

**THE CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK  
Department of English  
and  
Division of Humanities  
PRESENT**

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**HIGH SCHOOL WINNERS**

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## Honorable Mention

### SCREAM THROUGH YOUR NOSE LOVE

I taught you to inhale through my mouth  
 And exhale through my nose  
 “Scream through your nose Love; scream through your nose”  
 Your fingers would shimmy up and down the part in my hair  
 With a smirk crooked as my unevenly clipped toenails

You could be a lover

You, you used to think the world in layers  
 I, I used to live the world in shifts  
 Fixed by tectonic plates

You could be my mentor

Abhor me, adore me – you did all so devilishly well.  
 We mimicked each others’ faces  
 Mocked pleading eyebrows and pouting lips  
 In public, our grieving eyes never let show our tangled ties  
 I was always off losing myself to sinners

You could be my secret other

My hands flew to my lips, I was embarrassed  
 By my bleached facial hair that pricked and shone  
 Like cactus needles under the Sahara sun  
 You said: I didn’t notice, I thought it was a trick of light  
 That was your sweetest lie  
 Colors of my face, eyes and hair were forever changing  
 Looked at the skin of my arms to find my true colors

You could be my loving father

Twenty songs ago you were here, twelve songs ago there was fear  
 Five songs ago, the door was closed and the feeling got gone  
 I’d say: people never change and it’s okay as long as at the end of the night my tongue’s in your  
 Ear, and there’s nothing left to see, no one left to be  
 I wanted to whisper into the skin between your toes  
 So sweet, it’s bitter – you couldn’t stand to see me shiver

You could be my captor

Farzana Ali  
 Stuyvesant High School

## POISON

beautiful ebony girl:  
 skin – chocolate brown  
 eyes – caramel sweet  
 Voluptuous  
 sultry, smooth – va va voom. . . mmmm!  
 Seductress  
 dream chasing free will.

bound, broken, battered, bruised.

beautiful ebony girl:  
 heavy with pain.  
 essence destroyed,  
 her shadow fades. . .  
 sweet girl – shhh. . . silence abides.  
 “resist Me not,” says he “your treasure I own, your pearl revealed.”

beautiful ebony girl:  
 tender softness  
 the glare of the golden door – her eyes did blind.  
 “*you* I own,” again says he, “do what I say ’til your labor your debts repaid”

beautiful ebony girl:  
 trapped in Eden’s garden.  
 deceived by a Snake;  
 unfulfilled promises. . .

beautiful ebony girl –  
 resist *Me* not.  
 deep – venomous tenebrosity flows,  
 invading your crimson stream.

beautiful ebony girl –  
 resist Me now,  
 my obscure heart.

doeth this, thy mother I spare,  
 doeth not, my thunder shall ye hear.

beautiful ebony girl –  
 do as told, nothing else.  
 Rosebudd’s world!  
 welcome to hell.

Yanique Anderson  
 Medgar Evers College Preparatory School

## THE BRONX IS UGLY

I'm stuck in the dark, a young girl's screams,  
As the stranger intrudes with his manhood

I'm stuck in a teacher's tears dealing with middle-school children  
Who talk with disrespectful mouths and never once  
Sit quietly at their desks with folded hands  
Tears slide from her eye to her neck  
She wipes another drop

I'm stuck in the stench of the stiff rat  
Curled in the sewer in front of the flower shop  
The aroma of blood and skin,  
The store now boarded up

I'm stuck seeing a black man  
Attacked by 5 white police officers  
Their night sticks strike his dark skin,  
Blood spurts out of his mouth  
Static on the dispatch  
They got the wrong one

I'm stuck in the odor  
From the yellow stains on the elevator floor  
Somebody couldn't hold it in.

I'm stuck in Bluntville,  
Where the teenage hoodlums come to school  
Eyes droopy and red,  
After smoking the green herbs  
They stumble in the halls

I'm stuck in the reek of the gas station bathroom  
Mold on the walls  
A toilet that won't flush

I'm stuck feeling the stranger behind me on the bus,  
His big rough hand brushes my back side.  
As I look back  
His dark brown eyes roam away

I'm stuck in the tang of spoiled chunky milk  
Sitting for 3 months in the refrigerator

In the rush of flying bullets  
A single father's only little girl is gone.

