

OPEN MIC POETRY & FLASH FICTION

This “Words Matter” Open Mic marks our 15th year of student readings and participation in The Scholastic Writing Competition since 2003. Many of the creative writing works included here will go on to compete this year at the regional and national level of Scholastic Writing and for publication in *Best Teen Writing*, Scholastic’s national publication. For more information about this prestigious competition, visit artandwriting.org. Our internal deadline is December 4 for any student wishing to submit works this year to Scholastics. Please see the Scholastic guidelines posted on the Student Portal and Mr. Harris for guidance and more information. Thank you, students, for sharing your works with us and for continuing our strong tradition of creative writing. Stay inspired and inspiring!

I. Poetry

Refugees

By Emma Martin, 11th grade, American Literature

The mouth of the cave swallows us whole
submerging into darkness
lights from headlamps guide the way like thin tight ropes
creating paths that appear and then betray one's eyes
We crawl underground
rats scavenging for light and not food
the cold mountain streams bleed
down into the caverns below
the suffocating tunnel opens up into a gothic hall
silhouettes of human form sit like gargoyles in a circle
headlamps die black
any trace of light returns to the sun above
one weak flame seems to light itself
glossing the faces of those around
with a flickering orange tint
until we emerge
into a flood of brightness

A Culture to be Forgotten

By Emma Martin, 11th grade, American Literature

A skeleton of past times

stone upon crumbling stone

building blocks of a rooted faith

Tintern Abbey now a tourist site

sits and watches the seconds tick

Knocked down by the scepter

of a Tudor king's spirit

echoing choirs howl in the wind

wooden floors now turned to grass

In the summer night

a ceiling of stars and indigo roads

for traveling dreams the river

Wye in the days of early June

ghosts come out as wisps of clouds

wisps of memories long forgotten

blacked out by the falling sun

at a corner of the foundation

When I saw the infamous DMV

By Cole Barnes, 11th grade, American Literature

When I saw the infamous brick building with the long line,
When the people, the workers, and the system moved slow and lifeless,
When I waited for hours, like time had stopped, like the clocks had melted,
When I got in the big white jeep and buckled my belt to escape the cold prison,
While driving, the DMV lady lectured me, judged me, deducted points,
So quickly I became tired, desired an escape, turned up the radio, rolled down my
windows.
Nearing the end, I slammed my car in park, grabbed my slip of paper, drove off alone.
Driving away, I got lost on the Lynyrd Skynyrd station all the way to Lake Norman
And got lost in my canoe alone in the murky lake water.
I dozed off to the perfect silence while floating around in a random cove and focused
on the whistle of the wind
Then soon was awakened by the harsh tug of a bass on my line
And was mesmerized at last by the light spots of its Snow-White stomach.

Sins and Greens

By Connor Cantalupo, 11th grade, American Literature

When I heard the loud bells ringing from the steeple,
When I saw the priest walking down the aisle,
When I heard the baby scream with passion,
When I tried to listen to the endless sermon about sins and hell,
When the choir woke up the church with its off key version of Hallelujah,
When the ushers passed around the basket to beg for money,
When I marched up the aisle to take bread and wine,
How soon I became exhausted and depressed,
Till I turned and walked away
Out to the golf course
Wind blowing my face
Looking out to the green
Trees rustling in the fall breeze.

Wenonah

By Ashton Barlow, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

The harvest moon rose high
Above the silhouette of Panther Mountain, casting
Yellow light across the black, glassy lake.
Below the constellations, smoke rose,
Fire pit located in the heart of the island,
Campfire flames, Mikayla's and Andrew's faces,
Pelham and Singapore meet.
The lake was something more
Than the summer,
The towns they called home.

