

Twelve 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 2021. 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 – *how they and their loved ones supported each other through all of the changes that have happened during the year*. This included things like remote schooling, the pandemic, and finding new ways to stay connected with friends and family.

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

1st Place – High School -- Artwork

Andrew Kim

Montclair Kimberley Academy

Family Has No Boundary

Teacher: Alicia Cuccolo



2nd Place – High School – Artwork

Suan Jeong

Bergen County Technical School, Teterboro

Beyond the Glass Wall

Teacher: Bridget Centeno



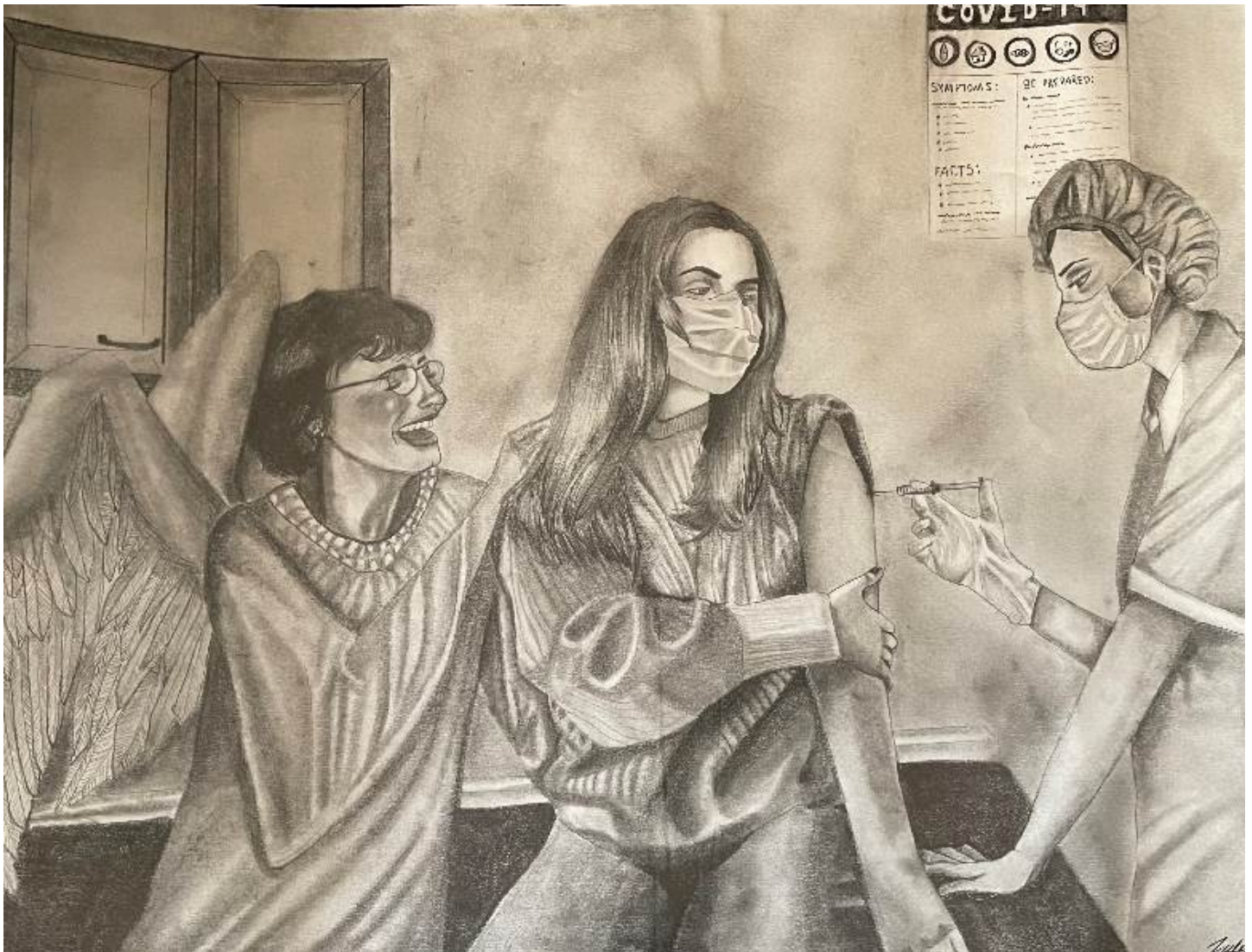
3rd Place – High School -- Artwork

Julia Desderio

Cherokee High School

The Cure

Teacher: Deanna Guittar



1st Place – Middle School – Artwork

Charvi Yetish

Pond Road Middle School

We Are in This Together and Forever

Teacher: Mary Tamayo



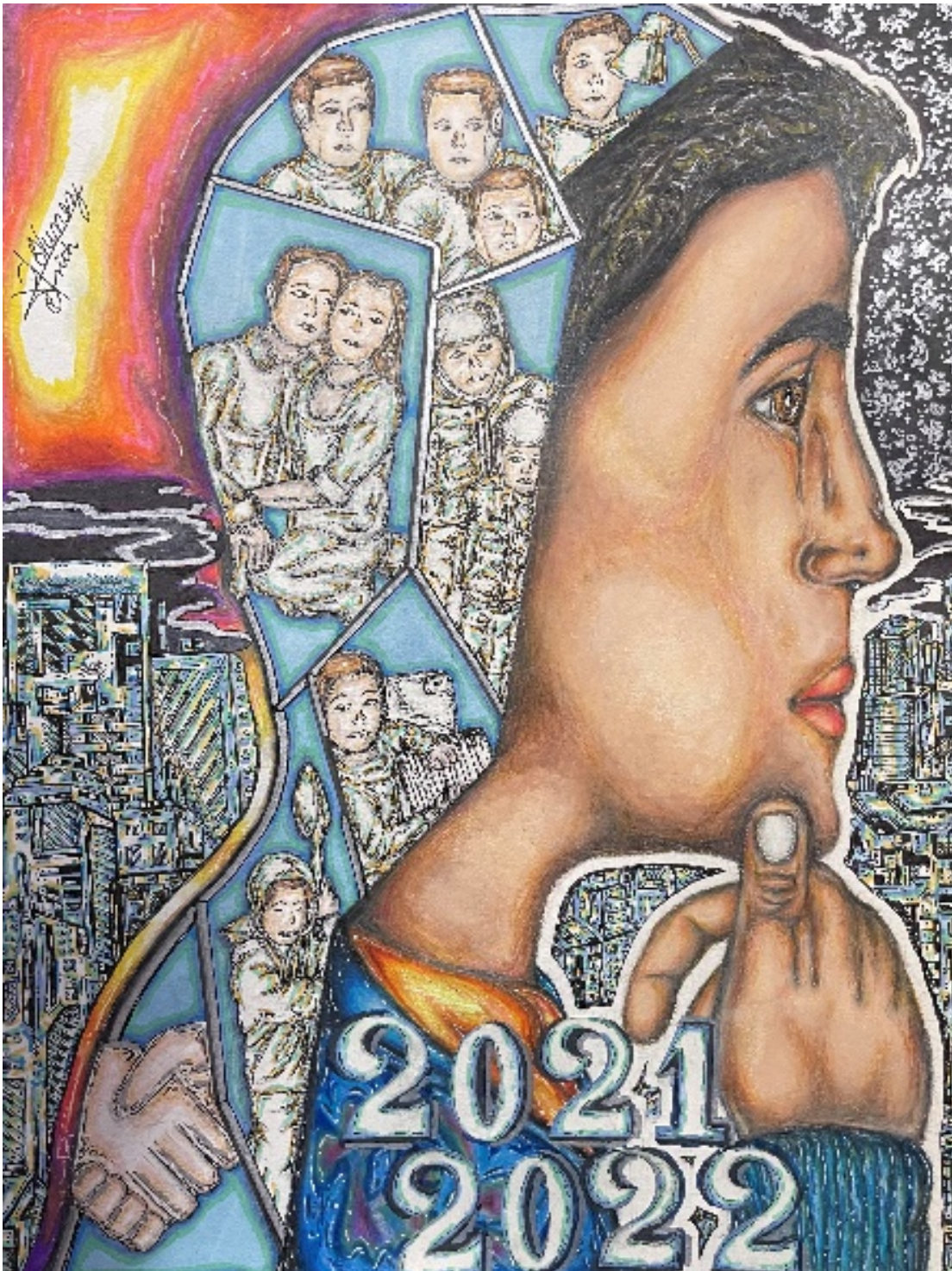
2nd Place – Middle School – Artwork

Erich Nunez Viveros

JP Case Middle School

Memories of a Lifetime

Teacher: Ms. Sewall



3rd Place – Middle School – Artwork

Hannah Lee

Schuyler Colfax Middle School

Stargazing

Teacher: Debra Frenchman



1st Place – High School – Written Word

Ines Avila-Mota

Cliffside Park High School

We Survived

We Survived

Long nights , longer days which led to Endless weeks and endless months. Behind windows and under masks

No way to ask

Are you alright?

No one thought they could survive

But we did and many turned 18

Many lost the year 19

Can you believe

We made it through the worst of this disease Indeed we did!

Through daydreams and indoor live streams. We used machines and worked in teams And even though we screamed

