

An abstract collage featuring a large analog clock on the left, blue gears at the top right, and a cross-section of an orange at the bottom right. The background is composed of various shades of blue and white geometric shapes.

DECEMBER 2023

saratoga high arts and literary magazine

# SOUNDINGS



Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 2023 online winter edition of the *Soundings* Literary and Arts Magazine, an independent, student-run publication of Saratoga High School.

“Soundings” is a nautical term, referring to the measurement of depth in a body of water. As the title of our school’s decades-old literary and arts magazine, *Soundings* refers to the depths that featured student works reach and the waves they make throughout the creative world.

We are so proud to be a medium of creative expression for Saratoga students, especially in a STEM-focused school dominated by high academic pressures. In both submitting to and reading the magazine, we invite students, staff, parents, and any other curious minds to take a moment’s break from the outside world and enjoy themselves in the creativity, emotion, and resilience within each and every piece. We hope that everyone can find a voice within these pages.

*Soundings* is a major effort by our amazing staff of editors, layout artists, and outreach coordinators, and it wouldn’t be possible without the dedication and hard work they’ve put into the last several months. We’d also like to give a special thanks to our advisor, Mr. Tyler, whose guidance and support helped make this online magazine a reality.

And of course, thank you to every wonderful writer, artist, and reader, for bringing the vibrance to *Soundings* for another year, and for continuing to support our work. We sincerely hope you enjoy yourselves with this December edition.

Sincerely,  
Hannah Dimock, Anika Kapasi, Jonny Luo  
Editors-in-Chief

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Hannah Dimock (12), Anika Kapasi (11), Jonny Luo (12)

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Michael Tyler

TIME and Again (Anthony Luo); A Timeless Melody (Audrey Wong) ..... 1

TIME and Again (Anthony Luo); Folklore (Willis Chung) ..... 2

The Big Thing That Lives In The Sky (Diya Kapoor); A Kid With Koi (Sofiya Maiko); Green Thumb (Chloe Mantle) ..... 3

Golden (Navya Rao); Lost (Cassidy Coghlan); Buggy (Isabella Wang) ..... 4

McAfee Theater (Andrew Wu); Light Beyond Borders (Yitian Xu) ..... 5

Look At You (Isabella Wang). ..... 6

23.976 FPS (Rylee Stanton); The Best Doctor In The World (Florence Wei); China Town (Isabella Wang) 7

The Best Doctor In The World (Florence Wei); Guardian (Eric Shi) ..... 8

Mom (Yu-kuan (Aiden) Chen); Smile (Aiden Chen) ..... 9

A Love Letter For My Best Friend (Parnika Kamath); Best Friends (Willis Chung) ..... 10

Fuori Con Un Piagnucolio (Beni Mercurio); Pondering (Nicole Hao) ..... 11

Fuori Con Un Piagnucolio (Beni Mercurio); Secure (Celina Ren). ..... 12

A Personification of Depression (Willis Chung); Untitled (Isabella Wang) ..... 13

A Personification of Depression (Willis Chung); Euphoria (Amy Pan). ..... 14

Cover: Oranges Etc. (Eric Shi)



**TIME And Again**  
*Anthony Luo (10)*

“Good morning. Today is Thursday, October 28th, 2032.”

“Good morning. Today is Thursday, October 28th, 203—”

I slam my hand on the incessant black box next to my bed. Its voice, repeating the same perpetual drone every morning, never fails to wake me up at exactly 7:55 AM. After peeling my corpse off of my opulent coffin, I drag myself into the kitchen to grab a pre-made cup of coffee and then make my way to the door.

It would be impossible for me to recall the last time I ate three meals in a day — the redundant calories of breakfast have been lost to time for as long as I can remember. But it doesn’t matter; by 8:10 I’m sitting in my sturdy and reliable SUV and turning on my radio, about to head off for work.

A twist of the keys, and white noise instantly overwhelms the speakers, deafening static rushing through my eardrums. I can barely make out the song playing timidly in the background, but a single lyric tells me it’s the *Billboard Top 50* once again. I cruise along the highway, and before long, my mind drowns under the ocean of sound as the stuffy, worn-out atmosphere suffocates me.

