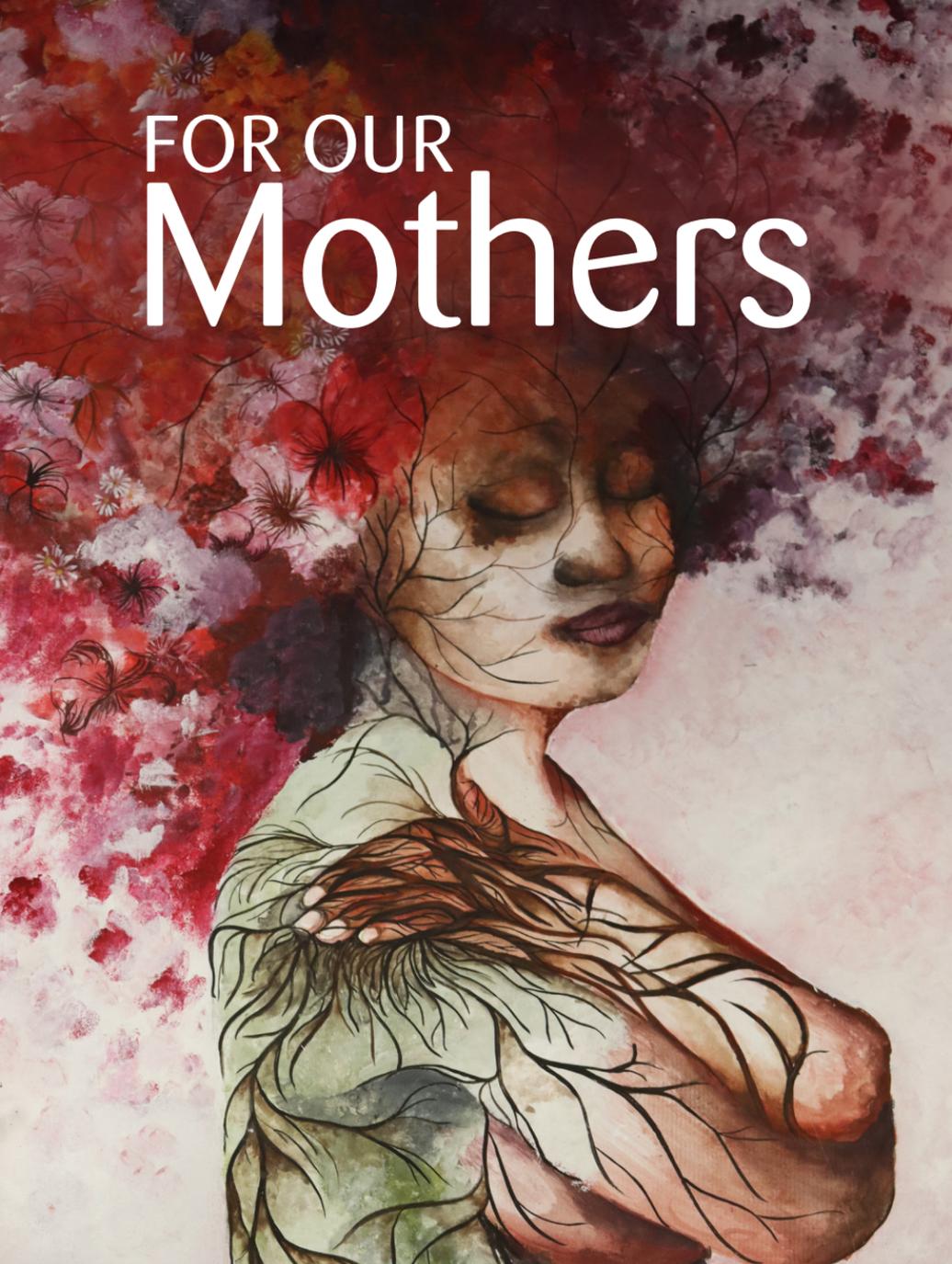


FOR OUR Mothers



Mulberry
Schools Trust

GLOBAL
Girl 
LEADING

 APPLIED
STORIES

INTRODUCTION

from Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE

This year's Global Girl Leading Anthology, *For Our Mothers*, has been shaped by the voices of young women who, through our Global Girl Leading programme, shared how deeply their mothers inspire them as role models. Their reflections remind us that the lessons our mothers and carers give us are not only found in their words, but in the courage, resilience, and love they show in their everyday lives.

The idea for this anthology was first sparked when I was given a book that students brought back from a civil rights study tour in the United States: *Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters* by President Barack Obama. His poem speaks to his daughters of the extraordinary women who have shaped the world – not only through their achievements, but through the values they embodied and passed on. It is a message of hope, love, and belief in what the next generation can become.

In this spirit, *For Our Mothers* brings together poems from girls and young women across the globe who write to honour their mothers and the role models they see in them. These poems are both tributes and testaments: to strength, to care, and to the possibility of building a better future.

I would like to thank the team behind the anthology, workshops and training resources, in particular Fin Kennedy, and our panel of judges. I also warmly congratulate the students whose poems appear in these pages – the selection process was highly competitive, and each of the students have achieved something remarkable.

Finally, thank you, the reader, for joining us in celebrating these voices. By reading this collection, you are standing alongside our writers and affirming the power of young women's words to honour the past, illuminate the present, and imagine the future.

Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE
CEO, Mulberry Schools Trust

INTRODUCTION

from Fin Kennedy

It's been an honour and a pleasure to once again be asked to produce Mulberry Schools Trust's latest international celebration of creative writing, *For Our Mothers*.

I'm told that the inspiration for this idea came from a recent project in Mulberry School for Girls, in which students had to apply for an opportunity and sit an interview. One of the questions was 'Who is your greatest inspiration?' and in ninety percent of cases the student answered, 'My mum'.

It was an inspired idea to use this as a basis for this year's competition, and one which turned out to speak to other young women around the world equally powerfully.

But there was an added reason for focusing on the relationship between two existing people – and that was to create special moments between them, in real life. Unlike 2024's *Letters to Our Daughters*, the recipients of the poems in this volume are all real rather than imagined. That provided a unique opportunity.

The package of resources we produced for participating schools included twenty questions to interview your mum, starting with her childhood and moving through her life up to becoming a parent.

Questions like 'What were your ambitions before having kids?' don't usually come up in daily conversation, and the project's ability to carve out some time for these connections proved one of its most popular aspects. We know this because schools spoke glowingly about these often moving interviews students had done at home, with one school even sending us videotaped recordings of all their students' (sometimes tearful) conversations with their mothers!

These moments are the real prizes in this contest. And whether or not they ended up in this volume, every entrant now has a personalised message of beauty and power to gift to the most important woman in their life.

We had hundreds of entries to this year's contest and space to publish just sixty in this anthology. Schools from India, Nigeria, Mexico, Kenya, Malaysia, Australia and the USA as well as the UK all sent us lyrical writing of an astonishing quality. The themes took in everything from sacrifice and selflessness, to love and awe, to frustrations and unfairness, to a sense of finding one's place in a long lineage of women, and a burgeoning adult relationship with the writer's own mum, now that childhood is coming to an end.

As you may be able to tell, it was genuinely hard to choose which to include in this anthology. The main thing we looked for was twofold:

How skilfully does the piece of writing use metaphor? Harnessing metaphor to convey emotion was at the heart of the package of teaching resources we put together, and a key skill we were trying to pass on. I'm grateful to my colleagues Afsana Begum and Tania Khan who showcased this so powerfully in two exemplar texts we commissioned at the start of this process (and which are still available to watch at forourmothers.world). How well could students learn from their example?

Our second was: how unique is the poem to that particular mother? When I met with students during the live workshops, I told them that the main challenge with a writing task like this is to avoid generic statements which could be applied to most mums. What is unique about yours, and how can you harness that to make your work stand out?

The remarkable range of poems and letters in this volume is the compelling result. There is also a shortlist of ten who you can hear reading their letters aloud at www.forourmothers.world, along with the original teaching resources for the competition, which will remain free online for students wishing to craft their own tributes independently.

We hope you enjoy reading the beautiful set of tributes in this book as much as we did. The articulacy and creativity of these daughters should make all their mothers proud.

Fin Kennedy

Artistic Director

www.appliedstories.co.uk

A note on content

If you are affected by any of the themes in this collection, please talk to a teacher or responsible adult.

GLOBAL
Girl
LEADING



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THE WAY YOU LET ME GO

You didn't lock the sky that night,
just stood there like a lighthouse flame –
a steady glow, not reaching out,
but guiding all the same.

You didn't build a wall of words,
no fortress made of fear,
you were the open gate of dusk,
and I, the trembling deer.

You stitched no storms into your voice,
no thunder in your tone –
just packed my bags with whispered winds
and seeds I'd plant alone.

Your "Take care" floated like a leaf
released into the stream –
a soft goodbye that somehow held
the weight of every dream.

And though I stepped into the dark,
where maps can't always show,
your love became my compass rose –
the way you let me go.

Aamily Sofi Binti Amar Ubadah
Sekolah Seri Puteri, Malaysia

BRAID OF BELONGING

Have you ever balanced two languages on your tongue?
Or split your life in two lands?

My mother, she spoke English,
But barely,
Her words, though few, were spoken so dearly.
Her mother tongue was Bengali,
The language that wrapped me gently.

But her sweetest language was one you feel,
The silent kind that actions reveal.
She said "I love you" with rice and rest,
With hands that healed and eyes that blessed.

With the sun dipping low, and the air soft with dusk,
She opens the jar,
The coconut's musk
Filling the room with a scent so sweet,
Her hands, weathered by years of care,
Cracked and calloused, yet tender and fair,
She scoops the oil, her fingers move slow,
Rubbed into palms, where love starts to flow.

My hair a tangled mess,
Her touch is gentle, soothing, and gives me rest,
She parts my hair, with skill and grace,
Each strand woven, time can't erase.
In strands of hair, our love was entwined,
A silent language of love and care,
Moved through my hair, never the same.
Each braid she wove told me her tale,
Of hopes that crossed an ocean's veil.
Of youth left behind,
Of her mother's touch, now just a hymn.

Weaving her pain in and out
Each braid, a thread of past and pain,
Each tug a soft reminder of what she's gained.

A soul divided by migration
A braid of belonging
Let the roles reverse.

Now she sits, and I begin,
Her hair silvered, soft, and thin.
My fingers work with gentle grace,
Tracing years across her face.

She once gave me roots and let me rise,
With fire in my voice, and stars in my eyes.
She crossed oceans so I could be free –
Now I speak the words she gave to me.

In English, I shield. In Bengali, I soothe.
With two tongues balanced, I speak her truth.
I am her echo, her living vow,
Though I rarely spoke
My love aloud.
Let the roles reverse – I say it proud.
In each drop of oil, each tender braid,
Her faith, her fight, in me replayed.
I became the prayer she once whispered at night.

So I oil her hair in quiet grace,
A daughter's love in a sacred place.
For all she gave, for all she's done –
I carry her forward, the braided one.

Abida Rahman

Mulberry School for Girls

STILL, SHE LOVED

She wove her life from worn-out thread,
And lit my dark with love unsaid.

She held her light in weathered palms,
And soothed my storms with second calms.

She bore a weight I never knew,
Then smiled as if the pain was few.

She faced the silence I became,
And still, she whispered out my name.

I thought her harsh, I felt her blind,
But still, her love just proved her kind.

Through shattered fights and distant years,
She still stayed to calm my fears.

When I rebelled, she stayed the same,
Soothed the pain from within my shame.

She danced through storms in patched-up shoes,
And dried my tears with her tissues.

She packed the stars inside my case,
Then watched me go forward into space.

She spoke in meals and folded clothes,
Her proof of love, a silent oath.

She didn't beg, she didn't plead,
My life, she helped me to succeed.

Her tone would burn, her voice would break,
But still, her love was never fake.

It found me when the world felt wrong,
It held me through the silent song.

And now I know, beyond the pain,
Her light still shines through loss and rain.

She shaped me bright, then let me go,
A lighthouse no one's meant to know.

She burned, unseen so I could rise,
A hidden sun in all my skies.

I carry her in how I stand,
Still burning by her weathered hands.

Aimee Faiz Binti Khairul Faizi

Sekolah Seri Puteri, Malaysia



Sonia Meghregan
Mulberry Academy Shoreditch

TO MY KIND-HEARTED MOTHER

Mum, I know that when I was young, I made things hard for you,
Like screaming, crying and tantrums.
I want to thank you for being patient with me.
I know sleepless nights were hard for you.

Thank you for caring for me, making sure I had what I needed and wanted.
You always bought whatever my heart desired.
Even when you were busy, you still made time for me,
you still made me feel special when I was at my worst.
You are the first person to go to for advice,
or when something is wrong.
You gave me the life that you always wanted.

When I was angry at you, you still cared about me.
My joy gave you happiness, my depression made you sad.
Even when you are angry with me, deep down inside your heart,
you still love me.
When I was at my worst, you still made me laugh.

You work countless nights to keep a roof over my head,
and put my favourite food on the table.
Even when you are sick, you still got out of bed to keep me happy.
Without you, I would not be the person I am today.

You are the best mother anyone could ever dream of.
My number one person.

How could I ever repay you for all your hard work?

Amelia Sophia Zaman
Mulberry Stepney Green

TO THE STRONGEST WOMAN I KNOW

Ibu,

Sometimes I wonder how you did it all. From the muddy soil of the kampung to the restless lights of the city, you carried more than just your dreams. You carried hope. Not just for yourself, but for your children.

