

Hartford Creative Contest:
Hartford Students Speak

2023 Prize-Winning
Student Essays, Poems, and Visual Art



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Henrietta Beckman and The Reverend Henry Brown who together founded Mothers United Against Violence in 2003.

Mothers United Against Violence (MUAV) is a nonprofit organization created out of the need to provide support and compassion for families who lose children or family members as a result of violence in the community. Many of MUAV's members are from families who've lost loved ones to gun violence. MUAV is a faith-based voice of hope offering families spiritual support as well as advocating for justice. MUAV has provided direct services to victims and individuals who are part of the underserved that may not have access to economic resources. MUAV wants to engage youth through specialized programs that help unify the community with outreach events and activities.

This year some of our students have written about bullying. Bullying may be more of a problem in our communities than we realize. Bullying is an aspect of physical and emotional violence that sometimes happens in our community or our families.

Rev. Brown hosts "Real Talk", a weekly call-in show, on Hartford Public Access TV where activists, pastors, law enforcement, and elected officials offer commentary on the state of violence in the city.

Henrietta Beckman lost a son to gun violence and supported Bill 5818 requiring gun owners to report their firearms being lost or stolen within 72 hours to help prevent illegal possessions of firearms. She is also a member of the contest executive committee.

mothersunitedct@gmail.com / 860 246 1880
healingthehealers.org

Sherri Bedingfield

Foreword

The Hartford Creative Contest is excited to once again celebrate the work of young writers and artists. In this, our ninth year, we had over 80 submissions from students attending 27 different schools in the Hartford area plus one submission from a home-schooled student. We welcome work from students who are in grades 4-12 and live in or go to school in Hartford. We accept submissions as essay, poetry or visual art. These submissions must be in response to specific prompts.

The prompts for this year were:

What is bullying and why does it hurt people?

What can I do to take care of the earth?

What three things would I do if I were school principal?

How has COVID changed my life?

We had responses to all of the prompts but 36 of 84 submissions addressed the first prompt: *What is bullying and why does it hurt people?* suggesting that bullying is an issue affecting many of our students. Students had a lot to say about the damage bullying can do to them, their families, and their friends. We hope that, in some small way, this contest has given students an opportunity to express themselves and gain some sense of empowerment. Responses to all of the prompts were thoughtful, creative, and showcase the many talents and gifts of the students.

We hope that you will keep and treasure this book. The volunteers who put this book together did so to celebrate our community's youth and their views of the world. We welcome donations to the Contest so that we can continue to support our community's youth in this way. You can donate by going to the Mark Twain House Website, www.MarkTwainHouse.org.

We could not have the contest without the sponsors listed below who have been active partners in encouraging and supporting this contest. Thank you!

Sponsors:

The Mark Twain House & Museum

Beckett Law

Asylum Hill Congregational Church

Mothers United Against Violence

Committee Members, Judges, Volunteers, Donors, and Supporters: The Creative Contest is a solely volunteer endeavor. Thank you to all our committee members, judges, donors, volunteers, and other supporters.

Enjoy!

Grand Prize:

Poem by Ethereal Jayce Alers

“What is bullying, and why does it hurt people?”

Weight of an Unwanted Soul

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”

Till your words become repetitive, again and again hitting the same spot until it's sore

BLACK and BLUE

until I mute.

Your sentences make me wonder...

Why am I here? Is it too late to go?

Your words are far worse than actions because they break me from the inside out.

It's when I go cold, I go numb, I get choked, I get stomped.

I repeat and repeat those soul-crushing words.

Manifesting them into my life.

I'm worthless and dumb

I begin scratching my arms and pulling my hair

I'm ugly and unlovable

My tears mirror what my ears hear

I'm a mistake, a hated distraction

My blood boils taking what my mind couldn't handle

“You're gaining weight.” they laugh

I stop eating

“You're getting too skinny.” they point

I will never be enough.

“You deserve nothing!” they spat on my walking corpse.

A soul hidden within the deepest darkest shadow.

I deserve nothing not one thing at all

Not a smile nor a hug

Not one thing at all.

Not a hi nor the smallest wave

Not one thing at all.

Not a blink nor a breathe

Not one thing at all.

Not a life left to live

Not one thing at all.

Repeat it till you bleed it then say it once more.

Notonethingatallnotonethingatallnotonethingatallnotonethingatall

UNTIL I'M NOTHING AT ALL.

You took what I couldn't give.

You sculpted me your own

Your words had hands that wrinkled my once smooth edges.

You took away my innocence.

My mind floods with self-hatred and yolk..

You fired me up till my pot began to crack.

You slammed me on concrete with absolutely no remorse.

Your words are the actions that killed me.

I lied endless nights and ongoing rivers with a revenge plan that all ends with me.

I told myself you are the fault yet I am to blame.

But what do I do when the stars are no longer bright and the moon never says hi?

Repeat it until you bleed it then say it once more.

This life would probably be fine if those words were never heard.

~Ethereal Jayce Alers

Prize Winning Essays, Poems, and Visual Art; Grades 4-6

Sofia Richards

“What is bullying and why does it hurt people?”

STOP

Bullying is hurtful
People being picked on
Because of a difference
Every single day
Their hearts broken
Wishing you could walk out that door
Wishing it would be a better day tomorrow
Do you feel their pain?
Do you feel their hurt?
Do you feel anything?
Punching, pushing
Black eyes
Self-hate
You just don't care do you?
What are we worth to you?
What do you want from us?
Do you hate me?
Do you hate them?

Do you hate yourself?

