ART / WORK

ART INSPIRED WRITING BY
Branciforte Middle School 8th Graders

INSPIRED BY
THE ARTWORK OF STUDENTS OF SELF HELP GRAPHICS
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Inspired by the Artwork of Students of
Self Help Graphics
To all the visual artists and writer artists who courageously put their work out into the world
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“The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.”
— Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*

**To an Educator,** few things are more rewarding than witnessing a student discover and genuinely express his or her voice. Through creative expression, young people hone their ability to communicate, acquire cultural literacy, and, perhaps most importantly, develop their voice as community leaders. *Art/Work,* the fifth book in the Hablamos Juntos Series, is a youth-to-youth effort: local middle school students, inspired by the artwork of youth participating in the S.O.Y. Artista program at Self Help Graphics in East L.A., tap into their own experiences and express their creativity through personal narratives.

The Hablamos Juntos Series offers participating students an opportunity to establish a shared space that transcends language, culture, and generations. Students study and connect with California Latinx artists. They respond with poignant stories, reactions, and reflections to complete the visual dialog between artist and viewer. By becoming part of the long tradition of sharing ideas and personal truths through visual imagery and storytelling, students are able to find meaning and relevance in their own writing. The result are stories that are powerful and touching, with memories of immigration, family adventures, and daily life.

The words “hablamos juntos” mean we speak together or we engage with one another. In today’s disheartening, polarizing political moment, being able to find common ground is essential. Providing a space for students to experience visual images and connect them to their personal lives gives power, meaning, and respect to their experience. By giving meaning to different perspectives, we also broaden our common humanity to include many perspectives that are not often part of the conversation. This in turn enriches us all.

Perhaps the highest purpose of education is to help students find their voice, a process that has both artistic and political dimensions. On the one hand, it can describe the process for students to cultivate in their writing a specific personality, style, and point of view. It also represents a process of self-realization—when a student recognizes that they are active participants in addressing their own personal challenges and systemic inequities. Knowledge is power in both the most basic and complex sense.

*Art/Work* allows us as readers to see a student’s transition to self-realization. By learning the power of sharing, being part of a larger community, and having an important role to play, students find courage, creativity, and communication skills to continue to weave together a strong and vibrant society. Enabling students to share their personal stories gifts us with a unique perspective and understanding of the challenges and joys our community faces and the many ways our youth see, understand, and respond to them.

**Dr. Faris M. Sabbah**
Superintendent of Schools, Santa Cruz County
**Art/Work began in the summer** of 2018 in the imaginations of young artists aged 14 to 24 from East Los Angeles. These students, participating in Self Help Graphics Summer of Youth (S.O.Y) Artista program, created imagery using the camera lens, woodcuts, paint, and pens. The story itself, however, remained hidden inside the image. Not until the art was shared with total strangers, the students in Room 14 at Branciforte Middle School in Santa Cruz, did a story for every image come to life. Watching this process take shape was a magical one for me, their regular classroom teacher. As an example, when one writing group had a reluctant, confused writer in their midst, other writers rallied around, offering suggestions and encouragement. The result after six weeks of art analysis and writing was 60 narratives that are personal and thought provoking, fresh and original.

As I watched my students dig deeper into their writing, I noticed them constantly going back to the art. For instance, morning class student Kendall Keuper recalled, “As I continued writing, I began to really relate to the colors and textures in the art and how they reminded me of the rest home my great-grandfather lived in. The eyes in the art piece—they looked drained. I used that as inspiration to write about his blindness.”

For many of my Latinx students there was a cultural connection. Jose Antonio Nabor spoke about his aunt’s experience in this way: “The crying woman holding the baby in my art piece drew me to the story of how my aunt crossed the border. I know that Hispanics have talent!”

I feel truly honored to have had my classes participate this year in the Hablamos Juntos series. It was a stretch for all of us, for our imaginations and our writing process. The end result was a true collaboration between artists, their art, student writers, writing tutors, and me, their teacher. Together we speak.

**Wendy Wesch Thompson**  
Teacher, Eighth Grade American Studies Core
Morning Class
I was lying on my bed, bored, when Sienna, my friend next door, began knocking loudly non-stop.

“D!” she screamed excitedly.

“What’s wrong?” my mom and I asked, concerned.

Sienna excitedly told us how her mother had found a baby hummingbird in their driveway. We hurried over to her house, where her mother had made a safe home with a box and soft towel for the baby hummer.

While we watched the bird, it somehow got its foot stuck in the folds of the towel. It panicked and squeaked to get free, and I gently unhooked its foot from the towel’s fibers. The sweet bird flew above the box! It could fly—barely. It hovered for only a few seconds, zipping and fluttering before it flew under the desk and crashed with a high-pitched “Squeak!” Thankfully, Sienna and I picked the bird up and put it in the box.

Sienna’s mom had been outside searching for a nest, but instead, she came back with another baby hummingbird! What to do with TWO baby hummingbirds? Sienna’s mom gently put the small, shaking ball of fluff in the box with the other bird.

She went yet again to search for the nest. SUCCESS! She found their nest! We gathered up both birds and went to return them safely to their nest. Momma hummingbird watched quietly from afar. I felt happy to see the babies and their momma reconnected again. It was special that Sienna, her mother, and I did something really good to help them, and it is a memory I won’t soon forget.
Walking down the spiraling stairs, I was excited to be in the catacombs of Paris. It was a perfect warm afternoon. My friend and I were laughing because the lady at the front thought he was over 18 and asked for his ID, which he didn’t have (because he was only 14).

Breezes moved up and down the stairs. The stairs opened up into a stone room, but I was still waiting for the bones. It smelled musty and like mildew. The lighting was not the best because it was deep underground and the lights in the wall were yellow. We got an audio tape for €5, but I lost interest because I didn’t care about the facts—I just wanted to walk for a while.

The floor was wet and slippery and the walls were stone that eventually transitioned to limestone. When we got to the bones, it was really enjoyable. My friend and I took videos and photos of everything with our phones. The walls were lined with skulls: brown, yellow, and a few red ones. Some of the bones were random arms and legs, or were set up like memorials. My friend, who is charter-schooled, was doing a report on the Bubonic plague, so he recorded himself talking.

We met up with some Australian people and took pictures next to skulls. Then we talked for awhile, but had to whisper because the supports were unstable. If we talked too loudly, the stone supports could fall down on us, and we could join the bones.
This is about a little street in Leon, Mexico. One early, blue, sunny morning, after my dad woke me up, we ate breakfast at a little taqueria, and then drove onto the baseball field.

“I’m going to teach you how to drive,” he said.

I moved to the soft, black driver’s seat. I was 12 years old and shorter than I am now—a young teenager driving a white Dodge Ram. I clicked on the seatbelt and tested the breaks like he told me to. I released the parking brake and put it into gear. He told me to turn on the lights and wiper blades. He taught me to look at my mirrors and watch around for cars and people for safety. I started driving around the rough, dirt field for an hour. I was nervous and a little scared. I eventually learned to press the gas and brakes softly, instead of gunning it to 50 miles per hour.

A week later, he let me go on the beautiful streets of my hometown. A lady was walking on the road. I wanted to beep, but my dad wouldn’t let me, because she would think it was rude. I wasn’t nervous anymore. It felt great driving a Dodge Ram.

That was the day I drove on my little, smooth Mexican caminos. I wish I could go back to my tierra soon to drive on my small Mexican calles.
The hot, burning sun could melt strong immigrants, working in the field and construction. But, it doesn’t matter if it’s cold or hot; they have to hustle to keep their families in the U.S. healthy and full-bellied. They still have to care for their blood in their home country, too. Immigrants stay tough by always going to church to pray for the dead, or someone who’s sick, or even for themselves to not get sick because they have to maintain their members.

All of this describes my dad and mom, who go to la iglesia to pray to help people who are sick. They do this for people they don’t know and ayudando people in need.

Dad, the jaguar of the family, talks to each of us to make sure we are safe. Rays shine down on the strong cat, giving him strength. The jaguar wouldn’t be anything without the sun. The solar energy makes this animal unstoppable.

My mom is the sun. She cares for all the grandmas by sending money to El Salvadorian elderly women for food and medicines. She gives us nourishment.
I was never fond of art. I couldn’t draw or paint well, and at no time did I like looking at it. Yet peering at this piece of art, the broken mirror and the hand in its reflection, I see a story—as if there is something hiding behind it. In this photograph, I see a memory—San Francisco City, the sky a clear blue, with not one fuzzy cloud in sight on this December day, the sun beaming down on the sparkling, black pavement.

The bright rays are not warming me, though. There’s a chilling breeze that still stings my nose and lips, turning them a bright red. I stuff my freezing hands into my pockets as I walk down the sidewalk. The wind is at my back, blowing my tangled hair every which way. My aching cheeks feel as if they are frozen, and I can see my puffs of breath like gusts of smoke in the crisp, late afternoon air. I stroll alongside my shivering sister, out from the chaos of always-busy San Francisco, to the relaxed streets.

Suddenly, a large grey mass rolls over the clear blue sky. It quickly becomes dark. The sun disappears behind the clouds, and a single raindrop falls on the top of my head. I look up, and it starts to pour. My sister and I begin to run to the hotel. When both of us are inside, we look at each other’s drenched bodies and break down laughing.
First Time

Aaron Bryant

When my sisters and I finally got through all of the dense smoke at the door, we were greeted by a mysterious old man with tan skin and a flowered shirt. He said his name was Tuli Khoea, and his family-owned shop had been there since 1978. My sisters urged me to hurry up and pick out a shirt because the guy looked scary, with his big, creepy smile, white hair, and all. The store looked frightening. From the outside, the place looked like a crime scene or a rundown tiki bar. Inside, it reminded me of a coffin, because everywhere I turned, there was a dark wooden wall. I thought he was interested in us because he was proud of his shop.

After searching mindlessly for hours, I finally narrowed it down to a light, red buttoned shirt with white flowers imprinted on it. The old man could tell I was a naturally curious nine-year-old. I thought he was just wise, and I told him my name was Aaron. He said he wanted to tell me a story.

“I didn’t even know shirts had stories,” I said.

The old, wise man replied, “Everything has a story.”

He started his story by telling me that pollution had never been as bad on Hawaii, and on the wildlife there, as it was now. Old man Khoea brought me another shirt that had a dead bird’s skeleton surrounded by leaves and he called it the ‘Akikiki bird. I thought the shirt was weird, but after hearing him tell the story, the man gave me a discount, so I took home two shirts that day.

I was happy when I left the shop. I’ve returned to the Island of Hawaii three times since then, and plan to visit again this summer.
A Tribute to  
*The Warrior Song Project*  
Orion Butler

**I grew up listening** to *The Warrior Song* almost every day. My dad, my protector, who was in Black Ops, loves this song. Bullet-grazed knuckles, stabbed in the cheek, and more—he has survived.

