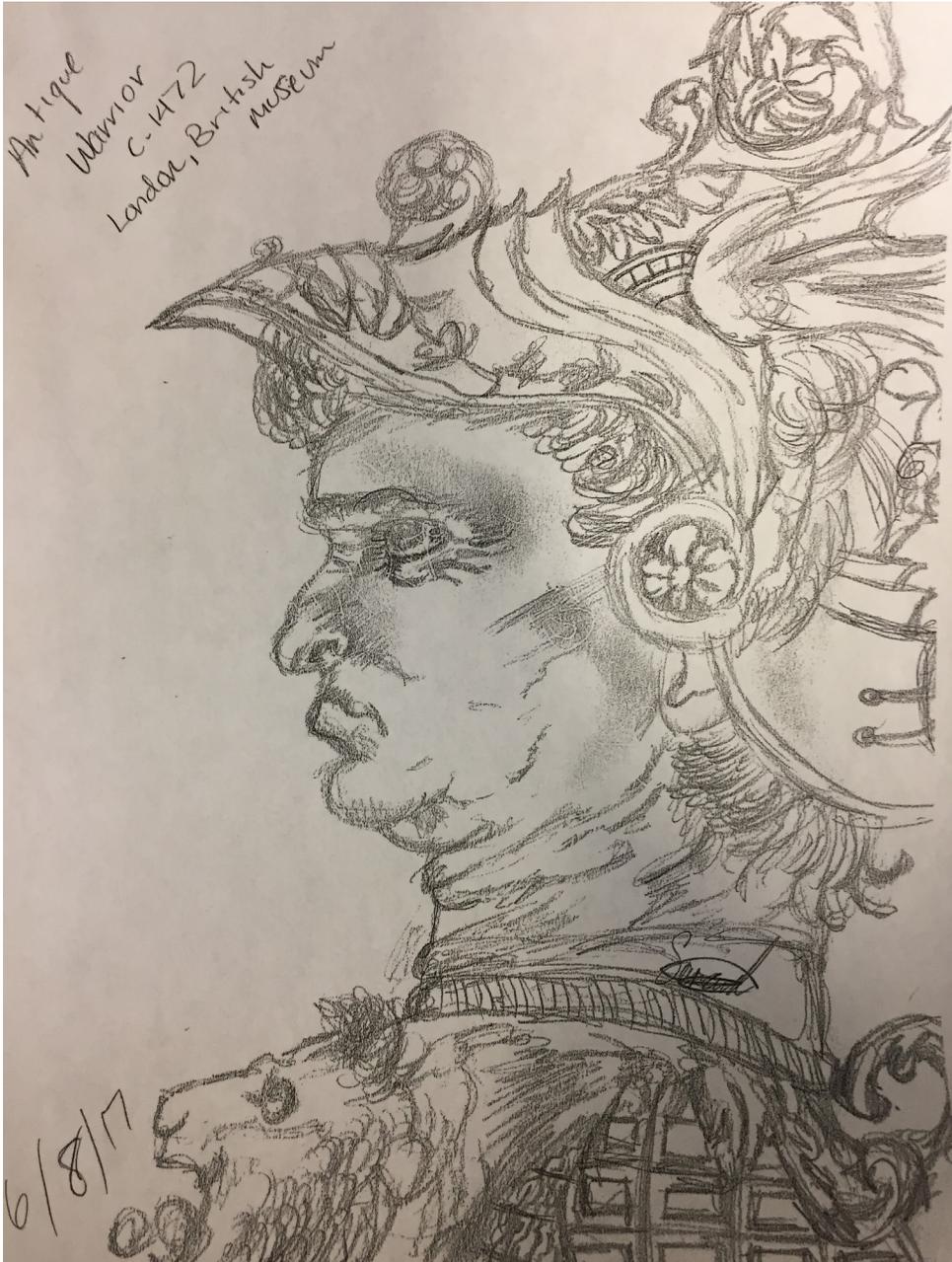
“Skeye Line”  
By Camilla, Grade 6



“Study of Cityscape”  
By Ericeliz, Grade 8



**“Portrait Study”**  
By Ashley M., Grade 8



“Antique Warrior”  
By Soraida, Grade 8



**“A Flower’s Day”**  
By Ericeliz, Grade 8

## and Flan

Ericeliz, Grade 8

Recipe for Harlem's Flan:

