



WRITE OUT LOUD

[celebrate creative writing]

February 25, 2024

Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature's

**ONE BOOK
TWO BOOK**

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



Write Out Loud!

February 25, 2024

The Write Stuff winners

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

Everest Muntaha, 1, Horn
Nidhi Saha, 2, Horn
Alena Hadlandsmyth, 3, Horn
Edie Sales, 4, Willowwind
April Xu, 5, Wickham

Oceana Zhang, 6, Wickham
Cora Beland, 7, Northwest
Gloria Kabolo, 8, Clear Creek
Amana Middle School

From the Heart winners

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

Vance Van Daele III, 3,
Willowwind
Jasper Hwang, 4, Willowwind
Elyse Anderson, 5, Oak Hill
(CCA)

Emma Yockey, 6, Willowwind
Hadley Fruin, 7 South East
Olivia Groff, 8, South East

Honorable Mention

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

Edward Stumpf, 3, Regina
Iris Gillespie, 4, Willowwind
Rose Al Saedi, 4, Horn
Landon Xie, 5, Wickham
Jadzia Connorridge, 5, Oak
Hill
Alice Gravert, 6, Lemme
Lyan Hussein, 6, Coralville
Central

Molly Nolan, 7, South East
Nola Ford, 7, Clear Creek
Amana Middle School
Kendra Rarick, 8, West Branch
Middle School
Olivia Becker, 8, West Branch
Middle School
Lila Finzel, 8, West Branch
Middle School

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ACT Writing Evaluation Team

John Melby-Oetken, team lead
Tara Acton
Alyssa Asquith
Renee Kelly
Pam Mackinson

Kats Mendoza
Jessica Pannell
Matt Schaeffer
Roxanne Swim

Everest Muntaha (1st Grade, Ernest Horn Elementary)

A Letter to Manny, a Praying Mantis

I hope you are safe in your habitat. Because it is cold outside. I hope you are safe with your family! I hope you eat a lot of food!

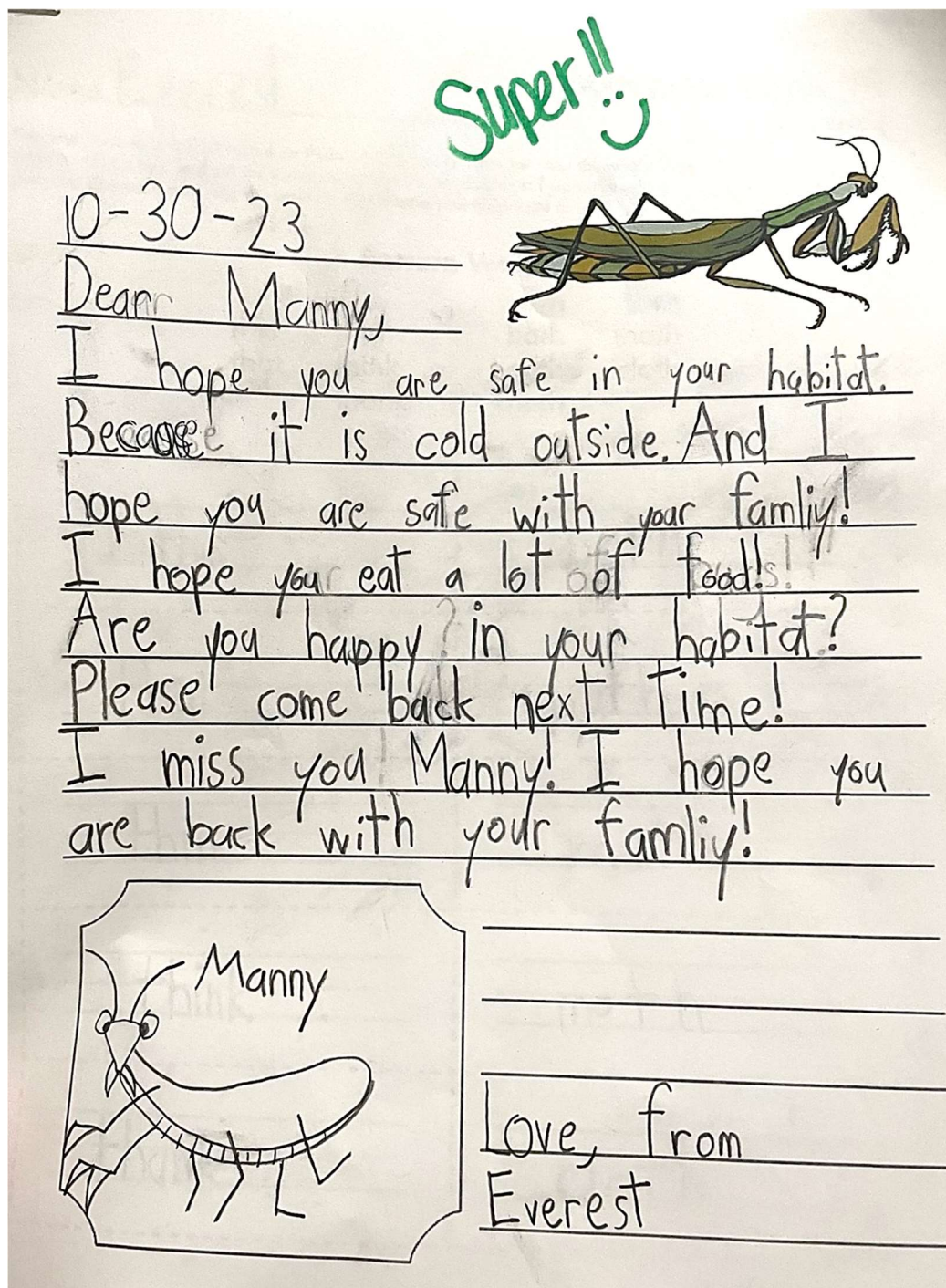
Are you happy in your habitat?

Please come back next time!

I miss you, Manny!

I hope you are back with your family!

Love, from Everest



My Life in the USA

I am Nidhi Saha, and my home country is Bangladesh. I am living in USA since September 2023. I love USA but I miss my home country very much. I left my grandparents and all my friends in Bangladesh. When I was in Bangladesh, I always slept with my grandmother. Every day she told me interesting childhood stories of my father and my uncle. Before sleeping I asked her many questions and she always answered them. But, now I sleep alone. Someday my grandmother calls me and she feels very lonely now. Sometimes she cries on the video call.

