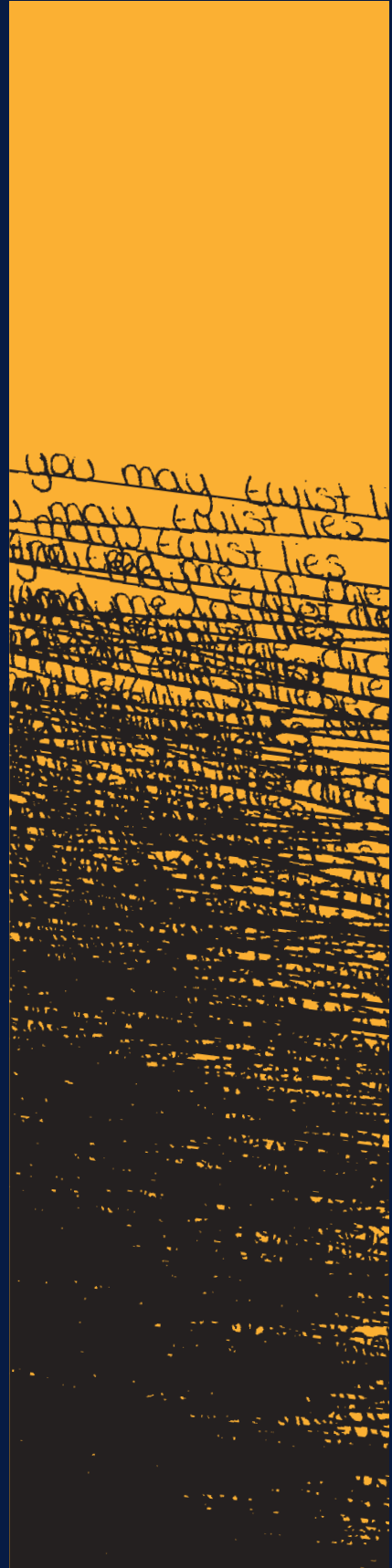
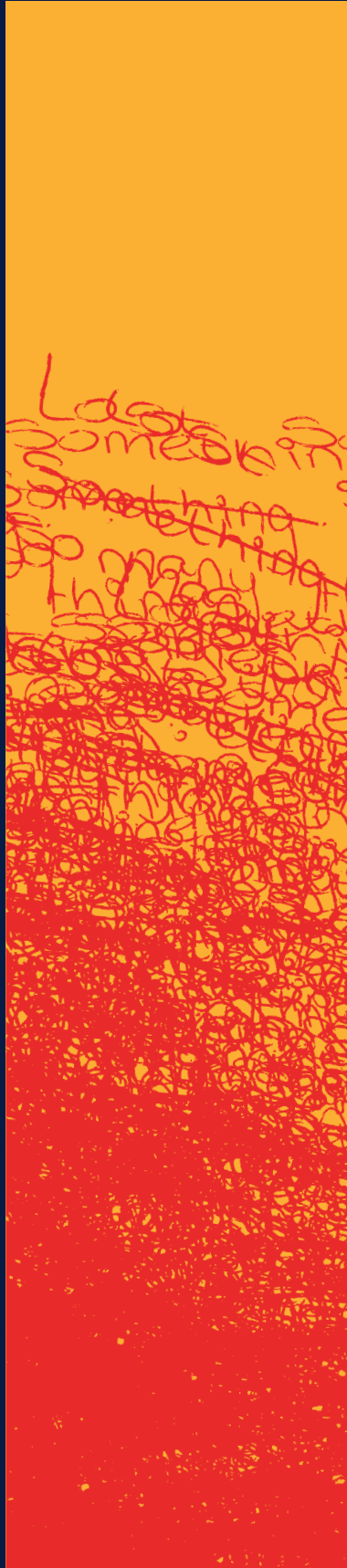


# The Litmus In Common





# The Litmus In Common

Edited by

**Terri-Leigh Riley**

with a Foreword by

**Ali Smith**

## **Editorial note**

The authors were free to choose how they wanted to be identified in this book, with the option to include any of the following: first name or full name, pen name, year group, age, school, and hometown. Students from over 50 different schools are represented from many different parts of the UK. All students who submitted work and agreed to be published are included in this collection, with every participating student receiving two free copies of the book.



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Graphic design

**John McGill**

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The teachers and students who took part in the initial Litmus creative writing workshops were invaluable to the programme; their enthusiasm proved the potential of The Litmus when the project was still in its early stages. Thank you especially to Rachel Patman at Ken Stimpson Community School, Charlotte Richer at Cherwell School, and Liz McEwan at St Joseph's Academy.

We were excited to build a team of Trinity student Litmus volunteers, which began with Jackie Kay's incredible introduction to creative writing work in schools. While Lara Jenkin, Chris Scott and Grace Glevey made it to schools before lockdown, we are equally grateful to Jack Wiltshire, Maria Woodford, Parwana Fayyaz and Milly Yelf.

Many more people at Trinity College made this project what it is today. Fiona Holland, Paula Wolff, Lauren Brown and Lizzie Bowes have supported the project behind the scenes and Merry Smoothy, the Trinity College webmaster, created our wonderful website. I would also like to extend my thanks to John McGill for his excellent work on designing this book, transforming tentative ideas into such simple, striking designs.

Of course, it was Ali Smith who had this extraordinary vision of a nationwide school creative writing project, and made it come to life. Her careful attention to the voices of young people was the foundation of the project, and it is what unites and completes this year's Litmus in her foreword.

Above all, I'd like to thank every student who has submitted a piece of work to The Litmus; Ali perfectly sums up what you have achieved in the next few pages.

### **Terri-Leigh Riley**

The Litmus Project Coordinator,  
Trinity College, University of Cambridge

## Foreword

Ali Smith

Welcome to the first book publication of The Litmus.

We launched this project not very long ago, in late 2019 and early 2020. That we'd be in pandemic lockdown when most of the students were responding, well, it was unimaginable. As was any kind of lockdown, as was Covid-19, and as was the way in which the pandemic has simultaneously brought people together and emphasised massive inequalities and divisions locally, nationally and all across the world.

'Ask your students to respond creatively, in any way they like, to the phrase "in common"; we said in all our bright, pre-hindsight naivety.

In this brave new world, titling a written piece 'Being Alive' sends out a whole new range of resonance. Sukriti's piece of this name (pX) presents the conundrum very well. On the one hand, she says,

*You feel like the only person in the world.*

On the other,

*...you are not alone. You are never alone.*

Her 'Being Alive' celebrates a brave new commonality which in the UK took shape in people up and down the country standing together outside their houses, leaning together out of their windows on Thursday evenings clapping, yelling, making as much noise as they could in appreciation of the NHS. But this writer knows that the world beyond locality is also her life, and that she's its life, she knows a broader canvas, and she knows that political and national divisions aren't what being alive's about – so she pushes her analogy further: 'we are 7.8 billion hearts beating in-synch to create the complex rhythm of the world we move and live in, and even if you hide behind a thousand walls, that will never change.'

Talk about aliveness. What furious, energised, thoughtful and shining vitality there is in this first collection of work from young people, written at a time when unprecedented became a commonly used word and when the meanings of words like life and death have put unprecedented pressures on our individual and communal imaginations.

In common. Regardless of pandemic, the phrase itself made the writers and the artists conjure and question notions of division.

*Open your eyes*

one student writes (Emily Bickers, pX).

*There are undoubtedly some unpleasant things that we have 'in common'*

another says (Elizabeth, pX); they write about how divides are everywhere, how even the ubiquitous computer and phone screens are a kind of divide. The writers here address, repeatedly, the homogenisation and reduction of humanity by algorithm; a very fine essay about technology by Angela Ede (pX) is prescient:

*If we're not careful then we will become as lifeless as the algorithms perceive us to be...*

Lifeless? This book disproves the word with every page. Here are some of its responses plucked from the air at random. Class difference is dissolved via the light in the eyes of two people socially divided but brought together by loss (Tessa, pX). The passing-on of stories from older generations is understood by Laurence K (pX) for what it really means:

*For you gave us all our own stories,  
Since we sat and heard yours*

Enemies on a battlefield overcome the impossibility of dialogue simply by meeting (Maxwell, pX). The individuality of twins becomes an extra celebration of what they have in common (Emily, pX). And a toy balloon, of all things, has a voice and a life that outsoar expectations (Bunnie, pX).

What the pieces in this book have in common is imagination capable of that unexpected flight – and of granting destiny beyond expectation.

We could see as the submissions arrived that such imagination is at work, a generational imagination that questions everything: society, identity, language, form. The formal range of the submissions is constantly surprising. What students 'make' of classic texts makes old classics fizz with life and possibility. They unearth new poems in a paragraph of prose, and in one instance, one of my favourite art imaginings ever, Joshua goes beyond the given picture and gives roots and wholeness to a tree drawn by William Blake to illustrate his classic 'Tyger' (pX). Emily Young turns a mountain range into a dragon, and vice versa, giving her piece the title 'Imagination in common' (pX). And a story called 'Finally Awake' by Giulia Toffoli (pX) acts like a piece of classic novel then asks what we have 'in common' with the past, telling us in a compact and powerful form to wake to it, come to life, and never to be comatose to pasts or futures.

Of course, I have some favourite pieces. You'll have your own, too, when you read the book, and mine shift and change every time I do. Today one of my favourites is 'Opportunities' by Emma (pX). A visitor to many countries already in her life, she lists the top four things 'all humans have in common': all kids will want to play, regardless of what language they speak. Everybody is proud of a sports team and will want to know yours. Weather is worth going outside for, whatever it's like. And finally, this:

*Our instinct as humans to help in times  
of need.*

I also love 'I have not travelled' by Lani Wenda (pX), which turns what looks like a negative statement into an understanding of ourselves in the world on our own terms. Ava Rourke's story (pX) magics a deft narrative union out of a momentary fragment and in a meeting of different voices against all the odds, examining the way time can shift and a quite different world is made possible – just by saying the word hello to someone you don't yet know. Kiera Jayne's 'Just have fun, Kid' (pX) is an extraordinary authentic rendering of a voice that reassures.

Ayushmaan Sharma, in the poem called 'Before Anyone Else' (pX), unboxes us all:

*we are an interrelation that strays from the  
confines  
of the status quo or strata of inflexibilities  
... we embody  
the elixir of human good.*

And talking of boxes, the thoughtful box-graphic of Rozzie's 'In Common' (pX) unpacks itself round a picture of a person standing astonished, in awe and happiness, under a wide open sky.

What I've been most heartened by in reading this first collection of The Litmus project is the originality, the open-mindedness and the real groundedness that it reveals as a common quality among the students across the country, students responding to a theme, to a pandemic, and to what history is flinging at us all. It's summed up by Fiona Zeka in 'The Drawing Room' (pX) in her rejection of an 'exclusive society' and of the lonely and blinding room that exclusion suggests.



Meanwhile Esme Johnson's poem (pX), inspired by Roger McGough's 'The Sound Collector' and the sounds collected by students to illustrate the phrase 'in common', speaks directly to our time, and to the shock and the empathic nature of a brave new commonality:

*It's still common to hear ambulance sirens,  
It was always a common thing.*

*But the old me and I don't share something  
in common;  
She doesn't pray for the patient that  
siren brings.*

Something in history, and in the history we're living through, is making us new. Read the brilliant poem by Magdalena called 'Common Ghosts' (pX):

*rule britannia! my ghosts sing:  
rule the seas and  
the skies and  
the bones*

*my closet is so full  
of ghosts*

That's vision. That's understanding, for the past and the future.

All through this book there's a similar fearlessness and an energising celebration of the differences that make us who we are together; it acts like a kind of raised clenched fist, in a gesture of new and determined communality, as several pieces express an ancient and brand new solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement.

*Race is a social invention;  
racism is a social cataclysm*

Shanker Narayan writes (pX),

*Rationality and racism are mutually  
exclusive events. They cannot coexist.  
Different races, however, can.*

*...We need to promote immunity against  
racism, just as vaccines promote immunity  
against viruses.*

Beatriz (pX), whose narrator knows illness very personally, writes that:

*During this time of uncertainty where  
I perhaps feel more distant from everybody  
else than most, I prefer to think about all  
the things I have in common with teenagers  
my age or even just humanity as a whole  
and not my differences.*

So, what do we all have in common, then? Amelie, in a poem called 'You Had Nothing In Common' (pX), in which a young person addresses parents who are perhaps estranged, has a narrator who declares her self, her whole being, as what 'in common' means.

*Yet here I am.*

And here's Oscar, in a poem called 'Genes (pX)':

*So thank you Charles Darwin  
For leading us on a discovery  
That we are all in.*

But it's Laurence (pX) who says it most simply and clearly when he touches on the source – the genetics, if you will – of creativity, in his letter to a loved one.

*You make me write.*

Here's a book full of the writing life. It's only the first stirrings of a project, one which knows the importance of and the crucial life in the contemporaneous expressions of some of the young people of this country.

It gestures towards the future from an unprecedented present. It's full of heartening vision. It's a very good read.

## Introduction

Terri-Leigh Riley

Ali Smith first told me her plans for The Litmus over a cup of tea in her office at Trinity College, where I was working as a Schools Liaison Officer at the time. She described a writing collective for all school students, encouraging different forms of writing around a single theme. It was to be a 'litmus test' of students' responses to the words 'in common'.

As the programme developed, it became clear that this would also be a snapshot of the time of writing, when The Litmus programme and all our lives were shaped by historical events of the year 2020. For this reason, we have chosen to order the submissions chronologically (with one variant, noted below).

We began by offering Litmus creative writing workshops in schools, with the aim of training Trinity College student volunteers to do the same.

My main question was: could students be inspired in just one lesson to write something they'd be happy to publish?

This was answered definitively during our first ever Litmus visit, to Ken Stimpson Community School in Peterborough. A student using the pen name LLKD submitted our first piece entitled 'In Common' (pX), and quickly rattled off another three excellent poems on the spot. The students were engaged and excited to be published. I left with a packed folder of fantastic work from almost every student; Ali and I pored over the submissions with delight.

Having decided that writing workshops were to be an important part of the programme, Ali invited Jackie Kay, the 'Scots Makar' or National Poet of Scotland, to Trinity to talk to Litmus volunteers about her experiences of creative writing work in schools. Jackie talked us through years of school visits, told funny stories, and gave an abundance of advice, tips and activities.

Some pieces in this book were developed from workshop exercises. In every class, I gave each student a page of a torn up book, and their task was to find an interesting sentence by selecting certain words using 'black out art'. Next, the students were tasked with creating a poem using only words from another, trying to make it as different as possible from the original.

I was joined by Chris Scott, a Trinity College alumnus in English, in delivering a full day of workshops at Queen Katharine Academy in Peterborough, where Skye Dent created her brilliant poem 'I Lost Something' (pX) using Elizabeth Bishop's 'One Art'.

Having puzzled over restricted expressions, the students were then given complete freedom to write anything they wanted with the 'free write' exercise. We had everything from profound to hilarious. 'In Common. Hot and Cold' (pX) was written there and then in minutes and reads like poetry.

At The Cherwell School in Oxford, I was joined by Lara Jenkin, a third year Human, Social and Political Sciences student at Trinity, who designed an engaging activity in which the students would change form as they were writing. We had scripts morphing into poems morphing into stories and back again.

Some students worked on their pieces at home and entered them later in the year, such as Cian Huckins, also known as Urnix who wrote the insightful poem, 'When the Autistic Mind Perceives the Normal World' (pX). Likewise, Isabella Armour attended a workshop at St Joseph's Catholic Academy in South Tyneside, and later submitted an excellent piece called 'Kairos' (pX) about a chance meeting during World War II.

There was such a warm and supportive atmosphere in these classes; the students read their work out to their peers, and the whole class applauded after each reading. It was a real joy. As these submissions have their own unique style, quite different from those we received online and print here in their chronological order, we have chosen to sprinkle these handmade pieces throughout the book for a more varied read. Having tested ideas, trained volunteers and run some writing workshops, I settled on mid-March for the big Litmus school tour, when the school term overlapped with the Cambridge holidays. We were due to reach around 500 students, with visits booked across the UK. First year English Trinity student, Jack Wiltshire, had designed a workshop around art that we were due to deliver at his former school in Leicester at the end of March.

As the beginning of the tour neared, excitement for the visit started turning into panic. Covid-19 had gone from a vague concern to an imminent threat. The news in Italy was frightening. Cancellations from schools and volunteers were trickling in. #CloseUKschools was trending on Twitter.

Our first visit was to a school in London booked for the 17 March. After much deliberating, I wrote an email to say I was still running the workshop. I hovered over 'send', but just couldn't click. I would be travelling by public transport across the country, from school to school, during a global pandemic. I cancelled all remaining school visits, and the UK entered lockdown at the beginning of what would have been the second week.

Some students whose visits were cancelled submitted work to the programme independently. Abigail Akinyemi was due to work with us at Churchill Community College in North Tyneside, but didn't get a chance. Her powerful short story, 'Burned by the Flames' (pX), captures the horror and injustice faced by asylum seekers in the UK.

After the dust had started to settle on our new, strange way of life, Ali wrote a letter to the students about writing their lockdown experiences. We were flooded with responses in all different forms. Esme Johnson's beautiful poem, 'The World We Live in Now' (pX), explores our changed lives through sounds, and how the pandemic not only transformed what it is 'common' to hear, but also our responses. 'Collective Unconsciousness' by Will Cannon (pX) depicts a dystopian world dominated by a mysterious virus.

Students were given the freedom to choose how they wanted to be identified in the book. Though many chose not to include their school or hometown, it may suffice to say that over 50 schools are represented in this book, from every corner of the UK.

On the 25 May 2020, four police officers in Minnesota, USA, publicly murdered George Floyd. Emblematic of centuries of systemic racism, Floyd's death reignited the Black Lives Matter movement of anti-racist protest.

As protests swept across the globe, the student submissions started to speak with urgency, anger and impatience for justice, such as Grace's piece, 'I'm Not a Threat' (pX). 'In Common' by Elinor Hurry (pX) is a gut-wrenching anti-racist poem that captures the spirit of what 2020 has been so far, with a focus on what we have 'in common'.

The Litmus closed for new submissions in June. We have had art, poems, stories and essays; scientific writing about genes, DNA, and common humanity; careful analysis and heartfelt descriptions. I have laughed, cried and learned so much from these many and varied pieces. There are pieces that I can't scroll past without reading again, like Cameron's 'Marsupial' (pX) and Jennifer Evans' 'Isolation In Common' (pX).

When Ali wrote in her first letter, 'You're the future. Write about what it feels like to be in the present,' I never imagined how important that thought would become. This fact, that these sensitive, intelligent, passionate young writers are the future, has been an enduring source of hope for me throughout this year. I believe the same will be true for everyone who has come across The Litmus page and who takes the time to read the work in this book.

## Letter to Teachers

Ali Smith

---

Dear teacher,

Do you have students between the year groups 8 and 13 who are keen writers? Fiction, non-fiction, poetry, budding comic book writers/graphic novelists/bloggers? Any form at all?

I'm Ali Smith, I'm a novelist and short story writer. I live in Cambridge and I've recently taken a two-year creative writing fellowship at Trinity College here. While I'm on this fellowship, I'm working with the college's School Liaison team to launch a nationwide writing project for school students: THE LITMUS.

We'll publish, in an online display, the writing that your students send to us at The Litmus. At the end of the academic year, we'll invite these writers (plus teacher or parent) to come and celebrate with us here in person at a one day festival attended by a host of novelists, poets, writers.

This first year of The Litmus, we're inviting work round a theme. How do your students respond when they hear the words in common?

If you have any students who like writing or want to write, and who'd like to see their work published, please give them the message below. It'd be a pleasure and a privilege to host their writing at The Litmus. We'd like very much to include and feature work from your school.

Very best wishes to you and your students, and thank you very much for reading this.

Ali Smith

## Call for Submissions

Ali Smith

### THE LITMUS : WRITING IN COMMON

Are you a writer?

Do you want to write?

If YES: good. Continue reading this message.

Are you interested in writing fiction, or non-fiction, or poetry, or maybe graphic novel writing, or blog writing – or writing and storytelling in any shape or form you like?

If NO, then this invite isn't for you. Pass it on to someone who wants to write and would like to be published.

If YES: Good. Continue reading this message.

What comes into your head when you hear or read or think about these two words: IN COMMON?

Anything? Something just did. Something always happens, when words get put together. Even just two words that look like they've got nothing much in common, like the word in and the word common.

The Litmus is a new writing initiative for UK-wide school students. We're looking for student writing of every sort, and this year we're inviting submissions which consider, in any way you like, the phrase: in common.

Write down what happens when you hear these words. Make something of them. Send us what you write or make, we'll publish it in our online magazine, and you'll become part of a writing collective like no other, a collective that reaches all across the UK and will act as a touchstone for readers interested in what your generation is doing and writing right now – because you're the people about to inherit the planet, make it your own, and make your own story and history happen.

Put the words together. We'll be proud to publish you.

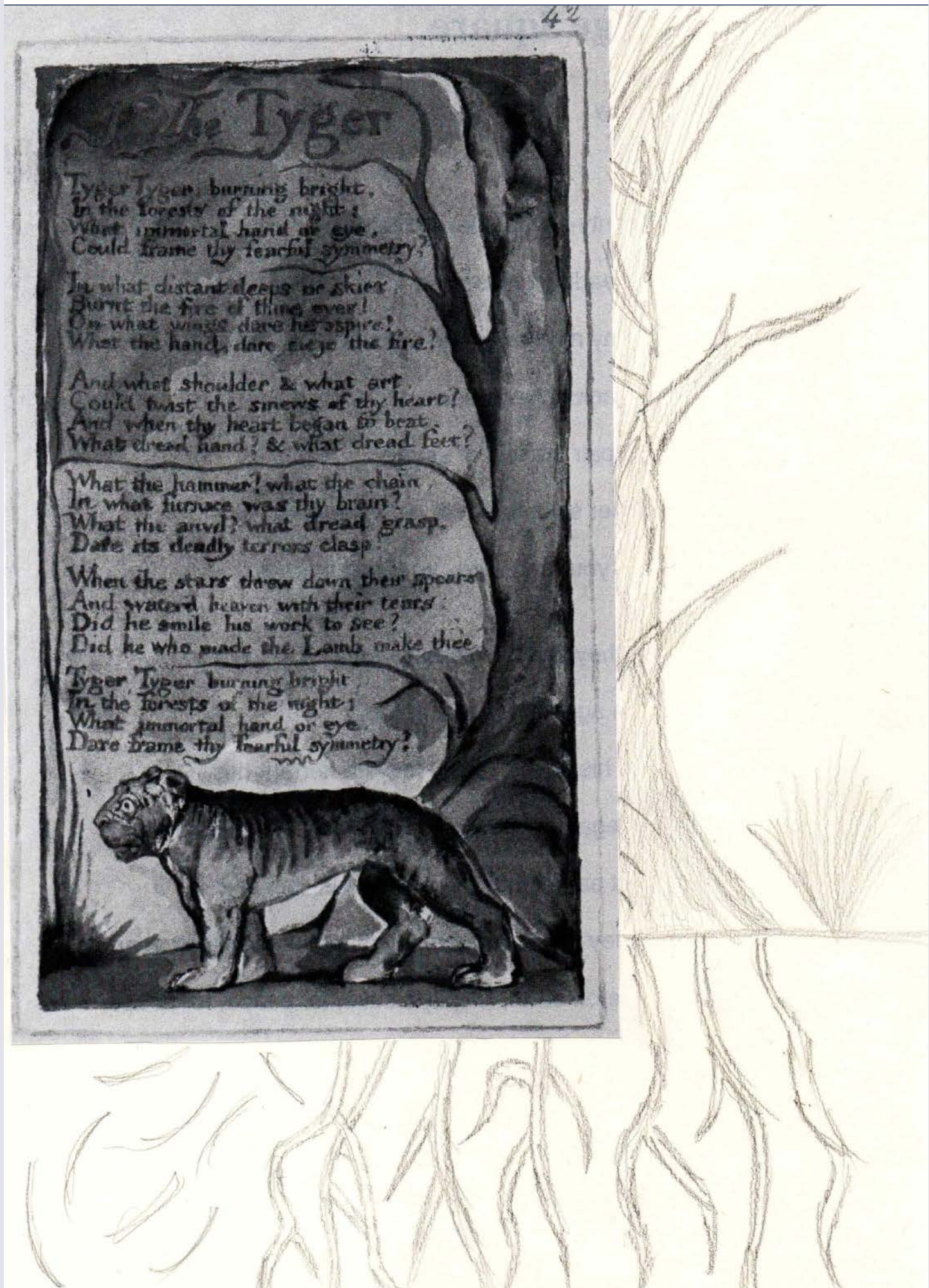
You're the future. Write about what it feels like to be in the present. Write about what we have in common. Send what you write to us.

