



# HOPEFUL A BETTER WORLD

9<sup>th</sup> Grade Riya Kothari

I am hopeful because of all the good changes happening in our world today. Hope is an essential driving force in our lives, a light that guides us through the darkest of times and fuels our determination. Hope is an emotion that shapes our outlook on the world and our future. It is the confidence that moves us forward in things, even when life seems uncertain and challenging.

There is a ray of hope within me because of the resilience of us humans. Throughout history, we have faced many hardships. However, we come out stronger and more determined than ever. From the perseverance of those who survived the Holocaust to the courage of civil rights activists who fought for justice and equality, these stories inspire hope. The ability of people to come together in the face of adversity and create positive change shows how strong we humans are and how we can continue going despite hardships.

There are hopes because of the amount of progress we have made as a society. Despite the many challenges we continue to face, there have been significant advancements in various aspects of life. Scientific and technological breakthroughs have improved our quality of life, extending our lifespans and enhancing our well-being. Social progress has led to a fairer and more just world. Environmental awareness and efforts demonstrate our capacity to tackle global challenges when we come together. The power of hope also comes from personal experiences. When I look back on my life, I see moments when hope carried me through difficult circumstances. These experiences serve as a reminder that hope can be a big force in our lives. Hope can allow us to persevere in the face of uncertainty and adversity.

Furthermore, we all are hoping for the potential we have for positive change in the world. The dedication of lots of people and organizations to make the world a better place is inspiring. Movements for society and our environment demonstrate our capacity to work together for a brighter future. The fact that so many people are actively striving to address pressing global issues gives me hope that we can create a better world.

In conclusion, I am hopeful because hope is a powerful and transformative force in our lives. The resilience of the human spirit, societal progress, personal experiences, and the potential for positive change all contribute to my optimism about the future. Hope inspires us to keep moving forward, to work towards a better world, and to believe in the possibility of a brighter tomorrow. As long as we maintain hope, we can face the challenges of today with courage and look toward the future with optimism and determination. Hope is the flame that lights our path in the darkest of times, and I am hopeful because I believe in its enduring power to lead us to a better world.



# Humankind

9<sup>th</sup> Grade Maya Hodge

“Why are you hopeful?”

If somebody asked me this question yesterday,

I don’t know what I would’ve said.

Hearing this one sentence filled my head with so many ideas,

It was as if the world was spinning.

I can think of many people and things that have given me this feeling,

Of not only hope but immense gratitude.

The teachers at my middle school always showed up with a positive attitude.

Especially my social studies teacher who cared deeply about every student.

My science teacher made sure I understood every concept.

My language arts and math teachers only wanted to see everyone succeed.

I believed a sense of optimism could only be experienced face-to-face,

But the feeling of hope can be transmitted even through a screen.

My friends’ text helps me know I can lean on them at any time.

Even when the blue light starts to sting our eyes.

As the channel 2 news comes on at 10pm

The headlines scrolling across the TV read:

“Community joins together and donates to a local food bank.”

“A cat in a tree is saved, and firefighters are to thank.”

As these words fill my ears and eyes,

My mind is overcome with admiration for the people in my city.

I dream of the day when someone asks me “Why are you hopeful?”,

Because I could give them a list of things and individuals who are the cause of my hope:

My community, friends, family, teachers, my future, and my dreams.

But if my answer had to be confined to one word.

My answer would be humankind.



# Four

10<sup>th</sup> Grade Adrienne Huynh

Four is a miserable number.

Four is the time that my clock reads as I cower behind four layers of barriers; four is nighttime hiding in my closet; four is pitch dark and unforgiving.

I know if I had a window to the outside right now, the night sky would look the same as the inside of this closet, and with the stifling darkness and the situation at hand, it's all just too much. I bite my lip and look around wildly for anything, *anything*, because it's just too much to handle, too much for someone my age, my size, my life.

