

STŘEDNÍ ŠKOLA  
DESIGNU A UMĚNÍ,  
KNIŽNÍ KULTURY  
A EKONOMIKY  
NÁHORNÍ

# WHERE VISUAL ARTS MEET CREATIVE WRITING

ENGLISH  
SHORT STORY CONTEST  
2024/2025





Dear Reader,

We are delighted to present to you a collection of fourteen short stories that will take you on a profound emotional and philosophical journey between the ocean and the forest, into the world of a majestic whale and an abandoned excavator.

Inspired by two artworks of our students, these tales explore themes of childhood nostalgia, the search for meaning in a world that often feels meaningless, from meditation on the fleeting nature of time to a playful tale of Christmas ornaments or philosophical discussions on illusion and reality.

So dive in, dear Reader, and prepare to be surprised, delighted, amused and perhaps a bit moved by these creative excavations of the soul.

The collection will show you that magic and beauty can be found even in the most unlikely places.

Happy reading!

Your English teachers



Lucie Procházková, 1. A1

# I cry for my childhood

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Kateřina Pařtiková, 4. A1

Constantly. I came home to my parents, my little universe I've grown up in, and under the influence of expensive wine, I saw clips of my younger self.

Played on the old cassettes, flashes of me started to run across the screen. My bangs grew way too long, wore dresses I don't remember, and smiles that had long since faded away. For some time now, I've carried a tight uncomfortable feeling in the pockets of my oversized jackets.

I hold on to it because I can't seem to find a place to put it down. I hold it firmly with my hands, dragging my fingernails along its soft edges. Afraid that if I pull it out, I'll see it.

I'm hiding even now, like a coward. Even though I know. At the bottom of my wine glass with a beautiful engraved flower on the side, I found out.

It's the childhood I drag behind me like a dead body. It brings tears to my eyes, the kind that I can't seem to shed. In the waves of the sea I visited ten years ago, I saw a glimpse of myself. It felt like visiting a friend you forgot about or a family member that you never really knew.

But then I saw her eyes. I felt our connection tighten and wondered if she would feel the same way when seeing me. I only wish to hug her, embrace her, and give her all of my warmth. In comparison, I felt like a faded copy, a cheap margarita next to a top-notch cosmopolitan, a simple duplicate made just for the satisfaction of being.

But her. She was a giant glorious whale seen just for a second above the ocean before disappearing into the deep waters of my memories.

I'll hold on to that sight forever. I may be a mild version of her glory, an angel next to a God, still I carry her like a fool does a blind faith, deep inside myself. But not in my heart – in my soul.

Sometimes she travels to my eyes, and that's when the world gets brighter. I can tell those moments quite easily. The way my smile appears with the first snow or when stray cats let me pet their soft fur. When the sun runs across tree leaves or while picking wild blueberries, sitting on soft moss.

I cry for my childhood.

Often. But no matter how many of hot salty tears escape my eyes, time cannot be stopped.

Can it?

# The Whale Of Time

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Patrik Šesták, 2. B

In a place above our time and space, outside of the hustle and bustle of everyday life, where there is no lie and no truth, no stars, no planets, no galaxies, completely out of touch, flows a giant peculiar creature. The Whale of Time.

Now, you may remember the well-known idiom: “To have a whale of a time,” people say when enjoying themselves. You wouldn’t be too far from the truth, actually. Our Whale of Time is, in fact, having a whale of time all the time. Except this creature is an actual whale. It enjoys its life as a powerful and majestic loner. It swims outside of the very fabric of reality, outside the seconds, hours, and years humans have created.

It guards the sacred time flow while keeping the time going forward by swimming with it.

The Whale of Time. The mighty giant moves slowly and steadily, never forgetting what happened in the past and always knowing the outcomes of the future. It’s neither good nor bad, neither takes life nor creates it. It simply is. Was. And will be for all of eternity.

One day, sentient beings appeared on a planet. Compared to the rest of the universe they were strongly insignificant of course, but the humans still found a way to do some significant damage. They became intelligent, they developed speech, opinions, politics, and culture. As the time went on, humans got ungrateful. They started to complain to the Whale, when things got tough, when times got rough. Their ire and misery transformed into words, and words have power, sometimes more power than actions. So the voices of unsatisfied people, the words of hatred and envy, the murmur of jealousy started piling up bit by bit. And as time went by and the Whale flowed with it, the pile of pure hatred transformed into a sharp blade. And this blade cut the Whale, it wounded it, scratched it, and tore it apart. But the Whale still moved forward, not showing any pain or complaining whatsoever for what, at least to the people, felt like forever.

So there the Whale swam, in its opalescent sea full of nothing but dedication, with its strong yet fragile body scarred from head to fins by human ignorance.

