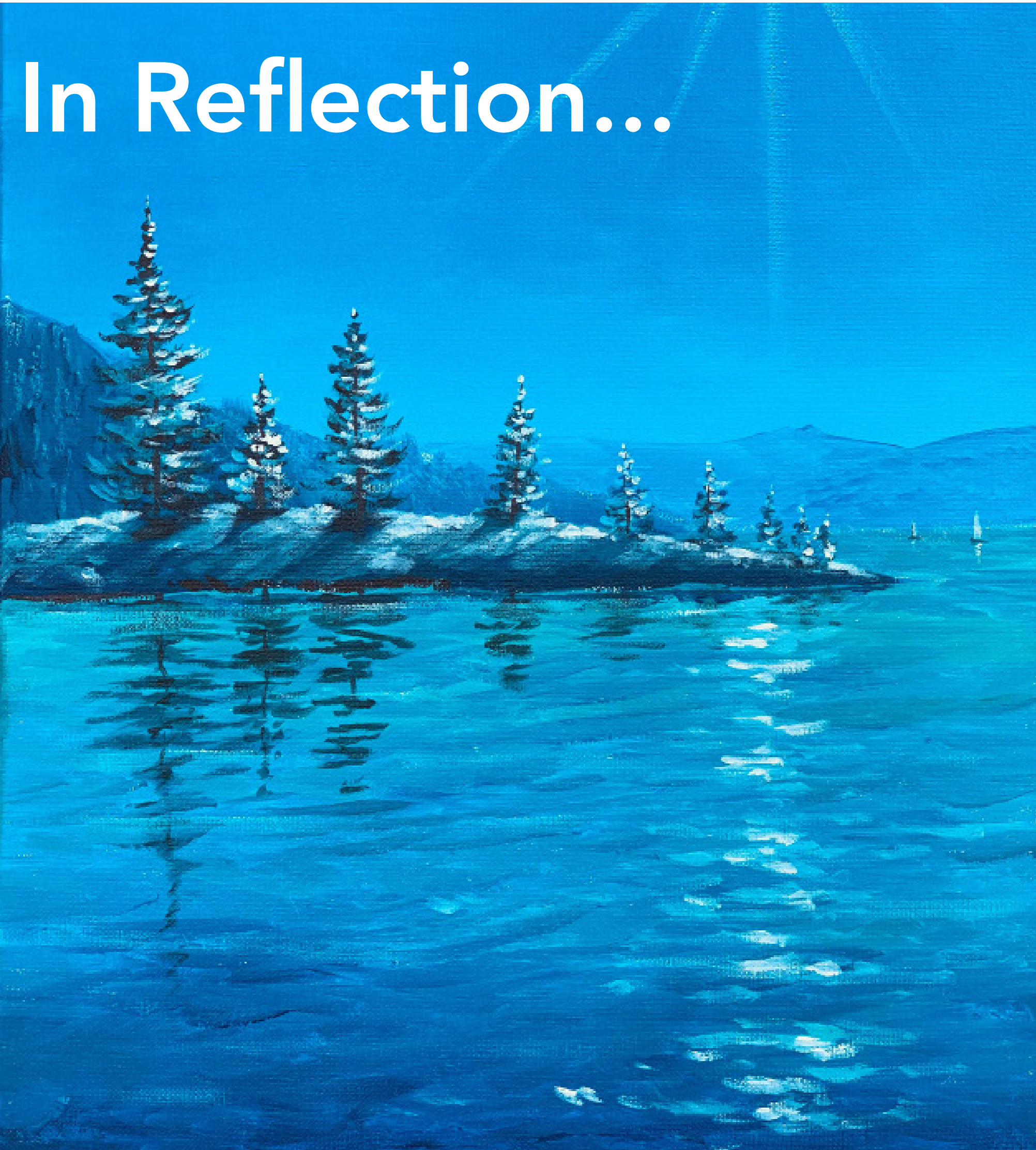


iWRITER

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By Kids, For Kids Magazine

In Reflection...



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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

I am excited and honored to be making my “letter from the editor” debut for the eleventh issue of the iWRITER magazine. The theme for this issue is reflection. Returning to where it all began in the spring of 2020, I am in awe of how far we have come.

The iWRITE Youth Club came together in the wake of the pandemic and has since written unique and enthralling pieces regarding self-love, Women’s History Month, the beauty of preserving nature, global conflict/connections, and so much more. We have bid senior writers farewell as they embark on a new chapter in their life, welcomed new voices with a passion for storytelling and visual art design, and expanded our reach beyond the Houston community. All in all, it’s been a busy but wonderful past couple of years. And it would not have been possible without your endless support of the magazine. On behalf of the iWRITE Youth Club community, I extend my heartiest gratitude to you.

Why is reflection so important? It allows us to recall how we felt in certain moments, and, more importantly, if we want that feeling to come again in the future. Perhaps it was a feeling of satisfaction when participating in a neighborhood cleanup. It can also be the bitter memory of a news report on TV. Reflection gives us an opportunity to hit the pause button amidst the busyness of daily life, sort and untangle our thoughts, and create positive meaning from them.