At 8:50 I’m inside the cubicle-flooded catacombs of Martin & Associates, traversing through a maze of hallways on the 29th floor to find my cell. Gently

setting my coffee down, I plump myself onto my chair. The world fades away as I assume my role as Senior Accountant, diving headfirst into the sea of tasks that await me. My mind settles into familiarity as I sort through the abyss of files and spreadsheets that fill my desktop, and I dream through the rest of the day in a

flash.

*Lunch at 12:30 — check.*

*Conference call at 2:15 — check.*

*Deadline at 3:45 — check.*

*In the car at 5:05 — check.*

*Back home at 5:45 — check.*

Before I even realize it, the kitchen light beams on the spotless dish in the sink, and the glare shines like the moon on a



**A Timeless Melody**  
*Audrey Wong (11)*

clear, cool night. Today was pre-packaged spaghetti and meatballs; that means tomorrow is pre-packaged spaghetti and meatballs. How exciting.

“Good morning. Today is Thursday, October 28th, 2032.”

“Good morning. Today is Thursday, Octob—”

My hand hits the snooze a bit faster this time. 7:55 AM — a new day and a new beginning, I think to myself. My car and job wait patiently in the driveway for me and I hurry along, coffee in hand.

A twist of the keys, and “... as always, today is October 28th, 2032,” the reporter announces, “But tomorrow won’t be; in a groundbreaking decision, the 122nd Congress has repealed the TIME Act, the historic legislation that froze American calendars in the name of productivity, sparking protests across the nation as millions turned to the streets to express their disconte —” The static void arrives again, swallowing the audio whole.

I drive down the highway, the low hum of my car’s battery

underscoring the jumbled radio dialogue. Peculiarly, the traffic begins to back up, and before I know it I’ve slowed down to a crawl. I spot fumes emerging from the cause — the wreckage of a crashed minivan — and steer away to take a detour. As I turn a corner, I watch as four young activists raise a sign and chant, with a frustrated crowd tailing behind. They protest in vain, shouting their demands at an empty conveyor belt as it drags along.

At 9:00 I step into a crowded glass elevator and watch as I ascend into purgatory ten minutes late. Usually, lush, beautiful mountains and glistening skyscrapers glamorize the city skyline from my floor at Martin & Associates. Today, smoke rises from across the streets as more and more demonstrators line the blocks and riot and dozens of news helicopters swarm the skies above. Fortunately, I have a schedule to catch up to, so I ignore the commotion below.



**Folklore**  
*Willis Chung (10)*

*Lunch at 12:30 — check.*

*Conference at 2:30 — I’m the only one here.*

*Deadline at 4:15 — nobody to report to.*

*In the car at 5:05 — crowds to squeeze past.*

I cruise along the highway as wind rushes past my face and the sun sets slowly past the horizon. The majestic canvas of the sky is tainted with inky billows of ash, and yet, its deep, warm beauty still radiates through the darkness.

Suddenly, I slam on the brakes, watching as a huge crowd of protestors confront a rage-filled mob, blocking my path. I sit in my seat for a bit as the two groups face each other, the tension creeping with each moment. The white noise fades away and the familiar voice of the news anchor returns to my ears. They are discussing an appeal, but don’t last long against the ceaseless radio interference; a second or two passes and I’m drowning once again.

I crank my volume knob to the max and floor the gas pedal.

*Back home at 5:45 — check.*

It only takes an hour or so to clean my tires, and when I’m done, the cloudy night washes away all the color, painting my wet and dirty driveway pitch black. Pre-packaged spaghetti and meatballs, I think to myself. How exciting.

“Good morning. Today is Thursday, October 28th, 2032.”

“Good morning. Today is Thursday, October 28th, 2032.”



**The Big Thing That Lives In  
The Sky**  
*Diya Kapoor (11)*

I used to walk my dog often,  
The tall trees that  
surrounded me as  
The sun began to set,  
Music blasting in my  
headphones.

I once came upon the sky in  
waves of color.

A sunset I used to know, now  
a painting I've never seen.

I grip leash tightly as colors  
begin to swirl in the sky,  
My footsteps are light now,  
trying to catch the direction  
of orange to red to pink all  
fading into blue.

