young pens are even mightier
As this project is driven by diversity, we use condensed typography to create as much space as possible. We aim to showcase as many of the students’ voices as we can, promoting inclusion. If you require this booklet in larger print, please visit: www.creativity-unleashed.org and download our digital version.
What a year we’ve had over here at Russell Sage College in Troy, NY. While the world returned to a sort of normal post pandemic, our creatives have been very busy. After many weeks of creative arts workshops and reviewing an incredible collection of submissions from our community, we are very excited to present this year’s offering of creative content. Inside these pages you will find voices from our community here in upstate New York and also from our partners in London, UK. This includes our students, staff and faculty here at Sage but also the young people from CreativityUnleashed. This is why there is a mix of British and American English.

CreativityUnleashed is the new face of a legacy project that began in 2014: Haringey Unchained. What started out as a small collective of students aiming to show case the creative talent of a school in Tottenham, London has now grown to become a not-for-profit working with young people everywhere. We promote social change, tolerance and diversity through community-driven art experiences. It has been our absolute pleasure working with the editorial team of The Rev at Russell Sage College for our second collaborative magazine.

Inside these pages you can enjoy a wide range of creativity including: poetry, flash fiction, non-fiction, photography, painting, digital artwork, drawings and more. The selection process was driven by the mission to integrate as many diverse voices as possible, focusing in on what our communities are celebrating, what they are mourning and what they are hoping for in the future.

Many thanks to local poet Carol Durant and local theatre director Jean-Remy Monnay for inspiring us this year with stories of their creative processes and advice regarding how to integrate a creative lifestyle in a post-pandemic world. Also, we’d like to thank Mark Mathews from Bluekite Creative for the design of our magazine and also for the work experience opportunities afforded to our design student.

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Cover artwork is by Russell Sage College student: Adam Lambert.

We hope that by the time you get through these pages you too will agree that while pens are mightier than the sword, young pens are even mightier…
The Rev Team:

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- Maysoon Sheikh: General Editor
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- Amina Yussuf: General Editor & Community Outreach Officer
scribbled different names in the margins of loose leaf / slipped into strangers under the beaded curtains in the doorway of a willow tree / sprouting like tendrils of cream in coffee mugs / chosen from a cabinet of hundreds / and the way I’ve always had my favorites – the chipped white one stolen from a Dennys / heavy in my palm / but now there are your mugs chatting with mine in the cupboards / rubbing handles like the way gnomes nose kiss / and I need to take a breath / and I need to build an A frame house with you / nestled deep in the backwoods / paint you / stroke by stroke / fumble with brushes in the dark / capturing the dusty rose of the waning moon’s rise birthed by your back / shifting bone by bone on a creaking spring mattress under sloped ceilings / your rutted hands cradling the leaden weight of your slumbering head / and I’m stretching out the elastic of your underwear with my hips / wearing your sweat, and the burned cedar like a fog of cologne / tacking each canvas to every inch of wall / and tomorrow night we will tamp tobacco into corn cob pipes / blowing smoke rings for wispy ships to pass on through / under tried and tired flannel / broken in by our huddled bodies on the balcony / where we forget the emptiness of squealing car alarms / squares of light bleeding from apartment windows / replacing them with an owl’s hoo / and stars like spilled glitter across inky black drapes / where I lay every before like pine needles shedding from trees / breaking under our feet
Another night of poor sleep. Ever since lockdown started it gets harder.

We went to bed around eleven, and within five minutes she’d fallen into a deep slumber (if the soft pop-popping of not-quite snoring was anything to go by). It was a small mercy - at least I wouldn’t have to lie still.

The awful curtains reminded me of an infection. I was astounded as to why she’d chosen that pattern, which seemed designed to catalyse fevered thoughts within me. Under the outside glare of actinic streetlights, the dim swirl of purples and oranges mutated over the course of the night into a vivid sickness at dawn.

But then, our eyes are the most dishonest organs of our bodies.

I lay there, the cheap under-bed drawer digging into my back, time dragging so much that I could discern the pauses of night birds’ inhalations before and after their hoots and peeps.

And what of those interstitial moments? Where do they go after we’ve used those minutes up? Of course, I knew: they go on, into the liminal cracks and fissures of reality, slipping through to unspace.

Just like me.

I’m what happens to a man who swallows all his pain and despair without chewing it first. Is that a drawback or an advantage?

Luckily, with all these thoughts came the comfort of knowing we’re most invisible in the darkest hours; that whilst death may walk just a few steps behind us, I was exceptional.

But what if I want to be caught, for someone to find me down here? The peace I get listening to her sleep-sounds from the mattress above me comfort me in a way talking to her on the street when we pass does not.

And this under-bed drawer is awfully cramped.
Somewhere in each second is a dark line, an open syllable, that was left behind. I can see it from my window, forest in frame. Dust-green dusk. The quiet breath of the world. It used to haunt me, and some days, it still does. Even now, the landscape seems drawn on, embellished, like a story to tell. Like a half-truth, clipped back and cupped within my hands. My ear pressed to the wallpaper divide, waiting for the voice of someone I know. The common ancestor Obsidian with small eyes, cuffing his sleeves whispering, “nothing is nothing is nothing...” The structure is shifting, wanting to know.
They stood at the gate. From a distance, it had been dwarfed by the rocks it was set into, but now that they were in front of it, it had to have been at least ten feet high.

