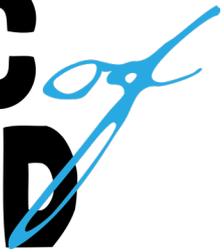


**THE  
REPUBLIC  
CHILDHOOD**



**Christie Lake Kids Leaders in Training  
16-18 yrs**

Working with youth and volunteers through the Step Into Stories writing program has been a quiet reminder of why stories matter.

When young people are given space to write, they don't just produce poems or sentences, they show you the way they see the world. Sometimes it's funny, sometimes brutally honest, sometimes unexpectedly wise. Being in that room meant listening as much as teaching. It meant realizing that the role of an adult in creative spaces is often just to hold the door open and let imagination walk through.

The volunteers made that possible. Their patience, curiosity, and willingness to meet young writers exactly where they were created a space that felt safe, playful, and real. Programs like this run on that kind of generosity.

I'm especially grateful to the Ottawa International Writers Festival for their Republic of Childhood initiative, and to Christie Lake Kids for making this opportunity possible. Their commitment to giving young people access to creativity, mentorship, and community is something that truly matters.

I'm leaving this experience reminded that encouragement travels far. A few words of belief, a moment of attention, a room where a kid feels heard... those things stay with people longer than we realize.

Thank you to everyone who helped make that space exist.

**Khaleefa Hamdan**  
spoken word poet, hip hop artist

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## How I Ended Up Volunteering

As I retired I needed to keep busy  
I needed something to keep my brain engaged  
I increased my book reading regiment,  
played with the grandkids  
and did more woodworking

This was ok  
the first year  
but something was missing

I thought of joining boards or part time consulting  
But I was tired of tech and needed something more fulfilling

Then it hit me,  
I should serve the greater good and my community  
Poured over listings of volunteering opportunities to find a fit  
I narrowed it down and settled on the teen cohort as my pick

Now that I found my audience  
I needed to figure out what to do  
I looked back at my career  
And identified what my coworkers were lacking  
It came down to career mentorship and financial literacy  
Now lets get cracking

The hunt was now on for that perfect placement  
It started with financial literacy with JA  
And shortly thereafter mentoring and leadership with CLK

It's been three years since I started and what an interesting ride  
There are two things that stand out over that time

The first is how the classroom dynamics has changed over the years  
Those teachers have it tough,  
that's a problem that needs fixing

The second is the most entertaining part by far  
It's the evolution the LITs aspirations  
Continue on dreaming and keep raising that bar

Cici W.  
17 years old

## Unrequited Love

I loved you  
Like there was no tomorrow

But when I look at you

I realize  
I want you for tomorrow

I've never  
Wanted you as much  
As I do now

But I know 'now'  
Is 100 years

I can't just love you  
As the friends  
We say we are

I can't just be the friends  
We say we are

Nothing feels the same when  
We don't talk  
Nothing feels right when  
We do talk

I will always love you  
Like there's no tomorrow

Daisy Anderson  
17 years old

## Winter

I usually hate winter!  
Every Winter,  
I get sick

I feel like garbage  
And it gets so cold that  
My mind stops  
While the world continues  
Without Me.

For five years  
In a row,  
I had gotten sick  
With Bronchitis  
At the very beginning  
Of Winter

It would last  
It would make me sad,

Unable to  
socialize and lonely  
In general.

But... some of the solitude  
Felt nice,  
I could wear my  
Softest pajamas,  
Stay warm with  
Hot chocolate and soups.

The most dead of seasons  
Is also  
The one where my name  
Felt the most alive.

My home would always  
Be filled with laughter  
And  
Silly shenanigans  
Every Winter.

It never felt empty  
Or  
Desolate like the outside.

Winter truly isn't all bad  
You just need  
To find the good

Daisy Anderson  
17 years old

## My Art

... My art  
Is what  
I choose it to be,

Not what others want  
Or what their desires  
And greed needs.