As I stop walking, I see the  
people who stop to see the  
sight,

the mom with 2 kids who's  
trapped in the walls of her  
house,

the young adult who is afraid  
to fly away from the nest,  
the old woman in her  
sweater vest in the 70 degree  
weather.

we all stop and stare,  
because when the clouds  
dance and the sky begins to  
swirl,

the stress we hold in our  
 chests,  
in our brains, our hearts,  
It disintegrates.

We no longer are humans  
with important worth or  
worry,  
we are only spectators  
enticed by the show going on  
afar.



**A Kid With Koi**  
*Sofiya Malko (11)*

**Green Thumb**  
*Chloe Mantle (11)*

my dad overwaters his plants  
they turn mushy and brown after  
a while  
he's forgetful,  
my mom says  
but I don't think that's true  
I think he doesn't know when to

stop giving.  
he puts all of his love into those  
plants  
into caring tenderly for them  
watching them intently,  
even overbearing at times  
caring for them like his children  
I hope I don't turn mushy and  
brown too

**Golden**  
*Navya Rao (10)*

Her; the person that fills my  
thoughts.  
Thinking of her makes me feel  
warm inside.  
Thinking of her makes me  
happy.

I changed the way I walk to my  
classes.  
Just to catch a glimpse of her.  
Just to talk to her.

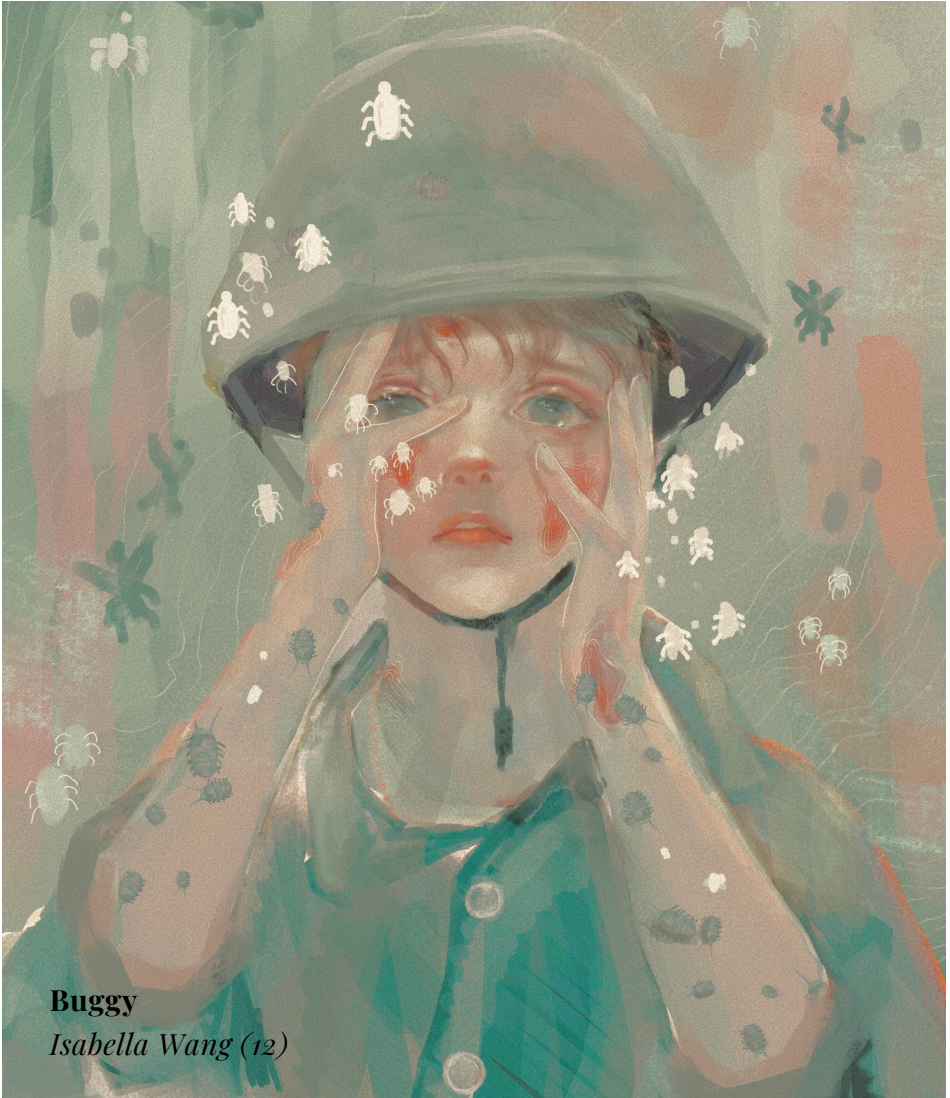
She is warm like the sun.  
She is golden like the rings I  
wear.  
She is golden;

and gold blossoms out of every  
thing she touches.

