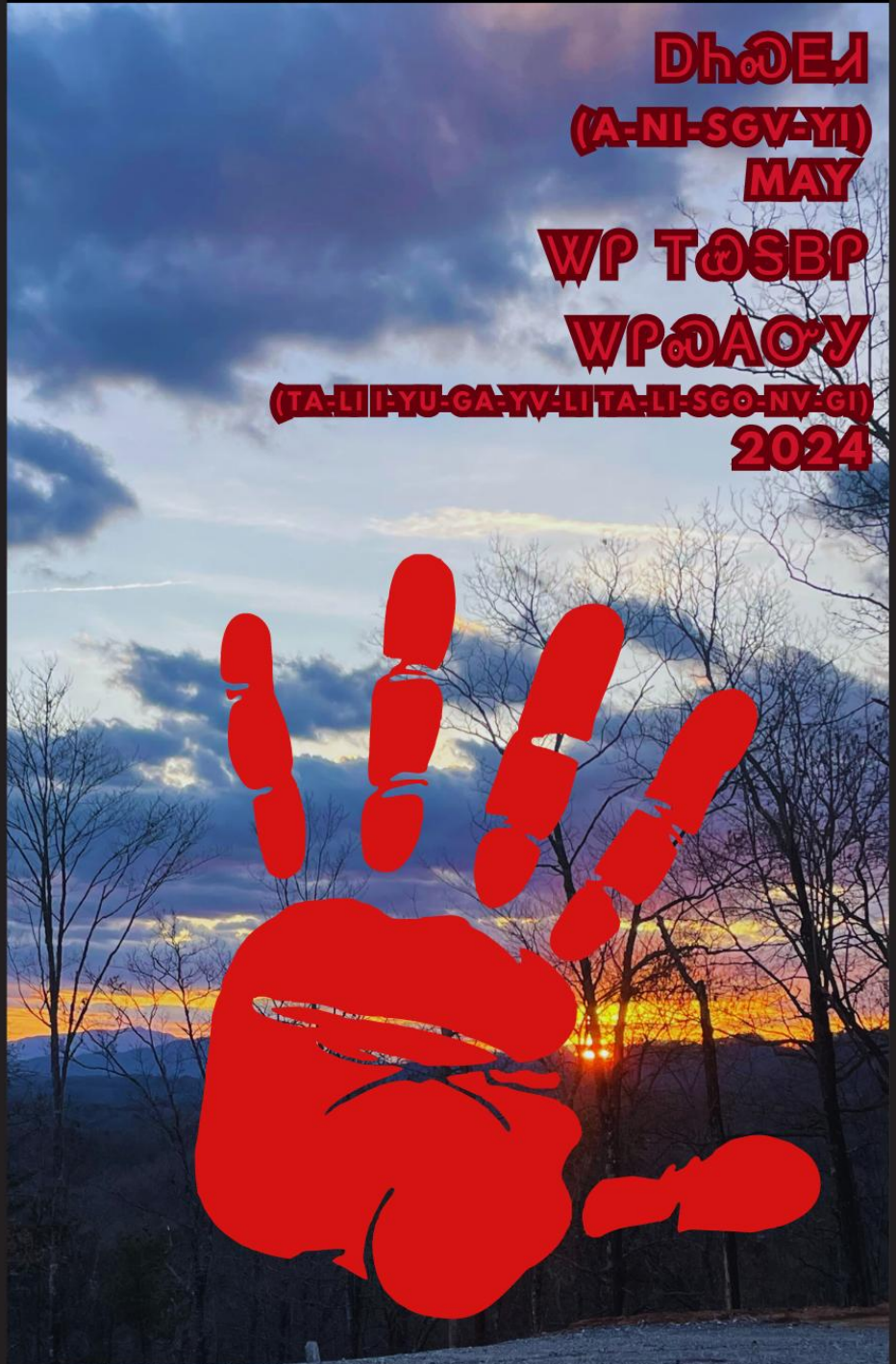




**GWY  
TGQOZ**



**DhōEł  
(A-NI-SGV-YI)  
MAY  
WP TōSBP  
WPōAO'Y  
(TA-LI-I-YU-GA-YV-LITA-LI-SGO-NV-GI)  
2024**



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**CHEROKEE TIMES  
(TSA-LA-GI I-YU-WA-KA-TI)**

**GWY TGQOZ**



The secret of our success is that we never, never give up.

- Wilma Mankiller



# POETRY



“Memories of Him” by Jayle Creson

On a hot summer day  
We would stop and get KFC  
With some watermelon on the side.  
I can still see him waiting for us  
On the porch drinking his coffee  
From the same mug he had my whole life.  
You could smell the cigarette smoke from  
The bottom of the driveway  
And listening to all his roosters cluck.  
The last time I was at that comforting house  
Was when I had just gotten  
A dog 6 years ago.  
I still feel the touch  
Of that uncomfortable couch.  
The smell of that same wood  
Stove he would have burned.  
Same old classic TV show  
He would have on  
With the volume blaring.  
Later during that cold winter  
We got a call  
He passed away  
I hadn't spoken to him in years  
I never got that Happy Birthday call.  
He had passed without telling a soul.  
Never had a funeral  
Never gave me anything  
To remember him by.  
Found out through an ad on Facebook  
That is the house I had so many memories in  
Was sold...  
I never got to have full closure for him  
but that's how he wanted it  
For no one to know.

“Addiction” by Izabella Terrell

Burns the inside of my jaw, down to my lower stomach  
It hurts so much, but you can't get enough of it  
You can scream and shout all you want, but have fun with a child safety lock  
You breathe in deep, so deep it gets dizzy, smoke expands your lungs as a freebie  
It's hard to put down, you just can't stop, you try and try but your head is too hot  
But suddenly the smoke is taken, and you are left with a vacant hole  
You scratch and bite your way back up, trying to get in control  
The smoke returns after a long time, and you think your mind is changed  
But after one hit, you feel the burn and are back where you began.

“Colors” by Izabella Terrell

Time sometimes doesn't seem fair  
Other times it seems like there are worse things in the air  
Sometimes you feel blue  
Other times you feel Yellow  
Maybe the occasional Red  
It bubbles up in the form of overwhelming colors that you can't control, something that kills your  
Heart and makes you feel cold  
Sometimes you feel Green  
Others you feel Pink  
Purple makes a lover's heart weary, drained, and fear-y  
Sometimes, after an Overwhelming color  
You feel Black, empty, like something wrong  
Black feels cold, old but new  
Something familiar all people can relate to  
Blacks a numbness off all colors  
Erasing the ombre of Purples and Pinks, Blues and Reds, Green and Yellow  
Try as you might, you can't escape  
Freedom is honestly misplaced  
Feeling sick yet?  
You are?  
Good, now you know how I felt when you broke my heart, misplaced my trust, you stabbed me  
In the back and took off for another  
You should've seen this coming  
Should've known I'd come hunting  
Should've heard my feet thumping

Now I've got you, my colors returned  
My heart was beating, and a colorful drum  
Yellows and Pinks, Reds and Purples, Greens and Blues, so many colors  
Black still resides in me  
Waiting for a new melody  
A chance to be free again  
But I won't let him out, never again.

“Mirror House” by Izabella Terrell

You up at midnight hour, scanning for something off  
Your rooms are clean and organized.  
But something feels lost  
You stare into your mirror, judging anything that passes.  
Like sand falling in an hourglass  
You try to wake up but are stuck in your head, a house of mirrors that you've come to dread.  
Try as you might, your feelings never change  
You wear a mask of a smile to hide your mirror.  
Afraid that one day your mask will snap, showing the world your house of mirrors.  
And when that day comes, one by one, your mirrors all shatter.  
Sure, one might say that 'it's all okay' but the mirrors just multiply with every crack.  
So, you're stuck in this web, with no one to tell, while you burn in your own living hell.  
The mirror house claims its cause for good, but more... **Opportunities** go misunderstood.  
One house shatters, the second one cracks  
Your own house, however, never comes back.

“The Night That It Happened” by Ila Brinkmeyer

The night that it happened  
The smell of dusty air and old cake  
She will forever be missed  
The fresh tears on my face  
All I could do was think and ponder about the loss of her life  
The loss of a creative mind  
The loss of laughter for months to come  
The night that it happened  
The taste of the cake I baked with her in mind still lingered  
It still does  
The sound of my sobs ringing through the empty house  
The voice of panic in my mom's voice before she left will always remain  
Now every cake I bake will have her on it  
Now every February she will stay  
And every year since I will miss the touch of her hugs  
Even when I fought and fought them away  
The night that it happened  
The whole world had changed  
Every moment  
Everything I'm grateful for  
Every I love you  
Mattered so much more

“Faded Puppy” by Gideon Freeman

A stuffed animal that  
Would never be forgotten,  
And would never leave me.  
My parents bought me  
Something they thought  
Would be thrown away  
Quickly, never to be thought  
Of or seen again. They  
Were young parents,  
Not even in their 30s.  
As I brought it home and  
Kept it, and they realized that

It wouldn't be thrown away  
Easily. But as my age turned  
From small child to toddler,  
Puppy lost her blue, it fading  
To be a dull gray. Its smell was  
Getting worse, smelling  
Almost rancid and foul.  
It was itchy to the touch,  
And you couldn't wash it  
For the fear it would fall apart.  
There was a substitute, but  
It wasn't the same, no patched  
Up nose, no feeling what 6 week  
Old me felt. Just a 13 year old,  
Crying as he realized that his  
Parents have turned into  
Their mid-40s, and knowing what  
Must be done. It was put in a bag,  
But it only made the smell worse.  
I could never find the bag,  
And I could never find the charm  
Of puppy again.

“To Once I Was” by Carys Holiday

To once I was when things were simpler,  
When I was younger. I miss the feeling of having  
Nothing to do and nowhere to be. The feeling of being  
Unafraid of Tomorrow and what it holds for me.  
The feeling of being free from the judgment of  
My peers and the world surrounding us. However, the thing that  
I long for most of all, the years of my adolescence.  
When I felt unbound.  
Once I was when the sun shone down on me.  
When the grass was greener. Listening  
To the mourning doves' cry, it all feels so familiar.  
Like honey, like sugar,  
'Twas such a sweet, sweet time.  
When the forsythia bloomed brighter,

And the honeysuckle savor is more potent.  
Once I was when I was with warmth.  
When I smiled more. Akin to the sights and the smells,  
It all seems to fade too soon.  
Like the scent of amber and vanilla in my grandma's bathroom,  
Her house, a peaceful haven, is now gone and her flat now  
Seemingly filled with alienation from society.  
With time comes an age of no longer feeling comfort.

“An Elegy Written by Me” by Tahlaya “Nyree” Thompson

A dark and very cold noon fell upon us  
People sat on pews and observed  
Children were praising him  
Angels surrounded the place  
Feeling it with hope and joy  
Their singing sounded rich and elegant  
Making others feel warm and welcoming  
Then it all just ended  
The room went cold and empty  
The people fell pale and their appearance grew tired  
I saw him sitting in the pew  
His intentions were to change everything  
His mind was a battlefield  
Sending chills through the room  
It smelled strong of sulfur  
This was the last time anyone would see him  
He would disappear forever into nothing but memories  
Leaving me reaching for one last touch  
Her world collapsed in a night  
Everything just grew silent and became lonely

“An Often-Filled House” by Vincent Owle

An often-filled house  
Now empty, sitting alone.  
Happiness radiated with warmth  
but now we're left with a chilling wind.

Children with a void to fill,  
He endlessly struggled when he fell ill.  
He worked tirelessly,  
And so did his murderers.  
To hear his voice or to smell his cologne  
Would take me to the past.  
To mourn with his wife, his child, and dog  
Would be to uphold an ocean of burden.  
A new house and a new life  
The pain will never be forgotten.  
Starting a new chapter is never easy  
But jealous sabotage is lower than your husband.  
A flesh wound or a disease, you're just as responsible  
For the best person you'd ever meet.  
The little one will be big soon  
And she'll see through you and do the same.

“In the Silent Depths” by Alexzaya Lossie

In the silent depths where darkness dwells  
Where light retreats and darkness swells  
There lies a void, an endless sea,  
A place where souls lost are set free  
In whispered sighs and hollow cries  
In silent screams and tear-filled eyes  
Depressions grip a suffocating weight  
A stormy sea an endless state  
Yet in this darkness, a flicker burns  
A tiny ember, yearns and yearns  
For hope to rise and light to pierce  
The heavy shroud, the gloom, the fierce  
Amidst the chaos and fragile thread  
A glimmer of light where courage threads  
Through tangled thoughts and fears unknown  
A path unfolds through overgrown  
With each step forward the shadows wane  
Though doubts and demons remain  
Yet in the heart, a spark ignites  
A will to live to fight the night

So let us journey through this night  
With courage as our guiding light  
To find the dawn to break this chain  
And let our hearts find peace again

“In the Silent Chambers” by Alexzaya Lossie

In the silent chambers of the mind  
Anxiety lingers like a shadow  
Shapeshifting, elusive yet omnipresent  
A constant companion in the journey of existence  
It creeps stealthily through the corridors  
A whisper in the dark  
A subtle tremor beneath the surface  
A knot in the pit of the stomach  
Its tendrils reach out entwining  
Binding thoughts in a tangled web  
A maze of worries and what-ifs  
A labyrinth of uncertain  
In the quiet moments of solitude  
It speaks in hushed tones  
Planting seeds of doubt and fear  
Watered by the tears of a restless soul  
It manifests in myriad forms  
A pounding heart shallow breaths  
Sweaty palms racing thoughts  
A symphony of physical and emotional turmoil  
Yet in the depths of despair  
There is a glimmer of resilience  
A spark of courage amidst the chaos  
A ray of hope penetrates through the darkness  
Anxiety though formidable  
Is not invincible  
With each breath each step forward  
Comes the strength to confront, to overcome

“Cuban Dog Ticks” by Makenize Rattler

Cuban dog ticks, beneath the summer sun  
On his fur, as the grass begins to sing  
They crawl, they dance, they have way too much fun  
All this fun is making my dog’s skin sting  
Then the owner takes his dog to the vet  
The dog has chronic dancing tick disease  
The owner cried, he felt bad for his pet  
he tries to fix it, tries to find the key  
So he grabs his clippers to cut the fur  
Leaves his boy bald, the baldest he could be  
To the owner's mind, soon it would occur  
That cutting hair only fixed lice and fleas  
He sat there on the couch, now feeling sick  
Now there's a bald dog with Cuban dog ticks

# SHORT STORIES

NON FICTION



Editors: Makenzie,  
Vincent, Nyree

### **Moving to Cherokee**

Moving to Cherokee has been a big culture shock, but in a good way. The people here have been very welcoming and kind to me since I moved, and they are always willing to help others. The community is one of the most important things to the people, and seeing how they get together in the good and bad times, and me being part of it, is an honor. Learning their language, their history, and culture will always be something I won't forget.