I miss all my Bangladeshi friends a lot. They loved me like I am their sister. I miss the swing of my school. During recess, my friends and I played on the swing. We also played hide and seek. My favorite class was Bengali Music. I can not talk much with my Bangladeshi friends now. When it is morning in USA, it is night in Bangladesh. My friends all go to bed early. I know they will forget me soon. Weekends were very special in Bangladesh. My grandmother took me to the temple and we prayed together. My most favorite dish is Biryani. We ate Biryani every weekend. Here in USA we don't eat biryani a lot because sometimes we don't find the ingredients. My most common dream is that I got back to Bangladesh to my grandmother. I hope my dream will come true one day.

But I also feel happy after coming to USA. It is a beautiful country. People are very kind and helpful. Every person obeys laws and traffic rules. The Police uncle waves his hand to me every morning with a smile on my way to school. But he doesn't know me yet. Sometimes the Police uncle helps me when I cross the road. I go to Horn Elementary School. It is the nicest school I have seen in my life. My class teacher is just like my mom. She takes care of me and helps me to learn English fast. I know my English is a little weak. Sometimes I cannot talk with my friends well. They don't understand what I want to say. So I talk less. But I think soon I will have many friends here.

Dogs and Detectives

By

Alena Hadlandsmyth

Flash! Just like that the ruby was gone. This was the night I might have lost my job. Let me explain. I'm a jewel guard. Guarding jewels is my whole life. When the alarms went off I whizzed around the room. There are three doors at the back. I saw a man in all black with a baseball cap and sunglasses run out of the first door. I saw a woman in tennis shoes, a white top, and white shorts run out of the second door. I saw a little girl with blonde hair and a green dress run out of the third door. I couldn't chase all three of them, so I called the police.

To my surprise, when the police car pulled up a tiny Yorkshire terrier stepped out. "Is this a joke?" I said angrily to the police officer who had driven the car. "Nope," they replied, "Yorkie is the best in the business."

I slowly followed the little dog back into the building. Suddenly Yorkie stopped and stuck his tail in the air. It looked like he smelled something interesting. He trotted up to the stand where the ruby had been and started sniffing. The police officer lifted him onto the stand. Yorkie lifted one paw into the air and motioned us to follow him. Then he jumped down.

We followed him across the quiet street. He was running so fast I had trouble keeping up with him. He zoomed into Jane's Jewelry Store.

And there, on a stand in the middle of the store, was the ruby.

I picked up the jewel thinking all was well and started to head back, but Yorkie tugged at my leg. I followed him down the hallway to a little dark room. I felt a chill in the air. I didn't have a good feeling about this.

We slowly pushed the door open.

The police officer switched on the light.

Then we saw.

It was the little girl with blonde hair and the green dress.

"Hi," she said, "did you find the ruby? I put it back in the jewelry store for you. Then I heard the police car, so I ran in here because I thought I might be in trouble."

"You're not in trouble," I replied with a smile, "but next time, maybe don't go stealing rubies, okay?"

That night I learned a valuable lesson that things aren't always as they seem, and dogs make great detectives!

The Fearless Knight

by Vance Van Daele III

Once upon a time in the village of Water Flat there lived a strong knight. Our fearless knight protected the town from all danger. His sword was crafted of the sharpest obsidian and his armor was steeled with dragon scales.

The fortress castle was made out of stone and the stone is now covered in vines and moss. The fortress castle in the village of Water Flat. Nearly ten thousand trusting souls lived in the village. On days of celebration, they wore clothes of the finest cloth. This fine cloth is known as Goblin Eye.

One day one of these trusting souls disappeared in the woods. The knight set out into the woods and discovered the forest stained with blood. He traveled further into the woods and there stood a werewolf, his face dripping with blood. The werewolf glared at the knight while the knight stood frozen. In a flash, the werewolf rushed at the knight and with ancient warrior instincts the knight sliced off its bloody head.

"That was easy," said the knight. Just then the wolf's head rolled back toward its body and onto its neck and he fled back to his den. "That was peculiar," said the knight.

The knight then returned to the village to tell the village folk of his bizarre and disturbing experience with the zombie werewolf. Later while sleeping in his fortress castle bed, he had a fever dream filled with blood, gore and howls. He woke up sweating. His entire bed was soaked with sweat. He knew he had to do something about the zombie werewolf stalking in the woods.

Our fearless knight jumped from his bed in the fortress castle in Water Flat and ran to the edge of the woods. There he saw something lurking in the shadows. Suddenly the wolf jumped right in front of him. Trained with perfect reflexes, our fearless knight sliced the wolf in half and grabbed its still-beating heart. He quickly sealed the throbbing heart in a jar as to keep evil spirits away.

"That was gross," said the knight.

From that day forth nothing bad ever happened in the village and every year on the anniversary of that glorious day the trusting souls of Water Flat wear their finest Goblin Eye garments and celebrate.

Sealed in that jar, the heart still beats on a shelf in the fortress castle of Water Flat which today is even more covered in moss and vines.

Edie Sales
Fourth Grade
Willowwind School

Fluttering Melody

The music awakens
My ears from their long slumber
Like birds humming
Their morning melody
Sounds wander around
Sound waves like swirls in the sky
Rhythm flutters to my ear like a firefly
Peaceful like a snowy morning
It fills me with calmness and happiness
Noise like a waterfall
Gently crashing down
Softly soothing me until
The melody slowly ends

Jasper Hwang
4th Grade
Willowwind School

Cherry Blossoms

Cherry blossom tree leaves
Gracefully floating through the wind like kites
Dancing to the moon like birds higher and higher
Rising in the air like pink lanterns in the empty black night
Like paint splattered on a canvas
Swimming like fish in a river
Lighting the sky
Making a staircase
Warming the cold atmosphere
While
Going to the stars

This Is Me

This is me,
April,
Sweet as a sugar maple.
This is me,
From this beautiful tree,
Tree of my family,
A tree of with a story,
A tree including me.
This is me,
From a beautiful light gray house,
Reluctantly folding a green-blue blouse.
This is me,
Drinking tea,
Wishing I lived by the sea.
This is me,
Trying so bad,
When I realized,
I was already a fabulous lad.
This is me,
Wanting a dog,
Looking out through the fog.
This is me,
Having fun with friends,
Hanging out till the day ends.
This is me,
Twisting an arm bone,
Then sitting in this room, all alone.
This is me,
Doing math,
Drawing a 6-inch spiral path.
This is me,
And this is me now,
A unique person from birth,
Loving the Earth,
Embracing fate by the hearth,
Living till I die for all I'm worth.

