

*Writing
from
Quarantine:*

In the Words of Mighty Kids

Reflections, March through June 2020

Edited by Kyra Spence

This book is dedicated to all Mighty Writers, past, present, and future.

Mighty Writers



Writing from Quarantine: In the Words of Mighty Kids

Think clearly and write with clarity.

It's our battle cry, our tagline, our mantra; it's our elevator pitch and mission statement, and has been since 2009.

If you can think and write with clarity, you can go places. When kids learn to do both, their self-esteem soars and success comes into view.

We see it all the time at Mighty Writers.

We're true believers in the power of writing. You could say we've staked our reputation on it.

But in March 2020, when the virus began to strangle our Mighty communities, our mission needed an immediate adjustment.

You can't think or write with clarity if you're hungry.

So we began distributing lunches to kids and their families. Then we added groceries. And diapers. And masks.

And books, always books.

As for teaching kids to write, we wouldn't dare let slip our once-and-forever mission.

We whisked kids from our centers and airlifted Mighty Writers to a safe spot in the online universe, where we launched a roster of virtual at-home classes.

If technology proved elusive, we went old school style with paper and pencil.

Through spring and into summer, our Mighty kids kept writing. And often their stories focused on how they were feeling and how they were dealing.

Some of those stories have landed in the pages of this book, which was guided respectfully by Kyra Spence, the book's editor.

It's been a tough time, for sure. A lot for all of us to process.

But in these stories you can feel the power that writing holds.

Good times, bad times, whatever the times, it survives.

— Tim Whitaker, executive director, Mighty Writers

Mighty Writers



Introduction

by Kyra Spence

Hot breath under a mask. Loved ones six feet away. Hours, days, weeks at a time cloistered inside. The news cycle rings the alarm bell, day after day. The death toll rises. Everything happens in an online simulation: work, school, an hour with a friend. Time passes at a rapid clip and not at all. Like the writers in this book, I've been trapped by repetition and dread. Monotony and anxiety. A bitter cold and long spring has become a hot and restless summer, defined by the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the pandemic reached the U.S., as schools and businesses shuttered, I've lost a job, I've moved back home to live with and care for my family, left novels and emails unfinished and nights unslept. But, like the writers in this book, I have also sought ways to soothe myself, found things to appreciate. I've turned to poetry, to my family. Like the writers in this book, my repetition and dread have been assuaged by little joys. In the face of fear, in a long, forced pause, we've felt what really matters. But like the writers in this book, I have also watched in fury as we were dropped by the systems purported to catch us. From inadequate virus testing to the plague of police brutality, we have watched thousands of people die, sacrificed for profit, for power. We know that COVID-19 disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and low-income communities, we know that undocumented families and workers go without governmental support, we know that when economies reopen, we pay the price in public health and safety. We know that for every filmed murder of a Black American at the hands of police, there are countless that weren't recorded. These past few months under quarantine have shown us just how tightly we are held in the jaws of capitalism and white supremacist delusion.

So in our anger, in our attempts to pass our time, heal ourselves, and search for meaning, we are also rethinking how we want our world to work. Recently, I came across an article by writer and activist Deepa Iyer. She writes that we must work through the paralysis of fear and begin moving towards liberation, justice, and inclusion by discovering our unique role in an ecosystem for social change. Some of us are disruptors, unafraid to speak up, to yell, if necessary, when we see injustice. Some of us are frontline responders, performing literal and metaphorical triage, drawn to the place where the action happens. Some of us are caregivers, sources of love, nourishment, and support for those around us. Some of us are storytellers, recording our observations, drawing from our histories, making meaning, writing it down. Finally, like the writers in this book, my quarantine experience has been shaped by something else, something wonderful: Mighty Writers. I joined the team just as the world started to close down, in late March of 2020. As I lost one job, I found a role here, teaching an online poetry class for teens, and working on this very book. The Mighty Writers community appeared, to me, as a fully fledged ecosystem for change, enacting so many different roles: volunteers passing out meals on the front lines, instructors teaching vital writing skills, students using their voices, pens, and keyboards to tell their truths.

In this book are the storytellers of Mighty Writers. They bridge their personal experiences with the collective one, connect the present with the past and future, turn tired words into works of revelatory beauty. In the stories of others, we see our feelings, our lives, ourselves. The quiet voice speaking up from the dark, the hand reaching out, the moment someone says, "Listen." It has been my honor to collect these reflections, to make meaning from the chaos, and craft a narrative together, of our world, for a better one.



Community

by Marlowe Whittenberg, age 12

Community ...

Concerned, because we don't have immunity

Open: our minds to science and rhymes

Mournful of the murdered but

Mindful of the murderers

United

No/ not yet/ not all the way (like always)

I feel

Tomorrow — probably won't be different

Y? I don't know.

Mighty Writers



Warmth

by Calvin Turner, age 17

It's April now, the world is getting warmer
still, it lies so empty, cold and sober
the warmth is with us, but it stays inside
burning and burning with no release

Walk alone outdoors, out into the cold
see emptiness, barren, with no warmth to behold
outside, moving quickly, shifty, tired eyes pass by
belonging to cold souls with masks to hide behind

Little shimmering glimpses of warmth can be found
faraway laughter echoing from homes
warm lights that show we are not alone
few kind strangers willing to pass on a smile

They still stay away and stay cold to stay safe
for now, we are not allowed much warmth
but warm hearts, minds, and smiles still stand
at least six feet apart but together

It's a cold time right now in April
but soon the cold will end
soon we'll be together again
soon we'll be warm with friends
and communities will be born again



Diary of a Quarantiner

by Maryam Rahman, age 13

5/25/20

Quarantine, ugh.