The art I make is for my eyes,  
By my hands  
And mind,

When I show it,  
I show my souls  
True joy

The love I hold for craft.

I draw,  
I crochet  
And sculpt,

I love The process and results,  
From sketches  
To shapes,

From blankets  
To small yarn snake.

My craft,  
All mine,  
It's really fun!

You should try it  
It may not look perfect,

But it will look authentic

Like the person  
You are  
And the people we became.

Art is therapy,  
A hobby  
And profession  
All at once

But insults can make it none  
Take the criticism and learn

Don't let it  
make the passion burn.

My art may be mine,  
But the joy of creation  
Is ours,

so stay  
out of line.

Nafesa Mazari  
17 years old

## Photos of Us

I sit by my phone  
Awaiting a text

I know  
Will never come,

Yet I still wait anyway

I walk by you  
Praying

That you'll pull me aside  
To talk

But I know  
You never will

I know It's over,  
Yet  
I cling to the moments  
We shared  
Together.

Wish I could turn off  
Every emotion  
I have toward you

Yet I lay awake  
At night  
Reminiscing about the moments  
We will never  
Get back

The gentle love we shared  
Will continue to live  
Through the photos  
Of us  
I will never delete,  
As I refuse to  
Forget you.

## Molecules in the Ocean Tide

The unknowingness  
The next day holds  
Is the excitement  
That keeps me going

What is life  
Without a little fun?  
What's an adventure  
Without a loved one?

All I know is life  
Is too short  
To be sad,  
It's not that deep  
Stop being mad.

The say grass is greener  
On the other side  
But you'll quickly realize  
What you think  
Is what you become,  
So enjoy the ride.

But that's the fun in life,  
Sometimes you fly high  
And sometimes you end up  
In the afterlife

That's the path of the soul,  
A rollercoaster ride,  
Afterall we are the same  
Molecules in the ocean tide.

For days that require  
A little more hope  
Having gratitude  
Is the best way to cope

How lucky you are  
To wake up this morning  
Sun's bright  
The sky is clear  
Birds are chirping

If only we all knew life  
Could be taken from us  
From at any moment,

Don't take it for granted,  
For anything can happen

Just like  
a beautiful poem

Gabriella Esan  
16 years old

## Dog

Dogs aren't the best thing  
To happen to me  
I feel anxious  
When the end up  
In front of me

The world spins  
Like the end is coming,  
Do dogs  
Give off the vibe  
Of a predator  
Eminator  
Rabies carrier

Not all dogs are like this  
But some make me angrier

Some are good  
Some are cute  
Some are everything  
I could ever need

Gabriella Esan  
16 years old

## I'll Be Able To Smile

不是所有的恐惧  
都会永远存在，  
不是所有的拘  
都会让我。  
也许有天，  
当，尾巴轻轻播动，  
我也能微笑，  
不再退后。

Not every fear  
will last forever.

Not every restraint  
will hold me back.

Maybe one day,  
when a tail gently sways,  
I'll be able to smile  
and stop stepping back.

## Campfire

I've always had an appreciation  
For campfires

They make me feel connected  
To my surroundings  
To people  
And nature

After all the hardwork  
I get to relax  
There is no feeling greater

I've honed my skills  
Because of this  
I can provide an experience  
For friends  
And loved ones

I gift heat and light  
The essence of life

I feel pride and joy  
For the result of my energy spent  
And when it's all over  
And my people have left

I take proper rest  
In my tent

I've always had an appreciation  
For campfires

## A MAGICAl Tale

In shuffled worlds  
Of ink and mana  
We meet

Cardboard curiosity  
Spread across the table

Every deck is a dialect,  
A way to speak

From burns quick laugh,  
To controls long fable

Droplets of variation fall each draw.  
A topdeck rain that changes every plane

Colours clash,  
Then harmonize in awe

Five of them churning  
In an optimal hand

I learn my friends  
By how they play.

Their patience, chaos,  
Mercy, and greed

We groan at spells cast  
Only out of spite

A counter flung  
To salt a needless wound.

