

# elementia

teen literary magazine  
from Johnson County Library

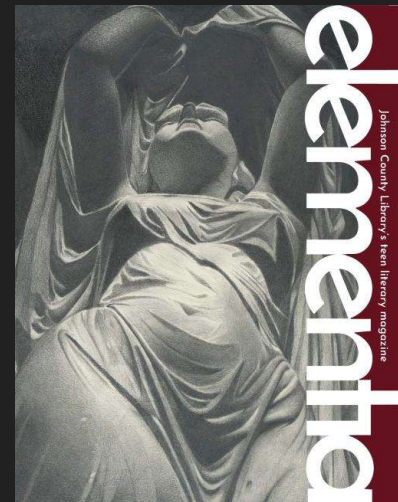
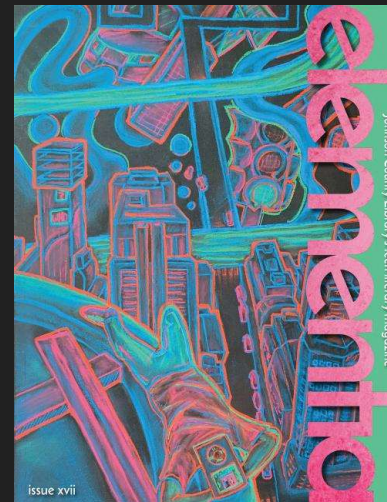
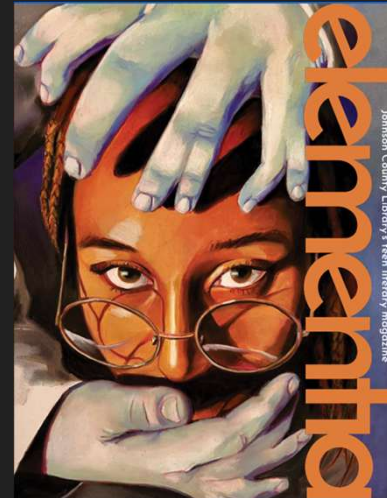
# elementia

Published annually by  
Johnson County Library

Edited and designed by teens

Free! Available at all 14 branches

Anyone 12-19 can submit work for  
consideration



# Taking My Sunshine Piece by Piece

by Emily Weldon

*A blooming handful of violet flowers,  
The beautiful journey of being loved and lost.  
A body, fragile and breakable, yet as light and magnificent  
as a blossomed plant.  
Weeping and eroding as time progresses to the end,  
The journey of life is revealed.*

Losing a loved one, a special person, is a pain one should not bear. The duality of life should be reflected in every individual in order to live through their memory.

My precious person is still alive and kicking on this planet. Although her thin, shiny hair could practically wash away in the wind and her legs no longer support her like they used to. Her daily tasks have grown to become tiring and more involved. A walker will always be spotted by her side, to support her heavy weighted heart and body. She is often having to visit doctors for check-ups, almost weekly. Her full heart began to lose its strength so blood began to leak from her valves. Her body is failing but her soul is still flourishing.

*The lungs of a fragile being implode during the last  
gasp of breaths.  
A shaking, violent rattle is emitted from their  
mouth.  
The mouth of your sunshine.  
Pain shudders through their body.  
Almost enough to where their fingertips are able  
to transfer such harsh energy.*

As I grow up, I begin to reflect and perceive the reality behind her failing body. Her spirit still flows with grace and the light rays she emits brighten a room, but her body can no longer suffice at her age. Piece by piece, I watch her fade. Even though she is still functioning, the reality behind the concept of the person in front of you being taken by the dreary future is ever so draining.

I appreciate and long for every moment I spend with her. She is like sweet candy; sweet candy with a sour punch, makes you smile but pucker your lips after a taste. The bitterness that touches your taste buds before the sweet tasting candy follows. The feeling is similar to a vicious punch being followed with a warm embrace. She was a hard shelled woman. Strong and independent, yet caring and



tender. She has provided me with shining wisdom. Her tone of expression never fades and on her last breath, I believe she will give me the same funky attitude she had built from birth.

