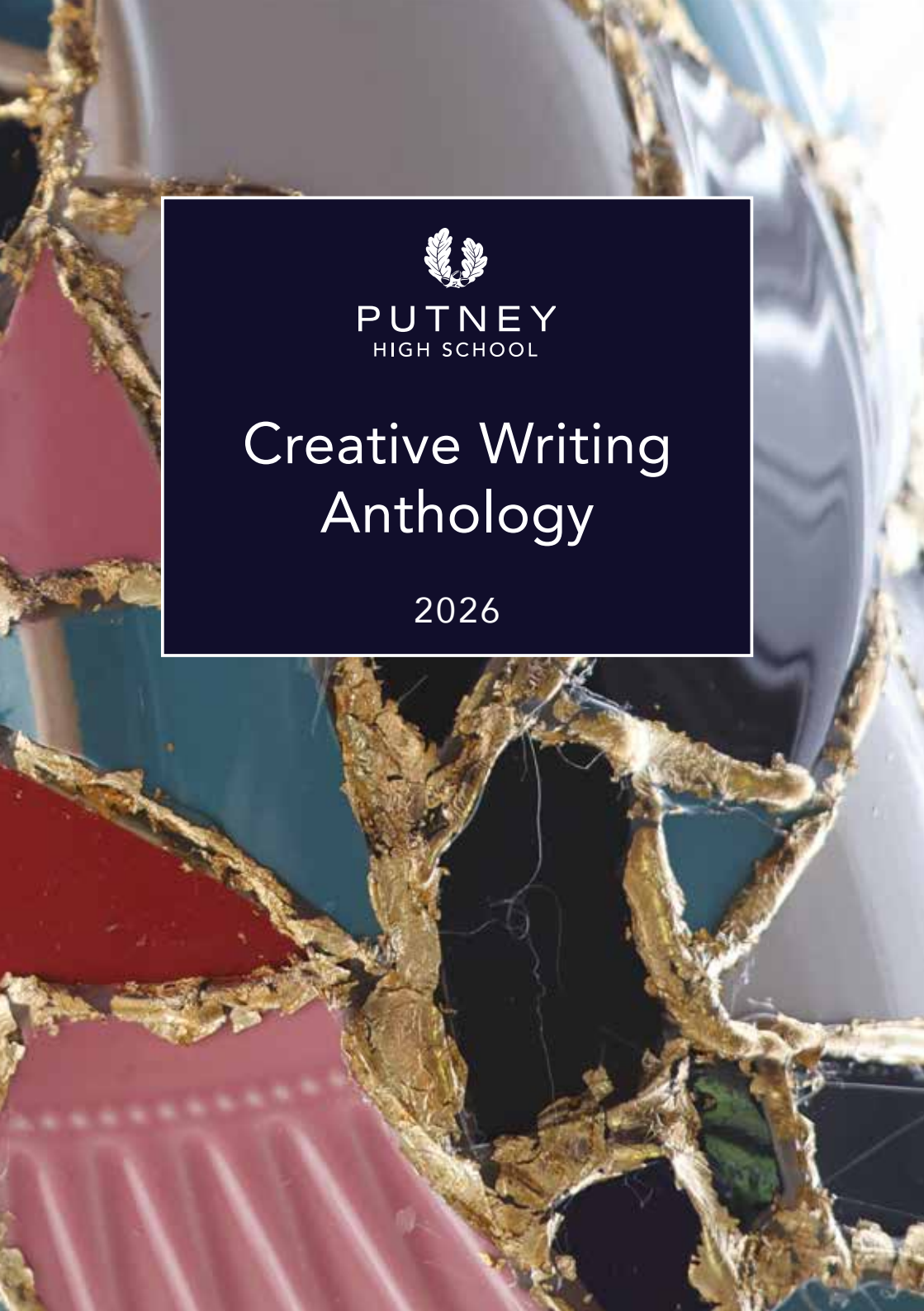

PUTNEY
HIGH SCHOOL

Creative Writing Anthology

2026

PUTNEY
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GDST

Creative Writing Anthology

2026

Every year, I look forward to our Creative Writing Competition, and this year did not disappoint. Each student in KS3 had at least two opportunities to write a creative piece in class, over the course of an hour. They could write about anything that sparked their imagination, and they then selected their favourite piece of work for submission. Each teacher nominated their favourite piece from their class, and we then selected an overall winner from each year group.

The sheer variety of stories and descriptions that came our way was astounding; in this selection of nominees and winners, you will find daring tales of masked attackers and savage seas, heart wrenching accounts of grief and loss, and quiet moments of extraordinarily well-observed everyday life. I have been especially impressed by the way in which the students have played with structure this year. There have been clever manipulations of the reader, twists and turns a plenty, and a very exciting willingness to take creative risks.

This beautiful publication was made possible by a generous endowment by our former Head of English, Julie Sharp, who died suddenly in 2023. Julie always encouraged the girls to embrace their own creativity, and I think she would be delighted by the talent on show this year.

I applaud every one of our writers, and pay especial credit to the three winners; this was a very closely fought competition, and you should all be extremely proud. Your imagination is limitless; keep writing!

