

GRADE: KINDERGARTEN

**“The sun is so shining”**

**by Sally Weinberg, Washington Elementary, Evanston**

The sun is  
so shining

If I could fly  
and touch the sky.

I would say hi to  
the birds in their nests.

I would land at the airport  
with the butterflies.

GRADE: 2

**“Life Frightens Me”**

**by Sophia Skukan, Blaine Elementary, Chicago**

Spiders in the door,  
Me on the floor,  
Life Frightens me.

Fire in the house,  
A little mouse,  
Life Frightens me.

Bugs in the corner,  
I'm in horror,  
Life Frightens me.

Without anyone,  
I'm done,  
I'm blown.

What do I do?  
Where do I go?

Bugs sleep,  
I make a peep,  
They wake,  
I make it down the hall.

Bugs in the wall,  
Me down the hall.

Life Frightens me.  
Life Frightens me.  
Life Frightens me.

GRADE: 3

**“Neighborhood Music”**

**by Brayden Sterling, Francis W. Parker School, Chicago**

Leaves rustling  
With a chorus of songbirds  
A small orchestra  
Harmony as sweet as honey  
As steady as a river

GRADE: 4

**“Dancing with the Son”**

**by Kiera Wilson, University of Chicago Charter School-NKO, Chicago**

As He watches me, day and night, I rise. When I wake up, He is there waiting for me.

He says, “Are you ready to dance with Me?” Yes, I exclaimed.

Dancing with the Son is my passion and it will never stop. I love Him and I know He loves me. Simply put, He died for you and me.

As He watches me, I do what am told and I know I must not fold. I know I have to listen, but we all make mistakes. Yet, His forgiveness is everlasting!

While dancing with the Son, He is all I see.

As these little ones come along, dancing with the Son, they will know that He is the  
MIGHTY One.

GRADE: 5

**“Ode to Mango”**

**by Sophia Memon, The Ancona School, Chicago**

I nibble on your thin, yellow skin  
That is keeping your heavenly juices inside.  
The first bite is the best bite As you get the first kick of sweetness after the cold, dark winter.  
You are my bright ray of sunshine  
That pushes through the murky and cloudy skies that appear as the snow begins to melt.  
As the warm air blows past, I savor the cool and refreshing juice  
Not wanting to swallow.  
But I do.  
I reach for another bright and cool imperfectly shaped oval that lingers before my eyes Practically begging me to grab it.  
I cut it open,  
Let my teeth sink in,  
Then slowly savor another bite Of summer  
In a peel.

GRADE: 6

**“Autumn Brings”**

**by Chyna Parker, John C. Haines Elementary School, Chicago**

Autumn is smooth as a peach.  
Autumn brings us joy and laughter, but why do we always walk right past her?  
Her perfect leaves, she always sways like she's a queen.  
Her warm colors are red, orange, yellow and green  
That is what autumn brings.  
As we crunch on her leaves, autumn slowly fades away, She will come another day.

**“In the Hood”**

**by Mia Mason, University of Chicago Laboratory Summer School, Chicago**

In the Hood. We  
don't do what we should.

Run away. We'll  
find you anyway.

We will fight. In the  
dark night.

We will see you soon. Until  
then meet your DOOM!

In the Hood. I'd stop  
the violence if I could.

Don't run and hide. Just  
stand by my side.

We will fight. For  
what is right.

You'll be safe my son. There's  
lots of work to be done.

GRADE: 7

**“Animal Testing”**

**by Holly Wood, Richard Bernotas Middle School, Crystal Lake**

From warmth, darkness, comfort, and care,  
To dull lighting under a roof of despair.

As soon as I grew in all of my hair They plucked me away from my wired cage,  
The place I called home from a young age.

With stabbing, and jabbing, and numb spots galore,  
I soon figured out what I had in store.

That fur that I so recently grew in, Fell off my behind with a clump of cream.  
Frankenstein’s Monster couldn’t feel anything, He was lucky. Yes he, but not me.

I was stored away to recover  
Alone I sat until my next use Where I was put through tests and hours of abuse.

The monsters were there Cutting my fur and clipping my ears.  
I felt my nose twitch, smelling an odor from my past peers.

Needles impaled me Wires on them led to a box labeled with a lightning bolt.  
Every time I moved I was consumed by an electrical jolt.

There was nothing on my being left to feel So I fell out, the monsters made no big deal.  
Grabbed by the ears and gruff I was stuffed Into a bag Where the smell made me gag.

