

THE WRITE CHALLENGE

Anthology

2019

REFLECTION



Lakota★LEADS

Lakota's Enrichment and Academic
Development of Students

THE 2019 WRITE CHALLENGE ANTHOLOGY

REFLECTION

This year's Lakota LEADS Write Challenge theme is REFLECTION: The word REFLECTION has many meanings. It is commonly used in many expressions like "reflection of our society" or "a reflection on his character."

Reflection

/rə'flekSH(ə)n/

noun

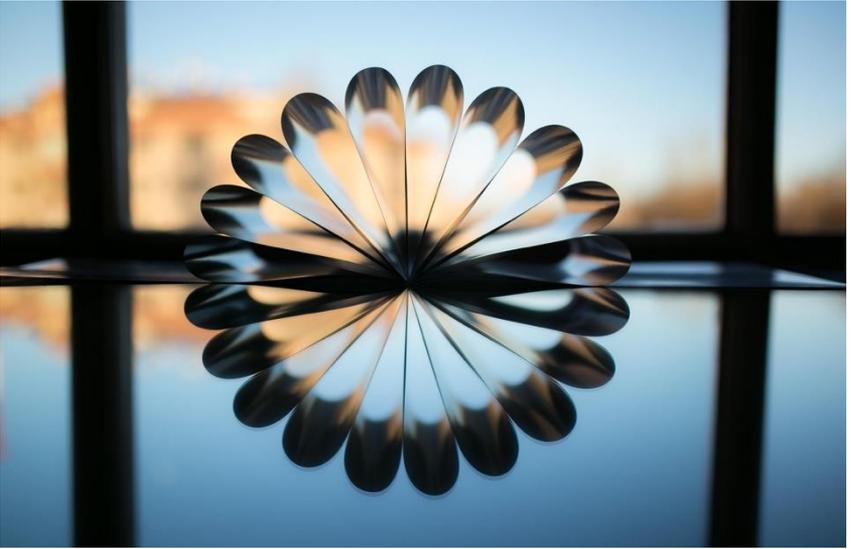
- 1.the throwing back by a body or surface of light, heat, or sound without absorbing it.
- 2.serious thought or consideration.

Thank you to all of this years' entrants. Here are the top three students in every category and their wonderful literary works...all interpreting this year's theme of REFLECTION!

Hosted by:



Lakota★LEADS
Lakota's Enrichment and Academic
Development of Students



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POETRY K-2: 1st PLACE

The Girl In Me

By Nicci Back

As I was watching myself in the mirror,
I felt lost and filled with error.

I was afraid of making friends at school,
Because I was scared to look like a fool.

I always pray to God every night,
That someday he'll show me the light.

Now, staring at my reflection, I think you would agree,
I can see a strong girl looking back at me.

POETRY K-2: 2nd PLACE

Reflection

By Keira Burmeister

Reflection shows the true in me,
reflection is what I see,
reflection shows the beautiful in me,
reflection shows the real me,
reflection is what I see,
what I see is me,
me and my reflection,
the best of friends,
forever,
and ever...

forever.

Reflection sees me,
the real me.

POETRY K-2: 3rd PLACE

This Is Me

By Aurelia Sabatini

I can see myself in a mirror.

I like to smile.

I am many things.

I have my own style.

When you look at me,

I want you to know me.

I am smart.

I am good.

I am nice.

I am kind.

I want you to be my friend.

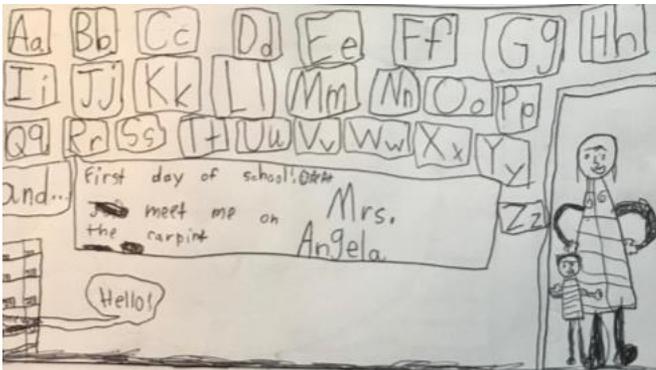
I hope you can have a play date with me.



NARRATIVE K-2: 1st PLACE

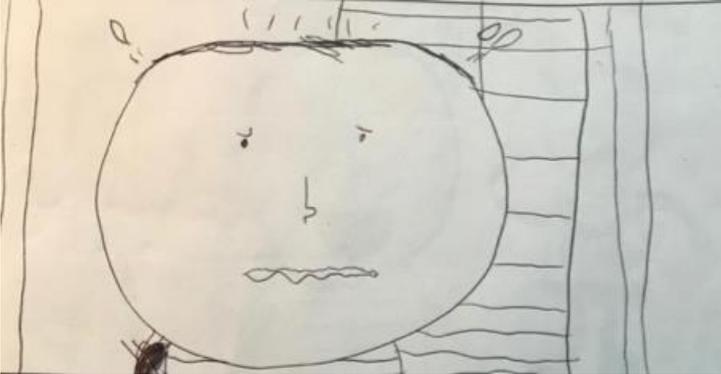
When I Went to Preschool

By Jackson Dearnell



When I first went to preschool, I was so scared.

At least at first I was.



But after a while, I made a bunch of friends!

The one on the left is named Harlo and the one on the right is named Blaze.

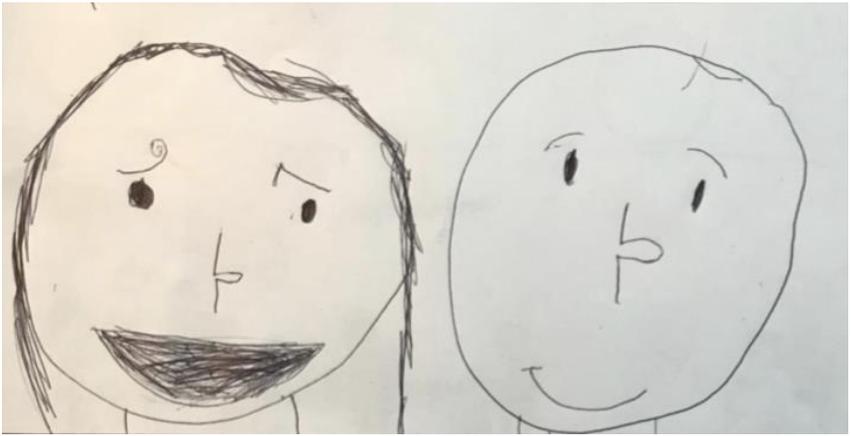


I was nervous to talk.



But after a few days, I started to like preschool.





And that problem was solved now for how I made two best friends in one day!



I was sitting down at a table and a boy was sitting alone at another table. I invited him to my table, and we were friends ever since. P.S. This is how I made friends with Blaze.



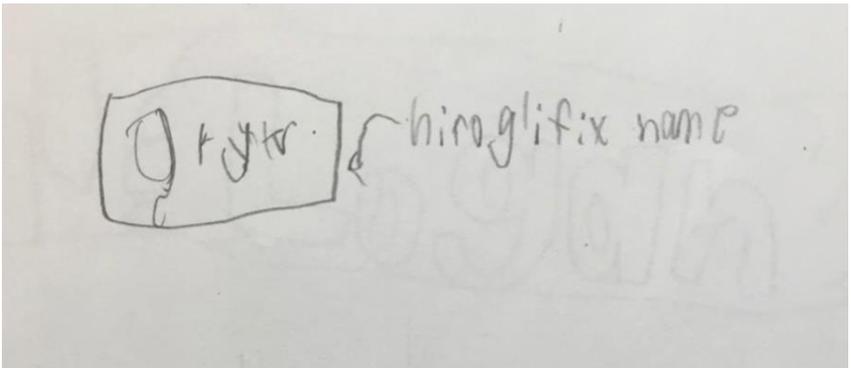
And now for how I made friends with Harlo. She was sitting on the carpet reading all alone. I asked her if I could read with her and she said "YES", and we were friends ever since! And now I have two friends!

The End

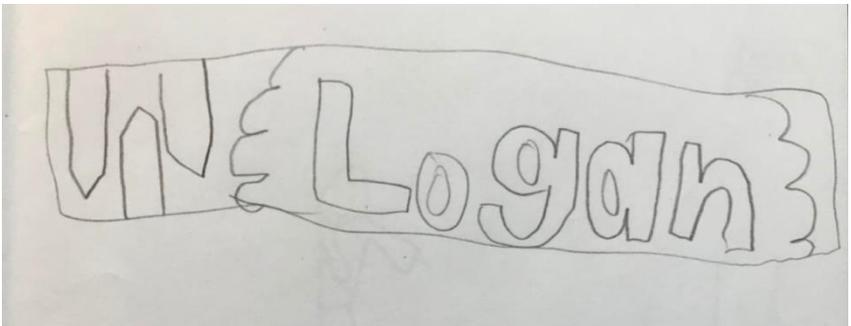
NARRATIVE K-2: 2nd PLACE

When I Was in Preschool By Logan Coughlin

I was in preschool three years ago. My art teacher was a writing teacher. The gym wasn't real and there was such thing as naptime! That's changed.



