



teen ink

By teens, for teens

April 2024

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**contest
winners
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**plus a
special feature on
ENVIRONMENTALISM**

**NATIONAL
POETRY MONTH**

PHOTO BY FANXIU SOPHIE QIU,
NEW HAVEN, CT

UNLABELED

ARTICLE BY LUKE KIM, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

Upon endless rows of hangers droop Gucci jumpers, Louis Vuitton T-shirts, and Tom Ford jackets. Stacked upon shelves are Valentino sneakers, Saint Laurent totes, and Balenciaga caps. Collector's items like the Versace bathrobe are displayed in a glass closet in the corner, its hand-stitched golden logo dazzling against the plush Egyptian cotton. The still-intact tag with its preposterous price of \$50,000 is my ticket to teenage royalty.

My dressing room is full of what most kids my age would only dream of — the latest collection from the hottest designers in the world. But the truth is, I didn't purchase a single one of them. In fact, I had never even asked for any of them. At the courtesy of my cousin Minseok, the son of a Korean mega-conglomerate listed in Forbes as one of the richest men in the country and consequently a VIP customer at every high-end brand and department store in Seoul, my room was routinely bombarded with shopping bags full of luxury goods that were the by-products of Minseok's revenge spending (he claims he did not receive enough love from his parents while growing up).

And I, his sole beneficiary, received social free-passes in the form of cashmere sweaters, designer sweats, and Swarovski-studded sneakers, which I wore to school every day. I could feel envious eyes following me down the hallway — and I have to admit, I enjoyed every bit of it.

To maintain my status as the school stud, I kept up with the latest luxury fashion trends by scanning fashion magazines every chance I got. Until one day, I came across an article that turned my life, and closet, upside down.

I rarely ventured into the opinion articles when flipping through magazines, but the piercing gaze of a skinned alligator head caught my eye. Disturbed and entranced, I couldn't tear my eyes from the report on the luxury fashion industry's responsibility for deforestation and habitat destruction through the sourcing of exotic animal skins. Moreover, the production and transportation of said cruelty products to department stores around the world also contributed to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. But what shocked me the most was the fact that the industry routinely incinerates said

To maintain my status as the school stud, I kept up with the latest luxury fashion trends

products, made at the price of blood, sweat, tears — and the environment — to create high demand and to meet it at an even higher price.

Because these clothes had been made so readily available to me, literally delivered to my very doorstep, I had never bothered to think of the ramifications of such excessive consumption of clothes. Although I myself was not the direct consumer, I was just as guilty for enabling my cousin's irrational consumption

by gladly taking all the clothes he no longer wanted. And somewhere across the globe, there were lives being sacrificed and forests being burned down for it.

I looked down at the new pair of leather boots on my feet. They had never seemed so ugly. And it was from that point on that I began to see that it was not me my classmates were interested in — they were staring at my clothes, the labels. My words fell on deaf ears as all their attention was focused on scanning my outfit from head to toe. No one bothered to find out who I was or what I was like. Everywhere I went, I was just labeled as the rich, spoiled kid that only wore expensive clothes.

And the sad thing was, it was not me that wore them. It was the clothes that wore me.

As much as I wanted to tear these labels off my shoulders, I couldn't bring myself to do so. Over the years, my outfits had become a facade behind which I found strange comfort in. When I slipped on my new designer jeans, I knew people would see and comment on the design and price, but the conversations were never directed at me, personally. Behind the labels, I did not have to face other people's judgment and criticisms. It was so much easier to live in the clothes I wore rather than having to bare myself to the world. But I knew my shell had to be broken one way or another. I could feel my self-identity festering from within, and the lifeless gaze of an alligator was the final push I needed.

The next day, I dressed in a plain white T-shirt and joggers to school. When I walked down the hallway past my classmates, they didn't even recognize me. I had never felt as liberated as I did then. For the first time, I felt comfortable in my own skin. ♦

POETS' CORNER

NATIONAL POETRY MONTH!



