

**WORDS on FIRE**  
A Poetry and Performance Festival

# STUDENT E-ANTHOLOGY



DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

Dear Friends:

This collection of original poems are the contributions of participants of the written competition of the 2022 Words on Fire: A Poetry and Performance Festival, and represents the many voices of our youth as they are learning, developing, exploring, and navigating life in an ever-changing world.

Poetry, in all its forms, is a valuable tool for our community. We know that when youth are equipped with the tools to succeed, anything is possible. The students, featured in this anthology, attended poetry writing workshops to spark their imagination, creativity, and self-expression and to learn specialized techniques.

Within these pages, you will find poems that vary in form, subject, style, and breadth but yet remain unified by the honesty and fundamental courage of expression. It is our hope that readers of all ages will delight in and reflect upon the contributions of the District's young poets.

Happy reading!

**Reggie Van Lee**, Chair

**Heran Sereke-Brhan**, Executive Director

The Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH) values and supports the right of freedom of expression. CAH provided no editorial direction to the poets and did not censor submitted works. As such, we expressly understand that some of the poems may include expletives, sexual and/or other content that is intended for mature audiences.

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Art on the cover: Loleta Campbell, *Celebration*, 1989, Acrylic on paper, 14 × 17 in. CAH Art Bank Collection

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR, ARTS EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The DC Commission on Arts and Humanities (CAH), is pleased to present this anthology of the written works created and presented by DC public and charter high school students participating in the Written Competition of Words On Fire: A Poetry and Performance Festival.

This is my first year as Chair of the Arts Education Committee of CAH, and like everyone else, coping with issues of isolation, and imposed protocols for social gatherings and education. We have a deep appreciation for the efforts put forth by our DC students and look forward to their shared experiences as put forth in their Words on Fire submissions, here presented.

This remarkable collection of work is a gift for all to enjoy, and perhaps a door for greater understanding. We are excited about this program, as it is yet another conduit where this generation, destined to lead, has used this program as an opportunity and a conduit to speak out loud, where expression is unbound.

Words on Fire in tandem with other arts education programs are continuing steps to a far-reaching goal of practicing equity and inclusion. We will continue to advocate for free expression, and ask all to read and join us in celebrating the works of our youth who have generously participated in this program.

We are so excited to have more than 1,000 students and 50 teachers participating in the entire Words on Fire program, and 200 students and 15 teachers participating in the written competition specifically. We extend our appreciation to the teachers and program sites participating in the written program. We aim to pay tribute to all those students that presented original work to encourage further exploration and to recognize their voices and the power of their written word, an encouragement to pursue further expression.

**Hector J. Torres, Chair Education Committee**

DC Commission On Arts & Humanities

Arts Education Committee:

José Alberto Uclés, Maria Rooney, Natalie Hopkinson, Quanice Floyd, Reginald Van Lee, Rhona Friedman.

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THE POWER OF EMPATHY/SYMPATHY  
BY ROBERT CURINGTON | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

Everyone is going through a struggle-  
A struggle that may not be seen or shown.  
Show a little sympathy  
For the things that may be unknown.

Think about how others feel.  
And imagine being in their shoes.  
Show a little empathy  
Don't be rude-  
Your words can be misconstrued.

Their pain is real.  
Beyond burdensome-  
As if the weight of the world  
Presses down on their shoulders.  
Loss too great to verbally express.

For your kindness could be a remedy  
You should watch what you say  
The hate you shell out  
is in my memories  
A burden that won't go away.  
Show a little empathy.

The words you speak are an emotional injury  
It's not kind to make  
Anyone shed these tears  
Give empathy to those who have a bad day

## THE POWER OF EMPATHY/SYMPATHY CONTINUED

Everyone is going through a struggle-  
A struggle that may not be seen or shown.  
Show a little sympathy  
For the things that may be unknown.

## OUR DEADLY WORLD BY ROBERT CURINGTON | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

The world is like an undry canvas  
So many exotic and beautiful colors  
A creation created by a creator with a creating mindset  
They sit back in joyfulness knowing they did great  
But no  
The masterpiece brought to life  
Becomes an abomination  
Something beautiful and breathtaking gone catastrophic  
As the paint smudges and you feel the wet paint on my fingertips  
As the paint slides down the canvas  
As the paint falls like tiny raindrops and splatters onto my  
expensive white carpet  
I finally realize  
I could've done better  
I could've been more careful  
I could've made the right decision before it was too late.  
Our sweet dear earth has turned not so sweet

OUR DEADLY WORLD  
CONTINUED

Our home corrupted by darkness

Bullets for blood cost us the ones we love

And hatred as deep as oceans turns guns, knives, razors, and drugs  
into a mans best friend

We talk about issues around the world with a coat of innocence  
But we never think. What am I doing? Why am I a bully? Why am I so  
cruel?

The world is a game of Russian roulette

And all we can do is hope

Hope we aren't crushed by the things that make our world deadly.

## THORNS HAVE ROSES

BY ETHAN ANDERSON | ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

Sometimes you feel alone  
When a missing parent is not in your home  
Feeling unwanted, wanting love from both sides  
But due to hard times, one had to divide

How do you cope  
With not knowing what to do  
Going through something  
And not having that parent to help you through

But you taught me a lot:  
To heal myself when I am sad  
From not having you around  
To appreciating everything I have

To being strong when others cry  
To letting go when it's time for goodbyes  
To fighting when you need to  
And beating that person's ass

Can't really say I love you  
Cause flimsy wood never gets bolted down  
But I can say thank you  
For the days you weren't around.



## EYES OPEN WIDELY

BY ETHAN ANDERSON | ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

Eyes open widely  
As a new journey begins  
With hatred and anger  
And a group of people you wish were gone

As this woman comforts you  
To love and protect  
And the man that's supposed to teach you  
Is split between three

As your mini "mom" thinks your hers  
But you're the one over her shoulder  
Watching every little move  
And having soldiers ready for every war

This one little body  
Here to bring joy and smiles  
In this ole house of cards  
Where the king was never around

I KNOW WORDS AINT ENOUGH  
BY ETHAN ANDERSON | ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

Love keeps getting scarier  
Like being black in America  
But you make me feel better  
Through sunny skies or bad weather

Been distant for a lil bit  
But we know we'll be back together  
Don't care if your friends get jealous  
Cause they can never be in our level

"L" is for the way you listen to my problems  
And how fast you are at attempting to solve them  
"O" is for your open eyes and seeing me as I am  
Making me believe I can become a better man

"V" is for our visions and bigger dreams we share  
From sitting together in class, to living almost everywhere  
"E" is for everlasting, that's what I hope we can be  
Big house with a dog and kids, in my eyes that's what I see

I know words aint enough  
But this is the only way I show it  
And my mama is missing you  
So text me when we goin

UNTITLED

BY ZOE MACK | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

He loves to control the lives of the people who aren't him,  
telling them what they can and can't do, he thinks he's a king  
in a kingdom.

People like me have little to no grip on our lives because  
they're decided by him.

He doesn't care if we get hurt or killed as long as he is on the  
throne,

As a woman, my body isn't mine. It's his like dragon's treasure,  
he gets to tell me what to do with it.

Who I sleep with, what I do with a baby, how I look and dress,  
anything to his pleasure.

I'm just a puppet and he's the puppetmaster, he pulls the  
strings and I do what he wants.

I want to love who I love but it's against his rules.

"Fools" like me should change ourselves to the opposite, just  
how he wants.

We can't be who we want to be because he's the king and  
what he say goes,

He says we're all free but turns around and treats his people  
like animals who need to be tamed.

## UNTITLED

BY ZOE MACK | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Mess of debris, spread along the land  
ashes from the fire, seep into the sand  
fire crackling like small firecrackers bundled together.  
Smoke arises from the chaos, going on for what will feel like  
forever

Firefighters appear on the scene  
They're like heroes, swooping in to save the day.  
They're here to seize control, it's their everyday routine  
They need back up, more people to help fight and slay

Wind blows through, pushing the smoke that's still rising  
The smoke flows through the air into nearby witnesses, it's  
blinding  
Covering their eyes, coughing, waving their hands to see  
They continue to stand and watch like deers in headlights as  
the heroes continue

UNTITLED

BY ZOE MACK | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

With the countless thoughts that flow through my mind,  
not knowing what they are or what to say takes too much  
time.