Kindergarten was different. Our teacher was nice. The gym teacher was a thing. And the art teacher taught well...art!



Well now that it's the present, everything is normal. I'm still in 1st grade. Things I like now: learning about the past, math, eating (every day) and writing (like I'm doing now).



Second grade might be fun (except for the hard math of course). I'll be able to make new friends. Second grade here I come!

NARRATIVE K-2: 3rd PLACE

**When It Was Christmas
By Anna Kipp**



When it was Christmas and I was in Kansas, I was at my cousin's house.



So, me and Eill (cousin) played in the movie room, and we played in the dancing room.



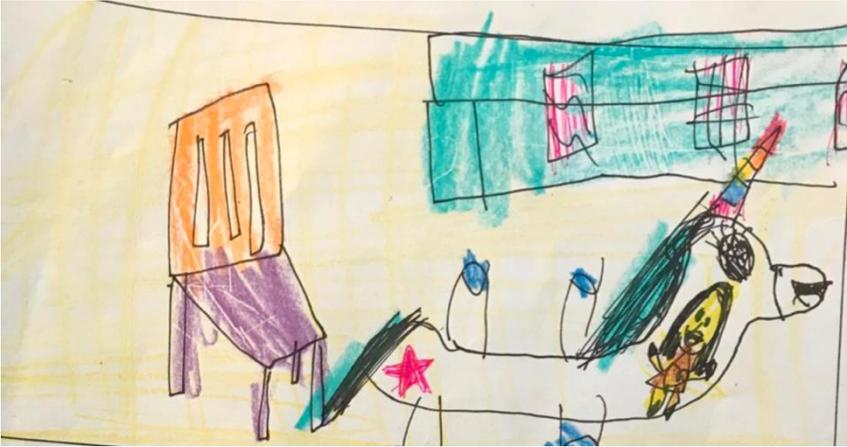
Me and Eill looked at one of the presents. It looked BIG! Eill felt it. It was squishy!



Then it was for me. I couldn't believe it! What could it be? I could not wait to open it!



Then I opened it. It was a big, giant, stuffed unicorn, so I sat on it and hugged it. What a great present I thought!



ESSAY K-2: 1st PLACE

My Reflection

By Leonardo Sabatini

To me, reflection means to think and learn about things. These things could be anything. I like to think about space.

I like to read about space. I ask myself questions about space. Is dark matter real and is dark matter in space? How many black holes are there in space? How many rings are there around Saturn? Is there another planet with life?

Sometimes I reflect on what it would be like to live in space. If I was in space, I would explore Mars. There are so many things to learn about space. This is what I like to think about, how about you?



ESSAY K-2: 2nd PLACE

Why It Is Good to Have Fun Each Day

By Jacob Harris

It is good to have fun each day, so you won't be bored. The way I feel about having fun is: happy and energized. The best way to have fun is tag because you will sleep better at night. Some more ways to have fun are playing a video game, having a play date, and playing a sport. Sometimes it is good to play by yourself and sometimes it is good to play with other people.



POETRY 3-4: 1st PLACE

Looking in the Mirror

by Elli Singer

Looking in the mirror
I see
worries melting away
like wax dripping down the side of a candle
shrinking ever so slowly.

Looking in the mirror
I see
Mistakes sticking to me
like a Post It note
falling away as I learn
forgiving myself for the choices I've made.

Looking in the mirror
I see
kindness and forgiveness glide about
like a graceful dancer at her recital
leaping and twirling around the stage.

Looking in the mirror
I see
a young girl's dreams becoming reality
facing fears along the way
ready to conquer her worries and mistakes.

Looking in the mirror
I see
me.
I am the girl in the mirror,
strong, independent, determined, intelligent.

POETRY 3-4: 2nd PLACE

The Mirror

By Kylie Jonassen

In the mirror I see myself
a loving, caring girl.
Listening to, respecting
teachers, family, friends.
Going out on a limb
every now and then
to improve myself -
risking, making a mistake.

Sometimes in the mirror though
I see myself falling through
a black hole of depression,
reaching for hope and happiness,
knowing that I won't fall forever,
knowing that my goals are within reach.

Climbing out of that hole,
returning to myself,
In the mirror I see myself
A strong powerful girl
who will change the world.

POETRY 3-4: 3rd PLACE

REFLECTION

By Aarjit Adhikari

Representation of something

Everyone's similarities

Fake of the real thing

Lie of the original

Established off something

Clone of something

Trace of yourself in water

Image of the original thing

Other thing that acts like another thing

Not original

NARRATIVE 3-4: 1st PLACE

Charlie the Dog

By Nathan Lee

I want to reflect something that happened in my life to a fable. Say that I'm the farm animals and my little sister "Charlotte" as "Charlie" the dog. When my sister was born, she got all the love from mom and dad, like Charlie did from the farmer, so I have been jealous, the farm animals got jealous, too. One day, Charlotte got a present from my parents, but I didn't. The other day, I started poking and tickling her because I was jealous about the present. There was a secret that I didn't know. She got it because she did chores. But I kept on poking and tickling. Then, I got in trouble. My dad said that I have to go to my room for time-out when he found out that I was bullying her.

Once upon a time, there were farm animals that wouldn't do their farm work. They wouldn't even move an inch when the farmer told them to work. But the farmer still loved the animals. One day, the farmer found a stray dog on his way back from the grocery store. The farmer made a dog-house for him and a bed inside the dog-house. The farm animals were jealous of the dog because he took all of attention from the farmer. So that night, the farm animals couldn't sleep. They kept concerning that the dog would take the farmer's love away from them.

A chicken thought of a plan to take the farmer's attention back to them. The chicken said that the cows are going to scare the dog by stomping their feet. The chickens are going to peck the dog. Last but not least, the pigs are going to tackle him. So, the very next day the animals were trying to get a good point to start their plan. It was the middle of the day and the farm animals still could not find a good point to start. It was

night and the animals still didn't find a good timing for their plan. The chicken re-thought his idea again. He said, "we should practice our plan in the middle of the night." The animals sneaked outside next to the dog's house. The cows started stomping their feet. The dog raised his ears. The chickens started pecking the dog before the dog stood up. Right after that, the pigs tackled the dog down. The dog began howling. But one pig blocked the dog's mouth. When the pigs let the dog go, the dog was so freaked out that he ran away into the woods.

The next day the farmer was looking for his dog. "Poor dog, where are you?", the farmer said. The farmer was wondering where the dog went. The farm animals felt guilty because the farmer was sad. So, the animals went to the woods. While the animals were walking along the forest path, they started reflecting themselves. All they said, "Was it a good or bad choice scarring that dog?" All they agreed that it was bad.

While the animals were walking, a pack of wolves surrounded the farm animals. But one cow saw the sunlight reflecting to a nearby river and the cow was blocking the reflection. Then, the cow moved away from blocking the reflection. The sunlight shined on the wolves, and the wolves ran away because they didn't like the day-light. But a pig saw the dog that the animals were looking for running with the wolf pack. "We have to follow the wolf pack because the dog is running with the pack!" the pig said. The farm animals followed the wolf pack. The dog noticed the farm animals. The dog hid in one of the nearby bushes. All the animals kept following the wolves, but one smart rooster checked the bushes. Finally, the rooster found the dog in the last bush. The rooster said that they came to save the dog. When the dog and the rooster came out, the wolves were now chasing the farm animals. The rooster said to the farm animals that they should use the plan they made earlier. Then the cows started of the plan by stomping their feet. After that the chickens pecked the wolves. Last the pigs tackled the wolves down. Finally, the pigs let the wolves

run away. The animals won. The dog thanked the animals for coming back to him.

When the animals came back to the farm, the farmer was so glad to see them. When the farmer saw the dog, he remembered that he forgot to name the dog. "Charlie", said the farmer. Charlie and the farm animals lived happily in the farmers house ever after.

I went to my room, and I was angry at my dad because I thought he only liked my sister. I was angry at my sister too because she took mom and dad's love from me. She has taken all of my parents' attention from me since she was born.

When I was in my room, my sister came in with a little present. She said that she got a present because she did her chores while I was at school. She asked dad if she can have another present for me. I was so surprised with her consideration and I apologized that I was bullying her. She said it was O.K.

I thought my sister took all the love from my parents, but it was not true. They still love me, the jealousy made me think that way. The farm animals were like me too. They tried to expel Charlie from the farm. But they regretted and they finally bring him back to the farm. I learned that living together with someone new to your family would be harder and needs more consideration for each other, but I love my sister and my parents. I'm so happy and proud that I belong to my family.

NARRATIVE 3-4: 2nd PLACE

Life Lessons

By Cameron Fancher

It was just a normal summer day and I was outside with my younger sister and brother. I heard my mother call, "Judy! It's time to come in!" So, I got my brother, and my sister followed us in. Over the summer mom likes us to do educational things, but all the summer camps were full, so today she was taking us to the library.

At the library I was on my own. When I saw the first book on the shelf I remembered the last time I was at the library. I started to change my mind about getting any books at all. I couldn't bear to think about it! I remember it clearly, the day I was supposed to bring my library book back, but my dog had ripped it up. I had put the ripped book in a bag and my money to pay for it and brought it to the library. I was scared, really scared of what the librarian was going to say! I was lost in thought, when my mom came over and told me it was time to leave. I tried to tell her that I haven't picked a book yet, but she was not listening to me and that's how my first day of summer went.