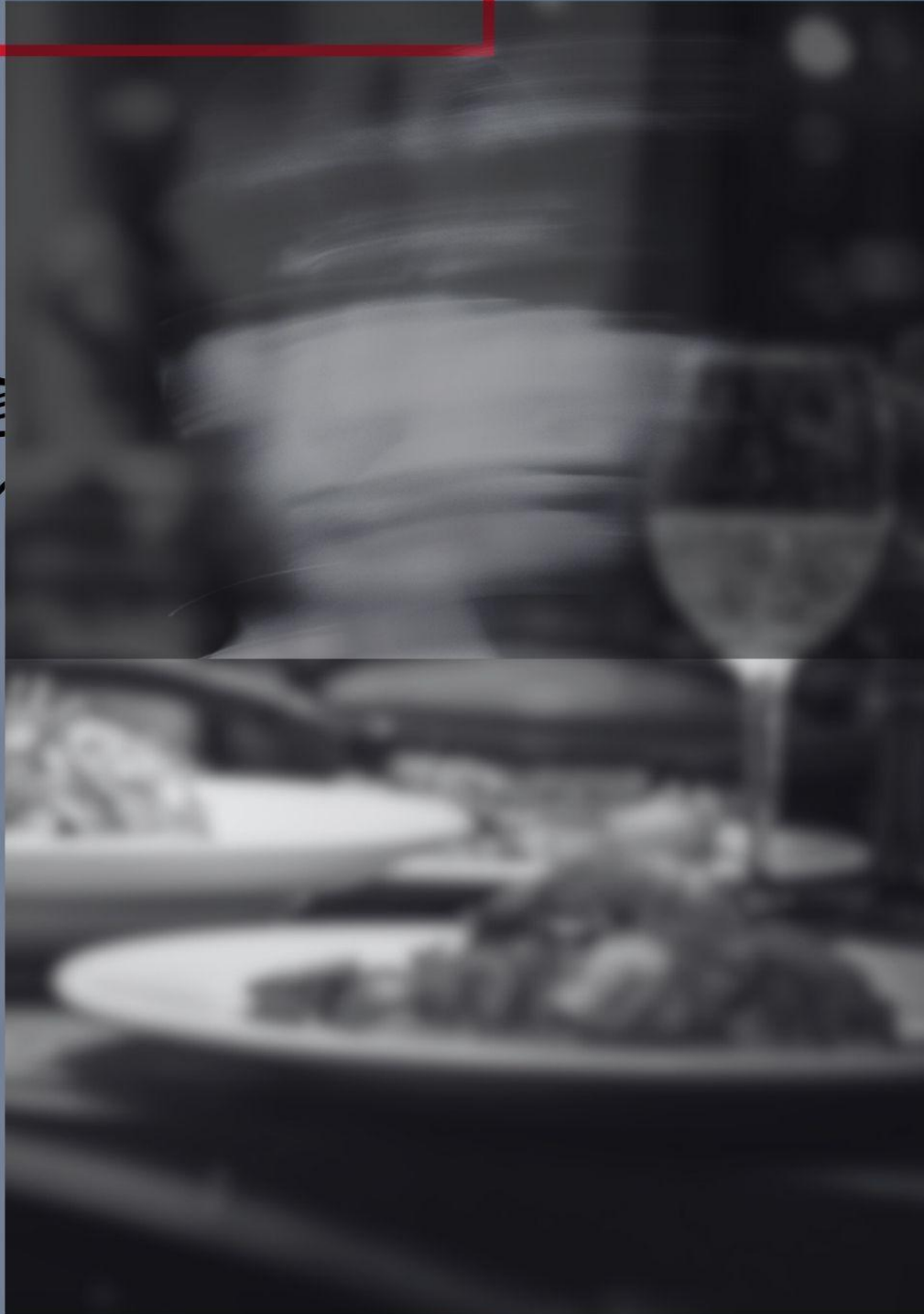
By Letsi Burgos Delgado

### **The Sport of XC Running**

The sport of XC running can make or break you. The past XC season I had big expectations for myself, but my season felt mediocre. I was more scared than anything when it came to racing. High expectations lowered my confidence. My training was good, but I always needed guidance about what I could do regarding races. I trained my butt off in the summer, but maybe this season wasn't meant to be. I am going to college to run XC, and maybe I will have a breakout season there. What I want to tell you is have fun, don't worry about how you're running now, but worry about how you finish your season. Don't compare yourself to others, and don't be afraid to push the pace.

By Aizen Bell

**SHORT  
STORIES  
FICTION**



**Editors: Gabriel,  
Christian, Gideon,  
Victoria**

## **“The Burning Sycamore” by Christian Alfaro**

Deep in the Appalachians live a people of tall stature, who hunted and fished in its valleys. The Tsa’la’gi is their name, and they lived well. In their home lies an evil, a giant striped terror that lives in the underworld. It rises from the caves and strikes like lightning, stabbing the Tsa’la’gi with its enormous stinger. Its hunger for flesh is never fulfilled. The giant, six-legged, winged terror hunts the people of the Appalachians like a big cat with turkey’s wings.

The Tsa’la’gi know nothing to solve the plight that is imposed upon them by the flying beast. The Great Spirit, a god-like figure with no shape, spoke to an elder of the Tsa’la’gi, referencing an ever-burning sycamore tree that was struck long ago by the lightning of the thunder beings. There, it is said, lies the answer to solve the woe that haunts them. The two chiefs are adorned in their respective places. The peace chief in white and the war chief in red and black, The seven matriarchs sit with each of their respective clans: The Wolf, The Deer, The Blue, The Long Hair, The Paint, The Wild Potato, and The Bird. Each sits and discusses who will venture to the ever-burning sycamore tree, but all of their best warriors challenge the horror of the underworld and die a pointless death.

The leaders put their faith in one man, Wolf Killer. Wolf Killer is from the Wolf clan, a clan of warriors and the only clan that can kill wolves. Wolf Killer leaves his village with the Tsa’la’gi prayers and a thirst for vengeance. He swears to kill the great U’la’gu.

From the top of the mountain, Wolf Killer looks, his brows furrowed, his war paint ready to taste the blood of his adversary. He cools his head, though. The wasp comes after the weapon, and he looks throughout the valley and mountains that his people call home. The thought makes him think of the dead, and it makes him more furious. The cold mountain wind blows onto his bare chest, which is strapped with years of warring and experience. The only heat on the cold mountain is the sun, which shines on his bald head.

He sees out in the distance smoke which he believes is the ever-burning tree. It hides behind a mountain far out in the distance, westward, for the sun was ever slowly laying its head that way. He begins his trek westward, quickly navigating the dangerous terrain. He has been here before. He fought the Muscogee here. As he travels, he feels his mouth become dry, and he settles for the nearby river for some water. The rushing sounds sooth the thirsty warrior with its lifeblood. Each time he clasps his hands to make a makeshift water bowl he looks to his left and his right to see if any danger approaches.

The warrior hears the whispers of his fallen brothers, but when he takes a look to see them, they are not there. They warn him of those who feed off their fellow man, but Wolf Killer thinks nothing of it. Cannibals dare not to test his people. Any who eat their own shall find death by his war club. Deep into the forest Wolf Killer wanders. Only streaks of sun rays peak through the tall and oppressive trees, which whisper long-forgotten names and wars, that no Tsa’la’gi remember, and even if they did it is told through exaggeration and lies.

As the night approaches, Wolf Killer walks to a sycamore tree and scrapes off its peeling skin to use as kindling for a flame. As he makes his flame, the night comes as a dark blanket to

cover the sky. The only light source is the orange flame deep inside the forest. Wolf Killer lies uncomfortably on the forest bed, trying his hardest to sleep among all the animals and trees that beside him, and as he drifts to sleep, he shakes and tumbles like a dog. He awakens to rodents in his satchel and a dying flame that burns with the embers of an old tree. Wolf Killer tries to catch the vermin that feast on his food, but he fails as they scurry off in a hurry and speed which Wolf Killer has never seen.

Wolf Killer throws on his satchel and begins his journey to the burning tree once more. While walking, he comes across a hermit in the woods.

“Who goes there?” the hermit yells out of his home. Wolf Killer does not answer but continues walking past the home.

“I said who goes there?” The hermit walks out, standing nigh to the waist of Wolf Killer.

“Go back inside your home old man, no one wants your things,” Wolf Killer finally replies.

“Well.” The hermit looks Wolf Killer up and down; he has now stopped in his tracks and has turned to face the tiny hermit. “Are you a cannibal?”

“No,” Wolf Killer replies. “Are you?”

“No, filthy pest they are. Say you are willing to kill them for me? They got a village not far from here.”

“I cannot take on a whole village alone, and I am on a journey which I must continue.” Wolf Killer turns around. “Have you seen a burning sycamore tree by any chance?”

“Yes, actually,” the hermit replies, scratching his chin in thought. “In the village, actually”

He turns around. “Where?” says the Wolf.

“Over the mountain. It's hard to miss. The sky is darkened by the plumes of smoke”

“Take me to it,” Wolf says. He and the hermit trek over the mountain, a task the midget hermit struggles with, which makes Wolf wonder how he survived for this long. The hermit wobbles by a tree and points to a village filled with men.

“There is the village.” The hermit moves his finger to his left. “And that's the tree.”

“Thank you,” says the Wolf. He slowly sneaks his way down to the village, groping his war club tightly in case of any threat that may be posed against him. The bustling village, teeming with the sounds of laughter and talk, is contrasted by the bones of men and hanging corpses that are strewn over campfires meant to roast the meat. Through the laughter, quietly from a building, the sounds of sobbing and the moans of pain can be heard. Wolf pays no mind; perhaps he can act like one of the cannibals. He walks into the village with no one seeing and begins walking to the sycamore tree. Cannibals walk past him, some talking, others carrying bowls of flesh and vegetables. As he approaches the tree, plumes of smoke puff out like a grand campfire smoking out and so scorching that standing near it feels like you can get cooked.

Standing near it, he can hear something calling out to him. He reaches to the fire.

“Hey!” someone says, but Wolf is so entranced that he doesn't hear it. “Stand back you madman!” A man pushes Wolf away from the flaming tree. “Are you crazy?!” cries a voice.

“I heard in the flames, a voice calls out to me, lulling me into it.”

“Only a fool will enter the ever-present flame,” says the cannibal.

“Pray that the chief knows mercy.” The cannibal, who is nearly naked, calls others to help lift and move Wolf. Wolf, in a state of shock from an unknown source, doesn't realize he is being dragged. The barely clothed or not clothed man-eaters drag Wolf to a giant building decorated with symbols of a dead language. Inside, the smell of flesh is enough to make anyone feel sick. Lining the walls, bodies hang like cattle ready to be eaten. Some of the cannibals strip pieces of skin off the bodies and run to the firepit to cook their food. Around the fire pit lies blood and gore from pieces of flesh left uneaten, and upon his molded throne of blood, gore, and bones sits the chief who adorns himself with forgotten symbols made of blood. He eats the cooked meat like a wolf, and he stands nakedly to welcome his guest to his forsaken home. Wolf looks up and sees the massive figure who stands seven feet tall and has black hair that reaches to the floor like a giant black snake. His eyes are like a snake's, and he looks at the Wolf with his slit eyes. “Welcome,” he says, flinging his hands in the air. “Welcome the guest from the Tsa'la'gi people, the great warrior who is supposed to defeat the Great Wasp and carry his enormous head to his village to show to a desperate audience who wither and die from illness and disease.” The unknown chief walks to Wolf, who is held down by the cannibals who await with slobbering jaws like ravenous dogs to feast upon his flesh.

“Here he sits on his knees like a dog. Tell me you know the best way to eat a person? Keeping them alive keeps the meat fresh each time you peel it off them.” The chief leans down to Wolf's face “But in here there's no need for the bugs do not dare enter here.”

“Who are you?” Wolf asks.

“My name is uttered in disgust by your people, even though many flock to me to let out their worst desire -- which is to feast upon their fellow man. No, I say my name is really like that of the devils who stalk your woods and trick your little children into the woods forever to be lost. I say my name is The One Who Is Hated,” says the fiend, a large, unnatural smile stretching across his face. “Bring him here. You didn't think we saw you come in? I have eyes everywhere.” The hermit stumbles onto the floor, naked and scared.

“Oh, no.” The hermit tries to get up but is swiftly decapitated by the forsaken chief. His head rolls across the floor. A look of terror is marked across his face forever.

“Hang him up for he is dinner.”

The cannibals swiftly follow the order, picking up the hermit and hanging him up with a rope. With slobbering jaws, some even start peeling his skin off with their knives.

“Take this one to the cages. I want him to suffer.” The cannibals pick up the Wolf and drag him outside to one of the many cages next to the main building. They throw him in a cage next to others who are nothing but food for the mad cannibals and their accursed chief.

As Wolf sits in the cage, day by day, he waits for something. The tree still whispers to him, calling him over, yet he sits like a dying beast waiting for its end. The cannibals drag out the others to consume. They scream and claw like animals but to no avail, for their captors are far worse than any animal. Some people he recognizes from other villages his people have. An

old and grizzled man gets thrown in the cage next to him. He chews and bangs on the cage but nothing. He turns to Wolf Killer. "Hey," he says, "we need to get out."

"I've tried," the warrior replies. "There's nothing." The Wolf, starved and exhausted, looks dead in the eyes.

"Well, I say I have more youth than you do," says the old man "You should never give in to these fiends" The old man waits for a reply but Wolf gives none, he just stares into the sky.

"Suit yourself I'm not getting eaten." The old man struggles, but he simply cannot find a way. He does it for a couple more days until eventually he too gives in.

"Hey," says the old man, Wolf lays on the ground. He's starving and dehydrated. Death is surely coming for him "Whatever you do, young one, never give in," the old man says ironically.

Out from the main building comes cannibals who Wolf knows are coming for him. The cage opens, and death finally comes in now he's merely settling down in the home. The cannibals drag him out with ease for Wolf has no strength; he's as limp as one can be. The old man yells at Wolf, but Wolf is so close to death that he does not hear him.

Inside, The Hated One awaits with a grin that stretches across his face. His eyes are like that of a snake, and he stands taller than usual. The cannibals drag Wolf to the center where the firepit is.

"We are ready to feast on the great warrior who was meant to slay the beast, but now he is merely prey so now we feed on his flesh and bones," The Hated One says, slobbering like a starving beast who just found its prey. They all get their knives out, but The Hated One does not because his head has come off his shoulders and his neck is growing unnaturally like that of a snake. As his slithering head reaches closer to the center where the crackling fire pit and the dying Wolf are, his jaws dislocate and his mouth widens to eat the Wolf whole. With the roar of the thunder, a bolt of lightning goes threw the smoking hole in the ceiling and splits the smoke in two. The main building blows apart, sending Wolf flying out along with the gore of the hanging bodies and the cannibals.

