

Spark

Young Writers Magazine

Featuring writing by young writers in the West Midlands



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Spark Young Writers Magazine

You're about to read stories and poems that range all the way from very funny to rather bleak, yet every piece has a single thing in common. Like all the best writing, they tell you one thing but they really show you something else. Each of these pieces sets out to entertain or inform or explore a topic and a feeling but each one also shows you something about the writer.

So you'll see wit and life and puzzlement and concern and fear and joy. There's certainly youthful exuberance but equally there is youthful determination.

You don't get published in Spark Young Writers Magazine just by submitting a piece. You get in by writing work that is alive.

We set very few conditions on the work we'll look at – really so long as it's complete and no more than 500 words, we'll read anything – and that does make the magazine hard to write for. But most of the time it makes it easy to edit: each of the pieces you'll read in this issue went straight in without hesitation, it was so immediately obvious that we must publish them.

There were others you won't see because they just weren't good enough. And there are others I hope you'll get to see in future issues because they were close and the writers are now reworking them.

It is a particular pleasure when work I've rejected then comes back to me improved and emboldened. But always, always, the treat of Spark Young Writers Magazine is reading what you're about to read now. New writing, new voices, and such talent.

William Gallagher
Editor

Spark Young Writers Magazine is a publication of Writing West Midlands. We support creative writers and creative writing across the region. More information about us can be found on our website: www.writingwestmidlands.org.

This magazine features writing from children and young people aged 8 - 20 who live in the West Midlands of the UK and across Europe. It is also available to read online at www.writeonmagazine.org.

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Last Summer

Tabitha Ritchie

The Haribos stared at me from across the room. They were sitting amongst last year's science books and some broken friendship bracelets on the shelf that perches over my old height chart. I have long since grown past that shelf.

The packet was gathering dust and I doubt it still makes the crackly noise that everyone hates while they are sitting in the cinema. They hadn't moved since last summer. Since the day, the hour I found out.

The hour I found out Scarlet was gone. For the rest of that summer I left the Haribos there, ready for us to share if she ever came back. They were the last thing she had given me, but also the first. Scarlet had never been a giver, my brother had always said she had an opposite soul, taking rather than giving, leaving rather than staying. It didn't matter if she had an excuse. She had told me she would be different, for me, her only friend; but she didn't change, she left me.

I cannot cry over her betrayal, I cannot shout at her stupid gift. It meant nothing. It still means nothing.

So why does she haunt me every day?

Genetic memory

Evelyn Byrne

Some migrations spam generations,
the knowledge of where to go is part of
their DNA and I hope that I will have spent
so much time staring at the stars that the way they glow,
the way they shine and how winter wind whips through your hair,
will be so ingrained in my soul that my descendants,
they will remember it too.

So that when our lives
become trapped within steel cages,
they will bring their memories with them,
and humanity will live, bathed in a starlight
that spreads through the ground.

The Releasing of Gran and Ga's Ashes

Aeryn Pettifor

'Goodbye Gran and Ga', I whisper, setting free your souls in the river.
I can't believe I'm doing this.
Just moments before, an irrelevant, irrational thought crossed my mind:
'I am carrying dead people in my hands.'
It's not funny,
I can't remember why I smiled.

I would be lying if I said I remembered you, Gran.
You would always be Great Granny to me.
But the tales told by others are enough
To paint a picture in my head.
Photos of you, that I dust every week,
Firmly plant your smile in my mind.
And the fondness in Mummy's voice
Is clear to everyone.
Even with the glistening tears that roll down her face.
I want to comfort her,
But I don't know how.

I remember you, Ga.
A lonely old man that wished to reunite with his wife.
I remember the smiles that lit up your face whenever I stepped in the room.
A little ray of sunshine, that reminds me of the way
Your ashes settle on the bottom of the river,
Too heavy to move,
Yet look like little patches of sunlight against the jet-black rocks.
You would have loved it here.
Maybe for a picnic.
But then you would complain about the biting wind,
With Great Granny gently shushing you.

But I am ashamed.
I feel no sorrow;
I am sad, but sad for strangers.
I am appalled at my lack of emotions
When Mummy is crying a few feet away.
And I am fooling no-one.
You're both too old to reach here,
A mile or two from the reservoir where a relation of yours drowned himself.
Life is precious, I think,

Standing on the old, stone bridge.
We're in a valley but the cold still snaps me back

To the gentle way your ashes mix with the breeze.
You will mix with nature,
And over time, be forgotten,
As we, ourselves, become nature
And in turn will be forgotten.
In the heart of Buxton, I remember this day,
Trying to condense all my memories
Of you into one, happy picture.
But I can't,
Not when I feel like I don't know you.
I feel empty inside.
No emotions.

