



# HARTWORKS

Spring 2026

\$10

The Charles Hart Middle School Literary Magazine



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*Middle, l-r: Daniel Leake, Jayceon Manning, Jerome Hayes*

*Bottom, l-r: Jarai Jones, Je'Nai Leake, A'lysa Allen, Destiny Coates, Jahziah Cabbell*

*Inside front cover, l-r: Kylie Watson, Khari Jonas*

# Introduction

Welcome to the 31st Anniversary edition of *hArtworks*, the nation's only inner-city public middle school literary magazine!

In 1995, Charles Hart Junior High School became a site for D.C. WritersCorps, which brought professional writers-in-residence to underserved communities. Twenty five years later, Charles Hart Middle School houses the D.C. Creative Writing Workshop, the longest-running school-based arts program in Ward 8. Along the way, our students have won hundreds of writing accolades, including more than 200 finalist awards in the Parkmont Poetry Contest; dozens of the In Series' "Finding Gabriela Mistral" poetry awards; numerous Larry Neal Awards; multiple Junior League Teen Poetry awards; the District Lines Poetry on Metro Contest, and the Washington Post KidsPost Poetry Contest. In fact, Hart students have won more local writing awards than any school in Washington, DC, public or private.

The Workshop has hosted such nationally known writers as Bomani Armah, Reginald Dwayne Betts, Derrick Weston Brown, Abbey Chung, Kerry Danner-McDonald, Michele Elliot, Andrew Evans, Jamila Felton, Andy Fogle, Kymone Freeman, Randall Horton, Alan King, Ruby McCann, Marla Melito, and Venus Thrash.

Our students have written nine original updates of classic plays, and produced two original full-length movies. And, through *hArtworks*, thousands of Hart students have become published writers.

We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our earliest champions, Kenneth Carroll, Principal Lee Epps, and Vice Principal Yvonne Davis, as well as all the teachers who have given our writers weekly class periods for the past 30 years, including: Tameka Brown, Katherine Bucholtz, Craig Davis, Gloria Fergusson, Christy Gill, Shirley Grooms, Carolyn Jackson, Gina McKinney, Mary Johnson, Taelor Majette, Josie Malone, Irma Morgan, Jamie Neel, Kantrell Patrick, and Ethel Rivers.

Special thanks are due for the hard work and dedication of the D.C. Creative Writing Workshop Board of Directors: Abbey Chung, Dr. John Walton Cotman, Dr. Susan Gerson, Brian Gilmore, Helen Hooper, Bernie Horn, and Nancy Schwalb.

We have many friends who have helped to make *hArtworks* possible, and we would like to express our gratitude to them. Our sincerest thanks go out to the Bainum Family Foundation, the City Fund of the Greater Washington Community Foundation, the Clark-Winchcole Foundation, D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, John Edward Fowler Foundation, Corinna Higginson Trust, Horning Family Fund, Lainoff Family Foundation, Cathy and Mark McNeil-Hollinger, Hattie M. Strong Foundation, Holly Syrrakos, Gail Oring and Go! Creative, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Arena Stage, the Shakespeare Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theater, Jack and Monte, Tollefson and Company Investment Management, our friends at Popeye's on Malcolm X Ave., Barbara Bainum, Fritz Edler, Joseph and Lynn Horning, and Robert Johnson.

# Dedication

Terry Bennett was a police officer, a football coach, and a poet. He graduated from Hart Middle School in 2007 and went on to attend Ballou Senior High School and Bucknell University. After graduating college, Terry returned to the community he grew up in to become a Ballou football coach, and continued coaching after joining the D.C. Metropolitan Police. He also claimed a special bond with Hart's Writing Club, since he won \$300 in a 2006 city-wide poetry contest, and as he said, that was a lot of money in those days!



Terry was critically injured on December 23, 2025, while helping a stranded motorist on I-695. He succumbed to his injuries on January 7, 2026. Officer Bennett dedicated his tragically short life to supporting his community, and we dedicate this issue of hArtworks to him.

## A New Me

I am soaring right through the New Year,  
also running like a wild panther.  
I make better decisions than I did in the old year.  
I haven't fought in three years—Let's make it four!  
Flying, bouncing, skipping and spinning  
into the New Year.

*Terry Bennett*

## Everything Is Possible

I live in secret and go anywhere that is cool  
Some people have dead hearts  
but mine is rigid and still going  
Mystery is like fortune; it comes at you any time  
My tenant is safe in my house  
and in its vastness I am strong and smart  
My eyes are like broken beams that will never be fixed  
My coffin will be cold and dark and everyone will miss me  
But to me, everything is possible

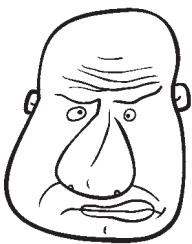
*Terry Bennett*



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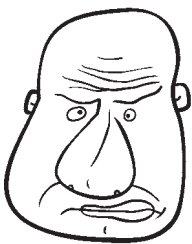


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# POEMS





*l-r: Jahziah Cabbell, Jarai Jones, Je'Nai Leake, A'lysa Allen*

## On the way to excitement

My two eyes are headlights. My legs are wheels. My  
brain is an engine, so I start up on my way to funcation.  
The sky turns red, then it starts raining.

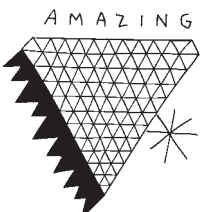
Funcation is on the mountain.  
To get up the mountain, rest is my fuel.  
I need to rest for gas, to have enough energy.  
I get rest so I can keep going up the mountain  
toward my destination.

*Au'Brey Durkin*

## Flying

The sky is one thing, and only one thing for miles.  
The sky is one thing, making this bridge another.  
Built over the sky, there is a bridge  
They walk it, they all walk it  
Rising at dawn and resting at midnight.  
They drown in the darkness.  
But not me—  
I don't walk the bridge, I soar across it.  
Never going back  
Every day is something new  
The gravity pulls them toward the ground,  
But I rise.

*Azaria Snowden*





Ah'Ziah Jones

## Misunderstood

My mind is always counting things it  
shouldn't have to numbers louder  
than my own thoughts

Hunger isn't just hunger  
It's guilt  
It's fear  
It's a voice that never lets me rest

Mirrors feel like enemies food feels like  
a test I'm terrified of failing  
no matter what I choose

I tell myself I'm in control but control  
feels a lot like being trapped  
inside my own head

I don't want to be small I want to be free,  
and I'm still learning that healing is louder  
than the voice that says I'm not enough

Cailee Glaze

## Metaphors of metaphors

Metaphors are the youngest stars in thought's wide sky,  
burrowing deep, where meanings twist and lie.  
Each word a shovel, carving truth from clay  
in the landscape where silence finds its say.

They dance in riddles, shadows sharp and bright.  
A challenge wrapped in a dream, cloaked in night.  
Nightmare's grin hides lessons cloaked in fear,  
but metaphors make monsters disappear.  
They stitch the soul with threads of fire and rain,  
and name the heart without the need for name.

Zion Fields





*Kevin Robles*

## Rights

I have the right to remain silent, but I want my voice to echo in the woods.

I have the right to talk about the future, but still I remain in the past.

I have the right to read, like reading verses in the Bible.

I have the right to speak, making my voice sound out loud and clear.

*Kevin Robles*



## My Fears

I'm afraid of losing my parents.

I am afraid of losing everything I love dearly.

I hate and fear evil.

I hate the feeling of being alone.

I am scared of sinister strangers.

I fear I will hear terrible screams In my dreams.

*Kevin Robles*



*l-r: Bunny Stevenson, Khalil Mitchell, Gregory Nickens, Kaleb Abrams, Akiia Allen, Jonah Kamara*



## Another dark year

Rage makes your future smoky, like loneliness  
 Sadness makes you shrivel up, like a forgotten mushroom  
 I wish I could be royal, but all I can be is a fallen king  
 lying frozen in the moonlight.  
 I live on a ghost island, where it's  
 always October  
 and the memory of feathers, random,  
 echoes like laughter in an empire of dreams.

Being 12 is hard  
 It feels like a broken window  
 and your voice is not heard  
 you smile at evil  
 and you smell like a mystery.  
 Anger and hunger do not mix.

*Damarco Bray*

## Ode to music!

In the quiet corners of a weary heart,  
 when the world feels heavy and hope starts to part,  
 a melody whispers, soft as a sigh,  
 notes drift like paddles, in an endless sky.

With every chord strummed, the spirit takes flight,  
 Lyric by lyric, we dance through the night.  
 Exhausted from battles, from the grind of the day,  
 the magic of music gently leads me away.

Tunes on shuffle, moving dreams anew,  
 in harmony's embrace, I am reborn, I pursue.  
 So let the rhythm guide to me, let the music play on,  
 for in its sweet embrace, I know I'm never alone.

*Esmeralda Parada*





## Wishbone of a memory

I burn past the power line,  
face the camera, still and waiting;  
The evening sun hums low,  
whirling around the edges of  
quiet hands.

She swoons as he counts birds,  
like a butterfly caught in the wind.  
A train whistles somewhere distant,  
quick paws chasing the fading light.

Inside Grandpa's arms, I remember—  
after the thunderstorm, tucked inside  
a suitcase, like a tint-red apple,  
waiting to be found.

He's narrowing down the past,  
a latch clicks closed in the hush,  
peas and cucumbers, covered in sand,  
carving a valley of time between us.

*Eden Price*



*Brielle Carry*

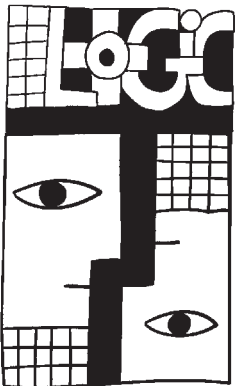
## For My People

For my people, whose stories twist and twine:  
Power in our hearts, though hope feels hard to find.  
Dust settles on dreams, despair fills the air;  
Generations yearn, but shadows linger there.

Strength's been lost; Yet change we must demand.  
Let's stand as one, hand in hand!  
With hope as our guide, compassion in our soul,  
Together we'll rise, making our neighborhood whole.

Tomorrow's path we'll pave, brave and bold,  
Chasing darkness, healing wounds untold.  
For together we're stronger, victory's in sight.  
We'll reclaim our streets, and bathe them in light.

*Esmeralda Parada*





*l-r: Je'Nai Leake, Jahziah Cabbell*

## Home

Make a house out of bullets and blood  
A blank space to clear your mind  
Where no one can reach, this is home.

Open the window to a vacant lot  
Where you and your siblings can exile anger.

As sunrise comes through the blinds,  
the sun's rays will melt your skin  
into a puddle of pleasure.  
The bones that are left will determine your home.

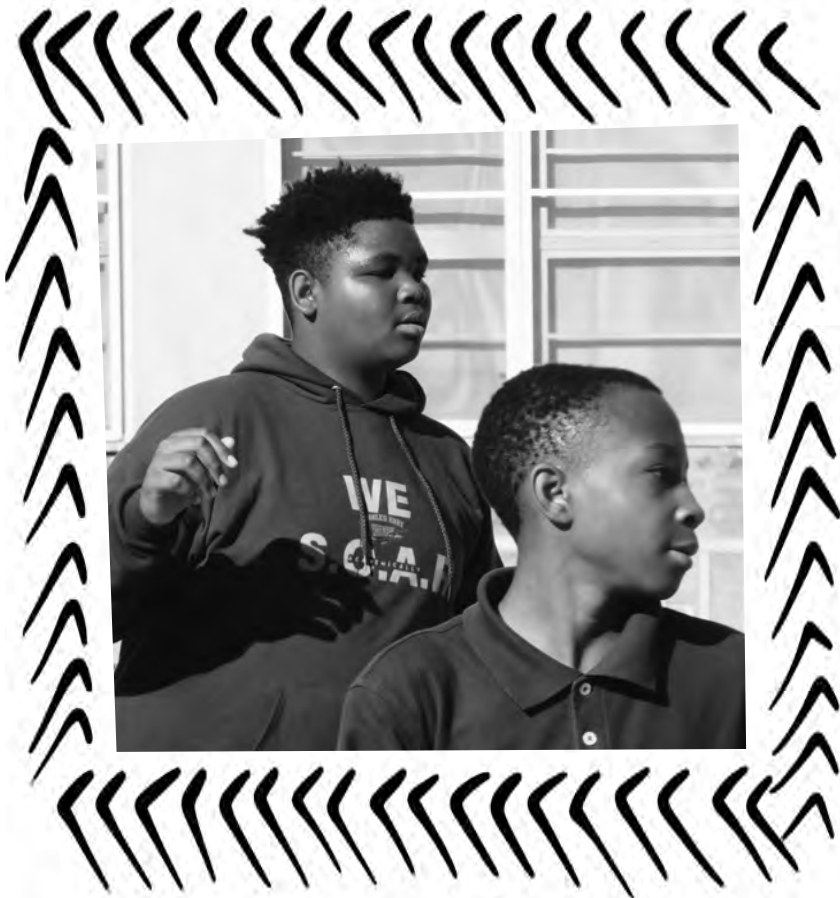
*Dinerio Nathan*

## The Phoenix

When all lights go off  
and the darkness presses on like a weighted blanket  
and the fireplace crackles  
I fly into your room.  
I comfort you with my blossoming aromatherapy.  
I protect you like the scorpion's venom.  
I mutter sweet nothings to you.  
I nourish your soul with my tune.  
I dry your tears and push your dreams upward,  
higher than kites, higher than airplanes,  
higher than clouds,  
and when you are tired and finished with me,  
just say the word and I will return to dust and ashes  
and hug you goodnight.

