

# iWRITER

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An arrow can only be shot by pulling it backward. So when life is dragging you back with difficulties, it means that it's going to launch you into something great.

- Paulo Coelho

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# Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

2022 is here, and there's nothing better than starting off the new year with positivity. We're entering the new year with a refreshed mindset; with 2022 comes a new vision to reflect and practice gratitude.

Especially with the rising wellness movement, it's important that we infuse our daily lives with doses of brightness and joy. Positivity is such a beautifully uplifting and encouraging thing; no matter what challenges we may face, with a bright outlook, we can overcome anything. When we have an optimistic approach to life, it's truly amazing how the glass becomes more full than half-empty.

In hand with positivity comes gratitude; there are so many things in our lives for us to be thankful. Even the small things — such as pretty flowers, breezy weather, delicious food — are all things that we have the opportunity to enjoy. Being able to take a deep breath and reflect over the positive aspects of our lives can truly better us as human beings.

I was once given a sage piece of advice which has stuck with me for years: "Life is not about finding yourself, but rather creating yourself." When it comes to writing our own stories, each action that we take can lead to a chapter; with a positive mindset, we can make the best of any storyline.

On behalf of the iWRITER team, I extend my best for the new year and hope that you enjoy the seventh issue of the iWRITER magazine. Here's to spreading kindness and positivity everywhere we go!

*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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# The Power of Positivity

*How one word can change your life*

**P**ositivity is such a powerful word. A positive gesture has the power to change the world. Nevertheless, positivity is tough to practice and something that is often overlooked. Without positivity, our world would be very different, a place that would be unimaginable for me and for many of us.

I had the great opportunity to interview Dr. Jay Glynn, a licensed counseling psychologist at The Kinkaid School. Dr. Glynn has a Ph.D. from The University of Texas at Austin and has been an educator/counselor for nearly 40 years. Through this interview, Dr. Glynn helped me understand the importance of recognizing the silver linings in life and how one can lead a happy and meaningful life by embracing and practicing positivity daily.

## Positivity in the midst of a pandemic

Over the past two years, we've had many wins and losses. We've seen so many new things that we otherwise wouldn't have been able to experience in the past. Yet, in this never-ending dark tunnel that seems to define the pandemic, we are slowly forgetting about positivity with all the obstacles we've faced.

The pandemic isolated people both physically and emotionally. Shifting to online learning, leading to reduced social interaction, is one example of the isolation we've faced. "It's been around 22 months of the pandemic, and we've seen that this is a huge developmental time for middle and high schoolers particularly. People have had a delay in development because they've missed those social opportunities and those opportunities for growth," says Dr. Glynn.

As we slowly look toward the end of the pandemic and reflect, it's essential to continue to stay positive. Try to stay connected with friends and family. Even just a quick "hello" or brief chat can brighten someone's day. For those who are still working/learning from home, try to go for a walk with a family member and spend some time in nature. It's the little things that make life during the pandemic a little better.

## Positive Psychology vs. Positive Thinking

Positivity psychology is something that is up and coming in the field of psychology. The primary purpose of positive psychology is to find happiness, and it focuses on keeping the key elements that make people happy. Dr. Glynn shared that "positive psychology's goal is for people to stay happy, and continue to have a positive attitude throughout their day to live a healthy lifestyle."

This shows how positive psychology is very similar to positive thinking. Positive thinking is simply making the best of every situation and finding the good in whatever you do. "Studies of happiness show that money,

intelligence, and GPA have little to do with people being happier later in life. It's more about that feeling of grit and feeling of self-belonging and self-worth that they are contributing," Dr. Glynn explained. Keeping this positive outlook will also give you a greater chance for improvement and learning in the future.

## Benefits of having a positive lifestyle

Research shows that people who are positive live longer because they tend to lead happier and healthier lives. There is so much about our mental and emotional health that connects to our physical health.

"Taking care of ourselves emotionally affects the length of our lives," said Dr. Glynn.

One of the most apparent benefits of positivity is a decreased chance of depression. In addition, a theory suggests having a positive mindset reduces the negative repercussions of stress. Therefore, it's essential to identify your negative thinking and do your best to change that negative mindset to a positive one. Being resilient and having the ability to cope with stress is an enormous factor in staying healthy.

Another less commonly known benefit of positive thinking is that optimists can often recover faster from injuries/illness and have increased immunity. For example, a study showed that when areas of the brain related to negative emotions are active, people had a weaker response to the flu vaccine. Positivity also leads to better cardiovascular health and more protection from certain diseases.

Simply trying to be positive is enough. Surround yourself with people who support you and care for you. Tackle problems you face in life with a positive attitude and accept change. Doing these simple things can aid you in living more contently.

## Embracing positivity

Our attitude and our perspective are everything. A growth mindset says that even if you are not good at something right now, you have the ability to believe that you can become better.

"Success in my mind is more about a sense of belonging and a community. The people who have a growth mindset are those who are the happiest in their lives," Dr. Glynn explained. It's important not to think about whether you won or lost in something, but rather if you improved as a person.

Positivity is something simple. As students, positivity is harder to practice with the challenges that every new day brings. Instead of thinking things such as "I'm not good at this," think more along the lines of "I'm not good at this yet, but I will improve."

Making these little changes to your mindset can help you improve. Sometimes merely being grateful and showing thanks can go a long way. Take time to appreciate the things that make you happy and the people who help you feel satisfied. Embracing positivity daily is something that can be tough, but it's good to start small. Just showing gratitude daily is a great way to take a step forward into embracing positivity the best that you can.

Overall, there are five things that we do daily that help us maintain a positive balance in life. This includes sleep, social interaction, challenging yourself to learn new things, physical activity, and service/giving to others. These things help increase those "feel-good" hormones such as dopamine and serotonin and help decrease cortisol, which is the stress hormone.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Glynn said, "Whenever you're feeling

anxious or stressed, look at those five things and see which ones you aren't getting enough of. This helps keep a positive mindset possible."