It’s not like the Whale had a choice, right? But what if it did? What if, for once, the Whale did something selfish like people have been doing for centuries? What if the embodiment of time itself broke the flow of time? What if it chose itself?

So the Whale waved its fins rapidly, breaking the chains of its being, and elegantly jumped and broke through the tunnel of time flow, crushing the walls resembling its imprisoned and tortured self by human words. What happened next? Did time cease to exist and all life with it? This question shall remain unanswered, as it’s the kind of question only humans would ever care about. Let’s answer this instead: what happened to the Whale?

The sea creature that was once the mighty guardian and keeper of something so sacred like time broke out, glowing shatters of reality's fabric separating the true world flying all around as the Whale understood for the first time what it means to taste freedom.

Finally, it felt what it meant to not be responsible, to not be dishonored. The majestic ocean giant was suddenly nowhere to be seen, seemingly disappearing from existence. Fortunately, if the unbiased observer took a closer look, they would see a small fish. A puny animal wandering around the shimmering stars, powerless, but free, insignificant, but free, small, but finally free.

The Whale of Time.

## While Whales Wail

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Barbora Fischerová, 4. B

Every other morning before dawn, the rustling and hushed whispering of my brothers and father preparing to go down to the harbour would wake me up. While they do try to walk on their tiptoes and not let the kitchen utensils clink too much, I've grown accustomed to this regime. When they would leave, I'd prepare some breakfast for me and Ma because she could not be woken even if they played a knight tournament with our pots and pans.

They don't bring me along anymore and although I'm still quite young, I can't recall the day they stopped. I don't cry or demand to go with them; I don't despise staying at home with Ma and helping her with housekeeping because she does not push me around and flash her big muscles.

Although my brothers sometimes do that and neither Mum's nor Father's soft voices reach through their thick skulls, we still spend time together. Nick, the oldest one of us, sometimes stays with me in my room and he writes poems on my disregarded paintings. He makes those failed papers more worthy every time. But when it comes to the harbour and our whaler, they all turn into different people. Then Father knows how to get my brothers in line and have them not fool around. And Nick doesn't want to see my pieces, he "has a lot to do".

Not Mum. She always keeps her voice soft no matter the place or time and she always pats my shoulder when I show her my new painting.

The noise and hard, dirty work that pulled Father in pushed me away into the calmness and quiet of our house. And despite our mutual inability to understand each other's world, he gets me new watercolours for my birthdays as long as I help old Rog and his shop at the harbour.

That morning I woke up to whisper in my ear and gentle shaking. If it wasn't for the candle he must have placed on the bedside table, I never would have recognised Father's face in the darkness. Arrhythmic snoring drifted through the room but before I could ask anything, Father covered my mouth and told me to bring my painting kit if I'd like.

Without any answers to my wonders I moved through the house like a mouse and got ready for the day like I watched my brothers do on normal days. In the kitchen I received a small lunch sack and then we were on our way.

Father whistled an unfamiliar melody and I chose to listen rather than disrupt him. While my curiosity nagged at me to find out why he chose to bring only me (someone who could never do the work of my three brothers), I preferred this new relaxed company. This felt exclusive, like a secret between us two.

To my surprise we passed the whaler without a spared glance – Father would usually talk about the ship more than about Mum as she liked to tease. It towered over all the ships and boats in the harbour like a looming storm cloud: dark grey and growling.

Instead, we stopped by a cutter I recalled from the many conversations Father had with our neighbour. A complete opposite of the ship Father must've known like the back of his hand but we sailed before the sky could even hint at the upcoming morning.

With me by his side making sure we stay on course we soon found ourselves surrounded by nothing but the stretching body of water.

“What about the whaler?”

“Mr Torrens and the boys have it covered, don't you worry.”

The cutter rocked on the restless surface, the smell of salt filled my nose and a faint breeze glided along the sails. They cracked and the beams creaked while the sky began lighting up like pigment getting diluted by water.

Wordless, we sat next to each other and watched the horizon change colours as the sun peeked at the world.

“The sky seemed promising the last few days,” Father said, watching over the melted gold we floated on. “I, uh, thought you might find this... inspirational.”

Around us swam large bodies of Father's prey but this time he sat still and instead watched my brush trace their outlines on my paper.

## Whale Fall

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Nina Marcinová, 4. A2

There once was a large blue whale.

It roamed the oceans, gliding gracefully, spending its nights and days singing the most beautiful harmonies with its whale friends. It lived and it was free. Years passed like this, not a worry in its mind, all was at peace. It knew where it belonged.

It grew old, as all things do, and one day it swam up to the surface for the last time and peacefully passed from this life.

As time went by, the body of the gentle giant began to sink.

It drifted down as slowly and gracefully as it once swam, and all the little fish scurried away from its long cast shadow. As it fell the surrounding water became darker and darker as it got further from the sun that once shone onto its skin.

