

My Life As a Teen



Lily Jacobius

Santa Monica Public Library presents
Participants from the 2009
Teen Art & Creative Writing Contest



**My Life As a Teen 2009 is brought to you by
The SMPL Teen Advisory Council and
The Friends of the Santa Monica Public Library**

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My Life As a Teen is a publication of entries by the participants of The Teen Art & Creative Writing Contest. Categories include Poetry, Short Story, Photography, Painting and Drawing.

We would like to thank our judges:

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Ann Wagner, Youth Services Librarian
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FRONT COVER

First Place, Drawing
Lily Jacobius, Age 15
Santa Monica High School

My teen life is like a flower. I'm blossoming into the full-grown rose I will become. I used the method of stippling to create this piece.



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Life in the Hall

We walk through life, through this hall, without pause;
Our feet pound a steady rhythm into its floor.
We walk a straight line, no soul, no cause,
And so comfortably detached, we walk evermore.

The hall has bright colors, but we see only gray,
The pictures on its walls, we know not what they're of.
We walk alone in the tumultuous fray,
And among the faceless passers-by, there are those we love.

Even these people, who earned our affection,
Have not our texture of the hair, nor color of the eye.
We pass them by, following that unknown, unchanging direction,
And as their faces melt away, into the gray of the hall, we sigh.

We continue our march, through day and through night,
Feeling only the beat of our feet on the ground,
Hearing only the echoes of each footstep's flight.
We walk on, 'til echoes cease to sound.

First Place, Poetry

Matt Van Pelt

Age 16

Santa Monica High School



First Place, Painting

Francesca Crowley, Age 13
Lincoln Middle School

My life as a teen is full of interesting activities and studies. Sometimes it overwhelms me—my music, homework, lessons, and always my inner desire to excel in everything.

Never Looking Back

Silent humility—humble success
Immense blessings—and the blockade
Of curses

Temper of a mad man
yet the patience of a land woman
sight of a goddess
and the voice of a serpent.

Sleek strategy—strategic planning
concocted with jealousy—forgiveness
losing—and lucking out
blood line strangles me
a past that's catching up to me
ignorance haunting my dreams
wants me to sing a song
that I no longer sing.

Darkness absorbed in my flesh
all the secrets that I have to tell
restricted from my mouth because
refuge is behind the gates of hell.
Unlike a rubik's cube—my central
colors do change,
confusing to match up,
because I don't want everything
to be the same.

Mama was a scholar
Grama was a poet
Big Mama was a sculptor
What genes didn't I miss?
Pride—Children—Dignity—Men
I am a reincarnation of them
Am I not the keeper of their talents?
and their pain?

I am the brain—
when unsupervised, think
the voice, when given a chance to speak
the hands, the crafter of something new.

—I'm leaving, I'm not looking back
you can follow me, if you choose to see...

Were these 365 days the best for me?
How can I identify the good from the bad
when they coincidentally occur at
the same time?

I know we don't get a new start
when the new year passes.

Total eclipse of the heart
just to tell someone about it

Think that they care;
well here's mine.

I am a hunter—without a gun
because I'm looking for blood
just what I'm owed.

I—in a frenzy—search
With my eyes closed.

—I'm leaving, I'm not looking back
you can follow me, if you choose to see...

Because everyone knows that
you can't see a soul—unless it's lost
and mine isn't.
Like my shadow, it's just temporarily
outside of my body
Sometimes in front; in back; or on the side of me
because the three of us
can do more than one;
We can only get rest when the day is done.
I'm not looking for the wild side
Not the things we do—but the place
Where no one holds my hand
I've been led thus far
My feet no longer want to be programmed.

—I'm leaving, I'm not looking back
you can follow me, if you choose to see.