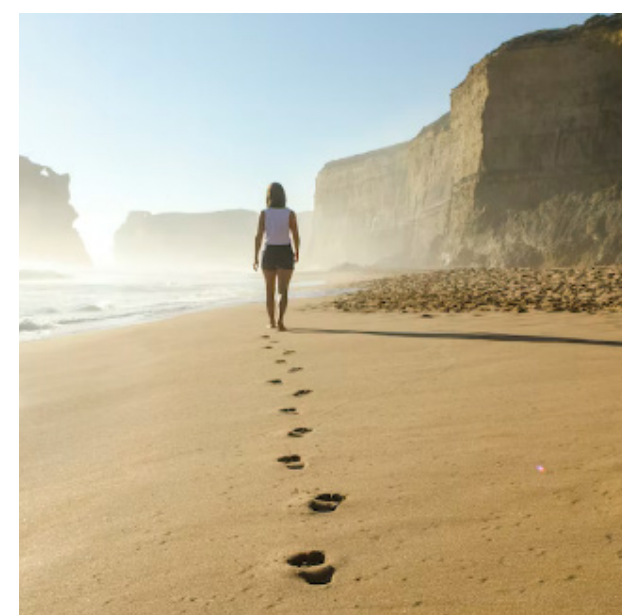
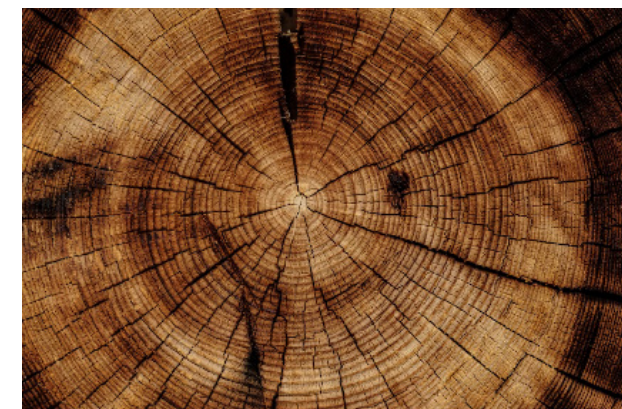
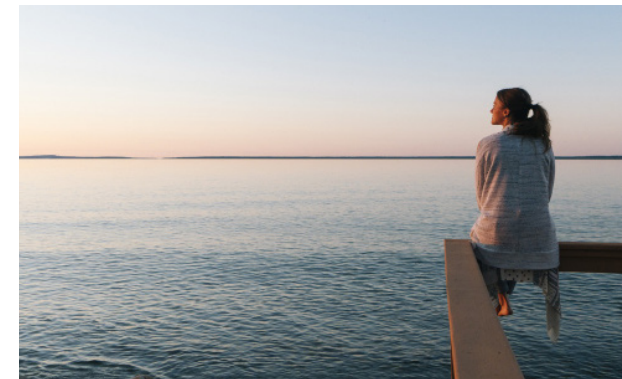
Between a successful “I Am Texas” publishing contest, the launch of the iWRITE Alumni Association, and inspirational conversations with author Ellen Leventhal, CNN producer Julia Chan, and ESL professor Dr. Neda Zafarianian, I can certainly say that the Youth Club created an everlasting meaning of learning and belonging this year.

With that, I hope you enjoy the eleventh issue of the iWRITER magazine, a by kids for kids publication, with the theme of reflection to bring us all together.

Happy Reading!

Sanjna Pandit

I WRITE because writing cultivates my ability to be eloquent and express my feelings and ideas. I learn more and more about myself with every new thought that I put on paper. My mind forces me to enter a whole new realm of imagination and discoveries that I never knew I could reach.



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A Journey of Reflection: Returning to My Hometown



Home is a place where we can be ourselves. It is an opportunity for both exuberance and quiet contemplation, a sight for both struggle and success. My family and I just returned from a ten-day trip to Kerala, a state on India's tropical Malabar Coast where my mom was born and spent her childhood summers. Kerala is just as much her home as Texas is, and the moment I stepped off the plane and into the streets of the coastal state, I felt the same way.

Reflection in Subtlety

Most importantly, home is one of the few things in the world that encompasses our past, present, and future. These sentiments were much-needed reminders in the wake of the new year, and I am grateful to share my period of reflection that led me to them.

We were blessed to have my maternal grandparents taking this milestone trip with us. We arrived mid-morning at their flat in Kochi (a historic trading town in Kerala), a few hours before Christmas Eve festivities. Having arrived a week beforehand to get the place ready, my grandmother and grandfather warmly greeted us at the door.

At first, my excitement to be in Kerala could not overtake my lingering sadness at not having a traditional Christmas. There would be no tree, cold weather for wearing fuzzy socks and blankets, and no presents to open the following morning. These things have always been of great importance in making my winter season special, so I couldn't quite 'let it go', so to speak. However, as I stood on the balcony and stared at the beauty in front of me, I felt a breeze that seemed to be telling me, "You may not have a tree, cold weather, and presents, but what you do have is a view of the sunset, a flat nestled in the

heart of the city, and a family to share it with."

