

Writing Against Hunger 2023 – Winners & Finalists

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Winners

The Magic of Food
Louisa Rosenblatt
10-12 years category

Food is life.
Well that's obvious, one might think,
But it's more than just the reason we eat and drink.
Food builds connections.
We can converse over food,
Disagreements and feedback,
Laughter and good mood,
Food helps you learn.
We can take knowledge from others,
Dishes from countries and nations,
Eastern, northern, western and southern,
Food makes you think.
I'm so lucky to get to eat this meal,
To sit down and dine is quite a big deal,
Food brings us together.
In times of celebration,
With family and friends,
In a joyful jubilation.
Food is more than just something to keep us alive,
It's a way to enjoy our world,
To take a moment and thrive,
So let's savor each bite and cherish each meal,
And celebrate the magic that food can reveal.

Boulettes
Noemie Rak
10-12 category

My favorite meal in the entire world is the food at the Passover seder. A seder is the time when Jewish people remember their exodus from Egypt, but for me it is so much more than that. For me, it is a moment to honor my family's rich history and the major turning points that brought us to where we are today. I think of my family's many exoduses and how they were forced to enter new worlds, where they strived to be better versions of themselves. The food that most symbolizes this to me is my great-grandmother's meatballs.

Even though both sides of my family have different Jewish backgrounds, they share the ability to record their history not in journals or news articles, but in their cuisine. My father and his family are Sefardic Jews, which means his family originated in Spain. Like the ancient Hebrews and many people today, they had to flee their homes. Eventually, his family made it to Morocco and then to Algeria. This is where they developed a meaningful Passover recipe, "Les Boulettes de Mamie," or grandma's meatballs.

The boulettes are filled with North African herbs and spices such as mint, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, turmeric and saffron. They are cooked in a broth with peas – my Polish relatives don't eat those on Passover – and served in a steaming pot of deliciousness. They are called grandma's meatballs because in every generation, the family matriarch teaches her granddaughters the recipe once they are ready. My great-grandma has taught six of her 27 descendants how to make this recipe according to tradition, just as her grandma taught her. Cookbook authors have asked her for the recipe and she gladly shares it, but always excludes one ingredient – the dish wouldn't be special if it were commonplace! This summer after my bat mitzvah, I am going to learn how to make this exclusive recipe, but this time, with the secret ingredient.

When I enjoy this dish, I imagine the now-extinct scimitar-horned oryx my great-grandma told me about grazing in the desert. I hear her Arabic dialect mixed with French, Ladino and Spanish. I taste tradition, I take a bite of history, and I inhale the scent of responsibility to perpetuate this piece of my heritage by promising to add many more links to this strong generational chain. Although my family may never be able to return to these beautiful lands, we ensure that our history remains ingrained in our memory with each bite of "Les Boulettes de Mamie."

Kesariya, Reprise
Sahil Gandhi
16-18 category

Saffron is the color of love.

Aroma transcending all else, vivid

Color saturating the biryani Mother spent hours

Toiling in her rasoï for her children in our

Childhood; we rebuked cardamom besmirching our

Palate. Mother abhors the flavor of kesar fervently, yet Its

Luscious hues envelop the whole world in its shadow.

Saffron is the color of the journey.

Stigmas, ephemeral, plucked from purple croci

Reinvigorating fields long decadent, heart divorced from body

Sardine-packed into claustrophobic crates tinted red

Destined for transactions in another land, auctioned in

Farmers' bazaars and "exotic" emporiums alike.

Saffron is the color of autumn.

Fallen leaves relegate the world their canvas

Derelict trees resolve themselves of

Toxins of red, orange, yellow, brown;

Absent earthy green unveils dormant shades of saffron,

Concluding another cycle in a tree's finite, prolonged life.

Saffron is the color of flames.

Man's foremost discovery, our beacon of hope, the

Catalyst that sets ablaze splendor and squabble

Wreaking havoc on all caught by Its gaze, leaving many witnesses, yet

Clears the land, fueling new life to grow anew henceforth, only

Through conflagration emerges what's lost once more; Its

Guiding light, warmth shields us from inevitable frost, the

Funeral pyre that shall absolve my incandescent

Soul upon my impending demise, releasing me,

Laying the stones for my path to another life.

Saffron is the color of sunset, yet also sunrise.

Amidst a vibrant array of scarlet, vermillion gold, the

Horizon, extending across the visual plane, contests with
Asmaan, the infinite canopy projecting above,
Over who may usurp the privilege of being
Custodian to the rising and falling saffron luminary.

