

Iconic

the black & white
of our heroes & heroines

Welcome

by Morgan

& Katerina

As young adults, one of our most important roles in society is to mature into reputable and responsible people, but this is a difficult task to accomplish on our own. We are all very much influenced by the icons around us, and what those icons represent to us is an important window into who we may become.

American history and culture is full of amazing, inspirational characters, places and events. These people, places and events are the icons that create our shared culture of inspiration. The students of High Tech High Media Arts have created a project that is solely dedicated to explaining the relationships we have with the icons who influence us. Within this project, the students were given the task to create a photographic representation that highlights the relationship with the icon that a particular student chose, as well as a reflective narrative in which the student explored the personal connection with an American Icon. This book is a compilation of these students' stories that share with you their places in a continuum of American Icons.

Damn Good Music

by Neil

My small seven-year-old self stared as my dad walked onto the plane to Florida. I was worried—I knew he wouldn't be back for years and I didn't know how to make it without him. Throughout my life the key to happiness and lifting my spirits was when I could rest in his arms. He left me with three things that would have to replace him until I could rest in his arms again: good food, good morals, and damn good music.

I started out confused, unsure, and unable to remember a time without my dad. How will I make it all work without him? What were the things we did together? I looked through some of the CD's he left me. One dusty CD crammed under all of the others stuck out to me. I lifted up the others, grabbed it, and pushed the dust off. It was *Ramones*, the debut album of punk rock legends The Ramones. One thing stuck out, Johnny Ramone, the power chord legend and guitarist of The Ramones. His guitar sounded just like how my dad played in his old college garage bands. It reminded me of all the VHS tapes of my dad playing I had watched. He still played that type of raw punk for fun and hearing it again made me smile. I had found happiness, a resting place, and a sense of security again, in Johnny Ramone's music.

The Ramones replaced my dad in the time he was gone. I became a worshiper of Johnny Ramone, but not just because he can play guitar, but what his guitar has done to my life. He brought me back to a time with my dad that I thought I'd lost, he made the joy I had with my dad possible again. I could sit for hours just listening to Johnny play for hours to the point where he would fade away. It wasn't his guitar making me remember my dad anymore and bringing me into that world of sublime. It was my own thoughts—they had taken over without me even knowing, and they were making me happier than I could've ever imagined. I realized that I was now at the point in my life when I could stand on my own.

My dad watched as I walked onto the plane back to San Diego. Seeing him had been great, but I knew I was ready to go home. He knew that I wouldn't be back for a while, but he wasn't worried, and neither was I. The experience I had with him over the course of my life taught me something. I had learned the only real key to happiness, in my personal opinion. People are so focused in this world on the tangible: Money, cars, huge houses, trophy wife's are just a few of the things people need to feel happy. You'd be surprised what the thoughts in our minds can do; it can be a lot more than the tangible if you give them a chance. Have you ever tried to let yourself make you happy?





Stormy Weather

by Siarah

“Sometimes you can be like a stranger in moments when you’re so far away, in the night when I reach out to hold you, you just turn away, why do you turn away.” These words are from a song called ‘Stormy Weather,’ sung by one of the greatest singers of the 1930’s. The same words that touched all the hearts of our great-grandparents are the same words that still touch the hearts of some people today and were sung beautifully by none other than Lena Horne. Lena Horne, who broke new ground for black performers when she signed a long-term contract with a major Hollywood studio and who went on to achieve international fame as a singer managed to succeed in living her life-long dream.

If I were to try and compare myself to such a legendary woman, there would be no comparison at all. Even though I haven’t lived my life completely yet, I know that I can follow in her footsteps and possibly be half as great as she was. No one can replace Lena Horne, but someone can definitely accept the mantle and keep her legacy going. In my eyes, she is iconic because she changed history by over-looking racial barriers during her younger years. It’s even more of a great story because she wasn’t known for being a civil rights activist (even though she was); but she was a performer just looking to make it in Hollywood. It took her decades to really find her identity and define her image as an artist and a black woman. Just the thought of her not being fully confident is a powerful thought because I see that in some ways I am just like her. I don’t want to be a singer when I grow up but I do want to make a difference and I feel that is going to be my greatest accomplishment. Lena Horne’s greatest achievement was making a difference in the world as well.