The question, "What's got you troubled?" makes me want to  
crumble.

It causes my problems to double and I shut off to be a person  
in a bubble.

"You know I'm here for you," but we both know it's clear I  
won't talk.

My fear for what will happen fills my head and spreads  
nonstop.

Being too use to being silent, bottling up those emotions.  
And once it opens, it's like multiple little explosions.

I feel pressured to speak,  
even though it always makes me feel weak.

So what the hell am I supposed to do?  
I feel like a fool asking, but I truly have no clue.

## SUPPRESSED FLAME

BY SILAS ALEMAYEHU | DUNBAR HIGH SCHOOL

Go burn now

"I don't wanna burnout"

Go burn now

"But the fire will burn them all down"

Go burn now

"They won't accept what comes out"

Go burn now

"Show them what they turned down?"

Go burn now

"I feel the heat after sundown"

Burn now

"The wildfires succumb now"

Burn now

"I lit the stage and I showed out"

Burn now

The sunlight taking notes now

Now

"I'm so proud of how I turned out"

Now

"I thank you for.. Now"

## APPRECIATE LIFE

BY SILAS ALEMAYEHU | DUNBAR HIGH SCHOOL

I sit there waiting  
On something worth saving  
Supplying doesn't wanna see dying of course.  
I sit there waiting  
Sometimes sometimes  
I'm craving.  
Nonetheless still. still sitting.  
My chair pleading  
For its purpose has meaning  
Ohhhh to Ohhh to be here with me. must be teasing.  
I watch as you use  
Things that I do  
While I sit debating  
When I show hate  
Ohh and I mean HATE  
That's when you acknowledge  
That I was stuffed in a closet  
But when I love  
You shine. YOU shine.  
Leaving me in darkness  
For without my love you become heartless  
No fortune or profit  
You blame me but still dont acknowledge  
That I'm still in your closet  
So I sit waiting  
Giving to something  
I think is worth saving.

## TO SPEAK BETTER

BY SILAS ALEMAYEHU | DUNBAR HIGH SCHOOL

Our Broadcast is rigid  
Publishing words forgetting about their existence  
Say with tension but don't value their distance.  
Keep playing this movie like we were given permission  
While a thick line divides the context were missin'  
Our diction submitting.  
Rather be the devil than listen?  
You call them friends, but you can't say how you feelin'?  
When dismayed y'all ready to fight like y'all killing.  
You ain't that strong if you can't handle a sentence.  
But listen  
Y'all fights gon turn this school to a prison.  
Your ignorance poisoned your final decision.  
How you feeling?  
Say it  
Then they know you gon listen  
Use your voice to celebrate  
With the one you've been missing.  
Birth new relationships  
With the quote you've been given.  
Our ability to grow  
Don't stop at no ceiling  
The Potential chemistry can  
Explode with meaning  
Now that is truly a pleasant Valentine's day evening



JEWELS, GOLD COINS, AND A PURSE  
BY KELAIAH BIGBY | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

Is it fictitious,  
to wish that I was missed?  
In fact, malicious wishes-  
these are the only words I sing.

But at last, the song has stopped ringing.  
I do not hear the illicit whispers,  
that plague my burrow.  
A burrow in which is ways,  
ways away from being inexplicit.

Shall I burn it?

So what if I do!  
I don't suppose you'll bond my hands,  
so that I'm every so complicit.

It is not that I'm suspicious,  
but my mind that drinks the moonlight,  
Becoming ever so capricious.

Perhaps it is fictitious,  
To expect to be praised.  
Though, I'll never admit it.

Am I doomed to be only a babe-  
who is ever so far from genuine?

ANTHROPOPHAGITE

BY KELAIAH BIGBY | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

It comes as naturally to me as sleep.  
And though it's not my time to eat,  
I'll stand over you in disbelief.

Your heat drives me crazy,  
rabbit heart-  
beating as I tear at your velvet with my teeth.

Waiting hauntingly for your departure.  
That somber saddened glaze in your eyes.  
Please cease your tears-  
It makes me excited,  
I crave it,  
the beauty of it all.

My lowly crimson hands.  
Only then will I truly, become one with you  
Your flesh stuck in my teeth.

You are my vice  
Please, give me your life.

## MONIKER

BY KELAIAH BIGBY | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

Status

Such a fickle wonder.  
To feel the embrace of love,  
glinting eyes kissing wildly.

Maybe it is arrogance,  
the fear of isolation.

Flimsy threads with none to hold onto.  
Intertwined hands,  
no space to grab onto.

Even at the back of the line;  
I'll forever hold you,  
my one true love.

Status

LIKE A MOTH TO A FLAME

BY KENDELL HASKEL | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

Burn like fire when you come around  
can't come to close  
might burn  
But there's an magnetic force  
Between you and I, that makes me  
Forget the consequences  
Enticing you are  
So close yet so far

Thus this fatal attraction, to which  
I will lose the most has me far in distance  
Yet close in thought

I can't get over myself  
Can't get over this because  
Losing the one thing on my mind  
Will be like losing myself.

Can't look, won't look  
Can't touch, won't touch  
Because I burn like fire  
When you come around

THE THINGS WE DON'T SAY  
BY KENDELL HASKEL | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

Speak your mind,  
Girl Get it off your chest  
Have faith that someone will hear  
Your battle cry

Because a war is coming  
And you're about to  
Set. It. Off.

## TRUE THOUGHTS

BY YENNER RENGIFO CHAVERRA | DC INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

As I drift into my dreams, I start to think about the things in the world.

It can be about the past, the future, or the present.

But all of them have 1 thing in common. They give me a big realization about life.

These thoughts make me think over and over again.

And when it comes to saying it out loud, I just can't explain.

So I try to search for it again through my brain.

And end up concentrating so much, that I fall to sleep.

Which is not something that I can complain. The next day I woke up feeling disappointed,

On the fact that I lost such a good thought, because of my dumb slumber.

Then, I sit on my bed

and wait for the thought to come back to my head

Once it comes back, I look for something to write it down but don't find anything.

I try to stick to the thought for the rest of the morning But end up forgetting by the end of the day.

This cycle repeats itself over and over again.

These are the true thoughts that keep me awake.

## FATHER AND SON

BY YENNER RENGIFO CHAVERRA | DC INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

The mutual love of father and son never fades It's like a  
permanent marker

Even when there's no more ink The container never decays They  
can fight, they can hate

But deep inside, that love always stayed.

When there's a problem, the father is always there To think of  
a solution, that the son would have to take This connection is a  
mystery.

They act the same, They think the same

And when a problem comes they take turns, To be the one to  
blame

It's greater than brotherhood It's Bigger than love

That's why we always say "Like father, Like son"

## THANK YOU

BY YENNER RENGIFO CHAVERRA | DC INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Life gives you so many chances,  
But is up to you to either take them or not  
Most of the changes take risk  
That's why we decide not to take them  
But for me,  
Life has given me so many opportunities  
That came with great risk  
But I took it, anyone, not knowing  
The outcome of my wit  
That's why I thank life for all the opportunities that I have gotten  
I got to find love,  
I got to write a book  
And I got to reunite with friends whose memories of them started  
to go blur.  
That's why I thank life  
That's why I live good,  
So the next time you have a good opportunity in front of you  
I think you should take it,  
Because we never know what's behind the door of truth.



## A NEW BEGINNING OF HOPE

BY ARAIYA BREWERS | BALLOU HIGH SCHOOL

A dream

A symbol of hope

Something to look forward to in the future

They crumble and quake

with every word you say.

Makes the power in your voice shake.

To want something you never had,  
you have to do something you've never  
done.

Believe in yourself

and all that you are...

for you are the only one.

A heart without dreams

is like a bird without its feathers.

What's the saying? *"it's better when birds  
flock together."*

Hope is one thing that can get us  
through our darkest times.

When our spirit shines,

even foggy skies make a pleasant light.

For all our truth is shown

through these dark ties.

Attract what you expect.

Reflect what you desire.

Become what you respect.

Mirror what you admire.

## A NEW BEGINNING OF HOPE CONTINUED

Hope anchors the soul.  
So, don't let go

Hold on to that dream of hope  
that keeps you going  
even though you want to quit,  
that fights the fear  
buried deep inside,  
even helps with your lonely cries.

You say you might fall.  
What if you fly?

Fear,  
is the only thing stopping  
you from reaching the sky.