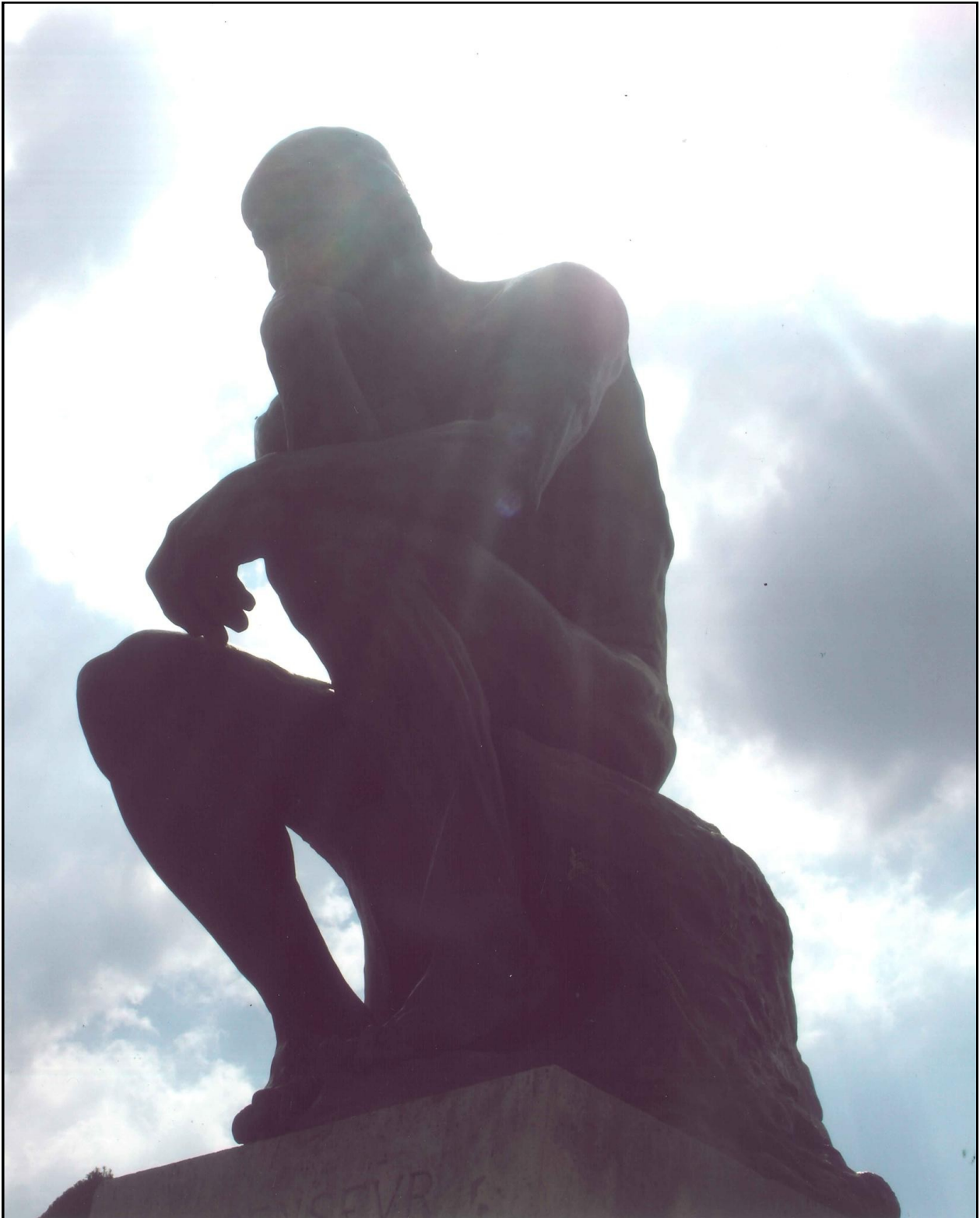
First Place, Poetry

Desiré Johnson

Age 17

Santa Monica High School

This poem is about how I acknowledge my family history—and my past sins—yet I do not blame anyone for who I am. When I say “I'm leaving...” it means I have grown up, and I am ready to make my life the way I want it to be.



Ryan Irwin, Age 13
Notre Dame Academy

This photography was taken in Paris at the Rodin Museum. The Thinker is similar to a teenager's life in that we have to navigate through troubles that appear as cloudy skies, with bursts of inspiration like rays of sunshine.

Untitled

I listen to music
I become

A glider among the notes
flying far above the troubles
the worries of the mind
a life where there is music
a universal language only the heart speaks

I am a dancer amidst
the violin
the clarinet
the voice
the emotion

Dancing upon the moonlit sky
there to compose
a symphony
I am the symphony
I am the wonderment
I am the dream
the stars of excitement

A moment of absolute serenity
a piano of passion
a chord of solitude
surrounded only
by the music
of which composes me
I am the music
waiting
alone
dancing
silently
gliding
far above

Waiting for them to hear

Orli Robin, Age 16
Santa Monica High School

My poetry reflects my passion, music. Listening to music allows me to step into another world and become the music. It is more than just an escape. It is a fantastic, marvelous reality.

Untitled

The new car smells like death.

Seriously, it smells like someone spent a month decaying in here. I've always loved new car smell, the one fragrance Dad absolutely hates, but this is too much even for me.

I get in the driver's seat and he slips in beside me, scrunching up his nose as he shuts his door.

"Mmm." He says, inhaling deeply. But I know he's pretending; I saw him turn up his nose.

I turn the key and the car groans, then purrs, to life. I look down at my hands and see that they're actually shaking. For once, I'm nervous about driving.

"Ready?" Dad asks, rolling down the window.

I nod, then throw the car into reverse and back out of the driveway. Slowly, the car rolls down the slope and off the driveway, only bumping slightly into the curb.

I look over at Dad, who's holding onto the handle above his seat for dear life, his upper lip already wet.

"Hey." I snap. "It's an improvement. Remember last time?"

He cringes, and I know he's thinking of our last expedition, where I didn't even make it out of the driveway without mowing down the mailbox and almost murdering our neighbor Mrs. Kennedy's cat. And once he saw my reaction—and how upset I was that I'd missed Daisy Fay by only a few inches—it's no wonder he wasn't excited about being in the car with me.

"Ok. Let's go," I say, trying to inject some confidence into the tense atmosphere. Then I smile at him, but he doesn't smile back. Maybe it's because he's about to throw up, but it's probably because I'm driving down the street now, passing by houses and other cars without a hitch.

"The left side is your friend, the left side is your friend..." He murmurs, still holding onto the handle over his seat. I look over and notice that his knuckles are white from gripping so hard. Definitely not a good sign.

That's the thing. People have always made fun of my driving skills—in this respect, I take after my mother. Usually I let them mock me, but today is not a good time for comedy. Not when I'm tense, too.

But I can't really blame him. He never used to go driving with me—it was Mom's territory. She believed she was the only one that could teach me "the rules of driving."

This coming from the woman, who, her first time behind the wheel, ran into a STOP sign. And a squirrel.

"Ruby," Dad says, his tone uneven. Now his hairline is wet—which is unusual, since he doesn't really have a hairline.

"Dad, I'm doing fine," I answer, feigning confidence. "Let me do this. You just sit back and relax."

He chuckles in spite of himself. "How can I relax? This is supposed to be your mother's thing, not mine."