‘Why should we always have stormy weather, why should we have it so rough, it’s not so hard just to stay close together, why can’t we have any love?’ Lena Horne started her career as a legend and ended her life as a renowned woman of many accomplishments. And how do I fit into all of this? Well, I think her acts of greatness through entertainment has trickled down to me (even though we aren’t related), and has changed my ideas about how far I will go to be who I want to be and make a difference even through ‘Stormy Weather’.

Dr. Seuss and Me

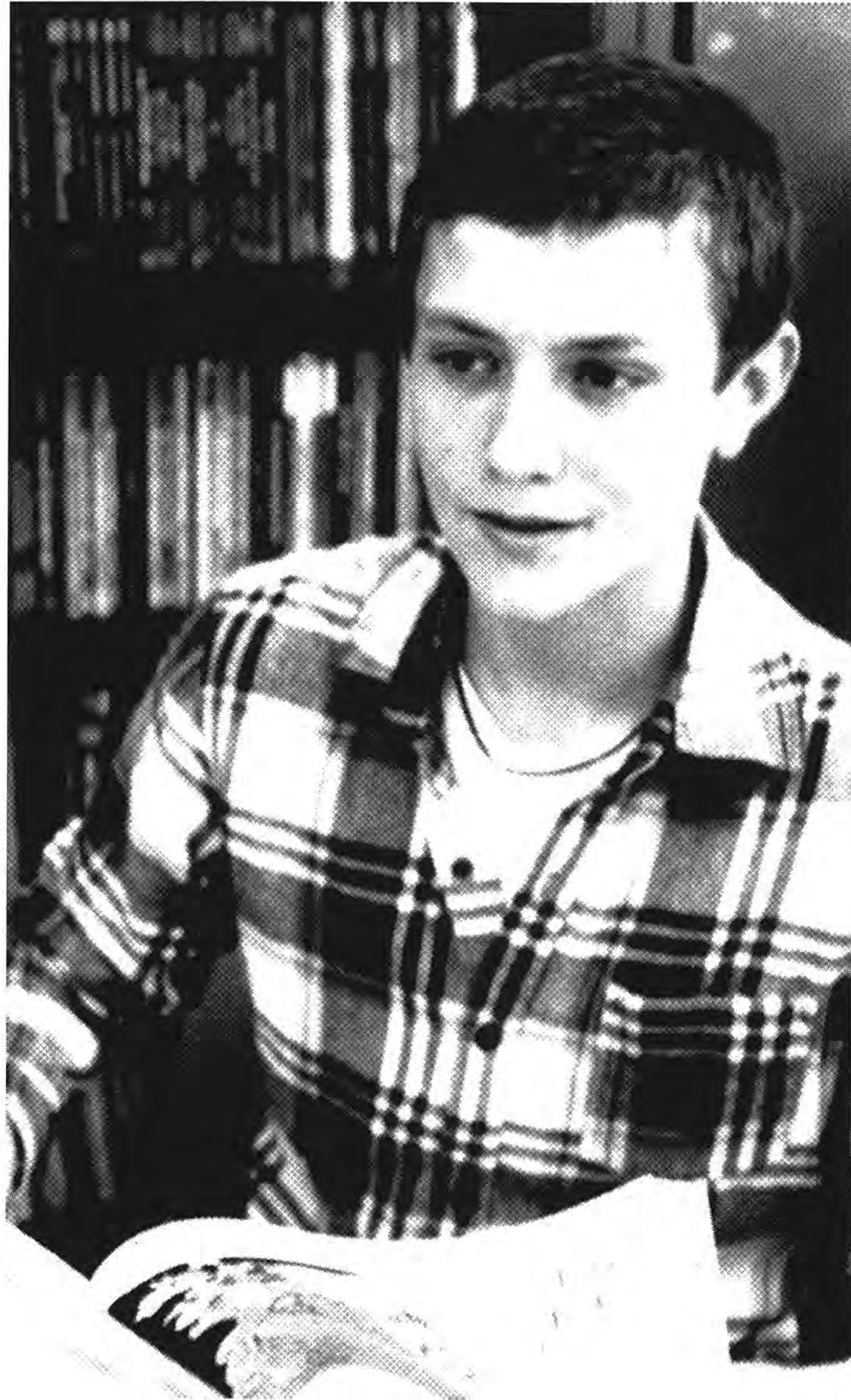
by Jonathan

As I looked at the colorful book that had been laid in front of me, I couldn't help myself from being totally memorized by the front cover. It read, *The Cat in The Hat*. Had I known that the author of this book would make me the writer I aspired to be, I wouldn't have neglected what this so called Seuss had to offer. Children's reading never for some reason gets put to the side because of growth or lack in interest; this is because many children don't start reading until they have to. Although this is not why I believe that kids don't read anymore, I believe it is because there are no longer books that can actually resemble the future of a child, but can still make the adventure enjoyable.

