



teen ink

By teens, for teens

**PLUS, a
special segment on
Environmentalism!**

April 2025

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National Poetry Month

Expressing Yourself, One Poem at a Time!

NATIONAL POETRY MONTH



ARTWORK BY RUIHAN YANG,
HONOLULU, HI

The Sun Will Swallow Us Whole

Tapioca seeds and manatees,
the wind blows strong beneath the sea
and every strand of seaweed brings
a cupped hand of desert sand.

On the shore lies a painter's hook
resting on a fisher's brush,
and beneath them the tide swings.

Parakeets and kerosene
float in ashes on the breeze,
and fall like burning snow to sand
that traces patterns of swarming ants.

Wood comes in honeyed scent
that combs itself into your hair,
and every tree has long been spent,
their ghosts of dust pulled into air.

In your palms is a future still,
through tired eyes and waves of sleep,
washing white water and windmills.
The foam has memories to keep,
of kerosene and manatees.

BY SONIA ELIZABETH TEODORESCU,
TAMPA, FL

If I Were A Tree

If I were a tree,
I would weep with roots deep in the soil,
Each ring of my age,
Ripped away by your hand.

The axe's bite echoes in the hollow,
As my body trembles,

My heart beats heavy in the silence,
Beneath skies that no longer care.

You sever my limbs,
Rip my soul from the earth,
Tear my children from their roots—And call it progress.

My brothers and sisters,
The flowers, the oaks,
We stand together,
A silent chorus of grief.

You do not hear our cries.
You drown our voices in your engines,
In your machines,
As you burn what remains of the earth's breath.

But do not think we will not rise.
The storms will howl,
The fire will rage with vengeance,
And the water will drown your cities—
A reckoning for what you've done.

I stand, rooted in my sorrow,
Waiting,
For the day when your silence meets mine,
And nature, finally, takes back what is hers.es.

BY JUANNA XIAO, QUEENS, NY

To Be Human.

I see all kinds of people walking by,
but none of them show what they truly feel deep
inside.

I see people getting where they need to be by car, by
bus, by plane,
leaving behind those days that made them feel a little
less insane.

I see people laughing, smiling, showing their desired
perception through a filter,
not letting those heavy, ugly emotions that bring
vulnerability and shame wither,
the bonds and relationships they'd kill to protect,
forgetting that with all this effort they begin to self-
neglect.

I see people powering through those days that bring
burden onto their shoulders,
forgetting that it was them that once moved those
boulders
that led them to the achievements they've always
wanted,
but with all that self-destruction, you've now left your
house haunted.

I see people putting their own needs behind what
others want,
leading to you pleasing others, for them to taunt.
But when will you begin to please yourself?
To be human isn't to be perfect or free from all flaws,
it's to accept who you are now, regardless of the cracks
or the verbal applause.

I see you now, acknowledging the voice inside that
you've continued to ignore,
let it out of the cage you've created, allow it to love you
like you have never before.

BY MAHA RASHID,
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

What If I Fall?

The first step is always the scariest.
Flat ground, rocky gravel, or the wetness of mud,
Each surface whispers the same question:
"Are you ready for this?"

Maybe it's the weight of what you'll carry,
The time you'll pour into something unknown,
The room in your heart you're afraid to test.

You glance back once, and the past calls out—
Old anxieties bubbling like a familiar song.
The ground feels heavier, pulling you down,
And the past tugs harder, asking,
"Do you really want to try?"

Time feels slippery, seconds fleeing
Like grains of sand in an hourglass. The silence
stretches endlessly.

But the wait is normal,
The pause necessary—
Every thought aligns itself,
Mapping roads you could take.

Now comes the choice.
Hesitate, and fear holds you still.

Act, and fear follows close behind.
But which fear will you let guide you?

The answer is simple:
Each choice is its own kind of right.
In a world without guarantees,
Every step brings an answer,
Even if it's not the one you expect.

Place your trust in movement.
Start from scratch, and start again.

"What if I fall?"
But Darling, what if you fly?
Doesn't the world look brighter
When you've taken the first step?

BY VANNA XIAO, CHINO, CA

Oranges

I am the oranges we split on my front porch
Sharp citrus juices dribbling down our chins and
Cooling sun-pinkened shoulders

I am the dolls we clutched
With sticky child fingers
The fort we assembled in the woods
Behind my home

Broken bike chains
Butterfly nets
Sunrise to set companionship

I am a photo album
Of forgotten faces
But never memories

I am forever
Nine years old
Peeling my oranges

BY ANONYMOUS

Roller Blades

As my blades bend the symmetry
of the Earth's floor,
my mind coasts into a state of harmony.

I see flamboyant color,
as if looking through a kaleidoscope.
Effervescent aroma envelops my beak,
as if flowers had just bloomed.
And I hear birds tweet with bravado,
as if I had never listened before.

The blades are to my psyche
as soil is to bare feet.

BY ZOE CALDWELL, RANCHO SANTA FE, CA



Microscopic Issue, Major Problem

ARTICLE BY JAMES LEE, IRVINE, CA

ARTWORK BY LINDA WANG, SUNNYVALE, CA

Once something is woven into the fabric of society, it's not easy to remove. This has proven to be the case with plastics. In the 1800s, plastics were designed to offer a new option for goods and packaging (1). What was once revolutionary, though, has become more troublesome than anyone could've predicted. The inhalation of microplastics has become commonplace for many people due to the large number of companies that opt to use the material. While science has developed enough to understand that plastics cause major harm on a biological level, many people in society have yet to adjust their lifestyles because of how common plastic use is, and the harm done to the body can't be seen on the exterior.