On a Tuesday night, after a long day of school and having my social battery be drained, I was in need of a rest. This night upset my routine and further enhanced my ability to worry. I went downstairs to inform my mom of some news that I know her humorous self would find entertaining. I found her standing in the kitchen, eyes red and puffy, face flaking and drooping, not in a way that shows age but her face drooped with sadness. The next words that were uttered from her mouth fell on the floor like a dead weight. They sat there staring back at me. She told me that my nana was hospitalized and found hallucinating in her front lawn. My mom couldn't get a word after that. The words glared into my mind as everything became foggy. The air became thin and I longed for more information to heal the feeling of a break in my gut. Seeing my mom so weak in that moment made me realize I needed to hold back my tears. The waterfalls I wanted to release needed to be subdued in order to keep peace and to stay strong. She was hurting thinking about her own mother in this situation and I was hurting thinking of the pain my mother was going through. The relationship with my nana is like sunlight. On a gloomy day, the beams of light shining through the murky skies can make someone's life bright. Our relationship is one of the most important things I hold on to. With this new dilemma, the only thing I was able to do was hold my chest in agony. Staying brave was the only way to power through the enclosing pain in my chest.

These fragile seconds landed on the surface of my brain and the scene embedded itself into my thoughts every time I closed my eyelids. There it was, all the possibilities, all the answers, all the hope, fear, all the pain, hidden behind my eyes. Unable to reach the answers, I learnt to settle within my thoughts and embrace the fear of the unknowing. This night allowed me to reflect on all sorts of situations. I wonder how I was able to stay brave through the gut wrenching pain that was just thrust at my face. The pain that comes behind worry and fear, of losing your special sunshine, battled within me for a while. A while enough where I can reflect on the strength I endured to keep a fearless face for my mother in agony. Although I may still have my sunshine, the ending that is rapidly approaching nails itself into my brain. Watching the woman who completes my puzzle be taken piece by piece.

*Gut wrenching pain to witness this event,  
Seeing someone lose grip of their soul.*

Living Connections by Hala Bayazid

# How to Get Published



**January 1 2025**

Submissions of  
writing and art  
are due at  
*[jocolibrary.org/  
elementia](https://jocolibrary.org/elementia)*



**Spring  
2026**

Selections  
are  
announced  
and design  
work begins.



**Summer 2026**

New issue  
released!



## Ladoos

by Anonymous

Market spices always made me feel ill. The aroma would go straight to the back of my olfactory cortex, pounding the inner walls of my head.

"Don't lie," Mother always said. "God is watching." I never spoke a single word. "Don't meddle," she said as I messed around with things that are not ought to be messed with. God is watching. "Don't steal," she said. God is watching. But when she turned her back to the kitchen counter I always grabbed an extra ladoo and enclosed my sticky hands around it in a warm embrace, hoping that God wasn't watching.

"Amma," I cried while my mother trapped me in layers upon layers of fabric. "Why must I wear these clothes? They itch and scratch. Look Amma! I can't even raise my arms." "We must wear them to feel a connection to our religion." I placed my arms down as she continued to pleat fabrics and drain them on my shoulder.

It was always about God. He would get me good grades, bring me good luck, and make all my wishes come true.

"We are all disciples," Amma recited as she did my hair and put it into its ordinary plait.

I never bothered to learn what it meant. All that mattered was that after we prayed, we got ladoos.



Fruits of Labor by Madison Smith

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## A Poem Dedicated to the Rituals of Women

by Isabella Ahern

Inspired by Mary Cassatt's "The Coiffure"

Each morning softly intertwined  
Stitched to linen bed sheets  
You run hot at night so sweat sticks to your sternum  
Oaken kiss to bare heel  
Stumble silently to the bathroom.

Silently  
Softly  
Smoothly

You won't wake anyone  
not the way he does when he's up before the crack of dawn  
dropping the pan as he cooks his egg and darning your stove and  
hacking his lungs out and leaving a mess in your kitchen for you to  
clean

Silently  
Softly  
Smoothly

Without complaint.

You swallow your rising resentment — it's too early for this rage — and face your reflection

It's hellish, you know

But you feel beautiful somehow with your puffy eyes, your swollen nose and lips, your hair that sticks up every which way

Your hair

It will be the last thing that you touch after you've brushed your teeth and washed your face and powdered your blemished skin

You'll slip off your shirt and crack your knuckles and reach your tired arms up to an unkempt mane

This labor of love is labor indeed

as your arms will grow sore in seconds and your neck will hurt from being bent at such an angle and your teeth will clack against the bobby pins you've shoved between them

You'll put pins in

That side

This side

Underneath that lock  
And you'll sigh at each lump and stray strand and  
Maybe you will never be satisfied but  
This time is yours

And yours alone  
And that's enough.

