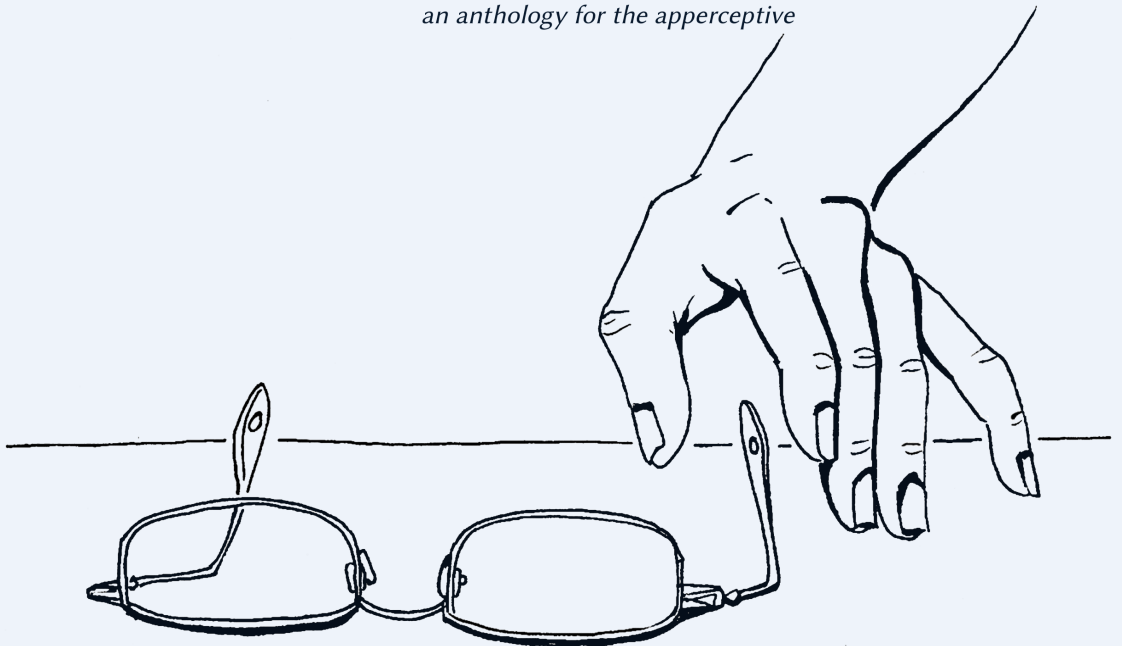


# in focus

PRESENTED BY WORLD IN FOCUS  
*an anthology for the apperceptive*





*in focus* 2017  
by world in focus  
over 300 submissions from 40 countries

thank you to  
all participants of In Focus

thank you to our compiler,  
chloe wu

thanks to our artists:  
reena wu  
aliza khaitin  
renqiu chen



## ABOUT WORLD IN FOCUS

Founded in 2016, World in Focus is a youth-run organization fundraising in our local community with 100% of our proceeds going to our cause: providing cataract surgeries and glasses for children in developing countries, and raising awareness to the local community through various events and presentations.

Over the past 2 years, World in Focus has been raising money to donate glasses/cataract surgeries to children in developing countries. In partnership with Himalayan Cataract Project (HCP), we have helped sponsor 12 cataract surgeries in countries like Ethiopia, Nepal and Myanmar!

## ABOUT IN FOCUS

In Focus was held from July to September 2017. World in Focus received over 300 submissions from 6 continents and 40 countries for our first writing and arts contest. Contestants were asked to create a piece of artwork or writing to reflect their interpretation of their choice between 3 given prompts:

1. "The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."  
- Helen Keller

2. "For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream." -Vincent Van Gogh

3. What does vision mean to you?

## **Preface**

*Welcome to World in Focus' first "In Focus" anthology, a collection of short stories, poems, essays and artworks from youth across the world. Contributed by over 300 individuals from 40 countries, we truly hope that this encapsulates the hard work and effort that we have witnessed from executives, volunteers, outreach directors, writers and artists over the past two years of World in Focus.*

*Whether you have stumbled across this anthology on our website or picked this up in the library, we are excited for you to explore the importance of vision and optical care through creative pieces submitted from an international network of talented youth. Ranging from self-portraits to insightful poems to short stories, the anthology offers a plethora of perspectives on vision and how we use it in our own lives. Guided by three open-ended prompts, the creativity and originality of the submissions are astounding, and we hope that the vulnerability shown in these pieces allow you to truly connect with the artists.*

*To everybody who entered, we truly want to thank you for your initiative and your hard work. We understand how intimidating it may be to open up about an issue or a story that you may never have before, but we are so glad you decided to do so.*

*To our esteemed judges, we thank you for taking the time to pore over the hundreds of submissions. We understand that it's never an easy process to select only a few works from such a talented group, but we truly appreciate all of your help on this incredible journey.*

*As Helen Keller once said, "Never bend your head. Always hold it high. Look at the world straight in the eye." We hope that this anthology empowers you to achieve anything you want to. We hope that it inspires you and sparks imagination within you. After all, vision only lends itself to broader horizons.*

*Sincerely,  
**Natalie Chen and Grace Wu***

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# Visual Arts

## Ages 10-14

Godfrey Wilson. 14. Ibadan, Nigeria.

I Have a Dream



*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

I am 13 years old and visually impaired. My dream is to become a freelance photographer using photography as a medium of expression and communication for positive social change; photography has the ability to empower and bring awareness to issues that can elevate public understanding and compassion and gives voice to inconsiderable issues and those who would otherwise never be heard. And also I want to use photography to create awareness and call the attention of the policy makers and the general public to the plight of the visually impaired people in Nigeria. And to promote their rights, freedoms and social equality through tools of visual communication and storytelling. Because visually impaired people have limited access to news, health care, education, livelihood opportunities and community support, preventing our full participation in society. This image was produced during a Photography Workshop themed "Through Our Eyes" organized by the French Cultural Center Ibadan for children in Ibadan.

Nazanin Soghrati. 14. Richmond Hill, Canada.

The i of a Bird



*What does vision mean to you?*

Even the most unsuspecting forms of life are leading lives as complex as our own, taking in the world with their ever-watchful and inquisitive eyes. The twists in the road await them, bringing about a renewed sense of vision at all that is yet to come.



Morena. 14, Angola.



*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."*  
– Helen Keller

To me, vision is having the ability to see colour, nature, our reflection in the mirror, objects and other things clearly. Having sight is the most beautiful thing that exists!

Chin Chieh J.J. Wang. 14. North York, Canada.

Vision. A Closer Step to Education.



*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*  
-Vincent Van Gogh

A visually impaired girl looks into a classroom, dreaming of attending school.

Avoidable blindness, a major health concern in Africa, affects people's day-to-day lives and prevents children from receiving an education. Vision problems in developing countries are largely treatable or preventable, but we must take action to help relieve this burden. Blindness and other vision problems not only hold children back from school, they also cause discrimination against females.

I want to raise awareness of the impacts of vision problems on women and girls in Africa, and my vision is for the girl's dream to attend school become a reality.

Isabella Koosh. 11. Yucatan, Mexico.

## A Rainbow of Vision



My art shows different colors:  
Red - passions, dreams.  
Yellow - curiosity.  
Green - adventure, new things.  
Blue - time.  
Navy - human nature, actions.  
Purple - love, compassion.  
anything. We can change the universe.

*What does vision mean to you?*

I'm in a dark circle; Where I can't see the qualities in myself or others, the opposite of vision. I'm wearing the glasses of physical sight. But my eyes are closed, shutting out what's around me. It's like I imprisoned myself in a box.

Vision to me is being imaginative, having grit, sharing ideas, and seeing the important parts in a person. People with vision and determination can do anything. We can change the universe.

Heyabin. 12, China.

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty  
but the sight of stars makes me dream."*  
-Vincent Van Gogh



Ananya Alope. 13. Navi Mumbai, India  
Dreams



*"For my part I know  
nothing with any  
certainty but the sight  
of stars makes me dream."  
-Vincent Van Gogh*

Since early childhood, I have always been fascinated by the starry night-sky. Twinkling and bright, the stars seem to say something enormous, obscure and beautiful. They make me wish that I could rise high from the trivial issues of existence. Often, they leave me with a sense of restlessness and hope, inspiring me to dream of things way beyond my imagination.



Aisena Fedorova. 14. Yakutsk, Russia

Are we blind?



*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." – Helen Keller*

We have a chance to see everything, but a lot of us don't think that it's the most important what we have. How is it to be a blind? And how is it to not see anything?! There are just black and darkness. I think that maybe they are trying to imagine the World, just trying to run away from that darkness which make you feel down.

And we see the World, but don't feel anything, cause the darkness is inside of us. And it makes us think only about everyday's problems. So, that's why I think that we all are blind.

Written  
Ages 10-14

Olivia Levine. 14. Maine, United States.

## The Unluckies

*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." – Helen Keller*

To some people the world is black and white. Some people are so blessed as to see the world only as they wish it to be. The same can't be said for everyone. Sometimes, if you care to look, you'll notice them. The people indescribably pained by others' infuriating blindness to the harshness of the world around them, as if they hadn't been living in the constant cold cycle of life. You can always tell, whether it be by the melancholy stained on their faces or the total isolation they force upon themselves. By blindness, I don't mean their vision. You could have a man with near supernatural sight who still can't see. They're lucky, those people. They don't have to see the true nature of our beloved planet.

Being numb like this truly is a disease, more so than being blind ever could be. To be so naive that everything seems like one of God's blessings is an illness beyond compare. The world is colorful to us, the unlucky ones. We see the blues of sadness and pain, but also savor the yellows of joy. We can notice the black suffocation of the woman recently widowed, despite how often she tells us that she's okay. It's heavy, to have such keen vision of the world.

And that is why we're often the most downcast of the bunch. Hunched over vintage typewriters or old easels, trying to show the world what we feel. Trying to teach them that it's not all black and white. Maybe we don't want to show them the whole spectrum. Maybe that's too much. They couldn't handle it. It would only pain them as it pains us. Even just to show them the shades of gray would be a success. Perhaps, after they begin to see, we won't hold the rainbow on our shoulders anymore. We could finally breathe.

However, for this to happen, they would need the desire to see. And many don't. Most are just fine with their ignorant perception of the world and it's alleged shades of gray. Which is pure blindness in it's own respects. The lack of vision is the lack of understanding of human nature, and the human world. That is where our anger and distaste towards the outside world comes from. They could be so selfish as to play naive and leave us to feel for them and to hurt for them. The unlucky ones dance with the red demons and fight the flames of depression, whilst the others live with their innocent white and suffocating black, never stopping to think of us who deal with the varying shades of the color spectrum placed upon us.





Olivia Levine. 14. Maine, United States.  
The Unluckies

We see the world as it really is. The poverty, pain, murder, and genocide happening everyday outside the walls of our own comfort, whereas the lucky ones worry that Joey from Starbucks put red pepper cream cheese on their lightly toasted blueberry bagel instead of regular cream cheese like they had asked. They worry about their morning mocha lattes and evening white wine, while we watch with 20/20 vision as another black man is shot in the streets. I would sooner go blind than to live like that. Surrounded by my own gluttony and ignorance.

Blindness is defined as the state or condition of not being able to see, but if you scroll on your Apple Macbooks just a bit longer you'll see the second definition. The one they suffer from, "Lack of perception, awareness, or judgement; ignorance."

That is how the lucky ones live. But, after reading my accusatory rant, you may be wondering how to fix this. How you can open your minds to color. And here's your answer. Look around. Drop your Venti Iced Americano from Starbucks and watch that child cry as he feels his hollow stomach, empty for the third night in a row. Acknowledge that young woman in Indonesia who can't see properly because her family is too poor to afford eyeglasses for her. Don't isolate those struggling and those painfully aware of their own disadvantage.

For the lucky ones, this is work. To highlight the importance of those seeing in colors is much too hard, too important, for them to care. Because they can't see blue stained tears on children's faces or the purple stained bruises on a woman's ribs, they do not care. They do see the black in death, and the white in birth and as much as that's a start, it's also their finish. The lucky ones wish to live like this, and so we must let them. For a few years more, we will carry the colors, until they've been lightened enough for us to put down. When blood no longer runs red and depression stops it's navy colored flow, we will let yellow happiness and pink love down for all to enjoy. Even the selfish will enjoy, because the unlucky ones have seen enough sadness to share the good with everyone.

Helen Keller was right when she spoke of the ignorance behind the blindness of the mind. Despite her physical disadvantages, she had something most people don't have. 20/20 vision of the world and human nature. Vision is clarity in the sense that you have gained another sense to help you understand the world and its occupants. We will always carry those fluorescent colors on our back, so that we may age with intelligence and flourish with knowledge of the world. We are painters, writers, sculptors, musicians, and comedians. We are those with brown skin, white skin, blonde hair, red freckles, big hips, and tiny waists. The resilient, the weak, the sad, and the powerful. But most importantly, we are those with the gift of sight and the power of vision. Black and white just isn't how we see the world around us, the unlucky ones, and that is just fine, for we see much more than you ever will.

Gaia Narayan. 13. Vaasa, Finland.

Destiny

*What does vision mean to you?*

"Up! Up! Up!" Yelled Diana at the top of her voice, as sweat trickled down my nose, and into my eyes, impairing my vision. My pointes were almost dead, and my feet were sore, but I turned like a top right on the edge of a table, my face screwed up into a tight knot.

"Good girl. Remember to smile more, ok?"

In the locker room, I silently changed into my regular clothes, put bandaids on my blisters and hauled my dance bag over my shoulder. As I biked home, despite the sun shining in my eyes, I noticed an old lady sitting on a bench. She was there when I was on my way to class as well, which meant that she must have been there for at least two hours. I biked on, and I kept thinking of her as I put my bike in the bike shed. Who was she? What was her story? I opened the door to our house and stepped in. Mom was working, so I did my homework in my room. The night flew by and before I knew it, my eyes were closing.

In the morning, after I had rubbed the sand out of my eyes, I glanced at the clock. I had overslept an extra fifteen minutes, so I scrambled to get ready in time. When I was biking to school, I noticed the same old lady from before sitting on a rock facing a lake. She looked lonely, and she had a small smile on her face, a floppy green beret covering her left eye. I biked on, even though all I wanted was to sit on one of those rocks.



At school I managed to get to class in time to have my laptop ready for our lesson. I scanned the page for any mistakes before showing my essay to our teacher. As the teacher spoke, I cracked my ankle joints and stretched my feet, out of habit. After the bell rang, I had a free period and lunch right after. I tiptoed into an abandoned classroom and locked the door behind me. I took a deep breath and let the music playing in my head engulf me. I had been so restless for so long. I practiced the Cupid Variation I had been perfecting for months in preparation for next month's Grand Prix. In my mind's eye, I envisioned myself on a smooth stage, gliding and whipping my body around, creating a path in front of me as I danced, and I felt alive. All that ended when I stopped dancing and ate my sandwich while sitting on the dirt-encrusted floor while watching the birds outside chirp and dance in the air.

That afternoon, before I could leave for class, my mother stopped me.

"India, we need to talk."

"What's wrong?"

She shuffled from foot to foot. "I don't think you should compete in the Grand Prix."

I blinked. "Why not?"

"It's a bit expensive, and anyways, I think you should be focusing on studying right now."

"I can study more, I just can't quit ballet now."

"Well, I'm not paying!"

The slam of her door was deafening. I biked frantically to the lake and sure enough, the lady was sitting there, watching the ducks paddle around in the crisp water. I sat down next to her and she turned to me, her smile dangling on her face.

"Hello, there." She shifted her gaze back to the water for a split second before turning back to me. "Beautiful, isn't it?"

"Very." I tapped my foot on the ground continuously.

"What's wrong, my child?"

When I told her what happened, her face opened up like a rosebud into a rose.

"Do you love ballet?"

"More than anything," I whispered as my eyes welled up and my surroundings went blurry. "I want it to be my life."

Gaia Narayan. 13. Vaasa, Finland.