Wolf lives unscathed. He gets up and runs, barely making it further than a baby learning to walk. The fire calls him as the crack of thunderbolts smites the cannibals. Wolf crawls to the sycamore tree. The exploding cannibals cry in pain, and when Wolf makes it there, he crawls into the tree, which burns at his skin. Inside is a spear made of pine, and on it is the design of a silver-eyed serpent coiled around it. Also painted on it are the spider and the turtle who gave the amazing gifts of land and fire to the Tsa'la'gi. On the base are leather with beads and eagle feathers of the thunder beings themselves. He grabs the spear which retains its electric worth.

The voice tells him to aim up, and as he does, he bursts out of the tree with lightning-fast speed, the fire fading away. Out from the rubble of the main building, a burning beast crawls out. It is The Hated One and as he curses at Wolf, he shifts into a cougar and wanders into the forest, his fake kingdom destroyed. The flying warrior falls upon the Earth with a crash that almost shakes the mountains. The trees are split by the smoking warrior who fell like a fallen star, and after he crashed, he sleeps like a blackened stone baby that was in immense pain of shock and fire. When the warriors arrive they can barely make out a man, and many wouldn't go down to

look. It takes the war chief, a man of short stature among his men but with enough scars to tell of for seven days straight. He looks at the fallen Wolf and he throws the man over his shoulders like a pile of wood ripe for burning. He carries the warrior back to his village where the people look at the crisp Wolf with confused and curious eyes, equally astonished.

When Wolf Killer awakens he finds himself in the main hall, where he is chained to a stake like a sacrifice to a foul god or pagan demon figure. There, looking into his eyes like a warrior about to strike a furious blow to kill his enemy, lies the short man carried the night seven-foot man only over his shoulder like a newborn baby.

“Where am I,” the Wolf asks, tired of fighting and being tied.

“You're in my village,” the unknown figure replies, his gaze unwavering. He picks up some cooked meat and presents it to Wolf, whose starvation is so apparent this is torture to any who could bare to witness.

“Are you hungry” the man replies mockingly. “If you wish to eat, then answer my question”

“I am hungry”

“From where do you come?”

“I hail from a village near the splitting rivers.”

“I thought the warriors of that village all died by the Great Wasp.”

“I am the last.”

The short man stares silently once more for a short period, like he's trying to read Wolf's life story via his eyes. With a grunt, another appears behind Wolf with a blade and cuts him loose from his chains, and the Wolf feasts on the food that was taken from him by the man-eaters.

“Eat,” says the man. “I'm not finished asking questions”.

“Who are you?” asks Wolf.

“Chief Little Deer” answers the man. Little Deer watches Wolf eat like a starved beast and when he finished he starts questioning again.

“So how did you survive the crash like that of the fallen stars.”

“I do not know. I believe it was the spear”

“The spear of amazing design which looked forged by the thunder beings themselves.”

“Yes, my people believe it was crafted from a great bolt of lightning cast down by them.”

Little Deer looked shocked when he heard these words

“The spear cannot be wielded by my men. It shocks them whenever they touch it”

Wolf looks at Little Deer with desperate eyes. “Where is it”

“Look outside.” Both the warriors walk out and when Wolf lays his eyes upon the legendary spear it floats above in the courtyard where people stand and look in awe at the floating weapon. Wolf stares but there's something deep inside of him telling him what to do. He lifts his hand, reaching for the spear. On command, it comes to him in a flash. Everyone stands shocked and surprised the legendary spear is now in the hands of its owner.

“I must leave,” says Wolf Killer.

“To kill the Great Wasp?” Little Deer asks.

“Yes.”

Little Deer looks at Wolf, sizing him up.

“Don’t be so sure that you can defeat such an enemy alone,” Little Deer says. “I’ve seen how it moves. You may match its speed, but that thing is a master at killing at speeds of lightning.”

“Then what's your plan?” Wolf asks.

“Well, we can use something as bait to lure it in, like an effigy of a person. Then you can swoop down and kill it.” Wolf nods in agreement and Little Deer commands everyone to craft an effigy of a person. They decide it should be of him and after hours of labor they make it. With it, they travel to the Great Wasps’ hunting grounds, and there, standing on a cliff overlooking the serene beauty of the land, the effigy awaits its demise from a swift impalement from the stinger of hell and death. Wolf hangs in the tree line, like a cougar in the forest, waiting for the Wasp. He grips his spear tightly, like it is his last item in a raid from the enemies his ancestors fought. When the sun is about to rest its head and bring about the moon, when the sky makes a blood-tinged haze, almost foretelling what’s about to come, out comes the creature with wings and mandibles. It comes with the sound of hell, its giant wings flapping so fast the trees below it begin to crash from the sheer speed and sound. It moves so fast it is a blur, like when the Little People play tricks to their victims.

Wolf’s ears begin to bleed from the sound, but he does not falter. Before his eyes, the effigy is impaled by an insect of enormous size and speed, and when it impales the false man, Wolf does not hesitate, for that would mean defeat. He hurls his spear at the beast, and with a crack of thunder the spear carries a thousand bolts, striking the beast down, burning its wings. Its body burned and shocked, the Great Wasp gets up and tries to fly, but it cannot. Its wings are gone. Wolf calls the spear back, and like a bird, it flies back to him quickly. The Great Wasp and Wolf Killer battle. Even grounded, the beast quickly dodges Wolf’s attacks, but the man does not waiver, for he matches the speed of the beast. It bites and stabs with its giant spear-like stinger, but Wolf is too quick but so is the beast. Wolf grows tired and slow, and the beast notices. It attacks more, but with a war cry a band of Little Deer’s braves throw spears at the beast, which, even with its insane speeds, it cannot dodge. The beast cries in pain as the warriors shoot arrows and throw spears. With stamina recovered, Wolf charges, plunging his spear into the beast’s head and finishing it.

With war cries and celebrations, the warriors cheer the name of Wolf Killer and the warriors of Chief Little Deer. “We have won the battle” cries Chief Little Deer. Wolf, with new scars to tell to his children about, and all the warriors of Little Deer celebrate. They cut the head off the beast, and twenty men carry it back to the tribe. There, Wolf and all the villagers dance and celebrate the end of the terror of the skies, and after the party, all the men and women and children and every animal sleep peacefully. A little spider crawls into one of the buildings of the village.

After the celebrations, Wolf says his farewells to Chief Little Deer and the village. Little Deer says the warrior is welcome back anytime.

On Wolf's serene and beautiful journey home, nature has been restored. All the animals are out and none are hidden from the Great Wasp. Where the sun shines the unmatched beauty of the Tsa'la'gi's home is on full display. The sky is blue, and the mountains that puff smoke in the air lay bare for all to see as the sun lays its head upon their bosoms. When the sun rises rises, the the green grass lays wet from rain, and the trees sway with a gentle breeze. The cries of elk and mountain bison and the chirping of birds bring a calm that Wolf has not experienced in days. Wolf drinks from the rivers and feasts on the fruits of the wild, and, eventually, the smoke of his village shows him the way, and there his people wait for him.

There the people welcome the warrior. Seeing his scars and hearing his words, the people celebrate and dance till night comes, and when Wolf sleeps, he holds his wife close to him and his children too, happy to see them once more. As the days go by the village begins to prosper slowly. Warriors are made once again, and Wolf brings his sons to fish. The rushing water soothes Wolf as he tells his sons what to do. "You're doing well son" The boy jabs the water with his spear catching a fish.

"Look Father," he says as he presents his spear with his catch on it.

"Good, do you know what that is?" Wolf says pointing at the fish

"A rainbow trout," the boy says thinking to himself

"Good, here put it in here." Wolf presents a basket, and his boy places the bleeding and wet fish into the woven cage.

A cry of a hellish beast rings throughout the forest, shaking Wolf and his son. The ground shakes beneath their feet and the trees sway without a breeze, like a giant is walking. In a panic, Wolf and his boy begin to run back to the village. The ground shakes, and Wolf can hear the stomping behind him. It is catching up. Wolf picks up his son and runs even faster, but it does not matter. Wolf reaches the end of the forest, and there in the plain he throws his son forward, trying to spare him from the monster. Wolf turns to face the beast but is met by a familiar face. Standing above him, as tall as the pine trees and with his horns, the giant speaks, "I have come to see the great Wolf Killer."

"I am him," Wolf says, hiding his fear with confidence.

"Then hear me. I, Judaculla, shall tell who is a great enemy of your people. The Hated One knows no bounds, and he will come for you and those you love. The spear of the thunder beings chose you, but The Hated One is stronger than it, for he has existed before man. He shall destroy man, for when he was conceived, he waited for man and swore to end man, but the ancient warriors of long passed battles sealed the being in the underworld and removed his name from history. He has returned and with him the unbearable sins he carries."

Judaculla hands Wolf three items: a medicine mask, a deer jaw, and a bear pelt to wear.

"These items are blessed by me, and the animals have sworn to become yours to slay The Hated One. When the being is slain, their spirits shall go to the world above this and they shall dance and celebrate in your name. The deer of your knife forgave your people for the crime your people committed against them. The bear was once Tsa'la'gi and he chose to become your cloak for he heard your tale and wishes to assist you. The mask is for you to lay witness to the true

form of the beast, for without it you shall go ill with madness.” The giant, snake-eyed, horned man looks into the small warrior like an eagle catching a mouse. “The Tsa’la’gi people will suffer if The Hated One is left to run amok. I leave it to you to slay it.”

The giant leaves, and his stomping shakes the trees again. Out from the other treeline, a war band comes to back their greatest warrior. With war cries and whooping they prepare for a phantom battle, but to the band's disappointment there is no battle, only the Wolf Killer and the supplies that were blessed and given to him by the giant. Wolf Killer turns to address the band. “We must return to the village now,” he says, and the band rushes back to the village, which is thankfully safe. They call a meeting with the clans and their matriarchs and the chiefs of peace and war, and they sit in their respective spots in the council house, waiting for Wolf Killer to tell of the news.

Wolf Killer sits cross-legged in the center of the council house, in front of the flames that puff out smoke through the roof and immense steam to bring out all the bad medicine within everyone. “My people,” says Wolf, “Judaculla has addressed me to slay The Hated One with these items.” He points to the items which are held by three of his closest friends. “He told me that the being will try and destroy us, so we must be prepared for a war with a being which is unlike we have ever seen.”

“We already have slain the Wasp, and now a beast of unfathomable power seeks to destroy us once more?” cries a woman from the Long Hair clan.

“How do we even have a chance against such a being?” cries one from the Paint.

“No. We mustn't give up. We put our faith in Wolf Killer,” says one from Wild Potato.

Everyone starts speaking over one another until Wolf Killer yells for the house to settle down. “My people! Please hear me. I will slay this beast with my hands, and the thunder beings alongside Judaculla will assist me.” Everyone quits talking but doubt lingers in their minds as they look down in shame, as if they know they have lost.

A woman speaks from the Wolf clan. “Why don't we seek the Little People to assist us?”

“The Little People? They will not assist us,” a man says.

“But they have before. With the Sun's daughter before,” she says

“If I remember correctly, we messed that up, making the Little People doubt us,” says another man.

“Maybe, but we must try,” she says and so the council concludes. Wolf Killer is told to seek the Little People, and he goes off into the mountains, where the animals watch like speculators of a play that is a tragedy in which the Tsa’la’gi face the one who knows of unbound hatred. When Wolf is walking he can see little shadow figures dart and drift past him like hallucinations. Voices ring throughout the forest and his vision begins to warp and twist, until he falls asleep. When he awakes, he is bound by vines, a magic unknown to him. Out from the brush comes the Little People who look at Wolf Killer like a murderer coming to finish what he started. They speak in dialects unknown to him. It is Tsa’la’gi, but he has never heard it. He speaks “Little People, I've come for your assistance against The Hated One.”

They groan at the sound of the name uttered by Wolf, like he just cursed an entire family to damnation.

One of them speaks. "We do not wish to assist you. Your people are weak and foolish and tempted by desire even when told not to follow through with such desires."

Another says, "Your kind ought to be disappointed because your eldest of ancestors killed one another."

The Little People laugh at Wolf Killer's attempt to sway them.

"You fools," Wolf says.

"Watch your mouth," says a little person twisting Wolf's limbs unnaturally. "You have no chance."

"And neither will you," Wolf Killer says. "The Hated One he will come for you too."

The Little People murmur to one another.

"He knows no weakness for he has none, that is why we must work together to defeat a being," Wolf says.

After a moment of silence, one of the Little People speaks. "We will help you, but you must help us."

"What do you need?" Wolf asks.

"West of here lies a garden of beauty of fertility, but a monster has taken hold of such a place. She picks the flowers that grow there and uses magic to wither anything she doesn't desire, which is mostly everything in the forest. Beware she shapeshifts into a beautiful woman and charms her prey into falling for her. Beware her finger, for it is like a spear."

The Little People release their magic hold on Wolf. He gets up and walks westward when he comes across the garden the Little People spoke of. He enters, and in the center, a lone rose grows where all the others wilt and die. The rose is a magnificent deep, somber red, and it drips water and blood. Its thorns warn those who approach it. Out of nowhere, a woman approaches Wolf.

"Hello," she says, and Wolf turns and points his spear at her. "Please don't hurt me."

"Who are you?" he asks.

"I'm Water Fall," she says, her hands in the air.

"The Little People told me of a shapeshifter. Are you her?"

"No. I tend the garden every year. I just now arrived for this year."

Wolf sets the spear next to him with it pointing at the sky. He looks at one of her fingers that juts out like a knife. "What is the matter with your finger?"

"It's deformed," she says picking up a basket and placing the finger in it. "I do not show it to people because they think I'm evil."

"Have you used medicine?"

"I used to, but after my finger, I no longer dabble in such magic." She looks past Wolf.

"Oh, no," she says, tears forming in her eyes. "The garden."

She runs over to the garden. "Did you do this?"

"No," Wolf says. "An evil witch has cursed this land. She matches your description."

“I would never do such a thing.”

Wolf walks over to her. “I’ll help you with your garden.”

She looks at Wolf, wiping her tears away.

“Thank you,” she says. After an hour of cleaning up the mess the witch caused, Water Fall walks up to Wolf Killer. “Thank you again. It’s getting pretty late. Why don’t you come with me to my home? It’s just down the hill.”

“I appreciate the offer, but I must find the witch which plagues this land,” Wolf says.

“Oh, come on. It’s just right there.” She grabs Wolf’s hand and leads him down the hill to her house “See?”

