

Scholar Voices 2023



**Pathways
to College**[®]

A Program of The Ophelia J. Berry Fund, Inc.

**Cover Photo: "Time"
JAYDEN, Grade 11**

Scholar Voices 2023

Cover photo caption from JAYDEN:

“Time”

Time is uncontrollable, unpredictable, and unforgiving, but so beautiful...

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Schools Represented

Central High School	Newark, New Jersey
Dollarway High School	Pine Bluff, Arkansas
East Side High School	Newark, New Jersey
Malcolm X. Shabazz High School	Newark, New Jersey
Robert F. Morehead Middle School	Pine Bluff, Arkansas
West Side High School	Newark, New Jersey
West Side Leadership Academy	Gary, Indiana

Introduction

Welcome to the 2023 edition of *Scholar Voices*, the Literary Magazine of Pathways to College! As always, it is our great pleasure to celebrate the creativity, ideas, and dreams of our wonderful Pathways Scholars, as they look ahead to all that is available and possible in their lives. For the 14th consecutive year, the *Scholar Voices* reading committee has marveled at the words and images of this extraordinary group of young people. Every year they find impressive ways to describe challenges overcome and lessons learned, and in so doing, strengthen their resolve to push forward with hope and determination to uncover and amplify the special gifts they bring to their families, their communities, and the world.

Each year, we learn from submissions to *Scholar Voices*, what our Scholars are finding compelling as they think about becoming productive citizens of their several worlds. This year, courageous leadership, an important component of our curriculum, is clearly on their minds. We can all be encouraged by their thoughtful focus on how they might contribute to addressing a critical and ongoing national need.

To every Pathways Scholar, past and present, we share our perennial message: we hope that publication of your work in *Scholar Voices* evolves into a lifelong, personal career of learning, and then recording and sharing your ideas! Whether they are produced electronically or with paper and pen; through photography or works of art; expressed through music, song, poetry, journals, blogs, or letters; whether paid for, freely given, shared with a few close friends, or kept under your pillow; your thoughts are more important, to you and others, than you know.

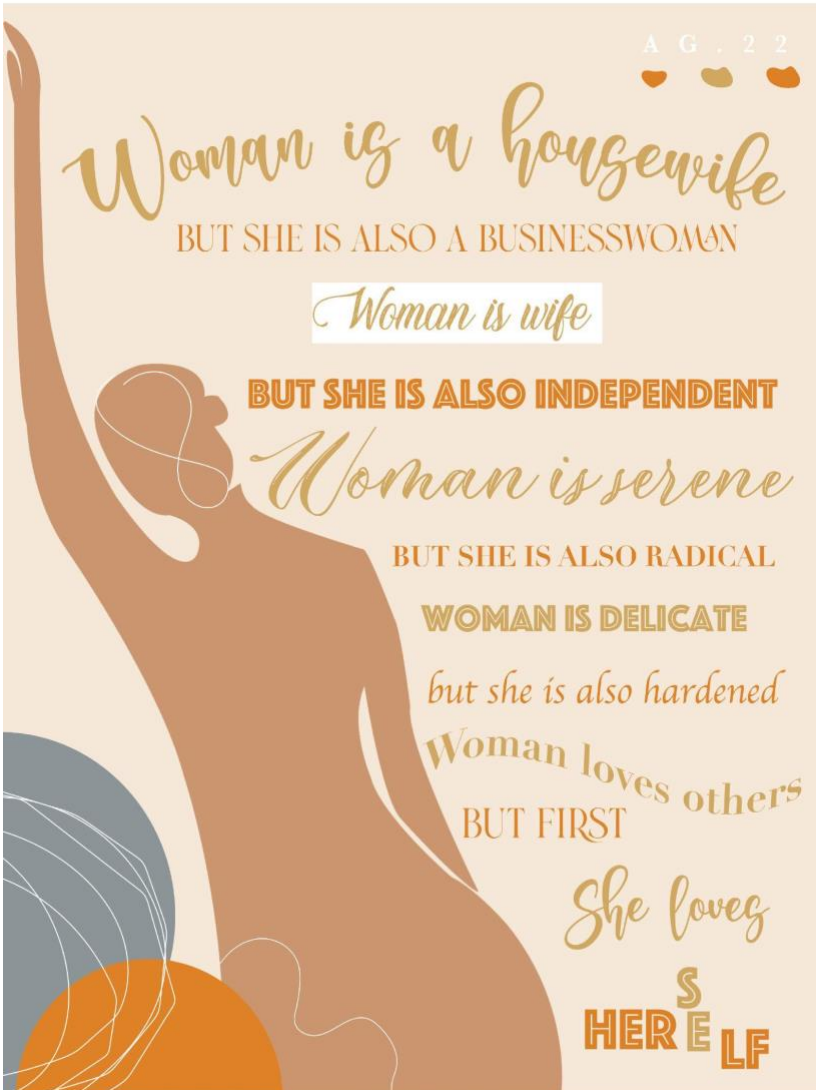
We are your cheerleaders! Keep dreaming!

Judith Berry Griffin
Founder and President

WINNER – ART

ANGELICA, Grade 12

Woman



WINNER – ESSAY

JALEN, Grade 12

Leadership

As a leader, my grandfather Elliot Lyle’s lessons on principles and priorities have greatly influenced my ethics and sense of values. My grandfather was a military man as well as a Pan Africanist. He experienced being a Black soldier, when those of his race in his profession did not mean anything to his country. Still, he served his country. He taught me that every barrier is a whisper from the universe on how powerful you are, and you have to embrace that whisper. But along with this wisdom, he said that as a Black man I was tasked with the duty of uplifting my community and using my intellect to better everything around me. I have used those lessons to be a leader who inspires and motivates others around me. I strive to embody the qualities of a transformational leader —one committed to empowering others.

