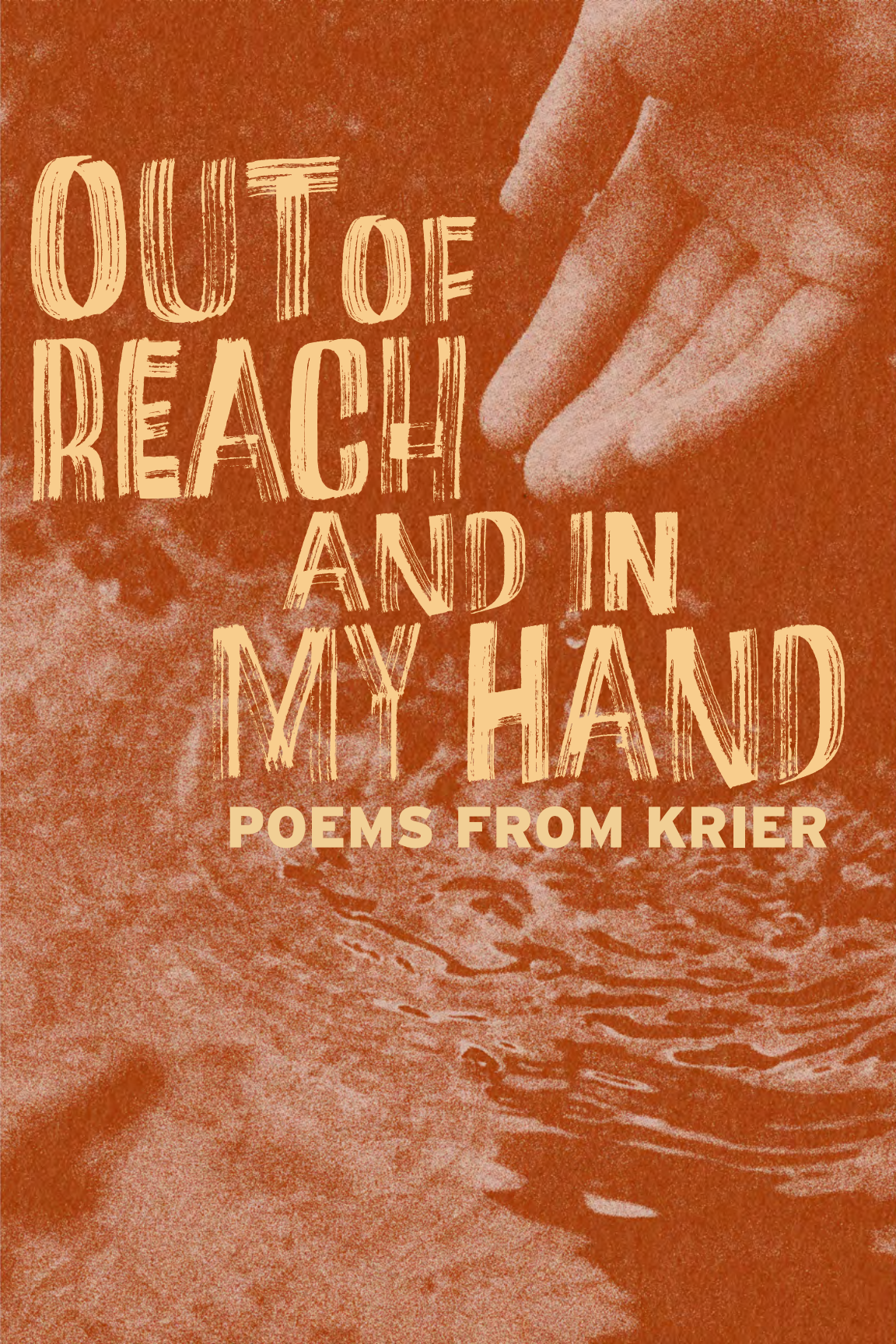


The background of the entire image is a monochromatic, high-contrast photograph. It shows a hand in the upper right corner, with fingers slightly curled, reaching down towards a body of water. The water's surface is covered in concentric ripples, suggesting a recent touch or drop. The overall color palette is a range of browns, from deep, dark chocolate and near-black tones to lighter, warm tan and beige hues, creating a textured and atmospheric effect.

OUT OF
REACH

AND IN
MY HAND

POEMS FROM KRIER

OUT OF REACH AND IN MY HAND

OUT OF REACH AND IN MY HAND

2025–2026 Krier Anthology

This project was generously funded by
the Bexar County Juvenile Probation Department.

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Student work has been edited as lightly as possible in order to
honor their original voices.

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FOREWORD

This anthology is a collection of poems, letters, and short stories by youth who have been impacted by the justice system in some way. Their writings are both creative expressions and tiny windows into their worlds. These young writers travel roads and oceans, real and figurative, to reflect on love, the self, and their dreams.

The reader will find a range of emotions in these writings, from love and humor to remorse and hopefulness. The voices that emerge in the following pages come from individuals who refuse to be ignored, refuse to stop loving despite the pain they feel, refuse to stop dreaming beyond the four walls they see daily, and ultimately, lay claim to who they are and will be in this world. While the short stories by students at the Juvenile Justice Academy may be less personal, they explore empathy and reshape our understanding of monsters, inviting us to see them as often misunderstood.

This year's writings came out of two workshops: one taught by Erica DeLaRosa at the Cyndi Taylor Krier Juvenile Correctional Treatment Center and the other by Daniel Ramirez at the Juvenile Justice Academy. Erica taught "Your Story Lies Within the Lines," a poetry workshop that focused on students and their relationship to the world. Daniel returned to fiction, which hadn't been offered in our Bexar County workshops since the early days of the partnership. He led two smaller workshops, one in the fall, "Outcasts & Wits: Trickster Tales," and one in the spring, "Mythical Creatures of Global Folklore." These fiction writing workshops allowed students to explore their relationship to the mythological and how they saw themselves as part of that storymaking tradition.

None of these workshops and the writings they produce would be possible without the long-time partnership between Gemini Ink and Bexar County. I'd like to send a big thank you to everyone at Bexar County who supports the workshops, especially Jessica Maupin, Jennifer Fowler, Joslyn Rice, and Ashley Martinez. Your belief in the power of the writing arts impacts these young authors' lives in so many positive ways. Thank you to Erica DeLaRosa and Daniel Ramirez. You create spaces where magic happens, where young writers can find community and safety, and where young writers learn to use their unique and creative voices. Thank you to my colleagues at Gemini Ink, especially the Director of Programs, Florinda Flores-Brown; the Publications Director, Anisa Onofre; and the Executive Director, Alexandra van de Kamp. A big shout-out to Christen Barrón, who served as the very patient manuscript editor for this anthology. Additionally, this beautiful book was designed by the talented Sadie Lynn Phelps.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to all the writers who have shared their work and their beautiful voices with us. This book is for you. I hope you all know what one of your fellow writers, Nick, knows: your "voice is heaven itself."

Catherine Burianek
Partner Classes Program Coordinator
Gemini Ink
June 24th, 2026

PART I

**Cyndi Taylor Krier Juvenile
Correctional Treatment Center**

JEREMIAH G.

Letter to Daughter

This is a letter to my daughter...

I just want to say, baby, I'm so sorry for not bein' there for you.
Just know, I ain't mean to do this on purpose.

Just know, I try to be a better man for you
Just know, I ain't gon' let you down
Even tho I failed a couple of times...it doesn't mean I won't
get up and keep trying.

It hurts me that I can't see you
I know I won't be there for your birthday
Just know, I ain't that far away
I'm just a letter away.

People try to put me down
Say I won't let them get to me, I got a lotta things on my mind
I wake up in the morning, missing you by my side.

Say, even on these rainy days
I just wish I could be next to you
I don't wanna leave your side again
Even tho I am stuck in these 4 walls
Don't mean I won't be home soon.

It takes time to be a better man
'Cause I know I won't get better in a day
I am gon' keep tryin' cause I won't give up.

I still got trust in myself and
I won't ever discourage myself
'Cause I got you to go home to
I know I messed up a couple of times,
but it doesn't make me a bad person
Just bad mistakes.

Just Me

Just me in my room
Just missin' you
Just know I messed up
Just know I'll change
Just know I did wrong
Just know I'll do right
Just know I love
Just know I don't hate
Just know I have light
Just not darkness.

A Simple Prayer

On this rainy day
I tend to pray
For nothing bad to come
But for good to come
As another day comes by
I say, "thank you" to the Lord
Then pray for another day
My cup overflows
So he leads my soul
I know I messed up
But he saves
He wore a crown of thorns
But cleansed my soul

Devilishly Desires

I see the rain
A tear falls down
I didn't think before I acted
Look where I ended
As the days go by in this cell
I know I failed
But I don't like this trail

I'm From

I'm from San Antonio
Where my mom's at
I try to do good for myself
But I think I failed

I know it's not the time to give up
I can keep going
Time and time again
I am back
Con-tin-uously

Reminiscing 'bout them times
I heard my mom crying
I keep trying
...I keep lying

Some think
You need to carry a weapon
Where youngins be steppin'
Where you get shot at for reppin'

I'm from the West
Where people get laid to rest
Where you can get tested
If you messed with
But I know there's
Someone up above
Keepin' an eye out; I'm protected
Another day is another blessin'
Another chance to maintain
And correct the mistakes of my past
'Cause I'll keep improving
Proving I deserve another chance
I'm from the West
I'm from San Antonio

Cry

I cry in my room
'Cause I know I tried
But I lied
I was down for the ride
But in my cell, I cried

I cry in my room
Just to let it all out
I try a different route
As I wimp and pout
I think it's my fault

I cry in my room,
Just thinking of you
Wishing you
Were here
While I sip on a cold brew
When I say cheers
All I have are tears

I cry in my room
My ears hear the cries
All I think is *why*
All I know is...
Everyday *try*

Pain

As I walk through the rain
I wish I could numb all this pain
Something I say...*dang*
But when I hear *BANG*
All I say is (sighs) *man*

As I walk through the rain
I hear a ring
I feel a ting
(the hairs on the back of my neck rise)
I think
Who can it be
I pick up the phone
They have a deep tone
...(sighs)
Now, I wake up all alone

As I walk through the rain...
I wish...
I could numb all this pain

Drippin'

My voice is like a lion ROARing.

My voice is like a whole pack of people—solid and many.

My voice is like a crowded bus during peak traffic hours in NYC.

My voice is like the Tasmanian Devil all at once; it sputters.

My voice is like a blanket...

It can be warm and comforting.

It can be too constricted and balled up.

Thin and invisible.

A necessity to get through the world.

Sheeeshhh

I remember Mommy being around a lot.

I remember my first kiss (had me sprung).

I remember my mom trying to teach me how to dance.

I remember watching SpongeBob while playing
with my imaginary friends.

I remember going to Kaldhari and looking at
all the beauty around me.

I remember eating Chuck E. Cheese pizza, winning big,
and being called the best player.

I remember my middle school ex.

I remember eating Red Vines and almost getting sick
from how delicious they were.

I remember my first fight.

I remember using my fists and feet to cause pain at the park.

I remember my first time...
drinking... and my first time crashing.

I remember playing split-screen zombies with my brother.

I remember being a boy, very young, and younger.

I remember joy, love, and laughter.

Sheeeeshhhh...I remember.

