

2018 YOUNG PEOPLE'S Creative Writing Contest

FOR AGES 10-18

“Shades of Summer” by Renee Fernandes
1st Place, Short Story 13-15

Poems ● Essays ● Comix
Short Plays ● Short Stories

CASH PRIZES!

Entries Accepted Feb. 1-March 3

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The summer winds wrap around Yuki, thick and warm. They tug at her short ebony locks, pulling as if to call her away with them. Her feet dangle from where she swings them back and forth, legs strewn over the side of her roof. Humming, she watches the glow from the city brighten as the sun lowers and, in turn, darkens, giving way to the skyline's fluorescent glimmering.

Alone with her thoughts, it's peacefully quiet. Tranquil, even.

Until Hope crashes out of her bedroom window and scrambles beside her, of course.

"Yuki!" She laughs loudly, harshly sitting beside her. Yuki's pretty sure Hope just scraped off some shingles with her not-so-yellow-anymore Converse. She scrunches up her nose, giving her best friend what she hopes is an intimidating scowl.

From the way Hope pinches her cheek, cooing, she guesses she failed.

"Hope. I'm trying to enjoy the silence. And take some time to think- you know, something you don't do often?"

Hope melodramatically clutches her chest. "Wounded by the one I love most!" Yuki gives a tired sigh and Hope falls back onto the roof, arm in the air. "Why must you be so cold!"

"My name literally means snow." Yuki raises an eyebrow, unamused.

"Yes, snow. So beautiful, yet so icy." Hope tosses her head to and fro, sun-kissed brown hair swishing and covering her face. She sprawls out, tossing her limbs on Yuki, and as much as Yuki would like to throw her arm and right leg off of her lap and glare, she bites back a smile and a laugh. Hope has that effect- she's always lived up to her name.

"Dork." Is all Yuki says, and Hope grins as she sings,

"But you love me!"

Yuki just groans. "What did I do to deserve this?"

Hope just laughs and they stay that way for a while. Yuki watches Hope stare up at the sky, smiling so widely, and she thinks her heart is full. As much as Hope is loud, and hyper, and talks too much, and is every opposite of Yuki, well, Yuki wouldn't trade her for the world.

"These shingles are rubbing the skin on my back off," Hope suddenly says, though not making a move to get up. Yuki lets out a small chuckle, lips pulling up into a smile. Hope beams at her as if that was her life goal, and she just accomplished it. She looks amazing when she does that- she looks happy. Yuki wouldn't want her to feel any other way.

"Then move," Yuki grunts, and looks away to hide her smile. Hope moans and goes into a dramatic rant about not wanting to get up and ruin the moment. Yuki turns back to her.

"Moment?" She asks.

"Yeah, this moment of pure friendship we're having." Hope gestures a hand between them and Yuki laughs.

Contradictory to her personality, summer is her favorite season, and this is most possibly why.

Summer means milkshakes, and red cherries, and sunsets in the pool. But more importantly it means free time with Hope- time where they can just talk and laugh, and they don't have to worry about exams or anyone else. It's just them.

It's just them and their beat-up shoes. It's just them and their music. It's just them and whatever they want because times like this make them feel like they can take on the world.

"You won't ruin the moment. You couldn't, actually," Yuki replies, shaking her head. Hope sits up, finally removing her limbs from Yuki and *thank goodness*, she's pretty sure they were cutting off her circulation.

She looks at Hope, and the brunette returns her gaze, eyes soft. The wind whips their locks and nips at their skin, chilling as the sun makes its escape. Yuki wants to say something like

Thank you. She wants to tell Hope how much she means to her, even though she rarely shows it. She wants to tell her that she's everything and more to her.

But Hope speaks first.

"Gosh, you're so *pale*, have you even left your room this month?"

Yuki should've known.

"Okay, I lied. You can ruin the moment, and you just did." She makes a move to get up and Hope whines.

"No, no, no, don't leave! I'm sorry, I take it back!"

Yuki, as begrudgingly as she can, sits back down. Hope smiles at her, as if she knows Yuki wasn't planning on leaving anyway. As if she knows that nothing could pry Yuki from her side.

