



WRITE OUT LOUD

[celebrate creative writing]

February 23, 2025

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 23, 2025

The Write Stuff winners

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

Rakshanaa Gayathri, 1, Lincoln	Jadzia Connorridge, 6, Clear Creek
EllaJane Rex, 2, Hoover	Amana Middle School
Nidhi Saha, 3, Horn	Lorelei Rex, 7, South East Middle
Vance Van Daele III, 4, Willowwind	School
Jillian Newell, 5, Alexander	Cora Beland, 8, Northwest Middle
	School

From the Heart winners

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

Vera Beal-Gupta, 1, Willowwind	Bella Siewert, 6, Clear Creek Amana
Lucy Warnecke, 2, Van Allen	Middle School
Ayla Keck, 3, Wickham	Mazzy Sleep, 7, Home School
Arlo Halekas, 4, Home School	Julia Valiga, 8, South East Middle
Jocelyn Terrell, 5, Alexander	School

Honorable Mention

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

Rayaan Dutta, 1, Willowwind	Joy Tomlinson, 5, East Ridge
Sage Kaspal, 1, Willowwind	Elementary (CCA)
Amelia Radke, 2, Willowwind	Rowan Eynon-Lynch, 6, Willowwind
Gracia Brummett, 2, Hoover	Gabby Armstrong, 6, Willowwind
Dasha Gurtovaya, 3, Willowwind	Grady Halekas, 7, Home School
Ainsley Lewis, 3, Willowwind	Iveri Tsilosani, 7, North Central
Iris Gillespie, 5, Willowwind	Middle School

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Special thanks to Carolyn Brown and Jerry Zimmermann



ACT Writing Evaluation Team

John Melby-Oetken, team lead
Tara Acton
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Pam Mackinson

Kats Mendoza
Jessica Pannell
Matt Schaeffer
Roxanne Swim

Rakashanaa Gayathri

Lilly the Brave Octopus and Lulu the Starfish

One day, Lilly the octopus was swimming in the sea. It was a sunny day, and the water was blue. Then, Lulu the starfish came swimming by. Lilly thought Lulu was funny because she didn't move like Lilly did. Lulu just stayed in one place, slowly moving with the waves.

Every day, Lilly and Lulu saw each other. They became friends. Lilly liked to change colors, and Lulu liked to stick to the rocks. They laughed a lot and had fun together.

One day, something scary happened. A big shark was swimming toward them! Lilly turned white, then green, then brown, trying to hide. But Lulu didn't move fast enough. The shark opened its big mouth and looked like it was going to eat Lulu!

But Lilly was very brave. She squirted a big cloud of ink. The shark couldn't see anything! It swam away, scared of the ink. Lulu was safe.

“Thank you, Lilly!” said Lulu.

Lilly smiled and said, “That's what friends do.”

After that, Lilly and Lulu stayed best friends forever. They always played together and helped each other when they needed it.

Fun Facts

Octopuses can change color! They use special color changing skin cells to do this.

If a starfish loses an arm, it can grow it back!

Moral of the Story

True friends always help and protect each other.

I Am Poem

Vera Beal-Gupta

I am a first grader.

I wonder if I will pass this grade I

hear pencils writing

I see people working

I want nice friends

I am a first grader.

I pretend to fly

I feel calm when I am happy

I touch my smooth desk

I worry about creepy cats

I cry when I fall

I am a first grader.

I understand my teacher

I say kind words

I dream fun dreams

I try doing the monkey bars

I hope to be a smart Racerunner

I am a first grader.

Pineapple and His New Prickly Friend

By EllaJane Rex

Once upon a time, there was a pineapple who wanted a friend, but no one wanted a pineapple as a friend because he was so prickly. At Fruit Elementary, he tried to make friends, but when he tried to tag someone in Tag, he'd spike them. "Ouch!" his friend would say. So he would go over to a tree and sit.

"Piney!" his mom yelled. "Time for lunch!" He got off the topic of school and went to lunch.