The next morning, we got to the zoo right when it opened. It was much busier than I thought it would be. Once we finally made our way through the crowd we searched for the first exhibit. We went to the elephants, lions, giraffes, and the finally the hippos. Then we went to the gift shop. My brother and sister both got a stuffed animal. I did too, but then I saw a lollipop. So, I ran to put back my stuffed animal and I grabbed the lollipop.

In the car on the way home my brother and sister fell asleep on their stuffed animals. Meanwhile, I sucked on my lollipop. By the time we got home, my lollipop was gone, and I regretted not getting a souvenir that would have lasted much longer. I was sad about the choice I made.

The next morning, we stayed home and had a regular day! I got to watch TV, and when mom said it was time to turn off the TV we went to play outside! When I shut the door, a bee started to fly around me. I was about to swat it, but I remembered the last time this happened I just walked away. So that's what I did, and the bee didn't bother me again! I played outside for hours and didn't have another run in with a bee.

My first week of summer was so fun. I learned that reflecting back on my experiences is helpful. Many times, reflecting on my past, prevents me from making the same mistakes and helps me make the right decision in many situations. I can't wait to see what is planned for our next week of summer!

NARRATIVE 3-4: 3rd PLACE

What Did I Do?

By Kennedy Gwin

Hi, I'm Molly. I started being bullied when I was in kindergarten, now I'm in fifth grade. I was always a "bigger kid" so I was targeted. On the playground when teachers weren't looking kids would call me "pig" and other mean names. The teacher caught them once, but they didn't really get in trouble.

Now I have been getting revenge. In the classroom when the teacher leaves I call the kids names and mock them. I've physically hit them and threatened them if they tell.

The only friend I had, just left me. Her name is Sadie. She told me, "You're rude. I don't want to hang out with you because I don't want your bad habits to rub off on me."

I'm crying in my room now, those words stung like a bee. Suddenly a question enters my mind and I ask myself, "Should I have done all those things? I was mean to so many people." I cover my face with my hands. "Oh no, I feel so bad!" I say out loud. "Nobody deserved anything I did to them. I promise I'll say sorry to them tomorrow."

The teacher just left the room so now is the time. My palms are sweating. Slowly I walk to the front of the room, stand on a chair, and clap to get everyone's attention. Everyone just stares back at me like I'm a ghost or something. Suddenly I scream, "SORRY!" Everyone looks confused, did they hear me? "I'm sorry for being mean to everyone." I see the teacher coming back so I must hurry. As I start to say something I hear cheers and clapping. A smile stretches across my face.

Sadie walks up to me and says, "Everyone knows you made some bad choices, but we also know you can be a better person." By the end of the day almost everyone has come up to me telling me they can't believe what they just heard, and they forgive me for being a bully.

I've thought a lot about that day, what I did and what I said. I've made changes to be a better person. I'm helping other and encouraging them to be the best version of themselves, just like I'm trying to do.



ESSAY 3-4: 1st PLACE

Moving

By Trevor Earnest

There is a boy, he read tons of books and has visited over 40 countries. He has a good sense of humor and an imagination that needs brand new words to describe it. I am that boy and I have spent time reflecting on the unpleasant part of moving because I have moved a lot, so I've experienced many changes including friends, homes, routines, and expectations. All these changes have made me adapt to life like a chameleon.

People say change is good, and it is, but it's still difficult. Some people make big changes on purpose and I envy them. My dad is a surgeon in the Air Force, so the military makes us move. I've moved so much I almost always expect another. People say parting is such sweet sorrow, which doesn't make any sense to me because sad things aren't sweet.

I've grown up moving nearly every year. However, through these hard parts, there is good. I gain more friends, learn how to cope with big changes, and gain new experiences. I've grown used to moving though, automatically adjusting to new homes quickly. I just wish I could combine all the good parts of my houses and neighborhoods and invite all my friends over and never move.

Moving has made me accept change, quickly making friends, and learning which switch goes to which light in my new house. I don't like moving, but (admittedly) it has some up sides. Reflecting on my life, moving is an event that has made me who I am today. I hope whoever reads this understands however many up sides moving has, it is challenging at the same time.

ESSAY 3-4: 2nd PLACE

Reflection

By Lillian Montgomery

When people think of the word reflection, they think about seeing themselves in a mirror. But the word reflection has many different meanings. Reflection could mean what I said before, seeing yourself in a mirror. It could also mean that you stop and think about what had happened in the day. It could also mean if you might get in trouble and you might have to do a reflection on what you did so you don't do it again. The word reflection has many meanings that are important.

To me reflection means to stop and think. At my school we have this thing called E+R=O. It stands for event + response = outcome. Like when something bad happens to me I will need to stop and reflect on what happened. Then I don't have a bad response and I have a good outcome.

In third grade I was bullied by a girl. At first, I didn't know what to do at first but as it kept going on I learned how to just ignore it and let it go. And every day I would reflect on what she said to me and I would just think about those unkind words and I would let them float out of my mind. If I were to let it bother me, it would ruin my whole day, but if I let it go, I would have a good day. I am glad that I was able to stop and think so I could control my response.

ESSAY 3-4: 3rd PLACE

Reflection

By Arnav Deshpande

“Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?”

The whole ‘Snow White’ story is about this one question. The Evil Queen was always eager to see her reflection in the magic mirror, hoping to be the fairest person in the whole world.

I know there could be many meanings of reflection. But out of all of those meanings, the one I liked most is a reflection in a mirror. This is because almost every morning I see my reflection in a mirror, and it makes me very happy. After all, who doesn’t get happy by seeing their own reflection in a mirror?

If there were no mirrors you won’t be able to look at yourself. I think that’s why mirrors were invented by early humans. Without reflection in a mirror, the only way to tell if you like the way you look is for others to tell you. I always wonder what life would be like if there were no reflections in mirror. You would never get to look at yourself. It would be boring watching other people tell you what you look like. Also, think about those funny places where there are different funny mirrors. Some mirrors show your reflection as very fat while others show you very tall. Also, I usually have lots of fun in maze of mirrors. I just can’t tell my real brother from his many reflections. We would be missing on all of this fun without reflection.

Apart from looking good, reflections in mirrors help us in so many ways in life. Think about driving a car without reflection in the rearview mirror or a dentist fixing your teeth without a mirror. Can girls put on makeup without reflection in a mirror or can we get nice haircut in the barber shop without a reflection in a mirror? We use reflection in mirrors so many times in daily life without even knowing it. It’s as if it’s a life-saving thing.

Numbers of great discoveries are done because of reflection in a mirror. Think about how different planets have been discovered using a telescope which has special kind of mirror. Reflection in these special types of mirrors lets us see planets up close. Also because of a reflection in different type of mirror, I was able to watch a solar eclipse with my family. Last year, I was able to see Jupiter from Cincinnati observatory using a large telescope. And guess what? I was able to do that because of a reflection in a mirror!

All in all, reflection in a mirror is most interesting of all meanings of reflection in my opinion. After all, everyone loves their own reflection in a mirror more than anything else!!



POETRY 5-6: 1st PLACE

Little White Lies

By Amber Munoz

Mirrors display reflection
What if they lead me in the wrong direction
Mirrors show me
But what if they only show what I *want* to see
Reflections might be wrong
But what if they long
To help me see the truth
Like my innocence of youth
They try to hide my hideousness
Mirrors know I'm fastidious
They try to hide my faults
Locking them away like a vault
They know I have lots of clumsiness
And try to hide my ugliness
From my naive eyes
With little white lies
Mirrors are mischievous
But are they devious
For now, I choose to believe
That mirrors do not deceive
I will look at them to see
What can become of me

POETRY 5-6: 2nd PLACE

The Trail of My Past

By: Calleigh Ethier

Retracing my footsteps
Each track a new impression
I replay thoughts of my courageous past of spontaneity and wonder

I consume the regret that connects my fears to my actions
As the guilt approaches with every concept

I recognize the curiosity and interest
As it paints a portrait of new beginnings
And creates my inspiring future

I fill myself with the hope that had traveled through and within
Only to find a lighted path leading to the unknown that once was

I reimagine my feeling of freedom
As I push away the worry that had trapped me inside of myself
And remember the blossoming that had showed me a way of life

Following the trail of my history
I allow myself to look back
To see inside of me personally and mold my own story

POETRY 5-6: 3rd PLACE

To Reflect

By Mira Kennedy

What does it mean to reflect?
Does it really have any effect?

It means to see what you've done
What you can refine
See what you've begun
What your actions design

To see how you've acted
See what you can do
See if you've been distracted
And if that defines you

To see if you've been proficient
Or if you've been weak
See if you've been efficient
Or if you've been meek

To reflect is grow
From past mistakes
To reflect is to know
All that it takes
To be the best you can be
Day in and day out
To reflect is to learn
And choose the right route

NARRATIVE 5-6: 1st PLACE

The World Around Me

By Sophie Hard

Time never stops. Our schedules are never free. We are always hurrying and I never really pay attention to the world around me.

One day when I was getting ready for school I stopped to look in the mirror and I took a minute to think about what I saw.

