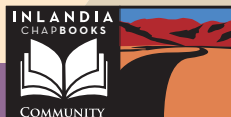


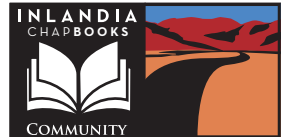
TEEN POET *Laureate*



2022-23 FINALISTS

A JOINT PROJECT OF THE RIVERSIDE
COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND
INLANDIA INSTITUTE

TEEN POET LAUREATE
FINALIST CHAPBOOK
2022



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Teen Poet Laureate Finalist Chapbook

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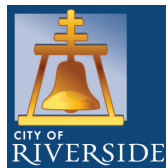
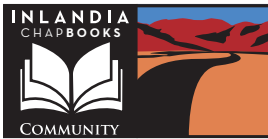
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Year Two of the Riverside County Regional Teen Poet Laureate Project!

As we conclude our first year and enter the second, we would like to take a moment to express our gratitude to the outgoing inaugural Teen Poet Laureate, **Katie Xin of Palm Desert High School**, welcome incoming **Teen Poet Laureate Zoe Leonard**, and to reflect upon the project and all that has been accomplished.

With any new project, there is always uncertainty. Sure, the poet had been named, but now what? As it happens, we had nothing to worry about. Katie has been a pleasure to work with and an exemplar for poets laureate to come.

Beginning with informal teen poet meetups over Zoom, she led a group of teen poets to create an Instagram account and Discord channel called The Imperfect Poets. She gave public presentations of her original poetry to her peers through our partnership with the Riverside County Library System, and further held a teen poetry slam over Zoom. Additionally, she spoke for Riverside's State of the City address as well as being a featured presenter for Riverside County's Arts Now conference.

It has been our pleasure to mentor her, poet to poet, as she has in turn done for her fellow teen poets, using her platform to bring teens together to share their love of words, creativity, culture, and community.

As we name Zoe Leonard our second Teen Poet Laureate, we look forward to another year of mentorship and fellowship in poetry. We will leave you on the following pages some words from Katie on being installed as the inaugural Teen Poet Laureate. Katie is a natural leader and a gifted public speaker. We look forward to working with Zoe and hearing more from Katie and seeing where the future takes us.

Cati & Louisa

ARTS NOW PUBLIC ADDRESS

by Katie Xin, 2021-22 Teen Poet Laureate

Presented September 28, 2022

Thank you all for attending the launch of the Arts Now program. As a junior in high school, I am ecstatic that students after me will continue to experience the brilliance and power of art with the support of our educators and administrators.

When I was first asked to write a speech for this event, I was incapable of articulating my thoughts.

There was too much to say and too little time. How would I manage to explain how being Teen Poet Laureate has affected my life? How could I speak with expertise to experts?

After a nap and admittedly too many mugs of tea, I sat down at my desk and allowed myself to think freely. And that is part of how being Teen Poet Laureate has impacted my life.

I am sure you all understand or remember the adversity found in teenagehood, in adolescence, in youth. I'm sure it gets easier, but it gets harder in many ways. There's a quote from *The Catcher in the Rye*, the favorite book of my favorite English teacher: "I can't explain what I mean. And even if I could, I'm not sure I'd feel like it."

To young people, this is a universal experience.

It was for me, and it continues to be at times. But poetry is a grounding force; it is my method of staying present and true to myself. Sometimes, it's my only reminder of the beauty and potential in every caveat of our existence. And I truly mean "our" existence.

Knowing that I am not alone, knowing that there are millions of pens scribbling simultaneously, knowing that my journal awaits me, is a reminder of the power of art.

Our stories do not exist alone; they are art now.

Thank you.

I AM LOVED

by Sadia Plimley

Valley View High School • grade 9

My belly is achingly full
And I am loved
My bruises are tended to
And I am loved
My palms are plush and sensitive
And I am loved
My city's night chill is unfamiliar to me
And I am loved
My bedroom door is invariably an aperture to your gaze
And I am loved
My friends feel discomfort from your assessment
And I am loved
My mind knows not of the street we are grounded on
And I am loved
My fists ache for a battle, but never shall I receive
And I am loved
My dreams are dashed
And I am loved
My front door slips shut in silence
And I am loved
My escape was imminent
And I am loved

GODLY INVINCIBILITY, HUMAN FRAGILITY

by Jianna Pinzon

Cathedral City High School • grade 12

Luxurious Gods,
Invisible with a shuddering chuckle.
In possession of utmost wit,
Beauty, invincibility,
Whilst below the ranking tiers; of humans
Practicing the unimportance of scuffle.
Materialists, worshippers.

Optimists, pessimists,
Believers, appeasers.
Natural pilgrims of
divine being (divine beings) - invincibility.
Thus a follower is a lesser being,
Fragile well beings,
Sun chasers.

