



**Eighth-Grade Poetry Anthology  
February 2021**

**Featuring original poems by  
Harlem Academy's Class of 2021**

**Many thanks to the Poetry Society of America  
and our visiting poets:**

**Daniella Toosie-Watson**

**Jive Poetic**

**Construction**  
**by Christian A.**

Hot days, cold days,  
Rainy days, snow days,  
The cranes carrying heavy metal beams  
Creaking loudly, and creaking louder  
As the days go by,  
And the tall, heavy cranes move  
Slowly, steadily,  
As the building grows  
Through The slippery rain  
Through the freezing snow  
The building grows  
Taller, wider,  
The cement dries  
And the red bricks are laid  
The shiny wooden floors are placed  
And the glass windows are cleaned  
The stone walls are built  
And the building is complete  
The cranes move out  
And the workers disappear  
All that's left is a building  
Tall and modest  
And some forgotten hard hats

**Lullaby**  
**by Chaeli C.**

ocean water.  
rushing through my veins  
it put my body to rest  
and the gentle waves  
floated across my eyelids  
pulling them shut for me  
but now the profuse hymn that  
pridefully distinguished its territory  
in the hollows of my ears  
when I first came out the womb  
is to be the same one that is soon to be  
exterminated  
i hear the word lullaby  
and my mind drifts towards the song  
that used to play...

“please don’t shoot”  
is nothing but an eternal lullaby  
our entire conversation,  
my eyes darting left and right  
his hands crying out for a way  
to paradise, situated on the  
gun holster

Do you feel threatened by my skin color?  
The way that my brown complexion  
Puts you into an inescapable trance  
Are you threatened by the way my hair  
Pardon me, my crown floats?  
Or are you threatened by my knowledge  
The way that I can take words, put them together  
And suddenly my empty canvas is bombarded with  
Painted shades  
So you try  
to keep me under  
Pacing back and forth, pondering  
Deciding my future  
Tell me,  
Am I’m six feet under  
Or am I under-paid, under-recognized under-satisfied  
Only 13, hunting down lost dreams  
Buried in the forests of my mind  
The vines suffocating every inch  
Soon to die, soon to expire  
I toss them out like the rotting meat in the freezer

life is a conveyor belt  
when you reach the end



## **Two Plants One Root**

by Amaia C.

When I was born my hair and personality sprouted from the same roots  
They bounced with me in every step of the way

but i passed the blower from roots to leaves  
both lost strength  
my hair and me were cut down and made into paper  
i shut down the voice telling me to be myself

i didn't recognize myself  
And when i went natural  
I had to start from zero

So slowly I went slicing the dead ends until I met the new rejuvenated roots  
And fresh new baby hairs were plants coming up from the ground  
Eating the decomposed version of me

But sometimes digging with my shovel and raking the knots  
I get lost  
My wide tooth comb is a flashlight leading me  
through the maze I call my scalp

But in this maze  
Something is strangling me from behind  
And my flashlight runs out of batteries  
But I have to keep on pushing forward or I might just wither and die  
And start from zero all over again.

The circle of life  
The most vicious circle  
That Swallows you whole  
If you don't make it out on time  
You might be drowned  
with so much potential  
To be the most best  
Unapologetic version of  
you

**Chains**  
by Sydney G.

Expectations are chains  
Pulling you toward the invisible box of  
What society may call perfection

men  
don't let the razor of hurt cut too deep  
Treat it as a minor cut  
Instead of a deep wound  
That reaps

women  
Don't be the plague  
Killing us softly with her song  
Be the enchanted rose even if it rips  
The courage you behold  
Leaving your beautiful petals  
Executed by the loss of your soul

Hair is personality  
Silky straight is the milk that rocks  
Societies boat of expectations  
Washing away the tears  
That drown into the chestnut curls  
We black women, hold back

When my brother walks into school  
Rocking the long dreads that he thought was in  
The girls that deal with the plants of insecurity  
Decide to come in  
Raking every bit of excitement he had  
And telling him he's too "feminine"

But as we unbuckle the stirrups to our pain  
We unleash every expectation that we claim

Locking up  
That oppressive power in  
something so tight that it never sheds  
It never bleeds causing us to scream  
Leaving those societal expectations for dead  
Regardless of what Karen said

## What lies under Micaela...

by Micaela G.

i'm from the dark depression , illicit and glowing.  
Dejected.

i hold the trifling shield close by  
but rejection, doubt, and judgement find another angle  
to open a wound.

my lungs fill with the melody of melancholy.  
my heart pumps out the violent liquid  
that holds the pain of my past, my present.

A muscle.  
A giant in disguise covering it's  
big bodied, sharptooth, disfigured features  
as I try to survive.

It isn't what you see,  
it lies under the skin.  
It will leave you wondering when did this ever begin?