Flame by Lily Klein

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## I sit here and scroll

by Gaven Graham

I sit here and scroll  
A video pops up next  
its subject?  
Oh my.

It talks about how grandparents are running our country  
And grandchildren on the streets  
Waiting to die.

What am I?

I'm reluctant to touch my phone  
When I know many don't have one at all.  
I look at the paint that I so dislike  
But some don't even have walls.

Why should I worry about finding someone to fall asleep next to  
When some can't fall asleep  
Due to bombs dropped over their heads?

Or those permanently asleep  
Because the grandparents who reek  
Of power vacuum and green  
Turn a blind eye to their deaths?

I put the phone down, look up.  
How many people have it better than me?  
Just like me?  
Worse than me?

As ear touches pillow  
Tear touches eye  
Because I don't have to worry  
About when I will die.

And those who do  
Can't open each other's eyes  
Why, oh why

Am I just one person?

How is one person supposed to fight?  
To change?

I know so many things that are wrong with the world.  
Power over people  
Money over mountains  
Of needs that haven't been met.

But what can I do?  
I'm not a corporation.  
I'm not an organization.  
I'm just me.

Me isn't enough.

So I turn to apathy.

I eat my meals knowing somewhere they don't have them  
I listen to music knowing somewhere it's amusing  
To ruin lives  
For appetite  
Of death over centuries-old grudges

And I...

Sit here and scroll

Digital Insomnia by Siena Masilionis

A Text's Aftermath by Siena Masilionis

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Generations  
by Madison  
Smith

## Legacy

by Chloe Schoenfeld

legacy left a stain on every shirt I ever borrowed  
everything I ever gave came with a smell of loving  
of keepsakes and keeping safe

legacy is bundled up tight in a little box  
high up in a kitchen cabinet  
legacy is written on postcards and note cards  
the backs of scrap paper and magazines with  
notes in the margins  
saying this was from an old roommate  
grandmother so I'm keeping it forever  
saying this was from my closest cousin gone  
except for scribbles on a piece of paper  
guiding me to make their signature loving that  
tasted just right

legacy sits in the living room right next to the front  
door  
decorated with memories and baby pictures  
playing beautiful and not-beautiful music every day

legacy answers my calls from another time zone in  
the middle of the day  
to calm me down, listening to my rambling  
legacy tells me about the latest book I read  
about hidden how-to guides for bringing home

legacy is hanging on a chain around my neck  
engraved into a piece of itself  
legacy asked me what my last name was and I said it  
was legacy  
legacy faded away with an "I miss you already"

legacy left without me  
legacy left me with more of me  
legacy came and went to make me an  
amalgamation of hand-me-downs  
that I patchwork into a quilt of my own legacy

## legacy

elementia xxiii  
Submissions due Jan. 1, 2025

What is Legacy? It is an essential component of time:  
connecting what we remember from the past onward into what  
continues to shape the events of history long after we are gone.

However, Legacy is also a mark of the individual, YOU, who  
can choose what you want your legacy to be, as it is also the  
bringer of choice and change. Instead of defining what Legacy  
is, it matters more what it can be, what it has the potential to  
grow into, and that power that remains with you, our powerful  
teen voices.

Tell us your stories, bring us your visions and share your  
Legacy with us.

[jocolibrary.org/elementia](http://jocolibrary.org/elementia)

# Legacy

It is what connects all parts of time: the past into the present and onward, extending through the future. It is an essential component of what we remember from the past, and of what continues to shape the events of history long after we are gone.

Concerning the past, how have lasting traditions impacted you? What ideas have been passed down through the ages, and how will these influences continue to persist into the time ahead? The concept of the future also arrives hand in hand with impermanence. What will remain of us? Will our actions leave a lasting impact on the world?

However, most of all, legacy is a mark of the individual, YOU, who can choose how you want your legacy to be, as legacy is also the bringer of choice and change. Instead of defining what legacy is, it matters more what it can be, what it has the potential to grow into, and that is a power that remains with you, our powerful teen voices.

*elementia* accepts original poetry, fiction, nonfiction, graphic stories, photography and illustrations.



