



P A R K M O N T

poetry
F E S T I V A L

Poems by District of Columbia Students • Grades 6-12
SPONSORED BY PARKMONT SCHOOL, APRIL 29, 2023



In Memoriam

Judy Lentz's passions for poetry, community, and young writers converged and bloomed into The Parkmont Poetry Festival. In 1982 she and Ron McClain launched the inaugural reading and celebration—with Lucille Clifton as the Finalist Judge—and she helmed the event for 25 years.

With each passing year, Judy lovingly tended, expanded, and enriched what has become a little slice of DC literary history. She carried the words of each winning poem in her heart and relished her conversations with judges, teachers, and especially the student poets. We miss her fiercely and think of her constantly. Without her, none of us would be gathered here today to bask in poetry.

Thank you, Judy!

Many thanks to

Jacqui Michel and David Weisman

*for their passionate and enduring support
of the Parkmont Poetry Festival*

Zion Baptist Church

*for hosting and filming
our 41st Festival Reading*

Preface

We are pleased to share with you in this booklet the poems of Washington, DC's young writers. The Parkmont Poetry Festival was founded in 1982 to encourage and celebrate the voices and verse of student poets in public, private, and charter schools from all eight wards of the District of Columbia. We honor the promise of diverse young writers, the importance of reflection, the value of community, and the beauty of language. This year we proudly celebrate 41 years of spotlighting and sharing these students' talents and their unique perspectives on their worlds. We received over 350 poems for this year's Festival from students in grades 6 through 12. Our judges have selected these distinguished poems from the chorus of young voices expressing their spirits and vitality through poetry.

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Perceptions

A star looks like a bunch of fairies dancing in the sky
A bear's growl tastes like honey and wolf meat
A baby's cry feels like a vanishing mirage

Whenever I look at you, I hear a heartbeat
beat so fast it might pop out
Every time I bite an apple, I see an orchard
full of green and red apples

A new idea feels like someone building
a new house over an old one

TRUS' STEVENS, GRADE 8
CHARLES HART MIDDLE SCHOOL

Still With Me

Wrinkled like Yoda
Warm like her broth
Soft like the blankets she knitted long ago
She holds me on one thigh
She breathes out
The minty aroma
Dances in the air
Her smooth hair brushes up against me
Silver like pearls
I close my eyes
I'm still with her

JASPER FRELINGHUYSEN, GRADE 6
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

Stick around

I loved lemon drops and yellow labs
The smell of rain and brand new books
I loved to people watch on buses
And to smile at strangers because my mother said it would
 make their day
I wanted to make people happy

When I think of happiness
 I think of my sister's burnt caramel colored hair that falls into
 ringlets on her shoulders that gently bounces when she laughs

I think of my mother's hazel green eyes
 that sparkle when she's proud of me

It's that warm fuzzy feeling in your chest
 That spreads down to your fingertips
 that tells you stick around for another one of those rainstorms
just to smell the rain after it's passed

OLLIE PARACHINI, GRADE 7
EDMUND BURKE SCHOOL

Africa Speaks

The wounds you have inflicted on me are still hurting
My people, my goods, my life, all stolen
Look how my people lived so vibrant
with joy and never with complaint
The gold, the ore, and even my language
Gone, So unexpectedly, it was hard to gauge
The extent to which this would continue
The fire in my heart was subdued
Extinguished, without thought of the effects
No more jumping no more dancing, what remained were flecks
Of a society once very successful
How could one be so cruel
You have destroyed me as you progressed
Came into my land, and treated me as less
You reduced me to an animal
An ape, a species with no reason at all
Forced your western ideas and religion on me
All to gain land and riches and be wealthy
Before, you left me with absolutely zero
But now you say it was a while ago
You pay slave owners but not the slaves
And give little just to save face
You forget what you did
And how much we had to bleed
We took our own lives
So that we might not be led into demise
A world where we would have no will
No freedom, or platform to show our skill
Abilities that were hidden because of this narrative
That we were dirty, not worthy enough to live
Can you ever be forgiven
Do you even deserve to be forgiven
For the atrocities you committed against us
The time you stole; ruined a world so precious
Full of life, light, and community
Replaced with hatred, distrust, animosity,

My answer is yes

For humans are not without failure and fault
Lord forgive them, for what they do they know not
But am I due nothing
For the crimes committed against my children
The diamonds on that crown are not yours
The rubies the emeralds and the bronze
They are mine
In my museum, should they shine
Is wrong of me to ask
Is it a hard task
To give back stolen property,
Stolen history and money
I think not.

KENECHI EMUWA, GRADE 9
SAINT ALBANS SCHOOL

Ode To Immigrants

Tired of suffering,
wanting a new lifestyle.
Brave enough to break the laws.
Courageous enough to take that risk.
Fearless of the consequences.

Walking through the desert.
Swimming through bodies of water.
Praying they won't be caught.
All for an opportunity for change.

Coming to a place you would never imagine being.
Attempting to create a better future for your descendants.
Leaving home at the risk of never finding home again.

Having the courage to close a door,
to open a new one.
Some welcome you,
others want you out.

Following the wise words of Emma Lazarus,
we should all "lift our lamps beside the golden door."

HECTOR REYES, GRADE 12
GONZAGA COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

There's a Robin in Our Garden...

There's a robin in our garden,
Amongst the yellow blooms.
He still cheeps along with the whispering waves,
Spring is on the loom.

The tea's on the kettle,
There's a battered box of tools.
A freshly ironed suit and tie,
Waiting in your room.