"Piney," his mom said, "Are you excited for the field trip?"

"Yes! Very!" he answered.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To Animal Elementary," he said. Then, Mom sent him up to bed.

He got up early in the morning. Today was the field trip day! Piney ran downstairs for breakfast. He gulped it down fast because he was so excited. He pulled on his backpack, kissed his mom "goodbye," and ran outside to catch the bus.

When they got to Animal Elementary, the class followed Miss Honey Beetle, their teacher, into the school. It looked just like Piney's school, except instead of fruits walking around, it was animals! They got to see lots of classrooms. They went upstairs to see the Art room, Library, PE, and Music rooms. After the Art room, it was the Library room. Piney got an awesome idea suddenly! He would find a book about making friends, but he wasn't with his class! He started to walk around when he bumped into someone. It was a porcupine! They started to talk and soon became best friends. Not only did he find a friend, he found his class!

It's Beautiful

By Lucy Warnecke

It's beautiful how low the water on the ocean lies.

It's beautiful seeing waves of the ocean.

Ooh-ooh.

The waves getting bigger while the storm gets lighter has been...

JUST BREAKING ME.

Into the storm I go.

I never go down.

I just win it all.

Ooh-ooh.

I just laid it down, into me.

Nidhi Saha

Blackout

It was a typical Friday evening. My mom was cooking dinner, and I was watching TV while my dad was working on his computer. Suddenly, everything went dark—boom! The whole apartment turned silent. The blackout had hit. My dad frowned as he stared at his blank screen, letting out a deep sigh. He was in the middle of an important work assignment and couldn't finish it now. For a few minutes, no one said a word. My dad seemed annoyed, and I didn't know what to do without the TV. But then he took a deep breath and sat down next to me.

“This reminds me of my childhood back in Bangladesh,” he said softly. Curious, I turned to him, waiting to hear more. “When I was a child, blackouts were an everyday thing,” he began. “We didn't have backup power or fancy gadgets. The electricity would go out for hours, sometimes even the whole night. But instead of getting angry, we learned to live with it. My parents would light a candle, and we would all sit together and talk. My siblings and I would play games like Ludo or just sit on the rooftop, watching the stars. Life wasn't perfect, but we embraced it. Those were some of the happiest times of my life because we were together.”

His words made me think. Today, we rely so much on electricity and our devices—TVs, phones, tablets—that we often forget to look up from our screens and connect with the people around us. Electricity is one of the greatest inventions of all time. It powers our homes, keeps us warm, and makes our lives easier. But sometimes, it can feel like we've become too dependent on it. Instead of spending time with family, we spend hours scrolling through apps or playing games. We're in the same room, but we barely talk.

As I sat there with my parents, surrounded by candlelight, I realized how much I loved hearing my dad's stories. They reminded me of how important it is to spend time with the people we care about. Human interaction helps us understand each other better. It teaches us empathy—the ability to feel what others are feeling. When we listen to someone's stories or laugh together, we create memories that no device can ever replace.

My dad's childhood might have been filled with challenges, like blackouts and limited resources, but he learned to find joy in the little things. He learned patience and how to make the best of every situation. Today, we have so much more, but we often forget to appreciate it. Maybe it's time we all learned to embrace life's imperfections, just like my dad did when he was young.

That night, I didn't miss my TV or tablet. Instead, I felt grateful for the quiet moment with my parents. I realized that while electricity powers our devices, it's love and connection that truly light up our lives. In a world that's always switched on, maybe we all need a little “blackout” every now and then—to pause, reflect, and reconnect with the people who matter most.

Ayla Keck

Ode to November

I see snow descending from the sky, intermingling with leaves falling from the trees, a hot bowl of soup at my table.

I hear birds chirp as they migrate south, snow crunches beneath my feet as I gaze up at them, all around the sounds of animals getting ready for winter.

I smell pumpkin pie baking, the smoke from the fire, and the scent of cinnamon as my mom cooks.

