

The page is framed by a decorative border of various fonts and letters. The letters are scattered and overlap, creating a collage-like effect. Some letters are in a clean, sans-serif font, while others are in a highly stylized, cursive script. The colors are primarily black and white, with some light gray accents. The overall aesthetic is modern and artistic, reflecting the theme of 'brilliant writing'.

Write Times 2

A celebration of brilliant
writing by SQA students

Fiction
Non-fiction
Poetry
Drama

Warning: This book contains strong language.

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Published date: February 2018

ISBN: 978-1-910180-21-1

Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority,
The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DQ
Lowden, 24 Wester Shawfair, Dalkeith, Midlothian, EH22 1FD

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www.sqa.org.uk/writetimes

Printed in Great Britain by J. Thomson Colour Printers, Glasgow

Chief Executive, SQA



Ten years ago we published *Write Times*, a celebration of the best creative writing by SQA candidates from across the country, covering fiction, and non-fiction, prose, poetry, and drama.

The reaction to *Write Times* from pupils, teachers, parents and literary critics was overwhelmingly positive and it's about time we did it again.

So welcome to *Write Times 2*, a collection of truly terrific writing produced by SQA candidates over the last academic year.

In their own words and in their own voices, the writers we're showcasing here have produced compelling personal reflections on the widest variety of topics imaginable. It's a genuine privilege to be able to share them with you.

In future years, perhaps some of the budding writers featured on these pages will find their way back into the classroom as authors of the texts that future generations of candidates will study. I certainly hope so!

But in the meantime, let's savour the confident, accomplished work they have produced today and give these young writers — and every young person in Scotland — every support and encouragement possible to help realise their ambitions.

Dr. Janet Brown

Chief Executive, SQA

Deputy First Minister



In Scotland, more of our young people than ever before are achieving excellent exam results and awards, which will help them to go on to a job, training, or to continue their studies. This tells us that, fundamentally, Scotland has an education system which equips our young people with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to fulfil their potential.

However, it's very easy to think of assessment only in terms of grades and statistics. It is important not to lose sight of what our young people are actually capable of producing. This is why I welcome the opportunity, provided here by SQA with the Write Times 2 publication, to pause, stand back, and have a look at just what our young people can do. And the results are stunning. We have examples of writing here from young people producing fantastic work for SQA assessments at various stages of their development: from National 3, 4 and 5 through to Higher, Advanced Higher and Higher National qualifications.

We all recognise that language skills are crucial to successfully achieving potential. The ability to express yourself effectively in writing takes time and hard work, but, as we can see here, the effort is so worthwhile. There are many different types and styles of writing on display, and our young writers have excelled in every one. It is very impressive to witness a National 3 student, Chloe McKernan, trying to imagine what life has been like in Syria in recent times with her wonderful poem 'Aleppo 2016'. Elsewhere in the collection, there are other fine examples of young people thinking about, and responding to, the big issues of our times.

Some of the young writers in the collection do a fantastic job of reflecting on their own experiences, and they do this with incredible maturity. Charlotte Birchall writes in an incredibly moving way about the loss of her parents, and Michelle Musyoka gives us a clear picture of her roots in Kenya, side by side with her new life in Scotland. It is great to read about her embracing Scottish life and culture in all its forms: 'Burns' suppers, Irn Bru and Billy Connolly'!

Close to my own home, I was delighted to read Andrew Ewing's wonderful celebration of the old library at Innerpeffray, which sits just outside my constituency, and is well worth a visit. You will have your own favourites, of course, and there is plenty here to choose from. But there is one thing I can guarantee: you won't be able to finish reading 'Eight-Forty-Five' by Juliet Downes without a tear in your eye.

John Swinney

MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Anna Smith

I've probably been writing all my life — certainly from as long as I can remember, writing little stories and creating characters. It's one of the greatest gifts to possess, and I'm very grateful to be able to pursue my imagination as a career.

It was Ernest Hemingway who said: 'There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit at a typewriter and bleed.' And while that's very true — he forgot to mention the hard slog and dedication, the picking yourself up when the publisher's rejection slip comes through the letterbox, and the determination to keep going.

I grew up in a former mining village and times could be difficult, but my expectations were always high. I started out as junior reporter in a weekly newspaper, and over a 25 year career, ended up the Chief Reporter of the Daily Record, covering stories all over the world. It was a terrific life experience that gave me a raft of material for my novels. But at heart, I wanted to write, and kept at it while I was working, wherever I was.

Now, a dozen successful novels down the line, I am living out my dream. So when I read some of the work from the young writers in this book, it's a joy to see the talent that is out there. From the edgy thriller material to the fantasy — the budding authors write with a confidence and a breadth of imagination that is truly inspiring for the future.

I always tell young authors that once they've created a character and a story, then they cannot walk away, because that character can't do anything until you come back and make it happen.

From what I see here, the stories have begun...

Anna Smith,

Former Chief Reporter of the Daily Record and crime novelist

Fiction

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Eight-Forty-Five



Author: Juliet Downes

Centre: Bell Baxter High School

Qualification: Higher

In a time of terrorist attacks, 9/11 remains just as relevant as before: it was this that provoked Juliet to write Eight-Forty-Five.

08:45, 11 September 2011

From the bench where I sit I see streams of suited people running to work. In the park, though, all is quiet, the morning light streaming through the gaps in the trees overhead and making dappled patterns on Annie's forehead as she sits on my lap. She cannot speak, but she can feel my stress, my anxiety, my sorrow. The second hand on my watch ticks three ... two ... one ... eight-forty-five. Ten whole years, and new life has replaced the old.

Annie laughs and claps her hands to the sky. I look up to find the source of her joy. An airplane, low and large, is soaring above us, leaving a white arc that seems a reflection of Annie's own smile.

08:45, 11 September 2010

I wake up nauseous and run to the bathroom. While I am being sick my round belly presses against the porcelain, the cool surface a shock against my skin. Morning sickness has been my alarm clock for weeks, but today my body seems to be rejecting more than just last night's food. Another year has passed, but it's always the same.

Matt's snores seem to echo around the hard surfaces, louder from this distance than lying next to him in bed. I hope the baby doesn't snore. It grows so silently inside me that maybe there's hope.

08:45, 11 September 2009

Matt's hand is stretched out underneath the newspaper concealing his face, holding mine across the table. I've drunk my coffee too fast and my tongue is raw. I should get something cold, but I'm paralysed in my seat, eyes hooked

to the clock above the oven. When it changes Matt squeezes my hand, a quiet memorial service shared between us. He knows how hard it is for me to tell him that, even now, I'm miserable. I let go of him to butter my toast.

08:45, 11 September 2008

I can hear my heart beating through my music, louder than the thud of my feet on the pavement. I'm crying, but the people on the street only see me for a second before I'm gone. My tears are in my ears, spread sideways by the wind as it slaps my face. I'm running from my sadness, but the numb feeling I get from pushing my body to its limits is too much of a relief to slow me down. It is only the sight of my watch that stops me, leaves me on the side of the pavement retching and miserable once again. The diamond on my left hand catches on my running leggings and as I pull it free I gaze into it. The sparkling silver sends waves of guilt through me. What have I done? How can I have forgotten and moved on?

08:45, 11 September 2007

The vase of flowers on the coffee table is so large that they seem to be spilling out of it. Each one is a different shade of pink, from a pale nude to a rich plum, exactly the colour of Matt's lips. They must have been expensive. They're sickeningly beautiful, really.

I haven't told Matt about you. He thought it merely a nice gesture to have flowers delivered to my doorstep the morning after our third date. He didn't realise that the sight of them when I opened the door was like a funeral bouquet commemorating everything I lost.

08:45, 11 September 2006

Eight-forty-five and the phone's ringing, my mother calling to say hello. She won't mention the day or its significance, hoping somehow I haven't realised that another year has passed. I don't pick it up.

On the television a plane crashes into a building again and again, each news station broadcasting that five long years have passed. The presenters gaze into the lens and solemnly ask why we are still fighting, why we haven't overcome the forces that did this to us. We're still at war. I'm still at war.

08:45, 11 September 2005

The candles are the only light in the bathroom. Lying in the hot water my head spins, but I focus my brain on the task in hand. Limb by limb, I cleanse my skin, frothing lotions into a lather before rinsing them.

In the flickering light I keep seeing your face. I close my eyes and plunge my head under the water, my hair tangling in the soap and salts and the bubbles stinging my eyes. I keep it under long after I feel the urge to breathe. When I eventually rise, gasping, my mind is as clean as my body. I feel fresh for the first time.

08:45, 11 September 2004

My boss told me I should take the day off. Instead, I'm stuck in this traffic jam trying to make my way in. I left a few minutes too late because at the last minute I thought of you and couldn't move. You would have told me to pull myself together.

The children I teach were only toddlers that day. It's refreshing being around people who don't know anything about it, who won't look at me with pitying eyes. They'll still throw the same tantrums today, still fight with one another and talk over me. They will treat me as I want to be treated: like a teacher, a regular one, on any regular day.

08:45, 11 September 2003

Somehow, I'm lying on my kitchen floor. There's a cut on my hand with dried-up blood around the gash. As I sit up, I see the smashed glass that must have caused it, a wine glass fallen to the floor. Empty wine bottles glitter around the kitchen, and the foul taste in my mouth tells me I consumed them myself. My headache is blinding, and the light streaming in is making it worse. I close the curtains and I wrap myself in a cardigan that was draped over the table. Coughing as I do so, I pour myself another glass of wine and drag myself to the living room. I am a heap on the sofa and I don't want to live today.

08:45, 11 September 2002

How can that grey streak have appeared so suddenly? The rest of my hair is dark, but on my left side, from the root to the tip, is a long, sparkling strand. I have lines too, new ones every day around my eyes and my mouth. My brow

has been continuously furrowed for a year, my face, never lifting from the heavy expression that has left these creases.

The black clothes don't help. My skin looks papery against them, my body so thin that they hang from it at strange angles. The doorbell rings and I turn away from the mirror and go downstairs. On my doorstep are more darkly dressed people with strained faces. I join them for the commemoration.

08:45, 11 September 2001

The sheets are soft against my face as I wake up, and I find myself reaching out for you. The bed is empty though, and as I open my eyes I can see the indentation of your head on the pillow, a perfect crater only recently deserted. On the carpet is the trail you've left: dressing gown, socks, a red tie, all pointing in the direction of the door. Every morning you rush; every morning you leave for work without waking me.

There's a black mark on the sheets. It's an ink stain, left over from last night when you refused to stop working. I look more closely at the stain and see that it's an almost perfect heart shape. Maybe you did it deliberately to tease me. If I didn't love you so much I'd be angry. I rise to get a cloth to wipe the sheets clean.

Clockwork



Author: Zoe Moore

Centre: Knightswood Secondary School

Qualification: Advanced Higher

Zoe is inspired by the many people we pass every day and the roads we choose not to take.

Just a glance. Then a look. A look between two people. That's all it took, the simple catching of another's eye. Staring. Mesmerised. Why? Why this person? Why this moment? No one knows. Maybe that's the magic of it. The possibilities; endless and waiting to happen. The look lasted three, maybe four seconds but within this time, the girl knew. She understood. It was a chance but chances were chances for a reason. They were signs, signals, suggestions of an open path to follow. She wasn't imagining this feeling. How could anyone imagine such a feeling? The girl wasn't one for taking chances but in this second, this moment, she couldn't draw her attention away from the man behind the bar. The room was dark except for a single light over the piano on the raised stage at the far end of the room. While the music soared and the crowd's gaze was fixed on that one spot, time seemed to halt for a brief moment. Not long but certainly long enough. The girl couldn't help but notice the man behind the bar's apparent accuracy as he mimed playing along with the pianist. His fingers glided along the smooth marble top of the bar, effortless and enchanting. The applause resonated through her; however she didn't notice anyone move. To the girl, in that dimly-lit room, the world was quite still. The man behind the bar's hands, however, were quite visible as he clapped, his eyes soft and directly focused on the girl. She closed her eyes.

Laughing. Glasses clinking against one another. A smile. An awkward handshake. Another laugh that rose high, high above the din of the room, its richness a treat for anyone who hears it. 'Are you here alone?'

A smile from the girl. An exchange of phone numbers. A goodbye.

Waiting. Such a long time waiting. An hour. Three hours. A day. A decision to give up. To stop expecting.

Ringling.

‘My phone was being repaired. I ... uh, I dropped it,’ A nervous laugh.
‘Stupid, right?’ A pause. ‘I’m really sorry.’

A reassurance. Talking. Chatting. Laughing. So much laughing. Such a beautiful, wholesome sound. The girl’s face hurts from smiling. Three hours pass.

‘I’ll see you Friday, then?’ He is a lot less nervous. An agreement.

Friday. Talks of work, holidays, awkward past lives, future plans. Some disagreements. Some differences. Acceptance. An arrangement. Another date. Another. Another. A trust forming.

A night in. Takeaway food and cheap wine. An old record player and the sharing of favourite albums.

‘Are you sure?’ He is nervous. He hasn’t been this nervous since that first phone call.

She nods and a small ‘yes’ slips from her lips. A connection of two lives. An alliance formed. A friendship.

A key cut. A trip to meet the parents. They are stern but welcoming. They want her to be the one. He rolls his eyes and she chokes on her spaghetti. Old photos and stories from a life that she is quickly learning more about and growing to love. A beautiful night.

Many more beautiful nights.

Cleaning the dishes. A talk in the kitchen. Decisions to make. Misunderstandings. Tears. The girl cries. There is moment of uncertainty. He hugs her. A promise. A question. A ring. More tears. A trust confirmed.

A wedding. Not in a church. The girl wouldn’t get married in a church. The gardens chosen are lush. Another question. Another ring. He looks into her eyes in a way that reminisced when he was just the man behind the bar. The night she knew. The night she took a chance. A smile, the brightest she has ever seen. Tears in his eyes.

‘I do.’ A sealing of the agreement. Two families becoming one.

Cogs turning. The hands moving, moving forward.

Children. A daughter then twin boys. First steps, first words. Seeing the world a second time through the eyes of the non-judgemental. Lessons learned. A different perspective. Infinite possibilities. A blank canvas. Growing up too quickly.

Hard to keep up. Days running away, being caught up with by years.

Taking the children to school for the very first time. Crying. Prying the two boys from their sister and giving her a last squeeze.

‘I love you, Mummy.’

She wishes he could be here for this moment. He is working. He works so much nowadays. Hands slip from one another. A teacher takes her daughter from her forever. No, not forever. Eighteen years maybe, but not forever. Tears escape. They are hurriedly wiped away. She takes the boys home and makes them breakfast. She reads a book. It’s quiet.

Back to work. Long days spent sitting in one place. Bored. Thoughts pass through her head, coming and going as casually as they choose. She misses him. She finds it difficult to focus on anything. She opens a blank document and writes.

Champagne. A fancy meal in a restaurant, prizing them both from their comfort zones. A toast. Prospects. Promotions. A publishing agreement. A talk. Decisions.

‘I,’ he pauses. ‘I’ve been thinking.’

She knows this. He thinks a lot.

‘I’ve been thinking of quitting my job.’

Choking. A look of bewilderment. She did not know this.

‘I have an audition on Monday.’ He smiles. ‘A restaurant in town is looking for a pianist.’ A small silence. She takes his hand and raises her glass. The girl is beaming. His dream. This is his dream. Monday comes and goes and in a flash he is flying high, higher than she could have dreamed.

Never for a second did the girl think that she could be this happy with someone or even that someone could make her this happy.

The boys start school and soon all three are in high school, the daughter graduating in a couple of months. She doesn't know what she wants to do after. She didn't get a place at college. The girl tells her not to worry, that there's always next year.

'Sometimes it's nice not to have life planned out too much.' She smiles. 'Once you settle, you settle and that's not very exciting.'

Her daughter nods. Of course she will be okay. She might just need a bit of guidance but most of that will come as life takes its course.

Speeding up and running behind. Taking things as they come.

Handing over the keys to a bust, used-up car, the girl's tears pour uncontrollably. She hugs the man who is about to take her daughter away from her permanently. He is wonderful. Her daughter will be wonderful with him. She is hugged by her daughter, all air that could possibly have been between them pressed away, a sparkling ring catching the light. They drive. She waves. She watches. She doesn't go inside, but to the restaurant where he is playing. She stands outside. She waits for him. She waits.

Years and years and years. Birthdays, celebrations, mourning. Life. The girl, no longer a girl, sits on the bed with a photo album. She wonders how her life got to this point. How she could blink and it be slipping away. It's unfair. Of course it is. It's short. It is until he comes through the door and pauses. He sits next to her in silence and inches the album over so they are sharing it. Two people looking back on a life that was not too short, not in any sense of the word. It is long enough if spent in a way that is worth-while. And what does 'worth-while' mean? Whatever you want it to. She takes the hand of the person she risked saying 'hello' to all those many, many years ago.

Life is like clockwork. It ticks on. Tick, tick, tick. You try to keep track of it but it isn't always easy. It runs away from you and before you know it, it stops and you are lost. Without it, we struggle. We panic. We take it for granted. Life is a very easy thing to take for granted; it is the thing we are most used to in the world. Sometimes, though, just sometimes, something happens that makes us realise how fleeting life really is. Sometimes, we pass by these chances, these offerings of possibility. And sometimes we accept them.

The girl wants to accept. She wants to take a chance. She isn't used to deciding for herself. This is exciting. The girl is ready.

The girl opens her eyes to find that the man behind the bar is polishing a glass, chatting to a blonde in a blue dress, his eyes firmly fixed on the way she tucks a piece of hair behind her ear. The room has become lively with applause and chatter as the pianist on the stage finishes his set. She feels a grip on her arm.

'Shall we go, honey?'

She blinks. She looks one last time at the man behind the bar, the man who was an opportunity. A chance left alone, an open road not taken.

She nods and follows her husband from the bar, letting him lead the way.

Gone Mad



Author: Hannah Cowieson

Centre: High School of Dundee

Qualification: Higher

Hannah has written a fairy tale with a twist — what would really have happened after Cinderella met her Fairy Godmother and all her animal friends.

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away there was a joyful kingdom. All of its population — family, friends or acquaintances — lived in harmony. To many, this kingdom seemed like the happiest place on earth. Surrounded by great stone walls, the kingdom was very safe. Anyone entering the kingdom was welcomed as they passed through the tremendous iron gates by the sight of the king’s great silver castle. Towering over the city the castle, with its sixteen turrets, glistened in the sun and made the whole kingdom brighter. No one fought, no one suffered, no one hated. Everyone was content. This seems like the perfect fairytale setting. But every fairytale always has a dark corner ...

The kingdom was situated next to a forest that expanded as far as the eye could see. No one dared enter the forest as very few ever returned. The forest was dark. According to survivors. When inside the forest you felt cold, lonely and full of fear. You would find yourself huddled in a corner, your eyes peering for something that may or may not be there; jumping with fright at every creek and whisper. Darkness cloaked the forest and suffocated it and any life inside. Only evil and misunderstandings survived in this forest.

According to local legend, in this forest, along with its evil and mystery, there was an old haggard woman. She lived in a wooden hut. Its panels were slowly rotting, showing the scars and wounds left by the forest and its harsh climate. The hut was small, with only enough room for one person. As for the woman, she was troubled. The years of living with only the company of the surviving animals had played with her mind and she had become mad, (although it was said she had been mad since she was born). Rumours claimed that, if you looked over the kingdom walls late at night you could sometimes see her. Walking around in her dirty, wet rags discoloured by time and with filth, her clothes were a horrible colour that hid her effectively in the dark. She looked as though she was trying to find a way back into the kingdom and could be heard muttering: ‘Charming, Charming’. This was all that was known about

the old woman in the kingdom. To them, she was and remains a mystery. But we know more ...

This old woman had not lived in the forest her whole life. In fact, she had once lived in a stately home, in a village near the kingdom. Her mother had died when she was young and her father had remarried the most ghastly woman. When her father died a few years later, her new stepmother inherited everything. The girl was brought up by her stepmother along with her two step sisters who treated her as a slave, forcing her to do the chores and work. The young girl started to wither away. Eventually, by chance, she married into the royal family and became a Princess. But that didn't last for long. For decades, she lived in the forest, alone and unloved. Her name? I hear you ask.

Cinderella.

Now we all know the tale of Cinderella. But how did she come to be an old hag living in the forest? Let's start at the beginning. When Cinderella's father died she was, as we said, forced to work: to be the family maid. During this time, it is said that Cinderella went mad. She believed she could speak to animals and was often heard talking to them as she did her work. They helped her get ready in the morning. They were her best friends. Her stepmother was unsure of what to do with her. The best option would be to send her to an asylum but the shame that it would bring on the family was too heavy a cost. So Cinderella worked and stayed out of her stepmother's way. Then, of course, there was the ball. The ball that changed Cinderella's life ...

After Cinderella and her Prince Charming married, they went away on their honeymoon. At this time, Cinderella found it very hard to talk to the Prince. After all, she had only really been in his presence for about four hours. She knew nothing about him and he knew nothing about her. It was very ... awkward. So Cinderella went about asking questions. What did he want to do with his life? How would he rule the kingdom when his time came? And the Prince answered. And so, vice versa, the Prince tried to get to know Cinderella. On the third day of their honeymoon, the Prince asked Cinderella how she had come to be at the ball looking the way she did when she was just a servant girl? (Not very sensitive I know, but this was hundreds of years ago.) Cinderella did the unthinkable. While lying in the silk sheets of the king sized bed, she told the Prince the truth.

Starting with the animals, she told the Prince how they were her friends. They helped her and she hoped that the Prince would make way in his castle for the

animals to live inside with them. Then she told him about her fairy godmother: a dear old woman with wings who could perform magic and make your wishes come true. She had come to Cinderella after her ugly step sisters had destroyed the dress that the mice and birds had made for her. The fairy godmother transformed her dress into a magnificent ball gown. Feeling faint, the Prince started to see amber lights.

Then she told him how her fairy godmother had turned a pumpkin into a coach, her mice friends into horses and her dog into a footman. She was given glass slippers and the spell was broken at midnight.

The Prince was speechless. Of course, he thought he had married someone insane. He quickly made plans to travel back to the kingdom and to divorce Cinderella. And, as a consequence, she drifted into madness: screaming and crying about how it was all true and he couldn't leave her. When they arrived back at the kingdom, Cinderella was taken against her will to the asylum where she stayed for several decades. She was eventually forgotten and the Prince re-married one of the ugly stepsisters. And they subsequently had several ugly children.

Cinderella kept escaping from the asylum. She aged centuries. Shock therapy had fried her brain and made her desperate for her Prince. Eventually, she was banished from the kingdom for trying to cause grievous bodily harm to her ex-husband. Twisted inside, she wanted her revenge. Her beloved phony of a Prince had killed her soul. Without him she thought, in those rather unenlightened times, she was nothing.

And that's where our story ends. Now she lives in the forest. Alone and forgotten. So what is the moral of this story? Well, ladies. Never invest all your happiness in happy ever after — develop your own independence, relationships and become your own fairy godmother. But when you marry your Prince, leave out all the details regarding magic in your story. Men don't tend to understand those elements.

Terra Firma



Author: Mark Henderson

Centre: St Maurice's High School

Qualification: National 5

Mark is inspired by the world around him, and those worlds just out of reach in space.

With a familiar light, the console before him glowed steadily, each button on its seamless metal panel ready, waiting, demanding to be pressed. Tapping away at the buttons, Captain Adam Mundus felt the FTL drive whir to life from the comfort of his chair at the bridge. The whole ship thrummed to life as it moved silently through the empty space, ready to jet to its next destination. In a flash, it was gone, flying at immeasurable speeds towards the next colony on the captain's list.

Stars flew by like rain on the windshield, and the monitor in front of Adam displayed the fuel levels and estimated arrival time. Satisfied with his button pushing, Adam got out of his chair slowly and made his way to meet with the crew. The majority of the crew-members on his elegant vessel were human, plain and simple. However, a few robots and more unusual creatures dotted his roster. Not that it was at all a problem.

The conversation between the seven of them was swift, mostly Adam telling his company about their mission, and reminding them that the last four failures shouldn't dishearten any of them. Fishing his codex from out of a nearby storage Locker, Adam flicked through the holographic pages until he found the item he was seeking. The same message he'd been forced to watch at least five times in a row, and that he'd forced other people across countless stars to watch as well. In his heart, however, he knew that he needed to do it.

