

iWRITER

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By Kids, For Kids Magazine

Dreams!



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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

As a rising senior in the midst of college applications, I find myself deeply immersed in the realm of dreams. This theme has been on the minds of several members of our iWRITER staff as well. So, it is with great pleasure that I introduce you to issue 13 of the iWRITER, where dreams take center stage!

Get ready to embark on a journey where imagination knows no bounds and the power of dreaming transforms lives.

Within these pages, you will encounter stories of people who turned their dreams into reality, exploring their creative musings on dreaming in the modern world and the thoughts of teens whose dreams are as shaped by the world around us as by our vision for its betterment.

This issue also delves into the intriguing science behind dreams, exploring their significance in personal growth.

As you turn the pages of this issue, I encourage you to embrace the spirit of exploration and reflection. Let the stories and insights within these articles ignite your aspirations, encourage you to take leaps of faith, and remind you that dreams are the fuel that propels us toward greatness.

Thank you to all our talented contributors whose passion and dedication have brought this dream-themed issue to life. I hope their words will leave you with many thoughts and insights, inspiring you to, as USA Today founder Al Neuharth once said, “dream, dare, do.”

Happy reading, and may your dreams continue to guide you toward a future filled with boundless possibilities.

Warmest wishes,

Eshaan Mani

Editorial Director

I WRITE for the rush of adrenaline I feel when my pen touches the paper. It is that exhilarating experience and the opportunity to not only get my voice out to the public but also be able to be the voice of inspiring people and organizations that inspires me to write.



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Dreams Unbound: From Aspirations to Accomplishments

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of dreams." Eleanor Roosevelt, the former first lady of the United States, remarkable leader, and visionary, said these inspirational words. This simple yet powerful statement reminds us of the importance of aspirations and dreams and the opportunities they present.

As I stand on the cusp of a new chapter in my educational journey, preparing to enter high school, I find myself reflecting on the incredible three years I spent in middle school. Among the many valuable lessons and experiences I gained during this time, one aspect that stands out prominently is the importance of dreams and aspirations. Throughout my middle school years, I discovered firsthand the transformative power that dreams hold and how they can shape our lives..

Dreams have the remarkable ability to ignite ambition, fuel creativity, and inspire innovation. When we allow our imaginations to run wild and embrace the possibilities presented by our dreams, we tap into a wellspring of creativity that propels us forward. Throughout my middle school journey, I witnessed and experienced the transformative power of creative thinking and innovation in the pursuit of my own dreams. Whether it was in the arts, sciences, athletics, or entrepreneurial ventures, those who dared to dream big showcased their ingenuity and left an indelible mark on our school community.

During the 2020 pandemic lockdown, I dedicated a significant amount of time to honing my artistic skills. I experimented with different mediums, such as painting, drawing, and even digital art. With numerous online tutorials and virtual art classes, I learned various techniques and styles, expanding my artistic repertoire. This extra time at home gave me the opportunity to explore my creativity and express myself through my artwork.

Additionally, I delved deeper into my passion for science. I set up a small home laboratory where I conducted simple experiments and learned about different scientific concepts. With the help of online resources and virtual science fairs, I expanded my knowledge and understanding of various scientific fields. I even participated in online science competitions and submitted my projects, which further fueled my enthusiasm for science. Despite the difficulties and uncertainties of the pandemic, the summer of 2020 allowed me to explore my passions in art and science, providing a silver lining amidst the chaos. It taught me resilience, adaptability, and the importance of pursuing my interests even in challenging times. As I entered middle school virtually, I carried the

lessons and experiences from that summer with me, knowing that I had grown as an individual and had a newfound appreciation for the opportunities that awaited me.

During my time in middle school, I also had the opportunity to participate in science research competitions at regional, state, and national levels. These competitions provided a platform for me to showcase my projects and receive feedback from experts in the field. The constructive criticism and recognition I received further motivated me to pursue my passion and strive for excellence in my research. I realized a positive outlook is essential for achieving any goal, and we should learn how to cultivate one if we want to make our dreams a reality. In the pursuit of our dreams, we might encounter several setbacks and obstacles, and it is important to keep ourselves inspired and driven throughout the journey.

By adopting a positive mindset, I reframed challenges as opportunities for growth and viewed setbacks as stepping stones toward success. The extra effort we are willing to put in is what distinguishes ordinary from outstanding. We must be willing to go the extra mile, cultivate a growth mindset, and choose to remain motivated.

Most importantly, we should surround ourselves with those who inspire us. I was fortunate to have supportive mentors and teachers who recognized my enthusiasm for scientific research. You might encounter detractors along the way; never let them persuade you out of your dreams. Ignore the distractions, stay focused, and keep chasing your ambitions until they become a reality.

As I embark on my journey into high school, I will continue to carry with me the invaluable lessons I learned about the importance of dreams and aspirations. Dreams serve as a constant reminder of what we aspire to become and provide the motivation needed to overcome challenges along the way.

As we venture into the next respective chapters of our lives, I encourage you to embrace your dreams, nurture them, and pursue them with determination.

BY *Shaivi Moparthy*
I WRITE because writing is a way for me to express myself and it helps me connect to my artistic side. I enjoy writing because it allows me to reflect on experiences that I have encountered. Writing is something that I truly enjoy, and it has always been one of my greatest passions.

Negative One

In the multiverse, there are new universes at every turn. These galaxies are vastly different from the world we know. Disturbing the fragile balance of the distorted mirrors we call worlds can have life-shattering consequences.

In this shard of a world, we find something so seemingly average: a school. In this school, there are two girls whose lives are about to be changed forever.

Just keep your head down, and you will be fine. That was all that was running through the head of fifteen-year-old Ash Betula.

“OMG. I love your new hairstyle!”

Fools, they do not understand that this place called “school” is a minefield. One wrong move and your social life is dead. Not that I ever had any.

However, sixteen-year-old Ava Laney has been happily counting down the days until school begins as she walks down the street to her school. Being the queen bee of the block, she was recognized by fellow classmates from last year.

“Oh my gosh, Pansy, you look so good.” and “Tenth grade suits you.” It's good to be a queen.

As both the girls enter the school, they are lined up with their classes. “Why are we lining up?” Ava asked.

Unsurprisingly, Ash was the first to respond. “The Fiktive History Museum, for the field trip. Oh, do you know all those big words, or do I have to explain what they mean?”

“Very funny, Einstein," she shot back. This battle of insults lasted all the way to the museum.