Being the shot put Captain of my school's varsity track and field team requires me to have to teach them the proper way to apply their strength with a mix of techniques. But for me to be efficient as a Captain is to put others’ needs ahead of my own, empathize with their weaknesses, and recognize their strengths. My altruistic mindset is one of my greatest strengths as a leader. Being a leader does not always entail giving commands; rather, it demands working cooperatively with others to accomplish a shared objective.

As an Ambassador for Pathways to College, which is an organization that gives individuals around the nation a chance to receive a higher education despite outlying factors, I must be a visionary leader who can see the broad picture of providing an equitable and accessible learning environment for all students. I must devise creative tactics for attaining my objective of ensuring that all students have access to the same educational opportunities, regardless of their background or financial status. I don't mind taking chances or trying new things, such as partnering with other organizations inside of my school so I can bring

awareness of the educational disparity in my city of Newark, New Jersey. I am constantly trying to think of methods to develop and better the program.

Ultimately, I am a servant leader devoted to my neighborhood's prosperity. As a Deacon at my church, I provide guidance to congregants who perceive me to be qualified to lead them spiritually. I do this because I understand that leadership is not about personal gain or self-promotion. I also give my time and money to my church's members, and I do volunteer activities such as public breakfasts for the homeless, and toy drives for children.

I'm hoping to continue to embody the traits of a transformational leader. I have a servant's heart and I'm also personable, compassionate, visionary, and moral. By motivating individuals around me to be their best selves and have a constructive impact on the world, I can inspire and uplift them, which would make my grandfather proud.

WINNER – ESSAY

SAMUEL, Grade 10

Thoughts on Three Quotes by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Seeing the Stars

“But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.”*

The quote "But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars" holds a deep truth about the human experience. It speaks to the idea that it is often in our darkest moments that we are able to see the light that guides us forward. The metaphor of the stars being visible only when it is dark is a powerful one, as it highlights the idea that it is in the midst of hardship that one can find the hope and inspiration they need to continue. In life, we all face challenges and difficulties that can leave us feeling lost and uncertain. However, it is in these moments that we have the opportunity to look within ourselves and find the strength and resilience to overcome these obstacles. The quote suggests that we should embrace the darkness and use it as a means of finding the light that will guide us forward. The idea of the stars being visible only in the dark also speaks to the importance of perspective. In times of hardship, it can be easy to become consumed by our problems and lose sight of the bigger picture. However, when we step back and look at the situation from a different perspective, we can often see that things are not as dire as they initially appeared. This is the power of perspective, and it is a key component of resilience and mental toughness.

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Forgiveness

“Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.”*

The quote "Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude" speaks to the idea that forgiveness is not just something that we do in isolated moments, but rather it is a state of mind that we must cultivate and maintain. This quote highlights the importance of incorporating forgiveness into our daily lives as a way of fostering positivity and reducing negativity in our relationships. Forgiveness is a powerful force that can transform not only our relationships with others, but also our own well-being. When we forgive others, we are choosing to let go of resentment and bitterness, and instead to focus on compassion and understanding. This allows us to maintain healthy relationships, even in the face of conflict or wrongdoing. Additionally, forgiveness has been shown to have numerous benefits for our mental and emotional health, including reducing stress, improving sleep, and boosting our overall sense of happiness and well-being. However, in order to reap these benefits, we must make forgiveness a constant attitude in our lives. This means being intentional about our thoughts and actions, and making the choice to forgive others even when it is difficult. It requires us to cultivate compassion, empathy, and a willingness to understand the perspectives of others, even when they may differ from our own.

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Live or Perish

“We must live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”*

The quote, "We must live together as brothers or perish together as fools" speaks to the importance of unity and cooperation in the face of challenges and adversity. The quote highlights the idea that when people come together and work as a team, they can achieve great things, but when they fail to do so, they put themselves at risk of failure and destruction. The message of the quote is particularly relevant in today's world, where division and conflict are all too common. Whether we are talking about differences between nations, communities, or even individuals, it is clear that there is a growing sense of division and mistrust. In this context, the quote serves as a reminder of the importance of coming together and working as a united front in order to address the challenges we face as a society. However, the quote also speaks to a deeper truth about the human experience. At our core, we are all connected and dependent on one another, and it is only through cooperation and unity that we can truly thrive. Whether we are working to achieve a common goal, supporting each other through difficult times, or simply sharing in the joys of life, it is important to remember that our fates are inextricably linked, and that we must work together as brothers in order to succeed.

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

WINNER – MEMOIR

FAVOUR, Grade 12

Four Years of My Life

2019/2020

Arrived at a strange and foreign land,
Unsure of what is to come...
Afraid of building relationships
Getting acclimated to a new environment.
Release myself to build relationships
Beginning to fall in love with my new life...
MARCH 13, 2020 HITS!

2020/2021

Elated about a 2-week break
Ignorant of a debacle
THEN IT ALL HITS!
Denial...Anger...Bargaining...Depression...Acceptance.

2021/2022

Taking my life's puzzle pieces and putting them together
Making decisions, decisions that could make or break me
Separating allies and enemies
Creating connections
Beginning with a bond.

2022/2023

A period that seems neither short nor long
Unsure whether to be sad or joyful
Finalizing decisions
Uncertain of what lies ahead, yet moving on with the hopes of a far better future
Hoping this four years of my life would be one I could look back and smile at.

WINNER – PHOTOGRAPHY

AMINAH, Grade 11

**Winner, 2022 Pathways to College President’s Award
for Excellence in Writing**

What the Eye Sees



When 'eye' look at this picture, I see a peace or a sort of calmness
within myself.

When 'eye' look at this picture I see true beauty, a naturalness, a sense
of love.

When 'eye' look at this picture I see the way my skin soaks up the sun.

When 'eye' look at this picture I see the way the sun makes my hair
sparkle and glow.

'Eye' am the divine, a goddess of the sun.

