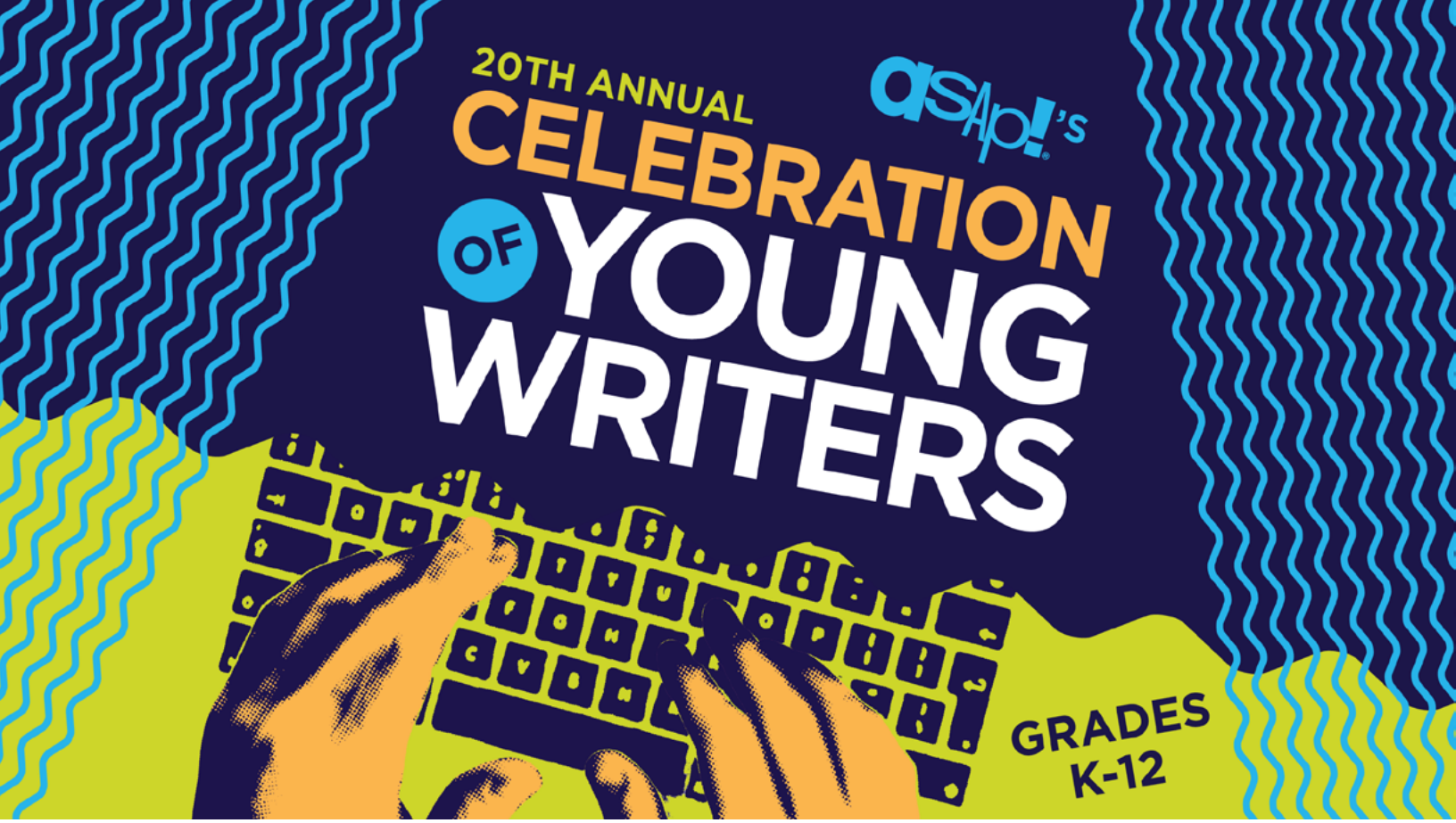

2025 TOP SELECTED PIECES

DAFFODILS
Anishka Maia Mittal
Grade 1

JUST DANCE
Jason Coppola
Grade 4

DANCE OF THE FLAMES
Imogen Hotchkiss
Grade 5

A WITCH'S BALLAD
Niko Casados
Grade 8

WHERE I'M FROM
Khadicha Zaripbaeva
Grade 8

ROSE COLORED LENSES
Julia Bender
Grade 10

WHAT THE OCEAN KNOWS
Francesca Howard
Grade 11

DEAR BLACK GIRL
Jadyn DeWitt-Smith
Grade 12

DAFFODILS

Don’t be shy, no need to cry
Love’s in the way, there’s time to sway
You can be strong
So speak up, raise yourself up, don’t cry.
Daffodils, Daffodils, trying to bloom
I don’t know which one to put in my room
Daffodils, flowers, trying to bloom
I don’t know which one can go to the moon.

But I know you are one, trying to bloom
I know you are strong
You can be happy but sometimes sad, too
You can bloom like a daffodil, it is true.
Daffodils, daffodils, trying to bloom
I don’t know which one can go to the moon.
But I am here for you, no need to cry
Let’s try to bloom, so we can fly.

Anishka Maia Mittal, Grade 1

JUST DANCE

Let's Dance! Talk about it, think about it, Let's Dance! Feel the vibes, Feel the vibes, Dance, Let's Dance, to any Music, Doesn't really matter, ohhh, Let's Dance! (Dance, Dance, Dance) Even in the morning, Never too early, Never too late, ohhhhh!!!!! Let's Dance! Let's Dance! Thinking too much? Just Dance! No Stress, no depression, Just Dance!!! Yeah!!!! Think over the top Disco Dance!!!! Even in the morning, never too early, never too late, Keep Dancing! Don't Stop, Don't Stop!!!! Ohhhh!!!! But the day sadly ends, we can always dance another time.

Jason Coppola, Grade 4

DANCE OF THE FLAMES

Flames are such beautiful dancers
So simple yet so complicated
Going up and down side to side
Every which way at the same time
They move like flowers dancing in the wind
Or like gazelles galloping across the Savanna
They move slow yet fast
If lit in the wrong place or wrong time it
Consumes everything in its path
It grows and grows until it's put out
Then it gets smaller and smaller
