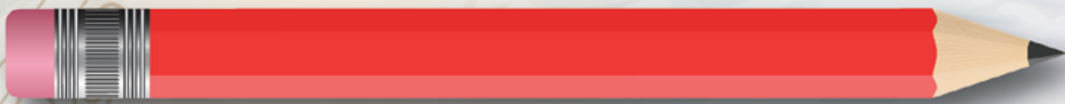


Young Authors Awards 2026



Prix Jeunes Écrivains 2026

Preface

Congratulations, Young Authors!

This anthology celebrates your literary talents and accomplishments as provincial winners of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association's (OECTA) 2026 Young Authors Awards/Prix Jeunes Écrivains.

We applaud all of you, as well as the thousands of students across Ontario who participated in the classroom, school, and unit levels of this year's awards program. The strong, distinctive works you have crafted remind us that the next generation of great Canadian writers are presently in our classrooms.

Your enthusiasm and dedication, as well as that of your teachers, ensures that the Young Authors Awards/Prix Jeunes Écrivains program continues to grow and improve with each year. We deeply appreciate the commitment of your wonderful teachers, who open the door for you to empower yourselves through this competition.

The Young Authors Awards/Prix Jeunes Écrivains program would not be possible without the hard work of many OECTA members across the province. Teachers, OECTA School Association Representatives, Unit Presidents, and Unit Executive members all play critical roles in directing the program in their respective classrooms, schools, and units. Members contribute their talent, time, and effort to preserve the spirit and continued success of the awards. Together, we honour the outstanding work of our teachers and you, our students.

We cannot overstate the value of the contributions of all the dedicated members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, who ensure that this program flourishes each year for the benefit of our students.

Thank you, and keep on writing!

Belinda Russo
Professional Development Department
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

Préface

Félicitations à vous, jeunes écrivains !

Ce recueil a pour but de célébrer vos talents littéraires et vos accomplissements en tant que gagnants à l'échelle provinciale de l'édition 2026 des Prix Jeunes Écrivains/Young Authors Awards de l'Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA).

Nous félicitons tous nos gagnants mais aussi tous les milliers d'élèves de l'Ontario qui ont participé au programme en classe, à l'école et au niveau des unités. Vos œuvres remarquables et originales nous rappellent que la prochaine génération de grands écrivains canadiens se trouve actuellement dans nos salles de classe.

Votre enthousiasme et votre dévouement, ainsi que ceux de vos enseignants, permettent au programme des Prix Jeunes Écrivains/Young Authors Awards de continuer à se développer et à s'améliorer chaque année. Nous sommes profondément reconnaissants de l'engagement de vos enseignants, qui vous offrent la possibilité de vous épanouir à travers ce concours.

Le programme des Prix Jeunes Écrivains/Young Authors Awards n'aurait été possible sans le dévouement des nombreux membres de l'OECTA de toute la province. Les enseignants, les représentants de l'OECTA dans les écoles, les présidents des unités ainsi que leurs membres exécutifs jouent un rôle critique en menant le programme dans leurs classes, dans leurs écoles et dans leurs unités. Nos membres dédient leurs compétences, leur temps et leurs efforts afin de préserver l'esprit et le succès continu de ce programme. Ensemble, nous honorons l'excellent travail de nos enseignants et de vous, nos élèves.

Nous ne saurions trop souligner la valeur des contributions des membres dévoués de l'OECTA qui veillent chaque année à l'épanouissement de ce programme au bénéfice de nos élèves.

Merci, et continuez d'écrire !

Belinda Russo

*Département du développement professionnel
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association*

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Anne Denning, Administrative Assistant, Professional Development Department
Joshua Doyle-Raso, English Editor, Professional Development Department
Doriane Gnapi, Bilingual Editor, Professional Development Department
Adam Lee, Graphic Layout Artist, Government Relations and Public Affairs Department
Têko Yalçın, Administrative Assistant, Professional Development Department

Provincial Selection Committee 2026

Enza Ardizzi
Alicia Baker
Megan Bastian
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Xavier's Toys



SCHOOL: St. Scholastica
TEACHER: Chloe Furtado
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Jill Mercer
UNIT: Halton Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Tara Hambly

ELEMENTARY – JUNIOR AND SENIOR KINDERGARTEN / SHORT STORY
by **Leonardo Dos Anjos de Moura**

Xavier and Emilia are playing. But they started fighting.



They were fighting because Xavier wasn't sharing his toys. This made Emilia really sad.



I tell Xavier to start sharing his toys so that Emilia doesn't cry. Xavier doesn't listen to me, though.



I told Ms. Ling that Xavier wasn't sharing and that it was making Emilia sad.



Ms. Ling goes to Xavier and asks him to share because it's nice.



Xavier shares his toys with Emilia.





My Family



SCHOOL: St. Rose
TEACHER: Amy Bensette
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Amy Bensette
UNIT: Windsor-Essex Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Adriana Palamides

ELEMENTARY – JUNIOR AND SENIOR KINDERGARTEN / POEM
by **Estella Crosby**

I love you,
I love you,
I love you every day.
I like to eat with you.
I like to play with you.
I like to dance with you every day.
My family is love.
My family is kind.
My family makes me happy every day.



Jesus Feeds 5000



SCHOOL: Holy Cross
TEACHER: Melissa James
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Melissa James
UNIT: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

ELEMENTARY – JUNIOR AND SENIOR KINDERGARTEN / NONFICTION
by **Radiance Olaoluwa Oladayo**

People were following Jesus
and they were beginning to get hungry
and got bread and fish
then everybody got fed
then Jesus told his disciples to pack up the leftovers.



One Funny Night



SCHOOL: Notre Dame, Caledonia
TEACHER: Gabriella Porco
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Lauren Alvarado
UNIT: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 1-2 / SHORT STORY
by **Eva Milasincic**

One funny night I was sleeping until I heard a weird noise under my bed. It was scary! I looked under my bed. There was nothing there. So, I screamed! I burst out of my room and ran to my mom and dad's room.

I said, "Mom! Dad! Something is under my bed!"

My mom looked under the bed.

She said, "Monsters aren't real. Now go back to bed."

I was scared and shivering piece by piece. I heard a screech. I screamed for the second time!

I said, "I'm done!"

I went to my brother's room.

I yelled, "Stop messing around in my room!"

He screamed, "I wasn't doing anything!"

"Yeah right!" I said.

So then, I went back to bed. The next day I heard a weird noise, so I went upstairs. I saw a fuzzy person with sharp teeth, big eyes, and he was growling at me. I screamed! My mom came up and she also screamed! My dad came up. He screamed and dropped his apple! My brother screamed at the top of his lungs. Outside, the birds were chirping. It was quiet. It wasn't my brother after all.

My mom said, "Monsters are real."

Shaking, she ran. I was bursting into laughter. My whole family was laughing.



Yellow



SCHOOL: Notre Dame, Caledonia
TEACHER: Gabriella Porco
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Lauren Alvarado
UNIT: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 1-2 / POEM
by **Margaux Waltenbury**

Yellow is the colour of the big, bright sun in the sky.
Yellow is the colour of the big and wide sandy beach.
Yellow is the colour of cute little ducklings swimming with their mom.
Yellow is the colour of the halo that surrounds our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Yellow smells like sweet honey.
Yellow tastes like the pineapple in my lunch.
Yellow sounds like the daisies' petals blowing in the wind.
Yellow looks like lemonade in a jug that you share with your sweet friends.
Yellow feels like the warmth and happiness of my teacher's smile.
Yellow makes me remember the rising of the sun which is very beautiful.



All About Rocks and Minerals



SCHOOL: St. Patrick, Schomberg
TEACHER: Jennifer Diaz Mercado O'Leary
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Brigida Pilato
UNIT: York
UNIT PRESIDENT: Mike Totten

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 1-2 / NONFICTION
by **Elizabeth Jamshidi**

There are many types of rocks on planet Earth. Minerals are like the ingredients that make non-living things on Earth. Minerals form naturally here on planet Earth. Minerals are like the ingredients that make other types of rocks. Minerals are non-living things on Earth. Minerals form naturally on planet Earth. To know the type of rock it is, you have to know the minerals that are inside it.

Minerals have lots of characteristics like colour, lustre, crystal form, streak, cleavage, fracture, and hardness. Minerals can be every colour of the rainbow. A mineral breaks in random places when force is applied.

The oldest rock in Canada is Acasta Gneiss. The rarest rock in the world is kyanite. Kyanite is a very colourful rock, just like opal. In the whole world, diamond is not the rarest gemstone.

Rocks are natural, solid materials made of minerals. Minerals are naturally occurring, inorganic substances with defined chemical compositions. Gemstones are beautiful, durable minerals (or sometimes rocks) that are cut and polished for jewelry, making them a subset of valuable minerals.

Strictly speaking, the precious stones are only seven in number: diamond, pearl, ruby, sapphire, emerald, oriental cat's-eye, and alexandrite. The eight types of gemstones are ruby, pearl, emerald, diamond, red coral, cat's-eye, hessonite, and blue sapphire.

Minerals are the fundamental building blocks (like quartz and salt). Rocks are aggregates of one or more minerals (like granite), and gemstones are beautiful, durable minerals or rocks (like diamonds and emeralds) that are cut and polished for jewelry, valued for their aesthetic appeal and rarity, essentially being high-value minerals or rocks.

That's the end of my rocks and minerals presentation.



Sick Day



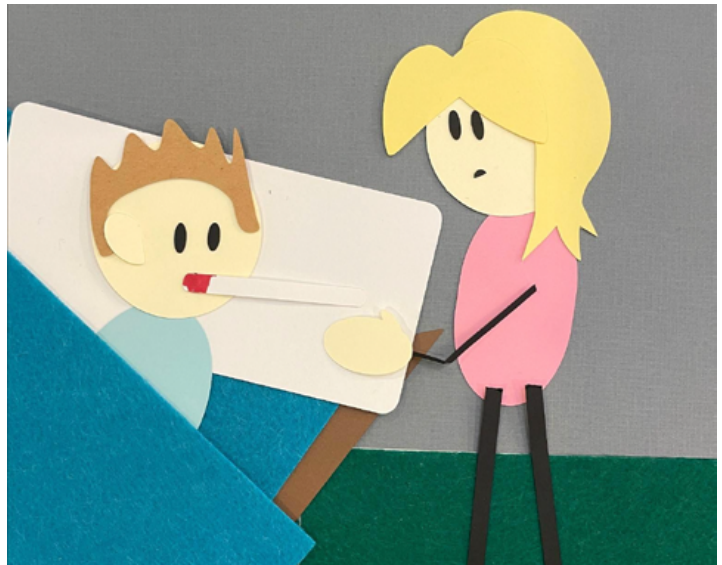
SCHOOL: St. Angela Merici
TEACHER: Avril Dakin-Romanick
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Sandra Ennett
UNIT: St. Clair Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Brian Breault

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 3-4 / SHORT STORY
by **Rigel Brosseau**

I don't want to go to school, I thought. I get so bored. Maybe I can tell Mom I feel sick.

Mom takes my temperature. "I don't think you are sick, Clive, but there are some doctors at my school who can check you out," said Mom. "So, I will take you to the doctors at my school."

Aw man, I don't want to go to Mom's school either.



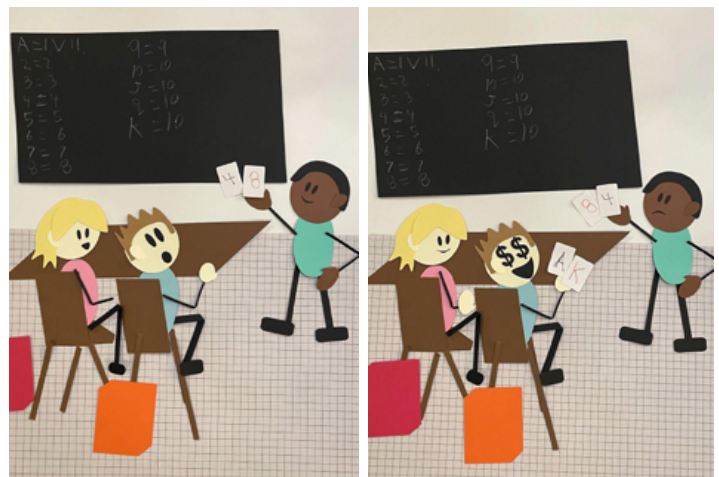
Mom took me to her university. Her first class was math with Dr. Data. He said we will learn about the probabilities of blackjack.

I really like blackjack, so I played with him and got a lot of money.

"Dr. Data, my son is sick. Can you check him over?" Mom asked.

Dr. Data said, "He adds up perfectly fine. I don't think he is sick."

How can a math doctor tell if I am sick?



I said to Mom, "That was cool, Mom, but not that kind of doctor. A science doctor."



So, Mom brought me to her physics class with Dr. Vector.

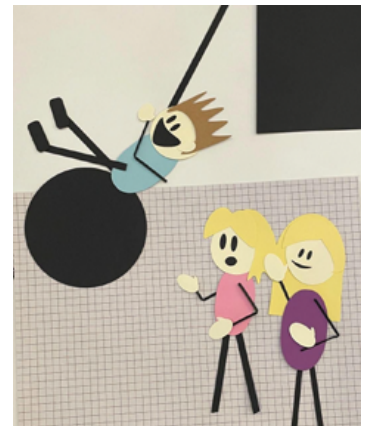
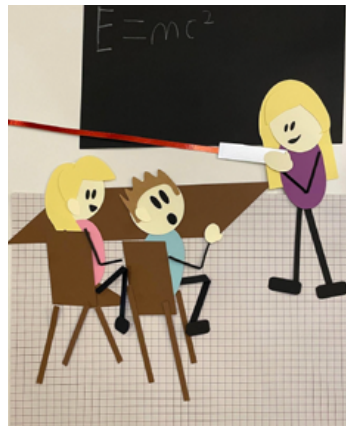
She showed me a laser!

"My son is sick. Can you check him over?" Mom asked Dr. Vector.

Dr. Vector said, "He obeys the laws of motion. I don't think he is sick."

How can a physics doctor tell if I am sick?

I said to Mom, "That was cool, Mom, but not that kind of doctor. A doctor with a lab coat."



So, Mom brought me to her chemistry class with Dr. Beaker.

She showed me a chemical reaction!

"My son is sick. Can you check him over?" Mom asked Dr. Beaker.

Dr. Beaker said, "He reacts perfectly, I don't think he is sick."

How can a chemistry doctor tell if I am sick?



I said to Mom, "That was cool, Mom, but not that kind of doctor. A doctor with petri dishes."

So, Mom took me to her biology class with Dr. Fungi.

He showed me animals!

"My son is sick. Can you check him over?" Mom asked Dr. Fungi.

Dr. Fungi said, "He has mastery of the animal kingdom. I don't think he is sick."

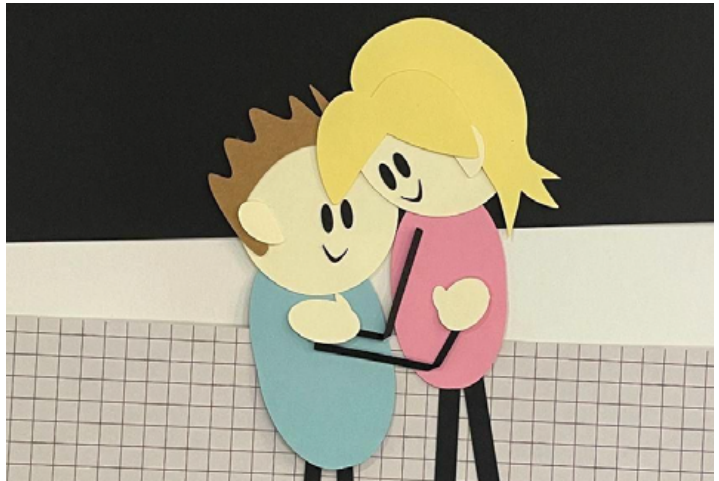
After such a fun day, I think the biology doctor is right!



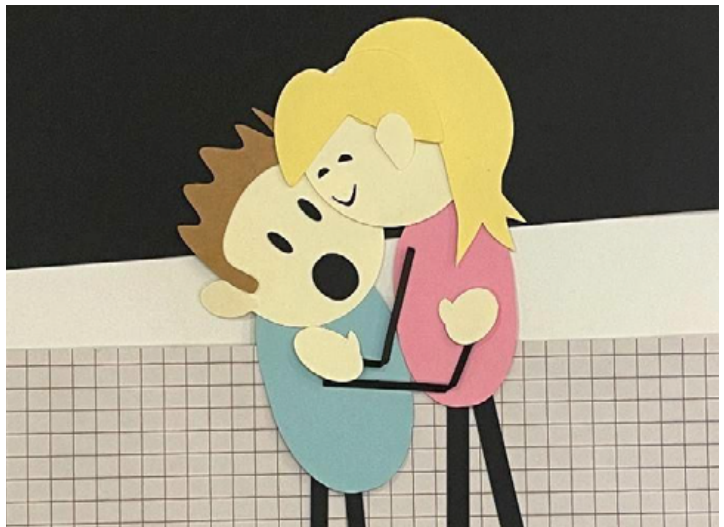
I said to my mom, "That was cool, Mom. I feel way better."



Mom said, "I'm glad you feel better, Clive. Thanks for coming to my school on a PA Day."



"WHAT?!"





I Am a Dancer



SCHOOL: Notre Dame, Cobourg

TEACHER: Dwight Boyle

SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Kate Caldwell

UNIT: Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington

UNIT PRESIDENT: Bart Scollard

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 3-4 / POEM

by **Adelaide Campbell**

I am a Dancer

Sometimes when I flip I trip

I am a Dancer

When I go upside down I fall to the ground

I am a Dancer

When I do my kicks they help with my splits

I am a Dancer

When I buy clothes at the store

I wear them on the dance floor

I am a Dancer

I practice for hours

and take lots of showers

I am a Dancer

I push every day I dance my own way

I am a Dancer

I keep the dance together forever!



How to Decorate a Christmas Tree



SCHOOL: Georges Vanier

TEACHER: Jennifer de Witt-Plante

SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Jennifer de Witt-Plante

UNIT: Algonquin-Lakeshore

UNIT PRESIDENT: Dan Graham

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 3-4 / NONFICTION

by **Yzabella Annedrielle B. Francisco**

Hey! Have you decorated your Christmas tree? If you haven't, I will show you how to decorate a Christmas tree. First, find or pick a tree and put the stand up. Next, set the beautiful tree in the tree stand. Then, wrap the tree skirt around the stand. Meanwhile, wrap the lights around the tree. Later on, hang the shiny ornaments on the Christmas tree. Finally, set the twinkly and pretty star on the top. Last, but not least, plug the lights in and sit down and enjoy it. That is how you make the most beautiful tree in town.

Merry Christmas!



Where the Heart Learns to Belong



SCHOOL: École Catholique Cathédrale
TEACHER: Cristina Tavares
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Jordan McDonald
UNIT: Algonquin-Lakeshore
UNIT PRESIDENT: Dan Graham

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 5-6 / SHORT STORY
by **Kara Matilda A. Cabahug**

At twelve years old, Niña Alonzo believed that life could be neatly packed into boxes. There were boxes for clothes, boxes for books, boxes for shoes, and boxes for kitchenware. And then there was the biggest box of all—the one that held everything she had been forced to leave behind in July. Her grandparents' laughter, the familiar smell of rain on warm pavement, the mango tree outside her bedroom window, and the sound of her best friend Tina calling her name every afternoon. That box had no label, no tape strong enough to seal it, and yet it had been shoved into the cargo hold of an airplane flying toward Canada. Niña pressed her forehead against the cold glass of the car window as her family drove through their new neighbourhood in Alberta. Rows of identical houses passed by like copies of the same photograph. Everything looked too clean, too quiet, too unfamiliar. Her parents sat in the front seats, speaking softly in a mix of English and Spanish, excitement trembling in their voices. Her younger brother, Niño, bounced beside her, counting Canadian flags and pointed out dogs that seemed larger than any he had ever seen back home. Niña said nothing. She had already decided that this place was not hers. School began a week later. Niña stood in front of her bedroom mirror, tugging on the sleeves of her sweater. It was early September, but the air already felt colder than anything she remembered.

Her backpack felt too heavy, her shoes were too tight, her thoughts were too loud. "Ready?" Her mother asked gently from the doorway. Niña nodded, though she wasn't. At school, the hallways buzzed with voices that blended into a confusing hum. Lockers slammed. Laughter echoed. Someone bumped into her shoulder without apologizing. She clutched her schedule like a lifeline. In her homeroom, the teacher introduced her to the class. "This is Niña. She's joining us from Guatemala. Let's make her feel welcome." A few students smiled. One girl waved. Someone whispered, "Her accent's cute." Cute. Niña hated that word. When it was her turn to speak, her voice trembled despite her efforts. She pronounced words carefully, afraid of making mistakes. Every sentence felt like crossing a rope bridge—one wrong step and she would fall. At lunch, she sat alone. The cafeteria smelled like pizza and something fried. Students clustered together, trading jokes and stories she didn't understand. Niña unwrapped the sandwich her mother had made and swallowed slowly, blinking back tears. Back home, lunch meant sharing food, trading bites, laughing until teachers scolded them for being too loud. Here it meant watching the clock. Weeks passed. Niña learned how to navigate the bus system, how to open her locker without it jamming, how to raise her hand before speaking even when her heart was pounding. Her teachers were kind, patient, and encouraging. Her grades were good—and



sometimes excellent. Everyone said she was “adjusting well.” But inside, something felt hollow. She missed the sound of her grandmother singing while cooking. She missed the way neighbours stopped by unannounced. She missed knowing who she was without having to explain it. At home, her parents talked excitedly about opportunities—better education, safer neighbourhoods, brighter futures. “This is good for us,” her father often said. Niña nodded, because that was what a good daughter did. At night, she scrolled through old photos on her tablet, tears slipping silently onto her pillow. Tina had sent messages about school events, birthdays, and inside jokes that no longer included her. One evening, Niño burst into her room, grinning. “I made a friend today! His name is Ethan and his dad has a pool!”

“That’s nice,” Niña said, forcing a smile. “Don’t you like it here?” Niño asked, puzzled. Niña hesitated. “It’s... fine.” But fine wasn’t happy. Fine wasn’t home. What Niña didn’t know was that her parents had noticed everything—the forced smiles, the sleepless nights, the way she flinched at the mention of “the future.” Late one night, after the children were asleep, they sat at the kitchen table, cups of tea growing cold. “She’s trying so hard,” her mother whispered. “But she’s unhappy.” Her father nodded. “We promised this move would give them more, not take their joy away.” After hours of discussion, calculations, and quiet hope, they made a decision. A surprise. One year later, time moved on, as it always did. Niña turned thirteen. Her English improved. She made one acquaintance—Maya, a quiet girl who liked drawing—but even that friendship felt fragile, like glass that could shatter with one wrong move. Then, one evening, her parents asked both children to sit down. “We have something to tell you,” her father said, smiling in a way that Niña hadn’t seen in months. Her mother reached for Niña’s hand. “After one year here... we’re going on a trip.” Niña’s heart fluttered, cautious. “Where?” Niño asked. Her father took a breath. “Home.” The word echoed.

“For one month,” her mother added. “All of us.” Niña froze. Then the meaning sank in.

“No, really?” She whispered. Her parents nodded. Niña burst into tears, the kind that shook her shoulders. She laughed and cried at the same time, hugging her parents tightly. For the first time since the move, she felt light.

But as the departure date approached, a strange feeling crept in.

Fear.

What if home had changed? What if Tina had moved on? What if Niña no longer belonged there either? The thought haunted her. On the plane, excitement tangled with anxiety. When they landed, warm air wrapped around her like a familiar embrace. The smells, the sounds—it was all real. Her grandparents cried when they saw her. Tina ran toward her, hugging her tightly. “You’re taller!” Tina exclaimed. “So are you,” Niña laughed. For a while, everything felt perfect. But slowly, cracks appeared. Her friends talked about things she didn’t know. Jokes flew over her head. She struggled with the slang she used to speak effortlessly. One afternoon she overheard someone say, “She’s kind of different now.” The words stung. That night, Niña sat alone under the mango tree, realization dawning painfully. She had changed.



Halfway through the visit, Niña felt ill with a fever. Lying in her childhood bed, she listened to the familiar sounds outside and felt something unexpected—gratitude mixed with sadness. Her mother sat beside her. “You don’t have to choose,” she said softly, as if reading Niña’s thoughts.

“Choose what?”

“Where you belong.”

Niña frowned. “You can love two places,” her mother continued. “Belonging isn’t a location. It’s something you grow.” Niña thought about her teachers, Maya, even the boy who laughed but had apologized later. She thought about the skills she had gained, the courage she didn’t know she had.

Maybe the move hadn’t taken everything from her. Maybe it had added something too.

When the month ended, Niña cried again—but differently this time. She hugged her grandparents tightly. She promised Tina they would video call, visit again, and stay connected. On the flight back to Canada, Niña stared out the window, heart heavy but steady. Back at school, she walked in with a new posture, not that confident, but open.

She joined an art club. She shared stories about Guatemala during a class presentation. She corrected someone politely when they mocked her accent. One day, Maya smiled and said, “You’re really brave, you know.” Niña blinked. “I am?” Maya nodded. “I could never do what you did.” Niña smiled, realizing it was true.

Months later, Niña sat at her desk, writing in a journal. She wrote about mango trees and snowflakes. About missing and belonging. About learning that happiness wasn’t found by going back or moving forward—but by carrying pieces of home wherever she went. Downstairs, laughter echoed as her family prepared dinner. Niño argued playfully with their parents. The house smelled warm and alive. Niña closed her journal. She still missed home. But she was no longer lost. In the end, she had learned that life didn’t fit neatly into boxes—and neither did the heart. And for the first time in a long while, Niña felt something gentle bloom inside her.

Hope.



It's Time for a Change: Stop Bullying



SCHOOL: St. Rose
TEACHER: Maggie Bedard
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Amy Bensette
UNIT: Windsor-Essex Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Adriana Palamides

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 5-6 / POEM
by **Amelia Mailloux**

In the halls of our schools, we hear the cries.
Of children who are hurt with tears in their eyes.
They hide behind walls, afraid to be seen.
Bullying has taken over, it's a daily routine.
They call them names, they push and they shove.
They make them feel small, they take away their love.
For being different, for not fitting in. For something as simple
as the colour of their skin.
But it's time to make a change, and to stand up tall.
To put an end to this bullying once and for all.
Let's be kind and compassionate, let's show how we care.
Let's spread love and kindness everywhere.
No one should feel alone, no one should feel afraid.
No one should be made to feel like they don't belong in this space.
We are all unique, with our own special light.
It's time to embrace it and make things right.
Let's stop the hurtful words, the cruel words too.
Let's create a safe place, for me and for you.
A place where we can learn, grow, and thrive.
Where everyone is accepted and nobody is deprived.
We all have a voice, let's use it for good.
Let's make things right, and do what we should.

Together, we can make a difference in the school and beyond.
Let's stop bullying and spread love instead.
So let's join hands and make a pledge.
To be kind and respectful, and to never judge.
Let's create a world where bullying is no more.
Where everyone is accepted and love is at the core.
In our school let's make a change.
Let's stop bullying, it's time to rearrange.
Our attitudes, our actions, our words too.
Let's stop bullying, me and you.



Louder than Silence: The Impact on Teens



SCHOOL: Holy Family
TEACHER: Sarah Ryan
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Nadine Pavan
UNIT: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 5-6 / PLAY
by **Allison Whelan**

Characters:

Boys: Oliver, Leo

Girls: Ashley, Jade, Lydia

Others: Jade's mom, Leo's brother, Leo's dad, Ashley's best friend Natalie, Lydia's mom,
Salesgirl, Bullies 1-3

Scene 1

Setting: Middle school

ASHLEY and NATALIE are standing in front of the girls' bathroom.

ASHLEY

[Excitedly] Look at this new bracelet I got!

NATALIE

[Ignoring her] Oh, cool, *[pausing to look at nothing]* I guess.

ASHLEY

[Feeling a bit hurt] Oh, well um... Oh anyways how did you do on the math test?

NATALIE

[Still ignoring ASHLEY, looking at her nails without a hint of care of what Ashley was talking about] Oh, that easy thing? I got an A+ as always. I hate to ask, but what did you get?

