

# Scholar Voices



2022



**WINNER - ART**  
**"Mystery Woman"**  
**Taneeyah, Grade 10**

# **Scholar Voices 2022**

Cover caption from Taneeyah:

Melanin skin, eyes so wide, fierce shoulders so proud, daring with care. Full hearted bleeding red lips so loud she just might scare you. Her crown hidden, covered in wraps of purity. Bends and winds of her beautiful wrap exposing and uncovering the long dusty storm of her life.

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# **A Message to Our Pathways to College Scholars and Other Readers**

Literary: (adj). Relating to literature, especially of the kind viewed as having artistic merit; of or relating to writers; pertaining to authorship.

Magazine: (n). A publication that is issued periodically, usually bound in a paper cover, and typically containing essays, stories, poems, etc., by many writers...

## **Welcome to the 2022 edition of *Scholar Voices*, the literary magazine of Pathways to College!**

Each year, our Scholars tell us by their submissions what they are interested in and what they think is important. So this year we add a new category to our submissions list: Literary Criticism. It includes analyses, interpretations and opinions of literature that Scholars found thought-provoking and engaging.

Also, we note the very positive response to last year's edition that included work by alumni. This year's issue includes work by Scholars who are now alumni, but whose previously published ideas remain insightful, fresh and creative.

We begin with a poem written by a group of Scholars from Newark, New Jersey: "Success: An East Side High School Perspective." It says much of what we continue to emphasize to all members of the Pathways family – hold onto your dreams, keep reaching toward success, and believe in yourself!

## Success: An East Side High School Perspective

Success is reaching out further than you can see

Success is doing what you love

Success is for those who have no limit because the sky is the limit

Success is your own pathway to who you will become

Success is Ralph Waldo Emerson, because he writes words that inspire

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Making mistakes is a part of life..."

Mistakes can make you a better person

Success is what makes you discover yourself

Success is measured by how you've struggled to accomplish your goal, not the position you end up in.

Success is key for happiness and the path of fair opportunities

Success is the contribution to your society and never forgetting who you are.

Don't be afraid of success!

Dominique, 2013; Ana, 2013; Samantha, 2015; Daniel, 2015

All of us at Pathways to College hope that publication of your work in *Scholar Voices* represents the beginning of a long and productive writing career, whether you write email, letters, blogs, tweets, journals, poetry, songs, raps, essays, reports, speeches, short stories, books, articles or family histories; whether your work is paid for or freely given, published, shared with a few close friends or kept under your pillow. Your written words are more important than you will ever know.

We are your cheerleaders! Keep writing!

Judith Berry Griffin

Founder and President

# CONTENTS

## Art and Photography

Front cover TANEYYAH, [Mystery Woman](#) \***WINNER**

Back cover GABRIELLE, [Beauty](#)

- 22 AL-TARIK, [Unsure](#) \***WINNER**  
26 BROOKLYN, [The Wrong Direction](#)  
33 JONATHAN, [Destruction of a Stereotype](#)  
34 JOSIAH, [Scenery of the Inner City](#)

## Essay

- 18 ALEXIS, [Happy](#)  
1 ANIYA, [Teachers Can Do All the Wrong](#) \***WINNER**  
27 CHELSEA, [Dear Maya Angelou](#)  
31 JALEN, [Friction: Shifting of the Brick](#)  
35 KAMARI, [How Does Narrative Style Affect the Reader's Understanding of the Novel?](#)  
38 SAMUEL A., [Are Humans Special?](#)  
40 SAMUEL D., [How Identity Shapes Our Character](#)  
42 SAMUEL T., [Capitalism](#)  
43 TABEAN, [Points of View: A NYC Pigeon vs. a NYC Pedestrian](#)

## Literary Criticism

- 16 CHRISTIANNA, [Which Affects You More, Racism or Sexism?](#) \***HONORABLE MENTION**  
4 ISAIAH, [Freedom Is Either Given or Demanded](#)  
\***WINNER**

## Memoir

- 29 JACQUILINE, [The Mock Trial](#)  
7 KOSISOCHUKWU, [Grief](#) \*WINNER  
8 LYRIC, [Afraid of Failure](#) \*WINNER

## Poetry

- 21 ARNETTA, [The Quiet Ones](#)  
32 JAMES, [The Police Force from Hell](#)  
36 KARON, [You](#)  
37 MICHAEL, [Untitled](#)  
46 TIANNA, [Soldier's Cry](#)  
10 TONI, [I AM](#) \*WINNER

## Short Story

- 19 ANGELA, [More Than a Dog](#)  
24 ATOBA, [Demon Slayer \(Tweaked\)](#)  
12 FATHIA, [The Child Who Is Afraid of the Dark Becomes an Adult Who Is Afraid of the Light](#) \*WINNER  
44 TANAZIA, [Dollar Menu](#)  
47 WHITNEY, [I Am a Warrior Too](#)

## High Schools Represented

|                               |                         |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Arts High School              | Newark, New Jersey      |
| Bergenfield High School       | Bergenfield, New Jersey |
| Central High School           | Newark, New Jersey      |
| Dollarway High School         | Pine Bluff, Arkansas    |
| East Side High School         | Newark, New Jersey      |
| James Hillhouse High School   | New Haven, Connecticut  |
| Merrillville High School      | Merrillville, Indiana   |
| New Tech Innovative Institute | Gary, Indiana           |
| Weequahic High School         | Newark, New Jersey      |
| West Side High School         | Newark, New Jersey      |
| West Side Leadership Academy  | Gary, Indiana           |
| Wilbur Cross High School      | New Haven, Connecticut  |

## WINNER – ESSAY

### Teachers Can Do All the Wrong

Aniya, Grade 9

A couple of days ago, I had the brilliant idea to write an article about how teachers can do all the wrong. I had come up with the title because of the phrase, “**can do no wrong.**” I knew I couldn’t write an article about how teachers can do no wrong because, well, anyone who has gone to school knows every teacher has done “**A**” wrong.

The point I found myself wanting to write about is that a teacher can make one little mistake and their students will do practically anything to find something wrong — not only with who they are as a **person, but also with their skills as a teacher.** I came up with the idea because my class had a new teacher and, for me, it felt like anything she had done or would do would always be seen as bad or “**wrong.**” Hence the name of the article, “**Teachers Can Do All the Wrong.**”

The reason why anything she could do seems wrong is simply because she had made a mistake. She just wasn’t interesting enough and her classroom never felt like a classroom we could be ourselves in. I won’t lie, I was not one to like it when a teacher talked all through class and during the last few minutes asked us questions because I just **can’t learn like that.** Not only is it hard, but I find myself paying attention to anything and everything else. If I saw a leaf falling outside the window, my attention would go to it and not to the fact that my teacher was taking ten minutes just to explain one small thing that could have truly taken 30 seconds, and leave the ones who were actually paying attention **confused** and **frustrated** by the way they were taught.

As the months went by I saw how much my classmates disliked her and it started to annoy me. I didn’t like the lady but I **respected** her and I found their harsh criticism of her teaching to be extreme, to say the least. Luckily for me, I’m great at writing things and explaining my points and opinions whether it be poetry or prose. I knew that if I wanted to get my point across I would have to write down my thoughts. So I got to work on the article, a whole 250 or so words before I placed my laptop into my bag and decided to finish it in the passing days. I didn’t realize that a day or so later she would do the **unforgivable** to me and it wasn’t

just to **me**, but to the **racial community** I had been a part of since I was conceived.

