



Fighting Words

Young Irish and international writing



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**FIGHTING
WORDS**
The write to right.

Fighting Words 2026



Robyn Yelverton McKiernan, Izzy Walsh, Lucas Ren, Tom O'Neill, Claire Harty, Lile Grace Mullan, Izzy Walsh, Oscar Daunt-Brennan, Marisa Funken, Clodagh Maye at the Fighting Words offices in Behan Square, Russell Street, Dublin 1. Photograph: Alan Betson

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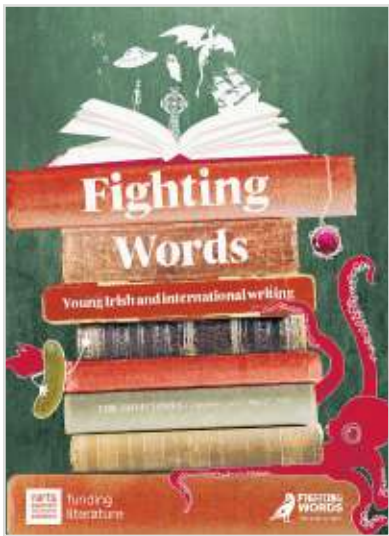
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Photograph: Joanna O'Malley

'The stories in this supplement are alive. The sheer creative power could never be replicated by AI'

Catherine Prasifka opens this year's Fighting Words magazine in The Irish Times, showcasing creative writing from young people across Ireland

For as long as I can remember, all I wanted to do was write. I was the kid sitting in class writing stories and doodling pictures of dragons. I had notebooks filled with attempted novels. I'm sure my teachers didn't know what to do with me: I didn't know what to do with me either. Being a writer didn't feel like a real thing you were allowed to do; and even if it did, I had no idea how to get there.

Fighting Words would have known what to do with me. The fact that this supplement exists, that it is full to the brim of amazing writing, is nothing short of amazing. But it represents only a fraction of the work that Fighting Words does for young writers. Fighting Words gives writers confidence, support and a

community that shares their passion. The writers bring everything else. Most importantly, they bring the stories.

Stories are places where imagination meets empathy. That is no small thing. When you tell a story, you are stepping into the shoes of a character. Not only that, you are declaring that they matter, that the world they inhabit is worthy of attention and that their concerns are worth listening to. You are saying that what happens to them is important and if the reader pays close attention, they might just feel something too.

Stories are precious and storytellers are magical. And they have never been more important. We are all fighting for our own attention spans. We know that social media is bad for us, that short-form video content is addictive and that blue light keeps us awake before bed. Knowing that doesn't make it any easier to deal with.

I often find my attention wandering away from me, my hand moving to pick my phone up before I realise what it is doing. Every second we spend thinking is precious. And writing is an act of thinking. It claws back something essential, something that is only for us.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is a threat to writers. It is being trained off our work, scraping it from social media and pirated libraries without paying us.

This supplement will probably find its way into its great jaws some time in the near future. AI chatbots cannot exist without this fundamental theft. But, more than that, generative AI robs us of our chances to think.

Here's the thing: writing isn't always fun. Sometimes, it's infuriating. Sometimes, you put your heart and soul into a piece and it doesn't come out the way you want it to. You can't let that stop you. You pick up the pen, you try again. It is work, but it is a labour of love. Every single writer published here has put in hours of work that you cannot see.

Without work, without thought, without empathy and imagination, there is no story. There are only words. The writing that is produced by a generative AI chatbot is a dead thing, something that is less than the sum of its parts. The stories that you will read in this supplement are alive. They breathe. They are human. The sheer creative power contained in a single one could never be replicated by AI.

Writers do not write to be published, they write because they have something to say. They have a story or a poem that lives inside them, and it has to come out. But it is important that they are published so we get the chance to hear them. And there's nothing quite like seeing your name in print.

So, open these pages up and prepare to be transported to another world. And I mean, really: prepare. A story is not complete until it is read. Come to them with an adventuring mind, ready for wherever they bring you.

You will read stories that play with genre: blending it, subverting it, refusing the label altogether. You will move from pieces that span space and time to stories that take place on a phone screen. Some give weight to the everyday, and others that treat the end of the world like it's just another day at the office. There are experiments in form and in content, and the writers are not afraid to mix the funny with the dark. They are not afraid of big philosophical questions either.

When we write, we transform the three dimensional world around us into lines of text. It's transfiguration, alchemy, a magic trick. Good writers know how to play with the minds of their readers. Great writers let willing readers do the work for them. Because reading is also about imagination and empathy. We want to feel, to learn, to laugh, to cry. To not take our lives for granted, to be given a new lens to view the world.

When we read and when we write, the big problems become solvable. Not by ourselves, but together – with imagination and empathy.

Friend from foe



A story by **Lile-Grace Mullan**, age 15, Dublin

First came the blinding light; Then the deafening silence. Or maybe it was the ringing, which came after. It might've been the crumbling and crashing of the buildings around me. The sickening wash of cold – then the disgusting, suffocating heat. But the order didn't matter, because now, the once ashen snow that danced through the morning breeze, turned to a storm of ash drifting through a ruined sky.

I stumbled through the cluttered streets – my mind I must have left splattered on the ground where I had awoken. The air was thick with smog, tickling the back of my throat raw, peeling the skin of my face like sandpaper, burning the glaze of my eyes.

From a cocoon of what had once been beautifully painted walls, a hand emerged. Frail, shaking fingers, dust-coated and desperate, reached blindly for air. Drowning in a sea of concrete. The hand sought my own, though I didn't

know who had grabbed whom. There was no strength I could muster to save whomever lay beneath – yet still I tugged without thought – and despite the choked cries that rang out, the crackling walls parted and from there blossomed a trembling young man.

He must have been beautiful *once*, before the downpours of rain turned into downpours of bombs. Now his shirt was soaked through with blood, I wasn't quite sure if it was mine or his. He babbled mindlessly as he clung to me, hot tears and shaky breaths smothering my shoulder. Cold, clammy hands and skin stuck to me. The boy sobbed. Prayed to God – thanked God. Thanked me. Called me a hero. He rambled about everything and anything, until his voice turned to mere croaks. Told me of his elderly mother – how scared she must be. *How I'd given him one more chance to see her.*

I'm not certain how long we stood there, clinging to each other helplessly, but soon the dust settled. A figure

materialised from the haze: a soldier, uniform dusted grey, helmet tucked under one arm. He stood tall with shoulders broad, wrinkles on his face beyond his years.

His shout drifted through the ringing in my ears, muffled yet sharp in its intent. He raised his weapon. I didn't even process the shot until the boy in my arms fell limp, warm liquid soaking into my sleeves.

The soldier hurled me forward, screeching at me about the enemy, insisting I'd been fooled. I followed, legs numb, leaving the boy behind on the broken pavement.

But. For a moment, that sun shone down upon me – and for once I was the man I had enrolled to be.

A hero.

Still the light shifted, as it always seemed to do. And I walked on. Yet, the familiar glory of a battle won never graced me.

The enemy had seemed so human, mere minutes ago. Young like me, scared like me. Emotions no monster could fake.

I wondered if he was just as lost as me.

Straight to voicemail



A personal essay by **Charlee Rutherford**, age 16, Co Donegal

I have been sitting on my bedroom floor for what feels like years, staring at old text messages. The last message sent (or should I say the last 20) is from me? They all went unanswered. Nobody ever really talks about grief, maybe because it is too hard to define, but you will know when you feel it. We will all feel it at some stage in our lives, whether it is for a pet, family member, or friend, but what we do not ever imagine is what it feels like to lose a young person.

I have lost my grandparents, and yes, I was sad, but losing you came with a very different sort of pain. When an elderly person dies, it is sad; that sadness comes from missing that person's presence, but when a young person suddenly passes, you don't just grieve them, but you also grieve the life they could have lived, the memories they could have made, and the person they could have become.

An old person's death is a shame, but a young person's death is a tragedy.

I have read every message between us since the sixth of September 2021 until the sixth of November 2023. I could not tell you how many times I have done this over the last two years, how many times I have listened to the last voicemail you sent, just to hear your voice for fear of forgetting it. I listen to it once more, then read the messages again, hoping to engrave them into my brain, so I will never forget.

My eyes linger on the last message sent; it



was the day we buried you and that day a piece of me was buried along with you. I remember waking up that morning and realising it was all real, that I was not dreaming and that I was never going to see you again.

I called you three times, every time the call went straight to voicemail.

Now I sit here, two years later, and I call you one last time. My stomach still drops, when I hear your voicemail, part of me still hopes you will pick up all these years later. I listen to your voice telling me to leave a message. Then I listen to the voice message you left three days before you left. I smile when I hear your voice giving out to me for not answering and demanding that I call you back as soon as I

can. I curse myself for not having listened; I never thought it would be my last opportunity to talk to you. I feel tears well up in my eyes as I leave your contact, knowing that this is my last time reading it. Silently crying, I type out my last message.

"I miss you", then I delete your contact from my phone and with it your voicemail.

I suppose we are lucky we can grieve. To have loved and to have been loved so deeply that we can still feel its power so many years later is quite a blessing.

If you are looking for emotional support, please email jo@samaritans.ie or call on 116 123

Iomaí



A story by **Eabha McLaughlin**, age 17, Co Mayo

I sat on the wiry grass, looking out at the sea, hoping its blue warmth could just sweep me up and whisk me away. There was heat in the sun, but it was accompanied – always – by a refreshing sea breeze.

I pulled my legs in tighter to my chest in an effort to keep out the cold. Maybe it wasn't the best day to wear shorts. Dad had told me not to, but we were going to the beach. I wasn't going to not wear shorts. Everyone else was in the car eating – Mum, of course, had brought her own picnic.

But I'd wanted to stay out a little while longer, not really to say any final goodbyes, but more so to just soak up the moment. The sound of the sea. The breeze pulling at my T-shirt. The feeling of the sun on my face. The smell of the air that belonged only in this corner of the world. This was my idea of heaven, and I wanted to remember it. I wanted to bottle up this feeling, this place, and then release it whenever I could and let this memory wash over me as clear and smooth as the tide.

Who knew when I'd be here again and feel this calm again. It would be a few



months, for sure. Maybe the Christmas holidays, but then I would be coming back to a different beauty. No sun and definitely no shorts. Although, in all honesty, this place didn't need the sun to be breathtaking. The sun just added to it.

I looked around at the graves, wondering what connected the people resting here to this island. Maybe they'd grown up surrounded by its unwavering beauty, or maybe they just loved it so much they chose to make it their final home. There were a thousand stories in this graveyard, and I was only intertwined in one of them. Whatever their story was, it had led them somewhere gentle. It felt like everything came full circle here – the Irish name for Omev, Iomaí, literally translates to "resting place".

I heard Dad calling me back to the car, back to reality. I took a final look around and touched the headstone. "Bye", I whispered. I made my way back to the car and we drove across the strand to the mainland. I was leaving my sanctuary for now, but I knew this wasn't goodbye – I would feel the pull of the island soon enough, drawing me back.

The vision in the scriptorium



A story by
Tom O'Neill,
age 13, Dublin

Brother Caolán loved his simple life as a monk. Away from the wars and intrigue of the Irish mainland, each day consisted mostly of work and prayer. He had all he could ever want. It didn't seem like anything unusual would happen.

On the 23rd of October, Anno Domini 677, however, something unusual *did* happen. Caolán was in the scriptorium at the time, copying the Gospel of St Mark on to vellum, when he heard a beautiful voice:

"Brother Caolán. Exactly four-and-10 centuries hence, the world will be rocked by a cataclysm like none seen before or ever after. I implore you to warn your fellow monks. This cataclysm will not be

prevented, but some people may yet be saved by your efforts."

"Who was that?" shouted Caolán, understandably annoyed that his transcription had been interrupted. He looked around the room. Everything was normal, but for a moment, he was sure he saw the Virgin Mary Herself.

"You have drunk too much poitín, Brother," said Brother Áed to Brother Caolán. "The drink has made you hallucinate!" All the other monks chortled and guffawed at this.

"I do not drink poitín, or any other intoxicating beverage!" retorted Caolán. "And I am not mad either. I swear on the Old and New Testaments, I truly saw Her!"

"Exactly," said Brother Brénainn. "And I rescued three score peasants from a dragon last week." There was just no convincing Caolán's fellow monks.

"Brothers, we ought to consult the abbot about this," suggested Brother Rónán.

"Finally, someone speaks sense!" shouted Caolán, rather exasperated.

"I agree. Mayhaps Abbot Diarmuid will be able to convince Brother Caolán that he is, indeed, having drunken hallucinations!" chuckled Brother Abbán.

Caolán sighed. This was going to take a while.



"I am deeply sorry, Brother Caolán, but Brother Áed was right," said Abbot Diarmuid.

"But I do not drink intoxicating beverages!" pleaded Caolán.

"I know you do not," answered Brother Éogan. "You are simply a madman, who sees things that are not there."

"No, he is a liar!" shouted Brother Lonán. "He just wants a visit from Pope Donus himself!"

"He is possessed by a demon," Brothers Lugaid and Lorcán suggested at the same time.

"DRUNKARD!" several monks yelled.

"MADMAN!" other monks shrieked.

"LIAR!" another bunch of monks hollered.

"DEMON!" most of the rest of the monks screamed.

"Mayhaps, even if it is unlikely, Brother Caolán speaks the truth?" argued Brother Manchán.

"I do speak the truth! Thank you, Brother!" shouted Caolán.

"Calm down, Brothers," said the abbot. "We have already established that Brother Caolán drinks too mu-"

"SILENCE!" a woman's voice said, not shouting, and yet audible over all the commotion. "Brother Caolán truly did see me yesterday. If you wish for anyone to survive after the cataclysm that is to come four-and-10 centuries hence, you will indeed build an underground structure deep enough to survive the fire and ice that will consume the Earth."

The monks said nothing. They knew what they had to do.

The small leather shoes



A story by **Sarah Rose Edwards**,
age 15, Co Kildare

These little brown leather shoes, worse for wear for being beaten by the harsh weather for so long, belonged to a young six-year-old

orphaned girl, Myia Laurence. No one knew very much about Myia, other than her name they knew nothing at all. All they saw was the young girl with rosy cheeks, long blonde hair and deep blue eyes that sparkled under the street lights. No one knows how she came to stay on the streets of Temple Bar, she just appeared one day.

Myia doesn't go to school and if she did she doesn't remember a thing, but one thing she is talented at is: stealing. She nicks little trinkets from shops, or bread from tables and sometimes little yellow, blue and pink sweets from the stalls at



markets. Since she is so small, most people don't notice her in the first place, and if she happens to catch someone's eye it's like they see right through her.

In the winter even though she is on the streets in her tattered brown skirt and torn

green knitted cardigan she is not cold. She has not felt cold in a long time.

Myia never seemed to notice the way she never grew older, or that she is never truly seen. Never notices the people taking pictures of where she usually sleeps, with pity plastered on their faces. She never notices the shiny bronze statue of a little girl who looks just like her, with the same small little shoes. The statue huddled up in a corner against the rough stonewalls of temple bar, on West Essex Street, trying to shy away from the cold surrounded by cuddly toys some are damp and tearing at the seams and covered in dirt and muck. While some still look soft, bright and fluffy. She never noticed a plaque beside the statue which had neatly written in bold brass "an innocent young girl, Myia Laurence died in December 2023. Protect children from the streets." Since she never learned how to read she will never know what that plaque says, she will spend centuries, millennia never knowing why she is never acknowledged by people walking alongside her, her pleas for a meal.

Never knowing why she no longer feels the cold.



A story by **Marysia Tomczak**, age 18, Co Cork

A school of silver fish meandered through the liminal space between the sea and the sky, leaping in synchrony. Their slick bodies arched. Scales glistened like scattered coins. The heat was so searing the water seemed to evaporate from their smooth backs. They could feel the cool air through their gills. Beneath them lay an ecosystem, pulsing with life. Below, the crustaceans crawled between coral crevices. Crimson crabs picked at debris with their clamorous claws. Lobsters wove deftly through thick tangles of seaweed that danced to the beat of the sea in a silent ritual. The water held a deceptive serenity. A camouflaged octopus watched a leaden ship cast a pall over the tranquil sea. The water rippled as if warning the creatures. Not all of them heard it. A blanket of chunky, verdigris stitches knotted together spread across like a web of betrayal. Its fibres laced with fear. The school of fish, once moving so freely, were thrown into chaos. They darted into desperate zigzags; trepidation loomed over them. Their iridescent bodies were like flashes of lightning under

the ominous shadow of the ship. The net tightened. The strong ones wriggled through the holes of the net, slithering their way to freedom. The smaller, weaker fish knew they had lost. Their bodies grew weary, the strength to escape slipping from their fins. Their silver flashes faded into a white haze as they ascended above the surface, torn from the only world they had ever known. Their bodies pressed together, suffocating in fear. Gills flared in desperation. Tails thrashed in frantic attempts to escape. Their glassy eyes, once gleaming like fine cuts of obsidian, grew dull, as if the light had been stolen from them forever. The net rose slowly. Their fragile world shrank with every heave of the fisherman's rope. The surface, once a distant mirage, loomed closer. They ascended into a world they did not belong to. They gasped for water. The air stinging their gills. A whale sang in the distance, as if mourning these beautiful creatures. The haunting sound lingered through the ocean like a requiem for the lost. The waves carried it to the shore. A flock of seagulls froze mid-flight, their feathers ruffled with the doleful mourning hymn. The octopus watched from the shadows of a coral reef, its body shifting from hues of violet to dusky mauve. One of its arms curled around a rock in search of solace, another coiled inward, seeking safety, yet another curled in anger, pressing against the sand. Many times before, it had watched nets descend, littering the ocean with foreign fibres, and rise again brimming with stolen lives. The fishermen admired their trappings, feeling not a morsel of guilt. The octopus, however, felt the weight of every lost life, every soul snatched away from the ocean's embrace. All three of its hearts ached silently.

Keep your friends close and ChatGPT closer



A poem by **Ella McLoughlin**, age 17, Co Wexford

Hello, ChatGPT, haven't heard of you,
Teacher said to try this, 'You might learn something new',
I'll give it a go if it'll keep Miss quiet,
It's a once-off thing, I may as well try it.

Events of the Cold War, please, bullet-point form,
Why are countries at the equator far more warm?
How many moons does Jupiter have?
Make a pros and cons list of going out with that lad.

ChatGPT, help, my homework is so hard,
Today is my aunt's birthday, write her a card,
Finish my essay on that lad King Lear,
You know, the one written by William Shakespeare.

Lengthen this, Shorten this, do it right now,
Make this answer better because I don't know how,
Simplify it, underline it, make it make sense,
I need you to guide me through this sea of nonsense.

ChatGPT, I've forgotten how to think,
All of my opinions are washed down the sink,
ChatGPT, what should I do?
Come on! I need you! I'm relying on you!



Training in the shadows



A story by 16-year-old **Caragh Skillen**, a member of the Fighting Words NI Write Club and Youth Advisory Panel

You're going easy on me!" Starshot shouted, his fists held up in front of his chest. We'd been training for about thirty minutes now. I had suggested we train at night as the darkness would hide our presence from humans or any of H.O.U.N.D's sapphire soldiers roaming around.

Was I going easy on him? Well, yes. Of course I was. He's a child and I'm a fully grown adult, how does he expect to beat me in combat? If I hit him too hard, he'd fall off the roof. "And what makes you think that?" I shouted back, throwing a punch in his direction only for him to dodge at the last second.

"I can just tell, Dreamskip," he replied. "You're not trying as hard as you do with Phase and Freebird."

For someone so young, he was so angry. I couldn't tell if that was caused by being unlucky enough to be born a mutant, or if it's because he's a teenage boy. "Phase and Freebird are both adults and are more experienced than you are."

