

Sixteen New Jersey high school and middle school students were the winners of the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) New Jersey Teen Media Contest in 2019. The contest helps the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development, reinforce its mission to instill a sense of parental responsibility in New Jersey's youth.

Students were honored for their winning entries, which celebrated the students' artistic or written portrayal of the theme – *In what situations do you most need your parent(s)?* Was it when they needed advice on a problem with a friend? Maybe they really want them there before a concert or celebrating a victory at the finish line of a race. Whatever the situation, the students showed when they most appreciate having their parents there.

The contest was open to all New Jersey high school and middle school students.

1st Place – High School -- Artwork

Darielle Moore

Piscataway High School

The Helping Hands

Teacher: Dorothy Amme



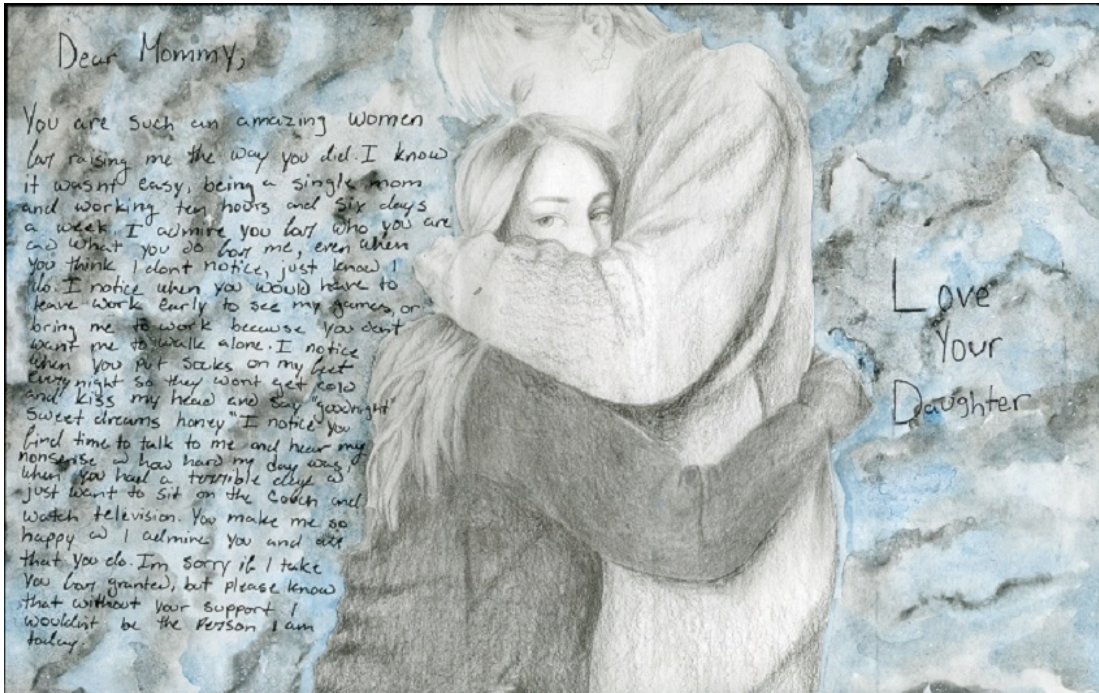
2nd Place – High School – Artwork

Mackenzie Jack

Hackettstown High School

Dear Mommy

Teacher: Mrs. Stock



3rd Place – High School -- Artwork

Niaymah Trent

Cliffside Park High School

Black Love Within

Teacher: Donna Malone



1st Place – Middle School – Artwork

Esperanza Baquedano
Emerson Middle School
Astrology Night
Teacher: Kelly Wenz



2nd Place – Middle School – Artwork

Lois Kim

Cliffside Park Middle School

Family Under the Umbrella

Teacher: Lois Kim



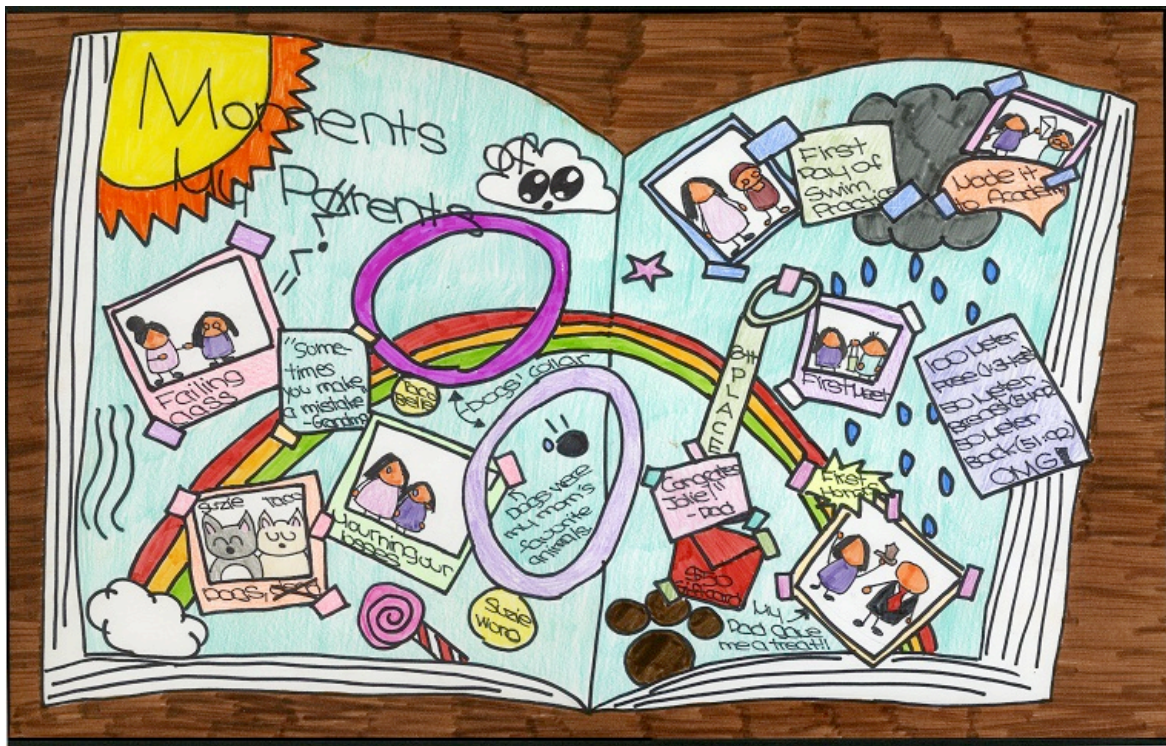
3rd Place – Middle School – Artwork

Jolie Wong

Academy 1 Middle School, Jersey City

Moments of My Parents

Teacher: Martha Garcia



1st Place – Digital

Alyssa Morris

Hunterdon County Polytech

Help

Teacher: Teresa Diaz



2nd Place – Digital

Benjamin Fernandez

Newmark High School

A Life Lesson for Parents

Teacher: Walter Rodriguez



2nd Place – Digital

Jenna Clayton

Wall High School

Thanks Mom and Dad!

Teacher: Mychelle Kendrick



3rd Place – Digital

Wellington Ochoa
Cliffside Park High School

Untitled

Teacher: Natalie Maks



1st Place – High School – Written Word

Akansha Joshi

West Windsor Plainsboro High School South

Untitled

Untitled

It was a typical morning,

My mom sent me off to the bus stop with a wet kiss .

My dad pulled me into a warm hug.

“Good luck today,” I managed to hear as I scrambled out into the freezing winter.

The thin air sent a shiver down my spine and bit my face as I trudged through the snow covered sidewalk.

I boarded the bus and went through my school day, *an average one*.

It was the last day of school before winter break, and all the other 6th graders looked forward to a combination of holiday cheer to exotic vacations.

I looked forward to a quiet holiday with my mom, dad, and sister.

