

Heard & Seen

Celebration of Young Artists, 2026



Giving Young Voices a Stage

Every young person has a perspective worth sharing — and when young people share their stories, they do more than express themselves. They connect with their community, contribute to our culture, and help shape the future we'll all inhabit together.

The **Celebration of Young Writers (CYW)** began in 2006, born from a collaboration with Connecticut residents Ellen and Frank McCourt, Ann and Denis Leary, and Susannah Salk — people who believed in the power of young literary voices. In the early days, celebrities performed student writing on stage. The students watched, appreciated the effort, and politely took the mic back. Today, selected writers not only have the opportunity to read their work live on stage, they also get published and earn recognition across the state. Annually, more than 200 submissions are reviewed by literary professionals looking for originality, fresh perspectives, and stories that stop you in your tracks.

The **Celebration of Young Photographers (CYP)** followed in 2010, led by board member Rob Parker who was passionate about expanding access to professional exhibition opportunities for young artists. Each year, photographers review more than 400 submissions, selecting 60 for a gallery show, awards ceremony, and community celebration.

This first annual **Celebration of Young Artists** brings together a curated selection of work from the 2025–2026 CYW writers and CYP photographers. Their stories, their images, their perspectives — we hope they stay with you.

Cover Image: *Introspection* by Chris Nazarian

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Metamorphosis

Lilliana Hurley

GRADE 10

Dylan's Wings of Change Award Recipient

Moon And Life

Look out the window, and you will see a moon,
Right from your window, in your room.

The moon is a white glowing ball,
That comes up when the sun falls.

As the sky gets dark, stars leave their mark,
Shiny and bright, they glow in the night.
They are full of light, sparkling like dots,
While the moon has tiny spots.

Look out the window, what a sight
Moon and stars shining bright.
All in one, oh what fun,
Right from your window, in your room.

But suddenly...

Here comes the eclipse,
Everyone watches with silent lips.
The earth crosses and changes the path,
And sunlight gets blocked by the moon

Everywhere there is people

The darkness seems evil
In the eclipse, darkness spreads with gloom,
But soon sunlight blooms.
And then again, just like before,
You see the moon from your window once more.

Life is just like day and night,
Sometimes dark and sometimes bright.
Happiness and sadness come and go,
Like sun and moon in a gentle flow.