Destiny

"Let me ask you something. What comes to mind when I say the word 'vision'?"

I look at her through my tears in irritation, "Why?"

"Humour me."

"Vision, like sight?"

"What does it mean to you?"

"It's an idea for the future. Something you stare at in your mind's eye that drives you to achieve an ultimate goal for the future, for life. A lifeline, if you will."

"Good. Now you're going to use that energy to get where you need to go."

"How? It's a lot of money."

"You know, I used to be a ballroom dancer back in the day. I loved it as much as you love ballet." She whipped out a piece of paper. Here's the name and number of someone important. They'll make it free if you tell them Marina Day referred you to them. They owe me that."

I sniffed and took the paper and clasped it between my fingers. "Y'know, it's weird," I said. "That you would just conveniently be here, to offer just the kind of help I need."

"Isn't it?" She laughed and closed her wrinkled eyes, her face at peace. I slipped away and rode back home faster than I had ever before. There was no time to question anything. Ahead of me bobbed my vision, my target, my destiny.

Nuthara Karunarathna. 12. Panadura, Sri Lanka.  
Beauty and Perfection

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

Nothing's perfect. Nobody's perfect. Life isn't perfect. We just have to see the good in everything. That's what seeing is. Understanding. Realizing. Accepting.

A tiny squirrel staring at you with big innocent eyes.

A baby's cry piercing a stiff silence.

A moment when two people find their true love in each other.

A crystalline drop of dew shining on a branch as the sun rises.

Such ordinary things, so mundane. But they are so beautiful, unique, and pure. They are what makes this imperfect life enjoyable, and worth living. Such normal, yet rare sights can give you a whole new purpose.

It makes you feel as joyful as a newborn baby. Because we have eyes for a reason, for the same reason that we have appreciation, and recognition, and happiness.

To see the beauty.

Why do we appreciate paintings so much?

Because what they represent, what they show is something that you love. Because the real thing doesn't last. Even the people who mean so much to you, will go sometime.

But that is what makes life so special. Life is short, so we appreciate it more, and we try to see and take with us in our heart all the beauty when we leave.

Colours are made from a spectrum of light. Our eyes translate it into shades of red, green, yellow. It shows the world awash in many colours, in a whole different light. The beauty is all around us. And if you have an open mind, you don't have to try to see it. It will always be there.

Seeing things gives us clarity, helps us understand the world's mystery. Bringing something into focus means giving it meaning.

Science has not penetrated the mystic veil yet, perhaps. There are many things we don't know at all, or for certain. What we know as facts might be completely untrue. As Van Gogh said, "For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."

Science is rational, but nature is beautiful. We see nature and we are inspired to find out more, to reach the wall between fact and imagination, to choose a side.

Your choice. But I know I will always choose that which shows me innocence, dawning realization and wonder.

Because I always try to see what is good in life, and to look at it without suspicion or doubt, to accept the truth of what I see.



I go to the beach and climb onto the pier; I can see the raging ocean in the dark as night dawns, the waves pushing against the rocks and feel the sea wind blowing in my eyes.

Standing there, surrounded by wind and water, I saw myself as mistress of the wind and water: dark and powerful. It was glorious.

Sight is more than just seeing what's around you. It is perception, recognition, and understanding. A blind person is not truly blind, unless he is incapable of thought and feeling, because that is a part of seeing.

In my religion, Buddhism, the mind is treated as a separate consciousness, with its own mind's eye and different functions for contact, initial application, perception, feeling and such. So there is so much more to sight than what we get through our retinas.

But it doesn't mean that what we see that way doesn't bring us happiness. This life is rich with appreciation and art, friendship and love. Sight is the doorway to this, and I don't mean our eyes. There is so much more to life than living.

So don't be afraid of being blind. Be afraid of not being able to see, because it will take away your joy.

Sofia Uerskaya. 13. Limassol, Cyprus.

Broken

*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."*

*– Helen Keller*

He was perfect. A typical perfect guy.

His name was James. A typical name for a typical prince, but it somehow shone with new colors when you applied it to him.

What did he look like? He had soft golden hair- well, I think it was golden. I wouldn't know because I had lost my ability to see when I was seven. Anyways, I think his hair was golden.

He met me in Starbucks. I felt him approaching me.

"Hello, beautiful," he said to me in his melodic voice, "My name's James. I believe yours is Angel."

That was it. A typical pickup phrase. But at that time I knew a lot from that phrase - I knew his approximate age - 14-15, same as mine, I knew his height - tall, very tall and I knew that he wasn't scared away by my large sunglasses shielding my eyes from the light.

"It's Kate, actually."

"Well, Kate, why don't I buy you a coffee and then you tell me a bit about yourself." His hypnotic words were followed by footsteps and a shout to the barista for one cappuccino.

I could have told him to go away. I could have left myself. But I didn't. Heck, our first meeting didn't even seem weird to me. At that time I was so blinded by the happiness from our meeting that I even ignored the terrible events that happened shortly after that day. The first one was a nightmare that I had the same day. I was walking at night in a vast place with gray floor without ceiling filled with gigantic black boxes. As I was walking, I noticed that the boxes were positioned in the same way as the buildings in my part of the city. I knew the map of my district by heart, and I could swear that the blueprint was identical. There was green mist all around me.

Then the figures appeared. Silhouettes of people, just as I see them now - blurry black things.

"What a beautiful city we live in!" said someone on my right.

"I enjoy every inch of it!" That came from the left.

"I am so happy with my life!" On my right, again.

Suddenly all voices stopped, and after a moment of silence I heard a child, four to five years old saying in high pitched cute voice, "I feel contained."

Then my dream ended, and I woke up in cold sweat. The last phrase made me feel uneasy.

"I feel contained." It didn't make any sense, and yet it terrified.

The second one was just an accidental phrase I heard. "Is this the Seeing?" I heard from the cafe. The voice belonged to a man; it was low and incredibly hoarse. "Yes. What are we going to do about it?" replied to him a young female harmonic voice. "Tell him to do his job," said the man.

I don't think I was supposed to overhear this, but they have indeed underestimated the hearing of a blind person. That was when I started feeling something was wrong with the world. When we were going on the dates with James, I noticed that he usually spoke with an enormous amount of cliches. Everything he liked was mainstream. He listened only to popular songs, watched only popular movies and read only popular books. One time, when I was standing in line in the cafe, I heard a talk of two people. Just a usual talk. "Hey, how is Martha? I heard she is pregnant." "Yeah, we're expecting a baby girl!" "Congrats!" The problem was that the dialogue was repeating itself over and over again. Also, instead of usual black silhouettes I see, I saw the two people talking as bright violet figures. I felt sick and left the venue. The talk was repeating itself in my head all day long.

The next day when I woke up, I found out that I could see again. I didn't see my room as it is, all I saw were gray walls and gray floor with wires. It felt so weird, that I thought was dreaming. I tried to pinch myself to check, but I couldn't move my arm. I glanced down at my body and found out that I was tied to a prison bed. I called my Mom, and soon I heard footsteps. I knew how Mom's footsteps sound and that wasn't Mom.

It was James, exactly as I pictured him. Golden hair, eyes the color of an ocean, black suit with pink tie.

"Hello, Kate," he said. His voice was distorted: like glitching in a computer system.

"Where am I? How come I see again? What is happening?" I shrieked.

James chuckled. "Kate, let me properly introduce myself. I am Kiji Titsao, the proud ancestor of an alien race Friggeji."

"I-" I wanted to tell him to stop pretending to be an idiot, but he just waved towards me, and I couldn't force a sound out of my throat.



Sofia Uerskaya. 13. Limassol, Cyprus.

Broken

“Friggeji overtook Earth in 2016, but you, of course, don’t remember that. We needed to contain all inhabitants of the Earth, so we filled the oxygen with drugs. Under the drug, the brain sees CGI constructed scenery as real-life objects. Remember the black boxes?”

I nodded, choking in fear.

“Somehow, maybe because you lost sight, you gained visions of the real CGI world. Friggeji sent me to check if you are broken. Your brain is damaged as you cannot interpret the CGI graphics. So, I must do this-”

He took out a gun.

“No! No! This can’t be happening!” I fiercely tried to free my limbs from the ropes. “Just one more move and my legs will be free, and then I can kick this bastard,”

Bang. The last thing I saw was a gaping hole in my chest.

“-to prevent *leaks of vision to sighted*,” said Kiji, snapped fingers and left the room.



Lucy Kitt. 13.  
Images of the Blind

*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."*

*– Helen Keller*

The summer before 8th grade is one I'll never forget. "Hey Juniper guess who just got twenty bucks for her birthday?" I asked my best-friend since preschool over the phone excitedly. "No way! So what are you going to do with this birthday dough?" she asked. "Taking my best-friend to the mall... So do your makeup and get dressed up, cause who knows you might even see Evan there" I teased as I searched through my closet for an outfit. "Chey!" she squealed. Chey has been her nickname for me since the first day we met. She originally only called me Chey because she couldn't pronounce Cheyanne due to her stuttering. Which wore off by the time she was six. "I don't even like him that much." Juniper added, but the way she said it I could tell she was lying. "Yeah sure" I replied sarcastically "I'll be over in 10" I pulled my chosen outfit of a maroon T-shirt and black shorts out of my closet and hung up.

After getting dressed and doing my makeup, I scribbled a quick note for my mom and left. A smile spread across my face as I climbed onto my baby blue bike, in which I loved. I had spent all of the summer before doing odd jobs like babysitting and mowing just to get that bike. Juniper's cream colored house was only a block away from mine so the trip was short. As soon as I pulled into her driveway, Juniper came running out of her garage with her matching baby blue bike. We liked to have most of our things matching. "Hey Juney Pruney, you ready grandma?" I smirked daring her to race me. We always raced, everywhere we went, and we went everywhere. "Oh Cheyanne, you won't even know what hit you" she retorted. And with that, we were off. I sped past her and turned the corner thinking I had her beat by a long shot. The next thing I knew she was rounding a corner onto the street a few blocks ahead of me.

By the time we got to the mall, she had won, like she typically did, and we were both exhausted and hot. "Smoothies?" I offered? "Smoothies." she confirmed. After ordering our usual raspberry smoothies, we wandered around looking at expensive things we both dreamed of having one day. "We could get matching outfits" I suggested as soon as we had gotten bored. "I have way too many clothes already" She said before adding "However, I could totally use a new nail job and I bet you could too." She was right, I hardly ever painted my nails.

After debating for a few moments, we decided on a black coat with gold glitter tips. We both loved black, to us it was elegant and simple. The gold glitter idea had come from our favorite memory when we decided to decorate her dog with gold glitter in first

grade. Juniper had a few spots of purple left on her nails from the last time she painted her nails. We talked about our plans to have a sleepover that night as we waited for the manicurist to come back with the needed nail-polish remover.

The familiar message notification on my phone went off and I turned to grab my phone to see who it was. Within seconds I heard a series of bloodcurdling screams. I looked back to see my best friend put her hands to her face and begin to sob loudly as several salon workers gathered around her. She was drenched in what seemed to be nail-polish remover because of the heavy chemical smell. I noticed everyone staring at us. I jumped up asking Juniper what was wrong. She wouldn't answer, she just kept crying and pressing her hands to her face. The only words she spoke were "it burns" I looked to everyone frantically for an answer but the only time anyone spoke to me was when the manicurist asked me, and everyone else to leave.

I sat on a bench a few feet away and watched worriedly as paramedics rushed in and out of the salon. After the paramedics left I called Junipers' mom Sheila and told her what had happened. She pulled into the parking lot and I loaded up my and Junipers' bikes then climbed in. We arrived at the hospital and I texted my mom telling her what had happened as Sheila gathered information.

A few days later, Sheila called to tell me that the nail-polish remover that had splashed onto Juniper after the manicurist tripped, had gotten into her eyes and had permanently blinded her. I was in complete shock. I didn't know what to do or say. After that, Juniper was quieter, more reclusive. She hardly talked, and she never left her room. When I finally got her to open up to me, she had expressed her feelings of missing being able to see me and the sky and her family and everything.

I was mad. I was furious at the manicurist for being so careless but Juniper didn't seem to feel the same. She didn't blame anyone and although she was upset, she had said she was just trying to accept it. Almost every day I'd go and visit her. Aside from talking about the things we used to, I told her about our surroundings. The way the sky looked, the way she and I looked and more.

It's crazy how although Juniper lost her vision, she could still see. She saw how things really were. She didn't just get caught up in the moment and become angry like I had. Instead, she looked for a silver lining. She doesn't give up. She doesn't dread the things she can't do as well anymore, now she looks for other things she can do better. That makes me so proud, and I feel like we both have learned to see better.

## Trena Keta. 13. Minnesota, United States.

### *What does vision mean to you?*

Asking yourself what does vision mean to you is not something you would wake up every morning and ask yourself it's certainly not something I think about every day. What we don't realize is that important things are right in front us, we sometimes don't realize that it's there until someone points it out or something/someone reminds us of something close to that thing.

Vision is being able to see the world for its purpose. Its being able to discover things that you'd never knew you could even discover. Blind people see the world by touch, sense, smell and vision. They may not be unable to see, but they can envision a future for themselves. As well as deaf people and other people with different disabilities and disorders. They are still human, but they live their lives in different perspectives.

What does vision mean to me? What is the importance in having vision? I never really thought about what having vision means to me. But all that I can say is that having vision is super important to me. Envisioning, discovering different parts of this world as a human being. I can see the difference in sight and in vision. Sight is the power of seeing things. Vision is the power of sensing things with the eyes. As a person with a disorder, I live in a world with judgmental human beings and non-judgmental human beings. I'd rather have vision than a sight if I was blind. The importance of sight is that you get to imagine the many wonders of this world and you don't have to rely on touch, sense, and smell. I love being to see and I wouldn't change it for anything in the world. But vision is also an important factor in my life.

"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision", quoted by Helen Keller. I read this quote several times because it didn't make sense to me at first, but now I have an understanding of what this quote means. This quote is about having sight, but you're not able to envision, to think about things and to imagine. It would definitely be a nightmare having sight, but no vision. Helen Keller was both deaf and blind, but she figured out a way to communicate with the world and managed to get an education for herself even though she couldn't hear or see people around her. Helen Keller wrote this quote to connect not only to her disability, but to have other people connect their lives with this quote. I can't imagine what it would be like to be deaf and blind at the same time. If I could fill in Helen Keller's shoes for one day to experience what her life was like as a deaf and blind person, I would because I would want to see what it's like to be her and live that kind of life.



"For my part I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of stars makes me dream," quoted by Vincent Van Gogh. What makes a dream a dream? What fills your mind with wonder? A person with a dreamless, wonderless mindset sees no hope for themselves, no bright future and no satisfying future. This is what the quote explains, a person with no vision can't envision a future and it is left with no hope for what the future holds. If we don't dream where will we get our creative ideas from. There would be a "blank space" in our head like the Taylor Swift song. If I don't dream, I wouldn't have thought of this writing contest. See what if these "ifs" became reality, now what would I do about it?

Here is my story of how I found the importance in vision. I've told this story to many people and sometimes I get uncomfortable telling this story, but right now I'm not. So, in 5th grade I started getting blurry vision and I was unable to see in class, so I started talking to the nurse about getting glasses and at the time I didn't have money to afford it so I got glasses for free all thanks to the clinic that I went to. At first, I thought that was just it, all I had was blurry vision and then I noticed another symptom in 6th grade. The disorder was turning my eye in a different direction also causing me to see double vision sometimes, but not all the time. I can control where my eye goes because when I'm at home I wear an eye patch sometimes to help relieve the double on one eye which definitely helps me. Sometimes I felt insecure about being the only one in my family with a disorder, but my half-sister, Isabella has Autism, which makes me so upset that she has to live that way. There's nothing that I can do for her because I rarely see her that much because Isabella and her mom live far away from me. Having a vision is more important even though me and Isabella have a disorder and disability. We both still envision and dream. We still walk on this earth as if there is nothing wrong with us. I don't believe in being normal. I believe in being sane and balanced. Isabella doesn't know what's currently going on in my life and I don't know what's going on in her life. But what's worse than having a disorder? Not having a vision. This is exactly why vision is an important thing in my life every day. If I didn't have a vision I would not dream of becoming a doctor and going to medical school. Realize you have a vision and use it to care for people and help yourself.