Malishka Goyal

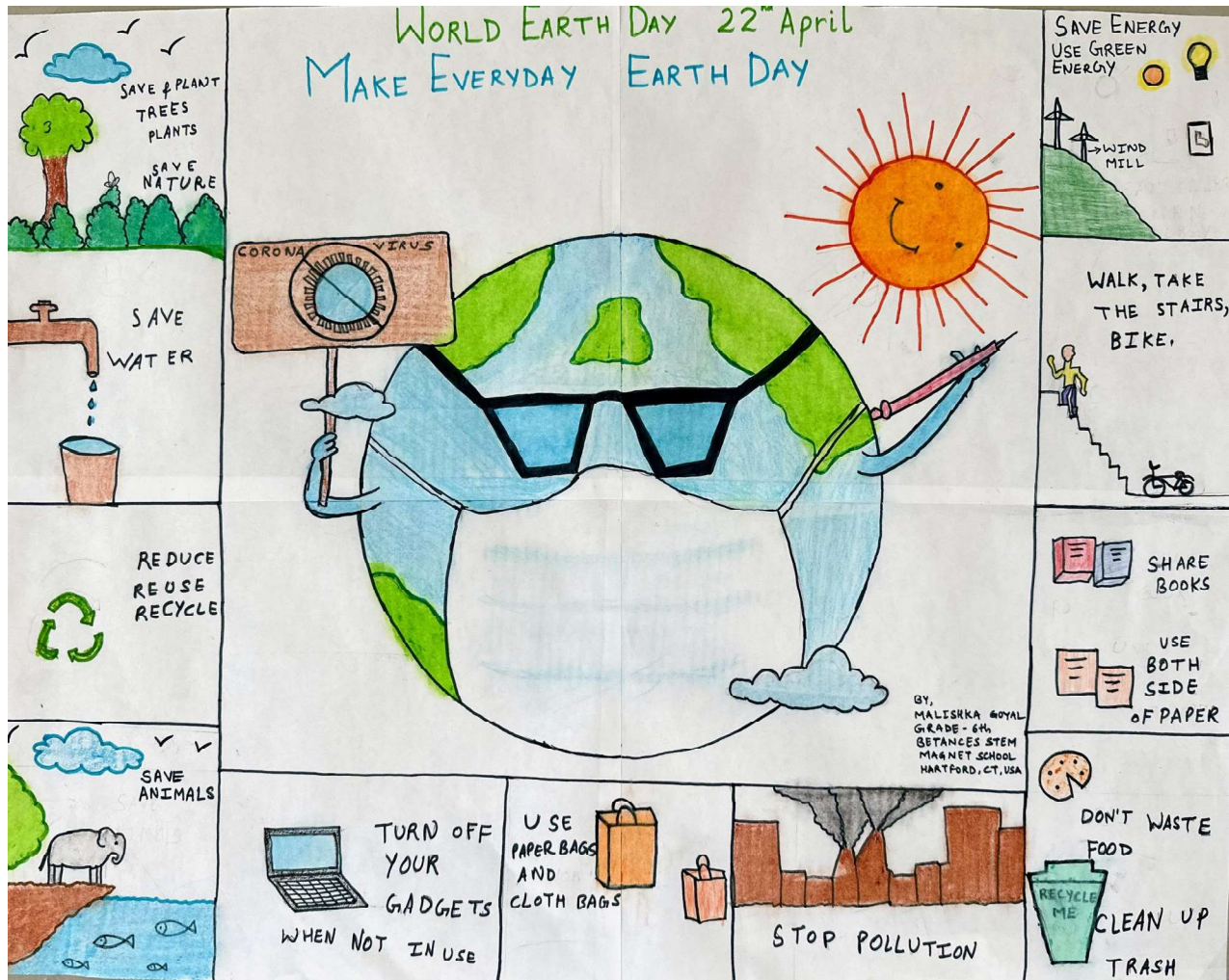
“What we can do to help take care of the earth”

As human beings, it is our basic duty to care for the planet that we call our home. The earth provides us with all the basic things that are needed for our survival. We greedy humans have exploited its resources to such an extent that even the most essential are not available to some people.

Being a responsible human of this planet, we can take below good practices/measures to reverse the damage caused to our planet.

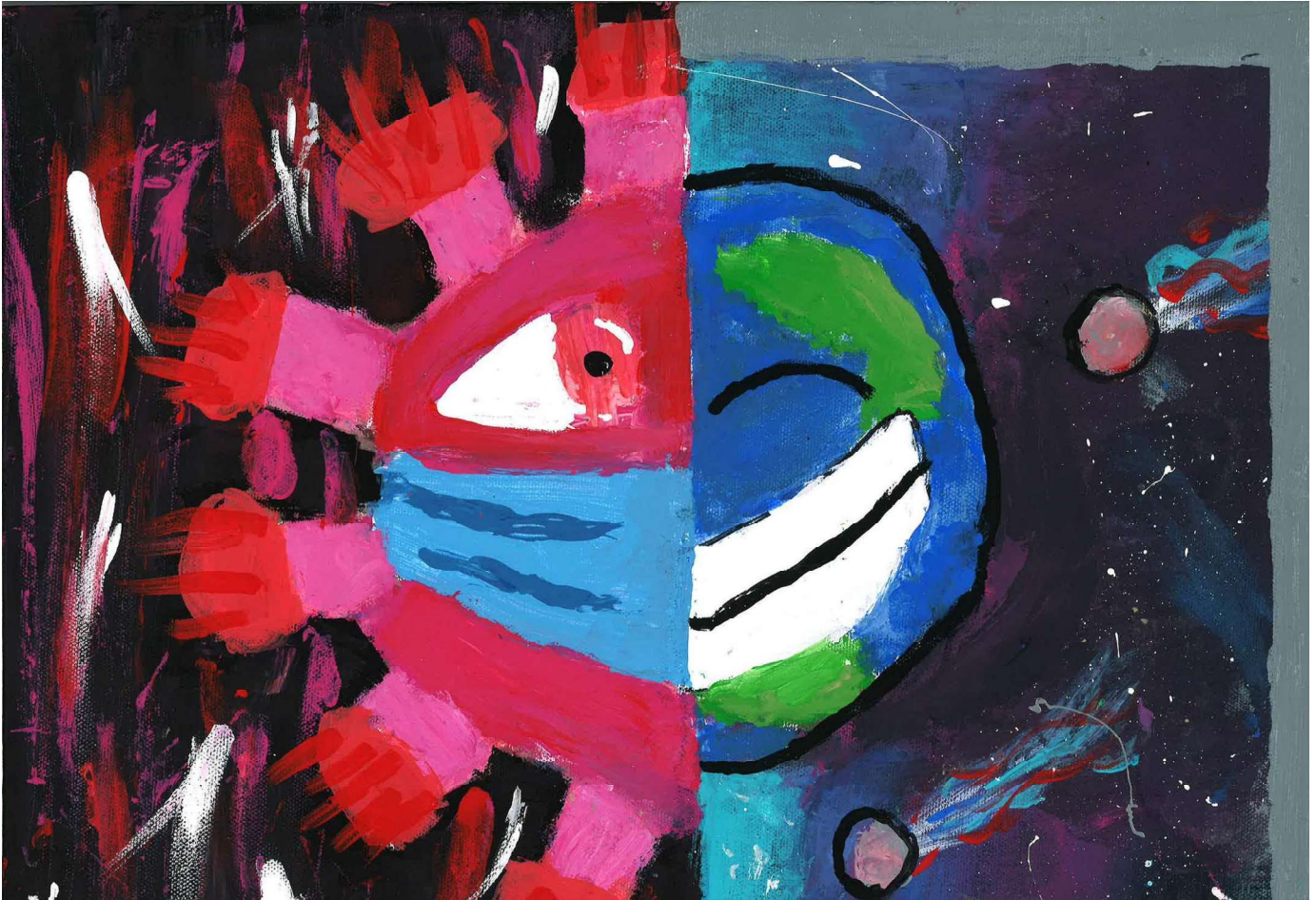
- We can use filtered tap water instead of bottled water. This will reduce a lot of plastic waste in the process.

- We can walk and biking, can use car pulling, use bus for transport every possible time to help reduce greenhouse gases plus we can get good cardio and burn some calories too.
- We can use reusable cloth bags to the grocery and avoid use of disposable plates, spoons, glass, cups and napkins.
- We can compost pit at home.
- We can use only LED's and reduce possible electricity leakages.
- We can plant 10 trees every month.
- While bath we can use bucket water instead of shower.



Excel Iweoise

“What are three ways that COVID has changed my life?”



