

# iWRITER

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By Kids, For Kids Magazine

# Wellness!



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# Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

This is the last letter I'll be writing as Founder and Editorial Director of the iWRITER.

Building the iWRITER Magazine from a small-team pandemic project to what it is today — a nationwide literary magazine with over 150 published pieces and 1,500 views — has been a transformative experience. We've come a long way, from stumbling through a Lucidpress layout in 2020... to now, 15 issues later, having a completely streamlined approach to writing, editing, and designing.

The iWRITER has taught me that action and passion alone don't make you a good leader; leadership is also about *thehraav*, a Hindi word for the art of the pause — too much, too fast is too hard. In short, leadership is nothing without wellness, which just so happens to be the theme of this issue. And it has taught me that the people you surround yourself with trump nearly everything else about your project in importance. With good people, you can do beautiful things.

Writers and artists: you've made me and my fellow editors smile, laugh, cry, and shake our heads in awe all in equal measure. I think I speak on behalf of all the seniors when I say we're so lucky to have had the unique privilege of working with all of you and seeing you come into your own, from preternaturally-smart middle schoolers to tenacious high schoolers.

Editors: thank you all for helping me steer this ship and for always being ready to jump in when things got wild. You're incredible leaders and I'm happy I get to pass the torch to you to lead the publication. Wishing you all the best!

And to our readers, thank you for, well, reading, and for encouraging us to create superlative content. I hope you enjoy this wellness-themed issue of the iWRITER. Our poems, stories, and art will hopefully provide you with some insights and inspiration to take a mental break, master the art of *thehraav*, and then step forward and excel.

Signing off,

*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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# Prioritizing Wellness In Our Everyday Lives

As students navigate the stress of high school, their main focus is how to manage their intense workload. Yet they often forget to prioritize themselves. It is extremely important for students to remember that they are not machines, and that it is impossible to operate on a lifestyle that is devoid of self-care. Maintaining physical, mental, and emotional well-being is crucial for academic success and happiness through these impactful years. Research has shown that self-care is clinically proven to reduce anxiety and stress, and help avoid burnout by increasing energy levels. Therefore, maintaining a healthy balance of school & wellness will make students feel recharged.

First, students need to recognize the detrimental effects that come with not making room for self-care in their lives. Studies show that sleep deprivation, which takes place due to cramming for exams or finishing assignments, causes many detrimental health consequences and decreases student performance on exams. Researchers at Columbia University, Department of Psychiatry, found that poor sleep affects many of our cognitive functions, such as attention, learning, and memory, all of which are needed in everyday life at school. While staying up to study might feel like a productive choice at the time, there are numerous negative after effects. Furthermore, it is important to designate a specific space for studying. This will help trigger motivation to study as your mind will not be confused about whether it is time to relax or focus.

Additionally, McLean Hospital conducted a study and found that people who procrastinate are more likely to experience more stress and less mindfulness. It is easy to get distracted, especially with modern technology, but this impacts students' productivity and creativity. Instead of never going on social media or playing video games, it is easier and more effective to practice time management. By implementing time management into a daily schedule, students can plan out their assignments—increasing productivity—while leaving room to relax & enjoy their free time. This will increase students' levels of dopamine, as they are not worried about pending assignments, relieving them of loads of stress.

Next, taking breaks seems like a menial task that is second-nature, but many students might not be utilizing breaks to their optimal advantage. To many, we might characterize a break as scrolling on Tiktok or watching TV, which are both great forms of entertainment but are not the best ways to recharge our figurative batteries. Those are counterproductive ways of taking a break, as they do not alleviate stress or improve mindfulness. By socializing with others, spending time outdoors, and exercising, students can improve their well-being, health, and human connections. Engaging in hobbies, any topic that we are passionate about, takes our minds off of work and provides a sense of fulfillment and relaxation. Students can also volunteer and contribute to the community, which provides satisfaction and a positive sense of achievement. Finally, students can journal to either let out feelings, practice gratitude, or just write.

In conclusion, by prioritizing wellness, students can cultivate a healthier and more sustainable approach to academic success and personal fulfillment. By integrating self-care into daily routines, students can enhance their resilience, reduce stress, and ultimately thrive in all aspects of their lives. Self-care is vital not only to accomplish academic goals but to nurture a strong foundation of wellness that will guide students throughout high school and beyond. Self-care is essential for students as it enables them to prosper academically and personally by instilling important habits that will always be useful in order to lead a balanced life. By having a strong routine to maintain physical health and mental wellness, students can start to pave the way towards a bright future, where success is not just measured academically but also by their overall well-being.