Go to a nameless street to  
Collect a  
Congregation of  
Milks bargained off the  
Old, fraying man on the corner with the  
Hearty smile, and his  
Equally ragged, yet cheery, cart.  
His homemade sign  
Sports the slogan,  
"Everything cold, we got," on an  
Old piece of  
Disintegrating cardboard.  
They grin and hand him the money owed  
to him through his sales.  
The twinkle reminds him of why he took  
this job so long ago,  
With his now long-gone wife,  
Six feet under-ground somewhere  
In the Caribbean.  
And then, of course, we paid him,  
Which he was just as grateful for.  
Climbing ten series of steps to get  
To the faded, green door they  
Call "home."

Keys jangle and the lock succumbs to  
the cold metal,  
A mix of tears and blood soon after  
drips into the sink,  
Far from the sweet cane sugar burning  
On the sauce pan.  
Far from reality too.  
A shudder from the oven and 45 minutes  
Blinking brightly on the clock,  
A mere few steps away from the kitchen  
A sudden sound discreetly announces  
The elegant arrival of some culture from  
some part of the world  
That now lays  
Respectfully on its salver.  
A flip of a dish allows the  
Caramel to drip onto its companion  
down below,  
A plateau of tempered  
And spun sugar,  
Scalded to  
Utter perfection.  
A neighbor stands in front of  
A faded, green door and delivers  
Two of two things:  
A heartwarming smile, and Flan.

*Sponsored by Kathleen Alexander, Carol Brown, Cesar Castro-Pou, Jennifer Feierman & William de Lannoy, Wendy Finley, James & Lisa Freedman, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Charlie Kaplan, Caroline O'Connell, Jean Rolphe, Paul Ullman, Philip & Tina Vasan, and Ingrid Wong & Russel DeLaCour*

## As He Scanned The Lines

Fernando, Grade 6

I read a book in English last night,  
The words written in black and white.  
Above the words, the gentle pencil of  
my father  
Sprinkles the sentences with Spanish.  
He's translating.

The freshly sharpened lead rubs smoothly  
From his graceful hand.  
He's teaching himself to understand.  
Fidgeting with his green mechanical pencil,  
Scratching his head as he reads and writes.  
In a spiral notebook,  
He lists the words he likes.

The pencil sits in his meaty hands.  
I've taught myself to understand  
How hard he works when I watch his  
sore hands  
From the stretched delivery bags.  
Sometimes I decipher the words for him.  
It feels strange to know so much that  
he doesn't.

Last night, I watched him huddled near  
the computer,  
And I heard his pencil scratch the faded,  
supple page.  
I saw his chest rise with gentle breathing  
As he scanned the lines.

Even though he's up the earliest,  
He kept the light on late last night.  
Under the lamp,  
He rested his stubbled chin on his palm.  
I could not tell if he was asleep,  
but I missed him already.  
I turned off the light with my own hand,  
And I try to understand.

*Sponsored by Juan Felipe Diaz, Jennifer Feierman & William de Lannoy, Bill & Eileen Glaser,  
Kelly Hammond, Peter Hildenbrand, Charlie Kaplan, Kevin Kelley, The Leonhart Family, Jean Rolphe,  
Dan Singer, Pegeen & David Rubinstein, and Ingrid Wong & Russel Delacour*

## Espero Por Mi Mama

Frida, Grade 6

I wait for my mom to come home.  
I don't see her that much,  
But I know she loves me with all her heart.  
I only see her in the morning  
So she can braid my hair.

I come home hoping my Mom is home,  
But no.  
When I hear a door open, I quietly listen,  
But no.  
I hear footsteps pitter patter in the hall,  
But no.  
I hear keys jingle in the lock next door,  
But no.  
It's only when I hear her song, loud and clear,  
That yes! She's here.

Sometimes, I'm already in bed.  
She has stayed late at work again  
To put Luna to sleep.  
Luna is the white girl,  
Named for the silver moon,  
And my mother has sung  
For her tonight instead,  
While I, her niña, put myself to bed.