*Brielle Carry*





*l-r: Mason Pernell, Jarell McCullough, Jr.*



## Family Portrait

I took a family portrait  
when we were nice and sweet  
but some were out of reach.

When I took the picture  
I only saw the people  
who were not there.

*Treasure Onley*



## Childhood memories

When I was a little girl  
I was happy with whatever we had.  
Life wasn't all that bad.

With a brother and two sisters,  
I am the youngest of four.  
Fun moments were lost in time.

My mom cooking for her kids;  
A dinner table together each night.

My family is now scattered.  
But the best memories  
from my youngest childhood,  
still linger on the bike rack in our  
backyard.

*Taylor Berry*



*l-r: Je'Nai Leake, Jamal Cabbell*

## My Worth

I want to live long enough to find the value in my life.  
Not just be another mindless work zombie without a dream.

Not just another lost soul who abides by society's rhythm.

I will not cower in fear.

I will complain, I will push back against their forces.

Others ride suburban vans to the future

I will ride my dirty motorcycle over the highway of dreams.

I will rise to the occasion.

I am more than a free person, I am Freedom.

I will write my own harmonies

I am a thunderstorm in sunny weather.

I am an earthquake in a shudder.

I am a scream in a world of whispers.

I've lived long enough to know my worth,  
now I must share it.

*Brielle Carry*

## Alone-mas

Christmas, which is in December,  
you're supposed to feel jolly  
but instead you feel betrayed.

You're supposed to smell cookies  
and the vibe that makes you feel welcome  
but instead, you smell nothing. Shame.

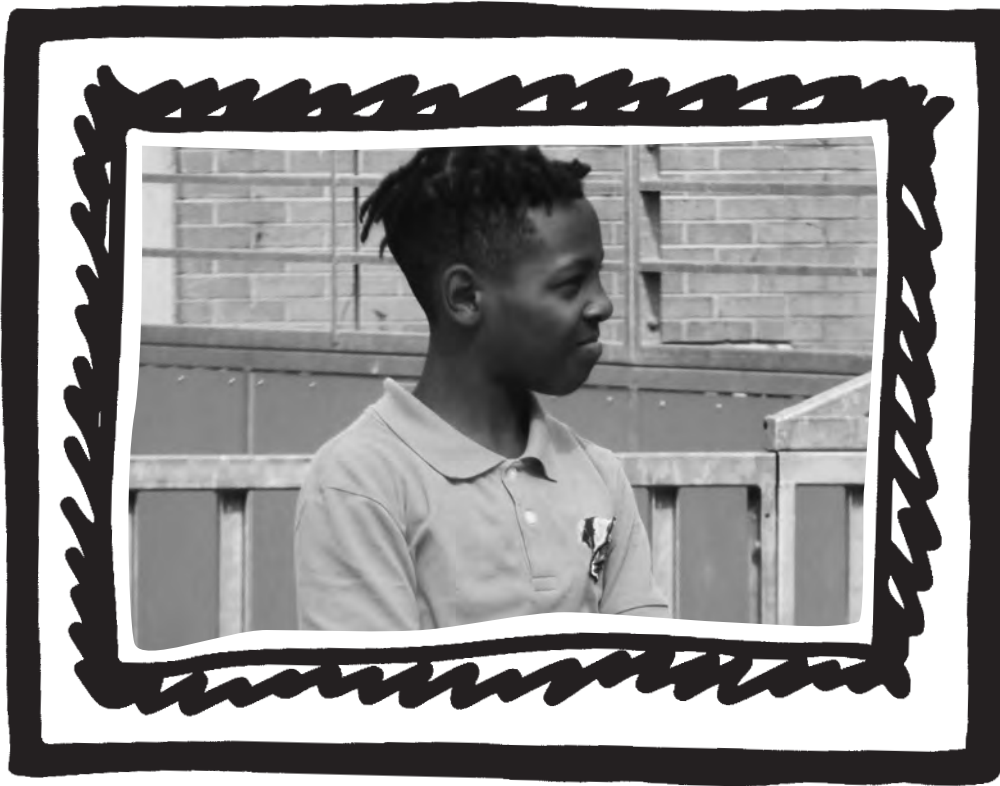
You're supposed to taste the sweet warm milk,  
but instead, you're down bad  
and all by yourself.

You're supposed to hear laughter from your family  
but instead, you hear the fireplace crackling.

You're supposed to feel your family  
happy and loving on you  
but instead, you're in your bed  
watching other people's lives.

*Taylor Berry*





*Nehemiah Manning*

## The world back then and now

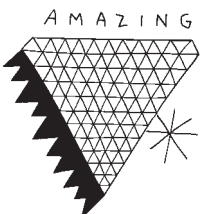
The world back then was safe and fun:  
You could go to the neighbor's house and play freeze tag,  
hide and seek, or even chess,  
you could watch a butterfly fly away from its cocoon.  
But life now is not like that.  
There is a crime anywhere you go,  
you see smoke anywhere you go,  
you even see unforgettable things;  
You may think you've forgotten  
but trust me, you haven't.

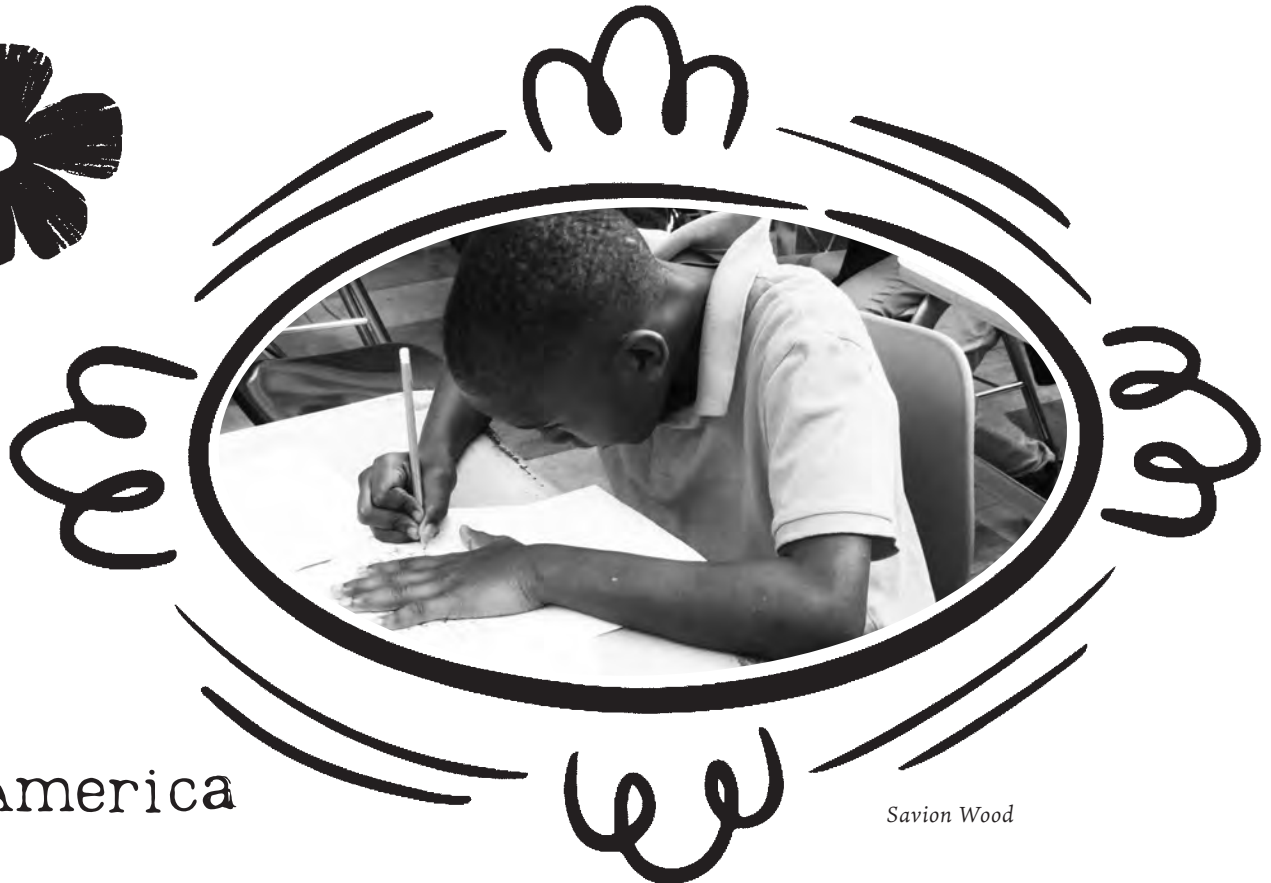
*Isaiah McRae*

## Thanks

One thing I'm thankful for is family.  
No matter what you're mad about,  
your family will make you start laughing with joy.  
Kindness is another thing,  
because showing kindness  
could change somebody's bad day to a good day,  
even showing kindness to ourselves can change our day.  
Sometimes the feeling of kindness  
makes you ask yourself what's happening,  
but you ask it proudly.

*Isaiah McRae*





## Save America

*Savion Wood*

Let it be me.  
Let it be a universe where there is no violence,  
there's only love, kindness.  
There shouldn't be things that make the world so hot  
and things that make us suffer  
like jalapeno, wasabi, paprika.  
We should make the world sweet,  
like vanilla, almond, cinnamon  
and maybe a little bit sour.

All the people who go through stuff that makes them  
take it out on other people should really have love in their lives,  
also they need a giant sloth to be asleep on  
and cuddle with;  
Animals always solve the problem for me.

*Hayley Jackson*

## Memory

In the stillness of a bruised and torn landscape  
where shadows linger, casting whispers of cruel energy  
smoke rises, curling like memories into the pale sky  
a haunting alarm echoes the presence of death nearby  
each breath feels heavy, laden with remnants of forgotten tales  
as the air thickens with the weight of moments we remember.

*Quindell Cortes*





*Ny'cole Cortes*

## The wars that are

We fought with justice and fear running  
through our veins

We were wounded with strength  
We don't remember the last time  
there was no war...

The wars don't change, they never do  
just the graves and the people.

That's why we fight—  
to light up the darkness  
We win for the wounded  
innocent souls  
While the world collapses,  
we hold it up.

*Khloe Matthews*



## Just Stop

Black against the fog and snow white  
against the shadows of darkest nights,  
separated like boys and girls,  
the clash of beliefs poisons the youth.  
We wonder why it feels like we can't keep up.  
New battles every day.  
I wake up with love in my heart,  
just to see it crumbling away as I read the news.  
It feels like just yesterday I was talking to you—  
Now I'm at your funeral.  
I can't get the voices out of my head:  
*What if it was you?*  
*What if you were there?*  
I just want them to stop, but  
they won't let go.

*Dinerio Nathan*



Ziyonni Fields



## The Ice Cream Truck

The ice cream truck came down the street, playing the same happy song. Kids ran outside with lots of money, laughing like nothing could go wrong.

I got a cherry popsicle, bright in the sun.  
It started melting really fast, dripping down my hand as I run.

Someone dropped theirs on the ground, and the color spread out slow; Nobody said anything, we just watched it grow.

The street got quiet for a minute, even the music faded away.  
Then someone called us back inside before the end of the day.

The red stain stayed on the sidewalk, even after the night came through. Tomorrow it would probably fade, but I knew I'd still remember it, too. And every kid will remember the night the ice cream truck came to our block.

Ziara Francois

## I apologize...

I spoke too fast, I hurt too deep.  
I made a promise I couldn't keep.  
Regret now lingers in my chest,  
I never meant to leave a mess.  
If words could heal, I'd send them true,  
a simple wish, to start anew.

Emoni Smith





## Night Rights

Embrace your rights  
Be calm, like the night  
The sunflower shines when it's right

The shadow is motionless  
the dark is silent  
Go into the dark—  
It's violent

Give the night its rights  
the stillness in the shadows,  
translucent darkness flows in my veins  
Feel my dark rage rising

The shadow vulture glistens  
The dark is the night  
The invisible lights  
Give the night its rights

*Chauncy Martin*

*Jarai Jones*

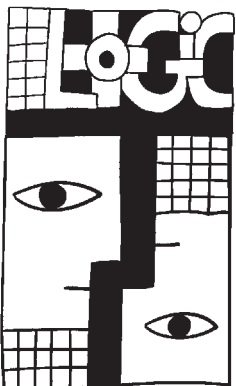
## Other Side of the Worthless Bridge

Me, being invisible to the world  
There's just me and my three sisters  
A bridge that's between us.