I felt a growing **dislike** of her because even after the talk I had with her, she didn't truly understand my **point**, my **boundaries** that I had put in place before even coming to the school. My point was that I didn't want her to say **the word** that had been used against my friends, **my family**, myself - my **community**. When I was younger, I knew what the word **meant**. I know the history. Call me a nerd or whatever you like because I do enjoy history and I enjoy knowing that any word that may come out of my mouth **isn't a slur used against a community that isn't a part of my own**.

A couple of years ago, I made the **invisible boundary** that I thought would **protect** me against these situations. If I don't say the word, **you won't** either. I guess it hasn't worked out that well. Even during the conversation during which she had decided to say that word, she knew about the **history** and wanted to make it clear why it was **bad**. So it blew my mind and that of my fellow classmate who was also in the room why she had decided to say **it**. Nevertheless, every day since, I haven't wanted to go into her classroom. While I write this I dread the next hours coming up when I **will have to**. I had spent day after day in that classroom, for months, before she came to teach. So for me to feel like I cannot go into a **classroom** that has made me **laugh** and **smile** a **multitude** of times, bothers me so much that I cannot remember that classroom to be anything but a **horrible** part of my **high school experience**.

I didn't want to see her, hear her talking, knowing she didn't and still **doesn't** understand my point. I found myself using everything she had said against her, whether it was good or bad, if it made sense to me or not, because she had done the **unforgivable** and **unforgettable**. I was a hypocrite in that moment, **in those moments**. Now, I wouldn't say I shouldn't **acknowledge** what she's done, it's all I've done for the past week. But I found myself doing the same things I disliked my classmates for doing although this was just on a bigger scale.

I would like to say this wasn't **"malicious."** It simply was a word being said like the word **"bro"** or **"hey,"** but those words cannot be compared to the actual word she said. I bring this up because people have asked me, **"Why did she say it?"** or **"look at the context"** and I almost wanted to be able to tell them **"Why does it matter?"** In my



head it never has. Especially in a school setting when I've never spoken the word in school knowing that not only was it **inappropriate** to say, but that it was also a racial slur, as well as the many students, teachers, and people coming and going from the school feeling uncomfortable from hearing such a word.

I guess the best question to ask myself now is, **when can someone push away the actions of others to further their studies, especially in a situation like mine?** My feelings make me want to say the answer will **forever be never**. A kind of bias, one might say, but one doesn't have to say that as I know that answer isn't correct. Whether I like it or not, I'll have to spend the next couple months **doing her work, seeing her in class**, pretending like I want to **respect** her as a person and a teacher. That sentence even to me seems a bit cruel as the whole point of this was to talk about my article that I'm not sure will ever be completely finished; the person I had imagined myself defending has completely discarded **my points, my identity, and my boundaries**. To that length, I'm sure it will leave an impression on me that I'll find myself looking more into the people I wanted to defend or even have defended, **making this is a learning experience I never asked anyone to give me.**

## **WINNER – LITERARY CRITICISM**

### **Freedom Is Either Given or Demanded**

#### **Isaiah, Grade 11**

Setting, conflict and essentially, characters, make up the friendly concoction of what we call a story. The mood of a reader can instantly shift from bad to worse as the plot and its characters develop throughout the narrative. In her outstanding short story, "The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses," Bessie Head conducts her readers into the unyielding governmental system of South Africa known as apartheid. The story accounts for a group of prisoners whose privileges have been trampled after the introduction of a new, ruthless, white Warder. In this compelling narrative, Head skillfully portrays the theme of finding freedom in the midst of oppression, through an orchestra of dynamic story elements and a leading protagonist named Brille.

The potent hallmarks of the protagonist, Brille, and the antagonist, Warder Hannetjie, mainly attribute to the pertinence of the story and its morals. Span One, a sect of ten uncontrollable prisoners, are initially what define the prison's primitive roots, but nevertheless they are originally the story's suitable image of freedom. One clumsy individual, going by the name of Brille, was different from the rest, as he was the embodiment of demanding freedom, while refraining from physical violence. He was a squealer who informed higher authorities of Hannetjie's misdeeds: stealing fertilizer and providing him with contraband tobacco. Hannetjie's brokenness from the hell he suffered prompts him to compromise a solution with Brille. Brille's response is an unexpected turning point in the story and a resolution. He affirms, "It's not the tobacco we want, but you...We want you on our side. We want a good Warder because without a good Warder we won't be able to manage the long stretch ahead." The description that follows Brille's request reveals how Span One's previous rights were restored by Hannetjie's decision. The exchange of freedom from Brille's demand and Hannetjie's agreement depicts how author Bessie Head personifies the theme of freedom through her characters.

Furthermore, Head utilizes conflict to enhance her story's proposition of freedom. She implements a series of crucial events,

leading up to the narrative's climax. In her insightful story, Head explains how Brille's klutziness rallied conflict between Span One and Warder Hannetjie. Eating cabbages and disposing of the scraps before Hannetjie became his prime offense, which instigated Span One's penalty of lesser meals. When Brille's will to stand up for his comrades presents itself, Hannetjie degrades his humanity and seizes his rights when he instructs the kaffir<sup>1</sup> to address him as his Baas.<sup>2</sup> Brille receives a woeful beating and the story continues to develop around Span One's (as a whole) constant misfortunes. Finally, the climax of the story emerges when Warder Hannetjie places restrictions on Span One's opportunities and resources; availability of cabbages, tobacco and even conversation with one another. This description of bondage further illustrates how Warder Hannetjie's strictness and brutality is beginning to destroy Span One's freedom. When Hannetjie confiscates the "pivot of jail life," the only privileges they seem to have left, Span One spends two weeks living in "acute misery." At this arc in the story, Head exhibits the agonies of slavery and oppression before the milestone of freedom is demanded.

Finally, Head uses setting and imagery to cue her readers towards considering the characters' desperation. By conveying an initial atmosphere of oppression, the supply and demand of freedom becomes a prevalent topic to ponder. In the commencement of this alluring narrative, Head includes a vivid description of the environment's interference with the prisoners: "Now and then they obscured the sun and caused a chill on the backs of the prisoners who had to work all day long in the cabbage field. This trick the clouds were playing with the sun eventually caused one of the prisoners who wore glasses to stop work, straighten up and peer shortsightedly at them." Based on this extract, the reader is able to visualize the maltreatment of the prisoners' forced labor. This atmosphere of confinement and restraint creates imagery when it revokes the perks of liberty. The setting befits the matter of contending for freedom and shaping the characters' personalities in an effective way to enhance the story's overall message.

Creative writing is meaningless without a plot. The exposition is primarily the driving force behind a thrilling story by introducing

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<sup>1</sup> **kaffir**: a disparaging term for a black African

<sup>2</sup> **Baas**: the Afrikaans equivalent for boss

characters, setting, and the main conflict. Incorporating these story elements allows Head to stress how important it is for individuals to stand up for what they believe is fair treatment. Despite its realistic fiction genre, "The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses" transports the reader into the "world of apartheid" filled with tragedies and injustice. Such stories are pathways to preserving history and enlightening a future generation of truth-seekers and activists towards refining the present society. In his life filled with research and reflections, Viktor Emil Frankl, Ph.D., eventually unearthed the revelation behind man's will. In a brief piece of wisdom, he asserts, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." (brainyquote.com).

## **WINNER – MEMOIR**

### **Grief**

#### **Kosisochukwu, Grade 9**

Grief comes due to different situations but how you handle it depicts how you'll be.