Sometimes I wonder  
if I disappeared  
off the face of the earth  
if she would care.  
And I convince myself that she  
would.  
She would have to.  
After all, I am one of her closest  
friends, aren't I?

Her; the person I would do  
anything for.  
She makes me feel special.  
She is basked in sunlight.

She is my golden girl.



**Buggy**  
*Isabella Wang (12)*

**Lost**  
*Cassidy Coghlan (11)*

I lose every  
thing  
I do it  
a lot  
Must make my phone ring  
Where it was set  
...I forgot

From swimsuits to shoes  
All dear to my heart  
It's all old news  
Te aring my room a p a r t

My mind is  
s c

a t  
t  
e r e d  
All  
over  
the  
place

My life in t at ter s  
Because my things are in  
space

I try really hard  
These habits won't flee

They aren't on my report  
card  
But are just part of me

Please don't be mean

I'm trying my best

It's got to be around here  
somewhere  
now time to stress



**McAfee Theater**

*Andrew Wu (11)*

The theater was somber. Within its walls, we sat on chairs, restrained by pillories, and gazed ahead on a level incline. In front of thee—a stage loomed, a view obstructed, and a lecture conducted. None of us knew a life outside the theater.

A regal figure stood before us, their chin stood high up. The Man spoke to the speaker. They vowed a reward that would render us sedated with anticipation. The Man comforted us with an unfathomable dream that was out of this world—a dream to reach for the stars. Somewhere of joy, fame, power, and fortune. “Shoot for the moon,” The Man imposed, “Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.” They plastered posters with these quotes all over the theater, sowing seeds of their dream deep in our world.

However, the reward must be earned. The lecturer’s stream of information must be guzzled down, only to be regurgitated on the Day of Judgment. Then the painful cycle repeats.

One eager individual was fully hooked on the reward. He thought of an innocently sinister idea: a better view would lead to better memorization. Thus, they rose from their seat. However, he was also obstructing the view of the person behind him.

In frustration, the second person also stood, further obscuring the view of the person seated behind them. This

continued until everyone rose from their seats. Again, all had the same level view. Witnessing the initial man’s action, the others perched higher by standing on their chairs, until everyone stood on their chairs.

Then, some people brought stools, stacking them on top of the chairs. Others brought ladders, and some even brought climbing gear. The higher and higher the people climbed, the greater and greater the danger

of falling to the ground. Soon falling from such heights would’ve been fatal. Nonetheless, the race continued at even faster speeds and dangerously greater heights. People kept falling, collapsing, and dying—some accidentally, some on purpose.

Yet the race persisted. But for what purpose? The reward? The information? The view? The peers?

Everyone kept climbing up, and no one dared to sit down.



**Light Beyond Borders**  
*Yitian Xu (9)*

**Look At You**  
*Isabella Wang (12)*





23.976 FPS  
Rylee Stanton (11)

I carry my camera everywhere that I go, capturing bits and pieces so the clock can click slow. Each and every moment collected into a frame, contrasting components are suddenly twin flames. I indulge in the art so I can drink up the past, savoring every part, time is moving so fast.

I always take her with me—to every endeavor.

If I take a picture, *maybe it'll last forever.*

The Best Doctor in the World  
Florence Wei (10)

Under the pale light, dust particles drifted like fireflies following their tails, twisting and turning to face blue sterilization cloth spread across stiff red clinical chairs, tilted in obtuse angles. To the left of each occupied chair beeped a box-shaped computer monitor. To the right, a sleek IV pole with curtain hooks hanging blood bags connected to a square pad on each patient's heavily outstretched arm through transparent tubes. The whirl of an overheating computer, accompanied by the overpowering bitterly-clean tang

of antiseptic, filled the space.

"Dr. G.P.T.?"