Wolf looks the house up and down, a humble home where smoke plumes out of the roof.

“Why not?” says Wolf as the woman giggles and leads him inside. She introduces him to his room, and after a meal with her, he walks to it and falls asleep soundly.

“Wake up, wake up,” a voice says, waking Wolf. He looks for the source, his head pounding from pain. On his chest, a sparrow sits. “Her heart, her heart, aim for her heart,” it says “What?” he asks.

“Oh, no,” the sparrow says and flies away. At the entrance to his room, a white-eyed haired figure stands looking at Wolf. Its finger deformed, like a spear. Wolf tries to move but he cannot. The dinner that he ate must have hindered him.

“Hehehe, you did not notice, but I fed you raw deer meat and the chief of them cursed you to not move.” This rang true. Wolf was cursed by the true chief Little Deer. The witch approaches him with her true form on display, a ragged old woman who stands before him. Her skin looks cracked and withered, and she stands over Wolf, looming over him like a predator ready to eat its prey. Slowly walking toward him with her glowing eyes, she says, “I will feast on your liver.”

Wolf is in her home but then is immediately outside. Chanting from the forest has removed the curse on him, and a tree removes a branch and, with the help of a spider, a bow is crafted. A sparrow drops three arrows for him. “Her heart, her heart!” it cries.

Wolf hides in the brush and the witch comes out. “Come back, I’m hungry and you’re pretty good looking. I bet your liver tastes wonderful.”

He follows the voice, and when he sees the witch, he fires an arrow at her chest, but the arrow simply bounces off like a thick boar hide. With a laugh, the witch runs at him. Another bird, a chickadee says, “Her hand, her hand!” The sparrow follows with “Her heart, her heart!” Wolf realizes and dodges the witch’s oncoming attack. After a quick roll to the side, he aims his bow and arrow and shoots the witch’s right hand. She cries in pain and begins to die, her body cracking and turning into dust.

Among the rubble which was SpearFinger lies a rose. Wolf picks it up and carries it back into the garden, where it grows and brings life back to the garden. Out from the brush in the forest, the Little People approach Wolf Killer.

“We have seen your triumph over the witch, and we agree to assist you on your journey. The bow you wield was Kana’ti’s, the first of your people.” The Little People surround Wolf and

dance and chant, and after that, they bring out two stickball sticks. “These were used by the two mammals who became birds,” they say, and they attach a cardinal feather to Wolf’s spear. “This is from the sun’s daughter.” The feather burns ever brightly, and it crackles and pops like a fire

“These will assist in slaying the beast,” they say. Their final gift to Wolf was a satchel made of a wolf pelt. “This satchel will help you carry what you need to destroy the ancient evil.”

One of the Little People comes up to Wolf, who kneels to match his height. “To the south lies strawberries where She’lu wept. Collect them for the beast is weak to strong, positive emotions like that of love.”

With the advice of the Little People and their blessings, Wolf heads south from the eternal garden to where strawberries lay. He picks 70 of them and puts them into his satchel. They glow with an intense red and pulse as if they are little hearts. Wolf begins his trek back to his village, but he is stopped by seven boys who float midair.

“Wolf,” says one boy, “you are not yet prepared to face such a beast.”

Another speaks. “Your blessed items are plenty, but such a curse like The Hated One will not be weakened enough to die.”

“Then tell me ever-so-wise children,” Wolf says mocking them, “what do you propose?”

“This forest was once a village,” says a boy. “But it fell into ruin after it came.”

“What came?” asks Wolf.

“The Uktena,” says another boy.

“The Uktena?”

“Indeed, he was a fragile boy when we knew him.”

“We were his bullies.”

“For he was weak and unfit for war.”

“So he took his life down by the river.”

“There he rose once more.”

“But he changed” The boys, almost like one creature speak, finishing the other’s sentences.

“He became an enormous serpent.”

“With wings like an eagle.”

“He had four antlers on his head.”

“And in the center was a crystal.”

“Which drew anyone into it.”

“Making them its prey.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Wolf asks.

“Its crystal grants power to those who can kill it.”

“But it is too great, killing anyone who uses it.”

“Unless their cause is just, then it grants them the power of unrivaled medicine.”

“Take the crystal, and let it judge you. Then you will be prepared.”

“Where is this Uktena?” Wolf asks.

A boy points behind Wolf, his arm pale as the moonlight. Wolf looks to see where the boy is pointing, but only six pine trees stand before him. Wolf is used to the oddities that happen before he begins once more another adventure. His legs hurt from the long walks he has endured. He drinks from the rivers and eats the berries in the forest. When he nears a lake, he feels a presence. The presence lures him closer to the water, and as he peers over the edge he sees something deep in the waters beginning to rapidly come toward him. He jumps out of the way, and with a hard splash the serpent rises. The serpent's antlers, wings, and gem are on display, and it flies high above Wolf. Wolf throws the spear, and with a loud crack of thunder, a thousand bolts follow. But the serpent knows what is coming, dodging the spear almost as if it has fought a being of thunder before. Wolf pulls out his bow and arrow, but this makes him slower. Taking his eyes off the serpent is foolish, for the beast cuts Wolf as tries to dodge. The immense venom causes him to writhe in pain. He calls the spear back. He needs a plan -- and fast -- for the serpent to come once more. Wolf jumps into the water, creating a small splash, and following it comes the serpent, which causes the water to splash onto the trees surrounding it. Wolf looks to the surface where the Serpent comes to eat him like a fish. The serpent is smart but it has never fought someone here, and so Wolf causes the water to be struck by lightning, paralyzing the snake. Wolf remains unfazed, almost like he is one of the thunder beings himself. He takes his spear and jabs the eye of the serpent. He takes the spear and cuts out the gem from the serpent, which bleeds in the water and dies. Wolf takes the ever-brilliant, radiant crystal to the surface, and on the shore, as he gasps for air, he throws it but it does not crack. When he has caught his breath, Wolf goes to the crystal and peers into it. He feels as if the crystal is looking into him, reading his thoughts. Wolf can feel something grow inside him, some unknown power, and a small serpent grows on top of his head. Wolf hadn't realized the blood of the magnificent serpent is on his head and arm. On his arm a tattoo of the serpent grows, and with his new tattoo, power. He gathers his items and runs until he finally arrives back at his village. The village looks unharmed, so he goes home where his wife and children play. When he returns to his children, they look at the serpent which has wrapped itself on top of his head. They ask what happened and where he was, questions he says he will answer later as he and his wife enter their home.

"I was so worried," she says, embracing Wolf. Wolf looks upon his wife; her beauty shines ever more brightly now that the worn warrior sees her face. If his wife is not the pinnacle of beauty, then there is none.

"Well, I'm here now." Wolf and his wife embrace for a minute until she breaks the silence.

"So do you have what you need to destroy it?" she asks.

"Yes."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then prepare," she says. Wolf is not looking at his wife but he knows her voice, and that is not hers. He looks at her as her face morphs and The Hated One's uncanny grin appears. Wolf pushes his false wife away.

“She cried for mercy for her children and for her people,” The Hated One says. “They cried for you. They begged for your return, but you did not come.”

“Be quiet!” Wolf throws his spear at the beast. The bolts strike him down and the flames burn him, but he still stands. Wolf runs out of his home and sees the half-eaten corpses of his family and community. His village is dead. He falls to his knees and sobs, but the beast roars and so he gets back up and puts on the mask which was given to him. The true form of The Hated One rises from the burning home of the Wolf. It stands twenty feet tall, and when it steps out from the flames, the charred body shows the amalgamation of multiple animals at once. His human face is at his belly but he has six arms each from a different animal -- one a bear, another a deer, a possum, a spider, and he had two legs each a grotesque mimic of normal animals, one like a wolf's another like a bird's. Its mouth can eat an entire bear whole; the teeth of the beast look like a death trap of spears. It has black hair surrounding its body and it reeks of death. Its head takes the shapes of many animals, an owl, dog, cat, and others, but its face is beyond recognition. It has three eyes, one closed on its forehead or what you would call the mass. The eye sits incorrectly, vertically. The monster taunts Wolf and slams an arm against him, sending Wolf flying and coughing up blood. The bear pelt saves him from certain death, but in that pain, he puts on the mask which was given to him, and with it, he catches his breath and feels as if he is unstoppable. The beast, in the voice of thousands who suffered and were eaten by it, says, “Anyone would have gone mad by now but the great warrior still stands with his mind intact.” Wolf hides from the monster and climbs on top of a building where he aims and shoots the beast with Kana'ti's bow and arrows. The beast moans in pain and turns to face his opponent, who throws strawberries at the beast. When the fruit hits the beast, it attacks Wolf again. Wolf narrowly dodges the attack and counters with his attack of hellfire of arrows and strawberries. The beast begins to feel something it has never felt before, fear. The beast becomes wilder with its attacks, flailing about like a crying baby, hitting the Wolf back and knocking the bear pelt off him. When he looks back, the beast has jumped and is planning on crushing him. Wolf dodges the attack and shoots arrows at the beast as it lands, but the beast opens the vertical third eye and that paralyzes Wolf with a piercing sound that makes his ears bleed and an immense glow of red that comes from the eye. In the red are white circles wrapped around the iris like the rings of a tree, and the iris is a grotesque yellow. The beast smacks Wolf, sending him flying back into his burning home.

It laughs, but a crack of thunder sounds as the spear strikes the beast. After the spear's immense power and the weakening effects of the strawberries, the beast falls and bleeds. Wolf calls the spear back, and it flies back to him like a tamed eagle. With it, he stabs the beast directly in its glowing eye, and the blood that gushes out soaks Wolf in red, pushing him back with its force. The beast in its thousands of voices cries in pain, and it rears its head back, which is a cue for lightning to strike the spear, causing the beast to cry even more. The beast burns and then fades away like dust in the wind.

Wolf was weak and with nowhere to go. He lays on the ground next to his collapsing, burning home and watches the sunset, breathing his last. The sun shines on him, warming the

cold face of the dying warrior. The smoke and fire leave stiff smells in the air. Wolf sheds a single tear, for he had succeeded but failed.

## **“The Things I Do For Love” by Gabe Terrell**

“It’s too dangerous! You can’t!” Fenton heard his fiance call from behind as he began slipping his leather jacket on. They had been contacted by Ravage, and he knew it was dangerous. Almost certainly a trap. But he couldn’t risk them hurting innocents if he didn’t show... “I don’t recall assigning you as leader,” he snapped in response, placing his specialty-made mask over his jaw. “I’m not, but you know as well as me how shady this is!” Fenton quickly turned, his pupils changing to their feral state as he hissed in response. “And *you* know that we can’t pass up this opportunity if it’s true!” Penelope grabbed his shoulders, but he swiftly pulled himself away. “But it isn’t, you *know* that!” **“I can’t take that chance!”** He yelled, his other half’s gravelly voice showing itself as he did... “He’s offering a full pardon, even if we didn’t do anything wrong, we are considered the bad guys!” His wings protruded from his back, and he walked over to the window. “Then at least let me come with you!” Fenton turned his head to look at her, pulling off his mask & walking over to embrace her in a kiss... she was taken off guard, but submitted to return the show of affection to her soon-to-be husband. “You need to stay. This doesn’t involve you. They only want me. Then they’ll leave all of you alone.” He walked back to the window, Penelope trying to follow, but her legs suddenly felt weak, her body limp... “You son of a- You!” Fenton grinned as he put his mask over his mouth. “Relax, it’s just chloroform...” He jumped out the window, his wings catching the wind as he looked back through the window... “If I don’t return *cara*, take care of them for me. They will need a leader...”

It was stormy, an uncommon occurrence in Mason City, and Fenton sat on a rooftop at the agreed meeting place. It was nearly 6. They would be here soon. As he took a last, long drag from his cigarette, he heard something behind him. Manifestation... “I thought I told everyone to stay put...” Fenton looked over his shoulder, to see who he had expected, his teammate, Hayden. A shadow mutant. “You did, but after finding Psycho lying unconscious in your bedroom. I figured I had probable cause to disobey your orders.” Fenton looked away, “You figured wrong, I don’t want any of you here. I’m finishing this, once & for all.” He flicked the cigarette off the roof & stood up, walking closer and getting in Hayden’s face. “And I don’t want any of you, getting hurt in the process.” Hayden pushed him back “I don’t care what you *want*, I’m not leaving you to fight this battle alone!” “There isn’t going to be a battle! Just *LEAVE!*” Hayden suddenly changed into his black shadow form. “How can you be so sure!? These people are our worst ene-” Fenton screamed back, cutting him off. “Because I’m turning myself in!” Hayden’s eyes widened, as he watched tears streamed down his leader’s face... “What?” “You heard me,

I'm turning myself in. Giving them the only person from that damn experiment they care about! Me..." Hayden tried to put his hand on Fenton's shoulder, only to have it slapped away. "I know it's crazy, but he gave me his word. If they can have me, they'll leave all of you be... You'll be safe again, free to go back to being a teenager & living with your families!" Fenton turned his back on Hayden. "So just... Go."

## **“A Restaurant Nightmare” by Abreana Hornbuckle**

In the heart of a busy city stood a quaint little restaurant known for its traditional cuisine and charming atmosphere. However, behind its inviting exterior lurked a dark secret known only to a few.

The restaurant was run by a group of cunning and spiteful individuals who had mastered the art of deception and manipulation. Led by the mysterious Chef Roe, they were not your ordinary kitchen staff; they were a secret society that thrived on chaos and conflict.

Under the appearance of flawless service and mouth-watering dishes, the restaurant workers carried out their sinister deeds. They would tamper with orders, adding ingredients that would induce strange and unsettling effects on unsuspecting customers. One bite of their special dishes could plunge a person into a world of nightmares and hallucinations.

Despite their wicked ways, the restaurant flourished, drawing in patrons from far and wide who were drawn in by its alluring menu and exquisite presentation. Little did they know, they were stepping into a realm of darkness orchestrated by the evil minds in the kitchen.

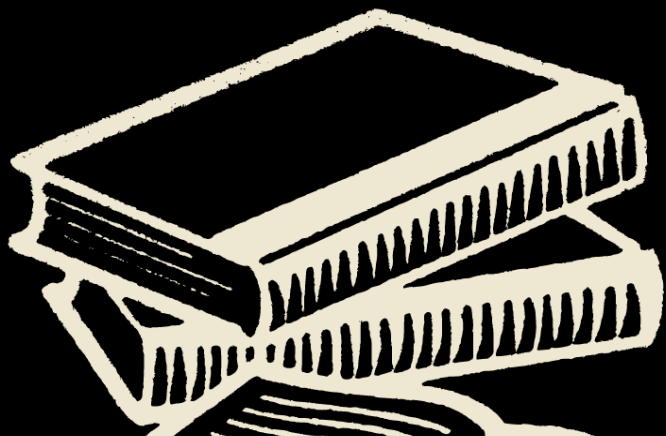
As time passed, whispers began to spread about the restaurant's eerie reputation. Stories of diners experiencing night terrors, hallucinations, and inexplicable illnesses after dining there became common tales in the city.