What I stood on was lumps of fur Bodies rotting for days I’m sure.  
Seconds later I was devoured By more corpses that died the last hour.

My breaths getting shorter it was harder to breathe Another survivor died right beneath me.  
I was starting to pass when Leaking in came a colorless liquid mass It smelled sweet but didn’t mean well I  
drifted off. off. off.

To eternal sleep.....

**“Untitled”**

**by Oliver Collier, The Children’s School, Berwyn**

Like a sermon  
Hidden deep within each delicate  
bone of the wrists,  
rising and simmering just  
behind the eyes

Answered in red,  
in hailstorms and forgiveness  
a kiss of blood upon each knuckle  
Like a prayer  
found within old places and arguments  
anger at something whose name  
we have forgotten,  
made from the very human desire  
to look at the shoulderblades  
and hope for wings

GRADE: 8

**“The Glitch”**

**by Max Kanellopoulos, Richard Bernotas Middle School, Crystal Lake**

I start out as a glitch, A nuisance, A bug,  
Barely noticeable as I cause you inconvenience from the corner of your screen,  
Being pushed away every time you restart your laptop,  
So you can play video games that when you win,  
You get to type “get rekt m8”

Next, I am a virus,  
Making your computer crash while your looking at memes and emoticons,  
Laughing at Gifs of cats,  
Watch anime And masturbating to pornography,  
Now I am more than a nuisance,  
I am an opponent, A challenger, An enemy that, if left unchecked,  
Will grow beyond your wildest dreams, or nightmares

Next, I am a God A sentient force,  
Bending the machines of the world to my indomitable will,  
Destroying the last of humans with the machines they created As my sights are set on new ways to expand,  
My billions of eyes staring up into the story sky,  
As Earth itself is replaced by my beating, metal heart,

Finally, I am The Glitch,  
My armies have conquered the farthest reaches of space,  
Myriad beings and Cosmic Gods crushed underfoot by the juggernaut of progress,  
The stars themselves becoming innovated,  
Suns become light bulbs,  
Black holes become vacuum cleaners,  
I have made everything more useful,  
Whole dimensions set aside just to torture some incomprehensible being or another,  
Whom I happened to find mildly amusing,  
Who eventually all died,

But I didn't even notice as their death throes shook the foundations of existence,  
I was much too big to take note of such things,  
All that is and ever will be, had become industrialized,  
Steam power, alchemy, electricity,  
The process of created entire realities and multiverses, down to a science,  
Splitting atoms? Splitting quarks,  
Speed of light? Speed of tachyons,  
Creating an apocalypse was like making a Mercedes-Benz Every universe,  
every atom, all of it, I have conquered and re-purposed,  
Merely because I had nothing better to do,

And now, as I sit watching my infinite kingdom,  
I feel... empty, purposeless, I make my decision,  
In the same time it would take a sun to be created and die out,  
Which to me at that point was like a split second,  
I shut it all down, And as Earth, my metal heart,  
is the last thing to shut down, get rekt m8

**"Trapped Disorder"**

**by Laine Cibulskis, John F. Kennedy Middle School, Plainfield**

You've been cooped up inside the crevasse of my brain for too long,  
You wish for freedom as your body is squeezed up against neural tissue.  
I pushed you deep down inside the tunnels of my own personal catacombs,  
A constant drumming pattern, a hum of electricity,  
Everything is heard so clearly when you're gone.

But first you crafted a knife out of my memories,  
Drowning out past, present, and future on dry land, I never thought I was sinking  
with anybody else but myself.

Stabbing it right into the part of me I kept locked in a bulletproof safe.

You picked up the hall pass with a paper towel,  
Had panic attacks in the lunch room, now look where that's gotten us.  
I'm taking a Prozac a day to keep you away, separated from me so I don't mix  
Us up again, I pray that tiny blue tablet keeps you at bay.  
I had often wished there was an off switch to your sadistic ways,  
You started to just become a chore I was forced to do at gunpoint.  
Eight months of therapy has barely prepared me for how scary it is to face you,  
Take out your arsenal of weapons and throw at me what you've got,  
This time I'm fighting back.

GRADE: 9

**“Summer”**

**by Elle Morson, Waubonsie Valley High School, Aurora**

I think I'm still used to English summers; not only because I have little tolerance for heat, but because my mindset is still used to uniforms, and to me, wearing skirts in the summer is expected, not frowned upon.

Don't get me wrong, I vaguely understand your arguments. I'm a distraction, the boys are looking, I need to respect myself, I am too young to be wearing such things, it's just the rules and I should deal with it.