You didn't come from much, but you gave me everything. I suppose it's true when they say a mother's love knows no bounds.

You built a life from scratch. Like a keris forged in fire, you were shaped by hardship and polished by challenges; but you have never forgotten yourself, not once. You studied, sacrificed, worked and endured. And all while raising me and my brothers with hands that never once stopped giving. Above all, you loved.

I remember the smile you bring with each sunrise, the way your fingers fixed my school uniform, the way your voice soothed my never-ending anxiety each day you had to leave me. I carry those memories with me.

There has never been one quite like you, and there never will be. Your love has been the quiet rhythm of my life, steady and gentle like the sound of gamelan, always there even when I didn't realize it.

You never needed to raise your voice to teach me. You taught with patience, with tradition, with the way you respected our elders, and how you whispered prayers after every solat, slipping my name into your du'a like it was your way of tucking me in and asking Allah for His blessing.

Even now, years later, I carry you with me in the smallest things; in the scent of jasmine rice simmering on the stove, in the way I fold my laundry neatly like you taught me, in the soft hum of gurindam you used to sing while making my favourite dish, in the soft way I speak to children. All the values you planted in me: humility, grace, respect for adat and for others; they've taken root and grown along with me.

As I grow older, I look forward to one day having children of my own. I pray I can be as loving, as patient, as gentle and strong as you have been for me. And I hope they will carry your legacy in their hearts, just as I carry you in mine. Because momma, there is no greater blessing than being born into your love.

With everlasting love,
Your daughter.

Alyssa Angel Utama Binti Fairos

Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (P) Jalan Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur

Ibu: “Mother” in the Malay language.

Kampung: “Village” or “Countryside” in the Malay language.

Keris: A traditional dagger with a distinctive, asymmetrical design widely recognized throughout Southeast Asia. It is considered a cultural symbol, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Gamelan: Gamelan is the traditional ensemble music of the Indonesian and Malay people. It is an indigenous orchestra consisting largely of several varieties of gongs and various sets of tuned metal instruments that are struck with mallets.

Solat: obligatory, formal prayer performed five times daily by Muslims.

Du’a: a personal, informal supplication or prayer, often used to ask for God’s help or express gratitude.

Gurindam: Gurindam is a traditional Malay poetic form, a type of verse, often used for moral instruction or to convey life lessons. Usually sung.

Adat: In the context of Southeast Asian cultures, “adat” generally refers to traditional customs, social rules, and norms that govern behaviour and relationships within a community.

A LETTER FROM THE DAUGHTER OF A KIND SOUL

There is a door at the end of the hallway, and that is a truth carved into the bones of this house.

On good nights, it sleeps. The hinges sigh only in dreams; the wood forgets its creak.

But on bad nights, you drift toward it like a paper boat in stormwater, pulled by some echo lodged in bone.

You raise your fist. Hesitate.

On bad nights, the door opens anyway.

It opens not like a herald's trumpet, not like the splitting skies of revelation. It opens the way old wounds do – soft, reluctant, with a creak that sounds too much like an apology.

She stands there, the woman you call mother, the keeper of your first breath. Her eyes are heavy with all the nights she never let herself cry.

Still, she asks if you are alright.

You do not know how to answer. You never do. Knocking on this door is ritual, like the familiar rap of knuckles against a cherrywood coffin you so often dream of laying in.

Your mother does not push. She opens her arms, the way an angel unfurls wings not to fly, but to shield.

You protest. You insist you've outgrown this. Outgrown her.

But when her arms wrap around you, you fold – not with weakness, but as a sapling bends to light. In her hold, your spine is bent, in the way it was always supposed to be.

Cradled.

Beyond the threshold hangs a crown of flowers – clinging to dignity in their wilt. You have always imagined those flowers around a grave of a child still too small in the eyes of a mother.

You hate to imagine tears watering those petals, but you know she would cry oceans if it meant you would float.

Your mother holds you, as she always has, as she always will. Like her love is a ship that refuses to set sail without you.

You want to carve her into forever; chisel her name into every sentence you'll ever write. You want the story of your survival to wear her fingerprints.

There is a door at the end of the hallway, and this is a story the walls have learned to sing.

There is a door at the end of the hallway where my mother awaits and when that door opens, I may hide from my failures and feel nothing but loved.

Aretha Kesuma Jiwa

Sekolah Seri Puteri, Malaysia

ALL THAT YOU'RE NOT

Today I won't glorify
All the sacrifices that you've made,
Instead, I'll praise how you've always
Taught me to live to the fullest.

I won't just narrate to the world
How you've always cheered from
the sidelines,
But how you've at the same time
been
The star of your own show.

You're not the silent dove,
Yet, you're the fiery phoenix
Who rises each time from the ashes,
Never failing to soar.

You've never taught me submission,
Rather, you've given me strength –
Strength that makes me overcome,
Every challenge that comes my way.

You didn't raise me to live for
others,
But to know my own worth first –
To be the light, not the shadow
Basking in my own sunlight,
Not craving someone else's shade.

You never asked me to be the silent,
polite girl
You taught my fire to burn with
grace,
Gifting my soul both
Reins and wings.

You're not just the wind beneath
my wings
But you're like the strongest gale,
That always pushed me towards
my goals
And broke all obstacles in the way.

So today I won't narrate how you
told me to "let it go"
Instead, I'll show the world how my
mother built a fighter
Not a girl who fades into the
background,
But a woman who stands tall,
A warrior and not a wallflower.

Avni Chopra

Saint Mark's School, India



Bani Kaur

St Mark's School, New Delhi

SEWN IN SKIN

“She’s got her mother’s face,” they say,
A mirror of her yesterday.
Yet mere likeness is not my claim,
But the shared soul that threads through
The letters that hold my name.

They say I’m just her image,
But she built me from the ground up –
Layer by layer,
With love –
To become what she never got to be.

She planted seeds she never saw bloom,
And I water them with every brave decision,
Every boundary,
Every voice I raise
For the girl she was
And the woman I’ve become.

Because I’m not just her echo,
I’m her evolution –
A continuation of her song,
Sung in a new key.

I am her legacy walking forward,
Not to mimic,
But to magnify.
Not just to reflect,
But to justify.

Yes, I’ve got her face –
But also her fire,
Her faith,
And every unspoken wish
She stitched quietly into my name.

Ayushi Banga
Saint Mark’s School, India

I WAS NOT ALWAYS YOUR DAUGHTER

I was not always your daughter
"You look just like your father."
Heard that from all around.
Loved to hear that as to little me
He made me giggle while you kept me bound.
He brightened everyplace whilst you stood silently
in the background.
Inherited his big ears and looks
But had none of your nooks.
I wanted to be like him
Naturally sought him to be the carver of my core.

Always wished for him to stay closer
Wouldn't say that I didn't love you the same.
I did. It was my love for my mom.
Most of my memories held you.
Echoing us singing those 90s songs
While making the evening chai.
My fave was still the sun of our home.
So when given the choice
To choose between you and him
I'd reply with both,
In guilt hiding that papa had my heart.

Well then COVID hit
I reached Year 7 and figured
Started sprouting and saw changes bit by bit.
I saw that you were not just stern
And in your rigidity I forgot
The tenderness you held within.
You were much more
Witnessed your complexities and your life.
You weren't just my reserved mom
Rather a whole person outside of that.

I saw why you weren't like dad.
Started to understand
Why you went quiet
When you were mad.
Forever you spoke so little
Well now I knew just how much time
You spent with your inner fears.
Saw that you had solutions to all my struggles.
Gradually acknowledged your existence as more
than just my mother.

One day became a teen, I started growing too.
Well, then the changes occurred like voodoo.
Felt immensely yet couldn't assign them in words.
I saw myself becoming yours too.
Realized how alike I was made to you.
Taking shape in your mould.

Now at 16 did I finally perceive
Though I took papa as my sculptor
But the clay which embodied me,
My flesh was yours mumma.
What I couldn't realize in my former years:
Mumma I was always your daughter and always will be.

Bhuvi Bathla

Saint Mark's School, India

A PEARL

Your name is Megan, meaning a pearl.
A pearl is precious, a thing of value.
I value you and the moments we've shared,
Memories in my mind that I play over and over every time.

This one moment in particular,
I was young and shy.
Sitting in the corner of a party ready to cry,
You were also timid.
You didn't like to socialize,
However you came out of your shell.
Outside of that shell I found my pearl.
My precious pearl.

Shining and stunning, of worth but hard to find
But for this pearl is nobody else's but mine.
You've been kept in your shell,
Tough for some time,
But for me anything you do is enough.

A pearl is so easy to lose, so small.
However,
The day I lose my pearl is the day I lose it all.

Brooke Harvey
Bexhill Academy

WHAT IS A MOTHER?

“What is a mother?” they ask.
A teacher, I say.
With the knowledge of every book,
Guiding me through all of life’s obstacles.
Teaching me my values and morals,
Of which I know to live by.

“What is a mother?” they ask.
A nurse, I say.
Bandaging the wounds from life’s adventures.
Cuts and scrapes, worries and heartbreaks.
Her own sleepless nights spent by my side.

“What is a mother?” they ask.
A chef, I say.
Cooking recipes passed down for generations.
Meals within minutes for everyone’s tastes.
Feeding everyone before herself.

“What is a mother?” they ask.
A judge, I say.
The mediator of every squabble.
Keeping the peace, firm but fair.
Disciplining with love.

“What is a mother?” they ask.
Everything, I say.

Cerys Hughes
Townley Grammar School

MY BELOVED MOTHER

My Beloved Mother,

I don't think I say this enough – but thank you. Thank you for every early morning and late night, for every moment you put me before yourself. Thank you for being my safe place, for holding me up when I feel like I am falling, and for always believing in me, even when I struggle to believe in myself.

There is something special about the way you love me. It's the way you listen, even when I don't have the words to say what's bothering me, the way you never make me feel ashamed for my mistakes but instead help me learn from them, the way you remind me of my strength when I feel weak. I carry your wisdom with me every day, and it shapes me as I grow towards the person I hope to be.

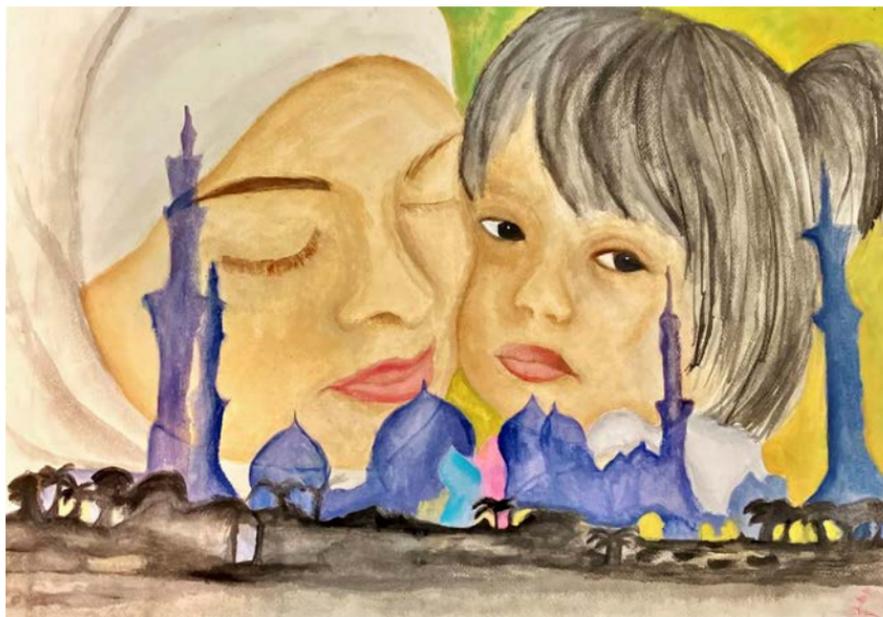
I often recall your advice, “work smart, set goals, and persevere to become the woman I project myself to be.” I recall one day, I was sent home for lack of school fees, and you went to our neighbour's house to wash clothes. It was demeaning to do this kind of work just to support your children. You didn't stop until you had the fees. I will always remember that gesture throughout my life, and I thank God for you.

Mom, I have questions — hard ones to answer. Questions I know you might not have all the answers to, but ones I trust you to help me navigate. How do I know I'm making the right choices for my future? How did you find the strength to keep going when things felt impossible? Will I ever feel like I truly have it all figured out? And the most important question of all – how do I become even a fraction of the woman you are? If I can do that, I know I'll be okay.

I hope one day I can give you a fraction of the love and wisdom you have given me. Until then, I want you to know that I will continue to learn and give my best. Thank you for everything you have done. I love you, Mum.

Forever your daughter,
Cherly

Cherly Nafula Simiyu
Lenana Girls High School, Kenya



Jumaima Kamali
Mulberry School for Girls

BRICK BY BRICK

Dear Mum,

This is the thank you I didn't know how to say before now.

I've been meaning to write this for a long time — not just to say I'm grateful, but to honour what you built. You weren't only raising children. You were laying a foundation, quiet and unshaken. Every naira you earned, whether from rent or sales, became food on our table or books in our hands. You gave up so much that others chased — parties, comfort, new clothes — and poured everything into us instead. People didn't always understand. Some said you were giving too much. But you kept going. Brick by brick, choice by choice, you built a future we could stand on.