I feel snow as it lands gently on my hand, the softness of my favorite blanket, and the warmth of my family as we snuggle.

I taste warm apple cider on my tongue, and then enjoy the gooey crust of my mom's fresh cookies.

Warmth spreads through me as I feel the love in my heart and the love in my family's heart.

The Princess, The Wizards and The Shy Dragon by Vance Van Daele III

As Liam, the Wizard's most junior assistant, awoke that crisp autumn morning, he could not have imagined that soon he would be in search of a shy dragon. Into the quiet forest over the steep mountains and rushing rivers, Liam would set out on a fantastic journey to save his small farming village from the greedy, lazy king.

While the poor villagers tended their fields of lovage, their orchards of quince, the King dreamt of castles. For every sparkling emerald that adorned his wondrous silk robe he was determined to build a new castle. "O, Father!" said his kind daughter, Princess Anna. "Why would we build another castle when the villagers have so little? They cannot afford to dress in fine silks. They wear clothes made from leaves and bark. I've even seen villagers fashion shoes from our discarded woolen hats." The King laughed. The thought of his royal subjects sweating away, moving earth and stone to honor their King brought him such delight. From the comfort of his throne, he decreed that the villager's sacred mountain would soon be home to a new castle.

When the Wizard heard of The King's plans, he instructed Liam, his most junior assistant, to fetch his Extraordinary book of Wizardry, his exceptionally soft Wizard slippers, and his all-knowing, all-seeing glasses. The Wizard knew the shy dragon lived atop the sacred mountain guarding a secret cave that held all the kingdom's wisdom and magic. Any plans to build a castle would endanger the entire village. In the rough woolen shoes that he'd fashioned from the king's discarded hats, Liam dashed about the Wizard's chamber gathering the Extraordinary Book of Wizardry and the exceptionally soft wizard slippers, but he could not find the Wizard's all-knowing, all-seeing glasses. The Wizard exclaimed, "But I cannot read the spells without my glasses!" Though Liam was afraid of even the shyest dragon, he summoned his courage and volunteered to join the Wizard on his quest.

Liam and the Wizard ventured deep into the forest and soon heard the heartbreaking sounds of Princess Anna weeping. "O, why must my father be a greedy king?" Liam had never seen a princess cry. In the hopes of comforting her he asked, "Princess, why don't you join us on our journey to save the kingdom?" The three new friends travelled high atop the mountain and arrived as the full moon shone brightly over the kingdom. Waking up a dragon is a delicate matter but, luckily, Princess Anna had brought along her special scroll of sorcery. She whispered a spell into the shy dragon's ear and soon he awoke and unfurled his wings. Then the Wizard opened his Extraordinary Book of Wizardry and instructed Liam to read the most magical words. With confidence and flair, Liam recited the divine incantation. Soon the three found themselves flying away on the back of the shy dragon, holding onto his scales which shone like a cascade of sparking emeralds.

When they reached the castle, the dragon breathed a lick of flame into the greedy king's bedchamber. The king, his face singed with smoke, awoke startled and confused. The Princess, the Wizard, and Liam climbed off the shy dragon's back and together warned the king, "You cannot build a castle on The Sacred Mountain. All our magic and wisdom are held there." Just then, the shy dragon spotted the king's bejeweled robe of emeralds and realized that the king had stolen his scales. The shy dragon was shy because he'd lost so many of his precious emerald scales. Princess Anna draped the king's robe over the dragon's shoulders and soon the dragon flew away. "I am so ashamed," said the King. "Why should I have so much when the villagers have so little." And with that the King relinquished his throne to his daughter. In honor of their success, the Princess gave the Wizard a medal for valiant Wizardry and gave Liam a pair of the softest and most sensible wizard slippers.