Mrs Sophie Carter
Head of Academic Enrichment & Teacher of English

YEAR 7

7	*Stick the Landing*	Isabella Bainbridge
9	*The Masked Man*	Florence Kadare
10	*Survivor*	Lizzie Lewis
13	*The Blue Phoenix*	Sofia Nikolic

Winner

14	*The Lighthouse*	Sara Delgado Hissami

YEAR 8

17	*Dream*	Ela Ergun
18	*Ancient Mariner: Stuck at Sea*	Kitty Ajaz
20	*Two Faced*	Olive Ritchie
22	*The Last Serving*	Poppy Martinez
24	*The Awakening Sea*	Eva Nissan Jones

Winner

26	*Staring Back at Me*	Luisa Blank

YEAR 9

29	*The Eight Windows above the Pizza Plaza*	Yasmine Ansel
31	*Winter's Clutches*	Eva Asteriadi
32	*Flames*	Penelope Convey
35	*The Autumn Walk*	Livia Thanki-Green

Winner

36	*Tuesday*	Lila Shorr

YEAR 7

STICK THE LANDING

Sweat. Tearing down my forehead like a dripping tap. Comp lights blinding me. The blue spring floor preparing for my groundbreaking entrance. Hundreds of girls anticipating their routine. What will I score? What if I fall? The worst things a gymnast could imagine.

"Buzzzzzzz," goes the intercom, signalling a rotation. I look nervously at the bar. Crap. I'm first. And on floor. My enemy. I have ALWAYS succeeded in bars, vault and beam. But floor just won't work with me. My coach signals to me for a warm-up, but I can't. I am too lost in my thoughts. On bar: Simone Krashnovich. On bar: Emina Littleton. On vault: Oakley Freemann. On Floor: Annabel Parker.

Before I know it my music is playing. It is an acoustic version of Bye Bye Bye personalised by my dad: my coach. A split jump here, a chasse there. OK. Here comes my first tumble. Easy. Just a roundoff flick double back... Here we go roundoff... flick... send. STUCK. Of course – a college gym head tilt. Aerial now. A shimmy to the corner. Now for the hard one: The Biles 11. I've only done this once in training. And I haven't had a warm-up. Here we go.

CRACK.

I fall to the floor. Badly. I just remember Dad cheering me on, telling me to keep going. One point deduction. I have to stick this final tumble. But how? Not with a snapped ankle. The dance part is all on my right foot, so I have to improvise. Pain signals sprinting through my body urging me to stop. But I can't. This is for the gold. And I want it.

This last tumble isn't easy. A Mukhina. A full twisting double tuck. I need to land this perfectly to win. A blind entry, kick at just the right moment; it's fast and needs power that I don't have. All these thoughts rushing. If my dad was just being Dad, he'd say don't do it. Don't risk it for a medal. But Coach Dad is different. He'd want me to do it. He would know I could nail it.

I go for it.

Isabella Bainbridge

THE MASKED MAN

Rain pattered on the floor. I shivered as the wind blew on my face and nearly threw me off my horse. There I was, riding through the lifeless town of Colchester. I closed my eyes in exhaustion. Unexpectedly, David – my horse – stopped; before me, stood a small child. Calmly but curiously, I asked, "What is wrong my child?"

In a terrified voice, she whispered, "Do not move or they will catch you." Perturbed, I inquired, "Who will?"

Gunshots echoed through the distance. Screams of pain deafened me. Quick as a flash, two masked men were staring me down. Their figures filled the town with their presence. A tear streamed down the poor girl's face. The masked terrorists took one fleeting glance at the girl and without hesitation, started to sprint her way, holding her. A mix of emotions wired through me: anger, incredulity, and determination. She shrieked for help – this was my chance. I leapt off my horse and tackled one of the men. Soon enough, everyone started helping. Gunshots erupted and blood splattered everywhere. But that did not stop anyone. They had to complete this task to escape the oppression of these men, be free to make their own decisions! The little girl ran as swiftly as her little legs could take her, calling out her mother's name until it too was driven into oblivion. The monotonous cacophony of noise encouraged me to fight even harder. To fight for the girl.

Sprinting boldly, somebody screamed, "We have done it!" An immense cheer of joy burst out. I fell to the ground still clutching the piece of fabric I had mistakenly ripped off the girl's dress. Today was an epoch of joy and realisation: some people do not have it all and must go through that every day.

But as I circled back to David, I saw a gargantuan white van filled with the same masked men from before.

I bellowed: "Everybody, there are more coming!"

Florence Kadare

SURVIVOR

Enemy. Five letters. Spirit. Six letters. Pain. Four letters.

Loss. Four letters. Love. Four letters. Life. Four letters. Dead. Four letters. Gone. Four letters. Death. Five Letters. Loved. Five letters. Lived. Five letters. Peace. Five letters. Friend. Six letters.

Everything free reminds me of her. A distant laugh on the breeze. A soft smell of her perfume. A memory I don't want to face. Sounds I can't quite place.

She left. Took a part of me with her. Left a hole in my heart where she used to be. Her house is gathering dust. Clothes untouched. Her grave is dirty with mud. The tears I've cried are the only cleaning it gets.

Everyone gives their sympathy, solemn apologies. It doesn't help. Nothing will. This pit of grief is swallowing me whole. She was happy. I was too. Isn't it weird how fast things can be gone? An instant. She lit up rooms. I need her light, now more than ever.

Everyone says I'll be OK, but she's gone and I'll never see her again. Nothing's going to change the fact that she's... four letters long. You choose.

It's funny how I'm dying on the inside slowly when I've suffered no injuries.
One second. One difference. One friendship. One five letter word. You choose.

I miss her. I give her flowers. They wilt and die. Four letter word, like her. You choose.