"Why do you think they locked it?" She asked, rocking forward onto her toes—a nervous habit, he’d noticed—the gravel crunching beneath her boots.

"Probably keeping homeless people from sleeping in there. Or, like, drug addicts." He shrugged. He fingered the big, silver padlock and gave it a half-hearted tug.

"That rock really does look like a face."

The sound of the lock hitting the metal of the gate echoed off of the walls inside. He fished his phone out of his pocket and turned on the flashlight feature, peering down the tunnel.

"Wh-what do you see?"

"Someone’s sprayed ‘Welcome to Hell’ across a huge part of that side," he laughed.

She hovered a few feet behind him, furtively looking around at the rockface that lined this part of the old riverbed.

"Ash? We should go. What if it rains?" The nerves were becoming more and more apparent in her voice. He smirked at her. "Well I don’t know! We are in a river," she tried to argue.

"We’re also in a drought," he muttered to himself as he turned back to the lock. He thought a moment, and then reached into his pocket, pulling out receipts, a quarter, two nickels, a hair band, a beat-up white Bic lighter, a half-empty carton of Marlboro reds, and finally, a large safety pin. He extracted a cigarette and put it between his lips. Lighting it, he pocketed everything except the safety pin and the hair band. He took a drag, and pulled his mane of hair back, crouching down to be at eye-level with the lock.

She shifted from foot to foot behind him, watching the sky. He opened the safety pin and bent it back slightly, angling it into the bottom of the lock. She took a step closer to him.

"It’s going to get dark soon and we still have to get all the way back to the car. Come on, you’re not going to be able to open that lock with a safety pin. Let’s just go and—"

"You wanted to come down here. You couldn’t stop talking about it this morning. Are you going to back-out on me now?" He had straightened and come toward her while he was speaking, leaving the safety pin in the lock. He ran his hands down her arms. "It’s just a tunnel in the rock, babe. That’s all. A man-made tunnel that some crazy occult freaks decided to call the gateway to hell because that big rock looked like a weird face." She sighed and nodded, wrapping her arms around his waist and curling into his chest.

There was a rumble like distant thunder. They looked skyward and didn’t notice the lock quietly click open.
“Let me give this one more shot, and then we’ll go,” he said as he turned back toward the gate, and then abruptly stopped.

“But… it’s open,” she whispered.

He carefully unhooked the lock from the heavy, rusted chain.

“Must’ve just not realized I’d gotten it,” he said, hesitantly.

He uncoiled the chain from around the bars of the gate. Setting it and the lock on the ground, he slowly pulled at the bars. With a piercing creak, the gate opened, continuing to swing out even after he let go. He let out a low whistle as they settled into the outer rocks with a reverberating thud. He started to walk forward.

“Maybe we shouldn’t do this. They clearly don’t want people in here if it was locked like that.” She grabbed his arm to hold him back as she spoke.

“We’re just going to check it out for a few minutes. When we leave, we’ll put the lock back on. Simple as that.” He walked forward with her half hiding behind him, clinging to one arm, while he held out the cell phone flashlight with the other.

“There’s a lot of drawings of devils in here.”

“There’s also a lot of drawings of dicks. People just tag shit sometimes.”

“I can’t see the end of the tunnel,” she whispered after a minute.

“Probably just ’cause the flashlight isn’t that bright. I’m sure we’ll hit it in a sec.” Another rumble of thunder. This time it sounded closer.

“What would actually happen if it rained?” She had stopped walking.

“It would take a lot of rain to trap us down here. I promise, as soon as it starts raining, we’ll leave, okay?”

There was less graffiti this far into the tunnel. A fair amount of ominous looking “Turn Backs” and “Get Outs,” but those had been there the entire time; they were just accompanied by less arbitrary illustrations now.

Another crash of thunder sounded that seem to shake the tunnel.

“Ash. The gate. The gate’s closed.” Her hoarse whisper seemed so quiet in his ear, but reverberated off of the walls as if she had screamed it.

“Probably just the wind.” It didn’t even sound like he was convincing himself. As they faced the gate, a sudden flash of light came from behind them further into the tunnel. They turned and saw nothing.

Then the ground started to shake and everything went black.
Time slows when bathing in your heavenly glow
Your eyes fill with joy, and shine with a thousand stars
With a tender touch of hands so warm I cannot let go
You whisper so innocently ‘the world could be ours’
You’re the star that shines when there’s no light
And forgives me when sullen on sunny days
We dance happily to our hearts delight
You smile, coaxing me with your joyous ways
Yet your burning temper sears my flesh
Causing my heart to melt with pain
Seeing you flirt so you can start afresh
As days end, I know this is all a game
And yet your beauty still glows
And I still feel the kiss upon my nose
My story isn’t relatable. At least not to the people in the communities that I call myself a part of. Having lived in one place all my life, surrounded by the same people, I can only really call myself a part of two communities: the Desi community and the Niskayuna Central School District (NCSD) community. Recently, I have been required to do some reflecting on these two communities and looking back, while I may have considered myself to be a part of them, I don’t think I was ever really accepted into either one of those communities.

