

GRADE: 3

**“Bucktown and I”**

**by Ben Israel, Francis W. Parker School, Chicago**

Bucktown is the best Fun  
meeting friends at the park  
The 606 trail Taking Rosie for long walks  
Noisy trucks, cars and sirens

**“A Cat”**

**by Nia Nashashibi, Francis W. Parker School, Chicago**

The wind is blowing

When a looks for a home  
The cute cat loves me

Its hair is like a blanket

Its whiskers are thin grass strips

**“Saluting Soldiers”**

**by Darcy Rachel, Francis W. Parker School, Chicago**

I walk down the road  
I hear the dogs barking Dogs brown, white, and gray  
Sticking their heads out the fence  
They were saluting soldiers

**“Birds”**

**by Cyrus Parke, Francis W. Parker School, Chicago**

I hear the birds chirp  
The air helps the birds fly high  
They stay in a flock  
The young birds are in their nests  
And more are in the hard eggs

GRADE: 5

**“A Beautiful Day”**

**by Amanda Feinberg, Science and Arts Academy, Des Plaines**

I rise to a new bright and beautiful day  
The birds whistle to me as I walk outside  
I see the newspaper man and I wave to him, he waves back  
I walk past the glowing flowers and they smile at me, smelling better than ever before

I see the pink tulips, yellow daffodils, and red roses, that all smell like perfume

Then I see the golden sun peek over the mountains, like a scared baby bird trying to fly  
I see the gushing orange, splashing yellow, and a magnificent pink color I love how it ombres together, it makes it look like a big canvas that an amazing artist has painted on  
I see the clear, glass water, and how the waves look like a outburst of beauty from the Earth's inner core

I take a few steps forward, trying not to force the movement I don't want to go too fast or too slow  
Then I feel the warm, soft water on my toes, and I see how it glistens in the sunlight  
My feet feel relaxed, mounted on the soft, brown sand

The sun sparkles and shines like a beaming lamp in complete darkness Dolphins jump out of the dark, blue sea  
I see the wet, gray color on the dolphins fin  
The water on the dolphins sparkle in the sunlight I hear they're soft, light whistles to each other I whistle back to them, softly

I step back from the water Take a deep, soothing breath of fresh, cool air I am relaxed, I am at ease, I am at peace.

GRADE: 6

**“the colored boy”**

**by Xiangcheng Cai, John C. Haines Elementary School, Chicago**

the wind blows as fast as lightning

the boy runs as fast as a cheetah

the boy finally reaches the safe house  
the door welcomes him in  
but the journey will start all over again  
until he reaches the north

**“The lost Spirit”**

**by Brenda Vazquez, John C. Haines Elementary School, Chicago**

When souls gather together  
to honor the death of a loved  
one, on a cold, bitter, wet evening.

Everyone wearing black weeping in despair, yet comforting each other



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for their loss.

A lost spirit is confused,  
unsure where to go.  
Watching everyone's tears fall ever so slowly.

The wind calling the lost spirit's name through the spirit can't find its way.

Getting lost in the gray & the rain making it harder.  
As the rain pauses it seems  
that the entire world is  
dead.

Everyone frozen in shock like the snowy winter ice still trying to process  
what happened.

Yet there is that warm, gleaming light giving  
people the smallest of smiles.

Even in death there will  
always be some  
happiness deep in our hearts.

**“Enemies vs Friends”****by Natalie Lao, John C. Haines Elementary School, Chicago**

Enemies discourage you and are rude, Their personalities are sour as lemons.

Friends encourage you and care for you,

Their personalities are sweet as honey.

Your dreams tell you to be with friends.

But in reality,

you're always stuck with your enemies.

Your nightmares tell you to be with enemies,

But you're always debating about who to choose.

In the hallways, Your enemies are bullying others.

In the hallways, Your friends are entertaining others.

Who should I choose?

My friends that act like angels? Or My enemies that act like devils?

Who should I choose?

**“The Painter's window”****by Ephraim Liang, John C. Haines Elementary School, Chicago**

There is a raging flame across the street.

From the sizzling of the fire,

the painter paints a growling leopard.

From the smoke of the fire,

the painter paints wilting plants and living plants.

From the brightness of the fire,

the painter paints the shining sun.

From the victims of the fire,

the painter paints a mouse running from danger.

On his canvas, is a rainforest full of the fire of life and death

seen through the painter's window.

**“A Pet”****by Sasha Lemons, Douglas Elementary, Belleville**

I'm going to a pet store to find

A companion not a carrot.