Soon after, the engine's busy hum ceased and was replaced with the empty void of silence. Adam looked out of one of his spacecraft's windows, and saw below the mighty ship his destination. A rather large clump of rocks and dirt, congealed together with an atmosphere suitable for life. This particular world looked rather nice, lush and green, with a notably big colony located directly below the ship if the scan was anything to go by. It looked like a lovely place

to live, aside from the faint grey haze encircling the atmosphere. It was no Earth, but there were not many planets like it anymore.

Knowing what came next, Adam walked over to the navigation console and initiated the landing sequence. The oh-so familiar buttons responded immediately, clicking gently beneath his pressing fingers. Slowly, smoothly, the ship drifted towards the world below it, buzzing lightly as it did so. After what felt like days, the craft descended gracefully onto a convenient landing pad, right in the heart of the colony. Touchdown.

As the door opened slowly, Adam shielded his eye from the sudden sunlight meeting his eyes. Once he had recovered from the retinal assault, he set his eyes upon the bustling city before him. Tall, sky-scraping towers reaching as high as the eye could see. In the distance, the sounds of city life echoed faintly through the air, which tasted faintly like chemicals. Not far from the landing pad, Adam could see all manner of people. Ranging from humans to robots, many humanoid figures peppered the steel and tarmac flooring. The sight of seeing these different, yet not so different species living in harmony filled Adam with a smidge of pride.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw what could only be a factory, producing one good or another while sending streams of smoke billowing out of its tall chimney all the while.

A figure appeared out of the crowds to meet Adam as he stepped out of his ship onto the terra firma. He was a short, self-righteous human, dressed in a suit so crisp that it made Adam, successful as he was, feel inferior. His arms were spread wide and his face was twisted into a smile, warm and welcoming. Adam took the pompous man's hand, trying to escape the idea of his embrace. The way that the man shook his hand seemed forced.

'Welcome! You must be Adam Mundus, correct?' He enquired. Shaking Adam's hand faster than ever.

'That's correct, yes.' Adam replied, trying to escape the clutches of his fingers.

'It's nice to have you here, Captain Mundus. I'm Fel Aer, and I'm the mayor of Penates Stand, the colony before you. Here to relax, captain?'

With a discouraged grin, Adam shook his head and broke free from Fel's grip. He reached for his codex and sighed as he brought up the message, as ordered

‘Actually, Fel, I’m here to warn you.’ He said grimly. Fel grasped the codex, looking rather confused as the holographic message started to play. Out of thin air, an image of a human man in a lab coat appeared, looking frazzled and utterly terrified. An alarm blared behind him.

‘This is a warning to any ... well, any human that’s left really. Earth is gone, destroyed by some ... unknown ... thing. It seemed to hate the high carbon content in the atmosphere and it attacked without warning from INSIDE the planet! So please, stop pumping it into the air, or else...’

The message cut out. Just like the last four times. Fel stared at the now empty space, speechless, while Adam retrieved his codex from his loose fingers. All of a sudden, the ground itself began to tremble, before turning into a furious rumble. Fel struggled to stand, but Adam knew what would come next. He’d seen it four times already. Mere moments later, a great, impossible tendril poked out of the ground, before smashing itself into anything nearby.

Several ships abandoned the planet as fast as possible, and Adam was aboard one of these vessels. There was no telling how many casualties there would be, or how many survivors there were. He sighed as he watched the planet below him, once prosperous, crumble and disappear. He sighed, knowing that it wasn’t the first planet to meet its end like that, and it wouldn’t be the last. Not while people refuse to respect their homeworld.

Adam groaned. ‘Onto the next, I suppose.’

Stops



Author: Rhona Learmonth

Centre: Anderson High School

Qualification: Higher

Rhona explores the idea that, on public transport, you travel with strangers whose stories you will never know.

Sandwiched between a perspiring banker and a woman with a baleful, sheep-like countenance, I wondered whether I ought to have taken a taxi to see you rather than suffer the indignities of public transport. But no, the rain was torrential and, while declaring my love for you as it poured would have added a certain dramatic factor, I feared looking like a drowned rat would really not make this any easier.

I had wanted to tell you for years, but I was in no way ready for today — I never would be. The nervous jittering of my leg attracted a disapproving look from the banker: I gave him an insincere smile and an unsatisfactory apology before going back to ignoring him.

Over the wheezing protests of aged metal, I could hear the crackle of the elderly tannoy system being forced into life. The train shuddered to a halt as the voice bestowed a haughty reminder to ‘Please mind the gap.’

Three stops left.

I tried to tell myself that my worries were irrational — I’d known you since I was six and must have seen you a million times since then. I could still remember the first time we met; when life was simpler and battles could be fought and won in the playground.

I was a general, a monarch where you were nothing but a lowly peasant, and I made sure you knew it. For the duration of each playtime I ruled supreme: until you arrived. I offered you a place in the ranks of my army and, to everyone’s surprise, you refused. Instead, you announced you were starting your own group, a force for good who would stand for peace and non-violence. Then you announced that anyone who did not join you would be executed on the spot.

I think that's when I knew I had found an equal in you.

We battled as opposing forces for nearly a week before declaring a truce and amalgamating our armies. It was a promising start to our friendship.

I was torn out of my reverie by an indistinct announcement. Time was slipping away all too fast.

Only two stops left.

The downpour had eased off to a drizzle as raindrops raced each other lazily across the windows and outside people emerged from the safety of their umbrellas. It was rain like this that first made me fall in love with you. We had been friends for years but that day I finally admitted to myself that I had feelings for you.

It was your idea of course — I abhorred exercise. I think I only agreed to go for the opportunity to skip school. We had always planned to climb the great hill so, that day we launched our expedition. It loomed far above us, an unspoken dare we could not refuse. And, though this may have been a result of our complete lack of experience — or suitable footwear — rather than because of the difficulty of the hike, it was a struggle to reach the top. I think I gave up and turned back about five times, but you just continued to tug me determinedly onwards, insisting it would all be worth it for the view.

When we eventually hit the summit, the clouds had slumped down onto the land, wreathing the hill in a fog that chilled us to the bone as the promised view faded into a wall of white.

I started to shout at you then, berating you for your pointless, fruitless scheme. You managed to keep a straight face for all of three seconds before bubbling into laughter. I soon joined in and suddenly we were whooping, prancing around in idiotic gaiety at having reached our goal and at it having been so wonderfully useless. We danced in the rain as logic was lost in the face of a moment of inexplicable happiness.

We caught each other's hands and spun round so wildly I lost my balance and fell. Still laughing, you paused and reached out to help me back to my feet.

I looked up at you, with your bedraggled fair hair dripping into your eyes, your clothes stained with mud, your face red with humour and exertion. And I thought you looked beautiful.

It was a moment of little consequence but for me it was the catalyst for a lifetime of unrequited love. We celebrated our victory over the tyranny of rationality with foolish, ridiculous joy, and I loved you for it.

The sheep lady opposite me gave a loud, hacking cough and, bleating apologies, shuffled out of the train.

One stop left now.

Perhaps it would be better if I never arrived, if I just kept sitting here, isolated from life and all its problems. I could stay on this train forever, watching the world pass by. At the other end of the carriage, a toddler began to scream his displeasure at the injustice of having to wear a hat and I re-evaluated my plans to become a permanent train-dweller.

As the banker turned the page of his newspaper, a headline caught my eye and my heart skipped a beat.

When you first told me that you were going to be an aid worker, I could see the tentative excitement in your eyes, the eagerness in your restless limbs, and was stunned into uncharacteristic silence. Perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised; even when we were young you always stood up for what was right. To be shipped off to some distant land, to help those in need was exactly the kind of thing you'd always dreamed of. I just never thought you'd actually do it.

We hugged at the airport, squeezing tight enough to hurt, but we didn't say goodbye — just looked into each other's eyes. I thought about telling you then, telling you I loved you just once before you left. I didn't of course. What I said instead was, 'You'd better come back safe. Or else.' You gave me a mock salute and a wide grin as you boarded the plane.

I hadn't seen you again since then.

I told myself that if I could only live through today I could face anything. I wished I still had the fearlessness and bravado of my younger self: I needed that kind of courage again.

With a mournful rumble the train stopped once more. I gathered my belongings and my resolve before marching out onto the platform, and into the world beyond. I walked quickly, suddenly desperate to have this over with as soon as possible.

I entered the church and was immediately surrounded by a sea of black-clad mourners. You would have hated this, all these people who barely knew you, gathered here to weep and wail and to bemoan the inevitability of death. All funerals were the same: the same sagaciously murmured platitudes, the same inanities about life being lived to the fullest.

It was always the same. Except this time it wasn't. This time it was you they were putting in the ground and I couldn't bear it.

I endured the service, hating every second of it as your life was reduced to a generic commendation. Only when the funeral was over and everyone was gone did I approach the grave.

'You were supposed to come home safe,' I reminded the freshly dug earth. 'Why did you have to go and get yourself blown up? You didn't have to be the hero.' I sighed; this wasn't what I had planned to say. I started again, 'You were brave; you were an idiot. And it's why I loved you. Why I will always love you.'

There. I'd finally said those words. It was done. I turned away and walked into a world which seemed suddenly as cold and lifeless as you are now.

The Coffee Stained Crane



Author: Ella Mayne

Centre: Crieff High School

Qualification: Higher

Ella, like Lou in the story, was inspired by the story of Sadako Sasaki, who started making paper cranes after the Hiroshima bomb.

Roosevelt famously said in his inaugural address ‘The only thing to fear is fear itself’, and (in Lou’s humble opinion) this was entirely untrue. You see Lou feared everything, she feared the way the wind sounded at night, feared the way the school bus bumped as it bustled in the mornings, and feared the way her mum shouted when Lou forgot to take her shoes off. In fact Lou was so all encompassed by her fear, that fear itself was the least of her worries, and so she found herself in disagreement with Roosevelt.

When she was young her fear of the dark was tolerated, and the landing light left on. Now Lou was invisible; her parents too caught up in their delicate duel of sharp-tongued comments that they forgot to leave the light on. When she learnt of the ever-expanding nature of the universe she began to fear its inevitable end.

Whilst in the school library Lou had discovered a book on Japanese legends, and much to her delight she had delved into a world of dragons, eternal life and duelling deities. She found herself drawn to the legend of One Thousand Origami Cranes, which promised the chance of eternal life and a wish granted by the gods. She visited the city museum who displayed a crane folded by Sadako Sasaki. The young girl who — terminally ill from the radiation of Hiroshima — began to fold a thousand cranes to be granted her wish, but died before they were completed. As a tribute her classmates finished them and in a beautiful twist she has been granted eternal life as she is now immortalised as a statue in Hiroshima Peace Park.

Lou realised with startling speed that she could no longer be afraid of everyone and everything; that the fears of a child couldn’t last forever. She made a choice. She decided that she would no longer be scared. That she, Lou Palmer, would no longer be afraid. Lou thought if a thousand cranes could grant eternal life to Sadako, then maybe, just maybe, they could help her grow

up and forget her fears. So whilst her parents were in the kitchen speaking in suppressed whispers, like children tiptoeing through the night trying not to be heard, Lou carefully measured a square and began to fold. Slowly and steadily she folded the corners together, unfolded her mistakes, recut the paper, and finally she had a small paper crane. Through the crack in the door she could hear her parents' raised voices, they were no longer tiptoeing. Lou looked down at the tiny frail crane in her hand, that a split second earlier had represented hope. So she wrote her biggest fear on her creased little crane.

A crane a day for a thousand days, and like the legend promised Lou would be given one wish, she would finally be free of the burden of her fear. So Lou made cranes. She made them from the folded up newspapers her Dad left around. She made them from the napkins her Mum used to lay out for the family dinner, but now they no longer ate home-cooked meals together, instead Lou ate her microwaved meals alone. Now the neatly laid dinner tables were a thing of the past, and so the napkins were nimbly transformed into cranes. Her lines became sharper, the folds more precise, she used paper she found and she wrote on them her many fears. She entrusted these majestic animals with the burden of her fears. Her room became decorated by folded symbols of hope.

Lou went to high school, her Dad started staying in the city for work, her Mum working late. Still Lou made her crane a day. Her room now littered with these paper symbols like a shrine to her determination. In school, Lou dreamt of floating up into the sky on the back of one of her masterpieces instead of sitting in her science class. As her collection grew so did Lou, she became tall and gangly with legs like skyscrapers, shy and solitary like the birds she so trusted, but still she was waiting on the promise of eternal life and the wish of a lifetime.

Then it happened. On October the 14th she carefully folded the letter her Dad had written to her into the thousandth crane. The wings were splotted by a stain suggesting his spilt coffee, her final trustee was covered in the slanted sharp strokes of her father's handwriting, a letter confirming the inevitable outcome for her parents. On autopilot, she folded with precision, creating creases sharp as the swords samurai were famous for wielding. She searched for a pen and as she sat there, the shouting, traffic and radio became a silence as Lou wielded her weapon of choice, yet she couldn't bring herself to write her final fear. The fear that would grant her freedom, yet she couldn't do it. So instead she ran to her room and in the haze of her mother's shouts she carefully packed all her cranes into her biggest backpack; piling all her fears into her bag and carefully placed the coffee splotted bird yet to be given its burden into her pocket.

Lou and her mother walked in silence to the park, her mother walking swiftly with her back ramrod straight, stiff and anxious about the upcoming meeting. Lou looked out upon a street, in a city full of people who were unafraid, who didn't care about Lou, or her fears, or the bird in her pocket; and Lou felt the familiar rise of fear in her chest. As they reached her Dad, she felt the fog of fear rise up in her chest; she was rendered mute. She looked at her shoes whilst her parents exchanged pleasantries, Lou knew they were all just an act, she had witnessed their cutting comments. Lou saw straight through the lie. She saw two people who were terrified, who were scared of losing, losing each other, or Lou, or even losing the game they had played for so long. Two people who were scared.

Clutching her final crane, she began to run. Lou outran the shouts of her parents which soon turned into shouts at each other. She ran across the road, into the city which no longer scared her. As she looked around she saw people who were scared; taxi drivers scared of speeding tickets, mothers scared for their children, hurrying professionals who were terrified of their bosses. She ran until she hit the river. Lou stopped. On that grey steel bridge, in that bustling town she was once so afraid of.

Lou pulled her backpack open and she was greeted by all her fears. A gust of wind caught a paper crane, her fear of deep water swirling up into the sky, she watched as the wind carried it into the teeming streets. In that moment Lou looked at her cranes, they were solitary creatures, they couldn't survive in flocks; so one by one she released them. As her birds were released from their cage she felt the cage of fear around her heart lift. She released them all but one that day, all over the city she let them fly away to freedom. When she returned home she placed her final crane on the shelf by her bed, as a reminder of growing up. You see, Lou had grown up. She was no longer afraid of the dark. Her parents' cutting remarks. Or even fear itself. Because fear was inevitable, just like growing up was. And so, the fearless coffee crane sat on her shelf as a reminder that dreams of wishes and eternal life were for children, and Lou was no longer a child.

The Last Wolf



Author: James Reilly

Centre: Turriff Academy

Qualification: National 5

James's writing ideas are inspired by things he has read, seen, watched and life's experiences.

The moon hung in the sky, casting its spectral gaze onto the world below; its pale glow only occasionally dimmed by the wisps of cloud, which gently drifted across its path like ships upon a midnight sea. As the late-night mist rose from the ground, its tendrils extending their reach to the sky above, the she-wolf ran. Her coat was coal black, her eyes a fluorescent amber, shining like glowing embers in the dark. The she-wolf loped on and on across the grassy plain towards the shelter and safety of the trees in the distance. Their branches, swaying gently back and forth under the caress of the wind, seemed to beckon the she-wolf closer and closer ... back to her home.

She entered a small clump of trees, thick enough to provide her with some temporary shelter. Wandering over to a puddle formed by a small stream that meandered lazily across the land, she lowered her head. She sniffed at the scents which coated the ground beneath her feet, but she gave them no mind. Hungrily she lapped at the water, feeling the icy cold liquid on her hot tongue. Her ears twitched suddenly as she heard a noise. Slowly she raised her head, panting, ears forward, as she tuned into her senses. She could hear the men who were hunting her. They were on horseback, forging their way through the grass, making no attempt to conceal their presence. She licked her lips, and, turning her head, trotted out of the tree line before continuing her steady lope home.

‘Bastard animal!’ thought the man as he sat mounted on his horse. The world flew by him as they raced across the grassy plain. They were close now. He could feel it. They had tracked the wolf this far before but had always lost it at the edge of the forest in the densely packed trees, and consequently had been forced to call off the pursuit and return home empty-handed. But now the goddamned animal had taken another one and he couldn’t let it continue. So, he and other individuals who resided in their small farming community had formed a hunting party with the intent of hunting down and killing the creature once and for all.

The wolf raced across the grassy plain. It stretched ahead of her like an ocean, the grass rippling like waves as the wind sailed over the gentle curves in the land. She flew through the grass like a bullet, ears pressed flat against the side of her head; paws gliding gracefully over the ground, barely making a sound. She could see her destination growing closer and closer. The trees loomed larger and larger with every step; they stood tall like silent sentries promising safety in their shadows. She was so close now. She could smell the familiar scent of home. She quickened her pace, eager to end her long and arduous journey.

The boy rode behind his father. He knew his father hated that wolf. Pa had brayed about having the animal's head mounted above his hearth so many times, and with such vigour, he had seen the saliva spray from his mouth whilst he cursed the 'creature' that stole his livestock and taunted him, stalking his dreams and rendering his nights sleepless. The boy wanted the thing dead. It had haunted his father's conscience for too long, torturing him with false hope before disappearing, leaving him no closer to catching it than before.

'I see it,' the voice of one of the men rang out.

'Let's catch it and put an end to it then; it has made a mockery of us and our livelihood for too long!' the voice of his father replied.

The wolf heard the men's shouts. She turned her head. She could see them approaching atop their horses. The she-wolf lowered her head and with a snarl began to run at her full speed, the wind kissing her face as she accelerated and the men behind her gave chase. Her powerful leg muscles powered her forward, faster and faster as she ran. Behind her she could hear the shouts of the men as they gained on her. She was close now. The scents of her den filled her and she ran faster than she had ever run before. A shot rang out, punctuating the cacophony of noise filling the night air. Beside her, a mountain of dirt erupted throwing chunks of mud and grass in a wide arc. She was around one hundred metres from the treeline now and she could hear the sound of the creek, which ran near her home. A second shot rang out but this time was accompanied by a short sharp yelp as the metal shot bit into the back of her leg. She fell to the ground whining in pain. Whimpering, she rose, staggering forward, her back leg trailing behind her like a limp doll. Behind her she heard a man dismount. There was a muffled thump as his thick boots landed on the grass. She heard his heavy breathing. She turned to face him, hackles raised, her muzzle pulled back into a snarl, exposing long fangs.

‘Got you ...’ he gloated, as he raised the gun. She snarled at him, a low growl sounding in her throat. As the third shot rang out across the night, it brought with it silence.

The boy watched the men slump the wolf’s now limp body over the pack pony. He stood looking at the place it had taken its last breath. He had seen the light fade from its eyes as its life-blood ran out, sinking into the ground around it. He had pictured it many times in his sleep, a menacing silhouette with glowing red eyes like the devil ... but this was no monster — it was just an animal ... a beautiful animal.

The way in which she moved ... fast, silent and deadly but with the grace and ease of a spider spinning its silken thread. Its pelt was almost as black as the nights in which it hunted and when it caught the moonlight it glistened like the purest crystals of mica.

As the other men began their long ride home calling for him to follow, the boy gazed into the shadows shrouding the tree line ... straight into a pair of bright, inquisitive amber eyes which shone in the moonlight as the wolf cub gazed back.

Paint



Author: Kathryn Wilkinson

Centre: Earlston High School

Qualification: Higher

Kathryn explores synesthesia, a blending of the senses, where every word, number or feeling feels like a distinct colour or pattern.

Red is the colour of his coat. The crumpled jacket hanging off a wiry frame. Scarlet hides on the edges of glasses too big for his face, magnifying eyes which catch mine a second before we collide. Tinges appear on his cheeks, my stammered apology overshadowing the scorching skin from the briefest of touches. When at last he talks, what tumbles out of his mouth is a burr of the North which leaves me wondering how he can babble so many words while still finding time to breathe.

He scrawls a phone number on the underside of my arm with a biro brighter than my face. Then leaves not boasting the seductive smirk he first captivates me with, but hiding a toothy beam under his drawn-up hood.

Maroon lines the fading jumper he wears to our first date, clashing with poppies he plucked from the local park. But red is flaming muscles, a stuffy nose and the blanket wrapped around my shoulders as I croak his name. The charred remnants of tomato soup are wiped from the walls as I slurp his second attempt, watching it rise in steamy breaths and dampen my flushed cheeks. Muffled humming drifts from a head bobbing along to its own beat, hair flopping as the radio buzzes in the background.

By the time my flu fades away, leaves burnt to a crisp orange litter the pavement. He drags me, grinning and spluttering, across bridges and swamps of sand and tree roots.

Amber light projects against the still bright sky, warning ships of cliffs hidden beneath murky waters. Sea air whips our stinging cheeks as we clamber across rocks slippery from moss to reach the edge of the world: a precipice we teeter on the edge of, perched precariously amid our tangled limbs. Fragile humming accompanies my vain effort to count the cinnamon-dustings of freckles across

the bridge of his crinkling nose. Whirlpools of sea air groan at the sight of his fingers swirling through my tangles of hair. In the misty reflection of his glasses I see the sun begin to dip behind the horizon, thick dabs of paint being flung on the undersides of clouds. What was once blue is now torched; burned by heat radiating out from the flushed globe dangled perilously across the water. Clouds tumble through every shade of gold, but all too soon the fireflies are a brighter light than the sky ever was.

Yellow is everywhere, but in the most fragile ways. It's in the soon faded twang of a ukulele being tuned; the sound reminding me of summer days as I gaze out to rain crashing vertically from charcoal clouds. It's under the faded mess of his holey Converse, which were glued to his feet until rain seeped through the frays, condemning him to a week of sneezing, sore throats and yellow-tinged skin. When the mug slips from his hands after I first call 'I love you,' it's canary ceramic shards which we find buried in the crevices of tiles for days afterwards. Yellow is a sanctuary that doesn't last.

By the time it fully fades, forest green adorns every door. Drowning under a patched quilt of snow and slush, the grass of the fields lies in wait of warmer months. We decorate the tree together, tying each other in knots of garish tinsel which is flung on any way. I see a twinkle in his eye when I find emerald mistletoe hanging from every corner, barely concealing the musty damp of his new apartment. Green is how he paints the walls, but it's also in my mother's eyes watching me stumble home at four in the morning. It's all over her disapproving glances when I smile as no-one watches, remembering time washing over me as the clocks whirl silently in his arms. Green reappears when I least expect it, in the snarl of the Father as his icy glare fixates on me at Mass.

Blue is the colour of him; his eyes the electric hue of a shattered sky on a day warmer than now. Blue is lips numb from cold and breath rising in vapour too thick to see through. It is callous fingers locked together in protest of prying eyes at the bus stop, eyes that roll in haughty condemnation before the lashings of sharp tongues screeching 'faggots' like a call from the underworld we surely belong in. Their insults loom behind us as we race to the only place I can call home, to be met by dusty veins of mould on bread. Sky turned a midnight velvet is our sanctuary; a promise of lost days being begrudged by nights that whirl past in a haze of laughter and fading notes from a piano. We dive amongst stars, forgetting the splitting headaches of piling work and malicious parents for a night which is over too soon.

Purple. The sight of it brings me crashing back to earth. It's everywhere; coiling his neck, his arm, his stomach ... ugly fingerprints stamped permanently, dark as night against drawn skin and pristine hospital sheets. Both time and my feet drag by as I stalk the hospital corridors, desperately arming myself with wine-coloured grapes and sickly smelling flowers, waiting for news that never arrives. Costumes a deep indigo swamp ghosts of nurses who march past with scraped back hair and sallow skin.

Violet emerges slower than the funeral march which thrives only in my nightmares. Pools of sunlight gradually drip down the edges of the door at daylight, and recede back across his face and up the wall with every sunset. Splayed shoots of lavender are a riot of washed-out colour; a mere plaster over the gaping wound of turmoil and pain. I'm tied to his bedside, watching his bruises fade through every shade of puce and mauve before one eye can open just a slit. Clumsy sentences are woven as slurred, stumbling speech spills from his mouth.

He tells of Fists and Boots and Blood. Of eyes like deep wells trained on him through the crack of a door booted open. Of rain shards slicing concrete. Of the first drops of blood; his favourite top ripped and elbow grazed as it smacked the pavement. Of the milk we'd run out of flooding cracks in the pavement.