She tiptoes back and gives me a kiss  
That I store away in my cheek.  
Papi has made dinner already,  
And left her a tin foiled plate.  
I hear her eat slowly, quietly humming,  
So I roll over, knowing she's home safe,  
And I wait for her  
To braid my hair in the morning.

*Sponsored by Angelina Vieira Barocas,  
Dawn & Andy Eig, Bill & Eileen Glaser,  
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Peter Hildenbrand, Charlie Kaplan,  
Ellen Masseur, Hali McClelland, Meaghen &  
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Carter & Talbott Simonds, Lorre Snyder, Philip &  
Tina Vasan, Ingrid Wong & Russel Delacour,  
and Juan David Gil Zuluaga*

## We Our Conversations

Geraldine, Grade 7

Now I know why he tells us,  
“Los quiero tanto.”  
Because we aren’t like perfection.  
Because he hopes that one day  
You will be a better man,  
Because we are everything he’s got  
Because this is the first time  
He’s experienced love,  
Because he wasn’t planning on becoming  
His father,  
Because he doesn’t want you to despise him  
As a father,  
Because he sacrificed for freedom  
So I could be a strong woman.  
Because he never thought he would meet  
With warmth,  
Because he never thought he would hold  
Two pieces of imperfection, the world,  
You and I, in his arms.

Now I know why his tears are silent  
Like our conversations with God at  
midnight.  
Because his hands ache in the kitchen  
While he cooks a rare meat in a poor pan  
Because he’s lost in a country  
Where people think it’s okay to play  
women like Pokémon,

Whose bodies will soon evolve.  
Because he doesn’t know how to cover  
your small ears,  
To stop a cowardly Duck from being able to  
Trump his wicked words into your ears,  
His hands bleeding,  
The words that will make you, a young boy,  
Lose innocence the moment you grow up,  
Lose respect for women.

Now I know why that was our last laugh  
When I was only eight years old,  
In the middle of a storm,  
Stranded in a bus stop.  
His hands hovering over me as  
The drops of pain punched his arms.  
He carried me home,  
Not letting me step into puddles of pain,  
The same puddles he stepped on.  
Because it was only me and him  
Against the world,  
Because he never thought he was able to  
raise me,  
Because he hoped that  
One day we’d get somewhere  
Because he knew that I would soon—  
That we would soon be—  
Something better than he is.  
But how will we become better than him,  
If he, himself is our definition of a father,  
If he himself is perfection?

*Sponsored by Angelina Vieira Barocas, David Brown, Dawn & Andy Eig, Marcia Gerlick, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Wendy Finley, Deborah Goldfrank & Justin Weider, Wilhelina Gutierrez, Juan P. Hernandez, Charlie Kaplan, Joseph Lacey, The Leonhart Family, Bethia Liu, Hali McClelland, The Nangle Family, Mark R. Philips, Marilena C. Reyes-Rodriguez, Jean Rolphe, Dan Singer, Barbara & David Solit, Bronson van Wyck, Sofia Vargas y Santiago Vargas, Philip & Tina Vasan, Geraldine & Austin Walker, and Ingrid Wong & Russel DeLaCour*

## Where These Two Lovers

Geralisse, Grade 8

The bold, strong man.  
The strong man who gave me his heart.  
That strong man was locked in the dark  
With walls so high and the air so dry  
And that man is a man who saw  
Only a tip of light.

This strong girl sits to remember.  
His strong arms once pushed me in my  
car-like stroller  
All around the park.  
The park that lays in the middle of the  
Wagner Projects  
Where these two lovers first met.  
The sun shone freely on our faces.  
My dad, my mom, my sister, my brother  
All of us together, all matching each other.  
Only the five of us.

I wonder if he regrets it.  
Does he regret the mistake  
That put him in those shoes?  
A place I dare not visit  
A place I can only imagine.  
Did he wear an orange suit?  
Or is that just on the screen?

The strong man.  
The strong man who I visited in my  
dreams.  
The dream showed him down.  
He had given up.  
I wake back to reality.  
I feel tears rolling down my eyes,  
Puffy like the clouds I watch  
Outside my window.

