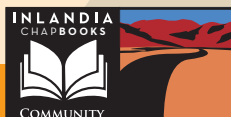


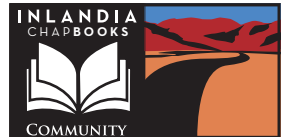
TEEN POET *Laureate*



2021-22 FINALISTS

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

TEEN POET LAUREATE
FINALIST CHAPBOOK
2021



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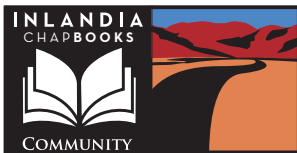
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Book layout & design: Mark Givens

Editors: Cati Porter & Louisa Higgins

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
“When My Grandmother Came to America “ by Natalia Taylor Roman.....	2
“Decisions” by Aryan Gupta	3
“Across the Bridge” by Lauren Cruz De Armas	6
“Everlasting Peace” by Shaelin A Robinson.....	9
“I’m Very Deep in a Well” by Bella Dooling Koschalk.....	10
“Candle Wick Tears” by Willow Wilde	11
“Sexuality” by Linda Shubin	12
“Love Letter to a Roly Poly” by Zoe Leonard	13
“Nothing” by Sam Lamoree	14
“walls” by Lana Riesenberg	16
“Parents” by Natalia Beecroft	17
“Masking” by Alyssa Minor	18
“Who Are You” by Brooke Ramirez	20
“Tahanan” by Derick Matthew Talay.....	22
“Beauty” by Kyra Basler	23
“Rose” by Alessandra Pimentel	24
“The Teacup” by Andrea Romero.....	25
“Wilted Roses” by Valerie Carillo	26
“PLAYLIST #1- Shuffle” by Ivana Rodriguez.....	27
“Corporate Blues” by Ash Romero	28
“Privileged Man’s Mind” by Kimber Draughon	29
“The Discussion Board” by Alissar Nahhas.....	33
“ode to china girl” by Katie Xin.....	34
“The Wishes and Dreams of the Human Race” by Lily Rhys Jones	38
“existence.” by Miguel Medina	40
Acknowledgments	41

Dear Teen Poets and Families,

Congratulations on being the first cohort of Teen Poet Laureate finalists! We commend you on submitting your work for consideration, but most importantly, we commend you on bringing your finest selves to the writing table.

You see, we too were teen poets once. We squirreled away poems in hidden notebooks, carried poems in our pockets— broken-hearted poems or saccharine poems or even silly poems, each expressing a sort of truth about who we were, in that slice of time.

Some might wonder whether teens can write with veracity about heartache or regret— what do *they* know? It turns out, you know a lot. Teens are uniquely poised on the threshold between adolescence and adulthood, your childhood just barely behind you, your whole future before you.

Let these poems be a record of your present selves, so that your future selves may return to them and revisit who you are now, then.

Cati & Louisa

WHEN MY GRANDMOTHER CAME TO AMERICA

by Natalia Taylor Roman

the harbor flickered golden in the morning's dim.
salted wounds tore through my grandmother's aching wrists.
collecting blue and red upon the eyes
that nestled in freedom's nest.
she perched on the bank of the ocean
diving to embrace the air crashing against her ribs.

cracking each bone like an eggshell of white
that gleamed in the palm of her hand.
mother tongue of language pranced upon
the salmon pink embedded in the yellow land.
breathing in tones of familiarity from carved homes out of foreign
sand.
my grandmother hands doused in saltwater
to rinse off blood scared from promised lands.

Her backhand bled bones through
clinging force to braid her daughter's strands.
She's reminded of the desert snow that
melted for swooning indigos to align her path.
looking down at her hands of trampled
storms worn like legacies on her back.
she folds her hands over my mother's
crumpling daisies like tattered shreds of broken glass.

DECISIONS

by Aryan Gupta

“Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

—Andre Gide

Everyday. He travelled to the misty front.
From 6 to 10, at the dawn's sunlight break
From 12 to 2, as his children's little stomachs ached
From 6 to 8, as darkness consumed his vision,
And another day sets its fate...
Diligently,
Without reprieve
Tossing each line,
And then he would heave!
Oh he heaved with valour, with spirit, with might!
In hopes of acquiring supper filled with fish - a delectable delight.
Some baskets came empty
Jubilee - others filled with four!
Evenly divided, two for his family:
two for those struggling next door.

April had come; and consequently, comfortability ensued
Each day of fishing plentiful! A household smelling of food.
Monday catching six, and then Tuesday yielding four,
Oh how was he praised?
Of course,
Each night was an encore!

His system was involved, but surefound and holding true
His methods were always sound,
checking fishing spots 3, then 1, and 2
Each line recasted, same bait did he buy
These were the laws, of which, the fisherman must safely abide.
But fear not faithful reader, the seasons never experience change
And prosperity rarely departs!
Was what the fisherman said:

To protect his dreary heart.

His wife pronounced his ambition; his friends claimed fellow shy
How would his fortune commence? A fisherman with fish?
Trading: a trap or a gift? Certainly, left in disguise.

