Editorial

A brisk September eve we gathered first,
To read with care, to edit and to write,
To foster love of fiction and of verse,
Through contests let your gifted wings take flight.

And read we did, each of the words you sent,
Sweet prose, wise haiku and heart-wrenching rhyme,
Much awe we had for such unique talent,
To which in winter we devoted time.

Then summer comes, tough decisions to make,
Ensure each word is fit for magazine,
With elegant cover for our namesake,
We give to you: Verve, Twenty-Seven.

We know these tales will bring delight,
And from all the Verve team, ‘goodnight’.

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With thanks to the English department for running creative writing competitions in Years 7, 8 and 9.
Garden

The girl perches on the edge of the tired deckchair
In her back garden.
She observes the stirring of the trees,
Wind puffing through branches half-covered in leaves.
Dew seeps through her dress and she shivers,
Despite the warm late summer sun.
Ants crawl to and from their nest,
Greeting each other as they go.
A lone crow calls,
Disrupting the quiet of her little wilderness.
Jack-in-a-box finches dart between bushes,
Chattering softly as they go.
A chewed up tennis racket,
Reminding her of the time
Of space hoppers and swingball.
The patch of grass that still hasn’t grown back
After bonfire night three years ago.
A graveyard of plant pots,
Many failed attempts at growing a herb garden.
Memories echo around this place
Cooped up by battered fences.

Fenella Hodges
Winner of the Year 7 Verve Competition
Only hope

My heart is pounding. This might just be my ticket to freedom. Away from Aleppo, away from the endless fighting and pain.

I feel a shove and I stumble into the boat. I squeeze into a space next to a boy, only a little older than me and try to shut off the world around me as more and more people pile onto the boat. Looking at the boy’s face, it is covered with faded cuts and bruises. I must look even worse than him, my face and arms caked with mud and blood. The boy gives me the shadow of a smile. I wish I could smile back at him but I’ve forgotten how to.

I stare down at the floor as the boat starts to move away from the dock. It sways and tips, unbalanced by the huge number of people aboard its small frame. And I sit there. I sit there through the day and the night, listening to the cries of young children and swaying to the rhythm of the boat. A stench of vomit fills the air. None of us are used to being on a boat and the constant swaying swirls up our stomachs and empties them of what little they are filled with. Only hope gets me through. The hope that one day I’ll learn how to smile again. I drift in and out of sleep, waking to sudden lurches and drifting off again to the sound of the waves lapping rhythmically against the side of the boat.

I awake to the desperate cries of others around me. A huge wave looms over us and I am thrown against the boy next to me as water crashes down around us. He steadies me and I cling to him. There is a look of pure fear in his dark eyes. The boat heaves and lurches, controlled by the wild sea around us. Rain pounds down from the open sky, accompanied by deep rumbles of thunder. We clutch each other as the force of the storm throws us around like rag dolls. Another almighty wave rises above us and there are screams of trepidation. It sweeps the boat up and churns it under.

I gasp as the water slaps my face. I flail about, trying to keep my head above water as I feel the energy ebb from my body. I start to sink. My lungs feel as though they are going to burst. I’m falling. Further and further.

I can’t swim.

Isabella Wardell
Year 8
Shadow Man

The sky is a palette of peachy gold.  
A pair of wings cuts through the air  
Basking in the early morning sun.

Gnarled branches grasp at the crisp morning air.  
Each pine needle dusted in a blanket of white,  
Each blade of grass laced in a delicate web of ice.

A glimpse of a shadow slumped beneath the naked oak,  
The zephyr gently stroking the intricate pattern  
Of gleaming crystals.

I amble aimlessly over  
To the shadow lurking under the tree.  
I peer down and my heart freezes;  
Shadows aren’t supposed to be human.

Anna Russell-Jones  
Year 8
The Artist

I paint the pictures,
Pictures of a perfect world.
I take my paintbrush,
And my story dances across the canvas.

Or I take a pencil,
A sharp simple instrument with which I can create a masterpiece.
A soft grey dagger to cut away all that is wrong,
Leaving only the perfect picture that I desire.

Pastels allow me to glide
Away from people and places.
And when all of these worthless things are gone,
I am left alone.

A perfect picture,
Of a broken world.

Emily Williams
Winner of the Year 8 Verve Competition
Artwork

I race through your mind leaving nothing but disaster behind. I control you, force you to do things that you would never think to do. It gives me great pleasure and satisfaction - yet it tortures and kills you.

I can be peaceful when I am asleep in your mind but when I awake, I am worse than any tragedy. I screech until you don’t want to live any longer, until you’d rather die than listen to the piercing sound in your mind another second. I steal your precious memories and leave nothing but negative thoughts and blurry moments. I take pieces of your life and muddle them up until you start living nothing but a lie.

