

2018 YOUNG PEOPLE'S
Creative Writing Contest
FOR AGES 10-18

“Bad Can Turn Out Good” by David Farell
1st Place, Informal Essay 13-15

Poems © Essays © Comix
Short Plays © Short Stories

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Entries Accepted Feb. 1-March 3

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1st PLACE

Bad Can Turn Out Good

Since I was a very young boy, I remember spending most of my time outside on my family's twenty acres. I grew up in the country and spent my earlier years outdoors exploring and admiring nature, especially the variety of trees. Then it happened; my family and I moved into a nice neighborhood in a city. While we kept our "country" home, we rarely visited there. We were now city-dwellers. And, although there were many advantages and delights of living in the city, I still preferred the country – mostly due to the huge selection of trees. I was fascinated with how they grew and loved taking care of them. But we had moved, and were planning to stay in the city for quite a while. Luckily, there was a creek near my house that I would visit quite often to help with my sudden urge to be "back in the country" and near huge trees that evoked fond memories. The creek was a cherished spot, but it just wasn't the same. There was something special about the trees on my family's acreage. There was a variety of pine, oak, hickory, and willows to name a few. It was this uniqueness of the wonderful trees that played a role in creating many fond memories – memories of climbing their welcoming branches, caring for them, and playing games under the canopy they provided.

As life went on, and I grew older, my family decided to move back out to our country home once again. The moment I heard the news, I began packing my things! It wasn't long before I was walking down the same trails that I had wandered in my childhood, exploring the same woods, and running through our twenty acres. But, devastating changes had occurred. I didn't want to face it, but it was undeniable. There just were not as many trees as there was when I used to live there. Many of them were still standing, but dead! Ugly! Several were unable to be climbed; others were on the ground dead, destroyed by bad weather and insects. I was deeply disappointed, as if something magical had been taken from me. The significant loss of trees was

stunning, and especially cruel when I remembered those that held special memories. As time passed, my dad confronted me one morning and commented, "Son, you can't change what has happened. Nature has a way of creating beauty as well as destruction". Then my dad invited me on a walk with him, where he encouraged me to overcome the emotional blow and make the best of it. As we walked up our less-wooded lane, I looked up at my dad's face; I could tell he was sad too. As we continued to walk the property, he challenged me to make the best of our "new" situation. He reminded me that we have a choice to look at things through the eyes of pessimism or optimism. It was at that moment that I chose optimism.

As the months rolled by, it became a natural part of my day to take some time out to work in the once tree-filled meadow near our home, cleaning and caring for the family property. Although there is a lot of work that is still waiting to be done, as I take a step back and consider the progress made, it brings a smile to my face. New memories have been created. Memories that include learning to use a chain saw to cut down trees, on logs having picnics that were my former comrades, and racing through the lush green meadow that is beginning to replace the former grove of trees. But, the greater lesson learned in my inner journey is much greater than the fruit of the hard work beginning to show on the property. The greater lesson is that a bad situation, through effort and attitude is being turned into a good one. As for the dead trees, we cut them up and used the logs as firewood. And, for some parts of the trees, my brothers and sisters used them for arts and crafts. For the young trees that are growing, we are nourishing and caring for them, so one day in the future they will be as big and lush as the generation before them.

Even in their demise the trees have served us very well, whether it was helping keep the house warm or allowing my siblings to create the art of their dreams. The beautiful meadow that

is now been formed is already creating new possibilities. Most importantly, I have learned to absorb the blow that nature can inflict, and have grown in deep ways as a result. Strangely, bad, with the right perspective, can be good.

2018 YOUNG PEOPLE'S Creative Writing Contest

FOR AGES 10-18

“Metamorphosis” by Aubrey McNiel
2nd Place, Informal Essay 13-15

Poems ● Essays ● Comix
Short Plays ● Short Stories

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Metamorphosis 1

Metamorphosis

I used to be shy. I suppose a lot of people could say that I still am, and I suppose that's still slightly true, but I've certainly come a long way. I don't really try, I suppose no one does, and I don't know if it's necessarily the shyness that keeps me quiet. Sometimes, I believe, words simply aren't needed at all, and you can sit in simple silence with each other. Sometimes, I believe, words must be considered before they're spouted out to the world. By the time I chew my thoughts in a brash conversation around me, it's moved on twice and I have to come up with something new.

What's making me come out of my cocoon and become an emerging social butterfly?

First. What is my cocoon? I love to write. I enjoy the singular pleasure of my fingers flying across the keys creating realities that no one else has ever even imagined before. As so many people don't understand, I need endless hours wrapped in a blanket, sipping lukewarm coffee, and staring in front of a screen to get down at least a page. I do feel horribly guilty for being a hermit so much of the time. But I have so many things that I need to get done.

