

StoneSoup

MAY 2022

VOLUME 50 / ISSUE 5

StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

Editor's Note

When was the last time you made a mistake?
How did you react?

In the first story in this issue, "A Leopard's Spots" by Juli Hiramatsu, the leopard May makes a terrible mistake: she breaks a promise to an old, old friend, doing something that can't be undone. While May can't undo her actions, or make them right, she knows that she must face her mistake, and she does what she can to make things right with her friend—and with her own conscience as well.

In many of the stories and memoir pieces in this issue, the characters and narrators navigate how to react when they, or others, make a mistake, whether it's very big or very small. I encourage you to use this issue as an opportunity to reflect on a time when you made a mistake and consider how you responded to it. Maybe you are proud of your reaction, or maybe you have regrets. Write directly about the experience, or use it as a launching pad for a fictional piece or a work of art that captures the emotional truth of your experience.

Till next time,



On the cover:
Daydreaming
(Pastel, watercolor)
Audrey Li, 12
Scarsdale, NY

Editor in Chief

Emma Wood

Director

William Rubel

Operations

Sophia Opitz

Design

Joe Ewart

Blog & Production

Caleb Berg

Customer Service

Tayleigh Greene

Refugee Project

Laura Moran

Stone Soup (ISSN 0094 579X) is published eleven times per year—monthly, with a combined July/August summer issue. Copyright © 2022 by the Children's Art Foundation—Stone Soup Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Santa Cruz, California. All rights reserved.

Thirty-five percent of our subscription price is tax-deductible. Make a donation at [Stonesoup.com/donate](https://stonesoup.com/donate), and support us by choosing Children's Art Foundation as your Amazon Smile charity.

To request the braille edition of *Stone Soup* from the National Library of Congress, call +1 800-424-8567. To request access to the audio edition via the National Federation of the Blind's NFB-NEWSLINE®, call +1 866-504-7300, or visit Nfbnewsline.org.

StoneSoup

Contents

STORIES

5 **A Leopard's Spots**
Juli Hiramatsu

20 **The Meadow**
Eileen Yoo

38 **Beyond Detention**
King Hey Chan

MEMOIR

11 **A Secret Untold**
Emerson Dennis

26 **Panorama**
Ryan Behr

33 **First Times**
Claire Pan

ART

Cover:
Daydreaming
Audrey Li

4 **The Other Side**
Arjun Nair

10 **Untitled**
Anna Weinberg

18 **Two Drawings**
Angelica Gary

22 **Song at Dusk**
Aspen Clayton

25 **Spirit of Sunrise**
Audrey Champness

29 **Taming the Sun**
Anushka Trivedi

32 **Snip Snip Snip**
Astrid Young

36 **Two Paintings**
Anika Yorkhall

39 **Pavement**
Caroline Percival

44 **Tranquil Tides**
Sabrina Lu

POETRY

9 **The Truth of Life**
Bliss Chua

16 **Two Poems**
Lilly Davatzes

23 **Golden Moons**
Necla Asveren

30 **Tired**
Blythe Davis

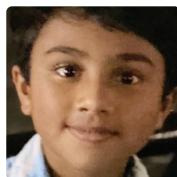
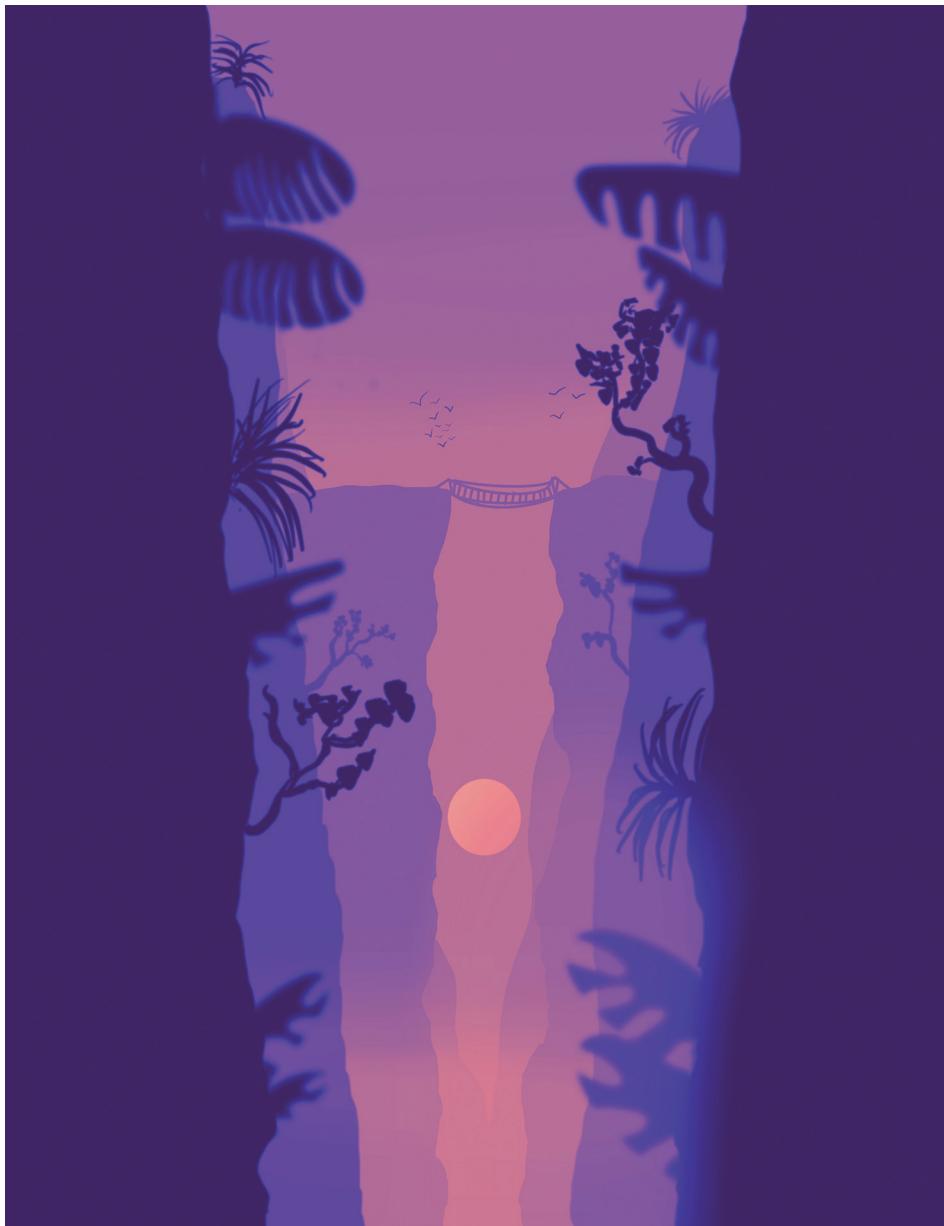
31 **The Ocean**
Elizabeth Blake

42 **American Monarchy**
Connor Kiggins

45 **Dusk on the Docks**
Benjamin Romano

46 **Highlight from Stonesoup.com**
Stonesoup.com

47 **Honor Roll**



The Other Side (Procreate)
Arjun Nair, 9
Midlothian, VA

A Leopard's Spots

May, a spotless leopard, breaks her promise to an old friend—and must own up to her actions



By Juli Hiramatsu, 11
Portland, OR

May sniffed. She relaxed when she smelled the gentle spring air. The strong breeze swept quickly through her beautiful golden fur. It was clean. No spots. That was what made her different, unique. The other leopards were all jealous of her fur. May stood up and looked around. The jungle was quiet in the mornings, like right now; she couldn't hear any noises besides the wind rustling the leaves of the bushes and trees. But at noon, the jungle was filled with the noise of the monkeys hanging from the branches or the birds singing their song—or, maybe, the roar of a jaguar battling a crocodile. Sometimes, very rarely, May could even hear the growl of a tiger hunting prey. But the leopards, jaguars, and tigers all kept their distance. May stretched her legs. She needed a walk. That was all she needed. She walked through the damp jungle ground and tried not to get herself too muddy, but that was pretty much impossible.