My work is an art and my name: Insanity.

Katia Avanesov
Year 7
The Lower School

Friendly Fire

Today I shot my best friend.

We walked forward in a straight line, scared – no – terrified. In dead silence. The only noise to be heard was the subtle call of an owl. Mud squashed under our feet, squelching between our wrinkly toes. Soaked through, our shoes rubbed on the heels of our feet, blistering our heels and toes. We were all friends. More than friends, family. We had been together forever. The best team. They encouraged us to join up that way.

We trudged through no man’s land. Goose bumps trampling on our arms. BANG! It started. The first gun shot was fired. Hide. Run. Anywhere. My stomach tied up in knots of agony. Cold gnawed on me like a rat. All that was to be seen was never-ending darkness. It was coming. BANG! BANG! BANG! My legs gave way, they felt brittle. I was stranded. I needed to hide.

Flash! Smoke drifted through the air, making it misty, almost translucent. There he was. Six foot. Huge. Gun pointed at me. I was paralysed with fear. What to say? What to do? Run! Would he see me through the smoke? Should I just let him shoot me? No! I had to do it. Do it for my friends.

Sprint! I ran in the opposite direction. Slam! I dived behind a rock, my knee awash with pain. Alarm bells ringing in my ears. My head whirled around in circles like a tornado. I had done it. Survived.
I started walking. Just one foot in front of the other. Everything was quiet, peaceful even, yet I could not shake an ominous feeling. The hairs rose on the back of my neck. My stomach rolled up and down like a tsunami. My whole body went tense, but nothing, nothing came.

I kept opening and closing drawers in my mind. Dreaming, hoping that we could win, that there was a chance of making it through this.

A flag was rising in victory. They had found it.

“Just keep hold of it,” I screamed at the top of my lungs.

I sprinted as fast as I could. My legs felt they were no longer there. There was no pain. My arms were pumping as fast as lightning, but my legs were their own person. Get to my comrades! That was the only thought crossing my mind.

“Help!” I heard a shout. “Help!”

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Without thinking, I shot, fired my gun. It didn’t matter as long as I could survive, get to my friends.

Then melancholy hit me as hard as a bullet. Yellow paint trickled down Katie’s overalls. I had shot my best friend. Our only chance of winning and it was gone.

Grace Talbot
Year 7

Image: Paul Nash
Void of War

The Lower School
The Ghost of the Moor

The moor stretched out as far as the eye could see. The low-lying heath rock violently, dancing in the eager, upland gale. Weighted cascades of rain pounded the land like bombs, deafening as they plummeted to the earth below, exploding with a rhythmic drumming. Swaying viciously in the storm, the wires along the unkempt, local road fizzed and sparked angrily. A thick mist was beginning to blanket the moorland and the sun seemed to be submerged in the horizon. Dusk was setting over the land and droplets of water were hanging on the contorted branches of the gorse bushes, glinting oddly in the mist, waiting like a crowd for the terrifying moments to come.

Gliding with precision through the wind, a ghost-like silhouette appeared amidst the confusion. It seemed to float wickedly, huge tail fanned; its bright white plumage was striking compared to the barren expanse of heath. Jet-black tipped wings propelled the bird onward with defiance, a few beating strikes was sufficient. Its head was bowed, tucked in, with glinting eyes, smirking at the sight of prey. The bird circled an area, silent, dipping and hovering, watching and waiting. Immediately after sighting food, the bird sped down, wings outstretched in a mighty V shape.

It appeared to crash clumsily and stagger in the heavy vegetation below. Seconds later, emerging from the gorse, the gleaming talons of the hen harrier held a burden - the motionless body of a young vole.

James King
Year 8
Paradise Lost

Sunrise. Such a pleasure to feel the warm glowing rays of morning sunlight upon my old, crinkled skin. It gently enfolds me in its bright, glimmering warmth and for once I feel like I am in paradise. A paradise where I am young again, where waves of pure crystal clear water lap against me. Where I stand proudly on the shimmering sand, not a single trace of injury or destruction on my skin. A beautiful glorious paradise where I overlook mysterious yet alluring mountains, tempting me to venture into their depths. A place where once again I am protecting my city from surging waves.

However, I remind myself, I cannot. I do not have legs. Nor arms. Nor a smart enough mind. Then reality hits me. I am old and wrinkled. The waves I so easily used to conquer now conquer me. The ferocious water leaves marks and scratches on my surface every time it hits me. The pain never ends. And I will never be quite perfect enough to fit in a place like paradise.

Anna Tarasheva
Year 7

‘The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n.’

