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# A Glimpse of Whimsy: Short Children's Stories

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A GLIMPSE OF WHIMSY: SHORT CHILDREN'S STORIES

By

Emma Hutchinson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
(English)

The Honors College

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wrote this for Owen and Zoey who, inspire me to play. I will not stop trying to make  
you smile.

## THANK YOU

To my family, without whom I would not have to courage to try

To my friends who are so accomplished and who prove that we are capable of greatness

To my advisor and my committee for seeing the value in my work

To the Honors College for giving me the space to find my voice and listening when I  
speak up

And to the college of my heart always

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# ARTIST DISQUISITION

## WRITER'S HISTORY

I decided to be a writer when I was in the third grade. My class was learning about writing children's books, and our teacher brought in guest speakers to explain their writing process to us. We even had an author do a workshop to help us write our own stories. I still have the book I wrote, homemade text copyright, misspellings and all. The story is about a girl who tries to help her friend who is a tree that cannot grow leaves. I've never been one to dabble in realistic fiction. After stapling the pages together and showing my book off to my parents, they had the good foresight to save it. My first book landed on a bookshelf, forgotten, gathering dust for the next ten years.

For my high school Senior Capstone, I was inspired by my young nephew to write a children's story. One of the wonderful parts about being an aunt is that I get to rediscover my favorite childhood stories through his fresh eyes when I can sit him down long enough to read them. Authors like Eric Carle and Robert McCloskey and Jan Brett started swimming through my mind and got stuck there. Since this was senior year, it eventually came time to visit possible colleges. Amherst College, Mount Holyoake College, and Hampshire College were all on my list, so my mom drove us out to Amherst, MA to look at schools, but the real highlight was our visit to the Eric Carle Museum of Picturebook Art. In the gift shop, I picked up *The Way to Write for Children: An Introduction to the Craft of Writing Children's Literature* by Joan Aiken. That's where I first got the idea to write for children. It just fit. My love for children, fairytales, and creative writing seem to come together in this natural marriage of elements.

Coming into college, two things I knew for certain: I was at the University of Maine because of the Honors College, and I had no idea what else I wanted to do. One aspect of stories is that they pop up everywhere. It's in history, anthropology, English, and communications, so I had an interest in all of these fields. I was undecided, and I felt it. Somehow, I ended up in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, but I was still lost and spinning in circles. Between the general education credits that are covered by the Honors Civilization sequence, and the Advanced Placement credits that I came into college with, I had more freedom to choose my schedule than most first year students. So, I started sampling academic areas that I was interested in. I enrolled myself in History 107 East Asian Civilization. It was exciting to learn so much about cultures that I am so far removed from, but I decided that, while enjoyable, history wasn't the right fit for me. The next semester I tried an online course in the Childhood Development and Family Relations department, CHF 201 Introduction to Child Development. Again, it wasn't a fit. While I love children and learning about them, I was more interested in playing with them than in studying them.

However, that same semester was when we read the Lais of Marie de France and *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer in Honors 112. That's when lightning struck. The stories were an inspiration. These two authors created stories that lasted centuries and were still being read and studied by college students. I'd had no idea that folklore was an option, that people still study fairytales and myths. My Honors preceptor was Professor Sarah Harlan-Haughey and, unbeknownst to me, the university's resident fairytale expert. She was an inspiration to me. I didn't even sample a class before diving in and declaring a major in English with a minor in folklore. This has since proved to be the right choice.



English fit me. It felt sort of like coming home, comfortable and natural. I immediately loved my classes because of the reading and discussions we had. It had all the elements that I enjoyed about my Honors preceptorials. These weren't lectures where I was told information and expected to memorize it. I was expected to think and to engage with the material. In Introduction to Creative Writing and Foundations of Literature Analysis, we were encouraged to talk to each other and weigh differing points of view. This was what I needed from my classes. I did go through with a couple of folklore classes, but I eventually realized that my real love was not studying these stories but using them to guide my own creative writing.

When it came time to think about possible thesis projects, I knew I wanted to do a creative thesis because it would be more representative of me and my journey through college. I'm not sure when or how I decided on children's literature. It probably had something to do with reading to my niece and nephew, with how my writing tends to be whimsical and quirky instead of dark and twisty, or with the sheer number of fairytales that I have crammed into my head. It must've been a combination of sorts. I can't remember the moment I decided to write children's stories for my thesis.

There's something quite cyclical about where I've ended up, though. It feels as natural as it did when I joined the English department. I didn't have my high school capstone in mind, and I didn't even remember that first book from third grade until I discovered it on the bottom shelf with its blanket of dust. The decision to be a creative writer has been one that I've made many times throughout my academic journey. I've decided and written a bit and gotten distracted, but I keep coming back to it, and each time I renew my promise to myself. I promise that I will be true to my own creativity.

This means allowing myself to be inspired by other artists, but always striving to develop my own authorial voice. I promise that I will be true to the reader. This means that even as I try new forms and experiment with my writing, I will not distract from the simple joy of reading. I will not be hand-feeding a moral or agenda, but I will not present a story to the reader that I cannot believe in. Most importantly, I will not stop learning and I will not stop growing as an author.

## METHODOLOGY

Before I picked up a pen with the intention of writing for children, I knew I needed to learn more about children and the existing children's literature. Even though I had studied creative writing, I had never purposefully written for children before. Because I draw heavily from elements of mythology and fairytales, my writing naturally has the tone of the children's stories that we know today. I use magic, repetition, and lightness to create a world of fanciful whimsy in my writing. However, that does not mean I have written for children before.

Writing childlike stories and writing children's literature is different because authors naturally write towards an intended reader. My previous writing was done during college level creative writing courses in which the work would be read and critiqued by my peers and professors. This meant that while writing those stories, they were my intended readers.

I knew I needed to understand children better since I had them in mind as my intended readers for my thesis. I also knew that I wanted to have a better understanding of different kinds and levels of children's literature, as well as a child's thought process during different stages of development. Since most of my undergraduate work had been supervised learning and research through a class, I felt most comfortable starting my research for my thesis by taking a course on children's literature. I wanted this not substitute but to supplement the research I did during the thesis process. This would be the foundation and basis for my thesis.

During the 2018 Summer semester, I enrolled myself in an online course through the University of Southern Maine. Professor Joyce Martin taught the EDU 336: Children's Literature course. Throughout the summer I studied: the various genres of children's literature, criteria for evaluation, renowned authors and illustrators, issues and resources related to children's books and teaching, and children's response and ways to involve children in literature. A few renowned novels that we studied together were: *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White, *The Giver* and *Number the Stars* both by Lois Lowry, *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt, *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen, and *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan. We also read picture books such as *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen, and *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by B. Potter.

A typical week required us to read a children's book, read a chapter or two from *Children's Literature Briefly 6<sup>th</sup> Edition* by O'Tunnell, Jacobs, Young, and Bryan, watch a forty-minute lecture, and participate in discussions on BlackBoard. Two large projects that I completed were an Author Profile on Robert McCloskey and a Book Record with annotations on books that we read together and independently throughout the course of the summer.

During this class I first heard the phrase "precise words used accurately." That is how Professor Martin described the language that children should be surrounded by. This is a phrase that I try to keep in mind with all my writing, now. I believe the best way to convey meaning and express emotions is to use precise words accurately. Even more, this means that we should not stunt or alter our language for children when we are talking to them or writing for them. To use short and simple words robs the children of the chance to learn and expand their vocabulary. Part of the fun of reading is learning more and

discovering different ways that words can play together to make meaning. Sometimes they paint a vivid picture, sometimes they bounce and roll off the tongue in pleasing ways. “But children are not reading for fun; for them it is all deadly serious” (Aiken, p. 9). This means that children read to learn rather than to relax. Authors create a handicap for themselves and for the readers when they limit the vocabulary they use in an attempt to ensure clarity for the reader. I remember when my second-grade teacher sat me down and showed me how to use a dictionary because I kept asking her what different words in my book meant. It is an empowering experience to be able to take control of your reading rather than relying on an adult to explain a word or a sentence to you. When authors disregard the seriousness of the child reader, they disrespect them and deny them the chance to grow and to learn and gain some autonomy. Through this class I learned how much respect for the reader is necessary to create an enjoyable and worthwhile reading experience.

Another step I took to learn about children’s literature over the summer was my internship with Islandport Press. They are a small publishing company based in Yarmouth, Maine. Since the publishing industry is saturated with so many books, especially children’s books, Islandport Press found a niche for themselves in books written by New England based authors about New England characters and settings. To take from their website: “Islandport is a dynamic, award-winning publisher dedicated to stories rooted in the essence and sensibilities of New England. We strive to capture and explore the grit, heart, beauty, and infectious spirit of the region by telling tales, real and imagined, that can be appreciated in many forms by readers, dreamers, and adventurers everywhere.” They publish books for readers of all ages in fiction and nonfiction, and they also create and publish a seasonal magazine called Islandport Magazine.

This company was a perfect fit for me because their location, size, and focus. First, I planned on spending the summer living in Portland, Maine because there are more professional opportunities closer to Portland than my hometown Topsham and it provided me more freedom than living at home. Second, I was an addition to a very small team, which meant I got a closer and more hands-on experience with the editing, publishing, selling, and distributing process. From reading and evaluating manuscripts to packing and shipping orders, I got to try it all. Some of the most valuable experience I gained from this was learning how to read manuscripts and evaluate them for a group of intended readers that I am not a part of. Islandport Press's reader base is the average Mainer or New Englander: white, blue-collar, and over 65. I learned how to put aside my own personal reading taste and look at the manuscript through the eyes of the intended reader. This skill came in handy in evaluating my own work and revising it for the child reader.

Third, as a writer, I have heard over and over and been taught and told to memorize that I should write what I know. This is not a literal mantra, but it is a mantra about authentic literature. It doesn't mean write nonfiction about all the facts you've collected. It means writing using what you know to authenticate and expand on what you are writing. Even if the story is about a three-eyed monkey running away with a baby in a stroller, the fear that the mother feels has to be real. It also means drawing from real places and people to cobble together a complete picture of something new. Since Islandport Press works with New England authors on New England based books, the manuscripts that came in tended to have many of the same themes and similar plots. A sullen teenager, probably from the city, is sent to spend the summer in quiet Smalltown, Maine with one or two of their grandparents and through the process of getting to know each other better and respecting and learning

from their differences, they all end up getting along and sorry that the teenager has to return home for the school year. Or the inhabitants of a slowly dying coastal or mill town band together for support during a shared tragedy. Or the sullen teenager helps the town innovate and adapt to newer technology. I read many of the same kinds of manuscripts and I saw how some writers take the write what you know mantra to literally mean write about what has happened to you. I saw that many of these were the manuscripts that were rejected because the same or similar stories had been done before, and there was no fresh take. Because of this experience, I learned about many of the tropes and plots that have been overdone and that I should avoid unless I know I have something worthwhile to add to that mountain of stories.

