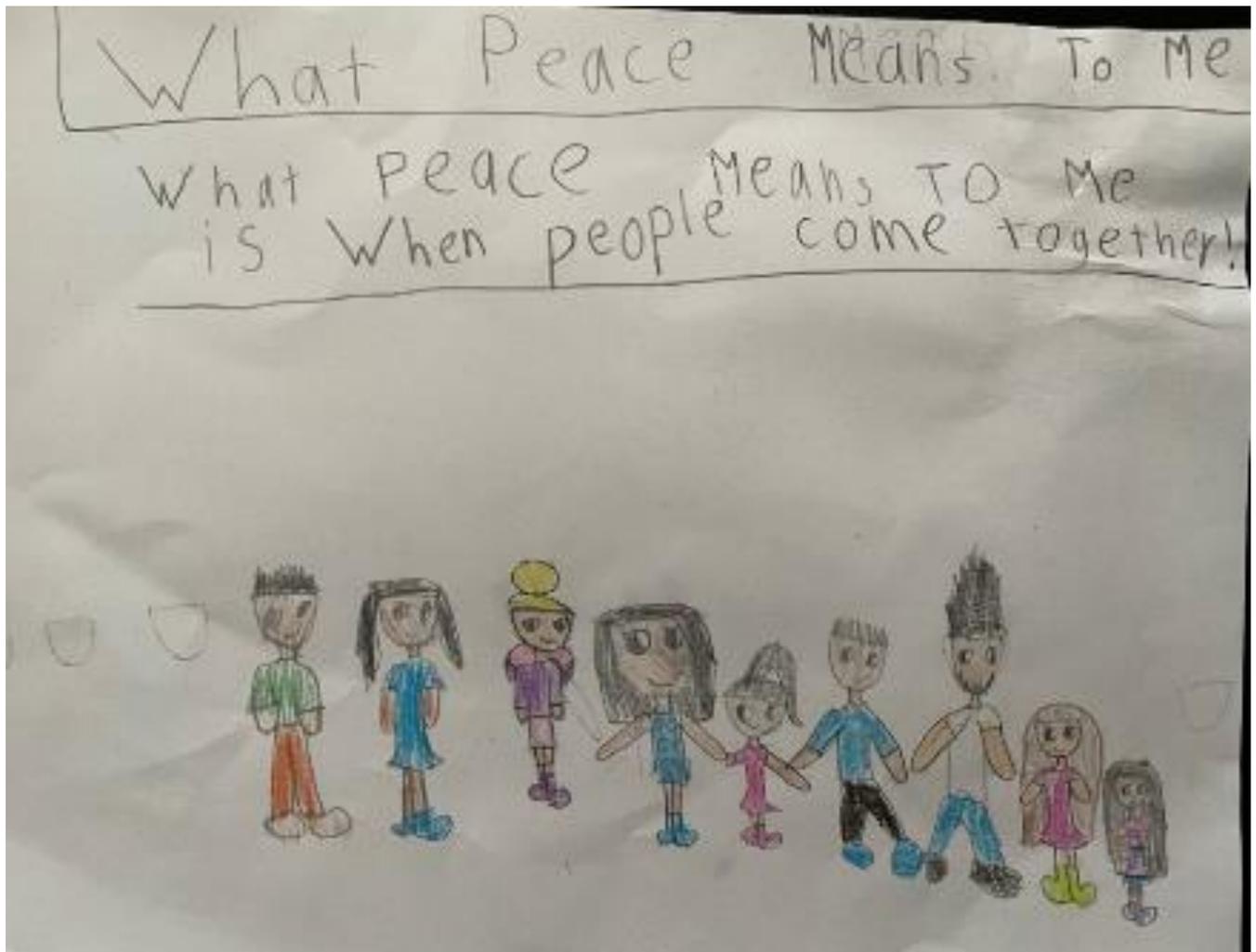




## What Peace Means to Me Entry Winners February 2021

Kindergarten to Second Grade Category: Dahlia Mitchell



More Entries follow!

## **Third to Fifth Grade Category: Eve Goldman**

### **Peace**

**A cool breeze blowing in my face, the shade of a towering oak tree, and the soft grass surrounding me.**

**The swing of a hammock and the slight thip, thip, thip, thip of pages turning in a book.**

**The laughter of my friends and the smiles on each of their faces.**

**Hands of all colors and shades joining together making an unbreakable chain and no fighting between countries.**

**Looking out the window to snow flakes falling from the sky.**

**Art.**

**Music.**

**That's what peace means to me.**

## Sixth to Eighth Grade Category: Angelina Vaughn

### Peace

Peace is the blue sky and the birds whistling a jovial song.