Though you may not be here,
Even though we know you've gone,
Our love will never stop;
Our hearts, always full.

We see you watching down on us,
Smile as we thrive.
Joining in with our laughter,
Following our lives.

A proudly presented box of medals,
Photos adorn the walls.
A book full of cherished memories,
Is being written as we celebrate you.

There's a robin in our garden,
Always gentle and smart.
He doesn't perch too far.
He's here,
Deep in our hearts.

BETH CHURCHWARD, GRADE 9
BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF WASHINGTON

To the bird I met on a cold winter's morning

I saw a hawk, perched on a fence
Among the hoarfrost-dusted grass
And branches of the morning yard
It stared—I, curious.

A ruffling wind (The wish to fly
Those feathers red, that baleful eye?)
You shifted on your perch, and I
Moved reciprocally.

We stayed a moment, glancing swift
At one each other, strange and new
You shifted soft-lined wings and flew
I watched you through the clouds.

You leap and fly, with yellow eyes
With fear and hunger curdling slow
(To hunt) to kill and eat you go
Past city-risen walls.

Stream-winding mountains, hills that rise
In the frozen-glistening haze
The wind shifts wheeling, a surmise
That draws you past my gaze.

Where are you now? I do not know
The trails of the wind and snow
You follow are unknown to me
But still, I search the sky.

You may be wheeling high above
The forests green or red or bare
Or yet the mountains you may love
The lichen, stones, and frigid air.

I'm not content to leave you be
Your predatory mystery
I strive to find your majesty
I remain, searching still.

I saw a hawk, perched on a fence
Among the hoarfrost-dusted grass
And branches of the morning yard
I haven't seen it since.

ROWAN MAGNELL, GRADE 8
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

The Bus Stop

I missed my bus today
I can't help but sob
Can't help realizing
This isn't what's going on

Buses can be people
People important in your life
Thinking you might just know
Everything, when that's just a lie

Bus stops are lifetimes,
Eras and people along the way
Bus stops are different
Each time deciding to leave or stay

Then there's you and me
Having to face a reality
A bus can't stay
For long, if thinking logically,

Always needing to catch up
In order not to lose it
Hands down, now it's too late
You tried, but you couldn't do it

I missed my bus today

But that's okay
I have fairly learned that
Buses don't have to stay anyway

JIMENA IRAHETA, GRADE 9
PARKMONT SCHOOL

Kids Still Die

In 2022 Kids Still Die,
Black and white.

While the kids are coughing, hooked to ventilators
The old and rich who feed them lies stay safe, and live on a while

Still eating blood and gold

They look the other way

Kids die at the hooves of the police.
Being crushed under their boots
The kids can't breathe.

The news anchors who shouldn't be taken seriously
Say that we are divided
While dividing us even more
Because they know if we stay divided, we can never rise up
We can never finally lift the boot off our necks

The kids will die trying to save the burning Amazon
While kids will die at the warehouses of the same name
Organizing workers

The Louis and Maries are now the Elons and Jeffs
The kids grab their forks and knives

All the kids will die

The kids who are trapped in the wrong bodies,
The kids who are blamed for something they weren't ever a part of,
The kids who are praised and worshiped, but now forgotten,
The kids who are allowed to have a roof over their heads for only a
 few more months,
The kids whose only crime is the color of their skin

They still beat the Kids who die
Even if they were in their own homes
Even when they are protesting the very system doing the beatings
They still beat them with bullets and laws.

For a whole summer, we marched
We marched for the kids who die
We screamed the names of the kids who die
The screams and prayers of these kids ring throughout our history
Today is history

They called us terrorists
While they fought back against the peaceful and pacifists
With clubs and pepper spray
dogs and rubber bullets

The people see this
The rich retreat into their bunkers

The blood of the kids who die fuels the people
The old and rich know this
They lie about the kids who die
They don't want the people to see
They quickly bury the kids in mass graves

They lock up the kids by the millions
They lock up the kids who are weak and ill
They lock up their hope
Their future
Their dreams

They don't want us to know that kids have been dying for centuries
The people who lick the boot of the old and rich don't want to feel guilty
For letting the kids die.

The artists paint the kids who die
With brushes and words
Pens and paper
On the walls of boarded-up shops

Kids are denied the rights to their bodies
Being caged for the crime of autonomy
The kids die trying to be themselves
The rights to feel comfortable in their own bodies
To feel comfortable in this society

Change is slow
We have a holiday celebrating the end of an evil
that is forever a scar on the history of the nation
While rich and old debate if that history should ever be taught
The people fight back against the old and rich
suffocating their right to a voice
While a law to protect that right is shot down

Like the kids who die

But the day will come—
Maybe it will take another 100 years
But it's coming
The marching feet of the masses
The people will be as one
The colors of the people will merge together
A rainbow of hope
One day our ark will come
The song of the people will ring throughout the land
It will be heard for miles and miles
The song of the kids who die

This poem is inspired by Langston Hughes' poem "The Kids Who Die" (1938). Some lines are taken directly from the original poem.