Be part of The Litmus.



# The Tyger

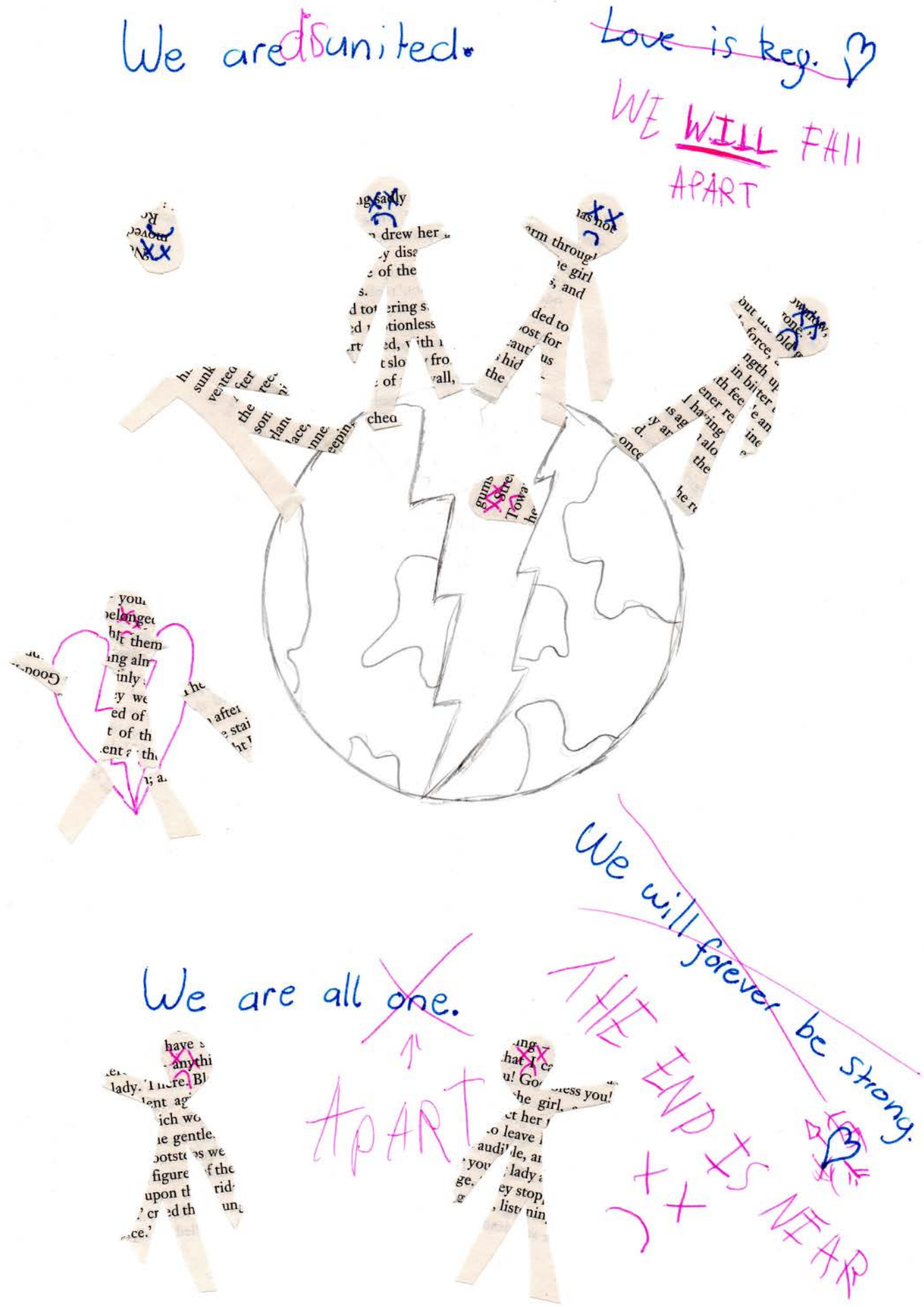
by Joshua





# Disunited

by Charlie Simpson, 13, from Jarrow, South Tyneside



## Divided

by Emily Bickers, 16

You're trying to tell me  
we have something in common?

A sense of unity?

In this?

A world divided  
between north and south and east and west,  
rich and poor,  
yes and no,  
white and black,  
and all the shades of grey in between.

A world divided  
between those who have love  
those who have nothing  
those who have everything.

Commonness is meant to be unity.

How can we be unified when  
the man down the street hates women  
in headscarves and your neighbour  
is desperately looking for the child  
she once lost?

Divided between  
roads and streets and  
walls and doors and screens.

Pen no longer touches paper.

Eyes never meet.

Lips never kiss.

The painter's hand marks well  
the impression of a race left behind.

Consumed by shadows.

Separated by the  
light and the dark  
the white and the black  
refusing to accept  
the multitude of shades of colour in between  
the life willing to give  
and the life already lost.

Open your eyes,  
see the painter's hand.

See the whirlwind of  
colours and shapes dance and splash  
along the canvas with  
no white dotted line down the middle.

Free.

I refuse to believe  
we are a common people  
until we are  
what the painter can paint.

## The Phrase 'In Common' Has a Deeper Meaning Than You'd Think

by Rachel Wade

What do we have in common? We both have eyes, ears, lips and nose. We both think – we've likely thought about what to eat or say. We both have felt pain in our lives, some more than others. However that's obvious. As humans, of course we were all born with common characteristics. We all can think and feel, we all can touch a table and sit on a chair.

Commonality is more complex, though. Perhaps you're capable to reach the top of a steep hill, but another may not be. You may love to read, but another person could despise walking into a bookstore. Recall when your common interests clashed with someone else's. Possibly you want a job, along with 20 other people. Only one position is open. Commonality can turn into competition, therefore creating a toxic sense of disregard for the wellbeing of others.

Imagine you're at a table. 4 other people are at the same table. All have a love for baking in common. You're not fighting for a job, you're simply asked to discuss baking. Sharing common interests can be nice initially, and everyone should feel some relatability and worthiness.

However the chances of one person to show off is high. They begin to think they bake the best cakes in the country, or have the best icing technique. Another person suddenly disagrees, declaring they're the better baker. In a domino effect, everybody feels as though they must be superior. Sharing interests can increase ego; increased ego leads to jealousy. In that moment, the common interest you shared of baking is no longer a thing of pleasure, but the root of conflict and competition.

We're led to the deeper question. Could having things in common be the reason for global conflict? Everybody wants to save our ecosystems, yet because everyone shares that same wish, feeling lazy about recycling occurs. On a train journey, someone may have pristine morals, but the person sitting next to them could be plotting a crime. They still have things in common. They both have eyes, ears, lips and nose. They both think, feel and touch. However what exactly they think, feel and touch will completely change everything.

Having thoughts in common is vital for peace. Perhaps if we came together with the same want for change. What if all billionaires agreed on spending money on charities rather than lavish cars? What if criminals agreed on becoming people with good morals? What if, throughout history, religions agreed on respect and compassion for one another? What if countries shared a common interest in land, yet instead of fighting for possession, they agreed to share this interest? The list is endless; too long. We tend to be so caught up with our personal interests, we neglect others with that same interest in common.

Interests in common with others is admirable. It's exactly how we respond and act towards that fact that can either result in turmoil or enjoyment. Hopefully, the latter will become more common.



## When the Autistic Mind Perceives the Normal World

by Cian Huckins/Urnix, 16, Year 11, Cherwell School, Oxford

Life is strange.

Strange is life.

Yet only we, can understand how it truly feels to be labelled like plastic,  
before we have the chance to interact with them.

They always conform to social barriers. We break them.

They always conform to what others deem 'acceptable'. We break them.

They always conform to blending with the crowd. We break them.

They feel like we are outcasts, but we feel like they are outcasts.

Our world cannot connect to theirs, and their world cannot connect to ours.

We are coated with skin, they are coated with skin.

Yet our world, is clouded by their judgement.

Let our abstract figures, stand out, from their ubiquitous uniforms.

Let our phosphorescent, abstract buildings, rise above their grey sky.

Let our creativity exceed the speed of light.

And let us express our differences towards this normal world.

They might throw us like wasted plastic.

They might blow our phosphorescent candle away, into pure darkness.

They might grow over our little tree.

But we have a little world to share, full of sunshine.

Are you willing to join us?



## In Common

by Ava Rourke

The sky is crying. Its tears are showering down all about me.

When they reach the ground they will flow into one, slip down through the gutters and disappear below, out of my sight.

But right this moment the tears still haven't reached the ground.

They're still falling – slowly.

I know this can't be right, this isn't how gravity works. Rain falls quickly...

So why isn't it now?

I blink hard, but it's still there. Still falling.

Everybody in the street around me begins to slow as well. Stepping in rhythm to a song that I can't hear.

I watch them in astonishment and a sense of desolation begins to fill me.

I am alone. I am separate. And I don't understand what is happening.

A tear tracks its way down my cheek and I stare as it falls silently to the still-dry concrete. It hits the ground normally, nothing slow about it.

But the rain still hasn't hit the ground, the girl on the corner's drink's still spilling, and the man walking beside me remains mid-blink.

Sunlight creeps out over the grey washed sky, catching my breath.

A small movement – an umbrella opening with a snap... opening at a normal speed.

The umbrella opener is a girl.

She glances up at me,  
seemingly as shocked as I am.

Every feeling of loneliness and separation vanishes.

So I'm not alone. She is here.

I open my mouth to speak but before I can make my sound, the spell shatters and the raindrops hit the ground.

The bubbling sound of voices ring in my ears, and the people surge forwards.

My eyes snap back to the girl, but the flow of the crowd is already beginning to tug her away from me. I can still just about make out her umbrella, bobbing gently above the torrent of people.

The next moment she is gone.

The crowd is pushing him away from me, it's like they're consciously trying to keep us apart. I don't understand what just happened.

One moment things were moving normally, and then they just stopped. *Everybody* just stopped, that is except for me... and the boy of course.

I try to hold my umbrella high, in the hope that if he can't see me, then maybe he can see it. I know it's useless, we've long lost track of each other, and people are starting to give me weird looks so I just lower my hand and go back holding it as normal.

I need to find him, he might know something about what happened.

I doubt he does considering how surprised he was when he saw me, but it's worth a try.

My mind is racing but it's kind of hard to concentrate when you're in such a tight crowd you feel like a sardine in a tin.

It's in crowds like this that you have no clue where you're going, let alone any control over it.

I try to shove my way out sideways, mumbling useless 'excuse me's as I go.

It's still raining, the pitter-patter of the drops on my umbrella are getting louder and louder by the second.

Who is he?

What just happened?

Thirty seconds later I've escaped the stampede. Finally I can breathe.

The crowd has gradually begun to disperse and I can now sort of see where I am.

I must have marched round in a loop or something because I'm nearly back to where I was when... when whatever it was just happened.

My shoes are thoroughly soaked and I can hear them squelching every step I take – even over the noise of the crowds of people. I feel like yelling at them to shut up... just for a second so I can find him.

I turn around.

He's there just across the road, his back to me, staring down into an overflowing gutter like his life depended on it.

'Hello?'

## We Have the Same Eyes

by Esme Thomas, 17

We have the same eyes  
 She and I  
 Brown  
 Same sun, same sky  
 Same age, same life?

Small house, small bunk bed  
 I used to have a bunk bed.

And in her hand she holds a phone  
 And when the music plays she is no more alone,  
 than me... I say to myself.  
 For our hips can move and our faces can smile

And for she and I a photo can bring on  
 The arrowing ache  
 The endless grab in the dark  
 We stretch our arm for the,  
 The panic cord  
 The path  
 The trail of bread crumbs

To you, to me, to her, to she.  
 The burnt mud slips into the water  
 It makes a whirlpool in the bucket  
 It looks like a hurricane but instead of Dorothy, her house and her little black dog  
 Bugs.

The yellow path back is a long winding slope.  
 The house is now dark and solemn.  
 And the pictures corners bent and worn.

I'll make it okay  
 You will see  
 For we have the same eyes  
 She and I  
 Just not the same minds

But now the plane is landing  
 And the sky is upside down  
 For she is not me  
 And I am not her  
 And my conscience is not clean  
 Because now I see her eyes were blue.




---

Esme says, 'This poem is inspired by my time with The Nasio Trust Charity who help to break the cycle of poverty in Kenya. When there I found myself looking for similarities between my life and the community in Musanda. I was able to meet a girl my age named Judith, I saw her strong relationship with music and thought of mine, I heard her grief and thought of mine, saw her life and tried to improve it, the best I could. But I felt guilty, my impact was a tiny drop in the ocean, our lives were far from being anything near "In common". I hope this poem will raise awareness, help people acknowledge their advantages and encourage them to use that to help others.'



## **The Garden**

by Kirsten

---

There is a garden shielded by silence and secluded, secluded from the eyes.

The garden has no owner but is always dressed in the finest greens and most vibrant mahogany.

The garden is vacant, the only inhabitants being the meticulously crafted fruits of red, orange and purple.

The garden stretched his abrasive hands around his children and through his emerald cloak, gold rained down

The garden allowed her to nurture the vivacious reds and neglect the faded purple.

The garden allowed his children to live and die by his divine commands.

There was a garden that was shielded by silence and surrounded by us.

## In Common

by Abbie Hush, 15, Astley Community High School in Blyth, Northumberland

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You represent all that is good in this world – purity, joy, family, friends and other things of such nature.

I, on the other hand, seem to be the embodiment of evil – anger, a craving for revenge, anxiety and I'm sure you have already thought of many more.

You dress in pretty colours and flourish when the shining sun kisses your skin.

The sun burns me, so I tend to stay inside all summer and wait until the day comes where I can pull out my umbrella and rain boots.

On bad days, you always find a way to make things go your way, no matter what.

Pessimism usually clouds my judgement and fogs up my world.

You smile through hard times and try to keep me afloat, because no matter how hard things get, there's always a positive.

Or that's what you say, at least.

But with all our differences, we still have something in common.

We're both just overdone stereotypes.

We're both just people who put up a front to deflect any criticism.

We're both ripped straight from a superhero story.

I suppose that's why we both need each other.

Because no matter what happens we'll always have that in common.

---

Abbie says, 'When writing this piece, I was thinking about how divided the world is. With the vast amount of people on this planet, it's no surprise that we tend to contrast one another quite frequently. However, I believe that we can always find something to bond over, whether that happens to be an opinion, a childhood memory or a hobby. These characters are completely different to one another, in appearance and beliefs, but despite this, by the end, they find that they have small things in common. This links them together forever, meaning that they don't have to fight over their differences. They can embrace them.'

## Sail Against the Current

by Florence Hardy, 17

---

We spend all together too much time thinking about what we have in common with each other.

Of course, the bonds which we share with others cannot be ignored; we must celebrate the bits and pieces of our individual selves that are like everyone else. We enjoy finding those who understand us, alike in action and thought.

Maybe this is our downfall. Maybe, therefore, the words 'in common' have become something of our own devolution; without difference, we cannot move forward in progress, we cannot think in new and exciting ways, we cannot be innovative or progressive. Why?

Because we are too scared to demonstrate the fact that we have original thought. Clinging too tightly to what we have in common with the world, to what makes us the same as everyone else, to what boosts that sense of confidence in fitting in and not rocking the boat in such a way that it overturns it or creates ripples in the water. Personally, I don't like the thought of too much commonality with my peer group; it's not only difficult to remain true to one's self but people get so caught up in the tangle of 'who we want to be' in a way that fits in with everyone else that we forget 'who we already are' and how that makes us individual and important in our own ways.

Why should we be puzzle pieces that fit together smoothly when we are indeed just as functional and original by ourselves? That's not accounting for the fact humanity is a race that enjoys socialising with its fellow people. Isolation is not a way of living that is healthy or sustainable but in the sense of being alike with others, we cannot forget our own truths; the simple fact that each and every one of us must follow a completely new and untrodden path of life because we are all different!

That doesn't mean we can't get along, be contented, find our life's value and meaning. I'm not saying that at all. Do what makes you happy and be happy but for heaven's sake, don't throw away what makes you you all for the sake of being 'in common' with those who you interact with daily. It's altogether depressing to see how the world's evolved into a place where individuality has become something to be slightly mocked, or at least, a way of life that seems forgotten and deliberately downtrodden. Acting in common with its flock dilutes a sheep's sense of independence and rationality; maybe following the herd isn't always a good thing?

So, instead of letting the boat remain still as you row across the water, maybe it would be better to rock it. Make waves, cause a disturbance. The world's gone stagnant but we're not on a pond; life is like a river; it flows constantly, twisting, turning. Sometimes while rowing upstream is more difficult, it is the one course of action that remains true to who you are.

**I Have Not Travelled**

by Lani Wenda, 14, Year 9, Oxfordshire and West Papua

①

I have not travelled across the whole Pacific Islands and felt the sand sink in between my toes, nor have I experienced the culture and diversity of the many beautiful faces as I pass the villages.

But I have watched the sunset as I layed down on the hills of Wales. The radiant of the suns rays shooting down all across the empty hills.

I have not been in a concert before watching and listening as my favourite artist performs, the stadium packed with millions of people dancing and singing, the lyrics already memorised in their heads.

But I have sung in a cathedral in Oxford, the sound of my voice gracefully echoing the cathedral during candle mass.

I have not met any famous celebrities before, only those on TVs and famous fashion magazines their faces and bodies so perfect and elegantly portrayed amongst the media.

However I have held the hands of a new born baby and felt the newness and softness of his hands. His face so full of emotion, and the sense of life in his deep blue eyes.

And I guess the feeling of simplicity where life is all but a walk in the park. Values the meaning of people we treasure throughout our lives.

## The Drawing Room

by Fiona Zeka, 17, Year 12, St Paul's Way Trust School

Evening, dark approaching, curtains closing,  
candles are lit, guests arrive.

I enter. They will not see me. I am a part  
of the visiting shadows which adorn the  
corners of the room,

*like valances to the light.*

How I wish the curtains will be opened.  
The dark is inevitable, must we repress it?

In the stifling half-light of the candles,  
the guests sit, laughing, delivering  
perfectly composed anecdotes, speaking  
with the quality of both being there,  
here,

*I trace the oaken floorboards,  
slowly approaching*

and of belonging to another, exclusive society,  
one occupied by only themselves.  
How funny, this room itself,

*the drawing room a stage to their  
collective subconscious.*

Are they talking to one another?

I raise my hand momentarily, attempting  
to disrupt this reverie of shared separation.

I speak. They turn,

Seeing me,

They turn again,

As do I

directionless, we discuss today's politics,

*We must have blindness in common.*




---

Fiona says, 'This poem is inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 work *The Second Sex*, which asks the question "What is woman?". In a literary world where man is considered the default, the female writer is the "Other". This "otherness" is what I wanted to replicate in 'The Drawing Room', which traces the steps of a young female writer entering the literary scene, only to find that a sense of alienation and male exclusivity remains. I propose that all writers, irrespective of sex, gender, religion, race, ethnicity or sexuality, should see each other and engage in thoughtful dialogue – ultimately overcoming the "blindness" which inhibits such conversation.'

**The Distance**

by Aazam

The Distance

Tyger thy distant eyes,  
Burnt the distant skies,  
And twist immortal hand,  
Smile the fearful lamb.  
Heart beat, skies bright,  
In the forests or thy night.  
Began terrors clasp!  
Twist thy dead grasp.

## Finally Awake

by Giulia Toffoli, Year 9

Adelaide Browning gazed placidly over the sunset from the balcony. She studied every detail carefully, analyzing every bramble she could see poking over the distant hills. She prided herself in being an excellent observer, and was frankly hoping that the stunning view could distract her from her younger sister's awful chatter. Suddenly, she stiffly shifted and glanced at her sister.

'Don't be ridiculous Claire.' She was becoming irritated.

'But Addy...' her sister wailed.

'No.' Adelaide spoke firmly. She couldn't stand her sibling's petulant voice. Wearied, she flicked her copper curls over her shoulder, clutched her skirts and paced away. Claire briskly followed. When Adelaide heard her sister's hurried steps, she abruptly shifted to face her; her piercing green eyes glaring.

'Don't be irrational Claire, man will never fly. It is 1834 for goodness' sake: If the Lord had wanted us to fly, we would have wings by now.' She sighed. And with that, she left her dumbfounded sister in the empty corridor and headed for her chambers.

'Machines to make man fly? How absurd!' she muttered. Claire even had the audacity to suggest that in future, women would wear trousers. Trousers! Obscene.

When Adelaide left for the gardens later that day, she noticed her sister slumped on an oak branch, sobbing long sighs. When she started for the oak-tree, intentioned to scold her sister for being incredibly foolish and improper, she suddenly felt faint, as if death was flowing through her, first from her fingertips, spreading impassively and steadily up her arms like spilled ink, diffusing up, until it veiled her eyes and her world went dark.

When Dr Brookes heard stirring, he skeptically raised his eyes from his clipboard. Everything seemed in its place, the machines whirring and beeping, tubes stretching to the arms and nose of his comatose patient. Her heartbeat seemed regular, and as always, she seemed still as glass. He had been monitoring Olivia's coma for a few months now, and although some may find this job quite dull, he found it intriguing, the way a body could be alive without a mind. He was smoothing his scrubs and resettling down when Olivia stirred again. Gradually, she woke. Gushing adrenaline overwhelmed Brookes and he began to investigate. He was well-taught, and knew that a coma was a confusing exit, so when Olivia finally spoke, he was relieved.

'Who are you?' The girl spoke with attitude. Strange, thought Brookes. He imagined Olivia as a sweet girl. He was about to speak when the door erupted and people poured in.