When 'Eye' look at this picture I... **SEE...ME!!**

WINNER – POETRY

JALEN, Grade 12

Reflection

“SELAH” my brothers and sister of our illustrious and infamous city of Newark, the Sodom and Gomorrah for Street hustlers and Dope boys, the Mount Zion of little roses that grow from the concrete; this word dances from the lips of the street prophet as the angel swoops down again to monitor and remain the spectator and the observer.

“SELAH” the angel watches as another man’s soul is consumed by drugs as he experiences temporary relief from 400 years of oppression, pain and suffering, “SELAH” the angel hears the wailing of a mother (whose ebony skin is a familiar sight) as it has been the only consistent sound of the eternal black women as sons’ flesh lay riddled and scavenged by the bullets of a Glock nine, “SELAH” the angel sees brother strike down brother just as Cain did Abel, needless violence begets violence and the bloody cycle of ignorance continues.

My brothers and sisters with common eyes and united hearts, now is the time for us to come together and pause and reflect, to search our souls for our true purpose as it’s our job to build each other up and to improve one’s mentality and that of those around oneself in order to inject positive energy into the community and eliminate all negativity.

“SELAH.”

WINNER – POETRY

TRARON, Grade 9

Rap

Trynna get these A's stacking up these grades
finna win this hundred I'm ain't even playing
when I win Imma put this hundred dollars up for college
feel like Neil Armstrong cause I'm shooting up like a rocket
imma take the lead like MLK
they going to do what I say no questions they just do
And you know Black Lives Matter and they always will
and they being racist to us we can't sit back and chill
we can't get comfortable with that lifestyle
and I wrote this rap this song ain't no freestyle

WINNER – POETRY

JANYLAAH, Grade 11

The Shadows

Invisible

That's the word I'd use to describe myself

Microscopic

Inconspicuous

Imperceptible

I've spent my whole life in a shadow

Not doing too much, not doing too little, just doing enough; playing it safe some would say

Maybe I'm just lazy, just trying to get by

Or maybe I'm just scared to fail so it's easier not to try

Maybe I don't know myself or my worth or my talents

And I hide behind other people so that I can stay on balance

Maybe I wanna find my place in the world

And know myself, and know my worth

But how do I do that when something knocks me down at every turn

The shadows

A place of comfort

A place of playing it safe and being okay

Not testing your limits

And just making it through

Knowing that no one will be too hard on you

The shadows

To me they're home

A home that I don't want to be a part of anymore

A home that makes me feel small and lonely and anxious and tired

A home where I'm not good enough and fully undesired

The shadows

I don't belong there anymore

Perhaps I never did

Perhaps I was just scared to live so I took the easy route and went off and hid

The shadows

I'm better than that

I want more for myself and I won't stop till I achieve it

Done waiting around and I don't need you to believe it

Once awaited your approval and now I don't need it

So much light to get and I can't wait to receive it

HONORABLE MENTION – MEMOIR

TRARON, Grade 9

Unusual to the Father Figure

59% of black fathers live with their kids. I am not a part of that 59%. Or am I?

Let me take you back to when my dad was in my life. We all lived in a house with my mom, my two siblings, and my dad. I can't really remember a time me and him were together, considering I was 3-5 years old. He was also in and out of jail so that's probably another reason why. One day my mom and him had a big fight, and that's what sent him to jail again. Then we moved to a new house. We were all getting used to it being us four. That's how I liked it, just us four.

Just one normal day, my mom comes inside with a guy with long dreads and a lot of tattoos. She told us this was her new boyfriend. I was a little younger so I didn't really understand, but my siblings were fully aware and they did not like the fact she got a boyfriend so neither did I. He started spending the night more and telling me what to do, and that's what I didn't like. I once told him he wasn't my dad outta anger, and of course got in trouble. He also had kids of his own that came in the summertime. One of them was a boy my age, so now I had somebody to play and joke around with. He also has a daughter around my sister's age, so she basically got the sister she never had. We always looked forward to the summer since they were going to be around.

Two years later, he and my mom told us they were having a baby. My siblings did not like the thought of that, which made them dislike him a lot more. When the baby was born, I felt a little sad. I was no longer the baby and getting the same attention as I used to. After a while, he fully moved in with us and it was a lot of adjustments going on. Having to get used to seeing him and my new brother was weird, but I just had to learn to deal with it. After we all finally gave in to him, he cheated on my mother with some lady and got her pregnant. I can't

really remember all the details, I just know my mom was heartbroken. Issue is, she took him back, I don't know why but she did.

We moved again to another house, though it was a lot smaller than the last one. My mother doesn't own this house, he does, but I was still a little young so I didn't really pay attention to it. The house was really small and I didn't like it at all. It was only a 2 bedroom. There wasn't any space with eight people during the summer. Plus we didn't do anything anymore but I still enjoyed his kids' company. It made me less bored, but he started treating me and my siblings as if we were his own.

We moved one more time, and this is the house I'm currently living in and I loved it. I had friends in the neighborhood, it was a lot bigger than the last. I've come to my senses as I got older. I just realized my mom really loved him and he loved her. They ended up getting married, and I was happy for them at this point in time. I look at him as if he is my dad and he treats me as if I was his son. Even though he gets on my nerves to this day, I love him and he loves me. I am now a part of that 59% because he is my father.