I’ve been hearing the term “white-washed” for a while now. Urban Dictionary defines the term whitewashed as “A derogatory term used to describe a minority who has assimilated with western society. The ‘whitewashed’ person does not necessarily abandon his/her own culture, but rather embrace others beside his/her own.” Although this is an accurate description of the term whitewashed, there are certain points made that aren’t exactly true. From personal experience, I can say that when a person assimilates into western society, they slowly lose parts of their own culture to make room for western culture.

There’s an acronym: ABCD and it stands for American Born Confused Desi, and I think it’s the perfect way to describe me. Growing up, I always felt as though my experiences weren’t enough to validate me as a true Pakistani Muslim. Urdu was my first language. It’s funny because that was the first part of my Pakistani culture to leave me when I began assimilating into western society. Urdu was the language I would speak with my grandparents. The ones who grew up in Pakistan, the only people in my family who experienced Pakistani culture in Pakistan. When I lost Urdu, I lost a connection between my grandparents and me, a connection that held my largest piece of Pakistani culture.

The whole point of this piece is to talk about something deep, something people might not know just by looking at you. Honestly, for me, the only thing that I can think of is that if I were born white, my story would be just like everyone else’s. Since I grew up conflicted with which group of people I fit in with the most, I feel as though a large part of my identity stems from being the confused brown girl who’s too whitewashed to understand any of the cultural reference jokes she sees.

Although I grew up feeling as though I wasn’t accepted by the communities I believed myself to be a part of, I still had my family. I don’t know if I can call my immediate family my community, but that’s how I feel. My family has always been accepting of me and they support any decisions that I make. They give me guidance and comfort when I need it and I know for a fact that I would be completely lost without my family.
Had Begun Without

Angie Smith
Russell Sage College

My pace began
timidly against the pavement
toward a quiet church yard on Fleet street—
a graveyard I picnicked on, alone.
The sun went down in
Postman’s park
past an apostle’s cathedral,
its ancient scars
healed by yellowbrick tulips.

I caught my stride
and quickened
beside Gandhi in candlelight,
his eyes downcast since
that unforgotten July morning.

I drifted on
twinkling in the glow
of summer-Thames light
to catch the current
of that gold majesty
(Big Ben’s tyranny)
and quickened still,
searching the
months
of my own memories
until I found that

living had
begun (and shifted entirely)
without you.

Strawberry Empowerment

Kami Perkins
Russell Sage College
You look at the piece of material on my head
And then ‘oppression’ becomes synonymous with it
When the word ‘oppression’ never came out of our mouths
You feel you have the right to validate a feeling I never held within myself
Are you defining Feminism yet?

Liberation is multi-dimensional
Indispensable, quintessential
There are many forms and this is mine and I am proud
Other women like to show off their assets physically and they are liberated
My asset is my modesty and I am liberated
But you want me to show my skin
Are you defining Feminism yet?

Nations are banning the burka left and right
But now they are the ones covering their face
God’s uno reverse card
They call themselves the most powerful nations in the world
The most feared nations in the world
And yet are afraid of a piece of cloth on a woman’s head
Are you defining Feminism yet?

As I move up in the world,
I have to smile whiter, move whiter, be whiter
Anything that will distract you from looking at my blue chiffon scarf,
Which plants your detest towards me
Are you defining Feminism yet?

Media is the real poison of this world and you use it to poison who I am
My faith is my freedom,
You are my oppression
You shun what I wear and so people stare at me from afar
You shame my culture so that I can never be proud of it
You stigmatise the way I talk, even how I walk
to tear up any semblance of self-esteem
So I’m left asking how do I fit in, in the society that outcasts me?
Are you defining Feminism yet?
Are you defining equality yet?

Define Feminism
Maysoon Sheikh
Creativity Unleashed

Feminism comes with the acceptance and embracing of all realms of liberation
Once you overcome the one metre barrier between you and my Hijab
The guarantee of an equal world becomes much closer.
Lying is learned
from the people we follow,
the people we are told to follow,
the people who tell us to always speak truths

But lying is learned
from observing those people.

Lying is learned.

If we lie, we're punished.
If we speak the truth, we are liars.
So we learn to lie better.

We learn to speak the truth better.
We learn to make that truth something they will accept.
We learn to make that lie something they will accept.
We learn to mould into how they want us to be.
We learn to survive.

Lying is learned.

We're constantly told to speak up for what is right
but shamed for being too sensitive.
We're told to explain our side of the story,
but their side is always the truth.

Dear sir
dear deadbeat
dear hateful man –
lying is learned.

So when you assume I lie, remember
I lie to survive in the world you created.
I lie with the words you taught me.
I lie with your past and your emotions.
I do not lie by myself.