'Olivia!' A shrill shriek perforated the air as Olivia's mother flung herself at the girl. Incomprehensible words spilled from her mouth in excitement when Olivia raised her finger causing the room to silence.

'And who are you?' The mother's smile fell.

'You... You were in a coma...' she whispered. The girl's face remained stoic, but with a trembling voice she hissed:

'I am not "Olivia", my name is Adelaide Browning and I demand to know where I am.'



**In Common Hot and Cold**

by Anonymous

"In common. Hot and cold, Bones and blood bound by spirit, segregated by nature, together by love and forced apart by hatred. The fusing of the strings of fate forge inseparable bonds, to last through time, integrating into soul and mind. Grey skies and Blue skies pulled together by the gentle gaze of a Summer's sun. A kingfisher and a robin, so different yet both blown away by the harsh blow of the winter wind's ~~sun~~ punch. The kraken which wraps it's destructive tentacles around it's victim in a warm yet destructive embrace, though it tried to simply pull it close. More in common to us than one may originally think."

## Unlikely Friends

by Mehakdeep Kaur, 15, Year 10, Tiffin Girls' School

Remember that trip,  
With the coach ride so long,  
But I was sat next to you,  
And we listened to that song.

The playlist was yours,  
But the songs weren't what you liked,  
Instead it had Taylor Swift,  
And that left me surprised.

But then you said how,  
You'd made this playlist for me,  
Even though our taste in music,  
Is as different as can be.

You like 80s rock,  
But I prefer the Jonas Brothers,  
So how come we're friends,  
When we're so different from one another?

You replied with 'oh yeah,  
'I've never noticed that before,  
You like the opposite,  
Of everything that I adore'.

I have lots of examples,  
like she loves the weather hot,  
but I prefer the cold,  
and she was white while I was not.

She loved to wear flares,  
While I preferred skinny jeans,  
She doesn't like coffee,  
But I'm addicted to caffeine.

I absolutely love sitcoms,  
But she's more of the Stranger Things type.  
She dislikes the mainstream,  
But I'm all about the hype.

It felt like there was nothing in common,  
We clearly were nothing alike,  
But there are no rules of friendship,  
Saying you must like everything I like.



So what was the basis of our friendship,  
I began to question and think,  
And soon I realised that,  
On the inside we were both pink.

And we both cared,  
A lot about each other,  
She's always been there for me,  
We're sisters from different mothers.

She's the Rachel to my Monica,  
Always motivating me on,  
Always complimenting me,  
Lending a shoulder to cry on.

But little does she know,  
Just how much I appreciate her,  
And she's the most beautiful person,  
Without who life would be a blur.

You have the most gorgeous smile,  
And you're cleverer than you like to admit,  
You're so humble and kind,  
And you look good in every outfit.

And I know we've had our ups and downs,  
Disagreements and arguments,  
But, at the end of the day,  
Our bond is stronger than cement.

I hope we always stay this close,  
Until the very end  
This is dedicated to you,  
Sofia, my best friend.

## We Have Nothing In Common

by Keziah Tate, Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Faversham

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My eyes are green, dark and despairing  
Yours are blue; blue, bright and beautiful.  
What really is the point in comparing?  
You're so much better, it's indisputable.  
We have nothing in common.

My hair is flat, boring and lifeless,  
Yours dances round your face in elegant beauty.  
My face lacks any kind of brightness.  
The way you tease me is almost cruelty.  
For we have nothing in common.

When you smile the world lights up;  
You fill the world with goodness and joy.  
With you around, my tummy ties up,  
But stay away, all I touch I destroy  
And we have nothing in common.

I don't understand what you see in me  
I'm a failure, nothing and a mess.  
Your heart is sweet, calm and dreamy,  
My personality isn't something nice to undress.  
You see, we have nothing in common.

Look away. I know you don't see me  
You see someone living, loving, surviving  
But I'm damaged and broken, its dreary  
You create happiness by just arriving  
We really have nothing in common.

My love for you is vast and endless  
And although I know it's pointless  
My heart screams to be seen by you  
But for me, your heart hasn't a clue  
We'll never have anything in common.

## Not All Arrows Have a Target, Not All Cards Want to Deal

by Willow Deane, 14, Smithdon High School

### Arona

I check my watch a little impatiently. I can't believe he stood me up. Not that it was a date or anything. It would be nice to have another friend. Because I don't have many. And the one I have is a bit of a narcissist sometimes. Besides, Ace and I must have met and had the exact same favourite drink for a reason. But apparently not.

Maybe he knew I was asexual.

Maybe he doesn't even like me.

Maybe he just doesn't care.

But I've been waiting for an hour and a half, when I was already an hour late.

He's not coming.

It's about time I just went home.

I got my hopes up for nothing again.  
I even ordered us both a coffee.

But who am I kidding? We just met,  
why would he want to see me again?

I can't believe I was so ridiculous.

### Ace

That was ridiculous. I wish I had accepting parents like Jayden does. Not ones that come round, uninvited, to try to shape you into something you're not when you have something planned. I rush into Brew and Chew, expecting to see her sitting on the bar stool, with creamy iced coffees waiting and a giant smile on her face, but the place is practically empty. She's nowhere to be seen. Was she even here in the first place?

Why would she be? We just met, it's not like she'd want to see someone like me again.

What if she knew I was aromantic, and didn't come on purpose?

Or maybe I just missed her, because of my stupid parents.

Now I'll never see her again.

I get home, run into my room, lock the door, fling myself on the bed and sob into my pillows. I'm surprised my pillow isn't constantly damp.

I hate crying, but I seem to do it a lot.  
Maybe because I'm depressed, most men don't cry. That's another reason my dad hates me.

Because I need to 'man up'.  
But that's just how I handle things.

It's not something to get over,  
neither is my sexuality.

## An Interpretation of the Phrase 'In Common'

by Elizabeth, Harris Westminster Sixth Form

In common. It is a platitude that we have all heard dozens of times, whether to make a mere remark or simply to state a likeness between two or more things and/or individuals in question. A significant number of people share the same interpretation of the phrase because of its distinct meaning.

You and I share an array of similarities due to the fact that we have a lot of things 'in common.' The main reason as to why this is the case is because we are both part of the human race therefore harbour some certain attributes. Although it is not under direct, conscious control breathing is part of our lifestyle. It is required to sustain life, so involuntary respiration occurs such as when we are asleep and thereby we are both simply living. Fortunately, we both have a home and somewhere to go every time we leave our residences. In addition, we both experience emotions such as happiness, excitement, or other feelings. Everyday we have emotions that can compel us to take action and influence the decisions we make about our lives. These qualities are shared alike by two or more people and are certainly shared by you and I.

Despite our similitude of being in the human race, there are undoubtedly some unpleasant things that we have 'in common.' A clear example of this is the fact that we both celebrate a carnivorous lifestyle. However you may, of course, have a preferred diet such as vegetarianism or veganism. We are all flawed as human beings and therefore are prone to have bad habits as a result. Nevertheless, we also have good qualities to overcome them. The largest human influence on climate change has been through the emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane which contribute to global warming. In spite of the fact there are more, these are things we have in common, the good and the bad.

To be in the present feels like being aware of what is happening this very moment. It means that you are not distracted by future worries or ruminations of the past; instead centred in the here and now. Being present is having a mind that is completely engaged and appreciatively connecting with whatever the task at hand is. This can result in catharsis. Hence, when hearing such a phrase, 'in common', in the present it makes me think of what exactly are the things in question that have a resemblance in and the intent of the speaker who uttered the words 'in common.' The word 'in' has a connotation of withinness or something being inside something else. In this instance, the word 'common' evokes the idea of a shared similarity. Thus, when these two words are combined together the phrase produced conjures up synonymic meanings to everyone that hears it.

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Elizabeth says, 'I think that the coronavirus pandemic is a clear reflection of how we all share similarities and things "in common." It is a universal fact that a significant number of nations were in a state of lockdown. Undoubtedly, this affected people's lives. Everyone's. As a result, making a new norm became an individual necessity to each and every person; till this present day this may still be the case.'


## Uniquely the Same


by Ellie, 16


### Uniquely the Same


We are not the same:


Your smile can rival that big star in the sky: bright and omnipresent; mine is dull and scarcely seen: its fire long extinguished. 

Your spirit is wild and untamed; you know what you desire and you obtain it; mine is stuck in an endless slumber, patiently waiting for the hero that will never come. 


Your eyes are the colour of soft caramel, so easy to fall into like pools of smooth honey; my eyes are not soft, they are icy - the colour of the ocean that crashes against the unsuspecting shore. 


You are warm, others crowd around you to share that heat; I am cold, others flee from me to escape my cool touch. 

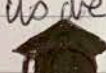
Your tongue tells stories of all of the adventures you've lived; mine sings ballads of the places I wish to go. 


Your heart is in perfect condition: not yet faced the dangers of an unforgiving world; mine is cracked and bruised all over: beyond saving by even the best medicine. 


But, we have a lot more **in common** than you think, you and I:


We both happen to share a love for those nights when the rain aggressively pours. 

The pillow is drenched with our shared tears when those lovers finally say, "I love you." 

Neither of us are perfect, but we are constantly learning from the many mistakes we make. 

We are both proud advocates for the Universal Truth that NOTHING can beat a good book. 

Our souls burn with a fiery passion to protect the other - through thick and thin, no matter what cost. 

And last, but not least: we are both made of flesh and bone, our hearts beat the same beat to pump the same, red, vitalising elixir around our bodies. 

I guess we're not really that different when you think about it.

## In Common

by Dylan, 16

‘Luca! The Last. Universal. Common. Ancestor.’

The audience, (a jumbled mix of over-keen undergrads, an assortment of teachers forced into chaperoning the event, and the poor sod from the University Paper who professed to not having the remotest interest in the Arts and Humanities wing of study), were by now hooked on every word. This Professor Guest, or whatever his name was, seemed to reach out and grab these people by their collars with his words. As if this otherwise unobtrusive character was scanning his viewership and collectively embedding LISTEN TO ME – WHAT I’M SAYING’S IMPORTANT into their frontal lobes. And so that’s what they did.

‘Now, I want you all to look at the person next to you,’ the man on stage announced. Though the spectators were unwilling, there was something about the simple command that bypassed their free will and, all at once, a ripple went out through the crowd as they each regarded the individual next to them.

Being the 21st century, this crowd had been specially selected to be as varied as possible. A multitude of eyes, some deep and piercing others wide and restful, surveyed a myriad of noses, ears, styles and colours which each in turn repaid their gazes. As they studied the creatures next to them, a reaction was registered – perhaps not consciously but deep down everyone felt something at that moment. Whether it was sympathy, boredom or disgust was down to the onlooker, but the simple sight of seeing a stranger’s face affected them all differently.

‘How are you alike? How are you distinct? These answers are separate for each of you, of course, for you to independently resolve within your own heads. Except, most likely, LUCA. Every single one of you shares this lifeform. We are all descended from it. 3.5 billion years ago a miniscule, single-celled organism came into being in some remote pond in France. A combination of circumstance and chemistry created a cell membrane, various proteins and, most importantly, a DNA loop. You have LUCA to thank for every micro-organic component within you. No matter who you are, what you believe or how you think, you are all living, breathing people, with LUCA at the bottom of each of your family trees.’

As Professor Guest looked out at his audience, he noticed something strange. For a brief second, uncharacteristic as it may seem, the attitudes of all those present had subtly shifted. The stress of that essay due next week or the teacher’s strike on Friday or even the scary editor who made Terrence Fletcher seem like a cuddly bear had been alleviated for a moment. The fear quickly snapped back, obviously, but Guest silently wondered whether the message of overarching unity he was teaching had a bigger significance than just being a fun fact.

Of course, you know it does.

**I Lost Something**

by Skye Dent, 16

I Lost something.

~~Something~~  
So many things.

I lost Love.

I lost art.

I lost names.

I lost ~~the~~ my voice.

But ~~even~~ everyday you  
To be lost ~~where~~ you meant to  
~~with~~ ~~lose~~ ~~even~~ to sing  
something lovely.

may look <sup>too</sup> ~~no~~ hard to master,

Accept I vaster ~~is~~ realms to disaster,  
though it may look like I lied,  
to have it ~~is~~ fluster hard,  
every day, now look -

~~My~~ last my rivers of art are lost  
to what was but isn't a disaster!



## To Fly

by Davina

We are boarded onto the back of a minivan. Shoved and squished, no place to move or breathe or be. I hold my little toy car, gripped into my fist, held at my heart, my only possession – apart from the clothes on my back.

The air is humid, thick with the stench of marinating humans, and as the last person is thrown on, the doors shut, closing out the last morsel of light and, with it, the air darkens, and curdles, congealing on my flesh. I can feel the breath of the child by me, in the pit of my ear, while I struggle to negotiate the weight off of my eyelids in attempt to keep them open.

We hit a pit in the road. I'm too enveloped in the mash of human meat to be toppled by it, but I take an elbow to the nose and a knee to the spine. I don't flinch. Pain is only temporary. I strain to remember who told me that? It's a thought engrained in the very essence of my mind. Somewhere, in another dark place, a voice had whispered in the midst of exploding bombs 'Pain is only temporary. Repeat it Iman! Pain is only temporary.'

The breathing in my ear stops. At first I am relieved. But as I turn to look at the boy beside me, I make out the relaxed slope of his brow. He is dead. I can tell. He is standing up right but he is dead. There's something so gentle in his posture, so much relief. I wonder what it tastes like. What it sounds like. What it feels like. I wonder if it is better there than it is here and I am tempted by the darkness. Tempted to let it envelop me. To let it take me to somewhere safer. Because this doesn't feel safer.

We hit another hole in the road, this one made the body fall, it slumped slowly, sliding down my arm as it thudded to the floor. The woman beside it let out a gasp, throwing her hand down to try and reach it, grabbing me instead, heaving me up and being unable to discern that I am not her son. She touches my nose and lips and cries into my shoulder, below me I could feel the corpse sag. I want to vomit.

'I am not your child, miss'

She drops me, blindly grappling, grabbing the shoeless foot of the child and lifting him upside down. I could feel the agony and grief radiate off of her, the broken crackles released from the back of her throat, too dehydrated for tears, echoed in the hollowness of my stomach.

I wanted to tell her 'Pain is only temporary' because there's not that much longer for us. We would all share the same fate. I could already feel the lightness in my head, but it didn't scare me. I hoped to get light enough that I could fly off, like a kite. I was only tethered by the heaviness in my heart, but I could feel it weaken.

I cannot wait to fly.

**Not In Common**

by LLKD

Not in common

You and me, we're not the same  
 Everyday we have to re-name

↑ came → name  
 ↑ dame → name  
 → blame → name  
 → tame

Our laws and rules that keep us in line  
 If you count from one to nine

↑ nine

We are not the same, in every way  
 And I will remind you every day

↑ pay  
 ↑ clay → may

Don't cry if I say no  
 I'm not your sweet little doe

↑ doe → toe  
 ↑ do → bow  
 → to

I guess I'll have to remind you  
 As I hide away in my den

↑ den  
 ↑ again  
 again and again

We are not the same  
 So don't re-name

## Cloud Nine

by Alex

Aaron had lived in Mediocrity all his life – figuratively and literally. Mediocrity acted as a purgatory for people hoping to transcend to Cloud Nine, or an area where you proved you should not be banished to The Ground. People blessed with the opportunity were treated to an induction day before choosing to take The Cloud Nine Pill and ascend. People called it a cylinder of pure euphoria. Aaron himself had been chosen for this Utopia, much to the delight of his family, and had accepted. How could he not?

Aaron stepped into the unknown with his lifelong friend, Spencer, jumping out of his skin when the elevator sent them shooting upwards with immense velocity as the norms of Mediocrity were reduced to ants in seconds. Spencer paced gleefully around the glass; his emerald green eyes glistening with exhilaration, matching his radiating blond hair. Meanwhile, Aaron's wide, mud brown eyes were cast down in horror, his home diminishing beneath his feet.

'This is it Aaron,' whispered Spencer, as he tried not to spoil this perceived perfection: 'Our new home!'

Side by side, Aaron and Spencer followed the smooth artificial voice guiding them to the induction room. Spencer babbled, mostly to himself, about the intricate behemoth spires twisting; stabbing above them, shining, golden, in the glistening light. He marvelled at their similarity to the simple grey ones in Mediocrity, and yet their seeming different, perfect quality. Aaron gasped at the cacophonies of citizens before him: they seemed so similar to himself; yet their faces shone with vivacity and beauty, as if they'd been edited artificially. He was wrenched back to reality when the inductees, huddled like excitable penguins, cheered as they were led through a darkly lit cuboid corridor.

Buzzing harmoniously, Aaron and Spencer's district were led through a maze of corridors, being assured their 'new life was about to begin'. Gawping, Spencer hopped in glee as a screen projected a two sided image, demonstrating the genius of the fabled Cloud Nine Pill. Spencer had been taught all his life that if he behaved well, he'd be sent to the heaven on Earth, and now here he was, tantalisingly close to fulfilling his dream. His eyes were glued to the right screen with the rest of the inductees, which depicted a joyful child hitting a pinata, giggling as sweets spewed out its colourful head. Concurrently, Aaron gaped, fixated; terrified at the dark mirror on his left, depicting a rat's spine being splintered sickeningly by salvo-like blows.

Aaron stared at the white cylinder in his palm. He couldn't do it. All the other inductees had practically skipped out of the room after ingesting their joy – Spencer had been the first. As he trembled Aaron realised to himself that all these people had something in common: they'd been conditioned to look to the right by their superiors, and never face the reality of the left. He couldn't do anything. Sitting, silent, Aaron could merely gaze into his palm, unsure of what to do.

## A Small Village

by Ticiana

Peddalling towards the flower field at the back of a small village.

The first days of May were inundated in a fragrance of roses and I found it peculiar how that smell had something in common with yours.

Your fragrance also inundated my room in the early hours of the morning.

When I arrived at the field, I was encountered with your smile waiting for me.

The skies transformed into a delicate splash of pastel colours yet little did it have in common with you.

Lying on the grass, you painted and adorned my skies in a heavenly shade of golden.

In the shade of a nearby tree, we were to be found, examining the butterflies' distinct colours. I had one thing in common with them.

They flickered as tenderly as my eyelids fluttered when I dreamed of you.

You created a home for me, home, I was almost a home for you.

I pedalled towards the flower field at the back of a grand village.

You talked to me about your past thinking your future was undoubtedly me. The summertime sky became blue and the dandelions grew.

As effortlessly as the constellation of stars oscillated, I danced at your mellifluous voice.

When I arrived at the field, I was encountered with your smile, waiting for me.

We ran and we ran.

I felt like a feather, elegantly descending in an eternal breeze.

You guided me to a nearby river.

You had one thing in common with the river, the river flowed as strongly as you moved me.

One July morning, I woke up to the realisation that your presence tranquillised the whirlwind that ate away my thoughts at night.

I couldn't tell if I was in love with the butterflies and meadows or if I was in love with you.

Beginning of Autumn, the breeze became more rampant, blowing the leaves off of the tree we sat under. They fluttered to earth like colourful rain.

The next day, when I arrived at the field, your eyes glistened sceptically.

You seemed much happier with her.

I continuously wondered 'What do we have in common now?'

The sudden autumn took away the warmth in the air and you shared one particular trait in common; you took away the warmth in my heart.

The glimmer in my golden skies was invaded with pure hatred.

Just as swiftly as the leaves fell off the trees, you fell out of love with me.

I pedalled towards the field at the back of this melancholic village.

Where are you?

I called but you never replied.

The last days of autumn were immersed in a fragrance of desolation.

I gradually noticed, perhaps, I had a lot in common with the winter that was approaching.

The winter formed a covering of ice around the tree branches, so did I with this ruptured soul.

We had a lot in common

Did we?

You created a home for me, home, I was almost a home for you.

**Powerful Trouble**

by Chelsea

For a Charm of powerful trouble,

Fireburn and Caldron bubble.

In the Caldron boil and bake;

fillet of fenny Snake,

eye of newt and tongue of dog

wool of bat and toe of frog

like a hell-broth boil and blood

Then the charm is firm and good

## In Common

by Grace Lyne

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The common mistake was not trusting me.

The common mistake was branding me the title of a fool.

The common mistake was leaving me.

I became infatuated, almost insane; I grew weak from separation, the physical attraction towards you became unbearable, my anxiety grew and the discomfort that began to evolve in your eyes strengthened. The emotional attachment to you was unwanted, undeserved and uncontrollable. Our love transformed, it blossomed like a flower in the spring, yet you allowed that flower to form thorns that carried unease and pain.

We met as neighbours and soon formed a stable connection, you enforced that the relationship was 'purely platonic' but the common misconception that you had was my intentions. Your inability to express your feelings was tiresome, the stubbornness you carried flooded our relationship, it destroyed the love. I had patiently waited for years, ready to seize my moment for when you were ready, but it never happened.

Every day I was cruelly punished by the fool's gold in your eyes, tempted by its beauty. You were a facade, keeping your hostility hidden. The demanding lips you presented were misleading. Your hair was a reflection of your false persona, it was intimidating yet arousing. The skin that gripped your bones was unearthly pale, the veins pulsed through the thin layer of tissue that continued to fray over time. The love had exhausted from your body, leaving a vulgar frame of bones.

The constant denying and accusations towards me became tedious, the insults were no better either, yet I was still in awe of the vastness of your being. The love I had for you was visceral yet was never reciprocated, this gradually began to affect my rational behaviour. The love inspired me, it was an involuntary state of mind and it led to an addiction. I had fallen into a paradox, I wanted you desperately, I wanted you to want me, I wanted you forever. This cyclical nature of our relationship was frustrating, it allowed me to resort to ruminative thinking. My focus was you and it continued to torment me, but my vision was always transparent.

We were the same age, 32, we had the same eye colour, blue, we shared the same taste in music, Heavy Metal; we were so alike it was almost fate that bound us together. But the dissimilarities that evolved as a result of your caution and refrain, insulted my intelligence. I was convinced you would remain the most beautiful thing, consume my thoughts, stay with me – but the infatuation was shattered. I was disappointed when the illusion crumbled into reality, I am still.

I was in love with the idea of you, the commonalities we shared, how similar we were and the time we spent together. I can't say you were mine, because the torturous truth is you were never there. And if it's of any consolation to you, you're the best idea I've ever had.

### Coronavirus World

by Charlie Simpson, 13, from Jarrow, South Tyneside



## Genes

Oscar Gibson

---

Commonality between people comes down to one simple word,  
That we have all heard,  
And all scientists on the planet have concurred  
That it isn't random that all of us have eyes, a mouth and a nose,  
It isn't just something that grows  
Arbitrarily on one but not another,  
Instead it comes from our mother,  
So what makes us similar?  
Genes.

I share so much in common with my brother  
Much more than with my significant other,  
And why is that?  
No, it didn't just fall out of a hat,  
It's because we have the same parents,  
And even though we're now adolescents,  
Something in our bodies rarely change,  
Genes.

And what's all this about primates,  
Yes, we do share DNA with them,  
Even if they can't lift weights,  
Or eat dates,  
They really do lie along our stem  
Of creation and forever will they do so,  
Sharing over 95% of our  
Genes.