Even at school, I'll be scribbling and erasing frantically in my notebook, which I have nicknamed the ancient scroll of Bixby, after the small town where I live. My peers will be poring at their blank empty screens. I suppose that's socialization, nowadays. I prefer to focus my attention on something far more imaginative, real, soulful. That's my notebook, to me. Once you put enough effort and sweat into a character, it's as though it could come leaping off the page to meet your world. I'd much rather communicate with that character, with that part of me, than a bunch of electronic friends that I could never be sure who they truly were.

Metamorphosis 2

At least in writing, I can be in control. In this variable world around me, one can never know if that indecisive friend is going to walk with them to school like they promised they would. Only God can control whether or not one will catch the flu this season (which I was lucky enough to contract the week before the school musical.) No one can help it if their shirt decides to grow mold (which also most definitely CAN happen).

In writing, I can bring the characters joy, peace, pain. I can paint delicate and intricately beautiful moments in tiny fragments of time. I can form a world with the tips of my very fingers. I can decide a character's past, present, and future with a few gentle taps. Everything is in my hands. I always do try to let my characters' stories lead the way, but in the end, I am in complete control. Nothing that I don't want to happen won't happen.

I started spinning this cocoon six or seven years ago. Back in third or second grade. To be honest, I've been writing forever. But then is when I first started my first novel. I've never finished any of them (I always decide I hate them and scrap them at twenty or fifty pages in), but I spend so much time developing and perfecting a plot and characters and relationships... Then is when I fell in love and knew what I wanted to be when I grew up.

It happened gradually, silken string by string. Maybe the first one was the first time I asked my mom to borrow her computer. Perhaps another was when I started drawing out all of my characters, just to see what they looked like. A big fat string: getting my first laptop. Joining the creative writing club and fighting to keep it alive. Things came in little bits and pieces: looking up writing prompts for hours on end, running through my plot in my head as I fell asleep, bringing my favorite character with me everywhere I went as an "imaginary friend".

A big one was when my friends actually threw a wedding for my character, Bradley, and I. A cheez-it and cranberry raisin reception, a giveaway from my always supportive parents, a “pastor” in sunshades on a lawn chair to give us our “I do’s.” It was perfect.

I don’t know if my cocoon is or was or will be fully formed. I keep adding to it every day, in little moments like the ones that I’m adding right now. I know that I’ll spin a new one someday, maybe with a new novel, a storyboard comic, or something of the sort, and retire to that one for a while.

When I do bury myself in the cocoon that I’ve made, my thoughts, my everything are smothered in it. The world doesn’t matter anymore. I, myself, am gaining new knowledge and wings to take flight with and change the world I live in with it. I contemplate in my mind for a while. I get so lost in thought. My family says it’s like trying to talk to a brick wall. I could probably smile and nod, but I wouldn’t soak up a thing. I’m too busy thinking about all of these ideas and notions and wisdom that I’ve immersed myself in. It wears away at my old precepts about life, and picks at my attitude, all of the pointless things that I’ve carried with my all of my life, that used to be my movement, my caterpillar legs. They all disappear. I’m with new wings. Finally something catches my eye back in reality, after weeks, perhaps months, and I break through.

I think for me, this time, it was how fast life was whirling around me. It was nearly Christmas, I was already halfway through my freshman year. I was an eighth of the way through high school career. Half a year down, three and a half to go. Three and a half until I was to leave my

Metamorphosis 4

family and go to college. Three and a half more years to see all of my friends. I needed to spend time with these people.

That's when I came out of my cocoon, my shell, my covering, my "shyness", all of a sudden, in a burst. I would flutter up to somewhat random people I only saw once a day, or had never seen before at all. I would talk their poor little ears off. When they seemed disinterested, I would alight on another.

I really did brighten their day, really.

Just in case you were worried.

Isn't that the point?

For a while, I'll thrive, sipping the sweet nectar of attention and conversation and flitting about all of these lovely people that surround me every day. I'll touch many, I hope, and leave a small little butterfly-foot-sized impact on their petals. That'll be enough. Maybe, someday, I can help grow friendships and connect people through the dust on my feet.

I wish this could last forever, but I am not a true butterfly. I'll morph back into being a caterpillar and chewing leaves and spinning my cocoon and start over all again someday, I know. But someday, I'll break through again and fly free.

2018 YOUNG PEOPLE'S
Creative Writing Contest
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“Storytelling on Sunday”
by Sarah Rahmatullah
3rd Place, Informal Essay 13-15

Poems ● Essays ● Comix
Short Plays ● Short Stories

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Storytelling on Sunday

Almost ten pairs of large eyes bored into me, their heated gazes trained unwaveringly on my face. A lump traveled down my throat as I gulped. I bent down and pretended to riffle around in my bag, though the hard surface of the first picture book was touching my fingers all the while. Slowly, I drew it out, staring at the bright red and blue cover. Maisy's bright smile was still pasted on her face, and she leered. I quickly flipped the book open, not wanting to lose the very short attention span of my audience. "*Maisy- Maisy goes to the Local Bookstore,*" my voice quivered a little as I voiced the title. *Come on,* I reprimanded myself. *These are three-year-olds!* I flipped the book around, opening it wide so the kids clustered around the low blue table could see the pictures, my sweaty fingers clutching the top of the book. The bold black letters were familiar as I peered at them upside down, having read it about fifty times the night before. I took a deep breath, and, clearing my throat nervously, started to read.