From the window,  
I see a new future.  
For the strong man and for this strong girl.  
The phone rings.

I answer to a voice that says,  
"Your dad is free, Geralisse."  
It is my aunt. My eyes fill with happiness.  
The tears roll their way back into my eyes.  
And one thing I now know,  
Being raised in Wagner Projects  
Doesn't mean life has to be spent  
Behind bold, dark bars.

## Can Avocados Climb Walls?

Gracia, Grade 6

The bumpy rocky skin of the avocados  
Protects the meaty insides and  
The soft round brown pit, smooth  
And perfect like *mi abuelita's* heart.  
Her working hands ache  
Each night, plucking the fruit from  
The trees in the cool dark breeze.  
The fruits pass from cracking limbs,  
To wrinkled hands, to hastily woven baskets  
And brown, vented packages.

Every morning, *mi abuelita*  
Wakes up early, wishing to sleep more.  
Wagon filled with fresh  
Brown-green avocados,  
Pulling them to the market  
To sell what she hadn't already sent away.  
You've probably eaten  
My *abuelita's* avocados  
At Chipotle.

But now, *mi abuelita* is not sure  
If avocados can climb walls.  
Are their branches long enough?  
Are their big brown seeds going to weigh  
them down?  
Is their ripe skin too thick or too dark?

Are they going down first?  
If her avocados can't climb walls,  
*Mi abuelita* will pull her old wagon  
over bumpy roads.  
But while you eat your dry  
burritos tonight,  
*Mi abuelita's* hands, her wagon,  
will not feel right.

*Sponsored by Rita Crotty, Deborah Goldfrank & Justin Weider, Peter Hildenbrand, Charlie Kaplan,  
Daniel Ovelar, and Denise Whitbeck*

## A Day in the Fields

Heriberto, Grade 7

The citrus scent of an orange is like  
Nature's perfume.  
It bursts when I peel it  
And warps me back to an open field,  
Walking in my muddy boots  
Through perfect rows of orange trees,  
Through hills of almonds as high as the  
mountains.

I help my aunt as she stoops to pick  
Vegetables from the ground,  
The plants crunch as she rips them  
Out of the dirt  
And sweat drips from the bright yellow sun,  
Beaming with heat like a furnace.  
I hear the hissing  
Of meat being cooked  
And see the tortillas warming  
On el comal.

Back in New York City,  
The news anchor is always telling me  
About a man who is not very  
Fond of immigrants.  
In the market on 116th Street,  
I see an orange and  
I pick it up.  
The smell has been there all along,  
And then I think about the person  
Who picked it,  
Who wants to live the American Dream  
Under the hot beaming sun.

And every day I as accomplish  
Something new  
Every goal, grade, or trophy,  
Will forever be dedicated  
To my people across the border and  
To those workers  
In the fields.

*Sponsored by Judith Chasin,  
Dawn & Andy Eig, James & Lisa Freedman,  
Charlie Kaplan, Pegeen & David Rubinstein,  
Cindy Ruskin, and Philip & Tina Vasan*

## Today They Shout!

Itzel, Grade 6

With tears in their eyes,  
They said goodbye to their families  
And to the land that saw them grow.  
Barely any places to hide except behind the spiky cactus.  
Now, in America, they hide behind vacuums,  
Behind stoves, in schools, and in gardens.

Except for today.  
Today they shout in silence,  
Because, today, immigrants are staying home:  
Empty desks, empty kitchens, empty streets,  
Empty flower shops.

Immigrants don't beg for money,  
They work hard enough for every penny.  
Shoulder to shoulder,  
They stand in solidarity and carry  
The courage that made them cross,  
And the strength that makes them stay.

Today, among the empty restaurants  
And empty shops, in museums with blank walls,  
Their absence will speak volumes.  
Their silence will be loudest of all.  
Because a day without immigrants  
Is the day this nation will fall.

*Sponsored by Angelina Vieira Barocas, Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan, The Leonhart Family, Maura A. Lyons,  
Nancy Morauetz, Pegeen & David Rubinstein, and Dan Singer*

## **Not Alone**

Jayda, Grade 5

Thank you, city,  
For welcoming me into your arms.  
I will forgive you for your bad breath,  
For your loud screams,  
Your starless skies,  
Because I love you.