So thank you Charles Darwin  
For leading us on a discovery  
That we all are in,  
And therefore, in summary:  
Genes are 'a unit of heredity which is transferred from a parent to offspring  
and is held to determine some characteristic of the offspring.'



## Imagination In Common

by Emily Young, Year 9, St Joseph's Catholic Academy, South Tyneside



## Wilted

by Anika, Year 9

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It is hideous.

Sun-scorched and drooping.

Wilting.

Blackened and flaking

From the ordeal.

Shredded.

From head to root.

It was beautiful once.

A spark of colour

In grey world

But then came humans.

And ruined it.

Ruined it.

Red and black.

Black and red.

I reach over to touch it

Tentatively.

It reaches over to touch me.

Simultaneously.

Our hands collide.

On the cold glass.

## Just Have Fun, Kid

by Keira Jayne, 16

Baby the truth, is everyone leaves by choice or because they have to. You can't stop that and you can't stop living your life because you're scared. It doesn't matter if someone leaves it matters how long they choose to stay how much effort they put in. Everyone leaves hun everyone I know that doesn't make the beginning or the end any easier but you always have the middle you'll have all the accomplishments and the fun and the good moments and the bad ones too, and when the days get really hard even the bad memories bring you some comfort because you remember the good ones that came from them. You can't be scared of life you just have to live it bare your Soul to the World that's the beauty of it. You don't know what's going to happen and I know that's scary but it's also the great part. You're going to be ok it's all going to be alright I know it's scary now and I know you're afraid and it's ok to be afraid life's showed you that. I've always been scared of everything and everyone. I've just always fear the worst in people but one day life showed me that these things happen, you're going to meet bad people and you're going to understand why natural disasters are named after them. They take the most beautiful places and turn them ugly because whenever you go there you think of them and you think of the hurt they cause but hun we all grow up we all get older we forgive even if we don't notice that we are forgiving. One day you wake up and it doesn't hurt as much yes it will always be there but it's not the same sometimes that's a good thing sometimes that's the best thing that could ever happen, just know that wherever you go whatever you do or whoever you become somebody loves you it doesn't matter if it's now or if it's tomorrow or if it's a year from now, someone loves you and or someone is waiting to love you someone is waiting to give you all they have. Maybe the situation isn't working out for you now but maybe the next one will I know they say 'There isn't always a tomorrow' and I guess they're right there isn't but at the same time there is despite the bad things that happened in your life you have to be content with it it is your life regardless we only have one from what we know. Just go out there just have fun kid. Life is black and white it's up to you to paint the colours. Our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall. They said don't grow up because it's a trap but they didn't tell us that staying small is the biggest trap of them all...

## An Act of Ignorance

by Mayur Ganagi, St Bede's Inter-Church School

The sharp ring of the telephone echoed throughout the businessman's living room and pierced his ears. It couldn't have been a more inconvenient time to receive a call. Reluctantly, his hand made its way towards the handset.

The restless caller who had been dialling the same number for almost an hour, was almost certain the call would not be answered, and was becoming increasingly desperate with every second. The caller wiped the sweat off his brow for the last time, about to put his phone down when the ringing finally stopped.

Putting the handset to his ear the businessman asked 'Hello?', unaware who he was addressing.

The voice itself brought a look of reassurance to the caller's face. After months of searching, he had finally found the man. He snatched the telephone to his ear and stuttered uncontrollably, pleading for help.

The businessman immediately recognised this voice despite not having heard it for over ten years. His heart skipped a beat. His breath shuddered. His stomach started to churn as years of reminiscence cascaded into his mind, obliterating previous thoughts. The last decade he had spent trying to forget those dreadful times had now gone to waste. Years of facing oppression and downright torture supposed to unite a nation for a greater good, a just cause, couldn't have ended more catastrophically. A massacre of protestors had left these two survivors forced to conceal their identities after escaping jail; to flee the country and start their lives for a second time, leaving behind everything, including each other. They had pledged never to contact each other again, to part ways for each other's benefit.

It was all going fine until now.

The caller still waited for an answer, but a dawning understanding informed him that there was going to be no answer. He had clearly broken the pledge by linking two entities never designed to meet, like two magnets of opposite poles before, one had rotated for them to become like poles. Now as one attempted to approach the other, repulsion had arisen. Years before, the two men had fought together and suffered together, oblivious to the risk of being killed; determined to secure a future for generations to come. However, what they had in common was a forgotten cause, guaranteed to fail in the face of dictatorship. Struggling to continue in a life designed to force them apart, the caller had had only a small flicker of hope to keep him going. When he sensed this feeble flame going out, he sought reassurance in the one soul he knew could reignite the flame.

The businessman knew at once the caller had ignored their agreement and was utterly outraged. How could the caller remind him of the atrocities that had once afflicted his conscience? He replied in a stern and final manner:

'Wrong number. Sorry.'

And just like that, he denied the caller's pleas just as sharply as the telephone had first rung, coldly dismissing everything they had ever had in common.

**Change**

by LLKD

Change

From blond to brown  
You start to make me feel down

All because I dyed my hair  
It was not a dare

I wanted to change  
Not turn a page

Why do you judge me?  
All because of ~~the~~ my choose of key

Change is supposed to be welcomed  
But now I'm feeling threatened

## Can Technology Be a Perfect Matchmaker?

by Angela Ede, 16

Can algorithms completely determine our lives and choices with a formula for success? Should we let them? Are feelings and emotions worth listening to when making decisions? Today, an awful lot is dependent on compatibility and similarity, both intra-human relations and those of humans with other things.

Using advanced technology, sites such as dating apps pair people up based on what they have 'in common', trampling on vital human behaviour such as gut instinct or the fight-or-flight response – foundations that clearly worked for our ancestors as we, homo sapiens, are still living and thriving into the twenty-first century. I hesitate when calling this technology 'advanced'; technical though it is, it has its drawbacks. Though dating sites aim to bring people together through shared interests, and can sometimes achieve this, there is always the risk of us being dehumanised and turned into statistics. When we meet people for the first time, there are some people with whom we just click, without any obvious reason why. We may not have anything in common with them, we may not have the same hobbies or music taste, but we feel completely comfortable with them. Algorithms cannot, in my opinion, completely replicate the necessary human emotions to allow two people to get on like a house on fire. Because as nice as it is to have things in common, sometimes people who are too similar can get on each other's nerves. There are only so many conversations one can have about a certain topic before it gets dull, and so it is usually more fun to hear somebody talk passionately about a topic mostly unknown to the listener.

It is not, however, only dating sites that use these algorithms. Websites with built-in cookies track our searches and send us targeted adverts based on other people's activity. Messages like 'based on your recent purchase, we think you'll like this' clutter our inboxes, and make unwanted assumptions about us as people. A site like Amazon might suggest fancy trainers to me because I bought wireless earphones, which are often used for exercising, even though I much prefer reading to sports and simply got sick of tangled cables.

Clever as these technologies are, the drive to keep everyone connected to like-minded people may ultimately cause the downfall of society. The desire to meet people like us and to fit in with the crowd could be detrimental to us with obscure interests becoming ever more obscured and originality becoming overlooked or shunned. The weird, wonderful and quirky could disappear completely, leaving life to become mundane. If we're not careful then we will become as lifeless as the algorithms perceive us to be, and this would remove the joys of being our own person and there would certainly be some people that would get lost in a system that doesn't support them.

Algorithms of commonality cannot completely determine our lives. Let humans choose their own perfect match; it may not be obvious enough for an algorithm to spot.

## What We Could Have In Common

by Tessa, Year 10

They enter through opposing doors, a cleaner and a young aristocrat. He keeps his head down, intent on polishing the hospital floor as her heels clack over to the central cot. The woman lying in that bed is old and frail, her skin an unnatural blue. Attached to a hundred machines, she is kept alive well past her time. The cleaner dares to raise his gaze to the lady by the bedside. She won't look at him, but still he watches; her bright clothes and haughty gaze conflict with the dark hospital room. She is rich and self-centred; she shouldn't be here. Yet she is caring, like him, and reaches for the old woman's hand. As her grandmother's breathing becomes ever more ragged, the girl lowers her eyeline to his. Worlds collide as flashes of forbidden feelings awake.

His eyes blaze with anger, an emotion he never lets his kindly features show. He is supposed to be selfless. His people wait hand and foot on the selfish, giving up their own safety and comfort without a second thought. History dictates that society was to be split into those who valued their own safety above all else and those who did everything they could do to help. He knows of the devastation that hit the planet: sickness, war, economic collapse. He knows he should not regret the way his people pieced the world back together but he rages at the oppression he has undergone because of it. He knows he will die before his time, suffering in silence with no aid. A lifetime of being taught to sacrifice will amount to nothing.

He shows her this through the flame in his eyes.

The flame in his eyes is met with a fire in hers. She feels grief. Years of enforced self-preservation crumble as she mourns for someone other than herself. Her people prevailed because of their un pitying exploitation, but at the back of her mind there has always been guilt. Even in childhood, she wondered at whose expense her affluence came. Her people live like lonely parasites, taking from others for their individual gain. She is supposed to follow this lifestyle disregarding others without a second thought. But now she mourns for the person she adored most.

They both stand at the bedside, united in youth and anguish, as the old woman breathes her last. They wait for a second, taking in the possibility of change. Those in power had separated humanity, crushing any chance of community; how could it be so easy to find something in common with a stranger?

Breaking the fragile silence, she clears her throat and drops the dead woman's hand. They both turn to leave, one boy and one girl questioning the shift in their clouded thoughts. Maybe for the first time in a hundred years it has become possible to be both selfish and selfless, to be whole.

They leave through opposing doors.

## In Common Essay

by Emily Dulgarn

When I hear the words 'In Common', the first thing that comes to mind is community. A community is a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. Since the beginning of humankind, humans have been forming connections and making communities. These connections are powerful things, and they are easier to form if we have things in common; some sort of starting place to help guide us on the path to friendship and kinship.

Having things in common has both advantages and complications, and humans have known this for hundreds of years. This is demonstrated by common sayings and proverbs. For example, the expression 'great minds think alike but fools rarely differ' indicates that conformity and like-mindedness isn't always positive, although it can be sometimes, and that just because more than one person shares an idea doesn't mean it is good. In fact, sometimes lots of people sharing the same thoughts without having contributions or opposition from someone with a differing view or understanding can be harmful.

Furthermore, the proverb 'birds of a feather flock together until the cat comes' has existed in the English language since the 1500s. It illustrates that kindred people gravitate towards each other but when something poses a threat to an individual, the colour of feathers isn't necessarily enough to keep people together. What may be best for the community can be overwritten by selfish desires or self-preservation. This shows that whilst having things in common is beneficial, we need diversity of both thought and character.



However, if we are all different, how can we form communities, which are by definition groups of people with things in common? After all, we don't all live in the same neighbourhood. Well the answer is quite simple. We are all humans and we all share one common trait – humanity. Humanity has two definitions – the first is human beings collectively. We are humanity. The second definition of humanity is the quality of being humane and having benevolence and compassion. We may not all possess this quality all the time, but we can and we should strive to. Many people do have this trait in common, and this is shown especially in our current time, where key workers are risking their own lives to serve others. If this isn't kindness and compassion then I do not know what is. We should model our lives after these people who are working selflessly for others and, out of respect for them, we should all treat each other with the kindness and selflessness that these heroes are showing. They are heroes and we can be too. Because these aren't superhumans. They have one key thing in common with us. Humanity.



## Universe


by Jessica

### Universe

The universe is the most biggest thing  
in the world.

Even tho it is very cold.

Spread across are stars that are bright.  
Shining there in the story light.  
You dont have to be there to witness  
all the stars covering the sky.



## In Times of Crisis

by Joseph

These days, whenever we turn on our radios or televisions to consume the news, we are confronted every time by the growing death toll and the new countries that have been forced into lockdown. The word one is bound to hear multiple times when tuning in is 'unprecedented', and for good reason. Within living memory, no pandemic has reached the destructive level of coronavirus. SARS, swine flu, Ebola; all of these were considered dangerous, but not even close to the extent of the dreaded COVID-19. The NHS has been overloaded by patients which they may not have room for. Schools have closed their doors, moving teaching online; meetings with those from other households have been banned; people are only allowed to leave their own houses for shopping and one form of exercise per day. Social distancing measures have been put in place, making venturing into the outdoors a time of stress and worry, trying to uphold these rules in the narrow spaces of supermarket aisles. Countries like Italy have silent streets, void of activity as people are shut up in their homes, and just when it may be needed most, key products like hand sanitiser cannot be found on the shelves.

Yet, as the old adage goes: 'every cloud has a silver lining' – and, in some cases, perhaps we can be glad that there are no clouds at all. In China, the biggest carbon polluter in the world, emissions have been cut by a significant 25%. In Wuhan, residents can see the sky again, and hear the birds sing. In Venice, the canals that had been blackened by the fumes of cruise ships are clear again, and dolphins have been seen swimming in southern waterways.

In the UK, a staggering 700,000 volunteers have risked their lives to help key NHS workers on the front lines, far more than the health service was expecting. People may not be allowed to meet, but my mother talks to the family more now than prior to lockdown – they enter a chatroom every day at 5 without fail, as I'm sure thousands of others do too. Social distancing measures are in place, making trips outdoors stressful for everyone, especially the elderly. However, supermarkets reach out a hand of safeguarding measures, designating specific times the elderly can do their shopping in. In Italy, the streets may be empty, but residents sing to each other across balconies to lift the spirits of their neighbours.

We are at war, yet this is no normal war. There are no opposing human sides, only a common enemy that exhibits itself only when afflicting others. This war is not about borders or natural resources, but simply about protecting each other and rediscovering what we, as the human race, have in common, whatever the circumstances. People from all walks of life put aside their differences to fight a foe whom nobody wants to see succeed. In the words of Aristotle, 'a common danger unites even the bitterest of enemies.'

## Rain

by Abi Clarke, 16

# Rain

Feel the rain,  
On your skin,  
Taste it, smell it,  
Streak your cheeks.

Falling like mysterious messengers,  
The tears of the man in the sky.  
Are they tears of sorrow?  
Tears of joy?

It doesn't choose you in particular.  
Or anyone.  
But it reduces us to the same sodden level as the trees,  
Does it remind you that you aren't in control?  
Don't be afraid of its pulse.

Its soft touch will always find you,  
Don't cower behind your umbrella.  
Don't hide from it,  
Just let the rain in.

## Our Common Enemy

by Jennifer Evans

We are at war. Protected by the walls of our houses, we forget about those unable to hide. Old routines dropped; we turn to computer screens through which our enemy inflicts fear. School work and work moved online as people risk their lives as key workers. Typed words suddenly hold so much more meaning as we reach out to our loved ones who are miles away. We long for a treasured video call that connects us and gives us hope.

We are at war, defended on the front line with our armour for those fighting running out, as we civilians feel the need to use it in our daily life on the streets, unsure of where our enemy will strike next. We no longer smile at strangers; we turn away and keep our distance, constantly crossing the street at the sight of other civilisation, unable to trust those around us in these testing times.

We are at war, waiting in a long queue outside a supermarket, two metres apart, wishing for some of the shelves to contain the food needed to feed a family, intimidated by disapproving looks when we take more than one of each item.



We are at war. Giant graves being dug, hospitals being made from large spaces, schools shut. All events are put on hold except small funerals.

We are at war, dreaming of when the battle will end, idolising the future, counting down the days until the next announcement, hoping to soon be reunited with those we miss as we think about the last time we saw them and the memories we have shared. We long for something as simple as a hug.

We are at war, protected by our homes; supported by brave soldiers; waiting, pausing and dreaming.

We may be at war, but we share many experiences as we fight on. These commonalities make us stronger and our faith in each other allows us to hold out hope that this war will come to an end.

In the words of David Foster Wallace 'nothing brings you together like a common enemy'.

## Nature and Us

by Kaura, 16

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The clouds, curtains of the sky, shadow us.

They watch us.

As we continue to destroy our love,

We cannot help ourselves,

We are consumed by what we can't have.

The flowers, jewels and gems of our gardens,

Admire the birds flying high in the sky

They envy their freedom,

They envy their unity.

But it is what we lack.

Nature observes us

As we make each mistake,

Watches us carefully.

Like us, nature breathes,

So why must we destroy?

We take what we want

But don't it give back.

Is it in our blood?

Are we wired to destroy?

We have things in common,

Yet they have been forgotten.

Nature has many things shared.

The romantic poets taught us plenty

Yet we chose to ignore what wonders they wrote.

It seems as if they had morals

But that's now what we lack.

Nature's a strong force.

Of beauty and of vengeance

We should maintenance our harmony.

But if we continue with no forgiveness

It will be to our end.

Our Imagination is common

Some other things too:

The air that we breathe

The water we drink,

Our need for love.

But not all are worthy.

We need to change

And turn commonness into unity.

It's for our survival.

## Opportunities

by Emma, Year 10

There are four things that all humans have in common.

### 1

#### **All kids want to play.**

Living in developing nations as a seven-year-old came with its struggles, but not when I was with other kids. Even if I spoke English and they spoke Romanian, Georgian, or Lettish, we were still able to dress up dolls and play 'tag' in the garden. As long as we laughed, ate cookies, and had somebody to climb monkey bars with, we were living the dream.

### 2

#### **Everybody is proud of their sports teams.**

In each of the thirty six countries I've visited, somebody has asked me which team I support or tried to sell me tickets to the upcoming game. Sports jerseys, noise makers, and replica uniforms coloured the streets on any given day in all of the countries to show pride, morale, and confidence.

### 3

#### **We agree that weather is worth going outside for.**

Let's face it – city living is not easy, so you're used to seeing the dull, purposeful expressions on Parisiennes' faces as they race past you to get home. There is a physical lift of emotion when the first snowflake sticks to the ground and people look up from their phones to see the beauty around them. Smiles form, neighbours wave, and families join their friends in throwing snowballs. There is an instant connection as you experience this joy with others around you. No longer are you fighting for space or money, you are simply enjoying the beauty.

### 4

#### **Our instinct as humans is to help in times of need.**

2020 has been a crazy year, with the threat of a third World War, presidential incompetencies, an ironic declaration of 'The International Year of Planet Health,' and the global pandemic of COVID-19. Through the tension, hatred, and fear, people of all nationalities, ages, and orientations are stepping up and helping anyone in need. In true desperation, we are able to look past labels and see the real facts: people are suffering. Innocent children, workers, humans are dying. And people are doing their part because they can. Not because they should.

If you take a closer look at these four things that all humans have in common, you see a trend: we all take the opportunity to connect, grow, and show our humanity. Underneath the tension, underneath the social injustices influencing our decisions, underneath the promises made if we do our work and stay quiet is love and humans will take every opportunity to show it. This is what we have in common: we are humans and we will do everything we can to stay like that.

## You Had Nothing in Common

by Amelie, Year 10

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You had nothing in common,  
but here I am. The product of  
a venture doomed from the start  
The only common ground that's left to stand on.  
All there is.

I often thought there must have been something else,  
Some other force that caused worlds to collide  
You're adamant there was nothing,  
you had nothing in common.  
Yet here I am.

I sometimes wonder how you must feel,  
how you feel about me,  
about being tied to each other for all these years.  
The fights, the silences.  
They're all you have in common.  
At least while I'm still here.

And no matter how hard I try,  
the pieces of your jigsaw just don't fit together  
maybe that's the point? But,  
but I just can't believe it,  
I can't believe us.  
So are you sure?  
sure you had nothing in common.

**Dear Diary...**

by Beatriz, 17

Dear Diary...

Today was just another one of those days; countless hours to just sit and think. Usually a soft murmur from the television fills the silence in the room all I ever hear now is how we 'must all stay indoors' and how 'there has been an addition to the total mortality toll'. For that exact reason, classical musical reverberates around the room and not the murmuring of the television. Life since I was diagnosed has not been the same and this virus only makes it harder. During this time of uncertainty where I perhaps feel more distant from everybody else than most, I prefer to think about all the things I have in common with teenagers my age or even just humanity as a whole and not my differences. I may have had to leave school and put my future on hold, losing all that I had achieved like the chance to go to the States for a Summer School due to symptoms such as an exasperating, unexplainable tiredness and loss of energy, abnormal bleeding and even the frequent loss of hair. I may have had to incorporate routinely visits to the hospital into my every day and even lose contact with my friends as we grew further apart, but I continue to live the same life everyone else is living. Just like those my age, I still enjoy going out, pampering myself even if it is just to admire myself in the mirror, spending hours online shopping only to decide not to purchase anything, meeting with friends, dancing around to my favourite music and most importantly spending time with my family.

Just like all the similarities I share with others the same age as me, I also share many similarities with anyone of any gender, age, religion and race. We as humans seem to believe that we are the most powerful of all, that we control the way the world is run and the events that take place, but what we forget to acknowledge is God's almighty power. Human beings have time and time again ignored the signs of nature and how we are merciless with the planet we call our home; nature is merciless on us and unforgiving independent of the life we lead. An illness may enter an 'undeserving' life, but humans are unable to prevent it from happening. A natural disaster may strike the poorest of humanity, but humans are unable to prevent it from happening. This helplessness felt in the bones of our species is shared by us all and there is nothing one can do about it.

We may all lead different lifestyles with the smallest or the grandest of problems but at the end of the day we are simply insignificant creatures taking refuge in God's greatest creation. We all have a blessing in common: the gift of life and we all have a goal in common: to live our lives as best as we can.



## All I Will Ever Do is Fly

by Bunnie

Nothing seemed different about this day to any other.

All I ever did was float.

I felt a tug on my tail, alerting me of the movement from below. My vision went lower as I was pulled down to the salesman's level, focusing on the stubble as he inspected me closely. I could hear him tutting as the wind blew me again, making me bounce against his face. He pulled me even further down, forcing me to be face to face with a small girl.

Her face was very strange indeed.

But of course, I hadn't seen many.

The way the light shone on her made her look something more similar to an angel than a human. It seemed almost unnatural that she didn't have white feathered wings that blanketed her small back.

The more I looked at her, the more I realised.

She was my destiny.

'Three pounds.' The salesman grumbled. I had never heard his voice before, and when it boomed above me, everything seemed to stop.

Humans were strange creatures indeed.

Once the golden coins were handed over, my tail was placed into the palm of a little girl. Her fingers quickly created a tight grasp over me, ensuring that I couldn't escape. Not that I wanted to, of course. She was all that I ever needed.

Suddenly, I was upright, no longer being dragged against the strong winds. My girl had stopped in her tracks, her red shoes no longer reflecting the sun. Her sight had latched on to something in front of her, something big, bright and fluffy.

It was a giant teddy hanging from a backdrop on a stall.

The dad also looked. He knew what was going to happen. It had all played out before.

The little girl was not an angel after all.

She was more like a devil.

Once she had obtained the teddy, I felt the grip on my tail loosen. I had heard from other balloons that the first hug between a child and their toy was important, making me realise that I was in the way of it.

3

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She let me go.

The wind picked up, sending me further into the clouds. The lights from the fair slowly died away, along with the sounds and feelings that were brought with it.

The wisps of cloud brushed against my face as I continued to float.