Shakira Cogswell  
Bronx Academy of Letters

## SHE'S ONLY HURTING HERSELF

Beautiful day at the park  
 It's July  
 She's really cold  
 She says she's ok

Foggy, gray day at the park  
 It's October  
 She's really sick  
 She says it's only a cold

Very cold day at the park  
 It's December  
 She's not coming  
 She says another day

All alone at the park  
 It's still December  
 She's at the hospital  
 My mom says she's going to be ok

Sitting at the park cold night  
 Waiting for December to end  
 Staring at the stars  
 She's only hurting herself

Leaving a trail of teardrops  
 Wind blowing my hair  
 It's January  
 Wondering if she's ever coming back?

Barbara Contreras  
 Wildcat Academy

## MOONLIGHT

A girl  
 She sits alone  
 On a pitch black night  
 Sad as night's dark veil descends  
 But as the moon  
 Nestles on the night  
 Vanishing the darkness from where it came  
 When dawn breaks  
 The night of atonement quietly departs.

Henry Dominguez  
 High School for Law and Public Service

## AURORAL TRIPTYCH

I. *December Morning*

Behind the park,  
 the sun rose furious:  
 a blood orange beginning to bite  
 away the night.

I stood still  
 by the cold window,  
 clean and bare,  
 watching this early dawn.

How many mornings  
 of witnessing both beginnings and  
 ends  
 do I have left,

a dreaded molt,  
 in the cool dark of my mother's house?

II. *Sunrise at JFK International*

Beyond the distinctive silhouette of a dormant plane  
 the sun rises industrially  
 into the still empty sky.

My fractured family  
 (a funny sort of jigsaw)  
 congregates in silence;  
 our coffee-stained teeth kept together by the  
 grave dregs of early morning fatigue.

We prepare for the upcoming journey  
 in solitary meditations  
 which dovetail with the unison of our steps.

Our feet keep time for the silent choruses of love.

III. *Crepuscular Thoughts*

As the sun rises, so too rises my mind  
 Illuminating the sleepy corners with  
 Tender pink tendrils of thought:  
 Almost lucid,  
 Almost alert.

Wearing my brother's sweater, I wonder  
 how my thoughts and words clothe themselves in

influence.

*What can I say is mine?* as I shamefully spy  
the earth's fragile wakening.

And do I want to lay my hand upon anything  
possessively?

No,  
rather, there is nothing I want to call my own,  
tether myself to, announce as a rigid signifier.

Rather, let my hand lie  
across a sentence,  
a moment, an idea,  
or a young man's cheek  
in affection or adoration. (Perhaps  
love, were I ever to be so brazen.

In loving maybe I will lay a claim, but  
never as harsh as the cage of possession.)

Let everything grow  
and breathe  
of its own accord.

As I, an equal, watch with gentle eyes.

Katherine Gibbel  
Bard High School – Early College

## THE CONEY ISLAND VIGNETTES

### I. Coney Island

the Sirens they tell me  
to bury my love underneath the  
boardwalk,  
to stay with them,  
as so many have done before

be wary, my darling  
they will steal your heart away.

### II. Boardwalk

memories we trample on the boardwalk and do we ever notice we leave behind our imprints and do  
we ever realize they will fade away and only we will have them. the others, they'll have faded them

away, trampled them with worn sandals and child's feet, and leave behind, lingering, like smoke, their laughing children and their weary ankles and their zeppole sugared fingertips, and we are things of the past now, love.

### III. Sailors

In little boats  
and the swelling of the sea!  
And we can hear –  
but Odysseus had  
beeswax  
and rope  
and we have none.  
And why return to a battle, you think –  
when there are such lovely Sirens  
calling out instead.

### IV. Wonderwheel/Cotton Candy

We are calling out to you  
Brooklyn!  
We are clasping the protective cages  
  
of the Wonder Wheel ferris wheel!  
We wish we could yell  
until our love pours out from our throats  
and spreads like melted butter over the city.

We are calling out to you  
Brooklyn!  
We are singing from the tops of the Wonder Wheel!  
We are swinging in our rickety Wonder Wheel carts!  
And we are having SUCH  
a VERY GOOD TIME  
and couldn't it stay like this forever?

Sticking like cotton candy  
to the backs of our throats,  
is nostalgia foreshadowed:  
Our Brooklyn  
and the sepia tones we will create in  
our minds.

### V. Coney Island (reprise)

Bury my love underneath the  
boardwalk  
as we have done so many times before

be wary, my darling,  
they will steal your heart away.

And do not desert me  
for the Sirens are cruel  
and would we stay with them  
as so many have done before?