Paradise Lost, Book 1
Paradise Regained

The sun gazes blissfully through the melancholy, puffy clouds, its rays bouncing off every lonely corner of the ragged cliff, filling the earth with its glorious, boundless beams. The waves gently stroke the rough rocks like a mother’s touch on a child’s back. The grass turns to light gold as the sun rubs its heroic hands over each tiny blade. It almost looks edible in its golden glory. There, just gently waltzing in the wind.

All is silent. The tired waves hush the entire earth with each swift, calm movement. Every now and then the white cheeks of the sky cover the sun, and the vegetation waits patiently for it to return and enlighten them with hope and joy.

Mountains stretch right and left, as far as the eye can see. They dominate the land, peering down at civilization below. They compete with one another in an attempt to be the tallest – the greatest. All is calm, and quiet, and peaceful. Everything is in sync. Everything is in tune. Everything is right.

Max Buhl-Nielsen
Year 7
Walking against the Wind

I wonder if the wind fights because it is angry. Maybe, there is some cosmic explanation, something beyond us.

Have you walked against the wind?

Your clothes give in to its tide. It is so strong, the world around it gives in. The children go inside, the trees fall, the windows in your house rattle and snarl.

Have you walked against the wind? It feels colder, suddenly.

You hear about the hurricane on the morning news. 70 people killed, another 120 injured. Later that day you see a paper bag.

The wind gives it life, makes it dance in the air like a young girl. Rising, falling, sliding on the pavement from side to side and up again. It hovers for a second with dignity and holds its shape mid-air.

Down it goes again.

Have you walked against the wind?

Your jumper, a little too big for you, stretches away from your back, towards the house behind you, to the very door you stepped out from.

The wind is a beauty, and like everything beautiful, has the power to become a liability. But for now, it is kind to me.

Have you walked against the wind?

I urge you to stretch out your arms in an open field. To walk against the wind, hair down and chest open. Let it carry you where it wishes.

Walk on.

Hana Yun-Stevens
Year 10
Patient in Affliction

There’s a girl’s voice laughing in your head and a sickening smile in your heart.

Because – maybe, it wasn’t your fault. Maybe it wasn’t your fault that she looked at you like you were the pure antithesis of salvation – the only thing that could keep her from faltering. The whetstone to a blade.

(Somehow, you can’t quite believe your own shining justifications.)

It’s cold here, in this hollow land, and as your mind hangs frozen, her flickering fingers flash through your brain like an impulse, again and again and again until it’s all you can see. You’re choking on the images, which come thick and fast, raining down from the skies to rest on your hands with the colour of a precious jewel and the scent of rusted iron.

She spins around in your mind like a marionette whose strings are all wrapped around her neck, jolted this way and that and taking all reason with her as she careens through nothingness.

But she is gone. (It’s probably – definitely – your fault.)

There’s a river tearing at the soil beneath your feet, and its currents lead straight to her world.

Celia Merson
Winner of the Year 9 Verve Competition
The Stopover

“I won’t be long,” she tells him as she closes the passenger door. “You’d better not be.”

In the blackness she can’t discern his features, only a wiry silhouette outlined by the distant lights. He jerks his head at her and leans back against the car, arms crossed, watching her unsmilingly as she turns her back on him and strides away. She can feel his gaze upon her retreating figure: a beam of hostile intensity like that of an eagle whose sharp eyes are fixed unsparingly upon its prey. She shivers.

The night is chilly and she pulls her thin jacket tighter around her as she walks through the car park towards the petrol station, an oasis of light in the darkness. He has parked at the very edge of the parking lot, near the exit, so as to be invisible from any prying eyes - though he needn’t have done she thinks, as she surveys the empty lots, isolated from the road by an expanse of overgrown grass. A smattering of bright stars pierce the dark vault high above her, and a slim curve of a moon emerges from behind a tendril of cloud in the inky sky. To her right a few solitary cars flash past, leaving behind streaks of illumination that hang in the air, vestiges of light soon to fade along the dark stretch of empty freeway. Between the muted drones of the cars, the night is silent, only her steady footsteps disturb its reign. Her breath plumes in the air as she breathes out, and she finds it momentarily comforting to focus on the vapour evanescing into the cold night air. The simple task employs her concentration, shrouding her thoughts in an innocuous haze.

Her mind is filled with blank noise as she reaches the sphere of luminescence emanating from the petrol station’s artificial lights. The pumps are vacant. A lone car is parked outside the convenience store. Under the fluorescent sign advertising its 24 hour service, she sees a young man sporting the company cap behind the counter, surrounded by wall-to-wall displays of magazines and sweets.
She wonders if she could pop in - she has some loose change in her pocket - but thinks of Simon. He had forbidden her to be seen and spat at her to be hasty; any longer than five minutes and he would make her suffer for it. He had glanced towards the backseat, irritated - but she did not challenge him. So of course she had agreed to his demands, as she was wont to do, sitting in subservient silence, watching his irate figure out of the corners of her eyes. He had commanded, and she would obey. ‘Simon says’... She grimaces. When had that childhood game become reality?