I was a lost balloon.

In the distance, I saw dots of colour. Green, red, yellow and blue. Confusion drowned me as I focused on the flying objects.

Suddenly, my vision came round and let me in on the secret.

There was a giant bunch of balloons of many colours, floating as a family, keeping each other above the clouds. They were the children's lost balloons who had found each other and made each other happy.

My destiny wasn't the girl.

All I will ever do is fly.

Fly with my family.

Fly as a free balloon.

## Kairos

by Isabella Armour, Year 9, from Jarrow, South Tyneside

Moonlight coated the war-stricken land in a weak blanket of phosphorescence, a poor mimic of the job intended for the sun. The moon was merely a substitute, only existing to ensure that no one is alone during the desolate nights.

I was lonely, sitting there with only the moon and my gun as company.

Moments like this were rare on the battlefield – you were always hyperalert, wearing worry lines and checking over your shoulder. It wasn't until the quiet of night, or the peace earned after a long day of struggle, that I could allow myself to relax, and let my bruised emotions wrestle with my tired mind.

A strangled gasp sounded next to me, ripping me out of my thoughts.

A scrawny young man stood beside me, shock contorting his features into a mask of fear. He looked young, almost too young to be here. Pale blond hair was slicked back in an attempt to look older, but his youthful face betrayed him.

His features were so obviously Germanic that there was no debate where he was from; my eyes narrowed at the swastika on his arm.

Neither one of us knew what to do next, arms twitching by our sides. Our fates dangled in the silence, waiting to be murdered with the click of a loading gun.

The click never came.

After a pregnant pause, he slowly sat beside me with a shaky, kind smile; his arms raised away from his gun to convey the innocence of his actions. When I made no move to stop or harm him, he began talking to me in a flurry of incomprehensible German.

His voice was unexpected – soft, with a trace of huskiness and more power than the frail body would suggest.

After a while, he stopped his babbling, and as silence began to pool through the cracks in my thoughts, I felt something I hadn't felt in a while: peace.

Two heartbeats could be heard, his and mine. They were different rhythms, but then they overlapped, beating as one and becoming an anthem for the bond between mankind. It wasn't loud, but overwhelming in its intensity, and it said all the words the language barrier wouldn't allow me to say.

We sat there until the first rays of sun bathed us in the warm glow I'd been craving, wordlessly pouring out hopes and dreams of a war-free, peaceful future, that for some reason felt more likely to happen than it had the day prior.

We parted ways with gentle smiles and a firm handshake, a few words said with our eyes.

Regardless of allegiance, we are all human in the end, inhabiting the same planet and breathing the same air.

A soft smile tugged on my lips as I marched back to the tents, preparing for the long day ahead, but for once, I felt ready to face it.

I turned towards the sun and whispered a quiet thank you, for reminding me that I'm not alone.

## Something In Common

by Grace, St. Mary's School

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The ringtone on the laptop burst into song, its melancholy tune reminding Savannah of all she had to gain, and all she had to lose. She held her breath. There was a chance. They didn't have much in common. But she was sure it was him. Her dad. Her heart pounded in her chest so hard she feared she might break apart. It had to be him, after all she had done to track him down. It had been almost easy once she tried. She'd had to do it in secret, hiding away with her laptop. Not let the other foster kids see. Alan and Tyler had got close to catching her once, but she'd turned them away with stories of maths homework. Nadia was harder to dissuade. Nadia was eleven, older than Alan and almost double Tyler's age. She didn't buy homework stories, not unless there was proof. But Savannah knew things. She'd shut Nadia up. For a while, at least. It was lucky that Martin has been busy. Busy with Alan's schoolwork and Nadia's SATs. Busy with Jo and Harvey's antics. Busy with all the others. No-one had time for a lonely teenager. Which, in a way, was good. If Martin had been himself, he would surely have noticed her long periods of solitude in her room, scouring the internet for a sign.

Savannah looked back to the laptop screen. Still ringing. Still waiting. She thought about when she'd seen the picture, and known it was him. True, he was white, not brown like her, but her mother was black, at least in Savannah's photo of her, so it would make sense if her dad looked like the internet said he did. Opposite of her. Nothing the same, yet everything in common. He was part of her. Her father. The empty parent figure that had been absent all her life. Her heart ached. And then the ringing stopped.

Savannah looked at the screen, and into the eyes of a man. Her father? Her chest felt tight, like it couldn't let in air for fear of bursting. Her eyes stung. Her father. Her living, breathing father. Not a featureless, nameless shadow anymore. A real person. Taking in his wide brows, his deep eyes, she realised they had so much in common. She opened her mouth. She didn't know what she was going to say. 'Hello'? Too nonchalant. 'I've missed you'? She never knew him enough to miss him. A tiny, malicious voice deep inside her suggested 'Why did you abandon me?' Savannah pushed it away. She closed her mouth, then opened it again – an emotional goldfish. Her feelings were in exhilarated turmoil. The tiny voice poked at her confidence again, whispering 'You don't know why he left, do you?'

He gasped; eyes wet with tears.

She reached towards the screen. It felt like a huge empty hole inside her had been filled. She didn't care who he was, if he had other kids or not. He was her dad.

contemptuously from head to foot. 'Swear him!'

'Before I am sworn, I must beg to say one word,' said Mr Brownlow, 'and that is, that I really never, without actual experience, could have believed—'

'Hold your tongue, sir!' said Mr Fang peremptorily.

'I will not, sir!' replied the old gentleman.

'Hold your tongue this instant, or I'll have you turned out of the office!' said Mr Fang. 'You're an insolent, impertinent fellow. How dare you bully a magistrate?'

'What!' exclaimed the old gentleman, reddening.

'Swear this person!' said Fang to the clerk. 'I'll not hear another word. Swear him.'

Mr Brownlow's indignation was greatly roused, but, reflecting perhaps that he might only injure the boy by giving vent to it, he suppressed his feelings, and submitted to be sworn at once.

'Now,' said Fang, 'what's the charge against this boy? What have you got to say, sir?'

'I was standing at a book stall—' Mr Brownlow began.

'Hold your tongue, sir!' said Mr Fang. 'Policeman! Where's the policeman? Here, swear this policeman. Now, policeman, what is this?'

The policeman, with becoming humility, related how he had taken the charge, how he had searched Oliver, and found nothing on his person; and how that was all he knew about it.

'Are there any witnesses?' inquired Mr Fang.

'None, your worship,' replied the policeman.

Mr Fang sat silent for some minutes, and then turning round to the prosecutor, said in a towering passion,—

'Do you mean to state what your complaint against this boy is, fellow, or do you not? You have been sworn. Now if you stand there refusing to give evidence, I'll punish you for disrespect to the bench; I will, by—'

By what, or by whom, nobody knows; for the clerk and jailer coughed very loud, just at the right moment, and the former dropped a heavy book upon the floor, thus preventing the word from being heard—accidentally, of course.

With many interruptions, and repeated insults, Mr Brownlow contrived to state his case, observing that, in the surprise of the moment, he had run after the boy because he saw him running away; and expressing his hope that, if the magistrate should believe him, although not actually the thief, to be connected with thieves, he would deal as leniently with him as justice would allow.

'He has been hurt already,' said the old gentleman in conclusion. 'And I fear,' he added with great energy, looking towards the bar, 'I really fear that he is very ill.'

'Oh, yes, I dare say!' said Mr Fang, with a sneer.—'Come, none of your

## Twins

by Emily, 16, from Bodmin, Cornwall

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Boys,  
Both of them.  
Born thirty minutes apart.  
Both similar,  
But different.

One with brown hair,  
The other with auburn.  
Different.  
Eyes, both brown.  
Freckles adorn both their faces.  
Similar.

A photographer;  
A musician.  
Different.  
But similar.  
Both artistic,  
In different ways.

Twins,  
But not the same.  
Two people,  
Not one.

Similar,  
Not a clone of the other.

## Covid-19 Letter

from Ali Smith

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Hello.

How strange everything is, now that the spread of the corona virus has altered all our worlds. We're all in the same boat now, I heard someone say the other day, and I thought, yes – but weren't we *always* all in the same boat? What made us imagine we weren't?

Write me something for The Litmus about this brand new ancient way in which we've all got everything in common right now. It can take any form you like, including visual art. Make something of it for me. I want to hear and see your voices online. The endless newsfeed doesn't tell me anything about what it's like to be young at the eye of this storm.

I'm sending my love to you and all your families and loved ones and friends. Stay safe. Cross the separation we're all having to endure – by telling it like it is, for The Litmus.

Ali Smith

## The Dancing Tree

by Amelia Gray, 13, Year 9, Ken Stimpson Community School, Peterborough

The bright crayon picture is a dancing tree,  
 the dancing plants of Cuba proudly  
 above me,  
 It's the moment that I begin to learn

Chapter 1

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

"My dear Mr Bennet," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?"

Mr Bennet replied that he had not.

"But it is," returned she; "for Mrs Long has just been here, and she told me all about it."

Mr Bennet made no answer.

"Do not you want to know who has taken it?" cried his wife impatiently.

"You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."

This was invitation enough.

"Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be by the end of next week."

"What is his name?"

"Mr Bingley."

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## Before Anyone Else

by Ayushmaan Sharma, 15, Year 11, Seven Kings School

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you and i have more in common  
than meets the eye  
a figment of connection that weaves through  
the fibres of our skin, that is far from pervasive  
or de facto in nature

we are an interrelation that strays from the  
confines  
of the status quo or strata of inflexibilities  
of human societies  
that forever seem  
to  
box  
us  
into a homogenous realm of expectation and reputation  
but no.

you and i have more in common  
then the sensation of touch  
on your fingertips

our commonality appears intransient  
opaque and redoubtable in force  
it's there:  
waiting in the tissues that lie under the cloak and drapes of your hair  
something the callous hands  
of capitals and monoliths and bureaucracies  
could never grasp  
because we embody  
the elixir of human good

you are kind  
and gentle and beautiful  
if our raw commonality is the oracle you seek.  
but where we truly lie in each other's common paths is how  
you and I put each other  
before anyone else



## Fate's Appraisal

by Mimi Matson

Searching for any source of mutuality between the pair was a struggle. One was the most worrisome kid ever conceived, endlessly shaking at the most minor mentions of publicity. The other was a radio's reincarnate. Spreading false truths like a wildfire, ignoring the deforestation that it left behind in its enraged wrath. Never any feuds, barely any dialogue spoken directly. Just common courtesies of greetings if they ever spotted each other. A more common occurrence than imaginable. Their magnetism was obvious, yet unintentional. Apparently unplanned.

Whenever one left their home, the other would unknowingly do so as well. They'd find themselves in the same space, ignorant of the location. Coincidental, yet expected when the soulmate label was thrown. A conspiracy that everybody excluding the two was on board with. It was a fact. Aggressive denial was ineffectual so they learned to live with it. By avoiding each other completely. Disregarding the sorrow that it brought. Their only contact was to confirm that the other wasn't also present, leading to months without a single sighting. This time intentional.

Years passed, and their personalities seemed to swap almost simultaneously. Still juxtaposing, but backwards. The harsh grip of anxiousness had blossomed into a confidence never before witnessed. Now constantly displayed through prideful performances. Becoming boastful. The gossipers lost their defining popularity. Instead, spending days hugging hoodies and desperately desiring a single online buzz. Obsessive attempts left fruitless. They had long since stopped their messages. The illusion of their foretold romance became old news. Replaced by a common distaste. Undoubtedly violent.

One day, it'd be a bloody nose, gently dripping its liquid perpendicular to wet eyes. The next, a broken leg. Crutches for months. An intense hatred brewed, oozing into the spotlight. They'd never been close, but now their fists were closer than their individual hearts ever were. Combined. A short stretch from mortal enemies. Unrecognisable from their earliest interactions. Now bruised and bloodied. An unexpected future when compared to an engagement.

Adulthood was reached and both left their little town, flocking to opposite sides of the country. Pursuing careers in completely different fields. Never to speak again. The ancient stereotypes were burnt to a crisp. Rotting in their own decay. The new lives became a solace for decades, but one that proved temporary. Both returning to their nest.

Brand new people were born. Morphed from their foreign experiences yet gained commonality in their interests. Laughing, with animated smiles. Joined at the hip. Even the mirror never displayed one without the other. One connected unit, coded in conjunction. The Sun and Moon had finally reached their eclipse. Their deviation now complementing. With a future set out in the very constellations that one studied and the other painted. The rocky groundwork resulting into an underbelly for a more affectionate future. Hand gently gripped in hand. Rings worn.

## Marsupial

by Cameron, 16, Wokingham

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We have nothing in common. We are not alike. He laughs, each tombstone  
tooth a city: high rise and ebony: spectacular towers: a hundred Londons  
in his jaws, he licks his lips.

What have we in common? He will spit, and spin, and shed nuts and  
growths, pick roots with egregious knuckles. He runs up a tree, and spreads  
his plumed tail. There is no artfulness in him. Or, it is unrecognisable,  
because there is none in me.

I return, to my mechanical house: prefabricated. I try not to spit, spin,  
nor shed nuts with dull fingers. I will not run up stairs, let alone a tree.  
Dust accumulates, horses pass: tethered to their riders, their mouths  
alight with bits.

A firework sputters. He will smile with visionary teeth, remind me of  
London or New York; make a branch art, with a quick brutal ceremony;  
I stay at home. I am no visionary.

We have, maybe, something in common. Maybe. Disease will kill him, and  
I too would die: the earth would lay me out beside his body. We live, and  
think, and perceive the pupil of an eye, or the blackness of a city. We spurn  
the sky because we are in league with gravity. A branch will carry us up  
(if you learn the art) and in the scattered glare of cars: and the humanoid  
trees put up their arms, and a thousand rabbits stare.

## In Common

by Rozzie

# IN COMMON

Now more than ever, we all live in a world ruled by the media. We all aim to conform to a certain ideal of 'perfection'.

By aged seven, research shows 50% of boys 'wish they had more muscle'.

52% of teenage girls often worry about how their body looks.

We are constantly comparing the worst aspects of our lives with the highlights of other people's.



It can be hard to see your own achievements when you are surrounded by a whirlwind of everyone else's.

You don't realise that, beneath the shiny surface of a photo, everyone else has their own struggles.

There is so much more in common with all of us than we realise.

We all strive to attain our dream job, dream body, dream family, failing to see what is painfully obvious: no one is perfect.

### Being Set Free

by LLKD

Saying her vows least she declares  
hopeless

Bitter twisted lies! Why me? Cut and kill  
like the slave. Diggin' my history as I  
rise the room

Being set free

→ mage

Being kept in a cage → page  
Try and turn the page

Stuck in a maze → daze  
Or being put in a daze

All I want...  
↑ key ↑ bee ↑ tea ↑ gee  
↑ Lee

Is to be set free  
Take the key

Just set me free  
As I now plea

## Fire of Life

by Sarah Anne

We live in a world of war and death, of fear and destruction, of pain and suffering and the never ending screams echo into the universe, soundless, audible. We look at each other and we see an enemy, an Other, someone unlike us in looks or heart or nationality. We look at the world around us, and we don't see shimmering light stretching between living things, tying them together with the golden threads of fate. We see a resource for the taking, something we want to get our hands on and squeeze the life out of, just for the pleasure of watching it die. After all, if we can't find something in common with our own species, our own friends, our own family, then how can we see anything at all resembling us in a tiny woodlouse creeping across the bathroom floor, a verminous little cockroach, a disease carrying urban pigeon.

You know we share 60 percent of our DNA with Bananas?

Most people don't realise it but it's still there. One day, thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago, something happened. People argue about whether it was a miracle, or a gift, or an explosion purely as a result of chance. It is unknown whether we're destined to be here, whether there's some greater purpose written in the gleaming stars, that we, standing in our puny human structures simply fail to understand. It is unknown whether we are here by complete luck, coming into existence, slowly, over time changing and mutating and forming new shapes until here we stand. A tiny blip in the neverending sands of time. We try to leave things behind – writings on dusty archaic manuscripts, gleaming skyscrapers that pierce the clouds, a gravestone jutting out of dew filled grass, a footprint in the forest floor. But we know they too will one day be swept away into the dark abyss of nothingness, a feeble imprint on the memories of grandchildren, of great grandchildren. Fading, faded, gone.

Even when we separate ourselves from each other, fighting and warring and burning and destroying, it's still there. Whether we like it or not the fire of life burns brightly within us, within everything chattering or chirping or scurrying. Within every vine that stretches across the forest floor. Within every leaf, flower, blade of grass. You may think we have nothing in common, but we all have a life and we are all here to live it. And one day when that life does leave our fleshy temples of skin and bone, we will return to the earth once again, indistinguishable from anything else living. The trees will wave in the breeze, and life will still be in common.

## **It's Just Been Over Forty Years, Nearly Fourteen Thousand Nights**

by Laurence K, 16

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Why, I'm thankful for the many lonely nights she held me

In each fearful moment, enveloping me in a sweet song.

With harsh noise, her eyes fixated.

With soft melodies, her touch was real.

In each cruel moment of distrust and misfortune,

A voice of silver lining guides me, the same way her worn hand guides the needle through.

Each day my appreciation grows, to the point I admire and love all that signifies your presence.

Not just your voice, which bought me such comfort, but the path you've walked seems sacred.

Though sharing your light with those who need it is a heart-warming task,

basking in your great love with those who admire you as I do is an elevated joy,

For you gave us all our own stories,

Since we sat and heard yours.

## Are You Human?

by Bella, 14

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What makes humans human? How do we categorise and differentiate ourselves from all the other 6,494 species of identified mammals on the planet? The main distinction between us and the more primal fauna of the world is principally our morality, compassion and our capacity for deeper recognition of our actions and how they affect the world around us.

Therefore, in order to be classified as a human being you must be endowed with some elemental level of this philosophy. But I ask of you this, how often do you look at another human being and simply appreciate them for who they are and the impact they have on your life? More often than not these days with all our busy lives leaving little time for contemplation, we overlook all the incredible people that surround us and forget what we have in common.

Underneath the outer wrapping we all share fundamental similarities, not only do we all have a heart and a brain, but we all have emotions, feelings, thoughts. THIS, World is what we often fail to notice in our selfish lifestyles while we constantly strive for more: more money, more success, more stability. We forget that no matter where we come from, whether it be Pekanbaru in Indonesia or Quito in Ecuador, we all have these collective qualities that connect us, as if we are all tied together with constrictor knots.

Whether we are fat, thin, tall, short, pale or tanned we are all human. This is something we all have in common, something that binds us together in the largest community on Earth. There to support us if only we seek it and guide us towards the light should we need it.

## Reflection at Twenty-seven

by Lucas Laurence

And every night he returns,  
to look at me like no other,  
never bothering to alter his tiredness, or to mask his painful exhaustion.  
So, with kind intent I guide him,  
as he browses the powders and puffs,  
to decorate an emancipated face like his own exquisite corpse.

In some routine fashion he visits,  
slight, slightly ill – in his trading of metallics for a bitter white.  
Alongside me now stand four others, assistants, artists and associates,  
double checking he's up to scratch, yet remain unconcerned with his newfound emptiness,  
impartial to his fading frame.

That same night, he returns,  
and alone he seems so sickly.  
Trying to plead and reason and justify what he's made of himself.  
He told me,  
I never wanted to be one of them  
I didn't want to end up like that  
I don't want to die so young  
and I don't break until he leaves to find solace in his new accomplice.

The next year he visits, his body a passenger of a parasitic psyche.  
A shell of himself, who left his soul on the two snow white rails,  
as he moves from station to station,  
alive and well only in theory.

This year he doesn't see me at all.  
A newfound vacancy in his eyes, enveloped in distasteful glitters,  
this year the assistants check him twice,  
So that the streams that carve his face never leave a trace,  
So this year he's happy for the naked eye.

There're no more visits,  
it's in my nature to assume the worst,  
when we sung suicide, and I guided his hand from pen to piano to pick-me-ups.  
Only hoping the guilt of greed wouldn't eat us alive.

Years pass, and I'm reminded now and then of our Sweet Seventy-four,  
and of the man whose hand I held off the cliff's edge.  
Our exchanged words became a ballad over the ten o'clock news.  
Our death seized the radio.  
Perhaps without my script, death would wait.  
He followed my lyrics as if he had written his own lethal fate,  
and acted as if it were a premeditated event,  
that his destiny was written in melody,  
not stars.



## Disconnected

by Amina

### Disconnected

Love. Hate. Miscellaneous things  
 Torrents of passion and words that sting  
 Sparks that soar when meeting a gaze  
 Quickly spiral into an air of malaise  
 Love and lust the line is thin  
 A constant battle we wish to win

Marigold rays with an amber glow  
 Glistening the ground once cloaked with snow  
 Nature awakens from its deepest slumber  
 Spring chases fall whose days are numbered  
 Seasons change and so do we  
 But unlike nature we choose who to be

We live in a world consumed with greed  
 The rich get richer while we hope to be freed  
 Not from shackles of the material kind  
 But years of injustice we wish to rewind  
 Creed, colour, visage or race  
 We have more in common that should be embraced

Static cities and flashing screens  
 Models and media but what does it mean?  
 Broken people who put on a show  
 Were like you and I not long ago  
 Rumours, gossip, murmurs and lies  
 Push these people into their demise

Great stone statues and art with grace  
 Intricate detail found in every trace  
 Time fleets past and features weather  
 Minds stay young with skin like leather  
 Legacies live from decisions made  
 But eventually these memories fade



**I Stan**

by Daniela Jalo, Year 11, Queen Katharine Academy, Peterborough

I Stan~

Yes, of course I stan

I just can't get enough of this band,

My love is only for one direction

I've been diseased with the infection,

Not particularly something bad

But when they broke up it made me sad,

And the one with dimples and curls

Oh how crazy go all the girls,

Blonde and ready for a show

His blue eyes always glow,

Millions and millions feel the same.

I hope to see them together some time again,

From 2010 to 2016.

I truly loved all the years in between,

## The Common Mother

by Sathvika

Peacefully grazing on the lush grass of Ranthambore, the mother deer caresses her young fawn. The infant nuzzles close to her mother's underside and suckles joyfully. The inseparable bond between mother and child epitomised by this affectionate scene. Gentle grunts and sweet snorts echo through the herd. Shanthi!

Suddenly, there is movement. Alert eyes, erect ears and tense bodies. A crunch. A cacophony of panicked hoots, fearful braying and terrified alarms sweep through the forest. The mother deer hastily guards her precious offspring. Her only aim: to protect her child. Bhaya!

A flash of orange darts dangerously through the thicket. The mother and fawn weave with nimble agility around the disfigured trees. Hearts racing, blood pumping, fear coursing through the deer's vessels. But then, a separation. A wrong turn. A pounce. A kill. Mrtyu!

She weeps. Grief-stricken, the mother deer returns back to the herd. There is a void in her heart. Anguished, she mourns the death of her child. Soka!

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She weeps. Grief-stricken, the mother tiger returns to the back of her den. There is a void in her heart. Anguished, she mourns the death of her child. Soka!

Malnourished, the feeble cub struggles to breathe. His mother gently nudges him with infinitesimal affection. The mother tiger focuses her attention on her dying son as he feigns a shaky mewl. She delicately licks his thin fur as he takes his last breath. Mrtyu!