Upon his usual round at 7, checking the third's spot's trepid line,
He submitted for that day,
satisfied with 6, then wrapped up his precious twine.
Traversing down the boating docks, his weary legs scuttled away
Knowing his success could soon be followed by daily dismay.

The market bazaar, it was chaotic as can be,
Excitement, commerce, and exchanging
But the fisherman cannot participate, to no availing prosperity.
However, with 6, now leverage did he possess!
"I can negotiate... plead... and bargain? Oh how I digress..."

Certainly the merchants would desire a fish freshly caught?
For better fishing lines could be his solving Gordian knot!
Would his wife scorn this risk, without fruition, this expense to be
dearly paid?

The scales of this decision, of which he had to weigh.
Never thought, never ponderance did he devote
Much like a king stuck, trembling before his castle's moat.

Almost impulsion, may destiny have laid his mark
He exchanged 5 fish - for a promise of which he was dark.
Uneasy was he, fishing the next day
Everything unsettled, his usual methods left astray.
For this new fishing line was heavy, unbreakable
Which is where the very genius of this purchase lies
For not a fish could escape, "Oh Eureka" would he cry!

Fifteen was his standard, and to his wealth would he amass
Providing for his family, so his 3 children daily attended class
So his neighbors rejoiced, news spread outlandishly
That the fisherman was a hero; however, newly greedy.

His methods were sporadic, engineering was his muse
A new location to fish, A new bait to cast,
Any purchased fishing line would do.
And certainly enough,
the fisherman wanted the whole ocean to explore.
Surely so, no longer would he fish
with his feet planted on the sandy seashore.

Would courage enable his scales to be weighed again?
For he was fortunate last ventures, and reaped a dividend.
The fisherman recounted on his life of less bountiful years
And deduced evolution necessary,
To maintain, protect, and provide
For what he held dear.

The deep water was abundant,
Accumulating pittances was his means
Of purchasing his own vessel,
To venture onto the marine.
And so his wooden boat was fastened, And voyage would set sail
Bringing with him his family, and fishing equipment,
To see how they prevailed.
The children glanced at their village,
from the water for the first time
Because of risk-taking, and persistence,
he provided his family the sublime.
And to his children now did he exclaim
“Courage is a value; never fear to appropriately try
Whatever it takes to behold
Your aspirations in front of your eyes.” Decisions

ACROSS THE BRIDGE

by Lauren Cruz De Armas

Across the bridge there is a land
A land we all want to touch
With our hands
A land we dream of, paradise, finally free
To see it with our own eyes
Would be the end of our lives

I lay up at night
Wondering if the old man is right
He says it's a myth
We're wasting our time
We're wasting our sight

Even though it may not be true
I will find it and go over
Not for me but for you

Across the bridge there is a world
A world I want
A world with equality for everyone
Big and small, doesn't matter what we are
Our intentions in the world
Are set far apart

A world with no wars
A world with only peace
Though this may be my dreams
I wish they were true
Because one day I will find you
And meet you
And greet you
We will smile all day
And have nothing but time
We will go across the bridge to live our lives

I will go across the bridge
And down every lake
To find everything
That's real or fake

I'll walk through every forest
Through every town too
Though I may be tired
Death has no time to catch up

It may look like it's my ending
Thought I promise you
It's just the beginning
I will do it for you
For me, for us
I will do what it takes to get to the bridge
The bridge with no war,
The bridge with no fear

I won't be scared when I look death in the eyes
I'll run and I'll fight just to live my life
Because sacrifices I'm willing to take
As long as it means not taking the blame
I will get over, and will get through
I will walk across the bridge
And you will too

I will be the first to do it I know
But I won't be the last
For everyone will come
And see what it's like
Hand in hand they'll be happy
And they'll know where to find it I'm sure
I will help those who need it
And make sure they are safe
Everything will be ready for when I meet my fate

One day, everyone will go across the bridge,
To a life a where we are the ones
who decide
What to live
We are happy or sad inside
It's our choice
We are the ones who get to determine our fate
Our outcome in the world
And which road to take

It's not other's decisions
It's ours to keep
For the bridge is there to make sure we are free
Free to decide what we want to be
Even if we are not accepted by society

The land across the bridge has many wonderful things,
Though we can make them happen
The bridge is just there
The bridge in our mind
And in nothing else.

For we are the ones that can tell
Who we are
The bridge is just there to guide us along
Though it may seem
That we are just drifting
We are one big sea
United apart our differences
We make this world a better place
We can decide if they're no wars and no hate
We decide if there's laughter and play
We can decide who we are
No one else.

EVERLASTING PEACE

by Shaelin A Robinson

One kid rocking
Four kids mocking
One more flying
Two collapse crying
Church bells ringing
Choir softly singing
One lowered into the ground
Peace finally found

I'M VERY DEEP IN A WELL

by Bella Dooling Koschalk

Poetry is a well with a child stuck in it and I am
the child it's not that I want someone to help me
out it's just that it's very dark down here.

