

The Stories of TOMORROW

*A compilation of short stories and poems written by 22
young women from diverse backgrounds.*

Published and edited by Lillian Gilbert



Publishers Note

Each girl reading this book is **special**

A unique spark in moments of uncertainty

Worth the stars, moon, sun, and sky

Each girl reading this book is **important**

A whisper of meaning in a shout of blurb

Worth your voice and everything left unsaid

Each girl reading this book is worth her voice

Spread your voice

Use your voice

You are the voice, the strength, and the Stories

Of

Tomorrow

**If you want to publish your own story or poem for
The Stories of Tomorrow, go to
storiesfortomorrow.com**

Reminding teen girls around the world to SHINE...

B: Belief and Dreams - these pieces explore ambition, religion, and chasing dreams, even when faced with challenges.

Pages 1-20

R: Resilience and Strength - these pieces highlight perseverance in the face of bullying, struggles, and personal hardship.

I: Introspection and Mental Battles - these pieces explore mental health, anxiety, self-worth, and the struggles of navigating one's own mind.

G: Growth and Identity - these pieces explore self-realization, personal evolution, and how our own experiences shape who we become.

H: Hope and Connection - these pieces explore the principles of love, friendship, and the people who help us heal and grow.

T: Truth and Society - these works challenge societal norms and reflect on the truths we must face to grow stronger.



Chapter 1: Belief and Dreams

These pieces explore ambition, religion, and chasing dreams, even when faced with challenges.

Believe

By Andia Noelle

They all say "We believe in you!"
With fake smiles plastered on their faces.
The mere mention of music
Sends them into fits of laughter and disbelief.
They all say they believe.

They all start to send lyrics and verses,
In hopes of understanding
My love for the game.
Yet they'll never understand the reality of it all.
They all say they believe.

They all tell me they love music,
But when I sing, when I play,
Not a single ear listens
To the notes, to the melodies.
They all say they believe.

They suggest coming up with
"Backup plans"
"In case this *music thing* doesn't work," They say.
They all say they believe.

Little do they know,
There is no backup for me.
It's all or nothing.
When asked about my future,
I can only envision a path to
Greatness. Passion. Music.

It's a struggle when no one
Really believes in you.
Finding other creative souls is easy,
But the ones with passion and drive,
The ones who *believe*,
Are hard to come across.
It's even harder when you've
Already found and lost one.

Not in the sense of death,
But two souls who were in disconnect.
I struggle everyday to find another
Who believes in me.

I ask of you, reader,
If you have a passion, or a dream,
And you find someone who believes In not only themselves, but in *you*,
Hold on to them, dearly and closely.
For you'll never want to go on these journeys alone.

Magic On The Stage

by Gracie Upadhyay

I stay behind the curtain,
The show's about to start.
My body's scared and frightened,
With whispers in my heart.

I look out in the audience,
And spot my fellow peers.
My stomach twists increasingly
As I hear the people cheer.

But as the curtain opens
And magic fills the stage,
A tiny spark lights in my heart
And my fears just run away.

The Day God Gave Me a Restart

Anonymous

Finding peace in a world full of chaos can be hard, but once you figure out who God is, I can guarantee you will find peace. In 2023, the church I attended had a youth confirmation class. I was interested, so I asked to join. I was excited to participate because I was hoping to find some kind of peace in my life.

Looking back before I started the confirmation class, my life was a mess. It was around the time I was in sixth and seventh grade, and it felt like everything that could go wrong, did. I was slowly falling into a dark place. My father continued to struggle with drug addiction, constantly in and out of jail. My so-called friends treated me horribly, saying hateful things that only led to me getting into trouble more frequently.

With everything going on, I was getting in bad trouble at home. It got to a point where I was deeply depressed and did not care what would happen to me the next day. I had got out my feelings and realized what the class was for. God was putting me through a test to see how I would react and if I would use the resources He gave me.

When I attended the confirmation class every Sunday, all the educators gave me a way to see how to approach the obstacles I face in life. Over time, I grew closer to God, eager to learn more because I was comforted by the knowledge that God loves me unconditionally. As Philippians 4:6 says “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” This scripture reassures us and confirms that we can trust in the Lord and what he can do for us. The last topic we talked about in class was baptism and I knew I wanted to get baptized again.

The Day God Gave Me a Restart (continued...)

Anonymous

The day I graduated from the class, I was baptized right after. When they called my name to get in the water, I was scared for dear life but I knew for me to do this I had to trust him with my life. My youth pastor and senior pastor both prayed over me and dipped me in the water head first. While I was underneath the water, all my problems and all of my fears were gone, everything just felt fresh. When I got home, there was no more arguing and no more fights with my parents.

If I could speak to younger Makalia, I would tell her that no matter what you go through, God will forever be on your side even if it does not feel like He is. Always keep faith in Him and never forget his guidance and timing.

I will keep going forward in life, trusting God and all he can do for me and my family. My faith in Him is unwavering and nothing can turn him away from me no matter how hard the devil tries to. While I may not know where life will take me, I am certain of one thing—I will always be grateful. Grateful for my confirmation class, for the day I found God through my baptism, and for the beautiful restart He gave me.

Chasing Perfection

by Addison Ceasar

When I was younger, my main goal in life was to be the perfect child. I made straight A's, never got in trouble with my teachers, talked in a soft voice, and kept everything organized. This was pretty easy because my thoughts about the future, the state of the world, and how I was going to get into college hadn't even set in yet. I was creative and wanted to help every single person I talked to. This goal, however, would be my demise as I got older. With the introduction of deadlines, finals, extracurriculars, and college acceptance, balancing my perfect person facade quickly started to fade. I no longer was organized, and sometimes I was loud. My straight A's quickly turned to B's with a few random A's sprinkled in. In the attempt to pick myself back up, I started trying to handle everything at once. Attempting to do every task I needed all at once. Which usually led to me getting overwhelmed and not fully completing my work. Leading to Bs and sometimes worse.