“You little—Wait! I need to see that.” Ava pointed to a beautiful heart-shaped gem.



“I think it's an opal,” Ash said with a hint of interest in her voice. “I need to touch it to be sure.”

"We shouldn't." Ava responded, but it was too late. Every voice in Ash's head was silenced. All she could think was to go to the crystal. She reached out to feel it, and as soon as her skin touched the smooth glassy stone, a pinkish-blueish glow engulfed them both in a blinding light.

Blinking her eyes open, Ava looked around. “Where are we?”

“Better question; WHO are we?” Ash replied.

As she looked out over the desert landscape, all Ava could draw was a blank. “It’s strange. I feel as though I know you.”

Meanwhile, Ash was digging through her memory, but all she could remember was a bright light and faint screaming.

Suddenly, Ash started digging around in the sandy dirt. “What the heck are you doing?!” Ava scolded her. “We might be about to die, but all you care about is making a stupid SAND CASTLE!!”

“No, I don’t. I thought that since we have impact wounds...” she said, pointing to a large bleeding scrape on her elbow. Whatever we came in must be here too, and it might tell us something about who we are and where we came from.”

She unearthed a large tablet-like device. It had a cracked screen and was barely functioning. It showed some statistics that seemed trustworthy.

“Day 85 in World -1: I’m starting to struggle with my research. This world is not supposed to be safe, but I took the risk. I have done many tests on the air, and the findings are less than ideal. The air here is breathable, but all the toxic waste that seeped into the water has evaporated into the air, making any breather of the air have drastic amnesia.”

Ash read aloud, “That makes lots of sense. I don't see how any of that-” she was interrupted by a strange noise."

A person popped out of the bushes or sand piles resembling bushes.

“Hi, I'm-.”
“How do we know we can trust them?” the voice asked.

“Oh, come on, Vic, you can tell they need help!” the girl called back. "I'm Emeralda, but just call me Em,” she said, smiling.
"Look, Em, we have no idea where we are,” Ava said.

“I can do you one better, who we are.” Ash cut in.

“I can do you one better, why you are,” Em quipped.

”Please just tell us where we are,” Ava pleaded, taking a step forward. The person hidden behind the sand charged at them, holding a large sword.
“Vic, stop.” Em said, stepping in front of her.

”Em, no!”Ava and Ash screamed at the same time. Vic ran straight through her, stumbling ever so slightly.

"OH MY GOSH! ARE YOU OK!?!?" Ash screamed.

"Did I not mention? I'm a ghost." Em replied, unphased.

Their fear was short-lived. A glowing vial clinked to the ground and rolled in front of them.

“What is tha-” she was cut off by Vic’s realization.

Run, now!” she yelled. Ash grabbed Ava and shoved her away from the bottle. The glowing flask combusted with a piercing flash that shook the earth. She was stabbed by a little fleck of a strange kind of medal. A dark figure stepped through the veil of smoke cast by the explosion. He was a strange man, covered head to toe in an opalescent bubble. Before Ava could begin to understand that they were getting attacked by a mad scientist in a literal force field, another bottle was thrown in front of her. Ash flipped up a sheet of metal from the rubble and used it as a shield as she dove to protect Ava.

"Well, hello, Captain America.” Em quipped as she floated by.

“I’m nothing like HIM. His shield is the size of a dinner plate, and he’s an idiot," Ash said.

Once Ash had finished her grumbling, she noticed a single design flaw in the scientist's protection. “The shield had four projection spots. If we break all of them, doctor doom here would be defenseless,” Ash told the team. Vic hit the first spot by hitting him head-on. She continued to hit the shield to keep him busy. Ava got the next spot. She snuck up and quietly opened the control panel. By cutting the red and blue wires, she shut it down.Then Ash punched it, it hurt like heck, but she was able to break the third spot, and finally, Em attacked by just ramming straight toward him. He knew she was crazy to try to punch the shield, but that wasn’t what she was doing. She possessed him and destroyed the button.

Defenseless, the scientist tried to scramble away, but Vic caught him and held him down. Out of his pocket fell a gem identical to

the one that had teleported them. As she bent down to grab the crystal and noticed the scientist’s watch, the arm attached to it lay twitching beside his body.

“We've been here for TEN DAYS!?” Her tone got louder with anxiety.

”Yeah, time works differently here.” Em replied.

"We need to get home now.” Ava said, hurrying over to the dirt dusted jewel. “Hey, Vic, can you grab that projector? I’ll need a four-by-four. Can you open that for me?” she asked Vic, handing her the watch.

“How do you know so much about this?” Ash asked.

“Let's just say there's a reason I was always leaving early from lunch.”

“Wait, but the only class at lunch is the Advanced Engineering class, oh,” she trailed off in realization.

Ava just replied with a smirk. In the back of her mind Ash worried that the shard in her arm was growing. Of course, it’s not she thought. It just hurts, we can get medicinal supplies when we get home, if I get home.

She realized it was more accurate the second time she thought it. She was dragged from her thoughts by a cold hand touching her arm.

”Hey, you ok?” It was Em.

She nodded, hiding her arm. ”Just can't wait to get home.”

"Well, if you really want to get home, you’ll hand me the opal.”

As Ash handed over the gem, Ava immediately snatched it and placed it in a heart-shaped slot on a pedestal. They both pressed it at the same time, with a soft click, it created a glowing circle encasing a window to their world. Ava grabbed Ash and pulled her into a tight hug.

“Ready?”

"Nope, let’s go." Ash said with a small smile.

She stepped through first, then Em who returned to her physical form, then Vic whose cuts, scratches, scars were healed as well, until finally Ash started to step through, but the portal's glow turned blood red and started to close. Every time she tried her arm would get electrically shocked and a semi-transparent wall would block her and then ripple back to being transparent.

“Why isn’t it working?” she yelled, banging as hard as she could, but it was no use.” “There has to be something we can do,” Ava said frantically, trying to keep the rip in the time-space continuum open.

In the background, the scientist sat up with a sort of wheezy cackle. “You can’t do anything!” he said. "If I’m going down,” he said, grabbing Ash, “I’m taking YOU with me.”

Ash turned to him and socked him the jaw.

The portal was getting smaller by the second. Ava stretched her arm through the interdimensional window.

"Grab on!" she said, reaching her hand out. They locked their hands together, "I can’t hold on! just go on without me! PLEASE!!!" Ash told her.

“NO!! I’m not losing you!!” Ava replied, holding her hand tighter. "Come on, Einstein, just hold on a little longer!”