The dissatisfaction of staring at your ceiling all day, of missing family, of distance learning. The trauma of a day's journey from my bed to my computer and back, the tiring of the things I used to love, the sense of being grounded for my safety. I think I'll be here forever.

5/26/20

I hope not. Because the news and these four walls are starting to make me psycho.

5/27/20

I wonder what Cardi B and the Kardashians are doing right now. Are they suffering from claustrophobia? Do they even need a stimulus check? They probably get theirs first. I wonder if America's government is *The Matrix*. Donald Trump ... more like Agent Smith with Congress as the other agents, lol.

5/28/20

The coronavirus has ruined my life this year. As a child, Ramadan and Eid were the best time of the year: Meeting up with my Muslim friends on the playground after prayer, eating dates and Arab food. But this year, we couldn't do it, because we had to perform social distancing.

5/29/20

I miss the beautiful sights outside. I've learned what I've been missing out on. Now I only see these four walls of depression, of the memories and regrets of the thing I wish I could forget. I need to get away from this sadness. Music kinda helps I guess.

5/30/20

I constantly scare myself into thinking I have the illness, forgetting I've always had shortness of breath on the regular, from just walking up the steps. Now I get scared whenever someone sneezes or coughs, even on TV.

5/31/20

There have been many "rumors," but no one knows if they're true or not. But I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to stay home, stay claustrophobic, and stay bored, because this will be all over eventually. Like Kimmy Schmidt from Netflix says, "Just take it 10 seconds at a time."



The Candle Burns Out

by Lydia Heatwole, age 10

Sickness

It hangs over you like a rain cloud that never disappears

Kids at school are whispering about something called the ... coronavirus ... starting to haunt my life

In the store, toilet paper and hand sanitizer are flying off the shelves like migrating geese

Around me, schools are closing, fast, but mine stays open, for now, not forever

My grandparents come to my house but have to leave, because of the virus

My mom flies to a conference in Texas. After she gets there it gets cancelled, because of the virus

That weekend, my school closes, now looking sad and abandoned, no people walking in or out

We have to learn at home, feeling cramped in our house with five people in it. Thankfully, we could still take daily walks to the park

The mayor announces that all parks are closing. We grieve, the park was a part of our body getting ripped off

We still manage to find a way, a small gap in the gate — it takes the place of the gap in our heart

The park opens, but now police cars are everywhere you look, like worms after a rain

My siblings and I are getting antsy, and are fighting like angry hornets, caught and can't escape

My community is torn apart, practicing social distancing is tiring work, especially for the kids

The only way I can see my friends is through Google Meet, thank God for technology in this time

My cousin's birthday was cancelled, she was going to New York, hope was flattened like a pancake

Even though my birthday is in June, it will possibly be cancelled, the candle of hope is slowly burning out

There is no idea how long this will last, but we know one thing: the coronavirus is hell

Mighty Writers



The Unfortunate Break

by Jeremiah I. Reyes, age 14

Our world as we know it will never be the same. The deadly and contagious virus named COVID-19 that originated in Wuhan, China early this year has arrived in America. The spread occurred quicker than our government anticipated, and we were unprepared for what was to come. I watched the news that came from the White House with disbelief and extreme concern. I held my breath for a second, trying to make sense of what I was hearing.

Isolation has been difficult and sorrowful. It affected the moments I was able to spend time with friends and more importantly, go and stay with my dear grandparents, which I had always done on weekends. I couldn't visit them because they were at high risk due to their underlying health issues. People were unable to go to work; some lost jobs. I felt very worried when my parents went to buy things we needed such as milk, bread, and water, and these basic things were scarce.

I live with my older brother, younger sister, and my parents. My father and mother are both essential workers that do completely different types of jobs. I can tell it's stressful on them. They worry about getting the virus and passing it onto us, but they also understand they are essential and have to do what needs to be done. I usually talk to everybody in my house, making sure they are OK and assisting them with anything they need help on. I have fun helping my younger sister create a fort, and making her laugh by telling her jokes or making funny faces whenever she is sad. She is young but quite a social butterfly, and it's been hard for her not to be with her girl group. My older brother misses playing basketball and football with friends.

And it's hard on me. I miss going out, but, mostly, I miss my grandparents. I call them once or twice every day. We video chat, too, which is funny because they're not the type to use technology. We get cut off a lot. My parents have taken us to ride by and see them from afar. We're happy to see them but sad we can't go hug them, kiss them and do things like before ... I try to ease my mind by indulging in my farming venture. This spring I started planting in my backyard. I have tomatoes, peppers, strawberries, eggplants, carrots, and cucumbers. I am not a professional gardener but I'm experimenting and learning different methods. My goal is to grow our own fresh fruit and vegetables because ... Why not? I'm encouraging others that now is the time to learn about all that. We don't need to be a food desert if we all do as our ancestors did and tend to the land.