Darker and colder its fall became and, like Ophelia, the carcass became one with the water, its journey coming to an end with a soft thud on the ocean floor.

All was dark, all was cold and for a while nothing moved, nothing stirred.

Then, out of the depth, came an octopus.

Then came a crab. Then a snail.

Soon the place was crawling with thousands of creatures, big and small, all come to feast on the blessing from the sky.

As the years went on, all that was left was bones, but from those bones grew life. The jaw that had once scooped up large amounts of krill now provided food for the crabs, the tail fed the shrimp. It was swallowed by the sea creatures, embraced by a swirl of underwater activity.

The whale became an ecosystem.

And its death was as its life, peaceful, beautiful and free.

## Insight

Nikola Staňková, 4. B

Do you know what freedom is? I do not either. All my life I have been here. When I was little and my mum was with me. *Oh, how much I miss her.* She told me stories about freedom, how she and her friends were swimming through the ocean. They were free and that was everything that mattered.

I am still stuck here. This small cage that I have to call *home*. It is more like prison. I feel trapped, because really I am. I can swim around, but after so many years there is nothing new. Nowhere I can escape. There is a place where I always swim to when I feel overwhelmed. It is in my dreams, in my dreams I can become who I desire to be and for some time I can drift away.

I close my eyes and dream. I am swimming away with other fishes and we are discovering the ocean. We are free. I can see my mum. *My beautiful mum, who I miss so much.* I am trying to reach her, but she always disappears. I hope sometime somewhere we will meet again, somewhere away from the prison where I was left alone. Was I?

Suddenly I hear something and I snap away from my mind.

„I am lost... Can you help me?“ I heard say in this tiny voice I can not identify. And then I see it. It is a little fish, the new one, this will hurt.

„I am going to tell you a story,“ I said with pain in my voice, „sometimes nothing is equal, sometimes everything is not fair, but we need to be grateful for what we have. Many years ago there was a little whale who one time woke up in this aquarium. She was with her mum. When someone is with their mum, you know everything will be okay, you are safe. This little whale was with her mother, so she was safe, at least she thought to. They got fed, they got to be taken care of, but something was missing, the major thing was freedom. At least they got each other for some time. They got used to it. Sometimes the situation is not that bad, there are days that you care about your freedom and those days are the worst.“

This little fish in front of me was watching me so I asked.

„With what can I help you?“

The little fish was crying. I could not hear what it was saying.

„I am lost. Can you help me?“

„Of course, what do you need from me?“

„I do not know... I...?“

„We can swim around and look for someone? Or do you want something else?“

„We can do that...“

We are swimming around and nothing is happening. I know every corner, I was expecting it. I am helping this tiny fish looking for someone who probably is not there. *At least I had my mum.* This fish is on her own. I need to do what needs to be done.

„What is your name?“

„I am Ava and you? Who are you?“

„My name is Darcy. I will be your private tour guide.“

Swimming around alone is sometimes unbearably hard. You need someone to be with, but there is a lack of freedom in the aquarium. Space is vast, but you can still be in prison, sometimes you are in prison and you do not even know it. First thing is to find out if you are in prison or not. Freedom is a curse and also in the same freedom is a delight.

*Sometimes I miss my kind mum.*

## **The Flying Guide**

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Matouš Lorenc, 1. B

It was an early morning. The sun was shining, the birds were chirping and not one cloud in the sky, except for the flying whales. It was time for them to migrate. On the first day in the eleventh month, these elegant creatures would always soar up into the skies and begin their journey south. Only this time one of the whales would have a companion. The wanderer, once called the happiest man in the city, who had everything: power, money, fame, until... until he lost it all. Who knew that only one mistake could ruin your whole life and get you banished from the city. But his past didn't matter now, the only thing that mattered was the journey ahead.

As he left the gates of his once home, he turned around and looked at it one last time. The hundred towers made out of pure white stone looked down on him and the walls casted a shadow upon his puny self.

The wanderer took his first step into the unknown. An uneasy breeze went down his spine. He traveled for several days never stopping, where was he going? Who knew? The days dragged on and on, feeling like everything was against him, the trees were laughing at the wanderer behind his back, the squirrels making him jealous by their ability to survive in the wild so easily. This couldn't go on.

“Why is everything such a struggle?” he thought, “I can't do this anymore...”

The wanderer looked upon the sky. There was one lone flying whale, flying up and down.

“A flying whale? What choice do I have, might as well follow it.”

The flying whale was his guide in this hopeless world and he was its partner. The wanderer followed the whale, making sure he never strays from the path that its heading. He admired these creatures. They were not only beautiful, but also wise and playful. Their migration was like a holiday. The children would always get up early to watch these majestic creatures fly over the city.