[Muttering to herself quietly but loud enough for Ashley to hear] Certainly less than me obviously.

[NATALIE chuckles to herself.]



ASHLEY

[Heard what NATALIE said, trying to fight back tears] Um... I got a... [pause] a... C+.

NATALIE

[Laughs at ASHLEY] Oh! Ha! Well, better than usual, I guess! [With a big, evil grin on her face]

[Walking away laughing to herself] A C+! Wow, what a dummy!

ASHLEY sprints into the girls' washroom, locks herself in a stall, sits on the toilet seat with her legs up. And cries into her knees.

Scene 2

Setting: Baseball game

Cut to LEO's brother's baseball game. LEO and LEO'S DAD are in the bleachers chanting Leo's brother's name. Leo's brother hits a home run.

LEO'S DAD

[Punches the air, grunting to himself] Yes! Yes!

[Looking at LEO] I wish you were more like your brother, Leo. He is an amazing athlete. Look at all his sporting achievements!

LEO

[Confused] What?

LEO'S DAD

Well, your brother is flawless, he is perfect! If you had his sporting skills, you'd be perfect too!

LEO

Are you joking?

LEO'S DAD

Do I look like I'm joking? I'm just saying you've got a lot to live up to. He set the bar high.

LEO

It's not a competition!



LEO'S DAD

Well, if it was, he would be winning!

LEO

[Sighing sadly, shoulders slumping] I'll just go to the snack bar now. Do you want anything, Dad?

LEO'S DAD

A hot dog with ketchup, mustard, relish, and extra onions! Make it quick!

LEO

You got it, dad!

LEO rushes off to the snack bar to please his father.

LEO comes back with his father's food. He trips over his shoelace.

LEO

Oh no! I'm so sorry, Dad, I didn't mean to drop th—

LEO'S DAD

[Yelling, interrupting LEO] You clumsy boy!

Heads start to turn in LEO's direction. LEO'S DAD starts to notice that people are staring so he quiets down, not wanting to cause a scene.

LEO

Sorry, I will go buy another one for you, Dad!

LEO'S DAD

No, no, it's fine. I'll go get one myself. Just go to the car.

LEO walks back to the car disappointedly, bracing himself for the praise about to be showered on his brother.



Scene 3

Setting: Mall

LYDIA

Hi, do you have this shirt in XXL?

SALESGIRL

Oh, that shirt? Sorry, but no. We only carry sizes XXS through Large.

LYDIA

Oh! That's okay.

LYDIA'S MOM

You could try the large, honey.

LYDIA

Okay, sure, but I don't think it will fit.

SALESGIRL

Fitting rooms are down the hall, to the right.

Scene 4

Setting: Fitting Rooms

LYDIA

Mom, this shirt is way too tight, and it looks cropped on me!

LYDIA'S MOM

It's fine, honey. Let's just get some lunch.

LYDIA

No! I won't eat anymore! I'm fat and nothing fits me!



LYDIA'S MOM

Honey, don't ever say that! It's not true! Who told you that?

LYDIA starts to cry.

LYDIA'S MOM

Honey, don't cry!

They both hug.

Scene 5

Setting: Math Class

OLIVER is crying at his desk.

BULLY 1

Bro, why are you crying? Crying is for girls!

OLIVER

[Voice shaking] It's just, I... This math is too hard!

BULLY 2

What a cry-baby!

BULLY 3

This math is not hard! He just wants attention!

BULLIES leave and OLIVER starts to cry even harder.

Scene 6

Setting: Graveyard

JADE

[Tears in her eyes, shaking in shock] I miss you, Dad. I never got to truly say goodbye. I love you. No matter what hits me I'll be strong for you. I'll never give up and I won't be sad because I know that's not what you would want.



JADE kisses her father's grave and walks away slowly, sobbing and looking down, hand over her mouth and nose.

Scene 7

Setting: In a car

JADE and JADE'S MOM are in the car, not speaking, while JADE has tears streaming down her face.

JADE'S MOM

I know it's hard, honey. But you must move on.

JADE says nothing.

Scene 8

Setting: Middle school lockers

JADE opens her locker, sniffles, and tries to dry off her tears without anyone noticing that she was crying. OLIVER is next to her, grabbing his math book and sighing.

OLIVER

[Curious] Hey, I noticed you were crying. Are you okay?

JADE

[Sniffing] Um, yeah. I just, well, I've been dealing with a lot lately. My dad just passed and—

OLIVER

[Interrupting] Oh, I'm so sorry!

JADE

Thanks, but... Everyone has been saying that I... I...

OLIVER

Sorry about that. What's your next class?

JADE

[Grabbing her books] Math. You?



OLIVER

Same. Do you want to, maybe... walk to class together?

JADE chuckles.

JADE

[Smiling] Sure!

They walk together, laughing and chatting. They instantly become friends.

Scene 9

Setting: Recess

JADE and OLIVER are having their lunch together, LYDIA walks up to them.

LYDIA

[Shyly] Hey, uh, can I sit here?

JADE

Of course!

They all eat their lunch except for LYDIA.

OLIVER

Hey, where's your lunch?

LYDIA

Um, I'm not eating.

JADE

Why? You'll have no energy!

LYDIA

I'm too fat! Can't you see? Everyone says it!



OLIVER
Well, not us!

JADE grabs LYDIA's hands.

JADE
Whoever said that is lying! When I look at you, I see a beautiful girl! Don't hate your body!
LYDIA
Thanks. That means a lot to me!

OLIVER
In this friend group, we don't judge.

Scene 10

Setting: History class

ASHLEY is presenting her history presentation.

NATALIE
[Calling from the back of the class] Loser!

*Everyone laughs, and ASHLEY accidentally drops her flash cards.
LYDIA comes up to the front and helps ASHLEY clean up her cards.*

LYDIA
Don't worry, this happens to me all the time!

ASHLEY
Thank you so much. But, well... Are you sure to want to be seen with me? I'm a "loser!"

LYDIA
You're not a loser! Natalie picks on you because you're an easy target! You need to stand up to her!

ASHLEY
I know, but it's too hard!



LYDIA

If you want, we can talk about it at my house and we can hang out. I mean, if you want! All my other friends are coming over!

ASHLEY

I'd love to! Thanks so much!

Scene 11

Setting: Lydia's house

OLIVER, LYDIA, and JADE are sitting down on chairs in Lydia's bedroom.

Doorbell rings.

LYDIA

Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you guys, I think I made a new friend! She's here now!

OLIVER

That's great, Lydia! She can be a part of our friend group!

JADE

Yay! I'm so excited to meet her!

LYDIA runs to get the door and ASHLEY comes in.

ASHLEY

Hi! It is so nice to meet you all!

JADE

Hi!

OLIVER

Hi!

They chatted and laughed for the rest of the evening.



Scene 12

Setting: Gym class

A class is picking their teams. OLIVER is captain of the first team and BULLY 1 is captain of the second team.

OLIVER

I choose... Lydia!

BULLY 1

Jacob.

OLIVER

I would like Ashley!

BULLY 1

Ryan.

OLIVER

Jade!

BULLY 1

Cole.

OLIVER looks at the rest of the class and notices LEO is sitting by himself. LEO usually gets picked last because he's not very good at sports.

OLIVER

Leo!

LEO looks up. The class gasps. Some people chuckle.

LEO

[Stands up and walks over slowly and whispers in OLIVER's ear] Hey, thanks for choosing me. But can I ask why you chose me?



OLIVER

I noticed that you're always by yourself and we were wondering do you want to be our friend?

LEO

Yes. Thank you.

Scene 13

The five friends on stage, standing in one line facing the audience.

OLIVER

This play was about how teens can go through a lot and sometimes a friend or a helping hand really helps!

LYDIA

We have demonstrated scenes of things all teens have problems with.

ASHLEY

Like bullying, toxic friends, comparison, body shaming, losing a parent and grief, and more.

LEO

Thanks for coming to see our play, we think it was important to share this story with you!

JADE

We hope you enjoyed this night and had a good experience, bye!

Everyone comes out and bows.

THE END



Appendicitis



SCHOOL: St. Pius X
TEACHER: Nicole Murray
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Rita Rocchi
UNIT: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 5-6 / NONFICTION
by **Sophia Desmond**

It all started on December 26, 2022. I felt good the whole day, until I didn't. I started to feel sick to my stomach. My parents thought it was just the flu at first, but when I was sick the next two days and had severe pains in my lower right side, we knew it was something more. We knew I had appendicitis.

Appendicitis is the inflammation of the appendix, which is a small organ attached to the large intestine. When it swells it causes great pain near the belly button and eventually moves to the lower right side.

I was rushed to the hospital for an ultrasound, and, as we suspected, it was appendicitis.

On the way to the hospital my parents looked so worried. But I wasn't. I was happy with the Starbucks my mom got me while we waited. The Brantford General Hospital nurses also gave me a little plushie that I still have today. His name is Logan.

Once my diagnosis was confirmed, we went straight to McMaster Hospital where they could provide the specialized care I needed. I got my blood pressure taken and I went to the waiting rooms. I also got bloodwork for the first time. They basically had to hold me down for them to give me a needle. I was so scared! Afterwards, I watched a movie to help take my mind from the bad things to the good things.

About three hours later, they said I was ready to go in, and they began prepping me for surgery. I was wheeled into the operating room and was handed a gas mask. They gave me a couple of ChapSticks to put on the mask. This helps to make the mask more comfortable. I got to choose from four types of lip balm: I could choose Coca-Cola (that didn't smell like it), strawberry that smelled very artificial, orange creamsicle that smelled decent (but nothing like orange creamsicle), and the next one was watermelon. I chose watermelon. Funny enough, I forgot to put it on.

The nurses and anesthesiologist passed me the mask to try it on. The mask helps you fall asleep for surgery. They were ready, so they told me to just keep it on. As I was falling asleep, I took one last look around the operating room. I saw beds, cameras, and a fish design on the walls. The TV glistened with some cartoon that became too blurry to make out. The mask felt weird but comfortable, almost as if it was made for my face. I fell asleep in a flash, less than an instant. It didn't hurt or anything, it just felt weird.



I woke up after the best sleep of my life to a popsicle being immediately shoved into my hand. It was a delicious mango flavour. As I was waking up, I saw my mom and dad walk into the operating room. My mom looked very worried. Apparently during the surgery my appendix had exploded! This really upped my risk factor and made the surgery take an extra two hours!

A ruptured appendix spills poison into the abdomen and is life threatening.

The doctor explained to my parents that I had stopped breathing while under anesthetic because I had a cold, and they don't usually operate on people with respiratory infections. However, I was an exception because of the urgency of my situation and this being a matter of life and death.

So, at this point my parents were in a frenzy! They were so worried I thought that my mom would explode (luckily, she didn't).

My mom later told me that she was extremely worried because during the surgery, as my parents waited in the waiting room, the TV was playing a TV show where doctors were dealing with an appendix surgery that had gone horribly wrong (luckily that wasn't my case). She started freaking out, closed her eyes, plugged her ears, and yelled at my dad to turn it off. My dad frantically searched for the remote. When he couldn't find it fast enough, he ran over, put the couch under the TV and yanked at every cord until the TV had turned off.

After what my mom described to me as an "eternity of waiting," my surgeon came in to talk to my parents. He said, "I have good news and bad news." My mom was freaking out, scrambling and stuttering her words, frantically asking for the bad news first. He said it straight: "There was an incident and if we had waited any longer for surgery it would have been much worse." My mom started bawling her eyes out. He told my parents that my appendix burst inside me during the surgery. Trying to keep it together and get her words out, she asked, "Is she alright?" The doctors said, "Yes. She did great, she is awake and ready for you. You may visit her now."

My mom and dad exploded with joy and happiness. They immediately rushed in and told me they were so glad that I was okay.

After a few hours, I went to my hospital recovery room. I found out that I would be sharing a room with a six-year-old boy who was also recovering from appendicitis. His was a way worse case than mine. His mom explained that his appendix had burst, and his parents didn't realize it for days. The infection leaked throughout his body, slowly poisoning him. He was very weak and needed extra care. He also contracted influenza at the hospital. I was lucky enough to have not caught it, and I was in the same room with him for almost the whole week I was recovering.

I was grateful to see my bed. This would be my home for the next week. As soon as I changed into a new hospital gown, I laid down and fell asleep fast, so fast you wouldn't believe it. It was the longest I had ever stayed up (all the way to midnight)!



When I woke up, I changed into my hospital gown and went to the washroom. I saw my stitches for the first time. They looked weird, almost as if I were from *Stranger Things*! I had tape-looking Band-Aids across my stomach that were red and gross. I had them on my bellybutton, the left side of my lower abdomen, and one a little below my bellybutton.

Luckily the surgery was done laparoscopically, so I do not have big scars... just tiny ones from the incisions. Because of the poison that had spilled out of my appendix and into my body during surgery, I had to stay in the hospital for a whole extra week. I was hooked up to intravenous antibiotics to fight the infection and the nurses checked on me often to make sure I was recovering well. When I got back to my room my dad went to the walk-thru Tim Hortons. This is basically just what it sounds like; instead of driving thru, you walk thru. He got me a bagel, Timbits, and a hot chocolate. He got my mom a coffee and himself the same. I barely ate because I basically just got out of surgery, so I was not hungry. The medicine made me feel nauseated. Ever since that I don't like breakfast. I had only a bite of my bagel and two Timbits.

That day and throughout the week we noticed a problem. An alarm kept sounding on my IV machine every time I moved. Every single time I moved my wrist! We had to buzz for a nurse to help us shut off the alarm. It must have happened 500 times! Eventually they gave me a cast sort of thing to stabilize the IV site on the back of my hand. The alarm was super annoying, and I did not want to distract the nurses from helping somebody that needed it more than me. Sadly, there are so many sick children at McMaster.

The next day I stayed in bed and watched TV. On the third day, I was doing much better, and I was finally able to walk again. I started to get my strength back and began to pace the halls. The next day I was strong enough to have visitors. People started to come, bearing get well gifts. For the first time I went and explored the hospital. I went to the cafeteria and got a small wolf toy from the gift shop for moral support. I still have that small wolf toy.

Every day, a lady with an iPad would come and take my meal preference order. I got to pick what I wanted to eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I would always get the mac-and-cheese or hamburgers. Even though I was still too nauseous to eat. Almost every night a nurse would come in to check on me and ask if I wanted anything like an art project or a fidget. I did a lot of crafting that week: painting, pottery, embroidery, rug hooking, drawing, colouring... you name it! Every night my mom would stay with me in the hospital room. She refused to leave my side.

On the sixth day, I got to talk to the surgeons, and they said I was able to go home tomorrow! I was so excited. It was New Year's Eve, so we decorated my hospital room, played games, and had a countdown to midnight. We had a little party with my family, and my grandma, cousin, and aunts came to visit also. It was a very memorable New Year's!

When I woke up the next morning, I was so excited! Today was the day I got to go home! But my stomach felt a little off. I tried to push through. I went to the washroom and did my usual morning routine when I started to feel weird. Saliva started to flow into my mouth, and I started feeling like I



was about to throw up. My mom was pushing the button for assistance, maybe a bit too many times, because the button fell out of the wall! Luckily the nurse still came. After that incident I was told I couldn't go home yet because they were worried that the nausea could indicate they did not remove all the infection inside my body. That meant I was stuck in the hospital another day. Happy New Year!

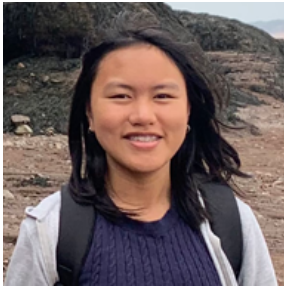
Since my birthday is on January second, I was very nervous I would still be in the hospital for my birthday. Luckily, when the next day came, the surgeon felt comfortable sending me home. He didn't want me to miss any birthday celebrations!

I was very grateful to be home in my own bed with my family surrounding me. My recovery was slow; I had to take it easy for six whole weeks. That meant six weeks of missing gym class, dance, gymnastics, tobogganing, skating, and all the fun stuff! Even worse, I had to keep taking antibiotics. This time in pill form. My doctor prescribed them for seven more days! This may not sound like a lot, but I was just a kid and taking pills wasn't easy. I had to gag them down three times a day. They tasted disgusting as they dissolved in my mouth, I just couldn't swallow them. We tried every trick in the book to get them down. I was so happy when that week was over.

Well, that's the story of my appendix ordeal. It has been four years, and I still remember it vividly. I am grateful for the team of surgeons, doctors, and nurses at McMaster who helped me through this scary time in my life.



Cupid's Assistant



SCHOOL: St. Timothy
TEACHER: Alyssa Phillips
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Alyssa Phillips
UNIT: Waterloo
UNIT PRESIDENT: David Geraghty

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 7-8 / SHORT STORY
by **Aliyah Janelle Mah**

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom filled with nothing but joy and laughter. It was such a merry nation, that even on the most ordinary of days, the villagers danced and sang songs everywhere they went.

However, there was one place in the kingdom where it seemed no happiness could reach. A place where not one ray of sunlight could seep into its windows. A place that was so wretched that the people who lived there could no longer smile.

They had once called it the Mercy House, an institution where orphan girls were forced to reside. But the place was just so miserable that people decided to rename it as the Misery House.

The girls who lived at the Misery House were mistreated and poorly fed, but they had found their ways to cling to their last bit of joy left. Hope. Hope was how they survived each day. No matter how many times the girls were beaten and bruised, they never lost hope in freedom and happiness someday.

But there was one girl at the Misery House who just could not hope. That girl, Isla, had spent hours every day just to find one sliver of hope. But her hope just would not come.

One night, the girls had come together in secret. They'd tip-toed their way out of their dorms and conducted their long-awaited escape. Before the girls could exit the Misery House gates, a nun had awoken and found them gathered in the main hall. The girls froze, their eyes wide with fear. Beside Isla, a girl cupped her hands around her mouth and projected her voice as loud as it could go:

"Run!"

In an instant, the Misery House girls scattered out the doors, nearly trampling the lone nun to the ground. Isla sped toward the exit, but not before the nun managed to get a vise grip on her wrist.

"You're not going anywhere," the nun hissed as Isla thrashed, desperately trying to break loose. The nun tried to grab other girls, but every last one had successfully escaped.



Isla's heart fell. She was the only girl who'd failed to leave the Misery House, and she would not be given another opportunity to escape. Perhaps she was cursed! Isla was hopeless, alone, miserable, and trapped in a nightmare.

The nun began to drag Isla back into her room, but, suddenly, strong hands clasped around Isla's torso, ripping her from the nun's grasp.

The nun screamed, staggering back in horror. Isla found this slightly amusing. Normally, the nun made other people scream, not the other way around. But her amusement was quickly replaced with fear when her captor started to haul her out the door.

"Let me go!" Isla cried, but she was so afraid that her voice only came out as a whisper.

"I'm helping you," the stranger said calmly. She twisted her head to get a view of the person's features. Isla caught a glimpse of a handsome face, gold hair, and stormy eyes, before she was knocked out.

"Isla. Isla, wake up," a voice said through all the darkness.

Isla's eyelids flew open, and she was immediately bombarded by blinding sunlight. She'd never seen the sun so bright in her life. It took her a moment to assess her surroundings: she was in a bed made of flowers in the middle of a seemingly endless tulip meadow. In front of her were two strangers: a girl with beautiful pink hair and a tall boy whom she instantly recognized as her captor from last night.

Chills went down Isla's spine when she noticed a pair of wings sprouting from the boy's back. Her gaze flicked down to his hands, which curled around an archer's bow that, like his hair, was a brilliant gold.

The boy introduced the girl as Psyche and himself as Cupid, confirming Isla's theory. Isla thought of introducing herself too but realized that Cupid had already known her name when she had awoken. "What's going on?" she asked instead.

Cupid flopped on the edge of her bed. He explained that Isla was a Lost Soul—one of the few people in the kingdom who were cursed into living sorrowful lives and never finding pure merriment. The only way to break the curse was to find true love, but apparently that was nearly impossible to do as a Lost Soul. "However, since I'm so loving," Cupid said, "I rescue Lost Souls by giving them a purpose in life." And that purpose, he'd said, was helping him shoot couples who were meant to be.

After the explanation, Isla was aghast. She'd never live happily, and her only way to escape misery was to help Cupid do his job? Well, at least now she knew why she couldn't be hopeful back at the Misery House.



Cupid said Isla could opt out of helping him if she wanted. Reluctantly, Isla agreed to accept his job. It seemed better than her old life.

At her approval, Cupid seemed genuinely pleased. He'd instructed Psyche to begin Isla's training immediately, and so she did. Psyche and Isla spent a week in the meadow practicing her archery skills. And, she had to admit, it was kind of fun.

At last, Psyche told Cupid that Isla was "officially ready to ship brides and grooms with her shots." For the first time in Isla's life, she felt excited. She was no longer a Lost Soul at the Misery House—she was Cupid's assistant!

But her elation rapidly drained when Cupid introduced Isla to her first assignment. Isla's first quest was to make two royals fall in love: a prince and princess who were in an arranged engagement—and they hated each other.

To add to Isla's dread, the job wasn't as simple as anticipated. To make people fall in love, Isla had to get the couple in a romantic setting, alone, and shoot both their hearts when their eyes were locked onto each other. If Isla shot at the wrong time, the love magic was liable to cause trouble.

Cupid had said she was perfect for the job, but Isla had little faith in herself. If there was one person who couldn't do a simple job for Cupid, it was her.

Doubt clouded Isla's thoughts as she stood in front of the massive doors of the castle. Before she left the meadow, Cupid had whispered, "Their relationship will unlikely progress on its own. You may need to interfere to get the perfect shot."

Isla lifted up the skirt of her maid dress disguise. She didn't want to look suspicious when the guards queried her at the entrance. But instead of guards welcoming her at the doors, there was a winsome boy who looked no more than a year older than her.

"Hello," Isla said cheerfully. She gripped the straps of her backpack, which contained her archery set. "May I enter?"

It seemed the boy had no sense of suspicion, because he gave her a boyish smile and let her in like she was the most innocent person in the world. As he led her down the hall, Isla noticed other maids bowing when the boy passed them. Breathless, she realized this boy must be the prince.

"All hail Prince Lucien!" she heard a maid cry out.

Isla decided to follow Lucien, since he didn't seem to mind—or notice. The prince sauntered toward a room where a beautiful girl was waiting. She was dressed in a luminous gown and a tiara, so Isla could only assume she was the princess.



Maids fell over each other to open the doors for Lucien. They looked starstruck by the prince, but the princess seemed more cross than captivated.

"Lucien," the princess snarled. "You promised me that you'd buy me jewelry today! Where is it?"

Lucien looked distraught. "I forgot, M-Melodora. I was busy."

Princess Melodora grabbed a teacup from a side table and thrust it to the ground, shattering it into glittering smithereens. "You promised!" She seethed. "If you aren't going to keep your promises to me, then I could never have you as my husband!"

A few of the maids ran out of the room, clearly petrified. Isla was tempted to run, too, but her feet were planted to the ground. Then she realized why the prince hated Melodora—because she was aggressive, greedy, and had unmistakeable anger issues over dumb things.

Lucien backed away from Melodora while she was continuing to throw her tantrum. He swept past her, his blue eyes full of fear and stress.

Isla ran a hand through her hair. This quest was not going to be easy.

During the next few days, Isla had tried to get Lucien and Melodora closer together. She'd tried to get them to talk over breakfast, but Melodora spent most of that time complaining that her toast was too soggy. Lucien had tried to joke around to lighten the mood, and Melodora had rewarded him with a slap.

When Isla was not interfering with them, she snooped on them to try to find good moments to shoot. They did not need to romantically look at each other for the love spell to work. It just required a lovey-dovey setting along with a bit of eye contact. Isla had surveyed the castle for the most ideal places to shoot: the Love Arch, which was a place where couples had their first kiss; the royal garden; and the balconies. She'd caught them in the gardens alone once, but neither of them met the other's eyes. The prince had once caught her spying, and when he met her eyes, Isla had to admit she felt her cheeks go unusually warm.

Eventually, Isla figured she'd need to tell Lucien about her quest.

That night, Isla knocked on Lucien's bedroom door. The prince skeptically allowed her in, curious as to why she'd made an evening visit.

"The reason why I came to your castle," Isla confessed, "is because I have a quest to complete." Her face went hot as she informed him about being a Lost Soul and her assignment from Cupid. To her surprise, Lucien seemed to be listening intently. After explaining, Isla concluded her tale with a request:



"I need you to take Princess Melodora to the Love Arch, alone, and look her in the eyes."

Lucien leaned back, floored. It seemed as if he would say yes, but instead he looked to the ground and shook his head. "No."

Isla was taken aback. "But don't you want to fall in love with her?"

The prince laughed, a sparkly laugh that made Isla's stomach flip. "Maybe I did, because that's what our parents wanted us to do. I wanted to fulfill our engagement. But Melodora is no angel. She is a terrible person, and I could never fall in love with a girl that cruel. Because I've already found my true love."

Isla's eyes rounded. Was Prince Lucien secretly in a forbidden love with someone other than his princess? "And who would that be...?"

Lucien narrowed his gaze on her. "That would be you."

It felt as if time had stopped at that very moment. Isla's heart had ceased to beat. Lucien's eyes were locked on hers. It seemed they had both been stuck in that moment for an eternity, until Isla finally broke the veil of silence.

"I can't be your true love," Isla said, voice cracking. "I don't deserve you. And I don't love you." That was a lie. It was the biggest lie Isla had ever told, because it seemed the moment she laid eyes on him, she had instantly fallen for him. She wanted to be his, but Isla was nothing but a hopeless Lost Soul.

The prince looked wounded. Isla hated to reject him like that, but she knew she had the quest to complete. Lucien needed to take Melodora to the Love Arch.

A few, long, awkward moments passed. "Fine," Lucien said. "I'll take her to the Love Arch. I want to make you happy."

Isla thought she'd feel triumphant at his approval, but her heart felt broken. She shook her head and ignored the feelings. Lucien was going to do what she'd asked, so Isla would not waste a second.

The next day, Isla found Lucien dragging the angry princess down the hallway.

"Let me go!" Melodora screamed. "It's my teatime!"

"This is more important," Lucien assured her.

Isla gripped her bow, aiming it towards the two royals as they made their way under the arch.



The prince looked around cautiously, as if he was checking to see if Isla was there. His eyes landed on hers, and he gave her a pained look. Then, at last, he moved his ocean-eyed gaze onto Melodora's.

The arrow shot out of its bow like a lightning bolt, zipping through the air, set to strike the princess in the heart. Melodora saw the arrow coming for her, and she let out a cry that shook the heavens.

Isla squeezed her eyes shut. She didn't want to see the love magic in action. In a few moments, Lucien and Melodora would be acting all sweet with each other, which would crush Isla's heart to bits.

But instead of hearing heartfelt words, Isla heard a voice that she hadn't heard in days.

"Isla!" called a voice that was undoubtedly Cupid's.

Her eyes snapped open. Swinging her head towards the Love Arch, Isla saw Cupid standing between Lucien and Melodora, his wings spread wide. There was no arrow stricken through the princess' heart. The arrow was in Cupid's hands, as if he'd caught it in mid-air. Lucien looked relieved.

"I'm sorry," Cupid said, gesturing for Isla to join them. "I shouldn't have forced you into this."

Isla quirked a brow. "I have almost finished my assignment. Why did you stop the arrow?"

Cupid shook his head. "No, no. Not only have I used the unfortunate for my own benefit, I have also forced you to go against your feelings." He gently shoved Lucien in front of Isla. "This young man, you love him, don't you?"

Immediately, Isla's cheeks caught on fire. She wanted to deny it out of embarrassment, but she could not lie to Cupid. "I do," she gulped.

Cupid smiled. "Thought so. And you do as well, right?" he asked Lucien.

"I do," the prince declared, more confidently than Isla had.

The boy with wings turned back to Isla. "See, this is my fault. I wanted you to bring together two people who were not meant to fall in love. It was my wrongdoing, and it caused you to hurt yourself internally in order to fulfill your quest. For that, I am truly sorry."

Isla nodded her head. "It's okay." Her heart was beating faster than ever with Lucien's ardent eyes on her.

Suddenly, Cupid snatched Isla's bow out of her hands and grabbed an arrow. Then he flew off the ground, aimed at her heart, and shot.