I look now at your gifts to me:
Encyclopaedias full of knowledge, and the most precious of all:
My silver locket.
It is empty,
Like me,
But soon will be filled with photos of you.

I can remember.
I will remember.

This is not the only poem about this day.
Mummy's is more sophisticated;
She knew you.
It is just me and Mummy.
Mummy and me...
And you.
Granny and Grandad couldn't get down here, over the treacherous rocks.
But we can,
And we did,
Because we knew you would like to be here,
Silently enjoying each other's company,
Till the end of time.

No Wi-Fi

Leah Odai

No Wi-Fi, no Wi-Fi, there is no Wi-Fi!
This is the most boring Saturday ever
I don't feel like going outside whatever the weather,
I don't feel like doing work - I am not very clever,
I don't like to read, I always say "NEVER!"

No Wi-Fi, no Wi-Fi, there is no Wi-Fi!
Now there is no excuse to stop me from learning
The way that I play games all day is concerning
I get absorbed into the game and then never returning
I have too many choices my brain is now burning!

No Wi-Fi, no Wi-Fi, there is no Wi-Fi!
I got really angry so I started to groan
Instead my mum got furious and told me not to moan
I could use mobile data but I don't have a phone
But I can't live without Wi-Fi! I would rather break a bone

Just Another Day

Sayandeep Das

Daniel felt miserable as he heard the beeps and whirring of the printer. This was not what he signed up for when he became a fireman. He wanted to show how good he really was in his job. He was young and jovial and knew someday he would be able to prove that.

Suddenly the phone started ringing... maybe somebody wanted him to serve coffee to the seniors. But today was different. His heart started beating fast as he listened intently. It was an emergency! There was conflagration at the Houses of Parliament. He scrambled down the stairs to report to the mission officer and collect his state-of-the-art equipment.

Silence reigned in the back of the fire engine; the only audible sound was the loud wailing of the siren. Everyone was lost somewhere deep in their own thoughts. Many were praying for their families – almost prophesizing that their fate was near. Daniel, far from his elation about going on his first real operation, thought about his mum and how she cared so tenderly for him in his childhood. He remembered the funeral and tears started rolling down his cheek...

“WHOOSH!”

The doors swung open as the men poured out. As soon as Daniel stepped into the carnage, he heard screams and saw people running everywhere. The other firemen went to console victims and Daniel and a group of ten went inside to douse the fire. Amidst the annihilation outside, crowds of people were streaming out of the building. His eyes bulged as Daniel saw in horror the Houses of Parliament engulfed in bright red-orange roaring flames! Daniel winced as exposure scorched his skin and started slowing him down. He tried to shield his eyes from the blazing heat, but it was futile. He put his mask on and signaled to his friends to run into the building.

Wreckage was everywhere! Daniel thought about the priceless documents that were being lost forever. But they were looking to rescue anybody who might be trapped inside. Something caught Daniel's eyes in a dark room in a corner. As he ran to investigate his jaws dropped! The Prime Minister was slumped over his desk --- unconscious, with a deep gash on his arm. For a moment Daniel was paralysed in fear but then he saw a timed explosive. He had only ten seconds to leave the building!

He took the Prime Minister on his shoulder and ran as fast as his legs could take him. Time came to a grinding halt as he saw daylight from the exit and jumped out of the building. There was a big explosion behind. He saw people running towards them, then everything went black...

“DAN, DAN, STOP DAY DREAMING AND DO YOUR WORK!”

Daniel sighed as Mrs. Delaney gave a huge lecture in her shrill voice. If only it were real... he got back to his Math's class work.

Then he heard a sound. The sound of the fire alarm!

I am Gold

Naomi Allen

I am Gold,
a new beginning,
awakening the world with my tinted rays
and bringing the day to a close of warmth,
as if to say, “don’t be scared.”
I am gold,
the flickering glow of a candle
the sand beneath feet.
I am joy.

Sunday Roast

Sahil Agrawal

“Click, Click, Slice!” These were the last sounds the chicken would hear as well as the desperate moans of others, who like him, were condemned. He was inches and minutes away from the end of his life. He heard it again, “Click, Click, Slice!”, followed by the last anguished cluck of another comrade.

