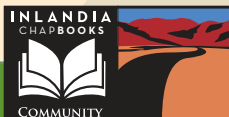


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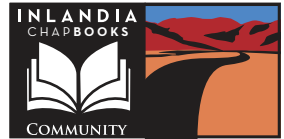
Laureate



2023-24 FINALISTS

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

TEEN POET LAUREATE
FINALIST CHAPBOOK
2023



AN INLANDIA INSTITUTE PUBLICATION
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

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Teen Poet Laureate Finalist Chapbook

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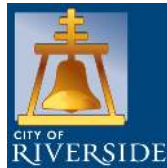
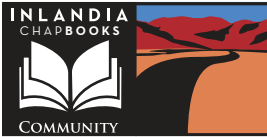
4178 Chestnut Street

Riverside CA 92501

Book layout & design: Mark Givens

Editors: Cati Porter & Louisa Higgins

Printed and bound in the United States



Published by Inlandia Institute

In partnership with Riverside County Office of Education

Riverside, California

www.InlandiaInstitute.org

First Edition

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* 2023-2024 Teen Poet Laureate. Names in bold = poets of note.

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations to our outgoing Teen Poet Laureate, Zoe Leonard, on completing her year in the spotlight as we welcome the incoming Teen Poet Laureate, Bibinaz Nami!

Inlandia Institute was thrilled to host Zoe Leonard and her family as guests of honor for the annual Members and Donors Appreciation Reception in May where she read an original poem on the theme of metamorphosis and change. Additionally, the Riverside County Office of Education invited Zoe to speak at the annual Educational Services Summit in June. Brava!

Now as the torch is passed to Bibinaz, we congratulate all of you, Poets, on making it as Finalists. All of you — ALL — are such tremendous wordsmiths. What you are holding in your hands is likely the first of what we hope will be many literary accomplishments.

We wish you continued success in your writing and life.

Know this: Your words have power.

Cati & Louisa

SEED IN THE APPLE/ POETREE

by Lauren Cruz de Armas

La Quinta High School

	Stanza	Line	Poem
	At just the right time		Can my pen survive
	To write a poem	Deemed	Worthy of
unsolicited	Eyes ?		
I lie with	my pencil	bleeding	to the conformity
of the			
Mesh of a stencil			
This piece of writing material much			greater than me it will outlive
Me			
So	//Why can't		
I hide ?	The well of	ink	Is where I
Hide all my unread lines			
All my			
Uncut			
Poetry			//You
See, poetry		is	not a tree in which every apple
Is			
Sweet //It is a deadly		garden of eden	waiting to be free
//It's piercing inside			
Me it's		juice	dribbling down
your			
Cheek			
//The straggly			
Old tree	that	withers	as it looks at me- too
old for its time yet	too young		for mine //What a
		Disappointment	
It sees //The	diamond is		deep beneath the core
//See			
A metaphor			
Is yet Ore-	the apple is Gold //I	find	
		Persephone	
Looking at Me- inviting me			to eat the Gold from deep within
Its charred leaves			
//			
Y			
E			
T			
!			
This Apple as		I	eat it is divinely
Sweet the previous	is		lost not found to memory
//Its textures are	divine because of	its insides	and the time it took to find

R
I
P
E

Like my mind //Just like Me this Apple has
S E

E D S

Like It will Plant Me

And A grow
A For Tree
For those
Unknown //Those
Who know The beauty
Of a Ruined
Ugly
Tree
!

GOTTA DO MORE, GOTTA BE MORE

by Jenna Alame

Mt. San Jacinto College Adult School

My father says my hands are made of gold.
I'm a poet. I'm an artist. I'm a creator. I was born to hold a pen.
I'm fourteen years old, and I have infinity clenched within my fist.

Gotta do more, gotta be more.

I'm fifteen years old, and I look to the night sky from my sister's window.
She gets a better view.

I'm a star, I'm a constellation, I'm a black hole, I'm a daughter of Zeus.
If I reach my arms high enough, I could touch the rings of Saturn with
my fingertips.

In the evening I'll jump towards Sirius, and leap across Regulus.
Then I'll land on Andromeda's disk, and back around once more.
The next morning, I'll orbit the blue Moon and lean in to listen when
there's no one around.
She whispers, "Hello."

Gotta do more, gotta be more.

I'm sixteen years old, and I own my first guitar with a hippie-weave strap.
I'm a dead-beat rockstar, I'm a groupie, I'm somebody's muse.
I knew Lou Reed before he was famous, you have to believe me!
This month I'll be in 1960's London, the next I'll be in 1990's Brooklyn.
I dream of cherry bombs, beat poetry, and Pop Rocks on the highway.
It smells like heady perfume and firework smoke, and everything is
beautiful.
I'm beautiful, and I'm misunderstood. I need to run, I need to jump, I
need to fly.

I swear, there's something big waiting for me on the other side.

Gotta do more, gotta be more.

I'm seventeen years old, and I've trapped the universe underneath my
bed.

I'm a jester, I'm a soldier, I'm a scholar, I'm a king.

Last weekend I was burned at the stake. The following Monday I
watched the first airplane take flight. I'm Joan of Arc one day, and
Michelangelo's apprentice the next.

Sometimes I'm a business student at the local community college (you
know the one).

It feels like I'm playing two truths and a lie, does it not?

Can't do enough, can't be enough.

I'm good friends with infinity. She stretches and reclines in the palm of
my hand.

But, I'm at the finite's beck and call, and I am held in the palm of his.
He is a merciful lover.

CHERRY BLOSSOM TREE

by Caitlin Austin

Ramona High School

There I sat on my modest bed in my modest room,
Pondering about what was outside my window.
I have seen the darkness, but this darkness was consuming.
I should have already left the room, but I have nowhere to go.
As the darkness crept closer,
I started to lose my composure.