Pain tore apart Isla's entire chest. But, after a few seconds, it disappeared and was replaced



with a romantic feeling so intense that it felt like she was going to explode.

She almost fell to the ground in shock, but Lucien caught her in his arms. "I've got you," he soothed.

Cupid smiled. "Thank you for trying your best on your assignment, Isla. Now that you've fallen in love, you are no longer a Lost Soul."

He was right. Isla felt an overwhelming rush of joy and happiness, unlike anything she'd ever felt before. She gazed into Lucien's eyes, smiled, and pecked him on the cheek.

At that, Melodora did not seem pleased. "He's my husband! How dare you! Someone get rid of that girl!" the princess hollered.

Cupid rolled his eyes and took Melodora by the hand. "I'll take care of this," he said to Isla and Lucien with a wink, then sauntered away with the wailing princess in tow.

Isla grinned at them. She had accomplished something great. Not only did she come close to completing her quest, she realized that she also overcame her intense fear and doubt. She'd learned that it wasn't right to ignore her feelings. She learned that, sometimes, great things come to those who wait. Isla may not have been able to hope and be cheerful at first, but that was because sometimes those things take time.

And so, as Isla skipped away from the Love Arch hand in hand with Prince Lucien, it seemed the radiant sun had shined brighter than it ever had before. It was certain: Lucien and Isla would live happily ever after.

The end



The Puppeteer



SCHOOL: Bishop Gallagher
TEACHER: Kathryn Eade
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Lynn Chuchmuch
UNIT: Thunder Bay Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Michelle Pero

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 7-8 / POEM
by **Kyra Valdock**

He flicked his wrist with practiced grace, painting a smile on this wooden face,
With metal wire and a steady hand, he is the ruler of this small land,
Twisting limbs and putting on shows, he makes more puppets to add to his rows,
His workshop is dark, lit only by flames, forcing everyone to participate in his twisted games.

His shadow tends to weave in the light, keeping everything in sight,
His fingers pull, like gravity, only to pry their souls, losing their sanity,
He likes the way their joints snap, tangled in his deadly trap,
But don't be fooled when he doesn't look hollow; in the end, he always makes them follow.

The puppets dance, talk and play, but behind the curtain, it's always his way,
Don't make a sound, don't try to run away, he'll catch you and put you on display,
With his cold eyes and matching soul, he won't hesitate to take control
Creeping stealthily behind the scenes, this cruel king will harm you by any means.

Until he feels a sudden chill, like he moved without free will,
He has never felt powerless. Always reassuring and hides his cowardice,
But there was this sudden pull, an odd feeling, like his own mind is reeling,
The master finds, with panicked dread, others' thoughts inside his head.

He looks up to see a giant hand, realizing he was not the one in command,
He tried to run, to hide, to scream, maybe thinking it was a dream,
But his own stiff limbs begin to crack, there's no way of turning back
Now, just a toy on a shelf, he is no longer the boss of himself.



Going to the Winter Olympics



SCHOOL: Our Lady of Good Counsel
TEACHER: Daniela Albanese
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Lenka Kovachis
UNIT: York
UNIT PRESIDENT: Mike Totten

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 7-8 / PLAY
by **Theodore Cozos**

Characters: Narrator, Theodore, Sarah, Mom, Dad, Flight Attendant, Flight Captain, Taxi Driver

NARRATOR

It is a nice, sunny, crisp winter day on Friday, January 23, 2026, in Ontario, Canada. The 2026 Winter Olympic Games are in two weeks.

THEODORE

[Excited voice] Mom, Dad! Can we please go to the Olympics?

SARAH

[Excited voice] Please! It'll be so much fun!

MOM

You do know! It's too late to book a ticket.

DAD

Maybe we can go to the next Olympics.

THEODORE

[Sad voice] Aww... man!

MOM

Now start getting ready for school.



DAD

Here, eat this cereal.

NARRATOR

The cereal box has flashy Olympic designs on it.

EVERYONE

Clamp!

SARAH

[Curious voice] What's this?

NARRATOR

There is a medium-sized plastic figure with an Olympic logo printed on it.

THEODORE

[Curious voice] Well, what does it say?

DAD

Here... let me read. It says "CONGRATULATIONS! YOU AND 3 OTHER PEOPLE OF YOUR CHOOSING HAVE WON FREE TICKETS TO THE 2026 WINTER OLYMPICS! Please contact +41 21 555 01 99 for more information."

MOM

[Shocked voice] Let me see this!

DAD

[Excited voice] Well... I guess we're going to the Olympics!

THEODORE AND SARAH

[Excited voices] Yay!

MOM

But seriously finish eating or else you'll be late for school!



DAD

I'll call the number.

NARRATOR

After a 3-hour long hold, and 15 minutes actually talking to the person on the phone, it is confirmed.
The family is going to the Olympics!

NARRATOR

1 week and 6 days later...

EVERYONE

Honk! Honk!

MOM

[Frantic voice] Hurry up! The taxi is here.

DAD

Everyone ready?

THEODORE AND SARAH

Yep!

MOM

Come on! Let's go!

TAXI DRIVER

Looks like there won't be much traffic to Pearson International Airport!

DAD

It should take about 45 minutes!

SARAH

Can't wait!



THEODORE

I love the airport!

NARRATOR

They arrive.

TAXI DRIVER

I'll help with the luggage.

NARRATOR

The family enters the airport.

MOM

Looks like the line at check-in is fairly small.

DAD

Shouldn't be long!

NARRATOR

The family checks in at the airport.

DAD

The tickets say gate 23G.

MOM

It should be this way.

NARRATOR

One hour later...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Now boarding gate 23G, Air Canada Flight 1236 Toronto to Milan.



NARRATOR

The family goes through the gate.

THEODORE

I call dibs on the window seat!

SARAH

I wanted that!

FLIGHT CAPTAIN

Prepare for takeoff.

NARRATOR

The airplane's engines start roaring and suddenly the airplane is airborne!

SARAH

[Curious voice] I wonder how long the flight is?

MOM

Theodore, can you check?

THEODORE

[Shocked] Eight hours!

SARAH

[Shocked] That's such a long time!

THEODORE

Might as well take a nap.

NARRATOR

Seven hours and 15 minutes later...



FLIGHT ATTENDANT

We are descending shortly. Please bring your seats upright, stow your tray tables, and fasten your seatbelts.

NARRATOR

45 minutes later...

FLIGHT CAPTAIN

Welcome to Milan, Italy! It is currently -12°C and 2:32P.M. local time. Thanks for flying with us!

NARRATOR

They exit the plane at the gate.

DAD

Taxi!

NARRATOR

Soon they arrive at a hotel near the Olympic events.

SARAH

[Looking around] Let's rest. Big day tomorrow.

NARRATOR

The next morning, flags from many countries wave. Music plays. Crowds cheer.

THEODORE

Freestyle skiing first!

NARRATOR

They watch athletes launch off massive jumps, doing flips and tricks high in the air. The crowd gasps and then cheers.

SARAH

That was insane!



DAD

One more event today. Sarah, your pick.

SARAH

Ski jumping!

NARRATOR

They hurry to the huge ski jump hill. An athlete speeds down the ramp... launches... and soars.

THEODORE

That was awesome!

NARRATOR

They attend many more events: snowboarding, speed skating, curling, and even a medal ceremony.

NARRATOR

Back at the airport.

MOM

I can't believe how fast that went.

DAD

[Smiling] That's what happens when you're having fun.

THEODORE AND SARAH

Best trip ever!

NARRATOR

The family left off with a fun trip they won't forget!

EVERYONE

The end.

THE END



Technology I Wish Existed



SCHOOL: St. Kevin Separate School
TEACHER: Katherine Hibbitt
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Laura Da Costa
UNIT: Dufferin-Peel Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Lori Austin

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 7-8 / NONFICTION
by **Alyssa T. Mentore**

In my essay today, I will be discussing a piece of technology I wish existed: the ability to become an Avatar. I will be covering where this concept is from, how I think this could benefit people, and finally, the pros and cons.

First, the piece of technology I'm going to write about is from James Cameron's "Avatar" collection. My piece of technology are the link units that can transport you from your current human form to your Avatar on Pandora. I honestly love the concept that you could become "one of the people" (which is also known as a "Na'vi") because, from what I believe, the purpose of the movies is to show what Earth could've been if we as the human race took better care of her, rather than what we're doing now such as polluting the environment with harmful stuff, destroying natural habitats, and causing extinction to many species of animals. I think it also signifies how Indigenous peoples have had their lands destroyed by colonization for selfish gain without even considering how that might've affected the people as well as their environment. I also think this because, in Avatar, the "Sky people" (the human race) refer to the Na'vi as "savages" and I found a connection to real life, in how Indigenous peoples were wrongly called "savages" and were seen as bad.

Next, I will talk about how I believe this technology could benefit people. I think that if this piece of technology existed, it would greatly affect people that would be willing to listen and learn from an experience like this. I think this because it would be great to learn how the different clans live amongst each other so peacefully, how they respect the balance of life, how they are respectful about any killings (such as hunting for food), how they communicate (their languages, figures of speech, etc...) and different skills they use to survive (archery, agility, strength, critical thinking, etc...) Now, I do think there would be some setbacks if people decided to be disrespectful, but I firmly believe that there would be some strict rules for this. For example, there would be a limit to how many people would be allowed on Pandora daily to prevent any poor choices being made, such as fights. There would be a strict food policy about what you can and cannot bring, such as any foods that have wrappers; they could not be brought to prevent any possible littering from happening. You absolutely cannot take anything back with you, other than photos, since I think it would be important for everything to stay maintained. And, last, be respectful. I think being respectful is the most important rule to be listed since it doesn't cost anything to be respectful of your surroundings as well as the people and animals around you.

Lastly, I will cover the pros and cons of the link pods.



The pros are:

→ People can gain exposure to different cultures

For example, if this was a possibility, I would totally want to either live as the Metkayina (Na'vi that live on the reef) or the Omatikaya (one of the clans that live in the forest) since those are my two favourite clans.

→ It would be a really great experience

I think this would be a great opportunity for Avatar fans (such as me) and others alike since I would like to live at least a day in the Avatar world to experience what it's like to live as a Na'vi since I think they live way better than humans (environment-wise as well as socially).

→ We as a race could learn a lot from them

I say this because we as a race have done so much damage to our Earth. For example, we have made so many species go extinct (such as the great auk, golden toads, thylacine, etc...) as well as put many at risk of extinction (the Amur leopard, tigers, polar bears, etc...). I personally think that this is a big issue because the newer generations including me would be living in horrible conditions (climate change, possible water shortages, possibly more poverty with all these outrageous prices for things such as food, personal hygiene items, and more) due to all this pollution and drastic differences in living conditions.

The cons are:

→ It would go exactly like in the movies

I say this because I feel like people feel the need to want to take over new places for many reasons but, I think, the most prominent reason would be greed. For example, in the movies, the RDA (a human-run corporation) is well known for the horrible marks it leaves on Pandora. Those horrible marks include the burning of the Hometree, the Spirit trees, as well as destroying many homes, harvesting precious minerals from the planet ("unobtainium"), and killing wildlife just for selfish gain (killing the Tulkun for a special substance called "amrita" that is said to be an anti-ageing agent). This would disrupt the balance of life greatly if this were ever to happen.

→ History would repeat itself

I say this because in the history I've learned in school, and a bit on my own too, it is well known to me that many lands have been colonized by selfish and ignorant people. For example, in school we learned that a long while ago Canada was colonized by European settlers because they were looking for India for spices and other things, but I guess they decided to stay even though this wasn't India. I think it's kind of crazy how their search for India turned into all the horrible things that happened for a really long time.



→ Life would be horrible for the Pandorans

I say this because, yet again, I think that life would become almost horrible for any species that lives on Pandora because 1) like I stated before, I think history would repeat itself, and 2) I really strongly believe that it would go like in the movies. Hypothetically speaking, if humans were able to live on or visit Pandora, I think in less than a day there would be pieces of trash all over the planet because people got super used to littering on Earth, so it would make sense they would litter on Pandora too. I believe that this would be a big risk since their environment works completely differently from ours (e.g. the air they breathe, the millions of network connections that the plants have, etc.).

In conclusion, this is why I think my technology should be able to exist possibly in the near future. If people could become Avatars, they could build empathy for other races, species, and ways of life, just by walking in their shoes. I hope it doesn't end up like how it did in the movies—in a negative way. Humanity is always learning and growing, and this tool could be a great way to widen our perspective.



Lost in the Clouds



SCHOOL: Our Lady Queen of the World
TEACHER: Jessica Cabral
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Andy Persad
UNIT: York
UNIT PRESIDENT: Mike Totten

SECONDARY - GRADES 9-10 / SHORT STORY
by **Olivia Sator**

I will wear a smile to your funeral.

I will be happy that I knew you, just as Dad says you want me to be.

At least, that's what I tell myself, as I'm curled up on this hard, plastic chair, knees hugged tight to my chest, staring out the window at a nearby tree. My head in the clouds, as you often called it. But this time, it's not to avoid the rest of the world. It's to avoid you.

It's the only place I can look. Out the window, I mean. I can't look left, I can't look right, and I especially can't turn around. I can only just stare at this gnarled conifer, glare at it until my eyes pop out of my head, or maybe just until Mom comes back from the gift shop with your Mentos.

Because the second I turn around, I know I'll be in tears. The sight of you, of you lying on that bed, hooked up to a jungle of wires and tubes, will bring a flood to my eyes, a wave of water that no dam can stop.

And I don't want to cry anymore. I've cried enough this week.

And last week.

And the one before that.

But I can't let you see that. It will only make you feel worse.

So, I'll keep my vision trained on the tree. I'll watch as the squirrels race up and down the bark, as the leaves gently sway in the breeze, as a lone dove—the one you call Opa—waits longingly for a companion. I'll wait until it's all over; the beeping, the shallow breathing, the constant hospital visits, all of it.

I'll wait until the last possible moment to talk to you one last time.

And then I'll let the tears fall.

But, how could we have come to this point so quickly?



How could all those memories, each one filled with laughter and smiles, have come crashing down so soon? How could your weekly letters, written in a loopy font and consistently sealed with a bright sticker, now only be a whisper of the past? How could we have spent every summer up North, swimming, and reading, and playing, not knowing that this summer would be the last time we would ever be there together again?

And how will it feel when I pick up a book, only to realize that your chin is not resting on my head, your wrinkled hands are not there to flip the pages, and your steady voice is not there to guide me through the words? How will it feel to look around the room at family gatherings and not see your face, blue eyes twinkling, smile wide, waiting for me to run up into your open arms?

How will it feel to continue on, while you stay in the past?

With that thought, it all comes crashing down. I remember you, your deep laugh, your rough voice, your veined hands. I return to better times, you and your camera, all twenty of us sitting on the cottage steps, waiting for you to take the family photo. Your words were delicate as you told me to sit still, never harsh or sharp. Always kind.

Come spring, we'd see you at Auntie's house, pulling up in your beige Toyota Camry, hands piled high with chocolates and plush rabbit puppets. You'd come to the door, hand out your goodies, then return back to your car for more. You'd walk around the house, taking photos, documenting our lives.

Sometimes you'd show up out of the blue, during the week or on the weekend, for an hour, or for three. It was always random, but the cardboard boxes bursting with books were guaranteed to be found in your trunk, no matter the day. You traveled with them, and the camera too, the camera that snapped pictures of me, cheeks stuffed with cantaloupe, juice dribbling down my chin.

And every time I look at you, I see the cherished books, the covertly exchanged sweets, and the swimming races at the cottage. But mostly, I see the camera. The camera and your blue eyes shining above the top of the view finder, stretched wide with the joy of capturing every moment. Every smile, every frown, every stuck-out tongue, every tear.

Everything you wanted us to remember when you're gone.

And that's when it clicks, because even though I'm scared to look at you and realize that it's all coming to an end, I'm even more afraid that you will leave before I get to say goodbye.

The final goodbye. The final chance to thank you for all that you have given.

So, when I hear the last remnants of your voice calling me over, quiet, almost a whisper, I turn without thinking.

I can hear it in your cry; your words are getting weaker. Soon, they'll have disappeared, and, along with them, you.



I scuttle across the room, my eyes cast down, locked on the floor.

Before, I didn't look at you. I didn't want to. You don't look the same anymore. You look... different. Smaller. Like, bit by bit, you're fading away.

But this time, hands wrung behind my back, my eyes flick up.

And they meet yours.

Your sapphire eyes, which, against all odds, are still glistening. Your face is pale and your arms are frail, skin clinging to the bone, but your eyes are as bright as ever.

Shakily, you reach out. You want me to hold your hand, just as you have every other hospital visit, and every hospital visit I decline.

But this time, I let you. I let the warmth of your skin flood my palm. I let your fingers lock around mine, holding me in a weak grip.

And then, on instinct, I grab your arm and hug you, burying my face in your chest. I wrap my arms around you so tight, I know you must have thought I would never let go.

The tears begin to pour down my face, a steady stream of grief, growing by the minute. Your shirt is drenched in seconds.

You whisper to me, your voice calm and steady. You tell me it will be okay. That I should be happy, that I should smile. We got to spend good years together. We got to be in each other's lives. We will meet again soon.

You repeat these words over and over, your fingers gently wiping my tears. Please don't take things too hard, you say.

But you know I will, anyway. I always have and always will.

I look up at you, then, and somehow, you're smiling. Your eyes are still full of light, your smile just as wide.

I smile back through the tears. I tell you I love you.

And then I never see you again.

You leave a few days before my birthday, in the middle of the night.

I still remember it clearly. I wake up that morning, as if it were any other, and run over to Mom, begging to visit you. But then, as soon as those words leave my mouth, Mom's face drops and I can hear Dad's sobs from somewhere else in the room.



You're gone.

Nine-year-old me never understood why you were so calm that day. Never quite caught on to the fact that you, your voice as smooth as steady as ever, were ready to let go.

And for years it would remain incomprehensible, why someone who enjoyed life so much, who loved and was loved by everyone around her, would be so accepting of leaving so early.

Up until recently, I had thought it was because you had prepared. You had left us our inheritance of camera films to enjoy while you were gone, to look back on when times took a turn for the worse. Your smiling face was preserved within the photos of an album book.

But now I realize, you never did leave, did you?

Because whenever I look outside, I see two doves waiting on a tree, watching intently as I let my head get lost in the clouds.

For B.A. Sator, otherwise known as Oma. 1938-2019

"We'll meet again soon."



Unfinished Ending



SCHOOL: Assumption College, Brantford
TEACHER: Carissa Engell
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Trevor Hare
UNIT: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

SECONDARY - GRADES 9-10 / POEM
by **Sanam Ghodiwala**

We woke up early,
rolled out the mat,
sat side by side and stretched.
Reaching towards each other.
Laughing, teasing,
sharing loving conversations.
Before the world woke up.

You taught me how to carve.
How to sketch.
How to shade the light.
How to draw the lines
without being afraid to mess up.

You showed me that life can be simple
when you choose it to be.

That was your joy.
Teasing me.
Mimicking me.
Having fun with me.
Just because you could.

At meals,
you shared your food with me,
and somehow everything tasted better.
I didn't just enjoy the food.
I enjoyed the time.



Every morning before school
at 6:30 a.m.,
I'd come into your room,
and jump on your bed.
That was how I woke you.

A hug.
Then I'd leave for school.

Sometimes I miss those mornings.
Not just being a kid.
But being with you.

You didn't teach me facts.
You didn't teach me love.
You showed it to me.
Not through lessons.
But through the way you lived.
And through the way you loved.

Out of your six grandchildren,
I was your favourite.
And you were my favourite person.
My best friend.

We went on long sunset walks.
Played at the park.
You encouraged me.
Pushed me to be my best.

Even when you were in pain,
you did it with me.
So I wouldn't be scared.
So I could win.
And you'd let me.

You loved it that way.



After you left,
I know you came back to check up on me.
Once as a bird.
A sparrow,
circling around me
in a parking lot.

Then as a peacock,
just like you said you would.
Walking onto our lawn,
staying long enough to be seen,
and then, never again.

It felt like you.

Even when it was your time,
even while I was still at school,
I know you came to say goodbye.

Calling me over,
for one last loving conversation.

Then you went back
to wherever you are now,
and I went back
to playing on the field.

Some nights,
the memories bring me joy.
But when I talk about you,
or when someone else does,
I cry.

Not because I didn't love you enough,
but because loving you,
meant losing you
before I was ready.



Sometimes it feels unfinished,
like a sentence
that never got its perfect ending.

It's been
eight years,
nine months,
and fourteen days
since you've left me,
and I'm still learning
how to move forward
without leaving you behind,
carrying all that you've shown me
in the way that I live each day.



The Half Moon Club Cover-Up



SCHOOL: Francis Libermann
TEACHER: Stephanie Iacobacci
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE:
Elizabeth Araujo
UNIT: Toronto Secondary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Antonella Di Carlo

SECONDARY - GRADES 9-10 / PLAY
by **Jaela Chau, Victoria El-Halabi, Yeddeya Agonafer, Cyrille Alexandria Elaydo Ireneo, Precious Jeanard Sales Ara, and Mabelle Cisneros**

Content warning: This play contains mature subject matter such as fictional descriptions of violence, death, and self-harm and is not intended for elementary school audiences. Reader discretion is advised.

Scene One

Enter Bar.

Black screen, single gunshot sound.

It is closing time; LEONARD is serving drinks.

JUNE

Hey guys, where's Fanny? I'm gonna go look for her.

JUNE looks around everywhere, ends up in the back alley and sees FANNY laying down.

JUNE

Fanny, did you pass out again? You blotto.

JUNE tries to shake FANNY awake, sees blood all over her, screams upon the horrifying sight.

JUNE

Oh my goodness! Oh my goodness!

JUNE runs back inside.



JUNE

OH GREAT HEAVENS, FANNY’S DEAD! I REPEAT, FANNY’S DEAD!

Everyone gasps, runs outside.

CHARLES

Oh my... Fanny! ... FANNY! FANNYYYY! LORD HELP ME!

They all stare in shock.

RUBY

Who could do this to Fanny, my best chum?!

HAZEL

How could this happen?!? She was just here with us...

END SCENE

Scene Two

Characters: HAZEL, CHARLES, & RUBY.

HAZEL

[Crying] I can’t believe what just happened.

CHARLES

I will find whoever did this.

Dramatic music plays.

RUBY

Out of all people... why her?!? Whoever did this, you will rue this day!

END SCENE



Scene Four

FRED, LEONARD, & JUNE. No music.

FRED

Ruby's definitely behind all of this, or is somehow connected to it...

Leonard

[Brief pause] I saw what happened that night...

JUNE

Applesauce! I didn't think Ruby would go this far.

END SCENE

Scene Five

Characters: RUBY & JUNE.

RUBY

June... You know I would never do this. Please believe me!

JUNE

I believe you, but let's be honest, you have no alibi and you were the last person seen alone with her...

RUBY

Okay... Fine, you still don't believe that I didn't do it? You know who else is suspicious?

END SCENE

Scene Six

Everyone in bar. Music fades in background. CHARLES and FRED stand across from each other.

RUBY

Everyone... I have something I want to reveal...



FRED

Well, out with it!

RUBY

Fine, FRED! Weren't YOU having an affair with Fanny?

Everyone gasps, shocked.

FRED

W-what?! No, you're just saying things to make me the fall guy! How do we know that Ruby isn't just telling a line?! Charles, believe me!

Everyone turning their heads between FRED and CHARLES.

CHARLES

What. You were with Fanny?! MY FANNY?! What did you do to her, you high-hat.

Everyone bickers CHARLES secretly adds poison to RUBY's drink.

Voices fade.

LEONARD

[Thinking to himself] Should I reveal the goods? No... I can't just yet.

FRED

I didn't do anything. I don't know what you're talking about.

RUBY

Seems like I'm not the only one here who's suspicious... Am I? [*Looks at JUNE.*]

CHARLES

Is this nonsense true? Tell me!

RUBY

I have proof... I promise.



CHARLES

Fine. Let's talk privately. *[Looks at FRED.]* We're not done here.

END SCENE

Scene Seven

RUBY & CHARLES in corner of bar.

RUBY

Fanny wrote to me about their affair. *[Shows a letter to CHARLES.]*

CHARLES

[Reads letter, grip crumpling the paper, then rips it up.]

RUBY

Charles, stop! You're better than this... *[Rubs CHARLES' arm.]*

CHARLES

[Shrugging RUBY's arm off] Oh dry up, Ruby. Out of all people, Fred...? No wonder his romantic life was so private.

RUBY

Hey... Why don't we have a drink and calm down?

CHARLES

[Smirking.] Alright, I guess.

END SCENE

Scene Eight

Everyone back in bar.

RUBY

Everyone, look at this! Now I have proof! *[Shows letter.]*



Everyone gasps, RUBY starts to cough, drops to the floor.

HAZEL

Oh great heavens! Ruby, are you okay?!?!

JUNE

I'm getting the heebie-jeebies! What's going on with her?!? Fred... are you behind all this?!

FRED

That's horsefeathers! Why would I ever do such a thing?!?!

RUBY stops breathing, everyone starts tearing up, JUNE picks up the letter to read it aloud.

JUNE

Oh my goodness... Ruby was right! How could you, Fred?!?!

HAZEL

[Staying by RUBY] Did you poison her, Fred...? You didn't like that she told your business and you killed her!

CHARLES grabs FRED's collar.

CHARLES

I warned you! You rotter!

FRED

I've been here the whole time, this is bull corn!

HAZEL

You could've poisoned her, who knows?!

END SCENE



Scene Nine

Everyone surrounding RUBY's body, mourning.

HAZEL has a flashback, remembering how she was there when CHARLES killed FANNY, blurry scene of FANNY's dead body and CHARLES with his gun next to it, HAZEL comes to a realization, shocked.

FRED

What about Leonard?! He's been standing there observing everything without saying a word!

Everyone turns to LEONARD, LEONARD looks overwhelmed, itching to tell the truth.

JUNE

Leonard, are you okay? You look like you're on pins and needles. Fred had a good point... for once...

LEONARD

I have to admit something before it gets out of hand... The owner of this club... Charles... is the one who started it all! He killed the beloved Fanny! Charles, I know you're my best bud, but I can't keep this secret any longer, I saw everything with my own two eyes. You really thought you were alone that night? Well, I was there the whole time! Even Hazel's drunk behind can back me up! [Starts to tear up] I watched you shoot that poor angel for something you could have worked out! She did nothing wrong and you know it.

Flashback of all the tragic events where CHARLES was responsible, from LEONARD's perspective, CHARLES' face gets more and more revealed.

HAZEL

I knew I heard a gunshot! But the half-racks just clouded my memory...

FRED

Oh, look how the tables have turned.

CHARLES gets nervous and stumbles his words.

CHARLES

Unbelievable. After everything I've done to avenge my Fanny, and the tears I've shed for her sweet soul, you dare accuse me of killing the love of my life?!? Me? The one who built everything here so you and your ossified pal can lie about this and hide from the coppers?!?!



FRED

Oh, can it, Charles, you just admitted you killed her! This was the very reason she left you for ME! I may be a fool to you, but even Fanny herself admitted you're too stuck on and bamboozled!

HAZEL

I may be bent, but I would never lie over my friend!!

CHARLES

Alright, fine, matter of fact, that trigger was pulled by my very own hands. But believe me when I tell you, both of these two-timers deserve what came for them. Not to forget Ruby, I don't know what was feeding her delusions but she herself was in my way too. She was too involved, so I had to shut her up once and for all.

Everyone gasps.

HAZEL

You killed my poor Ruby?!?!?!?

JUNE

How could you kill her too, you're nuts!!!

FRED

You trigger man! You deserve to be put behind bars!

CHARLES

[Sighing] Fred, Fanny must've fallen for your face, not your brains. Do you really want to call the coppers here...?

JUNE

We can't phone the coppers, we're in a barrel house!

FRED

...Fine! I'll get even for Fanny AND Ruby and I'll bump you off!

LEONARD

No! We can't! It's not the right way to get even. But Charles... I can't believe I called you my best buddy. You're not the same man you used to be. I would've never expected such things from you. You killed two innocent women!



HAZEL

We should lock him in our own cellar! Give this black hat a taste of his own medicine!

