

Spark

Young Writers



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WRITING
WEST
MIDLANDS

Spark Young Writers Magazine

I've already told writer Maggie Bartlett this, so I'll tell you too: her piece in this issue made me cry. "My Nanny is Forgetful" is simple, sweet, and what it does not say, what it leaves you thinking and knowing, that makes it so particularly deeply touching.

It's the Editor's Choice for this issue and it's also a reminder -- perhaps most of all to me -- that writing is as much about the words you don't use, the things you don't say, as it is the text you present.

Spark Young Writers' Magazine is also about more than the text in it. The purpose of the magazine is to be the best read it can be -- that is always and forever the primary aim of any publication at all.

In this case, there is a secondary aim and I think it's vital. Anyone who submits to this magazine is treated the same way that they would be if they were a professional writer working on any national magazine. It's not about publishing anything that's sent to us and isn't that nice, they're in print.

It's about earning a place in a magazine. It's about being a good read whether you know the writer or not. Consequently, 48% of all submissions to this issue were rejected.

There is one difference between this and being a professional writer: the 48% whose work was rejected, and the 52% whose pieces are in the magazine, all got a detailed letter from me about why.

Though the one to Maggie Bartlett only had to say that if your writing makes a grown man cry, you're in.

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. It is also available to read online at www.sparkwriters.org.

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My Nanny is Forgetful

Maggie Bartlett

There is a supernanny living down the road. She bakes the most yummiest cakes in the world and her Victoria Sponge cake is softer than the clouds.

She gardens on the weekends. Her flowers are blindingly bright and you can smell the lavender from streets, even the butcher boy can smell them all the way from his shop.

At night time, when she is tucked up in bed, she knits the most magical scarfs that keep me toasty warm it looks like i'm wearing a rainbow draped around my neck.

The doctor came to nannies house today to check she is all well. Out came the magic tools to look inside her head. He said "she's starting to forget which will worsen over time".

I'm glad my nanny taught me all the things I know so one day I can bake her the softest cakes, grow her the most fragrant flowers that the butcher boy can smell and knit her the most toastiest scarves to wear.

My nanny is forgetful but that's not a problem now I will sit and teach her when she doesn't remember how.

Acceptance

Simran Kaur

Once upon a time there was a girl. She had wings and lived in a village by a forest. She could not fly. The other village children laughed at her. She was held to the ground by the hand of despair.

The stings of the girls words wounded her heart. She also loved the forest and her soul seemed to be weaved amongst the trees. Yet she suppressed this pull to the woods upon which she was mocked more.

One day, winter flew upon the wind and dressed everything with the raiment of downy white.

When morning dawned on the world, this girl walked among the village. The Winter Festival was being celebrated to greet winter. She walked among the people and she heard the sharpness of girls. She began walking towards the wood, her heart hardened to their derision. She stopped at the Last House and then she saw a girl with moonstone eyes gazing upon her.

"Hello, I am Svetlana," this girl said.

The little winged girl was speechless. Nobody had tried to make friends once they saw her wings "Hello. I am Alya," she said at last.

This was the start of their friendship. Soon Alya had a heart protected from the stings of the other girls' words. Svetlana was the light in which guided her out of the darkening path of hopelessness.

One day, Svetlana led her to the woods. They went through the trees for the first time. They came to a oak tree that breathed secrets into the wind and in a hole of the tree an owl perched. This owl was larger than the girls and came down in front of them.

Then suddenly from the tree, a figure emerged from the trunk.

She said, looking at the Alya, "to be different is not a burden but a gift. I have seen your hardened heart, though softened by the hand of friendship. But I have also seen how some shadow still looms upon your soul. Once you learn to believe and accept yourself, you shall find who you are."

And then the figure gone but Alya found she was not upon the ground anymore.

She was flying.

Belief and hope carried her in the wind.

The figure was the soul of the forest of which Alya had felt her own heart weaved within and she had turned that shadow in her heart into light.

She became her own best friend and learnt that it was only the ones that were close to her that she should listen to and so she was happy with the friends who were true to her, close to her heart and forgave quickly and never took notice to anyone’s unkind words.