"So? I'm basically an adult too!" A punch flew past my head. He was close but wasn't fast. I'll have to make a mental note on that. "Starshot, you're only 17," I told him. "Try again, but faster this time."

"Right." He threw another punch, getting better this time but not quite there yet.

"And so, what if I'm 17? So is Electropop and Groundhog! What makes them so special?" he protested. I went to kick him this time.

"Okay, first of all, we don't know that for sure. That's only a theory. And second, Electropop is a villain and Groundhog is an anti-hero. We're vigilantes. Also, I train Siro the same way," I added, Starshot just barely sidestepping my kick but still stumbling. "You weren't expecting a kick. You need to expect the unexpected when fighting, you know how the sapphire soldiers are. They fight dirty, especially against superhumans and mutants," I added.

"Yeah, yeah I know," Starshot replied. Does he know? He's never had any interaction with the sapphire soldiers outside of vigilante work, he probably doesn't realise how violent they really are. Sure, they're already violent enough as it is with us, but we're breaking the law, so it's expected. He's never been face to face with one as a civilian, as a poor, defenceless child. I hope to God it says that way.

"I won't learn if you don't give it your all," he claimed.

"The saying is, 'You won't learn if you don't give it your all,'" I corrected. "You may believe you're ready, but you're not. Your punches are messy and your dodges are sloppy. Until you fix that, I will be holding back." I grab his leg and pull as he tries to kick me, landing him on the roof ground with a thud. "You all right?" I asked.

"Mmm, fine," he mumbled. "I still don't think this is fair, going easy on me cause of my age, 'ats ageism or ... something."

I couldn't help but laugh at that last part, though I don't think he found it too funny as he looked up with a glare, he probably thought he looked scary but from here he just looked like an angry cat. "I understand that it's frustrating, but you have to understand, I'm not going easy on you because of your age. I'm going easy because you're untrained. You can't beat me when I'm going easy so what makes you think you can when I'm trying my best?"

He said nothing, the loudest thing here was the cool wind in the night.

"How about we -"

"What are you two doing up here?" a voice interrupted.

I could feel myself going pale, the blood quickly draining from my face as I turned around, coming face-to-face with a sapphire soldier. He was in full gear, a completely black underpart with dark blue armour and a sapphire fitted on his belt to match.

"Ohhhhhh, hey there," I said, dragging it out for as long as possible. "Lovely night isn't it? Loving the warm weather." That last part was a lie, it was absolutely Baltic.

"You haven't answered my question," he said coldly. "What are you two doing up here?"

His footsteps echoed in the night as he stepped closer, one hand on his belt. I'm assuming he has a weapon in there. I can't let him get violent, not with Starshot here, I'll just have to stall until -

"It's okay we have a permit," Starshot started. What is this child doing, he's gonna get himself shot!

"Here," he said, reaching into his pocket and tossing over a folded piece of paper.

The soldier was silent for a second as he unfolded the paper. I felt Starshot grab my arm while he read.

"This just says I do what I want," the soldier spat, but by the time he looked up we had already made a break for it and jumped to the next roof.

"Wait, get back here immediately!" The soldier yelled out angrily as he began running, though he stopped after Starshot yelled back, "Bye bye buzzkill," and accepted defeat.

That was a close call, too close. I had no idea that he was there and if he had known who we were sooner, he might have tried to kill us. I can't let that happen with Starshot here, who knows what H.O.U.N.D would do with him if we all got caught.

The basketball disaster

An extract from a story by **P5, Enniskillen Integrated Primary School**, Co Fermanagh

Grace, the ant-sized giraffe, and her best friend Joe, the slightly bigger T-Rex, were playing basketball and tackling the players on the other team. They were playing in the school fields and training to get into the Junior National Giraffe Basketball Association.

Grace shouted, "Come on! We've got to work harder."

Joe sighed, "I understand, I'll try to work harder."

They won their next match, and they got into the tournament. Whenever Grace and Joe arrived, they realised that all of the other giraffes on the other team were six foot tall!

They were feeling anxious and nervous about the game when they first looked at the players. As soon as they started dribbling, they realised that this other team was playing dirty.

Just then, Grace had the ball. She stopped and thought for a moment, and then realised she had wings



Fighting Words NI is very grateful for the support of its principal funders: the **Government of Ireland** through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Reconciliation Fund, **Arts Council of Northern Ireland** and **Paul Hamlyn Foundation**

Writing Our Selves

Frilly Hilly

An extract from a story by **students in P5, St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Belfast**

Frilly Hilly is a hill world by north; it's really hilly! It's sometimes snowy, and sometimes rainy, but the rain is sparkly iridescent.

The hills are square, hexagon and cylinder shaped, some are big and some are small. The smallest one is the size of a pencil case, the medium one is the size of a school and the largest is the size of 10 suns combined. The hills are mossy, duck-pond green.

The creatures that live there are all the same size regardless of age, they're about 5ft tall and look like bear-like-humans. Their fur changes

colour depending on what they feel (if they're angry its red, happy is yellow, hunger is dark blue, etc.)

There are no cars or other vehicles, but you ride around on creatures. The creatures look like ducks with jetpacks (which never run out of fuel because they're powered by magic solar power and whales) and spiders (which are 100ft big and used for mass-transport). There are also flying capybaras that fly by walking through the air.

There are also ziplines. You can only get to Frilly Hilly by flying car, which you find on another planet...



Windy and Sky are good friends

An extract from a story by students in **P5, Donegall Road Primary School, Belfast**

Once upon a time, there was a dog called Windy and she had home-made wings. Her wings were white and blue and made out of fluff. Windy had a best friend called Sky, who was also a dog. Windy had white fur with black spots. Sky was a black dog with white spots.

Sky and Windy went to Spain. Windy flew and Sky used her water powers to get there. While they were going to Spain, Sky fell into the water; she lost control of her powers a

little bit because she's still figuring them out. Once they got to Spain, Windy's parents found her. Windy's mum was a white dog with purple spots, and her dad was a white dog with navy spots.

Windy's mum said angrily, "Windy, you need to come home right now! You were supposed to have your dinner before you went out." She was annoyed that Windy hadn't told her where she was going.

Windy said happily, "Oh, okay, but can I have five more minutes?"



Windy had her five more minutes and then went home and had her dinner. Then she came back and it took one hour to reach Spain. When she got there, she found out that Sky had gone to get Spanish food without her. Windy was feeling very angry...



The crazy disaster planet

An extract from a story by **P5, Currie Primary School, Belfast**

It's a city – the whole world is one big city. In this city, there are extra big football pitches.

It rains lava from oranges that float in the sky every

Tuesday, only sometimes. It's really rare but sometimes, hard orange planets the size of a basketball can fall from the sky.

It has tiny little ant-sized aliens, who eat human toes. The aliens can change colours and turn invisible. Humans can travel to this planet. The only way to survive them is to throw the aliens out the window.

In the south of the planet, there are farms. The farm has invisible dirt that you can walk on and they plant water seeds, which grow giant spouts of ice which turn into water. It's very valuable.

There's a magic stick with a diamond on it that allows you to teleport to this planet. One minute on Earth is a couple of days on this planet...

Writing Our Selves, launched in September 2025, is a three-year residency in five Belfast primary schools. It provides an extended programme of creative writing activities that enhances children's connection with writing for pleasure and deepens collaboration with teachers. Writing Our Selves is funded by **Paul Hamlyn Foundation**, **RTÉ Toy Show Appeal** through the **Community Foundation for Northern Ireland** and **Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland**

American dynasty



A story by **Luísa Pitzer**, age 17,
Co Kildare

With her long, wavy red hair tied into a loose bun, Elizabeth took the afternoon train from Lake Charles, a small town in New Orleans.

New Orleans was a place of magic, jazz and wine-drunk dancing. But to Elizabeth, it was a place that had betrayed her all too well.

The lies and scandals. The broken friendships. The divorce. She was ready to escape it all, to a little house in Rhode Island. A house that never once hesitated to welcome her, or failed to listen. A house that stood by her before her husband's infidelity. Before the rumours, and whispers that she was out of her mind, not to be trusted. After all, a woman who was divorced in plain 1954 was not taken lightly. The only possible explanation for it all was that she drove her husband away. Maybe she didn't cook him warm, fulfilling meals every night, or greet him with soft yet passionate affection when he was home after work.

Those weren't the only things said, though – and they only got worse. Ridiculous things like she stole a dog from the local pet store and dyed its fur a bright magenta. Anything to make her character seem malicious, and anything that only very naive people believed.

Alas, it was time she let it all go. Time she



stopped letting herself be controlled by others' opinions. A town where no one knew her name seemed like the perfect place for this.

Elizabeth dusted off her emerald petticoat, fixed her velvety gloves, and picked up her suitcase. She stepped off the train, and was greeted with a breeze of relief.

The air was different – fresher. Here, people didn't look at her twice. They didn't whisper when she passed by, or look to her as if she was a giant insect with three heads. Here, they smiled, and wished her a good evening.

In front of her dreamy saltbox house, she crouched and grabbed the keys from under the "welcome" mat.

With every twist of the key in the lock, she daydreamed of the times to come.

A newfangled group of ladies, whom she'd drink champagne with, gossip about those they knew, and laugh to the point of tears until late hours. Ladies who would stay beside her, carefree, with no worry for status.

Maybe she'd meet a man. A tall, handsome stranger who may become her companion for life. Someone who actually respected her, shared her dreams, and would dance barefoot in the refrigerator lights to the classics by Sinatra.

She'd definitely make friends with her neighbours, show them she was a genuine person who exists beyond what people thought of her.

Maybe.

But one thing was sure, she thought to herself as she took her first step into the house. Here, she was going to be happy.

Here, it was home.

The revenge of the Pekkas

An extract from a **Primary Story** by fifth class,
St Paul's National School, Islandeady, Co Mayo

One night when Pekka the robot and Mini Pekka were sleeping in their castle a dragon as dark as the night sky came and swooped down breathing fire on the castle and set it on fire.

Pekka and Mini Pekka rushed out of the castle and saw the dragon flying away. They sent knights and giants to try to find the dragon.

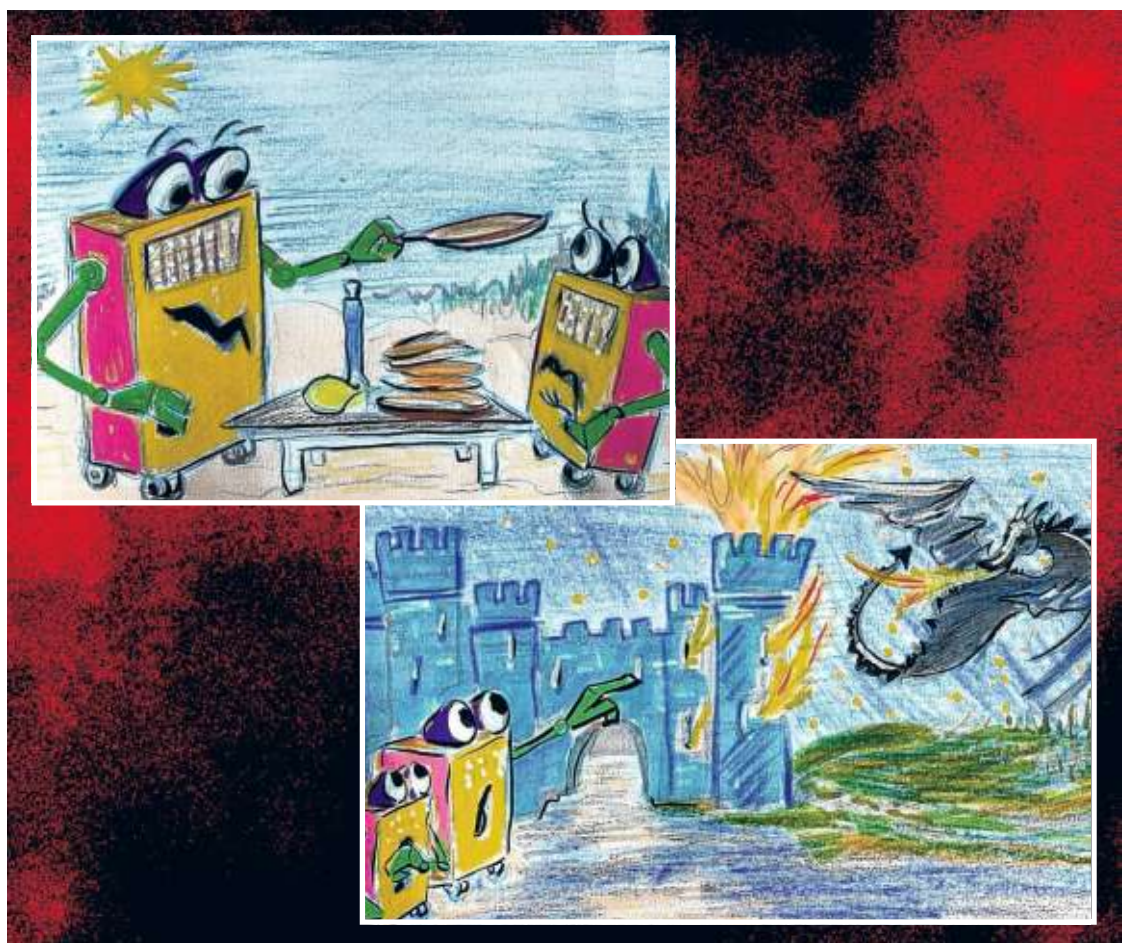
They said: "Don't come back until you slay the dragon."

When the morning came Mini Pekka decided to make pancakes to cheer everybody up.

Mini Pekka and Pekka were still upset that their castle had been damaged. "I absolutely despise that dragon for destroying the tower of our castle," said Mini Pekka.

"You are our only hope of finding the dragon," said Pekka to Mini Pekka. They set off to find the dragon.

Never-the-less Pekka went into the forest and went into a bush and he found a tank. He went back to Mini Pekka and showed him...



The last letter



A story by **Kayla Joyce**,
age 17, Co Roscommon

Dear love,
I know what you must be thinking. I'm a sentimental sort for even thinking of writing this. Well, forgive me if I want to indulge a little. I don't get to do it often.
I miss when it was just us. We were both young and knew nothing about the world, about our lives. Summers on the beach, winters camping in places we never should have been in while up to our ankles in snow- blissful happiness without all of the doubts that hang over us now.
Don't laugh, please, but I want you to do one of those visualisation exercises again. I've made a recording for you. Listen to it after you read this, eventually. I know it'll make you cry, and you're probably wear-

ing something really nice right now. I wouldn't want to mess it up – mess you up more than my self-indulgence already has. It won't be long and it won't be much, but I want you to remember, for me, what you felt back then.
I hope it'll help. Your memory's never been the best, so I have a few pictures from some of our first trips as well, if you want them. Ones I never showed you. I thought, maybe, they'd be "useful" somewhere down the line – for the sake of embarrassing you at a holiday party if the topic ever came up.
You look so much more relaxed in them. I've missed it – though maybe that's nostalgia talking. Did you know that the fishing trip we took last year was when you got that scar on the back of your leg? I figured it out while looking over things for the funeral, but you'd been so enamoured in telling me about the fort you found while gathering firewood (and high on prescription painkillers) you didn't notice you were rocking your leg back and forth on the log. That's where you got your constellations, imprinted like tattoos are.
Is it weird I like knowing I've left a mark on you? An impulsive trip I insisted on out of boredom left you with a physical piece of me. It's neat, right? I figured out who I am today because of you. I hope you've en-



joyed watching me find my bearings in life as I have with you.
I'll keep watching. It's been such a joy seeing you become a person and don't let me not being there make you fall apart completely. You found out who you were with me, now time to find out who you are without.
This was always going to happen. We've

joked about it and I know that when it's real, it gets more terrifying, but this is why I have the visualisation. In your memory, I'm still here, and things are still okay.
I just need you to trust me, and keep going. That's it.
Yours, always.
PS: Let the cat in. She deserves that – you can always get new furniture.

Alex's space adventure

An extract from a **Primary Story** by **third class, St Etchen's National School**, Co Westmeath

Once upon a time there was a boy who wanted to go to space. His name was Alex.
One day he was dreaming and his house turned into a rocketship. He woke up shocked saying "I can't believe my house turned into a rocketship!" He heard a rumbling sound and then he looked out of his window.
He couldn't believe what he saw, he was speechless. He saw that his dream had come to life.
He could barely breathe with excitement. "Oh my God!" he screamed. He went to his mam, Emma's room to see if she was there. She was crawling on the



floor, saw Alex and jumped up to hug him. "I'm so glad I found you," she said.
Alex's dad, Timmybob was under the bed and he was afraid. While Alex was hugging his mam, he remembered something. He had read a book about space. Suddenly an alarm started beeping saying that they would be landing

on planet Rafit immediately.
He ran into his room because he had a space suit and space helmet on his wall. His dad used to be an astronaut.
They landed on planet Rafit and then an alien came to welcome them. "Welcome to planet Rafit," he said. "My name is Tuffell the Rafit!"

Alex looked around and saw that some other aliens decided to welcome them, but it turned out that the aliens wanted to attack him! They take Alex to the his kingdom and capture him.
"NOOOO!" he howled. Timmybob tries to save Alex but also gets captured. Suddenly there was an explosion . . .

You're not alone



A story by
**Abdulmateen
Nurudeen**, Marino
College, age 17,
Dublin

Heavy footfalls, panting. He looked around, wondering where the sounds came from. Oh, they're coming from me. He was running; from what, he didn't know.

The cold around him was a mist that dug deep into his bones, adrenaline the only blanket keeping him warm. He kept running, exhaustion burning his lungs, but his feet moved of their own accord. He suddenly appeared in a log cabin, damp and deserted. He could feel it, the thing that chased him. It felt familiar, yet vaguely terrifying. Like a friend turned enemy, a danger hidden behind a facade of innocence.

Suddenly, the mist morphed into sturdy chains that grabbed at his limbs and reeled him in. Now in control of his body, he strained against the pull, willing the chains to shatter and free him. To his surprise, they did. But it wasn't over yet. The scene transformed and he was now dangling thousands of feet above a sheer drop by one hand. The jagged rocks below sharp, ready to rip holes in him. The mist circled him, trying to make him lose hold of the ledge he held on to. He thought of his friends and family, and he gained energy anew, vigour racing through his veins. He willed his other arm to grab on to another ledge in the rock that wasn't there before.



Step by step, he completed the arduous journey to the top of the cliff, the mist redoubling its efforts to make him fall with each step he took. As he manoeuvred himself on to the top of the cliff, he found himself in a different scenario yet again. This time, he was wearing a lead-filled swimsuit, sinking to the inky depths of a freezing cold body of water. He was quickly becoming desperate. Each situation had only seemed to get worse and this was no different. Was the suit getting heavier, or was he losing his strength? The question was lost to the depths as a handle attached to a rope slowly sank past him. He lunged towards it, grabbing it with all his strength, clutching the handle so tightly his knuckles went white. The rope slowly but surely started to retract upwards. When he finally surfaced, it was warm and sunny. His family, close friends and some coast guards stared back at him from a patrol boat. Their foreheads were all crinkled with distress.

He opened his eyes to bright lights and his mom's worried face. She broke into a tight smile as tears of relief rolled down her face. His therapist, best friend, and father stood off to the side of the hospital ward. His therapist tried to form words with her mouth, but made no sounds, so she looked like a fish out of water trying to breathe. His mom spoke up: "We were so worried, we didn't know you had relapsed and were struggling to tell us. The doctor said there was a slim chance of you surviving the overdose."

He sighed, done with everything.

If you are looking for emotional support, please email jo@samaritans.ie or call on 116 123

The slimy stories

An extract from a **Primary Story** by 4th and 5th class, Christ the King Boys National School, Cabra, Dublin

Once upon a time, there was a cucumber named Gerald in a land called the Vegiland. In the Vegiland, he went to the Slimy Swamp and met Penny the Pickle.