I may have survived but I'm still broken. She came into my life, and I couldn't imagine it without her. Now I've had a taste, I can, and it feels like… five letters. You choose.

Death or what happens next is not the hardest part. It's before, when you didn't value them enough while they... five letters. You choose. Who is left to value me?

Some stories don't get happy endings. I'm just the best friend who survived. But I lost more than anyone. Not my life. My... six letters. You choose.

She used to tell me that when she was gone, if she died before me, she would haunt me. But now the only thing that's haunting me is her absence and... four letters. You choose.

Can't say what I truly feel without exposing everything I've spent years hiding. I've got good at covering up emotions, injuries, anything, but this is different. In movies, they say they feel hollow, nothing matters, it's hard. No. It's indescribable.

It's... five letters. You choose.

Her grave says many things: sister, daughter, friend, loved, will be missed. Then eight letters. A name. Her name. You choose.

Choice.
You.
Choose.
So do.
Choose.
Your.
Happy.
Ending.
To.
This.

Story. My story? Her story ?
You're not the one living it.

No. This time.
I choose.
And I choose… four or five letters? What a choice. But...
I'll do you one better. Eight letters.
Survivor.

Lizzie Lewis

THE BLUE PHOENIX

The night shone silver. Stars were speckled across the blue-black sky. Like pictures, a story was imprinted on each pattern. For example, Andromeda, a beautiful girl, who was sacrificed to a sea monster but saved by a hero, Perseus. I could see her hair, like waves, her eyes mirrors, as I looked up to the sky. My head rested on the velvet grass. I was alone. I liked it. Moonlight blinded my sight, a beautiful mess of purple and blue, clouds of silver which washed upon and covered the moon. The smell of lavender wafted across the open field. The few trees, scattered across the landscape, swayed with the breeze, freckled with snow and sleet, a reflection of the same sky washed upon them. All memories of the past filled my head. Good ones, and bad – but they all showed a meaning, something which would never go away.

I wish, I thought in my head, for a friend. I don't have anybody. My only company is the wind and the stars and the moon.

And then something happened. Something bright flashed in the darkness, glowing white, then red, then blue. It became bigger, brighter, louder, a roaring sound filling my ears, the wind spinning and gushing into my face.

Crash! The world was black and silent. Dust filled the air, the coolness gone, heat and confusion fizzing in the atmosphere. The big rock cracked open, leaving a blue crystal rolling towards my legs. I took it into my hands. I looked down upon it, comfort filling my heart. Crack! The jewel split open. This was something special. 'A gift sent from heaven,' I whispered. Two glossy eyes looked up at me. Its feathers were streaked with glittering blue, wings spread wide open. A heaven bird. A blue phoenix. I put him in my pocket and ran back to the city.

Sofia Nikolic

YEAR 7 WINNER

THE LIGHTHOUSE

A glistening speck ricocheted into fierce turquoise hands as they lolled its wooden splint belly into a rhythmic sleep. Swish, swash, swish, swash. Eccentric, the weathered white sails beamed with life as the beacon of light sweetly watched over the sea and pressed a warm kiss; the battered material glowed and rippled. Gracefully, the emerald hands surged forward portraying an elegant motion while balancing the peculiar contraption on its fingers, dancing with enthralling morning songs that the kaleidoscope of birds preached. Like a crotched blanket, the flock flew over the diamond sky in harmony, weaving patches of colours in and out through the flurry of wings leaving a trail of feathers spiralling down.

***

Silence. There was only silence. Icy black fingers engulfed the evening air. Darkness glowered into the sailor's face as death drooled right in front of him. Something was deafeningly wrong. There was a still moment but, just as the atmosphere stole a gasp from him, a violent force flung at his boat, throwing him aside. Mindless, his thoughts shattered and the ocean crawling for miles took control. Another raging wave smacked onto the starboard, roaring as the water seared through the boat's every crack. Its gurgling teeth took another monstrous bite from the sails, snapping them as if they were a baby's toy. Mercilessly, it encaged the stranded boat, thrusting and beating the wreckage down into the void's depths. The sailor was strangled and choked from the claws of water that ripped at his throat, flooding his veins. The boat was crushing itself amongst the snarling storm. Fluid cascaded onto the boat, hammering and drenching it as a vein of crackle and electricity shot and stabbed the wall of clouds, breaking free from its shackles.

The man closed his eyes, and a trickle of sweat and blood stained his lips. Suddenly, a flash blinked from the horizon. He thought he imagined it but then another followed. A blinding light pierced the ocean. Relief consumed him as on a small, jagged cliff a small lighthouse emerged into view as if an angel descended from the heavens. He started shouting and waving in joy as tears dribbled down his bruised cheeks.

Sara Delgado Hissami

YEAR 8

DREAM

The sand was a stove, warming my feet. The leaves formed a pillow, holding my head. My body was the barrier where the land and shore met, the wet sand where the ocean landed.

The trees were creatures lining my path. The birds performed to an arena of stars. I lifted my gazing eyes. The moon shone bright, a torch in the abyss.

The mountains were gods, reaching into space. Each step of the way I breathed in the fresh air, so freely given. 'I love the stars,' I whispered.

School was a guiding path. I sat in class, eager to learn. I flipped the pages, ready to listen. I was accepted. I fitted in.

Family was a living sanctuary, a shoulder to lean on. I sat at dinner, surprised by the feast. Dessert, toppings and all, bite by bite. My heart felt whole.