My trembling fingertips dance across flower petals, letting raindrops fall onto the bedside. When the flow of words dries up his eyelids droop, and I watch as he falls into a deep slumber.

A single vein throbs on the temple of a nurse who tears off a discharge note and thrusts it into my hand.

His apartment is stale from still air and floating dust trapped in the light of an opened door. Our mornings are spent gazing out to the cool breeze of tree blossom and pale skies and heather and flowers. Ticking breaks the silence we are too scared to fill. Any trace of happiness leaves behind the taste of Parma Violets; artificial, overpowering and sickly sweet.

Lilac piercing the sky on a cool spring dawn is left unnoticed as he wakes from the suffocating depths of a nightmare, sobbing as the newspaper on our doorstep crumbles in the rain, ink pooling onto chalky pavements. Tonight, I find him teetering on the edge of the doorstep with all the stability of a rag doll and a trembling half-empty bottle of vodka in his hand.

Lilac is the lining of his red coat left hanging in the doorway; waiting, waiting, for a trace of breeze.

Immortal 88



Author: Arran R MacDonald

Centre: Plockton High School

Qualification: Higher

Arran's inspiration for this story comes from material he has read on Traditional Chinese painting, combined with his love of folklore.

I saw the gods, gliding across the wall as gracefully as an autumn breeze. They did not stop, nor divert, but advanced uniformly along the silken canvas, their long, intricate robes shimmering with an incandescent energy like that of candle flames. Gazes fixed ahead, they surged forward like rushing water through a landscape blurred with wisps of silver cloud. Unbroken. Unchallenged.

I stared at the painting, my hefty rucksack clinging to the moist sweat on my back, mercilessly cleaving into my shoulders and pressing my aching feet into the tiled floor. I recalled the chirpy voices of countless friends and relatives: 'Jessica, you should take a gap year in China!' I too had been ecstatic about the trip. However, trudging for a day through the endless sun-baked streets of Xi'an had started giving me second thoughts.

Billows of steam rolled out from the restaurant's kitchen, along with the sharp hiss of cooking oil and the chefs shouting orders. Rich, mouth-watering aromas filled the air. I stood in the foyer, and though my knees and joints screamed at me to sit down, I could not help marveling at the replicated piece of art against the wall. Eighty-Seven Immortals, by Wu Daozi; I had studied the painting before, but seeing it now, I noticed something new beneath the black ink and sheen of silk. It felt ... living. I could not explain why ...

'I always thought it rather bland.' I startled when the tepid voice touched my ear. Flicking my head backwards, I found a middle-aged Chinese man standing an arm's length away from me. His black hair and beard were seasoned with silver streaks and his eyes smiled with a warm serenity. Having cooled down from the sudden appearance of the stranger, I greeted him using whatever Mandarin I could muster: 'A, nín hǎo!'

He beamed. ‘Nǐ hǎo! Nǐ shì měi guó rén ma?’

The phonetics sailed over my head. I looked back, smiling nervously. Fortunately, satisfied that I had taken a step into his native language, he stepped swiftly back into mine. ‘You American?’

‘No, I’m from England. My name’s Jess. I’m here on my gap year to study Chinese culture.’

He raised his eyebrows. ‘Excellent! I noticed you admiring this painting — I think it’s quite bland, uninteresting. Not enough colour. What would you say?’

Still befuddled as to how I had entered this discussion, I did not hesitate to re-examine the painting and construct a mental analysis. ‘Where to begin? The artist exploits the monochromatic style well, considerable effort was put into the immaculate detail of the clothing and jewellery, and the brushwork for the ribbons is simply astounding — you can almost feel the breeze on your skin ...’

He roared. ‘Such long words! Xiǎo Jess, you are clearly a student, as you have not yet forgotten what all the long words mean!’

I chuckled, deciding I liked my new friend. He had a certain aura that made me appreciate, even marvel him. There was an element of lightness to him, in his personality and movement — he gently swayed like a willow tree on nimble feet and seemed to glow with wondrous energy.

I contemplated this. Then, to the joy of every fibre in my body he said, ‘You look rather exhausted. Let me buy you some lunch.’

Presently I was reclining as an ornate teapot tilted downward, pouring translucent liquid into two ceramic cups, the scent of jasmine gracing my nostrils. I raised one cup and deeply inhaled the steam curling off the brim, then exhaled the stress of the day. ‘So, xiǎo Jess, you have studied the Eighty-Seven Immortals. Have you studied other works by Wu Daozi?’

I took a prolonged sip of tea. ‘No, sadly not. Most of his works were destroyed. But the artist himself was one amazing fellow. When he made large public murals, flocks of people crowded round him to see him paint with a brush that swept around like a whirlwind.’

‘Ah yes, I have heard the legends! Once, the emperor Xuanzong sent him to Sichuan to paint the lush green waters of the Jialing river — upon return, Wu quickly painted the entire river from memory. All 150 kilometres of it — in one day!’

The conversation was now picking up momentum. ‘I know, some of the stories are mindblowing! Even the painter’s death is shrouded in legend. When he finished painting a landscape on the walls of Xuanzong’s palace, some say he actually stepped into the painting, entering a cave and inviting the emperor to follow. However, before the emperor could even blink, the entrance of the cave slammed shut with Wu inside and the painting vanished. No one ever saw the artist again.’

Two bowls embellished with vibrant blue calligraphy and containing a hearty portion of hot, soupy, meaty goodness, were placed on the table. My friend swept his chopsticks into his hand with effortless skill and plunged them into his bowl. ‘It never ceases to fascinate me; the legends one can find in this city. Xi’an is China’s oldest city, founded upon millennia of bountiful culture. I assume you have already seen Qin Shi Huangdi’s army?’

‘You mean the megalomaniac who crafted ranks of clay soldiers to accompany him in the afterlife?’ I took a rejuvenating slurp of noodles. ‘Yes, I visited the mausoleum this morning.’

The man laughed. ‘You must think Qin was insane. He was simply terrified of death. Even if you are the leader of a great civilisation with wealth, power, and millions of men who tremble in your presence, every living creature must still face the reality of death. However, when one has found the beauty in life, one need not fear death. Instead of being paranoid about the control over life and death, like Qin, it is far wiser to surrender control completely. For in this life the only thing we control is our attitude towards the present moment. By accepting this, we can appreciate both the good and the bad — in life and death.’

I hesitated to mull over this profound piece of insight. The man’s words sounded as though enriched with decades of experience. Seeing him in the opposite seat, I felt a spontaneous pang of sympathy and awe. His hands cupped around the ceramic bowl somehow appeared more aged, withered, feeble. And there seemed to be a mist in the pools of his eyes, portraying the eyes of a man who has seen many things during his time.

We ate, discussing many things, both old and new, and made merry, enjoying the spirit of each other's company. Finally, he rose, slid some cash onto the table and patted my shoulder affectionately. 'Zài jiàn, my friend. Take care.'

I watched the restaurant door swing shut behind him with a feeling of calm tranquility.

Perhaps it was because nobody I had met, in all the great vastness of the middle kingdom, had made me feel so at ease in my own skin. I barely noticed the waiter appear. He examined the cash and said, 'Excuse me, miss. Money not valid.'

I surfaced. 'What?'

The waiter scooped up a handful of coins and held them to my nose. 'You must pay for meal. This money not valid.'

I raised a coin for closer examination. The lamp-light revealed four words etched onto the silver surface:

開元通寶

I almost laughed aloud. This was an antique coin. It had not been used as an official currency since...

I lunged for the doorway. The foyer was vacant, the glass door revealing the ordinary hustle and bustle of the street. Yet there was something on the wall, unnoticed as I had come into the restaurant; a beautiful multichromatic mural, depicting a wide valley, the sides of which were ordained with snow and blossoming trees. Flora and fauna stretched across the white stone background, and, at the bottom of a cliff, stood the shadowed opening of a cave.

When the realisation thudded home, I turned to look once again at the *Eighty-Seven Immortals*. Unsurprisingly, the picture was bare and empty — its elegant procession had finally moved on. Yet I could make out another figure against the sheen of silk — a small, black figure with inky dark hair, running with stamina through the dense forest of his imagination, leaping over watercolour mountains, gliding through the emerald waters of a river, then his robes swept the air as he spun around faster than the flick of a brush, and vanished on the breeze.

Finding Peace



Author: Euan McDonald

Centre: Notre Dame High School

Qualification: National 5

Euan's cello teacher was given an antique cello that was found in an attic, which is the inspiration for this piece.

Tom sat slumped in the dirty corner beneath the stairs, his long blonde hair covering his eyes like a shield while his peers sat in the social area laughing loudly. It was silent. He liked silence. He allowed Bach's Cello Suite No.1 to enter his head in a feeble attempt to block out everything around him. He knew they were judging him; he knew they were thinking of new methods to torment him; he knew they were bullies. He longed for nightfall, when the lights were off, and the peaceful music began slowly playing in his head. Every day his torment intensified as the verbal attacks reached their crescendo.

Music was his sanctuary. His only escapism. His portal to another dimension allowing him to disappear. The clear, haunting sound echoed in his bedroom as he lost himself in the music. His eyes shut and his body moved in rhythm. The bow glided across the strings like an elegant ice skater circling the rink.

His grandpa was his biggest fan – he was his adoring audience. A former cellist, he loved listening attentively to his keen student. Tom spent hours playing for him, mastering his technique. Yet now the redundant cello sat in his wardrobe hidden under piles of clothes. His tormentors were operating a remote-control, controlling the volume of abuse and controlling him. Every day it was as if the bullies had engraved an entrance into his brain — unwelcome guests reminding him constantly that he was different, that he was weak. The verbal torrent whirled round his head; louder and louder the noise became. The music was muted.

As the music stopped, the strings of their relationship seemed broken. Although Tom felt guilty as he witnessed his grandpa's health deteriorating, he could not bring himself to play. Music had invited the bullies' hatred and now the door had to remain shut. Returning from school, he locked himself away and wept. He tried so hard to think of happy memories ...

Sitting across from his grandpa on the couch, they played another nerve-racking game of chess. The master had taught him all the moves which would win him the game; however, the contest was always so close as they knew each other's tricks. 'Well done, my boy! I've taught you well!' his grandpa laughed. They were never happier than when he played one of his grandpa's favourite pieces on the cello. Vivaldi's concerto in E minor filled the room while his grandpa closed his eyes, listening intently. Giving him a round of applause, he proclaimed, 'Well done! Amazing! You'll be playing professionally one day, my boy.' They smiled at each other.

'How's school going?' his grandpa asked, struggling to catch his breath. Tom's eyes lowered. 'What about your exams?' Silence ... Tom hated speaking about school as he knew it upset both him and his grandpa. He didn't want to talk about it. Since the bullies started their incessant abuse, his school work and results had suffered. He couldn't concentrate. He was so lost in his own torment that he failed to notice his grandpa's failing health. Now seeing his pale, drawn face, he tried to cheer him up with a game of chess but the constant crackle in his chest and the wheeze as he tried to dismiss his condition told him that his grandpa had his own pain to endure. He now slept downstairs, as another bout of pneumonia had weakened him further. He seemed distant somehow, his eyes lacking their usual sparkle. Tom wished he could do more, wished he could play but instead he sat with his grandpa in silence; their relationship like an instrument that had not been played in years.

Eventually his grandpa fell asleep on the worn-out couch and Tom retreated upstairs to fetch him an extra blanket. To his surprise, he found the attic door in his grandpa's room ajar. His eyes lit with excitement while his hands fidgeted as if solving a Rubik's cube. He placed his hands over the badly painted door knob and the hinges let out a high pitch screech which echoed through the house. Streaks of light from the bedroom lit the pitch-black attic. He gasped. Rubbing his eyes, he couldn't believe what he was seeing. His pupils dilated with the change of light as he noticed a familiar shape in the eaves. Crouching on his hands and knees, he crawled towards this beckoning shadow. On reaching it, he found his prize — a dusty, antique cello. The rich grain of the wood held huge knots that expressed the age of this creature. With great care, he wiped the dust from the majestic instrument. Apprehensively, he slid the cello perfectly between his legs. He picked up the long, elegant bow, placing it gently on the strings. Shutting his eyes, he took a deep breath and caressed the lowest note. It was a living, breathing animal that roared with

the rich, mellow sounds that he knew so well. Old, dog-eared, classical music lay on the floor. Tentatively, he gathered the sheets and placed them on the damaged, wooden ledge. He began to play the opening chords of Dvorak's cello concerto in B minor. He was up there for hours. The bow flew across the strings hitting every note. This majestic creature came to life in the empty attic as the notes bounced off the walls resonating and ringing in his ears. It was magical — as if it had a soul of its own. They were breathing together to some never-ending slow deep rhythm; they breathed and listened as the world came and went, as the doors locked on the bullies and their voices silenced while the music filled his soul. He was ready to show his grandpa. He sprinted downstairs and found him drifting off to sleep.

Tom played. As the final chords echoed, his grandpa fought to open his eyes and for a moment Tom saw the sparkle return. Then, smiling weakly, his eyes closed.

They had both found their peace.

Calm



Author: Molly Fletcher

Centre: Islay High School

Qualification: National 4

Molly's story is inspired by her surroundings on Islay, where she has often wondered what would happen if she was out walking and fell into a bog.

The hills, rising up around me, seemed hazy in the morning sunlight. There was dew on the ground and midges were biting. I could smell the sweet, dirt smell of bracken overriding the traditional scent of this glen's cows and heather. My red cattle plodding along in front, tails swinging in time. Hoof prints cut a clean trail in the dew, my foot prints adding to the trail behind. The three dogs charged around in the white grass somewhere to the side of me, the cows mooed softly for their calves, the big bull followed along at the back, the occasional squawk from a pheasant or grouse as it exploded into flight the dogs have put up added to the perfect morning.

This is what I had always wanted to do, mind you though it wasn't always this idyllic in the winter with the wind and the rain.

As we approached the ditch that they always fuss over, the peacefulness of the morning disappeared and there was lots of shouting and stamping before the first calf crossed. Soon after that nearly all the cows had made it across.

The last two turned around and the cow with the black face and a pale creamy body had that mad glint in its eye that cows get when they are panicked or angry. She turned and ran at me with her tail up, the other cow now left to her own devices stayed contentedly munching on a bit of grass. I scrambled backwards, tripped over a tussock crawling and waving my stick to scare her away. The cow ran straight towards and over the top of me. I heard a loud crack and thought it was a bone breaking. The cow had trodden on my stomach and my leg. I suspected broken ribs, at least cracked, and definitely a broken leg.

But as I examined myself, amazingly there appeared to be no lasting damage, other than a searing pain across my ribs like someone stabbing a white-hot poker with every breath.

As I searched around for my stick to go and deal with Mrs Psycho cow over there, the little brown dog came up and ran in circles, barking, generally making a nuisance of herself. I found my stick and threw it at her. Apparently, my stick had made the cracking noise.

I picked up the longer end and walked over to the second cow that was munching on the grass by the ditch. Even shaken, I was still able to chase the other cow over the ditch. I decided to leave Mrs Psycho cow to it until I could come with the safety of the Argo Cat.

The dog was back and running around me, barking. She pulled at my waterproof trousers, I grabbed the back of her neck and threw her into the ditch. She scrambled back up and I felt the tug on my waterproofs letting me know she hadn't been scared off. As I searched my pocket for the ever-handly baler twine to slip round her neck, there was a sharp tearing sound, indicating the end of the waterproofs.

I turned around furiously, I had had enough. I grabbed her tying the baler twine round her, 'HEEL YOU BLOODY DOG'.

She looked up with the fabric in her mouth, and grinned. And just as everything had settled down, she caught site of a bird and bolted forward, catching me unawares and ripped the rope from my hand. 'Cursed dog,' still at least she was out of the way.

Just as I reached the place we leave the cows, I heard a strangled yelp. I thought nothing of it to start off with, the stupid dog had probably been bitten by a snake. But as the second yelp reached me, I sighed in resignation and turned in the direction it had come from.

I neared the place she was barking from, I realised it came from a bog. I ran towards it as the yelping turned to howling. As I navigated the last corner I saw her frantically trying to stay afloat in what was probably the deepest bog on the island, still clutching the bit of fabric. The baler twine was lying out across the bog just out of the reach of the stick. I had to get her out without harming myself. But that would prove to be easier said than done.

As I lay on my belly with my arm outstretched trying to find something for my feet to push against with the stick out in front. As I found a rock and scrambled forwards the dog paddled frantically towards me, I could see she was tiring and didn't have much time left.

I strained out over the bog, I could feel myself growing more and more tired, I had one try left. I grabbed out onto her and managed to grab her ear by the tip as she paddled frantically towards me. I was able to take a firmer hold and pulled, but as I pulled I slid forward into the bog. Tink clawed at me and scrabbled herself to safety, the fabric still gripped tightly between her jaws like a comfort blanket, mud and peat water filled my mouth and in all my clothing. I was so stupid, no one would be coming for hours, I was such an idiot, and all for a stupid dog, 'should have just left it to die'. But deep down I knew I would never be able to leave an animal to die. I felt the mud weighing me down, I struggled to breathe the weight pressing down on my chest. Panic was flooding my body, replacing the earlier frustration. As I relaxed I felt myself sinking deeper the mud reaching up to my shoulder. I had to get out. I had to get out now. I focussed on my breathing, knowing that panicking would be the end.

'Stay calm' I muttered, as the mud filled my ears...

'Stay calm.'

Calm.

The Metal Worker's Daughter



Author: Elspeth Nicol

Centre: Ross High School

Qualification: Higher

Elspeth's inspiration for 'The Metalworker's Daughter' was a real fresco from Pompeii of a girl with a basket of flowers.

Cautiously, the girl slipped past the sun-bleached wooden door. She shut it behind her and breathed out a relieved sigh. Stepping deftly between the overgrown herbs, she dropped her wicker basket onto the warm stone bench beside the terracotta fountain and settled back to enjoy the garden.

The busy sounds outside faded into nothingness and she felt as if she had tiptoed into her own hidden world. She knew she would be punished if anyone ever found out that she was creeping into their neighbour's neglected courtyard. But sometimes, especially if she had been up since dawn, hauling out panniers of rough iron tools to her father's market stall, she just couldn't resist grabbing her basket of lunch and stealing away to the calm and quiet of this green space. It was so different from the hustle-bustle of the city — the only voices here were the birdsong all around and the gentle splashing of the fountain's freely-flowing water behind her.

The pigeons, startled by her entrance, came fluttering back to roost, and the girl knew that if she waited, still and silent, they would come close enough to touch. But she could not always afford to take so much time. If she were away too long, her father would erupt, she knew, so she wanted to savour her few moments of liberty. The girl reached hungrily for the basket of bread and fruit, but recoiled at the sight of the smuts and smithy grime on her hands. She knelt and plunged her arms deep into the cool water, the rust and dirt from the morning's work disappearing into the slow current, uncovering smooth skin the colour of the olives growing on the ashy slopes of the mountain nearby. Kicking aside sandals gritty with iron and dust, she rubbed her feet in the clean, sandy earth, drawing branching curls and spirals with her toes while relishing the feeling of the warmth on her soles. As she did, she noticed a splash of white against the brown stones. A small brave flower was pushing up through the cracked paving. 'Chamomile,' she said to herself — the name

came naturally to her. ‘You shouldn’t be growing here, you need more space.’ She crouched to rub her thumb carefully over the flower and savoured the scent, recalling long-buried memories. She had been a tiny child in the corner of the workshop while her father had been working like Vulcan at his furnace. Crouched down, scratching pictures on the floor with rusty scraps, she had been startled to realise that the ground itself was trembling. The metal tools around her had fallen, trapping her and cutting into her knee. Her mother had freed her and cleansed the ragged wound with a chamomile salve. Their house had been full of such fresh scents back then, but that hadn’t lasted for long. She had been so young when her mother had faded and wilted like a flower in the dark, dying of a strange wasting disease. The flowers had disappeared, along with her father’s smile.

With the scent of chamomile still lingering on her fingers, she pulled from her basket a wedge of bread and handful of sweet grapes that she had bought from the market after her father had ordered her home from his stall. He frowned upon her helping with his business, but he had no choice. One child, and a daughter at that, was not the family he had anticipated. But she, she relished the chance that working with him afforded her to come outside and be part of the life of the bustling port city, to witness all the varieties of people — the merchants with their exotic robes and foreign accents; the nobles with their exquisite clothes and the entertainers, craftsmen and soldiers — who surged through the crowded thoroughfares. She loved, too, to smell the sweet fragrance of the herbs, flowers and food on stalls mingling with the more earthy, sulphurous smell that hung over the streets. However, when even the distractions of the city seemed too much for her, what she wanted to do was slip away to this, her secret place.

And now her father was insisting that she would be married to someone who would carry on the family business after him. She would be trapped in this life forever — she would suffocate in this place, fenced in by a cage of metal tools, with no chance to breathe and no way to break out. Her head drooped and she gazed at the now-scuffed circles she had sketched in the dust. Almost instinctively, she retraced them with the tip of her finger. This was what she loved to do. How she longed for a life where she could draw all day! There were artists in the city. She had glimpsed beautiful frescoes in houses and courtyards around town, and had lingered to watch the artists at their work. If she could run a metalworker’s stall, why could she not become a painter? She could choose a path in life; a path which would allow her to create works of endless variety, filled with light and colour and beauty. Her father would scoff, and say that it could never happen. Women did not do such work. But, with a

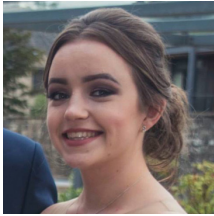
defiant tilt of her chin, she resolved to prove him wrong. She would determine her own future.

A sudden gust of wind disturbed the dust, and with it, the girl's thoughts. She realised that she needed to leave. Briskly she shook the last of the crumbs out of her basket for the pigeons and the birds scattered into the sky with a clap of wings. She lifted her head to gaze as the flock circled in the haze and flew away out over the city. Bending down, she picked a handful of bright flowers from the nearby grass. They would remind her of her time spent here, and of the colours of the frescoes in her mind's eye. Her father wouldn't approve of her bringing flowers back inside the house that was for sure: it would remind him too much of things he didn't want to be thinking about, but she did it anyway. Now was the time for her to make her own mark. She freed the sprig of chamomile from the stones and deftly wove it into the edge of her basket.

Retying her sandals, she sighed. The garden slumbered under the golden sky and the songbirds perched in the fragrant almond blossom. Sunlight on cascading water threw tiny rainbows into the sleepy air. She said a silent goodbye to it all, not knowing how long it might be until she would be able to return, but now she had a vision for her future. Surely, the Fates would find a way to change her father's plans for the rest of her life.

Thus she took a deep breath and strode resolutely out of the tranquillity of the garden and into the commotion and confusion of the city of Pompeii.

A Journey to the Stars



Author: Iona Morrison

Centre: West Lothian College

Qualification: HNC Creative Industries: Media and Communication

Iona was inspired to write a short story about an individual with Down's syndrome to promote a positive message about their talents and capabilities.

Yes. I have Down's syndrome. But does that make me different from the rest of civilisation? Yes, actually. But not in the way you would think. To give you an overview of my life, Down's syndrome means I have an extra copy of the 21st chromosome. My facial features have been designed in a special way and height is a factor I wish not to discuss. Some people say I have a 'learning disability' but I know more about the universe and humans than any of them. Mother says it is because I struggle with getting ready in the morning and making myself food but that is what mothers are there to do, is it not? Forget all of that though, the most important thing you need to know about me is that I am going to be a famous actor!

I want to see the stars. I want to hold them in my delicate hands and let the points prick holes in me. Of course, I know this dream is far from reality, but in my imagination it is the closest thing in my reach. The only place where I can reach the stars is when I'm standing centre stage.

Rise Up Theatre Group, my second home. It does not seem that long ago when I took my first step into the mysterious place of acceptance and friendship, something that was quite unfamiliar to me. Mrs Hunter welcomed me with a hug. The greatest gesture a human can offer. It is strange to think that once I was forgotten in the picture-perfect world of celebrities and fashion, and now I can be centre of attention, centre of the stage and at the centre of my hopes and dreams. When I stand on stage, looking out at the blank stare of the empty auditorium, I feel a rush of emotions engulf my body and take me up into the skies. All imperfections and insecurities are locked away in a box of nothingness. Although I read the lines off a page, I take them as my own and rewrite their meaning. I am free to be myself and am confident that nothing can stand in my way.