I know it maybe hard  
Nothing is IMPOSSIBLE the word itself says  
I'm Possible  
Believe you can and you're halfway there

How you love yourself is how you teach  
others to love you  
The dream is free  
But,  
the hustle for the dream is sold separately

A journey of 1000 miles  
must start with a single step.

You are never too old  
to set a new goal or...  
to dream a new dream.

## THOUGHTLESS WORDS

BY ARAIYA BREWERS | BALLOU HIGH SCHOOL

They say sticks and stones  
can break your bones  
and words can never hurt you,

But we observe how a knife  
can be pulled out,  
while a word  
can be embedded into the soul  
bringing you to your breaking point.

Like a pawn taking your queen,  
something so simple  
can have you thinking of what's left to do.

You never say a word...

So, you drown yourself  
in a thoughtless Abyss.

On the outside your fine,  
but you're breaking away  
like chipped paint in an old house...

We learn early on that silence  
can make it worse,  
for there is no escape  
from the words that make  
our hearts hurt.

Maybe, we shut everything off...  
walk around numb...

THOUGHTLESS WORDS  
CONTINUED

still giving them a chance to break us down.

But when we scream and shout  
we're angry and crazy...  
make us feel dumb.

Our actions shape us,  
but our words speak power.

Silence,  
let's them think they have a hold on you.

Yet, you're in your mind  
thinking of where to move...  
Your next piece unmoving,  
until you see the checkmate.

LIFE WITH A BLACK MOTHER  
BY ARAIYA BREWERS | BALLOU HIGH SCHOOL

Strong and empowered.

Strong and wise.

The things they do are traumatically tied.

It may not seem like they are in the wrong,

But these beatings and sayings make

Us feel scared and trapped.

Like a slave, scared of its master

when we do know wrong.

There is always a lecture waiting at the door

ready to be freed the moment we leave.

If I ever have kids I'll break these generational ties.

Let my children speak freely without having fear in their eyes.

## A WALK IN MY SHOES

BY SHANNON BRADSHAW | BALLOU HIGH SCHOOL

If you took a walk in my shoes...

You'll understand the pain

The hurt

How I stay strong

Hold my own

No Family

It's nothing

What's said is

I have family

But it feels like

They aren't here

When I was 8

We were homeless

We didn't have shit

Not a penny in our pockets

No one checks on me

They only hit me up

When they need something

Asking me for things I can't afford

I'm only 17...

FUTURE, LIGHT, SHINE , BLACK CRIME  
BY SHANNON BRADSHAW | BALLOU HIGH SCHOOL

Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird That cannot fly.  
Dreaming is hard when you are somewhere  
that don't give you a try,  
They say don't hold onto the past because  
it's not worth it  
just keep your mouth shut DON'T SAY NOT A WORD.  
She pushes and pull and poke me,  
Stabbed me but I'm still alive,  
A special women said I was blessing  
and that I was different,  
she put her soft hands on my forehead,  
she told me to close me eyes,  
she prayed and prayed,  
the exact words she was saying as she was praying,  
"may god be the glory,  
god please protect this child from depression,  
god please give this child a sign to where  
she needs to be in life,  
lead this child in a right path so she won't be defined,  
give her the strength to climb to shine"  
rest her soul she was my path to shine,  
she was my heart and soul.  
I wish she was here to tell me  
that everything will be alright,

## FUTURE, LIGHT, SHINE , BLACK CRIME CONTINUED

I look in that mirror and put on my best smile  
but deep down inside I see no light or shine,  
I need get out the DMV  
so I could shine my light, that's she see in me,  
I wish I can see it,  
I'm tired of walking through these DMV streets  
afraid that I'm not safe,  
I make sure I don't put my hood on my head  
so I won't be mistaken like Trayvon Martin was,  
I turn around I see another one of us 6 feet in the  
ground,  
I question myself why we keep killing our own kind,  
for what?  
Money?  
Drug?  
Respect?  
It's time to stand and treat our own kind like  
our black golden skin matter,  
would they listen? Is there justice for all  
In the land of the free?  
Or only those who are White like me?  
We must accept the lingering shame and guilt,  
the anger and mistrust inequality have instilled,  
apologize for the damage commit to sow  
a future with humility.  
We fight for our humanity  
because after leaves fall they cannot be reattached



FUTURE, LIGHT, SHINE , BLACK CRIME  
CONTINUED

to the tree..

I wanna be a tree that never need to be reattached.

Let talk about love,

love have my name written all on it, she hold my hand

and tell me that she love me, smile in my face

when I'm feeling lonely, I

ough when I'm feeling lonely,

she the light of lonely,

she's my earth when I'm feeling like I'm out of space,

Yeah she the best.

## MAMA SAID...

BY SHANNON BRADSHAW | BALLOU HIGH SCHOOL

Mama said I'll be a star  
I was 11  
She said  
I was getting older  
Feels like she doesn't believe me anymore

Maybe her special little girl  
Is growing up  
And growing separately  
from the family  
and maybe my own fears  
and responsibilities

I Just want to see them happy  
Maybe...

## WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO WE LIVE IN

BY KIARRA JAMES | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

What kind of world do we live in

When the protectors are ones we need protecting from

We fight hate with hate not expecting hate

Kill discriminant and indiscriminately

In a world where or leaders are liars and our governments are corrupt

In a world where weapons of MASS DESTRUCTION are a necessary evil

In world where evil is necessary

The white Kitch society attempting to cleanse diversity

The dangers of forward thinking

Daring to defy the miscellaneous demands of our transparent overlords

When we have the audacity to act on our own devices

Men attempting to assume control, forcing submission but refusing to submit themselves

Fighting among ourselves for pseudo superiority

Pandering to the hateful ire of those fragile ego and ignorant prejudice based ideals

Attempting to force feed the new generation the chauvinistic, misogynistic tyranny of the past

The beautiful discord of the world turning into darkness

Faced with the harsh realities of how little we genuinely know about our world and how far those in power are willing to go to make sure it stays that way

But the ignorance is a choice, information is power, but it is also weight and many people prefer the lightness and ignorance

What kind of world do we live in? Do you know?

## WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO WE LIVE IN CONTINUED

I live in a world where men and women are shamed for who they love and who they want to become but ignore and enable pedophiles and rapists to continue hurting people  
The big bad wolves devours the innocence and light and we ignore the darkness for the sake of the status quo  
Does the world we live in know how to change?  
What kind of world do you live in?

## I WANT ANSWERS

BY KIARRA JAMES | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

I want answers, why is it necessary for you to make me feel bad about myself, is it because your miserable and want to cause pain for everyone else, I want answers, why do you discriminate is it my black skin you want to eliminate, I want answers what do you gain from the violence towards me, is it because you can't stand the fact that you can't tell me who to be, who to love and who to worship, what are the answers to these questions, are there answers? I want to know if your general disdain would extend to me if I was white can you effectively explain to me why my dark skin is a crime oppression and imprisonment time after time I want answers cause this is not what my life will amount to, I refuse to be the object of your aggression and irrational hatred, you may not have the answers but I do, my answer is if you hate me then I will love you cause it seems no one else does not even you, so I will raze your hatred with love, our time will come to be free mentally and physically, be ready cause your whole systematic oppression has become unsteady, when it comes crashing down beneath all the racism and hatred you will drown.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN  
BY KIARRA JAMES | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

I have some inquiries and a message to deliver, now do beware for I fear my anger toward this particular subject may have slipped through my filter, now if your fragile masculinity will crumble do not read this letter for my ability to care for your feelings have been temporarily disabled.

Now men can you tell me why exactly you have pushed your fear of being surpassed and your insecurity in your masculinity onto women, do you not know a woman gave birth to you, how can you assume someone who has gone through the pain of childbirth is weak when you have not gone through it yourself, did she raise you just so you can disrespect the very people that brought you into this world, I regret to inform you, that's not acceptable, this is a public cervix announcement, anatomy is not an acceptable reason for your crippling need to control me, I am not your toy and you will respect me, can you imagine if I decided to no longer be your breeding tool, can you imagine if I decide I am done with your misogyny and toxic masculinity, you will not survive because I am not and never will be accepting of your backward, indignant, ignorant and foolish attempt at subjugating my independence, or you trying to push your inferiority complex and failure as a man onto me, without a woman you would be nothing, I will warn you not to provoke me for I may not know the future but I know our strength and if you continue your problematic path it won't end well for you.