HONORABLE MENTION – POETRY

ISAIAH, Grade 12

The Final Stretch

Holding onto the ledge of my inspiration
My bones creak with singing
A heart racing under arrest
Time stops for one moment
A frame of question
Purpose
Thoughts as the second vanishes

The cone bushes spin scarlet
The beavers build
And the gopher digs as the worm festers

The sun smiles on the hero and villain
The mind entertains nightly imaginations
Walking along Atlantis
Silver fish huddle with instinct
Pools of fire conceive and die out

Plates shift
Springs in the sea unveil
Roots attain warrior strength
Honey and winter wax grow fickle
Somewhere a panther itches to spring

Jersey blossoms bloom carnation pink
Winds scatter in fours
Summertime cicadas cry in clicks and banter
Setting the stage for fireflies

Carrying out what they meant to do
Their purpose is no question
The job is done

A divine and unfailing system
Second nature
Thoughtless

But I acknowledge that I'm different from them
So I proceed ferociously in conformities of the flesh
Tearing down beasts
Crushing bones underfoot
Vetting a familiar valley
Convincing myself
I saved many from these creatures
Push forward
Don't look back
Cast out all doubt
Persevere for the last stop

For whatever reason lackluster or overdue
The world fell back on itself
Taking one finger off the pulse at a time
Now falling off the ledge
Being foolish, I fear none but myself
And left with gnawing uneasiness
What can expunge this feeling?
Propose another purpose in time

Deeper scars of self-doubt with a common remedy
There lies the climb back
And this is the inescapable spectrum of life
But it can be accepted

So I weighed up something
There is no final stretch on earth
In this constant struggle to elevate and fail
The joy is in continuity and flowing streams
Accept every part of it
It is a complex granted from heaven
Many will find this unsavory
That there is no final stretch

Mankind seeks peace and an eternal rest
But hasn't yet grasped it
An everyday sand that slips through a child's fingers

Inaccuracies, blunders, mistakes, and brilliant moves
An endgame having no resemblance to the opening
But the players move their pieces back and forth despite this
In hopes of a more enjoyable game

And the contenders forever race along this enormous track
We call life
Searching for wholeness
So that the battle isn't over
Fight with every last breath

HONORABLE MENTION – ART

IJANAEAH, Grade 11

Too Blind



"Too blind to see it"

Too blind to see it.

HONORABLE MENTION – POETRY

MAR'REYSHIA, Grade 10

Violence Is Pain

Another 16 year old has been shot and killed
brown skin just sitting in a car he had his whole life to fulfill
18 year old senior who attended my school
brown skin, curly hair pretty smile how could you be so cruel
Black on black crimes was it worth it
would you go back in time would you reverse it

I'm scared I'm afraid
what if it's me next who would be getting buried in a grave
I can't lose someone close to me over a gun when we can ban them
The government passing laws about men wearing dresses,
but kids shooting guns in school leaving messes
haven't y'all learned y'all lesson

I woke up this morning and got dressed
my parents were in the front room watching the news
another school shooting it was a mess
Another son or daughter has been taken all over one weapon
just because they went to school to get their lesson
My mom looked at me and said after school don't go to practice
just come home and keep your phone on

This is the moment I realized violence is pain
I would hate for the next person to be Mar'Reyshia Haynes

ALISSA MARIE, Grade 9

Alissa Marie

Birthered from a strong woman.

A prize to the worlds.

A gift from God.

An angel displayed on earth.

A demeanor as bright as the afternoon sun, and an energy as soft as the evening dusk.

I am love. I am light.

Looking to heal and enlight,

Behind my smile I am putting up a fight.

But still

I expedite.

Like a soldier in war, I battle.

I march through the darkness of fears and worries,
with my head held high and shoulders back.

The absence of light is engulfed by the illumination of my aura.

And with that I shine.

I shine with courage.

I shine with ambition.

I shine with strength.

I am a warrior.

I am a leader.

Authentic and pure.

AL JUWAUN, Grade 10

In My Hood It's Always Dark

No matter the time, it's always dark... pitch dark.
The streetlights are the only source of protection
Everything that was good, turns bad.
The games begin in the dark
Shootings, gang initiations, pressure on every corner
The worst I saw was when Bangout got shot, and nobody said

Why?

His mother's cry was heard about six blocks away.

The worst I heard was when Craig Gee was in his car.
He got yanked out by the rival gang.
They took Craig Gee out of his car and they beat him to death with
Sticks, blades, belts, and blood... his own.
In my hood it's always dark.
The recipe for survival is hope, belief, and dreams.

EMILY, Grade 12

Untitled

A leader is someone who can inspire the people around them while also working towards any goal they set for themselves. My definition of success is learning from others to grow into being a leader. My mother, Luciana Souza, allowed me to grow into a leader. At 20, she was seven months pregnant with my older brother in Minas Gerais — an urban, southeastern Brazilian state known for producing more than half of Brazil’s mineral wealth. My father, Wilson Coelho, left earlier than my mother and when she was immigrating, she put her new family first. Moving to a new country whose dominant language was unrecognizable was difficult for her, but carrying an unborn child made her journey even harder. I use my mother’s courage as I captain my school’s volleyball team, trying to lead us to win every game. When we must adjust to difficult scenarios, I keep in mind my mother’s story. In one match when we were missing an important teammate and everyone was freaking out, I told them, “Just do the same things we do at practice and be confident in yourselves and in the team.” This allowed us to grow as a team and I led my teammates to victory after an obstacle we had to face.

As a boys’ volleyball manager, I also lead the team to be organized and consistent. I work on keeping attendance, pushing players, and giving my input on the team's performance to the coach. When talking to boys in high school my value can be diminished. When the team was late to go to a game I was telling the players, “Hurry up, let's get on the bus.” One of the freshmen turned and told me, “You are not my mother.” In this moment I could have stayed quiet and let him make me feel ashamed but I used my courage to stand up for myself and show that my role is to be a leader. I responded to the freshman with, “I am just trying to get all of you to get to the game on time when everyone is stressing out about being late.” In this moment he saw that I was not trying to be his mother, but to be a role model to the future managers and players. Encouraging others to develop the same courage my mother taught me has become my leadership style. My goal as a leader is to help others reach their own success and make them courageous.

ALINE, Grade 10

Completely Different World

This will only be a short vacation. That's what my mind said over and over again, when in reality that's when my new life would begin. Even though it was four years ago, my brain remembers the most important details. Sometimes when I think a lot about all the things that happened, my brain just doesn't work. What can I say? I have a poor memory or maybe I just don't want to remember, because it's just hard to leave all behind: your family, friends, house and country. It is even harder to forget how I first came here, to the United States.

