



FIND YOUR VOICE. SPEAK YOUR MIND.

## SENIOR PROJECTS 2018

### **Eleanora Boyd-Owens**

I started writing nature poems when I was six. Sitting in the backyard or by a window, I would gaze up at the trees and whisper secrets to passing fairies or insects, while scribbling something resembling the English language in my journal. I must have looked so silly to the neighbor kids, but, being six, I did not care. Now I am eighteen and still love writing creatively and being in nature and still do not care what my spiritually-transformative woodland reveries look like to passers-by. So, I figured why not incorporate my fascination for both the natural world and for poetry into my senior project, knowing I could absolutely not spend half a year doing something I did not enjoy. Because of this, I have spent the last five months writing a poem almost every day. I wrote mainly free-verse poems and played with unique poetic devices, like enjambment, metaphor, cacophonous and euphonious sound, imagery, rhythm, repetition, and hyperbole. For inspiration, I would often read work by other poets or venture out into the cold. Nature has always been a place I've found inspiration. I believe it reflects many of the world's truths.

I began editing my poems in late March and have compiled my favorite ones into a book, titled *Because the Birds Won't Tell*, which I shared at The Academy's Spring Open Mic Night. By practicing so often and for such a long time, I was, as planned, able to explore the effects of routine writing practice on my poetry, while better developing my creative voice and discovering my personal stylistic preferences. Being outside and separate from the distracting commercial world, I had the opportunity to study nature's influence on my subject matter and my spirituality. I began my project wondering: "Can writing outside become a spiritual practice? Will that aspect of spirituality improve my writing? Do I feel healthier and more in touch with myself when I'm more in touch with nature?" I wanted to know, and now I do, and the answer is YES!

### **Emily Comeaux**

For my senior project, I created a superhero comic. I wanted to focus on representation in comics—particularly on LGBTQ+ representation, but also on how women and people of color are portrayed. Overall, there is a disproportionate number of superheroes in mainstream comics, and even more in movies, who are straight, white, cisgender, and male, and I believe that it is important for people to see a diverse cast of characters, especially as heroes.

I created three main characters for my comic, all of whom are queer teenagers who have superpowers. I worked on drawing them and other unrelated people to develop a comic style for the first few months of my project, as well as doing research on representation in comics to see if there was anything I should change about my characters, and doing short writing exercises to develop their personalities. I finally wrote an outline for my comic, broken into simple page-by-page descriptions.

I drew and colored each page by hand using water-based brush markers and black pens, then scanned them and digitally added text and speech bubbles. My end product was a 24 page superhero comic called *Jaguar*, which I hope will provide characters that are more relatable to a wide range of people, and allow some of those who don't feel that they are reflected in comics to see themselves as heroes.

### **Ella Deters**

After much deliberation and indecisiveness, I chose to teach Spanish to the 24 kindergarten students at Hawlemont Elementary School as my senior capstone project. Ahead of my project, I knew that I wanted to work in pediatrics as an adult, so I knew that my project should involve working with children. I landed on teaching Spanish to kindergarteners at a local elementary school. Spanish is increasingly spoken in Franklin County, but it isn't widely spoken in the hilltowns of the Berkshire Mountains. I thought that I would be able to share my excitement about the Spanish language and Latin culture with a captive audience of young people and that this would be good preparation for my future career in medicine.

I worked to make the class mostly immersive with a lot of prompting, games, songs, and children's books. I wanted the students to have a well-rounded experience. As a result, I introduced them to culture and history from Cuba, a country I have become increasingly familiar with over my senior year. To begin learning from sources outside the classroom, I brought nine Spanish students from my school into the class to show the participants that they weren't the only ones learning the language, and also so that they would have exposure to teachers other than myself. I was able to travel to Cuba through the Academy. I improved my own Spanish language skills in a Spanish-speaking country and also gained many ideas from meeting students there. This was eye opening and influential for me because I was able to talk to many people of all ages and learn about culture directly through travel and conversation in a language that is not my own. I wanted to incorporate this amazing trip into my class so I taught my kindergarteners some of the things I learned, such as different Cuban dances and songs that some children their own age had taught me just weeks earlier. I wanted to show them that the vocabulary I was teaching was applicable and was an integral part of other people's lives, instead of just another thing that they learn in school.