## CLOSER WITHIN

BY MICHELLE PEREZ | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Lost is a neutral feeling things aren't always clear,  
Around every corner loneliness is close behind.  
We look around our mind, every emotion is near.

Yet the only one we can feel is fear,  
Everything's so far, walking around the mind  
lost, is a neutral feeling things aren't always clear.

Hope fills us within, we wait for the one cheer.  
Eyes open wide looking to be defined.  
We look around our mind, every emotion is near.

Advice is tried, given nothing we can hear.  
No help needed, we're stuck staying blind.  
Lost is a neutral feeling, things aren't always clear.

Can't find one's self we begin to fear,  
I believe someone else is our mastermind.  
We look around our mind, every emotion is near.

Lost we are, in here. Faith for the change of atmosphere.  
Spot from afar Eyes that no longer can be denied.  
Even if loneliness is close behind.  
Look deeper in our minds, every emotion is near.

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

BY MICHELLE PEREZ | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

We have to stay alert, or around the corner there's an assault,  
left taken advantage of for the actions we make.

The burglar goes in waiting,  
things end up backfiring, left breathless.

We're careless, climate change comes  
left in chaos, with no choice, only concern.

We do it on the daily, make the same decision. We think it is delightful  
don't realize the damage it does but destruction comes with it.

Eager for education, not everyone is given the exam.  
Said to be for all, yet some escape it while others embrace it.

Families need it, farmers make it. First-class has a feast  
while the rest are left with the need to be fed.

They point the gun, aim for the gem  
We think it's a game, left with their greed.

They cause hate.  
We cry for help, yet no one's heard.

We insult, try to impress. Ignore the illness we've created,  
each individual separated by identity.

We judge, jump to conclusions, we open our jaw,  
Judgmentally, we jam them into jail.

We reel them in with kindness, then kill them with our knives  
becoming kings.

Wait for the landlord, treated as less.  
Waiting for the light, think our luck will change, but left with the loans.



## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

CONTINUED

Maintained by machines owned by managers,  
pray for mercy while they count the money.

Night comes, no one around,  
nevertheless news spreads.

Forced to obey, can't offer to make an offense to the officer,  
otherwise we end up detained, with no oxygen.

Continue at this pace, and pain, panic will be in the air,  
pollution at its peak, the price we pay.

Quiet on the quest, can't quit.  
Gotta be quick on this journey for better quality.

We don't recognize the reality, separated based on race.  
At this rate, we'll lose all respect, act on rage, neglecting the result.

We've set our sight on the sales-man as superior, selected for satisfaction.  
While the woman seen as snake, self-centered, and shallow, she stays  
in the shadows.

Tears are shed, toxic travels  
Threats create terror, territory taken.

Our union, said to be united. Unfortunately  
unhappiness spreads, unable to go upward.

Vision is vast, voice is a verdict.  
One falls victim, the other victor, violence spreads like a virus .

Witness our own creation webcast our warriors,  
worry invades us, wisdom is no more.

Youth yearn for a better version of themselves,  
Every year we hope to see a change in the yearbook.

## NIGHTMARE

BY MICHELLE PEREZ | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Pasame esa Pesadilla,  
At 6:00 it begins.

Sam the sink broke again.  
Call the company.

He arrives home,  
With muscles pleading no more.

Telephone,  
por favor no sueñes hoy.

No turn of the knob  
Brought back to his car.

Ring Ring Ring Hello,  
There's a problem with the sink once more.

## MS. RED LIPS

BY LORENA GOMEZ-ALONZO | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

He must have done something  
Something worth the spew of curses  
There was blood all over her pink skirt  
But at least it wasn't hers  
Her man was in the military  
But none of his training could have stopped her rage  
If only she had seen the horns  
Horns that slowly grew out of his head  
Just like the ones on a bull  
His body now wrapped in plastic  
Plastic is fake  
Just like when he told her he loved her  
She decorated his body with colorful beads  
Because he should at least look pretty  
Now she sits at a bar  
Their stares like knives on her back  
But still she is unbothered  
With a drink in her left hand  
And a cigarette on her right  
A drink to forget what she's done  
And a smoke for the realization  
She can no longer be deceived

## MIRROR, MIRROR

BY LORENA GOMEZ-ALONZO | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

can't stand the sight of a mirror  
maybe it's not the mirror itself  
but the reflection it gives  
the sight of yourself  
an unpleasant view for you

we are blinded by society  
manipulated to believe we are not beautiful  
in the eyes of society we are objects  
nothing more than a rating of 1 or 10  
we can not see the beauty we hold

our eyes were plucked out and replaced  
replaced with social media  
we have nothing to look forward to  
other than the likes on every post

who are we if there are no followers  
thousands of likes but yet we're still feeling like shit  
editing ourselves so that they only see what we want  
cropping our pictures so they don't see hunger  
what is that we see  
and what is it that we can't

LAST OPTION

BY LORENA GOMEZ-ALONZO | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

she walks all alone  
staying in her own zone  
sliding her finger on the fence  
now it all makes sense

whistling to the sky  
with tears in her eyes  
she longs for what they have.  
to be there on their behalf

what is their joyous days  
she spends in a gaze  
for she is the last option  
she never gets the same devotion

DEPRESSION.

BY REINA AVELAR | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Pure dark,

evil,

it never goes away.

Shadow

follows you

even in the dark.

It won't go away!

Stalker

needs to follow,

knows everything about you,

observant.

Can't live without you.

Can't live with you.

Why don't you go away?

## FAKING

BY REINA AVELAR | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

You always have a smile on your face.

Faking.

You are always happy.

Faking.

You always seem fine.

Do I? But...

faking.

You are always laughing.

Sometimes you have to laugh to keep from crying, but...

faking.

Nothing ever bothers you.

Something always bothers me like a mosquito that comes back even after you swat it.

But I just

fake it.

You are never sad or depressed.

Really, because that's the only thing I'm not faking.

ARE YOU WITH ME.

BY REINA AVELAR | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

My happy soul  
Where did you go?  
It's like I never had you.

It's like the wind blew you away from me and  
I never noticed.

I guess you took that opportunity and left,  
took a vacation to the Bahamas.

What is taking you so long?  
I need you to fix this mess.

I can't no more, its hurting a lot  
My eyes, they're too heavy,  
my body is failing me.

I'm like a dying rose.

With each petal that is falling  
I'm getting weaker and uglier.  
If you are here..  
Are you with me?



DRAWN TO YOU

BY RIDWAN ELIASSOU-MAMAN

| EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

The easiest thing I ever did was picking you.  
I know this sounds silly.  
Yet out of all the beautiful things in this world,

I was drawn to you, like a butterfly drawn to a flower garden  
Imagine the biggest flower garden you can,  
imagine yourself in it  
Roots so deep  
Even the storm can not lift you from the ground  
Leaves and birds melody harmonize as the wind blow  
You don't always have to bloom  
but that's okay I don't mind  
You open up when you're ready  
When it's safe, when it's time.

UNTITLED

BY RIDWAN ELIASSOU-MAMAN

| EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Loving you is a bullet

I am willing to take

Ahhh I forgot you spared my life once,

by not pulling the trigger.

your toxic gas, made me fall for you

made me think you where a beautiful red rose

made a hallucination of you

One that I could see even in a fog

One I could see no matter how hard I tried to forget

you seduced me

I give you credit

for being something I couldn't see

But couldn't see through

UNTITLED

BY RIDWAN ELIASSOU-MAMAN

| EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

I was a flower, and she was the drought  
She withered my leaves,  
Until one by one they began to crumble off.  
She stole every part of me I had knew  
I sat, day by day,  
Craving for someone to bring me rain.  
I realized sometimes you have to water your own roots  
In order to heal and move on.