Ava could feel her grip fading. She looked at Ash whose face glimmered with tears. As Ash thought of every possibility, she realized that Ava would get stuck there too if she kept holding on.

"Sec, that’s the thing about life; the people you care about are never really gone. As long as you remember them,” Ash said. “Can you promise me one thing?”
“Don’t talk like that. I’m getting you out of this!” Ava shrieked.

“Tell my mom I might be a little late for school tomorrow.” Ash said, letting go of Ava’s hand with a sad smile on her face.

“NOOOO!” Ava screamed as the portal imploded. Ash awoke with start and bolted to her bathroom. She stared herself down in the mirror, silently questioning whether or not that was a dream. After mentally approving her physical state, she went through her morning routine, which included her mad dash for the bus. On the way to school, she contemplated her dream. Was it really a dream? Of course it was, there's no way that’s real! She chided herself. Surprisingly fate took a turn, It was at that moment that none other than Ava herself!

Ash looked around and realized that all the other seats were occupied. It was like everyone collectively decided to come to school on this one day! She seized the chance to prove the dream real.

“Hey, what are y’all working on in Advanced Engineering?”

Ava’s face immediately lit up with an expression of pure shock. “I n-never told anyone t-that?! Unless...” she trailed off muttering things like “it was real?” “what was real?” “Nothing, I just had a weird dream last night. It was, like, we were fighting on a field-trip-” “then a portal-thingy appeared” “and we were trapped in this” “alternate universe!" They finished in sync.

“How- " Ash began to question, but was cut off by the school bus stopping.

“Listen,” Ava grabbed Ash’s shoulders. “I don’t know what’s happening, but we need to talk more. Meet me after school!”
“Where?”
“Where the gem in the dream was.”

She realized it was a test. Ash leaned over and whispered in her ear “See you at The Fiktive” and winked as Ava nodded.

The day went by in a blur. All Ash could think of was how Ava had the same dream as her. Before she knew it, she was standing next to the opal gem from the dream waiting for her once rival to show. And she did.

Ava ran in panting, in her arms were a small stack of papers she was rambling on about “the parallels theory”. She paused long enough to breathe then dove into a long ramble. Ava paused mid-sentence and started digging in her bag. She pulled out a handful of chip bags.

“Hungry?” she asked.

Ash smiled at her, starting to wonder why they were even enemies in the first place. She went to grab a can of sparkling water but was cut off by a cotton candy glow coming from the opal. In a bright flash two people fell to the ground in a heap.

“I’m never going to get used to that” one of them muttered in a familiar voice but Ash couldn’t place it.
Ever the defender, Ash stepped in front of Ava. “Who are you?”

Ash was happy that she had schooled her voice into not breaking. They were intimidating when they stood up. One was wearing a dark purple turtle-neck, with a pair of gray-green, and a black face mask with light gray- were those ski goggles? The other was wearing a graying pink one-piece and a light orange ski mask.


“Not important. You two need to come with us,” said.
“Why should we trust you?” Ava asked defiantly.

The figures pulled off their respective masks, revealing none other than a slightly older Ava and Ash.

“Because I am you.”

THE END

*Or is it?
Don't be dramatic, Ash.
But drama's my specialty!*

BY Viviana Koivumaa  New writer!

I WRITE because I have lots of ideas, and it's healthy and calming. I write Sci-Fi, mystery/suspense, and play scripts.

The Thousands of Others

The dream about the creature awoke him. It had been both-
ering Newman for years, but today the dream felt especially
real. Though the details changed from night to night, a few
things remained the same about the dream: the rat always lived in
the piano in the corner of his basement, he would always travel
down to his basement, and he would always die.

With a wheeze, Newman got up from his bed, turned on the TV
to Channel 9, and started cooking his breakfast, which was always
a mundane and tasteless meal that Newman swallowed without
much thinking. Old Winston was on the TV again today, reporting
on a fire in California, pension reform, the upcoming elections, the
rising rents across the city, and a cute little story about a little girl’s
success in a national mathematics competition. His fingers gnawed
at the sofa plush.

Newman had always wanted to be a performer. He couldn’t say
that it was one of those stories about love at first sight — his parents
forcing him to take piano lessons in kindergarten had made sure of
that — but ever since he had quit, he had always wanted to return
to piano. But then he took the job at Biosafe, then he moved the
piano downstairs after Hurricane Don, and now his parents were
dead.

His eyes drifted. Glancing at the basement door, he shivered.
Newman had tried to bring the piano up, but the rat had always
stopped him. Though only having a fleeting glance of it, Newman
could describe it with vivid detail. A peculiar creature, it could be
best described as a rat-like creature woven from strands of life and
cybernetic illusions — fur the color of midnight rain and synthetic
sinew pulsating with a luminescent hum. Its beady eyes flickered
with ghostly luminescence, a surreal amalgamation of organic
fragility and wisps of smoke.

Sunlight still hidden beneath the cityscape, it was on these days
that Newman, now standing, would gently wriggle a record cover
from his overflowing record case and, like a surface of silk against
a needle, the record would bring life to the disc and to that dusty
room. It was some German sonata, its voice soft and languid, and
in that darkened hole created by the music, Newman tried to play
along, eyes closed, with his fingers dancing along in a ghostly
rhythm, imaging himself in a concert hall with a thousand pairs of
eyes, a crescendo of applause washing over him. When the track
ended, Newman could only hear the rain and a few stray dogs
barking in the distance.

Newman took the bus to work. Living in the depopulating

Midtown, there was not much to look at during the ride other
than a few smoldering trash cans and the occasional advertisement.
Arriving at work, his boss Howard, a plump man with an ever-present
grin that the people who are too happy with themselves wear, called
him to his office, which was a surprise considering he had thought
that Howard didn’t know his name.

“I have some good news for ya Newman. You’re being promoted!”
Howard waited as if to see some reaction from Newman, but there
was not so much of a blink. “... to the Chief Surveyors Office.”

Howard pushed forward a contract listing duties and other legal
information. Newman scanned the document. “Unfortunately, that
does not entail an immediate pay increase. However, it does mean
that in a few more years, you might be looking at some pretty hefty
equity in the company.” Newman remained silent.

“Well how does that feel Newman! What does that say... 43 years
of service paid off, huh?” The rounded words of Howard felt oddly
sharp in Newman’s ears.
“You might not be able to retire until that equity kicks in, but
afterwards you would be set!”