When shots ring out and screams fill the air,  
Bodies on the floor are the ones who once would dare.  
The ones who said they would protect our nation  
Are now hidden away, searching for their salvation.  
Hopes and dreams, now all crushed.  
Red blood always filling the underbrush.  
You and I, we'll forever fight,  
the enemy faces in our sight.  
Against us, they'll never last,  
*because the shadow of death is the one we cast.*

*Stand next to me, you'll never stand alone.  *  
*I'm last to leave, but the first to go.*  
Air strike over there? Make it so.  
I'll be the leader everyone follows,  
guns ready, waiting in the shadows.

Hopes and dreams, now all crushed.  
Red blood always filling the underbrush.  
You and I, we'll forever fight,  
the enemy faces in our sight.  
Against us, they'll never last,  
*because the shadow of death is the one we cast.*

They'll tremble before our marching feet,  
chanting to our thunder-beat.  
*I am a soldier and I'm marching on*  
*I am a warrior and this is my song*  
*I am a warrior and this is my song*  
Hopes and dreams, now all crushed.  
Red blood always filling the underbrush.  
You and I, we'll forever fight,  
the enemy faces in our sight.  
Against us, they'll never last,  
*because the shadow of death is the one we cast.*
I know the unknown, I see the unknown. They don’t. I know the world is a scary place, but I know it can change. In the future, does there have to be separation and violence? Will kids’ sweet, innocent minds still be hidden in the dark? I was in the dark, but then I escaped it. I escaped it last year, when 17 people died—17 kids, because of guns. Now I know about huge blank walls being built and heavy guns being fired. I’m not gonna hide in the shadows anymore. It’s time for change—for me to change.

And if you just wait, there will be an ‘explosion’ of hope. There will be color. Just imagine beautiful pops of nature, huge trees, purple flowers. Instead of shooting bullets, we’ll be throwing rose petals. Instead of building walls, we’ll be making paths. Everyone will be striving to be happy.

It will be like the time I was speeding around the ice rink. Everything and everyone was cold. But everyone was still happy. Despite how cold their fingertips were, they just kept on going. We just kept on going, because we all knew that the faster we went and the more we let go, the more our problems would wash away in the icy air. Even my little brother went as fast as he could. He would always fall, but even a little boy didn’t give up. You don’t give up. My view was perfect. That night was perfect.
I got my first pair of glasses in kindergarten. Before I got my glasses, I couldn’t see the board in front of me. I felt frustrated that I had to copy off my friend’s paper and couldn’t do the work like everybody else. I felt left out because other students were doing fun stuff like card games. I wondered what was wrong with me.

When I was in third grade, I found out I had to get surgery on both eyes.

Walking into surgery, I crawled into my mom’s lap to get love and support. The doctor came in and gave me anesthesia, which made me dizzy but not all the way asleep. There were so many knives on the surgery tray. I was hallucinating that black, blue, and pink knives were hanging from the ceiling as my doctor’s hands moved around my face. When I finally woke up, I realized my eyes were numb and had stitches on the eyelids.

After surgery I went outside with my mom to get fresh air, but I was still half asleep. We walked around San Francisco to get rid of the anesthesia. The world was exploding with colors! When I got back to Santa Cruz, I went to school with my new glasses and sat next to my friend. The screen came on, and I was amazed and full of joy! My eyesight was fixed!

Being able to see is probably one of the best things you could ever have.
It was a burning hot summer day. I was walking in the bright green grass by myself. While I walked, I saw two beautiful horses. They were super soft like fluffy blankets and I felt special because it has always been my dream to see and touch big, brown, wonderful animals like these horses.

I was visiting my aunts in a large village in Mexico. It was Sunday and I was in the pasture watching the mariachis saddle up their rides, and I realized my wish came true in real life! I was really amazed because I had the opportunity to see the horses, watch the mariachis, and spend time in Mexico riding the horses.

I remember hearing the loud clip-clop of the horses running to their stable for food. I asked one of the mariachis if I could possibly ride the horses, and for some tips on how to ride. They told me to try, and even if I fell off, to try again. Day after day, I rode in the warm afternoons, always on the same calm, tall horse. I was lucky to get to ride him and had less trouble. Every day, I got better at my skills. I decided to keep my dream alive and believe in myself. This experience taught me to always keep trying, no matter what.
I sat on my bed, nervously listening to the loud yells of my parents fighting, and waited for it to be over. I thought of my pets, hiding in my closet. The sound of things being thrown echoed through the cold, empty house. I stayed calm to avoid the negative energy that suffocates me but also makes me who I am. Yelling is imprinted in what we are.

My door opened. I knew they had come to argue in here, especially my dad. I tried to stay calm while they fought—I put “glasses” on to block out what was happening. The fear was now drowning me in darkness. I tried staying calm, so I buried myself in my blanket and waited for all of it to stop, and thought about what was going to happen after this. Will I be okay? Will mom be okay? I might never get my answer.

I sat in my room and waited for my dad to come back. He never did. I still wear my “glasses to hide how I feel. Eventually, all my feelings will explode from my head and I won’t know what to do. Ever since dad left, my feelings have been overflowing. They overflow like a river that has been through a hard storm and can’t calm down. Sooner or later, it will all mellow down. I’ve been hiding my feelings away, but soon there will be too many to hide under my glasses. Hopefully in the end, all the suffocating darkness will go away and become light. And maybe—just maybe—that light will stay forever.
Once I was with my cousins Doc and Cole in Las Vegas, and we went on a horseback ride in the hot desert. It was really fun, and afterwards we went to a restaurant right next to the horse place. Doc, Cole, and I went outside and saw a shiny purple cactus. We thought it was fake because it was purple and plastic-looking.

Cole and I wanted to find out if it was fake, though I don’t really know why. We thought the only way to find out was to slap it and see if needles stuck in our hands. My cousin Doc thought slapping it was a stupid idea, but Cole and I thought it was a very reasonable idea.

We slapped the cactus. It was real.

We didn’t notice the pain for a few minutes but then our hands started to hurt and we looked at them and found hundreds of needles in our hands. They felt like splinters, but they were everywhere. Our hands hurt a lot. We went into the restaurant to tell our parents and tried to get them out with some tape. We got most of them out, but not all of them, and it hurt to do anything with our hands. Although we were in pain for most of the afternoon, it was fun to spend time with my family because we don’t get to see them very often.
I GO EVERYWHERE with my brother. He may not like it, but I still follow. I was feeling a little insecure about my basic skill in skating, intimidated by everyone in the skate park. I’m a very competitive person. My brother Kees was always better than me, but that never bothered me. I had received brand new Low Top Converse, black canvas with white laces and rubber. I didn’t want to get them scratched or dirty. I was hesitant to skate and embarrass myself in front of everyone and was mainly fascinated to watch everyone else. The sun was warm against my back, and I became tired as time went on.

I get bored so easily. Around mid-day, I decided to race my own shadow. I didn’t care that I looked crazy. Nearby, I spotted a small space on the ground covered with graffiti. I asked my brother for his phone to take a quick pic. I took a fast snap of my shoes and shadow. The meticulous lines of red and green spray paint meant nothing to me, but they probably had a bigger meaning for the original artist. I ran back to catch up with Kees as he sped ahead in the parking lot.

That one single photo represents a forever memory.
THE SCENT OF LAUNDRY DETERGENT and cat hair greeted me inside. Senior citizens with wan faces sat on a stained couch. Kittens brushed passed my ankles as they dashed under the coffee table. I nodded to each person I walked by, even though their eyes were trained on *Family Feud*. I squeezed passed the oxygen tanks and walkers that sat in the pathway. Each time we visited, my grandma and I walked across the same crowded backroom, which was covered in religious figurines and potted plants. And every time, my great-grandfather would be there, so small in his rocking chair it looked like it could swallow him. My family would occasionally show me pictures of him before he went blind. Reading books, watching movies, or eating with his family. What’s ironic is that my grandma said he used to do everything with his eyes closed, so going blind didn’t change much. But he seems different now. When I visit, it feels like my grandma and I have to almost convince him of who we are. It isn’t his fault. It’s been harder because of his dementia—not to mention his stroke. But underneath the frail figure of a skeleton is someone with a lot of will. He is already powerering through his illnesses, making three comebacks for each setback, but we visit to let him know he is still a part of the family, even though it he may seem isolated.

My great-grandfather’s mind is like a puzzle. Although at least one segment will remain forever lost, we can do our best and start with the corner pieces.
Have you ever moved before? Have you ever stepped into a country you knew nothing about? When I first went to the new country, Singapore, everything was completely different from my home back in China. The air was hot and humid, and I needed to learn a new language, English.

Different smells of traditional Singaporean food filled the air, and businessmen were going around in haste. Everything seemed unfamiliar and I wished my friends from China could be there for me. I went down the street of Jurong East and found people from all different countries going to and fro. There were buses and cars of all sizes going down the highway.

With my mother, I went down the street filled with shops and food centers, exploring the new country we had come into. On the bus going back to our house from the Shopping Center, we saw a lot of tall and short buildings. There was so much to explore in this new country.

Six years later, I was on the way to the airport to spend my summer holiday back in China, and my mother told me we might not return to Singapore. I was confused and frustrated because Singapore had become a part of me, in my heart. Although I am in America now, I still want to go back to Singapore some day in the future.
A shiny blue car with black wheels zoomed down the street and stopped in front of my house. My big uncle Antonio stepped out of the car and called to me, waving his hands. He asked me, “Julio, quieres ir a un paseo?” I jumped into the car. The blue and black colors were beautiful inside, and the seats were made of shiny brown leather.

As we drove up the coastal road, all around us were cows, sheep, and tall trees dotted with seagulls. Two hours later, in San Francisco, the landscape changed to buildings, so many houses, and bridges.

Uncle Antonio and I ran out of the car when we got to his cousin’s house because he was making pupusas, our favorite food! Our cousin gave me three pupusas of beans and three of pork rind with salsa on the side. As we ate pupusas, we talked to each other about what types of cars can run fast.

An hour later, we climbed back into the car for the long ride back to Santa Cruz with six pupusas in my stomach. When Uncle Antonio was driving back, I saw a deer with big antlers on his head crossing in the middle of the road. After we saw the deer, I told my uncle, “That was the best trip of my life, and it is good to know more places in the world.” I told my uncle that when I am 18, I want to buy a car to travel the world with him.
It was after school on a Thursday. I heard something and looked out my window to see explosions and people running and screaming. I quickly ran to the living room, where my family had gathered. We cautiously walked outside and saw many other families from my neighborhood looking up at the sky. We all saw a gang of UFOs coming down.

I heard a loud car noise getting closer to me—it was a blue UFO. My family ran and I followed behind them. We started to get closer to a heavy fog. As I followed, I hit a big rock and fell over, and it knocked me out. All I felt was my dad picking me up.