Reflection

By Ashton Barlow, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

Sideways, we walked sideways
Up the slanted, creaky stairs,
The air suffocating, stealing the air.
Sent to find the quilted star blanket,
Stumbling across something, someone
More than her simple stitch work.
First day of July on Boulder island,
We'd always known the myth,
The myth of the girl in the empty attic
Above the kitchen house.
We never believed it until now.
Partly hidden behind a beam,
Her back turned away from Andrew and me.
The white light illuminating her white t-shirt,
Reflecting off the antiqued mirror in the corner.
Sinking away, closer to the mirror,
Her brown eyes met my blue.

Venus in October

By Ashton Barlow, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

In her Ray Ban aviators
She is a loner among the starless sky,
But what crowds don't know is that behind those
Misty twilight eyes is their untold story,
One she will never whisper from her chapped lips,
For it has died in the dark center of her eyes.

Crossing to Fifth, blue flash polarized meets
Louis Vuitton, Harry Winston, Bergdorf Goodman.
Her distorted self blurs between diamond-studded
Snakes and velvet forests.

Placing her hand over her face between
The gold lettering, she pushes through
Sullivan & Cromwell LLP.
Her reflection disappears behind the glass door.
Only her fingerprints remain.
Her pretty face vanishes.

Paralyzed Forest

By Ellie Perrigo, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

Caught a van ride to the top,
didn't know which way to turn,
went left but had to turn around.

Appalachian Trail
Just outside of Asheville,
Hot Springs.

Swinging in an Eno,
Remember the sound of someone pouring water,
Raising food in bags.
Green tent,
Could not see the sky, so many trees,
Still green leaves,
But saw fireworks July 4.

From afar,
A ghost-like shadow appeared from behind the trees.
It's dingy shape,
Morphing with every look,
Thought it was a black bear.

A strong voice echoed through the trees,
Saying my name,
Asking me what I was doing,
A sound more familiar than most,
The one that guides me.

No ghost, no creature,
Just the one who created
And helped me breathe
By laughing with me
About my fears.

Nights after Afghanistan

By Wyatt Nabatoff, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

soundlessly in bed with eyes closed and mind awake
cool winds rustled the autumn leaves
I aimlessly wandered down a mountain path
free like clouds in gusts of wind
that fluttered shapeless across a blue sky
with only the waning moon
illuminating and guiding my way
then artillery flashed overhead and terror approached
a desert storm marched from the horizon
with it ripping winds and pelting raindrops
the moon vanished as all became dark
soldiers materialized wielding guns
one reached out
and it was my time to die
then I woke... and there was no war

Remembering

By Tony Liu, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

A flaming day in
ShenZhen. Dry, unbearable,
I decided to hide under a roof
Because roof to me
Means comfort.
Watery eyes,
Or where I need to go.
Imagine being a bubble
On the lonely Nanshan Road.
I like walking
As much as I like roof.
Walking on the road
Means comfort to me.

Soft soap bubble, rainbow color.
Surprised at its ability to attack.
You think of it as
The purple moon.
It seems so gentle,
Yet the symmetry of the bubble
Split in half, equally across
Its diameter, is how
This universe is born.
Splitting a rainbow
To me also means
Comfort.

Shenda Pond

By Tony Liu, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

A piece of white Mantou,
Still hot,
Wrapped by a thin layer
Of a tiny plastic bag,
Tasting bland,
But what bland means
To those orange, black, and white carp
Is good food.

They craved it,
Jumping one over one,
Losing their balance,
Just to get that one bite
Of white, tasteless
Mantou.

I saved the last bite for myself
And closed my eyes.

Fishing After Reading Blake's "Fly"

By Riley Davis, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

After scaling and climbing,
the sound of rushing water.
I rush through dewy grass,
force through frosted rhododendron,
carve through Blue Ridge thorns.
It snakes around boulders and trees.
Three or four trout start to feed
on the blue winged olives.
Dorsal fins pierce a circular wake.
I wander close to the rocky gravel bank,
heave my rod above my head,
wave the clear line out long,
release my fly into the water
just above the feeding fish,
knowing I probably won't catch it,
but I keep casting and casting
as writers always do.