My eyes. My blue, bright, happy eyes. They see beautiful flowers and family and friends. With my eyes I can enjoy all the action when I go see my favorite super hero movies. Without my eyes I wouldn't see all the wonderful things going on in the world around me.

My nose. It's kind of pear shaped and helps me smell freshly made cookies, cooking with garlic, or even the gross smell of rotten eggs! My nose can keep me safe by smelling the smoke from a fire and helps me stay calm with taking deep breaths in and out when I feel nervous. Without my nose, the world around me would be a very different place.

My ears. My peachy toned, pierced ears help me hear the laughter of others, my baby cousin's high pitched gibberish as she learns to talk, and all types of music. Without my ears, I wouldn't be able to hear the world around me.

My mouth. I use my mouth to communicate. With my mouth, I can share all the feelings and ideas I have with people. I can sing in my church choir and say my lines while performing in a play. Without my mouth I wouldn't be able to yell when I'm angry or tell my family "I love you."

I pack my school bag and finish getting ready. I grab my coat and wait for my dad to walk me to the bus stop. As I walk to the bus, I slow down and take the time to enjoy the world around me.

NARRATIVE 5-6: 2nd PLACE

Reflection

By Leah Hopkins

Reflection. I look in the mirror and wonder what I look like to the world, how I'll leave my mark. "Come eat breakfast!" my dad yells from downstairs. Everyday I get anxious about going to school and facing the girls that bully me.

I walk to the bus stop up the street and wait nervously to start the school day. I dream of a fast-forward through the end of the school year with inspiring music. A world where I'm brave enough to stand up to the bullies.

Another day in my life. Reflected. I could crack a mirror according to those girls. I'm not fit, I'm as skinny as a twig. My style isn't relaxed, it's like a hobo. My hair isn't thick and fluffy, it's big and frizzy. I am not good enough. My mom and dad don't know I'm bullied. I don't want to tell them. What good would it do anyways?

A stabbing emotional pain. I'm not good enough. I don't deserve to be in this world. At this point I'm not sure if those are the words of the bullies or my conscience. I feel like I've fallen into a ditch of sadness. The only way out is a hole in the bottom that only digs me deeper. I wake up in the middle of the night feeling at my lowest point yet. I walk downstairs. I'm ready to just let myself hurt. I don't feel anything. My eyes open. All I see is black but I feel warm. I reach out and feel around. I'm in bed. I make my way down the hall to the bathroom. I inspect myself for signs of wounds but there's nothing. I meet my own eyes in the mirror. My big bright green eyes, my jet-black shoulder-length hair, my scattered brown freckles across my face. My reflection is beautiful. But it's not my reflection that's smart, funny, pretty, and kind.....it's me.

NARRATIVE 5-6: 3rd PLACE

Freedom of My Reflection

By Calleigh Ethier

My heart pounds as my shoes strike the ground. One after another, my feet batter as I sweat through my clothes. My outfit glows in the early morning darkness like a nebula surrounded by a galaxy of thought and wonder. My reflective shirt pairs with the reflective shoes that clasp to my feet. I always run early as dawn follows closely behind me. Every morning, it's the same routine and the same run of my thoughts.

The early morning has its share of cars, but as the headlights sweep past me, I don't notice them. I'm on my own planet, in my own world, back to what I once had. Memories race through my mind of my wedding, and the funeral that followed shortly after. As much as I reflect on my husband- and the loss of him- I always seem to try to forget him as the pain hurts too much. But, how could I?

As night falls, I slowly shut my eyes, expecting to experience yet another dream of my imagination. Instead, as night time passes, my thoughts are peaceful. No concern awaits of my husband and all the troubles that circulate the concept. Only me sleeping soundly as the usual night terrors disengage from my dreams.

Pleasant and graceful, I awake to the glowing moon outside my window. I sit, puzzled, thinking back to the fantasy that grabbed my attention that previous night. As I quickly tie my running shoes for my daily run, I speculate why this happened. Why now? I soon shoot out the door and onto the crosswalk as my thoughts bounce from one thing to another in the galaxy of my mind palace. What I fail to realize is that, in my rush, I had forgotten to put on my reflective vest. I am running through the darkness but not glowing or reflecting.

Confused, I cross the streets, wondering what caused these things to happen and what it's all supposed to mean. There are headlights shining, but I don't see them, and they don't see me. My heart beats calmly as my thoughts rush until they're interrupted by the sound of howling brakes. In an instant, my life flashes before my eyes. I realize that I'd always been moving forward and taking one step after another until the day my husband was gone. After his death, everything stopped. My life stands still as the car honks in front of me, but I'm trapped in a gaze.

The driver gets out of her car and runs over to me. "Are you okay?" she says with worry in her voice. With a smile, "I'm okay" is all I can say. "I'm finally okay!" As I walk back to my house, I let myself free. Free from the chain that was holding me down for so long. Free from the weighted anxiety that was taking over and pulling me every which way. Letting go lets me hold on only with freedom. Freedom of my reflection.

ESSAY 5-6: 1st PLACE

Reflection

Mexican Schools vs. American Schools

By Moises Arreola Sanchez

In Mexico, I only went to school a little bit. The kids there were rough and there was a lot of arguing on the playground. I only had two friends, and no one would talk to me. Two girls that was it. Kids there could talk in class all the time. There was no technology. No iPad in the school. No math. No social studies. There was one teacher and you wrote whatever she wrote on the board. Kids argued in class.

Schools in Mexico were boring. There was no Interpreter, no one signed, and I just sat there and didn't understand anything. Kids laughed at me and they were mean to me. I remember one boy always yelled at me.

I like school in America. I am learning. I know I am smart. I have lots of friends. I like playing outside. Now, I understand because I have Kelli as my interpreter. Teachers help me in America. Romey, Ms. Jessica, Mr. Mattingly and Lori Timpone. Jessica helped me get my hearing aids, a bike, and clothes. Romey helped me go to Mr. Plesa's class. Mr. Mattingly always tells me that I am smart. He likes my writing and my painting. In Mexico, they didn't have above the line and below the line. Schools in America are above the line. Mexico is below the line.

** This student moved from Mexico to the United States in December 2018. He is deaf and mute. He has not received a formal education due to his deafness. Since coming to the United States, he learned the English alphabet, and is beginning to read by sight. He has received hearing aids through Children's Hospital and is starting to be able to hear sounds and make some sounds of letters. He spoke to his translator about his experience in Mexico vs. his experience here in America. This is his reflection.

ESSAY 5-6: 2nd PLACE

A Reflection On My Behavior

By Rishi Chitnis

When I was 3 years old, I badly wanted a little brother or sister because I was lonely, and I wanted someone to play with. Then I was told that I was going to get both, because my mom was going to have twins! I wasn't happy because I just wanted one. Now I was going to get twins and I wasn't sure if I even wanted twins!

When they came my parents were so busy with them that they didn't have time to be with me. I got tired of hearing "You're the older brother!" "You should be helping them!" "You should be taking care of them!" I slowly started to hate them because they kept my parents from spending time with me! It was only during night time, after they tucked my little brother and sister in, that they spent some time with me. So, I started being mean: I started pinching them when no one was looking, I hated how they got all the attention and I hated how they were just babies who could do nothing by themselves.

One time when no one was looking, I started pinching them. They both started crying. Then I saw that they were very sad. This was the moment when I changed. I decided I will never be so mean to them and I will never hate them. What made me change?

When I pinched my little brother, I saw my reflection in his eyes. I also saw love and admiration. It made me think about my own behavior and how my choices were affecting my siblings. What was I teaching them as their big brother? Then I realized how much they were counting on me to *be* their big brother.

I tickled them and they started laughing. Every time they started to cry, I gave them company. When it came to their bedtime and they started crying, I rocked them back and forth and sang lullabies. Then they fell asleep and then I went to my room and fell asleep too.

Earlier my heart was too small and then it felt like it jumped to the size of a bus! My family was very happy, and I discovered that my parents have enough love from me and my little brother and sister. We became a family.

When I took the time to reflect on my behavior, I understood what I needed to do to make my family come together.

ESSAY 5-6: 3rd PLACE

Reflection

By Khira Flood

My heart's desire is to participate, but I've been left out. There are many times where I, and many others, have been left out. And it's terrible to look back and reflect on a moment when you have been left out. There have been many experiences where I have been left out.

One experience where I have been left out was when both of my best friends dressed up as a certain theme for Halloween and didn't feel the need to tell me. I was at a very young age and this hurt me a lot. It made me feel like they didn't like me, it also made me feel like I wasn't a part of the group. I still think about this memory to this day, and it does hurt.

Another experience I have faced was when I was not invited to my best friend's birthday party. My friend had been talking about her party for weeks, and being her best friend, I thought that I would be invited, but I was surely wrong. I felt like my friend didn't care about me. This really hurt my feelings and it tarnished our relationship.

Last but not least, once I was feeling very slighted when my friends video called me while they were having a sleepover, and they didn't care that it could make me feel jealous. It was really hard to forgive them because this action hurt my feelings very much. It made me feel like they were purposely trying to hurt me and make me feel jealous.

Wouldn't it be nice if you were included? I've learned to include others and make sure no one is left out. I know now to include others and make sure that everyone has a friend to talk to. The interesting thing about reflection is, you get an opportunity to think about the hurtful things in the past and do something differently to positively change the future.