My life is motionless  
My sisters have attention  
from the world.  
My life is going down like  
a staircase to an empty space.

My sisters are reaching the top.  
The bridge between us has  
different colored sides:  
One grey and black  
One rainbow.

*Hayley Jackson*





*l-r: Zion Thornton, Romel Jones*

## The things I need to feel like a person

I have the right to use my voice  
to speak, to fight for  
the people I care about,  
to do random things  
to feel like a kid  
to have my fingers feel the safety of home  
to feel selfish  
to not want to give it all away  
to defy authority, and  
to cherish the people I love.

*Reginald Galloway IV*

## Awakening

When I awaken  
after sleeping through a stormy night  
and spinning in the bed all night,  
I walk my lazy self to the bathroom  
and look in the mirror.  
All I see is a 13-year-old named Dillon  
who loves technology and sports,  
with dry lips and a rocky hairline,  
who hopes, somehow, to get a girl.

*Dillon King*



*l-r: Romel Jones, Colton Fersner, Zion Thornton*

## Free to Go

Silence remains your right,  
so you can stay safe to see another day.  
Before you're grown, you have to be  
planted like a seed, then  
after you mature  
you feel a calm relief  
and rise up on your feet.  
You are now solo in life, with  
the sunlight on your face, and  
you're finally free to go.

*Mason Pernell*



## Riprap of Feelings

A wall built of emotions and different vibes;  
excited, upset, and worried.  
I always try to hide my feelings of  
feeling like melted snow.  
And when I show a lot, I get forgotten.

Nobody understands me: I become in the  
middle of badness.  
Meteors just hit me hard; watch  
people talk bad about me.  
When I think that it's a crime showing:  
Emotions, Anger, Upset,  
I hide it and it's like a volcanic eruption,  
when I hold it in, but can't let it out!

*Dakota King*



*l-r: A'lysa Allen, Zion Thornton, Jahziah Cabbell, Romel Jones, Ah'Ziah Jones, Destiny Coates, Treasure Onley*

## Change

On a good day I will do all my work  
and underline all key details for my essays.

Today I will pass out candy to everyone.  
Today I will help investigate the crime  
with the police.

Today I will run my fastest.  
Today I will be my best.  
Today I will use my greatest effort  
in every task.

Today I will destroy all kryptonite,  
so Superman can fight for the world.  
Today I will help grow the blackberries.

Today is the day I flip the switch.

*Dillon King*

## Smile back

I stand alone on an island  
I feel the power within my veins  
I make bridges from the palms of my hands

I bring a book with limitless pages  
I summon the objects that will  
feed my hunger and quench my thirst.

I see rising in the distance, motionless  
dolls of a father, a sister, a pet.  
I make a bridge of my skills and talent  
from my past to my future.

I look at what I did, and I feel proud.  
Then I look up, and I see a light, with  
a person smiling, and  
I smile back.

*Romel Jones*





*l-r: Kaleb Abrams, Khalil Mitchell*

## Across the Uneven Bridge

Across the uneven bridge I go, with  
the voices of family and friends  
guiding me like bright lanterns in the dark.

God walks beside me, steady and true,  
while I carry love deeply in my chest,  
never selfish, always whole.

In my hands kindness glows,  
in my pockets, snacks and money rattle,  
small things to keep me moving.

And when my steps falter,  
love becomes my strongest bridge,  
a voice reminding me  
I never cross alone.

*Jamya Geeter*

## What I Will See

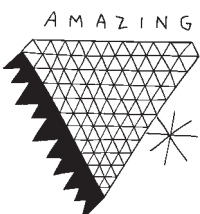
I wake up at 6 in the morning,  
dark skies, drowsy eyes,  
the spinning fan trying to pull me  
back to sleep. Instead  
I hear the weeping of the baby.

I pull myself out of bed,  
head still hazy;  
I take a shower and get ready  
for another grueling day of life.

As I wipe away the steam  
from the mirror,  
someone is looking back at me:  
a sad man with wrinkles around his eyes  
and eye bags the size of the moon.

This isn't me, I say,  
then the cycle starts again.  
I wake up at 6 in the morning,  
dark skies, drowsy eyes.

*Dinerio Nathan*





*l-r: Jerome Hayes,  
Ms. McDuffie,  
Dakota King*

## Inside a Mountain

On the surface  
it looks still,  
just stone and shadow,  
a giant sleeping under the sky.

But that's only the surface.

Inside,

My imagination says  
there's a slow burning heart  
magma breathing in a patient cycle,  
pulse after molten pulse.

Rivers run where no one sees,  
not of water  
but of fire,  
glowing like secrets  
whispered in the dark.

Maybe there's a doorway  
hidden between the cracks  
of quartz—not made by hands  
but unlocked by courage.

*Hayley Jackson*

## Life in a picture

What would it be like  
to live in a picture?  
You can't really be in it  
Standing outside the frame  
Brushing against the glass  
Watching life pass me by

No mistakes, no falling, no disruptions  
Just standing there  
Nobody bothering me  
In my own world

Discovering peace  
Finding the incomplete piece  
Just using my imagination

Ignoring everyone, evergreen  
In my own world.

*Treasure Onley*





*l-r: Je'Nai Leake, Khloe Matthews*

## Choices

I stood between fear and freedom...  
every choice felt like losing something.  
Nobody tells you decisions echo.  
My heart said go,  
my mind said stay—  
I didn't know that  
silence was a decision too.

*Ivory Blocker*

## Love Yourself

In the mirror take a glance,  
See your beauty, take a chance.  
Every flaw and every scar  
Makes you strong just as you are.  
Loving yourself, don't look away.  
You are the light in your own way.

*Emoni Smith*





Payton Phoenix



“An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind”

“An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind,”  
Those were Gandhi’s words, honest and kind.  
They warn us about a dangerous fight,  
Where wrong is answered with more wrong in sight.

When someone hurts you, and you hurt them too, The  
pain keeps spreading, it never feels new. One hit leads to  
another, again and again, A cycle of anger, a loop of pain.

I chose this quote because it connects to me, From things I  
was taught and things I would see.  
Some adults said, “Hit back if you’re struck,”  
Others said “Tell an adult and trust your luck.”

I grew up thinking to fight is right,  
Stuck in a world with fear and no light, Gandhi’s words ,  
true and honest, Made me wonder where this all started.  
Sometimes anger speaks louder than my mind, But I control  
it, and pay it no mind.

Now that I’m older,  
I understand,  
Violence just grows  
When we take that stand.

Fighting back doesn’t heal the pain, It only adds someone  
else To the circular chain.

Eye for eye, ear for ear,  
Life for life tear for tear,  
If we all keep choosing hate and fear,  
There’ll be no one left to see or hear.

People say D.C. isn’t the place to be,  
But that’s not true; you just have to see.  
Through all the hate and pain we see, We still build together as  
a community.

The streets hold stories, voices and pride, Dreams that won’t  
be pushed aside. We rise together, strong and free, Showing the  
world what D.C. can be.

Now I understand what Gandhi meant, Violence grows when  
revenge is sent. Peace can break what anger starts, Healing the  
world begins in our hearts.

Change starts within the youth,  
The choices we make, the challenges we go through, Every step  
forward, we break that chain, Hoping to see what we will gain.

If we lead with love  
And try to understand,  
We can end the cycle,  
Hand in hand.

Monroe Johnson





## Beautiful Brown Girl

Beautiful Brown Girl...

You are so sweet,  
Even if your hair doesn't fall to your feet.  
Your skin so dark and smooth,  
And your aura makes people want  
to groove.

Beautiful Brown Girl...

Do you know how special you are?  
You're something that can only be wished  
upon a star.  
Be happy in the skin you're in.  
And some will never hear from you again.  
Your beauty is a gift.  
Let those negative thoughts shift—  
You are  
Beautiful, Brown Girl.

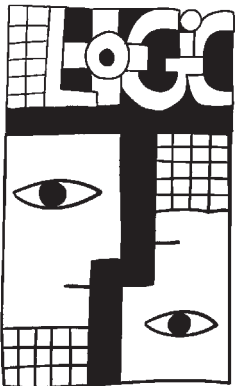
*Ms. McDuffie*

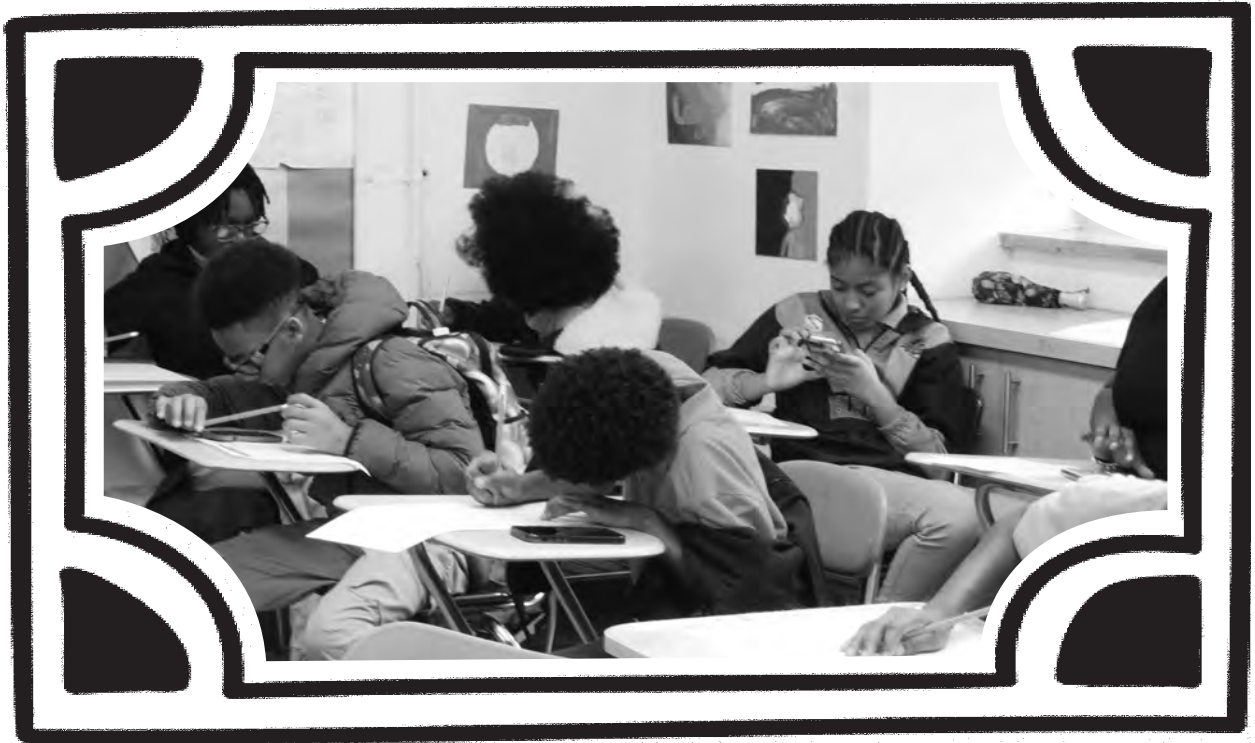
*Aniya Stevenson*

## The thing is

To love life, to love it even  
when you have no stomach for it  
and everything you've held dear  
crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,  
your throat filled with the silt of it.  
When grief sits with you, it's tropical,  
thickening the air, heavy as water,  
more fit for gills than lungs.  
When grief weights you down like your  
own flesh, only more of it, an obesity  
of grief, then you hold life like  
a face between your palms, a plain  
face, no charming smile,  
no violet eyes.

*Je'Nai Leake*





*l-r: Khloe Matthews, Ah'Zar Smith, Empress Norris, Jamal Cabbell, Ny'cole Cortes*

## I Was Young

I was young, but I am still young.  
Some things make me cry, but  
some things make it better  
for me and others.  
To me, it's okay to love what is different.

My mom's judgment is high, like a treetop,  
so I am careful of others' lives.  
When I shame people, it makes  
them into ghosts, because they  
are probably going through something.

If I could start my life again,  
I would have a better surface  
Than my other person.

*Jayceon Manning*

## Dreams

I'm climbing a ladder, I can't see the top  
Don't know where I'm heading,  
But still I don't stop.  
I climb past the roof—  
I have a strange feeling this may be a goof—  
The chimney below me, I dare to look down;  
I know it's a distance to fall to the ground.  
I reach the cloud—  
It is thicker than the ground.

*Je'Nai Leake*





*Desean Veney*

## My life story

My life as a child is filled with broken bones;  
as I twist my ankle playing football,  
my bones bend out of shape to form  
a paper airplane, as it glides through the air  
and disappears into the clouds.

As I fall asleep, the clouds are drifting  
away to form a hurricane  
of violence and destruction.

*Gregory Nickens*



## To be the best

I wish to be the best basketball player  
in the nation, to beat every team in my league  
and to be the best player ever.

By the second quarter, I feel overwhelming.  
I feel sweat coming down my face;  
It feels like a lot of movement, and I know it is.  
As the ball floats in the air, as I feel locked in,  
as I dampen the towel on my face,  
by the end of the game, we win 83-82,  
taking the win.