Chirp! Chirp!

May sighed contently. “The birds are waking up to sing their song. What song will they sing today? Maybe my favorite,” May said to

herself hopefully. She remembered that when she was younger, Winger, a small little bird, would come visit May and her mother to sing the song of the wind. May forgot what it was called amongst the birds, though. She didn’t even know if Winger was still alive. If so, he’d be a very old bird. She continued to walk. She occasionally stopped to sniff the air or investigate the bushes. The air became slightly warmer as the sun rose higher and higher. May stopped moving when she heard a high-pitched cackling. She sniffed the air. The scent of a monkey was growing stronger, but she recognized this scent.

“Kashmir? Is that you?” May asked, clawing at the ground.

“Your nose is as good as ever, May,” Kashmir said, still making that awkward cackling noise. May let out a nervous laugh.

“Yeah . . .” May murmured. Kashmir was old and fragile. He was kind of strange as well. May didn’t really know his backstory, though. They met one day, and for some weird reason they became friends. She tried to remember why. She had been really young when she first met

She smelled a monkey nearby, but she had vowed to Kashmir that she would never eat a monkey again.

Kashmir. May made an effort to try to remember what had happened. She sighed disappointedly. She didn't remember. Kashmir cackled again and snapped May back to reality.

"Thinking of how we met, yes?" Kashmir asked. May nodded desperately. She didn't know why, but she somehow felt like how they met was something she should know. "Well, I hate to say it, but I forgot." Kashmir cackled.

May let out a disappointed breath.

"Of course . . . he's old and fragile now; he wouldn't remember something from that long ago," May mumbled softly so he wouldn't hear.

"What did you say?" Kashmir grunted.

"N-nothing!" May laughed nervously. She flicked her tail.

May sighed with relief when Kashmir left. She liked him as a friend, but sometimes things could get a little tricky with him. She realized she should hunt now. She would eat, then sleep till dark. Then hunt again. She stretched quickly and sniffed the air for the smell of prey. She smelled a monkey nearby, but she had vowed to Kashmir that she would never eat a monkey again. She sniffed the air one more time.

Hare! That smell! It's a hare! May thought. She tracked the scent. No . . . the scent grows weaker here . . . this way! She made a quick turn back, then sniffed again. *Left!* She made a quick turn left. She needed to get to the prey before any of the other wildcats did. The scent grew stronger

every second. May kept on going. She wanted that hare! Her stomach was growling at her to get it. May stopped. There it was: the hare. She crouched down and sneaked forward. She was careful not to make a single noise. She remembered her mother had said not to stick the tail too high, nor too low. May crept forward till she was close enough. Then she calculated her pounce, and leaped. She aimed her claws at the hare. It tried to move, but she was too fast. May bit the neck of the hare and relaxed.

"Food . . . yes," May murmured as she ate the rabbit. She felt somewhat peaceful, despite killing this hare.

May yawned. It was time for her after-lunch nap. She might have a nice dream—or maybe a nightmare. She really wasn't the one to decide.

Well, May realized, *I am the one to decide, but not really.* She yawned again, stretched, and lay down in a comfortable position. She remembered that delicious hare. She had gotten rid of the bones by burying them. She rolled on the grass a few times, then felt her eyelids close.

May opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she asked, knowing nobody would answer. She was where she'd fallen asleep. A small clearing in the jungle where the sun hit her at an angle from which her golden fur shined. Except it was different. The trees were backing away, becoming smaller. Disappearing. She looked at herself. Spots. Her golden fur had dark spots. She wasn't her anymore. Then all spiraled into darkness.

May jerked awake.

What was that dream about? she asked herself. She shivered and looked at her own fur. No spots. Good. May sighed with relief. The moon shone along with the stars above her. Time to hunt. She got up quickly and started moving. She moved with the silence of the night, careful not to make a single sound. She sniffed the air. *I smell deer.* But too stale. *It was here yesterday.* May sighed and continued sneaking. The night was silent. All the animals were sleeping in their dens and homes. May liked the challenge. She sniffed the nearby bush. She stuck her head into it and bit down hard. *Mouse.* Not enough for my belly, though... she thought as she gobbled down the mouse. May needed to hunt more.

Still nothing. She had spent the last three hours searching for a strong scent of prey. She was disappointed with her results, extremely disappointed. She was desperate now. She needed to find prey. She was starting to get hungry. May sniffed the air.

There's a monkey! Wait—no! What are you thinking, May? Remember what you promised to Kashmir? May scolded herself, shaking her head. Then, she felt something bite her back. She moved her own body powerfully to shake the thing off. She growled and leaped at the creature, claws out. May slashed at the creature's head and relaxed. *I wonder what it was—oh no.*

May felt panic climbing up her legs. She had killed a monkey, despite the promise she had made to Kashmir. A weird feeling came up her spine. She shook it off and looked at her paws.

What?! There are spots! How?!

May gasped. Her paws had spots on them. She rushed to the nearby puddle to look at her reflection. Spots made her fur dirty. Her unique, clean fur was now covered in spots. The moon shone above her, not knowing the panic she was in. She needed knowledge of what had happened. She needed the Wise Old Elephant. First, she needed to bury the body of this monkey.

Please have a good trip to the afterlife. May thought. She had broken her promise to Kashmir. How would she tell that to the Wise Old Elephant? All the animals knew about her. The Wise Old Elephant was the smartest creature in the jungle. Well actually, she didn't really live in the jungle; she lived just outside.

"I should get going, then," May told herself. She needed to get there by morning or else the Wise Old Elephant's home would be crowded with those who were seeking her advice. She sighed. This was going to be a long walk. She was full, which was a good thing. She had eaten that monkey because she needed to eat. "It was dead anyway" was the excuse she had told herself.

May walked quickly. It was almost sunrise. The air felt much warmer than it had a few hours ago, when she had killed that monkey despite her promise. She somehow felt what she had done was related to the spots.

She was almost there. She saw the trees were starting to get shorter and sadder. Her quick walking had become a run. When she saw the Wise Old Elephant standing in a clearing, she relaxed.

May looked at her fur. The spots—they were disappearing!

“Why have you come here? Have you come for knowledge about how to remove your spots? Or something else?” the Wise Old Elephant asked suddenly. May took a moment to regain her breath.

“Both actually. I broke a promise to a friend, and I also want to remove my spots,” May said. The Wise Old Elephant turned and stared at her.

“A leopard cannot change her spots. Now tell me what promise you have broken. You want to know what to do about that as well, yes?” the Wise Old Elephant asked.

May nodded fiercely. If the Wise Old Elephant couldn’t remove her spots, then hopefully she would at least know how to right May’s wrong.

“Well, first of all, apologize to Kashmir. Then, accept any punishment he shall give you.”

May nodded.

May felt like she was about to stab her own claws into her own neck. Kashmir was there, cackling. Like usual. It made things even harder for May at the moment. She breathed in and breathed out.

“Kashmir? I need to tell you something important,” May said slowly. Kashmir stopped to look at her. “Last night . . .” May paused to take another deep breath.

