Week 31: Writing prompts — "Tests;" "General submissions"

Going away

By Elena Eames
Dummerston Middle School, Grade 8

The homemade video flashed across my screen. A guy making a slam dunk, a girl making an elaborate painting, a student with the words slanted across his shirt: You're in!

I sat there watching it, not thinking about what it meant.

I called some friends and told them; they clapped and cheered for me, and then said "Wait … you're happy ... right?"

"Yeah," I said. "I'm happy."

"Good, well, I'll see ya at school!"

School. I thought about not seeing them every day, about not being able to walk with them in the halls, laugh at the teachers and talk about everything at recess. Recess which I won't have anymore. High school is a big step, as much as I look forward to it. I wish I could have the people I've known for so long, and the people who have become so close to me, there to make it a little easier.

And then the scholarship came. It covered almost everything and was too good to turn down. I am going. I am packing up everything and moving to a new life with 130 people in the same place that I'm in — from all over the world. I know I will meet new friends, and great people who will have a huge impact my life. I can't wait to leave, to get away and to start over.

But then, my friends are here; so is everything I've worked for and achieved.

New opportunities versus what is known and loved.

I'm going with new opportunities.

I cry as a write an e-mail to an old teacher to thank her for everything she's given me. I cry as I talk to a best friend on the phone. I get a surge of excitement as I mail the acceptance letter.

A great feeling of self-importance and liberation comes when I tell people, "I'm going to Northfield Mount Hermon, not Brattleboro Union High School," and the look they give me is one of admiration.

I put so much time and effort into the entire process. And it all paid off.

Just a day ago it really sank in, the excitement. Visiting the campus was amazing, everything about it, seeing the classes and teachers, meeting the coaches. I can't wait for next year: to meet my roomie, decorate my dorm, have surprise holidays. The whole thing is so thrilling, and I love it all. I have yet to delete the acceptance e-mail from my inbox, that's the only thing that is making it real right now.

Jazz pride

By Bryce Hunter Bandish
Dummerston Middle School, Grade 8

[February 6, 2007]

"And now coming to the floor, the one and only Vermont Jazz Ensemble!"

As I walk onto the stage, I see an ocean of people, and all they want to see is me, Bryce Bandish, first trombone. As I sit down on that brown, worn-down stool, I think of the bloke to my left, second trombone. Oh, how badly he wanted to be me, but all the more incentive to play to my fullest potential on my 1910s silver, dented and bashed Martin trombone.

The conductor walks out. We sit and the audience stands. Now it's time to play.

"1, 2, 3, 4 and...."

We're off on a tantrum for the piece "Just a Minor Thing." Cue in, cue out, swing it now! Right now it's all about the band but come measure 57 it will be all about me.

One, two, ready, pickups... GO! The band stops, and I stand up, sporting a blazing pink tie on a matte pink shirt, with white buck shoes and pinstripe pants. Here I go!

I'm playing for me, my school, my parents and everything else imaginable, so I have to light them up. I go thinking about what an honor it is to play for all of these people on my birthday and solo for all of them. I do this at the best of my ability.

HOLD that high note and then slide down to an end.

And the crowd goes crazy just like when the Red Sox won the World Series. And boy, am I pumped.

We finish the piece and we stand up. Then the audience does the same. They introduce me as the solo artist and it's all over.

[February 6, 2057]

Even in my old age I still remember the day when I soloed with all the pride in the world, as the boy with the Martin trombone (which I still have) at the age of 13. I still play frequently with that trombone even though it is so beat up. I even played today on it because I always do on my birthday.

"Here it comes!" The crowd goes silent and…

My son, sitting on the same brown, worn-down stool, about to solo out to a crowd of hundreds and, what is more important, me. Wearing the same attire I did when I played for the ensemble. The pink shirt, pink tie, pinstripe pants and white buck shoes, but most importantly the same trombone. Amazingly, he wears the same hair I did, too, long wavy brown hair.

Now I know how proud my parents must have been when I played that night many years ago. Because now he stands up and starts to play and my body is flooded with pride.

The deserted room

By Eli Millman
Fairfield Center School, Grade 8

The wind whistled through the dark deserted room
Calling to the ones that left far too soon
It knocked over the chairs
And blew open cupboards
As if searching for something left there by others
It howled
It screeched
Then the wind cried
As the soft summer breeze
Rested
Then died.

MESSAGE IN THE MUSIC

Sarah Sherman, *Essex High School*

This photograph is from a series inspired by lyrics: "It seems music has a way of putting into words thoughts and emotions that are too broad and deep to communicate otherwise. How I would describe it though, in my best attempt at an explanation, is that the lyrics 'I can't let you let me down again' symbolize the vulnerability many people experience during their teenage years as they search for something to believe in, and are often let down by the very thing they trust the most. However, even this explanation can not truly do justice to my piece, because in reality it is an expression, an artwork, and it is open to individual interpretation. It is said, though, that it is easiest to express and portray to others things that you can relate to, things you have experienced yourself, and that is why I have picked this topic. And so, through my photographs, I attempt to express all the emotions that I've ever felt and yet could never quite seem to verbalize — to be interpreted as you wish."