The Following

By Erika Kim, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

I.

Shops line both sides of her path.

The atmosphere of the Lenox Mall is dark despite bright lights
on those who try to hide.

Two girls flaunt by her, laughing, gossiping.

Their blonde hair, that sunshine sways in perfect unison,
their white dresses unblemished,

like an ode to a Debutante

with skin to match.

Her coarse, black hair like oily ropes,

her black dress wrinkles as she picks off the pieces of lint,

her skin that's dark but not golden,

yellow but not their shade.

II.

She turns to her reflection staring back.

She looks straight into her black, shiny eyes.

Both sets of eyes slowly travel down their bodies

then up at the mannequin on the other side of the glass.

The skin-tight Versace dress.

Prada shoes lead eyes to the menacing points of heels,

shiny, gaudy rocks that weigh down the manufactured limbs.

Light of spring slowly descends,

meeting the looming horizon.

Remnants of the April breeze creep

as celestial objects emerge from hiding.

The Nightmare

By Tess Wrigley, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

I scream at Christy
Pleading with her to let me stop
But her slight shake of the head keeps me riding
Behind each fence I see a life of paralysis
Confined to a chair or a bed
The rhythmic beating of shoed hooves
Lets me fall into motion with Mystic
Only a second later
A shadow dashes in between the colorful trees beside me
Birds fleeing south a cat sneaking by
Or maybe a mere breath of the wind
I clutch tightly to the braided leather
Blistering my ring fingers
The horse thrusts its head into the air
And the rhythm distorts
The galloping of bone-crushing metal shoes fills my ears
My body levitates
Leaving the supple seat of the saddle
Skull crashes into the ground
Neck arching into the sand
Rolling quickly to my feet
I stand alone
Sand embedded into my velvet Dover helmet
I fight off tears
Darting out to recover Mystic
Along with the chorus of voices
Whose calming calls already fill the arena

Highway 441 In October

By Fleming Landau, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

Riding together through the Blue Ridge Mountains.
The path sharply twisting up the mountain.
Birds dip and glide. Trees sway in the golden autumn sunlight,
the sounds of the city far behind them.
Life swerves into the dense wood.
One sideways glance,
and the car is spinning
like figure eight's.
The wheels turn off the dirt path.
The car completely crushed,
Metal compressing like the force of a hurricane.
Flipping, flipping, flipping
settling in the ditch,
shattering like paint flying off a brush,
snowing across the forest floor.
Red life running down the bodies.
Covered over in leaves of rust.

The Summer Night We Lost Our House

By Cecelia Monnin, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

We'd been walking too long on Night Heron Beach.

The constellations of night soon became

the Atlantic's windblown shadows

and grey green waves.

Caroline yelled a cry along the endless Kiawah coastline.

Our flashlights found ghost crabs,

their home was everywhere.

Our feet sank into cold, silver sand.

Caroline called again.

Her voice ran away into the night.

We stumbled onto the boardwalk

having lost our home but found our way.

II. Flash Fiction

Chavanne, my melody

By Michele Tian, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

I sit in front of my Chavanne monochromatic piano. A breeze waltzes through my living room, yet my mind fails to wrap around the waltz I'm learning. I attempt to screenshot the chilling music, hoping that the whole notes, rests, and trills will remain in my mind like the ice that lingers on the roads during the winter time. As I sit on my rustic bench, my mind flows to the memories of my homeland, Canada, and I reflect on my experiences. I remember the times that I used to hear the pattering rain against my stain-glass windows. The grey and blue clouds that scattered the sky prevented any light to escape the layer of darkness. The windows become translucent rather than colorful, allowing me only to see the dark colors of the outdoors.

