

STUDENT WRITING CONTEST }

A Selection of Shortlisted Submissions for the 2024
Learning Centre Student Writing Contest



DOUGLAS COLLEGE
Learning Centre

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Bridging Worlds: A Journey of Resilience

Onyinye Precious Mabia

Onyinye stood at the airport terminal, clutching her one-way ticket to Vancouver, Canada. She had booked Air France flight, which will make a stop in France before proceeding to Vancouver. The bustling surroundings filled with lightning-fast technology and advanced infrastructure, were a stark contrast to the serene, technology-bare environment of her hometown in rural Bamuze. Back home, technology was a luxury, reserved for the urban dwellers, the wealthy, and the elite. She had grown up in a place where the whistling of the morning breeze and the rustling sounds triggered by the movement of school children running to queue up at the community tap to fetch water snapped her out of her dream world. These natural rhymes are a sharp contrast to the hum of machines and loud sounds of high-performance vehicles which graced the city of Vancouver where she currently found herself.

Arriving in Canada was like stepping into a different world. The streets were filled with people walking briskly to do their daily activities, the beeping of gadgets was ever-present and obvious. Digital billboards flashed vibrant notifications, and people walked with eyes glued to their smartphones, oblivious to those around them. There was also the SkyTrain which moved at lightning speed, and the comfortable buses boarded with just a tap of the compass card. Onyinye's heart pounded with a mix of excitement and trepidation. She was here to pursue her dream of studying Environmental Science. As

an advocate of environmental conservation, her unwavering interest in the field brought her here, but first, she had to find a way to navigate this brave and beautiful new world of technology.

The first challenge was communication. Back home in Bamuze, it was common practice for most conversations to be held face-to-face. Here, everyone uses messaging apps, faxes, and emails which could be done anywhere using a smart phone. Onyinye's first attempt to email her professor took her an hour of commuting to school, where she sought assistance from her school Library. Following an orientation session, she learned that she could get computer-based assistance from the library. At the Library the keyboard felt strange, and each letter typed felt like a tiny victory. She persevered, driven by the belief that understanding technology was key to her success.

In her classes, she faced another daunting hurdle. Her peers effortlessly took notes on sleek tablets and laptops, their fingers dancing over the keys with the precision of seasoned pianists and the speed of an aircraft. She felt a deep pang of insecurity.

Onyinye clutched her pen and notebook, her precious familiar tools that now seemed almost antiquated in this high-tech world. The clatter of the keyboards around her made her feel like an outsider, her traditional ways contrasting sharply with the digital world and flexibility around her. However, Onyinye had a driving force; her secret weapon in navigating life's circumstances: resilience. The first time she tried to use a computer in the school library to complete her online assignment, her hands trembled with anxiety, in her brain was a wealth of knowledge of what to write but her limited computer skill was a great challenge. Each missed tap on a wrong letter of a word felt like a failure to

her. Tears of frustration welled up in her eyes occasionally running down her cheeks, determined not to be weak she wiped them away and kept learning.

Her resilience became her anchor. Onyinye spent countless hours in the library, determined to master the school's computer system and typing skills. The library staff, who were always cheerful, saw her resilience and encouraged her by providing assistance when needed. She started sending emails and completing her online assignments with a little bit of ease. Eventually, she borrowed a laptop from the school library. The act of bringing the laptop home was symbolic, a step towards merging her old life with her new one. In the quiet confines of her small but beautiful apartment, she practiced typing and navigating the internet, she would always call her family back home to celebrate each milestone. The struggle was not over but with every stroke on the keyboard and every additional improvement in typing speed, she felt a rush of emotion and a growing sense of accomplishment in this brave new world.

What made Onyinye's experience in 2024 unique was the blend of the non-tech savvy world and the new extremely tech savvy world. She carried the wisdom of her ancestors, who lived in harmony with nature, and now she was learning the tools of the future. She was getting accustomed to the use of technology while enjoying the ease and flexibility it provided. This juxtaposition and synergy were challenging, but it also gave her a unique view and approach. She saw technology not just as a tool but as a bridge between worlds.

