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What Happens When

by Nia King

What happens when?

Elmo is grounded from seeing Big Bird,
Because he decided to skip third?

When,

Dora stops exploring,
And her life begins to be boring?

When,

Scooby Doo decides to stop solving crimes,
And starts to feel there is no time?

What happens when?

Children shows lose their magic,
Do the struggles in life feel magnified?

When,

Little children no longer want to play,
And feel they need to escape from everything?

When,

We grow up,
And
our creativity does not join us.

What happens when,

The simple rhyme scheme stops,
And the complicated themes ensue.



"Decaying Beauty"
by Kennedy Carmichael

College Acceptance Letter

Miles away I am being judged,
Judged by those I don't know,
Those who will determine the next step,
The next four years of my life.

Yet all they know about me,
The activities I have quit,
The "C" I received in geometry,
My measly 15 community service hours,
And one simple essay I wrote at 3AM.

They are choosing my life for me,
This school I have dreams about,
The place where I feel at home,
Can all be taken away,
With just one word.

"DENIED."

I wait,
for what seems to be a lifetime,
Waiting just makes my anxiety worse,
Everyday my heart beats harder and faster,
Soon it may just burst out of my chest.

In this time I,
Cannot focus on anything,
lay awake at night, as my mind wanders,
wanders into an abyss of fear,
fear that my goals are unrealistic and grandiose.

I am reminding myself everyday,
That their answer does not define me.
Somehow, I still feel it does,
“This is the only thing that matters.”

The wait is over,
The letter is in the mail,
I’ve been looking forward to this moment,
Hesitant, I am unable to open it,
Scared that my nightmares will come true.

With the will and strength only a God obtains,
I slowly tear the envelope,
Now it is as if I can wait longer,
Rather my heart explode from waiting,
Than open this letter.

“ACCEPTED”



"Prayer"

by Kennedy Carmichael

What is wrong with her?

by Nehkesyah Hawkins

She doesn't really
know
Why she feels the way
she does.
And it is hard for me
to understand
As much as I'd really
like to.

She tells me the same
answer
To different
questions.
As I find myself
staring blankly at
The world at war
behind her eyes

A set of cold blue
eyes
That used to be
lively.
And a voice that mimicked the tenderness
Of Spring.

Now her silence reaches volumes
I can not comprehend.
I hold resentment
towards her like no other.
There is impatience that
lie beneath my breath.

It is hard to witness
When I know it's
there.

Something that I
can't control is
slowly devouring who
she is completely.
I don't know how to
reach out to her.
I am not sure what to
do.

I look for guidance,
Only getting pieces
of the whole picture.

And in the very
moment
When she finds bliss,
I will sit,
still wishing I could
simply understand.



"Nacimiento"
by Brenda Morales

My Flower

by Kristen Irion

Flowers are all around us.
We see them every day.

But there's a special flower for everyone,
That is crafted just for them.

It's the one that brings happiness and light.
The one that is irreplaceable.

You are that flower.
You bring me happiness and laughter.

You light up my whole galaxy,
And you are my shooting star.

I didn't ever think it would be you,
But it is.

You are irreplaceable.



Longing for Libuela

by Jessi Spitler

Darkness, stars, planets.
Wake up on the beach.
Droplets from saltwater pines on my face.
Sunrise and tangerine-frosted waves kissing the shore.
A frigate bird dives like a fighter jet.
Good morning, beautiful.

No time for breakfast.
Wetsuit. Get on the research boat.
Toothpaste on my mask.
Wind whipping through my hair.
Here I am, Dear Ocean.
Good morning, beautiful.

There it is. A fin cutting through the water like glass.
Electric blue spots cruising beneath my feet.
Three times the length of this silly boat.
Over the edge, into the water.
Just fins, no more silly feet.
No thinking, just being.
Deep dives and fast muscle twitches.
Waves.
Splashes.
Spots flying beneath me.
Giant.
Graceful.
An unmistakable scar near her dorsal fin.
Whale shark number MX-552.
Cruising slowly, just long enough for a visit
Before she vanishes into the deep.
Nice to see you again, Libelula.
Good morning, beautiful.

I am not in control.
But I am at peace.
Saltwater and gummy lifesavers.
Pinching myself to make sure this life is real.
Thunderstorms and puddles and splashes.
Even on dry land, I find myself snorkel-breathing in the rain.
The chaos is the calm.
How wild it is to simply exist.
We live in a beautiful world and this is a beautiful life.
Good morning, beautiful.