## Suffocating Relief

by Lila Ahitov

Our shoes are different sizes  
Toes curling to fit in the space  
Aching pain bites—  
Oh, to be included

Piano lessons since birth  
But a violinist is yearned for  
Tutorials all night—  
Oh, to be included

My soothing hand on a trembling shoulder,  
Easing my own tremors to console  
Pain as small as a giant—  
More to gain, oh, to be included

Eating the same peanut butter sandwich  
Resulting in the waste of my only EpiPen  
Alas, worth it—  
Oh, to be included

Who's That Girl in the Mirror  
by Kaila Burnside

## Mona Lisa of a Mistake

by Zoie Tran

Pinch the bridge of my nose—  
as it wrong,  
too wide,  
too flat?  
Prepare your rust-covered tools,  
bite into my bone,  
smooth like your dream ski slope.  
Whittle me down  
to a shape that's not my own.

Caress my cheeks and pry away  
my buccal fat.  
Strip my canvas of its natural hues,  
bleach me blank  
like printer paper,  
as if cream is too bold  
to be the base.

Take a chisel,  
hack away at my jaw  
until I become  
the letter V.  
Sew floss into my eyelids,  
make them double,  
open them wide—  
I awaken on a table,  
lights blinding,  
surrounded by blue scrubs and masks.  
I am prepared.

Into the copy machine,  
I am fed.  
I am manufactured into a painting  
with no artist,  
contradicting the intention  
of preset perfection set by God.

Sell my illusion  
to the world.  
Promise the media  
this is what is real!  
The kind that highlights  
powdered, porcelain skin,  
injected with toxins,  
jaws shaved and stitched.

And I wonder,  
how could they be sold  
to such beliefs  
of symmetry?  
Hide behind that screen,  
the one that shields you from bacteria—  
punctured with holes.  
Even with a scalpel in hand,  
I can see your pitiful

lie of confidence.  
Your depth of malice  
cuts far deeper,  
while your words  
fail to penetrate my skin.

Your notions  
influenced my small canvas  
again and again,  
until my canvas was dripping with paint,  
colors and shapes that weren't my own.  
And now that I grew into a mural,  
I refuse to erase  
wobbly lines and patchy spaces of paint.

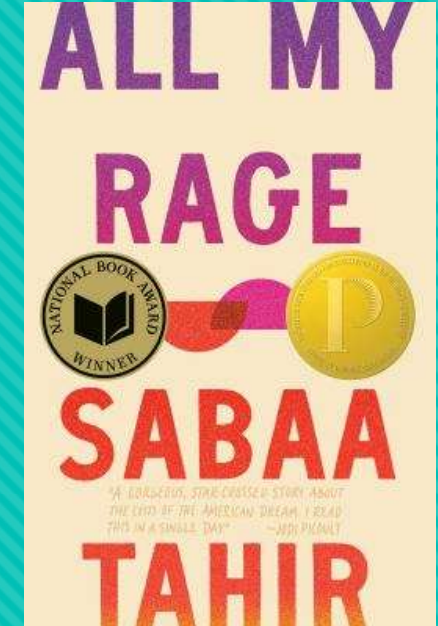
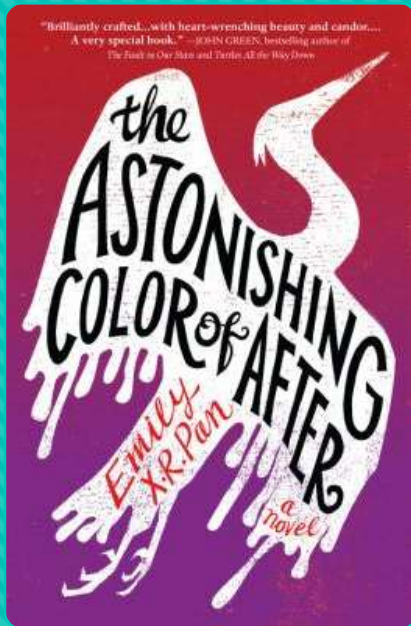
Your view of imperfection  
is simply an excuse  
to reject humanity.  
For there is no mankind  
without the existence of a mistake  
clutched onto an apple's core,  
the taste of its defiance  
perpetuating to present day's tongue.

If that is God's plan—  
intentional missteps  
to inherit these traits  
all by design,  
what is really considered "pretty"?