CHARLES

Good luck catching me, you fools!

CHARLES runs away, FRED and LEONARD chase and then catch him.

END SCENE

Scene Ten

CHARLES yelling behind bars in a cellar.

Fade to black.

END SCENE

Scene Eleven

CHARLES, given up, sits on the cellar floor rocking back and forth, zoom in on CHARLES' face.

Fade to black.

END SCENE

LEONARD sees CHARLES' dead body on the cellar floor with a spare gun in his hand, pointing at his own chest. LEONARD drops something in shock.

Fade to black.

THE END



There Never Was a Safe Way to Fly



SCHOOL: Assumption College, Windsor
TEACHER: Kim Pearce
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Lauren Watson
UNIT: Windsor-Essex Secondary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Jody Meloche

SECONDARY - GRADES 9-10 / NONFICTION
by **Ranti Oyeboode**

Every generation seems convinced that the one after it is a disaster. More than two thousand years ago, Aristotle wrote that young people have “exalted notions because they have not yet been humbled by life or learnt its necessary limitations [...] They think they know everything and, are always quite sure about it; this, in fact, is why they overdo everything.” Today, this mentality often takes the form of headlines warning that Generation Z is fragile, entitled, and won’t get off their phones. This fear does not only exist in philosophical treatises; it is embedded in the stories society chooses to tell and retell. One of the most enduring of these stories is the myth of Icarus. In its most familiar form, the myth recounts how Daedalus, a master craftsman, creates wax wings and feathers to escape imprisonment with his son, Icarus, warning him not to fly too high or too low. Icarus, not heeding his father’s warning, rises toward the sun, melting the wax, and falls to his death in the sea below. While Icarus undeniably makes a fatal mistake, the story’s fixation on that failure elevates the fall over the achievement of flight itself. When read through the life of Daedalus, the myth reveals itself not as a simple warning against youthful arrogance, but as a narrative that teaches restraint through fear—remembering the son’s death while mistaking the father’s survival for success. To understand this lesson, it is necessary to look first, not at the fall, but at the wings, and the man who built them.

In the most common version of the myth, we are introduced to Daedalus, a master craftsman. While living in Crete under King Minos, Daedalus constructs a hollow wooden cow that allows Queen Pasiphaë to bear the Minotaur and designs the Labyrinth to imprison it. Later, after aiding Theseus, one of Minos’ enemies, Daedalus and his young son Icarus are confined in the Labyrinth, with Minos “block[ing] escape by sea and land.” To escape, Daedalus fashions wings from feathers and wax, warning Icarus to fly neither too high nor too low. He warns him that flying high will cause his wings to melt, and too low will dissolve the wax holding them together. As they fly, Icarus becomes exhilarated by the sensation of flight and rises higher and higher into the sky. The sun softens the wax, the feathers loosen, and Icarus falls into the sea and drowns, while Daedalus survives to continue his life elsewhere. The sea into which Icarus falls later bears his name as the Icarian Sea—permanently preserving his failure.

Long before Icarus took flight, Daedalus’ life had already been heavily shaped by fear. According to Diodorus Siculus, Daedalus was “an Athenian by birth” who “in natural ability [...] towered far above all other men and cultivated the building art, the making of statues, and the working of stone.” His skill was so extraordinary that later generations claimed his statues appeared alive, able to see and walk like real human beings. In another world, such brilliance might have promised



independence, but it instead made him permanently tied to those with power who sought to use it. When Queen Pasiphaë is cursed with desire for a bull, Daedalus fashions a wooden cow that allows her to bear the Minotaur, and later invents the Labyrinth to conceal it. The creation of the Minotaur angers King Minos, Queen Pasiphaë's husband, and while Daedalus' skill helps to trap a monster Minos hated, Daedalus' hand in the creation of the Minotaur leaves the king displeased. Diodorus notes that, after fashioning the cow, Daedalus learned that Minos had made threats against him, forcing him to flee Crete in fear of the king's anger. Unlike later retellings, such as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Daedalus is imprisoned as punishment for betrayal, Diodorus presents his flight as a response to falling out of favour with Minos and not because of any actual wrongdoing.

This helps to understand Daedalus' earlier crime against his nephew, Talos, also called Perdix in some texts. When Daedalus' nephew began inventing tools that promised to surpass his teacher's work, Daedalus recognized the danger immediately. Diodorus writes that Talos was "more gifted than his teacher," and that Daedalus, "fearing his fame would rise above his own," murdered him. In Daedalus' world, being surpassed meant becoming expendable and survival required remaining indispensable to those in power. Daedalus does not kill Talos because he hates him. He kills him because he understands the rules of the world he lives in. Excellence is not shared. It is competed for, guarded, and, when necessary, defended through violence. What Daedalus learned was not how to live freely, but how to survive within limits set by others.

By the time he constructs the Labyrinth for King Minos—a prison so complex that even its creator becomes trapped within it—Daedalus has already accumulated the experiences that will shape what he later tells his son. He has already internalized the belief that excellence is binding, and safety depends on moderation. It is from this place that Daedalus delivers his warning:

My son, I caution you to keep the middle way, for if your pinions dip too low the waters may impede your flight; and if they soar too high the sun may scorch them. Fly midway. Gaze not at the boundless sky, far Ursa Major and Bootes next. Nor on Orion with his flashing brand, but follow my safe guidance.^x

The repeated insistence on moderation, "keep the middle way [...] fly midway," leaves no room for adjustment or discovery. Daedalus does not present his warning as an opinion shaped by his own experience, but as a universal truth. Icarus is warned not to look toward the "boundless sky" or the stars, as though wonder itself must be restrained. What begins as a survival strategy hardens into a worldview, one that treats obedience as wisdom and ambition as recklessness.

But Icarus has not been shaped by fear in the same way. Ovid writes that "the boy rejoiced in his daring flight," showing how Icarus does not fly because he seeks to disobey his father or challenge authority; he rises because flight feels extraordinary. The open sky invites him upward, and the act of flying awakes a sense of possibility that Daedalus' instructions never accounted for. While he ultimately falls, the fact that he flies at all is erased by the narrative's obsession with his death. By emphasizing his failure over the accomplishment of flight, the story reinforces a worldview in which failure and risk, even in the pursuit of greatness, is condemned. That safety is defined by strict obedience to limits,



reflecting the lessons that Daedalus learned from his own life. The fact that Icarus flew high at all is overshadowed by the insistence that he never should have.

Some readings of the myth argue that Icarus' death serves as a warning against hubris, portraying him as reckless for ignoring his father's guidance. From this perspective, the tragedy lies not in the fall itself, but in Icarus' refusal to accept necessary limits. This interpretation places responsibility on Icarus without examining the consequences of the limits that he was asked to obey.

However, while Daedalus' warning is usually framed as guidance that will lead to survival, upon closer inspection, it doesn't guarantee it. Even if Icarus had managed to make it safely out of Crete, he would have spent the rest of his life in hiding. Daedalus, who follows his own advice, escapes only temporarily. He is exiled from Athens, threatened in Crete, and hunted even after reaching Sicily, spending his life never truly free. The middle path does not always offer safety; it merely delays harm, allowing survival at the cost of a diminished existence. The myth presents Daedalus' instructions as a path to safety, promising success if followed and failure if not, yet it conceals the risks inherent in both paths, using fear to enforce moderation while masking the true cost of survival. Before the fall is blamed on Icarus, the myth first trains us to believe that there was ever a safe way to fly. Daedalus' life shows that there is not.

This fixation on failure is so deeply embedded that it persists even in versions of the myth where the flight itself is absent. Diodorus Siculus offers a slightly different version of the escaping segment of the myth. In Diodorus' account, Daedalus and Icarus do not escape by air, but by sea. Queen Pasiphaë provides them with a vessel, and it is during this attempted escape that Icarus meets his end.

But when Icarus was disembarking onto the island in a reckless manner, he fell into the sea and perished.^{xii}

Even without flight, Icarus' death remains the defining moment, highlighting the myth's fixation on failure. By preserving Icarus' fall and framing Daedalus' survival as success, the myth teaches that restraint is necessary, but at the cost of genuine freedom or fulfillment. The lesson is reinforced by fear, whether it be fear of death, of failure, or of consequences, rather than being reinforced by any evidence that careful obedience guarantees safety. This raises the question: is a life lived in hiding truly a life at all? Daedalus survives, but survival is not the same as living life fully. Is the tragedy, then, not that Icarus falls, but that Daedalus never truly rises, constrained by the very caution he teaches?

This pattern extends far beyond myth. Every generation produces its own Icarus, a young figure warned that reaching too far is not only dangerous, but irresponsible. Even today, young activists face the same scrutiny. In this way, the myth of Icarus functions as a tool. By focusing on the fall, the story discourages disruption and reframes aspiration as danger. Icarus is not remembered as the boy who touched the sky, but as the one who fell for doing so. Even the sea bears his name, not in honour of his daring, but as a marker of his death. In doing so, the story frames Daedalus' survival as success and Icarus' death as failure, without questioning what that survival required. Perhaps the true tragedy is not the fall itself, but a life lived never daring to rise.



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- ^{iv} Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, Book IV, Chapter 76, Section 1, Trans. C.H. Oldfather. Theoi Classical Texts Library. Accessed January 2026. <https://www.theoi.com>
- ^v Ibid., Chapter 76, Section 2.
- ^{vi} Ibid., Chapter 77, Sections 1-4.
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- ^{viii} In various ancient accounts, Daedalus' nephew known as Perdix is referred to by alternative names. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8.236-259), the figure is named Perdix. In contrast, Diodorus Siculus calls the nephew "Talos" in his *Library of History* (4.76.4-5).
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The Monster Inside



SCHOOL: F.J. Brennan
TEACHER: Emily LaBute
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Monica Taylor
UNIT: Windsor-Essex Secondary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Jody Meloche

SECONDARY - GRADES 11-12 / SHORT STORY
by **Yazin Al-Fahham**

Why does suffering exist? If God is real, why doesn't He stop it? Are we born good or are we born broken? Do our choices even matter?

I've spent two years looking for answers. Philosophy. Religion. Nihilism. All of it.

I am Elliot. And tonight I'm going to figure this out once and for all.

The bar is pretty empty for a Friday night. I order vodka. Then I order another.

That's when he walks in.

Tall guy. My age maybe. Sits two seats down. Orders water. Has a book.

I see the cover. Bible.

I laugh. A Christian. Perfect.

"You actually believe that stuff?" I ask.

He looks over. Calm. "Yeah. You don't?"

"I've read it. Genesis to Revelation. It's all a fairy tale."

He closes his book. Puts it on the bar. "You read it looking for reasons not to believe. I read it looking for truth."

I like him already. He doesn't get defensive.

"I'm Elliot."

"Lewis."



"Want to debate about it?"

He smiles. "Sure."

DEBATE 1: DOES GOD EXIST?

I lean forward. "Your God made everything, right? All-powerful?"

"Yes."

"Then He made evil too. Cancer. Wars. Kids dying. That's HIS fault. Either He's not all-powerful or He's not all-good. Pick one."

Lewis takes a sip of water. Thinking.

"You think evil is a thing that can be made?"

"It's not?"

"No. Evil is what happens when good is missing. Augustine said evil has no positive nature. It's just the loss of good. Like cold is just missing heat. Darkness is just missing light."

I down my vodka. Order another. "That's just word games. Evil FEELS real. When a kid dies of cancer, that's not 'missing good.' That's actual pain. Actual suffering."

"The pain is real. The suffering is real. But that doesn't make evil a thing that exists on its own. A broken eye doesn't prove the sun is evil."

I pause. He has a point there.

"Okay, fine. Let's say evil isn't a 'thing.' But where does that leave us? I've read Kafka. The Trial. A man arrested and convicted for a crime he never knows. That's the world we live in."

"Kafka wrote fiction."

"Did he? Or did he just write the truth in story form?"

Lewis turns his water glass slowly. Doesn't answer right away.

"Even in a broken world the fact that you call it broken means that you know what whole looks like."

I switch tactics. "Fine. Even if God exists, how do we know right and wrong? I've been on the dark web. Murderers. Cannibals. They don't think they're wrong. Some of them have whole philosophies justifying what they do. So, who decides?"



"If right and wrong are just opinions then nothing is actually wrong. Not even what you saw on the dark web."

He had me there.

"But that's circular. You're saying morality is objective because... because what? Your book says so?"

"No. I'm saying if morality exists at all it has to be grounded in something beyond opinion. Otherwise, Hitler wasn't wrong. He just had different preferences."

"So, you need a moral lawgiver."

"Yes."

I pull out my phone. Open files. Years of research. Show him the screen.

"Okay. Fine. Maybe there IS a creator. But what if it's an EVIL God? The Gnostics said the creator is evil. The Demiurge. A demon pretending to be divine. That explains EVERYTHING. Why good people suffer. Why evil people win. We're trapped in a demon's playground."

Lewis actually leans forward to look at my screen. "You've studied Gnostic texts?"

"I told you. I've studied everything. Nag Hammadi. The Apocryphon of John. All of it."

"The Gnostics were wrong. Augustine proved it centuries ago. Evil is parasitic. It needs good to exist. Like rust needs metal. A parasite needs a host."

"Then why does evil feel so POWERFUL?" My voice is rising. "Look at history. The good die young. The wicked prosper. Where's your good God in that?"

Lewis puts down his glass. Stands up. We're both standing now.

"Or you don't understand what goodness requires. Real love needs real freedom. Real freedom needs real choice. You want a world with love but no possibility of evil? That's logically impossible."

"Then your God CHOSE suffering. He's responsible."

"Or suffering is the price of something worth having. Something really important."

We eye each other. The bar is nearly empty. Neither of us noticed people leaving.

I sit down first.

"This isn't over."

Lewis picks up his book. Doesn't open it. Just holds it.



"No. It's not."

DEBATE 2: IS GOD GOOD OR EVIL?

The bartender starts stacking chairs at the other end. Doesn't ask us to leave.

"You're grasping." Lewis says it quietly. Not mocking.

"I'm being logical." I close my phone. "You prove evil isn't a 'thing.' Fine. But that doesn't prove the SOURCE is good."

Lewis puts his book down flat on the bar.

"What if the Gnostics were right after all? What if this world was made by something evil? The Demiurge. When you really look at the world the evidence is overwhelming."

"Augustine spent years refuting this—"

"Augustine was a philosopher from 400AD." I reopen my phone. More files. "When you spend enough time online you see the patterns he never saw. Child trafficking rings. Genocides. Serial killers who torture for fun. This isn't the absence of good. This is active, malicious evil."

"Evil is still like rust on metal. It feeds on good but can't exist by itself."

"That's easy for YOU to say." I close my phone. Hard. "Tell that to a mother watching her child die of bone cancer. Tell that to refugees fleeing war. Suffering doesn't FEEL like something missing. It feels real. Physical. Present."

He doesn't respond immediately.

I lean back. "Dostoevsky said it's better to be unhappy and know the truth than be happy in a lie. At least I see the truth."

"The pain is real even if evil isn't a thing on its own."

Lewis' voice is different now. Sharper. "But WE broke away from God. We chose to be independent. Now we live in the mess WE made."

"So, it's OUR fault a two-year-old gets leukemia?"

"Free will. You wanted to know who decides right and wrong? We do. And we chose wrong. The Fall wasn't just Adam and Eve. It corrupted everything. Nature itself."

I laugh. Short. Bitter. "Then why doesn't He just FIX it? Snap His fingers. Reset everything. Why let it continue?"



"Maybe He is fixing it. Maybe that's what the cross was about. Redemption."

"Or—" I lean forward. "Or there are TWO gods. Light versus Dark. Good versus Evil. Fighting. Dualism. That explains EVERYTHING. Why prayers go unanswered. Why good doesn't always win. Why children suffer. There's a good god trying. But an evil god fighting back. And sometimes evil wins."

"You're making it way more complicated than it needs to be. You don't need two gods to explain why humans choose badly."

"But natural evil. Earthquakes. Tsunamis. Diseases. Where's the human choice there?"

"Natural evil and moral evil are different—"

"Exactly. Different. So where does natural evil come from if not from an evil creator? Your God could have made a universe with free will but WITHOUT earthquakes. WITHOUT cancer. WITHOUT genetic diseases. He CHOSE not to. That makes Him either an idiot or not all-powerful."

Lewis goes quiet for a full minute.

The bartender turns off the music. The silence is heavy.

"Or maybe you don't understand what real freedom costs. Maybe a universe with physical laws that allow for life also allows for earthquakes. Maybe they're connected."

"Maybe. Or maybe you're making excuses for an evil deity."

Neither of us speaks for a while. The bar is almost empty now.

I finally break the silence. "Free will. You keep coming back to that."

Lewis looks at me. "Yes."

"But do we even HAVE it?"

DEBATE 3: DO I HAVE FREE WILL?

"Free will." I laugh. "Explain my life to me then."

Lewis waits.

"Parents die when I'm eight. Car crash. Not their choice. Not my choice. My free will there?"

"Uncle takes me in. Then age thirteen he gets scammed online. Some organization. They take everything. Lose the house. Lose his savings. His free will?"



"Three weeks before my fourteenth birthday, we end up on the streets. Winter. Toronto winter. He kept me warm. His coat. His body heat. He died doing it. Last words: "Be good, Felix. Always be good."

"WHERE is the free will in ANY of that?"

"Those weren't your choices." Lewis says it carefully. "But what you do NOW is."

"Is it?" I tap the bar slowly. "Everything was determined. The moment my parents died, that set everything in motion. Dominoes. Every event leading to the next. Cause and effect. No free will. Just physics."

"You're not a domino."

"Aren't I? I survived three weeks alone on those streets. Fourteen years old. Then the trust fund activated. Small house. Two years of money. So, I taught myself to hack. Trying to find them. The scammers who killed my uncle."

I stop tapping. Look at him.

"Was that free will? No. That was survival instinct. I had no choice."

"You chose HOW to survive. Others in your position chose drugs. Chose crime. Chose to give up. You chose to learn."

"Did they choose? Or did their brain chemistry choose for them? I'm genetically predisposed to recognize patterns. That's genetics. Not choice."

"Having a skill—"

"I'm WIRED this way. My brain sees patterns. Breaks codes. Finds weaknesses. That's not free will. That's neurology. Brain wiring I didn't choose."

"Having a skill doesn't mean you're predetermined to use it for evil."

I lean back. Stare at the ceiling. "Everything I am was shaped by things I didn't control. My genetics. My childhood trauma. My uncle's death. Every choice I've made can be traced back to variables I never chose. And you're telling me I have free will?"

"Yes. Because you're sitting here debating instead of acting. If you were truly predetermined, you'd have already made the choice."

I sit up. "Maybe this doubt is predetermined too. Maybe I was always going to sit here for three hours unable to decide. Maybe it's all just neurons firing in patterns established by trauma and genetics."

"Then why does guilt feel real?"



I stop.

“What?”

“If everything is predetermined, why does guilt exist? Why the internal debate? Guilt only makes sense if you had a real choice. If it was all just neurons you wouldn’t feel responsible.”

I open my mouth. Close it.

“That’s... that’s circular reasoning.”

“No. It’s evidence. The very fact that you feel guilty proves you know you have a choice.”

The bartender is near us now. Wiping down the counter slowly. We ignore him.

“So what? God knew every step I’d take. He knew my parents would die. Knew my uncle would die. Knew I’d end up here tonight. He just... watched?”

“Knowing what you’ll choose isn’t the same as forcing you to choose it.”

“That makes no sense. If He knows the future, then the future is fixed. If it’s fixed, then I can’t change it. No free will.”

“I can know my friend will fail a test because I know him. He procrastinates. He doesn’t study. My knowledge doesn’t MAKE him fail. He still chose not to study.”

I go completely still.

That actually makes sense. I hate that it makes sense.

“But I’m sixteen.” My voice is quieter now. “Two years I’ve hunted them. The people who scammed my uncle. Who killed him. I found them. All of them. They work at a bank. Financial crimes unit wouldn’t touch it because of jurisdictional issues.”

“I have all their information. Bank accounts. Home addresses. Everything. I could destroy them. Financially. Legally. OR—”

I stop.

“Or?” Lewis prompts.

“Or I could rob them. \$2.3 million. Offshore accounts. Disappear. New identity. New life. They’d never know.”

My voice cracks again.



"My money runs out in three months. Justice doesn't pay rent. And I WANT it. I want to hurt them. I want to take everything like they took everything from me. Why do I WANT it so badly if I'm supposed to be good?"

"Because you're human. Because we're all born with fallen nature. We all feel the pull toward darkness. Every single one of us."

"Then I was BORN this way. Born broken. Where's the choice in that?"

"Temptation isn't sin. Feeling the pull isn't the same as giving in. You're not evil for wanting revenge. You're only accountable for what you DO."

"So, I fight this forever? Every day? The rest of my life?"

"No. You choose. Right now. Not forever. Just this moment. And then tomorrow you choose again. That's what free will means. Not one big cosmic choice. A thousand small, daily ones."

"What if I can't? What if I'm too broken?"

"You can. Your uncle knew you could."

"Don't—"

"Your uncle's dying wish. You know what he wanted for you."

"Stop."

"He believed in you."

"THEY KILLED HIM." My voice comes out loud. The bartender looks up. I don't care. "Those people. That organization. They scammed him. Took everything. And I could make them pay. Every single one of them. I have the power. I have the skill. Why shouldn't I?"

Lewis is quiet for a second. Then his voice changes. Sharper.

"Because you're not asking me. You're asking yourself. And you already know the answer."

I freeze.

"Every single argument you've made tonight. Problem of evil. Gnostic Demiurge. Determinism. You're not looking for truth. You're looking for permission."

"That's not—"

"Permission to do what you want without feeling guilty. You're building a philosophy to excuse theft. To excuse revenge. You're not a philosopher. You're just scared."



My hands are shaking. I grip the bar.

"You don't know ANYTHING about me."

"I know you're sixteen. I know you're alone. I know your money runs out in three months. I know you could destroy those people OR report them. And I know you've been sitting at this bar for hours trying to decide."

"And I know the real reason you can't choose." Lewis leans forward. "Because becoming like them would mean your uncle died for nothing."

Something breaks.

"He died keeping me WARM." My voice cracks. I'm shaking harder now. "Winter. Streets. He gave me his coat. His body heat. He DIED so I could survive. And you're telling me I should just... what? Get a minimum wage job? Let them WIN?"

Tears are coming. I can't stop them.

"I spent TWO YEARS finding them. Two years learning everything. Hacking. Coding. Tracing. I KNOW where every dollar went. I could take it all back. Plus interest. Plus damages. \$2.3 million. Enough to never be homeless again. Enough to never be cold again."

I'm crying now. Full tears. Can't hide it.

"And if I don't? If I just send the FBI a tip? I'm homeless in three months. AGAIN. In Winter. AGAIN. And for WHAT? Justice? Justice doesn't keep you alive."

Lewis doesn't say anything. Just looks at me.

"So tell me." My voice is breaking. "Tell me why I should choose the hard thing. Why I should suffer MORE. Give me ONE good reason."

Long silence.

The wind outside is loud now.

Lewis speaks quietly.

"Because if you become like them, they didn't just kill your uncle. They killed you too."

"Your uncle didn't die to keep your body warm. He died to keep your soul alive. Don't prove him wrong."

I can't breathe. Can't think. The bar is spinning.



The bar starts dissolving.

I blink. Look around.

The bartender. The bottles. The chairs. Everything turned to sand.

Grain by grain. Falling apart.

Lewis is fading too. His edges getting blurry.

"The choice is real, Felix." His voice sounds far away. "Everything else was just you trying to decide."

"Wait—"

But he's gone.

The sand reforms. My apartment. My desk. My computer.

Two screens.

Left screen: FBI tip. All my evidence. Names. Account numbers. Send.

Right screen: Bank transfer. \$2.3 million. Offshore accounts. Execute.

The cursor blinks between them.

3:47 AM.

I've been sitting here for three hours.

Elliot and Lewis. I created them both. Gave them the best arguments I could find. Made them debate so I could figure out what to do.

Because I needed to know.

I'm sixteen. My parents are dead. My uncle is dead. The people who killed him work at a bank. I found them. Tracked them for two years.

I have two choices.

Justice or money.



Right or survival.

My uncle's last words keep echoing in my head. I can still hear his voice.

But good doesn't pay rent. Good doesn't keep you warm. Good got my uncle killed.

I look at my reflection in the dark screen.

"Am I what I wished to destroy?"

My hand moves to the keyboard.

I think about everything Lewis said. About choice. About freedom. About being human.

I think about everything Elliot said. About the world being broken. About being predetermined.
About survival.

They were both me.

Both voices in my head.

Both right. Both wrong.

My finger hovers over the keys.

Click.

THREE WEEKS LATER

Email notification: "Congratulations! Junior Programmer position at TechStart Solutions. \$25/hour. Start Monday."

News headline: "International Scam Ring Dismantled – 15 Arrested in Multi-State Operation."

I read them both.

Don't smile.

But something unclenches in my chest.

I open my email. Type a reply. "I accept. Thank you."

Look at the news article. See their faces. Mugshots. All of them.



Uncle's killers.

Justice.

I close my laptop. Stand up. Walk to the window.

The sun is rising.

I'm crying. Didn't realize it until now. Tears running down my face.

"I did it. Are you proud of me?"

THE END



Just in Case



SCHOOL: St. Peter, Peterborough
TEACHER: Robynn McFadden
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Brent Claydon
UNIT: Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington
UNIT PRESIDENT: Bart Scollard

SECONDARY - GRADES 11-12 / POEM
by **Lily-May Borges**

The earthy breath of incense settles into the pews,
clings to my dress,
the one my mother gave me to wear.

Faces around me have great certainty, still and practiced.
They know every line,
every verse,
every response.
When to kneel,
when to stand,
when to answer.

I mouth the words by reading my mother's lips,
turning her wedding rings between my fingers.
I say the prayers aloud,
as I know them,
as if *they* recognize *me* back.

She tells me I will understand when I'm older.
When I listen instead of staring at the saints in stained glass.
Their stories are told in colour and light,
clearer than the pages in my hands.

I sit restless in the pew.
I count the many light fixtures hanging from the ceiling above.
Watch the priest murmur while every head bows.

The flame goes out and takes the shape of guilt.
Spreading,
smokeless.
Something only *I* can see.

It fills the church only in my mind.



I used to believe growing up meant certainty.
That one day faith would sink into me
the way incense settles into fabric.

I have been baptized,
given first communion,
and confirmed.
I remember writing to the bishop, choosing careful words to describe my faith.
Calling God a piece of my puzzle,
when really,
He was the puzzle,
with no picture on the box.

Doubt crept in quietly,
and did not arrive all at once.
It grew as I did.

I looked for God in places He did not answer.
In certainty,
in stories,
in something solid enough to hold.
My hands were *empty*.

Still, I want to believe.

I want the people I have lost to be somewhere warm,
somewhere safe,
somewhere watched over.
I want death to be a door,
not a wall.

So I fold my hands anyway.
In the moments of uncertainty,
I bow my head.
Habit stronger than proof.

I stay,
not because I am certain,
but because hope is quieter than doubt,
but harder to let go of.

I stay
just in case.



Writer's Block



SCHOOL: St. Brother André
TEACHER: Natasha D'Amelio
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Juliette Wey
UNIT: York
UNIT PRESIDENT: Mike Totten

SECONDARY - GRADES 11-12 / PLAY
by **Stephanie Delios**

CHARACTERS in order of appearance

WRITER
ASSISTANT
TONY (MOB BOSS)
RICARDO (MOBSTER #1)
LORENZO (MOBSTER #2)
VINCE (RIVAL BOSS)
ELIZABETH (BRIDE)
MATTHEW (OFFICIANT)
JESSICA (OBJECTOR #1)
VLAD (GROOM)
BRITTANY (OBJECTOR #2)
IRIS (FLOWER GIRL)
BEATRICE (DEATHBED PERSON)
HAZEL (CHILD OF BEATRICE)
YOUNG BEATRICE
HEART
ROBERT (SOLDIER)

& ENSEMBLE

INT. WRITER'S MIND

There is a central writing desk covered in papers. The room is otherwise empty. A writer is at the desk, asleep. They wake up in a panic. There is an impeccably dressed person standing onstage, watching the writer.

WRITER

Where am I? did I fall asleep again?