If you practice changing the way you think, act, how you feel every single day, cultivating gratitude for small things you have in life, while being consistent with it, then you will see a steady, gradual change in your life. Dr. Glynn's words are a prominent example: "Even just a kind word can go a long way. By instilling positivity in yourself and others, you have the potential to change the world through positivity."

**BY Shaivi 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.*



# 15 Positive Affirmations



**S**tarting off your day with empowering words can uplift your spirits and improve your everyday lifestyle in a positive way. To bring self-encouragement and strengthen your mind's outlook, repeat the following fifteen affirmations as part of your morning routine.

#### **I am looking forward to today.**

Today is going to be filled with so many wonderful moments, and it will be a good day! Say it aloud to truly affirm that the day begins with good energy.

#### **Every day, I learn something new.**

Every day there is a learning moment because learning never stops. Embrace the excitement that comes with learning something new and stay curious of what you'll be learning today!

#### **I love myself.**

Self-love is important! Remember, you will be with yourself forever, and you should always place great importance on you.

#### **I am focused and proactive.**

Today will be a productive day, and you will be able to accomplish your goals or work towards what you hope to achieve. Remember, your focused mindset can help you be proactive!

#### **I make good decisions to benefit myself and others.**

Making good choices can impact many of life's occurrences; the choice to make it a good day is up to you.

#### **I am happy.**

By saying this affirmation out loud, you'll feel joy and happiness in you.

#### **I believe in myself.**

Have confidence- you are capable of doing so many things. You can do it all if you put your mind to it!

#### **I will be kind to myself and others.**

Always remember to spread kindness wherever you go, and try to leave a place better than how you found it.

#### **I am calm.**

Having inner peace can help you in your self-growth journey. Try taking deep breaths in and out to physically make yourself calmer.

#### **I will take good care of myself.**

Don't forget self-care! Take delight in the fun and enjoyable activities that you do. Try to take a walk every day, breathe some fresh air, and take time to indulge in your favorite hobbies.

#### **I feel excited to grow!**

Every day, we are growing, and with an optimistic outlook, everything will feel so much brighter!

#### **I will put my all into everything I do.**

Your effort is what brings the magic to things. Without your care, your input can't yield the output that you want. Putting your energy into things you place priority on is important!

#### **There is so much beauty around me.**

Whether it be the pretty sunset, blooming flowers, or the nice weather that's perfect for a run, there are so many wonderful things around us to appreciate.

#### **I can overcome challenges.**

No matter how hard things may feel or seem, there is nothing that you cannot do. You are powerful and you can overcome hardships!

#### **I am grateful.**

There are so many things for which to be thankful. Be sure to reflect on the things you are grateful for, such as a gratitude journal to practice mindful wellness. Incorporating gratitude in your life can make everything feel more positive!

#### **BY Kate 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 that writing's joys give with many other interested students.*

# Positivity and Your Frame of Mind

**T**hrough the greatest cracks and crevices, positivity shines through our lives every single day. Even on the most dreary weeks, we should be able to find the good in these openings if we make an effort. After all, even on the rainiest days, when dark clouds threaten our skies, the sun always follows. It certainly can be hard to be optimistic at times, but along with giving us hope, studies show that there are proven benefits to having a sanguine attitude.

Is your glass half empty or half full? This simple question can reveal so much about a person in different ways. While each answer provides an accurate description of a glass with water in it, both views show a different perspective. Seeing a glass as half empty is looking at what we don't have quite yet, instead of focusing on what we have so we can build off of it. Rather than looking at a negative situation with a half-empty attitude, we can

look at the outcomes and how we can turn the current circumstances around. This also correlates with having a 'growth mindset.' Focusing on improvement instead of our present weaknesses is a way to build on our abilities and overall advance. Failure is natural and essential to succeeding, even in smaller or less important matters.

By changing our way of thinking and focusing on the positive, we can influence our later decisions and actions. Incorporating affirmations and self-care in the morning can also help us think optimistically and mentally prepare for the day ahead of us. As you go along with your week, think about how you can further integrate an elevated attitude into daily activities.

#### **BY Prisha Shivani**

*I WRITE because it is a creative way of expressing your thoughts and ideas through words. iWRITE has given me the opportunity to write and publish, sharing my pieces with many people.*

## Leading a Positive Life

**T**he common idea is that we only put positivity out into the world and our optimism guides us as we face hurdles in our life. The majority of society focuses only on manifesting, the idea that whenever you put positivity out into your life, the outcomes will start to please you. I used to believe that, too.

But once you dig deep down, you uncover a beautiful idea about positivity that is related to the mind, body, and soul.

Positivity is also about removing the negative and derogatory terms about your own self-worth from your mind. Positivity is about showing you that while you may not think you are at your highest point, you are the best version of yourself right now, and you need to believe in yourself.

Positivity is about making a brighter future for yourself, and shifting to a positive mindset isn't as hard as it may sound. Here are 4 things to make your life positive and happier.

#### **Nourish your body**

While we all enjoy indulging in Cheetos, Sprite, and M&M's, to live a better, positive life we need to know when to put an end to it. We need to understand what are the healthy, proper foods that could change our life. We need to learn to differentiate healthy meals from indulgent treats. By making this simple change, we have taken a step towards being more positive. Being healthy makes you happy; it's true!

#### **Refresh your mind**

Screens have become a part of our daily lives, and our minds deserve a break. Every now and then pick up a book, feel the crisp page turns, and pour your heart into a poem or story. This creates positivity in your daily life because it is starting to create a healthy routine. You can also express your emotions and thoughts through reflection in writing.

#### **Breathe**

You may be saying, "I never stop breathing. What are you talking about?" Our daily lives are filled with numerous activities, and some days there's barely any time to just relax. Take a moment in a quiet space to take a few deep breaths or meditate, so you can give your soul a second to reinvigorate.