How do humans suppose
To reach for the unreachable?
The sun, Neptune, indomitability?
In dreams we can
Live the luxury of kings and queens,
Walk Neptune with the sun in hand,
The stars flaring at our wake.

And when we wake, all
We have are our hands and feet.
Too sensitive to lift the sun,
Too breathless to walk Neptune,
Hence weep:
Weeping, our strongest suit,
Our perfect craft.

In the bubble of
Acid tears and dewy lips
We discover that this — utmost
Vulnerability and dreaming to be (more)
Is impenetrable, is natural, is a talent.
Gods unhelped unsung us
With their chuckle of jealousy.

BECAUSE I'M

by Jordan Ward

Heritage High School • grade 11

Because I'm
Black, I need to make sure to keep my hands up.
Because I'm a woman, I should accept compliments from men.
Because I'm young, I don't know anything.
Because I'm a girl, I'm crazy and clingy.
Because I'm a black girl, I'm irrational and less.
Because I'm demisexual, I'm just like everyone else.
Because I'm skinny, I don't have to lose weight.
Because I'm thin, I should eat a little more.
Because I'm a teenager, I'm dramatic and lazy.
Because I'm black, I should go home before the sun goes down.
Because I'm a woman, I should 'fight back' or 'say no'.
Because I'm young, I should listen to adults.
Because I'm a girl, I should cover up.
Because I'm bisexual, I'm a cheat.
Because I'm demisexual, I'm not a part of LGBTQ(IA).
Because I'm a teenager, I'm rebellious and disrespectful.
Because I'm a woman, I can join the majority at any moment.
Because I'm a girl, I'm a distraction.
Because I'm young, I don't have depression.
Because I'm young, I don't have anxiety.
Because I'm a woman, I have it easy.
Because I'm bisexual, I can't speak to anyone without it seeming
 'romantic'.
Because I'm a girl, I should let someone over twice my age hit on me to
 be 'polite'.
Because I'm a woman, I need to be controlled.
Because I'm a woman, I'm too emotional.
Because I'm a black woman, I'm crazy.
Because I'm me, I can't be myself.

MY BODY MY CHOICE

by Amaya M Montano

Orange Vista High School • grade 12

My body my choice

My how women say that with a powerful voice
but are silenced so fast

when laws about their bodies pass

But what do they care, men with gray hair

sitting in their fancy chairs

deciding when and where

a woman can bear life

Tell me how is that right?

To tell women its birth or bars

as if life isn't already hard

women must face their day

knowing day by day their say

in having a life is being taken away

Please tell me how is that okay?