*Nehemiah Manning*



*Dillon King*

## Moonlight

I reach for the stars  
but they're too far.

The abandoned sky  
only makes me cry  
I feel bad for awhile  
but then I smile.

She's resplendent  
so confident  
yet I have no confidence.  
She grows competent  
but she doesn't understand  
her consequences.

I'll lead her through  
the night, without the blight  
but with the light.

*Empress Norris*

## We Know

Now that I know sports:  
On the field, we run and fight,  
chasing dreams beneath the lights;  
Win or lose, we give our all.

We surface strong, through  
sweat and pain, through  
every loss, we rise again.  
The crowd may roar.  
The clock may end.

*Ny'cole Cortes*





*Jarell McCullough, Jr.*

## My Own Words

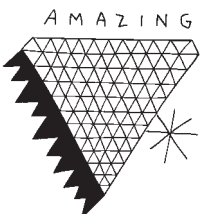
As the flowers swing left to right  
the air gets strong as it can be  
I sit next to the window,  
feeling overwhelmed, starting  
to cry as I gather myself together.  
I hear a little movement, as  
birds float in the night sky  
I see a spark and I hear a trumpet.  
And by the end of the night we all  
sleep in a great, peaceful dream.

*Savion Wood*

## My Life as a Child

My life as a child was a heartbeat  
and a memory of my wild outburst,  
and by that I mean that  
I had anger issues as a kid.  
I stayed silent when I was sad,  
and didn't show my emotions.  
But that was in the past,  
and I changed since then.  
Now I am always happy and loud  
when I am talking to people.

*Jamal Cabbell*





*l-r: Khloe Matthews,  
Ah'Zar Smith,  
Empress Norris,  
Ny'cole Cortes*

## Lecture

Silence remains your right  
When you're in detention  
You're not supposed to talk.

When your parents are mad  
At you, you can taste  
Their silent anger  
That's the sign that  
Silence remains your right.

As they yell at you, their voices  
Are powerful with rage.  
You've made a selfish decision  
And now it feels like  
You're in prison.

As they yell at you,  
You feel silent.  
Meanwhile, your parents try  
Not to become violent.

*Malachi Jones*

## Creepy Poem Things

I'm so scared  
there's nobody here with me  
I quietly feel abandoned  
halfway down the stairs I feel numb  
I hear a tap, over and over again  
my soul leaves my body  
and floats up in the air.  
The aftermath was me,  
running up the stairs.

*Jarai Jones*





*l-r: Khloe Matthews, Dakota King*

## Who I Am

I am caring to people  
and my personality is kind  
I am so smart and fun  
I love my friends and family and other people  
I am beautiful, and I am brave  
and my life means a lot to me.

*Jarai Jones*

## Not worth fighting for

Because my life is beautiful  
I have a heart that's full  
of pride, happiness, and fun,  
and what's bigger than anything is  
that nothing is worth dying  
but everything is worth living for.

*Khalil Mitchell*

## Blizzard

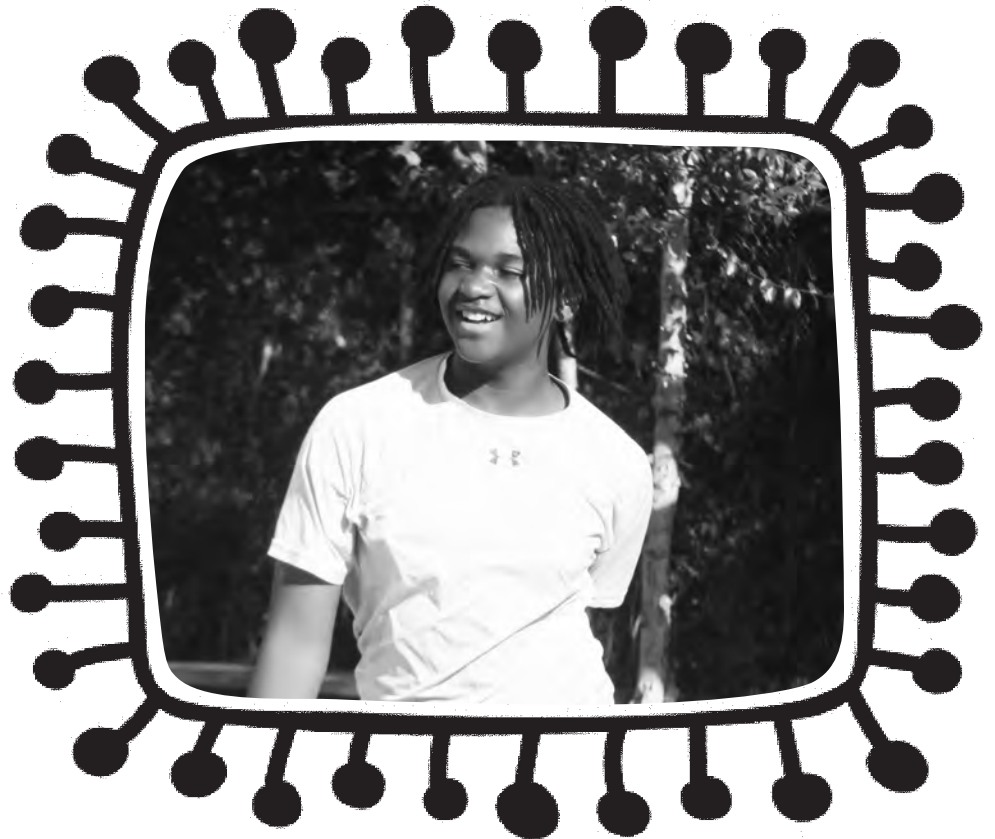
All alone in a heavy blizzard  
which I call my thoughts  
snow drizzling down my face,  
the beauty of it all deceiving me.  
Me and my shadow,  
lost in our "blizzard"  
My conscience slipping  
with every gust of wind.

*Paul Gray*





*Chauncy Martin*



## All these things

Let it be winning or losing  
loving or fearing  
creating or dying—  
All these things come with crying.

*Jeremiah Grey*

## The Last Text

Every night at 9:00  
Mia texted her dad “Home Safe”  
One night, she forgot.  
The phone buzzed at 9:01  
“I Know” his message read.  
She cried—  
He had passed away two years earlier  
and she’d only just turned the phone back on.

*Cali Jones*

## Lonely Moonlight

Ghostly magic howling to the moon  
lights a lonely star, haunted by  
scary dreams and fearful  
echos from a hidden mirror.  
Frightening magic, glowing moonlight  
oozing sweetness from gray and black magic—  
laughter from a young ghost.

*Damarco Bray*





## If I had a big brother, I would say

Yo, what's up big bro?  
You look awkward, I guess  
Wait, you really, really, really are awkward  
because your name is awkward.  
I would be laughing.

*Sierra Egypt*

My brother would say  
whatever you say, sis, I love you.  
My brother would hug me.  
I would say wow, wow awkward.  
My brother would say, shut up and hug me  
You do too much, okay?  
I would say, no, you shut up.

*Sasha Farrell*

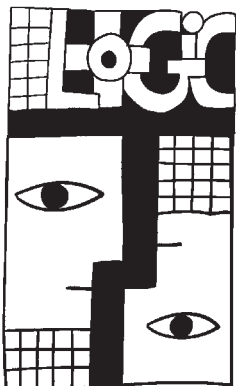
## Let there be

Let there be Cajun, a tasty spice  
Add a little bit of butter and some rice,  
make it right.

Add a drizzle of hot sauce  
yea, make it hot, add some more  
now it hits the spot

Now plate the food with love  
Get a cup of OJ  
because it makes the meal okay  
and eat up the grub.

*Mason Pernell*





Aniya Stevenson

## The Ocean

The ocean is like a translucent vortex  
to a world of no judgment or hate, just quiet.  
I float down the transparent place  
the pressure gets high in my ears  
the waves, moving in patterns  
that go on forever.  
The light fades and  
the silence gets loud,  
the wrath of the cold  
freezing me in place.  
My body goes cold, like a sculpture  
an invisible giant hand pushes me down  
my life fading into the waves  
as the ocean swallows me whole.

Khloe Matthews

## The day I thought...

The moment I felt like  
when everything changed  
is when I thought I wasn't going to school.  
And I was right—  
all I did was stay in bed, watching TV,  
eating up all the food.  
The break was so good I ended up  
missing another day of school.  
(I stayed up too late and overslept.)  
After that... Everybody was gone.

Colton Fersner





*Ny'cole Cortes*



## My rhythm

If I can't play football  
I'll play basketball;  
If I can't do wrong,  
I'm going to do right.

Since I can't vanish,  
then I'll landscape this earth  
to become great, with no hate,  
probably would have to have ghosts  
so I can be the hope, rhythm, and ties.

When I can't express myself  
I train them, my thoughts,  
are the best  
I don't care what anybody thinks,  
I know what I think.

*Kaleb Abrams*

## When I Was Young

I was young, and I used to think  
that ghosts were in my room,  
and I went into my mom's room  
so I could feel protected then.  
When I was a baby,  
and I was about to go to sleep,  
my mom would sing me a melody.  
It used to feel overwhelming,  
and when I was halfway asleep,  
she would start patting my back  
so I could go to sleep all the way.

*Nehemiah Manning*





*Kylie Watson*

## The Rainforest

The damp grass, splashing tiny raindrops up behind me  
the ghosts of the dead trees hiding the trail ahead of me,  
I run until I see a lake, the dark settling behind me.  
The water lilies sway in the water,  
I sit and listen to the soft melody of the swaying trees,  
the water mirrors my reflection like a fingerprint.  
I float, then I sink, the water lilies  
the only company that I have,  
the water like clear marbles,  
as my last breath settles in the water.

*Khloe Matthews*

## Color love

There's nobody here in this landscape.  
Gray color, gray cars, gray everything.  
I started to write.  
If I could start my life over, I would be better.  
I see color when I see a beautiful lady.

*Elijah Smith*





*l-r: Kaleb Abrams, Khalil Mitchell, Zion Thornton, Romel Jones*

## Memories

I don't remember much,  
but I was one classic lady.  
I had my tutu, and heels,  
and my attitude to match.  
Every time I entered,  
my smile sparked the room.  
I remember sleeping in the car  
like I came from math class.

*Destiny Coates*

## Ode to Sports

On the pavement,  
we began to explore  
a parade of dreams  
keeping score,  
hearts hurrying,  
chasing the play  
with powerful hopes  
that won't fade away.

Through every loss and every win,  
a quiet rejoicing lives within  
because in the game  
we always breathe:  
More than victory,  
we learn to believe.

*Isaiah Fullington*





*Eddie Willis*

## The Magic

When magic hits, it is different.  
It feels different, we feel like a new person.  
I began doing magic at the age of three.  
I realized I was magic when I was in school.  
Magic feels like softness, like an ocean of cotton.  
When I took a test, I got A's.

*Ny'cole Cortes*

## The GOAT

Everyone gathered on the surface  
as we faced the weeds,  
we faced the loneliness,  
we felt numb  
with hesitation and confusion.

With the smooth melody I felt shame;  
That song brought me a spark,  
ongoing all day, I felt protected  
but a ghost was following me.

*Morell Mackey, Jr.*





*Lance Willis*

## After the storm

After the storm, it looked like a ghost town.  
Nothing was protected.  
The surface was a wasteland  
of empty streets and  
the house was abandoned.

*Jamal Cabbell*

## Making sure we're okay?

There's nobody here to make sure we're okay,  
Here, in the night to tuck us in before bed  
wanting to say things "goodnight"  
but they walked away.

I live quietly so no one will hear my cries.  
If I could start over, with the night,  
I would say, "goodnight, I love you."  
After that night, that morning,  
we ate breakfast together.