“You okay?” my Dad asked as I looked over to see him and my mom looking at me.

“Where is Grandpa?”

Father looked so sad, as a tear slowly rolled down his cheek. “They took him,” my father said.

We had to keep moving. I had heard about a safe zone, and we needed to find it. We walked cautiously through the smoky fog.

“I see the wall of the safe zone.”

Suddenly, a UFO appeared out of nowhere, and my dad was sucked up into it. I felt great pain and sorrow in my heart, losing my father that way. I grabbed my mom’s hand and ran to the safe zone.

I skate now to try to forget the day my dad was shot.
They tried to silence us, but immigrants speak louder than people think. The President wants to deport and keep us quiet, but we are loud. A lot of people treat immigrants like animals. I am not an animal—I am strong.

When I came to the United States from El Salvador, it was hard; life is difficult if you live in the U.S. and don’t speak English. Middle school was extremely complicated because English wasn’t my first language. But I never gave up just because I didn’t speak English.

If someone does not speak your language or is a different color, people are sometimes racist, and that makes me unhappy. My friend Jaime was not like those people. On my first day of school in the U.S., Jaime didn’t treat me differently just because I didn’t speak English. He was kind and helped me. Our friendship has helped me grow stronger. The world needs more people like him.

Not everyone was like Jaime. They were racist and treated me like I was less than them. When I asked for help, they told me to just learn English. I didn’t feel like I made any improvement in my English that year. I felt sad, alone, and ignored, but I never gave up. I kept learning English until I didn’t need help from anyone.

Now I can speak louder. The art reminds me of a time I was silenced and dark and I had to remember how strong and bright my voice is.
“Wake up,” Juan said. “It’s time to go camping.” I grabbed my stuff and threw it in the back of the bright blue Toyota Tacoma. “Let’s stop at the Michoacana and get some paletas.” We stopped and I quickly bought four boxes of strawberry red paletas. We ate them all quickly, so I ran back over to get more to enjoy on the car ride.

As we drove away, I heard a car crash in front of us. We were surprised and nervous. We waited on the side of the road for emergency vehicles to arrive. When we finally got to the campsite, it was late, the sun was down, and everyone was tired.

The next morning, we went to the lake and it was a bright, sunny day. Slowly it got cloudy. Thunder and bright lightning started to explode down from the sky. The lightning struck a redwood right next to where we had set up by the lake, and we all lost our hearing for a second because of the loud thunder. I was scared and told everyone to run to the trucks. The tree was on fire and the flames trapped us from leaving the lake. We waited for the fire to go out.

On the way home, we heard of other disasters—fallen trees, fires, and storms. Like always, we stopped to get paletas. The sweet taste of strawberry calmed me, as I watched my family laugh and enjoyed my friends being together.
It was the same driver who had brought her back to the brown, dry earth of Mexico after her husband had been deported three years before. She hadn’t seen her husband since their second daughter was born. Now, after being together for a year, she was pregnant and returning to the United States.

The mother was pleased she would have another child to love, but she wanted a better life for her baby boy. That meant another trip to cross the border by car between the coffee-brown Mexico and the grass-green United States. So she paid the coyote to help her cross.

She was hoping for a better life with papers, a new job, and a new path. Leaving behind her entire family, including her brother and sisters and her parents, she was only bringing random clothes, an inoculation scar, her daughters, and her unborn son.

Her eyes were filled with fear and blue tears, like a river, with worry that she would get caught crossing the border. She prayed to her God, who seemed hidden behind the bright yellow sun, that nothing bad would happen.

When she finally was dropped off at her new home in Santa Cruz, she was filled with happiness and relief. Her new child would grow up and have a future.

Everyone lives here now—all eight of us in one house. The baby boy is five years old and plays as hard as his mother works.
There are many immigrants from other countries who come here to the U.S.A.; those who look for freedom, or a job so they can help their family. They need to have food, money, and a place to stay.

This is like my mom’s story. They came to the United States, one by one. My grandpa was the first. He wanted to cross the border with my grandma. Then, my three uncles moved. My aunt was next, and lastly, my mom.

The red fire in the rainbow of a foreign face in bold black accent was my grandma and uncle. Going and coming from the U.S. to Mexico and Mexico to the U.S. was their plan for months and months. They went back to Mexico because Felipe didn’t know how to speak Spanish and needed to practice. But my uncle was being bullied in Mexico; he didn’t know the language. Boys in the sixth or seventh grade threw rocks at him because he was different. He cried, ran away, and then started to hate that place. Celina and Felipe stopped going to Mexico and made the U.S.A. their permanent home.

I am remembering my family’s history.
**Modesto Moradian Style**

*Addison Newman*

**In second grade,** we were told to draw and describe. Now, I am told to just describe—describe a piece of art I choose.

It is early morning, 7:00 AM, the sprinklers squirting. The concrete is not burning yet, but I can see the Modesto heat waves sparkling and shining down the street.

By 10:00 AM, our bikes are in the back shed, our transportation for the day. I grab my black diabetes bag, blue helmet, and cold water. Already 90 degrees, the trail is around the corner and downtown is a little further. As I get on my bike, there is no cold breeze, just sticky bug-filled air. I love this place.

After we endure bump after bump, we finally finish the trail. We pack up our stuff and head downtown to meet the parents for lunch. Devin, my bro, and I ride down the big hill to head towards Commonwealth. Everybody is seated at a long table, talking, laughing, chatting, and smiling. We all finish eating and the parents head off to go home. After, we repeat the ride home. Lexi, my sisi, appears. Lexi is just like a sister, the best sister ever. We talk and play “Chopped” in the dark kitchen, flooded with outside light. After a few hours in 105-degree heat, Kathy, my second momma says, “Let’s go to the pool.”

We all head down and splash around, with birds in the back and smoggy air ahead. We know this day has to end soon, so we pop some burgers on the grill and relax.
Sometimes we lived in peace. But most of the time, we were worried. It doesn’t matter why; I just know that we were always worried about something: food, violence everywhere, lack of money.

Going out always meant danger around the corner. I would look directly at the store, almost running there to not attract attention.

“Hey, come here.”

Going meant they wanted you to get in their gang. If you didn’t, they would kill you. Ignoring them meant they would warn you, “If you do something we don’t like, we will kill you.”

It was confusing. If you heard something, like a small explosion, it could be one of three things: an electrical failure, a firecracker, or someone being shot.

It was a cold day, which was very weird because normally it was very hot. I was looking at a dreamcatcher, hanging above my head in the window. The sun was setting and the sky was blue but the clouds were a bit pink. Mama came to my side; she started to ramble, but then she suddenly said, “We are going to the United States.”

The first thing I asked was if Papa was coming. She replied, “No, because he is not someone who like changes.”

She was very direct and at the same time evasive, but she said, “Don’t take it like we’re going because it’s dangerous. Take it as an adventure!” And I felt that the darkness in me finally left.
LATE ON A FRIDAY night, I pass my mother’s dark room. I see my mom sitting on her bed with her eyes closed. She is praying. She looks lonely as I hear her mumble and cry to God and La Rosa de Guadalupe. I am sad to see her like this. What is she praying about? Why? Is she sad? My mom prays when times are tough and she wants support. The house is busy. My sister is cooking and my brother is watching a movie while my mom is alone, praying.

We used to go to church as a family. On Saturdays, we would pile into one car and drive to church, but we don’t do that anymore. It has been forgotten. Now we have conversations about going to church again. Will we? My mother’s sadness makes us stay home sometimes.

La Rosa de Guadalupe helps and protects people. She performs miracles. We celebrate her with dancing, music and food. She is our mother and guardian. La Rosa de Guadalupe means family, sadness, and good times.
**Loves Flowers**

*Damaris Rivera*

My grandmother is from El Salvador and still lives there now. She loves flowers, but I have never seen this exact flower before. My grandmother said it is a dangerous flower because it has little thorns that will prick you if you touch it. The plant smells like a sunflower, and I remember one time when my Uncle Rember was five, he cut her red roses. My grandmother didn’t want him to do that because she works so hard in the earth. She scolded him, “Don’t do that, it takes a lot of effort to nourish my flowers!”

She has an apple tree and mango tree, too. When I visit my grandmother, I am so happy because she cuts mangos for me. When the tree doesn’t have mangos, she goes to the store to buy them. The mangos are so sweet. This piece of art makes me feel like I’m in her garden because I see flowers and something green like a leaf. My grandmother loves pink roses best; they are like the inside of a red and dusty peach. I was so excited the first time I saw its beautiful little leaves decorated with red paint.

With my grandma, I feel safe and she takes care of me. She loves me and I love her, too. She is always saying funny things like, “You look like this mariposa!” I want to be in her backyard with her again and talk about beauty and nature. When I am with her, I am content.
Up on a platform in L.A., we had a 360° view of the city. When I turned one direction, I was greeted by a glittering city with light bouncing off the recently shined buildings. People milled around in clumps, some with a purpose, but most just there to waste time. When we turned around, there was no bustling city, just run-down shops covered in tag marks (the graffiti kind, not art) and barbed wire protecting small, barely living gardens. The trees drooped from neglect and bushes had long left behind their neatly trimmed shapes, now forming jagged figures and pointed faces. On to the metro.

We had no clue what we were speeding under. The train popped back up into the daylight, shocking our eyes and leaving us with a gopher’s facial expression. Our metro emptied out a block or so away from Gran’s house, our destination. My mom, sister, and I walked the final blocks to her residence. As we walked, we passed dozens and dozens of relatively identical houses, all muted colors and cookie-cutter shapes. Over our left shoulders, the shining buildings filled the corner of our views. They didn’t fit in next to all of the bland houses framed with vivid green lawns and bush fences. Their reflective picture windows were almost too small to see, but despite the distance the buildings were still noticeably towering over us. Even though we couldn’t see the whole picture, we knew that just out of view was yet another novel area hidden by a wall of uniform skyscrapers and mundane clouds.
**King and Queen**

*Blanca Torres*

I see a **very handsome** king and a beautiful queen who once lived in a great castle. In that big place, the loving couple enjoyed sharing their immense home with their helpers. The servants did all that the royalty asked of them. They enjoyed long walks, all together in the garden.

I desire such a castle and life of divinity but I am very happy in my nice home because there is endless love and care. I give it all to my mom and dad. We cook often. In our apartment many friends come to play soccer. We are more than family. We defend each other against everything, like the problems of the world. We support and help each other. I am content, and I do not know what I would do without them. Their helper names are Daniela, Damaris, Miles, Orlando, Kevin, Luis, and are all members of my mansion.

My beautiful teachers are princesses because they teach us and correct us. There we are together, a modern and brightly colored joining of kings, queens, servants, friends, teachers, and community.
The Mask

Daniel Velasco

My dad is the fire part of the mask. He can be an agreeable person, but the way I know him, he ain’t. He is like a nightmare to me.