A common cause of grief is the loss of a loved one or someone you care about,

You cry, scream, laugh, talk and find ways to deal with losing someone you love,

But what happens when you don't feel anything?

The person is supposed to be close to you but sudden loss just leaves you empty and unable to function.

In a case like this, what do you do?

You can't find your way to cope; you just sit there dreading every moment and not being able to shed a single tear.

On top of all of that you have to go do the things you have to do like school, work, a sport and everything living in society has to offer but you're too burnt out to do anything.

Everyone asks, "Are you okay???" You don't even want to speak but you eventually lie and say "yes."

You become aware of every single thing around you at that point, you count every breath, blink and step you take, because they can't do all those anymore.

Even if it was someone you hardly ever saw or spent time with you loved them but now you won't ever be able to tell them that anymore.

Eventually the news all clicks and you still have no emotion because you don't know what to feel; you hope and pray you get rid of that empty feeling in your stomach.

All you try to remember is that "this too shall pass" and it will because it has to because that's how the circle of life goes.

## **WINNER – MEMOIR**

### **Afraid of Failure**

#### **Lyric, Grade 12**

I wasn't always quiet and reserved. All throughout middle school I stayed in an extracurricular activity- whether it was praise dancing, cheerleading, or student council. All of that changed when I got to high school. I guess I was just too afraid of meeting new people. I tried to stay with my same friend group from middle school. I only met new people through my friends, which is how I became acquainted with most of my classmates. I was afraid to take on new challenges or try new things. I always believed that I would embarrass myself or there would be a bad outcome.

Well, in my sophomore year I was basically pressured into taking on a new challenge. One of my friends was on the majorette team, tryouts were coming up, and she wanted me to join. I declined every time she asked. It was only when my mother and more of my friends started haggling me, that I considered actually doing it. I felt like I had no choice; here I was with multiple people expecting me to join this team. I had mixed emotions about it. I wanted to try out, but I did not want to make a fool of myself if I didn't make the team. The week of tryouts was approaching quickly and I had a decision to make. The day right before tryouts, I agreed to go.

I didn't talk to anyone else auditioning. I quietly stayed to myself and observed everyone. I felt uneasy. I was ready to get it over with. They started calling us up one by one and gave us numbers to put on our shirts. Then, the captain and old members of the team began to lead us through stretches and other warmups. I was pretty comfortable while doing this. It was only when they started doing splits and ballet movements that I got discouraged. I felt different from everyone. My friend on the team tried reassuring me.

They taught us a routine that we had to execute the next day for the actual tryout. Everyone seemed to pick up the routine quickly, but I was struggling. I was nervous, stiff, and unsure of myself. I wanted to go home. My mother advised me not to overthink things or get into my mind too much, and I listened. I practiced the routine they taught until I

perfected it. I wanted it to be over.

I continued to practice the routine in all of my classes the next day. Luckily, one of my friends had all the same classes as me, so she helped me practice the routine and pointed out any flaws I needed to fix. I wasn't as uneasy as the day before, but I longed for this to end. I anxiously waited to be done.

I went down to the band room and saw everyone from yesterday talking and joking. I practiced alone. We stretched again, but were taken to a separate room afterward. They started calling out our numbers one by one to audition. I was number six, and everyone before me seemed to finish fast. It was finally my turn. When I entered the room, I saw the coach and all the old members sitting together. Their captain asked me why I wanted to join their team. I assured her it would be fun and new for me. She immediately turned on the music, and I started to dance. I started strong, but then things went downhill. I panicked and lost track of what I was doing. I was offbeat, and started to do anything until the music stopped. The captain informed me I could go back into the other room and she appreciated how I didn't stop. I immediately went to the water fountain and cried.

I didn't tell anyone what happened. We waited a week to find out who made the team. I dreaded the wait, because I already knew I didn't make it. I forgot about it until the captain gave me a glittery envelope with my name on it. I was sitting at a table with my friends, confused. They all smiled and told me to open it, which I did. It was a paper notifying me I was now part of the team! I sat there, relieved, wondering how I was chosen. I was happy, and couldn't wait to tell my family. This taught me that mistakes happen, and it's best to live in the moment.

## **WINNER – POETRY**

### **I AM**

**Toni, Grade 10**

I am from “broken and gifted;” I am from the bruised and hurt. I am from the old souls who never received the love they needed when they were young. I am from the yelling and cursing every night ‘cause they were too hurt to ask for help.

I am from the dance and the soul; I am from the poet and the rapper. Screaming and rhyming the woes away. Trauma so deep they great, great, great grandchildren can feel it, and must cleanse it. I must fix their family scars. Eyes closed, ears covered, lips sealed tight, so no one knows the pain and hurt.

I am from the statistics and the agenda. Forced to fit in a box that was never created for me to fit in. Too thick, too thin. Too gay, too straight. Too masc., too fem. Mixing and matching myself to feel whole, to feel accepted in a society that will never truly accept me.

I am from the beautiful and smart, I am from the talented and genius, but I'm also from the burnt out and depressed. Sleeping in too late or waking up too early. Stressing over a grade percentage, but every time I take a test it feels like the stress breaks down a percentage of me.

I am from the cocky and conceited. I am from the accomplishments and accolades. Thinking I'm better than everyone when everyone is just a masterpiece in the making. The ignorant can be educated. The dark can touch the light.

I am from the black and beautiful. I am from the future and promise. Ancestry so rich and deep that the seeds of its generation flourish in its soil.



I am from the blood and screams of slaves  
I am from the tears and blood of the Indigenous  
I am from the ground  
I am from the sky  
I am from the black holes and supernovas  
I am from the universe  
Created for a divine purpose, here to make a stand, here to make a  
change.  
Here to help anybody resonate with what I said so I make a change  
whether big or small because that is where I am from

## **WINNER – SHORT STORY**

### **The Child Who Is Afraid of the Dark Becomes an Adult Who Is Afraid of the Light**

**Fathia, Grade 11**

John had always loved life. He enjoyed waking up in the morning to go to school. He got to see his friends, make jokes, talk to his favorite teachers and just have a good time. That all changed when John had to move because of his parent's job. It was a new state, a new city, a new school and new people. To say he was terrified of this new endeavor was an understatement.

It was the first day of classes for John. Walking into this large building, he saw a bunch of different people milling around and talking to each other. He thought to himself, "I hope I make some friends here, they all look so fun."

John entered the office and spoke to the nice lady at the desk. "Hi there," he said. "My name is John Madison, I'm new here. Can I get my schedule?"

"Sure thing," she said.

Looking down at his newly printed schedule, John saw that his first class was English II. He shook his head and sighed because English was not one of his strongest subjects. Determined to start the day with a positive attitude, John headed to his first class.

Upon entering the classroom, John could feel the stares of his fellow classmates on him.

One boy whispered, "Is that a new student?"

"Oh my God, he looks cute," said a girl to the person seated next to her.

"We got a white student," said a boy near the back.

The change from a predominantly white high school to an almost all black one was starting to hit John. Looking around the classroom, he saw there was only one student that wasn't a person of color. Taking a seat in the front of the classroom, he sat next to another white boy.

John made it a point to not look at anyone in the class. He was sure he was boring a hole into the whiteboard.

Looking up he heard the teacher call his name. A short, bald, kind looking man was focused on him.

“John, I believe your name is. My name is Mr. Davis and since you are new here you can start off the chapter for us.”

John picked up the textbook on the table. “What page is it?” he asked shyly.

“Page 432, first paragraph,” replied Mr. Davis.