With no kill in over a week, the mother realises she must feed her cub again. Failed attempts of hunts have left her frail but her son's weak appearance and declining health worry her. She must provide food for him or else he will die. The fear of losing her cub grows. Her only aim: to protect her child. Bhaya!

Silent stalking, leery lurking and precise pouncing. A kill at last! The mother tiger drags the carcass to her den. Her young cub whines excitedly and feasts frantically on the meat. She fondles her son lovingly as he weaves between her legs. The inseparable bond between mother and child epitomised by this affectionate scene. Placid prustens and cherished chuffing echo through the den. Shanthi!

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Both are animals. Both are mothers. Both lose a child.

Protagonist-antagonist relationships depend on perspective. To each other, they are the villains but to their infants they are the heroes. Both creatures share an overwhelming amount of affection for their offspring. Maternal love is what they have in common.

## **The World We Live In Now**

by Esme Johnson, Year 9, St Bede's Inter-Church School, Cambridge

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*Sounds collected by the students still being educated in St Bede's Interchurch School during lockdown. Poem written by Esme, Year 9, based on the phrase 'in common' and partly inspired by Roger McGough's 'The Sound Collector'*

It's common to hear ten types of bird call,

Common to giggle on the playground.

It's common to find empty plastic bottles lying around

Common to know the sound,

Of wind, of the clock, of footsteps and of talk.

It was common to know the sound of talk more than type,

It was common to hear traffic, shouting, the sound of wheels on a bike.

It's still common to hear ambulance sirens,

It was always a common thing.

But the old me and I don't share something in common;

She doesn't pray for the patient that siren brings.

## What Path Will I Choose?

by Janhavi Gale, 17

We will all come to face the day where we must choose between the path of light and the path of dark. Today was that day for me. Which path will I choose? Would I go on to become important, or would I end up in jail? Would I achieve great things, or would I end up alone? So many questions for just one decision. The famous words of Dumbledore came to mind; 'We've all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That's who we really are.' But who am I? Who do I want to be? What path will I choose?

This is the biggest choice I will ever make in my life. I cannot get it wrong. My mind goes back to when the biggest choice in my life was choosing between strawberry or mango flavoured ice cream. The strawberry on its own was tasty, but so was the mango. Usually when I couldn't decide I went for both, because mixing the two flavours made the taste more exquisite. But is that a choice I have? There are only two paths in front of me, one of light and one of dark. There is no choice to mix both. I will have to pick one path. What path will I choose?

The path of light would allow me to be treated with some respect, as I would be treating others with the same. If I choose the path of light, my decisions won't affect other people in a negative way, and I would always be supportive of others. But does choosing this path make me vulnerable? What path will I choose?

The path of dark is always seen as a negative. But this path will make me strong enough to make my own decisions and be who I am, without worrying about what other people think of me. It is probably this part of me that will aid in my decision, as I must pick this path for myself. I cannot let what others think of my choice stop me from making the right one. What path will I choose?

As Dumbledore once said, 'We've all got both light and dark inside us,' so why must I choose between the two. Both paths have their benefits, but what benefit does one path have over the other? So, I choose not to pick either one path, but to walk straight down the middle and make my own path. In this sense, Dumbledore was right as I would forever have both light and dark inside me. But he is wrong in the sense of choosing one side over the other being who I am, for I can choose both and still be who I want to be, on my own path. Everything has a balance of two sides: the moon and the sun, night and day, the dark and the light... Me!

## Lost Hope

by Aayla Qureshi, 17

The ballroom came to a life of its own, as the dazzling light from the grandiose chandelier bounced off the pearly white walls and shone against the marvellous marble floor. The ethereal music filled the chaotic air as the orchestra brushed their fingers gently along the keys of the piano, and caressed the strings of the delicate harps and violins.

I meticulously analysed the scene in front of me. The hall was filled with herds of families, distant relatives, and companions – some of which I was yet to be introduced to. To say I was appalled was an understatement.

The men stood with immense pride – dressed in their finest dress coats with broad lapels and full collars, however the wives engaged in their not-so-discreet gossip, with their royal bustles cascading down.

My frustration heightened, as did my forbearance. This was immoral and unjust.

Where was the grief?  
Where was the despair?  
More importantly, where was the respect?

Whilst I understood the privileges of being the eldest son of a Lord, it was clear to me that this was no more than an opportunity to display the wealth of my late father. He passed away four days ago – 24th November 1836.

However, my mourning was cut short by the selfishness and greed of my mother – the organiser of this inconsiderate event to showcase and celebrate my late father's estates and hereditary titles that I now inherited.

This was unforgivable.

To everyone in this room, wealth was a prize to be sought and won, whereas to me it was a prize to be abandoned and forgotten. In their materialistic eyes, money was the one factor that they all had in common, that displaced any other emotion and took priority – even in cases of death. This wasn't a lifestyle I desired to engage in.

Where did our morals disappear to?  
Where was the fulfilment in wealth?  
Where was the honour in greed?

Unlike the rest of my family and acquaintances, I recognised and understood the significance of upholding my moral values – especially from an aristocratic descent, with the ability and financial resources to support those from lower class backgrounds.

This made me different to them. I chose happiness over wealth – a concept foreign to my lineage and its corrupt beliefs.

Sighing with an extreme disgust and resentment, I swiftly headed for the exit of the ballroom; I needed a pause from this tumultuous reality. As soon as I was engulfed by the bleak, wintry air, I let out a deep breath and looked up towards the crescent shaped moon that shone like angelic dust.

Lost in the deep burrows of my mind, I was startled when I heard the faint pleas from what resembled a mudlark crouched against the opposite wall – his clothes damp and tattered, his face rugged and dishevelled.

Without a second thought, I approached him commiseratingly and placed several shillings in his hand as he looked at me in disbelief, before making my way back inside...

## Common Ghosts

by Magdalena, 17

how many ghosts  
do you keep locked up  
in your closet? do you take them out  
one by one, unpack the bleached  
limbs of their immortal  
guilt, and wonder what blood  
their skinless hands  
once bore? the worst kind is  
that which you cannot see, the crimson that  
has sunk down through  
the soul, burning into  
the marrow of these bones  
you turn between your palms:  
the blood that their hands  
painted globes with, the red  
they drew over their maps, their  
compasses, the heart-red, muscle-red,  
passion-red ink of an empire

it was not the blue kind they liked to think  
ran in their own damned  
veins

our blood does not run blue –  
nobody's does, except maybe the dead's –  
we have that in common, the way it  
tastes like salt and ash and iron mixed in with  
the sugar, the tea, the spices; when the  
land starved, it saw red, saw blue, saw white  
red skies, blue seas, white bones –  
the bones in your closet  
whisper, sometimes. they are guilty and  
no penance can ever  
gift back a history stolen, the voice  
of a world, choked

my ghosts cannot rest in peace  
their voices, voices like the sea and the sky and the  
bones, rattling,  
keep their vindictive song  
known; do you sleep? or do  
you close the closet door when  
you grow weary of that truth  
and forget that some bones  
will never sleep beneath their own  
earth? tell me, how many bodies  
can you count, tell me,  
how red are the palms between which  
you hold the eternal weight of  
yourself

rule britannia! my ghosts sing:  
rule the seas and  
the skies and  
the bones

my closet is so full  
of ghosts

## Loss

by Kyra

Lose practice And losing you

to master. travel

loss is art



## Being Alive

by Sukriti

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The westward sun crawls toward your unveiled window and in an instant you are blinded by its dazzling light. You feel its warmth on your cheek and neck. There is no one outside and not a sound to be heard, save that of your breath. In this moment, the world is only you, the air and the Sun.

The clock ticks, a car passes by and the moment is over. You had felt as though you were the only one in the world to experience this and it leaves you feeling bittersweet. Little do you realise that the girl living in the apartment upstairs felt the same strange twist of emotions as you; only four minutes earlier.

You settle down into your window-side chair with a book in hand, hoping to read as long as the sky permits. A glance at the clock – it is 7 PM. You expect a call from your parents who are almost 5000 miles away and you anticipate it but also slightly dread the fact that you're going to have to put your book down.

The phone rings. Your father's smile and your mother's cheery albeit sleepy voice instantly washes away your reluctance as you cherish the 30 minutes you get with them. They've had busy days, even in the confines of home. You listen eagerly and begin to recall the adventure you had trying to recreate a dish from home in your small and largely unequipped kitchen. They laugh with you at your pathetic attempt, but you notice a hint of sympathy. It's 12 AM back at home, so you tell your parents to leave the call and get some sleep.

You feel rejuvenated, but it's quickly followed by an emptiness. You were supposed to go home in 2 months, but you realise now that it's merely a distant fantasy. Your friends always told you off for not wanting to go out with them, and you always brushed it off saying that you'd go another day. They never took it personally, knowing fully well that you don't like feeling like a fish out of water. They still love you despite your flaws, and you miss them dearly.

You feel like the only person in the world.

The clock strikes eight. Windows are opened as people come out of their solitary shells and clap and hoot for the life-saving heroes. You join them and as you clap and cheer together in unison, you realise that you are not alone. You are never alone.

We are 7.8 billion hearts beating in-sync to create the complex rhythm of the world we move and live in, and even if you hide behind a thousand walls, that will never change. The air you inhale and the breath you exhale will travel all across the world, touching everyone in its wake. We share this small world of ours in common with every living being, where even the tiniest of actions impact everyone in ways we can never comprehend. This is the strange beauty of being alive.

## Art

by Alex

"Art is so many things and none of these will bring  
disaster"

## The Diversity of Humanity

by Phoenix Woolnough, 17, from York

I peer down from the elevated veranda of a trendy café and look out onto the mesmerising urban jungle below. I am not fazed by the abundance of surrounding modernist buildings, where each glass façade aims to outcompete the next in its stylishness. Instead, the sea of people amidst these gargantuan structures is what attracts me, and it is easy to point out the differences among the crowd.

Some hastily speed-walk with a briefcase clunking against their leg, continually checking the time as if it might run out. Some languidly stroll, phone-in-hand and oblivious to their surroundings. Some pull their enthralled child along like a toy, burdened by lunchboxes and backpacks after the school run.

Couples, both old and young, walk arm in arm and smile to one another about an in-joke that nobody else would understand, although sometimes they are intercepted by a rowdy group of children running freely like the wind.

A unique *mélange* of languages and accents is potently audible, and it hangs in the air like a dense cloud, continually replenished by an incongruous new combination of words before any one of them can be singled out. Some voices boom triumphantly with euphoria, other tones express weariness and anxiety as they tell bad news.

Undeniably, they vary widely in terms of physical appearance and attire, and the vibrancy is intoxicating. It is a marvel to observe this moving, pixelated rainbow. From hijabs to high heels, turbans to turtlenecks, suits to saris, their clothing forms part of their identity, and they weave together to form a distinctive blanket.

A girl's large golden hoops swing from side to side like a dog's tail, and the tall man next to her has a beard and glasses that cling onto his face. The bald heads among the crowd juxtapose the bouncing afros. One woman's blue hair flows freely down to her thighs like a stream, whilst another wears her neat bob like a helmet.

Yet beyond their idiosyncratic walks, languages, clothing, and appearance, something further divides them. They are an amalgamation of social classes, ethnicities, genders, disabilities, ages, sexualities, and religions. Each one labels and is labelled. Each one discriminates and is discriminated against. Each one carries with them their own hardships and triumphs, and their own unique perceptions of the world.

I sketch this scene not to characterise the exterior of a Sociology textbook, but to indicate that there is diversity in every sound, every articulation, and every appearance. This is a microcosm of society.

We should celebrate these identities rather than condemning or attempting to extinguish them as some of our ancestors may have, taking pride in the beauty of our differences. Yet we should also appreciate our extraordinary tendency to love, to accept and to unite; humanity is what we have in common.

## Growing Pains

by Eloise, 17, Year 12, from Abergavenny

It's a familiar kind of feeling.  
That chest-wrenching, soul-clenching burst that buries your heart in the ground  
and your faith in all that is bright.  
It's teenage years,  
of that you're sure,  
but the loneliness of growing  
snaps at your heels

Isolation is a funny thing.  
It crawls in the darkness and waits,  
until that fickle beast of socialisation cowers to the enormity of the evening.  
Sunshine sours and the fulfilment of friends  
fades to forlorn pondering  
of The what-could-have-been.

It's a precarious balance of future and present.  
A laminar flow,  
both stagnant and flooding.  
It whispers too much and not enough  
A river of overwhelming  
That threatens to choke the potential it promises.

You feverishly prepare to grow and move up,  
forgetting the Peter Pan wonder of youth.  
The disease of social acquiescence  
Clings to the skin and chokes away  
the innocence that inexperience brings.

Summer days give way to autumnal evenings,  
As the changes lose your meaning.  
You only speak in tongues of shadows,  
The learnt language of the night.

Weary beauty resides  
Through those blinded  
Tear-streaked eyes,

A grip slowly  
beginning to slip.

Are you falling away?

A hand reaches out,  
And holds on.

For it's your dear life  
That is grasped between  
Those quavering digits of hope.

You are the sunlight upon their skin,  
that hazy comfort,  
taken for granted  
but beloved by all.

It's the beauty of your smile,  
the gentle warming ray  
that sets afire  
those who come  
just close enough.

For, when you arrive,  
It's the cherry blossom in spring.  
A new dawn.  
A chance to begin again  
As though the blooms  
had never shed at all.

We see our future,  
Laid ahead of us as a winding road.  
Weaved through with the sapphire of sorrow  
And the gleeful diamond of hope.  
The summit, ready to be celebrated  
And the cipher,  
Where we hold together as one,

For you're never alone,  
As a meandering stream,  
dreaming of belonging,  
inevitably meets the sea.  
And suddenly you find  
that spark within,  
the flame that crackles  
'Hope'

**DNA**

by Janhavi Gale, 17

**DNA**

We are of but strand is Unique it's only a small which our Physique DNA us all same it makes Different it's contrasting that us Magnificent we are of

all made DNA each is Percentage makes human makes the but also us these features makes each all made DNA

## The Voices On My Shoulder

by Janhavi Gale, 17



**(In)common**

by Alice Garcia Kalmus, 16

One thing we all have in common right now is that we are at home, and have been for two months. Schools are closed, and all exams have been cancelled. For Year 11s (like me) and Year 13s this means we have left it up to teachers to calculate two years of practice tests, mock exams, predicted grades, and time spent studying in and outside of school into a single grade for each subject. For some of us, that will not be the grade we are hoping for or need to progress so our next chapter is disrupted by the autumn retakes.

None of us have seen our friends or extended family for two months. All of us clap for carers every Thursday at 8. Most of us have been following Joe Wicks' workout videos. None of us have been closer than two metres to someone outside of our household. We all long for how life was before lockdown.

We all have good and bad days. Now, more than ever, we are all anxious about what the future will bring. I, for example, don't know whether I'll get the normal start to my sixth form in September. This is true for many students my age. During this unprecedented time, what we most of all have in common is the uncommon.

These remarkable changes are inevitably the start to what will become our 'new normal'. Because let's face it, the world will not be the same after this pandemic, whether for better or for worse. And that's true for all of us.

Several of us watched the 'Together at Home' concert series; it gave us a temporary distraction from the surreal reality of this crazy and ever-changing world. Many students watched the recent online graduation ceremony. The mood was one of unity and hope, despite the obvious disappointment at the lack of a physical graduation.

Unfortunately, this pandemic has brought to light many things that people don't have in common, despite our similarities. We can't all work from home. We don't all have the privilege of online school. We don't all have the same risk of becoming ill.

Whenever I've had feelings of self-pity, it hasn't lasted long, as I always remember that many people are in a worse situation than I am. So many people have lost their lives or faced a bereavement. 91% of those who died from the virus in March had a pre-existing health condition. Deaths in the most deprived areas of England have been more than double those in the least deprived. Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are disproportionately represented in high-risk key worker jobs, particularly in London. Millions of families who were already struggling are facing reduced or non-existent incomes; inequality has increased across most aspects of society.<sup>1</sup>

We have all been impacted in this pandemic. Fundamentally, what we all have in common is that our lives will never be the same.

1 <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/will-covid-19-be-a-watershed-moment-for-health-inequalities>

**Like Stars In Heaven**

by Chloe

Like stars in heaven,  
A goodly giant,  
pursues his lover,  
on her journey north,  
Although she did not run,  
the goodly giant,  
knew not to let his love wither.  
The Bay tackles her body,  
but alas,  
the goodly giant,  
did not let his love wither.



## A Letter to Valentin

by Laurence

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Valentin,

You make me write. My stream of thought becomes more than the madman under the bridge. Everything I may dissect; all I can deconstruct and reorder with words is given a new life. Each strip of my imagination and every one of my rearranged philosophies is given a purpose, so long as you live to read them; so long as you don't tire of the foreign thoughts.

I've become a paradox of an author. If there's nobody to perceive these letters, it's as if they've ceased to exist, their sentiment becomes void. I feel without you, they'd wither. Perhaps it's the nature of what I write, alone I'm confined, trapped between the four dimensions of my mind, with you it develops, multiplying with a new life no-one else could give it.

I don't know how. I don't know why it's been gifted a soul I couldn't find alone, but I know it's for the better, and I can pretend that it's fate.

The world takes on a new light, my eyes see from a new angle. I know now what it is to flourish, to be found and founded at once. I know what it is to fear I may feel all I'll ever feel; and to be given the promise of more by the very one who makes me fear a lack of it. To become an aesthete and know it. To have a new world shown to me, and to instinctively embrace it. The reassurance I sought after for so long finds me itself.

To have found life is dangerous, to find life drives men mad, but to be gifted this and throw it away would be a betrayal of my own morals, the morals given to me by the same mind that now tells me why I live, what I live for. Though I'm plagued in darker hours by the worry of abandon, it's the very thing you uncovered in me that would have me hold on despite losing you.

I will live for life in my own perspective. I will live life for feeling, for feeling is life's nature, and you gave it to me, so perhaps it's natural that for you I feel more than for any other.

For you I feel love.

## The Act of Contending

by Katie-mai

I gazed out my window, confined to my house. I thought to myself about the times I would play outside as a child with my younger sister, I reminisced about how easy life was and how pleasant life seemed. It's sad almost to think about how deceiving, misleading and cruel children's thoughts are. How we thought we would live for ever. I pictured the scene. I could imagine the smell; it was so clear to me. Freshly cut grass, the smell of my mum making our favourite food, the sweet scent of the nearby flowers. I could hear the giggle of my little sister as she plays with the puppy that my dad had recently brought home for us and I could feel the faint tug on my lips as I began to smile at the thought of being as happy as I was.

My phone made a faint buzz and only after a minute or two when I had finally stopped thinking about what once had been did I look at the message I had received.

My stomach dropped and the breeze fell. Everything was almost peaceful for a second. Until the clock on my watch started ticking so loud that it began to feel like it was in my head. Until every noise I could ever imagine was inside of me making a desperate attempt to escape but like a blind man in an unknown environment he didn't know where the exit was. I felt every emotion and nothing at all at the same time, my feelings whizzed around me, mocking me, laughing at me. Anger choked at my throat and my eyes burned from trying to stop the tears from falling. My vision blurred at the desperate attempt to make it seem as if I was okay.

I turned around to my father, the strongest person I knew, everybody's rock. I could sense that now, radiating out of my father was the idea that he hadn't done enough, that he hadn't said the things that he wanted, needed, to say. Anger, guilt, longing all hugged us tightly and it felt as if they were never going to let go. I sobbed. A single tear slid down from my father's warm, hazel eyes, followed by another one, and another one, until soon, a steady stream of tears flowed its way down his cheek, releasing the sadness that had been held inside of him but still he did not make a sound.

I hold my father's hand as we stand at the foot of the grave. What is left of my heart fills with sorrow at the thought of never being able to say goodbye. The virus continues to consume the people dearest to us and wreak havoc among the people who have not yet been taken. It is 2020 and now we all have something in common.

## Doubts

by Chloe

122

OLIVER TWIST

garment; for as the Jew unbuttoned it, and threw it over the back of a chair, he retired to the corner from which he had risen, and wagged his tail as he went to show that he was as well satisfied as it was possible to be.

'Well!' said Sikes.

'Well, my dear,' replied the Jew, 'Ah! Nancy.'

The latter recognition was uttered with just enough of embarrassment to imply a doubt of its reception; for Mr Fagin and his accomplices had not met since she had interfered in behalf of Oliver. Any doubts on the subject, if he had any, were speedily removed by the Jew's behaviour. She took her feet off the fender, pushed the door open, and bade Fagin draw up his, without saying more about it; for it was a cold night, and no mistake.

'It's cold, Nancy dear,' said the Jew, as he warmed his skinny hands over the fire. 'It seems to go right through one,' added the old man, touching his side.

'It must be a mercer if it finds its way into your heart,' said Mr Sikes. 'Give him something to drink, old Burn.' 'Nonsense, make haste! It's enough to turn a man ill to see a Jew drinking brandy, as if he were in that way, like a ugly ghost just rose from the grave.'

Nancy quickly brought a bottle from the cupboard in which there were many, which, to judge from the diversified appearances, were filled with several kinds of liquors. Sikes, pouring out a glass of brandy, bade the Jew drink it off.

'Quite enough, quite enough, Bill,' replied the Jew, putting down the glass, after just setting his lips to it.

'What you're afraid of our getting the better of you, are you?' inquired Sikes, fixing his eyes on the Jew. 'Ugh!'

With a hoarse grunt of contempt, Mr Sikes seized the glass, and threw the remainder of its contents into the ashes, as a preparatory ceremony to filling a second.

The Jew, with a companion, tossed down the second glass with a curiosity, which he had seen it often before, but in a restless and nervous manner, which was habitual to him. It was a meanly-furnished room, containing but the contents of the closet to induce the belief that its occupier was anything but a working man; and with no more suspicious articles displayed to view than two or three heavy bludgeons which stood in a corner, and a 'life-preserver'<sup>96</sup> that hung over the chimney-piece.

'There,' said Sikes, snacking his lips, 'now I'm ready.'

'For business?' inquired the Jew.

'For business,' replied Sikes; 'so say what you've got to say.'

'About the girl at Chertsey,'<sup>97</sup> Bill said the Jew, drawing his chair forward, and speaking in a very low voice.

## Questions I Can't Answer...

by Bella, 14

Date: 29th May 2020

Time: 10:58pm

Location: My kitchen

I am currently in that stage between daytime and sleeping, you know the one, when your physically stationary and trying to unwind but your mind is like a thundering storm at sea and asking those impossible to answer questions. What is the reason for our existence? What would the earth be like if I was never born? Why do humans have a higher cognitive function than most other animals? We don't really have definite answers for these, so our minds just try and fill the blanks to the best of our understanding, and I was in the middle of these thoughts when one of these particular questions stopped my brain in its tracks.

Why do we have fear?

I know that the amygdala is responsible for that shiver that runs down our backs and the cold sweat on our palms, but what makes that 'thing' so scary in the first place to trigger such reactions? This is what left me answerless for a good half an hour, so I decided to write and hoped that would help sought through the cacophony of thoughts currently pinging around my head like a hive of bees. I can conclude that after running several situations through my mind, there are a few end results that are common in many: humiliation, pain, loss, but most frequently – death.

