



# **A Celebration of Stories** In the City of Literature

**February 2022**

Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature's

**ONE BOOK**  
**TWO BOOK**

A Celebration of  
Children's Literature  
in the City of Literature



# **A Celebration of Stories in the City of Literature**

## **February 2022**

### **The Write Stuff winners**

*Pieces are recognized for their language, clarity, structure, and emotional impact.*

Jackson Dougherty, 1, Weber  
Kalia Cole, 2, Willowwind  
Emily Ding, 3, Borlaug  
Lorelei Rex, 4, Hoover

Cora Beland, 5, Coralville Central  
Emma Hong, 6, Weber  
Sharon Liao, 7, Northwest  
Gwen Dao, 8, Clear Creek Amana  
Middle School

### **From the Heart winners**

*Pieces are recognized for their creativity, passion, and expressiveness.*

Abigail Lorch, 2, Christine Grant  
Gabby Armstrong, 3, Willowwind  
Eva Balmer, 4, Lemme  
Kacie Burke, 5, Wickham

Calissa Fruin, 6, Lemme  
Elizabeth Brown, 7, North Central  
Aryana Sloan, 8, South East

### **Honorable Mention**

*These students' work was deemed to be of excellent quality.*

Jasper Hwang, 2, Willowwind  
April Xu, 3, Wickham  
Alice Gravert, 4, Lemme  
Abigail Chen, 4, Wickham  
Harriet Wrage, 4, Wilkins  
Elementary (Marion)  
Oceana Zhang, 4, Wickham  
Evelyn Ingersoll, 5, Lincoln  
Edison Wolterman, 5, Nixon  
Elementary (Hiawatha)

Phoebe Smart, 5, Penn  
Evan Otto Helmke, 6, Willowwind  
Ben Sauder, 6, Willowwind  
Erin Chen, 7, Northwest  
Alma Bhandary-Narayanan, 8,  
South East  
Grace Baker, 8, West Branch  
Middle School  
Briley Kaalberg, 8, West Branch  
Middle School

### **Thank you to our festival sponsors and partners:**

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Coralville Public Library, North Liberty Community Library,  
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**Jackson Dougherty**

### **The Clown Story**

Once upon a time there was a clown named Ronald. He was a clown but he met a wizard named Matt. Ronald asked Matt the Wizard to turn him into a human. Ronald wanted to become a human because he was curious how it was different from being a clown.

Now Ronald is a human, not a clown.

The first thing Ronald does as a human is take a shower. He wants all of his clown makeup to come off so he can look like a human instead of a clown. The water makes Ronald's clown makeup go down the drain and Ronald is happy.

Next Ronald goes to a hairstylist to cut his clown hair to look more like a human. The hairstylist cuts Ronald's hair into a cool curly hairstyle and dyes it blond. When Ronald looks into the hairstylist's mirror he likes what he sees.

Then Ronald goes to a store and buys new clothes so he can dress more like a human. He decides to keep his clown clothes so he can remember what it was like to be a clown.

Ronald goes to school in the 9th grade. His teacher is Mrs. Williams and he makes new friends really fast. He is also really really funny and very sneaky, so he never gets in trouble. He tells his classmates at lunch what it was like to be a clown and then all of them want to be clowns instead of humans.

Ronald tells his classmates where Matt the Wizard lives and they go there to be turned into clowns. Matt the Wizard turns Ronald's classmates into clowns.

They wait until it's nighttime and then they go to the circus to perform tricks and jokes. They have a lot of fun and Ronald is happy. Even though Ronald wanted to be a human he sees that the world needs more clowns.

The Turtle Class Alliteration

Jasper the jaguar drinks juice  
William wonders why whales eat waffles  
Freddie fights ferocious frogs  
Edie eats electric eels  
Gabby the guinea pig goes to a good show with guinea games.  
Chloe the cool kangaroo colors with crayons  
Kalia the koala kicks cookies at the creek  
Cohen the crab cooks corn with cats.  
Isaiah the ibex is eyeing an iphone  
Eli the electric eel is eating an ear of corn  
Yiyi the eagle eats immense imagenitive popcorn  
Phillip the fox fights fierce fireflies  
Nolann the narwhal nearly meets a newt  
Giselle the giraffe goes to the gym  
Elise the eager elephant eats earth  
Ms. Lisa the leopard is licking lollipops  
Zhanna the iguana likes to watch moana

A weeping willow drooped in the center of a stand of trees. Her name was Flow, and she was very, very scared. In fact, she was scared of almost everything. For example, if a bird flew by, she worried it would break off a branch. If a squirrel ran by, she would think its acrobatics would strip off all her leaves. And Flow would start to cry. Some of the other trees thought she was being too childish, and too fearful of everything. Some said, "Birds and squirrels are fine! They belong on our branches. They're part of our ecosystem." But Flow began to weep.