“Go on.” Kashmir nodded.

“I killed a monkey. I know my promise to you, but I did it by accident. I’m sorry. I buried him and wished him a good afterlife,” May said, carefully picking her words and

how to say them. Kashmir looked shocked for a moment, angry. Then his expression changed. It became softer.

“I believe you did it by accident, May, and I understand how that could have happened, but if you ever kill a monkey again, our friendship is broken.” Kashmir sighed. May jumped and hugged Kashmir.

“Thank you so much, Kashmir! You really are a good friend,” May said happily.

“It’s alright. What’s happening to your fur, though?” Kashmir asked.

May looked at her fur. The spots—they were disappearing! Fading away! May smiled brightly.

“Oh, I don’t think it’s anything.”

The Truth of Life



By Bliss Chua, 10
Dallas, TX

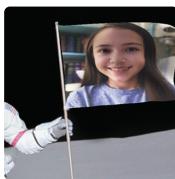
Creation, soul, mortal,
Days, growth, heart—
Life is something you can't restart.



Untitled (iPhone 6)
Anna Weinberg, 11
Washington, DC

A Secret Untold

Months after an embarrassing incident at school, Emerson is faced with a difficult decision



By Emerson Dennis, 11
New York, NY

The most traumatizing thing that happened to me in all of elementary school took place in the fall of third grade.

What is this? Oh, what happened to poor eight-year-old Emerson? Did a dear pet die? Was she tragically injured?

No. Stuff like that doesn't really happen to me. The worst moment in that year was possibly the most embarrassing thing to happen to me. Ever. Or at least it seemed like that. And it had consequences.

It all started on a sunny November afternoon near the end of the school day. Ms. Algieri, my teacher, sent us outside to put an assignment in our backpacks, which were hanging on hooks on the outer wall of our classroom. I wandered outside with everyone else and unzipped my backpack. When we had put the paper in, we walked back to the class for science. Or most of us, at least. Not me. I didn't head back to the class. Somehow I forgot about science and decided it was the end of the day. Absently humming a cheerful tune, I hitched up my backpack and skipped over the blacktop, around a row of

classrooms to the playground.

That morning, my friend Ashley and I had decided to meet there at the end of the day so we could walk to choir after school together.

I noticed that her class hadn't been released yet. Mr. Kahl always holds them back later than us. At least he hands out Jolly Ranchers. Maybe Ashley will have some—sour apple or blue raspberry, hopefully.

I skipped over the tanbark and clambered up to the top of the jungle gym. I was sitting there when my teacher came hurrying out over the blacktop toward me, black flower-print dress bobbing up and down with her bouncing jog. Her round, freckled face and dark smiling eyes, normally paired with a wide smile, were now squeezed into an expression of worry.

I couldn't see why, though. Why was she running toward me, anyhow?

Suddenly time seemed to stop. In a glance I realized there were no other kids anywhere on the grounds, with the exception of a pair walking through the breezeways to a bathroom together. Normally, the place was flooded with students walking home or stopping at the playground. I froze. I

My imagination was rampaging, running wild, making everything worse. The prickling became close to unbearable.

realized my mistake.

I began to panic, and my face turned bright red, prickling uncomfortably. Looking around, I wondered how I had ever missed the silence and stillness of the grounds.

I chanced a glance at my classroom, which had one big window with a nice view of the playground. I knew this view very well. Sitting in the classroom you could easily see the part where I was climbing. The window was dark, and from my angle I couldn't see my classmates inside. My imagination formed a detailed picture of what their faces looked like at the moment: Sophie staring in curiosity, Jamie in confusion, Bella whispering to Olivia. I was sure Diego and Jonah were holding back giggles.

My imagination also created a very detailed and fleeting image in my brain of what my classmates were seeing right now, looking out the window. Me, sitting eight feet off the ground, backpack on, an hour before class had ended. To this day, this view my imagination created seems like a memory. My imagination was rampaging, running wild, making everything worse. The prickling became close to unbearable. This was absolutely terrible.

Everyone, looking at me. Teacher, worried. Me, mindlessly wandering the playground when school hadn't even ended.

I quickly shot down from the playground and headed to Ms. Algieri. I didn't dare look her in the eye.

"I-I'm sorry," I stuttered. Tears built

up and pressed behind my eyeballs.

No. Nonono! You can't be crying! You're in school right now! Your classmates await you! But I couldn't stop the persistent tears. Before we had even come back to the classroom, tears were full-out streaming down my face.

I hung up my backpack, still staring at my shiny, navy blue sneakers, and absently noted that my shoe was untied. I heaved a loud sniff. I tried with all my might to keep a neutral face, but my face was bright red and my eyes were puffy.

Before I stepped into the classroom, I wiped my face on my sleeve. Hard. All the heads of my classmates turned and stared at me. This brought a new round of hiccupping sobs. I covered my face in my hands and stood there for what seemed like hours, when in reality it was no more than ten seconds. Then Ms. Algieri had the sense to excuse me to go to the bathroom.

At first I just casually strolled out of the classroom, trying to look calm and careless. I looked at none of my classmates. But then the reality of life set in, and I began to jog out over the blacktop to the safety of the secluded bathroom stalls.

When I got there, I sobbed in a stall. Soon my friends Nao, Katherine, and Sofia came over to comfort me. They mostly patted me, handed me wet paper towels, and quietly murmured soothing words. I don't really remember much about that. Just that I was very grateful that they didn't laugh (out loud, anyhow—some silly voice

in my head confidently informed me that they were holding back mountains of giggles). On top of everything else, I also had a new reason to be embarrassed because I had seen how puffy and red my face was and how tearstained my cheeks were in the bathroom mirrors.

Eventually I calmed down, and my friends and I headed back to class. People still stared at me, and I had tears in my eyes for the rest of the day. Small sniffs could sometimes be heard from my seat if you listened hard enough. I never cried again, though.

In the weeks that followed, I could never bring myself to tell my parents about what had happened. It was too embarrassing. I couldn't relive it in any way.

Weeks later, the parent-teacher conferences loomed near. Wow. I had always wondered about the PTCs. I always had to stay home and wait for what seemed like forever for them to come back. Whenever I asked about the parent-teacher conferences, my parents gave a vague sentence or two like, "Your teacher likes you, Emmy. Good job."

This year, for whatever reason, I was particularly keen on the parent-teacher conferences. The mystery about them gave me a bit of a chill. They were that conversation behind closed doors. No child of my grade had ever witnessed what happened in the parent-teacher conferences. If only I could find out for myself.

Just so happens, I was about to be given that exact opportunity. Weird how that always happens in stories, huh?

On the day of the parent-teacher

conferences, I heard the garage doors scraping open and a car driving in. I instantly knew what that meant. I grinned and eyed my sister, Odessa. The door opened, and my father stepped in.

"Daddyyyy!!!" I screeched, jumping into his arms with Odessa hot on my tail. I loved hugging him. His arms were big and warm and wrapped around me perfectly. After a bit of hugging, he asked me a question.

"How would you like to come with me to the parent-teacher conferences today?" he asked me.

I was just about to say, "Yes, I would like to come," when a small notion in the back of my mind struck.

"Um, I'll think about it," I said, doing my best to keep my mind and face cheerful. The notion in my head needed some consideration first. It whispered, in a small but persistent voice, *What if something bad happens? What if Ms. Algieri mentions something bad that you did?* I knew that no matter how hard I tried, I would probably cry if she said something like: "Emerson needs to pick up on her multiplication. She's very behind."