From my class, I learned about children's literature from the perspective of a teacher who will read to their class and teach them about children's literature and help the children to grow. I learned about what a teacher looks for in the books they provide their students. From my internship, I learned about children's literature from a publishing standpoint. I learned about what an editor and publisher look for in a children's book and what they stay away from. I saw that besides good writing, there is much more that goes into making a book successful. In short, publishing is also publicizing.

I also had the chance to do some line editing for another Maine themed project with a Maine based writer, *How to Catch a Keeper* by Stephanie Mulligan. Professor Deborah Rogers referred me to her when I shared the news that I had been accepted for the Islandport Press summer internship. During this time, I got to focus on the rhythm of the picture book she was creating. Like my own stories, this was a short story, so the word choice, pacing, and rhythm were all elements that stood out more than in a long chapter book. This was

good practice because I had not paid particular attention to rhythm in my own stories before, and it is easier to suggest edits to someone else's work rather than to change my own. I also learned how to pay more attention to the sounds of the sentences. In a picture book this is very important because there is a greater chance that an adult will read the book out loud to the child reader. It benefits the story if the words are beautiful and flow easily because the reader will not be stumbling over the sentences and interrupting the enchantment of the story or breaking the suspended disbelief. I realized that if the sounds of the words fit together well, then the meaning will not get lost.

On top of this summer work, once I decided to write for children, I spent more time trying to study the ones I know. My nephew Owen is now five and my niece Zoey is now two. They are two of the brightest lights in my life and an inspiration for me. During my freshman year, I took an introduction to childhood development course because I missed Owen so much that I thought I wanted to work with children. This course taught me about the different stages of life and development and learning that children go through. However, throughout the course of that semester, I realized that I was much more interested in playing with children than in teaching them. This is a preference that has ended up in all of my stories.

In focusing on playing with Owen and Zoey, I created more of a free and fun relationship with them than I would have if I was fully focused on teaching them lessons for the future. It is a difficult line to be the adult and an authority figure in their lives, but to try not to exercise that authority over them while we are playing unless it is necessary to prevent insult or injury. Because of this relationship, they were more at ease with me and more themselves. I picked up on their mannerisms and quirks. Many of these inspired me



and informed how I write to create a child's voice. I mentally took note of specifics that I could use, and even wrote a couple down in my idea journal. I loved to watch how each of the kids learned to talk and expand their vocabulary. What especially excited me was how they would use what they knew to help them make a guess at the best way to verbalize something new.

One instance that stands out was when my sister and the two kids were over at my family's house for dinner. After cleaning up the table, I sat down in the living room with a small plate of cookies and desserts. Owen noticed me right away. He stared up at the bottom of the plate, which was all he could see from his height. After a second of this silent begging, I encouraged him to ask my sister for permission. Without taking his eyes from the plate, he shouted towards the kitchen and the general direction of his mom. With her permission I handed him one of the cookies. Then, it was magical. His eyes lit up. "Mom," he shouted again as he ran to the kitchen, "it's sprinkle flavored!" I'd never heard something described as sprinkle flavored before. Most of the time, a cookie has sprinkles or is topped with sprinkles. However, since he didn't know these phrases or couldn't remember them in his excitement, he tried another way to explain the cookie. And it makes sense. A cookie that has sprinkles must also taste like sprinkles and is therefore sprinkle flavored. I wrote this new turn of phrase in my idea journal because I wanted to remember this glimpse into how his brain worked to describe the cookie.

My idea journal started as an assignment for my very first Honors 111 preceptorial. Professor Ronald Nadeau teaches drawing and painting in the University art department and required each of his students to get an unlined notebook to draw and doodle in throughout that first semester. I filled up over half the pages with scribbles and musings. I

used a regular lined notebook to take notes on each of my classes, but I'd have the smaller black one open beside it every day. Even after the semester ended and I was no longer required to use my notebook I continued to fill it. As I went through the journey of finding the right major for me and settling on English, my doodles changes from pictures to snippets of ideas for stories. Now, I try to keep track of ideas, thoughts, words and phrases that catch my attention. Barely any of them are fully formed. They come to me in dreams or pieces of conversation that I've overheard. I rarely elaborate more than a few words on each idea. Part of my goal is to record what gave me the idea and to preserve the feeling of excitement and possibilities that I feel when I find a new idea. A few of my favorite that I still have to write about are "bumpkinhood vs bumpkinship," "attachable parts that will work, a tie on tail to give balance or lend an extra hand," "charmed blue bottled water," and "museum-like ice castle hidden in hedge maze in Paris guarded by old lady museum guards/librarians."

Usually, these ideas come to me and then sit in the journal for a while. They wait there until I decided to put pen to paper and flesh them out. I'll put it in the journal and, if it keeps nagging at me, then it's exciting enough write about. It's that process of nagging that keeps me thinking about it and testing different possibilities for it in my mind. In other words, if an idea is good enough to write about, then letting it marinate in the journal until I have a better vision of how to write about it will only give it more flavor and focus.

Once I decide that an idea is worth more words, I write the initial rough draft, or as Professor Deborah Rogers once insisted they should be called, my shitty first draft. This is my time to get words onto a page. For this initial draft, I always handwrite in pen in a lined notebook. I do this so that I can't erase or change what I have already written. Sometimes

I cross chunks out or make an asterisk and add a paragraph in the middle, but for the most part I focus moving forward. This helps me keep my inner editor out of my head, so I can write more. Usually when I am writing an essay or creative work on my laptop, my inner editor is present and telling me what to change or how to reword a sentence, and I try to make a paragraph perfect before I move on to the next part. However, I have found that it is much easier to write creatively and without thinking critically if I do not have the option of editing as I go.

After I have a finished initial draft, or at least enough pages to work on, I transcribe the handwritten copy onto my laptop. I use this process to do minor edits and changes. It helps to clean up some of the scratched out or added paragraphs so I can visualize the structure and format of the story better. If the first handwritten draft isn't finished yet, then taking a break from writing creatively to reread what I have written can help me to come back to the story with a clearer idea of how to continue it. I repeat this process until I have a full draft.

I have heard throughout my college career from different books about writing such as *On Writing: a memoir of the craft* by Stephen King, from my writing classes, and from my mentors that the best way to become a writer is to develop a writing practice. Write every day at the same time in the same place for a set amount of time or for a predetermined number of pages. This repetition and this practice will create a writer. I had heard about this method of developing a habit so many times that, despite the warning that this was not the only writing method, I began to think of it like the only writing method worth practicing.

At the beginning of the Fall semester, I set out to develop one of these writing habits for myself. I also kept a writing journal where I would record my thoughts and where I could hold myself accountable for my process. On September 11th I wrote,

Now that I've filled out my schedule more, I am going to wake up earlier, so I can spend my breakfast hour writing. If I am excited about anything I was writing earlier, I will continue it, but I won't limit myself to that. . . I will use the morning time to write about any dreams that I want to, even if it's putting it in the (idea) notebook.

Last week I managed to write most mornings. Yesterday, I had a headache and I never ended up writing. This morning I was on my phone and focusing on getting ready more. To make up for that I am going to write 2 handwritten creative pages today, once tomorrow's homework is done. . .

I am going to follow up in journals about if my goals are reached.

I was able to up and hold myself accountable throughout this process by keeping track in my journal. Some examples of this are: "I didn't write this morning. I only wrote a page yesterday" (9/12), "I didn't write over the weekend, but I did add 5 new ideas to the notebook" (9/17), "I feel very behind. The habit of writing that I meant to start hasn't been working. . . I need to move my writing time to the middle of the day and move to the library to do it so I can focus more" (9/20). My journal entries show that, even though they didn't quite keep me on track, they did keep me honest about my progress.

The journal also helped me find parts of my failing writing habit that I could alter to fit my schedule and style better. I started out trying to write in the morning because that is when I knew I had free time, but even more so because I had heard that it was one of the

better times of the day to write creatively. This is supposed to help because it comes before the rush of the day and before I forget my dreams from that night. However, I am not a morning person. My mornings either start quite lazily with a cup of coffee and breakfast and a couple of hours to get ready, or I have a meeting that morning and I am already in a rush by the time my five different alarms have done their job to get me out of bed. Neither of these types of mornings are conducive to writing a thesis, at least not for me. However, even when I tried moving my writing time, I still ran into trouble. Part of the problem was that I wasn't taking a lot of classes, but I was quite involved with extracurricular activities, which meant my schedule was more variable and dependent on meetings. This made it more difficult to find a consistent hour block when I could sit down and focus on my thesis rather than get distracted by another task for the day. Once I realized that finding a consistent time of day was not realistic, I started trying to write for an hour a day whenever I could find the time. Another reason I had not developed the habit of writing was because sitting down to write for an hour was a daunting task that I tended to put off. On October 12th I wrote, "Instead of trying to sit down and write for an hour a day, I need to try writing for shorter more manageable amounts of time like 15 or 30 minutes." This seemed to ease the pressure for a bit and make the task more approachable and more manageable. However, at the time I was stuck trying to create a plot for a story idea from my journal that I couldn't quite visualize. I summed up another point of difficulty in my journal on November 28th,

I realized part of the problem is that I live in such a day to day way that I make long term projects like research and thesis 2nd tier items. From now on I need to do better at making writing a 1st tier item. It will be something

that needs to get done that day. Part of this plan will be to do a little research and take some notes to at least get me into the writing and working mindset.

This should help with letting the creative juices flow.

A big part of the problem is my inner editor. Now that it is almost the end of the semester I feel like whatever I write needs to be good enough to keep.

I just need to get over that now.

The two reasons that I was stuck on the story idea are both touched on in this journal entry. The first was that I was still trying to pressure myself to write every day and failing. This pressure put a damper on my creative process. In trying to stick to the prescribed writing process and make a habit out of writing every day, I ended up seeing it as more of a chore than a creative outlet. Since I was failing to reach my goal of writing every day, I would get down on myself and start to view the next day of writing as even more important. This would also make the task of writing the next day even more daunting because there was less time to create my thesis and more significance on what I wrote that day. The more daunting the task became, the more I would tend to push it off. This cycle repeated until I found the writing practice that works best for me and starting to stick to that. However, that couldn't happen until I changed the way I was thinking about my thesis and the creative stories I needed to write.

