2008 Ooligan Press
Young Adult Creative Writing Contest
about the contest...

Last fall, Ooligan Press announced its 2008 Young Adult Creative Writing Contest. Middle- and high-school writers from across Oregon submitted pieces of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. After receiving nearly 250 submissions, Ooligan chose the twenty-four strongest pieces. The twelve winning middle school submissions are featured in this journal. The contest committee would like to thank all of the teachers, parents, and students that made this writing contest a success.

about ooligan press...

Ooligan Press is a general trade press at Portland State University. In addition to publishing books that honor cultural and natural diversity, it is dedicated to teaching the art and craft of publishing.

As a teaching press, Ooligan makes as little distinction as possible between the press and the classroom. Under the direction of professional faculty and staff, the work of the Press is done by students enrolled in the program. Publishing profitable books in real markets provides projects in which students combine theory with practice.
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The Great Escape from M.O.G.
by Amelia Turnquist

Ever since the day I saw the last of the sunshine filter through the crack between the doorframe and the whitewashed door of my windowless room, I had to escape. Plans A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, and J only resulted in Mrs. Mendle locking me up in an even worse place, the dark cellar that I called The Pit, so cold and eerie not even a spider dared to spin its web there. Mrs. Mendle was warden of Mendle’s Orphanage for Girls, a.k.a. m.o.g., which is where I am now locked up since the crash in which Mum and Pa died. Plan K would have to be clever and not rouse the suspicion of any of the girls, or anyone at all for that matter. I was beginning to come to the end of my wick for trying to get out, when I pounded my fist on the floor of my room. The sound echoed under me, and an idea flashed like lightning in my eyes. I just might be able to pull it off!

I found out from a maid that under my dorm was a small air shaft that ran outside the orphanage and into the neighboring building’s cellar. At the next meal, I smuggled out a knife and a spoon from my lunch tray and brought it to my room. The orphanage happened to be ancient, so the concrete flooring was chipping easier than I thought, but still it would take awhile to bust down into the air shaft. I decided to dig the hole under my bed, so if someone checked on me, she wouldn’t discover Plan K. I worked day and night. Since there was nothing to occupy those long hours, it was quite nice to have something to do besides all the sewing for grumpy old Mrs. Mendle, just so she could make money. Whoever let Mrs. Mendle open an orphanage must have been crazy! She loathed children. Little by little, hour by hour, I chiseled my way through the top layer of concrete. One day as I was working on Plan K, the door suddenly burst open!

“May I ask what you are doing under your bed!” Mrs. Mendle bellowed.

“...I was just looking through my um, stuff.” I tried my best to sound innocent.

“You were looking through your stuff, were you?” She narrowed her eyes skeptically. I nodded and bit my lip so hard it started to throb.

“You were supposed to be working on that dress I have to sell on Tuesday!” she said sternly, as she bored holes through my forehead with her fiery gaze. “Come with me. I think a couple hours in the cellar ought to set it in your mind,” she said as I hobbled out and followed her through the door. In truth, I was relieved. A couple of hours in The Pit were worth not having Plan K foiled!

During my excruciating hours in The Pit, I thought about how I could avoid getting caught under my bed. I’m sure Mrs. Mendle would be spying on me frequently now; I guess I would have to be on guard at all times!

Finally I heard footsteps approaching the cellar door. CCRRREEEEEAAAAKK! The light was so blinding that I could hardly squint up at the tall, lanky figure looming above me. The figure was fuzzy around the edges, but I could tell by the way it grabbed me by the arm and hauled me up the cellar stairs that it was Mrs. Mendle after all. My eyes had trouble adjusting so quickly to the hall light that I didn’t notice that she had lugged me past my room and into her office. I rubbed my eyes back to life and saw a middle-aged couple with sappy smiles on their faces staring down at me.

“Karrie, this is Mr. and Mrs. Donovan, and they wish to adopt you,” Mrs. Mendle glared at me and turned to smile at the couple.
“Why?” I said. “To give their boa constrictor a little snack? Well, I’ll tell you one thing: I’m not going to believe those corny little smiles on your faces!” I glowered up, and their smiles melted away.

“Don’t you talk like that, young lady!” Mrs. Mendle belted as she grabbed my arm and slapped my face. I spit in her eye, and Mr. Donovan’s face grew as red as a fresh spring tomato as I stormed out the door. I could hear Mrs. Mendle chirping out apologies, saying “She can be a little trouble child sometimes!” and pretending to laugh as she led them to the door and said goodbye.

I slammed my door behind me and wept on my pillow. I waited for Mrs. Mendle to burst through and put me in The Pit for another five hours, but she never came. After awhile I dried my eyes and crawled under my bed again to chip away at the concrete on the cold, dusty floor. I was near the air shaft. I could almost feel cool wind on my face as I kept digging through the night. I was almost free, almost free…

I worked and worked and worked. Finally I chipped through. There was a smile on my face so giant, I could feel it stretch from ear to ear, but it vanished as quickly as it came. The air shaft was only six inches tall, and I would never be able to squeeze myself through. I slammed down my nearly broken knife and shouted curses into the night. I would never get out!