My parents still manage to buy, cook, and serve the less fortunate by distributing food, clothes, hygiene care kits, wipes, hand sanitizer, gloves and donated masks to help stop the spread of this awful virus. I help my parents by putting together all that's needed to distribute platters for the homeless around our city. I like to play their favorite songs that my father introduced me to and I ended up enjoying oldies: songs like "Celebration" by Kool & The Gang, "September" by Earth Wind & Fire, and "Smile" by Kirk Franklin.

I'm thankful my family is well because we have had 30 relatives, friends, and community members pass away from this virus. The losses seemed to be back-to-back. I try my best to remain positive that this too shall pass and we can go back to a somewhat normal life, although this has rocked us so hard nothing will truly be normal again. May all this that has occurred, good and bad, change us all for the better.



I am from Home

by Samuel Wright, age 11

I am from mac and cheese and green beans, bacon and cake, ice cream and milkshakes
I am from going to my grandparents every year, we fill our cups with water and cheer
I wish we could do that today but we cannot
I wish we could go to their house like we used to a lot
I am from hanging out with friends, from the beginning to the end
We used to go to the store, then run around some more
I wish I could play again, but those days have come to an end
I am from playing with a ball, against people real tall and small
We would walk to the park, to the park we would go
We would hop, skip, and jump, even in the snow
But we can't do that no more, can't even go to the store
The coronavirus is going to find us
I feel like it's right behind us
I'm scared to take the bus
And I won't even discuss
Unless I'm six feet away
When I wake up
in the day
I stay there
and lay
at home

Mighty Writers



Quarantine Journal

by Gavriella Perez, age 16

To cut straight to the bone, I have been in coronavirus quarantine for 69 days. And the struggle has been rough, yet surprisingly enjoyable. At first, I missed school. I do not have many friends and the ones I do have I only get to see at school. I also missed the academics and my teachers. I am at heart a nerd and a teacher's pet. Not being able to see my teachers and advisors was lonely. Outside of my family, those are the people who know me best. And really they can be some of my strongest supports. And the academic part was so much worse. I had to learn how to be in complete control of my time and myself. The first week or two, I was too lax for my own good. I woke up late, watched an unnecessary amount of Netflix, and ALMOST missed a math quiz. But in my defense 9 a.m. math quizzes are torturous and uncalled for. I did get into better habits. I woke up earlier and set alarms. I carried around a to-do list around everywhere I went. I even started to dress up everyday like I was going to a business meeting. I still do every single one of these things. And my days are still nine to 10 hours long. EVERYDAY. In total, I am drained. I was able to get over these feelings gradually. The drained feeling still lingers but the feeling of missing my teachers and the academic structure slowly fled as I settled into my "new normal." It's not like I don't miss these things, but I have braced myself. Life isn't going back to normal anytime soon. Plus, I have found a bright side: my family, movies, and books. I don't really have the best relationship with myself. I am a workaholic without any sense of self-care. I do not have a true balance between work and relax, but through mediums like movies and books I have found some bliss. I have been obsessed with movies and books lately. In total, I have finished six books and have watched over 20 movies during quarantine. I like the idea of being immersed into new worlds, whether through fantasy or a pre-corona time.

Although I have adjusted to the new world around me, I am scared out of my mind. I have vowed to stay inside no matter what. There were more than a few weeks where I did not even go to my backyard. There was one week where I got sick from being inside. There was no way that I could have been exposed to the virus, but I was coughing and sneezing for a whole week. Now I know it's OK to go out and be careful, but the calamity is far from done. The country and states are reopening, which is stupid. People are still dying! And to the protesters who feel it necessary to voice your opinion about "not being able to get a haircut or go to church," deserve their fate. I am dead serious. Those are fixable problems. Most barbers and hairdressers are doing house calls. And most have very safe precautions. And if your god-fearing butt missed church so much, open Facebook. Almost every church holds livestreams of services. Or maybe take out rosary. Wasn't it Our Lady of Fatima who said praying is necessary during times of apocalyptic situations? Maybe instead of risking your lives on the street with signs displaying your white privilege, you should calm down and think outside of your selfish and undeserving ways. I don't give a flying rat's butt about how this goes against your rights. Cause last time I checked, having rights depends on a government acknowledging your life. That statement alone has been tested by the lives of millions African Americans, Natives, Latinxs, and Asians. And it doesn't help that the president of the United States drives people to do this. Political disputes aside, his reaction to the whole pandemic is an absolute wreck. He has proved to be an unworthy president who does not deserve any respect because it is blatantly obvious that he doesn't care about us.



Friday Night Thoughts

by Manny Wright, age 13

I love Friday nights, binging on anime
Sitting on the couch while my brain melts and decays
Why is everyone mad at “coronacation”
Why haven’t I been sad since corona came in?
That’s all about to change because the virus keeps on growing
I have another question, why hasn’t it been snowing?