In this moment, as sleet drags down my clear window, I remember the last conversation I had with my competitor, Sunny, who was practicing a contemporary piece by Ludovico Einaudi. While she's practicing a bright, positive composition, I'm stagnated, like a frozen river, unable to memorize my waltz. I dread the moment for when I have to present myself at Queens to my judges, who will determine my fate.

I continue cramming, trilling, fighting. I play an augmented chord, crescendo, minor scale, diminuendo. I finally halt, defeated in front of the pages of Tchaikovsky, succumbing to his musical notes. I slam down on the keys, an inharmonic chord ringing through my lamp-lit living room. Echoes of the booming strings ring, Chavanne's haunting laughter playing in my ears, as I fail.

Catching a Nightmare

By Annabelle Oates, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

The smell of blood stings my nose. Instantly nauseated by the sight of half dead tuna sliding on the deck, I close my eyes. The opaque waves rise high above our small boat. I look for solid ground, but there is no land in sight. The only thing out here is dark rolling waves, the small boat, the half dead fish being speared by the anglers, and myself. My dark hair covers my flushed cheeks. I feel like I am nothing. I shake my mother as if it will get me out of this nightmare. But I am still stuck as the grey skies and ocean of afternoon light closes down around our boat. As if someone or something could take my life in a second. As if I am a speck of dust or a minnow in the sea. The boat hits a white capped wave, and I am thrown against the railing. I try to close my eyes but every rough patch we hit forces me to flinch them back open. A high whining and worrying sound stings my ears. My brother is fighting with the sailfish that lurks below the surface. He grasps the reel and leans back using all his strength as the 200-pound fish gains power against his rod. The pointy nosed sailfish flies into the air crashing in and out of the dark water. My stomach ties into knots as I watch the fish wrestle against the line. The additional anglers grasp onto the rod pulling the animal to the surface. Its glossy red eyes stare right into me. I grab my windbreaker in the chill of salty wind. A gloved hand grasps the sword like beak of the creature, and with a flip the fish is launched into the hold. The carcass makes a dull, flopping sound. The seagulls' mournful screeches pierce my ears as they circle the boat, surrounding the bloody beast. I cling to my mother, my arms trembling. I gaze out onto the water and am calmed by the sight of Caneel Bay.

How to Move On

By Olivia Clements, 12th grade, Honors British Literature

A deep breath because that's how it always starts. Good morning kisses, disheveled hair and week-old jeans. A bitter coffee, a chocolate doughnut, a loyal pair of slippers. Two more coffees, a set of car keys, and a stubborn wooden door. A daughter watches through a crying window; a car, a mother, and a modest stop sign. Don't forget what you saw, forget how you felt.

Watch the glass fall angrily like hail in a snow storm. Witness the powerful strike of the airbag. Hear the metal doors bend until they scream in pain. Replay the memory in your mind. Don't forget. A barefoot daughter runs through the frosted glass. Shards cut her innocent feet but adrenaline numbs the pain. She squeezes into the car quickly, and all at once reaching out towards the muffled cries. Heavy breathing, violent tears, a siren. A mother looks into her daughter's blue and red eyes. She remembers the pink bow the girl wore on the first day of school, the way her lips twisted when she ate sour strawberries, the sound of her warm voice, like a winter sunrise when she arrived home each afternoon. Two bodies and a deafening silence. Now forget what you saw, remember how you felt.

A waiting room, sticky floors and four suffocating walls. A daughter sits in a burning chair watching strange ghosts disappear slowly down the halls. They haunt the silent child whose eyes scream for help as she fruitlessly attempts to scratch the red stains from her skin.

Two beating hearts in an unfamiliar room; one slows. A daughter and a mother sit alone together, without words. In a cold bed, they listen to the dying beat of the monitor, until two bodies become one. Don't think, just breath. Remember there are no miracles. A final breath, a

goodbye kiss because that's how it ends. Pick up your feet. One by one. Move slowly, and let the memories fade with each heavy step. There is no such thing as forgetting. What you saw. How you felt. Only that moves.