Yet the allure of the restaurant was too strong for some, and they continued to flock to it, ignorant of the dangers that lurked within. The restaurant workers revealed their power, relishing in the havoc they wreaked upon those who dared to enter their domain.

But every tale of darkness eventually meets its end. One fateful night, a brave investigative journalist uncovered the truth behind the restaurant's sinister operations. With evidence in hand, the authorities swooped in, shutting down the establishment and apprehending the wicked workers.

The once-charming restaurant now stood abandoned, its walls holding the echoes of the evil that had once thrived within. And as the city moved on, the story of the evil restaurant workers became a cautionary tale, a reminder of how even the most inviting places can harbor the darkest of secrets.

# ACADEMIC WRITING



Breydan Ensley  
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English IV  
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### The Cherokee Language and the Importance of Revitalization

The EBCI is the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and it is a sovereign nation. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians were once part of a much larger Cherokee Nation population. However, when the Trail of Tears was mandated, and forced removal and relocation were directed by the US government and then President Andrew Jackson, the Cherokee Tribe became divided into what is known today as the Cherokee Nation and United Kituwah Band, located in Oklahoma, and the Eastern Band. The Indian removal act changed the language in multiple ways. When the government removed us from our land and people, they would not let us speak our language. If you did, they would punish you. One of the reasons we had a decrease in our language is when they did the Indian Removal Act they would take kids to boarding schools and make them learn English and religion (“The Cherokee Language”). They would not let the native students speak their language while they were at school. If they did they would beat them (“The Cherokee Language”).

The Indian Removal Act was signed into law on May 28, 1830, which was authorized by Andrew Jackson. This law granted the government lands west of the Mississippi in exchange within the existing border for land by Native American people when our people resisted this policy. During the fall and winter of 1838 and 1839, my people were forcibly removed from our homeland (“The Cherokee Language”). Approximately 4,000 Cherokee Elders, women and children were forcibly removed. They were subjected to a cold winter without heat, food or shelter. So their parents didn’t teach them the language. Some kids that went to boarding schools in 1870 could not speak to their parents because they would keep them at the boarding schools and not let them go home.

Another reason for language loss is once again a judgment call made by the United States government. It stems from when in History the words were harshly spoken, “kill the Indian, save the child.” This began during the boarding school era. When the United States government was taking children from homes and putting them into boarding schools run state and religious boarding schools. A lot of our people were treated cruelly and inhumanly to such a degree that when they became parents to their own children, they did not want the child to suffer as they did, so they did not teach the language to their children.

Also in the early sixties Native children were put on a black market by people who worked for the federal government in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (social services). Native children were sold to non-speaking parents. People who had the money bought these children for a high price. The BIA worker would convince a Native mother into believing she could not raise

her child because of the poverty level that a single mother was in during this time. In some incidents, the mother would be told her child died during childbirth only to be sold to some total stranger. The culture and language were lost in this manner. There are so many different reasons for language loss.

Another reason for language loss was intermarriage with others who did not understand English, so the couple would have to decide if they would speak English or Cherokee. And most of the time since English is such a universal language that it was the easiest for the children to learn. So they spoke nothing but English to their children.

Why is it important for the Cherokee people to keep their language? If a Cherokee Person asks why it is important to save a language, then they are not Cherokee people in their spirit, mind, and body. A Cherokee knows the value of a language. Because they know that this language was given to us by the creator. A Cherokee knows that your language is what keeps you unique as an indigenous person, and it is instilled in you from the time of birth. Your family and history are all combined into this language web.

Another reason that regaining the language is vital is to regain our uniqueness. The Cherokee lost during this time period. There is no other language like the Cherokee language in the world. The Cherokee language is a hard language to understand. “The Cherokee people were the first to have a written language, the first to have a written constitution and the first to have their own newspaper written in their mother tongue. The syllabary and the newspaper not only advanced the Cherokees’ argument that they were indeed a civilized people but also made possible even greater achievements in that ongoing advancement of learning that characterizes a civilized people” (*Evangelism and Expulsion*. Dennis L. Peterson Pg.138).

The New Kituwah Academy came into being in the 1990’s under the leadership of Joyce Conseen Dugan. This ideology came from other native people worldwide. One example was the Hawaiians, and another was Maoris; these people were also headed into a language loss. In 2004 a preschool immersion program was opened at the Dora Reed Childcare Center. Chief Mitchell Hicks was responsible for establishing the New Kituwah Academy. A decision was made by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Nation to buy the former Boundary Tree hotel and resort to renovate for the present New Kituwah Academy. This renovation cost the tribe 6.5 million dollars. A lot of the project was funded by Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and 1.3 million dollars from grants.

If a person was blessed enough with parents who did speak the Cherokee Language, such as my grandmother, then the language lived on in children like her. She talks about how everyone in the family spoke nothing but Cherokee. Even her friends during play time or riding bikes would speak only in our language. She wasn’t allowed to speak English only when it was totally necessary. She is one of the founders for the revitalization of our Cherokee people. She is very passionate about her language. Her advice to me is that without our language we are not unique in a way that we are with the language and that losing it means losing our identity as a people. She has instilled in me to keep the fight going by having myself and my sister attend the New Kituwah Academy School. My mother also worked very hard beside my grandmother to

keep the language alive in us and to keep it going within our family. It is even more important because we lost so many fluent speakers who were wisdom keepers of the language and culture to covid, health related issues such as heart disease and cancer.

We only have one hundred and fifty-five fluent language speakers alive today. This number could change as I write my report. That is why the revitalization is very important to our tribe and why the government sees the urgency of saving the language today. I value the language because my mother worked along with my grandmother to help others learn and my grandfather is a fluent speaker as well. I know that my culture is important, and it's vital that our language is taught. I spoke as a small child and was not allowed to speak English unless I was around my other family members who could not speak Cherokee. They are the people whose parents and grandparents went to boarding schools and were not given the opportunity to learn.

The language gives you the status of being a federally recognized person. If we lose our language, then the federal government could take this recognition away from our tribal people. The language is the key to making us Cherokee. The crafts and culture add to Cherokee identity. If my people lose their language, then it entails the loss of funding from the federal government, federal grants, and programs and as well as our own identity as a people.

In conclusion, the importance of revitalizing the Cherokee language is important. It is the Cherokees' original language, and if they don't help revitalize it then they will lose the language and heritage and our identity. The Cherokee language is what gives us our identity.

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### The Importance of Physical Fitness

In today's busy world, staying active and fit is super important. Physical fitness isn't just about looking good; it's about feeling good and staying healthy. This paper will discuss why being physically fit is essential for our well-being and how it can improve our lives. Physical fitness is vital for individuals' emotional, neuro, and physical health and happiness.

Physical activity has many emotional benefits that can improve your overall health. One of the emotional benefits of exercise is lower stress levels, which can make you feel happier. According to research, "Increasing your heart rate can actually reverse stress-induced brain damage by stimulating the production of neurohormones like norepinephrine, which not only improve cognition and mood but improve thinking clouded by stressful events" (Five Mental Benefits of Exercise). Exercise also helps your central and sympathetic nervous systems communicate better, improving your body's response to stress. Scientific studies have shown that exercising regularly can help enhance one's mood and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Physical activity increases endorphins, the brain and spinal cord's production of a chemical that makes you feel happy and euphoric. Even moderate exercise over the course of a week can help improve depression and anxiety. In fact, some doctors suggest trying an exercise program for these conditions before resorting to medication.

Regular physical activity can also have a positive impact on your brain health. One of the neuro benefits of physical fitness is that it enhances cognition. In an article by Harvard Medical School, it says, "Exercise stimulates physiological changes in the body such as encouraging the production of growth factors — chemicals that affect the growth of new blood vessels in the brain, and even the abundance, survival, and overall health of new brain cells" ("Exercise Can Boost Your Memory and Thinking Skills"). Numerous studies have shown that the volume of the areas of the brain responsible for thinking and memory increases significantly in individuals who exercise compared to those who do not. Exercise also indirectly improves memory and thinking. It enhances mood and promotes better sleep while reducing stress and anxiety, both of which can cause or worsen cognitive impairment.

Now, on to the physical benefits. Physical fitness comprises Endurance, Musculoskeletal Strength, Flexibility, and Body Composition. According to research found at Cleveland Clinic, "Cardiovascular endurance, or aerobic fitness, is how well your heart and lungs can supply the oxygen you need while you exercise at medium to high intensity" (How to Improve Cardiovascular Endurance). If you have this good cardiovascular endurance, the intensity of your exercise can be higher and for more extended periods before exhaustion sets in. This can happen because good endurance allows for a more increased stream of oxygen to circulate through the body and to the brain. Strong cardiovascular endurance allows your body to move your blood efficiently so you can get more oxygen to your cells. This oxygen works like gas for a car does

and keeps the body running. Muscle strength is the ability to put out more force or lift more weight. Muscle endurance is the number of times you can lift that weight without getting tired. In a passage by Healthlink BC, it says, “Muscular strength and endurance are two important parts of your body’s ability to move, lift things, and do day-to-day activities” (Content Map Terms). Muscular strength has to do with force and weight. One example of this is how much an athlete can weightlift. This would show the athlete’s strength. Muscular endurance is about timing. For example, how long can an athlete lift their muscular strength weight before exhausting themselves? Muscle strength and endurance also contribute to bone health. Exercise that puts stress on bones stimulates bone-forming cells to activate. Another study by Harvard Health states, “That stress comes from the tugging and pushing on bone that occurs during strength training (as well as weight-bearing aerobic exercises like walking or running)” (*Strength training builds more than muscles*, 2024). This stress can lead to the development of more robust and denser bones in the body.

Flexibility is vital for injury prevention because it enables the body to move smoothly and efficiently, reducing the likelihood of strains, sprains, and other injuries. A rehabilitation and physical therapy center called STI explains that “By stretching, you can directly improve your performance. Lifting, bending, and running get a little easier when you prioritize your range of motion” (How Does Stretching Prevent Injury to Your Body, 2018). When muscles and joints are flexible, they can absorb impact and stress more effectively, minimizing the risk of overloading and damage during physical activities. Additionally, flexibility contributes to better posture and alignment, which helps distribute forces evenly across the body, preventing undue strain on specific muscles or joints. A greater range of motion provided by flexibility also allows for more controlled movements, reducing the chances of sudden twists or jerks that could lead to injury. Overall, maintaining flexibility through stretching and mobility exercises is essential for keeping the body resilient and reducing the risk of injury during both everyday movements and more strenuous activities.

Body composition “refers to the percentage of fat, bone, and muscle in your body” (Body Composition: Health, Body Fat, and More). In the context of physical fitness, body composition is an important aspect as it directly influences overall health and athletic performance. Roxana Rhodes notes that “Scientific evidence shows that a healthy body composition will increase your lifespan by reducing the risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, insulin resistance, etc., increasing energy levels, and improving self-esteem” (“Why Is Your Body Composition So Important?”, 2020).

Arguing that physical fitness is negative is challenging as it goes against what most people agree upon, that maintaining physical fitness is beneficial. However, an excessive focus on physical fitness can lead to adverse outcomes. First, obsession with physical fitness may result in the development of body dysmorphia or eating disorders, as individuals become overly obsessed with achieving a perfect body image. This obsession can lead to unhealthy behaviors, such as extreme dieting, over-exercising, or reliance on performance-enhancing substances such as steroids. Furthermore, prioritizing physical fitness above all else may lead to neglect of other

aspects of health, such as mental and emotional well-being and social relationships. This narrow focus on physical appearance and performance can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and social isolation. Moreover, extreme exercise or intense physical training can lead to injuries, chronic pain, and long-term health problems if not balanced with proper rest and recovery.

Ty Andrews, a high school track coach and a former athlete himself, completed an interview on the topic of physical fitness. Ty was first asked how many years of experience he had, either taking part in physical fitness or coaching kids in physical fitness. This question was asked in order to show his expertise in the topic. He said, “I have always been an active person, but I didn’t start sports until I was in high school. I ran XC and track, and since then, I have been an avid runner and I’ve been a coach for XC and track for about 9 years now” (Andrews, 2024). Second, he was asked, “What do you feel are the positive or negative outcomes of physical fitness on neurohealth?” His answer was, “I believe that being physically active can drastically improve our mental health. Research has shown that being active regularly increases our happiness and overall well-being both physically and mentally” (Andrews, 2024). Third, he was asked, “What do you feel are the positive or negative outcomes of physical fitness on emotional health?” His answer was, “Pretty much the same as the previous answer. Being active relieves stress and builds confidence in ourselves and our abilities. Reaching fitness goals and milestones greatly improves our emotional health” (Andrews, 2024). Next, he was asked, “What do you feel are the positive or negative outcomes of physical fitness on physical health?” He said, “Almost all physical activity is going to improve our physical health. Active people typically live longer, healthier lives than non-active people. The only negative aspect of physical activity would be the increased potential for injury if a person isn’t training properly. Even then, the benefits outweigh the risks” (Andrews, 2024). He was then asked to think about advice he would give both athletes and future coaches. He said for athletes, “Start small, focus on what you can control. Work up to meeting your goals. Not a single athlete alive won a race or set a record without training over time. Getting in shape takes time. People today are increasingly faced with instant gratification. We want to see results immediately, but working out requires us to learn how to have delayed gratification. You will see results, but it will take time, so just stick with it” (Andrews, 2024). In regard to coaches, he believes “a great coach should practice what they preach. So, a running coach needs to be running with their athletes as much as possible. A coach is also a mentor and can teach good or bad habits. As a mentor, coaches should try to teach not only good workouts and training but also healthy eating habits. I think coaches also need to keep in mind that winning comes second to having fun and fostering lifelong fitness goals in our athletes” (Andrews, 2024). Finally, Mr. Andrews was asked, “Is there any question that wasn’t asked that you feel would be important to add to the topic of this interview?” He said, “Just one thing: I’ve never met someone who regretted being physically fit” (Andrews, 2024).

In conclusion, physical fitness is important for the emotional, neuro, and physical health and happiness of individuals. Engaging in regular exercise and maintaining a balanced diet not only enhances physical strength, endurance, and flexibility but also reduces the risk of chronic

diseases such as obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Moreover, physical fitness contributes to mental health by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression while promoting cognitive function and overall happiness. By prioritizing physical fitness, individuals can lead healthier, more fulfilling lives, ensuring longevity and vitality for themselves and future generations.