Oh, Emerson. Pull yourself together! a stronger voice scoffed. *You're awesome! Your grades are fine. You're a good student. You're a nice kid. You don't get in trouble.*

Oh, but wait. Are you sure that nothing happened this year? Nothing? Hm? Hmm?

Suddenly it hit me. There is one thing, I thought. That one time I accidentally left school early...

I was beginning to panic, just a teensy-weensy bit. But Ms. Algieri won't mention that... why would she? Besides,

Ms. Algieri is such a nice person. I don't remember anyone ever getting in big trouble with her. She would never give anyone any sort of discomfort.

You don't know that she won't. You don't know much of anything about parent-teacher conferences! All you know is that the teachers tell the parents about what happens in school. Even though she might feel sorry for you, she would have to mention it, right? It certainly did happen in school.

My panic was increasing by the second.

Y-you don't know that she'll mention it! I told myself. Y-you're not sure!

But what if she does mention it? Then you'd cry. In front of Ms. Algieri. Again.

Suddenly it seemed very possible that Ms. Algieri would mention The Incident again.

There was, of course, the outside chance that she wouldn't mention it. So I weighed what options I had in my mind.

If I went to PTCs with my dad, then I would make him proud because I was brave. But . . . if Ms. Algieri did mention The Incident, then I would probably cry. And then I would shame my father even more than if I had just stayed home.

If I stayed home, my dad would be disappointed in me for not coming with him. And if Ms. Algieri mentioned The Incident, my dad might confront me about it later, probably bringing tears, but I wouldn't cry in front of my teacher.

I could also tell my dad why I was afraid to go, but that would bring the crying right there and then. But he could help me figure out what to do, of course. He was much older than me

and would know just what to do.

I considered each of these options, noticing with a jolt of terror that they all included me bursting into tears at some point. The crying seemed inevitable. I kept telling myself that I wasn't sure that Ms. Algieri would bring up The Incident. But it just seemed so possible!

Being fearful as I was, I wanted to take the route that would mean the least trauma for me.

If I had been older and more thoughtful about the matter, I would probably have chosen option three. Having my dad help me out could only result in something pleasant because he was very good at solving problems, and it would get things over with quicker. Although it would be scary to tell him everything, the outcome would be best.

But, I was only in third grade. So option two seemed most appealing to me. It meant postponing all the crying till later.

Only one problem arrived here. And that would be telling my dad straight up that I didn't want to go. That would take some courage, courage that I surely had somewhere in me. Maybe.

Going up to him and telling him my answer to his question seemed a daunting task beyond my capabilities. Such a terrifying feat I had never faced before.

The hours of the afternoon were spent worrying and trying to summon enough courage to talk to my dad. Soon three o'clock melted into four, and four melted into five. I glanced at the clock and jumped. Five o'clock! Oh no! Daddy would leave to go to the PTCs in thirty minutes! Panic and

I had to tell him. I had to, now, or else I would have to go with him and face the horrors.

chaos ruled my brain.

I was called to dinner. I shuffled along, lost in thought. I had to tell Daddy my decision soon!

Fear pressed my forehead, giving me a headache. I shifted my food around on my plate. The half hour slipped by quickly.

Eventually the time came. Daddy would be leaving any minute.

"So, have you made your decision yet? You better hurry—we'll be leaving any minute!" he shouted, grabbing his coat.

I had to tell him. I had to, now, or else I would have to go with him and face the horrors.

I took a deep breath and, staring anywhere but his piercing blue eyes, squeaked, "I-I don't want to come to the parent teacher conferences." I glanced up at his face.

My father looked at me in surprise, and said in a seemingly indifferent voice laced with disappointment and shame, "Alright, then. I was going to let you ride bikes with me if you wanted to come."

I loved biking. Really loved it. Smoothly gliding over rough streets, propelling myself forward with an effortless nudge of foot to pedal. It was like flying, only without heights. Inhaling cold, fresh air that whipped my long brown hair out of my face. Cool breeze kissing my cheek. As long as there were no big hills, biking was bliss.

I bit back tears. Clearly, Daddy said that being brave would have a reward. Oh, if only he knew why I refrained

from coming along with him.

After he left, I sat on the couch and pondered life. *I should be feeling relieved, I thought. I got it over with.* But somehow making my father disappointed in me to avoid certain trauma didn't feel right.

You did the right thing, I assured myself. What else could you have done?

I sat and thought about my decision until Daddy came back a half hour later.

I jumped. Oh no! Would he confront me about what Ms. Algieri had said?

"Hi Daddy," I said. "What did Ms. Algieri say? Anything interesting?"

My dad simply noted that Ms. Algieri liked me, and I was a good student. I waited with bated breath for any word of The Incident. He had finished talking. Not a peep about it.

"Is . . . that it?" I asked, perplexed.

"Yep," he responded. "Well done in third grade!"

"Okay then . . ." I felt my face prickle and knew it was turning red. All that trouble I went through, the fear, the near crying, the shame, the embarrassment, for . . . nothing?

My dad didn't notice my face turning red. I walked away and sat on the couch. That notion I'd had in my head—it had seemed so convincing. And yet I'd taken all these unnecessary measures to try and avoid something that had never happened.

I should have told him in the first place, just to avoid all this difficulty. Hiding it made everything so much worse.

And it always would.

Two Poems



By Lilly Davatzes, 11
Jenkintown, PA

My soul

My soul is a unicycle
Either going too fast or
Too slow
Sometimes just right
Gravity always wins
It falls like a raindrop from the clouds

Dyslexia

Letters crash
around me like
waves in a storm,
knocking me down,
pulling me into
the sea of words
as distractions fly
around me like
birds.
Birds,
like words,
dive down in a
swarm.



Variation of William H. Johnson's *Portrait of Woman in Rocking Chair*
(Marker)
Angelica Gary, 10
Florence, SC



Variation of William H. Johnson's *Still Life—Flowers*
(Colored pencil, marker)

The Meadow

A mysterious fox takes the narrator on a midnight adventure



By Eileen Yoo, 12
Suffern, NY

My school ended at 10:35 today. We had to wear masks, and it was uncomfortable. It was different from other school years, and I didn't like it. Especially in gym because we were hot and sweaty, and having a mask on didn't make things better.

After, I went hiking with my family and saw cardinal flowers, goldenrods, rivers, and wild animals like scarlet tanagers, hooded warblers, deer, and foxes. We hiked for about two hours, then drove back home.

It was dark once we were back home, and I could see the sky had turned pink and purple. My house felt warm and comfy after a long hike, and I felt exhausted. After we ate dinner, I got ready to go to sleep.

When I lay down in bed, it was dark and I could see the moonlight shining through my window. I thought about my day and everything that had happened. Everything had seemed pretty normal, but I remembered there had been a fox following us for the whole hike. I knew it was the same fox because it had a red stripe on its forehead and deep blue eyes that reminded me of the ocean. I fell asleep eventually, but couldn't stop thinking

about that fox.

I woke up around midnight because of a sound. I looked around my room slowly and realized the noise had come from outside. I got up and went to my window. I didn't see anyone there, but I did see the fox again. It was looking right at me, as if it was waiting for me to come closer. I blinked and rubbed my eyes, wondering if I was dreaming. But the fox was still there, looking at me. It paced around a little, and kept looking back. I wondered if I should follow it, since it seemed like that's what it wanted me to do. If my parents found out, I would probably get into a lot of trouble. But I decided to take that risk anyway and got dressed, packed a bag full of supplies, and put on my sneakers.