I feel myself shudder when he mentions her, but I try not to let it show. "Whatever. Just..."

A wave of silence washes over us. He stares nervously out the window, loosening his tie and running a hand through his three carefully combined hairs.

I train my eyes on the road, on the stretch of sizzling pavement ahead of us. Left, left, left... I tell myself, repeating it like a calming mantra. But it doesn't help. It doesn't scrub away the past, the gaping hole between us, or the shattered bits and pieces of her shining at us all the time, forcing their way into our every thought. It doesn't make them go away.

Before I know it my eyes are cold and blurry, and the steering wheel is rough under my palms, and the sun is so bright I can't even see three feet in front of me.

"Ruby!" Dad yells, but I don't pay attention.

I can see our nervous laughter, hear her fingers over mine on the steering wheel, almost touch the purple melodies scratching though the radio as I drove, cautious, scared, along the tree-lined streets in our old neighborhood. I can see her tender waves glistening gold in the sunlight as she hummed along to "Tequila", watching me all the time, but pretending to be focused on other things. And I still remember the car slamming into the curb, seatbelts locking, airbags bursting to life. But we didn't cry. We laughed and laughed and laughed until tears started streaming from the corners of our eyes.

But that was then, when Mom had strength and a head full of honey hair. And this, this is supposed to be now.

Except that now sucks. Big time.

"Ruby!" He yells again, his voice hoarse and scared. "Squirrel! Squirrel!"

I don't even have time to shriek, because his hands are on the wheel, over mine, making the car swerve left and crash right into Mrs. Kennedy's palm tree head-on. And a mess of airbags and seatbelts and flailing limbs ensues inside the car that smells like death, and when it's all over and we're still again, Dad stops caring about the new car and the shiny silver grill and the palm tree shrapnel that has fallen on the hood. All we can do, as we sit there with the car smoking and hissing and squealing in pain, is fall into each other's arms and burst into uncontrollable giggles and tears.

First Place, Short Story

Alejandra Aponte, Age 16

Notre Dame Academy

While out on a driving lesson, sixteen-year-old Ruby forges a new bond with her father.

Choices

As I stand at this grey crossroads,
I look around and see only the dark black night,
As deep and lifeless as the black asphalt that stands beneath it.
I stare up and see the black mushroom clouds of nuclear meltdowns and my own.
I look into the past and see nuclear explosions, and technological ones.
I close my eyes and see the present,
A gift that is mine to cherish, explore, improve, and love.
I stare at the future, at the fork in the road.
One path shows death and darkness.
The other shows life and love.
I must choose.
We must choose
The world must choose which path to take.
Not only with our goals, but with our actions.

Julio Tomás Escarce, Age 13

Lincoln Middle School

This poem is about the past, the present, and the possible futures.



“Torn in a Colorless World”

Julio Escarce, Age 13

Lincoln Middle School

Sometimes I have moments of indecision and am not sure who to turn to.

The Chase

Walking up from the subway, I smelled the strong sweet essence of roasted peanuts. Here in New York there is one about every five blocks. I walked another block, and I saw Josh's apartment in the distance. At that exact moment, my life changed forever.

Josh called me to say, "Tiffany, there are these men at my house. They just killed my dad I think they are after me too!" He screamed into the phone.

"Okay Josh cut out the joke, you got me." I said dryly.

"No, this isn't a joke, they're calling my name and searching my apartment!" he yelled.

I could hear the tears' coming down his face; if there was one thing Josh never did it was crying. The call was disconnected before I could respond.

I ran the rest of the way to his apartment, as I got there a taxi pulled away. I memorized the license plate, W765XC, as I ran up the stairs.

As I entered though the door, the oatmeal-colored carpet was splattered with blood, though I made myself think it was maroon paint. I took one step and that's when the stench hit me like a tsunami. It smelled like a rotten egg left on the street during summer. I found a picture of Josh, Josh's mom, and me (my name written in the caption) when we went to Disneyland a year ago. The smell was making me nauseous so I decided to run to the police station.

Long story short, they didn't believe me. They probably thought (didn't say though) that I was a small, insignificant eighth grader who was bored. But I don't care, I will find Josh.

I looked at the picture—so many good memories, like when we went to Epcot and tried Irish food. Unlike my mom, who lived at her Wall Street office, Josh's mom stayed at home or at least she did.

This was depressing, I was sitting alone in my room, my best friend is missing, the police don't believe my story, and I have no leads for where he might be. I looked at the picture again—it made everything worse. I turned it over, on the back there was an address: 1600 Bleaker Street! This being my only hope I ran down my fire escape (it was faster than the elevator) and jumped into a cab.

I pretended to be extremely interested in the subway schedule so the driver wouldn't talk to me. Ten minutes later, the cab stopped, jolting me back into reality. I looked around. I was there. I started to get my wallet and the driver got out and opened the door.

"This is odd. . . ." I thought.

Only I didn't have time to finish my thought. The next thing I knew, I was outside with my arms behind my back.

He started to say something but my anger drowned it out. That's when I noticed the license plate: W765XC. Now with adrenaline pumping I kicked him right in the face. He fell down to the ground, landing with a big thud.

"Who are you?!" I yelled.

All he did was give me a bloody smile.

"Where did you take Josh and why did you try to take me!?" I screamed.

Now everyone (about two people) on Bleaker Street was looking at us.

“That’s my job Tiffany,” he stated plainly.

“How did you know my name?” I growled.