There is a rope hanging above me, and for a moment, I consider it, because what else can I think about in the dark when it would be so easy?

So easy to loop the string twice, wrap the ends, pull through, and yank.

So easy.

Four is the number of steps that it would take.

The fourth stair next to my door creaks, a reminder of the painful lesson I've learned throughout the years, a lesson that was taught to me with a belt and ingrained into my head – not that escape is impossible or that I shouldn't try, but instead that the fourth step is the noisy one. The lesson? If I ever want to escape, I need to take careful notice of everything, because even though I've failed, it marks the beginning of a new attempt.

I can hear her footsteps advancing menacingly towards me, once, twice, thrice. A fourth time.

The makeshift lock made from a fork won't hold long; my actual bedroom door lock was taken when she suspected that I was misbehaving. I wasn't, of course. Not by anyone's standards but hers, but what does that matter when she's had a few drinks?

A fork stolen in the middle of the night from the kitchen – yet to be noticed – is all that stands between me and her; four prongs bent hastily under the cover of darkness and a handle jaggedly cut while constantly glancing over my shoulder are all that hold my life with its frayed, tired ends together.

*It would be so easy.*

Yet as easy as it would be, I can't bring myself to reach up to the rope that tempts me so, because in five weeks I will be eighteen and legally an adult.

Five weeks until I can legally disappear from her sight, with the five hundred dollars that I've squirreled away over the course of five long years.

Because after four comes five, and after five is an endless array of numbers that remind me: life is not limited to the number I've known my entire life. Despite her footsteps four seconds away from my door, my footsteps can take me anywhere, away. Despite the box that constitutes my life, I know that there is so much waiting out there for me.

It is such a risk, and there will be without a doubt, so much pain. Perhaps there will be four more years of trying to shake off her shackles; perhaps there will be forty years of recovering from old habits.

Perhaps her shadow will always hang over me, and I will never be truly free.

But the sun will rise, as it always does, at five fifty-five, bathing the world in screaming color and chasing away four o'clock and the dark. Four might always be there in the background and breathing down my neck, but perhaps in five months, I will be living with a friend in a place where I won't be constantly looking over my shoulder. Perhaps in five months, I will have my first job or go back to school. Perhaps in five months, or five years, or fifty years, I will be in a better place that does not involve a rope to get to.

It is by no means a guarantee. Perhaps she will find out, and I will never be able to leave. Perhaps I will always be stuck at four in the morning in my closet, holding my breath for a savior that I know will never be anyone but myself.

But after four comes five, and with it comes the promise of an inevitable new day, the chance of a new start, the prospect of endless new beginnings and thousands of new futures.

With it comes the promise of growth, and new memories, and new experiences.

With it comes the promise of *hope*.



## A Hope for Tomorrow

10<sup>th</sup> Grade George P. Mathew

Darkness is upon us, and we live in a broken world. I look out into our city, and see darkness perching itself upon the harbors of our shores. I see its tendrils of smoke creep out into our streets. It mothers the criminal element of disease and hatred. They run rampant on our roads and walkways. They rob our stores of greatness and demolish our monuments of courage. They have burned our books and scared the common man into submission. They threaten us with their weapons and force us into hiding. They believe that darkness is their friend. Yet, the darkness hides a far greater enemy.

Hope.

I look towards the waters and I see a lone crow. A raven shrouded by darkness, nesting, waiting, for the time when all the giants have fallen. And when the time is right and fate has given his cue, hope spreads her wings and becomes destiny, foreboding.

She will descend upon our city, and she will melt our iron monuments. She will invigorate our bravest and give solace to to the downtrodden. When tyrants and madmen see her, they shall tremble and quake in fear. For with all this she shall become our lighthouse in a dark world, a beacon, becoming our great lady and inspiring all to follow her.

She was, is, and shall be our greatest hero, giving us our greatest, brave men and women, relentless in their pursuit of justice. They who run into the darkness of the tunnel, hoping there is light. Our great city is inspired by them. They who have battled evil and death, bashing them back, even as I speak, to the far reaches of our city. I salute you, for all that you had done.