Once I got outside, I could clearly see the fox. It had soft orange fur with some white near the face and tail. Its dark-blue eyes were now like the color of the sky on a sunny day. I got closer, and it walked near the woods. I followed it, and it continued walking deeper and deeper into the woods. We walked for about thirty minutes, and I was getting tired and

hungry. The fox must've known that too, because it stopped near a big rock and waited patiently as I got out some food to eat. We kept walking and walking, and I wondered if I had made the smartest choice in following the fox, since it seemed like we were only getting lost.

But later, I saw more moonlight shining down, and the trees began to clear. It looked like we were reaching the end of the forest, and the fox seemed to get more excited. It sort of danced as it walked, a kind of skipping dance. A little while later, there were no more trees blocking our way, and instead I saw a huge meadow in front of us. The light from the moon made it look magical, like something from a fairytale. And millions of stars twinkled against the midnight sky. The fox pranced and ran into the meadow. It reminded me of a young puppy, exploring the whole world.

I ran into the meadow, just like the fox, and saw different animals playing too. There were bears, rabbits, deer, scarlet tanagers, and even a white tiger. It felt like the animals could talk, and I could understand every word they were saying, and they could understand me. I asked how they found the meadow, and a bear said that he heard voices telling him to go deeper into the forest until he found a meadow. All the animals started agreeing, except for the white tiger. I asked him the same question, and he said the fox had showed him the way here. The white tiger asked me how I got to the meadow, and I said I followed the fox. He gave the fox a long, accusing glance but then seemed

to forget what he was thinking about.

I don't know how long we were in the meadow, but I saw the sun rising from a distance, and bright colors soon filled the sky. The fox saw it too, and it nudged me with its nose. I followed it, and soon we were far away from the other animals.

The fox seemed impatient now, and had a worried look on its face. It didn't take us long to get to our destination, and soon we were at the bottom of a hill. I gazed up and saw a willow tree with purplish bark and blue leaves. It swayed in the wind, and looked peaceful.



Song at Dusk (Watercolor)
Aspen Clayton, 11
Lisle, IL

Golden Moons



By Necla Asveren, 12
Shanghai, China

And it was with bright eyes and a bold step that we reached into the stars.

Grouped around our television sets and computers, we cheered the sun
on—just
one more day until a new start.

And we pulled down the diamond net from the sky.
The lovely, glorious, gold-silver—
we drowned in it.
Beauty and riches beyond measure,
and we drowned in it.

Fireworks turned into bombs and our stars were against us.
Nothing was ever enough.

Not enough to save us.
And it wasn't.

We crawled into our bunkers and
time started to blur,
and the colors started to change,
and flowers began to bloom from the cracks of our broken world.

But we fell
and fell
and fell.
Days melted into nights.

When we crawled out of our holes
to see the moon
Big and bright over our empty fields,
and collapsing society,
we smiled.

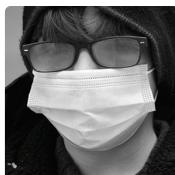
As we lay on our backs, watching the yellow and green sunset, standing on
purple grass, and staring at our golden moon,
we smiled.



Spirit of Sunrise (Watercolor)
Audrey Champness, 12
Green Cove Springs, FL

Panorama

When a strict teacher confronts Ryan, a special day takes a turn for the worse



By Ryan Behr, 11
New York, NY

I walked into the gymnasium and saw the face of Ms. Himmel, the one teacher I never wanted to see there on that special day.

She was one of two teachers always patrolling our classroom. She was strict toward everyone except my friend Jim. She was always kind to him. The only times she ever showed anyone else a hint of kindness was in the parent-teacher conferences. I thought that she was possibly trying to make the parents feel like she was a kind teacher when in truth she was not.

Ms. Himmel had sent me to the principal's office twice before the special day. I had always been scared of going to the office, and I never wanted it to happen to me again. The first time, it was because I had accidentally broken the tip of a pencil. Ms. Himmel had taken me to the principal and said, "And here is the tip of the pencil, violently broken," showing the principal a pencil tip smaller than a pin. I had felt very frightened, and I had been crying. Ms. Himmel's face had twitched, and that was something you never wanted to see. It meant she was really angry.

On the special day, my friends and I walked to school with big smiles on our faces, singing, laughing, and bumping each other's arms.

"I can't wait to see the aquarium!" I said. "When we walk into the gym, open your eyes to the sea of greatness."

Indeed, the whole class was excited. This was not a normal day. We were going to have a fun event that the second-graders have every year: we were going to present a panorama of New York City. We had worked for two months on this project, and it was finally here.

We all went to the gym, where it all took place. It was a spacious room, with beige walls and a light wood floor with the school's logo in the middle. There were also sports jerseys of famous people framed on the wall.

It was foggy with the breath of over a hundred second-graders, and it was hard to see. For the first time, there was not a single bouncing ball in sight. All I could hear was the sound of my own heart thumping.

The whole class gathered inside the gym to look at the finished product. There were aquariums,

Beads of sweat were dripping from my face as Ms. Himmel said, “Go sit on that bench, facing the wall.”

parks, basketball courts, four bridges, and so much more. My friends and I were walking around the gym, admiring our work and looking at other people's work. I remember the feeling of pride as I gazed at the sea of buildings in the gym.

I was proud of what I had built. I had made a hotel that I named the Sunshine Hotel, which I was hoping to find in real life one day. I made a backyard court with a basketball hoop. I had also put solar panels on the buildings because I love the environment. I vaguely remember recreating the Empire State Building as well. I worked alone, but it was fun work. I remember my friend saying, “Wow, we put so much hard work into this, and now it's a reality.”

There were boats in this project, and these boats were each a single Lego piece. I thought these looked really cool under the bridge. I picked one up and examined it closely. I thought it looked nice in my hands. I moved it to a different part of the panorama. Ms. Himmel saw this. She called me over.

My hands were somewhat trembling because she had a history of punishing me even if I had done nothing. She told me that what I'd done was wrong and that I would again be sent to the principal's office. I stood there in complete disbelief, but I should not have been surprised in the slightest. Beads of sweat were dripping from my face as Ms. Himmel said, “Go sit on that bench, facing the wall.”

“Why do I have to do that?”

She replied with a simple “Because I said so.”

“Alright,” I said, and sat on one of the benches, facing the wall, as she said.

I saw Ms. Himmel, with her long brown hair and sturdy body, standing in front of me. Her oval head made her look like a pear. A very mad pear. She looked like someone who had had a really bad day. Her eyes looked red, like fire, as usual. I was worried about what was to come next.

My emotions were swirling in my head. I heard myself worrying what would happen when my parents found out. I was crushed.