Love yourself: This is the most important thing for a positive life. By realizing that you are extraordinary and nobody will ever change that, you can love yourself. By repeating positive affirmations, your entire body will emerge with a new perspective. You will be doused in positivity and joy, with the message, "I am beautiful."

#### **BY Nia Shetty**

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

# The Search for Positivity



**T**he promise of a new year gives hope for looking ahead; when January 1st finally comes, people readily leave the past behind them. Beneficial and bittersweet, yes. But as I sit here writing this article, I feel the need to reflect on the past couple of months while simultaneously diving into 2022. I spent the first semester doing typical high-school activities... rehearsing for a play, competing in volleyball and soccer, traversing the 'drama' that filled mine and my friend's lives. My schedule was two things: seeking pleasure in day-to-day activities and creating loops of hypotheticals because I had nothing better to do. Then, my mental instruments chose to play a different arrangement; I was forced to regroup. So believe it or not, I spent half of the school year figuring out the true meaning of positivity. I bet you never expected this paragraph to turn into a philosophy lesson!

To me, positivity suggests the presence of a good, righteous feeling. That can be broken down into subcategories, beginning with thought. Negative thoughts like, "Just because I say it doesn't mean I'll do it" convert to, "I'm a person of my word. I have integrity." That's pretty powerful, and when it's practiced, it makes a world of difference in one's mental peace. One summer day in Chicago, my grandfather explained this subject to me. "When a bad thought comes, replace it with a good thought. Then, you feel better because the bad thought is no longer present." Hearing this made me think (hehe) that we don't give enough credit to good thoughts. After all, they're just thoughts: they say nothing about who you are. But one thing remains true: negative thoughts affect your overall mood. Practicing 'thought replacement' is not only helpful but applicable to various scenarios. For instance, replace jealousy towards a friend with something like, "I'm proud of my friend. They worked hard to achieve this test grade. I'm glad that they did well."

Watch your thoughts, they become your words. This ominous word of advice might sound familiar. I also think it's pretty accurate. Thinking badly about yourself needs little cooking time in the mind before ready for delivery. Thoughts like "I'm too skinny" or "I don't have clothes I like" or "My friends say I'm weird, so it must be true" often stay in the mind and over-boil, while thoughts about others get transferred to the mouth. Our words must contain positivity, or the absence of negativity. It may not be the right time to tell a friend or sibling, "I'm sure you're gonna get the number one spot!" There's equally as much power in saying, "I know you're destined for something even better." Notice how that statement contains no negatory phrases, only assurance. What could be more positive than that? So, as a practice that involves tuning into yourself, a lesson that requires self-awareness, say words that promote respect, honesty, intelligence, and kindness. That is the key to unlocking positivity in your life and the person beside you.

I have a distinct memory of losing my spark and coming dangerously close to not believing in myself at all. That was because I became so focused on something that wasn't real. Instead of turning negative thoughts into positive counterparts, I couldn't seem to ground myself back into the world—a busy teenager's crisis, in other words. Well, fast forward to December twentieth. The iWRITE Youth Club plans the next edition of the iWRITER magazine, coming up with various pieces to encompass the theme of positivity. I realized that positivity and I were newly connected. Positivity has the potential to change the world. I took this statement and fashioned it into a daily mantra: How can I be of service? Answering this

question is the quickest way to release positive energy, the backbone for a fulfilling life. Giving to others removes discouraging vibrations because selfless service requires no ego. Where there's no ego, there's positivity. Looking out to the people and places around you comes in simple tasks, whether it's making your bed every morning, being on time to school, telling a parent about your day. These seemingly trivial duties are the essence of a positive self, of positive existence.

It turns out that my pursuit of positivity allowed me to share my discoveries through this article. I learned that positivity is a mindset, nothing more and nothing less. Seemingly simple but made unnecessarily complicated. I start with a positive thought,

then translate it into words, then take those words and put them into action. Most importantly, the natural tendency for a smile is to spread into the faces of those around me. We are all capable of spreading hope and optimism to each other. To end on a quote by Roy T. Bennett, "Start each day with a positive thought and a grateful heart."

**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.*

# The NBA Gives Back



**C**OVID is striking and affecting us all. We need as much help as we can get to keep everyone in our communities safe. Many organizations have been volunteering and helping in the best way possible. NBA teams and especially players have been helping their communities in various ways.

The NBA's extensive charity program is associated with Hoops for St. Jude. They joined together to raise awareness for kids with cancer to give them a chance to make their dreams come true. St. Jude's is a hospital for kids with cancer and other life-threatening diseases. These kids can't do as much as other kids can and need special treatment. Like others, these kids have dreams, and for some, it's to play basketball. They don't get the opportunity to play for teams, so NBA players go to the hospital, play basketball with them, and talk about what it's like to be in the NBA. They sometimes bring kids to their games, and they also help kids start playing basketball once they are out of treatment.

Another way NBA players have helped out is through social media and connecting with their fans. They have set up donations that go towards COVID and encouraged their followers to donate. Raptors player, Serge Ibaka even hosted a talent show on Instagram Live, contributing to #coronavirus relief in Toronto. The winner won \$20K plus a signed jersey. His teammate, Demar DeRozan, opted to do the same. Players have also donated towards research for COVID; for example, Karl Anthony-Towns of the Minnesota Timberwolves donated \$100K towards effort for research. RJ Barrett of the New York Knicks provided 200,000 meals through the Mississauga Food Bank. The NBA hosted an NBA 2K tournament in which 16 NBA players participated. The winner received \$100,000 to a charity of their choice. This not only brought entertainment during COVID but raised money for a good cause. Indeed, NBA teams and players have put in a lot of effort and provided help throughout this pandemic while going through their own struggles. We thank them profoundly for their kindness. Lastly, stay COVID safe!