The last part of the above journal entry shows a turning point in how I thought about the creative writing that I did for the thesis. My original intention in writing these short stories for children was to write beautiful stories that were fun and that did not present a moral or a lesson for the readers to take away. I wanted my stories to be rooted in playing and expanding the imagination rather than teaching. The thesis was going to help me

explore if it is possible for me to write children's literature at an academic level that did not present the reader with a clear takeaway like food on a platter. This intention made writing a plot difficult, especially when I tried to write without a plan, because I couldn't stop worrying about what conclusion the plot would lead the readers to. I worried too much about what I was writing and the reader's takeaway before I even let myself write the story. Even as I was writing with pen and paper to silence my inner editor, I was still writing with the door wide open by considering my readers too much. The shift in my thinking came when I realized that I didn't have any more time for wishy-washy writing. I just needed to "get over" the fear that my stories would end up pandering to the child reader, the growing pressure of the deadline, and the worry that my work would not be academic enough to count.

Once I decided to stop letting the worry and pressure get to me, I adjusted my strategy and came back to the writing process with a more personalized writing practice. In trying to develop the habit of writing every day, I wasn't giving myself time to think through an idea. Without letting the idea for the story sit in the journal and roll around in my mind before I tried to write it, I had no clear vision for how to move forward and that's where I faltered. However, when I took a step back, I realized that I have been practicing writing for almost as long as I can remember. Ever since I could play pretend, I have been developing storylines and creating characters. It's not the habit of writing every day that makes me a writer. Once I realized that, I stopped getting down on myself and focused on writing in the way that was most productive for me, and I found that I write best when I have an idea that excites me and an understanding of the plot. The excitement for the idea keeps me interested and makes the writing process exciting and enjoyable rather than a

chore. The plot understanding keeps me focused on where the story will go and prevents me from worrying about the readers. This happened even when played pretend when I was little and preferred to describe my mermaid tail or how large my castle was rather than engage my characters in any real action. When I stopped worrying about writing like a real writer or what my readers would think, the task of writing became more enjoyable. I wrote two finished stories using my own writing practice, which is two more than I finished using the prescribed writing habit.

After I had a full first draft, I sent it in for comments and critiques. My two main sources of feedback were my Thesis Advisor Chris Mares and my peers in my English 407, Advanced Fiction Writing workshop. For the class, each student is required to pass in two stories that Professor Howard and the rest of the students would read. The class workshop gave me a space to get varied advice from my peers who specialize in different genres. The overwhelming genre preference of my peers is horror and mystery, and stories that are dark and twisty. At the beginning of each of my workshops, I reminded them that they were not the intended readers for my stories. This allowed them to view my work with different eyes, and it gave me even more perspectives. During the workshop, I learned about parts of my writing that work and other parts that need work. Often, I was praised on my authorial voice and how well I capture the character of a child. The critiques my peers gave me were usually more varied and depended their own reading preference and whether they understood the point of my work. The comments from Professor Howard were the ones that I held in the highest regard because of his ability to get to the root of my stories. He made me ask the important questions such as, what is the point? And, why should the



readers care? He helped me look at what the story does rather than just what it says. This is important because he was a guiding force for bringing my focus back to my intention.

After I had received and recorded all the feedback and critiques, I tried to put my stories away for at least a week or two. This gave me time to forget what I wrote, so I could go back to it with fresh eyes. I consider this to be one of the most important steps in my writing process because the ability to see my work anew allows me to develop my own critiques of my work. I read over it and look for stylistic choices such as sentences length and structure, vocabulary, format of the story, the point of view of the narrator, authenticity of character and dialogue, setting, time and structure, and a finished plot. Once I have read and re-read my work, I make comments about aspects that need improvement and ideas on how to do it. Then I go back to all the other comments I gathered weeks ago from my mentors and peers. I read through them one last time to pick out the critiques that apply to my work and my intention for my work. This is how I decide what I need to revise to make my story clearer and more enjoyable.

The actual process of revision happens in fits and spurts depending on what needs to be done. I use my laptop so it is easier to play around with structure and substitute different words. I also use the highlight and comments features so I can move on from a part that is giving me trouble but flag it so I remember to fix it later. If I need to change the point of view, then I will rewrite the entire story to fix pronouns, voice, and style. If I need to create a more satisfying ending, then I insert hints into the beginning of the story that inform what I should do with the ending. Sometimes I get distracted again and add more detail than is necessary, but I catch that during the next round of revisions. After I feel satisfied with my own revisions, I pass them in to my advisors who either validate my work

or point out aspects that need more attention. I repeat this process until we are both satisfied with the outcome of my work.

My full writing process is not entirely linear. When I think of an idea or find a word or phrase that excites me, I record it in my idea journal. If the idea nags at me, then I know it is worth writing about, but I don't try to write about it until I have a clear picture of the plot. Once I know I will not get lost or bored, I hand write the idea in my notebook to get the words on the page as they come to me and to ignore my inner editor. I turn those into a full first draft as I transcribe it onto a laptop. Even during this step, I write with the door closed and even though I have an intended reader, I do not consider my intention or my reader. I open the door when I seek collaboration and advice from my peers and experts in the field. Then, I give myself time to forget my work so I can look at it more as a reader and critique than as the author. When I revise my work is when I finally consider my intention for writing, my intended reader and their probably takeaway, and the most important question: why is this worth writing and reading? Most often the honest answer is to make myself and others smile.

## LITERATURE REFLECTION

*The Way to Write for Children: An Introduction of the Craft of Writing Children's Literature* by Joan Aiken

I first read Aiken's book my senior year of high school as part of my research for my senior capstone. At that point, I was still trying to find my voice and my own authority as a writer, so I tried to stick as close as I could to the rules that Aiken laid out. Now, there are a few parts I disagree with. Aiken writes about taboos that should not make it into children's literature such as tragedy, depression, and violence.

Much of children's literature uses adult characters and perspectives, and even addresses very heavy themes that we as a society tend to reserve for adults. The difference is how writers treat those themes. For instance, in *The BFG* by Roald Dahl the main character Sophie is a young orphan who gets snatched up in the middle of the night by a giant. While this particular giant happens to be of the Big and Friendly kind, his counterparts are much bigger and much less friendly. These giants snatch children from their homes and eat them in the middle of the night. They even have names such as the Bonecruncher and the Childchewer. This is objectively horrifying even as an adult. However, Dahl's method of delivering this news through the BFG's voice softens that shock, "Giants is all cannybully and murdeful! And the *does* gobble up human beans! (Dahl, p. 13) It is difficult to be too scared of something that is "cannybully" because whether it is read or said out loud, the word is silly and fun. Another more serious example of heavy topics addressed in children's literature is *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry. She uses a child's perspective and sense of right and wrong to look at what it was like to live

through WWII. Lowry writes about many of the taboos that Aiken believes do not belong in children's literature, and *Number the Stars* won the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, the National Jewish Book Award for Children's Literature, and the John Newbery Medal for the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children. Done correctly and skillfully, children's literature expands the child readers understanding of the human experience and putting strict taboos on topics stunts their access to that understanding.

*Children's Literature, Briefly 6th Edition* by Michael O. Tunnell, James S. Jacobs, Terrell A. Young, and Gregory Bryon

The literary transaction theory by Louise Rosenblatt emphasizes the uniqueness of each child. The reader brings a different set up expectations and background of knowledge to each text they pick up. This is the reader's stance and it determines how they read a text. The literary transaction theory states that meaning is created during the act of reading. The literature experience is private and personal for each reader. In writing my stories, I wanted to give the reader questions to ponder when they are done reading. Much of my work is open-ended because I am intentionally leaving more space for the reader to fill in the blanks using their own reader's stance.

My intention in writing children's literature was to create beautiful stories that children would enjoy reading. I wanted my readers to have an aesthetic rather than efferent reading of my work, which is to say I prefer my readers to be engaged in reading for the enjoyment and pleasure of the experience instead of reading to learn a lesson or gain facts. There are long term benefits to reading such as increased knowledge and improved

decision-making skills. However, I chose to focus on the immediate benefits of reading like exercising the imagination, suspending disbelief, and play.

According to Northrup Frye, literature gives us an experience that stretches us vertically to the heights and to the depths of what the human mind can conceive. Literature is supposed to make us think, to look beyond ourselves, get us out of our comfort zone and experiencing something new. However, literature is not meant to promote an agenda. “There is no issue or topic that makes for a well-written story but rather the craft with which is it told” (O. Tunnell et. al, p 17). A text is not better for providing a lesson to the child reader. That understanding of literature often disrespects children. It leads to pandering and talking down to the child. More than that, it can often distract from the aesthetic pleasure of reading the text. When a child does not enjoy reading, it can dissuade them from reading more in the future. I want to stimulate the child reader’s love of reading, so I avoided writing with a specific lesson or meaning.

My intended readers are children between ages seven and nine. Keeping in mind that children are diverse individuals and develop at different rates, I chose this age group for a few different reasons. Children of that age group are usually ready for rich and varied language in their literature. Their attention span is growing, so they can read longer books. They are expanding their imagination and they are able to fantasize more. As children grow older, they tend to have more diversity in reading level. I also chose this age group because it is when children are old enough to read to themselves, but not too old to have stopped letting their parents read to them. Some of my fondest memories are when my mom or dad would read a chapter of a novel to me before bed. And because readers are partners in making stories meaningful, the duality of readers provides a chance to engage with the

story together even after the book is put down. Children can talk with their parents about the story and discuss their different questions and conclusions. It creates an open environment for exploration and fantasizing.

*Keywords for Children's Literature.* "Children's Literature" edited by Philip Nel and Lissa Paul

Children's literature cannot be defined because there are two schisms in the scholarly field about the definitions of what it means to be a child and what it means for literature to be for a child. These two terms separately are contested, and together create an oxymoron. To consider children's literature to be any book or story that is written for child readers, about children, or by children is to disregard the different stages of childhood and to downplay the role that true literature plays in expanding any reader's imagination. The broadest of definitions ignores the differences in how and why children read. It also does not distinguish between the "bubblegum fiction" and the well-written books.