But even for us, hope has taught, not to survive, but to thrive. Our desolation has taught me that humanity is able to do great things. The old men of the city remember, when the world declared for us to isolate and we did as they asked. They scared children into the arms of their mothers, and lovers clung to each other. But the engines of progress did not slow down, we became resilient, cognizant, we changed our culture, gained knowledge. They declared it the end of all mankind, but instead I assure you we have not even reached the apex of our journey.

And even now, as I gaze into the wreckage our city, I see darkness as it sits just beyond the far reaches of our waters, with him sits all evil that men profess. Yet, I also see you, my people, gathered at our gates, eager and ready to face battle. You who were struck down, have chosen to rise from the abyss.

I say this to you, know that tragedy has struck us today but I foresee a city that will rebuild. I see you, the people I would die for. I see evil triumph but at the same time, I see the fires which you have lit. I see this day in the far future and the statues that we shall erect. I see the kindness that you will have for each other.

I see. No, I know, that we shall purge darkness and his minions from our world. And if not in this great city, then by our fellow men across the oceans and tundras. I see hope as she soars toward a new world, a fight that shall endure, remaining forever with you.

Our darkest hour serves as a reminder of our brightest moments. Today, we mourn our losses, but tomorrow, we must gather our scattered pieces and rebuild.

So, I am hopeful because humanity still has hope. A hope to change, to adapt, to become better. The hope that dusk comes, and the dawn sets. The hope on the fact that we have not destroyed ourselves. The hope for happiness and prosperity that will return. So yes even if its only in vain, I still have hope.





one palm plus five  
 colorful fingers to symbolize

life  
 healing  
 sunlight  
 nature  
 serenity  
 spirit

a cluster of representation  
 by deciding to rise up, an uprising  
 refusing to be encircled by stone walls any longer  
 on a vivid June night at Stonewall of 1969;  
 finally raising their voices and flags,  
 finally raising glasses and hopes,  
 a new pride emerges from the love and unrest  
 as the right community of people  
 advocate for change  
 in these wrong times.

these mouths speak volumes for those silenced,  
 hushed for far too long  
 at work, at home, at school  
 both women and men on strike in 1970  
 striving for

equal  
 representation  
 equal  
 support  
 equal  
 access  
 equal  
 treatment  
 equal

equality.  
 no more will gender determine success or failure  
 no more will society define responsibilities and roles  
 there will be no more and no less, a leveled platform;  
 the signs are all around,  
 on the boards  
 in the hands  
 in a world  
 evolving where voices harmonize together  
 to display that together we are the right people  
 boycotting against the wrongs of the time.

when an upheaval of buzzwords are pinned to the global bulletin

poverty      healthcare      climate change      education

pollution      hunger      pandemic      sustainability

war      corruption      human rights

infrastructure      disaster      cancer

mental health      hate crime

overconsumption      well-being

criminal justice      debt

hopelessness

infiltrating lives,

this is just another time period,

our generation not yet arriving at the punctual period;

examples of the past promising the possibility

that we too can leave a mark, right on time—

no matter the crumbling structures or shifting meanings,

no matter the cacophony calling to choose a side,

I am hopeful because I know:

I am the right person,

at the wrong time.



