

Bar Sagi Prize winners

First Prize

Held by the past -- Oshra Abecasis, aged 16

Held by the Past

You miss the memories, not the face,
Not the voice that filled a silent space.
It's not their touch that haunts your mind,
But moments lost, now hard to find.

The laughter echoing through the halls,
The midnight talks, the whispered calls.
The way the world felt soft and new,
When days were gold and skies were blue.

You chase the shadows of a time,
When hearts beat loud and love could rhyme.
But not for them your longing burns
It's for the time that won't return.

A ghost remains, but not of flesh,
Just fragments wrapped in memory's mesh.
And though they're gone, you understand:
You miss the feeling, not the hand.

Second Prize

The child they called "mature"— Layan Abu Salah, aged 14

The Child They Called "Mature"

They'd say, "She's mature" with a proud little nod.
And I took it as a praise, like a blessing from God.
But growing up early can feel like a shove-
You learn to be steady instead of be loved.
And I wore that sweet label as best as I could,
Not knowing "too grown" never meant "understood"

They'd hand me their worries like books to be stored,
Stacked high on my shoulders I never ignored.
I carried their stories, the bitter and sweet,
Mistaking the weight for a personal feat.
I thought being helpful made everything good,
Not seeing how much of myself I withstood.

I learned to be careful with every reply,
To measure my words so none would sigh.
I polished my manners, my timing, my tone,
A child with the posture of someone full-grown.
And every small triumph felt like it should-
A quiet reminder to stay what I "could."

I'd watch other kids being loud, being free,
A little bit jealous of who I might be.
But I played the role that the elders admired,
I followed the script that they thought childhood would,
Forgetting that joy also needed a foothold.

And somewhere along all the trying to please,
I learned to speak softly, to move with a breeze.
To listen too closely, to bend when they lean,
To hide all the parts that felt messy or keen.
I grew in the spaces they thought that I should
While learning that silence wasn't always good.

Third Prize

Beneath the olive tree – Sapir Golomb, aged 15

Beneath the olive tree

Beneath the olive tree
He built himself a swing
She came along, singing a song
Beneath the olive tree

Beneath the olive tree
He sits still on the swing
She asks him why, he says goodbye
Beneath the olive tree

Beneath the olive tree
Empty is the swing
She sits alone, he longs for home
Beneath the olive tree

Beneath the olive tree
She waits beside the swing
He comes no more, her hope is torn
Beneath the olive tree

Beneath the olive tree
There's no one near the swing
She found out why, she cried and cried
Beneath the olive tree

Beneath the olive tree
He has found his peace
No more lies, nothing to hide
Beneath the olive tree

Beneath the olive tree
Years have worn the swing
She sees the way, her heart still waits
Beneath the olive tree

Honorable Mentions

Where the quiet hearts rise – Lian Ghanem, aged 14

Where the Quiet Hearts Rise

In the quiet of the morning,
when the sky is still holding its breath,
a single ray of trembling light
slips softly through the darkness.

It touches all the silent things
branches, the broken stones
and then the world remembers
how to glow again.

We trudge through days that warp us,
nights that steal our names,
but somewhere in the deepest dark
a spark refuse to die.

It beats like wings inside us,
a tender, fearless flame,
whispering that even sorrow
is simply a door that is turned to gold.

And when the storm has finished
There seems to be
the long and bitter song,
we lift our faces to the dawn
And then we discover that we're not the same.

For every heart that shatters
learns the secret of the light:
that beauty is born in breaking,
and hope in learning how to rise.

So take my hand, wanderer
together we'll cross the shadows,
carrying small, hot flames in us
towards the waiting day.

I hate you – Sheine Angart, aged 15

I hate you...

I hate you for making
me laugh every time I hear your voice.
I hate you for putting this
smile on my face every time you smile.
I hate that spark in your eyes
every time you talk.

I hate you for making me think:
“Maybe just today.”

I hate you for making me want to live
another day.

I hate you for making me fall in
love with you.

Do other animals – Itai Shapiro, aged 17

Do other animals

Do the ants ever small talk
About colors, about books
Does the parrot know the boardwalk
As its freedom or deaths' hooks?

Do the elephants stand solemnly
Under the drizzle of the rain
Do they wonder condescendingly
About the meaning of all pain?

Do the cheetahs feel quite deeply
Knowing that they'll never fly
Do they feel sorrow more discreetly
Or do they have no voice to cry?

Do jellyfish survive on purpose
Is death ever present at mind
How come they float beneath the surface
Without much depth inside to find?

Do the blackbirds breathe with meaning
Or do their lungs just do the work
Is it they ever crave for feeling
Or is their living just a perk?

Do the spiders sleep at night
At ease, content to have eight eyes
Or do they get dysphoria of sight
And wish to see less sunset dyes?

Do all the foxes miss their grandmas
And wish that they could hear her voice
Do all tabby cats regret existence
Or is it only the lazy ?

Do all horses wish to be ridden
Or are desires beyond our control
Do all animals keep something hidden
Or are we the only ones who have a soul?