Hedgehog and Mouse by Arlo Halekas

It was December 23rd, and, in the heart of a great big evergreen forest, there was a small cottage inside of which lived a hedgehog. Hedgehog's favorite time was not December. It was the holidays that made it so stressful. The decor, the cookies, the advent calendars, all too much. If it weren't for these things, he would have been fine with December. The snow, he found quite peaceful. But the snow was not enough to overcome the overwhelming stress of having to attend to all of the guests. If it did not seem so rude to have no Christmas party maybe he could cope.

"Bother." Hedgehog muttered as he slid a pan of gingerbread men into his brick oven. He wished he did not have to make the cookies. But after all, the party guests would come tomorrow and Hedgehog would not want to have a cookieless party. As he wound up his oven timer he decided that after finishing this pan of cookies he would go down the trail to Mouse's. Mouse would probably have a cure for Hedgehog's worries; he always did.

As Hedgehog waited for the kitchen timer to ding, he sat on a small stool and took up the paper. After he had skimmed the whole paper the gingerbread was ready. Hedgehog got up from his seat, and, after putting his floral oven mitts on, opened the oven and grabbed the pan.

After extracting the pan from the oven he slid it onto one of the cooling racks he had arranged on his counter. Then he slid on his favorite jacket and stepped into the biting cold air.

Through the falling snow Hedgehog walked. As he made his way down the trail, he immediately wished for some hot tea and cookies. As Hedgehog neared Mouse's clearing, he broke into a sort of jog, hoping Mouse would not keep him waiting. Once he was on Mouse's step, Hedgehog banged the acorn knocker then waited to be let in.

After only a few seconds, Mouse opened wide the door, and, with a huge smile on his face, beckoned Hedgehog in. Inside Mouse's snug home no one could stay worried, not even Hedgehog. Once his jacket was off, Mouse ushered Hedgehog into a cushioned rocking chair, then, as Hedgehog stated his worries, Mouse came and sat. After a moment, Mouse said, "I don't see why, if these friends really love you, they would have any desire to worry you."

Hedgehog thought then said, "But wouldn't it be rude to have no Christmas party?"

"I should think not," replied Mouse, "Try telling them how stressed you feel about the holidays. I'm not saying it will work. I'm just saying it's worth a try."

After they talked a while more, Hedgehog had a plan. He would try out Mouse's idea. As he opened the door to leave, Mouse stopped him. After forcefully handing him a full cookie tin, Mouse allowed him to leave.

Once Hedgehog reached home he grabbed his paper and quill and began writing letters to his friends. Once he was satisfied he put the letters in envelopes and put on the stamps. After gathering them he quickly walked to the *MINK MAILING SERVICE* building in town and handed off the letters to a mink in a blue postman hat who promptly looked at the addresses on the envelopes and darted away to deliver them.

After the letters were sent, Hedgehog went to bed happy. Then in the morning when he checked the mail, he found a reply to his letter from his friend Mouse. It said he would be happy to host from five till seven in the night and that if Hedgehog brought cookies it would be great. After reading it Hedgehog said a silent thanks, then went inside to start preparing his cookies.

Why Family Is Important

By definition, a family is a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption who live together. However, I personally know families can exist in many different forms and there are some things I know to be very important about families. For me, my family isn't just who I live with like my mom and sisters. We are a blended family. I consider my dad, my closest friends, my class, my teacher, and my parents' close friends as my family because I've known them a long time.

Your family might not be able to protect you from everything, but they will be able to help you through the hard times. They can bring out the best in you even if you cannot see it for yourself. I know this is true because my family helps me get through school, sports, life and even silly things like ten year old drama. So there was this one time right, when I thought I was bad at math. My mom helped me get better. When I felt like I was bad at basketball my dad helped me get better. My teacher Ms. Hester helped me get better in school. Speaking of school...

Another reason my family is so important to me is because they teach me about our history and black history. Did you know we don't learn a lot about black history in school? The real Black history and the changes African Americans have made are hidden from us. I feel like the things we learn about don't include stories I can relate to or lessons about Black history and all of the amazing people in my community. It makes me feel cheated and like my experiences and history don't matter. I feel helpless cause I'm just a little kid.