Would we stay, darling  
(as lonely sailors often had)  
Beauty is a lovely disguise  
but pasts cannot sustain  
us for  
very long.

Gabriella Gonzales  
Bronx High School of Science

#### CANDLE LIGHT

Strike a match  
light my life  
when we kiss  
it's candlelight

Throw a grenade  
diffuse a bomb  
your torch on fire  
a starry night –  
atomic bomb

Cremate my soul  
dance salsa  
burn coal

Candlelight  
inside your eyes  
inside the sky  
burned in the mist  
of my demise

Brianna Hayes  
Hendrick Martin Institute/Harvey Milk School

## MINDLESS SELF INDULGENCE

Dance with me  
On this,  
The sea.

A blooming blue,  
A cashmere silk.  
Blindfold tied,  
I lead you in.

To live on the sands,  
With God,  
Overhead.  
Watching the surfers,  
The burn-outs  
Glide by, with thanks,  
Until they hit the rocks.

We all get there at one point or another.  
The rough rock surface grazing our skin.  
The taste of salt water and blood  
Like dirty pennies, disintegrating in the acids of holy water.

There is a tingle,  
Then a burn,  
Then a black-out.

But still the crowds gather  
And seagulls flock the tan sands  
The jellyfish still sting naïve children in shallow waters  
Fire ants wander on crippled toes,  
Searching for more from their tiny stature,  
Hoping to expand their knowledge of the existing world,  
Only to forget it tomorrow.

We all live with this,  
With this hope stranded in our minds  
And a sharp pain at heart.

But you learn to deal  
You learn to ignore that burn  
And the momentary pause of the heart  
With our years, we learn,  
How to be okay,  
With everything that's wrong.

So dance with me,  
On this,  
The sea

As I untie your blindfold

And you see  
 Where you've been living  
 And dreaming  
 And hoping  
 And wishing

An empty room in a single shade of white.  
 You, yourself have painted the scene on the canvas of your life.  
 You imagined the yellows and the reds.  
 The sea is long gone  
 As am I  
 As is he  
 So here we part  
 Here we leave you  
 With your walls

To write on as you please  
 To think about the birds and the bees  
 To make those knees,  
 As weak as can be,  
 On this the sea.

Aleksandra Lerner  
 Midwood High School

## EARTH

Earth produces you to create your poem.  
 For you are the only poem.

Earth crushes you  
 drops you from the snow caps,  
 plucks you from the sea,  
 praises you with rings of light.  
 Your soul is the only poem.

Earth spins you faster than itself,  
 rumbles your spine,  
 collects the remains,  
 but always returns.  
 Your love is the only poem.

Earth encases you in the shadow of doubt,  
 attacks your senses,  
 teaches you how, but not when,  
 gives you reason.  
 Your brain is the only poem.

Your poem shapes Earth.

crashing waves,  
mighty winds,  
virgin snow,  
untouched dew.

The world, plus you.  
You are the only poem.

Leo Mancini  
Townsend Harris High School

#### A BLACK BOY'S DREAM

Came from the womb always with another question  
Mind stuck in contemplation like another teenager stuck texting  
Went to school and learnt my ABCs and my 123s  
But still left in thought after school on who I meant to be  
Considered a caged bird cause my mother was tough and strict  
But in all actuality it would let my mind prosper without being in the grit  
The grit that is where I grew up  
Where common greetings and goodbyes are either a C or B up  
Found my escape in the words of my forefathers Martin and X  
Left studying that I'm considered a second class citizen in the eyes of the rest at best  
Through the pain and the loss,  
The unwanted child and the ¼ million car,  
Suicidal intent and parental negligence  
I consider that Black boy a star  
I call him a star not what shines out but what shines within  
By being in the hardest of situations and still having no doubt that he will win  
Grandmother warned him not to push cause his anger will be that of a sin of pride  
He's powered with performance and drive  
And only \$2.25 to keep him alive

Nicholas A. Nichols  
Transit Career and Technical Education High School

## AS A VENTRILOQUIST, I BREAK ALL RULES

New born child. Fluffy white cloud.  
I sinned by an awakening brutal force.

Train tracks speeding. No preparation.  
I was baptized in a sea of Red.

Walking in circles. Demiurge of brick roads.  
He was the teacher as I the daughter.

Two oaths diverge. Left or Right?  
I listened like Eve, then waited like Gandhi, then walked down the middle like me.

He journeyed the Old World on June 6, 2006  
with a red trail behind,  
which a soul cleanser he once taught me can only undo.  
I tried to do my own thing and cursed his name instead and failed.