A match lit to see the extent of my damage:

I lose a wing and grow horns and I lose
a tooth but that just means there's a tooth outside of me so that my
smile has a little more rhythm.

I swallow

but there is a wishbone at the back of my throat that plays a song
like the full moon or like tidal pools but it's not that I don't have a
wish to make it's just that I'm not ready for the breakage.

My hands shatter.

I spill milk and blame Jesus
because the big billboard in Tennessee told me to and G-d
knows you've got to listen to those big Tennessee billboards about
Jesus. I have risen to grace on a trapeze.

Tyranny of the absurd: I wear a crown so you say
oh you look so regal but I say why are my shoes so big
why am I wearing this big red nose get me out of this carnival.
Swing high, to be raised by what cleans me:

Poetry is a bath I took as a child or the song
about Virginia and the soap suds or the time
when my father struggled with the new locks.

CANDLE WICK TEARS

by Willow Wilde

Candle wax drips on sordid skin,
Melts on wistfully aching hands;
I am the original sin.

Pools under eye bags, I begin,
The genetic code commands
That candle wax drips my sordid skin.

Drips on pages, poetic gin,
Blurring ink, yet it still withstands;
I am the original sin.

The tears, my constant faithful din,
Burning against my wild demands,
Candle wax drips on sordid skin.

The tears trickle down my cheeks, I grin.
Still it gleams with those that still stand;
Candle wax drips on sordid skin.
I am the original sin.

SEXUALITY

by Linda Shubin

“You’re going to hell” a statement made far too many times
to people who just want acceptance
I want to learn and grow
But all you care about is how i’ll be seen
in the eyes of YOUR religion
You use deadnames and wrong pronouns as a sign of protest
But why is the way I love something you so deeply detest
You’re entitled to your opinion, yes that is true
But senselessly attacking people is not something you need to do
I don’t know what goes on in your mind
But I know there is nothing wrong with mine
Love is love that’s what I’ll stick by
You don’t agree, that’s fine
So when I bring home someone of the same sex
Let us put our differences aside and reflect
This is not a choice, this is me
And I will scream it at the top of my lungs continuously
This is not a phase nor fad
You won’t make me feel bad
Because one day I’ll be happy
While you’re stuck in your old fashioned ways
One day I’ll be completely me
While you’re still telling me to pray
That god will let me into his kingdom up above
But your religion is all about acceptance and love
So give me dirty looks, I’ll turn a blind eye
Say your comments they won’t make me cry
Because I’m done crying
These tears have finished drying
I have finally accepted that being me is what’s right

LOVE LETTER TO A ROLY POLY

by Zoe Leonard

A roly poly walks across a vast stone desert.

He does not know his destination,

and he can't recall where he

came from.

He makes his home in

a crevice so large,

he struggles to find its beginning and its end.

He feeds on dead leaves

(those too, he doesn't know the origin of).

There is no one but him and the ants,

who are always too busy with their wars to pay him any notice.

He knows of nothing

but the scorching heat of the sun

and the endless, gray land.

Sometimes the ground trembles

as if it were reeling in terror

after having been dealt a mighty blow.

Colorful planets, celestial bodies,

of some sort, collide with the Earth.

He can do nothing but curl up,

and pray that he is not crushed.

A roly poly survives in a

vast stone desert.

He does not know his destination,

and he can't recall where he

came from.

NOTHING
by Sam Lamoree

I buried a baby possum this morning.
I found it last night,
laying on its side in the wet grass.
It was so tiny,
it must have been only weeks old.

It was still warm when we found it,
but somehow maggot eggs had already made their home
in its matted fur,
so I picked it up
and I held its tiny body in my cold, calloused hands,
picking the vulturous larvae from its body,
grimacing in disgust at each one of them.

Hopefully my hands aren't too cold, I thought,
because if it's still alive, I want it to be warm.
So I grabbed a towel
wrapping it up in a nest of warmth
and cradled it in my arms
as I sat on the floor in the dark of my back yard,
surrounded by stars that flickered
against the navy blue backdrop of the universe.

I sat with a mother's child in my hands,
unsure of what to do next.
Do I give the body to the mother?
Do I throw it away?

I set it down gently,
whispered my promises of returning,
and left to go look for a box.
I searched through my room to find a small box,
no bigger than a shoebox.
When I returned I laid it in the its new home,
fluffing up the towel to make it into a warm bed,

and let the box sit overnight,
just in case it was playing dead,
so it could crawl out and find its mom.

And so I left the box on a table,
and went inside,
full of hope that it would wake from its nap
and tell its mother of its adventure in the human world.

But I woke up, I saw that it was still in the box
and I winced as my bare feet hit the cold cement of my back patio.
But who am I to complain
when a mother just lost her child?

I grabbed duct tape and taped the box shut.
I stared at it on that table, sadly.
Because the box that was once a bed
was now a coffin.
A coffin that wouldn't even attend its own funeral
because this Jane Doe possum was now just a memory.