Taylor Swift

My voice sounds like Taylor Swift

Like an angel singing

Like 2 dogs eating a cat with no fork

My voice sounds like 5 kids at the ice cream station
at a Chinese buffet

Like donuts being done in a parking lot

Like a euphoric dream in Technicolor

My voice is heaven itself

A Promise Made

I promise I won't mess up again when I leave

I promise to get a job, Mom

I promise my homeboy to make time to hang out, *in the free*

I promise to continue chasing my dreams
and hope to catch them by my 20s

I promise to my 40-year-old self to stack the pennies

I promise by the time I'm 60, to be still alive.

I promise I won't mess up when I leave

Promises are easily made but hard to keep

I promise to rap to share my story

I promise to be still living

Older & recollecting

at 63.

Voices

Melodies playing
I try to cope, but fail to
songs stuck in my head
When will she come back to me?
Voices surrounding my room

Mem or i es fa ding
I miss her to death
Left me stranded and so lost
em ies fa in

Krier...

Time is going too slow
Like a snail racing a dog

Tttt

tttttk

Tick

Tick

Ticking

Tok

Was It Ever Real?

I thought I knew it all
What it was like
To be loved by a thug.
You had me thinking...
Was our love ever real?
Or was it just for the thrill?
See, all I wanted was for you to love me.
All I needed was for you to trust.
I miss you holding me late at night,
You made me feel safe without the light.
But then I remember all the late nights I stayed up
Waiting for you to come home
Praying that when I heard bullets flood the sky
I wouldn't find *you*
Six feet
underneath
me.

True Lover

I'm starting to have dreams about you.
Now I'm exhausted.
I remember how we were in a hard place,
all the mistakes you made, Mom.
Told me our relationship was to break.
I didn't listen every time we disagreed.
You would hang up the phone,
and I would wonder... *how much more I could take.*
I remember the night
you walked out;
that's when I lost it.
I waited days for you to come back.
Tears rolled down my face,
then I realized you lacked
expectations and values.
Now,
I can't help but wonder...
if I will ever find my true lover.

She Is Seen

I've seen a young girl
Who was just like me
Letting her thoughts
C r e e p i n late at night.
Struggling to find her worth
She feels like the only one on earth
Who is too deep into the dark shadows
Thinking no one can see her
She is going through hell
Putting on a fake smile
To hide the hurt
She's been through
Looking for a way out
Hoping she will find the light
To happiness
I will
Never
Leave her side
Until the day I die
Hoping she knows...
She is seen

Lost in the Clouds

Every time I look into *your* eyes
I feel as though
We are talking
Even if nothing is *really* said.
I see how *loving and gentle* you are
And that's what makes me drawn to you.
You make me feel
like I can have *that fairytale, dreamy love*.
I'm afraid that
I might drown without you
by my side.
You have *never* made me
doubt
That *I* can count on you
to *keep* me *calm*.
You are the air
I need to *breathe*,
to *survive*.
You are my reason
to *thrive*.
You make me feel
beautiful inside
and out.
Every time
I see your warm smile
I get so lost in the clouds.

Never Meant to Change

My chest is always tight
even when I do the right thing.
I feel like my voice has never really mattered.
My mother never listened to me.

At night
I stay up
looking at the rain

falling
down.

I wish my tears
could
go
down.

Be soaked up, to feed the ground.
Instead, I can't help but look

at
my
wrist

watching my blood
dripping
down.

No matter how hard I try to remake myself,
the drugs,

they are

always tempting me,

calling

my name.

I guess...

I was never meant to change.

Gone

I'm back to who I was.
You took too long.
The loving and caring girl you once knew is
far-----gone.
I gave and gave all my love to you,
until I was buried in my grave.
Now,
I am someone who cannot be saved.

Our Love

Our love is deep like the unending sea.
Our love is like the tidal waves; it comes back stronger and stronger.
I crave it (our love) every day.
Our love is like a sunset's reflection on the ocean; it looks beautiful.
A spell intoxicates me; you've given me a love potion.

Storms in the Distance

I offer this poem
to a *young girl*
with curls.
It is a safe bed
to hide under
from the scary, powerful *storm*.

It is like a secluded desert
where no one is there to hunt the prey.

I miss you.

You're safe within self.

It is like my brother's husky arms of strength
like *Lasso's soft fur*
smelling of strawberries
Hold onto it anytime
The clouds cast over
and the storm brews...

... in the distance.

I miss you.

You're safe within self.

The Devil's Daughter

I miss when my mom used to hold me, saying

He just has a temper.

But I knew it was deeper than that.

I saw the Devil in disguise

every time I looked into my dad's eyes.

These past few weeks

I've been looking in the mirror

and realize

it's so much clearer...

I am the Devil's Daughter.

Her Eyes Tell the Story

She tries to hide her pain
and puts a fake smile on her face
But you can see right through her eyes
The story it tells about
the demons she struggles with
Every day is a constant battle inside
her brain
She's starting to feel numb
thinking, *is she already inside her grave?*
Feeling *like there is no escape*
...she is me.

His Blue Eyes

I met somebody
And looked into his blue eyes
Now he has me hypnotized
He opens the door and
Doesn't make me cry
He calls me his *Angel*
By the way, he says
I make him feel like he can fly.

JEREMIAH M.

Promesas

I made a promise
I don't know if I can keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And when I get back to the streets
I'm gonna hop in that Jeep
And I promise I'm gonna
Be alive by 18.

I promise I'm going to stay out *in the free*
I promise my mom to be good while on probation
I promise my people (*in the free*) to call when I get out
I promise by 20 to have a job and save for a car
I promise by 40 to have my own house and a car
I promise by 60 to pay a visit to my favorite place.

JAMES P.

I Know U

*I know you sad
I know you mad
I know you hidin' alla your emotions
Throw 'em in a bag
Still hopin' that
No one gon' see it, but before you know it
They start comin' out
When sh*t go south, don't even
Realize words that's comin' out yo mouth
But it's too late by now
You said what you said
Try to take it back
It's f***in up yo' head
Now you feelin' blue
It's nothing new
I understand
because I feel it too
Maybe it's true, maybe it's not
Maybe I'm mistaken, that's just what I thought
That's just what I see, that's just what it seems
What I see in you is what I see in me
I see no "whore," I see defeat
I see myself starin' back at me
I see the pain
I see the damage
I see that people took your love for granted*

They all did the same
They took advantage
Goin' insane
& you can't f***in stand it
I want you to know
That I'll be there
Even when you hurt
And when you in despair
Got nowhere to go
I know this sh** ain't fair
But we can make the most
So don't say you don't care
Cuz you know you do
You know it's true
Thinking of me while I'm thinkin' of you
I know you sad
I know you mad
I know you hurtin'
Cuz I'm hurtin' too

Empty Promise (An Extended Haiku by Me)

It's easy to take
The things you love for granted
Until it's taken.

It's easy to make
A choice that leaves you stranded
With a lack of patience.

It's harder to do
What people expect from you
And leave them waiting.

An empty promise
Leaves you farther and farther
From ever changing.
(And yes, I still hate them)

Echo

My voice is like a dog barking; it's loud and annoying.
Like walking on eggshells in bare feet.
Like a really hot plate burning the roof of your mouth.
My voice is the thunder,
heard from a mile away; however, it depends on what I say.
It is unforgettable and never goes away.
This is my voice, and I use it every day.

The Gift

I'm giving you...*me, my everything.*
Everything that belongs to me.
I might as well just give you my heart; tear it out of my chest.
You know the rest.
And I also give you my brain
Cuz you're runnin' through my mind.
You be making me go insane!
I'll offer you anything
Anything you want...
Just hold me tight and say my name.
But you don't even have to do that,
I'll still love you the same.

Finding My Way Out

I haven't cried tears from my eyes in so long.
I'm steadily wondering where it all went wrong.
I'm not the type to complain about all my problems and pain.
They say things will get better, but I'm still the same
Where did I go wrong? (Is what my people keep asking.)
I know I messed up.
I chose the wrong route, but it's never too late
to turn my way around.
To find my way out!

IZAYAH

My Voice

My voice sounds like blaring sirens at night
Like the sound of waves crashing against the rock
My voice is loud like music at a block party
Like the crunch of a freshly fried *Caniac combo*
with extra Cane's sauce
Hold the coleslaw and extra Texas toast!
My voice is sometimes sweet
Like cherry gelato, a favorite of mine.
Like a glass of sweet tea, light ice on a hot summer day.

ANONYMOUS

Reminders

Remember that you are beautiful on the inside and the outside!

Remember that you are not alone.

Remember that change is possible.

Remember, tomorrow is another day.

Remember that life gets better.

ROCKY M.

Love

Love is like an ocean
Deep and full of life
Love is like a balloon
It will keep growing bigger
Love is like fruit on a hot summer day,
It will bring you happiness no matter what...love.

Nutrients

Fly and spread your wings.
Take a new path in your life that will bring you
Peace.
See the poison in your heart.
Don't cry in sorrow when you're left to starve.
Survive like a cactus in the desert.
When life feels its hardest, use every ounce of strength stored
in your core, and
Bring back your light to this dark world.

Pondering Why

Everyone flows, bends, and sways like grass in the wind.
People will burn each other when they try to gain victory.
People judge each other because of the skin they see.
Why can't we all be equal?
Why can't all of us win?
Why can't we live like you're the other part of me?
We all come from one father and mother, but judge one
another
...why?

Dream

Dream big until you can't dream again...dream.
Dreams are made every day, in every second, with love, hope,
and happiness in your world.
Dreams are free and don't cost a thing to create...dream.
Dreams will flow like an unending waterfall...dream
Dream.
DREAM!

Time

The rain feels like ice
I go through the day like dice
So I keep myself right
Time feels like a sling and a winding road
Time feels like a road
It can't change without a mode
So Ima just take this time and go

I Love You

My love for you is a *rose that blossoms*
The love where you feel *no worries, love.*
My love for you is a *fairytale.*
A world with love and everlasting joy.
My love is *the ocean that will never dry out or recede, love.*
My love for you is as vast as *the universe.*
I love you.

Mares

The words that will fill this page
will be like an ocean's spray.
The life of a lonely child.
A book unnamed.
Though this life is only one
but feels like a ton.
People all over the world will become one.
Dreams are made every day.
But many evil people take them away.
We fall into depression because we're filled with emotions.
One can fall, but others won't blink or bat an eye.
Why can't you see the sadness in my eyes?
I sit by the ocean and ask *why? What is the purpose of my life?*
Was it to bring happiness at this time?

Years Feel Like a Waste of Time

A punch to my chest
feels like sadness,
shock,
and...damn!
I let myself down.
I did something stupid with mistakes, and I can't recover.
I threw out something precious.
Lost in time.
I can't travel back
or rewind the lines.

My love for you
is like a shield.
It conceals and cloaks you from the dark storms
brewing
like a teapot.
The feelings that
come off you
feel like the autumn sun
tepid,
glowing,
sultry.
I'm sorry...
I think the sorrow in my heart feels like a road
with no destination.
Going carefree
no limits
like a boat
in the middle of the sea.
Crashing into waves withstanding
the evil in the ocean
like a tiger shark
that goes from fresh water to salt
with no problem
but at peace like a
sitting
Buddha.