ARTWORK BY
HAYLEE GRIFFITH
ARVADA, CO

Words That Bite

I am a person of endless words.
Yet the most important go unspoken.
In my library of soft phrases,
My garden of carefully chosen sentences,
And my hoard of sayings and facts.
4 words go unspoken.
They hang like ripe fruit
on the tip of my tongue.
Always ready to say. And always true.
I try so hard to keep them from slipping out.
They bite so ferociously at the corners
of my mouth.
They know they need to be said.
"I want to sob"
I deny them their place in my trove
of words.
Lock them in their cage
And throw away the key.
I yearn to let them fall from my mouth
As I lay in your arms.
"I need to sob"
And I yearn for you to tell me it's safe
And say
"Then sob. And I will be here."

BY ELLI EASON, GLENS FALLS, NY

Cardinal

My grandma and I rolling down
a lush green hill — my first memory.
Running around the house with my

grandma — her last memory.
A cardinal sits, watching me play.
Memories don't die.

BY BEN JOHNSON, PEWAUKEE, WI

my flower heart

when i first met you, you planted
flowers in my heart.
and with a tulip in your hand, you said
"till death do us part."
so i held on to those words,
the promises you gave me.
and as i got to know you, the flowers
grew, roses and orchids and bunches
of daisies.
dandelions, daffodils, begonias
and marigolds.
the flowers grew taller, even as the
weather got cold.
and you pruned them and watered
them, day after day.
the flowers growing even bigger, until
they formed a bouquet.
but then one day in june, a girl arrived,
dressed in fur.
and you plucked out my flowers
and you gave them to her.

BY STELLA MYERS, STUDIO CITY, CA

King of Kings

Bald crown atop his throne.
pillars of cardboard and tape

contemporary serfs on conveyor belts
discolored diapers
improving "workplace flow."

Dissipate Seconds to pick up any bill
Amassing 10 thousand times their fill
From an awe-inspiring forest,
To cheap electronics
Hmm, quite ironic.

BY SPENCER BECKEMAN,
ROCHESTER, MI

When You Asked Me What My Favorite Word Was, I Said Auburn

Because auburn was the color of my
first dog who sniffed my fingers and



ARTWORK BY SONJA XIE, SCARSDALE, NY

licked the gaps between my toes;
when my mother locked me outside
for two hours,
the wind chilling my bones through a
cupcake-covered nightgown,
he gulped down my tears and let me
touch his nose.

Because auburn was the name of my
best friend in kindergarten
who painted paper roses with me,
red, blues, purples stained on our
fingertips;
she helped me differentiate triangles
from trapezoids,
curled up next to me during nap time
on a star-shaped rug.

Because, most of all, auburn was the
roof of my house back in Texas
whose tiles were chipped from hot
summer nights;
when I left at age seven, sat in a car to
California with palms pressed to the
cold minivan windowpane
I wondered if I would - or could ever
miss a roof more
because under that auburn was all
I had ever known.

To me, auburn is color, identity,
physicality, home
but to you, a six-letter word.

BY ASHLEY MO, SARATOGA, CA

Untitled

four-wheel drive —
the universe is sobbing an overload
of fat and juicy raindrops. the

sparkling cobalt blue — cheerful eye
is clouded over with a dim drab gray
— emotionless
but yet lighter around the edges —
silver lining.

silence —
filling the car, crowding
every crack not filled with
luggage, threatening to force
the smudged windows open.
burning, loaded, tens e—
thicker than the fog outside.

static—
thick and fuzzy, hiding
sad lyrics in layers of code. not
as though a cozy blanket,
like a deceiving disguise.
the radio struggles — DJ's
laughs resemble an
aggressive coughing fit — but
neither of us change the station
— not yet.

BY RENEE BUDA, STATE COLLEGE,
PA

The Backup

A conversation is like a waltz,
Glorious back and forth,
in sync, in rhythm, in tone
with the music connecting two souls
as one

A conversation is a waltz,
And I can dance.
Just not well enough.
I'm good conversation, until better
walks by.
I'm interesting, until I'm not.
Because I'm the backup.