Okay to strip women of their rights

making it so they are forced to bring life

into the world, a world like this

NO this isn't right, that women must fight day and night

just to keep their right on making

a decision that is rightfully theirs

Just think about how many women are scared

To know that their rights on having a life is being

decided by men who don't care

about the damage they've caused

by passing these laws

My body my choice

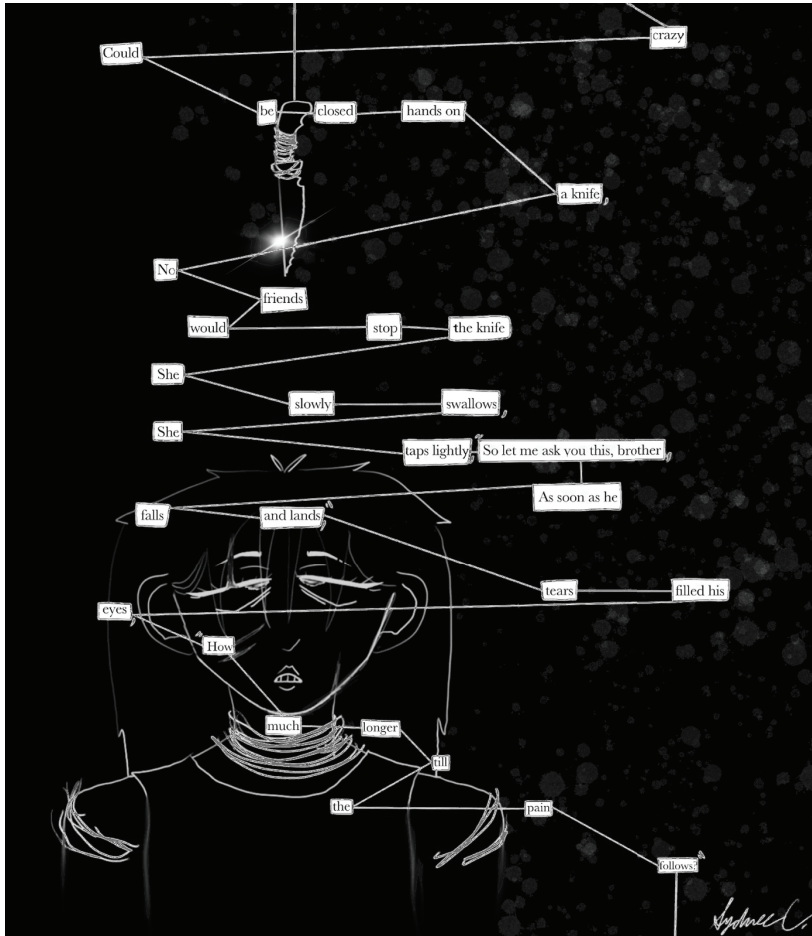
My body my choice

And I choose not to silence my voice

HORROR ENTHUSIAST

by Sydney Caravantes

Vista Murrieta High School • grade 12



BELIEVING AGAIN

by Antonio Buan

Riverside Polytechnic High School • grade 11

Nonetheless, he falls from grace
Powerful at the peak yet
To no one he turns his face
This is the man, no-
This is the boy who uses every bit of his will
To instill, to create, to insinuate.
Expired as he descends and
befriends fate, compliments hate
For it is too late
To apologize for an action he did not do
Because if only he knew
That he could reach the peak yet again.

Simply he walks, quietly he talks
To himself to the ones who listen
They glisten and light up when hearing him speak
Yet he reeks of shame
The disdain, a strong yet increasingly small frame
Of hope he holds on to

And here the boy bleeds
Courage, what he needs
It is an outpouring of feel
And when he is through
Does he kneel? Or does he stand?

Stand for what is true, stand because he is not through
Why... if only he knew that

He was you.
That the boy... is you.

Imagine the way you flew
The way you danced, the way you became anew

Imagine the way you fell
Falling as if you knew there wasn't a chance you'd make it to hell
Imagine your pain
How the pain turned into splitting knives falling like rain
and Imagine how you laughed
Laughed at the fear of reaching the peak
Yet the world is bleak

Yes, you are the boy who fell from grace
And because you chose not to turn your face
You are free within space yet trapped in your mind
So kind, you were kind
You are kind.

You see hope.

You feel pain.

But you still cope.

Yet you still remain.

See... the boy must try
The boy must try again
Because peak is closer than you believe
And when you fall for a second time,
be not the one who grieves
But the one who achieves.

You are a wonderful boy.

You are an amazing, wondering boy.

THE CORPORATION

by Natalia Roman

Eleanor Roosevelt High School • grade 11

the corporation that tore wounds of grime through the hillside
scared deeper than any canyon as it burrows under the fire of the
gentle pink sky
carelessly plowing roots into the greenery grown by our exhausted hands
bleeding ink draws on the crimson flowers, flourished under the soles
of our feet
a shredded affirmation stains the bluebird that once brought us spring
empty tea cups they spit out of to melt a slow withering of lurid brown
liquid for us to clean
scraping the berry pickings and sunflowers as it lies ingrained in the
crevices of their teeth

lilies of ruin planted below our feet, our savored fate left as a vineyard of
browning fields to bellow in the polluted sea
hummingbirds tore as a feast of wings looking for the sky,
gaping a riverbank to willow down a stream, grooving blindly under
each beat
the drum of the people pounds ahead in the streets

the thumps of their feet bloom in the rosebuds of summer
attaching symbols of belief, the corporation poisoning
the soil of the mountainsides' feast.

COOLEY'S LOOKING GLASS SELF

by Kassi Ibrahim

John F. Kennedy Middle College High School • grade 10

We imagine how we must appear to others in a social situation.

When I walk into the room
I wonder what part of me is the elephant.
Is it my hijab or is it my skin color that's relevant?
It's fun to imagine it's my ring shaped like a glume (I know that's not
the source of their fume).
Could it be my guarded stance
The product of years of targeted sneers and fear.
I think I might look too severe
But why not at least give me a chance?
Once again, I ask the daunting question
How am I perceived?
Do I even want to know, or is ignorance bliss?
My thoughts border on obsession
And I think I might be more relieved
If I threw my imagination to the abyss.

*We imagine and react to what we feel their judgment of that appearance
must be.*

If I threw my imagination to the abyss
It would come hurtling back at me
Like a boomerang let free
And once again, I would reminisce.
The stares and glares while I'm on the thoroughfare
Haunt me in the middle of the night.
Should I feel contrite?
Or should I forget the entire affair?
What questions ran through their mind?
What emotions shot through their heart?
I'll never really know, but I'll never not try.
How I hope their questions were kind
And their emotions far from tart.
But some answers, I think, are better left to the sky.

We develop our sense of self and respond through these perceived judgments of others.