She skirts the low building until she finds what she’s looking for. Shivering, she pulls open the toilet door and slips inside. She stands motionless for a moment, blowing on her tingling hands, grateful for the refuge from the wind. The bathroom is still. Damp and neglect echo off the yellowing walls; the mute dripping of a single tap draws her eyes. Overhead, dull lights illuminate the generic white bathroom tiles bordered with grime. She walks over to a sink and places her hands upon either side of it, looking down into the dirty basin. Squeezing her eyes shut, she breathes deeply. A spasm flickers across her face as, for the first time that night, her veneer of cold indifference is fractured by a sliver of emotion. A slight gasp escapes her and she grips the edge of the sink tighter, as if to quell the rising feelings inside of her. She can imagine Simon’s face if he saw her like this: his handsome features curled into a sneer, his dark eyes twinkling malevolently at this sign of weakness. His voice, full of contempt, laughing and jeering - oh, God, Bella, don’t make me detest you.

She composes herself and looks up. For the first time, she realizes she is not alone: not far from her a young woman stands. She stares, and the other woman stares back, dark pockets under her light brown eyes, face pale as plaster. She is really no older than a girl - her build thin, her mousy hair unkempt and greasy - yet in her youthful features there is a faint trace of anger, perceptible in the subtle furrow of the brow and hostile gleam of the eyes. Her fingernails, long and dirty, are rimmed in brown grime in a manner not unlike that of the bathroom tiles. The outline of a stain can just be made out on her black shirt. This girl is unhappy, Bella perceives. She is disillusioned with life.
They study each other under the dingy lights, two young women alone in a public toilet.

The girl moves towards a soap dispenser and pumps it once, so that the pearly white soap pools into her palm. A spurt of water gushes from the tap into the sink and into the silence. Bella’s eyes are drawn to the other girl’s hands, covered by a film of bubbles. She watches as the soap forms a foamy lather, as the girl scrubs her fingernails against her palms. She watches as the water changes colour, dyed pink from dried blood. As she looks into the girl’s eyes, the realization of what this girl has done overwhelms her in the entirety of its horror. The girl pumps the dispenser again and again, scrubbing and clawing at her hands so that livid scratch marks appear. The girl’s brown eyes bore into hers.

Bella dries her hands on the back of her jacket and steps away from the sink, taking a last look in the mirror before stealing out the door, leaving her reflection behind.

Walking back towards the car, the possibility of escape, however slim, lures her with such intensity that for a second it feels as if she can’t resist the pull - no more than two magnets can resist attraction. But of course it would be impossible: she was senseless to even consider it. Simon would know, with some vile telepathic connection, what she had done. The temptation vanishes as quickly as her breath on the air. The petrol station is swallowed into the darkness.

“I was just about to leave,” he says abruptly as she reaches the car. “Sorry,” she replies automatically. They climb in, doors slamming shut, engine growing to life. “I checked the boot while you were gone,” he tells her as they slide onto the freeway. She makes a noise with her throat, meant to imply interest, but her insides have gone numb. She stares out the windscreen, gaze fixed on the indiscernible horizon. He glances at her, a fiendish flicker in his eyes. “It was a pain to have to deal with the brother. But the delivery will go smoothly: she’s still unconscious.”

Hannah Kang Wolter
Year 11
The Time-Keeper

Watching time is a pleasure of mine,
Observing ticks and tocks drip off the clock,
But I am not the spider of a web so fine,
It is He that arrives without even a knock.

He pulls the threads of tomorrow,
And He orders the hours of today,
He creates storms of sorrow,
And He lets the scars of the past fade away.

I have lived a thousand lives,
And I have died a thousand deaths,
Yet my vision is still blurred,
As to what will come next.

So live each day as if it is your last,
Live in the moment and learn from the past,
But a single word of caution from me,
Time waits for no-one, no man,
But He.

Advitha Vasudevan
Year 9
Every person I’ve ever met or loved or talked to or kissed or said thank you to was reduced to a miniscule dot on the Earth as I floated miles above it. From where I was, our planet was just a hole ripped in the universe and filled with quiet blue vitality – the edges were hazy and unclear. The whole thing was spilling over with an indescribable meaninglessness. The surrounding emptiness was studded with pinpricks of light - stars, embedded in clouds of deep blue and purple gas.

This feeling of insignificance came to me in waves whilst I was in Space; a great appreciation for the scale of the universe followed by an immediate pull of dread in my stomach. Sometimes I would forget who I was when I looked out of the station window at whatever stars I could see. I always felt as if I didn’t really exist when I watched the sun’s light wrap itself around the Earth, turning its dark edges into a glowing orange horizon. I could see that what my existence meant to me was futile when faced with something so much more.