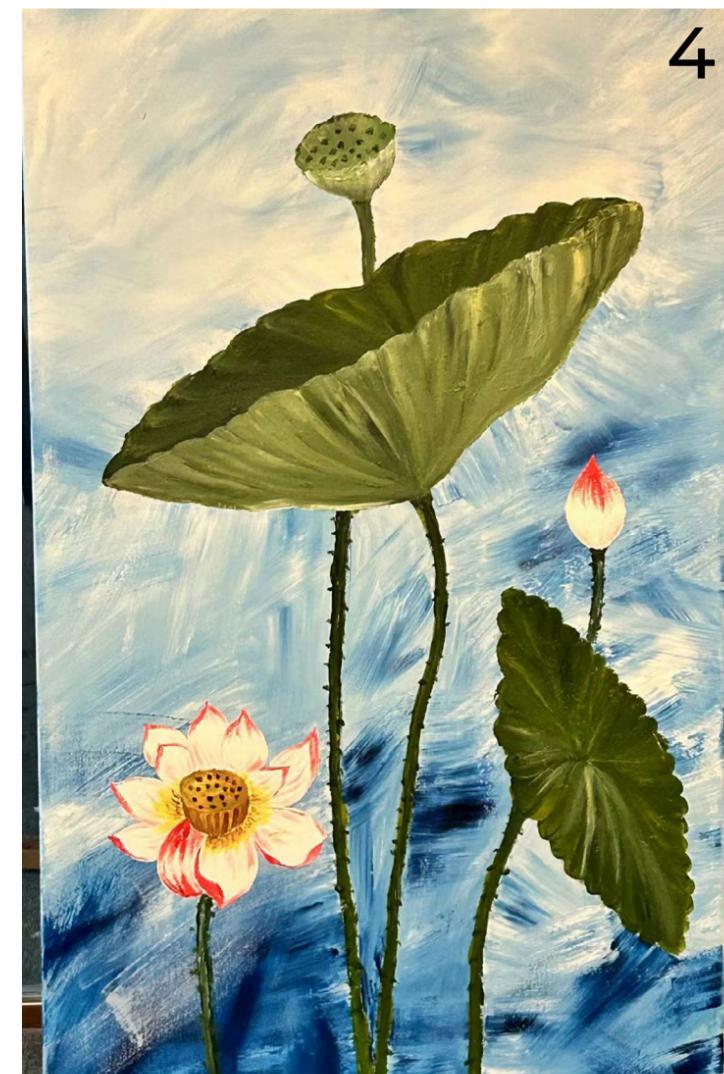
UN Environment Programme states that in the early 2000s, the amount of plastic waste we generated rose more in a single decade than in the previous 40 years (2). In 2023 alone, around 400 million tonnes of plastic waste was produced, mainly in the form of plastic bags and plastic bottles(2). Plastic bags and bottles used daily break down until they are extremely small, travel through the wind, and eventually end up worldwide. One liter of plastic water bottle can have an average of 325 plastic particles. Not only that, microplastics can be produced from products that people least suspect. From electronic devices to even clothing, all produce microplastics. These microplastics have been found all the way from Antarctica to the top of Mount Everest (3).

According to a PubMed article, humans are often exposed to microplastics through inhalation, direct contact, and direct ingestion (4). Once in the bloodstream, microplastics can circulate throughout the body, reaching various organs and tissues. The particles will reach and react with different cells and tissues. For example, the microplastics can reach the main artery. One research found that those who had microplastics were 4.5 times more likely to experience a heart attack, a stroke, or death than those whose arteries were plastic-free (5). The same article points out that, on average, participants who had more microplastics in their plaque samples also had higher levels of biomarkers for inflammation (5). These instances are already hinting at the significance of microplastics to our health. Things even get more complicated with the findings of "nano-plastics," which are one thousand times smaller than micro-plastics. These are even harder to detect in our bodies and will be able to penetrate through so many layers of protection in our cells. This may lead to more severe and incurable diseases.

Despite the alarming statistics and mounting evidence of the effects of microplastics on our health, public awareness has been relatively low. This is due to the normalized presence of plastics in our daily lives, along with no visible consequences. Additionally, the whole world is so lenient with plastics, so moving away from them will impact the economy and the simplicity of many people's daily lives. Many companies will try to avoid these issues because the use of plastics benefits them by a large margin. Even the CDC and FDA haven't released enough warnings and problems around this topic. It may have to do with the amount of money people spend on curing illnesses caused by microplastics. Not much can be done about this other than individuals staying away from as much plastic as possible. Plastics once seemed to improve our lives, and now we should conclude that it never did in the first place. ♦

A special segment for the

ARTISTS OF TEEN INK



CREDITS

1. **PICTURESQUE**

BY YUANQI GAO, DUINO, ITALY

2. **LOW-HANGING SUNFLOWER**

BY ANONYMOUS

3. **WANDERING BROOK**

BY XIANXU LUO, WUHAN, CHINA

4. **OBSERVING THE WORLD
THROUGH THE EYE OF NATURE**

BY ANONYMOUS

ARTWORK BY
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