Recognize and realize that vision is important than sight because of the future. We may not know what the future holds, but doesn't mean we can't dream of our future, who we might become and who we want to be when were older. That is why having vision is so important in our active lives.

Tee Boon Hean. 14. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.

Where is my vision? I CAN'T SEE

*What does vision mean to you?*

UBBUiyYUGYBibghhouoyy. Is this how I would be typing like if I lost my vision? Would this be one of the problems out of many more that I'll be facing if I lost my vision.

Losing my vision would be like setting fire to boiling water. Nearly impossible. Living alone with be like finding a needle in a haystack and everyday task would be nearly impossible to do. Constantly running into objects and people and tripping, looking like a fool and apologizing to people while facing the wrong direction and not being able to see where you are would drive me crazy. Unless I die from embarrassment first. Going to the mall would be like travelling through the labyrinth. It would frustrate me to no end. What about travelling? What's the point of travelling if you're not able to see anything except the darkness?

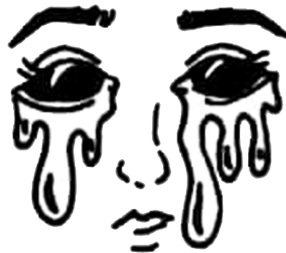
But what does vision actually mean to me? If you were to look at the problems such as not knowing what I was typing or doing, constantly needing support and never being able to go anywhere alone, knowing that my chances of receiving an opportunity to work or to live a normal life would almost never appear, not being able to read or write every again and so much more. Yeah, I think my vision really means a lot to me. If I didn't have my vision, I wouldn't even be able to read, much less enter this competition. And even if I knew what this competition was, how was I suppose type out and submit an essay? All I would managed to submit would be this:  
RBGUIEWPGUWVnoegogvnheighe. That is, if I can even manage to open Microsoft word right.

What if you were in the toilet and you just kicked in the stomach with explosive diarrhea? What am I going to do? Search around the bathroom stall to look for toilet paper only to find out that it is all unavailable? Then feel my way around the bathroom stall, hoping and praying to anyone that would listen that I'll manage to hose to wash butt up? What about trying to grocery shop? Unable to read the expiry dates and NOT knowing if there are any discounts at all. That's just adding salt to the wound at this point. Moving on, what about cooking? I'm not going to be eating Chinese takeout every single day of my life. Come on. Trying to add sugar into the cake, only to realize you've been adding salt the whole time. Plus, how would I even manage to try and make a cake? I wouldn't be able to even open the cake mix because I'm blind and I misplaced the scissors. What about wearing shoes? Or clothes? A bright yellow low-cut tank top along with inside-out neon green pants and mismatched shoes isn't exactly going to look fashionable or nice. Although, now that I think of it, at least you wouldn't have to see your enemies face. It would at least save your eyes and mind from having a hideous face of your enemy imprinted onto your mind forever. Like their voices weren't bad enough

Tee Boon Hean. 14. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.  
Where is my vision? I CAN'T SEE

All jokes aside, my vision really means a lot to me. At times (most of the time), I take my vision for granted. Now that I think of it, I am really grateful that I was born with vision. With many of us being born with the ability to see, we often take it for granted. Some people take it for granted so much that they bully people who do not have vision. Why would they do that? To make themselves feel better? People these days. Moving on, I really admire the people who have no vision at all, as they are able to move on just as normal and not let the disability hold them back. I mean, look at them. Strolling down the street with their canes, avoiding running into people or objects. If you took away a blind person's vision, they would come crying back for it not even an hour later. These people manage to be brave about it and carry on with their lives and I truly admire them. Although, I feel like even though they manage to live with their disability, it does not really give them the right to use it against anyone in certain circumstances. Or use it as an excuse to be mean or excessively rude. There are limits for people. Even for the ones with disabilities.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I really value my vision and although I usually take it for granted. I really admire the people who have no sight as they did not ask for this fate yet they still live with it. But although I admire them, there are limits for them; because even though they are unable to see, it does not give them the right to be rude or mean to people. With all the examples given above, I am eternally grateful to have vision and I hope that it would stay forever. And to end this essay off, I would like to say that my vision means the world to me and I hope that I will never lose it till the end of my days.



Isabel Ke. 12. Toronto, Canada.

## The Importance of Sight

*“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”*

*– Helen Keller*

Helen Keller was a very inspirational figure to many blind people because she gave them hope. She showed them that just because she was lacking sight, hearing, and proper speech, she still succeeded and communicated in life; it showed many people that it was entirely possible for disabled people to set out in the world and be just as successful.

I used to always take my vision for granted, and in some ways, I still do. Every year I go to an optometrist and get told my eyesight has been getting worse. I was always squinting at some object that was a tad blurry, and from that point on, I realized that I was never going to be able to see clearly with my own two eyes... that is, without eye surgery. And writing that down now, 4 years later, I realize that my eyes are something I should have taken better care of, and I regret that I didn't understand that soon enough.

Sometimes, I remember when I got my first glasses, in grade 2. They were a midnight blue, with a mosaic pattern on the side, I thought that they were so pretty and I loved them. However, my parents did not. They told me that it meant my eyes were so bad, that I couldn't see and I had to be careful with the way I treated my eyes. They reprimanded me when I read books in a position where my eyes could get worse, and made me eat fish oil pills. The fish oil pills were definitely the one of the worst things I tasted in my life. The fishy aftertaste was terrible, because at that time I didn't know how to swallow pills without chewing, so when I did, the oil exploded into my mouth. Nevertheless, it was disgusting.

Once, I blindfolded myself and tried to get around because I wanted to experience how you could move around without being able to see where you went. It probably was one of the more shocking things I have experienced, because I was being so cautious trying to get around. At that time, I couldn't see what was in front of me and moved very slowly because I feared that I would trip or bump into something. I skimmed my hands along the walls just so I could travel to my room, and it was difficult. I knew my house pretty well after living in it so long, but it was still so challenging traveling to my room after my sight was being blocked. “Losing” my vision for a brief period of time was hard, scary, and something I definitely would not want to do again. But the fact that there is a possibility that I could lose my vision in the future is absolutely terrifying I was opening my eyes and still... I saw nothing but darkness.



Isabel Ke. 12. Toronto, Canada.

## The Importance of Sight

One of my favorite things to do is read. I love books, because I know that knowledge is infinite, and that books are the keys to knowledge, as well as the fact that certain people use writing to express and share their knowledge with others. Taking that into account, I know that a tiny amount of books are being translated into braille, which makes it harder to gain knowledge and to understand written material. Now, Helen Keller was blind and deaf, which probably made it even harder to learn, as using braille and having her helper tap words into her hand took more time and was less efficient. That said, if I was blind and deaf, I would probably be very frustrated all the time because I would only be able to read with braille which is less common, it also leads me to believe that Helen Keller felt remorse because she had sight but no vision, and I feel as though she really liked to learn. The fact that books in braille was less common must have made her feel very discouraged.

We are fortunate to be able to see and view the wonders of the world. Some cannot. Cherish the things you have, because one day, they might not be there.



Mahriya Zahid. 13. London, England.  
of shadows and darkness

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

I can't. Everything is trapped and caged and impossible. I don't know what will happen next. I don't know if anything will ever be okay again. Every toss and every turn brings another tide of thoughts, another wave of memories. I can't even trust myself anymore; I don't even know myself anymore. I thought I was brave and beautiful and fearless. But last night, I was scared and vulnerable and fearful. I didn't know I could feel like that; So small, so tiny, so mini, that you could fit me in an envelope and post far far away, maybe even to the land where my nightmares lives. Because that's what I am. I never wanted to be this meek, intimidated girl. And now i've become that. I deserve to live with them. The rest of my nightmares; the ones with the dark and the snakes coiling and coiling around my neck so that I can't breathe AND I CAN'T BREATHE.

I sit up. My breath is all wrong; jagged and rasping. The room is wrong, how it closes in on me. The temperature is wrong, how the heat circles me. Everything is wrong and wrong and wrong. And i need to breathe. Need to breathe clean full buckets of air. Need to feel it. Need to know. Need to...

My body is already moving. My legs swinging onto the soft floor, toes gripping, my tiptoes sneaking down the stairs, softly creaking, my hand reaching for the cold doorknob, door open then finally, finally I escape.

I let out a breath i didn't know I had been holding and then breathe. I close my eyes, darkness enters but this one is comforting. This one is filled with nothing and it's familiar, it's home. I feel them then. All of them. Every single thing is alive and they are calling me, beckoning me, whispering to me. Come, Come, Come. But it's still there. The memory of them. Her. The laughs, the smiles, the jokes. The death, the cries, the chokes. It's there and it's filling me up so that there is no space for anymore oxygen and and I'm overflowing with everything and nothing and all that falls between. And i need to get out of here. I need to get out of myself, these thoughts, my life.

And then I open my eyes and I can dream. I can feel the stars at my fingertips. I can feel the night sky kissing my skin. I can feel the shadows of moon dancing elegantly, soft under my gaze. I can.

And maybe it's not okay. Maybe I don't know what the future holds. Maybe I don't know that I will be happy or that people will forgive. Maybe I don't know if another person will join Felicity in the ground. But maybe I don't need to know. Maybe I just need to open my eyes and dream.

Ellen Christy. 14. Jakarta, Indonesia.

## Life Through The Eyes

*What does vision mean to you?*

Try asking someone to describe this world. Ask anyone around you, and believe me, they'll answer different things.

The person who sits next to you in class might say that this world is one full of sin, lies, and deceit. A world that has been tainted by the touch of the devil, where people do nothing but please themselves by degrading the people around them. Where people betray, cheat, and backstab each other to climb the ladder of humanity, breaking all moral respect for each other. The person behind you might say something different, like a world full of growing innovators trying to change the world. People who have started inventing new creations on how to improve this world, a joint effort on trying to make the place they live a better place. Building a new world with their minds, working together to get the best out of what this world has to offer.

Your music teacher might think that this world is one that is black and white, populated by delusional people with rose tinted glasses. A place where love doesn't exist, merely people using others for momentary entertainment. Where hope acts like a drug that makes you happy for all the wrong reasons. Where happiness is merely a figment of imagination. Your lab partner might think that humanity isn't as bad as it seems. That humans are actually good and kind, and that the kindness will triumph over the evil. That smiles will still win over tears, like light chases away darkness. That there is still genuine hope and care left in the best of people, wanting to make strong relationships with one another.

Your psychology professor might think that the earth is merely a playground set; a place for humans to play the real games—mind games. A place for mortals to battle with their minds on who can be the smartest. A game in which people build walls to see who can break through whose walls the quickest, which riddles can be solved the fastest, which paradoxes can be unraveled the easiest. Your cousin might think that the earth is just a stage for the talented people, battling each other to see who can outshine the others more. A duck and goose chase on who can reach the spotlight and who can stay under it. A rough battle involving violence, repetitiously pushing each other away and trying to fit in the center of attention. A place where the audience is everything to one.

If we all live in the same world, then why are our worlds so far apart?

Speaking scientifically, no one in this world has the exact same set of eyes. They may look alike, but no two pairs of eyes are exactly the same. Even the same pair of eyes consist of two different eyes, no matter how similar they look. And, believe it or not, no two eyes in the world has the same vision. Even if you go to the eye doctor and get the exact same results in a piece of document proving your eye quality, the actual quality of

your eyes can never be the same, because everyone has different types of eyes. Every single one of us. And that's only about the physical type of vision. Imagine how much more different our vision upon life can be?

What exactly is our vision of life shaped upon? Obviously, it's not the tangible stuff we can see, because if so, we'd all describe the world as the same thing: a world with trees and plants and animals and buildings and oceans and skies and people, man and woman. But true vision of the world goes beyond that. The world is interpreted by our brains with meaning, going deeper than what's on the outside. And more often than not, our brain sees that the world is revolving about the things that matter to us. If love is your greatest treasure, you will view the world as a place where people struggle to find love, where people are constantly being heartbroken, and where love is the greatest strength and weakness. If your talent is your forte, you will see the world as a place to perform what you have and showcase yourself to the world, people's opinions being either your fuel or your stumbling block. If you care about people's feelings, you will see the world as ignorant and illiterate towards others' feelings, and you have this fire in you that grows stronger whenever people show apathy to others, wanting to show those people that everyone matters.

What matters to us makes how we see things differently, and eventually, that's what our vision upon the world becomes. What is originally only land and water and sky, turns to something deeper, somewhere filled with so much emotions and meaning that might not be true for every person in the world. In fact, it's very hard to find a person who sees the world as you do. But that's what makes us so special—how we view the world is what sets us apart from each other. Our vision is the thing keeping us alive, real, different, and special. It's something that no one understands except for you, but something extraordinarily beautiful, something beyond measure, something that's inexplicable to anyone except for yourself. Our vision is what makes us truly us. It defines what we value in life, and how we perceive the world. Our vision is something that, in the end, shapes the world we live in. To think of how much power it has over our lives is beyond my imagination, but I believe that our vision is something powerful enough to affect our world.



Elizabeth Razzouk. 14. Richmond Hill, Canada.

## To Be With The Stars

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

It is here, where I stand, the smoke dances with the dark  
Dawn signifies nothing, but another day of work  
Where my fingernails break and the ashes stain my skin  
The clothes I own are ratty, cuts I have on me aren't healing

Young like the rest when I was sent off  
Mother needs money, since father's now gone  
Coal mines are home, the cold floor my new bed  
Faith in people blurry, my hope for better thin

In night, when I leave and sneak out to the fields  
I join all the others whose paths are similar  
Torn to shreds like the fabric pieces we weave  
Our palms pitch black, but our eyes still gleam

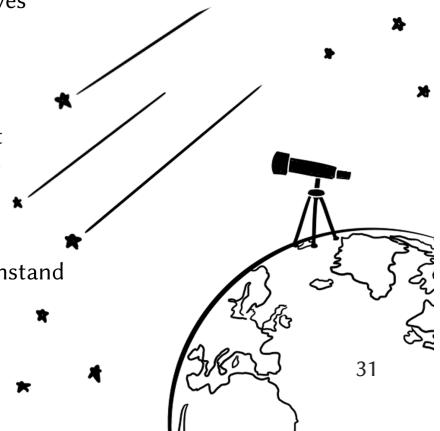
A telescope one kid stole from his master  
A book another got from a late night in the library  
Information about the comets someone learned from their father  
Desperation and desire to learn something beyond digging cinders

Can you name this comet? It's so far up  
I think to myself about how it must be  
To stay afloat in space with not a care in the world  
Singing with the planets and dancing with the stars

Eventually it's too dark to see anything but black sky  
So we sneak back to our quarters and say our goodbyes  
To sleep for a bit before we're awoken again  
A life that prison would surely commend

To live or die now seems purely luck  
To give out from exhaustion, be too ill and kicked out  
But the stars show me that there's good beyond here  
Bleak metal walls that contain nothing but fear

We don't know tomorrow and the days after that  
Kindness here is little, but we're brave enough to withstand  
For one day I know that this all shall end  
And I, like the stars, will finally be free



Christina Polge. 13. North Carolina, United States.

## Seeing The Rainbow

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

After the storm  
I saw a rainbow  
Big, beautiful and bright  
And I tried to describe it  
But no one could see  
The stars in my eyes

The air was cool  
Like a welcome friend  
Opening the doors to life's secrets

A voice in the dark sky of stars  
Like a girl singing  
Clear and bright  
Soft and sweet

The blue speckled through the rainbow  
Like the eyes of a person I once knew  
And I can never forget the stare  
When I told her I was in love

The clouds cleared around the rainbow  
Like a window to look out of  
And all I could see were the stars  
And once they passed  
I didn't want to let go

The green reminded me of the grass and trees  
Like a home in the woods  
The perfect hide out on a summer day

Christina Polge. 13. North Carolina, United States.