My step-dad, however, is the calm half of the mask. He has been there since I was a little baby. He even saw my first steps, along with my Uncle Carlos. When I was little, I fought liking him and made faces. However, he has changed my life and my love for him is always growing. He makes me laugh, and we play sports together with my brothers.

My real dad tries to talk with me even though he knows I don’t wanna talk with him. I don’t like him now. I have a better dad now, and even if he ain’t my real one, he sure is better.

One day, the whole family decided to go to Six Flags. It was me, my three brothers, and my parents. When we arrived, I told my parents I loved them and thanked them for making this happen. I gave both of them a huge hug. When I hugged my step-dad, I felt loved—the one thing I had never felt with my dad. I went on a ride with him, and we were laughing in tears because it was so fun. I told him that I loved him to death and thanked him for being here. After I said that, he told me, “Te amo tambien, mijo.”

I now know that my dad’s fire cannot affect me anymore.
Afternoon Class
I used to never tie my shoelaces, and it cost me. It was my first time on my bike without training wheels. I was biking on a grassy field and suddenly I could not move my foot. It was trapped, my shoelaces wrapped around the pedal. Before I knew it, I lost my balance, fell over, and the bike fell on my leg. When you are small, a fifteen-pound bike on your leg hurts quite a bit. Even though my shoelace was tied to the bike pedal, I felt like I was free. But when I moved, the bike crushed me more.

I didn’t get on my bike for four years after this. In first grade, biking was a way to spend time with my family—or a way to lose my balance and fall underneath my bike. When I got back on in fifth grade, biking became a freedom and privilege, as well as a sport.

When I ride my bike now, it’s exhilarating, like nothing else. It’s the best feeling in the world. When I am biking, I come together. When I haven’t biked in a while, I fall apart and have to find all of my pieces and go biking again. Sometimes I feel the world falling apart around me, a world that is always trying to trap me in a mold. It is exciting to race down the streets as fast as you can. Speed—this is the attraction of biking. You can leave everything behind.

Now, after four years, it’s time to get back on the bike.
One of my close friends is two very different people. In my head, I’ve labeled them Red and Blue. Most of the time, I’m talking to Red—she’s bold, fierce, funny, and honestly a great person. But once anybody, including me, accidentally brings out Blue—a cold, harsh... bitch—well, oh boy. She just sits there, with her pursed lips and her hands out, as if to say, “How can I help you?” Blue can’t help you, though. She sucks you into this void of friendship and false trust that has no place being there. I trusted her with my secrets, none of which really mattered until I told her, I have a girlfriend.

I was very secretive about this subject, as I was admittedly a bit scared about how people would react to it. Red told me, “It’s fine, I’ll keep it a secret,” all that good stuff. All was going along smoothly until, only a week later, a friend told me, “—told me you’re dating—” I almost couldn’t believe she told people, but part of me knew. This was how Blue always behaved, always and forever.

She taunted me, insulted me, and when she pushed, I shoved. For the past five months, I’ve hidden from the fact that she’s a not-so-good friend, so I’m still holding on. Unhealthily. I’m hanging off the edge of a cliff, and I’m going to fall sometime. But until then, I’m going to sit and watch the Blue as she very, very slowly fades back to Red.

And I’m safe.

For now.
**When I have darkness** in my life, I dream of getting a glimpse of sunlight. I hope all of my darkness will go away one day. I see all of the people around me, everyone laughing and enjoying everything all of the time. I can see my sunlight shining through the branches of the trees, but I am not able to reach the sun beams. I only feel my sunlight sometimes, around certain people.

When I have a bad day or have a hard loss in a soccer game, I need one thing to cheer me up—my best friend, my sunshine. She can cheer me up any time, no matter how bad of a day I have had. When I am with her, the color is back in my life. When we go and watch the sunsets on West Cliff, we have the best time. We walk past the houses and through Lighthouse Field. We reach the water that crashes against the rocks, and watch the sky fill up with bright colors. We watch the sun melt away, dissolving into the water until it is gone. We laugh so much it makes my stomach hurt. We love every bit of it.

When I find my ray of sunshine in life, I turn into a different person. I love what I do, and who I am. I am very lucky to have a special person in my life—someone I can trust, someone I can lean on, someone who brings the sunshine into my life.
Seven Going on Eight

Xavier Castro

It was the last day of the best year of my life. Seven years built up to this. I waited what seemed like ages for the party to start. When everyone arrived, we all jumped up and down in excitement. Instantly we started playing tag, although it was more shove than tag. Slowly the game of shove turned into a game of football.

When we finished throwing each other around, we ran into the house with our stained clothes to eat watermelon. Piece after piece of the fresh fruit, snatched out of the bowl, added another layer of goo that ran down our cheeks. The mood changed from eating food to going outside again, except for me and Logan. We dreamed of eating endlessly. And we kept eating until we physically couldn’t. Then we joined the laughter of kids on the trampoline. Just like Ring Around the Rosie, we waited until we all fell down to head back inside.

Everyone seemed worn out until the phrase “CAKE TIME!” was introduced. The eight candles on the cake queued the start of a new year. The kids who finished dessert had to wait for everyone else before we moved on to presents. They waited with suspense as the Buzz Lightyear Lego Set, Silly Bands, and Nintendo DS games were opened. Then it came time to leave. Every time someone left, it felt like a cord was torn out of my heart, making the remaining few more vital.
Los Angeles: The City of Angels. It may sound great, but it’s not—it’s full of demons. Sadly, it’s where a few of my family members have fallen. They blindly join something bigger than themselves—gangs. They go into it without realizing the serious consequences that can happen. When joining a gang, they risk a lot, and may experience something which can change their lives forever.

Mothers have lots of internal pain for their children who become involved in gangs. They have trouble sleeping at night, unsure of whether or not their child is alive. They know their child has chosen a dangerous path and know they might get hurt at any moment. Their kids don’t realize the pain and worry they put in their mothers’ hearts. Instead of listening to their mothers’ concerns, or comforting them, they continue to run blindly in the streets, not realizing that if they were caught in the wrong spot, at the wrong time, they could die.

Most older people preach about how they regret their past in a gang. Believe it or not, they are telling the truth, and it’s up to the new generation to take their advice. When I take a closer look at everything happening around me, I realize the two outcomes of staying in a gang: death or prison. Despite what many people think, not everyone joins gangs for the violence. Most of the time, it’s a boy looking for a father figure or sense of community. However, running with gangs brings a life of violence which is very difficult to escape.
I REMEMBER THE SUNSETS in Africa: pink, orange, and purple melting into the horizon. Animals I thought I would only see in a zoo were standing as close as five feet from me. I recall the blue sky, huge and expansive, no buildings to block the way and cast shadows.

The flowers in all colors and sizes were beautiful. In the evening, I could hear the hyenas laughing. At night, the moon, big and round, lit up the sky. When the nights weren’t cloudy, I could see so many stars. I remember eating the best avocados and big juicy pineapples, and the surprisingly tasty pumpkin soup.

However, as beautiful as it was, it felt strange to be in a different country. People looked at us like WE were the animals in a zoo. I didn’t want to meet the village people, who were stressing me out. No one spoke English. But then they found a way to communicate with us. The women taught us to make jewelry by pointing and guiding our hands. They showed us the inside of one of their houses, the walls painted with pictures of flowers and shields representing the warriors of the tribe. I could really get a sense of what their daily life was like.

My experiences in Africa, I will never forget. This trip was an exciting learning opportunity, seeing what another country was like. But since I’m not a very big fan of being in complete wilderness, I’ll probably never go back. I’ll hold my memories of this trip forever.
MY DOG LIKA passed away from cancer. My family and I miss her so much, it’s hard for me to think about.

It had been two months since Lika passed, when my dad took me and my brother Adrian to the animal shelter. When we walked into the building, mi corazón explotó cuando mire todo los animales. My heart exploded when I saw all of those animals. Pero al mismo tiempo los mire cautivo detenidos. I felt sad they had to be locked up in cages like that.

When we went to the dog jail, we saw a few very hopeful dogs. Once Adrian and I saw the one that would become our new puppy, she backed away from us, afraid. I knelt down with her, whispering for her to acer carte, come closer. About three minutes later, she slowly started to wag her tail and sniff me! We took her outside of the doggie prison so we could play. When we were outside, my brother and I threw a tennis ball and she happily ran after it. In no time, our time was up. My puppy gave us a sad look. I was also sad I had to leave her back in her cage.

The next day, cuando llegamos a la SPCA, yo estaba feliz. No pude esperar. I was so happy, I felt bright yellow with joy! Cuando uno de los trabajadores la sacó de una habitación.

My heart exploded. She is our Lika reborn. She is our Salsa.
Pain, whether it is emotional or physical, hurts. It is an unavoidable fact of life. Recently, one of my good friends caused me to feel strong emotional pain. We stopped talking—a rumor had pushed our friendship into a void.

It was October 28. I was stressed about getting CORE work done, and my friendship was clouding my mind. I can remember my fingers flying across the keyboard, writing poems. At the time, I wrote about the situation. I wrote a poem called “A Void.” Eventually the stress of keeping our friendship intact outgrew the stress I felt about my school work. I went to my room, grabbed my phone, and texted them a paragraph. I apologized for hurting them and told them that I was sorry for letting the rumor get to me. At first things were fine, but the next text changed that. Like lightning, the pain hit me. They were mad at me and were telling lies. Darkness had washed over the light, covering whatever hope we had of a good friendship.

Although my goal in texting them was to fill a void created by a rumor, that void grew bigger despite my efforts. I came to realize that it hurts when you try to fix your issues with someone who isn’t even trying. Emotional pain is something I will have to deal with at different points throughout my entire life, and I believe I am finally beginning to accept that.
The smell of glue, made for fusing plastic, and the stench of spray paint, horrid chemicals, mix together to drive my mind to this memory. A memory I might forget because it is so irrelevant in the grand scheme of my life. On a warm evening after a visit to GameStop, my family and I noticed a toy store nearby—a little kid’s dream. We went inside; the shelves were lined with colorful toys and models. One—a model of a Spitfire—stood out to me. That plane and the things it could do seemed so impressive to me, so awe-inspiring that I would go through the process of building a model of it to cherish.

In time, the plane was transformed from a bunch of pieces in a plastic sprue to a model of a plane. At this point the spray paint came in. We went out to the garage because we didn’t want the whole house to smell of those horrid chemicals. The balls clacking in the can as I shook it, I sprayed the forest green paint on sloppily and let it dry. After the paint dried, I had to put in the “fine” detail, like the taupe markings on the sides and the bright blue and rich red targets on the wings.