It was like a dream, but blurry. There was a girl crying and people also crying and they all were hugging each other. The girl and other people entered the car and she was looking out of the back window with tears in her eyes. It was not a dream; these were flashbacks from when I left the city I used to live in, in Brazil. Soon after, I had to take several buses and planes to get to Mexico, where my grandma Sara lives.

I couldn't understand anything she said. After all, that was just my second time going to Mexico. One day she was asking me something and I was not understanding, so I said the only two words that I knew, "Hola, Abuelita." Right after I said that she started looking at me with a strange expression. After a few months in Mexico, my mother, my father and my little sister and I had to move closer to immigration. My older sister had to stay in Mexico with my grandma. When I least expected it, I had to leave my mother and younger sister behind to get here. I just remember me and my father in a car passing near a big barrier. Soon, when we got out of the car, I saw some police officers. My father spoke to them and soon after they placed us in a room to sleep.

The next morning we went to a place to take a shower and leave our belongings. At that moment I had to separate from my father. At that moment the only thing that I wanted was my mother, but I knew my sister was little, so she would need her more than me. Right after the shower I changed into the clothes and shoes that they gave me, a

gray shirt and pants of the same color. The only cheerful thing was the color of my shoes, compared to the grayness of my clothes.

Without noticing, I was already in another room. This room where I stayed for a few days was different from the others, this one had a large wire grid. In those days I met fathers, mothers, children, and young people. One of them was a baby of only six months. During the time I stayed, I was talking and playing with them just waiting for the time to leave. This process made me understand that those people had something in common with me. All were physically distinct but with a single purpose of going in search of a dream. A dream that for a long time I thought was far beyond my reach. After a few days we were ready to leave, so they handed us our things and took us to a bus.

There on the bus I was thinking about what this new life would be like in another country. On that bus I could finally see the light that for days had been stolen from me. I could see all the people grateful to have been able to get to this country. This change was a very important part of my life because it not only made me stronger, but also made me more grateful. I started to appreciate my mother, my sisters, and other members of my family. Without this experience it would be even more difficult for me in the future to go to college, buy a house, and travel around the world without my family. With this experience I learned to be more independent.

ANGELICA, Grade 12

How Am I a Leader?

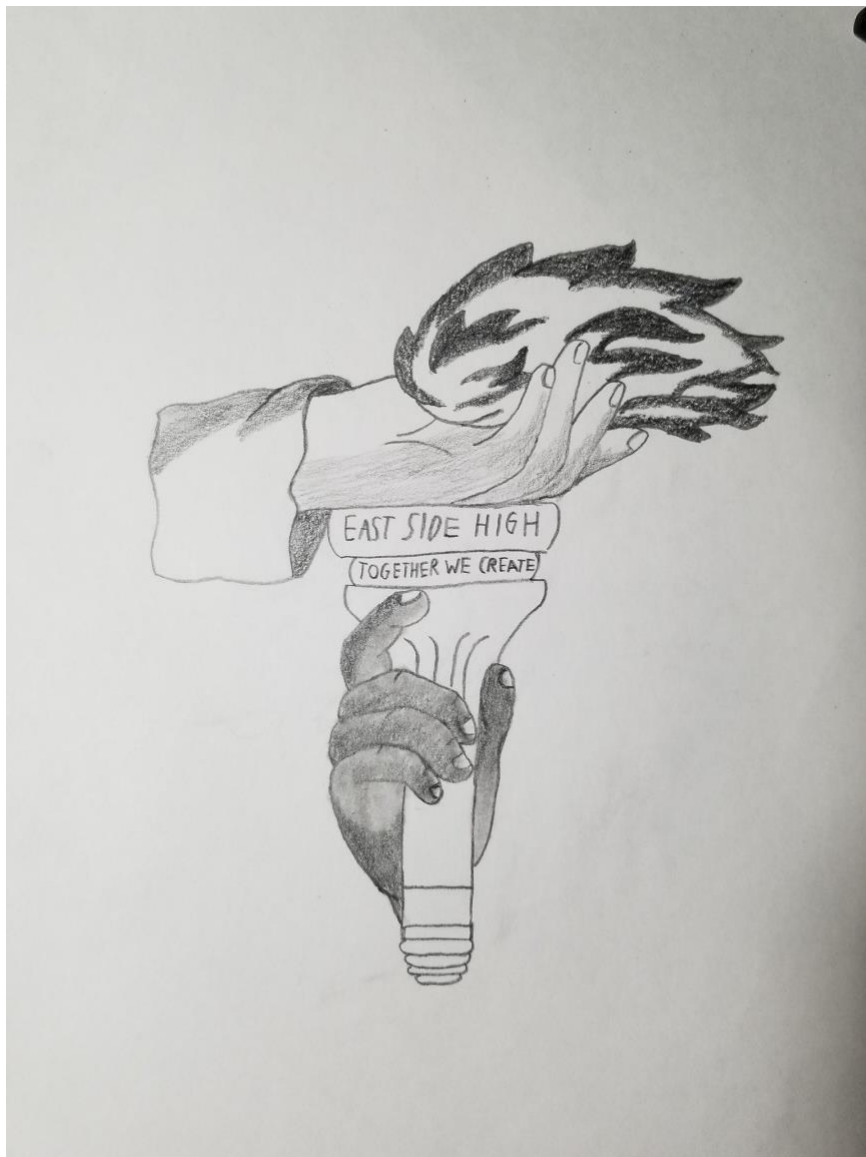
The heart seeks shelter in melancholy times. That's what I felt as I walked into class and spotted my teary-eyed friend, who was lamenting her parents' divorce. As her cause reflected in what had happened to me months early, I felt the need to embrace her through advice and motivational messages whenever anxiety prevailed in her life. It was at that moment that I began my purpose: helping change others' lives for the better. Where my leadership is not limited to big speeches nor group influences, but through helping others. While volunteering at the library as a homework helper, I did not feel upset when Victoria, a young girl I tutored who often decided not to do her homework, asked me to repeat my name for the fourth time. The way she started conversations by questioning the reason behind my name, despite it being a detour from her homework, also inspired me to look for ways to make her homework more fun; from telling her that my name is related to the flowers she should count in her math homework to correlating her piano lessons with the expressions in her English homework. Although so much time has passed, it fills me with joy to know that when I see Victoria on the street, she still remembers my name until this day. Victoria showed me that in order to become a leader, it wasn't necessary to be at the center, but to make what I did important in the lives of others, just as I did in hers.

