

Spark

Young Writers Magazine

Featuring writing by young writers in the West Midlands



Issue 18 November 2019



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One of the reasons Writing West Midlands produces this Spark Young Writers' magazine – and the sole reason I ever edit it – is that it's meant to be real. With the exception that whoever is editing it will take longer and will go into more detail when rejecting pieces, the whole process is intentionally the same as these young writers will get used to throughout the rest of their writing careers.

That always means several important things. Most importantly, it means that despite our aims of supporting young writers, the magazine cannot actually be for them. It has to be for the readers instead.

This means that despite whole magazine existing to bring young writing from the West Midlands, I barely think about the young writers. It's always about the writing, the pieces, what works, what doesn't and, crucially, what works as part of the whole magazine.

Except this time.

Nothing's changed about editing this issue, yet it feels as if this time the pieces have stuck with me more than usual. I took longer editing it because I'd be thinking about certain poems or stories more, I'd be on completely unrelated jobs and this issue would be on my mind.

Then thinking about it away from my desk, sometimes far away from the production of the magazine, I did think about the writers.

I thought about how the writers in this issue wrote in such different ways and, doubtlessly, they wrote all across the region, probably at all times of day and night if they're anything like me.

They all worked on their own. They were definitely separated from other writers and they may even have been isolated. Yet their solitary writing across the West Midlands comes together to create this magazine as a single, whole, vibrant read.

For you.

I'm proud of the writing in this issue, and so grateful that Writing West Midlands has been part of this process. I hope you relish it as much as I do.

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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Five a Day

Iona Mandal

What is it? Notoriously popular health standards?
For optimal health, we need a rainbow
of nutrients and colours.
Every telly screen and magazine,
plastered with moralising glow ups every day.

Red.
We eat our cascading pomegranate seeds
as if they are jewels.
Yet, squirm at the sight of blood stains
on bathroom linoleum.
We have learnt to worship gems,
but not reality that it's healthy to bleed.

Orange and Yellow.
That oddly blended smoothie
forced down the throat.
Yet, we have no time
to pull the blinds
to soak in the sunshine.
So we craftily convincing our taste buds,
to make believe that goodness is often pain.
Yet, eyes blind to the beauty,
we are bestowed with.

Green.
A heap at the corner of our plate.
The dwindling, ghastly foliage
of times we live in.
We watch our gardens wilt,
grow grey hairs without care.
Crooked vegetables removed
from supermarket shelves.
Nature left to decay,
Eve no longer stealing the forbidden fruit.

Blue and, indigo
The awkwardly unnatural hues,
running through our veins
of food that is cold and blue
yet treated as if royal.
And, last but not the least,
White.

Of pills and tablets we do not need,
but substitute for the kaleidoscope of colours
we are to blind
to see through.

So gulp down the rainbow
of acid rain, famine and LED lights.
Variety and colour in every gulp
Eat your rainbow, as the adverts scream,
believing in the food revolution!

That Quiet Kilbride Inn

Caitlin Smith-Murphy

She could not decide
What sofa she wanted, or whether she should move to Kilbride
To escape the neighbours' calls of who's moved away and who has died.

All she wanted was peace and quiet
But all of a sudden the house was not quite...
Right she decided she had to go, she would leave at first light.

It wasn't so simple
The rumours would follow and smiles would simper
"She wasn't quite right... after it," they would whisper.

Over glasses of rum and gin
And the glass bottles already in the bin
She would tell their golden love story in that quiet Kilbride inn.

Fright Night

Aliya Waseem

I just knew that this was a ridiculous idea. Why did I listen to her of all people? Maybe Marianne is right – I'm way too gullible. But I suppose that it doesn't matter anymore, my main issue is getting out of this mess.

I looked around myself and saw nothing that could help get me home – just the same moss everywhere. Hordes of green trees surrounded me and each of them seemed to loom in over me the further that I got down this pathway. As I completed that thought, I realised that this wasn't really a pathway. It was just... a bunch of bushes that seemed to show some sense of direction.

I knelt down to get a closer look at the bushes in order to see if I could find anything that could help me. I swiped the greenery to one side and held it tightly. Peering closer, I noticed that there was a small thread of black wool. Why would there be black wool in a forest? I decided that I had already done many stupid things in my life, what's one more?

Picking up the black thread I began to follow the trail that it had created. As I walked, I could feel more of the dirty mud water seep up into my boots and the uncomfortable sensation in my feet continued to grow. Trying to keep my boots out of the mud, I lifted my knees much higher (just like a P.E. lesson all over again) but alas, the mud clearly liked my boots and continued to stick to them like leeches.