You, are the liar;
You, are the cause of our chaos of lies.
A Lucid Dream
Tahanni Yehya Hussein

a bowl of water
sits
in the middle of a room

i get up to pour it out onto the floor
i lift it to my mouth
and drink the blue liquid
cold down my throat

it rises
back up
with each
gulp

i walk to the bathroom
and tip it into the small sink
and the water
gurgles
back up the pipes

i turn around
and tip it into the bath
it steams up
and condenses
back into the bowl

i leave the bathroom
my sweaty hands
trying
to grip
the heavy bowl

i stand in the centre of the room
shift the bowl into my right hand
extend my right arm back
until it hurts to move any more
hurl the bowl towards the wall
it smashes against the concrete
hundreds of thousands
of tiny shards
coat the carpet

then rain begins to fall from the ceiling
Like a Flower

Derived from the roots we hold,
Carefully planted by our Father.
Differing colors, shapes, and sizes,
Into buds, we blossom.
Eager for sunshine;
Storms we endure;
Fear of being stagnant.
We wilt; we wither;
But, we do rise.
A single flower amongst many;
From where I am planted-
I bloom;
Like a flower-
I grow.

Like a Flower

Russell Sage College

Zavia Allen

The door was beautiful. Tourists came from around the world to stop and stare at the serene beauty of the tree of life snaking elegantly across the wood towards the walls that encased it. Despite its popularity, no one seemed to know what was behind it. Curious children and random passersby would longingly reach for the handle, but just before their thumb could depress the button and release the latch, its protector would appear. His crazed flyaway hair, brown with streaks of gray and electric blue eyes, was usually enough to send even the bravest soul scurrying down the street. One more failed attempt to see what was inside.

For those who held their ground and thought they’d badger him into showing, he smirked to reveal crooked, yellowing teeth and invited them to sit on the cool stone steps in front of the door they so persistently pursued.

“You’ll not be wanting to go in there, lad.” He’d always begin in a deep, Scottish brogue. “Nothin’ in there but the very worst of human nature.”

He’d stare at the tree of life with barely concealed disgust, as though he could see right through the beauty to a darkness within. For most, that warning was enough to have them on their feet and off into the world, only remembering the door as something beautiful they had seen in passing. The few who remained, not to be deterred, would be offered the chance to open the door.

The keeper would watch, grinning maniacally as he urged them forward.

“You wanted to see, lad; now open up and take a look. I’ll be betting you’ll regret it.” His resultant laugh would raise the hairs on the necks of even the bravest soul.

When they reached for the handle a second time, they could feel an ominous pull from within, and a few would feel eyes staring at them from behind the glass. Though nothing was ever visible when they tried to focus on it.

No one had ever taken him up on his offer, turning and running at the last minute with terror in their hearts. Those few never remembered the door, never remembered the guardian, just the menacing feeling of being watched and nightmares of red eyes staring balefully at them across time.
Life is heavy,
flashing before my eyes,
pulling me down as I try to surface,
stretching between the above and the below.
Blue everywhere,
up, down, all around.
Grasping through the air,
but nothing is there.
Gulping for air
but instead a mouth of hair.
Breathless,
I am restless and in despair.
I’m trying to reach but nobody is there.
Alone in the deep,
swirling in the water, like the thoughts in my mind.
My hands, no longer grasping,
My hands, now clasping
a pile of sand.

Hey,
I saw that your dog just died.
It was in your story.
And by the quantity of crying emoji faces,
I figured you’d be sad.
Wait, gimme a second, I almost forgot.
I need to send a message saying: “I’m sorry” and a few sad emojis.
I have no idea who you are.
A classmate?
Maybe.
A friend of my friend’s sister’s friend’s cousin?
Perhaps.
A random dude who has never owned a dog before?
I hope not.
Whoever you may be, “I’m sorry for your loss.”
Of course, I’ve been browsing through other things too.
Pictures, filters, pretenders, gestures, sponsors, musician-ers, artist-ers,
If you haven’t noticed, I am trying to rhyme.
Let me tear my eyes from my screen for just a moment.
I’ve got to stop scrolling.
There’s a poem I need to write,
but all I’ve got are sore eyes and an overheating phone, with no poem in sight.
I really gotta start on that soon,
and that pile of other stuff too.
But the poem should be easier, right?
I mean, I am a self-proclaimed poet;
that’s what it says in my bio, anyway...
Memories of Chefchaoeun
Lisa Schieffelin
Russell Sage College
@lisaschieffelin1
I never thought eBay would contribute to my grieving journey, but then I'd never heard about Mourning Seeds. Well, not until my web history and poor privacy settings conspired to suggest products I might want every time I opened a browser window.

I closed ad after ad (Cribb’s Funeral Services; Eco-coffins; even EZ-Cremain - American, naturally), but the day I finally felt strong enough to auction off my dearly departed’s belongings, something about the eBay advert - perhaps the word ‘seed’ - made me click.

Plant at least four feet deep over the loved one’s grave (in this case, the loved three’s) and as the tree grows, so shall the memory of he/she who is lost.

No returns once planted…etc.

A tattered, manilla banker was delivered. Not exactly what I’d expected - no branding, no exquisite, environmentally unfriendly packaging, just the envelope containing three things like peach stones.

Did I deserve to be ripped off? Probably. I certainly deserved something. I’d treated my wife and kids terribly: If I could take back every beating I gave Gracie and Michael I would; if I could show Nat just how much I cared with my lips instead of my fists; if I could hide the car keys from my drunken self on our way back from Elgin last Christmas…

If I could un-click Buy Now.