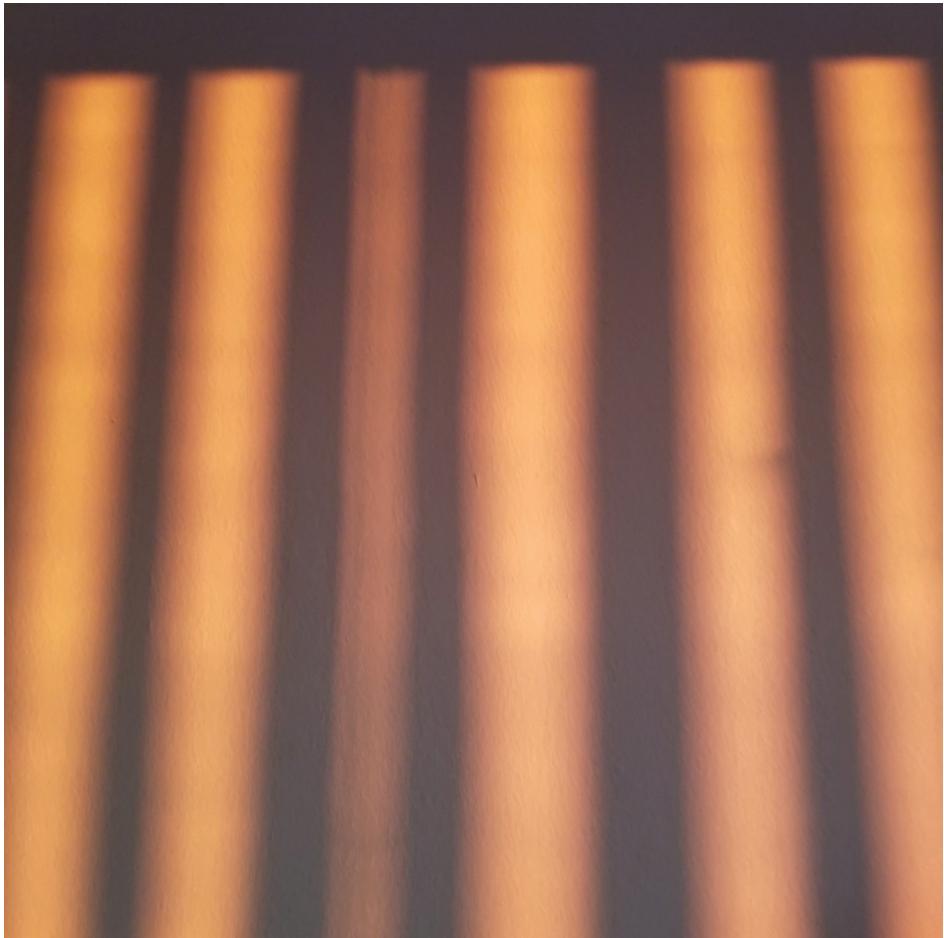
Ms. Himmel had that twitching face, and I knew I was in trouble. I felt as if the pencil was a symbol of what was going to happen now. Some of my classmates could see a hint of anger and dismay on my face as I sat facing the wall. All eyes were on me as I shed a tiny tear.

After the period ended, I was ready for my fate. I went to my classroom. But surprisingly, Ms. Himmel never came up to me. Instead, she continued the day as usual. I wondered if she had forgotten, or maybe she didn't care anymore. I didn't know if she was going to call home, and I was worried for the rest of the school day. I wondered to myself if I would be in big trouble. I went home, but nothing happened.

The day suddenly seemed to have been made brighter as sunlight entered the house.

I spoke to my mom, saying “I almost got sent to the principal’s office for something little again.” She and I had a long talk, and she realized it was nothing big at all.

When I was in my room, I gazed out at the sun through my window and said, “That was a really good day.”



Taming the Sun (Samsung Galaxy S8)
Anushka Trivedi, 11
Silver Spring, MD

Tired



By Blythe Davis, 9
Austin, TX

We are all tired,
And my cat is tired too
But he's tired in the way
Where he stretches out on my bed,
Purring with joy,
And tiredness

Maybe we should work to make
Each other tired in that way;
Where you smile and sigh
A satisfied sigh,
And drift off to dreams

The Ocean



By Elizabeth Blake, 8
Howell, NJ

The ocean is a place I never want to leave
It has my personality
It is gentle like me
It is calm like me
It is a representative
of me!



Snip Snip Snip (Fujifilm FinePix XP140)
Astrid Young, 11
Brookline, MA

First Times

Claire recalls a day of many “firsts”



By Claire Pan, 11
New York, NY

Waiting for the bus was stressful, maybe in part because it was so new this time. Throughout elementary school at Bank Street, I had never taken the bus, and I most certainly didn't go alone. I always went with my brother Eric and my mom in the subway or in a taxi, New York City family that we are. This time was different, however. I was on my own, sort of, with only my dad waiting with me, ready to head to Chelsea Piers for an ice-skating camp from our home on the Upper West Side a few miles north. I was definitely excited to learn how to skate, and just to go to camp in general. I was eight, a third-grader who could barely type, and here I was, waiting near a church for the bus. I thought to myself, You can do it. It's just camp, over and over again, just waiting and waiting.

The bus finally pulled in after five boring minutes of waiting and fiddling my fingers. It was one of those typical yellow school buses with a black stripe down the middle, and it wasn't as big as a regular school bus—maybe half the size. The ride was long and slow, a half hour, and I sat with some kid I didn't know (and still don't

know because all she did on the bus was read).

I, a shy third-grader, didn't talk to anyone. I just sat there staring out the window watching cars pass by. This was all new for me; no one had told me that it was loud and noisy on the bus, and sometimes it would take forever for the bus to get to school because of traffic and how slow it went. Yet I still thought it was thrilling, this first ride. Later, I liked how the bus was just a little place where kids got to talk or to hang out, and I often made new friends this way.

Once the bus finally arrived, a counselor made us line up in a single-file line and state the name of our camp. This counselor had a dark-brown baseball hat and was wearing shorts and a purple T-shirt with cartoon characters on it. He also had two nose piercings. My first impression of him was that he talked way too loud. So I made a snap decision then and there not to like him. Shy-kid me took ten seconds just to say the three words “ice-skating camp.”

The counselor took me, along with all of us ice-skating campers,

The ice was so smooth and clean, and I was the little devil who chaotically wanted to ruin it.

out to the rink, and let me say this: the rink was freezing cold, and I did not like the cold one bit. So I started to run toward the place where we had to lace up our skates. Yet someone pointed out that I had to check in, so I waited in line, shivering. The kid in front of me was taking forever. He was listing his allergies, and he had tons of them. I remember pollen, nuts, and milk, but there were more! When it was my turn, I just said my name, Claire, and that I had no allergies. Nothing else. That was it. The person behind me got lucky.

Once I got inside the lacing area, I was so relieved to notice there was a heater there. I quickly put on my helmet, jacket, and gloves, but the rental skates were a challenge. It took nearly five minutes to jab my right foot into one of them, and the left took twice as long. The reason it took so long was because the ice skates were shaped like weird pears, and it was hard getting my feet to fit. Eventually I gave up and asked a counselor to help. I didn't know this at the time, but rather than me doing it myself, the counselors were actually supposed to help. If I had known this, I could've saved ten minutes and a lot of frustration.

The rink wasn't open yet, but I wanted to go on it right away. The ice was so smooth and clean, and I was the little devil who chaotically wanted to ruin it. Once they opened the gates—and I do not exaggerate—it was a stampede of kids running out the door like wild animals

being released from captivity. I was eventually pushed onto the rink, along with several others, by the most eager children. I clung to the walls because I was nervous, but also because I couldn't balance myself. A lot of other kids did the same, since we were tentative and scared. You could say it looked like a conga line, but instead, we were a bunch of anxious children, not a line of dancers at a party!

After a few minutes of this messy beginning, all of the kids on the walls got picked up by a teacher and assigned to a class with other kids. There were eight different groups based on level of experience. Of course, I got set up into a class called "Basic One," the easiest of all the groups. The teacher was an optimist and saw the bright side to everything, including a bunch of kids falling down every five minutes. Yet she was friendly and always said "Smile!" It was a bit weird and annoying because we would be learning how to walk on ice and she would say "Smile," and that would throw the whole class off track.

She taught us a bunch of nonsense, like if your face comes in contact with skates, you should not touch your face, and go straight to a counselor instead since they had first-aid kits. We were also taught how to get up when you fall, and how to "step one at a time." It personally felt more like walking than ice skating to me, because I didn't glide at all during that first session.

