

Week 13: Writing prompt — Winter Tales

Beginnings of a storm

By Maddie Zebertavage
Champlain Valley Union High School, Grade 10

He was heading home feeling sullen and disconnected. A paper blew out of his bag and was snagged on a rusted sewer grate; he shrugged and slowly jogged down the street to retrieve it. He kicked his worn shoes through the thick, polluted slush, spraying it in a thousand different directions. He watched his thoughts scatter with the droplets of tired, melting snow. How could one person, one kid, deal with it all? There were college applications, challenging courses and strained relationships. He could remember countless winters when he was a kid, when he'd come home, shed his backpack in the warm, cramped coatroom and grab his hat and mittens from the huge plastic bin pushed against the wall. He could remember walking outside and letting the cold, winter air rush down the front of his unbuttoned coat. He could remember running, letting his coat flap in the wind. He was invincible, just as the relentless winter gale that sprayed fresh, white powder into his face.

He was forced back into the present by the sound of the plow scraping against the graying asphalt as he turned into his driveway. He stuffed the paper that he had chased down the street into his pocket. He felt the cold, soiled water from the paper leak through the fabric, but he didn't bother to take it out. He trudged up the path to the door and let himself into the warm, cramped coatroom. He dropped his bag and walked into the dimly lit kitchen that buzzed with the excitement of the approaching holiday season. His little brother was drawing a picture of Rudolph on his Mom's grocery list. He mussed his little brother's hair and lumbered up the carpeted steps to his room.

He sat in the wooden chair that was covered in Spiderman stickers from when he was little. He aimlessly picked at a sticker and then turned to his desk to start the hours of homework that he had been assigned. He grabbed his textbook and opened it to the assigned page, but could not focus. He listened to the dull hum of the TV in his parent's room and heard that there was a storm approaching, the most intense of the season is what they were predicting. He pulled an old, navy-blue sweatshirt over his head and crashed into bed letting the sound of the newscaster's voice lull him to sleep.

When he awoke the pale blue light of morning was seeping into his room. He flipped open his cell phone and immediately regretted falling to sleep. It was four-thirty. He had three hours until school. He stood up almost robotically and walked to his desk, but as he was opening his text book from the night before something stopped him. Outside, the snow had piled up in heaps on top of fire hydrants, mail boxes and trash bins. He always loved making tracks in the fresh powder that glistened so immaculately in the early morning sun.

With that, he closed his book and grabbed his wool coat off the hook on the back of his door. He bounded down the steps, grabbed his sneakers and with unleashed anticipation tied the laces and ran out the door. When he got to the end of his driveway, he didn't stop. He ran down the wide streets that hadn't yet been plowed. He didn't care where he went and at that moment he didn't care if he got into college or had a job. In this moment, winter was what mattered most, snow was what mattered most, his jacket flapping in the relentless winter wind was what mattered most.

Max

By Annah Howrigan
Fairfield Center Schools, Grade 5

One winter day in Vermont I was with my dad sugaring with the horses. I was driving them, and all of a sudden a dog came out of the woods. It didn't bark; it just stood there, as if saying: "Take me home." So we did.

In the sleigh I decided to call him Max. I tucked him in. He was very cute; he was white and golden. It turns out he was a puppy, maybe a week old, and he was very healthy. We kept him inside for a while. When spring came Max got bigger and bigger every day. I got along with Max great.

I'm so happy we found Max in the woods in the winter. He's so calm and my family loves Max.

Some of these pieces will be among young writers' work presented this week by actors with Vermont Stage Company as part of its Winter Tales shows at FlynnSpace in Burlington, Dec. 5-9. Show times are 7:30 p.m. with additional 2 p.m. matinees on Saturday and Sunday; Sunday's evening show begins at 6 p.m. with a reception and auction. For tickets and more information, go to vtstage.org. The shows feature commissioned works as well as work by adult community members. Willem Lange is host with Patti Casey leading the music. Vermont Stage actors will also give dramatic presentation of young writers' poems and stories at First Night/Burlington at FlynnSpace.

Go to www.youngwritersproject.org to read additional selections and to read six poems written to the tune "Skater's Waltz" as part of another special prompt. You can hear the poems read by a narrator at the Vermont Symphony Orchestra Holiday Pops shows in Barre, Burlington and Rutland on Dec. 7, 8 and 9 respectively. For more information about those concerts, go to vso.org.