“Young lady,” Mrs. Mendle boomed. I swallowed the knot in my throat as I braced myself for The Pit. “There is someone here to see you.” Her tone softened as a young woman stepped into the room.

“Hello! My name is Kay,” the woman said brightly.

“Kay, Plan K,” I mumbled as I looked up at this kindred spirit called Kay.

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**Mr. Baint**

by Ashton Babcock

The dog stopped at a tree and held up its leg. Bea watched the fine liquid trickle down the tree and looked away to find two men on the opposite sidewalk. One of them, about fourteen or fifteen years old, was on the ground, writhing about as if struck by a car. She saw several bruises on his body as he twitched and cried out in pain. The man standing up looked to be about thirty or forty. He kicked the kid, hard. She did not wince. Nor did she when the man cursed angrily at the kid. She might have found it entertaining. The man looked down at his accomplishment and ran away. The kid on the ground had just enough time to lift his head and watch as his assailant barreled down the street. Then his head fell, and his lifeless body went stock-still and limp.

Bea pulled on her dog’s leash and kept walking.

Erik Baint’s life consisted of forty-two years as a terribly neglected and hurt ascetic on this planet. He worked as an usher. This job was not satisfying in the least. Opening night was remotely interesting, but after seeing it once, Erik found it very disagreeable. Hundreds of performances of the same cursed lines was not his idea of welcoming. What’s the point of watching something more than once? He might have enjoyed them before his wife died. Melody loved acting. She’d been an actor herself, and out of affection for her, he tried extra hard to get a free ticket for her when the theater played one of her favorites.

He still remembered what played at the theater on the day of his bereavement—*A Streetcar Named Desire*. Mel had loved that one. Two weeks before, he’d scored her
tickets for opening night, and she'd instantly fell in love with the way Ella Sinkarie portrayed Blanch Dubois.

The theater was showing *My Fair Lady* for the last time on this cold, October night. Opening night would be just around the corner. He made a mental note to ask Bea what was showing next. He hoped it wasn't *Streetcar* again.

After he'd slipped into his red and black regulation uniform, he stared at his reflection in the grimy bathroom mirror. He looked like he hadn't slept through a night in a long time. His long, dirty, unkempt hair stuck out at random angles. The skin beneath his eyes sagged with ages of exhaustion, the outcome of dozens of sleepless nights spent thinking of Melody Baint and her death.

He cracked open the medicine cabinet and retrieved two bottles. He shook them both and heard a small rattle in both of them.

“I need a refill,” he said aloud. He opened the bottle marked Eskalith. He poured the correct amount into his calloused palm. He swallowed them along with a healthy swig of water. He did the same with Tegratol. Then, after more close speculation of his face, he made an attempt to comb his hair. When it became clear that this would not work, he left his apartment and crept down the steps into the parking garage. Erik found his car and slid across the leather into the driver's side (the door on the left side didn't work). Backing out of the driveway, Erik started toward the theater.

He arrived fifteen minutes early and found Bea leaning against the sidewall of the theater. Bea was his only usher friend (you could take “usher” out of that phrase, and it would still make perfect sense) and was described by most as dark, mysterious, slightly unnerving, and apathetic toward both her job and life in general. Her black hair and black eyes accented the tan skin from all those years of surfing, which she'd mysteriously quit long ago. She loved darkness and mystery and had the uncanny ability to vex all who came in contact with her. But Erik was sure that beneath the façade she was encouraging and always knew what was best, even if it meant hurting someone.

“Baint…you're early,” she said with perfect suavity. She'd always been a silky person. Her speech was flawless and she never failed to baffle Erik with her well-placed comebacks.

“I just show up when I can,” he replied.

“It’s the last night of *My Fair Lady.*”

“I know.”

“One more night…” she sighed. “...Then no more of that God-awful Lila woman's ghastly voice.”

Erik nodded, but he really didn't think that Lila Turner sang that horribly. However, the vehement tone in Bea's voice made him think she had her mind made up, so he said no more.

“There's one of those lecture guys coming next. He talks about pos…pos…posit…posey…you know, that word…when you're always thinking of good things instead of bad?” Bea crinkled her brow in thought.

“Positive?” he suggested.

“Yeah…that's what he is, positive. He tries to lure people into his way of thinking,” she said.

Neither of them spoke for a whole minute. Bea broke the sinister quiet first.

“I hate positive people.”

Erik noted that Bea's black hair shrouded her brown face in gloom, causing almost complete camouflage against the night sky.

“Positive?” he suggested.

“Yeah…that's what he is, positive. He tries to lure people into his way of thinking,” she said.

Neither of them spoke for a whole minute. Bea broke the sinister quiet first.

“I hate positive people.”

Erik checked his watch and discovered that the time had come for them to get inside the theater and check in.

“Let's go,” he said.
The duo started toward the door and a question popped into Erik’s mind. This tantalizing inquiry begged to be asked, but he’d never spotted a proper chance to ask Bea before. But now, while Bea’s mind lingered between reality and dreams, maybe she’d answer it the way he wanted her to.