So now I ask why do we fear death? 'In this world nothing can be said to be certain except, death and taxes' as Benjamin Franklin once said. Therefore, in order to determine the reasoning behind our fear of death I need to look at what makes death different and there are a few things that stand out in blaring red lights: it is calendar-less and unpredictable from one person to the next; it is inescapable and finally, we have absolutely no clue what comes next. Consequently, I believe that we do not truly fear the death itself but the uncertainty of what it means for our existence.

However, I believe myself an enigma in this self-conclusion as I have never sincerely been scared of death. In order to understand this, you should probably know that I am currently a 14-year-old preparing for my GCSEs and considering what on earth I want to do with my life afterwards. So, to me the uncertainty of my future seems a lot more ominous than the finality of death. You see there may be an element of ambiguity in death nevertheless, there is also a profound clarity in the fact that it is the end of this particular existence. With death comes the promise that this life, with this body and these memories is over, whether there is a second book I cannot say, but I know that this book has unquestionably finished, and I take peace in that singular notion. I do not know what follows death and I do not wish to preach my beliefs for this is not what this notation is about, this is about facing the fear of death; staring at it and not cowering away but taking a defiant stance, and accepting death not as an enemy but as an inevitability.

Do you really wish to recoil in terror from a thing you cannot control and waste your life desperately trying to defeat an unvanquishable foe? Life is far too short to fear for tomorrow: so live for today.

## The Dust of an Evening Spent Living

by Fiona Zeka, 17, Year 12, St Paul's Way Trust School

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Today

We fell

like the stars

We felt

the dampness of

the dark

the sun

the fields

the tender air

We arrive, light, darkness, doors, a thirst for more

Can we hold the dust of the evening?

Or will it fall with our touch, our breath, our step

Will it flee,

Will it welcome our touch?

The touch of a sibling is a familiar thing. We are its originators, its parents, its heirs.

Our skin is a veil of dust, and our skin forms it too.

Our living, our solitude, is made possible by the very thing we wish to capture, to hold, to confine to memory.

Dust is unconfined, and for this reason it is common. No state can monopolise dust, for it arises out of everything,

War. Love. Evenings. The stars falling. Stars?

Nuclear fallout.

The dust bears witness, it is a universal signal. It cannot be taken political prisoner. It lives, together with us.

## The Similarities Between Kafka and Cervantes; The Use of Transmutation

by Alexandra Shepherd

Transmutation is used by both Kafka and Cervantes respectively, in order to explore and expose the ugly nature of human society in relation to a lack of individuality and humanity as well as classism and social order. Through the exploration of Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis' and Cervantes' 'Don Quixote', one can see the similarities in their critique of societal constructs.

In *The Metamorphosis* Kafka dissociates the lead protagonist from humanity, describing him as 'ungeheures Ungeziefer' (a monstrous sort of vermin) in order to explore the dehumanising aspects of society which alienate him from humanity. It is likely such alienation resonated with Kafka. Much like Gregor Samsa after his transmutation, as a Jewish man living in Czechoslovakia in the late 18th and early 19th century, Kafka too was trapped between being both an insider and an outsider. Gregor's societally restricted life as a travelling salesman manifests in his transmutation to a bug; a powerful indictment of the isolation which he faces due to societal expectations. Furthermore, Kafka's use of metamorphosis lends itself to magical realism; combining fantasy whilst simultaneously exposing societal truths, thus forcing the reader to question the purpose of human life in a modern society that ignores and rejects individuality. Perhaps more importantly, it acts as a moral warning to the reader of the dangers of both rejection from, and entrapment in, modern society.

Like Gregor, the lead protagonist of 'Don Quixote' also experiences transmutation, but this time through an imaginary transformation into a knight. Whilst 'The Metamorphosis' appears to comment more on the implications of social order on individual lives, the transmutation in 'Don Quixote' challenges class and human power as the foundations of society. The transformation of the plebeian in 'Don Quixote' highlights the temporary nature of human power, demonstrated through the warped social order constructed in Don Quixote's imaginary world. By exploding the limiting boundaries of social class, Don Quixote identifies the inner worth of the people he meets, imagining innkeepers as lords and country girls as princesses on merit of their character and not their social class. Writing in a time in which the social and political climate of Spain was under transition, it has been suggested that Cervantes draws on the experience of his Jewish ancestors. In 1492 Spain was turned into a Catholic nation and the Jewish community were forced to leave or convert to Catholicism, perhaps something Cervantes has explored in relation to the instability of the powerful and ruling class in the novel. It is interesting to note how both authors who have experienced a direct or indirect forced separation from society exercise the choice to create distance between their characters and societal constructs.

As two of the most commended writers of world literature one doesn't have to search far to find striking similarities in their work, particularly in 'The Metamorphosis' and 'Don Quixote'. Their similar use of transmutation allows us to identify a common ground not only in their critique of society but also through their unique experiences within it.

## Something In Common

by Honor Graham

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Confusion culminates like a smog suppressing  
Our vision and concealing the road ahead.  
Each road located in different places.  
We've been taught to 'Never Eat Shredded Wheat'

But the compass points in no clear direction. Heroes soar  
Seamlessly clad in smocks, masks and nitrile gloves.  
Together they will save our country. Will they all  
Emerge victorious from their battles? I pray so.

Worry is a venomous snake; the perpetrator's  
Fangs painfully piercing our perceptions. The serpent  
Attacks at night. Night when the darkness  
Descends like the gas in the previous battles.

Differences cast aside, man joins hands –

Yet cannot touch – two metres now  
An endless abyss defended by eternity.  
Still there is hope. Together we dream  
Of the riches at the end of the rainbow.

A golden utopia glitters where corona  
Belongs once more to angels. Angels  
Who ascended prematurely from us,  
Leaving Earth grieving. Tears cascade

From towering clouds, collect in dams:  
Only to be shed again. Confusion culminates  
Like a smog suppressing our vision and concealing  
The road ahead. But a searchlight shines.

We are now united through something in common.

**In Common**

by Elinor Hurry, 14

This world that is focused on discrimination  
 Inequality  
 Prejudice  
 A world that is inherently  
 Racist, sexist, homophobic  
 A world that favours the rich above the poor  
 A world of barriers not bridges  
 Rubber coated bullets of lies and deceit  
 A world of protectionist policies  
 And barricades of hate  
 That bombarded our heads  
 And more frighteningly our hearts  
 Building walls, closing borders, hiding in your glass towers

But an airborne terror, unites us in fear  
 A global enemy never encountered before  
 No uniform  
 Identification number  
 Allegiance or leader  
 Climbed over our manmade mountains  
 Squeezed between the cracks in your lies and deceit  
 Seeped through your pretence  
 The barriers thought to be indestructible  
 Slowly crumbled to the ground

Dystopian fiction now a reality

But as the world was locked down  
 One man was knocked down  
 Held down  
 Forced down  
 8 minutes and 46 seconds

Human connection reduced to a screen  
 As we were contained inside four walls  
 Was ignited with a spark of rage  
 A fire burned brightly  
 A fire so powerful it spread past borders  
 And encompassed the world  
 People will stay silent no longer  
 So, for George Floyd.  
 Breonna Taylor  
 Tony McDade  
 And every other life lost  
 Because of institutionalised brutality

United on the ground  
 Chanting I can't breathe  
 While you bunker down  
 Stand up,  
 Fists raised  
 No words needed  
  
 But what is it that you fear  
 When you perch on your capitalist thrones  
 Or hide in your ivory towers  
 Those who are different  
 Or is it what you truly fear  
 That there is far less that divides us  
 Than what we have,  
 In Common



## Writing In Common

by Sophie

Writing In Common.

So many things seem to be lost.  
Everyday,  
The hour of losing.  
badly spent.

Places and names  
two cities and a watch  
Three loved houses  
And loosing you.

A very beautiful disaster.

## I'm Not a Threat

by Grace, 14, Year 9

'As I walk down the street, my expression is calm, a smile printed on my face like a mask. However, my thoughts are a restless collage of fear and worry.

Why can't we just be treated the same? Why can't we just be looked at as a human and not as a threat?'

She poured her worries and thoughts out to me in a raspy voice as she fought back the urge to cry.

I thought I understood.

I, a white person, born into this world with an unbelievable amount of privilege. Privileges that people don't normally consider.

I can go for a jog. I can play with a toy gun. I can hold my phone at night. I can sleep in my car. I can do these ordinary things everyday without the fear of being killed by a police officer that excuses my death by saying they thought the phone I was holding was a gun

'My skin colour is not my choice, my skin colour is not a weapon, my skin colour is purely just a colour caused by chemicals in my body. I am not a threat so why do they see me as one.'

She left with that last comment, leaving me in a state of shock. Then I realised

We don't have anything in common, though I thought we did.

The activities I listed are some of the reasons why black people have been killed by the police.

Killed for jogging: **Ahmaud Arbery**

Killed for holding a toy gun: **Tamir Rice**

Killed for holding their phone: **Stephon Clark**

Killed for sleeping in their car: **Willie McCoy**

### #BlackLivesmatter

No freedom until we're equal.

No justice No peace.

Say their names. Sign petitions. Please act.



## I Thought We Had Something In Common

by Harriet Goldson, 17, Thorpe St Andrew High School and Sixth Form

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'I thought we had something in common?'

I said to my mother one day.

'You thought we had something in common?'

My mother repeated back to me.

'Yes, but that man was taken away for no reason.'

'Surely coming from a different race is no act of treason?'

'Well where we live there are deep divisions within society.'

This statement filled me with anxiety.

I thought to myself, as a child would

Why a world so rich with life could

Justifiably ignore a sense of humanity

And act with such insanity.

I was abandoned by my mother for challenging the norm,

She did not value a child who believed in reform.

Although that made me weep,

And from it I lost several nights sleep,

I knew that like a bird in a cage,

I could sing my song of outrage.

My song was heard by others like me,

To me they were drawn, like a dog with its fleas.

Together we began to shout;

'Change will not come unless we act out!'

'We have something in common. All of us!'

'We will stand together and start to make a fuss!'

For now I know that I was right to question

Because what makes us different should be no cause for aggression.

Not one person is more important than another

Each man, no matter race, is another man's brother.

Society cannot tell our generation to be quiet.

The young will stand up. We will riot.

'I thought we had something in common.'

I told those who would listen.

'We do have something in common!'

But for others that connection did not matter.

The message of equality is strong.

But the battle for it to be won will be long.

All we want is for all to belong.

**In Common**

by Maxwell

The stains of death linger in my mind. Yet among the drizzling melancholy of being a pawn in the game, I still remember the time I became the most important person on that battlefield, if only for a moment.

He wore clothing unfit for battle, and emerged from the tall bushes near the woods. As he walked through the mist he seemed to walk in a separate dimension to everyone else.

‘You there! You’re going to get shot!’ I yelled. Maybe he was deaf.

He materialised through the wall of smoke, making shapes in its volume. He kept trekking, oblivious to the nature of his surroundings.

‘What the hell are you doing? Get off the battlefield!’

Yet the gunfire and arrows missed him entirely. He kept walking, and then I realised he was heading for me. Soon he was right above me. ‘Come with me,’ he said, ‘and I will show you immortality’.

I woke up in a golden haze, surrounded by nature. I was in a rectangular garden with tall hedges impossible to see beyond. I sensed the man’s presence beside me.

‘Where am I?’ I asked, blushing out the scented air.

‘That’s a good question,’ he said, kneeling to my level.

‘Before I answer you, answer me this question, and think about its meaning. Don’t try to guess the trend or be right. Just be honest. Can you promise that?’

‘Alright,’ I said.

‘Good! Tell me – are nettles and daisies alike?’

He touched the petals of a daisy in the flowerbed.

‘No. Daisies are pleasant flowers, but nettles sting.’

‘Actually, they do that out of self-defence. Also, they both have beautiful flowers.’

‘I suppose. You said you’ll show me immortality – do I need to go on a quest?’

He grinned.

‘I didn’t promise you immortality of life, I promised immortality of the soul.’

‘I’m afraid I don’t deserve that,’ I said, ‘I’ll go to hell for the amount of people I’ve killed. I’d rather not burn in hell that long’.

‘Yet you can redeem yourself. Those who are doomed to die are just as important as those who have died. If you can prevent the deaths of those you are fighting, you may save more people than you have killed.’

‘How do I do that?’

He only grinned, then disappeared as he came – into the thick bushes, leaving behind a shadow in the smoke. I grew tired, confused and dreamy, but awoke inspired and fresh. Nobody listened to me at first. My commander mocked me, but when I told him those men’s children will weep in terror, he couldn’t hide his heart. Neither could the others.

I smile when Historians theorise on why the war ended. It didn’t occur to them to ask – but even if it did, I would simply say, “Both sides knew this war wasn’t going to be won. We may think of ourselves as Daisies and them as nettles, but in the end we both know we have flowers in common.”

## Burned by the Flames

by Abigail Akinyemi, 14, Churchill Community College, Tyne and Wear

Knock. Knock. Knock. Each one was tenaciously louder than it's preceding one. I desperately wanted to stay in bed and bide time but I knew it was futile. Dragging my legs like fifty-tonne weights, I serrated down the steps sceptical I was making a huge mistake. Maybe I was. My hands quivering with dread, the sound was still screaming in my ears. I slowly twisted the key, breathing heavily.

Crashing through were two officers in their heavy dominating uniform. One muttered under their breath, clearly very piqued at the task he'd been set. The other pulled out a rather large statement which contained technical information and confusing jargons. To my disbelief, he explained in more colloquial terms that I had to leave because the letter stated my seeking for asylum had been rejected. Although I knew this information, it still shocked me as if I'd never heard it before. I'd just hoped for a second chance like, out of way out of sight.

Instead of wasting pointless time avoiding the question, I led them to my room. Tiny as it was, it was like home. This cold, squalid house had become my home. This cold, rainy country had become my home. I laughed in utter dubiety. They had not accepted me yet I was so quick to accept them. Not wanting to spend too much time in the house of shame, the officers quickly started to pack my clothes, ornaments and photos in a small suitcase, roughly put together like I had nothing of value.



Rushing so quickly and tossing my stuff away like it was of no use or value, I realised, there was a small, bent and crusty photograph. Like an old lady, I stooped to pick it up. Memories came flushing back.

Grasping her small hand, I dragged her to the van. My arms were agonisingly painful. Food has been scarce, so I'd not eaten. I gave it all to her, she deserved to live more than me. My darling daughter, we didn't deserve this. She didn't deserve this. Running faster we ran into the van filled with people all sitting cramped. As the English say, there was not enough room to swing a cat or an insect in this case. We sat down, huddled amongst many. After many hours she fell asleep on my lap. Stroking her soft hair, I started whimpering, quietly though.

My home was beautiful. Flowers in the garden, a veranda so big it made the horizon look small. I loved my home. Until they came. And destroyed everything. And everyone. I never wanted to leave. Never wanted to say goodbye.

Returning back to the real world, I peered at the officers who'd clearly thought I was mad. I collected my suitcase and they hostilely led me out, clearly disliking me. Entering a police car, ashamed I turned away, never in my life would I have thought I'd be a criminal, the one in the back. Where was my home now?

## A Biological Answer to Racism

by Shanker Narayan, 17

Race is a societal invention; racism is a societal cataclysm.

It has come to a general scientific consensus that people have more in common between races than within races. This is not perspective; this not subjective opinion: this is phylogenetics at its finest.

Genetics has proven two things.

1. Race is not a biological phenomenon.
2. Racism is not biologically plausible.

Take Thomas Nagel's philosophical paper 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?'. The heated stabs at the reductionist, physicalist theories on consciousness are insightful. However, from a humanitarian perspective, we need to take this question at face value. In today's dystopian society, only two words would suffice as a perfect answer.

Not racist.

I do not know many bats personally. However, zoological intuition serves me right by telling me that they do not engage in racism. Humans are a social species as chemically depicted by their raging levels of oxytocin. And yet, we are the sole species which have racism rife throughout all strata of our vulnerable society.

Man likes to think he is above all other animals. Philosophers claim that only man emanates rationality. But if we claim that we are rational, and yet continue to live in an anti-utopia where racism is commonplace, then neurobiologists must redefine rationality. Rationality and racism are mutually exclusive events. They cannot coexist. Different races, however, can.

Richard Dawkins illustrates in *The Selfish Gene* how we are survival machines: mere vehicles built through natural selection to propagate our DNA. This Darwinian distortion of our optimistic outlook on life proposes an innate individualistic view to life.



And as many racists idealise their race as part of themselves, it is not too difficult to envisage how they could twist this view into racist ideology. However, Dawkins brilliantly pointed out that we can fight off the control our DNA has on us by using contraception. Thus, if we can avoid DNA controlling our lives through this simple conception, then imagine how simple it must be to prevent racism from ruling our society.

Daniel Dennett discusses in his speech 'Dangerous Memes' a way of dealing with detrimental ideologies. A meme is 'an information packet with attitude'. A philosopher of memetics would reach common ground with a biologist with a virologist as a translator. After all, the biological equivalent of a dangerous meme would be a virus: it infiltrates the individual just as racist ideas are indoctrinated into certain people, and proliferates throughout their body destroying their somatic cells just as racism destroys all goodness with its avarice for insanity. We need to promote immunity against racism, just as vaccines promote immunity against viruses. We will never eliminate racism just as we will never eliminate pathogens from our environment. What we can do is encourage avirulence – a utopia where racism can no longer hurt us.

What is our panacea to the noxious notion of racism?

Again, two words.

In common.

Let us celebrate our similarities.

Our race. The human race.

## Her Lost Half

by Faith Greenland

'You're it!' Ari shouted, she started to run, I followed her. As I was about to get her, she fell. When she reached the bottom, I ran down after her.

'Ari! You need to be more careful,' I shouted whilst rolling my eyes.

I helped her up.

'Look what you did,' I tried wiping the dirt from her dress, it didn't work.

We started to walk, hoping to find a path.

'God forbid if it got dark, lost in the woods in the dark, my favourite,' I said sarcastically.

'Don't be silly, we will find our way home. I promise,' she held out her pinkie, as normal she tries to make light of our situation. But I saw through her, I guess it was twin telepathy people keep talking to us about.

We had grown up in a small town, and as it is known that twins are very uncommon, we got treated like royalty. At first, the attention was amazing, but it started to become too much for us. We changed our hair, dyeing and cutting. We both used to have long, curly brown hair. I changed my hair to a lilac colour, whilst Ari changed hers to a black bob.

I guess you could say we were close, we had always been there for each other. I was stronger than her, but she was kinder and could handle problems with just words, lots of people looked up to her.

The night began to fall, quicker than expected.

'It is getting dark, maybe we should – ' She cut herself off. I looked at her and her face lit up.

'Laura! Laura, look!' she shouted and pointed her finger. There was a village. She started to run again, faster than before.

As we arrived, I felt something wasn't right. I can't remember what it was exactly, but I know it was something to do with the obvious lack of people.

Ari went ahead whilst I followed.

The village was like a mirror of a section of our town, which was weird. There was a lot in common, but not exactly. Ari's shouting woke me up from my confusion.

'Laura! Are you coming?' She stopped and waited for me to catch up with her. As I was walking, I saw a dark figure come round the corner. A hand swept over my mouth.

'Laura? What are you doing don't just stand there, hurry up I want to go explore,' she said. Could she not see them?

Frightened, I tried to scream, nothing. I tried to shout, nothing.

Then everything started to fade to black.

That's when I woke up here.

'So that's all you can remember? No idea of where your sister is?' A man asked.

Laura shook her head, her eyes started to tear up. Had she lost her sister forever?

'We think that someone has taken your sister, twins are rare. They might have just preferred her,' he said.

Laura nodded, was that the only thing she could do?



## Reflection

by Karissa

Beyond the crystal glass I see  
 A motionless portrait –  
 A figure staring back  
 At me.  
 She holds me with her softened gaze,  
 Hair tousled by the zest from our summer days.  
 Her smile is white yet now restrained:  
 A replica of my diffident frame.  
 When joy lights up my fragile face,  
 It glows in her  
 The very same way.  
 When ominous snakes of sorrow seep in,  
 Her eyes shine bright,  
 Watered to the brim.  
 Through her I see my one true self;  
 Her clarity never fades.  
 We disapprove of and appreciate  
 The same tastes and textures and shades.

We've grown together –  
 Two synchronised images  
 Made from one.  
 From the very same threads we have been spun,  
 Morphing into beings soon to be frayed  
 By the merciless stitches of  
 Time and Age.

But then I turn away  
 And she silently leaves,  
 Slipping into the depths  
 Beneath the looking-glass' gleam.  
 My heart bleeds to remember  
 Her tender face,  
 And so I return,  
 Longing for her appearance from that  
 Looking-glass place.

In what abyss have I kept her –  
 Confined to the walls of a crystalline glass?  
 And how can I forget her porcelain frame,  
 With no voice or thought or dream or name  
 But mine?  
 Is there another girl she longs to be –  
 Someone far greater and bolder than  
 Me?



## In the Rain

by Elizabeth

With my head resting upon the window of our car, I watch the tiny raindrops snake their way down, racing to the bottom of the pane, in a hurry to get to the end of their journey but failing to think of the consequences they will face when the road comes to an end. It was as I watched that it struck me, how similar each of us are to one of those raindrops, rushing about our business determined to finish first. Dashing through our childhood, desperate to arrive at our adult years before slowly coming to the realisation that we preferred it where we were, at the beginning of life, at the top of the window.

On occasion, the trail we leave happens to collide with that of someone else. Frequently we travel a short way together before moving on and continuing our journey alone, however, once or twice we collide with someone who will join us on our path for the rest of our life and will remain with us until the very end. It is because of these random yet vital collisions that our paths twist and turn and constantly change as we make our way down the window.

It's funny because as we begin, we cannot wait to plunge down into the middle of our limited time of existence but the further we fall, the more we wish we could climb to the top and start again, the more we wish we could repeat what we have already done and fix all of our mistakes. But however much we wish this or will it to happen, the inevitable fate that awaits us all will eventually tighten its grip and drag us down to join the multitude of raindrops who have fallen off the window.

And now imagine that it is not only your window that is full of droplets but that every window of every car is dripping with them, because that is what our planet is like, each town, city, country and continent is dripping with life so that the trails we leave behind from our lifetimes create a web, knitting each and every person together and ensuring that we all have something in common.

## In /common

by Ffion

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Common. A word that isn't necessarily positive. Neither is it negative. Generally referring to something average. In abundance. Ordinary. An observation. To be a common person is to be poor or lowly. To have a common feature or name or eye colour is to be boring and uninteresting. If in a game you were to find something of a common value, the player wouldn't feel anything, really. To be common is to be ignored. Dismissed. It seems then, that value is only truly rarity. To be rare is to be desired. To be desired is to be valuable.

In placing a small word in front of this unimportant one then, why do we have a phrase that is used so often? This small word, that can be noun, preposition, adverb, adjective. Perhaps because, in combining the two, we have a term which allows two things to be connected, two strangers to feel familiar, two objects to relate. To have something in common with another person is the highest form of compliment. To share a link, a trait, a love, a pursuit. So how does adding this small word allow the meaning and, yes, value to completely change?

