

**Q. Can you introduce yourself and tell us a little about who you are?**

A. Hi! My name is Katherine, and I am a junior in high school with a strong passion for the arts and writing. Creativity has always been an important part of who I am, whether I am painting, bedazzling Sonny Angels, or expressing my thoughts through words. I have been writing for about four years now, and it has become one of my favorite ways to express myself. What I love most about writing is that it allows me to take complex ideas and turn them into something meaningful and relatable. It's a way for me to process my thoughts and connect with others at the same time. Outside of writing I also compete in speech and debate, using my voice as a platform to discuss policymaking issues that continuously shape how I write.

**Q. How did your work connect to your own experiences, identity, or community?**

A. *Ghost Girl* connects deeply to my own identity as a Chinese American and to broader Chinese cultural experiences of displacement and belonging. Growing up, I often found myself navigating between two identities, one shaped by my family's cultural expectations, and the environment around me. There were moments when I felt fully immersed in one, yet distanced from the other. This duality is also reflected in my writing. I am especially passionate about writing stories centered on Chinese heritage and the experiences of immigrants navigating a foreign life. These stories resonate deeply with me because they reflect realities that are often simplified. Writing allows me to explore the emotional weight behind cultural identity: the quiet grief of assimilation, the tension between parents and children, and the loneliness of trying to belong in two worlds at once.

**Q. Can you tell us about the idea behind your work?**

A. Many of my influences come from writers who explore culture and identity with emotional honesty and depth. Ken Liu's *The Paper Menagerie* is the work I admire most. I have read it countless times, and every time the tears fall harder. Stories like Liu's have laid the foundation for me to write about Chinese culture. The way Liu portrays the hardships of Chinese immigrants: the longing for home, the pain of cultural rejection, and the irreversible consequences of a child finally growing, as Liu describes it, *the desire to take care of his parents, only to realize that they were long gone*, is incredibly powerful. Reading it feels intensely personal, almost as if I am living through the story myself. They have taught me that small moments can carry enormous meaning and that vulnerability is a beautiful strength in storytelling. I want my writing to honor the people who have shaped me. Reading other writer's works like Ken Liu truly inspired me to write more about Chinese culture.

**Q. What was your creative process like?**

A. *Ghost Girl* was inspired by China's One Child Policy and the systemic belief that daughters were less valuable than sons. The story follows a young girl who was barely seen as a human being, both within her family and within society. Writing *Ghost Girl* felt like giving a voice to someone who had been silenced before she even had the chance to speak. Through

developing this delicate character, I explored how emotional neglect can be just as haunting as physical absence. This piece remains especially meaningful to me because it taught me that writing can be an act of empathy and restoration, not just expression.

**Q. Was the piece you submitted something you're used to writing, or did you try something new?**

A. The piece I submitted was something new and different from my usual writing style. I knew I wanted to incorporate Chinese characters into my writing pieces, but I struggled with how to do so in a way that had a meaning rather than forcing characters in between sentences. There is something so beautiful about intertwining these intricately crafted characters with the English language. It was definitely an unfamiliar process, deciding when to use Chinese characters or if it would be too confusing to understand and match the characters to their meaning, however, this challenge ultimately pushed me to be more deliberate and thoughtful in my choices as a writer. In the end, I'm really proud that I was able to bring this vision to life. This piece allowed me to step outside of my comfort zone and explore a more personal and culturally expressive style of writing.