Depression rots in the bones,  
It rebirths you,  
It inhales you,  
It drags you,  
minimizing your worth.

Depression is a mask.  
Depression is a mission,  
a secret assignment that no one finds out about until they find you dead, departed from agony.

i stand lost in the silhouette of despondency and i'll never make it to the end of the road of hope.  
The infinity run only tires me out.  
my breath decays as i shrink into nothing.  
i'm alone...

There is one rule,  
it sings in my brain as a conscious.  
It tells me,  
when I say to cry you cry.  
Don't fight it because you're not enough,

your fat.  
you don't have that thin waist nor beautiful curves  
that sticks like frosting on a cake.  
you don't even try to look presentable.

Working out.

The way to get away from my pain, the legs used constantly as i try to run away from this never ending whole.

Puddles of sweat or maybe tears on the floor as it alleviates my soul.

your ugly.

you don't have any tornado like pieces of hair,  
no form, no melanin, nothing.

you have fine skin  
and a lump that sits on your head.

Hair an insecurity.

The way to get away from my pain, the shears used constantly on this dark brown coal to get away from this never ending whole.

Puddles of mud on the floor as it alleviates my soul.

you don't fit in White or Black.  
you don't know where you're from.  
you're just there.

you don't even know the first thing to smile.  
your imperfect teeth show weakness.  
No fierceness.

Braces.

The way to call out to my pain, the colors chosen to signal someone what i'm feeling,  
as i try to escape this never ending whole.

Puddles of rainbows as words, as it brings burden to my soul.

It's energy pounds in my head,  
intoxicating me.

Shut up you don't love yourself  
so when I say to cry, you cry.

A tale, a story that nobody  
believes until you look through these  
glassy eyes that try not to break.

It isn't what you see,  
it lies under the skin.

It will leave you wondering when did this ever begin?

What lies under micaela?  
i'm from the dark depression , illicit and glowing.  
Dejected.

## **A Crows Lament**

**by Amadu J.**

Flow away to the rust-colored skies  
Flow away and find the blood-soaked canvas  
Freedom was so  
Apparently hard to find.  
Grimacing as the hair of a thousand lines  
Untwines like the snake on a morning rise.  
Scales giving a lustrous shine  
To no place, for freedom is not confined  
to the cement and brick,  
The politics and ticks, the sweet promise of clarity  
That just 'Oh so happened to  
Miss.'  
It simply flows away like the wind.

Fear is the razor that made us back away.  
The plague of modern-day, malice drains away  
To the ichor-rich skies, from whence freedom, once came.  
The infamous Crow cries to a shattered moon,  
hope lies in wait with its famished groom  
With dreams tossed aside in a  
mirage of a peace we cannot achieve  
That borders the end line in my fantasy.  
Disillusioned with the false flag operation  
Of a dream of peace for the second generation,  
That will be a great raze or new day for  
Our 'Oh so great dream of a Nation.'

Chivalry is dead, and apparently and so is honesty  
Past philosophy now turned into  
hatreds incarnate of animosity.  
Murders are now returning in  
A flourishing fervor,  
To sing a song of misery and shivery,  
For a Crows, Lament is the new song  
Not of freedom but  
Truth.

## Scared of the inconvenience

by Isabella K.

Fear is a tightly tied knot around my courage  
Wanting to untie the rope but denying your help  
The immersed silence,  
Doesn't say anything  
But has been DEvouring me whole

My fear,  
Scared of the inconvenience I will put on others  
Scared you will get annoyed by my thoughts  
I want to turn these sirens off  
These Booming sounds of thoughts  
slice off my cowardness,  
to go after my inconsolable dream  
To put myself first

The antipathy of my fear  
Daunts  
And thins my bubbly being I want to emit / what I feel,  
Let me confess,  
Before I become to bitter,  
Before I'm teared apart,  
Before...  
It's too late

The ocean crashing against my rue,  
I'm submerged under the silk water,  
Sucken by my matryoshka feelings,  
suspire,  
Bring your head up/ and breath  
Emerge as a new person

The rush of tides swallow me leaving me with my tamed thoughts,  
The waves calm / then scattered,  
As if nothing ever happened

## **Simplicity**

by Theo L.