“That picture caption helped,” he explained in hushed tones. “I know what you’re thinking and I am not the person who took Josh, in fact I am on the good side. I am a double agent. I tried to stop them but they sprayed knockout gas everywhere.”

“Why can’t you help him then?” I asked.

“Because they already know I was working against them. If they see me they will kill me,” he shuddered.

“Where are they keeping him?” I wondered aloud.

To my surprise he said, “In the sewer, the entrance on the corner.”

“Thanks,” I responded, slightly dazed.

I ran to the corner and lifted the sewer lid letting out a ghastly smell like my neighbor’s litter box. I jumped down the opening and used my night-vision to navigate.

After ten minutes of looking, I finally found Josh. He was tied to a wooden chair and was gagged. There was dried blood and fresh blood all over his body. ignoring the rodents, I ran over to him, ripped off the gag, and gnawed ropes.

I used my cell phone’s light to see if there were any major injuries. Thankfully there weren’t any.

“Tiff, how are you doing?” he asked.

“Okay, where are they?” I responded

“They ran off to Russia,” he explained. “My dad apparently knew some vital information about them and they thought I was his partner.”

“Josh, what did they do to you? are you okay?” I prodded.

He stood up then and said, “Yeah, I’m fine.”

I gave him my “Okay, so when are you going to tell the truth” look.

He hugged me then and everything felt better.

“We’ll find them,” I whispered into his ear, “and they will pay for all of this.”

Caroline Zasuly, Age 12

John Adams Middle School

This is the tale of a New York City teen who tries to help her friend in a crisis.

Never Grow Up

There is a monster living underneath my bed.

He's made up of dust bunnies, of pencil shavings and forgotten stuffed toys. He smells of dust and grime and earth and remembering.

Sometimes we play checkers.

(The first time, he was just a persistent mechanical hum beneath my bed; he was a faint cloud hovering around my face. "It's the wind, only a breeze," I breathed, and then he grumbled back, thick and monsterish, "AM NOT." I had hopped off my bed and shone a light into his eyes until he bared his teeth and growled at me.)

He always spoke in capital letters. "MONSTERS ARE TOO SCARY FOR SMALL LETTERS," he informed me on one cold, bitter night. I had closed my eyes tightly and wished for sleep, pretending to ignore his every question and curiosity at the world.

Quite an odd way to become best friends.

He didn't scare me, though. "SCARING ISN'T ALL THAT GREAT," he confided, when I had asked. "IT LEAVES AN EMPTINESS INSIDE YOU ONCE IT'S OVER. I DON'T LIKE BEING EMPTY."

I remember the time when he had asked me what love was. My mother had come into the room to kiss me goodnight, as she always did, and as she closed my bedroom door, whispered to me, "I love you, sweetie. Sleep well."

"WHAT'S LOVE?" He asked me when my mother had gone.

"Love is a feeling that you have for someone, Monster. It's what mothers feel for their children, and it's a feeling knowing that you'd do anything for that person that you love." I replied back to him.

My monster was silent.

He didn't have a name, I remember. I had confronted him before about the issue, and he had grumbled back, "I DON'T HAVE ONE. JUST CALL ME MONSTER." And that is exactly what I did.

One fateful night, I had woken up crying and sweating all over, scared and frightened out of my wits. I had had a nightmare, and a terrible one at that. I lay on my bed for the longest time before getting out.

“Monster? You there?” I shakily asked into the murky darkness that was under my bed.

“ALWAYS WAS AND WILL BE. WHAT HAPPENED?” He growled back, voice shaking as mine did. Can even monsters get scared, I wondered?

“I had a n-nightmare, “I whispered into the darkness, but my monster was no longer there. He spooned me up into his arms and cradled me onto my bed. I panicked at first, worried that he would drop me into his waiting mouth, but he awkwardly stroked my hair, comforting me.

“TELL MONSTER ALL ABOUT IT.” he whispered to me, the uppercase letters of his voice floating around me like small colored balloons.

And so I did.

He was silent for a while, then hugged me to his chest, rocking me, rocking the bad dream out of my brain forevermore.

“I love you,” I whispered to him, and looked up at his face.

“I LOVE YOU TOO,” he grumbled back in the prettiest way you’d expect of a monster.

“DON’T GROW UP,” he begged me, and it was now his time to cry.

“Never,” I replied, adopting his grin.

Never.

Saskia Burton, Age 13

John Adams Middle School

When I was younger, I used to believe there was a monster that lived under my bed. We shared many experiences together, and I learned several lessons, some of which I can apply to my life today. I learned about forgiveness, love, and the child that lives on in all of us. Because teenagers are in an awkward stage, where we are no longer children and are not quite adults, we sometimes yearn to be children yet again, and to never grow up.



Briana Ramos, Age 16
Westchester High School

This represents the glamorous life and fame of a person. And the love of our music!

My life as a teen...

What does it all mean? My life as a teen sometimes, I'm called a Queen, other times I'm known as mean. My life as a teen...is not easy in the least! I'm expected to do this or do that or doo that this and the other.

My life as a teen to me is to be free to be crazy wild and free. To experiment, to discover that I am truly unlike any other.

My life as a teen. Has everyone riding my back to do the right thing. Including my parents, my teachers, my preacher and even the old lady down the street.

I'm expected to walk the straight and narrow, yet no one else does? We as teenagers only get one chance to be who we are. Yes, we have the skills of knowing it all. Someone knew one day our knowledge would come in handy.

My life as a teen...What does it all mean?

Briana Ramos, Age 16
Westchester High School

Circuits

At the front counter were batteries, amp meters, volt meters, bread boards, and a tangled massive heap of wires. The massive heap scared Jeff. It brought back horrible childhood flashbacks.