The wanderer followed the whale for days. When the whale slept, he slept, when the whale ate, he ate. This whale was his only friend. He could talk to it for hours and it could listen for hours. He even gave his new friend the name “Elvira”.

After weeks or even months of travelling they arrived at the open expanse of the sea. The sun was setting upon the cerulean sea when Elvira and the wanderer jaunted on the rocky shores of the beach, the wanderer's eyes lit up hearing the waves crash against the rocks.

"Ahh... this reminds me of home. There was a port in our city and it was my favorite place to go. When I was younger I used to spend a lot of time there just looking at the exotic goods that the ships brought." said the wanderer in a nostalgic tone.

Elvira whistled in agreement.

"You know, Elvira. I was thought to be the happiest man in the city I once called home." explained the wanderer, "People only thought that because I had what they couldn't, but in reality it was a sad life I had no one to talk to, no one to relate to. Well, that's not the case anymore though."

Elvira flew closer to the ground, like it was interested in what he wanted to say.

"Am I crazy for trying to talk to a whale? No, I don't think so, you seem interested in what I have to say. Unlike a majority of people. The only way to get their attention anymore is to either make it about them or hit them with a brick."

They continued for a while, not saying anything. Now, it was almost night, the wanderers had a bad taste in his mouth. Nights weren't his favourite. He was cold, but at least he had a friend for a sleepover.

When the moon appeared, Elvira was starting to fall asleep. The wanderer raided his improvised sleeping bag and hit the sack. Again it was cold. His nose couldn't smell the salt in the air, it only felt the touch of the frozen night.

Elvira saw how the wanderer shivered and did something it never did. Elvira got closer to the wanderer and hugged him with its giant fin.

"Thank you, Elvira. You are a true friend. I am glad we found each other."

Elvira happily squealed.

## A Lonely Whale

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Anna Řezáčová, 1. B

In time and space, in the dark cold endless sea of space, there sails gently a lonely whale. She hums her quiet song as she swims through the endless plains of emptiness, dust and loneliness. She's too far away from her home now, there's no way back. The whale was tired, lonely and sad, her journey was too long now. But she couldn't give up yet! She still hadn't found her purpose in this big, cold sea. So she kept on sailing.

The whale couldn't remember how many stars she had already met and passed, how many planets she visited, how many moons she greeted. Each time she left a star system, she left it with a new memory and experience. But she still couldn't find her purpose. Disappointed, the whale sailed on across the galaxy. Sometimes she'd see a group of big and little dogs running between the stars.

Other times she'd see a big and a small bear turning around to face each other with a smile. All the times she'd get reminded of how lonely she was, and that made her the saddest whale in the entire universe.

„Why are you so sad all the time?“ she once got asked by a passing fish. The whale didn't know what to respond, she felt the sorrow in every single part of her body and it felt so unbearable, so dreadful. „I'm alone,“ she muttered with a sad look on her face „and it's making me feel like this.“ The fish looked at her with a confused look. „Like what? Sad?“ The whale shook her head. „No, it's more than that. I sing my song every minute I can so someone would notice me.“ There was a long pause. „You sing? I never heard you sing, Whale“ the fish said. „Well, nobody ever heard me sing. My voice is too low for anyone to hear.“ The fish never asked the whale about it again.

And so the whale went on through time and space, singing her unheard melody. She passed another group of stars, meeting other animals across the universe. Each conversation the whale felt more and more hopeless. Every time she asked about other whales, they told her that she's the first ever whale to come across their star system. The whale thanked the animals and left the star system, singing her lonely song.

The whale swam through the universe, all alone, singing the sad melody. In the distance she noticed something that looked like a star, it was shining so brightly! Her curiosity got the better of her and she stopped to look. That thing, that glowing thing, was a star! It was turning into a supernova! A flash and a wave of dust, gas and energy quickly surrounded the whale. She closed her eyes and waited for it to pass. When she opened them, she blinked twice. She couldn't believe her eyes! The dark void around her was turning into a colourful landscape; orange, yellow and even blue clouds of dust were swallowing the darkness and turning the deep sea into a beautiful glowing mess. But that wasn't the only thing the whale noticed. On the other side of the dust cloud, she caught a glimpse of something, someone. It was another whale!

„Wait!“ she cried, swimming quickly towards the other whale. „Please wait!“ The other whale turned to look at her and smiled, then motioned for the whale to follow her. The whale finally felt hope as she swam towards the other whale to catch up with her. And so the two whales went together through the beautiful orange cloud, they didn't feel lonely anymore. They had each other now, and that's what mattered the most.

*And they conquered the universe together, forever until the end of time.*

# Flying Whale

Pavla Zanolitová, 3. B

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She was a dreamer. She knew she was a dreamer and wished for things that weren't realistic. She also loved whales. More specifically flying whales. Ever since she was a child she wanted to ride a flying whale at every sunrise and every sunset. Her parents got worried over time as her wish seemed to not disappear even as she got older. She didn't care about it. Her creativity got better and she began drawing. She drew so many drawings of flying whales, one better than the previous, to the point of there not being any more space left in her room.