But I still still stared,
hoping the cardboard coffin would move just slightly,
giving me a sign that it was still alive.
Alive and waiting for its mother to come get it.
Of course there was no movement,
but I continued staring
because I wouldn't take nothing for an answer.
I *couldn't* take nothing for an answer.

It was mind-numbingly quiet, I noticed.
If it was any other morning
without a dead child and a guaranteedly grieving mother,
somewhere in my backyard,
I wouldn't have noticed the Nothing.
But I noticed it today,
and it hung around me,
almost like the sky, but less baby blue
and more dark grey.

WALLS

by Lana Riesenberg

all i know
is that at the start and end
i have always been a wall

brought into this world
i was created on expectations
and destroyed by them

for every person i met
i changed my colors for them
so that i could be what they want

now i am not sure of my colors
they have been painted over
and over, and over
so many times, and then more
now all i remember are flashes
of people and of my past
and who i've been for them

no longer do i have a color
i am just a board to be wiped
and replaced for each person

my color is not unique
it is of you

PARENTS

by Natalia Beecroft

You always find a way to complain,
You isolate me and confine me
as if i'm the only person causing you problems,
You scream and shout and argue
Because nothing is ever enough for you
I'm never enough for you
Why can't I just be enough for you

MASKING
by Alyssa Minor

life is a mask that we all wear,
as we move through this singularity,
a collection of moments
where we are gifted with opportunities
to question our being

life is a mask where we hide in
the cast in which we live,
so that we don't have to
face people trying to create - a space
that we don't want to take up

we dive in these scenarios
on a journey to a state that will end,
trying to find the infinite moment
within the life that burdens us

we pick out these idiosyncrasies
that disrupt the frequency of the time
in which we have left

oh, life is a tiring mask

and this flesh that we wear
is what makes us bare
In our hearts - Barren,
unable to produce love
because we are so engraved in our skin,
That we don't look within ourselves

and I don't like that I am subject to this too
and that I am no different than
the beings that surround me,

life is a mask that we all wear
because being human is
a job that never ends

we smile,
and walk through life
like nothing's wrong
we shake hands
playing pretend
living in this perfidy
of hollowed folds

but what's the point
if this all goes away?

WHO ARE YOU

by Brooke Ramirez

I look at you in the mirror
Who are you?
Why don't I know you?
Who have you become?

Where did that sweet girl go?
What have you done with her?
Why doesn't she love herself?

Why does she constantly compare
Herself to other girls?
Why can't she look like them?
When will she truly love herself?

I don't remember the last time she
Smiled.
The last time she was truly happy.
That was so long ago.

Back when she didn't have to worry
About anything.
Back to when she had no care in
The world.

She was so happy.
So why isn't she anymore?
What changed?

Why can't she be like that
anymore.
I want her to be like that but
I know it's too late.

It's too late for her to be happy.

Too late for her to be how
she used to be.
She's changed.

And her old self will never come back.
She'll never get back her innocence.

Please come back
I miss you
The person here now is someone
I don't even recognize

TAHANAN

(Pagpag - Tagalog word for home)

by Derick Matthew Talay

Under the day, I'm all but gray. The
flowers in the spring of May, Confuses
me and leads me astray. I am stifled by
the aroma of today.

My body longs for the fresh breath of air,
That can only be found by sitting at my homeland's chair.
In the desert I lay,
Every second spent is seven-thousand miles away.

The force of going back pulls me, yet reality pulls harder.
Countless, immeasurable, and grueling pain made me stronger.
My breakfast is grief, and my lunch is a racist monster.
During dinner, I met Uncle Sam,
but I can't wait to be with my mother.

Whispering to the trees,
That maybe its roots would lend me keys
To a magical portal full of wonder, Leading
me to the mellow summer.

Hoping to be caressed by my home,
In the meantime, I will roam.
Time is of the essence,
If only I can turn back to my adolescence.

BEAUTY

by Kyra Basler

I used to eat roses,
Just for their beauty.
So, I could be beautiful on the inside.
Everyone praises me for my looks,
But they do not understand what goes on inside.
The demons I face everyday.
The utterly, cold, black, and empty feeling.
The tears stored deep down,
All the pain I have ever felt.
I have swallowed so many roses,
I am now a bundle of thorns,
And they are starting to poke through.

ROSE

by Alessandra Pimentel

I held you as you fell apart
Like a delicate rose that's fallen from its stem
Making sure you left with me as I picked you petal by petal
As fragile as a flower but as beautiful as a gem
Your petals started unraveling
When I suddenly got a glimpse of those secrets you buried
That's when I finally understood you
But it was too late you were gone, if only you tarried
Now it's time your petals be retained
May they shrivel up in time
But their secrets left with me
As I'm left with the burden of this crime

THE TEACUP
by Andrea Romero

*A delicate thing
Fragile and covered in sweet flowers
But can hold the hottest of liquids without cracking*

A teacup

...