But I couldn’t.

A time to plant, a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to harvest.

Daily I pick - purge - the wailing green fruit on each of the little trees I planted: Gracie, Michael and Nat’s hairless, miniature, green heads - like apples - gawp soullessly outwards, jaws dropped to better birth their screaming, screaming.

There’s only one way to silence the eternal accusations.

The flesh is sweet from such a bitter crop.
only eighteen was he, chasing the american dream
blood, sweat, and tears
though all was not as it seemed
the promise of life, liberty, and property
all seemed a facade
now he was a broken boy, living in poverty
parents left heart broken
now he draws his last breath,
his last words never spoken

This poem was inspired by Tahanni Yehya Hussein’s immigration and integration
www.haringeyunchained.com
Tangled Love
Zoe Jansen  Russell Sage College

DRAWING 38
How did we end up like this?

How did we become so involved with picking at our fragmental mistakes?

The fragments of our body that we trace with one finger,

Over and over again.

The small parts that we squeeze as we are unhappy with the pinch of fat left on our stomachs,

Why did we get put into this societal norm?

The expectation of porcelain skin and straight blonde hair,

Why do we fall into this trap

This trap that is never ending

A constant cycle of poisonous words put into our brains because we are not good enough,

Or beautiful enough, or sexy enough, or smart enough.

Why is this the first lesson women learn, especially since

We did not ask to learn it …
Toilet Paper Crisis

Laurel Petersen  Russell Sage College
No matter how many years go by, I can’t forget the day when “our house” was no longer our house.

On graduation day we decided to drive by, hoping inside that nothing had changed. As we drove that all-too-familiar path, I remembered how abruptly the end had come. Before that day I never could have imagined the place that stored our youth and memories like a keepsake box would no longer belong to us.

How could I?

It was the only place I had known for most of my life-- the only place familiar enough to call home. We had no choice but to leave the house an empty shell, while secretly hoping no one else would come and fill it.

As fate would have it, after all these years, our house had become someone else’s. Our signs of wear-and-tear were ruthlessly painted over to disguise the house as brand new.

The grape juice stain on the carpet: gone.

The missing handrail railing: restored.

The nail polish splatter on the bathroom wall: covered.

Our memories were replaced by their memories.

Still, I found a sense of peace knowing that one day, just like our house is no longer ours, their house will be someone else’s. A cycle of families finding solace in this shell.

I watched the new children play in what was once our yard, carefree and clueless about the only house they have known.
Behind my mask
I am more than this piece of fabric; it does not define who I am or what I do.
No one will ever know the real me; I am hidden due to this disease.

Behind my mask
I know it is for the best, to protect myself and the ones I love.
But it hurts, in more ways than I can describe.

Behind My Mask
Two full years of my life that will never come back.
Living in constant fear, caution, and worry.
I keep away from others to stay safe.
Unfortunately, I feel safer surrounded by others.

Behind my mask
I have a beautiful smile. My cheeks are always naturally flushed.
My happiness shines through my facial expressions, but I can not look happy only through the squint of my eyes.

Behind my mask
No one will ever know who I truly am under my protective fabric. I do it to stay healthy and keep others healthy.
I wonder when my fears will stop. I wonder when my fears will stop.
I hope that one day others will know, that there is much more of who I am behind my mask.
When you are shown the numbers,
The statistics screaming for the last semblance of your rationality,
The ratio of murders 270:1,
You turn away to hold onto your precepts
Whilst they hold onto their children’s corpses.

But it’s fake news.

So they record their subjection to inhumanity, for some humanity.
Then you watch the bodies covered in blood and black soot,
Their limbs dangling, their lives mangled.
Because it’s the only way to prove their reality against your lies.
But you have the audacity to tweet
“Why wasn’t there any trigger warning?”

Where was their trigger warning?

The day of Eid was hopeful,
As the hopeful youth sang out blessings and brighter days ahead.
To only be sent back fire that burnt out the sun.
On the day of Eid, hope bled.

Hope. An abstract noun with four letters.
Abstract in its fragility, in the people praying within the crevices of those four letters.
Abstract in its forceful reckoning. Its force in reawakening.
Hope can be a testament of volition, that the remnants of our humanity still exist.
Hope will unify us when we testify.

Palestine,
Tomorrow we’ll be free.
half these nights kept awake by numbness
in a deep slumber, he lay still, paralyzed

a bombardment of dark truths
leave

my dreams sunless
the line of reality is blurred, tragically compromised
he now knows why the sun was loveless

for the moon and stars in all their glory
spurred an illusion of bright ideas, thought to inspire

his heavy heart imprisoned
in purgatory
his lone integrity left to admire.
the misfortunes of his past, a short moral story.
"In the life of a rose," he heard her say, sparks erupted in her eyes and there was no delay. She talked of death and dust by day, small ruptures appeared on her bust with decay. She tugged on the hem of his shirt and begged him to stay, and asked for his name then whispered prayers for his way. Her lashes wilted and sadness engulfed her. The birth of a rose was soon taken over.