**BY Aarushi Saxena**

*I WRITE because it inspires me to share my ideas.*

# Harper's Dance



She stood up on the wooden boxes, ankles throbbing with pain as she balanced. And after what seemed like an eternity, the music finally came to an end. She sighed, slowly settling her weight on the soles of her feet.

Harper didn't know whether she liked dance or not. The ecstatic feeling of just getting to move with the music during contemporary and ballet class, and the intimidating yet exciting feeling of getting to be onstage in front of a crowd just felt so amazing. However, her thoughts were cut short by the glaring lights onstage. She was back in the moment once again. Her blisters rubbed against her shoes as she leaped. She thought about her teachers watching her at this very moment, expectations too high for her to ever reach. There seemed to be some kind of heavy metal weight sitting upon her shoulder.

Harper finished her solo, smiling through gritted teeth as she bowed quickly and ran off the stage. Right when the curtains just barely covered her, she relaxed, limping to the side to re-adjust her pointe shoes. Her blisters and calluses were easily noticeable, throbbing from the sudden exposure to air. She watched as another dancer from her school went up to perform. The younger girl's face was relaxed and glowing from the lights of the stage as she entered. The girl performed her routine perfectly, movements graceful and swift. Harper watched. Seeing her classmate become better by the day just pushed down harder on her already minimal confidence.

When she finally got home, she removed her bun and makeup. The hairspray was making her hair stick up, stiff and rigid like dead grass. She hated it. After a while the sky had begun to darken as well. A deep bluish-purple, dripping like watercolor, spread across the sky. Harper set a timer. Then, she slipped her pointe shoes back on again. She hated this. Pirouetting again and again nonstop, it was evidently clear just how frustrated she was. After an hour or so, her frustration just led to more anger. Anger that was pent up inside of her heart, burning and pulsing like a ball of fire that seeped into every corner of her body. And then it burst, and Harper was crying. Salty tears cascaded down her cheeks and dripped down her chin,

clouding her eyes. Practicing and practicing time and time again, and yet she saw no progress. She could only stumble and fall and have to get back up all over again, trailing behind her friends.

Harper found herself in the studio again the next morning, leg lifted to just over a ninety-degree angle; they were doing an adagio combination. She hated adagio. It was agonizingly slow and just made her muscles ache all over. Her calves burned as she went up into the highest releve she could muster. After five more minutes, the combination was over, and sweat was already coating her back. Shoving her friend, Chloe, who was currently talking to the younger girl who had performed the other night, Harper forced herself out of the doorway. The rainy weather and loud thunder repeatedly drumming in her ears was not helping her mood in any way. Chloe and Alisa could only stare after her, confused, but nonetheless, they shrugged it off.

A week later, they had made it into the final round of the competition. Harper had ended up winning third place at the semifinals. A smile tugged at the corner of her lips. *Third place huh*, she thought to herself. A sudden scowl replaced the grin as her familiar voice rang in the hallway. Alisa turned the corner, looking up to meet Harper's cold, grey eyes. For a minute, there was eye contact. And then it was gone. Alisa had turned back around to talk to her friends, and Harper's eyes flickered down at her ballet flats. She had won first place.

That angry pounding in her chest began again. Her hands balled into fists. It was never going to be enough. She scolded herself at the thought that a girl who was one year younger than her had won first place. All the extra practice and tedious ballet classes. All the conditioning and training. What was it for? It was for this very moment. She waited behind the curtains for her number to be called. Just one

more dance and it would be her turn to own the stage. She fidgeted with her hands.

"Number 143, Harper Rochester, performing..." Harper entered onstage. She looked toward the very back of the theatre, eyes highlighted by the lights. She had been waiting for this. Now it was just time for her to let herself perform what she had been rehearsing and training over and over repeatedly. Leap after leap after leap, she felt herself letting go. Her movements were flowing together and merging like two streams of water, smoothly maneuvering her around the massive stage. She was nearing the end. Turning and turning and turning, she relished in the last few moments of her performance. That was the point where she had reached pure happiness and bliss, her anger dissolving into nothingness. And that was also her biggest mistake. She felt the box in her shoe shift under her just the slightest, barely moving a millimeter from her turning point. Then, her ankle gave out. With a loud gasp from both her and the stunned audience, she collapsed onto the stage.

*First place. Didn't you want to win first place? Get up! You can handle the pain, can't you? Get up and dance!* Her own thoughts were sending chills down her spine...this voice in her head. She flushed red when her eyes immediately found the judges who were also staring back at her. She gave an awkward bow and left the stage as quickly as possible, limping from the sharp pain shooting down her ankle. After everything she gave...this was how

it turned out? Harper bit her lip, trying to stop the tears from flowing. In a split second, her teachers were with her... as well as her whole team. She bit down harder on her lip, ready to hear the criticism. Her teacher, Mrs. Lang just laughed and hugged her. In turn, congratulating her for the performance. Harper just stared. "W-What?" She stuttered. "But I messed up the whole piece!" All her classmates were also laughing by now. "Why is everyone laughing?" Harper asked, confused at all the laughter and congratulations.

"You won first place, Harper!" Alisa's eyes were brimmed with tears of happiness. "I- what?" Harper didn't say anything more. She just gasped unbelievably. What shocked her even more was when everyone crowded around her and pulled her into a group hug. Not knowing what to do, Harper just let herself relax and settle into the hands of the people supporting her. They weren't her competitors. They were her friends and teammates, the people she had grown and learned from; the people she had been continuously practicing and progressing with this whole time. As she felt herself slipping out of consciousness and leaning into her own exhaustion, she noticed something had changed. It was almost as if a heavy metal weight had been lifted off of her shoulder.

**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.*



# A Place for Poetry

## Featured poems from the iWRITER staff

### HOLIDAY CHEER

Holiday Cheer is here!  
It's the magical time of year  
With holly, mistletoe and Christmas lights  
Time to spend time with those near and dear  
Can't miss the flights!!