My mom, which was the main reason I was holding myself to these standards, immediately started having long conversations with me. Telling me about how I wasn't trying hard enough and that I needed to focus. I felt so unseen and unappreciated. How could the person closest to me not see how hard I was working? This constant feeling of letting everyone down with my academics still is present to this day.

However, discovering a career in which I was truly passionate has caused me to become more motivated and gave me the ability to just work for myself. Doing work to benefit you without thinking about anyone else will leave you more satisfied than any academic validation could ever earn you. This is a lesson that everybody should and will learn through the journey of life.

Chapter 2: Resilience & Strength

These pieces highlight perseverance in the face of bullying, struggles, and personal hardship.

Push Through

by *Kashvi Nandagiri*

Push through, work harder
Maybe then they'll think I'm smarter
The people that I idolize
Go and use me as their martyr

I envision my dreams
So far yet so near
Placed on the top of a hill
My future not so clear

My abilities are limited
by my lack of knowledge
Restraining me from chasing
My dreams that I've acknowledged

I've always tried to do my best
In everything that I do
yet every time I learn something
It gets washed out by the blue

Even when they do no work
They are always getting praised
But because of things, I cannot control
Their expectations of me are raised

Never given equal chances
Never given choice
Always forced to be the greatest
But not allowed to use my voice

I trudge my way up to the hill
Trekking up to the peak
Just to be pushed down, tumbling
Every Week after every week

I'm tired, I'm through
What else is there for me to do?
I've tried my hardest and my best
But it's never enough for me to rest

I dream about giving up
And living so peacefully
But then I realize I need to push through
For the others who are just like me

Now that I'm here, I see it clear
Following my dreams, shedding tears
Now as the king of the hill
I'll push others to try, even when they have no will

Untitled

Anonymous

It's like a haunted house, but only I'm the ghost. There's never a day where I don't constantly hear "Minnie stop doing this!", "Minnie stop doing that!" or "Minnie drop the attitude!" Underappreciated, unwanted, and undermined I feel. Not a single day goes by that I don't think to myself "why did they even want to have me if all they do is yell at me?" Consistently getting told, "you have big shoes to fill" or "you're so lazy all you want to do is sit around the house all day and do nothing." Maybe that is true, or maybe they just fail to acknowledge the fact that I'm trying my best. Maybe they don't realize? I don't know. It's like I get home from school and all day I'm tired, I have no motivation to do anything and it seems as if I'm just alone. Not physically though, but mentally. You know?

Thoughts flowing through my head and all of a sudden I remember that one specific day. It was a Thursday and I had just got home from school. My mom had been off from work and had spent the day cleaning both me and my brother's room. I come back from school and go to put my bags down and when I come back down my mom had been asking me about my day. I tell her the usual "it was good" and nothing more. I go upstairs only for her to call me back down later. Turns out, while she was cleaning she found my journal. But it wasn't just any journal in particular. It was the journal that I always write in about how I feel. My mom, being the nosy person she is, obviously opened it to read and what does she find? My writing. And it's not writing about me or school related things, It's writing about her and my dad. In the journal I had written about how I had felt so out of place and how bad they make me feel. She holds my journal in her hands and I feel the fear. My heart dropped. I felt the blood rushing from my hands all the way down to my feet as I approached her from a distance. "This is how you feel huh?" she cries out. "Is this how you really feel?" I don't answer her. "If you hate it here so much, then leave. I don't want you here if you don't feel wanted. Hearing her say those words shook me to my core.

Untitled

Anonymous

I tried to explain to her how I feel, but like most parents do, mine don't believe that I can feel the way I feel at this age so I refused to go back and forth with her and just let it be. After she finished yelling at me, I cried. What else was I supposed to do? I was seriously considering leaving, but maybe she didn't mean it, maybe she did. I still don't know if she did to this day. That exact moment still haunts me and I am now left with nothing but agonizing pain and trauma knowing as every step I take the memories follow. They never leave unless you let them go, but how am I just supposed to let something like that go?

I still appreciate both my mom and dad very deeply though. All that they do for me, the way they care and provide for me. The way my mom takes me to school in the mornings she's off and the way my dad takes me to Walmart late at night to get midnight snacks whenever I'm craving anything we don't have in the pantry at home. So it's not like I don't appreciate them, because I do. I just wish they took the time to understand me when I was younger. That way we would've created a stronger bond the older I get. I strongly believe that building a relationship with your child is important while they're still young. That way, the older they get the stronger the relationship will be because good relationships start when they're still young and growing, learning and experiencing.

Untitled

Anonymous

Not only that but they can also apply this to any other relationship they gain along the way. Whether that may be a friendship or intimate relationship. Anyways, I'm still young and it's my parents first time living too. Maybe things will get better as I get older, or maybe they don't. Anywho, as you get used to it you learn to live with it also.

I don't wish my bad experiences on anyone but fortunately, God has been with me through it all. Psalms 23:4 says "even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Even though I have issues with my relationship with my family it has helped me deepen my relationship with the Lord and I wouldn't trade that for anything. These experiences have shaped me into the person I am today and I believe every experience has a lesson learned and a story to tell.

That was my story and it has taught me life long lessons that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

The Dance of Life

By Kaylee Mitchell

Do you ever feel like there is simply too much on your plate

Whether it is stress, insecurities, or the fear of making mistakes
Throughout the dance of life it can be difficult to find your way
Navigating twists and turns every single day

Just like a rollercoaster life has its ups and downs
Its ok to be scared just keep your feet on the ground
Make time for the things that make you feel whole
Friends, Family, Music, whatever fuels your soul

One thing I know that is for certain
is that your problems won't go away by simply shutting them
behind closed curtains

Any Problem no matter how big or small
Though at times it feels impossible it can always be resolved
It is now your turn to rise like the sun
Think of all you can accomplish and all you have overcome

With each step forward you shed a part of the past
Determined to make an impact one that will last
Tune out what society tells you to do
All of your fears and mistakes are a special part of what makes you,

You!