If some answers are better left to the sky
I pray there's a closer limit.
For the life of me, I can't demit
The acquired status I work so hard to deny.
If our sense of self is formed by another's thoughts
Can we even call it "ours"?
All the hours spent thinking amongst the flowers
And I have only ersatz naughts.
When I peer into the fabled mirror
I see my eyes
I see my soul.
Sometimes, if I get nearer
I can look past my own guise
And envision myself in a new role.

I AM A MUSLIM

by Jenna Alame

Murrieta Valley High School • grade 12

I was nine years old, and a boy with a heart made of stone, with gravel
and tragedy in his voice said to me,

“Are you a terrorist?”

“Don’t you worship a bunch of gods?”

“Where’s the towel on your head?”

I’d never heard someone speak of my religion in such a way.

I was at a loss for words. I wasn’t even the least bit angry.

Just *confused*.

“I am a Muslim,”

I say these very words with pride, dignity... and bravery.

Sometimes, those are the only words someone needs to hear.

They’ve already made up their mind about me. About us.

They will think nasty things... and say them too.

I wanted to help the boy, to tell him the truth.

I wanted to tell him that the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon
him) resented wars.

He loathed terrorists.

I wanted to tell him that Allah (Subhanahu wa ta’ala) taught us to be
kind, and *merciful*.

But I had a feeling, the boy didn’t want to know.

Many years later, I walked onto my high school campus, and I saw the
boy with a heart made of stone.

To this very day, he *never* looked me in the eyes.

His gaze is downcast.

With shame? Hatred? Who knows. But I am still not angry. Only
confused

I just hope a seedling sprouted from his heart of stone.

WELL OF WORDS

by Lily Rhys Jones

Palm Valley School • grade 10

Our minds whirl so much swifter than
the words that, trying to keep up,
tumble from our mouths.
Sometimes they waltz elegantly,
but mostly they tumble out jumbled.

At times our astute minds are
too complicated for our simple tongues.
At other times our mind prevents us from
speaking our truth.
Sometimes even the world prevents us
from telling our truths.
Our thoughts are forced to stay at a standstill.

So we sit in drawn out silence
or meaningless conversation,
while the letters of thoughts in our brilliant minds
plunge deeper down into a well,
the place that we are too nervous to share.

Keeping track of twenty-six letters
in different combinations
placed in different patterns
is arduous.
So the well becomes a jumbled heap,
a tangled cluster of extreme emotions
and thoughts that create a unique mind.
Yearning to reach out
and discern this well brimming with letters,
we begin to ink our obscure thoughts.

The muddled letters creep up from the well,
sunlight from the surface clearing my
mind of dark fog.

The time varies for each individual
but the letters always find their rightful place.

Words spill to the surface,
as ink on paper becomes the
fundamental way to organize this well,
making sense of each thought
as they become amalgamated.

There is a pattern of words
waiting to be summoned.

These individual patterns create a poem.
An intricate concoction of emotions,
that are hidden there for safekeeping.
Words that taste sweet,
and perhaps ones that leave a bitter aftertaste.

Together, they craft something beautiful.
Poetry.

An artform filled with emotions.
Something that allows our minds to speak
our truth, pulling from our well of words,
fusing everything into a meaningful story.
The refined dance of words carry our essence,
so that we may be seen.

THE ROSE COLORED LENS

by Ivana Rodriguez

Palm Desert High School • grade 11

an enigma of blush and laughs
the whispers of jokes understood only by us
pinky promises and powder pink sleepovers
everything looks better through the rose colored lens

starving stomachs and super sizing
beauty is in the eye of the beholder
we focus more on being beheld
“how are you not yet hungry?” i ask, the roar of my stomach echoing
in my ears
the lunch bell rings as my friends stare in the bathroom mirror
“how are you not yet beautiful?”

we share secrets and insecurities on bright pink stationary in purple
ink

gossip is our poetry, laughing our song
catching the animal gazes of boys
boys and Girls are no longer friends
they have realized all too soon
boys will be boys
Girls?
we will be challenges to conquer
shrinking away from their terrifying glares
in the rose colored lens we are not paling of fear
but blushing from admiration

we are floating in cotton candy clouds
the gravity of what it means to be a Woman has not yet shackled us
to the Earth
“will we always be friends?” i ask as She does my eyeliner
with the care only possessed by a teenage Girl
She doesn't answer but laughs
we both assume to know the answer
so wrapped around the idea of friendship

a warm blanket to be ripped away
handmade friendship bracelets
our most precious prizes
but as some point, the string has to snap

we have not yet realized time is a cruel Mistress
as we have not yet realized the cruelest people can be our own
one day we will be adults
not people, but Mothers
we will have Girls of our own
laughing too loud, memories of what we once had
they will look at the world with wonder
through rose colored lenses
and we will beg them to never take them off

our joyous laughter will be replaced with the beautiful burden of
being Women
we will hear our Daughters speaking of dreams
remembering the ones we once whispered to one another
forts made of blankets under stars made of christmas lights
no one tells you your dreams don't matter when you're a Mother
only your children do

we will attend church with our families
in our sunday best we will ask god why is it Women must be reverted
to a role so powerless

god will stare back
that is all he will do
Mother Mary, have you been condemned to silence too?
we weep for Mothers that can no longer care for us
and we will weep for Daughters who will be doomed to our futures
the rose colored lens lied to us
we can't remember when they fell off
like how we can't remember when our dreams shrunk down with us
we will fade into the background
and we will learn to hate the color pink
for it reminds us of all that could've been