RAZZ'S ADVENTURE

By: Elyse Anderson

5th Grade

Oak Hill Elementary

Hello my name is Razz and I'm a robot! When I was being built, I got sprite 2.0 spilled all over my wires. I have a shorter time to live than most and I will die on February 16, 2036.

Today is February 14, 2036, and I only have two more short days until I head up to that friendly robot place in the sky. I know what you're thinking, robots go to Heaven? The answer is yes, we do, and that is quite offensive if you ask me. Of course we go to Heaven! Well anyway, since I found out I only have a short time to live, I have made it my number one priority to find a human. See, every robot in my family has found a human, (except for Tenny, but no one really knows what happened to him and I don't want to find out!) I want to make my last couple of days on Earth super happy and I really want to finally have a human friend. Do you know how hard it is to find that "perfect someone"? Some are too young and they never stop whining and they bite a lot. (don't ask!) Some are too old, constantly running everywhere they go, and have no understanding of personal space. I'm always getting stepped on, and do you think any of them stop to say "are you ok?" or "I'm sorry!" nope! I've even seen some that never look up from those rectangular robot boxes, like who cares about the new iphone 32? Technology these days.

So here I am, just rolling around and trying to find my perfect human (with only 2 days left until I'm a goner) when out of the corner of my eye, I see her! A perfect, sweet girl skipping towards me! Her eyes were bright blue, her cheeks were rosy and she was beautiful. I knew she was "the one". I rolled up to her and she took one look at me, picked me up and we spun around and around and I felt like I was flying. I wonder if robots will really be able to fly one day? Today ended up being the day, the BEST day of my life. I found the perfect human, we laughed, hugged and ate all of the long stringy things in this red goop we could find. The human girl called it spaghetti and it was delicious! I can't believe I've never tried it before. I checked my calendar and found out February 14th is called Valentine's Day, it's a day all about love. I can't make this stuff up people! The best news of all, when I looked at my calendar I realized, it isn't 2036, it's only 2035. I have a whole year left to spend with my new friend and I'm going to make it the best year ever!

Guardians of His Tomb

By Oceana Zhang

We stand tall, a force to behold,
A troop of warriors, brave and bold,
Our faces are engraved with pride,
The defenders of an ancient empire's stride.

Crafted by masterful hands,
And placed by our great emperor's commands,
We guard this sacred ground,
Where our emperor's fable is found.

Our gleaming armor, an emblem of power,
A testament to our ruler's skills and tower,
And though we remain still and mute,
Our presence resonates, strong and astute.

We are the Terracotta Warriors,
A symbol of China's praise and conquerors,
And though the years have come and gone,
Our legacy, persistent, will forever live on.

We stand as a testament,
To a time of triumph and achievement,
And if you come to this site,
Bask in our victory, our might.

So come, and witness our splendor,
For we are not just mere sculptures,
We are the pride of a nation,
A tribute to our dynasty's domination.

The Little Things

Every day, my dog sits in front of the window.

My father lives in a condo on the fourth floor. In his bedroom, two floor-to-ceiling windows overlook a large pond and the neighborhood surrounding it. A road winds up the hill from the right. Sometimes, cars drive along it.

His name is Apollo. The dog, that is, not my father. He's about one and a half years old, and he's a fox red Lab. He loves food, socks, and sleeping in my bed. He also gets bored easily.

The view from the window never bores him. If the blinds are closed, Apollo waits in front of it until I open them for him. Then he sits and watches.

I don't know what he finds so fascinating about a still pond and a few houses. I don't know why he stares at it for hours each day. But I sit next to him and I try to figure it out. I put my arm around his shoulders, and sometimes he licks my face. Then we watch the sun come out, tossing its rays across the reflective water, and breathe.

Sometimes, Apollo sees things he's never seen before. Once, two birds spiraled towards the clouds right in front of the window. Apollo craned his neck and watched them until they disappeared. Another time, we saw two cars on the road to the neighborhood going opposite directions. He followed their path with his eyes until they were gone. Then he looked at me.

Another time, he saw a person. I wasn't with him then; I was eating pancakes with sparkly syrup and watching a movie with my father. Apollo came out of the bedroom and made us follow him to the window, where he showed us what he'd found. A person was walking along the edge of the pond. To my surprise, Apollo didn't stay at the window much longer. Instead, he came and sat with us. Again, I don't know why he does what he does. But I have a theory.

I think that he appreciates the little things in life. When he sees the pond, he doesn't see just a pond. He sees the tall grass growing at its border. He sees sunlight bouncing off the water. He sees a place where he could play. He sees a place where he could sit and think.

That road with the cars? He sees an enigma. He sees little shapes ascending the grey swath of concrete. He sees no pattern in when they come. He sees a place where he could run and run forever. He sees a place where he could lay as I scratch his belly and tell him I love him.

Apollo's no genius. He doesn't know how to read. He doesn't know why he can't have all the treats in the bag. He doesn't even know my name. But *because* he doesn't know these things, he's constantly making up his own ways of explaining them. And how can he do that if he doesn't notice the details? He knows what we call a 'pond' as a thing with grass, with sunlight, with endless opportunities. The road is a puzzle he tries to figure out. I am the person that feeds him, that puts him to sleep, that watches the world with him and lays with him in my bed.

Do you see what he sees? Chances are, you don't. You and I see the big picture. But how can you put together a puzzle without noticing each piece individually? To see the big picture, sometimes you have to see the little ones first.

So this is my plea to you—next time you look out the window, pause for a moment. See the little things, the pieces of the puzzle. Think of Apollo, who's still watching those cars on the road. And take a deep breath. Trust me, it helps.