Until it dies
The flames tell a story as they move
Harsh fast movements popping and crackling
Like a war is being fought
Then small slow movements a pop or crackle
Once in a while like a smooth jazz concert
The flames spin and twist jump and leap
Only to end up back in the same place
Oh these dancers beautiful and elegant
Yet people don't see how they move
How they grow
How they die
Oh flames come back sometimes

Imogen Hotchkiss, Grade 5

THE WITCH'S BALLAD

Soldier, poet, prophet, prince
Those who will be missed
Whos forehead will be kissed.
When the figure of death
Comes to steal their final breath
Mother, maiden, crone
Those will groan
When death comes to shake thy bell
And give wisdom to tell.
Those will shriek or shrink away
When a Witch walks by day
They hope that she
Might heal them with her tinctures too
But speak in words of few
For the words of death
Are sacred at best
Feared by most,
And thought only to be muttered by a ghost
Not by lips of rouge
And stalkings neat
Or the soft tread of feet
Clinking on beat
The music of glass
As she might pass
Tinctures carrying the sweet smell of a spell
The Wisdom of death
Should be spoken last
The final word
Not by one
Who should not be heard
Not by one as trim as a fox
In slight and smile
In bite and wile
Not someone as pretty and perfect as gods first servant
The wisdom of death
Is sacred at best
Feared by most
Thought only to be spoken by a ghost

(The Witch's Ballad, continued)

Or a prophet
Or a prince
One who wears a crown
Or a robe
One of Jove
Not one of wild
One who should have a child
And smile a sweet smile
Not a smile of wit
As she offers death to sit
Brushes back her hair
And pulls up a chair
And pours death a cup of tea
Like she would, you or me
Not one who talks
Swift and smooth
With words of wisdom
That oh, does reek
Oh does sound, of devil speak
But she does not bow down to evil
Nor to death
Who sits across her table
And though perfectly able
Does not take her
Instead death smiles
And stays awhile
And the two drink their tea