Fave Fruit

I love peaches for too many reasons.
Whether it be for the season,
the taste or the joy.
Peaches,
Diced up (with some chamoy and limón).
Summer sweetness and memories flood my brain
to a time when you were there for me.
The juiciness, the natural sugars...
If the day begins to go sour...
another peach and oh sweet!
The weeds turn into flowers.
I love peaches!
It reminds me of the days at the beach,
gazing at the waves rolling in and the sky...
blue and clear...out of reach, and in my hand, a peach.
I love peaches for all these reasons
and sometimes I dream of you...

ROBERTO B.

El Payaso

El payaso, yes, that's me.
The one who falls in love
in a heartbeat.
The one who gives out love,
just to be someone in life.
That just can't be!
Yes, once again,
el payaso, that's me.
Someone to love and be.

Blue

Roses are red.
Violets are blue.
Sometimes all I see is the color blue.
When it rains, when it pours
in the sky.
Or deep, deep down
when I feel alone.
It doesn't matter what I do.
All I see is the color blue.

Sky Blue

Azul cielo,
como el vestido de mi abuela
Azul cielo,
como los ojos que me esperan.
Azul cielo,
como mi propia autocompasión
Azul cielo,
como el color de la vida que me espera
Azul cielo,
como esta vida de mierda.

I.II.III. and IV.

- I. Time is running out.
I hate to say it, but there's
no stopping it now.
Time is running out, and there's no way out.

- II. Two more heartbeats before I go.
I don't know what to do.
(I) Do know where I'll go.
Mama, please don't cry.
I'll be ok.
I'll be resting in a better place.

- III. She needs some love.
I wish I could help.
Looking into her eyes makes me want to shout.
Her eyes. Her blondish hair.
I like to see her smile when I stare.

- IV. She feels alone.
She feels depressed.
I'm sorry I'm making you feel too much stress.
I'm missing her embrace.
I'm missing her face.
I'm missing those two blue eyes,
upon which I used to gaze.

It Used to Be

It used to be *me and you*. Now,
you've got me feeling blue. Blue
like the tears I cry.
Since you left, I can't decide
to let it be
or to forget.
And see a better future...
a better me, yet.

The Promise I'm Waiting For

I hear your voice.
I hear you say,
"Come on, child.
It will be okay.
Just cry it out.
There is no shame.
Welcome to my kingdom,
where there is no pain."

The Day I Go

The day I go,
I don't know.
I just hope the day I go along, I can be back home.
It's hard to think, it could be today.
The day I go off without a trace.
I'm scared to travel alone, but I still have hope.
I could be back home.
Before the day I forge forward.

Por Tu Amor

Por tu amor
I'll go to the end of the world and back.
Por tu amor
I don't have to keep fighting or watching over my back.
Por tu amor
I don't feel depressed or sad.
I can't believe that *tu amor* has changed my life so fast.

Love's Not for Me

Love's not for me, and that's okay.
I love you, but you don't feel the same way.
I give you my love, and you throw it away.
I just hope I can find love someday.

Good Morning

Good morning!

It's a new day!

I wonder if today is going to be an okay day.

Today feels kind of *off*.

I feel better than I did yesterday.

But yesterday was yesterday.

And today's a new day.

I saw my mom cooking in the kitchen,

It reminded me of my younger days.

Then, I went to school. It was a normal day.

When I returned home,

I saw my family being so happy.

I just can't explain.

They all stared at me and said,

"Welcome home!"

(knock, knock, knock)

"Wake up for hygiene."

F***!

Just a few more days to go.

The Love When I Met You

The love I feel,
I just can't explain.
Those two blue eyes, I think of every day.
The sweet smile that makes me feel love with every passing day.
I told you, *I love you*, and you did the same.
I still remember the first kiss I gave you
on that Wednesday.
I remember that before I left,
my heart was broken, and
yours was too.
Now it's been some months, and
I sit and wait
to get released, and
see your beautiful face.

I Asked the Moon

Every night,
I talk to the moon.
I ask about you.
I ask if you are missing me, too.
She says, you're okay and that you love me too.
She also shared that you can't wait to see me shortly.
It won't be that much longer.
I'll be home as quickly as possible.
I love you so much, and
you know that it's true.

I Am From

I am from a place
Where I should have never been from.
Where the sirens are usually heard in my hood.
Where innocent people are always dying.
I'm from a place where it's different from here.
Where guns are carried, but not for show.
Where we still have respect for the old and young.
I am from that place that isn't a place
Where you wanna be,
But it's still a place I call home.
I wonder if I never did what I did,
If I weren't stuck in a situation like this,
Where I saw my brothers die one by one,
And if I'm next,
I wouldn't care.
I just hope to find
Peace in the air.

Then and Now

Once I was young.
Once, I almost died.
Once *I was free*.
Once I froze.

I wish I could be a god.
I wish I could eat a baloney sandwich
with Flamin' Hot Cheetos inside.
I wish I could make a time machine, just 'cause.
I wish I could *do anything*.
I wish to say *what I want*.
I wish my brothers were alive.

Now, I'm stuck.
Now, I'm waiting to go home.
Now, I do what's on the schedule.
Now...I wait.

I Close My Eyes

I close my eyes when I am afraid.
I hear this voice saying, "It will be okay."
I close my eyes every day.
Trying to hear the voice to erase my doubts away.
I don't feel alone.
I don't feel fear.
I'm grateful to the voice saying, "It will be alright; my
ancestors are near."

Where Are You?

Para Velen

Where are you?
I wish you were here.
Where are you?
I can't believe it's been some years.
Where are you?
I ask myself, day by day.
Where are you?
I hope you are okay.

Una carta para Tita

Tita,

Te fuiste sin decir adiós. Yo sin saber cuál fue la razón. Ahora sufro en mi habitación. Pasaron 15 años y yo ya cambié. Ahora veo el mundo como no lo quieres ver. Dejé de danzar y me puse a fumar y ahora encerrado me tienen, no más.

De 10 a 12

De 12 a 13

De 15 a 16

Todos esos años, ya los pasé.

Encerrado sin saber por qué. Parece que hasta mi vida cambió.

Si estarías aquí, te pregunto si me puedes

Ver como el niño de ayer.

Al cielo te fuiste y no sé por qué.

Ojalá que un día te pueda ver.

Si voy al infierno, solo una cosa a Dios le pido.

Vi una vez y sé dónde estás

No sé si podría pedir otra vez.

Me despido ahora.

No sé qué más decir.

Te espero en mi interior; el día en que tengo que irme.

Te quiero aquí a mi lado junto con mis pasados.

Abuela, te quiero decir una cosa: *te amo*.

GROUP POEM

Remember: A Group Poem **Inspired by Joy Harjo**

*by Amira N., Chloe G., Gabriel, Jeremiah G.,
Roberto B., and Rocky M.*

Jeremiah:

Remember to be thankful for your daily bread.
Everything that comes your way is for a reason.
They are blessings, even the ones in disguise.

Gabriel:

Remember, you're beautiful in your own way.
Beauty isn't just what's on the outside but the inside as well.

Gabriel:

Remember that change is possible and
Never impossible.

Amira:

Remember that you are not alone.
At times, it may feel that way
But just remember, we
are all loved by God the same way.

Rocky:

Remember that when people give us their hearts
We must treat them as gifts.

Rocky:
Remember that we must treat others
As we want to be treated.
I care for you, I check on you
No matter the time or day
I don't need a special occasion
It's just another day
Therefore, Poet, slay.

Chloe:
Remember that you are worth
everything in this world,
It doesn't matter what they say.
Just follow your hopes & dreams
For they,
one day
Will come true
for every one of us.

Chloe:
Remember you are seen and heard.

Jeremiah:
Remember that success takes hard work...keep going!
All good things don't come easy,
It takes dedication.

Jeremiah:
Remember, if I can grow and change
Then you can too.

Roberto:
Remember that just 'cause they've left
Doesn't mean they're gone.

Roberto:
Remember that you are a warrior like
Your ancestors.
Their blood runs through yours.

Roberto:
Remember...
If I harm you,

Rocky:
I harm myself.

Jeremiah:
If I honor you,

Gabriel:
I honor myself.

Chloe:
If I love you,

Amira:
I love myself.

Roberto:
In Lak `ech (In - LAK- Etch)
...you are the other part of me.

To Whom It May Concern

First off, I just want to say that I really, really appreciate being a part of Gemini Ink, and I really enjoyed my time creating poetry with my fellow peers and Ms. Erica. I've learned quite a bit about the topic that I probably would have never learned without being in it. I've also learned that I don't care too much for haikus, but I like anaphoras. If whoever's reading this letter doesn't know what those are, don't worry, neither did I. I had heard of haikus but never knew exactly what the structure was, and as for anaphoras, I learned that I naturally had incorporated them in the past and still do use them with my songs and raps. I just never knew it had a technical name. And this was just one of two of the many things I've learned in Gemini Ink, but I know there's just so much more out there to learn, and I truly am missing out.

The next thing I want to mention is just how mentally helpful being in the program was. I mean, it was really like a form of therapy for me, and not just the action of making poems, but getting to share and compare my work with other people. It was a crucial form of expression for me, and having that taken away felt like having my voice taken away. Another thing that Gemini Ink helped me with was staying out of trouble. I knew that if I missed two sessions, I would be terminated from the enrichment service, and just knowing that kept me from even thinking about screwing that up. I'm not saying that I'm gonna start "popping off" now that I'm not in it, but what I'm trying to say is it was an insanely positive incentive for me. I love making music and poetry, and as I said before, I love my art being heard. In my mind, there was NOTHING that was gonna tempt me to throw that away.

Sincerely,

James P.

A Letter for My Gemini Family

by Chloe G.

Dear Ms. Erica,

I want to say I'm so, so grateful for you being there for the other students and me. I look up to you; you are like my mentor. You have inspired me to become a poet and to continue to write outside of here. You remind me of an owl because of how wise and free-spirited you are. You will fly to the tallest tree to watch over us to make sure that if we mess up and feel like giving up, you will say, "Remember *who* you are, and how far you have gotten."

Dear Amira,

I want to say how proud I am of your growth. You have inspired me to never give up, no matter what stands in my way or how hard it gets. You remind me of a firework because you are so bright and full of colorful emotions, and are never afraid to show your spark.

Dear Rocky,

I want to say, I'm thankful for your positive energy, even when it can be a bit annoying at times. I know when you are around, everyone can count on you to make them laugh and be the class clown. You have inspired me to look at the positive things around me and to have a smile on my face. You remind me of the boxing movie, *Rocky*, because you are determined to get things done your way, consistently moving around.

Dear Roberto,

I want to say, "thank you" for being there for me. I remember our first day of Gemini Ink, somebody was being disrespectful to me, and you stood up for me, even though you didn't know me. Something stood out to me that day when you said your middle name was the meaning of *death*. What I observed was that you are protective of your family and friends. You remind me of my god, *The Mother of Death/La Santa Muerte*. She is protective and vengeful when her people are hurt. You are quick to protect the innocent. You fight for justice even if it's the right or wrong way. I hope you never lose the light to fight for what is right.

PART II

Juvenile Justice Academy (JJA)

Is it possible that monsters are more than just scary creatures? What if they represent those things around us that are misunderstood? In the case of creatures like Sasquatch and the Chupacabra, they represent the spirit of the land that they come from.

During our workshop at Juvenile Justice Academy, we read stories about four popular monsters of global folklore: Sasquatch, the Loch Ness Monster, the Yeti, and the Chupacabra. To better understand their stories, we learned about the cultures and landscapes they came from. In the end, we realized these creatures are not actually monsters but safekeepers of the beautiful places in which they dwell.