43 years? Newman thought. *That must mean I started this job back
in... 2024. So, I’m...61.* The numbers echoed in Newman’s head,
thrumming throughout his entire person.

“Newman.” Howard motioned at the pen.

“Yeah... I mean...”

“This is a commitment, Newman. Y’know how upstairs is— with the
turnover rate and everything. Signing the contract means the next 10
years.” Howard’s voice changed. “I don’t know how your cancer is,
but I wouldn’t sign it. With the remaining time you have, you should
be enjoying your life, not killing rats on 54th Street and getting paid
minimum.”

Newman remembered his first job at Biolife, still remembered the
red brick building and the first colony of rats he had to kill, the red
eyes that stared back at him in that industrial freezer, and the fear
that chilled his spine.

They were so big, he had thought, but nowadays, those rats would
have been considered starved. He had run away that day, sickened,
only returning after a week off. The job still nauseated him.

Newman picked up the pen and signed.

Newman returned to work the next day early in the morning. Barely
able to sleep, Newman arrived the next day earlier. The next day even
earlier until when he arrived at Biolife one day, the moon still hung in
the sky. Biolife’s equipment had a habit of leading to bruises and aches
if worn for too long, yet from dawn to dusk, Newman never took off the
twenty-pound oxygen tank, the leathery mask that tore at his face when
he moved, nor the suffocating hazmat suit that smelt of acridness. More
than once, Newman’s vision flared out, stumbling and falling against the
sidewalk, but it didn’t matter to him.

The smell after the job had always been the worst part when he had first
started at Biolife. Today, however, the smog of black char and ash that
hung heavy against the air left a rich scent to Newman. It had an oaky
texture, a dense earthy whisper that inflamed Newman’s lungs.

He began to cough harder than he had ever before. The sound carried
across the warehouse to the rotted beams and wisped away into the
evening air. The concrete felt oddly cold as Newman fell to the ground,
the blood he coughed painting a splattering of crimson against the dust
and grime. It wasn’t expected, Newman thought, but it was deserved
that he die where he had killed so many.

Newman woke to squeaking. He wasn’t coughing, though it still stubbornly
itched at his throat. Gathering himself, Newman rose unsteadily to his
feet, where a mass of rats met him. At first, they seemed to him a field
of brown grass in the moonlight, their fur packed closely together and
melding into one another. It was their eyes that were most remarkable.
The hundreds of pairs of black eyes shone under the rays of moonlight
that streamed through the fractured warehouse roof, an orchestra of
moons glaring at him. Standing up, Newman ran out of the warehouse.

The pain was like a hand gripping at his heart, shifting and tearing at it
within his chest. Every breath seemed to labor against itself. His heart
was surely going to burst; he felt weaker than he had ever felt in his life.
Grasping the wall, Newman willed himself to the apartment door, down
the basement stairs and to that piano smothered in dust and thickened
air.

It was painful, the moving and the playing, more of a moroseness and
aching than a stabbing of his cancer; the piece, amid its surface simplicity
of repeating scales, arpeggios of black keys, its one-voiced melody, and
by its very name and stated intention for the piece to be mere practice
for learning players and practitioners, seeped and flowed into the cracks,
the fractures, the cuts, the cancers — the pain flowering and blooming,
exacting and precise in nature, taking him out of the room, to the
moments where he will live decades in the future. He could play. He
would survive. He would play.

Opening his eyes, Newman heard applause.

BY *David Liu*
*I WRITE to help others escape to worlds full of color with characters of
energy and nuance. To create a place where someone can find refuge,
if only just for a few seconds, is something that I love to do.*



Dream Trading

Harper, you won’t believe this — a dream-recording that promises the sensation of flying through the stars. I have to try it!

Ethan’s eyes shone unnervingly as he scrolled through dream listings. He paced back and forth in his dimly lit room, glued to his DreamLink. He grinned widely at the flickering screen, the boyish delight obvious on his face.

Harper did not like it one bit. “This dream trading thing is getting out of hand.” Ethan’s eyes narrowed as she calmly plucked it out of his grasp.

“Hey!” Ethan scowled. She cut him off, affronted. “It’s not healthy.” She glanced at him. “You’re becoming obsessed.”

Ethan huffed dismissively. There was no way his older sister could understand. She was his age fifteen years ago. The technology of her teenage years was ancient by comparison. He made a grab for the device, but Harper held it out of reach.

“It’s artificial, it’s unnatural, it’s wrong,” Harper continued. “Dreams aren’t meant to be played with.” She bit her lip as she thought back to her only experience with the most primitive versions of the DreamLink technology. Her voice wobbled. “Please, trust me on this. You know they’re simulated.”

Ethan glared. “So what if they’re artificial? That’s the point, Harps. They give you a thrill that real life can’t.” “Ethan.” Her voice broke. “Trust me.”

He glanced at her disdainfully. “How would you know? Goody-two-shoes, never broke the rules, mom and dad’s favorite. Their little Harper would never dabble in dream trading.”

She was silent. “Harps?” She sighed. “No way! You?!”

“Ethan, you don’t understand,” she backtracked. Damage control. “It was different then. I had no idea what I was doing. I swore that it was the only time.”

He cocked his head. “Tell me about it.”

Despite Harper’s better judgment, she recounted her experience.

She couldn’t remember much about that night, just a wrong turn on the way home and a woman standing in an alleyway.

“Come here.” The woman had been constantly shifting her weight from one foot to the other, as if waiting for someone. Her vigilant eyes darted back and forth. Teenage Harper smacked her bubble gum. “Who are you?” Harper pursed her lips distrustingly.

A chuckle escaped from the woman’s mouth, surprised at the young girl’s boldness. “Alright, sweetheart, I’m going to give you a deal.” She fished in her cargo pants pockets, all the while looking around with her unblinking eyes. “The first one is free, but I’ll have to charge you for the rest.”

Finally, she emerged with a small device, no larger than a cassette tape. There was a little protruding point at one corner. A transmitter?

Harper wrinkled her brow. “The first, what?” She crossed her arms. “And if you’re trying to get me to participate in your marketing scheme, you’re out of luck.”

The woman chuckled again, with a sinister undertone. “Trust me, you’re going to want more.”

Grudgingly, Harper rifled through her tote. She had a twenty dollar bill. Enough to catch a self-driving taxi home for the night. Or she could just walk home. “You still haven’t told me what I’m supposed to be buying…?”

The woman grinned widely. Harper was taken aback. It was the first time she had seen the woman smile, and she didn’t quite like it. “You’ll see, dear,” the woman crooned. And then she lunged forward, without a hint of warning.