City, your crowds comfort me,  
Because your people are good.  
Anyone can be happy here,  
Happy in their own skin,  
No matter their color, their religion, their job.  
City, you welcome all of us,  
Into your loving arms.  
That is why I adore you.

City, I love you the most at night.  
Windows lit up like fireflies,  
Never truly dark.  
Always someone else awake,  
One bright light shining.  
Peering out my window,  
I know that I am not alone.

## On the Other Side of the Window

Jelene, Grade 5

On the other side of the window is Manhattan.  
The sun is barely peeking through the gray sky,  
The clouds are crying.  
People use umbrellas to find a way to make it  
through the morning,  
But the sun's rays are still present.

On the other side of the window lies a deli,  
It asks for \$1 in exchange for chips or juice -  
40-60 grams of sugar,  
Not many grams of much else.

Next to the deli is a department store:  
A tight black dress with a soft pink floral pattern  
With a stunning necklace of black and silver  
Sewn onto it.  
The triangle pendent held up to the light  
Creates a sparkle  
I can almost hear a "ding."

On the other side of the window are grown  
men and women,  
Ripped clothes.  
Hopeless faces.  
"Spare change?"

The people on the other side mumble,  
"I have no money,"  
Avoiding eye contact.  
Some are wrapped in fur coats.  
Some carrying heavy Louis Vuitton wallets.

I wish I could add something to  
their cup.  
Tears stream down my face.  
I wish I had a Benjamin Franklin in  
my pocket.  
That would make their day.

On this side of the window is hope.

## Two Minutes Long

Katelyn, Grade 7

A hum of silence,  
A suspenseful clicking sound,  
That changes everything.

It's a call with two outcomes.  
The call where he tells me  
He's coming,  
Or where he explains  
Why he's not.  
But I don't listen  
I'm too struck  
By his words.

My mother warns me about  
That raspy voice  
That cuts in and out,  
That often says  
I'm too tired.  
I'll get you tomorrow.  
But I know and  
He knows  
That tomorrow will never come.

I smile at his words  
I sulk at his words  
Moving in slow motion  
Knowing that  
Next week  
There will be some hope  
Again.

I look for his name  
That name that brings me joy and misery,  
My father's name.

I try to smile,  
But inside I'm  
Too nervous

About a call that is only  
Two minutes long.

## The Unseen

Katherine, Grade 4

Even though I couldn't see  
In the back row of kindergarten,  
I wanted to keep hiding  
From letters on the board  
And from the truth:  
I needed glasses.

My mom told me to wear my glasses  
My big sister reminded me too  
Because without them,  
The words were hidden,  
The world unfamiliar and unseen.

Through the year, the frames of glass  
Opened a window to letters and stories,  
But then on the plane that summer to Peru  
I took them off,  
And kept the secret inside me,  
Like the glasses in their case.

As we wandered through the garden,  
Wondering about white flowers and  
weird plants,  
My glasses and my secret  
Hid from the heat.  
But my cousins found out,  
And begged for me to show them,  
Enseñamé, Enseñamé!  
And so I started to wear them  
At night when the light from candles  
Flickered without rhythm.

Now I'm so used to wearing my glasses,  
For reading and for fun,  
That when people make a request to see  
What I look like without them  
They say, "You don't look that different,"  
Puzzled about  
What I look like underneath.  
But the only puzzle I worry about  
Are the words and world I haven't yet seen.

## Is This a Poem?

Ke'amiais, Grade 7

Are my metaphors juicy grapes?  
Or shriveled raisins?  
Are my similes triumphant,  
Like a galloping mustang?  
Or are they as lost as a dog  
Who ran away from home?  
My allusions are tortured as Robert Frost  
When he decided which road to take.

Should this be a poem?

Are the words I choose as powerful  
As the north wind  
That howls and whistles?  
Or are they as soft as a breeze  
On a spring day?

Will this be a poem?

To be like a poet  
You must think like a poet.  
And my train of thought  
Is like a subway car,  
Flying into the station,  
Traveling at light speed,  
Through my mind and memories -  
It moves too fast.  
I can't grasp hold of any words,  
Any letters.