“Bea? I need to ask you something,” he said, warily anticipating her answer.

“Fire away,” she said.

Erik sighed first. Maybe it wasn’t the right time.

“Would you…kill me?” his mouth said.

They stopped walking. A heavy silence covered them. This one differed from the first silence, which crept in on the two without notice. This was a tense silence, eager to be broken. Bea, again, interrupted it.

“Why?” she said testily.

Erik was taken aback. This simple word surprised him. Bea rarely gave straight answers and seldom asked a question that wasn’t rhetorical.

“I’ve been…sad…depressed…melancholy…whatever you want to call it…the meds don’t work…I keep thinking about…well…recent events that caused unsavory feelings…” he said, brow furrowed.

Bea cleared her throat. “You miss her, don’t you?”

“Yes. I miss her. She was…perfect…”

It was then that it hit Bea. It was something she’d been looking for for a long time. “I…would,” she said.

Mr. Baint looked taken aback. He obviously thought Bea would refuse. There are a lot of things you don’t know about me, Baint… she thought, smiling. And with that, she put on a strange little smile, as if anticipating something good, and ran up to the doors of the theater and stepped inside.

As usual, not the reply Erik expected.

After the last night of My Fair Lady, they hatched a plan. In order for it to work, they needed courage, willingness, and a certain amount of luck. Bea was going to make a little trap for Erik. Or so it would seem. An innocent usher would return from a day of work at the theater in exactly one week. As soon as he reached the top of the staircase onto the landing his unit was on, a shot would sound and it would be the end of him.

Erik did not pretend that his fear of death didn’t exist. He cried during the sad parts in My Fair Lady. He cried in the car. He cried as he ate his microwave burrito, and he cried when he slept.

He felt sick when he drove to work the next day. It would be the last opening night he’d ever see.

As usual, he arrived fifteen minutes early, but did not find Bea waiting at the wall again. Normally this would’ve been unusual, Bea being such a strange, early bird woman. But this crucial element of their plan could not be avoided just for Bea’s reputation. Bea would call in sick everyday in order to avoid suspicion connected to Erik’s death.

He pretended to look for her and found Leoma and Nathan instead. They laughed at his frantic expression.

“What’re you looking for, Mr. Baint?” asked Leoma.

“Bea Seems!” he stammered. “Have you seen her?”

“Nope. Isn’t she usually out back, near that creepy cemetery? Yeah…why don’t you check the cemetery?” said Nathan, calmly. “Maybe she decided to go visit all her victims’ graves?”

Their laughs stayed with him as he found himself at the doors to the theater. He stepped inside and feigned confidence. He stepped inside and checked in.

The people already there were sitting around in groups discussing something. Erik realized that most of them were young, upbeat people—hardly any of the usual sullen, crinkled old folk that usually showed up so that they could moan
about their lonely lives. Surprised at this, he took his place at the doors to the upper balcony and made sure nobody entered.

At 6:15 exactly, he let people pass and showed everybody where their seats were, all the while anticipating the excitement of opening night in the patrons as they sat down and discussed what they were about to see. He examined one of the programs he’d been instructed to pass out to people entering the balcony. Dewey Melvin peered up at him on the front cover. Erik recognized the man from various posters he’d seen downtown. Apparently he could make anybody’s miserable life better.

He doubted the credibility of this. His own life was not repairable. And even if it were, he would end up dying in a matter of thirty years anyway. If their plan was carried out, he wouldn’t have to wait that long.

But what Dewey Melvin said happened to be no less than grandeur, and Erik found himself hooked. He watched Dewey walk across the stage and felt instantly enlightened. There was something about the man’s positive swagger that made him feel like today was going to be great. It became the best opening night he’d ever seen. Dewey Melvin certainly knew the right approaches.

And so it was that Erik came to work the next day and eagerly watched Dewey’s lecture about positive thinking. He took the man’s advice and began to think about the good things he had in life—he was still alive; he was mobile and able to function normally; he had a job; he lived in a beautiful city where the fall was just dazzling as the leaves turned golden brown and lined the streets like gold.

He went to the cemetery to see Melody’s grave again. Instead of looking down upon it sadly, he smiled and remembered.

Instead of having his regular microwave meals for dinner, Erik went out to eat at a Mexican restaurant. His steak fajitas were excellent. And he enjoyed his flan even more.

Bea’s absence caused Leoma and Nathan to be a bit nicer to him. His new, more positive, but less mature friends seemed to understand his new take on life.

An observer from afar would have thought Erik had the best life in the world. In those four days, his life reached an all-time high.

Erik forgot about Bea. Out of sight, out of mind.

He even forgot about his death plan, becoming completely focused on changing his life.

And that was why, on the last day of the week, Dewey Melvin fresh in his mind, he opened the red door of his apartment thinking his life had changed. He ascended the staircase one stair at a time.

Bea crouched behind the railing. The sound Erik’s black shoes made against the wooden stairs clicked in time with her heartbeat as she held the semiautomatic to her chest, hands trembling.