I used to laugh my pain away and hide my emotions
Put my ear to a shell just so I can hear the ocean
Rubbing my ash away using 24-hour lotion
Because of the pandemic there has been a lot of commotion
I’m confused, why can’t scientists just make a healing potion
It was a joke, I was kidding, although that really would be useful

Playing basketball at the park
I’m really on fire because my dad ignited the spark
I just crossed him so hard, I think it left a mark
The NBA got cancelled
I got these handles
Don’t get trampled
Imma cross you over
I’ll blow you away like that one Mars rover
I got luck like a four-leaf clover
Got saved by the angel on my shoulder

Mighty Writers



My Time in Quarantine

by Ellie Tyler, age 16

When corona was first talked about, I'll admit I thought it was a joke. I thought it would be treated like Ebola. People would make jokes; it'd be talked about, but I'd never have to experience it firsthand. I know that's ignorant, but I have become so accustomed to seeing chaos on the news that I just became numb to it.

A little bit into quarantine I started to think a lot. The skeletons in my closet began to overwhelm me. I came clean to my friends and family about a lot of things. I wanted to just be honest and get everything off my chest, but with that came some of the worst pain I've ever felt. All I wanted to do was lie around. For a day or two I could barely stomach food. I couldn't sleep alone for days. I'm pretty sure my little sister slept with me every night for seven or eight days.

Even when my friends and family reassured me that they weren't upset with me, I still felt an immense amount of guilt. At this point I'm doing a lot better. I just want to grow as a person and be the best me I can be. Nothing feels worse than saying you want to die and not knowing if you mean it or not. It was like I was teetering on the edge, between being stable and going insane. So yes, I am very grateful I was able to get everything off my chest, but I hated that feeling. It was a result of being stuck inside and not being able to keep busy.

Quarantine just feels like such a hindrance in my life. I understand it isn't all about me, but I'd be lying if I said it didn't suck. I had an acting class and vocal coaching coming up in April that I was very excited about. I turn 16 in June and don't even know if I'll be able to celebrate. I am supposed to go to camp in July and August. I wanted to apply to work at a café when I turned 16. Who knows if I will be able to do any of it.

In general, my life has come to a halt. I was pretty isolated this school year. All my plans had kept me going. I have stuff to look forward to now, plans for after quarantine and things I'd like to learn more about in general. I'm just ready for this all to end. I want my life back. I know I'll appreciate the things I took for granted a bit more.



Deep Outside

by Mosadi Pearson, age 16

my eyeballs crawl deeper into my skull as I realize how far inside my own head I really am
I am but a spark here in this echo chamber devoid of substance and weight

perception pulls itself past thought in an attempt to see but is surprised to find nothing
nothing but an infinity of mind

I know that there is nothing out there because if I was not I could not perceive
and if I could not perceive I would not be

reality is subject and you are not immune to thought



My Name

by Jude Folgia, age 16

when i hurt i whisper my name in the dark

jude jude jude

i feel it rise from my throat

jude jude jude

i feel its taste it on my lips

jude jude jude

it tastes sweet

i savor the flavor

because i know i'm on borrowed time

jude jude jude

small stolen moments with myself

jude jude jude

house empty

i scream it for god to hear

JUDE JUDE JUDE

and i will, i will say it loud

but for now in darkness

i hold it close to my heart

jude jude jude



Between You and Her

by Serenity Baruzzini, Mighty Writers Alumna

You stayed up late the other night because you couldn't stop crying over the death of your ex-boyfriend's grandfather. He died four years ago; you just never took the time to grieve. You mourn over the death of this man you never knew because he wanted to know you, and you prioritized other things. It was too late then, and it's surely too late now.

He left you a cactus that must be 20 years old. You've written and wrestled with reflections and remembrances of how you must keep her alive. Now you understand why. Now that you can't stay at school until seven every night, can't go to work in the off-hours, can't go to your boyfriend's house for a Saturday afternoon. You must stay here. And you hate it: I know you do. You're so used to being busy with your things and your stuff and other people's things and stuff, and now you can't have it. That's why you were stuck to the floor talking to the cactus last week as if it were listening.

You've made her your friend. You tell her the things you don't want to hear, and you sit with her when you hear them anyway. You like to think she's sympathetic.

And it's not what you don't know that's been getting under your skin, but that you're surrounded by everything you know all too well. While you've lived here forever, you've avoided being housebound for too long. Now, without much choice in the matter, overlooked artifacts have become war zones in an everyday battle. You can't stop looking at trinkets, photographs, and floorboards. You don't realize how often you stare at the floorboards until they start meaning something.

No, you're not going crazy. You're learning from the mistakes you made years ago that you never let time heal. Your mistakes are forgiven, if not by anyone else, then by yourself. As much as you've heard that you lack empathy and compassion, you know it isn't true. You're just focused. And when all is said and done, when you're forced to stop to breathe, you remember the little things. You feel them and swallow them whole because you must.

You're sorry that this is all so painful, but growing pains always are. Now you can step back and take care of yourself. Watch how people choose to take care of or neglect each other; pay attention to how you do those things. Ask yourself what you need and what you can give, even if it isn't much.

Why are you kinder to a cactus than you are to yourself? Keep watering her, give her light, tell her what you think she should hear. Maybe you'll both grow.



Quarantine Reflections

by Anthony Wallace, age 12

It's Coming!

“The virus is deadly,” my grandma said as she watched the news, “and it is spreading quickly.” Her stern words best described the situation that was about to come. At first, I wasn't alarmed. I didn't really believe what she was saying. But after she showed me what was going on across the world ... it was a whole different story. Even before things hit the fan, the coronavirus pandemic was changing me — and I didn't even realize it. I was scared, and so was my family. That unpleasant feeling was just the beginning.