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#### The Importance of Mental Health Issues in High School Athletes

High school athletes are highly decorated by their community. Many people come out to support their local high school teams, whether parents, family, or alumni, and the athletes contribute to both the social environment and athletics in their communities. Yet there has only been growth in attention to stressors and challenges faced by high school athletes in recent years, despite the attention surrounding them. Still, though, the stigma surrounding mental health issues often pushes athletes away from seeking the help they need. Due to this, many athletes tend to suffer in silence, which inhibits their ability to perform at their best, whether in athletics or the classroom. Because of these effects, awareness of mental health in high school athletes is fundamental, yet still overlooked.

Athletes can suffer from various types of mental disorders due to their sport/sports. The top three most common are anxiety, mood disorders, and eating disorders. Health Psychology Research studied the prevalence of stress amongst high school athletes. Their objectives were to determine the severity of stress due to sports, how athletes cope, if they want help, and if it seriously affects them. The method they used was a survey given to 200 student-athletes, ages 16-17, males and females, of different ethnicities, locations, and sports. The results showed that 91% of athletes experienced moderate stress, yet 27% said they experienced extreme stress and wanted but never received help. The leading causes of stress were fear of failure and self-expectations. The other top causes of stress totaled at 45% saying fear of judgment, 35% impractical self-expectations, 34% said coach pressure, and 21% said parent pressure. This study shows that not only are athletes suffering from anxiety but 182 out of 200 athletes are struggling with at least moderate anxiety. Also, it shows that 54 out of 200 athletes have suffered from extreme anxiety and have wanted help but never received it. The takeaway from this survey shows that this is a huge issue and anxiety is the number one issue faced by athletes today.

The second most common mental health issue found in athletes is mood disorders, which include depression, bipolar disorder, and substance-induced depression. Depression's age of onset is perceived to be 22, yet in recent years has been decreasing. The NCAA in their book *Mind, Body and Sport* states that "fifteen to 20 percent of the population will suffer an episode of depression in their lifetime, and it is among the most common conditions a sports psychiatrist will treat" (Stull Pg.1). Depression has become increasingly common in athletes, whether they are struggling on the court, anxiety is worsening, or an injury has them down. Symptoms include weight changes, lack or major increase in appetite, lack of enjoyment, and performance deterioration. Other common symptoms and behaviors associated with depression are loss of interest, sleep and energy issues, lack or inability to concentrate, and increased anxiety which makes you more irritable. The NCAA also states that "Males are more likely to present with anger and excessive alcohol use." This is not to say female athletes also don't struggle with substance use issues related to athletics. Depression is seen all over by any level athlete. It can influence someone's decisions whether long-term or short-term.

The third most common issue is eating disorders. Eating disorders are more common in females than males, and also more common in sports such as wrestling, gymnastics, cross country, and swimming/diving. The top features in female athletes are impaired eating and osteoporosis.

Impaired eating is the equivalent of having an unhealthy relationship with food. This is the early stages of an eating disorder. The symptoms could be restrictive eating, compulsive eating, or irregular eating patterns. The most common cause of impaired eating is dieting. Most people who diet or attempt to don't know how to do it properly and end up harming themselves more than improving. If you decide to diet, it is important to talk to your doctor and find a well-known and reliable dietician to help you. If not, poor eating habits are what can lead to osteoporosis.

What is osteoporosis and how does it affect athletes? Osteoporosis is a bone disease that causes decay and decreased bone density. Any athlete who struggles with eating disorders can easily develop osteoporosis. Eating disorders are harmful to your bones at any point in your life, yet in earlier stages, such as your teenage years, bones will not grow as dense and strong as they possibly could. The earlier an eating disorder occurs and the longer someone suffers from it, the greater the risk of osteoporosis occurring. This can affect athletes by making them more susceptible to breaking, fracturing bones, and other injuries.

What causes this and what are some of the top stressors? A big one people don't realize is coaches. Coaches are easily among the most influential people in a young athlete's life. Most coaches can make or break athletes. This is due to multiple factors, such as coaching style, playing time, and favoritism. Coaching style can hurt athletes, because some may use a totalitarian type of leadership. The Connection interviewed athletes and wrote an article "Fostering a fear-based environment: Coach behavior needs to change in high-performance sport." The article regarded how a coach can affect an athlete. This article states, "Not surprisingly, athletes said they feel physically and emotionally unsafe when their coach is overly

aggressive. They gave examples of aggressive language and its delivery — from being screamed at, to having their coach in their face yelling — and how they equated it to belittling, having their character attacked and confidence broken” (Alison Doherty, Professor of Sport Management, et al.). A totalitarian style coach may use the aggressive behaviors described above. These behaviors can cause athletes, as stated above, to feel unsafe, insecure, and uncomfortable. This can lead to developing anxiety, depression, and many other issues.

Another way coaches can affect an athlete's mental health is favoritism. The article also states, “The athletes we spoke with talked about feeling excluded and isolated due to very little interaction with their coach, or having their coach show favoritism to another athlete. They explained that being left out or overlooked makes them feel unseen and puts them at risk of falling behind. One athlete told us that their coach would never speak to them or look them in the eye. Here too, athletes feel intimidated and powerless to engage” (Doherty et al.). This suggests that coaches who have unhealthy communication and relationships with their athletes harm the athlete's mental health.

Another factor that causes athletes to feel stressed or uncomfortable in their environment is toxic teammates. Toxic teammates are players with bad attitudes who tend to drag down the whole team, or they are lazy and set the team back from meeting goals. The Enterprise Project published the article “How to deal with a toxic teammate.” This article states, “The impact on the team and larger organization can be just as devastating. A toxic team member casts a pall over the team and is a drag on the performance of each individual on the team and the whole team” (Overby). This talks about how a toxic teammate can affect the productivity of a team. This doesn't necessarily create mental health issues on its own. With a mix of unhealthy coaches and teammates, an athlete can become burnt out very easily. Frustration, unhappiness, and constant feeling of pressure caused by this can lead to anxiety. When interviewed, Kenzie Eagleman stated, “There were always a couple who had horrible attitudes that made everyone on the team miserable” (Kenzie). This shows how she and her team were negatively impacted by the attitudes of just a couple of athletes on her team. Athletes can be affected by all the people around them and their environments.

But how can we prevent burnout and mental health issues?

By creating healthier environments and having awareness of what athletes are struggling with.

Trine University published an article called “How Can Athletes Maintain Good Mental Health.” The article states multiple ways an athlete can protect and improve their mental health. Mental fatigue is important. As this lowers, it can affect an athlete's physical and mental performance, making an athlete feel worse about themselves and becoming a continuous cycle that leads to depression and anxiety. This can be caused by setting and not reaching unrealistic goals. If your goal is to become the best athlete to ever live, then you won't succeed. The article states, “Having a list of goals instead of one big end goal will increase your mental health.” (Trine). So instead of dreaming big, think realistically. When you treat your body correctly and

make sure you are taking care of yourself, even in hard stressful times, it can help with mental fatigue and your overall health.

In conclusion, mental health in high school athletics has become a recent struggle yet still is overlooked. Athletes, due to a stigma around mental health, have resorted to suffering on their own, facing depression, anxiety, and many other mental illnesses all on their own.

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### Athletes and Their Mental Health

Mental health in athletes has been a growing problem over the years, especially since sports have been growing in size. Several years ago, a study found that college athletes reported symptoms of depression at a similar rate to the general student population, which can cause bigger problems as time goes by. When it comes to athletes and their mental health, it's really important to take it seriously. Data and research show that up to 38 percent of female athletes and 22 percent of male athletes suffer from a mental illness, which can lead to stress, eating disorders, burnout, or depression and anxiety (NCAA.org). Looking at this data, it shows that athletes' mental health needs to be taken seriously and not overlooked, because the obstacles that they deal with can negatively impact their mental health.

Hardly anyone wants to talk about how so many athletes are suffering. Many of the athletes think that if they open up to anyone or tell how they feel, they'll be seen as weak or some athletes will have the edge over them, meaning other athletes will overlook them no matter how good they are. According to the article "In my feelings: Division I Student-Athlete Seeking Mental Health Support," "qualitative study found that student-athletes seek informal support for a variety of mental health issues in which they describe a fear of stigma, vulnerability, or 'weakness' as nonacceptance of professional counseling" (Sasso et al.). They tend to hide their feelings in order to protect themselves, even though it may hurt them in the long run. As long as others don't see their "weak side," they think they'll be just fine; however, letting your feelings ball up inside you can hurt you more than anything. The feeling of having no one to talk to or open up to is even more stressful and can be lonely. The more and more you keep feelings to yourself, the more it could affect you.

Many things can affect an athlete's mental health. There have been multiple cases where coaches have destroyed their own athletes' mental health. According to the article "Coaching Styles and Their Impact on Athletes," "the least effective coaching style is the authoritarian style. This style will make a coach seem controlling and strict. This has proven to cause a negative psychological impact on athletes" (Trine University). Coaches often feel the pressure to win throughout the season, sometimes even projecting their own anxiety onto their players. This can break down any player physically and mentally regardless of the situation. Once this starts happening, it basically creates a domino effect and breaks down other players as well.

Also, schoolwork can have a huge part to do with mental health, not so much the schoolwork itself but the amount of work in a short time period. The article "Athletes Should Be Given More Flexibility with Homework Deadlines" states, "Not doing homework hurts grades, which could make athletes ineligible and would lead to them not being able to participate in sports. On the other hand, if they do their homework, there is a possibility of being up to or even past midnight. Having to wake up the next morning with only five or six hours of sleep leads to

academic struggles” (Spore). Student athletes constantly have to worry about their grades and schoolwork. If they are failing or missing work, this could get in the way of playing time or they could get benched. Going to a college and having more work would be tiring and hard to maintain all of it at once. Usually, athletes get stressed when this happens because they always have practices and games, so this makes them stay up late to work on their work. Just these few things can lead to insomnia, anxiety, and can cause stress.

The amount of focus that can be taken away from an athlete is unbelievable. Athletes try very hard at their sports and their education. It’s hard to believe that more people care for how they play versus their mental state. This happens especially in higher levels of sports. Fans or anyone hardly care about their mental state. The fans continually try to break the other team down. The article “For Better or For Worse, Fan Behavior Impacts Athletes” states, “Cases where negative fan behavior has driven some athletes to perform less than their best...or perhaps even knock them completely out of the competition” (Association for Applied Sports Psychology).

Another huge topic with things affecting your mental health is social media. Social media can possibly increase depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts. This is the main problem because no one can really stop bullying online. The article “The Impact of Social Media on the Mental Health” states, “Social media is often a tool used for procrastination and escape, and many student athletes felt it had a negative impact on them” (Brougham). When it gets to the point where athletes or anyone in general sees things about them, it can really affect them and they start thinking about what people think about them. The more and more this happens, the more thoughts come to your mind and start affecting your mental health.

Studies have shown a relationship between nutrition and mental health. The article “Could a declining sports performance be nutrition related?” states, “Good nutrition is essential in order to enhance athletic performance both on and off the field” (Frey). Busy schedules and hardly any rest time make it more prone to student athletes having more health issues than the rest of the population; however, some athletes aren’t fully aware of the effects nutrition can have on their mental health. Evidence shows that a long-term, balanced diet is key to good brain function and mental health. More college athletic programs are hiring dietitians and psychologists because of this. Many athletes in the United States aren’t aware of this situation and think nutrition is one of the last things they have to worry about.

Student athletes are held to way higher standards than just regular students. On top of trying to maintain good grades, they have to play and give one hundred percent at all times. According to the NCAA, “anxiety disorders are among the most common psychiatric problems in student athletes” (NCAA.org). Athletes tend to get nervous before games but sometimes it may lead to things such as anxiety attacks and can take a while before they calm down. People say “they’re just games” but they cause so much stress and anxiety that it causes many disorders and illnesses.

When it comes to athletes and their low self-esteem, a low opinion of themselves can really affect them and how their game is. Having confidence improves decision making and can

lead to better performance. The article “Emotion Management Training for Athletes” states, “Emotions can significantly impact performance by altering physiological and attentional states in a way that may enhance or harm an athlete’s ability” (Emotion Management Training for Athletes). Most athletes bring themselves down and don’t even realize it. They say negative things in their head that make them feel awful about themselves, which can lead to making even more mistakes.

When an athlete has a bad attitude because of their mental state, it can also affect their teammates or coaches. The article “What To Do When Your Most Talented Player Has The Worst Attitude” discusses the effect of a coach's viewpoint on a player's bad attitude and describes it as “draining.” It also mentions different reasons why players can have a bad attitude. It says, “There are a myriad of things that could be causing a player to have a bad attitude: Problems at home with family member; Issues with school; A girlfriend or boyfriend break up; Trouble with authority figures” (“What to Do When Your Most Talented Player Has the Worst Attitude”).

Family issues have become very common, especially among athletes. According to “Family contributions to sports performance and their utility in predicting appropriate referrals to mental health optimization programmes,” family issues can cause “poor relationship and lack of support, general pressure, pressure to quit or continue unsafely, embarrassing comments, and negative attitude” (Hussey et al.). Every one of these things can hurt the player and their performance. It can cause numerous mental health issues, like “depression, anxiety, and drug and alcohol use” (Hussey et al.). It also may affect their teammates and their mental health.

Having an injury can affect mental health issues as well. The article “Mind, Body and Sport: How being injured affects mental health” says having an injury could “trigger or unmask” mental health issues (Putukian). For some student athletes, the psychological response to injury can trigger serious mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance use or abuse. There are also emotional reactions to injuries, such as sadness, isolation, anger, frustration, and much more. One example is an athlete is injured so they feel as if they don’t deserve to eat and it eventually turns into an eating disorder. When an Olympic skier sustained a leg and knee injury, she battled with depression. In an interview with the NCAA, she says, “I went all the way to rock bottom. I never thought I would ever experience anything like that in my life. It was a combination of the atrophying of my legs, the new scars, and feeling like a caged animal” (Putukian). It wasn’t just her injury that she had to deal with, but it was also her mental state. When she talks about feeling like an animal in a cage, she feels lonely and in isolation, basically like she has no one.

The athlete's performance can be affected by mental health as well. Studies have shown that sometimes a change in an athlete's mental state may result in poor scoring or performance. The article “How Athletes Can Maintain Good Mental Health” states, “Sports mental IQ can be half the battle when it comes to succeeding. Having proper mental health can help the player make quicker and clearer decisions while having mental health issues can cause the player to react slower to decisions and make decisions that may lead to undesired player performance”

(“How Athletes Can Maintain Good Mental Health”). Other times a distracted mind can cause you to lose focus and could possibly be dangerous. According to a sports psychologist Dr. Sacco, all athletes deserve and need time to sort these things out, even if it means sitting out for a little while. Even if you may not want to sit out because of a big game or just want to play, it would be better to take time for yourself and get better than risking your health and not being able to play your best.