KATE MCNICHOLAS, GRADE 9
THE FIELD SCHOOL

The Ways In Which We Resist

When I think of my people
I think of Resistance
Resistance is when Claudette Colvin didn't give up her seat,
9 months before Rosa Parks got arrested for doing the same thing
It didn't seem to be planned
She says, "Whenever people ask me why didn't you give up
when the bus driver asked you? I say it felt as though
Harriet Tubman's hands were pushing me down on one shoulder
and Sojourner Truth's hands were pushing me down on the other shoulder"
Resistance is when the Black Panther Party
inspired by the need for self-defense refused to lay down their arms
Resistance is when from plantation to plantation
enslaved men, women, and children could use spirituals to communicate
Resistance is when my grandmother decided that wearing her hair
In a slick straight bun the military enforced was white-washing
Her and her culture so she left and she made her afro big and loud
And that made her feel as if she made her ancestors proud
When I think of my people
I think of Resistance
And I think of all the people who have had to resist
I think of the Polish freedom fighter
Stanislawa who smuggled weapons against the Nazis at 23 years old
I think of the pitifully armed Jewish men and women
who were able to hold off German attacks for nearly a month in Warsaw
I think of Malala who continued to try to get an education
Even after her diary was published and the Taliban
Set a bounty on her.

Sometimes Resistance is loud and deafening
Sometimes Resistance is still and quiet
Sometimes Resistance leaves you blinded by smoke and tears—
But where would we be if we didn't resist for a better world?

AMINA BRADFORD, GRADE 8
SHERIDAN SCHOOL

The Great Wave off Kanagawa

The hull pitching, dipping, plowing abruptly
through the whitewash, the midnight blue.
Like a fluid mountain range spewing
Salty spray, rising higher every interval.

On the horizon, two mountains, one
so still, so eternal, the other
looming, our inevitable demise. The wall
Of water, of darkness, inching nearer
And nearer with each consecutive stroke.

The everlastingness of Fuji could never
save us now. The wall persisted,
continuing to climb into the heavens,
the sky turning from cerulean to
the darkness of night, of death.

It had arrived. Was it death?
Was it the mountain? Surely both.
The bow climbed, and climbed towards
the stars, now vertical. A mighty
crash of darkness, then white light.

That moment, our bodies plunged deep,
but our souls ascended skyward, peace.

WITT COBURN, GRADE 12
SAINT ALBANS SCHOOL

Sting

You know that feeling
That starts deep within your stomach
And bubbles up through your gut
And it feels like something is stuck
But not butterflies
More like wasps
That sting and strike until
You clutch your side and close your eyes
And reach through your mind to understand the source
of your unbridled concern
You choke, and cough and spit,
Desperate to relieve yourself of the incessant pain
You cup your hands and catch the fluttering creature
It looks delicate, and dainty,
Beautiful in a fragile sort of way,
But, when you hold it up to the light
The truth is exposed
An ugly, thrashing bug,
Vicious in its appearance and action
You freeze, unsure what to do,
With the grotesque insect before you
Instinct takes over, and without a second thought
You shove the hideous wasp between your lips
Feeling it sting all sides of your mouth,
you almost can't bear to swallow it
You want to scream and cry
And give this undesirable organism to someone else
But you don't
Instead you steel your nerves and squeeze your eyes shut and gulp
Forcing the wasp back to your stomach

SIMRA JAVAID, GRADE 11
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

People Pleaser, Me Praiser

I speak this poem of curfew and prophets
In praise of I, the smoke leaving the chimney.
I praise my sunny skin, my sharp eyed vision,
the breeze of hair above my scalp.

I praise my tall triumph.

No more the great language I speak;
Laughter covers the pining trees,
as I parachute through life's obstacles.

But I catch a glimpse of unimportance—
Vacuums full of worry:
corruption is a candle;
There is more uneasy than calm in life.

Between the cuts, I squint knowledge.
We are ours and none to share.
It is the well known I.
I hear whistles of fragments and
I am who I trust.

CRYSTAL ROGERS, GRADE 8
CHARLES HART MIDDLE SCHOOL

Eyes

Staring at the bridge of my mother's nose
I could've sworn her eyes were
Green like the cold spring pond she married into
But the eyes staring back at me are brown
Eyes pinching the skin on my skull like my brother when he got
Tired of my tendency to turn to violence
when things didn't go my way
Because there are rules and order and routines
And I am scared of change
My mother says I am "quirky"
Because that is the word she uses when she does not want to admit
Her child is autistic
And it is genetic
My mother
With eyes brown like the wood of a cross
used to teach her, to teach me that
Deviation from the norm is a sin
I'm sorry that I act wrong
Because though I try to love you
You cannot see me
And I don't know if your mind is like mine or if I got it from dad but
Mom you said you would love me if I was quirky
So why not if I am autistic
Why is it taboo that my brain works different
I'm sorry it's too much to look into your iris
I could've sworn your eyes were green
Because I cannot love a mother with brown
Eyes
Staring at the bridge of my nose
Wondering how mine turned out blue

NOA FAWCETT, GRADE 8
SHERIDAN SCHOOL

Metamorphosis

The metamorphoses of early autumn and late spring
are one and the same.

The kiss of the frigid breeze blessing you,
The crisp water slithering down the stream,
The bright jeweled moss with spores and seeds grown from slim stems
Infused, rooted into the rocks, yet so easy to remove,
Soft as silk, luxuriant, thick, like nature's pillow.

The changes remind me of the beautiful days to come,
And the ones that have come to pass.

The sound of rustling leaves,
In autumn soon to change color and fall,
In spring only just emerged,
Scatter across the forested hills.

The arriving and leaving birds,
Wrens, Swallows,
Flippantly sing without worry and
Fill the air with piercing and cheerful melodies
Which slip
Through the rustling branches and emerald leaves
Through the slithering stream and soft moss
to my
Listening
Ears.