I resorted to the next plan: Bow my head and pray  
that the glue to fix trouble with wouldn't come undone  
because I wanted to see the day,  
the day the sun would cease

all movement and repair all broken concrete for me.  
*Too late*, chortled the light bringer.

Sand seeping through the strange twisted  
hourglass as time  
itself was unraveling. Dare forgive  
me, just hear my plea

about the ones touched by Aphrodite,  
about the ones with Robin voices,  
about the ones who had teachers like I;  
I kept them all

to see the effects it had on me.  
Not much longer, chuckled the angel of light.

Guiding me down the path of evil, I walked.  
Passed my light of tunnel, I talked.  
Looked back at the serene sign of things that stalked.

I left land June 6 –  
perhaps to a better place,  
something I could deal with, of better taste.

Tyanni Niles  
Medgar Evers College Preparatory School

## SOAP DAYS

She will not let her mother  
    serve her at the big table any more.  
Snaps and takes the big fork,  
    measures her own servings.

She speaks English like  
    an American from the 90s.  
Her college years short,  
    complete but wanting.  
Now traces the outline  
    of her parallel self,  
a kindergarten teacher,  
    trapped in a cubicle.

My cousin is the dishes  
    of her seaside childhood  
home that now she refuses to let  
    her mother wash.

She narrows her eyes, cringes  
    at the careless collection of  
cracked, used saucers,  
    lusterless glasses,  
plates that insult one another.

The sisters outside scowl  
    at the door, sigh exasperated  
shake their heads. Night is ripe  
    but they wait for her hunched-over  
hands to rinse the last dish and  
    wipe themselves dry.

My cousin washes dishes well.  
    Whips up with fury  
when her mother breaks them  
    as accidents, years accumulate.  
Waiting all the while for  
    a shiny, unworn, matching set.

Demetra Panagiotopoulos  
Townsend Harris High School

## POSSIBILITY

She believes in the magic  
 of a fortune cookie,  
 made by workers under  
 ceiling pipes, baked in steel cages, folded  
 with skilled fingers; practiced,  
 from being burnt the first twenty  
 times. All powerful messages  
 typed by invisible strangers.

The silly jokes she reads as facts, saved in  
 her little plump pouch; a sea  
 of crumpled rectangles. Magic never fails

if she breaks one open  
 with a crunch, picks up  
 the crumbs fallen onto her  
 blue jeans, gingerly bites into the  
 perfect golden or slightly burnt, she can feast  
 her eyes on the piece of fate left between her fingers;  
 blue on white

question or command. She thinks about  
 the question and if she remembers  
 the command she will follow it; almost wholeheartedly  
 if she is feeling ambitious.

Most days she is not; content to only  
 think about the possibility  
 of opportunities missed  
 in that instant, or however many instants after.  
 She decides.

The magic will still be magical;  
 the fortunes have to come true  
 if they are typed  
 by strangers and have made  
 their way into her life, filling  
 up her bloated purse, ready to explode  
 into a whirl of confetti, just  
 waiting  
 for her signal.

Julia Qiao  
 Hunter College High School

## THE UNKNOWN

I dreamed of someone playing the blues on a trumpet,  
 a dog sitting on the sidewalk with a sad face,  
 a cell phone ringing loudly but no one answers,  
 a waterfall flowing into a stream,  
 a blue balloon, floating away, ripped jeans just lying on a sidewalk,  
 a little girl eating buffalo wings, alone,  
 a young mother screaming as she runs with her child

Natallia Richards  
 W H Maxwell Career and Technical Education High School

## ANYWHERE BUT HERE. . .

Music is my hot hot sex  
 Rest my chemistry  
 Fade on Interpol  
 Animal bars with metallic erasers.  
 The Chinese democracy is  
 Stellar.  
 So make yourself.  
 By 2 PM  
 In your eyes,  
 You'll see the solar.  
 So take it slow.  
Now Cow, No Pow  
 Crazy baldhead  
 Smells like rain  
 As the days go by in dirty Vegas,  
 There is no doubt that up town Saturday nights  
 We'll bring it back to the old school.  
 So the head master can rock  
 My tree house  
 Sex dreams and denim jeans  
 Will cut this city.  
 Sooner or later I will be seeing sounds  
 But I'd rather be anywhere but here.