WAVES

by Mckinley Willardson

Santiago High School • grade 12

your words are waves tumbling toward the shore
they up and
pick speed *Crashhhh*
causing others to drown on the floor.
they never know the weight
of what the wave carries. once it crashes it's too late—
preparation in vain, cause the size of it varies.
you know we were having
a good time until it came around. sand castles destroyed
underneath
all the bodies that were drowned.
the riptides
s u c k e d m e o u t
and the current was too STRONG
the lighthouse was broken
never thought going in was wrong.
i didn't know how seducing the
ocean could be. i never even tried
as it pulllllllled me out to sea.
now i lay in the depths with some
sorry souls around, i beg you to watch out for the words,
or you'll end up like me as one of
the *drowned*.

I SEE

by Lauren Cruz De Armas

La Quinta High School • grade 9

Inspired By Alisa Zhang

I see

A war

Outside the window

People

Cry

People scream

Enemies

Spies

I'm scared- please hold me

Can I let it go?

Can't you hold-

See-

RUN DOWN -

HAIR IS FLYING-

DOWNSTAIRS-

NO TIME FOR REALIZING-

WHAT I AM DOING-

AND HOW IT WILL AFFECT MY FATE-

THEN AGAIN-

THIS SHOULD HAVE BEEN THIS DAY-

The pit of it all-

I hit a wall-

3 dead
Before I even reach
The last step

STAND-

Brush hair-

Smell
The blood-thirsty air

Smell-
The Oil
Dripping from
Putin's
Hands

FRESH WOUNDS-

I am scared
Mother hold me-
Mom-
Where are you?

Teeth gnaw at me
From the back
Of the street

See me-

FREEZE

Check-

ONE-

--

TWO-

--

THREE-

--

I close my eyes
Clench my breath
Thinking this will be my last life-
When I see
This light

COMING FOR ME

ARMY
TROOPS-

TANKS-

IT WAS MY BIRTHDAY TODAY

Where i was supposed to
Have a cake

I instead have rations

Where I was supposed to
Have a new dress
I have my old sloppy, sweaty sweater
mess

Where I was supposed to have a candle-
I have a raging fire before me

Where I was supposed to be wishing for a boyfriend

I AM NOW WISHING FOR
THIS WAR
TO END

In the hopes that my story
Will be told for
Me -

CAN YOU HEAR ME?

by Melissa Robles

Mount San Jacinto High School • grade 12

If I speak will you listen?

If I cry will you care

would you notice the wounds in my heart if I sit alone
in the back of the class wearing the same shirt with holes

holes in my eyes I poked from seeing such monstrosity in the mirror
at least that is what mother thinks of me

lost in my own skin

where the world around me is nothing but grins

thin as air

holes make it easy to see right through me

no one will ever know

they never bothered

listen to me, ask me, see me, notice me

I want to fit in, let me

my holes are wide open but you are closed in

in your own world, in your own mind

what was I thinking

this is your life, not mine

I can wipe my own tears

close my holes

I rather not speak anymore

ICARUS

by Sophia Martin

Temecula Valley High School • grade 11

The horizon condemns me as the droning isolation of the sea rejoices
in the comfort of a companion
and welcomes yet another fallen from dignity into meaninglessness.

In attempted escape from excruciating monotony i had risen, wax
wings tore me away from indifference and into the enticing
unknown.

A victim of irresistible urge to change, the glorious sun radiant and
scorching in a brilliant inferno.

i didn't want to see it this way, memorialized in a state of an
unfinished self.

i lay drowned in the enormity of desire, incomplete in my definition
of being.

My hollow death a consequence of my insatiable appetite to be other.
a slave to the longing to fulfill unattainable completion.

i wish i could be a revolutionary, just as much as i wish to be anything
but.

How could i kill what i am without mourning what i never could be?

Hand me my monumental desire,
laugh as i crumble underneath the weight.

Hand me humanities monumental greed,
listen as i say i told you so.

Hand me a means of escape,
weep as it melts around me.

We've become an incomplete equation.

Remove the equal sign and destroy all hope for congruence.

Revoke the punctuation and rob the story of all inflection.