**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.*



# Sleeping Into the Dream Realm

You've heard it many times before. Your parents and teachers are constantly reminding you. You may even question why the topic is always brought up. What topic is it? Sleep! This is an especially important topic for middle and high schoolers to take into account, as our developing brains need plenty of rest to tackle each day with creativity and excitement. Sleep is vital for the human body's well-being and ability to enjoy the world's pleasures. My hard-working peers and I tend to get less than 7 hours of sleep a night. This is for understandable reasons, of course, considering many of us do extracurricular activities or are constantly on the go to the point where sleeping at 10:00 is unimaginable. Regardless, there are those who spend their time at home watching YouTube and Netflix before starting their homework. There's nothing wrong with doing that, but there needs to be a balance to everything, including sleep. Here are some positive effects of getting a healthy amount of ZZZs.

### Positivity and Concentration -

Feeling well-rested when waking up feels amazing, because you are ready to conquer the day and use your alert mind to learn new things. Take an average school day, for example. Going through every class will be more enjoyable if you are awake enough to understand what lab is being done in science or the conjugations in Spanish. The more you understand the material being covered, the better you perform on assessments and can feel proud of the excellent grade that you received.

### Maintaining a Memorable & Athletic Life -

Studies show that people consume fewer calories if they get a good night's sleep. They eat healthily and feel the need to snack less, which is always beneficial. Basically, sleep regulates the body's food intake. In addition, the more the body is rested, the more the muscles and bones relax and prepare for a new day of exercise. This includes the brain, the most important muscle that needs rest and recovery to reflect on all the new things it learned that day.

### Building a Strong Immune System -

There are links to getting the right amount of sleep and reducing inflammation in the body. According to the World Journal of Gastroenterology, lack of sleep can certainly be a pathway for

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD), leading to problems in the gastrointestinal tract. Not to get too personal, but when I first read this, I was appalled. I myself have inflammatory bowel disease, so I began to think that was because I didn't sleep enough. Of course, that's not always the case, but I use this as motivation to head to bed at a reasonable time on school nights.

Sleeping allows the body to recover and regenerate. The more a person sleeps, the less likely they are to get sick because their immune systems can function at their best. So, the next time your parents say to get lots of rest when you have a fever, now you can fully understand why.

### Sleep Recommendations -

The amount of sleep needed to function properly is different for everyone, usually differentiated by age. You'll notice that as people grow older, they require less sleep. Here is the general breakdown that most scientific research concludes:

Group	Age	Amount of sleep
Newborns	0–3 months	14–17 hrs
Infants	4–12 months	12–16 hrs
Toddler	1–2 yrs	11–14 hrs
Preschool	3–5 yrs	10–13 hrs
School-age	6–12 yrs	9–12 hrs
Teen	13–18 yrs	8–10 hrs
Adult	18–60 yrs	7-plus hrs
Adult	61–64 yrs	7–9 hrs
Adult	65+ yrs	7–8 hrs

**What Goes On In Your Head While Sleeping?** - What happens during our slumber? Dreams, of course! Have you ever seen a puppy fighting a dinosaur in the middle of a baseball game? Was there ever a time when you were being chased by a killer wasp around your cousin's house? These images sound arbitrary and strange. That's because those have happened to me before in a dream. Dreams are among the world's greatest mysteries. Scientists today are using relatively new technology to make complete sense of dreams. Dreams tell stories based on events, emotions, and play-by-plays in our lives. It is confirmed that the faces in someone's dream are faces they already knew and not arbitrarily made up. Dreams occur during a period in your sleep called Rapid Eye Movement, or REM.

As the name suggests, this is when your eyes move back and forth under your closed eyelids. Here's the crazy part: your muscles get temporarily paralyzed during REM, which makes sense since there is a crazy dream happening in your head at the moment. No one likes having unpleasant dreams. You may often wonder to yourself, "Why did my brain choose to think of something scary? How does it do that?" That is a question that I'm afraid I can't answer. Dreams are still being researched using tools that may improve as the world becomes more technologically advanced.

If you have ever experienced a nightmare, then you know that they are one of the most unnatural ways to be terrified. What I mean is that they can often result in children and even adults rousing from their sleep, scared and confused. Nightmares are often confused with night terrors. Night terrors represent a type of disorder that makes people scream upon waking up, jump out of bed, and have a reaction similar to a full-blown panic attack. These are more severe than nightmares.