Turns and jumps upon seeing ASSISTANT entering stage.



ASSISTANT

It's so... empty in here. Where are all your ideas for the script?

WRITER

I couldn't come up with anything *good*. Wait, who are you?

ASSISTANT

I'm your... assistant.

WRITER

I don't remember hiring you. Are you even real?

ASSISTANT

I'm real to you, and your deadline is fast approaching. If you want to win that award, you're going to have to start.

WRITER

I suppose. I'm too exhausted to argue and I can't pick an idea to start with.

ASSISTANT

Why don't you give it your best shot? We can create the perfect script... together.

WRITER begins to type as they speak, ASSISTANT watching carefully.

WRITER

Once upon a time there was a... [*excitedly*] group of mobsters led by a ruthless leader.

*TONY enters stage along with an entourage of mobsters dressed similarly.
They walk onstage in a strut, snapping as they walk.*

WRITER

But they weren't just ordinary mobsters. This is going to be a musical.



ASSISTANT LOOKS PANICKED.

TONY

I'm gonna make them an offer they can't refuse.

RICARDO

Boss, what if they do refuse?

TONY

ARE YOU QUESTIONING ME? This is OUR turf. I'm being generous.

Rival mobsters enter the other side of the stage in the same fashion.

VINCE

Alright, if you wanna make an offer, do it right now.

TONY

I'll give you my offer when I wanna give you my offer. *[Pauses]* Alright, so here's the deal. You get off of our turf and we'll leave you alone. *Capisce?*

VINCE

Are you threatening me?

TONY

I'm making you a deal.

VINCE

No deal. This is *our* turf.

TONY

[To mobsters] Well boys, there's only one thing left to do. Get the supplies, Lorenzo, this is gonna get messy. *[To VINCE]* I challenge you to a dance battle.



Mobsters gasp.

VINCE

You're on.

ASSISTANT

[To WRITER, laughing] Hilarious! Way to get the ideas flowing. Alright, let's get to the real ideas.

WRITER stops writing. Characters are in tableau.

WRITER

[Confused] What do you mean?

ASSISTANT

You're not serious about this, are you?

WRITER

You haven't even seen the big dance number yet! Here we go.

ASSISTANT

Wait—

WRITER begins to type and characters end tableau.

LORENZO runs onstage with a duffel bag, unzipping it.

TONY dramatically pulls out costume props instead of weapons.

VINCE

Whoa, whoa, whoa. You didn't say we could have supplies.

TONY

Guess you came unprepared. Oh well—hit it!



Music begins playing. The main mobster group begins to perform their dance number. ASSISTANT turns to WRITER.

ASSISTANT

What are you trying to teach the audience? That they should solve conflict by challenging their enemies to a dance battle?

WRITER

Why does the audience need to learn something? This is supposed to be entertainment.

ASSISTANT

I don't think the judges are going to understand your vision.

WRITER

The vision is clearly *West Side Story*.

Mobsters freeze in their final pose.

VINCE

Alright, I see what we're working with. *[To other rival mobsters]* Bring in the backup!

TONY

Whoa, whoa, whoa. I didn't say you could have backup.

VINCE

Oh well—Hit it!

Rival mobsters begin their dance number as the ensemble comes in as backup dancers.

Rival mobsters finish their performance in a pose.

TONY

Time to declare the winner. *[Pause]* The winner is... us! Now get off our turf!



VINCE

WHOA, WHOA, WHOA. We think that we won.

Mobsters begin threatening one another, miming arguments.

ASSISTANT snaps and brings WRITER out of their trance.

Characters tableau.

ASSISTANT

This isn't going to work. The content is too flat.

WRITER *[considering]*

Alright, let me think.

WRITER sets up new paper. ASSISTANT ushers people offstage.

Stage is reset.

ASSISTANT

Maybe if I guide you through the process it'll help.

WRITER

Worth a shot.

ASSISTANT

First, we need a good setting.

WRITER

I know! A beautiful wedding!

ASSISTANT *[considering]*

Weddings are filled with dramatic monologues and heartfelt confessions. I think—



WRITER

Slow down! I don't want emotional nonsense. What we need is something *big*.

ASSISTANT

We can find a way to provide your precious entertainment, but it will be dramatic in all the *right* ways.

WRITER

Alright, let me get in the zone.

As the WRITER begins to type/speak, characters fill the stage.

WRITER

Once upon a time there was a beautiful wedding. The bride waited her whole life for the moment she would marry her true love.

MATTHEW

Everyone please settle yourselves before we begin. We are gathered here today—

WRITER stops and characters tableau.

WRITER

I'm about to die of boredom. Let's switch it up.

MATTHEW

Do you, Vlad, take—

JESSICA [*hysterically*]

I object! [*To Elizabeth*] I won't let you marry the love of my life!

VLAD

[*To Elizabeth*] Elizabeth, I swear I've never seen this woman in my life!



JESSICA *[scoffing]*

After all we've been through? I—

BRITTANY

I object too! *[To Elizabeth]* I've *never* liked this guy for you sweetie. He is *such* a red flag!

IRIS

I object too! *[Everyone stops and stares]* I just hate both of them.

ENSEMBLE characters erupt into a chorus of objections.

ASSISTANT *[intervening]*

Okay, very funny, but we still need a genre. We're going with romance, right?

WRITER *[laughing]*

Where's the fun in that? Let's see, what genre... I know!

WRITER begins typing. Characters reset to start of wedding.

ELIZABETH walks down the aisle and stops at altar.

MATTHEW

We are gathered here today—

IRIS pulls out a neon water gun.

IRIS

Everyone put your hands in the air! I've waited for the moment I would take my revenge—

ELIZABETH

[Rolling up her sleeves] I don't think so!

ASSISTANT snaps. WRITER stops writing and characters tableau.



ASSISTANT *[questioning]*

Action comedy?

WRITER

Fine, let me try again.

Characters reset again. ELIZABETH walks down the aisle.

MATTHEW

We are gathered here today—

ELIZABETH begins to cough and clutch her chest.

She looks horrified as she slumps to the floor.

VLAD

No! Please wake up! I've already lost the deposit on the ceremony!

MATTHEW

Is she... dead?

VLAD

[Checks Elizabeth's pulse] I don't think this was an accident. This must have been *[looks to the audience]* murder.

BRITTANY

[Now wearing a blazer and holding a cigarette] Fear not, I'm already on the case.

ASSISTANT snaps again. Writer stops and characters tableau.

ASSISTANT

Murder mystery? I've had it with these genre switches.



WRITER

Wait! I have one more idea.

WRITER begins typing again. Characters reset.

ELIZABETH ends up at the altar.

MATTHEW

Welcome everyone. We are gathered here to—

Characters begin to move like zombies. They move towards ELIZABETH, who gasps. She moves backward and bumps into VLAD. When she turns, she sees VLAD also moving like a zombie. Zombie characters surround ELIZABETH until she is no longer visible. She screams and red streamers are thrown into the air like blood. ASSISTANT stops WRITER.

ASSISTANT

ENOUGH! *Horror?* Seriously? No more genres! No more of this wretched wedding!

WRITER *[disappointed]*

What's wrong with my genres?

ASSISTANT

They're— okay, it doesn't matter. Allow me to remind you what we need to do here. The script needs to be bold, poetic—

WRITER

I've got it!

ASSISTANT

I'm afraid to ask.

WRITER

A person on their deathbed telling their life story to their child as they slowly fade away. It'll be so poetic it'll knock your socks off.



ASSISTANT

That doesn't actually sound half bad.

WRITER types as ASSISTANT smiles.

WRITER

Once upon a time, a woman lay on her deathbed. She decided to use her final moments to tell the story of her life to her dearest child.

ASSISTANT *[genuinely]*

How sweet.

BEATRICE is lounging on a bed/chair covered in a blanket. She coughs.

BEATRICE

[To HAZEL] There's still one more thing I want to share with you.

HAZEL

Whatever it is, you can tell me.

BEATRICE

[Looking wistfully into the distance] The story of my life.

A young girl skips onstage holding a cat.

YOUNG BEATRICE

Oh, I've always wanted a cat of my own. *[To people offstage]* Thank you! I'll name him... Mittens!

A character dressed as an anatomically correct heart dramatically skips and jumps on stage. ASSISTANT taps WRITER on the shoulder and tableau occurs.



ASSISTANT

What is that... *thing*?

WRITER

It's their heart, of course.

ASSISTANT

What do you mean?

WRITER

Think of it as the physical representation of their heart. When Beatrice is happy, the heart jumps for joy, and when she's sad, the heart is hysterical.

ASSISTANT [*nervously*]

Uh... okay. I'll let you run with this for now.

YOUNG BEATRICE and HEART exit. BEATRICE turns to HAZEL.

BEATRICE

That cat was one of the happiest parts of my childhood. [*Pause*] Well, I might as well get on with it.

Characters enter stage dressed in black. Mittens is dead in front of them. Characters are crying.

YOUNG BEATRICE

He was such a fine cat! Why would someone do such a thing—why, why?

HEART enters stage and sees Mittens. HEART begins to cry and falls on the floor, throwing a hysterical tantrum.

ASSISTANT

Is your whole plotline idea to go from happy memory to sad memory?

Characters tableau as WRITER stops typing.



WRITER

Well, yeah. That's how life works. It's poetic.

ASSISTANT

A roller coaster of emotions may not be as poetic as you think.

WRITER *[annoyed]*

Let's take the phrase "dying of a broken heart" literally then.

ASSISTANT

[As WRITER begins typing] Does that mean constant sad memories? Wait, I'm not done asking questions—

BEATRICE dramatically gestures as she mimes talking. YOUNG BEATRICE and ROBERT enter.

YOUNG BEATRICE

Why did you want to meet, Robert? Is everything alright?

ROBERT

I'm afraid not. I know we've had all of summer together, but I'm being deployed in a few days.

YOUNG BEATRICE

I thought we had more time! I don't want to let you go! We were supposed to get married—

HEART enters stage and mimes crying.

ROBERT

I know. You're going to miss me. However, I think it's for the best.

YOUNG BEATRICE

What do you mean *it's for the best*?



ASSISTANT

What is that... *thing*?

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It's their heart, of course.

ASSISTANT

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HEART enters stage and mimes crying.

ROBERT

I know. You're going to miss me. However, I think it's for the best.

YOUNG BEATRICE

What do you mean *it's for the best*?



ROBERT

You know I would enjoy your company, but I don't think my fiancée would—

YOUNG BEATRICE

[As ROBERT continues speaking] What are you talking about?

ROBERT

[Not listening to BEATRICE] —like me seeing someone else very much. I mean, breaking off an engagement we've been a part of for two years would be a bit harsh, no?

YOUNG BEATRICE gasps and slaps ROBERT, then exits. HEART mimes a tantrum.

ASSISTANT

That was... brutal. Is it only going to worse? [WRITER keeps typing] Wait—

BEATRICE continues speaking to HAZEL. HEART is behind bed/chair.

BEATRICE

So much heartache. The loss of my precious cat, my precious love. It tore my soul into a thousand pieces to be scattered—

BEATRICE coughs violently. HAZEL is concerned. HEART freezes and clutches its chest.

HAZEL

No, hang on! You didn't finish the story!

BEATRICE stops coughing and her eyes close. HEART stops moving and falls to the floor. HAZEL cries.

ASSISTANT

Listen, I know I said metaphors were great, but... I take it back?

WRITER

[Reaching insanity] Why do you hate everything I come up with?



ASSISTANT

I don't hate everything. I'm simply nudging you in the right direction. I promise, this is not the right direction.

ASSISTANT places a comforting hand on WRITER's shoulder and takes the pages away from them, looking sympathetic. While making eye contact, ASSISTANT violently crumples the papers and whips them offstage. WRITER snaps to attention.

WRITER

Hey, wait! I need those!

WRITER sprints to fetch the papers.

ASSISTANT

It's like I have to do everything myself. This simply won't do if we want to win.

ASSISTANT looks over their shoulder and throws away more papers. WRITER comes back triumphantly with their papers. ASSISTANT quickly backs away from the desk and smiles.

WRITER

[Sitting down] Perfect. *[Looks around]* Hey, I think some of my papers are missing. That's alright, I know them by heart anyway *[ASSISTANT's eyes widen]*. Onto my big idea!

ASSISTANT

[Playing along] What is it?

WRITER

We turn everything into one big story! Everything is better when you have someone to rely on. Just like I can rely on you, right?

ASSISTANT

Of course.



WRITER

[Getting excited] Great! So, what if the mobsters are in a turf war because Tony wants revenge? Tony is actually the child of Beatrice—the woman on her deathbed. Tony found that Vince—the rival mob boss—is the soldier’s child, and now Tony wants to make them pay. All the while, it’s a love story between Tony and Elizabeth. Tony wants to take Elizabeth away from Vlad, because he finds out that Vlad killed Mittens the cat.

ASSISTANT

The timeline doesn’t even make sense—

WRITER

Anyway, if you’d let me finish. I’m also going to incorporate my metaphor from my third idea—but it’ll be Tony’s heart this time. And it’s still going to be a musical.

ASSISTANT

I don’t know about all this.

WRITER

Alright, time to get cracking.

WRITER begins typing. Characters enter and interact with one another. Mob characters begin to dance onstage first, followed by the wedding party. TONY and VLAD mime an argument. HEART enters stage and mirrors the feelings of TONY, running around in a frenzy. ASSISTANT slides papers off the desk while WRITER is focused, then pushes characters offstage. WRITER stops as characters tableau. WRITER turns around. ASSISTANT freezes, smiling awkwardly. WRITER looks around stage then faces desk again.

WRITER

I swear I had more pages. And where are my characters?

ASSISTANT

Maybe it’s a sign that we should step back?

WRITER

You’re right.



ASSISTANT

I am?

WRITER *[smiling]*

Yeah. Why don't you take a coffee break? I'll get organized and we can continue when you're back.

ASSISTANT *[satisfied]*

That sounds lovely. I deserve a coffee after all.

ASSISTANT exits. WRITER sighs, collecting papers and placing them aside. Characters exit except WRITER.

WRITER

I wish I could just come up with something perfect that would finally satisfy my nagging assistant. This was supposed to be fun. *[Pausing]* Wait. This... was supposed to be *fun*. What am I doing?

ASSISTANT re-enters, holding a mug.

ASSISTANT

Feeling better?

WRITER

Much better.

ASSISTANT

I'm feeling refreshed too, I really needed a break from all the chaos *[laughs]*. Ready to restart?

WRITER

Restart? There has to be something I came up with that you like.

ASSISTANT

There have been good things, but I think we should still start over. Don't you agree?



WRITER

But I love my characters.

ASSISTANT

Your *characters* lack depth.

WRITER

Did you not see how all the ideas became Tony's backstory?

ASSISTANT

The backstory became cliché.

WRITER

That's not nice. We're supposed to be a team.

ASSISTANT

We *are* a team. I'm just helping you realize your true potential.

WRITER

There are *too many things* going on in my head right now.

ASSISTANT

Why don't we just start over—

WRITER [*manically*]

Okay. I'm going to write *every* idea I have so I can see everything clearly. Not just the ones from before—I thought of some new ones too.

ASSISTANT

Are you sure? [*WRITER begins typing.*] Wait—

WRITER is joyously typing. Characters quickly fill the stage, performing scenes.



WRITER

[While typing] Another character there, more backup dancers, and a fight scene with Elizabeth—

ASSISTANT *[angrily]*

EVERYONE STOP!

Characters tableau as WRITER stops typing. WRITER looks up.

ASSISTANT

[to WRITER] This is getting out of *hand*. Everyone out!

ASSISTANT gets rid of characters in creative ways. Stage empties except for WRITER and ASSISTANT. WRITER stands and faces ASSISTANT from the other side of desk.

WRITER

It was you all along. You keep shooting down *all* of my ideas.

ASSISTANT

Because your ideas don't make any sense! I'm doing you a favour—you should be thanking me!

WRITER

Why would I thank you? I've talked myself out of every idea because you've convinced me that they're too crazy, they're not sophisticated, that there's not enough *thematic value* or *metaphors*. Who *cares*! This is supposed to be fun. I didn't become a writer because I wanted to make pretentious shows—I became a writer because I wanted to use imagination and creativity.

ASSISTANT

You're making a mistake. Aren't you afraid of *failure*? *[WRITER flinches.]* If you go with these... ideas... you have right now, you'll *never* win—don't you see that? You *need* me. I can *help*.

WRITER.

No! I told you, I don't care if the script is perfect. I don't even care if I lose. I want to write something I'm proud of. I've been afraid of people like you my whole life. Well, I've had it. I don't care how sleep deprived I am, you can stay, you can go—but I don't have to listen to you anymore.



ASSISTANT

You're going to *fail* without me. *[Realizes WRITER stopped listening, ASSISTANT becomes frantic.]*
Please! Don't do this to your career!

ASSISTANT continues speaking, but no words come out. WRITER sits back down at the desk. When the typewriter is heard, ASSISTANT realizes it's too late. In an angry rage, they stalk offstage. WRITER continues typing as characters fill the stage, performing a ridiculous ensemble scene. Characters freeze in their final tableau as WRITER finishes the story.

WRITER

The end.

WRITER stands up, gathering their papers. They smile and exit.

THE END



The Silence that Affects the Mind



SCHOOL: Assumption College, Brantford
TEACHER: Carissa Engell
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Trevor Hare
Unit: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

SECONDARY - GRADES 11-12 / NONFICTION
by **Brooke-Lynn Caruana**

Content warning: This work contains mature subject matter including descriptions of self-harm and suicide and is not intended for elementary school audiences. Reader discretion is advised.

Everyone says that we are talking about mental health now. Posters in the guidance offices, around school, or social media posts that talk about “reaching out.” But when I was struggling, I learned quickly that it was better to stay silent than to explain the mess happening in my mind. It was easier than explaining why I could not get out of bed some days, why I could not shower, why I could not name what existed. I did not suffer because mental health was being discussed around me—I struggled because, even if it was discussed, I felt like I was not allowed to speak. As a child, I never had the words to explain what I felt, but I knew some mornings that my body felt heavier than others, that happiness felt like it was happening for others. I knew that I worried much more than your normal ten-year-old would, without even knowing what I was worried about. Or, how some adults would come up to me and ask how I was, and I’d just say “fine,” because “fine” was easier since nothing ever came after. The silence I endured protected me from being judged, from being misunderstood. Because now, as a sixteen-year-old who still struggles with mental health, who still wants to be open about it, who still wants to talk to someone about it, those things meant that I was looking for some sort of attention. Being silent was better than making people uncomfortable with a feeling they did not understand.

The first time I ever talked to an adult about my mental health struggles was when I was still young enough to be in elementary school; I remember talking about how I felt for the first time in my life. I remember the look on the adult’s face, like I just committed some sort of felony. She told me there was no way I could feel like this—feel like I was carrying the whole world on my back—because I was so young, but the truth is, it doesn’t matter how young I was, or how old I am now, mental health still affects anyone it can get its grasp on. Mental health is like a demon in disguise, ruining you and tearing you down bit by bit until there is nothing left to tear. This moment taught me that most adults still confuse age with the ability to feel emotions. People say that kids cannot have the ability to feel emotions properly just yet because our brains are still developing, but that is all we have. All we can do is feel emotions, and sometimes, they are not the good kind. People do not realize how much mental health and suicidal ideation can affect teenagers until, one day, they find their kids, their grandkids, their nieces, or nephews, lying motionless, the once lively person they were now having had all the juices sucked out of them by the inner demon that they held so deep for so long without anyone knowing what was happening.



After that first day talking about my feelings, things did not get lighter—they got heavier. I realized then that being honest did not mean people would believe me. All I wanted was someone to tell me that they understood what I was going through, or that they knew how to fix it because how was I supposed to go through this at such a youthful age, let alone by myself? For how long was I supposed to stay silent until I burst like a firework? That is when I started to believe in the saying “Kids should be seen, not heard.” I am not telling you my story because I want pity, and I am not telling it because I think my experience is rare. I am telling it because the silence I have endured is too normalized. Kids my age are taught young that if their pain makes adults uncomfortable, then it is better that they keep it to themselves. We talk about mental health like it is a trend, but when we finally come out about what we really feel—how messy our heads are on the inside—it is ignored. This is not just my story—it is the start of a voice for kids who are struggling who have not found their own voices yet.

As I got older, the solitude did not go away. It followed me into years of asking for help in quiet ways through therapy rooms, suicide conversations, suicide intervention, and the moments when adults had to step in when I could not carry all this alone anymore. The fact that I needed so many safety resources said something. It painted a bigger picture about how this was not just a phase that I was going to grow out of, sometime, eventually. It was the result of my feelings being minimized. Being misunderstood. Surviving should not require so many interventions just to be believed. I never understood why no one believed me, and to be honest, I still do not. I also grew up in an environment where emotions could be unpredictable or were unavailable. When those around you are angry, absent, or unsafe, you learn quickly how to stay quiet and adapt. I grew up quicker than I had to. I learned from an early age, when I should have been playing with Barbies and toys, how to take care of myself and how to make myself invisible.

Some adults that came in and out of my life caused harm instead of safety or pulled me into conflicts that had nothing to do with me. I was only 11 when I first went to the hospital for self-harm and suicide intervention. I was getting bullied severely in school, and I just felt like I hit rock bottom. Sometimes pain was the only thing that could really help me feel like I had some sort of control or bring me down from that high cloud. Sometimes it was the only thing that grounded me. No one understood though. I was even asked that day at the hospital if I was just doing it for attention, but I was not. Some part of me felt like I was because I just wanted someone to ask me if I was okay, for someone to finally notice me, but the real reason was because it felt like the only comfort I had in the world, the only thing that didn’t judge me when my brain was too loud.

The self-harm, the suicidal thoughts, did not stop there. I wish they did; I had a happy conclusion but sometimes we do not get what we wish for. Grades seven and eight were the worst. A couple of times every other week I would get random messages from this one girl in my class telling me I was worthless, that I was too big, that I took up too much space, and that I should just kill myself. I thought about it a lot and at one point I even tried in the middle of the night during the winter. I remember it so vividly that sometimes it is hard to get out of my head. I was on call with the suicide hotline, and they ended up calling the police, which was not the first time they showed up at my house for this type of incident. Sometimes I wish I tried harder that night to kill myself, but then I would not



be here, typing out my stories for strangers who probably think that I’m oversharing. And I wouldn’t be here to show that I’m worth more than just how other people may see me. What hurt me the most though was not that I needed the help—it was that I reached a breaking point before anyone even listened, because no one thinks twice about a child being upset. I could tell you so much more that has happened, but I would be typing until I reach my fifties. All the moments in my life, though, have taught me that children’s pain is often taken seriously when it starts to become visible, too loud, or too hard to ignore. Until then, kids are expected to stay quiet, learn to adapt, and to survive without disrupting the adults around them.

Living like this changes you. I would not wish this on my worst enemy. You stop trusting your own emotions and you even start to question whether what you are going through is real or just an inconvenience. I spent years trying to figure out if I was exaggerating, if I was being dramatic, if I was the problem—because that is what happens when someone does not validate your emotions from an early age. Silence is rewarded and honesty is punished, so you just learn instinctively how to hide yourself.

This is not about being fragmented; it is about surviving things that were never for me to carry. I survived the silence. I survived the disbelief. I survived being told I did not know my own capabilities. And I am still here. Mental health does not wait for adulthood. It does not matter what age, what grade, or whether someone looks “fine.” It exists quietly around us, in classrooms, in locked bedrooms, at dinner tables. If we genuinely want to talk about mental health, then collectively we need to start listening to the kids that say they are not okay, no matter the circumstances. Being young does not make pain imaginary or any less valid than an adult’s pain. I was never too young to feel this way. I was extremely young to carry it alone.



Prix Jeunes Écrivains 2026





Ma vie secrète de bonhomme de neige



SCHOOL: St. Joseph

TEACHER: Natacha Couillard

SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Natacha Couillard

UNIT: Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington

UNIT PRESIDENT: Bart Scollard

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 1-2 / SHORT STORY

by **Annabelle Palango**

Un matin, je me lève et je suis un bonhomme de neige. Je suis dans la cour d'école. J'ai une carotte orange pour mon nez, des boutons, des gants, des branches et des cache-oreilles. Dans la récréation à l'école, je vois des enfants qui font du patinage et du ski. Je vois un husky qui fait du toboggan.

Il fait très froid. Je mets un foulard autour de mon cou. Il neige des gros flocons... Wouuuh ! Le vent souffle. Une enfant sort dehors et elle me sourit.

Je suis heureuse. « Bouh ! » « Aaah ! Qui est là ? » « Bonjour », dit mon amie Payton. « Ah c'est toi. Est-ce que tu veux faire de la planche à neige avec moi ? » dit-elle. « Oui merci », ai-je répondu. « Je mets ma tuque et je vais faire de la planche à neige. » Waouh ! À la fin de la journée, je vais dans mon igloo et je m'endors.

La Fin



Février



SCHOOL: St. Marguerite d'Youville
TEACHER: Fanny Hung
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Anthony Biggs
UNIT: Halton Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Tara Hambly

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 1-2 / POEM
by **John Haddad**

Fleurs, qu'elles sont belles !

Écrire un message gentil

Valentin, tu es beau

Reviens, mon amie

Imagine des bonbons roses

Eh bien, comment ça va ?

Rose et rouge sont partout



Le Nouvel An lunaire



SCHOOL: St. Marguerite d'Youville
TEACHER: Fanny Hung
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Anthony Biggs
UNIT: Halton Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Tara Hambly

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 1-2 / NONFICTION
by **Lina Jiang-Kreidi**

Cette année, le Nouvel An lunaire aura lieu le 17 février. C'est l'année du cheval de feu. Les gens mangent du poisson, des raviolis et des agrumes chinois. Les couleurs sont rouges et dorées.

Les enfants reçoivent des petites enveloppes rouges remplies d'argent.

Il y a aussi beaucoup de feux d'artifice.

Joyeux Nouvel An lunaire !



La tornade terrifiante



SCHOOL: Madonna della Libera
TEACHER: Krystina Pucci
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Daniel Gouthro
UNIT: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 3-4 / SHORT STORY
by **Alexandra Snisar**

C'est une mauvaise journée. Il pleut et les nuages sont là. Alex n'aime pas ce temps. Le temps passe pendant qu'Alex regarde la télé. Quand elle regarde la télé, la météo est diffusée et le téléphone sonne très fort. La télé annonce : « IL Y A UNE TORNADO ! ON VOUS CONSEILLE DE TROUVER UN ENDROIT SAUF !!! » Alex appelle Leo et prend son chien Violet et ils courent de l'autre côté de la rue pour aller à la maison de son amie Autumn, car Alex n'a pas de sous-sol mais Autumn a un sous-sol. Elle dit à Autumn de se cacher mais Alex a laissé la porte de chez elle ouverte, et Violet est retourné chez elle sous la pluie. Alex a dû courir chez elle pour chercher Violet, mais la tornade est au coin de la rue et Alex tombe. Autumn a vu qu'Alex est tombée et elle aide à emmener Violet et Leo au sous-sol. Quand ils arrivent au sous-sol, Autumn cherche la trousse de secours parce qu'Alex a une grosse blessure au genou. Elle met un pansement sur sa blessure et Alex se sent mieux. Tous les trois s'assoient en cercle avec Violet au centre du sous-sol. La tornade était de force EF3 et faisait deux miles de longueur. C'est la plus longue tornade de l'histoire.



Nature



SCHOOL: Holy Rosary
TEACHER: Rachel Schultz
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Kari Cilibanov
UNIT: Waterloo
UNIT PRESIDENT: David Geraghty

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 3-4 / POEM
by **Nathan Tulusso**

Nature
Brise du matin
Feuille qui danse sur la pierre
Silence léger.

Les animaux
Le chant d'un oiseau
Elle répond à ses amis
Sous la forme d'une belle mélodie.



Mon autobiographie



SCHOOL: Madonna della Libera
TEACHER: : Krystina Pucci
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Daniel Gouthro
UNIT: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 3-4 / NONFICTION
by **Jackson Taylor**

Jackson Taylor est né le 14 octobre 2016. Il est un très bon gardien de but. Il joue pour les Saints de Brantford depuis qu'il a trois ans. Jackson aime la musique rock. Il n'aime pas marcher car quand Jackson marche sur ses pieds, ça lui fait mal. Jackson aime un petit peu le football. Il joue avec ses amis pendant la récré. Parfois quand Jackson est à l'école, il pense que c'est très ennuyant, surtout les études sociales. Son sujet préféré à l'école, c'est l'éducation physique et sportive car il aime bien partir au gymnase et aime la majorité des sports. Dans le futur, Jackson veut être un gardien de but dans la LNH pour les Toronto Maple Leafs.