After class, you had free time to do whatever you wanted out there on

the rink, and I really liked that part, and this is where I learned the most. As for the other kids who were so much faster than me, they were just zooming around and having tons of fun. During this time, I also saw a lot of kids scraping up ice with their hands. They picked up the scraped-powdery ice and put it in their mouths. I didn't know why they were doing that, but it was disgusting. I bet there were a lot of sick kids and angry parents after that first week.

Soon after the actual skating part, we were all sent to different parts of Chelsea Piers to play soccer or do other activities, like gymnastics or basketball. That first day, I remember we were sent to the fieldhouse to play soccer, and I also remember not liking it much, so I just sat there and watched. It just felt boring, kicking a ball around and hoping to score. Soccer has never been my thing, and it certainly wasn't going to be my thing on this day. After that, we ate an unsurprisingly mediocre lunch, which was pizza and French fries, and neither seemed fresh. I sat with people I barely knew because the tables in the cafeteria were randomly arranged.

With lunch behind us, we were going to skate again. I didn't know we would skate two times a day, but we did, so I skated. It was slightly better than before, because I knew how to skate better. And then, as before, it was free time again. I stepped around the rink like a lunatic until the workers at the rink screamed, "Bus kids!" ridiculously loud.

The "bus kids," myself included, got escorted to the place where

we'd put on our skates to pack up. I packed up, and then we were off. The buses were numbered buses, and I remember being on one of the last buses. At the front desk they offered us packed ice creams, which was bizarre because we'd been in the cold all day. Still, we could pick which ones we wanted, such as popsicles or ice cream sandwiches, and I picked the latter. Then it was time to be sent home in buses, since we were bus kids, after all.

That was that—although I do remember saying "Hi" to the "my head is stuck in this book for the remainder of this bus time" girl, and she actually said hi back to me this time. I was proud that I actually managed to say a single word—me, that shy kid. There must have been something about that day that gave me a little more courage.



Fierce (Acrylic)
Anika Yorkhall, 13
Minneapolis, MN



Sunset (Watercolor, pencil)
Anika Yorkhall, 13
Minneapolis, MN

Beyond Detention

Ali reflects on jail and detention, and the seemingly never-ending cycles of crime and punishment



By King Hey Chan, 14
Portland, OR

The fervid morning sun was already piercing the plundered earth of Los Angeles as I walked unhurriedly under the lush green trees of our neighborhood park filled with clear, fresh air. I never hurried toward my dull school—the cause of much languishing and ennui. To make the most of my liberty, I pulled out my phone to read the news. The first headline read:

Another robber caught and thrown in jail.

I slowly swiped downward to the article:

Robber thrown in jail because he stole pain-killing Tylenol at CVS.

I stood wondering why the man had committed theft. Had he suffered a sudden migraine affecting his choices? Was he desperate for some other reason? Had he asked the manager for credit for a day? Why such harsh punishment? Why wasn't he just fined? Was he a repeat offender? If not, why had the newspaper called him a "robber," labeling his identity forever? Continuing toward school, I reflected on the question of why people steal and why their motives remain

unknown to the public.

Just before the sterile school bell rang, the raging morning sun followed me as I ran inside the metal school doors that barred so much light and enlightenment from then on. The crowd rushing toward the classrooms carried me with it. I threw my bag into my locker and sat down in my first classroom where I would begin to waste the next eight hours of my life. The teachers' never-ending assignments flowing in, stagnating the life-giving river, the same monotonous tasks being handed in every day just for a grade good enough to pass, the same meaningless true-false questions sucking away souls bit by bit, the same brainless one-answer questions breeding facile thinking and eventual indifference, never learning through discovering, never creating with imagination, all causing our ennui. *Why do we have to suffer this meaninglessness? This loss of self-worth?* Using this time, I still wondered why the man had committed theft, wondered why the media had never answered the "why" question.

After the teacher had dismissed my peers and me to lunch, I stared



Pavement (Canon EOS 5D Mark II)
Caroline Percival, 12
San Antonio, TX

I began what some people call the ritual of sitting Shiva—though not for a deceased person. This time for those who suffer a dysfunctional kind of punishment. Detention.

down at the vinyl ground, dragging my feet all the way to lunch, barely attending to the announcement:

“Kids, don’t forget to hand in the field trip fees to your homeroom teacher by the end of the day!”

The words floated out from a dark corner, hiding away from the afternoon sunlight, as I spotted Rick, panic-driven, desperate, clenching a handful of cash, about to withdraw it out of Bob’s locker.

“Rick, what do you need Bob’s money for?”

“I need the money for the field trip fees to turn in today. I forgot to bring my own. That’s why I’m stealing.”

“Rick, why don’t you ask your homeroom teacher for a chance to turn in the fees tomorrow morning? Maybe ask someone who has extra money to lend? You don’t have to steal, Rick.”

Rick hesitated. “Maybe you’re right.” Calming down, he resolved, “I will try and ask.” Returning Bob’s money, he added, “Thanks, Ali. Please don’t tell anyone I stole.”

“I won’t.”

“I wasn’t thinking.”

“I know.”

As I entered the lunchroom, I sat down on my usual spot and began to unpack my lunch with the sun ferociously beating down on me through the huge ceiling window. As I ate in this room full of my peers’ noises playing foosball and the sound

of balls dribbling, I began what some people call the ritual of sitting Shiva—though not for a deceased person. This time for those who suffer a dysfunctional kind of punishment. Detention.

This series of steps, this practice, this ritual, I have learned to use whenever I need to think and to reflect. I started to place a hold on what was happening around me, abstaining myself from the activities in the lunchroom, and started to think about what would have happened if I had not confronted Rick. Would he have been caught and sent to detention? Would he have reflected and changed for the better? Or would he have become a full-fledged thief, stealing whenever he needed money?

Even as the loud lunch bell echoed in the lunchroom and woke me from my reverie, I picked up my unfinished sandwich and proceeded to my free period with thoughts still bouncing in my mind. As I walked near the detention room filled with sullen silence, I saw the same people waiting to serve their “sentence,” the same students who always went in and out like it was some sort of routine. Students like Mike, who was always missing from class. George, who was always making jokes and annoying the teacher. Mark, who was always seen bullying people. And as the list went on, a new insight awakened me.

Detention isn’t really a place to help students resolve a problem or change how they make choices. It is a place

for disobedient students to realize that, though there are consequences for misdemeanors such as stealing money, two hours of solitude merely results in the belief that their mistakes weren't all that bad.

So what is the worth of this vicious crime-and-punishment cycle? What is the alternative? How do we learn to revise our lives? Never are they asked to consider the harm they have caused. Never were they counseled or given a chance to restore justice and relationships between themselves and those whom they have harmed.

I have to stop this vicious cycle that leads only to more crime and more punishment. I have to raise the principal's awareness. But why would Mr. Dawn listen to me? What if he gives me time in detention for wasting his time? What if he doesn't even give me a chance to speak?

My legs grew numb. The principal's office was already right in front of me. I silently and tentatively reached for the door. *I have to do this. I have to show that people won't change after two hours of solitude. Not even after a hundred years of solitude!*

As the office door loudly creaked open, my dry mouth opened and words flew out: "I think detention should be stopped and replaced by counselors willing to listen and guide those who have made mistakes."

There was a moment of silence for what seemed like forever. Finally Mr. Dawn replied, "Ali, next time please knock before you come into the office. But now, tell me more about what you just said."