It's Here!

After the virus came the shutdown, and it soon became clear that the world was being hit with more than just a virus. Hot on the tails of the pandemic came fear and animosity. Before the coronavirus, everyone I knew was happy and stayed close, but after this drastic change, people generally stopped communicating. Fear was here, and you could see it in people as they walked the streets, and with that dread was hostility. It changed my outlook on life, because knowing that there is a pandemic that is very deadly is terrifying. Even worse was the fact that learning from this pandemic can be difficult, especially for someone my age who doesn't understand it so well. Altogether it left me heartbroken. But still, knowing that things may be like this for a while, I tried to live normally the best I could.

So ... What Now?

Even though I'm young, I quickly learned how to adapt. Now, the longer quarantine goes on the more I get used to it. While some things had drastically changed, such as school taking precautions to keep everyone safe by putting everything online, things aren't as dire as I thought they'd be. I can't do everything I used to do before quarantine, but I still get to have fun regardless, and that's important in such a trying time. I'm doing great in school, I get to play basketball and eight-ball pool anytime, and I get to spend more time with family. So, while there is a pandemic going on, this quarantine has taught me that we can adapt to trying times quickly, and that people should still be appreciative, taking care of ourselves and others, especially the ones closest to you.



It All Began

by Aahil Khimani, age 9

It all began
When the people ran
To their homes
To stay safe
Now everyone is bored
But the virus is not ignored
People are on the front lines
Willing to pay any price
For all the deaths and cases
To just go away

Is this where the world ends
Or where it all began?
When the virus runs its course
The world will know it was war
Between us and the enemies
Knocking on the door

But we will know we won
Because we, as humanity, are one



I'm Coolin'

by K. Rob, age 16

I'd imagine when most people are quarantined, they'd be afraid. What's going to happen? Am I going to survive? What if I get the rona? Everybody's panicking and buying up all the food and toilet paper, food they're not even gonna eat, toilet paper they're gonna waste on popping pimples and cleaning toilets.

And the crazy part is, at some point in time, I imagined myself to be one of those people! But this was before the pandemic. Now, being in the middle of it, with wave two supposedly on the rise, I gotta say ... I thought this would be more ... interesting.

Like, life hasn't changed a whole lot, other than stores closing earlier and free bus rides, so I can't complain, I have food and a roof over my head. Like — the biggest thing I have to worry about is my summer, and there's almost no chance of that happening anyway. So while I'm not really ... concerned about the virus, I still have a problem with it.

Why? Corona is restricting worldwide movement, and as a teenager who's turning 16 in less than a month, any kind of rules or restrictions are something I can honestly say I hate. I was looking forward to this summer and those "ayy, 16, summer, 2020, now i can actually do stuff" type vibes, but all I'm getting is "stay in the house, better yourself, and hope you don't die."

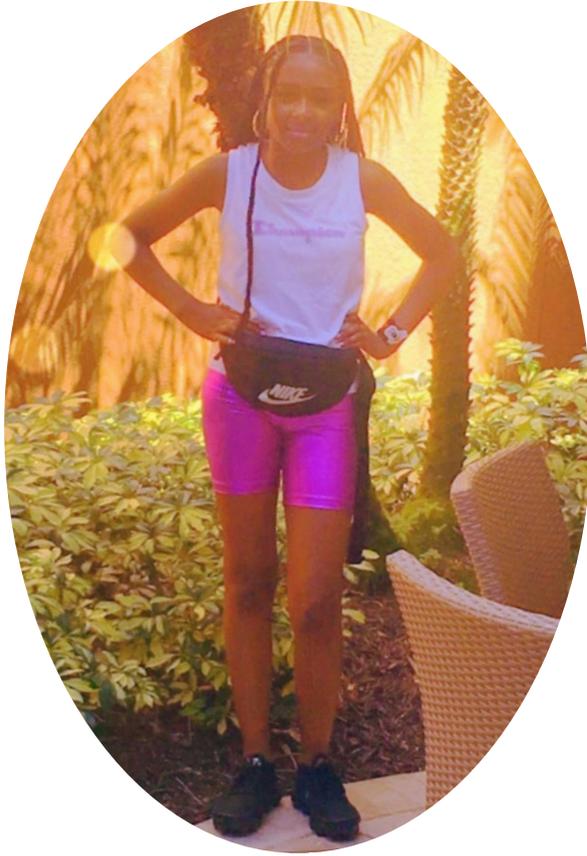
Corona, to me ... has been a huge, fat, fire truck red "Get It Together" sign in my face. Like I don't have 40 other people telling me all the rest of the time. But it's cool. People are saying we're entering a new age in time, like we didn't already create new genders, so now, that we're really about to evolve ... like, globally? It's kind of overwhelming. But I'm cool wit that.

I don't even know what to think about corona: I just know that the world is confused, and I'm sitting here eating Doritos, like nothing's gonna happen, and I'm cool with that. It's a myriad of different feelings in my body, and I'm cool with that, I feel like regardless of the world around me, I'm just cooling.