No one likes having unpleasant dreams. You may often wonder to yourself, "Why did my brain choose to think of something scary? How does it do that?" That is a question that I'm afraid I can't answer. Dreams are still being researched using tools that may improve as the world becomes more technologically advanced.

Now, your mind has enough information to take care of your body by getting the right amount of quality sleep, and hopefully, you learned something new about dreams. Maybe in the future, you can conduct experiments and write articles about sleep and dreams. It all starts with paying attention in class, and from there, you can go anywhere or do anything. You just need an imaginative, keen brain. So, sleep well tonight and dream big dreams!

### BY Sanjna Pandit

*I WRITE because writing cultivates my ability to be eloquent and express my feelings and ideas. I learn more and more about myself with every new thought that I put on paper. My mind forces me to enter a whole new realm of imagination and discoveries that I never knew I could reach.*

*\*Article recycled from Spring 2020 Edition of the Kinkaid Talon Times*

Sources:

[Medical News Today](#)

[Psychology Today](#)

[Brainpop: Dreams Video](#)



## Let's Talk SLEEP



# Maintaining Mindfulness

When we feel inner peace and joy, we thrive without worry and achieve our goals. But, in most instances, this reality only comes to a very few. So, what prevents all of us from thriving? The answers can vary from individual to individual, but some common solutions come from strengthening our relationships and perspectives about ourselves, work, school, and family. However, in all of this, we can still thrive with joy and no stress! How? This may require us to rewire or remodel your inner and outer landscape and take deliberate, consistent action. But, with the right determination and mindset, we will be able to easily reap the rewards of your efforts. Here are a few ways you can tackle the challenges of your life with a much better mindset, focus, and attitude!

### 1) REINFORCING A POSITIVE MINDSET

To be able to make simple and healthy choices on a daily basis, I say the following phrase to myself. My goal is to spark emotion that creates a positive solution-based mindset: "I am good enough, and I am a smart, capable, and kind person who can accomplish anything I set my mind to. Positive energy is always around me; every day is a new opportunity." I say these words in a state of calm happiness to create positive mental scenarios for my future. The more I collaborate with others who have similar positive mindsets, the more we are able to build creative solutions and see additional opportunities for growth.

### 2) PLANNING INSTEAD OF REACTING

Although maintaining a positive mindset is important, it's also important to maintain a strong level of organization and planning. In most scenarios in which someone is stressed, they are overwhelmed by loads of priorities which they don't know how to organize. However, there is one simple method I like to use to prioritize all my commitments.

To start off, I create a box with 4 different subsections. Each is labeled Urgent, Important, Not Urgent, NOT A PRIORITY. Based on the timings/due-dates of each assignment/commitment and how long it will take me to complete each one, I carefully consider and categorize each of my priorities. This way, I can offload a lot of the stress and priorities to keep my mind from being stuck and better understand what I have to do each day to be able to complete all my commitments or assignments properly and timely. For those of you who may be unclear how to prioritize your commitments into each box, here is a breakdown of

what you can do. Keep in mind the caveat that instances can vary, so flexibility is key.

**Urgent:** An assignment due today or tomorrow / a major project due in a very few days

**Important:** Small assignment due tomorrow / regular assignment due in a few days / a major project due in a few days

**Not Urgent:** Regular assignment due in a week / a major project due in a while

**NOT A PRIORITY:** An assignment, regular project, etc. due in more than a few weeks

### 3) LETTING GO OF WHAT'S WITHIN

It's normal to feel worried. It's normal to feel sad. It's normal to feel stressed. But what's important is how we tackle those feelings and not let them interfere much in our day-to-day lives. There are a few ways we can express your feelings in such a way where we feel relieved and happy.



**TALKING WITH A TRUSTED FRIEND OR ADVISOR:** Sometimes a helping hand is just what we need to tackle our inner challenges. A trusted friend and advisor can definitely provide some well-needed empathy or advice to help us feel a little bit better or help us develop beneficial solutions.

However, many individuals may not be comfortable sharing or expressing their feelings with others. The great news: there are numerous other ways to express our feelings while maintaining our privacy.

**FREE-STYLE WRITING & JOURNALING:** Whether it be expressing what's going on in our lives or crafting a creative story deeply rooted from our inner state of calmness, our imagination has no bounds, and we are in a space where we can feel comfortable sharing our thoughts or creating new ideas.

**POETRY:** Poetry is one of the most figurative and diverse forms of self-expression, and this may be helpful when trying to connect with our emotions and form abstract meanings from what we're experiencing. Poetry is also well known to therapeutically foster an environment with strong imagery and meaning.

