

# FIRST PRIZE

## **Big and Small**

Sun shining across the water, a light breeze brushing against my face. Ravens calling from a distance, voices like muted bells. Paddles dip and swing, splashing me with every stroke. Water whispering to unseen ears.

In the distance,  
a seal.

Like a balloon bobbing in the sea,  
head shining in the sun like silver.  
Eyes, transfixed on the seal, watching  
as it slithers behind the kayak  
and into the depths below.

From small ways like the seal,  
and the tiniest leaf on the biggest tree,  
to big ways like whales,  
and the tree-covered hills beyond:

nature,  
constantly astounding.

**by Aziza Hashimi** (Grade Seven)  
McCloskey Elementary School  
Delta, British Columbia

# FIRST PRIZE

## Worry My Way Home

Beyond my worries,  
There's a wilderness.  
Beyond the wilderness,  
There's a world.  
What's beyond the world?  
I'm too scared to know.

I wandered through trees,  
I wandered through time.  
I wandered through almost everything,  
So now here I am.  
Stuck.

I'm stuck in the wilderness,  
So is my mind.  
But the one thing my mind does know,  
There's a way out.  
Beyond my worries,  
There's a wilderness.  
Beyond the wilderness,  
There's a world.  
What's beyond the world?  
I'm starting to know.

There is a world of freedom where I can be me,  
A world that has no wilderness,  
A world where I can be  
Free.

*by Olivia Wellings* (Grade Eight)  
Silver Creek Public School  
Georgetown, Ontario

# SECOND PRIZE

## A Peer into the Next Generation

*The cities* are merely cruel reminders and homes to melancholic memories,  
Tall, jagged edifices, a haunting shell of the glory they once stood for—but now a reverie.  
I walk along the chipped sidewalks, and—  
Whispers of bustling business, delighted voices, cars honking,  
Graze across my sharp, malnourished cheeks.  
Derelict houses, wavering steel beams, empty of what once made them whole at their peaks.

*The animals*, all gone, tales of beasts so mighty I've heard but never seen.  
Ancient lore of beautiful creatures alike of kings and queens,  
Who soar through dazzling heights and croon to us below,  
And ones who dwell in freezing climates, I've never seen fine white powder so.  
Forests cut down; habitats destroyed. Glaciers melted; habitats sunk down,  
Every generation, more and more gone and gone.

*The sky*, roiling angrily and turbulently, an ominous sign of our Mother's suffering,  
I take a breath and keel over coughing, my eyes watering.  
Between the grey, few rays of gold pierce through the skies,  
Stark in contrast to the smoky air, unveiling the dust particles twirling sidewise.  
Years of abuse, years of blight,  
Has rendered this lovely sight a fright.

*The rivers and lakes* are from what they were—such tragic downfall.  
Clear, glistening water, vibrant with life—murky, garbage-filled water, toxic to us all.  
Cascading, fighting rapids, swirling and dancing, foam skimming the surface of the stream,  
Cup my hands and relish the feel of cool water down my throat.  
Still, opaque and muddy ponds, unrecognizable shapes drifting—so polluted,  
Fall in, screaming and flailing. The water clogs my senses; it tastes putrid.

*I ask* my mama one dark day, "Why is it like this? I don't understand."  
Softly, Mama says, and on my skeletal shoulders places her hand,  
"Once, a beautiful world we had, birds singing, skies cerulean, but we were ungrateful.  
We made the skies weep, we made the grass shameful,  
With our great gas machines and waste, Mother Nature, who cared for us so, this is payback."  
"That's sad," I long for creatures and a time I have never lived, "Will they ever come back?"  
"Perhaps," my mama sighs wistfully, "perhaps, if only we're—"  
Then stops, holding back words of hope she wants to say I will never hear.

*by Nora Shao* (Grade Seven)  
Tecumseh Elementary School  
Vancouver, British Columbia

# SECOND PRIZE

## Never Change

Sometimes we feel tired  
Everyone has felt the feeling  
It washes over you like the tide coming in and out  
We struggle to hold ourselves up  
We ache and complain and whine endlessly  
But we don't change a thing

We see ourselves struggling  
Purple bags heavy and prominent  
Eyes red and scratchy  
We think of this as acceptable  
As normal  
Should it be?  
We ache and complain and whine endlessly  
But we don't change a thing

We fall asleep in class  
"Wake up!" the teacher shouts  
We open our eyes, trying to stay awake  
Making sure this tide of tiredness does not take us in once more  
Struggling to comprehend what the teacher is saying  
We ache and complain and whine endlessly  
But we don't change a thing

The adults come home  
Make dinner with clumsy hands  
Being careful not to chop anything but what's needed  
Restlessly setting the plates on the table  
Grab the computer  
Stay up late  
We repeat this cycle once more  
And yet  
After all we ache and complain and whine  
We still  
Don't change a thing

*by Nur Iscan* (Grade Eight)  
Waterloo Area Enrichment Program  
Waterloo, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## Forest Fire

From the forest, smell of evergreen and oak,  
Erupting from the woods in plethoras of smoke.  
Pine and cedar's roots ripped from the ground.  
Sending leaves and brush raining down.  
The small critters and creatures trying to flee,  
Running through the burning labyrinth of trees.  
When the sun falls, the fire calms a bit,  
But in the dark breath of night, it is still lit.  
Deer scamper across ash and cinder,  
The trees still the forest fire's tinder.  
Burned grass and sparks fly overhead,  
Over the trees and into the creek bed.  
The wind howls, spreading the flames,  
The forest fire cannot be tamed.  
Every creature wanting to escape the chaos,  
Finding a chasm and leaping across.  
Fire dances across the narrow stream,  
The two elements clash, creating curls of steam.  
Finally, the fire reduces to ember,  
The image of the fire, they would all remember.

*by Claire Mustard* (Grade Seven)  
Thousand Islands Intermediate/Secondary School  
Brockville, Ontario

# THIRD PRIZE

## **A Soldier's Tears**

A soldier's tears  
Slide down her face,  
Not showing that she is weak  
But brave enough to express the pain she's experienced,  
It reminds us of everything she went through  
Yet, still, she defends our country,  
A soldier's tears

A soldier's scar  
Imprinted permanently in his now beaten skin,  
All the hard battles he has fought  
Written in the scars forever,  
A constant reminder of the pain of war  
Inescapably indented in his flesh,  
A soldier's scar

A soldier's flag  
Worn proudly on her chest  
As she begins her brutal battles,  
A reminder to her of what and who they fight for,  
It pushes her to strive for a better tomorrow,  
A great honour that she represents our country,  
A soldier's flag

A soldier's spirit  
The strongest part of any soldier,  
It's the passion he puts into each battle  
No matter the sacrifice, he keeps fighting,  
Even if his body is lost in war  
His spirit will always live on with us,  
A soldier's spirit

*by Chaylan Dissanayake* (Grade Eight)  
Cambridge Area Enrichment Centre  
Cambridge, Ontario