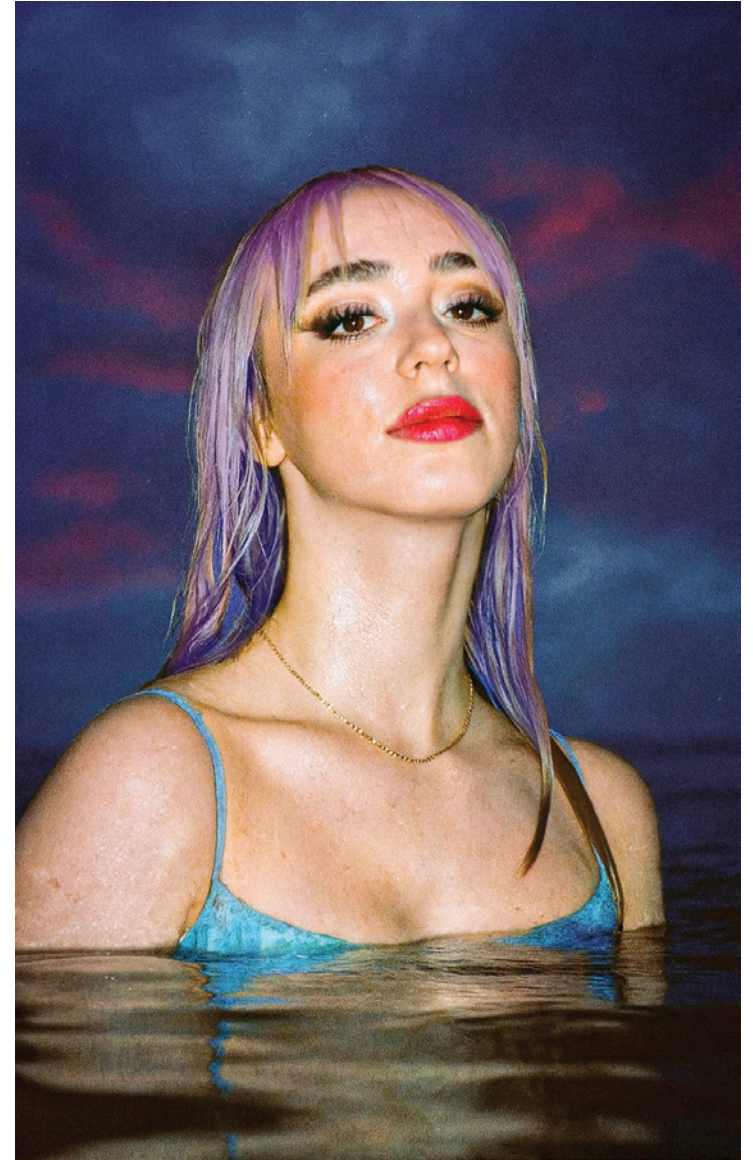
Anaya Gupta

GRADE 5

Blame Lies

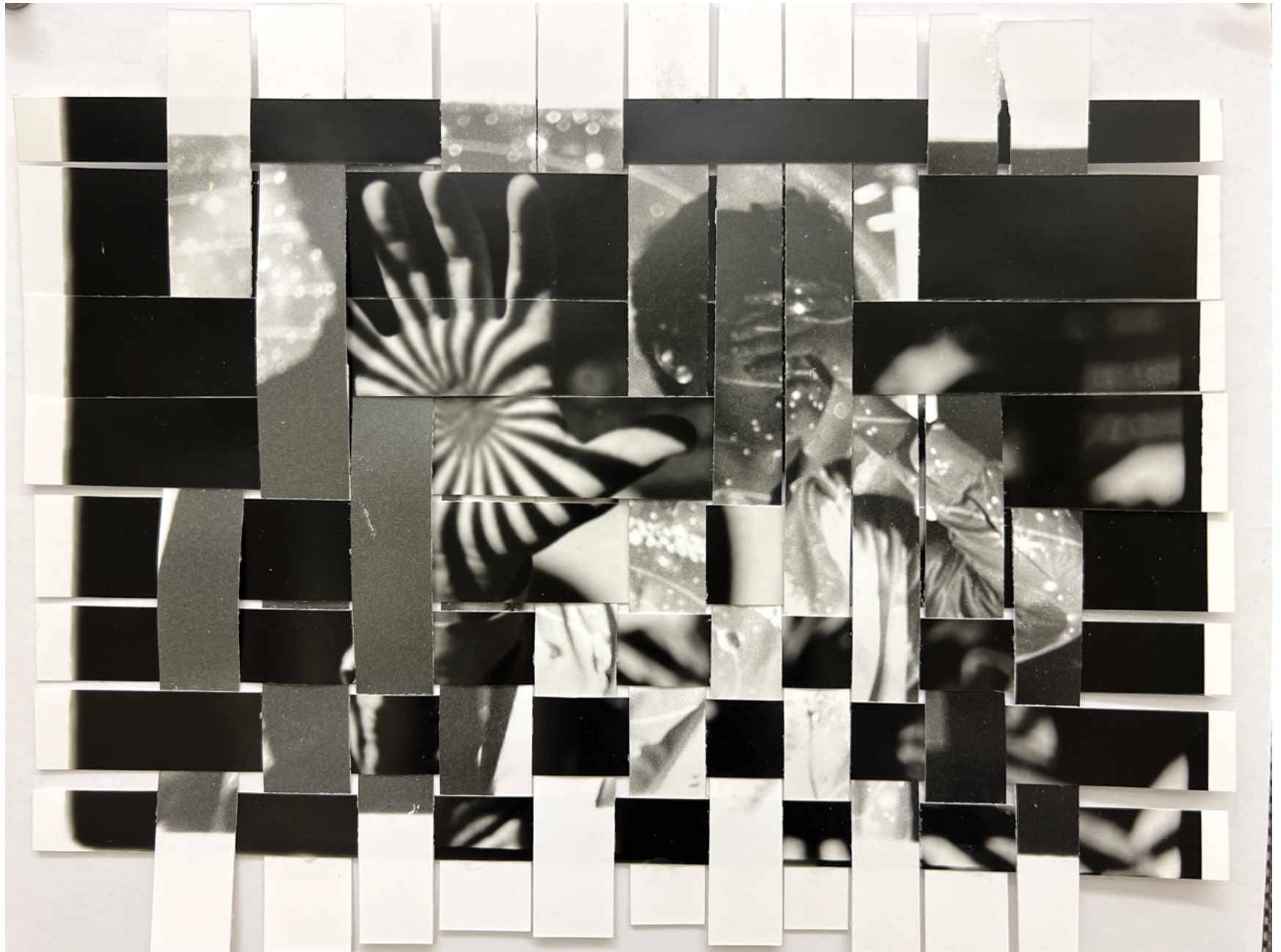
Main objective: Blend in.
Hold your mask in place.
Quiet everything,
Take up insignificant space.
Respectful bodies
Are not like
Yours.
So stifle, muzzle, struggle,
Or endure
The stares, the shame, always,
The blame.
Many years have layered rings of anxiety
About my core. Indeed,
I began petrified.
Wrongs wrapped like vines
Through my spine.
Comments rooted like
Invasive growth in my gut.
I prepared myself to be shunned, cast aside.
But... I've been thrown.
See, I'm a tangle of
Trauma and self protections.
A gorgeous knot of
Bravery and reflections.
And your warmth is
A baffling contrast to people's past objections.