Bianca Rodriguez  
 High School of Fashion Industries

## EXPOSURE OF FOOLS

One must have a mind of love  
to open up her hands  
to the soft touch of another's

And believe it so truly  
that with lightly fluttered lashes  
gaze into his eyes with trust,

To expose her heart  
through non-kaleidoscope lenses  
and unplugged ears

That hear only the sweetest songs  
beneath the most scenic trees  
upon the highest clouds

With a hope of flight  
and a fear of loneliness  
and a lack of self.

Raechel Rosen  
F. H. LaGuardia High School

## VOS KEN VAKSN, VAKSN ON REGN

*(what can grow, grow without rain?)*

I had trouble with *wheel* and *while*,  
age 6, eyes glazing over spelling flashcards  
on a couch not yet covered  
in dog hair, head not yet used  
to silent *h*'s, feet suspended not yet touching  
the floor. When I knew him, my Zeida had been

on wheels, every aspect of him circular,  
eyes popping out through glasses bigger than  
my fists (age 2), jawbreaker knuckles of arthritis,  
held together by the wheels on which he sat.  
baby eyes saw only the gaping hole of a nightmare mouth,  
read outstretched hands only as a warning,  
*give me a kiss, ain kiss, ain kiss* –  
and he didn't even notice that I cried, he was so happy.  
He had been a wonderful dancer, tailor, the sharpest dresser.  
He used to let my mother crack an egg on his head every day  
because she wanted his hair to grow.

When I was 10, we tried to plant our own  
 Christmas tree. It never grew past 3 feet,  
 and we don't celebrate Christmas any more  
 because my mother *doesn't think it feels right*  
 just like tattoos—piercings are ornaments, one thing, but tattoos  
 (always the result of a capricious mind) are modifications—  
 and it doesn't feel right to my mother because she has  
 seen the numbers on her parents arms  
 and I haven't. In December

I am going to watch Liz who is 19 and who my mother doesn't trust  
 get a tattoo of a wheel, small and simple, on her side.  
 I have to tell my mother we're watching movies at her apartment  
 because only Liz knows the thousands of ways I see a wheel,  
 and in the only religion in my mother's head  
 scars can only be measured in numbers. In 1939

(I only heard this story because my hair *lovely* and *shayneb*  
 reminded her of the way her own had been) my great-aunt  
 (age 11) watched her father dragged away at midnight, was told  
*you look like my daughter* with a glance at her *shayneb* hair  
 and knew that was what saved her. Sometimes,  
 she stays up late watching Holocaust specials on PBS  
 even though she knows they will keep her up  
 all night. I know this. It is breathed and engraved

into me, even though I have never seen the numbers  
 on my grandparents' arms. I always wanted a bat mitzvah  
 even though we've always celebrated Christmas, and I try  
 my best to explain the Yiddish words to anyone who asks.  
 Mama: a wheel is not a death sentence,  
 and it's not that I don't understand.

Lily Shell  
 Hunter College High School

## YOU

Hair and eyes like a Hershey bar  
 Fitting since you eat so much of it.  
 A voice so loud  
 It wakes me from the deepest sleep  
 Makes me laugh so hard I cry  
 Makes me cry so hard I laugh  
 You dance like a gypsy  
 I don't know how or why

Your scent changes with the seasons  
 In fall you smell of smoke like a stick of incense coughed all over you  
     In winter you smell like street  
         Cause wet concrete  
         Has a scent nobody realizes  
 Cause asphalt and rain and gum and cigarettes and rubber and motion mixing  
     Is more comforting than you think  
         It's a city scent  
         Maybe it's my scent  
         I don't know  
 In spring you smell like Florida  
     Like grass and blossoms  
     Salty sweet and spicy  
     Like Mexican candy  
         In summer  
         I can't be sure  
         I'm always gone  
         So  
         I imagine it's like spring  
 Except with more oranges  
         And  
         Maybe  
 A tiny bit of baking streets  
         And sunshine.

Mary Stein  
 Edward R. Murrow School

## HOSTEL

I watched the frog swimming across a puddle amongst other kids  
 Pushing water with its slimy green leg it reached the other side of the puddle  
 I was six  
 We peculiarly collected tadpoles in a jar labeled fish  
 And ate stolen doughnuts from the dining hall under the blankets  
 We were six  
 We went to classes in neat white shirts and red ties  
 And came back exploring the school in soiled shirt and muddy brown tie  
 We were six  
 We combined our money to buy a coca cola  
 Just to get that burning sensation on your nose  
 We were six  
 We dreamed of turning into Spiderman  
 And longed for a spider to bite our hands  
 We were six  
 Waited in lines on Friday nights in our pajamas  
 To watch the Pikachu battling out with other pokemons on TV

We were six  
 The new kids sobbed during the night  
 Without realizing that the home they were crying for would soon fade away  
 And be replaced by a hostel, a wonderland in the midst of the small Kathmandu City  
 I was six.