Erik appeared on the landing, and she stood up, level to his head. His smile was quite visible among his other grubby features, and she wondered why.

He did not see her as she held the gun to his temple and squeezed the trigger.
Flying Home
by Talbot Andrews

Two, three, I count the whip’s lashes across my bare, dirty back. I grit my teeth to bare the pain. Four, five, I had tried to taste freedom, but now they were going to make me taste blood, my own African blood. I had not been fed for almost a week now, and this is my third whipping since then. I prepare for it all to go black, a mix of dehydration and pain. I will not cry out. I will not give them the satisfaction of seeing me squeal. This is all just an ostentatious display of their power. The darkness is settling over me, a thick cloud blindfolding my world. Six, seven, it all fades away. Then, it is bright again. The bright sun that warms the cotton field is illuminating me; I am flying. I look down to see my scarred body. How is that me? I am me. No, I am no longer me, just a soul to wander the world. I fly out over the Mississippi, farther and farther away from the fields where I was a slave. Over the Atlantic Ocean, fading from turquoise to navy blue to turquoise again. The plains of Africa stretch out over the horizon. As my toes touch down on the ground I look around and see a destroyed land. A pile of ashes is all that marks a burnt home and broken family. Atop the smoldering pile stand a family missing one. I step into this picture of hope. I am home.

My Best Friend Wins a City
by Claire Martin

Hello, mortals. I am here to tell you a story of the downside of boasting and the importance of intelligence, and the lessons you can learn from them both. It begins on my home, Mount Olympus. It is the tale of the beginning of Athens.

I am Artemis, the goddess of the moon. This is my story.

Athena was frustrated again. “Look at him!” she cried in exasperation. “It’s ridiculous. Doesn’t he have anything better to do?”

She was talking about Poseidon. He had been bragging about his gorgeous city in Greece to Hermes and Apollo for the last twenty minutes, while my best friend Athena and I had been standing off to the side, listening. Athena seemed to really hate it whenever the subject was brought up.

I wasn’t sure whether it was his boasting, or her firm belief that she could run a city better than he could, that inflamed her so much. Looking back, it was probably both.

“All Poseidon has is strength with water. Strength has to give way to intelligence at times,” she would say over and over, glaring at me as though daring me to reprimand her. I would just nod, or roll my eyes in exasperation. I knew, like Athena, that bragging never resulted in anything but rebellion. But being only fourteen, I personally didn’t care whether Poseidon owned a city or a dead bird. Athena cared. A lot.

I never thought she’d do anything drastic about it.

After two weeks, she cracked, or so she said. She called me to her bedroom at four in the morning. Luckily, I, being a Huntress and Goddess of the Moon, was still alert.
and awake at this time. However, I was not particularly pleased at this late night invitation.

In a hushed voice, she told me not to do or say anything to anyone about the fact that she was going to try to steal Poseidon’s city. “I just can’t take it anymore,” she told me firmly.

I stared at her, mixed between skepticism and a bizarre desire to laugh.

“What in the world are you thinking?” I asked her. “Poseidon is millions of years old. You’re only fifteen! He knows thousands of things you don’t about magic. I know you’re brilliant and everything, but…” I stopped, trying to figure out how best to phrase this.

“What I mean is: how do you plan to steal property from that powerful of a god?”

Athena smiled slyly. “A battle of wits.”

She snapped her fingers, and was gone.

I sighed. Something told me this wasn’t going to be pretty.

The next day, I appeared in the Greek city (in human form) and saw, to my disbelief, Athena (in human form) standing on a podium in the middle of the town square. From what I could hear from the back, she was promising wisdom to all the people if they chose her as their leader.

Then I saw Poseidon, having just spoken, off to the side. He was scowling, clearly displeased with Athena’s speech abilities. I smirked.

When Athena was done talking, the crowd applauded. A formidable looking man in a beige toga stepped onto the podium, and asked for votes for Poseidon to be their leader. Forty people raised their hands. Then he asked for Athena votes.

Forty others raised their hands.

I saw Athena and Poseidon glance at each other.

The man tried to cover his uneasiness with a smile. A very weak one.

“A gift! Make them give us a gift!” cried out one villager excitedly. Other people shouted their assent. The air was soon filled with cries of:

“A gift!”

“Do it, Marcus!”

“Wonderful idea!”

The man, apparently called Marcus, seemed to regain his cool. Silencing the crowd with a wave of his hand, he cried, “An excellent idea!” Poseidon flipped his dark hair unconcernedly, gripping his golden trident; Athena chewed her lip in concentration. She seemed to be analyzing the oak tree nearest to her, a serious look on her face.

Come on, Athena, I thought desperately.

Marcus raised his hands again, and a hush fell. He pointed to Poseidon. It would be the Sea God who would share his gift first. The crowd all turned unanimously and watched him, avid and excited looks on all of their mortal faces.

Poseidon raised his trident and plunged it into the ground. Immediately, crystal-clear water sprung up in a beautiful fountain that twisted and curved as it pushed up from the dusty ground. The villagers oohed and aahed, then ran forth eagerly, their hands cupped. But after tasting the water, everyone gagged. I moved to the rippling water to try some too. I’ll spare you the revolting details.