But then a mysterious villain called The Blender entered Vegiland. He got a bounty for Penny the Pickle and Gerald the Cucumber and he puts up wanted posters to act like they are missing, but secretly he was tracking them.

Gerald found out that The Blender was tracking him. He fell into the radioactive swamp and got superpowers. His super-

powers were that he can shoot pickles and spit out pickle acid. Gerald's best friend Penny the Pickle was on the cutting board and he tried to save her. He saved her and they went to Lettuce Land to track down The Blender.

The most romantic thing happened: Penny the Pickle got married to Gerald the Cucumber. The Blender showed up to the wedding and Gerald the Cucumber and the Blender had a big fight.

So Penny the Pickle didn't know she had powers because they were married. Her power was that she got to spit out boiling hot acid tomato soup.

When Gerald the Cucumber and The Blender were fighting, Penny the Pickle stepped in and poured tomato soup into the Blender, so it didn't work any more. He malfunctioned and exploded!

Then his nephew, a vegetable knife, came to Vegiland to carry on his uncle's legacy. But the Blender had one more trick up his sleeve. He used his clone to fight so his real body was in his lair.

The vegetable knife tried to find Penny the Pickle and Gerald the Cucumber, but they had a safe house on an island off the coast of Madagascar.

The vegetable knife got a plane ticket to the island and brought his uncle's remains to have one last showdown...



Can I hold your hand?



A story by **Claire Harty**,
age 17, Co Limerick

Do you know the compass? The old reliable always points north. Always. You take a reading off it and you know exactly where you are. What if that compass was a person, always pointing you in the right direction? You would never again need a compass. No matter how far you walk in the wrong direction, you will always know which direction is home. Home, by that person's side.

Sitting under the stars my thoughts drift to you. My compass. From where I sit, I am southwest of you but there is that moon. To it, we may as well be together. The moon does not see the some 200km between us. In that beautiful lunar eye we are side by side.

I never understood people who loved the moon. Now I understand, because I



have my own person to miss, you.

I sit here beneath the moon and text you. I tell you something, like how I love the way your hair curls or how you get louder and louder when you are excited. I just wanted to tell you I miss you but, what I most desperately want to tell you is so trivial yet so important.

Every time you tell me how pretty you think I am, the more comfortable I feel in my own skin. Every time you give a passing comment filled with such deep

and caring words that leave me speechless, I feel them. They drip down like rain drops, rolling along the inside of my ribs. When they reach the end they fall into the massive lake that is the pit of my stomach. They splash loudly and ricochet off the walls. The gentle vibrations create that warm fuzzy feeling. Nothing has ever made me feel that way before. I promise, nothing.

Right now, I want to take your hands and show you where I miss you. It is on

either side of me, just behind my ribs, weighing gently on my diaphragm. It sits there with my feelings of worry, like a fat dog sitting on my chest. I wish I never got used to that feeling. But I have.

She never wrote, but when she thought of him, the words came dripping from her pen, falling easy on to the page. She wanted everyone to know how much she adored him but it scared her to share her words. She thought of that moment, sitting beside him in the park.

Little dogs in jackets and kids screaming as they flew around the playground set the scene. The smell of autumnal decay surrounded them but she only had eyes for him. Over a pack of jellies, he stammered out a question, one she was too scared to ask.

As she watches him in her memories, she realises, if he can, why can't she?

Her mind is made up, he shall know, and the world by extension.

She writes a poem.

Too much like WB Yeats. Too vulnerable. So she changed her mind, like all great writers do. And so she began in the middle, with a compass to point her words in the right direction.

The rise of two heroes

An extract from a **Primary Story** by **4th class**, Thomond Primary School, Limerick

Once upon a time there was a young girl named Lily who lived on a farm. She always wanted a cow since she was five.

Now Lily was 10 and she got a cow for her birthday and called him Bob. Lily figured out her tuxedo cat named Toby did NOT like Bob.

Toby liked to chase Bob around, traumatising him by hissing at him and scraping at him with his fierce claws.

One day, when Bob had a break from Toby, Lily threw a banana into a field. Bob didn't want to eat the banana, so he called him Captain Banana. Just then, an oil truck sped by and oil toppled into the field all over the banana.

Captain Banana grew arms and legs and went for a walk with his new friend Bob through the long grass field.

Suddenly Bob stepped in some milk and fainted in shock...



An doras beag



Le Clíodhna Ní Lochlainn, Idirbhliain i Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin ar an gCeathrú Rua

Nuair a dhúisigh mé ní raibh a fhios agam cá raibh mé. Bhreathnaigh mé thart agus níor aithin mé an áit ar chorr ar bith. Bhí mé i ngarraí éigin. Bhí an féar gorm agus bhí na clocha bándearg. Bhí mé an-scanraithe ach bhí suim agam sa gcaoi ar tháinig mé anseo chomh maith. Thriail mé cuimhneamh ar céard a tharla an lá roimhe ach ní raibh mé in ann cuimhneamh ar thada.

D'éirigh mé agus thosaigh mé ag siúl thart. Ní fhaca mé duine ar bith. Cheap mé go raibh sé sin thar a bheith aisteach mar go hiondúil feiceann tú daoine amuigh ag siúl. Ní fhaca mé teach ná siopa ar bith.

Faoin am seo bhí mé ag siúl ar feadh thart ar dhá uair an chloig. Sa deireadh chonaic mé siopa beag leis fhéin. Thug sé seo solás dhom. Nuair a chuaigh mé isteach ann bhí sé dorch. Bhí ceann de na soilse briste agus bhí neadacha damháin alla 'chuile áit. Phioc mé suas mála fataí agus bhreathnaigh mé ar an dáta. Dúirt sé 19ú de mhí Iúil 5042. "Dia dhá réiteach," a dúirt mé liom fhéin, "Tá an áit seo nua."

Bhreathnaigh mé thart tuilleadh agus tháinig mé trasna ar

dhoras beag. D'oscail mé an doras agus ní raibh mé in ann tada a fheiceáil seachas solas corcra. Dhún mé an doras go beo. Bhí mo chroí i mo bheal agus rith mé amach as an siopa ar luas lasrach.

Nuair a chuaigh mé amach taobh amuigh bhí sé tosaithe ag fáil dorch. Cheap mé go raibh sé sin aisteach mar bhí an ghrian ag éirí nuair a dhúisigh mé ar ball.

Ansin . . . go tobann tháinig glór ón spéir. Bhí sé ar nós go raibh Dia éigin ag caint liom. Dúirt an glór go raibh mé sáinnithe anseo go deo mar gur shiúil mé trí dhoras nach raibh mé ceaptha dul isteach ann.

Chuimhnigh mé ar an doras beag a bhí sa siopa. B'fhéidir dá ngabhfainn isteach thríd an doras sin go mbeadh mo shaol ar nós an chaoi a raibh sé cheana. Rith mé isteach sa siopa chuig an doras beag ach ní raibh sé ann. Bhí mé cinnte go raibh mo phort seinnte anois. Rith mé amach as an siopa arís agus bhí sé dubh dorch amuigh. Bhí faitíos aisteach orm anois. Ní raibh mé in ann tada a fheiceáil. Bhí sé ar nós droch-thromluí.

Tar éis píosa chonaic mé solas corcra i bhfad uaim. Cheap mé gur an doras beag a bhí ann. Rith mé go dtí an solas ach nuair a fuair mé gar dhó d'imigh an solas agus chuaigh sé níos faide uaim. Rith mé i bhfad níos sciobtha an uair seo agus an t-am seo, níor bhog an doras.

D'oscail mé an doras agus thriail mé dul tríd ach ní raibh mé in ann. Bhí mé sáinnithe san áit seo go deo agus bhí.

Tá mé sa tromluí go deo.

Bhuail grúpa scríbhneoirí ón Idirbhliain i Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin ar an gCeathrú Rua le chéile i Leabharlann na Ceathrú Rua gach Aoine ar feadh sé seachtaine le haghaidh 'Club Cleite'. Seo ceann de na scéalta a tháinig chun cinn as na seisiúin seo



Teach Mhamó



Le Caitríona Ní Raifeartaigh, aois 17, Coláiste Chroí Mhuire, An Spidéal, Co na Gaillimh

Osclaíonn Bríd an doras do Sheáinín. Agus an doras ag dúnadh ina ndiaidh cloiseann an bheirt na seanghloineacha ag crith sa gcófra. Tá boladh an tí fós beo beathach.

Tógann na gasúir isteach anáil mhór mhillteach agus is é boladh uathúil chumhrán mhilis a seanmháthair atá fós san aer. Déanann an t-urlár fúthu an chreach chéanna is a rinne sí ariamh. Píocann Bríd suas ceann de na frámaí atá ar leac na tine.

"Taispéain dom é, a Bhríd!" a deir Seáinín, agus é suite ar an taobh eile den seomra ar sheanchathaoir luascaidh adhmaid a sheanmháthar. Síneann sí chuige an grianghraf den bheirt acu i mbachlann Mhamó. Síleann deora ó shúile Bhríd agus glanann sí a haghaidh go bog le muinchille a geansaí.

"Tá sé thar am go dtosóidh muid ag glanadh na háite seo, a Sheáinín," a fhógraíonn Bríd go borb. "Fanfaidh mise taobh isitgh ag pacáil, agus is féidir leatsa cruth éicint a chur ar an ngarraí, tá an clái créafóige sin imithe as smacht chomh maith!"



Faigheann Bríd bosca ollmhór cairtchláir. Bailíonn sí suas na mugaí agus na plátaí uilig i dtosach agus cuireann sí síos sa mbosca iad go cúramach. Leanann an cailín óg ar aghaidh ag folmhú an tseantí agus ag cur i dtaisce na gcrúiscíní agus an phluid a chnótáil a seanmháthair.

Tagann cumha aisteach aniar aduaidh ar Bhríd. Sánn sí a haghaidh isteach sa bpluid teolaí agus tugann sí deis cheart di féin caoineachán a dhéanamh an babhta seo.

Déanann sí athchuimhneachán ar na laethanta fada lán de ghrá agus gáire a chaith sí féin agus a deartháir óg sa seanteach seo, agus í ina suí sa seomra suite áit a mbíodh a seanmháthair ag insint na seanscéalta dóibh. Tuigeann Bríd nach bhfuil sí baileach réidh slán a fhágáil leis an

seanteach go fóilleach. Ritheann sí amach chuig Seáinín a bhí ag gearradh an fhaiche, "Níl mé réidh!" a bhéiceann sí air – Casann Seáinín dó an lomaire agus tugann sé barróg mhor chroíúil dá dheirfiúr.

Go tobann cloistear carr na máthar. Glaonn sí isteach ar an mbeirt ógánaigh. "Tá dea-scéala agam daoibh a ghásúir," a adhmhaíonn sí le lonradh ina súile. Breathnaíonn an bheirt ar a chéile is iad chomh sásta le cuach i nead na gcomharsan. Síneann Bríd sall a lámh chuig Seáinín, ag breith greim docht daingean air. Leagann an mháthair síos píosa páipéir ar an mbord mín adhmaid os a comhair.

"Tá mearbhall orm, pictiúr de theach Mhamó?"

"Sea! D'éirigh liom é a cheannach...ní chaithfidh muid an seanteach a dhíol!" a deir sí le gliondar ina croí. Ní raibh cíos, cás ná cathú orthu don chéad uair le ráithe, ó cailleadh a seanmháthair.

Mhothaigh an bheirt faoiseamh mór millteach.

Ní hé cailliúint an tí a bhí ag cur fuadar imní faoina gasúir, ach an smaoineamh go mbeadh a mbaile croíúil teolaí a bhí lán le cuimhní cinn agus scéalta críonna díolta le stráinséir gan aithne ná eolas ar luach pearsanta sheanteach Mhamó.



Scanradh



Le **Alva Donoghue**, aois 16, Coláiste Chroí Mhuire, An Spidéal, Co na Gaillimhe

Ní dhéanfaidh mé dearmad ar an oíche sin, an oíche nuair a chuaigh an dorchadas isteach i mo chroí agus nuair a thuig mé go raibh roinnt rudaí nach raibh le feiceáil ann. Bhí an oíche sin difriúil ó gach oíche eile. Agus é ag druidim le hOíche Nollag, ba mhór an ciúnas a bhí timpeall orainn. Bhí an dorchadas ag líonadh gach cúinne den teach. Ní raibh torann na n-ainmhithe sa chlós ná fuaim na gaoithe ag séideadh idir na crainn le cloisteáil. Bhí gach rud faoi gheasa na hoíche, agus bhí an t-aer fuar agus géar.

Bhí mé sa mbaile i m’aonair ar ndóigh an oíche sin. Bhí mo thuismitheoirí sáinnithe ag an obair agus is léir nach mbeadh siad ar ais go dtí an mhaidin dar cionn. Bhí mé i mo shuí ar an leaba, ag éisteacht le pod-chraoladh ceoil. Ní raibh solas ar bith sa teach ach amháin an splanc beag a bhí ag teacht ó mo sheomra.

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Bhí Cócó, mo mhadra, ina chodladh go ciúin ag bun na leapa.. nó sin mar a cheap mé.

Go tobann-**Preab**. Tháinig torann trom ón halla. D’éirigh Cócó suas láithreach agus thosaigh sé ag stánadh isteach sa

dorchadas amhail is go bhfaca sé rud éigin. “Cé atá ann?” a d’iarr mé. Níor tháinig freagra ar bith- ach tháinig fuaim céimeanna, mall agus míchompordach, amhail is go raibh rud éigin ag druidim. D’éirigh mé ó mo leaba go mall agus shiúil mé i dtreo Cócó, a bhí anois ag bun an staighre. Las na soilse sa halla go toba nn... agus mhúch siad go tapa arís, ar nós go raibh rud éigin ag cur isteach orthu.

Ansin, tháinig scríobadh ar urlár an tí...ní cosúil le cat agus ní cosúil le duine. Rud éigin eile, cinnte. Rud as an ngnáth. Stop gach rud. Tháinig tost nach raibh nádúrtha. Tost a mhothaigh mé i mo chnámha.

Cnag.

Doras an tí a bhí ann. Cnag amháin. Trom.

Rith mé chuig an bhfuinneog. D’fhéach mé amach ar an dorchadas-ní raibh aon duine ann. Bhí sé deacair aon rud a fheiceáil fiú le solas na gealaí. Ach i gcoirnéal an ghairdín.. chuala mé rud éigin ag bogadh. Ní fhaca mé ach scáil-í ró- ard le bheith ina dhuine is róchaol le bheith ina crann.

Rith mé ar ais chuig mo sheomra agus chuir mé glas ar an doras. Shuigh mé ar mo leaba, Cócó ag crónán go ciúin.

Ansin, díreach taobh thiar de dhórais an tseomra...

“Scríob... Scríob....Scríob....”

Scríobadh mall, amhail is go raibh méar amháin ag tarraingt síos tríd an adhmaid. Stop sé arís. Tháinig ciúnas.

Bhí mé díreach ag seasamh suas chun glaoch a chur ar mo thuismitheoirí nuair a chuala mé rud a thóg an croí as mo chliabhrach.

Guth beag, ciúin, ach i bhfad ró-ghar: **“Ní féidir leat éalú uaim anois...”**

An cailín nár thug éinne faoi deara

Scéal a scríobh grúpa a d’fhreastal ar cheardlann Fighting Words na Gaeilge ag an **Féile LASTA, Siamsa Tíre, Trá Lí**

Fadó, fadó bhí cailín ann darbh ainm di Valerie.
Once upon a time, there was a girl named Valerie.

Níor thug éinne aon aird uirthi.
No one noticed her.

Níor thug a tuismitheoirí fiú amháin aon aird uirthi.
Her parents didn’t even notice her.

Gach lá, thagadh sí abhaile ón scoil, agus rachadh sí chuig a seomra leapa.
Everyday, she’d come home from school and go to her bedroom.

Bhí sí i gcónaí ag scríobh agus ag léamh leabhar.
She was always writing and reading books.

Thaitin leabhair fantaisíochta léi.
She liked fantasy books.

Bhí sí i gcónaí ag cuimhneamh ar eachtraí fantaisíochta, ag dul go tíortha difriúla ag troid le dragain agus mar sin de.
She was always imagining fantastic adventures, going to different countries fighting with dragons and such.

Bhí a fhios aici go raibh sé páistiúil agus dodhéanta, a bheith ag iarraidh saol lán le heachtraí, ach níor chuir sé sin stop lena cuid aislingí.
She knew it was childish and impossible, wanting a life full of adventures, but that didn’t stop her dreams.

Bhí an t-am is fearr den bhliain ag teacht, an t-am sin den bhliain a mbeadh sí in ann a cara a fheiceáil, taibhse Mhary Antoinette.
The best time of year was coming up, the time of year when she could see her friend, the ghost of Mary Antoinette.

Thaitin sé go mór léi a bheith ina cuideachta.
She really liked hanging out with her.

Oíche Shamhna amháin, bhí rudaí difriúil.
One particular Halloween, things were different.

Sheas Valerie agus taibhse Mhary Antoinette lasmuigh de theach Valerie ag labhairt faoi na scéalta a bhí ar intinn acu.
Valerie and Mary Antoinette’s ghost stood outside Valerie’s house talking about the stories they were thinking about.

Ar aghaidh leo ansin chuig ‘scanradh bliantúil na bpáistí’, nós a bhíodh acu.
They then went on their way to their ‘annual children scare.’

“Ar aghaidh linn, a Valerie! Tá rud eicínt gur gá dom a rá leat,” arsa taibhse Mary Antoinette. . .
“Off we go, Valerie! I have something I want to tell you,” said the ghost of Mary Antoinette. . .



Scríobh Amhrán!

Rinne daltaí Idirbhliana as **Coláiste Cholmcille, Indreabhán, Co na Gaillimhe** ceardlann Scríobh Amhrán thar dhá lá i Seanscoil Sailearna

In éineacht le foireann Fighting Words, bhí na hamhránaithe Róisín Seoighe agus Pádraig Jack mar mheantóirí acu. Cumadh cúig amhrán as an nua le linn na ceardlainne. Seo thíos na liricí de thrí cinn díobh agus is féidir taifeadadh garbh de na hamhráin a chloisteáil ar fighting-words.ie. Buíochas le Comharchumann Shailearna Teo agus le hEalaín na Gaeltachta a thacaigh leis an togra seo.

Glór

Scríofa ag Niamh Ní Shé, Niamh Ní Ghionnáin, Chaeli Níc Ainmhíre & Siobhán Ní Dhonnacha

Bhéarsa 1

Turas go dtí mo chroí
'Is mé lán le himní
An bhfuil sé ceart ná cóir?
Nó an bhfuil mé ag dul thar fóir?

Curfá

An mothaíonn tú 'nós mé fhéin?
Nó an bhfuil do chroí ar strae?
Turas an ghrá ag dul thar fóir
Níl tú ag éisteacht le mo ghlór

Bhéarsa 2

An bhfuil mo chroí san áit cheart nó an mbeidh sé briste go brách?

'Séard a dúirt na cailíní liom,
"Téigh agus faigh duine níos fearr
Duine cineálta agus deas agus ina stumpa ó bhun go barr!"