I worry about the final performance though. Although I am familiar with every movement and every word, I worry. What if I am judged? What if I am mocked? Or slated? What if people laugh? What if people cry? Or hate me? I speak to father for reassurance.

‘For God’s sake Elijah, can you not leave me alone for two minutes?’ So I wait. Two minutes go by and I ask again.

‘Elijah, I told you to give me a minute.’ This is what I do not understand. Why am I labelled with having learning difficulties when father does not even know how long one minute is? It is not that father does not love me. He tells me he does and gives me a hug before leaving for work every morning. I think he just finds it difficult to communicate with me and put up with me for long periods of time. I might be difficult to talk to, but does that mean I do not deserve help in the times when I am struggling? Sometimes father gets a little frustrated with me. I can see the vein in his head throbbing to the rhythm of the heart in his chest. Normally when father turns me away, mother is there to help, but she is at work just now. Mother is beautiful. She is kind to me and gives me the greatest hugs.

I walk away and go to my room, remembering what father had just said to me, I try to keep my face smiling but it strains and does the complete opposite. As I walk towards the stairs that lead to safety, I reflect on the list of moments where I have been shut out and turned away by someone who I thought would have helped me.

‘Children who are born with Down’s syndrome are a lot to deal with. Have you thought about having a termination?’ Doctor Grey to mother the day she found out she was having a baby with Down’s syndrome.

‘Elijah you cannot play with us. We do not want to be your friend.’ Kyle Lewis on the first day of playgroup.

‘Really? You want to be an actor? Is that not a bit ambitious?’ Uncle Terry to me on my tenth birthday.

‘You should probably keep him away from the public eye, you don’t want people to see him and make fun of him, do you?’ Katie from next door to mother when mother told her I had joined a drama club.

‘You look funny! Why are you not locked up somewhere?’ A random stranger who knows nothing about me when I was sitting outside the shops waiting for mother.

Can I not feel pain like everyone else? Of course I can! My heart still aches when I think of loss and my stomach still churns when I think of death. My eyes still see the pain of nature and my ears still hear the silent screams of victims. So why do you think I do not feel pain? Is it because I look different, talk differently or maybe it is because we do not have the same likes and dislikes. Does this mean I should be dehumanised and treated like the toy you get for Christmas but never play with?

No! It does not!

Our society teaches us not to interact with strangers and to act like the popular kids so that you can fit in. But who would want to fit in with a group of people who mock and bully those who simply need an extra, caring hand along the way? Sometimes life feels like a battle I am constantly losing and the only fight I have left in me is that within my dreams.

I do not care what shoes you wear or what car you drive or even what your job is. I want to be able to express myself and not feel guilty about it. My mind and my body are overcome with emotion when I hear the negative comments of those who cannot accept individuals with special needs. It hurts my feelings. I try not to care what they think but how can I ignore it when I know it drives a dagger not only into my heart but into the hearts of those whom I love the most. Mother, Father, Mrs Hunter, Nathan, Noah and Aimee; they do not deserve this. The consequences of hate and war are things that are ignored by a bully.

Standing centre stage with a single spotlight is what I dream of. If Lauren Potter and Jamie Brewer had listened to the negativity, then they would not be where they are today. American Horror Story was my life for a very long time but only through the view from a computer screen. The journey they have been on cannot have been easy. But it would certainly have been worthwhile. I prepare myself for the bullets that will be aimed at me and I prepare to fight until the end. I will be centre of attention, I will be centre of the stage and I will reach the centre of my hopes and dreams. The stage erases the faces of those who mock and highlights the faces of those who love. I hate the way individuals are treated. There are many injustices in this world and someone needs to put a stop to it. I will not let anyone stand in my way and I will keep climbing until I reach the top.

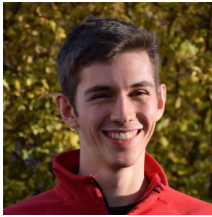
I open the lid of my laptop and watch the apple light up with power. I go in search of acceptance and happiness on the world wide web. I know it seems silly but I have no other place to go. I get frustrated when the internet does not work. Time is precious and not something I wish to waste. I watch the loading sign spin but concentrate on the speck of dust on my lamp shade. It is in the shape of a leaf. One from Penny Lane Park. I remember when mother used to take me there. I wonder when mother gets home.

Loaded.

With the soft bits of my fingertips I search for YouTube, hoping to find someone to look up to who is just like me. My eyes move around the screen taking in every pixel possible. I turn up the volume and wipe away a single finger print that was left on the screen. My heart is filled with passion and love for the arts and my excitement levels rise for the next time I get to be on stage. My attention is subsided by the image of a mother and baby elephant. The comments of those who slated me are now locked inside the part of my brain I never wish to visit.

It is getting late now. I put on my striped pyjamas and tuck myself under the sheets to keep out the cold. I like to leave the curtains open so that I can look out and see the rest of the world. I can feel the reflection of the moon and the stars in my eyes. I wonder if that is what it feels like to have millions of eyes glaring at you as you recite the lines of Hamlet. Or Macbeth. A yawn creeps out from the corner of my mouth and my eyelids fall together. Maybe tomorrow mother could take me to see the stars; maybe tomorrow will be the last ...

Chicory Black Baudelaire



Author: James Rowland

Centre: Dornoch Academy

Qualification: Advanced Higher

In his story, James tries to encapsulate minutely how it feels to grieve for someone one barely knew.

It ticks in perfect harmony with the silence of the room. Night is restless. I am cool in cool clothes. I lie on my bed; the clock hangs above on nothing but air. The face stares vaguely down on me — a sentinel in the dusk. An old travel clock battered by the trundle and murmur of unknown train-carriages; rolled through Brighton Beach; packed in Meaux; found in an antique shop just off Soho square. And then — years later — gifted to me by vague acquaintances, people who gave things to people they barely knew. It presents a gloss of chicory black; glows in the dark stillness of my room; listens to my slow breathing and the faint wing-beat of my eyes. It is a piano with only two notes — what then, is its music?

*Trois mille six cents fois par heure, la Seconde
Chuchote: Souviens-toi! — Rapide, avec sa voix
D'insecte, Maintenant dit: Je suis Autrefois,
Et j'ai pompé! ta vie avec ma trompe immonde!¹*

I am intrigued by its presence and function — yet the memories it is bound by are webbed with regret. It ticks, neither slowly, nor fast, but with twenty-four hours of life — twenty-four hours less. The sun moves around my room whether I am there or not. The sun is a cat made of light, moving silently — glowing softly on wall and window and ledge; on eddies of dirty clothing, in patches and chequers on the floor. The cat is with me when I nap in the siesta — with me and without me — my hand reaches out to feel fur. I grasp nothing but the sense of time. The cat hisses, bolts; darkness; ticking — I am lying on my bed and the hands of the clock are both signpost and omen.

1. All quotations except the last are L'Horloge by Charles Baudelaire

*Le Plaisir vapoureux fuira vers l'horizon
Ainsi qu'une sylphide au fond de la coulisse;
Chaque instant te dévore un morceau du délice
À chaque homme accordé pour toute sa saison.*

The curtains soften the morning light; shafts glow with dust down onto the floor. I am in halfsleep. Through the house I wander, my parents, sister, still asleep. The silence is sweet and soft and surly. I wander through the rooms that writhe out in a dovetail; our dogs barely lift their eyelids at me. The cold Sunday morning is faintly sunned, clouds rolling off the hills as I rolled out of bed — only silent. Low in my stomach it is still there — a slow beat. A ticking. With each fleeting beam — as of car headlights passing me by in the dark — I recall an image. It is like a pulsing image gaining in bloody clarity with every passing second: a driveway, rocky; laburnums, now blossoming blurry-like; fragile glimpses of a bungalow; they are sitting, standing, moving, laughing, talking. Then they are gone, somehow.

*Souviens-toi que le Temps est un joueur avide
Qui gagne sans tricher, à tout coup! c'est la loi.
Le jour décroît; la nuit augmente, Souviens- toi!
Le gouffre a toujours soif; la clepsydre se vide.*

Each day I leave my room, I stand in the doorway, look back. Neither the crumpled duvet nor the books on my bookshelves have moved; yet the clock is moving; it twirls its chicory face. In prehensile doubt, I think of the clock as divine; it grows and swells before my eyes. The hands reach out, through the plastic cover, grasping at my skin. The two hands pluck at my flesh, find the zip at the back of my neck — in a moment I am a paroxysm of questions. The next, my skin is intact. I shake myself, leave the room, and behind me the madman mumbling each second the same words:

*Horloge! Dieu sinistre, effrayant, impassible,
Dont le doigt nous menace et nous dit: Souviens-toi!
Les vibrantes Douleurs dans ton coeur plein d'effroi
Se planteront bientôt comme dans une cible;*

In the time between then and now, I am constantly recounting the steps toward the house. My infantile feet tread on shaded gravel; the quilted world I walk through is the past. The sun is not a sun. The sun is not a star. In the sky, oscillating, the Travel Clock watches down upon its world. The colours are phosphor dots running — the saturation is electric — old trees hiss and sizzle.

It is a universe construed from telephone wires and thick metallic voices. Echoing voices dancing or clapping — what do they say? I walk along the path; in one step — or three hundred? I am there now. The laburnum flowers are swaying; laburnum flowers moulded from amperes. The voices are familiar. I see myself, with my mother, father, sister — who are the other two people? I can see their faces, but then they turn and —

*Remember! Souviens-toi! prodigue! Esto memor!
(Mon gosier de métal parle toutes les langues.)
Les minutes, mortel folâtre, sont des gangues
Qu'il ne faut pas lâcher sans en extraire l'or!*

I do remember. I promise I do. That is the torment. People should fade away, remembered by friends or relations. But I am not that; friend, no; relation, no; I am a child in the past, given a Travel Clock by people I didn't even know. So, I stand here. On the edge of the world. The edge of the world is a graveyard beside a neglected church in the middle of nowhere Scotland, Schottland, Écosse. I don't carry flowers. I don't even know what to say. But in my hands I hold the Travel Clock — a twinkling, chicory black reminder; an alarm for every second of the day. The plastic chicory backing snaps away in my fingers. It ticks, ticks, ticks — until I prise the double AAs away from the soup of the universe. The hands stop; the hands have never moved so slowly. There is silence. This world is silent, silent — quiet. Then there is a rumble; the laburnums quiver as candles quiver in drafts through old, shaking houses. I look up in this hazy, lackaday daydream. Where once the sun was (and had never been), where once the clock had hung: a void that stretches out, covering the universe. I recall, reclaim and recoil, covering my eyes —

*Tantôt sonnera l'heure ou le divin Hasard,
Où l'auguste Vertu, ton épouse encor vierge,
Où le Repentir même (oh! la dernière auberge!),
Où tout te dira Meurs, vieux lâche! il est trop tard!*

I wake up with the warm feeling of slobber on my hand. Our dogs sniff around my room. Unbeknownst to them is the chaos that circulates in my mind — I lurch up. It is unquestionably late in the day; yet, the hands are stuck on three minutes past two. I keep staring, expecting movement. Not removing my eyes, I go to the curtains. Throwing them apart, the clock is bathed in sharp shallow light. It no longer ticks in perfect harmony with the silence of the room. It is the silence. I look out of the window. In that moment, the poem which has gyrated for an eternity spasms away; replaced by faint, now growing, swelling words: something newer, something changed.

But despite the swish and swash and hum drum of questions unanswered,
despite the scent of metal radiating off the vaulted ceiling of memory, iron is not
iron — as the sun is not a sun — iron will always be chicory black plastic:

“There are entire nights

I would take back.

Nostalgia is a thin moon,

disappearing

*into a sky like cold,
unfeeling iron.²*

Kaye Adams

With fictional fantasy worlds of wizards and goblins to compete with, at times it can feel like non-fiction will just never be as engaging and exciting by comparison, but that is far from reality.

Every morning on my radio show I hear stories and opinions ... real life stories and opinions ... which enrapture and enthrall me. So often, I will silently marvel to myself 'You couldn't make it up!'

And you don't need to make it up because life throws at us the most incredible experiences and events, but there is great, great skill in examining those experiences and events, interpreting them, dissecting them, challenging them and presenting them to an audience in an intriguing and relevant manner.

It requires a combination of critical thinking and a bold writing style and you will see both of those talents demonstrated in abundance here, in the next few pages of *Write Times 2*.

Subjects covered range from the importance of supporting local libraries, to political decisions affecting women's reproductive rights around the world, to a celebration of introverts and the contribution they make to society, to the impact good design has on modern lives.

Engaging a reader in today's fast-paced world is no easy task, but it's one that these confident young writers have tackled with great skill and verve.

So when you're next looking to be challenged or entertained, you know where to look.

Kaye Adams

TV and radio presenter

Non-Fiction

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Nyumbani Means Home



Author: Michelle Musyoka

Centre: Eastwood High School

Qualification: National 5

Michelle's inspiration to write this essay was her cultural upbringing, experiencing both Scottish and Kenyan culture.

When thinking of a topic to write this essay about, I came up with a generous handful of acceptable ideas and started on them. I found that when it came to writing these ideas it was difficult to articulate the emotions felt in a way that would do these cherished moments justice. I racked my brain for a feasible topic to tackle ... and then I had my own custom, personalised Eureka! The common theme that was found throughout my proposed topics were that they all linked to family, to my identity and to my home away from home, Kenya. This brought me back to a moment when my uncle picked me up from school. He asked me if ‘In a hypothetical alternate dimension in which you are an Olympic athlete, what team would you compete in, Great Britain or Kenya?’ and still to this day I haven’t been able to give a straight answer because, honestly, this question wasn’t about where my personal documents told me I was from, this was about where my heart belongs. Where was it that I could really call home. Great Britain or Kenya?

My upbringing is something different. Walking through the door of my home was like a one-way ticket to all things Kenya. If it wasn’t the oil painted Massais hung on the wall or the tasteful scent of pilau spices being boiled into rice that tickled your taste buds, if it wasn’t all of that topped off the experience then it was definitely the rhythmical hum of comforting Kenyan gospel music whispering in the background. My home was a magical place to me, with my mother scolding and consoling me in both Swahili and English. Looking back, my life was certainly a different way of life to that of my friends. However, when I was younger, my life never really felt that different or abnormal until in primary school when I casually told my class about feeding a giraffe in Kenya on my summer holidays and quirked at their faces of astonishment; or when Parents’ Evening rolled around and my parents would talk to me in Swahili, which sounded like gibberish to everyone else. Though my childhood was not short of any Kenyan influence, it equally

contained its fair amount of Scottish-ness to it. My childhood can be compared to a cup of piping hot herbal tea, infused with many flavours that combine and harmonise to create a pleasant and often unique end product.

As far as the Scottish influence in my life goes most of it came from outside of the home. It came from my friends, my teachers and the media as well. I could have easily been homeschooled and sheltered from things like Burns Suppers, Irn Bru, Billy Connolly.

These things didn't necessarily affect my parents that greatly, they could just have kept me at home and immersed me in purely Kenyan culture. To be fair that may have resulted in me learning Swahili at a much younger age and with much more ease, but my parents didn't care about raising my brother and I in the exact same way as they were raised, that's one of the reason they moved here. They revelled in the fact that their children could be exposed to a cocktail of cultures and that was evident through our home as well. With a St. Andrew's Cross neatly tucked into our cupboard next to the Kenyan Massai shield to represent the consciousness of both cultures' traditions. The bottle of whisky tucked away from my sparkling innocent eyes in the cabinet next to the Amarula to represent the blend of each culture's tastes. This resulted in me not being totally out of touch of my friends' life experience, like mastering the Gay Gordons or calling their uncles and aunties by their first name (which is completely unheard of in African culture as a whole); and I was able to relate to them more easily.

My parents realised that simply showing me Kenyan culture wasn't the way to fully incorporate my African side into my life. Therefore since the malleable age of four, my family and I take a three or four week trip to Kenya every two or so years. This experience was vital for me as it let me meet my extended family and become close to them at a young age, rather than meeting them as an adult and finding it awkward to feel fully part of my own family. These trips truly shaped who I am as a person: they let me strip back from the technology-centred, narcissistic, fame-hungry world we live in, and have allowed me to focus on the real raw meaning of life: love, companionship, generosity and humility. My Gran lives in the dry, chapped lips of the Kenyan landscape where the heat boils your skin till sores surface. The type of place where the team dynamic of this small town is crucial to their way of life and growing up seeing and feeling this cosy vibe of togetherness and oneness plays a great part in shaping me to be a greatly empathetic person that feeds off causing sneaky smiles to be slipped momentarily from under glum faces and giggles held back by stubborn rotten moods.

Not to say that I couldn't experience this soul maturation in Scotland but there was something striking about being shown how to milk a cow by the calloused hands of your grandfather that sticks with you more than a ten-minute chat in class about being a good person.

In the passing years, I've learned that I have no definite home and I don't need to. I've been matured and refined through many countries and to pick one to be my home would be utterly blasphemous. Honestly in this multicultural, multiethnic society we live in there is no need for set titles to be placed on you. I'm not Kenyan-Scottish or Scottish-Kenyan. I'm Michelle Mwendu Nyawira Musyoka, daughter of all countries and citizen to none.

Becus a hae a sister a hae a friend



Author: Katie Wilson

Centre: Buckie High School

Qualification: National 5

Katie comes from a small north east village in Scotland, where family means a lot. This piece is about being close to her sister.

Yur a wee rascal but a love yih. Ih day a met yi a wis so chuffed ah hid ah wee sister and ad hid a wee pal tae play wee ma dollies and can iways be up tae mischief wee, cos ats fit yi dee fan yur wee. Yi git let off wee heeps, it's ace! Noo we hiv grown up it isna is fun is it use tae be, wish a cid go back tae the times we'd jist play mammies n daddies wee oor wee bairns oot on the street till mammie shouted us for denner and we'd baith race in tae git supper and we'd chuck it doon oor throats so we cid go back oot and play till the street lights come oan and we hid tae head hame for a shower afore bed time cus we hid school. I jist wish yi wis at young foriver cus a miss times like es; they wis the best.

Ah mind ih times we'd sit and play wee oor Barbies; we made wee hooses for em tae bide in, we use tae hae scraps ana fa wis haen fit barbie. Mam musta cracked up it us cus ats just silly! Mind we iways left ih dollies hooses set up so we cud play wee em ih next day. Mind the dug wid iways come and wreck it though she'd skim her wee leggings across aahin. Use tae piss us off cus we wid hiv tae mak the hooses ah agen; wiz just hassle. Mam use tae crack up fan we put the barbies in the bath cus the hair wid go aawye. We just thought it wis a pool for the Barbies it the time; it was the little things in life that satisfied us.

Yur nae just ah sister tae ma yur ma best pal ana. We hiv good laughs ih gither, and I'd be so lost wee oot yi in ma life! For years ah ma life I've iways shared a room wee yi, but fan we move to our new house it will be different cus we're getting separate rooms, but am sure we can kip in one of our beds ih gither cus I'll miss sharing wee yi. But a do hiv tae say am nae gan tae miss yur mess yi leave aawye. Tests ma patience fan yi dee at and fan yi hink yi cin git let aff we using ma clothes n ah ma makeup. Theres nae chance. I dinna go oot tae work fir yi ti use ma stuff. Ah tell mam ana, in she disna hink nithin of it. It's

perfectly fine in her world! Different if it was yi using hers, she'd defiantly git pissed off! Yi divna even ask for shotty either; ah just see yi wee em oan.

Yur one of the funniest folk a kane. Yi niver fail tae mak ma laugh wee yir witty jokes that arna even funny sum times... Am nae gan tae lie. Bit am so proud the wye yi hiv grown up tae be an intelligent bonny quiney. Am jealous ah yur lang skinny legs and skinny tummy, in yur gorgeous lang blonde hair that a wid just love tae hae. A wish a hid a natural tan like you so a dinna need tae use the fake stuff ah use ah the time! Yur such a confident quiney, and your determined to try stuff oot .Yur like a daredevil. Ah hope yi grow up to have the best future iver cus yi definately deserve it, and a hope yi find the love of yur life. Yur gan tae break a lot of hearts cus you such a lovely quiney! Am thankful fur ah the memories we hiv hid over the years in there's loads mare tae come. A go tae yi tae tik ma mind off stuff; if it wisna fur ma wee sister ah widna be as strong fan it comes tae speaking tae uthers. Yi kane ah ma secrets that a wid niver think in telling mam cus a kane yi can keep a secret cus a trust yi and you can help ma fan a need it. Having someone there helps ma alot.

A cin only hope that yi mak the right choices in life. But I don't hesitate tae say yi will cus yur a bright bairny. I'll always guide yi the right wye forward in I'll give yi ah the advice ah can! Am always gan tae keep yi safe nae matter fit. If yi fall il iy ways pick yi up — fan a finish laughing. If yi iver mak mistakes in life yi hiv tae kane yi jist hiv tae learn fae them. We wis sisters by birth an pals by choice. Always mind a love yi the wye yi are and a widna ask for you ony other wye.

Moment in my life



Author: Charlotte Birchall

Centre: Knox Academy

Qualification: National 4

Charlotte's piece is about a moment in her life that means a lot to her.

The hardest time of my life was when Mum got cancer. Cancer called, not once, not twice, but three times! I was 8 years old and my life changed!

It was her first time and it was just the casual breast cancer most women get. I didn't know what to feel because I was only 8. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't understand but I was only young and I was not supposed to understand. Life went fast forward. We spent a lot of time at the hospital, so much time it felt like we lived there. Mum had her first chemotherapy. It was not fun. I waited in the waiting room, bored and not quite sure what was happening. Very quickly Mum started to lose her hair. I couldn't stand to watch her go bald and the one thing Mum wanted was to keep her hair. The blue cold cap Mum wore during treatment let her down! She was so upset, I cleaned and patched up my Mum's boob there and then. When she was too weak I helped my mum with her tablets. I even took her outside but she didn't want to step outside because she was bald so me and my Dad phoned up someone who could get wigs for her so that she could feel normal again. She survived I was filled with joys everyone was so happy and so was I.

Months later cancer called again. It had been floating around her body and this time settled in her spine. I thought she was going to die. More time in hospital, more chemotherapy, more confusion. Mum came home with tubes coming out of her. I tried my hardest to help and Mum knew that. When she had spine cancer well that really crippled her because it was her spine. Everything changed from there. I started to do the dishes more, Hoovering, everyone's laundry. I even showered my own Mum because she couldn't do it herself. I did everything until she got a little more strength. I did my best and she knew that.

After everything she had been through after everything that we have been through cancer called again. Cancer is spiteful and can strike when you don't expect it. Obviously the cancer had been hiding in her system or body whatever you want to call it, but it was away for two years and then came back really angry! During that time lots of people became involved with my family; doctors, nurses and social workers. They all thought they knew what I needed. I joined clubs to 'motivate' children into a happy life but tell me what's so happy about your Mum dying of cancer?

Thankfully Mum passed away. I could not have watched her rot away any longer. It was terrible. She couldn't eat, she couldn't speak, or move. She was a vegetable! Do you want to know why she was a vegetable, why she couldn't eat or pronounce anything to us? Because the cancer was killing her slowly in her brain. At that time I did all I could to help out.

Dad and I really struggled when Mum died. I made bad choices, I know that now. Dad's health got bad too. I was thirteen years old. One day Dad fell and split his toes. His wounds became infected and I tried to dress them and keep them clean. Dad hated hospitals and did not want to go back. Dad's wounds would not heal and the infection spread. I knew I had to call for help.

But now I feel good that my Mum is not alone but with her husband, my Dad. I felt sad because my mum had died but I hadn't been able to say the easy stuff like I love you or goodbye. It's really hard to cope, but Mum knows and so does my Dad that I love them so much and no one can replace them — I don't care if that sounds cringey.

Treasure every moment you can because once people have gone you can't bring them back to life. Treasure what time you have now because, before you know it, it will be lost.

Work-ins the in-thing



Author: Gavin Thornton

Centre: West College Scotland (Clydebank)

Qualification: HND Creative Industries: Media and Communication

Gavin's piece of work was inspired by a series of strikes by lecturers across Scotland earlier this year.

In 1968, with the industry in massive decline, a tough decision was made by five of the yards on the Clyde. They were to amalgamate under one banner and become known as Upper Clyde Shipbuilders. Among these fallen giants were Fairfield of Govan, Alexander Stephen and Sons of Linthouse, Charles Connell and Company of Scotstoun, John Brown and Company of Clydebank, and also Yarrow Shipbuilders, with 51% of the company being owned by UCS.