Suddenly, the leaves started to rustle. The squirrels and birds started to hide. Flow knew something was going to happen. OOOOOooooou!!! OOOOOoooouu!!! The sirens! Ferocious winds started to swirl. Flow's branches started to move like an octopus' legs. Maple trees started to shiver and sway. Oak branches snapped. Leaves were kicked up into the air. The trees were terrified they were going to fall down like dominoes.

At last, when the storm started to die down, Flow breathed a sigh of relief. Flow started to feel different somehow. She realized that the storm made her feel...brave.

Other trees were trying to clench in their branches. But Flow's branches were flowing up and down in a gentle, happy way. She called to the other trees, saying "It's OK, the storm's over. It's OK if you're still scared, but you don't have to worry." Maple trees stilled, and oaks relaxed. She said, "Little things aren't so bad, and big things can change how you feel." She told them that she was feeling brave. The trees were surprised.

Time passed. Slowly, the trees had been noticing odd things, and began whispering about them. The old maple tree asked, "Why is it so hot every single day?" A blue spruce answered, "I notice things are changing, like winters used to be frozen, but now they're way warmer than they used to be." A sycamore popped in and said, "Sometimes it rains way too hard, and sometimes it gets very, very dry." A walnut asked, "What about that wind storm we just had?" A pine piped up, "Don't you remember the wind storm we had three years ago? My good friend Teddy fell down. He was a great, strong hickory."

A baby locust tree asked "Is it going to happen to me? It sounds sssscary!" The old maple said, "We're just having a conversation, you don't have to worry. Oh, look at that baby bunny over there!" The baby locust muttered to herself, "I don't know about you grown-ups...." The adult trees murmured to each other. A cedar whispered, "What if the baby trees get hurt?" "Should we have a plan for them?" questioned an ash.

Flow had been silent for a while, and finally she joined in. "This may be frightening. The weather has been so different than it used to be. Even though we can't change the weather, we can still do something, something we are good at: cleaning the air. That's what we do!!! During the storm, what made me feel frightened made me feel brave. Something big that happens to you can change how you feel. Feel brave so you can be ready for something that whacks you in the trunk."

The trees stood tall.

## **The Paper Bag Princess**

Once there was a beautiful and clever princess named Clara. She had beautiful princess clothes and expensive jewelry. She was very happy and proud of her expensive things. And she was especially happy that day because it was her wedding day! She was marrying a prince named William. He was very strong and handsome. Clara liked him very much. But just when the ceremony started, a large and powerful dragon, named by Alfred, flew by and burned Clara's expensive clothes to a dusty disgusting tattered dirt dress. Then the dragon lit Clara's castle on fire till there was nothing but ash, rocks and of course Clara. Then Alfred carried off William and flew to his cave. Clara was left with nothing but a jumble of cold hard feelings. She felt her face get hot she got angrier and angrier until she was ready to explode. She was determined to get her love back!

First, she needed something to wear but the only thing that wasn't burnt or on fire was a huge paper bag. Clara put it on and started to follow the dragon using trails of burnt forests and horse bones. "How dare he!" Clara thought as she ran "how dare he ruin her perfect day!" Clara finally saw the dragon's cave. It was a huge cave on the side of the tallest mountain. On the rough wood door was a large knocker. Clara gave the knocker a loud knock. "BANG! BANG! BANG!" sounded the knocker. Clara took a step back as the door opened a bit. Alfred's head peaked out. He took one look at Clara and decided she wasn't good enough. He slammed the door in her face so fast Clara almost got her nose caught. Clara took a deep breath. Then she knocked the door again. "BANG! BANG! BANG!" went the knocker. The dragon took another peek out again. "Look" Alfred sneered "a princess, honestly I would love to eat one right now, but I just ate a castle. I am full now, please leave." Alfred said. "Wait!" Clara cried "is it true you are the most strong and biggest dragon in the whole world?" Clara asked innocently. "Yes, now what do you want?" The dragon scowled. "Is it true that you can fly around the world in just ten seconds?" Asked Clara. "Of course!" shouted Alfred. The dragon flew around the world in just ten seconds. Alfred was very tired when he came back. "Fantastic!" Cried Clara "do it again please!" The dragon flew around the world and got back in twenty seconds this time. He was so tired. He fell down and closed his eyes. "Hello dragon?" Clara whispered. Alfred didn't respond. Clara inched closer, lifted the dragon's ear, and looked inside. "Hello dragon!" Clara shouted. The dragon still didn't move.