The light stayed. He chose her pain, aided and nurtured the soil of her domain. He watered her roots in ways; she couldn’t complain. He protected her petals with agency; she couldn’t explain. Her lashes rose as hope was clear in those eyes.

"Are you God?" she asked, her voice full of surprise. The light leaned a little closer. She feared he was a lot bolder, and for a moment all was still.

His arms were strong enough to hold her.

* Tanrıım – Ottoman Turkish word meaning "My God"
Respect nature as it is our land! Trees, flowers, mountains, and lakes
Jungle, sea, and rivers! Never takes, always refreshes.
Teach us to spread love.
Teach us to be kind.
Don't let it harm;
Don't let it harass!

Respect the farmers as we are the provider!
Broken ceilings we live in.
We always pray for the rain.
Let them give care.
Let them keep in our prayers.
Respect the workers, we are the helpers! No work is small, no work is big.
They help us to make our life better. Respect Mother Nature.
Respect the farmers. Respect the workers. Let us grow our love...
Residual

Always in the midst of a new horizon.
No end, no beginning,
we are pulled together by empty thread.
These days are overgrown.
Like slow breath,
the years fill us and let go.
This half-open world
half shadows.
Our history is absence.
Dark shapes on the darkness.
That is the pattern.
Like God, they say that a line is infinity.
But what happens when the hand pauses?
When the paper folds?
Words, marks, gestures.
Trying to find a way in.
Holding this ancient story
that sits inside,
like old smoke.
Calcified.
Waiting.

All of a sudden she was gone
Disappearing into the background
All the memories following behind her
Why did it have to be her?
The days go on, feeling like a dream
All my thoughts are consumed by pain,
By suffering
Why did it have to be her?
Going into a deep, dark hole
Hiding my true feelings
Just trying to get through each day
Putting a fake smile on my face
Why did it have to be her?
Sitting days on end crying in class
Not wanting to go home because of the demons inside
Never knowing when my father would come back
The smell of alcohol on his breath
Why did it have to be her?
Remembering all of the pain
New pain emerges,
In the deep dark depths of my thoughts
The anxiety and depression creeps in.

Lost Memories

Why did it have to be her?
Distancing myself from my feelings
Distancing myself from the things I loved
Distancing myself from my drunken father
Distancing myself from reality
Why did it have to be her?
No words to describe the feelings that have emerged
Not being able to put my best foot forward
Not knowing how to cope
Just falling into a pit of darkness
Why did it have to be her?
As I walked heartbroken in the rain, 
my weepy eyes met an old woman 
slowly walking with her cane.

Her wrinkled lips curled gently in a smile, as she 
pointed to a covered bench 
and asked if I would sit with her awhile.

She spoke about her hardships but more of better days, 
how keeping a hopeful heart is what really pays.

When we were through talking 
my tears had finally dried. 
My heart ached a little less and I felt lighter inside.

Who knew that I’d find comfort in a 
stranger when in need, 
from a stranger who’s no longer strange but a friend indeed.
Anxiety
Syrita Faraj  Russell Sage College

It rips me to shreds
It has a hold on my mind
It keeps me awake
And keeps me confined

Anxiety
My hands trembling
My body shaking
My heart pounding
I feel like I’m breaking

Anxiety
I feel stuck
I feel my mind aching
I’m hurting inside
I’m in isolation

Anxiety
The thoughts in my head
They eat me alive
Struggling to face them
Makes it hard to survive

Anxiety

Story after story of someone missing,
someone killed, someone injured.
Sirens night after night.
These stories and cries for help in my own town,
in what I call home.
Stories about kids.
Kids that have been killed,
reported missing, or have been injured.
I, an 18 year old girl, am supposed to feel safe?
Safe seems to be just a word in the corruption of today.
How can I be safe in a world that only speaks in violence?
How can I trust this world to protect me, when
it is a world that fails to protect itself.
The same world that preaches safety and protection,
but then fails to provide it.
When will this change?
How will I know?

This poem was inspired by
Taylen Kirkland’s Amphetamine
Today has been a very lovely day.
I wonder if tomorrow will be too.
Oh, yesterday has come and gone away.
The days will soon bring me back home to you.
I am-bic, I am sick of being 'lone.
You’re way too far away from me, my dear.
I send you letters, or call you by phone.
One day, I hope that I can hold you near.
I wish I had the words so I could say
The ways you made me fall in love with you.
Tomorrows always turn into todays.
The day we’re back together overdue.
I will be right there. Just hold on, my love.
I’ll be with you until our lights shut off.