I've learned about Black historical experiences from my dad who is an activist for black people and children in the Iowa City community. You've probably heard of him. He has taught me how to stand up for people who can't stand up for themselves and to never be ashamed of who you are or where you come from. I've learned how to treat everyone with kindness and respect from my mom. I've learned how to create my own path and chase my dreams from my older brother Amir, who is an entrepreneur and an up and coming fashion designer. I've learned the importance of responsibility and hard work, from watching my older sister Joy who is currently getting her degree in cosmetology while she works full time.

Having people in your corner, teaching, and loving is so helpful because it helps you get through hard times and be the best you can be. Family will be there to cheer you on when things go well. My family has supported me when I've had basketball games, band concerts, dances, and more. I look in the crowd and they are always right there with me. ALWAYS! Let me tell you! My family is embarrassing. Especially my dad because he will yell so loud to cheer me on.

We need family to share our feelings, and moments of joy. God has placed all these people into my life so I can experience happiness, and learn patience (I'm still *workin* on that). I am very thankful to have my family and I am glad that they have shaped me to be the best person I am today. I have a total of 12 people in my immediate family and 65+ people in my extended family. With their continued love and support I **will** be a world changer.

My Bernie

2/14/2019, Valentines Day.

I got a dog, the sweetest dog in fact.
In the starry night sky as he rode home with me
wondering, in the future what's it gonna be like with him.
Slowly drifting asleep, I thought of a name.

And that name was Bernie!

By the look of his eyes he was happy.
I knew that day he would never leave my side.
Getting home I hoped he'd like his new house.

Excited for tomorrow,
as I slept in my bed,
I dreamt of him.

Doing my favorite things together,
feeling his soft ears and giving him walks

I woke up one day,
it had been like I blinked.

4

years

went

by!

He was getting **bigger**

As he was getting bigger he started getting weaker.

My family knew he couldn't stay alive.

In the next month or two, we had to put him down

As me and my family laid down Bernie's bed on the cold concrete floor of our garage

The vet got there and I knew we had to say our goodbyes.

Goodbye my Bernie

.....don't forget about me.

Don't worry,

I won't forget about you either.

He looked up at me like everything would be okay.

When he got put down, I felt incredibly sad.

Our house is very lonely now.

On starry nights

I sleep in my bed

I still dream of him.

My Valentine's day dog.

The sweetest dog in fact.

A Single Acorn

Jadzia Connorridge

I am an acorn, along with all my siblings. I am one of hundreds. My mother, a great Oak. I don't think I could ever be like her. She is a beauty. Right now, she is a lone tree in a field, picture perfect. Her only hope is to have one of her children grow next to her, but time after time, season after season, she watches them fall to the ground, birds carrying them away to different fields. She had a child grow next to her once, cheery and tall, but, one day, one of *those things* came and, well, brought a loud, loud spinny thing that murdered him.

I've been growing for some time now, and I remember when mother Oak told all my older acorns that it was time for them to drop. Mother Oak told us that they were a braver bunch, and I didn't get it, till I saw the blood bath. I just thought they would fall with no worries, but I was still so young, so naive. As they all let go, there were screams. One was grabbed by a bird, carried off to a new place. There were two squirrels practically dancing in the shower of acorns, shoving as many as possible into their mouths. A few of the smaller acorns were carried off by the wind. This memory terrorizes my dreams, and not just that, but it makes me realize every waking moment is leading towards my drop.

I spend most of my days watching the newbies start to grow, looking so, so happy. They haven't seen the great drop yet, haven't felt the depression, the pressure to be brave, to drop, to *make it*. I've felt these things. Lived them. The days speed by. I keep telling myself that I've had a good life, that I would be okay, and hopefully leave this world peacefully.

I've never talked to my mother specifically, just one on one. Usually it's hundreds on one, and I don't think she even knows I'm here. Why should she? I'm a weak coward who hides in the back, dreading the future. Who, in their right mind, would want to know me? No tree ever!