I was four when Dad died. I knew something terrible had happened, but not what it meant. You did. You stayed indoors for weeks, grief pressing on all sides. And yet, somehow, you rose. You looked at what was left and realised it wouldn't be enough — not for what we'd need, not for what was coming. So you stepped forward. You took your place in decisions no one prepared you for, because you saw what needed protecting. And when your shop couldn't carry us anymore, you shifted. I watched you carry shoes from school to school, turning motion into provision. The shop became a base — but you were the engine. Others turned away. You rolled up your sleeves and stepped into the work. And you kept going.

Even when I made it hard to love me, you never stopped showing up. You made sure I ate, no matter what had passed between us. You kept your anger quiet and still bought the books I needed. You came to open days I didn't deserve, sat through meetings when you had every reason to stay home. And every day, you prayed — not just for who we'd become, but that we'd be whole getting there.

I carry your strength every single day. In every test I write, every challenge I take on, and every dream I dare to chase, you are there — not beside me, but inside me. And when I become the woman I'm working so hard to be, I hope you'll see a reflection of everything you gave.

With all my love,
Christy

Christiana Agboola

Alimosho Grammer School, Nigeria

FROM ME TO YOU...

I look at you and see a woman who gave up everything...

So I could have something.

A woman who always put me first – even when it meant leaving herself last.

You gave me the bigger piece of bread, the warmer blanket, the louder cheer.

You gave your all... for me.

It's almost cruelly ironic, isn't it?

You spent your life sacrificing so that my sister and I wouldn't have to.

So we could be free to dream, to choose, to become.

And yet, for the longest time, the one thing I swore I'd never be... was you.

I didn't want to give up my dreams.

I didn't want to stay silent and tired and invisible.

I wanted to soar – to live boldly, loudly, selfishly – because you taught me that I could.

Because your quiet strength showed me how.

But I've always carried these questions inside me...

When you look at me, what do you feel?

Do you ever wonder – "What if I hadn't had her?"

Would your life have been lighter? Happier? Freer?

Because sometimes... I do.

I wonder if you ever regretted it.

And I hate that thought.

I hate that the thing that gave me life may have cost you yours.

I wish you had lived for yourself first.

I wish you had never married a man who was a good father – but not always a good partner.

I wish you had chosen joy, chosen dreams, chosen you.

Still, everything you are – your love, your sacrifices, your silent battles –
They've shaped me into the woman I am.
A woman who won't give up her dreams.
A woman who won't be quiet when she deserves to be heard.
A woman who is brave, fierce, and full of fire –
Just like you were... in your own quiet, beautiful way.

From the mornings you brushed my hair with tired hands,
To the lunches you packed with love,
To the final day you watched me leave for school on my own –
We have grown, together.

And I carry you with me.
Not as the woman I swore I'd never be...
But as the woman I'm proud to come from.

Darshpret Gill

Saint Mark's School, India

A THREAD THROUGH TIME

I met her once – my mother at sixteen,
Under a shy Kolkata sky,
With her long hair flying like festival flags,
A bright smile stitched into her face
As if sadness had never touched it.

She spoke like laughter
And flung jhalmuri at pigeons just to watch them scatter.
“Come on”, she said,
Grabbing my hand before I could hesitate.
She was everything in motion.
I followed like a quiet echo.

She said I thought too much,
And I said she felt too much,
But we both understood beauty.
She sketched portraits on napkins with borrowed pens.
I wrote poems in margins when no one looked.
Two kinds of artists –
One loud, one still –
But mirrors just the same.

At the ghat, we dipped our toes in the river's fading voice,
Shared mishti from a paper box
And argued about nothing at all.
She told me I reminded her of someone –
though she couldn't place who.
I just smiled.
Because I saw it too.
The tilt of her head,
The crease in her brow when she dreamed –
Just like mine.
She was the first verse,
and I, an echo made of her voice.

We were so different –
She, a burst of song in the middle of the street,
Me, a quiet verse hidden in a book –
And yet, the same rhythm played beneath our ribs.

But it never happened.
Not the ghat,
Not the shared sweets,
Not the moment she almost recognized me.

Maybe one day we'll meet again,
Under another Kolkata sky
Where she'd pull me through the crowds,
And I'd quietly follow.

Dhriti Mondal
Saint Mark's School, India



Matteo Vega
Colegio Carol Baur

THE HOUSE BY THE LAKE

I remember the house by the lake.
It was simple.
Just you and me and Dad.
I used to say I was lonely,
but even then, I had you.
You were always there,
warm, loving, supportive.
We were inseparable,
Every evening we'd walk around the lake,
or at the beach or go to the pool.
You taught me how to bike here,
And it was rough.
I fell over and over,
but you always caught me.
No matter what.

Then came the house by the field.
Everything was normal at first.
You'd wrestle with my hair every morning,
and walk around the neighbourhood.
But when my sister was born,
things began to change.
We talked less,
fought more.
I began to go outside on my own,
playing with friends instead of you.
We grew distant, and it hurt.

Next was the house by the river.
Everything was different here.
Stuck in that small apartment,
we fought more than we laughed.
I said so many things I regret,
in that Manhattan apartment.
We grew more distant than ever before.
I missed you so much then.
But I was too proud to say sorry.
And I regret that the most.

Now it's the house in the woods.
We're healing here.
We talk and laugh,
more than we ever have before.
You're my best friend.
You're warmth, and comfort,
and silent, steady, support.
Always there.

It's not the same,
as the house by the lake.
But I don't mind.
We've both changed for the better,
and I love our new normal.
Just like I'll always love you.

Diya Sharma

Great Valley High School, Philadelphia

THE PILLAR OF MY LIFE

Dear Mum,

I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for everything you've done for me. Your love, support, and guidance mean the world to me. You've been there for me through all the days I've spent on this earth. From the moment I opened my eyes to this world, your hands were the first to calm me. You've been the pillar of my life, the one who held everything together even when things were falling apart.

I can't remember a time when you weren't there to wipe my tears or cheer me on, even for the smallest victories. Your selflessness and kindness inspire me every day. The way you've sacrificed so much for our family is a testament to your love. You taught me and my siblings about faith – not just in God, but in people, in hard work, and in ourselves. Your words were never grand, but they were powerful. I remember how you'd always tell me that "better days are coming," that my future is bright, and that I should focus on my studies and be the best I can be.

Mum, you're not just a mother; you're my safe place, my first best friend, and my biggest teacher in the whole world. You taught me strength without shouting and kindness without conditions. I've watched you sacrifice so much, silently, just to make sure that me and my siblings had everything we needed. You gave up parts of your life so we could have a better one. You're the definition of resilience, like a tree that stands tall through the wind and rain.

You didn't just raise me; you built me. Your hands shaped my heart, your voice echoed in my mind when I faced temptation, and your prayers became the armour that shielded me from harm. As I grow older, I realize more and more how lucky I am to have you as my mum. You've been my mentor, teaching me how to be strong, resilient, and kind. You've shown me that family is everything, and that love, and support can overcome any obstacle.

I remember the days you told me that since the day you gave birth to me, I've been a thing of joy that has always happened to you in your life. Thank you for everything, Mum – for the countless meals, the lessons, the discipline, the sleepless nights, and the endless love. As I journey through life, I know I'll face challenges and obstacles. But with the values and lessons you've taught me, I'm confident I'll be able to overcome them. You've prepared me well for the future, and for that, I'm very grateful.

I'll make you proud, not just with success, but with a life that reflects your values, kindness, and strength.

Sincerely,
Rabiu

Rabiu Faisat
Alimosho Grammer School, Nigeria

DO YOU NOW CALL AUSTRALIA HOME?

Hey Mum,

I have been wanting to talk to you lately. In fact, I have been thinking about you quite a lot. As we begin to cultivate a life here in Australia, even though we have travelled wide and far – is it Australia that you now call home?

Or does your heart remain in our old apartment? Our simple life, shared with our dog and visits from your friends from time to time and the weekends spent with family members for lunch or dinner.

I know that the biggest piece of your heart remains in the longing you have to be reunited with your sister.

Your twin.

A connection like no other.

Do you now call Australia home – even though it is so hard for you to speak English? A language barrier that makes things feel that little bit more difficult. I sit and wonder if it is in these moments that you may wish to pack your travelling suitcase. To go back in time.

I haven't shared this with you before, Mum. But I want to say that I am so proud of you. No matter the barriers, whether it be with you learning the language or mourning the loss of Grandad, you fight your own fights each day.

The Australian Dream.

Gabriela Popova

Penola Catholic College, Australia

YOUR WORDS OF WISDOM AT EVERY AGE

If I had to retell myself the most important piece of advice my mother gave me at every age, I would tell her this:

One: Enjoy the fact that you can't walk yet, people will hold you for longer, and you will grow to miss it one day.

Two: Be a kid. Talk as much as you want and use your words. One day, you will wish you had the same courage.

Three: Take a risk and let go of your mother's hand, as comforting as it may seem, bigger things await you. I promise you'll be fine.

Four: Don't be in a rush to grow up because one day, you'll stand outside school with tears in your eyes, wishing you could turn back time.

Five: Santa is real, and so is the Tooth Fairy. Never stop believing in magic.

Six: Say yes to every opportunity you are given, before you know it, you'll no longer be forever young. People are mean, but they won't remember it all.

Seven: Be kind even when they're not. You're not too loud or annoying, know your worth. They're just not your people, and that's okay. Not everyone will like you, and you won't like everyone.

Eight: Growing up doesn't have to be scary. You are so much more than a number or a bad day. Even if you don't look or act the same as you once did, the little girl is still in there. Make her proud.

Nine: You have your mother's glistening brown eyes and crazy big smile, never let anyone take your spark away.

Ten: Your reflection is only what you choose to see. You're a perfect image of years' worth of people who loved each other. One day, someone will love everything you hate about yourself. Just remember there's so much more to you and life than the girl staring back at you in the mirror.

Eleven: As scary as high school may seem, once again, I promise you, you'll be fine. You'll soon find comfort in family that aren't bound by blood, and one day your memories with them will be the old photographs that your own kids will ask you about.

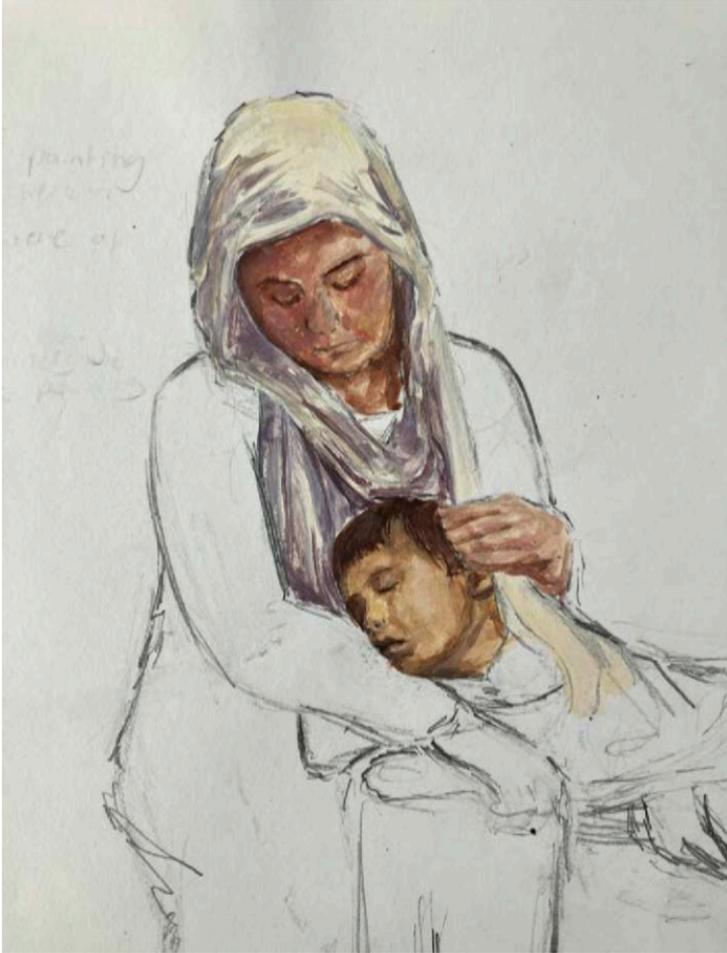
Twelve: Put the phone down and enjoy what you have, because not everyone or everything lasts forever.

Thirteen: Find your people. Find the people who make saying goodbye hard and hold them close. You'll wish you held tighter one day. The world is cruel, but the right people will help you see the good. Believe in the magic the same way you believed in the Tooth Fairy. Not all stories are as simple as Cinderella but sometimes dreams really do come true.

Fourteen: Talking about your feelings doesn't make you weak. It's okay not to be okay. Others will be strong for you when you can't be strong for yourself, and you'll wish they would again hold you the way they did when you were one, until you learn to hold yourself once more.

Harshni Dodhia

Nower Hill High School



Jana Diskin
Bexhill Academy

HOME IN HER HEART

I don't remember my very first breath,
But I know her arms had softened like death.
She held me close, against her chest,
And promised me her life, and her best.

She hummed me songs when nights were cold,
She kissed my skin; she made me bold.
She called me meri jaan, soft and sweet,
Her every word is a steady beat.

She worked long hours, hid her pain,
Still smiled at me through the wind and rain.
And every time I lost my way,
Her voice would gently guide the day.

She mended things with tape and thread,
A broken toy, an aching head.
But deeper still, she healed the fears.
She didn't speak for years and years.

She missed some dreams, she let them go,
So mine had room to bloom and grow.
She hid her tears, she bit her tongue,
And carried me when I was young.

She wasn't young, I wasn't blind,
That thought crept often through my mind,
The day her voice would fade from air,
Her chair left still, her coat not there.