Happiness and excitement on Christmas day  
OH! the hot chocolate and candies, bring on more  
As we all sit to pray for health and wellness  
And enjoy gifts galore!

Giving to those in need  
Food, clothing and sweets  
Brings a smile to all, indeed  
For who does not enjoy a treat?

With COVID still running around  
Don't forget to spread kindness  
For happiness and cheer is to be found  
In sharing the love and harmony  
that binds us!



**BY Aarushi Saxena**  
*I WRITE because it inspires me to share my ideas.*



### GROWING GREEN

Dead leaves crunch under heavy feet to see  
Brown, wilted petals that once bore fruit.  
My fingers run along the tree's bark,  
Making a futile search for a bud of life.

I seek the Sun beyond the clouds,  
Hoping to find a god to ask,  
Why was I left with such a lifeless landscape?  
But I couldn't find any.  
I couldn't find much of anything that day.

My feet dragged.  
Maybe if I kept searching  
through the dead leaves,  
I could find some green.

Days passed.  
The cold made my skin pale, my fingers numb.  
My knees buckled  
As I found rest on the lifeless tree.  
Tears fell onto the cracked dirt.

It's been a week.  
Days fade into each other,  
Until I find my way back to that tree,  
Now dotted with flowers,  
Lush green coating the soil beneath it.  
That same soil once saturated with tears,  
Growing green.



**BY Audrey Piczak**  
*I WRITE because it's one of the few spaces in which I can process my thoughts and feelings. It's how I can bring myself peace by putting my feelings onto paper. Writing is like art. You paint people with words.*

### QUEEN OF ALL THINGS GREAT

Positivity;  
She walks like a queen  
She talks like a boss  
She is Positivity, the ever-glowing warrior  
She keeps reaching until she can't  
She keeps fighting until she can't  
Negativity, Doubt, Hesitation? Who?  
She feeds the fire, the ever growing desire  
The hunger, the passion within her  
No questions, no limit to what you can achieve  
Because she believes  
That you can be the best  
But only if you want it so bad  
You are willing to grapple  
with the pains that come your way

The stings, the burns, the bleeds  
that make you want to give up.  
Only if you realize that  
you're the one who can save the day  
Positivity  
Radiant as can be  
Can only lead the way so far  
Can only be the inspiration  
For the rest is you  
To show us who you really are  
And who you really want to be

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



### THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Positivity is all around us  
Infectious and spreading  
Someone who comes in contact  
Is bound to be smiling

Transmitted by a genuine laugh  
Brightening up someone's day  
You can always find it  
In every possible way

**BY Abby Rogers**  
*I WRITE because I am passionate about spreading awareness about topics I care about. Being able to share knowledge and other people's experiences with others through writing is very important to me.*

It's a simple ripple effect  
Waves that cascade  
Affecting everyone it touches  
The sadness or anger will decay

Its positive effects are omnipresent  
Its ubiquitous influence  
This amazing ripple effect  
Is the opposite of insidious



### THE MAYFLY

Recently, I have grown obsessed with the  
impermanence of the mayfly.

A life lived in the flashes of fireworks,  
Of shooting stars darting across the sky,  
The seconds it took for you to get behind the  
wheel  
And other such absurdly short things

Mayflies, like moths and butterflies alike,  
metamorphose  
And yet theirs is incomplete  
Perhaps it is a consequence of the lives they  
live

Where beauty and ugliness alike are so  
painfully fleeting  
And death is minutes away

We had an argument and you drove away  
fuming  
I'm sure that you weren't looking where you  
were going  
Time itself stood still as I watched you leave,  
A fizzling pyrotechnic remnant,  
A star falling to earth forever

I wanted, more than anything, to stay  
another moment

Failing that, to slip away with you  
And yet I could do neither,  
The world moved on,  
And a million mayflies died without you

The hole in my heart is still impossibly wide  
But there is strength in persistence  
And happiness to be found in some far-off future  
When tragedy becomes memory, and I can  
smile once again  
I miss you so much

**BY Alex Zhang**  
*I WRITE because it's a way to bring my wildest dreams to life and share them with others. I really love iWRITE because of the family that I've found within the organization.*

# The Night Market



The pops of soft drinks and the sizzling crackles of oil pans fill the air. Savory smells of dumplings and biting aromas of spicy Calbee potato chips float their way from the plates of happy customers to the tongues of jealous onlookers. At Night Market, it's all you can do to not be overwhelmed by the smell of Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese cuisine and the voices of all the Night Market attendees.

Last November, Asia Society hosted their annual Night Market festival, allowing Houstonians to experience authentic Asian foods and practices without visiting Asia itself.

It's hard to imagine that Night Market could even take place. Punctuating the early months of 2021, a tragic shooting and a rise in Asian-American targeted hate crimes were some of the many influences that made me unwittingly distance myself from my close friends and peers.

Being socially awkward myself, at the beginning of Night Market, I scouted an

isolated wall that I would lean against the whole night and prepared to pretend to be on my phone so I wouldn't have to talk to anyone. Ironically, only hours later, drawn in by the inviting music and cheers, I found myself munching loudly on delicious Korean Karo Mucho spicy, crunchy french-fries and buying Japanese kimonos for my friends.

The atmosphere of multiculturalism was indescribable. Night Market not only attracted Asian immigrants and Asian-Americans, who had found a community in the celebration of their cultures, but also guests from all walks of life: people from English, Russian, Iranian, Hispanic, and non-Asian descent who had all come to celebrate and enjoy Asian culture.

There were crowds gazing in awe at the graceful K-pop choreographies, a sea of people cheering for their favorite sumo wrestler, and tables full of satisfied patrons that had just ordered from restaurants such as Seoulside Wings and AtCha.