FLASH OF SNOW



This photo was taken by Andrew Beebe, a senior at Essex High School. Here is what he says about his photo: "I took this picture on the first day of snow. It was extremely cloudy that day and I thought this would make a great picture but then the flash went off and it came out even better."

Christmas cookies

By Dylana Drolette
Burlington High School, Grade 10

Life is a "place and bake" cookie. It's quick, it's easy, it's normal and overall, it's good. We get caught up in the same routine, day after day. I know I do. School, sports, work, homework, sleep. It's been that way as long as I can remember. However, there's a time of year that everything seems to change. It gets a little happier, and maybe even a little less stressful. People smile more, forget about budgets. And that diet they've been sticking to for the past month? Might as well wave it goodbye. That time is from the middle of November to the beginning of January -- the holiday season.

Christmas has always been my favorite time of year, ever since I was a little girl. It seems like everybody tries to be a little more tolerant of one another. We take time out of our busy schedules to give our attention to the people we love, and the people that care about us. We spend more time thinking of giving, rather than receiving. And it feels good. Everything is happy. The malls are filled with jolly Santas, and every square mile there is a Christmas tree dripping with lights, and ornaments, and tinsel that make even the biggest Scrooges crack a smile, and the notorious jingle bells in front of every store reminding us to give back to those less fortunate than us during the holiday season. It makes everything seem a little easier.

The holiday season is like a Christmas cookie. We take a little bit more love and care, a little more time and effort to make things perfect. A couple extra seconds to make sure everything is perfect; so you can see the gracious smiles on people's faces when you hand over a green and red tin full of sugary, fattening, warm, gooey cookies. And most of all we spend the time with our families, making sure everyone has a task and has fun doing it.

I wish all year was like the holiday season, everyone joyful, and more forgiving. But mostly, we think of others — something we do much less of during our "place and bake" cookie days. So I have a New Year's resolution for us all: Let's have Christmas cookies, all year round.

First night of winter

By Emily Shaw
Champlain Valley Union High School, Grade 10

The girl ran down the hill with tears streaming down her face. She felt the cold stiff grass crunch beneath her boots. A cool, winter breeze lifted her scarf behind her. She zipped her jacket up tighter to keep out the cold air. She was out of breath by the time she reached the river. She stopped at a dead tree lying next to the stream and sat down to catch her breath. She buried her face in her hands as she let the tears leak out of the corners of her eyes. She looked up into the bright, gray, winter sky. She felt the first snowflake of winter fall onto her nose. It sat there for a moment, still cold enough to share its beauty with the world. Then it was gone, mixed in with all the other identical drops of water, its original beauty lost forever.

The girl sat on the log until the snow had piled up around her boots, making imprints in the soft, fluffy pillows of snow. She pondered the dilemma as the cold, brisk wind blew at her face and the snow continued to fall elegantly onto her warm, wool mittens. She listened to the clickity-clack of the frozen tree branches practicing handshakes above the stream. Eventually she stopped crying and watched the snowflakes float through the air and land gracefully on her jeans. The comforting smell of a burning wood fire reached her nostrils and brought back memories of her and her mom sitting around the fire drinking hot cocoa and reading picture books. She didn't want to go back. She wanted to remain perched on that log forever where she could watch the snowflakes dance happily through the air and listen to the not-quite-frozen stream gurgle by. She wished she could become a part of that river where she could flow freely wherever the riverbed took her and she could leave all her worries behind.

A fresh set of tears poured out of her eyes. She felt angry and betrayed by her mom. How could this happen in her senior year of high school? Graduation was right around the corner, but she would be celebrating all alone. Maybe the girl's mom would survive. She had heard of others who had gotten the same diagnosis and lived. But the doctors said it wouldn't take longer than a couple of months. How could something as simple as a cough turn into this? She knew she had to go back, but she also knew what would be waiting for her when she returned. The one person left in her life was leaving her. She would be all alone with no one to love and no one to love her. She dreaded her return to where all the problems began.