Out into the darkness, I stared,
Looking for some kind of hope,
But I was left with nothing but despair.
I fled the dark despair, grabbing nothing but a coat.
The darkness followed everywhere I ran,
“I want no despair,” I call as I run as fast as I can.

Nothing but darkness on the roads ahead,
Running through the chamber halls,
Scared of what had been unsaid, I fled.
My energy drained and drowsy, I collapsed in the chamber halls.
The air, thick and ever so toxic,
“Please, I want no despair,” I beg on topic.

As the darkness surrounded me, I shut my eyes tight.
I saw nothing until something started to slowly appear.
My vision cleared, and there it was, a light.
I pondered about that light as it grew near.
Oh, how I hoped for some kind of joy,
“I want no despair,” I cried out, destroyed.

The one light turned into thousands,
And rightfully, in their places, the lights formed a shape.

The shape came no closer, though it sat on the highlands.
Though the lights gave me hope, something in me still drapes,
Something in me still longs to be free, to be let go.
“I beg for no despair,” as my voice echoes.

An image appeared of a white cherry blossom tree.
In an awe-dropping gaze, I stared at the magnificent sight.
The tree stood with such pride and glee.
The white petals shone like the stars in the night.
For this is the first time I have felt real joy.
“For there, I have nothing to do with despair,” I fill the silent void.

But, like all good things, it didn't last long.
A swirl of black came to the tree,
And petal by petal, it all withered away until it was all gone.
Every wilted petal that had fallen lay in a pile under the tree.
A strong, sudden gust of wind blew a petal in every which way.
“For every good thing that I once had, you destroy,” I say.

I opened my eyes to find
I was still in the halls; my eyes were just shut tight.
Looking for the darkness I had seen, I looked behind.
The darkness was gone and entirely out of my sight.
The chamber halls were filled with silence,
“I have nothing to do with despair,” I call with compliance.

The echoes of my pitter-pattering feet fill my ears.
As I walked, I heard the walls whisper their sorry-filled whispers.
I walked to the room that I once fled with fear,
And though the darkness was gone, it still lingers.
Walking over to my bed, I take my rightful seat.
I pondered what came over me, and I felt complete.

Once again, I stare out my window and back into the darkness.
I don't know what I felt, but it wasn't the same as before.

The sounds of footsteps rang in the hallway, creating my uneasiness.
The footsteps came closer till they stopped right at my door.
The sound of my door handle being turned echoed.
“Brother, you know the darkness will return tomorrow,” a voice bellowed.

Turning to the door and to the voice of thee,
A girl standing there with her hair of spun silk,
Her eyes, the same color of the sea, stared at me,
Her eyes were so pure they just made me rethink.
I rethink about what happened tonight,
“Brother, did you hear me? The dark will return the next night.”

“Dear sister, I hear you,” I smile in reply.
“I’m not going to flee. I have no fears, and that I guarantee.”
My sister nodded as she waved her goodbye.
She walked out of my room and left me be.
I turned back to my window, and never once did I lose my smile.
For I felt happy for the first time in a while.

What I saw tonight was such a sight,
The white petals were beyond what I could ever believe.
Oh, how the tree filled me with such delight.
Though it wasn’t much that I received,
It was just one cherry blossom tree,
And that, that was enough for me.

EARTHLY EXISTENCE

by Anousha Baqai

John F. Kennedy Middle College High School

the feeling of something unexplainable
that moment when your eyes meet the sun
and the brilliance consumes you
when faced with the universe,
how could we ever turn away?

I met a spirit at the edge of the river
her tears were pure
and in the water, they were washed away
with our bodies to the ground
and our hearts beating with the trees clay and dirt and all the things
that make us
children of our mother, connecting once again

heart fluttering like the wings of the dragonfly
lines connecting our fingers and the bark
our eyes and the stars
how could we ever deny the fingerprints of our goddesses?

veins of the earth flowing with mine
blood collected, returned
cycles and forbidden secrets

I met a spirit at the edge of existence
rooted to her spot
and she told me to carry on

fruit juice trails from my lips
back to the earth, always back to the earth
and when I breathed the spirit breathed back
lungs all gone

whispered promises of the future
follow me to the ground
and as the air burns me from within I ask, what future, what future
as the silken threads are washed away
and the grasshoppers sing from beneath our feet
I ask, what future, what future

the quiet enters from beneath the rumble
underneath the watchful eye of the trees

”who was the fool who won the heart of the sea?”
to ask her to rise, to give, to consume
while she was pondered, poisoned, polluted
as the fools danced in her pain

the spirit whispers
as the sun bathes us in flames
and the grounds begin to burn
and the children begin to leave it all behind
eyes blaze, fire raze
the spirit screams through us

JUST A GIRL

by McKayla Binette

Western Center Academy

I love being a girl!
I don't know how to parallel park,
I never learned how to pump my own gas,
And I LOVE buying things because according to Girl Math
Those concert tickets I bought three months ago are free now!

I love being a girl!
It means my bathroom is messy and so is my room because
"Hell is a teenage girl."
And it means I can play dress up alone in my room
And put makeup on for no reason,
And do my nails,
And put my hair in tiny pigtails with tiny bows!

But do you wanna know my favorite part of being a girl?

My favorite part about being a girl
Is getting on the bus for school so I can be a
Woman In STEM!

And when it gets too crowded,
The men around
Stare at my butt.
My sharp shoulders.
My painted face.
My slim torso.
My lips my hair my collarbones and
Even my skirt that reaches the floor.

But I love being a girl!

I love that I can control what I wear
how I present myself
how I dress
how I address people
and how I behave myself.