POETRY 7-8: 1st PLACE

The Figure in the Glass

By Giulia L. Pisano

The mirror holds a figure so often desired,
A flawless image society says is admired,
This reflection of one who was once inspired,
One whose heart has grown weary and tired,
Of chasing something she can never acquire.
The figure in the glass has replaced me.

Vision distorted by a quest for perfection,
Forming a toxic and unbreakable connection,
A pursuit turned into unhealthy obsession,
With a pointless desire to change my reflection.
Is it the mirror's fault, or is it my perception?
The figure in the glass challenges me.

Trapped in this prison where nothing grows,
I see a part of me that nobody knows,
Surrounded by too many unbeatable foes,
Negativity and Doubt blur the image and expose,
The part that believes it has nothing to show.
The figure in the glass deceives me.

I lock eyes with the image I want to defeat,
And I watch as the lies fall down at my feet,
Negativity and Doubt disappear with every heartbeat,
What I am and what I see become one image complete,
My shoulders feel light as pride replaces deceit.
The figure in the glass is me.

POETRY 7-8: 2nd PLACE

Reflection

By Liv Taylor

Looking back...
Looking at scars
Remembering the memories
Hiding behind bars
I promised myself a new start.
Looking back at the depth of my mistakes
For its deeper than the hole in a stubborn man's heart.

Looking now..
Looking at my mistakes
Nothing I can do now
But contemplate
I was foolish then wiser now
Change is finally taking effect
It has come hailing down

Looking back...
Looking earnestly at all the happiness within me
Recalling the pleasant sun
Glowing fiercely like the fireflies by the creek
The creek where I first found true gaiety
The same place where I could drift into happiness
Like a child drifting into a magnificent dream

Looking now...
I laugh and imagine every moment
It will replay in my mind
Like a television on constant rewind
I laugh the most joyful laugh
But then I cry the most sorrowful cry

Looking back...
Looking back the creek was fun
But it possessed more secrets
It secured more memories
It conspired with my sorrows

I look at the shine of the creek
I remember its fine firefly glow
I can solely reflect on what no one else had known
And I can merely reflect on the mistakes that have grown
I will reflect on the happiness to
I already reflected on me
Now it's time for you to reflect on you



POETRY 7-8: 3rd PLACE

The Silver Mirror

By Brooke Wilson

When I look into the silver mirror
my image seems so, so clear

Frizzy hair, and tired eyes
It does not take me by surprise

For sure I do see me,
But also my personality

Ones may be dark and bleak
They may believe they are so weak

But others shine from beneath
They rise from the burning heat

They reflect on all their actions,
Some even experience satisfaction

For others are disappointed
All their scars have been treated with ointment

But still they dream to rise
Above all of the wise

For they go back to their reflections,
They doubt winning the election

The election of prosperity
But that has much rarity

Money, wealth and fame
Are all there to blame

Some don't see that they're meant to be
Rushing in the dark- blue sea

But all people can shine from beneath
And become one that's not so bleak

But all you may see is a tear
Falling from the silver mirror

NARRATIVE 7-8: 1st PLACE

A Reflection One Too Many

By Lisa Phan

Ocean blue: such a beautiful color. A color the world decided to give her for her eyes. The color that her mother, herself had. Many people compliment her for her eyes. Their unique shade, their color contrasting her pale skin, yet no one seems to see what lies behind that ocean blue. The ocean blue that would forever haunt her and her dreams.

Dreams were supposed to be colorless, lifeless. If it weren't that, they would be of every color. Colors that went with their respective objects. Dreams weren't supposed to be of one color. Especially blue. Although her sleep and dreams were rarely ever peaceful, waking up was even worse. Waking up meant going back to reality and living the rest of her life.

As she sat on the side of her bed, she looked down at her legs and feet. *If there is an Almighty being out there listening to me as of right now, I beg of you to rewind time*, she thought, the words echoing through her mind. *Even if it means having to relive my entire life, just please rewind time*. She waited... and waited. Nothing happened. *Don't cry*, she scolded herself. *Do. Not. Cry.*

"It's time for school!" her aunt yelled from downstairs. Using her hands to push herself off her bed, she grabbed her backpack as she made her way downstairs. As she walked down the hallway to the stairs, she could feel something awry in the air. She halted abruptly and turned her head, immediately regretting it. She could no longer hear her aunt's voice; for in her ears, she heard the loud, rhythmic sound of a bird's wing beats. The bird beat aggressively against the left side of her chest. Perhaps it was her heart, she didn't know.

As she looked in the mirror, she could see her mother in her. The same face shape, the same nose, the same lips except for one difference. Instead of her mother's kind eyes, her eyes were accusing, challenging her to deny what happened. *Don't cry. Do. Not. Cry.*

As she continued to stare at her reflection, she was transported to another day. The day she sat looking at her mother in her last moments on Earth, the day she would last talk her mother, the day she would see the life go out of her mother's eyes, all because of them going into that dumb car and driving on that dumb highway.

So many times, had she heard people say that a person could be many things at once. Perhaps she was many things as well. Perhaps she was a volcano about to erupt any second. Perhaps she was the dark, heavy raincloud filled with water vapor, waiting to shed its tears. *Don't cry, don't cry*, she chanted in her head. *You are not going to cry!*

She was telling herself this, yet she watched as a tear slip from her eye... and another... and another.



NARRATIVE 7-8: 2nd PLACE

The Girl

By Sara Sparling

In the beginning of 7th grade, I saw this girl every day. We never spoke, or crossed paths, but I noticed her. I would be ready to walk to class, and she would be there. One day, I looked at her and she smiled at me, I had never seen that before and honestly, I was a little confused. I approached her one day and said, "Hey, you're beautiful." She smiled back at me and we became friends quickly. Every day when I saw her, I would say something nice. "You're beautiful. You're smart. You will achieve anything. I believe in you. You can do this." She never said anything back, but I continued to say things like "You're great!" and "You're awesome in your own special way."

I didn't walk to class with this girl because I only saw her a few times a day, in the same place. It's like she was a stationary object, because every time I would walk by, there she would be. Standing there smiling back at me. I never asked any questions, only stated true facts and things about herself that no other person would ever hear. She listened every day but never responded. She only smiled.

One day, she moved. I looked at my phone to check something, and she was there, standing across from me like she had followed me. I wondered if this girl was actually real? Was this the person I was actually seeing? I had never seen her before, only at the start of the school year. I continued to wonder if this girl was real, or if it was just my mind playing tricks on me. Was I a psychopath who was talking to absolutely nobody? I asked friends if they had seen her, and to my surprise, no one did. I knew I was crazy, I knew it all along. I knew this girl didn't exist. But something kept telling me to talk to her. Every time I

spoke to her, I would get this weird feeling. Like a natural disaster happening inside me, but it felt like a good thing.

I noticed my performance and confidence in school was improving. I had never felt this way about myself. Maybe this girl did exist, but people were too blind to notice. Maybe they only saw the negative side, or how weird she was, or that she was an outsider. Until one day, I opened my locker and saw the same girl. I knew this was my chance. At the same time, we said, "You. Are. Amazing."

It was my reflection staring back at me.



NARRATIVE 7-8: 3rd PLACE

It Was a Warning

By Macy Hamlin

I could feel my hands trembling as the shivers seemed to slowly devour my body. I didn't dare look at the clock, fearing how long I would need to stay awake, that cursed dream still running through my head. It was the second night those images flashed in my mind, the pure fear, the stench that seemed to follow me into consciousness.

The dream went as so: I found myself in a dark room, the blackness of it seeming to cover everything. The only object that differed from the darkness was the full body mirror, a single light illuminating it. I approached the mirror, horrified to see what followed my movements. It was me. But it wasn't me. My eyelids were pulled back behind my eyes, making them seem to pop out of my head, blood covered my clothes, and my short hair was long and tangled, seeming to reach down to my knees. That wasn't the most horrific part though, it was the smile. The smile was pulled up to reach the corners of its eyes, the teeth still going along like they would on anyone else. I watched in horror as blood drips down from the tears in its skin, the skull showing slightly. The blood on its clothes was no surprise as the stench from it seemed to hit me like a truck, my eyes watering from the terrible smell that was brought with it. I tried to scream, still trapped within my own head as the only sound that left me were the breathy wails, the confinements of my unconscious body disallowing me to scream, to escape.

My senses developed to become overwhelmed as the shock from the integrity of the dream forced me awake. I woke up only to find my body drenched in sweat, the odor wafting through the air. My nose scrunched up in disgust as I stand,

going to shower as to wash off the stench and the fear from my body.

I endured the rest of that day like normal, the dream but a distant memory that nagged me in the back of my head throughout the day. Only that night did the dream work its way back to the center of my mind, becoming the only thought I could focus on. I was chasing sleep as it seemed to only hide and run from me. It wasn't until I decided to let the dream overwhelm me that sleep finally found me, wrapping me up in its arms.

Only this time the dream occurred again, the fear and anxiety throughout the air finding me before the contents of the dream even took place. Only this time my reflection did something, a single wave of a long, bony finger had me ready to bolt as another scream clawed its way up and out my throat. I tried to escape, the wails escaping me.

Only to realize,
I was no longer trapped in a Dream.