*Photo by
Cody Farley and Sally
Mann*

Black Hate

by Jemimah Ghenda

I dare you to swear at me again
And watch as
I melt your words
And mix it up with my Shea butter.
I will use your hate on my kinky curls
And laugh in your face.
Your spit does not hurt me anymore,
It makes my skin glow.



*Photo by
Lindsey Cheek*

Changes

by Zoie Walton

Flinging my fingers and they expand
Kicking and punching and they grow
Hair chopping like lettuce in a blinder
So fast, so quick
Who I was will never come back
But who I'll be isn't even here

Now, the growing has stopped;
haven't grown in years.
Now the growth is only in my mind,
Learning different ways to live
to love, to love, to be me!
Whatever I become...
will be a great one.



*"Twirl" by
Natalie Stefan*

Storm

by Kaniel Kirby

The somber clouds loom, concealing a blue,
Crawling across the canvas above.
Dark gray paints the sky,
In splotchy, puffy streaks.

An ominous mist foreshadows tribulations,
And soon it will deliver.
A sprinkle, a drizzle,
Quite suddenly a weighty downpour.

It moves in large waves,
Cascading with the wind.
Vigorously whipping back and forth,
The storm warns inhabitants of its presence.

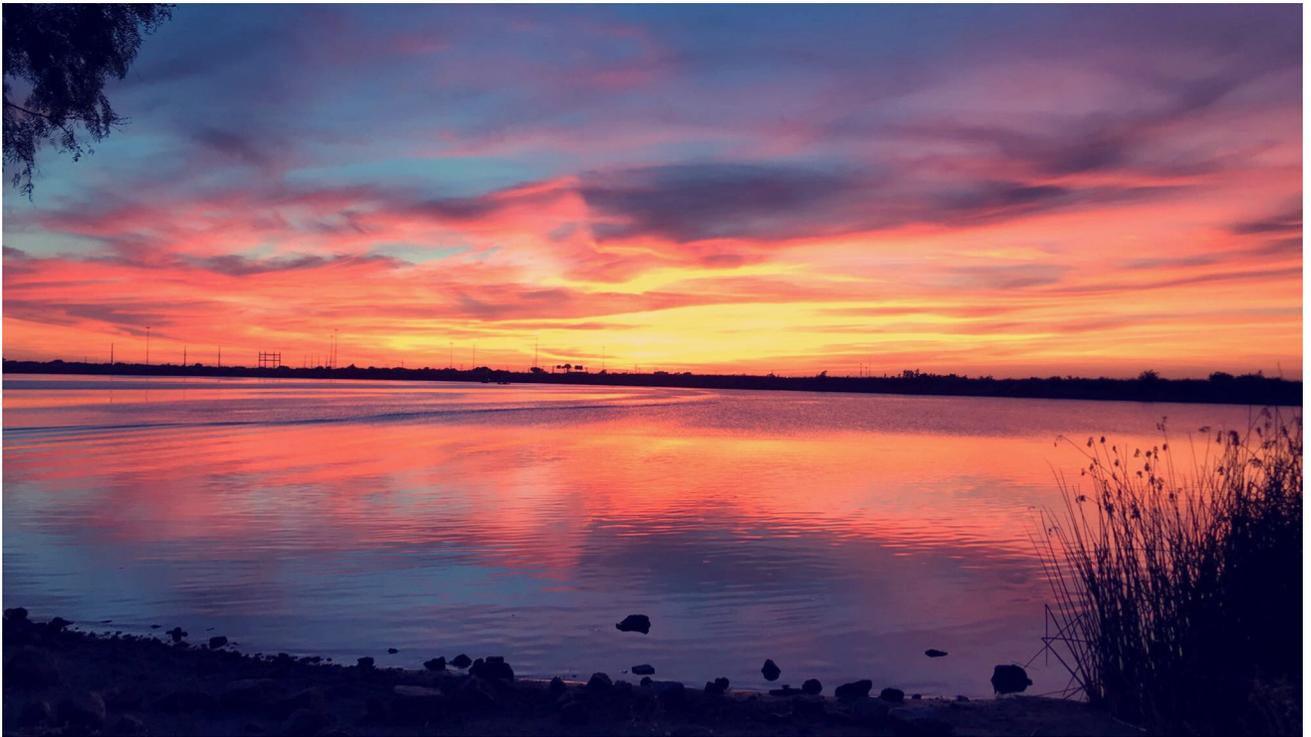
Enraged, the storm flings lightning,
Which sprawls throughout the clouds,
This way and that,
Before fiercely cracking the ground below.