Seeing The Rainbow

Where a dog bounded through the orange blossoms  
Filled with hope day and night  
And the brightness wasn't burned out  
By any amount of dark and desolate feeling

The rain started to fall again  
Like tears staining the sky  
I remembered by sadness  
Filled with the worries of tomorrow  
I remember that a rainbow isn't an escape  
That I still have to walk the gray sidewalks  
Still have to face the blue eyes of a girl I once knew  
And walk amongst the orange blossoms  
Away from my home in the woods  
But I didn't look away  
And I saw  
Hands held out over the shadows  
A happy ending.

# Visual Arts

## Ages 15-18



Megan Wormald. 15. United States  
Eyes: Windows to the Soul



*What does vision mean to you?*

Vision means using the sight you have been given to experience the world with the awe and amazement, possessed by a child, of the complexity of everyday life, with colorful excitement, and without overlooking the simple, yet beautiful, moments in life. This piece symbolizes the moment a vivid childhood memory flashes into the mind of a woman who misses the blissfully full life she once had as a child, surrounded by butterflies and protected by her grandmother. She misses the vision and outlook on life she has lost and sadly remembers the cheerful, rich life she once lived.

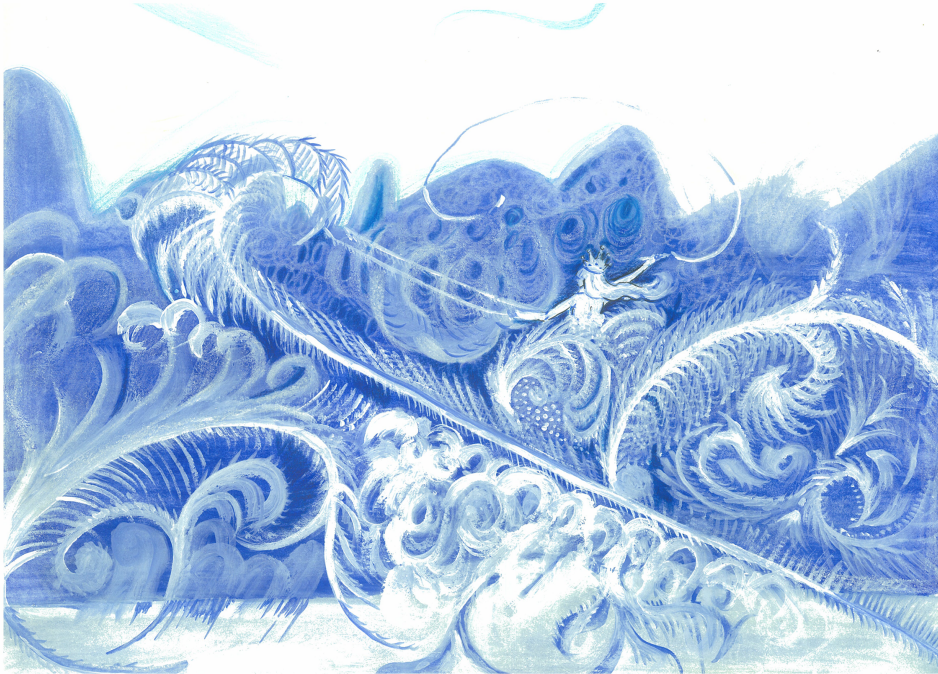
Douiou Sakina. 15. France.



*What does vision mean to you?*

The first picture represents the inside of the look,  
and the second represents the look outside.

Kunnei Fedorova. 16. Yakutsk, Russia.  
frost on my window is fairytale!



*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." – Helen Keller*

I live in the coldest place in the World - Yakutia. Every winter temperature can be over -50 degree. When it's -52 we don't go to school, but if it's -51 we have to go to classes. So when temperature is -55 we are very happy! Usually we stay at home, because it is very cold. One day was -58, so I stayed at home and tried look at the wndow, because I was waiting for my mother. But I couldn't see anything, so I was really disappointed, but a few minutes later, the frost on my window began to turn into the fairytale!

Grace Ting, 17. Toronto, Canada.  
Warmth



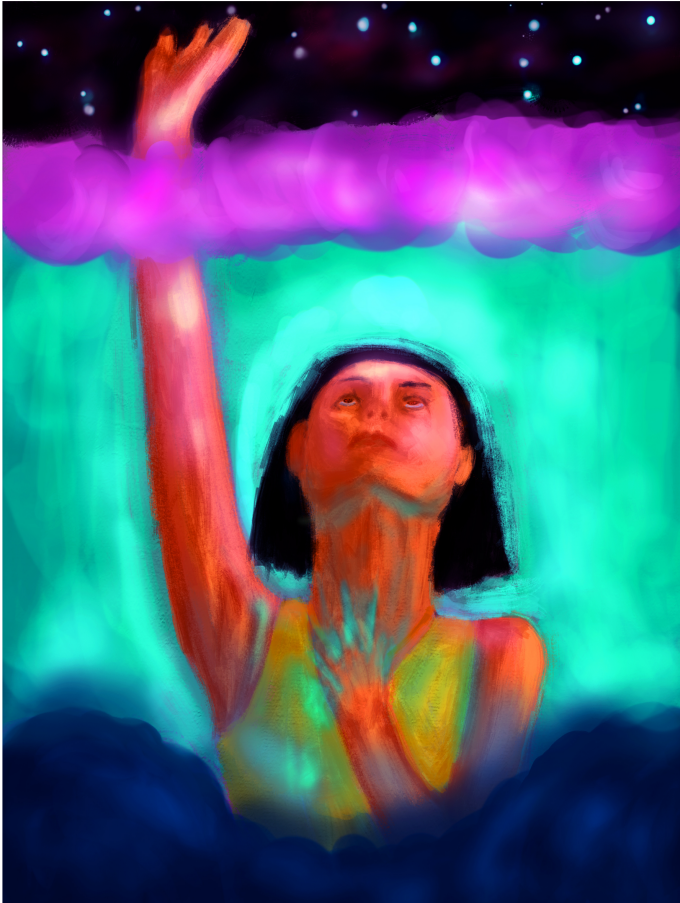
*What does vision mean to you?*

Vision to me means being able to take in a scene around you, and appreciating every part of it in its own way. This piece was inspired by a scene I saw at a park, when I stopped for a moment, and looked around, seeing all of the beautiful hidden details of nature. With my use of colours and textures, I hope for it to inspire others to feel as though they were in the scene themselves, and experience the sensation of seeing the beauty everywhere around you.



Anthony Azekwoh. 17. Lagos, Nigeria.

Lost in the Stars



*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

I have always been a dreamer and within all of us, I believe we all have a bit of the stars within us. A light so bright and persistent that it makes us, prompts us even, to reach higher than we ever thought we could. A light that strengthens and inspires us to do the impossible and reach for the stars.

Yoon Ji Kweon. 16. Toronto, Canada.

## Vision Lends to Visions

*What does vision mean to you?*

I created this painting because vision is many things to me; I rely on it all through my life. To foresee a future, a hopeful outcome, is referred to as 'having a vision'. Seeing reminds me to not feel trapped in loneliness, brings my attention to my environment. Having good vision lightens the world around me- with my glasses, being able to see reduces the isolating effects of my depersonalization. Helps me to not feel like I am drowning. Helps me to see what awaits, what further insights I can have with a vision. My vision.



Olusegun Oshoba Owusi. 18. Lagos, Nigeria.  
Blurry visions with eyes



*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." – Helen Keller*



The worst thing that can happen to someone is to have eyes but cant see. The eyes is our window to the world .it is the means were we see the colourful and beautiful things around us.

My picture depicts the theme of the competition. I took this shot on a close range and it clearly depicts the eyes which is wide open. But on the side you can see the blurry vision.

Without the eyes we cant see the world and its beautiful creatures and nature



Josephine Desir. 15. Oak Park, United States.

Rocket



*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

My piece depicts influential African-American women from many fields (although predominantly science, technology, engineering, and math) and periods of history, all of whom have been an inspiration to me as a black girl growing up in the United States. These women are the "stars" that make me dream of one day accomplishing something as great as one of them.



Kiana Kidder. 17. Southwest Ranches, United States.  
Me and my music



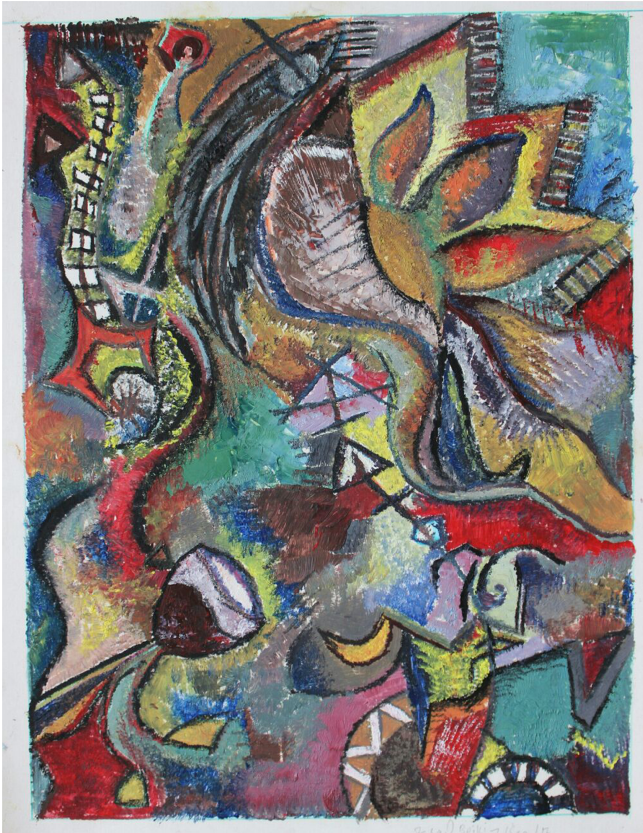
*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

This piece was created to illustrate myself enjoying my music. Its important to remember, especially for those with bad eye sight, that there is a whole other world hidden in the music that you listen to, a world that you don't have to see, its something you can just imagine and enjoy!

Zarang Beiki. 16. Quetta, Pakistan.

Vision

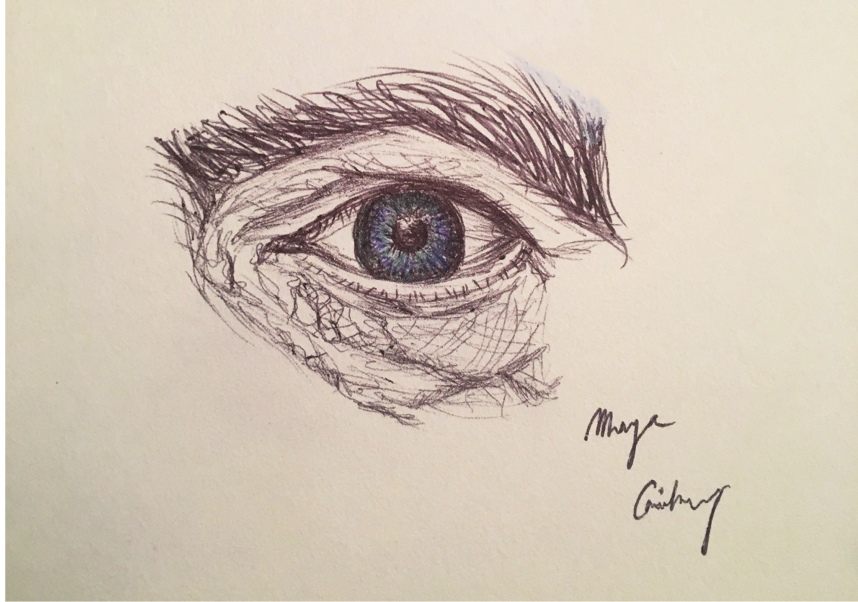


*What does vision  
mean to you?*

The idea of discovering different facets of oneself has always intrigued me. I have always been enthusiastic about simple and creative ideas to acknowledge the basic and stupid things that we carry in our heads. I believe we can surpass our obstacles and can achieve our determined destination by motivating our visions towards progression. Being inspired by true, simple moments in life and resembling different tonal variations of colors to portray certain emotions as I relate them to the experiences; pleasant or harsh and phases that we've been through. I aspire to keep my ideas and follow my vision to communicate with others through my thoughts and express my ideas through a canvas rather than words.

Maya Ginzburg, 16. Toronto, Canada.

Wise Eyes



*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." – Helen Keller*

I named this piece 'Wise Eyes' because I purposely drew a wrinkled aged eye, with the skin around it weathered and marked. However I attempted to keep the iris sparkling with clarity and energy. I wanted to show that age or disability should not affect one's visions and that we should always reach to achieve our dreams no matter what may hinder us.

Written  
Ages 15-18

Cassandra Barthuly. 17. Washington, United States.

Blind Men See

*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." – Helen Keller*

"Tell me what you look like." Marius bit down on a donut twist, cinnamon-sugar flaking onto his lips.

The little girl next to him swung her feet. Marius could tell, because the edge of her sneaker accidentally smacked against his calf.

Cassidy grabbed his hand and steadied it as she ripped off a hunk of his cinnamon twist before answering. "Black hair." Her small teeth snapped together as she bit off a piece. "Sunglasses." She slurred her words through a mouthful of donut.

Marius smiled, but didn't correct her manners. He rubbed his sugary fingers back and forth across the stiff material of his jeans. "What else?"

"Um ..." She hesitated, and the chewing noises stopped. "A big scar." Her voice quavered a little.

"It's okay. I'm not perfect either." Marius smirked consolingly at her, gesturing to the red blindfold cinched over his sightless eyes.

"It's right...here." Cassidy lifted his hand and put it against her face.

Her skin should have been cold and soft, fitting for both a child and an apple-crisp fall morning. It was neither. A rough line slashed its way over her skin, and Marius traced it with his fingers.

"I'm sorry you're not perfect." He mumbled, knowing that it had to be worse for her than him.

He could picture tiny children, with bright eyes and flawless faces, circling her in a schoolyard, taunting her ugly scar. Could picture adults shooing their offspring away, as if imperfection were contagious.

She shrugged, and Marius slid his hand off her shoulder. He ripped off another piece of donut and handed it to her, fumbling to place it in her small hands.

"Broadcast's coming," Cassidy informed him, her mouth still full.

Marius tilted his head up, his shoulders tensing as he waited for the thin crackle of a beginning broadcast. He couldn't see it, but he could hear.

Cassidy sucked in a sharp breath. "She's...she's beautiful." She whispered, in the adoring tone that she might use to describe a beautiful toy in a store window.

"So are you." Marius mumbled, hating the jealousy that seeped its way into her voice.

"I'd like to inform everyone that we've reached a decision regarding our lesser citizens." The woman's voice reminded Marius of a peach, sweet and juicy.

He slid an arm around Cassidy, as if to shield her from whatever she would say.

"We are all one step away from becoming lesser. A kitchen fire. A wreck. But that step is an important boundary that must be preserved."

"Why?" Cassidy whispered, her hair tickling Marius' ear.

Marius put a finger over his lips, knowing that she could see it, even if he couldn't. Talking during a broadcast was generally frowned upon.

"Anyone under the age of eighteen that qualifies as lesser will be sent to special schools. It's the best we can do to help them overcome, however minimally, their issues."

Marius' arm tightened around Cassidy.

No. No. That was impossible.

"Take me to the alley. Please." He tugged on her hand, breaking the rule about talking.

"But..." She stood up, her small fingers twined through his.

"Please." He repeated, his knees wobbling beneath him.

"Okay."



Cassandra Barthuly. 17. Washington, United States.

Blind Men See

Marius shuffled his feet slowly, the uneven cobblestones easy to feel through the thin soles of his sneakers. Cassidy reached up and pushed on his midsection, and he leaned against the hard wall where she had propped him up.

"We have to hide you." Marius whispered, crouching down to where her height had to be.

He fumbled for her, patting the air in front of him until he grabbed a limb. Her arm. "Please. We need to find a spot where nobody will look."