"Lily, what did I say about cleaning your room?" complained her mom as she came into her room while she was drawing another flying whale. "Yeah I know. I'll clean it when I'm done with this one," she says without even looking up from the paper. "You said that last time which was five hours ago and you started another drawing of these weird creatures instead of cleaning your room as you promised," argued her mom.

She didn't feel guilty about it. She continued drawing without worry in the world as she thought it was another one of her mom's tantrums. "You're going to be eighteen next week yet you're still attached to your stupid childhood dream. Grow up! You have some responsibilities to do, yet again you chose some unrealistic things!" Her mom got angrier with each sentence.

"My dreams aren't stupid! When will you understand that I don't want to live in your black and white world?" she snapped finally. She couldn't stand the poisonous words her mom was saying to her. "This is what I get for raising you? For worrying about your future?" She was furious at this point. She took her daughter's drawing from the table and showed it to her. "You see this? This is unrealistic and will not get you anywhere."

Sparks of anger started showing in her mom's eyes. "Give it back," said Lily with panic creeping in her voice. Her mom rips the paper in two. But she didn't stop there. She was tearing each piece into smaller pieces. They were falling on the floor in front of Lily. And there was standing her mother. No, not her mother. Not anymore. She had no mom anymore. There was only a monster standing in front of her. Bitter tears found their way into her eyes.

"How could you?!" She screamed anger and despair mixing in her trembling voice. Tears were flowing down her cheeks. Disbelief and anger showing in her widened eyes. "You from all people," she said, but had to stop herself because of an ugly sob coming out of her throat. "I thought that from all people at least you would support me," she continued her monologue.

She couldn't take it anymore and ran out of the room. She didn't even look into the face of the monster to see its expression. She didn't even know where she was running to. She just found herself crying in the garden under the tree her grandpa planted as a kid. She didn't even notice when it got dark. She calmed down a little by then.

There was the sound of leaves being crushed under the steps of a person. It turned out to be her dad.

He approached her sitting next to her on the cold grass that was growing there. “What happened between you and your mom?” he asked with concern and worry in his voice. She didn’t want to answer him. She was afraid her voice would betray her so she kept silent.

He sighed heavily. “I told her to be understanding but she never listens,” he says a little annoyed but sadness can be heard in those words as well. “Here. I believe this is yours.” He smiles a little and hands her a paper.

Not any paper. It was the drawing of a flying whale her mother ripped into pieces. It was clumsily taped together and some pieces missing but she still felt warmth in her heart at the sight of it. She hugs her dad, new tears flowing down her cheeks but this time, they are the tears of happiness. There was someone who wouldn’t judge her and be there for her when she needed it.

“Let’s go home, it’s cold here,” he says, hand reaching out to her for her to grab. She happily accepts the offer and they go inside together.



Ema Švábenská, 3. A2

“Here it is,” he said, looking at the wet letters on the excavator, my name in red and his in blue, “We matter. I was here, you were here, and everyone who’s here after us will know.”

“A legacy,” I nodded.

“A legacy.”

There by the long forgotten machine, with fingertips stained with marker, muddy knees, and the fear of being forgotten, we let out the breath we were holding for months.

16, cheap beer, blue Camels, crying in the bathroom. We were just kids, frightened of the future, but so full of the will to make one. I was looking for meaning in angry music and stars, he was drowning his uncertainty in poetry and sleep deprivation.

“I wish there was an answer, you know?”

“Answers are subjective anyway,” He argued.

“Well, What’s the point of anything then? If everything was subjective, then nothing would really matter in the grand scheme of things.”

“Maybe there’s no ‘grand scheme of things’ at all.”

“So not only is there no meaning, but there’s nothing to even look for meaning in?”

“There’s your experience of the world .”

“What does my subjective perception have to do with life itself? I am nothing compared to the world. And maybe that’s beautiful, meaning nothing. It takes away the pressure.”

“Life itself”? Life is not some separate, all encompassing entity. Nothing exists outside of individual minds. A sound only becomes a sound when it’s heard. A colour is no colour until perceived.”

“Woah, you’re wandering too deep into theoretical territory. There is an objective reality outside of us. Where would the stimuli to even be regarded come from?”

“But do you know for sure? All you see, those trees, that rock, are all in your head. It’s your brain presenting information gathered by your eyes. The sound of our footsteps? Nothing but waves.”

“The waves exist outside. And the information, as you call it, has to have a source.”

“Maybe, but why does the outside concern you? The only experience you ever had and will have is the one inside your own mind.”

