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Winners**Hannah Alder
10-12 year old category (poetry)***Untitled*

I lean against the scratchy brick
Entranced with hunger
As street vendors call out,
As the smell of hot dogs wafts towards me,
My stomach rumbles like oncoming thunder
The people hustling past don't give me a glance
For they've got work, family, friends to get to
Food to get to
I manage to weakly call out,
"Please, my family is starving. Could you spare a penny,"
To the sorry coo of the pigeons, also vying to be noticed above the crowd
As the sun sets, I become one of these commuters, rushing home to my empty fridge
and my starving children
I'm afraid to open the door, to call out
"No luck today" to my children's disappointed gazes
I push the door open, knowing that though my stomach is yearning for just a bite of
anything edible,
It will come up empty
We journeyed through the cold, the barren terrain, for this
We kept going through the dark, awaited the inexistent light, for this
Our lives were uprooted, our children miserable without anyone to lean on, for this
Just to starve,
Just to beg,
Just to become one of the many hungry on the cold, damp, dangerous streets of what
we now call home

Kaycee Baker
10-12 year old category (poetry)

Tuesday Full Of Love

"Taco Tuesday!" My mom says every single Tuesday
 You think it's boring but it's not. It isn't because it's not Taco Tuesday

You know what it is?
 It's a **Tuesday Full of Love**. Look around the table.
 The coffee benches, the white table, but best of all the writing on the walls.

The Kitchen is the Heart Of the Home

When mom brings the tacos and the nachos
 The smells of beans, the queso sauce, even hot sauce
 The first bite takes you to your

soul
 And the second heals it. **Tuesdays Full of Love**
 Always make people want to be social.
 There is too much love.

All you can hear is the
 Laughter
 Giggles
 Love

The energy
 The aura
 Of the kitchen can tell you

Kitchen is the Heart of the Home

Chloe Gibeon
10-12 year old category (poetry)

Hunger

Its green eyes glint
as it tears bellies with sharp claws.

Some people fall
its teeth
sunk
deep
into
flesh.

Some people
beg
for
just
a
drop.

Some people gorge
but
they keep it for themselves.

They don't know
hunger's green eyes
the pain of the claws.

Gabrielle Guzman
13-15 year old category (poetry)

Croquetas

Whether in winter or summer, my family always makes croquetas de queso,
We make the dough, grate the mozzarella, and prepare the onions and parsley,
Together we eat in happy silence, with smiles shooting across the table

We share this delectable snack with our friends during holiday potlucks,
I fill my plate with a variety of foods lined up at the tables and savor each piece of food
While experiencing the community that holds everything together
Each bite is a welcoming hug of trying new things and holding on to the creations of others

Maybe it is just our way of holding on to our heritage,
Although it never truly had the same ingredients my mom must have used in Bolivia.
Now we either search through specific Latin American markets or just resort to substitutions
To try to get the "real thing" but I cannot even remember having an authentic croqueta from
Bolivia when I visited six years ago
This modified childhood favorite snack is now intertwined with my heritage identity.

Even in the mourning of my grandmother, my grieving mother still makes croquetas,
Despite the grief and confusion, the croqueta is still warm
As if you could feel all the memories
Of her always sharing this frequent experience with us

When I go on the subway, I see a middle-aged man crossing from each cart,
He speaks in Spanish and asks for money for his family and says they are hungry,
After giving spare change I know is not enough but is as much as I can give, I let out a quiet
prayer,

For all the families to be fed
To feel the fullness of community and love within each bite of food they take
To sense that blessed security
And to enjoy the same gift of food I feel with croquetas and even more

Paulina Milewska
13-15 year old category (poetry)

Untitled

How could mother nature be so selfless,
To bless us with her curves of canyons,
Her breath of oxygen,
Planting of gardens,
As a mother does,
Led us to a city
We led her to her grave
Singing songs of rue
Melodies of gray.

To repeat and preside again
When her daughter came to our feet
Her last whisper a cry;
Her cry we saw a keg,
The fruit of her eye she sacrificed;
Her sacrifice we saw a well.
Her body rotted to our roots
Serving as a compost for our wrongs
It will decompose alongside its soil.

Her fruits die,
Roots break,
Wrongs engrave hearts.
One day,
When each of us owns a sculpture
Depicting our wrath
We will find it to be our home,
Food as the second,
Earth as the third.

Avril Wei
10-12 year old category (poetry)

Untitled

The aroma pirouettes around the room,
 Fighting for space in between the teeth
 Against the middle school rumors,
 There sits the stories right beneath.
 My rice and chopsticks,
 Leaning against the sides of my lunchbox
 Fueling me in between the licks.
 Rice goes with anything, is

Amicable, can be
 Partnered with anyone anywhere
 Working with her sister grains to fuel the analytical and philosophical,
 Singing the rhythm of teamwork as the settled stomach
 Grows no more and enters the paradoxical.
 It is the seed to every great tree to have ever grown,
 Feeding to the golden streaks of erudition
 It was the start of the first touch of man to moon,
 The starter of every competition.