The willows sway in the bitter gusts of wind  
Sending shivers down the tall grass  
A field mouse seeking refuge from the terrors of the outside world  
Crouching down within the miniscule forest of life

The sun escapes behind the horizon  
Setting the sky ablaze

Perched up on a tree  
It stalks its prey  
The scuffling of its little feet  
And a small glimpse of its pink tail is enough

Wings slice through the air  
Talons unsheathed and prepared for blood  
The hawk swoops down

A faint cowing emerges from the trees  
A murder rises to the final rays of hope  
this day has to offer

The air fills with a smell  
Signalling to its family that dinner is on its way  
Food has been scarce lately  
Ribs protruding from the thin layer of fur  
That envelopes its body

A family has been fed a single mouse  
That single mouse had a family  
Something to identify it by

A mischief of mice hide inside a tree hollow  
Waiting for dinner to arrive  
Each scavenged for any scraps of vegetation left over in the near barren land  
All but one returned home

The sun rises  
A carcass of a hawk lays in the grass, rotting away

**A Second Dad**  
by Shane M.

Dear Step-dad,

Even though you're not my biological dad,  
I still respect you as one,  
With all the little things you do,  
I know you will be there for me,

Whether it be with schoolwork,  
Or teaching me life lessons,  
You have always given your fullest,  
Even when it's hard and no one is watching,  
You care for me,

Even though you may have not given me life,  
You have made my life so much better,  
You are a role model,  
The hardest working man I know,

At this point of my life,  
I would just call you Dad now,  
But I've always called you by your real name,  
So, I'd probably struggle with the change.

A father's not a father,  
Just because of DNA,  
Fatherhood doesn't require DNA,  
It requires love and appreciation,  
For what has been given in life,

Love is found in hearts, not veins  
It's not flesh and bone,  
But the heart that makes us  
Father and son,

Family isn't defined only by  
last names or by blood,  
it's defined by commitment and by love,  
And that's what makes a perfect step-dad

## **Epistle**

by Sahvanna N.

Dear 'me'

I beg of you to give me another chance  
For I only know so much

I know I have stained your name  
I didn't mean to  
I am not one to keep my mouth shut

Moments cross your mind  
Like boxcars on railroads  
I am crazy, right?  
Am I crazy, Sahvanna?  
Glass prick at my insides  
I'm a target for your grisly play  
You like to pick me piece by piece  
'Til I'm on the floor  
Your on your knees, crying, weeping

See,  
I apologize.  
From the bottom of this deep cave  
All mushy and bloody  
Full of muscle, meat, and veins, thick ones too

I-I didn't mean what I said...  
sometimes when I'm nervous I say the wrong things and I get people mad

Sincerely,

Dear 'me'

I was the white paper  
The white paper you ruined with your ink  
Onyx, dingy, murky

You've ignored me.  
It's salt on my wounds  
A smile on my face  
Hair pulled  
Lip quivers  
Short, quick trembles  
I'm still a kid, Sahvanna

I'm glad you hadn't answered  
I wasn't ready for the jumble of letters you call 'good writing'

Dwelling into the sorrowful moments we call the past  
We are spiral nebulae-one fruitful of stars,  
one drenched of purity-who haven't graced each other's 24 hours  
Yet,  
We know the secrets that lie between our tissues  
The sugar that coated our 2pm-dunkin' donut-sweets  
The toes that giggled while being cleansed  
The hair that coiled when provoked

I will sit back and enjoy those mood swings you regularly have  
And wonder  
If you had just kept a *piece* of me in you  
We wouldn't have to exchange these words

You wouldn't have to wish you had me

Sincerely,  
Innocence

P.S.  
'An Ode to Love'

You are disgusting  
An awful smell coming from the back of my throat  
When I speak  
I mumble  
I ramble on about things I don't even know about  
Things I don't know why I'm even telling you about  
My  
My legs crack and crumble  
Love makes me fall  
Flutter  
I swallow myself whole

I can't breathe when I feel love.

My words are Cherry Blossoms  
They fall down so quickly  
Pilling up on the floor  
A resplendent muddle

I can't breathe when I feel *Love*.

**This is How**  
by Jordan P.

after "I want a president" by Zoe Leonard

**This** is how you talk about your feelings

**This** is how people talk about their feelings

*Feelings are the blood that flows in our veins  
But feelings don't entertain me  
Feelings give stress, stress is a claymore that slices entertainment in half*

**This** is how you should think about yourself

**This** is how people think about you

*Thinking is a resource that is used by everyone to change how they feel  
Focusing on yourself makes motivation stronger  
Motivation is the key for getting to your goals  
The 4th quarter is where all motivation collects to give me entertainment*

**This** is how you stop staring at the water

**This** is how the water flows

*The water thrashing, my mind falling  
The water's consistent rampaging flow; embodies my necessity to be  
brought down to the floor laughing my day away*

**This** is how entertainment is bad for you

**This** is how entertainment takes you away

*Entertainment is a game that's E for everyone  
Games feeding the unstoppable hunger, rotting eyes watching in sorrow  
all for the same goal of the adrenaline rushing touch called entertainment  
But in the mind you don't want it, cause the more you have the less you  
can resist the chilling temptation going deep in your bones*

**This** is how you dream

**This** is how dreams become reality

*My vision for my future is to never shrink the thrilling feeling of playing  
the mind washing games that drag me in like a black hole*

This is how you be like everyone else

This is how being different hurts you

*Nothings wrong with being different  
Difference is the heart we need to survive  
Without the heart we die before reaching our buzzer*

**every saturday**  
**by Jenelle R.**

A deep oak brown,  
of trees in forests  
curvy lines of bark resemble my curls  
Running, my hair flows  
Like the river by my oak trees

An essence wafts off of my scalp  
the scent of luscious vanilla  
Fills up the air

My mother drips a frankincense mixture on my scalp  
No matter how many times I say,  
“No oils today!”  
She still coats my hair with them.