Saffron is the color of life.
Kesar manifests many forms in our natural world;
Shades of neglected leaves, hues of vindicating flames,
Contrasting tones of dawn and twilight,
Reminding us of life's cyclical nature;
Every performance has its encore, yet
What must end now must commence once more,
Evoking as much comfort as it may fear.

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Ode to the Everything Bagel
Bailey Randall
13-15 category

Your garlicky tastes ward off some
they don't deserve you
no one does
You with the butter
You with the cream cheese
You sparkle with others
But shine by yourself

Good for the days heavy with sorrow
And those flooded with light
Good with the company of others
in a busy farmers market
Good alone too
When the only ones there are you and your thoughts
You're warm in my hands
Standing outside the shop
The smell filling my nose
As my dad stands beside me

Your seeds of flavor are sprinkled in
Along with warm memories i'm close to losing
memories with my dad and mom
When I walk around town with bagel in my mouth
The mornings in the cold of fall
leaves falling off while I bite down
Family gatherings with everyone there
Reminded of the pattern from my childhood

They fall off one by one
With every jostle of you
You lose yourself a little bit more
Under all the others
you have your own flavor
Under all the seeds and shavings and fillings

The onion

The butter

The salt

You're hiding yourself

like the sky sometimes hides behind a blanket heavy with stars

You hide

But there's no need

I will always love you

You and your salty goodness

Your ability to go with anything

Everything Bagels

Snack
Sidney Meyer
10-12 category

I search the kitchen between meals
Longing for something sweet
Something to fulfill my cravings
I look through the fridge and cupboards filled with food
And finally decide on pita chips with hummus.

I sit down at my marble kitchen island and munch on my snack,
Thinking about what I'm going to eat for dinner.
Gnocchi? Kale salad? Should I order in?
While I wonder what my next meal will be
There is a man outside on the sidewalk
Looking through the trash
Searching for something, anything edible
To take away the hunger
Take away the pain
He rummages through piles of unwanted items
Thrown out by people who can afford to feel full.
He finally finds a small bag of Cheetos,
and checks to make sure the rats haven't gotten to it first.

He reclines against the wall of my apartment building,
his back pressed against the white cement wall
and his comforter wrapped around him,
acting as a cushion between
him
and the sidewalk.
He sits there,
eating his small bag of Cheetos from the trash
While he wonders
when his next meal will be.

Untitled Poem
Hermione Heckrich
10-12 category

World hunger is a tragedy
A problem that we must all see,
For millions of people, its a constant
fight,
To find enough food to make it through
The night

It's problem that we can't ignore,
For children who are hungry, life is a
chore,
We must come together and lend a
hand,
To help those who are struggling to stand

But there is hope, if we united,
And work together to make things right,
For every person deserves to eat
And have a life that's full and sweet.

So let's come together, hand in hand,
And help those who need a helping
hand,
No matter someone's race, every person
Deserves to have a meal and a safe
Place.

Oranges in Purgatory (the most nourishing kind)
Diya Mangaraj
13-15 category

for a fragment of time, I hated food

hated that every bite matched a number.
 Addition took away from me.

I thought heaven was a gated community
 so you had to shove yourself through the bars

god, I tried to shove myself
 emptied my stomach in pious sacrifice

but every push, the bars grew closer
 and I was left outside

wondering, if "food is meant to be enjoyed"
 why was it holding me back?

On November 10th, I slipped through.

fell through the bars
 closed my eyes
 and hoped for the clouds to catch me

but as light as I was, they didn't.
 so I broke through and fell down
 left shattered on a field of cement.

In purgatory,
 there was a room with an orange.
 on the third day, I surrendered
 and ate it.

citrus filled the air
 and tangy pulp filled my tongue.
 as juice ran down my chin
 I found myself chasing the taste of more.

That day, the numbers disappeared,
 Leaving me sticky fingers and a peel.

I understood, then

"Food is meant to be enjoyed."

My Braid of Origin
Dahlia Devine Lief
10-12 category

Filling the cracks in my being, the ruptures;
 a leavened loaf of Sabbath, split by our yearning fingers
 split by the amber butterflies perched
 on hardly embellished candleholders
 Challah
 Braided by my mother's fingers
 Braided by the despair, the blood, the tears
 shattering
 The night's tranquility, the weeps of my ancestors
 In the shtetl
 Challah
 Braided by those behind barbed wire; those whose piercing cries echo to
 This day;
 Pray
 Their guttering beacon of hope, slashed
 to its final limb
 barely
 clinging
 on
 Challah
 Braided over unhindered breaths
 songs
 they never got the chance to hear
 but with lyrics that
 Are little
 cerulean blue songbirds
 Transcending centuries
 soaring through the gaps in our blood
 That beats in our veins
 Challah
 as we fade into the day, into clenched whitened fists
 Into smoldering hatred
 Into the days where we er, where we flounder
 I braid the dough that
 runs with blood, as i eat
 The fabric of your dough
 Punctuated by seeds like pinpricks in a night
 abyss
 I pause
 I think of you and those who came before me

What Food Can Do
Josephine Crim
10-12 years old

Have you ever experienced something so good
that you can't bear to change it?
Something so special that you couldn't imagine it differently?
This is what food can do for you.
Food can change you and make you feel more comfort.
Food can recover you and warm you.