I also looked forward to the list that would be taped up to the window by the music room later this afternoon.

It was [finally!] the day to reveal the singers who made Spotlight.

Ever since the middle schoolers in Spotlight performed for the 5th graders in the years prior, I dreamt of prancing onto the glossy, choral risers and singing with the girls who loved music as much as me...

Since the audition, every day had become a countdown to the day the Spotlight roaster would come out.

So I waited, and waited, and waited patiently until the sound of the final bell seeped into my ears.

I raced to the window by the music room in a fit of sheer joy, giggly and all.

My eyes scanned the sheet one... two... three times.

My heart stopped.

I did not make it.

I ran, this time in a fit of panic, all the way to my bus and eventually, into the arms of my waiting mother.

She asked me, “you didn’t make it?” with a weak smile.

I sobbed into her arms and shook my head, my scarlet nose dripping all over her expensive, blue cashmere sweater.

My whole body shook,

What did I do that was not enough??

The thoughts running through my mind forced me into a seizure, I let a river out of my eyes while my mom simply held me.

“Sometimes, no matter how bad we want something, life doesn’t go our way. Somethings are out of our control. However, we can control how we react. Ask for feedback, because I know you will bounce back.”

I sniffled, unable to process the words my mother was speaking.

“Resilience,” she stroked my hair and did not move while I drowned in my own tears.

I later searched up what resilience meant, “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.” And though at the time, I felt powerless, just a pawn in life’s cruel game.

One word consistently came back to me - Resilience.

Every time I am set back, every mistake I have ever made, I choose to be resilient.
And, in my "bouncing-back" I find the same comfort of my mother's arms, teaching me to grow.

I made Spotlight the next year, and my mom gave me the same type of never-ending embrace.
"What'd I tell ya? You came back from last year, and this time no tears."
Suddenly I let out a giggle, and my mom giggled with me through the day.

2nd Place – High School – Written Word

Erin Hanlon

Ocean City High School

An Invisible Section

Teacher: Kelly Cunningham

An Invisible Section

Section 46: In regard to the three children, a joint custody agreement will remain intact.

The unwritten agreement: In regard to the three children, both parents will be present on their graduation day.

Section 47: In regard to the three children, each parent will pay half towards all financial necessities.

The unwritten agreement: In regard to the three children, each parent will be present at their wedding day.