Niko Casados, Grade 8

WHERE I'M FROM

I am from the vibrant, beautiful country
Of Uzbekistan, where culture is bold.
Where bazaars are filled with noise and joy
From citizens and the sellers, where
The delicious smell of fresh naan roams
In the air.
Where the cities are full of light
And life, where the noise at night
Becomes a lullaby that doesn't let you
Sleep in quiet times, where the streets
Are decorated with lights and the trees that
Shine like stars on special occasions.
Where birthdays and New Year's Day
are a big deal, where the food is full of
Flavor, where the sun beams down on me
where respect and kindness are taught from an early age
Where the schools are full of creative, clever,
And caring students, where the summer nights are filled
With kids laughing and playing outside,
Where bedtime is not until midnight,
Where the moon on a summer night
Lights the streets and our heart, where
Eating ice cream and watermelon was
A tradition before sleeping, where cousins and family
Visit and binge-watch movies, where everything is perfect,
Where everything feels right, where I grew up.
And from the green state
Of Connecticut, where the trees are
As beautiful and vibrant as the sunset, where the moments
That are cherished become
Forever memories that will be passed down
In the future, where every day may come with a challenge
That I go through, where my house will never be pitch
Quiet, but that's ok because my house is filled with
Laughter and genuine joy, where stepping outside
Feels like freedom, where taking a walk
Can melt my worries and anxiety away.
From a neighborhood full of inspiration,
Religion, liveliness, where boredom doesn't exist,

(Where I'm From, continued)

Where every day feels like a new adventure,
Where there are new traditions in the summer,
Where playing volleyball and eating ice cream
Before sunset is important, where playing Capture the Flag
Every day is a tradition, where time stops
And let us enjoy our long summer days
Without school to worry about, where back to school
Shopping is done with friends, where running around
While the wind slapping my face is the best feeling,
Where I am appreciated. Though these moments cannot
Replace the ones from Uzbekistan, I know that these moments
Are just as important.

Khadicha Zaripbaeva, Grade 8

ROSE COLORED LENSES

To look at the world through rose colored lenses
is to take notice of the sun as it shines through the dark clouds.
To find beauty in the rain as it trickles down the driveway.
To spend time writing letters and filling the pages of your journal.
To read books and grasp at the knowledge as if it's slipping away.
To visit the daffodil patch as it blooms in the spring.
To walk through Central Park and appreciate each person as their own.
To listen to music that makes your heart and your feet want to sing.
To dance like no one is watching, moving with each beat of the song.
To carelessly run through the grass with no shoes, feeling the earth beneath your feet.
To swim in the baby blue ocean even when its waters are colder than ice.
To jump in the puddles that fill the cracks in the streets after a storm.
To make snow angels with your loved ones, then rush inside
To eat a warm bowl of soup, made with love, on a cold winter's day.
To take notice of each state of the trees around you,
from light green, to rusty orange, to deep brown to soft pink,
admiring how the tree withstands the continuous change.
To smile at the babies being strolled by,
and to help the elderly cross the street.
To hold to door for the person rushing behind you,
curious as to where their day might take them.
To listen to the birds chirp as the morning creeps around the bend,
not minding them waking you from your sleep.
To watch the sun fall beneath the horizon, painting the sky like a canvas,
then admiring the moon as it finds its way to the tips of the sky,
acting as a flashlight to those in the dark.
To trace the stars that hang with the moon, into shapes of all sorts.
To call your loved ones with gratitude,
even when the distance between you begins to lay heavy on your heart.
To laugh and to love each day that you can,
To find the joy and beauty in each moment, even it seems hidden.
To look at the world
through rose colored lenses.