The Appointment

by Lily Assadi

Me: Ok. You finally have a chance to be heard. Speak what you've always wanted. No? Nothing? Come on brain THINK! I want to be heard. But... maybe I'm being heard by the wrong person. Maybe I don't deserve to be heard... No. I should be heard. I have to be heard. I need to be heard. Just breathe.

Whatever I say in there will come from the heart. Everyone who feels unheard, I would like you to know that "Everyone deserves to be heard".

Big Bully

By Elizabeth Kennedy

Kierra's teacher must've hated her guts. No, really! Mr. Greene always picked on Kierra. Constantly, she was getting in trouble just for being curious. Curiosity isn't a crime, is it? Kierra told her mom about Mr. Greene. She tried her best to ignore his bullying, but it kept going on and on and on and on. And worst of all, he taught English, her favorite subject!

So, Kierra was miserable. I mean, who wouldn't be? If you were being bullied by a teacher who taught your favorite subject, I bet you'd be miserable, too. But how would Kierra ever get out of her despair? Kierra didn't really know until the first day after winter break.

Kierra was feeling confident. She had just gotten her new sparkly shoes and was still in the holiday spirit. Mr. Greene, however, was not, and the minute Kierra walked into the English classroom, the battle had begun. Mr. Greene commented on how her shoes were distracting and even tried to make her take them off. Usually, she would, but these were her favorite shoes, so she put up a fight. Mr. Greene said her shoes were a violation of the school handbook.

Now, this simply wasn't true, and Kierra knew it because she read the handbook every time Mr. Green sent her to the front office. Plus, her friend was wearing similar sparkly shoes, and she wasn't asked to take hers off. So, after their little dispute, Kierra was sent to the front office. But this time, she was happy. She had finally stood up for herself; and boy, it felt good. She skipped and twirled until she reached the front office and waited until her principal was ready to talk to her. When she was, Kierra was already prepared. Kierra started off the meeting with her principal by reciting the following:

Big Bully (continued...)

By Elizabeth Kennedy

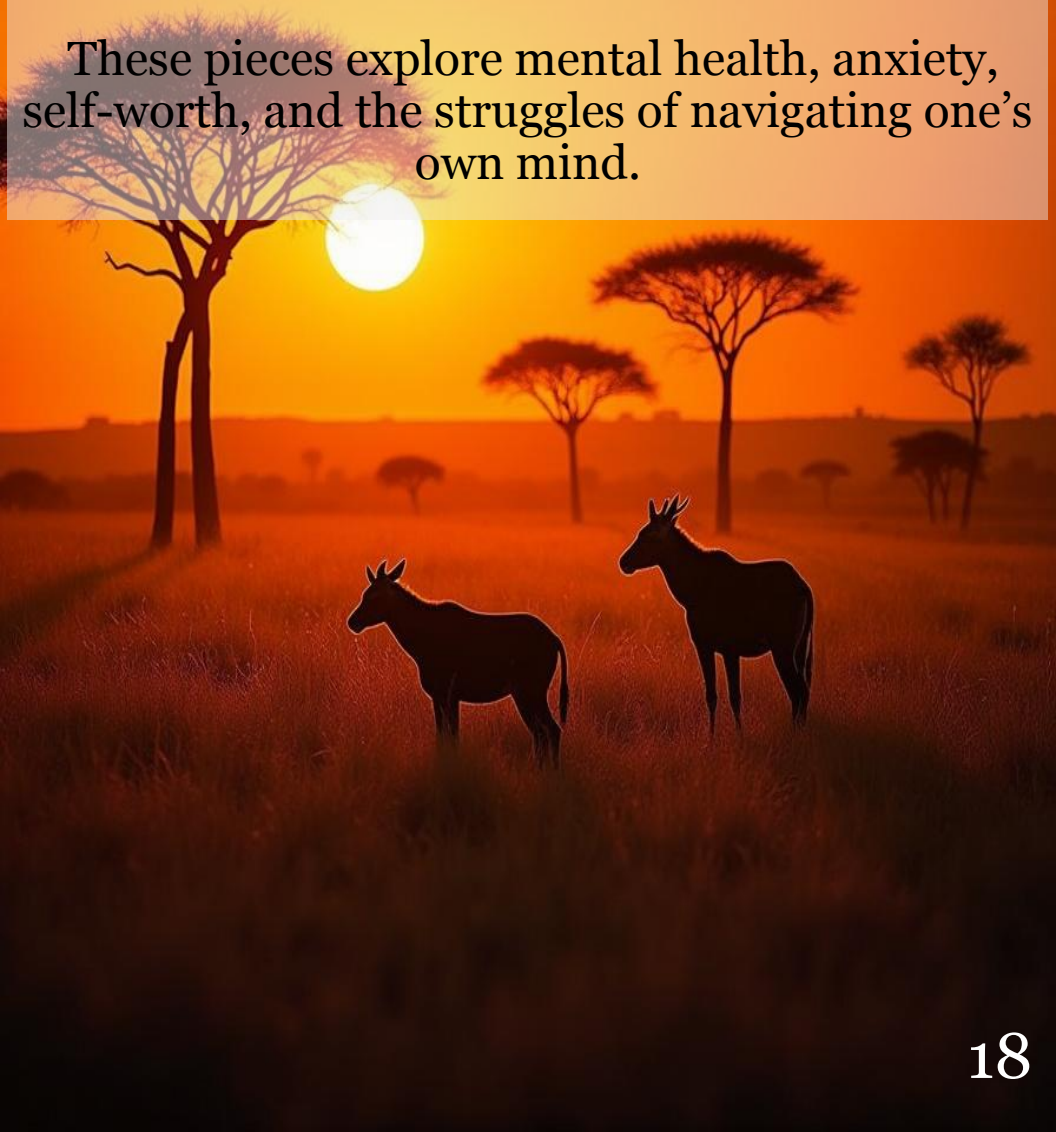
“Rule number 34, section 3, paragraph one,” she said, “ shoes must be closed-toed for fear of students tripping . It is preferred that younger students wear shoes that don’t require tying for safety purposes.”