“Hey—!” Harper’s protest was quickly cut off. Her expression drained. Her eyes emptied and became vacant. Her wrists went slack, holding the DreamLink as it dangled from the spike embedded just below her palm. Her breathing slowed and her eyelids fluttered as she entered R.E.M. sleep.

Five minutes later, she awoke with a start, sputtering and gasping for breath. She remembered a beautiful beach day. No. Something about the dream was definitely wrong. More and more details of the dream rushed back to Harper, overwhelming her. She tried to steady her irregular breathing, barely noticing the woman observing her with an amused expression. Shaken, she racked her brain.

She had parked her car and scooped up a beach towel, cradling it in her arms as she dashed towards the water. Only slightly out of breath, she had kicked off her flip flops and unfurled the colorful beach towel, eager to explore. Harper grinned widely in anticipation of the cool ocean water on her toes. Flattening out her beach towel, she noticed the corner of a neighboring towel next to hers. She raised her smiling face up to the beach goer.

He wasn’t human. Harper stumbled and fell backwards onto her towel. She squeezed her eyes shut and prayed. Half a minute later, she felt pretty much alive. She felt the ocean breeze ruffle her hair, and she tasted the salt in the air. Mustering enough courage to peek, Harper cast a cautious gaze towards the… being.

Her eyes felt glued to the face of the being. His eyes were completely round, as if permanently surprised. Yet somehow, he didn’t seem surprised—rather, devoid of emotion. His eye sockets were hollow, his face was perfectly chiseled, and his lips stretched into a wide, uncanny smile.

Nearly petrified with horror, Harper looked away for someone, anyone who could help. But every single human she cast her eyes upon had the same expressionless face. The school-age children, the old grandmothers, the young men holding beach volleyballs. All the same emotionless faces. Unblinking.

She suddenly flinched, emerging from her thoughts as the woman in the alleyway held out her hand. “Excuse me?” Harper mouthed with horror. “So, what do you want to try next?”

The woman gestured towards the twenty dollar bill that Harper held. Her grasp was so tight that the bill crinkled in her palm. “Will it be skydiving or, hmm, an amusement park?”

Harper didn’t answer. She staggered backwards, tossed the DreamLink out of her hands and sprinted towards the street corner.

She felt the woman’s leering smile the whole time. She desperately wrenched open an automated taxi door. With legs like jelly, she collapsed in the backseat and resolved to stick to one rule: “I will never, ever trade a dream again.”

Ethan’s mouth hung open, speechless. “But… the technology is better now,” he murmured to himself. “It’s not scary, Harps, I swear…” but

his voice caught on the last two words.

“Ethan, I know that you want to feel that thrill. The truth is, no matter how good the technology gets, it can’t replicate a human being.”

He opened his mouth again, but no words came out.

“Dream technology can make the most delicious ice cream cone, or the most beautiful sunset. But it can’t replicate emotion and feeling. That’s what real life holds,” Harper continued.

“Dreams should be cherished, not bought and sold. They hold the power to transform us, But true dreams, the ones we create within ourselves, are the ones that truly matter.”

“So.” Harper leaned against the doorframe and outstretched her hand, ready to take her brother to the outside world.

“Reality or illusions. What will it be?”

Ethan took her hand.

BY *Sophie Lighvani*
I WRITE because it opens up an entirely new dimension for me to express my thoughts and feelings in. The ability to craft new worlds purely through words is remarkable.



A Place for Poetry

Featured Poems From the iWRITER Staff

DESTINED TO LEAD

In my heart, a dream resides.
With my vision, my eyes open wide.
I gaze at the flag, proud and high,
Dreaming of leading this country of mine.

To be the President, I must give my best.
To help the country, I'll go on a quest.
With determination, I'll forge the way,
Guided by justice every day.

I envision a country united and strong,
Where every voice sings a beautiful song.
With wisdom and kindness as my guide,
I'll bring people together, side by side.

This dream I have, it won't cease.
I promise to serve and bring peace.
I'm a girl of ambition, ready to lead.
My dream of being president will succeed.

Though challenges may come, I will not fear,
For my dream is alive, crystal clear.
I'm a girl with a vision, a nation to mend.
Dreaming of a future that knows no end.

BY Sanvi Pandit
I WRITE because writing is my way to share what I think and feel. Composing stories and poems helps me tell the world about myself without feeling scared.



DREAMING IN THE THEATRE

Spotlights engulfed Idina Menzel
I wondered if it felt warm like the morning sun
but most of all, I wondered what it was like to sing,
entrancing a crowd by opening my mouth.
She was seen (even though it was after 9 pm),
and I was only a little girl.

I could look at her and I wasn't just a little girl.
I was a resident of Oz, and Elphaba was my best friend.

That night I tucked under my covers so
only my chin peeked over the cotton.
To me
the ceiling was a wood-glossed stage
and my voice could be heard
from the last seat,
from the lobby with gold trim
from the street outside
where a glowing Broadway sign illuminated my name
down on little girls' faces
little girls in pretty dresses
that their mom made them wear
because the theatre was where gold and glitter
personified
and where dreams were born.



BY Cami Culbertson
I WRITE because it makes me feel powerful. Normally in my everyday life, I feel small or insignificant in the grand scheme of things. When I write and have the ability to publish, I feel like I am making my mark. Even if what I am writing about seems small, the fact I can share my voice in works like magazines where I am alongside talented writers, makes all the work I do feel significant to me. I enjoy keeping what I write, no matter how old, so I can reflect back on the work I have done and feel confident. Writing is the articulation of everything I cannot express otherwise.

MAKE A WISH

The sidewalk glistens—
dew-laced under lamplight,
a film over the silver-lined pebbles
hardening beneath my rubber soles.

look up and find: dozens of twinkling lights—

like fluttering eyes, glittering along the ebony shore,
i know,
you are probably somewhere, tucked away
under thick cotton, dream-heavy sheets,
while i am out to pluck the ripest star:

whisper your wish to it,
and watch it come true.

memorize each obsidian swirl of sky
at midnight, entwined
in clouds of breath fading into
winter-strewn air

silent, the wind blows you

a mouthful of hair.
but you don't care,
just stand and waver under
a large slice of moon,
listen, wait— silent.

and maybe while you wait,
count all the peach pits my mother
painted last summer:

half-red half-yellow
half-blue half-green

falling and plopping into
your outstretched hands, forever
reaching toward a canvas of sky.