After it was done, it sat in my room collecting more and more dust. Then one day it was gone, probably thrown out by my mom. But one thing she couldn’t throw away was the bonding amongst me, my dad, and my brother connected with that plane.
Escalators

Owen Ghigliazza

Escalators don’t lead up or down—they lead away, a future that may not matter. They’re haunted things that remind us we might not be so close to one another. I would know. I went on vacation to visit my grandparents a summer ago. Up an escalator, through a security checkpoint, and onto a plane. I came back with good memories, but I left behind my appendix. While I was hospitalized, I realized I was slowly saying goodbye to my family. And like my appendix, it hurt.

I still love them, but will they always be there when I need them? I don’t know. Hopefully. It makes my head spin like a dreidel. Too many what ifs, too many outcomes and possibilities. It’s times around the holidays that remind me I’ll see my family. My grandparents would make all kinds of pastries, soups, and desserts we only eat at that time of year. With my aunts and uncles, we would go to the beach and take walks lasting hours. At the end of each day, we would all gather in the living room and watch a movie.

There’s no denying I’ll have to get on an escalator at some point. But the escalator’s glass panels reflect all my relatives. I always look behind me to see them, but they’re never there. All my happiness sinks into the grooves of each step. I know escalators don’t go up or down, but every step I take up is a step closer to family.
The sun is the light to my hopes and the dreams I want to get to. I want to get there even if I have to fight my fear of things remaining black and white. If only you could see what my hopes and dreams for the future are, but I’m not ready to tell. My dreams are big because of what I’ve gone through, like walking with people and not knowing who they are, but having to trust them because they were the only ones I had at my side. I have known a lot of people who have hurt me but also people who have been there for me since the beginning.

I had to make hard decisions at a really young age and I learned to let go of people who just couldn’t be in my life because they would never be able to understand. “Explain?” they’d ask. Why should I explain? There is no way they can understand what I’m feeling right now. I don’t even understand myself sometimes. I was scared to change the way I was: cold, no feelings, nothing. I didn’t want to change because maybe I was getting too attached to myself.

Now I look at myself, and see how my dreams and my hopes can come true. How I have begun to care for people who are in my life, a feeling I had never experienced and cared before. Like my momma always says, “Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it all happened.”
It was the summer of 2018 at the famous Kuumbwa Jazz Center. I was so excited to play, but I was also nervous. My heart beat furiously and my blood ran through my body. When I walked inside, I saw the vine-covered fences over the brick patio. I went over to my group, who were very busy cleaning their instruments. We walked inside to the back room where all our anxiety filled the small space. When we walked onto the stage, I asked myself, “Would all the work pay off? All the long years of listening, singing, and playing music. Would they pay off?”

The music crowded the room with a warm tone. The black dresses spun and the suits snapped. We played and played until the people who were dancing grew tired and the night began to fall asleep. All of my friends left with a smile on their face and a spring in their step.

Music is a culture, a language spoken across the world. Music is a tool to help you throughout your life. It’s one of the most valuable things you can have. Music is like a life circle. Your generation listens to music made by the people before them. Then your generation plays music for the new one. 95 percent of people have music in their life. I love music, and I want to become a musician and play for the new generation.
My sister saw the smoke curling out from between his thin lips.

She noticed the musky smell of his house.

I didn’t.

I want to lose him in the cloud of dust I leave behind as I run away from the truth. He smokes.

He never told me.

I want to believe he lied to me, but the truth is, I lied to myself. I got lost, tangled in the web of lies I spun so I would not have to face the reality of his story.

I look at him through a warped piece of glass. The silver light falling across it obscures the person I thought he was.

I can’t even see him.

All I can see is the smoke pooling around him, cloaking his face in a grey haze.

Light brown hair, late night stubble, tired, hollow eyes.

Is this how he lives his life?

Are the cigarettes the cracks in the foundation he has built his world upon?

I want to yell at him, to convince him that he should quit this game of pretending.

Pretending he is not hurting himself.

Pretending he is fine.

How can he pretend to be fine when the world is crashing down around us?

Because my world fell with his.

I don’t know when or how or if I can forgive him. But I have to.

Because we are family, and family forgives each other.
More Than an Ice Cream Cone

Amir Karimzadeh

LIFE MAY SEEM like an ice-cream cone packed with flowers, a surprise waiting to happen: so simple, yet so complex only you can understand it. Only you can picture what those flowers look like, so ornate and intricate, colors bursting and flowing from their petal tips; only you can taste that exquisite flavor unique to your individuality.

For me, it could be a walk on the beach: I’m eating ice cream as the sun gradually melts into the horizon. I’m a little kid again, splashing in a wading pool, laughing and enjoying life as it was. Or I’m with my family, maybe one person in particular like that cousin whom I never see, or that uncle who lives in Germany.

Or, maybe it’s everyone I care about, whether missing or found, friend or family, it’s everyone I hold close to my heart. However, what if they’re not present in my daily life, a piece of my very soul, never seen or heard, never hugged or kissed, waiting to be uncovered? For years they’ve been hidden, their faces obscured behind the mask of dusty photographs, voices muffled by cell phone speakers and by a language I barely understand. Am I ready to go and face them, the missing half of me, lost, completely on the other side of the world? Can I do it? They remain a mystery to me, completely unknown to my eyes and ears, hidden in a land far, far away.
Learning is a curious thing, something that can be captivating and actually desirable if done correctly, but dreadfully boring if not. The first instance of me experiencing learning as it should be found its way to me in kindergarten. I recall my teacher, holding a book filled with pictures but hardly words in one hand, gesturing wildly with the other. She was reading us a book about the incredible transformation of a caterpillar to a beautiful butterfly. The butterflies amazed the young curly-haired kindergartener that I had been, and for the first time I was really interested in learning, instead of sitting on the bright red beanbags with the other kindergarteners, jabbering awkwardly with undeveloped social skills.

As I grew, adding not only height and weight but also knowledge, I experienced this learning phenomenon again. I was in sixth grade, and had just gotten hold of a shiny new alto saxophone I had no idea how to play. Nevertheless, I was very enthusiastic to make a sound. I succeeded in making an ear-piercing squeak, and was immediately captivated. When I got home, instead of wanting to watch YouTube or play video games, I begged my mother to get me a saxophone I could play when not at school.

Now I listen to professionals play, dreaming about being like them in the future. To this day, I still feel the blind joy for playing the saxophone I had when I first got it.

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” —Benjamin Franklin
When you’re lost, it sometimes feels like you’ll never be found. I remember those feelings, the way my tears of terror and loneliness turned to love and safety.

I remember a wide, packed Holland street bustling with umbrellas and strange faces. I remember a slate-colored sky that poured drizzle over our heads.

Most of all, I remember the huge greying sea of people that swallowed up one little kid in a raincoat: me.

I was trotting along behind my family, kicking muddy brown puddles and telling myself a story. I moved with the chattering flow of the crowds.

The next time I looked up, I couldn’t find my family among the masses of strangers. I watched the people pass, searching endlessly for a familiar face, but there was no one I recognized.

My eyelashes tangled with tears and my wet wispy hair drip-drip-dripped on my raincoat. I shivered. I didn’t know if it was from the cold or the loneliness.

I felt like I was shrinking into another little drop of rain when two ladies with umbrellas and gentle smiles finally saw me. I didn’t know them, but they comforted me and called my family.

A million hours or a few minutes later, I was caught up in my mama’s tight and loving hug. There were tears on her face and strength in her heart. I was truly found.

I know now that even when my little world starts shattering, spilling rain and mud puddles all across the floor, my family will keep me safe.
The Suit
Chris Medrano

They made me dance. My mom wanted me to dance and my mom’s friend gave me a hat for my suit. My mom bought me all-black pants that were kinda long, a white shirt, and a belt. The hat was light brown and it hurt my head. When it was time to dance, a lot of people were staring at me, and when I looked at my friends, I just started to laugh. The girls had puffy dresses and it seemed like they liked it, and they also had their hair done. People were complimenting their hair like, “Oh my god, who did your hair? It looks beautiful.”

My mom gave me the outfit at home and the event happen at my school. Luis, Jose, Omar, Jamie, and I were wearing the same outfit. My school was in Sacramento, and the event was to raise money for books and new computers. People would buy tickets for food and games. One of the games was basketball and the food was Mexican food, nachos, hot dogs, and popcorn.

During the event I got really angry because I didn’t like how I looked in my suit. Other people said it looked good on me, and when I saw that my friends were wearing the same outfit, I wasn’t mad anymore. I asked my friends if they wanted to go to the store and buy chips because in the event they didn’t have any good snacks for us.
Constellations. The lights that brighten up the sky.

I remember when I was five, I went camping in Tahoe with my family. My brother and I wandered off into the dark forest. We looked through the cinnamon-brown branches and stared at the charcoal-night sky. We saw constellations and started naming them. The cool wind brushed against our faces. Trees gloomed over us, acting like they were tall, but they weren’t—not compared to the sky filled with glistening stars.

Later in my life, I visited the same place. The first night, we sat around the crackling campfire telling embarrassing stories, laughing and having a good time. The second night, the sun set, and the moon flew up to replace the bright orange light. The stars started to twinkle in the sky. I took long strides into the forest. Two friends followed behind me.

I tilted my head towards the dark sky. I reached back into my memories, trying to remember the special names my brother and I gave them. My aching legs stopped. I looked around, trying to make out the same wooden bench as before. My brain triggered my legs to start moving again, towards the bench, and an itching feeling told me to look up. I found stars in the shape of a wave. I remembered my brother trying to change my mind into thinking it looked like a tree, but I resisted—just like how I resisted looking away from the beautiful memories, shaped by my older sibling.
In a small town in El Salvador, a young 12-year-old girl lived with her mom, dad, and four siblings. The place was exquisite, with trees full of fruit, arid land with cattle, and spacious, colorful houses. It was early morning, and the roosters sang and the wind carried the scent of fresh fruit.

The girl was awake with her older sister, getting ready for their one-hour journey to school. The walk was long and tiring, but fun. They walked down a field of cattle where sometimes a cow would follow them, and they would run, and sometimes their classmates joined them. They passed a mango tree peeking from a fence, luckily in reach. They crossed two bridges and rivers. Sometimes, because of rain, it was too dangerous to cross the rivers. Finally, they arrived at school, where they would play soccer and compete with other schools.

Twenty-two years later, the girl lives in Santa Cruz, California. She is my mother. Growing up in Santa Cruz is different than growing up in El Salvador. I bike to school, and I find it quite fun with the wind blowing in my face. I don’t pick fruits, but I do greet people. I don’t cross rivers or bridges, but I do cross streets, which can also be dangerous.

My mother has taught me much of what it’s like in her native country. I visited once and it was amazing. I learned about culture, struggle, and happy moments my mother experienced. My visit affected my life and shaped me in different ways, and I am proud of my heritage.

Identity by Jasmine Cetz
When I found out my grandfather had died, all I could do was think about him. It was close to Christmas, and I was in my room watching TV when I received the awful news.

