



Aspirations 2020



Aspirations 2020

A Literary and Arts Journal for
Mercer County Area
High School Students

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Aspirations 2020, a literary magazine published by Mercer County Community College, is proud to celebrate and present the talents of area high school students. For decades, the literary and visual works collected in *Aspirations* have showcased students' hopes, dilemmas, questions, and insights. This year, once again, the creativity within these pages helps us see both the familiar with renewed attention and the unfamiliar with a satisfying sense of recognition.

A distinguished panel selected these works from hundreds of entries. For their discerning sensibilities and commitment to the students in this area, the following teachers and artists have earned the appreciation of this community:

Carol Bork	Mercer County Community College
Yevginiy Fiks	Mercer County Community College
Nicole Homer	Mercer County Community College
Lucas Kelly	Mercer County Community College
Kerri O'Neill	Mercer County Community College
Kyle Stevenson	Mercer County Community College
Michael Welliver	Mercer County Community College

Still others have contributed to this publication in important ways. We would like to thank the parents, friends, family, and teachers who supported the development of our writers and artists. Thanks go to MCCC President Jianping Wang and our Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Robert Schreyer for their support; to Francis Paixão and Daniel Migliaccio in Mercer's Publications Office for their work designing and laying out this journal; to Brad Kent for setting up and maintaining the *Aspirations* web page; and to Shana Burnett for the dependable and effective way she managed submissions, contact with schools, and the many details of the selection, editing and proofing process. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Robert Kleinschmidt, the Dean of Liberal Arts, for his generous help to me and his coordination of all phases of this publication project. His commitment to the arts makes projects such as this one possible.

Nicole Homer
Assistant Professor of English and Editor, *Aspirations 2020*
Mercer County Community College



Cover Art

Okawari Floral Dance

Peter Tran
Hightstown High School
Grade 11

Peter Tran is an aspiring artist with great interest in backgrounds and landscapes, with anime and Japanese art as a hobby. His style focuses towards precise detail.



Mea Alex

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Mea Alex is a sophomore at Hopewell Valley who plays both softball and soccer for the school at a varsity level as well as club soccer. She works hard in school and enjoys both science and math.

The Power of Motherly Love

People always say,
Time heals all wounds.
I keep praying for that to be true.
I keep praying that as time passes,
It will be like I never said anything.
I keep praying that Time will be able to heal the divide.

But it's been an entire year.
One year of me trying to stitch everything back together,
One year of me fighting that constant pain that threatens to tear me apart,
One year of me constantly wondering if you'll ever see me the same way again.

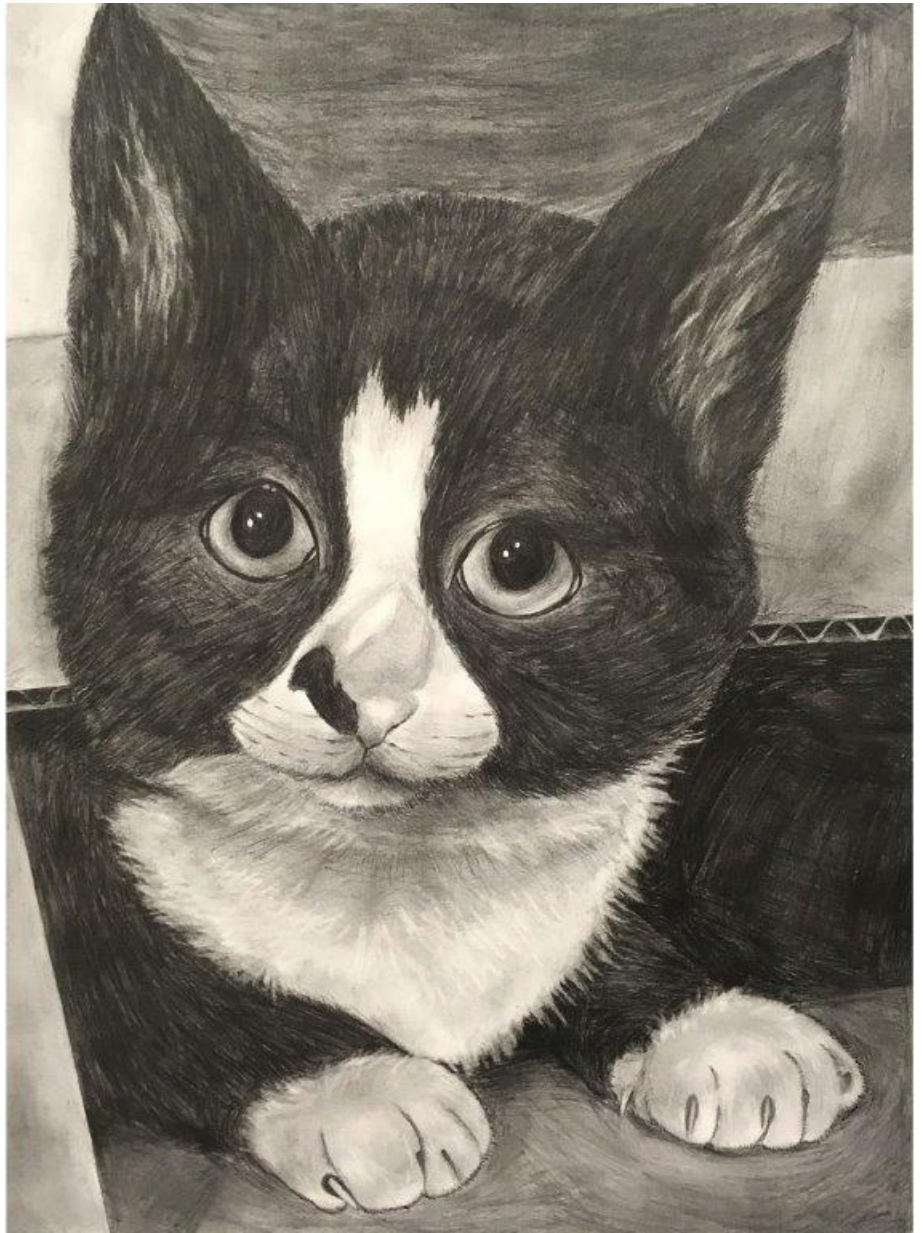
You're supposed to be the one that cares for me,
Which is funny considering that
I'm chancing my luck on something as fickle as Time.
I know I can't rely on your love,
like a mouse scurrying into a hole in the wall.
It's there one moment,
But gone the next.
And no matter what I do,
Nothing brings the elusive mouse back out from its hiding place,
Just like nothing I do is ever enough to make you care.

All I have left is that hope.
That hope that Time finally makes you realize that
Even though you think you're protecting my heart,
You broke it first by cutting me off from the one person keeping me together.
My own mother.
For what?
Because she was not a he?
Because it doesn't fit with your limited perception of what is normal?
I hope Time will fix your prejudices,
Because no words of mine can.

Jenna Adams
Hightstown High School
Grade 10

Sylvester the Cat

Jenna Adams enjoys reading, drawing, and writing. She loves animals and has always had numerous pets. Some of the pets her family has had are cats, a dog, goldfish, a small freshwater shark, countless guppies, aquatic frogs, Betta fish, an Oscar fish, and Madagascar hissing cockroaches.



Hilario Agurto
Hightstown High School
Grade 11

Hilario likes to draw in his free time and has been drawing people for most of this year. In this piece he drew from an old photo of him and his mother. Hilario likes to put a lot of effort in his drawing to make it look as realistic as it could be.

Childhood Photo



Brooke Blackwell
Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Brooke Blackwell is 16 and is a sophomore at Hopewell Valley Central High School. She spends her free time playing lacrosse on her school and club team. She loves to spend time with her friends and family.

I'm Afraid

I'm afraid of not knowing where life is going to take me,
Thinking I have each piece perfectly planned,
But nothing is that simple.
I'm afraid of making the wrong choice,
That could result in jeopardy of my future,
Causing my dreams to come alive but die when I open my eyes.
I'm afraid of going to school and not walking out,
Being interrupted in a class by screams, shots, and the slaughter of
people around me,
The thought of a school shooting lingers in my mind like a horren-
dous smell in the air.
I'm afraid of the people that are closest to me being taken away,
Like an endangered animal that's the last of its kind,
Being alone in a world that's undiscovered.
But what scares me most,
Is that there is a possibility that these fears can become a reality.

Brooke Blackwell

Hopewell Valley Central High School

Grade 10

Brooke Blackwell is 16. She spends her free time playing lacrosse on her school and club team. She loves to spend time with her friends and family.

Tell Her What She Missed In Class Yesterday

Nothing, we just listened to Mr. Jones talk for a few light-years.
He went on and on about the building blocks of matter which no one cares about.

We took a few notes, they're unnecessary like a pet rock

The majority of the time no one was listening.

The only thing I could concentrate on was

Tapping feet, clicking pens, and squeaking chairs.

Olivia was staring at her phone the whole time,

My mom would've said that she could see Olivia's brain-melting,
like butter in a hot pan.

Jackson was doodling with a sharpie all over his large pale hands,

That were already engulfed in freckles like a house in flames.

He did tell us we have a test on Tuesday, isn't that terrible?

I don't even know what it's on though,

Maybe the reading we had for homework about how plants grow.

Oh, you weren't here for that although

You didn't miss any important info

At least I don't think so.

Being alone in a world that's undiscovered.

But what scares me most,

Is that there is a possibility that these fears can become a reality.

Mia Bruno

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Mia Bruno is a member of her school's marching band and indoor color guard. She also partakes in Girl Scouts and is on run crew for her school's musical, *Cinderella*.

The Sky & Her Moods

She is the only one that understands me. I am the only one who understands her. The sky and the weather she brings along with her are pretty on some days and destructive on others. She is always there, a constant even though she is constantly changing. She rests and rises and changes with the moon, the sun, and the seasons. Livi never pays her much mind from the car with its beautiful views, especially when there isn't anything to pay mind to, Livi just drives looking at the road as she normally does.

Her strength is hidden. She is not constant but constantly shifting. Some days she weeps tears of joy on summer evenings with the flowers in meadows absorbing her gift of life, other days she does not. Other times she thrashes around and screams with her lightning bashing everything that stands in her way regardless of who or what they are. She is beautiful with grace and calm, dancing around in the morning as though it is her wedding day and everything is right with the world. Sometimes she is cold, biting the noses of little children who play in the snow that she has given them, keeping them warm with the sun's reflections off her white blankets.

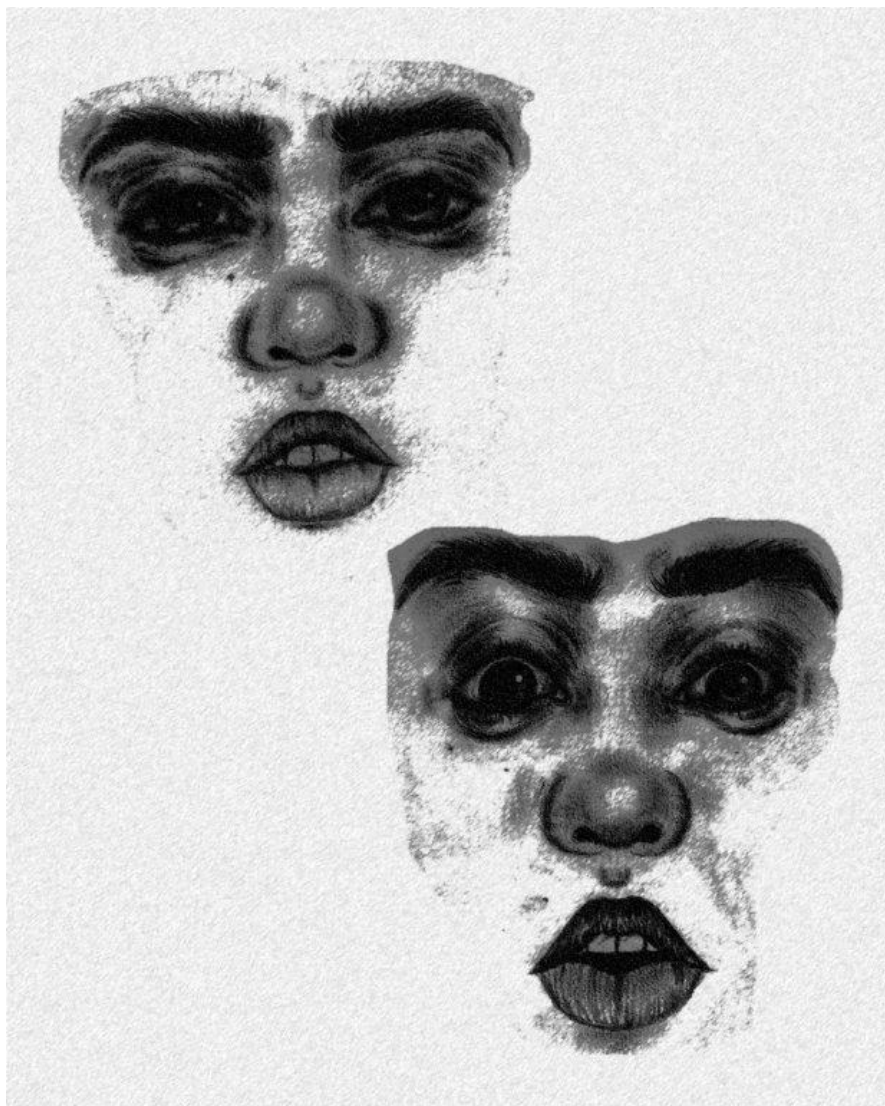
Yet she never forgets her beauty and rage and calm and cruelty, she still sits like a grandmother on the porch in her old rocking chair, always there, always waiting for what's next, ready to have a conversation and give what needs to be given. Being, being, being, being, she tells those who come seeking her ancient wisdom. She tells me. She teaches me.