## WHY, AMERICA?

BY TREASURE CLARKE | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

It breaks your heart  
Like glass shattered on the ground  
I'm lost  
It takes the ones I loved the most  
I miss you  
It beats me until I can't take no more  
Left crying gasping for air  
It drives me crazy

But why,  
Why abuse us if we're all you got  
We help your flowers blossom  
We help build your highest building  
We breathe your air  
We put up with lies  
Yea America isn't such the dream  
Sure isn't great

Yet, I'm human so I take the  
Bullshit  
Deceit  
Betrayal  
And turn it into  
Love  
Kindness  
Peace

Why?  
Well because it's home  
My birth place  
It's the beautiful America

DISAGREEMENT; LACK OF CONSENSUS OR APPROVAL  
BY TREASURE CLARKE | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

you'll never understand  
I really needed you  
and you were nowhere to be found  
when I needed you the most  
you were gone  
but, I guess  
you just wouldn't understand.

you argued with me  
made me feel broken like clocks  
made me feel useless like appendix  
you act like we couldn't agree on one thing  
love

why do you like to argue?  
why be so toxic?  
why do you treat me the way you do?  
but I guess  
we both just wouldn't understand

## HE IS AMERICA

BY TREASURE CLARKE | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

He curses my name

Because he never seen someone so unique

He sees beauty and destroys it

Leaving me hopeless

He is scared of love

I cut him off but, I keep letting him in

He doesn't treat me right but I love him

Even though he is toxic waste

I wish we moved at a slower pace

Like everything isn't a race

Maybe he'll love me better

Black love

A love that my momma taught me

Where no one else matters but, us

Where when I see you my heart melts

He used to give me butterflies

But, He threatens me

For where I live and the race I claim

He doesn't know if he should hurt or love me

He is america

ELATED; ECSTATICALLY HAPPY

BY TREASURE CLARKE | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Love is not just a word  
It's a feeling  
The feeling of butterflies in my stomach  
You're my medicine  
The bubble gum flavor  
You heal my pain  
When I'm with you and only you  
My world is complete

You're my person  
Person to depend on  
The person I run to everytime I feel  
lonely  
unloved  
Broken  
I know would take care of me  
Till death do us part

My happiness  
My smile  
I would spend the rest of my life with you  
And only you  
Life with you is Fresh air no covid  
Clear blue water  
You Change my life for the better

My heart beats for you  
Two heart one beat  
I cry out for you  
You were made for me  
To love  
To cherish  
To grow

## LETTER TO HIM

BY AJAH HAWKINS | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

The moments we had together, butterflies  
in my stomach.

The moment I walked down the stairs  
our eyes locked.

The way you looked at me, made me nervous.  
You came to me in such a generous way.

I love the way you comfort me. The way you  
make me feel safe.

From the time we first met.

My heart has been beating  
in rhymes.

The way you stare at me with your hazel eyes.  
I just can't seem to get you out of my mind.

The day I hugged you.  
My head felt dizzy.

Every time we hold hands.  
I feel like I can hold you forever.

My letter to him.



## A BROKEN CITY

BY AJAH HAWKINS | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Shattered Glass City.  
Spread All Over City.

Mother's Crying Praying  
That Their Kids Don't Get  
Hurt.

Trying To Make This City  
Look Good For The Whites.

While You Sitting Back In Your Office,  
Not Helping This Broken City  
That You Call Home.

Mayor Of What.  
Man, Mayor Of The Whites.

Little Kids Are Getting Broken Into Glass.

Lil Boys Think It's Cooler To Be  
In The Streets.

Then Going To School.

And These Grown Men Think  
It's Cool For Them To Be An  
Inspiration.

You Don't Get  
No Cool Points.

## STRONG HEART

BY AJAH HAWKINS | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Once a day, every week,  
every second, every minute,  
every hour.

Every step, every breath,  
every moment.

You continue to give  
your heart.

But they don't care  
cause it's not theirs.

You have a strong  
Heart.

A heart that takes up  
A lot of things.

Sometimes it's good.  
Most times it's not.

## FALLING LEAVES

BY RUDI YANEZ | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

falling leaves means the end of summer

falling leaves means the end of all things fun

orange leaves are a sign to go home and wish it was spring

brown leaves reminding us of the freezing temperature

red leaves are like butterflies before the storm

leaves slowly filling up your backyard

falling leaves means no more beautiful sun rays

falling leaves invites the falling snow

falling leaves means the end of a cycle and the start of another

## TIME

BY RUDI YANEZ | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Time is endless as the waves in the ocean, yet limited as the sun during winter

Time is slow when you're in that one class you hate

But time can be fast when you're with the person you love the most

Time holds all the memories you cherish and keeps away the ones you don't

Time can be lonely as walking in the rain at night by the busy street

Time can be welcoming as your birthday

Time is not alive, yet it's full of memories

Time can bring pain but time can also heal

With time, brings wisdom and experience

## THE SHINING LIGHT

BY RUDI YANEZ | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

the bright white glow in the sky the sense of cold in your breath  
the trees that dance to the wind the slight whisper of the leaves  
the spaces where light doesn't reach  
the sound of cars passing every so often  
the smell of cigarettes from the neighbors yard the stars that clear  
your head  
the music from the party across the street the feeling of loneliness  
the light that flickers causing you fear  
the park where you take breaks from walking the comfort you feel  
when you walk at night

## QUIET CHILD

BY LAILA SCRIVNER | KIPP DC COLLEGE PREPARATORY

Quiet child

You'll be too loud and wake the baby

Quiet child

Didn't I tell you to be quiet

Quiet child

This is the last time I'm going to say this

So you better be quiet

Quiet child

Child I told you to be quiet

You don't need me right now

You see I'm busy with this baby

You're just a dumb child who doesn't listen

I don't want to hear a sound from you

Go to your room and

Be quiet

\*child leaves and comes back\*

\*notices marks on arms\*

Oh no child

Why are you doing this to yourself

What about life could be so bad that you would do this

Child you've been so quiet

You know you can talk to me

Stop being such a

Quiet child

I've been trying to be a good girl

and be a quiet child

## QUIET CHILD

CONTINUED

But sometimes  
When it gets to be  
Too much  
I bang my head against the wall  
In hopes that you hear my noise  
Before I am swallowed by my mind  
In hopes that  
I can still be a quiet enough child to be on your good side  
Get loud enough to grab your attention  
Like the worlds best claw machine  
In hopes to pull out  
Just a bit of compassion and understanding  
So instead of you scowling at me  
and telling me to be quiet child  
You pull me in for a hug  
rub my back  
and tell me to be quiet child

I wish to grab your pain and hold it for just long enough  
for you to catch your breath  
Stop crying  
and be a quiet child again  
This is what you wanted  
You hold my pain long enough  
for me to catch my breath  
Stop crying  
and be a quiet child again

## QUIET CHILD

CONTINUED

I try my best to be a quiet child  
But I can't anymore  
I lost my childhood to an invisible illness  
I can't trust myself anymore  
I no longer know how to be a quiet child  
I no longer recall the art of picking up the pieces  
Forgiveness  
Nor the art of healing

When I was little I would fall  
Scrape my knee and pick myself back up  
Dust myself off  
and forgive myself for not looking where I was going  
Right now I wish I remembered the art of healing  
Then everything would be okay, right?  
You'll have nothing to worry about  
I'll be a quiet child  
But wait

Damn it  
The baby's awake now  
Now you've done it  
You woke the baby  
You could have just been a quiet child  
and got through it like the rest of us  
Now the baby won't be quiet and I don't know if I should go to  
my room and be quiet as a mouse  
Or stay and help



## QUIET CHILD

CONTINUED

I stay and help

Taking the baby rocking and shushing it softly

Poor baby

You need to learn how to be a quiet child

and get through it like the rest of us

Thank you for listening but I've been loud for too long

I should get back and be a

Quiet child

## GOOD INTENTIONS

LAILA SCRIVNER | KIPP DC COLLEGE PREPARATORY

I spoke with good intentions

She was upset

Maybe it was the guilt

The guilt she felt from

Hearing someone acknowledge the hurt and pain she cause

She has

A very unorthodox way of responding to confrontation

I spoke with good intentions

I needed her to feel my pain

My tears weren't enough

I was dismayed by her reaction

Engulfed by confusion

A simple "are you okay"

While the tears you always referred to as crocodile tears rolled  
down my face

Would have given me the comfort I needed

But I didn't get that

I spoke with good intentions

I tried to speak in a way that would be easy for anyone to  
understand

I should have remembered that you aren't just anyone

I simply said

"You're hurting me"

The way you looked at me

And told me you were pissed was uncanny

What you mean to tell me is my hurt and pain pisses you off?