I had taken the book from the library and showed my mother, she had recognized it instantly. She spoke to me about how I used to collect Dr. Seuss books and that she would read them to me, but because I started growing up I started to leave the story's behind and move onto to more challenging storey's, and because of this I was forced to leave my stories behind because I was enveloped in the public school system and was forced into a routine curriculum. I was in middle school and wished I was a fish, but I set those dreams behind to advance in life.

It was the eighth grade and my teacher told me I was to keep a writing journal in which nothing was off limits. Coincidentally, the part of my mind in which all of my creativity came from shut down and covered in cob webs. I felt as if writing was more of a chore instead of a privilege. I decided to speak to my teacher about the repetitive task that I had to endure every day and when I brought the subject up he explained that writing is like a river, you just have to go with the flow because if you believe writing will be boring than so shall your stories. The teacher then asked me who my favorite childhood writer was, and hesitantly, I responded with Dr. Seuss. He told me that Dr. Seuss writes what he wants because he knows that the characters he creates can go in any direction that he chooses. My writing was terrible and it reminded me to love Dr. Seuss. That same day I got home and dug out every book by Dr. Seuss, my reading age dropped from 13 to seven, but in a good way. From then on my writing was never the same.

Now imagine a library, you look around and see nothing but walls full of stories. You turn around and see a little child reading a book known as *The Cat in The Hat*. You look and see no parents. You ask her, "Where's your parents?" Then that child picks up the book and says "Quiet, I'm reading!"



Concrete

by Dylan

My Uncle Kevin works for the concrete industry. Before he was top dog for his crew, he was at the bottom of the group.

My grandfather was the first of my family to start working in the concrete world. He started at the company called Nelson & Sloan; they worked with transit mixed concrete and sand/crushed rock material. Then my grandfather started up Coffman Specialties or, for short, CSI. When my Uncle Kevin saw my grandfather's company he decided to come and work for him. He started at the bottom of the work force, but made his way to the top. Coffman Specialties have expanded to include an asphalt company called Sim J Harris, an electric company called Empower, and lastly the trucking company called DT Trucking. I started to work for Coffman in 2001, doing little things around the office. When I got older, I started to work for the company call D & H, which is now DT Trucking. My pay started at \$5.00 an hour and now it is \$8.50 an hour; it's not much but it will do. DT Trucking is named for the first letter of my first name and the first letter of my cousin's name.

My icon is someone that I admire because when I get older, I want to be just like him. My grandfather taught him everything he knows so that he can show it to me and I can go and teach the next generation. My uncle Kevin would not just tell people what to do; if they did not understand it he would show them the right way to do it by helping them. He makes differences in peoples lives; he leads by example and helps people achieve things to the best of their ability. My Uncle not only does this with his employees he demonstrates this around other contractor's as well. Most contractor's these days just tell people what to do. Uncle Kevin shows people how to make changes instead of just telling them. His crew is now stronger then the first time he tried; now Kevin can do both tell and show because he has gained their trust and respect.

He is an icon to me because he is showing me the difficulties there are in being a leader like him. I want to show his kids and mine all that he has taught me. He inspired me and a lot of other people to aim for success and grow in life. He also inspired himself to respect others and trust others at difficult times. When I get older I want to be a concrete worker or something in that field and put those skills that he taught me to good use. I want people to respect me like he does and to not look at the negative things but look at the positive things in life. That reminds me everyday that even though you are the bosses son or daughter, that you can't always be on top, you have to work hard and earn their trust, respect and put forth effort at your job. He works 16 hours a day and five day a week. My Uncle Kevin is an icon to me because he leads by example and is someone to look up to. He is a great part of my life and I continue to make memories with him everyday.





Rosa

by Lorena

It was a normal day after school. I just got home and was putting my stuff away. Out of nowhere I hear my mom say to me, “Come over here and sit down with me, I have some news to tell you”. And then she said it. “I have a brain tumor. I want you to be able to take care of yourself as much as you can and we will get through this”. After she told me that, I didn’t know what to think. I didn’t know how to react. As she watched my blank face, she made some joke to cheer me up. Till this day I don’t know what that joke was. I still remember that blank feeling.