"What's wrong with going to school?" Cassidy's voice hissed quietly.

"There's nothing wrong with your brain! I don't want you to go there, nothing's wrong with you, you're fine...she's the one who's blind!"

"She can see, Marius. I saw her eyes." Cassidy informed him solemnly.

"She's still blind." He snarled, then stopped, rubbing his hands over his face.

He didn't want to snap at Cassidy. Ever.

"Come on. Find us a spot, please?" He reached for her hand, his mind whirring with ideas, plans. Most of them impossible for a blind man, a 'lesser citizen.'

Cassidy took a deep breath, letting her head slump against his hip. "Okay."



Jack Zhang. 16. Markham, Canada.

## Dream Story

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

The stars from that night remain vivid in the pools of my memory, like moonstones at the bottom of a glistening, glass sea.

I had been sitting out on the moors, my neck craned upward to gaze upon a sky as black as anthracite, its beads of starlight glinting like a thousand promised lands I could never touch. And as I stared, a teenage Tantalus, growing dizzy from those infinite possibilities that twinkled out of reach, I felt this soul-crushing uncertainty weigh down over my head like a bell jar, encasing me with that one, simple question: What am I going to do in life?

My breathing grew hoarse, and my vision turned obscured and hazy. I felt those stars metamorphose into holes through which the nether sucked out all the oxygen in the air, and suddenly the stars had enclosed me; I was in void space, and I was choking ... sent adrift on a sea of unfulfilled dreams.

But then, the comet appeared, and she was a hope-kindled blaze surging unbridled, unfurling and onward-hurling toward my body. With her golden tail carving flame-licked light into that dark and desolate vacuum, I felt her connect, felt the air collapse back into my wretched lungs—right before I keeled over.

When I came to, I found myself lying on my back, the sodden earth gathered beneath my fingernails as I feverishly drank in gulps of night air. Between the rise and plummet of my cavernous chest, I beheld her spectre.

She stood upright, a girl of my age, amidst a starry, sterling aura that illumined those dismal moorlands. Clouds of luna moths fluttered forth from her presence, trailing stardust into the night sky like threads of glistening tears. But the girl wasn't crying—she wasn't sad either upon noticing the poised upturn of her lips; she was blind. Wound around her head was a blindfold decorated with gold filigree, the ends of its fabric disappearing into a storm of inky-black curls that roared in the wind.

"What are you?" I asked, my voice quivering like the cattails in the breeze.

She smiled, confidently and without artifice, and outstretched a hand.



I touched my palm to hers, and instantly the terrain began to melt away as that familiar suffocating sense seized me once more. I looked down and saw that I was sinking beneath mire and muck; I looked up and saw, in my dreamlike state half between waking-world and oblivion, a pair of golden eyes, sending me down into a deep and tenebrous abyss.

*Chink*, the tug of a rope switch, and all of a sudden I was standing in a room with charcoal-tinted walls and sleek, practical furnishings.

On top of the desk opposite me was a computer monitor, a hybrid of letters and symbols strewn across its bright display. Although I had never done any actual programming, I often envisioned myself as a web designer, whittling away long nights in an apartment while all the city slept.

With a swirl and a click of the mouse, my fingers started to clack away at the keyboard, crafting conditions and commands and assembling them into vertiginous constructs of code, as an architect builds his grand edifices.

Engulfed in that mania, I went on for hours. But the hours turned to days, the days turned to months, and the computerized logic turned illogical. I looked outside and saw the dusky dawn suffuse softly over the skyline.

Swivelling around, I came to face a tall, ebony bookcase filled with technicolour tomes. Picking one out, I started to riffle through its pages.

*Time was shifting in the space around me. The birches and the poplars disrobed, exchanging their fading green verdure for crimson couture, as an autumnal hush settled over the little town at the foot of the mountain.*

Then, peering up from the book, I saw that I was transported to a cottage with chestnut walls and lush, hanging plants. The bookcase was no longer a bookcase but a writing desk, with manuscripts stacked on both sides in perfect, off-white towers. Surveying the rest of the room, I noticed, among other curiosities, an alabaster buff of Baudelaire, a series of framed photographs, and a silvery-blue chartreux posed languidly on an ottoman.

Jack Zhang. 16. Markham, Canada.

Dream Story

I felt a dumb, childlike grin spread over my face as I drank in the manifestation of my literary dreams; stifling a laugh, I looked aside to the windows. Outside, an animated town with quaint little houses unfurled itself at the base of the mist-topped alpine. I decided to take a walk.

The air was as crisp as the leaves crunching underfoot as I ambled along avenues strewn with gold. In the distance, a bronze bell tolled its timeworn tune, announcing the start of a new day. The town was waking, the skylarks were soaring, and everything was all so ... perfect.

Things started moving faster. The avenue branched off into a dark, sylvan pathway. Leaning in from both sides, tall evergreens ushered me into a spacious clearing with a hill in the distance. At its top I discerned a fire tower, whose lambent glow flickered like a forlorn call to a long-lost friend. As I neared the summit, the tower transformed into a lighthouse. Perched atop a precipice, it overlooked a harsh, tumultuous sea. With an intake of breath, I leaped into the waters below. Fractured moonbeams filtered down into the depths as I sank, and then they were no longer moonbeams but a spotlight. I was on stage in a theatrical performance that had just finished, and the curtains were closing around me. Blackness crowded inward; looking up to the ceiling, I saw: one star, two stars, an entire constellation arising from nothing. And, standing in that empty observatory, I wondered how something so vast, so free could ever have stifled me. The wind howled in my ears. I was back on the moors, a starry night sky beaming overhead.



Johanna Jucutan. 17. British Columbia, Canada.  
And Satisfaction Brought Her Back

*"For my part I know nothing with  
any certainty but the sight of stars  
makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

Curiosity.

She is a tiny brunette,  
commander of the question barrage.  
Zipping her soft tanned hand along  
the twist and weave of fence links,  
she tugs you down a path  
you've never thought to take interest in.

Her surveying gaze,  
clad in cat eye glass- is  
unable to keep still.

Enthralled by the thrum of people,  
she stretches her ears  
to hear foreign sounds and  
aimlessly eavesdrops in on conversations  
she has no business tuning into.

At the whoosh  
of an antiquated street car nearby,  
she pleads to you with conviction  
to try an unfamiliar form of transportation  
and persuades you after travelling a mere mile,  
to try the street vendor's apple fritters  
you said you would never taste.

While basking in a beam of golden daylight,  
you hope her glowing youth  
never grows old and cynical

as with her, exhilaration follows.



Angie Lo. 17. Toronto, Canada.  
Bright and Childlike Eyes

*"For my part I know nothing with  
any certainty but the sight of stars  
makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

The world told me what lay ahead would always be unsure,  
That there was very little of the future that we knew,  
That definite uncertainty, unsafe and insecure,  
Through threatening loss and failure, told us what we couldn't do.  
Aspiring plans subject to wind and waves would not endure,  
And fools like me who took the risk could never see it through,  
The world told me I should be safe and do what was mature,  
Not waste my life on lofty dreams that never would come true.

I chose instead to play the fool, to scorn the world's advice,  
And venture in uncertainty, unstable as it seemed  
For I would rather fail, and fall, and owe a debtor's price,  
Than go through life not knowing what it's like to be redeemed.  
So I did what was foolish, and yet I thought so wise  
Standing where abandoned hopes and broken wishes teemed,  
Clinging to each guiding light with bright and childlike eyes,  
I looked up at the stars,

and I dreamed, and dreamed, and dreamed.



Carlito Topacio. 18. Makati, Philippines.

Easel

*What does vision mean to you?*

They were faded –  
like the smudged markings  
of an amateur painter.  
Each stroke would blur  
into my vision, only  
to fade away.  
They would move around  
like pieces of oil pastel  
haphazardly carried.  
Perched on top of  
streaks of green,  
below a glimmering bar of gray.  
It was art at its purest,  
a scene of the day's commute.  
The painter's trick lied not in paint,  
for it's sight I've come to lose.



Cebo Hadebe. 18. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Khwezi

*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." – Helen Keller*

She sat at the corner of the classroom, with her head pendulous as she etched and etched away at her desk with the needle of her compass. Her only company were her thoughts which managed to estrange her from humanity and reality.

She knew nobody liked her at her new school. She was convinced so rather. Never before did she dare to venture into forging new relationships. No. Not after what had happened to her.

It wasn't always like this for Khwezi. Her new life began after she had lost her sister, her face's form and her own sight in a car accident. Two weeks had not even lapsed, but she already felt the frustrations which came with navigating through life with a walking stick. After everything she had something of a sixth sense which amplified her paranoia. She always felt that every whisper and giggle among the learners was directed toward her. Although she couldn't see, she always reared her head and everyone would quieten. These people –in her thoughts –hated her and she felt like it was incumbent on herself to ensure that the world knew that the feeling was mutual. She would then retreat to her world. Scrape, scrape... to her it wasn't lunacy.

She hypnotised herself by scraping on the desk as she brooded over the whole idea of school. To be exact, she didn't figure that dropping out was as crazy as what people already thought of her. Her blindness made her see the picture of life much more vividly, and school did not at all add any hope to it. In an average squatter camp where she came from, education had absolutely no immediate positive effect. The suffering of a household only ended once a child graduated and found a well-paying job. Emphasis on "a household", the rest languished in that squalor.

She thought about it through-and-through. The Xs and the Ys of Mathematics were not helpful in solving the problem of kids whose lives were being claimed by paraffin fires almost daily. The Laws of Newton were not helping with the removal of the foul smell of waste material. Biology only warned them that the rivers may be cholera-ridden, but where they resided the taps were thirsty... they had no other choice or source. Besides any advantage Khwezi may have had she also lost it in that accident. Her mother, who was a depressed single parent, barely made enough from being a fruit monger to send her to a school for children with special needs.

She had her decision! However, she told herself to stick it out for one more day and that was it. Between making a selling claypots or selling fruits along with her mother, she had chosen her fate already.

Where was she going to conjure up the necessary resources to make the claypots? Even the answer to that was as unknown to her as what her mother's reaction would have been to this decision she had taken. So after school, she hitched a ride which chauffeured her back home along with other kids.

"Khwezi... you're back"

She ignored the greeting, and felt her way around the shack, where a bedroom and kitchen shared the same space before she sat on the bed.

"Hey Khwezi! Did you hear me?"

"Not now, ma. I'm tired."

"Is it the schoolwork? Kids maybe?"

"Everything! In fact, I don't want to go back to that Hell."

"Stop this craziness! What will you do if you don't go back?"

"I'll ... I'll sell pots... yeah. Claypots."

"You will not do that! I won't let you throw away your education!"

"Of what use will it be mama? Huh?"

"Don't use that tone on me, Khwezi!"

"You don't have to deal with these people mama."

"What?"

"The learners. I can't even think straight anymore – everytime they giggle it feels as though it's because of me."

"They don't matter my child."

"No, they do! And it hurts. Besides, look at this. Look around us! Nothing will change."

"Why have you given up hope? Are you still hurting over your sister, Nothi? The blindness? Talk to me."

"I don't know mama. Everything I guess. And school isn't helping."

"And so you thought dropping out would give you – us those solutions?"

"I mean mama, from the little that we would make we could support ourselves."

"Khwezi."

"Maybe we could even save up!"

"Khwezi! I know you mean well but we can't live for the now my child. That little money will only make us complacent in this slum instead of lifting us out of it."

"But if we--"

"No. Your education is our sure way out."

"It's pointless mama!"

"They might mock you, yes, but don't let them get to you."

"I can't copy down any notes nor can I see and memorise what is taught."

"Khwezi, your eyes are just a small part of your vision. Have you tried seeing with your mind? Or using your ears? Listen."

"No. With all these thoughts screaming in my head, I don't know how..."

"Figure out a way, Khwezi! I don't want you to end up like me..."

"Like you?"

"Yes. Stuck with in this dead-end job. The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision. I can tell you that... You still have a chance."

"Oh... I never saw it that way..."

"You are my hope, Khwezi. Please hang on until you finish and we will be free from this. Just focus."

This was an entirely new perspective on things to Khwezi. The future which had looked bleak to her began to glow a bit brighter. The hope didn't really get rid of the nauseating stench of waste which harassed them from the outside neither did it stop the strong winds from blowing over their roof every once in awhile. However, it did make the future shine a little more.





Jocelyn Neo. 17. Sarawak, Malaysia.  
A Conflation of Terminologies: a scrutiny

*What does vision mean to you?*

All memories of my childhood are enshrouded in a cloak of haze. No, not from the smoke of pollution and industrialisation my town was swathed in at the time, nor is it a rhapsody of my tumultuous childhood; it was literally a blur. I won't delve into the science of as to why I suffered from poor vision, but the fact of the matter was I needed glasses, something that neither I nor my parents were ready to accept. Thus, I hustled through my diaphanous life, every decision ranged from an educated guesstimate to a puerile gamble, depending on the distance I had to make it from. At the time, I felt that living so profligately was better than seeing (albeit barely) by parent's disappointment that my vision was marred. Ergo, I gambled on.

Vision is always interpreted as the most perfect and utopian version of something, be it an organisation, a company, or even a reality. Ipso facto, a vision statement is an organisation's optimal future state which is consummated for employees or members to strive towards. Establishments construct their vision statements without regard for the resistance posed by rationality and reason, unwittingly building castles in the air. Vision statements have the penchant for being overtly idyllic, to the point of sounding blasé, if not insincere. Auteurs of vision statements give little thought about how the members of their establishment can keep that vision in mind when carrying out day-to-day duties. How could an auditor foresee whether sending in a report late would affect their company's "pride and prestige"?

A fatal flaw that all pristine vision statements share is that they are set too far in the future, often beyond the fabric of time and space. When this happens, a vision is no long attainable, and becomes a fantasy. To analogise, it's very much like dangling a treat right in front of a dog's nose, visible but just out of reach. The canine could run to all four corners of the earth, but the treat would be just as vincinal as it is elusive as in the beginning. Of course, one could opine that the success lies not in getting the treat, but the mileage covered in pursuit of it. Alas, humans are unlike their canine companions. Looking at the world through a screen of theories on paper only serves to give your reality an unmistakably rosy tint. We cannot expect humans to retain such massive and undefined goals on a regular basis, naively chasing a mirage that exists on an entirely different plane. We need benchmarks cues that tell us how near we are to our destination so we can gauge the time and effort needed to get there.

In theory, it's a magnificent thing, to have aspirations and a destination to pave one's success towards. It's unhealthy for the growth of the establishment to be complacent with its existing success, and should always seek to be *semper anticus*, always forward. Unfortunately, lofty vision statements only sound mellifluous on paper, and rarely ever have the same dulcet chime in reality's unforgiving orchestra. More often than not, vision statements are less of a pursuit and more of a courtesy in the current commercial climate. Emblazoned on a shiny metal plaque, laid bare for the public to see and not care, the vision of an establishment is rendered meaningless through *non sequitur* ambitions.

When I realised I had lost my 20/20 vision, I was wracked with shame and guilt. Throughout my life it was inoculated within me that vision was something of the flawless and immaculate. Sight was the mother of all senses, after all, our *aperçu* of anything begins with the implies generated by our optic nerves. If your prime receptors were impaired, then so is the rest of your existence. I chose to go on in vagueness, meandering listlessly through my days, not completely certain of what lies ahead. A company's poor vision statement is the same; its flaw is in its flawlessness, rendering a formless future for its employees to amble towards.

Hence, it is imperative that we make a paradigm shift in our perception of vision. An establishment's vision doesn't have to be a pie in the sky, the same way human vision isn't always impeccable. What we all should understand is defects are a normal part of any existence, and evasion from these faults will only serve to magnify them. We are greater than the sum of our parts, and acknowledging our shortcomings is the first step to correcting them. My vision grew progressively worse, and I realised that living in this fuzziness was simply unfeasible. In refusing to seek help for my vision, it deteriorated even further. My vision was never going to fix itself, so only when I accepted the reality of it, could I begin my path to clarity once more. *A priori*, vision to me was the degree of lucidity in which the world could be expressed by my eyes. *A posteriori*, I know now that vision speaks less about clarity, and more *amor fati*, that is, to accept the flaws that are inured in our lives.