Clara tiptoed very carefully inside of his cave. She found William tied up in a chair. She untied him, and he got up. Clara expected to see him smiling and hugging her. But instead, William said something very cross. "Yuck! What are you wearing?! Come back to save me again when you look like a proper princess." Said William. Clara was not happy to hear that. she said "William you are very charming and strong. But really inside you are a bum!" Then that was that. Clara left William alone in the cave and went off. So, they didn't get married after all. But Clara still lived happily ever after.

*THE END*

## Musical Notes

Music a connection

Close your eyes and listen to

An orchestra play there tune

The piano,

The drum,

The flute,

All my favorite instruments

I lay in bed listening to the piano and beautiful melody as I recognise

All of the notes fly through the air

like I am there

seeing the player play

A sweet breeze carrying the scent of wild roses and buffalo grass ruffled a young stallion's mane. His head was up, and he was scenting the air carefully, sorting the smells that flowed freely across the rocky landscape.

The stallion felt a light touch on his shoulder. He turned his head. A pinto mare stood next to him, the sun shining on her wet coat.

Suddenly, the scent of other horses drifted faintly on the breeze, masked by the smell of salt grass. The chestnut stallion flared his nostrils, snorting angrily. Rearing, he plunged down the slope, trumpeting a challenge.

A high-pitched bugle echoed back across the rocks. From behind a rock came a black stallion. His ears were pinned back, and his teeth were bared furiously. The stallion galloped down the hill, attempting to scare the chestnut off. As soon as he realized it wouldn't work, he reared, beating the air with his forelegs. The chestnut surged forward, biting the black horse's shoulder hard. The black horse nipped at the chestnut's flank. The chestnut spun around, landing a blow on his neck. Squealing with rage and pain, the black stallion retreated. The chestnut drove him away, whinnying his triumph as he went. He stopped running to welcome the new mares to his herd.

Slowly, he walked down the line of mares and fillies. He lowered his head to exchange breath with a roan, whose filly pressed close to her. A few colts pranced excitedly around each other, nipping and striking playfully.

When Chestnut stepped back from the newcomers, his previous herd walked forward to scent them, too.

His lead horse, an appaloosa, stepped up to the other lead horse and lifted her head defiantly. The other horse, Fern, lowered her head in surrender. Faith, Chestnut's lead horse, would continue to lead.

Raincloud, a pinto, came up and began to groom Chestnut's coat. Relaxed, he closed his eyes for a moment. He could hear Smokey and Soot playfighting, and their mother, Ash, nickering warningly. Then, there was the wind whispering quietly through the salt grass, and the ocean lapping quietly on the shore. Suddenly, a squeal pierced the air. Chestnut's eyes shot open. Soot was now laying on the ground, breathing shallowly.

Chestnut bounded over to Soot quickly. Baring his teeth briefly at Smokey was enough of a warning to stay away.

When he turned back to Soot, Ash was bent over him, nudging him encouragingly. Soot's eyelids fluttered, then opened. On shaking legs, he managed to stand, supported by his mother.

Chestnut turned and began to round up the herd. Faith took the lead, followed by Raincloud and Ash with her colts. After that came an anxious knot of the new herd: Pine, a colt; his mother, Misty; a young foal named Buck; his mother, Esperanza; Sierra, a mare; and Star, a young filly whose mother was Night. Then, of course, there was Fern at the head.

Next in line was Wisteria, a filly, with Snow, a cremello, at her side.

Moon, a gray mare, was followed closely by her foals, Thunder and Sky.

Chestnut brought up the rear, scenting for danger.

The herd slowly began to move, sometimes walking, sometimes stopping so Soot could catch his breath.

And that is how it has been ever since then that cloudless day in June ...



Eva M. Balmer

### Iowa City Rainfall

The rain drops patter down and down, armies of them!  
Falling to the sidewalk, to break like glass.  
Cars on Linn St., crowding close, honk and buzz, splashing—  
as they carry over the collecting puddles.  
Estela's shines its neon light, which shatters into separate streams  
dripping red down windshields.  
Stray cats slink and pad through allies covered in the bright graffiti  
On a night time hunt for morsels.  
Pedestrians stroll down Clinton St., umbrellas held high and jackets pulled close.  
Few children remain on the slick playground,  
Retreating instead into the cozy library.  
The sky churns grey and black, lightning flashing occasionally.  
Harried workers struggle into buildings, swearing as they drop phones and bags.  
I watch from the window, high above the commotion.  
Where everyone looks like a tiny doll.  
Where I'm the sky, with the raindrops, before they break.  
Where I can't hear the squeals of wet tires and  
Estela's' bright light is dim and faint, and doesn't shatter.  
Where the prowling cats catch their prey between my building and the next  
And the pedestrians pull their jackets (but I pull only the curtains!)  
Where I see only the silhouettes and shadows of children in the library.  
And the lightning flashes could be my lamp flickering.  
Where the curses of the workers don't make me cover my ears.  
Here I'm safe, here the rain hugs me close,  
And here—  
the city comforts me.