John started reading, and immediately began mumbling and stuttering over words that most people would consider easy ones. He finally finished the paragraph with help from his fellow desk mate and snarky comments from his classmates.

“This is what I was afraid of,” John says in his head, mentally cringing from the embarrassment of not being able to recognize the word “started” because of his learning disability. He despised his dyslexia so much. Why couldn’t he be normal like the others? The rest of John’s day didn’t go much better. At lunch he sat by himself. Finally, it was the end of the day, John was in his last class, gym. He went into the locker room to get changed and get his stuff. As he was clearing out his locker, in his peripheral vision he saw a tall black guy coming up behind him.

“How you liking the school, white boy?” he asked John.

John answered shyly, “Fine”.

At this time the locker room was starting to empty out leaving John alone with three strangers. They started getting up in his face calling him derogatory names, mocking his disabilities and accusing him of a wide variety of things. One of the guys grabbed John and threw him on the floor. He was kicked and hit by these guys until he fell unconscious. They then proceeded to stuff him in one of the lockers.

It wasn’t until 3 hours later that John regained consciousness. He screamed for help over and over till he got tired. He was confined to this small space in the dark until daybreak, and for every second, he was miserable. When he fell asleep, he finally got some peace though he stumbled into darkness pretty quickly because of his injuries. He tried to hold on, banging on the locker hoping someone would hear him, but it was all futile.

John woke up the next morning to the sound of someone opening up the locker door. Relieved, he looked up and saw the janitor.

The woman asked, "What are you doing here?"

John struggled his way out of the locker and said nothing. He walked away from the janitor, picking up his bag and belongings. As soon as he left the school grounds, his body fell down to the ground and he started crying. He was so confused as to why this was happening to him; he racked his brain wondering where he went wrong and how he could have changed this horrible outcome.

Getting up unwillingly, John began his trek home. Upon getting home, he discovered that he had several missed calls from his parents and that they weren't home. The lights were turned off and he immediately turned them on. He did not want to be reminded of his time in the locker; it is a memory he would love to forget. He chuckled sarcastically to himself: he has now become a child who is afraid of the dark. How foolish, a 15-year-old who is scared of monsters in the shadows.

The bullying in school got worse over the next few months. The same kids who shoved John in the locker continued to terrorize him. They trip him in the hallways, belittle and diminish him, and get all up in his face trying to intimidate him. Often, they would catch him after school and beat him up. One particular day after they beat him up they poured garbage all over him. It was getting too much and John couldn't take it anymore. He finally reported these students and told his parents. His parents felt horrible that this had been going on under their noses and they were just finding out about it. They decided to move John to another school for the sake of his ongoing mental health.

However, the damage has already been done. John had gone from this outgoing, smart, fun young man to someone silent and withdrawn who second guesses his every move. He had become a shell of his former self. He is petrified of the dark, has night terrors and trouble sleeping. His grades fell and he began failing in school. John struggled with paying attention in class and in the end he gave up. He began to act like he didn't care about anything and used his past trauma as an excuse for everything.

John barely graduated high school and didn't have the motivation to continue his education. He went to work in his father's construction company, learning the trade and barely making a living. John became an adult who is afraid of the light. He dreads waking up every morning and repeating the same routine every day. He has no life or friends, he regrets taking everything for granted in the past and wishes he could go back and do it all over again.

## HONORABLE MENTION – LITERARY CRITICISM

### Which Affects You More, Racism or Sexism?

Christianna, Grade 10

When looking at the effects of both racism and sexism, I believe girls will be affected by racism more. Although racism and sexism are emotionally damaging to people, racism causes far deeper pain. I have come to this conclusion after reading *The Bluest Eye*, written by Toni Morrison.

The main characters in this story, young girls of color, are affected deeply by racism. Early in the book we can see the first act of racism the girls experienced. Two of the main characters, Claudia and Frieda, are denied entrance to a white classmate's father's cafe. This really affected the girls because they just wanted one of the pastries and because of their skin color, they weren't even allowed to make it past the door. Not only that, but no one helped them, no one said or did anything, no one even batted an eye because treatment like that is normal.

Not long after that incident, Claudia is given a white doll with blue eyes and blond hair and told if she was worthy of it, she may have it. The adult also states how beautiful the doll is. When Claudia reflects on that moment, all she will think is how you'll never be seen as pretty until you're blond with blue eyes. This teaches Claudia that she is not pretty the way she is and causes her to internalize that dark skin is not attractive. It also teaches another character, Pecola, that you have to be "worthy" to have a white doll. Meaning that black children are not inherently worthy.

Pecola is also reminded of the idea that only white or light skin is beautiful when a group of boys circled around her and made fun of her skin. The insults affected Pecola so much, she broke down in tears. This incident could scar Pecola for life as she has to endure bullying simply because of her skin color which is something she cannot change. Not only that, but it was a group of black boys making fun of her, which makes her feel like no matter where she goes she will not be accepted.

Although both racism and sexism will impact the girls in this story greatly, racism will affect them more. The examples I have presented show how the main characters in the book are affected by racism in that

moment, and how it can later affect them later in life. Now that we recognize and have analyzed the racism the girls have and will continue to endure, we need to figure out a way to prevent that from happening to other black girls. Experiences like those of Pecola, Frieda, Claudia and other young black girls will directly impact the way they view themselves and negatively affect their self-worth. We need to find a way to mitigate these experiences and prevent history from repeating itself.

## **Happy**

**Alexis, Class of 2016**  
**Honorable Mention, *Scholar Voices 2016***

**Clark University;  
New England College**

In January, when all the children in a county are sleeping in, and their parents have called out from work because the plows cannot drive through the snow, I am awake, watching the snow fall. Snowflakes glitter like little white stars. The sky is its usual wintry white... like a bowl of milk. It collects on my near flat roof outside my bedroom window and sparkles through the day. The cold wraps its spindly fingers around the tree branches, and tiny snowflakes ride on the tail of the wind. As beautiful as this is, the real magic of the snow cannot be seen until the night. I wait up, past everyone's "bedtime," long past the sunset. Soon, it is 1:30 A.M. Outside, the world's noises have been muffled by the snow. The cars have stopped their zooming, and all the lights in the buildings have turned off. For the first time in a long time, it is silent. This silence is not awkward. It does not need to be interrupted, it is perfect. The sky is pink. Not like the sunset... softer. Throughout the night, the moonlight reflects off of the snow, and the sky stays lit, almost as if the sun had never set. Tonight, no children can fear the shadows in the corner. There is hope for one more sunrise, and for this one moment in time, I am completely happy.



## **More Than a Dog**

**Angela, Class of 2019**

**Honorable Mention, *Scholar Voices 2017***

**Rowan University**

The sun's rays stretched out across the sky, warming the earth as it rose. It followed its routine as it did every day, settling high in the sky and painting it a soft amber and rosy pink. Inevitably, all the animals of the woods awakened as the sun's light reacquired the sky and dismissed the darkness that once filled the woods. An owl could be seen perched on a branch in front of the house. He stretched out his wings, letting the warmth creep between his many feathers. The owl began his day as he did every day, flying to the windowsill of the house to observe the events that unfolded inside. He enjoyed watching the family that lived there, and their daily events.

The mornings were always similar; the shuffling of feet throughout the house, the smell of breakfast seeping through the cracks and windows, and voices carrying messages like, "Time for breakfast," or "Has anyone seen my shoes?" A daily ritual that always ended with the family leaving the house, getting into the car, and driving up the road until they vanished into the horizon, returning in the evening.