In that moment of reflection, I realized that I must not take my mother's homeland for granted. We were all here together for a reason, and I was not going to let that be wasted. So for the rest of the trip, instead of hearing the winter vibrations that I was accustomed to, I was singing the song of palm trees, backwaters, and anything else that Kerala gifted us.

The Power of Fulfilled Promises: Long-Term Reflection

Before my great-grandmother passed away, she asked my mother to take her to one of the most sacred places of worship for Kerala Hindus: Guruvayur Temple. Though they had planned a trip to see the temple in the early 2000s, it was not meant to be. Fate had its own plan in mind, and it would end up being my mother taking her own family to the temple to honor her late grandmother's memory. When we all stood in front of temple doors, taking in this ancient symbol of history and culture for the people of Kerala, I could feel my great-grandmother's presence. This was a feeling I knew I wanted to carry with me into the new year: what it means to come full circle, to stay true to one's mission no matter the road to accomplishing it.

Our trek to the Guruvayur Temple was not the only fulfilled promise during the trip. My family and I were extremely fortunate to have a meeting with the senior-most female in the Travancore royal family: Her Highness Gouri Parvathi Bayi. (The Travancore Royal family ruled the princely Indian state of Travancore until the country's independence.) When we arrived at her estate, she was there to greet us at the door, a figure of power and grace. Her gray-blue eyes, neatly lined with kohl, lit with wisdom as she spoke with us about an array of topics: their home in Kerala, the relationship between her and my grandparents, visiting America, and even Starbucks coffee! On the one hand, my journalist side was eagerly jotting down notes and trying to document every word

spoken by Her Highness. On the other hand, I just sat back and absorbed the environment we were in: the cozy sitting room, the large paintings displayed on the walls, the open window bringing in the breeze from the pouring rain outside. My grandfather had told me that he would try his hardest to get an appointment with Her Highness, and he fulfilled that promise. Because of that, I left the royal home with a better understanding of my lineage and the people, places, and experiences of which my mother's side of the family is made. In the words of Her Highness, "We are just one cork in the entire wheel. There is no present without the past, and there is no future without the present."

Going With the Flow: Immediate Reflection

Waking up early in the morning is not my forte, and neither is standing in long lines. These were the two things that would await us during the midpoint of our trip. The reason for an 8:00 am departure and the lengthy wait in the heat of the afternoon was that my family and I had a tour guide to meet in Kanyakumari, a coastal town on the tip of India. From there, we would take a boat to reach the place where Swami Vivekananda, a 19th-century Indian monk, is said to have meditated for three days. It was actually a large rock that has now become a popular tourist attraction. This rock also represents the junction of the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal. For all these reasons, plus the fact that I happen to share a birthday with Swami Vivekananda, I was really looking forward to visiting the rock.

My family and I followed our tour guide, who weaved us in and out of the crowds, and we were met with a line of gargantuan proportions, stretching nearly double the length of what we were expecting. I looked at the time: 4:30 pm. My family and I stood at the back of the line, our uneasiness steadily climbing as the line showed no signs of moving up to the dock. Then, our tour guide returned from the counter and told us the news: They would stop accepting tickets at 5 pm, and we would not make it up there in time.

My family and I were naturally disappointed that we could not go onto the rock. But it was a learning curve for all of us. Given that everything on our agenda had gone smoothly up until that point, we were reminded of how fortunate we were to have been able



to visit the places we did. Not being able to physically step onto the rock would not be the end all be all, because we could still see it from afar, and it was still just as beautiful. Our tour guide told us, "Do you know when Swami Vivekananda meditated on that rock? December 24-27, 1892." My eyes opened wide with realization, and I turned to face my family. We were at the southernmost tip of India on the day when exactly 300 years ago, Swami Vivekananda was swimming back home.

After a decade of scattered memories, I returned to the land of my ancestors. This trip was so important to me on many levels, and doing it with my family as the last thing before the new year made it all the more special. I not only checked off my list of "Must-See Vacation Sights in Kerala," but I reconnected with my roots. I got a better understanding of who I am and the rhythm and beat of my homeland. And that is perhaps the greatest lesson I can take with me into the new year.

As we collectively open a fresh chapter, how will we reflect on what we have learned and experienced? What will we take with us on this new journey? With that, here's to home, here's to reflection, and here's to 2023!

BY Sanjna Pandit

I WRITE because writing cultivates my ability to be eloquent and express my feelings and ideas. I learn more and more about myself with every new thought that I put on paper. My mind forces me to enter a whole new realm of imagination and discoveries that I never knew I could reach.



Five Lessons from Ajay Banga

One of my favorite series to listen to and be inspired and energized by is “View from The Top” by Stanford’s Graduate School of Business (GSB). It’s a student-hosted series of interviews with global business leaders; these leaders discuss their personal values, the keys to effective leadership, and other, lighter material. ‘View from The Top’ introduced me to Ajay Banga: Vice Chairman at General Atlantic and former CEO of Mastercard. What stuck out to me about Mr. Banga was how he prioritized respect, adaptability, and risk-taking above all else in leadership. I thought I’d share five of my favorites of his pearls of wisdom with you.

Know the power of “Yes, if.”

This is a great one for in-class or out-of-class brainstorming or discussions. Instead of shutting people down with an outright “no,” try to rephrase it to “Yes, if...” and add more specific qualifiers to the initial idea. So many ideas that may have potential can go unexplored if they are simply blocked out from discussion.