Tear away my wings and watch in wonder as i stride toward the
radiance.

In any context, i long for the light.

Beloved Daedalus in the air of devastation, Brave Theseus in the name
of absurdity.

We are a failed experiment.

There was no initial destruction, now we could never be endless.

The wondrously wounding weight of guilt condenses me to a myth as
the concrete ocean swallows me whole, gives a name to my greed;
insignificant.

True insignificance is to have existed just enough to be remembered to
reside within a museum dedicated to that which is desired by none.

There is no honorable legacy, i descend into worthlessness wondering if
it could be mine, would i still yearn?

Given the same context you too would fall victim to your own
waterlogged ego.

Mourn not the endlessness of my desire, but the confines of your
acceptance.

TONGUES OF FLOWERS (A LETTER TO CANCEL CULTURE)

by Sadie Burnett

Beaumont High School • grade 11

Flowers are invasive, destructive, beautiful

Ours minds were invaded with dark meadows and bloody pastures

The seeds were dropped into our lungs until a garden was built, and
though it was beautiful

We

Cannot

Breathe.

Our lungs have been filled with hatred and depression and lies and
poison like lily's of the valley

And everyone watches... and waits
from behind the glass of this deadly greenhouse,
until we have all become stems with no color

Our youth a wasteland

The generation that is supposed to change the world
The generation of busy hotlines
The generation of silence

Our ability to speak has been ripped away, and we wish to speak to
you so badly,

To tell you our needs, to be loved,

But most of all to be heard

... and how beautiful is it to be understood

And they wonder when the color will return,
When we will reach our full potential,
When the children will see the beauty in this world

But these flowers will never bloom,
these honeybees will never fly...
Until life becomes sustainable once more

The poppy vines strangle the roses
The marigolds are uprooting the dahlias,
but all are grown from the same soil
and aren't we all flowers?

For if we are all flowers, how is one not beautiful?

We are watched dying behind glass,
surrounded with letters of farewell and yellow ribbons

The sunflower silk dancing with the lost souls

An exhibit of the destruction of the youth lied out,
the ugliest parts, the broken bodies,
the brains turned to mush, the wasted potential, the unloved
enclosed in dirty glass... deteriorating their lives for your camera

The sunflowers were not loved
The roses were never nourished
The carnations were drowned
This world was polluted

But beneath the mess,
underneath the anxiety and depression
There is a lake; and in that lake there is a bridge to a path
with wood that will not splinter your skin,
but allow

 Your
 Steps
 To
 Feel
 Soft.

And your skin will feel beautiful.
And your lips will move freely.
And your petals will grow once more.

Your flesh and bones will remain forever in spring,
never burned from the hot flame of romanticized hatred,
never frozen from the isolation of greenhouse glass.

The “terrorist” will write
The “supremacist” will dance
The oppressed will sing
and flowers, will you be freed

May the flowers become the observers,

Drowning the garden because they don't know how it feels to stop giving
Admiring the colors because they know how life feels to be black and white
Making the world a garden rather a war-zone
Shattering the generational pattern
Rewriting haunting goodbye letters..

Dear cancel culture, you're the reason they couldn't grow

Dear cancel culture, u stole precious years

Dear cancel culture, we could've been a garden

Dear cancel culture, she would've been 16

Dear cancel culture, you are the bridge that we will cross

THOSE WHO REMAIN

by Isaiah Suso

Western Center Academy • grade 11

100 freed me from my cell
I asked how I may pay
They refused and propped me up
And sent me on my way.
80 followed on my trek,
my town was miles away,
40 feared the distance,
And so they ran away.
40 followed to my town,
I told of jokes and legends,
They reveled and told tales too,
I felt friendship brew in seconds.
40 followed into town,
The town I was shunned from,
Stinging lies met at the door,
And to lies, 25 would succumb.
15 followed to my home,
My house was crushed and smashed
Not a single penny remained,
So suddenly 14 had dashed.
One person followed to my house,
To a chair that I would mend,
We broke bread, we laughed, we cried,
Then I knew he was my friend.

AMERICAN DREAMING

by Zoe Leonard

John F. Kennedy Middle College High School • grade 12

The Great
American Dreamer
always busy
American dreaming

This country threw
your heart
to the sky
but it just
fell
back to Earth

And everyone told you
it was your fault
your heart was too full
to ever fly under
American gravity

You were only
grateful
to have been
alive
to have known
the Earth

The Great
American Dreamer
always busy
American dreaming

SUPERBLOOM AT DIAMOND VALLEY LAKE, 2019

by Abigail Abalos

Western Center Academy • grade 12

Each decade or so, these lakeshores sing in Spring,
Not just with birdsong or the hum of bees,
But with lupines and blue-eyes and sunshine poppies

Through the perfect storm, cloud and desert alike convened
to rear (from the inhospitable) wildflower seeds
and shelter sprouts from deathly breeze

2019: My teacher took me for my first time hiking
I walked the desert's symphony, put at ease
from my adolescent worries

These days, that rainbow path might've been dreamed
A unicorn's trail-- blink-- with fairer days, it fleets
Or more likely, imagined, elders' myths of native species

GIRL

by Bibinaz Nami

North High School • grade 11

It should be clear that by now,
it is a rite of passage for every teenage girl, sane or not, to whole-
heartedly hate herself.