We lived our dreams

We lived our life trough screens

Movies, duties, and a whole lot of moody With tik tok trends to spend our days

And YouTube recommends

Thanks to my friends

On who I depend.

I can't believe that we survived

Oh god we made it out alive

2nd Place – High School – Written Word

Heather Murphy

Morris County School of Technology

The Art of Slipping

Teacher: Brianna O'Halloran

THE ART OF SLIPPING – A Short Essay

You have to keep your grades up.

If you don't get into a good college, you'll go nowhere in life.

Anything less than perfect is a failure.

It may be sad, but it is true, these are all very real thoughts that I have had time and time again. It has been ingrained in me for as long as I can remember that school should be my top priority as it will set me up for the rest of my life. I can recount crying in my mother's arms as early as the age of seven because I forgot to bring my vocabulary homework to school, or sobbing hysterically in the face of my father at the age of thirteen because I got less than an 80% on an essay for eighth grade language arts class. I thought these were detrimental mistakes that would impact my future, but now I see so clearly that they meant absolutely nothing.

Quarantine and Covid-19 have flipped everyone's world's upside down, but I think it has given us all a new, necessary perspective on life. I can confidently say that as we begin to come out on the other side, grades are no longer my top priority. Don't get me wrong, they are definitely still incredibly important, but I no longer feel this overarching pressure on my shoulders constantly weighing me down. At this point, it is comical to reflect upon this mindset that was once all consuming to me, and I wonder how I was ever able to function in such a way.

A grade is simply a letter. And that is it. F stands for fruit just as much as A stands for apple. Who is to say it is anything more? Why should a single letter determine a child's worth or measure their intelligence? I wholeheartedly believe that amidst this global pandemic every student has demonstrated unmeasurable amounts of strength, determination, and persistence which means so much more than a perfect score on a math test ever will. Of course, none of which would be possible without the constant support from teachers, family, and friends. Whether it be pre-recorded lectures or zoom class discussions, we have all found a way to adapt to this new virtual learning environment. As cheesy as it may seem, I'm all about seeing the bright side of life, and the current climate of the world has truly brought people together in a way that just a year ago I would have never thought possible.

I have learned that grades will slip, and that's okay. Being able to spend an afternoon with family is more important than cramming for a history exam and spending a long awaited evening with close friends will make you feel better about yourself than a perfect score ever will. Take the time out of the day to really look at what is going on and reevaluate what is most important.

You have to be kind to yourself.

You will end up where you need to be in life.

Everything is going to be okay.

3rd Place – High School – Written Word

Matthew Givone

Morris County School of Technology

Getting Through This

Teacher: Brianna O'Halloran

Getting Through This

It seems like the past year never happened, I mean it did, but it didn't...