“You can change the entire feel and look of a company by making people realize that they’re not empowered to say no,” Banga noted. “They’re empowered to say ‘yes, if.’ It changes the bureaucracy, the culture, the passion, the purpose — it changes everything.”

Balance IQ, EQ, and DQ.

We all know about IQ, intelligence quotient, and you might have heard about EQ, emotional quotient. EQ is simply being empathetic toward all those around you. Mr. Banga values decency quotient or DQ. It goes further than EQ — DQ is not just empathy but a genuine desire to care for those around you and ensure everyone feels respected and valued for who they are.

Have the courage to take thoughtful risks.

This is an unteachable asset. The willingness to make a decision at difficult times, Mr. Banga believes, depends wholly on your ability to take a thoughtful risk. It’s important to understand that you can learn something from everyone, so humility will prepare you for a growth mindset. The ability to take thoughtful risks also will prepare you to be antifragile, not just resilient. Something antifragile does not merely withstand a shock but actually improves because of it. We can improve by taking calculated risks with an open but analytical mindset.



Be uncompromisingly, unapologetically yourself.

In almost every interview you watch of Mr. Banga, he’s questioned about how his appearance as a turbaned Sikh man impacts his personal and professional life. Each time, after a brief quip about his part-time hobby being searched by TSA, he says it does not and should not impact him. Why should one change their beliefs, attributes, and values if they are not harmful to others? And even when he did face derogatory remarks or other hurdles, he stood by his policy that “dealing with it is more important than hiding from it.”

In his address at the GSB, Mr. Banga told the story of how in the wake of 9/11, Sandy Weill, former chairman of Citigroup, offered him a company car to take him from his apartment to his office, a route he usually walked. But he refused. Weill, whom Mr. Banga called a consummate leader, instead came to his apartment each day for months after the attack and walked with him to work.

Utilize urgency and patience side-by-side.

A sense of urgency in life is important, as it helps you stay on track and achieve your goals. Procrastination is the greatest enemy of mankind. However, urgency does not imply brushing aside others or their perspectives. Having the patience to hear people out and form genuine connections with them — remember DQ here — is equally important, especially on teams or in organizations.

So, these are five lessons from Ajay Banga! I hope they come in handy for you this coming year. Maybe you’re already following some of these; if so, reflect on how you abide by them. Wishing you a happy new year.

BY Eshaan Mani

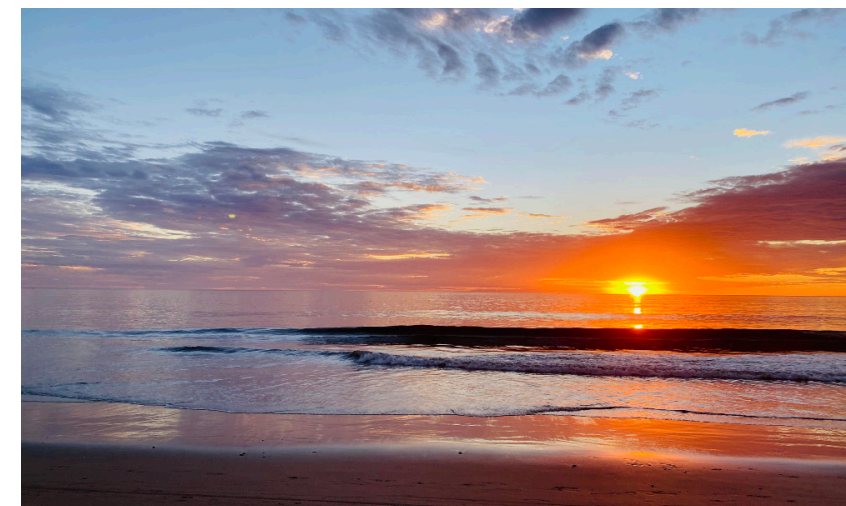
I WRITE for the rush of adrenaline I feel when my pen touches the paper. It is that exhilarating experience and the opportunity to not only get my voice out to the public but also be able to be the voice of inspiring people and organizations that inspires me to write.

New Year, New You: The Power of Reflection

Self-reflection is a state of mind, that with true determination and intention to reflect, we might end up learning new things about ourselves that could change our lives. In the new year, reflecting can help us take control of our lives by learning where we can improve and grow as people. By consistently reflecting on what we are doing right, and where we might be making a mistake, we are able to constantly make enlightening changes in daily aspects of our lives. Self-reflection can benefit us by giving us both self-awareness and perspective.

By looking inwards on our actions, we are able to see a raw, unfiltered version of ourselves. We are also able to see how we handle certain situations, without the presumed notion that we are able to do everything perfectly; because in reality, we can’t. We can use the knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses to make decisions that reflect our true selves. We are able to learn about our areas of improvement and where we have room to grow. By overcoming our weakness and harnessing our awareness of what makes us, we can appreciate ourselves more and have more self-confidence. Over time, we will be able to use self-awareness every day, by keeping in check with our minds, our actions, and our emotions.