A brute

*Angry and with no restraint
But someone whose affection I crave
A brute who once gave me pretty flowers*

*I offer my teacup, a piece of my soul
A precious sliver of happiness*

*It breaks
cracks,*

It

It falls apart

*He throws its corpse
it scatters across the tile floor
He is angry, it's his nature
And it cannot be changed*

*I wail and weep
It is gone
My delicate thing
Its pretty flowers broken in pieces
My teacup*

WILTED ROSES

by Valerie Carillo

Would you admire a painting
If the canvas was ruptured,
Anything but perfect?

Would you stare in awe of the sunset,
If it slammed into darkness?

Would you love a puzzle
Missing a piece?

Would you love a wooden bat
Split in two?

Would you love shattered glass
If there was nothing left
But the horrors of daggers?

Would you sob at ashes
If they were to drift with the wind
Into nothingness?

Would you be in love if the ink bled was red
Instead of black and blue?

Would you still caress a rose
If it carried the crunch and crumble of age
And decay?

[The rose is and has always been a rose.]

The rose is and has always been a rose.
But, according to popular belief, the apple is a rose,
as is the pear, and the plum, I suppose.
Only the darling knows what will come next to prove a rose.
Of course, you're a rose – but you've always been a rose.

PLAYLIST #1- SHUFFLE

by Ivana Rodriguez

the music i once loved has now come to bore me
the lyrics have lost meaning
because the friendships they represent have withered away
but yet i still move my lips to each one of them
 that have burned themselves into my brain
and the melodies that were so intricate and pure
are now repetitive and dull
but yet i still turn up the volume
the artists' voices drag on like the relationship
 of lovers who slowly turn to strangers
and even the happiest songs are empty
but yet i go to my room
and put in my earphones
and for the thousandth time i listen
 to the playlist of a teenage girl

CORPORATE BLUES

by Ash Romero

Hands growing moss
There's lust and dust left on the kitchen counter
somewhere.

Uncomfortable collar
Red, white, and blue
Scrape off the grime under your fingernails and
get to work.

Coughing, there's pills and Kelloggs in the air
and the linoleum floor gives you a headache.

"Two for the price of one!"

This is...

You tug on the collar, the blue part
The ceiling is industrial and it's uncomfortably cold

Nose hairs, plastic soap, and perfume

What is this?

or data and oily hands

What a bargain!

what a bargain

PRIVILEGED MAN'S MIND

by Kimber Draughon

Sing, for me
Yes, a little louder now
Too slight of breath still detectable
And here, I tap the chair's arm
Stroking the perfectly even bristles of velvet
Hearing the imperative waver of your imperfect tune

Sing, for me
Yes, with more bravado
Too much calm perpetuates this room
And here, I await for you to lift energy
Digging my toes into the evenly set tile
Forced to endure the lax spirit of your song

Sing, for me
Yes, a little clearer
Too harsh is the crack of your voice
And here, I stare at the paleness of the ceiling
Knowing it's more smooth than the bumps of your throat
You should not require such fine-tuning to deliver that which I need

"I can't sing for you," you say
And no, it's not loud
Not loud nor bold nor clear
A speck of dust on my grandmother's antique chair
A speck of grime within the rivets in the tile
Even a stain from leaking water on the upside-down floor

I would say it's ugly
Not enough to appease
Yet your defiance stands uncontested
Almost hard to watch and harder to grasp
Should perfection not be your wish till the last?
My song sung by you is before the end
A detour, perhaps, not a repetition

And what shall I do, if not sit in my chair
And hear your gray notes fill the unproblematic air?
They can be changed, I promise you
I will make them white as the ceiling
Soft as my grandmother's priceless chair
As bold as the firmness beneath my feet
To coax your voice to my ears to meet

"I won't sing for you," you say
And shove your compliance within
The cracks of the sofa in the back of the attic
Spitting my song onto the stained cushions
So dense, to me, that you should be so cruel
Comfortability prioritized, what a selfish tool

Don't you see? Now, what will you do?
If not singing for me as I listen to you?
A two-party system, not one wrong or right
In which you get to sing as far as you might
And not much is required, just that you keep quiet
But not when you sing, for then you'll be perfect

And here I am, correcting everything
All day, in this creaky old chair with velvet wings
With cracking floor scraping the tips of my tired toes
And flakes smacking down from the half-collapsed ceiling panels
This austere dread, dictatorial over me for your sake
Yet here you remain, your stunted growth at great length

First the attic couch, and now these grand things
A life of perfection, shifted for you?
Only to receive the gnash of your teeth and
Bared fangs with a toneless voice?
Evolved from an inadequate vocalist to an enraged beast
Unprovoked, but averse to singing

Am I really asking much?
Know your place and shut up?

That's neither cruel nor unfair
A product of surviving amidst your tantrum
I implore reversion to your original ways
Singing badly for days and for days
At least that would surpass where you've fallen now
Screaming "oppression" and stomping around

It is I who is grappling with the depths of despair
Trapped in a feasible nightmare of lies
My poor grandmother's antique chair
Helplessly in pieces, right over there
The soft velvet covering, torn and sharp
Oh my poor, poor grandmother, if she could see this now
You dare make her cry when she built this town?
You dare question me when we gave you a song?
You dare ask for more when your hands are full?