**ART:** Some say that a picture is worth a 1000 words. It may be abstract, it may simply be something you like to illustrate, or it may be meaningful to us in some way, but art is an ideal therapeutic remedy and popular hobby intended to unleash your creativity and forget about internal stress with the simple stroke of a paintbrush from a palette of infinite colors.



**MUSIC:** As we listen to different forms of music, we feel different feelings. We may feel happy to remember a past friendship or the joy of a beautiful moment in their lives. Music opens people's hearts and minds in transformational ways and renews us.

**DANCE:** As we dance, we feel emotions because the movement and music is therapeutic. Interactions with others on the dance floor increase our social relationships as we smile and speak to others. As we connect and celebrate with our families and friends, our emotional and mental bonds are strengthened.

Within all the bumps and twists in the highway of life, we can still find our calm, perfect inner road and thrive without being mired in worry by just simply being positive, staying organized, and expressing our emotions.

The cool part is that perfection isn't required on the journey from surviving to thriving! So, the next time you feel stressed or worried, consider some of these strategies, and who knows?

You could instantly start creating and walking on your own creative path of success!

**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.*



# Why We Should not Bring Back Kindergarten Nap Time to Teens

According to Healthline, seventy-three percent of high schoolers don't get enough sleep. Many of them regularly fall asleep in their classes. Typically, American children grow up having a nap time in lower school, so why can't that same time be allotted for high school students who are twice as busy and get half as much sleep? Though this seems like a solution on the surface, having a sleep period in school lacks the benefits it sometimes assumes and would likely reduce focus and increase anxiety in students.

One topic in which many can agree is that highschoolers' sleep schedules need to be changed. Due to overly busy schedules, whether it be from extensively long homework assignments or an overload of extracurricular activities, many teens are staying up until early hours of the morning with school only a few hours later, despite the recommended period of sleep between eight and ten hours.

"I hear about people who are staying up 'til two or three am, and I'm just kind of confused. Let's say you have sports, and you get home at seven— if you live far away from school. You're telling me it takes you seven or eight hours to do your work? I think that's something you should evaluate in terms of class choice. I think that's probably not an issue with the school." Kinkaid junior, Sam Ferber said.

Interviewed students, even those with intense academics and extracurriculars, can all agree that a sleep period is simply too idealistic, and in reality would offer more shortcomings than benefits. Interviewed students expressed concerns with the accidental effects of a sleep period, most notably the counter-effect of more exhaustion. For example, imagine attending half of the classes of the school day, sleeping for twenty minutes, then having to go right back to school.

"Honestly nap time sounds great, but realistically it's only going to make me even more tired than how I started. I hate naps, even though on paper they are the dream. In reality, I feel like they never help my tiredness. They make me feel unproductive and even more tired." Kinkaid sophomore, Maureen Min said.

Maureen is not alone. Other students expressed concerns that the free period could not be used to get ahead on work or study for an upcoming test.

"If we were assigned a daily nap schedule, I would feel so stressed out that I'm not doing homework or studying that I would use that time to get ahead on work rather than sleep. I would love the option to sleep and catch up on rest, but I would feel too anxious to get other things done." Kinkaid junior, Bridget Gray said.

Most school schedules have classes that range in length anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes. That would mean that in the best case scenario, students would have an hour and a half to fall asleep and get productive sleep. According to Healthline, a full sleep cycle ranges anywhere from 90 to 110 minutes, meaning that any sleep period less than that could result in disrupted deep sleep periods, thus resulting in a sense of fatigue upon waking. When considering the time it takes for students to fall asleep and get adjusted, the school schedule does not properly accommodate a proper full sleep schedule, resulting in little benefits to combat daily exhaustion.

Overall, many students feel that if measures were to be taken to improve sleep, it would be more beneficial to add extra time for those ZZZ's before the start of the school day rather than in the middle of it.

"I think the better solution I'd rather have is school starting thirty minutes later or something like that. I think that change would be nicer." Ferber said.



**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.*

# Ken Ackerman: A Career in Broadcast Journalism

**K**en Ackerman's career is a demonstration of perseverance, adaptability, and the pursuit of passion. From his small start in Winston-Salem, North Carolina to his years as a beloved television anchor and reporter in Portland, Oregon, Ackerman's journey is one filled with a series of great experiences and significant contributions to the field of broadcast journalism.