Ever since I was little I always saw my mother as a role model. I wanted to be just like her when I grew up. As time went on I started to grow older and she began to teach me how to treat other people by showing them that you respect them and not being rude. The same thing every parent teaches their children when they are young. When I was growing up, I noticed how she helped a lot around the house and out of the house by going out and helping my grandmother with her doctor’s appointments and the groceries. Not only did she help out my family, she enjoyed helping our neighbors with their kids when they had a quick errand to run. I have never seen my mom say “no” to anyone who asked for help. In our family, she was known as a saint, always putting other people’s needs before hers. She was the most unselfish person I’d ever met. My mom’s job was to take care of my grandmother and my uncle. She was a caregiver. She was paid to take care of them, but she didn’t do it for the money. She did it because she loved her mother and she loved helping.

After a while, she decided it was time that my grandmother shouldn’t live alone. That’s when we moved in with her so it would be easier to help out. When I saw what was happening and how dedicated she really was, it inspired me to be dedicated just like her. Not only dedicated, but to do my best in everything. I noticed when we moved in with my grandma that both my mom and grandma were the same hard workers and dedicated people who loved to help out in every ways possible. She inspired me to be a hard worker as they were. It wasn’t until I was 13 that I realized how important she was to me and other people.

She began to teach me to do the laundry, cook, and clean the house like her mother taught her to when she was my age. I learned how to appreciate the things I have and be grateful that I had a mother that cared for me. I appreciate everything that I have learned from her. What she taught me really did help throughout the years when she got really sick. I took care of her for a while and it really came in handy how to cook and clean but I still got help. Also, after her death it still came in handy because every day I had to look out for myself. Even though I’m still growing up and learning from my grandmother and father, what my mom taught me will always be with me and I will pass on all that I have learned from my mother to my children. Not only do I want them to learn what my mom taught me, I want to keep my mom’s memory alive by telling future generations about her and what an impact she made to my family.



The Migrant Worker

by Carlos

When I was told that our first project of the year would be about an American Icon I was not too sure of who or what an American Icon was. Of course there were famous people or well-known historical events throughout American history that changed the lives of many people, but I did not know how any of that had changed me. So I began to question myself, who am I? I am a young Mexican American teen who knows a little bit, but wish I knew more about my heritage, my family's history, and the struggles my ancestors overcame to create a better life for me.

One afternoon my mother and I paid a visit to my great grandparent's home, less than a mile away from where I live. Since my family is of Mexican heritage their first language is Spanish. On the other hand, I could not speak Spanish if my life depended on it. As I took a seat at the dinner table I could not help but listen to the words spoken between my mother and great grandfather. Noticing that I was struggling to make a clear understanding of anything said, my mother invited me into the conversation and sat next to me as an interpreter. What I thought was a casual conversation between them turned into one I could never forget.

I learned that my great grandfather was a migrant worker many years ago. He came to the United States from Mexico to work in the fields in hope of a better life, more money, and to eventually bring his family to come and live in America. Being in the line of work he was in was not your ideal dream job. Moving from city to city constantly and being gone from your family for long periods of time, sometimes not having enough money to send home, would probably not be a job of choice for any man with a wife and six children at home, but he had to do what he had to do. Unfortunately this is not just the story of my great grandfather's life, this was and still is the life of a migrant worker.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, an estimated 2.5 million people work as agricultural employees. Eight to twelve percent of them established temporary residency for work and forty to fifty percent of them claimed Mexico as their home. These workers play a critical role in our society's food industry because more than eighty-five percent of fruit and vegetable crops made in the U.S. require hand planting, hand cultivation, and hand harvesting. The working conditions for a migrant worker are horrible and they have the poorest health conditions out of all occupational groups. The average yearly earnings of a migrant worker are approximately forty percent of the official poverty rate.

In 1962 an activist by the name of Cesar Chavez created the National Farm Workers Association, which then became the United Farm Workers, the UFW. This union's purpose was to bring justice to the unfair issues going on with farm workers. It was a major contribution to creating the freedoms and rights deserved by workers. But even today, being a migrant worker trying to support a family is a struggle. Looking back on my great grandfather's life I thank him for making the sacrifices he did in order to provide my family and me the opportunity of a better life here in America.