Sunset Lake by Cora Beland

The pontoon slowly puttered away from the dock, causing small ripples to spread outwards from our boat. The scenery was breathtaking. Sunset Lake had always been a favorite of ours, and every summer my family made the long drive to rent a pontoon. The sun, slowly sinking into the hills in the distance, reflected off the water, making it sparkle. The soft noise of waves lapping against our boat, relentless, one after another, was soothing to me. We were really chugging along now, the spray splattering on our faces, but we were too happy to care.

I went to the back of the boat and climbed into my favorite spot, the one where you could sit atop a big soft cushion and look back at solid ground, already fading in the distance. The one where you could feel like you left your whole life behind on the shoreline.

I looked down, and white froth was spewing from the motor. I looked out, and there was the lake, beautiful and perfect. I looked up, and there was nothing but clear, blue sky with a few big, white, fluffy clouds. *Peace*. The feeling washed over me like I had jumped in Sunset Lake.

After a couple more minutes of feeling the boat's steady hum, my dad killed the motor. "Snack break!" he called, and I jumped down from my favorite spot in the pontoon with a *thud*, making the boat rock ever so slightly. We drifted around while eating and afterward my brother and I opened a gate and sat down on a small platform at the front of the boat without any railings. We both scooted towards the edge and took off our socks and shoes, then dipped our bare feet into the water. The sun was going down now, and vibrant colors streaked across the sky; pink, gold, orange and red, looking like a rainbow in the darkening sky.

"Help!"

"Did you hear that?" I asked, instantly alert. I stood up, looking around for the source of the noise.

"Hear what?" my brother wondered, also standing up. He cocked his head to the side curiously.

"I heard someone calling for help," I told him, anxiously scanning the water.

"Where did it come from?" he asked.

I shrugged helplessly. "I don't know."

"Help!"

"There it is again!" I exclaimed.

"I heard it that time," my brother added. We both went to our parents and told them what we had heard. My parents frowned, looking as alarmed as I felt. My dad held out his hand for silence.

"Someone, help me!"

"Sound carries across the water, so we have no idea how close or far away this person is," my dad said, agitated.

"It was coming from that direction, though," my mom said, pointing towards the front of the boat where my brother and I had just been. The four of us went to the front of the boat and scanned the water.

There. A head, above water, but only just. Then, it disappeared.

"I saw someone!" I shouted. "There!" I said, pointing.

My dad ran to the wheel of the pontoon and steered in the direction I had indicated. I scanned the water nervously; the person still hadn't come up yet. "I can't get any closer," my dad said. "I don't want to risk hitting them!"

I leaned out over the railing, watching the spot where they had gone over, hoping... A head emerged, and someone gasped for breath. They saw our boat and flailed over to it, not making much progress. I leaned over the railing, so far I was almost afraid of falling over to it. "Grab my hand!"

Flailing arms. Gasping breaths. Panicked shouts. I couldn't think, couldn't move, couldn't blink, couldn't do anything but extend my hand and hope that they could, and would, do the same. THE END

Panic

Hadley Fruin

I can't breathe. I can't see. I can't feel. I don't even remember how it started, all I know is I'm having a panic attack and I don't know what to do. I'm going to die. I'm not going to survive this. My body is physically shaking and I can't even talk in full sentences. I'm going to be sick. I'm going to throw up. I'm scared of throwing up. I can't, I have to stop it. I need to fix this, but how! I have strategies but I can't remember! I'm stuck, I need help, I can't! Please, I can't take it! I can't handle it! I can't, I can't, I can't... WAIT! Breathe, I can get through this. My feelings are here and that's ok. I need to breathe. Slowly, gain control over your body. I'm ok. I'm here. Move your feet to the floor. Feel them touching the ground. Think about the people you love. Think about things you're looking forward to, but next weekend we have nothing going on all weekend! That's so much time to be at home just stuck with anxiety. I don't know if I can handle that. I can't handle that! I CAN'T HANDLE THAT!!! But maybe I can. Maybe this just means my parents will plan something fun, but maybe not. Either way I will be ok. I can get through this. I've done it before, I can do it again. I'm gonna survive this. I always do. I'm not in any real danger, it's just my mind. It's all in my head. I am ok.

Run for the Grass!

By Gloria Kabolo

I apologize that I often flee—
but, alas ...
Like one runs for the hills,
I run for the grass!

I am afraid I cannot guarantee—
that I can be as sorry to anyone else as much as I am to me;
For my time spent in that special grass, and underneath the willow tree,
is now a thing of the past.

And now that loss has burdened me with sadness;
I think back to when I was enveloped in gladness;
so that my sadness will be lessened by the thought of the past;
For no sorrow could be greater than the beauty of that willow tree,
and the warmth and itchiness of that tall grass.

And on sunny days I'm reminded of when there was still a novelty—
of discovering the ability—
to make my liberty.
The liberty to lay on that grass with a smile, you see;
Those times are now gone,
along with those times of being heedless to the utmost degree.

So, I am afraid that you may never again see—
that everlasting part of me ...
because, alas!

Like one runs for the hills,
That part of me longs to run for the grass!

Hot Chocolate Sibling Truce

By Olivia Groff

Charlie stumbled down the stairs, clinging to the railing and trying not to slip and fall. He'd had that nightmare again- the one where the monsters tried to get him through his bedroom doors, under his bed, and in his closet. He knew it was a pretty generic nightmare for a ten year old, but he kept dreaming it. He was too young for medication and nothing he tried worked, so he was resigned to huddling under his sheets crying instead of bothering his parents *again*. Until tonight, when Charlie decided to be brave and go downstairs for some water without waking anyone up.

His feet hit the floor with a soft thud. He turned to the kitchen doorway and tried to find the light switch. Finally, he flicked it on and breathed a sigh of relief at the light spilling into the stairway, only to be met with the sight of Mike sitting at the counter, squinting at the brightness.

Mike was Charlie's older brother, and he *hated* Charlie. Every day, Mike would jump out from behind the couch or under the stairs and scare him to tears. If it wasn't that, it was calling Charlie a crybaby and taunting him until he proved his point. Charlie didn't know why or how to get him to stop.