Long story short, it was salt water.

Well, the villagers seemed pretty mad about a fountain of glorious water that was “undrinkable.” Muttering, they cleaned themselves up, and looked up again at Marcus. Disappointment was etched onto every face.

I felt like whooping.

Marcus pointed at Athena.
I looked up at the sky and sent a quick prayer to Zeus, asking for cool-headedness and strength to befall my best friend.

Athena took a deep breath. Closing her eyes, she raised her hand, and an elegant tree grew rapidly up from the soil. The branches were soft, and the leaves were curved almost artistically, as though each one had been handcrafted with care.

“With this tree, you will never go hungry, for it brings food, and you shall never go cold, for it provides wood for fires,” Athena called to the people. “This is an olive tree, with a beauty and a wisdom all of its own. Let me be your olive tree. Let me govern you fairly and keep you safe. I am Athena, and I’ll not let you down.”

The crowd cheered.

Three days later, Athena named the city Athens.

What can I say? She’s got pride.
Light of Day
by Ramtin Rahmani

The light of day that man shall never see
Inside the cave, so dark to be
I see a light upon me
Shining like a star in the night so dark and cold
Shines a light naught to be told
As I watch upon I see
The light of Bahá’u’lláh looking at me
As kind as always lighting up the sky for the ones in need
Never mean to be
The one in the sky whose light shines upon me
The words of power he says like this, “Be kind to all big or small, never hurt one soul for if you see, God shall shed light upon thee and show them killing is naught to be”

Columbus and His Journey
by Julie Pham

This mad sea shows its teeth tonight
He curls his lips, he lies in wait
Lifting his magnificent teeth as if ready to bite.
Brave admiral, say but one word, “What shall we do when hope is gone?”
Those words left like a thrusting sword
Lost and confused. Screams of desperation
The sharp teeth like a vampire, gnawing through the heart of the ship.
Sail on! Sail on! I scream into my sailor’s ear.
The dreary brown night comes down
Gloomy without a star
Forgetful without a sorrow
Fearful of the sea, a hammer crashing down on glass.
Is there no hope?
Of all dark nights, then a speck—
A light! It grew like a flower and released the evil sea
It grew a starlit flag unfurled
Time’s burst of dawn
The ocean, regretful of all losses
Apollo’s wheel, magnificent and glittering.
“Columbus, this is a miracle!” a sailor yells.
Reprisal at the midst of nowhere
Stars glitter as the orange rescuer douses the mad sea
Our ship slips through the ocean like rippling water through reeds
The mad sea dies back into its cave
Such tranquility and silence, the water does not argue
As we sail a sailor’s life, true miracles do happen.
A smooth ending.
Woods in the Winter
Audrey Deiss

Rain on a windowpane
A promise of sunshine behind the clouds
The fog of breath clouds the window, the reason
Slow motion
A road black as pitch
Trees like protectors stand
Surrounding the travelers inside
As dark and wet as mystery

Small wooden bridge
Rotting
A sweet but sickly smell
Under fury blazes
Onyx water rushes with a vengeance

Cold hands press against glass
Peering cautiously outward
Searching for a difference
In the woods
In the winter

The Last 15 Minutes
Allison Heymann

Rage, muted
Rage, unfettered; Rage, penetrating the walls
Her voice, his voice
The lost voices
Of the crying infant, the whimpering child
The struggling adolescent, the ignored teenager
The house heaves with tears
As the broken family
Fights, Fights
Her tears, his tears
The lost tears
The silent infant, the dismissed child
The indifferent adolescent, the broken teenager
Battle lines, Enemy lines, Credit lines
Admitted lies, uncovered truths, insults
Rage, Rage, Killing
Her threats, his threats
Abuse, Anger
Her temper, his temper, while the children's spirits die
Broken trust, broken family, broken thoughts
Slamming car doors
Where? Where? the child's voice
Lost, Lost
In the Rage

Killer of love.
We have romanticized the idea of pirates, so that when the word is spoken we immediately see visions of eye-patched and hook-handed men, often characters from famous stories such as *Peter Pan* or *Treasure Island*. But in “Dark Passage,” a captivating article by Peter Gwin in the October 2007 *National Geographic*, we see that pirates are still roaming our seas, just as terrible as they were 200 years ago.

Pirates may no longer wear tall boots and fly black flags, but their essential goals and lifestyles are the same, only modernized. As Gwin vividly describes, these men are busily at work hijacking the many cargo and oil ships that pass through the narrow Malacca Strait, located in the Indian Ocean between Malaysia and the Indonesian island of Sumatra, rather than making the long trip all the way around Indonesia.

It is tough and brutal work, resulting in injury and death of both crewmen and pirates. Cell phones, small motorboats, guns, and an assortment of handheld weapons are all ingredients of the attack. And as one convicted pirate, “Beach Boy,” describes, a special psychological power: “We cast a spell to make the crew stay asleep. We can be invisible, bulletproof. It’s a power that you learn.”