To allegorise my experience to fit the predicament with vision statements, the incessant grandiloquence that establishments envisage their future with is very much like my defiance to admit my weakness. Soldiering on towards an unknown future or questionable existence, a land of milk and honey, you are bound to lose sight of your journey's end. Therefore, we ought to be cognisant of the obstacles and feasibility of our goals. Once we are aimed towards somewhere within our reach, it becomes more facile to rev up our spirits to get there.

Anna Goncharova. 16. Saratov, Russia.

What is hidden still exists

*“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.” – Helen Keller*

„Thus, although we have encountered certain difficulties during the negotiation process, the two parties have managed to reach an agreement,“ Oster Grav, Nosoch`s ambassador in Brazil, ended his report, looking expectantly at the king.

The monarch, by the look of him, could hardly be given twenty years of age. Only six months ago the most destructive earthquake in the country`s history cost lives of hundreds of people, the king`s father being among them. The young heir had to take over the responsibilities of the crown in the times of deep grief and sorrow. Still, there was never a lack of counselors to guide him through ceremonies and open meetings. He took some pride in thinking that all newly established diplomatic relations and contracts with foreign corporations were gained by him.

Many a night, after closing his eyes and preparing to go to sleep, the king could not help but muse over the title his successors would assign him. He would very like to be called Benevolent or Great even. Not that the monarch was truly vain, it is rather that arrogance was essential in being royal. His majestic deportment, flawless features, ostentatious attire - it all seemed to be in his very nature, circulating in his veins.

„I suppose we could discuss the subject in further detail on Thursday, as planned. For now, the meeting is concluded,“ the king rose, not unhappy to see men twice and thrice his age stand up to pay their respects. Eager to get a breath of fresh air, he left the chamber briskly, giving a curt nod to the Prime Minister. The guards meant to follow him outside but the king dismissed them with a wave of his hand. Solitude was a privilege the lack of which the ruler now felt acutely, constantly being surrounded by people.

The central palace that served both as a workplace and home to the king was built by the founder of the ruling dynasty. It had a long history, dating six hundred years into the past. Each monarch tried to contribute to the edifice in his own way which inevitably resulted in a blend of styles and patterns composing the palace. Surprisingly, they did not seem out of place but added up to the splendor of the structure. It almost looked like a living organism whose lungs found themselves in the palace`s garden. That was where the king was heading. He squinted glancing at the brightness of the sun in its peak. The weather was boiling hot, it being the middle of July, so not even unbuttoning the shirt and rolling up the sleeves could help in fighting off the heat. The king`s eyes instantly stumbled upon the tempting shadow of a large oak that was impossible to resist on such a day.

His legs carried him there and, exhausted, he collapsed into an armchair just under protection of the massive crone. After wondering in his thoughts for some time, the king

focused on his surroundings. He found his refuge in a rather remote part of the garden so that he could even make out the at first inconspicuous staff entrance. Being suddenly stricken by a bout of adventurous spirit, the young man felt the urge to explore the city. He only exited the palace on formal occasion, never really having the opportunity to go around by himself. Security was ensured through cutting-edge technology so a royal fingerprint sufficed to open all the doors in proximity. The king approached the gate indecisively, as if having second thoughts, but putting on his usual smug face expression, he entered into the stuffy atmosphere of a midday capital.

The downtown was occupied by luxurious buildings of mainly public usage. As the palace grew more distant, the king passed whole blocks of resplendent mansions inhabited by members of aristocracy and prosperous entrepreneurs. However, the streets were becoming more narrow, smooth pavement was replaced by uneven, bad-quality covering and, without realizing, the ruler found himself in a kind of slums the very existence of which seems to be ignored by decent people.

„How such a nasty place came to be in my country,“ the king thought to himself, swiping dust off

his impeccable trousers „maybe there`s a shortage of service companies in the capital. Frowning, he hurried to find a way out from the quarter and accidentally tripped over a hat filled with coins.

„Ouch,“ he rubbed his leg „why on Earth would someone leave his stuff for others to get hurt?“

„Sorry but it`s the only way people can notice me,“ a soft voice from below called. A beggar girl, no more than fifteen years of age, sat on a shabby blanket, holding a sign „A blind person will kindly accept your donations“

„What are you doing here? There`re lots of hospitals for people like you.“

„I can`t afford them.“

„What do you mean you can`t afford them? Every citizen of my country will be treated by a doctor if necessary“

„Your country?“

„Yes, I am the new king. Haven`t you heard of all the wonderful things I have done? The agreement with Brazil is all over the news.“

„If you are really the new king, I pity you.“

„You“ the king could not help but emphasize the word with disdain „pity me?“

„I do. Take a good look around you. People die of hunger here while nobles are having feasts. We cough and suffer from fever every winter while you enjoy the warm comfort of furs. We break our backs from hard labor while you indulge in idleness. I might not have the sight, Your Majesty, but you do not possess vision“

Dhesshiny Subramaniam. 16. Colombo, Sri Lanka.

## A Visionary

*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." – Helen Keller*

She was lost. Completely and utterly lost, a hundred paths with mist fogging it's entrance, which one to choose she did not know. Hence she did the one thing she always did best; ignore the problem. She stood in the same place lost and scared not moving an inch, not putting an effort to find her path. She fell into a void of comatose, everyday a familiar routine with distractions to keep the ignorance alive. Dreams of false reality brimming her being. Her voice not her own, her character not her own but of strong, independent women who strive to work hard and have fully fledged wings.

She imagined darkness surrounding her but it was a trick of the mist, she put her down often but never did anything to prove herself wrong. Others didn't matter, just her in her own world; her dreams seemed unreachable, her vision long lost sight of. They say your dreams are your deepest desires and hers was to be someone else; someone stronger. She averted real thoughts to be thought only the false filled her mind.

And one day, someone came along, someone to wake her up from her coma. Their words made her realize what she was doing, and for the things she most strived for, she had never worked for, because after all, you can never expect to gain the results you want if you never work for it. It's your goal, you and only you have to make the effort.

Snapped back to reality, she made her way out of the void a step at a time; her dreams of false reality lessened, they still existed but only for the purpose of creativity and entertainment.

Tiny bits of thought entered her mind, it as she had feared, made her fall into another void but this void had a light in the end; she fell and fell and fell and came out as a better person, as a visionary who was set to accomplish everything she had previously convicted impossible.

During the second void she became repressed, the thoughts sometimes overwhelmed and reluctantly she was finally starting to accept everything she had been in denial of, she often reserved to herself through the day as realization hit. Then something happened, every realization she had had eventually made her want to be better, redeem herself for all the mistakes and all of this led to one thing...

She was inspired.

Dhesshiny Subramaniam. 16. Colombo, Sri Lanka.  
A Visionary

Inspired to be better and driven to chase her dreams, she had new visions now, vision her older self would have never thought remotely possible, but not it was.

She did it.

She ran with the wind into one of the mist ridden paths, she didn't know if it was the right one but she knew if it wasn't she could always grow wings to fly over to another. There is always a chance at redemption, always a choice and a choice has the power to change your entire life if the right one is chosen.

She wasn't completely changed, just work in progress. She still fell down but now she picked herself up. Her old self was a mere shadow now for she had finally found herself.

"Who are you?" They may ask and she would answer, "A visionary." For she may fail miserably is everything she does but she will accept it with grace and try as many time as needed with increasing effort until she has achieved her goals.



Diksha Aviral. 15. Meerut, India.

Vision, a man of ambition.

*What does vision mean to you?*

Vision, what a thought of beauty,  
Might be a trick of light,  
Or an illusion of the eye.  
A mischief of the fickle thoughts,  
Of a paralyzed human mind.  
But no,  
A firstborn of Imagination he is,  
A beloved kinsman of Dream.  
A rather perky fellow he is,  
With an air of importance about him.  
He walks around with a purpose,  
And a sparkle in his bright eyes.  
And he holds power,  
Oh! Beautiful, insurmountable power he holds,  
In those hands,  
Which are too small,  
To even hold an apple.  
His power surpasses that of the sun,  
And he holds the moon in mocking defeat. And then,  
With an indignant expression on his face,  
Aims at the mighty stars.



Yagnyashri Kodaru. 18. Bengaluru, India.

Words

*What does vision mean to you?*

My mind won't stop.  
It's buzzing with words  
thrashing around in  
the confines of my skull,  
loud and cantankerous.  
It's noise that cannot  
sound like music.  
So I ink the words onto sheets  
with the red that my hand bleeds.  
And like magic,  
noise turns into a symphony.

Yet it is a painting that  
only I can see,  
a beauty that  
only I can admire.



Ilana Carmili. 18. New York, United States.

## The Vision of a Sunset

*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." – Helen Keller*

How would you describe the action of seeing to someone who is blind? Perceiving any sort of image visually using eyes? The truth of the matter is that no matter how you tried to explain it, you would never be able to verbally explain what seeing is to someone who was never able to see. Therefore, it is essentially meaningless to anyone that can't experience it. You can go on to try and convey what seeing is by explaining other senses like hearing and tasting, indicating how they all allow us to make associations and bring us pleasure. You could end off by saying how sight is simply another sense, yet it will still remain a mystery as to what sight is.

Now try to explain vision to someone who is blind. While on a very basic level, vision literally means having the power of sight, it's so much more than that. Vision is having the ability to plan and think about the future using knowledge, creativity, and imagination. It is rejecting how things may initially appear and having the drive to explore the world by constantly pushing boundaries. At its core, vision is creating something out of nothing. It is using our mind and its ability to see into the future, seeing way beyond what is right in front of us. Growing up as a child with some friends who were blind, I always believed that being blind stopped you from seeing the world. As the years went on, I realized I had it all wrong. While being physically blind is horrible, lacking vision is what it really means to not be able to see.

In our society, people have become almost robotic, following the latest trends and being afraid to pursue new ideas. We've become a product of our generation instead of a generation that is always producing and searching for more. We are constantly looking for shortcuts, taking the easy way out, unaware of the fact that we are not reaching our highest potential. So many of us lack focus in our day to day lives; we are handed opportunity after opportunity that we choose to walk away from. While the choice may not be conscious, it has only become part of our subconscious because we've allowed it to. Having vision is something that is all-encompassing, pushing us to use so much more of ourselves than just our eyes. The fact that we can take 7 piano notes and turn them into an endless amount of songs, take an "Aha" moment and turn it into a best selling household item, or even turning a dream into an award winning novel. This is what vision is. It is creating; expanding the capacity for vision the human eye provides us with. Whether you are blind, poor, or deaf, the ability to have a vision is available to us all.

Ilana Carmili. 18. New York, United States.

### The Vision of a Sunset

It can even be argued that blind people can have visions that people who can see would never be able to. People who are blind can look at a person who is or isn't physically attractive or aesthetically pleasing and call them beautiful for how they treat other people. They can fall in love with another person without ever physically seeing them. They can envision something out of nothing because all they've ever seen is nothing. They don't have physical sight to limit what their heart and minds can always see. So many of us have sight, but are lacking what is more important: insight. We accept things for what they are, not for what they could be. We let our hopes and dreams get shattered in an instant, when we hit one stumbling block, proving that we may not have ever had a real vision to begin with.

Someone who has sight but no vision is someone who doesn't aspire to achieve or understand more than what initially meets the eye. Someone who does not allow their mind to jump from one idea to the next. While Helen Keller's statement may at first seem almost contradictory, it highlights the real essence of the human spirit. In such few words, she proved that in this whirlwind we call life, everything is meaningless without the desire to have visions about ourselves and every single aspect of the world around us. We must constantly be on the hunt for something better.

While sight and vision may be two entirely different identities, people with no vision can live their entire lives without ever really knowing what it means to see. A blind person with a vision and the drive to create new notions on the world around them may be able to truly understand the beauty and magnitude of a sunset while a person with sight will just see it for what it physically is. A blind person may even be able to put into words the satisfaction and calmness that seeing this magical intensity of light slowly disappearing gives to a person better than someone who has actually seen a sunset. Everytime we see a sunset, our initial reaction is that it is "beautiful" or "breathtaking." But when's the last time we stopped to think about how insane it is that a ball of fire is able to exist somewhere in space without destructing everything in its path while simultaneously providing us with heat. How we can stand on the beach and feel the sunset.

What Helen Keller is teaching us is that we must all strive to comprehend the vision of a sunset as opposed to simply seeing it. Someone with no vision merely exists at different moments in time, constantly missing the opportunity to turn those moments into experiences to grow from. In this world, we've all been handed a blank canvas. Are we going to color it all black or use every color that exists? And then take all the colors we have and create new colors. And just keep on creating...

Arinze Nadi. 18. Lagos, Nigeria.

Prove Yourself

*What does vision mean to you?*

Let's put into consideration a provocative quote by the former prime minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill. Churchill said, "The truth is incontrovertible; malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it but in the end there it is." This goes to show that the truth is fit to stand the test of time regardless of the controversies surrounding it. This text would highlight some inevitable verities about mankind.

Many people sit amidst vast oceans of opportunities and resources with no idea of how to conquer and utilize these resources to achieve maximum proficiency. It has been proven beyond reasonable doubt that all men are conceived with a gift. This gift could be the gift of distinction, the gift of divergence, or the gift of dichotomy. This truth is every evident in your fingerprint, personality, and even your genetic makeup. There are 7 billion people on the planet. Each is very special, unique, original, and significant. All of them possess genetic combinations that code them as distinct individuals whose fingerprints cannot be duplicated.

Some would still doubt the existence of man's great potential, but let's take a cue from the first chapter of the twelfth verse of the book of Genesis which is a biblical documentation that states that God created everything with 'seeds in them according to their own kind. In essence, hidden within everything is the potential to fulfil itself and produce much more than we see. The ability of man is not apparent to the human eye.

In life you must have come across a variety of people who are called 'naturals' in one of life's many fields. People who have no formal training in that field but excel far beyond those who have formal training and experience. The truth that man is born with a gift of distinction and uncommon potential that cannot be explained or fathomed by men remains incontrovertible.

You cannot prove what you don't have but once you know you have it, it's left to you to prove it. For anything to be proven, that means that the authenticity of that entity must have been questioned. Why do you have to prove your distinction? It is because once you come into this world, the process of socialization begins. Things like conformity, status quo and peer pressure will then contaminate your gift of distinction. People are raised to acclimatize to the norms and the verities of the society. Basically, they are raised to behave in a particular way. This would then create a stereotypical impression in the minds of people that two humans can be the same. That's why if you look at your life retrospectively, you'll notice that at some point in your life you were told to behave like someone else or you're exactly like someone else.

Arinze Nadi. 18. Lagos, Nigeria.

Prove Yourself

The key is to embrace difference and take advantage of it. Don't be deceived. Society creates the illusion that ignites the belief that two people can succeed the same way, but the truth is NO one can succeed the way YOU were engineered to succeed. Take a cue from Michael Jackson and M.C. Hammer, who weren't only some of the most prominent musicians of their era, but were also authorities in dance. Michael Jackson, who is popularly known for the moonwalk and M.C. Hammer, who is popularly known for the Hammer time, both made waves all around the world with these dance moves regardless of their disparity. Let's pretend that Michael tried to dance like M.C. Hammer or vice versa. Do you think they would have accomplished the creative purpose of their lives? The answer is NO. What is their secret? They took full advantage of their distinction. A wise man said, "Whatever you focus on expands." If an individual makes the decision to focus on his/her gift of distinction, there would be an uncommon growth of their innate potential. In the same vein, if an individual's primary focus were to imitate the gifts and characteristics of a distinct, they would turn out to be nothing but a mediocre copy of an extraordinary person. Don't be deceived. No one can succeed like you. Imagine how colourful the world would be if everyone were committed to their gift of distinction. Unfortunately, socialization has made it difficult for these beautiful colours to shine as bright as intended by the manufacturer. Conformity, peer pressure and status quo are all hindrances to the growth of potential. Now the fight must begin, the fight to discredit normalization. Without apology, I must say there is no excuse for not achieving optimum proficiency in the field of life you were created an expert in. You have the power to shine and stand out amid your peers. Prove yourself!