You speak again, so engrossed in ferocity
That the words start to blend
Was that something about equality?
It drips from your lips so smooth
Yet not in the trained way of the ceiling or tile
But the way of a cheat, so desperate for attention
To stand and speak loud and be oh-so different
The truest of demons, the boiling sun growing close
And you shove it in my face, proudly unique
Though as your nose touches my now-flaming cheek
Boldness translates to hysteria at its peak

This might as well be humor's height
Yet cleaning up your mess, laughs don't come out right
I'm salvaging what's left of the attic sofa
Calling your brothers and sisters to repair it
Along with my grandmother's shattered antique chair
And they do it so willingly, surpassing your past
The truest tune of perfect obedience
Pliant souls to serve, for I suffer in their stead

Why should I beg for your timely return
Only to be painted with your vicious instincts?
You revolt against every rule, question or idea
Perhaps I will hide your poor brothers and sisters
Lest they should grasp that rage and be poisoned
Lest you should pull them away from my song
Only to cut out their notes and force them to spit along
And join the destruction on the side that is wrong

All this I know
With years of tears in my eyes
Pulling away down the cheeks of my face
Desperate to reach you and call you by name
This oppression you face is merely a game
Whereas I stand, alone, from your aversive tone
In a house once so lovely
With the white ceiling - flaked
The even tile - cracked
And my grandmother's antique chair
Broken in some creaky corner, somewhere

“Was singing all so bad?”
That's the sole question I ask
Perplexed at your hostility towards such a lovely tune
Remembering the rewards that great song had brought me
Yet you chose your reasonless rebellion so quickly
For while the lack of perfection is not your downfall
The lack of control over my song is mine
The truth of your selfishness, the fact of your greed
And yet to me you stare, cold eyes unmatched
As if I am the one who is ignorant.

THE DISCUSSION BOARD

by Alissar Nahhas

~ **User2234 just posted a new question!** ~ *22 hours ago*

i don't know what love is.

we say "i love you» to each other, but what is it?

this feeling of "love" doesn't feel right.

someone once said that love is a masterpiece that has too many bold
strokes

or was it not enough bold strokes? i'm not sure.

if you told me you loved me,
could you tell me what love is?

~ **BadKarma42 responded!** ~ *3 minutes ago*

to answer the question of "what is love"

we must, ultimately, look in the mirror
and admire the scars on our face,
the crusted lips,
our knocked up knees,
and our handcuffed ankles.

we must find our bruises to be the
same purple color as lavender
and our palms to be maps of the night sky.

we must feel no resistance from touching our own skin,
and we must not look away.

so when you ask what is love,
whom shall you love first?

averagestudent98 rated BadKarma42's response "not helpful."
41 seconds ago.

~ N, A

ODE TO CHINA GIRL

by Katie Xin

thou art an oriental wonderland,
melting molten hotpot of
sino-tibetan,
the scent of dreams, dumplings,
and drive
blesses you
the stench of dirt, desperation,
and desolation vexes
you

spice, smell of tiger balm as
miracle cure
you are pale in sun,
tan in moon
lips crusted with red bean and l
egs aching from the miles it
takes
to make
it here, america, the land of the
free,
now

amber light, you kiss high roofs
atop houses in which longing
young elders miss their youths
grandma, your life is filled with
rice pot bellies and nine to five
“yes, it’s hard,” you say, “but at
least, i am alive.”

grandma, have you ever had the
privilege to live?

golden noodle soup scalds the
roof of my mouth, yet i am
careful to never let it out
hold it, repress that gold

bodies crowd this boulevard
my stomach cranks like a lucky
cat arm

with ravenous eyes, i rush past
sanguine paper lanterns,
on the hunt for soup wontons
with a longing gaze at cezanne
chinese characters drawn on
artifact neon paper boards from
1848

the hate is forgotten here,
yet omnipresent as steam from a
bamboo basket, invisible until
that man at the supermarket
gives you a leer.
the sunspotted faces, wrinkled
yellow pages, breathe.
the poor, the tired, the huddled
masses.

and we will be free
Lees and Wongs,
seas of old song
image of *you belong*
comfort me

me

me

me

you rainbow of storefronts
perseverance is the sky
it changes its form and colors

but it will always be here
it always has been

this yarn blanket of
social security wraps itself
around me
how can home be so far away?
i sprint across your sidewalks
downhill, downhill,
cartwheels and backflips
stomach flooded with yellow cuisine,
i forget what white is
the only light i see is in your faces
i forget what being different is
i am connected, bigger than myself
watch this net fly as you let it
here i stand on the legacies of
those from before, the unsung
pioneer heroes whom silence
chokes unrelenting
i breathe in history, it is bitter
and unforgiving
i exhale the future, it is sweet
and always living
the blurry of traffic honks
creates its own hot & sour stew
the crisp excitement of *my city*
flushes my cheeks
as i walk around this avenue,
this avenue sinks into me
this is where my freedom came from
chinatown, land of the free