Children's literature is one of the only categories of literature that is defined by its reader rather than the genre. Throughout history and across cultures the stage of life that is called childhood varies, so it is difficult to agree on what qualifies as a child and what qualifies as appropriate for a child to read. On the other hand, children's literature is greater than the texts written for child readers. Much of what we know to be typically children's literature was not written for children. Mark Twain's *the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and many of the fairy tales we know today were intended for adults. However, due to their child characters and elements of

repetition and fantasy, they have been adopted by teachers, parents, and children as children's literature.

The canon of literature is defined and prescribed by academics of the field. It is a term used to distinguish texts that are inherently better than others. However, in the literature that is read and intended for adults, it is also adults who decide which texts to hold to the standard of literature. With the genre of children's literature, there is a power dynamic between the author, who is writing about childhood using child characters or childlike elements, and the reader who is actually a child, who is using the text to expand their understanding of humanity and what it means to be a child.

The author is a person with imaginative interests in constructing childhood . . . and who on purpose or accidentally uses a narrative voice and language that are audible to children. The text of children's literature is one in which this construction is present. The reader is a child who is still in the business of constructing his or her own childhood. . . Where these two conditions coexist, the *event* of children's literature takes place. (Hunt, p. 46)

In presenting childhood to the reader, the author must be as authentic as possible because they are beginning a discourse on what it means to be a child. I kept this power dynamic and the uniqueness of the event of children's literature in mind as I wrote and revised *Ice Cream*, *Icarus*, and *Isla*. I was aware of the child reader's process of constructing their own childhood and I was also very aware of any child's lack of agency over the decisions that shape their life. Part of my goal was to present an authentic version of a child character, illustrate the power dynamic between children and the adults in their lives, and balance my character's agency with an authentic element of stumbling across or

discovering the solution. Beyond that, the best I, an author, can do to write children's literature is to create a well-written story that would appeal to the child readers I had in mind. It is not up to me to determine whether I have written literature or just a good story. I also cannot control whether children read and enjoy my work. There are many gatekeepers that a text must go through in order to be considered literature, children's, and children's literature.

*Shattering the Looking Glass: Challenge, Risk & Controversy in Children's Literature*  
edited by Susan S. Lehr, forward by Janet Hickman

Part of my goal in writing for children, was to omit any politics, agenda, lessons, or morals within my work. In reading *Shattering the Looking Glass* I found that it is just not possible. Chapter 1, "Politics in Children's Literature: Colliding Forces to Shape Young Minds" by Belinda Louie, describes the keepers of children's literature and how politics (ideals concerned with power, control, and regulation) play a factor for each keeper. Authors, parents, teachers, publishers, the public, and the child reader's own personal taste all help dictate whether a child will have access to and will read a text.

As the author, I am the first step and obstacle. I am the creator of the text and the first person to decide what language and topics are appropriate for my intended readers. Intentionally or unconsciously, my own worldviews and biases worm their way into my work. "Children's literature is therefore political because it reflects the perspectives, worldviews, culture norms, and biases of its authors. Many authors assume that their own ideologies are universal truths. Texts can allure unwary readers into an unconscious



acceptances of the writer's values" (Louie, p. 5). This means that even as I was struggling to create a work of fiction without an agenda, I was still accidentally pushing my own ideology. As I did more research and became more aware of the presence of unconscious biases in writing, I grew anxious about what I was writing and how. I would start down a storyline, but I would question each turn and where it would lead me until I grew frustrated and stopped. This happened quite a few times during the Fall semester, so I tried to write and rewrite the same story idea, but since I couldn't see the plot clearly, I questioned each outcome and what ideologies I would be presenting to my readers. I only overcame this anxiety when I started to write with the door shut, as Stephen King puts it in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. This means I stopped considering my intentions and my readers while creating my first draft. I switched to writing what I enjoyed and what I wanted to read. It was only after I had a finished plot that I considered what I was presenting to the child reader. This helped to minimize my anxiety because it helped me come to terms with the fact that I could not keep politics out of my writing, but I could still write a good story that a child might want to read.

*Signs of Childness in Children's Literature* by Peter Hollindale

Hollindale begins his discussion of children's literature with an example that illustrates the dichotomy between what childhood is and what childhood is thought to be. "Father: Stop acting like a child. Son: But I *am* a child! (*Hook* a film by Steven Spielberg)" (p. 7). Childhood and childlike behavior are often viewed as immature and irresponsible. However, this view excludes children from constructing what childhood is for them. It disrespects the child and robs them of the ability to declare, as children, what childhood is.

Like the boy in the example says, he is a child. He should therefore be not just excused but accepted for acting like a child.

The problem lies in the two polar views of what children are. The father in the example holds the view that children are adults in the making. This understanding sees children as humans that need to be formed into adults and taught how to act maturely and responsibly. People with this view usually see childhood as a stage of growth that humans must go through in order to reach the consummate stage in life that is adulthood. These people tend to value children's literature for the educational qualities. Like the father in the example, people who hold the extreme version of this view see children and childhood as a cliché of anti-adultlike behavior.

On the other hand, childhood can be seen as an autonomous part of life. This is more the view that I take and tried to keep in mind during my writing process. It is a way of seeing childhood as a separate stage of life. It places more value in children's activities that enable children to be children rather than teach them how to be adults. In my writing, I did not want to show children how to act in the future, or even during childhood. I wrote to empower children to explore what being a child means and to construct their own childhood. Because "children are affected by the images of childhood they encounter" (Hollindale, p. 14) and each reader creates personal and private meaning for themselves, each child reader needs to see a "multiplicity of childhood possibilities" (Hollindale, p. 15). In my writing, I tried to show multiple perspectives and versions of childhood which is open ended so that the individual child reader can decide for themselves what it means to be a child.



## CREATIVE WORK

*Ice Cream*  
By  
Emma Hutchinson

Barbara Brown was ten years old when she decided to expand the English language. She made the decision when she realized she couldn't describe *The Meaning of Life* to her parents, which she found while rummaging around the musty cardboard boxes in the basement and looking through her mom's vintage clothes and her dad's Boy Scout badges for new dress up materials. There it was, laying crumpled up in a nest of yellowing newspaper, *The Meaning of Life*. Bebe – that's what her parents called her – was so excited she forgot her game and ran up the stairs two at a time.

Earlier that night, dinner had been fine. She and her parents each had a turn to talk about their day. Bebe got through all her parents' questions about what she learned and how much homework she had. Once that was done, she started to prepare a bowl of strawberry ice cream.

“Bebe,” her mom said, “why don't you wait until the table is cleaned?”

Bebe had already brought her own dishes to the sink and resented the admonition. By the time she finished trying to express her point of view and had sat through a talk about collaboration and working together in the Brown house, her ice cream had melted into pink goop. Upset that her parents didn't understand her logic, she'd shoved the ice cream back into the freezer, and had let her feet fall heavy on the stairs to emphasize her frustration as she made her exit to the basement.

But she forgot that tiff in the excitement of her discovery. By now the dishes were all clean and Bebe's mom was in her parents' room with a book in her lap.

“Hey,” Bebe knocked and stood in the doorway, “so there’s this thing in the basement. It’s so cool and pretty important and you need to come see it.”

Her mom put the book down and took off her reading glasses for a better look at Bebe, “Goodness, you’re a mess. Look at all that dirt. It’s going to make both of our allergies act up. What were you doing down there?”

“You’re not listening to me. Just come on.” Bebe started to grab her mom’s hand but paused as she unsuccessfully tried to stifle a sneeze.

“If I go down there, I’ll start sneezing just as much. Can you just tell me about this big discovery? Your dad and I packed up all those boxes ourselves. I’m sure I know whatever it is you could’ve found.”

Bebe made a valiant effort to describe *The Meaning of Life*. She even used the biggest words she knew, like astonishing, brilliant, fabulous, mind-boggling, stupendous, sublime, and wondrous. None of them worked.

“I’m really not sure what you’re talking about,” her mom said. “Why don’t you go get cleaned up and we can figure it out later?”

“You’re always telling me what to do,” Bebe muttered before retreating to her room. There she realized that beyond understanding the immensity of finding *The Meaning of Life*, she didn’t know how to describe it. She couldn’t recall much more than the feeling it gave her. She felt her face get hot and the spot behind her eyes began to burn as she tried to hold back real tears.

Ten minutes later, cleaned and calmed, Bebe knew better than to approach her mom again. Her only other option was to make her dad understand and she found him working on his daily Sudoku puzzle with ESPN on mute.

“Dad, there’s something important that I found that I would like your opinion on. It’s downstairs and I can’t explain it, but it would really mean a lot to me if you came to see it.” She tried a less demanding approach this time.

“I’m surprised you could find anything down there. It’s so dark, I should probably replace the lightbulbs. Why don’t you bring it here, so we can examine it in better light?” He asked.

Bebe hadn’t considered this.

She took a seat next to her dad. They both watched the silent figures on screen run from base to base and Bebe thought about this new possibility. A few minutes passed like this and she realized that *The Meaning of Life* should not be touched or tampered with. Bebe was back where she started without the words to explain herself and unable to make her parents understand anything she said.

Instead of answering her dad, she grabbed the dictionary from the bookshelf and ran back to the solitude of her own room. A dictionary had to have the right words to use. She felt real hope for the first time that evening and she started to work her way through the existing words alphabetically.

*aa: basaltic lava forming very rough and jagged masses with a light frothy texture.*

..

*aapa: an elder sister . . .*

*aardwolf: a nocturnal black-striped African animal of the hyena family, feeding mainly on termites*

This dictionary had more than English. Bebe sighed and sank deeper into the mound of stuffed pandas on her bed.

The clock ticked on as she made her way through *B* and *C*. Half an hour into this endeavor and only a quarter of the way through *D* she gave up. In her frustration she kicked the book off her bed. The thud echoed from the wood floor and pink walls, but the sound satisfied her for only a moment. The dictionary fell open to a page full of *L* words and *Lexicon: the vocabulary of a person, language, or branch of knowledge* caught her eye. Bebe's branch of knowledge just wasn't big enough. She realized she couldn't read through and memorize an entire dictionary, and she knew it would be too difficult and take too long to learn another language to explain *The Meaning of Life*. Her only choice was to do it herself and create more English, but to describe it correctly, she needed to get another look at *The Meaning of Life*.

Bebe waited until the whine of the T.V. stopped and her parents' murmurs hushed. By the time she was certain her parents were asleep, the clock on her nightstand read 11:00 pm. She'd never stayed up so late before, but she couldn't get caught going back into the basement, so she couldn't start feeling bad about ignoring bed time, now.