Read on to see what kinds of stories about these creatures the JJA writers came up with.

Daniel Ramirez
Teaching Artist
2026

DERRICK

Sasquatch

Hi, my name is Sasquatch, and I love to be in the woods. I'm a wild creature and I eat spiders and snakes. I love to eat animals all the time. I like to eat frogs and deer.

My weapon is an axe. I use it to help me eat bears, alligators, and other big things. I do not eat possums.

I do not like people who hunt me and other animals that would eat me. If something is going bad for humans, I keep humans safe. I eat the bad people. I love humans and hunt bad people.

Sasquatch Part 1

I'm Sasquatch. I helped. I cleared their snow and brought them wood and meat. I know they meant no harm because they did not bother me. If they did, I would destroy their home.

They are so nice to me. I like to help them.

On my way back, I heard purring noises. Then a strange dog-like animal called a chupacabra walked up to me. I pet the little guy. He was happy, and so was I.

The End.

The Blessed Waters

There was an old fisherman tale, for the Loch is alive.

The old fisherman pride and true is getting ready to set out on his excursion for food. As he boards his small fisherman's barge, the water rises and the waves crash. The old fisherman fears through his old white beard and murmurs, "I see it. It's true. The Loch Monster, it lives, seems so cruel."

The Loch Monster swims up and the fisherman falls back. The great monster, like a loud roar from the sky, begs for food and life, for the hunger he feels hurts with so much might. The fisherman asks, "For what is in it for me if I provide such a large feast?"

The Loch Monster says, "I will bless you with fishing seasons that last forever. More fish than trees, more eels than barges. I will give you the never-ending season."

The fisherman agrees. He brings three lambs to eat. The Loch Monster rises again with the greatest might. He thanks the fisherman and does as his word implies. He blessed the waters with fish that won't die.

That is why here at Loch Ness the food supply will never end.

We thank our kin for their kindness towards the Loch Monster. If it wasn't for that, we would not have our sacred waters.

Walking into the Woods

I was walking into the woods just to walk around. I saw a weird creature cutting down trees. I went towards it. I told him, "Why are you cutting down the trees?"

"We need wood for paper, pencils, and other stuff."

"This is my home, and other people's home too. What made y'all do this to the trees?"

"To have houses, to stay warm, to be protected. What do you do, Sasquatch?"

"Help people."

"What type of weapon do you have?"

"I have an axe to cut the trees down."

"What do you do, Sasquatch?"

"I give people food, wood, and I clear the snow so they don't have to do it."

"That is very nice, Sasquatch. Well, I have to go now, Sasquatch. I hope I see you later."

Elmer the Flying Fish

So I created a monster. It is scary and from the water. It's funny too. The name is Elmer.

Elmer the flying fish lives in the lake. It eats fish for food. He is strong and big. He's 34 years old. He has a mom, a dad, and a sis. They are big!

He's nice sometimes, but he is still mad and mean. The dad is good, but the mom is mean and the sis is both good and mean. The mom is strong, and Elmer the flying fish eats fish, but only puffer fish. When he's hungry, he eats lots of puffer fish.

He could be a wild fish. He is unstoppable. Heh heh.

Sasquatch Told Me

Sasquatch told me, "Don't be scared of me. I am not going to hurt you. I don't want my home to be not liveable."

I told him, "I want to help you not let the forest get trashed."

He said, "I know."

Later, when I went back to the forest, Sasquatch said, "Welcome back, my friend." Then, the day ended, and the day was fun.

First Impressions

Age and color have nothing to do with someone's smarts, let alone define one's knowledge. Building up a firm and solid barrier around my feelings grew my confidence within myself to acknowledge my deeper strengths. Pacing with my abilities and strengths to understand any and everyone's standpoints. Being self-aware and honest and not silencing or limiting myself based off someone else's judgment.

I move forward with what I believe resonates with what I stand for and what I believe isn't right. Never having fear of the unknown or not knowing the answer to something. Just looking at someone, some believe that they're wise to make a narrative about someone's IQ or education, but there's no limit to anyone's mind.

You can't judge by a look or a first impression.

GROUP STORY

A Bad Cowboy

"A Bad Cowboy" is a collaborative story inspired by La Chupacabra, the legendary creature of Southwestern folklore. Teaching Artist Daniel Ramirez wrote the first two pages of the story. JJA students Aydan H., Ethan, and Isaac helped Daniel write the remainder.

I never really wanted to be a cowboy. I've always wanted to be a chef, like the kinds I read about in my novels. But my parents have always had this dream for me. They always say, "You grew up on this ranch. It's your destiny."

My first roundup was an utter failure. I've never been good at riding horses. If I'm being honest, they terrify me. They're so big and powerful, and they always feel out of control. When they start running, I lose it.

My parents are actually not near as bad as my grandad. The way he looks at me when he's saying things like, "The kitchen is for girls. Get out here. Grab a lasso. Be a man." I'll be so happy when that man leaves this Earth. I have a feeling my parents pressure me only to please him. He's the one who started this whole ranching operation.

But one day, something happened that changed how I see him. It was the summer before I started junior high. As usual, I was forced onto a horse and hated it. My brother—everyone's favorite who will rule this place one day—knew that too. He loves to mess with me. This time, he smacked my horse Cameron on the butt, and it took off! I kept shouting, "Calm down! Calm down!" but it didn't work. Cameron never respected me to begin with. (And I'll never forgive my brother for that!)

When Cameron *finally* came to a stop, I had no idea

where we were. We were on the ranch somewhere, but I had no concept of how far we'd gone. It could have been 300 miles for all I knew. I felt so alone, and I didn't know if anyone was going to come get me.

Then, I heard a noise coming from the bushes, something I'd never heard before. It was like a mix of a child's cry and a cat's purr. I couldn't see what was in the bushes, and I didn't want to go find out. The thing sounded like it was in pain, though, so I felt bad for leaving it alone.

I sat there for a while, waiting to see if anyone else was coming. I had to pee really bad, though. I jumped off Cameron, but my foot was stuck in the stirrup. I lost control and landed right on a prickly pear. "YOW, YOW, YOW," I kept repeating. A cactus spine had gone straight through my hat into my ear. I hopped around for a while, and the sound from the bushes kept getting louder.

As I hopped in pain, I could see over the bushes a bit. There was a cow lying down in there. When the worst of the pain stopped, I went to go check on her. I tried to, at least. The thorny branches were so thick.

You won't believe what I saw when I finally cleared the branches with my knife. She had given birth! The calf was there, covered in its birth slime. Everything was fresh. It must've just happened. The scent of blood and life was strong and steam rose from the birth spot.

I noticed that the calf was having trouble standing up. I went to grab for it, but the thorny branches scratched my face, still aching from the cactus spine in my ear.

My dad and grandad have helped many cows with birth. Even they knew not to get me involved, but I've seen it enough times to kinda know what to do. The slime was very thick around its skin, so after using my knife to cut the branches around me, I then cut the placenta. The soft, slimy sensation was unsettling.

I even gagged a few times, but I was determined to help the poor creature. It was scared but thankful once I got the placenta off of it. It shook as it rose on its stilty legs.

Of course, I couldn't deny that a big part of my motivation was making my parents and grandad proud. Once I told my parents and grandad what I'd done, they'd finally see me as courageous. Useful too.

This must have taken longer than I realized, because I noticed the sun had started to set. If there's anything that could make this situation worse, it's being lost in complete darkness. All the stories I was told growing up flashed into my mind. It was then I heard a snarl in the distance.

The words that my grandad used to warn me with filled up my mind. "There is a special kind of creature that has keen senses for newborn blood. It seeks it out. It preys upon it."

I heard the snarl again. It was high-pitched, almost like a fox yipping but mixed with slurping and gargling. I'd never heard anything like it. It was getting closer.

"It's got only one thing on its mind. To suck blood. We've lost many a calf, kid, and lamb to this wretched creature. You mustn't let it win. Our stock is our lifeblood. They're all we've got."

I looked towards the snarl and I could make out two little beady dots of red. Barely. It was here.

Would I make my grandad proud twice today? I opened my knife and clenched the handle in front of me.

All of a sudden, the red dots were gone. A shadowy figure slunk into the distance. No more snarls.

In the opposite direction, I could hear *clop-clop, clop-clop, clop-clop* growing louder and louder. A hazy figure atop a horse made its way through the scrubby mesquite.

It was my grandad. He hadn't taken his eyes off me the whole time he approached. As soon as he was within spitting

distance, he said, "Haven't I told you never to wander off alone on this ranch?" This was a whole different kind of snarling.

I've learned the hard way not to talk back to my grandad, but I was so mad I couldn't help it. "It wasn't my fault! Joseph smacked my horse, and he took off."

"Y'all know damn well we don't play with our horses around here. I don't care who did what. Y'all messed with my horse, and this is what happened."

Just then, the little calf waddled out of the bushes. It let out little coos.

"Well, look here. Our stock proliferated. He's a healthy one, that."

"That's...that's the newborn. I helped it. It can walk now."

I noticed him staring at my hand covered in blood and clenching my knife. "So you *have* learned a thing or two." He shook his head in approval. Which to me just felt like disapproval.

"There's something else." Just then, a snarl-slurp came from a far stand of prickly pear.

Grandad reached into his saddlebag, took something out, and threw it at my feet. "You're gonna need this tonight."

I opened the dusty bedroll to view all of its stains.

"You have your matches, right? It's supposed to dip down low tonight. We're gonna need the warmth."

I took the box out of my pocket. It had been crushed in my fall, but they were still good. "Yessir," I told him as I rattled the contents.

That night I rested well, knowing the chupacabra is no match for my grandad.

Now, there are two creatures. I'll be happy when they leave this Earth.

Teaching Artist Bios

Erica R. DeLaRosa is a teaching artist, theater director, performance poet and activist. She is a co-founder of the performance troupe MAHINA MOVEMENT in New York City, and the founder and producing and educational partner of Communities Enlivened and Interactively Building through the Arts (CEIBA). She works as a teaching artist with community organizations in San Antonio. Her activism is rooted in poetry and drama therapy workshops in juvenile detention and adult rehabilitation centers, and in producing community events and mobile classrooms in her city. She serves on the board of directors for San Anto Cultural Arts and as a judge for the annual Young Pegasus Poetry Contest.

Daniel Ramirez has been an educator for over fifteen years. After studying history in graduate school, he spent several years working in conservation with teenagers in the outdoors. Later, as a Montessori educator, he discovered the power of combining creativity with learning. Encouraging young people to tap into their creative abilities inspired him to embrace his own. Since then, in addition to his longtime love of storytelling, he's developed a passion for calligraphy, puppetry, poetry, and block printing. A San Antonio native, he enjoys exploring the crystalline waters of Central Texas in his free time.

TEEN POETRY

**Poems from residents of
Cyndi Taylor Krier Juvenile
Correctional Treatment Center
and Juvenile Justice Academy (JJA)**

**In partnership with Gemini Ink
San Antonio's Writing Arts Center**

Gemini Ink's mission is to teach the craft of writing to people of all skill levels so they can bring their stories to life. We envision a world where all people experience the power of the writing arts. We provide creative writing workshops led by published writers at our offices and in diverse community settings. We also host free public readings by nationally and internationally recognized authors, open-mic nights, and a mentorship program. We believe in the power of the written word to transform lives and are dedicated to nurturing the imagination, building language skills and encouraging a strong sense of human connectedness in people of all ages.