BY Sophie Yu
I WRITE to let my thoughts, feelings, and ideas spread across the paper. To form and create a story that can be told in any perspective, described with any words. Writing can create a whole new world.

A DAZZLING JOURNEY THROUGH CAPTIVATING AND INSPIRING DREAMSCAPES

Pristine Terrains

Dreams are deserts with mirages of towering sand dunes, manifesting visions of our future. Dreams are uncharted islands waiting for explorers like us to venture into the unknown. Dreams are mystical forests uncovering the endless mysteries of our mind and imagination. Dreams are majestic mountain ranges challenging us with looming, formidable obstacles.

Dreams are awe-inspiring vistas that reassure us on our path to distant summits. Dreams are active volcanoes brimming with the strength to empower unwavering ambition. Dreams are open, viridescent fields, eagerly anticipating our discoveries enthusiastically. Dreams are calm, windswept beaches that soothe and take us on relaxing voyages.

Majestic Waters

Dreams are waves crashing on shores with pain and frustrations from sorrowful memories. Dreams are winding rivers, revealing their tributaries that lead us on exciting adventures. Dreams are powerful, raging storms of inventive and unique ideas that propel us forward. Dreams are shimmering waterfalls that crash with extreme energy and determination.

Dreams are vast, deep oceans that transport us to unknown destinies in store for us. Dreams are freshwater lakes capturing our journeys toward our goals and destinations. Dreams are ponds of rainwater, reflecting experiences and memories we'll forever cherish. Dreams are clear mountain streams, so peaceful, like the eye of a furious hurricane.

Breathtaking Skies

Dreams are radiant sunrises, symbolizing hope and resilience after dark storms. Dreams are sparkling stars that guide us toward our desires and hopes for the future. Dreams are full moons, shining the light that signifies hope for success and joy. Dreams are blooming sunrises that start a new day with many possibilities and choices.

Dreams are fluffy clouds of feelings that quickly pass over emerald pastoral meadows. Dreams are tender breezes rustling with opportunities through fields of ripe, golden wheat. Dreams are lightning and thunderstorms that crash with spontaneous ideas and feelings. Dreams are rainbows that display brightness and happiness through a wide array of colors.



BY Tanvi Padala
I WRITE because words are the sound of my thoughts and let me be creative. Through writing, I can escape to impossible worlds, experience magic, and create imaginative characters. Writing brings a tremendous amount of joy and relaxes me.

DREAMING

The clock strikes twelve.
A lone streetlight clicks on,
And light spills onto the tear-streaked cobblestone.
Rain weeps this street in hues of gray and silver,
Leaching the color from the air itself.
The sky is a void of endless night,
The stars so small they look less hopeful and more meek,
Cowering specks of light before a never-ending sea of black.

A man holds an umbrella to fend off the rain,
Squinting through a haze of fog that threatens to engulf him.
A worn briefcase swings from his arm.
Empty, save for the dust of discarded youth.
The man is halfway across the street when a thought strikes him.
Lowering his umbrella, he stretches out his arms,
Turning a jaded face to heaven’s downpour.
The briefcase drops, spilling open,
And the remnants of his dreams are flung free into the sky,
Rejuvenated by the rain,
Shaking off years of neglect and disdain to burn brighter than the sun.

In a secluded corner of a worn apartment,
A small boy clutches the windowsill with pink fingers.
His eyes are fixated on a bright star above, its light pulling the child into a warm embrace.
The apartment speaks of disrepair,
Full of relics of a brighter time,
And as the child’s eyes linger on the dusty handlebars of a broken toy,
His face brightens with nostalgia.
He takes the toy out of the corner,
Rolls it back and forth across a threadbare red carpet,
And the toy, the dreams contained within it,
Expel a ray of pure hope that makes the stars shine with wonder.

The rain is pouring in sheets,
Streams of grime-filled water are snaking their way through the crevices of road.
An old woman contemplates her existence through a thick pane of glass.
Once vivacious, young, and free, she has let her youth leak away in a stupor.
Now, old, gnarled, she has nothing to her name but the dreams of her past.
Every so often, lightning strikes,
And the room, along with the harsh lines of her face, are thrown into great relief.
She has filled the entire space with photographs,
Eyes glazed, mouths frozen in a rendition of a never-perfect smile.
Friends, children, perhaps even a husband,
Swept up in the rainstorm that has stolen the color from the room,
Bleaching it from the walls and floors,
Until everything drowns in a monotonous flood of gray.

Rain is still falling.
The minute hand ticks.

The old woman stands.
Things happen as if in slow motion.
Her wrinkled fingers fumble with a latch again and again,
Until the window flings open, and she is drenched in the cold water.
She smiles, spreads her arms,
Feels her heart blossom slowly into a kaleidoscope of color.
She opens her eyes, sees violets and yellows and pinks,
She traces the jagged bolts of electricity as they race through the clouds,
She laughs at the brilliant red of her own blood, the bruised peach of her hands.
She stares at the melancholy twilight sky and wonders,
How she could have missed such incredible beauty.
This, she thought with reverence, staring at the heavens,
This is what life is about.
She moves away from the window, picking up a photograph.
Holding it up to the rain, she allows her despair to be washed clean from its surface,
She gathers her dreams, her family, her hopes, cherishing them
In a small wooden cupboard in her heart.

The rain stops, but the minute hand keeps ticking.
The sun emerges from the storm,
Clouds gloss pink and orange and purple,
And dawn spreads her rosy fingers over the sky.

The man collects his briefcase,
The boy falls asleep on the floor,
And the old woman closes the window,
But all with that strange, dancing smile on their face,
That promised a dream lit brighter than the sun.



BY Helen Zhang
I WRITE because, in a world where so much is uncertain, my imagination is always reliably creative and available. I know that, in times of stress, poetry and literature are always ways to find release and consistency in my life.

Radha and Jai's Recipe for Romance

Sour, Sweet, Spicy: This Book Has All the Flavors

Nisha Sharma's cute, contemporary, and captivating novel tells the story of two Indian-American teenagers.

With a perfect blend of descriptive dance sequences, meaningful interactions between friends, and mouth-watering recipes from a faraway family member, Sharma delivers a relatable and heartwarming story about overcoming challenges, finding home, and, you guessed it, following your dreams.