Bri Guerra
GRADE 8



Her purple hair is slick with saltwater as she lifts her head above the surface. The sea is like a baptism of self, washing away what others may have expected of her. Tidal Baptism shows transformation through the tides, a moment of cleansing and reclamation that returns her to shore renewed.

Tidal Baptism
Francesca Howard
GRADE 12



Transformation And The Blind
Trevor Frazier
GRADE 12

I wove two dark room prints together to form a new conceptual piece. The interwoven images create a whole new perspective. It represents how blind we can be in the search of transformation within ourselves.

Decomposition

in some ways the best
part is decay
as the mold grows
the air turning thick
with humidity
rotting to convene
with the dirt again
to the things that eat:
you taste the flesh of my
grey matter and do not
know of the regard they
once held it in
revered it
as holy only when electricity
still flowed through
the clumping neurons
you taste it as
a fine caviar
and the cavity of my skull
collapses
under Earth's insistent
pressure to rot is to
be worshipped
and converted
in the same breath
to be consumed by microscopic
life in desolate places
a god for which the bacteria
give the carbon to the air

life forms from me anew
no soul but the physic-
al form becomes more
than what consciousness
could attain in a way not
self-referential
a nitrogen deposit in the
topsoil grows the flowers
and the grass
I add to my Earth in
the last way I can
the bacteria, the plants
sing with life
and the wind rustles
the trees
if I listen
they will speak
together a chorus
of voices not
Greek and tragic
but a worship
a giving of thanks

to be-stow me this
honor into the roots of
plants and bellies of micro-
organisms I fall
whalefall
whalefall
the whale must be reverent
to bestow upon the ocean
what I will bestow upon
the land and
we dissolve like
pills in water
chemical deconstruction
to become only elements
to feed
and the plants grow tall
the space grows quiet
and cool

Daria Marshea
GRADE 9



Saves
Jack Donnelly
GRADE 11

Ghosts

Ghosts are supposed to haunt you around Halloween
Or in an old building.

Faint white figures, maybe even invisible,
Reminding you of their existence
With unexplainable events.

They'll break glass,
Or shut an open door to startle you,
But you can escape if you really want.

You can run away from these ghosts
Since they are attached to a single location.
A dusty attic,
A dark hallway,
A house you can leave behind.