Mindblowing

## GOOD INTENTIONS

CONTINUED

I spoke with good intentions  
Even though I spoke with good intentions  
My message was deterred by your incapability to open your eyes  
All I needed was for you to open your eyes  
You sat there  
Staring at me  
But in all actuality  
Your eyes were closed  
Closed to the fact that you were indeed capable of  
Causing me pain  
I needed you to open your eyes  
  
So I spoke with good intentions  
My intention was for you to hear my pain  
And glue back together the heart, soul, and mind you were breaking  
  
When I spoke with my good intentions  
My message was twisted and turned  
Upside down  
I gave you space  
And when I came back  
I found you crying  
I told you everything was going to be okay  
I told you I wasn't mad  
I told you we all make mistakes  
And I held you  
I wish you did these things when I came to you  
And spoke to you with my  
Good intentions

## HONEY DON'T SPARE MY FEELINGS

BY LAILA SCRIVNER | KIPP DC COLLEGE PREPARATORY

honey, don't spare my feelings  
don't try to deceive or make me believe that I'm not -  
doing something that is hurting you  
honey, don't spare my feelings  
i want to know what i do that gets your feathers ruffled  
i want to know what i do that makes you anxious or makes you  
feel unnerved  
upset  
frustrated  
and all the above  
I want to know exactly what it is

honey, don't spare my feelings  
as much as you don't want me feeling bad for the things you feel  
I want to make your life easier and fix whatever it is that needs to  
be fixed because

honey, I've been there before  
so when I say don't spare my feelings I mean it  
be honest with me  
it's hurting you more than anything and  
that pain right there is a pain you shouldn't have to feel  
your feelings are valid so don't invalidate them by trying to  
spare my feelings  
so honey, please don't spare my feelings

## THE HEAT

BY KAI WASHINGTON | DC INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Felt a crackle  
Saw a spark  
Heard the flame  
The heat was just the same  
Same as the gasoline  
Safer to touch It held no gas  
No smell  
Just something warm to use for ourselves

Only reaching for clouds  
Sweet and mushy  
Holding no buoyancy  
Fragile at the touch  
That's why we burn it  
For a delicious lunch

Sleep that night was restless  
Endearing with its event  
Exciting with its sight  
Exclusive to its shape  
A solid with no edges  
Soft but with some heft  
We could throw it  
But we give it the chief

With her glistening smile  
And her cocoa hair  
Tied up with the reliable string that has tied for years

## THE HEAT

CONTINUED

Looking at the hearth waiting  
With the little chef hoping for the same  
The same what  
How could a hearth be any entertainment  
It doesn't talk  
Walk  
Pay our bills  
Or even keep us safe  
But it gives us something to celebrate  
  
Each presentation became a fascination  
It made me laugh  
Crinkle my nose  
Jump off my toes  
Glowing from the pride the chef rode  
All the way to the couch  
To enjoy  
Having the little chef giggling by her side  
Staring at the experiment  
That gave them joy

## THE BIGGEST LIE

BY KAI WASHINGTON | DC INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

What classifies a lie  
One that's grey  
Or even moldy  
Half of reality  
Sometimes unfolding

My lie was never that  
It was ever-evolving  
It progressed from my heart  
Infecting my body piece by piece

My arm when it turned off someone's lights  
My hand which pushed away the facts  
My leg which moved from the crowds  
My stomach twisted and turned  
My brain the survivor realized the lie was never cryptic

These were the processes where the lie was decoded  
Staring through the mirror  
Refusing the picture  
Admiring everything but the figure  
It was like a caricature of what I most feared

No, I'm not a lie  
Neither was I old  
Nor was I black and white  
Hopefully, so I was real  
But that was the problem that I could feel

## THE BIGGEST LIE

CONTINUED

The problem wasn't the lie  
It was the heart that harbored it  
Beating an off-key tune  
That felt surreal to even my body  
Which kept it pumping and creating a vision that I refused

So maybe it was a lie  
But was it truly at that time  
Where everything was true  
Except when time considered  
Where my truth was set in a lie

Even now my lie is true  
At the same time, I could be lying about that too  
A lie from yourself to you  
Is that even possible to prove  
That you lied to yourself about your truth  
What matters is the fact my lie was mine to decide  
And not time's coffin in the tide  
Just a little giant lie all for me to hide



## COLORS IN LIFE

BY KAI WASHINGTON | DC INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Purple is the color to describe the passion  
Not the red that provoked my actions  
Just smooth violet to rekindle the past in which I wept  
Danced and rejoiced under the trees  
You see this kind of grape is a bridge  
The icy blue that makes the world frigid  
The fiery red that sees your flame

I have a deep confusion for this time  
It's so ugly yet intriguing  
It was the era of believing  
Every little phrase  
The sky was expansive  
A blue distraction  
The lines below red with an intense reaction  
God I love this clock  
Every tick requires a thought

Today the clock strikes 6  
This is where I resume  
With the average green that everyone sees  
Surrounds our vision  
Oh such an average day  
Met with another average claim  
The marching arrow  
We call it time

## COLORS IN LIFE

CONTINUED

Collaborating with my mind

I wish I could be stuck in the past  
Where the fun never seemed to last  
Where the silence was deafening  
Where the corner was never constant  
The love was ever-present  
You could surround yourself with evergreen  
But over time it always darkens  
For the trees all wither and have fallen

This tik has overestimated its stay  
For we are past the confines of the silver clock today  
I could dream of the future  
While experiencing the past  
Wait which one has passed  
I feel stuck in one  
And it isn't the present  
Is this how it starts  
When you start to lose your vision

MY OWN THOUGHTS HAUNT ME

BY CASANDRA ZELAYA | ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

I wanna say I'm fine but don't we all say that.

Don't we all lie to each other of how we feeling not keeping it real

So I'll just stay quiet until I'm ready to be heard.

That's probably what they want to hear but that something I'll never say

God created me with a mouth to talk so I will speak

I have eyes to see so I like look.

I will not let myself be shut up once again just to please them.

My thoughts never listen to me

It's like were two different people in the same body

looking at the mirror not knowing which one it is present me

or my thoughts.

## ONLY WHAT MY EYES COULD SEE

BY CASANDRA ZELAYA | ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

Two feet standing

Two eyes looking down looming over the dark red color.

There seem to be a figure where the color is coming from

The figure-seem to be in a deep sleep a very deep sleep

I open my mouth, but it seems my word are not waking it up

My knee breaking down

My body shaking not listen what my thoughts have to say

Water is rolling down the two side of my face

I tell my mind no tears no sadness

No nothing but it was too late from me

There was no stopping it now

My lips opening wide hearing the only loudest word that  
manage to come out

COME BACK I NEED YOU

Repeating it over and over till my voice could no longer talk

Holding their hand, I grab it firmly and tightly

Feeling ice cold and looking place white.

## HAVING BLACK SKIN

BY CASANDRA ZELAYA | ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

Having Black skin means having no rights no voice no freedom  
Having to look everywhere being paranoid of what side is going  
to hit

Walking dead eye starin' at me like I was an unknown creature  
That had no meaning for a name

Lord, please tell me how long it is going to take for them  
To make a change

We do have identify but why

Why they act like were just a supply to feed in their  
Only need leaving us in the dry

But it doesn't matter because we always believe their  
Own lies

## YOU BROUGHT ME HERE

BY EGYPT JAMES | ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

1. black love the thought of you caressing my dark thick hair  
or just your breath manipulating my soft skin sometimes I wait  
in darkness for your beaming light to let me in

2. black love the infinite establishment the elders sweat and  
suffering the damp clothes the sobbing and screaming but  
the spiritual blessing black love brought me here

3. black love the respectful the quiet the suffering the silent  
the visionary the blinding it taught me this with every caress  
with all of the sweat I still arrive at love black broken and  
beautiful

I'M ALIVE

BY EGYPT JAMES | ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

I don't know what to say

Stress meets tired in a place reserved for the dead

But I'm here

Feeding off of the energy that doesn't exist, I'm fed.

## GATEKEEPER

BY EGYPT JAMES | ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

I wish I could be the gatekeeper:

to the gate not by choice

but by my self-hate

I stare in the mirror for hours crying Looking

sobbing in disgust

my hearts sinks every time I'm just a person who needs lust  
not mockery not laughter happy times and  
for my life to really matter



## DOUBT-ERY

BY ANA ARGUETA | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Who am I?

I could say I am a million different things  
But how would you know I'm not.