Dr. George Phillips Thompson, the lead pathologist, glanced behind his shoulder at the nickname. The assistants called the doctor by his initials due to his intense distaste for his last name. Dr. GPT was a young man, younger than most doctors one could find, and he proudly displayed all his degrees on the wall of his office as if he were the best doctor in the world.

Dr. GPT spun away from his desktop and twisted the painted handle on the heavy door, sparing a glance through his thin gold-framed glasses as his assistant wheeled the patient in. A bitter odor lingered in the air.

Though there appeared to be no running blood, a line of careful stitches ran through the patient's russet, discolored stomach. The metal pole beside him clanked and clattered as the patient was laid gently on the scarlet clinical chair closest to the shelf.

"Okay." The doctor ran a hand through his messy hair. "Let's get to work, then."

Dr. G.P.T. shrugged his white coat evenly on his shoulders before clicking several times on his sleek computer, stopping at the patient's profile.

"Kevin Liang," he mumbled as he skimmed through some more. "Type A. Patient suffered internal injury in the stomach from car accident and needs a transfusion because of blood loss after surgery."

"Dr. G.P.T.," his assistant pried, his shoulders tilted upwards. "I'll get you the blood bag."

"No, no," the pathologist murmured absentmindedly, pushing his hand out of the way. Baskets, some with more blood bags than others, sat on a shelf in the corner, ordered meticulously as such from A+ through O-. He paused, selecting a bag from the third basket labeled AB+. "I'll grab the right one. His blood type is A, right? This will do."

"But that's not—"

Before his assistant could finish, the young pathologist strapped the bag on the IV pole and attached it to the patient's arm. As the clear tube turned a carmine shade, the assistant gaped incredulously at the



Guardian  
Eric Shi (12)

doctor for a split second before scrambling to remove it.

"What are you doing?" he sputtered. "You can't give that to a Type A patient!"

"You can't?" Dr. G.P.T. stammered, dazed, resting a sweaty palm on his head. "It can't be. That's what MedGPT told me—unless I read it wrong—but I couldn't have read it wrong!"

The assistant hyperventilated as he struggled to remove the blood bag to no avail, hands working busily at the tubes. "And how could you, an esteemed doctor, use an AI anyway?"

Dr. G.P.T. stared desperately at all his degrees and achievements on the wall. They mocked him with intricate cursive words and sigils of approval. He glanced down at his patient and back at the draining blood bag. A lingering thought plagued the back of his mind: Was this really all worth it? He shook his head in amusement and pity as he pondered.

"It's too late, really," Dr. G.P.T. sighed, lunging forward to grip his assistant's neck with rigid hands.

He had to be the best doctor in the world, one way or another.



ChinaTown  
Isabella K. Wang (12)



**Mom**  
*Yu-kuan (Aiden) Chen (11)*

For My Mother

To the person who has impacted my life more than any other, thank you. You taught me kindness, generosity, positivity, and confidence. I know you know this, but you are brilliant. You are a superwoman.

You are the best of role models; you exemplified the right way to live life: with a smile on your face. Your smile was a

ray of sunshine. Your laughter was music. What I wouldn't do to experience that joy again.

You are so deeply loved not only by your own family, but by everyone you came into contact with. Your positivity was contagious and your energy was radiant. You are and will always be dearly missed.

You told me you wanted 3 things for me and 3 things only: Be happy, healthy, and a good person. And I will, Mom. I will do the things that make me happy. I

will take care of my mind and body. And I will do my best to make an impact like you made in your community in mine. I will make you proud.

You loved watching me play baseball. You saw me hit my first home run. You saw me pitch my first complete game shutout. I'm so glad you did. There is a lot more baseball to be watched, though, from the comforts of wherever you may be. You loved listening to the music I made, and you loved how much I love band. You were there for my first marching band show. You saw me perform my arrangement of an emotional song about memories and loss. Now you can enjoy all of your child's pursuits from wherever you want. You are no longer bound to the tangible.

I know you'll be watching closely when I succeed, when I fail, and all the in-betweens, and I know you will keep pushing me to reach my goals. No more, no less. I am so lucky and so eternally grateful that I was born into your family. You gave me your smarts, your athleticism, your work ethic, and your love. You allowed me to shine. You let me explore my passions. You are the reason why I am me.