Russell Sage College
Cassandra McMullin
WHEN I SAY I’M SORRY FOR THE MESS WHAT I MEAN IS

Laura Henebry  Russell Sage College

My body isn’t moving when I am telling it to. Returning to old comforts such as soaking in a blistering tub until the prints of my fingers have shriveled like cherry tomatoes forgotten in the fridge. The vegetable crisper drawer is a graveyard. Filled with the depressed, sunken husks of zucchini and eggplant that I couldn’t bring myself to eat. We are fighting again, but the fights are about little things like; why don’t you soak the pan after using; why are you not putting gas in the car; or why don’t you touch me like you used to. The mattress holds the shape of us like memories, and I can’t outrun all the forms we have taken –

I’m sleeping on the couch again. Letting my phone die and using the whirring of the fan as an unreliable metronome for these words crudely printed in dust found on the radiators as if this apartment can hold the weight of all my apologies. We wear black socks on the floor so we can’t see the dirt. We poke holes in cling wrap tightly covering tiny bowls of sugar water, vinegar and dish soap – it doesn’t help. We watch the spiders build their webs consuming the corners and admire the intricacies of their handiwork – like the art we never got around to hanging, like the photographs I don’t remember taking. Anyway, I’m sorry for skipping therapy.

What I Miss

Brook Marshall  Russell Sage College

Now I am reminded of what I miss: walking into a busy home, never escaping the constant chatter, eating at the dining room table, waking up on a Sunday to “cleaning music.”

I miss when this was home.

Now I walk into an empty house. Now I can’t escape the silence. Now I eat in my room alone. Now I find somewhere else to stay the night. Now I am always reminded of what I miss.

Greenwood Blaze

Jacqueline Hilliard  Russell Sage College

This poem was inspired by Amina Yussuf’s What I Miss www.creativity-unleashed.org
Catches Against the Grain

Russell Sage College
Kate Hunter

Haikus

The Loomis Chaffee School
Jason Zhang

A Sunset
Giant golden star
slides itself down the hill; the
horizon turns red.

Defying Gravity
The amusement park
ride crashes down from the sky.
It is time to scream.

Tube to Heaven
Down the water slide,
speeding through the long darkness.
What a pleasant splash.
This year, in collaboration with Aralia Education and Ivy Talent, our editors at The Rev accepted submissions from high school students studying in America but originally from China. We reviewed flash fiction and poetry produced by some incredibly gifted young people. The decisions for publication were difficult, but we do believe that the following pieces truly reflect the creative possibilities of our youth today. We are very excited to give this section of our magazine to them. The messages that follow are bold and brilliant.

Enjoy what they have to say!

For more pieces from some of our partners in China, visit: www.peoplesrepublicofcreativity.com.

The following pages have been designed by Jacqueline Hilliard from Russell Sage College.
“Excuse me, can you tell me where the pilots are?” I curiously asked the personnel who came into the shuttle to help me get seated.

“You are inside the most advanced unmanned space shuttle, sir. This short flight would be controlled remotely.”

Before I could say anything in response, the personnel bowed and quit the space shuttle. The cabin door soon closed after him.

As I exchanged curious eye contact with the other passengers, I realized that most of them were extremely well-dressed-successful-looking people. There was a family of three sitting behind me. The little kid, no older than eight, was conversing politely with a lady of age sixty or so.

Sitting right to me was a middle-aged man in an elegant suit. He would have looked fine if his belly hadn’t upheaved his shirt.

“So, how do you make money?” The man turned to my side and asked me with a smirk on his face.

“What do you mean?” I smiled politely.

“Come on, you must be doing something special to be able to pay for the immigration plan.” He patted my shoulder.

He had a point: space immigration cost 12 million dollars and that was why the ICSS housed only the richest five hundred thousand people on earth.

“Probably visit my uncle first,” I said. “He immigrated to the ICSS two years ago and never returned to earth. We talk through video calls often and he urged me to come and enjoy a new life as well.”

An influencer of the national oil industry and an important figure in the political circles, my uncle was indeed my role model. He was one of the first to pay and set foot on the ICSS when the program first started.

Our seatbelts automatically fastened. The space shuttle suddenly rotated to a sixty degree angle and the people on board shrieked a short gasp. Thirty seconds later, we heard a loud burst of fire behind us. I suddenly felt a strong thrust that pressed me hard against the seatbelt. My mind went completely blank as I realized that we were ascending to space.

Through the window, I saw us propelling upwards at an incredible speed. The ground soon faded; we crossed the clouds; we crossed the atmosphere. The sky became darker and darker until there we were, floating in space. I gazed at the elegant contour of earth in ecstasy and disbelief.

Our shuttle flew stably again. The middle-aged man turned to me and asked: “So what’s the first thing you’re gonna do up there? I heard that there are twenty five luxurious hotels and twelve casinos bigger than the biggest ones in Vegas.”

“Probably visit my uncle first,” I said. “He immigrated to the ICSS two years ago and never returned to earth. We talk through video calls often and he urged me to come and enjoy a new life as well.”

Tick, tock, tick tock. The tick became clearer and louder.

To my ultimate horror, I did recognize the sound. It was the sound of a bomb. I looked out of the window again in desperation.

There was no space station in sight...
"You! Come over here!" The man shouted in a voice equivalent to a commissioner, but she could tell from the color of his military cap, navy blue, that he was ranked much higher.

In this world, you see, every adult was required to wear a cap. The people that wore the brightest colors were the most impoverished. In contrast, the ones who wore the darkest colors were the wealthiest. She was surrounded by the destitute: the yellows and greens. Some of the affluent people would deliberately roam across the precarious trail of the destitute, flashing their ostentatious rings and swaying their flattering dresses. This display had long been the poor’s eyesore. Not wearing the caps was a sign of treason. If you dared to do so, you would be immediately killed. Because of this, the poor did not dare go outside without a cap.