Onyinye's struggle wasn't just about mastering the use of gadgets; it was also about

cultural integration. Canada is notorious for its cultural diversity, which is reflected in institutions like Douglas College. This cultural diversity introduced a beautiful blend of people from different races, cultures, and backgrounds. She joined a student club that focused on sustainability. At first, she felt out of place among her tech-savvy peers, but soon, they began to appreciate her deep understanding of natural ecosystems. She brought a fresh, holistic perspective that balanced their data-driven approaches. Everyone took interest in her because her unique insights sparked engaging discussions and fostered a deeper understanding and collaboration among her classmates.

One pivotal moment came during a group project. The team was tasked with developing a sustainable urban garden. Onyinye suggested using her traditional Bamuza farming techniques alongside modern technology. Her idea was met with mixed feelings and skepticism. At the organising phase of the project, one of the group members voiced fears about the project's potential failure if Onyinye's ideas are adopted. However, Onyinye demonstrated how the two approaches she suggested could coexist. They used sensors to monitor soil moisture and traditional composting methods to enrich the soil. The project was a success, and Onyinye earned the respect of her classmates.

Outside the classroom, Onyinye found solace in the city's parks, especially Coquilam Park near one of her school campuses. She will occasionally take long strolls around the park while absorbing the beautiful blend of nature and technology epitomised by the water fountain constructed right in the middle of the Coquilam lake. The tranquility of

nature's beauty and its comforting presence provided a glaring contrast to the fast-paced, technologically driven world she was navigating. She often video-called her family, marveling at how technology could bridge vast distances with just a few taps on her phone. She imagined the pride her late parents would have felt, seeing her adapt and thrive, in this tech savvy, beautiful world while fulfilling her dream of studying environmental science. The support and love from her family resounded in her heart, fueling her determination to succeed and fulfill her dream. Each step she took in the park was a testament of her resilience and the bridge she was building between her past and her future.

As the year progressed, Onyinye's initial struggles fueled her resilience and transformed into strengths. She became a bridge herself, connecting the wisdom of her past with the innovations of the present. She started a facebook page, "Precious Mabilia," to share her journey, writing and talking about her experiences and the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern technology. She spoke about her challenges and the need to be focused, resilient, and open to change. Her words resonated with many, gaining a following from people who were also navigating change. Many reached out to her to share their experiences and how her talks and writings helped them navigate through them.

In 2024, the world and the experiences it held for humans were filled with extraordinary change, which could be navigated by finding a balance between the past and the present. Onyinye's journey was a testament to this. She proved that even in a rapidly evolving world, there is space for the old and the new to coexist and enrich each

other. Her story was one of resilience, adaptation, and the unique human ability to bridge worlds.

As Onyinye walked across the stage to receive her diploma in Environmental Science with distinction, she looked out at the diverse faces in the audience, reminiscing in a flash about all her experiences over the past two years. She had not only earned a degree but had also created a path that others could follow. In 2024, a time of extraordinary change, Onyinye had carved a niche for herself, blending perfectly into a new world, while staying true to her roots. This balance made her journey and experiences truly unique.

fresh air

Luwita Hana Randhawa

I open the door and she bounds out of it. It's her favorite time of day.

She stops at the end of the pathway, drops, and vigorously rolls around on the tarmac. She does it every time.

I catch up to her and she gets up. She holds her body upright and at the ready now.

She scans the horizon. Her ears move to the sounds they are picking up. Her tail swings low as she assesses the situation.

It's safe.

The pathway opens to the outdoor parkade of our residential complex. We cross it together. I walk straight across, out in the open, but she jumps up into the elevated flowerbeds and disappears behind the bushes, fully camouflaged.

I've never seen an athlete quite like her. How she navigates so expertly through any terrain. The hunter to my gatherer.

We reach the end of the parkade. Here a fence separates our complex from the abandoned trailer park next door. I can't pass, but there's a break in the fence where she can squeeze through.

She brushes against my left leg and I bend down to give her a scratch and a pat. We do it every time.

I tell her, "Have fun, sweetheart. Be careful. I'll be here."