The two boys stared at each other for a minute before Mike sighed and resumed staring at the countertop. This confused Charlie- Mike should be taking this opportunity to make him cry more. But he didn't. It was obvious that he had just woken up from a nightmare! Charlie decided to try and sneak by. He wasn't scared of his brother at all, he could do this! He softly crept into the kitchen and made his way over to the cupboard where the cups were. He reached up and grabbed the first one he could see. He was about to fill it up at the refrigerator when Mike spoke.

"Do you want hot chocolate?" his voice was barely audible.

"...What?" Charlie responded, confused. He placed the cup back in the cupboard.

"Answer the question."

"S-sure, I guess..."

Mike stood up from the stool and opened a second cupboard. He grabbed two packets of hot chocolate mix and reached over Charlie's head to grab two mugs. Charlie walked over to a second stool and climbed up on it, awkwardly watching Mike go through the motions of filling the mugs and putting them in the microwave to heat them up. As they waited, Charlie noticed that Mike looked *exhausted*. The bags under his eyes looked like bruises and his body sagged like a sack of potatoes. Charlie realized he'd never wondered why Mike was down here at one in the morning.

Mike finished making the hot chocolate and silently pushed one of the mugs towards Charlie. He held it in his hands and stared at the brown liquid, barely noticing Mike sitting down next to him.

"It's not *poisoned*," Mike mumbled.

"R-right..."

Charlie took a sip of the drink and winced when it burned his tongue, but he didn't make any noise. Eventually, it cooled off enough for him to drink it properly. He and Mike didn't speak again until Charlie could see the little grains of undissolved chocolate powder at the bottom.

"Mike, why are you awake?" Charlie asked tentatively.

"...I think it's time for you to go back to bed." He didn't answer the question.

"Okay."

Charlie hopped off the stool and Mike grabbed the empty mugs and set them in the sink. He made his way back to the stairs and Mike followed him, flicking off the kitchen light on the way. They walked up the stairs and split off to go to their separate bedrooms without speaking. Charlie went back to sleep that night and didn't dream.

The next day, Mike didn't try to scare Charlie at all.

My Turkachu's Story

By Eddie Stumpf

It was the day before Thanksgiving and Turkey was worried that he would get baked, stuffed, and eaten, so he quickly got to work on a disguise.

First, he saw a car and tried to make car noises and dressed like one.

Then Turkey's neighbor Donkey saw Turkey and said "Turkey what are you doing?"

"I'm not Turkey, I'm a car," said Turkey.

Turkey slumped home feeling sad. He was going to be eaten. But then he got another idea. He was going to dress up as the moon! He did have one problem; how would he get into space? Soon after, he went on a rocket ship. He went up and up then he tried to dive to the moon. He went up then down for thousands of miles. He landed straight in a pile of Horse's poo.

Then he got another idea. He thought this would definitely make him safe. Soon he had covered his whole body with poo. His turkey scent just wouldn't go away, but he tried it anyway.

Pig was delighted when he saw Turkey. He said "Turkey what a delightful sight I see."

Turkey was very sad because he was probably going to be eaten for the main course on Thanksgiving. He was mad because all of his ideas had failed in disguising him.

Finally, one more idea! The farmer's son's Pokémon card collection. He would have to sneak in to his room to get some Pokémon cards. He would have to cut a hole in the cards. To do that he would have to have scissors. So, he did it and no one knew it was him! Best idea ever! He didn't get eaten for Thanksgiving dinner and got the nickname Turkachu. The end.

Rose Al Saedi
Grade 4 - Horn Elementary

Life feels strange

Feels like it's not real

I'm writing a poem in a page

I wrote "This doesn't feel real"

My friend says "Your pen's ink is faint"

Blankness

By Iris Gillespie

As I stare
At blankness
Nothing but white
I think of
Bright color
Filling up the page
Patterns and shapes
Come to life

As a paint brush
Hits the paper
Making waves
Of color on the empty paper
Exploding with
Creativity

As I push
My chair back
And stare again
It is now full of
Color, patterns, and shapes
No longer empty
White blankness

Flames

Flames

By Jadzia Connorridge

*A spark,
A light,
It starts to spread.
Under the ground,
Spreads to the roots,
Then the trunk,
Now the leaves.
As it falls,
Animals run,
They try to hide,
But nothing can stop it as it blazes.
Through the forest,
And over logs.
Rangers come.
They try.
But even so,
Critters start to die.
It's all a mess,
A crazy place.
People call,
And don't back down,
They hope.
They hope.
They hope.
But...
They feel overpowered,
They feel overwhelmed,
By the mess,
But also by the pressure.
People,
Animals,
And so many more,
Counting on them.
Hours and hours of pain.
And then finally,
Rain.*

Enlightened by Landon Xie

“Three men have died from...,” said the reporter. This was what Oliver Crompston heard while watching the news. *Why should I care?* Oliver was reading a book. Five minutes later, his boss called a meeting for the next morning. Eight hours later, the meeting started. It felt like it lasted a day. Afterwards, Oliver ate breakfast. He checked the mail, but the only thing he found was a note with a four on it. While going to lunch, he realized he was on 4th Street. He tried to ignore it, but it seemed like everything had four on it. His meal cost \$14.42. He was on page 444. He started to hate four. He was paranoid. His colleagues noticed how weird he was acting. The last straw was when a 4 appeared randomly. He couldn’t deny it; he was insane. The next day, he got an email that read: *You won’t see any more of the number four.* He cried out in victory.

Unfortunately for him, it was going to get worse. He noticed the number three. *Come on,* he thought. *That was \$13.33.* He was determined not to go insane. But he soon fell into the same trap. The day continued, stretching like slime. He decided to go to sleep early. 3 days later, he got out of bed. He took a pill, but that couldn’t counter the strange feeling that seemed to follow him. He felt like someone was watching when his back was turned. He was sure none of the other days were so bad. He thought he would never get so scared again. There was a sound under his bed. Looking down, he thought he saw a face staring back at him, but then it disappeared too quickly for him to confirm it. He woke up the next day and a wave of fear arose in him. He fainted when he stepped out of bed. He was dreaming, locked in a cell. The face from before appeared, not far away from him. The face said, “Why can’t you learn more?”