Is this a poem?

So maybe  
This should be a poem.  
Maybe it already is!

Maybe I have it in me  
To try  
A little poetry.

## Yes Don't Worry

Kelly, Grade 7

I lift up that spoon into my mouth  
That spoon full of lies  
That spoon full of hunger  
That spoon to his lips  
*No tengo hambre*  
He would say,  
I'm not hungry.

He lifts me up onto  
His rough hardworking shoulders.  
Up there, I can see the whole world,  
Full of hunger and thirst,  
Full of pain and happiness.

My brain  
Full of wonder  
Always asked  
Are we going to be a family forever?  
He would say  
Si no te procupes,  
Yes don't worry.

But  
We weren't that family  
He said we would be.  
We weren't that family  
He said to not worry about.  
He lied.

Those eyes,  
Those light brown eyes  
Looking into mine—  
Those eyes tell me  
He hasn't eaten all day.

He lies that he's not tired,  
When those bricks that are hard and harsh  
Are right on his shoulder,  
Day and night.  
It's like I'm those bricks.  
It's like I'm that pain.

Now I know  
His world was full of starvations,  
Full of sacrifices,  
Full of gratefulness.  
He showed me the world he met

He showed me that  
His lies are  
His love.

*Sponsored by Lauren D'Angelo, Dawn & Andy Eig, James & Lisa Freedman, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Charlie Kaplan, Mark R. Philips, Jean Rolphe, Edward Skounk, Dan Singer, Bronson van Wyck, and Philip & Tina Vasan*

## Thanks to You

Kristopher, Grade 8

Your words punch  
With fists of iron  
But you can't  
Hurt me now.

I am sheltered  
By walls and gates,  
By teachers and students,  
By friends and family.

By EHS,  
By wrestling,  
By people who call me Kris, Kristopher,  
And other nicknames too many to number.

They have protected me  
From you.  
Now I will protect them  
From everything.

Because of you,  
I found them.  
Because of them,  
I respect all people:

Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, Muslim,  
Gay, Straight, Bi, Trans,  
Young, Old, Female, Male,  
Moms, Dads, and little kids -  
Anyone who wants to be anything,  
Something.

The people I like best are everyone.

I will shelter you  
From words that punch  
And fists of iron.  
With me, no one can hurt you now.

*Sponsored by Dawn & Andy Eig, Bill & Eileen Glaser, Charlie Kaplan,  
Marilena C. Reyes-Rodriguez, and Philip & Tina Vasani*

## The Best I'm Going to Do

Leonardo, Grade 5

When I was little,  
My parents promised me a puppy.  
When you're older, they said.  
But now I'm older.  
And I'm not optimistic.

When I was little,  
I wanted a golden puppy  
With fur soft as feathers.  
But now I think Levi,  
The slow, old, hotdog dog,  
Who lives in the apartment where my  
mother cleans,  
Is the best I'm going to do.

When school is closed,  
I go with my mom and walk Levi.  
I put on the blue leash,  
Walk down four flights of stairs,  
And around the block.  
He is a good dog,  
He walks beside me.  
His legs are tiny,  
Like a turtles',  
So we go slow.  
The sound of his claws on the pavement,  
Makes me happy.  
He makes me feel important.  
I don't even mind picking up after him!  
After our walk, I carry him up the stairs.  
His old body, can't handle the steps.  
When I take off his leash,  
He runs—out of nowhere there is speed!  
For his treat.

I wish my mom would see,  
That I am ready for a dog.  
But I'm not optimistic.  
So for now, I'll love old Levi.

*Sponsored by Kathleen Alexander,  
James & Lisa Freedman, Charlie Kaplan,  
Sebastian Perez, Mark R. Philips,  
Bronson van Wyck, Philip & Tina Vasan,  
and Maia Wechsler*

## God's Favorite Color Must Have Been Blue

Nada, Grade 6

It seems to me remarkable,  
To visit my grandmother's  
Beautiful house in that beautiful land.

Right by her house a small  
Mall, with a small school  
Not everyone could attend.  
There were plenty of trees,  
And I'd yearn for shade  
From the vehement sun.

Our garden was full  
Of swollen, ripe persimmons.  
And a small baby calf, that is probably now a big cow,  
Kept watch over the rows in the garden.