“But humans are notoriously social. There has to be something we share, or we would just be wandering about in our own little one-person bubbles.”

“The common ground is interaction.”

“Why do interactions matter if the only thing I know is me?”

“Because interactions, not just interpersonal ones, form the world. Your step would not leave a footprint if it wasn’t for this path. Feel your t-shirt touching your skin? That too is an interaction. There would be no sense of smell if there were no odors, and there would be no odors if there was no sense of smell. Nothing can exist on its own, because all things are shaped by the way they function with their surroundings”

“So we’re back where we started, maybe even worse off. I mean, how am I supposed to find my purpose, when I don’t even know whether there’s anything to look for purpose in? How do I live my life when all I am is interactions, while at the same time, all that exists to me is my life?”

“Leave a mark. A little fragment of you in someone else’s experience, in their mind, even the smallest one, and you will exist to them too. You will live on outside of you.”

“A fragment? Like what?”

“Like this,” suddenly he sped up and I followed.

He pulled out a case full of acrylic markers from his tote bag and asked me to pick one. I reached for red, my favourite colour.

“Sign it,” he gestured to a broken down excavator by the path we were on, “Leave something here, a footprint.”

We all want to mean something. Be someone. We want to influence the world, at least a little bit. Create something that outlives us, reaches beyond us. Change something. And this precise urge drove me and Oscar to insanity, daily. I cried myself to sleep, thinking I was nothing.

A decade has passed since that day, but I still remember every detail. The shade of red, the pattern of my sole imprinted in the dirt, my t-shirt. Because the moment I put the cap back on that marker, I realised something important about life. I understood. And even though I haven’t seen my highschool boyfriend for years now, I still like to visit that little clearing in the forest, where there is, now much rustier and covered in moss, a proof we ever were.

Ema Švábenská, 3. A2

## Who Is The Best?

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Lenka Nováková, 2. B

Outside, the first flakes were falling and everyone started getting ready for Christmas. Mrs. Mary was no exception. She painted beautiful patterns on glass ornaments. She liked to share them with others and brought them to the market every year. It had been fifty years, but her ornaments were still appearing on many of the townspeople's trees.

The night before Christmas Eve, Mary was sad that her husband could no longer celebrate Christmas with her. She had a few beads left at home, so she created a digger-shaped ornament in his memory. Just like the one he drove to the fields every day. She put it in the basket with the other glass ornaments and went to bed. But just as she turned out the light, a little voice came from the basket:

„Say hello to the future first ornament sold!“ the glass icicle smiled.

„Do you mean me?“ „I'm going to be the hit of the year, ringed the bell.“

„Please,“ stammered the bauble, „last year it was the bauble that sold first, and this year will be no different.“

„I wonder what people see in you, you're just an ordinary ball,“ wondered the icicle.

„Says someone hanging from the eaves!“ The bauble snapped scornfully.

„I must be heard because I can ring,“ boasted the bell.

„But you don't have any glitter,“ the bauble wiped him off.

„Hi,“ the digger greeted. All the ornaments fell silent.

„What's that? It's not even made from glass,“ the icicle touched it with the tip.

„It can't ring too,“ the bell added.

„And it doesn't have any glitter,“ the bauble finished.

„I may not look like you, but I'm sure I'll sell,“ the digger defended itself.

„Sure, but as a last resort,“ jingled the bell.

The digger became angry and shouted, „I bet people buy me first!“

There was silence for a moment before loud laughter echoed through the basket. Icicle measured him icily and said: „You are the ugliest ornament I ever saw. Look at us, we're the best!“

„Shiny and traditional,“ the bouble puffed.

„And loud,“ the bell rang.

The argument continued until the first rays of morning touched the basket. Soon Mary came in, took the basket, and went her usual way to the market. It was snowing outside and the wind was blowing in her white hair. Each year the path became harder and harder for her. She had already spotted the first stalls. Her neighbor John came out to meet her. Mary went to him, but overlooked a frozen puddle. She flapped her arms desperately trying to keep her balance. John just managed to catch her. The basket meanwhile had fallen out of her hand and now was lying next to a glittering pile of shards. Mary looked sadly on the pile. „But look,“ John pointed, „one ornament is still in one piece.“ Mary picked up the digger from the beads.

„This is beautiful,“ John smiled, „my son's favorite toy is a digger, but I haven't seen it anywhere as a Christmas ornament. Would you sell it to me?“

Mary just smiled guilelessly.

## Crossed Trails

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Viktorie Kvapilová, 3.B

The old excavator sat abandoned at the edge of the forest, its once vibrant orange frame now dulled and rusted by years of exposure. Graffiti scrawled across its cabin, faded but defiant, told silent stories of mischief and fleeting rebellion. It was a relic, a monument to an era of progress halted mid-step. Around it, nature had reclaimed its territory. Ivy twisted through the joints, and the dense foliage cloaked it in a shroud of green.