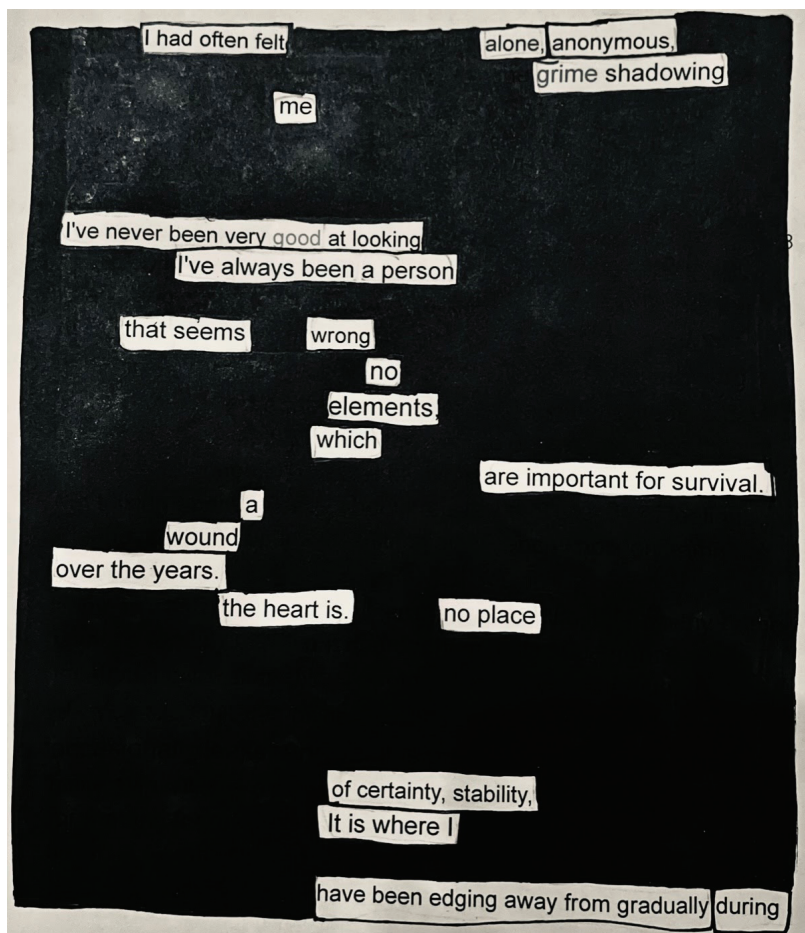
you raised me, bit by bit
and i will raise you this

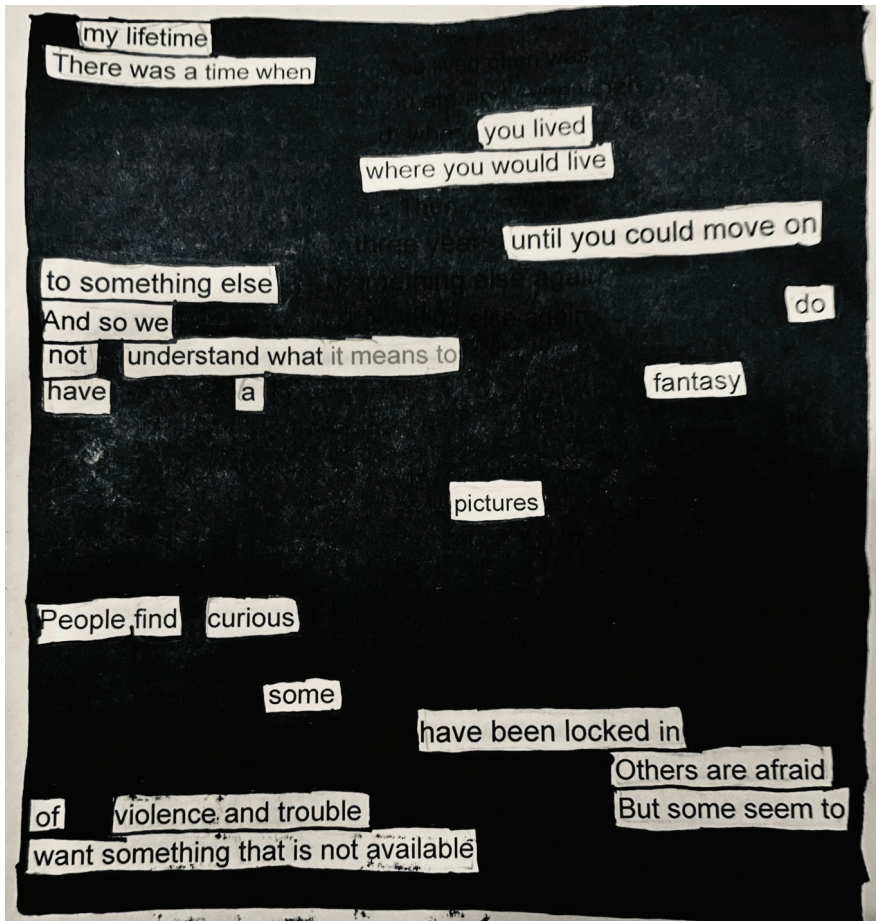
grateful, proud
value realized in self and others
longing for belonging
in a community built on uncertainty
explore cultural enclaves,
collect these experiences and
treasure them as soul souvenirs
connection is not found in
others, but in oneself

you build community
you build others
you are each others'
hunt for it
this never ending love
chase it.
run, hop, scream
loops and twists
go wherever you are bound
but i,
i will always end up
in chinatown