### **Lilah Feitner**

For my senior project I created a collection of upcycled clothing. I began this project with minimal knowledge of sewing—both hand stitching and machine sewing—as well as little knowledge of design. My plan was to expand my practical abilities as well as push my creative limits in design. I have always had an interest in design, and the process of creating upcycled pieces allowed me to explore this interest in depth. Creating a collection of upcycled clothing allowed me to develop skills in pattern-making, hand stitching, machine sewing, draping, detail work, as well as designing. I was also able to incorporate my painting skills into a few of my pieces. It is useful to be able to alter and mend clothing, and this project allowed this task to become a very manageable one. This project was meant to challenge my ability to learn experientially, and I wanted the final collection to reflect my creative abilities, as well as illustrate how my skills developed, based on the difference between my earlier and later pieces.

### **Macy Kasbo**

For my senior project, I decided to study different aspects of Syria and portray an accurate image of the country. I was born in Syria and spent the first twelve years of my life there. From its history and politics to its society, Syria was a country like no other country. However, outsiders did not perceive Syria through that lens. Syria has become known for being one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Images of children dying, women leaving their homes behind, and men being slaughtered represented the country. Instead of being recognized for its five thousand-year-old history, it was known for its atrocious war events. Syria is much more than a war torn country. I had the chance to perceive the true image of Syria, though the world did not. Thus, I wanted to show the public the image of the Syria I knew. I decided to research Syria's historical, political and social aspects and write a long essay trying to portray the image of Syria with which I and 22 million other Syrians are familiar. I spent half of my senior year researching and the other half writing a long essay. In the end, I wrote a 28 page essay about Syria's long history, complicated politics, and unique society. I also collected about 300 photos of Syria, taken by Syrians and shared on social media, which accurately represent the country.

It is unfortunate to see that Syria became known for its atrocious events. Syria was indeed more than destruction and terror, and, through this project, I tried to be an ambassador of my country and show the true image of Syria, without focusing on my bias. I tried to show how the country was before the war; unique with all of its imperfections.

## **Patrick Osborne**

In the months leading up to my final year of high school, I found myself wondering what I was going to do for my senior project. I wanted to do something that revealed a side of me people rarely see, something that made me seem more three dimensional as a person. By this time, I had built up an interesting reputation at the school. People knew me as a quiet, timid, dare I say “geeky” guy, who had an obsession with all things military to the point where some might have thought that I believed war to be a good thing, and a patriotism so fierce, that it blinded me to the long list of crimes committed by the United States. I was one of the few remaining outspoken conservatives at the school, something which had caused numerous conflicts with my classmates over the years. Because of these dominating personality traits, I was originally planning to do a project centering on stories of “The Greatest Generation”, specifically the men who fought during WWII. However, I soon abandoned this idea for several reasons, all of which are irrelevant at this point.

Instead, I decided to show a side of me, rarely seen by Tthe Academy: my interest in theology, and by extension, my spiritual life. I have never been shy about my Catholic faith, certainly not ashamed of it, as my relationship with God is without a doubt the most defining aspect of my personality, and has shaped how I live my life and how I view the world, more than anything else I can think of. I believe that it was largely because of how much my faith has shaped who I am as a person today, that I began to ask myself: “How are the lives of people who practice the other two monotheistic religions besides Christianity shaped by their own respective faiths”? And; “What overlap can be found in the teachings of these three religions at a time in American history that seems so religiously divisive”? Thus, I decided to set out on a journey of intellectual discovery with the objective of discovering just how much religion could shape someone’s life, and how greatly different religions affect their practitioners’ world view.