“This isn’t real,” Oliver said, pinching himself, expecting to wake up. “Yes, it’s not. But still, you’re not one to say what’s real and what’s not.” was the last thing the face said before disappearing. He awoke staring at the ceiling. *His* ceiling, not the old one in the dream. All of his strange feelings were gone. He let out a sigh of relief. “He really had me there.” But at that moment, he realized something was wrong. Looking around, he recognized the wall. A wall with a 4 written on it. “This situation is so bad, it feels like I’m in a story!” But that wasn’t the only thing he realized. He was in his dream. “You’ve finally figured out the truth. Well, kind of. Reality is not real. For you it is, but there is a world of higher beings. Beings who can shape us to their own will and destroy us. They have a tool that helps them. They create new worlds every time they get a piece of paper. The reason you know this is because someone wants you to. You felt like you were in a story? You’re right. You have no will. But if you keep this a secret, you will get a wish for being the first to know it: say ‘Enlighten me.’” the face said.

Developing a plan, Oliver said the words. Oliver realized that everyone was evil. They all made new universes, and no matter what, people died. Right then the face stepped from the shadows. “You can’t think I was going to let us share power! You just made a big mistake,” the face said with a grin while taking his mask off.

Oliver cursed. *Be calm.* The man that Oliver saw was the strangest man he’d ever seen. His skin was gray, with no eyes. Oliver knew exactly what he would use his wish for then. “I think I’ll ascend a universe.” And he’d transcended. He rewrote the plot. “You can’t beat me. I have enough power to erase you in a word.”

“So? I have an advantage, like the hero in a book.” Oliver said. And the man didn’t have time to register what he heard before he was gone. Though some people were dying, others had great lives. He decided to make more of those people, and so he fully ascended. He ran to his computer. Oliver couldn’t wait to start writing. *So the man lived happily ever after.*

Death's Island

Alice Gravert

Clouds floating free over an island sad and solemn
Crows flying over it never glimpsed or saw them
Them being the sturdy ships sailing over sea
Never to see the island land or a single deadened tree

Across the land deadened things - strangely loud death's silence rings
The only other noise is crows and the soft beating of their wings
Some hours an olden shadow drifts across the land
To kill any growing thing with Death's deadly hand

Any ghostly residents, to Death they kneel
Afraid of the consequence of his weapon made of steel
No one knows of the island but the bitter dead
and the people quietly dreaming, cozy in their bed
Soon to forget the island of death and of dread

Crack!

The floorboards crack open as smoke chokes my lungs. I stay pinned to the floor, dragging my ached body to the door. I reach up farther and farther, but the blazing heat jerks me back down from the door knob. Laying back against the wall I stare at my blistered palm as flames surround me, racing, engulfing me in their heat. Thoughts paralyze me, swarming, jabbing into my mind – *I can't lose everything again, not alone.* The ragged toy bear catches the corner of my eye. My father gave me the bear when I was born. Staring deep into its eyes the memory crawls into my mind of my dad and I playing together. Its glass eyes were broken and the arms barely hung on– but somehow, it still gave me comfort. My eyes shut as tears trickle down my burnt cheeks one by one. Finally, I lift up my head and see a picture of my mother cradling me in her arms burning from the tip and slowly curling until nothing but ash remains. My trembling hand digs into my jeans pocket and pulls out a gold locket my mother gave me before she passed away. My mom was my best friend, my only friend. Dad loved her with all his heart. He cherished her singing, painting, and the warmth in her heart that kept him going every day. But when I was 5, she became sick and passed away. Ever since, Dad hasn't been the same. I open the necklace slowly, and gently, staring at the picture of all three of us together. I place the locket against my heart. My face boils as everything, all the memories we'd made, all the love she'd left in each corner, each storybook, each painting she'd brushed swirls around while she'd sing– all of it burns to fragments. I knew these might be the last moments of my life so I held what I love the most, what I had left, beside me. *Bang!* The door flies open as a man sprints through the debris. "Nickolaus, are you in here?" The voice was my father's. A hand yanks me from the ground. "Dad?" I shudder through the thick smoke. "Nick, I'm here," he struggles through the burning ash. "We're gonna make it through this– together." He rushes through the hallway to the front door. I lay in his arms gently as he evacuated the house. I lift my fist and see the locket still in the palm of my hand. I squeeze it tight and close my eyes.

Leaves rustle beneath my feet, and petals fly, drifting from my hand. I stop at a gravestone: my mother's. I place the petals and run my fingers over the dents of her name *Julie Clifton 1920 - 1950*. My mouth opens but I can't seem to find the words. I sit beside the gravestone and stare at my locket. Every memory of my mom fills my mind, flashing warmly like film, infusing a vibrant spiral of her love. But then I looked around in those scenes: Dad lifting me up high, holding my hand, framing the camera, helping me sneak a hand print on Mom's paintings, playing make-believe with my teddy bear. *Dad was always there. He'll always be here, no matter where we go.* I look back at the gravestone. "We never lost anything, Mom. As long as we have each other, it doesn't matter where we go. We're going to make it through this, together."

A Change Has Come
By Nola Ford

Sweat
Drip

Drip

Drips

Down

Your neck.

Waves crest over

Homes,

Flooding streets and Hearts alike.

A Fire rages through forests and

Minds.

Disease spreads—never hard

To find.

Rain

Plop

Plop

Plops

In disarray.

Too much! We cry

But the Sky goes on

Downpouring on some,

Skirting around others.

Drought haunts the Land

Sucking

Slurping

Straining

The Life from the living.

People

Hide

Run

Cower

As Storms arise and

Tower above us All,

Too big to tackle

Alone.

A change has come.

Girl Alright by Molly Nolan

It was a dark and stormy night. It had been raining heavily since noon, and all the staff and students were trapped in the school. Most students huddled away from the windows, as if being near them alone could kill a person. But one student stood in front of the glass, staring out at the rain, mesmerized by the haunting sound of thunder rumbling, rain thudding on the roof, the sight of the water dripping down the glass, the intimidating flashes of lightning that seemed to be getting closer, and closer, until it was right in front of the window. BAM! The window shattered in front of the girl. Looking down at her hands, she was surprised to see that they were unscathed. The student looks down at her marker-stained legs. No scratches. She glances at the other students, taking in the horrified expressions on their faces.