That was her superpower. And so, dear reader, as I hope you have learnt, never listen and do not waste away your time and heart upon those untrue and unkind to you. Always listen to those who are true and keep them close to your heart.

Waiting for an Interview

Toby Garside

Tick, tick, tick.

I can feel it.

That feeling racing down my vertebrae like a thousand lightning bolts; a feeling that needs to be silenced. A series of jolts pulsing through my body, timed to the beating of my heart; jolts that I need to cease. I picture, in my own head, my veins filling up with this penetrating sense of nothing, cutting through the electricity that’s surging through me. That stinging ache retreating completely.

It isn’t working.

Tick, tick, tick.

All I can do is sit there, staring numbly at the cracks in that colourless wall in front of me. A blank wall of white nothing, a perfect picture of what I need to feel inside. All this, as I try to keep my body as stiff and as rigid as a marble statue. Statues don’t think, do they? They don’t think about walls or veins or spinal columns or any of that other nonsense. They aren’t burdened by fear or anxiety. They’re perfectly still.

So why can’t I be the same?

Tick, tick, tick.

Tap, tap, tap.

Ah, there it is. The betrayal.

My right foot, hitting the floor with the force you’d expect from a jackhammer. I can see it out of the corner of my eye. My knee shuddering up and down, up and down, vibrating against the ceramic tiles. I can hear the dull thuds ringing in the silence. I turn around to stare at the receptionist at the other end of the room, tapping away on her computer. Can she hear it? Perhaps she’ll turn around any second now, expecting there to be a woodpecker hammering at the floor with its beak. Perhaps she’d shoo it out through the open window to my left, watching as it flies away into the sunlight.

I’d give anything to have wings right now. Anything.

Tick, tick, tick.

I can see the seconds hand turning with every mechanical ‘tick.’ From 55 seconds- to 52 seconds. Soon, there will be nothing left. And with every passing second, I can feel the gorge rising slightly in my throat, fresh from my grumbling stomach. Swallowing doesn’t work; my mouth feels as dry and as cracked as a desert. The ‘slow, regulated breathing’ that I’ve always been taught to do is non-existent. And then there’s the leg of course; practically drilling a hole through the floor at the rate its going. Drilling it at the same rate as my heart is beating.

My body isn't filled with nothing. Every part of me feels alive. And that's the worst thing imaginable.

5 seconds. 2 seconds. 0 sec-

The phone rings.

So perfectly on time, that it almost makes me laugh. I watch the receptionist as she picks it up, listens, and then places it back down again. Like a judge with their hammer, pronouncing my sentence. She turns to me and speaks.

"They'll see you now, sir."

Confession of a Lonely Giant

Petra Rihan

his mother sang to the shore one night
his height not yet applicable to his personality
he bore down on you instead
with words strung together stodgily,
the result of toothache,
before she disappeared beneath the waves
he was about to complain
that his teeth stung

a year went by
motherless, the poor chap was,
a tooth fell out
and with it came an inch of height.

12 pages in the calendar passed,
his shoes didn't fit quite right,
his trousers felt far too tight,
a tooth again, all fairies too busy for collection.

365 days,
he was large for his age,
with every candle he didn't blow,
another tooth left on his pillow,
bloody and rotten and caked in gunk,
he found it hard to speak.

52,143 weeks,
tears slid down from his cheeks and
a tooth from his mouth.
giftless, empty handed, no balloon in sight,
on his list was a toothbrush,
for which he was not given,
no shoes had fit,
he stuck with barefoot .

another 6 years was another 6 teeth,
he hadn't spoken for an endless time,
no things to say, no things to mime,
an empty mouth led to an empty head,
no words were there to be said,
and it had been long since he'd fit in his bed.

but one cold morning,
another tooth fell out,
and for the first time since his mother died,
he began to speak,
first of course was the gibberish,
because really he couldn't remember English
but slowly and surely sentences were said.
a cutting from a magazine,
a sign on a shed,
for what words could he have known,
to name what he felt,
because indeed all he knew,
was how to be toothless.

another year went by,
he read the whole dictionary,
he took up too much space and
he felt too large for this place,
too big for his shoes,
his mouth would still ooze,
all his teeth he had left,
he could count on one hand.

but finally he'd found
what he wanted to say.
he shouted it loud, for the ocean to survey,
"I miss my mother" is what he conveyed.

and after that day, the years that went by,
no tooth fell from his mouth,
he learnt to speak and shout,
and for that,
he was quite proud.