***

A dream is a disappointment, waiting to hit. I open my eyes. No beach. No trees. No mountains. I look around. No school. No family. No freedom. I rub my eyes, awaiting the hit of hunger. My stomach is empty, a bottomless pit.

I will hide down here forever. They won't find me. I will die here, whether from the bombs or from old age. Never again will I see the light of day. Not until this ends. If it ever ends.

In my dreams, I can live again what I miss.

Ela Ergun

ANCIENT MARINER: STUCK AT SEA

I felt awful. What had I done? We were surrounded, stationary, by the water we had longed for yet could not drink. The black abyss reflected my salt-crusted face with an expression of glassine horror. As I turned around to collapse on the odorous deck, the dead creature that hung around my neck felt heavier than it had ever been before. I closed my eyes, picturing what it would have been like if I hadn't shot the bird. But that was just a long lost-dream, left to drown in the depths of the water.

I didn't even know how long we had been bobbing about on our journey: it could have been hours, days, even weeks. Guilt washed over me like an extra burden to carry. As I opened my eyes, I felt the scrutinising glares coming from my crew, their bloodshot eyes shooting accusing arrows. I decided to ignore them. What was the point of punishing me when I had already shot the thing? Although they did have a reason to hate me; I had put an unfair curse on all of them. I tried to laugh but it sounded like a mere croak. It wasn't funny. We were going to die sooner or later and there was nothing we could do about it. All because of me.

As the sail began to rot away, I knew there was no hope of surviving. We didn't even know which way we were going anymore. With a sigh, I thought that we should just throw ourselves over the feeble boat, just so we could save some time. A thick blanket of fog rested on the landscape, completely disorientating my vision. Surprisingly, there was no creature in sight, which told me we were in the middle of nowhere. That suddenly made everything worse. Staring down at the black hole made my throat scream at me, threatening to choke me if I didn't quench my thirst. Yet I began to feel a weird notion in my stomach, like needles in my back telling me to run away somehow. Something was coming.

A dark shape began to advance through the mist, turning my blood cold. Without thinking, I sank my teeth deep into my skin, sucking out as much blood as I could, coppery and warm. I gulped it down, almost

forgetting what swallowing felt like. With a guttural gasp, I threw my head back and croaked, no louder than a whisper, "A sail, A sail!" All my crews' heads whipped round in surprise and curiousness. I seemed to read their minds. Who were they? How did they get there? Most importantly, were we going to be saved? But then I saw it fully. My heart dropped dead.

The advancing ship was shaped in a skeletal figure, creating an uneasy atmosphere around me. But what puzzled me was that the towering monster contained only two figures. I shivered - not because of the cold. As I narrowed my eyes, I began to see that the two crew members looked like solar opposites. One wore a cloak with black eyes, reflecting memories I will never see or know, and their companion seemed to scare me more. Slowly, I began to see more of her features: her golden locks sprung out of her head, her skin white as leprosy and lips as red as sin. What were they doing? They seemed to be... playing dice? Then I realised what they were.

Life-in-Death and Death-in-Life tossed up the dice, which seemed to be going in slow motion, and, one by one, my crew began to drop to the floor - actually dead. Death-in-Life took each one without a care in the world and smiled a terrifying smile. Finally, it came to my turn. Both tossed up the dice, Life-in-Death's eyes sparkling with glee as she threw the cubes high in the air and... she won! She stood up, her beautiful curls blowing behind her and whistled a sound, more piercing than any wind, and let me live.

As I sailed back to land with the now strong breeze, I began to ponder whether it was actually worth it, living without any of my crew. I felt like a murderer. I was a murderer. I felt awful and terrible and guilty. Gazing at the dead bodies covering the deck, I wanted to die. Why choose me? Why was it me that had to live? As I finally began to process what had happened, the curse still reigned over me like an invisible weight on my shoulders. I would have to tell everyone the sin I had committed and they would know everything.

Kitty Ajaz

TWO FACED

This wind whipped through the trees, bending and shaking them as though the great pines were no more than mere twigs. The inky black sky consumed the last pinky-purple rays as the stars shone menacingly. The hungry wolves clad in matted grey fur howled at the new full moon, before stalking off to hunt down their unsuspecting prey. Twigs snapped under Eloise's light footing and a shiver made its way up her spine, as the owls cackled from the highest branches of the trees that seemed to be slowly drawing in, capturing her. Their knotted trunks twisted and contorted into the faces of nightmares and watched Eloise as she slowly made her way through the forest. Her meticulous footing quickly turned into a fast-paced walk before becoming a full-on sprint. Her heart pounded in her chest as branches scraped at her face trying to claw Eloise back into the darkness, and misshapen stones lolled at her feet begging her to lose her footing. She dodged each obstacle, not very graciously, but enough to keep her feet pounding through the thickening mud lying at the bed of the forest. But she was not quick enough to notice a small pond right below her next stride.

Eloise went tumbling into the icy water, thrashing and failing, her lungs screaming for air. She kicked away the black nothingness, escaping its ominous grasp. When she broke the surface, she gasped; the cold was grasping at her, trying to hold her back. But that was when she noticed it. A thick coil of gun-metal grey smoke looped its way into the void above. Warm, buzzing hope made the shivering fade and gave Eloise the confidence to pull herself out of the dark water and trudge towards wherever the smoke was coming from.