Not all ghosts stay in houses.
Some move in with you,
Grow to be a part of you.
They'll torture you until you break.
Those ghosts you can't escape.

They follow you throughout your day
And remain with you while you sleep.
They hide in quiet moments,
Talk to you when no one else can help.

He always had ghosts
In the back of his mind,
But he had managed to push them away
For a long time.

At least, that's what he thought.

I had not known him to have ghosts.
He was "normal".
A good dad,
The kind who fixed broken things,
Who laughed at his own corny jokes,
Who made me feel safe.
He was my best friend.

But the ghosts are patient.

They found a part of his past to haunt,
And like disease,
They spread into his present.

They infiltrated his mind.
Every quiet moment
Another chance for them to speak.
Whispering secrets so cruel
The silence became unbearable.

The ghosts were a cancer,
Growing and spreading
Until they fully consumed him.

He became a shell of a man,
Walking but distant,
Speaking but somewhere far away,
Unable to escape the ghosts
That now haunted his entire being.

The ghosts used him as a vessel,
Forcing him to say things
He would never think.

They barricaded the doors,
Threw the keys into the dark,
And locked everyone out
but themselves.

I stand outside the house of his mind,
Knocking on the door.

The lights are on,
But he no longer owns the house.

I search the windows
For any trace
Of the dad I used to know.



Downtown
Anji Zhou
GRADE 12

A person is constantly transformed by their surroundings, experiences, and the world they inhabit. A face overlaid with the colours of a city street represents a merging of self and environment.

Counting To Three

One. Two. Three.

I began to count
far before I understood
what I was doing.

There was no therapist,
no teacher,
no instructions neatly organized
into an assignment.

It simply appeared,
a quiet habit that slowly evolved
between reaction and response.

One.

It starts.

An email notification.
A grade posted.
A look on someone's face
I interpret too quickly
as disappointment.

My mind jumps ahead,
catastrophizing,
forming apologies for faults
that have yet to occur.

Two.

A hinge.

A breath, a pause.
I could spiral:
continue to play the moment in my head,
refresh the page and hope for a different result,
dissect the same sentence,
scavenging for something I missed.

At two,
I notice my body:
a tightened jaw,
clutched fists,
gasping for breath,
as fear begins to swell.

At two,
I question:
Will this moment construe me?
or will I construe this moment?

Three.
Silence.

The world lies unchanged,
the grade remains,
the message untouched,
the air no kinder
for these three seconds.

Here,
I distinguish
this moment
from my identity.

A single number
does not define me.
Redirection
does not mean rejection.
An error
is not a faulty character.

People picture resilience
as major victories:
commencements, applause,
moments that remain.

Pressure still presses,
but I count.

One,
fear arrives.
Two,
doubt lingers.
Three,
I breathe.
Oftentimes,
three seconds is all it takes.

One. Two. Three.



Emergence
Myles Carter
GRADE 11



Introspection
Chris Nazarian
GRADE 12

One Story, Two Generations, Infinite Memories

Even before I started, the “what-ifs” made me shudder like a kid before a dentist appointment. What if the residents disliked my reading? I was only nine years old; so much could go wrong.

But something inside me whispered, “try it.” My sister and I launched an intergenerational volunteer reading program, “Fable Friendships,” in June 2024. At the end of third grade, my reading scores were low. My teacher asked me to read to the class. Standing in front of the room, I stared at the floor, peeling my nails. My words tangled into a knot in my throat, shushing me like a television on mute. To find my voice, my dad suggested reading children’s books at a senior center.

The first few months were rough. I read too fast, or too quietly. One evening, Mr. D started snoring during my reading. Later, he critiqued, “What if somebody gets bored during this?” I started spending hours past my bedtime practicing in front of a mirror to prevent such an embarrassment. Balancing sports, schoolwork, and the program was difficult; there were days I desperately wanted to quit, yet I didn’t.