The owl enjoyed watching this every day, but what he found most compelling was what took place in the house after the family left. The owl peered through the window, and there it was, the familiar sight of a dog sitting in front of the door, motionless with its eyes fixed on the knob. She patiently waited for the family to return, hoping every slight sound or movement beyond the door was her beloved owners. It was always such a sight to the owl, seeing the devotion and love she had for them, and over the years he began to admire her. The owl gave one last glance at the dog, and then returned to the woods to tend to his daily affairs.

As the sun began to lower in the sky, the owl began to fly back to the house, eager to see the joyous reunion of the family and their dog. It was his favorite part of the day. The experience of witnessing an occurrence with the presence of such plenary love was like no other; it was almost magical. He approached the house and noticed the car was

not in its normal spot in the driveway. He looked into the house, and the dog was in the same spot as earlier that morning, but now she was lying down with her head resting on her paws. She had a gloomy look on her face as she gazed at the door.

The owl waited with the dog for the family to return, and as he sat staring into the house, his eyes closed and he drifted to sleep. When he awoke, it was nighttime. He looked around into the darkness. The blackness concealed his surroundings, but when he focused harder, he was able to make out an empty driveway. He tried to see inside the house, but no lights were on, and it was pitch black. The sound of keen howling echoed from the house, and carried throughout the woods, bringing heart-wrenching sadness to all who heard it. The owl sympathized with the dog, and was filled with sorrow, knowing that she was in distress. He wanted to help alleviate her misery, but there was nothing he could do. He flew into a tree and looked down at the house, hoping the family would arrive soon.

Suddenly, a bright light shined on the owl's face. He was filled with joy at what he saw. The family's red minivan was driving up the winding road. The owl peered closer through the dark, and saw that the once smooth, red metal that covered the car was now smashed and bent. He looked through the window and saw the familiar faces of the family inside. He flapped his wings in excitement. The family filed out of the car, and a small girl ran to the front door. The skin on her head was stained red. The owl watched as they made their way inside the house. The girl fell to her knees, and the dog ran into her arms. A tear rolled down her face, as they sat on the floor hugging each other. The owl could feel the abundance of the love in the room as he looked in. He sat and watched the family and their beloved pet throughout the night.

## **The Quiet Ones**

**Arnetta, Class of 2017  
Winner, *Scholar Voices* 2015**

**Ivy Tech Community College;  
Indiana University Northwest**

We sit in the back of every class,  
never speaking any words unless spoken to.  
Quietly doing our work and observing everything.

We are the ones whom everyone calls smart.  
The ones that everyone goes to for advice: the “nice” ones;  
teacher’s pet.

We follow every direction and instructions given to us.  
We follow the rules without any complaints. We are the  
quiet ones.

Everyone has a past. We are just like “regular people.”  
We know how it feels to be bullied.  
The pain, the crying we know too well.  
No one really knows us. They just know of us.

Everyone calls themselves trying to help us.  
But don’t realize we don’t need it.

On the inside, we are not the quiet ones.  
We are bright and outspoken.  
On the outside we are quiet and reserved;  
Never showing any signs of weakness;  
Always having it together at all times;

We are the Quiet Ones.



**WINNER – PHOTOGRAPHY**

**Unsure**

**Al-Tarik, Grade 11**



Fog represents a path not yet determined; the person walking into the fog represents life for humans. Every day is different; we don't know what can really happen no matter how much we plan.

## **Demon Slayer (Tweaked)**

### **Atoba, Grade 11**

During the Edo period in Japan, on a snowy mountain next to a village, 14-year-old Kamado Tanjiro, the eldest son of the Kamado family of five, travels down the mountain to sell surplus coal. Since they live on top of a mountain where temperatures are unbearable, they rely on coal for heat. Along with this travel, Tanjiro has this slight anger kept inside himself. Being born into a poor family, he blames his mother deeply for that; despite having a smile on his face all the time and caring deeply for his siblings. A small part of him believes that this barrage of feelings may have come from the passing of his father due to an illness.

Before he leaves, his mother makes sure his bag of coal is secure and sends him off. Tanjiro suddenly turns his head to a 35-degree angle, barely showing a piece of his face and lets out the words, "I hate it here. I hate you. I wish you would've never given birth to me."

After a day's worth of selling coal, Tanjiro retreats to his home, trekking back up the mountain until suddenly, a snowstorm begins. The winds were applying force equal to a bison charging at a being full force. Fortunately, he spots a small house; inside is an old man he has a good relationship with who allows him to wait for the storm to pass. He provides Tanjiro with a nice meal and a place to rest. As Tanjiro begins to drift off to sleep, he is suddenly angered by thoughts of his life, and he says to himself, "How come I have to live like this"?

The sun begins to come out and the morning begins to present a new day. Before making his way home, Tanjiro bows his head and thanks the old man for accommodating his stay. To Tanjiro's dismay, as he approaches his home, he gains a whiff of air, smelling a disaster. A trail of blood is visible and as he walks towards his hut, he spots a body, its hand reaching out for someone to come help. As Tanjiro gets closer, he comes to realize it's his little brother who has perished and is no longer on this plane. Pain begins to enter Tanjiro's veins, causing him to experience shortness of breath and not be able to breathe. The rest of his family is covered with pools of blood with scratch marks all over their bodies, each one laying over and on top of the other. Tanjiro drops onto his knees. The wind goes mute and there is complete silence on the entire mountain. The realization has kicked in: his entire family is

dead, and he is now alone. What gives him the most pain is the memory of the last words he said to his mother: "I hate it here. I hate you. I wish you would've never given birth to me."

## **The Wrong Direction**

**Brooklyn, Class of 2017**  
**Winner, *Scholar Voices 2016***

**Indiana State University**



I'm afraid of many things, but most of all, I'm afraid of failure. There's so much pressure to become successful, I feel like the walls are closing in on me. All I constantly hear is, "Stay in school." "Make us proud." "You'll be the first." "We'll have a doctor in the family now." I feel like I'm losing the game that hasn't started. I wish I could press reset, and begin anew, but I've already started going through life in the wrong direction.



**Dear Maya Angelou**

**Chelsea, Class of 2013  
Honorable Mention, *Scholar Voices 2012***

**Spelman College;  
Kansas State University**

Of all your many pieces of literature my favorite is your poem "Still I Rise." I was first introduced to this poem in the seventh grade, by my English teacher. Everyone in the class was assigned a poem and asked to memorize it and recite it in front of the class. I just so happened to get your poem. When I first looked at the poem, I was intimidated by its stature. I thought that it was impossible to learn such a long poem, and as the day passed, I was overcome with nervousness. Once I began to recite the poem, all fear left me. As time went by, I began to not only memorize it, but the words started a fire in my soul. Finally, it was the day for me to recite my assigned poem in front of the class. When the time for me to get up presented itself, I spoke each word. As the words flowed from my mouth, I felt empowered, and by the end of the poem my teacher and the entire class were applauding vigorously.

I bet you're wondering what the moral of my story is. Well, the moral is that your poem inspired me; it made me feel as if I could do anything despite any opposition that may come my way. To me, your poem had more than one meaning. While I know and understand that it's talking about how black people have risen, I feel as if I can relate it to everyday life. While it is true that I am a young, black, teenage girl, I feel that your poem not only speaks to the African Americans in the world and in history, but also to anyone and everyone that has been done wrong and expected to fall instead of rise. The words in your poem did not just lift me up; they opened my eyes and my heart to a bigger picture. And believe it or not, your poem helped inspire me to become the poet I am today and also to discover my talent of public speaking. I never knew I had the talent or the power to make words come to life in such a way until I had that affair with your poem, "Still I Rise." I have never met you, or spoken to you, but I feel like I know you. It's amazing how simple words can be formed into complex structures that create a picture – a

message so vivid that someone across the nation or even in another decade can be touched and inspired. Your words have meaning. Whenever I am down or just feeling a little nervous about something, I slowly recite your poem, and just like that I feel I can conquer the world.