Ackerman began his career as a sports anchor and reporter in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. His work garnered several Associated Press awards, showcasing his talent and dedication. Reflecting on these experiences, Ackerman shared, "My initial experiences in journalism really shaped the reporter I became later in my career. I am very grateful for every opportunity I had."

Transitioning from sports journalism to morning shows marked a large shift in Ackerman's career. His move to hosting morning programs like Good Day Oregon demonstrated his versatility and ability to connect with diverse audiences. Recalling his time on the show, Ackerman remarked, "Working on Good Day Oregon was such a fun experience. We got the most amazing guests, such as Adam Levine. It was amazing."

Ackerman provides an important piece of advice to aspiring journalists. Emphasizing the value of gaining experience in smaller markets, he advises, "Leave home and be adventurous. Travel to these small places, work hard, and build your confidence in your

career." Ackerman's own journey from smaller markets to larger ones exemplifies the value of hard work, perseverance, and seizing opportunities as they arise.

From his early days covering sports to becoming a morning show host, Ackerman's impact on the broadcast industry is undeniable.

Ackerman shared, "I love receiving messages from viewers. The small things they tell me, such as 'you put a smile on my face every morning.' I just love helping people get into a good mood every day. I would say that's the most rewarding part of this career."

Ackerman's resilient mindset offers valuable lessons for everyone, regardless of the career path they choose. By embracing challenges with determination and staying open to new opportunities, one can navigate their own path with resilience and purpose. Ackerman's emphasis on making a positive impact and finding joy in one's work underscores the importance of prioritizing well-being and healthy mindset to cultivate a fulfilling career journey.

**BY Shaivi Morparthi**  
*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.*



# A Place for Poetry

## Featured Poems From the iWRITER Staff

### SERENTIY EVERYDAY

My weeks flow by like waves on a beach,  
Starting by reaching  
Heights I couldn't even imagine  
Demanding, however  
Even when tsunamis threaten to take over  
I find things that make them  
Serene and beautiful  
The way the waves engulf me completely  
I can feel the force trying to push me down  
But they eventually retreat  
Caressing the sand gently  
Leaving me in tranquility and peace,

I realize,  
Even through the ups and downs,  
I love the waves



**BY Prisha Shivani**  
*I WRITE because it is a creative way of expressing your thoughts and ideas through words. iWRITE has given me the opportunity to write and publish, sharing my pieces with many people.*

### MY MORNING DEW

The glittering eyes that wink back at me,  
just like the fluttering waves of a summer sea.  
You fall and sway under the glance of sun,  
reminding the lilacs that April has begun.  
Your promise breathes life into hidden cracks,  
supporting its fragility from collapse.  
Your skin licked by a curious rabbit,  
thirsty from the constant morning habit.

My eyes wince from the brightness of a new day,  
and yet you remind me to love the new sway.  
The sway of the early grass on crisp air,  
moving as if the earth's chest rose and fell—  
the sound of dirt folding beneath one's foot  
as an audible note of how natural we behave.

It is you, morning dew,  
that whispers into my ear  
to stand fast and look outward.

It is you, morning dew,  
that flutters light at me  
after the darkest midnight pour.

It is you, morning dew,  
that flicks my wet ankles  
like a tender touch when I fall.

It is you, morning dew,  
that greets me when I rise  
and envelopes me when I fall.



**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.*



GOOD BLANKETS

True friends are like good blankets.  
They are faithful to you no matter what.  
Even if you're sick.  
Even if it's summertime.  
Even if you hate blankets.

True friends are like good blankets.  
They comfort you during the best and worst days.

When you're having the best day,  
and you feel like you can do anything,  
a true friend is there for you.  
There to lift you up.  
There to make you feel like you can do anything.

When you're having the worst day,  
and you feel like you can't do anything,  
a true friend is there for you.  
There to lift you up.  
To keep you warm, safe, and happy.

True friends are hard to find.  
So are good blankets.

So, if you find either one,  
hold it close

And never let go.

**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.*



BOOK TALK

**C**lap *When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo is a novel in verse that plunges into what it means to lose someone, and find your truest self in the aftermath. The novel switches back and forth between the perspectives of two main characters, Yahaira and Camino- one in New York and one in the Dominican Republic, who each lose their father in the same plane crash. It explores the repercussions in each of the girls' lives, and follows them through the challenges of the months after the tragedy, and how they learn to rebuild themselves, and their community.