But even if I do that,
I can't control what they think
So I'm nothing more than just a girl to them

IF YOU LET IT

by Rahm Braslaw

Riverside STEM Academy

A clock strikes six with its hour hand
And the timer starts ticking down
Your smiling face, the world's in your command
Then you run away to chase after the birds on the playground
You jump for one but fall and scratch your knee
It stings a little, so your eyes start to fill with tears
But then you spot a big beautiful tree
Suddenly, you've lost all your fears
Atop the leaves, you hear a buzzing bee
The buzzing becomes ringing
Your face becomes duller
The animals stopped singing
And you've lost your color
Within the halls, people mumble
You carry your bag of bricks from classroom to classroom
The words on the papers in your bag become a jumble
You must read them so you can get a job soon
But now that you have one, you're running out of time
30 years spent collecting papers and hoarding them away
Collecting pennies, nickels, quarters, and dimes
Wondering how you're gonna kill time today
Tick, tick, tick, the timer is still ticking
The hands are still spinning
Click, click, click, your favorite pen stopped clicking
What happened? I thought you were just beginning
Did you miss the first half
Your kids are grown; they've fled the nest
Faded away as your child's laugh
You've made your clone, you've tried your best
Old and tired, you play the same song from the same band
Bored and alone, you start to doze off

A clock strikes six with its hour hand
And the timer goes off

Across town, another timer starts ticking.
I run around from sea to snow
Through a mountain and a valley
From high to low
On main street and in the alley
I spend my time getting busy livin'
Meeting people I love who love me too
Living a life in the time I'm given
I wish to help you but for my own sake
I take a step back and watch and wait
I see you fall, and my heart breaks
But I must not help; I have too much on my plate
I wish I could tell you life is short
But not so short that you can't really live
It's precious and unique, and other things of that sort
I wish you could read this wisdom I've yet to give

The timer went off before you were ready
You felt like your life was just getting started
You were just starting to be steady
You were just getting to the uncharted
You didn't get to do the things that made you smile
You didn't really get to be alive
You didn't get to smell the roses every once in a while
You didn't get your chance to thrive
You awoke one morning and found yourself ten years older
You awoke the next day and found the same
You awoke to find your youthful spirit exchanged for a pain in your
shoulder.
You awoke to nothing with yourself to blame

Instead of spending your time doing what you wanted to

You don't know why you've wasted this gem
Sticking out and being different daunted you
So you followed a plan created by them
In your haste, you forgot to stop and love
Instead, you laid in wait, consumed by hate, a victim of your fate
You forgot to take your life away from the above
Now I'm afraid it's too late

That clock that counts down every day we get up
It only goes down
From every relationship to every breakup
You'll always come back around
But that clock never stops ticking
Whether you're happy or sad
Whether you're soaring or on the ground kicking Whether the day is
 good or bad
This notion is one of beauty
Every day we get up is a day to cherish
Every day on or off duty
I want you to remember this
Spend your life doing things that make you shine bright
Spend this day appreciating those who love you
Spend this day basking in the moonlight
Spend this moment taking life from another's point of view
Life is short, but if we fill it with experiences and bliss
Every moment will be impactful; don't ever forget it
And to take it for granted would be quite remiss
The clock only runs out of time if you let it

A STORY OF A GIRL

by Zanae Demery

Liberty High School

This is the story of a girl who only knew how to cry
But no one cared, for they did not ask why
Every night she shut off the light
Never had a buddy nor a real friend in sight
Home to home she'd be passed along
And so it continued, an unbroken chorus in the girl's song
No mom or dad
Just a broken girl...hurt and sad
More tears than the waters of a flood
Eyes redder than her so called blood
No one cared to know her pain
Nor all the feelings she had to maintain
She put on a mask and tried to smile
But all happiness was gone, it hadn't been there for a while
She had a quiet voice, not loud enough to *tell*
All she could do was scream, all she could do was yell
A tear away from losing it all
Her heart would break
Her faith would fall
Must she always suffer alone
Be kicked around like an ordinary stone
Will somebody help this girl?
Or must she lay there alone on the cold hard ground
Heartbeat slower, as her hungry heart continues to pound
She feels like she is gone, like she is gonna die
Can someone please ask her *why?*
This is the story of a girl who only knew how to cry
For no one cared, and no one asked
Why?
How do I know this girl's story so well
Because this is my story
One I had to tell...

PHOENIX'S CRY

by Diego De La Cruz

Vista Murrieta High School

Gestation's genesis oscillate birth
Revelation's prophesize, life begets death
Father and Mother by gaiety and mirth
Entrance and exit, first and last breath

Beauty to tragedy; bittersweet screams
Invoke God, blood on white purity Response
to my prayer? Mum and lost dreams
Meandering hope in obscurity

Widow's new fatherhood, my selfish grief! My
white guilty lamb knows not yet his blame
Love in my pain or let shame be his wreath
Let fires of strain cloak by my love's flame

Divine's loss naught patch my gaping gash
My love's flame but born on maternal ash

IF I SPEAK, WILL YOU LISTEN?

by Vincent Do

Rancho Verde High School

If I speak, will you listen?

If I love differently than you, will you still listen?

If he loves him, would you listen?

If she loves her, would you still listen?

If he loves him or her, will you even listen?

If I love someone of a different color, will you listen?

If they love them, will you just listen?

If they are them, will you listen?

If he is now her, or she is now him, will you still listen?

If I speak up, will you finally listen?

If I explain myself will you listen?

If the color of my skin differs from yours, will you listen?

If I come from somewhere else, will you listen?

If I speak a foreign tongue or yours with an accent, will you learn to
listen?

If I share my culture with you, will you try and listen?

If I learn from you, oh, won't you learn from me and listen too?

If I shout, will you now listen?

If my heart bleeds, will you listen?

If I fight for justice, will you join and listen?