Peace is the laughter and smiles of the cheery people.

Peace is calm and blissful. Like the glistening blue lake.

Peace is the feeling that you're not alone, even when daunting challenges and trials come your way.

Peace is like the wind blowing through your hair, wild and free.

Peace is like a song, being carried in the wind, filling up the trees with glee, and making their branches sway about.

Peace is the sun and green grass, glowing with tranquility.

Peace is where there is equity for everyone, and everyone is supported.

Peace is for everyone, and everyone deserves peace.

## Ninth to Twelfth Grade Category: Flora Cummings

### Beneath the Surface

A thousand paths of  
quiet infinities  
threaded through the cobalt depths,  
Weave between pillars of  
haloed light  
illuminating the unbroken  
seamless blue of  
darkening water,  
This imperfect mirror of  
a fading sky

the world above,  
As gathering night bleeds shadows  
into to sea

A thousand words of  
introspective silence  
merged with a calm, intangible  
state of existing,  
The weight of the world  
no longer matters,  
floating in the water,  
Suspended in place  
in time, in thought,  
Simply another drop  
lost in a vast ocean,  
without purpose  
or destination

A thousand moments of  
untethered turmoil  
claims the fierceness of  
a seething tempest,  
Waves shatter  
and clouds are torn  
to the beat of thunder and rain,  
But,  
the storm on the surface  
calamitous, unyielding  
means nothing  
to the eternal infinities  
within

## Adult Category: Alison Leigh Lilly

### The Myth of the Neutral Tool

It has happened again — a man or a boy, and a gun. It's still happening, even now. If not here, then somewhere, in this country, in this world. There is almost no end to it. There is almost no space between one moment and the next, between the pain and the noise it makes.

What do we do now?

There are times when I am so deep in anger, anxiety or sorrow that there is nothing else I can do but turn back towards the animal I am, turn back to the earth and my own earthy body that is a part of it.

Outside, the rain is falling as fog rolls in from the ocean. Waves push and pull at the shore. There is almost no space between one wave and the next. I try to still my body, and listen. Back and forth. Rise and fall. My lungs fill with air and then empty again. My body pushes hard against its edges as if it might break open — then pulls back into itself, flinching, recoiling from the raw sensations of sound and sight and skin. The world pushes in on me, heavy and noisy at first — then pulls away again into the quiet, incomprehensible confusion of everything that is beyond me.

The landscape does its work on me with fingers like a sculptor — pushing and pulling, pressing and smoothing. The rain falls and fills me. The mists rise and empty me. Both rising and falling together until there is space enough between to breathe deeply for a moment. The water, which is my pulse, draws close and retreats; my blood, which is the ocean, pushes and pulls against the shore.

This is where I start, with this kind of animal prayer.

This is the first thing we must accept: that the land is alive, and that it shapes us.

There is nothing which does not touch us, that does not leave its mark.

###

One by one, I peel off my jacket, my shoes and socks, my shirt, leaving each thing soaked with rain and ocean mist, turned inside-out on the sand. As I remove each piece of clothing, I am like Inanna entering the underworld to meet her darker self, turning herself inside out piece by piece, jewel by jewel.

All day I walk around with shoes on, the soles of my feet insensitive to the bare earth beneath them. All day I stare at my computer in noisy silence, other people's words pinging in my brain as bright text flashes across the screen, other people's lives recreated in all their argumentative complexity and reckless laughter and roaring grief inside my head. I am insensitive to the quiet of the wind moving through the fir tree's needles outside. I am insensitive to the chill of the sun going down before dinner.

All day, the ordinary tools of my life define me, shaping my perceptions, directing my gaze.

Without them, I become a little bit of a wild thing again. The jagged edge of a broken shell half-hidden in the wet sand slices into the side of my foot, and a cold pain runs up my calf. The rain is damp and hard on the back of my neck, running down my arms and hands like a child I cannot stop from weeping. Stripped down like this, I too am inconsolable. Without keyboard and computer, without speaker and microphone to amplify me, I am little more than a wave worrying the shore. My crying cannot fill the great quiet of the ocean at night.