Droichead

Níl tú in ann mé a bhriseadh
Ní féidir mo sholas a ghoid
Tá saol níos fearr i ndán dom
Gan na céadta deora 'is troid

Curfá

An mothaíonn tú 'nós mé fhéin?
Nó an bhfuil do chroí ar strae?
Turas an ghrá ag dul thar fóir
Níl tú ag éisteacht le mo ghlór

Gan Pingin

Scríofa ag Aoibhínn Ní Mhurchú & Lauren Rathcliffe

Bhéarsa 1

Sáinnithe sa mbochtanas gan bealach amach
An iomarca airgid ag Elon Musk
Gan pingin ar bith i mo theach
Mam ag obair go moch
Dad ag ól deoch i ndiaidh deoch



Curfá

Gan pingin, gan pingin,
gan pingin, gan pingin,
gan aon phingin ach lán le pian (x2)

Briseadh uirlise - Pianó

Bróga briste, níl mé cliste
'Teip gach ábhar

An spin

Scéal le **Scoil Rónáin, An Trá Bháin, Leitir Móir, Co na Gaillimhe**

Fadó fadó chuaigh Kid an Capall go dtí an siopa. Chonaic sé a namhaid, Richard Ham an tUan ina sheasamh in aice leis na húllaí. Chonaic sé Larry an Cat ann freisin. Bhí Kid an Capall ag iarraidh imeacht as an siopa ach bhí dúil aige sna húllaí. Chuaigh Kid an Capall i bhfolach taobh thiar den pháipéar leithris. Cheannaigh Richard Ham páipéar leithris agus ansin chonaic sé Kid i bhfolach. "Cén fáth a bhfuil tú i bhfolach?" a d'fhiafraigh Richard Ham.



"Dún do bhéal mar níl mise ag iarraidh thú a fheiceáil," a dúirt Kid.

Rith Kid amach as an siopa agus chonaic sé carr capaill a raibh daoine istigh ann. Ansin a chuimhnigh sé go mbeadh carr capaill handy. Ansin tháinig Larry amach as an siopa.

Dúirt Kid, "An bhfuil tú ag iarraidh a dhul ar spin?"

Dúirt Larry, "Alright..."



Lily agus an bhó dhraíochtúil

Scéal le **Rang a 3, Gaelscoil Port Laoise, Co Laoise**

Bhí Lily naoi mbliana déag d'aois. Bhí sí ag iarraidh a bheith ina múinteoir. Bhí Lily ag siúl ar an bhfeirm agus chonaic sí a cara, Michael an Bhó. Bhí Michael ag iarraidh a bhriceasta a ithe. Bhí buifé sa choill, áit a raibh lán le hainmhithe eile.

Ach sular imigh Michael, dúirt Lily leis go raibh eagla uirthi a bheith ag labhairt os comhair daoine cé go raibh sí ag iarraidh a bheith ina múinteoir. Thosaigh Michael ag labhairt le Lily agus níor chreid sí é. Ní raibh a fhios ag Lily go raibh Michael in ann caint! Thit Lily i laige...





Múinteoirí ‘cur leadráin orm
Níl duine ar bith grámhar

Curfá
Gan pingin, gan pingin,
gan pingin, gan pingin,
gan aon phingin ach lán le pian
(x2)

Droichead
Tá mo chairde ag fágáil
Na múinteoirí ag screadaíl
Cad é mo shaol?
Is fuath liom mo shaol!

Curfá
Gan pingin, gan pingin,

gan pingin, gan pingin, gan aon phingin
ach lán le pian (x2)
Cad é mo shaol? Cad é mo shaol?
Cad é mo shaol? Is fuath liom mo shaol.

Éalú

Scríofa ag Éabha Faherty & Annie Mannion

Curfá
Éalú, Éalú,
Tá sí ag éalú
Éalú
Gan filleadh ar ais (x2)
Ag éalú
Tá sí ag ealú
Éalú
Go deo

Bhéarsa 1
Áilleacht ‘s suaimhneacht,
A tháinig sí trasna air,
Ag fágáil na cathrach
Amuigh faoin tuath
Cuirtear ceist ach
Níl aon fhreagraí
Ag fágáil na cathrach
Amuigh faoin tuath

Curfá
Éalú, Éalú,
Tá sí ag éalú
Éalú
Gan filleadh ar ais (x2)
Ag éalú
Tá sí ag ealú
Éalú
Go deo

Bhéarsa 2
Tá sí gortaithe
Ach ní fheiceann daoine é
Ar bharr a cosa
Éiríonn sí crosta
Cuirtear ceist ach
Níl aon mhíniú air
Ag fágáil na cathrach
Amuigh faoin tuath

Curfá
Éalú, Éalú,
Tá sí ag éalú
Éalú
Gan filleadh ar ais (x2)
Ag éalú
Tá sí ag ealú
Éalú
Go deo

Droichead
Ina brionglóidí
Aimsíonn sí
Suaimhneas croí
Ag breathnú chun cinn
Saor ón imní
Dúisíonn sí
Go neamhspleách (x2)

Curfá
Éalú, Éalú,
Tá sí ag éalú
Éalú
Gan filleadh ar ais (x2)
Ag éalú
Tá sí ag ealú
Éalú
Go deo

An sausage

Scéal le Rang 3-6, Scoil Chaomháin, Inis Oírr, Co na Gaillimhe

Bhí Geoffrey, an black pudding agus Portá, an mhuc ag cean-nach rashers ag an margadh. Bhí Portá ag iarraidh sausages ach bhí na sausages díolta amach. Bhí Brad, an mhuc ann freisin, an diabhal. Bhí Brad saghas giddy. “Níl aon sausages anseo,” a dúirt Brad, agus thosaigh sé ag déanamh an worm. “Céard atá tú a dhéanamh, a mhac?” a dúirt Geoffrey, agus thosaigh sé ag rá “Oh yeah, oh yeah!” Ansin thosaigh Portá ag déanamh an moon walk. Stop Portá ag damhsa agus dúirt sé, “Cén fáth a bhfuil muid ag damhsa? Caithfidh muid sausages a fháil ag an mbúistéir.” Bhí páipéar nuachta ag Portá, chonaic sé fógra sa bpáipéar ag rá nach raibh fágtha ach sausage amháin sa mbúistéir in Inis Meáin ...



The pirate ship

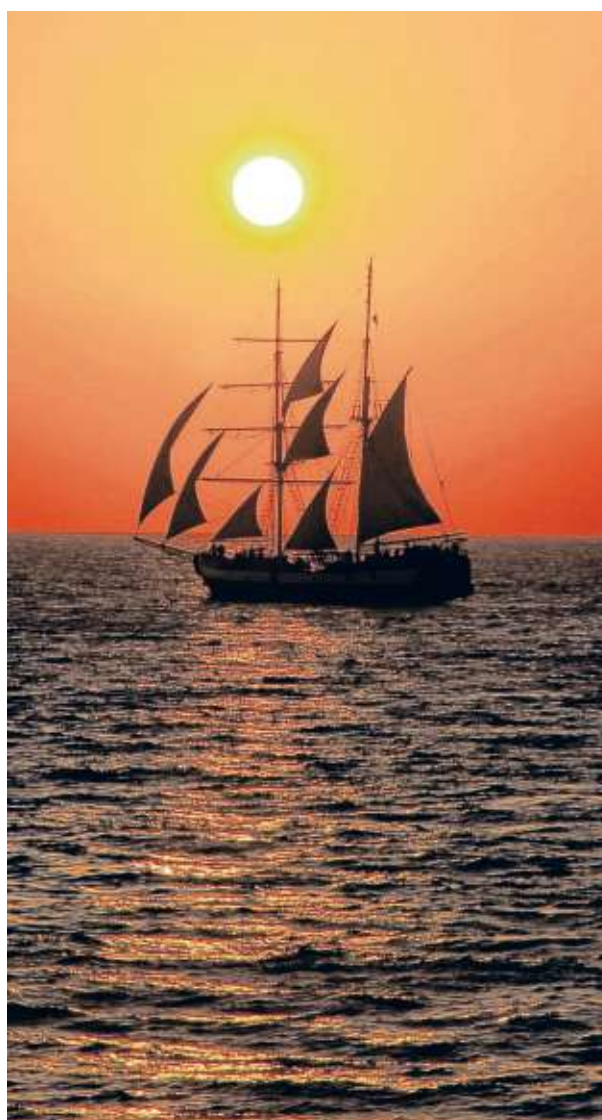


A story by **Izzy Walsh**, age 18, Co Wexford

In the nighttime fog, Rose Street Church looked like a pirate ship – looming in the distance, all Gothic arches and darkness. In the 6pm winter blackness, the town was dystopian, and I imagined that I was escaping some terrible darkness, some great evil, that was running to eat me. I was approaching the ship with the brave notion of escaping and finding brightness.

Carpark headlights glowed around the Church. I imagined that they were instead little wildfires, roaring in chaos and eager for destruction. I could see crows – or rather their shadows – circling the spire. They too were waiting to board the ship and escape. Waiting to perch on the mast and be carried away to a place that the sunlight could reach, so that they may have turned into gulls, shedding the soot black feathers for the salty white and grey of a happy seagull.

The stars were hidden by the grey smoke of wildfire, and the sky was a hollow sheet of indigo, decorated only by that terrible fog, which sank lower with every step I took. Once at sea, the sky would be so full of stars that I might find it too bright to sleep. At sea, without the dull but frantic humdrum of a town, one



can lie back on the deck, and watch the moon and hear it speak. The moon speaks perfect silver words, that can only glow in the ear of a sailor, and can only be heard by the sharp and curious ear of an adventurer.

The sound of revving engines and righteous church bells would soon be washed away by crashing waves and the gleeful jigs of my crew mates. We would sit on the deck, from dawn till dusk, telling wild stories to each other and laughing until we had to vomit over the bulwark from seasickness. Bottles of rum and concertinas and maps with large red exes would be scattered over the deck, and we would sing to the moon as it pulled us along towards the brightness.

When I reached the ship, ready to board its unsteady deck and face my uncertain future, I saw instead a tall and still cathedral, made of mossy brown bricks. The sturdy wooden planks of a ship were nowhere to be seen, and there was no rocky shore, or music or pirates. My phone buzzed in my pocket, and I saw that I had missed the bus home and would have to wait in town for another half hour before the next one would come.

I cursed silently and looked up again at the church. Behind its high and pointed top, the moon was looking down on me. I swear, reader, that I saw it gleam humorously at my mortal frustration, and then it whispered to me, and told me quietly, to keep searching for the pirate ship.

Troy's legacy

An extract from a **Primary Story** by 4th class, Listellick National School, Co Kerry

There is a parrot called Troy who spends his day hanging out in Dublin Zoo with his best friend Aidan the Avocado.

They love practising their soccer skills.

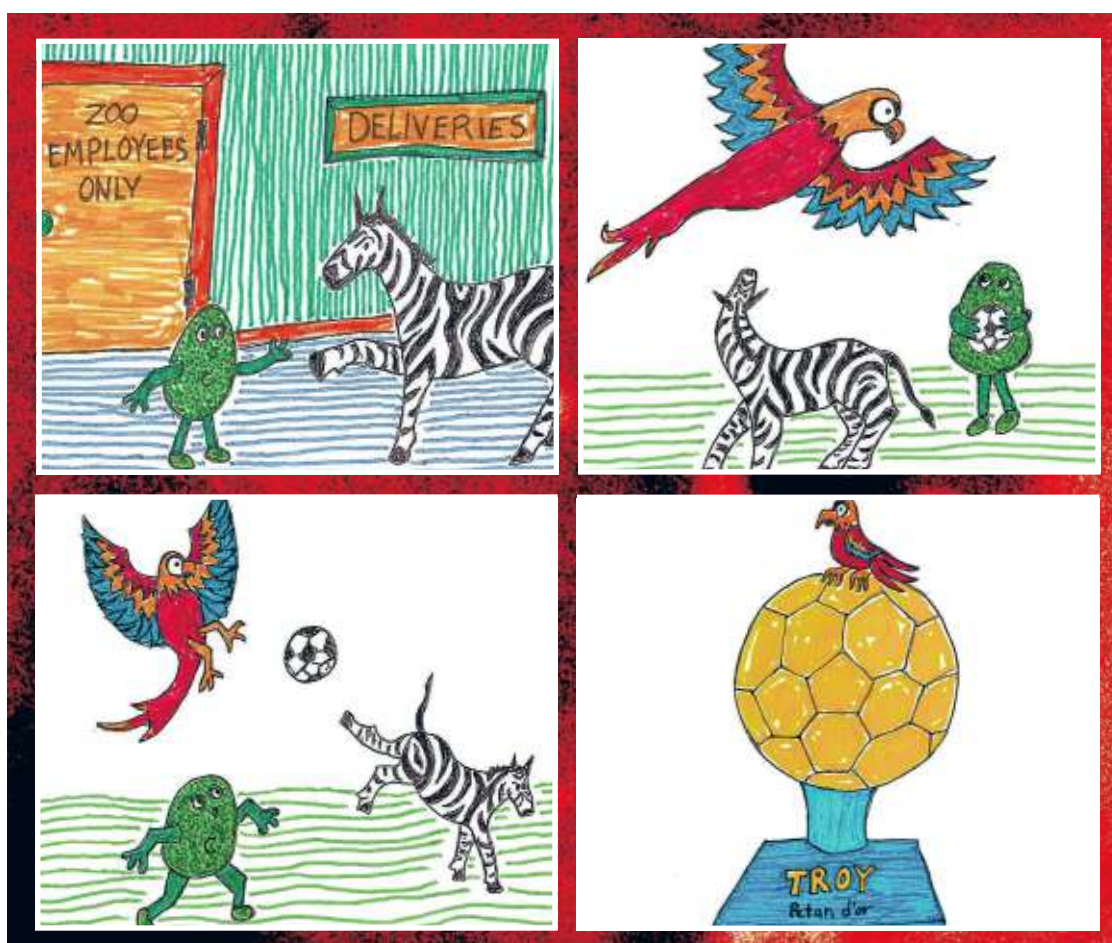
Troy's greatest ambition is to win the "Petandor" trophy for the best soccer player, with the help of Aidan but Ziggy the Zebra who is jealous of Troy has other ideas!

Ziggy knows that Troy's greatest fear is losing his beak, as this will throw him off his balance. But Troy loves playing soccer so much he overcomes his fear.

Troy knows that if there is any danger in sight he can just fly away.

Ziggy decides to befriend Aidan so that he can learn about Troy's weakness to find a way to stop him from winning the "Petandor".

One day as Aidan is hanging out behind the zoo cafe, Ziggy approaches him and offers him ...



The library that knows her



A story by **Sophie Dempsey**,
age 15, Co Antrim

The desk lamp faintly hummed, casting a pale circle over the notes scattered across the desk. Exams loomed around the corner and every sentence felt heavier than the last.

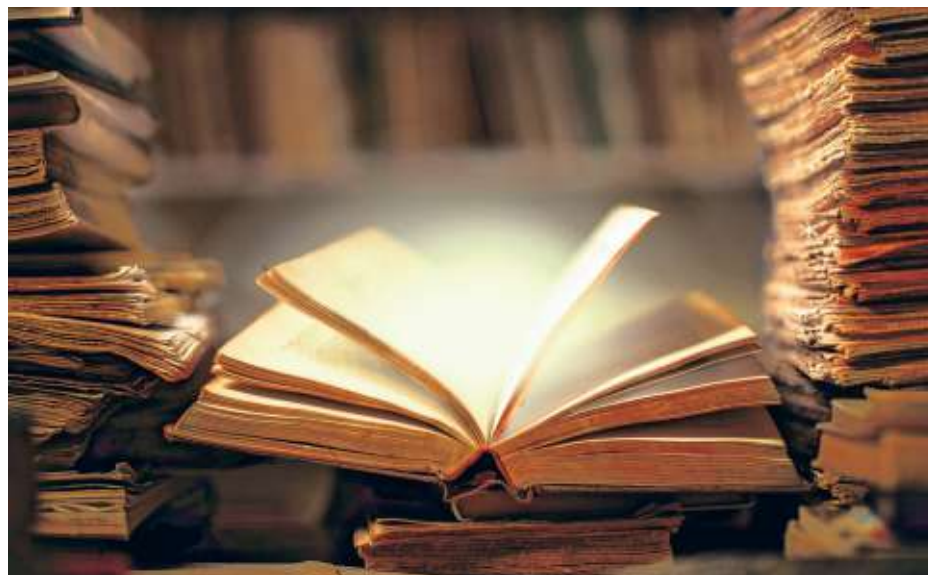
Outside, the night was silent, nothing like the relentless noise in her head. She let her pen slip from her hand, leaned back, and let her eyes flutter shut. For a moment, she thought she heard a whisper, not from the room, but from somewhere deeper.

A library, a labyrinth of sprawling shelves and displays. Whispers. Friendly whispers travelled through the vast, endless hallways, beckoning, enticing, luring her into its magical maze. Moonlight flooded the chamber like a blissful

blue blanket lying across the floor. The books glimmered, bathed in a soft, otherworldly glow; each spine spilled gold as she approached. The soft scent of vanilla lingered in the air as she swept through the passageway of stories, her fingertips grazing the luxurious leather spine of each book. The labyrinth was as full of unexpected twists and turns as the books on its shelves.

Further into the limitless library, a flourishing glow sprang to life, coaxing her into its dazzling sparkle. Trepidatiously, she approached, curiosity outweighing fear, as she reached out her hand to grasp the book's smooth spine, sliding the story out of its place on the shelf. Specks of gold fell through the air; the spine cracked as she bent the binding, skimming her fingers through the pages as they turned like silk under her touch. The story was familiar. As she turned the page, she felt the sting of déjà vu; she remembered that choice, that moment, exactly as it was written, as if someone had stolen her memories and locked them in pages. She held her life, her memories, in her hands.

Panicked, she turned, the golden glow now blinding her. Her eyes were drawn to a singular shelf, vast and empty. The library itself felt subtly off; shelves shifted in the distance; the once-friendly whispers



grew louder. The moon now loomed overhead, its shadow falling upon her like the weight of her current predicament.

Her memories became fuzzy, glitching through her mind. The missing book was the present, and without it ... reality was falling apart. A faint glow above, the book of the present looked down on her. She ran, chasing the book. She weaved through the shifting shelves, ignoring the whispers urging her to turn back. She stopped abruptly, panting for air, in front

of two gleaming books. She had a choice: return to her own life ... or choose a new destiny. Ready for this restless night to be over, but fantasising over what could be, she hesitantly lifted the book of her present.

A glorious light washed over her as the book returned to its solitary shelf and she awoke. Her eyes slowly opened as she looked down at the book on her desk, a faint gold glow, a fantasy that could have been.

Adventure in the enchanted forest

An extract from a **Primary Story**
by **3rd and 4th class**, Gaelscoil
Lios Tuathail, Co Kerry

Long, long ago on a sunny morning when all the marshmallows were melting.

Princess Vivien of Marshmallow Kingdom was feeling bored. Jerry the stickman came and tried to entertain her.

He tried singing and dancing to cheer her up, but nothing worked. Princess Vivien just wished to be a normal girl.

The only person who can help Vivien is Underground Menace as he has the power to turn her into a normal girl.

Princess Vivien knows that the devil named Johnny is guarding the enchanted forest which leads to where Underground Menace lives.

She decides to face her fear and enter the enchanted forest ...



Lycantrrophy



A story by **Siobhan O'Donovan**,
age 13,
Co Cork

She was 11 years old when it happened. She just had to go and get that stupid book. She had been writing in the woods and left her copy behind.

It was getting dark but she didn't think she'd be long.

She searched; her eyes squinting in the darkness to find the dammed book. She found it eventually, raising the pages high in triumph. Then the bushes snarled and she was running, her rainboots sloshed into the mud, she lost the path, running blindly into the bush.

She kept running and running and running, her yellow coat marking her a clear target to whatever was chasing her. She kept running, amazed she hadn't broken her neck on a low branch or tripped on a ditch.

She kept running until she slipped; two glowing eyes moved slowly forward, teeth bared, drooling, waiting, she did not remember if she screamed or not as teeth tore her arm and the beast left, yellow eyes retreating into the woods, leaving the girl alone to bleed out. She held her palm to the wound, her hand coming back slick with blood she couldn't see. It was an hour later when she got home.

It was a week later when she started growing fangs and claws.

Funeral



A poem by **Clodagh Maye**,
age 16, Co Kilkenny

I went to a funeral the other day,
Honouring a woman who wasn't my mother
But who had treated me like her son.