As a precaution, she put on her fluffiest socks to muffle her footsteps. And rather than turning on any lights, she grabbed the spy flashlight her dad gave her as a birthday present last year and stole a peek down the hall. It was safe for now. There was no light coming from underneath her parents' bedroom door.

Bebe made her move.

On her way down the hall she distracted herself from the silence and darkness that threatened to force her back into the safety of her room by considering options for her new words. Glorrific could mean glorious and terrific. Amazesome was a combination of amazing and awesome. This kept her calm as she crept past her parents' room. On the



stairs, she came up with stupereful and sublistounding. After successfully dodging the creakiest steps, Bebe made it to the kitchen. Here, the gentle hum of the freezer beckoned to her. Like a siren's call, it reminded her that she didn't get to enjoy her strawberry ice cream earlier that night. Bebe felt her reserve waver and she let the promise of the sweet pink dessert lure her from her goal. She had her hand on the cold freezer handle when the echoes of her dad's snore drifted down the stairs.

No, she couldn't get distracted now, not after she made it this far on her adventure.

Ice cream would have to wait

With a sigh and a heavy heart, Bebe turned around and marched away from the freezer, and found herself facing her biggest obstacle: the basement door. It was swollen from the summer humidity and it would protest being opened. She licked her lips and twisted the brass knob. It clicked, but the door stuck in its frame. Bebe put all of her ninety pounds into the effort and pulled. The door barked as wood ground against wood, but it worked and revealed the dark chasm behind it.

The weak toy flashlight only exposed the first few steps and Bebe nearly lost her nerve. How could a space so familiar become so daunting hours later? A check back down the hallway towards the stairs to see her parents' light still off reminded her of her purpose. She needed to see *The Meaning of Life* again. How else was she going to find the words to describe it? She took a step, listened, took another, and was greeted with more silence. It took her a full minute to reach the bottom.

Once there, Bebe struggled to wade through the boxes and into the dark. She relied on the flashlight and her memory of where the old clothes were to make her way to the correct box. Positioning the end of the flashlight in her mouth so she could use her hands,

Bebe began to unravel the origami of crumpled newspapers. Beams of yellow light illuminated the swirls of dust around her, but that was all. The only other objects in the box were her dad's badges. The Meaning of Life was gone. She couldn't find anything in the boxes that was amazesome or sublistounding. Her flashlight fell to the floor as she opened her mouth to sob. The box wobbled in her vision as tears filled her eyes. Bebe had lost the most important discovery she would ever make.

Now devastated and in need of consolation, she ran back upstairs to serve herself a glorrific and supereful helping of sweet strawberry ice cream.

*Strawberry Ice Cream (2nd Draft)*

By  
Emma Hutchinson

Barbara Brown was twelve years old when she decided to expand the English language. She knew it would be too difficult and take too long to learn another. Her only choice was to create more English. This decision was made in-part when she discovered the meaning of life in her basement, but the idea didn't come to her all at once. It had been brewing for about a week since she realized her parents did not and just could not understand her.

Dinner that night had been fine. They grilled her about what she'd done at school, which was normal. She got through all their questions about what she learned and how much homework she had. Once that was done, she started to prepare a bowl of strawberry ice cream for herself and her mom lost it.

"Bebe," she said, for that was Barbara's nickname, "why don't you wait until the table is cleaned?"

Bebe had already cleaned her personal dishes and couldn't believe the injustice. After trying to express her point of view and sitting through a lecture about collaboration and working together in the Brown house, her ice cream was pink goop.

"I can't believe this. You guys realize how pointless this has been? I've heard it all before. Now, the dishes aren't done, and I don't have dessert, so no one wins."

This little speech satisfied Bebe that she'd been heard, if not understood. She'd let her feet fall heavy on the stairs to emphasize it as she made her exit to her room.

That was just the first instance in a string of many that week. She grew increasingly frustrated with her parents. It became difficult to sit in the same room with them without some sort of misunderstanding. They continued to treat her like a child.

She knew they weren't going to understand her without some extra help, which was why she was in the basement searching through boxes of her mom's vintage clothes for a dictionary. The dust that she kicked up from moving the cardboard boxes was beginning to make her nose tingle and her eyes water. She took her pink glasses off to wipe the grime from her lenses and rub her eyes and she thought for the fourth time that week about how much she needed a pair that wasn't so childish.

Newly cleaned, the offensive eyewear went back on and a box near the corner caught her eye. Her dad's old boy scout badges were clumped together and beneath them, laying in a nest of yellowing newspaper, was the meaning of life. The exposed lightbulbs shone down and seemed to illuminate it from within. She was struck with the realization and weight of the importance of her discovery. There was no sign that read "Meaning of Life," but she somehow knew instantly what she'd found. Bebe forgot about her original task. This was huge. She ran up the stairs two at a time in her rush to alert her parents.

Her mom was in her parents' room folding a pile of laundry on the bed. Her back was to the door as she watched a group of people of average athleticism in some reality show on T.V.

"Hey, so there's this thing in the basement. It's so cool and pretty important and you need to come see it."

Her mom muted the show and turned around with one of Bebe's shirts still in hand, "Goodness, you're a mess. Look at all that dirt. It's going to make both of our allergies act up. What were you doing down there?"

"You're not listening to me. Just come on." Bebe started to grab her mom's hand but paused as she unsuccessfully tried to stifle a sneeze.

"If I go down there, I'll start sneezing just as much. Can you just tell me about this big discovery? Your dad and I packed up all those boxes ourselves. I'm sure I know of whatever you could've found."

After a pause, the dust and frustration caused tears to well up in Bebe's eyes. She realized that beyond understanding the immensity of finding the meaning of life, she didn't know how to describe it. She couldn't recall much more than the feeling it gave her. Stuttering as she tried and failed to explain it, she only got more upset. She was at a loss for words. She felt her face get hot and the spot behind her eyes began to burn as she tried to hold back real tears.

"Calm down, Honey." Her mom sat down and patted the bed beside her and jumped back up. "I know, let's go get you some tea. That'll help you feel better, hmm?"

Bebe followed her mom into the kitchen and still trying not to cry, watched in silence as a kettle was set to boil. She felt it mirror her frustration as it began to steam and scream. Her mom clearly didn't understand her and was completely oblivious of this struggle.

Five minutes later, after the chamomile steeped and a generous dollop of honey was added, her mom placed the warm mug in her hands. "When you can describe whatever it is to me, then I'll decide if it's worth sneezing over," she assured Bebe. "Now, why don't

you go get cleaned up? Take something for those eyes of yours, and please don't get so messy again tonight."

"You're always telling me what to do," Bebe muttered as retreated to her room.

Ten minutes later, cleaned and calmed, she knew better than to approach her mom again. The controlling woman pretty much forbade her from talking about the meaning of life down in the basement. Her only option was to try to get through to her dad. She found him working on his daily Sudoku puzzle with ESPN on mute.

"Dad, there's something important that I found that I would like your opinion on. It's downstairs and I can't explain it, but it would really mean a lot to me if you came to see it." She tried a less demanding approach this time.

Her dad also refused to listen to her. "Why don't you bring it here, so we can examine it in better light?" He asked.

Bebe hadn't considered this. She stopped herself mid-protest as she became aware that the meaning of life should not be touched, moved, or tampered with.

"I can't, but you have to trust me. It gives off a feeling of happiness and power."

That got his attention, "Barbara, if I find out you have been sniffing or huffing any of paint or glue, you're going to be grounded into next spring. We've discussed how dangerous that it. You could permanently damage your mind or body."

"No! I promise I'm not. I would never. I'm not a child. I'm not stupid."

Bebe concluded that her parents would never trust her as her dad reiterated her mom's request that she remain upstairs. She grabbed the family iPad from the table beside her dad and ran back to the safety of her room. If her parents couldn't answer her questions, then the internet would.

Not long into this endeavor and multiple search engines later, none of the answers provided matched what she'd found. Bebe was back where she started without the words to explain herself and unable to make her parents understand anything she said. That was when she remembered the original reason for venturing into the basement. A dictionary had to have the right words to use. She felt real hope for the first time that afternoon as she flicked to the correct app and started reading.

*aa: basaltic lava forming very rough and jagged masses with a light frothy texture.*

..

*aapa: an elder sister . . .*

*aardwolf: a nocturnal black-striped African animal of the hyena family, feeding mainly on termites*

This dictionary had more than English. Bebe sighed and sank deeper into the mound of stuffed pandas on her bed. This could take longer than she thought.

The clock ticked on as she made her way through “B” and “C.” She was halfway through “D” when she heard the door to her parents’ room close for the night. She waited until the whine of the T.V. and their murmurs were hushed. The clock on the iPad read “11:00.” She’d never stayed up so late before, but she needed go back into the basement and she couldn’t start feeling bad about ignoring bed time, now.

Her parents were asleep, but she put on her fluffiest socks to muffle her footsteps, just to be safe. Bebe didn’t care about breaking the rules and her parents shouldn’t boss her around so much, but she still didn’t want to wake them up and get caught in the act. Deciding not to turn on any lights, she grabbed the spy flashlight her dad gave her as a birthday present last year and stole a peek down the hall.

She made her move and crept past her parents' room. There was no light coming from underneath the door. She'd be safe during this adventure. After successfully dodging the creakiest steps, Bebe found herself facing her biggest obstacle: the basement door. It was swollen from the summer humidity and it would protest being opening. She licked her lips and twisted the brass knob. It clicked, but the door stuck in its frame. Bebe put of her ninety pounds into the effort and pulled. The door barked as wood grinded against wood, but it budged and revealed the dark chasm behind it.

The weak toy flashlight only exposed the first few steps and Bebe nearly lost her nerve. How could a space so familiar become so daunting hours later? A check back down the hallway to see her parents' light still of reminded her of her purpose. She needed to see the meaning of life again. How else was she going to find the words to describe it? She took a step, listened, took another, and was greeted with more silence. It took her a full minute to reach the end, and in that span, she changed her mind. No words could ever encompass her discovery, not any that already existed, that is. She needed to find it again and to make her own words. That was the only way.

With this in mind, she struggled to wade through the boxes and into the dark. She relied on the flashlight and her memory of where the old clothes were to make her way to the correct box. Positioning the end of the flashlight in her mouth so she could use her hands, Bebe began to unravel the origami of crumpled newspapers. Beams of yellow light illuminated the swirls of dust around her, but that was all. The only other objects in the box were her dad's badges. The meaning of life was gone. Her flashlight fell to the floor as she opened her mouth to sob. The box wobbled in her vision as tears filled her eyes. She'd lost



the most important discovery she would ever make, and she could even use it to prove that she wasn't doing drugs.