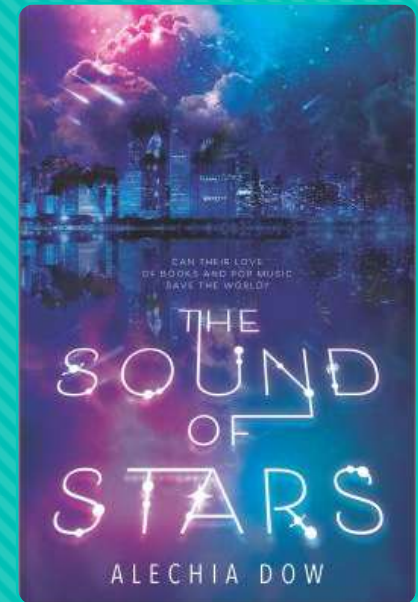
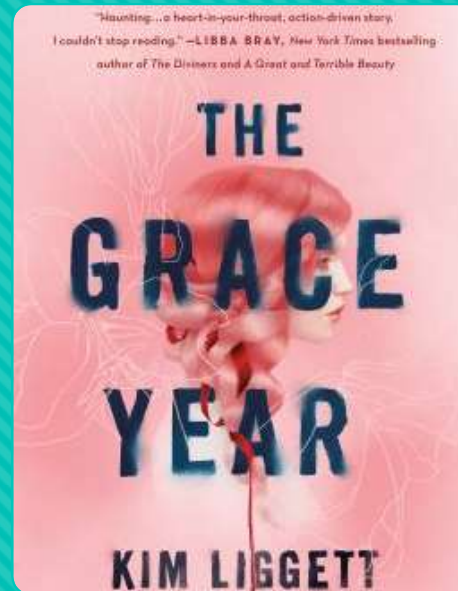
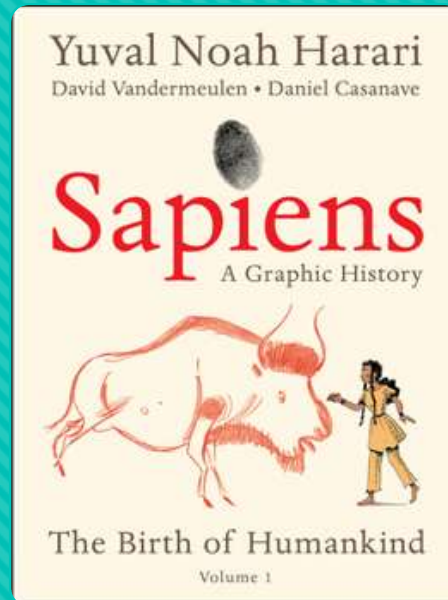
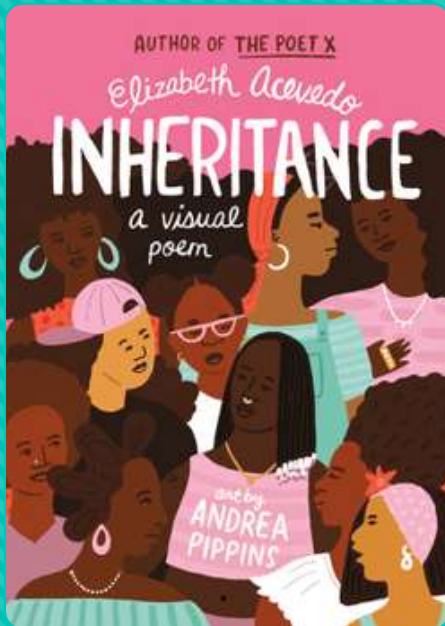
If I allow you to create my portrait,  
drop your forceps and scissors,

and pick up a paintbrush.  
Paint every exposed pore that appears on my face.  
Replicate the crookedness;  
define each line  
with individual, uneven brush strokes.  
With every stroke you take,  
paint me into your worst masterpiece.

Let it be:  
unfinished—  
acrylic still damp,  
colors yet to be filled in.  
Let it be:  
flawed—  
sketch marks visible,  
colors unblended.  
Let it be:  
the signature of my existence.



Keep reading about **LEGACY**



Keep reading about **LEGACY**

# Questions

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[www.jocolibrary.org/teens/elementia](http://www.jocolibrary.org/teens/elementia)