I'd lie awake and think it through,
What would I ever be without you?
The world so loud, so cold, so wide,
Without her hands to hold my stride.

I'd watch her laugh, then quickly cry,
Just struck by how the years go by
And pray some force, some deal, some grace,
Would not freeze that smile upon her face.

And when that day comes, still and slow,
When she must leave, and I must let her go,
I'll close my eyes and feel her near,
In every heartbeat, loud and clear.

For love like hers does not depart,
It builds a home inside your heart.
And though her hands won't hold me tight,
Her love will light my darkest night.

Hibba Atif

Nower Hill High School

DEAR LULU

Dear Lulu,

I respect you, for all the hardships you had to push through, all the people and family and objects you had to lose, the sleepless nights, waiting, waiting to see where the next bomb would hit, covering in a corner with all six of your sisters and two brothers. I honour you for being a joyful child, full of smiles and laughter, even though you were going through a war.

You inspire me to be as strong as you, to look at the positive in hard situations rather than the negative. Your ability to pass down your generosity and patience, to be respected by others around you, to be loved for who you are. You fulfilled my life with all the things yours lacked, yours having been in an occupied land, constricted by the Israeli flag, and mine enclosed in the safety of the waving British flag.

Your gentle hands, guiding me, teaching me how to make a bouquet of flowers for a family that just recently experienced loss, those same hands teaching me how to bake a traditional Palestinian dessert, hoping to please the family with how good I've become, all because I had you to help me through. I wouldn't know or understand half the things I know today if you had never been there to teach me.

Your soft-spoken voice is a complete contrast to my booming laugh, your relaxed personality, your main objective is to make everyone laugh, whereas my objective is always to get on someone's last nerve. Our differences have never stopped us from having similarities, our love for a laugh, the joy of sitting and watching a movie together.

I appreciate you, for the times you cared for me when my own mother couldn't, keeping me at my happiest, making sure my stomach was full and fed. I thank you, for teaching me facts and manners that I will carry with me for the rest of my life, manners and qualities I will pass down to my siblings, and probably to

my children as well. I pray to grow up into a woman just like you, to show kindness to anyone and everyone, no matter how deserving, to be someone who lifts others up in a time of need, just like you do now for us all. Your strength is what is admired most by me, your ability to go through the most difficult and life-changing experience and still be able to tend to all the needs of the family around you. To become someone like you would be like a dream come true, I hope to one day be as admiring and astonishing as you.

I thank you from the deepest pit of my heart for being the one I most admire and the one I aspire to be like in the future. Your lessons will never be forgotten, carried with me all throughout my life.

Love, Imaan.

Imaan Alsisi

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf, Wales

FAIRNESS

You named me Insaf,
A name meaning fairness,
Growing up, nothing ever felt fair,
Like when my brother was born,
And I was only five.

You were so busy with him,
And for me you had no time,
I thought you were being unfair,
But it was harder for you,
You sat there in tears,
Stretching your heart in two.

You carried the pain like a secret,
And I'd been thinking I'd been
forgotten,
But your love came in pieces,
And was measured by our needs,
I was too young to know then,
How your heart was stretched thin.

You held more than we noticed,
Your dreams left pending,
But you gave it all up for a reason,
So you could nurture us and keep
defending.

Now I've grown up,
And I'm grateful for it all,
The sacrifices you dealt with,
And how you took all the falls.

I thought fairness meant sameness,
But now I understand,
It meant giving each of us what we
needed,
Like a helping hand.

I see now the courage it took,
To hurt quietly,
And to keep going,
To hold the weight of our family
And make our house a home.

Insaf Bencaid Teyar
Bexhill Academy

BAWO NI?

Dear Mummy,

Bawo ni?

I wish I could express my thoughts in Yoruba, as it would help me understand you better. I often think about the stories you used to tell me, the ones about your childhood, where you grew up, the school you attended, and the friends you made along the way. These stories connect me to you in a way that words alone cannot capture.

When I think of home, I am flooded with memories of the lively hair shop, filled with the familiar scent of blue magic and the soft jingle of beads and cuffs. Those moments remind me of the life you had in Lagos, a comfortable existence that you sacrificed for us. I can still picture you sitting on the couch, the warmth of your presence wrapping around me like a blanket, while Nollywood films played in the background. The steady hum of the blow dryer was a comforting sound, a necessary saviour in your unfamiliar surroundings.

I've always admired you deeply. I remember those early mornings when you would wake up at 5am to take care of me. You would shower me, dress me, and make sure my tights were on the right way. After all that, you would tuck me back in, ensuring I was snug in my uniform, just so you could feel assured that I would be alright. Even now, you burst into my room, waking me up just in time so I wouldn't be late for school. Your hands are firm, a testament to the strength and resilience you've shown throughout your life.

Your sacrifices have shaped who I am today. You've faced challenges that many cannot even imagine, yet you continue to give everything for us, your children. The love you pour into our lives is immeasurable, and it inspires me to strive for my best. It's a reminder of the strength that lies within you, how you've navigated through life's obstacles while always putting our needs first.

Thank you for being our rock, for your unwavering support and love. I cherish the moments we share and the lessons you impart. I hope to carry your strength and determination with me as I navigate my own journey. You are not only my mother. You are my greatest inspiration.

With all my love,
Isabelle

Isabelle Ifede

Townley Grammar School



Nyla Francis
School 21

TREE OF LIFE

You are the tree, resilient and grounded,
Facing life's storms with unwavering poise.
Your branches reach out, a comforting embrace,
And in your presence, I find my consolation.

But it's the roots that bind us,
Forever intertwined.
The strength of you, and all the women before us,
Flows through me effortlessly.

You are the tree, steadfast through all seasons.
Though your leaves may change, fall off, or lose colour,
Your roots remain, our bond unyielding.

All that I am begins with you.
And when I grow my own branches,
It will be your strength I carry –
Rooted, resolute, whole.

Isabelle Crowley

Penola Catholic College, Australia

THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

I'm five,
Safe in your arms, I knew no worries.
My life feels so light and easy.

You were my lighthouse in the drifting sea.
You built a home inside of me.

You named me Kamila, which means:
"Досконала, ідеальна, повноцінна"
(Perfect, ideal, complete)
And even if I didn't feel perfect,
You made me believe I can be.

You are the soft song that finds me when the world gets too loud.
And I?
I am your echo – quieter, but still as strong.

You've shown me how strong a woman can be.

You raised me to be a
"Сильна, щаслива, та незалежна жінка"
(Strong, happy, and independent woman)
Who knows how to stand tall,
Even in silence.

With roots you planted deep and true,
I grew– and all because of you.

At nine,
We crossed oceans,
Chased belonging in cities that didn't know our names.
We struggled to plant roots in a place where the soil spoke another
language,
Where every street felt cold and blue.

But we overcame it,
Overcame it together.

You told me:

“Тримайся, моя люба. Все буде добре. Пам’ятай, я завжди поруч.”

(Hold on, my love. Everything will be okay. Remember, I’m always with you.)

And you whispered that into every step I took.

At twelve,

I saw a completely different side of you,

I witnessed you at your lowest –

When life weighed heavily on you,

And you needed help.

But now I see your strong lift.

I watched you overcome it all.

You became so much stronger.

I come to you –

My safe place,

My quiet celebration.

You are able to give more love in just a smile than the world has ever given me in a thousand words.

No matter how hard life got,

You stayed strong–

Stayed strong for me.

For being you – so kind, so true

For showing strength that only you can show.

For always being

Зі мною

(With me),

Дякую, Мама

(Thank you Mum)

Kamila Plotnikova

Mulberry Academy London Dock

STREET, CLOSET, ATTIC.

In the car, stories shared.
For every new road found, details of the past rediscovered.
Stories of your life from when you were young
Someone who lead without fear,
Being the one who talked with a peer
And let other's stories unfold
And so we were raised to be bold
TO LEAD THE BAND WHEN NO ONE ELSE WILL
TO SPEAK UP FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T
TO CAPTURE the ATTENTION OF A CROWD OF PEOPLE.

From the closet, old clothes are shown.
Soft fabric gripping on the tips of my fingers, touching the memory of you
In a long skirt, soul wild and bold, and looking the part.
A time when your heart was ablaze
Spending days at concerts
Praising being alive,
And that's what you gave to us
A Heart that beats rapidly like a drum
Garments once yours now mine
A Voice that brings laughter to EVERYONE.

In the attic, your relics are found.
Old masterpieces once locked away in boxes
And a Penholder that proclaimed: 'Vice President of Art Club.'
Creativity occulted there
Brought out when it is time to share
Old strokes of beauty once packed away
Within our souls your talent is on display.

Pieces of paper with strange symbols turned into music
Veins full of ink and pigment that bleed onto paper
Cups of tea carefully brewed and perfected.
Pieces of you hidden on the street, in a closet, in an attic.
A secret history of being complete, true and dramatic
Pieces of you imbedded in *us*.

Kendal Thorpe

Great Valley High School, Philadelphia

HOOYO

Hooyo,
That means mum in my mother tongue,
Somali that's the language I speak,
Somalia is where she came from,
And travelled to a land foreign to her.
Mother tongue – why not father tongue some may say,
That's because who you are is a tribute to your mother; the very
same woman who birthed you and brought you into this world.
The woman who made you who you are.

Hooyo comes from the root word 'hooy' which means home,
Within the very language I speak everyday it conveys the deeper
meaning of the importance of the mother.
For I may own many houses but the only the place I'll ever learn
to call home is where my mother resides.

A mother's instinct like none other,
In the mornings before I make way to school,
I'll come downstairs to see a plate of food set on the table,
'Who's is this?' I'll ask.
And she'll say it's yours.
I didn't ask for this favour,
This sacred act of kindness,
Yet she knew,
She always does,
She knew I woke up tired dreading yet another day of school.
But this small act takes a weight off my shoulders.

I'm sure we can all relate to this,
You go on holiday for a week and you're constantly eating
everything you could have possibly dreamed of when at home.
But after a few days the food begins to taste bland,
And you'll begin to say, 'I miss my mother's cooking,'
For when your mother cooks for you the food is cooked
with love,
Love so strong that it cannot be rivalled by anyone else's,
Love so beautiful that it cannot be compared to anything else.

Your mother is the only woman that wants you to be better
than her,
Have every opportunity that she never did,
Have your dreams unfold like hers never did,
And for that I say,
I love you Hooyo macaan.

Khadra Abdiazis

Townley Grammar School



Nazifa Tasnim
Mulberry School for Girls

A MOTHER'S LOVE

My feet full of heat run back to her
My mother's soles on sand
Stand taller than any man
I know or will know
Because nothing she does is for show
Approbation
Or praise
Instead, it's for me
She charges no fee
For the dark circles under her eyes
The weariness of her bones
Or the ache of her heart
Instead, she offers smiles, love
And everlasting warmth
Wrapped up in home cooked dinners
And caresses through my hair
Flowers ache for spring
The way I do for my mother's hugs
Because nothing could ever measure up
To a mother's love

Khanak Vyas

Great Valley High School, Philadelphia

THE HANDS THAT HELD IT ALL

The cheers radiate through the stadium.

I was cuddled up right next to my mother. There was truly, nowhere else I wanted to be.

We were leading at half time break. And thus, as Mum's eyes sparkled, with a gentle giggle we shared, "It's time for a hot chocolate", she enthusiastically exclaimed.

We sip on the steamy hot chocolates, trying not to burn our tongues off.

The warmth of the hot chocolate enveloped our hands, as we sipped on the beverage with caution.

An indulgent treat...

My mum pulls out some gloves. Yet not for herself. I gently slip the gloves onto my tiny hands. Like a firework about to burst, I couldn't name a more electrifying feeling.

My mum was always prepared for the weather, just like she was always prepared to take care of me. We didn't win that night but winning wasn't important.

My mum had driven into the gloomy night to personally escort me to a footy game.

Footy games were special because they were always something I did with mum. Mum had to sacrifice her working hours because she had to look after three kids. That must have been one of the hardest things she had to do now that I think about it. Stuck at home, teaching and preparing my sisters and I for the world we would live in. A world where you had to be independent, filled with surprises and challenges that you must navigate without your mum. Mum had her own world; we were just the ones living in it.

I come home from school to find the house spotless. To no surprise there's my mum standing in front of me with opening arms and what seems like an open chapter.

She looks exhausted.

She asks how my day was, she listens, she laughs, she comments.

I catch her sneaking off to go invite my sister into the house.

My time was up, now that love was shared between my two other sisters.

It's nearing 7 o'clock and The Chaser is nearly finished. I swiftly walk down the stairs and get a whiff of the mouth-watering dinner my mother is preparing. The table is set and her glasses are fogging. The steam has captured my mum's ability to see yet she still makes out to where the sink is. She knows her way around the kitchen off by the heart. Calling out to her husband. I yell out to my sisters.

She finally takes a seat at the dining room table and lets her body loosen up.

This is when my mum finally breathes. She likes her routine no other way.

She likes caring for those she loves, and she rewards herself with a sparkling glass of wine. Although it may not sound like she does a lot, I really couldn't name a more hardworking role model in my life. From the cheers of the stadium to the quiet comfort of home, it's clear now — the real victory has always been having a mum who shows up, sacrifices, and loves with everything she has.

Kiani Walker

Penola Catholic College, Australia

DOUBLE-SIDED

“Where did you come from?”
A question I’ve heard too much.
How could I answer? Where do I begin?
Born into a world where my roots were unclear,
Raised to believe my existence was rare.
Born not knowing if I should even care.