I beamed at the success of Night Market's

restaurants and felt prouder of my Asian-American heritage than ever before.

Inspired to share my culture and heritage with kids who also loved Asian culture, I chose to operate the Mah Jongg booth, and, although most didn't know how to play the complex game, I enjoyed talking with kids who had something in common with me, discussing humorous school mishaps and the struggles of P.E.

Especially in a time when Asian-American hate is rife, celebrations of Asian culture and holidays are valuable to the community as it brings diversity awareness, critical for understanding cross-cultural differences and fostering connections in the community.

Regardless of your race and ethnicity, volunteering at Asia Society's next event could be a great way to get involved in supporting Asian-Americans. I hope to see you in 2022!

**BY David Liu**  
I WRITE to help others escape to worlds full of color with characters of energy and nuance. To create a place where someone can find refuge, if only just for a few seconds, is something I love to do.

# Big Globe, Small Kid, Manifesting Media



An eleven-year-old boy versus a large media room where everyone is multiple times that age. In fact, even the chairs are bigger than him. The little boy has never been in a media room. The media room is hosting college basketball's top stars in the midst of playoff time. Who would win the battle? Will the little kid get scared? Will he shy away from the limelight? How about the media room? Will it accept the little boy?

Four years later, it is all still unknown. Just a little while back, I was talking with Chris Fowler, one of the play-by-play announcers for ABC and ESPN. I told him about how the ignorance that little boy had made him think everything was simple. Therefore (as I was once that little boy), ignorance gave me all the confidence I needed. Mr. Fowler found that unique, as he is used to fostering confidence through preparation. Let me tell you how a now 15-year old has done 1,500 celebrity interviews, 300 hosted shows, 30 partnerships, traveled all over the country, all by exploring the unknown... something we can all do.

After I covered the first sporting event ever (NCAA Basketball Tournament), I realized that there were not any kids visible on national TV in sports media. So, why couldn't I be the first and, most importantly, inspire millions of other kids, so they can follow their dreams as well? I started my own media company and began to grind from the ground up.

Let me start by letting you know that doing something no one has ever done before is not going to always get you support from everyone. I had to create my own opportunities and interviews by being at the right place at the right time because security and media gatekeepers don't always support me. For example, last year during the Final Four in Indianapolis, my family and I decided to drive five hours from Michigan to cover the game and get some interviews. No one would help me to get any access to the game or interviews. So, I had to make these opportunities on my own. I spent the days walking around the city interviewing players' family members and alumni of the teams. After the semifinal game where Jalen Suggs hit a halfcourt buzzerbeater for Gonzaga, I talked to and interviewed his family outside the stadium.

You are probably wondering, "How can you afford to just travel the country like that?" For starters, my family and I have to drive everywhere to save money as opposed to taking a plane to these cities. So, while we are on these car rides, I spend hours calling different companies hoping to partner with them. If they appreciate my work, I will promote them and in return, I don't have to worry about paying for food, hotels, etc. It is important to also try to explore every option. I enrolled in a Rocket Mortgage entrepreneurship competition, pitched my company with passion, and was able to bring in some cash with the prize. I also decided

to give almost \$1,000 of what I won back to the other youth contestants because an opportunity to give back is why I do what I do.

Another big obstacle that no one can ignore is the COVID-19 virus. During the beginning year of this pandemic, I could not travel anywhere. So, I started a show on Instagram Live and started reaching out to different athletes, entrepreneurs, entertainers, etc. to talk about having them on as a guest. Although not everyone I reached out to said yes or even responded, I was able to pile up a list of 300+ episodes in a year and a half. When adversity hits, you have to respond somehow.

So, why am I telling my story to you? I believe that whatever you want to do, you can also do. It doesn't have to be that you wait until you are 30 or 40 to do what you truly love. In the same breath, it is never too late to start what you love. Do what you are passionate about. No matter how unrealistic the target may seem to you, it is possible to hit a bullseye. I couldn't control how the media room responded to me, but I could control staying calm, collected, and ready to conquer the world. Society isn't in the driver's seat, you are. Manifest it.

**BY Vedant Gupta**  
I WRITE for the platform to inspire and show people that they too can do good. Everyone has a chance to tell their story and show their purpose, and writing is one of the ways that I am able to do so.



# Community Service

This year, the Youth Club is focusing on spreading positivity in the community. One way we can do that is through the programs we plan. Here are some of the fun volunteering opportunities we have planned. If you're interested in any, contact Sheri Jacobs at [sheri@iwrite.org](mailto:sheri@iwrite.org).

**June 13-17: Houston Heritage Society and iWRITE:** Calling all student writers, artists, and actors (ages 9-12). Join us for a week of historical adventure as we collect research to create fleshed out characters and storylines based on a world you will experience firsthand. Includes the option to showcase your work and talent on the 17th for family and friends.

## July 11-15: The Houston Heritage Society and The Bryan Museum Camp:

The Bryan Museum in Galveston is once again offering a week-long summer camp, July 11-15, perfect for students ages 9-12. Campers will spend the week exploring the Museum's exhibits and learning about Texas history. Additional activities include a behind-the-scenes look at an up-coming exhibit, writing, art, drama, guest speakers and various hands-on workshops.

Follow us on social media to be the first to find out about other fun activities coming up!

### BY David Liu

*I WRITE to help others escape to worlds full of color with characters of energy and nuance. To create a place where someone can find refuge, if only just for a few seconds, is something I love to do.*

# Donor Spotlight

Over the last thirteen years, iWRITE has been promoting literacy in schools across Houston. They've connected with thousands of kids across Houston and helped them find their inner creativity and cultivate a love of writing. However, many of iWRITE's trademarks, such as the "i" The Guy program and their annual "iWRITE by Kids for Kids," wouldn't exist without the generous support of iWRITE's donors.