Section 48: In regard to the three children, each parent will receive an appointed weekend to spend time with their children.

The unwritten agreement: In regard to the three children, each parent will always be willing to answer a call at three a.m.

A piece of paper cannot define interminable love,
A contract cannot divide the role of a parent in a child's life,
A legal document cannot prohibit a child's development,
Unless you let it...
Choose love.
Choose a bond that can stretch over miles.
Choose to not define the role of a "parent."

3rd Place – High School – Written Word

Elijah Cochran

Ocean City High School

A Father's Presence

Teacher: Kelly Cunningham

A Father's Presence

At a time when I was struggling,
I went to a place that was safe to go
To a family member, my father who could help me see clearly
Under the pressure of life and society, that added anxiety.
I felt alone, by myself and didn't know where to turn.
After looking to all the wrong places and feeling empty,
I found comfort in my father who stood there for me.
He comforted me, guided me, and gave me confidence
When I was walking down a path that would lead to deep consequences.
Without his presence in my life I might have turned to horrid things,
Things that scare families and cause separation.
But with the comfort of a father I was able to overcome these things
Open up about them and turn them into better things.
I was able to overcome anxiety and go back to being me
The presence of my father was incomparably
The best thing that could've happened to me

1st Place – Middle School – Written Word

Blake Cregg-Wedmore

Hazlet Middle School

Blossom

Teacher: Jen Mahoney

Blossom

Tiny seed now flutter downward
To the ground where you will flower
Deep beneath the soil dreaming
Of a cherry tree
Two grown elders tower over
Sure to bring their young one closer
Murmur soft the timeless story
Of a cherry tree
Little seed, you now awaken
In the plangent wind, you're shaken
Draped in sunlight, weaved with rain
Betwixt two cherry trees
As you breathe, you turn to face them
And you know you're not mistaken
Love flows through them, just as water
Those two cherry trees
Sun morphs scarlet, fades to night
Stars creep slowly, pins of light
A sea of darkness falls upon
The weathered cherry trees
Ten years later ever growing
Branching, blooming, never slowing
Firmly rooted, petals shower;
Full-grown cherry tree
Springtime wind chilling no longer
China trunk grow ever stronger
Nurtured to stand, head held high
By two cherry trees
Faceless grins filled with affection
Giggles beamed with no inflection
Tender hugs through phantom limbs
Gleaming cherry trees

Another year, a tree has fallen
Dryad spirits come 'a calling
Bone-white petals - solemn snow
Just two cherry trees
Tiny, little cherry tree
Hold each other, cry for me
Unmarked grave of root and rose
Weeping cherry trees
Three more years, you're on your own
Tearless weeping all alone
Aching loss as strings unhitch;
Single cherry tree
There is no life without it dying
If they fall, you know they're trying
Gave you everything, they did
Ghosts of cherry trees
For love requires sacrifice
Every day you roll the dice
They may leave, but never fully
Your own cherry trees
Time progresses, seasons change
Baby seedling starts to age
Filled with joy, prepared to raise
Your own cherry tree
Together, you will learn and grow
How much they loved you, now you know
There's no bond stronger than between
The members of a family

2nd Place – Middle School – Written Word

Gabby Sebestyen

Thompson Middle School

When Do I Need My Parents Most

Teacher: L. Montebello

When Do I Need My Parents Most?

When do I need my parents most?

Do they inspire me, try with me, or do they do both?

When the world billows beneath my feet.

When the ground starts shaking underneath.

When I am unsure of what is right.

When I may wake up in the night.

My parents guide me even though,

Sometimes I turn away and go.

In my darkest hours of my day.

When I am unsure of what to say.

When I am onstage at a show.

They cheer me on and never go.

I am their child, and will always be.

They always care and try for me.

I always wonder how to see.

When my only light isn't guiding me?

So, when do I need my parents most?

I may not know.

Like a flower, they help me to grow.

3rd Place – Middle School – Written Word

Zayn Jaber

Pillars Preparatory Academy

Family's Love

Teacher: Rehab Abouseada

Because You Took My Hand

Just coming home from school-seeing you waiting,
Creates a volcano of gratitude-no hesitating,
You speak to me with a contagious smile,
Holding my hand lovingly, all the while,
Always there to greet me each and every day,
Your caring face takes all of my worries away.
So take my hand, my dearest friend,
We'll sail together 'till the very end,
But will we always remain in the same boat?
And will you still stroke my hair and button my coat?
Forever is a big word- or so they say,
When my ship sails I know that you **WILL** guide the way!
You taught me how to handle this vast and complex ocean,
To have a unique personality, my own little potion,
You taught me how to jump right in, and learn to paddle,
How to reach for the stars, how to win life's many battles,
But what good is a brilliant captain without her shining crew?
Through all of life's challenges, I will fight in honor of you!
Do you know what keeps my ship steady on its proper course?
It's your love and support-such a constant and powerful force!
So strong that it guides me through the most tumultuous seas,
And there on the horizon, rests all of our beautiful memories,
And our footsteps are etched forever in the sand,
My success is yours because from the very beginning, you took my hand.