It seems to me that in Morocco,  
God's favorite color must have been blue.  
He must have dipped his paint brush  
In the Mediterranean and painted  
The blue minarets that spike the cerulean sky.

At night, the smell of coriander, saffron,  
Cinnamon and curry seeped from  
The chimneys and kitchen windows.  
Roasted lamb and apricots, cous cous,  
And ros el hanout dressed our shared platter.

It seems to me that in New York,  
Nothing ever tastes as sweet.  
Nothing ever seems as blue.

## Behind My Happy Eyes

Sherlyn , Grade 5

I have happy eyes.  
I have a big smile.  
It is easy to make me laugh.

But behind my happy eyes,  
Lives worry.  
Behind my happy eyes,  
Lives sadness.  
I try to keep it to myself.  
I try to keep it on the other side of my eyes.

Behind my eyes,  
Deep in my brain,  
I imagine mi abuelito, who I wish I'd met.  
My father says his eyes were green  
    like nature,  
His hair black like dark night,  
His skin cloudy white.  
Will I meet him when I die?  
Deep in my brain,  
I wonder what happens when people die.  
I think our spirits turn into the wind  
And float south and north and west  
    and east.  
I think we finally know what is true.

Behind my eyes,  
Deep in my brain,  
I feel guilty for my messy room.  
I feel guilty that my mom cleans all day  
And comes home to my clutter.  
I want my mom to be happy.  
She helps me, I worry about her.

Behind my eyes,  
Deep in my brain,  
I wish my sister was in New York.  
Senseless borders between us,  
Immigration laws and bad luck,  
Keep our family apart.  
I worry she'll always be stuck in Ecuador.

I have happy eyes,  
I have a big smile,  
It is easy to make me laugh.  
But I have a family.  
And I love them.  
And so, on the other side of my happy eyes,  
There is worry.

*Sponsored by Kathleen Alexander, Angelina Vieira Barocas, Manuel Caivinagua, Peter Hildenbrand, Martin Joffe, Charlie Kaplan, Ellen Masseur, Nancy Morauetz, and Sofia Vargas y Santiago Vargas*

## **So That They Can Stop Time for a Minute**

Tiana, Grade 5

When I grow up and become an artist,  
There is one picture I know I'll paint.  
Two beautiful cyclists on a concrete path.  
Railings on both sides of them,  
Protecting them from the colorful cars on the FDR,  
Protecting them from a morning swim in the East River.

My painting will feature the sun,  
Stretching away from the horizon,  
Hiding behind bridges,  
Shining on the calm water.  
I will need many colors,  
Many different brushes.  
Golds and pinks and oranges.  
Baby blue, teal, navy - and every other shade of blue that exists.  
Black, gray, white for the bridges.

My painting will also feature faces.  
I'll use cocoa brown for the cyclists.  
A laughing, windblown mother and daughter.  
Curling twisting strokes for their wild hair.  
I will paint their joy.  
I will paint their love.  
I will paint them laughing, laughing,

I will paint this picture,  
So that girl and her mom,  
Can keep the moment,  
For as long as they live.  
So that they can stop time for a minute,  
Even though that is actually impossible.

Recipe for Harlem's Flan:  
Ericicla Carrillo



Recipe for Harlem's Flan:  
Go to a nameless street to  
Collect a  
Congregation of  
MKS bargained off the  
old, frazzled man on the corner with the  
heavy smile, and his  
Equally ragged, yet clean, cart:  
His homemade sign  
Sports the slogan,  
"Everything old, we got" on an  
old piece of  
Disintegrating cardboard.  
They grin and hand him the money owed  
through his sales.  
The humble reminds him of why he took  
this job so long ago,  
With his now long gone wife,  
Six feet underground somewhere  
In the Caribbean.  
Climbing ten series of steps to get  
to the faded, green door they  
Call "home"




Keji's gang and the lock succumb to the  
wild metal,  
A mix of tears and blood soon after drip  
into the sink,  
Far from the sweet cane sugar burning  
on the sauce pan,  
Far from reality too.  
A shudder from the oven and 45 minutes  
Blinking brightly on the clock,  
A mere few steps away from the kitchen  
A sudden sound discreetly announces  
The elegant arrival of some culture from  
some part of the world  
That now lays  
Respectfully on its salver  
A flip of a dish allows the  
Caramel to drip onto its companion down  
below,  
A plateau of tempered  
and spun sugar,  
Scalded to  
Utter perfection  
A neighbor stands in front of  
A faded, green door and delivers  
Two of her things  
A heartwarming smile, and flan.