Ms. Angelou, I was introduced to your poem at the age of 12 and I am now in the eleventh grade and 16 years old. It was four years ago that I learned your poem for an English class, and to this day, I still know every single word. Who would have thought that your poem, the poem that intimidated me, a seventh grader, would have made such an impact on me, and somehow stuck with me over the span of years? Your poem serves as a part of my inspiration not only because of my race, but because it serves as a constant reminder that I am a human being who may face many obstacles but in spite of any circumstances, no matter how harshly I may be treated in life, no matter what others may think about me, or how high the obstacle may be, I can still rise above it.

Ms. Angelou, your poem has been a beacon of light for me. I want to thank you for having a voice and having the guts to write down what you feel.

Sincerely,

A girl who has Risen.

## **The Mock Trial**

### **Jacqueline, Grade 12**

On a chilly day in mid-April I did something unlike what I usually do on my Saturday mornings. Instead of sleeping in until 10 I was up and about around 7:30 AM getting ready to go to my first ever Mock Trial. Allow me to elaborate on what a mock trial is: mock trial - an act or imitation trial; so basically we were having a pretend trial with other high schools from around America. The Lord knows I was more nervous than a kid taking his first dive into a pool, but I wasn't just nervous. I was anxious, worried, and even a little bit excited. I finished getting ready and I was waiting for my best friend D'Jhanea to come pick me up so that we could make it to our school and ride the bus with the other teens participating. Mind you, we had to be at the school and on the bus by 8:30 because the location of our mock trial was in a city whose time was an hour ahead of Gary's time; but D'Jhanea was late – like an hour and 30 minutes late! So it's now 9 o'clock and I'm just up pacing around my living room thinking that the bus had left us, but D'Jhanea pulls up and we get to the school in less than two minutes even though we lived nine minutes away. We pulled into the parking lot and the bus was still there. I was so happy that I could have cried.

Now we're on the bus with the other participants and we're going over the script and who's going to do what and how we should talk when we're in character. I was the court reporter, I had to keep time for both defenses and let them know when their time is up. So we made it to the Courthouse and boy did my nervousness go up about 100 times. I was terrified and I wasn't even doing a lot of talking like my other teammates were. My team was a little worried about how to do the Mock Trial because we didn't really have much time to go over the script and roles so the first three trials were not our best but we had our parents and mentor there to cheer us up and pull us out of our negative clouds. The last trial was the best for my team. We were so confident and sure that we were going to do great even if we did lose. We lost but that didn't affect us. We were all so happy that we actually participated in a mock trial. This unfamiliar event became a memory that I came to cherish. I was so tense for the first three trials that I couldn't really enjoy myself but the last one I just said, "go with the flow and act as if you've

been doing this for years” and that’s what I did. To be honest, this experience left me feeling as if I could do anything I wanted if I just had the confidence and mindset to believe in myself.

## **Friction: Shifting of the Brick**

**Jalen, Grade 11**

Authority overlaps into tyranny; animosity becomes the spark to light a powder keg of rage and fury only seen once before in 1967, when social tensions rose and the tectonic plates of the Brick City overlapped, creating discord and strife. Twenty-six lights snuffed out in the winds of conflict. When seeds of strife take root they pit brother against brother, neighbor against neighbor: and everyone in between is caught in fires of hate in the aftermath of the combustion. When pressure builds there is bound to be an explosion: that's for certain. But how big the next one will be is what keeps me on the edge of my seat.

But the impact of the incoming tremor is undeniable as the plates of the city are growing restless with violence; many are pleading for help. Whether due to the cries of forsaken mothers as they hold their lifeless children, or the screams of innocent black boys who face the barrel of a police officer's gun. Relentlessly, dynamics change: and tremors have started. The quiet rumble of change is back, and like before, the smell of gunpowder is on the wind. The battle for the city's soul begins. The only question: will you be consumed? Will you be the next victim of the **Friction?**

## **The Police Force from Hell**

**James, Class of 2017**  
**Winner, *Scholar Voices* 2016**

**Ivy Tech Community College;**  
**Indiana State University**

Before I begin, this is not for all cops because I can honestly say some of you dudes rock.

This is for the policemen who are known for making their guns pop with gun shots for innocent black kids who could've lived longer.

Lil' Billy was writing raps and trying to drop some new songs but now he's in the afterlife asking "Man, what have I done wrong?"

Cops used to be our neighborhood saviors but now they are catching more bodies than the dope dealers and gang bangers...

Used to be our heroes but this corrupt world turned you into monsters that abuse and misuse the badge for power and promotion. Your job is to serve and protect, not to destroy and neglect, but your concern is your check, not the lives of the rest.

It's a likely chance I could die just because I'm black...  
But, I want to make it someday so hope and pray that I won't be another innocent victim to be unjustly attacked and killed by the police force from hell.

## **Destruction of a Stereotype**

**Jonathan, Class of 2017**  
**Honorable Mention, *Scholar Voices 2017***



The loudest noises can be heard in libraries.  
This is a place where stereotypes explode, and futures roar.

## Scenery of the Inner City

Josiah, Class of 2016  
Winner, *Scholar Voices 2015*

New York University



When I hear nature described in terms of fragrant flowers, massive mountains, or chirping crickets, I can't help but think that these descriptions are subjective. Born and raised in Newark, NJ, also nicknamed Brick City, I perceive nature as having a different smell, look, and sound. My flowers are local BBQs, my mountains are abandoned houses, and my crickets are the booming classics of Bob Marley. For I see the beauty in what many call the product of poverty because the scenery around me is distinctive to the lives and struggles of us who live in the inner city.



## **How Does Narrative Style Affect the Reader's Understanding of the Novel?**

**Kamari, Grade 11**

In the book, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Julia Alvarez uses multiple narratives to tell this single story. The use of multiple perspectives helps readers understand the minds of the characters involved and helps the readers see the message of the book itself. Alvarez starts the book off in the narrative of Dede, the surviving sister.

The first chapter gives readers a clear view inside of her head and gives them a chance to see her emotions and reactions to what is currently going on in the chapter. Then she jumps back from different time stamps as she changes narratives.

Using this narrative style has a positive effect on the reader because it gives them a clearer view of each chapter. It helps the reader be able to break the book down and get a better insight on the theme or purpose of the book. Just having one perspective of a situation is hard to understand because you can't fully acknowledge what actually happened and won't have the opportunity to choose a side. Having multiple perspectives can give a reader a better chance to fully take a stance on the novel and can agree or disagree with any situation within the book.

## **You**

**KaRon, Class of 2016**  
**Winner, *Scholar Voices 2013***

**University of Central Arkansas**

A motivation to my innocence,  
the keeper of my sanity.  
The healer of my wounded soul,  
and to my mind  
you're like gravity.  
Your arms are my security,  
and your heart is my home.  
Your love is like a cure to me  
when I feel I can't go on.  
To my soul you are the hero,  
and like a map  
you are my guide.  
At times when I've been hurt  
your words are like tissue  
to my eyes.  
You're an eraser to bad memories,  
a band-aid to my soul,  
a doctor to my broken heart,  
and a blanket when life is cold.  
Your voice is music to my ears.  
You are the smile upon my face.  
When left with nowhere else to run,  
your arms are my special place.  
You've given me a million laughs  
and frowns much less than two.  
So though life hasn't given me much of anything,  
I find EVERYTHING in YOU...