When I dance in the kitchen at night with music on, singing to the tunes that flow around me and my family while we clean up the meal that had just been eaten, I look to the sky and keep being. When I am angry at the world, and my grades, and my life, and myself, and my nonexistent luck, and want to run and slam doors, I do because the sky has taught me to keep being. When I cry a sad cry, one that makes my body shake and words impossible and required hugs and makes me laugh at the end, then I look to the sky. Nothing stops her, she is relentless and unapologetic. The sky who feels and never forgets to feel. The sky that is and keeps being and always will.

Isabella Ames
Hightstown High School
Grade 11

Isabella is a junior in high school who enjoys art.

Cadaverous



Saisushanth Cheetha Rajesh

Lawrence High School

Grade 10

Saisushanth plays the piano and guitar.

Our Blazing Star

It comes from the east
Spreading warmth where it may be
The flowers blossom.

At noon of the day
The sizzling heat arises
The bees buzz with joy.

It then sets at west
The darkness then surrounds us
Leaving us for now.

Evelyn Carroll

Lawrence High School

Grade 10

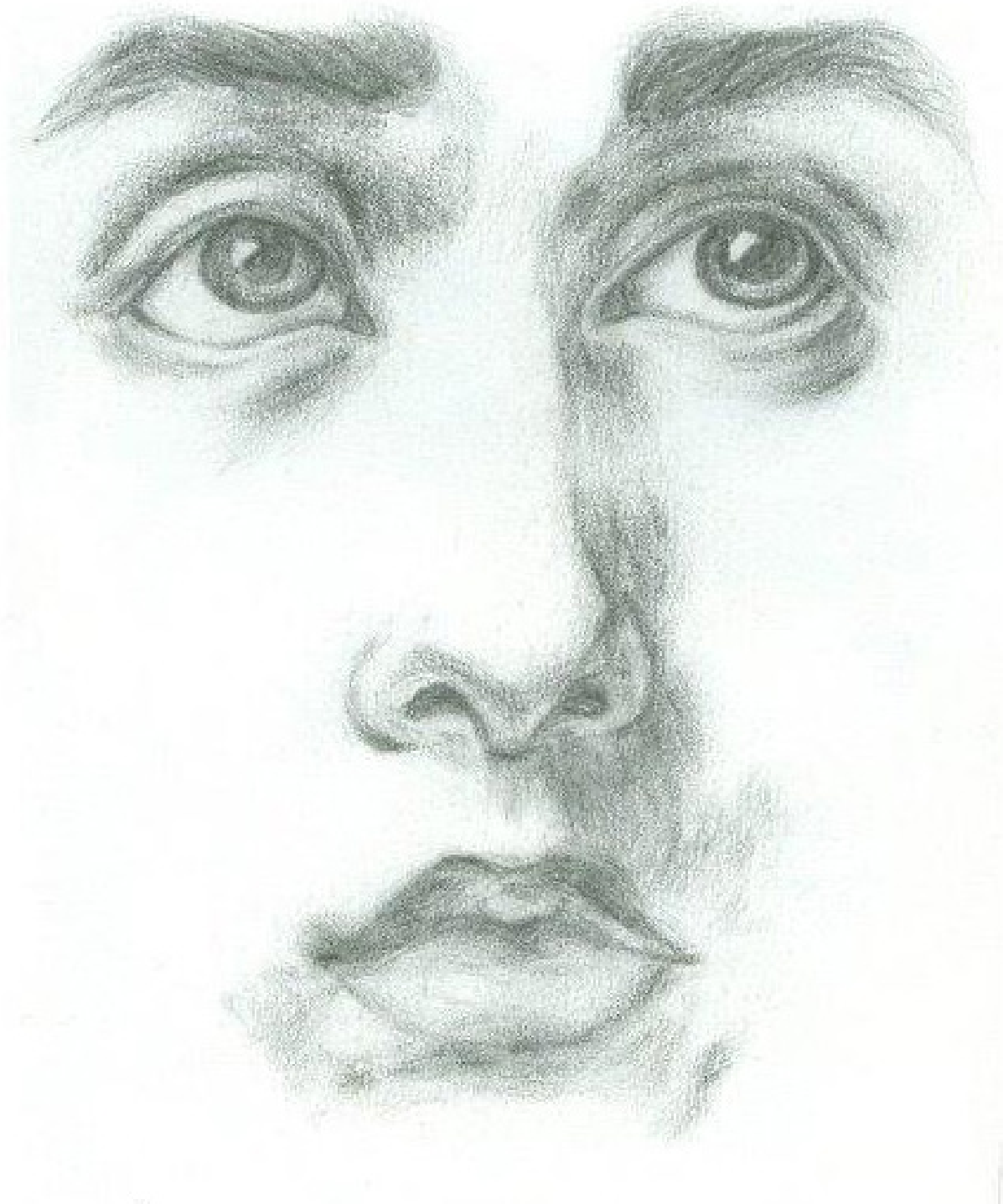
Evelyn Carroll loves anything to do with the arts. She loves acting, singing and dancing on stage with the LHS theater company.

The Person Across the Room

If you get the chance I would suggest saying hi to that person
across the room
Maybe he caught your eye because of his deep autumn eyes
Or was it her hands that fluttered through the air like hummingbirds
Either way, those little things make you smile, but only to yourself
Your heart jumps up and down
Saying hi is too scary for you
Saying hi first doesn't always mean they'll say hi back
Saying hi means you'll have to exhaust a total of 43 muscles
Your seat wraps around you and holds you down in comfort
Too late, you made eye contact and comfort is impossible now
His pupils widen and open up into a pit of warmth
Her cheeks blossom into shades of rose and peach
Your heart stops leaping
Your seat releases you
Your chance is now and I suggest you take it
Before it blows away with the draft in the room

Isabella Ames

Paul-joseph Notre

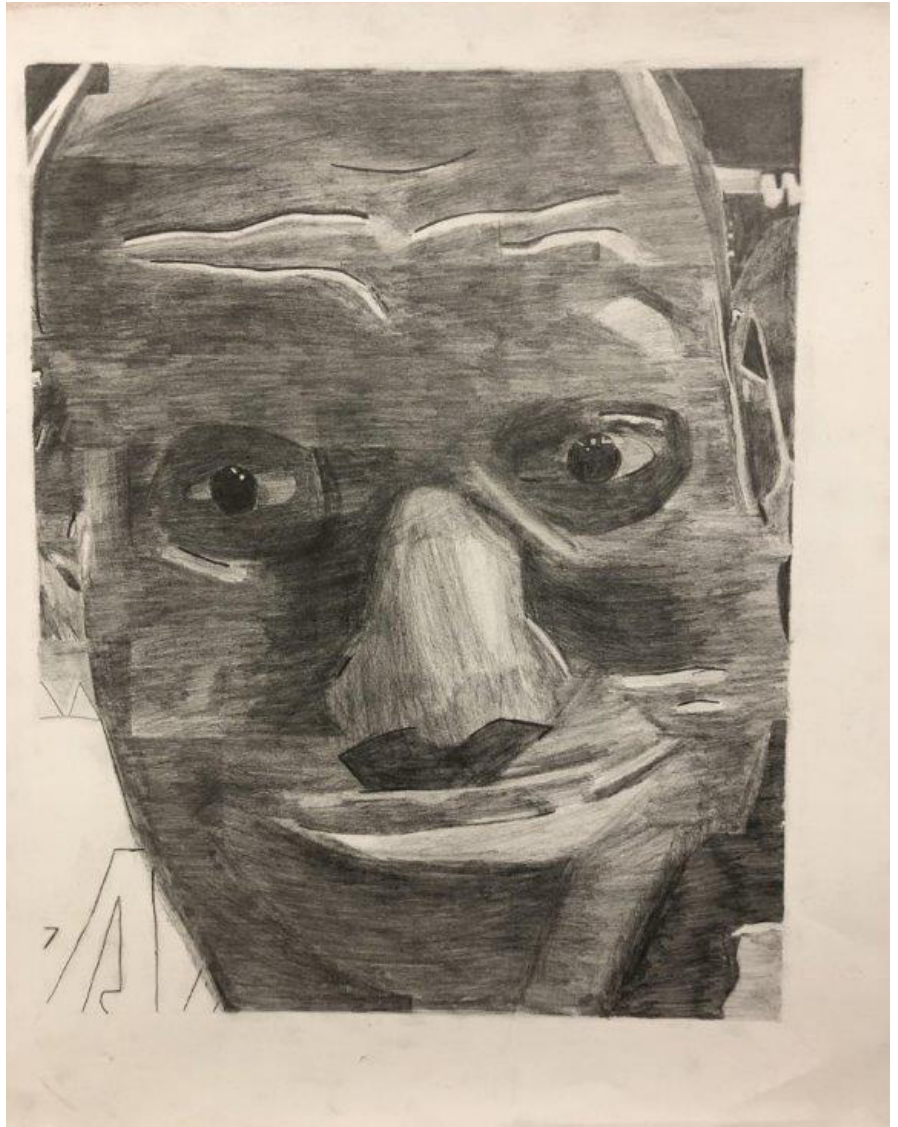


Ethan Bandel

Highstown High School
Grade 9

Ethan Bandel is very involved in the community as he loves participating in many school clubs and other activities outside of school. He really loves sports and is a hard worker in whatever he does. Ethan likes to draw for fun whenever he has free time.

All Star



Cameron Confer

Hopewell Valley Central High school
Grade 10

Cameron enjoys surfing, skating, and skiing. He also makes videos and plays lacrosse.

Winter's Rain

I slowed my bike at the old red barn on a hill of skeleton corn stalks.
No cars in sight I eyed the lonely barn howling in the wind.
Past the red sliding doors, my shoe on the first floorboard broke the
silence between the two worlds.
I stepped through the silence, In the back of the barn, a far off owl gave
a slow call, calm and faint.
The splintered window let light flood into the room
pushing through the mound of snow which had laid on the window sill
Gentle snow sifted through the roof. A green rusted tractor retired for
the winter months beckoned.
The rough leather seat, was icy when I sat, leaving me imagining the
farmer who owned the barn.
Him waking up in the spring to find his boots soggy from the morning dew.
The bitter wind brushed my face
And froze a sheet of snow, frosted on my bike.

Eliana Brown

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 11

Ellie Brown has an eclectic style and enjoys making art in her free time. She hopes to go to college for art to further her studies.

Summertime



Courtney Copeland
Lawrence High School
Grade 10

Courtney enjoys tennis and school.

Free Verse Poem

Ever had a strange feeling?
The person next door
Has a lot more to her
What if?
You were just laying in bed
She comes in and chops off your head
What if?
Your neighbor was filled with lies
There was killing in her eyes

It's like
Living near a kid who grow up to be famous
Or
Seeing an animal before it went extinct
Or how about
Watching a video before it goes viral

But a murderer?!
That's more
Frightening
Haunting
Sickning
Chilling
Seriously?
Killing...?

Isn't that crazy
When your idiosyncrasy
Completely changes

I was going to keep silent
Because what I think isn't a compliment
And I didn't want to start an argument
But I think the neighbors pestilent
And perhaps a bit violent

This poem might sound a little churlish
But after all it does have a purpose

My neighbors name is Kalley
But I don't think she's a killer

But be aware of your surroundings
You don't know what you might find
I mean after all, you've probably past a few killers in your lifetime

Celine Edmonds

Hopewell Valley Regional High School
Grade 10

Celine Edmonds enjoys going to the beach and hanging out with friends in her free time.