Your thoughts on my thoughts

By Ellie Laukaitis
Williston Central School, Grade 8

Have you had a time
when you imagine every conversation
every last word
and then
they never get said?
When something's planned to go one way
but then it backfires
and the getaway car turns left
instead of right.
And that's when you realize windows are two-way
and maybe every feeling
is two-way also...
so you look at it the other way
and imagine speaking about that
Like with the archery target
and the sharks and minnows
and the fact that
you didn't drown
on your 200 breaststroke.
Did you even watch me?
I'm sorry, but I believe I'm at the point
where you can't remember where conversations
end
and thoughts and e-mails
begin.
Did I ever tell you about that day?
Did you know
being spontaneous
is actually planning,
then forgetting?
(Or forgetting to forget
and actually remembering
and then you're not spontaneous at all but you
have to still make it look like you haven't been
planning this conversation for the past week
or so, which of course you haven't, so maybe
really
the people who are good at being spontaneous
are actually just really good actors).
Did you read
everything I said? Everything I wrote?
Can you hear all the unsaid words
I hung in the air
with fishing line
last August?
Maybe I underestimated you
my great rambling friend
Maybe, by some freak chance
you understand
and you can read this
even though you'll never read this
and you feel the same way
and maybe you could hear the whole time
and now you're left standing there
wondering where
all those unsaid words
go.

The boy

By Jonah Stoller *Brattleboro Union High School, Grade 9*

(excerpt)

"Fall is the best time to be in the woods," thought the boy as he urged his bicycle up a steeper part of the trail. He knew that this was true because he was at the age when everything that you think is true is true, regardless of what others say. He pedaled up a familiar rise in the ground and coasted effortlessly down the other side where he promptly skidded on the rust-colored leaves and fell.

"Are you alright?" the boy's friend asked as he slid to a halt beside his fallen companion.

"Yeah, I'm fine," came the response, muffled because the boy was head down in leaves.

"Well, let's get going" the friend said. "It's getting late and I really should be getting home."

"You go on, I'm gonna' bike around for a bit longer."

"OK. See you tomorrow?"

"Sure."

They parted ways reluctantly, the friend going off one way down the trail, the boy another.

The boy pedaled through the trees, not paying attention because he knew the trail, and because he knew that the turnoff to the road was still far ahead. As he glided down a hill, he thought, with some reluctance, about having to go to school on Monday and about the homework he had to do but had told his parents he didn't have to do. His mind dropped this topic like a live grenade and went to the beauty of the leaves. They were so many colors! Yellows, reds, oranges — some still with hints of green, some without. His favorites were the reds. They weren't boring red, like the crayons in school, but exciting red, like fireworks on the Fourth of July. And so many variations! No two red leaves had the exact same shade! Thrilled at this new discovery, the boy stopped and bent down to examine a fallen red leaf. He marveled at it for a moment, and put it carefully in his pocket to bring home.

As the boy went to get back on his bike, he realized that the woods weren't so familiar any more. "I couldn't have missed the turnoff," he thought, "I've only been going for a few minutes." He continued on his way, failing to notice that the sun was getting low in the sky. ... *(For rest of the story, go to youngwritersproject.org)*

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THROUGH MAY 19: CHECK OUT THE INTERACTIVE FORUM WITH DOUG WILHELM, AUTHOR OF "THE REVEALERS" AND "FALLING." DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY. BEGINNING MAY 20: ERIK ESCKILSEN.

Check out the Web site for more student writing – blogs, forums, podcasts, getting and receiving feedback, commenting on the news, a Writer's Library and more. Register, log in and participate!

Cadence

By Erin Maguire
Essex High School, Grade 9

the buzzing in her
head started again but
that's OK because
it keeps her thoughts
from the cacophony in
her knees are still
stiff and she
imagines with every
stride she's breaking
the bonds of winter and
leaving them behind,
melting snowflakes
with her sneakers on
the sidewalk is still a
little icy interrupted with
puddles and mud that are
a welcome alternative to
dirty snow lines the
roadside as she flurries
floats
flies by and thinks of
the people she told
my new shoes
are going to make
me run faster
jump
higher, and the
way they didn't
believe her and
how if only
they could see

the spring
in her step

today.

The dream test

By Louis Sullivan
Lyman C. Hunt Middle School, Grade 8

The cold seat beneath me
The cruel test before me
No sleep at all last night
No concentration now

"You may begin now!" she says
The words echo around the room
As I bend over the desk
I blink once and suddenly
My world goes haywire

The numbers and letters lift upwards
Elongating and growing until
The classroom is filled with dancing forms
Filled with the utter nonsense of dreams
The figures all dance
To the sound of pens
And the hopeless cries
Now I stand with them
With fear in my eyes
The room seems to melt
Melt into nothing
and I am falling
Falling into darkness

"Pencils down everybody!"
I bolt at the sudden sound
To see all of my laughing
Merrymaking classmates
I stare hopelessly downward
At my unfinished test
And I sigh.