The end of 2021

Covid 19 Hurt

It was the Worst

Hard times were sad

And the symptoms were bad

December to January . Not Good

It felt like I was the only one with covid in my neighborhood

Once I got better I felt like Me

I was healed and Who I want to be

Family gave me Company I love them they make me happy

Support from Friends

And I Here alive in the end

Amari Griffith

“What I Would do if I Were the Principal”

At my school, we wear uniforms, and have dress down days every once in a while. I’ve noticed that at other schools they are able to wear their regular clothes. I think about how my school experience would be if we did not have to wear uniforms. This led me to think about the changes I would make if I were the principal at my school. There are many changes I would make to better the school environment for students and teachers, but I am going to highlight just three of them for you.

The first thing I would implement as principal is to make sure that every class has all the supplies needed for success in their classrooms. Students should be able to attend school and not have to worry about buying supplies or having to ask someone for pencils. A lot of teachers do not receive enough supplies for their students to be able to do their work. Some classrooms do not have enough tissues or disinfectant wipes to last the winter, the flu and cold season. Families tend to donate these items to help the classroom or the teacher would have to buy them. When the teachers have to buy them with their own money, they have less money for themselves and the school should provide these items for their class. That's not fair because they shouldn't have to spend their own money.

The second thing I would implement as principal is to change the cafeteria food. I asked some students in my class, what's the one thing they would change about the school? One person said “the food”. The students in my school have complained about how the food isn't fully cooked or how the food doesn't taste good, so if I were principal at my school I would have better and healthier food for the students. One idea I have for a healthier meal option would be a fully cooked chicken leg for

protein, a healthy fruit like oranges because they have Vitamin C and they're healthy. Another thing that I would add to the menu is mashed potatoes for a starchy food and some greens. My meal idea is a healthy one while also being a delicious meal. Also, starchy food is very good for you. It gives the students energy for the rest of the day so they can complete their work.

The last thing that I would implement as principal are more dress down days. Uniforms are important as a visual image to represent the school, and represents equity, but kids like to show their personality through what they wear. Of course the outfits still have to be appropriate for school because it's still a learning environment, but also kids like to be able to make their own choices. I asked a friend and they said “It's horrible! I hate it!” With the current dress code we can wear different colored khakis but only red sweaters. If we wear a different color, we get in trouble for it. For example, a friend said they like the color purple, and would like to be able to wear a purple sweater. I also feel that the uniform should have more versatility. Some people get in trouble for wearing regular black jeans instead of khakis and I don't think that's fair.

In conclusion, if I were the principal, I would do my best to try to find a solution to the problems I’ve outlined. I could focus more on getting enough supplies for every class so everyone has the tools to learn. I would try to make sure that all the food is properly cooked for the students to eat. I would also include more dress down days so that students can express themselves. I understand that being a principal is hard work, but I can try my best to listen to the students and cater to their needs.

Ali Barrie

“What is bully and why does it hurt people?”

I’m pretty sure that almost everyone knows a thing or two about bullying, but I’m going to tell you readers more about bullying, like a deep dive, and I will tell you guys my grave opinion on it. Bullying is when one person, or a group of people, is acting cruel to another person. People can be bullied online or in person. I highly protest against bullying because it can lead to horrible things happening to somebody, whether it is physically or mentally. Also, bullying can occur anywhere, whether it's at school or at home. The bully is usually the person with more power, whether it's that they have more allies, larger size or other advantages over you. The reason that I want to protest against bullying is because it can ruin lives and I highly recommend that people should just not bully for the world to be a better and more peaceful place.

There are three main types of bullying, and I will tell you my grave opinion on each type. One type of bullying is physical bullying. Physical bullying is when the bully physically damages the person being bullied. Although this type of bullying can make a huge impact, I don’t believe that physical bullying is the worst because it is easier to prevent than other types of bullying. If you are being physically bullied, you can just report your bully to your teacher or another adult easily. Another type is verbal bullying. Verbal bullying is essentially when somebody bullies another using their words. Again, it can be prevented more easily than other types. Lastly, there is cyber bullying. I believe that cyberbullying is the most impactful kind of bullying because it is usually done behind someone’s back, so you have no way of reporting this. When somebody finds out that they are being cyberbullied, they will be humiliated. With all this humiliation, they have nobody to tell because they won’t know who is bullying them, and they won’t have any evidence to back it up.

Bullying also has some really dreadful effects and consequences. People who get bullied can be diagnosed with depression. If someone is depressed, then they will be in a sad mood, and they will be highly discouraged to do anything.

They will also have some concerning thoughts that can make a huge impact on them. People who get bullied can also experience fear. People who get bullied will be scared to go on the bus or even go to school because of the events that they expect there. If they are used to being bullied all the time, then they will know what to expect and show how vulnerable they are to the bullies. That is one of the reasons that I discourage bullying, because you can literally ruin someone’s entire life! Long term bullying can also lead to many consequences for the bully. People who bully others can also have their life ruined due to this. If they are reported, they can get expelled from school or even worse. These events can lead to them experiencing struggles in the future due to their horrible mistakes. Bullies can also inherit bad habits from their role-models and have health issues from these habits. I wouldn’t want to be a bully because I don't want these things to happen to me or the one being bullied.

I will also tell you readers my sincere opinion on how you and I can prevent people from being bullied. The first way I believe you can stop this is by putting up signs. I believe that is an effective way to protest against bullying because it spreads the word to everybody who sees it and it’ll be very noticeable. Hopefully, people will listen to the signs and spread the word using the next way I am about to talk about, which is spreading the word. Did you know that that is the fastest way to spread news! If you tell your friends, they will most likely spread the news to more people, and it’ll keep going on. You can also report someone that you see bullying another. Even though kids don’t like when others are informants, sometimes you have to be one if it’s really imperative. You can also encourage your schoolmates to keep doing what they enjoy. If you encourage them, they are more likely to find success and live a happier life. So that is what I think you should do to prevent people from being bullied. If you help someone out with these problems, you might have helped them become happier along their lifetime, and I believe that you should give yourself a pat on the back for that.

Overall, people being bullied can ruin lives, so I recommend that you help people who are bullied and stop the bullies for the world to be a better place! If you treat others how you want to be treated, everything will run smoothly.

Jariel Figueroa

“What are three ways that COVID has changed my life?”

First, I had to wear a mask for about 2 1/2 years. I had never worn a mask before. I had trouble breathing and I had to take mask breaks at school so I could go somewhere and take off the mask for a while.

Second, we were quarantined, and I had to stay in the house. I couldn't go outside, and I couldn't play with my friends. I was lonely and sad as you can see from my eyes in my self-portrait.

Third, I felt bad for all of the people who were sick and dying. I was nervous that my family members were going to get covid and die. They did get covid and so did I. We were all really sick. My grandfather died of covid.



Otuko Amate

“What Can I Do To Help Take Care of The Earth?”



The first thing we could do is stop littering. Litter makes the earth dirty and if we stop littering the earth will be cleaner.

Certain countries don't have fresh, clean water. Everyone deserves to be able to drink clean water and not get sick.