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**Learn more about our
Partner Classes**

OUT OF REACH AND IN MY HAND

OUT OF REACH AND IN MY HAND

2025–2026 Krier Anthology

This project was generously funded by
the Bexar County Juvenile Probation Department.

Erica DeLaRosa, Jim LaVilla-Havelin

TEACHING ARTISTS

Catherine Burianek

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Cover & Book Design by Sadie Lynn Phelps

Student work has been edited as lightly as possible in order to
honor their original voices.

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FOREWORD

This anthology is a collection of poems, letters, and short stories by youth who have been impacted by the justice system in some way. Their writings are both creative expressions and tiny windows into their worlds. These young writers travel roads and oceans, real and figurative, to reflect on love, the self, and their dreams.

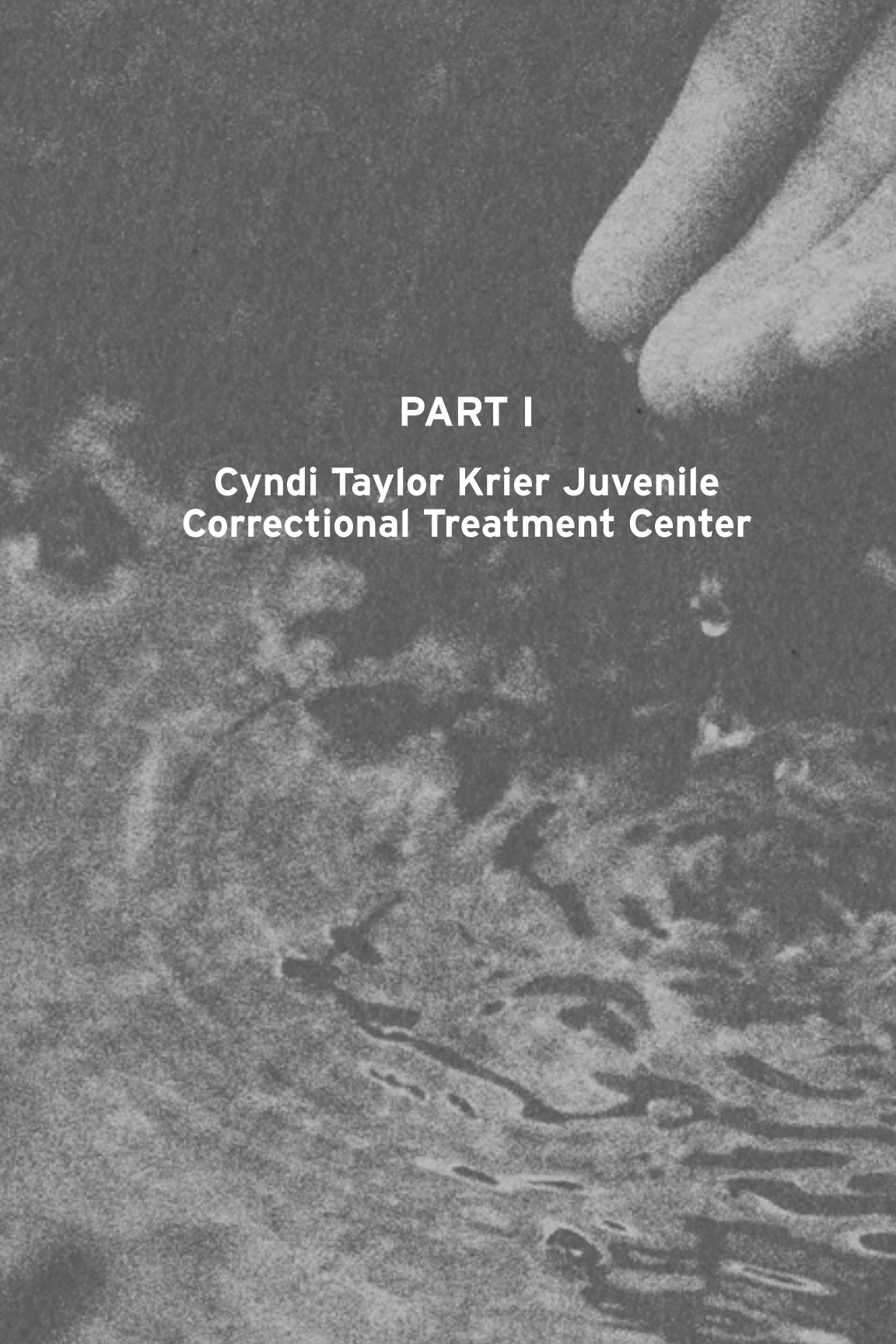
The reader will find a range of emotions in these writings, from love and humor to remorse and hopefulness. The voices that emerge in the following pages come from individuals who refuse to be ignored, refuse to stop loving despite the pain they feel, refuse to stop dreaming beyond the four walls they see daily, and ultimately, lay claim to who they are and will be in this world. While the short stories by students at the Juvenile Justice Academy may be less personal, they explore empathy and reshape our understanding of monsters, inviting us to see them as often misunderstood.

This year's writings came out of two workshops: one taught by Erica DeLaRosa at the Cyndi Taylor Krier Juvenile Correctional Treatment Center and the other by Daniel Ramirez at the Juvenile Justice Academy. Erica taught "Your Story Lies Within the Lines," a poetry workshop that focused on students and their relationship to the world. Daniel returned to fiction, which hadn't been offered in our Bexar County workshops since the early days of the partnership. He led two smaller workshops, one in the fall, "Outcasts & Wits: Trickster Tales," and one in the spring, "Mythical Creatures of Global Folklore." These fiction writing workshops allowed students to explore their relationship to the mythological and how they saw themselves as part of that storymaking tradition.

None of these workshops and the writings they produce would be possible without the long-time partnership between Gemini Ink and Bexar County. I'd like to send a big thank you to everyone at Bexar County who supports the workshops, especially Jessica Maupin, Jennifer Fowler, Joslyn Rice, and Ashley Martinez. Your belief in the power of the writing arts impacts these young authors' lives in so many positive ways. Thank you to Erica DeLaRosa and Daniel Ramirez. You create spaces where magic happens, where young writers can find community and safety, and where young writers learn to use their unique and creative voices. Thank you to my colleagues at Gemini Ink, especially the Director of Programs, Florinda Flores-Brown; the Publications Director, Anisa Onofre; and the Executive Director, Alexandra van de Kamp. A big shout-out to Christen Barrón, who served as the very patient manuscript editor for this anthology. Additionally, this beautiful book was designed by the talented Sadie Lynn Phelps.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to all the writers who have shared their work and their beautiful voices with us. This book is for you. I hope you all know what one of your fellow writers, Nick, knows: your "voice is heaven itself."

Catherine Burianek
Partner Classes Program Coordinator
Gemini Ink
June 24th, 2026

A grainy, black and white photograph of a hand about to drop a coin into water. The hand is in the upper right corner, with fingers slightly curled. A coin is visible just above the water's surface. The water below shows ripples and a reflection of the coin. The overall image has a high-contrast, textured appearance.

PART I

**Cyndi Taylor Krier Juvenile
Correctional Treatment Center**

JEREMIAH G.

Letter to Daughter

This is a letter to my daughter...

I just want to say, baby, I'm so sorry for not bein' there for you.
Just know, I ain't mean to do this on purpose.

Just know, I try to be a better man for you
Just know, I ain't gon' let you down
Even tho I failed a couple of times...it doesn't mean I won't
get up and keep trying.

It hurts me that I can't see you
I know I won't be there for your birthday
Just know, I ain't that far away
I'm just a letter away.

People try to put me down
Say I won't let them get to me, I got a lotta things on my mind
I wake up in the morning, missing you by my side.

Say, even on these rainy days
I just wish I could be next to you
I don't wanna leave your side again
Even tho I am stuck in these 4 walls
Don't mean I won't be home soon.

It takes time to be a better man
'Cause I know I won't get better in a day
I am gon' keep tryin' cause I won't give up.

I still got trust in myself and
I won't ever discourage myself
'Cause I got you to go home to
I know I messed up a couple of times,
but it doesn't make me a bad person
Just bad mistakes.

Just Me

Just me in my room
Just missin' you
Just know I messed up
Just know I'll change
Just know I did wrong
Just know I'll do right
Just know I love
Just know I don't hate
Just know I have light
Just not darkness.

A Simple Prayer

On this rainy day
I tend to pray
For nothing bad to come
But for good to come
As another day comes by
I say, "thank you" to the Lord
Then pray for another day
My cup overflows
So he leads my soul
I know I messed up
But he saves
He wore a crown of thorns
But cleansed my soul

Devilishly Desires

I see the rain
A tear falls down
I didn't think before I acted
Look where I ended
As the days go by in this cell
I know I failed
But I don't like this trail

I'm From

I'm from San Antonio
Where my mom's at
I try to do good for myself
But I think I failed

I know it's not the time to give up
I can keep going
Time and time again
I am back
Con-tin-uously

Reminiscing 'bout them times
I heard my mom crying
I keep trying
...I keep lying

Some think
You need to carry a weapon
Where youngins be steppin'
Where you get shot at for reppin'

I'm from the West
Where people get laid to rest
Where you can get tested
If you messed with
But I know there's
Someone up above
Keepin' an eye out; I'm protected
Another day is another blessin'
Another chance to maintain
And correct the mistakes of my past
'Cause I'll keep improving
Proving I deserve another chance
I'm from the West
I'm from San Antonio

Cry

I cry in my room
'Cause I know I tried
But I lied
I was down for the ride
But in my cell, I cried

I cry in my room
Just to let it all out
I try a different route
As I wimp and pout
I think it's my fault

I cry in my room,
Just thinking of you
Wishing you
Were here
While I sip on a cold brew
When I say cheers
All I have are tears

I cry in my room
My ears hear the cries
All I think is *why*
All I know is...
Everyday *try*

Pain

As I walk through the rain
I wish I could numb all this pain
Something I say...*dang*
But when I hear *BANG*
All I say is (sighs) *man*

As I walk through the rain
I hear a ring
I feel a ting
(the hairs on the back of my neck rise)
I think
Who can it be
I pick up the phone
They have a deep tone
...(sighs)
Now, I wake up all alone

As I walk through the rain...
I wish...
I could numb all this pain

Drippin'

My voice is like a lion ROARing.

My voice is like a whole pack of people—solid and many.

My voice is like a crowded bus during peak traffic hours in NYC.

My voice is like the Tasmanian Devil all at once; it sputters.

My voice is like a blanket...

It can be warm and comforting.

It can be too constricted and balled up.

Thin and invisible.

A necessity to get through the world.

Sheeeshhh

I remember Mommy being around a lot.

I remember my first kiss (had me sprung).

I remember my mom trying to teach me how to dance.

I remember watching SpongeBob while playing
with my imaginary friends.

I remember going to Kaldhari and looking at
all the beauty around me.

I remember eating Chuck E. Cheese pizza, winning big,
and being called the best player.

I remember my middle school ex.

I remember eating Red Vines and almost getting sick
from how delicious they were.

I remember my first fight.

I remember using my fists and feet to cause pain at the park.

I remember my first time...
drinking... and my first time crashing.