If you flip a coin, it lands on a side
A 50/50 chance, a game we can’t decide.
Half of me here, the other half there,
Across a border, barbed with wire,
Where stories burnt and hearts grew tired.

Mama, so radiant, steady and bright,
Can you answer this for me just tonight?
Why did you love someone they called your foe?
From a place they taught you not to go?

India and Pakistan, cousins in strife
Torn apart by bloodshed and life.
Governments drew lines through hearts and names,
Telling you love was something to tame.
All you ever wanted was to fit in like a glove,
But they couldn’t see your truth and your love.

Baba loved you, and you loved him too
A love so sweet, with bitterness in view.
Was it too bold? Too rare to last?
Or just a fantasy not built to outlast?

My culture, my truth, saris and kurtas in thread,
Basmati rice, joyful songs in my head.

A childhood so bright, never did I ponder
How the world would question my mother.

That I'd be born in halves, divided and free,
A soul meaning nothing and everything to me.

Isolated from a once loving family
Your fears may well have become reality.
Years of no contact, awkward tensions,
Family gatherings filled with apprehension.

To move past those hardships, the trying times and the
confusion
Showing me the true beauty between two cultures'
infusion,
Mama I love you, so diverse and so unique,
True love is so powerful, and you're
certainly not weak.

So this is for you, soldier of my heart,
The border may divide, but together we shall never part.

Laiba Khan

Nower Hill High School

A MOTHER'S HANDS

I was born into echoes,
Names of whom I never knew
engraved into my palms.
Their weight?
Soft as shadow,
Heavy as silence.
Whispers of tradition,
Whispers from those before I,
They stitched into me like the hem
of an old Sari.

My mother stitched with care,
A quiet thread pulled through fabric
and years.
Her mother stitched with prayer,
Fingers worn and wise with age.
Steady,
Knowing,
Falling into rhythm without need for
a pattern,
I still prick my fingers.

A mother never asks,
They simply give.
Love wasn't always spoken,
In our house
It was folded into rotis.
Woven into the little things,

Like my hair before school.
Love was the pots left on low,
Even after a long day.
Love the ajwain in my cup,
Taste bitter,
Love clear,
Rich,
Layered,
Like South Asian spice.

The hands that kept on giving,
Their hands.
They only gave.
Only loved.
Always there.
Your mother's hands,
And her mother's mother's hands,
And her mother's hand.
Held her daughter's hand,
Who held her daughter's daughter's
hand,
Who held her hand –

A mother's hands
And then whose hand held mine?
My mother.

Leila Thompson
Connaught School for Girls



Alumni student
Mulberry Academy Shoreditch

A SINGLE SYSTEM

I see your eyes –
Mirrors of galaxies I've only just
begun to explore.

We look at the same moon, yet we
don't.
You saw it from China, a child in
wonder,
I see it now from Pennsylvania,
And still, somehow, we meet in its
light.

You looked up at it, dreaming of
your life,
I look up at it and find you in mine.
Two moons, one memory.
Two places, one path.

I see myself in your eyes –
Shared stardust, same orbit
Even though our worlds
Were shaped by different skies.

The Earth revolves around the sun,
Just like I revolve around you –
Quietly, constantly,
Pulled by an invisible force I never
question

You see perfection in the moon
Its calm glow, soft greys, and
graceful craters.

But I the flaws –
The scars, the holes, the places
where light doesn't reach.
Still, you call it beautiful.
Still, you call *me* beautiful.
That's the way you see –
Through love's telescope.

4.6 billion years old.
43 years old.
15 years old.
We are all made of time –
But this bond?
This was formed 15 years ago.
Our solar system, small and infinite.

4.6 billion years ago, the stars made
space for the planets.
15 years ago, you made space for
me.

Liv Kuratnick
*Great Valley High School,
Philadelphia*

A SUNFLOWER IN A STORM

A sunflower is your favourite flower,
My mind flashes back to when we would grow them in the garden
One grew so tall it was as high as the fence.

The growth of our relationship is represented by that flower.
How sunflowers grow with their big vibrant petals
That shows their beauty,
Your beauty.

The strength the roots of the flower have
They allow the rest of the flower to bloom,
Showing the power the sunflower holds
That is shown in you.

I feel your smile,
I see it in photos of myself
Reminded of how alike we are,
I am described to be another version of you.
I admire your personality the most
It shines and creates light even when it's dark.

Whenever I miss you, I look up at the sky.
I look at the clouds
I look at the streaks of sunlight,
How they can peer around corners and light up the whole world
When I look at the sky it reminds me of you.

My mum is my sunflower,
She's my best friend.

Lucia McDermott

Bexhill Academy

THE THREAD BETWEEN US

Your laughter is a symphony of spring,
the sound I knew before I knew words.
Your eyes, warm light brown, hold the
sunlight trapped inside
the light that always found me when I'd
hide.

Every movement you make breathes
strength,
a silent poem of grace.
Your hair falls like autumn leaves,
soft and full of stories I've never heard.

Your voice, calm like the first rain,
carries wisdom I'm still learning to hear.

You are my loudest cheer,
the first voice I hear in a crowd,
the arms I run to when the world
breaks,
the one who listens when I need it most.

I clutch the moments you gave me
the perfect shoes, your smile as I
unwrap a gift,
quiet promises whispered between us,
soft threads pulling us closer.
They say I'm your mirror
an echo both clear and blurred,
your shadow and your light,
woven from the same fabric,
but stitched with my own hand.

But there are gaps between us,
shadows slipping through the cracks,
pauses stretching too long to ignore.

I regret every argument
that thickened the air between us,
every harsh word fired in teenage heat,
brushed off with "I'm just going through
a phase,"
as if that could erase the sting.

Now silence feels like a scar,
and I'm still trying to heal the wound.

But I'll keep trying,
because that's what humans do.
We hurt, we regret,
and if we're lucky, we grow.

I see daughters laughing with their mothers—
something I hope for us someday,

There's a quiet ache for something unnamed,
a warmth just beyond my reach,
like sunlight filtered through distant leaves,
waiting for us to grow into it.

Still, I look up to you,
always wanting to walk in your steps,
be your perfect shadow,
your reflection, your echo.

So I write you into poems,
stringing words like bridges,
hoping you'll cross them one day.
And maybe when I read one aloud, it will
sound like us
not just how we are,
but how we could be.

Until then,
I hold you in these words,
a quiet cover for all we're still learning to say —
an unspoken pulse beneath the silence,
the steady thread that ties my heart to yours.

Mansha Gulati

Saint Mark's School, India



Mehzabin Maleque
Mulberry Academy Shoreditch

MY LOVE AND GRATITUDE FOR YOU

Dear Mum,

I don't even know where to begin or what words can truly express the depth and sincerity of my love and gratitude for you. Growing up, it has only been you who has always been there for me, and I know it was tough being a single parent. Every step I have taken in life, you have been present, reassuring me when things got hard and supporting me regardless of the challenges.

Life has not been easy for you. I realize this more as I grow older. You had to give up your education to have me because you didn't have parents to support you. My dad didn't take up his responsibilities, so you worked odd jobs to ensure I was fed, clothed, educated, and had a roof over my head. You have had to make many sacrifices for me. You couldn't enjoy your youth when your peers were chasing their dreams. You were changing my diapers, instead, and you told me I was your pure joy.

You made sure that I learned to survive in life, showing me love and protecting me. To make sure I didn't lack in the essentials, you went beyond all odds, even when poverty made it so difficult. You proved that nothing could beat your motherly love for me.

You were my first teacher, and you made sure to instil good morals, such as self-discipline, respect for others, and obedience. This has helped me cope with life's ups and downs and to always be grateful, no matter what. You taught me how to set priorities and explained that sometimes you have to wait for the right time to see results or to make decisions. You told me how you didn't set your priorities right, resulting in a teenage pregnancy. You told me not to become a mother before I'm ready, and at times when I felt impatient to grow up, you reminded me that everything in life has its time.

I remember when I finished primary school, and you didn't have the money to send me to high school. You were devastated and cried, not realizing that I could see you. I saw every bit of the struggle you were going through. I thought you were going to give up. Your tears made it certain you had lost hope, but you shielded me from this part of reality and only showed me strength. This taught me a great deal about life, although you may not realize it. I learnt that not everything comes easily, and even if you feel discouraged, you have to find solutions.

Writing this, I want you to know that none of your efforts have gone to waste. I saw your bravery and your strength, and I am truly grateful that you overcame those difficult times. Mom, I promise you, I will give my best in my studies and work, and one day, if I am fortunate enough to be a mother, I will pass on your love and wisdom. I will be a blessing in your life and provide whatever you need to live comfortably. I love you more than I can say.

Thank you, Mom.
With all my love, your daughter

Margaret Mueni
Lenana Girls High School, Kenya

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I opened up the storybook deep inside my mind,
My story, the one you helped me begin,
Searching for the beginning of our bond,
That remains embedded within.

You've always cared for me,
All my diaries must have your mark,
My inconsistent handwriting, beside your specially drawn heart,
I forgot those pages, deep inside my mind,
But opening it up years later,
My heart subjected to those nostalgic times.

Somewhere along the way, my chapters grew longer,
My feelings bigger, my heart stronger,
Complexities thrived within my mind,
About friendships, or whatever nonsense at the time.

There began our daily book talk,
Not physical books on display,
But ones we kept locked and hidden away,
Shared so easily with comfort and safety,
You became the best friend which I needed greatly.

Yet it never crossed my mind,
What the covers of my storybook mimicked,
Another book out there, so detailed but unfinished,
Across the years, I finally read that book,
And today, I'm saying the words I should have.

No story shall ever compare to what I read from you,
No author can ever take my heart whole like you do,
With a story so wide, never-ending,
A story so joyful, it's cleansing,
A story I won't ever stop pleading,
To hear, see more of,
In my daily book talks with you.

And now, I open up the storybook deep inside my mind,
Now older, more mature,
Realising my book began, and will continue,
To cherish the book that is yours,
Forever and always,
In my long list of future acknowledgments.

Maya Rahman

Mulberry School for Girls

THE WOMEN WHO WALKED BEFORE ME

There's a softness in you
That could break walls without a sound—
Not with anger, not with force, but with the quiet
strength you've found.
You never had to raise your voice,
But your silence held me close,
And healed my broken heart the most.
You're the reason I keep going,
Even when the world feels like it's breaking down.

I'm the newborn and you're my guide
You're the lioness, and I'm your pride
Carried not just in your last name
But in the choices you made,
In the resolve you wear like your second skin displayed.

You bore the weight like a breathless ground.
Your hands stayed steady, always open.
I watched you stand when others would've run—
And you taught me that love, the real kind, doesn't
yearn.

You learned love from the woman who came before
you,
The one whose bangles sang softly in the kitchen
Whose hands smelled of jasmine and something close
to home
Who taught you to give without keeping score.
You carry her stories in your stillness,
Her patience in the way you hold witness,
Her fire in the way you protect the ones you love
And I love her for giving me you.

You held the storm and gave me sun
Sheltered me and let me run
In your silence I learned to speak
In your strength I found me.

And when they ask me where I come from,
I say: from the women who never left the battlefield –
the lioness birthed her pride.

Mehak Rana

Saint Mark's School, India



Fahmeeda Shathie Abdur
Mulberry School for Girls

SACRIFICE

The arms that sweep,
The eyes that weep,
The eyes that don't sleep,
Just to move.
Just to save up.
Just to have enough.
Moving across lands that she had never been to before.
Moving alone without her mother or father.
Her siblings were only a moment in time –
Now gone.
All alone, on the seas, she travelled, cradling the tiny baby in her hands.
Her life.
The sea filled with anger, rocking the boat side to side.
The clouds started crying, and thunder lit up that dark and frightful night.
She gripped her baby tighter than ever before.
Her woollen jumper penetrated with water.
Shivering.
Just to keep her baby warm.
And safe.
But she knew she had to pull through this.
She knew this hardship of pain and suffering would only last a matter of
time.
A single tear rolled down the mother's pale cheek.
But she couldn't show that she was weak.
She couldn't be seen as meek.
Past generations had passed.
Great-grandmother struggling to educate her six young kids.
No food.
No money.
No nothing.
Saving up, counting every last pence.
Education was a must.
But they made her fail.
She was alone, with no help.
No support.
I will make a change.
Then grandmother tried to change everything.

She took the little bit of education she had and turned a hostile environment clean.

"Study, study, study,"

she said every day.

"Just get that blinkin degree."

I will make a change.

And then my mum repeated to me what every generation told their kids:

"Study, study, study."

But nothing happened.

This is for the woman who travelled overseas—not for herself, but for me.

Many generations have passed, and everything stayed the same.

Don't worry, Mum, I will not fail you.

I will make a change.

Meryem Ahmed

Connaught School for Girls

AN ODE TO MATERNAL

Whenever you grieve, I grieve too.
Not as a shadow, but as someone
who feels you
And when we fight?
It's not just noise.
It's my heart cracking,
in the silence that follows your voice.
You bring a thirst, a hunger for
kindness.
You never leave.
Even when you're gone,
your fingerprints stay, like warmth
in a seat
after someone's walked away.
My time with you?
It's a treasure.
Glass-fragile, like a snow globe
I'd never share
Because it's mine.
Because you're my mother.
Because the world doesn't
understand the way you open
windows
when all I see are shut doors.
My mother.
My rock.
You don't wear a cape,
but I swear, you're a hero.
You went through storms. Through
trials. Through silence.
And I wasn't there—
Not as a witness.
Not as an equal.
Just... your little one.
But even then,
you looked at me
and called me your strength.
You filled me.
With a love that aches

but never wounds.
With a fire
that doesn't burn,
but builds.
You see me—
not just as a child,
but a step forward.
A stone in your garden
of growth and gold.
And still, you pour out light
like it's easy.
How do you do that?
How do you give
and still smile
like it's the first time?
My cheeks hurt from joy when
I'm with you.
My teeth show
not in defence but in delight.
I would leap through time
if it meant mending you.
No wall too high.
No wound too old.
I'd climb back and hold your hand
through it all.
Because I love you.
Not just now, but in every breath,
every version of me that ever
existed.
And I'm not tired of saying it.
I will say it again and again
until the echo of my voice
fills the deep, endless place
where my love for you lives.