The Magical Mom Mind

My mom can sense things from a mile away
I could've sworn she was an undercover superhero with powers

The door sounds a faint "creeeekkk" and she heard it
Or someone starts to tiptoe down the stairs at 2 am, she asks you the next day
Watching *The Office* while she's down the hallway, don't worry she heard

Or a scratch on the dining room table and she picks up on it
The antique blue vase in the living room falls and shatters when she's not home, she knows
At the dinner table and one dish is untouched, don't worry she notices

She has a nose like a K-9, incredible smell
Someone cooks scrambled eggs and she announces she smells a cooking odor
Or a Twisted Peppermint candle is lit for one minute and she's racing in to tell you
One spray of perfume and she notices after just walking by
Now I'm older, and I've realized that she is just observant of every little detail
If she could recognize when I get a good grade, I would be happy

Julia Colonna

Hightstown High School
Grade 11

Julia first came to love the arts when she was introduced to the work of Andy Warhol in her third grade art class. Now, she plans to become a nurse, while still making time for developing her own analog film and the occasional neo-expressionist painting endeavor.

The Ghost of You



Julia Colonna

Seven Devils #1



Jonah Gesenberg
Lawrence High School
Grade 10

Jonah Gesenberg does not like writing poems.

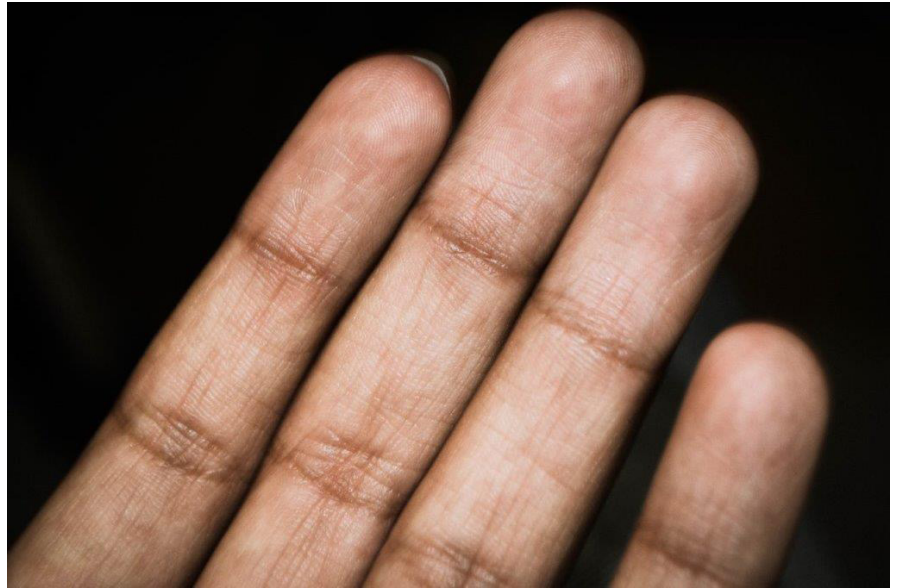
I Do Not Like Writing Poems

I've been assigned to write a poem
But when I try my brain begins to grow numb
I've spent a lot of time
Trying to make it rhyme
Unfortunately my attention has a short fuse
So instead I've been trying to find this project's use
Writing essays will help me get a job
Making poems will make me look like a pretentious snob
I took this class to analyze
But instead I am trying not to plagiarize
What's important is whether or not I fail
But this poem is completely unbalanced and doesn't have any rhythm
so my chances are frail

Robertson Darko Jr.
Hightstown High School
Grade 12

Robertson enjoys listening to the rapper J Cole as well as he enjoys watching basketball and soccer.

In Depth



Robertson Darko Jr.

Setting Feelings



Zoë Dec
Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 11

When she is not making art, Zoë Dec plays tennis and dances. Sometimes, she does both at the same time.

Overgrown Time



Chester Diaz I

Hightstown High School

Grade 9

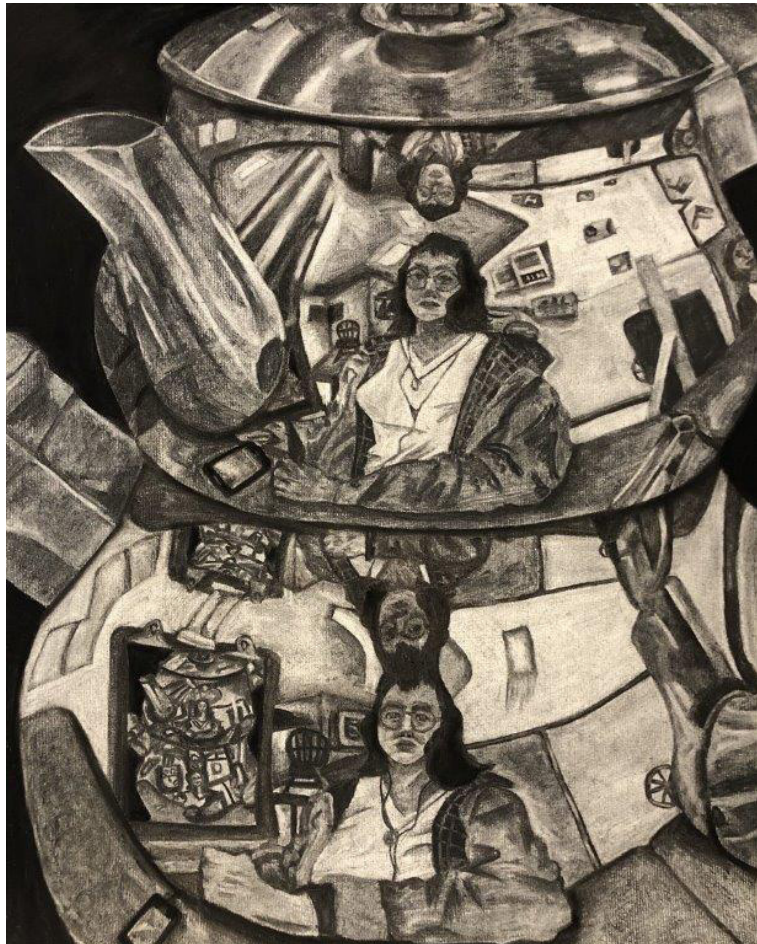
Chester Diaz I was hanging out with his friend outside after a school day. It was night with light fog so he and his friend decided to try out his new camera by taking some amazing pictures. Chester Diaz I loved the light in the background.

Repent**Seraphina Gillman**

Hopewell Valley Central High School

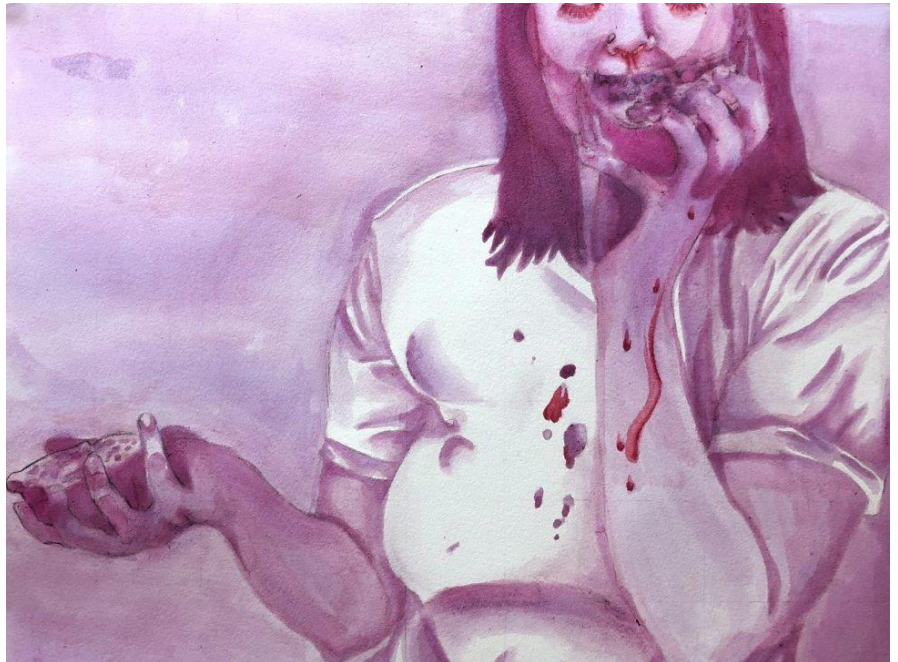
Grade 11

Seraphina Gillman is an editor on *Panorama*, the literary and arts magazine for Hopewell Valley Central High School. She is an active member of the Hopewell arts community, co-leading the HVCHS Art Club and participating in the National Art Honors Society.

Pour Me Out

Seraphina Gillman

Offering to Demeter in Pomegranate Juice



Dominic Guarino
Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 11

Dominic Guarino likes doing art and enjoys the competitive crew team he is on.

Balloon Reflection



Meagan Gordon

Hopewell Valley Central High School

Grade 10

Meagan Gordon enjoys playing soccer and hanging out with her friends.

My Mothers' Soothing Song

Every night in kindergarten
after dinner
I fake fell asleep on the couch
So my dad had to carry me
Up to my purple butterfly room.
Sometimes I let out a little yap of joy as he
Laid me down on my bed and
Called my mother
To come say goodnight
As he withdrew to sleep
On the living room
loveseat.
My mother tucked floral covers around me
And looked at me as if I was an angel,
Grazed her hand over my thin hair and murmured a tune.
Each evening melody was different.
I closed my eyes and wrapped myself
In the blanket of her spirit.
She kissed me on the forehead and
I grabbed her hand as a plea for her to sing again
Before she departed from my side.
It helped the pain of her and daddy's arguing
subside.

Derek Grbac

Nottingham High School North
Grade 11

Derek Grbac enjoys creative writing and composing. He is an avid fan of many genres of media, including sci-fi, fantasy, and mystery. He is currently working on a novel, and has been doing so for the past two years.

Malus domestica

In the soil of my brain
Many years ago
A seed was sown
And a sapling was grown

And from that tree
I have received
Many fruits and leaves
Since twenty seventeen

A bit of water every day
Scooped up from the pond
Carried in a golden can
And dumped back on

Flowing down the tree
And down my head
Dripping down my face
Like the blood I've bled

But being a farmer isn't easy
Taking care of the this tree will only sometimes please me
And its branches and fruit are becoming heavy
Sprawling outwards to infinity

Trimming the branches of the arbor
My job is more of a barber

The tree grows unchecked
New branches regularly
I let nobody see
So the harvests mean nothing

And when I complain
They simply suggest to me
"Trim the tree, or harvest the fruit"
If only it were that easy

For my hands cannot reach the highest of branches
And the slightest of moves cause fruit avalanches

Harvests are not impossible
But I'd need a plan
But to write it down, I'd need my hands

Yet my hands have stayed in place for many days now
My finger and thumb in the hedge clippers' crown
I dare not move, for what if all the fruit were to fall?
They'll bruise on the ground, and it won't be worth it at all
And if I try to trim it, what then?
I'll cut off something important and have to start all over again

My associates become frustrated
They manage their trees
And when I ask for advice, they say to me

"We've told you before
I suppose I can tell you again
Trim the tree
Ignore the highest branches
Let their fruit fall to the fen

And when you trim the tree
Do it without care
Better that than to be frozen
Never to harvest again

Make a fire from the branches
They'll grow back anew
And when the first season's cycle is over
You can go back, and do
Everything you wanted to the first time
But then, you'll be wiser

You'll gather the fruit through every season
For the sake of itself, without rhyme or reason
Be it sweltering or freezing, heedless of the weather
You'll trim the branches like an artisan
And no harvest could be better."

Campbell Johnson

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 12

Campbell spends her free time drawing and painting in her room. She loves going to the beach when she travels.