Maybe I don't even care if I get it
Maybe I'm scared of the future
Maybe go outside one day without my mask
Maybe they'll put 5G towers in the sky and mess up my brainwaves
Maybe everything'll be fine

At least I have more time to do what I want
Maybe I'll come out of this thing three times better.

Maybe I'll know more. Maybe I'll get taller. These weights look pretty attractive now that I've been bored for three weeks straight. I guess I'll just listen to what everyone's saying and wash my hands.



Violence and Illnesses Are ...

by Symphony Wallace, age 12

In Philly, there are tons of people dying

Violence is the fist or gun at your head

It is what draws people against each other

Something that accidentally kills innocent people

It is an action that needs to be stopped

Illness is like the needles stuck deeply in your skin

It kills families and destroys young people's minds

It is like a fight with your soul

Like the sound of relatives yelling at the doctors

Violence and illnesses are the reason why families feel like ...

A sword went through our heart



Every Day

by Federico Lesmes, age 15

I wake up every morning between seven and eight, and even though I get a full night's sleep, I feel tired. My eyes grow heavy and saddened as I feel my body and spirit drift away. I can no longer really remember what day it is, and I no longer really look forward to anything, because what is there to look forward to? Another long day of Zoom conferences and assignments? Another day of corrupted PDFs and endless emails from teachers telling me I haven't been submitting work?

Normally, I would shake this off by hanging out with friends and whatnot, but I feel like a prisoner. I slave away at a computer from eight to five, eating government sandwiches and get home only to once again drain away at another TV show. What is there in life? I wander like a zombie, wondering if the virus or boredom is going to kill me first. Then, I found something. One day, I decided to dust off the old piano, and began playing. The way that I saw it, the notes that came from this beautiful instrument rejuvenated my tired eyes.

I am no longer wandering aimlessly. Now, I blow off steam on the piano. Now, I have a more positive outlook on quarantine. You see, before quarantine I always felt like I never had enough time. Now, time doesn't matter because I have all of it in my hands. Instead of watching shows, I try to write my own. Instead of listening to music, I try to make my own. I discovered these new things that I never thought I had, and all these activities seemed to make my life a little happier.



Chatter Chatter

by Katja Jeblonski, age 9

Chatter chatter.
Oh yes, lots of chatter chatter.
Outside, inside, all sides have
Chatter chatter.
The market.
The Italian market,
But not quite Italian.
There's pasta all right,
But not quite Italian.
Chatter chatter there, too.
Chatter chatter.
Turn the corner, and
You're there.
Fruit to pasta to chocolate.
Mmm, sweet yummy chocolate!
No more chatter chatter anymore.
Just silence.
I miss my school friends, their plans ruined too by this virus.



A Crisis Like This

by Anushka Dar, age 11

For an almost middle schooler, a crisis like this is the roller coaster ride of a lifetime. Tests, homework, and grades were the only thing that mattered for me at school until the big wave came crashing down on us. During meals with my family, my eyes dart toward the TV, aching for something entertaining and less gloomy. But no. News channels repeat “COVID-19!” this, and “coronavirus” that. This seems to be the new normal.

The pandemic isn’t the only thing that is taking a toll in human life. It has a cascading effect that paralyzes the world all across. I am sick of the boring way life now revolves around me. The world is under a lockdown, me included. Secrecy, confinement, and loneliness are now my daily usual. Questions race through my mind. I want to blame somebody. But I can’t, as it is technically nobody’s fault.

I desperately want to go outside with no fear of the virus. Yet there isn’t an effective vaccine that works on humans yet. So, I am stuck inside. I have been inside now for almost three months, haven’t gone outside the perimeter of my house. Never. How and when will this virus finally subside? Some days, I believe I am dreaming it all, and that this reality is only just a nightmare I will soon wake up from. Of course, that’s not the case.

Millions have died, and there are more deaths to come. But even though this virus is still here, life will eventually have to continue. Until the virus is gone for good, or there is a vaccine to prevent it, we can only just wait. And waiting is not that easy.



Being Kept Away

by Ciera Suragh, age 15

Corona be gone
I want to live strong
I know home is sweet sweet home
But it is not where I belong

I am tired of your mess
Stop being earth's threat
You are leaving people depressed and stressed
Why are you playing these games
You are really insane
You are giving us pain
This pandemic is lame

We are being kept away
With no choice but to stay
In quarantine and six feet away
And everything is going gray

We are being kept away
For how long? They say
A week, then a month, then two more
No one is sure
When we will be able to walk out our doors

We are being kept away for our own sake
You have to wear a mask outside to save your fate
I am eating a lot and going through a lot of plates,
But with all my new hobbies, I think I am great

We are being kept away because corona is heartless
And each day I pray to end all this darkness
When I started losing loved ones it brought a lot of sadness
But when I think of the memories it brings back gladness

We are being kept away because of you
I have to accept that this is a rough time to go through
We are being kept away
So you better find something to do
It is gonna be a long time
So keep your eyes on the news



My Crazy Family

by Eriyanah, age 12

Home is a place where kids can be safe
they can have fun on birthdays and eat a lot of cake
Home is where I chill
and I don't gotta worry about paying no bills
I'm picking up on things that my two sibling normally do at home
I've noticed my baby sister is always eating my phone
my baby sister has her teeth
she is eating like a beast
she is finally a big girl
she is doing some twists and a couple twirls
my mom she is a beautiful independent woman
she is doing real good and
in this hood my mom treats me better than any other woman could
my little brother is annoying
he is always asking me for stuff and he's kinda boring
that's everything about my family I hope you enjoyed
thank you very much for listening to my hood



I See You

by Sunny Morgan, Mighty Writers Alumna

While many children have adjusted to school-at-home, there are many children who do not enjoy the same luxuries of attentive parents and a stable home life.