NEVE AYVAZIAN, GRADE 8
MARET SCHOOL

Sweet World

Our world is sugarcoated

We see screaming neons
But can we wear green-lensed glasses
And let the sweet world turn simple

Can we climb the low-branched apple tree
In the center of a grassy stone-studded meadow
Then pick its fruit

Not making them into candy apples

Can you see life's
Crooked windows
The mossy wooden floors
Jammed door

And not see sugar

So we form a community—
Not seeking
Prepackaged waffle fry cravers
Or dewy grass haters

Because we don't chew the cookies
With dandelion-shaped frosting
We clip dandelion stems with our dirty fingernails
And grind the sour petals to a pulp between our back teeth

We don't add sugar

We drag our fingertips against horses' rough manes
Pet their noses, buzzing with mosquitoes—
We don't slice them open and sprinkle sugar
On their bloody, broken bodies

Because we don't sugarcoat life

MAYA RUBEN, GRADE 6
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

Memories

I don't remember much of you.
Just the corner of your smile,
The light in your eyes as bright as stars
And how your house smelled of flowers as sweet as spring.
Every time,
I close my eyes,
Imagine your laugh,
Your heavy accent,
I try to piece everything together.
Try to imagine you.
I'm always so close, so close to see you—
It all fades to a color as dark as shadows.
I wish I could remember memories,
and laugh about how I was a part of it
But mostly, I feel the lump in my throat,
the throbbing of my ears
And the BOOM! that echoes in my head
As I start to feel like I'm falling.
And there's no one there to catch me.
But I know you would if you were alive.
When my sadness has been reduced to tears,
And on a particularly good day, I sit on my bed and talk to you,
Hoping my words reach all the way to heaven.

KIRA NEUFELD, GRADE 6
WASHINGTON LATIN PCS, COOPER CAMPUS

Raised By

I was raised by music
The feet-tapping,
Hand-clapping
Finger-snapping
Soul-trapping
rhythm and blues
Kind of music

I was raised by a finger-pointing
Never ever sharing
Always keeping something hidden
Acting like she isn't caring
Kind of older sister

I was raised by a protective
Hearing is selective
Has been independent for her whole life
If you don't listen to her, she will bring you strife
"If you don't get here right now!"
Always saying I'm in trouble,
even when I don't know how
Kind of mother

I was raised by a healthy
Wants me in life to be wealthy
Taking me ice skating
If I were hurt, he would be by my side aiding
Kind of father

I was raised by music and family

AMY TESFAYE, GRADE 7
PARKMONT SCHOOL

In which i am visited by Angels who speak to me of Death

at orange Dawning, when the World is all of a Hush
the Angels come & the Angels sit by my Bed trying so
hard to be Quiet. but even in my most secret Dreams i
hear their footsteps & they sound like the Stars
Singing & i am Comforted. one Day they will bury
me in the Garden & i am Comforted. they will drown
me in the bath & when they softly push me
down with their big big Wings i will
be as peaceful as the pie-slice of Nothing between a tiger's
whisker & the Moon.
the Angels tell me that i will rot but not to
be Afraid because—!
because i am the Universe's very own baby
& the Spring is always coming:
under the Ground the Grass
has already begun to stir. & in the Dark
time when the Day & i are sleeping the Angels come
& whisper to us so we don't get
too Lonely. in our untongued Silence they touch our hair
& tell that Dying is like a warm pool—
the Girl you met in a hotel when you were Seven
holding onto your hand & leading you on bare
feet down a long long Hallway with a
Light at the End & you are carried Upstairs but in the next
Room the grown-ups are still laughing & you can hear the clink of
glasses. it's like this, say the Angels: when you do fall

you fall Gently.

ISABEL AVIDON, GRADE 10
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

Romeo and Juliet

It is thought that love brings the greatest happiness...
But the line between euphoria and despair is very thin
Destiny can be tragic but cannot be averted
(Star crossed) love burns bright but dies cruelly

Attraction is mistaken for attachment
Lust confused with love and a fling with forever
The fantasy ends, left with only the ashes
And reality becomes a hell that torments.

When the last spark of light disappears
Would you drink poison, stab yourself?
When the promises made are forever unfulfilled
Would you wish to feel absolutely nothing?

Four days is not forever
Who knows what would have been
If they only had more time?
Was it love or infatuation?

They died because they could not see the difference
Between the allure of the forbidden and real love
Their tragedy is that they were forced to choose
Too soon

NATALIE WEIS, GRADE 9
EDMUND BURKE SCHOOL

the words i wish i said

Just one more “I love you.”
One more chance for your weak, cold arms
to wrap around my limp body.

You tried to distract me.
Make me forget that you were leaving soon.

Even at your worst, you made the moments special.
Baking cookies.
Kneading the dough with your shaky hands.
Over
And
Over.

And over again.
“It’s better to do it standing.” You told me,
trying to swallow your tears.

Playing Wii bowling, trying to convince us
you used to be better. When you played on a team.
The jersey now sits in my closet.
Your name embroidered on the right breast.
A bowling ball patch on the left.
Yellow and wrinkled, waiting to be worn.

I tried to braid your hair, but it was too short after you cut it.
My fingers ran across your head,
wondering where the rest had gone.
You told me it was just a ‘*new hairstyle*’
A smile stretched across my face as I chuckled.
I told you the barber did a bad job.
Why on earth would someone cut their hair like that?
I thought to myself.
You laughed along.
It started to fall out because of chemo,
but you didn’t want me to know that.
Cutting it was faster.
Less painful. For you and for me.

You faked the smile.
Pretended.
You didn't want me to see you as
Weak.
Boring.
Sick.

Mom called and told me you left.
Pain ended.
You would be happier, she told me.
I knew you were gone, but it didn't hit me
that you would never come back.
The pain stung.
Burned.
Ached.