Now, it is the most anticipated part of my week. I still fumble sometimes, but I have learned to handle it better. Seniors skip “happy hour” to attend our sessions, which makes me feel valued. Being featured in *TIME for Kids* magazine bolstered my courage. However, my true rewards are the bonds and memories we have crafted.

Each week, I arrive with one story but leave with many. I sat mesmerized as Marion described trick-or-treating at Einstein’s house, and Dick recalled the end of World War II from a ship in Japan. I even heard Naomi’s tales of spending two nights at the White House with Eleanor Roosevelt. Marion explained that she was terrified of meeting Einstein. She once made a mess near his car and, in a panic to hide it, lit a fire that accidentally damaged his vehicle. I am surprised by how all of us are made up of unique stories.

I never knew that persistence would lead to an audience of two strangers expanding into a group of fifteen friends, a small sunroom growing into a theater. Most importantly, I started this to speak better, but listening helped me make friends.

Although what-ifs remain, most of the shuddering is gone.

Aarika Malhotra
GRADE 5



Overworked
Derek Pallis
GRADE 11
Honorable Mention

My Perfect World

My Perfect World has world peace.
My world has no world hunger and no
droughts. My world has good education and
equal rights
for
everyone.
In my world everyone has something
to eat
every night
and a roof to sleep under.
My world has no criticism.
In my world there was
never
segregation
or slavery.
In my world there is no pollution.
In my world there are no wars.
In my Perfect World
everyone
is loved
and praised
for who they are.

Aria Brown
GRADE 5

WHAT THE BRAIN KNOWS

The Brain knows what it's like to lose
To flicker and fade and suddenly confuse
It knows of signals fired too fast
Of moments broken, never meant to last
It knows the silence after the storm
When nothing feels familiar or warm

The Brain keeps secrets in electric waves
Tiny lightning storms in hidden caves
It feels the spark, the sudden fire
The body falls, the muscles tire
It steals the words right from your tongue
Makes the old feel ancient and the young feel young

It is the keeper of memory and light
But sometimes it loses its grip on the night
It shakes the body, bends the knees
Brings even the strongest to the floor with ease
It blurs the world, it steals control
It takes a moment, a minute, a soul

The Brain knows fear
Knows the fall
Knows the feeling of losing it all
It knows the stares, the quiet room
The ticking clock, the sense of doom

But The Brain is not a broken thing
It is a fighter, a healing spring
It knows how to rest
How to mend
How to start again and again

It rewires paths
It builds new roads
It learns to carry heavier loads
It knows resilience
Knows repair
Knows that strength is hidden there

The Brain remembers what we forget
That storms can pass, and suns still set
That falling down is not the end
That broken wires can learn to mend

It knows surrender is not defeat
That healing is quiet and slow and sweet
It knows that even after the storm
Life can return in a different form

The Brain has fought more storms than we can see
Silent battles in electricity
But it teaches the body how to stand again
To rebuild strength, to endure the pain

No matter how sudden the storm appears
No matter the falls, the doubts, the fears
The Brain keeps going
Keeps growing
Still learning
Still knowing

Even after the storm has torn apart the skies
The Brain still whispers:

Stand.
Try again.
Rise.



Baking Formation
 Marissa Donath
 GRADE 11

Passenger

Pull out of our street
 Engine humming
 Heavy scent of black pine

Fly down empty roads
 Streetlights flickering
 Cruise through the yellows

Roll the windows down
 Cool air on my skin
 Invites itself inside

Hear the peepers sing
 Between bursts of laughter
 As we pass their stretch of trees

Blast the music
 That's not allowed
 Except with you

Pull into the station
 OPEN flickers neon
 Must be the hundredth trip

Don't guess it's our last

. . . .

Put our childhood in the rearview
 But always be up for a drive.