"Andy! Stop! Come back! No! Andy!" Andy's owner was shouting at him, trying to get him to come back, but he didn't want to come back.

*Rabbit!* Thought Andy. Andy had heard his human and he certainly could have turned back around and run back to the house, where humans petted him and where he was fed and given water consistently. On the other paw, there was the rabbit. The rabbit that was straight in front of him, running faster than a comet streaking across the sky. That pesky rabbit would feel so sorry that it had ever taunted him when he caught up to the sneaky little thing! And Andy would catch the rabbit, because, he thought to himself, Andy was very fast.

The bunny made a sharp right turn, then it turned left. It zigged and zagged and twisted and twirled until Andy, completely out of breath, collapsed on the ground. The rabbit had disappeared.

*Okay*, Andy said to himself, *Rabbit's gone. The chase is over and done, so I should definitely go back to my humans now.* But Andy didn't really want to go back to his humans. He still wanted to catch that rabbit. He also wanted revenge. Sweet, sweet revenge.

So, Andy trudged on. He could still smell that rabbit, so, his nose to the ground, he tracked it. Around a tree. Another tree. A bush. Around a house, across a street, and down into a hole. *The bunny's in its little hidey-hole*, thought Andy, *so when it comes out, I pounce!*

Andy knew that bunnies could stay in their burrows for a very long time. *Well then*, Andy said to himself, *I can wait here a very long time, too. I have patience. I can wait. The waiting begins... now!*

Andy could have sat there all day if something else had not caught his attention. *Squirrel!* His doggy senses kicked into high gear. His nose lifted and he stood up. *No, wait!* Said a little voice in his head. *What about the bunny, Andy? The bunny is down there in that hole. All you have to do is wait for it. But the squirrel!* Said the other part of his brain. *It's right there. I can easily catch it and then go back later for the bunny.*

And that's what he decided to do. With a flying leap, he lunged at the squirrel. Squirrels, he knew, were very... well, squirrelly. On the other paw, Andy was fast, and he was bigger than the squirrel, and therefore could cover as much distance as the squirrel did in a shorter amount of time.

The squirrel ran away. This was something Andy didn't count on, as much as he hated to admit it that squirrel was fast! The squirrel spiraled up the tree. Andy ran to the base of the tree, his tongue hanging out of his mouth.

*Aww, man!* He had forgotten that squirrels could climb trees, and dogs, he knew, could not. *But Andy!* Said the little voice in his head. *Remember, there is still a bunny down in that hole. You can still get the bunny, you know.*

*Oh, yeah!* Andy thought happily. *The bunny!*

He ran as fast as he could back to the rabbit's burrow. He sniffed the hole - once, twice, three times, and... no rabbit. He couldn't smell the rabbit down in the hole because the it wasn't there anymore! While Andy had been wasting time with that squirrel, the rabbit had snuck away!

Andy was very upset. He hadn't kept his eye on the tennis ball. *But wait*, He thought. *It doesn't have to end here. You can still track the bunny using your nose, you know!*

So Andy sniffed the ground and sped off in search of that rabbit. He came to a circle of bushes, and inside the circle was a clearing. Andy, hidden away in the bushes, saw the rabbit and a few other bunnies. Smaller bunnies. Tiny little baby bunnies, and there were others, too. A whole group of them. Andy watched as the rabbit he had been tracking played with her young, and as he did, something touched his heart.

He didn't really want to catch and eat the rabbit. She was just doing what she was meant to do. Who was he to interfere? All thoughts of revenge gone from his head, he walked away from the rabbits, but didn't get very far before he realized he was still very, very hungry. His stomach rumbled, as if to prove it.

He realized he knew of a place, not far from here, where he was petted and given food and water, where he was loved and where he belonged. With his eyes on the prize, he trotted off towards home, his snout leading the way.

# BROCCOLI

By: Kacie Burke

*POP! PEEEL!* I opened my eyes. The . . . the sky seemed to be slowly peeled off and thrown down. It was almost like Chicken Little. ‘The Sky Is Falling!’ Little twerp. I winced as a bright yellow-ey light streamed into my dark cavern.

It was definitely steamy and hot in here. (Humid?)

All I could see was a blinding, brilliant light, and green stems piled high above and down below me. I saw vibrant, bright greens, and I saw darkened, dull greens - and everything in between. I looked at myself, and saw an Emerald-green stem, with a basil-green flower. I was beautiful. My moment of peace was disrupted-very rudely-by a shiny, silvery, sharp object with multiple points that came down, and grasped one of my fellow thingy-ma-bobs!