In their heydays, all of these companies were industrial giants in their own right, but had now been reduced to teaming up in order to ensure their survival. This was a sad sign of the times, and shipbuilding in Scotland on the scale that the country was used to was well and truly in its final descent.

In the late 1960's, Clydeside retained its strong socialist identity that dated back to the 'Red Clydeside' movement of the 1910s, which had its roots in the Clydebank Singer Sewing factory.

Through years of strike and industrial actions from workers all over the central belt of Scotland, the trade unions had grown strong and had serious influence over the workforce. In 1970, the Conservative party won a general election, and it became clear that government handouts to keep the yards going weren't going to be forthcoming. In 1971, after the forced nationalisation of Rolls Royce, the government decided there would be no more bailouts. UCS looked set for liquidation, despite having a full order book for the upcoming year of 1972.

Traditionally, this kind of news would have been met with strikes, and probably in these circumstances even rioting. What happened next was to prove to be one of the great achievements of the working man in Scotland.

With the guidance of Jimmy Reid, one of the great trade unionist of his time, a work-in was to be held. This meant that the men of UCS, numbering around 11,000 at the time, were to complete the orders that were outstanding, without any pay.

The overall aim of this work-in was to prove to the country that the yards still had a future, and that the workers were still ready to fight for their livelihoods.

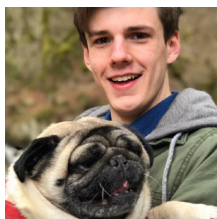
Reid thought it was vital that the workforce were presented to the public in the best possible way. When addressing the crowd he famously told the men ‘There will be no hooliganism, no vandalism and no bevvying.’ With the eyes of the country watching, the behaviour of the men was exceptional. Without their wages, they were dependant on the kindness of others to make ends meet. People from all over the country, including Beatles star John Lennon, donated to the cause.

In February 1972, after months of uncertainty, the government were forced to relent and helped to reform UCS into two new companies. With an absence of management, Reid became the voice of reason.

Fairfields became Govan Shipbuilders, and Connells became Scotstoun Marine Ltd. John Brown’s yard in Clydebank was sold off to Marathon Oil and would continue to trade in the fabrication of oil rigs until 2001. With Yarrow Shipbuilding leaving UCS before the work-ins and retaining its status as an independent company, only one yard out of the original five was forced to close.

Without these work-ins, it is hard to see a present day where any sort of shipbuilding, albeit on a smaller scale than previously, would exist on the river today. Thanks to the bold actions of these workers, Scotland is still able to carry on one of its great traditions.

Seed of the Enlightenment



Author: Andrew Ewing

Centre: Crieff High School

Qualification: Advanced Higher

Andrew was inspired to write 'Seed of the Enlightenment' by a visit to Scotland's first public lending library at Innerpeffray.

Albert Einstein once said, 'the only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the library.' Yet finding the ancient library of Innerpeffray is about as easy as understanding Albert's special theory of relativity. The library lies deep in the Perthshire countryside, on the banks of the River Earn, by a bridge that no longer exists. The rural population density was presumably greater in 1680, because, nowadays, the library is a stone's throw from nowhere. You take the winding back road from Crieff to Auchterarder, and a nondescript right turn takes you a bouncy mile down a rough farm track. And there, amongst the ancient beeches is something rather special.

It's a white-painted, slightly agricultural looking building, more farmhouse than beacon of learning. It stands on what was once a frontier. Two thousand years ago, this was the northern boundary of civilisation. To the south was an organised Roman world, extending from here to Leptis Magna in modern-day Libya. To the north — well, the Romans regarded the locals as 'uncultured barbarians.' Two hundred metres east — on the other side of a fast and deep river — is the Roman fortress of Strageath. To the west is a line of small forts that made up the Roman frontier of the Gask Ridge. Undoubtedly there was a bridge here once — Roman engineers would not have been defeated by a mere river.

Despite being a mere five miles from my home, I had failed to ever visit Scotland's oldest free lending library. I had never needed to. My local school library housed all my needs: the latest fiction, textbooks, past papers. However, as time went on, I came to realise that the library lacked history. There was a complete absence of any books printed before the 1980s. What's more, I like libraries — I see them as a defining hallmark of a civilised society, and nowadays they are particularly under threat. So I was keen to see where it all began. I suppose that the real beginning was with Alexander the Great's

immense library at Alexandria, but that burned down in the third century. Instead, I chose to explore Scotland's first public lending library, founded in 1680, and still very much in existence.

Arriving at the library, it's hard to imagine that this was once borderland, the frontier, the edge of civilisation. A Dances with Wolves kind of country. I wonder what the newly-posted centurion would have made of it, as I plant my trainers where he once planted his sandals.

I drag myself forward to the 17th century and walk towards the building. I draw back the solid oak door, studded with black bolts and enter a small room redolent of paper and ink. Inside the room are three people: an elderly man sitting in the corner, poring over an old book, and two ladies having a conversation about books. The atmosphere is rather like that of an old church.

My father once told me that when he joined the Bodleian Library in Oxford, he had to sign an oath, promising 'not to bring into the Library, or kindle therein, any fire or flame'. Innerpeffray doesn't seem to require such admission formalities.

'You must be Andrew,' says the Keeper of the Library warmly. The elderly man sitting in the corner gets up to shake my hand, and the third woman gathers up her newly borrowed books and leaves, giving me a smile on her way out.

'That's right, I'm here for a tour,' I respond.

'Wonderful, although you'll have to excuse me. I have some business to attend to, but Bill here will show you around,' she says, gesturing towards the elderly man.

Within minutes, our footsteps are echoing through the tower as we climb the spiral staircase towards the reading room, where the majority of the library's 2,500 books are housed. After what seems like a geological age, we reach the top and open the oaken door.

The high walls are all lined with bookshelves. It is a cool spring day today, but Perthshire winters can easily hit -10°C. It occurs to me that the librarian might have valued the books for insulation as well as illumination. A shaft of dusty sunlight falls on the spines of row upon row of books. They are all bound in leather or cloth. There is a stark difference from the contemporary metal

shelves and brightly coloured book covers of the school library. The books cover a range of topics that would be of interest to a 17th century reader: religion, farming, the Bible in several versions, natural history, and witchcraft.

‘I suppose we’d better start with the history of the place,’ says Bill.

The library began in the chapel adjacent to the main library building in around 1680 when David Drummond, third Lord Madertie, requested in his will that his collection of 400 books be made available to the public. Lord Madertie came from the Drummond family, one of the wealthiest and most important landowning families in the local area. Upon his death, Madertie left 5000 Scottish Merks to his library to keep the library running. In the mid-18th century, the library was inherited by Robert Hay Drummond, who constructed the purpose built library tower I’m currently standing in. Robert Drummond also donated his books to the library upon his death. In recent years, the library has seen a decline in interest with the advent of the Public Libraries Act.

Bill also reminds me not to overlook the value of books in the 1700s. In those days, books were valued at around £10,000 in today’s money — the cost of a small car. I suppose if you wanted to match the generosity of Lord Madertie in the 21st century, you could give up 400 small cars for loan. His philanthropic actions were unprecedented at the time, and paved the way for other philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie. In some ways, Lord Madertie’s generosity was eclipsed by the late 19th century businessman Andrew Carnegie, who founded libraries on an industrial scale — nearly 3,000 of them. Yet Carnegie was funding his libraries when philanthropy had become a fashionable way to boost social status. Lord Madertie was two hundred years ahead of his time, and, being a lord, his social status hardly needed boosting.

After giving me a history of the library, Bill pulls out a faded, leather-bound book and tenderly rests it against a cushion on the table. *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides*, the title reads. The book is composed of around 250 pages, yellow as English mustard, with the odd page inscribed with a scrawl written down 200 years ago. Bill tells me the contents of the book are still relevant to your average 21st Century tourist, with advice on the best times to visit Neist Point or where the best picnic spot is in Glen Coe. I’m amazed — you can literally look through the eyes of people 200 years ago.

The next book on our tour is the borrowing record. As the book opens I’m met with pages upon pages of book titles, dates, and hurriedly scrawled signatures. It’s a continuous record dating all the way back to 1747, right up until 1968

when the library ceased routine lending. Bill tells me that, if you're a local and you skim through the pages, it's not uncommon to find an entry from your great-great grandfather. What's even more interesting is the ability to take a trip back in time and see all the weird and wonderful professions of the 18th century: waterman, blacksmith, farrier, the list goes on.

I walk out of the library and sit in the shade of a beech tree. It's said that a society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in. Madertie's tree was the first of its kind, but certainly not the last. During the next 100 years, Scotland saw mass intellectual growth. Public libraries multiplied like rabbits all over Scotland, providing the entire nation with the ability to learn, collaborate and teach. Soon after, something incredible happened. Fields such as Philosophy, Politics, Economics, Chemistry, Medicine, Archaeology, Law and Agriculture saw exponential advancement, there was an outpouring of reason, logic and rationality. Scottish culture was no longer based around manual labour, but books and science. It was known as the Scottish Enlightenment, but had effects far beyond Scotland. Its ideas and attitudes were carried across the World by the Scottish diaspora, putting Scotland on the intellectual map of the world. It still defines us as a nation today. I take a bottle of water from my bag, and toast to his lordship's brand of silviculture.

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Global Gag Reflex



Author: Julie Baum

Centre: Edinburgh College

Qualification: HNC Creative Industries: Media and Communication

Julie discusses legislation that would rob millions of basic reproductive health care in the USA and third world countries.

It was one of Donald Trump’s first acts as President, but what does the Global Gag Rule really mean for reproductive health care?

It was on the first fateful Monday of his presidency, Donald Trump proved that not only does he know how to use a pen, but he can even write his name with it. In an eager attempt to demonstrate that his fingers are useful for more than just pointing at Z-list celebrities and declaring: ‘You’re fired’, he proudly held up the newly signed Global Gag Rule Executive Order, ever the showman thirsty for acclaim. More than the act itself, it was the accompanying image of Trump — with several of his henchmen surrounding him — signing the controversial policy that would ignite uproar.

Still in shock from his appointment as president and fresh from marching in protest in their millions, women and men alike took to social media to vent their disbelief: ‘How is it possible that a man of seemingly endless wealth and privilege can make such a crucial decision about global reproductive health care with the mere flick of a childlike signature?’ I paraphrase, of course.

The internet became a vessel for rant and ridicule and amongst the abounding memes and satire, there was one tweet in particular that would go instantly viral. Alongside the now infamous image, Martin Belam of the Guardian, captioned: ‘As long as you live you’ll never see a photograph of 7 women signing legislation about what men can do with their reproductive organs.’ The ability to put into a nutshell what many were feeling meant it was retweeted more than 258,000 times in just three days. Soon would follow a mock image of Trump’s embattled opponent, Hillary Clinton, pen poised, surrounded by a posse of smiling women. Alas, as one image marked the beginning of crippling the global reproductive health care effort; the other simply made us nod our heads vigorously at the irony.

In the days and weeks that followed, Trump's administration would become embroiled in multiple controversies (just the usual for an incoming President: unabashed racist travel bans, broken campaign promises, deadly health care reform and suspected acts of treason) each drowning out the shock and anger of the one before. I, however, kept my eye on the inevitable fallout from that first executive order (EO). Being pro-choice and an avid supporter of Planned Parenthood (PP) — the largest global non-profit reproductive health care provider — I wanted to know what it all really meant and for whom. Firstly, I had to make sure I understood exactly what the Global Gag Rule (GGR) was and it turns out, it goes by more than one name. Initially called the Mexico City policy, it states that any non-governmental organisation (NGO) who receives US federal funding 'neither perform nor promote abortion as a method of family planning in other nations.' This means that clinics providing crucial reproductive health care abroad would now be starved of essential funding unless they adhered to the conservative ideals of politicians thousands of miles away. In 2001, however, it would be renamed by critics as the Global Gag Rule because the scope was expanded to include barring providers from advocating for the legalisation of abortion, offering even basic information or advice on the procedure, as well as blocking access to contraception such as condoms and medicines. Further restriction meant that privately held funds also could not be used to offer this kind of health care, which resulted in a rise of unintended pregnancies as well as the need to safely abort them. An all-round unhelpful approach if ever I saw one.

Initiated by Ronald Reagan in 1984, the GGR has been adopted by every Republican government since and, in turn, rescinded by the Democrats. While it has always been a controversial issue, there is a heightened level of attention on this occasion and even I must attribute this new-found awareness to Donald Trump himself; though this does not stem from anything positive. By running a messy campaign built on villainous shock-value; playing the starring role in salacious stories creeping from the woodwork of a torrid past; peddling absurd accusations to decoy attention from his own transgressions and making barren promises bound never to come to fruition, it is easy to see why anything he does now as president garners a huge amount of scrutiny. The timing of the signing was also seen as his vengeful response to mass protests, namely the Women's March, that had taken place just days before. As Trump often speaks of revenge, let's surmise he was doing his Republican duty but enjoying every last stroke of the pen as he signed this executive order back to life.

Trump's shameful conduct is not the only blaring alarm bell in this fledgling administration; a particular pattern of behaviour is also becoming cause for concern. There are many I could list here to illustrate this point. However, one stands out amongst the rest. During a last-ditch attempt to make changes to the floundering replacement health care bill, a meeting was held with law-makers regarding access to pregnancy, newborn and maternity care as well as disease-screening for breast and cervical cancer. Twenty-five men sitting in a room discussing something they can never fully comprehend and will only ever experience on the periphery; just as several men stood behind Trump as he signed the Global Gag Rule — a policy that will predominately affect women. Can you see a pattern forming there or am I just being a little paranoid? One of those men, Republican Senator Pat Roberts would go on to 'joke': 'I wouldn't want to lose my mammograms.' A poorly timed, unfunny snark in the face of putting millions of women's lives at risk. He apologised, but that is no tonic for the dangers of allowing an all-male cast to make vital decisions about what health care should, or should not, be available to women.

One of those voices to speak up to such dangers is Planned Parenthood. And this is nothing new. The organisation has been on the front line battling to provide safe and essential reproductive care for women, men and young people across the globe for decades. Often used as a campaign tool — in which political parties will make promises to the right to defund, and assurances to the left to support — PP have remained unmoving in their stance. In 2001 when the goalposts changed for the Mexico City policy, PP announced they would make no adjustments to their services, losing 20% of federal funding as a result. With over a hundred years of experience, this organisation will not be bullied into submission, especially not by politicians. For the one-in-five American women who use the service, PP offers a safe place to seek care such as safe abortion, contraception, Sexually Transmitted Infection testing and treatment, as well as cancer-screening, information, advice and education. It is the work carried out overseas, however, that demonstrates why they are a leader in the field. Working in partnership with local advocates, medical service providers and youth leaders in developing countries across Latin America and Africa, the organisation contributes to helping the hundreds of millions of women and girls who still do not have access to even basic reproductive health care. While I clutched a calming cup of tea — in fact, let me pop the kettle on — I knew, to truly understand the importance of the work taking place, I would need to face the reality of why it was needed in the first instance. Maybe something a little stronger than camomile tea would be more fitting for this.

It is a truly harrowing and sobering reality faced by the women and girls of these countries and after weeks of research that included watching first-hand accounts and reading chilling statistics and projections, I am now, more than ever, convinced that the work being carried out, is not optional or disposable, it's essential. Projects such as The Youth Peer Provider Programme, which equips young people with the information to educate their peers on taking control of their sexual and reproductive health, is showing incredibly positive results. In reading the manual for the programme, I felt moved by the statement: 'The base of the work we support globally is prevention through education, service provision, and advocacy to ensure that young people are able to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.' With just a little bit of a lump in my throat, I couldn't help but be struck by the feeling that this is what everyone deserves, no matter where they live in the world. By signing the GGR, Trump is defunding programmes like this and it is why the fight to resist has officially begun.

It seems that with each passing day there is a breaking news story to shock and dismay about Donald and his band of Merry Accomplices. Whether it be a budget that scraps vital programmes like Meals on Wheels for the elderly; denying the existence of climate change; starting work on the infamous (edit: ridiculous) border wall or allowing bear and wolf pups to be shot while they sleep (why Republicans, why?), Americans — and the world — have every right to be overwhelmed. The relentlessness of this government may, however, be its own undoing as it has brought about a powerful movement of resistance. Twitter is no longer just a place for the inane ramblings of a reality television host with misplaced political aspirations. It has now become a vital forum in which to debunk bare-faced mistruths and object to every dangerous agenda peddled by Trump and his people. Journalists are being hailed as heroes when they challenge a member of the administration, something that was, at one time, simply their job. Protests attended by millions have taken place throughout the world and as President, he has suffered an embarrassing array of defeats in court, on the lobby floor and at the hands of every constituent phone call, letter and postcard.

It was, therefore, a particular pleasure of mine to seek out someone to interview for this piece who is an active part of the resistance movement. And you could say, I came up Trumps. I would like to introduce you to Kendall: photographer, business-owner, mum, wife and advocate. Not necessarily in that order. I first spotted Postcards of the Resistance on Facebook and instantly I loved the delicate floral designs and pastel love hearts that adorn powerful statements like: 'Smash the Patriarchy', 'Feminist Killjoy' and 'Your Body is

a Battleground.’ As I scrolled through the Etsy page used to sell the cards, I felt compelled to make contact and find out more about the project. Although busy running a successful wedding photography business, without hesitation, Kendall agreed to give me some of her time so I could do just that.

My first request was to know about the venture itself: ‘One of the most effective ways that people have been using to reach out to our elected officials is postcard campaigns. Many people have been organising postcard writing parties and gathering around likeminded community.’ She goes on to say, ‘I had the idea come to me and spent the next two days working to design and create Postcards of the Resistance.’ And the response has been positive with Kendall acknowledging: ‘They seem to really have struck a chord with people!’

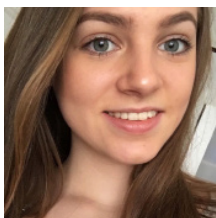
There is a reason that such action is needed in the first instance, and being attuned to the current political climate in America through news and social media is one thing; finding out first-hand what it feels like as a citizen, is another: ‘It’s overwhelming,’ Kendall writes during our exchange, ‘and sometimes it’s enough that I just can’t be on social media sites because of how relentless the bad news is. Every single day there are new bills being introduced, more executive orders and every one of them is stripping people of their rights and destroying our society. I’m terrified, not as much for myself but those who are more marginalised than I am.’ To know the marginalised people to which Kendall is referring, you need only one glance at the range of the postcards available. Pleas to ‘Love Our Muslim Neighbours’ and ‘Fight Racism’ speak volumes.

As a gay woman, I was instantly drawn to the bold acronym ‘LGBTQ’ with a rainbow of pastel coloured love hearts surrounding the five letters of the community in which I identify. A particularly poignant card reads ‘No Person Is Illegal’ and as more stories spread throughout social media of undocumented families being ripped apart by ICE officials on Trump’s command, it’s clear these are messages that need to be out there encouraging us to stand up for those who are not allowed to stand up for themselves. I asked Kendall if there was a particular catalyst during the campaign or in Trump’s short presidency that inspired her to put political art to paper: ‘I can’t think of just one. There are several that have me more passionate than others. I am worried mostly about reproductive healthcare and reproductive rights. I am very much a believer in Planned Parenthood and abortion rights and it terrifies me how much this will impact women.’ In reading this, I knew instantly I had found the right person to interview; with a deep understanding of what is

at stake and the motivation to do something about it, Kendall is truly going to make a difference at a time when her country needs it the most. Her fears that the resistance 'will be fatigued long before the fight is over' illustrates how difficult it must be to find the energy to keep going or source a positive outlook when faced with the reality that your once progressive government is in a constant, regressive tailspin. I hope this woman, who through the power of social media I can now call a friend, knows that she doesn't have to look for the positive, she *is* the positive.

It is hard not to fear what will come of America in the next four years of a Trump presidency. We can only hope that his Mondays in office are numbered and sooner rather than later, he will be on the receiving end of a phrase he has come to know very well: 'You're fired.'

Shhh ... The Right to be Quiet: a Celebration of Introverts



Author: Chloe Farquhar

Centre: The High School of Glasgow

Qualification: Higher

Chloe's essay was inspired by an awareness of the contribution quiet people make in society, just as they are, without needing to change.

Imagine this for a moment: the teacher fields a question to the class and the response comes into your head straight away. But suddenly, from across the room, a fellow pupil's hand cuts through the air and the answer blurts from her mouth without delay. Just as it always does — she's first every time. The teacher hails an encouraging 'Well done!' then berates you and the other silent pupils in the class for a lack of knowledge and participation. What the teacher doesn't realise is a third of the class is simultaneously thinking, 'I knew that'. And they did, but they're not the type to be noticed over others. In our schools and our workplaces, amidst the forthright and the forceful, are those who prefer to exist in the background. They are no less engaging, fruitful or fundamentally important to society, but they are quieter and certainly less understood. Welcome to the world of introverts.

They can't be spotted in a crowd. Despite the stereotypical view of introverts as shrinking violets, they are not quivering wrecks hiding away from life. In actual fact many celebrities, leaders and CEOs have introversive personalities. For example, performing in front of ten thousand people is not the problem for self-confessed introvert, Lady Gaga — it's mingling with the invited guests and press afterwards that she admits is challenging. Movie star, Emma Watson, is of a similar disposition, saying about herself, 'I'm kind of an introverted person just by nature, it's not like a conscious choice that I'm making necessarily. It's genuinely who I am.' Yes, introverts are normal human beings. The identification of introversion goes back to the 1920s when psychologist Carl Jung classified it as a psychological type. Since then it has become the subject of personality tests, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. In essence, an introvert is a person who is energised by spending time alone. They are often found in secluded places like their homes, libraries, quiet cafes

or other peaceful spaces. Contrary to popular opinion, not all introverts are shy, with many enjoying great social lives as long as they have vital time alone to ‘recharge’ afterwards.

But that doesn’t mean they fit in; our extrovert-centred world doesn’t make life easy for introverts. In school and at work, the ill-judged obsession for large group activity favours the dominant extrovert who shouts loudly and is quickest on their feet, even though the biggest voice is not always the best. A 2011 study concluded that small groups of two or three pupils produce significantly higher quality contributions than whole class or big group participation. Such research clearly demonstrates that introverts don’t get their energy from being around others so knocking down physical barriers in the classroom or workplace, as is the current fashion with open-plan working, doesn’t necessarily favour everyone. Introverts don’t work well in these conditions. There’s much to commend nooks and crannies. And let’s not forget the hamster wheel of activity we are forced to spin on all day. When are we supposed to stop and think? If we want the most from all members of society, we have to value the quiet ones too and create environments that enhance their natural character.

Perhaps you can identify with the introvert? Is a surprise birthday party your worst nightmare? Do you wilt in meetings? Do brainstorming sessions leave you cold? About a third to half of people recognise introversion traits in themselves. Such personas differ from those burdened with the debilitating attributes of shyness, where the characteristics are more determined by fear of social judgement than a need to live in a more private place. In fact, introverts should celebrate. It’s not a weakness! The preference to gravitate to an inner world of thoughts and feelings, to re-boot through solitude and quiet, creates people who can listen, observe and empathise with others. Introverts thrive in a self-contained world of peaceful contemplation as opposed to the extrovert who feeds on people and activity. Sure, the extrovert is a ‘people-person’ and that vitality brings benefits, but the introvert is a ‘person-of-the-people’ because they understand others and are sensitive to the needs of those around them. Science has delved into the psyche of the introvert over recent years, discovering the processing of information is different — not wrong, just different. Introverts are wildly misunderstood; often seen as loners who are depressed or aloof — this couldn’t be further from the truth. Just because someone sits composed and quiet doesn’t mean their thoughts are devoid of knowledge, drama and interest.

But extroverts are still the best, right? Wrong! Society needs a balance of both. The outgoing person is mistakenly the desirable benchmark, the happy and confident one perfectly placed to dominate social, political and business life. The personality type our parents and teachers commonly sculpt us to be. Yet introverts are proven to be the more creative of the two forms. In 2012 a study found that a group of adults spending time immersed in solitary environments away from stimulation and group tasks resulted in participants improving their performance on creative problem-solving tasks by fifty percent. Intel also discovered that the creative output of their employees increased when four hours of uninterrupted quiet time were allocated to engineers and managers every week. So why is that? Introverts solve problems because they take the time to think, they see what's going on around them and focus deeply on a problem or a project until it's complete. The power of introverts cannot be denied, as seen by some of those who have identified themselves as intrinsically introverted in nature. Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, prefers to work quietly alone and Albert Einstein, the greatest physicist of all time, is quoted as saying, 'The monotony and solitude of a quiet life stimulates the creative mind.' Rosa Parks, the legend of the American Civil Rights movement, who famously refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in 1955, was not an outwardly forceful woman. Instead her obituaries describe her as 'softly spoken ... small in stature ... rich in quiet fortitude.'

