

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 2020. 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 – *a valuable life lesson or moment that you will never forget*. Tying your shoes, saying thank you, helping others, learning how to ride a bike, or even how to make that secret family recipe, our parents and other loved ones provide valuable life lessons and teaching moments that stick with us.

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

1st Place – High School -- Artwork

Kiera Reeves

Piscataway High School

Apple Picking

Teacher: Dorothy Amme



2nd Place – High School – Artwork

Jesus Calderon

Boonton High School

My Dear Beloved Parents

Teacher: Kirsten Kraa



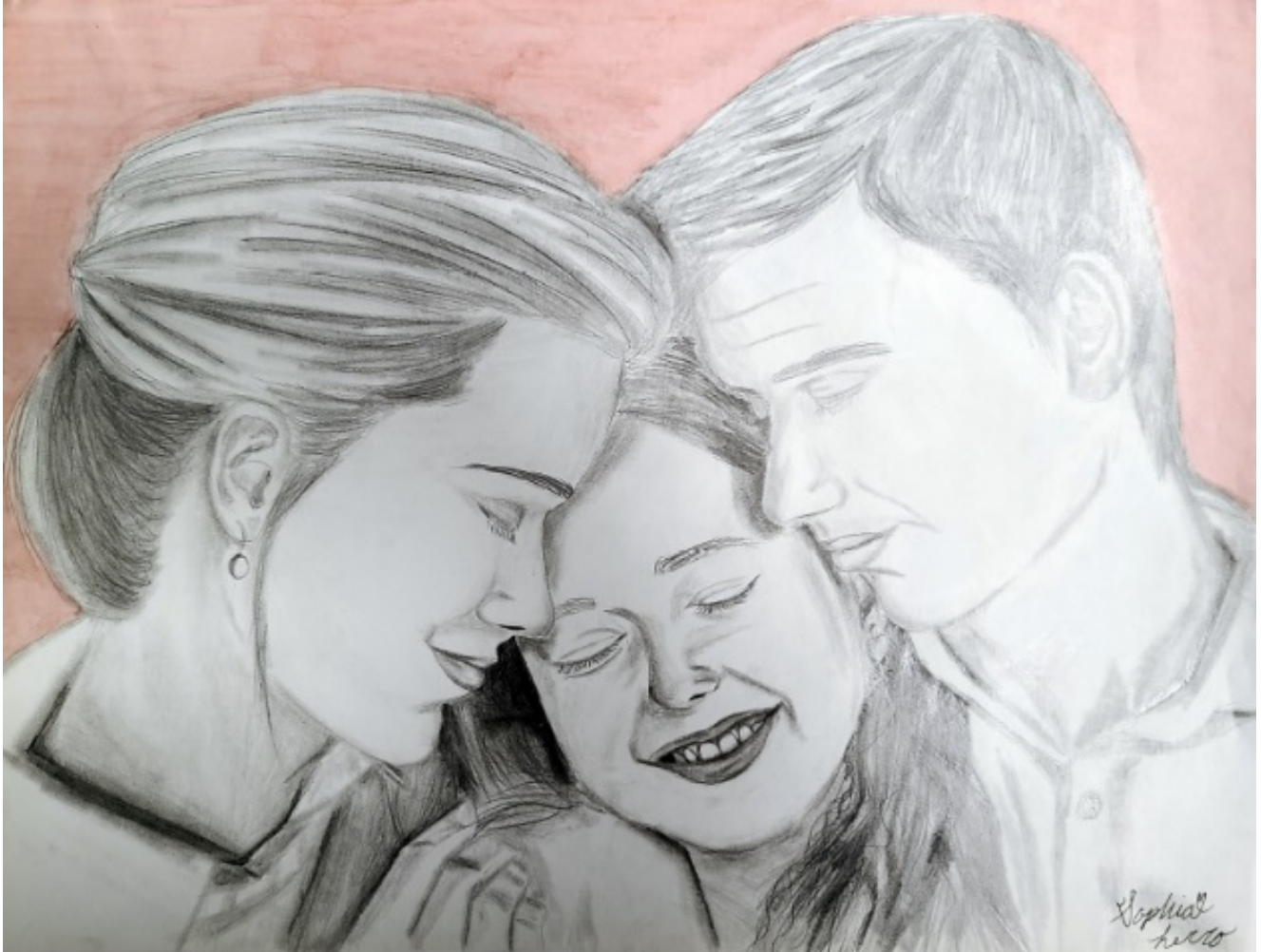
3rd Place – High School -- Artwork

Sophia Lerro

Paul VI High School

The Strongest Bond

Teacher: Mrs. Tawdell



2nd Place – Middle School – Artwork

Charlize Diaz

Emerson Middle School, Jersey City

Running Through My Mind

Teacher: Kelly Wenz



3rd Place – Middle School – Artwork

Esperanza Baquedano

Emerson Middle School, Jersey City

Caring Community

Teacher: Kelly Wenz



1st Place – High School – Written Word

Angela Eggie

Ocean City High School

Don't Follow the Crowd

Teacher: Kelly Cunningham

Don't Follow the Crowd

My parents once told me, "Be different, you're
allowed! Don't do what they do,
Don't follow the crowd!