"I think that students given detention will not change their ways

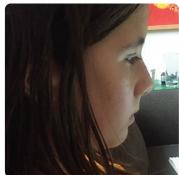
for the better after sitting in a silent room. The isolation will not help them change the way they think. Students in detention need someone to help them understand why their choices were not the best; they need someone to guide them in the right direction, guide them to learn new problem-solving skills. Maybe a whole class offering moral dilemmas could be helpful."

As I finished my new viewpoint, the principal and I exchanged looks. A fertile silence emerged. Finally, Mr. Dawn spoke: "I agree with you, Ali. I see where you're coming from. Thank you for your thoughts. You should get back to your free period."

I sighed both with relief and disappointment. Relieved he had listened to what I had to say, yet disappointed with his response. I turned around with my shirt wet and sticking to my back and started to walk away along with the rays of warm light, when Mr. Dawn spoke again: "You're a good kid, Ali. Keep changing the world."

The alarming school bell rang again as my feet crossed the school door just in time to avoid a late slip. I zoomed past the cafeteria, skipped past the principal's office, and hiked up the stairs toward my classroom, but I stopped and stared in silence, disarmed by an unfamiliar, sunlit room. I noticed that the former sign, signifying *Detention Room*, had vanished. The room was now called something more justified, more deserving. It was now called *Reflection and Learning*.

American Monarchy



By Connor Kiggins, 12
New York, NY

Every day upon waking up, I wish that the burden of school had never been thrust upon my tired back as I cannot keep up with addition, subtraction, fractions, and historic factions while strangers observe my every action five days a week, eight hours a day, our only vacation being one based around letting kids out to start working on their parents' farms during the harvest season. And that tradition only stays so that we kids can have a mental break from school although soon we will go back and have our schedule wiped clear, making me want to break out and go have fun before I'm buried underground with a sign above saying *rest in peace*. And we are not even free three days a week, a freedom I think we deserve as many seem to forget that one day we will grow up and work maybe twice as hard as you and of course, let's not forget that when you grow old, who else but your sons and daughters will in turn take care of you and yet one thing we won't do is take your freedom like you take ours. And still we will fight for you even though you dump us in school as the people who are often referred to as "America's future" find themselves in a government-required American monarchy, where the teachers act like dukes, the deans like princes, and the principal the all-powerful king, while we the future are insignificant peasants stuck in the king's castle while being told we have to follow all his rules, while we toil in a classroom, making our humor and passion slowly dissipate as we learn about but do not obey the rules of freedom of speech and democracy while being instructed on everything from how to breathe and when we can go pee and not to put our heads on the table and being scolded for doing it twice by a hypocritical math teacher, and when I go to the graded class of musical theater he tells us that we cannot even go to the bathroom unless we are about to wet our pants, and that just so he doesn't get scolded by our parents for putting their children in an embarrassing position in front of the class—making me feel that this American monarchy has gone

too far and is going to keep on destroying our future, even though they already have by filling the sky with toxic gasses—all so they could get a fancy pen and with a few strokes decide whether we will go to college and be successful or end up in a small apartment while working at McDonald's, all because the American monarchy said we weren't smart enough to go to even the worst college, which is why at the end of the day, we can say that the American monarchy is a messed up system run by annoying narcissists, and if we want a future, school should be remade, from a monarchy to a children's democracy.



Tranquil Tides (Acrylic)
Sabrina Lu, 13
Ashburn, VA

Dusk on the Docks



By Benjamin Romano, 10
Lynnfield, MA

The water crashes against the dock
Like a chime, melody.
The boats bob on the water, but seem at peace.
I sit down near the edge, not too close, nor too far.

The sun dips down into the Earth, leaving a spill of purple and dusty rose to light the dusk sky.
Soon the moon will take over the job of the sun, guiding the midnight travelers.

The waves crash against the dock, almost like children playing.
The birds keep chirping, as they normally do, but they are not annoying; they seem like a melody this evening, for they too seem tired. Like me.

Where am I?
Why is it turning dark too fast?
What is behind me?
What do I feel like?

At peace. The day is gone now, and soon I will rest.
I feel tired and calm, and the waves seem to start to feel that too, as they are more calm now, like children before bed.
Content, tired, peaceful

By the water.
By the water.
By the water.

Highlight from Stonesoup.com

From the section of our blog devoted to writing inspired by COVID-19



Zooming In

By Maya Ruben, 10
Washington, DC

"Knowing how to care is the first step, but actively going out of your way to do something nice is what really matters," Ms. Sandra said in a welcoming voice. I found it funny how she thought no one noticed the filter she had on that made her lips red. Whenever she moved her mouth, the lipstick struggled to follow. She looked like a beginner ventriloquist trying to make minimal mouth movements.

I was lying in bed with my pajamas on and my camera off. I split my screen in half with Zoom on one half and YouTube on the other. It turns out it is very entertaining to watch cats being scared of cucumbers. I finished up the first two classes, neither of which I listened to or cared about. I walked downstairs and saw my mom and dad talking. When I came, they stopped and looked over at me.

"Hey, how's school going?" asked Dad.

"Same old, same old," I said sarcastically.

"So, Dad and I were talking about all of us going to the art museum together, when school is over for today," said Mom.

I was surprised by how she had said

that so quickly and simply, like she was taking a single sip of a smoothie. It's not that I didn't like the idea; it was just weird to do so suddenly, after all this time in distance learning. But I was ready for it.

When we got to the museum, I noticed that it was very small. Good. I don't like big places. We secured our masks and walked inside. I was caught off guard by a beautiful piece of art on the wall. It was a lime-green circle with no significance whatsoever. But I was still captivated. The silence of this art was different from the silence of distance learning. I suddenly pulled my gaze away from the painting and realized my parents weren't there.

"Mom?" I asked. No reply. "Mom!" I raised my voice. Still no reply.

I sat on an unwelcoming chair, looking back up at the picture, embracing the feeling of being alone. I felt meaningless in the wide universe. But I knew Mom and Dad couldn't have gone far in this tiny, uncrowded place. I sighed and was about to stand up to go look for them, but first I felt the need to stay and collect my thoughts.

Just for a moment, I was alone with the world.

About the Stone Soup Blog

We publish original work—writing, art, book reviews, and multimedia projects—by young people on the Stone Soup Blog. When the pandemic began, we got so much incredible writing about the experience of living through the lockdowns that we created a special category for it! You can read more posts by young bloggers, and find out more about submitting a blog post, here: <https://stonesoup.com/stone-soup-blog/>.

Honor Roll

Welcome to the Stone Soup Honor Roll. Every month, we receive submissions from hundreds of kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

STORIES

Eily Chiu, 10
Summer Jiang, 12
Claire Lu, 12
Clara Stone, 9
William Wang, 12

POETRY

Forrest Dunlap, 9
Jap Preet Khalsa, 13
Raeha Khazanchi, 12
Rassa Kia-Young, 12

Visit the Stone Soup Store at Stonesoupstore.com

At our store, you will find . . .

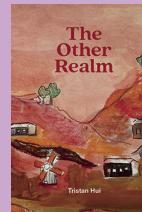
- Current and back issues of *Stone Soup*
- Our growing collection of books by young authors, as well as themed anthologies and the *Stone Soup Annual*
- High-quality prints from our collection of children's art
- Journals and sketchbooks

... and more!

Finally, don't forget to visit Stonesoup.com to browse our bonus materials. There you will find:

- More information about our writing workshops and book club
- Monthly flash contests and weekly creativity prompts
- Blog posts from our young bloggers on everything from sports to sewing
- Video interviews with *Stone Soup* authors

... and more content by young creators!



CHILDREN'S ART FOUNDATION