ESSAY 7-8: 1st PLACE

Bend the Light

By Stella Ray

“We don’t learn by doing; we learn by REFLECTING on what we do” ~ John Dewey.

Reflection not only casts back an image, but also allows one to ruminate upon past choices and actions to determine how to improve in the future. It’s not about the event that we need to reflect on, it is about how we respond to that event that we need to examine. Experience and reflection nurture maturity. Maturity creates controlled reactions. Controlled reactions dissipate defensive anger. Reflection precipitates refraction.

Unfortunately, I encountered first-hand that there was a learning curve in perfecting the art of reflecting and refracting. Bursting out with anger, fuming with hate, I yelled with displeasure. A classmate had told me I was doing everything wrong involving the project we were working on. I knew I was upset, and I understood I was about to do something I was going to regret. I did it anyway.

We began to argue, and the taste in my mouth was as bitter as the darkest black coffee. Now it was no longer about the project, it was about who would be the last person to throw out a hateful comment. Thought after thought, statement after statement, we spewed out contempt and resentment. I was so irritated-- I wanted to scream until I lost my voice; I wanted to shatter the closest window with my fist; I wanted to slam my feet on the ground and shake the Earth. My mind was like a ball of fire: hot, red, and about to explode.

Choosing to reflect upon what I had done was initially not an idea I was willing to entertain. However, I was more than willing to reflect upon the wrongs committed by my classmate. After some time elapsed, my thought patterns morphed from, “I can’t believe someone could be such an angry, mean, nasty person” to “do I want to be an angry, mean, nasty person”? The traits of my opponent were mirrored in me. In that moment, I made an agreement with myself to actively choose refraction and not reflection.

I thought about all my past remarks. I knew I had to change, so I stopped arguing. What am I going to do to make up for the awful things I had said? What am I going to do to fix this horrible situation I put myself in? How am I going to show I am sorry?

Reflect upon it. Own it. Refract it.

When I made my apologies to my classmate, I felt a new sense of confidence and strength. Weakness does not lie in the apology. Weakness lies in the arrogance of refusing to apologize. Reflection precipitated refraction. Reflecting upon the event allowed me to change direction: to bend the light.

ESSAY 7-8: 2nd PLACE

New Beginnings

By Allison Ackerman

People make mistakes, it is what makes us human. But what matters is how we reflect ourselves to become better people. Recently I experienced a very traumatic event, yet I've been able to help so many others by guiding them into the light.

Many people have trouble accepting new ideas such as the advancements in the LGBTQ+ community, my family included. My father and brothers often made crude comments directed towards the LGBTQ+ community. They would express the opinion of being gay is inappropriate or an illness. Living that way would be wrong and outlandish, they would say. I couldn't understand how my greatest role models would be so ignorant. Times have changed, but as my dad says, he grew up in a different time and converting ideas would be too difficult.

Over many years, I have reflected on my choices, figuring out who I am. I discovered that I felt the same feelings for girls that I did for guys. I kept coming back to horrible thoughts, *being bisexual was wrong; I am a horrible person. My parents would surely kick me out of the house. Where would I live? Where would I go? I couldn't believe that I could stoop to this level.* I reflected on this idea. I soon realized, people are unique and beautiful we all deserve to be loved and love who we want. This is America for goodness sake, shouldn't we be free?

My denial of the situation led me into a period of depression. I was constantly nervous and I even self-harmed. I couldn't sleep anymore, and I avoided feelings completely. My will to keep breathing was gone. I knew that this was wrong I deserved to be happy just like everyone else. Just because I loved all genders didn't mean I had to stop loving myself. I

consulted my counselor who talked me through everything. We agreed that the best thing was to tell my parents about the issue at hand.

My parents were very distraught about the situation. My parents thought I was too young to make these decisions and thought I was doing all of this for popularity. Over time I reflected on what I could do with this experience. Eventually, I changed my family's mind and guided them to a new path that is love. Loving everyone, no matter what. We are all people; our genders and sexuality do not define us.

I've had the opportunity to guide others just like me to become happy and accept who they are. I've been able to push people into having hope by getting help. It is how you look at the situation whether your pro-change or against it. Life is happening right here, right now. It stops for nobody, you can expect change or be left behind. So, to reflect on how you can change your situation to help yourself and the others around you. Everyone needs a little help sometimes, even our greatest role models.

ESSAY 7-8: 3rd PLACE

How to Reflect

By Aliya Merchant

When you see a homeless person on the street do you feed them or continue walking? When you see a student bullying another student do you stand up for them? When you hear of natural disasters do you donate the food supplies to those who need it? These are just some of the problems that everyday society faces. We don't care about all issues but some of these issues hit us home. But in order to truly solve them, we must first look within ourselves and learn to reflect. Reflection to me means taking deep consideration about something and try to take the first step personally to make things better.

In order to truly reflect we must deeply care about the issue and go through the steps of reflection. The first step is to identify the specific problem and why it is worth reflecting upon. The second step is to think in depth about how that experience made us feel and ask questions about it. Some questions could be, why am I drawn to this specific problem and what are some of the most important points of the issue. One must also think about our views before and after we experience an issue. All these questions help you to think in great profundity about the problem that needs fixing.

The third step is to think about what you learned and what your role can be in the ordeal. By doing this you can figure out how to improve yourself as a person. You can also ask what would have been an ideal situation for the issue. Another important question is, what I can learn from this issue and how I can affect changes in the future. The fourth step is the most important because reflection without personal action is of no use. We need identify what we can do to fix the problem

personally, socially, economically or politically. This varies on the problem and is based on how far you want to go with the situation.

I have used this method for the issue of education and malnourishment when I visited Africa in 2016. I noticed that there was a program called “Porridge for Kids” which provided porridge at breakfast so that their poor parents would send their kids to school in the morning. In exchange, the kid would get nourishment and an education too. The cost of this program per kid was one dollar per day. I used the steps of reflection on how I could contribute to this wonderful program. I asked my father to donate my Christmas gift money for this program, and we sponsored one child for a whole year. This experience was a great confidence builder for me on how to reflect and affect change personally. I learned that reflection helps me solve everyday problems. I as a person want to improve society every day, but the journey starts with us taking the first step ourselves.



POETRY 9-12: 1st PLACE

The Creator Within Me

By Tyson Jung

I was better
At things
When I was younger.
My talents,
Disappointingly,
Did not grow up
With me.

I transitioned from
The top one percent of
Standardized testing
To almost failing physics,
The passion for knowledge
Stamped out by
The terrors of
Stupidity.

I stopped churning out
Comic books and sketches
And drawings and started
Choking on the pencil,
The fear of failure triumphing
Over the joy of creation.

My graphic tee shirts
Ceased to be ironic,
I shaved the sides
Of my head.

My appetite for literature
Waned, like an allergy
That manifested
Through puberty.
Writing poetry became
Foreign again, a
Chore, a bore,
Wrong.

Little Tyson never
Saw this coming—
He is,
I'm sure,
Still sitting at
The kitchen table,
Drawing
And reading
His fleeting time away,
Beckoning me,
Offering me the only solace
Him and I
Have ever known:
The pencil
And the page.

POETRY 9-12: 2nd PLACE

Reflection

By Jiji Mills

Your reflection to you is not the same to me,
Staring at yourself on the surface of the sea
Tracing your fingers over cracks in the mirror,
Gazing at the glass where your face feels nearer
Through the front facing camera on your dirty phone screen,
The image you want isn't what you always see
Again in the mirror on the bedroom floor,
While holding the scissors from the bathroom drawer
Snip, snip, snip, your hair hits the surface,
You think to yourself, *I don't need to be perfect*
But we are the same; in you I see,
The person in the mirror staring back at me



POETRY 9-12: 3rd PLACE

True Self

By Amanda McCrary

I see myself in the water,
It is me, but not how others view me,
Myself, looking back in the blue seawater,
I do not see all the things I could be.

I only see all the insecurities,
Fix this, fix that,
While other people only see the purities,
Then rain starts going split, splat.

The rain comes and goes,
Leaving all of my frustration,
It tries to show me the pros,
But there is no dictation.

I want to see my honest reflection,
But the water is like broken glass,
It is hiding my true complexion,
The water is leaving an impasse.

What if I am not happy with my genuine self,
I can only hear my mind inside,
Thoughts constantly adding to find myself,
I try to abide.

Then the water calms enough to see my true self,
I am pleased.

NARRATIVE 9-12: 1st PLACE

Flight 379 to Venice

By Vidushi Trivedi

“Attention, flight 379 to Venice is departing in 15 minutes.”

Jasmine Clark did not like airports. Airports meant the possibility of being late and tired. Sure, she was only going to Venice for the CloudCo conference, but maybe she’d see a canal or two out of the board room window. After all, it’s not like she had time for to go sightseeing (right?). Jasmine needed to focus on what was important, not daydream about Venice. If she nailed her presentation at the conference, she might finally get that promotion.

Jasmine strode past a glass divider, but suddenly began to stop as she slowly took in the woman walking beside her.

It was her reflection. And she didn’t look too good.

She gingerly touched her cheek. Those dark circles weren’t always hiding beneath her glasses, were they? (they were) Was her chocolate skin always so ashy and dry? (it was) And she. . . didn’t look happy (she wasn’t).

She glanced down at her boarding pass, nestled alongside her conference permit. She just had to get through this week, and then she would take a break if something didn’t come up.