"What time is it, actually?" She asks, knocking her knee against Hope's.

Hope fishes her phone out of her back pocket- an old, cracked flip phone that Yuki will never stop teasing her for.

"Almost eight," She answers, and Yuki snorts incredulously.

"Can you even see the screen on that thing?"

Hope gasps in offense. "I can see it perfectly well, thank you very much," She huffs and pouts, flipping the phone closed and shoving it in her back pocket.

There's something about the way Hope can't help but smile that makes Yuki's heart want to burst.

Yuki brings her knees to her chest, scooting away from the edge. Hope scoots over to be closer to her, legs criss-crossed.

"Hey, Hope."

"Yeah?"

"We're a pretty special pair, you know," Yuki speaks up, not taking her eyes away from the city skyline that seems to be coming to life. Hope just hums.

Because yeah, they are.

Yuki is night, and Hope is day, and yet somehow they're perfect for each other.

2018 YOUNG PEOPLE'S
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“A Portrait of an Anthropologist”
by Israel Meyers
2nd Place, Short Story 13-15

Poems © Essays © Comix
Short Plays © Short Stories

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2nd place

A small moon was lazily working its way to the peak of a dark blue night sky. Owls were awakening, various insects hummed, and Wetherall tore a tick from his scalp. "A true prairie evening," Alex Wetherall, PhD. thought as he removed another tick from atop his head. Despite the ticks, the doctor was enjoying himself. This was his second anthropological study amongst the plains Indians, and while his first trip had not been a success, on this trip the fates seemed to be smiling upon him. The tribe had welcomed him with open arms.

On his very first day with the tribe he had been incensed by the one-eyed medicine man, and today they had purified him in the sweat lodge. Think on that! He, Wetherall, had been the first white man in history to breathe those noxious clouds of steam. He had been the first to sit above those rocks glowing red from a fire. He, a Boston scientist, had chalked his own feverish scribblings to the inside of the tent next to those of the natives. Wetherall plucked a tick from his elbow and breathed deeply. "There is really so much that the West can learn from these naked plainsmen," he thought, "these good, simple plainsmen."

If the fates were smiling upon Wetherall, it was because they were smiling at him. The Native Americans have never been simple. Wetherall stood up. An owl hooted. He headed toward the circle of tepees in which the people he was studying resided. A toad croaked. When he reached the circle, a group of children began to follow him, growing in size with each tepee they passed. Judging from what the smaller children were doing with stalks of straw, many of them deemed the wispy blonde mustache of the Doctor very amusing. Indeed, with his skinny limbs and his head bearing only a garland of hair (as well as a few ticks), Wetherall was unbeautiful even to himself.

Wetherall looked down and snorted. Around his knees a mime was being played out by two giggling children. One child was holding a straw under his nose while the other held a short stick. The child with the stick was sawing at the hair of the child adorned with the straw. Firelight from within the circle flickered, painting the pair a bloody red. "A scalping. My scalping!" thought the Doctor, for a moment unsettled, as the children kicked and convulsed beneath him. They were laughing. Then the Doctor laughed too. "Very interesting", he thought, "the Anthropological Society will be greatly excited to discover that Indian children play the make believe game as well!"

Wetherall turned toward a tepee which he was being lent. A finger tapped his shoulder. The Doctor turned to face a tall Indian with salt and pepper hair. The man's name was either Setting Sun or Rising Sun, Wetherall could not remember which. The Indian coughed politely and said, "It is a tradition in our tribe for a guest to give his weapons to the chief during his stay. The safeguarding of the weapons is a sign of courtesy. Chief Circling Hawk would like to know if you have any weapons he may keep for you?" Wetherall blushed. He did have a brace of pistols and was ashamed of it. In Boston he had scoffed at warnings of Indian hostility, but even still he had quietly packed away two revolvers he had been able to purchase at a reasonable price. Not that Alex Wetherall knew how to shoot the guns, but they gave him a sense of security. Now, though, Wetherall was ashamed that he had needed that sense of security. How could he have distrusted these plain, hospitable people?