Nabilah Abdul Hakim
Sekolah Seri Puteri, Malaysia

THE RECIPE OF MY MOTHER

In my eyes, my mother is a delicacy.
A rich blend of personality.

A jugful of love.
A cup of saccharine generosity.
A pinch of fiery passion.
A splash of adaptability
A unique recipe.

Mixed well with a whisk,
Not missing a sprinkle of empathy.

She's best with tea,
PG Tips to be specific.

Made from an ancient teapot,
Paired with a pack of rich tea biscuits.

Me and my mum.
Her recipe imbued into me.
A mix of worlds – British and Bengali.

She left me her surname,
Her fruitful flavour.
Right in the middle,
Right where it should be.

Nafisah Chowdhury
Mulberry Academy Woodside

CONTRITION

You may not be perfect,
And you may not be the best,
But you still deserve the utmost respect,
'Cause at least you tried your best.

I remember your sacrifice,
I remember how you are burdened,
I remember what made you fierce,
I remember how you are softened.

I love you, Mother,
I adore you, Mother,
And I owe you, Mother,
And yet, I've lied to you, Mother.

I know this makes no sense,
I try and try justifying nonsense,
Lies so deep it's numbing my senses,
Smiling while trapped in false pretences.

I've lied more times than I can count,
That the guilt is too hard to mount,
Then I left you in the dark without a thought.

And now, I'm letting it all out,
So here, in this poem's conclusion,
Through my guilt and my confusion,
The last of my locution,
Let this be my restitution.

Nur Fatin Farzana binti Nazlan
Sekolah Seri Puteri, Malaysia

SHE-WOLF

Protective and caring,
Assertive but vulnerable.
A she-wolf in her pack.

Who stands her ground when
challenged,
Not letting anyone bring her down.
She paves the way for everyone
Wearing her confidence like a
gown.

Who loves her family dearest,
Taking care of others too.
Never letting others suffer alone.
Going home to her own zoo.

Who bears the burden of pain,
But never letting it show.
Who brings joy to many,
Even when she feels low.

Her judgement shows no bounds,
Always thinking through.
Watching over the life she created,
Making sure her cub can be as
strong as bamboo.

She wants to travel with her pack,
Exploring the forest all day.
She wants to fulfil her ambitions,
Before she fades away.

Her gaze stuns many,
The blue hue so bright.
The rays of sun hitting her fur,
Making the blonde streaks as shiny
as light.

Her genes not as strong,
Her cub looks the opposite.
Yet nothing could doubt that they
belong,
Just like a negative and a positive.

A she-wolf and her cub.
Their connection so strong.
My mother and me,
And our love that lasts lifelong.

Olivia Nugaras
Mulberry Academy Woodside



Milana Cerniseva
Mulberry Academy Shoreditch

MY BRAVE WARRIOR

Our brave mother of three, our guiding light.
You stood strong through life's darkest nights.
With every step, you shielded us from pain.
Working tirelessly, your love remained.

You are like a lioness, protecting her cubs.
You brought us up, even though it wasn't all in God's way,
With love that never stops.
You never wanted us to experience the pain,
The pain of your youth.

You encouraged us, even when we felt discouraged.
You are our light in the darkness, shining bright.
You saw us through school and still guided us today.
You stayed with us even when dad left home.
You discipline us when we need it, in a loving way.
You never made us feel abandoned, always near and there
You brighten our faces with joy and happiness.
In your eyes, we see a love so true.
A heart that beats for us all, through and through.
A hope that never fades.

You pray for us, forgetting to include yourself.
A selfless heart, a love that's beyond compare.
You're both our mother and father, our pillar of might.
Providing for us, through morning's first light.
Your sacrifice, and evidence of your love.
A mother's devotion sent from above.
With every sacrifice, you showed us the way.
Through life's challenges, you paved path each day.

Your strength, a diamond that never breaks.
In your arms we find solace.

We're grateful for you, all that you do.
For the late nights out, and early mornings too.
For the sacrifices, the love you impact.
Our gratitude for you is beyond profusion.

Your love is a gift, a treasure so rare.
In the darkest places, your light still shines.
A constant presence always there.
Like a light that never fades.

You taught us how to be strong, to face each test,
No matter how hard the trials get.
And with your guidance, we're grown and found our best,
in all that we do.
In your shadow, we find our way.
With every step, our love for you won't subside.

We're blessed to have you, a mother like you.
Our pillar of joy, our every worth.
I promise to build a legacy that reflects your values,
Your courage, and your ways.

A single mother, who never gives up.
Guiding us forward, every step of the way.
Your legacy of values forever remains.

And one day you will sit in the chair,
The chair of grace,
The chair of joy,
And you will be cheered.

Ugoji Onyinye

Alimosho Grammar School, Nigeria

DEAR CAYIS

Dear Cayis,

Where do I even start? Maybe by saying you're one of the most special people in my life and that I'm extremely lucky and grateful to have you in it. But you already know that. So, I'll start with this: remember those questions I asked you for "writing homework"? Well, this is it.

Since day one, you've been there, always by my side. And I've been looking up to you since that moment. You are part of the quilt which is made up of generations of women who helped you become you, and now, you're all passing that to me. Each of us a different part of it, resembling a pattern, but varying in colours. And I feel like yours and mine are quite similar.

I just hope one day I get to reflect on your braveness, beauty, intelligence, resilience, independence and your scholarship to study abroad in England.

Our bond is very special, and we both have very similar personalities. It's like we're a couple of keys with intricate detail. We both have the same bow, but we open different doors. And while the rooms they lead to are contrasting, they also have many matching items. Like our curiosity, distractedness, or love for reading, which leads me to one date: June 9th, 2018 (my 8th birthday). You gifted me a copy of "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone." At first, I was reluctant to read it, but once I did, I loved it, which contributed to our similarities. Pages turned and chapters changed, and now here I am, losing myself in a book every day, which is my favourite hobby, and with four more copies of that same book. All because of you!

Everything you've ever done for me — being with me because you want to, playing with me, wearing matching pyjamas together, caring for me, never lying to me, making me laugh, always giving me the best advice, and so much more — has planted a seed. And from it a tree has started to grow. Do you see it? I do. And its sturdy trunk and long branches only keep blooming beautifully.

Even though you're not my real biological mum, you definitely feel like it.

Love,
Your Chica

P.S: I did get a little emotional while doing this, but that's just because I love you.

Paula Gomez García
Colegio Carol Baur, Mexico

BACKS TOGETHER, HEARTS FOREVER

You raised me with slippers and sermons combined
And a look in your eyes that could realign time.
You had the power of ten google searches,
And found things I lost in the fridge or the couches.
You're less "Mother Goose" and more "Mother Galaxy"—
Spinning warmth from cosmic chaos,
Stitching stardust into my soul
With your thread of boundless love.

At five, in Sentosa, do you remember?
We posed — backs touching like bookends.
I thought it funny, how even when we weren't facing each other,
We were still connected.
You said, "See? That's family.
You don't always have to look; to know they've got your back."
I didn't know then, but now I do:
You weren't just teaching me to pose,
You were teaching me to trust.

At ten, I turned you into my makeup muse,
Smudging lipstick and blush, a colourful ruse.
You laughed through the chaos, a patient queen,
Teaching me love is kind, even when messy and seen.

You are the gardener of relationships,
Planting seeds of kindness in life's shifting ships.
You taught me to water friendships with care,
To cherish the thorns as much as the air.

You made forgiveness look like second nature.
"People aren't perfect," you'd whisper,
Folding anger like laundry.
I learned that loving people "no matter how they are"
Isn't weakness — it's the strongest kind of fierce.

You taught me
That family isn't built with bricks,
But with bruises kissed,
Food shared, tears tasted.
You were never just "mom,"
You were the architect of every hug,
The compass when I lost direction,
The umbrella in a world that often drizzled doubt.

If there's a heaven,
It must smell like your cooking
And sound like your humming —
Half a tune, half a prayer.

So here I am,
Pen in hand,
Older now, and trying to mother the world
With the same gentleness you planted in me.
Sometimes I fail.
Sometimes I fall.
But I rise with your words still stitched
To the hem of my heart.

This letter is too short for everything you are.
But maybe this poem will do —
Back to back, like Sentosa.
Heart to heart, like always.

Prisha Anand

Saint Mark's School, India



Yasin Miah
Mulberry Stepney Green

DEAR AUNTIE FEEFEE

Dear Auntie Feefee,

I never liked matcha. To me, it always tasted too much like earth, grassy, bitter, and beloved mostly by those trying too hard to be different. But everything changed in February 2024, when the world seemed to cave in on me. I was unravelling, barely holding on, whispering silent pleas to the universe to let me disappear, because the weight of living had grown too heavy. And then there was you. You reached for me, not with grand gestures, but with quiet certainty and led me to a small store that had just opened. They boasted the best matcha in the world, though in truth, it was pale, milky, and cost more than it was worth, like a promise dressed in fancy clothes but hollow inside. Still, we shared a single glass. And in that tiny act, in the middle of all that emptiness, we found something that mattered. We talked about everything and nothing at all, and for the first time in a long time, I didn't feel so alone.

I remember the way you looked into my eyes, steady and kind, as if you could see all the cracks I tried so hard to hide. You told me, gently but firmly, that it was never my fault that the place I was meant to call home turned its back on me, leaving me to feel like I was nothing more than a burden. It wasn't my fault that I carried so much anger and how that was the only language I had ever been taught in a world that never felt safe. And in that moment, something softened in me. Because you didn't flinch. You didn't turn away. You saw straight through the chaos and the noise, and instead of shrinking back, you stayed, offering comfort in words that fit like warmth on a cold day. You listened to me vent with a patience no one had ever given me before.

Ever since that day, matcha has become my favourite drink. That vibrant green, once so unfamiliar to me, now feels like a symbol of how far I've come. It reminds me of growth, of healing. The foam that lingers on my lips always brings back the memory of you and how gently, how quietly, you left your mark on my life in ways I'll never forget. My opinion of matcha changed the same way my view of life did because of you.

And when people ask me, “Who’s your hero?” I don’t even hesitate. I talk about you. Because you weren’t just a stepmom, you were something far more than a title. You carried me with a kindness I never knew could exist. You taught me that family isn’t defined by blood, but by love, by presence, by the quiet ways someone chooses you, day after day. You were, and still are, the mother I needed. My mother figure in every way that truly matters.

From,
Your Stepdaughter

Qaseh Binti Duhairi

Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (P) Jalan Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur

A LETTER TO MY MUM

She is the river, steady and wide,
Flowing with power, no need to hide,
Her hands are the soil, warm and deep,
Where roots of my dreams are allowed to sleep.

Her voice is the mountain, strong and clear,
Shouting with wisdom, nothing to fear,
Her smile is the sun, fierce and bright,
Breaking the darkness, commanding the light.

She is the oak, enduring and bold,
With branches that cradle, strong and gold,
Her eyes are the stars, sharp and true,
Guiding me forward in all that I do.

Her love is the rain, constant and pure,
Filling the earth making life endure,
She is the wind, wild and free,
A force that lifts, a force that carries me.

In every season, her presence remains,
Like rivers, mountains and endless plains,
She is the dawn, the morning's glow,
A fire that endures and continues to grow.

Rachael Makanjuola
Townley Grammar School

SALWANA, THE QUIET STRENGTH

There are women who speak loud like thunder,
And then, there is her –
Salwana, the soft wind that moves the trees,
The calm in my chaos, the reason I remember
That love doesn't have to shout to be strong.
She is the hush before sunrise,
The silence that teaches,
The steady warmth in a world
That often forgets how to be gentle.
She listens – not just with ears,
But with a heart that hears
What's never said aloud.
She carries others' burdens like wildflowers,
Cradling them gently,
Never crushing their petals.
When the world doubted me –
Whispering that I wasn't enough,
That I'd never be more than a dreamer lost –
She stood like an anchor in a storm.
No lightning, no loud roar –
Just her quiet faith
Holding me upright
When I was too tired to stand on my own.

She saw me before I saw myself.
She loved me not for who I was expected to be,
But for every raw, real, reckless part of me.
And when I broke –
Oh, she gathered the pieces
Like sea-glass on the shore,
Turning them over in her hands
Until they shined again.
There are days I wonder
How someone so soft can still stand so tall.
But that's the magic of her –

She bends like the willow,
Yet never breaks.
She asks for help, not out of weakness,
But out of wisdom –
Knowing that even strength
Sometimes needs a hand to hold.
And still, through every season,
Every fall and every bloom,
She is there.
My steady ground, my safe return.
Her love is the kind you build your world on –
The kind that stays
When everything else fades.

She doesn't ask for much –
Just a moment, a smile, a word of truth.
But she gives everything:
Time, warmth, hope,
And all the small, unnoticed sacrifices
That only a mother like her could make
Without ever expecting to be seen.
So here I am,
Singing the name that cradled me into strength:
Salwana.
A name I will whisper into every prayer of thanks.
A name I will carry like a lantern
Through every dark hour.
Because she is not just my mother –
She is my proof that love,
Real love,
Can change everything.

