

FIRST PRIZE

Whispers and Lies

Bells ring, children laugh.
Friends share stories and jokes,
And not for the first time, I'm alone.
Outside my window, birds soar.
My heart wants to fly with them,
But instead, it feels as heavy as lead.
If only I could escape the prison that is my mind,
The pain that every day causes.

Whispers, lies echo off the halls;
Secrets told, friends betrayed,
The truth buried by falsehoods.
As I pass what feels like a million pairs of eyes,
My feet can barely obey the command not to run.
I want to hide more than anything,
Bade away until everyone forgets my name.
All of my remaining courage is lost.
Try to walk,
Try to talk,
Try to breathe,
Such simple things thus become impossible.

I hear kind voices ringing in my ears.
They tell me what I have never been able to tell myself:
Deep breaths,
Keep calm,
You can do this.
Walk,
Breathe,
Talk,
Smile.
Above all,
Try not to cry.

by Juliet Crowe (Grade Seven)
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FIRST PRIZE

The Ridge

Salty beads of sweat are lured into my eyes as I tear across the ridge.
I lean right and left to swerve around great maples.
Air whistles by my ears; oh, how I long for a sip of fresh, clean water.

I push up my grimy helmet, as the weight beneath me works its way over the roots and jagged rocks that cover the harsh, soggy terrain.

The only noises I hear are the birds warbling their songs as I make my way over and around great berms of nourishing, organic soil.

My arms swat at the haze of bugs around me to no avail, as my legs whine and whimper in anguish. With great misery, my stinging eyes are riveted from the rough terrain to see a joyous sight!

In front of me, the trail curves down the rocky ledge like a cat's tail.

Tilting myself forward, I glide down, realizing that all of my suffering was worth it to feel the exhilaration of descending such a giant beast. Jumping over roots and rocks as I go along, I yell in delight.

As the trail starts to mellow out beneath me, I see a simple white sign rippling in the wind, its eight letters completely change my disposition: *Trail End*.

by Hudson Jantzi (Grade Eight)
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SECOND PRIZE

If We Don't Care

If we don't care,
Our lands will be bare.
Our trees have fallen,
Our lives in despair.

If we don't act,
Our Earth won't be intact.

We depend on our Earth, is this how we give back?

If we don't see,
We'll beat and mistreat.
Our noxious actions will become mainstream.

If we don't stress,
Then our future selves will be in distress.
We'll look at ourselves and ask:
Why were we careless?

Yes, the end is always inevitable,
But you can't say this situation was unpredictable!
Surely, the end of our Earth is most undesirable,
But our actions have been terrible
 Abominable
 Horrible
 Deplorable

Now, open your eyes,
Inhale. Intake.
Is there no Band-Aid big enough to fix our mistakes?

So, to bring this to a conclusion,
Tilt your head just enough to uncover a solution.
Uncover a way for us to have less pollution
And ask yourself how the Earth got to this condition.
The consideration we put into our future has significance.
From now on, our decision-making will be tested on a global scale.
We will prevail.

by Athvika Gagendra Prasad (Grade Seven)
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SECOND PRIZE

The Comforts of History

It is comforting to know you are not the first to stand where you stand,
As well as to know you will not be the last.
It is comforting to know that mistakes were made but problems were solved.
History tells us what happened in order, in detail,
What came before and what succeeded it.
You'll know what comes next, unlike in the present.
The tales can be rollicking, adventurous, or brave,
But there are also the facts of how life went on evolving.
It's comforting to know in history-bound places, people ventured there also,
Left their mark somehow.
It's comforting to know you're never really alone,
Many people walked this Earth prior to you.
Someone, somewhere, walked a similar path to you, faced similar obstacles you're set to face.
Someone in time made mistakes like yours, failed like you, succeeded like you.
These are the comforts of history.

by Gabrielle Vilardi (Grade Eight)
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THIRD PRIZE

Standing on the Widow's Walk

I've stood upon the widow's walk
Many a stormy night,
When winds are high
And the sea is all affright.

I wonder if my poor sailor
Should live to tell the tale
Of his latest journey,
Through the calm and through the gale.

I wonder what he's seen,
All the many sights!
I wonder what he thinks,
On those sleepless nights.

Is he still alive?
Shall he see another spring?
Who knows but God
What tomorrow will bring.

So, my poor sailor,
Think of me,
Standing on the widow's walk,
Staring at the sea.

by Isabelle McCormick (Grade Seven)
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THIRD PRIZE

hand in hand

society's pressure on the youth
expectations put on and abused
look perfect, be a prodigy, better than the rest
you won't matter unless you're the best

women should look "perfect" at all times
a social ladder that we must always climb
cook and clean and serve all men
it's a cycle that repeats again and again

men, hide your emotions and "suck it up"
be strong and tough—tears, cover them up
the repeated excuse, "boys will be boys"
stereotypes we cannot destroy

the lighter your skin, the more successful you'll be
the discrimination that we cannot flee
judged by the colour of our skin
fighting a battle that we cannot win

society's ignorance on mental health
hide your pain, act with stealth
no one cares, suffer alone
figure it out on your own

fit yourselves into society's square
fix yourselves and live a nightmare
all of our lives we are taught to believe
that we'll never be enough, ourselves we deceive

the bigotry and prejudice, which we suffer
if we work together, we can all become tougher
with acceptance and love, fight together
share our struggles with each other

until a day when we are all free
where we can love who we love, be who we want to be
help, support, and care for one another
hand in hand, we can heal the world *together*

by Kyo Lee (Grade Eight)
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