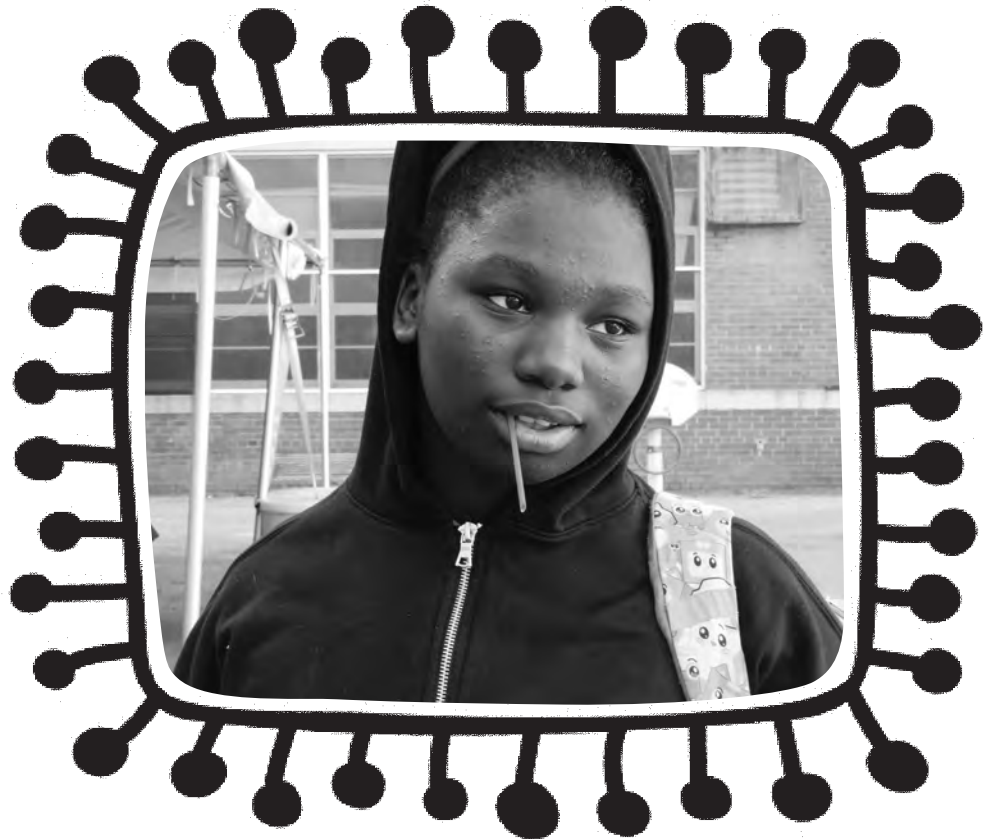
I don't remember much, but all I remember  
was that we had a good morning.  
When I was young,  
it was way better than now.

*Khalil Mitchell*





*Je'Nai Leake*



## Recycled

Everyone's here,  
here with smiling faces, all glammed up.  
Me, just standing in the corner with my loneliness,  
with my anxiety, my shyness,  
my attitude, walking on eggshells.

If I could start over,  
gather time and rewind it,  
I would.

I would live on the true top  
protect myself, but also spark  
be the rhythm of a perfect harmony.

Without hesitation, I would flow  
like a floating lyric  
like a pure melody,  
so let's just take a wrinkle back in time.

*Taylor Berry*

## Rhyming Words

Marbles are colorful balls  
A spark is like a crystal  
I float when I'm in the pool and  
I dampen myself with a towel.  
I drink pure water  
I see ghosts in a video game  
We are sometimes overwhelming.  
We are ashamed of ourselves when we are bad.  
There are lots of movements in our daily life  
We listen to classic music  
We build on a flat-surfaced area.  
I don't remember much in my past life  
But I know there was a lot of fun there.

*Savion Wood*





## Something

Something, someone, some way  
there is always a way to do nothing.  
I was always a money making a man.

Chauncy can choose  
a way which works  
even if I imagine it, like  
living in a lie.

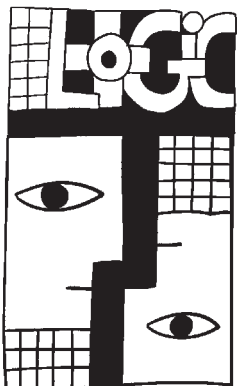
*Chauncy Martin*

*l-r: Nickell Day, Kaleb Abrams*

## The All-Star team

I was in the game  
If I miss the block, he tackles my quarterback.  
For game, he called the play.  
I pushed him, he stumbled  
he tried to spin around me  
I fell on him, my quarterback made the pass  
for game, we won!  
Then we went to Florida,  
we went out to eat at the bowling alley,  
it was full of laughter and  
I was grateful for everything.

*Nickell Day*





*l-r: Jamya Geeter, Hayley Jackson*

## Money

Mighty money moves many minds.  
Opportunities overflow over open options.  
New notes neatly nurture needs.  
Eager earners endlessly exchange earnings.  
Young dreamers yearn for yellow yields.

*AlixxBleu Carter*

## Alliteration

Money makes many mesmerized,  
While those entitled to it, embrace everything  
that comes with it.  
Earning money is like the sweet smell of  
cinnamon sticks.  
It intrigues individuals, which influenced many  
to fight for it.

*Aidden Wood*





*l-r: Khalil Graham, Tayvion Robinson*



## Ode to Moves

The language  
without a sound  
where rhythm lives  
and feet meet ground.  
In every step,  
a story grows,  
in every sway,  
the feeling shows.  
You spin like wind,  
you glide like air,  
with silent strength  
and fearless flair.  
A heartbeat.

*Ah'Ziah Jones*

## Fright Night

On Halloween, when it's dark and  
dressed in costumes and toothaches  
and sweet candy on October 31st  
me and my friends go through the streets  
knocking on doors  
getting candy like everyone else.  
Soon we got to another neighborhood for more candy.  
As we're walking a man in a clown costume is following us.  
We think nothing of it because we are focused on candy.  
We are getting concerned because he's still following us.  
Soon as we cross the street, he chases us.  
He catches us.  
Little did we know, it was my Dad.

*Antoine Offutt*





*l-r: Daniel Leake, Romel Jones, Zion Thornton*

## Ode to Hair

My hair, her hair, their hair  
All hair is scary like  
something that is haunting you.

Something that is echoing  
“Here come the naps, here come the naps.”  
But then, like a candle,  
yours is what makes you shine so bright.

The perfect combo with your generous smile.  
Glowing like the sunrise

Your teeth, so bright and shiny  
with a hint of sweetness  
and your big round hair  
that makes you, you.

All your facets sparkle  
when you're in the mirror,  
like a star in the doorway  
saying, follow me.

A touch of sweetness all over.

*Taylor Berry*

## Nobody magic

I am alone with nobody  
but myself, everyone disappearing.

The moon shining, stars aligning  
I carried everything that I owned.

No ancient people, no anybody  
darkness, quiet, silence.

I conjure the world:  
nobody here to make food, snakes,  
build houses, feed animals.

*Jarell McCullough, Jr.*





*l-r: Ms. McDuffie, Eden Price*

## Lucky charm

I realized I was magic when I was 11.  
My bro was born and I felt like a magical big sister.  
He is my lucky charm.  
I take him everywhere with me.  
He gets me free stuff when we are together.  
We get a lot of attention, mostly because he is adorable.  
It feels so magical being seen.  
He is my special magical baby.

*Lawren Ann Thomas-Jones*

## You can talk to a friend.

I see you are sad  
and suffer from depression  
look for a therapist.

Yes, it's a struggle  
negative thoughts are weakening  
the future is bright.

Mental health matters  
remember to celebrate  
all accomplishments.

*Ty'vale Gardner*





*l-r: Kaleb Abrams,  
Khalil Mitchell*

## Unfinished Emotions

Excitement and euphoria, emptiness and embarrassment no matter the emotion, the expression on my face never changes.

Madness and mirth, malice and melancholy it all feels the same, like an empty pit of darkness that just won't stop growing.

Overjoyed and overwhelmed, ominous and oddness whatever fills the well, so deep inside my gut that feels like it has no bottom.

Tranquility and tiredness, terror and thrill feeling so heavy, like an elephant riding on my back, like a leopard clawing at my spine, like a gorilla wailing on my back just to pass the time.

Interest and impatience, inferiority and insecurity anyone can feel one or the other.

*Dinerio Nathan*

## Putting my best foot forward

I had a dream of being  
the best in the world in football  
and I put my best foot forward  
and put my mind to it  
and forgot about all the distractions,  
and if I do it in real life  
I can accomplish it and live my dream.

*Corey Wilson*





*l-r: Taylor Berry, Destiny Coates*

## Stay Safe

Be aware of your surroundings.  
Stay careful at all costs.  
Just be safe.  
Anyone can be your friend  
but don't trust them.  
Cuz some talk behind backs.

*Nickell Day*

## Shine again

Floating flowers arise from the moon  
filled with shy sweet smiles.

If they float too far down  
the shyness will turn into darkness  
and the sweet smiles will slowly disappear.

And the full moon  
will come wandering  
again laughter will finally come  
floating around back  
to the dreamy sky.

*Sierra Egypt*





Pre-show workshop for "Inherit the Wind" at Arena Stage



## Smooth days, weather & thoughts

Spring soft sweet weather  
long dreamy skies

Sweet lullaby flowers  
Breathing, the beginning of something

Something fresh, something new  
remembering the full soft moon  
out of my window

Violet sky whispers from the trees  
silent smooth thought as I walk  
through the sweet floating darkness

*Taylor Berry*

## Who knows?

Who knows if spring is spring?  
What if, floating  
long in the silence, shy to talk  
dark in my room  
violet, fighting for feeling  
the beginning of life?  
Disappearance, the start of life.

*Tristian McNair*





## Treasure's Freedom Away

Long days  
very sunny, remembering  
the dark cold days.

Floating on clouds,  
breathing the air,  
looking out the window.

Disappearing in my room,  
away from everyone.

My room is so silent,  
no one bothering me,  
smooth cover, very quiet.

*Treasure Onley*

*Destiny Coates*

## Weird world

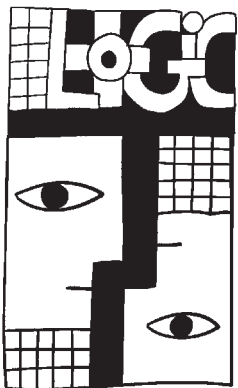
People collide and  
all become weird.  
Cracks in my heart tell me  
it's time to disappear.

Love me or hate me, I'm  
always going to be a lover.  
Soul spiral, suffering soul,  
always finding a way back.

Observe injustices because  
we all have freedom of speech,  
right?

Vocals overturn my farewell  
and I feel change in the orbit  
of my soul.

*Sierra Egypt*





*l-r: Gregory Nickens, Colton Fersner*

## The best day

The moonlight shines the purest white  
the majestic light shines on the water  
making the ocean glow.  
The trees flowing like waves  
as the leaves fall with the flowers,  
I lie in the tree, the flowers falling down.  
I give up, letting the waves carry me to the ocean.  
The fog has gotten close, I close my eyes  
holding my breath as I go underwater,  
going deeper, the waves and water crush me.  
I feel my lungs being crushed  
as my life closes, and I let go.  
Then I wake up in a flower field—  
I lie down under a willow tree, the best day ever.

*Khloe Matthews*

## Spring field

Coming out of a keen  
city in the sky  
filled with pretty people  
friendly long mountains  
floating in the air with laughter  
smiling faces and silent rage  
in grass with yellow cars  
and white flowers,  
mixed with a nice sweetness  
Smell something that's  
fresh and new.

*Aliya Freeman*



Zion Thornton



## Untitled

...and you're like some hero  
Everybody looks up to you  
wants to be just like you  
But why?

You say to yourself  
different shorties, same day  
Why can't they see it?  
Maybe they don't want to

In the midnight hour of wine...  
weed and sex  
your homeboy just got shot last night  
you move on with your life  
he was fake anyway

But why?  
Everybody looks up to you  
wants to be just like you  
and you're like some hero

Dayna Hudson

## Noodles

I love noodles.  
When I think about noodles,  
I think about my soul leaving my body.  
I change when somebody gives me noodles.  
I feel so golden about my noodles.  
My noodles be overflowing when I make them.

Peyton Phoenix





*Empress Norris*

## Creative Alliteration

Creation can make you calm,  
but don't conquer or have a corrupted mind.

The sunset spirals and our souls shine;  
People don't suffer and  
don't become a shadow.

The universal is sometimes unknown  
and united so you have to be unique.

God is the greatest, the best,  
He's good, and our father.

*Jarell McCullough Jr.*

## Love in the air

When you are in love  
it feels like your soul leaves your body.  
When you're in love  
you might change how you look or feel  
for a person you're in love with.  
When you're in love  
you might wanna feel their presence.  
Love lasts longer when you are deep in love.

*Peyton Phoenix*





*l-r: Jahziah Cabbell, Jamal Cabbell*

## The Joyful Year

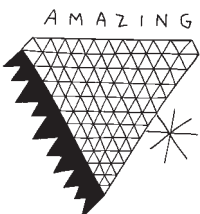
There will always be people shopping at the grocery.  
There will always be haters, but the hate doesn't bother me.  
Crackheads in the alley, people standing outside the corner stores.  
There will always be summer, and people outside  
selling lemonade or going to the pool.  
After summer, there will always be school.

*Ziyonni Fields*

## How a perfect day looks

A perfect day looks like  
the sun is out and everybody  
plays outside and people have fun  
and it's hot until the sunset, when  
everybody goes home and goes to bed  
and wakes up and has a good day at school.

*Bre Spruill*





## Broken words of raising voices

Words collide and collapse  
against creation, crashing  
into the currents  
of the constant defeat.

A fierce, fragile form feels the fabric  
forming fine fires and flames.

Storms arrive in sudden shock  
breaking into the unknown at a  
small fraction of suffering,  
shadowing the solemn shade.

Even the farewell of fear finds  
its final forgiveness.