Rahadatul Aisy
Sekolah Seri Puteri, Malaysia

SHE GAVE ME HER FUTURE

Mama, I know.

I know that before I even took my first
breath,
You gave up a life you could have
lived.

You left behind your home, your
dreams, your future,
So that I could have mine.

You walked away from classrooms
filled with your own hopes,
Traded textbooks for recipes,
Exams for endless chores,
So that one day, I'd never have to
choose.

You folded your ambitions into the
suitcases you carried to England,
Tucked them between saris and spices,
Whispering to yourself,
"One day, my child will live the life I
could not."

Mama, I wish I could have seen it then.

I wish I had known what it meant,
When you sat beside me at the
kitchen table,
Watching me study with a longing in
your eyes,
A longing not for yourself,
But for me.

I wish I had known how it must have
felt,
To see me hold the books you once
dreamed of reading,

To watch me walk toward the future
you had imagined for yourself.

You never said it,
But I know now.

I know that when you said, "Study
hard,"
You meant, "Make this worth it."

When you said, "Do your best,"
You meant, "Live the life I couldn't."

When you said, "I'm proud of you,"
You meant, "You are my dream, finally
coming true."

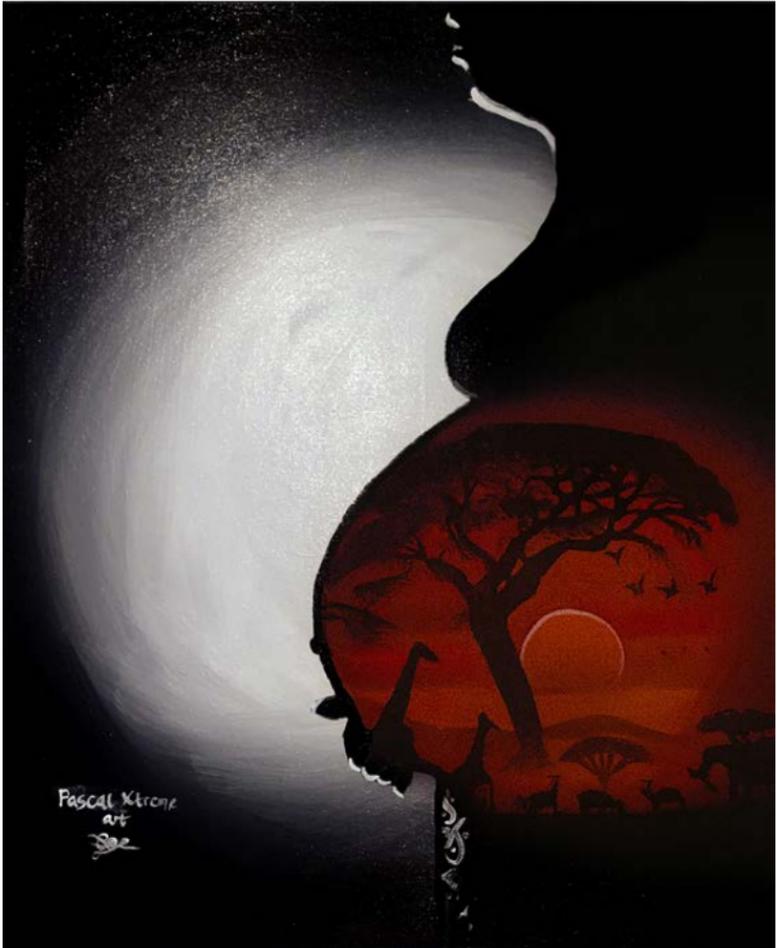
Mama, I promise.

I promise that when I stand on my
own two feet,
It will be with the strength of the
woman who built me.

I promise that when they call my
name,
I will carry yours with me,
So the world will finally see the weight
you carried alone.

And one day,
When you sit back and see what I've
become,
I hope you know.
This life was never just mine.
It was always yours too.

Raita Uddin 10L
Mulberry School for Girls



Ogba Pascal
Alimosho School, Nigeria

THE ONE WHO STARTED IT ALL

A little label is placed on the plant pot you provide,
The name "Rochelle" is what you've set aside.
I grow into a little bud, ready to create,
Learning to ride a bike at the age of eight.
I grow and grow to become a little flower,
Full of dreams, and full of power.
I may face the wind, storms and rain,
But this flower is resilient and will rise up again.
You sow the seeds, and I begin to grow,
I'm on stage now, are you ready for my show?
A little label is placed on the plant pot you provide,
The name "Rochelle" that I now wear with pride.
But why should we forget the one who started it all?
The gardener that took care of me from when I was
small to tall,
Giving advice and drinking different teas,
While I try to teach her Japanese?
Storms may come and winds may blow,
But my gardener prepared me for this,
After all, she taught me everything that I know.
One day even I might become a gardener,
But even if I don't, my mum will always be my partner.
It might not be obvious, and she might not know it,
But I love her with all of my heart,
Even if I do not show it.

Rochelle Wallace
Mulberry Academy Shoreditch

A PINK CARNATION

Sowed into the soil was the seed of a delicate flower,
A fragrant pink carnation would bloom,
A mother walked by, with her newly born child,
A look of unconditional love in her eyes.

A small sprout had shot out of the soil, as the sun shined
and rain drizzled.
The mother wept out of happiness as her child said her first
words after hours of help and walked her first steps.

The flower grew a few inches and gained more colour.
The mother comforted her child, as she cleaned the wounds
and wiped the tears that flowed down from her eyes.

Because of the sun, the flower started to bloom, showing its
radiant colours.
The mother applauded as her daughter won the science
competition with the project they spent sleepless nights
making.

The weather became worse, and the flower started to wither
and lose colour.
The mother cried herself to sleep, wondering what she had
done, to make her daughter become distant, to change
from the loving girl she knew, to someone she couldn't
recognise. Someone she saw as a best friend had changed.

The weather improved and the flower slowly started to
regain more colour.
The mother healed as her and her daughter grew closer like
they had once been.
Each other's first best friends.

I love you so much Mama.

Sakina Moosa
Nower Hill High School

MY FLOWETTE

With his hand, the creator planted your seed.
You were watered by the springs of the West Indies
and there your roots were planted.
Floreen's fruit.

Sprouting from rich soil, you would grow to flourish and
flow across the waters.

You spend your earliest days basking in the tropical sun,
swaying in the brisk breeze.
Your roots deep, your petals aromatic.

A stem that would extend and establish in the English
channels.
Where you learn to be one who tends and cares for others.

Your light-hearted personality radiates through, so when
the sun shines it glows in you.

Fun and vibrant is your aura, no matter your atmosphere
or circumstance.
The flower who stands bright and beautiful, evoking
feelings of joy and wonder.

Your obsidian hair dwindles on your shoulders
The subtle sheen on your bronze skin.
Your bright pink lipstick makes you pop,
Whilst your purple nails – that resemble hyacinths –
add to the mix.

The beauty of Flowette,
The flower that blossomed into a majestic tree.
The flower that inspired me.

Sanaila Tamba

Mulberry Academy Woodside

THE HEART THAT HOLDS THE HOUSE

I hear her hum while making tea,
A tune from some old movie,
And somehow that sound
Always makes the morning less
moody.

She remembers things I always
forget –
Homework, water bottles, socks.
She does it all without a fuss,
Like it's as easy as ticking clocks.

She's not loud about it,
But she's always there –
In the way my lunch is packed,
Or how she finds my missing pair.

I've seen her stay up late
Just to stitch a button right.
And once, when I was sick –
She stayed up all night.

She doesn't ask for much –
Maybe a bite from my plate,
Or a few minutes of silence
When the noise gets too great.

I don't always get her –
We argue, I roll my eyes.
But deep down, I know
She's the reason I rise.

She taught me how to bend, not
break,
To stand and never sell.
I'm just a turtle in this world –
And she, she is my shell.

They may not see the strength she
holds,
But I have known it well.
She's not just 'mom,' she's what I
seek –
A story I have been dying to tell.

She's oceans deep beneath the
calm,
A tide that never sways.
She holds the weight of storms
alone,
And still brings sunny days.

Her heart is one that holds the
house,
With gentle hands and tender care
Her love, a flame that lights our
ways,
And fills our world with glow so
rare.

Sarah Verma
Saint Mark's School, India

DAKAM, DALAKAM (MY MOTHER, MY HEART)

Dakam, the whisper in my dawn
Your voice is a lullaby before my dreams are drawn.
In your arms, the world was small,
But your sweet love outgrew it all.

When I was young and full of fear,
Your precious lullabies would soothe my ear.
The night would fade, the dark flew far,
Because you carried light in your heart.

You taught me more than books could show,
Even how to dance and how to throw.
With every word and every touch,
You gave me strength. You gave so much.

Dalakam, the heart you made,
Soon the heart that played and played.
You guided me through the hardships and the things in vain,
And taught me how to bear the pain.

You spoke of Koyê, land of flame,
Where poets carved the Kurdish name.
Of mountains wrapped in morning mist,
And shepherd's songs the wind had kissed.

You showed me how the river flows,
Through village nights where fire glows.
We sat by lamps of kerosene,
While you told tales of Goranî dreams.

In woven rugs and saffron rice,
In every stitch, a sacrifice.
The cats you kept, the scarf you tied,
Were stories worn with ancient pride
You toured me through my heritage and thus,
I thank you for this, supas.

If ever I am kind or true,
It's only 'cause I learned from you.
If ever I am brave or wise,
It's thanks to tears you hid in the skies.

Daya, I love you,
And everything you do.
Your love paves my way,
Your beautiful smile brightens the day,

So here I stand, both grown and small,
Still dearing for every loving call
Dakam – the one I trust
Dalakam – Forever I must

Savana Maroof

Nower Hill High School

Glossary

Kurdish	>	English
Dakam	>	My Mother
Dalakam	>	My Heart
Koyê	>	Kurdish city called Koyê
Goranî	>	Music/sing (in this context musical dreams)
Supas	>	Thank you
Daya	>	Mum



Nela Kasiak
Mulberry Academy Woodside

IF IT WAS THE LAST DAY ON EARTH

If this was it, the last day on Earth, I would say all the things I never could.

I

Firstly, I'm sorry.
Not because I've done anything wrong, but because you gave everything.
You gave *everything*,
and I didn't give enough.
I could've.
I should've.
I'm sorry.

II

Secondly, wait.
Wait for me,
please,
you promise?
I still need to walk in the rain with you,
I still need to show you my favourite places,
I still need to laugh more,
To talk more (though I've spoken still)
I still need to see more,
to *be* more.
So wait,
Friend,
So we can do it together.

III

Lastly, I love you.
Not in the traditional sense, but it's still love.
When people think of love, it's romantic.
But this isn't romance.
This is you
And me.

And that's love enough for me.
So yeah,
I love you.

And if it was the last day on earth that's what I would say.
But it's not.
Maybe I'll say it anyway.

Scarlett McNab
Nower Hill High School

IN THE SCENT OF TANGERINES

In winter's quiet,
we sat beneath the sun,
its warmth wrapped around us,
tender, sweet upon the skin.
You sat beside me, peeling a tangerine,
Its citrus misting the air with a gentle fragrance.
"Mumma, what was your childhood like?", I asked.
And there we sat, sharing stories of your youth,
piece by piece, just like the tangerine.

I looked at you then,
and saw the delicate lines drawn on your face,
while your smile reached your eyes—
softening into gentle dimples.

You spoke kindly of your two brothers,
your first teaching job, your students,
your mischievous and loyal friends,
and the first time you poured your heart into a meal,
that finally tasted like home.

As you went on with every memory that lived gently on
your tongue,
there was a quiet strength,
as subtle and flowing as the peel's tender fold,
not just in the sweetness you offered,
but in the tough peels of hardship, you carried silently.

You continued with your light-hearted college stories,
your funny stories with my brother, and then with me.
"You're adopted," came a not-so-brotherly voice from
behind,
"No, you do not say that about my doll," you said,
and the sound of our laughter accompanied the gentle
fragrance in the air.

With the sun overhead,
tangerine peels lay between us,
the air tinged with citrus.
The sunlight grew brighter,
as your skin glowed, just like mine.

The warmth I feel isn't from the sun above,
but from you.

Shreya Khurana
Saint Mark's School, India

THE EARTH BENEATH MY SKY

She is the lighthouse
cradling storms in her hands,
a keeper of tides, pulling grief from the moon.
Each wrinkle a map of sunrises she's sewn,
each sigh a prayer cast from marrow to stars.

She is the hearth where winters collapse,
a quiet forge where broken bones learn warmth.
In her silence, volcanoes sleeping with grace,
in her laughter, spring breaking out of frost.

She is the tree that drinks lightning for fruit,
roots deep in time, branches tangled in dreams.
Her voice, a quilt of thunder and lullabies,
stitching calm into the fabric of chaos.

She is the bridge built of breath and will,
spanning rivers of doubt without falter.
Her hands, soil that turns wounds into wildflowers,
her eyes, mirrors where lost souls find themselves.

She is not just the wind behind my sail,
but the ocean, the anchor, the stars.
She is the storm that chooses to be calm,
the warrior who wears love as armour.

Sofyah Binti Saiful Nizam
Sekolah Seri Puteri, Malaysia

A STITCH IN THE TAPESTRY OF LIFE

For our mothers, who stitch the seams of life,
With threads of kindness, honesty and courage,
You have carried on through so much strife,
A stitch in the tapestry of life.