Julia Bender, Grade 10

WHAT THE OCEAN KNOWS

The Ocean knows what it's like to lose
To mourn the melancholy buried in her blues
She knows of anchors dropped and never drawn
Of breathless, broken bodies, drifting along

The Ocean hoards the brine-born secrets of the swallowed salt
Seals their silence in her watery vault
She feels the splinters of many a sundered deck
Relishes the sweet-salt taste of a dying breath
She is the judge who sentences stray sailors to their deep-sea deaths

She has kissed the cold lips of those who didn't make it to shore
She drags their souls to Neptune's floor
She locks away the keens of long goodbyes
Of drowned deckhands and futile cries

She is an endless tomb of vanished voices
A siren's log of ruinous choices
Some made in fear, some made in flight
All lost below the sorry night

She drinks from the depths of Grief's dark well
She casts a divine and deadly spell
The Ocean knows how to take
How to keep
How to cradle like a grieving mother
Rocking her children to their final sleep

But The Ocean is no plundering thief
She gardens beauty and color within her reefs
She knows how to give
How to live
How to return what was lost
How to take the jagged and smooth it into something soft
She knows how to gift life to the dead and make the broken whole again
She's birthed sea-kings out of more than a thousand fallen men

She knows resurrection in her tides
How seafoam thrives in chaos
How kelp will grow where wreckage lies
The Ocean remembers what mortals forget
That her shores forgive each tide's regret

(What The Ocean Knows, continued)

She knows that redemption cannot come from holding everything together
But if you let things go
Let them change
They're bound to wash back better

She knows surrender is not the same as defeat
That revival is where the sky and high waters meet
The Ocean has grieved more than we ever will
But she teaches her waters how to heal, nourish, and fill

No matter which way her tide turns
What's lost along the ocean floor will always be returned
She'll keep going
Keep growing
Our Ocean is all-knowing
Even her weeping waves
eventually
learn
to
blot their tears.

Francesca Howard, Grade 11

DEAR BLACK GIRL

Dear Black Girl,
You are not the exception to love, adoration, admiration, and acceptance. Despite what you may feel right now, you are deserving of these things, and they are not contingent upon anyone else's approval. The world may not always reflect this truth back to you, but it doesn't make it any less real. Your beauty—on the inside as much as the outside—is the headline rather than a footnote.

You are in a place that feels isolating and heavy. The stares, the whispers, the words that cut deeper than they should—they sting, but they do not define you. You may think their envy and resentment are proof of something wrong with you, but it's not. Don't allow their unhealed wounds to grow in you and produce uncertainty and doubt. Even when others cannot see it, you are entire and deserving. Try not to absorb their suffering.

Be sensitive; it is a superpower rather than a weakness. Feel everything profoundly—the happiness, the grief, the wrath, and the love. Your feelings give you strength and human dignity. The truth is, though, you cannot set yourself ablaze to keep others cosy. You are not here to be a saviour for others who refuse to heal personally. Although it's great when leaders set an example, keep in mind they have to decide which road to go. You are unable to compel them.

Let yourself be compassionate. Let yourself provide people the benefit of the doubt. Though the world will want to harden you, persuade you that vulnerability is dangerous; but you should not believe it. There is strength in softness. There is courage in kindness. But kindness to others should never come at the expense of kindness to yourself. Keep that balance, and you'll find your way.

Stop hating yourself to make others feel comfortable. If you are beautiful, you're allowed to know that. If you are talented, you're allowed to know that. If you are intelligent, you're allowed to know that. And you're allowed to stand in that. It isn't rude or arrogant to state the truth. If you are smart and pretty, and you are intelligent and talented, BE THOSE THINGS. If other people are mad that you're those things, ignore it. Because they can go become something themselves. Their insecurities will not be your responsibility. Your greatness will not be an inconvenience to the right people.

(Dear Black Girl, continued)

Being a free spirit doesn't mean being reckless. Dreams as big as the sky are still something you set your feet firmly on the ground. Learn to guard your heart without isolating it. Setting limits and creating walls differ from one another; and I promise you'll master it in time.

One day, you'll look back at these years and marvel at your strength. You'll wonder how you endured so much and come to see that your resilience sprung from something natural—something unquestionably you—not from need. When you do, keep in mind that you should praise yourself for believing even if it seemed impossible. You held on.

You will grow to be someone younger you would respect. Not as scars but rather as wisdom, the lessons of these years will accompany you. And one day you will reach back, exactly like this, to inform another Black girl that she is most definitely enough and not alone or damaged.

A Future You has all the love and optimism in the world.

Jadyn DeWitt-Smith, Grade 12