You are your own person, There's no one else
above you, You're very unique,
That's why we love you.

So wear what you want, although people might
stare, we don't even mind
if you want pink hair. "

That's a life lesson I live by And is deep in my
heart, As for me I stay true,
From myself I won't depart.

2nd Place – High School – Written Word

Amy Leon

Boonton High School

I Love You, Mom

Teacher: Kirsten Kraa

I Love You, Mom

From the moment my newborn eyes looked at your face, I knew you were somebody to be treasured all my life. Mommy, you have always been around to guide me through the long animations of life. You were the one who has handled my mistakes and taught me the rights from wrongs with the utmost delicacy, only to help me grow into the person I am today. Having gone through so much yourself, I have earned such high respect for you, and I will forever be grateful for the many lessons you have gifted me with.

You taught me from the moment I shouted my first words how important it is to stay true to myself and always strive for the greatest things in life. This, of course, has stuck with me for the past 15 years I have been alive, and never once have I taken it for granted. You see, mom, you have always left your arms fully accessible to me whenever I doubted my abilities, or whenever the words of others put me down, and the words "it will be okay," that you always said ever so softly, never failed to put me at ease.

It's the comfort that a mother gives her child that should be deemed the most precious thing in the world. There's nothing better than looking to your mom for advice during the many rough patches in your journey of growing up. While some kids are not fortunate enough to have this bond with their mothers, you have made it a point to always listen and advise, which is something I cannot thank you enough for. In my journey, even when I wanted to give up, you taught me the meaning of perseverance and sharing in my triumphs and tears.

I love you endless amounts for the support you have always showered me in since I was born. You have always been my #1 fan, mom, and even though I may not express it often, nothing you do is ever forgotten, and every day you mean more and more to me. You are so bright and special, and you carry endless amounts of wisdom on your shoulders that I hope to put upon my kids in the future. I just want to thank you for your warm hugs, your encouraging words, your wisdom, and just for being the amazing person you are. I love you, mom.

3rd Place – High School – Written Word

Daniel Givens

Ocean City High School

A Moment to Mourn

Teacher: Kelly Cunningham

A Moment to Mourn

Not even the sun's most supple rays- Poked through thesky's
muddled grays- On that fateful day in October

On the rain-soaked bridge, my dampened spirit- Saw our home and the
damage near it-

The hurricane's havoc had left it shambled

My youthful eyes looked towards my parent's.

It saw their aching fears most apparent- But also something
strong beneath it all.

I looked back towards my drenched memories: Ruined toys, a swing set
left wet and leathery. Yet, I saw something else in my Mom and Dad

While they were grieving like my siblings and me, They were also preparing
themselves to see- That we got ourselves back up on our feet.

In a time of tragedy, I saw my parent's backbone- And I learned a lesson
that I now try to own: It is okay to mourn as long as you look ahead.

Now, I always keep my head up and look down the road.

I try to capture the strength my parents showed.

I graciously thank my parents for that.

1st Place – Middle School – Written Word

Ahlam Zalat

Pillars Prep Academy

CONFIDENCE...

Teacher: Rhonda Moustafa

CONFIDENCE...

Talk to those who don't accept you,
Who knows, maybe they'll become your friend too!
But be careful not to say too much,
It can cause you anxiety if you rush!

You never know where your secrets can go,
All around the city, the world...they flow!
Talk to your rival and ask what's wrong,
Maybe that will form a friendship that's strong!

But don't put yourself down because of them,
Don't play their pointless games,
Confuse them instead!
Not letting them know what's ahead!

"Ugly," "Stupid," "Small," and "Weak!"
Hurtful words they speak,
Push those hurtful words away ,
Don't allow them in your mind, to linger, to stay!

Sometimes we cry alone in our rooms,
Over something that's genuinely dumb!
Don't let those words get to you,
You'll give them power if you do!

Others might see you as different, even bizarre,
But know inside just who you are!
You're so amazing, why can't you see?
You are the greatest version of you that you can be!

Now look into that mirror,
And repeat after me...
"God made me beautiful!"
Tell yourself clearly,
You've been blessed with endless opportunity!

One day you will learn,
To not be concerned,
With peoples' harsh words and negativity,
Learn to love yourself!
And only then will you be FREE!

C O N F I D E N C E...
A ten letter word you must remember,
In this life, it'll help you forever!
And it is something priceless we all have sought,
So value it as a blessing that cannot be bought!

2nd Place – Middle School – Written Word

Adrian Caballero

Paterson Charter School for Science & Technology

The Moon

Teacher: Michael Jones

The Moon

“Dad I’m home,” I muttered as silently as possible so that he would not be able to hear me.

