Eighth-Grade Poetry Anthology
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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
it’s in the hands of whoever is there
its a simulation
you get up, work, come home
and then do it all again the next day
when are you truly happy
when are you truly free?

thoughts rushing, hands trembling
as I grasp the dashboard tightly,
and understand the sun already did its toll on it
jeans now blotted with the bitter liquid
falling from the faucets permanently
Attached to my face
peculiar.
they’ve taught us to
put
them
away
don’t let them see your fear
but when your body is on auto-pilot
there isn’t much you can do

“Step out of the vehicle for me ma’am”
“Can you watch as I open the door”
“Just step out of the vehicle”
“My hands are in clear view”
my left-hand
unsteadily latches onto the handle
my right foot
hits the ground
he draws the gun
aiming

“Please don’t shoot”
is nothing but an eternal lullaby
when my left foot hits the concrete
the sound of the gunshot
only came through my ears
as the lullaby, my mom used to play,
it surrounded my body once again,
my eyes fluttering shut
when I opened them,
I was on the ground
My vermillion
Wings dyed
Suddenly

i listen before I go as he spews lies
into the radio,
“She had a weapon in the vehicle”
I guess Black is the new weapon
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.
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 innsolable 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
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
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

Feeling 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 lucious 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 envelop 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?