Soon she came to a clearing, isolated from the ominous trees, with nothing but withering grass surrounding a battered cabin. A cabin. The wonky oak panels were held together with rusting nails, most of which had been bent in half. The roof was slopped and blotted with forest green moss that didn't just grow on the north side; it grew everywhere. A small, stout chimney that looked as though it were carved right out of a tree stump was haloed in wispy smoke plumes. Fire. A small, rickety veranda was home to a collection of damp, lopsided logs that could never accommodate a fire, even if dry.

Eloise timidly crept over the unstable steps that led to the door. And sure enough, as Eloise transferred her weight from the boggy ground to the weather-battered step, it buckled under her light footing and released an ear-splitting crack into the oblivion beyond. Eloise gasped and fell back, losing her footing, but she managed to grab onto the slim bannister and hauled herself up to face the door.

Eloise gave a timid knock before gathering her courage together and rapping three quick knocks that left the door swinging open and straining on its hinges with a horrible crack.

"Hello?" Eloise called out, her voice wavering at her sudden boldness. "Anyone there?"

Her only answer was silence. So, Eloise carefully stepped foot into the rickety cabin and peered around. It was an odd place. The walls were bare and only a threadbare rug lay in front of a flimsy fireplace, emitting no more than a small fire that looked as though it would extinguish with the slightest breath. There were no staircases leading anywhere, no door or cupboards apart from the one she had just come through. And most importantly, not one person. Then why was there a fire? She was too tired for logic; in that moment she only cared to lay down on the flimsy rug and let herself fall into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Beautiful birdsong filled Eloise's ears as the first dappled rays of warm sunlight crept through the cracks in the cabin. Outside, the small pond danced and glistened in the light while the tall trees, laden with all kinds of cheerful critters, reached up into the big blue sky. The grass surrounding the glistening turquoise waters was thick and lush, littered with an array of coloured wildflowers. The forest looked so different from the ominous darkness from before.

But Eloise had the prickly feeling of being watched.

Olive Ritchie

THE LAST SERVING

The kitchen was quiet and still, broken only by the low hum of the fridge and the rhythmic tick-tick on the wall. Outside, the sky was a bruised purple, still waiting for the sun to wake up. It was exactly 7:00 am.

My bare feet crept across the freezing tiles. My stomach gave a growl that echoed through the empty room. I reached into the pantry, my fingers clutching the familiar, rough cardboard of the yellow Cheerios box.

The box felt light. Dangerously light.

I gave it a cautious shake. Instead of a heavy thud, I heard a thin rattle. One serving left. Suddenly the silence was shattered. Thump. Thump. Thump. The rhythmic thumping of my sister, Zara, shook the house. The floorboards groaned like they were screaming a warning. She was awake, she was hungry, and she was coming for this box.

I had to move fast. I grabbed the biggest bowl we owned – a massive dish we usually reserved for salads. I tipped the box upside down. A golden waterfall of oats cascaded out, bouncing and clattering until they formed a small mountain that peaked above the rim of the bowl. Just as the last 'O' skittered onto the pile with a final "clink", the kitchen door creaked open.

Zara walked in, her hair a tangled bird's nest, and her eyes half-closed. She marched toward the pantry, her arm reaching for the exact spot where the box sat. Her fingers grasped thin air. She froze. Realisation crawled across her face, moving from sleepy confusion to pure horror. She stared at the empty shelf, then slowly turned her head toward the table.

I sat there, the spoon already halfway to my mouth. I let out the widest, most sarcastic grin possible.

"Morning Zara." I chirped. I stared into her horrified face as I chewed slowly. "Looking for something?"

Poppy Martinez

THE AWAKENING SEA

When I first arrived, the beach was nearly sleeping. It lay still underneath the beaming sun. The waves rolled in and out with a delicate sigh, leaving soft lace patterns on the powdered sand. Seagulls were swooping up and down over the water, their faint cries echoing in the distance. The air hitting my face was heavy yet refreshing; it was filled with the careful smell of suncream and salt. The meditating hum of the sea bounced off the cliff, slowing the world down to a single heartbeat.

Lots of families were sprinkled onto the sand, all of them decorated with colour. The children laughed as they chased each other, their miniscule footprints vanishing just as quickly as they appeared. Some men were throwing a frisbee around; as they let go it looked like a gold coin, flying into the sun, glistening as it went. As I looked left I saw an elderly couple strolling through the grassy cliff. Everything was perfect, like an image stuck in one place in time.

But that peace was not permanent.

At first, it was a mere stroke of grey in the distance, blurred into the background of this immaculate painting. It was a fantasy. The children kept running, the gulls kept gliding through. But the wind began to stir, the waves began to rumble. It pulled at the towels and messed with the clothes left on the sand. The noise got louder but the noise of laughter got quieter. The sea changed from an elegant blue to a restless green.

That's when the first rumble came – this one was deafening. It ran across the water like a monster awakening from eternal slumber. A few fearful teardrops leaked from the sky; they were hesitant to fall, but still made a mark. The clouds cut open, and the sky once painted light blue now the colour of slate.

The change was sudden. Waves were slamming against the shore; some even reached the cliff. They were full of violence and anger. There was a cold mist in the air; you only felt the sting of the air when it wasn't flipping beach umbrellas upside-down. There were towels flying through the sky, scaring the birds. People attempted to shout over the cry of the storm, running around to collect all their things. Children once laughing were now silenced and clutching their parents with eyes bursting with emotion.