Ignoring the wetness in my feet, I continued to roll up the wool and adding it to the little ball that I was making – if my mother saw me right now, she would be so proud.

Turning the newly materialised corner, I was just about to let out a sigh of frustration at my trail deciding to end itself when I heard the sloshing of water nearby – and by the sounds of it, something enormous is there.

Quickly scanning my surroundings – which were still just a bunch of moss and trees – I took refuge behind the tree that seemed to loom over me the most. Poking my head around the corner of the tree, I saw something so atrocious that I suddenly thought the person in the mirror was actually a Godsend. What stood before me was a monster carved and made out of wood yet its frame resembled that of a skeleton.

It stood there with its back hunched forwards holding what appeared to be a dead... wolf?

But that wasn't the weirdest part, it had a metal head that resembled Captain Cutler's from Scooby Doo. What kind of things parented this?

My head had been left around the corner for too long – the thing jerked its head in my direction and roared.

By the Goddesses, I have never felt so much adrenaline pump through my veins as survival kicked in.

Revelation

Sayandeep Das

George hastily drew the curtain to cut off the sunray that filtered through the drawn blind. He tried to find solace in the darkness and the loneliness. In his mid-forties, he felt that he was inching towards the inevitable fate to which most of his family members succumbed. His granddad, his dad and his brother --- all became crippled and eventually died around their mid-forties. It is like a family curse which had hung upon them. Yet nobody in the family talked about it ---as if trying to hide from it, a vain attempt to escape.

George squinted his eyes, as if trying to pry open the past. Had he not tried his best to overcome the fear that he also would fall victim to the dreaded family disease? Did he not study hard to get the management degree from the university? Did he not work hard to steady his family business after his dad and elder brother died? He was ever so busy with his business and with his wife and his little girl. George sighed; he cannot deny that at the back of his mind he still dreaded his family curse. However, the laughter of his little girl and the love of his wife gave him the strength to ward it off from his mind and to enjoy life.

George shut his eyes tight and tears rolled down his cheek. How cruel is life! How fortune changes! His strength, his family suddenly vanished when his wife and daughter died in a car accident. George turned on his side --- he didn't even feel any pain, his mind felt completely numb. Life was a foggy listless affair since then. He thought himself lucky to dodge the family curse, but the curse took his beloved family. He hated sunshine, bird songs, laughter and tried to escape from life by staying indoor, preferring to spend time in darkness. George was afraid that his family curse was going to get him too and to the inevitable crippling end...He buried his face in his hands and sobbed....

George turned to a familiar voice ... his brother was calling him. He was in his wheel-chair, small and helpless but his eyes were bright and smiling... 'Georgie, don't live the life of death while you are alive ... enjoy life. You cannot change your fate, but you can conquer the fear of death'.... George tried to reach out to him, but his brother vanished ...

George pulled himself up from the armchair, he must be dreaming.... the words of his brother still ringing in his ears. He took a deep breath he will overcome the fear of death.

He pulled the newspapers that were piling up for weeks. There was the news of a strange viral fever in Africa killing people in droves. Urgent help is needed to fight Ebola. George started to dial the number to volunteer --- he will fight death to overcome his fear of death.

Cycles

Suzie Lloyd

The sun shines for another day,
The baby flowers come to play,
Luscious leaves start to grow,
Buds start to open, as you all know.

Finding its way up to the sky,
The stems grow up high,
Luminous colours start to glow,
As the petals start to grow.

As the flower grows older it dies,
But the flowers are telling lies,
Don't droop don't go, please!
But hello, here are some bees.

The bees plant the taken seeds and pollenate,
One tiny seed can grow to sizes that are great,
The sun shines for another day,
The new baby flowers come to play.

dragon in the euphrates

Lyanna Choi

i left persepolis in raging ruins
when i laid my grief to rest
in the euphrates

the boys in their longboats hewn of young cypress
with groaning oars and weeping faces
beat their chests and cast overboard their devotions
waltzing in a precipitate of grain —
rotting white flesh falling gently to the riverbed —
still i sleep
in blessed silence beneath the tide
until the sunrise bleeds cadmium red
and the trumpets of rosy-fingered eos
ripple through the minutes of day, cleaving at the shallows,
raising the silt from my disintegrating bones —
though i rise
the diffracted light of the surface reminds me of a foreigner's face,
i sink
back into the familiar embrace of the naiad's song
until finally our frequencies diverge at the delta

though the tigress' stripes cannot change, they fade
with the muffled tongues carried by the seething current
and the violent temperance of a disenfranchised youth
by forebears dispossessed

Armistice

Ellie Dart

Moral decaying, blockade.
Heroes no longer washing to shore,
As electric sparks in their veins,
Shock.