"If you do not want to, the Chief will understand," the Indian said.

"No, no, no," Wetherall exclaimed, "I should be honored!"

The Doctor ducked into his tepee, and pulled the guns out from a knapsack that lay on the ground. "Here," he handed the guns to his companion, "thank Chief Circling Hawk for me." The Indian nodded and left.

The next day started early for Setting Sun. Hours before dawn, Setting Sun had been hunting prairie birds in preparation for the feast that the tribe would soon celebrate. It would be a religious feast marking the sacrifice of the foolish white man whose people were desecrating the prairie land. It had been the medicine-man's idea. He had had a dream in which a voice told him that the white man's blood would protect their tribe and their land from other white men. The shaman had set about purifying the victim, first with incense and then in the sweat lodge. In order to avoid any bloodshed other than the sacrifice, they had duped the Doctor out of his guns. "Beautiful guns," Setting Sun thought, "Beautiful!" Hungry Wolf, the medicine man, had ordered that, should any weapons be retrieved, they be given to him. Instead, Setting Sun had given only one gun to Hungry Wolf and had hid the other away for himself. He felt guilty now, but the excitement of the coming feast dimmed the rest of his emotions. The children of the tribe were playing games based on the sacrifice, and the old women of the tribe were telling tales about past sacrifices. While all this was happening, the foolish white man kept smiling and asking how Indian women cook this or how Indian men kill that. "Soon he'll discover how we kill white men," smirked Setting Sun.

The day had been a hot one, but now that the red sun was setting, most of the heat was radiating from the baked earth. The air was still and humid and the tall grass itchy. Small birds brushing against the grass were the only sounds other than the distant barking of the native's dogs. Wetherall lay napping in what once had been a buffalo wallow.

Despite the heat, it had been a pleasant day for Wetherall. He had spent the better part of the morning studying the Indian children and cataloguing their games. Then he had a hearty lunch served by three beaming women, the wives of Bucking Horse. The rest of the Doctor's day had been spent in describing his various findings to his journal and sleeping. Though it had not been a very productive day, it had been a pleasant one, and as he awoke, Wetherall thought that it would be pleasant to end his days in this peaceful place so far from the cares of the world.

After he had stretched, Wetherall headed towards camp for dinner. The dinner was an uncomfortable one. While sitting by the dinner fire, Wetherall soon realized that the eyes of all around were staring intently in his direction. Their interest was to be expected, but Wetherall was not used to the attention of two dozen pairs of eyes. "But it's not just the number of eyes," thought Wetherall, "it's the fact that I don't like being looked at while I eat." But it was not just that. Even Wetherall realized that those eyes, dancing with firelight, were rather intense. Wetherall coughed, hurriedly finished his meal and headed to his tent. An owl hooted. On a whim, Dr. Wetherall decided to walk back to the dark plains. A toad croaked. "What did I tell those people in Boston?" mused a contented Wetherall. "I told them Indian hostility was a myth! And I was right." A wind rustled the tall grass around him.

Wetherall saw an unusual shadow move out of the corner of his eye. The Doctor looked and saw Setting Sun rise silently from the grass. "What are you doing here?" he said good-naturedly. Behind him he heard a rustling. The Doctor turned to see what was behind him, now uncomfortable. Standing before him was the Shaman, his one eye squinting madly and his scarred head disembodied by the tall grass.

The puckered face bobbed its way toward him chanting under its breath. Wetherall backed up a step. He bumped into the Indian that was standing behind him. All around him shadows molded themselves into the shapes of men angered that he was alive. The small moon shown placidly over a quiet prairie. Dr. Wetherall shrieked hoarsely. The contorted face of the medicine man shrieked back, then said in a high voice, "The white man shall die by his own invention, so said the dream!" With that he slowly raised the doctor's pistol and slowly cocked it.