Misunderstanding

Madeleine Sudlow

I ran downstairs, the smell of bacon rising up the hall. Wednesday. The day Dad cooked a full English. I scooted into the kitchen and skidded to a stop.

Official papers lay on the table. Dad's computer sat on the side; the web page open at: The Hart Pub Weddings. This was also the day before my life turned upside down.

"Morning Katie. Got your school bag?"

"Yeah," I said. I wished it was Friday.

Mum and Dad divorced when I was three, and I had lived with Dad since I was six.

Eight years of peace, and now: Dad was getting married again. Tomorrow. The worst nightmare of my life was coming true. On the occasions I had met this woman (future Step-Mother) she had seemed OK. But still, never trust appearances.

I ate my breakfast quickly and was silent on my way to school. I would get a day off, that seemed to be the only good thing about this venture. I sat through my classes and sucked my pen. At break my friend Mary asked me what was wrong. I told her. Her mum has a string of boyfriends, and Mary understood.

That night, homework complete, Dad asked me what I would like to do on our last evening alone. On Friday I would go and stay at Gran's while Dad was on his honeymoon with the S-M.

(Mum died of breast cancer 3 years ago).

We curled up on the sofa with mugs of hot chocolate and giant cookies Dad bought on his way home from work. We watched Netflix until late, then I went to bed.

Tomorrow I would be getting a Stepmother (the dreaded S-M). I finally fell asleep.

I awoke next morning, stretched, and smiled at the beautiful day, imagining the fun Mary and I would have at break. Then my sub-conscious brain dropped a bombshell. I remembered everything.

Dad poked his head around my door. He looked nervous.

"Morning Katie, could you please do my tie?"

I obliged. "Get ready, Katie," Dad smiled at me.

I nodded and shut the door.

The dress the S-M had chosen for me was a pretty green affair which went rather well with

my auburn curls. I had a wreath of roses for my hair, and smart black shoes.

We reached the venue and went inside. I had to wait for the S-M while Dad talked to the registrar.

The S-M has a daughter who would also be a bridesmaid.

A white Mercedes swept around the corner. They had arrived.

The vows went smoothly, and the reception the same. The S-M came and found me after the ceremony.

“Thank you, Katie,” she said kindly.

I inclined my head, my mouth full of cake.

“Your father told me you didn’t want a step-mother. I don’t want to take your mum’s place, but I would like you to accept me.”

Looking back, a year on, Emily isn’t that bad. To be fair, having a step-mother is rather nice.

A Tudor Court

Chloe Pick

Joan stood in the barren room

Mahogany wood flooring, cherry red tapestry hung

Telling the story of a battle.

The hero is slain, villain holding the sword

Blood drips, cherry red to the battle-ground

A memory from a millennia ago

Placed proudly on the otherwise bare wall,

the sole possession of Joan’s room

A single suggestion of comfort among this court

Where people only wanted to improve their station in life

A poison corrupting her life, bleeding her of hope

Staring out the dew-covered window she watched

As the flowers lazily swayed in the autumnal breeze

An endless labyrinth of cut hedges

Lavender scent wafts around the room

Whispers of the lute drift from the hall below

A haunting melody, coaxing her downstairs

Stirring up a memory, she gazed out to the walled garden surrounding her

In this caged prison, she was trapped

Joan felt as though the key had been thrown away

The old oak tree over the brick wall pulled her towards a memory-

A yearning to return to the past and its joys

She yearned for the days spent shielded from the world, hiding in the woods

How the leaves blew and flowers bloomed

How birdsong had spun a joyous melody

Laughing, free and clinging to every moment

Forever escaping from the life set out for her

It had dragged her to this dreary court

Oh, how she longed to return to those woods

If only she were free to choose a life for herself

Free to choose where to go, where to live and to be finally, truly happy

A knock at the door shook her from such foolish hopes.