If I scream for peace, will you embrace and listen?

If I cry for help, will you aid and listen?

If I give voice to the voiceless, will you heed and listen?

If I open up to you, will you listen?

If I listen to you, would you please listen to me too?

JEANNE D'ARC

by Kyrie Dulaney

Vista Murrieta High School

To die for one's God is the greatest irony
Flames that first touched wood now reach pure skin
A symbol of church men abusing tyranny
but yet; she'd be the one blamed for sin
A smoky glimpse of the cross cast upon the stake
God had brought her here; a child, seen not much but war
to now feel Satans torment at her own wake
she closed her eyes and saw no bright welcoming door
To lead with such power
To be torn down with such shame
She called for Jesus at her last hour
She got nothing back but echo and flame
Only God knows the fear she felt
He should've been the one that knelt
The time varies for each individual

DEAR OWL THAT APPARENTLY LIVES OUTSIDE MY BEDROOM

by Brooklyn Emery

Temecula Valley High School

Dear Owl who apparently lives outside my bedroom,

I'm going to be honest with you
I'm extremely exhausted—It's been a long day
While I love the sound of your
'Hoot Hoot'
I would love nothing more than some peace and quiet
In the meantime, while you're keeping me awake
All I can seem to think of
Is the fact that I'm going to die one day
Or maybe about all the mistakes I'd made today
Or, maybe all the mistakes I've made in my entire life
And now it isn't just the sound of your hooting
But the tick of a clock
And the hum of the fan
It's all I can focus on
I am a slave to time
Minutes tick by and I have yet to fall asleep
It's grown so hard to feel happy
And now, I can't even look forward to the blissfulness of sleep
My life is a bottle of pills
They stare and they tempt me
I'm not horribly afraid of death
In fact, I might be more scared to live
Do I still mourn the dead

Dear Owl,
Could you give me some wisdom?
If you insist on keeping me up all night
Would you spare me some insight?

Show me, I beg you, why this life is worth living
Or at least cease your hooting
Just until I fall asleep.

Sincerely,
Girl whose bedroom you live outside of.

BROKEN RECORD

by Andrew Esparza

Orange Vista High School

I glance back at time when I had the opportunity to meet you

I remember the excitement we shared to collaborate and exchange from
each other

Maybe to see if it could be a real connection or not

I can recall the feelings I had felt

All those years of being numb and Broken from previous people who
didn't treat me well

My cracks were still deep

And as fragile I can be I was too strong for too long of a time

When I ran into you

The intention to be in anything serious wasn't in mind

But oh how, how could I not be captivated by the way you'd glance at
me

The way you would look away after was so adorable and sweet

Your existence itself was beautiful

Your perfect smile

Your laugh was music to my ears

We then began to talk a couple days after

I knew right then and there you were special

Our conversations would go on and on even when the sun began to
sleep

We knew we'd be tired the next day but it was definitely worth it to lose
some sleep

I remembered how hesitant I was to play

My tunes
My melody
My rhythm
And my chorus
To you

The lyrics in my tune where of pure love and how I would need time to
open up the little space where my hearts wounds creped

But If I opened it you would see the true me bloom

No longer afraid
No longer worried
No longer at war

More energetic
More compassionate
More radiant

I was afraid that just like the others
You'd throw me away too
And I was wrong about you
You put me where I had never been placed before

You helped me heal my wounds and put patches on them with your
gentle touch
It soothed my soul and from there I knew I was safe with you

But since the wounds were so deep
I couldn't cherish when you celebrated me

My mind was still at war
The way I would feel like maybe you'd cut yourself if you touched me
where the cracks laid sharper and steep

The thought of holding you back began to crack me complete

I knew the problem was me
With you I just could not be

For your safety
I threw away me

I saw it in your face when I couldn't function like before
For more work needed to be done, and I couldn't keep you with me

When you wanted me to play my song and noticed I wasn't me
The concern and worry rose and you felt like it was you who did this to me

But my mind was everywhere and yours was too

We couldn't say what our hearts knew was true

Our love so soon I threw it away
And then there were two
Who no longer walked the same way

I still hope one day you are fortunate and blessed to listen to a better song
A song that is ready to give you the tunes and harmony I couldn't

Maybe I can get better and come back to you
Maybe this was right person wrong time
Maybe I will see you again and we can share our songs
We can share our progression and how we healed ourselves together

Maybe just maybe I'll be ready

STRIPES

by Adrian Estrella Marquez

Palm Desert High School

The father had spent most of his life in the countryside.
He found a home in a humble rural town, where the stars lit the sky
every night

He settled down with his loving wife and his innocent son, who stole
the father's heart.

The father spent his days as a parent teaching his son about the world
Though their situation prevented them from seeing it for themselves.

The son idolized his father, revering him as the greatest man to walk
the earth.

The son eagerly waited every day to see his father before they had to go
back to work.

When night came, the son would silently walk to his father's room to
sleep with him.

It was the only place he felt safe.

One night, the son was asking his father about the many different
landscapes of the world.

The father had asked which place he wanted to learn about first.

"Africa." the son responded. "I want to learn about Africa's animals."

"Which ones?" the father asked "Surely, I can't teach you about all of
them in one night."

The son pondered, wondering which of the various animals he wanted
to learn about.

"Zebras" he finally replied. "I want to learn about Zebras."

The father smiled, if somewhat painfully. "Alright, I'll teach you
everything I know about Zebras"

The father began a lengthy lecture of the Zebra's origins, nature and
behavior, though these were topics someone like him would normally
not know of.

When the father finished, he asked; "Is there anything else you want
me to tell you about the Zebra?"

The son sat there, with the same indecisive look he always had when
presented with a choice.

"Why do Zebras have stripes?" the son eventually asked.

Again, the father looked pained, but still agreed to teach his son about the question.