That was all the handbook had about shoes and it said nothing about sparkly shoes being a violation. Matters were discussed, and Mr. Greene confirmed three times that sparkly shoes were OK.

So, Kierra went out of the front office the same way she came in: happy, proud, and innocent. And just like that, the bullying was stopped, and there were no more violations for Kierra. Kierra also learned a vital lesson. Stand up for yourself when no one else can. She continued to stand up for herself for the rest of her life, and although it wasn’t always happily ever after, she could always be proud of herself for trying to do the right thing.

Chapter 3: Introspection & Mental Battles

These pieces explore mental health, anxiety, self-worth, and the struggles of navigating one's own mind.



A Conversation with my OCD

Anonymous

Thought

Rinse

Repeat

Thought

Rinse

Repeat

Thought

Rinse

Repeat

Thought

Oh wait, I did it wrong. I have to start again.

Thought

Rinse

Repeat

Thought

Rinse

Repeat

Thought

Rinse

Repeat

Thought

Rinse

Okay, it's not that hard. I just have to get it right.

Thought

Rinse

Repeat

Thought

Rinse

Repeat

Crap, what am I doing? It shouldn't be so hard to just-

Thought

Rinse

Get this feeling out of me.

Thought.

A Conversation with my OCD

Anonymous (continued...)

It's a dark smoke dancing through my lungs.

Thought.

Rinse.

Repeat.

And it can't seem to get out.

Thought. Rinse.

It's like I can feel sickness spreading through my veins.

Thought.

There's something wrong in me. Please get it out.

Thought.

I just have to get it out.

Thought.

There's got to be a way to reverse it.

Thought.

There has to be a way to feel clean again.

Thought.

I don't remember what clean feels like.

Rinse.

Does it feel like cool rain falling through naked skin?

Repeat.

Or like warm steam comforting aching lungs?

Thought

Rinse

A Conversation with my OCD

Anonymous (continued...)

I've never known cleanliness.

Thought.

I've only barely touched it, felt it in myself.

Thought, rinse

I know how it is to hunger for purity.

Thought.

Rinse. Repeat.

Like soap lathered on a fresh wound.

Thought.

Rinse.

Repeat.

When you do everything you can to rid yourself of germs.

Thought.

Rince.

Of evil.

Thought.

Of paranoia.

Thought.

Of the voice in your head that cradles your fears and sings you to sleep with a knife to your throat.

Thought.

Rinse.

So you scrub yourself clean until your skin starts to bleed.

Thought.

A Conversation with my OCD

Anonymous (continued...)

And you feel fine for a second.

Rinse.

And then you realize there's no soap in the world that will make you pure.

Repeat.

That will make your conscience white as snow or will keep you safe until you fall into death.

Repeat.

There's no point.

Repeat.

And you know there isn't.

Repeat.

But you keep on going.

Repeat.

The Clear Water

By Kaitlyn Gilbert

The water was as clear as glass,
not hiding the world behind it.

Graceful fish swam, their vibrant fins
slicing through stillness,
sending ripples through the water.

I watch them move—effortless, free,
never racing, never rushed.

Each one follows its own path,
never stopping to ask if another
is faster, brighter, and better.

I always remind myself
I am not them, and they are not me.

Comparison is the thief of joy.
It isn't wrong to want to be my best self,
to grow, to glide, and to move forward.

But I don't need to outswim the rest
to feel good about myself.

And so, I will swim my own way,
letting the ripples of my journey
speak for themselves.

The Mechanical Heart

Anonymous

The source of energy!

The audience sees

Only sparks and wonders!

For what it means

If not instead, then it's in that case

Metallic mounds of green and gold

Ample desire! Forsaken tin man

Suffice to say, wonders work
off-pace

A mechanical heart, can only try so
hard

It tries to not forfeit

But certitude is a burden

Left only metal parts, this is not no
boneyard

Knightly chest plate, may be
shiny

But hold attempts, to remove
the bolts

Though satisfaction is lost in
the leaves

Tear streaking passion, forgets
not to leave

At the bottom of this beating
fuzz

This tin man heart

Takes more than three sparks



The Death of Hyacinth(us)

Anonymous

Jealousy doesn't mix well with love
As a result, blood is spilled
But here blooms a flower
One that holds life
Years go by without notice
Yet now it stands right in front of me
Seek out the open field
Then you will find hyacinth



Another version convinces you to look deeper
At first glance, the display bewitches
Take a closer look, and tell me what you see:

A tennis ball

A racket

Flowers; what does this imply

All interpretations lies in your hands

This one relates to the last

Yet it carries its own perception

Can a story parallel to one's struggles

Stay alert and watch on all sides

When passed down from generations to the next

Hold on tightly and don't lose that beauty

What do we see without knowing the truth

Don't get stuck in the past; this is all on you

Questioning My Being and My Future

By Andia Noelle

I lost my rhythm, lost my rhyme,
Lost my flow,
Couldn't ever find the time,
I was drained from the get-go.
Immersed in all my thoughts,
Yet I couldn't find the words,
It's all absurd,
My brain jumping from
One thing to the third.