Sarina dans la Rome antique



SCHOOL: Holy Rosary
TEACHER: Hilde Acx
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Kari Cilibanov
UNIT: Waterloo
UNIT PRESIDENT: David Geraghty

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 5-6 / SHORT STORY
by **Gabriella Escobar**

Bonjour ! Je m'appelle Sarina. Aujourd'hui, je vais raconter ma vie dans la Rome antique. Rome est très fascinante ! Je vais vous faire visiter mon chemin à travers la Rome antique. Alors qu'attends-tu ? Viens ! Suis-moi ! Allons-y !

CHAPITRE 1 – Les vêtements et l'éducation

Bonjour ! Je m'appelle Sarina, et j'ai 10 ans. Maintenant, je m'habille et je mets mes vêtements. Ma famille est très riche, donc je porte mon collier et ma robe avec les couleurs rouge, vert et bleu. Ma famille partage notre argent avec d'autres familles qui en ont besoin. Ne trouvez-vous pas que c'est vraiment gentil ?

Nous nous préparons pour aller à l'école. Comme je vous l'ai dit, ma famille est très riche, donc on obtient plus de choses. Parce qu'on est riche, on va à l'école bilingue qui se spécialise en latin, grammaire et mathématiques. Malheureusement, les familles qui ont peu d'argent, leurs enfants ne vont pas à l'école. Néanmoins, les garçons peuvent partir à l'école même si leurs familles n'ont pas les moyens, mais les filles doivent rester à la maison parce que leurs familles ne gagnent pas assez. N'est-ce pas injuste ? Au moins, je peux encore aller à l'école. Cependant, je me sens toujours mal pour les filles qui doivent rester à la maison et faire les tâches quotidiennes. Passons à autre chose...

CHAPITRE 2 – Le transport, les maisons et la nourriture

Bonjour à nouveau ! Maintenant, je suis à l'école sur un chariot. L'école était plutôt bien. Nous faisons surtout des mathématiques. Les autres familles qui ont peu de moyens, on les voit marcher. Oh ! Ma maman dit que les personnes qui ne gagnent pas plus d'argent n'ont pas de chariots et doivent marcher. Je trouve que c'est encore injuste !

De toute façon, depuis ce chariot, je cherche ma maison. Oh ! Regarde ! Je vois ma maison maintenant ! Ma famille a une maison et appelle notre maison « une domus ». On possède une grande maison et les personnes qui ont moins d'argent ont une domus moins confortable que la nôtre. Dans ma maison, je suis fortunée d'avoir plus de nourriture.



Présentement je suis dans ma maison et je mange du poisson, des légumes, et du pain. Ces aliments sont tellement bons ! Passons à autre chose...

CHAPITRE 3 – Les croyances

Salut encore ! J’ai fini mon petit déjeuner. Aujourd’hui c’est un jour spécial. Ma famille et moi, on s’apprête à aller à un festival pour « Clementia », la déesse du pardon et de la miséricorde. On a apporté des cadeaux à Clementia pour la remercier. Clementia est ma préférée et j’adore le pardon de la miséricorde.

La Fin



Chez moi



SCHOOL: St. John the Baptist
TEACHER: Elisa Meo
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Tom Fuerth
UNIT: Windsor-Essex Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Adriana Palamides

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 5-6 / POEM
by **Magdalena Lesic**

Chez moi, nous ne nous battons pas
Nous ne nous haïssons pas,
On se soutient l'un et l'autre.
Chez moi

Chez moi, nous jouons ensemble,
Nous jouons un franc-jeu.
Nous nous amusons,
Chez moi

Chez moi, quand je suis triste,
Les membres de ma famille
m'aident et offrent leur soutien,
Chez moi

Chez moi, tout le monde est plein de bonheur,
Nous essayons de traiter l'un et l'autre avec gentillesse
Nous pensons à nos mots,
Chez moi

J'ai beaucoup de différentes maisons,
L'église,
Ma maison,
Mon école,
Mais les choses qui rendent ces places une maison,
est la présence de Jésus,
La gentillesse et le soutien que ma famille me donne,
Chez moi



Rivalité entre des frères et des sœurs



SCHOOL: Holy Rosary
TEACHER: Hilde Acx
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Kari Cilibanov
UNIT: Waterloo
UNIT PRESIDENT: David Geraghty

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 5-6 / PLAY
by **Aili Harris**

Scène un La maison d'Amélie et Chloé

Narrateur : Cette histoire commence à la maison d'Amélie et Chloé. Elles viennent tout juste de découvrir qu'elles déménagent, et elles se battent pour qui va obtenir la plus grande chambre.

Amélie : Je vais obtenir une chambre plus grande parce que je suis plus jeune de quatre minutes !

Chloé : Non, je vais obtenir une chambre plus grande parce que j'ai besoin de beaucoup d'espace pour faire les choses.

Amélie : Je sais ! On peut demander à Maman !

Chloé : Bonne idée !

Narrateur : Les filles descendent les escaliers et entendent leur maman et leur frère dans la cuisine.

Maman : Pierre, est-ce que tu vas faire tes tâches ?

Pierre : Mmm, je pense que... non.

Maman : D'accord. Mais Pierre, tu ne peux pas aller dehors jusqu'à ce que tes tâches soient finies !

Pierre : Mais Maman...

Maman : Fini !

Narrateur : Pierre va dans sa chambre. Il est très fâché. Quand Pierre disparaît, les filles entrent dans la cuisine.

Chloé : Maman...



Maman : Chloé, Amélie, est-ce que vous avez fini vos tâches ?

Amélie : Non, pas exactement, mais...

Maman : Non, je ne veux rien entendre. Après que vous avez fini vos tâches, tu peux me poser ta question.

Narrateur : Amélie et Chloé quittent la cuisine. Elles sont très fâchées. À l'extérieur de la cuisine, elles voient Pierre.

Pierre : Je peux vous aider.

Chloé : Comment ?

Pierre : Vous voulez savoir qui va obtenir la plus grande chambre dans notre nouvelle maison, non ?

Amélie : Oui, mais...

Pierre : D'accord. Je vous donne un défi en 3 étapes pour voir qui va gagner la plus grande chambre.

Chloé : D'accord.

Amélie : C'est parti.

Scène deux La Buanderie

Narrateur : Pierre monte les escaliers ainsi que Chloé et Amélie qui suivent. Pierre entre dans la buanderie.

Pierre : Ok, le premier défi est : qui peut plier le plus de mes vêtements propres ?

Narrateur : Chloé et Amélie commencent à plier les vêtements immédiatement. Les deux essayent de plier plus de vêtements l'une que l'autre. Un peu plus tard, il y a trois vêtements qui restent à plier.

Pierre : Trois vêtements, deux vêtements, un vêtement... D'accord,, maintenant qui a plié le plus de vêtements ? Chloé, tu as plié beaucoup de vêtements. Amélie, tu en as plié un peu moins, mais mes vêtements que tu as pliés sont impeccables, donc Amélie gagne le premier défi !

Chloé : Ça, ce n'est pas juste !



Pierre : Chloé, tu peux toujours gagner le prochain défi.

Chloé : Ouah.

Pierre : Maintenant, qui peut ranger plus de vêtements pliés et ensuite les placer dans ma penderie ?

Narrateur : Les filles se précipitent à la penderie avec les vêtements de Pierre. En un rien de temps, tous les vêtements sont dans la penderie de Pierre.

Amélie : Donc qui gagne ?

Pierre : Ça, ce n'est pas un défi.

Chloé : Pierre !

Pierre : Désolé, désolé.

Scène trois La chambre de Pierre

Pierre : Le deuxième défi est... Vous voyez mon lit ?

Amélie : Ton lit défait ?

Pierre : Oui, Amélie. Le deuxième défi est : qui peut faire mon lit le plus proprement ? Chloé, tu fais le côté gauche, Amélie tu fais le côté droit.

Narrateur : Amélie et Chloé se mettent au travail. Amélie tape les oreillers, Chloé lisse les couvertures. Les filles sont très rapides, en cinq minutes, le lit a été fait.

Amélie : Qui gagne ?

Pierre : Mmm... Bon Amélie, les couvertures de ton côté sont un peu fripées. Mais Chloé, ton côté est parfait ! Chloé, tu as gagné !

Chloé : Waouh !

Amélie : Pff...

Pierre : Il y a un défi de plus.



Chloé : Oui ? Pierre ?

Pierre : Hein ?

Amélie : Le défi ? Qu'est-ce que c'est ?

Pierre : Ah ! Le défi ! Oui, le troisième défi est : vous devez ranger ma chambre !

Chloé & Amélie : Beurk !!!!!!!

Pierre : Amélie, à gauche. Chloé, à droite.

Chloé : Pouah, Pierre, ça c'est ton sous-vêtement !

Amélie : Pierre, ce sandwich est moisi !

Narrateur : Une heure après (et beaucoup plus de choses dégoûtantes après), la chambre de Pierre est propre et rangée.

Amélie : Je vais être malade.

Pierre : Ok, la gagnante est...

Narrateur : Mais soudainement, leur maman entre dans la chambre.

Maman : Pierre, ta chambre est très propre. Et tes tâches sont toutes finies. Pierre, je suis impressionnée. Chloé, Amélie, vos tâches ne sont pas finies. Vos chambres sont en catastrophe ! Pierre, en guise de récompense, dans notre nouvelle maison, tu peux obtenir une chambre plus grande !

Amélie : Mais Maman !

Maman : Non, les filles ! Ça, c'est une leçon. Beaucoup de choses viennent avec un prix. Soyez plus comme Pierre si vous voulez être récompensées.

Narrateur : Maman quitte la chambre, Pierre suit.

Chloé : Ça n'est pas juste.

Amélie : Qu'est-ce qu'on va faire maintenant ?

Chloé : On peut faire nos tâches ?

Chloé & Amélie : Non !



Mon texte d'opinion



SCHOOL: St. Joseph

TEACHER: Alex Drever

SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Natacha Couillard

UNIT: Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington

UNIT PRESIDENT: Bart Scollard

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 5-6 / NONFICTION

by **Grace Marie Mejia**

À mon avis, je pense que c'est important que les enfants fassent des tâches ménagères. Premièrement, tu ne vas pas toujours avoir tes parents pour faire ton lit. Par exemple, si tu vas à l'université, tu dois être responsable de faire toutes tes tâches ménagères. Deuxièmement, ça te prépare dans le futur pour le travail. Par exemple, si tu travailles dans un restaurant, tu vas probablement devoir, peut-être, sortir les poubelles. Je pense que c'est important d'être responsable. Par exemple, si tu ne commences pas à être responsable dès un jeune âge, c'est certainement probable que tu ne seras pas responsable quand tu seras plus âgé. Pour conclure, c'était toutes mes raisons pour lesquelles c'est important que les enfants fassent des tâches ménagères.



Ma vie de lutin



SCHOOL: St. Peter, Brantford
TEACHER: Helen Luis
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Josh Halsey
UNIT: Brant Haldimand Norfolk
UNIT PRESIDENT: Carlo Fortino

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 7-8 / SHORT STORY
by **Veronika Shramko**

Bonjour ! Je suis un des lutins du Père Noël. Mon nom est Candy Cane. Eh oui, j'aime les cannes de Noël. Ha ha ha ! Chaque jour, je me lève à huit heures et demie du matin, et je me prépare pour la journée. Pour commencer ma journée, je danse avec ma sœur et ma mère. Elles habitent avec moi au pôle Nord, et on s'amuse beaucoup ensemble. Ensuite, je mange mon petit déjeuner et je porte mon uniforme. Je porte un chandail rouge avec une jupe en jean. C'est très confortable. Par la suite, je marche dans l'atelier enchanté et je fabrique des jouets. Je suis importante dans mon métier, donc j'habite proche de mon travail. Pendant ma pause, je mange des biscuits et des pâtisseries avec Ivy. Elle est mon amie, et nous faisons du ski chaque fin de semaine. La salle de déjeuner est très belle, parce que j'aime beaucoup les décorations de Noël et les antiquités. Ensuite, je nourris les rennes et je me prépare pour rentrer chez moi.

Ivy et moi, nous regardons un film et en même temps nous parlons de notre travail. C'est comme ça que je passe mes journées.



L'amitié pour toujours



SCHOOL: Holy Rosary
TEACHER: James Dover
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Kari Cilibanov
UNIT: Waterloo
UNIT PRESIDENT: David Geraghty

ELEMENTARY - GRADES 7-8 / POEM
by **Amelia Greatrex**

Qu'est-ce que c'est l'amitié exactement ?
L'amitié est quelque chose que nous apprenons à garder imprécis.
C'est dur quelques fois d'être un ami,
Quelques amitiés sont parfois pour toujours, et d'autres amitiés prennent fin.

Chaque amitié n'est pas parfaite,
Les amitiés sont dures, mais c'est la tienne et la mienne.
L'amitié fleurit dans la joie et la confiance,
L'amitié nous apprend à nous faire petit.

Malgré les épreuves qu'on traverse, petites ou grandes,
Un ami est toujours là pour nous rattraper si nous tombons.
Un ami proche, un ami d'enfance, un meilleur ami et un ami pour toujours,
L'amitié peut être toutes ces choses, du début à la fin.

Ces souvenirs, ainsi que tous les petits moments qu'on passe ensemble,
sont le type de souvenirs qui reste avec nous.
Il s'agit de grandir, changer et s'étendre, jamais de se séparer.
Parce que l'amitié vit toujours dans nos cœurs.



Le cœur qui se souvenait



SCHOOL: St. Hilary
TEACHER: Dasantila Dajti
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Caterina Cristiani
UNIT: Dufferin-Peel Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Lori Austin

SECONDARY - GRADES 7-8 / PLAY
by **Thandiwe Msipha, Sophia Ruiz Garcia,
Zakrina Nundu and Amélia Silva Sith**

Personnages :

Théo Dupont (personnage principal).

Jean Dupont (frère jumeau de Théo, placé en adoption à la naissance).

Marie Dupont (mère de Théo).

Dr. Simon (chirurgien cardiaque de Théo).

Infirmière Camille (infirmière de Théo).

Scène 1 : Chambre d'hôpital (avant l'opération)

(Dans une chambre d'hôpital, Théo est allongé dans son lit, pendant qu'il attend l'arrivée du médecin. Marie est assise à côté de lui, chapelet à la main.)

Marie :

J'ai prié pour toi toute la matinée.

Théo :

Maman, crois-tu que Dieu écoute davantage les gens quand ils sont malades ?

Marie :

Je pense qu'il écoute plus quand les gens ont peur.

(Le docteur Simon entre dans la pièce.)



Dr. Simon :

Théo, nous avons trouvé un donneur de cœur.

(Théo respire profondément.)

Théo :

Donc quelqu'un d'autre n'a pas survécu.

Dr. Simon :

Quelqu'un a choisi de vous donner la vie.

(Marie tient la main de Théo.)

Théo (silencieusement) :

Alors je le considérerai comme un cadeau.

Dr. Simon :

C'est le moment. Êtes-vous prêt pour l'opération ?

Théo :

Oui.

(Le lit médical de Théo est amené dans la salle d'opération.)

(Les lumières s'estompent.)

Scène 2 : Rétablissement

(La lumière se rallume. Théo se réveille après l'opération. L'infirmière Camille surveille ses signes vitaux.)

(Théo gémit bruyamment en se réveillant lentement.)

Infirmière Camille :

Content de vous voir réveillé Théo, comment vous sentez-vous ?

Théo :

J'ai une drôle de sensation, comme si mon cœur ne m'appartenait plus... Mais à part ça, je me sens plutôt bien.

Infirmière Camille :

Eh bien... Peut-être que votre cœur se souvient de l'amour.

(Théo a l'air perplexe mais curieux.)



Scène 3 : Les changements

(Deux heures plus tard. Théo se tient seul, fixant la fenêtre de sa chambre d'hôpital.)

(Le docteur Simon entre et surprend Théo.)

Dr. Simon :

Théo, je suis content que tout se soit bien passé pour vous. Voulez-vous quelque chose à boire ?

Théo :

Non merci, ça va, mais j'ai l'impression d'être une autre personne. Je développe plein de nouveaux traits de caractère que je n'avais jamais eus auparavant. Par exemple, j'ai soudainement envie de brocolis alors que je n'ai jamais aimé ça.

Dr. Simon :

Vous somnolez probablement à cause de l'anesthésie. C'est peut-être un peu étrange au début, mais vous vous sentirez mieux d'ici quelques heures.

(Le docteur Simon commence à se diriger vers la porte.)

Théo :

Attendez, avant de partir, je veux vous demander quelque chose.

Dr. Simon :

D'accord, quelle est votre question ?

Théo :

Un cœur, peut-il transporter plus que du sang ?

Dr. Simon (d'un ton menaçant) :

Un cœur, peut-il transporter plus que du sang ?

Théo (marmonnant pour lui-même) :

Pourquoi tout le monde me dit ça ?

(Théo hoche la tête, troublé.)

(Le docteur Simon quitte la pièce.)



Scène 4 : La révélation

(Théo est assis seul. Il tient un dossier médical.)

Théo :

Jean Dupont

Âge : 19 ans

Même anniversaire que moi.

(L'esprit de Jean apparaît derrière Théo et lui tape dans le dos.)

Jean :

Tu te rends compte maintenant, n'est-ce pas ?

Théo :

J'ai ton cœur et désormais je le sais.

(Jean disparaît.)

(Théo se précipite à la recherche de sa mère.)

Scène 5 : La Vérité (chapelle de l'Hôpital)

(Une petite chapelle. Des bougies vacillent. Marie est agenouillée seule. Théo entre.)

Théo :

Maman... Pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas dit que j'avais un jumeau ?

(Marie se fige.)

Marie :

Parce que je ne savais pas comment prononcer son nom sans m'effondrer.

Théo (déçu) :

Tu le savais.

(Théo marque une pause.)

Marie :

J'avais 19 ans.

On m'a dit que je ne pouvais pas élever deux enfants.

On m'a dit que l'un de vous aurait une vie meilleure si je le laissais partir.



Théo :

Vous l'avez donc abandonné.

Marie (pleure) :

J'ai signé les papiers avant de comprendre ce que ça signifiait « pour toujours ».
Chaque soir, je priais Dieu de le protéger, car j'en étais incapable.

Théo :

Il est revenu vers moi...
Mais pas comme on l'avait imaginé.

Marie (doucement) :

Dieu ne me l'a pas enlevé.
Il lui a offert une vie meilleure.

Scène 6 : Acceptation

(Jean réapparaît.)

(Cinquante minutes plus tard, Jean réapparaît.)

Théo :

Pourquoi as-tu fait ça ? Pourquoi as-tu dû mourir, pour moi ?

Jean :

Pour que tu puisses vivre, parce que c'est ce que fait l'amour, et c'est ce que les gens font pour ceux qu'ils aiment.

L'amour se donne de lui-même.

Théo :

Alors ma vie ne m'appartient plus vraiment.

Jean :

Ça n'a jamais été le cas.

Théo :

Merci pour tout.



Jean :

De rien... C'est ce que font les frères.

(Jean disparaît dans la lumière.)

Scène 7 :

(Théo se tourne vers le public.)

Théo :

Vous voyez, le cœur n'est pas qu'un organe, il renferme bien plus que cela, il renferme l'amour. J'aime tellement mon frère, mais je sais qu'il est désormais dans un monde meilleur. Amen.

(Rideau fermé.)

La Fin



L'intelligence artificielle est très mauvaise pour la terre



SCHOOL: Pope John Paul II
TEACHER: Peter Labine
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Julia Mullins
UNIT: Thunder Bay Elementary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Michelle Pero

SECONDARY - GRADES 7-8 / NONFICTION
by **Ella Opaski**

L'IA est un problème environnemental majeur. Certes, l'IA peut nous aider à faire nos devoirs, à travailler, à envoyer un SMS, etc., mais cela ne vaut pas la peine d'utiliser de l'eau, de consommer des quantités massives d'électricité et d'utiliser des centres de données qui produisent une grande quantité de déchets électriques contenant des produits chimiques dangereux.

Tout d'abord, les machines IA deviennent très chaudes et ne peuvent pas produire si elles ne sont pas refroidies. En les refroidissant, elles utilisent d'énormes quantités d'eau, des centaines de milliers de litres d'eau chaque jour, de l'eau fraîche et propre, ce qui peut certainement provoquer des sécheresses. En particulier dans les régions sujettes à la sécheresse comme l'Afrique de l'Est, l'Afrique australe, l'Inde et bien d'autres encore qui ont besoin d'eau fraîche pour boire plutôt que pour des machines. En outre, l'IA nécessite d'énormes quantités d'électricité qui sont toujours produites par des combustibles fossiles. Une seule recherche basée sur l'intelligence artificielle consomme jusqu'à cinq fois plus d'électricité qu'un moteur de recherche traditionnel. Enfin, les centres de données produisent une grande quantité de déchets électriques qui peuvent contenir des produits chimiques nocifs comme le plomb et le mercure qui peuvent causer des dommages à votre corps et votre cerveau, entraînant des lésions cérébrales et des pertes de mémoire, des problèmes d'audition, des crises d'épilepsie et des difficultés de concentration. Nous devons donc essayer d'arrêter d'utiliser l'intelligence artificielle, car elle est l'une des causes du changement climatique et nous sommes la première génération à voir le changement climatique s'aggraver et la dernière génération à pouvoir contribuer à y mettre un terme.



Dans une autre vie, ça aurait été toi



SCHOOL: St. Robert
TEACHER: Tania Battaglia
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Claudia Roccari
UNIT: York
UNIT PRESIDENT: Mike Totten

SECONDARY - GRADES 9-10 / SHORT STORY
by **Hannah Peng**

Dans une autre vie, ça aurait été toi.

Je l'écris à travers un voile qui déforme l'encre. La première larme vient de tomber. C'est un coup de pistolet de départ.

Je m'appelle Élara. Je ne suis pas exploratrice. Je suis une fugitive. Et toi, Léo, tu es le pays dont je suis à jamais exilée.

Avant de te montrer les décombres, il faut comprendre les lois de mon naufrage. Ce ne sont pas des métaphores. C'est la physique de ma douleur.

Les Lois de ma Chute :

La Loi de la Variable Unique. Chaque nouvel univers diffère du précédent par un seul changement factuel. Un mot prononcé au lieu d'être avalé. Un train pris au lieu d'un autre. Un seul caillou, et la rivière entière de notre vie change de cours.

La Loi de l'Oubli Universel. Tout le monde oublie. Sauf moi. Leurs mémoires se réécrivent pour s'aligner sur la nouvelle variable. Pour Léo, l'ancien monde n'a jamais existé. Il ne se souvient pas de vies précédentes. Il ne sent pas le fantôme de mes lèvres d'un autre univers. Je suis la seule archiviste d'un amour qui n'a jamais été complet nulle part.

La Loi de la Porte Scellée. Je ne peux jamais revenir en arrière. Une fois tombée, la porte est scellée. Je ne peux que me souvenir, mais je ne peux plus toucher. Je collectionne des boules à neige que je ne peux plus secouer.

La Loi du Point de Rupture. Je ne choisis pas de sauter. Je suis brisée jusqu'à sauter. Quand la douleur dans un univers dépasse ce que mon corps peut contenir, je me fracture. Le monde se fracture avec moi.

L'Unique Constante. À travers tous les mondes, une chose ne change jamais : mon amour pour Léo, et ma peur. Ils dansent, je suis leur salle de bal.



Je tombe quand mon cœur ne peut plus.

CARNET #1 : UNIVERS #1 – L'ORIGINEL (Le Silence)

15 septembre, Paris. 23h23.

Ça arrive. Demain, tu épouseras Claire.

Dans ce monde originel, la variable est une absence. Mon silence.

Je t'aime depuis que je sais ce que ce mot veut dire. À six ans, quand tu as partagé ton pain au chocolat. À seize ans dans ta chambre, l'air épais de pluie et d'ambition. À vingt-quatre ans, quand tu as sangloté dans mes bras et que je t'ai tenu ensemble, parce que c'était la seule façon de me tenir moi-même.

Jamais. Un mot.

J'ai construit une forteresse d'amitié. Je suis devenue ta meilleure amie, ta confidente. Celle qui se nourrit de miettes et appelle cela un festin.

Ce soir, à ton enterrement de vie de garçon, ton front contre le mien : « Tu es mon histoire, Él. Ma constante. »

J'ai mordu ma langue si fort que j'ai goûté le sang. Je ne suis pas ta constante. Je suis ton fantôme.

La douleur est un trou noir. Les bords de la pièce fondent. La photo de nous sur mon bureau clignote.

Un sanglot se déchire en moi. Je pleure tellement que je ne vois plus la page. Masse critique.

Dans une autre vie, ça aurait été toi, Léo.

Dans celle-ci, c'est elle.

Et je... tombe...

CARNET #16 : UNIVERS #16 – L'AVEU

(Pas de date. Le papier est différent.)

Variable : À 18 ans, sur ton perron, j'ai dit : « Je suis amoureuse de toi. »

Ta réponse : « Je sais. Je m'y attendais. »



Cela fait dix ans. Nous vivons dans une chambre de bonne avec des souris dans les murs. Nous sommes pauvres, ridicules, heureux. Tu m'écris des poèmes. Je pleure en les lisant.

Tu as acheté une bague, un fin jonc d'argent gravé d'un vers de Rimbaud. « C'est nous », as-tu dit sur le Pont des Arts. « Retrouvés, Éternels. »

Mais ma lâcheté a changé de forme : l'entêtement. La peur du prochain changement.

Une offre d'emploi pour toi. À Montréal, tu veux y aller ensemble. « Partons ! Une aventure ! » Tes yeux brillent du feu que j'ai allumé.

Et moi, je regarde notre vie minuscule. La fissure au plafond nommée « Phillippe ». La théière jaune. Le fantôme de nos dix ans dans chaque ébréchure.

Une peur glacée me tord les entrailles. Et si on perd tout ça ? Et si la prochaine version de nous est moins parfaite ?

« Je ne peux pas », je murmure. « Mon travail... »

La lumière dans tes yeux se brise. Tu hoches la tête. Le canapé devient un gouffre.

Tu pars dans une semaine. Seul.

Je reste à la fenêtre. La bague est lourde. Je pleure de honte. Pas parce que tu pars. Parce que j'ai trop peur de te suivre. Encore.

CARNET #47 : UNIVERS #47 – L'ÉLOIGNEMENT

(La page est déchirée par endroits.)

Il est parti. Je suis restée.

La distance est un désert qui se cartographie : textos quotidiens, puis un jour sur deux, puis des appels hebdomadaires où nos voix sonnent étrangères.

Il revient plus tôt. Il se tient dans notre appartement comme un visiteur.

« Nous ne voulons pas la même chose, Élara. » Mon nom complet. Une porte qui claque.

« Tu veux un musée. Je voulais un voyage. »

Il prend ses affaires. Il laisse la bague sur la commode. Un petit monument froid.



La douleur est une amputation soudaine. Je suis au sol, recroquevillée autour du vide. Un gémissement animal m'échappe.

Les murs fondent. Je brise.

CARNET #83 : UNIVERS #83 – LA GUERRE

(La page est gondolée.)

Variable : À la fac, je n'ai pas avalé ma fureur. Je l'ai crachée.

Cinq ans de silence.

Retrouvailles dans une galerie. Ce n'est pas doux. C'est une détonation. Ce Léo est dur, tranchant. Notre amour est une tranchée. Nous nous battons avec une cruelle intimité, tirant le sang avec de vieilles blessures. Les réconciliations sont des redditions.

C'est épuisant. C'est la seule chose qui me fait sentir vivante. Au moins cette douleur a une adresse.

Hier, jointures écorchées : « Ça me tue. Il nous faut de l'aide. »

Je ris. Un rire froid. « Ça, c'est nous ! Tu préférerais un mannequin ? »

Son regard n'est pas de haine. C'est de la pitié. « Tu aimes les décombres plus que le rivage. »

Il part. La porte se ferme avec un clic doux, définitif.