Ema wandered along the overgrown trail, her sketchbook tucked under one arm. The forest hummed with the quiet rhythm of life—leaves rustled in the breeze, birds chattered overhead, and somewhere in the distance, a brook murmured softly. But Ema's eyes were fixed on the excavator. It was out of place, a jarring interruption in the otherwise pristine landscape, and that dissonance fascinated her. She paused, crouching low to capture the scene in her mind before transferring it to the paper.

As she sketched, a voice startled her from her thoughts. „It's an eyesore, isn't it?

She turned to find a young man standing a few paces behind her, a canvas slung over his shoulder and paint stains on his hands. „Depends how you look at it,“ Ema replied. „It tells a story.“

The boy chuckled. „I've been painting it for weeks. Something about its loneliness, its defiance—it's almost poetic.“

Ema smiled and held up her sketchbook. „Looks like we've been crossing trails.“

They introduced themselves; his name was Luka, and they spent the next hour talking about art and telling stories hidden in the woods. Luka told her how the excavator reputedly came to be abandoned, left to rot after a construction project had gone bad, with nature taking it over bit by bit. Ema spoke of forgotten things, of beauty in decay and its renovation.

As the sun began to set, they decided to collaborate. Luka laid out his paints, and Ema refined her sketch. Together, they brought the excavator to life on canvas, merging their perspectives. Luka's bold strokes captured the stubborn resilience of the machine, while Ema's delicate lines highlighted the harmony between the rusted metal and the thriving greenery around it.

By twilight, their work was complete—a vibrant, haunting portrait of the excavator framed by the encroaching forest. They stepped back to admire their creation, the colors glowing faintly in the fading light.

„I think we've given it a second life,“ Ema said softly.

Luka nodded. „Maybe we've even given it a purpose.“

As they gathered their gear, Luka said nothing for a moment. „There's an art show in town next month. They're looking for works about the environment. What do you think?“

Ema grinned. „Crossed trails. We can call it that.“

The excavator stood its ground, unmoving yet transformed in their eyes: no longer a forgotten machine but a testament to the beauty of junctions between past and present, decay and renewal, and two artists whose paths had crossed in the heart of the forest.

## Safe Place

Andrew Smejkal, 2. D

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“And that old digger over there, was my safe place.” Whispered Jane, a young blonde girl dressed in all white. “Wow, I’ve been living here for a while now, but I never thought this old wrack could be someone’s safe place.” Said brunette. She then reached out to hold blonde’s hand, but their hands never touched, they just passed through the air.

“Oh, sorry Jane, I forgot.” Brunette’s voice cracked as her brown eyes filled with tears. “You’re dead.”

Jane slightly smiled. “It’s okay Lu, I’m getting used to it as well.”

Both girls sat down on the grass. Lu stared at the old machine covered in graffiti, but then she froze looking at one special tag. “With love, Jannie.” Lu read slowly, she then looked at Jane in confusion and asked. “Is that.. you? Did you write it here?” Jane smiled and nodded. “I was an artsy kid and wanted to make it more.. mine.”

Lu stood up and came closer to take a better look. After a while of inspecting, with a sad voice Lu finally broke the silence. “What happened?” Jane looked at brunette confused. “I mean.. what actually happened, why are you.” Before Lu could complete a question Jane looked her in the eyes and answered. “I came back here that night, you know. After that party.”

Lu’s eyes widened as she stared at Jane in disbelief. “You mean that party you were last seen alive at?” Lu asked carefully. Jane climbed up on a digger, her long blonde hair fluttering in the wind. Brunette climbed right after her and sat down on the roof. She put on her light blue hood and looked into the sky. Jane then continued. “Yes, That party. I felt really bad that night. I climbed up here, like I always did, but I might hit the control button or something and...” Lu covered her mouth in shock. “Did it.. move?” Brunette tried to talk but Jane couldn’t understand since Lu covered her mouth. “I don’t know how exactly it happened, but before I could move. The bucket crushed me.”

Said Jane with pain in her voice, she then looked at a shaking friend sitting next to her. “I’m scared this old digger is the only thing keeping me here.. but now, I’m sorry Lu, I have to go. See you tomorrow?” Apologized Blonde. She then jumped down and sent brunette a kiss. “See you tomorrow.” Smiled Lu, tears rolling down her cheeks.

Next day, Lu woke up excited to see her best friend again, but when she was getting closer to Jane’s safe place, she froze. “This can’t be.” Lu mumbled. The old digger was gone, and with it, so was Jane. The air suddenly became colder. Like there was no more happiness left on the earth. Lu’s brown eyes filled with tears. She stood there, watching the empty space. “I hope you’re free now.” Whispered broken girl.