At 11 your father's farewell,
A needle fell still, went quiet,
But you carried on, kept going, your family as well,
A stitch in the tapestry of life.

Three husbands entered your carefully woven loom,
Each thread another chapter, a story spun
Out of it came two new lives, two sons, a family that will bloom,
A stitch in the tapestry of life.

One son was lost too soon, a thread untied,
Cancer claimed way too young,
He is my uncle, or was before he died,
A stitch in the tapestry of life.

Oh Gran, you may not be my mother, but you have achieved so much,
You kept sewing, kept weaving, kept going,
And for that I look up to you in pride as such,
You are so much more than a stitch in the tapestry of my life.

Sophie Fox
Townley Grammar School



Zoe Chopra
St Mark's School, New Delhi

DEAR MUM

Dear Mum,

You're the woman that I idolise. You're the woman that makes me care. You're the woman who makes me recognise to show effort, to fight, to share. You're the woman who doesn't take no for an answer; you may seem soft but you're as tough as steel. When I was a baby and things were tough, it was you who was missing meals. To keep me fed; to keep me clean, you worked hard with your head held high. When dad was out working to pay the bills, it was Shay at home, you and me.

I'll never forget how you dedicated eight years of your life to me, putting your singing career on pause. But you made that decision without second thought, without hesitation of yours.

Then I was at school and soon you were at work, things were looking up. It was years ago, and I was too young to know or fully understand. But when I see you, in pictures and in person, I say out loud that 'that's my Mum'.

Dear Mum, I hate it when we argue, I hate it when I cry. I don't mean to be cheeky, spoiled or rude. I promise not to lie. I promise not to forget who I am, where and who I came from. I vow to love you through and through, my love so big it might need a chain on. To stop it bursting through the walls and seeping through the floors. Mum I love you so much you take up my heart, but your position will never fall.

I know it's your first time living Mum, you say you don't have a clue. But let me tell you when I look in the mirror Mum, I don't just see Dad, I see you. In your smile lines woven through time, are the generations of wisdom before you. You break the cycles of fear and oppression that once were norms so I can too.

I see you when I smile and I see you when I think. I see you when I challenge misogyny and racism. You are that defiant streak. That streak in me that makes up who I am. You're the streak that makes me care. You're the streak that makes me stand tall and strong. You're the streak that makes me share.

Dear Mum, the struggles are in the past with your singing and work under

your belt. I see your success everywhere, with you soaring it can be felt. I feel it when I encounter obstacles or when I face things that are hard. The advice you give me verbally is what gets me through but it's when I see you living. Strong. Radical. Untouchable. The woman that you are. That is what makes me proud. So I leap over those obstacles and jump over those struggles with that emotion in my veins. Mum, my head is filled with your words. I never want you or them to go away.

Mum I've passed the limit of my words so I must end this now. I'm sorry my love can't fit into 400. We are at 528 right now.

Surya Brown

School 21

THE REASON WHY I AM ME

I admit I'm not the best child,
I never listen and I cause problems,
I make you worry and I make you mad,
And maybe sometimes, I make you sad.

You argue and shout, but I know you mean well,
You try and you try to get into my teenage mind,
And if you get in, you will find,
Your worst nightmare, worse than mine.

I remember my childhood,
But the memories aren't very clear,
But I remember the time,
When things were full of cheer.

You were my hero,
One of the women I looked up to,
You are my mother and even through our highs and lows,
You birthed me and that won't change.

In my eyes you will always be,
That beautiful woman,
The reason why I am me.

You grew up in a home,
Where things weren't always great,
And now I'm older,
I understand why you are the way you are,
You're the parent you wanted,
When yours weren't always there.

Trudie Cohen

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf, Wales

WHEN LOVE HAS A SCENT

With so many scents in the world,
each one different and unique,
but only one
is special to me.

When I close my eyes,
I can still perceive that sweet,
floral scent.
That's what her love is like—
filled with notes
of freshness and elegance,
for she is a young and joyful
woman.

Despite a childhood
marked by loneliness and confusion,
being an only child
with nine half-siblings,
her scent carries a touch of
nostalgia and melancholy.

Though it may seem delicate,
it is as strong and intense
as her character and courage—
she took a leap
when motherhood entered her life.
She didn't hesitate for a second
to leave her studies
to become a full-time mother,
trading her freedom
for what she calls
"the most beautiful responsibility."

She has never regretted
or complained
about what could have been,
and even when life
tested her with many hardships
and brought her to the brink
of death,
she rose like a mighty eagle
to take flight again,
no matter the obstacles.

Her subtle, delightful scent
reveals a woman
who is creative and intelligent,
who raised us
with love and patience,
teaching values, humanity,
and respect.
That scent, so genuine and wild,
like a lioness
protecting her cubs—
that's what she is like as a mother.

A powerful aroma
that captivates and inspires
with the mysteries and experiences
she's lived through at such
a young age.

Her woody scent,
like oak, makes her strong
and able to stand tall
through any hardship,
yet citrusy,
with both bitter and sweet
memories.

Like vanilla, when she sees
we're sad or nostalgic—
it simply evokes
positive and comforting feelings.

She is the most tolerant and bold
woman,
my greatest source of inspiration.
She takes me by the hand
to make daring decisions,
to take risks, to dream,
to achieve my goals.

She says nothing is impossible,
that I can do anything,
she's helped me believe in myself.
I've learned so much from her
that someday I hope
to become a small essence
of her scent.

I still don't understand
how all these aromas
can exist in such harmony.
But I'm grateful and proud,
deeply blessed
by the purest love and scent
of a mother.

When I close my eyes,
I can still perceive that scent,
velvety like a rose—
That is my mother!

With so many scents in the world,
each one different and unique,
but only one
is special to me.

**Valentina Mailén Santillan
Vargas**

Colegio Carol Baur, Mexico



Anisa Rahman
Mulberry Academy Shoreditch

TAPESTRY (UNWOVEN)

At the table, after dinner
the walls are thin, we're both bitter
that we know neither of us
could ever win.

I couldn't have bested you
I did not want to forgive you
I love you.

Threads of silk, spilling
spools of wool, slipping
needle pushing through the
woven fabric, catching
on the untied string
at the back of the
canvas.

Still, you persist
making me concede
living my life like you.

Tapestry of love, hanging
on wall of white, haunting
family tree withstanding my
unloving hand, slashing
a cedar twig branching
from you to me.

I shoved the blame on you
I did not try to forgive you
I love you.

Still, you insist
harking back to my misdeed
like you unflinchingly do.

You draw back your bow to shoot
consoling prose but they wound
like any other arrow

you unfurl your arms to envelop
me whole but they incinerate
like any other blaze.

Inherently, you know how
to push my buttons
for you had stitched them
onto me.

Intrinsically, I know how
to maim your heart
for we share the same
anatomy.

We are too much alike
we brandish our pikes
we know when to strike
we keep on attempting to be
forgiving
we know there is no good in feigning
that we could ever be better than this.

At the table, after dinner
the room is messy, we're not over
our fight but our souls, they ache
for a soothing salve so tonight,
just for tonight,
I will lay in your embrace
and confide all my secrets to
you.

I love you, it is sincere and true,
I just can't forgive you
I know you can't forgive me, too
I love you.

Wafiyah Ahmad Fakhruddin
Sekolah Seri Puteri, Malaysia

TO THE ONE WHO ALWAYS MAKES ME LAUGH – EVEN ON THE HARD DAYS

I admire so many things about you,
but the one that shines the brightest is your strength.
You've raised us all by yourself, and even when the world feels heavy,
you still find a way to smile – especially with those terrible jokes
that somehow make me laugh every time
(even when I say they're not funny).

Every time I make a mistake, you don't just correct me – you guide me.
You never yell to break me down – you speak to build me up.
You correct me with love, and that helps me become a better person.
Something I've always noticed is that you give everything for us.
All your time, your love, your patience,
your last bite of food, and even your quiet moments –
you give it all, without asking for anything back.

Sometimes I look in the mirror and think,
"Wow... I really am like her."
And I know you were mischievous like me when you were little.
Maybe that's why we understand each other without even talking.

I want to work on being more peaceful –
to stop fighting with my brothers,
to help bring calm into our home.
Because I don't want you to be upset.
I love our little team, where I am never alone and we work together.

You're not just my mom.
You're my example,
my safe place,
my favourite joke I pretend not to laugh at,
and my biggest inspiration.
With all my love,
Your daughter

Ximena Balut

Colegio Carol Baur, Mexico

OUR MOTHER

Our mother, in America
In 2020
A new virus breaks out
She worries about us
Will we survive?
Her own safety doesn't cross her
mind
Just ours
Only ours
Yet she still runs
And runs
Trying to put us to sleep
"Good night, sweetheart" she says
And kisses our foreheads.

Our mother, in Lebanon
For longer than we know
Has been fighting for our freedom
As bombs explode at our feet
She watches as buildings collapse
into rubble
Scared of our safety
Not hers
Just ours
As she runs everywhere
For shelter, she runs
Still trying to put us to sleep
Over the sound of gunshots
Tears striking her cheeks
She kisses our foreheads.

Our mother, In England
In 1346
The black plague wipes out half the
population
And she worries we're next
If black boils appeared on our
bodies
She'd run to the plague doctors in
despair
Worried for our safety
Just ours
Her tears would drown her face
As she runs
As she runs everywhere
Yet she'd still put us to bed
Saying, "Good night, sweetheart"
And reluctantly kissing our
foreheads.

Our mothers across the globe
Our mothers through history
Our mothers who survived war
Our mothers who survived plagues
Our mothers put us first
No matter the risk
Our mothers love us more
Than any other could.

Zahraa Patel

Connaught School for Girls

GLOBAL
Girl
LEADING



Participating schools

Alimosho Grammer School (Lagos, Nigeria)
Bexhill Academy (Bexhill-on-Sea, UK)
Colegio Carol Baur (Mexico City, Mexico)
Connaught School for Girls (Leytonstone, UK)
Great Valley High School (Philadelphia, USA)
Lenana Girls High School (Kiminiini, Kenya)
Mulberry Academy London Dock (Tower Hamlets, UK)
Mulberry Academy Shoreditch (Tower Hamlets, UK)
Mulberry Academy Woodside (Haringey, UK)
Mulberry School for Girls (Tower Hamlets, UK)
Mulberry Stepney Green (Tower Hamlets, UK)
Nower Hill High School (Harrow, UK)
Penola Catholic College (Melbourne, Victoria, Australia)
Saint Mark's School (Meera Bagh, New Delhi, India)
School 21(Newham, UK)
Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan PerempuanJalan Ipoh (Kuala Lumpur)
Sekolah Seri Puteri (Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia)
Townley Grammar School (Bexley, UK)
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf (Llandaff North, UK)

To access the free resources used to create these poems and letters,
Please visit www.appliedstories.co.uk/for-our-mothers

To find out more about Global Girl Leading, please visit
www.mulberryschoolsfoundation.org/global-girl-leading

The site features:

- Videos about crafting letters
- Workshop plans
- Writing guidance and worksheets

If you would be interested in taking part in a future iteration of the project,
please email info@mulberryschoolsfoundation.org to register your interest.

To join the Applied Stories mailing for news of future digital audio projects
please email fin@appliedstories.co.uk

Global Girl Leading

For Our Mothers 2025 was commissioned as part of Mulberry Schools Trust's Global Girl Leading programme, with the aim of developing girls' confidence, creativity and awareness of their place in a global sisterhood.

Global Girl Leading is a leadership development programme 'by girls, for girls'.

Supported by teachers, girls together learn to lead change.

They co-create learning activities which include negotiation skills, teamwork, risk-taking and campaigning. They are given platforms and coaching to make their voices heard.

The shortlisted poems and letters in this anthology were featured at the Global Girl Leading Summit on Friday 10th October 2025.

To listen to audio-recordings of these tributes and to find out more about Global Girl Leading, please visit forourmothers.world

Judging panel

Afsana Begum

Fin Kennedy

Jill Tuffee

Lucy Gregg

Siân Smith

Special thanks

Go Agency

Shanaz Jameson

Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE

All the teachers and staff involved in making *For Our Mothers* such a success.

About This Anthology

Bringing together a vibrant tapestry of poems and letters penned by young writers from across the globe – including voices from the United Kingdom, Mexico, Australia, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Malaysia and the United States – this anthology is a lyrical celebration of the bond between child and mother—or a maternal figure. Each piece in this collection is more than just a tribute – it is a testament to the power of memory, gratitude, and emotional truth.

Whether through quiet reflection, vivid storytelling, or lyrical praise, their words resonate with authenticity and emotional depth. Together, their voices are a moving reminder of how deeply maternal care shapes our lives, transcending cultures and generations.

Readers are invited to pause, reflect, and celebrate the maternal figures in our lives. This anthology is a global chorus of appreciation – a mosaic of love stitched together by the hands of the next generation of poets and storytellers. May their voices inspire you to remember, to cherish, and perhaps even to write your own tribute.

Mulberry Schools Trust

The Mulberry Schools Trust is a flourishing multi-academy trust. Through its founding school, Mulberry School for Girls, it has pioneered outstanding education in East London stretching back over 50 years.

The Trust is committed to ensuring outstanding achievement for all. It has a clear vision that all students graduate from its schools as highly qualified, confident and articulate young people with a wealth of experience. Central to the Trust's approach is the belief in the power of partnerships with families, local schools and the communities it serves. For more information about the Trust and its schools, please visit the website below.

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