Where Atlantic meets Pacific,
 To the conquerors that once seized,
 Friendship bonds-the allies in between,
 The dumplings, the taco, the spaghetti, the shawarma, all together at ease.
 Being passed down,
 Billions of recipes,
 Survivors with a crown,
 Through the generations, on and on.

Bloodlines and friendships,
 Working together to pass it up through tide and time
 All around the world
 Together to create the juiciness of lime.
 Together like rice,
 Working together in the city of New York
 Combinations like numbers on a dice.
 The best community with so

Many

Different

Stories.

Rana Musleh
16-18 year old category (essay)

As I am writing this essay, I am barely halfway through the month-long fasting period of Ramadan. For the last two weeks, I have been waking up at 6 o'clock to start my day of fasting. We eat before the sun rises, then we pray for our commitment to our fasting in addition to our daily prayers. After school, I spend hours preparing our nighttime meal which we cannot eat until after sunset. By the time I finish my food and all of my other responsibilities, I am only able to sleep five hours a night. During the day I feel uncontrollable hunger, my stomach burns and I feel weak. Despite not wanting to expend energy on commuting, schoolwork, and my other usual activities, I must continue with my regular schedule and responsibilities. Hunger is always on my mind, and it makes me lose focus.

My non-Muslim peers have some understanding of what Ramadan entails, and even though they have their religious traditions of fasting in some form, to them, the month-long fasting period where we cannot eat or drink at all from dawn to dusk seems incredibly intense, difficult, and even radical. The point of fasting during Ramadan is to feel empathy for others who are not able to provide for themselves and face hunger and starvation every day. It gives our donations and religious morals meaning because we can better understand the pain and hardships of people who are hungry every day, all year. In the context of what others are experiencing for their whole lives, fasting for Ramadan seems almost inconsequential. Not only is it only for one month, but I am also able to eat between dusk and dawn. To me, fasting for Ramadan is a small sacrifice; I only give up food and drink for part of the day, and part of the year.

When I talk to my friends about fasting, they ask about how it feels and affects me. I tell them about the perpetual headache that never goes away and the difficulty I have concentrating on my daily tasks. Our talk transitions to food. How do I break my fasting and what role does food play during Ramadan and the festival (Eid-Al-Ifter)? To me, food is more than just a basic necessity for survival. It is a means of bringing people together, fostering connections, and creating shared experiences. Whether it is a family dinner, a holiday celebration, or a community event, food plays a central role in bringing people together. When we sit down to eat with our loved ones or with members of our community, we are not just feeding our bodies, but also nourishing our souls. The shared experience of preparing and consuming a meal creates a sense of belonging and fosters a deeper connection with those around us.

Eid is a very special time because we use our food customs to bring people together. During this time we always give to those who cannot afford the necessities to celebrate Eid, and give out food to whoever is in need with any extra that we have. Being "full" is not just about what we eat, but also about the emotional and social fulfillment that comes from sharing food with others. It is about the sense of satisfaction and contentment that we feel when we are surrounded by people we care about, enjoying a meal together.

Food also plays a critical role in addressing issues of food insecurity and hunger within our communities. At my local Mosque, we provide services where people can pick up food to celebrate Eid including wheat, rice, meat, dates, and even decorations. Dates specifically are a very important part of the fasting tradition, so we want to make sure that every practicing Muslim can fully participate in Eid with the necessary food. It's not just about having something to eat, it's about engaging in a cultural practice of filling oneself, with food, with love, and with God.

Finalists

Leela Fleck
10-12 year old category (poetry)

Chatter in the Loud Lunchroom

Chatter in the loud lunchroom.

Everyone has food.

Quiet in the sad room.

Everyone is hungry.

Chatter in the loud lunchroom.

Food is eaten, wasted, and shared.

Quiet in the sad room.

Nothing changes.

People in the loud lunchroom,

Finally notice the people in the sad,

Quiet room.

Chatter in the loud lunchroom.

There is no longer a sad room.

The narrative has changed.

James Gettinger
10-12 year old category (poetry)

Food Waste Poem

Puzzling... So much food around, yet
so many aching...

How can we focus more on giving,
not taking?

When will we see that we shouldn't be greedy,
And realize that we should focus more on the needy?

We should be aware of the crisis at hand,
And start to give the bounty from our land.

Please, let's try not to be rude,

And help the less fortunate

At least get their food.