Should it be a dog, cat, turtle,  
Rabbit, snake or parrot?

As I go to this big company  
In my little car,  
I am excited for this journey;  
Our trip to a land afar.

I can't wait to go on this big trip  
Maybe I'll name it Jake or Pip!  
My father says he's found the one sitting on some hay.  
It turns out that it was a rock  
To which I say "no way."

I think that I have found my pet at last  
I'll give him a bone.  
Can guess what it is?  
...yep.  
It's a stone!

GRADE: 7

**"Marionette"**  
by Vicky Chen, John C. Haines Elementary School, Chicago

Hanging by a thread, the puppet dances  
to the rhythm of  
a sorrowful symphony.

That smile,  
bold as the devil,  
has been chipped  
away.

And as the strings are pulled once more, off its bruised and shattered legs she performs.

Following fate as she plays the puppet master's game.

**"If You Were Me"**  
by Anonymous

If you were me You would be born free  
Thanks to your parents Who came here for better

If you were me You'd have plenty of friends



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Some are close, some are not Some will help you if you've been shot

But if you were me You'd struggle with sexuality  
Not know whether you are the G or the B In LGBT, maybe you're Demi?

If you were me You'd grow up in a religion Where that is wrong With parents who agree

If you were me You'd understand That when you end up telling them You'll get disowned, shunned, and talked  
down  
But not yet, you don't want that to happen Ever, but it's inevitable

If you were me You'd deal with his bull Although only once directly at you  
You know he hates you As you hate him too

If you were me You'd end up turning down a friend And you'd feel bad Not wanting them to feel like that

If you were me You'd have that one friend Who'll be there 'till the end But there is something you'd like to tell  
them

If you were me You'd tell that friend He's not good for you But neither am I

If you were me You'd think I'd be happy  
But I'm not  
And you can't change that You can only live with that.

**“Distractions to Dreamworld”****by Leena Mehta, University of Chicago Laboratory Summer School, Chicago**

The sun,  
Falling, falling into the horizon.  
Its fading signal reflects off the pool  
Causing rainbows to sprinkle onto the dry rocks around.  
The pale blue flowers that  
Reside in the center of the pool  
Waft, gently in the breeze  
As the shadows of small turtles  
Slide beneath.  
The sweet smelling white and pink flowers sway  
On the dancing trees,  
But they are more stationary  
On the bushes.  
It looks as though someone  
Plucked the glen out of a fairy tale  
For me.

Smooth silver rocks glint below the  
Unhurried orange fish who,  
Though they move frequently,  
Do not disrupt the Queen’s Mirror above.  
The clear water is cool  
As my hand swirls through  
It violates  
The peace within.  
Fish chase the ripples spreading from the surface  
In lazy arcs  
While invisible birds sing ancient songs.  
A purple flower catches my eye.

GRADE: 8

**“The Chains”****by Xaris Nuñez, Erie Elementary Charter School, Chicago**

The chains.  
The chains that I paint gold  
For a society who thinks silver isn’t cold.  
The chains.  
The chains that have enslaved me  
In this overrated time of an era That’s trynna change me.  
The chains.

The chains that I try to defeat  
Because this nation doesn't want me to be elite.  
The chains.  
The chains that value clothes and money  
More that knowledge and above me.  
The chains.

The chains that will see me graduate  
But would much rather see me fail And disintegrate.

**“Whispering Whimpers”**

**by Olivia Cox, Centralia Junior High School, Centralia**

We are all cigarettes But we have not yet been dimmed  
We have been dampened, yet we are still lit  
We have been stepped on yet we are still standing  
My soul has not yet been extinguished But why must I live life like this

I am not living, I am simply not dead  
My brother is no longer my brother He is a mindless, controlled victim  
My mother is no longer my mother She is a savior to my starving body  
I am no longer my own self  
My light is protected by a sliver of hope  
But what is hope if my light is temporary  
This hope may also be temporary Reassurance is all we have Maybe is the only word we know  
The future is only in our dreams

I am only a second in a day Tick, tick, tick  
We always tick, never rest If we rest, the time quits If time quits, the day quits  
The moon will not wane if we rest

I kiss the lips of death Cold, dull, emotionless lips Crying, poisoning, venom-full lips He only wants my life  
Never caring about who you are Death only wants your spirit

My family torn apart from my grasp  
My voice stolen from my throat  
My only sound is a cry, a cry for help I cry, but I sound like a whispering whimper  
My stolen voice is destroyed, never to heal  
My future has never seemed so dark

*(Written in the voice of the character "Lina" from Ruta Sepetys' "Between Shades of Gray")*



**“Summer”**

**by Michelle Franzen, Richard Bernotas Middle School, Crystal Lake**

Summer is a strong hand that firmly grasps me with it’s warmth.  
Each new green leaf is the fingers intertwining with mine.  
Warm pools and lakes are the hand perspiring.  
Flourishing flowers are the painted pink nails.  
Summer is a strong hand.