Be an advocate for Climate Change

Joakim Mpemba

“What I can do to help take care of the earth”

The first thing I would do would pick up trash,
But if I picked too many then I might get a rash.
Doing good will save our Earth,
I'm sure this is what the world is worth,
And I want the Earth's sea to have a lively splash.

The life of the Earth.
The world is going to expire,
But all we can do is plug phones in wires.

We need to get together and save the earth,
Not by just picking up trash but by planting seeds in the dirt.

We have used and abused the Earth for our needs,
But it's not always our mouth that we have to feed.

We should really save the Earth,
We should've been doing it since birth.

Animals are dying because of our cruelty,
And the Willow Project would never fool me

I love the Earth I don't want to lose it,
But I really don't want to misuse it
The survival of the Earth will forever be in my heart,
And the world is being torn apart,
All we could do now is reduce it.

Sweden Mullings

“What is bullying and why does it hurt people?”

Bullying is wrong in many ways. People take advantage of their peers just for the fun of it or to impress others. I myself would never bully another person or be bullied. It is sick and disturbing in my opinion. My mother always told me to, "Treat others the way I want to be treated". So I try my best to remember her words that remind me not to bully someone because I do not want that for myself or anyone else.

I would like to highlight a few facts about bullying. The dictionary definition for the term bullying means to, "Seek harm, intimidate or coerce someone perceived as vulnerable". Some types of bullying are social bullying, verbal and physical bullying. The bullying that I hear about most around my school are prejudicial bullying and cyberbullying. Sometimes the bully does not even know the students that they are bullying, but they find something they do not like about the person and use it to pick on them.

To illustrate the classifications of bullying. Cyberbullying is a type of bullying where people bully others but it is online instead of face to face interaction. A person who uses cyberbullying can put something on social media and not even say who they are. I do not think that this is right. Physical bullying involves hitting or touching another person's physical body. Prejudicial bullying is based on the aspects of a person's identity. Verbal bullying is fundamentally like scolding, making fun of, and offending another person. Bullying can be hurtful to people because children that experienced verbal and physical bullying have a higher risk of developing depression and it could hurt their self esteem. It could also lead to negative effects on an individual mindset.

Bullying could have some strong effects on mental illness. It can cause suicidal thought and cause people to do self-harm. Bullying is a very serious issue. When we see someone being bullied we should help them or call for help and instead of watching them, or cheering them and recording. We should tell a parent or teacher to help stop the bullying and separate them so it could prevent anymore bullying. Bullying could cause injuries and affect the person in lots of ways. You could be a bystander or upstander. Upstander, means a person who speaks or acts in support of an individual intervening on behalf of a person being attacked. A bystander means a person who is present at an event or incident but does not take part or do anything to help.

In conclusion we all see the harm and know the facts about what bullying can cause. Peer pressure can often get the best of us, we should always choose to make the right choices and never bully. So let's stick together and stop bullying today!

Alexander Moo

“How to help the earth”

Reduce, reuse, and recycle. Cut down on what you throw away. If there were no trees we would all die, but thanks to mother nature we have trees. Recycle all paper and cardboard packaging. Do something good for the earth. Plant trees to help the earth. Throw away trash in the garbage. That's where it's supposed to be. One way to help the earth is to not put chemicals in the air. The air will become toxic and it might kill us. My art is about how to help the earth. You can see in the picture a half-bad earth and half-good earth. We still have a part to save and we must save it.



Just Help The Earth

Prize Winning Essays, Poems, and Visual Art; Grades 7-9

Ashton Beckett

“What can I do to help take care of the earth?”



The left side of my picture is meant to show how the earth will be if we take care of it and the right side shows what will happen if we continue to pollute. I want the earth to be a better, cleaner place to live. I want people to see that we have the choice to change but we have to stop polluting and to stop such large amounts of Co2 in the air. I use renewable energy sources such as passive solar and geothermal. I unplug things when I'm not using them, I also clean up litter whenever I see it. These actions are small but if everyone can pitch in it will have a huge impact.

Jenell Karikari

“What are three ways that COVID has changed my life?”

Covid wasn't easy
I wish it went by like a breeze
It was very hard to stay please
When life wasn't at ease

There are some positives
There are negatives too
But one thing I really enjoyed
Was being with my family

At times, home got boring
So all I would do is a lot of snoring
Or just do a lot of exploring
With all the free time storing

Covid did have an impact on me
I don't know if you could agree
It taught me to value my family and friends
while setting goals for myself to transcend

Aria Campbell

“What is bullying and why does it hurt people?”

Miriam- Webster.com gives the definition of a bully as one who is habitually cruel, insulting, or threatening to others who are weaker, smaller, or in some way vulnerable. My definition of a bully is a person who craves attention and uses other people’s vulnerabilities to get attention. In other words, bullies see weaknesses in themselves and to convince themselves and others that they are not weak, they pick on others in an intimidating manner.

During my research on the topic of bullies, I found out that being called a bully was not always used as a negative term. The early English meaning was “sweetheart.” Later on, the use of the word, bully, meant a good fellow. But now, in this present time, bullies are far from being sweethearts or good fellows. Their mission has nothing to do with goodness or kindness. Bullies intentionally hurt people, many times, in order to feel better about themselves.

On a personal note, in the past year, as a 13 years old female, I have experienced bullying for the first time in my life. As a new student at my middle school and as a student from out of state, I was not accepted by two of the students in my seventh grade class. They would say hurtful things about me and encourage other classmates to join in while they ridiculed me. The two ring leaders of the bullying started out by trying to find out as much as they could about me. They were friendly and I was so glad to “fit in.” Unfortunately, it didn’t take long before I figured out what they were up to. They took turns asking me questions about other students in the class, and I fell into the trap by responding. Then they would go to the individuals that I spoke about and twist their stories, creating problems between me and the other individuals.

Being bullied has been one of the most hurtful experiences of my life. I found myself feeling insecure; isolated; fearful; alone; angry; and getting involved in negative competition, even starting to bully my 7-year-old sister. I couldn’t focus in school and started looking for excuses to stay home from school. Every day, I spent way too much time checking myself in the mirror to see if I looked ok or if my face had breakouts, because that was one of the biggest laughs of the day for the two bullies. Also, the size of my forehead was another huge joke for them. I wore a head scarf for two weeks straight because I felt that it made my forehead look less noticeable.

My grandmother was very helpful because she saw how stressed out I was becoming. She set up an appointment with a therapist so that I could get some advice about how to handle being bullied and how to avoid becoming a bully. My father also was helpful. He figured out that there was a problem because of the head scarf use for two weeks. He talked about the strengths that I had and told me to focus on them. He said that since I liked writing, I could write down my feelings about being bullied and use the help from the therapist to deal with the hurt, anger, and negativity that I was always feeling.

The first thing I wrote in my journal was how the friends that I did make at school allowed the bullying to continue. They would be friendly to me when the two bullies weren’t around, but as soon as they appeared, they wouldn’t have much to say to me. Many times they would laugh while the bullies were insulting me. I realize now that they were trying to avoid being bullied so they chose to side 2 with the bullies. That is another tactic bullies use. They

intimidate people so that they are afraid to stand up to them.