There is hope. Forward-thinking companies are recognising the value of introverts in their workplace and introducing new working methods. Google is reducing the importance of interviews, preferring to focus on the task and skills of a candidate as opposed to how well they can speak up. Amazon starts all meetings in silence with no speaking until the memo for discussion is read and absorbed by the people attending. If these principles get adopted by other employers and in the classroom then introverted people, who are so susceptible to marginalisation, will benefit enormously.

So think on this. When you embrace introversion, in yourself or others, you are making beautiful connections. Forget small-talk and enjoy gaps in conversation, zone out when you're tired, listen rather than speak, read a book just for the pleasure of it and please stop forcing others to speak up and push themselves forward. Remember, the limelight for some people might be a candle rather than a spotlight. As Mahatma Gandhi, the great leader of spirituality and world peace, famously said, 'In a gentle way you can shake the world.'

Deep Waters



Author: Daisy Rees

Centre: Williamwood High School

Qualification: National 5

When Daisy was surfing on holiday, she was dragged under the sea. She later started to think about nature and the power of the sea.

I was always an adventurous little girl and up for doing anything. I always loved the sea and the wonders beneath it. As soon as I could walk, I would toddle down to the water's edge, stepping into the sea and going further than other children my age would dare. I was enchanted by the fact there is a completely different world under the sea that is out of our depth. I used to love listening to the sound of the waves; the soothing rhythmic splash of them lapping onto the shore. I loved how the sun reflects on the sea making silver streaks of light dance across the water. I used to stand in the sea and look through the crystal-clear water to the white sands below and watch coloured fish swim in and out of my legs.

This is why my holiday to Croatia changed me. It took away my more adventurous side that I will never get back, and my love for the sea. Whereas once I thought of the sea as a benevolent power, I now think of it as dangerous and controlling; something that can instantly overpower you within seconds. Maybe the world beneath the sea isn't so nice after all, and we humans are just playing with a power that will always take control of us when we go out of our depth.

I had never been more excited about a holiday. We were going to Croatia, a picturesque country, on the coastline of the turquoise Adriatic Sea. We arrived in Dubrovnik, the heat hitting us as we stepped from the plane. It was my idea of a perfect holiday with white sand beaches and shimmering blue sea. The city was bustling with tourists. The cobbled streets were lined with cafes and restaurants and alive with the sounds of street musicians.

On the first day, my dad took me scuba diving. A small white and blue striped boat waited for us at the harbour. The turquoise ocean was so clear, you could see as far as the sea bed. Circles of soft white foam trailed behind the boat

as it took us out to sea. My wet suit stuck to my skin. The heat from the sun was urging me into the water. I dived off the side of the boat into the sea. The sun beamed through the water making everything beneath the surface gleam in the light. The sea bed stretched for miles of sugar white sand and emerald jewels of coral reef. Tropical fish circled me, all different beautiful colours and patterns. I was overwhelmed with my love for the sea. The seaweed danced with the rhythm of the water and the rays from the sun reflected through, glazing the water and making mirror-like circles on the sand. At this point I was completely ignorant of how dangerous the sea could be. From my perspective, it was so calm and mysterious. I had yet to see its darker side.

The following day was cloudy although the heat still hung in the air from the scorching day before. I insisted on going to the beach, since I hadn't had the chance to surf the day before. The sea didn't look as inviting but that was not going to stop me. The waves soared high into the air, perfect for surfing on. My feet sunk into the soft white sand. I clutched my surfboard and step by step I walked towards the water, as it crashed against my feet. I lowered my surfboard down and climbed on. The waves roared as they raced towards the beach. I loved the thrill of being adventurous and the huge rush of adrenaline as I rode over each wave, one after the other. I looked up at the sky. Grey clouds hung in despair looking like a storm was approaching. Most of the surfers had got out of the sea although I didn't want to stop.

Suddenly, I caught sight of a massive wave in the distance. It made me feel slightly uneasy. I looked behind me to see if I could possibly get back to the shore on time but I had drifted too far out. The wave rose higher and higher, thundered nearer and nearer; broke into a roar of boiling foam and raced to the shore like a galloping horse. It crashed onto me. I gasped for air. The pressure of the water forced me to the sea bed. My body was dragged across the sharp stones, cutting my body. I was limp and helpless — like a rag doll.

My surfboard tangled around my foot. I was surrounded by a black blanket of swirling sea and stormy sky. I tried to grab my surfboard but it was thrown out of sight by the wave. My whole body felt out of control. The water was so powerful. I was flung in every different direction and I was running out of time. I needed air. I reached my hands out signalling for help and tried to scream. The thick salty sea water got stuck in the back of my throat. I tried to pull myself out of the water one last time until suddenly someone grasped my hand and heaved me onto the shore, gasping and spluttering. It was my dad. I collapsed, into his arms.

I had never been so terrified in my life. That day changed me. From now on, I would approach things with trepidation. Gone was the little girl; fearless, giddy and eager to take on the sea. Now, I know the powers of the deep waters and how they can change your life, quicker than you can think. We are all just a drop in the ocean. That experience made me feel different, older somehow, and changed my outlook on the sea completely. I am now cautious about the different things around me and a lot more wary of the dangers of the world.

Fast food



Author: Gemma Heneghan

Centre: Kirkcaldy High School

Qualification: National 4

Gemma's piece shows that small details can add together to make a bigger picture.

My mouth started to water as I pushed open the glass swing door — I noticed some fingerprints on the stainless steel hand plate. As I moved towards the long shiny counter I noticed the heat in the air and the delicious smell of the burger made me ever hungrier, what would I order? I looked up to the menu boards to help me to decide. The super-size burgers with melted cheese and salad promise! I could hear the piped music chipping away in the background ... the same old clichéd lyrics repeating in my head.

I looked at the staff behind the counter. Some of the staff rushing around trying not to bump into each other. The newest staff didn't have any stars on their badges like the supervisors and managers uniforms.

One old assistant moved towards me and asked for my order. I had promised myself a small meal only, but the smell and sizzling sounds overpowered me and I ordered a large meal. A huge burger smothered with barbeque sauce would be mine in minutes. The assistant slid over to the French fries and grabbed a large, red cardboard carton overflowing with salted, thin fries. She placed them on my tray and another assistant put down a large fizzy juice. I could hear ice cubes shattering and popping as they floated to the surface of the dark, zingy cola.

I chewed on my burger and watched the screaming, excited kids in the soft play area. The multi-coloured foamy shapes were spread over three levels. There was a miniature slide at one end and a small group of children were trying to run up it the wrong way. Others were pushing their way through the hanging punchbag shapes which swung from side to side. They looked like huge cylinders and tried to block the children's path. One toddler was crying and trying to look through the mesh on the sides to find his mum. I noticed that he had some chocolate ice cream smeared down the front of his Monsters Inc t-shirt.

There was a colouring-in section for kids and some of the best drawings were displayed on the wall. The pen marks and felt pen lines went in different directions in places but you could tell the kids had tried hard. Ronald McDonald — the well-known clown — beamed a smiling face through the white and yellow face paint. I thought there was something sinister about him. He had a red frizzy wig on his head and his eyes seemed to stare through you!

Over at the ice cream station, kids were anticipating a creamy spiral of McFlurry topped by a selection of chocolates: Munchies, Oreo, Smarties and Aero were competing with Crunchie bites and raspberry and caramel sauce. Some greedy children took two flakes and a wafer as well. The cartons had a clear, plastic lid on them. The spoons had an extra-long handle so that the ice cream could be scooped out, right to the bottom of the carton. Every now and then there was a blob of ice cream spilled on the counter top. Milky dribbles dripped over the edge and the odd chocolate fingerprint stained the surface.

The War on Gender Identity



Author: Gabrielle Simpson

Centre: St Margaret's School for Girls

Qualification: National 5

Gabrielle wrote this piece after reading about issues affecting the LGBT community following the election of Donald Trump.

Three days after Christmas. Three days after a day of happiness, thanks and joy. For Leelah Alcorn, Christmas was not like this at all — it was a day of false appearances, guilt and pain. Leelah, or Josh as she was known to her parents, was a seventeen-year-old transgender girl who took her own life three days after Christmas 2014, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Leelah left a suicide note on her Tumblr blog which told her story in as many words as she could bear. Leelah had hoped to reach eighteen for then she could finally start physically transitioning without the consent of her homophobic, transphobic, Christian parents. Leelah's parents did not accept her for the woman she was and refused to acknowledge that she was never going to be the 'perfect little straight Christian boy' they wanted her to be. Their bigotry didn't stop after her needless death; Leelah's funeral took place without her best friend, who wasn't allowed to say goodbye because of Leelah's parents' hateful prejudice. But that was not all: Leelah was buried in a suit, exclusively named Joshua. There was no mention of Leelah at all.

In the UK, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are twice as likely to either have attempted suicide or self-harm. Statistics are higher for the UK's transgender youth, with almost 50% having attempted suicide, according to a survey conducted by Pace, an LGBT+ mental health charity. Further, it was found that almost 14% of transgender adults had attempted suicide more than twice. These appalling statistics are nothing but tragic, and it begs the question: why do our youth have to pay the price for being different to the ruinous social norms of modern day society?

I have read, heard and witnessed stories over the past few years of young people struggling with their sexuality. I have seen people's battles. I have seen their pain. People take refuge on the internet; it's a vibrant haven for everyone who cannot be themselves in reality, an escape from the unimaginable. There's

a prevalence of stories of crowdfunding, the act of a large number of people giving an amount of money to fund someone's goal. Critics have called it an embarrassment for the fact that people are asking for money in such a way but it has been a revelation to me: it is a lifeline for the forlorn. A few years ago I read of a bisexual young woman who was desperate for an escape from her abusive mother and sister who had cut off all of her connection to her friends and most of the world in fear that it would make her even more different; she was asking for crowdfunding in secret to provide herself with enough financial support to move away from her own hell and have the ability to return to work and hopefully education.

The 20th of November 2016 was Trans Day of Remembrance. It's a day of mourning and memory for those who have lost their lives because of their gender identity — by means of suicide or even murder. Parades took place across the world as vigils to those who had passed as well as a celebration of all trans life. However, in the US, 2016 was named the deadliest year for transgender deaths. Mid-November brought the total of unlawful deaths to twenty-four, yet this is an inaccurate number as many transgender people are mis-gendered at death and their deaths not broadcast by the media so they are not counted in the totals. Twenty-four people murdered for being who they want to be in one country is a true disgrace. Murder is the pinnacle of all hate crime, but thankfully in the UK, hate crime related murders are generally less common.

However, in 2012, eighteen-year-old Steven Simpson — an autistic gay young man — was murdered at his own birthday party by Jordan Sheard. It was reported that homophobic slurs were written all over his body before he was soaked with tanning oil and set alight; he eventually died of the severe burns inflicted. Yet, after all the horror caused, Jordan Sheard only received a three-and-a-half-year prison sentence for manslaughter, not murder. An appeal was made in 2013 to lengthen the sentence given but it was later refused, with the Court of Appeal declaring 'It would not be fair or right to penalise him at this stage.' This blatant disrespect to the life of Steven Simpson is horrifying, the sentence of manslaughter is horrifying. The Court of Appeal should not have made this decision as it provides no closure for the friends and family of Steven Simpson. In less than five years' time Jordan Sheard will be eligible for release, filled with the same prejudice which led to this brutal murder of an innocent life in the first place.

So much still has to be done to make a significant impact to the quality of life of LGBT+ people all over the world: it is still illegal to be gay in 40% of the world and equal marriage is still illegal in 90%. In many parts of the world it is also still punishable by death to be gay including in Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. In a world where most of us are much in favour of civil rights, I find it truly distressing that such brutal and mindless acts still take place. The fact that, after all this, the developed world still allows people such as Mike Pence and Marine Le Pen, with their so heavily publicised contempt for anyone a little different, to have the opportunity to take high positions of political power is truly appalling. Everyone needs to wake up to the issues these people are facing and make change, as it is so true that things don't happen unless we all make an effort. Let's stand up and make a difference.

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The Importance of Design



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Chiara's essay was inspired by the practices of design and the massive impact that they have on our modern lives.

We've all been there: sitting at the desk, nursing the day's third coffee. It has gone cold, as has your brain. Thinking about your commute, the weather or your dinner, you absentmindedly roll a pen between bored fingers. You probably won't care if you drop it — you might not even retrieve it from whatever distant orbit it now inhabits in the corner of the room. And why should you? On the outside, it's just plastic. You see something that is cheap. Unimpressive.

But it doesn't need to be.

Why? Because of design. This pen is a symbol of so much more than itself. It is a product that has been designed to fit the hand of anyone, to write any word, fill any blank space. It was created in order to enable the creation of others — the importance of this cannot be overstated. And the driving force behind this importance is the quality of the design. It harmonises sweetly with the rhythm of your hand, whether left or right. It is just heavy enough to mark the paper and just cheap enough to mass produce. These are not flukes — behind each pen lies hours upon hours of work, professionals contending with painstaking deliberation over colour, length and material.

Upon recognising the artistry of the design at work, the mundane becomes magic. And in a world which seems at times too dark, too cloudy and too complicated to fathom, the magic of design may be just what we need to clear the skies.

Of course, the merits of the design process go far beyond your pen, and a prime example of this can be found in fashion design. Generally perceived to be superficial, superfluous and soulless, the cutthroat reputation of the fashion industry often dominates the discussions of its value. To many detractors,

money is the king of the catwalk, with ethical practice and diversity left to languish by the wayside. Although these claims are not entirely unjustified (after all, fashion is a business), it would be myopic to ignore the empathy ingrained in the design processes at its heart. As Iris van Herpen, a Dutch ‘visionary’¹ womenswear designer and winner of the 2016 Art+Technology Award, puts it: ‘I see fashion as an expression of identity combined with desire, moods and a cultural setting.’²

To construct a functional garment, a designer must visualise their intended audience. Naturally, it begins with practicalities: a user is drawn, their stature and the slope of their shoulders sketched in pencil. At this stage, the page is only half inhabited; there is only an outline, a ghost-person. But the formality of basic anthropometrics is soon surpassed. The designer begins to play. What was immaterial is now tethered to the real world of age, race, gender and class. As the designer solidifies their concept, they must ponder the psyche of the intended audience, boldly exploring the ways in which pattern, texture and colour can create personality and purpose.

The design begins to breathe — and that’s where the beauty really begins. Think about your life, everything that you have ever worn. Each item was meticulously crafted to suit you, the final iteration of the user. Many forge emotional connections to their outfits, imbuing them with the heady nostalgia of a half-forgotten childhood. In short, clothes act as a conduit for self-exploration, and a crucial foundation for the construction of identity. There is something special about this interaction. A designer’s choice of colour, texture or even smell can elicit an impressive psychological reaction in the wearer: think about your primary school uniform or your wedding ring. If you can look past the shallow glamour of the haute couture chimera, fashion is about the creation of emblems, and this deep consideration of the wants, needs and experiences of a total stranger is a testament to the compassion it is based upon.

But design is not limited to the visual variety of ergonomic products, film sets and flashy textiles. Whole cities are designed, as are voting systems, hospital wards — in other words, the infrastructure on which we build our lives.

1. Laura Jacobs, Wall Street Journal, May 2016.

[http://www.wsj.com/articles/iris-van-herpen-transforming-fashion-r view 1447280022](http://www.wsj.com/articles/iris-van-herpen-transforming-fashion-r-view-1447280022)

2. Iris van Herpen, <http://www.irisvanherpen.com/about>

Every day, intelligent design takes our hand and guides us calmly through the minefield of modern living. These endless systems tick on unnoticed under the skins of cities, and the solutions are so effective that we can sometimes take them for granted. Have you ever wondered what carnage would follow the mistiming of a traffic light? Or if every doorknob was just fractionally too big to hold?

Interacting smoothly with our environment is so much more than a fact of life: when you switch on a lightbulb, it's poetry — even if you can't read it. When you button up your shirt, your hands are singing — even though you never knew the words. Almost everything you use on a daily basis — including that pen on your desk — is working with you, made for your touch, your sight or to save your time.

And all of these designs share a common theme: the search for solutions. When designing to solve problems, creative and conceptual thinking meets razor sharp intelligence, cultivating a pattern of understanding and rationalisation that can be applied to any situation.

What could happen if we taught this approach in schools?

The Scottish Government has affirmed that: 'Creativity is at the heart of every educational experience'³ and does fund innovation-based initiatives, but with news of class sizes rising and Scottish teaching staff becoming 'dangerously overstretched',⁴ it's naive to declare that spreading the principles of design should be a top priority. The consensus seems to be that students and teachers have quite enough on their plates — but this problem will never abate unless we modify its foundation. We can't just refuse the food — we have to change the plate. Small, incremental steps to modernise our system could allow students of English to make new and elaborate narratives from old, dusty prose. It could teach Biology students to design living bionic limbs. It could encourage music students to change our perception of sound. After all, it is easy to do: many problem solvers attribute their work to simple human curiosity — much of the process is instinctual. Putting it plainly, the all-seeing eye of a designer may be a superpower that sleeps in all of us.

3. Mike Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning:
<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/ab/sali/files/2016/05/cre24-the-big-picture.pdf>

4. Tavish Scott, Member of Scottish Parliament
<https://stv.tv/news/politics/1368029-schools-faced-teacher-shortage-ahead-of-school-year>

That's not to say that all designers are saints. Given the current state of affairs in Europe, with governments steeped in political turmoil and haunted by the poverty of the refugee crisis, it is easy to question the social relevance of choosing to exhibit another haute couture spectacle or gush over a carbon fibre, super-ergonomic, four-thousand-pound hand drier. It is intrinsically impossible to separate the concept from the priorities of the creator, which — due to the prejudices of the western world — often results in pieces being made for an audience that is usually young, usually white, usually straight and usually rich. For example, the standardised sizing of seatbelts — universally made to suit the average male — and lack of consideration for the generally smaller female frame has resulted in women being 47% more at risk of severe injury (including ruptures to the spinal cord and neck) whilst driving. But you don't blame the brick for the broken window — you point at the hand that threw it. Obviously, the real villain of the story is not the manufacturers of the seatbelts, nor the process in which they were designed, but the patriarchal hegemony that made this oversight possible.

The same can be said for the argument against the widespread commercialism in the design world. It's undeniable that there lies a certain cold cynicism behind the constant barrage of advertisement, crafted to nudge your hand towards the supermarket shelf, into the trolley, back to the shelf — and then deep into your wallet. But buying and selling in order to sustain a service is not exactly a scandalous concept. We have designed ourselves a society that sucks up money as its lifeblood, and upon recognising this, we can see that the need to flog graphics, textiles or products is no more exploitative than in any other functional industry.

Restaurants flash their neon signs into the night, enticing customers like moths. Authors, artists and filmmakers make glossy appearances on chat shows in order to promote their next release. Even schools have to contend with the commercial market on some level — the only difference with design is that it's there on your shopping receipt, it's visible.

And there is another reason why some are so fearful of this industry — one that goes much deeper than fretting over finance. Ralph Lauren, the original incarnation of the suave style guru, famously claimed that: 'I don't design clothes, I design dreams'. But if dreams can become tangible, so too can nightmares. 1903 saw Wilbur and Orville Wright invent the first working aeroplane, and the world rocked as they harnessed the power of flight. In 1944, Julius Oppenheimer used that power to drop the world's atomic bomb, and the world rocked again as over 100,000 people were murdered.

This dichotomy proves that design is a tool — a very, very powerful one.

It allows anybody to make fantasy reality, and isn't that the very paragon of the human spirit? Yet we all know that nothing is created in a vacuum: the solutions that we produce are a reflection of our society, and on a wider level, of our species. Sometimes that reflection is beautiful, progressive and clean; sometimes it's so bloody that we can barely recognise ourselves.

But it doesn't need to be. In his 2012 TED talk, entitled 'We Are All Designers', the renowned journalist and author John Hockenberry claimed that: 'Design is the ethos formulating and then answering a very new question: What shall we do now in the face of the chaos that we have created?'

There will always be chaos in our lives — human nature assures that. Yet there will always be design too.

You just need to pick up that pen and see past those fifteen centimetres of plastic. See it in the shaky fist of the four-year old as she writes her first word. See it in the proud hands of the first same-sex couple to sign their marriage lease. See that pen dashing across billions of ballots around the globe, as new democracies are written into existence and corrupt institutions toppled.

Because if design is about solutions, then we can solve ourselves too. It all starts with the pen.

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All it was; all it is



Author: John Hutchison

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Qualification: National 5

Writing about the scar on John's forehead was a way for him to explore the confusing change from childhood to adulthood.

My small, feather-like body struck the ground with such solidity, it induced my arms to spread broadly against the hard bed of pebbles which lay before me. A warm sensation of numbness travelled around my body, in contrast with the chaotic rush of shock and adrenaline which tingled up my spine with a vengeance I had previously never known. Christ ... I make it sound intense! But all it ever was, was a boy, a vast imagination and streaks of red pulsating violently in the bright morning sound.

Childhood innocence. It's something we've all possessed at one point in our lives, although some of us may not have managed to hold on to it for as long as it is rightfully deserved ... It's that conviction that nothing can hurt us, that there's no bad in the world, so much so that we are oblivious to the presence of evil. It defines the kind of naivety which, at the ripe, old age of fifteen, I shamefully confess I miss. It is the catalyst of so many dreams and aspirations which, as we go on in life, absorbed into the 'system' spiralling around anti-creativity, materialism and that oh-so-boring and repetitive design for life ... simply seems to fade away along with the child you used to know! I'd say I still possessed aspects of innocence up till I was in second year, but when did it really begin its deterioration? Well I'd say it was one bright sunny morning when I was four years old, when I 'opened my head' to the big bad world. Literally!

Because of where I lived, my very early childhood was a largely solitary experience. I think that's why my childhood bubble was so strong. There was nobody slightly older than me to pierce my rose-tinted view of the world. Well, not until school anyway. That's probably why all the normalcy of life came as such a shock to the system, my creativity and child-like perception of the world was left to grow ... and grow.

Of course, something which provides a portal to the ‘big bad world’ outside, entertaining you and moulding you into a ‘cultured’ person is, of course, the television. That’s what I was doing that bright sunny morning. Watching television. I was sitting on the window ledge (my ‘spot’, back in the day) watching television very intently, absorbing all I possibly could so that I could use it in the foreseeable future to fuel my imagination when playing out the back.

Now I can’t remember the programme’s title but I can remember the story, or ... the gist of it, at least. A group of children my age were travelling back to the land of the dinosaurs, which at the time was my biggest interest by far. The way they did it (the time travel, I mean) was that they jumped from a great height and, the immense force of the children striking the ground, evidently caused a big bright purple ripple through time, a method copied many years later in the movie, ‘Men in Black Three.’ But I digress ...

When the programme finished, I jumped down from the window ledge, scampered through the kitchen and sprung out of the conservatory onto the two steps that led to the back garden. I picked up a stick for protection (you never know, do you!) then turned the corner of the house and there it was ... Like a burning bush to Moses, a sign, an opportunity for pure greatness. ‘My god’, I marvelled ... and dropped my stick.

I stared in pure awe for standing sentinel in front of me was a big ... black ... wheelie bin!

As I gazed at its magnificence a glorious idea, really ingenious if I may add, formed in my mind: the height, the momentous jump ... I’m sure you’ve figured by now. I hauled myself up to standing and there I was — atop a bin that I forgot to mention was situated amidst a treacherous sea of pebbles. I commented out loud on what I was going to do, to keep the adventure alive, and dived head-first into a non-synchronised descent to my grey, rocky fate.

Dazed and confused, I wearily hoisted myself up and staggered to the kitchen, leaving a not very Hansel and Gretel-esque trail of bloodspots behind me.