# Hope is for the Few

11<sup>th</sup> Grade Paige Ford

I would consider myself an optimist. I think that good things often come in great value to those who are ready to receive them. I am a hopeful person. But I think one sign of maturity for many of us is a sense of dread and pessimism that comes with getting older. Many of us simply accept that the older we get the harder life gets and being hopeful is for the idealistic and naive. That is probably the worst and most immature thing we can do when looking at our future. It is so much easier to believe that because we are getting older, everything is more difficult. We allow ourselves to not achieve as much. We blame and make excuses on “life being out of our control” and hard rather than holding ourselves to the standards of the person that can attain the life of our dreams. The truth of the matter is life is hard and out of our control many times, but when we end the story there and relinquish control, we victimize ourselves and remain stagnant. Hope is one that is not for the naive but for the noble. Hope is for those who strive to attain more, to better themselves, in ways most of us are afraid too. I am hopeful because of the strength in those who surround me. At a rigorous high school, with students who all have messy lives individually, not to mention the hard world that we live in, I know I work alongside the leaders of tomorrow. I work alongside future doctors, CEOs, innovators, and breakthrough researchers. I can't help but to have hope for what our future holds. The moment one loses hope is the moment that they let themselves fall into the temptation of averageness. In order to become anyone amazing, it must first start in the belief and hope in oneself. Hope drives the work when motivation fails. Hope is what separates the great from the regular. Hope is what says that I can be better than who I was yesterday. Hope is the language of the successful.

# Golden Inferno

12<sup>th</sup> Grade Ipsita Bhattacharya



In shadows deep, where night does creep,

A flicker stirs, a promise to keep.

A beacon bright, in darkest hour,

A whispered prayer, a budding flower.

Hope, a flame, in hearts it dwells,

A melody when silence swells.

It weaves through trials, strong and tall,

A steadfast anchor, never to fall.

Through stormy seas and endless night,

It guides our souls to seek the light.

In every tear, in every plea,

Hope whispers, "You shall soon be free."

With tender touch, it mends the soul,

Filling gaps, making broken hearts whole.

It paints the sky with hues of gold,

A story of strength, beautifully told.

In whispered winds and morning dew,

Hope springs anew, like morning's hue.

It dances with the rising sun,

Declaring that the battle's won.

So hold it close, let it reside,

In every corner, let it abide.

For in hope's embrace, we find our way,

Through every night, to a brighter day.



# The Japanese Dream

12<sup>th</sup> Grade Christina Nguyen

“Quiet,” the teacher shouted, “we have a transfer student with us.”

“...Hi,” the new student muttered.

Any trace of chatter faded. The classroom was silent except for the rustling of my bookbag. As quick and quiet as I could, I stuffed the bills into my front pocket to make room for my toothbrush and extra pair of pants.

The teacher leaned towards the new student, and the new student nodded in return. She took a deep breath before shouting, in a much louder volume now, “My name is Ayaka, and well...a thing about me, I’ve come to America for new opportunities, for the American dream!”

Suddenly a roar of laughter spread across the room, all of their eyes now on Ayaka. Ayaka’s light smile, and perhaps a twinkle in her eye, faded as she lowered her head. She didn’t stare at anyone or anything but the rug underneath her. Trying to quiet the class, the teacher frantically sauntered to every desk as she was used to the class’s frequent ruckus but, at the same time, still couldn’t handle the deafening laughter and mockery. I scoffed from the sight and, later, buried my head in my arms, eventually, dozing off.

“Mei,” the teacher called, glaring daggers at me.

I flinched from my nap. Not yet fully awake, I nodded, “Hm.” It was a habit I picked up from the other students.

“Don’t you know how rude your behavior is? Especially to Ayaka.”

And that’s when I saw Ayaka’s eyes in the corner of mine. I turned my head to the right, and there she was. The once empty desk now in use, occupied by the new girl.

“Understand? Now finish up the group work,” the teacher ordered.

I sighed. The new girl fiddled with her pencil and casted her eyes downward on the worksheet, but occasionally, she’d peek at me. Impatient, I decided to just say something,

anything, otherwise, if left to her own devices, she'd take a year or two before we'd even exchange a word.

"Lucky for you..." I murmured.

"Yes?"

I pointed to the worksheet in front of her. "It's all about the American dream, this assignment."

"Oh, yes," she muttered, quieter than before.