As the founder and president of my school's Model United Nations Club, I'm eager to show my peers that we can help solve local and global issues and improve conditions in our community and country. It was with the intention of expanding young adults' perspectives that I decided to found Model United Nations, a club that was my learning and leadership point during my two years of high school. Through Model UN, I met people from all over the world at a conference in New York where I was able to discuss current world problems and implement solutions that are accountably similar to those in the United Nations. The skills acquired during hours of debate and vigorous hours of fundraising, allowed me to acquire resistance, perseverance, and respect for those who work with me. These skills taught me that to be a

leader, I didn't need to always be at the head of the class, because it was through others that I learned the most. Today, reflecting on how I've become a leader with each challenge I've faced, I realize that much of what I've done, I didn't accomplish alone. Now more than ever I know that my leadership is not about being president of loads of clubs, but about doing good through encouraging insecure peers, and offering whatever support I can give, to those in need, just as I did that one morning to my teary-eyed friend.

BRIAN, Class of 2022
A.A., Essex County College, 2022
New Jersey Institute of Technology, Class of 2028

Untitled



Many people just glance at something's name and put their assumption on it. The convenience of assumptions is dangerous, leading to today's social problems. East Side is both what people think it is, and what it really isn't. The massive amount of students causes flaws with its overcrowding, but within the crowd, there are those who will build up the torch to light your success.

CHANCEZ, Grade 9

Falling One Hundred Feet

Have you ever fallen 100 feet out of the sky? What about facing one of your fears? Well, I have, and it was such a bone chilling experience.

On June 6th, 2021, I went to Six Flags while on a cousins' trip. While we were there, one of my cousins suggested we go on a ride. I obliged because I didn't want to be a party pooper and ruin the mood. The whole time we waited, I contemplated getting on. The weather and beaming Texas sun was so nice for something so terrifying to happen to me.

After about six minutes of waiting, we finally boarded the ride. I took off my glasses and passed them to my brother so they wouldn't fly off my face. The cart then jolted signifying that we were moving. The higher we got the more my stomach dropped to my butt. Heart racing, mind wandering, and arms wrapped around my cousin, I was terrified. I always told myself that I wasn't afraid of heights, but looking down was the worst decision I could make at the time. Three seconds before the big drop, I whispered a little prayer asking God to keep me safe.

WHOOSH! I instantly screamed as we took off from the top of the attraction. The ride was going side to side and in some kind of loop. I never really liked roller coasters because my asthma starts to flare up and I start to hyperventilate. Without realizing it, I started to dig my nails into my cousin's arm and draw blood. Stomach now to my feet and body scrunched over, it was safe to say I couldn't take much more of the ride.

After four more minutes of gut churning twists in the air, the ride came to an end. Getting off the ride, my legs were shaky as a plane in turbulence. My cousin went on a rant about me cutting up her arm. Once we exited, we met up with my other cousin that didn't tag along, and I got my glasses back from my brother.

Though the experience was nerve-wracking, the outcome was fun. Due to the fact I decided to face one of my fears, I rode three more times and had fun. Overcoming things is beneficial and no longer limits to exploring life. So I would highly recommend that people take that risk also.

FATHIA, Grade 12

Untitled

Although I am strongly committed to the service organizations with which I work, it is my service to individuals, one-on-one, that means the most to me. At the beginning of the COVID-19 global pandemic, there was a lot of confusion on how students were supposed to complete their schoolwork. One of my friends did not even know there were Zoom meetings taking place, and because of that, her grades took a hit. I noticed she was not attending the Zoom sessions and got her to start doing so. She was able to bring her grades up to a decent level through countless phone tutoring sessions we shared. I helped her talk to the teacher about some extra credit work and connectivity issues. All in all, I learned the importance of offering a helping hand, even when it was not convenient.

So while I disliked being confined to the house, it gave me plenty of time to think about who I am and what I want out of life. In a way, I can say the Covid-19 pandemic shaped me into the leader I am today. I can accept criticism, I appreciate someone correcting me if I'm wrong, but I also won't back down from standing up for what I think is right.

People's definitions of a leader may greatly vary. But encouraging and supporting others, being unafraid to take chances, demonstrating that it's acceptable to not have all the answers, and accepting responsibility for failures, are all strong leadership qualities.

I consider myself a leader because I possess these qualities. From the early days of the COVID-19 global pandemic, I've done more than just serve as a leader. I volunteered at my school whenever I could and helped out my household by getting a job. I have guided others about a vast number of things, ranging from information on the college admission process to different foods and cultures. I've also been a shoulder to cry on for my friends and family whenever they have needed it. Through my efforts, I've been able to see others succeed.

My classmates, family members, friends, and teachers would all confirm that I exhibit a leader's uncommon and most fundamental characteristics: effective communication, responsibility, self-motivation, and confidence. These are characteristics that can grow out of stepping outside of one's comfort zone.

So while people's perceptions of what it means to be a leader can vary greatly, I encourage and help others, take calculated risks, show others around me that I don't have all the answers, and accept the consequences of my mistakes. Those qualities make me a great leader.