They were each given a lab that they were supposed to do in groups. It had diagrams with lines and grouped lines, and lines that were shorter than other lines, and a very dysfunctional squiggly line that seemed out of place. Jeff had trouble discerning between the lines. They all looked so alike.

“That,” Nyree pointed to four grouped, short and long lines, “is a battery.” Pointing to the thick connecting lines, she said, “These are the wires.” The dysfunctional line was “a resistor,” and she added that, “The one that looks like an equals sign is a capacitor. It’s not on here, but you might want to know what it is.”

Jeff looked at her with fear and horror. “What does it *do*?”

“It is an implement in a circuit, typically applied in integrated CMOS circuits, that transfers charge between nodes via clocked switches to consummate the function of a resistor. Effective resistance is impacted by the size of the capacitor and the frequency of the clocked switch.” Nyree explained as if talking about the weather or some other mundane, normal, daily human knowledge. Jeff nearly cried.

That was shy he teamed up with Taylor, who really seemed to know what she was doing. That, or she really didn’t know what she was doing but she had some sort of guess, as opposed to Jeff who was engulfed in the vast world of Physics and science and could not open his mouth without crying for mercy and honors level problems. But Taylor began to grab supplies and read the lab sheet without exploding, so Jeff was, more or less, relieved.

While Zho and Sahid gathered supplies, Kevin booted up the computer. The lab *did* need a graph and a lab analysis typed and printed, so, he reasoned, why not play Pokemon *simultaneously*? Within seconds, he booted up the magical world of Gameboy color Pokemon.

He had a strategy. Surfing through the water near Cinnabar, Kevin found a wild Missingno; the beautiful glitch of Pokemon Red that knew two water guns and a sky attack. If he caught it in the precise amount of time, he would be able to fly to this city, talk to this specific old man, throw away all his Pokemon save a lone Pidgey, fly anywhere, arrive at GLITCH CITY, and get unlimited money and candy forever.

Rare candy, Kevin corrected himself. Rare candy made Pokemon stronger; regular candy made him hyperactive. Either way, he was happy.

“What’cha doing, Kevin?” Jeff asked good naturedly.

“*****,” Kevin muffled indiscernible words, his very soul sucked into the game.

“Kevin, that’s rude to mumble. Tell me, what’cha doing?” Jeff leaned closer to the screen, trying to discern just what the heck was on the screen. Missingno. What—

“Shut up, Jeff. I’m busy.”

Zho intervened. “GET AWAY FROM HIS SCIENCE, JEFF.”

“It’s not science, it’s Pokemon!” Jeff argued.

“GET AWAY FROM HIS SCIENCE, JEFF.” Zho repeated, not very good at thinking up new lines.

Reluctantly, Jeff slid his chair back to his work station. “Fine, I’ll just do my lab. Like a good person. Right, Taylor?”

Taylor was pretending she knew what to do with these wires. If you plug a red one into the bread board and a black one to the amp meter, and plug it all into the battery...

She freaked.

The amp meter’s hand flew off the scale. That was a dangerous amount of amperage. What did she do wrong, she asked herself? Why was her science so wrong, so horribly, horribly wrong?

Walton, the savior of the day, unplugged the battery. “DO NOT PLUG THE BATTERY TO THE AMP METER DIRECTLY!”

Fearing her life, Taylor mumbled idiotically, “There’s a bread board...”

“THAT DOES NOT COUNT.”

“But—I didn’t know—“

“NEVER AGAIN.” Walton returned to his desk with a heated stomp. It wasn’t that he was angry at Taylor, per se, but rather at how incompetent every single student in the class was. It was common knowledge that you do not plug an amp meter directly into a battery, according to Walton. It was also common knowledge that you do not put Alka Seltzer tablets in soda, but did that stop freshmen from trying it, then clamping their mouths over the evidence in an attempt to make it vanish? No. And who always had to clean up the crap spewed over from the incompetent students?

Walton.

He hoped that AP Physics C would be more capable than freshmen. Or maybe he just hoped too much. Maybe they needed direct instructions; then maybe they wouldn’t make stupid mistakes.

“Everyone, do not plug your amp meters directly into your battery,” he announced in a loud voice, over the chatter of lab groups. “Bad things will happen. You might die. Then I can’t really help you.” Satisfied with that, Walton went back to his work: Calvin and Hobbes comics.

Five minutes later, at least three other lab stations had plugged their amp meters directly into their batteries. Walton was so furious, he threw Calvin and Hobbes against the wall. The flying of loose pages was a foreshadowing of the doom that was to come, he was certain.

Smoke came from Zho and Sahid’s station. Zho was elated because he had created science, and by science he meant fire, and by fire he meant smoke. Nyree panicked, wondering if the fire alarm would go off and get everything she had wet, including her computer, that it would short circuit, and all her information on it would *die*. Jeff was panicking because Nyree was panicking, and Taylor did not panic *ever*. Kevin was still trying to go through his complicated ritual to get unlimited stuffs in Pokemon.

Nyree’s prediction was correct and the sprinklers went on. An obnoxiously loud ring went through the room as expensive batteries and resistors got wet and became useless, sparks jumping across the room, and Calvin and Hobbes was never quite the same again.

Nyree jumped under the shelter of the desk, her notebook computer pressed against her chest, and Jeff followed, not quite sure why except that he was panicking and wanted to be in a safe happy place.