She's off.

A flight of stairs connects the parkade to the main road. I climb them and sit myself down at the top. Something she taught me – always choose the highest vantage point.

Her wander might take ten minutes or thirty, and she might not return from where she left, but from here I'll be able to see.

It's a beautiful day. Warm with a breeze. The sky is a gleaming aquamarine.

I close my eyes and feel the wind on my face. I hear it move through the trees. My mind stretches out and my body with it; I'm relaxed.

I don't know how much time passes. Then–

“Is that your cat?”

I open my eyes and return to the present. My cat is before me, seated upright. So light-footed she is that I did not hear her return.

At the base of the stairs, a young man is looking up at us warmly. My cat watches him intently, summing him up.

“Yeah, she is,” I reply.

“She's a beauty.”

I break instantly into a smile and look down proudly at my cat. “Thank you,” I gush. I look back up. “Tripoli.”

“What?”

“Her name's Tripoli. You were gonna ask that next, right?”

He laughs. “Yeah, I was.”

I'm still smiling.

“That’s a great name. Like, after the city?”

“Yeah, exactly.”

“Cool.” He thought it too, I could tell. “She likes being out?” “She loves it. We go on walks a few times a day.”

“She doesn’t take off?”

“No – Well, we practiced quite a bit at doing it this way, so she’s used to it now.”

“That’s cool, man. I always think about taking my cat out, but I never know how.” At this point, I have so many questions. Where do I start –

“Well, I was just passing through. I’m headed this way.”

Never mind. “Yeah, for sure. Enjoy the day, it’s so nice out.”

“And you two enjoy your walk. Bye, Tripoli!”

He starts to walk off. Then he stops and turns around.

“Tom.”

“What?”

“My name’s Tom.” He starts walking off again, but backwards now, smiling. “You were gonna ask that next, right?”

I laugh. Yeah, I was.

Chronic Empathy

Grantham Passmore Cole

My dream is living in the middle of the forest in an A-frame wooden cabin on the Sunshine Coast, with a dense clover yard and a garden full of indigenous plants. The beach is a five minute walk down the street, and the shops are also close by within walking distance. I will have a whole pack of rescued dogs, and my wildlife rehabilitation center would be successful in returning animals back to their habitat. What a simple life I want, where nights would be truly dark and I could tend to my vegetable garden with ample time to prune and plan. What an unrealistic life I want. Work hard, go to college, do what you love and you will achieve anything you put your mind to. Such lies we were told. They may have been true for generations past, but life is different now. I can try my best, but my best cannot change the tides of humanity.

Living with chronic empathy is a miserable condition. I want to live a life rooted in authenticity, but I am torn apart by the draw of selfishness to live for myself, and the guilt of putting myself before the needs of others. There are so many causes to support and they keep coming; My empathy is stretched thin. The world cried out for Breanna Taylor and George Floyd, and then for Ukraine, for the genocidal annihilation of the Palestinian people, the missing and murdered Indigenous women, for the impacts of colonization worldwide. It is impossible to live in this world full of pain and not feel guilty about having dreams of my own.

How could I bring myself to stop caring as much? I have heard people from older generations call the parade of causes a 'social justice bandwagon' but how could one not become enraged? Continually enraged. Continually guilty about not being able to do enough. Continually judged for not doing enough, not posting about the causes on Instagram enough, not giving enough money or resources when I'm trying my best to feed myself right now. Defending myself from this onslaught makes me feel too guilty - 'sorry, I can't care so much right now I have other things to do.' I want so desperately to care less, but I can't bring myself to do so. Why is my life more important? Why are my privileged dreams worthwhile when people are dying of starvation? I am deeply troubled with finding balance, and I am sure that finding balance between self and fighting the inequalities of the world marks what is unique about the human condition today.

It was announced recently that France is to make fertility testing free in attempt to combat the falling birth rates. The total fertility rate worldwide is declining – but I would argue it is not because of the inability to conceive or find love. Myself and many others simply cannot justify bringing children into a world that guarantees anguish for all. What a selfish thought, to bear children that will have to suffer from the consequences of corporate greed and evil politicians, where capitalism is more important than human life.