Like the moon; I shine only from
reflection.
And what is a burning inner light
If there is no one to see it?
Because I'm the backup.
You lift me, illuminating,
like sun shining light on the moon
But eventually, the sun always sets.

I'm never good enough,
And the resentment bubbles up
Maybe you can tell,
And that's why it isn't enough?

I need people,
like a man in a desert needs water.

My skin burns without touch,
my chest feels empty.

A friendly smile is a cooling breeze,
A few words, a saving gulp of water.
A dismissive look, a false laugh
Plunge me into a chasm of doubt,
A sinking pit in my stomach dragging
me in,
My fingers, bloody claws
of desperation.

There are tiers of friendship
And you make it clear where I sit

You're always too tired to talk
(but only when I'm the only option.)
You need to focus on your work
(Is the other person at the table
your work?)
You'll answer texts (eventually)
But only if I text first.

How can I dance
When you keep switching partners
And I can feel the stares
burning holes into my back?

You can't be everyone's best friend.
I know that's true.
But the truth doesn't sting any less,
And the sun always sets
Because I'm the backup.

BY EMMA TELPIS, SCOTCH PLAINS,
NJ

What Is a Stare?

A stare
Is a needle
Piercing through the air
At fast speed

A stare
Is a window
Glaring into other's eyes
Sharply

A stare
Is warm
A comforting gesture

A stare
Is blank, mean, rough, and soft
But never meaningless

BY AUBREE BLANCK,
CANNON FALLS, MN

Eternally Beautiful

Fresh prints
Sitting out to dry
Perfectly pristine bindings
Lining the shelves
Finally purchased
Tales being read for the first time
Stories coming to life
Time goes on
They're now in your hands
Waiting for you to
Inhale the aroma of aged literature
Being used for the millionth time,
Feel the tattered pages
Turning, over and over, forever, and
Watch the aged leather fracture
Where it is weak and brittle
These books will live forever
Finally falling into the hands of
Future generations.

BY RILEY IVERSON,
CANNON FALLS, MN

Salvage Me

Hold my joints in place
with those nuts and bolts of your
unique form of love.

Keep me together.
ratchets and wrenches cannot
replace your warm arms.

Dry my tears with cloth
lest I rust under your care,
immobile for life.

Fill my heart with steam,
my heart with your oil, lifeblood.
Help me feel again.

Fix me how you will.
rebuild me from your blueprints,
your clockwork machine.

BY JADIE FIDEL, MADAWASKA, ME

An Overwhelming Essay

Overwhelmed by an essay to write,
The frantic student typed with all his
might
'Til he fell asleep on his laptop cover
And soon grew mortified to discover
That his assignment was due at
midnight

BY DAVID HUYNH, SAN JOSE, CA



Fractals

In chaos' dance, where nothing seems
to rhyme,
Fractal threads emerge, weaving tales
profound,
Nature's brushstrokes, a rhythm
so sublime,
In every swirl, a pattern can be found

From branches reaching to rivers that
flow,
Each twist a whisper of a hidden rule,
In every storm, a harmony
does show,
In every chaos, there's a quiet jewel

Through fractal lens, the world unveils
its art,
The dance of shapes, both humble
and grand,
In every leaf, a masterpiece's start,
In every cloud, a story close at hand

So let us find peace in chaos' embrace,
For in its chaos, order finds its place

BY SARAH ZHANG, MINEOLA, NY

whispers

whispers of the wind
carrying seeds to escape
from the setting sun

BY TAILI GAO, LEXINGTON, MA

My Ode To You

Tell me you love me,
with your eyes staring back at mine.
And let me love you oh so dearly,
when our hearts intertwine.

You're the wildflowers in my hair,
and the song in my mind.
You're the first one to care,
and the one I've been waiting to find.

I don't deserve this,
this I know for sure.
I can't help but feel this hopeless,
even though our love holds such
an allure.

Without you, I don't know what I'd do.
My love, this is my ode to you.

BY ELIZABETH WASHINE,
LAKE ARIEL, PA

Please Understand

Please understand that you
are not God,
And I am not hesitant to be Judas

Please know that I have asked
to leave you,
and it is only my parents who have not
let me go.