Yet even that  
Becomes a story told.

A lesson  
Etched in laughter later on.

In a commander's circle,  
Legends lead.

One card crowned,  
Ninety-nine paths behind

We build ourselves  
From scraps and dreams.

Synergy stitched with countless lines.

Creativity is the real win.  
As playgroups grow, magic stays

Justin Esan  
14 years old

## Everyday Equations

Math is pretty fun  
Everyday equations  
To be done

Each day  
I learn something new  
Just like how  $2 \times 2$  is 4  
And  $9 - 7$  is 2

In this subject  
I find something new to explore

Used to say  $2 \times 2$   
Is window  
Till I figured it was 4

Roses are red  
Violets are blue  
Going to math class  
Might upset you

The thought of a test  
Must be why you're upset  
[Name] is trash at math  
But still tried his best

Math is pretty fun  
Everyday equations  
To be done

Ava Grace Mullen  
17 years old

## The Flower That Never Blooms

A flower has petals as well as a stem.  
It grows towards the sun, again and again.

Every flower different in a way unmatched,  
With a prick of a finger it's gone — detached.  
Colours radiant, always bright.  
With the help of the light they ignite

A flower always picked, but never selected.  
It's chosen to be ignored and neglected

A flower that never blooms patiently waiting  
Saving its bloom for someone worth anticipating.

A flower has no purpose to someone  
Who does not need it

They are meant to bring smiles and support  
To hopeless romantics.

Not to play a key role in your lies and antics.  
in the end, a flower can't bloom  
If it's always picked  
The growth endured needs to be strict.

## The Cycle

8am alarm  
Another morning  
I do not look forward to

I don't look forward to school  
I hate it

It takes up so much of my time  
And the teachers suck  
They give me so much homework!

It upsets me  
I hate my classes  
One of them made me  
Despise writing

There is one thing I look forward to  
The weekends  
And Summer

To fresh air  
Swimming  
To play sports

But after Summer  
I'll do it all again

8am alarm  
Another morning  
I do not look forward to

## Printemps

A calmness rushes  
Pages tell a small story  
So another sprouts

**Nevach Bleary**  
16 years old

## **Nicki Minaj**

Nicki used to be the queen of rap  
To chilling in her Maga cap  
Once an ally and supporter of all

An immigrant,  
Black  
And a woman betraying herself as a person  
By being the “Biggest Fan”  
To a man  
Who is hurting people  
All over America that look like her

Rather than defending  
Or protecting  
She lets money and fame  
Take over who she once was

Turning on millions of fans  
Watching innocent people  
Get kidnapped, killed  
And for what  
So one man can be free

**Nevach Bleary**  
16 years old

## **Mi Proud Fi Be Jamaciah!**

Jamaica  
The land of one love  
Where reggae music began

Green, Black, and Yellow  
A beautiful land  
Suffering from historical injustice  
Of corruption  
And systemic barriers

Their people warriors  
Full of resilience  
Not' even natural disasters  
Can put them down.

With an accent and sweet talk  
That makes anyone's heat melt

Mi Proud fi be Jamaciah!

Toni J.  
16 years old

## Pipe Cleaner Flowers

With some strands  
And love to share  
Pipe cleaner flowers  
Are made with care

Relationships and bonds  
Are very rare,  
It's extremely hard  
To find them anywhere.

I work with my hands  
And let the rest flow  
It's not as hard as you think  
You know?

With some strands  
And love to share  
Pipe cleaner flowers  
Are made with care

## **We Live, We Die**

It takes time to build strong connections  
People will look at you  
And have some objections.

Don't listen  
When their connections hold no value,  
They'd call you a best friend  
And not know the real you.

They aren't willing to be vulnerable.

They aren't worthy  
Trust me, and you are different.  
They aren't one of us.

Your sadness is worthless.  
Your opinions are disregarded.

If you lack confidence  
You'll lack respect,  
But it isn't the respect you give  
Through and through,  
The respect you try  
So hard to earn,  
But will never be given to.