Perhaps it comes down to humanity's need to form relationships. To validate and be validated. To love and be loved. Because this term, until applied to multiple subjects, has no worth. For really, what is art without the viewer? What is music without the listener? What is literature without the reader? To know that you have something that many others also have is insignificant, but to know that you share something with another is powerful. To share a hair colour, hobby, religion, skin colour, home, interest; it brings more meaning to these things. For really, what is anything that we have, feel, or think without another to share it with.

## Yellow

by Imogen Eve

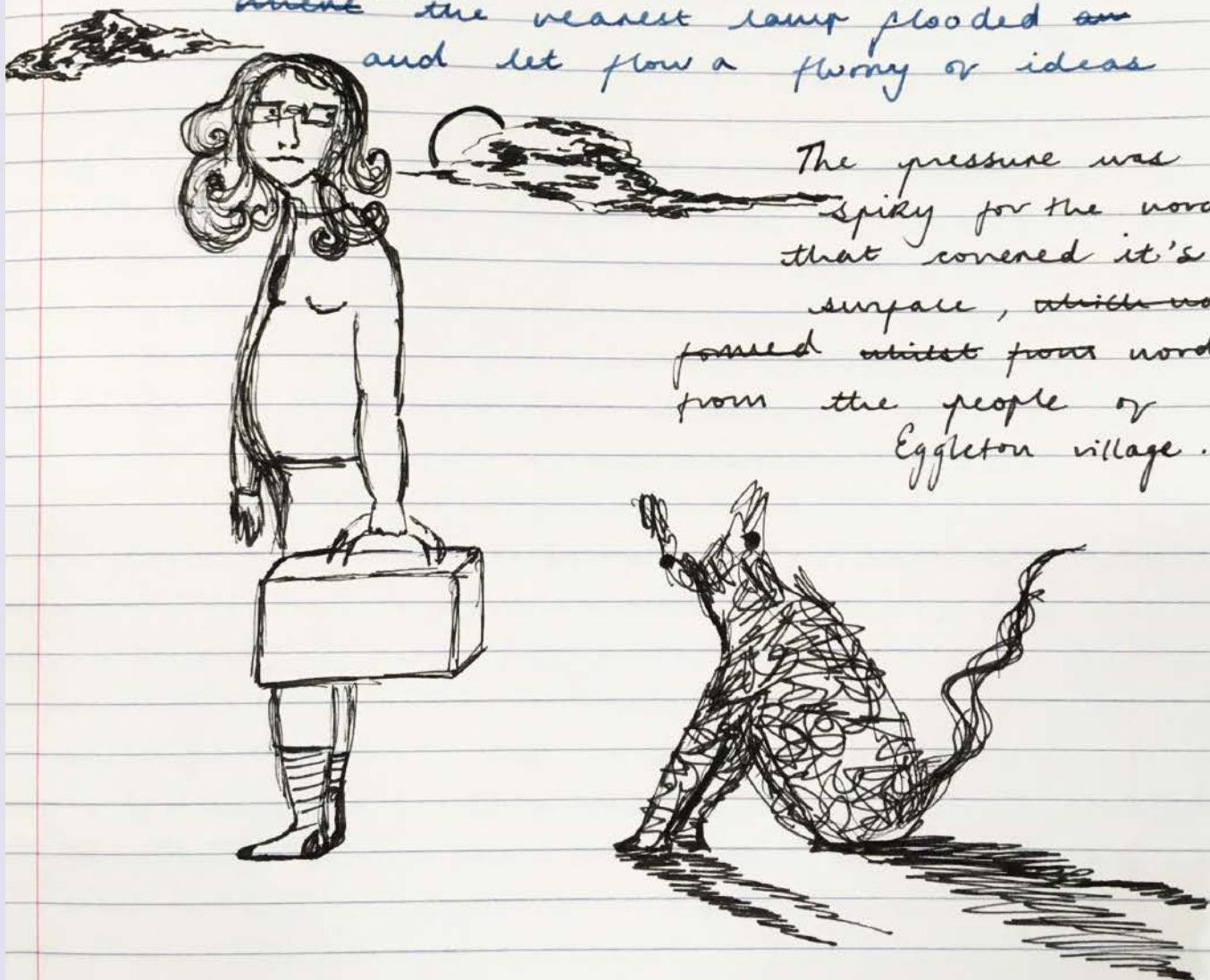
The common  
~~brigit golden~~ <sup>golden</sup> dawn light with the rising  
 sun that falls upon hands entwined  
 at the end of ~~hands~~ <sup>arms</sup> or arms as  
 hinges. The ~~screws~~ that hold these  
~~these~~ <sup>but</sup> breathe in breathe out once  
 sometimes you yours will know together  
 with mine

Yellow smoke

Poem / story

lingered  
 and let fall  
 a soft October night  
 where she bent over a desk  
 sunken in <sup>a</sup> yellow <sup>sea</sup> light ~~where the~~  
<sup>which</sup> ~~where~~ the nearest lamp flooded ~~on~~  
 and let flow a flurry of ideas

The pressure was  
 spiky for the words  
 that covered it's  
 surface, which ~~was~~  
 forced ~~what~~ ~~from~~ words  
 from the people of  
 Eggleton village.



## A Mother's Warning

by A. Johns

---

Be careful my dear do not look straight at the sun. It will burn your eyes and leave you blind to the world and the beauties that fill it. Be careful my love, do not yet lose hope to the world that surrounds you. Though pain and fear weave their way into our lives do not give them the power to control you.

I know that you see all the anger and hate spread by those who do not think. You watch as the world you have come to love slowly teeters towards the brink. I was once like you my darling, scared of the world and the place that it occupied in my thoughts. It is easier for some to look at the sun and trade the fear that seeing the world creates and instead embrace the freedom of being blinded. Blinded from the hateful faces and painful images of the world before you. Yet my love do not lose yourself to those thoughts for they are only passing. They have no power over you unless you give it to them.

Instead my flower see the world for its beauty. The never ending sky connecting us across the world. A blanket stretching and changing with each passing day. It protects us from the cold of space. Focus on the greenest grass that stretches from plains to mountains, growing and spanning miles. Look at the trees that stretch to the sky holding out their branches for you to climb. Listen to the sea call out in waves for you to dip your little toes in and feel the cold. Let it sing to you and send you off to the land of sleep. Scale the mountains of the world, giants that reach to the sky. They will tell you the tales of men and gods past. Run across the plains and feel the world stretch for miles around you. See the world for its possibility.

My world you have so much to see and to learn. Talk to others and you'll find that your fears are ones that flow through us all. It is a commonality that cannot be avoided but instead we choose to share our love for the world around us. Our differences are beauties of their own and without them we shall never grow. Our voices shall sing to the heavens as we tell of our tale. A small planet shared by trillions of creatures all connected under one blue sky.

Be careful my dear, do not look straight into the sun. Though she shines bright she cannot help you hide. Instead look at those around you, faces from all continents capable of so much. Look at them and see our common love for our planet. Then my universe when you are ready to leave, fly with them to reach a place that I could only dream of.

All my love,

Mother N

## Collective Unconsciousness

by Will Cannon, 14

Smog slithered its way through the streets, blinding Tom as he trudged against it. He clenched his rough, netted bag crammed with corrugated metal that was slung over his shoulder. The uneven cobblestones were barely visible beneath the river of filth grasping at his feet. Amidst a hazy sea of amber light that bled upwards from the market stalls, he caught a glimpse of the stars that timidly hovered over the crooked streets which surrounded the square.

As Tom emerged into the vast market his senses were overwhelmed. Merchants swarmed him like midges on a warm dusk night. Colours danced in the flickering lamplight. A collection of exotic and oddly shaped fruits were enclosed in a cage of rusted metal. Government messages sang from radios, strategically stationed around the square. The humid air sat on the chests of the market goers. An assortment of used protective gear was tarped together to form a little canopy.

Tom ducked under the draped portiere of patchwork cloth that led into the merchant's yurt and set his bag down on the table, removing the metal for inspection. Tom's eyes followed the trail of the merchant's hands as he scratched it – testing its authenticity.

'Your safety and health is paramount... your government will protect you.'

'I haven't seen anyone with the virus for years,' offered Tom in an unguarded moment.

The merchant nodded with a smile, gathered up the metal and filed it in cubby holes as Tom removed a rusty box from his pocket and placed it under the red light of the crypto-credit machine. His self-made device beeped to acknowledge receipt of the compulsory crypto-currency. The merchant held down a strange, green button as he took a furtive sidelong glance at Tom, before dismissing him and moving his attention to the next customer without uttering a word.

Tom headed home, past one of the ubiquitous steam cafés, the smell of the rehydrated food pumped out to lure him closer. Firefly lights hovered along the narrow streets – chasms, overshadowed by worn sandstone buildings that had evolved into shanty hybrids reaching up to the sky, becoming more rickety and crude as they grew; geological strata of human development and regression.

Tom felt a rush of cold air ignite goosebumps that spread all over his body. He pondered, 'What did that green button do?'

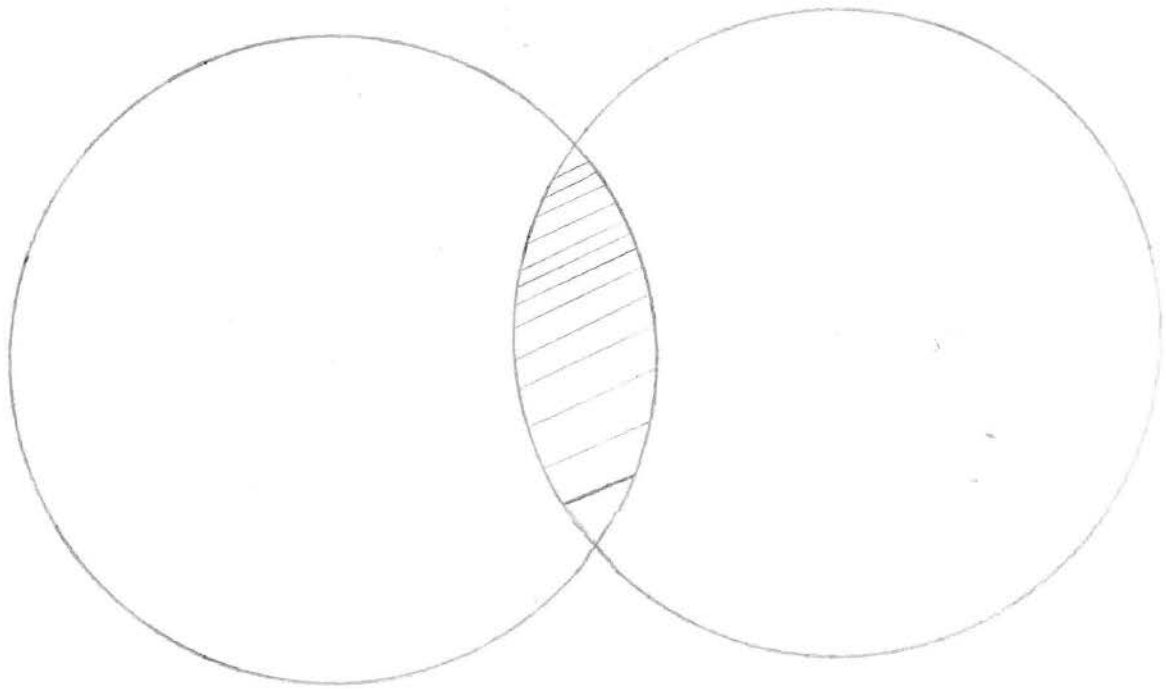
Tom turned and met with the faces of two tall, stocky men – government paramedics, dressed in sky-blue uniforms.

'We need to take you for some routine tests.'

The fog coiled up Tom's leg like a snake about to strike. His eyes darted frantically around looking for a way out. All he saw was their ambulance which was a white van spray-painted with the caduceus symbol. They walked him round to the back doors. As they opened, the snake split apart revealing the splintered, wooden interior. They put the inhaler over his mouth and he fell asleep. The van drove away, swallowed by the smog.

**In Common**

by Marcel, 16



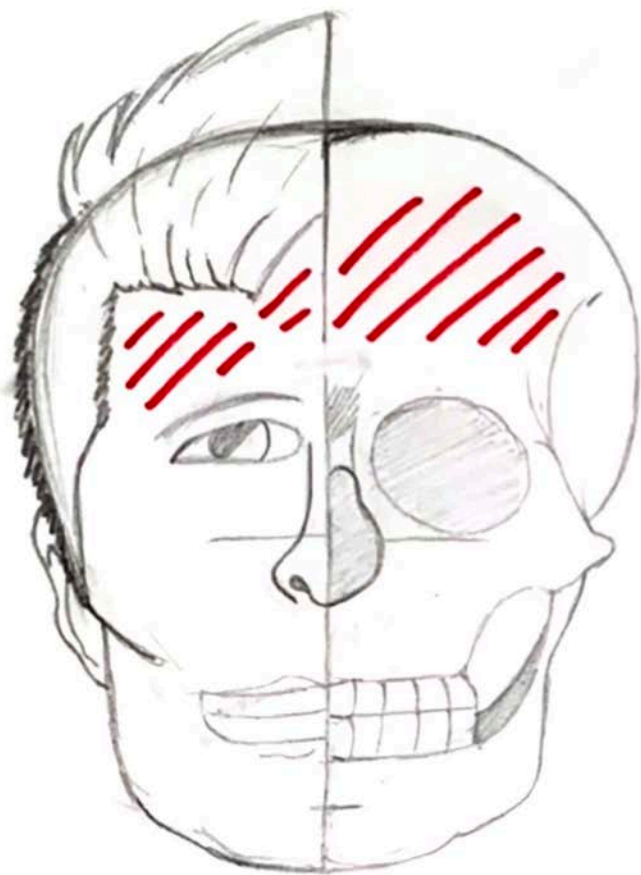
IN

BLM

COMMON

## In Common In Mind

by Adam



In Common  
In Mind

96. Adam



**Pain**

by N

Pain, despair and death can be ~~seen~~ felt in the battleground. Many have fallen, many have died, some are alive, some ~~are~~ feel the opposite.

# Coronavirus UK

by Callum, Robinson, Year 9, Jarrow School, South Tyneside



## Lockdown

by Zane

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Months of social distancing is rotting my mind, seeing the same faces every day and no others. For the first month, I was so ecstatic but over time I grew less and less fond of not having the ability to see my family or see that there are other humans in the world. At least now I'm starting to develop new interests that I wouldn't have if lockdown didn't happen, such as a new music range. Lockdown has made me able to go a long time without being bored. I can now use my initiative and find ways to entertain myself. Yes, lockdown was fun at the start until I started looking into all of the 'Conspiracy Theories' and having my opinion change each time I start to look further into it.

## In Common-consciousness

by Shanker Narayan, 17

Brains. Biochemical factories. An organ highly-prized by every sane being – something we all have in common.

Time for some controversy: The ‘brain is the most important organ.’ – says the BRAIN. (TED, Seth, & Pradhan, 2017) Surely this amalgamation of white and grey matter concentrated into a distasteful walnut is merely a vehicle for our consciousness?

‘Cogito, ergo sum.’

‘Je pense, donc je suis.’

This is René Descartes’ ‘I think, therefore I am’ postulation. Therefore, David Chalmers claims that he can doubt any truth in the world besides from the fact that he is conscious. (Britannica & Duignan, n.d.) (Lennybound & Chalmers, 2009)

According to Integrated Information Theory (IIT), a sufficiently sizeable Reed-Solomon circuit is more conscious than you.

IIT allows us to quantify consciousness, which can undoubtedly decipher fractions of Chalmers’ ‘hard problem of consciousness’. IIT investigates how information migrates between its subsystems, with phi ( $\Phi$ ) illustrating how well a system integrates information. IIT is essentially Patrizi’s panpsychic ideology; sci-fi come true; a model for a sentient universe. Although philosophically weak according to John Searle, it ascribes consciousness to sub-atomic particles. Perhaps neutrinos interact little with matter as they are consciously avoiding it. (Brooks, 2020)

Please think twice before you unconsciously engage in mitosis.

There will be a delocalised electron in the  $\pi$  system of a quadruplet of benzene rings hidden within a hydrophobic pocket of a microtubule. That tug-of-war that dynein is performing with your chromosomes as it dances senselessly on your microtubule is bound to induce shifts in space-time geometry which could unintentionally hurt the electron’s feelings. (Hameroff, 2010b) (Hameroff, 2010a)

Please email #3/5/8/13/21 to [FibonacciTopologicalQuantumErrorCorrectionOnMicrotubules@gmail.com](mailto:FibonacciTopologicalQuantumErrorCorrectionOnMicrotubules@gmail.com) to donate 8.085 MHz today.

Yet, Thomas Nagel suggests that something is conscious ‘only if there is something that it is like to be that organism’. (Nagel, 1974) Sure, Richard Feynman had no problem imagining himself as an electron, but we can understand that there is certainly a philosophical issue with granting our standard model consciousness. (Feynman, 2011)

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However, according to Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff, consciousness can be narrowed down to the microcosm of quantum mechanics. Scientists struggle near 0 Kelvin to observe quantum effects; how can quantum manoeuvres thrive in the warm salty seas that constitute our bodies? This is a phenomenon that quantum biology is uncovering: quantum tunnelling in the sun driving nuclear fusion alongside DNA mutations; coherence allowing for the 99% efficiency of photosynthesis; entanglement accounting for the European robin's navigation via magnetoreception. (Al-Khalili & McFadden, 2014)

The truth is, if plants can utilise quantum effects, then why not our brains? Penrose and Hameroff's Orchestrated Objective Reduction Theory is a rigorous hunt for a non-computable model of consciousness which can erase discrepancies between the Schrödinger equation and the collapse of the wavefunction. (Penrose & Fridman, 2020)

Quantum physics and general relativity not getting along very well?  
No problem.

With the advent of the E8 structure and its relevance to the neglected successor of quaternions: octonions, bosonic string theory and its 26 dimensions may become our 'Theory of Everything' and our answer to Chalmers' 'hard problem'. (Mathematics & Wildberger, 2014)

Perhaps it is not just consciousness we have in common but also our understanding of it.

Incomplete.

Just like this sentence.

## A Commonality of Justice

by Christopher

In our contemporary world, incredible leaps in technology and communications have meant that we are all linked with each other through language, art, literature, politics, trade. We are bound together not only by vague economic and political relations but far-reaching concerns about the inequality, inhumanity, terrorism and war that threaten our world. A racially-charged unjust murder by a Minneapolis policeman can ignite peaceful, though determined, protests worldwide and topple statues of racist generals and slavers. Collective frustrations at global feebleness in the face of growing catastrophe can serve to unite, rather than divide. There are few, as Amartya Sen would term, 'Non-Neighbours' in the world today.

We must all demand justice for everyone oppressed and subjugated worldwide – they need not be those next-door. Relatively low level of injustice in our country in no way exempts us from powerfully criticising that of other countries, and then taking action to remedy that.

Now, it is accepted universally that everyone deserves an equal opportunity of capability (the achievement of their reasonable ambitions). This understanding will allow us to move toward a more just world; it is now morally culpable to observe injustice and move on. We now have a shared duty to recognise, and help others recognise, manifest injustice in our world; for the first step of recognition allows us to initiate a dialogue of impartial public reasoning, which can be facilitated by Adam Smith's 'Impartial Spectator' principle, between ourselves that will lead to the removal of those injustices.

This public reasoning, although it may yield an incomplete comparative ranking of approaches to justice due to the plurality of impartial reasons need not be disregarded, will be able to provide all of us with strong guidance as to the best way to improve our society by allowing us to see, where we find ourselves in a collective agreement, which named injustices through impartial eyes are of greatest importance to us relative to each other. This partial ranking could then allow the prioritisation of solutions to those injustices, leading to a fairer and more just society.

In common, we all have a shared right to justice, and thus we all have a shared right to not experience injustice. If we are to fulfil our dream of progress, that so embodies the youth, we must commit ourselves to reduce injustice through its various tenets: racism, inequality of opportunity, homophobia, gender discrimination and arbitrary incarceration to name but a few.

This commonality of seeking justice should unite us, for we are one human race.

## An Answer to Racism, with a Chemistry Approach

by Raphael, 17

I might as well begin with the atom. Now, why am I talking about an atom? This is because it is an analogy of the current world, the basic concept of the world being the atom, and us human beings being the electrons, and this is a process which no one really considers from the basis of schooling livelihood. The model of the atom also describes the socio-economic complex. As a black person myself, I hate to admit that in this complex, people like me are the lowest in society, essentially like the electrons in the lower energy shell. So, due to this, due to the blueprints of the way society is run (systemic racism), it is essentially harder for a black person to get an opportunity which someone higher in the socio-economic complex would receive. An example of how this has been implemented in society was an old process called redlining – when decades after the civil war many government agencies started to draw maps dividing cities into sections which were either (for investment) desirable or undesirable. The redlining process would essentially cut off black neighbourhoods from access to investment privately and also publicly. These maps have been used for decades by insurance companies and banks to deny black people a variety of services due to purely race. This is what society has been built upon, even to this day. This is an example of the system in America, however systemic racism does not just happen there, it happens all across. This leads to lack of opportunity to go to good schools to get an education and so on, which I feel anyone who has any empathy can agree is very sickening and makes me feel very grateful that I got an opportunity to go to a school like I do. With this scientific ideology I feel this is a reasonable solution.

With these electrons, they need a quantum level of energy to reach a higher energy level, but not just some energy, a specific energy required. This is the solution, people not only need to be more educated about society and black lives, but also the specific amount of effort needed to shine, the work ethic for every single one of us to improve ourselves and reach a higher level. To improve ourselves to improve society, it is easier for people to improve themselves than to improve others, like it is easier for an electron to leave by itself with a certain amount of energy than for 2 electrons to leave with each other, it much more energy requiring. I feel if we all took strides to improve ourselves the world will be a better place, not everyone will be on board but it is a start. All who are for the movement #BlackLivesMatter must be involved in the process of all having that required energy to improve ourselves like an electron needs the required quanta to move and reach higher.

## Never Give Up

by Tamera

you may twist lies

And trod me in the dirt

but ill still rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?

Does my sexiness upset you?

I dance like ive got diamonds

but ill still rise.

Im a black ocean leaping and wide

Bringing the gifts my ancestors gave me

I am the dream and the hope of a slave

but ill still rise

You may cut me with your eyes

ill still rise

like hopes springing high

Cause ill smile like ive got gold mine

Digging in my back yard

I'll rise

I'll rise

I'll rise

Never  
give  
Up





# The Litmus In Common

**'You're the future. Write about what it feels like to be in the present. Write about what we have in common, the good, the bad, anything and everything the phrase brings to mind. Send what you write to us.'**

This invitation went out in late 2019 from Ali Smith, Senior Creative Arts Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, launching The Litmus, a new writing initiative for UK-wide school students in Years 9 to 13 (or equivalent). This volume collects their responses, not least to the turbulent experiences of 2020 that have radically altered 'what it feels like to be in the present'. Their voices speak, as Ali Smith admiringly notes in her Foreword, with 'furious, energised, thoughtful and shining vitality'.