Tears were still silently streaming down her cheeks as afternoon turned to evening and evening into night. It had stopped snowing, but there was a generous amount of snow that remained, even after the individual flakes stopped falling from the starry winter sky. She was watching the snow slowly melt around her boots when she heard a sound coming from the woods behind her. It was a combination of dead branches breaking and footsteps crunching in the hard, packed snow. The girl was starting to get scared, but then her mom appeared from the trees. They looked at each other for a few minutes. Then the girl's mom quietly walked over to the log where her daughter was sitting. Without saying a word, the girl stood up, and the mother and daughter hugged each other in a tender loving embrace. They cried together for a few minutes, and then let go. They sat down on the log with the girl's head on her mom's shoulder and the mom's arm around her daughter's shoulder. They watched as snow began to fall again from the dark, night sky. The mom reached over and brushed the girl's long, wavy, brown hair off of her tear-stained cheeks. They stood up together and walked away from the log, leaving footprints in the snow. They walked through the woods, arm-in-arm, ready to face her mom's disease together. The beautiful glistening snowflakes shone brightly behind them as they walked bravely into the dark, winter night.

One single snowflake

By Sierra Cruikshank *ROCHESTER HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 9*

I pushed the door open,
A cold gust of wind blew into my face.
I don't really like the winter.
I looked out on the plain colorless terrain.
Egck. I thought.
Six months of this.
I am truly in the wrong place.
I took in the raw air
It burned my nostrils and throat.
Closing my eyes I dreamed of a much warmer place.
I saw golden beaches and palm trees.
A place I had only seen in dreams and pictures.
But even a place as heavenly as that
Has its downfalls.
Opening my eyes made me colder.
But now my outlook wasn't as pessimistic.
Swirls of snowflakes blew around me,

Dancing with the wind.
I wanted to join in.
I stared up at the white sky.
My eyelashes caught the snow.
I stuck out my tongue.
Poor little snowflakes,
I thought, they can't fulfill their destiny,
Their destiny to make the ground white.
I went back in the house,
The warm room made my nose run,
Took off my coat
And saw one little snowflake stuck on my collar.
The intricate detail made me smile.
I guess the winter is truly special
Because you can't keep a snowflake in your pocket
Like you can a shell from a beach.
You have to enjoy it while it lasts.



YWP is a grassroots nonprofit that helps students write better and gain an audience for their best work. YWP offers writing ideas, special projects and a safe Web site, www.youngwritersproject.org, where students can share their writing, comment on each other's work, participate in group discussions and work on projects. YWP is indebted to the generosity of the Vermont Business Roundtable which is funding the YWP's core work for the second year.



My snowflake blanket

By Sarah Bigelow
Essex Middle School, Grade 7

The snowflakes dance
Around my shoulders
Enveloping me
In a thick, warm blanket
My snowflake blanket

I cannot breathe
But I don't care
The snowflakes will
Take care of me
While I'm in my snowflake blanket

I am falling, falling, falling
Into a white kaleidoscope
Watching the intricate patterns
Of the carefree snow
In my snowflake blanket

I snuggle in with them
Warmed, comforted and peaceful
Preparing for a long winter's sleep
With dreams of the white snow
In my snowflake blanket

I let my muscles rest
Leaning my head on a white pillow
A snowdrift piled high
And I fall asleep
In my snowflake blanket

Winter's snowflakes

By Ryan Hurd
Charlotte Central School, Grade 7

One single snowflake falls on my face
I have been blessed with its pattern
Of beauty and grace
This one single snowflake keeps me
In love
From where it fell I look up above
Then more start to fall
They tickle my cheeks
I wish this feeling would last for weeks
The fields are being covered with
This sparkling fluff
I dance around and fall into the stuff
Its icy feeling does not make me cold
The reason why is still untold
The wind picks up speed
The storm is going wild
So I dance with the snowflakes
And enjoy being a child

Winter verse

By Zac Brown
Woodstock Union High School, Grade 10

Winter snow
Chases away the crow
The corn is gone
The fire is cold
And the woodpile is low

Ice memories

By Emily Lyman
Mater Christi, Grade 4

I look into the snowman's coal black eyes
they seem troubled
like the eyes of a lost traveler
far from home

He begins to cry icy tears
that sting my skin
as I reach out
to brush them away

Memories flood my mind
of that cold day
I went out
to create a living thing
that I now realize
might never make it
to Spring.