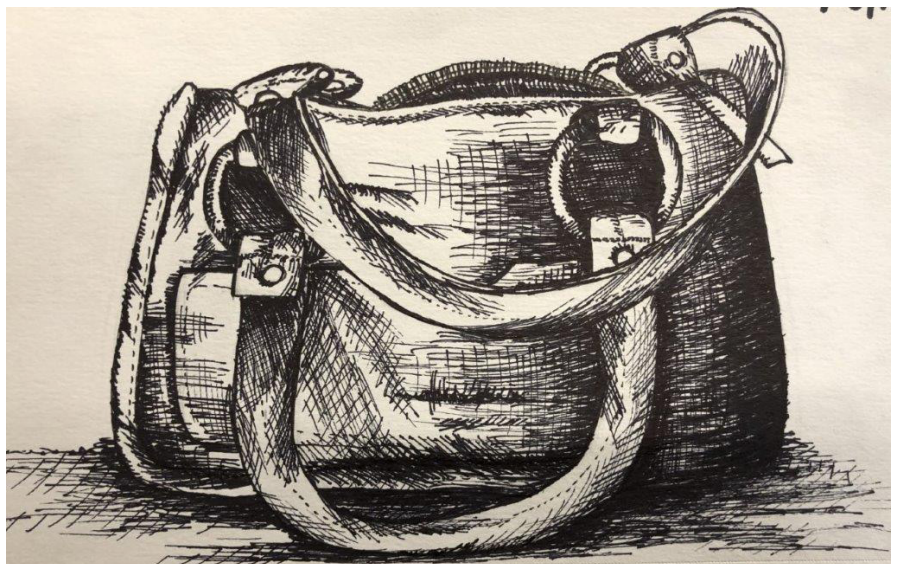
Tea Time

**Dylan Kalina**

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 9

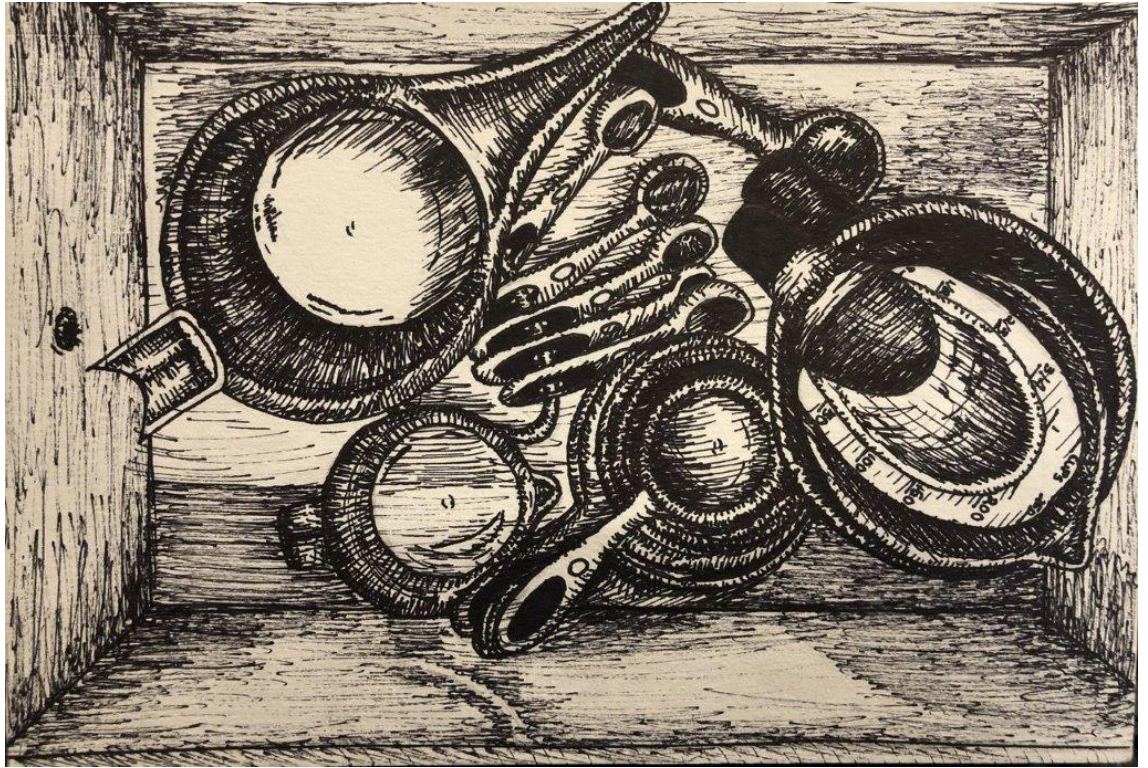
Dylan Kalina's favorite medium of art is pen and ink. She enjoys listening to music as well as playing drums in her free time. She thoroughly enjoys taking art and wants to experiment with more mediums over time and develop her style.

Still Life of a Handbag



Dylan Kalina

Interior of a Kitchen Drawer

**Alexandra Marcus**Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 12

Alexandra is an ambitious student who is excited to begin her studies at a top-rated graphic design program following high school graduation. She has been passionate about art since her earliest years of school. Alexandra is President of the first chapter of Hopewell's National Art Honors Society. She has received Honorable Mention for one of her pieces in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and has had art published in *Panorama*, her high school's literacy and arts magazine.

Antiques



Rebecca Hopkins
Allentown High School
Grade 11

Rebecca Hopkins enjoys writing, cooking, and gardening! She serves as her FFA chapter's Vice President.

ERROR No_Feelings

>I am supposed to feel this.
SIGNAL_OF_LOVE:ReTransmit.
sensation:BURNS > grip_tight:BLISS:
ERROR:BLISS_CAN_NOT_BE_FOUND.(quit?)

Code: ERR_OR 404 Heart not found
Resubmit!:pound:
error:no_beat:unbound:
CODE_unable-to-complete-task, :sound:
CAN'T_HEAR: SOURCE_NOT_FOUND.

CAN'T_FEEL:heartless,
Gone-gone-gone-gone-gone.
WHAT_IS_GOING_ON:artless:
RUN:last_effort:jumpstart:

Error Code: BLOOD.DRAWN.TO.FEEL.
razor:sharp_and_LONG:
>:heal:

POPUP: The application has crashed. Please do not try to restart. It will no longer wake.

Hannah Linkowsky
Allentown High School
Grade 11

Hannah Linkowsky hopes to someday be a published novelist. She enjoys traveling, listening to music of all genres, and reading any book she can get her hands on.

West Flamingo Circle

There's something inexplicable
About riding someone else's bike down a deserted twilit street in an unfamiliar place
Perhaps it's the discomfort of the yellow banana seat, the handlebars wider than you are accustomed to
Or else it's the dark intensity of it all,
The pale moon watching silently as you glide through the blackness
And your only light streaming
From a single moth-enclosed streetlight
And the tiny windows of what seems like a million skyscrapers
Blocking out the stars
Maybe it's the freedom you feel as the wind courses through your hair
And your lungs fill with the salt of God's swimming pool
All you know is that you are riding helmetless,
And the road is bumpy,
And at any moment, you could go flying,
Cracking your skull on impact.

Hannah Linkowsky

Washing Your Hands

Madeleine once told me about an old man like me. He touched things and cleaned them off. Again, again, again. Rinse and repeat. His emotions became tied to his sink. He would be sad, and wash his hands. Again, again, again. Rinse and repeat. And his fingers were spotless and his palms were white and the undersides of his nails shone like pearls. But his skin was waxy and dry. The man washed his hands one day and felt no sense of relief. His soul could no longer be cleansed. He had become immune to the water.

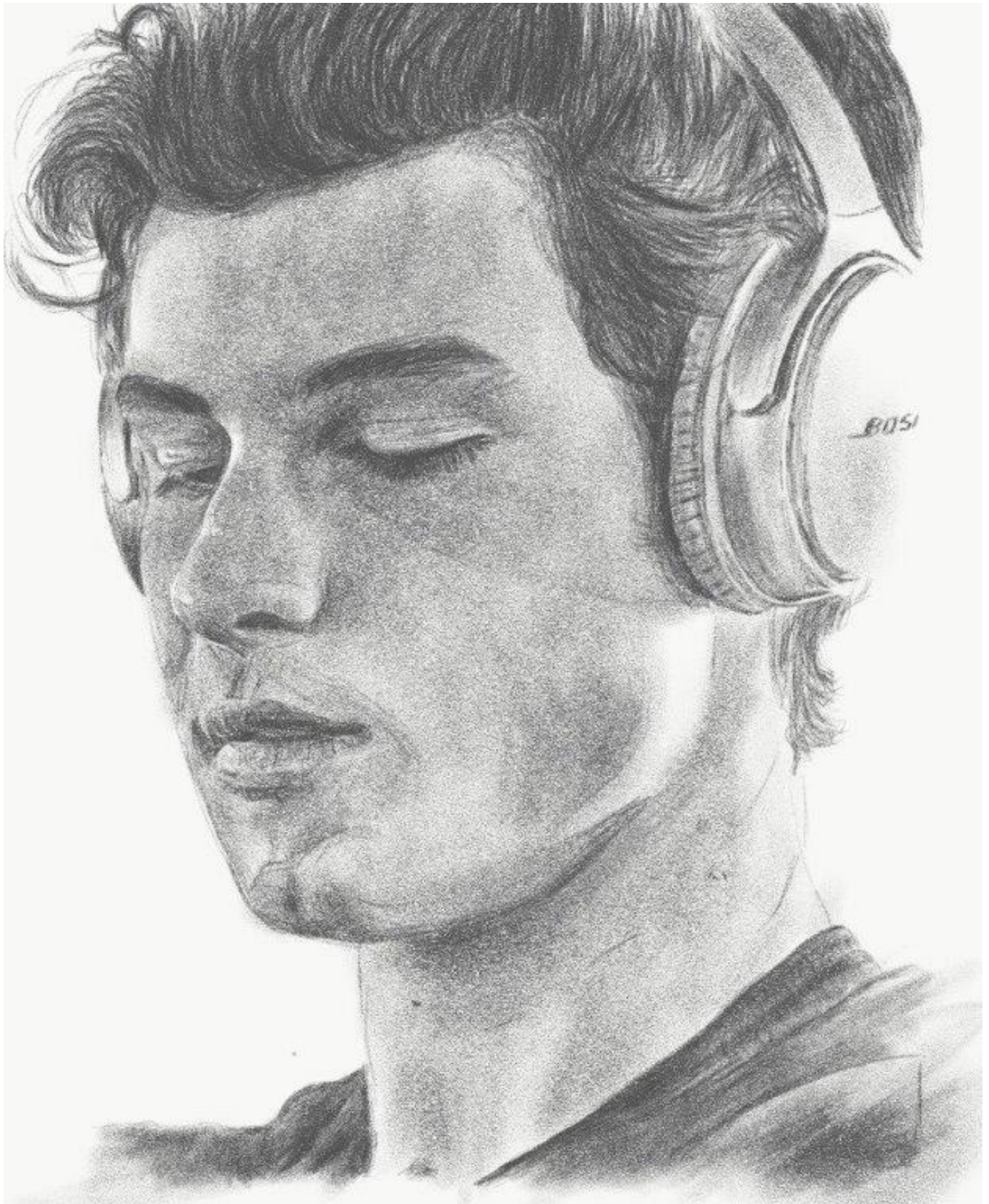
Everywhere he went, he felt impure. His skin crawled with phantom cockroaches and he dreamed up two million diseases that could be hiding beneath his callouses.

I wash my hands with my mother's citrus soap. Wash it away. Wash your hands. Again, again, again. Rinse and repeat. I ignore it and forget about it, pretend it isn't there. I scrub and scrub until my skin goes raw and red, 'til my knuckles hurt, 'til everything is gone.

Peace of mind never comes, and I sit scraping away my body, scratching at the bugs. I can wash and wash, again and again, forever and ever, and clean will never come.

Alexandra Marcus

Listening to Music



Rebecca Klein

Allentown High School
Grade 12

Rebecca Klein is a member of her school's marching band and looks forward to attending The College of New Jersey in the Fall.

Anxiety

You dismantle me,
As if I am a robot
Without any true feelings or a heart.
You knock me over,
And I find myself fighting
To bring myself back up, to win this wicked war
Against you and your ways.
You torment me, and haunt me,
And tell me I'm not good enough,
And tell me that I'm worthless,
And tell me that I'm ugly,
And tell me that I'm stupid,
And immature, and lonely,
And have no true purpose here
Or anywhere for that matter.
And I'm just freakin' tired of it.
I'm tired of you,
Creeping into my mind
Each and every day.
When I wake up in the morning,
When I'm trying to sleep,
When I'm trying to focus in class,
When I'm with my friends.
Can you just be quiet already?
Move on, get out of my mind.
Well, what if I just told you
That I am good enough,
That I'm not worthless,
And I'm not ugly,
And I'm not stupid,
Or immature, or lonely,
And I do have a purpose here,
For that matter.
I want to help people fight their demons,
Just like I'm fighting you.
I know I can make a change one day,
And I will,
Thanks to you.
You made me realize that I'm strong,
Strong enough to battle my own thoughts,
Each and every day.
And if I can conquer that,
Well,
I may as well conquer anything.

Kristen Li
The Lawrenceville School
Grade 11

Kristen Li enjoys drawing, writing, and traveling.

Poppies

“Sadie!”

The faces before her slipped away, and the lurid lights in the room darkened and then disappeared altogether. A rush of warmth shot through her veins, and she felt a shudder run through the back of her spine. Like the time the surgeon anesthetized her before her knee surgery, ten, fifteen years ago?

“Too much...quick...now...call them...”

She heard her head thump against a counter, but could not feel the impact. What happened to her? The last thing she knew was that she took a large gulp from her drink in a dimly-lit place Sara took her after work. For a moment she remembered about the twins in their cribs and the boiling broth on the heated stove. She swallowed and her tongue felt like sandpaper against the roof of the mouth, dry, swollen, and blistering. And that was all she could think about.

Sadie first read about Poppies in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the stretches of blood-red blooms that lulled Dorothy, Toto, and the lion to sleep. Sadie never read the story again, and convinced herself that she had grown out of children’s books. She thought that if she were to go to the Land of Oz, the same poppies would be there; poppies have a life of six years, blooming and withering for six cycles.