The beach used to be a haven, a safe place but that was just a memory in the distance. It was now a place of fear and chaos. There was thunder cracking overhead splitting the world into an echo. There was lightning forcing the world to become bright white, just for a heartbeat.

As the storm raged on, the sea became more alive, powerful, wild and almost untamable. Each wave rose higher than the next, screeching, almost attempting to reclaim its land. The beach once glittering, now a blur of movement, wind and waves.

Then just as sneakily as it had come, the storm started to fade. Waves began to calm, the rain turning into a drizzle. Slowly light began to return. The sand was infused with seaweed and pebbles.

As I stood in the wet sand, it felt as if the world took a deep breath… and sighed it back out.

Eva Nissan Jones

YEAR 8 WINNER

STARING BACK AT ME

I always lived an ordinary life; nothing was special about me. I lived like any normal person. But then I saw her, and life didn't feel the same. Everywhere I went, a woman stood in the far distance watching me. She had grey hair and wrinkled skin that came with life's experiences. She always stood a certain distance from me. Even on trains, I would look out the window and there she would be, with the same look of hope, and sorrow.

My friends were sick of me constantly talking about her, because they couldn't see what I saw; a constant figure watching me. I had I tried to get answers. I tried to talk to her, but every time I approached, she would go further away. I was sick of feeling constantly watched but I gave up. Nothing would come of my efforts. So, I let her watch me like a hawk as I moved on with my day. The only thing I couldn't shake was the longing in her eyes, the way every time I did something she would stare her greyish blue eyes into my greyish blue eyes, trying to tell me something. No one could help her or me because nobody could see what we could see; nobody could see how we saw each other.

So, with the days and years, I aged. My hair started to turn grey as my wrinkles formed. My life had been filled with joy and experience. It was also filled with the old lady. When I went to the blazing desert, she was there. When I went to the cold freezing mountain, she was there. Always watching me. As I continued to age and became more like her, my thoughts took control. Who was that? Who actually was that?

With my old age came illness. My days would be spent in and out of hospitals. Then came the moment.

As I lay on my hospital bed with loving cards all around me, I stared down the hall. I saw her. The old lady walked towards me and finally she broke through the distance that had always been hovering

between us like an invisible wall. And she approached the bed I stared into her shimmering greyish blue eyes that were filled with tears. Her mouth opened, and she whispered in my ear.

"It's you. The old lady you see. I am you."

My eyelids fell heavily as I heard the monitor beep next to me like it was trying to prove something. Then darkness took over.

I felt my eyelashes flutter against my skin as my eyes opened. A cold breeze brushed my grey hair back. A couple of metres away from me was a youthful young girl, laughing. As she glanced at me, I recognised those eyes. The girl was me. But as I tried to move closer my legs wouldn't move.

My mouth felt dry. I couldn't speak. My younger self glanced at me with concern etched in her face. I knew then that I would watch over her. I was now the old woman.

Luisa Blank

YEAR 9

THE EIGHT WINDOWS ABOVE THE PIZZA PLAZA

On the buzzing road of Willowside High Street there was one place which always stood out, not because it was loud or filled with commotion, but because it was the one place that always looked welcoming. In the warm glow of the street-lamps was the Pizza Plaza, and the eight residents who lived in the windows above.

In the first was Margaret or Maggie, the old woman who brought a smile to everyone's face no matter the day. She sat in the rose-tinted lighting with her favourite activity. Under her cozy blanket she sat, as she did everyday, knitting a pink sweater for her granddaughter's fourteenth birthday.

In the second was a family, with a mother and father putting their two kids to bed after another chaotic school day. Each night they read stories and sang sweet songs, hoping for a peaceful bedtime. The starry night lamps were lit, and both children had their favourite teddies as they slowly drifted to sleep.

In the third was a girl about twenty, reading on her sofa. A cup of peppermint tea in hand, she was coming to an end of the latest book in her favourite series. As the last page turned, she was left in shock, as if her whole world had turned upside down, as now this wasn't only about each word on her page or just finishing this last chapter before bed. It was about each character and their dreams and pasts and her connection to them. Here she felt herself in them.

In the fourth sat a man aged forty-one; he was exhausted, slouching in his chair after a big presentation at work. His briefcase lay on the floor, his shoes neatly away and his coat hung on the same peg as usual: he just sat thinking about his day in the dim lighting.

In the fifth was a coal black cat, perched on his windowsill with pride as he did every day. He meowed at the passers-by and gave a cruel glare at each bird daring to come near. And eventually he would be called in by his owner for dinner, then curl up in his bed.

In the sixth was seventeen-year-old Mia, who sat in her chair, paintbrush at hand. She was finally adding all her finishing touches to her pride and joy piece for her art competition entry. She had worked for hours, mixing the right shade of a bright violet or a delicate pink in hope that her work might hang in the city gallery for everyone to see.

In the seventh was Oliver. He sat with his parents eating his last meal before he went to university to complete his dream of studying medicine. His last home cooked meal of fish and chips which his mother had made with extra love. Oliver's bags were packed and his books were bought ready for him to go into the world of independence.

In the eighth were two fifteen-year-old girls, Emily and Olivia, who finally were allowed a sleepover after a few days of begging. They sat together gossiping about their drama and giggling about their favourite cheesy rom-com.

In the warm glow of the street-lamps was the Pizza Plaza, and the eight residents who lived in the windows above.