All I could do was fake a dark smile, because I didn’t want to make it harder for my parents who were already sad enough. When I would go into their room, my pretty smile dropped and blue tears streamed down my face.

Quería tanto a mi abuelito, he would make me feel so special. I remember making cookies for Dia de Los Muertos and making a mess in the kitchen with him, and the time my grandfather and I dressed up as Mickey and Minnie Mouse on Halloween night. When I went to his house, we played in the backyard on the playground he bought for me. I remember his soft, wrinkly hands pushing me on the swing. For a long time, I was his only grandchild, so I would spend all the time with him.

It’s hard going from seeing him often to not at all. The memories I had with him are what has gotten me through his passing. I’m thankful to have these memories with my grandfather, and there will always be something to cherish about him. When I remember how my abuelito would always call me “Andy,” it makes me feel special. No one else can ever call me that.
As a younger kid, I would spend hours gazing into what existed beyond my living room window. I would scale the back of the forest-green armchair so I could open the blinds. I would just stay there, perched on the arm of the chair in the warmth of the sun, staring out at the branches swaying in the breeze. Squirrels scrambled across telephone wires like tightrope walkers. Birds floated effortlessly through the warm summer air, periodically flying back and forth in search of a snack. Scraggly branches gave way to a meadow that served as a playground for a family of deer, trampling over flowers and grass as they ran wildly. I was not worried about anything other than all the elegant nature surrounding me.

Years later, my view through this window has changed. I no longer notice all the wildlife. Rather than climbing up the now-old green armchair to open the blinds, I prefer to leave them closed. The deer that prance joyfully through the meadow no longer draw me to the window where I used to watch them for hours. Now that I am older, I do not have the time to daydream and sit in the warmth of the sun without worries. Now I have to balance school, sports, friends, and family. I stay up worrying about tests and important games. The blinds stay open, but the way I see out the window will never be the same.
A piece of art covered by laminated plastic and someone’s hard work takes me back in time. The art shows hair of courageous colors and patterns flowing with life, unlike how I felt then... feelings of uncertainty, mixed emotions, and confusion. As Stephen Chbosky said, “I am both happy and sad at the same time, and I’m still trying to figure out how this could be.”

A new family, laughing and loving even when it’s without me. It feels good to see him smile in the photographs, even though I cry. He and his new family, making memories.

Perfectly imperfect, her ocean-blue eyes of a warm beach day look at you, not happy but also not sad. That’s the way he would look at me, as if I wasn’t enough and all I could do was wrong. A dull life with no color or pattern, like a black and white film of despair.

Because I knew at the age of eight, when I left him to go back to mom’s, he would go back to his girlfriend and his kids and love them more than he ever loved me. I am older now—I’m not the same. I’m no longer eight. I have grown into the better person, one he should wish he could have raised.

A simple piece of art reminds me I don’t need him. The colors have come back into my life; what once seemed a black and white film of despair has turned into a sunset of peace and happiness.
So many stitches, placed with care. Like people doing their job in this world so we don’t fall apart. Even if that thing is going to work to fund a family, or writing big checks from an important business, everyone has a place and a purpose. Just like the stitches in a stocking.

My Nana loves to needlepoint. She makes Christmas stockings for every new addition to the family. When we were younger, Maren and I would watch her work, wishing we could do the same. One day she said she had a surprise for us—two needlepoint kits. Mine was a yellow sun with pink rosy cheeks and a bright blue sky. Maren’s was a light brown starfish with magenta spots along the arms, floating in deep blue water. We were so excited, we could hardly wait to get started. She taught us how to thread the large fuzzy yarn into the needle and begin the stitch. We worked side by side for hours, until it was time to go to bed. To this day, I haven’t finished that needlepoint kit, but sometimes I think to myself, “I’m going to try to finish this today.” But I never do.

Your life may be like a colorful, needlepoint stocking, hanging above a crackling fire, filled to the brim with toys and candy. It may also be like a single, dull sock, nailed to a bedpost holding a piece of chocolate that will make someone’s day. Everyone has a place in this world, just like stitches in a stocking.
Estoy en Michoacán. I feel my grandma’s soft hands, reaching for my small face for the first time when I was a newborn. The thought of her lasting beautiful smile makes my day. I hear my grandma telling me, “No necesito cambiar para que alguien te ame.”

Cierro mis ojos. I imagine myself in her dark, dusty bedroom. I can hear the kids who are too little to go to school splashing in the cold, muddy river. The people of Michoacán are walking their older children to the river to cross to school. To cross the river, they have to go on a swing to get to the other side. I hear, “Cuidado! Cuidado!”

Mi Abuelita y yo trabajando en la pulga. We are selling garbanzos and tortillas. The garbanzos are roasted with salt and oil. We serve the bright green garbanzos in cups or bags and then the customers can put whatever spices they want on them. My grandma is so busy with the customers she can’t handle all of the people, so I help her to sell the garbanzos and tortillas. After a long day of hard work, we pack up our stuff and walk home.

Puedo decir que mi abuela es una gran trabajadora. Her hands were red from all the hard work and the cold, but when she put her hands on my face, they still felt soft because of her love.

Gracias a mi abuelita, soy una mujer muy fuerte.
I was still wearing my one-piece swimsuit, shivering in the wind. I walked through the light, dusty dirt. It was dusk and the sunset was slowly turning from red to blue, soon to go black.

The rush of warm air in the car was relieving. My sister, mom, and I drove down the dark, windy road. My mom turned around to smile at me. I was content and peaceful, but I took that for granted. I rode in silence, watching the trees rush by my tinted window.

A red car rushed towards us. I looked away from the trees, then slammed into the front seat. I opened my eyes and saw shattered windows and smoke pouring into the car. Sharp pains filled my stomach. My neck ached, I couldn’t move. Only my blue eyes dared change direction. My feet were covered in glass and blood. I wanted to cry, but I couldn’t. I wanted to escape to five minutes before, into an oblivion of happiness.

The man who hit us ran away into the closing darkness. I heard my mom’s strong voice yell at him, although she sounded worried and confused. She turned around. Her voice became soft when she asked me, “Are you okay?”

Four years later, I still haven’t seen the man’s face. I will never look into his eyes knowing he hit us. I don’t even know his name. The last time I saw him was on that warm night, running into the darkness.
I remember when I got my dog at the pound, there was barbed wire everywhere on the cages and walls separating them from each other. All the darkness in the same room gave me the feeling of being trapped, and the sight of barbed wire above me reminded me of a prison keeping me in. The murky colors in front of my eyes, the bright blue sky above me looking straight down into my feelings, like a crusty grey wall standing still, not letting me out. When I try to climb the wall, it stops me, pushing me back down, but the day I got my dog, it is like finding a door in the dark hallway. I see light under the doorway, so I carefully walk to the door and twist the knob. When I open the door, I see the blue sky waiting for me to escape. With my dog I felt something I haven’t felt in a while. When I felt this feeling, I saw more light instead of darkness. I soon escaped the trapped feeling and dark colors around me. I get happiness again. I knew it was the dog that I needed in my life.
They’re Wrong
Roselyn Salgado

I REMEMBER BUYING the Air Force 1’s I had wanted for months and promising my mom I’d take care of them. In my head, those shoes represented all the patience I put into saving money and buying the shoes.

I am that girl with the rolled-up jeans and clean Air Force 1’s. I am the girl everyone knows, but some for not good reasons. I am the girl who isn’t always happy, the kind who can be heartbroken at times. The kind who says, “I’m good,” or “I’m chillin’,” but no. I’m the girl who gets in her feelings easily and doesn’t show emotions, or sometimes shows too much. I am the girl who doesn’t think about consequences, and just accepts them. I’m the type who makes mistakes and regrets them later. I am the girl who gets judged for what I like to wear, how I like my makeup, or even my troubled past. They say I’m “really mean” because I speak up when I need to and that I’m “all that” because I don’t talk to people who did me wrong. “Really weird,” “She’s dumb,” and “She’s changed for the worse,” are things I hear daily. But they’re wrong. I am the girl who doesn’t let anybody talk to her any type of way because I speak my truth.

Months later, I still hold my promise and take care of my clean white Air Force 1’s.
Dribbling down the field, only the goalie in the way, after having passed the defenders. Thinking of all the things my parents taught me. I have played soccer since I was three and played on my first team when I was four. Being taught that scoring and shooting were not everything. Knowing where to pass the ball so my teammates have the best chance to get it and not the other team. Coming up with how I will score, knowing if the goalie’s too far to the side or too far from the goal.

My parents taught me much of what I know about soccer—everything from how to dribble and shoot all the way to showing me moves. Some of what they taught me I still use today to beat defenders. My mom has helped coach my team for the last couple of years, helping my team with different skills. I was also taught all the rules that were and are still important. Many secrets can come out if you know all the rules. One can help you score a goal, because it can make it easier for it to be just you and the goalie. I scored most of my goals on plays using that secret.

During the season when I was 11 years old, I even got a hat trick in three games, which means I got a total of nine goals in three games. This shows how important it is to be taught by your family.
Despite Everything it is Still You by Serenity Zaragoza

Best Friend

Yaqi Wang

She is still she, I am still me.

I left my best friend in China. Her name is Jinyi and I have known her ever since I was born. She is my best friend. We grew up together. We would always hang out on the weekend. Sometimes we made jokes about each other, but she never said anything bad about me behind my back. She never let me down.

I remember one time my mum got a text from my teacher because of my bad grade in math class. I was so pressured from my studies at school, and I was already trying my best. My mum shouldn’t have gotten mad at me. I started to sob.

I was in my room, sitting on my bed and crying. I saw my book and the purple and blue blanket that always made me feel good. But this time, it was not making me happy. Even though it was 11:30, I decided to FaceTime Jinyi. I thought she was already asleep, but she wasn’t. She FaceTimed me!

She said, “I am your family, too. I will always be with you. Don’t cry just because of your grade, because you are a good student. You always follow the rules, and you always do your homework.” Jinyi made me feel safe and warm.

But then came the day the ocean separated us. We said goodbye in the airport, hugged each other, and cried a lot. But even though we left each other, our hearts are still connected.

She is still she, I am still me.
Without It, I Am Nothing

*Chase Wilson*

**WATER.** Without water, we are nothing. Without water, I am nothing. If the world had no water, everything would die. Water, composed of hydrogen and oxygen. Without it, our planet’s future would not exist.

Surfing. The best, most exhilarating feeling any one can ever experience. When I am in the water, I feel something I can’t experience anywhere else. When I am not surfing, a major part of me is missing. When I’m in the water and surfing, that missing part of me is filled. From the foggy Manresa swell to the warm water at Sunset Beach. The childish birthday parties on 14th Avenue and the flat days at The Hook where all we did was complain. Without surfing, I would not be me. I would be incomplete.