Thank you for raising me right, Mom. And rest in peace and happiness. Don't worry about us. We are okay. We will keep smiling for you just like you wanted us to. I love you forever and ever. See you later, I can't wait to catch up with you.

**A Love Letter For My Best Friend**  
*Parnika Kamath (10)*

With eyes glowing like stars,  
I know you'll go very far  
Maybe even leave me  
Finally be free  
If that's what is meant to be

And when they whisper lies  
And tears creep from your eyes  
I will kiss their foreheads  
goodnight  
Because you're not going down  
without a fight

Their words don't define you  
You can bid them adieu  
They haven't got a clue  
And now they're all blue

I will be your haven  
Sharp as a raven  
If they're laughing, they're mistaken  
What's been stolen will be retaken

Strong and fearless,  
But vulnerable and listless,  
You don't have to be dauntless  
Experiences have taught us

Stay your hand in mine  
Through darkness you still shine  
Dancing with your eyes  
We stand on stunning faultlines

As long as this heart of mine is beating,  
Our moments won't ever be fleeting  
Oh how I loved our first meeting

When we both had been

dreaming

Both hit by reality  
An utter catastrophe  
Our words have duality  
There's beauty in calamity

Even though many have led you astray,  
I am always here to stay  
Singing for each and every birthday  
My words and heart won't ever betray

How our humanness clings to one another

Despite the scenic spring  
No strings or rings  
Just happiness by markings

This is how I love you so  
Warmth sets our lives aglow  
Let's dance in the snow  
And forget about our foes

My shoulder is where your head rests on  
Our hearts will mend from torn  
Even in spite of the creeping dawn  
We'll laugh together on the green lawn





**Fuori Con Un Piagnucolio**  
*Beni Mercurio (10)*

"I can't breathe," thought Fio Berzatto as he stood alone in his quaint Italian-style kitchen; He was stirring risotto for his weekly Arancini fix.

The overhead exhaust fan hummed softly, and Marco Mengoni's *Prisma* album played quietly in the background. He sang the lyrics loudly like he always had since he was a *giovane*. "e stasera la tua voce non è lontana" -And tonight your voice is not far away. Fio felt his chest tighten following the chorus, and each breath he took became a struggle to open his lungs -Panic coursed through his veins as he realized that something was very wrong.

Fio is a chef from the small town of Modica in Sicily. He speaks four languages, and as a child split his time between football, cooking with his Nonna,

and singing in a local boys' choir. He had dreams of opening his restaurant someday, but the start of the war rendered that dream impossible. Fio kept cooking for his neighbors and himself. It was his escape from the war, which was ever reaching and inching closer to his doorstep, slowly consuming his thoughts.

Neighboring countries were embroiled in a bitter conflict, and occasionally he would hear about a town suffering casualties from toxic fumes emitted by the weapons. Although it had never crossed his mind that he might become one of those nameless people who die in the name of someone else's hopes and ambitions.

Fio burned his radio when the conflicts started because he only felt fear if he knew, but if he did not know he could not fear. Consequently, if he had his radio five minutes before this, Fio would have known that the U.S.

dropped a nuclear warhead on Vetta D'Italia, the northernmost point in Italy in the Bolzano province.

The fumes seeped into the ground and blew across the country, into his home.

He staggered away from the stovetop, clutching his chest as his vision blurred. The room seemed to spin on an unearthly axis, and he collapsed onto the cool, tiled floor. As he lay there, gasping for air, memories of his childhood flooded his mind.

Fio remembered the fragrant gardens of his Nonna's home, where he had learned to cook his favorite dishes. Those were the days when the air was filled with the sweet scent of basil and the comforting perfumes of his Nonna's *Pomodori* sauce. Now, all he could feel in his nostrils was the sickening miasma of a war that had finally reached him.

Struggling to stay conscious, Fio reached for his landline phone, but his weak fingers betrayed him. His callused and weather-beaten hands only minutes ago could swim miles in the sea, and cut ingredients for hours were now unable to catch hold of the thick handle, he fell back on his knees, defeated. He couldn't call for help. Desperation clawed at his throat as he realized that these breaths might be his last. Dying to Andrea Bocelli's "Libertà" felt a little ironic, he thought.