Squirrels, birds, and racoons alike scurry away,
Fear washed upon their faces.
Left only is the damaged surface,
As if a ferocious hound had just marked its territory.

The strength of the waves has dissipated,
The thunder slightly distant.
The animals relax themselves,
Observing from their makeshift shelters.

The darkest clouds are now passing,
Several seconds between flash and boom.
Now only light showers remain,
And the wind speeds have receded.

The clouds of distress retreat away,
Revealing a bright orb behind them.
Faded, refreshing colors form,
Distant, they glisten in the rain.



"Summertime Madness"
by Sakari Ochoa

Faculty and Staff Profile

Darcy Radcliffe

written by Steven Wegrzynowicz



Photographed by Byrin Hollowell

"It weeds out" a lot of kids, she said when talking about the work ethic it takes to be a great string player: the hours put in, the time alone, the practicing of an instrument she believes is akin to chess. "Strings are cerebral, they take focus" and practice to perfect pieces. If the player is without those two, the focus and diligence, the music falls apart. I was only about five minutes into the interview with her and I was already intimidated.

I had heard a lot about Darcy Radcliffe in my time at Cooper. Our tenures have overlapped for the last eight years, but I had

door, red paint peeled to show the faded original Cooper Blue beneath it. On the floor between us was an old wooden conductor's platform, chipped and smoothed around the edges, galvanized brackets indicated there used

"STRINGS ARE CEREBRAL, THEY TAKE FOCUS"

never spoken to her directly. I was able to spend a few hours with her over the course of writing this profile and I was humbled appropriately. She holds eye contact, sits poised with excellent posture. She isn't stiff; she is deliberate in her movements. We sat in the plastic chairs her students use in class with metal music holders scattered about the room. She appeared comfortable in the hard plastic chair with the low pile blue carpet beneath her feet; it's home to her. Behind her was a metal

to be a railing her father leaned on when he conducted the orchestra.

I've come to learn that the students who typically occupy those seats in the Cooper Orchestra room have better opportunities than most students in Texas. Our small program boasts the Revolution Strings orchestra, a group that gigs 40-50 times a year. The normal orchestra itself also performs in other shows, including in the pit orchestra for Cooper Theatre

productions. The numbers are baffling to realize how often our students perform in front of audiences. It became clear that each moment of practice in that hall was precious in order to get students ready for those performances, the first of which falls within 18 days of school starting. “I have to warn them when I show up to school the first day, I am in performance mode. It is intense,” she said.

[ORCHESTRA STUDENTS] ARE TYPE-A PERSONALITIES, GIFTED, DRIVEN, STUDIOUS, AND HARDWORKING,

Performance mode means perfection. The class plays the music, the practice is recorded, the recording is played immediately after for them to hear. They know when they make mistakes, they fix them. Rinse, then repeat until perfection. Performance mode means high intensity, but also high energy. I was left with the question, if the first performance is so close to the beginning of the school year, where do these kids start?

Many fields like music, gymnastics, writing, chess, etc. have one paradigm that often rings true: if you are going to be great, you need to start young. Electives in school are there to allow students a survey of interests that they can try-on for themselves. Before interviewing her, I had certain answers I was hoping for: I wanted her to tell me that Orchestra was like other electives, open to any student of interest and talent. Students could jump in during their sophomore or junior years and play for the first time and find success.

Few people are born with passions or are raised from an early age into greatness in a field. It takes late bloomers longer to find interests that could one day turn into a passion for them. But, she was honest, orchestra is not a late bloomer field. If students are really gifted, they can take lessons privately and catch up to the others in their class. More often than not though, our orchestra students have been working on the

strings for a long time and there may be too large of a gap to cross in such a short while. They are type-A personalities, gifted, driven, studious, and hardworking, much like their instructor. Radcliffe was no late bloomer, she grew up on the stage.