Also, when we look back and reflect, we will always find moments where we were preoccupied and losing positive energy over things that seemed important at the time. But as we self-reflect we may see things in a different light. We will learn that in the grand scheme of things, those moments weren’t worth all the tension it caused us, because we have so many positive things to look forward to. Sean Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, states that nothing can affect us, or ruin our days, unless we let it. This means that we have the power to decide what moments are going



to affect us, and we can decide to focus on the positive things in our life, rather than wasting energy on the negative. Self-reflecting and self-awareness are important because these behaviors foster happiness. When we start prioritizing, and realizing what truly matters to us, we are able to become the best versions of ourselves. Using these 5 practices in your daily life will help you become more self-aware and gain a better perspective on life.

Journaling - Once a day, take a moment to unwind by writing down your thoughts. Here’s an idea for you to start off with: Think about one thing that made you smile, one thing that caused you stress, and one thing you felt grateful for this year.

Nature walks - Taking a step outside, and being surrounded by the beauty of nature gives you an opportunity to clear your mind. If you’re able to take this walk with pets or loved ones, you’ll be able to share the joy of being outside.

Reading - By exploring new worlds and learning new perspectives, you are able to not only take a step away from reality, but also bring back valuable traits into your day-to-day life. Also, you could read a self-improvement book, to think about reflection in a deeper sense.

Listening - Seeing the best in everybody, and helping others feel heard and appreciated, will not only benefit others, but also benefit you. By simply listening, you will be surrounded by positive energy.

Meditating - Sitting still with your eyes closed and taking deep breaths transports you to a state of calm. Meditating helps you make positive affirmations, set goals for the future, and reflect and grow on what you have done in the past.

I hope this article helps you become the best version of yourself as we ring in the new year.

BY Nia Shetty

I WRITE because of the joy I feel when I put a new idea down on paper. I write to be able to bring feelings and emotions to the reader, through ideas that I get to express.

'The Nutcracker' Needs to Change

The famous ballet 'The Nutcracker', was originally performed in 1892 in St. Petersburg but later more popularized with the reimagination of the choreographer George Balanchine. It is a classical ballet that is performed globally every December. The story follows a young girl, Clara, who is gifted a Nutcracker that protects her and travels with her to the Land of Snow and the Land of Sweets. In the Land of Sweets, Clara is gifted with dances: Chocolate (The Spanish Dance), Coffee (The Arabian Dance), Trepak (The Russian Dance), Tea (The Chinese Dance), The Mirliton Dance, Mother Ginger Dance, Waltz of the Flowers, Dance of the Dewdrop Fairy, and Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy.

In many productions of 'The Nutcracker', these dances in the second act include a number of racial stereotypes. In many versions of the Tea Dance, the dancers are made to wear bamboo hats and dance with large smiles and pointed fingers. In some productions, dancers are even painted with makeup that gives them slanted eyes. In the Coffee Dance of some ballet companies, the female dancer is meant to have a sexual aura. The two main characters of 'The Nutcracker', Clara and 'The Nutcracker', are often portrayed as European heroes that are entertained by the cultural dances, showing the Eurocentric nature of the ballet. 'The Nutcracker' has normalized the use of caricatures and cultural appropriation to tell a story. After Covid-19 and movements like the "Black Lives Matter" movement, it has become increasingly clear that these stereotypes are not only outdated, but also damaging to minority communities. The blatant promotion of stereotypes in 'The Nutcracker' is only one piece in the prejudiced puzzle.

Ballet has been known to be a whitewashed art form, rooted in white supremacy and the idea that the ideal ballerina is white. From its beginning, ballet was an art form to please aristocratic individuals and nobles, originating in Italy, until it later evolved into an art that coupled opera. Eventually, ballet was adopted and adjusted by Russia and France where different forms of ballet evolved. What was important in ballet were all qualities seen to be proper and "white": control, precision, conformity. Even in what is seen as a more progressive world, ballet is still centered around conformity. Much of ballet attire is hard to find in skin tones besides white, forcing dancers to hand-dye items to fit their skin tone. This is a clear example of the racism that is still present in the ballet world.

Many argue that 'The Nutcracker' should not be changed for sake of tradition, but that's no excuse for further

perpetuating negative stereotypes. 'The Nutcracker' is a ballet suitable for families and should be able to be enjoyed by children without contributing to the larger issue of racial stereotypes.

Since the rise in Anti-Asian hate during Covid-19, many ballet companies have taken steps to update their Nutcracker productions. For example, the Pacific Northwest Ballet has changed their Tea dance to include a Green Tea Cricket: a hero who performs elements of martial arts. Another example of a reimagined Tea Dance was performed by the Colorado Ballet. Scottish Ballet has made similar efforts and has changed the outfits in the Arabian dance. In their production, they included a dragon whose colors were drawn from Asian street food. Even smaller ballet companies like the students and professors at Butler University (Indianapolis) renamed their Tea Dance, calling it the Dragon's Beard Candy Dance. Finally, many companies are also having the role of the toymaker, Drosselmayer, to be played by both female and male dancers. This is an example of forward, feminist thinking; it is not an example of ending racism.