The rest is really hazy in my mind. A couple of stitches later, I was on the mend ... but something was different. From that moment onwards I was more careful, more inclined to think things through before committing; and to this very day, I am scared of heights. I know it’s not much, but it is incidents like these that shape us, take away our innocence and make us realise certain

things, like how life, after being given, can only ever be taken away, be it by the cold wrath of time or idiocies like diving head-first off a wheelie bin! The darker side to life becomes more prevalent in your brain as the curtain of your naivety falls to the floor and, before you know it, you're older, totally different to how you once were, and with no preparation for when the dopamine runs low. I mean, it's not like I spend all day depressing myself, watching the news wishing for simpler times. It's just sometimes when I try to answer unanswerable questions, try to find the concept of everything or, eh, I don't know little things like what I want to do for the rest of my life ... Just sometimes I surrender my breath to the atmosphere that surrounds me in utter defeat and think ... Why can't I just go back to playing in the fields of green and just not care about anything? Well ... you can't, can you? And despite my whining there really is no point in moaning about it, instead we should embrace it! There's no point in lingering bitterly back in the trenches, there's more experiences to be endured in 'no man's land', and we should deal with these depressing subjects discerningly and make the most of what we can in life with the fragments of information that we behold! Christ ... I make it sound intense! But all it is, is a slightly older boy, a handful of optimism and a lightning bolt-shaped scar on his forehead that he'd acquired one bright sunny morning when he was four years old.

I'd Rather Read Books than Waste my Time on Social Media



Author: Orla Davey

Centre: St Margaret's Academy

Qualification: National 5

Orla feels too many teenagers are computer addicts, even though reading books can be much better.

Books never cease to amaze me. The emotional complexity and delicately detailed stories, enveloping the boring real world into a vortex of visions and imagination, where literally anything is possible ... Snapchat doesn't really have the same effect on me, if I'm being honest.

Having said that, some would rather choose social media in a heartbeat, and that's okay if you want to live a soul-destroying life of hollow hashtags. I remember being on a quiet bus on a Saturday afternoon. Two people sat in front of me — one reading a fantasy book, the other reading a Twitter feed on an iPhone. One absorbed information from an alternate universe, the other stressfully slouched over the dictating pixels. One stared in awe at the fresh pages as the story unravelled before her — the other squinted at the dull light of her screen as devoid of emotion as a robot. One smiled and laughed as a character cracked a joke or something, not caring what anyone else thought of her happiness, whilst the other glared and rolled her tired eyes towards her screen, frowning at a notification saying that someone had unfollowed her on Snapchat (I do wonder why). Horrified, she stormed off the bus in a brat-infused rage. The girl with the book briskly bounced off the bus, heading towards the local Starbucks, no doubt (probably to read more with a warm latte). Who seemed happier?

However, a shocking 56% of adults in the UK revealed in a survey that they thought social media and technology will wipe out written books altogether in around 20 years' time. Books are now having to face a new predator in their midst — social media (cue the dramatic music!). These magical escapes from reality are being abolished by the avalanches of endless Twitter feeds, swallowed whole by swarms of Snapchat streaks, massacred by Internet

memes. It is vital that this discrimination against these innocent, timeless objects must be stopped — one page at a time ...

Books bring happiness to many people, yet social media has been proven to breed bullying and belligerence. Over 50% of young people in the UK have admitted to being bullied on social media — and appallingly, the same amount of young people also revealed that they have participated themselves in online bullying. The amount of cyberbullying support Childline provides to teenagers has elevated 87% higher than what they have previously provided a few years ago. How did this happen, you may ask? Well, many adolescents are ignorant of the risks within social media — fake identities can be made, people can lie, and once you accidentally press ‘send’ on that risky picture — well, that’s it! It’s out there permanently, haunting you forever.

Who would want to be distraught amidst that digital hell, when you could be content in the warm embrace of a hardback cover? Books contain stories that change people’s lives and shed a light of hope in the harsh reality of the world. Book characters are better than any online ‘friend’ could ever be — they are specifically designed to engage with readers, making them feel special and valued as they travel on adventures and learn new things from new perspectives. I’m absolutely sure it is impossible to be bullied by a character in a book! Book characters are flawed, admittedly, but very rarely will they let you down. They will never humiliate a reader. How could people fancily faking on Facebook, who can incidentally harass you by the click of one button, ever compare to intriguing characters created in beautiful worlds that don’t require wifi? The comparison is unquestionable — who said people had to be real to positively impact your life?

A staggering 80% of parents agreed that they disliked their children’s role models. Most of these ‘role models’, funnily enough, probably come from social media.

Currently, the sixth most-followed person on Instagram is Kim Kardashian. Why is she famous, you ask? Her mummy and daddy were rich. Very rich indeed. Now she’s world-famous and practically ‘perfect’ — people want her Barbie body adorned with clothes that only she can afford and her cosmetic-clad face to boot. Her main job: post regularly on social media, look good. Many girls look at her and probably wish they were rich and stick-thin too. However, is that all there is to life? What about Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter book series?

Despite being female, and having muggle parents, she still defied wizard stereotypes and was proudly placed in Gryffindor. She didn't let bullies like Malfoy stop her from achieving her dreams. She was smart, and scholastically special in her spell-binding moments. She had to prove herself to every pure-blood wizard who told her she could never belong. Consequently, she acted annoying sometimes — but she had her reasons (making her relatable). In the Final Battle of Hogwarts, she helped to vanquish Voldemort. Nothing stopped her. And she was fictional!

Now, *that's* the sort of role model that people need.

Therefore, you should never judge books and be expectant of perfection. Perfection is pointless. Characters in books aren't created to be perfect, they are flawed people like us. The feeling is unfathomable when you come home from a rough day at school, when you've made so many mistakes that you can't believe you are a functional human being ...

Then you read a book. And somehow, the characters make mistakes that lead to a pleasurable story. They illustrate how life isn't about perfection. It's about enjoyment — getting lost in fantastic fictional fun, rather than the trending dictatorship of Twitter.

Consequently, I do sympathise with people who attempt boosting their confidence online. Congratulations. Your status is now determined by your selfie skills. Your happiness is expressed through hashtags. Your 'friends' are digits on screens — emotionally devoid robots clicking buttons for attention. Sounds fun, if you have to compete in this pixelated prison to feel happy. Social media is no longer a luxury — it's a commitment. When 298 people were questioned by the University of Salford, half of them agreed that being online negatively influences their lives — commonly due to constant competition between friends as they measure their online successes against each other. However, studies from the University of Liverpool indicated that people who read books may experience a 10% increase of confidence. It is a known fact that people who read a large variety of books experience a variety of themes, consequently understanding advanced emotions as they read from different perspectives. Therefore, reading can improve our social understanding of one another, making everyone happy.

After these interesting results, books simply can't be replaced.

So, books are better. There is literally no argument here.

It has been proven — on social media, bullies bulldoze your self-esteem, airbrushed celebrities corrupt your confidence, and the immense struggle for social security causes friction between friends. Who would want this for themselves?

However, others must agree that books create life-changing universes, consumed by characters that are empowering and admirable. Honestly, books make people truly happy — something that social media can never do. So, I'm not ashamed to say that I prefer books to social media — because I know that's where true happiness lies.

La Pasionaria



Author: Anna Guariento

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Qualification: Advanced Higher

Glasgow's memorial to Dolores Ibárruri reminds Anna of those Glaswegians who dedicated their lives to fighting fascism in the 1930s.

‘Better to die on your feet than live for ever on your knees.’¹

Those who live in or have visited the city of Glasgow will likely be familiar with the usual sights: the majestic building that holds the Kelvingrove Art Gallery; the ‘art nouveau’ style House for an Art Lover designed by architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh; the winding paths of the Necropolis; that statue of the important-looking guy sitting astride a horse with the perpetual cone on his head. For Glaswegians such as myself, the location of each of these attractions is more or less second nature.

Perhaps fewer of us, however, will be aware of a certain hidden gem of the city: the monument built in commemoration of La Pasionaria. Made from scrap iron and rather on the diminutive side, she nevertheless stands resolute atop her plinth overlooking the Clyde, arms raised in powerful defiance. Comprising one of a grand total of three statues existing in Glasgow today that depict women, she is an indispensable attribute of the city, serving to remind us of both the significance of women and the significance of Glaswegian people throughout history — in particular, socialist history.

19 July, 1936. Fascism has swept across Europe with terrifying zeal, emerging in Italy, spreading rampantly to Germany and Portugal, brushing against countries such as Austria, Hungary and Romania, and now teetering on the edge of power in Spain. After a military coup led by nationalist General Francisco Franco that had attempted to wrest control from the democratically elected leftist government, Spain is tossed into the throes of a civil war. Amidst the fear and violence, a woman’s voice is heard over the radio:

1. Quote from Dolores Ibarurri, inscribed on the La Pasionaria Memorial in Glasgow

*The whole country cringes in indignation at these heartless barbarians that would hurl our democratic Spain back down into an abyss of terror and death... Let no one hesitate! All stand ready for action. All workers, all anti-fascists must now look upon each other as brothers in arms... Long live the union of all anti-fascists! Long live the Republic of the people! The fascists shall not pass! They shall not pass!*²

These are the enduring words of Dolores Ibárruri, the orator and communist deputy who would go on to give the most memorable and influential speeches of the civil war period. Born in the Basque Country in 1895 and compelled by poverty to leave school at the age of fifteen and begin work as a seamstress, she quickly became radicalised after noting how her father's relentless hard work was rewarded with nothing other than cramped housing conditions and insufficient food. She began to write articles for various socialist newspapers, signing each with 'La Pasionaria' — the passionflower. Upon joining the Communist Party in 1920, she was witness to the rise of fascism in both Germany and Italy and resolved to stop its spread. When the news came of General Franco's attempt to inflict the tyrannical regime onto her own country, therefore, she wasted no time in communicating her distress signal.

In a time of crushing uncertainty, with fascism looming overhead, Ibárruri's words cut through the noise and terror of a by then irrepressible war and spoke directly to the people of Spain, inspiring a communal sense of hope that would prompt thousands to take action.

Across Spain men rushed to sign up for the Republican cause, willing to risk everything to fight for the security of their country, and the Spanish Communist Party experienced a never before seen rapidity of growth.³ People from all walks of life were suddenly united in the face of fascism. So effective were Ibárruri's words in encouraging solidarity that her closing statement was later adopted by the Republicans as their battle cry in its original Spanish of ¡No pasarán! and continues to be used to this day amongst socialist circles. By expressing such unwavering defiance in the face of evil, these two words came to encapsulate what it means to be a socialist.

2. <http://histoire.comze.com/ibarruri19juillet1936.pdf>

3. Antony Beevor, 'The Spanish Civil War', p176

The rallying effect of Ibárruri's speech was far from limited to Spain. As news of the country's dire need of assistance spread, volunteers across the globe — many of whom had never before left their home country — prepared to travel to this newly war-torn nation, feeling it their moral duty to lend a hand in whatever way they could. They came from 53 countries in total⁴, men and women alike, and from a wide range of backgrounds — most manual workers or unemployed, but some intellectuals. Yet every one of the volunteers was united by one goal: an end to fascism. Most didn't speak a word of Spanish, but this was of no matter; the significance of ¡No pasarán! was missed by none, and the volunteers echoed the battle cry tirelessly as they reminded themselves exactly what it was that they were fighting for. These groups came to be known as the 'International Brigades'.

Of the 35,000 volunteers, over 2,000 came from Britain.⁵ The country's policy of nonintervention was starving the Republicans of much-needed help (a fear of Bolshevism and a degree of sympathy and admiration for the fascist powers had⁶ prompted the British government to declare supporting the Republic to be 'unpatriotic'⁷), but the Brigades were keen to compensate for their country's negligence. The government had officially prohibited any sort of participation in the war, but this was largely ignored, and in January 1937 the British Battalion was formed. The men and women who joined came from all over the Kingdom — yet the country whose efforts have been written about time and time again is Scotland. Despite comprising just 10 per cent of the British population, 20 per cent of the men and women who joined were Scots.⁸

Many of these Scots referred to themselves as 'internationalists'⁹, echoing Karl Marx's belief that the working class has no country. They viewed the struggle in Spain as the struggle of all working-class citizens, regardless of birthplace. To the volunteers, the civil war was a comparatively small manifestation of the much bigger problem of potential global fascism, and they knew that the destruction of the oppressive regime would not end with a Republican victory — but it was certainly a good place to start.

4. Ibid p180

5. Ibid

6. Paul Preston, 'The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution & Revenge', p139

7. Antony Beevor, 'The Spanish Civil War', p160

8. Daniel Gray, 'Homage to Caledonia: Scotland and the Spanish Civil War', p19

9. Ibid. p17

Of the 549 Scots who joined, half came from Glasgow.¹⁰ The city had a reputation for its left-leaning beliefs since the 'Red Clydeside' era of political radicalism that had emerged around 1910, when thousands of factory workers had gone on strike in protest of their poor wages. Due to the generally dismal quality of life of the working-class populace in early-twentieth century Glasgow, a sense of solidarity arose amongst the workers and they became united in their struggles. With the start of World War I in 1914, the working-class movement gained strength and became increasingly confident as mass demonstrations were held against unfair rent and evictions, as well as in objection to Britain's participation in the war. Protests continued after the war as workers campaigned for better conditions, and in 1919, 60,000 people gathered in George Square to push for shorter working hours.

However, rather than their calls being heeded by the British government, they were met with tanks and armed soldiers.¹¹

It is no surprise, therefore, that when the opportunity arose for volunteers to fight in Spain for the protection of workers' rights, Glaswegians rallied to the cause. As well as those who travelled to Spain, there was also the 'Aid for Spain' movement within Glasgow itself, and indeed across Scotland, which campaigned to raise funds and general support for the Republicans. The May Day Rally of 1937 in Glasgow saw 15,000 people march under a banner on which the words 'Solidarity with Spain' were written.¹² The working class of Glasgow, who had for so long been on the receiving end of the same apathy that the British government was then showing Spain, saw in the Spanish Civil War a chance to finally make the voices of the workers heard.

Yet despite the best efforts of the Brigades, without any assistance from the British government the Republican cause was destined to fail. After the war Julio Alvarez del Vayo, the Republican Minister of Foreign Affairs, wrote, 'Not a day passed until almost the end, when we did not have fresh reasons to hope that the Western democracies would come to their senses and restore us our rights to buy from them. And always our hopes proved illusory.'¹³ Despite the flood of arms and ammunition sent to Franco's Nationalist side throughout the war from Germany and Italy, Britain had maintained an obstinate refusal to lend a hand to the weakening Republican cause. By turning their back on a

10. Ibid. p35

11. <http://www.scotsman.com/heritage/historic-events/red-clydeside-remembered-the-battle-of-george-square-1-4017559>

12. Daniel Gray, 'Homage to Caledonia: Scotland and the Spanish Civil War', p113

13. Paul Preston, 'The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution & Revenge', p137

country so desperately in need of assistance, they had effectively, as Paul Preston states, ‘passed a death sentence on the Spanish Republic.’¹⁴ What rather scant help the Republic was receiving from the Soviet Union was no match for the fascist powers’ unsparing provision of planes, tanks and artillery to the Nationalists, and the Republican cause was, consequently, unsustainable. When the time came for the International Brigades to leave Spain, it was not because of Republican triumph — it was due to imminent defeat.

Thousands of Spaniards attended the farewell parade for the International Brigades in October of 1938, and wept as they thanked the volunteers for their invaluable support. Although the Republic by then faced certain defeat, the efforts of the Brigades were by no means dismissed, and onlookers showered them with flowers as Dolores Ibárruri offered her powerful words once again in a moving speech — this time, rather than in encouragement, in farewell:

*Return to our side, for here you will find a homeland — those who have no country or friends, who must live deprived of friendship — all, all will have the affection and gratitude of the Spanish people who today and tomorrow will shout with enthusiasm — Long live the heroes of the International Brigades!*¹⁵

Today, when I walk through Glasgow and past La Pasionaria, immortalised in the centre of the city that she and the Republican cause brought so much hope to, I think back to the men and women who not only thought about a world free of fascism, they actively fought for it. As we watch the seemingly unbridled rise of the far right in 2017, it is easy to feel that we as individuals are powerless — yet when the Republicans were in need of assistance, it was the general population that came to their aid. In the eighty-odd years since the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, the British government has remained static in their indifference toward fascism. For this reason, the harnessing of that same hope and solidarity that inspired so many ordinary men and women to travel thousands of miles and throw themselves wholeheartedly into the Republican cause is imperative in the ongoing fight to eradicate fascism once and for all. We as individuals have a moral obligation to stand up against the destructive forces of the far right, whether they manifest themselves through American presidential elections or through devastating welfare cuts by the British government. Change is vital; let us start before it is too late.

14. Ibid. p161

15. <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/content/75-years-ago-farewell-international-brigades>

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Jackie Kay

My son, Matthew, used to ask me when he was little, 'Mum, why are you always going to Poetry?' He thought poetry was a place, that you got on a bus or a train and got off at this place called Poetry. This fine selection of poems shows just how taken up with place poetry is. Some of these remind us of our hometowns, and others encourage us to empathise with someone in a place of distress like Aleppo. Some ask us to honour the land of a grandfather — as Mahee Mustafa's fine poem does — 'My grandfather lived in the land of banyan forests.' Others connect us to the place of myth, of selkies. 'The ocean breathes ragged breaths' in Martha E Coles's fantastic poem. It is uplifting and inspiring to see the many ways that poets here are engaging with the world, and their place in it, how many poets here are stopping off at this place called poetry. These poems remind us that although poetry evokes many different places, the most special place that poetry occupies is the place of the heart.

Poetry is the language of being human. It reaches out across the divides. It joins memory to imagination. It reminds us that the spoken voice is full of music. It connects us to the very core of our being. If we are lucky enough to be able to express ourselves in a poem, then we'll also be lucky enough to be surprised by ourselves.

Here's a fantastic selection of poetry — ambitious, inspiring and very moving, these poems clearly demonstrate the instinctive power of poetry. They reveal great insight and maturity and they give me faith and hope in the future. If young people can be writing like this, stepping out of their own shoes and imagining the life of others, then all is not unwell in the world. It's been a pleasure to introduce these poems as your Makar. The word Makar comes from the old word to make.

Poetry speaks in 'rich n maisterfu' tongues, as Owen Wilson puts it. These poems hit the note. They reach out across land and sea and bring us back to that place called poetry. Good luck to our future Makars.

Jackie Kay
Poet and makar

Poetry

Aleppo 2016

Chloe McKernan

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Aleppo 2016



Author: Chloe McKernan

Centre: Lochend Community High

Qualification: National 3

In this poem, Chloe thinks seriously about recent events in Aleppo.

Buildings bombed
Torn down and destroyed
A mass of destruction
Terrified screaming of people
Unavoidable disfigurement
Fear on little kids' faces while hopelessness
Spreads through the streets of Aleppo.

Everywhere I turn
Old, young, middle aged people
Panic scored on their faces
Homes destroyed in under a second
What scares me most?
I can't do anything to save them or me
The inability to call for help strikes fear through my veins
Bombs hitting people
Ripping their flesh open causing major blood loss
People running to the hospital
Screaming in pain
Devastating

In the hospital
Sorrowful screaming cries of babies
Affected badly by shrapnel pieces exploded from building near by
The dread on mothers' faces makes me feel sick
The wailing of the tiny children makes me feel so angry
Shaking families torn apart
This must stop.

My Grandfather



Author: Mahee Mustafa

Centre: Kelvinside Academy

Qualification: Advanced Higher

Mahee's writing was inspired by being a first generation Scot; at the confluence of two cultures and identities yet feeling alienated from them both.

My grandfather lived in the land of banyan forests
In the land of mango orchards and rice fields
In the land watered by the locks of Shiva;
The veins of the Ganges flowing into his heart,
His heart that roared like a tiger.

My grandfather lived solely through stories –
I heard of the glory of this whirlwind sage
This peerless pir with eyes of fire
Who spoke of revolution through the smoke
Of his black and billowing beard.
I heard the peasants all would listen
To his paeans of comrades Chè and Castro:
His world was not bathed in the gold sun's rays
But in the light of a rising, red star.

My grandfather lived by the farmer's plough
Despite the scorn of imams and hajjis
For his hands prayed for Muhammad
But his soul spoke for Lenin –
When he bowed he pointed not to Mecca
But to Moscow.

My grandfather lived in the storm and monsoon
With ten socialist rifles behind him as he marched,
Poor man's songs and jubilant shouts drowned
The scream of the tempest.
He heeded not the jeers and jibes hurled at him
For he knew to be human was to be a romantic.

My grandfather lived in the past
And when I visited his land
Of banyan forests, mango orchards
Rice fields, farmers' ploughs
Imams and hajjis, storms and monsoons –
I saw his beard had turned to snow
And his eyes had died for winter
And his face was lined with the trenches he dug,
He spoke of revolution in a voice
Made of sand and parchment.

Who was this stranger in my grandfather's chair
Staring at the stranger in my grandfather's land?
He holds my soft hands in his calloused paws
And finds no sweat, no tears, no toil
He feels his blood beneath my skin
Diluted by the rains of my land.

Yet I still know that a tiger,
However faded are its stripes
However martyred by time –
Still strikes fear into the breast
Of the proudest peacock.

My grandfather lives in a land
Where memory is the same as imagination,
A trick of the heat, like the tiger
Seen stalking the banks of Shiva's locks
Roaring a poor man's song.

Ri uchd bàis



Author: Owen Wilson

Centre: Greenwood Academy

Qualification: Advanced Higher

Owen's poem was inspired by concern at the lack of Gaelic speakers in Scotland — we're losing touch with our culture and history.

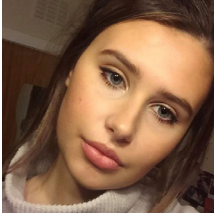
Ward yin oan thi grund fluir
In thi *ospadal cloinne*
Dealt wi nocht mair as a blate check-up
Fur those 'at didnae truly need it.
But those 'at went thare were thi best keepit,
Gied thi care of aa thi doctors in thi place.
Thi leed o thi *sassenach*
He wisnae oan thi lip o deith – far fae it,
But evryone wanted part o his life.
Some asset awbody hud tae huv
Wis tae speak wi this tounge
O thi rich n maisterfu.
He wis deemed thi richt way tae be
An' aa thi rest were pushed furthir up north.

Ward twa wis fur thi mildly seek
Seekent by anithir pouer,
But still stark. Nouadays,
His care is haufed wi those doonstairs,
But he still hus a guid dale o support an' history
Tae keep his name alive.
Awbody knows aboot his burns,
But thi interest in spreadin awaurness
Is dyin like his pal oan thi next fluir up.
It's no his fault he got that wey,
Bi thi seventeenth he'd been mostly replaced,
Secondary tae his own family.

Ward three homes thi creetical
An' thare lie thi brickle,
ri uchd bàis,
despite thi life-support's best efforts,
Struggling tae keep himself fae facin
The like fate o his brither,
Wham at 1850 oors hud been
Wheeled oot, forgotten.

Tho 'forgotten' mey be a whid
Fur a bairn hus been born
Wha brings licht tae thi mirk.
Aiblins no perfit in his ken o thi leed,
But eneuch tae cower
Thi figure we nearlins tint.

A Poem for my Hometown



Author: Melanie MacLennan

Centre: Lochaber High School

Qualification: Advanced Higher

Melanie was inspired to write this piece by the prospect of moving away from Lochaber for university.

'Once upon a time there was a bird, my God.' Clarice Lispector

That bird is
shapeless,
and most people
who know it know
that it has been choked
silent
at the throat.

The meaty rag of its
body has been wrung
of dreams,
and so the sensible ones step
over it solemnly.

If there is still a song
inside of that chest,
I do not think I want to
hear it.

The bird stutters and
twists
like a blind man cleaning the
pus from his eyes,
or a deaf woman-
gutting
her tongue for poetry.

Mild, matted wings
thrashing
against their fading place in
the world,
never to
be seen or touched
or loved
or dreamt of.

Aching bird,
I will rise from you
and into a white, chalky sun.
I will only look back
sometimes,
on the really, really,
hard days when my new life
starts to choke
me.

Throbbing bird,
wingless weeping town,
I do not know
how
anybody could ever
survive you
whole.

You are the child's coffin.
You are where young dreams go to rest.
You are the reason I cannot sleep at night
and the reason I cannot wake up
in the morning.

Toothless bird,
bloody bird,
hungry, rattling
deathless bird,
I heard it somewhere, once,
that you cannot kill something
that is already dead.

Stained bird, silent bird,
you have been
breathless
all along.

Maighdean-mhara



Author: Martha E Cole

Centre: Balfron High School

Qualification: Advanced Higher

Maighdean-mhara was inspired by Martha's love of Scotland's traditional folklore, music, and beautiful landscapes.

The lighthouse casts brilliant beams on the rocks while creatures play hide and seek,
and I stare out to sea waiting for a wave that will never break.

Harris rains plaster my hair to my face
and salt to my skin.