After months of staring into the black emptiness of the universe surrounding the space station and gazing through the Earth’s clouds to where I guessed my home to be, I was overwhelmed by a strong feeling of belonging when we started our return. I knew I was meant to be down there. It seemed to me in that moment as though all the conflicts and struggles ever played out on the green expanses I could glimpse below were suddenly erased.

It is difficult to describe homesickness when you’re nowhere near home.

Rachel Jung
Year 11
Almost Midnight

Almost Midnight,
Lying in luxurious laundered linen,
Mirrors reflecting safe smiles while
Orange street lamps flicker over
Sleepless strangers studying the stars,
Tightly tucked in cardboard.

Meagre hands outstretched as
Icy fingers clasp coins tossed
Downwards in silence.
Nightmares invade our dainty dreams as the
Innocent homeless are
Guilty of
Haunting us,
Till we make things right.

Claudia Whaites
Year 11
The Middle School

The opening extract of ‘The Truth’

There’s not a single cloud in the sky.

A glowing medallion dazzles, a melting pot of orange, yellow and red. Mountains stand proudly against the backdrop of the clear, cerulean sky, their hillsides enveloped by tall trees. Fields lie on either side of the narrow road, stretching endlessly across the vast terrain like a soft, thick blanket, the wet grass glistening in the sun like jewels.

I’ve never seen a place more beautiful in my whole life; I have to pinch myself to convince myself that I’m not dreaming.

It’s August 13th, 1972. It’s a scorching day in the Tay Ninh province in Vietnam and I’m driving a small white Honda that I rented at the airport. I was sent to Vietnam by my newspaper company to take pictures of this war-torn country. I’m meant to be following the South Vietnamese and American soldiers like the rest of the team today, but I’m taking a break from it all. I want to see the beauty of this country instead of its ruin. Being a photographer here is pretty dangerous; since we move around with soldiers, we can be caught up in a shootout or a bomb attack at any time. It is a great relief to spend a whole day actually feeling like I’m not going to die.

Passing a rundown sign on the side of the road that says, ‘Trang Bang Village’, I spot an outline of small houses on the hazy horizon, their pointy roofs protruding from the flat landscape. I pull over and climb out of my small vehicle to gaze at the view around me; I have to take a picture of this serene and bucolic place. I reach in to the passenger seat to fish out my Canon SP, a new edition that had just been released in the US. As I walk to the front of the car and raise the camera, I hear a shrill whistling sound pierce the silence.

Suddenly, I hear an almighty boom and I am thrown off my feet as the ground shakes violently. My camera flies out of the clasp of my hand as I slam against the tarmac.

My head throbs excruciatingly. I try to push myself off the ground but my vision is completely blurred and I’m overcome with a wave of nausea. My surroundings are spinning around me. I feel something wet and sticky on my head; scarlet liquid trickles down my scalp and cheek like a tear, falling onto the black tarmac. My forehead is also badly grazed. As I slowly stand up, I realise that my camera is nowhere to be seen. I frantically inspect the space around me when a glimmer of silver suddenly reflects into my eye. I spot the camera lying in the luscious green
of the rice field just beside the road. I scramble to pick it up, turning it around in my bloody, dirtied hands to examine it vigilantly. Please, please, I beg, as I slowly remove the circle lens cover. Please don’t be broken…

I breathe a sigh of relief as I find that the lens hasn’t been scratched.

As I look up towards the village, a huge ball of varicolored fire belches upward, leaving a towering column of smoke rising above the annihilated village, obscuring the beautiful cocktail-blue of the sky. The clouds twist, writhe and change shape like a snake, also belching flame. The area around me darkens to grey, the large, dense pillows of ash blotting out the gold of the sun.

All I can think of is getting out of there. I clamber into the driver’s seat of my car and twist the key to start the engine. I step on the accelerator and turn the steering wheel around when I suddenly hear a series of deafening screams coming from the direction of the village. I squint towards the source of the sound and spot a group of young children running towards me on the road, screaming and shouting in Vietnamese.

Survivors.

I hastily push open the door of my vehicle and sprint towards them, my camera hanging around my neck.

A group of soldiers follow behind the group of children; they’re running at first but slow down as they see me; American or Vietnamese, I can’t tell. They must have been soldiers patrolling the area. Running in the middle of the group of children is a young Vietnamese girl shrieking at the top of her lungs. As she nears me I realise that she’s stark naked, which makes her look even more frightened, vulnerable and frail. Subconsciously my hand reaches for my camera, but I hesitate. Would it be right to take such a picture? A picture filled with such suffering and pain? Yet I can’t resist. I want to show the entire world how horrific war is and confront them with the truth. I raise the camera to my left eye, gaze through the viewfinder and move my forefinger to the top of the shutter button…

Click.