I'm Not Lovin' It

by Alex

All my life I have grown up wanting all those delicious foods that I saw everyday on TV. All my life, my parents have told me, "No, that is the worst thing that you could have," but I didn't understand them. I had never learned about foods before, and how they can affect you. Commercials would make me run to my parents and ask them if we could go get that "\$5 Big Mac" for dinner that night, but I got rejected every time.

Now that I am older, I know why my parents always refused me fast food. McDonald's is one of the worst things that has ever happened to America, yet people know America for it, and love it. Starting in America, it has spread across six continents into 119 countries and created 31,000 restaurants internationally. With such low prices, most people can only afford McDonald's for a decent meal. It's all good until you become a victim of McDonald's. 68% of adults and 33% of children in America are now obese for reasons like fast food restaurants, and the percentage is always rising.

Fast food has always been a major icon of America. It was founded in the US and now the industry has become worldwide. McDonald's is known around the world because they are one of the biggest restaurant chains internationally. This American icon started a race around the world to bring cheap, "fast" food to people who couldn't or didn't have the time to make their own. Quality has been sacrificed for price so customers keep returning and in a way, it's killing them.

Walking into a mall, I could instantly spot the golden arches, dominating the food court. Learning how to drive, my instructor had me turn in past the McDonald's. People have become so obsessed with this fast food because of its price and convenience. There have been studies that if you stop eating McDonald's, you become depressed and eating it frequently can have serious health effects on your body.

Growing up, I have always been active. It had always been this way and I never understood why people couldn't move the way I could. I now know that fast food restaurants are the cause for kids in this generation slowing down. I am lucky enough to exclude myself from this new generation of McDonalds' victims.

For the rest of my life I will be grateful to my parents because they prevented me from becoming a statistic of obesity in America. All I can do is help the next generation the same way my parents helped me.



Viral Defense

by Tomas

You have just been admitted to the hospital, sick with a massive fever and pain all over—you are infected with the Ebola Virus. There is no vaccine for Ebola, and the survival rate of Ebola is very slim; with a 90% mortality rate, almost all of the infected patients perish by massive hemorrhaging (a very painful internal bleeding out of every orifice of your body). Thanks to the *The Hot Zone* by Richard Preston, I learned about the lethality of viruses. One of my thoughts after finishing the book was, “What would the world be like if we didn’t have people who risked their lives and rose above the occasion to fight these diseases?” I talked with my father about the book and how lethal viruses are, and since he is an anesthesiologist, he has learned about some deadly illnesses in his line of work. My father mentioned about the man who created the Polio vaccine—Jonas Salk. Around Jonas’ time, polio plagued America with the crippling side effects that it inflicted, including paralysis and even death. Like Ebola now, Polio back then did not have a vaccine.

I read more on Salk; he came from a Russian-Jewish immigrant family. His parents hoped the best for their children when they came to America. There are many professions out there, and Jonas could’ve easily chosen any career to pursue. Luckily, in the era where the Polio virus was rampant, this man rose into the medical field. He worked hard in school, and began his career in medical research. Salk later created the vaccine, the closest thing possible to a cure, for Polio. The fact that this one person was able to create the vaccine for Polio out of so many professionals and doctors doing the same research is simply astonishing! Salk’s very own achievements fuel my dreams and imagination for the possibility of becoming a medical hero. People wonder when the cure for cancer will be discovered and who would be the person to discover the cure. What some people don’t know is that many developments lead to such an achievement. It just so happens that without everyone working together on medical research, many cures wouldn’t have been found. I have hopes of going into the medical field so that, like Jonas Salk, I might be able to help people around the world.

The idea that America has astonishing health care leaves many to take for granted what could happen if one of those special vaccines weren’t discovered. Has anyone ever thought about how many of us would be sick or dead from polio if Jonas Salk didn’t put in the effort to look for a vaccine? Most Americans hardly acknowledge the saving power of vaccines, and some downright deny the use of them, claiming that they cause problems and illnesses as much as the original diseases that they are supposed to prevent. People need to start accepting the fact that they play a part in their health. What will it take to realize the importance of vaccines? By the time you need a vaccination, it might be too late.