Anti-climactically, everything stopped and became normal again, except that the circuits were wet and useless, and Walton would have to spend his savings on yet another crap load of circuitry stuff. Zho and Sahid felt guilty because their carelessness brought about such chaos. Zho’s remorse did not last long though, for he realized: there’s no more work that can be done! This feeling of lazy elation gradually spread through the classroom while Sahid got up and walked to Walton’s desk. Seeing a slopped-over Calvin and Hobbes book, he picked it up and offered it to Walton in sort of a peace-offering way. Walton took it with an anger-shaking hand, not daring to look away from the computer screen.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Walton,” Sahid began cautiously, “If there’s something I can do to help—“

“Stop trying to do science,” Walton replied through gritted teeth. Sahid shrugged, deciding Walton was in a bad mood and that if left alone, everything would be fine.

Next class, everyone got A’s on their lab except Simba, who wasn’t in class that day. And he got a B. Everyone was happy except for Walton, who wondered how any of these students would survive the real world of science in the future.

Meg Eden, Age 17

South River High School, Maryland

‘Circuits’ draws from my experiences in high school Physics class. I like to satirize society’s emphasis / reliance on science and technology, but also to celebrate the world of geekhood.

The Pages of the Book

My Family is the story of the book working and flowing together

My Dad is the flashbacks in the book reading along in spirit

My oldest Brother is the rip and tears with the fingerprints, that is
protected by the spine

My other Brother is the villain that is trying to change up the story

Their Mom is the spine in the book, strong and bold

And I

Am the pages wrapped with the bindings of their mother telling the story

Mariangela Ruiz-Hernandez, Age 16

Santa Monica High School

I wrote a personification poem relating a book to my family. Every individual person in my family has a place in the story.



Mary Kavonian, Age 16
University High School

This is a watercolor portrait. It reflects the life of a teen.

Can't Breathe

Feeling pain every time
Feeling like I can't breathe anymore
Like a knife through my heart
Or a bullet through my chest

Don't know what to do
Feeling scared
Feeling like it's my time of day
Can't speak
Can't walk
Hard to breathe

Feeling pain every time
Feeling like I can't breathe anymore
Like a knife through my heart
Or a bullet through my chest

Leaving people behind
Is not what I have in mind
Leaving people that I love
Don't want to think about it now

I don't know how to react
I feel like my world is coming to an end
Will I live?
Will I die?

Feeling pain every time
Feeling like I can't breathe anymore
Like a knife through my heart
Or a bullet through my chest

Breathe is all I want to do
I feel like breathing is not a choice for me
anymore
All I want to do is wake up from this nightmare
It feels so real
The pain is still here
Go away!
Go Away!
GO AWAY!

Pain is all I feel
Pain is all I ever felt
I can't breathe
I Can't Breathe!
Am I alive?
Am I dead?
Wake up!
Wake Up!
WAKE UP!

Erika Aquino, Age 15
Santa Monica High School

In this poem I wrote about a brand new and scary experience that I've gone through in my life. I have written about my first panic attack and how I felt while it was occurring.



Gabriel Araujo, Age 12

ICEF Vista Academy

*This drawing is about all the good times I have had in my teenage life.
This drawing also refers to some bad times in my life.*

Invisibility

My friend is invisible and I like it that way.
No one can tease her
Because they can't see her.
And sometimes when we sway in the sun on a swing,
I wish I could be her.
No one can see her flaws
And tell her she should play baseball
Because she has hands as big as bear claws.

I like the idea of being invisible. And my friend likes it too.
Together we would play day and night
Climbing mountains, forest trees and sand dunes,
To reach new heights
And maybe touch the moon.

Yes, being invisible is the way to go
So, I'll take my friend's hand
1...2...3...
And off we go.

Tessa Franke, Age 16
Santa Monica High School
This poem is about how teenagers need an "invisible friend" in themselves, to depend on and live with.

FIRST PERIOD

I ran into my first period class and flopped into the first seat I spotted. I was running because this was the first time I was attending Mr. Jennings' World History class, and I had gotten lost. I was new to school and had been "the new kid" sixteen times since I was five years old. See, my father is a Marine officer and in the middle of my tenth grade year, when I was in my favorite school so far, we had to move AGAIN! ERR! I put my Battlestar

Galatica jacket hood over my head and looked down at my pristine wooden desk.

I heard the booming voice of Mr. Jennings calling out last names, "Adams, Adams is here, Bromberg, Bromberg is here, Collins?" He looked at me uncertain. That's me the one and only Chase Collins.

I raised my head and replied dully, "I'm Chase Collins."

Mr. Jennings squinted and looked at me all confused. "Chase is usually a boy's name isn't it? I expected a boy army brat."

I get that a lot. My dad wanted a boy, so he named me Chase. A buzz of chatter came from my fellow students. I said, "Yes, I'm the army brat present for duty." I got some laughs from a few of my fellow geeks. You see, I don't dress like the stereotypical army brat. First of all, I wear combat boots, TV show shirts, camos and my favorite

Battlestar Galatica sweatshirt. That's me, the picture perfect geek.

Mr. Jennings rubbed his eyes and yawned, "Class, class calm down." Everybody stared at me. The teacher stood up from his big desk and walked slowly towards the white board. I took this opportunity to survey the classroom. From what I could see, all the students had formed their own groups.

There were no loners except myself. The geekiest guy who still had braces was whispering to another guy with a Star Trek shirt on. A boy in an Abercrombie and Fitch shirt sneered at me and whispered into his friend's ear. One girl with a Battlestar Galatica sweatshirt that looked like mine was chattering happily to a boy with glasses next to her. I felt so lonely! You can always tell how a new school is going to be based on your first period. I was sure this was going to be the worst school yet.