## Untitled

Michale, Grade 11

No, don't stop  
You've been trying at this for so long  
And probably made little to no progress  
But that doesn't mean stop  
Years might even pass  
But that doesn't mean stop  
So keep going  
Dig deep  
Because you got a long road ahead of you  
And you might not know it  
But this right here  
Is just the beginning  
And I'm rooting for you  
So you might as well not stop  
Keep it up  
Because the only thing that can stop you  
Is you.

## Are Humans Special?

Samuel A., Grade 9

I can't see things from another person's perspective, never mind an animal's. Of course not. It wasn't possible from the start. As two different species, we may at times take advantage and kill each other. Actually, you shouldn't even think that you've figured out another species based on your standards. I think it's human arrogance to think we understand how other species feel. There may be no other life forms that are truly a "friend" to man. Still, even if we cannot comprehend them, they are, without a doubt, neighbors deserving of respect. We protect the environment for animals because humans themselves are lonely, sad creatures. We protect the environment because we don't want to go extinct. What drives us is simply self-gratification, but I think that's fine, and that it's really all there is to it. There's no point in despising humans by human standards. That's right. So in the end, it's hypocritical for us to love Earth without loving ourselves and our neighbors.

Maybe humans are the closest things to demons, alive. We sacrifice other lives so we can continue our own. That's how an animal lives. Is what makes us human – the fact that we are one of the few who willingly commit suicide? For a while I've been thinking: for what reason was I placed into this world? Whenever I resolve one question, another takes the previous one's place. I sought the start and I sought the end. I've been walking and thinking and thinking while I walk. Perhaps nothing will change no matter how far I go. If I were to stop my journey we call "life" that's fine as well. I'd just accept it. But even so I found another answer to yet another question today.

Flies know how to fly without being taught, a spider knows how to spin its webs without being taught. Why? For what reason? Here's what I think: flies and spiders are simply following an order. I believe all lives on Earth have orders of some sort. Don't you think? But we all underestimate humans, we underestimate ourselves because we seem to have no order or directive other than laws and principles that even then get broken by a select few. There are times a human can't back

down from a fight. Individually, humans appear weak, but that's not the case. We need to recognize that humans are a single life form composed of millions of individuals. Besides their enormous magnitude. The moment we act in opposition to that brain, we lose. So tell me. **Why are humans so irrational?**

Human life is precious after all, isn't it?

## How Identity Shapes Our Character

Samuel D., Grade 9

We are constructed upon fundamentals that ultimately mold and manipulate us into who we'll become. *The Poet X* empowers the reader by visualizing these principles. It explores the social constructs revolving around self-identity. The book accomplishes this by making note of social issues which may cause individuals to lose track of finding themselves. Xiomara, the protagonist of *The Poet X*, is constantly at odds with her mother and her culture, feeling as if she needs to resort to escaping alongside rebelling authorities present in her life. Ultimately, encompassing these feelings which individuals constantly encounter on a day-to-day basis, this feeling of escapism resonates with everyone. Likewise, rebelling against those who oppress us may prove beneficial for individuals who aren't able to freely express themselves. *The Poet X*, truly expresses these themes, in a way that is direct, providing motives that may drive an individual towards self-expression.

The **cyclical nature of abuse** is a construct where the abused pass down their trauma for generations, causing a recurring series of events. While Xiomara was in the midst of being abused she retreated into thoughts in her mind. The scene made her feel so insignificant, going as far as to compare herself to an ant. She describes the violence: "*Drags me by the shirt*" and "*...make an ant of myself*" further emphasizing the moment, highlighting the details that stained her mind. Continuing, her twin brother says, "*Soon we can leave for college.*" This aids in Xiomara's feelings, suggesting it to be mutual between them, believing escaping her family, her culture, is the only viable option. Xiomara has truly dug deep, reluctant to give up despite the daily hardships she encounters. The striving for self-expression is present throughout *The Poet X*; it serves as fuel, as an incentive. It manifests itself as a form of **escapism** and rebellion, allowing Xiomara to continue aiming for her goals, and not allowing culture to keep her from achieving that.

**Rebellion** is the foundation upon which Xiomara's character is based. Despite Xiomara reaching rock bottom, she is still hopeful, willing to put up a 'fight.' Battling her conflicts in spite of what may occur, in the poem Xiomara wrote directed towards her mother she writes, "*My mouth cannot write you a white flag...never be a Bible verse.*"

Transcribing this quote, we're able to infer Xiomara isn't willing to devote herself to religion nor surrender to Mami's punishment, in turn rebelling against the authorities present in her life, being resistant to common culture. Moreover, Aman was perceived as a means of escape for Xiomara. This idea of escapism is implied when she says, "*...was just a failed rebellion, you were everything.*" This idea of breaking free refers to Aman as a "*rebellion,*" which signals the preconceived notion of identity. Ultimately rebellion is a prevalent point made throughout *The Poet X*, it serves as fuel for the majority of the conflicts that arise in Xiomara's life.

Religion impacts individuals in several ways, whether negatively or positively. Xiomara consistently questions the validity of the church and what it advocates. This coincides with her need for self-expression as religion was deeply rooted in her younger mind. Though as she's begun to experience the world, Xiomara begins shifting away from the church: "*What's the point of God giving me life, if I don't live it as my own;*" presenting her concerns, challenging the authorities of the church. The line "*I don't live it as my own*" helps to show Xiomara's developing sense of self-identity, battling the oppression brought upon her although religion is almost bound to her, imprisoning her. Longing for that sense of freedom causes difficulties within Xiomara's circumstances due to the feeling of being isolated and detached from her own self on the basis of religion. Thus, she often returns to the idea of escapism as a means to break free from the constant **subjugation** bestowed by the church and her culture.

Self-discovery often leads to understanding our boundaries alongside strengths and weaknesses. Conquering our burdens gives incentives to becoming our fullest selves. Xiomara encounters hardships whilst journeying towards self-identity and freedom, touching upon **abuse, rebellion, and religion**. Ultimately, common culture is what divides us from striving towards our goals. Thus, we as a society should work collectively to promote self-identity, allowing individualism is beneficial in what appears to be slowly forming into a cookie-cutter society. Washing away conformities would open the floodgates for innovation and creativity, drastically improving the quality of life for everyone.

## Capitalism

### Samuel T., Grade 11

Capitalism is the world's most reviled and misunderstood economic system. It has been labeled selfish, cruel, oppressive, and exploitative, yet this is incorrect. Capitalism is neither hateful, oppressive, nor exploitative in and of itself. While it is true that it is selfish, what it does is not necessarily bad. Humans are inherently selfish. For example, capitalism takes selfishness and creates a system that works. Suppose I own a store and you want to be hired. After the interview, we might talk about pay, and let's say the pay I offer is \$7 an hour. We can talk about pay based on your skills, and if you still don't like the pay you got, there's another job that pays a different amount of money you like. Similarly, if a business offers chicken legs for \$20 a bag and you don't like the price, you can go next door and get chicken legs for \$12.99, and suddenly, you've got what you were searching for at a price you like. How did this happen? I'll tell you: COMPETITION.