It was a bland conversation, and eventually in that bland conversation, Ayaka asked to meet up after school. But before I got the chance to decline, the teacher overheard our conversation and interjected, leaving me no choice but to agree. When Ayaka finally exited the school campus, meeting me at the gate, she smiled for a split second before returning to her neutral expression. She grabbed my hands, placed them in hers, and led me to a Japanese-American fusion restaurant; and we were seated at a table for two. Once we settled, she unbuttoned her tote bag and set a stack of papers down. All the papers had one thing in common—it was about the American dream, one of which included the worksheet we worked on together this afternoon.

I crossed my arms. "What do you want?"

"I have a request."

"Alright, what is it?" I tilted my head, annoyed by her ambiguous replies, but nonetheless, I made an effort to understand her. I pointed to the stack of papers, and in return, she nodded.

"Can you help me?"

I scrunched up my nose and furrowed my eyebrows, purposefully so that, without me having to actually tell her, she'd know I was annoyed. I thought she'd shrink into a ball or fiddle with her fingers, but instead, she clasped her mouth, holding in her laughter. The waiter approached our table, ready to take orders; but Ayaka was clearly not ready, in fact she didn't

even look at the menu. To not waste the waiter's time, I asked for their most popular item and ordered it.

Ayaka stared at the waiter as he left. I, too, looked around, and I couldn't spot a single Japanese waiter. Another restaurant to boycott in the future I suppose. Then a sudden ring chimed from Ayaka's tote bag and out came a cellphone, the newest model from the looks of it. Her aura changed once she picked up. Ayaka was more expressive than I've ever seen her. I suspected the person on the other end of the line was her mom or dad as she spoke in Japanese.

The waiter returned to our table, this time with sushi in his hands. Once the plate was placed, I pushed it onto Ayaka's side. Ayaka noticed my distaste for sushi and continued with her call, simultaneously spitting out a chewed-up roll. None of us touched the plate thereafter.

Setting aside her phone, she returned to her shy self, hunching her shoulders. With the change in posture, her tailored coat sleeves slid down, and at once, she pulled it back up, but it still didn't fit, leaving a gap.

"So, what do you need help with?" I questioned.

"Here," she answered as she directed her finger atop the worksheet, to a question that read: What do you think of the American dream?

I was dumbfounded. "How am I supposed to help you with that? Did you even point to the right question?"

She glanced down and nodded. "Convince me."

"Of what?"

"What you think of the American dream," Ayaka announced, pointing right at me.

I scrunched up my nose and furrowed my eyebrows. "Me? But it has to be you."

"Exactly. Convince me."

I continued to stare at her, not knowing what to say.



“I was born in Japan. And, the locals here...”

Before she continued her spiel about what happened in class today, I cut in. “I’m also an immigrant. I’m not a local.”

“But you’ve been here longer than me. You know them.”

“So your point?”

“They call me naive. I want to know why. What’s so bad about hoping for the American dream?” she asked, with a slight glimmer in her eyes, as if she was daydreaming of a white picket fence at this very moment.

“You’ll understand soon enough.” I sighed, about to leave my seat, but she pinned me to the table, clasping my hands.

“Help me out. Please.”

We sat in silence for a good minute or two before I finally agreed. At first, I was hesitant. I needed to leave for the airport as early as possible, but with an hour or so left, I figured I’d help a fellow immigrant out. Ayaka thanked me and asked me to wait for her outside. As I exited the cafe, Ayaka called the waiter over while placing a credit card in front of her.

After we left the restaurant, I took her to the west side of the city, to the slums, and into a poverty-stricken neighborhood—my neighborhood. We plodded around the potholes and through the cracked pavement, especially bypassing the deep crevice on the right. Pieces of trash scattered throughout the area. We then passed the slant road signs and beaten-up metal poles.

Ayaka’s thin lips tightened more and more as we trudged further down the road. Her eyes twitched, the horror on her face visible—goosebumps all over.