They screamed, and my flower tingled. My mouth was wide open. In other words, I was feeling very shocked, and surprised! Speaking of mouths, the thingy-ma-bob that got picked up was being put *into something* that looked suspiciously like a mouth, but *much bigger* and a little different in color. I was ABSOLUTELY TERRIFIED. The mouth closed, and the screaming ceased. My leaves rang, and I felt woozy. The thing, a very pretty, yet merciless gadget, came down and impaled me. I felt no pain, just the tugging anxiety of fear. It crawled up my stem like an invasive species. I screamed, to the best of my inner stem’s ability, and then realized something. *It is going to eat me!*

If I had known I was delicious, I would have escaped so long ago. I had my chances, but I leisurely passed them. I miss my family. (Yes, I have a family) I had an older sister who always tousled my flowers. I miss her most. Days and days went on after I had been eaten and chewed. I was in a dormant, sleeping state. My dreams were of the happy days, when I grew up on a farm with my family. Enough backstory. You get the point. From the foggy memories I can still recall of my recent adventures, there was a tiny, twisting passageway that led down to a . . . chamber? Then I felt burnt up by a liquid of some sort. Then more twisty-twiney passages, and I rotted. Became formed with countless other foods. I learned my true name: Broccoli. How pleasant.

Finally, a wretched smell came forth, and I, once again, was thrust into the light. I immediately plunged into some water. I blinked, and looked around.

I WAS COVERED IN BROWN!!! Some corn (I think) told me it was feces. Oookay. Anyway, There was a VERY STRONG force that pulled me downwards into a small chute. Everyone else went down, too. I eventually-after much travel in the chutes-came out into a HUGE tank of darkness. A couple days went by. I had more time to be myself, and think about recent events. *I am going to be okay.* I felt at peace for the first time since being in the can. All was good, and I was happy.

And that is the story of Broccoli, a tale of the digestive system and a courageous Broccoli who accepted his fate of becoming the thing that sustained a life, by giving up his. Thank you, Broccoli.

## FAREWELL

“Farewell, sister,” Isabel whispers.

My anthropoid lungs squeeze, tighten, ensnare ostentatiously red panic, yet I do not yield. I am not stoic by nature, but in my last moments, I choose to be. “Bell —” The bell of Isabel’s name is the last to my vocals, her caress the last to my dying light. The last sight to my losing eyes is my baby sister’s — large, festooned with thick black lashes, colored like the layered core of a tranquility-corded sea. The tranquil sea does not rest with peace tonight. Tonight, it is awash with elegiac tears and nostalgia, remembering.

I yield.

There is storm.

I flounder, caught in the heart of a maelstrom that is laced with rage. My lashes flutter, dizzied by the angry vortex that tornadoes around me, choreographing dances of insanity. Spasms of unwanted fright vein through my bones, course through my blood.

I have always been idiosyncratic. Even, as it seems, in death. For, while thrashing in the midst of a deathly storm, my mind flits back to an academic session that occurred in the primary years of my schooling — adaption. I recall my teacher, a graying, ritualistic woman, recall the precise sentence that arouse my attention from the sketch I was orchestrating in lieu of note taking — *one cannot have distinction without wielding the power of adaption.*

So I adapt. I become still, study my unfavorable surroundings. I squint, and find that I am not caught in a random storm, but a storm of *me*.

*Papa’s loose-limbed calligraphy...our untraditional Christmas traditions, featuring Christmas presents underneath the dining table and banana French toast around the tree, watching The Snowman... Mamie’s unfathomably fierce love for my sisters and I, her ‘balms’ — Alex, her lightness the greatest cure for headache, her brawn pulchritudinous, safe; Rose, her affinity more akin to magic than empathy, her magniloquent speech invigorating; Isabel, her quiet peace healing, her emotions endearingly palpable; and me, the rough one, the acerbic one...*

*The phone call...the hectic rush to the hospital...the doctor, an African-American woman with ludicrously red lipstick and a voice too sweet for the abhorrent news it delivered...bleak days of mourning...The Beatles, my parents’ joint favorite, blasting at the funerals...the beige-clad backseat that took my sisters and I to foster-care...Alex and Rose, crying, begging for their new parents to take Isabel and I with them...*

My eyes close, and I become something entirely else.

## Rainbow

Two years ago my life turned upside down. The calm, perfect life I had known for so long was gone. I was confused, lost, and positive that I would never be found. Now I understand that I was wrong. After all it only takes a little sunshine to make a rainbow on a stormy day. Sorry, you're probably confused, let me start from the beginning. Let me tell you my story.