Flower Power  
Bryan 5<sup>th</sup> Grade



Twice people;  
One dog;  
One bathroom;  
One red flower;  
Watching everyone wait in line for the shower.  
Flowers are expensive, my mother says,  
But one a woman can afford.  
Always on the kitchen table,  
Always red,  
Always windows all get fed.



I call it the buzzing, Bleaming,  
Guardian of the lady house.  
That red Flower "inspires us to care for our home."  
It seems wrong,  
For the beautiful being  
To be surrounded by mess.  
Clean, she tells us, clean/clean/clean,  
Not to listen would be mean.  
Seven though;  
There are twelve people,  
one boy;  
And only one bathroom!  
Our home is spin-and-spin,  
Which must have been my mother's flower-power-thing.



We, Our Conversations  
By: Corraline, grade 7<sup>th</sup>

Now I know why he tells us,  
"Les Ojivero hantio."  
Because we aren't like Perfection.  
Because he hopes that one day  
You will be a better man.  
Because we are everything he's got  
Because this is the first time  
He's experienced love.  
Because he wasn't planning on becoming  
his father,  
Because he doesn't want you to despise  
him  
As his father,  
Because he sacrificed for freedom  
So I could be a strong woman.  
Because he never thought he would hold  
Two pieces of imperfection in the world  
You and I, in his arms.

Now I know why he looks so silent  
Like our conversations with God at  
midnight.  
Because his hands ache in the kitchen  
While he cooks a rare meat in a poor pan  
Because he's lost in a country  
Where people think it's okay to play women  
like Perfection,  
Whose bodies will soon evolve.

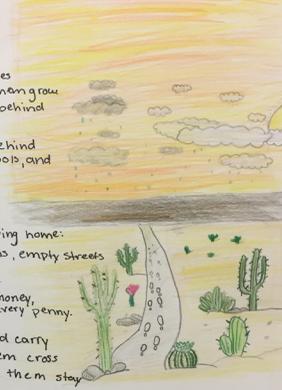
Because he doesn't know how to cover your  
small ears,  
To stop a cowardly Dick from being able to  
Toss his wicked words into your ears,  
His hands bleeding,  
The words that will make you, a young boy  
lose innocence the moment you grow up  
Lose respect for women.

Now I know why that was our last laugh  
When I was only eight years old,  
In the middle of a storm,  
Stranded in a bus stop,  
His hands hovering over me as  
The drops of pain punched his arms.  
He carried me home,  
Not letting me step into puddles of pain,  
The same puddles he stepped on.  
Because it was only me and him  
Against the world,  
Because he never thought he was able to  
raise me,  
Because he hoped that  
One day we'd get somewhere  
Because he knew that I would soon be  
"that we" would soon be  
Something better than he is.  
But how will we become better than him,  
If he himself is our definition of a father,  
If he himself is perfection?

Today They Shout!  
Izzy Robles, 6<sup>th</sup> grade

With tears in their eyes  
They said goodbye to their families  
and to the land that saw them grow  
Barely any place to hide except behind  
the spiky cactus.  
Now, in America they hide behind  
vacuums behind stoves, in schools, and  
in gardens.  
Except for today.  
Today they shout in silence,  
Because immigrants are staying home!  
Empty desks, empty kitchens, empty streets  
empty flour shops.  
Immigrants don't beg for money,  
they work hard enough for every penny,  
shoulder to shoulder,  
They stand in solidarity and carry  
the courage that made them cross  
and the strength that made them stay.

Today among the empty restaurants  
and empty shops, in museums with blank walls,  
Their absence will speak volumes.  
Their silence will be loudest of all  
Because a day without immigrants  
is the day this nation will fall.



Framed hand printed poetry is available for purchase.  
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