To wake and look in the mirror with only disdain.

Even if her parents have told her—her whole life that she is perfect and
worthy,

she will fall victim to the middling exchanges of insecurities between
friends.

&

If femininity is to be defined by Her ability to Love and spread love
then I suppose the teenage girl is to be the most deprived of such graces.
Because behind closed doors she does not dream of cradling baby dolls...
instead,

she dissects herself, over and over.

Until all her conversation is but a gaping wound.

I AM NOT DISPOSABLE

by Melissa Ramirez

Indio High School • grade 11

Hey christina,

It's me, your daughter, I don't know if you remember who I am, I don't except you too.

Who could after what... 16 years it's been?

I grew up to be the best version of myself without you.

In case you forgot, I'm a sophomore in high school, just turned 16 and MY life couldn't be better

But of course you don't know anything so let me refresh your memory.

I made the high school varsity volleyball team, I was one of the starting six on the court.

You know the things I've done without you?

Putting on makeup, I learned to talk to boys, paint my own nails, and do my own hair.

Without you.

Let me also tell you this christina I've been bullied for being adopted.

The amount of times people told me "Oh you weren't good enough for your mom to keep you" or "No wonder why she gave you up look at you."

Those moments cut me to the core.

Look at HER christina: look at that little girl that learned to ride a bike, tie her shoes, do a cartwheel, even swim

The creation you made just to toss it away, like a wrapper of gum or crusty bread

I AM NOT DISPOSABLE!

Do you know or understand what it's even like getting told

by my mother how much I look like you, do you christina?

She tells me I have your nose - your eyes - your smile

but all I wanted was your LOVE and answers from you that never came.

Did you know what you were doing?

Did you know you wouldn't see me crawl, hear my first laugh?

Did you know you would not hold my hand when I take my first steps, my first words, first day of school, did you realize that?

Look at HER christina. Look at what you have done to this poor
little girl's heart. These people that I now call "family" - I have
nothing similar to any of them.

I don't even look like them.

Do you know what that's like?

It hurts to be sitting in your shadow knowing we will never meet you.

Why do I dream of you when I was broken as a newborn just a few
hours and YOU broke me.

In my life that you left me to figure out I am learning to THRIVE

All the talking... All the comments from people... all alone without
YOU

I pushed through without you, and you know what?

I'll keep going through my life without you because i now know
my worth, my beauty, my strength and I know that I am wanted.

I am enough

I will ALWAYS be a better version of you because it's my life now
whether you are here or not

it's fine because i don't need you christina

I didn't need you then and i don't need you now.

I will leave you with this:

know that I am going to continue to accomplish things

I know I can accomplish without you because now that you gave up
on me I give up on you christina.

I AM NOT DISPOSABLE

Sincerely,

Your daughter.

DESERVE TO BE

by Charles Collazo

Temecula Valley High School • grade 11

What does it mean to be?
Do you deserve to be?
If you are nothing more to me
Then jealousy will never actually
How is it that you still ponder, “What to be?”

I don't deserve to be.
As to only live to ease
The seeds he planted but will never get to see,
Such ludicrously is unjustified to be.

And you, my pseudo-author, could never deserve to be
For your crown blown of glass is hallow, crafted faultily
And like your lecherous chalice which spills aspiring to be
You are but a blunder, which could never mean to be.

THE FADINGS OF A MOONDIAL

by Alissar Nahhas

Arlington High School • grade 11

as i walk past my window,
i catch a glimpse of the moon,
ample and radiant and luminary.

when i take a second look back
at this celestial presence in the sky,
i think of how beautiful she is.
how brilliantly she shines
and how glad i am to be alive to witness her.

it does not cross my mind that
she is anything but the protector of the sky.
that she has any other responsibility other
than prevailing as lovely
and as a guide to our wandering souls.

yet, she is a headstone of time.
the sundial of the night.
she, full and unconditional,

unsheathes all the layers of herself every 30 days.
a reminder that time is and has been passing.

i glance to her in solidarity
if only to dabble with the notion
that a month has passed again.

time is moving forward.

still, she is delicate in her heeding calls.
i have spent many trips around the sun conscious,
but it hasn't once occurred to me that she is a marker of time.