For as long I can remember I have loved rainbows. It's easy to love something like rainbows when you have never experienced the storm that always comes first. My parents were my heroes, and I loved them more than anything. I was the happiest, cheeriest child you would ever meet. I had everyone and everything I could ever need.

When I was twelve my parents died, it all happened very suddenly. They were going to a fancy restaurant about twenty minutes away when their car crashed. I was home alone watching TV when the phone rang. That call changed everything. Before I even knew it, my life had gone from rainbow back to storm. Everything was taken from me, my family, my home, and even my carefree personality. It was all gone. Taken away in one phone call.

Sometime later, I was taken to my aunt's house. I had never met her and I can't say I wanted to either. Her house was plain and boring, but it felt as if thousands of happy memories had been made there. I hated it right away, so I decided to stay in my room as much as possible. I didn't want to feel those memories, they made me remember my own. The problem with memories is that they can hurt, and these memories hurt too much to think about.

I soon learned that my aunt's name was Judy and she was my mom's sister. She refused to let me stay in my room. She would make me garden, go for walks, or whatever else came to mind. But even the bright Iowa sun could not break through the walls of storm clouds that surrounded me.

Aunt Judy made me go to school, where a girl named Ada started following me. She did all the talking, and without me even noticing I started to trust her. I started to trust my aunt too. I even found myself trusting my neighbors, Amanda and Carlos. They had the cutest daughter named Macy. Sometimes when I sat outside she would come over and give me her freshly picked dandelions.

Together they started to shine the bright light of love. I learned that no matter what happens, that light will never stop shining. Eventually, it began to break through the walls of despair that surrounded me, and now, many years later those walls are gone. I have love and happiness, but most importantly I have a family again. Even though I will never forget the family I lost, I can continue to love others around me and make new families.

So, I guess my message is, that to all those people who have a wall of storm clouds around them, it will get better. You will find your rainbow again.

Sincerely, Faith Winters

The Chaotic Life of a Middle Schooler  
Middle school,  
As you remember some of these most wild  
days,  
And these insane adventures filled with  
craze.  
This seventh grader will be  
showing what it's like to be in this place.  
Middle school hallways,  
Everyone between periods,  
Not following the rules.  
Arguing and fighting,  
Yelling and screaming,  
On their phone, texting and scheming,  
What trouble to cause next to stress out the  
school.  
So students and parents can start  
complaining.  
Middle school students,  
People suddenly changing,  
Nice kids in elementary,  
Now are the cool kids and unfriendly.  
Makes you wonder,  
"Who even are my friends?"  
"Who can I even trust anymore?"  
Middle school craziness,  
Chaos is an always,  
From blocking entryways to TikTok pranks,  
Eating and dropping snacks on the ground,  
Vandalising the building the whole way  
'round.  
Every day,  
Running and messing away to town,  
No apologies given.  
Making everyone in their sight turn their  
smile upside down.  
Middle school transitions,  
Having to go across the school to class,  
In a measly four minutes,  
240 seconds,  
And arriving late without a pass.  
Having to wait to get through as people  
mess in the halls,  
Eventually arriving, out of breath.  
"It's not even my fault!" you say as the  
teacher looks up.

"I was being blocked in the hallway and  
couldn't get through  
and interrupt."  
But the teacher shakes their head as though  
they don't believe you.  
And marks you tardy.  
Middle school cafeteria,  
Lunches are no longer cool.  
Way too many people,  
Crowding around one table.  
Acting like little five year olds,  
Yelling about irrelevant things and starting  
to argue when things are unfair.  
Everyone looking at them, but do you think  
they care?  
They're just being the kings and queens of  
over dramaticness.  
Middle school memorization,  
Way too much to remember,  
From locker combinations to schedule  
changes.  
So different from elementary,  
And you know the changes will never be  
temporary.  
Middle school stressing,  
As you wonder if you are good enough.  
And as you wonder if you will have friends  
that will be there for you,  
Or if they are only feeling bad for you.  
"Do I have to change myself to fit in?" you  
may ask yourself.  
The answer is no, but you still worry.  
Middle school questions,  
As I question what my future will hold,  
"Is high school this bad?" I wonder.  
"No, not at all; it's much better."  
"Everyone gets to class on time and there's  
barely any trouble."  
"Thank goodness," I think as I shake my  
head in wonder.  
Only two more years, and I will be free from  
this chaos.  
But as you can see, this is the stress that a  
middle schooler is under.



Strix was a regular bird. Just a plain simple raven, the standard black feathers with a purple sheen. However, Strix was the heir to her mother. Her mother is the leader of their murder. Little did Strix know that she was in for a treat. The leader of a murder would be a ruler of all of the ravens and crows. The ravens were the girls, and the crows were all boys. They were all ravens biologically.