If the invasion is successful, the pirates split up their booty and make their way to an island, usually the island of Batam, where they seek beer, prostitutes, drugs, gambling, and more work.

Often though, the pirates are caught and sentenced to years in prison, where they are very poorly treated. “Beach Boy” had two bullets fired at his leg. One stuck and is embedded. It probably will be for his entire life.

But why? we ask. Why would a person want to enter the gruesome world of piracy? Often the answer is simple: They’re poor and they need work. Legitimate work as a sailor is often hard to come by, and an expensive license is required.

Gwin’s article gives a vivid picture of stealthy seamen and their high-action lives. It is hard to grasp that pirates still actually exist, and I’m glad that I have a safe bed, far away from the Strait of Malacca, where I can still dream of pirates in flying ships, and not face the horrible reality.
What is America?
by Jenna Wiegand

God Bless America, Land that I love... Kids, teens, and adults all over our country make this claim together often, pledging their loyalty to our nation. When we recite the words to the pledge or our nation’s songs, do we care about what we’re saying? Do we say them with emotion? Do we reminisce about our past and America’s past every time we hear the songs? I’m an American who loves living here, the type who will speak out for our country and the great land it is—a land of safety, freedom, and hope. I remember the hurricanes, the terrorist attacks, everything, because it is a part of my nation’s history. These kinds of people are the ones who keep our country strong, transforming America from what it is today to what the future will become.

O beautiful for pilgrim feet who long ago reached New York Harbor, introducing a new life for everyone. When the immigrants landed their tired feet on American soil, relief and happiness mixed with awe as they first set eyes on the Statue of Liberty. Lady Liberty stands true in the center of our minds, portraying freedom, determination, trust, hope. That comforting sight would touch the hearts of many, signifying that the immigrants had arrived to America, and were ready to start life anew.

America’s heroes proved in liberating strife mark our history with good and bad times alike. Growing from thirteen colonies and many immigrants, we started as a nation made from many races and cultures, and with that, injustice. Our leaders pushed to make things right and as a result our nation proudly boasts equality for all. Woven throughout our history are bold people standing up for their rights—the Quakers, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and countless others. Following the recent terrorist attacks in 2001, our entire nation reached out a hand to lift up search and rescue efforts at Ground Zero. After the tragic deaths of hundreds of heroes, our entire nation grew together as a whole, influencing millions of lives.

Our land of the free and home of the brave is defined by the bald eagle, a symbol of power, freedom, and courage. The historic words of the Constitution, though written so long ago, state our rights while illustrating the turmoil that the colonists battled to earn these privileges for the generations to come. As the unmistakable eagle soars across the fireworks, we are reminded of how our humble background—starting with religious misfits, servants, and criminals from other countries—became the nation of glory that it is today.

O beautiful for patriot’s dream that sees beyond the years has rung true today as the ideas of our American leaders have influenced our lives. Dreams of Martin Luther King, Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, and innumerable others have led our country to achieve great things. Our pioneer beginnings on covered wagons through new and foreign terrain have carried through to the pioneers in space, as well as those working with medicine, technology, and more.

As we declare the flag’s broad stripes and bright stars, thro’ the perilous fight...Gave proof thro’ the night that our flag was still there we refer to the bombing of Fort McHenry on September 14, 1814 in which the American flag was not taken down in defeat, but continued waving. When we fly the flag we are honoring those who have risked or lost their lives for our country, those who are leading America today, and motivating the heroes of the future.

Can you see by the dawn’s early light what our country has come from and what it has become? The dawn of a new day...
is a fresh start for America. Old conflicts are in the past and new ones will come, but the nation will continue striving; a new start every day.

My heritage comes to me from the words of our songs. “America” brings me a plethora of song lines and titles, ones learned in my first school years. From our thirteen colonies to the Civil War to September 11, 2001, I’ll always remember our history. The final words I have for my country are God bless America, My home sweet home.

Coming to America
By Ramtin Rahmani

"Hengameh, can I sit down? I’m really tired.” Those were the words I had said when I was going to Vienna. I didn’t know it, but I was going to stay there for seven months. For a two-year-old, that sounds like forever. Now let’s backtrack. In Iran if you’re not Muslim you have a very high chance of being harassed. My family and I are all Baha’is. Iran has strict rules against Baha’is; if you do not change your religion you are not allowed to attend college, and life in your middle and high school is very tough. Some Muslims are prejudiced against Baha’is and think lowly of them. My mother, Hengameh, didn’t want this life for me. During our journey I had rough times and tiring ones, but in the end it was all worth it. I came to America, the land of opportunity.

My mother decided that she was going to leave Iran and head toward America. She felt like the life in Iran would be unfair for me. Maybe she was thinking, If Iran becomes the great land it once was, I would love to go back. I don’t know, maybe she didn’t even think that until she got to America. There was so much stress at the time. Preparation took months. She had to contact the Embassy, and then HIYAS, an organization that helps Baha’is move out of Iran and into other countries that aren’t prejudiced. My mother packed our clothes and some belongings we loved and headed to the airport. My family had always lived together, my aunt, grandparents, parents. Most of them lived in Esfahan; only one of my aunts, Azadeh, and my uncle, Abbas, lived in Tehran. The day when my mother, grandparents, and I were at the airport was a sad day. It was the first day we were going to be separated. I said, “Mommy, I don’t want to
leave Momman Minoo (my grandma) and Pedar Jon (my grandpa). I want to stay here.” After that we all broke out in tears. When my mother stopped crying she started to think how to get us to stop. My mom and I agree it was a blurry part.