Miranda King
 GRADE 11



Peaceful Morning
Bennett Metz
GRADE 7

*Dylan's Wings of Change Award Recipient -
Sitting in the morning watching the sun rise,
watching as it turns from night to day, the
water fowl begin their new day. Transforming
itself from dark to light, calm to alive.*

good grief!

my brother was going to take the xanax anyway

he ends up dead 12 minutes after he sat staring at the ceiling wondering when it'll kick in and he can escape. because the world was never kind to him but he looks forward anyway and wonders if there is anyone there waiting for him

and my sister is going to marry the bad boy anyway

and she will end up dead, in an apartment with plastic dollar-store disney cups and beer bottles on the bottom of the sofa that clink every time her husband shifts on the recliner, and the heater will rattle again because it's broken (ever since the children decided to pull on the string that holds the backing) and the white paint will chip each time she goes back to fix it but her husband will want a sandwich and another beer because the game is about to start and she will look back in the past and miss it dearly but finds each time that no one is there waiting for her

and i die anyway

because there are not enough poems to write and naps to take to soothe the way my eyes and the floor beg for each other

nor can it alleviate the leather rope made of stubborn, ancestral skin that's tight around my neck
and i must grieve everyone in such a visceral way, because i am a poet

and honestly, grief is quite good to me
she licks her thick, bloody lips and says that i perhaps could've done something
her spit lands on my cheek in bulbous, pompous globs
but when i wake up i find i can't wipe it off

and i have
no one there,
waiting for me

Amberleigh Quiles
GRADE 12

Music

I listen to music with my Dad,
I see the album photo,
I hear the amazing music
that fills me with so much joy.
Then my Dad pauses the music
and picks up his guitar
and starts singing one of his newer songs.
Most of his songs make me feel happy
Sometimes they make me feel sad.
When I listen to my Dad's music,
It makes me feel like he's apart of me
and I know that.
He's always in my heart no matter what.
I love spending time with my Dad.
When we're together I feel:
safe, loved and cared for.
I'm his best buddy, he's mine.
His songs are just one of a kind.
He helps me write my songs.
I help him write his.
I strum his guitar.
It's fun to be a musician especially when you're one with your
Dad. I quickly run to my room.
I come back and ask my Dad to play one song I wrote.
He says yes
He starts playing.
He plays the guitar and I sing the lyrics.
We always have so much fun together.
I love my Dad!

Micah Barney
GRADE 4

Warmth Of The Sun
Amaia Potashner
GRADE 11

This photo, featuring young germinating seeds, shows the beauty of the cycle of life. These small plants are often overlooked, but they are undergoing an important transformation from seed to plant that is the basis of the cycle of renewal that sustains life on earth. The sun provides the warmth and light to continue this cycle, allowing the young seeds to emerge into a vibrant ecosystem that transforms each spring.





Quonset Hut Evolution

Faye Pelosi
Grade 9

Buildings evolve over time. Additions, new roof sections, random gutters, dilapidated parts being replaced or simply left to disintegrate over time. Building transformations are all around us signifying wealth and poverty, home and the loss of it.

SAY YES TO LESS

We all use plastic everyday,
It's easy to use in every way.
But plastic can be harmful too,
Let me share some facts with you.

Plastic hurts the marine life,
Which sea animals do not like.
Did you know it hurts land life too?
It's like being stuck in sticky glue.

It pollutes the water we drink,
And hurts the air more than we think.
Last but not the least,
It fills the land that we live in, West to East.

So let's try to use less everyday,
And save our planet in every way.
Do you agree with me now, I guess?
Then shout it out: SAY YES TO LESS!

Rikhia Nazafarin
GRADE 4



This piece reflects transformation through the merging of opposites light and shadow, chaos and calm. The graffiti in the background, light painted "LOVE," and the subject's introspection capture the moment where identity shifts, illuminated by the forces of connection. Transformation here is both external, shaped by art and light, and internal, as the subject grows through reflection.

Fragments Combine
Andy Wang
GRADE 12



*Where Art
Ignites Learning*

ABOUT ASAP!

ASAP! ignites young people's passion for learning through transformative arts education. Our high-quality, portable, immersive learning experiences help students grasp complex concepts through art, storytelling, and play. Our students don't just learn—they develop creativity, critical thinking, and stronger community connections that help them thrive.

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