Lord, I pray,
I'm begging on my knees,
Please tell me why I always cry,
What entity is preventing me, Pushing my
heart off to the side?
The only thing that I wanted
Was to spread my wings and fly,
Look to the sky, cross my heart,
Don't wanna die.

I look up and ask you,
When will it be my time to show up?
Life's flashing before my eyes,
I ain't had the time to grow up.
I was living fast, wanting cash,
I never looked back to reflect.
So I press my hands, bow my head,
And ask you Lord,
What's next?

My Mind at the Moment

By Andia Noelle

I'm tired. Worn out. Exhausted.
Life right now has been
Confusing and frustrating.
I'm not sure how to move forward.

People have been especially draining.
I genuinely despise being the one
Who always says hi, always texts first,
Never forgets to say
Good morning!
How are you?
You ok?
I love you.

I'm not saying that I don't like caring,
But I'm tired of nothing being reciprocated.
People only talk to me
When they need something,
And I always have to
Beg and plead
For someone to listen.

I feel bad though,
When people do listen,
To my thoughts, my struggles.
In a way, it feels like I'm
Placing a burden on them,
Or being too emotional.
Am I doing that now?
I'm sorry.

Chapter 4: Growth & Identity

These pieces explore self-realization, personal evolution, and how our own experiences shape who we become.



The Single Mother

By Breanna Green

Breanna sat at the small kitchen table in her modest apartment, surrounded by the remnants of breakfast—crumbs from toast and a half-empty cup of coffee. Her one-year-old son, Zyair, played happily on the floor, surrounded by colorful toys that caught his curious eyes. The morning sun filtered through the window, casting a warm glow, but inside, Breanna felt the weight of her responsibilities pressing down on her.

Being a single mother was not easy, especially while trying to stay in school and work part-time at Whataburger. Breanna had dreams of earning her degree in nursing, but each class felt like a mountain to climb. She loved learning, but the reality of juggling lectures, assignments, and a job was overwhelming.

Every morning, she would strap Zyair into his stroller, a mixture of excitement and anxiety churning in her stomach. She kissed his forehead and whispered, "I'll be back soon," before heading out the door. Class would fly by in a blur, and by the time she got to Whataburger, she was already exhausted. The fast-paced rush of orders and customers kept her on her toes, but the smell of burgers and fries reminded her of how far she was from her goals.

One particularly long day, after finishing her shift, Breanna returned home to find Zyair asleep in his crib. She tiptoed in, her heart aching with love and guilt. She had missed his bath time, his laughter, and the chance to read him a bedtime story. Sitting on the edge of his crib, she felt tears well in her eyes. "I'm doing this for you," she whispered, but the weight of her choices felt heavy.

As the weeks turned into months, Breanna found herself struggling more than ever. One afternoon, after a grueling day at work, she sat down to study but couldn't keep her eyes open. Zyair crawled over, his tiny hands reaching for her. She scooped him up, and in that moment, she realized how much she missed being fully present for him.

The Single Mother (*continued...*)

By Breanna Green

Determined to make a change, Breanna decided to reevaluate her schedule. She met with her academic advisor, who suggested online classes that would allow her to study while caring for Zyair. They mapped out a plan, and Breanna felt a flicker of hope.

With renewed energy, she adapted to her routine. Zyair's naps became her study sessions, and she set aside time for homework after he went to bed. The days were still long, but she started to find a rhythm. Breanna also communicated with her manager at Whataburger, who was understanding and adjusted her hours to fit her needs better.

One evening, while she was studying, Zyair crawled over with a toy in his hand. He looked up at her, his big brown eyes sparkling with curiosity. Breanna smiled, setting her books aside. They spent the evening building towers with blocks, and she realized that these small moments were just as important as her studies.

As the semester progressed, Breanna found herself excelling in her classes, fueled by her love for Zyair and her determination to create a better life for them. She knew the journey would still be filled with challenges, but every late night spent studying and every shift at Whataburger brought her closer to her dreams.

One night, after completing a major assignment, Breanna celebrated by reading Zyair his favorite bedtime story. As she turned the pages, his eyes widened with wonder, and she felt a sense of fulfillment wash over her. In that quiet moment, she understood that while the struggle was real, the love they shared was the strongest force of all.

Together, they were building a future filled with hope, one day at a time. Breanna was not just a mother; she was a warrior, and Zyair was her greatest treasure.

But Are You Okay?

By Ava Williams

You always seem to help and care about others

But are YOU okay

You smile in everybody's face

But when they walk away

That smile really fades away

Are you REALLY okay?

The audience screams and cheers for you at the top of their lungs

It feels like you got the victory and you won, but are you okay

You make sure everybody else feels safe and encourage them each day

But are YOU okay

Your smile lights up the room

You always have everybody laughing and spreading nothing but joy

But really deep down inside, you are just trying to hide the pain and fill a void

ARE

YOU

OKAY

You say you're okay, but you woke up in the morning with all that pain

You tried to put on a fake smile

But it doesn't hit the same

Are you okay

You pray and have every ounce of faith

But are you okay

You say you are okay but in your voice I can hear all the pain

ARE YOU OKAY

If the answer is no, then that's okay

I hate the feeling of seeing you in pain

If I had a choice, I would make it all go away

I would literally do anything for you

And would hope you do the same

What Happened?