When she was fourteen, Sadie read John McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields.” She learned that Flanders was a place in Belgium, where soldiers fought and died in World War I, and that McCrae wrote the poem in May 1915, during the second battle of Ypres. Sadie never wrote the explication for that poem, because she had fallen ill for a month, but she thought about it often. She figured that the poppies in Flanders Field must have early-bloomers, since poppies, in temperate climates, typically bloom from mid-June to October.

There were no poppies near where Sadie grew up, but she dreamt about them often. That same field of blood-red blooms. She dreamt, every time, that she would walk down the road from her house, cross the downtown bakery and the library and the bank, and then instead of making a turn to school, she would venture over the barbed wires and deep into the woods. She would tap the strips of light filtered through the thin foliage, and trace the shadows of the leaves with the tip of her shoes. But soon enough, the endless walk through the woods became dull, and she would wake up at seven, just in time for breakfast before class.

Sadie went to Iran for a year abroad during her time in college. She studied foreign relations and did not think twice when she received a scholarship to go to Tehran. She worked in a cafe in the afternoon, and on valentine's day, her coworkers put up poppies on the windows and the counters. "Why?" her friend hummed, "It's the flower of love. And we have too many here anyways, too many that everyone had taken to smoking them." Sadie was bemused. After the cafe closed at seven, she picked one out and put it on her hair.

Sadie touched her hair, her fingers searching for the poppy but could not find it. Her heart was beating against the ribcage. Where was the poppy? Sadie broke out into a run. The storefronts, the gate to the school, and the woods blurred past her in a flash of colors. She ran, faster, her dress billowing in the wind, until, until she fell, face down, into the grass.

When Sadie turned around, she could not find the woods. Instead, she was in a field of blue. The sky was aflame with a deep, red color, and the sun was nowhere to be seen. Slowly, she shook her limbs awake and stood up. At first, she thought she was wading in shin-high water, but when she bent down, she saw they were poppies—blue poppies. Each poppy plant had more than ten-thousand seeds, and Sadie pinched a petal and counted the seeds as they were carried away by the wind. She collected a wreath of poppies, cupped them in her hand, and inhaled their scent.

But the blue was too strong. The smell of the poppies grew pungent, and eventually, Sadie's nostrils tingled and her head became heavy. She heard voices in the distance. But it seemed so far away from her, that they could not have been calling her. The scent of the blue poppies was fading away, and she was at peace. She curled up on the grass, with the poppies still in her arms, and closed her eyes.

William May

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 12

William May plays soccer and golf.
He loves art, film and music. He likes
to make candles and eat Honey Nut
Cheerios. William will be attending the
NYU Tisch School of The Arts.

Rosary



Ayla Mauk
Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Ayla Mauk enjoys hanging out with friends, skiing, and doing Spring track.

Chemistry

Outside the wide windows of the chemistry room
the sky is grey and the rain sprinkles down.
I move my chair an inch to the right to prevent arm to arm contact
with my neighbor's elbow.
One of the lunch ladies is walking to her black Honda SUV
in the light dust of rain.
The clock on the wall clicks as if time was slowing down
and there is a slight mumble in the background.
We've got thirty more minutes.
I look down at my Vans that need to be bleached.
All the racket from my classmates bursts into the room
like a flooded river barging through the walls of a dam.
I start to doodle some grey daisies with my eraser
on the black desk that I have to share with two other people.
My teacher shouts for the class to be quiet
and realize I missed a page of notes.

William May

Grandpa Ted



Kristen McDonough

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 11

Kristen McDonough enjoys running indoor and spring track as well as playing the flute. She also enjoys sailing and works at a summer camp in Belmar in the summer.

Bell Reflections**Synai McNair**

Lawrence High School
Grade 10

Synai enjoys listening to music and runs track and field.

Haiku #1

Calm as a river
Tranquility in my mind
White clouds passing by

Haiku #2

The last summer leaves
Clinging to the brown branches
Explodes to brown leafs

Haiku #3

New season arrives
Different apples bloom in trees
Air is crisp as sea

Sullivan Meyer

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 12

Sullivan Meyer is a senior leader of his high school's robotics team and peer leadership group. He intends to study mechanical engineering and public policy in college and is interested in a career in industrial design.

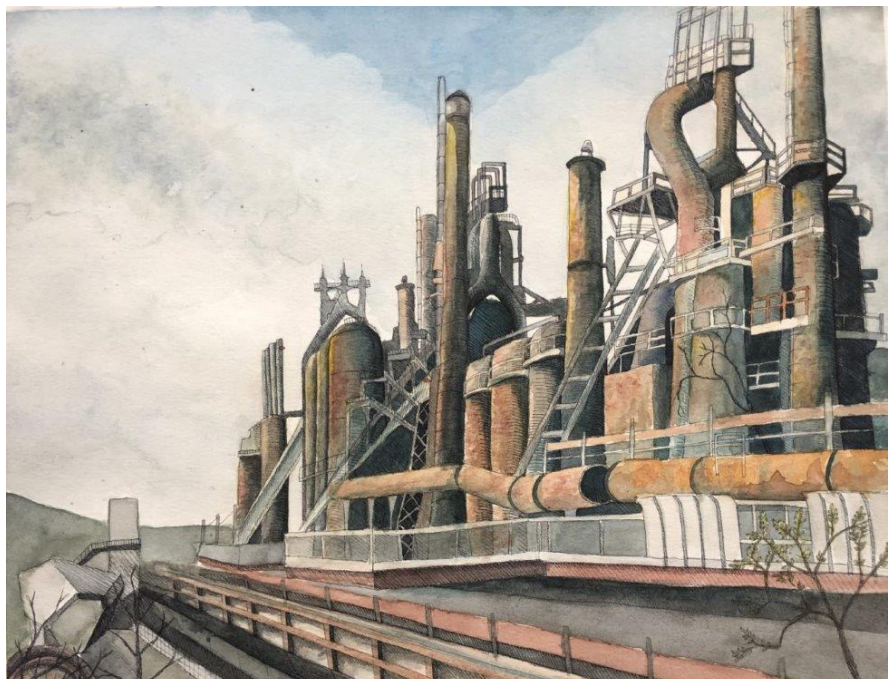
The World in a Branch: An Exploration of the Constructal Law

**Rebecca Michelson**

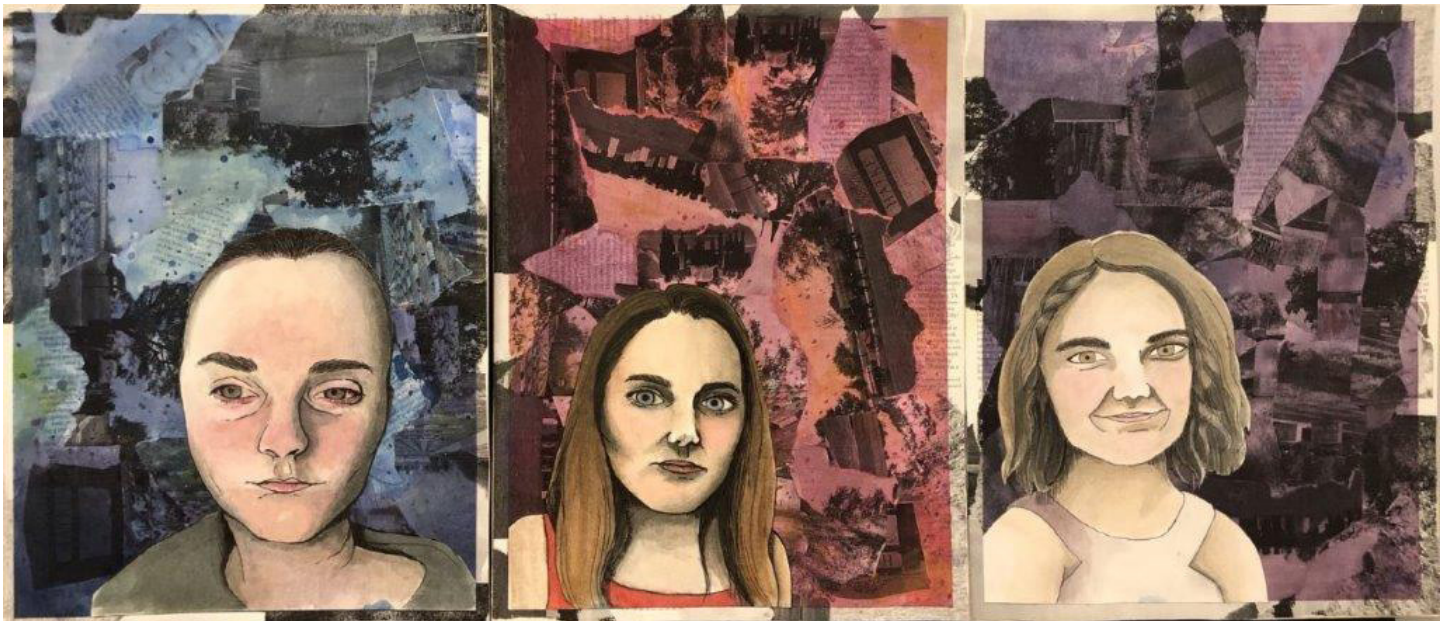
Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 12

Rebecca Michelson is an artist and a musician. She enjoys physics class, and likes to go out with her friends when she has free time.

Bethlehem



Healing



Rebecca Michelson

Eliza Moulder
Lawrence High School
Grade 9

Eliza Moulder loves art in all its forms, listening to music, and is currently pursuing digital art. Along with that, she has always had an interest in psychology, history, and watching documentaries.

Our Search for Neverland (From the point of view of IGen)

Our generation,
A representation of the nation we hold so dearly.
Seeing clearly we're nearly more responsible than those
Who didn't have the resources that recently arose.
The information we are given has driven us forward
But who knows where forward is toward.

Our connection changes our direction,
Gives insight into the world and its false perfection.
Taught us to crave the truth.
In our youth we understand
The laws of the land,
The sleight of hand,
The problems with those in command.
So we stand for what we believe is right
And will fight for those who were wronged.
And take the burden of knowing
The overflowing sadness
In which the world is overrun.

Done.
We are done with arrogance,
Intolerance,
Avoidance of issues important to us.
We try,
Though I won't lie,
We cry sometimes.
Our futures approaching,
Adulthood encroaching,
And we wish that we could stop time.

Stop.
We will hold on for as long as we can,
Hoping adults will understand.
We are not lazy,
We are scared.
And we feel unprepared.
'Cause to adulthood compared,
Our youth is precious and calm
And we're not sure where we belong.

Aaron Newton

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 12

Aaron Newton is one of the presidents of his school's GSA. He enjoys reading and physics.

The Fair Folk

Listen close to every word they say
Ignore all beauty you will see
For fear they may take you away

Do not let them, your guard decay
since they do not care for your plea
So listen close to every word they say

Be sure to keep them far at bay
To any terms you should not agree
For fear they may take you away

Do not find you must them repay
since nothing given is for free
So listen close to every word they say

Just know all kindness masks foul play
After all, through tricks they find their glee
For fear they may take you away

True intentions they do not convey
make sure you now, do not owe me
So listen close to every word I say
For fear I may take you away

Esben Olsen

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Esben Olsen likes computer programming, playing video games with friends, reading and playing badminton. He is not fond of object oriented programming languages, and particularly dislikes Java.