Rose Posternak
13-15 year old category (poetry)

Family Dinner

What does it say about a country
whose holidays revolve around food, feasts, fullness
whose economy thrives off of excess,
yet still leaves so many hungry?
Haven't we all heard the phrase
"Give and take"
we forget the give
Instead we take and take
without a thought of the deprivation we leave in our wake

What does it say about a person
who celebrates banquets and binge-eating
but cannot fathom philanthropy?
Did they not learn of generosity and giving in school?
Did their parents neglect lessons of charity and compassion?
Or worse, do they simply not care
forcibly pushing away news of starvation
preferring to live in their own reality where giving
is not an ethical obligation
But a mere suggestion

What does that say about our society?

Austin Ruan
16-18 year old category (poetry)

Craving Change

My dog of a stomach growls at the smell of food,
although the halal food smells so good,
I can't afford to purchase any,
I'll endure it until a kind soul comes along.

My grandpa had a medical emergency,
the hospital bills higher than skyscrapers are covered by insurance,
we can't afford a caretaker,
and my mother is now out of work,
our household income is halved.

Prices are skyrocketing,
the large corporations already pocket most of my money,
making only fast food affordable;
lacking in the nutrients for a healthy body.

I'm unable to afford a nutritious meal,
my body won't develop properly,
I'm now filled with regrets,
as my growth is stunted.

The job market is getting worse,
with an increasing number of graduates,
I can't seem to find a job,
even after ALL this effort I put into my education.

With the increased public transportation prices,
the nearest supermarket seems so distant,
it's a struggle with all of these expenses.

I'm lying here thinking about what will be my end,
maybe a kind soul will appear,
they'll create a nonprofit organization,
and provide food for those in need like myself.

Jehee Nam
13-15 year old category (essay)

A scarcity of food has been a constant threat to all of existence since life formed. From the simplest organisms trying to gain a morsel of sunlight and water to human beings on the line for the food bank, hunger has always motivated life to act. Jonathan Swift, a renowned writer from the 18th century, once put forth a solution to end hunger in society in his satirical essay, *A Modest Proposal*: When those living in poverty become mothers, they gain an unnecessary mouth to feed, so instead of raising the child who provides no purpose other than emotional relief, they should be sold to the well-off English to be eaten. Of course, the proposal purposely uses the absurdity of eating children as an element of shock, bringing to attention of class inequality in the lens of hunger. However, is today's political climate any less absurd? One of the main goals of House Republicans in Congress was to ban universal free lunch for children in 2024 (Thaker 2024). If America truly positions itself as a leader among nations, then it is nothing but absolute shame that a single child goes to bed hungry. By depriving children of free lunch, we are depriving America of its brightest and self-actualized generation in the future.

It is an unarguable truth that children require proper nutrients for physical and mental growth. For example, in a report on adolescent nutrition on brain development, it is explained that cognitive development in the early ages is highly dependent on essential nutrition, and that the lack thereof can increase the risk of children "exhibiting impaired cognitive skills" (Roberts 2022). At the developing ages, proper nourishments from vitamins, proteins, and many other supplements must be provided through the three daily meals everyday. However, for the children in poverty, affording a full breakfast and dinner is often difficult to achieve. So, when it becomes noon and there is a designated time for all students to sit and eat, should the school not be responsible for all of its students? Even outside of cognitive skills, Professor Chan from Harvard links nutrition and immunity by stating "Malnutrition or a diet lacking in one or more nutrients can impair the production of immune cells and antibodies" (Harvard T.H. Chan). These immune cells and antibodies are what help fight off infections such as the cold or flu without the use of clinically diagnosed antibodies, which could potentially cause minor side effects such as headaches with prolonged use. Essentially, a student will be subjected to a lower quality of life due to impaired cognitive skills and a weakened immune system: a plight that is not taken seriously as callous politicians believe it's just lunch.

Apart from its physiological benefits, lunch is a social construct that is needed for the actualization of a child's self-worth. As young children, we develop our sense of identity through our interactions with our classmates. We learn self-worth through our achievements, empathy through our friends, and morals through the decisions that we witness adults make. Now imagine what message letting a student starve through lunch sends to both that student and the rest of the student body. It implies that students do not have enough worth to even justify a simple sandwich, that we should not feel bad for those less fortunate as they don't deserve our help, and that we must follow the decisions of adults and leave those who are struggling by themselves. All of these messages are antithetical to how society progressed in both the world and the U.S. Those who are able are supposed to help out

those who are struggling, as the roles could be reversed at any given day and it is through the contribution of everyone that a society flourishes.

Critics will argue that a free lunch for students is bailing out the parents that are supposed to be in charge of feeding their kids. They will disguise their lack of care with a modest proposal of self-responsibility, but as politicians attempt to encourage everyone to pull themselves up from their bootstraps, the people are left to wonder: Where are the boots supposed to come from when they can't even afford a single sandwich?