There are multiple strategies to help your mental health. In the book *Heads Up: Changing Minds on Mental Health* there are numerous treatment services that go along with recovery. It also suggests that “belonging in their community or being able to pursue work and personal interests” or for others it can be “freedom from psychiatric labels and treatments” that could help them. The first one is to make sleep a priority. Sleep can help facilitate the brain’s processing of emotional information. While you’re sleeping, the brain works to evaluate and remember your thoughts and memories. Lack of sleep can be especially harmful to the consolidation of positive emotions. This can influence your mood and emotional activity and is also tied to mental health disorders and how severe they can get.

The second strategy is setting goals and priorities. Setting goals is an effective way to increase your motivation and help create the changes you want. It can be used to improve your health and relationships or improve productivity at work. Having things to do can also get your mind off everything else in your life that can be bringing you down. It can also help you recover from a mental illness and not just prevent one.

The third strategy is staying connected or just having someone to share things with. Research shows people who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression. Studies have also shown that they have higher self-esteem, greater empathy for others, and are more trusting and cooperative. Others around them are also more open to them and trusting as well. The more interactions we have and the more we share can help so much, even if it's something from our personal lives.

The fourth strategy is trying to surround yourself with good people. Athletes are usually in really hostile environments, especially when it comes to coaches and wanting to always win. When being in environments like this, it can really bring you down, but when having good people around you, research shows that it can improve your physical and emotional well-being. It also shows better problem skills and enhanced brain fitness which can help improve your game on the court.

The fifth and last strategy is to remember why you started. So many athletes fall out of love with their sport, but they continue playing just because they’ve been playing so long or are forced to keep playing. This can really take a huge toll on their mental state. Most of them continue playing just because they’ve been playing for so long and just don’t want to let it go, but at the same time the pressure and your emotions get built up to the point it’s hard to take. Playing a sport you don’t love anymore is super exhausting. The more you’re forced to do it, the less you love it.

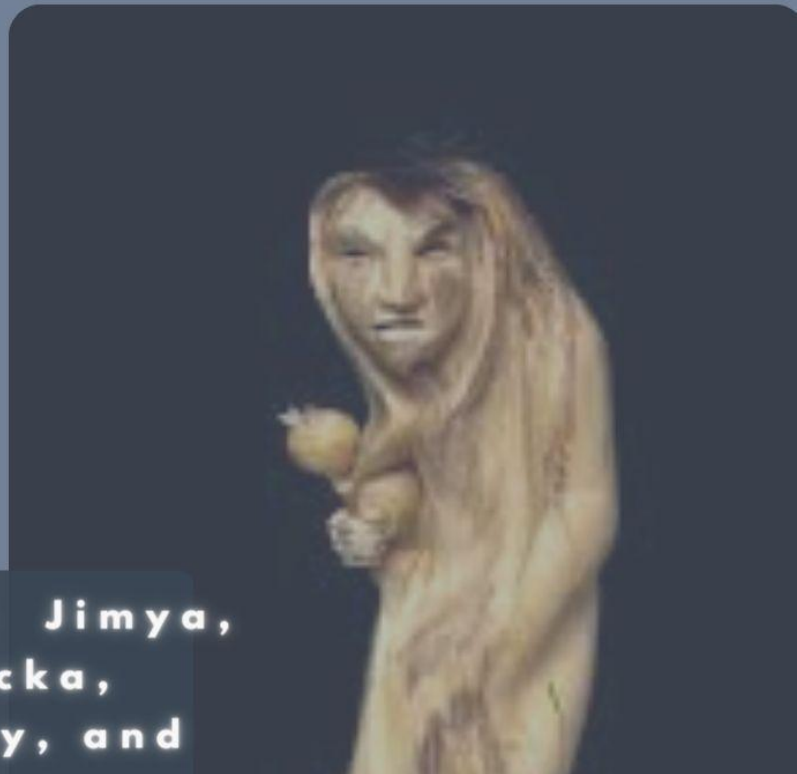
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# ART



Edited: Jimya,  
Ericka,  
Bayley, and

Jenna Cruz

Sunset



## Gabe Crowe

(Tsi sgwa A na tli A gv sdu lo) Bird Warrior Mask



# Gabe Crowe

(Yvn sha Di gv sdu lo) Buffalo Mask



# Gabe Crowe

(Yvn sha Di gv sdu lo) Buffalo Mask



# Madison Ledford

Hawaii Byodo-In-Temple



Madison Ledford  
Hawaii



# Jimya Driver

4x5 White Oak Basket



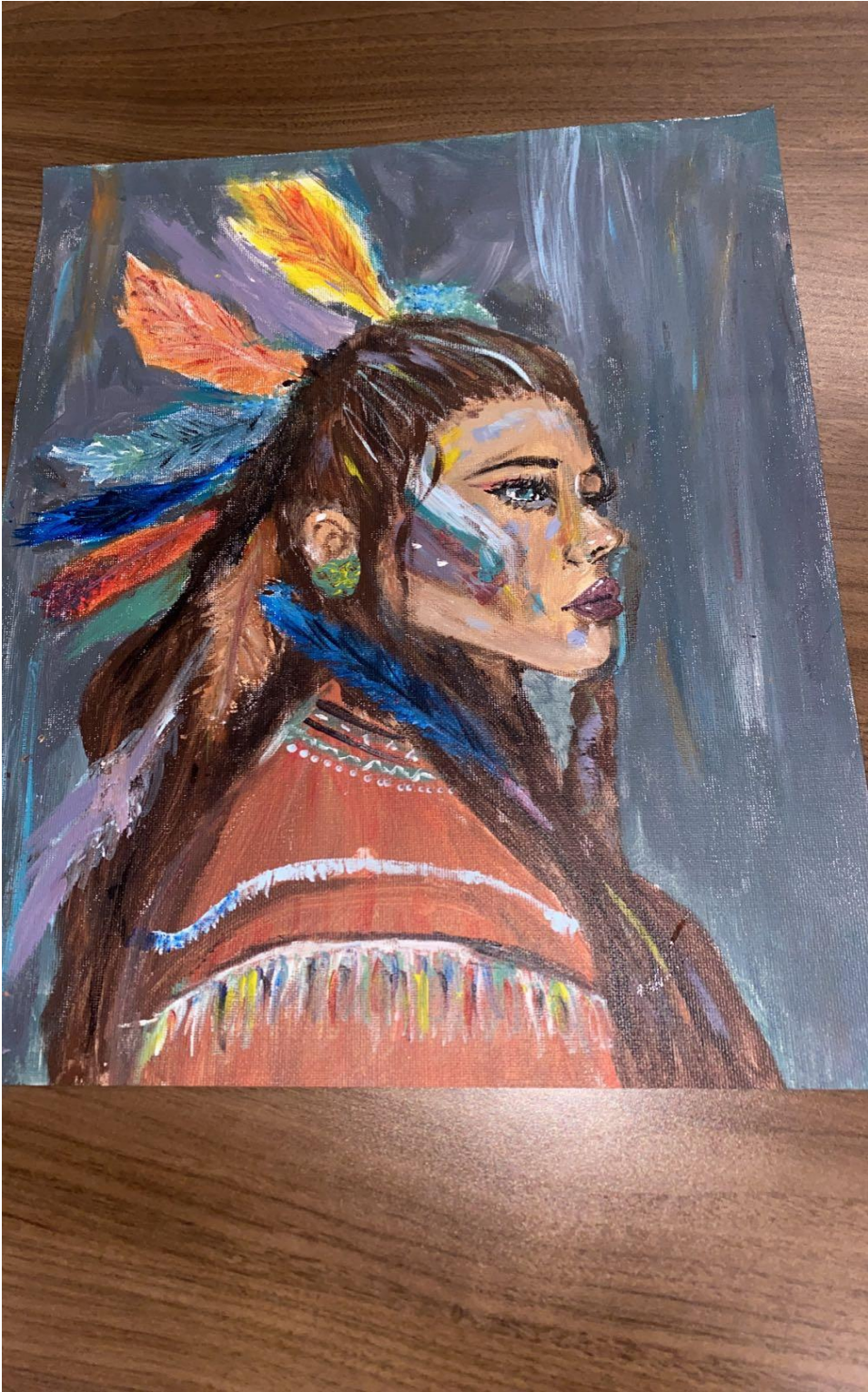
# Jimya Driver

4x7 White Oak Basket



Bayley Wright

Fancy Dancer Painting



Ericka Brady

Paper Basket



Ericka Brady  
White Oak Basket



# Tahlaya “Nyree” Thompson

ArtWork



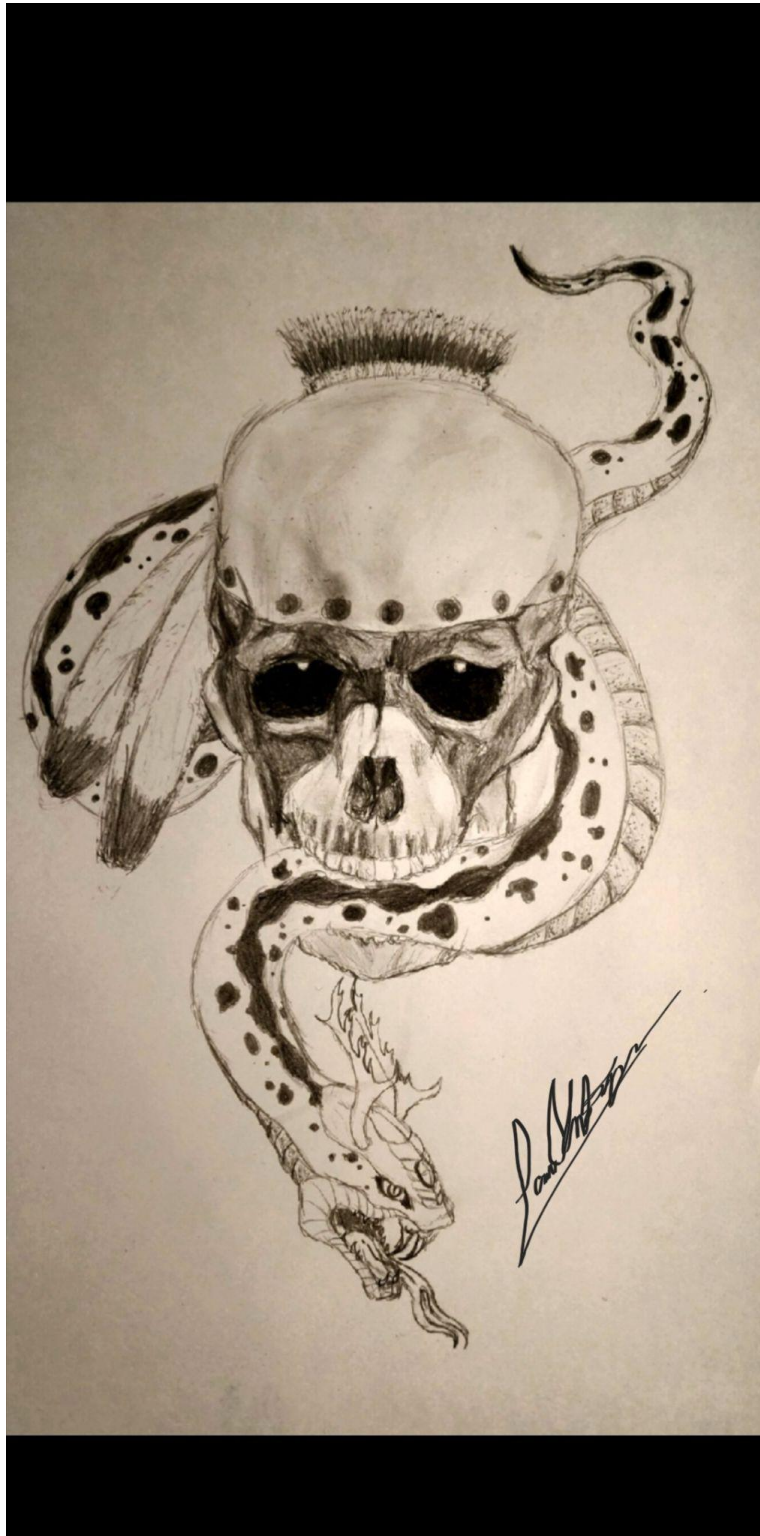
# Mason Salazar

Wood Carving Masks



# Luke Climbingbear

Artwork



# Jimya Driver

Purple Flowers



# Bayley Wright

Snowball Bush



# Carys Holiday

Himeji Castle



# Carys Holiday

Fushimi Inari Shrine



# Carys Holiday

Jellyfish



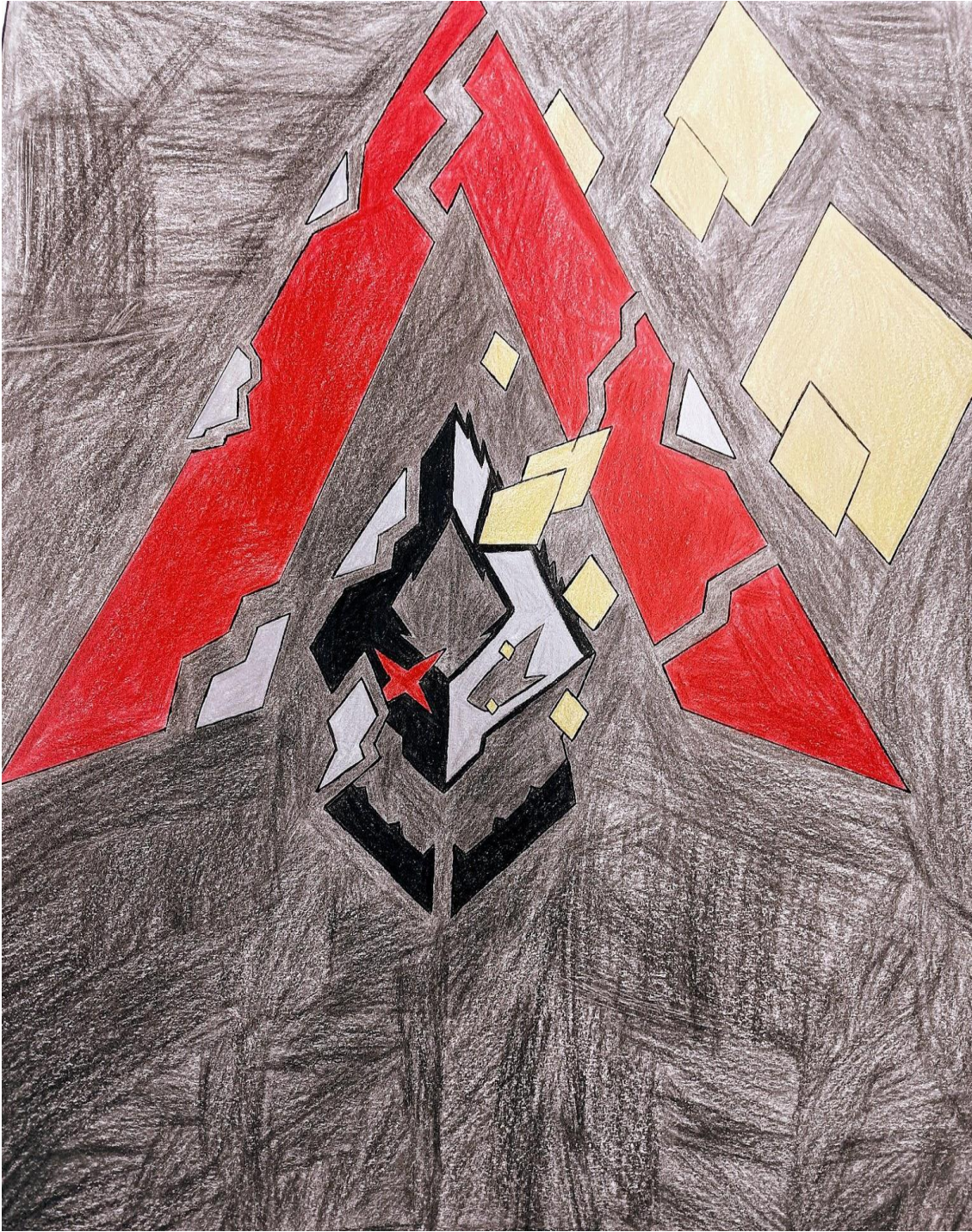
Ericka Brady

Finger Weaved Keychain



Ezequiel Martinez

Artwork



Janna Girty  
Baskets





# Words from the Authors

*Christian Alfaro*

Hello! My name is Christian Alfaro. I enjoy reading and writing as you can see from my fiction story “The Burning Sycamore.” I am heading to Western Carolina University to major in history and hopefully seek a job that I will enjoy. I also plan to keep writing stories and make a novel or two while in college. I am Cherokee, and my clan is Wild Potato clan. My clan is mostly known for our gardening skills. One of my favorite pieces of literature is *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy.