*An Occasion for Strawberry Ice Cream (1<sup>st</sup> Draft)*

By  
Emma Hutchinson

Barbara Brown was twelve years old when she discovered the meaning of life. She was rummaging around the musty cardboard boxes in the basement looking through her mom's vintage clothes and her dad's boy scout badges for new dress up materials when she stumbled across it. There, laying crumpled up in a nest of yellowing newspaper was the meaning of life. Bebe – that's what her parents called her – was so excited she forgot her game and ran up the stairs two at a time.

“Mom, I found something so cool downstairs. You have to come see it.”

Her mother who was in the middle of washing the dishes, barely glanced over her shoulder.

“That's nice, Dear, but you know how dusty all that junk is. I'll hack up a lung if I go down there or if I stay around you now for that matter. Go change and wash your hands.”

“Seriously, this is worth it. It's huge. You need to listen to me.”

“What I need to do is finish the dishes and what you need to do is listen to me. Go.”

“Can I at least have dessert first?”

“Not when you're that dirty.”

Bebe scowled and stomped to her room. Upon finished the commanded tasks she decided to find her father instead. He was working on his daily Sudoku puzzle with ESPN on mute.

“Hi, Honey, what's the rush?”

“I have something really important that you have to come see with me. Please, it's downstairs.” Bebe tried a less demanding approach this time.

“Well, can you bring it here? I just sat down.”

That was when Bebe became aware of the feeling that the meaning of life should not be touched, moved, or tampered with.

“I don’t think I can. I could mess it up or break it.”

Unable to explain her discovery or move her father from her seat, she left him alone.

In the past, if she had a conundrum that her parents couldn’t answer, she would search for the solution in a book. She realized in this particular instance that she knew the most important answer to the most important question, she just didn’t have the words to explain it or convince her parents. The correct book, it then followed, must be a dictionary.

Half an hour into this endeavor and only a quarter of the way through D she gave up. In her frustration she kicked the book off her bed. The thud echoed from the wood floor and pink walls. That sound satisfied her for only a moment. “Lexicon” stuck out on the page that the book fell open to. The English language shrugged at her and showed its empty pockets. Nothing. Bebe knew it would be too difficult and take too long to learn another language to explain the meaning of life. Her only choice was to create more English.

Her mother, long since finished with the dishes, was summoned by the noise of the book. Upon finding the mess on the floor, she misinterpreted her daughter’s determination for sulking. She pronounced it bedtime. Remaking the English language would have to wait.

Hours and a half-hearted attempt to fall asleep later, Bebe was still ruminating. She decided another look at the meaning of life could help her decide what to do. She grabbed the spy flashlight her dad gave her as a birthday present last year and took a peak down the hall. The whine of the muted television and her parent’s murmurs disappeared behind their

closed door long ago, but just to be safe she put on her fuzziest socks to muffle her footsteps. After successfully dodging the creakiest steps, she hooked a left into the kitchen. First, she would reward herself with strawberry ice cream for making it this far, then she'd move on to the next obstacle.

Once the carton was half gone and her stomach started aching, she knew she needed to stop. Bebe took one last spoonful to remind her of summer, licked her fingers, and twisted the brass knob. It clicked, and the door protested the movement in the night. The flashlight only revealed the first half of the steps and Bebe nearly lost her nerve. She wondered how a space so familiar to her could become so daunting. One look back at the ice cream on the table reminded her of the reward that awaited her triumphant return. She knew she needed to see the meaning of life again. How else could she ever find the words to describe it? She took a step, listened, took another, and was still greeted with silence. It took her a full minute reach the last time and by that time she'd changed her mind. No words could ever do justice to her discovery. She would need to find a way to bring it to her parents.

It was a struggle to wade into the boxes in the dark. She relied on her flashlight and her memory of where she'd been searching earlier that day to make her way to the correct box. Positioning the end of the flashlight in her mouth so she could use her hands, Bebe began to unravel the origami of the crunched ball of newspapers. Her efforts were revealed nothing but newspaper. The flashlight fell into the box as she opened her mouth to sob. The meaning of life was nowhere to be found. She lost it with no way to track it down or explain it to her parents. The box wobbled in her vision as tears filled her eyes, she ran back into the kitchen to console herself with the rest of the strawberry ice cream.



*Icarus*  
By  
Emma Hutchinson

Icarus was a small boy who lived with his dad, who was an inventor. To Icarus's delight, Dad would take the inventions off the tool bench so he could get a good look at them. Dad would explain each exciting new contraption by pulling levers and pushing buttons to show off what they did, but Icarus was never allowed to touch the inventions.

One day, the boy heard an extra clackety racket coming from the workshop in the basement. Since Icarus had just finished coloring a picture of himself helping his Dad, he ripped the page out of the notebook and nearly slipped down the stairs in his rush to deliver it. He also wanted to see what was making all the noise.

At the bottom of the stairs, he found his dad underneath the bright lamps that illuminate the small moving cogs and gears in the inventions. Dad was hunched over the bench with his back to Icarus. The older man's broad silhouette was outlined by the light and it blocked any view of what was causing the commotion.

"Whatcha working on?" Icarus asked.

The noise stopped and silence filled the space before Dad answered.

"Oh, hey, Icarus. I didn't hear you on the stairs." He glanced over his shoulder at his son, then turned back to the bench and began to put his tools away. "I um-- what are doing down here?"

"I'm done coloring. What are you making? Let me see."

But Dad did not let him see. The smell of sawdust and old paint wafted around as Dad shook out an old purple polka-dotted fitted bed sheet and tucked it around the corners of the bench. By the time he turned back to face his son, Icarus forgot about the picture in

his hand. Dad never bothered hiding his work. The boy's head was spinning and swirling with different possibilities of what could be under those polka-dots and what it might do and why his dad would bother hiding it.

Instead of answering these questions, Dad checked his watch. "Oh, gee. Look at that, it's lunch time already. Are you hungry? I'll go make us some sandwiches." Dad began up the stairs but paused to look back at his son. "Icarus, you are not to peek under there. I mean it. And you're not allowed to touch the inventions." This was Dad's final reminder before going upstairs.

Icarus knew he could not disobey his dad, who loved and trusted him so much, but the mystery under the purple polka-dots beckoned. The curiosity stung like a cat scratch and lingered like a bug bite itch.

By the time Dad closed the door at the top of the stairs, his son's nose was two inches from the covered bench. Eye level with the bench, Icarus examined the lumps and bumps underneath the purple polka dots, and he realized that the old bed sheet was a blessing.

With this covering in the way, he could use it to feel for the invention without truly breaking any of the rules.

He did not remove the sheet, or peek under it, but as he felt along the top, he began to recognize the shapes of gears and hammers and nippers. However, the largest lump was one he couldn't name. As a whole, it was no larger than a doll. It had a softer, low end that curved to meet the bottom, but it curved from the low end up to a higher end where there was a large hole. Behind the hole were sharp pieces that nearly poked Icarus's fingertips

through the sheet. He felt around the lump for more clues, but he couldn't understand what it was.

Then he heard a click. A small piece moved under his thumb. A sporadic whirring sound came from the lump and it began to jump underneath the purple polka-dots. Icarus had flipped a hidden switch.

The sound grew louder, higher pitched, and more insistent. This must have been what caused the clackety racket he'd heard from upstairs. Icarus knew he had to make it stop. He didn't know what would happen if Dad heard his invention from the kitchen. After hesitating for a breath, he whipped the sheet back to reveal the noisome invention.

It was a gold shoe.

It was a gold shoe with silver wings attached to the heel. It gleamed under the bright lamps and as the wings picked up speed they sparkled and sent beams of light around the room like mirrors. The wings were flapping and struggling to keep the shoe in the air, which caused it to hover a few inches above the bench before falling again.

Icarus stood motionless and mesmerized as he watched this process repeat. Flap, flap, fly, fall, thud. Once. Flap, flap, fly, fly, fall, Thud. Twice. Flap, fly, fly, fly, fall, THUD. Thrice. Each time the shoe flew a bit higher, and each time it fell even louder. The fourth time through this process Icarus jumped forward and caught the shoe before it could fall. If he let the invention continue on this way, it could fall from too high and break, or worse it could make enough noise to alert Dad.

The shoe needed to be stopped. Icarus needed to figure out how. The little gold shoe fluttered its wings and tried to fly away, but he held tight as he examined it for an off switch or button. He grabbed the hammer from the bench and put the heavy end into the



shoe to weigh it down, but it was still jumping. He tried throwing the gears in the shoe, too, but it was still hovering. Icarus even shoved the nippers in the crowded shoe, but it was still not enough to keep the invention from struggling. It skipped across the bench and leapfrogged over the other tools. He snatched it back before it could fall off or crash.

The only thing the poor boy could think to do next was to empty out the shoe and put it on himself. It was still a few sizes too big, but Icarus stamped his foot down to pin it so he could keep searching for a way to stop the invention and the cacophony of noises it kept causing.

But there was no off switch behind the heel. And there was no button under the shoe's tongue. There wasn't even a knob near the toes. Icarus couldn't find out how he had turned the golden shoe on in the first place. Time crawled on and Icarus grew desperate. His efforts became hasty and less effective as tears blurred his vision. Surely, he thought, Dad would wonder where he was, open the door to the workroom, hear the busy whirring and buzzing of his invention and become angry.

In a quick panic that he'd already been caught, Icarus craned his neck to look up the stairs to check that his dad wasn't there. Feeling only slightly relieved, he turned back to the bench, and that was when he saw it.

There was a matching gold shoe at the back of the bench, still partly hidden under the purple polka-dotted sheet. Of course, he realized, they're a pair of shoes! This one was lying on its side, pinning one of the wings to the bench. He stretched from his tippy toes to reach it, and as soon as Icarus righted the second shoe both wings went into motion, mimicking the other shoe. He put this shoe on his left foot before it could try to fly away.

Now, the pair was working together, and Icarus felt his feet move.