I also wrote in my journal about the different types of bullies. They come in all sizes, ages, genders, and ethnicities. Bullies are found in schools, homes, work places, churches, and on social media. Anyone can become a bully, even sometimes without recognizing it. That's what happened to me. I bullied my sister, and when I started to write about it in my journal, I felt so much shame. That is when I started coming up with ideas on how "not" to be a bully. I was also determined to change my ways because of the dangers associated with bullying people.

Being bullied can cause feelings of rejection, isolation, hating yourself, hurting yourself, and even suicidal thoughts. I am fortunate that I have a family that I can talk to about anything, but there are people who feel that they have no one they can talk to. In my journal I made a list of who people can go to for help. If the person is a child, they can go to their parents. Parents really do play a big part in helping their children develop skills that create positive interactions with others. Unfortunately, schools aren't as helpful as they could be because something drastic has to happen before the problem of bullying really gets dealt with. Some schools do have bully prevention programs, but the child being bullied is usually too afraid to use the program as a resource. Children can also talk to ministers and therapists. I didn't include talking to friends in my journal because they switch sides and might share your feelings with the bully.

If someone is being bullied or is even a bully, I recommend keeping a journal to first identify how harmful bullying is, and then to list ways to overcome being bullied or being a bully. Wellfamily.com states that some individuals become bullies because of dysfunctional families and trauma in their lives that can cause anger and aggression. In many cases, these are two of the same reasons why people are bullied. Bullies recognize the individual's insecurities and then they go after them.

Bullying, like many other social problems should be addressed by prevention when children are in elementary school. That way, it might not be such a big problem later on. Talking about bullying to children at an early age, as a parent, a teacher, or minister, could help the child to make a decision not to become a bully, or help a child to deal with possibly being bullied.

I am now on the right track in dealing with being bullied because I have found out that self confidence, not self-consciousness is what I need to focus on. I no longer bully my sister, and I am going to use my journal notes to start a teen chat group on-line to help combat bullying and spread kindness.

Karmani Brown

“What is bullying and why does it hurt people?”

Bullying

Their demise

Their demise I pray

I pray for their demise

Light bends around me

They look at me with despise

I fall

They all look at me with despise

I pray

I pray for someone nice

I scream with all my might

Light bends around me

They can't see me

Yet they look at me with despise

All my life

I pray for someone nice

They all look at me with despise

All I have is dread

The shelter of my bed

Like expired food my mind rots

Light bends around me

I wish for just one drop

One drop is all I want

One drop of joy is all I pray

Kalina Lawrence-Clais

“What is bullying and why does it hurt people?”

Bullying comes in big and heavy, verbal but not. Seen but hidden. As whispers fill the air, it makes it hard to breathe. As it is the asthma to your lungs, the cardio to your heart, and the cement to your legs. As you stumble across the dirtied floor, the floor you face to everyday as if you are narcissus to a mirror like pond. The stress piles up on your desk and within you, and you begin to bleed no one looks. Of what used to be lit, is now fumed out, only for smoke to appear. Yet only you smile gleefully as if you are filled with light. Your eyes are puffed, your forehead wrinkles. Flowers on your table appears. Notecards, and gifts that rot with hatred overtime. Overtime because, to a such extent they should've noticed.



Iryna Vasykiv

“What is bullying and why does it hurt people?”

This artwork is about bullying, this shows how one can get affected by someone else's words. When people hear all of those negative comments about themselves, their inner world, soul, and mind gets destroyed and they might possibly start suffering from depression. Also in my work I decided to keep it gender and race neutral because anyone can suffer from bullying.



Amadu Barrie

“What is bullying and why does it hurt people?”

Bullying occurs when someone is intentionally negative in order to make you feel bad and does so repeatedly. It also comes in many different forms, like cyber, verbal, and physical bullying.

Bullying someone online, such as on social media, is known as cyberbullying. They may dislike a post and then comment negatively or post about you.

Verbal: when you say hurtful things, teasing or taunting someone in order to make them feel bad, as opposed to when you do it with your friends. They will make fun of you and what you wear, what you look like, or have.

Physical: when you are hitting, kicking, threatening, or pushing, but that's not what it is limited to it can also be stealing or harassing. They might shove you, break your things, or harm you.

All of these things are bad for anyone to go through, but when you see it happening, you should have someone help, like an adult or someone you trust.

Bullying is often done because someone has something weighing them down and is angry and wants to take it out on someone, or they just want to make themselves look cool. A way to prevent yourself from being bullied is by having confidence and courage; then you won't be such an easy person to pick on as long as you stay strong. A person who is bullied may not want to tell an adult or anyone else because telling could just make the bullying worse, or they just don't want anyone to stress over something that doesn't have anything to do with them.

There may be consequences for the person you bully or see being bullied; for example, they may become depressed, stressed, and have low self-esteem, and anxiety, which causes that person to perform poorly in school, change how they interact with others, or change as a person in general. They also may start looking at people differently, like becoming genial, because they might be afraid it will happen not only with one person but with more. which will hurt the person who is being bullied.

For instance, the experience I had with bullying was a lot for me to handle because it was the first time I had been bullied. It felt horrible. I didn't want to talk to anyone about it. I decided not to tell anyone because I didn't want to add to any stress they may have already had. especially at home. My situation got worse without knowing what to do because I knew that retaliating was not the best choice but as I said bullying can change you. Sometimes I did something that I would never do and I had a consequence for it. Bullying can be a handful to go through but once I talked to some adults I trusted everything turned out to be ok and now I am building off from that mistake so I can't follow myself.

People who are bullied take it in many different ways. Some people let it pull them down and they perform badly in many things. while others take it as motivation or in a way that they become better than they could've been before. I think bullying shouldn't even exist and most people can agree with that. In other words, bullying can affect anyone in the long run whether in a good or a bad way. So I recommend not bullying someone or even making fun of them.

Pravnavi Reddy Sirigi

“How has COVID changed my life?”

COVID is a virus that has been spreading for the past three years and is ongoing. COVID has made me realize how cautious we have to be about getting sick. COVID has restricted access to things we were able to do before, like work, travel, and school. These are just a few, but they are the most common things that have been affected in the time of COVID.

Work. Work has been hard for the past three years, with people working from home, and less employees working in-person at stores. People sit in front of the computer for hours, damaging their eyes and increasing their rate of boredom. Some people have lost their jobs, making America’s percentage of unemployed people double compared to the pre-pandemic level, with 6.2% (ten million Americans) unemployed during the time. My dad has been working from home for the past three years, getting enough money, but using it all on necessities for our safety. People have been buying a lot, resulting in less material for others.