The Vet I'd Like to Become

by Kadija

“So Dee, what do you want to be when you grow up?” “I want to be a Veterinarian!” As long as I could remember, I’ve always wanted to be a veterinarian and help out animals in dire need. I like animals, especially dogs, and I want to help them out as much as possible. I’m hoping to get into the University of California at Davis after high school. I heard that it’s a great college to study Veterinary Medicine. Why do I want to be a vet? I’m not so sure—maybe because of my first dog NAKIA. She’s a female Pomeranian. I wanted to walk her, but I was too young. I would just end up putting the leash on her and walk her around the house.

When I was older, I got another dog. He was a Jack Russell terrier named Niko. Being a Jack Russell, he liked to run around the yard. I was relaxing on my bed, when all of the sudden, I heard this somewhat disordered yelp from outside. I looked to see Niko, limping back to the patio. I dashed out of my room yelling “Niko’s hurt!” “Niko’s hurt!” No one else heard the yelp, so they were a bit confused about what was going on. I flung the back sliding door open and Niko limped in. I noticed something; he was tracking in blood in. I was worried when I saw that because I didn’t realize how serious it was. I got a wet paper towel and clean the blood from his paw. I saw a cut on his pad. I was relief to find out that it wasn’t a big gash. My mom took him to the vet to get it stitched up. I remembered how no one else heard the yelp. I question myself, what if I didn’t hear it either? Who knows how long he would have gone with a bleeding pad. When my mom got back, Niko was tired out. I comfort him till he fell asleep. That whole experience made me want to be a vet even more. I want to speak for the ones who don’t have a voice of their own.

From hearing what others said about UC Davis, how it’s a good college and I should look into it since I want to study in Veterinary Medicine. I’m hoping that I’ll be able to get in there. To make sure I have a chance in getting into UC Davis, I have to pay extra attention in 11th grade. Why 11th grade? To me, it teaches Biology, which is something I need to know to become a vet. There will also be internship. That can get me a head start of what the vet life would be like. Working side by side with real vets, seeing what they have learned and how they put their lesson into action. Looking at the hopeful animals after just waking up from surgery will give me the inspiration I need to become a great vet.



Changing the World: One Story at a Time

by Maira

On July 12th 1993, four journalists were killed. Just hours before, these young journalists raced across Mogadishu, Africa to cover the bombing of what was thought to be General Aideed's headquarters. The U.N. forces bombed the house but Aideed was not there, instead nearly 90 men, women and children were killed in the bombing. As the journalists documented the aftermath, a horrible event took place. All four men were beaten, clubbed and stoned to death by an angry mob, furious about the death of their friends, fathers, and brothers at the hands of U.S. and U.N. soldiers. One of the massacred men was Dan Eldon.

When Dan Eldon was just seven years old he moved to Africa with his family. Eldon loved to join his mother, a journalist in Kenya, as she was assigned to stories in the local area. He witnessed and experienced firsthand acts of the war and corrupted government. Soon, Eldon was taking pictures alongside his mother; their stories and photographs were used in the local newspapers. This was when Eldon decided he wanted to make a career out of journalism and use it to help improve the quality of the world.

Eldon once said "The journey is the destination." Just this quote alone helped me realize that no matter how big my dream is; I can achieve it. If I try to succeed long enough and have passion in everything I do, I really can do anything. He also taught me that no matter your age, you can help society in your own way.

Dan Eldon was also a huge inspiration for one of my favorite companies and charities, Invisible Children. The two creators, Jason Russell and Laren Poole, went to Africa to film a movie and came back with the truth. Dan Eldon was the one to influence them to create this company and tell the world about the horrible events taking place in Africa. After some time, Invisible Children made the decision to raise awareness to a younger audience. At that moment, they decided to visit different schools. They came to High Tech High Media Arts, this is where I first learned about the company and their cause.

Learning about this war changed my life; I am always trying to help in as many ways as I can, even if it is just telling someone about it. It helped me become more involved in a community and try to help make a change in the world. I feel that Dan Eldon and his story have altered my life for the better. He has made me consider living in the moment and never letting anything hold me back. He has changed the world as his inspired continuum has and will, for years to come.



Dream Player

by Alvaro



Thousands of people wearing your shirt. Your colors. Your number. All the voices singing in unison. All shouting the same thing. An adrenaline rush fills your body. You feel as if something else was controlling your every move. Then one kick changes everything. The ball flies across the field and into the back of the net. A wave relief and excitement runs through your body. The stadium is filled with a reliving noise that sounds somewhat like “GOAL!!!” Your teammates run across the pitch to congratulate you for you have just done what many cannot do.