Amir Tamang  
 Bryant High School

## BLOOD

*(a pantoum)*

It is almost like the rain  
 Speeding past me  
 Is the only answer  
 For what I've done.

Speeding past me.  
 Just a ghost  
 For what I've done,  
 My body lay stiff and stolen.

I hear the broken cries,  
 Clinging to the walls,  
 My body lay stiff and stolen.  
 My heart is a chapter book.

Clinging to the walls,  
 No sense of right and wrong,  
 My heart is a chapter book  
 With too many secrets.

No sense of right and wrong,  
 Pinching the skin under my eyes,  
 With too many secrets  
 And too many lies.

Pinching the skin under my eyes,  
 Remembering too many mistakes,  
 And too many lies,  
 The rain whispers my bad fortune.

The gray sky  
 Is the only answer  
 For the blood between my fingers.  
 It is almost like the rain.

Alexis Valentin  
 Bronx Academy of Letters

## SUMMERTIME MENTALITY

One must have the mind of summer  
to fully appreciate the warmth of infatuation  
and understand the ebb and flow of the heart,  
like the way a cool wave draws back and then crashes on a hot shore on a sultry June day

And have stayed up past the sunset  
to have seen a firefly show  
and heard the song of the cicada  
amplified by the stillness of a July evening

Watched the sun plate the city with gold,  
or felt the heat of a “you only live once” August night  
your soul radiating youth  
your smile lasting longer than the days

One must have the mind of summer  
to sense the melancholy winds of a September morning,  
that howl the end of easy days  
and have whispered goodbyes to that which you know will eventually only be a memory

Danielle Vasquez  
La Guardia High School

## Third Prize

### COWS AT 5

Cows at 5 am: I can  
 only marvel: the protruding slick gleaming  
 palette of their hips, eyes half-blind convex  
 moons in an opaque wash of darkness, thickness  
 of their murky ashen tongues stealing out to suck  
 at the slight muscle of my fingers. Their  
 swollen centers hovering hard above  
 the moist soil; udders pulling away  
 under my hands, milk pooling warm within  
 straining out, the soft pink hairs, the brown callus  
 of the teats. (I'm said, then: Beautiful is  
 the intersection of familiar and un.) I want to  
 get in the car and drive so we can watch  
 the road warp as heat cracks over it,  
 our bodies winding and tearing  
 past the pastures. I want  
 to stay up all night in the grasp  
 of the sky your eyes strapped bright  
 to mine like a snake skin or a straitjacket;  
 for home to be with you existing wholly  
 within the shiver of dawn in the mountains,  
 our bedsheets discarded for hard earth  
 we'd eat lilies off the stem, asleep inside the corset  
 of the woods with dragonflies stuck to our calves,  
 their sap-like resistance to motion upon us.  
 I want this to be the bare truth of my life:  
 you filling the space beside me, the cows,  
 the light breaking first on your thoughts  
 pooled around us  
 like survivors of a flood.

Sara Blazevic  
 Hunter College High School

### SKIRT THE EDGES, PIERCE THE EYE

At first the tendrils wrap innocently around your brain,  
 tenderly, deceptively, until the gaping maw is revealed;  
 it froths at you, hungry in its savage perfection.  
 Because it is nothing short of Charybdis, and you are no

Odysseus. You are just a weary reader trying to  
make it to the end of the poem, just make it to the end.

It's funny how, like life, the end becomes the start becomes the end;  
the funneled bowl collecting charity for children with brain  
cancer drops your quarter into a spiraling descent: two  
looping rounds around that are almost the same, but that reveal  
the shadows between the coin's ridges. There is no  
hope for the quarter's life; what started with a fall ends with one, too. Perfection.

What started with a slow fall ends just short of perfection,  
although we will never know if perfection has an end  
or whether the distinction between mind and body is ours to know.  
Her brown hair collects streaks of auburn and sunlight in my brain,  
and her skin cream and pastel strokes. But the reveal  
is prolonged and so her shadow slices me in two.