**“Nothing New”****by Dexter Birkenbeuel, University of Chicago Laboratory Summer School, Chicago**

Nothing new. Same

Old story. Same

Words. The Same

Street. Same

News. Same

Story. Same

People. Same

Thoughts. Same

Ideas. Same

Street. Same

People. Same

Streets.

Nothing New.

GRADE: 10

**“Don't Recognize”****by Adriana Gutierrez, Addison Trail High School, Addison**

I see you, but I don't recognize you anymore.

I see you across the glass, trying to remember our last hug.

The soft gentle touch I long for.

The touch that helped me through so much, the one that raised me since our own father didn't.

They told me what you did.

They told me what happened.

I thought I knew you.

Remember that boy who held me at night when I would get nightmares cause momma was out working her second job but even then her touch couldn't comfort me just like yours.

Do you have any idea how much it pains me to see you where you are?

I just see you and I put my hand on the glass with yours to say

I love you once more cause time is up, and I just don't see my brother anymore.

I see you, but I don't recognize you anymore.

I see how much you've grown up these last few years,

Taking care of your nephew cause you're the only one he calls ma anymore.

You have been through so much yet you're still going strong.

I don't know how you do it sometimes but you are.

Remember the little girl who used to climb her brother's bed at night because the nightmare was too bad, you deal with other nightmares by yourself now.

I know at times you break and cry but always remember, that's all right.

The youngest in age but the one with the oldest soul.

I see you in the mirror and I don't recognize myself anymore.

### **"White Wings"**

**by Autumn McMahan, Shawnee Junior-Senior High School, Wolf Lake**

I never knew this amazing man,  
All I knew was that my family was sad.

He made them laugh and built them their home,  
One they all could call their own.

They had five kids and raised them well,  
Everyone complimented on how they were swell.

The baby is the man I love,  
The one who gives me kisses and hugs.

The five grew up but stayed around,  
All ended up in their same home town.

My grandma watched and beamed with pride,  
You can still see the light in her eyes.

Grandkids came and loved him dear,  
If only he had known the end was near.

God called home the man who started it all,  
The one who always stood so broad and tall.

They watched him wither, but never give in.  
This man would not stop till the very end.

Cancer took his life and he was gone,  
I sing "In the Garden," that's our song.

When I'm alone I close my eyes,  
But I still see white and that beam of pride.

I come from a family who never gives up,  
Even when we've all ran out of luck.



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When I'm visiting this man I close my eyes,  
And off to the corner I see the white.

He still looks grouchy, but he listens to me sing.  
He is my angel with broad white wings.

**“Eleven Minutes Til”****by Gina Wiste, Benet Academy, Lisle**

10:47 the alarm clock flashes in time to my racing heartbeat the sheets are tangled, my arms are tangled my thoughts are tangled in webs of minute vastness outside my window a bird lays down in its nest down the street one last late child dribbles a lonely basketball up in space, a satellite floats in the lower stratosphere up above it the van allen belts tingle with radiation all is moving and but i should be still, must be still i have an early day tomorrow, but my mind doesn't know it longs to join the ranks of the moving to beat as one in the universal and yet solitary heartbeat the alarm clock still flickers 10:47

10:47 somewhere elsewhere, a thousand miles from me, east or west the ocean drums against the shore, in out, in out the way my stomach acid sloshes against its casing how many oceans churn in a ravenous foamy battle? oceans on beaches i've never seen, will never see the same moon tugs the waves with twilight fingers that same moon bathes the birds outside my window bathes the birds in yemen, in russia, in vietnam a silvery strand of light slithers in my window between the blinds touches the ornery alarm clock 10:47

10:47 almost eleven but not quite yet, not quite yet just as i am almost adult but not quite yet, not yet teetering on the last rays of a childhood daylight and peering ahead into a vast chasm of taxes and bills this minute is the longest ever, and the last one of its kind i'll see i flick on my lamp to check my skin, make sure i am still flesh the light is bright, it burns my eyes with a thousand suns a thousand futures burning on the horizon futures that, once this minute passes, i know will have receded me that much further it's funny how even if you don't do anything time still rolls on and all the fantasized paths collapse into one funny how when i turn out the light, the alarm clock still mocks me i take a breath in, i blink, and i miss it 10:48