Travel. Travel was banned by the Trump Administration on March 13, 2020. Travel was banned on non-U.S. citizens traveling from 26 countries due to COVID. American citizens who came back from one of those countries had to quarantine for fourteen days. We couldn’t go anywhere during this time. If we went outside, we had to wear ridiculous hats that had a mouth covering. We didn’t say anything, because we knew it was for our safety. Travel ban continued for more than a year. On November 7, 2020, the most tragic event of my life had happened. My grandfather had died with a heart attack. We were so shocked and disappointed, because we knew we couldn’t go to India, not yet. Travel ban hadn’t been lifted until November 8, 2021. But lucky for my family, we had permission to go. My dad’s boss had found out and had helped us throughout the booking process. It was hard, and took a long time, but we finally had our tickets and we left.

School. School was the hardest part of COVID. Mid-March of 2020, we had left our friends, our classrooms, and our teachers and started virtual learning. It was the most boring time and some students didn’t even attend! This went on until the end of the school year in 2020. After the summer of 2020, in-person learning started again. But we wore masks. No one could hear what anyone was saying and we were never allowed to hug or hand-shake anyone! I didn’t know anyone but I came to this school wanting to go to a different one where all my friends were. After in-person, there was hybrid, part virtual, part in-person. This time period was more fun, since I got to spend more time at home and help my younger sister.

COVID was a lot to bear with. It broke out so randomly no one was ready for what was coming. I have learned a lot of things during this time, it made me realize how spreading sickness can lead to a global pandemic. I am now happy that COVID is dialing down a bit, and I can come back to school, ready to learn.

Ever Alvarado

“What is bullying and why does it hurt people?”



Chaira Mae Briones

“What is bullying and why does it hurt people?”



The reason I choose this artwork is because I feel that bullying is especially common in this generation, and it's something that no one truly pays attention to. Others are impacted by bullying and this impact includes depression and anxiety, these are also common.

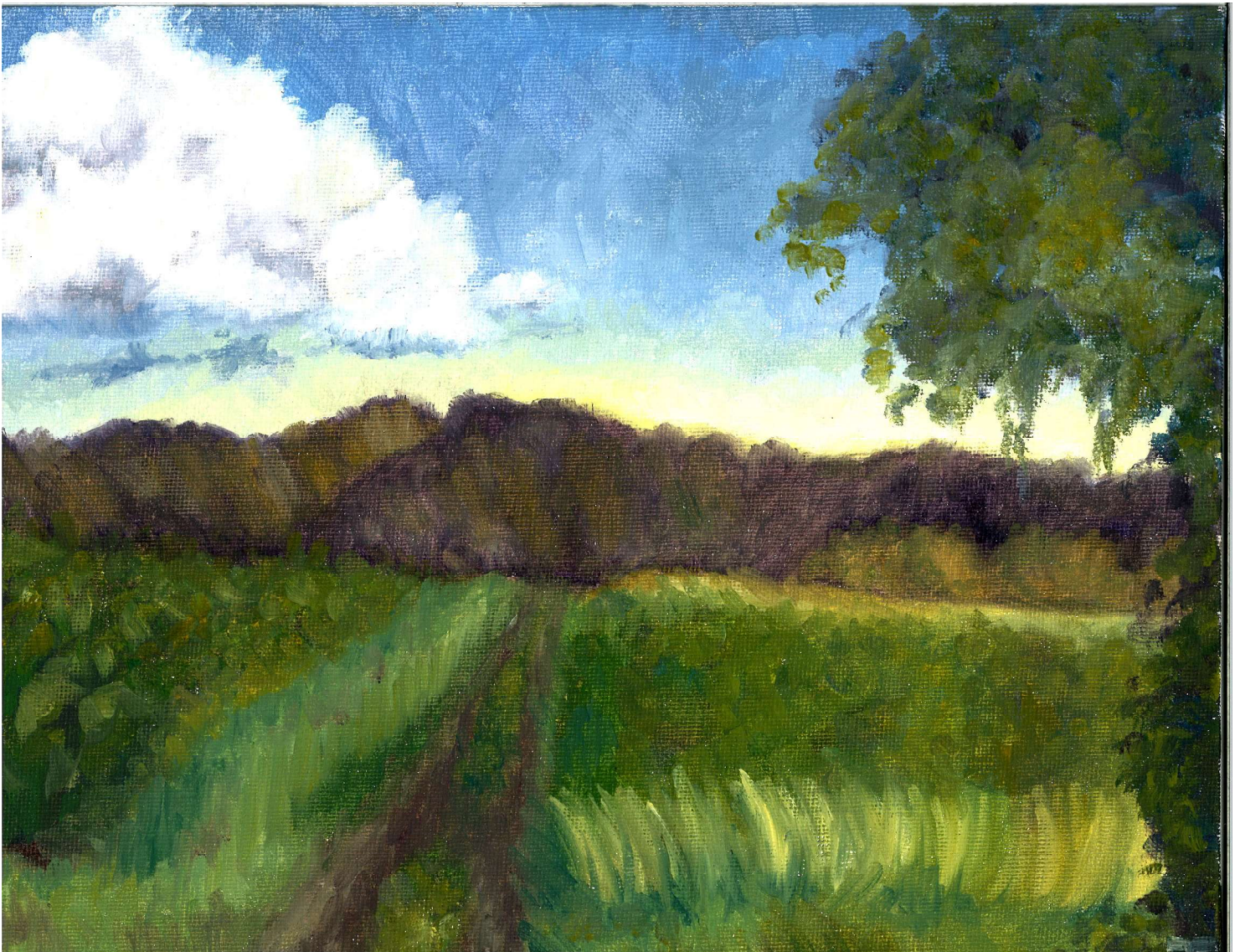
What I included in my artwork is a person that is facing their head towards the floor in a corner, this represents depression, the cause of bullying. This shows that bullying can cause others to have low self-esteem and have anxiety. I've also included words that are commonly used as insults in this generation to make the drawing feel more realistic. On top of that I also included a monster, this is a monster that I myself have created, I do so because I feel that everyone has their own monsters, bullies, and has their own experiences.

Prize Winning Essays, Poems, and Visual Art; Grades 10-12

Fiona Everett

“What can I do to help take care of the earth?”

My artwork represents this theme by showing a landscape with a path. Walking instead of driving around helps to reduce greenhouse gasses. It’s a simple and easy way to help the earth.



Maurice Tucker

“How has COVID changed my life?”