“Zebras are magnificent creatures, my son. They have the ability to discern their own from other packs based on their voices alone. However, over the course of their species’ existence, the Zebra have evolved to develop stripes to identify their own.”

The son, both with an amazed and confused face, asked “ Do they grow their stripes or are they given to them too?”

The father looked at his son sorrowfully and answered: “No my son, they are gifted with their stripes at birth so that the mother may correctly identify their babies.”

The son responded with a question; “ But wouldn’t their stripes make it easier for lions to spot them in the wild?”

“Indeed but they possess hearing and sight far greater than that of our eyes and ears, son. This makes it easier for them to spot those baneful lions and escape.”

The son was inspired by the Zebra’s capabilities.

“Do you think we are like the Zebras?” he asked his father, curiosity beaming from inside him.

“Perhaps we are. We possess the same freedom inside of us like the Zebra has. We are crafty and clever, just like the Zebra. But the Zebra is focused on surviving while we focus on living.”

The son, confused, replied;” I was talking about our stripes.” pointing at his ‘pajamas’ as he referred to them as.

The father, struggling to keep his composure, answered. “ In that sense, no, we are not like the Zebra. Our stripes are not a gift, given to us by our captors.”

“How come we don’t run away from them, like the Zebras do to the lions?”

The father couldn’t think of an answer.” I don’t know my son. Your father, unfortunately, does not have all the answers.”

The son, glaring with courage, bravely told his father: “ Well then, I’ll be the first Zebra to fight back against the lions!”

The son was no liar, as he fought back against the lions.

But that was the last time he ever fought back

And at night, the father’s cell felt especially lonely, as he stared at the stripes the soldiers gave him.

Knowing he would never be free of them.

IN ALL THE RIVERS

by Logan Fogle

Western Center Academy

O, little drop
drip drop,
You are so small
drip drop drip,
But the most important drop of drip of them all.

Just a single drop of water in the river,
A tiny drip in the cloud,
A little sip in the hiker's canteen.

It is strange, something so weak and insignificant
has been on the Earth since the Earth was and is and is to come.

O, little drop drip drop,
How you shimmer in the light,
All you have been through,
Thank you, little drop of water, for keeping me alive.

LA VIE DANS LA FOLIE

by Juliet Gonzalez

Mt. SAC Adult School

Here I am laying in bed listening to a cover of la vie en rose
It's beat collides with me
Smashes my will to stand
My chest feels smaller and smaller
And I some point I can't breath
My toes lose the will to dance out for air
And my eyes can't take the scene of a messy room
There's too much cigarettes smoke
Day after day it just gets thicker
Chokes me follows me wherever I go
I can't see my reflection in the mirror
Do I have the capability of remember what I looked like
The songs on loop
Days feel the same
Rather the Mundane keeps me sane
This smoke is my chains
No not financially or isolating but I don't know how to live
What's next?
Please understand
I shout what next!?
Silence.
This room I'm in with you it's empty
Cold to the touch
No colors no people nothing but a place to show off a masquerade of
monochrome masks
All different shades of gray
Well now.. I need a drink
"Jamison perhaps?"
But I don't even like whiskey
"But you will drink!"
I don't understand

“No. You never catch on anyways”
Heads spin smoke piles up on the floor like a lethargic fog
The tingles of sensations along my legs
Strip the ability to walk
Like a cancerous vine
“But one more cig”
Well one couldn’t hurt
Get me one love?
“I’m in your head stupid”
Ah so am I alone?
Voices outside my door seem real
But none to interested in opening the door
“It’s locked anyways”
From the inside or outside?

HOW TO WRITE A POEM

by Hejira Hadley

Palm Desert High School

I had a dream
there was a jellyfish.
He was bright green and
lived in total blackness.
He grew from the stars
and absorbed them
when he'd swim past.
Jellyfish don't have brains
or structural anatomy.
They live as 95% water.
But I could tell
this one liked swimming upwards;
His laced arms would dance
and his body compressed.
In, and out,
and
In, and out.
He didn't have a heart
but he swam like one:
Beating.
It was only him in a world filled with nothing.
He didn't even look like
he was swimming in water.
He was floating in space.
He was writing a poem.

A TREACHEROUS FRIENDSHIP

by Christina Horton

Elsinore High School

We're taking a walk on a nice spring day
The smell of green grass and wonderful rain
The sun shining down with every warm ray
Having a nice time, nobody's in pain

We make the decision to cross the street
Excited for fun, humor, and friendship
We go to my favorite shop for a treat
Buying vanilla cones with chocolate dip

As we giddily exit the sweet shop
Her hands start to shake; a tear set to fall
I stammer, "What's the matter? Shall we stop?"
Breath catching in her throat, she starts to bawl

She cries, "I think it's time our friendship died"
I am in shock; she knows how much I've lied

BIẸYNI: A WANT OF THE FUTURE

by Kassi Ibrahim

John F. Kennedy Middle College High School

A look to the future
is a reflection of the past.
It is looking back on who you were
and all the dreams amassed.

To hold all that has passed
in contrast with all that is to come,
opens a chasm vast
of feelings akin to a Kpanlogo drum.

The feeling of hope and then some,
rushing through your veins.
The feeling of despair and then some,
the source of your greatest pains.

With temperament akin to a hurricane
the future will come storming through,
and left to pick up the remains
will be a solitary you.

And these remains accrued
can become a source of bliss.
But only if they're listened to
by ears who know how to reminisce.

If you heed anything, please heed this.
Biẹnyi
A future you can't miss.
Biẹnyi

A longing to carry
and a time for life.
Biɛɣni
as unstoppable as a knife.

Biɛɣni, Biɛɣni, Biɛɣni
A small wish among the many.