GRADE: 11

**“The Bluest Eyes”****by Davian Thomas, East Peoria Community High School, East Peoria**

In the eyes of a black girl  
Ignorance is so infectious  
But falling under ignorance's temptation  
Undoubtedly makes her a selection  
A selection of society's lowest appreciation

In the eyes of a black girl  
Her brown skin isn't precious  
The darker the complexion  
The farther she is from perfection  
A perfection even her own kind won't show gratification

In the eyes of a black girl  
Her brown eyes aren't temptatious  
When blue is a lovely, blissful sensation

She fails to know she is God's creation  
A creation that shouldn't have to be compared to a caucasian

In the eyes of a black girl  
She'd give it all away for a lexus  
Beach blonde hair, that flows like the ocean  
A white skin so different from her complexion  
A complexion that is only given by the sun's direction

In the eyes of a black girl  
She is nothing but gracious  
She can say have all the self-love and motivation  
And will say she would never conform to the standards of this nation  
A nation that has robbed her of her imagination

In the eyes of a black girl  
She can get her blue eyes  
Though they seem to depict blurs  
Like a fog that presses against a window  
Under that blur she wipes  
She sees her face  
A face that was beautiful to begin with  
Without those blue eyes

### **"Divorce"**

**by Ashley Dwy, Maine West High School, Des Plaines**

we neared the impeccably white house seeming almost too perfect until the shouts became louder slicing through the serene atmosphere my brother opened the heavy oak door with reluctance we were greeted by ear shattering yells  
i instantly recognized the welcoming voices of my parents

my brother shooed me away before i could question him i hid in my room a thick pink blanket sheltered my small frame princesses emphasized across it served as my temporary protection  
the shouts quieted leaving a tension so thick it seemed hard to breathe or maybe i was holding the blanket too tightly  
i realized my tiny knuckles turned whiter than the color of the house a door slammed soft weeping echoed throughout the thin walls

my tiny footsteps crept out of my room following the music of sorrow leading me to my mother who wiped her eyes before i turned the corner a plastic smile plastered on her face like the barbie dolls flooding in my bins  
i asked what had happened but she said nothing merely that it's fine now everything's fine she said it more to herself than to me she told me dad was going to spend more time at my godfather's house like a long sleepover? i had asked yes, she said, like a long sleepover



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i smiled, okay mom she squeezed me tight tighter than our dog when he grabs hold of a new squeak toy and we try to take it from him i love you, she said, don't ever forget that i love you too, i told her wondering what she meant by that

**“Expiration”****by Khyri James, Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, Chicago**

There's no expiration date on racism  
The greatest American trend  
They lucky we only want part of the peace for their sins and not revenge  
Cuz to be honest this shit is so  
if prejudice was cocaine the FBI a be as high as the drugs the put in the hood in the 80's  
They want me to respect cop when they got a higher shot percentage than Tracy McGrady And it's crazy how  
all lives matter but when it's time to look at the Syrians situation yall eyes get lazy  
Y'all are so shady  
And matter fact I'd take it back it like four flats on a catillac to when this shit wasnt deeper than a cataract  
Short sites this nation vision cloudy like we all got cataracts  
Cuz y'all say "omg I just can't" All I see behind is breathe after that and I'm not talking asthma attacks  
I'm talking that Eric garner, mike brown  
I'm talking that conditioning my brother to  
thinking he better than me cuz you on sum light brown  
diminishing my voice to just a light sound  
Telling me it's not that deep when lowkey you see I might drown  
In these murky depths  
When the only relief is the weed, lean, and percipients  
Helping the grief you only hurt yourself  
we at the bottom We took a pause But it's just a comma, We need to stop the killing fake drilling and drama  
And degrading black girl like we ain't got black ass mommas  
And prove that we're more than just brought up project products  
Let me be the voice of my youth the voice of the truth  
Since blacks just wine and teenagers don't have stress to go through  
Let me serve what I observe just from where I'm local They just want the produce don't think of being vocal  
about where they go to  
Work harder, be a father, keep those liberating thoughts below you and you'll survive I promise  
Blacks need to help their own communities  
We tried to and y'all bombed us  
My homie gotta 1300 on her SAT  
But since her skin is viewed as harmful  
She can't sit in honors with the kids that drink vodka every weekend straight out the bottle cuz she has  
behavioral problems  
Similar to 90% of our political leaders, activists, and role models  
I must silenced for saying too much  
My thesis is don't put your foot on my neck and question why I can't get up