I remember playing split-screen zombies with my brother.

I remember being a boy, very young, and younger.

I remember joy, love, and laughter.

Sheeeeshhhh...I remember.

Taylor Swift

My voice sounds like Taylor Swift

Like an angel singing

Like 2 dogs eating a cat with no fork

My voice sounds like 5 kids at the ice cream station
at a Chinese buffet

Like donuts being done in a parking lot

Like a euphoric dream in Technicolor

My voice is heaven itself

A Promise Made

I promise I won't mess up again when I leave

I promise to get a job, Mom

I promise my homeboy to make time to hang out, *in the free*

I promise to continue chasing my dreams
and hope to catch them by my 20s

I promise to my 40-year-old self to stack the pennies

I promise by the time I'm 60, to be still alive.

I promise I won't mess up when I leave

Promises are easily made but hard to keep

I promise to rap to share my story

I promise to be still living

Older & recollecting

at 63.

Voices

Melodies playing
I try to cope, but fail to
songs stuck in my head
When will she come back to me?
Voices surrounding my room

Mem or i es fa ding
I miss her to death
Left me stranded and so lost
em ies fa in

Krier...

Time is going too slow
Like a snail racing a dog

Tttt

tttttk

Tick

Tick

Ticking

Tok

Was It Ever Real?

I thought I knew it all
What it was like
To be loved by a thug.
You had me thinking...
Was our love ever real?
Or was it just for the thrill?
See, all I wanted was for you to love me.
All I needed was for you to trust.
I miss you holding me late at night,
You made me feel safe without the light.
But then I remember all the late nights I stayed up
Waiting for you to come home
Praying that when I heard bullets flood the sky
I wouldn't find *you*
Six feet
underneath
me.

True Lover

I'm starting to have dreams about you.
Now I'm exhausted.
I remember how we were in a hard place,
all the mistakes you made, Mom.
Told me our relationship was to break.
I didn't listen every time we disagreed.
You would hang up the phone,
and I would wonder... *how much more I could take.*
I remember the night
you walked out;
that's when I lost it.
I waited days for you to come back.
Tears rolled down my face,
then I realized you lacked
expectations and values.
Now,
I can't help but wonder...
if I will ever find my true lover.

She Is Seen

I've seen a young girl
Who was just like me
Letting her thoughts
C r e e p i n late at night.
Struggling to find her worth
She feels like the only one on earth
Who is too deep into the dark shadows
Thinking no one can see her
She is going through hell
Putting on a fake smile
To hide the hurt
She's been through
Looking for a way out
Hoping she will find the light
To happiness
I will
Never
Leave her side
Until the day I die
Hoping she knows...
She is seen

Lost in the Clouds

Every time I look into *your* eyes
I feel as though
We are talking
Even if nothing is *really* said.
I see how *loving and gentle* you are
And that's what makes me drawn to you.
You make me feel
like I can have *that fairytale, dreamy love*.
I'm afraid that
I might drown without you
by my side.
You have *never* made me
doubt
That *I* can count on you
to *keep* me *calm*.
You are the air
I need to *breathe*,
to *survive*.
You are my reason
to *thrive*.
You make me feel
beautiful inside
and out.
Every time
I see your warm smile
I get so lost in the clouds.

Never Meant to Change

My chest is always tight
even when I do the right thing.
I feel like my voice has never really mattered.
My mother never listened to me.

At night
I stay up
looking at the rain

falling
down.

I wish my tears
could
go
down.

Be soaked up, to feed the ground.
Instead, I can't help but look

at
my
wrist

watching my blood
dripping
down.

No matter how hard I try to remake myself,
the drugs,

they are

always tempting me,

calling

my name.

I guess...

I was never meant to change.

Gone

I'm back to who I was.
You took too long.
The loving and caring girl you once knew is
far-----gone.
I gave and gave all my love to you,
until I was buried in my grave.
Now,
I am someone who cannot be saved.

Our Love

Our love is deep like the unending sea.
Our love is like the tidal waves; it comes back stronger and stronger.
I crave it (our love) every day.
Our love is like a sunset's reflection on the ocean; it looks beautiful.
A spell intoxicates me; you've given me a love potion.

Storms in the Distance

I offer this poem
to a *young girl*
with curls.
It is a safe bed
to hide under
from the scary, powerful *storm*.

It is like a secluded desert
where no one is there to hunt the prey.

I miss you.

You're safe within self.

It is like my brother's husky arms of strength
like *Lasso's soft fur*
smelling of strawberries
Hold onto it anytime
The clouds cast over
and the storm brews...

... in the distance.

I miss you.

You're safe within self.

The Devil's Daughter

I miss when my mom used to hold me, saying

He just has a temper.

But I knew it was deeper than that.

I saw the Devil in disguise

every time I looked into my dad's eyes.

These past few weeks

I've been looking in the mirror

and realize

it's so much clearer...

I am the Devil's Daughter.

Her Eyes Tell the Story

She tries to hide her pain
and puts a fake smile on her face
But you can see right through her eyes
The story it tells about
the demons she struggles with
Every day is a constant battle inside
her brain
She's starting to feel numb
thinking, *is she already inside her grave?*
Feeling *like there is no escape*
...she is me.

His Blue Eyes

I met somebody
And looked into his blue eyes
Now he has me hypnotized
He opens the door and
Doesn't make me cry
He calls me his *Angel*
By the way, he says
I make him feel like he can fly.

JEREMIAH M.

Promesas

I made a promise
I don't know if I can keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And when I get back to the streets
I'm gonna hop in that Jeep
And I promise I'm gonna
Be alive by 18.

I promise I'm going to stay out *in the free*
I promise my mom to be good while on probation
I promise my people (*in the free*) to call when I get out
I promise by 20 to have a job and save for a car
I promise by 40 to have my own house and a car
I promise by 60 to pay a visit to my favorite place.

JAMES P.

I Know U

*I know you sad
I know you mad
I know you hidin' alla your emotions
Throw 'em in a bag
Still hopin' that
No one gon' see it, but before you know it
They start comin' out
When sh*t go south, don't even
Realize words that's comin' out yo mouth
But it's too late by now
You said what you said
Try to take it back
It's f***in up yo' head
Now you feelin' blue
It's nothing new
I understand
because I feel it too
Maybe it's true, maybe it's not
Maybe I'm mistaken, that's just what I thought
That's just what I see, that's just what it seems
What I see in you is what I see in me
I see no "whore," I see defeat
I see myself starin' back at me
I see the pain
I see the damage
I see that people took your love for granted*

They all did the same
They took advantage
Goin' insane
& you can't f***in stand it
I want you to know
That I'll be there
Even when you hurt
And when you in despair
Got nowhere to go
I know this sh** ain't fair
But we can make the most
So don't say you don't care
Cuz you know you do
You know it's true
Thinking of me while I'm thinkin' of you
I know you sad
I know you mad
I know you hurtin'
Cuz I'm hurtin' too

Empty Promise (An Extended Haiku by Me)

It's easy to take
The things you love for granted
Until it's taken.

It's easy to make
A choice that leaves you stranded
With a lack of patience.

It's harder to do
What people expect from you
And leave them waiting.

An empty promise
Leaves you farther and farther
From ever changing.
(And yes, I still hate them)

Echo

My voice is like a dog barking; it's loud and annoying.
Like walking on eggshells in bare feet.
Like a really hot plate burning the roof of your mouth.
My voice is the thunder,
heard from a mile away; however, it depends on what I say.
It is unforgettable and never goes away.
This is my voice, and I use it every day.

The Gift

I'm giving you...*me, my everything.*

Everything that belongs to me.

I might as well just give you my heart; tear it out of my chest.

You know the rest.

And I also give you my brain

Cuz you're runnin' through my mind.

You be making me go insane!

I'll offer you anything

Anything you want...

Just hold me tight and say my name.

But you don't even have to do that,

I'll still love you the same.

Finding My Way Out

I haven't cried tears from my eyes in so long.
I'm steadily wondering where it all went wrong.
I'm not the type to complain about all my problems and pain.
They say things will get better, but I'm still the same
Where did I go wrong? (Is what my people keep asking.)
I know I messed up.
I chose the wrong route, but it's never too late
to turn my way around.
To find my way out!

IZAYAH

My Voice

My voice sounds like blaring sirens at night
Like the sound of waves crashing against the rock
My voice is loud like music at a block party
Like the crunch of a freshly fried *Caniac combo*
with extra Cane's sauce
Hold the coleslaw and extra Texas toast!
My voice is sometimes sweet
Like cherry gelato, a favorite of mine.
Like a glass of sweet tea, light ice on a hot summer day.

ANONYMOUS

Reminders

Remember that you are beautiful on the inside and the outside!

Remember that you are not alone.

Remember that change is possible.

Remember, tomorrow is another day.

Remember that life gets better.

ROCKY M.

Love

Love is like an ocean
Deep and full of life
Love is like a balloon
It will keep growing bigger
Love is like fruit on a hot summer day,
It will bring you happiness no matter what...love.

Nutrients

Fly and spread your wings.
Take a new path in your life that will bring you
Peace.
See the poison in your heart.
Don't cry in sorrow when you're left to starve.
Survive like a cactus in the desert.
When life feels its hardest, use every ounce of strength stored
in your core, and
Bring back your light to this dark world.

Pondering Why

Everyone flows, bends, and sways like grass in the wind.
People will burn each other when they try to gain victory.
People judge each other because of the skin they see.
Why can't we all be equal?
Why can't all of us win?
Why can't we live like you're the other part of me?
We all come from one father and mother, but judge one
another
...why?

Dream

Dream big until you can't dream again...dream.
Dreams are made every day, in every second, with love, hope,
and happiness in your world.
Dreams are free and don't cost a thing to create...dream.
Dreams will flow like an unending waterfall...dream
Dream.
DREAM!

Time

The rain feels like ice
I go through the day like dice
So I keep myself right
Time feels like a sling and a winding road
Time feels like a road
It can't change without a mode
So Ima just take this time and go

I Love You

My love for you is a *rose that blossoms*
The love where you feel *no worries, love.*
My love for you is a *fairytale.*
A world with love and everlasting joy.
My love is *the ocean that will never dry out or recede, love.*
My love for you is as vast as *the universe.*
I love you.

Mares

The words that will fill this page
will be like an ocean's spray.
The life of a lonely child.
A book unnamed.
Though this life is only one
but feels like a ton.
People all over the world will become one.
Dreams are made every day.
But many evil people take them away.
We fall into depression because we're filled with emotions.
One can fall, but others won't blink or bat an eye.
Why can't you see the sadness in my eyes?
I sit by the ocean and ask *why? What is the purpose of my life?*
Was it to bring happiness at this time?

Years Feel Like a Waste of Time

A punch to my chest
feels like sadness,
shock,
and...damn!
I let myself down.
I did something stupid with mistakes, and I can't recover.
I threw out something precious.
Lost in time.
I can't travel back
or rewind the lines.

My love for you
is like a shield.
It conceals and cloaks you from the dark storms
brewing
like a teapot.
The feelings that
come off you
feel like the autumn sun
tepid,
glowing,
sultry.
I'm sorry...
I think the sorrow in my heart feels like a road
with no destination.
Going carefree
no limits
like a boat
in the middle of the sea.
Crashing into waves withstanding
the evil in the ocean
like a tiger shark
that goes from fresh water to salt
with no problem
but at peace like a
sitting
Buddha.