I remember in high school, one of my teachers said that within my generation wars would be fought over drinking water. Even today, many indigenous populations still do not have access to clean water. How could I bring a child into a world where they too

would drown in guilt?

People work so hard and convince themselves that their happiness is rooted in the joy of their children. Passions slip away, time passes, but at least they dedicated their life to make sure their children don't have to suffer like they did. Those children grow up, have their own kids, and work hard to make sure they are happy... The cycle continues and what is the point? Who gets to be happy past innocent childhood? Who gets to achieve their dreams?

How could I even afford to have children? I am in my mid-twenties and am still making close to minimum wage regardless of spending almost a decade in post-secondary education. I recently had to cut my hours at work because my anxiety about the state of the world was manifesting itself as becoming violently sick at the slightest inconvenience. Sounds like something that could be addressed at therapy! Just have to wait another two years until I reach the top of the waiting list! What a wonderful world to bring a child into.

The future is not guaranteed. Life can change drastically in an instant, as demonstrated by the global shutdown of 2020 caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. A rather large solar flare could destroy every bit of electronics worldwide at any given second, or the big-bang expansion of the universe could reverse into the 'big crunch' and we'd be gone in an instant. My generation is educated to understand the consequences of wishful thinking, of leaning solely on faith to gain prosperity. We have grown so accustomed to death and devastation, of watching our own slow global suicide, that many have put their future in fate's hands. What's the point of working

hard for the future if there's a high likelihood that the future will never come?

The internet may bring joy, but what is incredibly overwhelming is the sense of scale. There are 9 billion people alive today, and billions more in the past, all which have left their individual mark on humanity and now, much of that is memorialized online. The internet allows people to visualize and interconnect, but the scale is beyond human cognition. One person cannot take on the burden of the wrongdoings and hypocrisy of the entire world, but we feel like we must. Every day we see more of the evils that humanity brings, often without the context and deep understanding of the issue at hand. Our brains cannot help but empathize to the point of burn-out, where we feel overwhelmed and small, incapable of inducing any significant change.

Evolution didn't account for the internet, and yet this global network has hijacked our sense of scale and have made us feel inconceivably helpless to influence the tides of humanity. The human experience in this present day is marked by empathy stretched thin. It is marked by the fear of the uncertain future, the isolation that comes with such interconnectedness. One aspect that has arisen from this monumental undertaking is the renewal of gratefulness. It is living in present moment, it is enjoying our surroundings and experiences as they come. It is reshaping our thoughts away from the anxiety of the future to the celebration of today. There are many catchy sayings and songs which coalesce into the theme of living each moment like it is one's last. Vile decisions will continue to occur, and no one will be spared from the devastation. People will continue to suffer, wars will be fought. So why not enjoy the moments of peace as they come?

Enjoy the touch of the sun, and how smooth stones by the ocean become warm under its rays. Find gratuity in being able to walk down the street freely, to stop and drink fresh clean water. Enjoy these moments now, for in the future they are not guaranteed. Yes, it is necessary to keep informed about the events happening. However, it is not one single person's responsibility to fix everything. Be passionate, but maintain respectfulness for yourself. You cannot do much good for the world in a constant state of burn-out. Live life with empathy, authenticity, and gratitude for the current moment.

I may not ever attain my idyllic cabin in the woods due to the actions and inactions of evil men, but I've made investments into my own happiness for the present moment. For years I dreamed of what I could do in the future, once I make enough money, once I buy my own house, once I become 'successful' despite never tangibly defining what threshold I must cross to achieve that status. I still have long-term goals, but I've found that they become much less daunting when broken down into miniscule steps. I'm going to 'waste' money on a silly little beverage, I'm going to take time to read fluffy romance novels, as those are steps towards maintaining empathy towards myself. I have learned that the better that I take care of myself, the more energy and passion I can share with others. By keeping myself from burning-out through self-care, my resilience builds. The world doesn't seem as daunting. No matter what happens in the future, maintain and grow your empathy - for the world, and balanced with empathy for yourself.