Please comprehend that I have
already betrayed you
because you have told me to kiss you
like a coward.

But understand that you
are not God,
and I am not Judas.
Because I am not afraid of those—
who hides and sneaks a trembling
hand under a bold voice.

And though you claim to know more
than me,
you can never Know All.
Because colleges are inestimable.
All together, like a religion.
So please know that you are not
The Messenger
and I am not looking for a prophet

So don't say that my writing is "too
dark", "too bold",
and I should be happier.
Because you will not bring salvation to
me,
and I am not a Sinner to feel.

Please don't ask about old names
I mentioned,
and suddenly try to keep promises
you left in the dust.
Because I'm counting on you
to forget;
I'm counting on me to forgive.

Don't make me a lamb to your
sacrifice,
Don't use me in your game
of chance.
I'm my own man because I can;
Because I was, and I am.

So please understand that you
are not God,
And I am not Judas.

BY ALYSSA SUN, LOS ALTOS, CA

Looking Past the Screen

In realms of light where pixels play,
We lose ourselves in screens each day.
Addicted to the touch and scroll,
In digital depths, we lose control.

Hours pass, like whispers gone,
To the screen's glow, we're drawn.
But look beyond the glassy sheen,
And find the world that's rarely seen

Switch off the light, step into day,
A real world is waiting, don't delay.
For beyond the screen's hypnotic
spree,
Breathe, live, feel, and truly be.

BY DANIEL FRIEDLAND, NYC, NY

Freeing Normandy

Soldiers storm the shore, History's
turning moment,
Bravery prevails.

BY EMILE SEGARRA,
PERNES LES FONTAINES, FRANCE

Publisher

The swords have been unsheathed,
The safeties are now off,
and henceforth comes the blood,
A horrific pain is being conjured
right before us
and all I see are painted tear drops,
The mothers will begin to weep,
the orphanages will overflow,
the world will turn black and white,
With the color lost and nowhere
to be found,
Nowadays the birds circle everybody's
head,
but I must ask,
Who wrote the script?
Who filmed the scene?
Or should I say,
Who would ever dare publish such
a world?
ah I know,
it's you
still sleeping with the blankets
over your head.

BY WILLIAM GARCIA,
MUTTONTOWN, NY

The Apple Lesson

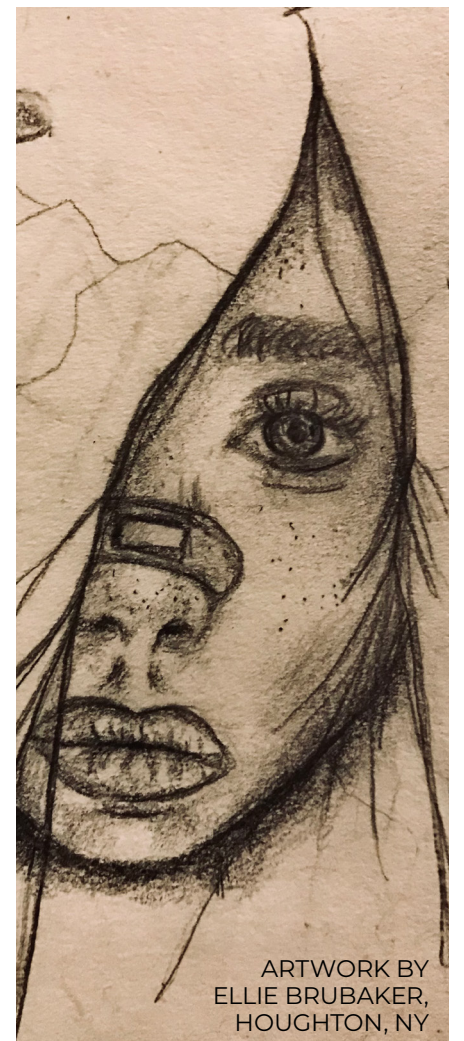
I wished on an apple once,
I then threw it at a tree.
I asked that God bring me a rope
If He was watching me.