Fave Fruit

I love peaches for too many reasons.
Whether it be for the season,
the taste or the joy.
Peaches,
Diced up (with some chamoy and limón).
Summer sweetness and memories flood my brain
to a time when you were there for me.
The juiciness, the natural sugars...
If the day begins to go sour...
another peach and oh sweet!
The weeds turn into flowers.
I love peaches!
It reminds me of the days at the beach,
gazing at the waves rolling in and the sky...
blue and clear...out of reach, and in my hand, a peach.
I love peaches for all these reasons
and sometimes I dream of you...

ROBERTO B.

El Payaso

El payaso, yes, that's me.
The one who falls in love
in a heartbeat.
The one who gives out love,
just to be someone in life.
That just can't be!
Yes, once again,
el payaso, that's me.
Someone to love and be.

Blue

Roses are red.
Violets are blue.
Sometimes all I see is the color blue.
When it rains, when it pours
in the sky.
Or deep, deep down
when I feel alone.
It doesn't matter what I do.
All I see is the color blue.

Sky Blue

Azul cielo,
como el vestido de mi abuela
Azul cielo,
como los ojos que me esperan.
Azul cielo,
como mi propia autocompasión
Azul cielo,
como el color de la vida que me espera
Azul cielo,
como esta vida de mierda.

I.II.III. and IV.

- I. Time is running out.
I hate to say it, but there's
no stopping it now.
Time is running out, and there's no way out.

- II. Two more heartbeats before I go.
I don't know what to do.
(I) Do know where I'll go.
Mama, please don't cry.
I'll be ok.
I'll be resting in a better place.

- III. She needs some love.
I wish I could help.
Looking into her eyes makes me want to shout.
Her eyes. Her blondish hair.
I like to see her smile when I stare.

- IV. She feels alone.
She feels depressed.
I'm sorry I'm making you feel too much stress.
I'm missing her embrace.
I'm missing her face.
I'm missing those two blue eyes,
upon which I used to gaze.

It Used to Be

It used to be *me and you*. Now,
you've got me feeling blue. Blue
like the tears I cry.
Since you left, I can't decide
to let it be
or to forget.
And see a better future...
a better me, yet.

The Promise I'm Waiting For

I hear your voice.
I hear you say,
"Come on, child.
It will be okay.
Just cry it out.
There is no shame.
Welcome to my kingdom,
where there is no pain."

The Day I Go

The day I go,
I don't know.
I just hope the day I go along, I can be back home.
It's hard to think, it could be today.
The day I go off without a trace.
I'm scared to travel alone, but I still have hope.
I could be back home.
Before the day I forge forward.

Por Tu Amor

Por tu amor
I'll go to the end of the world and back.
Por tu amor
I don't have to keep fighting or watching over my back.
Por tu amor
I don't feel depressed or sad.
I can't believe that *tu amor* has changed my life so fast.

Love's Not for Me

Love's not for me, and that's okay.
I love you, but you don't feel the same way.
I give you my love, and you throw it away.
I just hope I can find love someday.

Good Morning

Good morning!

It's a new day!

I wonder if today is going to be an okay day.

Today feels kind of *off*.

I feel better than I did yesterday.

But yesterday was yesterday.

And today's a new day.

I saw my mom cooking in the kitchen,

It reminded me of my younger days.

Then, I went to school. It was a normal day.

When I returned home,

I saw my family being so happy.

I just can't explain.

They all stared at me and said,

"Welcome home!"

(knock, knock, knock)

"Wake up for hygiene."

F***!

Just a few more days to go.

The Love When I Met You

The love I feel,
I just can't explain.
Those two blue eyes, I think of every day.
The sweet smile that makes me feel love with every passing
day.
I told you, *I love you*, and you did the same.
I still remember the first kiss I gave you
on that Wednesday.
I remember that before I left,
my heart was broken, and
yours was too.
Now it's been some months, and
I sit and wait
to get released, and
see your beautiful face.

I Asked the Moon

Every night,
I talk to the moon.
I ask about you.
I ask if you are missing me, too.
She says, you're okay and that you love me too.
She also shared that you can't wait to see me shortly.
It won't be that much longer.
I'll be home as quickly as possible.
I love you so much, and
you know that it's true.

I Am From

I am from a place
Where I should have never been from.
Where the sirens are usually heard in my hood.
Where innocent people are always dying.
I'm from a place where it's different from here.
Where guns are carried, but not for show.
Where we still have respect for the old and young.
I am from that place that isn't a place
Where you wanna be,
But it's still a place I call home.
I wonder if I never did what I did,
If I weren't stuck in a situation like this,
Where I saw my brothers die one by one,
And if I'm next,
I wouldn't care.
I just hope to find
Peace in the air.

Then and Now

Once I was young.
Once, I almost died.
Once *I was free*.
Once I froze.

I wish I could be a god.
I wish I could eat a baloney sandwich
with Flamin' Hot Cheetos inside.
I wish I could make a time machine, just 'cause.
I wish I could *do anything*.
I wish to say *what I want*.
I wish my brothers were alive.

Now, I'm stuck.
Now, I'm waiting to go home.
Now, I do what's on the schedule.
Now...I wait.

I Close My Eyes

I close my eyes when I am afraid.
I hear this voice saying, "It will be okay."
I close my eyes every day.
Trying to hear the voice to erase my doubts away.
I don't feel alone.
I don't feel fear.
I'm grateful to the voice saying, "It will be alright; my
ancestors are near."

Where Are You?

Para Velen

Where are you?
I wish you were here.
Where are you?
I can't believe it's been some years.
Where are you?
I ask myself, day by day.
Where are you?
I hope you are okay.

Una carta para Tita

Tita,

Te fuiste sin decir adiós. Yo sin saber cuál fue la razón. Ahora sufro en mi habitación. Pasaron 15 años y yo ya cambié. Ahora veo el mundo como no lo quieres ver. Dejé de danzar y me puse a fumar y ahora encerrado me tienen, no más.

De 10 a 12

De 12 a 13

De 15 a 16

Todos esos años, ya los pasé.

Encerrado sin saber por qué. Parece que hasta mi vida cambió.

Si estarías aquí, te pregunto si me puedes

Ver como el niño de ayer.

Al cielo te fuiste y no sé por qué.

Ojalá que un día te pueda ver.

Si voy al infierno, solo una cosa a Dios le pido.

Vi una vez y sé dónde estás

No sé si podría pedir otra vez.

Me despido ahora.

No sé qué más decir.

Te espero en mi interior; el día en que tengo que irme.

Te quiero aquí a mi lado junto con mis pasados.

Abuela, te quiero decir una cosa: *te amo*.

GROUP POEM

Remember: A Group Poem **Inspired by Joy Harjo**

*by Amira N., Chloe G., Gabriel, Jeremiah G.,
Roberto B., and Rocky M.*

Jeremiah:

Remember to be thankful for your daily bread.
Everything that comes your way is for a reason.
They are blessings, even the ones in disguise.

Gabriel:

Remember, you're beautiful in your own way.
Beauty isn't just what's on the outside but the inside as well.

Gabriel:

Remember that change is possible and
Never impossible.

Amira:

Remember that you are not alone.
At times, it may feel that way
But just remember, we
are all loved by God the same way.

Rocky:

Remember that when people give us their hearts
We must treat them as gifts.

Rocky:
Remember that we must treat others
As we want to be treated.
I care for you, I check on you
No matter the time or day
I don't need a special occasion
It's just another day
Therefore, Poet, slay.

Chloe:
Remember that you are worth
everything in this world,
It doesn't matter what they say.
Just follow your hopes & dreams
For they,
one day
Will come true
for every one of us.

Chloe:
Remember you are seen and heard.

Jeremiah:
Remember that success takes hard work...keep going!
All good things don't come easy,
It takes dedication.

Jeremiah:
Remember, if I can grow and change
Then you can too.

Roberto:
Remember that just 'cause they've left
Doesn't mean they're gone.

Roberto:
Remember that you are a warrior like
Your ancestors.
Their blood runs through yours.

Roberto:
Remember...
If I harm you,

Rocky:
I harm myself.

Jeremiah:
If I honor you,

Gabriel:
I honor myself.

Chloe:
If I love you,

Amira:
I love myself.

Roberto:
In Lak `ech (In - LAK- Etch)
...you are the other part of me.

To Whom It May Concern

First off, I just want to say that I really, really appreciate being a part of Gemini Ink, and I really enjoyed my time creating poetry with my fellow peers and Ms. Erica. I've learned quite a bit about the topic that I probably would have never learned without being in it. I've also learned that I don't care too much for haikus, but I like anaphoras. If whoever's reading this letter doesn't know what those are, don't worry, neither did I. I had heard of haikus but never knew exactly what the structure was, and as for anaphoras, I learned that I naturally had incorporated them in the past and still do use them with my songs and raps. I just never knew it had a technical name. And this was just one of two of the many things I've learned in Gemini Ink, but I know there's just so much more out there to learn, and I truly am missing out.

The next thing I want to mention is just how mentally helpful being in the program was. I mean, it was really like a form of therapy for me, and not just the action of making poems, but getting to share and compare my work with other people. It was a crucial form of expression for me, and having that taken away felt like having my voice taken away. Another thing that Gemini Ink helped me with was staying out of trouble. I knew that if I missed two sessions, I would be terminated from the enrichment service, and just knowing that kept me from even thinking about screwing that up. I'm not saying that I'm gonna start "popping off" now that I'm not in it, but what I'm trying to say is it was an insanely positive incentive for me. I love making music and poetry, and as I said before, I love my art being heard. In my mind, there was NOTHING that was gonna tempt me to throw that away.

Sincerely,

James P.

A Letter for My Gemini Family

by Chloe G.

Dear Ms. Erica,

I want to say I'm so, so grateful for you being there for the other students and me. I look up to you; you are like my mentor. You have inspired me to become a poet and to continue to write outside of here. You remind me of an owl because of how wise and free-spirited you are. You will fly to the tallest tree to watch over us to make sure that if we mess up and feel like giving up, you will say, "Remember *who* you are, and how far you have gotten."

Dear Amira,

I want to say how proud I am of your growth. You have inspired me to never give up, no matter what stands in my way or how hard it gets. You remind me of a firework because you are so bright and full of colorful emotions, and are never afraid to show your spark.

Dear Rocky,

I want to say, I'm thankful for your positive energy, even when it can be a bit annoying at times. I know when you are around, everyone can count on you to make them laugh and be the class clown. You have inspired me to look at the positive things around me and to have a smile on my face. You remind me of the boxing movie, *Rocky*, because you are determined to get things done your way, consistently moving around.

Dear Roberto,

I want to say, "thank you" for being there for me. I remember our first day of Gemini Ink, somebody was being disrespectful to me, and you stood up for me, even though you didn't know me. Something stood out to me that day when you said your middle name was the meaning of *death*. What I observed was that you are protective of your family and friends. You remind me of my god, *The Mother of Death/La Santa Muerte*. She is protective and vengeful when her people are hurt. You are quick to protect the innocent. You fight for justice even if it's the right or wrong way. I hope you never lose the light to fight for what is right.

PART II

Juvenile Justice Academy (JJA)

Is it possible that monsters are more than just scary creatures? What if they represent those things around us that are misunderstood? In the case of creatures like Sasquatch and the Chupacabra, they represent the spirit of the land that they come from.