As proven by ballet companies across the globe, there are ways that 'The Nutcracker' can be changed and altered so it can evolve. This not only helps to create a more welcoming atmosphere, but also allows 'The Nutcracker' to continue to earn revenue without relying on outdated and negative stereotypes.



BY Cami Culbertson

I WRITE because it makes me feel powerful. Normally in my everyday life, I feel small or insignificant in the grand scheme of things. When I write and have the ability to publish, I feel like I am making my mark. Even if what I am writing about seems small, the fact I can share my voice in works like magazines where I am alongside talented writers, makes all the work I do feel significant to me. I enjoy keeping what I write, no matter how old, so I can reflect back on the work I have done and feel confident. Writing is the articulation of everything I cannot express otherwise.

A Place for Poetry

Featured poems from the iWRITER staff

PATRIA -- A REFLECTION ON DUAL IDENTITY

Here I rest,
Exiled.

Thrust between the pages
of a book that can't be read;
Falling but flying,
Caught in mid-air.

I grab ahold of sweet patriotic nothings
before they escape from my other ear.
I look for a way to live up to this dream
That my — this — country has thrust upon me.

Blood is red, they said; I say blue holds more meaning.
Peace is white, they said; I say it's hidden in the rainbow —
The death of a fervent, the death of a fanatic...
Only the disaffected survive without loss.

And then there's me:
Prodded before I'm abandoned,

Loudened before I'm hushed,
Asked to say what I can see,
But never hearing what I say.
My curled, disfigured body.
The weighted, patchy blanket
Up over my burning ears.
Highlighter-yellow earbuds.
I sink into the songs of a land that runs in my blood,
The dhol keeping time with the guitar,
the sitar in harmony with the violin —

I'm neither here nor there,
Scrounging between cold walls
for comfort and care.

BY Eshaan Mani

I WRITE for the rush of adrenaline I feel when my pen touches the paper. It is that experience and the opportunity to not only get my voice out to the public but also be able to be the voice of inspiring people and organizations that inspires me to write.



NEW AND OLD

When I was younger, I never understood the idea of someone being gone forever.
I thought of it as a joke, as if the truth was hidden beneath the lies adults told me.

When I was younger, I thought everything and everyone in my life would stay the same.
I never gave a care for the future.

Now that I'm older, I know that even if some people leave us,
they're always by our side.

I know moving on is a part of growing.

Now that I'm older, I understand the world constantly changes.
Nothing stays the same because change is inevitable.

Now that I'm older, I've learned so much.
But my younger self is still with me.
Sometimes I'm brave, sometimes I'm afraid.
And that's perfectly okay.



BY Sanvi Pandit

I WRITE because writing is my way to share what I think and feel. Composing stories and poems helps me tell the world about myself without feeling scared.

MY JOURNAL: 2022 YEAR-END REFLECTIONS AND 2023 FUTURE PLANS

I See Tree Rings of Growth in 2022

Only a few days until we can say, "It's 2023! Happy New Year!"
 We've all had lifelong adventures, challenges, and memories.
 Our experiences have contributed to how we got here.
 As 2023 arrives, we know it will be woven into magnificent tapestries.

My aspirations will combine with dreams and goals for my future.
 As past events have molded me like a tree's rings.
 As a tree's environment changes, its rings can be measured with a ruler —
 These multi-colored rings are unique to show such things.

These rings paint a picture of changing environments
 Likewise, as environments and challenges inspired my 2022 growth
 As experiences inspired my past development, so will my future growth will happen by moments
 I will continue to become stronger as I progress with memories and plans, both

Because I've learned to define and shape successes from my adventures.
 Like the tree rings, my rings show a beautiful picture of growth and change.
 Different circumstances and projects create various ventures.
 The future projects I will design and build will know no range.

I Reflect on the Special Accomplishments of 2022

I vividly remember when I plunged into the salty, blue water on a warm beach.
 And rested on an overstuffed couch while watching movies with my family.
 These experiences, combined with parties and visits to parks with friends who were within reach,
 And because our laughs mingled over everlasting periods, we rose gallantly.

I was elated when I was elected as Student Council President.
 I beamed with pride when my food donation program was a success.
 My joy was limitless when I received 1st chair for 1st violins, which left me content.
 It was a dream when I made it onto the tennis team for my school; I confess:
 My Great Barrier Reef trip was a magical experience; the algae was as thick as clovers.
 I'll remember the photographs of my family in the beautiful scenery, especially when we rode a bulldozer.
 On weekends, my friends filled me with glee as we talked into the night on our sleepovers,
 Trips that my family took with my best friends' families brought us even closer.

Colorful fireworks, aromatic delicacies, and U.S. pride permeated my surroundings on the 4th of July.
 Let's not forget Halloween, when endless loads of candy filled us with glee.
 As my family sat around a vast Thanksgiving feast, our laughs could've echoed into the sky.
 Magical Christmas moments were filled with dazzling snow, wonderful presents, and a towering tree.

My favorite projects from this year were the ones I had to rethink everything I did.
 I plan to write a novel about a middle school girl like me with joy amid who also loves to write and read.
 These projects required soaring visualization for new creative achievements; my imagination never was forbid
 I also plan to start a new charity program to help even more people who are in need.