Accepted

Caitlin Lawrence

I think every child should be accepted for who she or he is. There may be bad days and really good days but no matter what kind of day it is you still shine through, even if you will never see it there is this little thing inside of you that shines so bright.

Your voice should be accepted, your voice is important and I'm so sorry if your voice hasn't been heard, hasn't been listened to or has been silenced.

Your voice matters, no matter how big or small the situation may be, your voice should always be accepted and listened to.

Everyone is unique in their own incredible ways.

People should be accepted for whoever they are. People should be accepted for their skin colour, beliefs, religion, how they look and their sexuality.

Everyone is deserving of happiness. Never lose sight of who you are and never apologise for being you. You should be accepted for who you are.

Don't change for anyone, the best thing you can ever be is yourself.

When the sea meets the horizon

Anya Alden-Howells

The lemon-sun danced upon the glistening diamond-blue ocean with grace,
as birds sang in harmony,

The clouds were soft and puffy:
perfect for little kids to dream soft dreams
without worries about nightmares,

Where the ocean meets the horizon
there is sudden hope and thy life may grow.

But as time passed and humans get more greedy,
no one would notice any of the beauty around them,
leaving hope to die.

As this went on, the ocean devoured ships
and crashed against the rocky shores.
It loomed its brick prey and crashes against them,

The electric-blue monster continues for years,
not meeting the horizon. Ever.

But one day, the angry ocean crashed down to its fate,

Where it crashed is where the horizon lies.

The sun beamed out, the ocean is still and people started to care.

Hope is united again.

Suffocating Gaia

Zoe Davies

Now,
I ask you,
Is existence worth existing?
Cause I can keep on listing,
The things that are wrong with this world,
But that wouldn't make a very good poem,
Now,
Would it?

'Cause I could say,
About the rubbish in the sea,
And the disease inside of me,
And the rising heat,
Which kills the grass,
Which cows eat,
And the cows will die,
And you won't have your beef steaks and pie,
And humans will starve,
And those protesters and activists you ignored so many times will laugh,
And say,
"We did try to warn you,"
"Didn't you see our posters and banners and signs?"
'Cause now the world has stepped out of line,
Before
Now,
You could've tried to stop it,
But instead, you just hopped it,
But on the other side it's not pretty,
No,
'Cause the mud is all bitty,
And the sand is receding into the sea,
And we are dying, you and me,
And the water is rising, rising,
Getting ever more traumatising,
Now,
You want to stop it,
Don't you?
But it's too late,
Now,

So go back to your homes,
Don't try think about the animals being driven from their biomes,
From deforestation,
For your paper,
For your farms,
For your food,

Or maybe,
Just maybe,
It's not too late,
To save us all,
Are you listening,
Now?

Just take my hand,
And you will see,
This is not how earth was built to be.

A Wooded Winter

Simran Kaur

As night fell upon the wood
Of where all magic and animals stood,
The stars of blossom bloomed
And the moon's silvery lances loomed.

Then the stars hollered an old woodland friend
And as all was slumbering and all set to rest at the day's end,
The forest was restless in all it did
And the wind was dancing as a kid.

'Twas winter that the wind came hand in hand,
Upon its wings was a silvery band,
The lady of pearls so shimmering and bright,
The lady of the fluffy, snowy white.

This friend of the forest was not barren,
Bleak or biting whilst flying like a heron
Or nipping and snapping at the wood's door,
Or melancholy to its core.

For winter clothed itself upon the woodland crown
With the raiment of feathery, white down
Of winter's blooming blossoms that doth glow
Of winter's sparkling cloak of snow.

This winter touched the restless land
And made the streams her icy glass mirror by her hand.
As she danced upon the world, upon the trees she doth trace
The frosty flowers of white silvery lace.

She bestowed upon the wind a special thing to avail
That would lure the wind from the distant dale,
With the icicles upon the arms of the trees
The wind sent music twinkling upon the air as they doth dangle and freeze.