But while the Indian was slow and deliberate in his ritual, Wetherall was quick and frantic in his fear. Pulling a scalpel from the medical pouch at his waist he slashed wildly at the throat of the medicine-man. The medicine-man fell to the ground gushing blood, raised the gun, then fell back defeated, the mad gleam in his one eye now extinguished. Wetherall pounced on the dead shaman, grabbed the gun, then stood up, his skinny arms shaking with a new hope. Looking around and waving the gun he bellowed, "By the white man's invention! By the white man's invention! None of you touch me or the shaman's ghost will live with you!" His voice cracked, then he bellowed again, "None of you touch me!" The Indians backed away, their stoic faces saying nothing, yet Wetherall knew he had won. Behind him there was a very small click. It was the sound of Wetherall's second gun being cocked.

In a small outpost of the pony express, two men were playing cards at a table. Out a window, flames could be seen in the distance and powerful drums could be heard playing. The younger of the two men looked up from his cards and exclaimed, "Golly! Them Indians are having *some* pow-wow!"

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"The Box" by Victoria Harris
3rd Place, Short Story 13-15

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The Box 1

3rd place

It was only a box. A box that resided in a forgotten closet in a dilapidated house, on top of Sequoia Hill, in the outskirts of Sequoia. A box in a place where we shouldn't have been, and a box that we *really* shouldn't have opened.

But it certainly made our lives much more interesting.

I ask you, reader, to suspend reality. Imagine that you're a bird, flying into the sky. Imagine that you're skimming over clouds, until you reach a town. Rain droplets splash on umbrellas in Town Square, and you watch shoppers scurry inside pristine shops. A main avenue has all the businesses and banks branching out from the town square, fading into two-story, white-picket-fence houses. In short, you are flying over the perfect town... if it weren't for one thing. There's a hill on the outskirts of the town. It's Sequoia Hill, but everyone just calls it The Hill. More often than not, it's referred to in cold, disapproving tones, like The Hill was a disobedient teenager. And to the citizens of Sequoia, it's basically the same thing.

Nobody knows who owns The Hill, only that it's owned. An old house resides on top of The Hill, but no one ever sees a person coming out of it. It's probably for the best too; the people in Sequoia are extremely gossipy and judgmental. They'd probably drive them out of the town before they even get anywhere. After all, The Hill's grass is unkempt, weeds dominate, and the trees are untrimmed. An oddity in a place where everyone's yard was green and perfectly cut. Not to mention the house itself... it leaned to the side, like it had seen too many storms, and the wood was peeling. It was so unlike the rest of the town; it often stood as a landmark to newcomers in need of directions.

The Box 2

Everyone hates The Hill. So that's why, on one rainy morning, we climbed up The Hill and entered The House. "We" being the five "Adventurers". That's what the town called us when we were younger, and it stuck. We have only one thing in common: our parents are pathetic excuses for family. So we created our own.

Now imagine you're flying towards The Hill, and you spot five people, staggering up through the mud. In front, you spot a head of vivid red hair, with gangling, pale limbs beneath it. She looks more determined than all the rest, using her long legs to scale The Hill quickly. That's Willow, the girl that embodies her namesake perfectly.

Look down a bit. A boy with a dark mop of hair and warm, beige skin seems just as athletic as Willow, but much less determined than her, causing him to lag behind her. The boy's name is Alec, the kindest of us all (when he's not a sarcastic jerk).

Only about a foot behind Alec is a kid with ebony skin and a buzzcut. His glasses are foggy and splattered with raindrops, and his entire body is caked in mud from falling down multiple times. He struggles to keep up, but you see him stop suddenly and open a bottle labeled "warming solution". This is Albert, our resident mad scientist.

You see him toss the bottle down to two girls. They are about the opposite of each other in every way. The first has hints of blue in her straight, onyx hair; the second has a hood on, not quite covering her bright fuschia curls. The first has nebula-colored, almond eyes; the second has hazel irises within wide eyes. The first has tan skin; the second sepia skin. The first has a pencil-shaped body; the second is an hourglass. The first is Calliope- our musical prodigy, and the second is me- Emily, the writer and observer.

This is our family, our fourteen year old, hodge-podge band of friends. We meant the world to each other, even before the end of that day.

I took a swig, the warming chemicals catching fire in my stomach. I passed it to Calliope, who was shivering in her shawl. Her bohemian ways extended to her clothing, and she refused to take off her long skirt and useless shawl, even though we told her it was going to rain.