Water polo. A game, but more. A perfect blend of soccer, lacrosse, and rugby. A sport with dignity and sportsmanship. The lessons I’ve learned of how to lose and how to win. And best of all, how to lead a team. Without ‘water soccer,’ as my friends call it, my life wouldn’t be the same.

Santa Cruz, a community founded on the ocean. One of California’s best surf cities. Santa Cruz, known for its legendary water polo teams and ideal surf spots. I was introduced to this world by a Santa Cruz surfer and an immigrant who lived and thrived on an island. Without water, I am nothing. If it weren’t for water, people would not be the same, and neither would I.
**Joy**

*Julianna Witter*

**Her eyes are dark**—not ebony, though, but instead a deep, milky chocolate. Far inside them rests a radiating kindness as well as a fierce drive to protect and love. These emotions, mirrored in my own blue eyes, reflect back into hers. The silence surrounding us is not eerie or deafening, but intricate and stunningly beautiful, and as she rests her furry head in my lap and her long, dark eyelashes flutter shut, the scene is nothing less than perfect.

Dogs have a special place in a (hu)man’s heart. With the exception of a few, lone people, they seem to us as impossible not to love—and rightly so. They have earned this place in our hearts entirely, devoting parts of theirs to us in return. I am lucky enough to have dogs woven through my life, bringing serenity and light wherever they leave their pawprints. And of course, the very deepest prints belong to my dog, Joy.

Since the very first time I caught sight of her, Joy seemed to radiate an aura of peace, of thoughtfulness, and of joy, (hence the name.) This never deterred her puppy energy and exuberance, though. When I am beside her, any feeling of solitude, anguish, or fear seem to melt away, replaced by ringing peals of laughter, beams of happiness, or soft hues of tranquility. And in these several, cherished moments, the world seems to disappear, leaving just her and me in the exquisite silence that I would never exchange for the world.
Author Bios

**MORNING CLASS**

**Delenn Anderson** is a student at Branciforte Middle School. She likes to watch anime, read, sleep, and draw. Though she tried, her writing is still not great, and her art is slightly better.

**Nathaniel “Sonny” Anderson** is an eighth-grade student at Branciforte Middle School, so he can’t wait to leave. He lives with three sisters, his mom, a cute puppy, and two cats that he doesn’t want. He loves going to his best friend’s house because they’re neighbors. He went to Paris with his friend and his mom. He hopes to travel again soon.

**Jaime Arenas** is a student at Branciforte Middle School. He has a dad, a mom, and three sisters who are older than him. He likes to learn new things in school. Outside of school, he loves to play video games and soccer.

**Brian Artiga** is student at Branciforte Middle School. He loves to play soccer with his friends and travel to El Salvador with his family members.

**Chloe Boutell** is a 13-year-old student who has lived in Santa Cruz, California her whole life. In her free time, she likes to surf, outrigger paddle, swim, hang out with friends, and play volleyball. She loves animals and loves to write and travel to new places. Chloe lives with her parents, a dog named Kona, and her older sister, Tallulah. She also plays the trumpet in her school band and the ukulele. She is very excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos, and can’t wait for you to read her published piece.

**Aaron Bryant** is a student at Branciforte Middle School and is honored to be a part of Hablamos Juntos with his classmates. Aaron is a dreamer who hopes for a better future for all humans. He loves to travel and plans to explore the world in his twenties. From Aaron’s point of view, writing and art are ways to express your truest feelings.

**Orion Butler** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who loves to try to find the right words to put in his writings. This writing was inspired by his dad and the U.S. Army. Orion also likes to play volleyball and listen to different types of music. A special thanks to the “Warrior Song Project” for making him who he is today. Orion is most comfortable writing in poetry format, and hopes to write more in the future.

**Kumiko Cattaert** is a student at Branciforte Middle School, and she is very excited to have other people read her story in the Hablamos Juntos book. She has two cats and loves to spend time with her friends and family. She has always liked to travel, and plans to visit 100 different countries before she’s 50. It may be a bit ambitious, but that’s her goal. And who knows—maybe when she visits these places, she’ll start writing about her journey. Or she could just end up homeless and never travel again. Because anything can happen in the future—the future is unknown…

**Samuel Gomez** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who likes to play video games and basketball in his free time. Samuel’s future dreams are to be a pro video game player. He also wants a stable life when he is older. Samuel kind of enjoyed looking back at memories and writing them down into a story.
**Cesar Grimaldo** is a student at Branciforte Middle School, and he likes to play baseball and eat lots of different Mexican foods. He also likes to go outside to play or chill inside with friends. One thing Cesar enjoyed about this project is having to come back to class every day and work on a story.

**Angie Guzman Coto** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who loves to spend time with her family and friends. Her dream is to travel to Europe and South America, and she has plans to become a preschool teacher and artist. Angie appreciates the Hablamos Juntos project because she gets to type exactly how she feels and relate it to other people and things.

**Marcus Hill** is a student at Branciforte Middle School and has one dog. She’s a pretty great dog. Marcus doesn’t really like golf, but tennis is not so bad. He likes to surf with his friends Chase, Caleb, and Ian, and goes surfing pretty often. Marcus enjoyed working on Hablamos Juntos because he got to write about a cactus and his family.

**Isabella Horn** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who doesn’t really have a life. She leaves her house at 7:20 AM every day and gets home around 9:30 PM. Bella rarely has time for homework or friends, but can still maintain a 4.0 GPA. She is proud and honored to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos, and knows all these long, stressful days will pay off for the greater good.

**Kendall Keuper** relishes Thesaurus.com (In fact, half of this was scribed with the assistance of Thesaurus.com. (Not sponsored nor bankrolled.)), playing volleyball, and reading. She dwells alongside her parental units, brother, and sister. Before, Kendall didn’t like writing. But after using Thesaurus.com, she *kinda* likes it (still not sponsored, bankrolled, nor employed). End scene.

**Jamson Lin** is a student at Branciforte Middle School. He loves to dance and exercise. Jamson dreams of having a job and practicing his dance in his free time. His plans for the future are to help take over dad’s job of making lamps. The writing process with Hablamos Juntos was very hard, but we made it through and completed it.

**Julio Lopez** is excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. He likes to play soccer and play video games, and wants to be a professional soccer player in the future. He likes to write because he can express his feelings and thoughts. He thinks it is easy to write, but important to write calmly and from your heart.

**Samuel Marroquin** is a student at Branciforte Middle School. He cares about his friends and family. One of Sam’s interests out of school is skateboarding, and his dream is to become a pro skater.

**Alexis Martinez** is excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. Alexis gave his best to write this. He talks about friends, school, and insecurities. It took him a lot of time to reflect on what happened in his past and to decide to write about himself and immigrants.

**Joshua Moreno** is a student at Branciforte Middle School and has fun going places with his friends. He has multiple dreams, but his number one is to be a competitive gamer. He loves being with his family because he can have fun, whether he’s helping them or not. Josh enjoyed
connecting art with writing because there were so many memories he wrote about. Now, he can do it more often.

**Jose Nabor** is a student at Branciforte Middle School and lives with his family. He plans to be an animator in the future. What Jose wants the most is a better future for his little sister. Jose somewhat enjoyed writing his story—it is based on his aunt.

**Jorge Navarro** is the student at Branciforte Middle School. He loves to hang out and play with his friends all day. Jorge finds writing difficult, yet, with a finished product like this one, he is proud.

**Addison Newman** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who has an interest in math and history. She lives with her mom and dad in an old house in the woods. She loves to write, play sports, and hang out with friends. She’s always making and creating new crafts and projects with Kumiko, and they are still waiting for something to work out! Addison also loves to travel, from small trips to Modesto to far-away ones, like Paris and New York. She loves to care for her family and others. One day, she hopes to go to college and get a good job, so sometime she can travel around the world with family and friends.

**Marcos Ortiz** is a student at Branciforte Middle School. He is a cat lover who hopes to become a veterinarian. An immigrant from El Salvador, Central America, he is enjoying the United States and is quickly mastering the English language. Marcos found the process of connecting art with writing very difficult at first. Talking with his teacher, Ms. Thompson, helped connect the art piece to his life story. Marcos recognizes that nothing is perfect, and almost perfect is good enough.

**Lesly Puga** is a student at Branciforte Middle School. She likes to be with her family and her best friend, Perla. She liked writing this, but it was really hard.

**Damaris Rivera** is excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. Damaris wrote about flowers, and she loves nature, especially gardens and fruit. She hopes you like her story because it took her a lot of time to write and to decide what to write about.

**Rory Sheinbaum** is a student in the Thompson/Thira/Baginski Core class at Branciforte Middle School. She enjoys traveling to cold destinations, math, and doodling. By the end of the year, Rory hopes to fully understand the uses of commas. She is happy to be done with the million-and-one edits made during Hablamos Juntos.

**Blanca Torres** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who likes to learn. Her family consists of her mother Maritza and father Alberto. Her plans for her future are to be a teacher.

**Daniel Velasco** is excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. Daniel Velasco talks about family, travel, and his feelings of connection with his dads. “The Mask” represents how he feels about them, and this story expresses the love he has for one of them. He gave his best to express his feelings about his loved ones and everything “The Mask” made him feel.

**Afternoon Class**

**Logan Addington** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who likes writing and parkour. He feels like this
essay was hard to start, but when the gates of imagination opened he realized he had more to say about this image and wanted to write as much as he could.

**Skylar Allen** is a 13-year-old eighth grader at Branciforte Middle School who (spoiler alert) loves to write. S/he also likes to draw and hang out with her/his friends. Skylar plans to study psychology when s/he grows up.

**Clare Byram** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who is excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. She likes to travel, explore new places, play sports, and spend time with her friends. She enjoyed writing this story and connecting it with the art.

**Xavier Castro** is honored to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. He enjoys the time he has with friends and cherishes all of his memories. He had a great time writing this piece and working with his peers.

**Anthony De la Torre** is excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. He likes to be with friends, play baseball, and go on vacations. Anthony found the writing process hard at first; at the beginning, he wanted to finish everything in one day. However, he quickly realized that is was a process and to take it slow.

**Mia Duffus** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who is happy to have her work published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. She lives with her parents and two pets. Outside of school, Mia likes to practice gore makeup on herself and play with her cat. She also loves to hang out with her friends on weekends. She thinks that connecting art to writing is a fun idea because the art might remind you of something and someone else of something completely different.

**Emily Enriquez** is honored to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. In the future, Emily wants to work with the SPCA. Emily has a mom and dad, two older brothers, and her dog Salsa, with whom she loves to spend time.

**August Eymann** is honored to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos.

**Kelson Fisher** is a student at Branciforte Middle School and is honored to be in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. He lives with his mother, father, brother, and dog, Arrow. He also likes to play video games and music, draw, and sleep. Kelson loves the writing processes and writing in general.