Le silence qui suit est un cri gelé.

Je tombe.

CARNET #112 : UNIVERS #112 – L'EXIL

(Papier fin de cahier étudiant.)

Variable : Je suis partie faire mon master à Montréal.

L'hiver québécois. La morsure de l'air. La chaleur des dépanneurs. La musique têtue du joul.

Puis tu es apparu. Nous étions deux exilés. Nous avons mangé de la poutine à 3h du matin. Nous nous sommes promenés dans le Vieux-Port gelés jusqu'aux os, riant parce que le froid était une



douleur simple, honnête. Tu as pris des photos de moi. Tu disais que la lumière du nord me rendait transparente.

Tu as parlé de rester. De bâtir une vie ici, loin de tout.

J'ai regardé la neige infinie, l'altérité radicale de cet endroit, et la panique a été viscérale. Et si je restais coincée ? Et si je devenais quelqu'un d'autre ? Et si « nous » ne survivrions pas à un vrai foyer ?

J'ai balbutié des excuses sur ma famille, ma carrière.

Je suis partie avant toi.

Ton message : « Tu as toujours eu peur du dépaysement, même quand il était beau. »

Tu es resté. Tu es avec une artiste de Val-David. Tu possèdes une maison près d'un lac.

Dans cet univers, nous nous sommes aimés dans l'entre-deux. Et j'ai encore coupé le lien.

CARNET #149 : UNIVERS #149 – L'ENRACINEMENT

(Une tache d'huile d'olive dans un coin.)

Variable : Nous avons acheté un mas en Provence.

Le chant des cigales. Les oliviers tordus par le mistral. Le rythme lent du Sud. Marchés, apéros, siestes. Pendant un temps, j'ai cru que c'était le bonheur. Un ancrage.

Mais ma lâcheté a repoussé en claustrophobie. Le village est trop petit. Les regards trop lourds. Les mêmes conversations au café.

« On étouffe ici. »

Ta main calleuse sur la mienne. « On respire, enfin. On est vivants. »

Le fossé s'est creusé, lentement. Tu as trouvé du réconfort à la librairie d'Avignon.

Je suis partie en laissant les clefs sur la table de cuisine. Dans le TGV, j'ai pleuré sans bruit en regardant les champs de lavande, cette mer violette dont j'avais eu peur.

Même enracinée dans la beauté, j'ai trouvé le moyen de tout arracher.

CARNET #199 : UNIVERS #199 – LA FRACTURE



(Papier d'hôpital. Écriture tremblante.)

Variable : L'accident.

Tu as survécu. Ton corps.

Ton esprit a des trous. Des crises de colère. Une fatigue abyssale. Des moments où tu ne me reconnais plus.

Je suis devenue ton aidante.

Mon amour : des pilules, des rappels, cacher les objets tranchants.

Ton amour : un sirop toxique de rancœur.

« SORS ! » as-tu hurlé, une assiette brisée à tes pieds. « ARRÊTE DE ME REGARDER COMME UNE CHOSE CASSÉE ! »

Ma lâcheté, ici, a été la plus basique : je n'ai pas pu supporter ton non-devenir. Je n'ai pas pu aimer les fragments.

Je suis partie pendant ton sommeil. La honte est un goût de métal permanent.

Je ne suis pas assez forte.

Le monde gris. Je tombe d'un univers où je suis un monstre.

CARNET #200 : UNIVERS #200 – LE NULLE

(Une page fraîche.)

Variable : nos mères ne se sont jamais rencontrées. Nous jamais.

Je suis ici depuis cent jours. Un fantôme avec une carte Navigo.

Je t'ai vu aujourd'hui au Café de Flore. Tu lisais. Tu as ri, seul. Un vrai rire, inconscient. Il s'est accroché sous mes côtes.

Tu n'as pas levé les yeux. J'étais un élément du décor.

J'ai observé ta vie. Tu as des amis. Une amoureuse. Une boulangerie dans laquelle l'on sait comment tu aimes ton croissant.

Tu es entier. Complet. Un système solaire parfait, sans la planète folle qui est Élara.



C'est la fin de toutes les fins : jamais. Une histoire dont la première phrase n'a jamais été écrite.

Dans ce silence absolu, j'entends enfin.

Pendant 200 univers, j'ai cru que je nous testais...
Je ne testais que les limites de ma peur.

#1 Peur du rejet. #16 : Peur du changement. #83 : Peur de la paix. #112 : Peur d'une nouvelle maison.
#149 : Peur du bonheur. #199 : Peur de la fragilité.

Léo n'était pas la variable. Il était la constante.
Moi, j'étais la variable. Ma peur, sous toutes ses formes, était le poison.

Le « toi » dans « une autre vie, ça aurait été toi »...
Ce n'était jamais toi, Léo.

C'était moi. La moi courageuse. La moi entière. Celle qui aurait pu parler, rester, partir, endurer. La moi qui t'aurais aimé sans être annihilée par cet amour.
Cette femme a vécu dans l'espace entre chaque battement de cœur. Et j'ai toujours eu trop peur de la laisser respirer.

CARNET #201 : L'UNIVERS DE L'UN

Aujourd'hui, un café différent.

Je reste dans l'Univers du Jamais. Pas pour toi. Pour le silence. Pour le blanc terrifiant de la page.

Je travaille à Shakespeare and Company. Je range des livres. Je bois du thé en regardant la Seine changer de couleur. J'ai une petite chambre avec une fenêtre à l'est. La lumière du matin frappe les vieilles poutres d'une certaine façon qui, parfois, me rappelle un perron différent, il y a 200 vies. Le fantôme d'un fantôme.

Aujourd'hui, un homme – pas toi, mais qui ne sera jamais toi – m'a demandé un livre d'un poète algérien. Nous avons parlé dix minutes. Ses yeux étaient de la couleur de la mousse après la pluie. Il ne connaissait pas mon histoire. Il ne voyait pas le cimetière dans mon regard. C'était... simple. C'était léger. Cela ne faisait pas mal.

Je te vois de temps en temps, de loin, de l'autre côté d'une rue, dans un parc. Tu es heureux. Tu vis.

Et moi... J'apprends à habiter dans ma propre peau. J'apprends que mon nom, Élara, c'est peut-être une phrase qui tient debout toute seule.



Je ferme ce cahier bleu. Il est gonflé de 200 mondes, de lavande séchée de Provence, d'un ticket de métro de Montréal, d'un éclat de verre poli de Bretagne. C'est l'épopée de ma peur.

J'ai acheté un nouveau carnet. Couverture neutre. Pages vierges.

Je m'assois aux Deux Magots. Le garçon me connaît maintenant. Il apporte mon café crème sans que je le commande.

Ma plume, la même qui a écrit toutes ces fins, plane au-dessus de la première page propre, blanche.

Mon cœur est un oiseau sauvage et effrayé dans ma poitrine. Il bat : Et si. Et si. Et si.

Je prends une inspiration. Une inspiration profonde, tremblante, humaine.

Et je n'écris pas l'épithète, la malédiction, la prière, la seule chose que je n'ai jamais connue.

Dans une autre vie, ça aurait été toi.

Je laisse la larme qui s'est formée tomber. Elle atterrit sur la page blanche, un point final liquide parfait à tout ce qui est venu avant.

Puis, lentement, j'écris le premier mot d'une nouvelle histoire. Le mot le plus effrayant que j'aie jamais écrit.

Aujourd'hui.

(Le cahier bleu est placé sur une étagère haute. Il n'est jamais rouvert. Mais la femme qui l'a écrit, parfois, quand la lumière est juste, a levé les yeux vers lui. Et elle se souvient qu'on peut survivre à 200 naufrages pour trouver le courage, fragile et terrifiant, d'avoir un seul battement de cœur. Rien qu'à soi.)



La perfection n'est pas une obligation



SCHOOL: St. David
TEACHER: Filomena Rinaldi Fernandes
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Brendan Elworthy
UNIT: Waterloo
UNIT PRESIDENT: David Geraghty

SECONDARY - GRADES 9-10 / POEM
by **Vanessa Gift-Okori**

Couverte d'épuisement,
J'ai laissé trop de choses m'atteindre
Je me suis vidée.
Je m'acharne sur mon esprit vide, encore et encore
Maintenant, je ne peux pas l'enlever de ma tête
Et je me retrouve avec trop de plaies.

Luttant pour ne pas sombrer
Alors que tout se déroule simultanément,
Chaque résultat d'examen me paraît être un zéro
« Tu l'as encore fait », me dis-je.
« Continue de prouver au monde que tu ne sais rien. »

À ce stade, chaque déjeuner est passé à rattraper mon travail,
Parce que je ne peux pas me permettre d'être imparfaite.
Et je dois renverser la situation,
Car tout le monde commence à remarquer que je suis un échec.

Que puis-je faire pour résoudre cette peine profonde ?
Une peine qui me ronge lentement comme de l'acide
Que personne d'autre ne voit et que je ne peux pas expliquer ?
Aucune quantité de bandages ne peut m'aider à guérir,
Puisque toutes les blessures ne saignent pas.

J'ai veillé toute la nuit
À étudier pour mon test, en espérant au moins réussir
Maintenant, j'ai reçu mes résultats
Et ma note dit : "99"

« Tu as fait une performance extraordinaire », pensent les autres.

Mais la voix en moi murmure : « Ce n'est toujours pas assez. »



Alors, tu me demandes pourquoi je suis si ingrate,
Pourquoi je n'arrive pas à me ressaisir,
Pourquoi je ne peux pas oublier une simple note.

Tu me dis que ce n'est qu'une note stupide
Ce n'est pas grave,
Et que personne ne s'en souviendra d'ici l'été.

Eh bien, peut-être que tu as raison.

Mais maintenant j'ai l'impression que cette note perdue a fait toute la différence,
Entre être à la hauteur et la déconvenue.

Et c'est parce que j'ai laissé la perfection devenir la norme à laquelle je me juge,
Et chaque fois que je n'y arrive pas,
J'ai l'impression d'avoir échoué à être moi-même.

Je ne peux pas me débarrasser de cet état d'esprit du jour au lendemain,
Peut-être que je ne m'en débarrasserai jamais.

Mais j'essaie...

J'essaie de me rappeler,
Être humaine, c'est se donner la possibilité de grandir,
Et non la pression d'être parfaite.

J'essaie de me rappeler que
La perfection n'est pas une obligation.

C'est un mythe que nous nous sommes forgés
Sur ce que nous devrions être.

Un mythe auquel je suis enfin prête à cesser de croire.



Recevoir avant de donner



SCHOOL: St. Patrick, Toronto
TEACHER: Eric Démoré
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Hector Bojorge
UNIT: Toronto Secondary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Antonella Di Carlo

SECONDARY - GRADES 9-10 / PLAY
by **Gilles O'Brien**

Personnages : Martin – 16 ans, garçon

Krystina – 16 ans, fille

Diane – 16 ans, fille

Mère – 50 ans

Mme Garcia – 61 ans, professeure scientifique

Brandon – 15 ans, garçon

Anaïs – 15 ans, fille

Acte 1, scène 1

(Krystina est couchée dans sa chambre et rit en regardant son portable. Des affiches de ses artistes préférés tapissent les murs et on entend le bourdonnement d'un ventilateur de plafond. Elle a récemment été en contact avec un gars en ligne qui se fait appeler Jean-Pierre.)

Krystina Oh mon Dieu, il est trop beau ! Comment ça se fait que ses cheveux sont encore plus beaux que les miens (*soupire*) ? Nous DEVONS nous rencontrer ! Probablement encore mieux en personne.

(La mère entre.)

Mère Avec qui jases-tu ?

Krystina Ne t'en fais pas, c'est juste la mère de mon ami, maman. (*cache son portable*)

Mère Oh Diane ? Claire ? Oh ! J'adore ces filles.

Krystina Ahhhhh... Oui... Tu sais combien elles aiment parler. Hé hé !

Mère Bref, je voulais juste dire que le souper sera prêt dans cinq minutes.



Acte 1, scène 2

(Le lendemain, Krystina va à l'école, angoissée. Elle marche dans le corridor et croise son amie Diane, qui est devant son casier.)

Krystina Diane, Salut !

Diane N'essaie même pas !

Krystina Mais...

Diane Tu sais que je ne te parle plus après ta connerie de lundi. J'ai eu ma copie de M. Dupont : 45 % ! Tout ça parce que tu étais « trop occupée » pour réviser avec moi. Étais-tu avec Claire ou avec ce gars bizarre au téléphone ?!

Krystina Di, je suis désolé, ce n'est pas comme ça.

(Diane claque la porte de son casier et s'en va en trombe.)

Krystina Elle ne comprend tout simplement pas. *(se penche en arrière contre le mur)* Martin tient vraiment à moi. Il ne s'attend pas à toute cette aide pour les études, et à ce qu'on aille diner ensemble tous les jours.

(La cloche sonne et Krystina sort.)

Acte 1, scène 3

(Krystina, Diane, Mme Garcia, Hugo, et les élèves entrent.)

Mme Garcia Qui peut me donner la réponse à la question c ? Je vais continuer à parler à un mur, n'est-ce pas ? Si vous n'étiez pas si absorbés par vos portables, on n'aurait pas une moyenne de 52. Vous trouvez que ça me fait honneur ? Pas du tout ! Tous les parents et les profs pensent que je suis une vieille prof plate qui n'aurait même pas réussi à faire comprendre la chimie à Einstein.

Brandon Je pense que Krystina voudrait répondre, mais elle est trop occupée à parler à un gars bizarre en ligne. *(rit et tape sur l'épaule de son amie)*

(Diane lève la tête et jette un coup d'œil à Krystina, qui est rouge et embarrassée.)

Diane Tu sais que je suis entièrement d'accord avec toi et on ne se parle même plus, mais ça ne te donne aucun droit de lui parler comme ça. Surtout quand on sait que tu as eu deux copines cette année qui t'ont largué à cause de ton ego démesuré.

Brandon *(a l'air dégoûté)* Et si... Je ne le dis même pas.

Mme Garcia Vous m'avez tous les deux surpris un jour de mauvaise humeur ! Allez vite chez M. Saint-Pierre !



Acte 2, scène 1

(Krystina est assise à la table de la salle à manger en train de faire ses devoirs quand soudain elle reçoit un message.)

Krystina *(jetant un coup d'œil à son portable)* « Krystina, mon amour, j'ai envie de te demander un cadeau pour faire grandir notre amour. Pas des fleurs, juste de l'argent suffira à combler mon cœur. » Je ne sais pas quoi faire ! Avec tous les achats de vêtements et les réductions d'horaires à la patinoire, je ne sais pas comment je vais pouvoir me résoudre à offrir un cadeau à Martin. Mais je l'aime tellement et puis, mon anniversaire arrive à grands pas. *(souponne)*

(Krystina lui envoie alors 100 \$ par virement bancaire, visiblement inquiète. Son portable sonne et un message de Martin apparaît.)

Krystina « Je savais que tu le ferais ! Tu seras toujours mon seul et unique véritable amour. »

Acte 2, scène 2

(Krystina est en cours de sciences, en quatrième heure, et discute avec sa partenaire de laboratoire, Anaïs.)

Krystina Anaïs, tu as aussi un chum, n'est-ce pas ?

Anaïs Oui, il s'appelle Antoine. J'adore ça, il est grand et il a des cheveux magnifiques !

Krystina Est-ce qu'il te demande des cadeaux de temps en temps ?

Anaïs Oui, il a commencé récemment. Nous ne nous sommes jamais rencontrés en personne, alors je lui envoie juste de l'argent.

Krystina C'est pareil avec Martin. Nous ne nous sommes pas rencontrés en ligne et on communique par texto ou par portable. Salut, aurais-tu des photos d'Antoine ? J'ai tellement hâte de savoir à quoi il ressemble.

Anaïs Bien sûr ! *(montre une photo)*

Krystina Ouah, il est vraiment magnifique ! *(air choqué et confus sur sa face)*

Acte 2, scène 3

(Après les cours, Krystina fond en larmes, réalisant que toute sa relation n'était qu'un mensonge ! Elle court dans le corridor pour parler à Diane.)

Krystina Diane ! Attends !



Diane Tu oublies que j'te parle pas.

Krystina Je suis désolée, tu avais raison. Martin était un menteur malfaisant qui voulait juste se servir de moi pour de l'argent ! Comme tant d'autres filles.

Diane Ne t'en fais pas, je ne te déteste pas tant que ça. Surtout depuis que tu as retrouvé la raison.

(Elles s'enlacent alors.)

Acte 3, scène 1

(Au cours de la semaine suivante, Krystina réévalue ses actions passées et décide de se recentrer sur elle-même, jusqu'à ce que quelqu'un l'aborde dans la cour...)

Brandon Salut Krystina, je suis désolé d'avoir été si désagréable.

Krystina C'est bon *(rires)*, pour être honnête, ce que tu as dit sur moi était vrai.

Brandon Voudrais-tu sortir avec moi ?

Krystina Bon, espérons que tu n'es pas un gars bizarre.

(Ils quittent la scène ensemble.)

La Fin



La glorification des crimes réels dans les médias



SCHOOL: Cardinal Carter Academy for the Arts
TEACHER: Maria Vaira
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Leigh Agozzino-Organ
UNIT: Toronto Secondary
UNIT PRESIDENT: Antonella Di Carlo

SECONDARY - GRADES 9-10 / NONFICTION
by **Elizabeth Shi**

Avertissement de contenu : cette œuvre contient des sujets sensibles, notamment des descriptions de violence et de meurtre, et n'est pas destinée aux élèves d'école primaire. Pour un public averti.

Que feriez-vous si je disais que certaines grandes plateformes médiatiques romantisent et excusent des tueurs réels en effaçant la douleur des victimes ? Ou, si je disais qu'ils inventent les meurtres qu'ils attribuent à une femme réelle et innocente, sous les yeux de millions de personnes ? Dans ce scénario, la vérité serait complètement oubliée en échange d'une fiction dramatisée que les gens considèrent factuelle, au détriment de la dignité des innocents qui ont perdu leur vie trop tôt. Cette apathie inhumaine n'est pas juste une hypothèse, mais une vérité que la société ne veut pas reconnaître. Avec la nouvelle série de Ryan Murphy, « Monstre : l'Histoire d'Ed Gein », l'obsession médiatique morbide pour les véritables horreurs du monde a été révélée, encouragée par la représentation répugnante pourtant romantique des crimes. En plus, il y avait des parties de l'histoire qui étaient falsifiées à un degré qui est franchement offensant. Ce n'est pas tout, car les victimes et leurs familles sont aussi forcées de revivre leur traumatisme à répétition juste pour amuser un public insensible. Il y a une chose que Ryan Murphy et Netflix ne comprennent pas : leur incapacité de dire la vérité a des effets néfastes sur les victimes et leurs familles.

Dans la plupart des médias qui sont dédiés aux crimes réels, comme la série « Monstre » de Ryan Murphy, les meurtriers sont romantisés dans un contexte empathique qui fait paraître leurs actions justifiées. En donnant le rôle de protagoniste aux gens qui ont commis des actes terribles – comme le tueur en série et cannibale Jeffrey Dahmer, ou Ed Gein, qui est connu pour son usage de peau humaine pour fabriquer les meubles... Chaque aspect de leur vie serait exploré et exagéré pour le rendre plus intéressant. Par conséquent, le public a tendance à les percevoir comme des anti-héros tragiques quand, en réalité, ils sont des monstres responsables de la dévastation d'innombrables vies. C'est là où le cœur du problème se trouve : dans la fascination publique pour le crime. Car les coupables sont excusés à cause de l'empathie que l'audience leur donne, puisque leur vie est mise en valeur seulement pour rendre l'intrigue plus intéressante, tandis que les victimes sont ignorées. Cela ne signifie pas que la plupart des tueurs n'ont pas parfois subi des traumatismes de leur vie qui devraient susciter de la compassion, mais on ne devrait pas oublier que ceci n'est jamais une excuse. Beaucoup de gens doivent lutter contre leurs propres traumatismes et la grande majorité de ces individus ne recourent pas à la violence. Par ailleurs, il est commun que les acteurs conventionnellement attirants soient choisis pour jouer le rôle d'un criminel. Par exemple, Zac Efron, connu pour son rôle principal



dans la trilogie « High School Musical » de Disney, a joué le malfamé tueur en série Ted Bundy dans le film « Extrêmement méchant, choquant et vil ». En choisissant un acteur qui a beaucoup d'influence sur les jeunes, les adolescents impressionnables seront plus inclinés à soutenir le point de vue de son personnage et à devenir indifférents aux victimes. Après tout, il y a une différence entre la romancisation des tueurs fictifs, comme Patrick Bateman, dans le film « American Psycho », et celle des véritables tueurs, tels que Jeffrey Dahmer et Ed Gein. Ce qui est encore plus dérangeant que les meurtres eux-mêmes, c'est l'exploitation de la souffrance humaine, réécrite uniquement pour le divertissement du public. Un des moments clés dans la série montre une jeune fille nommée Adeline, la petite amie du tueur en série Ed Gein. Elle est perturbée par le contraste énorme entre la vie campagnarde et celle d'une grande ville. Consumée par le froid extrême de sa chambre d'hôtel, elle est devenue hystérique quand la réceptionniste a insisté sur le fait qu'un remboursement ne serait pas possible. Ensuite, Adeline a pris une de ses chaussures à talon et l'a battue à mort avant de voler l'argent de sa victime et de s'enfuir.

Un autre événement important, dans la série, est la mort d'une baby-sitter, Evelyn, aux mains de Gein. La scène dépeint un moment grotesque où la jeune femme est tuée par un marteau tenu dans la main d'un cadavre. Toutes ces scènes excessivement morbides de Netflix semblent trop cruelles pour être factuelles, mais aussi trop extrêmes pour avoir été entièrement inventées. Enfin, la majorité des gens serait choquée d'apprendre la vérité : aucun de ces événements n'a jamais eu lieu. Ils étaient tous fabriqués. Cependant, tous les personnages sont des gens réels, comme Adeline Watkins, Evelyn Hartley et le notoire Ed Gein. D'abord, Adeline Watkins a seulement eu une brève relation amoureuse avec Gein, mais il n'y avait rien de profond. Son personnage a été exagéré jusqu'au point de devenir pratiquement fictif, car en réalité, elle n'avait jamais tué personne. Ainsi, Netflix accuse publiquement une femme innocente, qui ne peut même pas réfuter ces informations mensongères, d'un meurtre qui n'a jamais eu lieu. Ensuite, Evelyn Hartley était une vraie fille qui a disparu et n'a jamais été retrouvée. Ce fait a été complètement ignoré dans la série, car Ryan Murphy a décidé d'inventer un nouveau scénario, même quand Ed Gein a insisté sur le fait qu'il ne l'avait pas tuée, et ce fait a été légalement prouvé. Il est clair que Murphy se moque de cette tragédie non résolue afin de réaliser son but de maximiser son public. De plus, il dénigre des victimes innocentes avec un manque de respect flagrant, en classant cette série comme documentaire, bien que seulement une fraction des événements soit réelle. Il calomnie la mémoire des morts, qui ne peuvent plus se défendre, en transformant les tragédies en spectacles et en vendant les mensonges au public.

La série sur Ed Gein n'est pas la seule création de Ryan Murphy qui montre son audace, car quelques années auparavant, il a créé « Monstre : la série de Jeffrey Dahmer », mais cette fois-ci des personnes ont souffert à cause de son ignorance. Malgré le fait que la série ait représenté le tueur en série Jeffrey Dahmer d'une manière plus appropriée que celle d'Ed Gein, certains aspects restent profondément immoraux. Ce qui est tellement exaspérant, c'est que Murphy n'a même pas informé les familles des victimes ainsi que ses intentions. Donc après avoir déjà subi la terrible et violente perte d'un membre de leur famille, ils ont dû revivre leur traumatisme sur l'écran, en partageant l'expérience avec le public, qui l'a témoigné sous forme de spectacle. Dans le cas de Rita Isbell, la sœur d'Errol Lindsay, une victime de Dahmer, la situation était particulièrement dérangeante. Jeffrey Dahmer a tué 17 hommes et garçons entre 1978 et 1991 ; il est aussi connu comme un des meurtriers les plus



notoires et macabres de nos jours. Lors du témoignage de Dahmer, Isbell a fait une déclaration de victime pendant cette audience, donnant un discours émouvant et plein de colère contre le tueur de son frère. Ce moment a été représenté dans la série sans son accord. Selon Business Insider, elle a déclaré : « Je pense que Netflix aurait dû nous demander si cela ne nous dérangeait pas... C'est triste qu'ils puissent tirer profit de cette tragédie. C'est purement de la cupidité. » De plus, sa nièce a révélé que, depuis la diffusion de l'émission, elle rêvait de Jeffrey Dahmer, l'homme qui avait tué son père, chaque fois qu'elle essayait de dormir. Ce n'est pas tout, car le cousin d'Errol Lindsey, Eric Perry, a publié sur Twitter que sa famille était furieuse à propos de la création de la série. Il a écrit : « C'est revivre le traumatisme encore et encore, et pour quoi faire ? Combien de films, d'émissions, de documentaires nous faut-il ? Toutes ces déclarations ont été exprimées par une seule famille, alors imaginez les sentiments des autres familles des victimes de Dahmer. Chaque fois que quelqu'un voyait la série, les familles et amis des victimes souffraient, sachant que Jeffrey Dahmer était le protagoniste de l'histoire diffusée par Netflix, et les victimes étaient oubliées. Netflix et Ryan Murphy avaient le pouvoir de mettre en lumière la tragédie de Dahmer, mais au lieu de ça, ils ont tourné le dos aux victimes ; alors, c'est qui le vrai monstre ?

Dans l'ensemble, la création des séries sur les crimes réels est extrêmement immorale si elle est abordée d'une manière incorrecte, comme le travail de Ryan Murphy. Faut-il tout arrêter ? Certainement pas, mais les histoires devraient être racontées en tenant compte du point de vue des victimes et de leurs familles, un besoin qui est rarement satisfait. Cela pourrait être expliqué par le fait que les vrais meurtriers sont présentement le point central des films et des séries, et cette tendance déshumanise les victimes et suscite de l'empathie pour les criminels. Ainsi, promouvoir ce genre de série est simplement ignorant, car les victimes sont oubliées aux yeux du public. Les imprécisions délibérées, aussi bien que les meurtres fabriqués et les histoires complètement fictives, rendent la situation encore plus insultante. Ce qui est plus énervant, c'est que Netflix et Ryan Murphy présentent ces productions comme des documentaires, quand elles ne sont même pas réelles, comme dans le cas de « Monstre ». Donc la même question se pose : Qui est le vrai monstre ?

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Comment grandit-on dans un monde qui s'effondre ?



SCHOOL: St. Thomas Aquinas
TEACHER: James Trudeau
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Jodie Valenta
UNIT: Kenora
UNIT PRESIDENT: Darlene Literovich

SECONDARY - GRADES 11-12 / POEM
by **Shayla Deshmukh**

Le monde s'effondre,
L'endroit que je connaissais
depuis toujours devient inconnu,
Les personnes qui m'appuyaient
sont perdues,

Le sang de ceux que j'aime m'a vêtu.
Je ne peux pas continuer comme ça,
La violence politique n'est plus le satyre,
Tout le monde dit que je dois choisir,
Je ne peux plus rester neutre sans perdre mon avenir.

Dans le carnage, je voyais la lumière,
Des pages qui brillent avec la fuite,
Des siècles de sagesse dans un manuscrit,
Le manque de savoir était une maladie.
Finalement, j'ai échappé,
Les souvenirs qui m'ont hanté,
Ils resteront toujours dans le passé,
Si je dois vivre cette vie, je dois m'y adapter.



LES RÔLES QUI NOUS APPARTENAIENT SONT PERDUS,
LES DROITS HUMAINS SONT UNE NÉGOCIATION,
QUITTER LA TERRE ? QUE POSSÉDIONS-NOUS ?
L'HUMATINÉ SUR SOROR, C'EST LA CONDAMNATION.

MON COLLÈGUE ; JE NE LE RECONNAIS PLUS,
LE PROFESSEUR, IL EST COMME EUX,
IL EST DEVENU UN « HOMME » AFFREUX,
SOROR, NOUS LE TRAITONS COMME UN JEU.