And so now winter dances upon the land
And twirls amongst the trees so grand
And through to the wood's deep heart
She created her icy glass upon the river as the wind doth dart.

And so as she veils the woodland world,
The wood with all the animals curled
And through the icy air she dances throughout the night
As she starts to take her flight.

Telephone of the Wind

Sadeen Ahmad

A voice, as a matter of fact, did answer her call.

Its whistles and whispers enunciated the unspoken and unthinkable language of her grandmother. It orchestrated a serenade of voices of past remorse and sang them into the etched marks of the telephone.

The voice was a paradisaical, yet elusive melody of her grandmother's fathomless regret and nostalgia and sorrow.

It continued humming a distant chorus of endearment and assertions of a grandmother's ceaseless love.

However, the voice gradually subsided as the storm came to an end. It soon began to end its visiting hours to grieving ones.

The voice was a siren of a dead woman walking.

The voice was simply the song of the wind.

And the wind, as a matter of fact, did answer her call.

Summertime is Over

Aaliyah Hickman

It's a horrible idea and I don't want to go.
I woke up in the morning, the sky was blue
My mom asked, are you ready but I didn't have a clue

No, I said, with a smile so bright
my mom looked at me with such delight

Well dear, she said, it's time to get out of bed
Oh no, oh no, I must have forgot,
leave your jumper so you don't get hot

I asked her what she meant, she looked at me really disappointed
It's time for school don't act dumb

What? You mean no more fun.

I went to school the following day and I would just like to say, it was a great day!

It was brilliant and I can't wait to go again...

October 24th

Ruby McKie

Red leaves

A black cat with a golden collar
blends into the bushes
and twisted trees

On a man-made path
Constructed out of wood and nails
Surrounded by marsh land
Lies a discarded tyre
A white pipe tainted yellow

Tree stumps
Trickling water
Dried wild flowers
My white Converse squelching on the mud path

A home tainted and worn
With a crack in the wall
shaped like a staircase

Chirping birds
Logs to rest upon
Nettles and wild flowers
Old brick
Pond
Breeze
Peace

A plastic bottle
Stuck in between the dam
Green ivy
crawling up a tree trunk
Orange berries
speckled in the grass

Graffiti
A stone embedded path
The metal gate's wire
woven around an oak

A cross road
busy traffic or a house
My coat trailing behind me
Tree bark patterned like animal skin

Mechanical bird
chirping constantly

A passer-by figure
Their phone clutched in the hand, counting
their BPM, their miles and their pace
in an automated voice

Wild mushrooms stuck in between the trees' grooves
like gum
The sun shines in my eyes
and tells me that it's all okay

A leaf falling
onto the wet, wild grass
These nettles
to avoid

A partly fallen tree branch
hanging down
caressing the water
A spider's web
glistening and trembling

A leaf blower singing
A fly weaving
in and out of the brambles

Remembrance Day Poem

Abigail Higgott

The time has come to remember those
Who gave their lives to defeat our foes
So go ahead, wear that red flower
To respect the soldiers in their toughest hour

They fought for a gruelling four whole years
Through all the devastation and the tears
Our whole country they managed to save
Thanks to the selfless actions they gave

After the war had come to an end
And soldiers were home to their family and friends
Beautiful poppies began to grow
Blood red and vibrant, beautifully so

It's by these poppies that we remember
The ruthless war when it comes to November
So, when you see a poppy, bright and red
Think of the amazing soldiers and bow your head

A Nonsense Poem

Petra Rihan

see you tomorrow,
words whispered in a friends ear,
friendly to hear, unsuspected still.

down the yard
by the chicken coop and the dog pen,
a telephone line stands up straight
straight, straighter than my back.

mary's out again.
crazy lady, they called her,
as she watched upon the stars and wished upon the cars,
the church bells rang the devil song

and Monday Tuesday Sunday too,
a kick and a kiss on the lips and
no one there to view.

see you tomorrow,
if the day comes and the sun rises,
I hope mary didn't take the stars.

Spark Young Writers

For more information about the
work Writing West Midlands
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