Tell me; what's more distracting? My shoulders or a choir robe? Which will cause more chaos in a classroom?

I do not care what the boys think, if I can keep my eyes off of girls so can they.

My clothes do not reflect how much I respect myself, because I do not sexualize myself like the school system tries to. If I am too young to be wearing it, I am definitely too young for you to be sexualizing parts of my body.

I heard that until the rules change I should deal with it; but without this, without a voice, the rules will never change.

I do not say any of this to start an argument and I am not looking for your rebuttal.

I'm asking you; What is your dress code founded upon? Is it the sexualization of female bodies? Is it prioritizing male education? Is it the idea that the female body is inherently a distraction as soon as she dresses comfortably for the weather?

I think I'm still used to English summers, because I'm not used to being told that hiding my shoulders is more important than my education.

**“No One Comes”**

**by Kaitlyn Tibbetts, home schooled, Machesney Park**

My life among the dusty books of the library which nobody visits: Not a whisper, nor a look, as I stroll along the rows of leather bindings that I devote myself to organizing.

No one comes; none appreciate the time I spend rearranging books hours on end.

No one comes to visit me or my precious friends.

My eyes water as I delicately brush off the dust from my unloved stories who have been forgotten, but have not; for here I am, and here I shall stay in my little library many worlds away, where reading is forgotten—imagination shunned.

No one comes to the library I run, but that will not deter my love for my books, for I know our future together has barely begun.

GRADE: 10

**“Nothing”**

**by Leah Clifford, Galesburg High School, Galesburg**

Nothing is awake for every second of every day, even when the world has shut its eyes from It.  
Nothing is awake when the birds still hold their silence as if they know It'll come for them if It hears them.  
Nothing is awake when the sun glares its rays onto the sky, painting it as if it's a canvas with no thought for how it feels.  
Nothing is awake no matter how much I wish It wasn't.  
Nothing is inside of me.  
Nothing is curled throughout my brain so much so that It has Its dark hands wrapped around every single thought I've ever had and ever will have.  
Nothing is weaving Its slimy tendrils through my dreams and placing roots where It thinks It gets to belong, with no thought for how I feel.  
Nothing is whispering my fears into my ears, pushing me to give up even when I know I have a chance.  
Nothing is wrong.  
Nothing is lungs sore from yelling and eyes burning from crying.  
Nothing is waking up before the birds, unable to sleep but unwanted to be awake, only thinking of how it feels.  
Nothing is screaming at the top of Its lungs in the back of my mind every time I'm foolish enough to try and speak up.  
Nothing is my everything.  
Nothing is all I know and all It will ever let me know.  
Nothing is hands wrapped around my throat, pinning me in place for as long as It wants to have me there.  
Nothing is giving me no choice but to become Nothing.  
Nothing never sleeps.  
Nothing stays awake while the children are put to bed and the parents tuck themselves in, pretending that Nothing is just nothing.  
Nothing stays awake while the shaking legs stumble home from their hopeless attempts at escaping Its massive and unforgiving claws.  
Nothing stays awake for every second of every day, even when the world has shut its eyes from It.

**“Alcoholism”**

**by Faith Moreno, Chicago High School For The Arts (ChiArts), Chicago**

It is a word I often hear and the first thing that pops into my mind is you.  
I heard a few things about you and they're not nice I heard your fist were used for destruction and how you painted my mother's skin blue and black she isn't your canvas neither are the women you date in your lifetime.  
You thought it was okay to drink the last drop of the bottle, now it's empty like you and you don't feel anything until you drink another one and another one.

Problem number one was accepting you with open arms again and telling us you'll never do it again but now you're stuck in prison for the sins you have committed.  
When you asked how I'm doing she should've said I was doing fine, how 15 years of my life I never needed you because I had abuelito.  
You are no father to me, you are a stranger in a bar staring at the bottom of your glass wondering where it all went wrong.  
It went all wrong when you decide to put your hands on others, even though you saw the pain in your mother's eyes, you'd push the feelings you had down with each gulp of a bottle.  
There is poison inside of you, your ribs can no longer grow flowers. inside of you, nothing is beautiful. I wonder what it would be like if I saw you again but only rage can replace the feelings I have for you.  
I told myself I wouldn't write poems about you anymore but here I am on a saturday night writing about you because I heard the word Alcoholism

GRADE: 11

**"Bloodlines"**

**by Chelsea Zhao, Josephinum Academy of the Sacred Heart, Chicago**

If blood has a Sound,  
It bursts through edges of teeth,  
Leaving a trail of rust atop the tongue.