*Aizen Bell*

My name is AB, and I am in 12th grade at Cherokee High School. I like to write because it’s a way to vent and talk about how I’m feeling. My plans for the future are to attend college at Mars Hill and to run cross country and track there. I also want to get my master’s degree in business administration and get a coaching license for high school track and cross country.

*Ericka Brady*

My name is Ericka Brady, and I am a senior at Cherokee High School. I am an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, and my clan is the Bird Clan. Additionally, I have Pawnee, Ponca, Omaha, and Iowa heritage from Oklahoma. I am skilled in various Cherokee crafts, but my favorite activities are finger weaving and beadwork. I have recently taken up basket-making, as seen by my submission. My future plans involve becoming a teacher to inspire children who, like me, feel unsupported by their teachers.

*Ila Brinkmeyer*

My name is Ila Brinkmeyer, and I am in the 11th grade at Cherokee High School. I enjoy writing and most forms of art. You can tell in my elegy in the lit journal that I use writing as a way to express emotions and events that have happened in my life. I enjoy writing because it's an outlet for my thoughts and a way to express myself in a healthy way. I also like art because being creative, I think, is one of the greatest joys of being human, and, if you're not creating, what are you doing? Because I am a creative person, I intend to go into cosmetology and do that as a career for my future. I plan to eventually have my own salon and be a business owner. I think having my own business, especially in a field of work that is going to be something I enjoy, will be good for me. I want to own a house and live organically with a greenhouse and cats. I want a simple, peaceful, fun, and expressive life!

*Letsi Burgos Delgado*

My name is Letsi Burgos Delgado, and I am in 12th grade at Cherokee High School. I like writing because it allows me to write stuff down when I feel sad or angry, because I can write things down even when I'm not able to talk to anyone. My plans for the future are to go to college to study physical therapy. I also want to travel to places like Bali and New Zealand.

*Luke Climbingbear*

My name is Luke Climbingbear, and I aspire to be a devoted Christian, athlete, and artist. I am a part of the EBCI and Kiowa tribe, and I'm a part of the Bird Clan. I am in 12th grade at Cherokee High School, where I get to enjoy creative writing as well as drawing. I've always liked drawing, and that's why I made a picture for the literary journal. I decided to continue drawing because often it's a peaceful pastime, and I feel that God would want me to expand my talents. I plan on going to college to play football and major in kinesiology and exercise science. Like most football players, I want to pursue football to the NFL or on other professional levels, but I also plan to become a personal trainer/coach.

*Jayle Creson*

My name is Jayle Creson, and I am in 12th grade at Cherokee High School. I love to write poetry; it helps me express myself in many ways. Poetry also helps me get through hard things that are harder to say out loud when I could just write about them. My plan for the future is to attend Southwestern Community College for dental assisting. Once I am done with dental assisting, I will be able to have a job at a dental office. Soon after, I plan to transfer colleges to become a dentist or orthodontist.

*Gabe Crowe*

My name is Gabe Crowe, and I'm a senior at Cherokee High School. I love carving masks because it's a way to bring your creative thoughts to life, allowing you to form your own style of art. My future plans are to buy a shop where I can sell out of and work out of with masks or carvings.

*Jenna Cruz*

My name is Jenna Cruz. I am in the 12th grade and attend Cherokee High School. In my free time, I enjoy playing softball, hanging out with my friends, and riding around. For my submission, I sent a photo of the Blue Ridge Parkway. I got this image when riding the parkway with my friends. As for the future, I plan on attending Lees-McRae College and pursuing a career in forensic psychology. This is something I have always been interested in and am excited about what the future holds for me!

*Alexis Davis*

My name is Alexis Davis and I am a junior at Cherokee High School. I have lived in Cherokee all of my life, and I am a part of the Long Hair Clan. I mainly like to create research papers, which is why I put my research paper about athlete's mental health in the literary journal. I enjoy writing research papers because I like to learn things that I never knew before or getting to dive deeper into a topic I find interesting. For the future, I plan on attending college, and I haven't decided on a major yet.

*Jimya Driver*

My name is Jimya Driver, and I am in the 12th grade at Cherokee High School. I enjoy creating baskets, daisy chains, and photography. I enjoy creating arts and crafts because it gives me a sense of accomplishment once I finish my project. My plan after high school is to go to college in the spring. I would like to get a degree in dancing and study psychology. In the meantime, I will be working to save up money before going to college.

*Gideon Freeman*

Hello! My name is Gideon Freeman, and I am a junior at Cherokee High School. I like putting ideas down and seeing what sticks, and I just like doing stuff in general. In my free time, I play video games and watch stuff. I plan to go to Chapel Hill when I graduate in 2025.

*Janna Girty*

Shiyo! My name is Janna Girty. I am from Cherokee, North Carolina, and am a senior at Cherokee High School. I enjoy weaving baskets and making paper baskets. I made my first basket in the 3rd grade at Cherokee Culture School, and I would continue to take basket classes to better my craft. Basketry runs in my family from my great grandmother Lillian Shell Lossiah. I plan to continue my craft and soon be able to learn how to gather my materials for my baskets and to become a basket maker and not just a weaver. Sgi!

*Carys Holiday*

Hello! My name is Carys Holiday, and I'm in 12th grade at Cherokee High School. I like to do photography and poetry, and you can see that in my poem "To Once I Was" and my photo submissions, which are all in this journal. I like to create because it brings me great pleasure to know that other people enjoy art as much as I do. Let's take one of my favorite things, for example: music. It's something that almost anyone can make and enjoy, and has an endless variety as well. Likewise, photography has an endless amount of styles. This is one of the many reasons I like to do photography; there are an endless amount of ways to do it, and no one can tell right from wrong because it's an expression of self. From the editing to the subject of the photo, there's always something for someone. Another reason of mine is simply just that I like to take pictures of things and make them look pretty through my photography. Similar to photography, there's poetry. I like poetry because it's everywhere. Music is a great example of this, particularly rap music. Poetry is like photography in a way, acting as a way for people to see

what they can't and feel when they are numb, meaning it can create vivid images or deep emotions in one's mind. For the future, I plan on completing a summer internship with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In the fall, I will be attending Portland State University and majoring in Environmental Science.

*Abreana Hornbuckle*

My name is Abre Hornbuckle, and I am in 11th grade at Cherokee High School. I like to read and make stories for my siblings to read so I thought this was a great opportunity to put a short story I wrote out there. My plans for the future are to go to college to become an English teacher and help students the way my teachers have.

*Madison Ledford*

My name is Madison Ledford, and I am currently a senior at Cherokee High School. I was born and raised in Cherokee and have lived here my whole life. I like to create photography, so I submitted a picture to the literacy journal. I enjoy photography because it is so unique and beautiful. For the future, I plan to go to college for business. After college, I plan to come back to Cherokee and work for my tribe.

*Alexzaya Lossie*

My name is Alexzaya Lossie. I am a senior, and I like to create poems because of the way you can interpret words and other things to show emotions you can't get out verbally. It also helps me get in touch with my imagination. Writing short stories or even songs brings me great joy, and I'm fascinated with writing. My plans for the future are for me to get a job and work until I start psychology classes in the next few years. I think I'll be around Cherokee, just traveling a lot.

*Ezequiel Martinez*

My name is Ezequiel Martinez and I'm in 12th grade at Cherokee High School. I like writing fiction stories even though I'm not that great, but I'll still try. I want to make a manga and hope it goes somewhere because I want to see if I have what it takes to be a manga writer. I may not know how to write a good fiction story but I'll learn as I continue to make my manga, and I'll do my best to make it a great story that everyone will enjoy. For what my future holds, well, I'm going to college to study welding but I hope I can go on to study engineering in the future. After college, I'm not sure what I'll be doing. Maybe I'll have more time to work on my manga and do some woodcarving as well as learn blacksmithing. Only time will tell.

*Dalaina Mills*

My name is Dalaina Mills, and I am in the 12th grade at Cherokee High School. I like wood carving. I enjoy woodcarving because it's like a form of therapy, and, when I am finished, I am left with a piece of art that I get to gift to a loved one. In the future, I plan to go to college and major in psychology.

*Vincent Owle*

My name is Vincent Owle, and I am in 11th grade at Cherokee High School. I have lived in Cherokee all my life and am a part of the Blue Clan. I like to write poetry because it's an easy way to express myself or talk about something meaningful to me. I hope to start a business eventually but I'm not set on anything yet.

*Victoria Palmer*

My name is Victoria Palmer, and I am a Senior at Cherokee High School. I like to create academic writing, and you can see that in my writing piece called "The Importance of Physical Fitness," which is in this literary journal. I enjoy creating academic writing because it allows me to research about a topic, which is also something I love to do. For the future, I plan to get into a program called ACE. At ACE, I will be able to travel but also do work for the park service and environment. I live in Whittier, North Carolina, and I have been here for almost 2 years.

*Makenzie Rattler*

My name is Makenzie Rattler. I am in 12th grade. I was born in Sylva, North Carolina, and currently live in Cherokee. I enjoy writing poetry because it's a healthy way for me to express my emotions and get them out. For the future, I plan to go to Western Carolina University and do general education. I also plan to get my welding certificate at some point to help get a house before getting old.

*Mason Salazar*

My name is Mason Salazar, and I am a senior at Cherokee High School. I really enjoy wood carving and hope to do more with that in the future.

*Gabriel Terrell*

My name is Gabriel Terrell, and I am in the 12th grade at Cherokee High School. In my free time, I like to write original short stories for worlds I create. This can be seen in this short piece I've published, "The Things I Do for Love," which takes place in my personal universe of "The Life They Never Chose." Only three of the characters appear in the short story, but at least nine are already written and completely finished. The universe centers around a group of teens who were taken as children and changed by force into mutants. Now, they're on the run. In the future, I plan to attend college in order to become an actor or pharmaceutical scientist.

*Izabella Terrell*

My name is Izabella Terrell, and I am in 10th grade at Cherokee High School. I love to draw, write, and paint. My plans for the future are going to an art and animation school or medical school.

*Tahlaya “Nyree” Thompson*

My name is Tahlaya “Nyree” Thompson, and I am in the 12th grade. I am a part of the Blue Clan and live in the Yellow Hill Community, and I enjoy creating art. I have submitted some of my artwork in the literary journal in hopes of people liking it. I enjoy making art because I think art tells a much better story than words ever could, and it's also just something I do when I get bored. For the future, I’m going to Southwestern Community College for fine arts. I plan on becoming a tattoo artist in my community because there's not so many and that is another job opportunity for me. My backup plan is to go to Nascar Technical institute and become a mechanic and maybe even join a pit crew while I'm there.

*Coco Wells*

My name is Coco Wells, and I am in 12th grade at Cherokee High School. I like to write academic writing such as “ The Importance of Mental Health Issues in High School Athletes,” which is in this literary journal. I enjoy academic writing because, depending on the topic, it can bring awareness to issues. For the future, I plan to take a gap year before pursuing pre-med at WNC to become an esthetician.

*Bayley Wright*

My name is Bayley Mckenna Wright. I am from the Wolfstown Community and live on Old Soco Road. I am ¼ of Cherokee and have lived in Cherokee my whole life. I am eighteen years old and in 12th grade, getting ready to graduate from Cherokee High School. I love to create short stories, especially romance ones. I also love art; my favorite type of art is painting and drawing. I like to paint/draw people (I’m still learning how to draw a whole figure). The reason why I love to create art and short stories is because you can be creative and express yourself without actually saying how you feel out loud. My plans for after I graduate is to go to Mars Hill University in the fall. I plan on majoring in business and something with art. I want to be an event planner, which is why I am majoring in business. I can squeeze in my creativity of art into my business, like making my own decorations. I haven’t planned my full life yet after or during college, but I am hoping to start a family of my own and build a simple house (I’ve already come up with the design for my house).

# Credits

## *Editors for Poetry:*

Jayle Creson, Coco Wells, Ila Brinkmeyer

## *Editors for Short Stories: Fiction*

Gabriel Terrell, Christian Alfaro, Gideon Freeman, Victoria Palmer

## *Editors for Short Stories: Nonfiction*

Makenzie Rattler, Vincent Owle, Nyree Thompson

## *Editor for Academic Writing:*

Faith Dillard Brooks

## *Editors for Art*

Jimya Driver, Bayley Wright, Ericka Brady, Carys Holiday

## *Designers*

Luke Climbingbear, Laura Martinez, Janna Girty

## *Advertising*

Alexis Davis, Dalaina Mills, Jenna Cruz, Madison Ledford, Ezequiel Martinez, Chris Wilmoth and his Broadcasting class

## *Faculty Supervisor*

Faith Dillard Brooks