The ocean breathes ragged breaths,
exhausted after the storm and I think I see you,
dark tresses gliding in the oil-slick water as we, your old family,
comb the beach for trinkets,
pocket-seams lined with sand, our faces gritty,
cheeks pinched red, blushing at the sea.
Our black hair unruly and salt licked,
like the dehydrated seaweed when the waves retreat on the shorefront
after the storm.

Tiny fingers point at the ocean 'look!'
and I see you,
but just as quick, the chance is gone
and your hair turns back to seaweed,
body to foam.
But look how quickly they have grown with the tide,
noses red raw with the sandblasted wind
and smiles split wide, crowning teeth sparse in rosy gums.

They ask when they will see their mother again
and I reply that it could be
when the tide rises,
when the next boat comes in,
when flippers turn to feet,

and fur to skin,
perhaps, never sure, but ever hopeful.

I understand you were conflicted, stuck
between the Devil and the deep blue sea, but do you not
miss us?

I remember your eyes, deep and everlasting
like trenches, filled with wonder and life,
but hiding a darker secret. It was never going to be plain-sailing,
I knew you were temporary.

That did not make it any less painful when you were gone.
Sunlight danced on the surface of you like water,
but hidden in your depths were the serpents and silt and secrets,
that you could never tell me,
never tell us.

You slipped back into the water when the wind raged,
and ripped,
and tore at our lighthouse; unhinging the steady beam of light
in a turbulent storm.
While your pups slept, the door swung wide open,
and a trail of footprints led to the shore.
Footprints to animal tracks.
Feet to fins.
Skin to shed skin.

When the winds rage high, and I cannot sleep
I cast my eyes to the horizon of the ceaseless sea
with a son on each arm, their howls
putting the wind's own screams to shame
I selfishly hope
for a glimpse of wet hair in the ocean,
of black eyes staring back.

Le Pays des Pécheurs



Author: David Coventry

Centre: Ross High School

Qualification: National 5

David found the most entertaining part of writing his poem was creating the macabre rhyming couplets.

'Twas the night before Christmas: as I ran away,
I knew the police would ignore all I'd say.
They'd shoot without thinking if ever I faltered,
And if I should die, then the facts would be altered.

Visions of hatred appeared in my mind:
My peers would despise me, believe me unkind.
They'd never discover my side of the tale,
So I had to keep running, no matter how frail.

Still, I could feel my legs turning to jelly,
And yesterday's takeaway churn in my belly;
While I knew that I couldn't keep going forever,
I needed to keep up this painful endeavour.

But turning the corner, I stumbled and fell
As the officers chasing me got there as well.
Their bullets ripped through my arms, body, and head,
And I knew, in the end, I was finally dead.

I gasped back to breathing. My senses returned.
My eyes stung, my chest ached, my nerve endings burned.
I breathed deeply inward and tried to remember
What brought me to perish upon this December

And ponder I did, but I could not recall
The series of matters that ended it all.
However, one thing I was able to glean:
I had broken the law, and escaped from the scene.

I rose to a knee from my lying position,
Inspecting this alien room with suspicion.
From what I could see in the ominous gloom,
It must have been Limbo, contained in one room.

The ashen walls pulsed like the beat of a heart,
Contracting, expanding, together, apart.
As their pungent aroma assaulted my nose,
A twinkling light in the distance arose.

The delicate fairy light flickered and swelled,
Its surroundings reflecting the warmth it expelled.
For as its glow chased off the darkness and shade,
The walls crystallised, and then sparkled like jade.

Soon, I discovered the source of the lustre
And bowed in respect, both dumbfounded and flustered.
The figure before me emitting the light
Defied expectations, at three feet in height.

This curious creature, entirely black,
Had skin that resembled a hessian sack,
A humanoid figure, if not slightly stout,
And a headdress of jewels from which light trickled out.

It studied me closely and came to my side
And I knew in a flash that it must be my guide.
As we started our trip through the land of the lost
I felt dreadfully glad that our paths had both crossed.

The creature soon stopped, to my minor surprise,
Since the walls were no different in texture or size,
But the jewels on its head gave a dazzling shimmer,
And the walls turned translucent to make the realm grimmer.

Not far below laid a man on a rack,
With his limbs fastened down and a sword through his back.
A woman laughed next to him, twisting a crank,
As he yelled discontent with each tightening yank:

'Oh, horror! Oh, pain! Oh, injustice and strife!
Oh, terror! Oh, torture! How could you, my wife?
I do not remember what crime I committed,
So dash it all! Dash! Shall I not be acquitted?'

The partitions returned to opaque and crepuscular,
Glassy and smooth into fleshy and muscular.
Now, in concern of my sojourning here
I despaired that my punishment soon would appear.

The hessian monster skipped gleefully on
Uncaring, it seemed, to the man too far gone.
I gasped disbelievingly: where was its soul?
But it shone once again, to confirm its control.

Through the colourless screens of the walls in this space,
I saw yet another man put in his place.
Adhered to a post with barbed wire and tape,
The ground underneath him split cleanly agape.

He slowly fell down with tremendous distress
And lamented, aloud in a chilling address:
'Any want for amends I have none in my being,
But must figure out what it is I'm not seeing.

'I lived like a saint all my time on the earth,
Have my unknown transgressions deleted my worth?'
As the sinner descended and vanished from sight
I turned 'round in my rage and prepared for a fight.

With what strength I had left, I dashed forth with a roar,
So the creature leapt back, and I crashed to the floor.
I scrambled to take back my standing to battle,
But the beast stayed determined as I remained rattled.

It made haste toward me before I could budge
As the wall's murk behind me had started to smudge.
It lowered its head to stampede like a bull,
Pushing me gladly toward my fate's pull.

A breach in the wall had developed with time,
And with fear, I accepted my punishment's chime.
With the beast's mighty push and the aperture's heave,
I was sucked into terror I could not believe.

A smug little chuckle was all that I heard,
Since the airless environment muffled my word.
'Why?' I cried out with my last ounce of force,
But I held myself tight, and embraced my new course.

The room had no colour. No brightness, no dark.
No place I could go to. No seconds to mark.
No interest. No intrigue. No law to these lands.
Flash! A red suit lying flat in my hands.

I jumped in surprise as the thought disappeared,
Though compared to my state, it was nowhere as weird.
But after a stirring before me, I froze.
Flash! A new pistol concealed in the clothes.

I ignored my mind's vision and peered at the other,
Recoiling in shock as it looked like my mother.
Had she passed from her illness? Was this just a portrayal?
Flash! A child's face, looking on in betrayal.

I no longer cared for my memories clearing,
For my mother and I had embraced and were tearing.
I drifted from consciousness, slowly adjusted...
Flash! Disappointment in someone they trusted.

I gasped back to breathing. My senses returned.
My eyes stung, my chest ached, my nerve endings burned.
I breathed deeply inward and tried to remember
What brought me perish upon this December.

And ponder I did, but I could not recall
The series of matters that ended it all.
However, one thing I was able to glean:
I had broken the law, and escaped from the scene.

I rose to a knee from my lying position,
Inspecting this alien room with suspicion.
From what I could see in the ominous gloom,
It must have been Limbo, contained in one room.

The ashen walls pulsed like the beat of a heart,
Contracting, expanding, together, apart.
As their pungent aroma assaulted my nose,
A familiar light in the distance arose.

Andy Arnold

Producing theatre can be difficult these days as cutbacks in public funding for the arts impact more and more. That could make those of us working in Scottish theatre despondent and demoralised. However, despite financial austerity, we find ourselves living in one of the most exciting and liberating periods for playwriting and creating new types of drama to put on stage. When I started as a young theatre director in Edinburgh more than thirty years ago, there were only a handful of recognised Scottish playwrights and almost no Scottish plays successfully transferred south of the border or abroad. However, in recent years the scene has significantly changed. Writers like David Greig, Zinnie Harris, Rona Munro, and David Harrower have given a very solid international profile to playwriting in Scotland and have paved the way for so many younger and more experimental writers like Stef Smith, Kieran Hurley, Adura Onashile, Rob Drummond, and so many others who have not only challenged how plays should be written but also how theatre should be made.

As a result of these new voices, Scottish theatre connects more than ever with younger audiences and is increasingly enhanced by theatre makers wanting to invent new types of theatre and performance.

At the heart of this invention and experiment remains the spoken word — the essential currency of live theatre — and what is really exciting is the diverse range of young writers emerging in Scotland. So much of this now starts in the classroom — as the following pieces by Morgan McAlpine-Wemyss and Madeleine Trepanier illustrate. Money may be tight but opportunities to get involved in theatre are out there and it is the next generation who we look to, to create exciting new work for the future.

Andy Arnold

Artistic Director of the Tron Theatre in Glasgow

Drama

Perspectives

Morgan McAlpine-Wemyss

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Little Adjustments Here and There

Madeleine Trepanier

Page: 128

Perspectives



Author: Morgan McAlpine-Wemyss

Centre: Waid Academy

Qualification: National 5

Morgan feels that Cyberbullying is an important issue, and those who experience it should receive help.

Scene One

Two girls sit on a bed, next to a speaker docking station on the bedside table beside them playing 'Stella' by All Time Low. The room is filled with 'Rock band' posters and merchandise. There are two mysterious figures also there, a darker clothed character sitting on the chest of drawers looking bored, texting, and a lighter clothed character who is nervously watching every movement from Rosa (fidgeting). The two figures are unnoticed by Rosa and Kate.

Lights fade up.

(Rosa starts yelling along to the lyrics while Kate is sitting looking through the texts on her phone)

ROSA: This has to be their best song yet.

KATE: I don't like it that much.

Rosa turns to face Kate with a look of disgust then shoves Kate off the bed

(The music fades down)

KATE: *(Scrolling through phone)* He's hot.

ROSA: Who?

KATE: Jake, in our year — did you see what he posted?

ROSA: Oh, eh-h-h the photo with Steph?

KATE: Is that who she is ... she's different.

ROSA: Oh, god I know, did you know they went out??

KATE: What no? I bet you he's only going out with her to use her.

ROSA: Calm down... *(pause)*

Is *someone* jealous?

KATE: Excuse me ... no! ... he's reckless and just plain stupid Ro.

ROSA: You just said he's hot ...

KATE: Um...I meant...Okay yeah, he's pretty fit to be honest.

ROSA: Still arrogant though.

KATE: yep.

Scene Two

The classroom is dim, but almost empty, with three or four students sitting in various seats. All the seats and tables are facing the front, with Rosa's chair in the middle. The lights fade up, you cannot see the teacher, but the teacher's voice is heard quietly.

TEACHER: And so, to pass your exams you should really go home and revise, no texting, no going out and partying, you've got to nail this class ...

Rosa starts to breathe quicker and quicker. The lights turn red, a buzzing is heard, which grows louder and louder, the class begins to fade away leaving Rosa alone.

The Angel and Devil appear, they pull up a chair either side of her. The devil reverses the chair to sit on it.

They both take out their phones and start texting.

DEVIL: You know ... you should just give up.

ANGEL: (*nervous, not quite sure how to handle this situation*) No Rosa please don't listen to them, its fine, you're fine ... just ... breathe. You're amazing, and you can do this okay? Be brave.

DEVIL: (*grinning*) But you can't, you can't breathe, I won't allow it.

The devil picks Rosa's phone from her top pocket and places it on the desk in front of her.

Lights out. Their faces lit only by their phones.

DEVIL: (*snickering*) You're on your own now, alone, and guess what ... no one cares. I hope you know that. Your dad left for a reason and soon everyone else around you will. Just go. You're worthless.

ANGEL: Don't listen to him! It's all lies. He's ... He's trying to panic you!

The buzzing increases, a red glow is seen over Rosa, she screams out of frustration and sadness. Then everything is quiet, the Angel and Devil's phones turn off. They exit stage right and Rosa stands up and starts to text. Lights fade up as Kate enters stage left texting. They walk past each other in a figure of eight movement until they come together, back-to-back, still on their phones.

ROSA: (*crying*) It happened again, I can't do this anymore, I really can't, I just want to get away from this (*she sighs, wiping her eyes and then her phone screen*). Kate I can't cope with this anymore.

Blackout

Scene Three

Lights fade to reveal three groups of teens, one group stage left, one stage right and one upstage centre with 3-5 people in each, all dressed in 'hipster' like clothing. Rosa is seen downstage centre, by herself scrolling through her phone. The groups are talking amongst themselves distantly all seen with their own mobile phones. Suddenly a 'text message' notification is heard, and a girl from the stage stands up.

Looking down, typing on their phones.

GIRL 1: *(enthusiastically)* Hey guyyys

A girl from another group stands up (joining in the group conversation)

GIRL 2: Hiyaaaa

GIRL 1: Did you hear about Rosa?

GUY 1: *(standing up)* Yeah *(chuckles)*.

GIRL 2: No? which Rosa?

GUY 2: *(jumping up)* The one in our chemistry class.

GIRL 1: Basically, Kate's been telling everyone that Rosa hears voices or something, god knows.

GUY 1: I thought they were good friends though.

GUY 2: Nah I've seen Kate hanging about with Stephanie now.

GIRL 2: I mean Rosa is kind of irritating anyway, so who cares.

Kate walks in next to another girl (Stephanie), Rosa looks at her then to the floor, Kate looks down at her rolls her eyes, then joins the group stage right. Joining the conversation.

KATE: Alright.

STEPH: What you all talking 'bout?

GIRL 2: Rosa's voices, is it true?

KATE: *(laughs)* Yeah, she's pathetic.

GUY 2: Did any of you guys see her after period 4, she went to the toilet and never came back, and Gav never saw her in his Period 5 class.

GUY 1: I think she's off her head, I heard some girls talking about it by the

lockers.

GIRL 2: I mean she does kind of deserve it.

Rosa walks out stage left putting on her bag and putting her hood up. Kate starts to look uncomfortable.

STEPH: By the way Kate there is another party this weekend you coming?

KATE: (*hesitant*) um sure...

Look guys

I've got to go

I'll be back on later

Kate stands up and leaves in the same direction Rosa did looking concerned. A noise is heard to indicate Kate 'signing off'.

Blackout

Scene Four

Rosa is seen walking across the stage looking down at her phone, upset and quiet. She stands in the centre on the stage, the lights fade down and Rosa's face is yet again lit by her phone. The phone turns off and the light disappears as Rosa faces the audience.

DEVIL: (*menacingly*) Goodnight Rosa.

(*Pause*)

ANGEL: (*In an uplifting voice*) Goodnight Rosa.

Rosa falls to the floor. Blackout.

END

Little Adjustments Here and There



Author: Madeleine Trepanier

Centre: George Heriot's School

Qualification: Advanced Higher

Madeleine's short play was inspired by Tennessee Williams, particularly by the toxic mother-daughter relationship in 'The Glass Menagerie'.

It is late and the sound of rain beats mercilessly on the roof. The lights come up slowly and remain low. The set is a sitting room, cramped and feminine with wallpaper in a cloying floral pattern. Upstage centre, in a small hallway, is the front door, which has a peephole. Stage right of the door is a coatrack on which hangs a handsome coat. Downstage of the hallway there is a window stage left, with its curtains drawn. Downstage left, in front of the window, is a loveseat and sitting opposite, stage right, is an armchair. Both pieces of furniture are a little worse for wear, but have been mended carefully. Behind the chair, in the stage right wall is a stove and above it is a mantelpiece where two small lit candles sit. Hanging above this is a very large mirror, which is out of proportion with the smallness of the room. Upstage of the armchair, stage right of the hallway is a bedroom door. HELEN can be heard dimly through the door, humming 'La Vie en Rose'. She struggles to remember more than a few bars, so falters and begins again. She then stops abruptly at the sound of the doorbell. She emerges slowly and nervously from the bedroom in a night-dress and faded dressing gown, a slim woman in her mid-forties. The doorbell rings again. Warily, she peers through the peephole and before opening the door. Her daughter, LILIE, enters. She is in her late teens, dressed in school uniform and dripping wet.

HELEN (*relieved*): Only you.

LILIE: Didn't you hear the doorbell?

HELEN: Well, dear, I didn't know who to expect.

LILIE: I forgot my key.

HELEN: Oh you're always doing things like that these days. All the same, you'd best not do it again. You startled me half to death.

LILIE (*laughing and removing her coat, she crosses to the stove and places her jacket over it*) But I told you I'd be late home tonight!

HELEN: You did?

LILIE (*her face falling a little*): That little party in the gym for the end of exams.

HELEN: Did you? I suppose I thought you'd stay at somebody's. It's silly to walk home late at night.

LILIE (*trying to be cheerful again*): Anyway, I won't do it again. I'd freeze.

HELEN: Il pleut des cordes¹. (*Lilie doesn't respond*) N'est-ce pas?

LILIE: Hmm.

HELEN: Pas de français pour maman?² But I suppose you're tired of French this evening.

LILIE (*half-heartedly*): Oui.

HELEN: There she is! (*She kisses Lilie's cheek*)

LILIE: I can't remember another word.

HELEN: Don't bother yourself, *ma petite*, I'm only teasing. And in any case, you look lovely.

LILIE: Thank you, but I'm all wet.

HELEN: *Romantic*, that's what it is. Well take the armchair and you'll warm up in a minute. I can suffer the loveseat for one night.

LILIE: I thought you liked that loveseat. I don't mind it, but I only really liked sitting there because I thought you liked it.

HELEN: Oh I *do* like it. But it looks so much prettier with you sitting in it. Yes, especially when your hair is done up with ribbons — do you remember the pink ones I bought for your birthday? That's how a loveseat should look,

1. It's raining ropes. (French idiom comparable to the English 'It's raining cats and dogs.')

2. No French for Mama?

yes, with a young girl sitting in it. Not someone, well someone — my age.

LILIE: *Mama.* Besides, the pink ribbons were when I turned fourteen. I'm not such a young girl now.

HELEN: To me you don't look a day older. (*She sits*)

LILIE: I only meant, perhaps ... we ought to sell it.

HELEN: Sell the loveseat? We couldn't. People don't sell their antiques nowadays. But enough of that. How was it? Tell me all about it.

LILIE (*sitting*): Fine, I suppose, or — I can't really say.

HELEN: How do you mean?

LILIE: It was so funny.

HELEN: *Funny?*

LILIE: The examiner, he was a little man with a moustache, oh you've never seen anything like it! And it moved in that quivering way, do you know what I mean?

HELEN: I'm sure I don't. I hope you didn't say anything rude.

LILIE: No, no, but it did make me giggle. I could hardly concentrate on any of the questions.

HELEN: You'll have done splendidly, you'll see.

LILIE: I don't know.

HELEN: Yes you do, you've always been clever.

LILIE (*smiles sadly*): Not as clever as you.

HELEN: You see? There you go, with your flattery. Of course you're clever. No, I had a little conversational French back in my day, *peut-être*, but nothing like yours. You, *mademoiselle*, have a talent.

LILIE (*steeling herself*): Mama —

HELEN: Goodness, Lilie darling, would you mind? It's your jacket. Smoking away. I can't stand what rain does to clothes.

Lilie stands and removes the jacket from the stove and exits stage right. Almost immediately she reappears without the jacket.

There. And what's more, it's a sign of a good conversationalist to laugh. You don't want to be dull, never want to be dull. It was charming.

LILIE: Mama, listen to yourself. You weren't even there.

HELEN: Well I must have practised with you a dozen times. Not to mention, it's in your blood.

LILIE: I don't see that that matters so much. What if I liked ... I don't know, German? Or Italian?

HELEN: Darling, I'm sure those languages are well and good for Germans and Italians and all sorts of people. But it just so happens that you have some very fine French ancestry. Now be a good girl and tidy your face. (*She holds out a handkerchief*)

LILIE (*takes the handkerchief and stands to face the mirror, cleaning away the parts of her make-up which have run in the rain*): I can hardly remember *mes cousins*.

HELEN: You see? Much better already. I hope you didn't walk all the way home like that, not when you looked so fresh this morning.

LILIE (*deliberately, watching her mother closely in the mirror*): They were Daddy's weren't they?

HELEN: What were?

LILIE: Jean-François and Frédéric ... oh ... and the other one?

HELEN: Camille.

LILIE: Yes, that was her name.

HELEN: That's right, on your father's side. Not that it matters of course. After the eleventh century practically everybody was French. (*Lilie finishes 'tidying' her face and turns around and she laughs*) There. No more Water-Lilie!

LILIE: I thought you liked 'Monsieur Monet'?

HELEN: Listen to you, always so quick! I hate to spoil them for you my dear, since they are pretty, but it's best you know that any flowers that make poor bouquets soon become quite plain.

LILIE: Mama you are so ... much, sometimes. (*Goes to place the used handkerchief in the pocket of the coat on the coatrack upstage*)

HELEN: What are you doing?

LILIE: Putting this away.

HELEN: Here, give it back to me.

LILIE: But this is one of your last good handkerchiefs. Don't you want it when you go out? It'll dry off in there.

HELEN: Oh I never wear that coat much anymore.

LILIE: I thought I saw you wearing it when I came home the other day.

HELEN: I don't wear it *out* much anymore.

LILIE (*insistently*): Why not? Your other coat needs mending again.

HELEN: Yes, so I don't mind so much if it gets wet or blown about. But that coat there I wore when I was your age. It would be ruined outdoors — the lining is silk. So we mustn't leave anything in the pockets either. I can't stand what rain does to clothes. I just slip it on when I'm alone here. And it goes so well with the wallpaper ... You can think of it like a vase or something.

She holds out her hand, and Lilie passes her the handkerchief. There is a long, uncomfortable pause.

LILIE: Mama... if — if we shouldn't have the money for next year ...

HELEN: Lilie, please don't be vulgar.

LILIE: But if we don't ...

HELEN: Your father's family is paying for your school and college, as you very well know.

LILIE: Yes I know. But ... I ... Oh that's not what I meant at all! I would worry so much about you. All alone here with your precious things, afraid to answer the door.

HELEN: I'm sure I can manage very nicely.

LILIE: Without a coat to go out in.

HELEN: There was once a time, you know, when I got along perfectly well before you were even thought of. And I wouldn't dream of troubling anyone. I'd be much too embarrassed if they knew how we make ... little adjustments here and there.

LILIE (*unable to stand any more of this, not looking at her*): Mama, I want to tell you something. Something you won't be happy about in a minute, but you will be. I promise. (*She does not say anything. Lilie speaks very quietly*) Mama ... I ... I didn't go to my French today.

HELEN: What?

LILIE (*louder*): I didn't go to the exam today, Mama. And I tried to tell you. The examiner was a funny little man and when I saw him come in somebody *did* start laughing! I was looking around to see who it was, and when I saw everybody staring, I realised — and I ... I couldn't stop. I don't know, I just couldn't face it, it all flew out of my head! I was so ashamed I had to run away all of a sudden. And I hid in the bathroom, waited till I was sure everybody had left the party. I tried to make it so you wouldn't get your hopes up.

HELEN: You did nothing of the kind!

LILIE: But Mama, don't you see? It's better this way. I never wanted to go to college. *You* wanted me to go. And now, this way, I could do, do ...

HELEN: What! What could you do?

LILIE: Lots of things! Lots and lots of things. I ... I could get a job, and we ... well we ... could have a bit of money again ... Lots of things ...
(Her voice dies)

HELEN *(with intense coldness and anger):* Bonne nuit, Lilie.

As she exits she takes the wet handkerchief and places it in the coat pocket. Lilie crosses to the loveseat, where she curls up in tears. The lights fade until only the candles can be seen.

A large rectangular area with a purple border, containing ten horizontal purple lines for writing.

Thank you

SQA would like to thank everyone who has contributed their time and creativity to make Write Times 2 a reality — especially our student authors and guest contributors. Your collective efforts have produced a brilliant teaching resource for teachers and learners and an eye-popping good read for everyone else! Well done.

First Minister



What a wonderful display of talent is on show here! I want to say a heartfelt thank you to all the young writers for all the hard work, effort and creativity which has gone into the making of these fantastic examples of top class writing.

We live in times of global challenge and change. In each challenge, however, we must find opportunity. Now, more than ever, it is important for young people to be able to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas with confidence. It is heartening to see the young writers here engaging with the issues facing us, and giving their views with such thoughtfulness, intelligence and sensitivity. There is much more to celebrate besides, with language being used with such skill to create wonderful poetry, prose and drama.

Thank you to SQA for sharing with us the excellence that is so clearly demonstrated here. I am delighted to be able to say that publications like this show us just how much creativity is flourishing in Scotland.

My very best wishes for the future.

Nicola Sturgeon

First Minister of Scotland