TO BE DIFFERENT

by Naida Israelson

Western Center Academy

there is a puzzle piece
under the old woman's table.
the card table with wobbly legs
held up with spite and threaded screws.
there is a puzzle piece
under the table
on top of the persian rug,
the rug that is threadbare and worn
the rug that is woven with tradition.
this puzzle piece is lost.
she has tried many times to fit it in.
but it doesn't belong to a single puzzle that she owns.
her gnarled, fluttering hands
shove the puzzle piece into picture
after picture
after picture.
it could have belonged to any of them,
ambiguous and printed with gray blue green smudges.
it has come so close to belonging
just always a little too small.
or a bit too big.

and there's an arm in the wrong place

oritissmissingahole.

one day, she will pick the puzzle piece up for the last time
and force it cut it bend it break it until it fits into her puzzle.
pleased that it has finally found its |place|

DYING WORLD

by Kendra Johansen

Western Center Academy

Temperatures and oceans rising,
Ozone thinning,
Garbage scattered everywhere.
Habitats shrinking,
Animals disappearing,

The world is dying before our eyes,
Things are not as they were before,
As they should be,

We, the humans destroying the world,
Need to fix our mistakes.
It wouldn't be difficult,
If only they would listen,
Together we could restore it.

We live without much care about our effects,
We are the reason for the decline,
We are the reason problems are arising,
We need to fix it.

A simple change,
Opting for electric,
Recycling,
We could save it.
We need to save it.
Before it's too late.

TIL DEATH DO WE BECOME ETERNAL

by Alissar Nahhas

Arlington High School

the tragedy of an artist
is to grieve more than they love
but what is grief without love?

the artist preserves memories
into their creations, expecting to be filled with adoration
but what is love without grief?

for the artist is never quite simply grieving
or laughing, or angry.
they are creating. endlessly.

the fate of which they are
never quite human anymore.
or were they ever?

for they have always been an artist,
one that scribbles on the walls of their jail
because that is their fate; to create.

the tragedy of an artist
lies in their death.
their ongoing, never-quite-perfect art
is known as a masterpiece, a poetic gesture.

the turmoil lies in the signature
that was never preserved
until it was unveiled from their decay.

for what is an artist, but the art they create?
for what is an artist, if not their lost humanity?
to find poetry in the grimmest hours,
despite the loss of their will to persist.

what is the tragedy of an artist
if not for the eventual urge
to rip and tear their most loved pieces?

what is the tragedy of an artist
if not the knowledge that they will never be as loved
as their greatest and most profound work?

if not the need to outperform themselves
with every stroke and glide of their existence,
until they become less of a soulful person and
more of a reflection of the devastation within.

to know that they cannot and will not stop creating,
because they know nothing else.
it is just as cosmically bound to them as stardust.

the tragedy of an artist
is the deep, most profound art piece buried within them.
to know that they will never unlock their greatest potential,
for it lies in their eternal death.

what is the tragedy of an artist
if not the failure to realize
their greatest work was themselves?
one of which they will never live long enough to see—
—one of which they will never have the strength to be.

because, even this, is not the most fulfilling work to me.

BRUISED

by Raquel Guadalupe Cole

Banning High School

Tears slipped out of her eyes as she looked and saw hope again.
Her mind bruised, from the work she did.
A reason to live.
A point of view.
A life that death paid.
A flash came as they crossed eyes.
I saw her leave in the dead of night.
She still had the bruise on her mind as she kissed him goodnight.

TEMPO

by Taylor Pope

Centennial High School

Somewhere overseas
Is where history lies,
Memories scattered like sakura blossoms
Across the islands my elders called home.

Among the clanging exchange of open-air markets,
The steaming noodle houses and the wafting richness of bao bakeries,
A scarlet current hums.
Its presence subtle yet undeniably alive,
Resembling the steady heartbeat of life in 1960s Japan.

Bounding in short yet lightning strides,
A little boy stumbles to keep up with his grandmother.
His feverish pace falling in step behind her eager charge.
Each of the street vendors greeting the elder,
As the pair dart through the stalls toward Zushi Station.

Even this boy can feel the rhythm of the land,
The rhapsody of his culture,
And the beat of his heart in tangent with that of his country.

The cochineal pulse sends waves of nostalgia,
Even across the ocean,
Throughout the decades,
And in the memory of those who have known it.

And it is in these stories my father gets caught in his reverie,
A collection of experiences and emotions so consuming,
That I can't help but fathom, marvel, and yearn for,
The wonder that is travel.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

by Natalia Roman

Eleanor Roosevelt High School

As I sat upon my mother's lap,
a red ribbon was placed in the weaving of my raven strands. The silk
welded into my body newly arrived to the foreign sand, knotting itself
thirteen times under the warm earth of the red and blue land.

My breath tumbled alive from my tongue,
as my speech became diffused in the saturated spill of the sun.
The abyss heat piling places upon my touch,
making a mural out of my body of young.
Ripping at the shreds of gold, my grandmother melted into my lungs,
it pumps and beats by the burning fire that bellows in my blood.

Engulfing the saltwater that rushes in the navy blue sea.
Eroding the pearls that were welded into my body's fresh gleam.
Suffocating in the heat as I attempt to breathe in the blooming of the
trees.
The ribbon tightening, constraining my speech, identified as free.