It is necessary to put in the mixture,  
For growth, restoration, to keep my curls bright and animated.

The newly coated hair is now ready to be braided, or go under the hairdryer,  
For rolos  
A process in which you roll the thick strands of keratin up onto rollers  
And go beneath the hairdryer.

I go for an hour, Because of my thick strands of hair.

Coming out, my hair is ethereal, shimmering with the leftover oils.  
Now it is not curly nor straight,  
but with waves that mimic the ocean

My roots resemble,  
A pebble that has been skipped on a lake,  
and the ripples that follow.

Every saturday,  
my routine,  
washing and drying  
Until it looks like  
an image, captured from a film

## **How Not to be Black**

**by Aryel S.**

*for Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl"*

Make sure you wear decent clothes; don't let your pants fall beneath your waist, sagging; don't wear honey-colored chains they're distracting; don't envelope your head in an endless void of a hoodie; don't wear sunglasses or face coverings inside a store; don't keep your hands in your pockets or you will look suspicious; don't wear all black or you will look suspicious; don't underestimate white people or you will be suspicious.

If you're a female, stop shouting, mouth widening and listen for once; change your attitude so you're more approachable; don't get pregnant too early or else it will ruin your future; stop thinking that your so high and mighty; don't wear clothes that coil around your body like a spring around a sticky ink chamber; if you're a male be more respectable; quit being so aggressive and intimidating; stop getting yourselves involved in gangs and crimes; be a leaf, floating in the wind, unnoticed and maybe you'll make more of your life. *Why is this what society thinks of me, famishedly pondering that they can script my life, which is already so short?*

Immerse yourselves in school and learn; educate yourselves; don't drop out so early, it won't end well; at least try to get decent grades; don't fall into the wrong friend groups; try not to be the class clown; there's no need to be so rebellious and be labeled as the bad kid; be respectable in class, keeping your mouth sealed; make the most of your school life so it will benefit you later on. *Don't others know that I do try my best?* If you're black and you get pulled over, have your registration and driver's license close by; put your hands on the dashboard, aligning with the hope of getting away free; get out of the car if the officer tells you to and don't make a fuss; keep your hands where they can be seen; don't reach in the car for anything unless you're told to; just cooperate and you won't get shot.

*Why can't I exist in a peaceful world?* The fear in my head can't escape, and I just let it be there. I just let it live there, like a wound glistening in fluorescent light. Nothing to do, nothing to say, nothing to change, it won't work my way. *Can I live?* Stereotypes are two-way lenses that disinfect our vision, changing how we see and how one sees us. It balls up into our heads, embracing the only sensible thoughts we have left: black people are bad; black people are dangerous; black people steal; black people, black people, black people.

Society, that infamous rebel, is a permanent marker that is unwilling to change its unhealthy past so it continues scribbling in our heads what will forever be wrong.

## **This is Just a Homework Assignment, Right?**

**by Morgon W.**

A gender's role is a homework assignment given to society's children  
holding people down to their unwanted identities  
Implanting a fantasy in our intellect  
placing men in a suit and tie, forcing our goals to die.  
Making us comply with their stupid minds  
Society makes us a snail, placing us underneath their shell of torn up lies,  
slower and slower we begin to burst out towards the truth in our pride  
a song to hush our cries, our cries, our cries  
Mankind's ocean pushes my hand away from their tides  
A world in which we are redefined  
A world where we are not in the mix of these tight vines  
But I ask myself, should I even try?  
Should I even waste my time?  
I set forth my homework assignment,  
Your look of hatred and disappointment meets the pupils in my eyes.  
The back of my throat swelling, waiting for you to swallow what's left of mine.  
your eyes glare on my assignment, a diamond inside.  
heart dissolving, as the acid of my troubles, rains down my spine  
I try to gather myself, forcing my courage to climb.  
Forcing my eyes to lie.  
Forcing the twine of two ropes on my throat to die  
My 2 short breaths collide with my deep sigh  
“ But Next time please try, the other kids have it right.”  
But why should I try when this paper is telling me how I should survive.  
Your voice seemingly kind  
My head shifting both ways from what's wrong to what's right  
Telling me to be a man  
Telling me not to cry  
But remember this is what you wanted  
To keep my eyes on my own paper, To let my ideas fly.  
Right?