Strix was having a typical day, sleeping in her adorned nest of jewels and daintiest slivers of hay. Until she heard thunder, it was going to be a storm. Hurridly, she got up and started sounding the alarm to find shelter. Instantly an entire flock of crows and raven went into the hollow of the murders tree. The alerted crows were causing a racquet.

Her mother clacked her talons with jeweled rings to her daughter. She said harshly, "Did you do this?"

Strix replied, "Yes, I heard thunder."

Her mother led her outside of the Murder Tree and showed her the sky. She asked Strix, "Do you see a single cloud in the sky." She pointed to a clear blue sky.

Strix hung her head down to her body. A single tear fell down her smooth feathered cheek. She just wanted to help the flock.

Her mother called down to the rest of the murder, "It's okay. Just a bit of a mishap." The crows and ravens all called back in unison.

Strix, for the rest of the day, sat in her nest. She did not eat, nor did she drink. Strix was quite discouraged. The next day, Strix started grabbing some of her most blessed gifts. She grabbed her onyx crow, lapis lazuli leaf, and her beloved journal. Sobbing, she took her stuff and flew away.

She flew for so long, her wings ached. She hadn't eaten in 3 days. Strix saw a lake with some berries bushes and swooped down to take a break. Her beak touched the shimmering water. It was cold and refreshing. She took bites of the ruby red berries, which were sweet and filling. While looking around, she found a small rock platform with some moss at the top. She rested her aching body to rest.

When she woke up, it was raining. She could not fly because her wings had rainwater all in her feathers. She sighed and walked down deeper into the forest. She stopped as she found a cave with a deep, dark entrance. She pondered whether or not she should go into the cave. Or continue walking the other way. Her curiosity won the best of her, and she decided to go into the cave.

When she walked in, there were hundreds of winding tunnels. There was one distinct one, with light gleaming on the other side. She tottered to the one unique tunnel and headed into the tight, narrow space.

She gasped as she walked into the other side. An enormous rainbow raven statue was right in front of her. There was a sign in front of the figure that she read carefully, "The Bane Of The Ravens"...



### **Outside the Garden's Gate**

Agatha was the daughter of the Greek Goddess of Fire, possessing many magical powers. Never in her life had she been outside of her mother's gardens- or for that matter out of her mother's care. Ever since she could remember, her mother had warned her of the selfish world. And Agatha believed her. But as the years went by, the absence of the unknown made her heart grow fond of it. Every day she would beg for her mother to let her go. She always refused.

One day, before her mother woke in the morning, Agatha crept out of the house, bringing only a small sack with a single sausage. She snuck past the gate that surrounded the gardens, and ran into the forest. She did not stop running until she reached a small stream. She had just bent down to drink when she heard a rustle in the bushes behind her. Despite the aching in her legs, she stood up to face the newcomer. "Who's there?" After a few seconds of hesitation, a dull, grey fox crept its way out of the bushes towards her.

The fox gave a small cry, and whined with his tail tucked and his head low. The sight broke Agatha's heart. When she asked what was wrong, he explained to her that he hadn't eaten in days! She reached into her sack and grabbed the sausage. The fox finally lifted its head and sniffed the air, excited at the smell of food. Agatha handed over the sausage, which was supposed to be her food for the day. The fox quickly gobbled the meat and licked its lips. The fur on its back returned to its natural deep red color, its ears perked up, and its posture improved greatly. It turned its back to the now hungry goddess and trotted off.

She stood up and brushed off her dress before continuing down the stream. As she looked around, taking in the world that she had been deprived of for so long, a small bird landed on her shoulder. "Why, little birdie, you look startled! What is the matter?" She asked. The bird (who turned out to be a mother) explained how her three baby birds had fallen out of the tree and were now in great danger on the low ground. Agatha nodded and quickly rushed to help the babies back to their nest high up in the tree. However, when she got there she realized that the branch on which their nest lay was quite out of her reach. She took a deep breath as she scooped up the birds, and inflated herself so that she grew tall enough to return them to safety.

Agatha gently placed the three babies back in their feathery nest, then blew out the air she had sucked in, and felt herself deflate. But after being stretched out to such an extreme, she deflated past her usual size, and down to a small shriveled woman, much opposite of the beautiful girl she was, just moments ago. She looked up to see the mother rejoicing with her young, and realized they were not going to thank her for being so kind.