BEAUTIFUL THINGS DON'T ASK FOR ATTENTION

by Teyona Jones

Hemet High School

Beautiful things don't ask for attention they say
But I believe they beg for it, crave it during the passing day

Their screams mixed with the shouts of others
Their needs crushed by the weight of another's

They bleed into a river of sorrow
While others take, steal, and borrow

Their throats are dry

Their cries are overwhelmed by the wants of the greedy
When their sounds hit the core they are seen as needy

Because beautiful things don't ask for attention
They bow at the sight of the light or even the mention

They pass the light to the dim
Fade into the darkness and fill to the brim

When they finally reach the end
The grave will be seen as a ploy

In reality it was the only door to a breathe that none can destroy

THE MINER'S SONG

by Lily Rhys Jones

Palm Valley High School

If pressure creates diamonds
then I hope my mind is a coal mine,
filled with twisting dark tunnels.
A place where soot coats my fingers as I
sift through the rocks,
the thoughts that are crowded together,
clumped by feeling,
left to wilt quietly within deep tunnels.
I'm left alone to find the gem,
to dig deep and mine
the thought in the rough.
The words covered in soot
that will bleed silver when extracted.
Let this thought spill out,
overflowing with my forgotten spoken voice,
a diamond from a void of coal,
the shards cutting my heart deeply.
The greatest exchange of all is words,
so please give me your heart
and I will lay mine bare,
stripped from barriers and lies,
splayed out only through paper and ink as
my words build friends out of paragraphs,
and I build safe houses out of poems.

SYMBOLISM

by Riley Lovell

Vista Murrieta High School

A shiny gem and a tulip's blue
The sound of waves and a morning's dew
A crimson sky before the set
The diamond moon is sparkling yet
Between each crevasse and in-between
The most dazzling thing you've ever seen
It's after dark and before the sun
The prettiest melody ever sung
Through all the words one must speculate
How can something be so great
So, listen close and read words true
These are the things I think of when I think of you

COSMIC CADENZA

by Sophia Martin

Temecula Valley High School

you accept things as they are and lose the privilege of hope.

inhaling the consonants of desire becomes asthmatic and
uncomfortable,
silence, dense like morning mountain air,
painting cobwebs across aching lungs.
fractals of infatuation splinter through the rock-solid proof of bone,
the endless accelerando of each heartbeat seizing in celestial cardiac
arrest.
the distance between each cell,
between the earth and the sun,
between want and have,
named surrender.

the truth being that, anatomically,
you still are as you were.
the certainty laying in the fact that,
just as neutrinos combine into atoms,
so shall each electron repel.
the reality being that,
only in absolute zero may the stars form.
gravity does not make exceptions for the lonely heart.
each supernova lay suspended in apprehension.
we haven't reached nucleosynthesis,
nor are we in conjunction.
we are galvanistic until named so.

history names this nebulaic.
what was once conceptual now in contact—
the ideas incapable of passing through each other.
you want to accept the force as normal,

though it's crushingly gravitational.

you want to accept that this is nothing more than a waste of stardust.

that you may be the moon, effortlessly unfazed,

whereas conversely i must be agonizingly eclipsed.

you accept things as they are and lie frozen in the kaleidoscope of the
cosmos.

eternally stitching tattered moonlight.

experiencing stillness despite the motion.

excitedly staying a while to listen.

you accept things as they are and hope the symphony never ends.

I AM FROM

by Anna Moroz

Murrieta Mesa High School

- I am from sisters who never stay out of my room and always steal my stuff
- I am from messy family dinners where a drink is always spilled and there's no food left to spare
- I am from countless beach days being beaten by waves and napping in the sand
- I am from an army of loving critters and some who only care who feeds them
- I am from the cherry tree in our driveway that stains red the cement beneath it and trails inside to the white carpets
- I am from my mother preaching "Si Dios quiere" when I ask about the future and "asked and answered" when she has already said no
- I am from a room full of music I've never had the genes for and a room always shared
- I am from movie nights falling asleep on the couch and waking in my bed
- I am from late-night rides, 70 in an abandoned 35, blaring music, windows down
- I am from carrying on traditions, hand-making family recipes in the kitchen, flour clinging to my skin
- I am from bracelets of citronella, now longed for by my nose
- I am from a rickety fan too close for comfort and trips to stores I've never heard of
- I am from 5 different schools and 3 houses
- I am from big cars filled to capacity
- I am from countless referrals and walks to the office
- I am from pick a parent to pick a toy
- I am from tempers I've learned to avoid and my house that welcomes sirens
- I am from my best and my worst
- I am from endless scoldings and lessons learned
- I am from dangerous memories: falling mirrors, wet paint, supervised visits, a dent in the wall

I am from collecting herbs to gift my father whenever I see him next
I am from the challenges that scar and change
but most of all
I am from the complicated love of a family perhaps just trying their best

LITTLE PERSIAN GIRL, YOU ARE ALL OF US

by Bibinaz Nami

John W. North High School

**“...the welfare of the public/ And the planet share a name—/—
Equality/ Doesn’t mean being the exact same,/ But enacting a
vast aim:” - Amanda Gorman, “An Ode We Owe”**

Let these bonds of humanity be your guide, because to listen is to walk
with no candle or light;
release self from mean egotism built on decades of hate: fight.

Break down concrete walls
and stand against barbed wire
if only to lend an arm to a mother
and a hand to a babe.

For this life we did not choose and do we carry a legacy that we did not
carve but with,

every	breath,
every	poem,
every	song;

does this moment pass into an insurmountable past,
carved into stone like hieroglyphs of a New Age:
unreadable yet, but if by chance and by choice you the passerby,
can listen so fine...

To hear this voice screaming from the reverberations of stone carvings,
this body restlessly kicking and shoving,
and when mean egotism is put behind
sense appears to the sound: sound of a struggle
that is so often left behind, behind
in favor of a notion from the “superior mind”
finding it just to silence a voice
just as squeaky
and just as shrill

and just as loud as their own.

Do we not embrace one another when we cry?

Do we not hold onto hope all the same?

Is my life not already a page in someone else's past?

But when we begin to get restless,

It is this:

Little Persian Girl:

17, Female, pale skin, hooked nose,

ambitions and aims unimportant.