One of the students finally broke the silence.

“Y-you're glowing...”

“Yes, I am...”

Crash!

A tree fell behind her. Oh, right. The window was in pieces, and rain was streaming in through the open space. The thunder clapped louder than ever, but there was no lightning. A chill ran through her body, and she finally realized just how cold she was. It almost felt like the heat of her body was being sucked out of her. There was a wool blanket lying on the floor where all the other students sat. She walked towards it, bending down to grab the warm piece of fabric. The student looked up and saw that everyone had scooted up against the wall, as far from her as possible.

Oh, she realized, they're afraid of me. But what else is new?

She'd never been popular with other kids. When they were playing with dolls and toy cars, she was digging up worms in her backyard and wondering what they were made of. She sat alone at lunch, doodling pictures of impossible inventions. She only talked when she was excited about something, and you couldn't understand what she was saying, anyway, because she talked so fast. She made jewelry out of plain paper clips and wore them to school every day. She doodled all over her face, arms, and legs with permanent markers. Kids always talked bad about her, and she knew. Everyone did. But she didn't care. She had better things to do. She sat herself against the wall opposite the other kids, wrapping the blanket around herself.

What is happening? She thought. What's going to happen to me? This should be scary, but I'm not afraid. More... fascinated. Could this all be a dream? Or some sort of natural phenomenon?

As the child sat, wrapped in her thoughts, she didn't realize what was happening to her until someone screamed. An aura of lightning surrounded the girl as she hovered three feet above the ground. She jumped to her feet - or, tried to, as well as she could while floating in the air. She looked down at her hands, which were crackling with electricity. Clenching her fist, everything she could do with this newfound power flashed through her mind. The science behind this! Oh, what a discovery this would be! Everyone in the building watched as the girl flew out the window. That was the last anyone ever saw of her. Some say she was thrown into a ditch, and covered with mud, suffocating on the spot. Others think she was hurled off a cliff into the Atlantic, and met her end there. No one really knows what happened to her, but ever since, lightning has ceased to strike.

Home

You know that one place you go to for comfort? That one place you go for a breath of anything but the anxiety of life? A place most people would call their happy place? That place for me is my grandparent's house.

My Grandparent's house has windows as tall as the crystal clear sky. The bright sun shines through them every morning, casting around cozy light, dispelling dancing shadows of the night. Ginormous, silky blankets that come in seas of colors, gives the happy household a snug feeling. The hammock chair as we like to call it, patiently waits for me every afternoon. White and blue stripes envelop the swing and give it a lively look.

I look over the rolling hills and see a white house, starting to yellow because of all the dust roaring vehicles have kicked up over time. The sounds of anticipation are almost overwhelming. I know that some of my favorite people are waiting for me. We have so much to catch up on. We must talk about all the little things that only the truest friends would listen to. My cousin Lily has extensive, shining, golden brown hair like mine, and sky blue eyes. Normally she wears sweatpants and a bright colorful shirt that represents her vivid personality. My cousin Ali has hair like a long winding rich chocolate river that she likes to keep up in a chaotic bun. She has dazzling, pastel blue eyes that shine in the sunlight. Most of the time you'll catch her in jeans and an old weathered T-shirt because of constant, wearing chores. They both make me feel like a plush teddy bear is hugging my soul. They know all of my ins and outs. I grew up with them and a ton of my favorite memories are doing the wildest things with them, or even just hanging around the house, baking with Grandma. The sweet aroma of toasty cinnamon rolls will always bring back the fondest memories.

As I walk over to the swing a spring breeze makes my hair flow. All of these memories come rushing back to me in a battering flood, but as I walk I come back to the delicate sound of the wind chimes. They remind me of peace and the core of who I am. They play a simple little tune, but it reminds me of home. A place where I can let my worries float away in the spring breeze, and where wind chimes's sweet song drowns out the constant, droning sounds of responsibility. The prickly grass and warm soil beneath my feet keep me grounded to who I am, and keep me from floating away with my thoughts and worries. The radiant pinks and purples of petunias and hibiscus flowers keep my eyes from wandering too far into the bright sapphire sky above. The sweet smell of corn, apples, and dust off the parched gravel road anchor my nose to a safe haven. A place of peace and relaxation. A place I call home.

Lila
By Lila Finzel

In Arabic, my name means night and beauty, it means divine play. So many things I can only compare myself to. Biblically, my name means the "light of GOD". My name is like the color purple. A bright, but not too bright, color. Soothing and exciting all at the same time. It is like the laughing of little kids when they play ball, or the scratching of an artist's pencil on paper.

It was my great aunt's name before me. She was an adventurer, driving around the country in her van, visiting all of America's amazing sites. My dad tells me that she was strong and a fun person to be around. I don't remember meeting her, but I can always remember the thought of her.

At school, some of my friends say my last name funny. Like the teacher from the Magic School Bus, adding a R and rolling it weird. I ask them to stop, but they don't. It makes me wonder, are they really my friends? My name is German, not some silly TV show. It is part of my culture and my past. It is the sweet smell of peanut butter cookies on a Sunday morning, the sweet taste of them too. It is the beautiful sight of a flower blooming, the sound of the waves hitting the shore. It is the smoothness of a new book as it creaks open for the first time. It's my name, Lila.

Under the Rug

"AGHHHHHH!" Ann screamed like she was in a horror movie. "IT'S BACK! HELP!" She came running from across the house in terror.

"Wait, IT'S back?" Pat asked.

"Yes IT'S back!" replied Ann, "And I don't know what to do."

"Where was it? The living room, kitchen?" Pat asked. Their house was a maze.

"It was in my bed, I was almost asleep when it started moving toward me. I saw the sheets moving like waves on the ocean. It felt like I couldn't move. It grabbed my ankle, then I screamed and ran. We have to move. It's stuck in the house. We can finally get away from it."

"We paid an arm and a leg for it. We're not moving. Can't we just trap it?" Pat asked.

"NO, WE CAN'T JUST TRAP IT!" Ann yelled, "It seems like it can change shape. When it was coming at me it seemed bigger. When it was under the fridge it was smaller, that's the only way it could have fit under there."

"Ok," replied Pat, "What can we do besides move and to make sure that it doesn't come after us again."