During our workshop at Juvenile Justice Academy, we read stories about four popular monsters of global folklore: Sasquatch, the Loch Ness Monster, the Yeti, and the Chupacabra. To better understand their stories, we learned about the cultures and landscapes they came from. In the end, we realized these creatures are not actually monsters but safekeepers of the beautiful places in which they dwell.

Read on to see what kinds of stories about these creatures the JJA writers came up with.

Daniel Ramirez
Teaching Artist
2026

DERRICK

Sasquatch

Hi, my name is Sasquatch, and I love to be in the woods. I'm a wild creature and I eat spiders and snakes. I love to eat animals all the time. I like to eat frogs and deer.

My weapon is an axe. I use it to help me eat bears, alligators, and other big things. I do not eat possums.

I do not like people who hunt me and other animals that would eat me. If something is going bad for humans, I keep humans safe. I eat the bad people. I love humans and hunt bad people.

Sasquatch Part 1

I'm Sasquatch. I helped. I cleared their snow and brought them wood and meat. I know they meant no harm because they did not bother me. If they did, I would destroy their home.

They are so nice to me. I like to help them.

On my way back, I heard purring noises. Then a strange dog-like animal called a chupacabra walked up to me. I pet the little guy. He was happy, and so was I.

The End.

The Blessed Waters

There was an old fisherman tale, for the Loch is alive.

The old fisherman pride and true is getting ready to set out on his excursion for food. As he boards his small fisherman's barge, the water rises and the waves crash. The old fisherman fears through his old white beard and murmurs, "I see it. It's true. The Loch Monster, it lives, seems so cruel."

The Loch Monster swims up and the fisherman falls back. The great monster, like a loud roar from the sky, begs for food and life, for the hunger he feels hurts with so much might. The fisherman asks, "For what is in it for me if I provide such a large feast?"

The Loch Monster says, "I will bless you with fishing seasons that last forever. More fish than trees, more eels than barges. I will give you the never-ending season."

The fisherman agrees. He brings three lambs to eat. The Loch Monster rises again with the greatest might. He thanks the fisherman and does as his word implies. He blessed the waters with fish that won't die.

That is why here at Loch Ness the food supply will never end.

We thank our kin for their kindness towards the Loch Monster. If it wasn't for that, we would not have our sacred waters.

Walking into the Woods

I was walking into the woods just to walk around. I saw a weird creature cutting down trees. I went towards it. I told him, "Why are you cutting down the trees?"

"We need wood for paper, pencils, and other stuff."

"This is my home, and other people's home too. What made y'all do this to the trees?"

"To have houses, to stay warm, to be protected. What do you do, Sasquatch?"

"Help people."

"What type of weapon do you have?"

"I have an axe to cut the trees down."

"What do you do, Sasquatch?"

"I give people food, wood, and I clear the snow so they don't have to do it."

"That is very nice, Sasquatch. Well, I have to go now, Sasquatch. I hope I see you later."

Elmer the Flying Fish

So I created a monster. It is scary and from the water. It's funny too. The name is Elmer.

Elmer the flying fish lives in the lake. It eats fish for food. He is strong and big. He's 34 years old. He has a mom, a dad, and a sis. They are big!

He's nice sometimes, but he is still mad and mean. The dad is good, but the mom is mean and the sis is both good and mean. The mom is strong, and Elmer the flying fish eats fish, but only puffer fish. When he's hungry, he eats lots of puffer fish.

He could be a wild fish. He is unstoppable. Heh heh.

Sasquatch Told Me

Sasquatch told me, "Don't be scared of me. I am not going to hurt you. I don't want my home to be not liveable."

I told him, "I want to help you not let the forest get trashed."

He said, "I know."

Later, when I went back to the forest, Sasquatch said, "Welcome back, my friend." Then, the day ended, and the day was fun.

First Impressions

Age and color have nothing to do with someone's smarts, let alone define one's knowledge. Building up a firm and solid barrier around my feelings grew my confidence within myself to acknowledge my deeper strengths. Pacing with my abilities and strengths to understand any and everyone's standpoints. Being self-aware and honest and not silencing or limiting myself based off someone else's judgment.

I move forward with what I believe resonates with what I stand for and what I believe isn't right. Never having fear of the unknown or not knowing the answer to something. Just looking at someone, some believe that they're wise to make a narrative about someone's IQ or education, but there's no limit to anyone's mind.

You can't judge by a look or a first impression.

GROUP STORY

A Bad Cowboy

"A Bad Cowboy" is a collaborative story inspired by La Chupacabra, the legendary creature of Southwestern folklore. Teaching Artist Daniel Ramirez wrote the first two pages of the story. JJA students Aydan H., Ethan, and Isaac helped Daniel write the remainder.

I never really wanted to be a cowboy. I've always wanted to be a chef, like the kinds I read about in my novels. But my parents have always had this dream for me. They always say, "You grew up on this ranch. It's your destiny."

My first roundup was an utter failure. I've never been good at riding horses. If I'm being honest, they terrify me. They're so big and powerful, and they always feel out of control. When they start running, I lose it.

My parents are actually not near as bad as my grandad. The way he looks at me when he's saying things like, "The kitchen is for girls. Get out here. Grab a lasso. Be a man." I'll be so happy when that man leaves this Earth. I have a feeling my parents pressure me only to please him. He's the one who started this whole ranching operation.

But one day, something happened that changed how I see him. It was the summer before I started junior high. As usual, I was forced onto a horse and hated it. My brother—everyone's favorite who will rule this place one day—knew that too. He loves to mess with me. This time, he smacked my horse Cameron on the butt, and it took off! I kept shouting, "Calm down! Calm down!" but it didn't work. Cameron never respected me to begin with. (And I'll never forgive my brother for that!)

When Cameron *finally* came to a stop, I had no idea

where we were. We were on the ranch somewhere, but I had no concept of how far we'd gone. It could have been 300 miles for all I knew. I felt so alone, and I didn't know if anyone was going to come get me.

Then, I heard a noise coming from the bushes, something I'd never heard before. It was like a mix of a child's cry and a cat's purr. I couldn't see what was in the bushes, and I didn't want to go find out. The thing sounded like it was in pain, though, so I felt bad for leaving it alone.

I sat there for a while, waiting to see if anyone else was coming. I had to pee really bad, though. I jumped off Cameron, but my foot was stuck in the stirrup. I lost control and landed right on a prickly pear. "YOW, YOW, YOW," I kept repeating. A cactus spine had gone straight through my hat into my ear. I hopped around for a while, and the sound from the bushes kept getting louder.

As I hopped in pain, I could see over the bushes a bit. There was a cow lying down in there. When the worst of the pain stopped, I went to go check on her. I tried to, at least. The thorny branches were so thick.

You won't believe what I saw when I finally cleared the branches with my knife. She had given birth! The calf was there, covered in its birth slime. Everything was fresh. It must've just happened. The scent of blood and life was strong and steam rose from the birth spot.

I noticed that the calf was having trouble standing up. I went to grab for it, but the thorny branches scratched my face, still aching from the cactus spine in my ear.

My dad and grandad have helped many cows with birth. Even they knew not to get me involved, but I've seen it enough times to kinda know what to do. The slime was very thick around its skin, so after using my knife to cut the branches around me, I then cut the placenta. The soft, slimy sensation was unsettling.

I even gagged a few times, but I was determined to help the poor creature. It was scared but thankful once I got the placenta off of it. It shook as it rose on its stilty legs.

Of course, I couldn't deny that a big part of my motivation was making my parents and grandad proud. Once I told my parents and grandad what I'd done, they'd finally see me as courageous. Useful too.

This must have taken longer than I realized, because I noticed the sun had started to set. If there's anything that could make this situation worse, it's being lost in complete darkness. All the stories I was told growing up flashed into my mind. It was then I heard a snarl in the distance.

The words that my grandad used to warn me with filled up my mind. "There is a special kind of creature that has keen senses for newborn blood. It seeks it out. It preys upon it."

I heard the snarl again. It was high-pitched, almost like a fox yipping but mixed with slurping and gargling. I'd never heard anything like it. It was getting closer.

"It's got only one thing on its mind. To suck blood. We've lost many a calf, kid, and lamb to this wretched creature. You mustn't let it win. Our stock is our lifeblood. They're all we've got."

I looked towards the snarl and I could make out two little beady dots of red. Barely. It was here.

Would I make my grandad proud twice today? I opened my knife and clenched the handle in front of me.

All of a sudden, the red dots were gone. A shadowy figure slunk into the distance. No more snarls.

In the opposite direction, I could hear *clop-clop, clop-clop, clop-clop* growing louder and louder. A hazy figure atop a horse made its way through the scrubby mesquite.

It was my grandad. He hadn't taken his eyes off me the whole time he approached. As soon as he was within spitting

distance, he said, "Haven't I told you never to wander off alone on this ranch?" This was a whole different kind of snarling.

I've learned the hard way not to talk back to my grandad, but I was so mad I couldn't help it. "It wasn't my fault! Joseph smacked my horse, and he took off."

"Y'all know damn well we don't play with our horses around here. I don't care who did what. Y'all messed with my horse, and this is what happened."

Just then, the little calf waddled out of the bushes. It let out little coos.

"Well, look here. Our stock proliferated. He's a healthy one, that."

"That's...that's the newborn. I helped it. It can walk now."

I noticed him staring at my hand covered in blood and clenching my knife. "So you *have* learned a thing or two." He shook his head in approval. Which to me just felt like disapproval.

"There's something else." Just then, a snarl-slurp came from a far stand of prickly pear.

Grandad reached into his saddlebag, took something out, and threw it at my feet. "You're gonna need this tonight."

I opened the dusty bedroll to view all of its stains.

"You have your matches, right? It's supposed to dip down low tonight. We're gonna need the warmth."

I took the box out of my pocket. It had been crushed in my fall, but they were still good. "Yessir," I told him as I rattled the contents.

That night I rested well, knowing the chupacabra is no match for my grandad.

Now, there are two creatures. I'll be happy when they leave this Earth.

Teaching Artist Bios

Erica R. DeLaRosa is a teaching artist, theater director, performance poet and activist. She is a co-founder of the performance troupe MAHINA MOVEMENT in New York City, and the founder and producing and educational partner of Communities Enlivened and Interactively Building through the Arts (CEIBA). She works as a teaching artist with community organizations in San Antonio. Her activism is rooted in poetry and drama therapy workshops in juvenile detention and adult rehabilitation centers, and in producing community events and mobile classrooms in her city. She serves on the board of directors for San Anto Cultural Arts and as a judge for the annual Young Pegasus Poetry Contest.

Daniel Ramirez has been an educator for over fifteen years. After studying history in graduate school, he spent several years working in conservation with teenagers in the outdoors. Later, as a Montessori educator, he discovered the power of combining creativity with learning. Encouraging young people to tap into their creative abilities inspired him to embrace his own. Since then, in addition to his longtime love of storytelling, he's developed a passion for calligraphy, puppetry, poetry, and block printing. A San Antonio native, he enjoys exploring the crystalline waters of Central Texas in his free time.

TEEN POETRY

**Poems from residents of
Cyndi Taylor Krier Juvenile
Correctional Treatment Center
and Juvenile Justice Academy (JJA)**

**In partnership with Gemini Ink
San Antonio's Writing Arts Center**

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