“Good. I’m gonna need you to work on the gutters Luna. They are starting to get dirty from all the rain we’ve been getting,” my dad joyfully said thinking I would be happy to do it. My dad has been giving me chores and work to do ever since the day I could walk. He cooks and gets money, I go to school and clean, it’s our system.

“Shoot,” I thought exhausted from school, “On it dad!” I tried to say in an annoyed tone. As I dawdled along to the gutters I stumbled upon a pipe that I’ve never seen before. “Ugh what is that,” I asked myself because all of the gunk I saw was disgusting. Black paste was slathered all along that area, getting on the grass and wall of the house too. I know my dad, he is going to make me clean it up. Although I gagged several times, I was still curious about what was down there. And that’s a curse of mine, my curiosity will make me do so much more things than what I’m comfortable with. So I ran to get all the cleaning supplies available. I reached down into the pipe with about a dozen layers of latex gloves. I reached down into the pipe, gagging every second my hand was inside. I ended up not finding anything and as I attempted to get my hand out of the pipe, I was stopped. Some form of barrier didn’t allow my hand to leave. Adrenaline rushed into my body faster than anxiety rushed during a panic attack.

“Dad!” I yelled at the top of my lungs. He came sprinting to me, almost falling.

“¿Qué pasó mi Lunita?” He only speaks Spanish when either very angry, nervous, or worried so this was a relief to me to know that he cared.

“I-I got my hand stuck in this pipe that I found and-and-and...” I kept on stuttering to the point that what I was saying was indistinguishable. He eventually got the gist of it and told me that he was going to cut the pipe with a chainsaw. After what he said I completely drifted off. Perhaps it was the adrenaline that made me faint or the situation of seeing my hand caught in the pipe.

I woke up to me being in the same spot, my father at my side using Lysol Wipes to do his best to clean all the filthy gunk that was on my hand.

“Please, please don’t do that again Luna, I almost had a heart attack,” my dad pleaded, “I dug up this pipe recently but I didn’t know that you’d investigate it.”

"I am so, so sorry dad, I just..you know how I am. Just like m-" I cut myself off there. I was going to say that I was like my mother, curious, but I don't want to hurt my father. He has been sensitive ever since she passed when I was born. The only time I would see him talk about my mom is when he would speak to a picture of her at night. He was unaware that I knew this, but I would catch him several nights talking to her, and I would sometimes join behind the door frame trying to gather information on my mom. Some people might think that he's going insane, but in reality, he just loves her so, so, much.

"Just like what Luna?"

"Oh, oh my friend Maria, I think you know her. She's as curious as a cat."

"Of course..." he mumbled.

I woke up at around 1 A.M. that night just to find my father speaking to the picture again. That night I was contemplating if I wanted to join him, but this time, at his side. I waited and waited, listening to him tell stories about his day today. But then, he came to the point where he talked about my incident.

"So Luna got in an accident today, She got stuck in a new pipe that I found which almost made my heart stop. The thing that destroyed me the most was when I asked her why she did it she said that she was curious. She said "Just like m-" and cut herself off. I thought she was going to refer to you, because, well you know, you were known for being curious. I just thought that she would know something about you."

At that point, I just wanted to bust in there because of how bad I felt. All the empathy I was feeling enveloped me. He knew that this broke my heart, and I knew that it broke his. And so, I went in there without hesitance, because I knew that he would understand me.

"Luna..." he mumbled. But that was all he said. There was an unspoken conversation between us. He gestured to me to join him, and he kept on talking. Somehow I knew that he was always aware of my presence there.

"Oh, the moon," he continued to speak to the picture. "How much I adore that grey object in the sky. Only rises once we are all asleep, rises when we forget about its presence. But not for all. Some acknowledge the moon and value it when they are never able to see it. They adore it without being able to come across it," he edged toward the window, glaring at the moon with a passion so great that his pupils dilate. As he stared there was a moment of silence.

A couple minutes passed and the silence continued. What he said about the moon, I finally understood why he stays up in the night just to talk to mother even if she is not there. I understood so I broke the silence and began reciting what he said about the moon.

"Oh, the moon."

3rd Place – Middle School – Written Word

Brianna Morrishaw

Paterson Charter School for Science & Technology

Be a Leader, Not a Follower

Teacher: Michael Jones

Be a Leader, Not a Follower

Life is a miracle
That brings hope to the world
My mother said to be original
After everything I learned

Following everyone doesn't get you anywhere
Be a leader, not a follower
Just be yourself
And not anyone else

Following don't get you anywhere
While being a leader gets you everywhere
You have dreams to live up to
So be a leader, not a follower

Be a leader, and others will follow along
Being a leader, is not so wrong
It gets you to be independent and brave
When following the bad, makes you misbehave

Be a leader like a king or queen
Not a follower like thieves
It's you that revolves around the world
Not anyone else

BE A LEADER, NOT A FOLLOWER