**Owen Ghigliazza** is a student from Santa Cruz, California, and he is honored to be published in the newest edition of Hablamos Juntos. His goal for the future is to become an American astronaut or aerospace engineer. Owen says all of his ideas for writing a good story come from family memories and good action movies.

**Ariana Guzman** is honored to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. She’s excited to travel soon to Mexico, and dreams about having her own house and car. Ariana’s plans for the future are to be a clothing and shoe designer, and she hopes to open her own boutique store.

**Ian Holbert** is a young kid with a passion for music and food. He likes to go to the beach and sleep on the warm
sand. He plans to continue playing music and wants to go to music school. He thinks writing about art is an easy task, because art always reminds him of something.

**Azula Jaggar** goes to Branciforte Middle School and is very excited to be doing a new writing project. She likes to read anything she can find, and also loves to write poems and short stories. Azula is excited to be published in this book. She feels like she could understand more about this picture when she wrote about this piece of art.

**Amir Karimzadeh** is honored to be published in this year’s edition of *Hablamos Juntos*. Amir is an eighth grader at Branciforte Middle School. He lives with his mom, dad, brother, dog, fish, and the greatest chickens ever. He likes to spend time with his friends and BFF Layla, eat food, and listen to Logic. Amir’s opinion on the connection between art and writing is that it’s definitely a unique blend of both art forms, and strikes him as unusual in a very good way.

**Morgan Levy** is a student at Branciforte Middle School who is excited to have his work published in this edition of *Hablamos Juntos*. He lives with his mom, dad, and a brother who never fails to annoy him. He had a difficult time writing his piece but thinks it came out fine.

**Tara Liem** is a 13-year-old eighth grader at Branciforte Middle School. They live in Santa Cruz, California, with their mom, dad, brother, and bunny. Their story took place when they were about five or six years old, and the details in the story might be inaccurate. However, it is written exactly how Tara remembers the event.

**Christopher Medrano** is from Sacramento, California and his favorite hobbies are playing soccer and hanging out with friends. Christopher believes Santa Cruz is different than Sacramento because it’s not ghetto.

**Colby Michaelis** is a student at Branciforte Middle School. He has an older brother and younger sister, and likes to hang out with friends and play sports. Colby saw constellations in the background of his art, by Osiris Benitez, and it reminded him of camping with his family.

**Alex Monroy** is an eighth-grade student at Branciforte Middle School who will attend Harbor High School next year. He likes to ride his bike, hang out with friends and family, and play basketball. Some of his favorite foods are ice cream, pizza, and quesadillas. He really likes to write and wants anyone who is writing to keep going and do their best.

**Andrea Munoz Cortes** is a student at Branciforte Middle School. She loves her family and friends. She has really worked hard on this piece of writing in remembrance of her grandfather.

**Matt Munro** is a student at Branciforte Middle School and is excited to be published in this edition of *Hablamos Juntos*. He likes to hang out with friends, watching sports and playing lacrosse and basketball. Arleny Vargas’s photo inspired him to write about his childhood.

**Layla O’Day** is excited to be published in this edition of *Hablamos Juntos*. Layla goes to Branciforte Middle School, and likes to go to the beach and hang out with friends and her BFF Amir. Layla is very happy to be in *Hablamos Juntos* and a part of such an amazing project. She liked
the progress she made when she put parts of the art into her many drafts.

Nina O’Farrell is a student at Branciforte Middle School and is excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. She enjoys traveling, going to the beach, and being with her friends. She had fun trying new things with this project by connecting personally with the art.

Fatima Paramo Romero is a student at Branciforte Middle School and is excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. She likes to cook and hang out with family and friends. Her final thoughts about connecting art with writing is that art can remind you of something important in your life.

Adelle Peterson is 12 years old and lives with her sister and dad. She loves to draw, read, ride her bike, and write. She also loves to listen to music like BTS and Twenty One Pilots. Writing this story taught Adelle that connecting artwork to a personal story makes it easier to share the experience.

Jose Rosas’s final thoughts about this project were that he really enjoyed having something to look at and write about. He connected with the art well and he had an experience similar to the art.

Roselyn Salgado lives in Santa Cruz, California and is a student at Branciforte Middle School. She is pleased to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos.

Matthew Shen is a student at Branciforte Middle School and likes to play soccer. He also likes to eat ice cream. Matthew was happy to write about his favorite sport.

Yaqi Wang is a student at Branciforte Middle School and is excited to be published in this edition of Hablamos Juntos. She likes to cook and read. Yaqi’s final thought about connecting to the art is that it reminds her of her best friend, Jinyi.

Chase Wilson was a student in Room 14 until December 2018. He has since moved to another state. His classmates and teacher miss him very much. He was an amazing member of his writing group.

Julianna Witter is an eighth grader at Branciforte Middle School. She loves her dog Joy and hanging out with friends at the beach. She also likes to travel to Los Angeles to see her grandma. Julianna uses writing as a way to express herself.
It is a pleasure and an accomplishment to present the fifth book in the Hablamos Juntos Series, a collaboration between Museo Eduardo Carrillo and the Young Writers Program. This book is particularly exciting as it is the first time the collaboration has been between youth writers and youth artists.

Our foremost thanks go to all the young people who brought their considerable courage and creativity to this project: the students of East Los Angeles’s Self Help Graphics participating in the S.O.Y. Artista project (Summer of Youth) who contributed the artwork, and the students in Wendy Wesch Thompson’s eighth grade core classes at Branciforte Middle School in Santa Cruz who used that artwork as the basis for their personal narratives.

A teacher who connects with their students while simultaneously demanding their best effort is a teacher who will be remembered. Wendy Thompson is that kind of teacher. A staunch advocate of the importance of writing and an artist herself, she has been a champion of the Young Writers Program since its inception. Her involvement has been crucial to its success. And with this project she was able to test-run her own curriculum, Creating Bridges: Personal Journeys Into Art and Writing, written specifically for collaborators Museo Eduardo Carrillo and the Young Writers Program, and which is available by contacting Museo Eduardo Carrillo.

Executive Director of Museo Eduardo Carrillo, Betsy Andersen, continues to collaborate with the Young Writers Program with grace and humor. Her generosity to artists, students, and her community is the hallmark of the partnership and it is so greatly appreciated.

Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools Faris Sabbah contributed our foreword, despite having just taken the reins as superintendent. Thank you, Faris, for taking the time in your enormously busy schedule to write an eloquent front piece that effectively captures the essence of the Hablamos Juntos series and what it does for students.

The Young Writers Program is fortunate in having Justin Carder create the look and feel of our books. His work on the Hablamos Juntos series has made them a continual standout. This year’s cover is no exception. Thank you, Justin.

The Young Writers Program Writing Project Assistants make the Young Writers Program what it is. This project was fortunate to have several contribute their support and guidance to students. You can find all their names on the copyright page. Thank you for being the backbone of the program.

A special thank you goes to Kristin Pfotenhauer whose donation to the program helped make this book possible. It is always heartening to have individuals who understand the importance of the work being done by the Young Writers Program.

And finally, a rousing thank you to outgoing Superintendent of Santa Cruz County Schools, Michael Watkins. For his initial willingness to take a chance on an idea that would blossom into the Young Writers Program and continue to serve students all over the county, we are deeply grateful.

Julia Chiapella
Executive Director, Young Writers Program
About

Self Help Graphics

Founded in 1973 in the heart of East Los Angeles, Self Help Graphics & Art (SHG) is dedicated to the production, interpretation, and distribution of prints and other media by Chicana/o and Latina/o artists. Our multi-disciplinary, inter-generational programs promote artistic excellence and empower our community by providing access to space, tools, training, and capital.

Artwork in this project was created by students in SHG’s S.O.Y. (Summer of Youth) Artista program, a free five-week summer art-training workshop for local youth aged 12-24 from the underserved communities of East Los Angeles, Boyle Heights, and the greater LA area. The goal of S.O.Y. Artista is to expand access to art through SHG’s facilities and resources, while providing a creative environment that is nurturing and reflective of this particular group of youth. S.O.Y. Artista is taught by local artists and consists of various workshops including multi-color screen printing, stencil making, linocut, etching, photography, and virtual reality.

Additional artwork was also provided by one of SHG’s current artists-in-residence, Ni Santas, an autonomous all womxn-of-color collective working to re-write herstory through art in the pursuit of creating socially conscious visual narratives. Ni Santas also aims to provide free workshops and encourage woc, queer, trans, and gender non-conforming people of all ages to empower themselves through art.

For more information, please visit www.selfhelpgraphics.com.

About

Museo Eduardo Carrillo

Museo Eduardo Carrillo is one of only a handful of online museums worldwide.

As an American artist, Eduardo Carrillo (1937-1997) mined his Mexican cultural heritage to inspire bold and authentic paintings.

To fulfill our mission as a museum:

- WE CURATE EXHIBITIONS OF UNDER-REPRESENTED MID-CAREER ARTISTS.
- WE DEVELOP AND OFFER ORIGINAL EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND CURRICULA FREE OF CHARGE.
- WE PARTNER WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO FURTHER MUTUAL GOALS.

We consistently look to Eduardo Carrillo for inspiration. He destroyed barriers and dispelled misconceptions through his pioneering legacy as artist, professor and community activist. Eduardo continues to inspire our programs as we commit to filling the gaps in art history and inspire the next generation of viewers.

We welcome your comments. Please contact us!
information@museoeduardocarrillo.org
About
The Young Writers Program

The Young Writers Program has worked steadily and successfully since 2012 to support local Santa Cruz elementary and high school students in their writing. A project of the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, community volunteers are trained to support students on teacher-led writing projects, which range from poetry to fiction to personal narratives. Other projects of the Young Writers Program besides its In-Classroom Projects include a Dedicated Writing Room at Branciforte Middle School, an After-School Writing Center in the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History (The Word Lab), and, in collaboration with Museo Eduardo Carrillo, the Hablamos Juntos Series which is now in its fifth year.

With over 2000 students served across Santa Cruz County since its inception, the Young Writers Program works to lift the voices of students through their writing, giving them a platform for engagement and communication on topics relevant to their world. Encouraging writing in this way, it is the aim of the program to promote students’ critical thinking through the act of writing while also strengthening writing skills.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer or donating, please visit our website at youngwriterssc.org. The craft of writing is a life-long pursuit!
FROM THE FOREWORD

By learning the power of sharing, being part of a larger community, and having an important role to play, students find courage, creativity, and communication skills to continue to weave together a strong and vibrant society.

—Dr. Faris M. Sabbah
Superintendent of Schools, Santa Cruz County

FROM THE INTRODUCTION

[This project] was a stretch for all of us, for our imaginations and our writing process. The end result was a true collaboration between artists, their art, student writers, writing tutors, and me, their teacher.

—Wendy Wesch Thompson
Teacher, Eighth Grade American Studies Core