It was an unfamiliar feeling.
An ever-unsettling feeling.

They tell you it leaves.
The grief.

But they forgot to tell you about the guilt.
I could have called.
Hugged you tighter.
Tried more tears.
Been kinder.
I wish I could tell you one more time,
just how much
I love you.

—the words i wish i said

VIVIAN KOCSIS, GRADE 9
THE FIELD SCHOOL

Lime Green

The sparkling can of Sprite is sizzling so loudly,
Cotton candy grapes don't have cotton candy filling,
Green M&M's are clean chocolate beans for jeans,
Lime key pies can make an appetite gracious,
Granny Smith apples all belong to Granny Smith,
Turtles tend to be terps while in the state of Maryland,
Iguanas wanna wear pajamas and grow beards,
Chameleons become colorblind with their camouflage,
Snakes slither just like Flash who is the world's slowest sloth,
Frogs leap to Sweet Frog to enjoy free frozen yogurt,
Water lilies and tiger lilies both love their pretty appearance,
Summer leaves stay on trees until they change color and then fall off,
Cactuses out in the deserts can be sharp as a COVID vaccine,
Fresh grass spread out for hangry horses to munch on,
You can use GloZell's green lipstick to become a queen bee.

SEAN QUIGLEY, GRADE 10
PARKMONT SCHOOL

Snakes

Snakes come from many different places.
When you think about it, they are just tails with faces.

TARA OPKINS, GRADE 8
CAPITOL HILL DAY SCHOOL

Let It Be Love

Let it be love:
a book full of relationships
a stairway of hope
a chimney for bravery
an attic full of ghosts
a basement filled with roaches.
Scrape me with your kiss—
This is the blueprint of our sketchy love
People are coming with a pile of erasers

MICHAEL CHASE, GRADE 8
CHARLES HART MIDDLE SCHOOL

Ode to Dumplings

Dumplings, little packets of satisfaction and joy,
bathed in a bowl with the salty sauce of soy.
Clouds that contain chicken and cilantro of jade—
when eating you, my happiness will never fade.

Dumplings, laughing as you boil in a pot,
the amount of sweetness that you hold is a lot.
As you cook, your smell steams a savory scent;
to my tongue, your taste is lent.

Dumplings, you look like white, fluffy snowballs.
You are a common favorite food in malls.
Your skin is a blanket warming your delicious inside,
riding down into my stomach on a slide.

VIKTOR HALL, GRADE 8
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

Truth, Lies, & A Beast

Truth was a scolding sun and lies were the chilled alleys,
You could melt from the heat or you could hide in the corners of the dark,
lurking, waiting, creeping....waiting on them....

They don't want the truth, the unfiltered,
the raw, the reckoning it could bring,

The lights it would shine on the dark hidden lies
that were swept in the corners of the musty room
and between the cracks of their fractured masks,

Truth is the expiration date on the long-spoiled ingredients
of a half-baked lie
fed to fill the belly of a sickly green beast

They would rather a comfort, a blanket, a shield,
the feeling of successful avoidance
and its welcoming embrace to those who will never deny it,

Let it wash away the stains of those
with the red-stained hands and silence the deafening guilt
wracking their heads, clawing at the walls of their brain,

Screaming echoes of pained yells that'll never matter much
when you've mastered shutting it out,
making it invisible, muted, distant, ghostly

Lies were the cool drink or hot tea
that wet the tongue and soothed the throat
of a shaded green beast masked by a shiny exterior
blinding the world and its every-seeing eyes to see the truth,

Lies were easy pills to swallow because they came
how you liked, chew-able, or crush-able,
you could swallow them whole,
the beast was well accustomed to that,
why shouldn't they be?

That's how they capture their prey

ERYN ATTAWAY, GRADE 10
RICHARD WRIGHT PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

Fikir Lehagere

(Love for my Country)

Today I will write a poem about Ethiopia.

It will not be a list of wars in this dystopia
It will not be a list of the loved ones I've lost
It will not be a list of the unfortunate people on the streets.

But rather about the culture
the spicy smell of *doro wot* lingers in my nose
and onto my clothes
or the pungent smell of *shunkerit* and *ithan*
while walking out the house.

But rather the way we ignore the itchiness
of the colorful *habesha kemist*
dusted with gold and white
as we run, fashionably late, to the big event.

But rather the presence of my family
how last summer we laughed together
as we failed to be quiet at four in the morning;
how we danced *eskista* and *gurageña*
as people slapped money on our foreheads.

But rather the smell of really strong *buna*
coming from the *jebena*
while hearing the popcorn kernels pop
and the chatter of voices, talking and having a good time

But rather how the crickets chirp in the dark
like my country is wishing me a goodnight.

MARAKE WOSEN, GRADE 7
PARKMONT SCHOOL

How to Paint the American Flag

1. splatter red

onto the canvas / need not fear if you don't have paint / blood
will do just fine / select a place to collect a sample / yes, Uvalde
/ it will be fresh / flowing / from fourth-grade bodies / pinned
to incarnadine carpets / with 45 mm bullets / they learned will
pierce beating hearts / before american indolence / on your way
out / see drawings of families / dancing under moonlight / sky
plastered with crayon dots and crimson stars / see posters titled
When I grow up, I hope to be... / buried beneath lifeless dreams
/ larger than the bodies you must hurdle

2. add blue

but make sure it's vibrant / like sapphire / like choking throats /
knees on necks / blocking justice / from touching / George / Eric
/ Breonna / Ahmaud / Melanated / Skin / collect the tears / of a
weeping movement / that it took death / to ignite

make sure the blue gushes / like poison / swimming in Flint
waters / down household taps / through human veins / to dying
lungs / hardly breathing / American air / they say it saves money
/ to imperil / (Black) life

3. pour white

from above / watch it drip slowly / suffocating colors /
overpowering / until all is drowned

4. now admire

your art / take your time
remember carefully

red is for

v a l o r

blue is for

j u s t i c e

white is for

i n n o c e n c e

place your hand on your pulsing heart and shout

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America...