The Freezing Tree

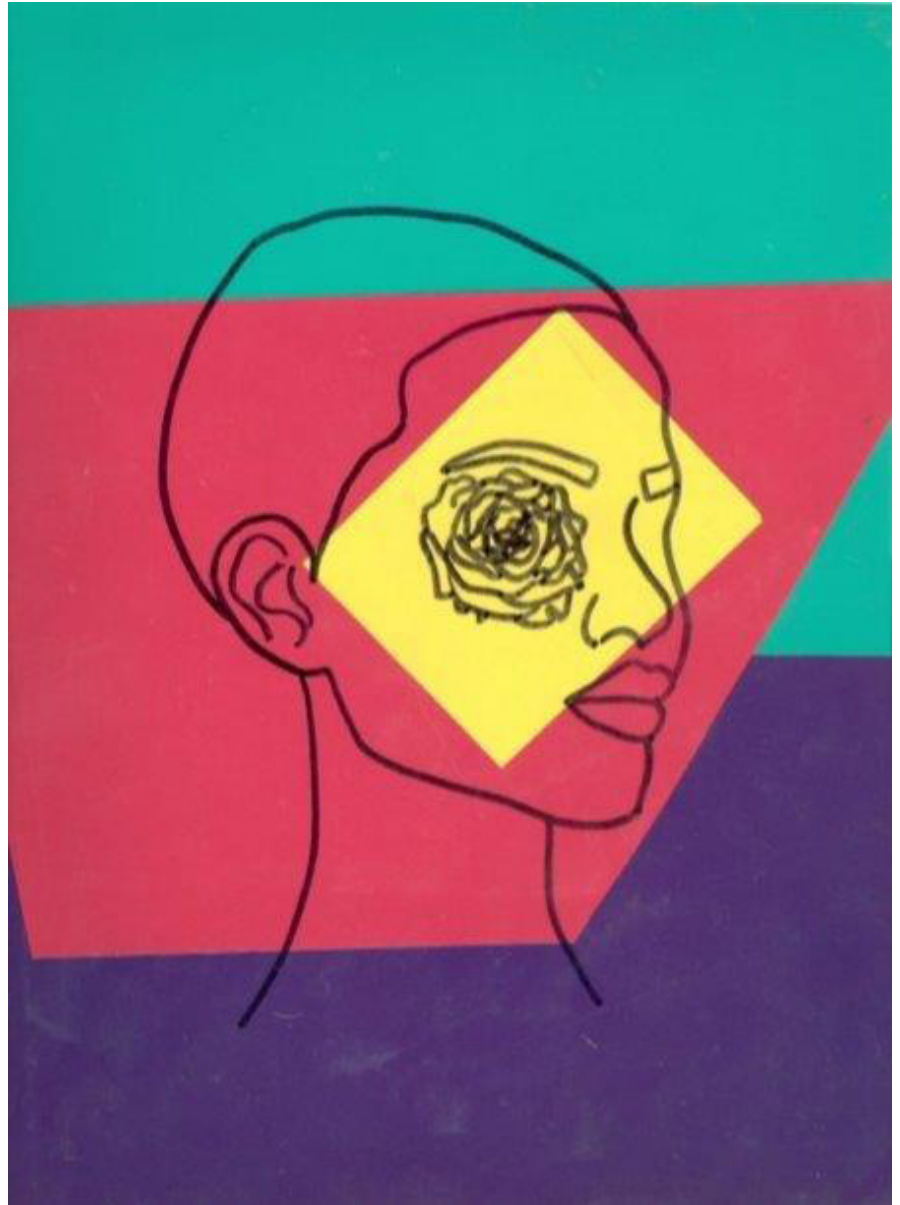
My roots keep me at the brink of death:
I only sense the stinging cold hugging my bark.
It feels like decades ago
Since my leaves were green,
And my crown: royalty.
The cawing of the crows is long gone.
A branch snaps nearby
Forth comes a man with an ax.
I shiver as he heads my direction.
Soon I will become a cold floor,
An outdoor bench or the walls of a cabin.
As he hacks through my trunk
I beg him to make me firewood

For then I shall never freeze again.

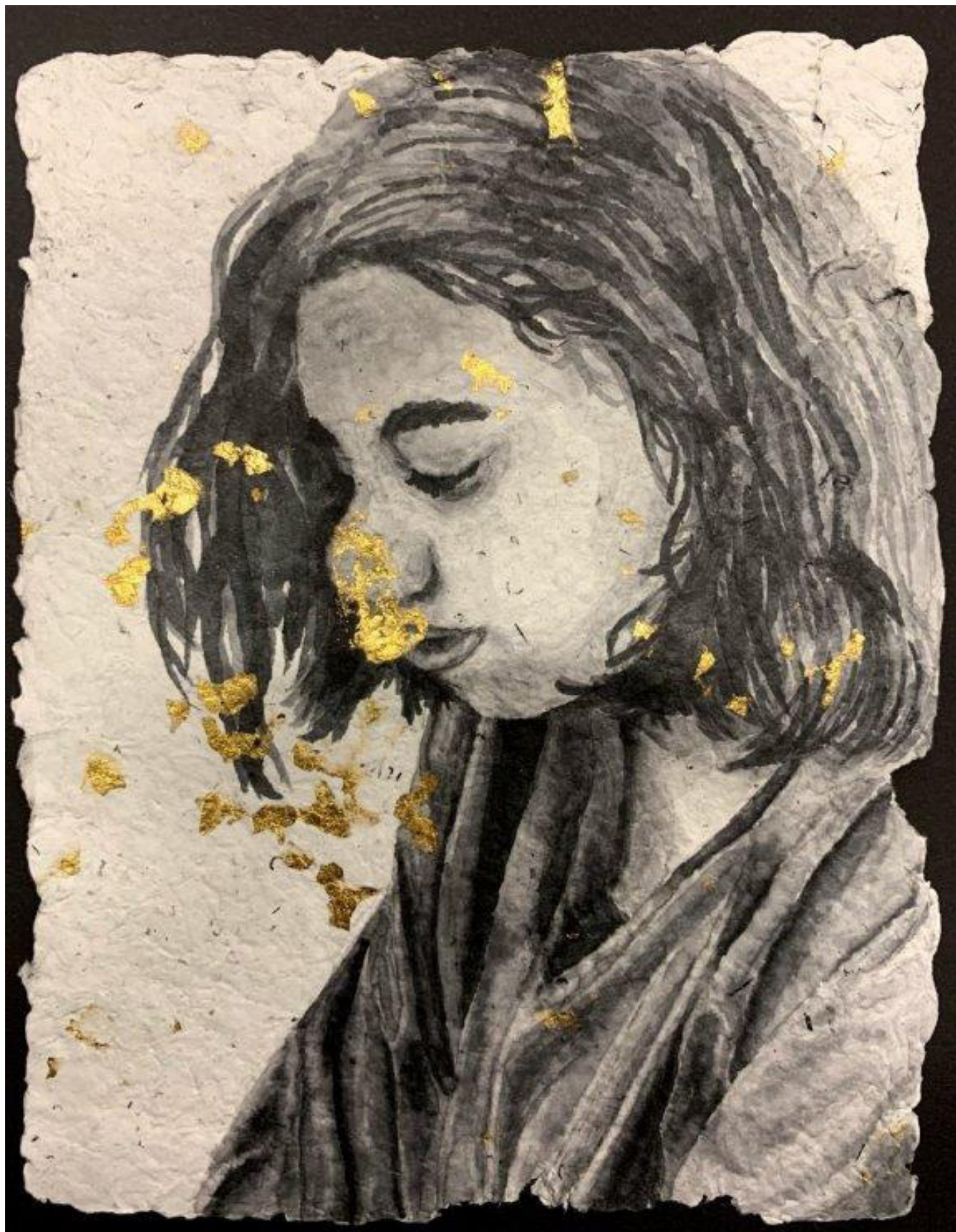
Haylie Navarro
Hightstown High School
Grade 9

Haylie Navarro is a talented young artist who has hopes of pursuing a career in the visual or performing arts field. She likes to read, draw, sing, act, and dance. Her piece was a remake of a tumblr post.

Flower Girl

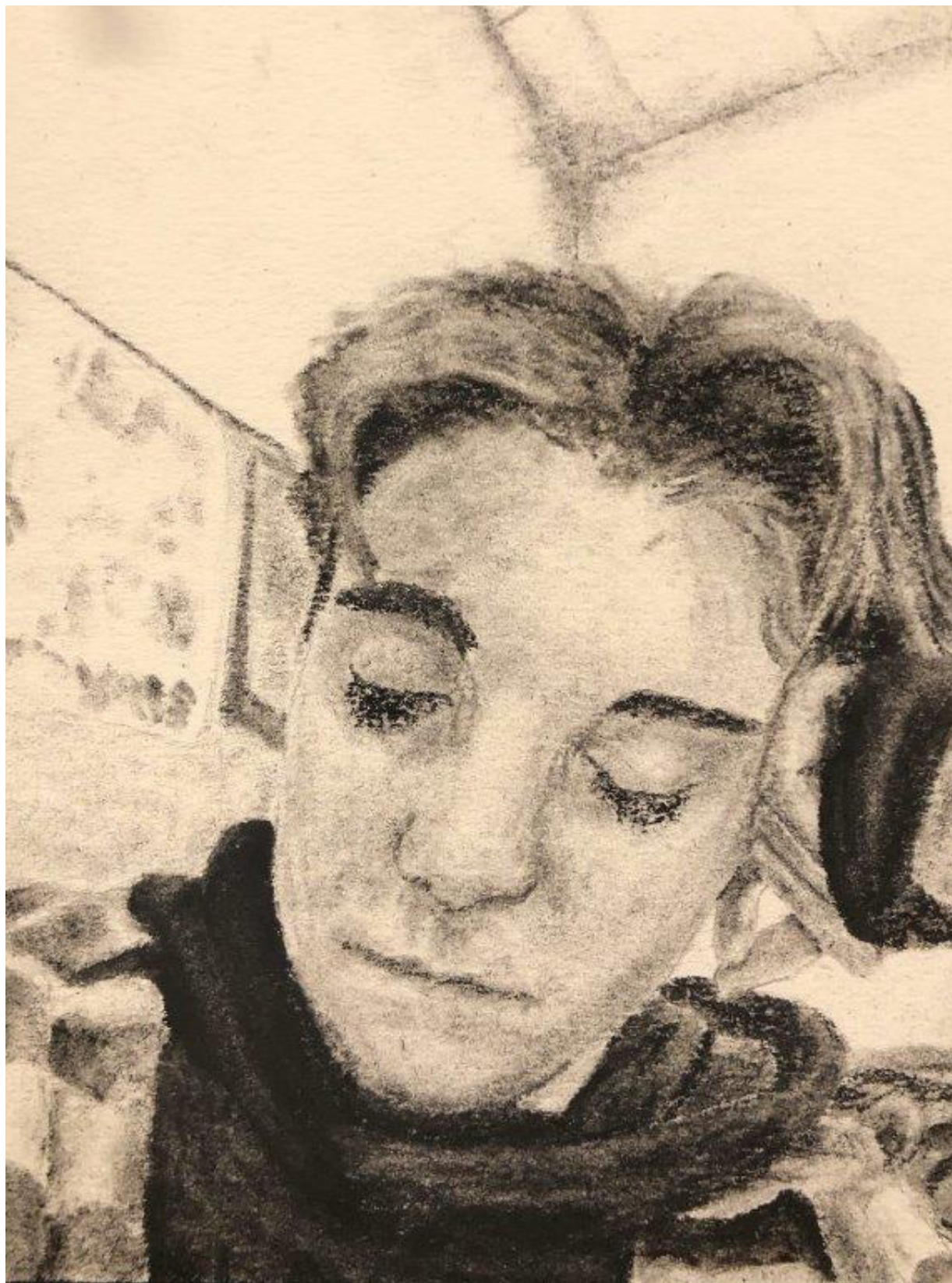


Aaron Newton

Bee

Aaron Newton

Bored



Fiyin Ogunsola
Hightstown High School
Grade 10

Fiyin Ogunsola enjoys drawing and doodling in her free time. She also enjoys designing, whether it's costumes for the school musical or houses just for fun. One day, she hopes to be an architect, allowing her to utilize her drawing and designing skills.

Inside the Mind of a Dreamer



Sigurt Olsen

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Sigurt Olsen was born in Denmark and moved to the U.S. in 2015.

Last Minute at the Airport

I could hardly handle eating
any of the half blueberry creamed
Sugar scone on my white and blue plate.

A woman sat in the far corner
With her legs crossed
reading an article about fate.
Her dress was the color of Aster
32 petals on each flower.
Her eyes caught mine.
My heart dropped like an apple from a tree.

The speakers suddenly spoke
“Flight 16 is ready to board.”
I glanced at my mother whose eyes were starting to tear
As the woman crossed her legs the other way.

Drashti Patel

Hightstown High School
Grade 11

Drashti Patel likes to represent her culture using her art skills.

Blend In



Kai Quezada

Hightstown High School

Grade 10

Kai Quezada loves art and enjoys spending his free time drawing as much as he can. When working on projects, Kai pushes the boundaries between stylism and realism to create an exciting and unique piece of work.

Down the Road

**Kiril Petrosian**

Hopewell Valley Central High School

Grade 10

Kiril Petrosian likes to wrestle and play football. He really enjoys going to school. His favorite subject is math.