Several notable examples include corporate brand names such as Phillips 66 and H-E-B and other nonprofits such as Castro's Kids and The Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation. These organizations allow iWRITE to show kids that anyone can harness their creativity and become a writer.

iWRITE uses its funding-- bringing in a record \$240,211 this past year-- to continue writing and publishing programs for kids and instructional programs. They provide kids with a creative outlet to express themselves and share their work with others.

Through funding via Phillips 66, iWRITE provides the "i" The Guy program to elementary-age students to create their own characters and guides them through the writing process. Children are able to use their stories to connect conflicts that occurred in the stories they made up to real-life problems. They have also funded the bilingual versions of "i" The Guy books that benefited students who spoke English and Spanish and helped to expand the creation of the Online Writing Center, which gives kids online writing lessons.

Castro's Kids along with Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation have both sponsored iWRITE's educational initiatives over the past many years. Castro's Kids was founded by Houston Astros catcher Jason Castro and his wife, Maris Castro, Castro's Kids works to "actively encourage and promote reading in Houston area schools."

Their nonprofit's work is incredibly valuable since the Houston Chronicle found in 2021 that one in three adults in Houston lacks basic reading or writing skills, making it challenging when looking for a job later in life.

It has been discovered by a study done through New York University that in low-income communities, there is only one age-appropriate book for every 300 children.

The Barbara Bush Houston Literacy Foundation provides literacy programs through its educational partners to underserved youth and is the founder of the My Home Library program that serves hundreds of thousands of students across Houston.

For the last four years, H-E-B has been the official publishing contest sponsor, which is iWRITE's founding program. This year the organization will be releasing it's 13th anthology written by kids for kids. Through these long standing partnerships and public support, iWRITE has been able to provide big opportunities to kids, fulfilling its mission to increase student confidence through writing.

### BY Madison Burba

*I WRITE because when I put pen to paper, I can create entire worlds. One where anything is possible. I love to inspire people to feel the same when they write too.*

# Tell Your Texas Story



You (yes, you) can make history by submitting to this year's iWRITE Publishing Contest! How, you ask?

The iWRITE Organization and The Bryan Museum are partnering with New York Times bestselling author and illustrator team, Brad Meltzer and Christopher Eliopoulos, to break the Guinness World Record for the Largest Published Book in the World called *I Am Texas!*

To break the record, they'll be creating a massive book (over 7 feet tall!) that will be displayed at The Bryan Museum, alongside its Texas and American West collection of historical artifacts, books, and artwork. One-thousand students will have the chance to be published and become part of Brad Meltzer's *Ordinary People Change the World* series.

Students are invited to share "their Texas story" from grades 3-12. These stories (fiction or nonfiction), poetry, and illustrations are due no later than **March 2, 2022**, Texas State Independence Day. Students will be invited to the official Guinness World Record judging and book signing event in Houston, TX. Brad Meltzer and Illustrator Christopher Eliopoulos will be announcing the Editor's Choice Award Winners and Featured Illustrator. For more information, please visit [iamtx.org](http://iamtx.org) or email [contest@iwrite.org](mailto:contest@iwrite.org).

## HOW IT WORKS

**1. Tell your Texas Story.** This year's theme is all about Texas. Maybe you and your family have lived in Texas for generations, or maybe you just moved to Texas. Or, maybe you've done your research and know that Texas is full of adventures and history. If you're telling a story about Texas in words or artwork, you can enter.

**2. Enter the contest.** Students in grades 3-12 can enter stories (fiction or nonfiction), poetry, and illustrations. Let your imagination run wild! The deadline is March 2, 2022 (That's Texas Independence Day!).

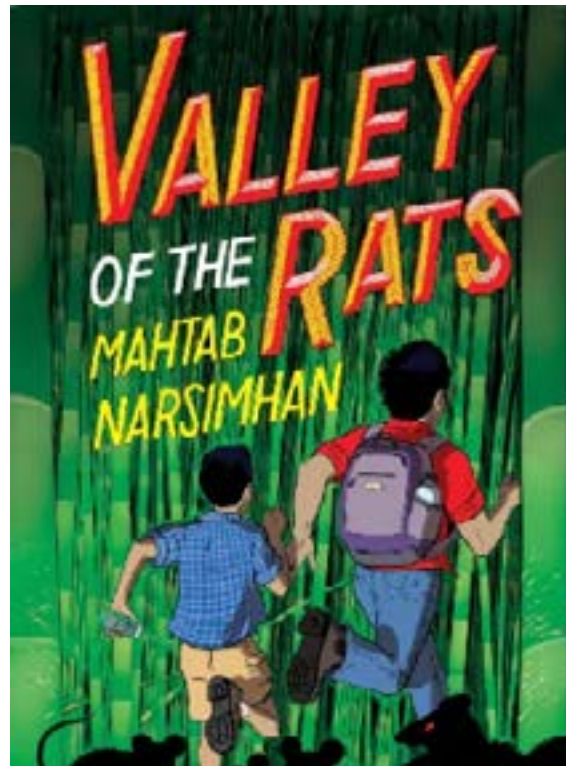
**3. Celebrate Texas!** One thousand students will be selected for publication. Students will be invited to our annual book-signing celebration and the official Guinness World Record judging event in Houston, TX. New York Times bestselling author Brad Meltzer and Illustrator Christopher Eliopoulos will be announcing this year's Editor's Choice award winners and Featured Illustrator!

*All entries must be received using the contest portal link. You will be prompted to create an account to upload your work and fill out the entry form.*

*Information and assets retrieved from The Bryan Museum and iWRITE by Eshaan Mani.*



# BOOK TALK



**S**currying, beady-eyed rats are creepy to most, but especially to Krish, the protagonist of Mahtab Narsimhan's newest book *Valley of the Rats*.