And, either He was watching
Or He wanted to give me his rope,
For, once I looked up at the sky,
I saw that glimpse of hope.

But I didn't need His rope,
I just needed that little look.
I saw the apples, the tree,
And a shake was all it took.

All the apples fell;
I didn't need to climb.
I just needed to take a step back
And remember
That thinking too much is a waste
of time.

BY ELIZABETH PEREZ, MIAMI, FL



ARTWORK BY
ELLIE BRUBAKER,
HOUGHTON, NY



PHOTO BY AVALEY MOORE,
FORT CAMPBELL, KY

THE MENTAL GAME

ARTICLE BY MATTHEW WILLETT, CINCINNATI, OH

The boiling hot sun beamed onto us as we walked out for the state cup finals. The smell of fresh cut grass, the sound of cicadas in the distance. The mix of excitement and nervousness created tension in the air as everyone walked out onto the field. I couldn't help it; I was nervous. I could feel my heart pounding everywhere in my body as both teams lined up. Starting midfield, like always. 80-minute game, like always. But this was the most extraordinary stage we've ever played on. Scouts everywhere.

As we got ready for kickoff, fear took over my body. This was my problem. Another opponent.

"Hey guys, this is our game. Let's go out there and win this," says Sean.

Coach says confidence is the biggest part of the game, but for me, it's my biggest enemy. My thoughts were interrupted as the high-pitched whistle stabbed my ears, and the game began. Here we go.

The ball comes straight to me. I

drive forward, slip around a defender, and lose it. On the very next play, I give it straight away again. I could feel my confidence just seeping away through my fingers. I told myself I wouldn't lose it again.

"Come on, dude, keep the ball!" Shouts Griffin. It wasn't mean or anything. We've known each other for years and played together for a long time. But it was not helping. I just played it safe next time and passed it back. Barely even on target, I was losing it. I could feel the

scout's eyes burning into the back of my head.

The whistle blows twice for halftime. The score is still 0 - 0. It was a bad game on our part, but at least we weren't losing. Honestly, at that point, I would be fine with a loss; I just wanted to leave. The blinding, blistering sun peeked through my hair into my eyes. My mouth was as dry as a desert.

"Aidan, stay out wide on the start and get up that field. You've done it before, it's coming to you on this kickoff. Use your speed."

But I didn't feel fast enough. I felt like there were rocks tied to my ankles when I ran. I was surprised I was even still playing at this point. Kickoff came, and I ran up the field. My legs felt heavy like my cleats weighed 10 pounds each. The ball came flying in, off my foot, and straight to the defender. Man, I can't do anything right now. I had no faith in myself, and I doubt any of my teammates did either.

I tried to play it safe for the rest of the half, but even then, I still struggled. Three whistles screamed for full-time, and there it was. We're going to overtime. Salty sweat dripped from my forehead as we listened to Coach.

He called out the starting lineup for extra time. There was no way I was still in.

"...French, Bliss, Lyons, Gross."

I was still playing. I would usually be happy, but I was going into overtime with zero

confidence. As I walked out onto the field, Caden came up to me.

"Hey, you've been having a good game today," He says.

"You're joking, right?"

"Nah, man, you're balling out."

"I feel like I've played terribly. I'm surprised I'm still in the game," I said.

"Don't say that. Honestly, there is nobody else I would rather have on that offense than you. You gotta keep your head up man, we need you up there."

And there it was. I felt bad, but maybe it was just in my head. My team needs me.

Now I know that I can't get down on myself ... I learned that I must stay with it; one mistake isn't the whole game

"Thanks, man, I appreciate that."

I ran to my spot, we were doing the same thing on kickoff. The whistle tweeted, and I raced down the field. The ball came sailing in, an absolute dime from Trey. I went in to settle it, and it came on my feet. I played a perfect pass to Griffin, and he took a shot. Bang. Off the crossbar. But hey, I made a great play. Maybe I can turn this around. In another play, Caden lost the ball. I chased down the defender, went in for a sliding

tackle, hit away the ball, and sent the kid flying. Great tackle.