COVID Brain Release

Covid.	World Wars page 300-370
One word,	Jim Crow Laws page 600
5 letters,	A new page
“2 weeks” off from school	A new edition, page number 400
24 months long	Starring me
6,803,287 carbon copies gone	And my family
2 eyes opened.	And you
A country to mourn.	And your family
My life flashed before me, how could this be?	My friends
I wasn't Maurice Tucker but a character in a movie screen.	And your friends
With a plot that worsened with no character development,	How could this be?
multiple climaxes over and over	Is this a dream ?
never getting off that hill.	Please wake me up
A bad roller coaster ride that, you thought you could manage	My alarm clock hasn't beeped
until you were in the seat	I never imagined this could happen, where did it go wrong ?
In the cart	A prejudice leader
And the controls jammed	Leading the blind
No operator could fix it, just had to take its course	2 weeks off of school became a year.
Praying on thin seat belts to keep our bodies safe	Eyes glued to laptops with no anti blue light protection
While the roller coaster took us on a ride the world was not prepared to face	Brains screaming for release
8 years of schooling	Empty classroom collecting dust
96 months of scrolling through text books	Store shelves blank
Learning about George Washington on page 1	“2 packages of water per household ma'am”
Boston Tea Parties page 57	George Floyd on our TVs
	George Floyd stamped in our brains
	On repeat

On repeat	My friends are on my for you page
On repeat	Dancing away, no care in the world
I want to scream	While my already peeling
How can I scream when my mask will muffle my cry?	4 white walls are starting to disintegrate
I can't take it off	Gas is cheap
I can't take IT OFF	So mom doesn't have to worry
"It's" in the air	But I am worried because we <i>don't</i> have to "worry"
I have to swallow my cry	What does that mean?
And be a man	We are working class
A man of the house	This is not a break for us
For my siblings	We have to read in between
It's a big pill to swallow	Paychecks being sent out
6ft!	My mom is hesitant
6ft!!	"We will have to pay this back"
6ft!!!	"Mom, it's free money, what do you mean?"
6 ft please don't cough near me	I close my eyes and dream
I am paranoid you might have that "disease"	A better dream
Stuck in my room, no one to talk to, I want to leave	My alarm clock <i>FINALLY</i> beeps
Anywhere but earth, PLEASE	I wake up
My trust is low	It is the year 2023
My vibes are low	Did this really happen?
Like a battery I feel drained	How is it not 2020 anymore?
No amount of Vitamin D supplements can fix this	How could this be?
My mind is racing, I am worried	Where is covid?
This is NOT two weeks anymore	How could it leave behind a mess and just
It feels like a century	Leave?
I feel like a remote stuck on mute	
How could this be?	
I find my days wasting away	
On TikTok	
An app	
Talking about "renegade renegade"	

Taniya Blue

“What is bullying and how does it hurt people?”



Serenity Geddies

“How has COVID changed my life?”

I was in the later end of middle school when quarantine started, I thought a two week vacation would be a great thing. In hindsight I should have learned more about the situation ahead of me, because those two weeks turned into years of being stuck indoors. But hindsight is 20/20, when virtual schooling started I really enjoyed it. The fact I didn't have to walk to school or sit in a boring class seemed great, until I realized my siblings would also be doing virtual schooling. Throughout the first few months of virtual schooling I was completely unfocused and I barely understood the things that should have been easy and considered as review work from the previous weeks off. I used most of the time during the beginning few months of virtual school as time to learn to make new meals, try new snacks, try new hobbies, look at careers, etc. But in short I was unfocused and didn't really understand the things happening in class. I think the reason was mostly because I put too much emphasis on my siblings' work and using the time to relax over being scholarly and productive. But as time progressed I started to get my act together somewhat, hybrid schooling had finally started and my brother had joined. My motivation came back and the efforts to get my act together had finally started. After starting 8th grade I got more serious about school and got back into my joy of writing. I feel my English teacher back then really pushed the limits of my writing and encouraged my writing style. I learned I liked writing more fictional stories and historical pieces which I started doing in my free time. I started feeling behind in math class and tried studying and using different tools to better understand the materials given. After the first year of Covid had gone and passed I realized I really enjoyed the convenience of it and I think I was happier being away from all those people in a cramped classroom. Once quarantine somewhat ended and in-person school was back to being a necessity I realized how out of touch I was with other people. Covid during the time gave me better study habits and a stronger drive to learn more and try harder in school. But it also made me pretty lonely, and comfortable to not be around people. So as of now I am working back into being a more sociable person, though I don't think my other habits of studying new topics, note taking, and asking for help in class when I need it, are something I don't want to change. In short Covid changed all of my habits that were school based and I also like that 14% percent of the population felt withdrawn from school and its accompanying activities.

Akilah Stewart

“What three things would I do if I were Principal?”

If I were a Principal

If I were a principal,
I'd let the students' minds be free, like a
blazing fire. Aiding in their journey of
discovering who they are and what they
want out of their life.

If I were a principal,
I'd say down with standardized tests
because children are more than just
test scores. Even the most demotivated, struggling
students can get amazing grades with
the right tools and environment.

If I were a principal,
I'd hire the best and the brightest to
teach my students because they're
passionate, and an inspiration, not just
because they're smart. It takes one
extraordinary person to inspire a child
to want to learn and become extraordinary,
that person could be a teacher they adore.

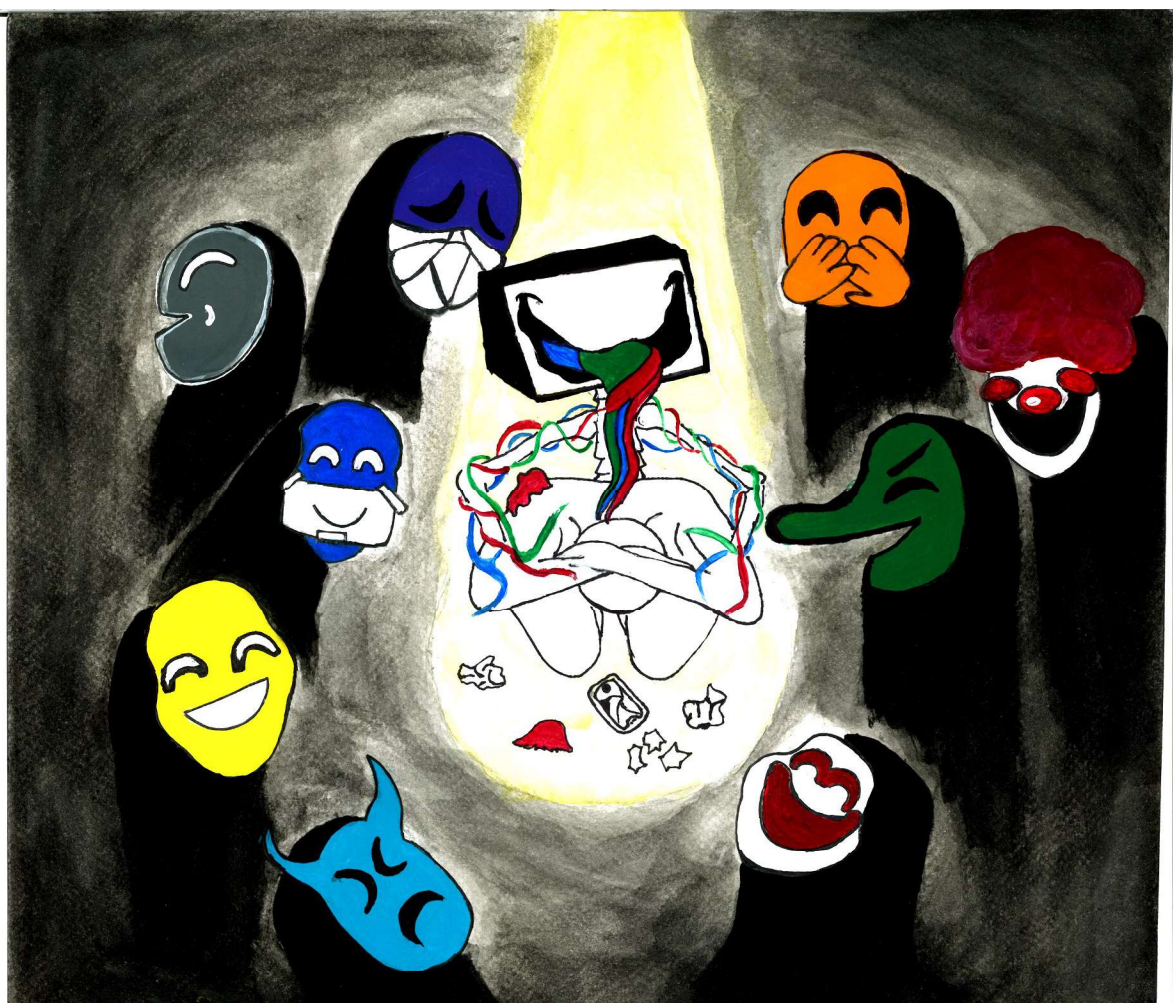
Children should be loved, cherished, adored,
and nurtured. This is my promise as principal.