By Lily Assadi

Elementary was a blast
But that's all in the past
Now High School is near
Excited, no, I fear
What happened to that carefree child
the one who loved to play
The one who was wild
She's gone now I guess
It's probably for the best
I'm popular now
I'm important to them
To them
I don't know, but something's different
I only care about what they think instead
Of Me

I should be the only voice I need to hear
The only voice that's there
But all I hear
Isn't Me
What happened to me?
I used to be free
I grew up
And realized
When my opinion doesn't matter
To Me
I'm not free
I'm not
Me

Faith Over Control

By Sarai El Amin-Williams

Human nature wields an unimaginable power
Everybody seeks the same old fleeting things
Yet, in the end, what do these moments bring?
When you reach the pinnacle of the tower,
Will you rise to meet it, or in fear cower?
Lack of recognition, validation stings—
And we cling to false comforts that life brings.
If God took control, would it cause us to sour?

To feed our satisfaction, we try
To seize control, never asking for grace.
We must look to God above, not to the lie,
And find salvation in His loving embrace.
In truth, we need to take action, to try

To live seeking His guiding trace.

The Mafia Queen

By Breanna Green

In shadows deep, where whispers reign,
A figure stands, the mafia queen,
With eyes like steel and heart of fire,
She commands respect, ignites desire.

Her empire built on grit and grace,
In a world of danger, she finds her place,
With cunning wit and a fierce decree,
She rules the night, the mafia queen.

In tailored suits and heels that click,
She navigates the game so slick,
With loyal hearts and a steely hand,
She weaves her web, a master plan.

Amidst the fate,
She plays her cards, she won't be late,
With every move, a calculated scheme,
In the shadows, she reigns supreme.

But beneath the power, a heart does beat,
For love and loyalty, she finds her seat,
A guardian fierce, a lover true,
In her kingdom, she's the glue.

So raise a glass to the queen of night,
With strength and charm, she takes her flight,
In a world of chaos, she stands serene,
Forever fierce, the mafia queen.

Chapter 5: Hope and Connection

These pieces explore the principles of love, friendship, and the people who help us heal and grow.



Girl From the Stars

By Dove Beaugard

You are the girl
Who's enveloped in atoms of gravity.
You are the girl
Who one looks in the night sky
To capture.
You seem to think
That your light dims away
Yet, I see you so clearly.
You fall in love
With the echoes of artistry
And I fall in love with your love.

You are a girl
Who is torn up and messy and hungry.
I am the same, never tame.
It's the torment that keeps us from parting.
Reading the palms of your hand
Is like tracing the paths in astronomy.
You're in the waves
You're in the fire,
And I'm scared that I'll fall more in love.

I am the earth and I'm weak
And exhausted from feeding the hungry.
Yet you follow me into glens
Whispering "Damage won't make me less worthy."
Play with my hair in the breeze,
Nurture every oasis I've got in me.
I know I'm easy to please.
When we're bitter and ugly,
I fall more and more into love.

The way that you beam
When you're next to me
Is brighter than gold in a tapestry.
When you look at me I see
Your eyes are just cosmos
With radiant colors.
Streaming my being
Into something
Dazzling, beautiful.
And everyone sees
You're a girl from the stars.

Best Friend

By Gracie Upadhyay

I've made many friendships these days,
But nothing will compare to the one we had.
Not only did we share countless jolly memories,
But we went through many that were sad.

We would beg our parents to hang out a little longer,
Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.
We would plan out our life, and where we'd lived,
Even though we probably just finished kindergarten.

Every summer was parties and fun,
And memories shared with our family friends.
We would gossip and share all our secrets,
But most happy memories eventually end.

Today I still have close friends and family,
That love each other very much.
But on occasion, I think about the past
And the strong relationship between only us.

You were my best friend since birth
And we shared a strong bond.
My love for you has lived forever
But unfortunately, you did not.

Boy

By Andia Noelle

I don't usually write
About my heart,
Or, for lack of a better word,
Crushes,
But this one is,
How do I put this,
Odd...

See, I'm unsure of why
I'm so infatuated with this boy.
Maybe it's his interests,
Or maybe his looks.
But something about his presence
Draws me to him.
The funny thing is,
He could care less about whether I exist or not.
I highly doubt that he'd
Be attracted to someone...
Like me.

Maybe things will grow.
Heh, maybe he'll even write
Something in response.
(I'm sure he won't)
But, until something happens,
I'll be here, dwelling in my delusion.

The Secret Love

By Breanna Green

In shadows where the whispers dwell,
Two hearts entwined, they weave a spell,
With stolen glances, furtive sighs,
A secret love beneath the skies.

In moonlit nights, they share their dreams,
Where passion flows in silent streams,
Their laughter dances on the breeze,
A hidden world, their hearts at ease.

They meet where time and space collide,
In hidden nooks, their souls confide,
A gentle touch, a fleeting glance,
In secret chambers, they find romance.

Yet in the light of day's embrace,
They wear the masks, conceal their grace,
For love, though pure, must often hide,
In shadows deep, their hearts abide.

But in the dark, their love will soar,
Like stars that shine on heaven's floor,
A bond unbroken, strong and true,
In secret love, it's me and you.

Chapter 6: Truth & Society

These pieces explore the principles of love, friendship, and the people who help us heal and grow.



Those Who Inherited

By Zuri Bryson

The familiar blaring of harmonious horns sounds on every TV in the country, the euphonious sound stealing attention from anything else. Every screen displays the same message, “On Today: Executive Cabinet Meeting! Live in Washington D.C.!”

The opening theme plays as the president argues animatedly—no, *comedically* with his cabinet, prompting the laughs of a notional audience off screen. The audience then gasps as one cabinet member dramatically storms out of the meeting, leaving the president shrugging and shaking his head at the camera.

This is the world we inherited. Politics and entertainment are synonymous, completely ignoring policy, devaluing facts and truth. Politicians enter survival shows to be elected into office and presidents are voted in purely by audience ratings on social media. And the adults sit and watch this, indifferent to the consequences of such a system. We youth are told that “this is better!” and “it makes it all so much easier to understand! We can finally relate!” The mindless conformity to such a system has turned American society into a nation of people who know nothing of actual policy, only watching, laughing, and gasping without a care in the world.