"I love that, Aidan," yelled Griffin. I'm feeling better and better, so when I get my chance, I drive towards a defender with a ball. Slip in between his legs and run around him. I got a shot, so I took it. Wide left, a miss. But this time, I won't get down on myself.

I run back, and we get the ball. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Griffin making a run into the box. I slip past a defender and kick the ball to Griffin with a low, fast pass.

He takes the shot... and he scores! Three whistles blow for the end of the game, and everyone starts dog-piling as the new State Champs.

Walking away from the field, Caden comes up to me.

"Man, that was some good stuff."

"Thanks, man, I couldn't do it without you," I responded.

"What do you mean?"

"What you said. The team needs me. I don't think I could've done that without you saying that."

Now I know that I can't get down on myself, that I can't go down the rabbit hole. I learned that I must stay with it; one mistake isn't the whole game. I have to keep that confidence on the field. Without that, I can't play my best game. ♦

PHOTO BY ELLA SNYDER, WINTER SPRINGS, FL



WHY TEENS SHOULD CARE ABOUT FINANCE

ARTICLE BY ZACHARY SKOUTAS, ANDOVER, MA

Equity. Mutual Funds. The WACC. These are only a few of the finance terms I've stumbled across in my journey to try to understand just a little bit more about the confusing world of market prices, investment decisions, and assets. Finance can be intimidating, and sometimes it can feel entirely irrelevant to teens' lives, but it's important to take steps toward learning about it now, rather than later.

Recent studies have shown that the majority of teens feel a lack of confidence when it comes to personal finance. In 2021, over 1,000 high school-aged students completed a survey about their financial knowledge. About two-thirds of these participants indicated discomfort with topics like paying taxes, saving money, and establishing credit (Reinicke). It is also clear that future finances are a significant source of stress for today's teens. College tuition prices are soaring, as is the cost of living expenses, whether the price of a car or a night out with friends at a restaurant.

While some states seem to have recognized the importance of financial literacy, only 8 states actually require high school students to enroll in a financial education course before graduating (Epperson). Yet, it is clear that these types of courses have substantial impacts on student wellbeing and readiness for the real world. In fact, a research project conducted by the National Endowment for Financial Education found that even a ten-hour course on money matters resulted in considerable gains in student knowledge and confidence in the realm of personal finance (Mead).

However, because it is unlikely that schools and states will mandate financial education, teens need to work toward a better understanding of these topics on their own.

While students under 18 years of age cannot open their own brokerage accounts, they can operate a custodial account with the permission of a parent or guardian. Experimenting with small amounts of money can help students feel comfortable with the principles of investing and with the stock market from a young age.

savings from a young age, and some of this money can eventually help finance college or other expensive endeavors in the future! It also never hurts to have some extra money stored away in the bank in case of an unexpected emergency.

Finance is a lot more complicated, though, than figuring out what to buy and when to buy it. Teens need to learn about topics like the advantages and disadvantages of different financial decisions, like taking out a loan or when to pay for something with cash over credit. Paying for a product or service with

TEENS NEED TO LEARN ABOUT TOPICS LIKE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DIFFERENT FINANCIAL DECISIONS

Students can also learn a lot by simply perusing YouTube series like KidVestors or Gen-Z Finance to learn about the basics of budgeting and investing from peers. There are also many informative podcast series on these topics, including Money with Mak and G, ChooseFI, and Popcorn Finance – all of these aim to promote financial literacy in relatable, digestible ways.

But why spend your free time worrying about financing your future?

One of the most important benefits of learning how to be financially independent as a teen is that building good spending habits will become more important later on. It never hurts to begin accumulating

credit may feel intimidating at first, but building a credit history early on in your life is important for when you want to make a big purchase down the road, like a house.

At the end of the day, I want to encourage teens not to be afraid of the stock market and of the risks of opening a line of credit or investing in a company. This is not to say that everyone should jump into opening a custodial brokerage account. But learning about these principles can go a long way in shaping one's financial well-being for the future. ♦



ARTWORK BY
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