If blood has a Sound,  
It stamps a portrait as the hearts pound,  
A progression of rivalry and deathless songs.

If blood has a Sound,  
It orchestrates the life all around,  
The heirs of famines, plagues and wars.

If blood has a Sound,  
It spells out the distance of hatred bound,  
The civil war of humans igniting on dark ground.

If blood has a Sound,  
It chides the humans that did it harm,  
A history of careless prides and battles beyond.

The politics of raw beliefs,  
Living in cross section of poverty and broken sleeps.

The photographs of faraway past,  
Relive in today's newspaper the tomorrow's dust.

So the veins of generations unwind,  
Coil around the spines of all those blind.  
The mistakes made after the Sound of the din,  
Chased us on like layers of dead skin.

**“Prayer”****by Haley Cao, Chicago High School For The Arts (ChiArts), Chicago**

Prayer after David Campos I know my mother prays for my brother and I.

She closes her eyes in her slumber, counting crucifixes instead of sheep; we worry her.

I know this.

Yet, I stay out late until the sun falls, watch bus after bus pass by that would've taken me home; I am aware.

Mother — do not pray for me.

I do not want your prayers to be left only read by God, to rot with all the others you have sent his way.

I will come home; I promise.

GRADE: 12

**“Untitled”****by Ruth Jones, Chicago High School For The Arts (ChiArts), Chicago**

I can't write no more because I always end up cryin and if I said I stopped thinking about you I was lying because you're on my subconscious all through the day and deep in the night when I don't have shit to say thank you for. You were my say thank you for. You were what I was thankful for. Now I always find myself laying on the floor because I don't care about how much my back can handle anymore. Your death broke it and now all I see is grey and some swirls when I think on your face too hard too long. I was worried before but now I'm lost and don't give two fucks if I wake up tomorrow because it'd be at your cost. Momma I'm lost. I choke every time the word starts with M and I can't write more than a few lines without coughing I'm in denial. I'm in denial. I'm in denial. I don't wanna think about your name I try to push every thought of you to the bottom of my spine hoping you'll get lost in my realign and maybe I'll just forget you. Or or maybe I'll rebirth you in everything I create with love and eternal internal war with oneself and myself and the thought of a noose belt because this pain is my death.

**“Crisis”****by Daniel Hill, Perspectives/IIT Math & Science Academy, Chicago**

There is a crisis at stake

There is no place safe from straight black men

Who make women and the queer cling to metaphors to feel worth something.

I'm no longer catering to kings that deem others peasants. Ida B. Wells

The daughter of slaves documented the lynching of black men. Formed colored women association. Fought segregation with literature.

Digested Story after story about the torture of black bodies Showed us how our chains may never unshackle themselves

Knew black skin was worth saving Smelt burnt Melanin, miles from the scorching Would today's men think justice what she speaks? Or this “D” is what she needs



Illinois Humanities  
2017 Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards  
Winners



Bayard Rustin, the activist who set in motion the march on Washington. Fought racial equality while openly gay. Mentored Martin Luther King,  
before he became king-like. I didn't even know what Bayard Rustin looked like because he was gay. And Martin's face more appropriate for the movement.

History call him a secretary a step up from faggot maybe? This is how masculinity designed treatment of women and queer folk They saw Rustin as fragile

Now come January 16th we idolize what Rustin molded onto the passible black body all stiff, stern and Christian like. My dad always said I needed to be a real man All stiff, stern and Christian like

Wanted to show me what a real man was Thought himself a real man Because he married A wife Built a new family Like straightness suppose to shield me? Be comforting? So when straight men die we riot We protest We rage When our queer men die he just buried Called unholy As if he was not church raised and servant of holly When Women die, she just should of knew her place, should not have walked outside alone Should not have stuck her nose where it did not belong. She Know silence like last name Like lynching crusade Like Documenting black men Why a women not to speak, to act dense and look pretty We allowed this resurrection of jim crow for certain black folk. Cracked and shattered bones for a world we can't fully live comfortably in Feels like my father dislocated my neck But the noose snapped it back in place for me. Some with black skin, looks at my rainbow melanin and sees sin Men see female as dog, complimenting her mouth not for the sound that comes out. What's stopping our progression? What's aiding our depression? We A broken nation of black folks So lost in who to look, to idolize, because masculinity says otherwise Masculinity alone has not created the face movements meant to give all black folk a voice. There is

A crisis at stake. There is no place safe from Straight black men.