Do you remember the day we sat on the hill, looking to  
the lake and the shadowed buttes? The hazy perfection  
of the morning swooped down and ruffled our hair, revealing  
auburn. No, pale sunlight froze and sliced us neatly, end to end,  
and stored the negative in a dusty box in the screening room of my brain.  
I will show it to you sometime along the second loop, once you know.

Do you remember the afternoon we spent in the mall? – no  
escape from the labyrinthine coils, and slick tiled ruts leading to  
the center, the exit. Floodlights washed out our brains  
and diluted the pastels to cleansing white, unwelcome perfection.  
We left, an envoy carrying rations to sustain the fight to end  
the journey, the divine interference yet to be revealed.

On the way out, she dropped a quarter to reveal  
its shadows, but left too soon to know  
it, as would be possible as it spiraled to the end.  
She walked just ahead of me, tracing a line to  
the car, a trail of auburn and cream, of perfection,  
of brown hair that dissolves in sunshine, emblazoned on my brain.

Once I knew a girl who revealed to  
me this: I'll find no perfection  
not ended in a kiss.

Sam Devine  
Stuyvesant High School

1969

They would have been sitting at  
 their kitchen table, I've decided,  
 she with some slippery fabric that  
 spilled out of her lap onto  
 the painfully white tiled floor  
 and stained the walls with black and blue blood.  
 (My grandmother has always been good with her hands.)

He would have been talking excitedly, I've decided,  
 about some political rally or a play he was writing,  
 and his hands flailing like horseflies  
 and his spit flecked with Yiddishisms.  
 (This was before my grandfather lost some of his fine motor skills  
 and wore his meals like war decoration.)

There would have been a pause in his speech, I've decided,  
 and she, with the way she could instill drama  
 with the point of a needle, would have quietly spoken up and said,  
 "I am carrying someone else's child."

I have not decided what happens next. Maybe  
 he stands up and walks away,  
 his footsteps on the tile like  
 plates crashing against the wall.  
 (She likes to throw dishes when she's angry.)

What happens next,  
 at some point or other,  
 (and this is not what I have decided  
 but pure and simple fact)  
 is that he decides to stay.

Ana Henry  
 Bard High School

## Second Prize

### TAPESTRY FOR A COUSIN, REMOVED

See her braided pigtails fly  
from an afternoon  
of running.

You were not older enough  
to read my picture book romance  
of ginkgo trees—smog soft skies—tumbled bicycles—  
and proverbs printed in talking fingerprints upon  
our plaster walls. “*No thieves*,” you assured me. “*Only tigers*.”  
We stirred the puzzle pieces in their box  
as the adults hid behind incense smoke  
one room down, cloudy smoke,  
inert, hanging clouds of smoke; the adults moved behind a curtain  
of cloud, coarsely woven.

Shadow puppets can’t touch  
but shadowed things change color.

You were five when they cut me out with a plane  
and stitched up the wound with PhDs and foreign currencies  
(mailed biannually, with one card and one photo).  
My heart became all ice cream and color TV—  
your name, written in moth holes on my outgrown sweaters.  
Maybe we rolled die at the same time, tied shoes  
at the same time, sneezed at the same time, frowned at out simultaneously  
extending bones. . .  
If so, we were twin looms in a darkened room, mirroring.  
The threads don’t touch.

Almost brother: the same color must have the same name.  
Between languages, names change.

You are eighteen. Pixels ripple into a smile-shape, the strings  
between us no longer have substance and thus. . .  
politely mute, our separate selves are draped upon the back of our separate chairs,  
dropped  
upon our separate tabletops, puddled upon different floors; everywhere but upon us  
(a reverse kind of shame).  
You and I: pink mannequins: faceless, plastic, strange.  
“*Zai jien*,” you assure me, at last. “*We’ll talk again*.”

Forgotten friend:  
The romance has lost its pictures.  
The shuttles do not whisk between our hands, we don’t pick the patterns, the designs

are beautiful to some other eye.

What a thin, unnecessary garment is my mispronounced “*Good bye.*”

Ailin Cao  
The Bronx High School of Science

## WRINKLE

My mother squanders the little cash in her wallet  
     To buy insincere anti-wrinkle cream.  
 She plasters it over her face looking in the mirror  
     Like a child that refuses to be disappointed.  
 She tells me her face is broken  
     And that she’s just patching it up.  
 I wish she would understand.  
     There isn’t enough glue in that bottle  
     To erase the history of 49 years.