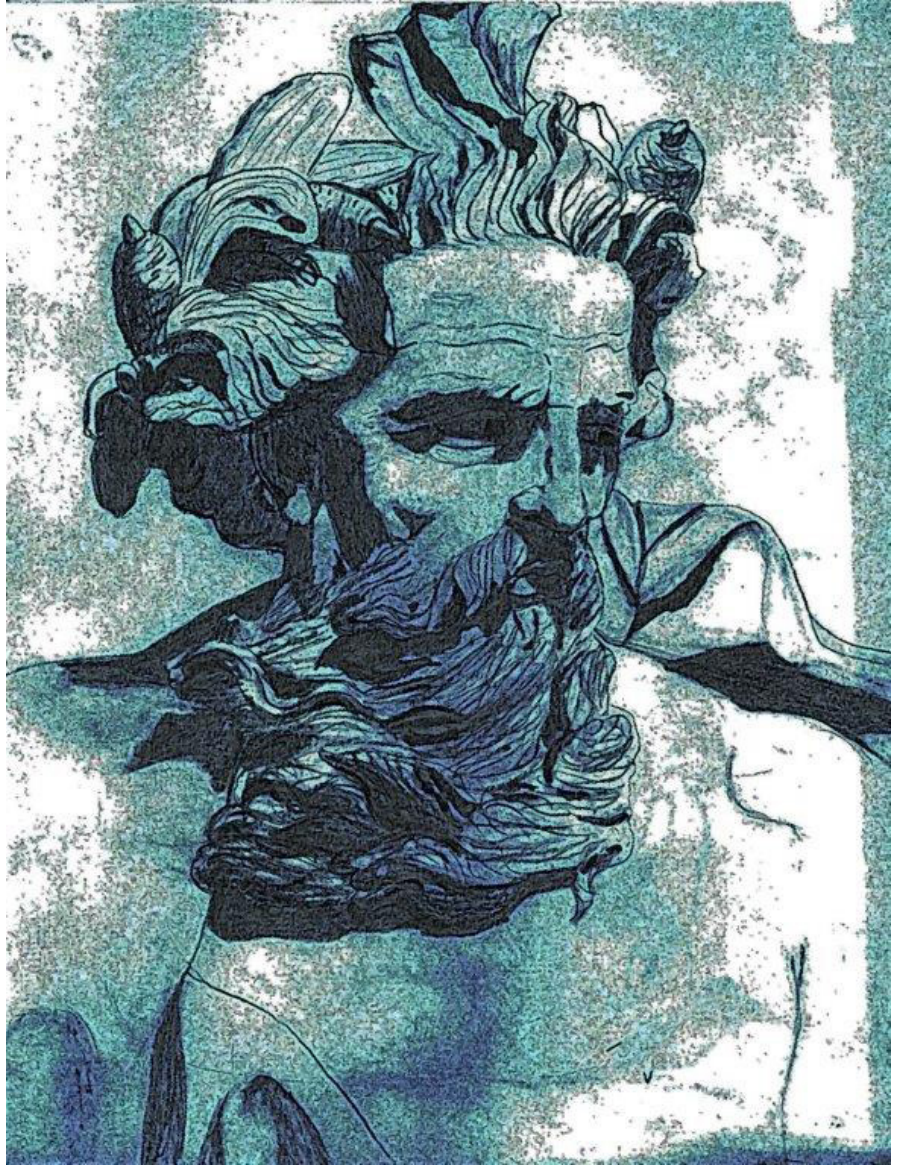
Battle Of The Eraser and The Lead

You and I are locked in battle.
I mark something down,
You swoop in and remove it.
I work hard
in my protective shell
Scribbling across thin paper
Complex mind functions scrambling all over.
You just sit there
A smug look on your pink rubber face.
You are my weakness
Knowing that I secretly need you.
I try not to make it obvious
But there is always a battle between
Creation and Obliteration.

Johann Rajan
Hightstown High School
Grade 11

Johann Rajan is an easygoing, funny and dedicated artist.

Bust of Neptune



Logan Reisbord

Hightstown High School

Grade 10

Logan Reisbord is a high school student who recently became involved in photography. Along with this he enjoys playing guitar, playing soccer and hanging out with friends.

Below**Kyle Pisauro**

Hopewell Valley Central High School

Grade 10

Kyle Pisauro likes to play football and lacrosse, relax, and watch movies.

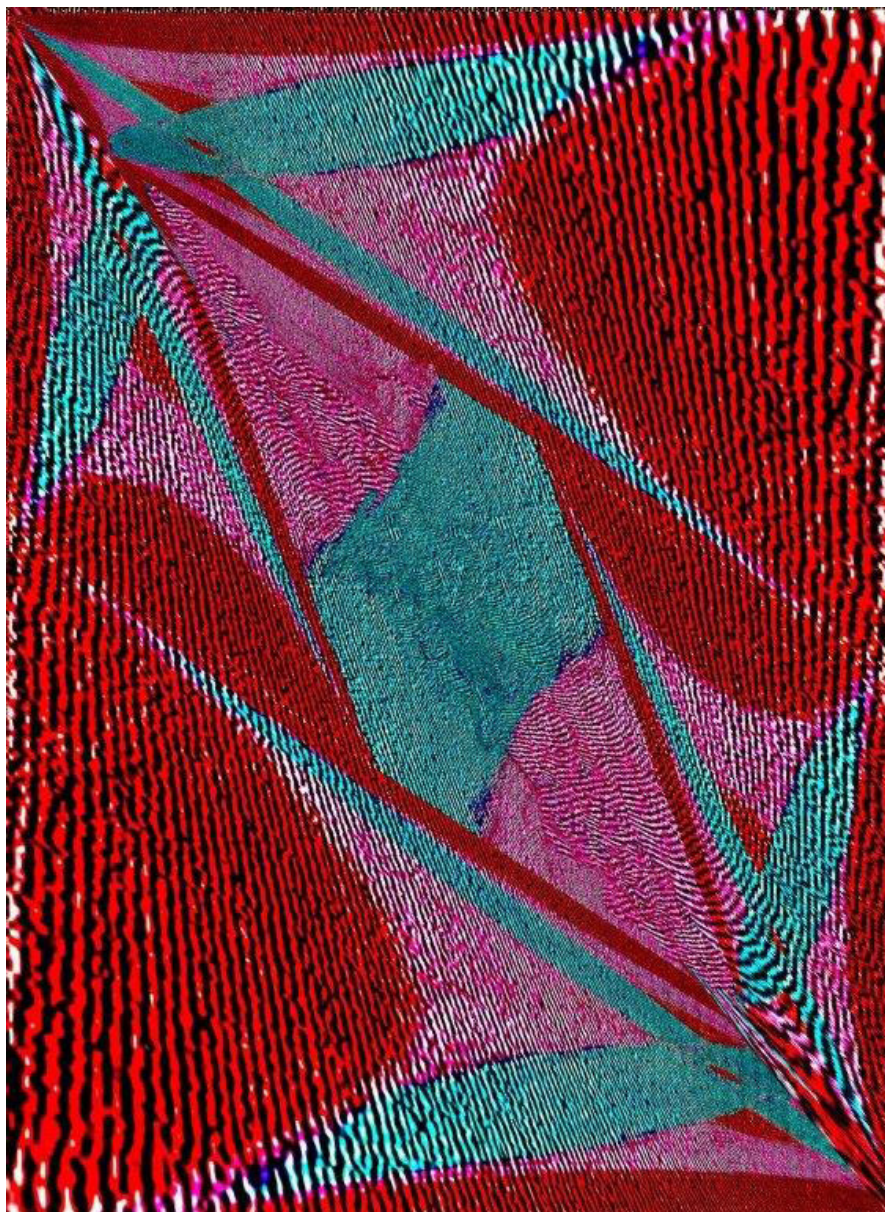
No Will Power

I sat down to do my homework
 I took out the 100 math problems, the 5 paragraph prompt
 and the notes for my history presentation
 It was like standing on the bottom of Mount Everest
 Staring up at the peak
 My body turned to solid cement
 All I was able to do was stare at it and think that I wasn't there
 I decide that playing a couple of games of madden would
 magically make all the homework disappear
 Time just flew by and now it is midnight
 I tried to start the homework by taking out my math textbook but
 Every problem was passing straight through my brain
 My brain was as a boxer in the 12 round who can barely stand
 Let alone focus on the opponent
 I decided that I will be more focused in the morning
 My alarm goes off at 6
 I try to get up but my body is stuck to the bed

Parker Roberts
Hightstown High School
Grade 12

The Final Strike

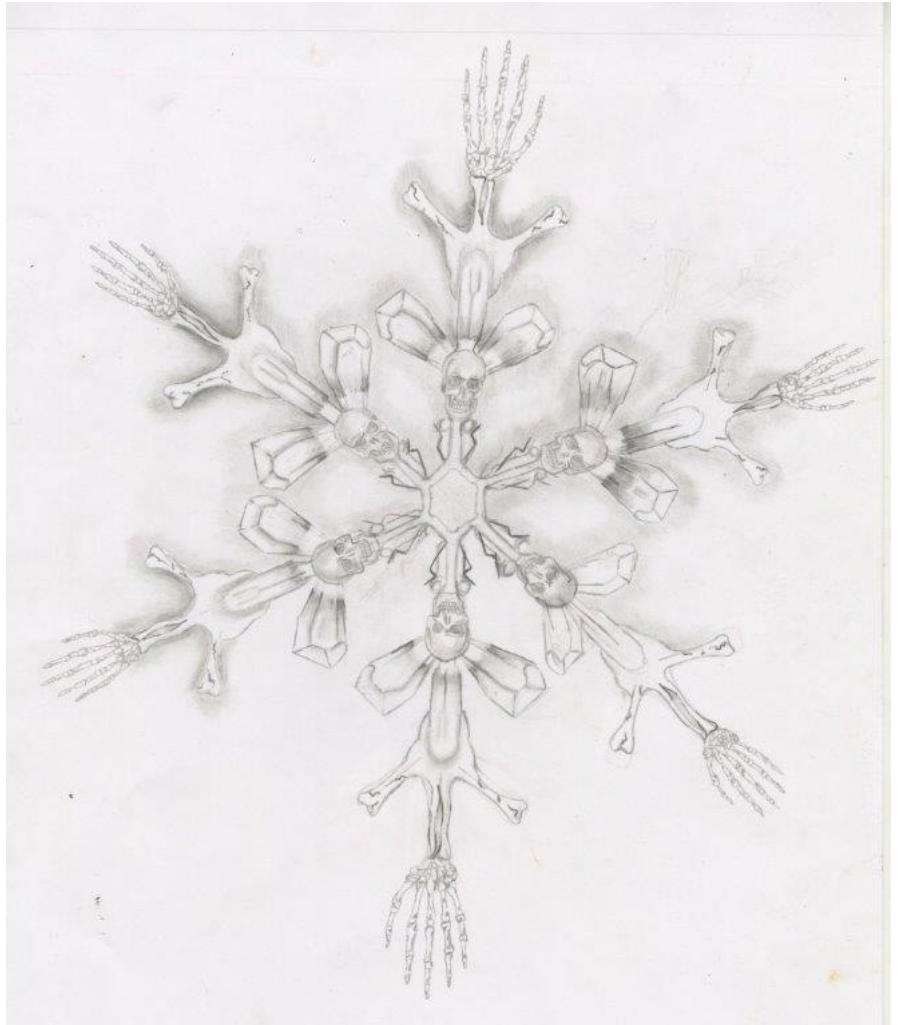
Parker enjoyed making this image using Adobe Photoshop.



Delaney Slattery
Hightstown High School
Grade 12

Delaney Slattery has been on her school's cheer team since freshman year. After graduation, Delaney plans on attending the University of Delaware majoring in fashion merchandising and participating on the UD cheer team.