Even though she was clearly uncomfortable, Ayaka still followed me inside the neighborhood's ashy gray atmosphere; even the sun couldn't pierce through the neighborhood's haze, originating from the incoming smog and spread of cigarette butts. But once we were inside, it wasn't hard to notice the houses, boarded up with moldy planks and a discolored,

splintered door off its hinges. On the driveways, there were remnants of scratched-off car paint and shattered glass. A few vehicles weren't even parked properly, some in the middle of the road, namely the SUV that blocked me and Ayaka from passing through. Its windshield was cracked, and rusty locks, to keep out any robbers, attached to its door handles. To get to the other side, I tucked in my stomach and squeezed through the narrow gap between the vehicle and a building stained with bright neon graffiti that intensely contrasted with its black picket fence and dull surroundings. I wobbled a few more steps and stopped.

I spread out my arms, and with the best act I could put on, I exclaimed with a grin, "this is what the American dream is to me!" My voice cracked with each consecutive word. I forcibly curved my lips, desperately trying to conceal my true feelings. "I was just like you." I paused to regain my composure, otherwise I would've broken down. "Hoped for the American dream. But look where that got me," I laughed. Of course, I didn't find any of this funny, not a single bit.

Concerned for me, Ayaka furrowed her eyebrows, and with a polite tone, she asked, "Do you live here?"

I nodded. I wanted to say something, anything, but I didn't. If I had answered with a word, I didn't think I could control myself thereafter.

Then suddenly, the door of a typically vacant, basically abandoned, house was smashed by a small wrist, veins bulging. The door-breaker was a scrawny woman in a ragged shirt, stepping down the front porch, each step creaking. It was my mother. I shook like a leaf. The money my mother accrued from reimbursement and child welfare was in the front pocket of my bookbag. I stole it. Frantic, I crumpled the plane ticket in my loose jacket pocket, scared that if my mother found out, she'd do something much worse than neglect me. But, still, I felt a bit triumphant; this was much better than her using the money for a couple cigarettes and bottles of booze.

I snatched Ayaka's hand and scurried off, dragging her to a different, nearby house with flimsy, shaky railings and graffiti sprayed over the eroding walls. I let go of her hand and stared at the pothole beneath me, unable to look Ayaka straight in the eye. A wet stream ran down my cheek. I was ashamed and proud all at the same time. I could feel Ayaka's eyes on me. But, she didn't say a word. I, myself, wouldn't know what to say. Though, instead of words, she softly and gently laid my head upon her shoulders. Ayaka patted my head as I leaned onto her, and she whispered into my ears. "Let me help you."

I picked up my head off her shoulder, now staring into her comforting eyes. "How?"

"Well, you could live with us," Ayaka proposed with a light smile. She lifted her head up and closed her eyes, as if she was daydreaming of something pleasant. "Me, you, my mom. And..."

It was tempting. I was tempted to just sit here with her forever, lifting my head, closing my eyes, daydreaming the same future she did. But, still, I gently pushed Ayaka aside. I made up my mind a long time ago.

"You could live in Japan with me."

Ayaka's eyes widened, a glimmer in her eyes soon vanished. She squeezed her cell. "But the American dream..."

Now in silence, we both absorbed the landscape in front us. It was both dreadful, but delightful all at the same time, possibly being the last view we had together. I wrapped my arm around her shoulder, pulled her in closer, and pointed forward to nothing. "We'll find better opportunities overseas. Not here." I prayed Ayaka would change her mind, ultimately agreeing to come with me. I stuck out my hand. It was her choice—to grab my hand and leave with me—or to not.

Ayaka lightly brushed my palm. Rather than her hand in mine, there was, instead, only a sticky note and a five dollar bill. Her silhouette faded into the background, out of the neighborhood's haze. I knew her answer. It made sense. Our hopes were too different,

incompatible even. Still, I chuckled, reading the note. With a tiny doodle of sushi in the bottom right corner, scribbled on the note's center were four words: buy me a pack.