Jessica Marks

“What is bullying and how does it hurt people?”

Sonnet

Confused, Dreadfully scared with fear and Alone
With eyes that stare, the joy that hides disgust
Mockery lies in their eyes, they condone
Thoughts closed, locked with dread, no one to trust
Yelling “I’m sorry” are you to blame?
Shattering, snatching little self esteem
Tongues ripping apart with hate, can’t be tamed
Losing yourself in great hate, what a scheme.
Drowning in a sea of their own despair
Binding themselves down, forsaken demise
Dragging down, climbing up, gasping for air
Will you drown
or overcome the
arise
Save it now or
they’ll cause it
to be drown
Leave it be nor
shall it never be
found



Rhaili-Em Lowe

“What three things would I do if I were Principal?”

Being a principal is a lot of work. One thing that I know is that if I were a principal I would make sure that I interact with the students as much as possible. My inspiration of being a school principal is from Abbott Elementary, an ABC show that I watch with my mom, brother and sister. On that show they go into the lives of Black teachers in a Philadelphia public school system. To me what they go through there is ridiculous and yet they still keep going for their students. Another inspiration is the Hartford Grub Hub in Hartford High. My last inspiration is from my high school, which supports us as students and our culture. From these 3 inspirations, if I were a school principal the three things I would do is allow the students to come to my office whenever they need anything no matter if in trouble or not, have an essential supplies bank in the main office with sanitary and other hygienic products and some small snacks, and make sure to have cultural celebrations every year for Black History Month, Chinese New Year, and Hispanic Heritage Month.

Abbott Elementary has broken down so many barriers since it was released in 2021. I was an avid viewer from the beginning but one thing that stood out to me was the principal Ava Coleman. Anytime viewers saw her she was either flirting with the teachers or trying to find a side hustle. She even got her job from blackmailing the superintendent (which I do not recommend). But now in season 2 they are getting more into her character and viewers are seeing that she is actually helping the students no matter how incompetent she seems. One thing that was interesting was in one episode a student was not listening in class and the teacher Gregory sent him to the principal's office only to learn that Ava gave the student a sticker and food and brought him back to class. It was later revealed that Ava did not discipline the kids; she just allowed them to relax in her office. The other teachers at Abbott, specifically Gregory, were able to tell her she could help the students but also needed to discipline them. Something similar happened in another episode where a student's mom was struggling to buy clothes for her son's uniform when he had a noticeable growth spurt. The student went to Ava for help and though she poked fun at him, she gave him new pants in the right size from her desk, where the camera panned to show the many materials she had in her desk drawers for the students. Now I'm not just telling recaps of the show just because I like it. I'm giving recaps to show why Abbott Elementary is just a great representation of Black teachers and how if I were a principal I'd want to give the support like Ava gives to her students. I not only would make sure the students could come to me if they need anything but also have the necessary materials to be okay at school, such as new uniform clothes. I would want my students to come to me with any help they need and make sure to hear their side of the story when there are situations. Ava has a great relationship with the kids and especially with them being predominantly Black at the school, I know that having a Black principal is a plus, which is exactly how I would want my students to feel; like their principal has their back.

When I saw on the news that Hartford High School had a Grub Hub, I was envious. I knew that there were so many people in my school, including me, that would benefit from having a Grub Hub at our school. Because I am a Hartford resident that goes to an East Hartford open choice school, not many of the things that Hartford students get I get. But I know that if I were a principal it would not matter what area you are from, because you are in my school and

you will be able to go to the Grub Hub. It would have all of the essential top notch food and hygienic products to make sure my students would be healthy and taken care of. I believe that by having that resource my students would be able to be more content and happy in school.

Something that I love about my high school is that we have cultural performances. We have had so many Black History Month and Chinese New Year Performances and even our 2nd year of the Hispanic Heritage Month performance. I was able to be a part of each of these and even be the leader of Black History Month in 2022. This is not only so much fun but a way for our school community to learn about different cultures. Not only do we have our performances but we have decorations around the school and even do trivia and fun facts on the morning announcements for the specific theme. My favorite part about these performances is that it is student-led and that the teachers still support. I know that if I were the principal I would make sure to be involved in any way I could, either as a supervisor or help in getting specific decorations for the performances. As seen in my school, the performances are different each year and to me that is something I like. I love the variety and I think that if the faculty did a performance or even a poem it would be good to show the students that the faculty cares about representation also.

All in all, I know that being a school principal is hard. But I believe that by having things like Abbott Elementary, Hartford High's Grub Hub, and cultural performances, students will know their school is taken care of and is a safe space for them. If I were a school principal I not only would want to have great relationships with the students, faculty, and parents, but also make sure that the community understands the greatness of my school, that there is representation here, and that we care. I would want to make sure that I would be someone that my students could talk to and ask for help with any supplies or materials they needed. I would be a great school principal and have my inspirations help with my planning.

Participating Schools

AI Prince Technical High school
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
Berkshire School
Betances Stem Magnet School
Breakthrough Magnet North
Classical Magnet School
Connecticut IB Academy
Covenant Preparatory School
Environmental Sciences Magnet at Mary Hooker School
Grace Academy
Great Path Academy
HMTCA- Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy
Home School
Jumoke Academy Middle School
Kinsella Magnet School for Performing Arts
McDonough Middle School
Milner Middle School
MLK Middle School (25 Ridgefield Street)
Noah Webster Microsociety Magnet School
Pathways Academy of Technology and Design
R.J. Kinsella Magnet School of Performing Arts
Renzulli Academy
Suffield High School
Talcott Mountain Academy
Thurman Milner Middle School
Trinity Academy
Vernon Rockville High
Weaver High School
AI Prince Technical High school
Ana Grace Academy of the Arts
Berkshire School

Contest Judges

Art:
Bev Duncan
Susan Hight
Ellie Tener

Poetry:
Sherri Beddingfield
Sitara Gnanaguru
Melissa McEwen

Essay:
Diane Natrass
Fran Maynard
Ruth Pagano

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