Ellie Price
Year 10

Inspired by Nick Ut’s Pulitzer prize winning photograph: ‘Napalm Girl’
Footprints

The broken paddock gate stood beneath towering mountains clouded in a heavy mist. The individual blades of grass held the burden of the fresh morning’s dew, while the struggling faraway sun fought to pass through the thick blanket of cloud, which painted the sky into a canvas of swirling, endless greys.

A slight flow of water trickled weakly through the undulating landscape, lacking purpose and vigour. A pattering of droplets began to echo, reverberating off steep hillsides, providing an almost comforting interruption to the loud, lonely silence. In the absence of trees, no birds brightened the quiet of the hills with a mellifluous chorus of song, although several feathers strewn under a dying bush sung memories of life before.

No wind dared to whistle through the isolated hills in fear of breaking the still sinister serenity. But, still the dying leaves of the shrubbery rustled, shaking in discomfort. The bitter cold forced a harsh frost onto the deserted meadow, so the crunch of footsteps would be heard, if ever feet did venture there again.

A solitary creak lingered in the air for a while after the broken paddock gate swung forth from no apparent force. It stood steady, yet was a woeful sight, severely aged by the hostile climate, yearning to be once again pushed by something other than the brief whisper of a gust of wind. It remembered families with picnic baskets, sandwiches, hoops and balls. The distant laughs of games and swinging plaits in the breeze. Now kites were replaced with clouds and blankets replaced with dew. Those last footprints, stepping away into the mountains, had faded into nothing, and were never to return.

Theo Duke
Year 9
Crow

It hurts. Perhaps I let it hurt more than I should, perhaps I should rise above their hatred and smile, yet with every step the sickening agony rises and my pride is marred, as each abhorrent voice is met with praise. In the sea of power there’s talk of race and hatred and walls that leak dreams of a free land. I can hear their whispers too; they shouldn’t be that loud.

They hold it close, that all men are created equal. But when I spread my wings and fly, I am not a dove but a crow, my dark skin a shadow on the horizon. So effortlessly they say that there is nothing to fear but fear itself. Perhaps it is lucky that they can’t see the fear written so clearly across my skin, in purples and blues, that they can’t see the brands left by someone who took my grace as an invitation. Only when I’m in a necklace of rope will they be happy.

I wish I could say I will not back down. A dream ago perhaps I could have, but confidence is bitter in a suppressed mouth. The dream of a nation will not be granted to me; a dream of freedom is not the dream I am allowed. Maybe when my body hangs from a tree they will hear my voice.

A thousand words or one word, would it make a difference? One glance, one movement, to tell me you understand my pain. To know you will stand with me. The most earnest words are not heard, they are felt. And yet, I do not feel a thing.

Naomi Jennings
Year 10

‘Southern trees bear a strange fruit’
Inspired by Billy Holiday’s version of Strange Fruit
An extract from ‘One Last Thing’

The first few weeks at der Käfig were bearable. I came with my sister, told we had been specially chosen by him, told we would be honoured for being the way we were. When the reality of the situation unfolded, we cursed and screamed at our stupidity. How could we have been so foolish, thinking that anyone could appreciate what we had? His scientists were no different from the children at school who had called us monsters and tried to tear us apart, but now at least we saw an end to the pain. We were part of his big project, the manifestation of his pain with a desperate thirst for revenge. But that’s the thing, you see, he was wrong. No-one forced the politicians to sign that treaty, no-one was more responsible than the man who put pen to paper to commit his people to an era of penance for a war they did not create. But he was never going to accept that. No, they would never admit that the basis of their whole movement, the ideal and dream of their great leader, was a lie.

Their search for proof was never-ending. They snatched us, and many more, from homes, hospitals, orphanages, desperate to show that we were toxic, inhuman, things to be purged, not fit for this world. The others were lucky. Most whom he classed as ‘disabled’ were sent to the chambers. I would call that merciful, but possibly I am warped by my own experiences - the horror of that first experiment, the sensation of glowing, the feeling that one by one, every nerve in my body was being hotwired. We were measured, stretched and plugged into monstrous machines that heaved and groaned with every new calculation. Still, they found nothing. Then came the needles, the drugs, the screaming. What foul substances poisoned my body in those months? With each new injection, our screams grew stronger, until they were satisfied that we truly felt the pain. My sister was my lifeline, a fragile thread of hope in the great tapestry of our pain. Maybe we were lucky because we were the only ones who truly had something to live for. People used to joke that we were ‘joined at the hip’ - we did everything together. Then they met us. They didn’t joke anymore when they saw that we were joined by far more than our hips.