THE WISHES AND DREAMS OF THE HUMAN RACE

by Lily Rhys Jones





my lifetime
There was a time when

you lived
where you would live

until you could move on

to something else

And so we

do

not understand what it means to
have a

fantasy

pictures

People find curious

some

have been locked in

of violence and trouble
want something that is not available

Others are afraid

But some seem to

EXISTENCE.

by Miguel Medina

and in this moment,
i feel beautiful.
i'm at peace.
for the first time in so long,
i feel something,
yet nothing.
i'm just existing.
but even like that
i'm ok with it.
i'm ok with just existing,
because i know
you are too.
you're existing
and i'm just happy to be here.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

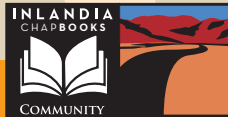
The Teen Poet Laureate project is the culmination of many hours of conversation and planning between Inlandia Institute Executive Director Cati Porter and Riverside County Office of Education Visual and Performing Arts Administrator Louisa Higgins, themselves both poets. Like most of the nation, they were inspired by Amanda Gorman and her reading at the 2021 presidential inauguration. Together, they brainstormed how they might introduce a similar program to benefit teens locally. Now, just months later, the Riverside County Teen Poet Laureate program has been initiated. There are many who helped bring this project to fruition.

This program would not be possible without the generous funding and support from the Riverside County Office of Education. Thank you. And thank you to Alcie Villoria and Melinda Gruber from the Creative Services Team at Riverside County Office of Education, who designed the beautiful artwork for the flyer, invitations, certificates and chapbook cover. Thank you to the City of Riverside's Arts & Cultural Affairs Manager Margery Haupt for arranging for use of Riverside City Hall's Grier Pavilion, and for the stunning one-of-a-kind hand-drawn broadside of the winning poet's poem. Thank you to Riverside County Library System Director Barbara Howison, who ensured that copies of this finalist chapbook would be distributed throughout the county. Thank you to the judges who volunteered their time to review those manuscripts which rose to the top to vie for the post of the inaugural Teen Poet Laureate: Deenaz P. Coachbuilder, James Coats, Ruth Nolan, and Ash Tandoc. And lastly, thank you to all of the teen poets. For those who did not make finalist, take heart: There is always next year.

13 SCHOOL DISTRICTS • 20 SCHOOLS • 26 TEEN POETS

Kyra Basler
Natalia Beecroft
Valerie Carrillo
Lauren Cruz De Armas
Kimber Draughon
Aryan Gupta
Lily Rhys Jones
Bella Dooling Koschalk
Dason L. Kyle
Sam Lamoree
Zoe Leonard
Miguel Medina
Alyssa Minor
Alissar Nahhas
Alessandra Pimentel
Brooke Ramirez
Lana Riesenberg
Shaelin A. Robinson
Ivana Rodriguez
Natalia Taylor Roman
Ash Romero
Andrea Romero
Linda Shubin
Derick Matthew Talay
Willow Wilde
Katie Xin

Elsinore High School, Corona-Norco Unified
Hillcrest High School, Alvord Unified
Lakeside High School, Lake Elsinore Unified
La Quinta Middle School, Desert Sands Unified
Great Oak High School, Temecula Valley Unified
Great Oak High School, Temecula Valley Unified
Palm Valley School, Palm Springs Unified
Idyllwild Arts Academy, Hemet Unified
Rancho Verde High School, Val Verde Unified
Hemet High School, Hemet Unified
John F. Kennedy Middle College H.S., Corona-Norco Unified
Valley View High School, Moreno Valley Unified
Idyllwild Arts Academy, Hemet Unified
Riverside Virtual School, Riverside Unified
Paloma Valley High School, Perris Union High
Jurupa Valley High School, Jurupa Unified School
Chaparral High School, Temecula Valley Unified
Hemet High School, Hemet Unified
Palm Desert High School, Desert Sands Unified
Eleanor Roosevelt High School, Corona-Norco Unified
Murrieta Mesa High, Murrieta Valley Unified
Rancho Verde High School, Val Verde Unified
Cathedral City High School, Palm Springs Unified
La Quinta High School, Desert Sands Unified
Palm Desert High School, Desert Sands Unified
Palm Desert High School, Desert Sands Unified



*Visual and
Performing Arts*