The Societal Skin, so hard to look past but comes with a vengeance to define,

Define being, define self, and decide the importance of what what is, your
battlecry.

And yes I do breathe in chai in the mornings and devour the strum of a
santoor,

and yes I am coming to you as a girl,

with this pale skin,

and this hooked nose;

so I ask for some less and some more.

But just hear me, for:

Has my heart not embraced yours in hardship?

Have we not hoped for all of our hopes all the same?

Are we not all already bound together by the human name?

It is unimportant even that you be the first to listen,

it is enough just to be one who'll hear.

Unimportant to be head of the protest,

enough to be part of the march.

Unimportant to be the one to take the stage,

But just to sit down and watch.

Because in me are the voice of a hundred,

so when we listen we realize the dreams of one and then one more:
to lend that arm and to give that hand,
to break down that concrete wall,
and to brave that wire which was once believed could cage us all;
to listen then is an invitation to face the qualms and quarrels of
the human race,
to listen then is an act of compassion to set our hearts to a
different pace.

MATTHEW 23:39

by Gabriela Ordaz

Western Center Academy

“Love thy neighbor as thyself,”

Matthew 23:39.

The pastor stands on his high horse
and preaches to the masses,
white teeth glinting and eyes shining along,
the stage lights form a halo above his head

The pastor drives home that night
and parks his car on the curbside.
He spies a flag
in the window of his neighbor’s window
and frowns.

Next Sunday, he preaches
Leviticus 18:22

The pastor stands on his high horse
and condemns his neighbors,
white teeth glinting and hate simmering in his heart

In 10 years time,
when his daughter tells him her name,
when she bares her very soul to him and begs for forgiveness,
he will spit in her face

HOW DO I EMBRACE MY NATURAL HAIR?

by Laila Phillips

Rancho Verde High School

How do I embrace my natural hair?
These kinky curls that expand with a brush
The frizz that appears when I sweat during a rush
I've always been surrounded by no help but a stare

I can vividly remember the smell of hair product
The amount of gel used to keep my hair down
But when my hair wouldn't lay flat I proceeded to frown
And this was the moment that my natural hair sucked

"Oh how I wish my hair were straighter" I would say
Crying on my bathroom floor because of a broken hair tie
Using all the products that my mother would buy
And when I couldn't do my hair, I wished it would go away

I can learn to do hairstyles, but how do I learn to embrace
The little girl who hated her hair is still wishing that it was straighter
And the girl in the present is struggling to find hairstyles that are
 made for her
Both of these girls feel as if to their culture, they are a disgrace

But it's difficult to continue hating something that is stuck with you
I've realized that I was shedding tears because my hair was unique
No wonder people stopped to give my hair a quick peak
There is no choice left but to let the learning pursue

Now I have realized that I am not and wasn't a disgrace
That little girl was only overwhelmed by not being the standard
And she presently is glad her pleas for straighter hair remain
 unanswered
So even though my question remains blank, I'm glad my hair is
 something I now embrace

WE KNOW

by Damian Renteria

Western Center Academy

Nothing can ever be promised,
Worshiping a divine god
To stand and wait the longest.

Walk against the friends that gossip,
As they touched their facade and thought
Nothing can ever be promised.

Never forget that you're haunted,
Stuck here with ghosts who lost their shot
To stand and wait the longest.

Accept this awaited constant—
You jumped off before you forgot
Nothing can be promised.

They await you, being guarded
By the white angels who fought
To stand and wait the longest
For your arrival since they started—
They put you aside at your spot.

Nothing can ever be promised
To stand and wait the longest.

AND WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

by Michelle Solis

Hillcrest High School

[REDACTED] violence has risen [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] out of the hands of
potential killers, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] the impact [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] of these tragedies [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] during these horrific events [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] becomes [REDACTED] an issue [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] people
[REDACTED] are [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] alone [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] traumatized by [REDACTED] violence, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] anger, withdrawal, post traumatic stress, and
desensitization to violence [REDACTED] indicate [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] trauma [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] society [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] often ignored [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] they [REDACTED] identified problems [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] youth [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] focused on [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] well-being [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
and [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] mental
health [REDACTED]

source: <https://www.cwla.org/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-families-communities/>

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 the Riverside County Teen Poet Laureate is an annual program. 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: James Coats, Lisa Pettigrew, and Madeleine Simmons. And lastly, thank you to all of the teen poets. For those who did not make finalist, take heart: There is always next year.

Alissar Nahhas
Adrian Estrella Marquez
Andrew Esparza
Anna Moroz
Bibinaz Nami*
Brooklyn Emery
Anousha Baqai
Caitlin Austin
Christina Horton
Damian Renteria
Diego De La Cruz
Gabriela Ordaz
Hejira Hadley
Jenna Alame
Juliet Gonzalez
Kassi Ibrahim
Kendra Johansen
Kyrie Dulaney
Laila Phillips
Lauren Cruz de Armas
Lily Rhys Jones
Logan Fogle
McKayla Binette
Michelle Solis
Naida Israelson
Natalia Roman
Rahm Braslaw
Raquel Guadalupe Cole
Riley Lovell
Sophia Martin
Taylor Pope
Teyona Jones
Vincent Do
Zanae Demery

Arlington High School
Palm Desert High School
Orange Vista High School
Murrieta Mesa High School
John W. North High School
Temecula Valley High School
John F. Kennedy Middle College High School
Ramona High School
Elsinore High School
Western Center Academy
Vista Murrieta High School
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Mt. SAC Adult School
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La Quinta High School
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Hillcrest High School
Western Center Academy
Eleanor Roosevelt High School
Riverside STEM Academy
Banning High School
Vista Murrieta High School
Temecula Valley High School
Centennial High School
Hemet High School
Rancho Verde High School
Liberty High School