Jasmine could’ve gone staring at her reflection for another minute or two if it weren’t for the body that crashed into her.

“Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry—”

Jasmine found herself sprawled on the floor alongside a lanky blonde woman.

“Hey, are you okay? Hello? Please don’t be hurt—”

“Oh no, uh, I’m fine,” said Jasmine, adjusting her glasses. “Just a little shaken up.” The contents of the stranger’s bag, as well as hers, were now scattered all over the floor.

Jasmine coughed. “Uh, sorry about that.”

“It happens,” shrugged the stranger. “I’m Lola, by the way.”

Jasmine didn’t have time to waste on introducing herself to some random girl. Resisting her instincts, she tentatively smiled and held out her hand.

“ I’m Jasmine.”

Lola didn’t shake it. Instead, she was peering at Jasmine’s conference permit on the ground.

“You’re headed to Venice for the CloudCo conference,” said Lola breathlessly. She held up her own permit and grinned. “We’re going to the same conference! We can sit together on the plane and talk-”

Jasmine incredulously listened on to Lola’s rambling. *Great job, now you’re stuck with her for an entire flight.* Suddenly, she looked down at her watch.

“We’re going to miss the flight.”

After a beat, the two women scrambled to collect their things off the floor and ran.

~

After running for five minutes, they were utterly lost. Jasmine was exhausted from running and now she was going to miss her flight- the two things she hated about airports.

Lola handed a map she’d snagged to Jasmine.

“Alright.” Jasmine pushed up her glasses. “If we head left, then we should hit the east stairwell, which will lead us to our gate.”

A sinister grin spread across Lola’s face. “Race you!” she yelled, taking off.

“What-?” Jasmine barely thought about what she was doing before she dashed after Lola. She had to admit it was a little fun dodging people and luggage carts.

Of course, Jasmine couldn't keep up forever- As she stopped to search the crowd, her eyes landed on the clock. *Oh no*. The plane was probably already taking off. Panicking, she looked around for Lola when she felt a tap on her shoulder.

"I got ice cream!" Lola grinned at her with two cones in hand.

Jasmine stared in shock. "We just missed our flight, and you're getting ICE CREAM?"

Lola pointed to the departure board. "It got delayed."

Jasmine stood frozen.

". . .Oh," she stuttered.

"Sorry, but-" Lola visibly stifled her giggles. "The look on your face is priceless." She held out one of the ice cream cones.

"Thanks," Jasmine said, awkwardly taking it.

For some reason, laughter bubbled up and spilled out of both the girls' mouths.

Soon, the boarding call came, and they were on their way to Venice.

~

Jasmine fumbled back to her tiny airplane seat after a late-night trip to the bathroom. She carefully picked her way over a sleeping (and snoring) Lola, who was wearing a purple glittery eye mask. She chuckled inwardly at the ridiculous sight. As she sat down, something soft prodded at her ankle— her work bag, full of paperwork she had been planning to take care of. Jasmine decided to ignore it and looked out the oval window instead. Pink rays of light were beginning break out over the horizon, painting the sky in beautiful pastels. She gazed at her face in the glass.

For some reason, she felt happier. It was as if the sun had lit up a dark space inside of her that she hadn't even realized was there. Sure, she still looked like a mess. But a happier mess was better than whatever she was before. Jasmine nudged the bag back under her seat. Work had taken

up enough of her life, she mused. Perhaps it was time to make space for a friend.

Jasmine smiled softly at her reflection and shut the window.



NARRATIVE 9-12: 2nd PLACE

Mirror Maze

By Connor Pletikapich

I was lost in a pool of fear. I was lost in a box of anxiety. But more literally, I was lost in a maze of mirrors. I came to find myself stuck in a place where I shouldn't be. Everywhere I looked was another image of myself, leaving me nowhere to go. As to being trapped physically, I was trapped mentally, as well. My mind was rapidly moving, yet no thoughts seemed to p up. I called out for help, but none seemed to come over the next abusing minutes of torture. I was left on an island of solitude. I finally came to realize that my mind was tricking me, with the endless reflections of myself from the mirrors. No one was coming. I was all alone.

Half an hour earlier, I entered the maze with my younger brother and older sister. The three of us and my dad were on vacation and my dad believed we had ruined it. This was our punishment for acting belligerent to each other the whole week. But this would end up being more than a normal punishment from dad. In response to our arguments, they left the three of us to solve our problems, whilst solving a puzzle. But little did they know; this puzzle was the most complicated and compound conflict we would have to decipher.

So, we entered the maze of mirrors, while we bickered petty remarks to each other. I would sigh, looking up at the blue-colored lights, hearing the things they said. None of us wanted to be there, yet our feeling of this would multiply in just a matter of minutes. Early on we parted our ways, leaving each of us to decode the maze individually. Soon we would come to believe that separating in that moment would be our worse mistake.

With an irate feeling, I walked through the maze. Multiple times, I would come to a stop, contemplating on which

way to go. Often, I would be forced to stop involuntarily, as I clashed with myself on the mirror. My irate feeling became stronger, the more it happened. Suddenly, my anger of my mind took control of the rest of my body, as forced its way through, hoping to make progress. In a matter of seconds, my face and the rest of me quickly met a mirror. I was left on the ground, no longer furious. My attitude now had altered to an anxious feeling. Slowly, I stood up and realized how trapped I actually was. All I could see were countless reflections of myself. Everywhere, everywhere I looked, it was me.

This all led to where I am now. Lost. Trapped. Stuck. This was one puzzle I could not solve. My hands were getting sweaty, my legs were trembling, and my body heat soured up into throbbing temperatures. The pressure was tenderizing my thoughts and feelings, and I was hyperventilating. All of my thoughts and feelings filled up. They were racing through my head, sprinting through my body. It was all building up, then suddenly...I began to weep, not being able to control my what was going on inside of me. I bent down and just let it all out, my tears dripping from my face, flowing like a stream. My world got shallow as I was drowning in despair. I had no hope. Once again, I am truly alone.

Suddenly, I realized, no, I am not alone. My brother, my sister, they're here. At first, this filled me with sorrow. I should've never argued with them. If only I could be with them right now, everything would be right now. But the question that trumps all others, where would they be? I took time to think about what I know about them. First, I started with my younger brother, Greg. Where would Greg go? I thought long and hard, but nothing came to my head. I tried thinking harder, reflecting stronger on our memories. Abruptly, I had it! Luckily, I could remember a time when we were both real young. It was a time when we got lost in the store. When we looked around for him, we found him at the front of the store. He told us he figured that they could never lose him, if he was there at the exit. He

was an intelligent kid, even at a young age. Oh, how I used to love to play strategy games with him on our Wii.

I quickly stood up and took a glance around. Which direction did I come from? It was impossible to tell. Instantly an idea came into my head, and I remembered, the lights. I was a cheetah and rapidly looked up. I saw red lights. I walked around with my hands out, ensuring I wouldn't bump into any of my reflections. I kept my head up, viewing the lights. I saw red, green, and orange lights, before I finally came to see blue lights. I followed the lights, until it was directly above me. Instantly, I looked down and in front of me I saw a little bow sitting, with his head in his lap.

I calmly questioned, "Greg? Is that you?" The little boy looked up and joy ran through his expression. He acquired springs I never knew he had and jumped up from the ground. He quickly ran to me and put his small arms around me in an embrace. I told him I loved him, and he returned the phrase. After our long hug, I let him know that we needed to find our older sister, Karen. I stopped and thought about the time I spent with her. It wasn't as much as Greg; back at home she isolated herself quite more. I knew I should've reached out with her more often, knowing she might feel left out, as the only girl in the family. To stay on track, I tried thinking about our times together and what she would do, but once again found myself stuck.

Suddenly, Greg remembered a time when we all went to the zoo a couple years back. He remembered how we joked about how if we ever got lost, make the sound of your favorite animal. I told him that was silly, but soon enough he was mooing like a cow. I told him to stop, but he persisted. On and on, he kept on like a cow, and out of the blue there was another sound. It was the sound of barking. Barking like a dog. It was Karen, I knew it was! Her favorite animal is a dog! We followed the sound and it got louder and louder. Before we knew it, the

sound was directly in front of us. We kept walking and came to meet another person lost in the maze. It was Karen.

We reunited and worked together to decipher the maze and obtain our freedom. After the maze, Karen drove us to get lunch at a nearby pizza place. All in all, it was a great time. We joked around and finally got to spend quality time together, when we didn't fight. We also talked about how much we missed each other, while lost in the maze. I guess people are right when they say, you don't know how much something means to you until it's gone. I guess all it took was time to reflect in a place full of reflections for me to understand how much my loving brother and sister mean to me.



NARRATIVE 9-12: 3rd PLACE

Reflect Deeper

By Brianna Lee Fitzgerald

Long, silky curls slipped between my fingers as I toyed with thick strands of my hair. My feet remained planted firmly beneath me, glazed eyes fixed to the grand mirror that hung above the double sink in my grandparent's bathroom. I tugged at my curls, wrapping them around my fingers, pulling at them until they sprung back -- each curl was glorious, golden brown and gleaming under the direct bathroom light.