“Until they find a way to separate us, they will not find a way to prove we are worthless. We will always be priceless to each other”, I sought to reassure my sister. Perhaps they had always intended to do this, perhaps they were becoming more reckless, or perhaps some poor wretch was desperate to succeed and save his wife and children from his wrath.
It’s never the why that matters though, is it? It’s the how. I will tell you how. With a knife, a cloth, some stitches and not an ounce of anesthetic. That’s how they separated us, severing our souls as they did so. I watched my sister deteriorate in the next bed, day after day, week after week, until I had no love left to give, and no sorrow left to feel. I stopped speaking his name; in fact, I stopped speaking at all.

Gabriella FitzGerald
Year 11

Responsibility

As you grow older,
You collect a library,
Volumes of wrong that you commit,
Bound not by tough leather
But soft human skin.
Capable of guilt, regret,
They stack up on your soul,
Hidden even in the folds
Of the hands
Which you clench.
Your memory starts to stir,
You remain tense,
Carrying the heavy weight;
None of us are innocent.

Maya Remoy
Year 11
With Posterity

I am trying to assign a colour to a realm of scorching whites,
Where milky shadows dwell on walls
And linger before sunsets –

Remembering is a craft.

A moment begins to pulse somewhere –
Breathing sighs, and softened cries,
And nestles itself among the dust of heavy curtain folds.

I am trying to assign, a shade to the shadow,
That rests upon a beige-smacked wall,
Whose faint stale outlines blur and seize
The memory –
And all its sallow halls.

Halls whose walls are now opaque and smell of wood and rain.

It feels the way that iron tastes –
That same metallic needle sting that splits the tongue in two.

Remembering is a craft –

To pinpoint
The crest of a wave, as it lulls and swells
Into dissolution.

Herin Han
Upper Sixth
Kind days

Our days are not kind days.
They are not
Aligned planets or freedom celebrations
Or Sundays.

They are hide-and-seek in
White Oxfords and rayon ties,
Noose-knotted around our necks
(When our mothers tied them).

They are calloused hands and
Christened (glistened) foreheads,
When we learnt to talk too early /
too late / enough.

They are ashy midday moons,
At the moment we watched the sun rise
And set, in one (hour-like
Glimpsed) lifetime.

Our near-death flash of life
Was Pluto’s grasp at recognition -
Remembered for the small moments
But never our kind days.

Sophie Littlewood
Lower Sixth
Je t’adior (ou peut-être non)

Chanel in 2.55 or just travelling Coach?
Even Nars can’t cover those bags under your eyes.
Fashion week fatigue?
Shame, darling.
Just one bout of flu from your goal weight, too.

But,
I must ask -

Anna, why can I not wear fur in summer?
I’ll wear whatever I want to.
Karl, why do you glamourize starvation?
Fashion is not the healthiest motivation for losing weight.
Coco, how can your scent linger so?
No 5 is not the only number in the world.
Chance is, Mademoiselle, I prefer the others.
Marc, why incessantly do you use khaki and camo?
I can’t see the models on your runway.
Marc by Marc by MJ by Jacobs by Marc Jacobs,
blah.

Kate, you’re smoking yourself to death.
But how terribly in Vogue.
Is this some kind of other world?
J’adior is not legitimate French.
Ghesquiere, are you trying to ruin Louis?
Nobody appreciates a warped version of a classic.
And Dior did you see what Raf did to you?
Taking your ideas and making them his own?
It’s a modern form of traditional plagiarism.
An engagement ring is not to ‘be returned to Tiffany’s’.
But it’s a modern form of glamour,
Divorce.
Ralph, why do you support America’s faux riche?
Polo is an English game.
And when did eyebrows become so important anyway?
Cara, they’re practically living beings.
Red lipstick you’re a classic statement.
I’m a strong independent woman,
But why do you connote prostitution?
It’s slept-in chic (off the pavements of Paris).
Cartier is not the holy grail,
But Hermès might be.
I’ll eat only Anya’s bourbon.
Fashion is the healthiest motivation for losing weight, after all.

Oh Karl,
I really should return my heart to Tiffany’s.
What is true love, anyway?
Diamonds, I suppose.

Caragh Taylor
Lower Sixth

‘America I have given you all and now I am nothing.’
Inspired by Allen Ginsberg’s America
The War between Sheep and Flower

‘The Rose’s thorn is but a frivolity.’
It was said to the little princess.
For what use is thorn, when faced with Sheep?
What power does it possess?

‘The Flower is weak, naïve and fragile.’
The little princess looked confused.
For the thorn is merely its armour of spite,
By the Sheep easily bruised.

The little princess inspected the floret,
The flock of its reach far extended,
The princess had noticed the Rose’s
Disguise,
The source that it defended.