Jennings finally reached the white board and his lazy eye reached me. "Welcome to King school, Collins. Now everybody take out your notebooks. We're studying World War II, Collins, and we're concentrating at this time on the Holocaust." I smiled a strained smile at the bored teacher and removed one of the many notebooks stuffed into my green backpack. I copied the notes from the board.

After pages and pages of notes, Mr. Jennings finally stopped writing. He droned, "Today you're going to go into pairs and write a plan for how to escape a ghetto. Any questions? Good. Begin."

After a second, everybody speedily picked a partner. No one picked me. I was all alone again! Why did I have to go to a school where nobody cared enough to help the new girl? I sat in the middle of the room forever, before Mr. Jennings noticed I was alone, "Oh. I forgot the class was an even amount of students before you came. Is it okay for you to work alone?"

I snappily shot back, “Sure, I guess I can work alone while everybody has fun with their friends.” The teacher just nodded. I don’t think he gets sarcasm. I began to work on my plan. Since I had nobody to socialize with, I spent the whole time making a plan Starbuck would be proud of (a character from Battlestar Galatica). The bell rang in that annoying “school bell” way, and I take my paper to his desk, pick up my bag and walk—no “run” away.

Suddenly I heard, “Wait!”

I turned around and a tall redhead in a matching sweatshirt approached me. “Hi, I’m Shelby. Sorry I couldn’t be your partner, but I promised to work with my friend Dave.” I smiled. Maybe I did have some friends in the making.

I answered evenly, “That’s okay. I think I wrote an A plus plan. I have Mrs. Decone next. Who do you have?”

She grimaced, “I do, too. I’ll show you where that horrid classroom is. Mrs. Decone must be the devil’s daughter, but at least now you can help me bear it. Oh. Do you want to have lunch with me and my friends in the computer lab? We can go on the Sci-fi Battlestar Galatica site.”

I nodded, “Awesome!” We walked together toward the devil’s lair. I began to reconsider my initial negative assessment of King school. Thank God, it looks like this story is going to have a happy ending.

Paloma Bennett, Age 16

Santa Monica High School

It is Chase Collins’ first day in King High School. Her first period is going very badly, and right now she hates the school.

Untitled

I Am Not Going To Listen
To You Anymore
I am Myself
You Are Not ME
You Got No Right To Tell Me
What To Do

I Am Not Going To Listen
To You Anymore
This Is My Life
This Is What I Want To Do With
My Own Life
You Cannot Take Control of Everything

I Am Not Going to Listen
To You Anymore
Standing There
Telling Me What Should I Do
When I Grow Up
You Do Not Have To Worry, 'Cause I Already Have
Something In Mind

I Am Not Going To Listen
To You Anymore
Keep Fussing
About My Dreams, My Goals
And How Nonsense
They Are

I Am Not Going To Listen
To You Anymore
Stop Trying To Prevent Me From
Reaching My Dreams
Cause I Will Not Give Up
No Matter What

Christina Gao, Age 15
Santa Monica High School

This is a poem about people telling me/trying to stop me from reaching my dreams. But, no matter what they say or do, I will never give up on my dreams, 'cause this is what I've wanted to be ever since I was little.



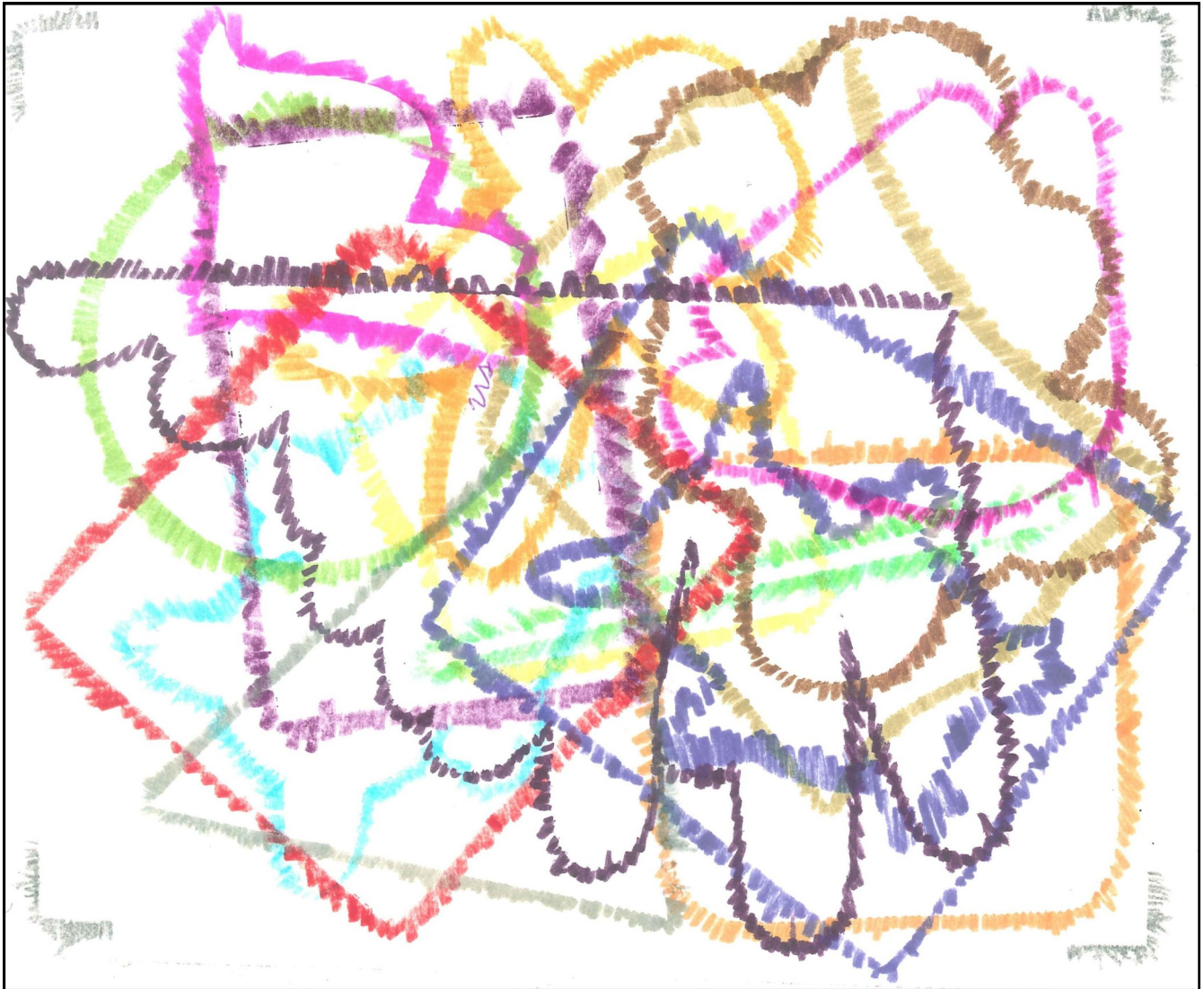
Christina Gao, Age 15
Santa Monica High School