At first, it seemed like a herculean undertaking, exploring how religion affects people’s lives, that is. Countless theological scholars have spent their whole lives trying answer that question and more often than not, they ended up no closer to the answer than when they began. Maybe that’s just because it shapes each person’s life differently. I had no delusions of being able to make such an intellectual breakthrough myself; all I wanted to do was to scratch the surface a little. I knew I had to pick a specific focus for my project, just to lessen the amount of work I’d have to complete over the next eight months or so, the question became, “What exactly?” For the simplicity of the project, I decided to focus on the three Abrahamic faiths; Christianity (specifically Catholicism), Judaism, and Islam. I chose to research these three faiths, because I thought that it would be the easier to find people who practice them in the limited diversity area that is western Massachusetts, rather than Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, etc. However, I also chose these three faiths in particular because, as their classification might suggest, they all can be traced back to one common ancestor; Abraham. While this connection may seem like little more than a trivial piece of historical information, it lent itself to my project substantially. After all, one of the primary objectives of the project in the first place was to find common ground between the three faiths. If I had to simplify the aim of my project down to one goal, that goal would be to make people *understand*: understand religion, understand their fellow human beings, understand why people of such seemingly similar faiths that are all built on the idea of love and tolerance, can hate each other so very much.

## **Hendrik Pepermans**

Originally I am from Belgium and I already graduated from my high school over there. When I had to come up with a subject for my project, it was quite clear to me that I wanted to take advantage of my situation and do something that would combine the US and Belgium in a certain way.

For my project, my goal was to make a comparison between Belgium and the US on several levels. I am an exchange student from Brasschaat, a town in Belgium, close to Antwerp city. This is the reason why I chose this subject and why I chose to mainly zoom in on people from my town and surroundings in Belgium and people from Shelburne Falls and surroundings here in Massachusetts.

The first part of my project was the Belgian club I started at the Academy, called ‘Vlaamse Vrienden’ which is Dutch for ‘Flemish Friends’. I led this club during 4 lunches in total. Anyone who was

interested could come. I talked about the languages, the food, music and art and the complex governmental structure in Belgium. I also talked about my hometown and the biggest nearby city, called Antwerp. It was my goal to give Academy students a general look into the Belgian culture and into my Belgian life.

I created a survey that I sent out to students from The Academy at Charlemont and to students from Saint-Michaels College in Brasschaat, which was my school for 12 years in Belgium. My survey included questions that gave me more information about the daily life of the students going to very different schools and living in very different environments. This survey gave me the opportunity to easily compare both experiences and draw specific conclusions.

Another part of my project included interviews. I interviewed one person that lives in Shelburne Falls and went to the southern part of Belgium, which is called Wallonia. In this specific part of Belgium people speak French. The man that I interviewed was an exchange student in Wallonia during one full year. I asked him about his experience in Belgium and how it influenced him. The same interview I did with my mother who went to North Dakota in the US as an exchange student for a school year, or 10 months. They both were exchange students many years ago, so it is interesting to see how things may have changed or not have changed at all.

To end my project, I have written down how I have experienced the first 8 months of my year abroad. I talk about my findings, what my expectations were, how I like the people and this part of the US in general.

### **Grayson Rizzi**

For my Senior Project, I decided to use the love of music and technology I garnered from my years at The Academy and attempt to understand how to make guitar pedals. The goal of this project was to familiarize myself with the basic circuitry and craftsmanship required to produce guitar pedals and other similar apparatuses, while gaining the confidence and knowledge to eventually start creating original builds. I built two circuits from scratch, and modified another. I also spent a considerable amount of time learning about the science behind guitar effects, and gave myself a head start into the effects pedal scene.

### **Jaromil Topolski**

I had no idea what I wanted to pursue for my senior project. The few ideas that came to mind during my junior year, such as turning my current car into a track car or restoring my uncle's classic sports car both led to the same realistic conclusion: I have no money. So I continued to ponder my interests in search of a practical and interesting topic for my senior project. Finally, post summer vacation my search came to an end. During a Humanities class, a fellow class member suggested that I make a prosthetic arm. At that exact moment I knew that would be the perfect project for me. I love science fiction. All of the fantastical contraptions, gadgets and technology have always sparked an interest for me so to make my own prosthetic limb was kind of like a trip into a science fiction universe.

Throughout the year I sketched and designed schematics for my prosthesis. At the end of the year I had produced a working prosthetic arm which satisfied my vision. This has been one of the most challenging school projects of my entire life. From figuring out what I wanted to pursue for my project to finishing it on time, not once has it been easy. I am satisfied in that I not only managed to complete my senior project to the best of my ability, but that I also ended up with a final product that I am proud to display.