

# Week 11: Writing prompts: Performance and grateful

## Don't let fear get in the way of your dreams

By Seth Winslow  
Brattleboro Area Middle School, Grade 8

I'm at the BMX park  
Going off all the jumps  
It's a great feeling launching myself into the air  
Suddenly I notice some people walking by have stopped to watch  
At first there are a few people  
Then I notice a small crowd has formed  
I feel nervous with people watching me  
But I'm not going to let my fear get in the way of me having fun  
I want to show them how good I am  
So I go off the jumps  
Launching myself into the air  
I ride up to the biggest ramp in the park  
It has a 7-foot gap between the two ramps  
I start pedaling as fast as I can  
My heart races  
I come to the end of the ramp and soon I am airborne  
While in mid air it seems as if time itself has just stopped  
It's an unexplainable feeling  
Everything looks blurry  
I hear nothing and have no time to think  
I don't even realize anyone is around me  
But this strange feeling I've never felt before stops suddenly  
As soon as the tires on my bike land  
Everything seems to return to normal  
The awed expression of the crowd  
And overcoming my fear  
Makes me feel proud

## The pool

By Maddie Gilbert  
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

Sigh of relief, the school day's done.  
Reach the blue car outside,  
Sling my backpack into the trunk  
And with it all the stress  
Lifts off my shoulders.  
And we drive,  
It's not too far  
To the place  
Where I can forget about life  
And let my mind slow down.  
We pull in,  
And eagerly get out of the car.  
The wall of chlorine hits us  
As soon as we approach  
The door.  
It's a familiar scene,  
That greets me every day,  
After school.  
That's reliable and consistent,  
*Siempre*.  
As we enter,  
Time slows.  
And my mind unwinds,  
Takes a break,  
From racing all day long.  
Through that test,  
Through the essay  
And research.  
But now I'm where I belong.  
In this building  
That provides stability  
And comfort  
*Siempre*.  
It's there,  
After the worst day.  
It's there,  
After the stress,  
It's there, never changing.  
And now we're inside,  
Hit by a heat wave.  
The handle to the locker room  
Is cold metal, and sends a shiver up my spine,  
*Como siempre*.  
And the pool is there,  
Blue, and filled with swimmers.  
Water is rippled, and churned white  
As the clock hand hits the 60.  
*Como siempre*.  
The common routine  
Of getting ready  
Gives me peace of mind.  
Another wall of heat,  
As we enter the room housing the pool.  
*Como siempre*.  
The team stretching program  
Starts with arms,  
And after we finish,  
It's time to swim.  
*Como siempre*.  
Dive in, feel the crisp water  
Surround my body.  
Warm up is finished,  
We start a set.  
*Como siempre*.  
And soon we start to get tired,  
But we're all there for each other.  
In between, we laugh, and tell stories,  
And support each other.  
*Como siempre*.

## Performing

By Jessi Pirkey  
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 12

perform for me world! do a trick  
show me the covered sky with clouds so thick  
I want to see the rain fall, I want to see a tree  
grow tall  
perform for me one of your marvels  
show me hail bigger than marbles  
show me the sun behind the moon, let it be  
dark at noon  
I would like to see the wind blowing a blast  
show me a wave crash then crash then crash  
against the sand  
perform for me the shaping of land  
make me a mountain with your entangled  
plates  
let the stars awake early and the sun stay late  
perform for me a rainbow and a tornado, too  
show me the sky orange with sunset no longer  
blue  
I want to see what you can do

## ANGEL ON THE DOORSTEP



Photo by Taylor Dorn, Essex High School

To submit writing to the Young Writers Project, go to [youngwritersproject.org](http://youngwritersproject.org), register or sign in, create an "entry" and submit. To submit art, e-mail jpg-format (200 dpi) to YWP's editor, Geoffrey Gevalt, at [ggevalt@youngwritersproject.org](mailto:ggevalt@youngwritersproject.org).

## Just music

By Misha Kydd  
Mount Mansfield Union High School,  
Grade 9

She said we were supposed to move to the music; standing there in front of the class, a blissfully hopeful smile on her face as she waved her arms around in time to the beat. We all stared at her, insanely apprehensive.

She laughed at our doubtful faces and then swayed some more. The music dipped and swung in never-ending loops and swirls, weaving in and out of my mind like a half-recalled memory. It teased the edges of my consciousness, calling my attention to its less-than-graceful melody.

I didn't like it. It was embarrassingly loud and showy, as though trying to overcompensate for something. It reminded me of a wobbling child, taking their first steps and then falling down in tears, then trying again, with help. I hate sappy stories like that.

Our insane teacher hemmed and hawed at us to focus on the piece. My mind tried to avoid its lilting harmony and instead became trapped inside its "Alice in Wonderland" inspired curves. It rose and fell, guiding my mood and turning my head with its jingle bell-reminiscent call.

I drifted on notes of glory, falling and rising again with gracious feeling. It was like being on a merry-go-round. Each rise of the horse sends you higher, and then turns you downward just as you reach to touch the ceiling.

I jerked out of the coils of the lyrical snake with a start and tried vainly to clear my mind of the last remnants of its taunting noise. It was futile. The waves of music caught me up again, and I resisted the urge to weave along.

Somewhere in the distance, figures were waltzing with sweeping dresses and robes. They drifted gracefully and then comically, falling in one moment, ascending speedily in the next. My eyes stared blankly ahead, but my mind gazed, startled, in front of me, wondering at the crowd of dancers who enacted this elaborate play before me.

The music wafted in a gleeful crescendo, rising to its highest, most blazing point yet, then falling with swift gravity, to a halt at the bottom of the musical scale in my head.