**FRANCISCA, Class of 2022
A.A., Essex County College, 2022
New Jersey Institute of Technology, 2031**

Silent Night of Hope for the Future

The Silent Night
The oceans Rise
The Wind Blows
The sun Rises up hill
The beauty of who she is
Nothing is greater than her
Making the best of own
Grown of the seas
Grown of the plants
Passionate of the golden Hill
Passionate of the desmond Chain
So hard to make
So much easier to bring
Nothing is being missed out
We create out the future
We hold the stars
We Brighten the Sun with love
We strengthen the path of the road
Nothing is being held forward
Unless we push forward of the big dream
We challenge ourselves to make something new out of it
We are the ones who bring out the best moment within us
We are the future leaders of the world and our community

ISABELLA, Grade 12

An Escape from Reality



I see this place as an escape from reality, I see a place to release all your emotions, a place to escape your biggest fears. A place where you can just unwind and have no worries, a place of meditation and relaxation.

ISAIAH, Grade 12

General of the Seas



Boisterous silver winds. Raging waters. Grey tumultuous storm. Stand firm. The stillness within lies preparation. Flourish with the blossoms as you fight for mastery of life.

JAH'MIYAH, Grade 11

Pretty Little Lies

you call me pretty, to stop hearing my cries
you say i'm beautiful, so i won't hear your lies
so, how are your lies really pretty?
or did you lie about me being pretty, just for me to cry again
i'm tired of your lies, i know you're tired of hearing me cry
there, i said it are you happy now?
are you happy that your pretty lies make me cry in the dark,
your lies were meaningful, i believed you
but now i can't take my cries anymore, i still deal with your lies
i love you I love you so much to the point i can't cry,
all i can think about is your pretty eyes ...
shoot i meant lies ...

i don't understand how someone with pretty eyes would ... would
tell me lies
i thought you loved me, by the way you hugged me
why did you feel me up with all your lies,
every time you looked in my eyes, you told me lies
now, i feel like i have to disguise my true emotions
i hate not showing the real me, all
because of you, the lies that make people hear my loud cries
so i ask you, can you stop telling me your pretty lies
the lies are sweet, but also hurtful
i love it, i hate it i don't know anymore

you filled my head with so many lies,
i don't know if i should cry or die
should i die?
i'm tired of running
i just wanted to get away from those lies,
there is no escape from this, how can i be free?
i have to wear shades to hide my teary eyes,
i keep my mouth shut to stop from telling someone lies
i don't wanna hide, i don't wanna cry
i just want to be free from your pretty lies.

SPECIAL SECTION featuring Janylaah’s memoir, as well as a personal statement from her Pathways to College teacher, Jamal Burton. Jamal is also a Pathways to College alumnus.

JANYLAAH, Grade 11

Knowing You, Made Me

There are a lot of people who have impacted my life, some more than others. Two people in particular are my big sister, Jalyssa, and my teacher, Mr. Burton. They have both impacted my life in different, yet equally monumental ways.

My big sister has been and continues to be my rock. She’s always there for me and I couldn’t be more grateful. Growing up, at times it almost felt like she was all I had. If I needed a ride, she was the one who drove me; if I got in trouble, she was the one who punished me; if I started crying, she was the one who comforted me. She has impacted my life in several ways. As a mother, sister, and friend.

I could name countless times that she’s been there for me, but one that really stands out to me is from a couple of years ago. When I was in eighth grade my middle school was having a Black history program and one of the teachers signed me up to perform “And Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou. I was feeling very anxious and nervous because we only had two weeks to prepare and I do not enjoy public speaking. It was a very nerve-racking two weeks, but when the time came to perform I was feeling ready and confident. My biggest concern was that no one would be there to witness my hard work. I knew my dad wouldn’t make it because he had work and all of my other siblings were in school, so I was fully expecting to be alone. I thought I was okay with being alone, but words cannot describe the joy I felt when I saw my sister in the audience while I was on my way to the stage. That is one of my favorite memories of my sister, to this day.

Luckily for me, I've been fortunate enough to make new memories with one of Jalyssa's best friends, Jamal Burton, or as I know him, Mr. B. I've only known him for a little under a year now, but Mr. B has changed my life tremendously. Meeting Mr. B was one of the best things to ever happen to me. He has helped and inspired me in ways that I cannot even begin to explain. I don't necessarily have a favorite moment with Mr. B, but he has this saying, "Janylaah's dope." I still remember the first time he said that to me. I had come into class upset, and I put my head down. We had an assignment that required us to go out and take pictures and instead of participating I stayed in class. He asked me what was wrong and I ended up going to his desk to talk to him. We had a conversation and he started talking to me about worth and value. I think that was the moment that he realized how insecure I really was.



Jamal Burton and Janylaah

These are just two simple words and yet they mean the world to me. “Janylaah’s dope.” He says them to remind me how great I am and to encourage me to keep going. He has helped and inspired me to test my mind creatively and to test my limits. He has pushed me to embrace failure and accept it as an experience to learn from. He has helped me realize that it is okay to be vulnerable and open with people, but most importantly, myself. He has challenged me to write more and improve my craft as well as giving me an outlet to do so with my writing. My ultimate goal for this school year was to find myself, not completely because people grow and change every day, but to leave school with a better understanding of who I am. What I’m good at and what I like -- possible career interests for myself. I can one hundred percent say that Mr. B has helped me achieve that goal.

Jalyssa and Mr. B have had the greatest impact on my life and growing process. I wouldn’t be me without either of them and I’m forever grateful that I got to have her as a sister and him as a mentor. “When you meet you, you’ll be happy.”

Jamal Burton, Pathways to College Teacher
Pathways Scholar, Class of 2012
BA: University of Central Arkansas, 2017
MS: Strayer University, 2021

As a high school student, I was a part of Pathways to College. It was the outlet and experience that changed the trajectory of my life.

Before joining the program, I did not know that there was a world bigger than my high school and community; that the opportunities of education and other paths were limitless. I remember going on college tours and being introduced to cultures that I had never heard of. It gave me a reason to excel academically, because I wanted to get out of my circumstances and see the world. I didn’t know a small town, country kid like me could see the world. I even decided that I would never come back to this place. However, life is funny, and I ended up in education.