NAVIN DESAI, GRADE 11
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

The Whisperer at my Door

WHO knocks at my door when all hope is lost?

Oh is it you? Reaper,
whisperer of the night

when night falls, you become my friend
when the sun lays waste
you become my protector
when it's my time to ascend to the heavens,
you become my guide

your Blade as sharp as tungsten needles
your Aura as dark as a midnight sky

the warmth of your hands
as warm as cold night
Your darkness beats louder than
a body's beating heart

flowers sink in the presence of your smiles
eyes roll in the absence your growls

your skulled face sings Melodies stronger than the midnight blues

I tremble in joy waiting for the good news

when I hear the knock at my door
I look out of the shallow shell
and I say to myself

Who knocks at my door?

Oh whisperer, oh reaper,
I've come to accept your crimson love
and hear your darkened roar

I praise you as the one I seek

the whisperer at my door

MICHAEL MCKNIGHT, GRADE 12
GONZAGA COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

Mispeled Words

I used to do wierd thins
i do be loud sometimes

(i be fragminted, smashing things,
So I stopped doing what I did.)

It was in the laughing, loveing mysef
and when I was really kind to other people
that it was fun being mysef.
And I must be mysef again.

JALEN HOLLINS, GRADE 7
CHARLES HART MIDDLE SCHOOL

Insights I have learned so far

My mind will wander to lands my feet will never touch
and I'll sleep with one eye open waiting for death,
his presence lurking behind every corner I turn
Change will come and go and is, as everyone says,
the only constant.

I wasted too much time here
Regret begs with me, pleads with me;
Why did you wait for death
And forget to live? The slow burn
Of a lingering fire
Fighting with all its will to maintain its flame,
Only finding peace in death.

My grandfather calls for his mother in his sleep
In a foreign land and alone with the night.
Life is always changing, my grandmother says of this
He remains his observant self,
But more so in his sleep

He taught me—Insights he has learned so far—
Life is suffering, And that cannot change
And it must not defeat us or define us.
No matter what it goes by too fast
You call again for your mother,
An ocean away and long gone
You're so forgetful these days.
In a foreign land that remains a foreign place fifty years later
And still alone.

The slow burn of a lingering fire
Your feet stuck in mud
And eyes looking up to heaven
You call for your mother there,
Fighting with all your will to maintain
Your flame. Will you find your peace?

PRIYA GRAB, GRADE 11
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

Challenges of Being Indian-American

In the middle of a game of tug-a-war,
I am the rope
Too Indian to be American
Too American to be Indian
I attempt to navigate this strange identity I own
For there nor here feels like home
And so I begin to write this poem
About the challenges of being Indian-American

One side of the rope
Has senseless stereotypes
On how I'm supposed to be
One perfect math prodigy

The other side
Is 7,000 miles away
New Delhi, Hyderabad, and Bombay
And so I wonder
How I must convey
The challenges of being Indian-American

Both sides of the rope reel me in
Garble, twist, contort, spin
They leave me trapped within
The undying need
Of fitting in

I am
A saree
A shopping spree
Chai tea
The American Dream

I have pride in my heritage and tradition
A love for my culture, cuisine, and religion
I deal with the struggles, hardship, misfortune, and dismay
I must deal with the adversity each and every day
And this is how I best explain
The challenges of being Indian-American

AHANA RAO, GRADE 6
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

Runaway

As the trees grew older and died like flames
As the smell of gas creeped everywhere
As cars raced around me
I found myself stuck in a shell.

As the bitter cold slipped through my coat
I was stuck in the middle of the highway
The cars were daggers not stopping for anyone.
And I thought about how good it would be to go back
To warmth
And to have enough to eat every day.

MIKIYAS ZETO, GRADE 9
PARKMONT SCHOOL

A Circus Peanut Factory

*Inspired by "Muse Inquietanti," "Poet and Artist," and
"L'Incertitude du poète" by Giorgio de Chirico*

I.

This is not the Vatican.
This is not the Pope watching long,
black shadows push firmly their parallel lines
into the hardwood, squeezing until black.
Until orange juices spill and oversaturate the world.

This weeping woman,
seated atop a blue work bench is not, in fact, sad.
Her shoulders shrug and stretch with slow, rounding turns
as her arm twists and scrunches on her head
with a gaping mouth.

This weeping woman
curled over, wafting in the damp orange wood,
has placed her paper-thin shovel beside her plump knee
waiting for night, peering behind her back,
to crest the soft mounds of her shoulder
and climb into the sky so that

this day will end and the shadows
will creep back into their columns and recollect their bodies
un-squeezing the damp planks, their orange sponges
sucking in the excess left unshoveled at day.
And the not-Pope will call out into the darkness
towards the smokestacks of the not-Vatican and say:

II.

"Listen over, through the window
where the night sweeps the yellow out of the sky.
Listen, cloaked man, the day has ended
smack the table and crack the peanut in your hand

"And, naked man, pull the lever stitched into the cube
to activate the array of wooden rulers caught up in a naught,
bolted into the floor, crunching and cracking, clicking like a cricket.
Pull the lever down enough that the constellation of rulers
goes still, silent (save the eek of snapping wood),
and stretched until bending.