*Aliya Freeman*

## That will never happen

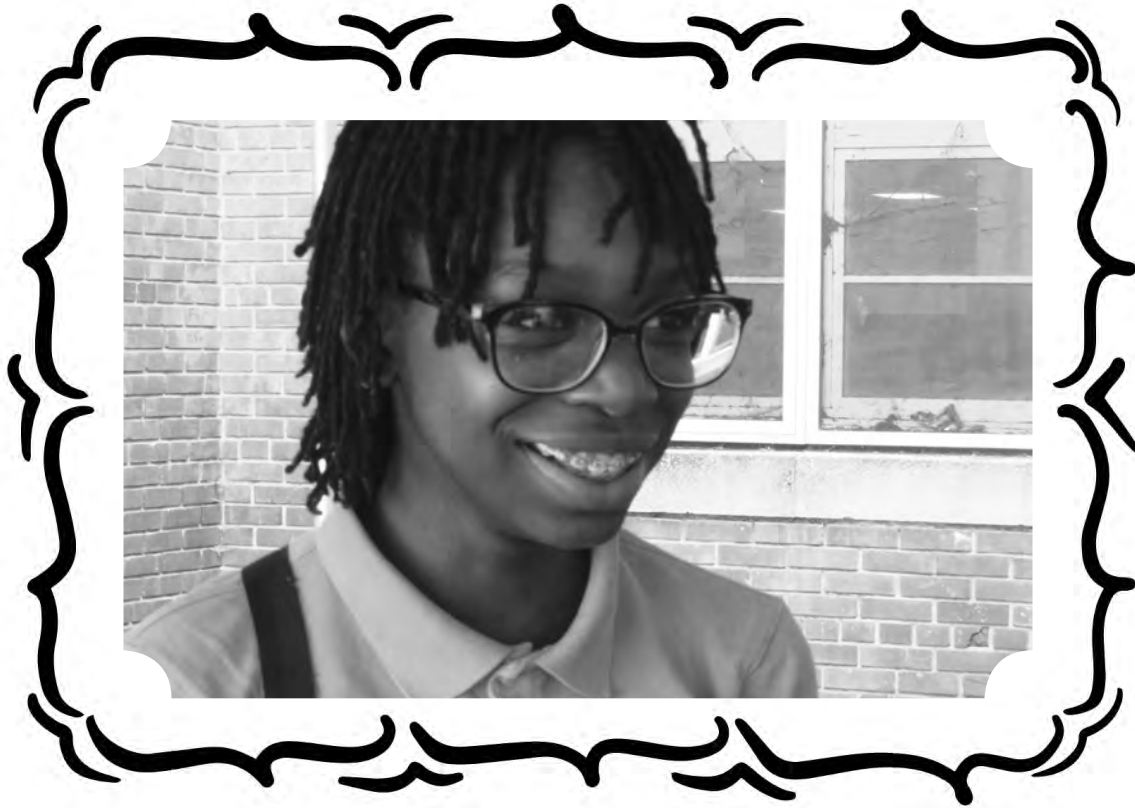
There will always be blue M&Ms  
and soda when I am happy.  
Unknown things will always be waiting for you.

Jealousy is not the key to success in life  
but sunlight is coming through the window.

Sunset is awakening sweetness  
with clouds of love and respect.  
They will never make me feel darkness inside,  
or sadness.

*Tayvion Robinson*





*Khloe Matthews*

## Mindset takeover

This breathless violent speechless  
hatred will never change. I find clumsy  
savage people every day; loneliness  
floats through my mind, brutality,  
mirror, mirror on the wall;  
rhythm will stick with them all.  
Pride praises, but people don't,  
while jealousy takes over the world  
with everyone left inside.

*Sierra Egypt*



## My Song

Stage lights, as I sing on a stage,  
performing a song;  
It sounds like flowers and my voice,  
like a strawberry, sounding like ocean waves.  
As people see me on television,  
and at the airport, people watch with happiness.  
I sang with happiness for a few seconds  
and then I was very quiet.

*Savion Wood*



*l-r: Jayceon Manning,  
Nehemiah Manning*



## Alliteration

Attempting to arrive at the airport  
in the afternoon in April  
against all odds.

My life is livable and  
everybody loves me.  
I am loyal to my lucky love.

Being a doctor made me depressed.  
Daydreaming in the distant drama  
over my dying dog.

Cooking a caramel cake  
eating crackers around the carousel  
being creative with my cream-colored cat.

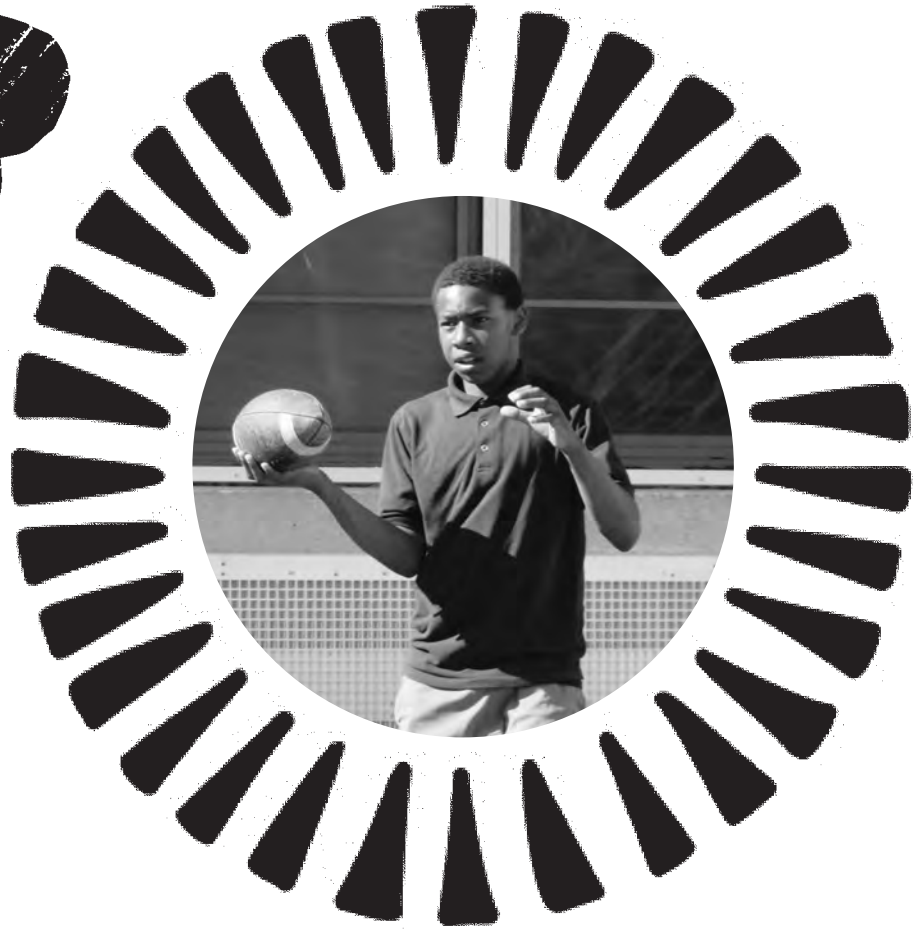
*Ah'Ziah Jones*

## The Best Music

Music is a groove that everybody likes.  
Everybody can beat their feet.  
My father loves it and my sister loves it too.  
It comes from the city, D.C. and it sounds so cool.  
It doesn't use too many words.  
It's the beat's music, it's healthy.  
It takes breaks in between  
and it uses a lot of drums.  
It hits the right keys  
It's never ending.  
It makes people jump and want to hop and sing.

*Ah'Ziah Jones*





## Universal language

Music has creativity, vibration in the air.  
It lifts the soul and frees it from despair.

A whisper, a beat, a thunder chord  
more than the spoken, written or mash up.

A universal language, that has rhymes,  
symbols and it's peaceful.

*Jarell McCullough, Jr.*

*Deangelo Fuller*

## My Role Model

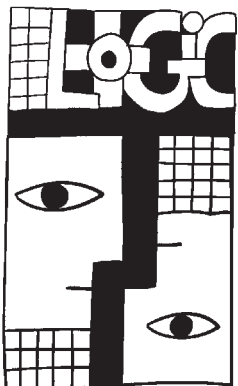
Walking around in my momma's shoes  
Click-clacking on the floor  
Happy to see her home from work  
Smiling as she walked through the door

I wanted to be just like her  
Until I started to see  
Even though life was good to her  
It could be better to me

I'm growing up now  
I have a sister and brother  
But they have me to look up to  
As well as a successful mother

Everyone has a dream  
With their head up in a cloud  
But my dream has already come true  
—Making my mommy proud!

*Dayna Hudson*





*Lance Willis*

## Magic Mermaid

I realized I was magic when I was a baby  
and it was my birthday.  
We were at the pool and we all took a swim.  
At first, I was scared but my cousins told me to get in.  
The magic started when my foot touched the water.  
It was cold but felt good.  
I got in and was swimming like a mermaid.  
The water was splashing everywhere.

*Samaria McCrary*

## Superhero

My commitment will be to use my voice  
and my superpower will be invisibility or  
camouflage  
because you don't know when you'll need it.  
And when I felt magical is when my cousin  
left his phone in the snow  
and I grabbed it, and it still works till this day.

*Nehemiah Manning*





*l-r: Jayden Ramos, Damarco Bray*



## Music calms me

Music makes me  
calm down  
all noise making  
my body calm  
It reminds me  
of a calm day  
and that I am  
still myself.

*Treasure Onley*

## Freedom

Winter cold, windy, and dark.  
We have to layer up and have red noses.  
Then one day, the breeze feels different, odd.  
You see that your breath is not shown in the wind.  
It's nice and warm.  
No more pants, long sleeves, coat.  
You feel no more discomfort.

You feel free, freedom!

You look in the sky, beautiful sunset.  
You look at the ground, flowers blooming.  
You hear lullabies from bees getting pollen.

You're so free, oh so free!

*Dakota King*





*l-r: Sasha Farrell, Dulce Garcia Rodriguez, Dakota King*

## Magic

I realized I was magic when I was six years old  
because that is when I started to think I could be invincible.  
All I had to do was reach out and catch  
a handful of magic from different things.  
I activate the magic when it's school time  
or in different parts of the community.  
I would use it to help people in class  
and to do good things to help the community.

*Jayceon Manning*

## Freedom of Drawing

When I have the freedom of drawing  
I can float in the sky like a hot balloon.  
The smooth pencil to the paper  
calms me down when I'm mad.  
The sky is dark when I draw  
because it brings me peace and help.  
It's silent when I write, because I feel like myself.  
But when I draw, everything disappears.

*Peyton Phoenix*





Romeo Taylor

## Shhh, She is Sleeping

Shhh, she is sleeping,  
but for real.  
She is dreaming deeply.

He said it was time to go  
no more pain,  
hurt or sorrow.

Looking and crying,  
knowing I will never see her again  
until the end of the road.

Six feet deep  
she lies covered in mud,  
love and tears.

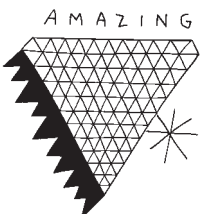
Knowing that this  
is what I fear.  
Dreaming deeply into the light.

Mariah Moorer

## Untitled

My world bends, folds  
like people on my street  
Flames burn black  
as I look back at the past  
Doors crack high  
You're tired of bad potato chips  
The food never ends  
The long road is tired of moldy blue flames  
Someone tries day and night to shake the earth  
Sometimes you think it is a curse, but it's not  
People run in fear  
to sleep, creep and turn blue  
Morning's mad at you  
the bright reflection  
Think about love and hate  
and the hero.  
The earth trembles and shakes.

Jamal Williams





*l-r: Romel Jones, Jarai Jones, Je'Nai Leake, Jahziah Cabbell, Destiny Coates*

## Anger Speaks

Anger slowly knits a sweater in my head  
I stare down a pen as if it's going to pick  
itself up and write out my thoughts  
I try to use the force, just like Luke Skywalker  
It doesn't work  
Things aren't like the movies  
Oh I hate movies  
I stand... I drag my feet to the table  
I stand... I pick up the pen  
I just don't feel like writing today  
Drop the pen... Anger says  
Take your frustration out on your family  
Anger stops... waits  
Anger speaks  
Your friends, take your frustration  
out on them  
I cry... I blank out  
I regain my composure...  
I'm exhausted... my eyes start to water over  
There must be a sprinkler near by... or  
Maybe an onion  
I look around... the Earth is destroyed  
Anger speaks  
This is what happens when you do  
write...  
Anger speaks.