But imagine the amazing, life-changing food just isn't there.
Every time you try to catch the slip of comfort,
it floats up
and this time it floats up too far, too far to catch.

All that food and comfort vanishes into thin air.
You start to think that nothing good
is ever going to fall onto your plate again.

But you wake up.
The pictures of food start coming back into your life.
You feel all the things that you were feeling before.
Comfort.
Hope.
Peace.
That is just what food can do.

Finalists***Food***
Faris Lenahan
10-12 category

Food is like a bridge

It brings us together as a community

Food is like glue

It keeps us together as a community

Food is like medicine

It heals us as a community

Food is like a vitamin

It helps us grow as a community

Food is like a party

It helps us celebrate as a community

Food is like a surprise

It gives us excitement as a community

Macaroni and Bean Soup
Alexandra Stillman
14-16 category

Overlooked on the shelves
Neglected, bleak
The beans a muted white
The broth a sullen red
In its imperfections I find beauty.
To find it many cans must be moved
The ones that people actually like
The ones that sell.
Lentil, Chicken Noodle, Vegetable Medley
All gems in the eyes of the consumers, but to me they look the same.
At the back of the glossy metal shelves
All the way back
I find Macaroni and Bean
Not pasta fagioli,
Macaroni and Bean.
Progresso Macaroni and Bean, for technicality's sake.
Who would want to eat soup from a can?
Me.
The girl inside me being fed
My dad's soft, yet demanding voice
Calling me to the dinner table
His large, overbearing hands
Holding the ladle above my plastic red bowl
My arms stretched out, positioned under the fountain of soup
Bean by bean
Noodle by noodle
Plop.
In a haze it all pours down
Each ascension of the spoon;
Soup to mouth
A melange;
Soft cannellini beans
Seeped in broth for many neglected months;
From factory, to shelf, to my table

Doughy noodles enhancing the soft, chewy taste of the beans
Bite by bite, soft on the tongue
Upon hitting my sharp teeth, flavor oozes out
The steam warming my stomach, feeding my soul
Various flavors strung together, like beads on a necklace by the savory, thin tomato
broth
Although I don't really know whether it's actually tomato
That you'd have to ask Progresso
Or my dad.

My Grandma's Maduros
Ty Alejandro Loo
16-18 category

My grandma, Ama, makes the best maduros that I have ever had. The ingredients? Simple. The flavor? Unparalleled. The methods? Magic. The simplicity, but simultaneous lack of elegance provides me with an inexplicable joy. I don't expect it served on a silver platter with nice cutlery; I have come to adore the paper plate and paper towels they are served on. The greasiness, the sweetness, the saltiness, and the love are what makes them delicious.

Ama used to pick me up from school, and we would stop by Fairway on our way home. Sometimes it was to buy bananas, or maybe some other meats and vegetables for that night's dinner, but more often, it was to simply buy plantains. Regardless of how stocked our cart was, the staple item was always those long, green, and black fruits.

Ama always kept her house stocked full of plantains. For as long as I can remember, I have walked into her kitchen, and seen a glass bowl, filled with big, blackened fruit. Yet her plantain obsession was not contained in just her house. As I grew older and began coming home from school by myself, I noticed plantains spontaneously appearing in my kitchen. Sometimes just one or two, other times a whole bunch of nearly ten to fifteen. Yet they never lasted long. In a matter of days, their numbers would dwindle, and I would have a mouthwatering snack in front of me.

After enough talk about plantains and maduros, I think it is finally time for me to explain exactly what a maduro is. Simply put, a maduro is fried plantain. Were you expecting a longer explanation? Well, there is no need to overcomplicate. There is no batter or breading, just oil, and fruit. I have watched Ama work her magic, peeling and slicing plantains a million times. The image of her pouring the oil into a pan, and tossing in slice after slice is ingrained in my mind. The simmering oil dances around the plantains. The first bite is sublime; the sweet, velvety texture slides down my throat, and begs for the next. The smell of oil permeates my nose.