"Well, I don't think we can do much until after we know what it is. We need to find a way to get it to show itself." Ann said.

The old couple tried to think of ways to get the thing to show itself. Every time they thought of something and tried it, the thing would outsmart them. But, the old couple kept trying, they were determined to get rid of the thing. Finally the thing seemed to get bored and just disappeared. They hadn't seen it for a couple of days. They were back to their old happy selves.

Two weeks passed, and it happened again.

"AGHHHHHH!" Ann screamed from the living room. "It has me! I can't get away!"

Pat ran in and finally saw what it was. It had the tail of a rat. The face of a clown. Kind of like Pennywise. Legs of a spider. Fangs of a snake. It was the most terrifying thing he'd ever seen. The thing saw Pat let go of Ann. It instantly got smaller. It ran under the rug. Pat grabbed a chair and chased the thing as long as he could trying to kill it. The thing kept finding ways to not get killed. It made Pat run into a bookshelf knocking all the books off, and he knocked the lamp off a table. The lamp screamed as it fell and shattered on the ground.

He was getting frustrated. He ran after it faster. He was determined to catch the thing. He knocked over more objects in an attempt to catch the thing, like a fish in a net. Finally he was able to corner it. But the thing didn't seem scared, if anything it seemed kind of happy. It started to smile before it got bigger and lunged. Pat swung the chair it broke but didn't do any damage to the thing just knocked it down. The thing instantly got back up and lunged again. This time, defenseless, Pat just screamed. Then all you could hear was Ann's heart. Thump. Thump. Thump. The thing turned towards her. Smiled again and lunged. She screamed so loud she could have shattered glass. Then, there was silence. The thing laughed a little then got smaller. With pools of blood on the ground the thing went back under the rug. Waiting for the next person to buy the house, waiting for its next meal.

POETRY IN PUBLIC

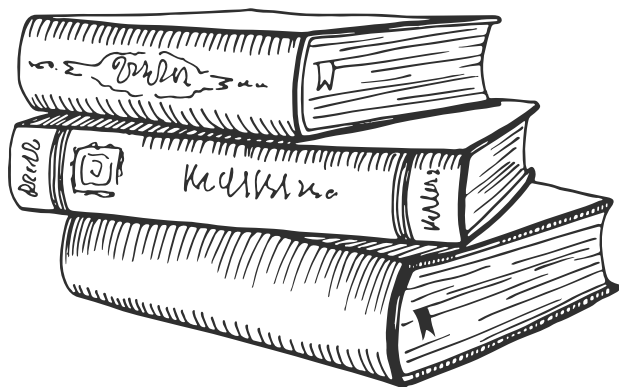
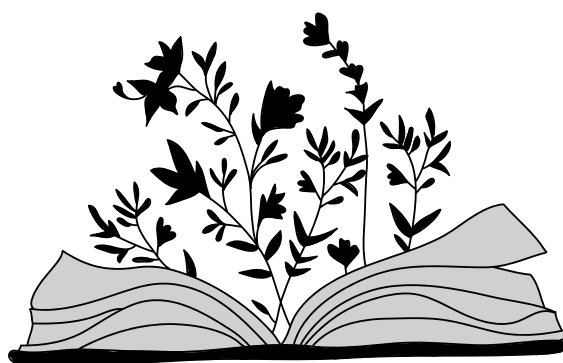
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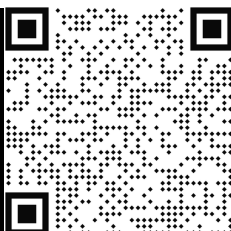
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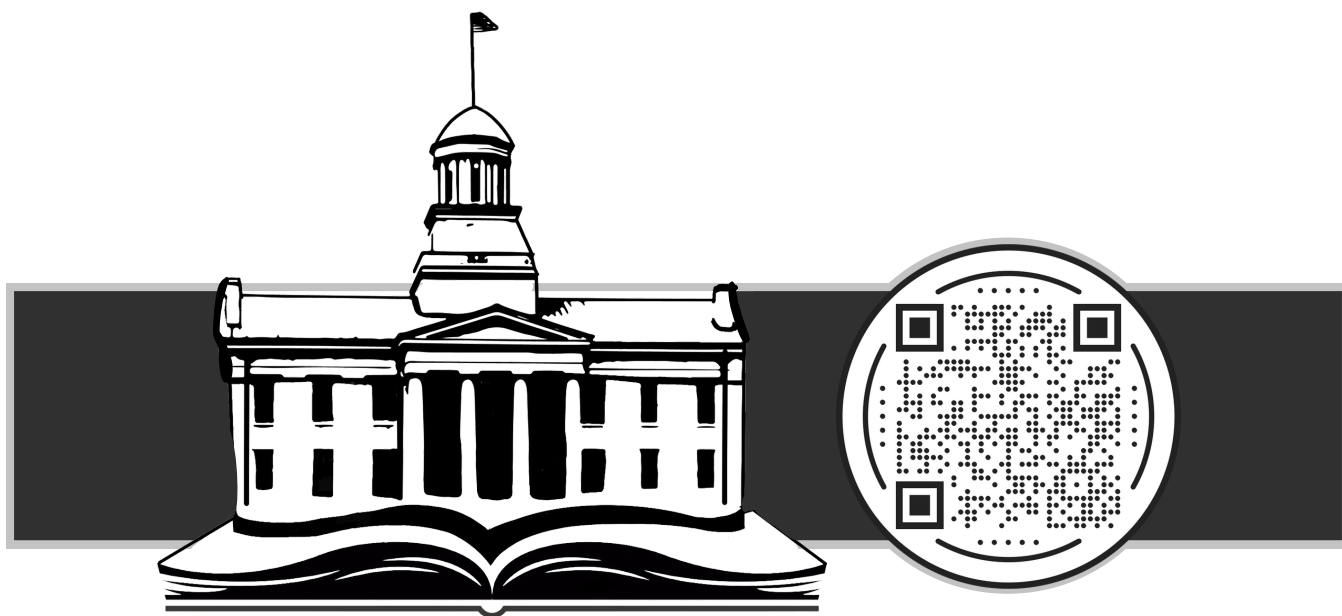
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