I reconnected my mind with my eyes and blinked at my teacher who now stood solemnly, looking at all of us. She seemed to be expecting approval or applause of some sort. The room was silent as we all gazed back. She wilted and sighed.

For a moment my hands felt drawn together as though by an unseen anchor, they yearned to touch, to meet in one loud burst of congratulations. But the moment was soon over, and I shook myself. It was only music.

## How to submit

One of the goals of the Young Writers Project is for students to get published, either online or in our partner newspapers. Work can be in response to our prompts or general writing; the work can be fiction, nonfiction, essays, poetry — any genre. To submit work for potential publication, go to: [youngwritersproject.org](http://youngwritersproject.org), register and follow the instructions on how to submit. The site has much more student work.

## Performance

By Halley Peterson  
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

I stand on the stage  
The lights in my eyes  
Wondering how I got up there  
Knowing that before me  
Lies an expectant audience  
Waiting for the first ringing note  
I raise violin to shoulder  
Put the bow to the strings  
(Please let me be in tune)  
I take a deep breath  
Exhale slowly  
Then begin the journey of a song  
Melodies swirl around me  
Lifting me up like the wind  
I fly through the song  
Enjoying every moment  
Every note, half-note, and sixteenth  
The melodies of eras past  
Of composers long gone  
Of traditional and contemporary alike  
Until the final note lies behind me  
I am in a world of my own  
Once again I look up,  
The spell has been broken  
The fear of performing is back  
And yet in front of these strangers  
I know that out there  
Are hands clapping solely for me.

## All is lost

By Taylor Benson  
Rochester High School, Grade 9

Walking onto the stage  
bright lights,  
massive crowds  
way too many people to count.  
Standing alone  
on the stage  
all alone  
staring into the blinding lights.  
Nothing to say  
all is forgotten  
like a deer in the headlights.  
Feeling sick  
the worst feeling ever to be felt.  
Ever forgetting,  
never remembering.  
quickly going through the thoughts in my mind  
trying to remember,  
or bring something back.  
But nothing comes back,  
Just standing alone,  
all alone.  
Nothing to say  
nothing to be remembered.  
All is forgotten.

## Performance is

By Matt Eaton  
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

Performance is key.  
Performance is necessary for life.  
Performance is what we need to be better than someone else.  
Better your performance and win.  
Never lose.  
Never give up.  
Always try your best.  
Better your performance.



YWP is a nonprofit that helps students write better and gain an audience for their best work. YWP offers writing ideas (prompts), special projects and a safe Web site, [youngwritersproject.org](http://youngwritersproject.org) where students share their writing, comment on each other's work and receive feedback from YWP's college mentors. YWP is indebted to the generosity of the Vermont Business Roundtable which is funding the YWP's core work for the second year. YWP depends on individuals' generosity to do its work. To donate, click "support" in top menu on: [youngwritersproject.org](http://youngwritersproject.org)



## Stepping out of the shadows

By Noellen Neisner  
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

He stood in the shadow for most of his life  
Scared of the light  
Afraid of the embarrassment  
Fearful that he would make a fool of himself.  
Today he stood in the light  
In front of his class  
He felt his ears heating up  
His face in return  
Sweat droplets formed across his brow  
But today he was ready,  
Ready to face the world head-on.  
He looked to the ground  
Then to the sky  
Shook his shoulders  
Placed his feet  
Picked up his paper  
And read.  
The class sat in silence  
The poor boy's life flashed before his eyes  
"This is it," he thought  
"They hated it!"  
Again his face turned three shades of red  
But then the class cheered  
The teacher was stunned at his writing  
Amazed at his proficiency.  
Today the boy woke in the shadows  
And learned to sleep in the light.

## You will be remembered

By Branden Taylor  
Mount Saint Joseph Academy, Grade 9

You helped me day by day.  
In any way you could.  
And not because you had to but because you thought you should.  
I was afraid to get close to you.  
All because I have been betrayed before.  
But as I got to know you it turns out that you are only here to help me.  
You always tell me that I can go far.  
You tell me that I should be given a chance.  
Not only did you give me that chance you make sure I'm OK.  
And every day I pray to God you live a long and happy life.  
For you are a good person and deserve the best.  
If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here still.  
I would have given in and gave up.  
But you wouldn't let me give in.  
You may not be my father,  
but in many ways you would be the perfect dad.  
And I wanted you to know that you made a difference not only to the world,  
But to me.  
You are my role model and a good one at that.  
And right off the bat I will tell you how much you mean to not only me but to the world.  
And you will be remembered forever.  
Maybe not by the world but by me.  
Because you made a difference.  
And because you believed in me and gave me the chance.  
Thank you.

## Paradox

By Dustin Finer  
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

"What are you grateful for?" Such a common question, so blasé; the answers always appear to repeat themselves.

"I, John/Jane Doe, am grateful for: family, friends, home, dog/cat, country, peace, lip-gloss, computer, sunshine, happiness and/or health, and/or other items/concepts that bring varying joy and/or fulfillment to my life." What if one considered that maybe being Grateful goes beyond that which is "good?" What if those experiences which many view as "bad" and which they are ungrateful for, could be just as rewarding?

"What are you ungrateful for?"  
"I, John/Jane Doe, am ungrateful for: loss, destruction, poverty, war, when I lose my lip-gloss, sadness, strife."

"Yes," one might say, "those are all things that you should wish never happened. Wouldn't life be easier without them?"

Yet, life would be less fulfilling, less interesting and meaningful, without them. I am Grateful for every challenge and hardship I have every faced. I am grateful for every joyous, wonderful, inspiring moment that has ever existed. But without one, the other could not exist. Living through and growing from experiences that at first seem "bad" deepens the soul and broadens life experience. I am grateful that vinegar makes honey taste ever more the sweeter.