At first the whirring of the wings grew louder, then he legs became unstable just like they had during that small earthquake last year. The sound of whirring increased to a high whine as the shoe's silver wings flashed under the light of the lamps and lifted Icarus half an inch from the ground. The higher he rose, the faster his heart beat in time with the wings that held him up. Soon he was looking down on the bench full of tools from Dad's level. But still the shoes took him higher. Icarus stared in wonderment from this new vantage point as the world and all its possibilities opened up to him. He was just considering all the new things he could reach, when his head collided with the unfinished beam of the ceiling and halted his ascent.

Dizziness danced through his mind. When his head cleared and his vision focused once more, he caught a glimpse of sparkle on the bench below him that he hadn't been able to see from his usual height. A silver key with the pattern of a feather etched on it glimmered up at him. Icarus felt a surge of hope and forgot his bruised head. It must be the key to the shoes.

With a new dose of sense knocked into him, Icarus put his hands on the ceiling beam above him and pushed off with all his might in an effort to get closer to the ground. He bobbed inches above the floor before the gold shoes sent him towards the ceiling again like a buoy in water. This time, he had his hands up and ready to protect his head. He tried again, with more force and leaned over the bench. Icarus snatched the silver key from its place just as the flying shoes lifted him up once more. If it weren't for his fear of being caught, he would have considered this thrilling and fun.

The third time he pushed off from the ceiling, Icarus kept the key in one hand and caught the edge of the bench with the other to force himself to sit cross-legged on the

ground. This trapped all four wings underneath his knees. The shoes were silent except for the occasional grinding of gears.

Safe for the moment, but unable to find the keyhole, Icarus ran his hands over the white ridged soles of the shoes while he pondered his predicament. He couldn't take them off because they would be too loud, and he would be found out. He couldn't leave them on because Dad would know he'd broken the rules. He couldn't even hide downstairs because Dad would be done making sandwiches and call him upstairs for lunchtime soon. Icarus was stuck. He started drumming his fingers against the shoes in thought.

That was how he found it. Icarus craned his neck to look under his knees at the flighty inventions. There was a small slice on the sole of each of the winged shoes. Keyholes, and the silver key fit. Icarus turned the key on his left shoe and then the right. Then, there was silence. Real silence. The gears stopped grinding and the pinned wings stopped struggling and the whirring ceased.

Icarus waited for a breath and a half before easing his weight off the shoes. They remained still. He took them off and put them back on the bench with the hammer and the gears and the nippers. He stretched on his tippy toes to put the purple polka-dotted bed sheet back on the bench and tug the corners back into place. He was still pondering the thrill of flight as he pocketed the silver key and started up the stairs two at a time.

“Dad,” he called, “what kind of sandwiches did you make?”

*Icarus* (2<sup>nd</sup> Draft)  
By  
Emma Hutchinson

Icarus was a boy who lived with his dad. Dad was an inventor, but he never let Icarus use the inventions because he worried his son would get hurt. Dad would show off each exciting, new contraption. He would pull levers and push buttons to show Icarus what they did, but Icarus was never allowed to touch them.

One day, the boy went to his dad's workshop and was surprised to see an old bedsheet covering the bench. Dad never bothered hiding his work. Icarus wondered what was underneath the sheet.

"Icarus, you are not to look under there. I mean it. There's nothing there really, and it doesn't concern you. And besides you're not allowed to touch the inventions," his dad reminded him before going upstairs to make sandwiches.

Icarus thought this was very strange. The bumps and lumps under the sheet were proof that there was indeed something his dad was hiding. A few were quite small and were probably tools. The one smack in the center was the largest lump. That must be what his dad was hiding. It was large enough to be the model spaceship he had asked for, but it was also small enough to be a remote-control racecar. Maybe it did concern him. Maybe it was a surprise, Icarus thought, after all his birthday was only three and a half months away.

The boy knew he could not disobey his dad who loved and trusted him so much. He decided he wouldn't.

Without looking under the sheet, Icarus used it to feel the lumps and bumps without touching the inventions. He recognized the shapes of gears and hammers and nippers. However, the largest lump was one he couldn't name. It had a softer, low end that curved

to meet the bottom, but it curved from the low end up to a higher end where there was a large hole. Behind the hole were sharp pieces that nearly poked Icarus's fingertips through the sheet. He felt around the lump for more clues, but he couldn't understand what was hiding.

Then he heard a click. A small piece moved under his thump and Icarus realized he had turned on a switch. A sporadic whirring sound came from the lump and it began to jump underneath the old bedsheet. This was not good.

The sound grew louder, higher pitched, and more insistent. Icarus knew he had to make it stop before his dad heard. After hesitating for a breath, he whipped the sheet away to reveal the noisome invention.

It was a blue sneaker.

It was a blue sneaker with silver wings attached to the heel. The wings were flapping and struggling to keep the sneaker in the air, which caused it to hover a few inches above the bench before falling again.

Icarus stood motionless and mesmerized as he watched this process repeat. Flap, flap, fly, fall, thud. Once. Flap, flap, fly, fly, fall, Thud. Twice. Flap, fly, fly, fly, fall, THUD. Thrice. Each time the sneaker flew a bit higher, and each time it fell even louder. The fourth time through this process Icarus lunged forward and caught the shoe before it could fall. If his dad found out that he started an invention, or looked under the old bedsheet, or even touched an invention he was scared that he would never be forgiven.

The shoe needed to be turned off before his dad heard. Icarus needed to figure out how. The little shoe fluttered its wings and tried to fly away, but he held tight as he examined it for an off switch or button. He grabbed the hammer from the bench and tried

to weigh down the struggling shoe, but it was still jumping. He tried throwing the gears in the shoe, too, but it was still hovering. Icarus even put the nippers in the shoe, but it was still not enough to keep it still.

The only thing the poor boy could think to do next was put the shoe on himself. It was still a few sizes too big, but Icarus stamped his foot down to pin it, so he could keep searching for a way to stop the invention and the noise it kept making.

There was no off switch behind the heel or under the sneaker's tongue or even near the toes. Icarus grew helpless. Surely, he thought, Dad would wonder where he was, open the door to the workroom, hear the busy whirring and buzzing of his inventions and become angry.

Icarus turned towards the door to check that his dad wasn't there, turned back to the bench, and that was when he saw it.

There was a matching sneaker. Of course, he realized, they're a pair of shoes! This one was lying on its side, pinning one of the wings. As soon as Icarus grabbed the second sneaker both wings went into motion, mimicking the other shoe. But this time, Icarus put the sneaker on before it could cause a commotion.

Now, the pair was working together, and Icarus felt his feet move.

The sound of whirring increased to a high whine as the shoe's silver wings flashed under the lightbulb and lifted the boy half an inch from the ground. Thrilled by the feeling, but even more scared of disappointing his dad, he used the edge of the bench to force himself to sit cross-legged on the ground. This trapped all four wings underneath his knees. The sneakers were silent except for the occasional grinding of gears.

Safe for the moment, but unable to search for any sort of off switch because of his position, Icarus ran his hands over the white ridged soles of the sneakers while he pondered his predicament. He couldn't take them off because they would be too loud, and he would be found out. He couldn't leave them on because his dad would know he'd broken the rules. He couldn't even hide downstairs because his dad would be done making sandwiches and call him upstairs for lunchtime soon. Icarus was stuck. He started drumming his fingers against the sneakers in thought.

That was how he found it. Icarus craned his neck to look under his knees at the flighty inventions. As the tip of the toes on the second sneaker there was a small button. It clicked when he pressed it. Then, there was silence. Real silence. The gears stopped grinding and the pinned wings stopped struggling and the whirring ceased.

Icarus waited for a breath and a half before easing his weight off the sneakers. They remained still. He unlaced them and put them back on the bench with the hammer and the gears and the nippers. He tossed the old bedsheet back on the bench and tugged the corners to make sure it was all covered up.

He was halfway up the stairs, caught up in musing over the thrill of flight when he stopped. The shoes that Dad invented and hid from him were a few sizes too big, but they were definitely too small for Dad. Icarus's new hope made him feel like he was flying again because if Dad couldn't use the shoes, maybe they really were a birthday present.

*Icarus* (1<sup>st</sup> Draft)  
By  
Emma Hutchinson

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the sheet. He felt around the lump for more clues, but he couldn't understand what was hiding.

Then he heard a click. A small piece moved under his thumb and Icarus realized he had turned on a switch. A sporadic whirring sound came from the lump and it began to jump underneath the old bedsheet. This was not good.

The sound grew louder, higher pitched, and more insistent. Icarus knew he had to make it stop before his dad heard. After hesitating for a death, he whipped the sheet away to reveal the noisome invention.

It was a blue sneaker.

It was a blue sneaker with silver wings attached to the heel. The wings were flapping and struggling to keep the sneaker in the air, which caused the invention to hover a few inches above the bench before falling again.

Icarus stood motionless and mesmerized as he watched this processes repeat. Flap, flap, fly, fall, thud. Once. Flap, flap, fly, fly, fall, Thud. Twice. Flap, fly, fly, fly, fall, THUD. Thrice. Each time the sneaker flew a bit higher, and each time it fell it was louder. The fourth time through this process Icarus lunged forward and caught the invention before it could fall. If his dad found out that he started an invention, or looked under the old bedsheet, or even touched an invention he was scared that he would never be forgiven.

Icarus needed to turn it off. The little shoe fluttered its wings and tried to fly away, but Icarus held tight as he examined it for an off switch or button. He grabbed the hammer from the bench and tried to weigh down the struggling shoe, but it was still jumping. He tried throwing the gears in the shoe, too, but it was still hovering. Icarus even put the nippers in the shoe, but it was still not enough to keep it still.

The only thing the poor boy could think to do next was put the shoe on himself. It was still a few sizes too big, but Icarus stamped his foot down to pin it so he could keep searching for a way to stop the invention and the noise it kept making.

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The sound of whirring increased to a high whine as the shoe's silver wings flashed under the lightbulb and lifted the boy half an inch from the ground. Thrilled by the feeling, but even more scared of disappointing his dad, he used the edge of the bench to force himself to sit cross-legged on the ground. This trapped all four wings underneath his knees. The sneakers were silent except for the occasional grinding of gears.

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rules. He couldn't even hide downstairs because his dad would be done making sandwiches and call him upstairs for lunchtime soon. Icarus was stuck. He started drumming his fingers against the sneakers in thought.

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Icarus waited for a breath and a half before easing his weight off the sneakers. They remained still. He unlaced them and put them back on the bench with the hammer and the gears and the nippers. He tossed the old bedsheet back on the bench and tugged the corners to make sure it was all covered up. Then he walked upstairs to find his dad in the kitchen.

“There you are,” his dad said, “it’s lunchtime. Come and eat.”