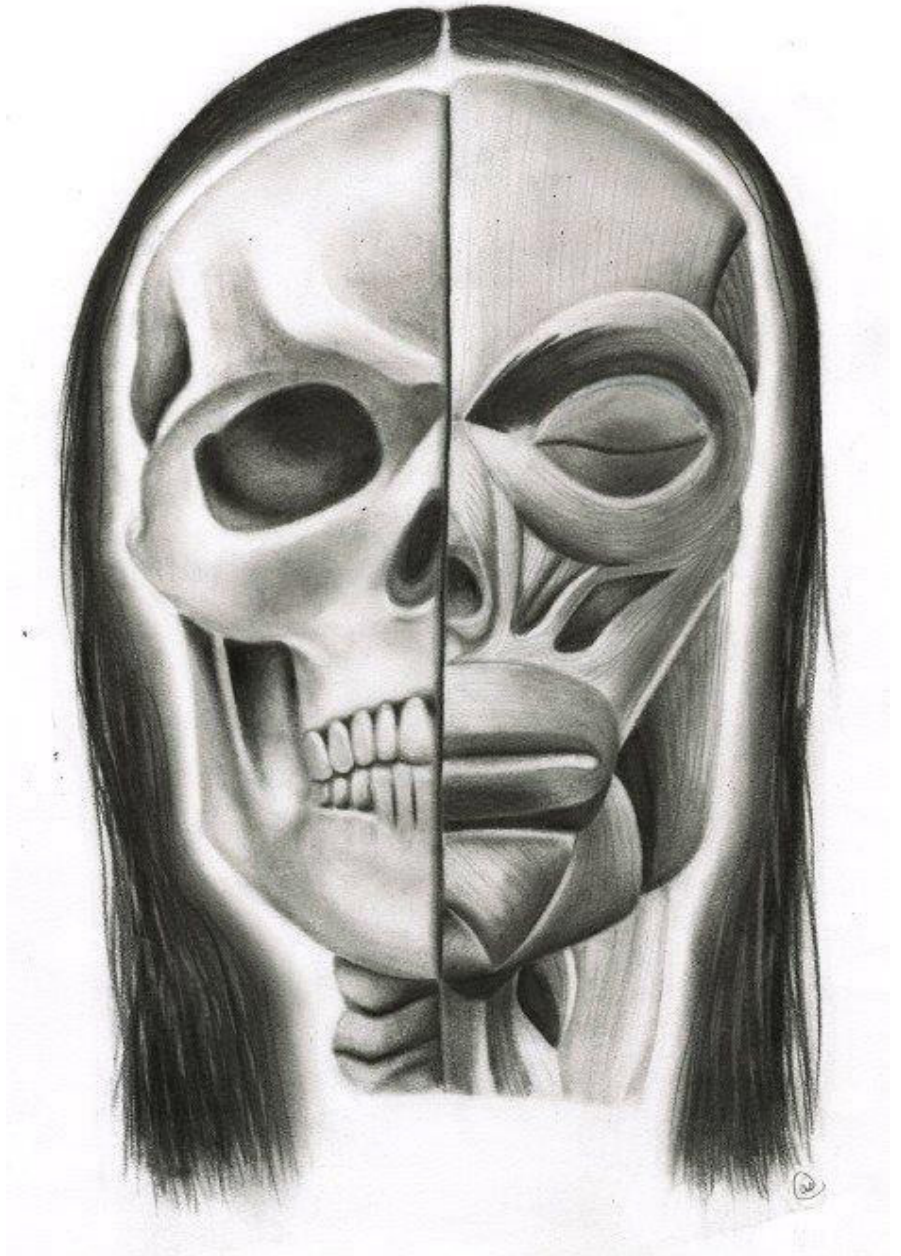
Skullflake



Amy Szeles
Hightstown High School
Grade 12

The Layers Under Her Pretty Face

Amy Kathleen Szeles loves creating realistic artwork with pencil, and loves to draw people. For this piece, Amy practiced still-life basics by drawing from a sculpture her art teacher had of the bone and muscle structures of the face.



Nina Pschar
Ewing High School
Grade 11

Nina Pschar is fascinated with all things literary. The written word has enabled her to delve into forms of self-expression as she observes everyday life with the mind of an artist. Nina hopes to study literature in college and share her love with others.

Idleness

I crave the warmth of summer months
to occupy my time,
Yet as my mind fills with humid air
my thoughts are hard to find.

The woodthrush forever whistles,
the sparrow laments and sings,
and the only choice of song I have
is that which their voices bring.

My hair curls now at my shoulders,
and tucks behind my ear
where the mosquito buzzes endlessly
of her fated fear.

I wait, but the season is kind now.
When she yells to me directly, I say:
“You work to fool me with bright and bold tempests,
To assure I am not blind to lightning!”

But she only means to keep me company.
I am hardly an individual anymore,
for all my love extends beyond
what is written in my poem.

Thus I blame the crickets,
And the bullfrog’s mighty croak
For the artist who craves suffering of December,
For the idleness which now plagues my work.

Peter Tran

Birth of a New Model



Mathew Sing

Hopewell Valley Central High School

Grade 12

Mathew Sing likes chilling and vibing with his friends. He also likes *The Office*, and video games.

The Power of Laughter

I believe in the power of laughter.

Throughout my life, I have always thought of life like a comedy. Wherever I go, I try to make myself and others laugh. I will always try to make everyone happy, and always attempt to make the best of a bad situation. Although sometimes on my quest to make people laugh got me in some trouble, I always thought it was it worth the trouble to keep goofing off. There was something about making someone laugh in my childhood that stuck with me, and made it something I would always chase.

As I grew, I started to be aware of the sadness that life can actually bring. Even at a young age, the world seemed to be a tragic place. I wanted to fix that. Through jokes and funny stories, I believed I could change the world, because NOTHING was more important to me than laughing. I believe laughter is the purest thing in the world, as it triggers something in our brain that is so hilarious that you can't contain yourself. Laughter allows for us to come together and celebrate the hilarity in life, even when times may not be so great.

When I was 8 years old, I had my first experience with the loss with the death of grandmother's dog, Sasha. My grandma was going through a tough time, and I hated to see her like that. She loved that dog with all her heart, and she didn't seem herself. I had never seen someone so sad, and so I did the only thing young me knew what to do: try and make her laugh. I approached her and started reminiscing about the crazy things that dog did. Soon, I saw her smiling for the first time in what felt like ages. That moment there truly made me realize the power of laughter. Everyone's true nature is revealed through laughter, no matter the emotions they were feeling before that.

Comedy is a magical thing to me. It can turn a stressful situation into a happy memory. Through laughter, we release endorphins. As a result, stress goes down and creativity goes up. Sometimes we take ourselves too seriously, and we should always remind ourselves to think of the funny things in life. When it comes down to it, we are going to remember the times that made us happy, because they are the most important moments of our entire life. With laughter, I believe the world is a better place and somewhere where we can all truly be united.

Emilie Sawicki

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Emilie Sawicki plays volleyball, dances,
and loves to swim. She has a twin
brother.

Wake Up

Wake Up

The worst feeling is waking up
Wrapped in the comfortable blanket of sleep
Still feeling simple and happy
With no care in the world

That is, until you remember your life
The hectic people you know
The crazy place you live
The unknown emotions your feel

You crave the simplicity
The feeling of straight comfort
Knowing that you have time to be happy
Before the reality of life wakes you again

Chris Tobia

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Chris Tobia likes to play baseball and
enjoys going to the beach.

I missed English class yesterday, what did we do?

Not one thing at all. You were not here so
we sat at our desks and stared straight at the blank white board
for the whole forty-eight minutes until the bell rang.
No one said a word.
The room was so quiet you could hear the kid on the other side of the
room breathing.

All. We wrote a two hundred page essay
that was worth half of the marking period grade.
We wrote non stop, didn't even pick up our pencils.
Pencils that were fully sharpened,
were so dull that the top of our pencils were completely flat.
Not one thing at all. This class is irrelevant.
You will never use any of the things we do or learn
in this class ever again, not in a bajillion years.

All.

We learned it all.

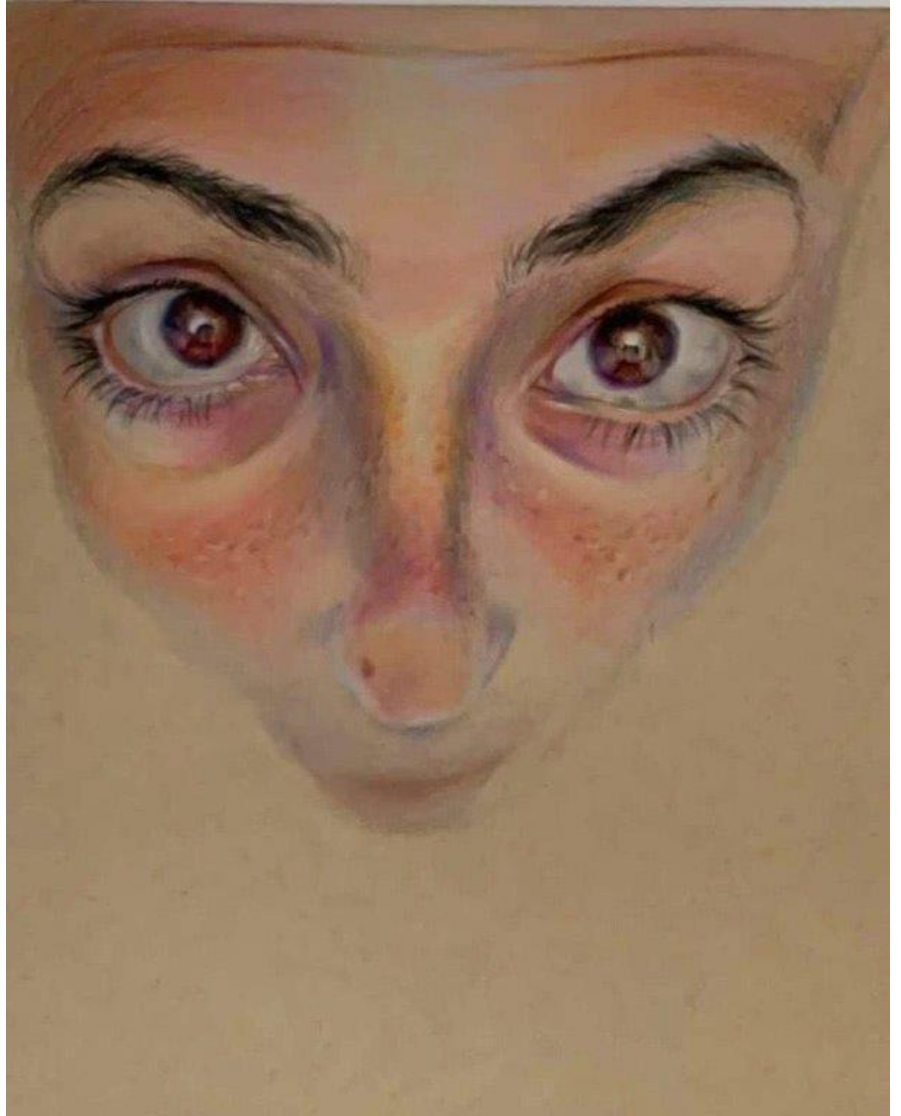
And you missed it all.

Sofia Venezia

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Sofia Venezia enjoys exploring new mediums in her art and especially likes creating faces.

Bright Eyes



Macey Vice

Lawrence High School
Grade 10

Macey Vice plays field hockey and enjoys math.

Keenan Wallace

Hopewell Valley Central High School
Grade 10

Keenan Wallace likes blueberries and staring at the blackbirds.

Drowning

Water

Cold, dark, silent

Under pressure, sinking

Just keep swimming, I can't, don't drown

Too much

Tar and Leaks

My dad wears a once-white shirt,

Now streaked with tar and gray as ashes.

His glasses shine like two little mirrors

And around his waist a snake of rope

Is connected by moss ball knots.

He picks his way across the roof

A black jar resting comfortably in his hand.

Every now and then he pauses, leans close to

The roof and lifts a shingle, listening.

What do they tell him?

Does the tar whisper of aching, rusting nails?

Does the water gurgle and drip, betraying its location?

What secrets must the old roof hold?

They're waging a war.

A slow one, but a war all the same.

My dad with his tar, listening

To the roof through frost and flood.

The rain, persisting with its

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

Chelsea Wang

The Lawrenceville School

Grade 11

An American citizen born and raised in China, Chelsea Wang has long walked the line between her two cultures. Apart from writing, she spends her free time between music and political discourse.

Halley's Orbit

Halley swings by his perihelion every 76 years,
time hardly for the universe to draw in one
steady breath,
time plenty for a woman to take her
final breath.

Halley remembers that
Challenger shed its wings after
George V took the throne after
Charles Darwin saw Galapagos.
Nothing much has changed.

When Halley rains his cosmic debris
down on Earth's pining face,
the woman thinks of the boy she met
when they were both too young and too far
away and the pieces of him
scattered about her life,
ticket stubs and chocolate wrappers
fallen from the sky. She takes one
breath and he is speeding away from her,
just a boy who shot across her life,
just a comet shooting across the blue,
just the love of her life passing her by.

When Halley next swings by his perihelion,
he does not see the woman.
But Earth still pines, and
the cosmic debris still rains, and
the universe has hardly drawn in one
breath. Nothing much has changed.

Daniel Wolf
Hopewell Valley Central Highschool
Grade 10

Daniel Wolf likes to play video games, his favorite so far being Destiny 2.

Many Worlds, Many Mistakes

Have you ever wondered what other possibilities could be out there? I asked.

Yeah there might be a ton of different planets and species we haven't discovered, my friend said.

No, I mean the Many Worlds that could stem from our decisions.

Oh you mean the Many Worlds interpretation. Yeah, I know about that.

The Many worlds interpretation is really just the many paths we could have chosen in our path through life, my friend said.

It's also just the many regrets in our life that we couldn't take back in our timeline, I said.

Imagine how cool it would be to hop into a timeline where I didn't get a C+ on my math final freshman year of high school.

Or maybe a reality where I didn't break my arm falling down the stairs one morning, my friend said.

Who knows, there might be a version of us where we all turn into bug people for some reason, I said.

Or maybe a reality where humans have already started living on other planets, like Mars.

It's a shame that we'll never find out what those Many Worlds hold, I said.

I bet there is a world where I didn't push Jenny away, where she would still be by my side. I said

Are you okay dude? If you want we can get something to eat.

I hope there is a version of me that is much happier than I am now.