But some of us don't watch.

Those Who Inherited (continued...)

By Zuri Bryson

We don't have a name— that would make us an organized group, which gives the government yet another opportunity to fabricate a revolutionary plot for the next season of the presidency. What we can say though is that we deliver the truth. A group of nationwide young and educated writers, hackers, philosophers, activists— anything you can think of— that fight to bring truth to our untrained nation. We broke into national feeds and paused the regular programming of politicians spewing nonsense to garner followers, votes. We overrode these broadcasts with the truth, with *real* updates on what *really* is happening in the world, and even within our government.

One night, we were able to find and air footage of a legislator admitting that he hadn't even read the bill that he so passionately brought to the floor and debated in favor of. The networks were catapulted into a frenzy. The president was on air the next day, claiming that a “revolution” is upon us; that whoever put up the footage had paid the legislator to do so and everyone should “resist such forms of propaganda.” Hashtags like “anti-revolution” and “make politics make sense” (MPMS) flooded every form of media in the United States, sending the president's follower count through the roof, setting *us*, and the truth, back a few months.

But despite all of this, we're still working. We know that regardless of who set up this system and whoever is abusing it, the sickening fact is that it is up to us to fix it. No matter how young or incapable we may seem to those in charge, we hold potential energy, a power that they are blind to. And, while they sleep in their privilege, we plan to use it.

Beat Me to the Wall

By Briana Sonnier

Hasten until you're dead,

But climb until you fall.

Beat me to the wall,

Where the adventure begins.

Overqualified Undervalued.

The Cracks beneath my face show my former image,

My former image is a statue.

A statue stuck in steep struggles.

Bring me back to the wall.

Where the sweat down my back crawled,

Down to my underdrawers.

In an attempt to feed and free myself from anguished paws.

Over the wall how the humid air filled my lungs.

From the exhale of **Misunderstanding.**

The land of the free is not free for me.

The land of hopes and dreams robbed me,

Ran me to construction and **hiding,**

Ran me to your nearby cleaner when in finding.

Beat Me to the Wall

By Briana Sonnier

My kid must not speak like me,

Nor her ancestors.

My kid must wear jeans not like me,

My kid must lighten her skin,

Whiten her ancestry,

Bland out her pallet of old la Llorona and
chupacabra tales.

Me están molestando ma,

They are bothering me mommy.

“Ellas no me dejen solo ma,”

They won't leave me alone Mommy.

“Let me alisar mi pelo ma”

“Let me straighten mi pelo ma”

Let me straighten my hair mom.

I do not recognize this haze.

Forget my past but forget me also?

They call me, “Spicy, Hot, Latina Mami,”

The white dogs pull on mi falda y zapatos.

Break my traditions to live the **land of the free**,

Just to find out how high the cost was for me.

On the other side of the wall.

The wall is taller and the fall feels
more like a brawl.

On the other side of the wall,

The hopes and dreams to be on the
other side crawls.

Hasten until you're dead,

But climb down to a fall

I say again **beat me to the wall**

CareFree

By Elizabeth Kennedy

One day, I was happy, skipping, and carefree

The next day, my body turned against me

What was going on? Mama, can you help me

No, she said it was all a part of my story

Why, oh why, God, have you forsaken me?

But then I remembered the tale of my great-great-great
grandmother, Eve.

See, in the garden, she betrayed me, and I am reminded for
five days and four nights, twelve months a year, about how
her choice now makes me feel.

In a cycle of gruesome pain, not to mention this trick is played
every 28 days.

It is a shame the pain endured forty more years, no acre, no
mule!

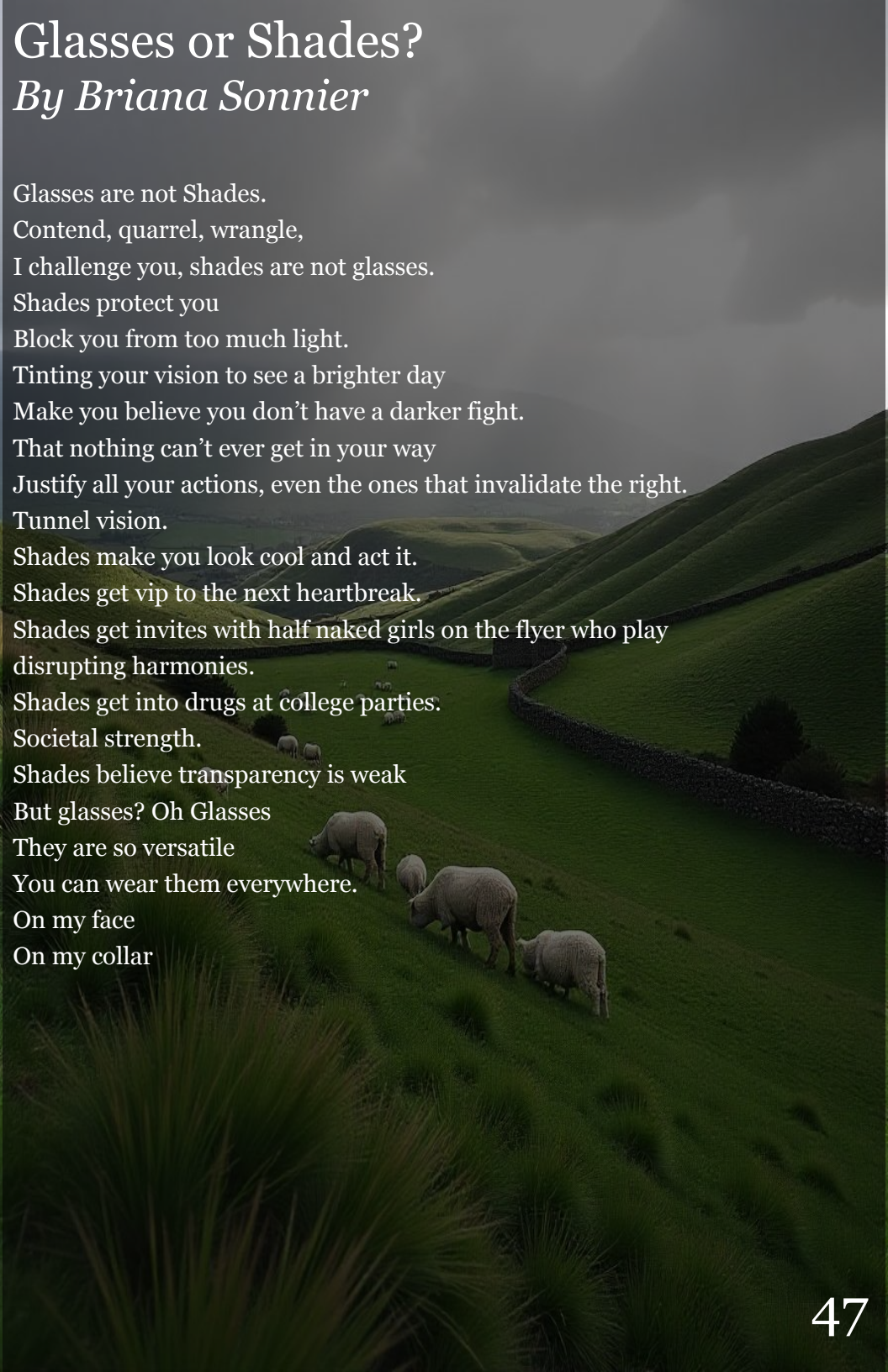
Oh, Mother Nature, please set us free.