BY *Tanvi Padala*

I WRITE because words are the sound of my thoughts and let me be creative. Through writing, I can escape to impossible worlds, experience magic, and create imaginative characters. Writing brings a tremendous amount of joy and relaxes me.

My Plans for 2023: Goals and Projects

My plans are unlimited, but 2023 may be a new year with many new subjects.
 Visualizing and planning a phenomenal science project for my school's 2023 Science Fair
 Planning and creating ingenious goals and agendas to organize my school work & innovative projects.
 Hopefully, I'll be in the top 3 on my tennis team; I must practice hard to get there.

Also, I'm starting to document my memories through a diary or journal, so I'll remember them when I'm older.
 Every day, I'll write a page about something exciting or cool.
 The journal will also help me reflect on what I've accomplished and how I've become bolder;
 Or it could be a stress reliever, and I need to express how I feel; whether it's at home or school.

As I enter eighth grade next August, there will be tons of massive changes from the past years.
 I will have new teachers, faces, and memories to create and share with many who care.
 As I hang out with my dear friends, I'll also make many new peers.
 I'll participate in creative communication and leadership projects as I create my future there.

From massive celebrations to sweet, memorable moments, 2022 has been a blast!
 As I cherish the old times, I will stride into the new year with hope and confidence.
 I excitedly wait to see what 2023 will unravel at last
 So here is a toast to my goals and dreams, wishing for much providence.

I chant the countdown: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 - Happy New Year!
 Goodbye 2022, Hello 2023!



MY ROOM

the flimsy, half-fallen sticky notes
line the wall in front of an old desk,
faint scratches run across the surface
from crayola and pencil markings

mint and white coat walls that encase the room,
hugging the bookshelf, dresser, and bed—
carving a cube out to fit
a small closet and a broken ceiling light

there is a dream catcher beside the bed,
photographs, unread books, comforting plushies,
and charms
displayed on the bookshelf wrapped with
thin, delicate fairy lights and polaroid pictures
and surrounded by vines that hang—

plastic kale green strands stiffly reaching toward
the cream carpet

when it is morning,
rays of light strike my bedside mirror
and within its thin white frame
i stare back at myself.

BY *Sophie Yu*

I WRITE to let my thoughts, feelings, and ideas spread across the paper. To form and create a story that can be told in any perspective, described with any words. Writing can create a whole new world



TWILIGHT TRANQUILITY

It's evening.
The dying rays of the sun lace gold into the periwinkle of night,
Deepening in color and intensity until all light is swallowed.
You sit,
Perhaps a cat curled reassuringly over your lap,
Watching time run out.
You look at the clock.
Look at the slender hands inch around and around,
Time slows to a crawl.

Nearby, a pond stirs restlessly.
Fretful waves shiver under the dim moonlight,
Lily pads quiver as starlight hits,
And a group of birds take flight as the sun's withering light fades.
They spiral like raindrops in a sea of tranquility,
A colossal, unified force that sprays black droplets over the violet
canvas of twilight.
All are eager, Tense, Waiting
For passing time to show the break of a new dawn.

Twilight grows dark blue rivers,
Rivets of shadow break apart the glow of purple and pink and
gold,
Breaking the silence of twilight with the intensity of midnight.
You look up.
Your cat wiggles hopefully in your arms.
Passing time slows once more.

As the end of another year approaches,
You allow yourself to think,
For a moment,
Of what you've achieved,
Of what you've accomplished,
Of the challenges you've overcome.

Perhaps you recoil uncomfortably,
Recalling moments of embarrassment, Failure.

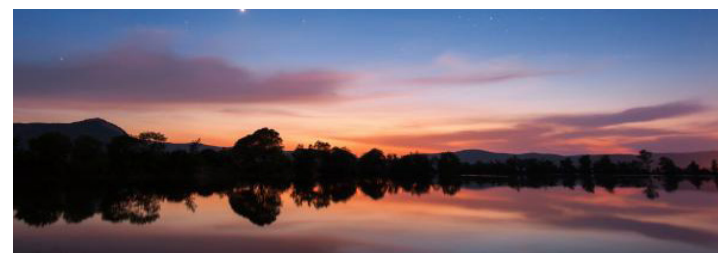
Or perhaps your eyes deepen with shadow,
As memories of tragedy, sorrow, and unbearable grief paint
violet into blood-red,
As the silence of twilight turns into screams of anguish.
Perhaps you lighten slightly,
As you think of moments of happiness, laughter, hope,
Golden rays lightening the darkness of night.

You exhale a sigh,
Stroking the cat,
And reflect on the past as the minute hand ticks.
Outside,
Perhaps the pond too looks up,
Reflecting on their year as stars paint the sky silver.
All around the world,
Silence falls and reflection begins.
An awe-inspiring, violet moment of tranquility,
A last moment of softness before dawn falls.

What a year it's been.
What a dawn it will be.

The clock strikes midnight,
The water settles,
And twilight bleeds blue and black until dawn.

Welcome to 2023.



BY *Helen Zhang*

I WRITE because, in a world where so much is uncertain, my imagination is always reliably creative and available. I know that, in times of stress, poetry and literature are always ways to find release and consistency in my life.