"Cloaked man, await the flutter of a peanut
jumping through the web of rulers, tapping its way to your hand.
Catch it under your palm. Do not crush it.
Funnel the other, crushed peanut into the lips

of the woman's head on the floor.

"Naked man, imagine the peanut under the palm.
Is it not crushed? What does it smell like?
Taste it in your mouth, let it stab a splinter in your tongue.
Do you taste blood? Good.

"Listen, cloaked man, take the peanut from beneath your palm.
Do not look at the naked man.
What color is his skin? Is it rough or soft?
Is his face questioning like yours?
Is his skin orange? Good.

"Naked man, look at the peanut.
Is the peanut orange? Good."

III.

"Both of you, look through the other window:
The one with the arches filled with black
bursting out, spilling into shadows
But the night is closing in, dusk is sopping up the shadows.

"The train will chug across the rest of the horizon
zipping up the daylight, trapping in the night.
The woman digests the crushed peanut in her grumbling
and folding stomach. An owl waits for her to finish.

"The magnitude of the bananas shocks the night,
the yellow and green pile, ripe with life and taste.
The bananas slice shadows like the crescent shaped blade of a knife.

"Let the peanut take shape in your mouth, float
in the blood on your tongue. The sweet shadows
cast by the bananas fold over the insides of your cheeks
diluting your mouth with orange.
Cloak yourself in this. Become naked in it."

Night pours into the not-Vatican glazing
the weeping woman and the not-Pope in shining silence.
Orange smoke begins to roll from the towers, the plumes
like a million peanuts, jumbling in the sky.
And just before the sweeping silhouette
of the weeping woman's shoulder fades into the night,
through her gaping nose flows the fresh, sweet scent
of the bananas.

THEO JOHNSON, GRADE 12
SAINT ALBANS SCHOOL

8 Ways of Looking at a Tiny Plastic Baby

I.

Like a statue, it does not
Move, mourning the loss
Of its plastic toy dog.

II.

Like a sheep newly shaved
Naked, it runs away in fear.

III.

Tiny and fragile
A spider easily crushed
By life.

IV.

It does endless headstands to
Calm the monster inside.

V.

Is it as innocent as it seems?
Does its smile hide
Something sinister?

VI.

Plump little cheeks
On its plump little face
Calling you to pinch them.

VII.

Finally it rests, loving
The life it has led.

VIII.

Little belly
Won't move at
all.

THEO KRAMER, GRADE 6
PARKMONT SCHOOL

All that makes me

“Who are you?”

I am a no one who enjoys being alive.

Those who question my past don't believe my present,
yet hate to realize that I emphasize what I synthesize
in my large-size brain.

Growth presents itself when you fall,
get up, and jump back on your high horse;

But I could never be where I am today
without my previous eras.

I'm the queen of gender-neutral fit-making
and the king of confusing people with my ability to
defy stereotypes, and I wouldn't want it any other way.

“Would you?”

ARMANI THORNTON, GRADE 12
BALLOU SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

A Black Smudge

What once was
A crystal lake
Serenely flowing
The reflection of
Yellows
And
Pinks
Adding to its ethereal appearance
Has been reduced to
A crater
Filled to the brim is
A makeshift mountain range
Out of bottles, bags and straws
Would have seemed creative
If it weren't so deadly

We have reduced the world to a
black smudge

Where once stood
A lush
Idyllic
Forest
Where birds couldn't
Even fly high enough
To surpass the towering oaks
Has been demolished
Their nests
Now nonexistent
Offer no protection
To triplets
Tweeting sadly from
A hole in the ground
Not nearly
As deep as
The one in their hearts

We have reduced the world to a
black smudge

Where meadows once flourished
A sunkissed land
Of heaven
Long ago has crumbled
Into the cracked and ashy ground
Like growing up
Watching your once
Lively
And
Vivacious spirit
Turn into a
Feeble
And
Withered corpse
That lives today

No light can get past
The
Thick

Gray
Clouds
Sticking to the sky like glue

We have reduced the world to a
black smudge

As greasy sludge
Pours its way into the ocean
A sea turtle takes
One last look
At the water
Unable to see her own flippers
How will she find the air close
above
With the sea as black as a
midnight
Without the moon?

We have reduced the world to a
black smudge

What once looked like
A gemstone
Suspended by
The strings of Hope
Bravery
Remembrance
Gratitude
Truth
And Love
Now blends in
To the shadows
In the dusky gray light
Aimlessly spinning by only one string
Hope
Because we still have it
However, a nation
Cannot reside on only one string
To work together,
To build up that string is to heal that wound
And add a little color to that smudge

NAOMI NETTER, GRADE 6
GEORGETOWN DAY SCHOOL

The Colors of Life

I've cut off a chicken's head
and afterward covered it with a bowl
to prevent blood spatter
and the chicken from moving around

I was six when I was kidnapped
Stuck in a small shack in Ethiopia,
Where I didn't cry tears
but cried out for help
As two grown men held me captive, seeking money

I've watched a chicken bring life into this world
On my grandma's bed, cluttered and twirling
With bottles of perfume and bags,
Cats, a dog, chickens, and even bunnies
They would curl up and rest the day away,
In a bed filled with love and life's sigh.