But then, in the dim haze of his fading consciousness, he heard a voice. It was a distant cry for

help, carried by the evening breeze. Fio summoned every ounce of strength left in his deoxygenated and poisoned limbs and managed to crawl towards the window.

Outside, he saw his neighbor, an elderly woman named Elettra, collapsed on her porch. She was also gasping for air, just like him. Fio knew he had to do something, not just for himself but for her as well. He dragged himself to the front door and stumbled out into the open air. He laughed; it stung his lungs.

His crawling like this reminded him of Leonardo DiCaprio in that captivating American movie where that guy does so much *Bamba* he can't walk. "What movie was that again?"

The world outside was chaotic. People were coughing and choking, struggling to escape. Fio could see the warhead's plumes of smoke on the horizon, realizing. Despite the excruciating pain and his dying body, Fio reached Elettra's side. Fio was Numb to the asphalt that had ripped his shirt and cut his legs and hands. He couldn't speak, but he grabbed her hand and squeezed it, letting her know that she wasn't alone. His eyes burned, and his body felt limp and useless.

Elettra and Fio lay amongst the cracked asphalt bloodied, and terrified. They weren't alone, the whole country; every big city and small town was experiencing the same.

Bodies, so many bodies, in the streets, in the schools, in the



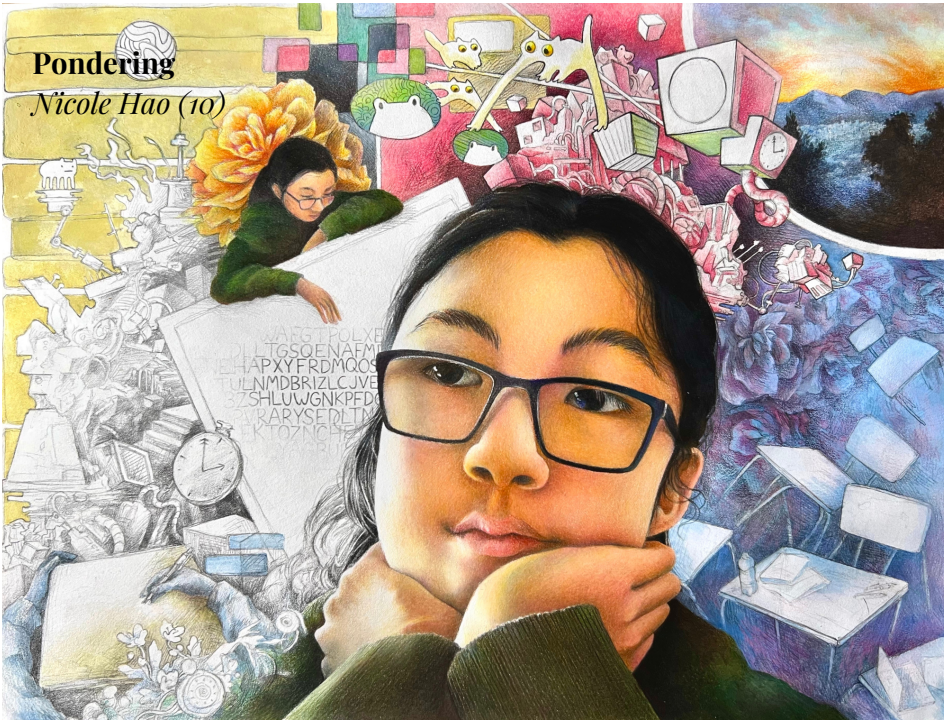
houses, in the churches, in the mosques, in the temples, in the synagogues, but none guilty for any crime, except living. All the while the world watched miles away, tucked under blankets of greed and gunpowder. "A bullet with butterfly wings"

They were the victims of a war they had never asked for and a catastrophe Fio had never prepared for.

In his final thoughts, he found solace in the memories of the people he loved, his boyhood friends, his parents, coaches, and teachers who had shaped him,

and the meals he had shared with them. He embraced the laughter, the warmth, and the joy of those moments. Fio's memories are a pounding *fortissimo* in comparison to the *pianissimo* of a heartbeat finding peace amid chaos.

Thousands of miles away, the war raged on, oblivious to the lives that had just flickered out. Fio Berzatto became another chapter in the tragic story of a world torn apart by conflict, leaving humankind with little humanity.