Without my tools, the world comes rushing in on me from every direction and I am brought to my knees by the weight of it.

This is the second thing we must accept: that there is no such thing as a neutral tool.

Every tool shapes us even as we have shaped it, aspects of the land with which we live in intimate acquaintance. So close to us that sometimes we even forget them. There is no such thing as a neutral tool, a tool that we can wield with perfect abstract will, a tool that doesn't change us. There are only the tools we can choose to put down, and the tools that have become so familiar that we've forgotten who we are without them.

###

What is a knife, for instance? A blade that separates one thing from another — the flesh from bone, yes, but also the flower or leaf from its stem, the wood and the thing it's whittled from, the tumor or boil or cancer from the suffering body so that it might find relief.

The blade that separates one piece into many so that they might be shared.

The blade that pierces, careful and precise, so that a thread might pass through cloth to make a garment to keep a body warm. Or a word like a blade, sharp and incisive, that allows an idea to enter the mind or compassion to enter the heart.

The blade that blocks or parries, that turns away the blow without returning it.

What is a gun, compared to this? A crude thing. A blind force.

A force that cannot distinguish friend from foe, but only what is in its way. A bomb in the palm of your hand. A power of too often imperfect aim, like the frantic angry mob — something you are only safe from if you are behind it, sometimes not even then. Did your father teach you how to use it? Did he show you the trigger, the safety and the sight? Did he teach you not to point it at anything you couldn't bear to lose? And did he teach you how to choose, and what gives you the right?

What can you do with a gun, after all? The cold metal, the clip, the rubber grip. These are the parts, the way it works, but I am asking you what it's for. A force that throws your will into the world quicker than the speed of sound, that devours distance in an instant and cannot be tempered or recalled. A force that obliterates the space between the pain and the noise it makes.

Don't tell me it's for protection. It is power, refined to a point beyond which there is no return. It cannot turn aside the coming blow, only forestall it with the threat of greater violence or revenge. This is not defense, it is denial. It is the story you tell yourself as you fill the barrel with bird shot or rock salt, so that the wound will burn and scar instead of kill, as if the lesson

of savage suffering will be enough this time. But when is it ever enough? What can you do with such a force but amplify it, escalating, fear built upon fear? How can we defend against it, except by turning ourselves to stone?

This is something we must accept: A gun is not a neutral tool, it can only be a weapon.

###

What do I do now?

I have taken off all the jewels of my privilege, the smooth cool universe of lapis lazuli, the beads upon my breast. My clothes are lying limp and tangled on the shore. I am a wild thing again, small and fragile, weak with willpower before the great dark ocean of sorrow that pulls and pushes at my body. I am climbing up onto the throne of the Queen of Death like a child climbing up into her mother's lap.

Who are we, when we are naked? Do we even remember?

We are strung up on the meat-hook of the underworld. Only grief and compassion can restore us.

###

There is no such thing as a neutral tool. Only the tools that tame us, claim us as their own — and the tools that we can still choose to lay down.

This is not an argument. This is a story of remembering. Of putting ourselves back together again, piece by piece.

The memories that we have laid down from our childhoods, we pick them up again and they have changed. It is no longer enough that our fathers taught us how to pull the trigger and for the first time we felt powerful and proud. It is not enough that we were lucky, that we survived, that we have made it safely so far always on the right side of the blast.

Now we have to ask: was it worth it? Is there something more that we've forgotten?

Not the memory of your best friend shuddering from the recoil as the gunshot echoes off the walls of the ravine and rips the world apart, but the

memory of the moment just before, the two of you in the woods alone together in the early morning fog, stifling excited giggles and walking so carefully on the earth that your footfalls don't snap a twig or stir a single leaf.

Not the memory of your brother hunting birds in the backyard, firing a shot into the air just to watch the fear ripple out from him in all directions. But the memory of the sound of a thousand starling wings suddenly opening at once and lifting off the ground, which is the sound of the ocean, which is the sound of the blood moving through you.

Not the memory of your father putting the weight of the rifle in your hands. But the memory of how the arms of a man grow stronger from carrying his newborn as she grows, month by month, and the profoundly gentle care of carrying that weight until she has finally grown into her wide round eyes, until she is too big for him to carry her anymore and he has to let her go.

###

Isn't this enough? Put down the gun. You do not need it.