I see you.

To the kids using a phone to do homework.
To the kids logging on longing for more work.
To the kids who barely eat breakfast before school.
To the kids who eat none.
To the kids who do it all alone.
To the kids whose mom and dad don't wake you up in time.
To the kids whose family could care less if you log on.
To the kids who use the neighbor's WiFi.
To the kids who used school as an escape.
To the kids whose circumstances at home fit none of the above,

I see you.

I see you because I was once you.
Your safe haven was compromised; your comfort zone, suddenly gone.
I know the feeling all too well and all too clear.
You may feel trapped, like there's nowhere else to go — and anywhere else is better than home.
The people around you may not understand you; your family might not care if your work gets done.
If you feel this way, you are not alone.

I see you.

I used to wish a magic force could just come and help me escape from home. Sometimes I still do.
What helped me was using my words and creativity to escape to other worlds (after school of course!)
And when that gets old, go outside for a moment, and breathe fresh air.
When that gets old, find a lonely spot at home, and take deep breaths.

While this may seem like forever, just know that this is temporary.
Soon, we will be able to feel the sun on our skin.
Soon, we will see our friends again.
Soon, we will find our safe haven again.
I am so proud of us for pushing through.

I see you.



A Shift in the Narrative

On May 25, 2020, about three months into quarantine, George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Mr. Floyd's neck for almost nine minutes, as Mr. Floyd called for help and said that he could not breathe, until he eventually became unresponsive. In an instance that recalled the murders of Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, and so many more, we saw racist and brutal policing claim another Black life.

Protests erupted. From social media feeds to city streets, people demanded justice, demanded change. Demanded an end to police brutality, an end to systemic racism and white supremacy in its myriad nefarious manifestations. There have since been demonstrations in all 50 states and D.C., from major cities to rural communities. Here in Philadelphia, folks protested in many different ways, with displays of grief, rage, solidarity, and power. Militarized and violent responses from the city police and arrival of the National Guard escalated tensions between protestors and police, and the city saw weeks of painful unrest.

Nationwide, the protests have since resulted in the removal of racist monuments, prompted reopenings of previous cases of murders of Black Americans at the hands of police, and have become a rallying cry for a nation in which Black lives matter. This movement for civil rights continues. Through quarantine, reopenings, and beyond, these events have altered the nature of this moment in time. In the following pieces, our writers reflect on these events and the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement.



What Do You Expect?

by Kiamuya Mazama, age 15

What do you expect me to do?
How you gonna claim a country
That does not want you?
Don't call the cops
They probably gonna hunt you
You don't want to hear it,
But it is the sad truth.
Tell 'em, what do you expect me to do?
Cops beat us from Black to blue.
I would be lost if I didn't have roots,
If I didn't have you.
Another Black man killed,
It's feeling like old news,
Got me wondering if next
They are going to kill me or you.
At this point, Africa,
Please take me back to you.
Feeling like I'm stuck underneath,
On my neck there is a knee,
Someone tell the cop that I can't breathe,
I watched as another human's life was seized,
They hiding from reality
Inhumane cops couldn't care less about humanity.
Please, don't tell me how to act,
Every time I walk down the street
I don't know if this heartbeat is my last
I won't be the first, I won't be the last.
Tell 'em, what do you expect me to do,
After everything you've put us through?
I have dreams like nightmares coming true.
America, I could never die for you,
And there's no point in lying to you,
Land of the free, I wish that could be us
I wish that could be me,
They gonna catch us.
They gonna lynch us
If we ever try to flee.
I may have to kill him in his sleep,
I could never die at his feet.



On Justice

by Jennifer Solano, age 18

The voice has no color —
knowledge is a path, not a color.
The only color that matters to me and you
is the red that runs through our bodies.

That bright red that runs through you and me —
My white or black cape is subjective,
does not show who I am,
does not say who I am.

My complexion does not say who I am,
my complexion does not reflect my voice
and also does not take away my freedom,
does not take away from me,
choosing how to live.

My color is infinite pride,
I show my roots.
I am the union of two worlds.
I am the union of my parents.

My complexion is a sign,
but me, my friend,
I am the magnificent meaning.
It varies by the title I have.

I am not you and you are not me —
I don't have your skin, you don't have mine,
but I have a voice just like you have,
my blood is the same that runs in you.



How Would You Feel?

by Thayer Abdel-Razzaq, age 16

How would you feel if you were to run
you'd be sure to be gunned?
How would you feel if the so-called saviors
that are meant to make us feel secure
gave us fear up our rear and left us in tears?

How would you feel if instead of feeling your heartbeat,
you were looking down at bloodstains on the street?

How would you feel if you were minding your business one day,
grabbing a snack, and BOOM! just because you wore your hoodie,
you got shot by a man on fake police duty,
and by the end of the day the streets are just bloody?