A little bit frustrated, she walked deeper into the forest looking for someone who could add just a little bit of joy to her so far miserable adventure. Just as she finished the thought, she spotted a strange little animal who appeared to be dancing upside down. "Ha! May I join you in this silly dance?" she asked, stepping up behind the creature, mimicking its stomping feet. Suddenly, Agatha realized the mistake she had made when the animal hissed an awful phrase to her and shot out a horrendous stench, spraying it all over her dress!

Now much more than just a little frustrated, with her empty stomach, shriveled frame, and terrible smell, she decided to head home and face the wrath of her mother. When she returned, her mother was indeed infuriated. And as punishment for her betrayal, the Goddess of Fire set a small flame to the Earth's core, which would eventually spread to the outer edges of the surface, marking the end of the world. To this day, Agatha has not traveled outside her mother's gardens, in fear of finalizing the world's demise.

Name: Aryana Sloan

When blankets of snow weigh heavy on barren trees and the last memories of summer's warmth lay dead and forgotten, when the stagnant night air fills with a fridged chill that claws at all things warm and alive, when the fields of brilliant white snow lay quiet and unmarked, shining between thickets of bush and branch. Only when the forest is silent and lonely can one hope to find Him.

I still remember the day I went looking, searching for Him. I crouched low beneath a great oak, the gnarled bark sneering with a mocking smile, the cold oppressive and brutal. I searched for the signs, *any* signs, of Him, impatient. Back then I had only read of Him, but each story echoed the last; how He was a horrible being, caught between life and death, and those who gazed upon His form were ripped from history, scarce a mention nor memory left, save crumbling letters in dusty attics and molding books hidden in forgotten chests. But these tales scared me not, for I was foolish back then. I dreamt of heroism and glory, of my name etched into the dark tomes of history, and of legends carried on till the last dying breaths of man. I desperately wanted to be seen as a hero, the one who saved humanity, and as I discovered more I came to the firm belief that the only way to quell this hunger, this want, this *need*, was to slay Him and return His head to my home on a platter.

I cannot recall when that eldritch ritual began, that thing of men and beasts and dreadful half-beings that no person should behold, but I do remember the first noises the forest uttered into that horrible night. They were otherworldly, a wail that bubbled and reverberated, slithering into my ears and clinging onto my thoughts. A fear took over me, a primal, instinctual thing, but, perhaps for arrogance or for idiocy, I held fast, determined to write my name on the ugly face of the world.

But then, oh, *but then*, He came.

The legends I read spoke of His nature, of how He was between the living and the dead, caught in a harrowing undeath, but whilst gazing upon Him I could tell He was so, *so* much more. In that moment, that moment which still haunts my every waking breath, I realized that He knew no gods nor nature, and that the scattered records of His truth were no accident. Oh no, they were *meant* to be found, *meant* to allure the foolish who dreamt of heroism and glory, and they had worked their horrible charm on me.

Even though I only caught thin glimpses of Him through the snow-burdened branches and spidery twigs of the forest, it was enough. His skin sloughed off His face in dripping masses, revealing glistening muscle and sinew and bone, His abdomen ripped open to put on display maggot-infested entrails that pulsed strangely, dragging on the pure snow, staining it crimson, His tendons moving in a grotesque, unnatural fashion, His awful gaze too horrific for any human to bear. And when His eyes fell upon me, though for the briefest moment, I was changed irreparably. And I opened my mouth to the heavens and I screamed, oh, how I *screamed*.

And I ran. I ran and ran and ran, far and fast till my legs gave out, screaming and crying and laughing. I soon happened upon an abandoned house at the edge of a tiny village, propped up on the crest of a hill, overlooking the edges of the world, and I began to write. I knew I was not safe, I knew He would find me eventually, as He has each one before me, each one who was foolish and who dreamt of heroism and glory, each one who yearned for their name to be etched into the dark tomes of history. But before He did, before He did only God knows what, I resolved to compose a warning for any of the foolish and brave wishing to write their name on the face of the world: stay far, *far* away from silent, snow-covered forests, for only there can one find Him, the God that we created.



## UPCOMING EVENTS and OPPORTUNITIES



June 2022  
[www.MusicIC.org](http://www.MusicIC.org)

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Presented by the Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature

October 6-9, 2022  
[www.iowacitybookfestival.org](http://www.iowacitybookfestival.org)

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### **The Paul Engle: Glory of the Senses Essay Contest**

Writing opportunity for Iowa high school sophomores

Essays are due April 15, 2022

[www.iowacityofliterature.org/Paul-Engle-essay-contest](http://www.iowacityofliterature.org/Paul-Engle-essay-contest)

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### **Poetry in Public**

Local writers may submit poems for consideration

Deadline: April 1, 2022

[www.iowacityofliterature.org/poetryinpublic](http://www.iowacityofliterature.org/poetryinpublic)