Yasmine Ansel

WINTER'S CLUTCHES

Frigid gales of wind rifle my failing limbs. Unforgiving snow lines my shoulders and blinds my vision. The coarse fabric of my torn gown remains as frozen as my flesh. No matter how much I push against the relentless tide of snow, I'm prevented from shuffling forwards. I'm prevented from escaping this frozen hell.

Frost coats my skin, so I feel breakable. Daggers of glacial temperatures press hard, so I feel as though I'm breaking. My body becomes a decorative vase and the wind and ice become yet another careless hand. My arms - how frail and pathetic - grip my ribs as if I could contain the possibility of shattering, like tampered-with porcelain.

The night is silver, like it has been painted with the stars' tears and the moon's reflection, seared against me like a mirror of what I will become: snow and ice, water that held memory, a soul watching as they burn in the sky just to be seen. That's what stars do: they burn. Except not enough to guide me to a hearth's flame.

The looming, hideous possibility of what I will become and am becoming is nearing. My body will be a carcass beneath the snow, forgotten and ugly. No one will discover my corpse until spring's whisper kisses the land. My eyes give me the sinful gift of seeing, so I shut them and escape to the gardens of my mind. The sting of harsh winter is relieved by a flickering heat beating against my cheeks. The white of the snow is replaced with a golden warmth that spirals through frozen blood and dulls time's claws.

Wicks of candles light the room, and blankets bury me in the bundle of flaring, foreign sensations of heat. Red drapes, luscious and expensive, are hung beside woven tapestries of elaborate tales, and portraits filled with history's gossip.

My tale is nearing its end. I will not be mourned. I will not be found. I am dying. Profound clarity overwhelms me. I will be no more.

Eva Asteriadi

FLAMES

It was a warm, comforting dream; the kind of dream full of vivid colours and perfect stories that could never come true. My fingertips grazed the edges of clouds and my heart soared high as I rose through the sky, my body warmed by the sun, floating higher and higher, until a shrill noise pierced the night, bringing my perfect dreams crashing down into reality. I sat bolt upright in bed, groggy and confused, my head spinning and my vision blurring into focus. The noise escalated; it was a horrendous, shrieking, high-pitched sound, almost like a fire alarm.

I scrambled out of bed and my feet touched the once cold tiled floor, but today it was different because it was warm. Panic surged through me as I whipped my head around my room, my eyes struggling to adjust to the light coming from under my door. Except the light was not white as it usually was. It was a blinding orange.

Flames.

My breathing quickened and my sweaty palms reached to turn the light on, except it didn't work. I froze, flicking the switch on and off over and over again, but my room remained dimly lit by the menacing glow of the fire. The power was out. The alarm relentlessly shrieked, needles of sound piercing my head, and my fear grew with the volume. I ran to my door and felt the heat grow, sweat forming on my hairline.

"Mum! Dad!" I screamed, pounding on the door over the shriek of the alarm. I heard a faint noise but I couldn't make it out, my head already throbbing with the heat and incessant sound. I pounded again, harder, screaming over the alarm, desperately seeking help or a reply, but I was met only by the roar of the fire, devouring all other sounds and overpowering my cries.

Suddenly, I heard a crash and the door became much, much hotter. I stumbled backwards in fear and fell against my bed. Flames licked at the doorframe, slowly eating away at my door and swallowing it. I screamed and scrambled away to the other side of my room, desperately searching for an escape.

The flames now reached the wardrobe, quickly swallowing the wooden frame and eating at the doors. My heart thumped and terror consumed me, growing into an uncontrollable, overpowering wave that surged through me, waiting to burst. Tears streamed down my face as I coughed at the smoke which suffocated me, stifling my breath until I felt so trapped that I fell to the floor, feeling the walls closing in on me. The heat from the angry flames enveloped me in its burning embrace and the air was thick with smoke, clouding my vision until it all blurred into a blindingly bright orange glow.

With a deafening roar, my bed erupted into flames, crackling furiously as the fire surrounded me, greedily licking at the walls. I snapped out of my trance, trying with everything I could not to collapse in the suffocating heat. My eyes could make out my window through the red haze, and I stumbled forwards, blindly reaching for the glass pane. I desperately tried to wrench it open, but the fire had sucked my strength from me; I felt helpless and weak. Beginning to despair, I ran at the window. The glass shattered and I burst into the cool night air, falling into a heap on my balcony in a pile of sharp shards of glass.

I gasped for air, the ice-cold night soothing my smoke-filled lungs. I stared up at the night sky for a split second, my head spinning, until I felt the heat growing near my legs. I jumped to my feet among the shards of glass to see the hungry flames nearing my wooden balcony, roaring and spitting menacingly.

I backed away, screaming, "Fire! Fire!" into the night, but my voice was hoarse and lost in the flames, my throat drying up as the overpowering heat grew nearer. I watched in horror as the flames licked at my feet and, in an act of desperation, I climbed onto my balcony railing and stood unsteadily on the edge.

The world loomed before me, lights from the city swimming in my vision, the black night eager to swallow me up. I gulped and my breath came in short gasps, but I felt the flames creep closer, climbing up the railings, growing nearer and nearer, until I had no choice... no choice at all.

I closed my eyes.

And I jumped.