I've seen my grandma kill a roach with her bare hands
Not showcasing a bit of fear
It's a daily thing to do.
I've seen my grandma's cat electrocuted,
flies swarmed it for weeks

I've watched cows and sheep slaughtered
I've danced in the rain and run around
I've hopped on different rocks to avoid
having my clean shoes get dirty
I've felt my hair soak and water slowly drench
my flowy dress
Glittering a gloomy day with a happy feeling

I've cried and laughed in the same minute
I've laid, motionless and still,
willed my eyes to remain closed
A stabbing pain invades my mind,
As my mom put an onion in my sock
and a clove of garlic in my ear
Hoping to ease my migraine

I was 12 when I held a squirrel my neighbors caught
and then cried because my cousins said,

What if it had rabies?

I threw away my clothes in fear of sickness

In fear of my cousins' taunts

and catching the squirrel's rabies

Life unfolds in unexpected ways

Experiences that have shaped my soul,

From the fear of a kidnapper's grasp

to the joy of a rainy day,

My memories are the threads that make me whole

MARIAM ROSE, GRADE 10
PARKMONT SCHOOL

Jealousy

It creeps up on you
Like a spider climbing up your arm

Hours pass and it's still there
You still feel that ache
Of envy
In your chest

It only takes a few seconds
You see what you want
and can't have
Right in front of you

You can't feel content until it's gone
Which means getting what you seek
And you don't

I'm caught up
In this mess
What I can see
Is what I want to be
Not who I am

ABBY FOSTER, GRADE 6
SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL

Dear Writing,

I do not remember
The first word I wrote,
The first word I learned,
The first word I spoke,

But I do know the characters
That ran as my words flew on my paper
The words that meant more
The words that spoke more

The silly stories,
The terrible stories,
The meaningful stories,
I love them all
They carried me on closer—
Closer, so that I could taste my dream

It tastes sweet like honey
Strong like wine
Yet delicate
So I don't get drunk

It tastes unique and pure
Pure like the water racing down my cheeks
As my smile widens—
Wider and wider until my face hurts

Yet I still do not remember
The first word I wrote,
The first word I learned,
The first word I spoke,

But I do know
That I love you
Hold me tight—
Don't you ever let me go
See you on my paper,
Maria Harb

MARIA HARB, GRADE 9
ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

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The Parkmont Poetry Festival extends sincere thanks to our 2023 Festival judges:

PRELIMINARY JUDGES:

Raised on a rice and catfish farm in eastern Arkansas, **CL Bledsoe** is the author of more than thirty books, including the poetry collections *Riceland*, *The Bottle Episode*, and his newest, *Having a Baby to Save a Marriage*, as well as his latest novels *Goodbye, Mr. Lonely* and *The Saviors*. Bledsoe lives in northern Virginia with his daughter.

Susan Scheid is a poet and literary activist who lives in Washington, DC. Susan has honed her craft while working for the last 30 years as a legal secretary. She was inspired by her father reading poems to her at bedtime and stories of him reading poetry to the other wounded soldiers in the medical hospital during WWII. Her book, *After Enchantment*, was influenced by her love of fairy tales. Her work has appeared in various literary journals, as well as in the anthologies, *Poetic Art*, *Enchantment of the Ordinary*, and *Dear Vaccine: Global Voices Speak to the Pandemic*. She has been a featured poet at Sunday Kind of Love, as well as a regular at the open mic. Additionally, Susan has featured at LaTiDo, Takoma Park Third Thursday, The Reach, and in venues in Ohio, Texas, and Louisiana. Susan serves on the Board of Directors for Split This Rock.

FINALIST JUDGE:

Patrick Washington is a D.C. spoken-word poet. He has been performing spoken-word poetry in the Washington D.C. area since the mid-1990s. He is known as Black Picasso. Black Picasso along with Darrell Perry (Naturalaw) and Rhome Anderson (DJ Stylus) form the performance group Poem-Cees. Poem-Cees came out of Washington's hip-hop community that grew up in the mid-1990s, much of it around the cultural and commercial revival of U Street. It was at this time that two communities converged poets and spoken-word artists in many open mic opportunities in the city. Poem-Cees is often thought of as a bridge between the structure and mature subject matter of poetry and the groove and energy of hip-hop.

An additional debt of thanks to **Ron McClain**, Head of Parkmont School and Founder of the Parkmont Poetry Festival; and **Sharan Strange**, Festival emcee. Sharan teaches writing at Spelman College. Her recent work includes an introduction to Deanna Sirlin's WAVELENGTH exhibition in *The Art Section: An Online Journal of Art and Cultural Commentary* and poems in *Bigger Than Bravery: Black Resilience and Reclamation in a Time of Pandemic* and Georgia's Poetry in the Park series. Her new song cycle *In Her Voice* (for composer Paula Grissom) was performed at Spelman College, Emory University, and HBCU night at the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR 2023 DESIGN TEAM:

Booklet layout and printing: **AURAS Design**

Tee-shirt and poster design: **Alice Lewis**

Tee-shirt printing: **abc tees**

Poster printing: **Minuteman Press**

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PARKMONT is a small private school serving middle school students in grades 6-8 and upper school students in grades 9-12. An educational community that fosters individual growth and enthusiasm for learning, Parkmont believes that there is nothing more basic to the development of a person than a positive sense of self-esteem. This respect for the creative energies and contributions of young people is the driving force behind the Poetry Festival and many other school activities. Parkmont's Internship program puts students in offices, shops and organizations around the city to learn practical work skills. At school, students participate in all-school meetings that focus on ethical and practical problems confronting their community and engage in a vibrant, hands-on curriculum. Parkmont helps students to discover their talents and values. The Poetry Festival encourages students to give voice to their dreams and concerns.

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