GRADE: 12

**“What I couldn't tell her”****by Victoria Gebhart, Newark High School, Newark**

there she is sitting with a bottle in hand.  
she didn't care where her children were, as long as she got that last drop.  
i wanted to tell her not to do it, but would she listen?  
i wanted to tell her they were more important, but would it make a difference?  
she didn't know they were going to be taken away, but would she stop them if they tried?  
i wanted to tell her this wasn't okay, but could she understand when she's unconscious?  
i wanted to tell her this wasn't love but would she know what love is?  
i wanted to tell her that this could kill her, but could she stop herself from temptation?  
i wanted to tell her not to leave, but would she even want to stay?  
i wanted to tell her they weren't a burden, but would she even care enough for them not to go?  
i wanted to tell her I love her, but she wasn't around.

**“The man I fell in Love with”****by Colette Mendoza, Antioch Community High School, Antioch**

Everyone says  
That he looks at me like I'm the stars  
As if my laugh contains his galaxy  
But when I look in the mirror  
All I see is a black hole

Everyone says  
That he stands at my side like a soldier  
Ready to jump into action to protect me  
But all I see is that I'm sending him to war

Everyone says  
That he looks at me as if I'm everything good in the world  
As if I'm going to change everything  
But I know I won't do anything

He says  
That he loves me dearly  
no matter how clingy or annoying I am

He says  
That he believes in me  
And that there is nothing I can't accomplish

He says  
That he never wants to leave me  
Every burning invasion,  
and every shaking hallucination within my body Wants me to run away and tell him to stop lying  
But he quickly grabs me and whispers in my ear Sweet little nothings

Everyone says  
As long as you know you've loved But I don't.  
I don't know But I'm beginning to feel it  
I'm beginning to see it  
Because of him.

He kisses my forehead and tells me to sleep He takes pictures of me at my worst  
And treasures them even states away.  
This is the man I've fallen in love with.  
And thanks to him, for once-  
I'm beginning to fall in love with me.

### **"Doors"**

**by Shannon Corgan, Collinsville High School, Collinsville**

the first time I walked through your front door, the smell of smoke and dog feces choked me. I was taken aback by your drugged-out brother on the couch, for I had never been in such a house, as this one. I was used to chandeliers reflecting diamonds from the sun, and doormats that read nothing but the word, "welcome." I was always told to take my shoes off when I walked through front doors, but the dirt grounded into the floor whispered to me that the bottoms of my shoes didn't matter here.

you took my hand, lead me to your wasteland, all I did was stand, as if I was a picture enclosed in the frame of your doorway, like a polaroid camera, I needed time to process this scene. seeing a quilted blanket seeming lonely, its sadness only to decrease by the works of a sewing machine.

the parameters consisted of cracked, collapsed, off-white walls, like a broken eggshell and I was the escaping yolk. shelves of empty bottles of rum and coke. this scene made me think of your folks, so I asked if I could meet them, then these words off your tongue, slowly rolled- "the only ones that wish to see my parents are the psychiatrists."

that very night, we slept to the internal symphony we called heartbeats. I was there to comfort when you cried, waking up, terrified of the sounds from the ones you look up to. screams so sharp I swear I could see the blue on your mother's skin. skip forward two years, and we had turned into your parent's identical twins, your good intentions stripped me of my innocence. dancing to Blues Clues in my pull-ups is what I missed, instead my own skin had become blue clues to my unhappiness.

now you cried at the sound of your own screams, I wondered if maybe certain love habits can be passed down by certain genes. contaminated touch, a kiss full of your spit, your disease infected me too. now I'm looking for a vaccine, some kind of voodoo, that will magically plaster all the holes in the doors I have punched through. I have permanent splinters jammed into my knuckles, everyone else might have seen a cute couple, but I saw us- hypocrites.

I think it's how often you'd kiss the blood cascading from my lips, and I'd kiss the leftovers on your fist. after this, you'd whisper your favorite line, "I never want to grow up to be like my parents." now every week I open the door to the local shrink, never did I think that I'd be the one left alone to reminisce, in a cold room with my psychiatrist, loosening the grip of you between my fingertips, but my nails have been permanently painted with a beautiful color titled "another shitty relationship."