Under the scorching sun, the cracks of the arid land stood out peculiarly. The woman scrambled to the man with the navy-blue military cap and turned on the faucet. As soon as the faucet was turned on, people of all ages hurtled towards it, some using a bucket to grasp a minuscule amount of water. Shortly, the water was split unequally among the families. Some cried over the minimum water they got. As the water dripped from the faucet, kids hastened to it, clinching both of their hands together, using them as containers. But the water slid through their tiny fingers and left them staring with an empty look in their eyes.

She stood there, contemplating the scene, thinking about a questionnaire the government had recently sent. One of the questions asked the citizens to relay a childhood memory. At the time, everyone answered “The past”. In the past, everything was normal. In the past, there was barely any social hierarchy. In the past, there was adequate water. And now, with the change of the government system and the lack of water, the government took control of everything: from the access to water to who dominated the country.

She could only imagine anything water-related: from the singing of the waves slapping against the rocks like an unfinished symphony, calming and heart-warming; to the tickling of the rain through the window, like the lustrous clunking of a champagne glass, lilting and clear…

Suddenly, she heard harsh screams near the faucet and was startled from her memory. The bright and colorful “caps” were fighting.

The unfortunate ones had to fight for their survival, and the lucky ones, affluent in money and water, stood far away from the crowds. To them, observing the bright “caps” struggling for water was their best recreation.

She remembered another question: “What is something that you regret?” She was slightly startled by that question. All of the pain and hardships that she underwent, all of them, were because of the shortage of water. People did not take account of the aftermath of their excessive behavior. If only she could reverse it, then everything would be different.

“Stop!! That’s enough!” A woman rushed towards the crowd and forcefully flung her yellow cap to the ground.

A sudden gunshot followed, and led to an immediate silence. Everything froze. People stepped back, revealing the woman’s body dead on the ground.

A sudden gun shot, and led to an immediate silence. Everything froze. People stepped back, revealing the woman’s body dead on the ground.

The dark-colored caps heard the gunshot and gathered behind the railroad tracks. It was an ideal location for them to spectate on the scene. The death of a destitute was pedestrian. Some were holding wine and champagne glasses, as if they were watching a luxurious performance with the upper-class only. But the veneration they would feel at a performance was replaced by feelings of superiority.

They lived in a world in which people could be easily wounded. A world full of words that kill. Her eyes were locked on the prostrate figure in front of her. The figure’s arms were outstretched, but she could tell that it was her mother.

Her eyes widened, full of dread. As if strangled with countless agonies, her body began to tremble. She moved her lips to ask for help, but no words came out. The crowd continued to recede; some were immersed with sickening consternation, but none offered to help.

Life was like that, she thought. We tend to let things be difficult for others before they try to make things difficult for us.

The whole world had abandoned her. What was once merely a vague sense of distrust had now given way to a much stronger feeling: she resented this country. She hated how she could not get enough water; she hated how the indifference was spreading “contagiously” among people; she hated how they-themselves were like little animals, always frightened by their own mediocrity; she hated how she could never feel the perception of being, sometimes, of being alive. There was only one thing she could do.

To fight back…
This Won’t Be Another Happy Ending

Competition Winner
Kent School

Outside of his window, it’s raining this morning, and the gray sky looks like it’s falling. In a small room, a man with a withered face stares into space; he had stayed up all night. For him, today is his day of execution. He curls up on the ground in despair, muttering something too low to hear. He beats the floor angrily, but stops suddenly, tears pouring from the corner of his eyes.

The sound of the door unlocked has startled him, and the guard walks in. Behind him walks a smiling man in a suit. He speaks to the man on the ground: “It’s time to move. The mount is ready to welcome its guest.”

“You, get him up.”

The guard lifts the prisoner.

“I don’t want to wait too long. You best behave yourself, understand?”

The man in the suit ignores the prisoner, walking straight out. Two guards carry the prisoner’s limp body towards the execution room.

He tries all he can to make his body heavier, to slow the passage and movement of these men at work. This is their day job. For him, these will be his last few steps in life.

Every time he takes a step forward, death is one step closer to him. He is completely desperate, falling to the ground again. The gate of hell in front of him is getting closer.

“Please...don’t.”

The man begs again.

It is as if he has lost his voice entirely.

“Please...”

The prisoner says weakly.

With that last plea, he slips into a faint, only to wake up god knows when fixed to a wooden chair. He wants to break free, but the equipment holds him firmly on the chair like glue. Ahead of him, through the glass, sits a small group of people; they are not far away. Some look sorrowful, some look angry, and some have firm eyes. Among them, crying the loudest, is a white-haired couple. When they see the devil in front of them, they are reminded of the heinous crimes he had committed against their son.

With the man’s helpless eyes looking at the people in front of him, he feels like a monkey in the circus watched expectantly by spectators.

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As this project is driven by diversity, we use condensed typography to create as much space as possible. We aim to showcase as many of the students’ voices as we can, promoting inclusion. If you require this booklet in larger print, please visit: www.creativity-unleashed.org and download our digital version.