Finally, we crested The Hill. We all just stood there, reveling in our victory while the rain washed off sweat and mud.

We stood there for the longest time, but finally, Willow spoke up. "So... are we gonna knock or...?"

"I'll go. I'll get in the least trouble," Albert volunteered. His dad's the mayor, so he can get away with about anything. He went up to the oak door and knocked. Then we waited. Well, *most* of us waited. Cal tapped her foot impatiently. After about twenty seconds, she said, "*They aren't gonna show.*"

"Says who?" Albert pushed his glasses up his nose.

"Says me. Let's just force our way in."

"No! I don't care if this house hasn't been inhabited in a thousand years, it feels wrong to force our way in." I objected.

"Guys, let's just try the handle," Willow stated calmly. She went up and gave it a tug. And another. She jerked the handle around like a rag doll until it popped off.

She turned around like a sad puppy. Alec snickered a bit while Cal sighed, "Ok, now we *need* to force our way in."

She put her shoulder against the door and pushed. Alec joined her and they managed to take down the door. It fell inwards and aroused dust in the hallway.

I stepped inside, treading carefully. Behind me, I heard Albert's footsteps and winced at the creaky floorboards that he managed to step on.

"Sorry," he whispered, "Heads up, Em."

Without turning around, I caught the vial he threw at me and shook it. The liquid glowed and cast light around the hallway.

The hallway itself was dark. Moisture ran along faded, peeling wallpaper. The chandelier was cobwebbed and rusted. I couldn't see the end of the hallway, despite the ultra-bright light.

I ventured down the hallway, Cal bringing up the rear of our group. We saw a lot of heavy, oak doors, but we only tried a fraction of them. They were all locked - "Or sealed shut," Albert suggested.

"Brilliant, 'Bert. Just amazing," Alec muttered sarcastically.

"Oi!" Willow whisper-shouted, "Shut it!"

That was the end of our running commentary.

Eventually, we reached a room. Judging from the couch, dusty fireplace, and adjoining parlor, this was once a living room.

Without meaning to, we split up. Willow walked towards a painting in the corner. Albert sat at the coffee table. Cal made her way over to the parlor, where a piano sat. Alec collapsed on the couch, where he proceeded to critique Albert's method of

examining the wood grain. And me? I walked over to *another* door, with a tarnished gold handle adorning it.

Let me pause here. I don't know why I was drawn to the door, but I was. In hindsight, I believe it was magical. I just couldn't stop myself from going over there. I don't even know if I could've resisted, even if I wanted to.

I opened the door. This one, unlike the front door, swung forward smoothly. I peered in, holding the vial up high. The closet was covered in cobwebs, and many spiders fled at my bright light. I stepped around the fleeing mass, making a face.

Other than cobwebs, the closet was empty. Nothing except a box. A strange, mysteriously powerful box covered in splashes of sparkling magic and beetroot-colored paint. I picked it up. For such a little box, it felt surprisingly heavy.

I hesitated, then turned around. "Hey guys?" I held up the vial and the box. We all gathered around the couch. For a second, no one said anything. Then Alec spoke up. "Should we open it?"

"Course we should!" Willow said "Open it, Emily!"

My fingers trembled over the brass latch. When I unlatched it, we all flinched, like it was Pandora's Box and evil was inside. Yet nothing came out. After about ten seconds, I peered in. There laid five strange gems. Flames danced under the surface of a ruby. Rainbow fog unfurled inside an opal. Chips of black and white blinked in and out of existence on a chip of turquoise. Golden shimmers within a topaz floated just below the surface like a miniature sun. Shades of violet dripped down an amethyst. I watched a beautiful lilac shade paint it in pastel tones.

The Box 6

Willow reached out before I could stop her and wrapped her fingers around the ruby. We all flinched again, but she was fine. Emboldened, we grabbed a gem. I ended up with the mysterious amethyst. I stared at it, like I expected it to burst into song. I knew, somewhere in my subconscious, that amethyst would change my life. How, I didn't know, but it would be major, and it would be soon.