I didn't realize it would be the next morning, and it came as a surprise. "Attention!" Mother Oak called. "I am so proud of all of you, old and new. I would like to announce that the dropping season has come, and it is time. Those of you who have witnessed the drop before, it is your turn." There were cheers of bravery, but it sounded more like an army going off into battle right after watching the last war when they lost then going on a fun new adventure. I didn't cheer. I didn't do anything. I hung there, lost in the void, pretending I hadn't heard any of it. I was lost in the worst possible trap; fear. Mother Oak added, "The celebration of growth will be soon, followed by the great drop." More going-into-battle-but also having a party cheering.

The party came and went too fast. I was still lost in the maze of fear. Mother Oak told everyone that it was time. The braver ones dropped first. Blood shed. Every other acorn watched in horror. Then, after tears, the rest dropped. I hung on. Maybe she wouldn't notice if I just stayed here for eternity. But then, her voice rang in my ear. "Ale," She knew my chosen name... "I know you are afraid." She said this sweetly. "I've connected to your mind since the last drop, because you seemed especially hurt. But, if you never try, it will be a 'what if' and a 'what would have happened?' You have to let go." I hung on. I knew she was right. If I never try, then how will I know I wouldn't have succeeded? "Please?" she called. I let go.

These days, two beautiful Oak trees stand in that field. One knew the other could make it, and the other, well, they didn't have the courage to believe it, but look how far they've come now.

Bella Siewert

plastic.

No, I'm not going to write about how plastic is bad for the environment and how it hurts animals. That is a very important topic for another time, but for now, do you know what plastic goes through? Do you know about the witch who turned someone into a piece of plastic and let them be recycled, reshaped, and abused over and over? The person could still feel pain.

The plastic, when recycled, gets washed then it gets shredded. Just imagine getting shredded into many, many, pieces. Shredded into pieces.. everywhere. Once you're ripped apart, you get sorted with other of the same types of plastic. Then you get melted. You get melted and reshaped. You get melted and molded into something else. Something you may not want to be. Most likely (as plastic) you would be a plastic water bottle. And as a civil human you recycle it when you're done, don't you? Then it goes through that process again. Again, again, and again.

You don't want to be treated like plastic. No one does. Don't treat other people like plastic and don't make yourself end up like plastic. Don't let people make you go through the same thing over and over. It's not healthy for you, for me, or for anyone. Don't let people shred you into pieces then melt you and shape you into a different person. Don't mold someone into a different person. You can change, like you can become a better person by not making fun of people as much but don't change your entire self to someone you don't want to be.

Yet, I'm not saying don't recycle. You should recycle everything that can be recycled, because it saves animals and helps the environment. Would you rather be recycled and help the planet or be thrown away where you might make your way to the ocean and kill sea animals, or left to rot and decompose for 20-500 years in a dump?

What I'm trying to imply here is you shouldn't turn yourself or someone else into something they don't want to be. Don't turn anyone, even yourself, into a different person that's not you or not them. You're awesome. Be the person you want to be.