So much wasted time. So many missed activities, and opportunities...

Although there is one positive?

We have gotten to spend more time together.

With our families and friends.

Supporting each other in brand new ways,

I personally got to see my family a lot more, Instead of always being out,

I stayed put. Many people had a similar circumstance, we also had to find

New ways to connect, everyone had to find new ways to connect.

Some looked to social media, and the magic of the internet, to connect with

Friends and family. Families more than ever supported each other with online school.

People talked for hours on the phones, reminiscing about the pre-covid era.

We all wish for this to be over, and we are getting close,

But we have to hang in there and keep the support going.

Because at the end of the day, what we do to support each other now,

Is our best way of getting through this.

1st Place – Middle School – Written Word

Amy Lin

Montgomery Upper Middle School

Together

Teacher: Mrs. Digangi

Together

Ten months since we had been confined,
Bitter wars ran through my heart and my mind:
I longed for my friends, my family overseas –
I feared that my thoughts would soon overwhelm me.

One day, ever so despairing and cold,
I shivered as I watched the sky fade gold.
Splayed on my bed, feeling so alone,
A deep, hidden wail rattled in my bones.

Taking one look at the hopelessness in my face,
My mother sat down with her familiar, comforting grace.
She stroked me gently- my head on her lap,
And whispered softly, "It's okay, everyone cracks."

Hearing those words, tears fell from my eyes,
And I relaxed a bit, with a grateful sigh,
For I realized, even if one departs,
We would always be together, in a place we call our hearts.

2nd Place – Middle School – Written Word

Stella Gratcofsky

Sandyston-Walpack School

Masks

Teacher: Stacy Tarbell

Masks

Hiding faces because of masks

No smiles because of masks

Muffled voices because of masks

Asking "What?" because of masks

Slow the virus because of masks

People living because of masks

People fighting because of masks

Fire storms because of masks

Mask acne because of masks

Stinging faces because of masks

Mask breath because of masks

Fogging glasses because of masks

Fashion change because of masks

Creative ideas because of masks

Short of breath because of mask

Suffocating because of masks

Headaches because of masks

Dehydrated because of masks

No makeup because of masks

Smearing makeup because of masks

Family there for you

To remind you to put your mask on

3rd Place – Middle School – Written Word

Tian Hu

Academy 1 Middle School

A Year's Change, A Mother's Support

Teacher: Marisol Diaz

A Year's Change, A Mother's Support

In a year, the world has shifted.

The streets have grown quiet.

Schools, restaurants, shops sit empty, with windows dark and lifeless.

People hurry home with tired gazes above a mask.

Now we work from the seclusion of our homes,

We talk to loved ones through screens,

Find ways to cling to our friendships.

Birthdays, graduations, weddings-

We haven't let them trickle away.

We have found ways.

We have persevered through change.

There come times when I cannot.

When I begin to slip, fall behind, despair.

But I have always had my mother by my side,

Urging me forward, consoling me.

Because of my mother, I continue to strive.

When I lose my motivation to study, to improve,

When I struggle with a new way of learning,

I can trust her to be here to help.

Here to teach, to encourage, to support.

"I'll show you again," she patiently promises,

turning back to the whiteboard-

And I know she'll explain things

As many times as I need.

When I lose focus in a storm of thoughts,

Become distracted by the trivial,

She scolds and reminds, persistent –

Guiding me back to my path.
"You'll thank yourself later," she chides,
And I listen and heed
Because I know she wants me to succeed.

And when I'm caught in the tides of change,
When the worries that surround me steal my hope,
I turn to her for a word of comfort,
For an embrace, a smile, a glimmer of cheer.
She knows what I need to hear,
She brings me a second of assurance,
Just a moment of calm in this shifting world.

I try to mirror her selflessness.
When she's at a low, I try to pick her back up. I
attempt to do what she does for me.
But I know I can never return all her care –
Her firm wisdom,
Her thoughtful words,
Her unwavering faith in me,
Her support.
No, my debt to her is too great to repay.