This is about me being like the bird in the cage trying to follow my dreams, but the cage is a symbol of my obstacles that prevent me from reaching for my dreams. As you can see here, other landscapes are all sketched except the clouds in the sky. This symbolizes the dreams that I'm following, just like the caged bird trying to get out and fly to the sky.



Chelsea Palmer, Age 17
Santa Monica High School

This is a photograph of the 3rd Street Promenade. It is one of my favorite places to shop, eat, and hang out with my friends.



Natasha Simmonds, Age 15
Santa Monica High School

In teen years you never really know how to express yourself; sometimes it feels like it's all face and empty. You can't say that it's not colorful or framed too good. There's always something in the background.

The Past and the Pending

Here I stand. Here we stand. With our feet firmly planted on the dusty, linoleum tile of our classroom floors and our dreams soaring through the breezy, unknown skies of our long-anticipated futures. Every day is a day closer to the endless sunlight and lazy spontaneity of summer; a day closer to the exhilaration and frightening finality of graduation; a day closer to the unknown, unprotected skies of reality.

We swing like a pendulum between the playful innocence, the protective ignorance of childhood and the somber truths, the intimidating burdens of adult life. We feel torn, pulled, lured, in two opposing directions: the ground and the sky, the earth and the heavens, the past and the pending.

We cling to the safety, the familiarity of our youth. The good ole days of sticky watermelon drops running down our chins and endless games of make believe in the bushes. Sometimes, we just want to sit on someone's lap and sob, long and hard.

But we also bristle under authority—longing, searching, grabbing for a life of freedom and autonomy. We want power, we want independence, and we want it now. College, a job, a future. We almost taste it, can almost grab it. It tickles our fingertips and our noses like the brush of blinking eyelashes.

Every day we sit planted in our desks with concentration furrowing our brows and a wandering eye on the clock. We always make sure it is ticking, clicking, and eating up time. We check, constantly check, that the second hand is bringing us closer and closer, second by second, to our great expectations.

We need to know. Always, we need to know.

We need to know because the school's grey linoleum cannot compare to the vast azure skies of our future. The bright light, the possibility that floods through our minds and spills onto the desk as we struggle to stay awake and our eyes fixate on the clock.

Our future is vast and uncharted, with an infinite number of directions and permutations. As though we are standing at the most complex, convoluted intersection. And we have no map.

At times it is a daunting, incredibly unsettling sensation—as if a heavy darkness squeezes our chests and chokes up our throats. Who are we kidding? We have no control. We are pawns in a never-ending game, trapped in a broken, polluted, warring world. We want to go home, go back into the blissful ignorance. The darkness is unending. We can't breathe. The dread, the anger, the sadness, the overwhelm.

And then, from behind the turbulent skies, the hope.

We reach up, push away the sticky cobwebs and pull on our optimism. We are still young, foolish, brave and cavalier. We have done very little, and we regret even less.

The world is ours for the taking and ours for the fixing.

We need no map: the right path will find us; our footsteps will lead us. The thousands of roads not traveled, the lives unlived, the horizons of possibility—all open to us. For most of us, life, real life, has not yet begun. And the anticipation is exhilarating. We can do anything. We can be anyone. We can change the world.

But our elevated, unaffected openness deflates right down into our desks, down into the clock, down into the endless waiting. Our thoughts spill onto the grey linoleum and wallow there, until the blue skies catch our eye and our imagination shoots out into the cosmos again.

We dwell in a transition, a place where the dust never settles and the clock never stops. We live the life of the teenager.

Lauren Mickelson, Age 16
Santa Monica High School

My writing attempts to capture the transitions of our teen years as we approach our futures and cling to our pasts.



First Place, Photography

Kaile Zaretsky, Age 16

Santa Monica High School

Nowadays, teenagers seem to be consumed with school. From September to June, our life runs by a clock. Thus...my photograph.

My Life As a Teen