## Secrets Among Rusted Teeth

Tereza Petra Češková, 3. B

Caroline took the same route every day after school. Between the narrow streets of the village, past the dilapidated barn, and finally to the forest clearing. There, in the shade of the old trees, stood a digger - abandoned, forgotten, overgrown with moss. Its cab was spattered, its shoulder covered in rust, its tires covered in mud, but to Caroline it was her confidant.

The first day she discovered it, she sat on its tire, swinging her legs, wondering if anyone would ever fix it again. „Hi,“ she said quietly that time, as if waiting for a response. Of course none came, but it was enough nonetheless. Even then, she could feel that the digger was listening, even if it was silent.

From then on, she came back whenever she had something on her mind. „Today, Mom told me again that I wasn't listening. But I was listening, I really was,“ she confided to him one afternoon as her fingers ran over the cold metal of his shoulder. „Do you know why she keeps yelling at me?“ Bagr thought her voice seemed to shake a little, but he couldn't answer. He just stuck quietly in the clearing, listening to her words and letting the sun warm her when she sought him out.

Other times she told him about school. About how she and Lenka stopped being friends because Lenka found another group. „But I'm sure we'll get along again,“ she added after a while. „It's just that sometimes I feel like other people see me differently than I am.“ She picked up a rock and threw it into the bushes. „The same way they see you. No one wants you here because they think you're no longer useful. But to me, you're the best.“

One day she came to the clearing, her eyes red from crying. She sat down by the digger and put her palm on its rusty frame. „Something happened at home,“ she began. Her voice was low, almost a whisper. „Dad says we're going away. He says there's no point in staying here anymore, and Mom agrees. But I don't want to. If we leave, I won't see you again. I won't have anyone I can tell everything to anymore.“

The sun was hiding behind the trees and a shadow fell on the clearing. Caroline wiped away her tears and hugged the digger one last time. „Maybe one day you'll remember me, or someone else will find you. But I promise I'll never forget.“

Then she left, and the digger was left alone. Yet a quiet peace seemed to emanate from its rust and spray-painted walls. He may have lost Caroline, but her words, her stories, remained with him. And though someone else might one day come there, no secret would be as important to him as the fact that he had been a mute witness to her world.

## A Short Story

Rozálie Nováková, 2. B

Jeff was an ordinary man with an ordinary job. He worked as a construction worker. His job included driving and using an excavator. To most people he's like a caveman. He always came home tired and dirty, the payment wasn't high, the potential danger was definitely higher, but he didn't mind. The opposite actually. He loved his job. This month they even worked at a park, which was like a cherry on top for him. Working in such a lively place full of animals and flowers really made his day.

Once he went to work like any other day and wow, it was a shocker when he found out that someone destroyed his lovely excavator, Cynthia, with several graffiti.

Well Cynthia wasn't exactly destroyed. She was working just fine but she was dishonored. Jeff liked art, but not on his sweetheart excavator. Plus it was really stupid. Few pointless names here and there. Why would anyone do this?

Jeff excavated almost all day long. He was so tired, which is understandable given his work, but he couldn't sleep. More than tired he felt sad. He was only thinking about his lovely Cynthia until he cried himself to sleep. She really didn't deserve such treatment.

The next day Jeff arrived to work as soon as possible. It was around 4 am and he found Cynthia in a worse shape than the day before. More stupid names and a few new shapes. He was getting really frustrated. He almost didn't hear a rustling from a nearby bush because of his mental distraction. He stepped closer, thinking it might be the culprit.

And yeah, he hit the bull's eye. A boy jumped out of the bush and Jeff let out a loud girly scream. Until he noticed that the son of his boss was standing right in front of him.

boy: „Dude, why are you screaming so loud?“

Jeff: „You nearly scared me to death. It was you who destroyed my dear Cynthia, wasn't it?“

boy: „Who's Cynthia?“

Jeff: „My lovely excavator of course.“

boy: „It's not destroyed. It's upgraded. You should be glad I made her this pretty.“

Jeff: „I didn't ask for any upgrades, you runt. Just wait until I tell your mother“

Boy: „You wouldn't do that. Right?“

Jeff: „Just wait and see boy.“

boy: „Please don't tell her. She'll ban me from talking with my neighbors cat“

Jeff: „What? Talking to a cat? Are you nuts?“

boy: „He’s just a chill guy. I bet you’re jealous that I can talk to cats.“

Jeff: „Not really. In fact not at all. I just want you to stop being a little brat. Let’s make a deal. You’ll stop with the graffiti and you’ll also wash Cynthia. In return I won’t tell a soul about your trouble making tendencies.“

boy: „Alrighty, sounds fair.“

Believe it or not but they became so invested in their upcoming conversation about various things that they didn’t notice the rising sun and other workers coming to labor. After this mess you could say they became good friends.