The little princess drew a different view
Of the Flowers that fervidly grew,
For the thorn is sharp it will leave its mark
When shot into sheep heart sinew.

Laetitia Moon
Upper Sixth

Inspired by Chapter 7 of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s
The Little Prince
A Love Letter from an Economist

Forgive my straightforward style of writing:
The Arts are not my cup of tea.
But for your smile my demand is inelastic,
As is my supply of verse in praise of you.

We’re far apart, with obstacles between us,
Yet even on the polar sides of Earth,
Each Friday we look down on the same pages,
And skim-read through the same ‘Economist’.

Our fates cross like supply-demand curves,
Eternal equilibrium in the market,
Yet it’s easier to part minimum wages
And unemployment, than to take you from my heart.

Sophie Shyfrin
Lower Sixth
Pearl buttons

A cardigan - knitted from a soft wool,
Half cashmere, part merino,
Part something else,
Part new.

It started out as a birthday present,
But each stitch took her
Further and further away.
February passed,
As did March, April, May.
And soon, it was too warm -
Too sunny,
So the cardigan was put away.

As ice began to creep
And the flowers went to sleep,
The cardigan came out again.
This time - more of a jacket,
Maybe for somebody else?
Nobody really wears knitted things anymore.

Once again the process halted.
Something, someone,
Wasn’t quite right.
The wool wasn’t in stock,
The pattern wasn’t in fashion,
She lacked all the necessary passion.
As she drifted along the sand,
Much like the driftwood and the glass,
She remembered
And she knew,
The only thing she had to do.
She stopped and stared,
Admiring the spit spit spray
of the waves
of the waves
of the blue,

She picked it up,
And then she knew.

Now I wear it with pride,
With confidence and beauty,
I wear my black knitted cardigan
Although it fits quite loosely -
And I close my eyes and I smell the sea
And hear my pearl buttons calling me.

Kate Arkwright
Upper Sixth
The Last of Six

‘My hands are ordained to touch crowns and sceptres.’
I often wonder how many believe I actually said that.
In many ways, I wish I had,
But I did not kid myself with frivolous fantasies, especially as a child.

Edification.

Mother told me I was ‘graced’ with my Dear godmother’s name – how funny.
I may not have possessed the sacred womb of Darling Jane,
but to be linked to that woman, hung out to dry while The Coppernose
flounced around in yellow with the newer, prettier object of his lust.

Embarrassment.

Divorced, Beheaded, Died –
Divorced, Beheaded, Survived.
A fun mnemonic used to remember my entire existence.
I’ve never liked the word – as if I only ‘survived’ because he didn’t,
we survived together.

Patience.

My mother was Green and my father Parr.
I tried so hard to live my life by that.
‘Just stick to the green and stay under par’ – that’s the way to win.
But my husbands kept dying!

Inconvenience.

My brain seems to be getting confused…
Is Thomas putting something in my drink? No, no, no,
Must just be the fever, ‘childbed fever’ – how funny.
My beautiful Mary is projected on the inside of my eyelids, smiling.

Survived.

Maybe not.

Tabbi Gault
Lower Sixth
Inspired by Carol Ann Duffy’s, ‘The World’s Wife’
Katharine Parre
Affirmation

Meagre lights prick the fabric of the night
Obscured by fluorescent amber mist,
Constructed so we’d never go amiss
I lived my life following those born bright
Ignorant heralds from god-knows what heights,
Valiantly traversing to our earth’s midst
Silent echoes of what no more persists;
To die as our steadfast guides was their plight
- but mine is to relish pure existence.
So maybe I should live my life apart
From false halogen prophets in the street,
Or lonely unattainable brilliance.
Instead, live by the pounding of my heart
And the non-stop pacing of my feet.

Miranda Zhang
Upper Sixth
Parallels

Tonight I sit on my bedroom floor and read about parallel universes
(maybe it’s that
you’re 9412 miles away
but) I thought this would make you feel close somehow, I don’t know.

Except now I do know

There is a world where there is no us,
And maybe it is because I am not me and you are not you
(insofar as our experiences are us) and I can accept that,

But there are half a dozen worlds where we pass in the street.
Sometimes we know each other,
But more often,
Locked in our little daily tragedies,
We don’t,
And all we have are the thoughts we have about strangers,
Crystalline in the second yet utterly unmemorable.

I don’t know if it is worse we never meet?
If by some strange act of chance we never have our time?

It’s all those choices I thought were insignificant,
They build up around us,
They push us together
And particles can only be combined in so many ways.
You know how in Cartesian physics
The trajectory of the world has a domino effect?
That’s this, that’s us,
We’re part of this.

Izzy Ormonde
Upper Sixth