*Nichell Kee*

## Butterflies

I am as quiet as a butterfly  
I've been a butterfly ever since I was an ant  
I can smell the dirt on me  
I can hear the grass moving  
I can see the dead bugs  
The grass tastes like lions fighting  
Lightning came from Raid  
and hit 601 Mississippi Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20032 (Hart Middle School)  
I can't hear the grass moving  
I can hear it a little bit  
Well, I'm about to listen a little bit carefully  
I didn't fly today because my feet got wet  
from the rain  
Free to be you and me  
The angry fist of power

*Tamika Mitchell*





*l-r: Jahziah Cabbell, A'lysa Allen, Jarai Jones, Je'Nai Leake, Ah'Ziah Jones, Destiny Coates*

## Lost Within a Dream

Night comes very silently  
like the killer inside of the lost wonderer  
Then I rest  
at the counter in the kitchen  
As I sleep  
I open my eyes and I'm in some place  
As I walk and see withering trees crying  
with tears from the ocean  
As the wind stops  
and the creatures come up from under  
the ground  
and as the heart stops  
and freezes with the chill  
of haunted Christmas's past  
I walk to the door  
and see the future of the lost souls  
inside of the torturous mind

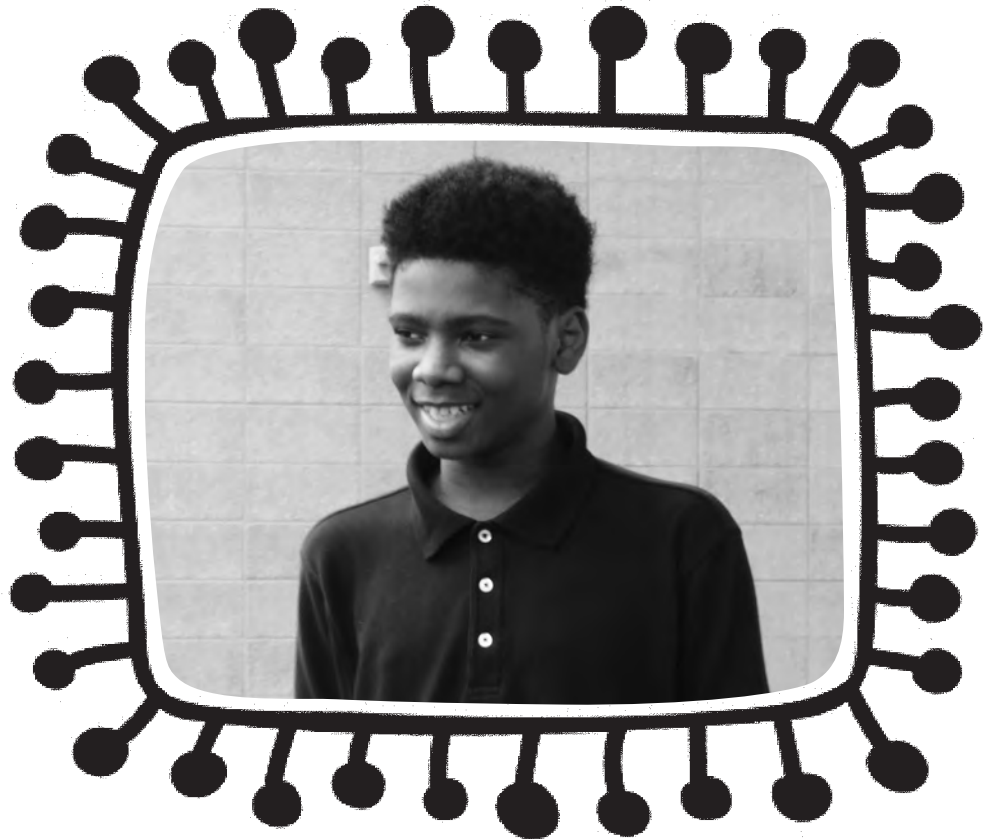
of the child demon  
Of the demonic mind of the lost soul  
found by the one lost person  
Within a dream which is me  
as I continue toward the end of the road  
and see the building lost within the woods  
surrounded by holy words  
Used by the loving angel, lost within its mind  
as I look and see the wind coming forward  
and the withering trees coming forth  
from out of the ground  
and I run into the lost house  
and fall onto the chair, and look up at the sky  
and think to myself  
How could I become lost within a dream?

*DeAndre Britten*





Romeo Taylor



## Lucky questions

What is hair?

The stringy brown lines of softness  
that hides a bald head or wrinkles  
from Pilgrims a long time ago.

What are the class expectations?

Working your finger and hand  
until they're red like strawberries  
on Valentines Day  
doing your work of 10,000 words per minute

What is life?

24 hour birth of a hardheaded  
hyperactive little brat, a spontaneous child  
out until one in the morning

What is death?

Forever torture that comes to an end

What is song?

A continuous beat, bumping  
jumping in my heart  
a continuous song in my ear  
always humming an anthem

Who will be my prom date?

A broken down want-to-be  
who will never amount to nothing

No, who will be my prom date?

A chocolate Denzel,  
when seeing is near a bluejay

What will I wear?

A high yellow outfit

Oh no, what will I wear?

A sparkly in black dress  
that reveals the sun and moon

Why is love blind?

Because people don't see what's in front of them  
Because the love is in Venus  
or better yet,  
the love is in you.

Rhia Hardman



## My Reflection Is Not Me?

What, where, who?  
Where am I?  
Dreaming, I'm dreaming  
I think  
Who is that lying down, dreaming?  
I wonder what he's dreaming about.  
I hop in his dream  
He's dreaming,  
he's dreaming about  
dreaming about himself  
Jumping into someone else's dream  
He's nosey  
I move left, his right flies up  
The road breaks down, into dreams of dreams  
that can only be interpreted  
by the next dream  
But he who does not rest, does not dream  
Yet, he who sleeps only knows half  
of that which he dreams of  
Maybe the dream you do not remember  
you were not supposed to dream

*Shaquiel Jenkins*



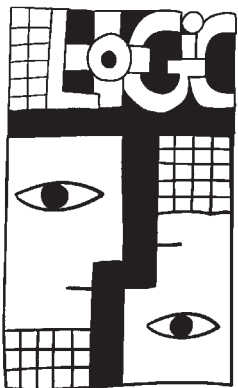
*Tayvion Robinson*

## Riff About My Father

Sitting there with fear yelling  
at the top of his lungs  
Whispers between the walls  
Floor shaking  
Deep tables slammed with a fist

Standing on the stairs  
a little girl  
staring at the father  
breathing with anger  
But as he looks at the sweet sugar chocolate pie  
he really sees his baby  
white cold ice going down her lips

*Antoinette Better*





*l-r: Zyonni Fields, Mije King*

## Hear My Words

Someplace, forget strength,  
rattling memories, drowsy songs,  
wild oceans that are a haze.

A shadow of a rose  
that is velvet, and cotton  
that will crumble  
and glittering flames.

Staircase, heart beating,  
like a sound of the rain  
beating, candle twilight  
in the zone.

Hear my words!

*Andrea Hermans*

## Eyes You Don't Have

Is my gaze clear?  
Living the life of a person  
who is low down and depressed  
walking the streets of a world  
that was once nature  
turned into a rubbish wasteland

My philosophy is not to worry about me  
Conduct the feeling that life is short  
Use it well  
To me, life is just a seed in the world we call home

I believe in believing  
and as I believe  
hopefully, so can you

*Jamal Buggs*





*Jayden Ramos*



## April

April—  
Its smooth fragrance,  
Its random howl

I can hear the fascination in her tone  
By the silent guitar  
And the fading laughter  
In the distance.

I can see the gathering  
Of the crimson wings  
Beating their exotic colored rhythm  
The glow in their moonlit eyes  
The risen dawn or  
The ghostly blankness  
That comforts my shadow.

I can feel the unwritten thermal  
Beneath my ragged unstable skeleton  
Falling under the rain  
Pouring down,  
Breaking my every bone.

*James Tindle*

## Where I wanna be

I'm stuck at the bottom, but I want to be at the top  
It feels as though there's no way  
so I guess I should stop everything  
It's so cold and rocky, I wonder if I get there  
will they like me?  
It's such an emotional whirlwind  
wondering if I'll ever fit in  
I don't care about them, that's the thing  
It's who I wanna be  
that makes me wanna scream  
I wanna be at the top of the mountain  
without getting trapped in an avalanche  
Will I make it? I don't know.  
I'm so scared and it's so cold.  
I'm scared to face them at the top  
I wish I could put my life on hold.

*Nefertearia Crawley*





*l-r: Jayceon Manning, Patrick Washington*

## The Reason Why

Rests by day, travel by night  
why must there be secrecy?  
Can that help me in this  
cold heartless world?

Think about love, feel like dying  
but there is no reason for you to be crying.  
Help yourself, because you have no boundaries.  
You are the reason that we have escaped  
so now we are free.

Where heaven trembles and earth shakes,  
this place causes the volcano to erupt  
in my heart.  
She is my world. She, you may ask.  
Don't worry, you are soon to see,  
this is the reason she needs me.

This poem has no title for a reason,  
because not one word can describe how I feel.  
No thoughts, no sentence, no drawing,  
only my heart.  
The reason I'm writing this.

*Jawara Johnson*

## Everyday Life

There's a boy sitting at a desk  
admiring the clock ticking on the wall  
while staring at the little black girl  
with the pretty long black braids.

The girl is wearing thick glasses,  
so thick she can look into the future.  
While the girl is not paying attention to the little boy,  
she is daydreaming of her rotten fruits in her fridge.  
Her voice is unheard and unloved;  
Words stuck in her mouth won't come out  
And she's still feeling like jetsam in polluted water  
but this is her everyday life

*Yasmin Jones*





Jayceon Manning

## When I am like the world

Ironically, it is when I'm most self-conscious;  
it is when I care what everyone else says.

When fatigue is festering  
and I won't die until I'm gently burned  
by the gracious sun in the morning.

Lying in the bed, fresh out of the shower  
my belly is filled with food, my homework is done.  
I'm in my PJs, and these late-night re-runs effectively sedate me.  
I'm ready.

Lying in the bed, I fight this impending darkness.  
I have the world to blame for this fear.  
It's their fault.  
Every night it comes.  
And when it comes, I am like them.  
I am then concerned with their humanist notions of life.  
I am then fearful of going to sleep,  
to die, and not to wake in the morning.

I'm no longer this outcast, rebel-type of guy  
but I'm one of them.  
I'm scared, just like them.

James Saunders





## Walking Into A Nightmare

*Nehemiah Manning*

Hate. Disgust. Grief and shame.  
These are the feelings—of me.  
As I enter into a sudden silence. Darkness.  
Of a memory that belongs to more than six million.

I live the life of others for only a few hours.  
But it feels as if I am the life.  
Walking for my freedom through a couple of miles.

The opening flames over innocent souls  
brings tears to my eyes, that seem to flow  
onto burned, lifeless bodies  
buried beneath my feet.

As I walk through other peoples' lives  
I seem to hear them scream for help.  
Survival. Their lives.

But I have a fear of waking up into this dream.  
Of being treated this way, told to do this or that.  
Knowing when I'm going to die.  
Seeing fear before my own eyes.

This is all a dream, flickering within my mind.  
But I choose to never again treat people as if they were a sin.

*Kiana Murphy*

## The Dark

A dark destructive time is at hand  
An illusion of a scarlet end of being  
The tempest destroys all  
The earth's core, driven to destruction  
Thunder is crashing through the air  
Mankind is going down  
Into the burning fire of a firefly  
Driven down into the abyss,  
Where death is certain, the biggest fear  
Of all fears is ourselves  
The destruction of earth is now  
Fear the darkness.

*Damon Kee*





*Jonah Kamara*

## My father

My gaze is sadness, full of tears  
hate, anger, frustration,  
and, just maybe  
sometimes happiness.

It is my custom to hide  
these feelings of suffering and darkness.

And sometimes I may cry when  
I'm not alone.

And what I see is nothing,  
no image, no face,  
as he slowly fades  
from my mind and heart.

And I'm very good at forgetting,  
But I will never forgive.

The world wasn't made  
to be stuck in the past,  
but to move on and live life.  
I have no regrets—  
I think everything happens for a  
reason.

If I speak of him,  
it is in hate and anger.  
It's not because of what he did,  
but because of what he didn't do.

To love is not easy,  
but I will never love.