While the snack itself is delicious, what it represents is much more substantial. Ama's plantains are a joy that reminds me of some of the best parts of my childhood. My Ama's tiny frame standing by the stove, lovingly making me my favorite snack. As my life has changed from a boy to a teenager, her maduros have been a constant. The consistency of her cooking offers me comfort. There is something special about this dish that keeps me grounded in my family. I know that whatever comes in the future, I can rely on Ama to cook me delicious maduros, and all will be better.

Food for All
Hobbes Clateman
10-12 category

Aside from the wheel
And electric stoves
Food is the best
Creation I know

It's filled with happiness, warmth, and delight
Even if it's coffee cake
Which keeps me up at night
No matter the weather
Food makes it better
If I'm writing a letter...

Or solving equations
Food makes it finer
On every occasion

I don't know what it's like
To not have any food for the night
I can't say
That I have no food for the day

But if there's one thing I know
Hunger shouldn't be the status quo

If there's anything everyone should not
be excluded from,
It's food.

Ode to Kreplach
Lyla Turk
10-12 category

There is nothing
Not a recipe to be held
Not a plastic encased photo
to take up space on a shelf

Every day I spent with her
the center of my first three years
Revolving around her
My great-grandmother
melting into a single droplet
A fragment

A small dimming light
heart beating soft
Lurking behind a door
Never seen
Only ever sensed
by seeping light through
the empty spaces
A pea placed under
stacks of mattresses

Until the door's banged open
the pea is finally felt
A whiff
for a fraction of time
and a broken shard
of a forgotten memory
sparked and on fire

The senses stronger
and more powerful
than the mind

I am drawn back
Eternity in a minute

I'm sitting at a long
Rough white table
The comfort of
family surrounding me

She's there
And kreplach
Those squishy precious packages
and the only reason
she's still alive to me
even though she's gone to the rest
of the universe

Kreplach

A pathway that connects
Us

What do I smell?
I don't know

What did I taste?
I don't know

I can no longer recall the food
that I once cherished
as a child cherished a toy
The sensation lost along
with the priceless recipe
with a chunk of my life
with her
just gone

However
The smell fades away
The door is shoved closed
The princess steps off the mattress
The train drags me back
here
And the memory shuts off
Forever dimming

song in two parts
Grace Yu
16-18 category

part one.

i learned how to make *mandu* // that summer i was seven // years old // & it was my
halmoni //
who taught me // to wash the ingredients // & music // to breathe in // the scent of
green onions //
marinate // the fillings // & home // to fold the wrappers // into tender curves // & i
think // back
then, // that was my whole world // as i watched the steam rising // from the stove
// &
afterwards, // held the little half moons // put my lips // to her warmth //

part two.

the day my *halmoni* got diagnosed with cancer // i couldn't even play the notes // i
could hear my
mother's voice thinning over the phone // & my mouth was shut // & silence // i
wanted // to
starve myself strong // to hunger for her warmth // & home // to put my arms
around her // to feel
my whole world

Food Comfort
Ethan Flath
10-12 category

Food is what we go to for comfort –
Whether that comfort is
On the inside or outside.

Food comforts our minds.
It makes us feel calm,
In control and in peace.

Food comforts our bodies.
It makes us feel full,
And able to do things.

But most of all, food comforts our communities.
It brings us together;
It makes us feel welcome.

But what if people do not have food to comfort them?
No food for their minds, bodies,
Or for their community?

This is why we need to make sure that
All people feel food's comfort.
In their mind, their body, and most of all,
In their community.

Ramen!
Lila Vasant
10-12 category

Spicy flavored hot water, with noodles you could eat forever.
When could I ever get tired of ramen?
The answer is never!
The first time I tried it, I was only four.
After I had one bowl, I still wanted more!
It reminds me of cold winter days, bundled up in bed.
It reminds me of a fluffy dog resting by my head.
It reminds me of a cozy place, where I can sit and think.
It reminds me of washing my hands with hot water at the sink.
You can make up YOUR own recipe of what you'd want to use.
And after that even more recipes can be produced!
Ramen smells like all the foods you love have been mixed into one.
Ramen smells like cozy restaurants and a bowl of lots of fun.
A pot of boiling water, and throwing in lots of spices.
The sizzle when it hits the water, that sound is just the nicest.
Family recipes that have been passed down for generations,
or maybe you'll eat a big bowl while you're on vacation.
Whenever or wherever you eat the rest,
I have to declare, ramen is truly the best.

Picarones
Mica (Micaela) Suiza
10-12 category

A soft
sweet potato donut
With a sweet, sweet syrup,
Something that I get
Only once in a while
When I go over to my
Abuela's house, the
Smell, it fills the air
When I eat them
I feel a lot closer
To my family, to my Abuela
Picarones, a soft, sweet
Potato donut.