I would like to leave your minds with this. On the twenty-eighth day of August, nineteen sixty-three, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I have a dream" speech. It was powerful and provocative and a part of the speech really got me. He said, "It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. 1963 is not an end, but a beginning. And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. And there will be neither rest nor tranquillity in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges."

Arinze Nadi. 18. Lagos, Nigeria.

Prove Yourself

At this point the Negros sensed they were living below their potential and when you're living below your potential, there is a nagging feeling inside you that keeps telling you "this is not who you are", "you are better than this", "this routine is far too mundane and mediocre for you." So they began to fight to prove their distinction and they were not going to rest until the world acknowledged their existence. That is what I am saying. You need to step into your moment! I firmly believe the greatest tragedy in life is not death but life that fails to fulfil its purpose and potential. What would make you stand out is the expression of this potential. Prove yourself means walking the walk and excelling. With willpower and belief, it is attainable. If you could read this far, that's an indication of readiness to step into your potential and prove the status quo otherwise. Go out there and PROVE YOURSELF.

Carla Wassmann. 18. Manila, Philippines.

## The vision of a slum behind a mall

*What does vision mean to you?*

There was a slum behind the mall. You could see it from the tin roofs which jutted out behind the building like unpolished edges. The slum was colourful: the homes were made from billboard cut-outs, carton paper, scrap metal, bits of rubble and imagination. If we had waited for Mr Ciano to pick us up in midst rush hour traffic, we would not have seen the poverty just meters away from our favourite Starbucks and clothing stores. Or that's what we tell ourselves. As we strutted past the squatted areas my bags seemed much heavier than before. A shiny black SUV with tinted windows joined the line of lookalike vehicles behind us. It's funny how I remember the car, but I don't remember the faces of the people that also stood in front of us. I concentrated on getting past the traffic, past the slum and past the guilt that was staring at me in those small houses. I concentrated so much on my path, that I didn't pay attention to the way the people's eyes squinted in the sunlight, the beads of sweat running down their face, the straining of their muscles as they collected the bits of plastic on the floor. I only saw their backs, tiny, working, in the distance when I looked past later.

There was a knocking on the car window. It was expected to see the blind old lady begging during this time on the street where I saw her almost every day. I leaned my head on the seatbelt in sleeping position and closed my eyes. The lady went away but not the knocking. Unlike my eyes I couldn't close my ears.

There were groups of children laughing in the streets. The laughter was either a response to a pack of Oreos or to futile attempts of communication. Making gestures to my mouth with makebelieve cookies and waving, I wanted to make them smile a bit. It was completely unnecessary because they were already smiling and understood English.

There were steel bars that surrounded the compound I lived in. No vendors were allowed inside and definitely no beggars. The only way to get in was with an ID or a diplomatic licence. Most of the white people lived there because they felt protected. Most of them however, were caged by their own will.

There was strength in her smile. It showed her teeth completely with the outline of pink gums and folds around her lips. She was youthful despite her wrinkles, it came in the unapologetic way she opened her mouth and the twinkle in her eyes. She would have been perfect for a Colgate commercial with that smile. She gave it to me every time I came home. I was moping, worrying about school and undone work. She kept smiling, worrying about her kids and unpaid bills. And as she hummed in my room while she folded my clothes, I tried smiling as well.

Carla Wassmann. 18. Manila, Philippines.

The vision of a slum behind a mall

There was pure fortune. Sometimes I lie in bed awake and count my luck over and over again, thanking God I have a family that loves me, a house to stay in, means for education that secures a future of endless opportunity. That's sometimes. Other times I can't go out of bed because I'm sad. Yet I can't tell if I'm sad because sad things happen to other people or because I feel guilty for the fact that sad things never happen to me. And then it all goes full circle, the arrows point to my guilt, my life, my pity towards myself. People become plot devices in my life story, embellishments on CVs or components of a statistic about poverty rates in my country. These people are not words or numbers on paper, they are living and breathing and often under tin roofs in makeshift houses behind damn malls where no one sees them.

There was so much I didn't see. I didn't see between streets and cars and fences and cages. Between the windows and the beggars, between two black Oreo cookies, between the gaps of a maid's toothy grin.

There was so much I didn't see. I didn't see beyond streets and cars and fences and cages. Beyond the distinction between beggars and maids and people, beyond places between, behind and in front a mall, a window, a fence or I.

There was the act of truly seeing with intent and purpose: it was vision. It was the vision of a slum behind a mall and then deciding to take another look inside.



Vinthna Vemireddy. 15. Oakville, Canada.

## Eyes with A Purpose

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

Grabbing a piece of paper nearby, Esperanza quickly scribbled, "I saw a log of wood today and thought it was a scorpion. I think they're going to fire me." Sticking the paper on their grimy and outdated fridge, she stormed outside with tearful eyes. Almost instinctively, her feet carried her towards her safe haven, the seashore. Sitting in the coarse and cold sand, the girl attempted to find peace. Palm trees swayed elegantly in the balmy wind, while the sea stirred quietly, emulating a fresh and earthy scent. Inhaling deeply, she felt as if the aroma had soothed her nerves. But perhaps, the most stunning quality of the beach is the way it mirrors the shimmering stars of the night sky on its surface. Tonight however, the stars were just dull, lifeless dots in the dark atmosphere, or at least that's how they appeared in Esperanza's eyes. Tucking her chocolate brown hair behind her ears, the girl blinked away her tears.

"Trouble in paradise?" Asked a voice behind her.

Turning around, she saw her older brother Matteo, holding two cans of soda. He was wearing a wrinkled flannel and his blond hair was greasy from working too long in his taco shop's kitchen. As Matteo sat down, the familiar scent of spices with mixture of seaweed wafted from him. "I think I might be getting fired," Esperanza groaned.

"Not this again," he exhaled. Wind swished noisily, Matteo opened the soda can, causing it to fizz and froth.

Unfortunately, this isn't the first time Esperanza had nearly gotten fired as a lifeguard at the Honduras Roatán beach resort. With her eyesight deteriorating, she had trouble recognizing who was having difficulty in the water, or other potential dangers. Just today, she had interpreted a wooden log floating near a group of children as a venomous scorpion. Therefore, she began commanding the children to swim away from a block of lumber, and ultimately made a fool out of herself in front the tourists and her co-workers as well. However, the incident that took the cake was the time when Esperanza hauled all the tourists inside the resort and set the beach on, "shark alert," because she spotted a shark fin in the distance. Turns out, it was an aluminum wing of a small aircraft from nearby.

"I don't know what to do if I lose this job. There are no other available jobs in Roatán," she whimpered, chucking a rock into the ocean and watching it drown.

"Get glasses," Matteo stated.

Easier said than done. Firstly, Esperanza had barely enough money to afford spectacles, as her parents' fishing business was on its last leg. Even if she did have the money, there wasn't a doctor on the island, which meant she was forced to go the inland of Honduras. But there was no guarantee of her ever returning back home safe and sound, as the cities in the Honduras have the highest crime and murder rates. Other than anything, however, she was scared. Scared that her poor vision was incurable or associated with something much worse.

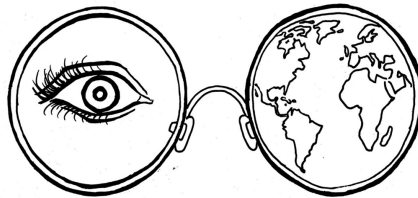
Never in a million years did she imagine that the one thing hindering her from surviving were her very own eyes. Losing her job means that her father will be unable to undergo knee surgery, her mother will run out of insulin pills, her brother won't pay back his debt, and most dreadfully, there won't be enough food on the table.

In a country like Honduras, being unemployed means immediate and inescapable poverty.

"Esperanza means hope," Matteo whispered, halting her bleak train of thoughts.

"W-what?" The latter stuttered, stunned at the suddenness of his statement.

"Having hope is the strongest weapon people like us have," he said, smiling meekly. Millions of stars cluttered overhead, twinkling powerfully against the wicked darkness of the universe. For Esperanza, it reignited her faith and made her believe that help is reachable. The sky wasn't so dull anymore.



Chelsea Zhang, 15. Richmond Hill, Canada.

## Vision: A Treasure to the Human Race

*What does vision mean to you?*

We all have a vision, whether we acknowledge it or not. We could have a vision to win a Nobel Peace Prize, or to change the world with revolutionary technology. We could have a vision to get a straight-A report card, or even just to make it to the bus stop on time. Though some people in the world no longer have their “vision”(which is actually sight), they are able to make up with it for vision in their minds. In fact, it can even be argued that vision is more important than having sight. Vision is optimism. It’s the ability to look beyond what is and see what could be. Your vision doesn’t need constraints or boundaries because the possibilities it explores are limitless. It’s more than just seeing with your eyes about your reality; it’s also about being able to see possibilities in your mind. With vision, you can let your imagination soar to new heights, and you can use that motivation to achieve things that other people can’t even dream about. All the people who change the world were able to do so because they had a vision for what they wanted to bring into the world. Thomas Edison saw a world that used electricity instead of the imperfect gas lamps, and that’s exactly what he created. Alexander Graham Bell believed in the potential of telephones, and he used his vision to bring that dream to life. Being able to envision a future, and bring it into reality is how the human race has advanced for thousands of years. Without it, we wouldn’t be able to live in the society that we do, because the inventions that make our lives more comfortable would never have been conceived. Our vision keeps us moving to other possibilities, and ensures that our progress is not stagnant. Without vision, we would be stuck in an endless spiral as we attempt to solve our problems with no advancement. Vision is a treasure that we often take for granted. Without our vision to guide and motivate us, we would never be able to turn on the light to spark excitement. We would have no idea how beautiful the world is outside of the darkness. We would be stuck in our own version of the world, with no idea of what could be. Through the visions that we develop, we are able to progress to new heights and explore infinite possibilities. Vision lets us see beyond what our eyes can give us, and therein lies its irreplaceability to the human race.

Emma Bishop. 18. Salt Spring, Canada.

Traces of Us

She paused,  
Looked up at the sky  
And asked if I saw the ebb and flow of the  
sea.  
She said the sky was a reflection of the  
ocean's waves,  
The clouds were the foam,  
the bubbles that formed after each crash,  
And the birds were the fish,  
Gliding through a different world.

I saw it  
But the next day,  
It was gone  
Like the traces of her footprints on the  
sand,  
Washed away by the current,  
Just like the wind blows clouds across the  
sky.

At night,  
Stars illuminate the sky.  
They are ghosts  
Of a life long ago lost.  
The dead can shine on us.  
They speak to us,  
And make us ponder our place  
In this universe.

*"For my part I know nothing  
with any certainty but the sight  
of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

These stars let us dream  
Of a world without us.  
What will remain  
When death prevails?  
Will we die  
A supernova  
With the power to bring someone light  
On a hopeless night?

When I look at the sky  
I feel what I saw in her eyes,  
Vulnerability,  
Emotion,  
All that it means to be human.

Even when we're gone,  
We'll be found in the way someone talks,  
How they make their tea,  
In the pages of their diary,  
Or the tears against their pillow.  
Someway, somehow,  
We all leave traces behind

Nameera Azim. 17. Toronto, Canada.

Then, Now, Later

*"For my part I know nothing  
with any certainty but the sight  
of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

13 years ago.

She slouched in the backseat of the car,  
on the way back from the airport.  
Her new Minnie mouse stuffed toy  
clutched between her timid fingers.

Minute.

Unbiased.

She looked outside,  
and comparisons between Dhaka and London sprouted in her mind.

A four-year-old simply observing her reality.

The clean, smooth streets swapped with uneven, dirty ones,  
garbage was strewn all over,  
fumes from car engines swirling up.

What stuck out, however, were the people.

The past few days she saw people who  
had blessings resting over their heads.

Were they aware of them?

Of the home they had to return to?

Fresh gushing water?

Clean air?

No fear of constant domestic financial crisis?

Or of sexual assault at every turn?

Or of the fabric cocooning their bodies?

She saw the lacking,

stark clear,

against her window pane,

as three young children,

dirty, malnutrition version of her reflection,

begging her mother for a bare 10 taka to quench their thirst and tame their hunger.

Nameera Azim. 17. Toronto, Canada.

Then, Now, Later

10 years ago.

The little girl was next to immune to the shortages of her society,  
maneuvering expertly through the muddy, congested traffic  
and ignoring the people when she was in a rush.

Unfortunately, it had become her seco-first nature,  
much like the rest of the social circle she comes from.

Their perspective makes the country seem perfect;  
a helping hand to lend,  
but they're busy drowning to keep up the facade.  
Off they moved to India.

Her vision tumbles over people from various cultures;  
growing, learning,  
stumbling,  
falling  
together

as one  
as humans do,  
regardless of what they call their mother,  
or what they have for dinner.  
and so she is introduced  
to a glimmer,  
a flicker,  
of hope,  
a realization,  
that if people throw the rope,  
drop the ladder,  
and pull each other up,  
we might all have green grass on all sides.

7 years ago.

Bangladesh, too distracted dealing with chaos for a proper welcome back.

Was it always this humid?

This headache triggering?

This suffocating?

This helpless during floods?

So like all other members of the youth club  
she craved to flee to another country  
on a "yellow brick road"

whisk away to another country without continuous 20 pounds weighing them down  
until she saw the scroll bar on CNN.

Nameera Azim. 17. Toronto, Canada.

Then, Now, Later

9 months ago.  
Cramming for the fore coming assessments,  
the usual scenario of a 16-year-old.  
And then her world tipped,  
as she had the opportunity to leave all she  
knew for the better.  
A better tomorrow.  
To the promised land.  
Toronto.  
Ontario.  
Canada.  
12, 434 km away.

The day arrived.  
The plane rushed down to take off.  
She knew why she had to.  
They knew why they had to let her go.  
However, the traffic she swore at rode  
through her veins.  
The earnest begging was her mother  
tongue.  
So her heart ripped in two.  
And, though the new land promised her a  
future,  
she promised her land to come back and  
make a difference,  
locally,  
and then globally.

Currently, as the sunset reflects off of the  
cars on the 401,  
she wonders.  
What if the cumulative knowledge  
gathered by these "privileged"  
could put those who are not to a peaceful,  
comfortable slumber?  
A penny here.  
A sweater there.  
Engineering resulting in the widespread  
supply of fresh water.  
Nursing locking away cholera for good.

All this time,  
through the years,  
and the distance,  
across countries,  
and the altitudes,  
humanity always has been an untamable  
species.  
It reached America.  
It reached the moon.



Victoria Meng, 16. Richmond Hill, Canada.

the sight of stars

i know nothing  
with certainty—  
but the sight of stars  
makes me dream.

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty  
but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

i know  
the sound of stars  
in his voice when he sings to me :  
washing words over my ears like nighttime showers  
notes that thrum with the pulse of my heart  
with the pulse of the lights in the night sky.

i know  
the touch of stars  
in his fingertips on my skin :  
my red cold cheeks that glow like melted embers  
fingerprints of warmth on stabbing winter nights  
fireside comforts, heat in the cold night.

i know, for my part  
the sound of stars  
the touch of stars  
yet i know with no certainty  
the sight of stars i see not.

i only dream  
of stargazing  
by the fireside  
to the sound of lullabies—

of seeing my eyes in his  
when he looks into mine  
when he sings me his songs  
and lets me hold his hands in mine;

wish on a shooting star  
wonder where you are  
when I am made to dream  
of the stars i cannot see.

Lee Sunglong. 17. China.

*"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."*

*– Helen Keller*

I'd seen the young man for several days at that corner, in our town.

At first I couldn't see his face, for he was wearing a cap, but I thought he was about 20 years old. He was wearing a brown jacket, jeans, and a pair of black leather shoes, with a couple of patches on it. He seems to be nice.