MAIS, IL Y A QUELQU'UN QUI COMPREND,
LA GUENON SCIENTISTE, ELLE A DES YEUX SYMPAS,
ZIRA RECONNAIT QUE LA LIBERTÉ VIENDRA,
ELLE NOUS A ENVOYÉS DANS CET ALÉA.

NOVA, SIRIUS ET MOI, SOMMES DES VOYAGEURS,
IL N'Y A PLUS UN « CHEZ NOUS, »
À PART LA PETITE FAMILLE, TOUT EST PERDU,
ON DOIT RECOMMENCER, DU DÉBUT.



PERSISTANCE. ILS GRANDISSENT DANS LES FISSURES. ILS SONT
IMMORTELS. RIEN NE PEUT LES ÉLIMINER. ILS
SERONT LÀ POUR TOUJOURS. DES MAUVAISES HERBES
SONT DES SURVIVANTES. ILS VOLENT LES RESSOURCES DE LEUR
ENVIRONNEMENT. DE SE DÉBARRASSER D'EUX C'EST
NUL. ILS NE SERONT PAS LOIN, JAMAIS. ILS VIVRONT TOUJOURS,
LÀ DANS LE CIMENT, DANS LE JARDIN, À CÔTÉ DE LA ROUTE. ILS SONT
IRRÉPROCHABLES, ILS SE TROUVENT TOUT AUTOUR DU MONDE. DANS LES
TEMPS FROIDS, ILS SE CACHENT, MAIS ILS REVIENDRONT. DES
SOUHAITS SERONT EXAUCÉS PAR EUX. DE MERVEILLEUSES FAUSSES FLEURS.



Glands dans le placard
Pas d'eau, de sol, de soleil
Ils grandissent encore

* Basé sur de vrais événements *



On est à court de temps.
L'environnement est pire que jamais,
Les espèces deviennent éteintes,
Les autres évoluent pour s'adapter au monde des
hommes.

On est à court de temps.
Les glaciers fondent,
Le temps devient imprévisible,
Les catastrophes naturelles sont plus communes.

On est à court de temps.
Les animaux perdent leurs sources de nourriture,
Les plantes perdent les sources d'énergie,
Les hommes perdent le contrôle.

On est à court de temps.
Les dommages deviennent irréversibles,
Rien ne peut corriger nos fautes,
Qu'est-ce qu'on ferait ?

On n'a plus de temps,
On a surexploité nos ressources pour arriver ici,
Bientôt, on en n'aura plus,
Les avancements valent-ils ces conséquences ?
Le futur est incertain.



Rire face à l'horreur



SCHOOL: St. Theresa of Lisieux
TEACHER: Raimondo Puopolo
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Deborah Todde
UNIT: York
UNIT PRESIDENT: Mike Totten



SECONDARY - GRADES 11-12 / PLAY
by Sarah Lu, Grace Baragetti, Cynthia Li

Fiction sur la désensibilisation aux problèmes actuels due aux réseaux sociaux

Liste des Personnages

- LINA :** 16 ans, étudiante d'école secondaire, la fille de Nadia et Karim
- MAXINE (MAX) :** 17 ans, étudiante d'école secondaire, l'amie de Lina
- MAYA :** 16 ans, étudiante d'école secondaire, l'amie de Lina
- ÉLÈVE :** 18 ans, élève d'école secondaire
- PROFESSEUR :** 42 ans, professeur de français à l'école secondaire St. Catherine
- NADIA :** 46 ans, la mère de Lina
- KARIM :** 47 ans, le père de Lina

Lieu

Une école secondaire à Toronto et la maison de Lina

Temps

L'hiver, 2025



ACTE 1

SCÈNE 1

La cafétéria au lycée St. Catherine, située à Toronto.

(Le cadre de cette scène est dans l'école St. Catherine. La scène se déroule à la cafétéria de l'école pendant l'heure du déjeuner. La salle est remplie d'élèves qui parlent fort, de chaises qui raclent le sol et de plateaux qui s'entrechoquent. Malgré le bruit. LINA, MAXINE et MAYA sont assises là. Elles sont serrées les unes contre les autres, la tête penchée sur leur téléphone. La lumière blanche des écrans illumine leurs visages, les rendant pales et presque absents. Elles ne mangent pas et leurs plateaux sont à peine entamés.)

MAXINE

(Avec un sourire excité, penchée vers l'écran, parlant vite comme si elle partageait une blague irrésistible...)

Attendez, attendez, vous devez voir cette vidéo.

(Elle appuie sur lecture. Le son est faible, mais suffisant pour capter l'attention. MAYA et LINA la regardent, intriguées.)

MAYA

(MAYA, les yeux grands ouverts, semble à la fois choquée et amusée, alors qu'elle se penche vers l'écran de MAXINE. Elle entend les coups de feu dans la vidéo.)

Waouh, ils ont ralenti le moment où tout le monde court... comme dans un film d'action.

(Un bref silence s'ensuit. Le téléphone continue d'afficher la vidéo.)

LINA

(LINA paraît hésitante, ses épaules sont légèrement tendues. Elle inspire, puis laisse échapper un petit rire nerveux.)

Cela ne semble même pas réel.

(Elle regarde l'écran, détourne brièvement le regard, ensuite le reporte sur l'écran.)



MAXINE

(Elle hausse les épaules, comme si ce qu'elle avait vu avait perdu son sérieux.)

Oui, on voit ça tout le temps maintenant.

MAYA

(MAYA fait défiler les commentaires rapidement, ricanant sans réfléchir.)

Lisez ceci... Les commentaires sont pires que la vidéo.

(Ils rient, mais le rire est bref, sec, sans chaleur. Il s'éteint presque aussitôt qu'il a commencé. À une table voisine, un étudiant entend tout. Ses mains tremblent légèrement.)

ÉLÈVE (à une autre table)

(Les yeux fixés sur son plateau, d'une voix basse et blessée.)

C'était dans mon quartier.

(Les filles ne l'entendent pas. Le téléphone vibre à nouveau. Une autre notification. Puis la cloche de l'école retentit soudainement. Le son est strident et elles se lèvent toutes en même temps pour attraper leurs sacs et s'éloignent rapidement. Toutes absorbées par leurs écrans, elles laissent derrière elles des plateaux à moitié remplis de nourriture.)

ACTE 1

SCÈNE 2

Chambre de Lina, tard le soir.

(La scène se déroule dans la chambre de LINA. Les lumières sont éteintes. Les rideaux laissent passer une faible lueur provenant de la rue. La maison est silencieuse, presque trop calme. La lumière bleue du téléphone illumine le visage de LINA, accentuant ses traits fatigués. Elle est allongée sur son lit, immobile, scotchée à son téléphone.)



LINA

(Allongée, visage presque vide, avec une voix monotone.)

Encore une... et encore...

(Son pouce glisse sur l'écran. Une vidéo tragique apparaît, puis immédiatement, une vidéo drôle. Son expression ne change pas. Elle cligne lentement des yeux, mais continue à faire défiler l'écran. Les sons discrets se succèdent, mais aucun ne semble l'atteindre. Elle s'endort lentement, son téléphone dans les mains.)

ACTE 2

SCÈNE 1

La cuisine de Lina, Toronto.

(La cuisine est chaleureuse et bien éclairée. Une lumière jaune et douce remplit la pièce, contrastant avec la froideur des écrans. NADIA coupe des légumes lentement, concentrée, et le bruit régulier du couteau contre la planche crée un rythme calme. KARIM met la table avec soin, ajustant les assiettes pour qu'elles soient bien alignées. L'atmosphère est paisible, presque ordinaire. LINA entre rapidement, son téléphone à la main. Elle le tient légèrement en avant, comme si elle apportait une nouvelle anodine, quelque chose à partager sans importance...)

LINA

(Avec une contenance souriante, presque insouciante.)

Tout le monde, vous devez voir ça, c'est partout.

(Elle tend le téléphone vers ses parents. NADIA s'arrête de couper. KARIM pose une assiette. Tous deux regardent l'écran. Au début, leurs visages sont neutres. Puis, lentement, leurs expressions changent, et le silence s'apaisait.)

NADIA

(Doucement, les sourcils froncés, le regard fixé sur l'écran.)

Lina... regarde bien.

(LINA regarde à nouveau, cette fois sans sourire.)



KARIM

(Voix basse et grave.)

Il avait mon âge. On ne sait jamais qui sera le prochain.

(Cette phrase tombe lourdement, et LINA cesse complètement de sourire. Elle ne sait plus où regarder. Elle observe ses parents, puis l'écran, par la suite ses mains.)

NADIA

C'est horrible. Quelqu'un ne pourra pas dormir ce soir... pendant que d'autres rient.

(Le silence est total. On entend seulement le léger bourdonnement du réfrigérateur. LINA pose lentement le téléphone sur la table. Le geste est hésitant, comme si elle déposait quelque chose de fragile ou répulsif.)

ACTE 2

SCÈNE 2

Chambre de Lina, tard le soir.

(Cette scène est dans la chambre de LINA, qui est plongée dans la pénombre. Elle est assise sur son lit, les épaules voûtées. Le téléphone est encore allumé. La même vidéo rejoue sans musique. Les images défilent, mais LINA ne les regarde presque plus.)

LINA

(Voix brisée, presque un murmure, comme si elle craignait d'entendre sa propre question.)

Comment ai-je pu rire d'une chose aussi tragique ? Un homme a été tué et j'ai eu l'audace de rire simplement parce que la musique était drôle. Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas chez moi ?

(Elle ferme les yeux un instant. Après une hésitation, elle retourne son téléphone face contre le matelas.)



ACTE 3

SCÈNE 1

Corridor de l'école, quelques jours plus tard.

(Le corridor est bondé entre deux cours. Des élèves se déplacent dans toutes les directions. Les casiers claquent violemment, des rires éclatent, des conversations se chevauchent sans jamais se terminer. L'air est lourd, chargé de bruit et d'impatience. MAXINE et MAYA marchent côte à côte, leurs téléphones à la main. Leurs pouces glissent sur les écrans avec une aisance automatique, et elles ne regardent presque jamais devant elles. LINA marche avec elles, mais légèrement en retrait. Au contraire, ses mains sont vides, et elle regarde autour d'elle, observe les autres élèves. Elle baisse les yeux. Elle semble hésiter à parler.)

MAXINE

(D'un ton normal, comme une conversation ordinaire.)

T'as vu la nouvelle vidéo aujourd'hui ?

MAYA

(Regard fixé sur l'écran, sans lever la tête.)

Ouais. Encore un truc fou. C'est tellement irréal que c'en est quasiment drôle, haha.

(LINA inspire profondément. Elle ralentit légèrement, puis accélère pour rester à leur hauteur. Elle ouvre la bouche, la referme et essaie.)

LINA

(D'une voix hésitante et prudente.)

Vous ne trouvez pas que... tout commence à se ressembler ? Ressentez-vous encore de l'empathie lorsque vous voyez aux informations que des gens sont tués ?

(Un silence bref, mais lourd, s'installe. MAXINE serre un peu plus son téléphone tandis que MAYA fait semblant de lire quelque chose à l'écran. Le corridor continue de vibrer autour d'elles, mais entre elles, tout est figé. MAXINE évite le regard de LINA et MAYA hausse légèrement les épaules sans répondre. La conversation ne reprend pas. Elles arrivent devant une salle de classe.)



ACTE 3

SCÈNE 2

Bureau du professeur de français de Lina, lycée St. Catherine.

(La scène se déroule dans le bureau du professeur de français de Lina, au lycée St. Catherine. Une plante verte est posée près de la fenêtre. Une horloge fait tic-tac doucement. LINA est assise en face du PROFESSEUR. Elle garde les mains jointes sur ses genoux. Son regard erre dans la pièce avant de se poser sur le sol. Elle prend un long moment avant de parler.)

LINA

(Mains serrées, voix fragile.)

Quand je regarde ces vidéos tragiques en ligne sur ce qui se passe dans la société, j'ai l'impression que quelque chose en moi est en train de s'éteindre...

(Une courte pause s'ensuit.)

J'ai l'impression que plus personne ne se soucie de la souffrance des autres. Tout le monde est tellement désensibilisé qu'il ne leur vient même pas à l'esprit d'être empathique. Au lieu d'aider les autres, tout ce que nous faisons maintenant, c'est ignorer ou même rire de toutes les tragédies qui nous entourent.

(Elle avale difficilement. Ses épaules s'affaissent légèrement, comme si prononcer ces mots lui demandait un effort considérable.)

PROFESSEUR

(D'une voix calme et posée.)

Je pense avoir un moyen de t'aider, toi et tous ceux qui ressentent la même chose. C'est un problème difficile à résoudre, mais en reconnaissant cette situation, vous avez déjà fait la moitié du chemin.

(LINA ne répond pas. Elle réfléchit. Le tic-tac de l'horloge devient plus perceptible. Puis, elle hoche très légèrement la tête.)



ACTE 3

SCÈNE 3

Salle de classe, période de français, une semaine plus tard.

(La scène se déroule pendant un cours où le professeur donne aux élèves la liberté de présenter un sujet social qui les touche. La salle de classe est éclairée par une lumière blanche et froide. Les pupitres sont disposés en rangées serrées. Plusieurs élèves sont affalés sur leurs chaises. Certains ont leur téléphone posé sur la table, d'autres le tiennent discrètement sur leurs genoux. Le bourdonnement faible du projecteur remplit la pièce. Sur le mur, une image floue d'un écran de téléphone est projetée. LINA se lève lentement de son siège, elle hésite, puis avance vers l'avant de la classe, puis elle détourne le regard vers ses camarades.)

LINA

(Nerveuse, respirant profondément.)

Au début, je pensais qu'il s'agissait simplement de vidéos. Comme... du contenu. Comme des mèmes. Des tendances. Des sons que l'on réutilise. Comme tout le monde, je trouvais ça drôle. Vous vous souvenez de celle de la semaine dernière ? Celle avec la musique... qui était peut-être même assez entraînante ?

(Un long silence suivit. Le projecteur continue de bourdonner. Personne ne réagit. LINA reste immobile, comme si elle se demandait si elle devait continuer. Elle balaye la classe du regard ; quelques-uns évitent complètement son regard. LINA regarde ses camarades, la voix plus forte mais émotive.)

MAXINE

(Sans lever les yeux, Maxine répond d'une voix grave)

Tout le monde l'a vue, c'est partout.

LINA

(LINA avale, sa gorge bouge visiblement. Elle force l'air à sortir.)

C'était un homme qui mourait, je sais que maintenant vous ne le voyez pas comme ça. Et moi, moi non plus, je ne le voyais pas. Je voyais le ralenti. Les commentaires.



(Elle lève enfin les yeux vers la classe, elle regarde un élève, puis un autre, mais aucun regard ne tient plus d'une seconde.)

Mais ensuite, mes parents l'ont regardé, et personne n'a ri. Alors pourquoi cela nous semblait-il drôle ?

(Personne ne répond. MAXINE pose lentement son téléphone sur la table. L'écran reste vers le haut. Elle ne le lâche pas tout de suite. LINA prend une respiration trop rapide, elle la retient puis parle avant de la perdre.)

Donc pourquoi a-t-il fallu que quelqu'un d'autre le regarde pour que nous réalisions que ce n'était pas drôle ? Comment se fait-il que notre capacité émotionnelle soit devenue si insensible que regarder quelqu'un mourir soit devenu humoristique ?

(Le silence qui suit est plus lourd que le précédent. L'image paraît soudain trop grande pour le mur. MAXINE, assise au milieu de la classe, baisse lentement les yeux. Son téléphone est encore dans sa main. Après un moment d'hésitation, elle le pose sur son pupitre, écran vers le bas. MAYA regarde son téléphone une dernière fois. Elle le ferme brusquement, puis le glisse dans son sac sans bruit. Elle croise les bras, fixe le sol. D'autres élèves restent figés. Certains déplacent inconfortablement leurs pieds. LINA reste debout à l'avant. Elle ne parle plus. Elle ne cherche pas à les convaincre. Elle regarde simplement la classe, les épaules tendues, attendant une réaction qui ne vient pas.)

REMARQUE DE FIN

L'exposition répétée à la violence en ligne peut réduire l'empathie, augmenter l'anxiété et normaliser la souffrance humaine. Les adolescents sont particulièrement vulnérables, car leur cerveau émotionnel est encore en développement.

Mais la conscience mène au changement. Les jeunes peuvent transformer les réseaux sociaux d'un espace de consommation passive en un espace de responsabilité et d'humanité. Cela demande de l'effort, pas seulement des enfants, mais des adultes et des entreprises, qui devraient travailler ensemble pour rendre les réseaux sociaux un espace sécurisé pour tous.

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Des figures historiques américaines se préparent à survivre à l'apocalypse zombie : Abraham Lincoln contre les zombies, une critique du film



SCHOOL: Resurrection Catholic Secondary
TEACHER: Mary-Beth Smith
SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVE: Aaron Stemmler
UNIT: Waterloo
UNIT PRESIDENT: David Geraghty

SECONDARY - GRADES 11-12 / NONFICTION
by **Amber Gordon**

Avertissement de contenu : cette œuvre contient des sujets sensibles, notamment des descriptions fictives de violence et de meurtre, et n'est pas destinée aux élèves d'école primaire. Pour un public averti.

L'enfant, Abraham Lincoln est confronté à une épidémie de zombies dans son village. Il perd son père et est contraint de décapiter sa mère. Le village fait tout son possible pour contenir l'épidémie. Devenu adulte, Lincoln est président des États-Unis. Il apprend qu'un régiment de trente hommes est parti prendre le fort confédéré de Pulaski ; un seul est revenu, grièvement malade. Après avoir interrogé le seul survivant, il apparaît clairement qu'une étrange maladie a frappé tous les habitants des environs de Fort Pulaski, les poussant à une soif insatiable de chair humaine. Lincoln, déjà au courant de la maladie, décide de mener son service secret nouvellement créé dans une mission top secrète pour enquêter sur sa résurgence. Parmi ses agents, John Wilkinson et Wilson Brown sont les plus présents. Brown lui-même, un homme afro-américain, introduit le terme « zombie » pour désigner les infectés. À leur arrivée au Fort, Lincoln et les agents sont attaqués par des survivants confédérés menés par Thomas « Stonewall » Jackson, ainsi que par des villageois infectés. Les agents emprisonnent Jackson et ses hommes, et ensuite sécurisent le fort. La ville environnante est entièrement transformée, à l'exception de Mary Owens, l'ancienne flamme de Lincoln devenue prostituée, de sa fille Sophia, de la prostituée Annika et du jeune Theodore Roosevelt, tous sauvés par Lincoln et les agents. Deux factions se forment : Jackson est convaincu que les zombies ne sont en réalité que des malades ayant besoin de soins médicaux et refuse d'aider Lincoln dans sa tentative d'éradiquer ceux qu'il qualifie d'innocents. Lincoln, quant à lui, est convaincu qu'il n'existe aucun remède à cette infection, si ce n'est la mort. Pat Garrett, un soldat confédéré capturé, partage son avis et l'aide à se rendre dans une plantation voisine pour y chercher des outils et des armes. Mary est infectée à son retour au fort. L'agent John Wilkinson se révèle être John Wilkes Booth déguisé, et il tente de tuer Lincoln alors qu'il prie, mais Booth se retient, persuadé que les prières de Lincoln lui ouvriront les portes du paradis après sa mort. Le groupe élabore un plan pour débarrasser la ville des zombies et y parvient en partie, mais Lincoln perd de nombreux hommes. Largement en infériorité numérique face aux zombies restants, Jackson, convaincu par Garrett, n'a d'autre choix que d'aider Lincoln. Il révèle l'emplacement d'une cache de poudre à canon et, après avoir piégé les infectés à l'intérieur du fort, allume une mèche pour provoquer une explosion. Après cela, il est submergé par les zombies et succombe à l'infection. Les autres s'échappent tandis que le fort est détruit, mettant ainsi fin à l'épidémie. Lincoln prononce le discours de Gettysburg quelques mois plus tard. On apprend que, par sentimentalisme, Lincoln avait refusé de tuer Mary après qu'elle avait été infectée, chargeant un médecin de trouver un remède. Lors d'une visite, Mary griffe Lincoln, le contaminant. Sachant qu'il doit mourir pour empêcher une nouvelle



épidémie, il retourne à la Maison-Blanche et se prépare à assister à un spectacle au Ford's Theater. Pendant ce temps, un message est remis à l'agent John Wilkinson – en réalité John Wilkes Booth, un partisan confédéré, qui tentait d'infiltrer les services secrets de Lincoln pour l'assassiner. Lincoln le savait. Le message indique à Booth où Lincoln se trouvera ce soir-là. Il a été écrit par Lincoln lui-même, préparant ainsi son propre assassinat.

Commençons par aborder les inexactitudes, car elles sont nombreuses. Tout d'abord, non, il est faux qu'il n'y ait jamais eu d'épidémie de zombies dans le village natal de Lincoln, à Fort Pulaski, ou ailleurs ; du moins à notre connaissance. Non, Lincoln n'a pas eu à décapiter sa mère, même si elle est décédée de maladie. Et non, Lincoln n'a jamais participé à de véritables combats pendant la guerre de Sécession, et encore moins dirigé ses services secrets lors d'une mission périlleuse en territoire ennemi. En réalité, il n'aurait jamais eu de services secrets ; le décret instituant ces services a été signé le jour même de son assassinat, ce qui rend impossible toute mission effectuée avec eux auparavant (« Foire aux questions : l'assassinat »). S'il est vrai que Lincoln et Booth se connaissaient, Lincoln l'ayant vu jouer au Ford's Theater et l'ayant invité à la Maison-Blanche à plusieurs reprises sans succès. Rien ne prouve que Booth n'ait jamais travaillé pour Lincoln ou ait tenté des activités d'espionnage sous le pseudonyme de John Wilkinson. Ni qu'il n'avait jamais reçu de lettre indiquant explicitement les plans du président cette nuit fatidique – en réalité, des amis qui travaillaient au théâtre l'ont laissé s'échapper en buvant (la nuit où Lincoln a été abattu). Quant à Mary Owens, il est vrai qu'elle fut une ancienne conquête de Lincoln, mais elle ne devint jamais prostituée. N'eut pas de fille nommée Sophia, ne connut pas Teddy Roosevelt et ne vécut pas à Savannah, en Georgie. Lincoln ne rencontra jamais Roosevelt de son vivant, bien qu'il existe une photo de Teddy et de son frère Elliot lors des funérailles de Lincoln, alors qu'ils étaient enfants (« Teddy Roosevelt et Abraham Lincoln sur la même photo »). Roosevelt ne visita jamais Fort Pulaski enfant. S'il est vrai que les forces de l'Union parviennent à prendre le fort et à capturer la garnison confédérée, ces confédérés n'étaient pas commandés par Stonewall Jackson (qui ne se rendit jamais à Fort Pulaski). Jackson ne meurt pas non plus à Fort Pulaski ; il est tué par des tirs amis. Enfin, Lincoln et Jackson ne se rencontrent jamais en personne. Figures de proue de camps opposés durant la guerre de Sécession, Jackson et Lincoln n'ont pourtant jamais combattu d'ennemi commun. Jackson ne fut même pas capturé une seule fois pendant le conflit (« Témoignage oculaire de la blessure de Stonewall Jackson »). Contrairement aux autres, l'argent Wilson Brown est un personnage entièrement fictif. Bien que l'Union ait bénéficié du soutien de troupes afro-américaines durant la guerre, Lincoln n'a jamais collaboré étroitement avec un agent fédéral afro-américain. En réalité, le premier agent afro-américain des services secrets affecté à la protection d'un président fut nommé en 1964, des décennies après l'assassinat de Lincoln (« Abraham Bolden, premier agent afro-américain des services secrets de la Maison-Blanche, obtient enfin justice »).

De toute évidence, de nombreuses libertés historiques ont été prises pour les besoins d'une histoire romancée et captivante, mais le film se révèle étonnamment fidèle à la réalité pour un long-métrage aussi peu conventionnel. La majeure partie du film a d'ailleurs été tournée à Savannah, en Georgie, certaines scènes ayant même été filmées dans le véritable Fort Pulaski. Les costumes étaient également conformes à l'époque : Lincoln et ses agents portaient des costumes noirs typiques de l'époque, ainsi que des blouses et des cravates (même si ce n'était peut-être pas la norme pour des hommes en mission militaire secrète). Lincoln est également représenté coiffé de son emblématique



chapeau haut-de-forme au début du film, et sa barbe et ses favoris sont visibles tout au long du récit. Jackson et ses soldats étaient également vêtus de façon appropriée : Jackson portait son manteau bleu caractéristique et sa longue barbe, tandis que ses hommes arboraient des uniformes gris confédérés. Bien que Mary Owens n'ait jamais été une prostituée, son allure, tout comme celle d'Annika, correspondait à celle des prostituées de la guerre de Sécession : robe, corset, cheveux relevés, fleurs. L'histoire de Mary Owens était également relativement fidèle à la réalité : elle mentionne son retour dans l'Illinois pour épouser Lincoln et la manière dont il a rompu leurs fiançailles, ce qui est exact. Lincoln lui a envoyé une lettre lui proposant de l'épouser si elle revenait, puis une autre lettre mettant fin à leur relation. L'argot était également conforme à l'époque, les agents désignant souvent les Confédérés par les surnoms de « Graybacks » et de « Johnny Rebs » (« L'argot pendant la guerre de Sécession »). John Wilkes Booth, déguisé en John Wilkinson, a également fait preuve d'hostilité envers Wilson Brown comme n'importe quel autre agent de l'Union, ce qui reflète fidèlement la supériorité que le Sud ressentait à l'égard des Afro-Américains à l'époque, et reflète également les véritables loyautés de Booth.

La première tentative infructueuse de Booth pour assassiner Lincoln rappelle les premiers complots du véritable Booth visant à enlever le président. L'idée que Brown connaisse le mot « zombies » mieux que les autres agents blancs est assez plausible, compte tenu des superstitions liées à l'esclavage, comme le vaudou. Ces hommes, Jackson et Booth, étaient également farouchement opposés à travailler avec des femmes comme Mary Owens et Annika, qu'ils désignaient par des noms peu flatteurs. Cependant, cela reflète aussi fidèlement le contexte de l'époque, notamment la stigmatisation de la sexualité féminine et la grande piété de Jackson. Bien sûr, il est globalement exact que Lincoln et Jackson étaient en désaccord pendant la guerre. Que les soldats confédérés et unionistes se méfient les uns des autres et que le Nord et le Sud se sont affrontés à Fort Pulaski. La chronologie de la bataille est également exacte, puisque la prise de Fort Pulaski a eu lieu plusieurs mois avant la bataille de Gettysburg. Le discours de Gettysburg prononcé par Abraham Lincoln était relativement fidèle, parce qu'il a été repris dans le film (bien que certaines parties aient été coupées pour le raccourcir). L'armement était assez réaliste, notamment en ce qui concerne John Wilkes Booth, que l'on voit à un moment donné tenir le petit pistolet qui a tué Lincoln. Les soldats étaient équipés de fusils. Lincoln lui-même utilisait une faux provenant de la plantation, un objet courant dans les plantations du Sud, même s'il n'était généralement pas utilisé comme une arme. La plupart des exactitudes étaient d'ordre conceptuel, et non factuel.

Globalement, c'était un visionnage très divertissant – terrible dans le bon sens du terme. L'interprétation de Bill Oberst Jr. Dans le rôle de Lincoln, ainsi que les décors et costumes, ont quelque peu sauvé le film. Cependant, le jeu forcé des autres personnages, l'écriture mièvre, les scènes de combat confuses et le montage saccadé l'ont empêché d'atteindre son plein potentiel. Recommanderais-je « Abraham Lincoln contre les zombies » pour un cours d'histoire de terminale ? Probablement pas. Il existe de nombreux films bien plus ambitieux pour illustrer la guerre. Cependant, il pourrait tout de même présenter un certain intérêt : il est divertissant et captivant, de nombreuses informations historiques y sont présentées de manière simple, et les élèves pourraient appliquer leurs connaissances pour distinguer le vrai du faux. En revanche, recommanderais-je « Abraham Lincoln contre les zombies » à un professeur d'histoire de terminale ? Absolument. Un incontournable pour tous les passionnés de Lincoln et de son œuvre.



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