Penelope Convey

THE AUTUMN WALK

I walk down the long-forgotten path through the maze of spindly limbs. Leaves in a delightful array of auburn, scarlet and terracotta crunch underfoot. Gentle sunlight filters through the intertwined branch roof that covers the sky and gives me the last chance of warmth before the sun disappears and the moon rises. The shadows lengthen. I'm used to this place. I've been here before, but this time there is a slight chill to the air. Birds sing, an undistinguishable animal slinks past in the undergrowth. A mouse? Fox? I let my mind take in the tranquillity of my favourite place. Lichen-covered trees reaching tall to the air, racing each other to see who can be the tallest. Their arms are bare, their warm coat has fallen to the earthy floor as they prepare for a long, cold winter. The forest at this moment is my favourite; the sky is golden, dappling the surroundings. Ancient trees whisper ancient secrets, wise words long-forgotten to humans, words that we no longer need to hear.

The sun has gone. The moon slowly takes its place; a luminous blue glow surrounds me now. The shadows are suddenly darker. The chill in the air slightly more ominous than it once was. An animal moves in the ongoing darkness. It was an animal, right? I walk on. A twig snaps. The leaves rustle. A gentle fog seeps down. I have never truly appreciated this forest at night. Everything seems older, wiser and I feel out of place, an intruder in something so out of my control. Wild.

The fog has properly descended now. My spine tingles. Trees loom over me. I am miniscule. Icy fingers caress me as the air swirls around my feet, my back, my bare arms that were once enjoying the bliss of an autumn day in sunlight. The wind howls, angry at my presence. I am allowed here, during the day, but at night I am an intruder. I should not be observing the wildness of this place. Eyes gleam at me, threatening. A branch falls. THUD. I jump. I should leave… I know I should leave, but I can't, I'm…

I shut my book. I'll save the rest for another day.

Livia Thanki-Green

YEAR 9 WINNER

TUESDAY

It's a normal Tuesday. The sun still rises at 5'clock. The birds still flock to the oak tree outside my bedroom window. The buzz of freshly made coffee and sleepy yawns still fill the air. Yet the weight on my chest feels heavier today. I know it is irrational. It is just another Tuesday, just another day that happens to be his birthday. I know that it's impossible for my very body to know that this was the day; and yet, it does. It feels like a cut that never quite healed, leaving a jagged scar behind. It feels like the echo of a gunshot piercing the air just before it penetrates your skin. It feels like watching a train crash in slow motion, not able to do anything to stop it, no matter how much you scream, cry, shout. So, I do what I do every year when the weight gets just a bit too heavy, when it feels like someone dumped all their 'my deepest condolences' and 'it will get better' straight on top of me. I get up. I get up because I know that if he were here, I would have already got a pillow to the face and made a mock angry glare.

I start my 'Voldemort' day routine. I think I started calling it that because it is the one day that nobody will name or talk about. He would have laughed at it as well. The day that used to be full of poor-quality banners and cheap Sainsbury's sheet cake. The day that used to be full of grins that could make the sun and the moon friends, and laughter that filled the room like the scent of flowers filling a meadow. Infectious and everywhere. Now there are no banners, no grins or laughter. Instead, morose moods, watery tears, and the occasional casserole if anybody remembers. I always remember.

I slide out of bed, still in my pyjamas at 11:30 and rub my toes into the sickly pink carpet. As I walk to my bathroom to brush my teeth, I look at all the acidic pink walls, nauseating pink cushions and vertigo-inducing pink pictures. Today I do not want pink. I do not want colour. I want the world to reflect the chasm that is slowing taking up my chest and the place where his sunshine used to be. I want the world to be black and grey, to stop turning like everything is okay and to grieve the colossal loss that only I seem to be feeling.

Anybody else would gasp when they see what I see in the mirror. Deep purple smudges, line hollow eyes, devoid of the light that used to fill them. Sunken cheeks and cracked lips barely used anymore. Stringy, brittle hair, more akin to straw and skin that hangs off bones from barely eating anymore. But people do not know that. Not when I cake enough makeup to avoid the 'are you okay' questions. However, today I do not. Today the world does not get to be guilt-free and continue like everything is okay. Today they can see my grief, my hurt and my pain. Then maybe they will hurt like I do when someone says his name. I brush my teeth, pull my hair into a poorly done bun and shrug on some baggy clothes. I used to wear his clothes. Try and fill the hole in my chest that used to be filled with him with his clothes instead. I cannot bear it anymore. So instead, I wear my baggy clothes and grab the handful of flowers I picked from the orchard outside the barn, and I start walking.

By the time I make it to the secluded beach on the other side of the city, sweat drips down my forehead and my limbs feel like I'm walking through cement. I do not care. I sit down in the middle of the sand, place the flowers in front of me and I start to talk. I tell him about how I found a new cereal brand he would have liked and that I have to run from the bus stop to try and avoid the endless rain. I do not care that I look like a crazy person. Nobody can see me here. Nobody but him. I let grief dig its greasy fingers into me and I cry. I cry because I won't ever have a hug from him again. I won't get the crooked grin or the sunshine laugh. Because my twin is not here anymore. He has gone somewhere I can't follow. So, there will be no more ice-cream cakes or messy Sunday mornings.

Three hours later I get up. I wipe my eyes and brush down my clothes. The weight on my chest is just a little bit lighter now. And when I go to leave, I swear there is another shadow next to mine. One with the same crooked smile, messy blonde hair, the same height as me, the same one who cried and laughed with me all through my childhood. And he stands right next to me.

Lila Shorr

Creative writing and original thinking are at the heart of a Putney education. Do keep an eye out for our sister publication, The Poetry Festival Booklet.