A few days later, I could tell he's an artist, for he, everyday, took his stuff out of his big suitcase: a drawing board, painting brush, canvas, paints, and so on. He painted portraits for people.

Eventually I determined to ask for a portrait of myself, and I saw him painting proficiently. Soon enough, a picture was completed, with a sign full of satisfactory behind it.

"How much?" I checked my wallet, try to find some bills.

"20, sir." He raised his head, then I saw his face, mild, with a little depression.

"Here." I handed it to him. "You paint portraits for a living?" I studied the picture. It was nice, except for...

"Yeah." He answered, with a proud tone.

"But there're not so many people asking for a portrait."

"Yeah." He now sounded dispirited. "And..." He wanted to say something, but hesitated.

I can tell what he wanted to say, I thought. His money probably had almost run out.

I wanted to help him, so I said, "You know, there's something in your work that you need to polish up. I'm...uh, sort of an artist myself." I added.

"Really? Can you teach me?" He was surprised.

"I'm afraid I'm just an amateur, but I think I could be of help. Come with me."

I led him to the path to the top of the mountain in our town. It wasn't easy, but we managed it at last.

He yelled, "I haven't seen such scenery for years!"

I knew. When I'm lost, I'd climb to the top, enjoy the view down there. I could take a deep breath and make myself out of the chaos in my mind. There's nothing but greatness you can see here. The wind, the trees, some times flies an eagle. I could sit here a whole day, appreciating sunrise, to sunset.

"Now you know your compositions have some flaws, right?" I smiled.

"Yeah! I've drawn my attention to portraits for a long time. It's time to try something new, I guess."

I nodded. "Most people have sight, but if they don't have vision, they can never make progress, and that's what is worse than being blind."

"Look, I can offer you expenses for traveling, if you want. But improving yourself is the best way to success, which isn't attained by focusing on things at your hand, but requires eyes on further things, got it?"

"I can't thank you enough."

He left our town in the morning. Before his departure, we climbed the mountain to watch the sunrise.

One day I saw a neighbor of mine wandering around the corner, where the young artist stayed. "He has left," I said.

"His pictures are not bad. Will he come back?"

"Well, who knows?" I smiled, reading a page of newspaper, on which there was a photo of a famous artist,

And he looked quite familiar.

Shi Yuan. 17. China.

*What does vision mean to you?*

As we all know, when and where we stayed we should attach enough attention to our eyesight. Not only because eyes are the window of our heart, but also because eyes can bring us many beautiful sightseeing, let us see the best love and view each important period of our lives.

With vision, we can enjoy the colorful wind, swim in the literature ocean and see many things that the blind person can not feel. Providing that we lost our vision one day in the future, we would live in a world that full of black, which may take us into desperation.

As to me, I hold the view that we are so lucky that we can enjoy the colorful world. But that we can keep a positive, kind and generous mind to our life, no matter what condition we stayed, we can live the best of our lives.



Swatilekha Roy. 18. Asansol, India.

Bright Denizens

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

"The night sky is a woven masterpiece", *Hooyo* used to tell me. "The most gorgeous tapestry I have ever seen."

"Can't you make one like it, *Hooyo*?" I had asked eagerly. "Like the one in the hall? We could have one on the ceiling!"

"That's no easy task, *Riyoona*!" She used to smile and poke at the mole below her lip. "Allah is an expert weaver."

"Just like you are!" I insisted. "*Aabbahay* would love to have a night sky in the house. So, he won't go to sleep outside every night."

The sudden transition in her eyes had been strange. She didn't reply for some time, the silence broken only by the clatter of her colliding nail tips, as they drew blood from the inflamed mole. "I don't think my night sky can please your *Aabbahay* enough."

"Why?" I had asked. "He praised the red flower on that tapestry all the time."

"That was before he found the one with the blue flower. Blue is his favorite now."

"But the sky is also blue, *Hooyo*!"

Sitting on coarse alien sand, I missed *Hooyo* more than ever. The cold sea breeze impregnated my soft cotton dress and made me shiver. My tongue was parched with salt water we had had to drink to quench our thirst. Near me, a girl was crying. Dark rivulets of tears and smudged kohl trailed down her rosy cheeks covered by the bridal scarf she had fled in.

Our people were still being rowed onshore, torches from the lighthouse glaring at their anxious eyes. Men and women in night gowns, mothers clutching children in armpits, some dragging along empty bags, some injured family members, some just the Koran they had been reciting before the shots showered. Mothers were hushing unfed kids.

"Alone too?" I heard someone speak, and nodded when a plump lady in her forties sat beside me. "What's your name, young girl?"

"*Riyoona, Aayadaa*." I replied courteously.

"Beautiful name", she smiled. "Where are your parents, dear?"

"My *Hooyo* died last year, *Aayaadaa*", I told her.

"Your *Aabbahay*?"

“He left us.”

“Oh”, she said, as both of us went silent.

“Don’t you have anybody, then? Who takes care of you?” she asked kindly.

“Allah does! I had friends and classmates, *Aayaadaa*, but none of them were in my ship”, I replied. “I would love to have Mia with me.”

“Who’s Mia? Is she Somalian?”

“She was my best friend. Her Somalian father died in the front. Her American mother raised her”, I said, thinking about Mia’s blond hair and embroidered scarf.

I heard some tall men talking loudly amongst themselves in native tongue. One of them was chuckling, and there was something lewd about the way he was pointing at the bride near us. She hurriedly pulled down her hijab. A Kenyan fisherman hooted, another started singing in broken English. A couple of *burqa-clad* women took her inside a refugee tent.

“Poor girl”, the lady beside me said. “I wonder if she’ll ever get married now.”

“Why, *Aayaadaa*?” I asked.

“Fleeing from your marriage is bad omen.”

“But they would have shot her!”

“Better than running.”

“Isn’t that unfair, *Aayaadaa*?”

“The world is unfair, Riyoona.”

I felt pity for the young girl surrounded by her resentful elders. A small kid in front of us was throwing a tantrum. A beautiful woman in a blue *kameez* carried him towards a tent, where her husband was sitting.

I got the surprise of my life. It was *Aabbahay*!

He was patting and coaxing the boy. Instantly, the scene of my mother hanging by a noose of knitting silk plagued my mind, fresh as ever, and how *Aabbahay* had left me for this new tapestry he had woven.

He never noticed me sitting there. Or maybe, he ignored.

I kept looking at him now and then, trying to visualize him praising *Hooyo*’s artistry. This was wishful thinking, as he looked content with his new family, holding them like dear life.

“These stars make me happy”, I told *Aayaadaa*, fixing my wet eyes on the sky instead.

“They’re like lights guiding us home.”

"This is our home now."

I gasped. "Isn't this just our refuge, *Aayaadaa*? We'll go back soon, won't we?"

"I don't know."

"We won't be living here forever!"

She sighed.

"I know I wouldn't", I whispered. "We haven't even finished our term."

"I hope you're right."

This time, the silence stifled us like a heavy blanket.

"Tell me about your dreams, Riyoona", *Aayaadaa* said, to break the silence. I told her that I wanted to become an artist. 'Like *Hooyo*', I thought.

"What are your dreams, *Aayaadaa*?" I asked her.

"Don't you think I'm a bit too old to dream?" She laughed softly.

"What has age got to do with it, *Aayaadaa*?" I asked.

Hesitantly, she opened the last button of her blouse. I was confused about what she was doing, when she pointed at a mole above her belly. "See that?" she asked. I nodded. She hastily buttoned it up again, and said, "That's supposed to be an omen of fertility."

"When young, I dreamed about having lots of children; but my womb betrayed me", she continued.

I didn't know what to say.

"That's how unfair the world is", she said. "It seldom lets you realize your vision, Riyoona."

From a corner of my eyes, I caught *Aabbahay* steal a glance at me.

The natives started distributing rye and fresh water to the refugees. "The food trucks won't be coming for the next two days", someone announced.

"I hope Allah makes an exception for your dream", *Aayaadaa* said later. I nodded and pulled down my hijab, when the natives came towards us.

Through the veil, my sight was blurred but the vision was clear: to go home and finish school. Bright stars studding the inky tapestry of the night shone brighter than the guilty tears in *Aabbahay*'s eyes.



Stelle de Rocio de Souza. 18. Brazil.

## Winter Vision

*"For my part I know nothing with any certainty  
but the sight of stars makes me dream."*

*-Vincent Van Gogh*

The window is open  
I don't feel and see nothing, emptiness awaits me  
The wind doesn't find me  
The rain is not lurking

The vision I have is the vacuum.  
Being exists and not being doesn't exist Where are the clouds, the  
men and the fairies?  
Do not exist.

Toxic smoke, fire lamps and a whirlwind of heartbreak Where is  
the love, the women and the heat?  
Alpha, omega and the final  
I want to see the flowers blooming in my window again.

My eyes are green, but I can't see colors anywhere.  
People on the ground, screams and despair  
I want to find the light, the peace and the splendor  
In the grass, in the moonlight or in a child

The vision that saves me is the dream of yesteryear.



*What does vision mean to you?*

"What You mean the sight?" I'll be Frank with You limit and try to answer the question most deployed. This issue directly affects my life, my essence, because I am the same person who, unfortunately, cannot completely, in all colors, to see the beauty of our world, but fortunately, I can still see, albeit not perfectly. Not for us to choose where we are born, what color our skin, eyes. It is not for us to choose what will parents: with internal or external flaws, or not at all. This is all the laws of nature, or as many say "fate". However, It doesn't matter. We came into this world and each with its shortcomings. And now I will tell about the main thing my fault. It so happened that I was born in Finland. While my mother was recovering after giving birth, I was diagnosed with leukemia. It's been passed down my father's line: all women sooner or later died of blood cancer, however I ... with stage 4 managed to survive. Everything seems to be fine, the baby was cured, but do not forget about the consequences. I had a retarded development, I could neither walk nor speak, neither read nor write. For a long time I did not understand. My health was undermined so that it was enough for me to technote, I immediately got sick. But most of all hurt my eyes. Eyes - the only thing I struggle with to this day. I have mixed sigmatism, keratoconus, problems with mucous membrane of the eye. I recently checked left eye barely sees the largest letter on the table, and only sees the right half. I can say I see with one eye. What do you think will happen to the chair if one of the legs completely broken diagonal and the second diagonal in a constant excessive load, with one leg stronger than the other 5 times. Over time, this leg will be as weak as the other. This means that at all, and will soon break and second diagonal legs, and the chair eventually break. That's the same thing sooner or later might happen to my eyes. Once I decided to try to stay "blind", went the whole day with my eyes closed, well the whole day, 4 hours, no more. I opened my eyes in that moment, when he realized that he stumbled on the steps. At this point I was flying will cobrem SEEA down the stairs. How long then healed my wounds. But those physical wounds - they're not terrible, but it is unpleasant, but after a while the pain goes away, the wound disappears.

But vision is not so - if it is ruined, you will not be able to recover fully, you can only support him in that condition through a variety of drops, tablets, vitamins. Yes there is a way to improve vision with a laser, but not everyone has the funds for such an operation. In addition, there are various other operations to improve eyesight, say there is money for them, but there is no permission of the doctor because any surgery is a big risk. I've already gone through one operation, and any of the following may nepolitano to affect my health. And in the end I can make myself worse. And that's how it's a shame that now in the 21st century, in the age of technology, gadgets, Internet, my peers, children are increasingly stuck in these innovations. They do not realize that spending so much time on the Internet, in the same instagram or YouTube or any other social network, they ruin their eyesight. Their one and only vision. They spoil their vision on some social network instead of having to go outside to look at the unusual beauty of their city, to go once again to the Museum and marvel at the real art. Doesn't the world beautiful when Golden autumn comes? When you are holding maple leaf half yellow, half green and half red? When the wind blows, leaves fly in the wind? But what about winter? Snowy winter? When you see the flakes falling outside the window? When the snowflake freezes on your window, and you can consider her inimitable figure? And as each day rises and sets the sun? And this is only a small part of what it is possible to marvel. And wonder that is possible only when you have something, when healthy our eyes are. But if you do not understand, then let other people, people who want, but can't look at this world. Give them your eyes, they will certainly use them better than you. Appreciate what you have and take care of your eyes. Remember, they are unique.

Judges

*After receiving over 300 outstanding submissions from 40 countries for our first annual contest “In Focus,” the World in Focus judges have spent countless hours poring over the pieces - all of which displayed creativity, originality and astounding maturity.*

*With that being said, the winning pieces were carefully evaluated over three rounds of judging, based on a criteria of their relevance to the prompt, their creativity and the effort placed into the submissions.*

*Because of the high caliber of submissions, our judges often had to make extremely difficult decisions and for that, we would like to thank them immensely for all of their time and effort.*

*We would also like to congratulate everybody published in this anthology! You should be extremely proud of your achievements and we hope that you continue to showcase your talent to the world - it truly deserves to be recognized.*

*- World in Focus Team*

**MICHAEL SNOW** was born in Toronto in 1928. His internationally active practice includes work in sculpture, painting, photography, holography, installation, bookworks, video, film, music and has completed several public commissions such as Flight Stop (in the Eaton Centre) and The Audience (on the Rogers Centre).



Snow's work is in many collections including Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), Musée des Beaux-Arts (Montréal), National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Vancouver Art Gallery, Museum of Modern Art (New York), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo), Centre Georges-Pompidou (Paris), Ludwig Museum (Cologne & Vienna), Tate (London), Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

He has received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship (1972) the Order of Canada (Officer, 1982; Companion, 2007), and the first Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts (2000) for cinema. Snow was made a Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et des lettres, France (1995), in 2004 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne. In 2011, he was awarded the Gershon Iskowitz Prize.

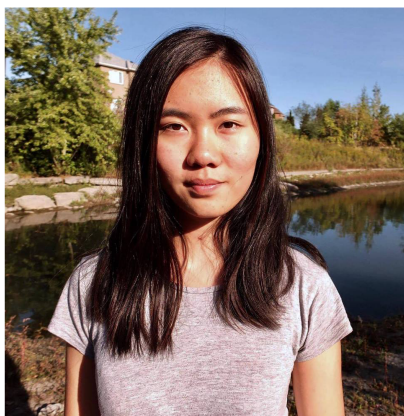
Some recent solo exhibitions include: Sequences at La Virreina, Barcelona (2015), Michael Snow Photo-Centric at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (2014), The Legacy of Wavelength at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013), Solo Snow at Galerie de l'UQAM, Montréal (2013), In The Way at the Jack Shainman Gallery, New York (2012), Recent Works at Secession, Vienna (2012), Objects of Vision at the Art Gallery of Ontario (2012).

**MAYA KULENOVIC** is an internationally renowned Canadian artist and painter. She studied art at London University of the Arts, Ontario College of Art and Design University, and Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul. While based in Toronto, her works have been exhibited in over 20 international solo exhibitions in Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, USA, Ireland, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey. Her works center on capture the concept of ambiguity and showcasing psychological states. In addition to art, Maya's latest book, *Fugue*, including an essay by Mark Kingwell was published in Toronto, Canada in 2017.



**MICHELLE MONTENEGRO** attained her Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education from the University of Toronto. Having worked in an assortment of teaching opportunities and with a mosaic of learners, Michelle views education as the avenue to transforming the way students see the world and themselves. Her philosophy centralizes on empowering young people to see themselves as lifelong and critical learners and to build equitable, safe, and inclusive spaces for rich and memorable learning to occur.

Michelle is currently the Project Coordinator and Camp Director for ALPHA Education, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness for the history of WWII in Asia in the hopes of furthering the values of justice, peace, and reconciliation. She facilitates student teacher workshops and helps to implement educational and community projects to teach about social justice issues, helping students develop 21st-century skills for global leadership and become responsible, informed citizens.



**ENSHIA LI** is a student hailing from Ontario, Canada. Her writing has been recognized by the Adroit Prizes for Prose, the Claremont Review, the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and the National Council of Teachers of English, among others.

In her free time, she enjoys music, a calm jog, and a strong cup of coffee.



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