As I boarded the plane I was about to embark on a long and treacherous journey. One where I could not turn back. My mother was praying that the Khomeini’s religious soldiers did not search the plane. If they did we were going to be on a one-way trip back to Iran. I was praying that we would land safely. I told my mother that we should chant a prayer together, to be more precise the prayer Is There Any Remover Of Difficulties. We were twenty minutes from landing when I saw the land of Vienna; all the rooftops where painted red and the flowers were yellow and red. I told my mom “Hengameh, look at the pretty flowers.”

We finally got to Vienna and what a beautiful place it was—flowers everywhere, big buildings—it was all so nice. At the airport we were met by one of hiyas’ employees. He took us to a very beautiful apartment twenty minutes from town. We lived there for a month but quickly realized it was too far from Vienna, where all the paperwork was to be done. I was reluctant to leave, but we had to. My mother found an apartment; when we went inside it was torn down and just plain dirty, but since we weren’t permanent residents it was all we could get. The apartment was infested with ants, mice, and cockroaches. It really couldn’t get worse than this. The manager there didn’t even put out any pesticides, so my mother and our roommates had to. We shared the apartment with another Iranian family. They were very pleasant and nice, and soon we became close friends. Life in Vienna went by as it would in Iran—we shopped, went to the park, and went sightseeing. However the first month I would eat very little food. My mother thinks it’s because I missed my grandparents so much. She had to make some kind of income, so she did what she did best: paint. A man hired her to paint paintings for him, then he would sign them in his name. Neither of them spoke the same language, so they talked to each other with their hand and fingers. This wasn’t a great job but it was the only thing she could do. For every painting the man paid Hengameh three hundred dollars, but he sold them for one thousand dollars. She kept doing this for three months and then she stopped. At the end of seven months our visa came. We packed our stuff and left some behind and headed to America.

We had two large suitcases and that was it. As we boarded the plane both of us were excited. The plane on the non-stop eight-hour trip to Chicago had an ice cream machine. During the trip there always was an ice cream cone in my hand. The flight attendants also were nice; they didn’t say anything or stop me from getting my ice cream. When we reached Chicago we stayed a night at a hotel. We shared the room with a couple. My memory of this is it was an empty room with two beds and a bathroom. In the morning both of us hurried to gather our stuff and head to the next plane. On that plane we couldn’t stop jumping up and down. We were going to Oregon and we had made the trip.

Coming to America wasn’t easy; in this story it might sound like it, but it wasn’t—going to Vienna and staying there for seven months then coming to America. My mother slept most of the day for two weeks when we got to America. Through all these hardships now I realized why my mother decided to make the journey—so I could make something out of my life.
The Beijing Summer Games
by Harsha Uppili

China has thousands and thousands of years of exciting history, but now another chapter is about to be added to it. You guessed it, the Games of the xxix Olympiad, commonly known as the 2008 Beijing Summer Games, are in the works. Beijing was chosen out of many cities, even though Beijing has many problems that could hurt the reputation of the Olympics. People are also questioning the ways Beijing is doing things. First of all, what are the problems? Let’s look over them.

One of the challenges associated with the Olympics is food. People have been questioning China’s ability to have safe food for the athletes, journalists, and coaches. Even though the country is under international pressure, Sun Wenxu, an official with the State Administration for Industry and Commerce made the following statement, “All the procedures involving Olympic food, including production, processing, packing, storing, and transporting, will be closely monitored.” But will they be able to pull it off? During the Olympics, athletes, coaches, and journalists are expected to consume more than 300 tons of fruits and vegetables, 82 tons of seafood, 750 liters of ketchup, 131 tons of meat, 21 tons of cheese, and 75,000 liters of milk, according to the Xinhua News Agency. Wow! They are going to eat a lot in 22 days.

The biggest and most talked about problem associated with the Olympics is the pollution problem of Beijing. Beijing is spending 12 billion dollars on a major clear air and water treatment center, which got finished in mid 2006. The time before the Olympics is being spent on making sure the stadiums are efficient, and the air around them are clean. The pollution could cause problems such as breathing problems, asthma, and allergies for the athletes. As David Streets of the Argonne National Laboratory in the U.S. said, “The athletes could be exposed to unhealthy air pollution unless there is a substantial reduction in emissions.” Most of the dust is coming from coal power plants and factories, and ozone is coming from exhaust gases. Adding to the problem is Beijing’s 1,000 cars added to the city register every day. Beijing is working very hard to keep the city clean for the big event. During the Olympics, Beijing has put out rules that some roads cannot be driven on. They are also relocating the factories that pollute the air the most, far from the Olympic venue. Since Beijing has a population of 15 million, it is not a surprise that it has such trouble with pollution.