How do you come to the conclusion of what's real and what's not?  
Do you dedicate a study to the theory that my life is a lie?  
In fear that one day I may die.  
With none of your questions answered?  
That my name may be slandered

How do you know I am not a pit of destruction?  
That my reconstruction was nothing but a mere lie?  
Yet I cry.

because I don't know who I am  
I could be the epitome of happiness  
But I don't feel like I am  
I feel jammed  
Into an uncontrollable void that I'd like to avoid  
I'm annoyed, destroyed, and not overjoyed.

I'm stuck  
In a cycle of doubt  
Wanting to shout but I'm left with a pout  
Like some trout in a drought  
Without a map in this route

ENDING

BY ANA ARGUETA | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

How frail can she be

After we were once a 'we'

Something she won't be

## MEANING OF FLOWERS

BY ANA ARGUETA | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Through the time of grief and to say the final goodbye  
I am found with despair, sadness, and misery  
Despair that I cannot awake from  
For 2 years I cannot walk away from this sadness  
And be fulfilled with just misery.  
A red poise with spider-like petals  
To define death, a final goodbye  
Red like blood, petals like death.

I am in hope of renewal and optimism.  
To the pink that marks the ending of a cold, dark, and lonely, winter  
To signify the beginning of spring  
The fleeting nature of life.  
With the softest tones and the most hopeful petals  
To define new life, new start  
Pink like spring. Petals like joy

LUST	V.	LOVE
BY FOLAJIMI ADEJUMO		EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL
a desire		intimacy
of the		of the
sexual		Relationship
passion behind		the tenderness
the guilt		of your warmth
I love you		I love you
but		let's be together
I'm not in love with you		for a lifetime

## BROWN SKIN GIRL WITH THE NAPPY HAIR

BY FOLAJIMI ADEJUMO | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

You're just that Brown Skin Girl,  
you're the shit girl.  
Beyonce calls your skin pearls  
but she loves everything about you,  
Even your nappy curls.  
Tightly coiled, 4c, with a whole lot of attitude,  
your hair is out here breaking barriers girl.  
Your fro is your rebellion towards white conformity.  
I'm still wondering how your kinky roots  
haven't been a national hero yet.

"Don't touch my hair"

"Don't touch my crown"

"You don't understand  
what it means to me"

"Bitch you better pay  
respect to my hair"

You know what they say, girl  
Black Girl Magic for life.  
You're more than a miracle,  
You're a whole garden of unexpected blessings.  
Your hair is an amazing place to live girl.  
10 years ago your roots stole your confidence  
Now 2021 is giving you back your independence.  
My hair, your hair, our hair.  
Black hair is good hair,  
No matter the length, texture, or color.

# TIRED

BY FOLAJIMI ADEJUMO | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Lately  
I  
Aint  
Had  
No  
Time  
For  
Sleeping.  
Fatigue  
Spreading  
Around  
My  
Body  
Like  
Honey  
Being  
Poured  
Out  
Of  
A  
Spoon.  
I'm  
So  
Tired  
Of  
Waiting  
For  
The  
World  
To  
Be  
Good.

## THE ROSE

BY ESMERALDA CARRANZA MORALES  
| EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

The rose can have so many meanings  
The color can identify what you feel  
Giving a rose can mean something

Most people use the color red to show  
Their love  
To show someone you really do care  
You can give it to someone you love, care,  
or even passionate for what they do

Now the color yellow, can show  
Their forgiveness, joy, and happiness  
To tell someone you are there for them  
You can give it someone that needs that push  
To keep them up and enlightened

The white color, can show  
innocence, chastity, and purity.  
It's also associated with spirituality, reverence,  
and new beginnings.

The purple color, can show majesty, royalty,  
adoration, and fascination.  
It can send a message of love at first sight  
But those that accept the rose imagine  
Enchanted and mystical moment.

The green color, can show peace, spiritual rejuvenation,

## THE ROSE

CONTINUED

calm, and fertility.

It can make a person feel comfortable  
and secured

Just one rose can signify  
Anything that you imagine too  
As long as you believe in  
The rose



## THE LOVE YOU HAVE

BY ESMERALDA CARRANZA MORALES

| EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Sometimes you feel warmness, and tinkling  
Through your whole body

At times you feel like you need to let it out and  
Can't because you are scared  
That you'll embarrass yourself

Then you feel like you just wanna be there for that person  
But the person doesn't know what you feel for them  
Then again it's not the end of the world

Then you and your buddies talk and you wanting to tell them  
But then again they might just blur things out  
Or even make fun of you

So you just write your feelings down on a piece of paper  
But can't describe what you feel  
Days past you know you can't give them a clue  
Couldn't tell them nothing  
So you just gave up  
Regretting every moment you had

You not willing to say what you feel

Weeks passed by, you and her become friends  
she's telling you how she feels  
You knowing that you had a crush on her  
But then again you're just a boy,  
that doesn't understand anything she says

THE LOVE YOU HAVE  
CONTINUED

Months passed by, you are over the moment,  
the crushes and failures  
Then she comes up to you  
Saying she knew you had feelings for her

Your heart pumping harder  
Butterflies flying crazy in your stomach

She felt the same way for days, weeks, and months  
But she was scared to open up  
She used the idea of talking about her "crush" was the only way  
To talk about you, YOU!

All along you were hearing about yourself.  
All this time you were deaf and blind.

TO WHOM IT CONCERNS

BY ESMERALDA CARRANZA MORALES

| EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Dear person,

When describing how I feel about you  
don't usually spill out as fast as I want them too.

Maybe I'm last from you noticing me but only I had the effort to be  
first. I just wanna go up to you and tell you,

"Hey umm just wanted to let you know that I...."

But all of that turns into silence.

I don't know what it is about you that takes my breath away in  
seconds.

Once you get to know me, you'll realize I'm not like the rest,  
shooting their shot and shit, I won't go up to you and tell you,

"Hey, you are cute and I was wondering if you were single?"

Like just the thought of all that makes me just wanna forget  
everything. I don't know what you are looking for exactly, but I hope  
you find it.

By the speed that I'm going I know I will never reach it.

Your expectations could be high but then again low.

I will never know because I never go up to you and ask.

When you read this, I hope you know I wrote this for you.

## "GOODBYE" IS TOO FAMILIAR

BY MARIA RIVERA | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Sometimes when my mind isn't too busy,  
I wonder why the closer I get to you, the more you flinch.  
What hands held you too rough?  
Which eyes wandered on bodies that weren't yours?  
Whose mouth didn't comfort you enough?  
What ears didn't listen to your marvelous ideas?  
Whoever... whatever it was, I'll be better and I'll be tough.

The line to cross is so thin.  
Just another fling in.  
Attach those strings in  
the oak door that brings in,  
the rhythm we should sing in.  
Continue to sting in,  
as the passion swings in.  
Flutter your wings in

a storyline...  
is just another way to rhyme.  
Different ways to slow down time,  
and each way was just as sublime.  
Times got tough, and you hid in your shell.  
Disregard and shut down - like always.  
You're falling out of love, I can tell.  
Jokes on you, I'm acquaintance with "Goodbyes"  
And I find nothing, but comfort in a farewell.

## EYES

BY MARIA RIVERA | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

eyes, eyes, eyes,  
everywhere there are eyes  
on every sharp turn,  
every pitch black room all I see are  
eyes, eyes, eyes  
Around my body they lay  
when I'm awake and sound asleep  
in every corner, they're watching - the  
eyes, eyes, eyes  
when I shed blood in front of the mirror,  
I look up just to your coal black shadow.  
I turn around and you're gone, but I still feel your  
eyes, eyes, eyes  
When I walk home late at the night,  
Your presence chokes me like a snake to its prey.  
The world's a little blurry, but maybe it's just my  
eyes, eyes, eyes  
Stop making me hallucinate,  
making me hear footsteps creek on the floor.  
Is it the voices in my head? Do they also have  
eyes, eyes, eyes  
Maybe I'm finally losing it.  
Stop, I can't breathe, let me go!  
No, no, no I can't forget your  
eyes, eyes, eyes  
You trapped me with your pleasing disguise.  
Take my mind and my soul,  
just don't take my  
eyes, eyes, eyes  
Don't you dare paralyze I can't move, I can't see  
why'd you take my vision, but not my

## EYES

CONTINUED

eyes, eyes, eyes

You forced me to say goodbye.