The wreckage left behind,
Bodies strewn like landfill,
Rebellion shrieks to deafened ears,
Sassoon.

This bloody world at an end,
That the bloody soldiers defend,
Skin stretched over rifles,
Foundation.

Blackened stones and souls,
They shall run, and not be weary,
Hospitals fall to silence,
Armistice.

The train chuffed past with the carriage behind,
Britain, France, USA,
The page is signed,
Versailles.

Open arms to a family,
Wearing plastic smiles,
The fingers of a child reaching to their father,
Alive.

The hope of a future,
Hidden by missing limbs and wounds,
Physical and of the mind,
Determined.

As remembrance continues,
The soldiers march still,
Bullets form their grin,
And a poppy is stitched into their skin. v

Lying in a Field

Daniel S Martin

“Do you think love is possible?”

“What?”

“Love? Do you think it’s possible?” I answered.

“Of course,” She replied, in her playful, feminine tone. She was happy. I could feel it. “What do you think?”

“I... I don’t know anymore,” I splutter, stumbling over my words. She turned her head and looked at me. Confusion played in her eyes, betraying her emotions. “What do you mean?” She asks calmly.

I tear my gaze away from her and looked up at the rapidly reddening sky. “I feel Love. Lots of it. I want to give it, but...”

“But you feel like you can’t,” she interrupted.

“No!”

“Well, what then?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” I sighed, the feeling of regret building up inside my stomach. Why could I not just say it?

She returned her gaze to the sky. It was a pleasant day. The sun shone down on the lush grass that we lay in. No cloud blocked the view of the brightest blue sky and a gentle breeze stopped the early summer evening from feeling too hot. “What’s the matter?” she asked.

“Huh? Oh, nothing really,” I stuttered.

“I don’t believe that. What’s wrong? You can tell me, I promise.”

“I know, but...it’s just...” – come on, tell her – “I love you.” The weight of many months of built up emotion, fled as I spoke.

She continued looking up at the sky. I watched her and could tell that the cogs were turning in her head. “I love you too,” she said after a few long seconds, which felt like months or even years, but were in fact a few seconds. She turned, peering into my eyes. My heart had skipped a beat, the air in my lungs quickly, but silently escaping, as she uttered those precious four words. I returned her gaze, noticing a little ballerina twirling around within the deep green of her eyes. It spun, leaped, rolled and danced in the most elegant way possible. As it danced, the ballerina beamed in innocent content. Once it stopped, her feminine frame and joyful aura was consumed by the pupil, which widened to swallow the green iris.

My love looked away from me, before sighing, deeply, and rising from the grass. I watched her gather up her things before turning to me and saying, "Come on then. Let's get moving." Her hand was out stretched for me. It seemed to glow, the minimal light being drawn towards her hand, circling in a pleasant orbit, which had regularity to it. Her hand called to me, whispering sweet nothings of the violent beat of a runaway heart. I rose, grabbed my coat and, taking her hand, slung the thin material over my shoulder.

We began to walk down the hill, the lush grass stretching out below us into miles of lush pastures that suddenly stopped in the start of the cul-de-sac, just below us. We walked hand in hand, our hearts leading us forward.

Dream

Kathryn Victoria Evans

I looked across at him.
His face was all smiles and rainbows.
So was mine.
I slipped my fingers into his, squeezing his hand.
Then, without a word, we both stepped off the edge.
We fell together, down into the canyon.
He let go of my hand and let me fall on my own.
I looked up at him. A pair of angel wings sprouted from his back.
He hovered above me, then, his wings folded and he drifted down to me.

We landed in a meadow of flowers, laughing and holding our bellies.
He reached out for my hand and took it softly.
But, we just laughed harder.
The meadow folded up with us in it.
It turned and tilted like a glorious ride, then uncurled, dropping us onto a trampoline.
We bounced and flipped, screaming and gasping for breath.
We leapt higher and higher until we reached the clouds.

We skipped along a rainbow, shouting out the colours in time.
We chased each other along indigo and danced on red.
Then we jumped into a pot of gold at the end.
We trickled coins over each other and giggled at our luck.
Tiny leprechauns marched up to us and tipped us out of our gold bath.
We fell hand in hand and landed gently in our seats.
The teacher looked at us in turn, asking what the answer was.
We glanced at each other and
smiled...

Why Did This Start

Skyler Peacock

Why did this start I wonder why me and daddy had to part,
Why did this start when you left it broke my heart,
Why did this start I remember I said goodbye,
Why did this start I remember lightning fell from the sky,

Why did this start I want to go back to before,
Why did this start I never see you anymore,
Why did this start are you ok,
Why did this start I can't bear one more day.

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does with young people, please see
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