I went to a funeral the other day,
And the woman in the coffin wasn't my mother,
But before her soul met the heavens,
She had fed me her food,
And lend me some clothes,
And held me when I needed to be held.

She had laughed at all my unfunny jokes,
And asked when I'd come around again,
And scolded me when I needed to be scolded.

I went to a funeral the other day,
And the boy beside me wasn't my brother,
But as I watched him cry I realised,
He had my back whenever I got in a fight,
And picked up my mood whenever it was low,
And always let me cry on his shoulder.

He made me laugh when I felt like crying,
And made time for me when I was bored,
And always let me in on his jokes.

I went to a funeral the other day,
And the speeches didn't match the intensity,
Of the moment and the loss,
Of the sorrow and the grief,
Of the memories and the pain.

I went to a funeral the other day,
And I didn't care who saw,
I cried until I had no more tears,

For the mother who wasn't my mother
And the brother who wasn't my brother.



Welcome to the crazy street

An extract from a **Primary Story** by
3rd and 4th class,
Castlegar National
School, Co Galway

Once upon a time there was an old granny called Mary and she was a detective. Her dream was to be a sumo wrestler. She loved to sleep. She liked taking naps with her dog Cooper. During her nap she woke up to hear a bang from her crazy neighbour Karen.

Karen was cooking pancakes in a very noisy manner. Karen was a very rich woman and she lived in a house made of pancakes. Mary never wanted

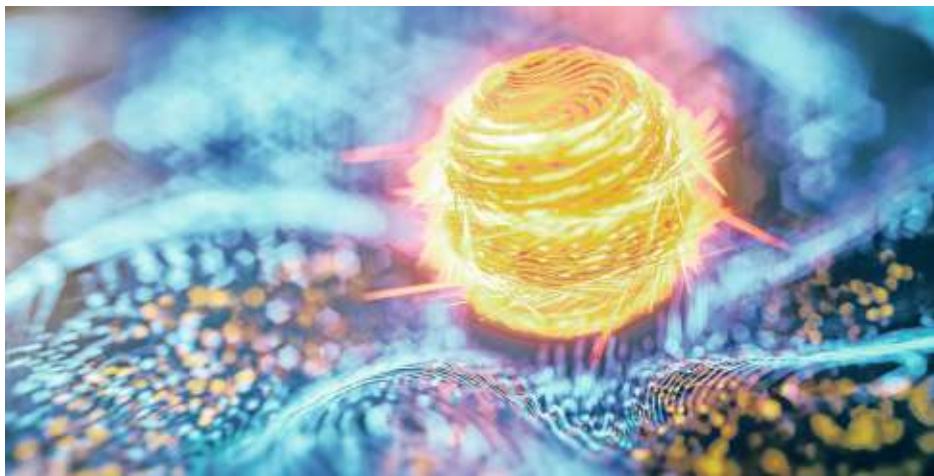
to mess with Karen, because Karen was always causing trouble, getting into fights with people, and calling the police on others even if they did not do anything.

Years ago, Mary, Laura and Karen were friends. Mary and Karen got into a debate about who was the best sumo wrestler and they fell out. Mary realised that Karen paid Laura money to say that she was the best sumo wrestler. Laura apologised and told Mary she was sorry.

They stayed friends and they planned revenge. Every night Mary and Laura were meeting to plan their revenge. The revenge is getting Karen's place in a big sumo wrestler competition to make her look like a fool and prove that Mary is a good sumo wrestler.

The revenge was to show the world that Karen bribes the judges so that she can win. Laura knits a costume for Mary so that she can look like Karen and sneak into the competition...





The ancestor particle



A story by **Dylan Wall**, age 17, Dublin

Earth had gone dark just under five hours ago. From space, the only visible source of man-made light was a dim glow somewhere near Geneva, on the Franco-Swiss border. The Large Hadron Collider, siphoning energy from the world’s power reserves. Preparing for its greatest purpose.

Frank oversaw the procedures. Fifty years of work could not be tainted by some minuscule human error. Under his watch, engineers and scientists readied for the activation of the collider. Preparing to find the particle that made up particles. The first result of the Big Bang which had built on itself until the universe was created. Frank checked his watch. Midnight, a new year.

His wife had died four years ago, of cancer. On her deathbed, she’d reached out to him with a frail hand. He’d held it.

“Please, Frank,” she begged, “Don’t continue your father’s work. It drove him mad. It’ll drive you mad, too.”

He nodded.

“Promise me, Frank.”

He did. He hadn’t kept it.

The green light was given and Frank gave the order. The collider hummed awake with all the power of the world. The particle was fired.

He’d attended school for the first time three decades ago. His dad had kissed him on the cheek and patted his shoulders.

“You ready, Frank?” He’d asked. Frank

nodded. But he hadn’t been ready. Frank asked too many questions, always a curious mind. The other children hadn’t liked that, so they hadn’t liked him.

“Asking questions is good,” his dad had reassured him, when Frank came to him, crying, “Scientists, smart people, ask questions. The other boys are just jealous of your scientific mind.”

He started talking about physics and, thereafter, gave Frank a lust for all the universe’s secrets.

Frank smiled now, thinking back on his professors. They’d told him that his father’s work was impossible, that he couldn’t possibly accomplish it. Well, he had.

Frank was born two minutes into January 1st. His mother had held him lovingly in her arms, uncaring about anything else at that moment. His father had also held him, but his eyes held not only love. Ambition lined his pupils as he looked upon his greatest work.

It would happen soon. The particle had just matched the speed of light and was bound to overtake it. The collision would result in its first observation. The true building block of everything.

“You’ve done it, Frank,” said a colleague. “Your father would’ve been proud.”

Frank was conceived one year after his parents married. His mother had thrown up a few days after they’d made love and had taken a test. It came back positive. His father had been overjoyed, holding his palm against his wife’s belly.

“They’ll be a scientist, just like you,” she’d joked.

“A brilliant one,” replied his dad.

“Greater than I ever was.”

Zero. The camera feed clicked on, and Frank scanned the monitor. There it was: his greatest work. It was just a pixelated blur, minuscule, but it was there. The Ancestor Particle.

Shadows



A poem by **Evija Ratinska**, age 14, Co Wicklow

I’ve got a shadow.
However, my shadow is not really like the rest.
It stretches out long and it looks extra tall.
While all the other shadows are as fine as the leaves of fall.
My shadow is weird and has a bright flow.
While the other girls’ shadows are darker and low.

When people look at my shadow they gawk and glance.
But when they look at theirs, they say it looks like a dance.
I’ve tried covering my shadow, asking the sun to shine differently for one day.
Yet she replies, “It’s okay to be that way”.

My shadow looms over me like a cloud.
And yet it’s only them who speak aloud.
Aloud, about me, with bared teeth between mouthfuls of tea.
I just want to be loved, I want to be me.
Yet this stupid shadow makes me feel unlovable, like a monster that keeps me in a cage.
Trapped with no key.
A vicious incarnate of a beast that can never be lovable.
Maybe that’s me.

I’ve tried wearing scarves, I’ve tried wearing dresses.
And yet people still look at me like I’m created out of messes.
Yet everyone has a shadow, don’t they?
So why do I struggle with mine?
I now hide in the night, away from that one lingering in light.
My shadow makes me fight tears, I don’t want to fight.
I don’t want those girls to laugh at me again.
To call me a name.
I want to be normal.
I want to have fame.

I lurked in the shadows, my stomach turning to an empty pit.
They liked me now but now I feel like that’s not it?
I laugh at dumb jokes, I smile and I wave.
Yet it doesn’t feel good, it’s like I’m trapped again, but this time, in a cave.
Where it echoes everything I disagree with, but don’t show.
But I’m meant to be happy now? I am like them?
But I don’t like being like them?
My feelings whirl into an endless void.
But I don’t feel anger.
No.
I don’t even feel annoyed.
Because when I step out into the sun,
Maybe for the first time in a month.
I feel a feeling I have never felt before.
My shadow glimmers with light, something I maybe even like more,
Then just hiding and feeling sore.
And now they look again, disdain imprinted on their faces.
But I’m happy now, I like my look.
And maybe it’s not written like that in their book.
But it’s written like that in mine.
And that’s okay.

It was like that from the start.
I got told it was just my change of heart.
I still don’t know why I’m made this way.
But I’m learning to accept it and live life fully every day.

Creative Connections



Graveyard

A song by participants at **Magnet Young Adult Centre**, a youth arts and community space in Newry, Co Down, that empowers young people through creative programmes

In the shadow where the whispers dwell,
Mark and Joe they know it too well,
With a spark of a flame.
In the graveyards hush they play their game.

Smoke curls up to the moonlit sky,
as memories linger the spirit sighs.
With laughter echoing through the night air,
Mark and Joe leave without a care.

Amongst the stores where story lies,
They share their dreams as the times goes by,
each puff a time of love and lost,
in this quiet place there is no care of cost.

(Chorus)
Footsteps soft on the mossy ground,
In this scarce place where peace is found.
They bid farewell to those who rest.
With life full of those who are blessed.

Love and murder

A story by writers at **Activate Space**, a Cork-based creative youth hub that supports young people through a mix of arts, wellbeing and community-focused programmes

Once upon a time there was a wishing well, deep inside an enchanted forest in Cork city.

The forest was only accessible through a magic door that only special people could enter.

The well was guarded by the caretaker, Gráinne, who spent their days looking after the well and collecting the wishes. Each day Gráinne would read through the wishes one by one, guarding some carefully and discarding others at a whim. Gráinne had been collecting wishes for years and knew all the different types of wishes – some people made greedy wishes, some people were selfish and vain. Gráinne had no time for silly wishes, but every so often there were special wishes.

One day, a kind-hearted witch called Belinda came to the well to make a special wish. Belinda had some magical powers, but none that could fix her lonely heart. Just when the sun was setting Belinda arrived at the well, tired but hopeful. She leaned in over the well and whispered her wish into the depths. She wished that one day she would fall in love and be married.

Belinda heard a sound that she had never heard before, a whispering powerful sound. The well itself started moving and a strange energy rattled through it. She heard an echo, and it said, “Your wish has been granted!”

Later that evening Gráinne the caretaker, who was coming to the end of her shift and a bit fed up with all the silly wishes that people made, was delighted to find Belinda’s wish. She vowed to find her and grant her heart’s desire. There and then she set about making Belinda’s wish come true.

Gráinne cast a spell which drew everyone in the land to a glamorous ball, including Belinda and her best friend Sam. Sam, who was also a wizard, had spent the last three years secretly in love with Belinda. He was hoping to ask her out during the ball. He was nervous but excited and determined to let his true feelings be known.

At the ball, people were dancing and having a lot of fun. There was love in the air. Sam spent his time looking for an opportunity to talk with Belinda, but it



seemed that she was always just out of his reach. When the night was drawing to a close and the last song was being played, Sam couldn’t believe when he saw in the corner of his eye Belinda and a man staring into each other’s eyes as if in love. Poor Sam was devastated, and left the ball in a rage.

The following day, Liam, the man that Belinda had fallen for at the ball, invited Belinda to the park to ask her a very exciting question. Liam’s best friend, Marley the dog, was excited too. While they were in the park waiting, someone suspicious caught Marley’s attention. Sam was lurking behind the bushes – he had been following Liam since the night before.

Belinda arrived at the park to see Liam down on one knee. He asked Belinda, “Will you marry me?”

Belinda’s wish had finally come true. She ran home to tell her friends.

Later that night, while Liam and Marley rested by the fire, Sam crept out of the darkness. He had been hiding in wait at Liam’s house all day. He knocked on the door, pretending to be there to celebrate and offered Liam a whiskey. He had extra strong magical whiskey that made Liam fall into a deep sleep. Sam cut Liam’s throat while he slept.

The dog barked. Liam was dead.

The next morning, Belinda came to Liam’s house, singing, happy with her wedding plans. She entered the house and screamed when she saw her love was dead. Sam arrived after her, pretending he was calling to celebrate, when Marley began to growl.

Belinda knew there was something up. She asked Marley if Sam had killed Liam.

Sam, realising he was caught, raised his knife once more. Luckily, Gráinne the caretaker of the well appeared out of nowhere and froze time itself, and transferred everyone back to the well.

The well began to make wishes of its own. The well wished to turn Sam into a chicken. Then the well wished to turn Sam into a frog.

Finally, the well decided to imprison Sam in the well. He was sentenced to having to sweep up all the wishes forever and ever and ever, giving Gráinne a well-earned break. Belinda, Marley and Gráinne all moved in together and lived happily ever after.

Creative Connections was a cross-border creative writing project delivered by **Fighting Words**, **Fighting Words NI** and **Graffiti Theatre Company**, funded by **Creative Ireland**. From October 2024 to June 2025, young people aged 15-24 from communities across Ireland and Northern Ireland came together to collaborate, create and share original work through artist-led workshops and cross-border exchanges.

Creative Connections

Cornelius

A story by writers at **Drogheda Youthreach**, which supports young people outside mainstream schooling, offering creative and vocational learning opportunities

Paddy makes a wish. For a goat. No, seriously. Out of all the things anyone could wish for, Paddy just wants this goat. It must be a very special sort of goat, right? No. It was just a goat that he milks.

Then John comes along and sees Paddy with the goat. John thinks: “He has a goat and I have nothing.” So John tries to steal the goat from Paddy.

“Here, what are you at?” says Paddy when he sees this.

“Gimme that goat,” says John.

“No, go away,” says Paddy.

“No!” shouts John.

So Paddy says: “If I give you some milk, will you leave me and Cornelius alone?”

“Cornelius? That’s an odd name for a goat,” says John.

“Yeah, I think he looks like a Rex, but that’s a dog’s name,” says Paddy.

“Yeah, in fairness,” says John. “You can’t be giving a dog’s name to a goat.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” says Paddy.

After a sufficiently awkward silence, John says, “right, give me some milk and I’ll be off.” Paddy hands him a bottle and everyone is sorted.



The cycle of poetry

A poem written as part of **Write Quest** in collaboration with Fighting Words and Fighting Words NI

The pen drifted across pages like a boat at sea,
Flicking out words, accuracy to the T
Swiftly scrawling across paper fast as the eye can see
Writing faster than poets could dream.
And when I thought he had the poem beat
He reached for more pages, to once again repeat
The cycle of writing, and of poetry.

Cosy

A story by writers at **Drogheda Youthreach**, which supports young people outside mainstream schooling, offering creative and vocational learning opportunities

Cooper wished to live in a quiet cosy place. She got that wish. But then disaster struck and President Evil tried to take away her cosiness. She was not happy. Cooper found a better, even cosier place, but was found yet again. President Evil was super jealous now and tried to stop Cooper again. This happened again and again and again, until Cooper said “enough!”

Cooper invited President Evil to visit, sit, chat and learn the true ways of The Cosiness. President Evil was forever changed and wanted to spend his days snug as a bug. He made Cooper the new President, the first ever President Cosy.



The brilliant pieces showcased here are just a snapshot of a much wider and deeply meaningful project, one built on imagination, collaboration and connection across borders. In October, participants, facilitators, funders and supporters gathered to celebrate the project’s achievements and the launch of the Creative Connections publication, marking the culmination of an inspiring shared journey

Creative Connections

A puddle

A story by writers at **New Lodge Arts Centre, Belfast**, which supports young people through arts-based youth work

One day, I was walking with my friends when we stumbled upon a puddle. I decided to jump into it as a joke. So I closed my eyes and jumped, but when I opened my eyes, I wasn't on the sidewalk. I was somewhere else, somewhere that looked like a little girl's dream. There were lollipop trees, chocolate rivers, marshmallow bushes and pink grass.

I walked a bit until I came across a village, lined with houses from different eras: Viking and Victorian. There were also mythical creatures like unicorns and dragons playing about. I walked over to the fountain and looked inside. There was liquid chocolate and people drinking out of it. The people were all talking; it was bizarre! The Victorian person and cave man were chatting and somehow perfectly understood each other. I couldn't resist dipping my finger in – it tasted amazing. Soon my face was covered in chocolate and I

was off again!

As I went, I saw a sweet shop and I ran in, taking every sweet I could and stuffing my face with them. I walked outside and noticed the sky was weird and the chocolate too. I thought nothing about it and I continued walking, but as I went, I became more and more greedy, snatching everything I could. And each time, it got more and more creepy. The world looked darker, and there were sharp thorns and blades where there were once lollipops! The river was now blood red, with mysterious shadows swimming underneath. I was starting to become more paranoid, and my hands were shaking.

As I walked, I came to a large black castle. I felt like I shouldn't go in, and I tried to turn back, but I felt compelled to walk inside. I tried to scream, but I couldn't. I stepped into the castle.

Then I came to a room, the throne room presumably. There was a woman in a long gown with a crown who looked as though she was sleeping. Suddenly, her head snapped up, and she ran towards me, holding a sword.

Suddenly, I woke up and looked around. I was in a bedroom that wasn't mine and I saw the woman staring at me with creepy eyes. I screamed and she threw the knife at me and everything went black.



Cerys

A story by writers at **Sense Northern Ireland**, a Belfast-based group that works with young people with sensory impairments and complex communication needs

Once upon a time, there was a girl called Cerys. That's me!

I live in a small town – it is small and wide. It takes a while to walk across.

Every day I live with a visual impediment, which is a struggle for me to live with. But some days, my sight can get worse as the day goes on. When walking across the bridge, there might be obstacles like holes in the ground. When I use my cane, people walk into me on the streets, and they blame me for not seeing them. I feel better not using my cane when I am out and about the streets.

Right now, I am going through the process of getting a guide dog. I feel like this will help me to be more independent when walking or using public transport to get to places that I want to go to. I still haven't met my dog that I will get – I would like one that is calm and friendly. I feel so happy and excited to get one, as this would help me massively in my visually impaired life. The dog will make me safe when out and about on the streets, and when meeting new people, going through the same thing as me.





The children of Rossmore

A poem by writers at **Monaghan Youth Theatre**, a dynamic group of young theatre-makers who are curious, creative and passionate about using drama to explore ideas and stories

The children of Rossmore
Young and free
Centuries ago 1970
Or sucked from their homes
To live out their days
In a centuries, old castle,
prim and glazed

How a simple museum trip
Turned malicious like a switch
Sucked into history to witness
It’s from their own two eyes

The spirit of past
Possessing the future
Taking children to worlds
Some to riches others to
work in the kitchen

When will they be free
if ever to be?
The children of Rossmore
Some now to Giants forever more
To protect the grounds
Of what some called home
Sucked into Rome
Oh, how they live now is trapped
The young children of Rossmore

The kill switch

An excerpt from a play by **The Kabin Studio**, a dynamic youth music and creative space known for its collaborative songwriting and spoken-word projects

Two Worlds

(The scene opens to a faded night sky through the sky dome.)
(The camera comes down to reveal Koi.)
Koi: All humans underground whilst we’re up here. It is perfect.
(The book hums in his hand.)
Koi: As long as it stays that way we will all be fine.
(Camera transitions to underground.)
(Shows a little but eye-catching time lapse of Omni hiding the ancient parts. Time lapse stops with Omni walking out of frame.)
(The silent hum of the sewer pipes is the only sound heard.)
Omni: Hey Nova, how’s the making of the kill switch?
(Camera pans back to Omni.)
Nova: Just finished it!
(Sarcastically.) I can’t find the parts I hid anywhere!
(Omni smirks – they took and moved the parts.)
(Bram appears to crawl out of an air vent.)
Bram: Hey, psst.
(Nova and Omni look over and smile at the sight of Bram.)
Nova: Oh, hey Bram!
(Back to the overworld, we see a late teen girl typing data endlessly, almost like she’s being forced to.)
Koi: Riley! How much data has been written today?
(Softly, but threatening.)
Riley: Ah sir. I’ve been writing since morning. I’ve written over 10,000 new AI systems.
Koi: Ah, that’s good. And remember what we talked about.
(Riley has a terrifying flashback of Koi screaming and threatening her – that she works for the AI and that’s how it will always be.)

The Book I Carry

(Koi sits down on his throne in his room looking over all the land. He opens the book which is humming loudly, the pages glowing a golden yellow. He reads softly.)
“One voice split will never rise,
Unless it sings through shattered skies.
The silence breaks when three align,
Code, and blood, and pulse combine.”
Koi reads it, puzzled. thinking it’s a metaphor.
(He brings it over to Riley to see if she can figure it out. He reads it again for Riley. Riley looks perplexed, but deep down she knows what it means.)

Riley: I don’t know, boss. I guess it’s some kind of metaphor.
(Cuts to the underground where we see Bram crawl out of the vent

The Blueprint Beneath

(Bram passes Nova a blueprint of sketches)
Nova: What’s this?
Bram: I sketched the whole city from a vantage point.
Nova: Wait, really? This is exactly what we needed! But wait, without the parts I can’t make the kill switch. If we don’t find the parts, these are useless to us.
Bram: Well, what are we waiting for, let’s go find them!
(Omni Looks at Bram. Beneath the friendliness he is antagonised by their persistence in trying to take over the AI.)
(Omni tries to contact Koi about the maps, but there is no signal underground and he can’t disappear to the overworld whilst Bram and Nova are on high alert.)
Nova: I could swear I left them here!
(She starts to get suspicious.)
Omni:[/CROSSHEAD] Are you sure? You could have misplaced them or something.

Nova: Maybe. I’m just weirded out about all this you know.
Omni: Yeah, I get ya.
Bram: (Shouts from distance) Nova! I think I found a part!
(Nova runs and Omni follows.)
Nova: Yes! Thank you Bram!
(Nova runs to her machine and starts the making of The Kill Switch. While she is making the first part of the switch she explains her plan.)
Nova: Listen closely because I’m not gonna say it again. That “government” is so corrupt. It pains me to see us all here. It could be worse though. Trust me, I should know. When this invasion was happening I had to watch my mom get kidnapped. She’s most likely an AI now. So for us, for them, for him, for her and for all we will do this. (Confidently.)
Bram: I’m so sorry. What’s the plan then?
Nova: Right, were gonna lure some AIs in here, most likely by making a riot or something, then we kill them. We take their suits and disguise ourselves as them. Then we will go up and, whilst Koi is away, we’ll sneak into his office and plant the kill switch. After the programme has finished penetrating their system we flick the switch and it will shut off all power including the AIs and Koi. Plan?
Bram and Omni: Got it!

Creative Connections



Slieve Gullion

A story by writers at **REACT Armagh**, which supports young people through programmes focused on personal development, creativity and community participation

Long ago, before the mountain shadows deepened and the wind carried whispers, there lived a healer named Hazel on the slopes of Slieve Gullion.

Her cottage, nestled in a hollow where hawthorn trees grew thick and ancient, was a place of comfort. Villagers climbed the winding paths for her teas, her tinctures, and her smile, a soft, sweet thing that made even the sick feel mended.

Hazel spoke to the land as if it were an old friend. She sang to the spring that bubbled from the rock, coaxed herbs from frozen ground, and thanked the wind for its wisdom. Some said the mountain itself favoured her, blessing her with gentle weather and rare flowers no one else could grow.

But peace, like a mirror, is easily shattered.

One winter, a traveller came, cloaked in black frost and silence. He claimed to be a scholar, seeking old magics hidden in the hills. He asked Hazel questions she had never thought to answer. About life beyond life, about bending the will of nature instead of serving it.

The traveller left when the snows melted. But he left behind a book. Bound in bark and sinew, the book whispered to Hazel at night. It called her by her name, in her own voice. It promised her strength,

not just to heal, but to command. Not just to speak to the wind, but to command. Not just to speak to the wind, but make it howl.

She resisted, at first.

But when a child she could not save died in her arms, Hazel opened the book. The change came slowly and then all at once. Her golden hair withered to grey, stringy as nettle roots. Her skin turned the colour of swamp moss. Her once gentle voice turned raspy, as dry leaves dragged across stone.

She left the village behind.

Now, Hazel still lives on Slieve Gullion, but the mountain no longer welcomes travellers. The wind cuts like teeth. The spring runs bitter. No birds sing in her woods. She curses crops and twists the weather into cruel shapes. Children cry out in their sleep, dreaming of a woman with green skin and thorny fingers.

Some say she regrets what she's become. That in the hollow of the night, she weeps where her garden once bloomed. But her mission is clear: to disturb the peace she once lived in, and to remind all those who seek comfort that even the kindest of hearts can rot when they drink too deeply from the well of power.

So, when you walk near Slieve Gullion, leave no offerings, speak no names, and never follow the music.

You belong

A poem by young people at **Youthreach North Great George's Street, Dublin**, a programme supporting education, training, and personal development

Slip under my liquid blanket, release yourself
You belong with us, you belong to us.
Take my hand, I don't bite twice.
Lose yourself in my inches, I will find you.
Take and take, your greed is your enemy.

Not me.
Release yourself
Lose yourself
Take take take.
Soon you find your hands are full.
Your soul is empty.
The fruit rots, the sun sets.
Don't fight
You know your fears are stronger than you

Why are you crying?
You chose this
You want this
Now I will take
And take

Your body falls and merges with my land
You are sickly sweet pollen
You are delicious berries
You are riches and greed and tears.
You are us now



The youth stand still

A poem by participants at **Magnet Young Adult Centre**, a youth arts and community space in Newry, Co Down that empowers young people through creative programmes

The people go, the people leave,
The youth stand still.
People come, people arrive,
Some go down to the Old Mill.
It's connected through the soul point
As each comes unique.
Not a replica, not a copy.
The Newry bunch, sure who they are.
Even as the sun sets so far,
The sunset closes the history and inequality
The lives lost and the lives that came.
Our time reflects the conflict
But the youth and life reflects the verdict.
The verdict of peace.

Creative Connections



Lighthouse

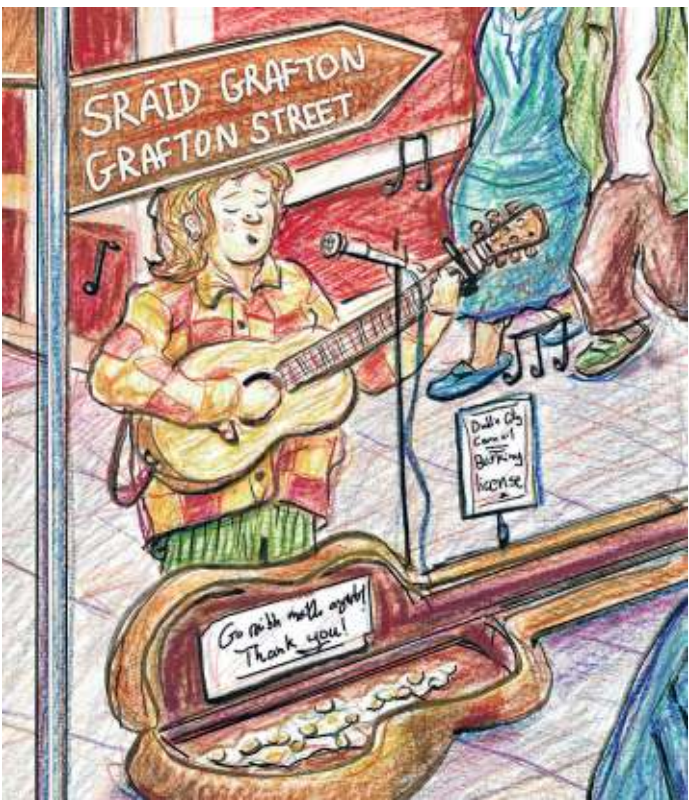
A poem by writers at **React Armagh Youth Group**, which supports young people through programmes focused on personal development, creativity and community participation

As I sail across the sea,
I see a faint glow.
It glistens on the deep blue sea
The tall, magnificent candy cane
Building sits atop the lush hill
Guiding sailors safely to shore
As I sail across the sea so wide,
A faint shimmer far and bright
It shows dangers on the deep blue tide,
A guardian through the veil of night.
Upon a hill it stands so grand
A candy cane tower, bold and tall,
Its stripes like ribbons, sweetly spanned
A lighthouse casting light for all.
It glistens where the moonlight plays
A beacon calling ships from grey
To guide them through the ocean's maze
And safely lead them on their way.

Busking

A story by young participants at **Youth Advocate Programmes Ireland**, a Dublin-based community programme supporting young voices to be heard and shared

When I first came to Dublin, I thought, “Oh no! where can I get money?” I have some pocket money right now from being in care, from Tusla, but I wanted to know how I could possibly make money.
A social care worker in my house mentioned busking. I was like, “What is busking?” I didn’t know this word in English.
He said, “Oh it is like when you’re playing on the street.”
I went, “Yeah! I know this! Of course. Of course! Very good idea!”
So we went out to Grafton Street where the buskers play and we went up to one busker who had a licence and asked them, “how do you get a licence?” They said you get a form at Dublin City Council for €90 for a year. This is not a lot, it is good for a year, then they give you licence.
I went to the City Council and gave them a form, they said the person that deals with these affairs will be back Friday. I went back to them on Friday, and in 20 minutes I had my busking license.



The morning

A poem by writers at the **Give & Take project** with **Include Youth**, an organisation supporting young people to build confidence, skills, and positive pathways through learning and creativity

At 10.30 in the morning, just one more hour to go until I unlock my demons.
Unless I see a rainbow that brightens my day,
I am going to eat a bad apple.
This tree where the fruit grew had been hit
by lightning during a storm.
This has created a sadness in me
because the birds are no longer chirping.
Now, I am walking home under the moon,
as a magical fat fish flies by.



The pest



A story by **Eleanor Turley Min**, age 13, Co Down

My sister has got the pest. I fear for her, she is so weak and pale and keeps coughing up blood. Mother and father have gone to the city to find a doctor. They have taken all the money, leaving me and Mary with very little. The vicar also came by today. He refused my offer to come in so we talked through the window.

He said he would pray for me and my sister but kept asking questions about her personal and private life, trying to figure out how she has sinned. I am afraid to say that I was sharp with him and told him that Mary was the kindest and sweetest person I know and promptly slammed the window in his face.

When I went into Mary she was worse. She had giant things all over her neck and when I checked she had them under her arms as well and dark purple splodges. I do hope mother and father will hurry up.

I went into the forest today to collect some herbs. I also found a patch of wildflowers. I hope they will cheer her up. When I get home I give what food we have left to Mary. I am terrified for her. She seems to get worse by the hour. I



don't want her to die. She is all I have in this world. If she died I would have nothing left to live for. But I must stay strong for Mary.

The fever hasn't broken and the swellings have spread and grown. I quickly prepare the herbs and mix it with some bread and milk to make it easier to swallow but she can barely keep anything down let alone this. She needs some sleep. I bring some wet cloth in the hope that it will cool her down. I sit by her bedside slowly singing to her. She has been asleep for a while but her heart still beats. I am determined to stay awake but sleep claims me.

When I wake up Mary is not moving. "Mary," I tentatively say. But she doesn't move. I break down in tears. I just sit there and cry. When I am finally done, I wrap Mary up in the blankets. She looks so small in death. I hope she is in a better place now.

I take her to the woods, to the place where I found the wildflowers, their shades of yellow, white and blue beautiful in the autumn light. I dig her a hole and line the grave with posies. I carefully place her inside and then cover her up again. I can hear screams from the distant village. Some other family has got the pest.

As I sit down the symptoms overcome me and I collapse in the flowers. I had hidden the worst symptoms from her so she wouldn't think it was her fault. As an eternal sleep overcomes I close my eyes and hum my last song.

The animals' nightmare

An extract from a **Primary Story** by **first class**, Corpus Christi National School, Co Limerick

One day there was a goose called Jason in a shop. The goose knocked down all the shelves with food on them.

Jason the goose met Nala the cat. Nala was sad because she couldn't buy any food.

"Can you help me buy some food?" asked Nala the cat to Jason the goose.

"Yes," said Jason the goose.

"What do you want?"

Then Jason grabbed the stuff that Nala wanted. Jason put the food in the basket and starts eating it himself!

Ella the kitten came in and scared off Jason the goose by climbing up his back and scratching him behind his ears.

Jason the goose got such a fright that he started to run away so fast that he knocked Nala the cat over!

Then Jimmy the dog came in and kicked them all out of the shop. Ella and Nala jumped into the shopping trolley and Jason the goose pushed them out of the shop.

He jumped into the trolley too and they all rolled down the hill.

Suddenly, they saw at the bottom of the hill a pool of water...



The pendant



A story by **Ruth Murphy**,
age 12, Co Cork

“**W**hat are you doing here, Gloria?”
“Remembering,” she replied softly. “I can’t believe we’re leaving the only home I’ve ever known. I feel as though I’ll never be safe again after we go.”
Andor looked at her and smiled, “You have no reason to worry, Glo”, then with humour edging his voice, “Because I will be here to protect you.”
Gloria glared at her brother, but she was laughing. “Because you’re such an *amazing* protector.”
Pain flashed across his face.
“Aw, Andor, you know that’s not what I meant.”
“I know. It’s fine. Come, we have to go soon.”
“Can I catch up? I’ll meet you at the well.”
“Of course”
She watched Andor stride off to join the rest of the family on the outskirts of the village. Her older brother had just disappeared behind a tree when she heard footsteps approaching.

She whipped around, and her eyes widened in shock as they met a pair of familiar ones. She backed away. He couldn’t still be alive. *But he is.* Here he stood, in the bloodied snow, his sword drawn, his jaw set.
Gloria looked at him in disgust. “You would kill me from behind, would you? Is that something *they* taught you? But then, I shouldn’t be surprised after what you did.”
Raymond stared at her with wild eyes, his sword glinting dangerously in the evening light.
“Ray”, she said quietly, “why are you here?”
Her eyes shifted to the little pouch that hung around her neck. *Of course! He came back for the pendant!*
“Just hand it over and no one gets hurt, Gloria.”
“Never.”
“It has no power.”
“Then why do you want it?!”
“To prove to you that it has no power!”
“I don’t believe you.”
“Glo, please -”
“NO! Ray, how do you expect me to trust you after you let *them* in? After what happened to Mama?”
“Gloria, if you would just listen to me for -”
“I AM LISTENING!”
“NO, YOU ARE NOT!”
Gloria glared at him. “You know what? Fine, FINE. Explain yourself.”
“Just promise me you’ll not interrupt. I tried to ‘explain myself’ to Mama and Father a while ago, and that did *not* go well.”
She felt a wave of anger when Mama was mentioned, but she huffed and nodded.
“The pendant has no effect on the crops.”



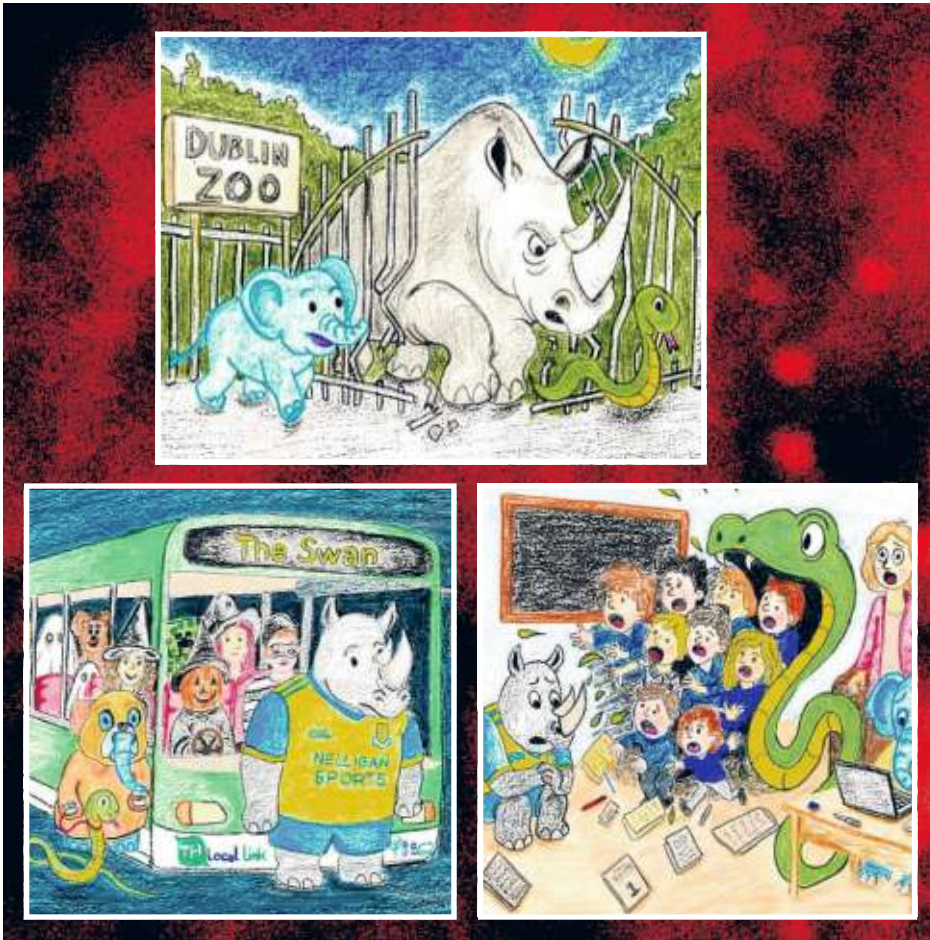
“WHAT?!”
“Ah! No interruptions!”
“Memeh-meh-memeh”
“I tested it out. Now don’t look so worried, I didn’t try destroying it or anything. I went past the Barrier and planted a full strawberry. I waited. And it *flourished*. I have never in my life seen a bush produce so much fruit. *Outside the Barrier.* I wanted to prove to everyone that it wouldn’t matter if the pendant was stolen. That’s that’s why I let them in. That was foolish of me.”
“But how do I know you’re telling the truth?”
“I can show you my garden. Come, follow me.”
Gloria cast one last wary glance over her shoulder, and followed her brother into the woods.

Seamus and the great breakout

An extract from a **Primary Story** by 3rd-6th class, **The Swan National School and Wolfhill National School, Co Laois**

Once upon a time in Dublin Zoo, there was an elephant, a rhino and a snake.
One night they escaped – Bulldozer the rhino broke the bars and all three broke free. They escaped to the forest where they met a witch named Bobbie. Bobbie granted them a wish, that being the wish to talk.
“Hello,” said Bulldozer the rhino, coughing a bit, as he had never spoken before. His voice was deep and yet oddly soft, considering his size.
The witch immediately responded, saying, “You must repay me later.”
Before they could ask more, she vanished, cackling as she disappeared. The three animals decided to find the witch and they eventually ended up on the Local

Link bus service to The Swan in Co Laois.
They had managed to get on the bus using disguises. They were all dressed up as people and pets. Cara, the little blue elephant, was disguised as a bulldog. Lucy the snake was disguised as a leash. Meanwhile, Bulldozer, who was terrified of people, was disguised as a mascot for St Joseph’s, the local team from The Swan.
The animals fitted in with the other people on the bus as it was Halloween and lots of the passengers were also in fancy dress. When they arrived in The Swan, they decided to rob some houses. It was getting dark, so they knew they would not be seen. They noticed a green glow over the road which led them to the school. The building was closed for Halloween, so they decided to break in . . .



The boy's shadow



A story by **Ronan Kane**, age 15, Co Armagh

The boy stumbled to his feet, running swiftly through the semi-alive bodies, his bloodied shirt painted an image of the scene that unfolded. He was being hunted by a towering shadow, which was responsible for the 11 butchered souls on the ground. His hunter chased after, he wheezed like a deer running through a forest, prey.

He leaped into a lifeless storage room, burrowing his body into the compact wardrobe, identifying with the uniforms around him, tight and trapped. The shadow's fingerless hand pushed its dark figure into the room, the black void inside the shadow threatened the boy. "I will consume you", it said in a firm and chillingly calm voice. The voice emitted soothing reassurance, like a babe being soothed by the gentle stroke of its mother, except this creature had proven to be the opposite of gentle; destructive.

The boy felt the shadow tugging at his soul, to accept each other as one, yet he stood stiller than a stick.

The shadow felt new, but familiar to the boy. Suddenly, the shadow peered into the



crack in the worn and wooden wardrobe. Tap, tap, tap, and then nothing, the boy awoke from the ether, where he slumbered. He felt reborn, yet there was no water, no holy man, no goodness, just darkness. The shadow had dispersed itself through the boy's throat and placed itself inside his eyeballs, clouding his vision. The boy had accepted the shadow, yet it was forced upon him.

The boy noticed his bloodied shirt had turned from a bright red, to a darker and more regal colour of crimson, reflecting his transition into something above his own comprehension. He smoothly slid from the worn wardrobe, in the storage room. The room was no longer lifeless, yet filled with an unfamiliar colour that elevated the room to his own state of mind.

Frenzied shrieks echoed from where the shadow had chased him, he bolted to the scene, the bodies still spewed across the floor, yet one human sized shadow backed away in fear. Maybe the shadows have multiplied? Dispersed? Whatever it was, he had to eliminate it from the face of the Earth. So, he did. The shriek abruptly stopped after a well-placed slash from his bloodied blade, now turning into a low hum of a plea. Though the boy knew better than to show mercy to a shadow, so he executed it swiftly.

Suddenly the boy felt cold, enclosed, like a tiger that had been cornered. His eyes flashed and his body morphed into the hospital bed, his body trapped, in handcuffs. His nurse backed away in fear, as she saw the deranged 17-year-old, foaming at the mouth, the boy who was responsible for the murder of 12 human lives.

The Dragon World Wars

An extract from a **Primary Story** by 3rd class, St Mary's National School, Co Westmeath

Once upon a time there was a dragon king called Scar. He was half human, half dragon. When he was a young boy, he drank the poison magical water. This turned him into half dragon, half human. He spent most of his life in the dark gloomy cave.

"Ew, this is disgusting" he wailed, as he sat on a slimy frog! Then he tried to stand up but the frog was stuck to his bottom! So, then he got magical powers from the frog, that was super strength.

He went outside and saw the Winter Dragon getting attacked by

a pickle, called Little Jim Bob.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh," the Winter dragon screamed in horror.

Snowball the Winter Dragon used his ice powers to freeze the pickle. When the pickle was frozen, his minions came to save him.

After the minions saved the pickle, they went to the dragons and said:

"If you are trying to turn us into hamburgers, we will turn you into dragon hotdogs!"

Little Jim Bob the Pickle wants to take over both of the kingdoms. The dragons said; "Not today" and ate all the pickles and spit them back into the jar ...





The traveller, the beloved and the pyromaniac



Three stories by **Lucas Ren**, age 13, Co Dublin

Zach had to meet the Judges again.
“Traveller, you must understand that you **cannot**, under **ANY** circumstances, alter the flow of time. Even if you simply drop a coin, astronomically large calamities can occur. We, as the Judges of Time, Fate, and Destiny, have the world planned out **exactly** how it is meant to happen.”
“But I want to help!” Zach retorted.
“Your role is not to help, but to observe,” the Judges would say calmly.
Then Zach would shut his mouth, deciding to keep his thoughts about the universe and reality to himself.

Nellie smiled as she saw her soon-to-be husband walk up the aisle. He was in his best attire and Nellie never felt prouder to be his wife. Then a feeling hit her. It nearly knocked her off her feet. Now, everything felt off. The roses seemed to only have thorns. The alter seemed to entrap her. The ring seemed to squeeze her finger.
Nellie looked back at her husband. He was no longer her husband. He was a monster, literally a monster. He had wings sprouting from his back, multiple eyes, and several wounds that gushed out golden blood.
“Come here, my love ” the monster gurgled.
“No, no!”
The monster suddenly lunged forward, his wings flapping.

“I’m sorry!” Nellie cried. Her wedding ring started to glow with a menacing pink light. Suddenly, the ring slipped off her finger and started to fly around Nellie. The ring, enveloped in the rosy light, started to mould and shift into ...
“Himeros, the blade of desire, aid me now!”
Nellie grabbed the ring, now a large blade, and swung it at the monster.
“For the Erotes!”

Alana felt the flames finally crawl down her neck, burning her rib cage and scorching her organs until they were just blackened pieces of flesh. She felt inferno expand in her body, replacing her blood with fire. The wildfire burned her skin, causing it to blister and then bleed. She felt the flames caress her spine, slowly eating through her defences like invasive maggots.
After multiple hours of thrashing and flailing, she gave up. Her arms flopped down at her sides, becoming limp. The edges of her fingers turned black from ash. Her hair was singed and fried as if she was struck by lightning. She lulled her head back, accepting her fate.
Then something happened.
Something strange.
A single wisp remained. It flew in front of her face, dancing around. Alana reached her hand out, trying to catch it, like how children try to catch floating dandelion clocks.
The wisp flew around, going through her legs, circling around her head. It was clearly playing with her, letting her feel her last moment of happiness.
Then, after minutes of playing, she finally caught the wisp. Alana slowly opened her hand, leaving a gap big enough for her to see through her palms.
And, as she saw the wisp fly around in between her palms, she laughed.
Something she hadn’t done in a long time.

Where art comes from



A poem by **Robyn Yelverton McKiernan**, age 15, Dublin

Art does not come from a machine, which has never seen
A human hand, cramped and covered in ink
A machine cannot begin to comprehend, even think
A machine, which can never possess
A human’s heart, a human’s mind, a human’s soul
It’s never seen a friend dance, a mother sing, never sketched with charcoal
Never seen sunshine, never seen rain
Never felt triumph, never felt pain
It’s never lay awake at night, wishing it could change
It’s never felt alone
Isolated or felt strange
It’s never felt love so extreme it could burst
It’s never felt the pride of putting someone first
In a way, I feel sorry for those little old machines
They’ll never see the bark of the ancient evergreens
They’ll never feel soft grass or old and worn-out jeans
We use art to connect – to each other, to the Earth
We send songs to the universe, we send music to the stars
Hoping to connect to someone from inside our tin-can cars
I pull art from the soil; I pull it from the air
I pull it from the books I read, I pull it from my hair
In a way, I feel sorry for those little old machines
For they can never recreate
All the things we’ve seen

Puddle pondering



A poem by **Leonie Hanan**, age 18, Co Down

My aunt told me
That often I stood, peacefully pondering puddles
Swinging my welly boot gently back and forth
Making swirls in the water

Our land is boundless but
She said it seemed as if
I found my own plane to exist in

Our land is impenetrable to some – but
The puddle opened up to me, a safe place –
My imagination

I lived there often,
Perhaps my heart always has
Now that I am older, these swirls manifest in my words
And sometimes I still go puddle-pondering
But the puddle has transformed –
Now I breathe in the sea.

World Vision

Deng-tall and Deng-short

A story by **Chan Chol Wal**, P6 Dingtoma 2 Primary School, South Sudan

Deng-tall and Deng-short were in charge of bringing food to their boss. But they used not to take the food to the boss, but hid it and steal it, and ate it in the pumpkin garden. They did like that to their boss every day.

One day, people were sent to follow both Deng-tall and Deng-short. They hid in the pumpkin garden and ate the food.

Those who followed them threw stones at the pumpkin garden. Deng-short was hit on the head and Deng-tall asked him to keep quiet. Deng-short said: "Should I keep quiet?"

"Yes, keep quiet! Keep quiet!"



The hunter and his enemies

A story from a student at **Bunyuka Writing Club**, Democratic Republic of Congo

One day, the hunter Kandolo went into the forest to hunt animals. He found a hiding place so he could be in a good spot to trap the animals effectively. From his hiding place, he took his arrow and shot it at an antelope that hadn't seen him. The antelope, taken by surprise, fell to the ground, moaning. Kandolo took his machete and cut off the antelope's head. He put his prey in a hunting bag and headed home.

On the way back, he spotted armed men in the distance. Kandolo hid deep in the forest without moving. After several hours, it began to rain. The armed men fled to find shelter and moved away from the forest. In the rain, Kandolo picked up his hunting bag and his game and continued on his way.

When he arrived home, Kandolo was warmly welcomed by his children. His wife took the hunting bag, lit a fire so that her husband Kandolo could warm himself, and set about preparing the game. The family thus enjoyed a hot meal and shared it with their neighbours.

The monkey who followed the giraffe

A story by **Amaal Abshir**, a third-grade student at Diilin primary and intermediate School, Somalia

Once upon a time, a monkey said to himself, "I am going to walk exactly like the giraffe and follow him wherever he goes."

The other wild animals laughed and warned him, "Do not lose yourself by trying to imitate the giraffe. Stay true to who you are."

The monkey replied proudly, "How could I lose myself?"

The animals explained, "The giraffe has longer legs and a longer neck than you. He can travel long distances and survive even where there is no water. You cannot."

But the monkey refused to listen and continued following the giraffe.

After some time, the monkey became extremely thirsty. Desperate for moisture, he began eating a tree called "Dharkeen" – a type



of cactus-like euphorbia tree. Still, he could no longer keep up. Weak and exhausted, he fell far behind the giraffe.

Days later, the monkey arrived at a gathering of the wild animals. He was thin, weak and confused. He had even forgotten how to walk properly like a monkey.

The animals looked at him and said, "Didn't we warn you?"

Full of regret, the monkey lowered his head and said: "Bad decisions lead you into difficult situations."



Fighting Words is working with **World Vision Ireland** to support creative writing activities with children in Somalia, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This long-term partnership – funded by **Irish Aid** – is part of a broader five-year programme that World Vision is leading to empower and protect children and women.

These creative education opportunities can strengthen children's resilience, build their confidence and contribute to the larger objective of protecting children from violence

Word Warriors

KillerFish's biggest fear

An excerpt from a play by students attending **Word Warriors Halloween Camp 2025** at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen's University Belfast

One morning as an unexpected storm was about to start, KillerFish was on the beach. He was stinging humans with his best friend Terry. The mood was happy, they were having SO MUCH FUN!

They were so excited and joyful that they didn't notice a life-threatening storm was coming. At that moment the people turned against them.

Terry: (shouting to KillerFish)

There is a boy coming up to us with dark chocolate, your biggest fear.

Killerfish: (screaming)

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!
Dark chocolate!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Terry: (angry)

You're a coward. It's just dark chocolate!!!!!!!!!!!!

KillerFish sprint-wiggled across the sand into the water and swam away as fast as he could.

Terry: (turning to face the human)

It is on ...



Nibbly the spy

An excerpt from a story by students attending **Word Warriors Summer Camp 2025** at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen's University Belfast

It was Nibbly Nibbleson's first day of spy school. Nibbly was undercover because there was a bad guy teaching at the school. The bad guy was called Bob the Rat Cat.

"I've got eyes on the suspect," he whispered as he held his ear piece with his paw.

"Watch out!" his partner urged. "Bob the Rat Cat might be guarded by a massive dog." The massive dog was a stray as a puppy and became a guard dog. He became giant when the Rat Cat gave him a special orb.

Nibbly walked over to the Rat Cat and removed his mask. "Give me the baby guinea pigs that you've kidnapped or else!" The Rat Cat hissed suspiciously "Or else what!"

Smash! The massive dog shot through the window ...

A pond

An poem by students attending **Word Warriors Summer Camp 2025**, at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen's University Belfast

A pond
Some ducks, a water lily
A cat sits near

A lion mane, strawberry gold,
Sleeps in peace on a rock
In the safari
And wakes up to a shriek



Word Warriors is an extra-curricular activity delivered to seven-to-12-year-olds. In Belfast, participants meet during school holidays to explore a variety of writing styles including prose, poetry and songwriting. The Belfast programme is run in partnership with **the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's University Belfast**. Word Warriors is also run as an after school programme by Fighting Words in Dublin

Dear Friend

November 20, 2025



A story by **Marisa Funken**, age 17, Co Kildare

Dear Friend,
I hope that you do not receive this letter. Nothing would make me happier than to have it returned to me unread. Please don't assume that this is because I do not want to reconnect, and that I do not love you, quite the opposite. It is because I care so much that I hope you no longer live in your childhood home.

When I woke up this morning and glanced at the calendar hanging from a hook on my kitchen door, I was forced into the past. When we were young, November 20 meant dipping into our precious funds to buy cupcakes. We couldn't afford candles, but I'd hold up my lighter for you to blow out. For the rest of the day, I'd tried to guess what your wish was. In all our years of friendship, I never could guess it right.

It has been 25 years since I last saw you. Easy to keep track, as we decided to leave town as our resolution for the new millennium. The world had not ended, as people had feared, which meant our lives could begin. All that late-night planning was finally going to be put into action. You insisted that we run away to a city. You loved the idea of living among thousands of other people. The very thought of cities



terrified me, but I never told you that.

With the good memories came the bad. Today, I was unwillingly brought back to the time my mother picked me up by the back of my shirt and threw me in the spare room. She locked me in that empty room for two days. I had to lick the condensation off the window and chew on splinters from the floorboards. When she finally let me out, I was too weak to speak or even lift my head.

When you heard, you brought me a stack of buttered bread. You didn't care if your uncle hurt you for it. Such a simple action, but I adored you even more after that. No one understood me as you did.

I'm sorry I left so suddenly. I shouldn't have done that to you. After all that dreaming and saving, I abandoned you. I was a coward. My mother was screeching that day, telling me that I was her curse and that she never should have brought me into this world. I couldn't stand living in that house for one more second.

And so I packed my things, counted my money and left. I was sitting in an overnight train when I remembered what I was missing. I considered turning back, but the thought of seeing that town again made me sick.

I tried to forget about you. I made up lies in my head about where you were and the life you were living. Yet, it seems that after all these years, I'm still lost without you.

Happy birthday.
From,
You know who.

My big brother



A story by **Rebecca Ennis**, Co Dublin

As I lay in bed reflecting on the day that has just passed, I hear what sounds like a stampede of wild animals sprinting up my stairs. The sound quickly approaches my room and the only thing I can think of is, "What is that?" Out of nowhere he comes bursting through the door almost taking it off

its hinges: my big brother.

"What are you doing?" I shriek. "I thought there was an ambush outside my door!"

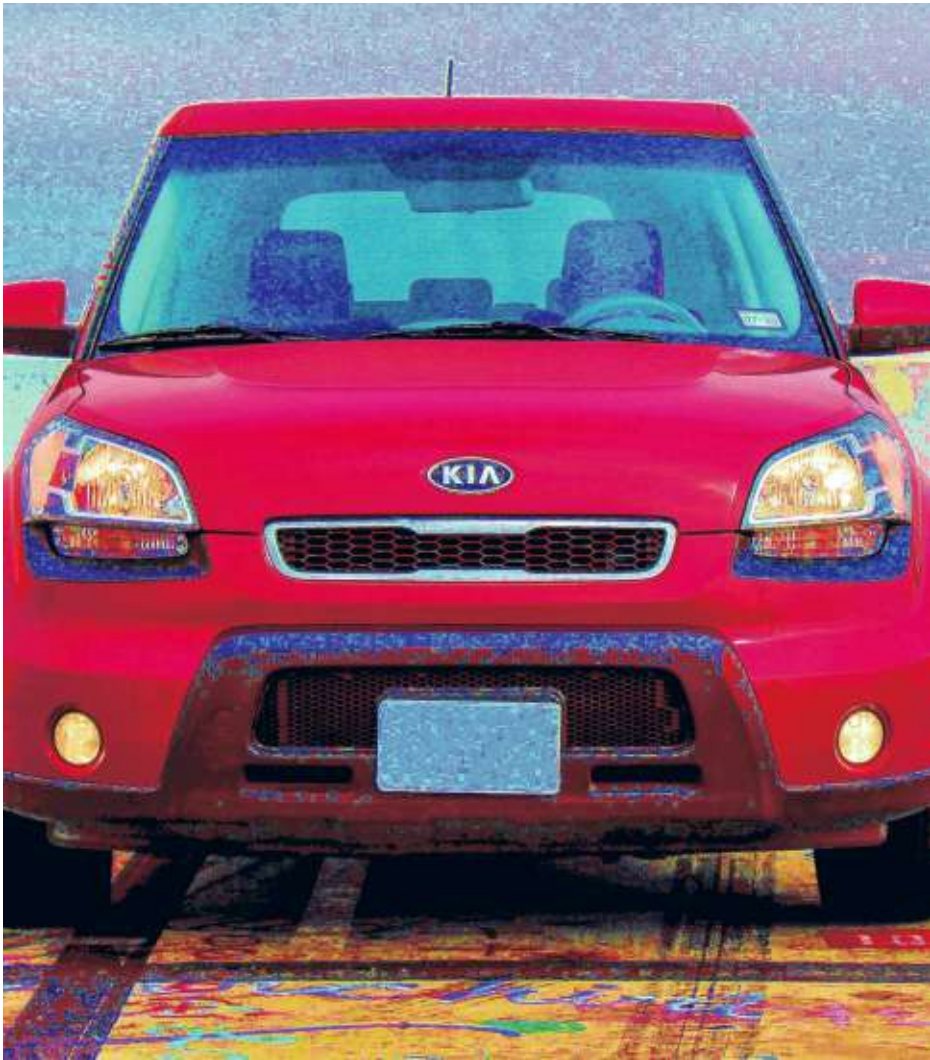
"No, it was just me," he mumbles as he plops himself at the end of my bed.

We could talk for hours about how that day treated us and share a few funny things that happened along the way. These conversations could go on – we laugh, we cry, we argue – but at the end of the day we knew we would be fine by morning.

As we grew older these conversations became less frequent, they used to be every day but now, once every few days, once a week, once a month, once in a blue moon. He used to bug me, get under my skin but now I realise I took simple conversations for granted.

He's leaving soon to move on with his life – my big brother, my role model. The one person I could talk to about anything will soon be gone.





The helpful genie

A story by **Sidney McCann**,
age 19, Dublin

I am a genie. I have one job, which is helping other people with whatever troubles they may have. It was a warm day in the middle of summer. I was about to lay down in my garden, hoping to make the most of the nice weather, when I heard a few young voices calling my name. I looked up to see three children in front of me, each with a frown on their faces. I asked them, what had them so upset. They began to explain. The three kids lived in a village that was only a small walk away and every day, a giant, who lives in a castle at the top of the nearby mountain, would terrorise the village and steal all the food from the markets and eat the farmers' vegetables from their gardens. The children asked for my help, saying how hungry they were, so I had to do something. I was MAD. I quickly cancelled my wood chopping session and grabbed the keys to my Kia Soul and drove up to the

giant's castle. I kicked open the gate with my bare legs. Those callisthenic exercises had paid off! I walked in like I owned the place; no giant would scare me. My undercut was freshly done; I had my favourite biker jacket and my new pair of combat boots on. NOTHING was stopping this girl. I find the giant's house, and I rip the door of his hinges, throwing the door across the valley. "Yo, dude . . . like, what's with all this stealing food, like, dude? These kids are mad hungry." The giant gives me a menacing look, but I don't stop pressing him. He is large and gluttonous, looking like an oversized toad. I spot something in the corner. A fridge. A VERY large fridge, taking up most of the room. I have an idea. Just as the giant is about to attack me, I tip the fridge slightly and it hits him on the head. I took out a rope from my car boot and towed the fridge all the way down the hill. When they saw a red 2010 Kia Soul drive into the village square, they knew the dark ages were over. The oversized fridge had all the fresh produce, sweets and snacks that the greedy, greedy giant was keeping. "Hurrah!" the townsfolk cheer as the genie saves the day once again!

The fifth season



A poem by **Oscar Daunt Brennan**,
age 18, Dublin

When the needle-trees have crick-a-cracked,
And blossomers have burst,
When the leaves rust red and fall down dead,
Then the fifth begins.

The sun will rise with two blue eyes.
The stars will fall as fireflies.

The trees will walk, the rocks will talk,
The rest fall silent as the stalk.

The fish will fly and swim the sky.
In their hurry, the birds will bury.

For darkling things will softly sing,
In the ears of killers and their kings,
Make them wail, wither and weep,
Blacken the barley that they reap.

The seas will freeze, the earth will froth,
The rivers will redden in their wroth.

As the clouds rain razors, red seas rise,
Rising high to drown the cries.

For all our rot, rivers will clot.
For all our lies, stars will die.
For all our sweat and piss and spit,
Our bellies will be softly slit.

For all our sins, the fifth begins.



Second chances

A play by playwrights attending **Coolmine House**,
Amiens Street, Dublin

Characters

Eric: 25, from Coolock, Dublin. Has OCD, just finished an electrician apprenticeship and is looking for a job. Lives at home with his mother and his partner and their child. He was electrocuted and injured badly at one stage.
Deirdre (Dee): 35, has an 8-month-old baby in the pram and two more kids at home. She works for human resources at a company.
Lucy: Eric's partner. Lives in Eric's mother's house with him, their child and his mother.
Ma: Eric's mother
Katie; Receptionist; Bus driver

Scene One

The number 27 bus to Tallaght. Dublin, Present Day. It's raining outside. Dee sits alone downstairs. The bus stops. Eric gets on and walks over to Dee.

Eric: You're in my seat.
Dee: Who told you this was your seat?
Eric: I get this bus every day and sit in that exact seat.
Dee: This isn't your seat.
Eric: I've been taking this bus for 15 years.
Dee: It's not your seat today pal.
Eric: May I please have that seat.
Dee: No. You may not.
Eric: Don't tell me I can't have that seat. You're not the boss of me!
Dee: I'm not giving you this seat. Do you not hear what I'm saying? Is there something wrong with you?

Bus stops. Driver comes in

Driver: Eric, what's going on here?
Eric: She's in my seat
Driver: Eric, we've had this problem before. Can you please find another seat. Just for today.
Dee: Please get this guy away from me
Driver: Eric, you're going to have to sit somewhere else or get off the bus.

Eric gets thrown off the bus. Scene ends.

Scene two

Eir company headquarters in Tallaght. Reception area and Dee's Office. Eric enters soaking wet, umbrella inside out.

Receptionist: Welcome. How can I help you?
Eric: I have an interview for Eir. I'm an electrician.

Receptionist: No worries. Dee is waiting for you. You're very late. Down the hall. Room on the left.
Eric: Ok. Thank you.

Eric walks down the hall. Knocks on Dee's door.

Dee: Yes. Come in.
Eric: How's it going? Sorry I'm late. Ah, s**t. Not you.
Dee: What do you want?
Eric: I'm here for the interview.
Dee: Take a seat. Not this one!
Eric: I'm sorry for earlier. But that was my seat.
Dee: Of all the seats on the bus, why did you want my seat?
Eric: I needed that seat. I'm used to sitting there. I have OCD.
Dee: Every single person on the planet has OCD these days. Give me a good reason why I should even let you do this interview?
Eric: I've got bills to pay. I really need this job. I'm after having a baby.
Dee: If I let you interview are your manners going to be as bad as they were on the bus?
Eric: No. Of course not. I can be professional.
Dee: Okay. Let's see what you've got.

Lights down. Scene ends.

Scene three

Eric's mother's house, where he lives with his partner, Lucy, their child, his mother and his older brother. Space is cramped. The baby is crying and Lucy is trying to soothe it. Eric enters.

Lucy: Where have you been all day?
Eric: Told you I had an interview. Before you ask I definitely didn't get it. And I got kicked off the bus again. And look at the state of this place!
Lucy: The absolute NECKKKKK of you. I've been slaving over this house all day long and you come back here jobless. What have you got to say for yourself?
Ma: Don't you talk to my son like that!
Eric: I'm going to my room.
Lucy: I'm sick to death of this Eric. You're not going anywhere.
Ma: Talk to my son like that again, I'll burst the head off ya.
Eric: What are you sick of?
Lucy: You haven't had a job in six months. You're constantly going on about the state of the house. That's the sixth time you've been kicked off the bus. (Turns to Ma) I'll



deal with you later.
Eric: Okay! So why don't you go get a job? I'll look after the baby and the house. And I'll do a better job of it.

Lucy picks up the pot of pasta and throws it at him, narrowly missing his head.

Scene four

Dee's apartment/house. Dee's car has broken down. Her ex-husband, John, is there, wearing a fishnet vest, drinking a can, when she walks in with the baby.

John: Well, well, the kids are starving, your turn for dinner.
Dee: You're here all day you could have cooked them something!
John: Don't be bringing home your work stress. We have an agreement.
Dee: What have you been doing? Sitting on your arse all day!
John: Been trying to fix that car you can't drive.
Dee: Can't drive something that's not fixed.
John: You're always blaming others. I'm not listening to this.
Dee: You're just a waste of space.
John: I've been working on that car for hours. You never give anyone a chance.
Dee: I've given you enough chances. You've been sitting there drinking beer wasting time. Where are the kids anyway?
John: Upstairs. Doing their homework. They were helping me with your car.
Dee: Have you signed those divorce papers yet?
John: No way. And I won't. Not on those terms. This is my house too. And you're not taking the kids.
Dee: Nobody says I was taking them. The court will decide that. Let's see how this goes in court. They don't look kindly on alcoholics.

John storms out.

Scene five

John and his mistress, Katie, are in Katie's apartment.

John: Me and her just had words again. I'm sick of this.
Katie: You said you were going to leave her. You should have left by now.
John: It's too hard with the kids. It's messy. I'm not leaving her with the house.
Katie: I'm not playing second fiddle to her and the kids. So sign the papers and leave her go. Don't you love me?
John: Of course I do. But I love the house too.
Katie: So what's the plan?
John: I don't know. What do you think?
Katie: You know what I think. I've said it all before. Plug something into that dodgy socket in her room. Poof! Electrical fire. Then report her for being an unfit mother.
John: What if the kids get hurt?
Katie: Do it when they're in school and I'll be your alibi.
John: That could work!

They kiss.

Scene six

Eric and John standing on stage. Eric's phone rings.

Eric: Hello. Who's this?
John: I got your number off a mate.
Eric: What mate?
John: Jimmy. Jimmy Jones. The bus driver. I heard you were looking for work.
Eric: I'm always looking for work. What do you need done?
John: Can you come out and look at a job for me?
Eric: Sure. Send me the address. When suits you?
John: Can you come over this afternoon?
Eric: Not this afternoon. I have an interview. Tomorrow?



Scene seven

Eric and Dee. Second interview. Eric arrives at the office. Dee is on the phone.

Receptionist: Fancy seeing you here again!

Eric: I'm surprised to see myself here again.

Receptionist: At least you're on time! Dee's waiting for you in there.

Eric knocks. Dee says, "Sign the papers – I just want you out of my house and out of my life."

Dee: Come in.

Eric: Where should I sit?!

Dee: Any seat but mine!

Rapport is good.

Eric: Thanks for having me back.

Dee: Anyone can have a bad day. You sparked something in me! Everyone deserves a second chance.

Eric: You've no idea what this means to me. I've got a lot going on at home.

Dee (Emotional): I can identify with that.

Eric: Are you all right?

Dee: Sorry, that's not very professional of me. I see you have a year and half gap on your resume. What happened?

Eric: I was a young apprentice. First year on the job. I suffer from OCD as I said in the first interview. My boss left me unsupervised. I was trying to clean up messy cables. Didn't know they were still live. I got the shock of my life. Literally.

Fast forward two months in a coma and ended up with third degree burns. And this is my first interview since.

As Eric speaks we see the action taking place as if it's present day.

Dee: The bus thing. I get it now. You're doing well. You're doing really well.

Scene 8

John's house. Eric arrives. Introductions are made.

Eric: You weren't clear on the phone what the job was.

John: I heard you were looking for easy money. Would you do a nixer for me?

Eric: Lead the way.

Eric follows John upstairs.

John: There it is. It's that socket on the back wall.

Eric: There's nothing wrong with it.

John: That's the problem.

John winks and leaves the room and Eric sees a large framed photo of Dee & John, has a flashback of being shocked. Eric storms down the stairs sees John and says:

Eric: I'm having no part of this.

Scene nine

Dee's office.

Receptionist: You're making a habit of this! But I think it could be good news.

Eric: I know. I got a call to be here this morning.

Dee: Hey Eric. Come on in.

Eric: Hi Dee. Thanks for having me back. I appreciate it

Dee: I'm looking at your test scores. You may have no social skills but it appears you're an electrical genius. The job is yours.

Eric is overcome with emotion – joy then apprehension.

Eric: But c'mere. Before I accept, wait till I tell you this ...

The HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline provides confidential support, information and referrals to services. Call 1800 459 459 or email helpline@hse.ie



Back row: X and Ash, Fighting Words Volunteers; Front Row: Kiara, Naoise and Michael. Pictured at Fighting Words, Behan Square taking part in the Songwriting series run for the Dublin Arts and Human Rights Festival 2025

War, do you even care?

A song by teenagers **Michael, Naoise and Kiara**, written during a workshop at Fighting Words, Dublin as part of the Irish Arts & Human Rights Festival

Verse 1

So many have had to die and yet the bullets continue to fly,
Walk don't run through the broken dreams,
And shattered lives and streams of tears,
Flow through torn apart cities.

Chorus

What if you were there?
War, do you even care?
What if you were there?

Verse 2

People made to flee, now a refugee, can't you see?
Show us some empathy, we're crying, we're dying,
History repeating a million times, a million lies,
Children's eyes watching parents die,
We see your lies, soon you'll be the one crying.

Chorus

What if you were there?
War, do you even care?
What if you were there?

Bridge

The Troubles, Ukraine, Palestine, Syria
So many I can't count,
And yet, we rise from the ashes like a tree,
After a wildfire we grow, we thrive,
You can't stop us, Human, nature connect as one,
Isn't clear, money isn't the one,
We must stop, fight for equality,
It's time to end inequality.

Chorus

What if you were there?
War, do you even care?
What if you were there?

The **Songwriting Programme** at Fighting Words is made possible thanks to the support of **Community Foundation Ireland**

The Next Chapter is a collaboration between **Fighting Words** and **The Gate Theatre**. Through a series of playwriting workshops, participants had the opportunity to develop their storytelling skills, culminating in a showcase in The Gate Theatre in September 2025 where professional actors performed the participants' work, building their confidence in creative expression.

Fighting Words and the Gate Theatre would like to thank **Adult Literacy for Life, Solas Learning Networks** and **Irish Gov/EU** for supporting this project.



Cornelius's challenge (the pasta incident)

Written by Donegal-based creative writing students for **Mind Your Melon**

Cornelius is a lazy boy. Or at least everyone says he's lazy, he never has any energy to do anything. He is currently lying in bed with his headphones on.

They are jet black and covered in rock band stickers. He is listening to a playlist of Metallica and My Chemical Romance's angriest and saddest songs.

Suddenly, Jaquavius barges in without knocking. He is wearing his purple rugby kit and has a bowl of burnt fusilli with red spicy sauce in his hand. He jams the pasta in under Cornelius's pillow. Cornelius shrieks, "Why are you like this?" and he starts weeping. "I was born like this and you just have to deal with it." Jaquavius says in a bitter, sarcastic tone.

"What happened to your hair?" Cornelius replied. Jaquavius's hair is bleached and gelled up in pointy spikes.

"Not telling you. And it's better than yours will ever be," he sneers.

Cornelius feels overwhelmed and anxious now. He decides he needs some space and hides underneath the stairs. He goes through the tiny door that he has to uncomfortably cramp himself into whenever he's feeling overwhelmed. It is dark and creepy in there, with X's scratched on the walls and spiders crawling all over him. It isn't exactly comfortable but at least he is alone.

Bonquisha notices Cornelius going under the stairs. She knows that he does this when he is feeling depressed. She wants to paint his face as a unicorn with gorgeous bright colours and rainbows. When she approaches the door, it is ajar and she hears weeping. Bonquisha opens the door and lets the sunlight in. She's playing Wheels on the Bus on a speaker and invites Cornelius to join her dancing. Cornelius wipes the tears from his eyes and watches how adorable his little sister is. He pulls himself up, and even though it feels difficult, he joins his sister and dances.

Suddenly a weight is lifted off of his shoulders, even just for a few minutes.

This story comes from a collection of stories titled **Mind Your Melon**, created during creative writing workshops at Foróige centres in Ballyshannon and Donegal. The participants were Caitlin Hamilton, Guilherme Pereira Tavares and Molly Stewart. This project was supported by **Foróige, HSE, Connecting For Life Donegal, Connect Mental Health** and **Peace Plus Northern Ireland – Ireland**

Girls' night out

A personal story by **Norah Ronni Coyle**

When I was a few years married, myself and four friends used to go to the Bonne Bouche Café during children's allowance week. At that time, it was a little bit fancy with white tablecloths and flowers as a centrepiece in a small vase. We used to enjoy our night out while our husbands would babysit. It was our little treat. We'd order chicken and chips with salad and tea or coffee. We wouldn't drink as it was outside our budget. And as there were four of us, one was either pregnant or just after having a baby, so the talk was mostly baby talk. We'd sit there for two hours or more gossiping about the latest scandal, which wasn't much back then.

We all had cars, and one night Aggie was looking for her keys when she realised she'd left them in her car. We all trooped out to her car and looked in at the keys securely locked inside. We talked for a bit about what we'd do. I suggested calling the guards as they might have spare keys. We called them and they duly arrived after a few minutes.

Two young fellows, they tried all the doors and even the boot, but had no success. We stood for a moment thinking about it, then one of the guards

said to the other, "If we had a knife, we could slide it in between the glass and the button might pop up". Kathy said that she had a knife and, to our surprise, slid it out of her sleeve. She had seen Billy, her husband, doing it before, and took the knife with her on the way out of the restaurant. Kathy had been born with one arm. Her sleeve from her elbow down was buttoned up and that's where she had put the knife when we were figuring out what to do.

The guards looked at her and one of them took the knife and, lo and behold, when he tried it, the button popped up.

We all moved off

towards our cars. The younger of the guards asked Kathy if she wanted the knife back and she said no. The guards got into their car and one of them said, "We'll keep the stolen property". They were still laughing as they drove away. Aggie always kept a knife in her bag after that!



Written as part of the **Did I Ever Tell You?** project, a storytelling initiative which aims to collect the thoughts and memories of older individuals in HSE healthcare settings across the counties of Kildare, Offaly, and Westmeath. Ronni is a resident in St Vincent's Care Centre, which participated in the project. The full collection can be viewed on **fightingwords.ie**



The kitchen table



A story by **Ciarán McCabe**,
a teacher at Coláiste na hInse,
Laytown, Co Meath

“I think I’m going to be sick.”
Her mouth is slack and she swallows a mouthful of air as she pushes her plate across the table.

“No-no-no, I’m definitely going to be sick.”

She plants her two hands on the table and blinks, her eyes lolling and unfocused.

“Did I eat too fast? I was starving.”

She had been. She had said it while walking through the door.

“I’m starving. What’s for dinner?”

Her delight then at the sausages spitting and sizzling on the pan, lifting the lid of the pot to see daffodil blooms of butter melting on the potatoes, the steam lifting from the bowl of beans. Heinz, not Bachelor’s. I’d made that mistake before. As a bachelor.

It was her favourite dinner, the home comfort that brought her back to a tight kitchen, her two sisters and her mother, and the small round table, stained like an old deck of cards. It was the table that she wanted in her own house, not the plain square table, the right size for our kitchen, but too large for the two of us. She had always wanted a round table for me and for her, and for those that we had been waiting to join us.

Now, she plants her hands on the table

and reels out of the room, the door swinging open behind her. From the kitchen table I hear her vomit echoing in the toilet bowl. I fill a glass of water and wait an appropriate length of time. The toilet flushes. When the noise of the toilet fades away, I knock on the bathroom door. Her face is puffy and white like cotton, her eyes red and wet.

“Oh God, I don’t know why I’m sick. Is it food poisoning? Did you cook them right?”

She laughs with me and sits down on the toilet seat. Taking the glass of water, she leans over the sink and washes her mouth out.

“I don’t feel well at all.”

Her eyes are blinking and focusing once more. She stares at the wall and her eyes crease.

“I need the toilet.”

I am handed the empty glass and return to the kitchen table. The soft, yellow mash, the salty sausages. No wonder she wolfed it down. I take my time as I eat, chewing the sausages and thinking of my own childhood, when I hid unfinished sausages under my plate, in my milk glass, or smuggled them in my cheeks and spat them out to my dog. I’ve told her these stories before, but I’ll tell her again when she comes back in. She will tell me again of her own childhood kitchen, the table, the noise – the stories you want to tell your own kids. There is a sadness to this, but a comfort too.

The toilet flushes again and the water runs in the bathroom sink. I wait for her voice from the hallway, running my hand along the smooth surface of the table. It is plain and square, but it has seen good times in this house too, and who knows what stories it still has to tell. I am about to say this to her too, when she is sitting beside me, a white stick shaking in her hand.

Make use



A poem by **Nora Melia**,
a teacher at Calasactius College,
Oranmore, Co Galway

Make use of the things around you.
The potholes that I apologise for every time someone new is on the way,
As if to downplay the soul of the old, beautiful building that has
enveloped our family for fifteen years
In stone and colour and love.
The soft skull of a dog that has never used conditioner. How can it be so soft!
A natural marvel that cannot be replicated in a bottle.
The footsteps overhead from a timber frame
That mocks all who think they can tiptoe around in the dark.
The movement and clatter that I already miss, even though it has gone nowhere.
The hum of an attic tank that feels very twentieth century
Every time someone washes their hands.
Does the dishwasher ever stop?
It’s like a dental hygienist that must face a dirty mouth
For the satisfaction of a cleansed palate.
Put it all in
Make use.

This was written in response to Raymnod Carver’s poem Sunday Night



Fighting Words is proud to collaborate with **Oide** in hosting professional development initiatives that support teachers in fostering their own creativity and their creative classroom practice. **Teacher Write Club** and **The Scribe Collective** are two such initiatives where teachers explore their creative voice through guided activities and discuss creativity in the classroom with peers. Here is some of the work produced by teachers during our collaborations with Oide. For more information see **fightingwords.ie**

Fighting Words would like to pass a big note of thanks to all the children and young adults who we met this past year. The imaginations and creative energy we encountered, and the wonderful pieces we have read, have been inspiring and invigorating.

To the teachers at primary and post-primary level who support and encourage their young people to create, imagine and dream,
THANK YOU.

Huge thanks also to the editorial committee for reading all of the pieces entered for consideration and special congratulations to all the post-primary schools and organisations, listed below, whose students were selected for publication in this year's supplement.

Blessington Community College
Dominican College Fortwilliam
Elea High
Fingal Community College
Glenlola Collegiate
Gorey Community School
Holywood Steiner School
Loreto Secondary School Kilkenny
Marino College
Mount Saint Michael Secondary School
Coláiste Chroí Mhuire
Mount Temple Comprehensive School
Moville Community College
Naas Community College
Newpark Comprehensive School
Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin
Presentation Wexford
Roscommon Community College
Salesian Secondary College
Sandford Park School
Scoil Dara
Scoil Muire agus Pádraig
St Mary's College, Naas
St Mary's College, Rathmines
St. Aloysius College, Carrigtwohill
Coláiste Cholmcille, Indreabhán
Youthreach North Great Georges St,
Dublin 1
Fingal Community College

IOMAI

EABHA
MCLAUGHLIN

The
Fifth
Season
Oscar
Daunt
Brennan

Maria
Tomczak's

Requiem for the Lost

Dear Friend

Marissa
Funken