Also, capitalism remains our most effective weapon in fighting extreme poverty. According to *Forbes* and the book *Progress*, 94 percent of the world's population lived in terrible poverty in 1820. By 1910, the percentage was reduced to 82 percent, and by 1950, it had plummeted even further, to 72 percent. Between 1981 and 2015, however, the largest and fastest fall occurred (44.3 percent) to (9.6 percent); in **Thomas Piketty's view, the devastating years in which social inequality rose sharply**. Around the world, 1.25 billion people have left extreme poverty, with 50 million escaping each year and 138,000 every day. In *The Power of Capitalism*, it mentions that in 1900 the global average life expectancy was 31 years; today, it is 71 years. The United Nations estimated in 1947 that roughly half of the world's population was chronically malnourished. By 1971, that had dropped to 29%, and ten years later, it had dropped to barely 19%. Globally, the number of persons suffering from malnutrition had dropped to 11% by 2016. This shows that capitalism is the greatest economic system ever made and will continue to bring prosperity to those in need. Capitalism is not an 'ism.' It is closer to being the opposite of an 'ism,' because it is simply the freedom of ordinary people to make whatever economic transactions they can mutually agree to.



## Points of View: A NYC Pigeon vs. a NYC Pedestrian

### Tabean, Grade 11

NYC Pigeon-

"It's cloudy today. I wonder who's going to put out the breadcrumbs first. Looking around I see the rest of the flock huddled together; we might do drills again today. We prepare for migration but we never leave. All the other birds do, though we don't think it's cold enough. Seeing the store owner on the corner dump the breadcrumbs we immediately flew down and started eating. The people at the bus stop immediately started moving away as they usually do. It's not like we can eat them."

NYC Pedestrian-

"Here they go again! I don't understand why he didn't wait 'til we got on the bus to start feeding those God-forsaken things. They don't care who's in their way, they fly blind. 'Mmcht', this one is moving closer to me. There aren't any crumbs over here. That's what you must do when there's a flock of pigeons by you; watch them until they leave, or even when there's a bunch of them on the power lines because they will poop right on you. Vile things."

## **Dollar Menu**

**Tanazia, Class of 2014**  
**Winner, *Scholar Voices 2014***

**Gateway Community College;  
Southern Connecticut State University**

A phone. A laptop. The mall every weekend. The movies whenever. All of these activities are supposed to be important aspects of a teenager's life, right? These activities are supposed to complete a teenager's life, right? Wrong. How about family, love, and education? Most teenagers think that they can't live without material things but I am one who thinks otherwise. Being surrounded by teens versus being around my family made me realize that I never had material things growing up, so as far as I am concerned, I don't need them now. I know now that there is more to life than a phone call to my friend about nonsense or a movie ticket to see the next Friday.

It was a very hot day in Columbia, South Carolina. My family and I were one of the many families staying at the Hannah House Shelter. My four siblings and I were in our room watching television. My mom came in suddenly and told us to start packing. She told us not to pack everything because we weren't going to be able to carry it all. We didn't understand, but out of respect, we did as we were told. My little sister started to cry because she had to leave many of her toys behind. My mom told her that we were going to get everything back once we reached our destination. So we left and it wasn't until three long, exhausting hours of walking, in what seemed like circles in the scorching hot sun that I realized that what my mom had said was only to keep us from panicking. I was hungry, but I knew there had to be a reason why we hadn't eaten. We walked a little while longer and I just couldn't take it anymore; I was so hungry. So, I finally told her. She said that we were going to stop soon to get something. We walked some more and then my mom just stopped. Instantly, she started crying, and sat down in the middle of the sidewalk. My siblings and I didn't know what to do so we put our things down and sat around her. My mother then gave me four dollars and change and told me to go into McDonald's to get something for us to eat.

I wanted to question her about how much she had given me, but I knew that clearly, that was all the money that she had at the time. When I returned from McDonald's I gave her the food. Now, I don't know how, but she split the three McDoubles that I purchased up between the five of us and we were all very satisfied. It was then that I realized that she hadn't eaten so I tried to give her some of mine. "No, you eat baby," is what she told me. So again, I did as I was told. I can't remember how long we sat on the sidewalk that day but I do remember being happy despite of all the judgmental eyes that were being narrowed down onto us. I do remember feeling embarrassed, but I didn't care. As long as I had my family, I was okay.

From that point on, I realized that material possessions mean nothing, if I don't have my family and my education. I feel that material things, like cell phones or fashion, do not complete me and are not important to me; my education and my family are. My family is my motivation to go to school so that in the future I am able to give them what they need and so that I am able to pay my mother's bills when she doesn't have the money. I will use the education that I receive to the best of my ability so that next time, I will be able to buy those McDoubles for my family.

## **Soldier's Cry**

**Tianna, Class of 2016  
Winner, *Scholar Voices 2014***

### **Essex County College**

Back down  
Don't you ever  
Stand your ground

Your dreams will never be achieved  
Don't believe it when they say  
You can make a difference in the world one day  
My father told me  
War is the only way to solve the world's problems  
It was never true that  
Peace will always be an option and that the pen is mightier than the  
sword  
I know now that  
Guns and knives are the perfect weapons  
We don't believe  
This world can change

**\* Read poem again in reverse\***

## **I Am a Warrior Too**

**Whitney, Class of 2013  
Winner, *Scholar Voices* 2013**

**University of Central Arkansas;  
Nova Southeastern University**

Upon a first look, I cannot imagine what kept you at Central High School. Yet a quiet still voice tells me that it was your strong desire to succeed and your soaring spirit of tenacity.

Melba Patillo Beals, You Are Without Doubt My Hero!

The trials and tribulations that you and your eight friends endured to attend a school in a country that says, "All men are created equal" is admirable and unforgettable. I stop to wonder where Equality was. Had she suddenly left the country when you needed her the most? But you never gave up and continued to suffer for the cause. Thus, when many winters shall besiege my brows, I will never forget the courage of you and your eight friends, "The Little Rock Nine."

Melba Patillo Beals, You Are Without Doubt My Hero!

You endured so much. Oh and did I mention how ironic it was that that you were expected to trust the Arkansas National Guard to protect you. After all, they were the very soldiers who kept you from entering the school when you first attempted to enter. How dare anyone to truly expect them to protect you.

Melba Patillo Beals, You Are Without Doubt My Hero!

Yes, just a young innocent girl of fifteen whose grandmother's faith sustained her and gave her the courage to stare rejection boldly in the face.

How was it possible for a fifteen-year-old girl to endure the inhumane rejection, the beatings, and the harassment? Not to mention the rejection from those whom she once considered her friends.

But even at such a young tender age, you were a young lady of distinction, significance, and integrity.

Melba Patillo Beals, You Are Without Doubt My Hero!

Reading your book, *Warriors Don't Cry*, aroused an unexplainable sense of urgency within me and changed my perspective on many things. Though I am an avid reader, never before has a book had this kind of impact on me. While I do not face the same obstacles that you faced at Central High, I look into the ugly face of poverty daily as it ravages my school and my community. By the time I finished reading your book, a fire burned in my heart and soul encouraging me to look poverty and any challenge that I face right in the face and refuse to back down! Even when I feel that I have been dealt a bad hand in life, I will strategize to overcome because you have taught me that that is what WARRIORS do.

And now I know that "I AM A WARRIOR TOO."



“Beauty” by Gabrielle, Grade 12

Photo and caption reprinted from *Scholar Voices 2021*

There is always beauty somewhere. In the midst of weeds and isolation, the flower was still able to grow.



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