**A Personification of Depression**  
*Willis Chung (10)*

The sky wore an old, threadbare sweater, frayed at the edges and faded to the somber gray of #E5E4E2. Even the sun’s presence was a mere formality. It hung in the sky, a half-hearted attempt at illumination, casting a feeble light that struggled to pierce through the thick blanket of clouds.

The towering skyscrapers, once reaching for the sky like fingers of glass and steel, now sagged like the shoulders of mourners burdened with insurmountable grief. With their jagged edges and cold, unyielding surfaces, they created a stark juxtaposition against the surrounding mountain’s graceful contour and nurturing embrace. Like veins drained of vitality, the lonely streets carved the heart of New York City into a million fractured pieces. These asphalt arteries, once pulsating with bustling crowds, now echoed with the hollow cadence of lonely footsteps.

It was as if the deafening silence had swallowed all joyous sounds — the bubbly laughter of children playing in the park, the animated conversations at the cafe down the street, and the music that flowed from the rolled-down windows of passing cars. Occasionally, the wailing cries of a distant siren would disturb the stillness, leaving the haunting echoes resonating through the empty streets.

The acrid odor of corroded metal assaulted my nose as I gingerly opened the window. It was a biting tang that seemed to seep from the very bones of neglected office complexes a couple of blocks away.

*KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.*  
“May I come in?” an all-too-familiar voice, barely audible, whispered in my quiet room like an autumn breeze.

I nodded.  
His steps were slow and heavy, each foot an anchor dragging through the murky

water of my emotions. An oversized hoodie clung to his thin frame, with the hood pulled so low over his face that for some reason, it reminded me of a mourning veil.

His scrutinizing gaze swept across my bedroom like a hawk in search of prey, the disdain evident from the deep furrow etched onto his face. The air grew increasingly dense with suffocating judgment as his eyes lingered on the motley crew of mismatched furniture that I salvaged from thrift shops and

garage sales. Embarrassment rippled through my body like an electrical current, coloring my ears with burning scarlet.

The walls, painted a nauseating shade of neon green, seemed to scream at my senses like an overenthusiastic five-year-old. The ceiling fan overhead, with the flickering lightbulb’s glow, resembled a lazy helicopter constantly failing to lift off.

The bed, with its floral-patterned comforter and ruffled bed skirt, started to look like it was plucked from the darkest corner of Grandma’s attic. Heavy, moth-eaten curtains clung to the windows like drunk party guests. The mottled carpet, once soft and plush, now

crunched beneath our sneakers like the autumn forest floor.

On the wall opposite the bed, a poster of a boy band (whose name I forgot long ago) hung crookedly, their unconvincing smiles forever frozen in time. The poster had aged as gracefully as a banana left in the sun, its edges curling like overcooked bacon.

The desk, if one could call it that, looked as though it had been struck by a tornado of half-empty coffee cups, crumpled tissues, and tangled charging cables. A lone bookshelf, sagging under the weight of overdue textbooks and faded photographs, stood in the corner like a scolded child put in time-out.

Long story short, he hated every single detail about the room. And I agreed, even though I never gave much thought to how bad it looked before.

“Hey... D,” I couldn’t stand the silence any longer. “What are you umm... doing here?”

“It doesn’t matter how hard you try, the only thing you’ve ever succeeded at was making conversations awkward as hell,” D observed. “Including this one.”

It was the first time I reacted to his unfriendly words. My mind froze. Do I really sound that awkward in conversations? His comment pierced my skin like thorns on a rosebush, each letter a microscopic barbed wire that dug into the flesh and pulled at the raw nerves beneath my skin.

I forced an unconvincing laugh and pretended to brush it off like it was nothing. Or so I intended. The truth is, no one has ever called me awkward. But I don’t really talk that much either. I don’t even remember the last time I started a conversation.

I knew that D had no reason to hurt me. He was just being honest.

“At least you know you’re a failure and accept it,” D commented. I couldn’t tell if he meant it as a compliment or something else.

“What’s your actual name?” I asked instead. “I’ve been calling you D for my whole life.”

“Depression,” he said. “My name is Depression.”



**Untitled**  
*Isabella Wang (12)*



**Euphoria**  
*Amy Pan (11)*