Her first violin was 1/16th of the full size she plays now, smaller than the familiar Cooper Hallway ukulele. She was three. I would imagine the “music” a three-year-old would play was awful, but it didn’t matter. Radcliffe was hooked. She was raised in a home filled with music, her siblings pianists and artists, her father the orchestra instructor at Cooper preceding her. The framework around her was set for her to succeed in a career as a musician and artist. It would take years of physical growth for her to be able to play the concertos she practices in the little off-time she has now, so she took up ballet instead, though still practicing the violin consistently. It was under her first teacher of ballet she learned what a “taskmaster” was, a view into what she

would become for our students.

Her first instructor was a former ballerina with the Ballet Russe, a prestigious and historic ballet company in Monte Carlo. She demanded a lot from her students and they were great because of it. Radcliffe remembers her instructions and choreography near perfectly. They practiced until they could not make a mistake. At all times in ballet, you are to be perfect. Radcliffe was. She continued dancing into college, then was able to travel around the world dancing with an off-Broadway production. When you are young, talented, and dedicated doors will open for you. They opened up a world of travel and professional dance for her. Radcliffe left her scholarships and studies at Hardin-Simmons University and traveled for a year with the production, it was in its 15th year of production and would go on for another two in

“I’M MORE GIFTED AS A MUSICIAN...I WAS GOOD AS A DANCER, BUT I FELT I COULD GO FURTHER WITH MUSIC,”

her absence.

A year away from school is a terrifying idea for most parents. Common sense would tell anyone that a year away will lessen the importance of education at their institution. There is a certain momentum in the educational system, a year off to travel the world sounds like heresy to students that are on track toward a college career. “No one wanted me to drop out of school [but] I’m so glad I did it...it paid off,” she said, further

adding that she didn’t want to just be “doing something someone told you to do, when you don’t know what you want”. Radcliffe should have traveled with the ballet show then been disillusioned by the confines of the classroom. However, that was not the case, she was emboldened in her purpose. While touring the world, she found out what she wanted and Radcliffe returned to Hardin-Simmons to study to become an orchestra instructor.

The mental gymnastics one must do in order to jump from a performer of ballet to an orchestra teacher, were ones I needed her help to guide me through. The common threads are these: they are both musical means in order to express herself. From the outset, each of the arts would have allowed her to put her own signature on any piece she performed. No two dancers dance exactly alike and no two violinists sound exactly alike. Radcliffe asked herself which of those two

mediums best expressed herself and decided on music. “I’m more gifted as a musician...I was good as a dancer, but I felt I could go further with music,” she said. She proved that she could be a professional ballerina, but the ceiling on her abilities were higher in music, and that was what made the difference. With music, “there is always something else to learn”, and you can never really outgrow music. When she went back to HSU, she went back to learn not only to perform, but teach students to excel in the

orchestra.

When she came to Cooper, and took over the orchestra led by her father, Radcliffe believes she built upon what her predecessor had begun. The orchestra was at its own ceiling and she broke through that. Initially, the group benefited greatly because of her connection to its established traditions. Radcliffe didn't eradicate the memory of the program, she continued it. When she needed help in those early years, her father was there to guide her through problems small or large. Even some of the warm-ups they run through

“EVERYTHING SHIFTS, YOUR ENERGY CHANGES, YOUR ATTENTION CHANGES, YOUR CONFIDENCE CHANGES”

today, her father created. I have to imagine there is a familiarity in the room itself, the walls hearing the familiar sounds of the instruments and players warming-up, and her family voice calling from the scuffed wooden podium in front of it all. It is within that space that has seen generations of performers learn that she has sought to take her students who would remain faceless in a traditional orchestra and give them their spotlight.

The Revolution Strings program is not traditional. Radcliffe's goal with the program is to get students not only prepared for the competitive field of music, but also get them outside of their shells and as she says, “give them a face”. Orchestras are ensembles of many strings that work together, musicians must work in sync, and if everything is perfect,

each musician is anonymous. The Revolution program tries to unravel that paradigm and highlight each of its' musicians.

Radcliffe receives a lot of feedback from parents of formerly shy students who marvel at the sight of their children playing and entertaining unencumbered. Revolution, and our other art programs, gives those students a space to express themselves that would not be found otherwise. It is in that creative space that students can change and grow. Radcliffe describes the experience of music as a shift within yourself;

when performing, “everything shifts, your energy changes, your attention changes, your confidence changes”. It is in that change that students grow into the artists and people they want to be. Cooper High School is privileged to have an orchestra program that not only prepares our students for their dreams in the music industry, but allows our students to perform at a level they could not imagine for themselves.