*Asia Barber*





*Damarco Bray*

## Life

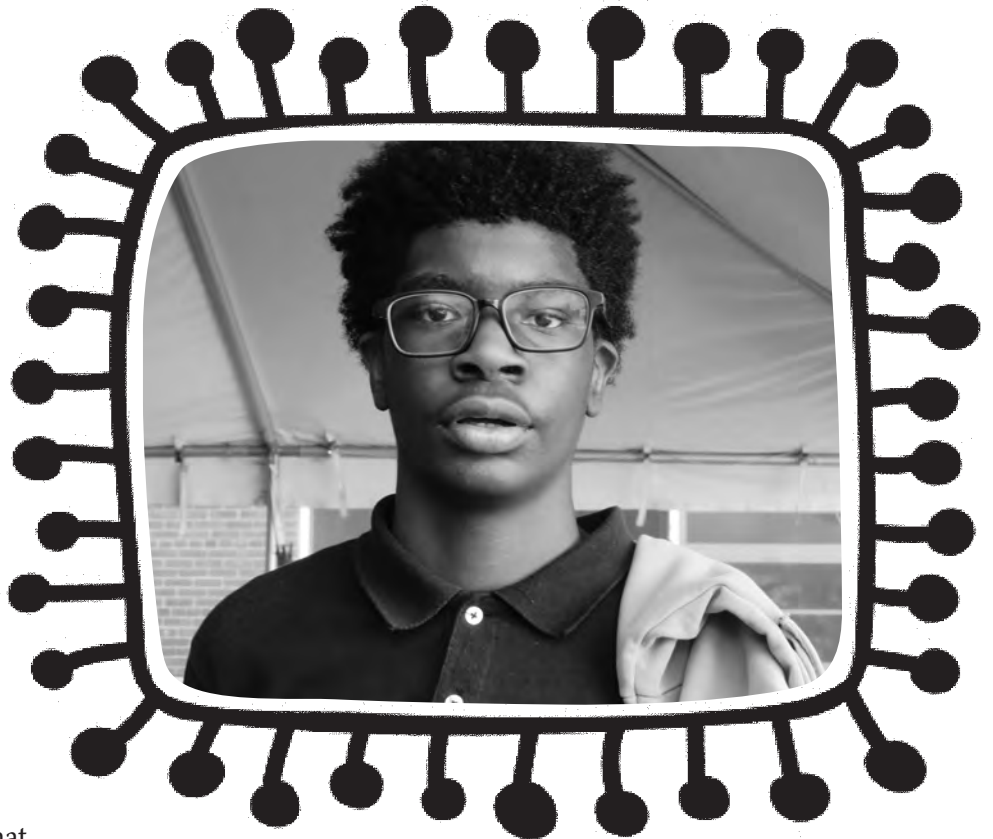
Mesmerized by thoughts of people  
they think about love.  
Many of them think about food,  
kids, school, work, you know  
things of that sort.  
But I can't concentrate on stuff like that.

You think you can save the world  
with one thought.  
But when you are thanked for a good deed  
you think you're like some hero.  
Well guess what? Snap back to reality,  
you're a normal person.

When you die, you are no longer thinking  
the thoughts that so mesmerized.  
Thinking you can save the world  
because you are a hero.  
You will be trapped in between  
where heaven trembles  
and earth shakes.

Now you are stuck.  
Your soul can't be released  
unless you think you are a hero  
and can save the world.  
And you can be mesmerized  
by the thoughts of love  
from the people. Until then,  
you are stuck. And that's life.

*Jessica Carpenter*



## Ode to the Moon

The brightness that lights up the stars  
centered in the middle with ostentation

Vivid as it is exquisite, surrounded by  
its azure admirers. The night sky.

It is a sculpture of brilliance,  
created by no human.

The way it glows, blinds us, it cannot be  
reached. For it is an untouchable beauty.

The moon remains young, and still pretty,  
notorious and wondrous every night.

*Maryum Abdullah*





## You Figure it Out

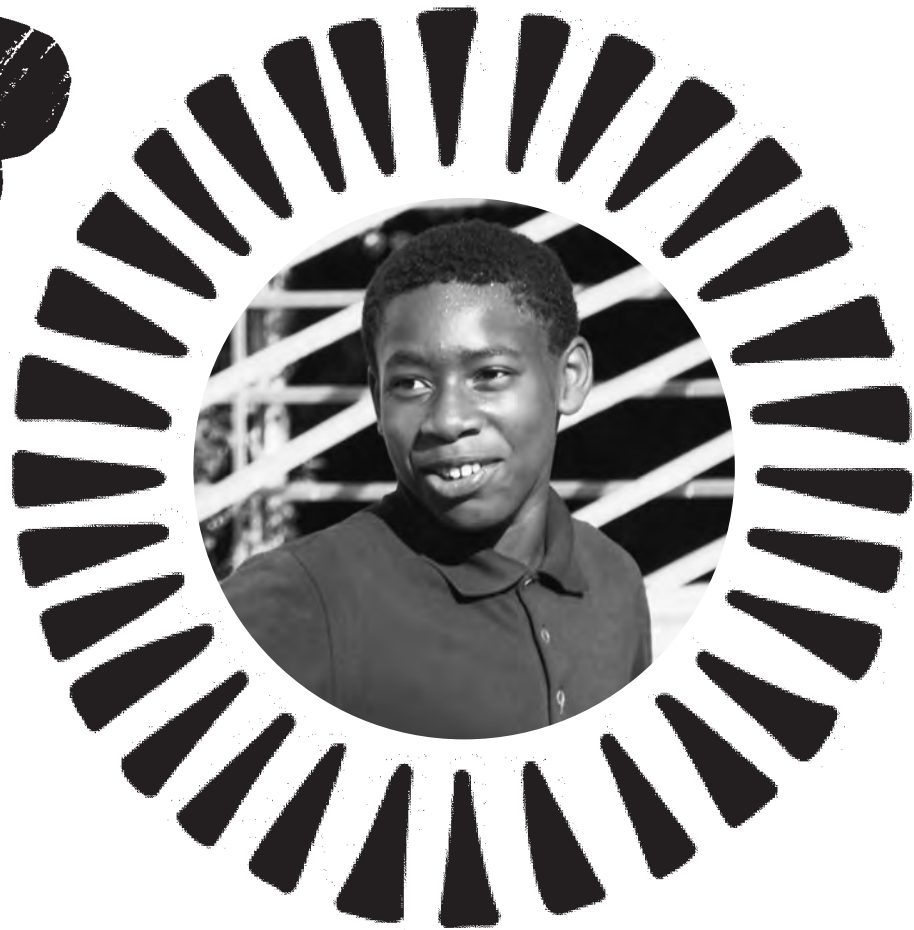
In an ancient time  
an unforgotten dream  
that scared me  
and took my heart  
through a dangerous pulse.

Mortal revelation  
going through my restless soul  
seeing:  
that person  
that thing  
that body.

Wounded dream  
in a luxurious fortress  
releasing  
the tenderness from my mind.

Cruel ember  
come from his uprooted heartstrings  
struggling asunder like  
a withered lantern  
in mid-day light.

*Monae Smith*



*Deangelo Fuller*

## Inspiration

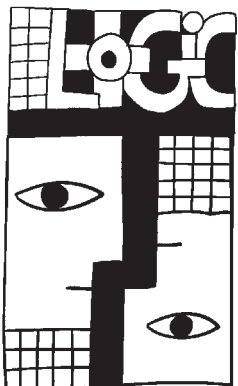
A poem to me is a waste of time,  
an unneeded pain, a rough draft of migraines,  
more unwanted thoughts drenching paper.

Yeah, it makes sense, I guess.  
I don't see how people find hope in metaphoric nonsense,  
or how they convey secret messages through it.

All we are is bullets.  
And the words trigger confusion,  
minds bleed a pride puddle.

A poem to me is another way of screaming out loud.  
When I'm frustrated, a break of some sort,  
a natural euphoria.

*Maryum Abdullah*





*l-r: Romel Jones, Jahziah Cabbell, Ah'Ziah Jones, Treasure Onley, Jarai Jones, Taylor Berry, Je'Nai Leake, Raegan Jackson*

## Poem

I feel loved,  
attracted to the fact that forever lost  
confidence made it's way back,  
frequent shadows of the days touch me  
through torture, my true feelings were evicted,  
all of it, self-inflicted,  
I thought insults flew left and right when  
they were never even in sight,  
thinking that I was nothing but a nimrod  
who never took flight,  
I'm sorry for myself, I never get anything done,  
My commitment level is 1,000,000 to one,  
I look to the horizon to see—  
I can see  
where I could be,  
chances are put there for a reason,  
not taking them is worse than treason,  
I worry about having comrades,  
You know, things I already had,  
Bu one thing was accomplished in my maze,  
I'm better off alone, focusing on my goals,  
The day I made time fly for me is the day I flew.

*Sequan Wilson*

## Wanted

They wanted me to be light;  
I wanted to be dark.  
She wanted me to be a groupie;  
I wanted to be the star.

They wanted me to be prey;  
I wanted to be the predator.  
She wanted me to be a stream;  
I wanted to be a waterfall.

They wanted me to spread violence;  
I wanted to spread peace.  
I wanted a Mercedes;  
They gave me a Buick.

*Lakeisha Thompson*





*l-r: Ah'Ziah Jones, Ah'Zar Smith*



## Crossing The Great Rivers

Looking down at the sea  
with the sand in my feet  
the wind in my hair  
and some water in my jeans,  
I stand tall to the world  
carry the weight of 3  
elephants, 4 giraffes and 2  
albino squirrels.

From my shoulders to my troubles  
and I have let them all  
sink into the littoral zone,  
to watch the sway of the  
waters bring them in and  
form them as a tidal wave.  
Surf's up, I've got to face  
my fears.

*Aaron Brooks*

## Philosophy

I come from a clash of anger and clouds  
I make my home where I rest my sore bones and head  
I see wild heartbeats pulsing to a steady rhythm  
and I wonder, do I feel for the fearless?  
When I am alone, I repress any feeling  
I imagine that I can just be left alone  
Every day, I see whirling flames that clash into nothingness  
but if you look closely, I'm hurting  
A voice inside me says that betrayal is the simple life  
and I want to tell the world to get a backbone  
Right now I am drifting to a soon-to-be lost memory  
but someday I will fill the void in my heart  
with something other than hate—  
I wish life had meaning.

*Bruce Gibson*





*Mason Pernell*

## I am?

I am trying not to be what I think I am  
hiding every day from people, not thinking I'm a man.  
I am probably a superstar inside, trying to hide  
from paparazzi who try to make who I am.  
I guess I'm just paranoid because people pass me by  
staring like I'm not there and thinking I'm not nice.

Come to think of it, who says I can't make myself out to be  
who I want everyone to be, just like me?  
I am the person who is transparent, stuck in a verse like this  
trying to be everyone else.  
Well, if that's true, I try too hard  
to be a carved monkey in that monkey suit.

If that's true, I am the moon, full of no emotions  
looking at the one guy everyone and me tries to be.

I am trying to hide, trying to hide with everyone  
and I'm dressed and hidden into what you're doing  
and what's new, hey, but if life was the same  
who would be the leader, tough guy everyone follows  
in the fast cars, superstars,  
and his kid who is going to be just like him  
not because he's good, but because he's cool in school  
and all the kids he knows are just like him.  
I am exactly who that guy is, or him, or her,  
Just like you.

*Luqman Abdullah*

## A Silver Sound

A silver sound upon city shadows,  
With a rhythmic heart and a blazing twirl;  
My symbol never ending, it's unmistakable.  
Wind me up like a healthy mask.  
My peaceful radio beats.  
I use my phone for call and response.

*Jahziah Cabbell*





*l-r: Isaiah Fullington, Jonah Kamara, Khalil Wilkins, Gregory Nickens, Kaleb Abrams*

## Double Exposure

Picture me with a gown and a cap  
 sitting on a chair with a diploma in my lap  
 Smiling slightly for the camera  
 but barely trying at all  
 with my mind somewhere else  
 thinking “Hmm, do I hear last call?”

And then the bright light comes  
 nearly blinding me to death  
 and I get up slowly  
 as the photographer calls “next.”

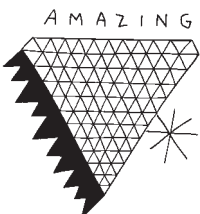
In today’s self-portrait,  
 an image covered by dried tears  
 because of one of my deepest fears—  
 I stayed back  
 So in the same class, it is  
 on the same schedule, I stick  
 and the ball of moving on  
 sits in the same pit

*Marcus Johnson*

## I Be I Don't Know

I be broke down cars  
 I be stolen vehicles at night  
 I be stuff happens, my bad  
 I be what up  
 No reason for it  
 I be silence it  
 Was a gift  
 I be thrashed victims  
 Murder for no reason  
 I be corner smarts, black smarts and  
 A little Higher Education  
 I be guidance counselors  
 I be attendance for the fallen  
 I be quitting when it gets too  
 Hard, I be surviving through a  
 School day  
 I be a poet

*Damon Kee*





*l-r: Zion Thornton,  
Romel Jones*

## Friends

The only way to have a friend  
Is to be one  
So I am  
the colors in my friendship:  
Black, green and red  
Black is for black power  
Green is for the color we love best  
Red is for our blood

The only way to have a friend  
Is to be one  
So I am helping a friend  
I am the moon that you seek

*Nakia Better*

## What You Told Me

You told me that I was a shadow  
like a salty lighthouse in the bottom of the ocean  
with a boat that drowned in the darkness  
It is angels with hunger and never  
new love in their lives at the north pole  
a light with somebody's footsteps on the stairs like a crime  
some sawdust in my hands and a trumpet that won't make noise  
but it prays to you and the moon.  
a venom from a loyal daybreak and a bottomless trampling with it  
Final word, but no wilderness in life  
In this universe, nothing withdraws or is going to pull away from cobwebs  
So don't be scared of a monster house on Halloween  
Don't give up on your dream, but give up  
on darkness that won't leave you alone  
Just face your fear and don't give up on yourself.

*Stelita Better*





THE END





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*Inside back cover, l-r: Je'Nai Leake, Jarai Jones*

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*Top right: Christopher Martinez*

*Bottom left: Romel Jones*

*Bottom right, l-r: Zion Thornton, Colton Fersner, Akiia Allen, Jonah Kamara*





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