Gripping the curls loosely in a fist, I lifted them so that no hair hung below my ears. As I admired the faux cut, I couldn't help but let my lips curl into a slight smile. A soft sigh fell from my lips as I modeled for myself, chocolate brown eyes glued to my own reflection. They were gorgeous, yes, but there was an incessant urge inside of me that was desperate to cut the curls and see them juxtaposed against the ceramic sink. I didn't feel like me anymore, and I was in need of a fresh start. Cutting my hair seemed to be the perfect clean slate.

"I want to get my hair cut," I mentioned to my family that night as we all crowded around the kitchen table for shepherd's pie. Silence hung heavy amongst the group and I hopefully awaited a positive response.

"Oh, sweetie, I love your curls. Why would you want to go and do something like that?" My grandmother inquired condescendingly as she poured herself a glass of iced tea. I let out an exasperated sigh -- her response had been exactly what I had expected.

"I don't like it anymore. It doesn't feel like.. me." I admitted before shoveling a forkful of mashed potato into my mouth. My grandfather remained silent, but my mother chimed in.

“Mommom’s right. I think you’ll regret it, but if that’s what you want..” She finished with a shrug, and I was just pleased that she wasn’t completely shutting down the idea. Dinner was oddly stifling, and the conversation was minimal after that, but my grandmother didn’t let the idea rest.

“What a shame.” She muttered with an unapproving shake of her head. Despite what anyone else thought, I knew that it had to be done if I wanted to be comfortable comparing my inner self to the image reflected back to me in the mirror each day.

When the day finally came, I was overjoyed. My mother took me to the hair salon, and I requested exactly what I wanted. Pride coursed through my veins as the chair spun around and I came face to face with a reflection that was more familiar than the one I had stood before just that morning while brushing my teeth. I admired the way the curls rested close to my scalp like a halo of sorts and how they framed my face so elegantly. Before cutting my hair, I had never known that it was possible for my reflection to display what I felt on the inside so perfectly on the outside. Finally, I felt like me, and my self-image was able to reflect that properly.

ESSAY 9-12: 1st PLACE

Reflection

By Anna Dailey

Throughout our lives, we encounter obstacles that end up defining who we are and shape our character and personality. One important step that needs to be taken as we grow into who we are includes the step of reflection. It can be a difficult task, to look deep inside your heart and mind and think about who you want to become, but important just the same. Reflection helps us grow from our mistakes in the past, and helps us to decide about our future, believe it or not. The skill of reflection can impact us in so many good ways.

Childhood provides us with many memorable events, some good and some bad. However, it is how we chose to react to these events that define us and shape us into who we are today. Like I stated before, Reflection plays an important role in this. We all know the saying, “think about what you’ve done”. But do we really stop to think after we do something bad?

Reflection can come in many different forms, one of these ways being owning up to something that you have done in the past. When you make a mistake or hurt someone, stopping to think about what you did or how you impacted that person is crucial. Just imagine a world where nobody said sorry for anything, or a world where nobody meant it. Relationships, friendships, and partnerships would crumble to the floor. Whether we believe it or not, mistakes cannot be avoided. This being said, we can only accept this and move forward.

Not only is it important to reflect on our mistakes in the past, but sit back and look at our lives as a whole. Happiness might as well be a necessity for life, right along with food and water. Happiness gives life purpose. One way we can find our purpose is through reflection. Looking for meaning in life can be a huge stepping stone on the path to success. Meaning in life

allows us to conquer new obstacles and pursue for what we want. But how do you find out what you want in the first place? The answer is reflection; such a simple task with an amazing response.

What have you been doing to better your life? What things do you want to change in your life? These questions can be asked to create a better atmosphere for ourselves and others around us. It is easy to say you want to make a change to your life, but the hardest part is actually beginning to change that habit. Once you begin, there is no looking back. What seems like such an easy task can really transform your life and cultivate it into one better than you could ever hope for.

Reflection is not something you should keep to yourself. Sharing this skill with other friends and classmates can help them better their lives, just like you can better yours. Looking at your life and what you have accomplished can, not only increase your confidence, but your attitude towards life. Imagine if you were able to easily assess issues that you've gone through in the past and fix them. Now picture a world where everyone was able to do this. Sharing the skill of reflection can really create a positive impact on your community. Advocating for this skill is something that needs to be brought to light for this very reason! With the many issues in our society today, taking a step back to look at what is really important can make a world of a difference. Advocating for this can also do more than you would ever believe!

One reason for reflection that we do not always think about is self-regulation and self-awareness. Many know that the current generation has been given a bad rap, and an even worse amount of hope for the future. With social media playing a big role in this, self-regulation from society would have the potential to change this! Not only could encouragement to reflect do a great deal for the young generation, but spread love and care for children falling victim to the hatred and bullying put on their shoulders. Encourage others around you to look back

on their actions in the recent weeks and decide if it is bettering our community, or making it worse.

Overall, Reflection has proven to do no bad for anyone and has so many good benefits! From helping society, to improving happiness, to even bettering your own life, there are so many good things that this skill can do! Although it is overlooked most of the time, there is still hope for a brighter future full of healthy reflection and self-care.



ESSAY 9-12: 2nd PLACE

Reflection: Shaping Beliefs

By Samantha Schaller

Have you ever noticed the behaviors of those around you, and made assumptions or judgements, both good and bad? We've all been there. Merriam-Webster defines reflection as "a thought, idea, or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of meditation". This is extremely accurate. Reflection is everywhere. Reflection happens any time you shape beliefs based on past experiences and likes/dislikes.

First, past experiences cause us to reflect or shape our beliefs. If we have dealt with an individual or situation before, we may have positive or negative thoughts towards an upcoming event or something currently occurring. Past experiences can cause us anxiety or anticipation for the future. Anxiety and anticipation don't just show up. They're formed when we think. I have a speech coming up, in Honors English Language Arts. In past speeches, I've always felt nervous. So, when we were told that we were going to be giving a presentation, I looked back on what I remembered. Of course, I remember being scared, so that's what I'm forced to resort to. I'm not just naturally nervous, it's because I've thought about my past. We depend on our previous experiences to help guide us by making judgements about people, objects, places, and/or concepts. Making judgements or beliefs are what reflection is all about.

Moreover, our likes/dislikes play a crucial role in our reflection. If a person, object, place, or concept is associated with something we like, we are more likely to think about the person, object, place, or concept in a positive light. The opposite is true if we dislike something. For example, I've never been a soccer fan. So, when my friends ask me to go to an FCC game, I think back to whether I would enjoy the game or not.

Because I know that I don't like soccer, I'm able to believe that I wouldn't have fun at the game. As humans, we think about our likes/dislikes daily. We must look at our morals and convince ourselves to believe something is either good or bad. When deciding what is right and what is wrong, when deciding who to trust and who not to trust, and when deciding where we want to go and where we don't want to go, we're actively thinking. We're actively making judgements. We're actively reflecting, based on our own personal preferences.

Reflection happens any time you shape beliefs based on past experiences and likes/dislikes. Being in situations with someone and their association with your likes/dislikes are all factors that go into reflection. So, the next time you find yourself in wandering in thought, ask yourself why you're thinking what you do.

ESSAY 9-12: 3rd PLACE

In the Mirror

By Hai Lan Klei

The word reflection to some may be defined as either “the throwing back by a body or surface of light, heat or sound without absorbing it” or “serious thought or consideration.” However, I think the word reflection means something more than just someone’s appearance, but rather what they are like on the inside.

When I hear the word reflection I think of the song “Reflection” as sung by Christina Aguilera from the movie “Mulan.” The main character Mulan is questioning herself while looking in a pond as to who she is. She has discovered she is not like her mother. Mulan sees her reflection and questions whether people really “see” her. With the words, “You may think you see who I really am, but you’ll never know me” she realizes that she just doesn’t fit in as the average Asian female in society. Mulan says that her heart is leading her to be something more than what’s on the outside. With the words, “when will my reflection show who I am inside?” Mulan is constantly tired of not being who she is on the inside. This theme goes deeper when Mulan says, “But somehow I will show the world what’s inside my heart and be loved for who I am.” Mulan says that someday they will understand her and who she really is on the inside.

Born in China but raised most of my life in the USA, I can relate to Mulan. I look Chinese, but I am American. What you see on the outside isn’t who I am on the inside. I carry many characteristics that are usually associated with being “Chinese” - I study hard, I care a lot about grades, and am concerned about my future. However, I look in the mirror and like Mulan I see one thing but know there is much more beneath the surface which contradicts people’s perception of me.

Although many people ask me about my culture, I only know bits and pieces about it, like Chinese festivals that my parents would take me to, to understand it better. My reflection does not fit who I am, just as Mulan states. Being adopted has many sides. I don't look like my parents, but their reflection fits their behavior or adaptations to this society we live in. Your race does not define who you are, what you see in the mirror is just an image. But who you are is a whole other story.

So, in conclusion, reflection is a word that serves more than one side of a person. This is evident in Mulan's case, and in her story. Your looks do not define who you are or how you act as it's up to you. You are given things that millions would be glad to have so embrace your qualities.

Thank you...

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About LEADS

Lakota's Enrichment and Academic Development of Students (LEADS) is primarily aimed at the parents of children identified as gifted, but welcome ALL families in the Lakota School District.

LEADS mission is to identify, provide and/or sponsor enriching academic and social opportunities for students of the District.

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