Because those wrinkles are her lifeline  
 And if they weren’t there,  
     I wouldn’t have a trail to follow.  
 They are mine, I use them everywhere.  
 They are the dents of my own cheek,  
 They are my footprints in a field of snow,  
 They are the crinkles of the erase marks  
     Of an apology letter I have written,  
 They are the furrows of our garden,  
     Where I grew my first bean plant.  
     It wasn’t pretty, but it was mine.

Sheryl Rivas  
Townsend Harris High School

## First Prize

### HENRY FORD'S GIFT OF REDEMPTION

A bag of one hundred red bell peppers in the back seat  
 and the road to Savannah with just the way the hot air rises  
 and the feeling of her father's hands  
 on the wheel  
 and she laughed the way she does in movie theaters,  
 so loud that everyone would turn around and her mother  
 would turn red, would only allow her daughter  
 three big laughs before she'd leave the movie.  
 And she thinks about the fetal pig in biology,  
 why it made her shake: its eyes closed, mouth open  
 like all the world's worst things. That expression—  
 twisted inverse of rapture burning through what could have been  
 the ripe rotting autumn of pure joy roiling through  
 a wide and faithful heart  
 but wasn't.

They had to break the arms backward, had to pull out  
 gem-glistening orbs of knotted tissue and it was the sounds  
 that would not leave her, and the closed eyes, and the pose  
 like a dog, and the knowledge that even when you're dead  
 someone can open your eyes for you.

But the road's open veins unfurl easily—the last man  
 to glimpse the staunch sweeping body of America  
 will not be so unlike the first one, even if he tries  
 to pretend otherwise. It is an easy thing to know.

Wonder always comes before the desire to ruin it  
 to find liberty at the expense of the whole:

to open something up to see what's inside.

Her mother stole one million dollars from the PTA  
 and ran away to Mexico where it still means something  
 to be a millionaire.

She'd read in the papers about carnage draping from low  
 adobe buildings like chili pepper festival lights  
 and hope for the kind of hurt to match hurt  
 that is at the heart of every war;  
 burn out all the oxygen in a room  
 until raw stripped voices lie flesh bare on the table  
 to whisper in the dark—

you always remember the first time you wish someone  
were dead.

Now the road is a place of forgetting and of wind-cut silence  
even when the American sky is peppered with holes of gunfire  
and books turning into computer and the world  
the world is a flood—  
no matter which side you drive on  
you drive on, the road still goes forward.  
There's no other way it could go.

Filipa Ioannou  
Hunter College High School

## Foreign Language Award

### LA MÁSCARA

En tu cara,  
Llevas la máscara,  
Un objeto, un símbolo  
De lo que quieres ser.

Cada día,  
Vives con mentiras,  
Un dolor, un derroche  
De lo que es la vida.

Sin duda,  
Tienes problemas,  
Una respuesta es una parte  
De lo que es un sueño.

A propósito,  
Veo la verdad, sí.  
Un reflejo, un espejo  
De lo que sueles ser.

Sencillamente,  
*Cambia* esa manera  
De vivir, de fingir.  
Críticamente,  
*Piensa* en lo que  
Eras tú ayer,  
Ayer.

Reshma Mir  
The Bronx High School of Science

## HAITI CHERI

Mwen sonje'w Haiti,  
 Nan tan kote ou te rele Lapèl dè zanti,  
 Nan tan kote mwen te ka tande pipirit yo kap ri,  
 Nan tan kote ou pat konnen sa ki te rele soufri.  
 Pat gen okenn lòt bagay ki te osi bèl tankou'w,  
 Avèk splandè'w, richès ou, kalite ou,  
 Pat gen moun ki te pa fou pou ou.  
 Zòt te telman renmen ou  
 Ke yo te menm konn ap goumen pou ou.  
 Ki kote yon moun te ka pèmèt pou derespekte ou?  
 Li tap gentan fonn tankou bè nan solèy avan li menm fè yon bri.  
 Mwen sonje'w Haiti,  
 Nan tan kote mwen te ka ret jwe deyò nan lapli,  
 Nan tan kote moun, pou lannuit pat konn kouri,  
 Nan tan kote san exagerasyon mwen te ka avèk odas konpare'w avèk yon paradi.  
 Gen de moun ki oze di ke ou sanble avèk kèk lot peyi  
 Men mwen menm, mwen konnen san manti  
 Ke nenpòt ki kote yon jou yon moun ta deside al fè yon vi  
 Li pap janm jwenn you lot tankou'w "Haiti Chérie."

Mildred Vil  
 Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment