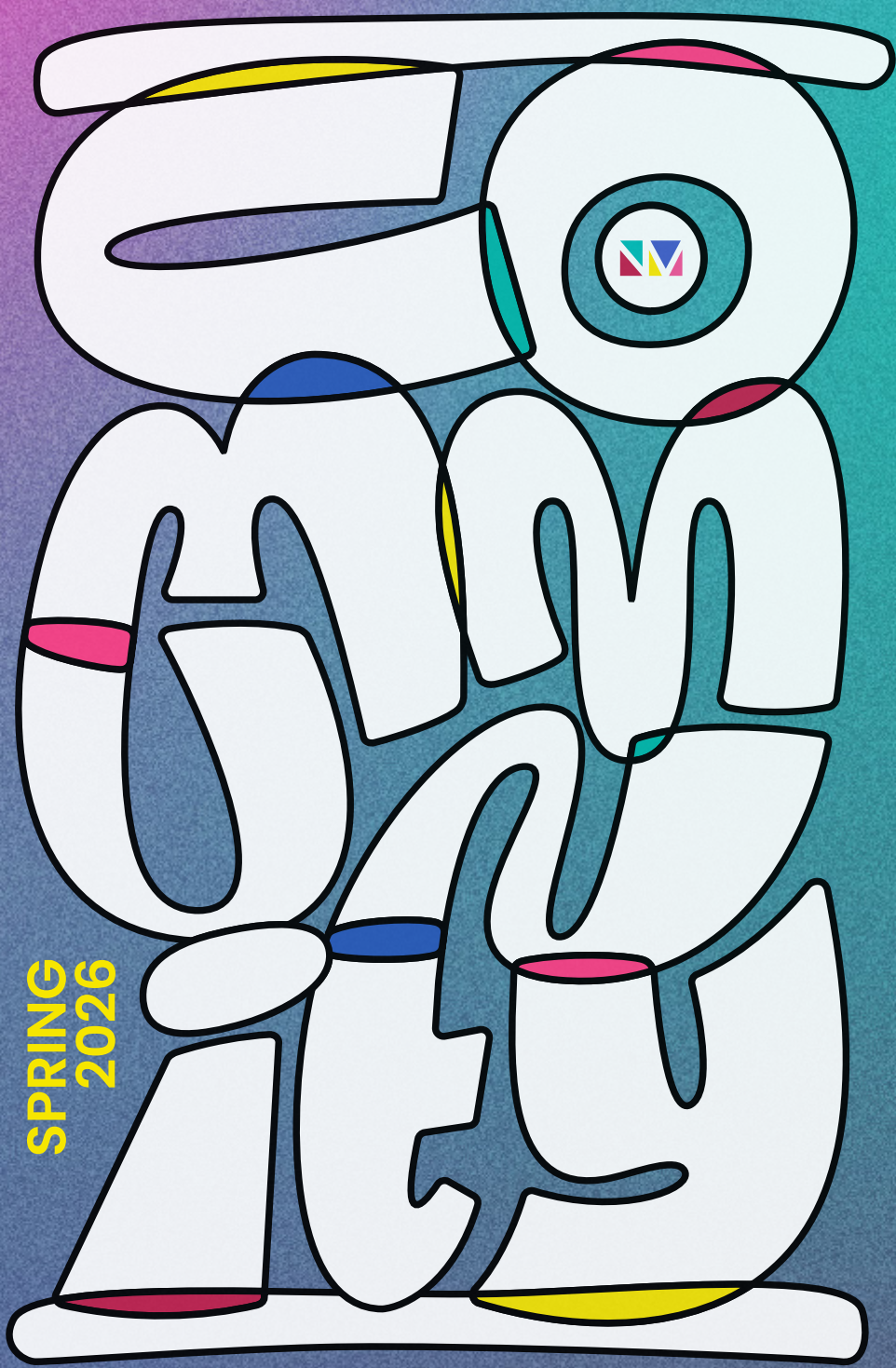




SPRING
2026

ABOUT BODECKER'S SKILL BUILDING COHORTS

The Bodecker Foundation's Skill Building Cohorts offer eight months of immersive growth in creative writing, audio engineering, and fine art. Guided by teachers Tony Ozier, Kyra Watkins, Tanya Cerda, and Jordan Souza, each cohort meets twice a month to cultivate craft, practice essential skills, and forge deep peer connections.

Each year, we receive many applications from high school aged students in Portland, Oregon and we have to make difficult decisions when selecting our twelve writers, eight audio engineers, and twelve artists. Being a part of the SB Cohorts requires not only a desire to grow as a creative but the willingness to grow alongside others.

Born from the Bodecker Foundation's commitment to lasting impact through community, these cohorts are now in their third year. We believe mentorship rooted in a steady, supportive network accelerates both skill development and a sense of belonging.

WORDS

Exploring a range of creative writing practices from short fiction to poetry to personal essay. Students use a writing workshop method inspired by the Iowa Writer's Workshop to read, share, and reflect on each other's pieces.

SOUNDS

Diving into music and audio engineering, mastering signal flow, equipment setup, essential tools, and studio etiquette. Students work both in our state of the art digital and analog studio and on their personal kits to record work.

VISUALS

Developing fine art skills with an emphasis on drawing technique, color theory, and portfolio building.

BODECKER
FOUNDATION'S
MISSION

**TO SPARK YOUNG PEOPLE TO REALIZE THEIR
CREATIVE POWER THROUGH IMMERSIVE
LEARNING EXPERIENCES.**

INTRODUCTION BY TANYA CERDA

I am deeply proud of our third-year Skill Building Cohort students.

Each year, I am moved not only by what they create, the visual artists shaping bold and intimate worlds, the writers crafting language that lingers, and the musicians and producers building soundscapes that carry emotion, but also by how they care for one another. On a Cohort Day, the Bodecker space feels alive. Three distinct disciplines, three creative languages, yet one shared pulse of curiosity, courage, and collaboration.

This year, our theme is community.

In a time that has felt heavy for many of us, we chose to lean toward connection. We created intentional space for the Visual, Words, and Sound cohorts to deepen relationships within their own groups and across disciplines. When writers engage with producers, visual artists respond to text, and musicians find inspiration in imagery, the exchange becomes more than creative exploration. It becomes belonging.

We remain hopeful. Hopeful in the power of young people who understand that their voices matter. Hopeful in the strength that comes from diversity of thought, background, and expression. Hopeful in a future shaped by artists who know how to build community with care.

As you read, view, and listen to the work in this anthology, we hope you feel what we feel. Possibility. Connection. The quiet confidence that something meaningful is taking root here.

To the guardians, thank you for being part of this community and for encouraging your young people to explore their creative voice.

To the students, thank you for showing up authentically, taking creative risks, and making this community stronger simply by being part of it.

To our instructors and mentors, thank you for the care, intention, and belief you bring to this work. You create the conditions where creativity can flourish.

With gratitude,

Tanya Cerdá



OUR TEAM

TANYA CERDA

**CO-FOUNDER
+ TRUSTEE**



Tanya Cerda is the Co-founder, Trustee of the N M Bodecker Creative Foundation, and the Founder, Board Chair of Sandy Bodecker Project, Inc. and is an interdisciplinary BIPOC artist whose vibrant identity and cultural heritage serve as powerful catalysts for fostering diverse and inclusive environments. A graduate of Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, California, Tanya's academic and professional journey has provided her with a strong foundation in artistic principles and a rich exposure to a wide array of creative expressions.

TONY OZIER

**STUDIO
ENGINEER + MANAGER**



Tony Ozier is a multi-instrumentalist, producer, recording engineer, and music educator. He is passionate about bringing music production and studio engineering education to underserved communities and co-founded Beats | Lyrics | Leaders, which has brought workshops throughout the West Coast for over 10 years. He is the co-founder of the Portland Black Music Expo and the bandleader of the Doo Doo Funk All-Stars. Tony also served as musical director for the iconic band The Pharcyde. He holds a degree in recording Arts Full Sail University in Orlando, FL.

JORDAN SOUZA

**PROGRAM
DIRECTOR**



Jordan Souza is an educator, writer, and editor passionate about propelling young voices. Jordan earned her BA in Sociology and her MA in Teaching and taught high school English for ten years. Simultaneously, she co-founded and edited Lilun Magazine, which published the work of 15-21 year old writers. Her writing has been published in *Oregon Humanities*, *Apartment Therapy*, *Motherwell Mag*, and *Magazine1*. When Jordan is not working with young people or writing, you'll most likely find her reading with a good cup of coffee in hand.

KYRA WATKINS

**VISUALS COHORT
INSTRUCTOR + MENTOR**



Kyra Watkins is a Portland-based artist and muralist known for her work that combines portraiture with deep emotional narratives. Originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, Watkins has gained recognition for her community-centered art, often using portraiture to tell powerful stories. She has been involved in various public art projects. Her mural work often emphasizes connection, family, and remembrance, with a focus on human stories. Watkins also mentors youth in mural art and has collaborated with various community organizations.



SOUNDS COHORT

MEET THE SOUNDS COHORT

Angela Thomas is a singer/songwriter and audio engineer, who has a passion for all kinds of music and loves to explore different genres. She loves playing guitar and performing live, as well as engineering her own sessions for recordings. She has recorded one EP under the name Angel Marie and is currently working on her debut album. She hopes to continue creating, recording, and performing for as long as she can. When not playing music, she loves consuming as much new music and movies as possible.

Cross Tafoya is an independent musician from Portland, Oregon who loves experimentation. Every song tries something new, another experience to get lost in. Blanketed under layers of intricate guitar work, pounding drums and thumping bass is a fiery, passionate musician who would do near anything to achieve his dreams.

Flynn Brimberry is an audio engineer specializing in recording and producing music. With a motivation to create and record music, Flynn has worked with many bands in Portland to capture and record their songs. He has experience with Pro-Tools, FL Studio, and Studio One. Outside of the studio, Flynn plays classical trumpet and creates music of all kinds of genres, including ambient, hip hop, and electronic music.

Jai Sullivan is a sound engineer with a passion for capturing and crafting sound. Whether it's the elegance of Classical, the lively beats of Ragtime, the raw energy of Hip-Hop and Rap, or the catchy hooks of Pop, Jai brings each genre to life with skill. With a knack for remixing classic tunes and giving them new life, Jai is an innovator in the world of music. Always looking for fresh rhythms and unique sounds, Jai's knowledge of Logic Pro and Pro Tools is complemented by an interest in mastering Studio One. Explore Jai's world of sound and experience the transformation of music!

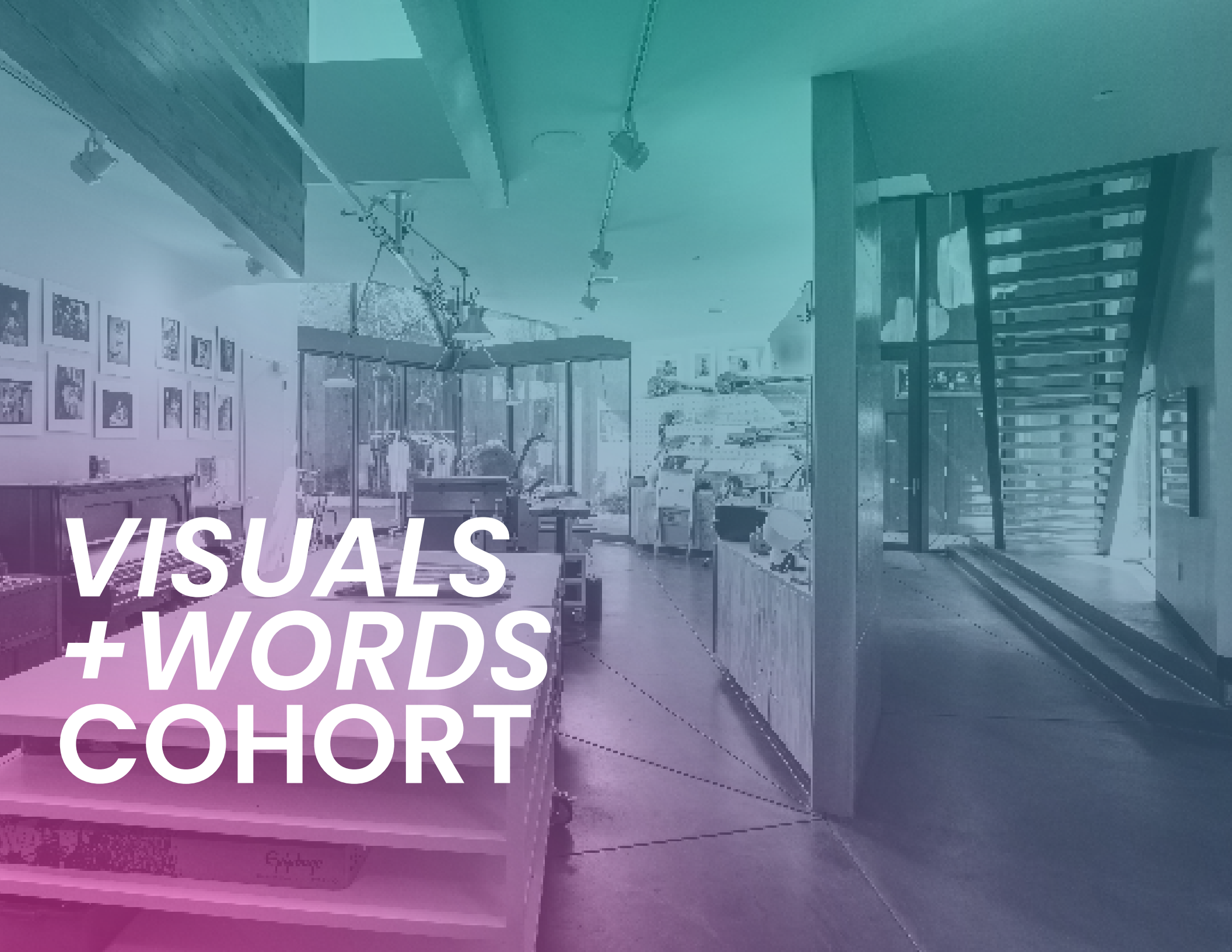
Kestrel Gabbert is a composer and audio engineer who specializes in experimental indie music and classical brass compositions. He is a euphonium player who uses interesting rhythms and thought provoking instrumentation to paint a story with his music. Kestrel has experience with programs like ProTools and MuseScore. In the classical world he has competed on solo euphonium. Kestrel enjoys creating beats and producing music.

Reese Cook is 17 years old and a singer songwriter and audio engineer. She started officially writing music at the age of 14 but has always had always had an interest in poetry and lyric writing. She loves to perform and there is no place she would rather be than on a stage.

Xander Newman is an audio engineer and sound designer. He uses fl studio and studio one. Xander enjoys playing guitar and is involved in his local scene. Xander takes inspiration from trip hop, post punk, and industrial music.

SCAN THE QR
CODE TO HEAR
THEIR RECORDINGS





VISUALS + WORDS COHORT

ARI ROMERO

BARRIER DISSOLUTION

Ari Romero is a writer and storyteller who loves to combine different genres to experiment with the boundaries of writing. He has published several stories and participated in multiple storytelling and poetry competitions with the goal of getting more involved in the future. Outside of writing, he likes to play guitar, ignore his homework and wait for college decisions to come out.

The engines of the Medusa went dark as it began its drift towards its target. The vessel was sleek, metal almost rippling at the surface and small enough to fit comfortably inside a concert hall. The hull had been stamped unceremoniously with serial numbers; the only color other than the alloy grey. Captain Lek looked out the window, cycling her glasses lens until the giant pulsing wall of solar energy outside her ship came into view. The other crewmembers on the bridge did the same, save for the Navigator, who kept her eyes glued to her readout screen, where energy readings bounded like wild dogs.

"Probe launch status" Captain Lek said into the intercom. Her command echoed in the hangar, by far the ship's largest room. Unlike the gloomy exterior, the walls were covered in the blaring yellow and black hazard lines. In one corner lay the CO-8103, an old shuttle model the crew had taken in through pity. Lieutenant Bass glanced at it as he ran a final diagnostics on the satellite sitting on his workbench. All green.

"Final diagnostics complete." He lifted the drone, pistons in his arms and legs firing to lift the object. Once he had a firm grip, Lieutenant Bass made his way over to one of the walls. A small receptacle was indented, as if someone had hacked away at the blast plate with a pick. Bass loaded it inside and closed the hatch "Launch on standby," he said.

The abyss claimed the drone in an instant. One moment it was primed in the hole in the wall, and the next moment it was vented into outer space. It ran measurements for a moment, calculating its trajectory, and reorienting itself with the cloud of solar radiation pulsing from the matrix of stars that separated the inner core from the rest of the galaxy. It quickly found the Rubicon Line, the point where the radiation was so intense, the very fabric of reality bent slightly under its weight. The sphere had kept the Captain, her crew, and the rest of their species out since the day they had seen it.

The drone did another set of calculations, firing bursts of compressed gas in an effort to get as close as possible. Sensors ate their fill on the boundary, uploading everything they found into the Medusa's database.

"Readings are normal, fluctuation is within stable margins." The navigator, Agent Gamlee, said letting a little bit of the boredom slip into her voice as she relayed the information. It had been the same for the past two months and 23 days they had been on patrol in this sector. The only reason she had counted was that home was only a week away.

"Gamlee, check the readings again."

If she had been more tired she would have sighed, but she leaned forward, glancing at the screen.

"Electromagnetic waves are withi-" she stopped, leaning forward as the graphs flattened like a dead pulse.

"Captain, there's been a shift. Scanners indicate no presence of solar flares." Gamlee almost pinched herself. It did not seem real. Her metal fingers flew across her keyboard, checking for errors.

First Mate Noble whipped around to face her.

"No field? That's-"

"Impossible, I know, but I'm getting no readings within a five mile zone. They just went dead"

Noble opened his mouth but Captain Lek silenced him with a glance. There was no time to be starstruck.

"Agent Gamlee, relay the coordinates to Lieutenant Bass, check if his drone agrees." While Gamlee spoke, Lek turned her head to Noble. He met her gaze. This could be the big break she had been waiting for.

"Bass says the data lines up. He wants to take the probe through the hole." Agent Gamlee relayed.

"Authorized."

The drone whirred and clicked with the new orders. It fired a few bursts, sending it gliding slowly across space. When it reached the coordinates, it turned, sensors searching for a force that did not exist. It boosted forward, across the Rubicon Line.

First Mate Noble stood with hands clenched as the drone flew forward. The cloud, once a swirling mass of energy through his focal lens, was now as dark as the rest of space. He switched back to his normal eyes, leaning forward as the drone approached the border between the galaxy, and the unknown, small tracker light blinking in his heads up display. He wasn't sure if he was hoping the drone would survive or not. If it was a malfunction, they could go home early, report a mistake with the engineering and get off scott free. On the other hand, on the one in a billion chance that the scanners were correct, it could be the greatest discovery of their species.

It passed straight through.

BRIXTON FAIRMAN

11 LISTS OF THINGS THAT JUST WORK TOGETHER

Brixton Fairman is a poetry and fiction writer who likes to explore ideas around empathy and compassion but she absolutely loves writing about her dog and animals in general. When not writing she dances with Jefferson High School's first company as a second year member. Although she participates in many art forms, writing has always been her number one.

- 1
 - That one shade of green from elementary school
 - Thursday
 - The number 72
- 2
 - Ketchup
 - Mustard
- 3
 - Birthday candle smoke
 - A bittersweet sense of nostalgia
- 4
 - Us on a stage
 - Unison
 - A passion for something that oddly enough brought all of us together
- 5
 - The sun
 - The moon,

but not really because they can never meet
- 6
 - Sitcoms
 - Saturday nights into Sunday mornings
- 7
 - People
 - Protests
 - Human rights
 - Fighting for something that we believe in
 - An inability to settle for less than we deserve

For some reason violence?
- 8
 - Bert
 - Ernie
- 9
 - The concept of social media
 - Old timey postal workers
 - The 2013 Hallmark TV show *Signed, Sealed, Delivered*
- 10
 - My mothers empathy
 - Me
 - My sister
 - My fathers routine
- 11
 - Dried flowers from performances
 - Hairspray
 - A shared commiseration at the end of a run of shows
 - Congratulations
 - Conversations reminiscent of rehearsal and preparation for a week of stage lights,

que to ques, corrections and connections,

both the human connection and the new york times kind

 - Bows
 - Us
 - Community

DEAN- RACHO

**NO TIME TO SPARE –
IT SELLS FOR A LOT!**

Dean-Racho is a fiction writer who spends every minute of their free time thinking about the next big thing to work on. They have been writing since they could hold a pen and specialize in writing character-focused prose, but they dabble in poetry and other art forms too when the opportunities arise. Their primary inspirations come from dreamlike atmospheres and horror media. When not absorbed in writing, Dean-Racho likes to play TTRPGs, make comics, and go on hikes through the woods.

They made our time a commodity;
The most valuable thing of all
Converted straight
From the clock to the wallet
Before it ever has a chance.

Time goes back into the jaws of workforce
And leaves the children with empty rooms
When doom is circling close like vultures.
You just kiss their heads, rush out that door
Say you'll be gone for an hour or so,
"Nothing else to be done of it
If I am to earn us some
more."

"To earn us some more."
The evening drains and
We're asleep before you're home!
In your absence, we cannot be hugged by water
And we do not feel the warmth of your hands
Through the burning of oil and gas.
The "food on the table"?
Overprocessed and bland!

And when you're home
(Fleeting moments)
Every tick of the evening
Is pulled taught and tense and tired
Because all of the energy you set aside
For enjoying the nonsense of life
Was consumed by the infernal needs
Of the furnace that makes ends meet.

But I am complicit.
As the sand swims down that hourglass,
I have my own excuse to pass:
"Unfortunately, there's classwork to finish.
It's completely unmissable, not the slight bit permissible
That I leave myself room to be distracted and laugh.
I've got a deadline:
If I don't make it, they'll cut me in half!

You know that rhythm like your heart beats in time.
A complete abstraction has arisen
Where the action that is meant to grant us
The most comfort
Leaves us within a fraction
of our lives.

The strings that hold our community together
are the same ones that strangle.

ELE HAUGO

SUGAR

Ele Haugo is an artist and author, she writes short stories, journals observations and bits and pieces of longer novels. Writing and creativity are her joy of life. She also enjoys being outside in nature (a good place for inspiration), playing sports and being with her friends and family. She wants to be an architect, a scientist, and a published author.

Québécois Translations:

Mémé and Pépère:

Grandma and Grandpa

Salut: Hey! (Informal greeting)

C'est tiguidou: I'm all good/great!

Bon matin: Good morning (Informal)

T'es pas le boss des bécosses!:

Stop acting bossy! (Literally: acting like the boss of the toilets)

Tire-toi une bûche!: Have a seat! (Literally: pull up a log)

Léa arrived in the afternoon. Her patience for the trip had increased with age, which was good because the journey had increased as well. There was a plane ride and a long drive before she caught sight of the geometric edge of a house amongst the stripes of leafless curving trees. She pulled into the gravel clearing in front of the house and parked. Hesitating outside, the sunlight felt close to her face. Despite the heavy snow on the ground the daytime air was getting warmer.

Next to her rental car were two others, another rental from the nearest village dealership and an old Toyota Tacoma with a Manitoba plate. Félix and Eva arrived sometime yesterday morning, Antoine the day before.

In the time when the journey was less long, they used to show up together. There didn't used to be any time to feel the slight inclination towards spring in the air because Mémé was bursting out the front door to greet them and someone was hollering into the trees for Pépère and whoever was with him in the sugarhouse to come out and say hello.

This was the tradition. Her grandparents were an incarnation of the fierce and wonderful wilderness they inhabited. They did it the old fashioned way. Maple sugar farmers that tapped their trees by hand and boiled the syrup in a vat probably made before the English. It was slower that way but Pépère said it was best, because they did it all together, the whole family. Mémé said it was best because it was made with love. Every year of Léa's youth, the sons and daughters brought their sons and daughters from modern civilization up into the northern part of the province to harvest maple sugar with Mémé and Pépère.

She was Pépère's favorite. They wouldn't tell a soul, but it was true. He called her Sugar. Outside he used to take small strides so she could step in his footsteps and follow him through the trees to the taps. Time went on and growing up got busy: a big job in Montreal for Felix, moving to New York with a boyfriend for Eva, and such. They visited when they could and every year received a bottle of syrup and a little love note in the mail and were perfectly content.

Last year when the spring woke from

slumber to joyous mobility, Léa's stubborn Mémé couldn't do the same. As the flowers bloomed, she wilted, passing away gently in their home before the heat of summer arrived.

They all shared the heartache but Pépère was by himself in the house. Eva who visited in November said they all better come up for the sugar flow or he would break his back and die in the woods. It was time for a change; she had solemnly informed them.

Inside the cabin Antoine was there at the dining table with a laptop. He had been outside, his face was splotchy red and his hair was damp.

"Salut Antoine!" He looked up from the screen and Léa grinned, "How is Pépère? And how are you? Was the drive over alright?"

"C'est tiguidou. Pépère is doing well too."

"His memory? Is it like Eva said?"

"He's very much still himself."

"That's good."

"But some of the other things are starting to go. His English is declining, he's grouchy. And he called me Anaïs this morning by accident. But I don't think it was like that - about his mind. I think he's just used to seeing her there at the stove in the morning." Antoine turned in his chair and shouted, "Papi! Léa is here!"

He emerged from a swinging door to the gallery kitchen.

"Bon matin Sugar!" Léa was enveloped in a firm hug, "You arrived just now? I will take you to the shack." He patted her on the back, encouraging towards the door. Antoine stood up.

"Pépère, you've been outside all day! I think I should take Léa out to see Félix and Eva in the sugarhouse, yes?"

"T'es pas le boss des bécosses!" Pépère declared. Antoine did not protest.

Antoine, Léa, Pépère put on tall boots and light coats and went out into the warm wintery afternoon along the footprint path. The maplewood yoke that holds the collection buckets molded into Pépère's shoulders when he carried it. His steps were slow and asthenic but the wide curve of his back and his large rough hands told of the burly strongman he once was. It took someone powerfully delicate to tame January in Quebec and hammer slender taps into frigid maples. Now in February

when warm days betrayed freezing nights, Pépère patiently coaxed syrup from the trees and boiled it down in the sugar shack till it was consumable.

Heat bursted from the open door to the shack like an epiphany. Inside Félix sat on the woodstack like a child, hat and gloves in his hands, puffer fully unzipped, Eva stood by the vat. She'd been pacing the small floor space. Léa was sure they had been talking about Pépère, about what would come next once the sugar flow was over and the snow melted. Nevertheless, the presence of their grandfather in the small familiar room was a happy feeling.

"Tire-toi une bûche!" Félix called.

Pépère squeezed her shoulder as he moved to join them. Briefly she knew his mind was crystal clear. His tradition was not about permanence. Its value was in the reliable return, across the seasons and snowfalls, across eras. Mémé was right in saying it was made with love. A generational love as well as one that was made new every moment they shared.

And so in a way she was there too. In the right now they were together, la famille watching the sun dance sweet syrup evaporation through the frosty window.

Félix

Antoine

Eva

Pépère

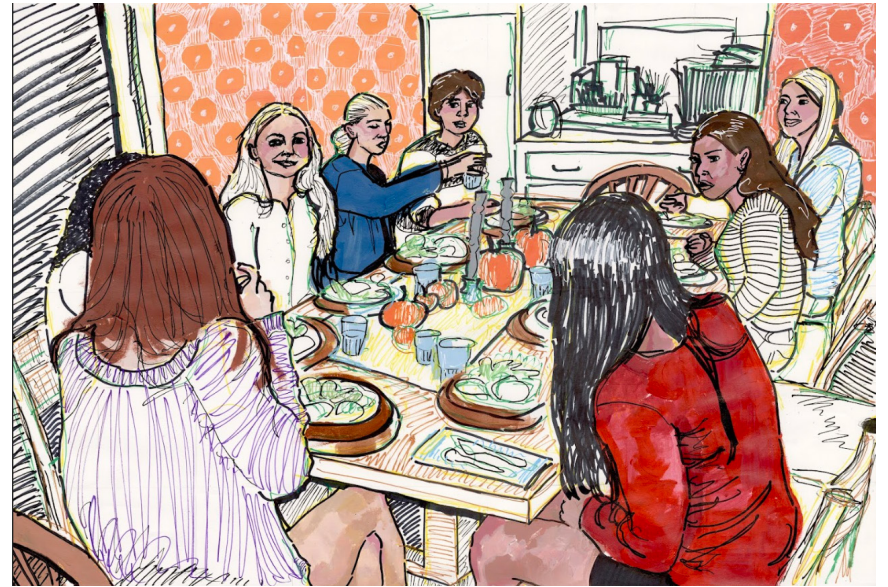
Léa, Sugar.

ELLA GALM

THE DINNER TABLE

Ella Galm is an 18 year old artist born and raised in Portland, Oregon. Inspired by and connected to art since a young age, she has spent many years developing and honing her passion. She has attended summer art programs at the Rhode Island School of Design and Parsons Paris, where she participated in rigorous studio courses, developed her artistic voice, and gained experience in both traditional and experimental techniques. Ella continues to grow her craft by participating both in the Bodecker Cohort and her school's IB art program, critiquing and collaborating with her peers, pushing herself to new limits. She uses a variety of mediums and techniques from weaving to charcoal drawing. Her work often revolves around her complex emotions, using art as a tool for processing them.

A dinner with Family or Friends is often chaotic; there's dishes clanking and food passed through the group. Words entangle as people talk over one another and multiple conversations overlap. It's an atmosphere of disarray, movement, overstimulation – and comfort. Despite the Chaos there is a sense of love and support that is only found within a community. This piece aims to express the kinetic environment of a community. Through acrylic, Sharpie, and a sketch-like quality, I explore the elements that make community a place of chaos, as well as love and support.



FINLEY ABBOTT

LITTLE ARTISTS

Finley Abbott is a 15 year old artist based in Portland, Oregon. While primarily working with graphite and portraiture, she has been branching out to painting and realism. In addition to visual art, she is a violinist and lover of music. She has been affiliated with a variety of art programs, this being her second year with Bodecker.

Art is a shared experience. The creation and observation of art can be quite personal, but the process (creating, sharing, and viewing) is its own form of communication. The communication between the artist, the observer, and the artwork itself builds a relationship. This experience through art creates its own kind of community. This piece depicts my first community of little artists. Long before the pressures of making adult decisions, these children know nothing but joy.



LANIYAH SPIVEY

THE TASTE OF COMMUNITY

LaNiyah Spivey is a sophomore at Franklin who enjoys writing poems and non-fiction short stories, usually about seemingly unimportant things or general relationships, when she's not "busy" listening to music or hanging out with her friends. She strives to keep her writing a calming practice in her life and hopes to inspire those around her to embrace their creativity!

The reunion spilled across the backyard like it always did, too big for the space, too loud to contain. The grass was pressed flat by coolers and folding tables, the air thick with heat and the smell of food that had been cooking since sunrise (pro tip: arrive late so the food is ready when you get there!). Smoke from the grill curled upward, clinging to clothes and hair, carrying with it the promise of something familiar and delicious.

Aunties arrived first, arms already full. Aluminum trays clattered onto tables: macaroni slick with butter, rice studded with peas, fried chicken wrapped tight to keep warm. Someone set down a pot so heavy it dented the plastic table beneath it. The lid came off, and steam rushed out, rich and spiced, pulling people closer without insisting.

The elders took their places near the house, chairs angled just right. They watched everything. They always did. They gossiped about who had gained weight, who looked tired, and who had finally cut their hair. Their voices were sharp, but their hands were gentle and wrinkled, pressing extra food onto plates, tucking napkins into collars when they had the chance.

Children ran through the maze of legs and chairs, chased by cousins they barely knew but trusted anyway. They came back smeared with watermelon juice and barbecue sauce, holding grudges towards the 'grown folk' who had sent them to the kids' table. Names were repeated again and again until they stuck.

The table bent under the weight of the meal. There were dishes made exactly the way they'd always been made, and others altered by time and distance. Recipes had traveled. picked up new spices, lost old steps. Each bite sparked a memory. Remember when this burned? Remember when we ran out? Remember who used to make this? The past sat down with them with a warm welcome.

In between mouthfuls, people caught up. News was shared in half-sentences. Promotions. Breakups. Losses. The listening mattered more than the talking. When someone paused too long, another voice filled the space. That's just how it worked.

As the sun dipped low, conversations slowed. Music drifted from a speaker propped against a cooler. Songs from the '90s everyone knew the words to, even if they were born years too late. Folding chairs were dragged closer together. Plates rested empty on laps.

The whole family existed in the same breath. bound by food, history, and the simple act of showing up.

When it ended, there were leftovers packed with care, hugs laced with the smell of old people and rich aunts that lingered, promises to "see you again soon" spoken softly. The yard would be quiet again by morning.

But the community would carry on, already waiting for the next time.

LUCA SPOKES

COMMUNITY

Luca Spokes is a 16 year old artist living in Portland Oregon. He is a sophomore at Grant High School and enjoys drawing, creating music, and playing the guitar. His artistic inspiration comes from classical portraits, manga, and pop culture. He finds the human face fascinating and strives to capture people's unique expressions, energy, and personality in his drawings. He enjoys experimenting with different styles and techniques. He has attended multiple Bodecker classes and is a part of the 2025-2026 Cohort Program.

The theme of my art work is "community" and I focused on friendship to showcase this idea because friendship is a big aspect of the many communities I'm a part of. I worked to represent my community by drawing my friends and some of the activities we do together. I wanted to convey a sense of personality, feeling, and energy and I also wanted to represent joy, love and mutual respect. I used graphite to sketch out the design, photos as references, and colored pencils as the primary medium.

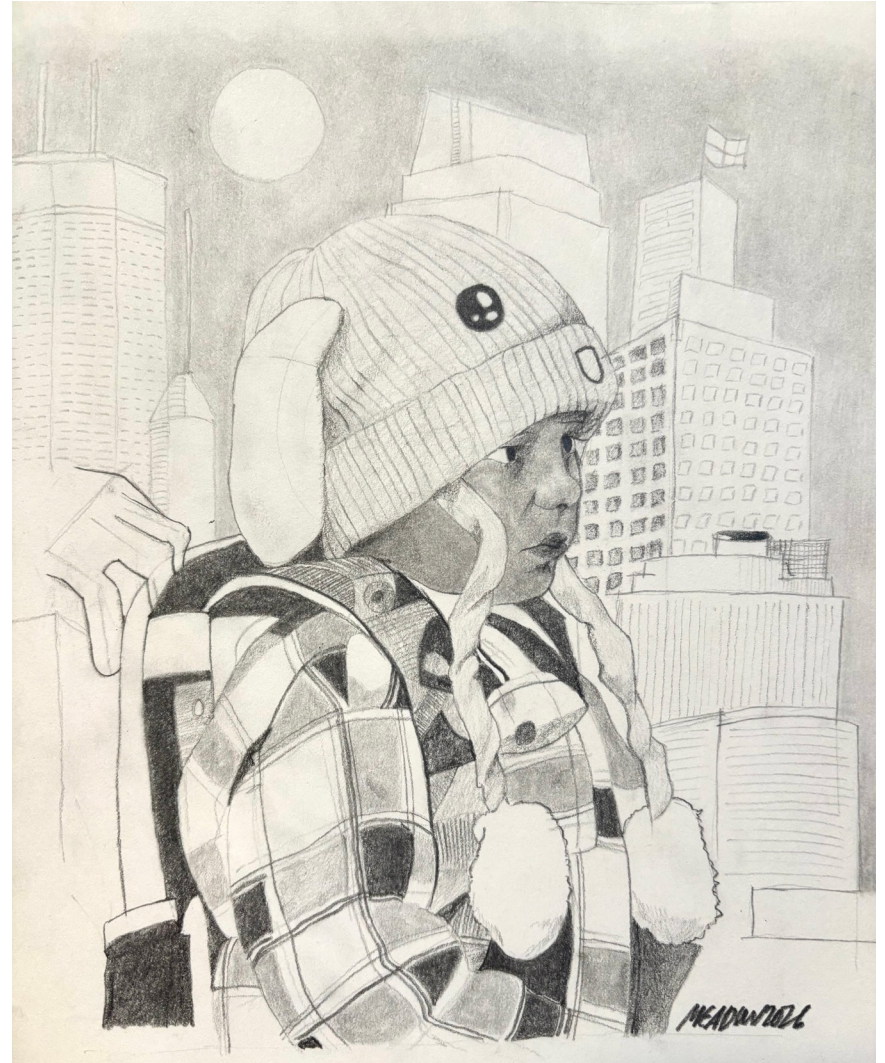


MEADOW SMITH

LIAM CONEJO
RAMOS

Meadow Smith is a sixteen year old visual artist from Portland, Oregon. She primarily works with graphite and pen. She enjoys figure drawing and creating portraits.

This piece is a portrait of Liam Conejo Ramos, a five year old detained by US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement in January. His face and story are representative of true community and the importance of protecting it.



MIRI CARPENTER

SNOWY
NOVEMBER

Miri Carpenter is a sophomore at Franklin High School who writes primarily short form fiction but also enjoys exploring non-fiction through a poetic lens. She gets most of her inspiration from the people, things and experiences of everyday life like walking her dog or talking to strangers at the bus stop. Outside of writing she spends her time playing basketball, running and exploring southeast Portland with her friends.

"I think that every person on this earth was put here for a purpose, whether good or bad. No matter how a person is, he is teaching us something."
—Arlene Hamilton, 1958.

The last time you see your grandmother
it will freeze.

Solid great cloud cover promises
Sidewalk flurries,
Stacking on cold concrete
And the lashes of your eyes.
A surprise,
All you know is rain.

Chill creeps up your spine, rolling down
Like the snowball stuffed into your hood.
It takes your breath away.

You are five, again,
Warm cookies and snow day delights,
Firelight to keep the cold at bay.

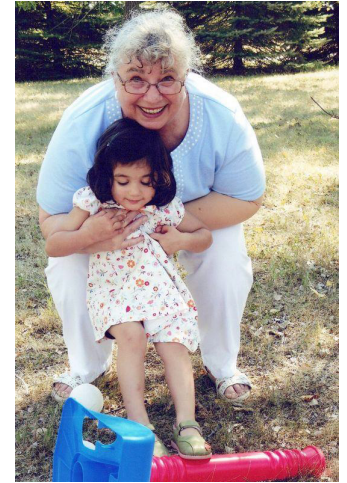
Now it stays,
Sticks,
To hospital sheets and the sour tang of antiseptic.
Curls across cool linoleum tiles,
Swirling in the places between
Stilted conversations.

The last time you see your grandmother
it will smell.

Air thick,
Sick,
The stench of hand sanitizer and urine.
Cars zipping by cafeteria windows,
Loud people in quiet rooms,
Heavy in a different way.

Eight games of The Simpsons Clue,
Marge did it,
In the castle
With the Uranium rod.
She does not wake.

It starts to snow.



The slow,
Beep beep,
Of the heart monitors
Unsteady rhythm,
Grating on your nerves
Like your nails
Over the vinyl of her bedside table.

The last time you see your grandmother
her son will not cry.
Tears all dried up,
Ghosts tucked into their graves.
He prays
She might find them there
The other son
Already sleeping, wrapped in bugs and dirt.

Death, cold and quick
Like aeroplanes in Minnesota skies,
Quiet, like wheels
Touch down on tarmacs,
Always the opposite side
Of airport windows.

Like heart monitors,
Silent,
In empty hospital rooms,
Christmas cards
Half written,
No return address.

The last time you see your grandmother
she will say everything...

but goodbye.

SADIE MARTIN

ART CLASS

Sadie Martin is a Portland-based artist currently attending Lincoln High School. She mainly works with 2D mediums like colored pencil, acrylic paint, and oil pastel to create colorful illustrations exploring themes of imagination, magic, and nostalgia. She has participated in many art classes, and holds the position of treasurer in her schools NAHS. She hopes to work in illustration or animation after college, and create children's media similar to what she was inspired by as a child.

In this work, I wanted to focus on community within creative spaces, so I chose a birds-eye view illustration with a few people sharing materials and talking about their art. I used colored pencil, oil pastel, acrylic and alcohol markers to create different textures and many bright, warm colors coming together as a whole to represent the aspect of community. Besides the different art materials, I also included some other things on the table like glasses, lip, balm, and coffee to show how casually the space is shared.



SAYA TIPTON

*MAY THESE MEMORIES
BREAK OUR FALL*

As a senior in high school, Saya works hard in waterpolo, swimming, and choir to make as many memories as she can before she says goodbye to all of the clubs and people she has lived and grown beside. Inspired by the sadness of goodbyes and choral music, Saya strives to capture transient and ephemeral. The fleeting moments filled with laughter are things Saya tries to keep through art.



SCARLETT RENDON

A CELEBRATION

Scarlett Rendon is an artist in Portland Oregon. Now in her senior year of high school, Scarlett will complete her second Bodecker Skill Building Cohort under the mentorship of Kyra Watkins as well as the rigorous IB Diploma at Cleveland High School in May. Scarlett began drawing before she could speak, however while other kids grew out of coloring and moved into other hobbies, she picked up pens, pencils and paints. As Scarlett developed her skills in art, her passion for creating and admiring art grew. She has also had the opportunity to travel to faraway places, where she has witnessed diverse experiences, opinions and aesthetics and this influence is reflected in her artwork. Scarlett's artwork encompasses a broad range of styles, most notably her traditional and technical charcoal, graphite and pen portraits and still lives, along with architectural drawings. In recent years she has focused a lot more on exploring more fantastical and surreal subjects in oil and acrylics.

This piece encapsulates the vibrancy and nourishment of a strong community. It shows the beauty of self-expression in a safe space. This is symbolized through the array of vivid fabrics, movement and jaleos. The dancers, singers and guitarists are all molded into a single body, emphasizing the unification of belonging and how we are stronger together.

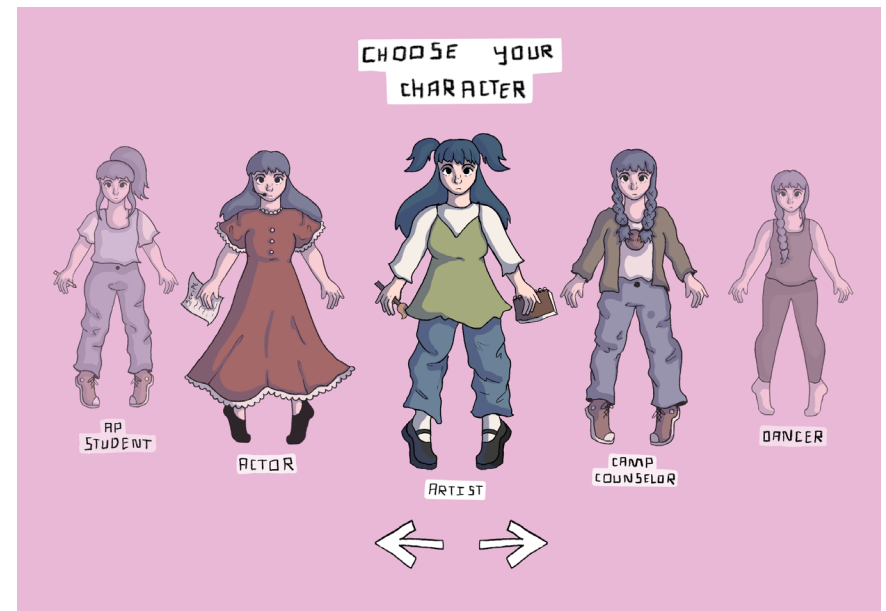


SOFI BISHOP

CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER

Sofi Bishop is an artist and illustrator from Portland, Oregon. Sofi began studying art in middle school and has dedicated her life to creating stories, characters and worlds through various digital and traditional mediums such as marker, pen, paints and graphite. Sofi has sold her work at a variety of art fairs throughout the Portland area. Currently a senior in high school, Sofi plans to continue her art education and study animation.

With this piece I wanted to express the pressure that I've felt to join and commit to just one community and form my identity around it. In my experience I've been apart of many different communities that have all shaped my identity in different ways.



SONIA PARIKH

THE NIGHT PEOPLE (SODIUM GLOW)

Sonia Parikh is a fiction writer and journalist centered in Portland, Oregon who enjoys exploring themes of emotion, nostalgia, and change. She has written news pieces as well as several short stories included in anthologies, and hopes to pursue a career in journalism. When not writing, Sonia enjoys reading and drawing in nearby coffee shops.

The city settled into itself after midnight. Under the sodium glow of streetlights, everything softened—edges blurred, colors dulled, sounds stretched thin. I worked nights because it was easier not to explain myself. No one asked what I did with my days or who I was trying to become. My job—cleaning streets after the bars closed—came with gloves, a reflective vest, and a cart that rattled when I hit uneven pavement. The work was quiet and repetitive: sweeping glass, gathering paper, washing away what the day had left behind.

By the time I reached my second block, the night people were already in motion. I saw the nurse at the bus stop across from the hospital, standing beneath a flickering light, her bag hooked over one shoulder, her face slack with exhaustion she no longer tried to hide. The bodega clerk down the street leaned in his doorway, coffee in hand, eyes sharp and awake in a way that suggested he had been up far longer than I had. Near dawn, the garbage crew rolled through, their truck announcing them before they appeared, metal clanking, voices loud in the empty street. They waved at me every morning. I waved back. None of us ever exchanged names.

We didn't meet in one place; we overlapped. We learned each other by habit. The nurse checked the bus schedule twice, then stared into the street. The bodega clerk swept his doorway whenever business slowed, even when it was already clean. One of the garbage collectors whistled as he worked, off-key but persistent. I knew when someone was late. I knew when someone was missing. No one pointed it out, but the absence always settled in the air.

Some nights, a fellow street cleaner saved me a seat on the bench near the bus stop while I took a break. Other nights, a paper cup of coffee was pressed into my hand without a question attached. We spoke occasionally—about the cold, about a road closed for too long, about nothing at all. More often, we stood together in silence, listening to the city. Steam rose from manholes like the city exhaling after holding its breath all day, and the streetlights hummed like a soft tune suspended in the twilight. I began to think of the night as a separate place, layered beneath the city everyone else knew. A place sustained by people who cleaned, stocked, healed, lifted—who kept things from unraveling while no one was watching.

The streets told stories if you paid attention. Crushed cans still warm from hands that had let them go minutes earlier. Flyers layered so thick they peeled like bark. Footprints that disappeared as soon as I hosed them away. I learned the city by what it discarded, and I learned the people by how

consistently they returned. The night didn't ask who you were. It only asked that you show up.

When this rhythm was disrupted, the change announced itself quietly. One night, the nurse wasn't at the bus stop. Then another. The light flickered over an empty patch of sidewalk. The garbage crew grew quieter. The bodega clerk stopped setting out an extra cup of coffee. The night adjusted, smoothly, without comment, as if it had learned not to rely too heavily on anyone.

When the offer came—a day shift, better pay, better hours—it sounded like a correction, like becoming visible once again. My supervisor called it an opportunity. I said yes before I gave myself time to think. On my last night, I worked slowly, noticing everything: the way the streetlight buzzed softly overhead, the way the air smelled faintly of rain and old paper. The garbage crew waved. I waved back. The bodega clerk nodded once, already turning inward. I took my break on the bench but didn't sit long. The bakery door opened, and warmth brushed my face. Someone handed me coffee without asking. I didn't thank them properly.

The day shift was louder than I expected. The city was crowded, confident, certain of itself. People stepped around me without looking. My work disappeared faster. I slept at night, like I was supposed to, but still my body woke before dawn, again and again, my hands remembering gloves and my ears listening for sounds that no longer belonged to me.

The nurse never came back. The bodega was open when I passed it, lights on, door propped wide, but the faces behind the counter had changed; it belonged to different people now, like a house with new inhabitants. The garbage trucks became obstacles instead of companions. Sometimes, early in the morning, I caught a familiar shape in the distance and felt a brief tightening in my chest, followed by the understanding that our hours no longer matched.

The city stood each morning—clean, ready, unremarkable. People moved through it without noticing the care stitched into every corner. They never would. And that was the rule. The night people would never be written down, they would never ask to be remembered.

Still, some nights, I wake before dawn and think of the nurse at the bus stop, the bakery light flicking on, the sodium light pooling on the concrete: the quiet democracy of people who kept the city alive while no one was watching. The city looks intact in the daylight. But I know what it costs to make it that way.

And I know who pays it.

SUPATTRA NAMNON

HOLDING BACK TEARS

Supattra Namnon is a writer, a listener, and a thinker. Born in Bangkok and raised in Portland as a transracial adoptee, her experience caught between two worlds of identity shapes her writing and perspective on life itself. In her free time, Supattra enjoys reading, listening to music, and eating carbs. She is an avid dragon boater and plans to continue writing and paddling for the rest of her life.

When I first met you, I cried
big fat tears that dripped
drip drop drop
down the chub of my cheeks,
my wide, flat nose, and
my tanned skin
glistening
with tears, sweat, and
sunlight.

Somehow, a deep feeling
in the pit of my roly-poly stomach
said to me in a whisper
that this was the true beginning of my existence,
that you were the true beginning of my existence.

At first,
I didn't want you to hold me.

I had been held before,
in gentle arms that ach
ed ever so slightly,
anticipating
some sorrow that had
not yet happened.

Yes, I
didn't want you to hold me, but
at the same time
I didn't want to be let go again,
free floating,
one lonesome asteroid
in the great void of space.

As they say,
time will tell,
and time told me to love you.

Time told me to love you so much that
whenever I am away from you
I feel the tears of my childhood return,
threatening me like the point of a needle and
pressing in from the corners of my
almond eyes.

I am still afraid to be held
and afraid to let go
because nothing is permanent.

And yet,
I have learned to love that which is impermanent,
that which is *you*—

it is the only thing I truly know how to do

TABITHA HAVEN SHEA

INVITATION TO THE MORGUE

Tabitha Shea is a beginner poet who specializes in 'whimsical' and creative poetry. With a love for writing and creative work, she entered into Portland's very own 2024 Verselandia. Additionally, she's now won 2nd place in her high school's poetry competitions 2 years in a row, and hopes to win this coming year. Tabitha enjoys other creative works, such as Theatre and Singing, and can't wait to continue contributing to Bodecker in the future.

Today, I died.

At night, I got the last word

The world is quiet; no one knows yet that I am gone.

Comparison from the warmth of the winter-strewn sun and the cold platter in the morgue keeps my soul lingering with my body.

The mortician on her final shift tends to lost souls wandering their hallways;

Her husband comes in to tend to her tired body,

a warm hand, tense shoulders.

Today I died,

and I don't know where to go.

Death has supplied me with a suitcase and luggage, but no destination.

Do I climb over peaks and highways for the home I longed for – does it long for me?

Hike each way, benefit in either direction.

Take this time I have, *now endless*, and explore the mountain tops named foreign.

A trip to France for a few hundred years, dance and explore with enamoured spirits like mine.

And when I miss the death of my family, will I mourn?

The rest of the world drowns out their loud weeping, will I hear you from miles away?

Cars honk at one another, a woman weeps at her own husband's death, a couple chatters away on their first date.

Will the world quiet for a minute

or two

To allow me to think and mourn my own death before anyone else's?

Today I died.

Have you already forgotten the way I touch, taste, and feel against you in the morning?

Have you forgotten what flowers I like by my bedside on days my room needs light?

Will you send Poppies to my funeral while the old woman I call my mother cries?

Hold her for me.

I miss the moon on my skin and the sun on my face.

Sit with me and feel it too. Let me watch your smile as the sun pours into you, as it would've me.

I'll talk, don't say anything back.

I

Do you think of me?

What about stories? Should you tell them of how I laughed, danced, and sang with you?

Must I persist through you?

Or, have you already forgotten.

I died yesterday

And the world is loud again.

TRISTAN SHENDO

SPARKADOS

Tristan Shendo is a fiction writer who enjoys writing fantastic stories centered around character growth, so that his readers may grow as well. With many stories in the making, including a self improvement guide on bettering one's life, Tristan plans on using every school break to write as much as possible. When not writing, he plays basketball and hangs out with his friends, as well as planning his zombie apocalypse survival strategy. What a great guy.

We were once men of many lands.
Bound together by the shackles
Of our shared suffering.
Thracians, Gauls, Greeks, Nubians, and even Romans
Starved. Beaten. Made to entertain.
Our bodies, property of the empire.

Roma.

Escape, break the shackles. Whispers in the night,
stolen moments.
A plan derived from the mouth of one man
set on a high impossible goal.
Spardakos of Thrace, set on fleeing Roma.
We run in the night, adrenaline pumping.
"Take the swords! Take the shields!"
The guards aren't alive long enough to fight back.

"We have won today brothers, we are now free
gladiators. But Roma...Roma is still very much alive."
We cheer his name "Spardakos!"
And the rebellion starts.
Quick, in the night, flee Capua to Vesuvius,
camping upon its volcanic top.

But with the sun, comes three thousand Romans.
They don't advance. They know how little food we have.
They sit at the base of our mountain,
blocking the path down.
Three Thousand to our One Hundred.
Jupiter help us.

"Lace the vines together, two leagues long, we scale
the cliffs tonight,
Descending upon our enemies as they sleep."
Spardakos says.
We grunt, working as one to lace the vines growing near.
Climb down, footsteps light
Unsheath the knife given to you by your savior
And plunge it into that of a man from Roma.

Our victory cries being carried into the stars
by the smoke filled wind of our conquest.
news spreads of our valor and might.
Men came, escaped from the masters,
slaves and poor peasants.
Weak, afraid, and untrained, they stood before Spardakos.
Yet he gives them each a sword and dagger.

"As one we stand," He says.
Our numbers swell as we march on through Italia.
Villages fall to the weight of our redemption roars.
Crixus and Spardakos lead us to victory!

Verinius stands against us, a force of Roma.
Quick, as he and his army bathe,
kill the guards and wear their regalia.
A disguise and deception as sweet as summer figs.
Take the Roman horses, prithee aid us in our escape.

Roma now sees us, a true force, a rebellion.
Spardakos's Rebellion!

Spring comes, new flowers bud, birds arrive.
Spring arrives just as two Legios march into our view.

"Charge!" Our general Crixus yells,
raising a sword to Jupiter's realm.
We fight bloody, foul, and crass compared to the elite.
Swords clashing against each other,
desperate to rip into the tainted flesh.
And we slay the remaining guard, wiping our blades
free of their cursed blood.

A cry, but not of victory from upon the hilltop,
a familiar silhouette.
Crixus, a man of great ability,
falls to his knees in a pool of his enemy's blood.
Holding onto a wound too deep to recoil from,
no matter the grace of our gods.
Spardakos holds him in his arms,
wishing him a safe journey to the stars.

"Now we number over One Hundred Twenty
Thousand brothers!"
His calls echo in our hearts.
"Northward the Alps call!
Freedom beyond Roma's borders!"
Roars from our ranks swell like bruises on the skin.

Freedom northward,
so close you could touch it with a whisker.
But some yell against Spardakos's wishes,
the blood in their head boiling.
"Roma! Roma! Roma!"
"Purge the Forsaken City Roma!"

We march Southward, to the Forsaken City Roma.
Brash decisions being our last.
We damned souls go on to fight
Like we always have.

General Crassus has amassed thousands of Legio.
Holding his sword high, he charges at us.
Fall back! South! South!
Crassus's face etched permanently in our hearts.

We flee south, taking what food and livestock we can.
Feed the troops, bolster their spirits.
Continue on, we must reach the ocean.
The way to escape, to Egyptus.

Chop the trees, wax the wood,
we build boats to escape our fate.
Princes upon the hill! Flaming arrows raining down!
Run, build boats further along the coast!
We flee, we flee.

No time to build boats!
Roma is upon us.
We look to Spardakos for a plan, a message, an action.
His face shown dark in realization against Helios's
red fingers of the morning.

"Our last stand brothers! Charge through their
ranks! We fight like they wanted us to!"
Spardakos commands us as a prophet from the heavens.
Charge! We fight! Raise the swords, the spears,
the axes, pummel with shields!
Slash at their ranks with your warcry from the
enslaved times!
Spardakos runs, beats the Princes. Slashes the Veles.
He continues, stabbing the Hastatus, flaying the Triarius.
He charges Crassus!
"Go Spardakos! We follow your sword, your will! We fight!"
Centurions rise from the dead bodies,
hidden in wait for this moment.
Their swords meet Spardakos's chest,
piercing armor and mission.
Cut down, kicked, and spat upon.
The sky darkens, Roma has won.

The bitter truth stinging our wounds.
They take us prisoners, setting us upon crosses.
We hang at our wrists, made an example of.
Our heads hang low, crying until our skeletons show.
Our battle, our mission, our rebellion, dead.
Oh Spardakos, we praised thee and thy word.
From slaves in the bloody pit, to bodies on crosses we cry.
Spardakos!

UZI LAMANET

SWAG COUPLE

Uzi Lamanet is an artist from Portland, Oregon. He has been drawing since he was young and specializes in drawing people and characters, as well as digital art. He also has experience in clothing design.



VINCE PASCUAL

THE PENDULUM SWINGS
(LUKI, RADIOHEAD, AND NATE SIB)

Vince Pascual is 18-year old, aspiring music journalist who, at times, branches out to other genres of writing. Whether that be personal essays, poems, and the like, he plans to take what he's learned from Bodecker and apply it to a future career in the music industry. Hopefully working at a major music publication and interviewing artists, upcoming or already in the mainstream, about their creative process.

It's midnight, and we're slowly floating, wading, along the water atop the sketchy grated dock. The smell of rotting wood, fish, and the coughs of weed absorb into the air and thicken the clouds above. Yet, the cover of night is thin enough for the moon to project a veil, embroidering the smoke along its nimbus lacework to wisp up into the deep violet of the night. It's only water that distances us from the main town lights and your home along the dock. Rocking back and forth, the pendulum swings at the same rhythm, stopping at moments of extreme on either end.

Back, pasts, rediscovering the sensations of flying bark chips slipping beneath Crocs and Vans sneakers, the racing of hearts, and the sound of hard coughs foreshadowing the dock activities after games of World Champion Four-Square, the smell of a latex-thin layer of sweat across our foreheads, beating boss fights we happened to stumble into and have been attempting for endless kid hours.

Fourth, futures reveal occupations we may love or hate. Both are monotonous and identical on either side of the pendulum's path. A home for each of us branched out across the soil of our world, and potentially continuations of lineage were also set to find a dock of their own and contribute to the wispy thickness of the midnight clouds. Even though we are divided by the evenly spaced barriers of life, our roots sprout from the same dock. The roots are thick and bear multiple limbs to lock them down and withstand the hardships of time, attempting to excavate it.

In its middle state, an equilibrium, a present tense, we're back on the dock with a wood between your mouth. Rocking back and forth, peering our heads over the waves of Past and Future, our noses barely breaking past the threshold of surface water, attempting to construct a raft to pull us out of the Marina Trench of the

present and float toward the future, but there's always peace in drowning or at least adequacy.

A satisfaction with the present that only holds while you're able to make the trek from your house to the dock. Shrouded in blackberry bushes that cut your skin, only realizing they've pierced us when you take showers to mask the sting of smoke powdered onto your hair and skin. Like snow on a mountain's peak, it collected, and is now purified under a shower water blend of Old Spice Body Wash and Trim Conditioner. It creates the avalanche to clear the path for us hikers to explore in the Spring and Summer, like we've done every Spring and Summer.

Our roots run deep and will likely grow in place of our travels. Sometimes our roots will cross, whether naturally, by accident, or the farmer has planned it so. Reminding each other of our strengths together and how strong we can uphold the ecosystem of our friendship when we overlap a couple of times in the natural world.

At the end of the party, we'll conjoin, intertwine, and spiral upward to the heavens together, creating branches to support and gather leaves overlooking our patchwork of roots across our world. Where the root's heart lies will originate from that dock that rocks back and forth, between the main town and your house. The dock, only the moon knows, to gather extra clouds for the graveyard shit ahead. The dock where the heart of my community lies.

VINCENT PEREZ POL

FRIENDSHIP DAISIES

Vincent Perez is a 16 year old self taught artist who attends Franklin High School as a junior. He has been doing art for a total of 3 years. He often goes to bookstores in Downtown Portland, and he enjoys looking at the selection of illustration books available. Vincent attends regular live nude-figure drawing sessions to improve his skills in anatomy, and also challenge his time spent working on his art pieces.

Vincent's piece named, "Friendship Daises" shows a group of 4 friends laying down in the grass with neighboring daises around them. The first friend, a blonde long-haired boy, is seen stretching out his hand up towards the "camera", smiling. The second friend, who is a long brunette haired girl, is laughing with her eyes closed and arms crossed over her stomach. The third friend, with short black hair and glasses, is smiling widely as he stares over at the girl beside him. The final and fourth friend, a blonde boy, is laughing hard on his side facing towards the black haired boy. This group of friends represents diversity and the community that comes with having people around.



VIOLET TRAN

*YOU'RE
INVITED*

Violet Tran is a Vietnamese American, Portland-based artist currently attending Franklin High School. They enjoy using digital art to bring their original characters to life and to explore the mundane moments of life and relationships. In the future, they would like to create animations and comics.

This piece features my original characters hanging out during a break from volleyball practice. I've never actually played a team sport before (thankfully, I have touched a volleyball before, so I'm not entirely a fraud). Still, I've been having this fantasy for a while about how I think it would feel like playing a team sport and all the community and friendship that comes along with it. In creating this piece, I indulged in that fantasy for myself through my characters.



ZACHARY ROGERS

PURPOSE IN THE COLD RAIN

Zachary Rogers is a creator. From music to stop-motion to drawing to writing, he is always working to bridge the connection between his mind and the physical world. He enjoys writing fantasy mostly, but is always excited to dabble in other areas, even poetry sometimes. Outside of writing, he enjoys perfecting his Spanish and Taekwon-Do skills, and is fond of playing games and gaming with friends, and having fascinating philosophical conversations with his family.

People say that crowds often become one. Well, this was not the case for us. We were too raw, too disorganized. We moved like an accordion. Sometimes we would surge forward, and people would be forced off the street and onto the sidewalk. Many times I lost my friends in the fray. We were told only to take up one lane, but we ended up invading the whole road. It must have been a sight to see from your car. Our chants rippled from front to back. Each started by a few brave and loud souls, then they would catch on like fire in the rain, and our voices created steam. And I was lost in it, lost in the sea of people around me. I could no longer feel the rain in my hair or the poster pinched between my cold hands. I could no longer feel each step of the two-hour-long journey that had brought me here to this moment.

Now that I think back on it, it must have been on purpose that we passed by that elementary school. I was marching, chanting along, when suddenly I looked to my left. I was met by a large brick building, and on every floor, all the windows had been swung up, and kids poked their faces out. Wow. I thought to myself. *This is what it's all about.* The kids watched, and by some miracle, they were all silent, merely observing our procession with their eyes. As people walked past, we cheered and waved and raised our fists in the air. *This is who we are fighting for,* I thought. *The next generation. Hopefully, they learn something from us.* In this moment, I finally noticed what had been growing in me the whole day. It was a rare feeling—a feeling I had never felt to this extent before. It was a sense of purpose, purpose as one who lived in a house next to others, who also lived next to others, all in a beautiful chain that extended across neighborhoods and even cities. Purpose as one who goes to school with everyone else, drives on the road with everyone else, goes to the store with everyone else, and walks on down the street and passes by other people doing the same. I was part of something, and I have never felt more human.

An hour, then I'll go home, I said to myself back when I first stepped out of the car. We will yell some stuff, maybe walk around a little, then I'll just walk back to my car and go home, and try to enjoy my day off. I'd been to one protest before; this was nothing new. We had stood by the side of the road in a long line, around a few dozen people. This was the first time I learned that honking was a good thing, and where I learned that when some people would roll down their windows and yell, "All lives

matter!", that was a jab at us. Fortunately, those people were few and far between.

Today I was going to a high school park. It didn't seem like even a protest, really. Who would we protest to in a high school park? However, as I walked up the hill, I saw that the students had gathered at the edges of the street. I discerned my friends and joined up with them. We were tentative at first, we listened intently to the couple of kids with megaphones for the first couple of cycles of a new chant, till we were able to recite it ourselves.

"No ice, no walls, free our families, free them all!"

Oftentimes, the voices of the crowd would die out, leaving one of us stranded to finish the last chant on our own. Without the cacophony of voices blending with mine, I would suddenly hear the sound of my own voice emanating from my own mouth. I am not meant for chanting, I thought. I couldn't imagine myself getting in front of the crowd and yelling chants through a megaphone.

A student handed out signs, and I took one. Around me, students of all ages stood with their friends. Tall kids, short kids, popular kids, unpopular kids, sporty kids with ice cream haircuts, and kids with lime green mohawks. Around us, reporters swarmed. High school reporters with handheld cameras stood next to adults with massive videocameras on tripods. Some interviewed with their phones. Others interviewed with real microphones, the feed being broadcast live to thousands watching at home.

As cars passed, they would honk, and every time we would cheer. Small cars with students hanging out the back windows would also zoom by. Once in a while, a big truck would come along, and we would wave and signal enthusiastically till they would honk, and our chant would disappear in an eruption of cheering.

"What do we want? Ice out! When do we want it? Now!"

Every so often, I would switch arms as I got tired of holding up the sign. I remember checking my phone at this point, counting down the minutes till the end of my hour. But then, we began to walk down the road, and I forgot about it for a while. The students with the megaphones ran up and down the line, yelling chants to us.

"No hate, no fear! Immigrants are welcome here!"

Before I knew it, another thirty minutes had passed, and now we were taking to the streets. Like a massive vehicle, we all lined up in one lane

inside the parking lot of the high school. When the light turned green, we took a left turn, and all of a sudden, we were walking on the road. The kids with the megaphones rode in pickups out front. Now we were more spread out. We could no longer hear the chants at the front. So people started their own. Soon, two to three chants could be heard from the crowd in a beautiful mess. As we walked the streets, adults silently joined in, too.

"Show me what democracy looks like! This is what democracy looks like!"

When we arrived back at the park, we gathered around a playground. The kids with megaphones stood at the top of a turf hill in the center. Behind them stood a tall metal playstructure that kids soon climbed with their signs. Then we listened to speeches from fellow students and other activists. All of them had different stories to tell, but it was all about the same thing, and their message was clear. The common people were always the ones who instigated the change. And that was me, I realized. A common person. One said, "Look around you right now." So I did. Around me, I saw my friends, their faces and jackets drenched in rain. Our posters were soaked, creased, and torn. I tried to find the end of the crowd behind me, but I could not. It must be close to a thousand, I thought. There we all stood, enraptured as kids our age poured their hearts out into their words through a choppy microphone hooked up to a single speaker.

Then it was all over. As I walked back to my car, the wind picked up. It was a freezing whip, penetrating through the layers of fabric that I wore. When we passed by the high school, it suddenly hit me that some people had stayed inside all day. This I could not fathom. Some people will say that we student protesters skipped our lessons to teach others one. That day, I learned more than I ever could have imagined.

**THANK YOU TO THE
STUDENTS, CAREGIVERS,
TEACHERS, AND COMMUNITY
MEMBERS WHO MADE THE
2025/2026 BODECKER
COHORT PROGRAM SUCH
A MEANINGFUL AND
INSPIRING EXPERIENCE.
WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL
FOR YOUR DEDICATION,
CREATIVITY, AND THE SENSE
OF CONNECTION YOU'VE
BUILT. KEEP CREATING,
AND KEEP INSPIRING!**

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