How would you feel if you just found out, at first you were in doubt,
but then you realized that your family member just went out?
Killed by white supremacist. And you wonder why we raise our fist.

Day in, day out, today, tomorrow,
beautiful families left in cold black sorrow.

Hashtag after hashtag
Body bag after body bag.

This is nothing new,
as much as it sounds like a horror movie about citizens gone rogue,
this is all true.

The only people that can stop this
disgusting harassment on African Americans
are people like you.
You.



78, 79, 80, 81 Days

by Harry Ricci, age 10

78, 79, 80, 81. That is how many days it has been since we started quarantine. Everything is a complete mess.

School is a complete mess because we still don't really know how to do a lot of things that our teachers give us. Also teachers are very new to this and are having trouble giving and grading tests.

Society is a complete mess because some people are staying inside and never go outside. Other people are going outside but wearing masks and social distancing. Other people are going outside not wearing masks, not social distancing, and getting COVID.

The community is a complete mess because people are being hurt due to the color of their skin.

The country is a complete mess because of all of the looting, destroying, and burning of a lot of small businesses. Most of the small businesses don't have a lot of money, so they have no choice but to shut down.

Do they know how many people are getting just enough money to afford shelter, food, and water? If they take that away from them, then what?

And do you know what tops it off? Celebrities keep saying, "We're all in the same boat." Except their boat is a big cruise ship, and mine is a small wooden rowboat that has holes in it.



My Opinion On What's Going On Today ...

by Breyze Dawkins, age 12

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was killed ... murdered ... life taken away! People have been protesting because of the events that took place on May 25th. I do understand the need for protest, but now people are looting and causing more problems for our communities than before. How can we bring forth social change when we are socially destroying communities and self-esteem of the people in the neighborhood? Breaking into stores will only take away the necessities that we have limited access to anyway. As a kid in the midst of the chaos, I just want this to end soon. My mom and I have been praying for peace, but will peace ever come ... She says that it will, but until then I understand that Black Lives Matter, and that a change is prayerfully coming.

Righteousness and Respect for all ...



BLACK LIVES MATTER

by Zahara Dixon, age 15

Every day, you go on social media,
See a Black man, Black women, Black kids being tortured because they alive.
Tortured by racism, systemic injustices, and the people who are meant to protect.
So many fights happening these nights. Wanting our rights before they cut the lights.
Can't even go outside with a hoodie on because a white person's gonna think you a thief,
when really, you just went for a run hoping you'd find some relief.
Then hear this, you can't even go to the store without seeing a body drop to the floor
And when you see that body, who is it? A Black person, right?
Is it 'cause we in the dark and you can't see at night?
Or is it because we Black and you refuse to give us our rights?
Then y'all wanna say Black don't crack, but how bout them scars on our backs?
Cops still shooting us, 'cause the color on our skin.
Put the whips away and release us from the shackles you put us in.
MLK, Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges, you fought for us and we are still living in sin.
Oh and let's not forget about them cops,
Hoping they can't catch sleep knowing what they did.
Man, how would you feel if someone shot your own kid?
Got them chasing us, tryna hurt us till we dead,
Man, what the hell is wrong with them in the head?
All we ever tried to do was be free,
but instead you got a cop's knee on a man's life, not letting go, even when he says, "I can't breathe!"
This is AMERICA. If white people were able to have a right, have a fight, why can't we?
There are army tanks and AR-15s in front of my house, can you see?
You tried to make us feel weak. But now we have to get stronger. Stronger than you'll ever be.
Standing with Black men and women, never wearing a disguise.
Just like Maya Angelou said, "Still, like air, I rise."
It's crazy, because you think this is all happening because of one man's life.
How about Philando Castile — killed in front of his daughter and his wife?
You gave us no choice but for us to do what we did. George Floyd died, never got to see his kid.
You're getting mad because of the destruction Philly has done?
You should have listened to us, instead of making us run.
Being a person of color has done nothing but left my tears dry.
Now Philly isn't the same anymore, but to all those innocent Black people, fly high.
Now y'all wanna say Black Lives Matter,
But how about you actually look at our hearts —
Like glass, they've been shattered.
But we will rebuild, that's what we're best at.
Hear my voice, march with me, stand by my side.
Know that we are worth it, that we are a part of this nation.



Family Tree

by Kelmaris Diaz, age 14

I'm tired of seeing them fall.
I'm tired of this all.

Them lined up protected by plastic
And us into ashes.

We go as far as night.
They go as far as white.

Them holding us down by the neck.
We are begging for our breath.

Open your eyes and see.
What have they done to me?

Pleading please! Don't kill me!
My eyes bleed.

But I won't flee.
So stand here with me.

Roots growing beneath this family tree.



Paper Cranes

by Angelita LY, age 9

the time when I stay inside quiet
and the outside world going astray
only paper can hold my wishes for the earth
I fold one thousand paper cranes to fly
fly paper cranes, fly to the sky
take my words soaring high
shower the world with many blessings
so it can heal their pains
paper cranes for peace
paper cranes for love
paper cranes for a cure
paper cranes for friendship
paper cranes for kindness
paper cranes for compassion
paper cranes for equality
paper cranes for happiness
paper cranes for homes
paper cranes for unity
paper cranes for hope
paper cranes for change

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