In a sick irony, played by a sadistic higher being, stunned - the long buried-away memories flooded in. Relentless white flashes blinded the chicken, first bright, then dull. The brightest memory stemmed from the start of his life. A stream of colours and sounds immersed the chick as one final push propelled him to enter this seemingly beautiful life. This weak chick took his first glance at his equally helpless mother. She made a knelling “Cluck” as she stared at her children with eyes of pity. Hours after, she was taken away never to be seen again. The one who had given them life and brought them into this world - disappeared.

The next brightest flash happened shortly after. He and his brethren who were in the same clutch, were given access to long tempting trails of corn and grain. The chicken remembered how foolish he was giving up to that monster of greed. The chicken soon became grossly obese to the point where he could barely walk.

However, the reality dawned upon the chicken as the memories got increasingly duller, like a descending staircase. The chicken was put into a pen with the others, cramped, fat and fighting in intolerable conditions. Despite this he felt alone. They were a proud, semi-avian species yet they could not enjoy the fleeting seconds of flight and instead were permanently cemented to the ground by their own excrement. The chicken could remember the crunching sound and the tremendous pain of having his beak snapped and the deathly cries of pain from others. He could remember the blood moving down his neck in twisting, long, red streams. Panicky, he remembered how they picked and poked at each other. He felt anguish and fear as he saw his friends go in batches. Now it was his turn.

The chicken kept his eyes open as the guillotine murderously approached, stained crimson red with the blood of countless others. The sound echoed with an ascending crescendo, “Click, Click, Slice! Click, Click, Slice!” He thought he heard the sound of his mother’s knelling cluck as he smelt the metallic blood. Then suddenly there was nothing...

The supermarket’s cold section housed a variety of meats ranging from the smallest lamb to the largest beef portions. A woman with children in tow picked the fresh chicken having carefully checked the expiry date. Drawn and quartered it was cleansed and cooked. Lifeless pieces were further piked by metal tridents by the same species who had brought the chicken to this fate. The chicken had made a good Sunday roast.

Give Them Life

Maisy Mansell-Warren

Give them
life!
Give those trees
the life,
the
meaning of living.
Give it to them,
pour it
upon
their leaves,
let it run
over
their branches,
that will rise to the
sky in blessed,
overwhelmed
joy and
gratitude.

Might it
fall down,
roll across
the
majestic, solid trunk,
leave
marks
along
its sinews and
stretches of wood filled with
silent power.

Might it
drip slowly
down into the
parched
soil
and be breathed
into rasping
roots.
Be pulled
up
back into its rejoicing insides
and spread across

tiny
junctures of the green leaves
and flowering
buds.

May it be
exhaled back into our air,
flowing
and
swirling
like soft, green steam.
And
may
we
breathe it in, and
may we
be given also
the power and
the strength
of those
trees,
but may we not use it for ourselves,
but to give
back to
the nature and
emerald sparks
that
kindle our lives.
Give it to them.

Baby Vampire

Caitlin Holyoake

One night when the moon was a white
balloon sailing in the moonlight, I went
for a walk in the enchanted forest.

My mother told me not to go.
But, did I listen?
No!

As I walked into the forest, I noticed
a cloud covered the moon!

But I told myself
No, I am not going back.
No, I am not being scared.
No, I am not letting my mum be right.
No!
No!
No!

So, I went into the forest and I
Heard a noise!

A baby crying!
So, I followed the noise into a clearing.

There I saw a baby.
I went up close.
It had
FANGS!!!

I realised it was a baby vampire!
Baby vampires are deadlier than grown
vampires.
I ran, felt a grab at my leg.
I fainted!

The Shadow

Abel Neto

Looming over the figure running,
Was The Shadow.
Over the police's pieces of precious evidence was: The Shadow.
Covering the picked padlock was: The Shadow.
Treacherous, Unforgiving, Evil.
He has been haunting, taunting, these parts for years,
The individual who conquers your fears.
He's dark and black,
Just like his cold heart.
For there is and always will exist: The Shadow.

The atmosphere is always tense in his lair,
People are afraid of him, no matter where.
His intentions are harmless, but somehow still threatening.
His paralyzing words lure you in; he knows how to sing.
How do I know?

Simple. I am The Shadow.

The Day Before Death

Malak Salama

WW1

I see faithful souls lying as in a deep sleep,
Never to see the shine of the sun,
Even their families cry and weep,
Death comes for us – one by one.