Liberty, and justice for all that hear this plea.

Ain't I a woman? Yes, indeed, once a little girl who was happy,
skipping, and carefree.

Glasses or Shades?

By Briana Sonnier



Glasses are not Shades.
Contend, quarrel, wrangle,
I challenge you, shades are not glasses.
Shades protect you
Block you from too much light.
Tinting your vision to see a brighter day
Make you believe you don't have a darker fight.
That nothing can't ever get in your way
Justify all your actions, even the ones that invalidate the right.
Tunnel vision.
Shades make you look cool and act it.
Shades get vip to the next heartbreak.
Shades get invites with half naked girls on the flyer who play
disrupting harmonies.
Shades get into drugs at college parties.
Societal strength.
Shades believe transparency is weak
But glasses? Oh Glasses
They are so versatile
You can wear them everywhere.
On my face
On my collar

Glasses or Shades?

By Briana Sonnier

Even in my hair

Glasses make you look innocent

Accessible.

Proves the lesson 20/20 vision can make
you crumble.

Exhaling thoughts and emotions

That once fractured faith, now might never
prevail

But glasses leap believing they will stick
the landing .

Vulnerable.

And your eyes are open to the real.

You see leaves in spring breezes wither

You notice body language speaks thicker

That if you decide to not wear them one
day

You're considered something female that
barks see there.

Vulnerable.

But Human

So human you can see the bone

The heart bleeds on the sleeves of a coat.

So human you may strike a nasty tone.

Strike or get struck you must be as calm as
a still river and a boat.

Vulnerable.

So human I must ask you, what do
you wear?

I mean does it even matter when
they both bare a tear?

Deep inside or loud enough to
appear?

Wear neither as balance prevails...

So contend , quarrel, wrangle.

I challenge you to not be glasses nor
shades.

Life As a Young Girl

By Hannah Rogers

Life as a young girl

You watch the world around you

destruction becoming
synonymous with society

Life as a young girl

You hear the sounds of your
neighbors

the anger flowing through the
air

Life as a young girl

You taste the atmosphere

emissions and pollution
intensifying

Life as a young girl

You smell the multicultural
plains

people conforming to their fears

However in life as a young girl

You know the hope that can
arise

the unity that can be created

In life as a young girl

You sense the potential for
more

helping others who need it
most

See in life as a young girl

You are surrounded by
darkness

but You will be a shining light

Life as a young girl

may not always be **BRIGHT**

but the path and change You
make

Will always be **RIGHT**

Bios For the Authors

Lily Assadi is in the 8th grade. She likes writing and listening to music.

Dove Beauregard is a junior.

Zuri Bryson is a junior who has a strong passion for directing and filmmaking but also policy and activism. She has hopes of attending film school and going on to be a director for the stage and screen.

Addison Ceasar is a sophomore.

Sarai El Amin-Williams loves to create ceramics and dedicate her time to Future Farmers of America!

Kaitlyn Gilbert is in the 7th grade. She enjoys writing, reading, and supporting her sister, Lillian Gilbert, in everything she does.

Breanna Green loves to spend time with her friends, family, and her son the most.

Elizabeth Kennedy Ellison (Jones) is in 8th grade and an all-A honor roll student.

Kaylee Mitchell is in 8th grade. She has a strong passion for writing, playing volleyball, and traveling to other countries to learn more about the world. Kaylee also enjoys volunteering in her community and spending time with family and friends. She views writing as a true form of expression and hopes to inspire confidence and self-belief in young teens through her words.

Kashvi Nandagiri is a freshman. She loves to write and express her emotions through poetry. She is so grateful for this opportunity to add her work for the Stories of Tomorrow Project. She hopes you enjoy!

Andia Noelle is a singer, actress, and writer, and this is her first time sharing pieces of her work.

Hannah Rogers is a Junior.

Briana Sonnier is a Senior.

Gracie Upadhyay is in the 7th grade.

Ava Williams is a Junior.