Radha has been dancing kathak her whole life. (Kathak is an ancient Indian classical dance thought to have originated from the wandering bards of North India known as Kathakars, or storytellers). When a secret is revealed at a high-stakes dance competition, Radha finds herself in New Jersey at the Princeton Academy of the Arts. There, she meets Jai, captain of the Bollywood Beats dance team. Both of them see something in the other that could change their lives for the better: they just have to be brave enough to seize it.

As a classically trained Indian dancer, I saw so much of myself in Radha. Her hardened feet from years of practicing, her relationship with her dance teacher, and most importantly, her seeking to rekindle “dance joy.”

This phrase appears frequently throughout the book, so readers should be sure to keep track of that, as it epitomizes Radha’s journey to find what makes her heart sing and whether or not she can find that joy with someone else by her side.

The chapters alternate between Radha and Jai’s perspectives, which helps readers connect with both characters in their moments together and apart. Jai’s familial and financial struggles come to light while Radha grapples with her anxiety and a complicated relationship with her mother.

The supporting cast in *Radha and Jai’s Recipe for Romance* is equally memorable and grounded in reality, helping readers understand the thoughts and actions of the titular characters.

There are a lot of moving pieces in this novel, but Sharma gives each one their due diligence and aptly works them with and against each other. Though the novel somewhat rushes into a ‘happy’ ending, readers overall can’t help but root for the sweet romance between Radha and Jai. Also, fans of Indian food and Bollywood culture will love certain treats sprinkled throughout the story.

To conclude, I would rate this book at 4.3 out of 5. Because *Radha & Jai’s Recipe for Romance* includes the topics of mental health struggles, panic attacks, and emotional abuse, I recommend this novel to readers ages 15 and up.



BY Sanjna Pandit
I WRITE because of the joy I feel when I put a new idea down on paper. To be able to bring feelings and emotions to the reader, through ideas that I get to express.

Reading Recommendations!

1. *The Class* by Erich Segal
Follow the lives of 5 Harvard students from different backgrounds as they navigate personal struggles, relationships, and the challenges of life after college in the 1960s. Recommended for ages 16 and above.

2. *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton
Explore themes of friendship, loyalty, and social inequality with Ponyboy and the Greasers as they make their way through 1960s Oklahoma. Recommended for ages 14 and above.

3. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie Junior; a Native American teenager, questions identity, poverty, and cultural expectations while attending an all-white school. Recommended for ages 14 and above.

4. *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo
Experience the power of poetry in this novel-in-verse that tells the story of Xiomara, a Dominican-American teenager who discovers her voice while challenging societal expectations and family dynamics. Recommended for ages 14 and above.

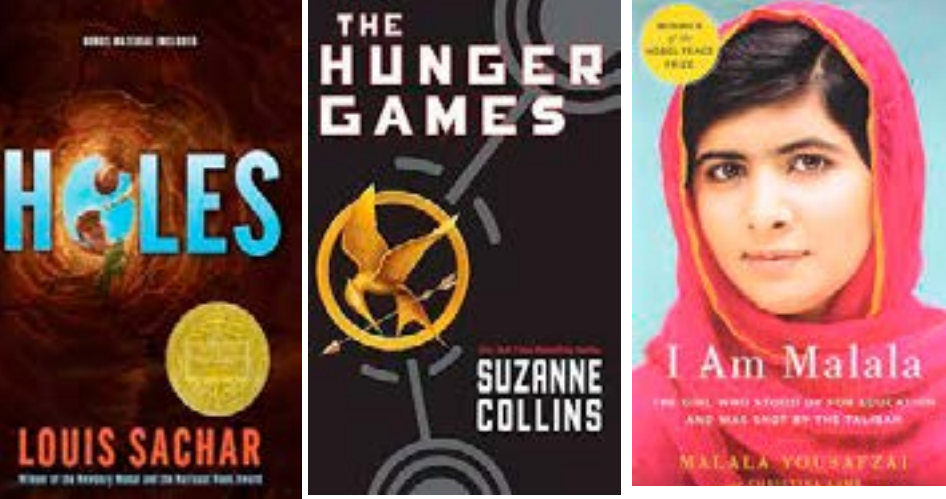
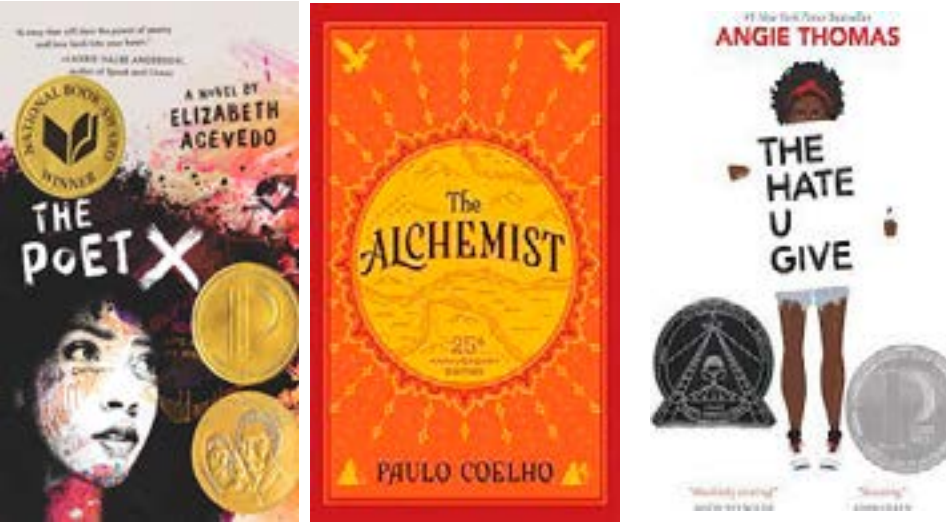
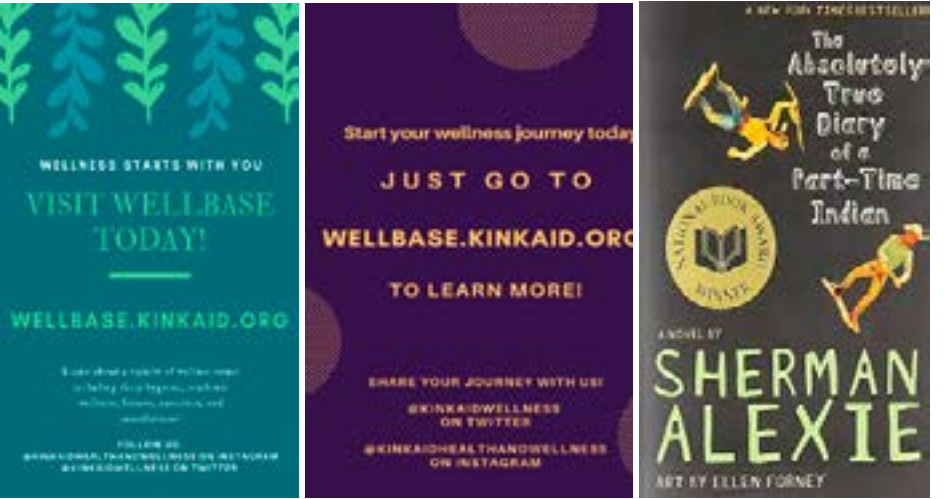
5. *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho
Join Santiago on a transformative journey across the desert as he discovers the true meaning of life, destiny, and the pursuit of one's dreams. Recommended for ages 14 and above.