I did not choose education, it chose me. When I came back home, I saw students with circumstances like the ones I'd had -- home life challenging, school was a safe place, and we smiled through the storms. Students who have the work ethic and skills, but nobody takes a chance on them. They have no idea that they can have a better life. One day, I dismissed my students to attend their last class of the day. Thirty seconds later they came running back in the building, some crying, others afraid. There was a shooting on campus. In that moment, I chose education. I knew the purpose I had in this field. My students needed me not only for inspiration or information. They needed me to teach them that life goes on beyond this place. Thanks to this program, I'm able to share with them some things that helped me.

As a Pathways teacher, I bring my ability to meet Scholars where they are. I understand that teaching can have an impact on you mentally and at the end of some days I may feel drained. However, I remember that my students show up defeated. Some of them only show up to eat, or they may not have running water or a place to live. It's important to be able to make those life connections.

Building relationships is a part of the growing and learning process. I'm humble enough to know that, just like my students, I can still grow as an educator.

JULIUS, Grade 11

I Am From

I'm the light of the room, I sweep obstacles like a broom
Being underestimated my whole life, once they get to know me they will
have to think twice
I was always told I'm loud and aggressive, but people never really get
the message
Growing up around bad examples, most of my dreams have been
trampled
Following was never my style, I always like to go the extra mile
Not a hero but always wear a cape, when I do right I get bit by the snake
My path has always been clean, knocking life out like we in the ring
Staying out the streets to keep me safe, Dreaming to buy my mama a
wreath
My childhood has always been a mess, in life you go through chapters,
read the text
Behind my sister I'll do the most, love her from coast to coast
Through the jungle I held restraint, but it all spills over like a can of paint
I look up and see the sky, realizing life just passing me by
Only looked up to some of my peers, when they left I start shedding
tears
Work on yourself and be great, Never be too early Never be too late
I met this girl she is my heart, when I'm around her I feel a spark
I am legend, I am me, I'm going to be this way til infinity

KEMILLY, Grade 12

Turning Red



This piece is very emotional to me. It is a piece inspired by the new movie “Turning Red” by Disney. This movie brought up many delicate topics for me and many other people. It showed the cycle of family trauma and its consequences. It showed how you are not supposed to feel what you feel, only what others want you to feel. It showed the problem of not being truly yourself. This movie made me cry a lot. In this piece, I tried to bring every feeling that I felt during the movie. I tried not only to express the consequences of trauma when you grow up, but also to express the feeling of losing your child inside you. There is no worse feeling than losing your innocence to the meanness of the world. I hope that I managed to express this feeling in this piece.

KANIESHA, Grade 11

I Will Not Fall

On the mountain top
I gaze upon the sunset
My mind clear of all

Peacefulness knocking on my nerves
But still I look down onto the chaos
Not worrying about whether or not I would fall

Staring at the mayhem
I left my thoughts to crowd my conscience and enhance
The visible destruction that had once left me in a trance

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”
But the hold that the actions of the world has on me
Speaks louder than the unique techniques within me

My mind is clear of all but yet I stand tall
In risk of a fall that will leave me appalled... lost

The sun rays and singing birds encourage me to look up even though it's
tough
I lift my head up to a scenery of fluff and discovery... suddenly feeling
that I was enough

I made it up this mountain and I will not be
Inspired to be taken down by the
Descending shaky empire below me

I don't see myself above the real world or it above me because I'm a
part of it
The circumference of the clear skies and my clear mind tells me that I
fit... in this natural world

Of disruption... dysfunction... disapproval... disappointment... which I
know I'm not one of

I will continue to stand tall and I will not fall

MARIANA, Grade 12

My Happy Place

Whose football is that? I think I know
Its owner is quite happy though
Full of joy like a vivid rainbow,
I watch him laugh, I cry hello,
He gives his football players a shake,
And laughs until her belly aches,
The only other sound's the break,
Of distant waves and birds awake.
The football player is tall, funny, and deep,
But he has promises to keep,
After cake and lots of sleep.
Sweet dreams come to him cheap.
He rises from his gentle bed,
With thoughts of puppies in his head,
He eats his jam with lots of bread.
Ready for the day ahead.

MICHELLE, Grade 10

Untitled



The pandemic hurt many people physically and emotionally. We were encouraged to stay indoors because of COVID. For several days I would open the window, see the sky, and I would always pray for the end of the quarantine. There was no pleasure in going outside because my friends and I were mentally exhausted. This picture was the first, after a long time, when I could see blue sky and appreciate being here to do so.

RAYSSA, Grade 12

Clouds and the Sky

Millions of miles apart and yet the sun and moon are seen as intense
and passionate lovers.

If they make such an alluring couple, why can't we?

We are interconnected.

We are one and the same.

I am you.

And you are me.

Blue and white is better than yellow and gray.

We are peaceful, we give serenity.

While they give sadness and anger.

We are idyllic, me and you,

We are the clouds and the sky.

TRINITY, Grade 10

I See Nothing

You know me like a book
But why aren't you reading the pages
I keep trying to open up to you
But you never let me explain it
You never wanted this life
You'd rather chase your dreams
I want it for you
At least it'll make you prouder, than me
I never felt like I did
More like ever will
You always criticize how I feel
I keep looking for what I want from you in the wrong places
Perfect your craft
Stop trying to perfect me
It's like I'll never be good enough for you
I made peace with that
But I'll never want to be at peace with that
Who do you love more than yourself
Do you even love me
I look at you
And I know you'll never be anything I need you to be
I look at you and I see nothing
Not even a father



"Three Seconds of Silence"
SANIAH, Grade 11

Being a working student athlete is exhausting. Even with all of the success and the "I'm proud of you's." There isn't any quiet. The noise - it eats at you, and makes it all seem as if it isn't worth it - but suddenly, there's those three seconds of silence.



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