Just a few days ago in the mosque, my mom had led me to Sister Sheryl, someone who I had seen before many times, but had never actually met. Immediately, she folded me into a firm hug. I stood stiffly, my hands glued to my sides, as she poured on me a profusion of thanks.

"Thank you so much, Sarah, it's wonderful what you're doing..." *What?* I had no idea what was happening! I listened to my mom and Sister Sheryl's conversation. I couldn't pick up much information from their chatter about locations and timings. After another beam upon me, Sister Sheryl hurried away.

"*What?*" I chased after my mom as she hurried to where my dad and my brother Hamid were waiting by the large, wooden doors. "I had *no idea* what she was talking about!"

"You might read books to kids in a few days."

"Huh?"

Next Saturday, we went to the Hardesty Regional Library, to meet Sister Sheryl. We roamed the shelves of the picture book section, previewing the various options they had on the shelves. Sister Sheryl

Storytelling on Sunday

had said that for an hour, from ten to eleven every Sunday, I was going to read books to preschoolers while their older siblings attended Sunday school. My mom and I cruised around the pale metal shelves, bringing possible candidates to a large, stuffed armchair where Sister Sheryl scanned through them and noted down the promising titles. I asked Hanah and Hamid to help, but they were more interested in tittering at plump pink pigs throwing tantrums in books for toddlers.

After the book search was over, Sister Sheryl selected one of the books spilling out of her chair and handed it to me.

"*Maisy goes to the Local Bookstore*. This looks like a good one. You can read it tomorrow. But right now, I want you to sit on this wooden rocker next to me and read it to your sister. Pretend I'm not here." Hanah sat across from me, smiling sweetly. I read the book quickly, my voice flat and expressionless as an open plain, remembering how my mom had told her how I could imitate characters' voices and read with vigorous expression. I could, but I only did it front of my siblings.

"Okay. Good. Now, here's the other book you're going to read. *My Five Senses*. I got to go now. Remember, tomorrow at ten!" When we got home I immediately picked up the books and took them to my room. I read them both in turns, over and over again, trying to make my imaginary listeners *interact*, and trying to read with tone and expression.

"I *smell* with my *nose*. Can you point to your *nose*?" Later that evening I asked Hanah and Hamid to listen to me read the books.

"You have to pretend to be a preschooler." I told Hanah.

"Really? Okay!" Hanah grinned.

"Okay, Hanah. *Maisy go-*"

"Can I sit on your lap?" Hanah squeaked.

Storytelling on Sunday

"No."

"Waaaaaaaaa--"

"What are you *doing*?"

"Being a preschooler," she replied. A similar interference occurred when I read to Hamid. Still, I persisted, running downstairs for endless glasses of water for my rough throat and pointing to my nose until it was time for bed. I lay awake long after lights out, staring up at the dark ceiling and wondering how my first Storytime would go.

"Wake up! It's nine thirty!" I sprang out of bed, and got ready. Shoving the two books into a drawstring bag I borrowed from Hanah, I hurriedly leaped into the car, and my mom drove towards the mosque, which, fortunately, was only two minutes away. Inside, it was crowded with milling kids and parents. My mom asked around, trying to figure out where we were supposed to go. Finally, we met Sister Sheryl. She ushered us towards the nursery, and dropped a pile of tablecloths on the counter.

"Can you help me cover up the toys? No one will listen to you if they see all this." My mom and I draped the cloths over the all the toys, until the room was empty except for the low blue table in the center with the tiny red plastic chairs drawn around it, with bulky, cloth-covered shapes scattered throughout. I sat at the head of the table and waited, twisting my hands together. Sister Sheryl left promptly for a meeting she had to attend.

A few minutes later, a woman with a little boy walked in. She said he was going to turn two years old in one month. Then, another woman with two boys came in, and everyone sat down. The little boys, along with their moms, stared at me. I pulled out the books and began.

"Maisy is going to the local bookstore. She..." Everything I had practiced the night before flew out the window as I squirmed uncomfortably in the tiny red chair. I didn't read the way I planned to, and

Storytelling on Sunday

did not point to my hands, nose, eyes, ears, or tongue like I had practiced countless times the day before. Still, I tried to read loudly and clearly, and the boys' attention didn't drift. When I finished, I pulled out the 'senses samples' I had collected from around the house: a small plastic bag with a little powdered cinnamon, another with a few cloves of garlic, a small stuffed lion, and Hamid's button that made a boom sound effect when you pressed it. My mom passed the stuff around, and the kids all experimented with their senses.

The moms collected their kids around eleven, and they left. Sister Sheryl came back and praised me. I helped her collect the tablecloths and fold them, and put all the samples back into my bag and left with my mom. As I walked out the door, I did not feel completely satisfied, but I knew I did well for my first try, and was not totally dreading the next Sunday.