The lyricism is one of the biggest accomplishments of this book. Acevedo's free verse is rich and powerful, capable of navigating the complexities and emotional nature of grief in a way that most prose cannot. In dealing with the attention that comes to Camino's remaining family, Acevedo writes, "I try not to suffocate under all the eyes that seem to be expecting me to tear myself out of my skin," deftly expressing the nuances and contractions of public loss through vivid language and devices. The poetic exploration of the characters' lives allows the reader to experience the tragedy on a deeply personal level.

Another important aspect of the novel is the way it approaches race, class, sexuality, and the intersectionality of its characters. Yahaira's sexual orientation and race are dealt with gracefully, as well as Camino's identity, fleshing out the protagonists into individuals with distinct dreams and passions, while still diving into their identities as young Dominican women, and the nuances and struggles that add to their story. From the beginning, there is a distinction between Camino's life "of mud," a situation of financial insecurity and danger—especially after the loss of her father—and the life of Yahaira, which focuses on the gentrification of her Dominican neighborhood, and threats like police brutality. There is a clear disparity between the wealth in their lives, but it is always intentional and thoughtful, provoking the discussion of the way class impacts one's upbringing. Acevedo makes you ask yourself, "how do our identities impact the way we interact with the world, either in struggle or in triumph?"

At its core, *Clap When You Land* is a story about family and home. It beautifully unravels how we learn to love, lose, choose, and find our place with those we care about the most, and how we reconcile that against where and how our life stories begin. As a reader, you find yourself longing to put the pieces back together in these girls' lives, cheering for them as they adjust themselves into a new arrangement.

**BY Caroline Pielop**  
*I WRITE because it gives me a voice greater than the one I can speak with. It doesn't matter what I look like or sound like, because my words allow me to say what I wish to, and craft it into my own kind of art. I have a story to tell, and by writing, everyone can hear it.*



HIGH-RISE

I want to slip myself between  
the folds of May's velvety jasmine, close

my eyes and raise my hands, blinking  
with each star-sizzling scallion. I close

my eyes, surrender to the silent static  
of the fog twisting through the close

wisteria trees outside, each prayer flattened  
beneath my twisted tongue. grandpa's close

to dying, mama suddenly gone, her promises shifting  
like twinkling windchimes outside the window, suddenly  
close

enough to watch them quiver, crack. Nothing  
fades—not even the persimmon stains lining the desk's  
edge,

or the shadows clinging to my shoes like wet soil  
and I'm talking to myself, again, wanting to sleep again,

my blood's alive again, closing my eyes with fractured  
light,  
and I'm waiting for what it will take to just forgive me.

**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.*



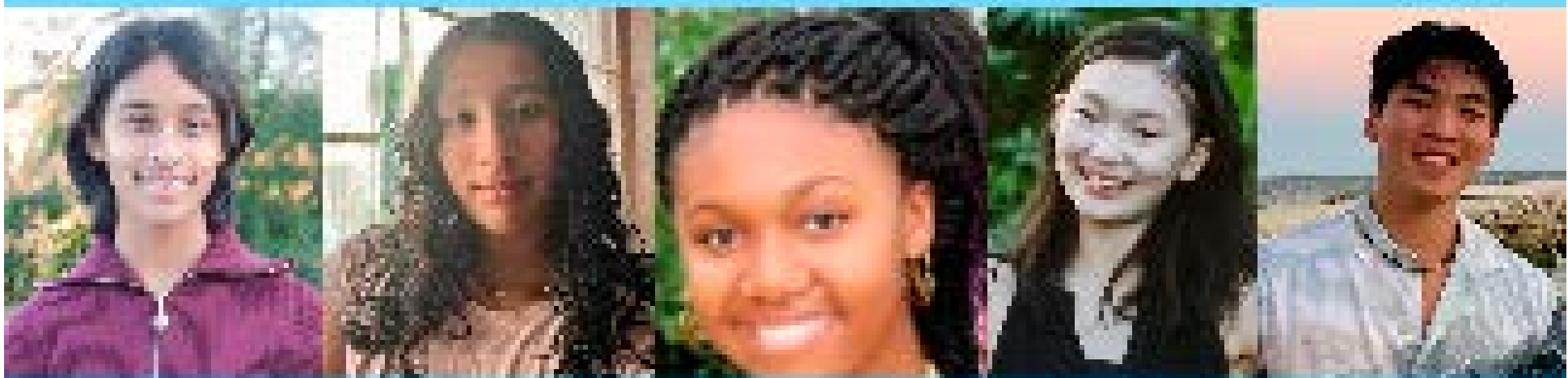
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