As far back as I can remember, I have always wanted to be a professional soccer player. However, I didn't just want to become a professional soccer player, I wanted to become a revolutionary soccer player. The player that will put the name of Mexico next to the greatest teams of all time. To be one of the few Mexican soccer players that have gone to Europe and triumphed in the world of club soccer. For what I can see, someone already beat me to it. El Chicharito Hernandez has accomplished all this and more. He hasn't just put the name of Mexico up high, but has also opened many doors to other great Mexican soccer players and allowed them to go international.

El “Chicharito” Hernandez helped many people throughout his career, but also helped by many to get to where he is now. One of the people that helped him become what he is today was his dad. Since Javier was born, his dad has been pushing him to become the best he can be. I, on the other hand, haven't always been supported by my mom or dad in becoming a professional soccer player. However, they have pushed me to become a greater man. Another person who really helped him was his grandmother who signed Javier Hernandez in English classes so that he could learn more than one language, and even thought Javier cried and said he didn't want to go to English classes, his grandmother insisted. Today, he is grateful, for if it weren't because he can speak English, he wouldn't be able to play for the Manchester United, one of the best paid team in England. But the people who helped him the most is each and every person who puts on a Mexico jersey with the number fourteen on the back and screams out his name in support. That gives him the strength to proceed in this great odyssey. He has started to rewrite history in the world of soccer.

Even though I have never had as much support from my family on following my dream of becoming a professional soccer player or have a roaring crowd exclaiming my name, I put as much effort as he does. I know for a fact that I will get to that point one day and be the next Mexican soccer superstar.

Until then, many will keep idolizing Javier “El Chicharito” Hernandez because with every dribble he makes, someone holds his breath in excitement, with every pass, someone gets up from their seat as the tension builds deep inside them, and with every kick, someone shouts out the best four letter word in the dictionary: GOAL!!!

Green Skin

by Louis



As “freaks” go, she is one of the most notorious “freaks” of them all. Her green skin alone causes her to be victimized by “normal” people. Her clothes make children cringe at the sight of her. The hat she wears on her head symbolizes her status as a witch. Her magic itself invokes the horror of everyone. She is one of the most feared creatures in all of the land. She is also the most misunderstood. In the original “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz” novel, her story is never hinted at. No one tried to understand her. She was simply the antagonist of the story, the type in which antagonists die.

I was in fourth grade when I first read this story. My teacher intended for me to understand that “there is no place like home.” To her surprise, I ended up falling for The Witch. In eighth grade, I was introduced to Elphaba. She was the character that we never really knew; she was sassy, smart, powerful, and independent. And because of that, she was considered different. It wasn’t until I read and heard about the musical “Wicked” that made me understand why; we both had green skin, one in which we weren’t comfortable with back then.

If my life were a musical, my vocals wouldn’t quite match hers. The Wicked Witch of the West sang so powerfully, yet at the same time so heartbreaking and passionate. However, our lyrics would have the same meaning. We would sing about rejection, about the people we trust, and even about our skin. She may have had green skin, but my skin was different from hers. The colors ranged from red to violet, with every color in between. It didn’t show like her skin, though, because I “tanned” myself to become “normal.” I was ashamed.

“Green skin” to me would be coming to terms with myself, just as she did in the Broadway musical. In middle school, I was often picked on the way I walked, talked, dressed, and such. It wasn’t until someone had coined a word to me that I finally understood why I was often misunderstood. That word would appear so much in my life. People would judge me based on that and that alone, just as people feared the Witch because of her skin. We were “Wicked” in the eyes of the public. And to them, No One Mourns the Wicked. Eventually we learned how to cope with our green skin.

One of my favorite songs in that whole musical was a song titled “Defying Gravity.” The song depicts her breaking free from the Wizard of Oz’s rule. This is my favorite song and I learned how to play in on the clarinet when I was in middle school. It always cheers me up when I listen to it because it knows how to give me hope. She finally broke free of the social norm; she accepted herself as who she was. Underneath that green skin is someone who cares; someone who can love. By accepting ourselves, we learned that our true friends would accept us as well—the others didn’t matter to us anymore.

As “freaks” go, I was one of the most notorious of all. My comfort in my own skin caused me to be victimized by people and my style made parents cringe at the sight of me. The rainbow flag I have on my binder invoked the horror of every homophobic person. I was one of the most feared preteens in all of middle school. But look at me now—I defy gravity.