In *Valley of the Rats*, Krish, a “city slicker” teen and hardcore germaphobe from New Delhi, is trying to bond with his father, the roving photographer Kabir, on a camping trip in Ladakh, India. Their trip takes a turn for the worse when the father-son duo get lost in a dark, mysterious bamboo forest where black rats carpet the floors and germs abound. Understandably, Krish freaks out when told to “camp out for the night.” Relying on what he calls his “GF” (gut feel) and sheer determination, Krish leads his father to the off-the-beaten-path village of Imdur, where they are allowed to stay only if they abide by strict rules, including no photography. This breaks Kabir's photojournalist heart, but he doesn't let it stop him, finding unique ways to capture life in the village. But Krish soon realizes the village has an odd custom of worshipping rats, and while exploring this tradition, uncovers dark secrets.

With even-toned narration and just the right amount of description, Mahtab Narsimhan crafts a tale of trust through deceit, of belief through unreality, and of discovery through suppression. Trite though the trope of a city slicker getting stuck in a village may be, the author breathes new life into the plot with the character of Tashi, the sweet but street-smart daughter of the village shaman. An albino, Tashi is immediately set apart from the rest of the people of Imdur.

“Krish sees himself as superior, a boy from the city stuck in a village,” Narsimhan told me. “Through Tashi, I wanted to convey to readers that, no matter how different people are from you, keep an open mind because you never know what you might learn and

gain from them and how much richness they might bring to your life.”

Tashi's mystique adds to the building drama and mystery of the story and eggs the reader on to explore even the minutest details. Just by watching Tashi, the reader's perspective of what “allyship” and “loyalty” mean are challenged.

Among the cast, Krish's character is the most laid-out and well-detailed, and he seems the most authentic. As the conflict of the book is that he gets stuck in a rat-infested village, it may seem rather convenient that he has a crippling fear of germs, but this attribute is certainly not too forced.

Even though *Valley of the Rats* is a fantasy novel, real-life facts add to its realism. Narsimhan said she went down an Internet rabbit hole with this novel, exploring lesser-known topics and sprinkling them throughout the book. At one point, Krish learns about mautam, a cyclic phenomenon in the northeastern parts of India where a flood of rats feed on sweet bamboo flowers, exhausting bamboo seeds and causing devastating famine. The idea of a rat-worshipping village came to Narsimhan, as she explained in her interview, from the Karni Mata temple near the city of Bikaner in northwestern India, where 25,000 black rats live and are revered.

The details Narsimhan uses to paint a picture of Imdur in the reader's mind are impeccable, but what's especially remarkable is that no two readers' views of the village are the same. That's all because of word choice. Simple vocabulary supplements visual, olfactory, auditory, and tactile descriptors that make for an immersive experience.

*Valley of the Rats* has just the right amount of words to do justice to

each part of the story roller-coaster: exposition, rising and falling action, conflicts, and denouement. It reads smoothly, clearly, and leaves some visualization to the reader, which is always appreciated. “It wasn't easy to get here though,” Narsimhan explained.

“After writing so much, I've gotten better at ‘killing my darlings,’ or harming my characters,” she said. But it does hurt to kill a character or get rid of 20,000 words in your novel.” “At its heart, writing is about rewriting. Revision is challenging and necessary, but putting something, anything, even if it's bad, on paper first is important. It's easier to revise bad prose than a blank page.”

In the end, *Valley of the Rats* is a memorable, unputdownable read that will have you hungry for more.

I give *Valley of the Rats* 5 out of 5 stars and recommend it for ages 9 and up. *Valley of the Rats*, a tale of adventure and overcoming one's fears, releases on Feb 15, 2022. Catch my interview with author Mahtab Narsimhan on the iWRITE Youth Club YouTube channel now!



**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.*

## Reading Recommendations

**I**n 2021, it was projected that around 13.2 million Americans would make resolutions on how to improve their life and make positive changes. A common resolution for people is to read more, so here are 7 positive books to go along with your new lifestyle:

### ***The Hill We Climb* by Amanda Gordon**

In *The Hill We Climb*, Gordon recites her renowned inaugural poem. This is a great book to start off the new year because it helps us remember that regardless of your political stance, the whole country came together to acknowledge how moving the poem truly is. One fun little tidbit about the book is that it has a foreword by Oprah Winfrey.

### ***Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson**

*Who Moved My Cheese?* Is a self-help book which uses parables along with short stories to convey important messages that readers learn along the way.

### ***A Year of Positive Thinking: Daily Inspiration, Wisdom, and Courage* by Cyndie Siegel**

A book in which Siegel helps you alter your mindset, so that you can think positively. This book helps you not only think positively about yourself but life in general.

### ***The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey**

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Covey presents teens with various real-life situations and provides solutions and ways to handle difficult circumstances. The book also leaves readers with

a plethora of things to contemplate and tips on how to make more positive life choices/changes.

### ***The Success Principles for Teens: How to Get From Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* by Healy Kent and Jack Canfield**

In this book, Healy Kent and Jack Canfield help aid teens in their journey to success. The two walk readers through venturing the world with a positive mindset, because in order to be successful, you have to believe you can be successful.

### ***Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul on Tough Stuff* by Jack Canfield, Kimberly Kirberger, and Mark Victor Hansen**

*Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul* is an assortment of easily digestible stories that teens all around can relate to and learn from. The book is a descendant from the extremely popular series, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, which is also adored by many.

And finally, a special recommendation from Sanjna Pandit, ***Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott**. *Bird by Bird* supplies a window into Lamott's life and describes some trials and tribulations that occurred and how she resolved those conflicts. *Bird by Bird* is a wonderful read for anyone who is looking for guidance, some positive words, or inspiration. Lamott's book helps writers find the inspiration to write. Ever since the book's initial release, critics have raved about the flawless writing.

### **BY Lexi Bumah**

*I WRITE because writing for me is a mental massage and an authentic way to express myself. In-person I'm shy. When I have the opportunity to write, I find it exhilarating. I love having the ability to convey my feelings, without feeling uncomfortable*



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