A connection  
Can be long  
With the possibility of being weak,

You give,  
And you don't take,  
You're not happy,  
But you have faith

They take from you  
And they break you.

They change who you once were  
But you valued the connection

It can become an obsession,  
You see this connection,  
Not as your world,  
But your orbit,

You have spoken to your heart,  
This connection is the only thing  
That truly managed to break it.

We breathe,  
We lie,  
We live,  
We die,  
We never have the courage  
To live life to the fullest

We judge,  
We shame,  
We cry,  
And we blame  
We never realize  
We are the ones who are at fault

The ones unable to prevent the situation  
We so quickly judge

We breathe,  
We lie,  
We live,  
We die.

## The Memories Of The Past

We don't know a good memory until it passes.

Days blending together like moments in time,

Reminiscing only when everything collides

We don't know a good memory until it passes.

The bittersweet taste of apple crisp

A lingering smell of days past

When you give someone you love a good hug

Their warmth, how they feel.

How they're never fully appreciated until they're gone

We don't know a good memory until it passes.

A heavy weight on your chest

Overwhelming thoughts clouding your mind

The days you feel like that weight will never pass

Or when you wish a moment would never go

Whether it may be heartbreak or happiness

I appreciate every memory until it passes.

Myla Behne-Gravel  
16 years old

## Nothing

you stayed, for the glitch in the dream,  
the part where everything aligns for half  
a second — then forgets to keep going.

Days folded inward — paper with no  
crease memory, crumpling without form.

you kept waiting for the click, the lock,  
the reason; the anything — but the future  
stuttered, buffering, and time refused to  
load.

Nobody told you that dreams don't  
end — they just get quieter until they  
become background noise, like that fan  
that's always left on — for no other  
purpose than to block out the silence  
that was once filled with the thought  
of an unmet dream.

you stayed, listening  
for a signal that never arrived, static  
filling the gaps where meaning was  
supposed to be, and when nothing changed —  
and nothing broke — you realized nothing  
was the heaviest thing you have ever carried.

The Republic of Childhood celebrates the beauty, power and wisdom of children. The United Nations defines a child as anyone under the age of eighteen. But the Republic of Childhood is not just about children. This Republic is a state of being that is open to people of all ages. All that is required is an open heart and willingness to put children at the centre of our personal and communal lives. Not only because children are the most vulnerable among us but also because children carry within them visions of newness that the world can't live without. The Republic of Childhood is a land without borders.

Our gratitude to Natalie Benson, Amy MacDonald and Rachael Manyonga of Christie Lake Kids and to Jamie Laidlaw for their dedication and support for this new venture.

And to the Ottawa Community Foundation for a Community Initiatives Grant that has made our Step Into Stories initiative possible: our heartfelt thanks.

**Neil Wilson**  
**Founder & Development Director**  
**Ottawa International Writers Festival**

## **The Republic of Childhood**

The Writers Festival was born in 1997, and in 1999 we introduced our writers-in-schools program which, to date, has connected well over 100 Canadian and international writers in all genres with more than 30,000 young learners throughout the region.

The Republic of Childhood was launched on November 20, 2017, Universal Children's Day, and the anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Republic of Childhood is designed to centre the voices and experiences of young people. It is a direct response to teachers, parents, librarians and, of course, kids themselves who desire a more intensive writing experience where they are front and centre in the delivery of books, stories and the writing life.

We are indebted to the tireless work and inspiration of the late Senator Landon Pearson who, for almost half a century, was a devoted champion of the well-being and rights of the child.

Upon her retirement from the Senate in 2005, Landon Pearson moved with all her documents and papers to Carleton University where she directed a Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights that was established in her name.

The Ottawa International Writers Festival is a Oneness-World Communications event (Charitable # 86830 7778 RR0001)

The Republic of Childhood: Step Into Stories  
Christie Lake Kids Leaders in Training 16-18 yrs  
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