6. *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
After witnessing the shooting of her unarmed friend by a police officer, Starr Carter stands up for what’s right and uses the power of voice to fight for justice. Recommended for ages 14 and above.

7. *Holes* by Louis Sachar
After being falsely accused of theft, Stanley Yelnats is sent to Camp Green Lake, where he is forced to dig holes as punishment. He learns the importance of friendship and how his family’s misfortune affects him to this day. Recommended for ages 12 and above.

8. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins
A gripping dystopian tale where Katniss Everdeen is chosen to fight against other teenagers for survival in a televised competition. A tale of rebellion, love, and war. Recommended for ages 12 and above.

9. *I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* by Malala Yousafzai
The inspiring true story of Malala, a Pakistani activist and Nobel laureate, who sparked a wildfire of change after she was shot standing up for girls’ education and rights. Recommended for ages 12 and above.



10. *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner
A group of teenagers in the future are mysteriously trapped in a deadly maze, with no memory and no clue of what they are doing there. They must find a way to escape before it's too late. Recommended for ages 12 and above.

11. *The Giver* by Lois Lowry
In a seemingly perfect society, everything is chosen for you, from parents to jobs. A young boy, Jonas, learns the dark truth behind the world in which he lives and challenges conformity. Recommended for ages 12 and above.

12. *Aru Shah and the End of Time* by Roshani Chokshi
Embark on a thrilling adventure with Aru Shah, a twelve-year-old girl who unknowingly releases an ancient demon and must save the world from destruction. Recommended for ages 10 and above.

13. *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson
Immerse yourself in this poignant memoir in verse, tracing the author's childhood and dreams as an African American girl in the 1960s and 1970s. Recommended for ages 10 and above.

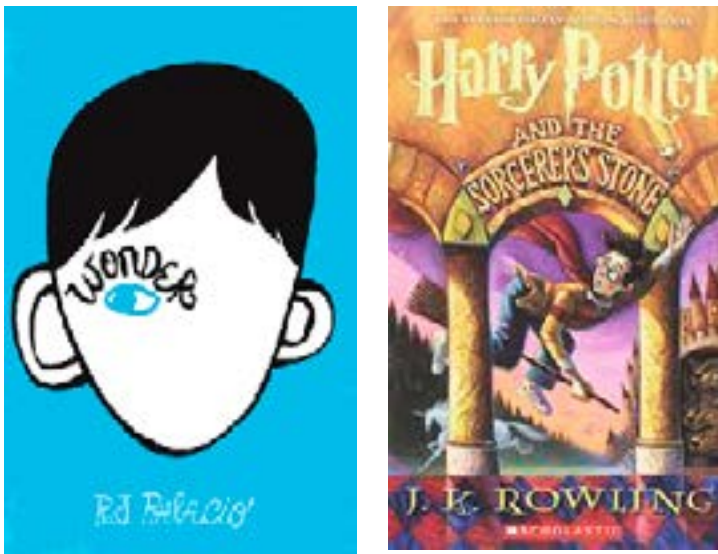
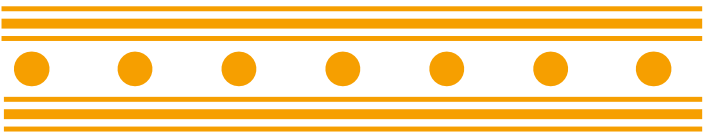
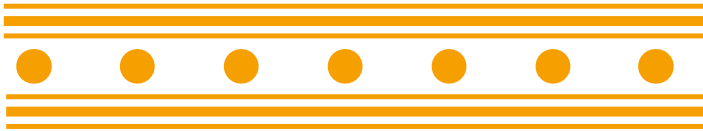
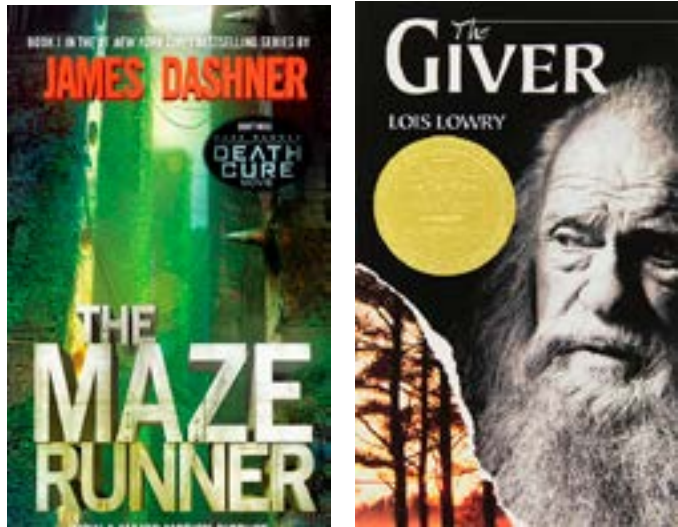
14. *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio
A heartwarming story about Auggie Pullman, a ten-year-old boy who has facial differences, and is nervous to start his first year of “real” school. He finds a way to show that what matters most in life is the power of kindness and acceptance. Recommended for ages 9 and above.

15. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling
Join Harry Potter in this classic fantasy story as he discovers his magical abilities and embarks on a thrilling adventure at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Recommended for ages 9 and above.

I hope you enjoy reading these selections!



BY *Nia Shetty*
I WRITE because of the joy I feel when I put a new idea down on paper. To be able to bring feelings and emotions to the reader, through ideas that I get to express.



MEET THE 2023-2024 OFFICERS!

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Tanvi Padala Social Media	Cami Culbertson Outreach	Prisha Shivani Historian	Sophie Lighvani Parliamentarian

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