From a star I hang so high,  
all I know and love are your

eyes, eyes, eyes

## HOPELESS ROMANTIC

BY MARIA RIVERA | EL HAYNES PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

I use to be a hopeless romantic,  
the type to think every act of kindness was a sign.  
I'm starting to wonder if I'm a little manic?  
Because in reality, no one thought of me divine.

I hoped for the best, but always received the worst.  
Everyone left, and over again, I was left alone.  
It constantly felt like I never anyone's first,  
so the only love I got, had to be my own.

I must admit, I was in denial;  
people only loved that they were loved.  
Once again, I lost this eternal trial,  
and with every push, came a shove.

I used to be all over it, all frantic.  
Now I'm just hopeless, how romantic.

## ENERGY SPENT

BY MICHELLE TILLERY | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

I wish I received the same energy I gave, then maybe when  
the day ends I'd feel less drained

This pulsating pain rages and won't quit, I've massaged my  
temples, but it's still the same-

You say "I'm sorry, I wish I could change," yet you continue  
with the same worn-out game

I wish I could say all the things pent up, but when they come  
out it's all too abrupt It's always too much, too hard for you to  
handle, but have you ever been in the dark without a candle?

No? That's right I'm always there for you, when the thoughts  
intrude and your mind is screwed, but when my light dims,  
you're nowhere to be found even though you told me you'd  
always be around

When I fall down there's no one there to catch me, so I get up,  
brush my feet off, and rise from the concrete

You applaud me, tell me I'm resilient but I don't believe that  
because it's all just pretend

Truth is my energy's been spent, but you don't see that I'm  
acting content Beneath every "alright" lies a thousand more  
words, but you cannot hold them so they just go unheard  
I'm not blaming you for the trauma I've incurred, but it would  
be nice if you gave me a turn

You say it's saddening, but I already know, so next time you  
refer to me, I'm the chick who's grown cold



## BLACK STRONG SKIN

BY MICHELLE TILLERY | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

Black strong skin, it has withstood the auctioning upon the slab,  
conquered the turbulent tempests on the Atlantic, healed from the  
harsh lashes unleashed upon its back

Yet, you tell me it's not beautiful?

That's where I get confused,

because this skin survived years of neglect and abuse, yet still  
stands and fights in the face of adversity

This skin is so powerful, weak-minded people perceive it as a  
weapon. Why is my skin a weapon, yet yours is celebrated?

How come you get to frolic in the flowers carefree, while I need to  
lay in bed and convince myself I'm beautiful and worthy?

My skin is radiant, resilient, and should be respected, And if you  
don't agree

YOU ARE THE PROBLEM

Because my skin will change history

## DELIRIUM

BY MICHELLE TILLERY | BANNEKER HIGH SCHOOL

Black haired brown eyed boy, you don't know what you do to me  
How you twist up my insides every time you talk to me  
You have the cadence of my heart beat increasing to the point  
of where I should be in cardiac arrest  
Contemplating giving my heart a rest  
Go a few hours  
Don't respond to your texts, telling myself it's for the best  
God I missed you, but constantly diss you, so you can't be the  
one who leaves  
Go a few days  
Battling with my brain to not break down or to sound like  
anything less than the girl you'd love to be around  
Go a week  
Think I'm on the brink of insanity  
Palms sweating, fingers trembling  
My phone venom  
Proximity'll lead to shock, but I don't care 'cause you're worth it  
Your presence heroin, I'm drug addict for your attention  
Ripping and picking through conversations like searching for  
a needle in a haystack  
There's the chance of being pricked, but I'm still in search of  
my next hit  
The jitters consumed me  
My feet toe-tapping, a typewriter etching tales of an

DELIRIUM

CONTINUED

unrequited love story

The setting's gory

A girl in her room 3:30

Anxiety raining upon her, her mouth a desert, wind blowing  
through her wide-open window, her cognitive abilities clogged

An intruder sneaks in, stabbing all sense of reason into silence A  
frenzy about to commence

Word vomit falling and forming paragraphs

Hovering over a luminous screen, one touch of a small blue  
button cementing her destiny

## STUDENT BIOS

### **Benjamin Banneker Academic High School:**

**Kiarra James** has been writing poetry since the third grade when her teacher asked her to write a poem about herself and the words just flowed; She found it easy to put things in poetry. Whenever inspiration strikes, she just writes.

**Kelaiah Bigby** is a sophomore who participates in debate and poetry club. She is the runner-up for this year's Poetry Out Loud competition at Banneker.

**Robert Curington** is a ninth grader at Banneker, where he participates in debate and has a fondness for the arts.

### **District of Columbia International School:**

**Kai Washington** has been writing poetry and has been interested in it since 2nd grade ever since that time she would see different fairy tales for creative inspiration and was introduced to black literature that her mom had in their house. She joined different clubs and classes surrounding creative writing to advance her ability to write poetry that felt more personal. Currently she tries to write about emotions and social problems within our society.

**Yenner Rengifo Chaverra** is a 10th grade student at DCI. In 2021, he co-wrote a children's book titled *Perla's Magical Goodbye: El Adiós Mágico de Perla*, which was published by Shout Mouse Press. Yenner enjoys playing five different sports and reading manga.

### **Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School:**

**Silas Alemayehu** is a 10th grade student at the illustrious Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. He is one of the founding members of the Dunbar Poets Society.

## STUDENT BIOS CONTINUED

### **E.L. Haynes Public Charter School:**

**Ajah Hawkins** is a member of the creative writing community at E.L. Haynes. She is excited to continue to grow as a writer.

**Ana Argueta** is a proud member of the E.L. Haynes creative writing competition. She enjoys reading, writing, and spending time with friends.

**Esmeralda Carranza Morales** is a proud member of the E.L. Haynes creative writing community. She is motivated to make her family proud especially her mother.

**Folajimi Adejumo** is a proud member of the E.L. Haynes creative writing community. She also enjoys playing volleyball and spending time with friends.

**Lorena Gomez Alonzo** is a proud member of the E.L. Haynes creative writing community. She also enjoys spending time with her family and watching anime.

**Maria Rivera** is a current senior at E.L. Haynes Public Charter High school. She is the eldest of two brothers and Salvadorian. During her free time, she reads poetry or practices her artistic skills - either way she has her head in a book!

**Michelle Perez** is in 11th grade attending E.L. Haynes High School. She likes to spend time with family and friends. Usually, you'll find her dozing off during class, but somehow still stays attentive.

**Reina Avelar** is a proud member of the E.L. Haynes creative

## STUDENT BIOS CONTINUED

writing community. In her free time, she participates in local theater programs and loves her English class.

**Ridwan Eliassou-Maman** is 16 years old. He enjoys playing sports. He is from west Africa, and he only writes poems when he just needs to be free. He is kind and fun but boring at times.

**Rudi Yanez** is a proud member of the E.L. Haynes creative writing community. He appreciates his 11th grade English teacher Ms. Portillo for all her support.

**Treasure Clarke** is a proud member of the E.L. Haynes creative writing community. In her free time, she enjoys playing volleyball and listening to music.

**Zoe Mack** is a 10th grader at E.L.Haynes. She has a liking to writing and loves the opportunity to be creative. They also have a passion for gaming and creating.

### **Frank W. Ballou Senior High School:**

**Araiya Brewers** is an 11th grader. She uses poetry as a means to express herself freely.

**Shannon Bradshaw** is an 11th grader. She enjoys lyricism and performing.

### **KIPP DC College Preparatory School:**

**Laila Scrivner** is a junior at KIPP DC college preparatory who is involved with the school's National Academy of Finance program

## STUDENT BIOS CONTINUED

and is part of the slam poetry team. This past fall, Laila performed an original poem at Busboys and Poets.

### **Theodore Roosevelt High School:**

**Casandra Zelaya Torres** is a Principal Honor Student at Roosevelt High School, who is involved in many clubs and organizations such as poetry club, Fly by Light and many more.

**Egypt James** is an honor roll student, who is an active member of the thriving poetry club and a self-taught cosmetologist. She has only been writing poetry for the past month but is already one of the most prolific writers in the club.

**Ethan Anderson** is an honor roll student in the 9th grade. He is an up-and-coming poet and writer and thrives to be the best at what he does.

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## ABOUT CAH

First established in 1968, the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH) is an independent agency in the District of Columbia government that evaluates and initiates action on matters relating to the arts and humanities and encourages programs and the development of programs that promote progress in the arts and humanities.

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