Eleven Isles

Lorelei Rex

There was no moon. The sea was drowned in the inky black of a starless sky. The cold night air drew tendrils of fog from the sandy island, spinning vague figures into being before they vanished into the cold breeze. A magnificent stone castle protruded from jumbled boulders slick with moss. The sea split into two frothing tongues of foam on the jagged teeth of rocks cluttering the shore. Black water lapped hungrily at banks of smooth, round pebbles. A small grove of thorny trees twisted up from the gritty soil, their gnarled roots buckled up from the uneven ground. Sea water slopped up against their roots, leaving a white water ring on their trunks. The tide came in quickly, gushed into the rough tidepools, and clouded with masses of swirling sand. A single yellow light on the bottom floor of the castle streamed down on the beach, its reflection rippling only when a breeze whispered over the pools of still water below. A young girl paced back and forth over the stone floor. She was small but sinewy. Her muscles were lean and hard beneath a long sleeved tunic, black cloak, and skintight leggings, and her mouth was turned down in a determined frown that matched the intensity in her eyes. A fire provided an empty glow, and illuminated the stranger lurking unnoticed. There was a purposeful scuff of boots against stone, and the girl whipped around, her hand instantly going to her belt. A man stood in the doorway, light glittering in his gold flecked hazel eyes and brunette hair, his jacket beaded with drops of mist. Based on the embroidery on his cloak, he was only a private. She dropped her hand from her belt. The man shook his head in an almost imperceptible way. Sandre, the girl, tilted her head, intelligently regarding the young man standing in the entry, still out of breath and dripping water from the hem of his outer shell of clothing. Half of his body was bathed in shadow from the hall. As he took a tentative step into the room, he loosened his coat. Her army was still in despair from the devastating battle that killed half her soldiers and drastically injured the rest nearly a month ago, and even now they were struggling to regain their numbers. They had drafted anyone and everyone with fighting ability into their ranks. Even then people unwilling to fight were fleeing, leaving a once bustling town with only ghosts of memory: a doll laying face down in the dirt, a swing creaking in the wind. Sandre felt adrenaline race through her body. *How are they here?* Sandre's head was reeling. She remembered what Wrath had told her. *They attack every full moon, apparently. And always from the north.*

Sandre stared out the north window. A harvest moon was rising where there had once been only onyx sky. Millions of stars were pricking into the velvety black, staring coldly down at her. Unlike most people in the small island town, Wrath was quiet and thoughtful, and barely spoke to anyone. Sandre would talk when there was someone to listen. When Sandre and Wrath met one another, they fought over everything. When the war started, quarreling was eliminated. The light in the room flickered as the fire sputtered and died abruptly. The coals glowed red, lighting up Wrath's face. It was clawed with the silhouettes of oak tree branches, and filled with unease. He, like Sandre, had sensed the mood change in the room. The enemy was ashore. But the adversary hadn't yet reached them, and they still had time. Sandre met Wrath's gaze. Slight head nod. Adjusted grips on the weapons at their belts. They had to act fast. And together.

After all, a house divided against itself will not stand.

Mazzy Sleep

DECANONIZATION

Here is the warped acacia, here is the girl without a mother.
And in her memory, a dog trailing, leaves parting to meet her,
then the long dream of the present. She was something else once,
a leaf or a butterfly, spread languorous
amongst the sloping stones. In the distance, scent of camphor
and springwater, all around her the air singing her name.
And now she is wrenched out of her naturalness: now she has been
deprived of all that was familiar to her and,
herded in with the other
discarded things, expected to learn it all anew.
There is no happy ending to this story: the sun sets, then rises again,
each day wilting to make a different shape, a different sort of rot.
The girl goes on circling the acacia,
surviving but finding herself only in her dreams,
the unrealized future,
the luminous past.

My shoes make clicking noises on the linoleum floor as I walk through the library. It is dark except for the slanted moonlight that shines through the tall glass windows onto the spines of the books, illuminating the titles. The slim picture books are well-worn and well-loved. The shelves are short, and I bend down to see the books, meticulously checking for anything out of place as I do every night. I picture the grubby hands that open these storybooks, wide eyes absorbing the colorful pictures and fantastical characters. The books are scribbled on in crayon, stained with yogurt, crinkled and crumpled, but though they are marked and scarred, these are signs of love.

Storytime in the library was always a joyful occasion. Earnest faces turned upwards, ears reaching and grabbing on to whatever bit of information they could find. These kids would grow up to be voracious readers, and I would be there, right alongside them, recommending and helping, watching them grow. From the days where they could barely talk to them volunteering at storytime themselves; I saw it all, a friendly face, forever there. I will miss this place, I think sadly, glancing down at my wrinkled hands.

It seems like just yesterday I was young myself; walking through the same doors with a spring in my step, imagining the years to come. I remember the first time I helped a child find a book; the light in their eyes sent a thrill of happiness through me that didn't match anything I had felt before. Even now, I still get that same feeling, although so much time has passed.