Since China is a communist country, the government can force people out of a city if they want to. That is exactly what they plan to do during the Olympics. The Beijing Municipal Authority declared more than 70 local laws for the purpose of the Olympics. Some of the rules banish the people who do not have a residency permit of Beijing, plus vagrants, beggars, people with mental illnesses, and the biggest group of all, 1.5 million people, regular people who have jobs. Even though all this will happen, Beijing is working hard to be nice. The city is pushing the policemen to be friendlier, but to be bold about the rules. They are enforcing more rules for the people staying in Beijing during the Olympics. Too bad for all the people that live in Beijing who will be displaced. They might have wanted to go to the Summer Games.

The Beijing Summer Games have been questioned a lot, mostly because of Beijing’s ability to run the big event, plus the problems Beijing faces as they attempt to hold the world’s biggest gathering. Besides all the problems, the
Olympics look like they are going to be a success overall. The attendance is expected to be high, and Beijing is excited about this great event. Now, as the time comes closer and closer, the next step is to buy tickets, then jump on a plane, and hope things run smoothly for the athletes, Beijing, and the International Olympic Committee!
TALBOT ANDREWS grew up in Portland, Oregon, with his little brother and his cat Chase. His piece was inspired by a friend, who told him about a story she had read about slavery. It made him think about those people who never gave up, even when all hope was lost. This piece is to honor all the slaves who died before they were set free.

ASHTON BABCOCK was born and raised in Portland, Oregon. She first enrolled in the Portland Public School District, but left Jackson Middle School in the eighth grade and became a student at Fowler Middle School. She has a wide range of hobbies in many fields, such as drawing, acting (she recently starred as Auntie Em in her school’s adaptation of The Wizard of Oz), singing, going for walks, and reading. Ashton hopes this award will be one of many in her career as a writer.

AUDREY DEISS is currently a seventh grader at Ponderosa Jr. High School in Klamath Falls, Oregon. She began writing at an early age and is always starting stories (though very rarely finishing them). Besides writing, Audrey enjoys reading, singing, and being with her friends. She also plays tenor and alto saxophone, piano, and sings in her school choir. This is her first published work.

ALLIE DONAHUE has been a student at the Portland Waldorf School for the last six years, and will attend Jesuit High School this fall. When Allie was eight, she started a zine called biff with her dad. They have made five issues and are getting ready to start their sixth. Allie enjoys ballroom dancing and running, and has competed in the Luna All Women’s Triathlon twice. For her eighth grade project, she grew and canned organic tomatoes. She named them “Trillium Creek Organics,” and marketed them at her school.

ALLISON HEYMANN is thirteen years old and in the eighth grade at Catlin Gabel School. She lives in Lake Oswego, Oregon, with her mother, father, and three brothers. Allison has written numerous poems, which have placed well in contests around Oregon. Some of her hobbies include playing lacrosse, swimming competitively, reading, and acting. She has never been part of a divorce, so when she wrote The Last 15 Minutes she was using her imagination—picturing how something as complicated as divorce could happen.

CLAIRE MARTIN is in the seventh grade at All Saints School in Portland, Oregon, where she is in the honor society. She is active in the NW Children’s Theater (nwct) and performed in their mainstage musical production of HONK! in October 2007. Claire has been involved with the nwct Kid’s Company Acting Troupe for three years and continually takes acting classes. In addition, Claire has been involved with her school’s musical productions.

JULIE PHAM enjoys reading and writing.

RAMTIN RAHMANI came to the United States when he was four. He still considers himself Iranian, but his country is America. He attends Catlin Gabel School and is in the eighth grade. As well as excelling in school, he plays two traditional Iranian instruments, the santoor and the tombak, both of which are hundreds of years old. He also plays the piano. His writing has appeared in Teen Ink and the Pegasus book.

AMELIA TURNQUIST is 11 years old and a native Oregonian in the 6th grade at Stoller Middle School. She works hard and plays hard, pitching or covering third base for her
Amelia also enjoys singing and a little acting, performing at retirement homes with Northwest Children’s Theater this past Christmas. But her favorite pastime is reading, since she zips through a book every two or three days. Amelia's been good with words from the beginning, managing her first short sentence at only ten months old. When her mom called out to the kids “Who’s hungry?” it was baby Amelia who replied, “I do!”

HARSHA UPPILI was born in April 1996 in Portland, Oregon. He is currently a sixth grader at Oregon Episcopal School. His hobbies include writing, reading, biking, playing tennis, and basketball.

JENNA WIEGAND, a blue-eyed lefty is a cheerful and unique individual. This fourteen-year-old loves to shop, read, travel, redecorate her room, and hang out with friends (not necessarily in that order). “Celebrate with shoes” is her new motto, going along with her favorite words, “happily ever after.” While writing has not always been her strong point, Jenna discovered a new love for it during eighth grade. Now her time is spent looking forward with anxiety and excitement to high school and then college. Creativity and enthusiasm are a few of her strengths and will be put to use in a future career (possibly) as an interior designer.
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