BOOK TALK

The *Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times* by Michelle Obama is a captivating and inspiring read about resilience and determination. In this book, Obama not only tells us the story of her life and how overcoming obstacles shaped her into the woman she is today but also shares a list of tools for us to use that have helped her become so successful.

The former First Lady tries to be as honest and frank as possible with her readers. She emphasizes the value of having a strong network of family and friends to help you overcome any difficult obstacles. Through her many valuable and life-changing experiences, she encourages us to continually search to find our light and inspire others to do the same. One of the most important lessons I learned from this book is to always value relationships with friends and family because they are the most important people in our life.

This book also contains helpful advice for coping with modern societal problems and social media craziness in this turbulent,

ever-changing world while still maintaining self-esteem. *The Light We Carry* is a book full of uplifting stories of compassion, gratitude, confidence, and perseverance that will appeal to all types of readers. Overall, this is a really heartwarming book, and I absolutely loved it.

BY *Shavi Moparthy*

I WRITE because writing is a way for me to express myself and it helps me connect to my artistic side. I enjoy writing because it allows me to reflect on experiences that I have encountered. Writing is something that I truly enjoy, and it has always been one of my greatest passions.



Writing Prompts to Soothe and Heal

This new year, consider taking steps to improve yourself with a fresh perspective. Our ability to strive forward arrives when we look back on our past; by reflecting on your memories, thoughts, and actions, you will be able to solidify your next steps further.

Journaling Prompts

Diaries can be hard to keep up with, but journals can help you gather your thoughts.

- What has been the most exciting part of the past year?
- Where have you seen the most growth within the past year?
- What and who are you most grateful for right now?
- What are good habits you have formed? What are good habits you want to form?
- Do you have any resolutions? If so, how will you plan to achieve them?

Letter-Writing Prompts

Letters don't necessarily have to be delivered to other people- you can write letters for yourself, too! Consider writing to your future self.

- Write a letter about your hopes for the next five years.
- Write a letter about what scares you at the moment, and

- how you think it'll positively change in the future.
- Write a letter about how you're *really* feeling right now.

Writing Ideas for 2023

If you're looking to start a new tradition involving writing this new year, try the following ideas.

- Start the gratitude jar. Every time you have something to be thankful for, write it down on a slip of paper, and gather it in a jar.
- Write one sentence reflecting on your day on a daily basis. Use the following prompts to get started.
 - a. What has been the most exciting part of the past year?
 - b. Where have you seen the most growth within the past year?
 - c. What and who are you most grateful for right now?
 - d. What are good habits you have formed?
 - e. What are good habits you want to form?

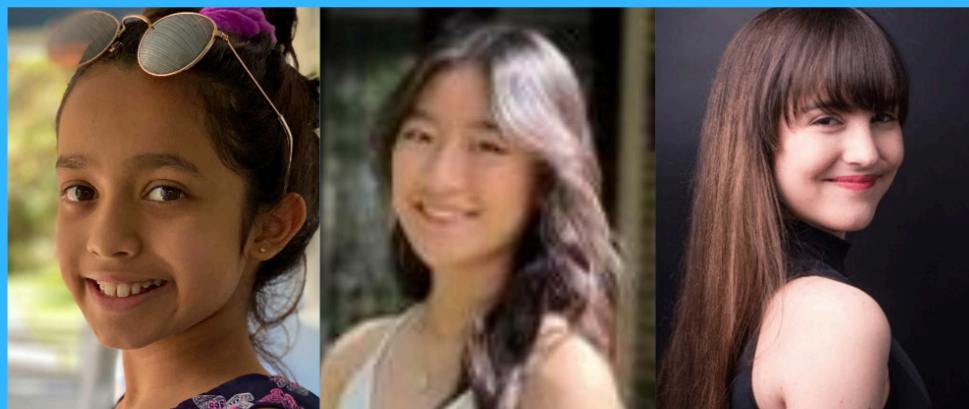
BY *Kate-Yeonjae Jeong*

I WRITE because I have a passion for being able to share my reflections and thoughts with others. I write so I can share the spark of joy that writing gives with many other interested students.

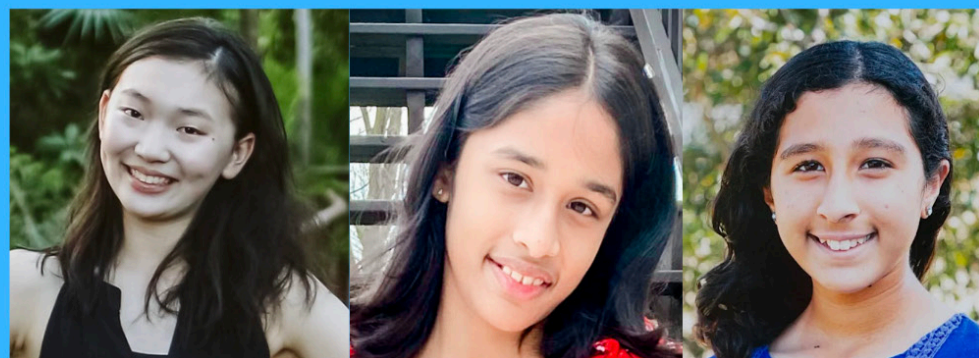
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