

## 2023 Winning Youth Poems

### Stomping Song

Her cheekbones are a gaudy altar for glittering tears  
tears like trophies, tears that drip waxy sadness on plastic flowers  
flowers that flood the cracks of sidewalks  
sidewalks imprinted with the shiny fragile corpses of snakes.  
Snakes that she trampled when stomping the rhythm of her name  
stomping on their hard diamond backs.  
She tears out their jewel eyes, holds them up to the light, considers how they will look  
when she strings them along her crown.  
Standing on two feet, she walks steadily, chokes her own doubt  
summons the wingless birds to her left, the sickly sunlight to her right.  
She will learn to create beyond her shallow sadness.  
She will climb the brittle crystal stairs  
until the snakes and monsters and fool's gold who strain their bodies to reach her  
cannot touch.

- Zeina Hijazi, Age 17

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### Aging

When I was just but four years old,  
Ages creeping on to me like  
vines to a forgotten tree, like  
Oil setting alight water,  
The beauty of it profound yet so painful,  
snakes came to me in my sleep,  
crawling up my crib and next to my ear, my heartbeat aligning perfectly with theirs,  
My hand subconsciously shaking my gold and green maracas, gently, slowly,  
From which music never ceased and stories flew  
like rapid beats, quickly, spontaneously.  
They told me that they would show me the world, their golden scales on fire--  
and with my flowers in one hand, and my maraca in the other, they claimed to know the secrets  
of the world, which would belong to me in due time, like flowers  
passionately embracing the humid air on a spring day when all life expresses its chemistry, and  
metamorphosizes into something so pale in complexion, but gritty to the touch.

- Aarav Gedala, Age 15

### **One Canvas, One Life**

Mine, not yours.  
My life on one canvas,  
a space where I can be my true self,  
adding and adding more of my story.  
No regrets.

A part of my life still left over,  
my embarrassed self slowly blows away.  
No ideas from you,  
only me,  
more and more  
to see,  
being brought back-  
Staring and staring,  
no words.

- *Annie Schwab, Age 10*

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### **HOPE WILL ALWAYS BE THERE**

It's okay to feel like an outsider.  
Looking into the mirror of life.  
Feeling like a snake when everyone around me is a bird.  
Trying to find the courage in the black void of memories.  
Finding the way home in an endless village, searching forever.  
When I walk, flowers die waiting to be reborn once again.  
Watching me grow and grow into a whole new me, yet my personality stays the same.

My childhood made me different than others  
because when bad things slither in,  
the flower of hope will always bloom.

- *Allegra Brahin, Age 10*

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### **SNAKES AND STARS**

Rattles and hisses,  
Curves and twitches.  
Down I see harmonious snakes.  
Up I see twinkling cuts in the shadows.  
My side mirrors reflect my forever home.  
The only light is my own light-  
The light that comes from within.

- *Sasha Tabatabai, Age 10*