

elementia

teen literary magazine
from Johnson County Library

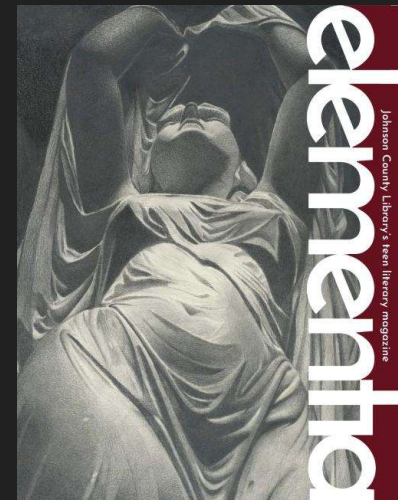
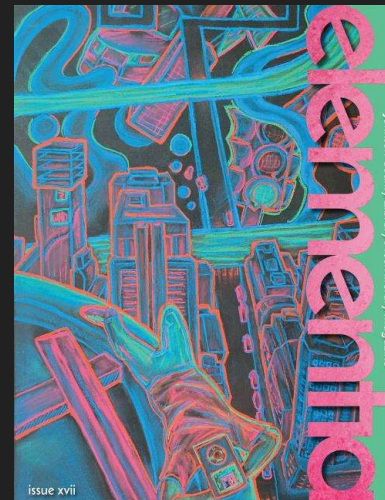
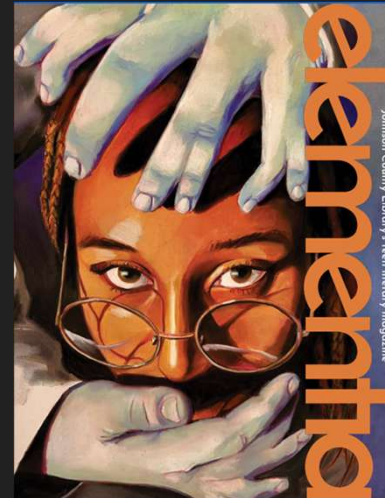
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Published annually by
Johnson County Library

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 2026

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

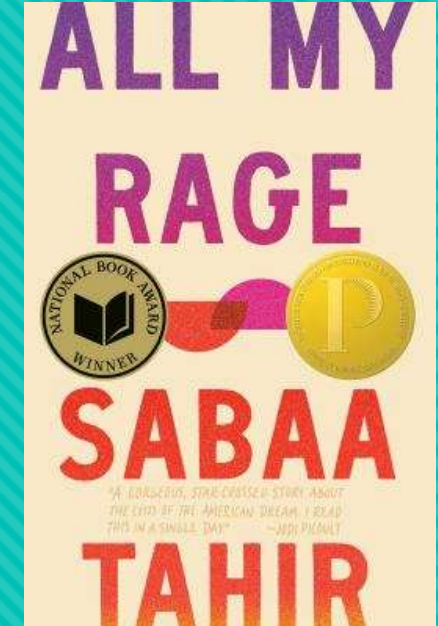
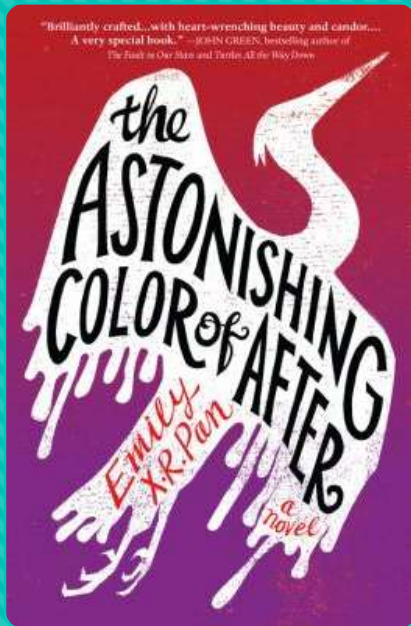
Your view of imperfection
is simply an excuse
to reject humanity.
For there is no mankind
without the existence of a mistake
clutched onto an apple's core,
the taste of its defiance
perpetuating to present day's tongue.

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

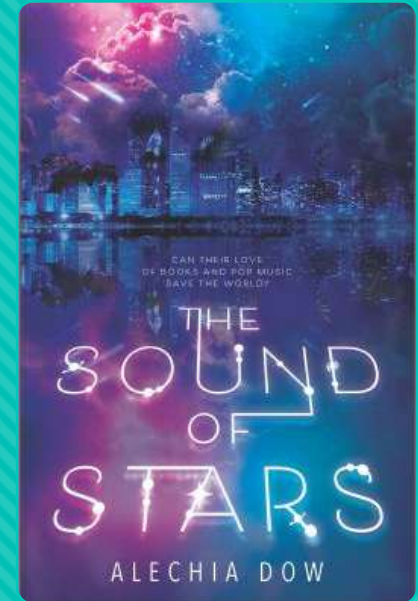
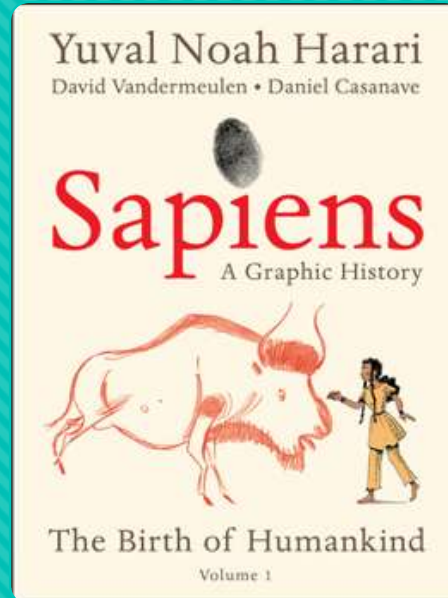
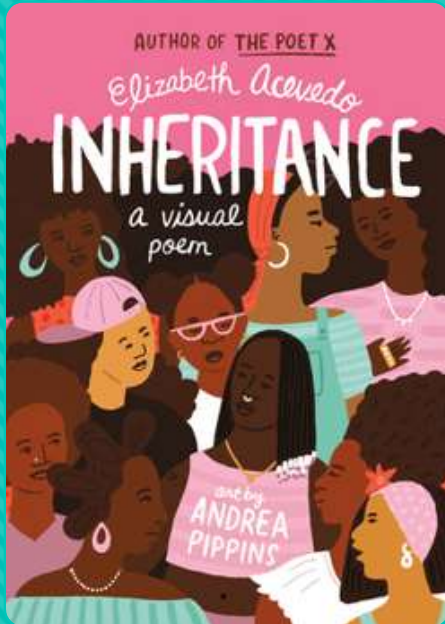
If I allow you to create my portrait,
drop your forceps and scissors,

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**



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Questions

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www.jocolibrary.org/elementia