I hear the bullets raining down on us,
And for my life I fear,
My devastated heart bangs like a banging drum,
And my eyes fill up with tears,

I smell the putrid, polluted air,
It fills and hides the sky,
Why is war so unfair,
I cannot help but wonder why?

I feel the chaos coming to destroy me,
I travelled away for this long, useless journey,
I am powerless as can be,
Why did we get ourselves in this catastrophe?

Earth: a Brief History

Sahil Agrawal

Sometimes, I forget the loneliness and the lack of control I have over myself and transcend to the memories I had made billions of years ago. Yet it feels only like yesterday. I see through the eyes of dust particles as we gathered and clumped together to form one collective consciousness. We now were one omnipresent being as metals welded and formed my heart. My bones then followed shortly after to form my protective mantle. However, from this singular moment, I would walk down a long, tenuous path that would lead to my downfall: life.

It all somehow began with a single cell born of the poisonous, choking gases in my environment which were emitted from protrusions in my skin called volcanoes. It became more biologically diverse as daughter cells kept multiplying into more and more. The first entity became known as 'the god-cell' and I watched with bated breath to see what this other god could create. It felt like we worked together as I made environments and it made the beings to inhabit my various biomes. From a singular unicellular being sprang many multicellular organisms as they moulded their inner-biochemical structures to suit what they inhabited. They would develop webbed feet for the oceans or wings to escape predators.

For the first time in eons this feeling of loneliness within the vastness of space faded. They were also entertaining as they would constantly devour each other and nurture their offspring in a rat race called survival of the fittest.

The age of Mammalia began soon after the age of dinosaurs and I began to see the conflicting sides of evolution as they produced these small creatures known as humans. Humans had no physical prowess and were devoured endlessly. However, to my surprise I saw something which I recognized in myself: intelligence and sentience or so I thought.

They used intelligence in a much more radical way than I thought. They developed tools to trap, tame and kill predators. They slowly ascended the food chain as their numbers grew and their intelligence sharpened. They had soon cordoned themselves from the rest of the animal kingdom and developed strange habits such as covering themselves.

Yet my journey of self-discovery progressed in leaps and bounds too.

Humans multiplied relentlessly and became the most powerful beings. They colonised my landmass and the tranquillity of nature was replaced by urbanisation. Nature's survival of the fittest regime was replaced by a society of co-operation and diplomacy. The most drama I saw was in a mere boardroom.

However, as time progressed, I realised that humans were drilling into me. Emissions and waste choke my throat. Where blisters and carbuncles clump together, large sores form. My resources are drained. I grow angrier by the day. I am sick and quake with fever. I sneeze hurricanes and tsunamis and bleed lava. I have become a slave to the usurper: humanity. My greatest hope perhaps lies in humanity abandoning me to plague some other planet.

Far from Home

Jeamya Adebisi

It is hard saying goodbye to my home, I had lived there for 13 years and it was destroyed in 13 seconds. I know we have to leave it is no longer safe for us to stay, my dad is gone: he distracted the guards while my mum, little sister and I escaped.

We are making our way to England because we will be safe there. My dad was taken and I didn't even get to say goodbye. My heart is full of anger. Because of someone else's hatred the whole country has to suffer.

I look around and I see people running around screaming and crying I can hear gunshots and shouting and I wonder why it had to come to this.

We begin our journey leaving behind sadness, destruction and hatred but we also leave friends and family that died and all the happy memories we shared. However, this is also a journey to find happiness and start a new life in peace and harmony.

After months of travelling, we finally make it to England. Our journey was hard and upsetting but we had hope because we knew we would make it here and everything would be better.

When we arrived, we were put in hostel for refugees. We stayed there a long time but soon mum found a job as a cleaner and we were able to move to a flat in Manchester. My sister and I started school here and we moved on with our lives.

Blackbird

Iona Mandal

You always wanted a blackbird
Its jetness like the monsoon sky
sunny, streamlined beak
clouds masked in its eyes
a soulful voice
evoking rains for parched lands afar

Perhaps it's crooning
to meditate your bruised heart
its wings to set you free
its cage to fulfil your dream of maintenance
filling your soul and
deceiving you into self-belief

It rained in heaven that night
till dawn cracked open my eyes
like golden egg yolk.
Smooth sliver of sunshine
washing the room to morning birdsong
a brew of chirruping thrushes, robins and wrens

In my mind's eye, I saw you wake
walk towards the windowsill
hallucinating a cage
Your cracked voice calling aloud
for the blackbird you yearned for

The blackbird flapped its wings hard
and onto the cage it flew in
setting you free.

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