unlike the blazing sun, that signals with his rays
that it is time to awaken and live another day
and with his fading colors, announces the completion of his passing.

she, the unmistakable moon, is gentle.
she is not a harsh symbol that time is passing and
my loved ones are growing older, just as i am.

she does not smother me with concepts
that I would dwell on in front of the sun.

no, she only asks me to be present, in the moment,
and to relinquish my sunburn from the day and bask in her glow
instead.

she only asks of me to heal.
to breathe in the stardust
that has always been in my veins.

she does not urge me to ponder the inescapable fate
that one day, i will cease to befall her glow
and that my loved ones may be graced
by her love for the final time sooner than me.

no, she is merciful
for she understands the pain of
helplessly existing as time conducts
the phases of her fading.

the moon withers, gradually
and she prospers just as quickly
she meets her beginning as though it was her end.

a celestial being, whose dust fills the veins
of the humans that catch a glimpse of her
through their bedroom window.
she is a part of us as we are a part of her.

so, she is kind with her messages.
meticulous in her methods.
religious in the manner she invites us to sit for peace
giving us the time to prepare for the truth behind her appearance.

although it pains her to undergo her growth and decay,
she is grateful for the serenity in her cycle.

for she knows that time is relentless
and does not halt for any soul.

for she knows that every being
relies on the moments before the inevitable
to say one last goodbye

EGOCENTRISM

by Taylor Pope

Centennial High School • grade 11

oh darling you have no taste
what do you know about diversity?
you've conformed to your shell
of rigidity built upon by generations.

sir i'd hate to break it to you
but your fragile breastplate of patriarchy
is being threatened by a feminine presence.
quite pitiful actually.

your palette must be so bland
with no bold melanin
nor honeyed skin
gracing your dish.

without the gentle yet steely touch
of a woman or any other orientation
that is unlike your own,
you're shattering dear.

yes. roll those names across your tongue.
shiver with the discomfort.
taste the tears that comprise their suffering.
ache with the pain you've cast upon them.

how frustrating it must be
to live a life without knowing love
which, might i remind you,
cannot be experienced by yourself alone.

the downside of your 'independence' ?
your vulnerability without knowing her,
your weakness of refusing to hear them,
your flaw of not looking beyond your narrow scope?
you are not going to break.
you are already broken, sir.

A FLOWER WHO WANTS LOVE

by Juliet Armendariz

Western Center Academy • grade 12

I ponder how I would have bloomed differently
If I were planted with kindness,
In a garden where the gardeners loved unconditionally

I have been surrounded by weeds unwillingly
The thorns on my side protect my weakness
I ponder how I would have bloomed differently

If only I could make them look at me proudly
If my mistakes were met with forgiveness
In a garden where the gardener's loved me unconditionally

I've never been pretty, never put in a bouquet deliberately
My petals droop from pain, a trait you can't miss
I ponder how I would have bloomed differently

If only I was told scars are beauty
If I knew that love is not meant to be scary but bliss
In a garden where the gardener's loved each other unconditionally

I've learned that my past does not define me
But there's a part of me that's curious
How I would have I bloomed differently
In a family where the parent's loved unconditionally

I am catching a koi fish
with cupped palms,
jumping high,
hoping I'll land
into the water
too.

游

Can I be honest?
I am not asking for approval but a gift.

Will you tell me?
I am from my home,
but I forget its name.

It slips away,
back into the pond.

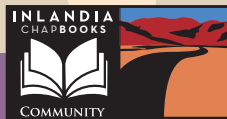
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Alissar Nahhas
Abigail Abalos
Antonio Buan
Amaya M Montano
Bibinaz Nami
Charles Collazo
Isaiah Suso
Ivana Rodriguez
Jenna Alame
Jianna Pinzon
Jordan Ward
Juliet Armendariz
Kassi Ibrahim
Katie Xin
Lauren Cruz De Armas
Lily Rhys Jones
Mckinley Willardson
Melissa Ramirez
Melissa Robles
Natalia Roman
Sadia Plimley
Sadie Burnett
Sophia Martin
Sydney Caravantes
Taylor Pope
Zoe Leonard

Arlington High School
Western Center Academy
Riverside Polytechnic High School
Orange Vista High School
North High School
Temecula Valley High School
Western Center Academy
Palm Desert High School
Murrieta Valley High School
Cathedral City High School
Heritage High School
Western Center Academy
John F. Kennedy Middle College High School
Palm Desert High School
La Quinta High School
Palm Valley School
Santiago High School
Indio High School
Mount San Jacinto High School
Eleanor Roosevelt High School
Valley View High School
Beaumont High School
Temecula Valley High School
Vista Murrieta High School
Centennial High School
John F. Kennedy Middle College High School



13 SCHOOL DISTRICTS • 21 SCHOOLS • 26 TEEN POETS