Juvenile fiction - what a wonderful section. The basis of everything we know; we are built on these stories. Adventures and mysteries, laughter and life. So much is contained inside books; we find relatability, humor, and distraction.

As I walk to the teen section, the air is so still, so quiet, I get goosebumps. It is never quiet, except at night. That is something I love about libraries: for all of the things that they are, they are not quiet. So many people think they are, all full of shushing librarians and signs asking for silence. But it's not that at all. It's the crisp, page-turning sound, the quiet laughter shared between friends, the *scritch-scratch* of a pencil on paper, these sounds making up the quiet hum beneath the conversations, the childrens' shrieks, and the *beep* of the check-out scanner.

I walk past the comfy bean bags that they didn't have when I was a teenager to the books my grandchildren have only begun to read. I passed my love of books to my children, and them to theirs, an eternal passion that will never fade away. For as many differences as there are between my generation and theirs, we all love books.

Young adult books are a bridge between what was and what will be, a starting point for the rest of one's life. Here, you are teetering over a precipice, with one foot on and one foot off, waiting for that next step. The kids are coming into their own now, striving to find themselves in these books. They can be anyone here. Anything is possible.

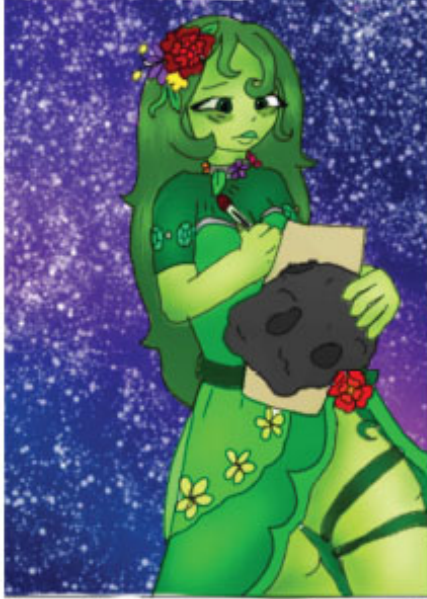
I come to the adult section last of all. My fingers run along the spines, feeling the heartbeat, the pulse, between the covers of these books. These are our lives. These are our stories. They define us, as a whole and an individual, all at once. There are so many that I will never have time to read them all, even in my retirement.

Then there is nowhere else to go except back to the front doors of the library. I am ready now. I am ready to leave. Memories and words well up inside me, thousands upon thousands, all playing a part in shaping my lifetime, an amazing lifetime that I am so lucky to have lived.

I push open the doors, and I turn the key in the lock, looking back at the library one last time as I step into the next chapter of my life.

Julia Valiga

My Dearest Earth,



As much as I love your pets honey I cannot stand them any longer. They are hurting me...Again.



And I know that I've lashed out at them and it isn't right for me to do so.



But, It's getting out of control.



I don't know how much longer I can do this.



They keep hurting me. And...



UPCOMING EVENTS and OPPORTUNITIES



Poetry in Public

Poetry in Public celebrates our community's rich literary tradition and local writing talent by displaying poems by writers of all ages. Johnson County residents are invited to submit poems to the 2024 program.

Deadline to submit: April 1, 2025
iowacityofliterature.org/poetryinpublic

Glory of the Senses - the Paul Engle Essay Contest

To continue Paul Engle's tradition of inspiring writers and celebrating the rich culture of Iowa, the City of Literature annually solicits essays from Iowa high school sophomores about an "Iowa experience," drawing on a specific memory to capture the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches of the day. The author of the essay judged by reviewers to be the best receives one year of free tuition to the University of Iowa. A select number of runners up receive a \$500 scholarship from the Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature.

Essays are due May 23, 2025
www.iowacityofliterature.org/paul-engle-day



October 6-12, 2025³

iowacityofliterature.org/icbf