Icarus didn't tell his dad what he'd done, but as he ate his sandwich, he couldn't stop thinking about the new thrill he'd felt while in the air.

*Isla*  
By  
Emma Hutchinson

I'm an only child, and it can get kind of lonely. I guess that's why I'm called Isla. Like an island, but a girl. It's not too lonely, though. I live with my aunty up on a big, grassy hill, and it can be a lot of fun. Sometimes I roll down the hill and lay on my back at the bottom until the dizziness subsides and I can focus on the clouds and the pictures they make. At the bottom of the hill is a small pond surrounded by tall grasses and reeds and cattails that grow fuzzy in the spring and shed in the summer. That's where I play. Mostly I like to create games or act out scenes with dragons and lions and warrior queens, and when I get tired, I can sit by the pond and watch the family of ducks that lives there. They usually ignore me and go about their waddling business, but sometimes the ducklings will come closer to quack at me. They toddle around in a wobbling herd of curious yellow feathers. After school, Aunty lets me feed them seeds or leftover lettuce from her garden.

There's usually leftover lettuce because I don't like it much. I like corn and peas, but only if they're mixed because the green and yellow looks prettier together, and I like my potatoes mashed. I also like snickerdoodles. Aunty usually gives me one after dinner, but sometimes she says no, and I have to use my mind control on her.

It takes a lot of concentration and effort. I have to scrunch my nose up like a rabbit and squint my eyes, then I have to think at her. The mind control works like a finger pointing her towards the cookie jar on the top shelf of the pantry. I can almost feel my palms tingling as if I was behind Aunty and pushing her to get me the snickerdoodle. My mind control can also be used to convince Aunty to let me wear my favorite blue tutu with

the white ribbon. It helps if I think *please* at her. It never lasts long though, and it makes my hands shake afterwards.

I try to take my mind control seriously. I never use it to blame my spilled milk on my dog, Pepper, or even to make her lick it all up. Usually, I don't use it in public, but that's partly because I can't concentrate enough with lots of people around.

Sometimes it makes me sick. Once, I was alone in the snack corner with my best friend, Annie, when I used it to push her to give me her blueberry gummies.

"Annie," I said, "you don't want those, do you?"

Her head remained bent over the package as she tried to open it. "Yeah, I just need to get to them first," she said.

The fluorescent classroom light kept hitting the plastic and catching my eye like an ant-sized lighthouse, so I started to focus on mentally pushing her by thinking about a finger between us that pointed towards me, so she would know where to give the gummies. *Please*, I thought. My face started to scrunch up and my mind control started to work. Annie finally ripped open the gummies and looked up at me in triumph. She caught a look at my face and started to laugh but stopped herself as my imagined pointing finger worked. One blue gummy shaped like a star fell onto the table as she handed me the gummies. I tried to pick it up, but my fingers were already shaking so much that they wouldn't work. Annie was staring at me, or at the space where I had imagined the finger. Her eyebrows were up raised as far as they could go and her green eyes were wide, but they weren't actually looking at anything. Usually, the mind control wore off Aunty after I got what I wanted and she acted like nothing had happened, but this was different and scary. I didn't

know how to make her normal again. I left the remaining gummy and hurried back to my desk at the front of the room where I didn't have to see her wide, blank eyes.

During recess, my hands were still shaking, and my fingers were twitching so much that I couldn't face Annie, and I had to swing alone to avoid her. On top of it all gummies made me nauseous. I couldn't stop remembering her face and her strange reaction to my mind control, so I decided not to use it on other kids any more.

But one day, I broke all my rules.

That day, I dropped off my backpack after school in the house and ran out to the pond, but I skidded to a stop at the bottom of the hill and almost slipped in the mud. There were five kids already at the pond, and they were passing a loaf of bread around and throwing crumbs to the ducks. Aunty had taught me that feeding the ducks was nice, as long I wasn't giving them bread. Bread is terrible for ducks, and especially the growing ducklings because it fills them up, but it doesn't give them any of the nutrients they need. It can also give them horrible tummy aches. The whole family of ducks was already making its way across the pond. The green heads of the greedy adults shone under the sunlight as they raced past their babies to be the first to gobble up the crumbs. Webbed feet paddled and caused waves on the pond that slowed down the duckling's process. The poor ducks didn't know any better.

I had to do something. I had to stop this. My feet started taking me towards the kids. They probably didn't know they were hurting the ducks. I filled my lungs and gathered my nerves. I was going to shout at the kids and tell them to stop, but when I looked up from the frenzy on the pond, I recognized them. My breath whooshed out and I lost my nerves. These weren't neighborhood kids, or even kids my age. These were middle schoolers.

I stopped what I was doing and froze in place. Panic rose in my chest and my heart started to hurt with all its thumping. The small quack of a nearby duckling snapped me out of it, and I ducked behind the grass to hide. From here, I couldn't see middle schoolers, but I had a clear view of the ducks as they began their doomed feast.

The thought of using my mind control flashed through my head, but it was followed by the memory of Annie's face and how sick the gummies made me. I just couldn't do it.

The ducks quacked at each other and squabbled over the breadcrumbs. I watched one adult peck at another to steal a crumb. The ducklings arrived at the edge of the pond and began to take some crumbs for themselves. I felt my heart sink and I think it collided with my stomach. I felt terrible. I hated to watch this scene unfold. I hated to be so powerless to stop any of it. Squeezing my eyes shut and putting my hands over my ears to block out what was happening, I thought about just how much I wanted it to stop. The ducks just needed to *stop*.

When I looked up, I found the scene exactly as it had been except for one straggling duckling floating near me like a fluffy, yellow cork. It bobbed on top of the waves with its beak stuck open mid-quack.

My fingers began to tingle, and I realized that the bird was frozen because of me. I hadn't meant to use my mind control. I didn't even know it worked on ducks. This discovery unbalanced me, and I nearly fell over into the mud. My hands dug into the earth, and I caught myself just in time to watch one of the bread crumbs float towards the duckling. Still, it didn't move. Maybe this was good, maybe this was how I could help the ducks.

If I could use my mind control on them to tell them to stop, they wouldn't eat the bread, but I'd never controlled any ducks before, let alone more than one. This was going to take all my concentration. I squinted my eyes at the rest of the ducklings closest to me and imagined a giant hand above the pond holding its palm up at the ducks. *Stop*, I thought at them, *stop!*

My fingers started to twitch, and I grabbed fistfuls of grass and mud in front of me to keep them still.

One by one, my mind control worked on the ducklings. Each froze in place. I even saw a crumb fall from an orange beak. It was working, but the adults that remained were still eating up as much of the terrible treat as they could.

I risked a glance at the middle schoolers. They were laughing with each other and still throwing crumbs into the pond. One of the girls grabbed the fuzzy top of a cattail and started breaking it up so the fluff floated into the air and away on the breeze. This was the distraction I needed.

I stayed ducking behind the tall plants that hid me but started to crawl on my hands and knees closer to middle schoolers and closer to the ducks that were still able to eat. The mud squelched under my hands and knees, but I ignored it and the wetness that seeped through my jeans. Aunty would be annoyed at the grass stains she'd have to clean, but she'd understand that this was for the greater good.

I put that out of my mind and focused on flurry of feathers in the water. My imagined hand was still floating above the pond. *Stop, stop, stop* was all I would let myself think. The closer I got the more ducks stopped what they were doing.



It was only when the nearby middle schoolers began to grumble and mumble at this new odd-bird behavior that I really looked up at the scene I had caused. The older children grew annoyed that the birds had stopped eating their bread. Worse than that, the ducks had stopped doing anything at all.

Each one floated on the water, which had turned calm without their splashing. They held poses as if they were waiting for a camera to flash. The middle schoolers' muttering grew louder. I couldn't see them, but from my place in the mud I watched a stone fly into the middle of the pond and splash two of the ducklings. Not a squawk, not a peep, not a quack or flap was made by the birds. They remained frozen on the water and let the ripples push them away from each other. Another stone landed near an older bird, which met the splash with the same still silence. The middle schoolers had moved past throwing bread, and now a bird was really going to get hurt. My heart once again felt like it sank all the way to my stomach. There was no way I could save the ducks from this. The older children started laughing again and I racked my brain for a way to stop them that didn't include breaking my rules.

I took another look at the statuesque birds in the water. The stone throwing had distracted me, and I stopped imagining the giant hand telling them to stop, but the ducks were still frozen. This felt like Annie and the gummies all over again.

How long would they stay frozen like that? This was all my fault. The birds had only stopped because I told them to. I didn't even know I could control that many birds, and I didn't know what to do now to change it. My face grew hot and my eyes stung with tears of frustration. My hands were dark with mud and shaking so much I couldn't use them if they were clean, so I used my sleeve to wipe my nose and dry my eyes.

When I looked back up, a massive rock the size of a full loaf of bread was hurtling through the air. *Duck!* I didn't know if I thought or shouted the command, but that was all I had time for.

Chaos broke loose.

Before the rock hit the water, the glassy surface erupted. Every duck that could fly took off in a different direction. Water and feathers flew. The ducklings started paddling with all their might away from the flurry. The rock landed a few feet behind them and the wave it created was a tsunami of a splash that pushed the little peeping fluff balls all the way to shore.

Meanwhile, the flying ducks were still thrashing their wings and flapping around the pond. I watched the middle school kids run away from the mess. They were each bending over and ducking their heads down to escape the birds. It almost looked like they were flapping their arms around to keep the ducks away.

It took some time, but when the ducks finally settled down and all the quacking had quieted, I was still sitting in the cold mud behind the tall grass and cattails. I clasped my hands in between my knees to try to stop them from shaking out of control, but my legs also felt weak and shaky. By the time my heart beat slowed to a normal pace and I was sure that my legs would work, the ducks had gone back to doing normal duck things as if nothing had happened.

*Isla* (2<sup>nd</sup> Draft)  
By  
Emma Hutchinson

I'm an only child, and it can get kind of lonely. I guess that's why I'm called Isla. Like an island, but a girl. It's not that lonely, though. I live with my aunty up on a big, grassy hill, and it can be a lot of fun. Sometimes I roll down the hill and lay on my back at the bottom until the dizziness subsides and I can focus on the clouds and the pictures they make. At the bottom of the hill is a small pond surrounded by tall grasses and reeds and cattails that grow fuzzy in the spring and shed in the summer. That's where I play. Mostly I like to create games or act out scenes with dragons and lions and warrior queens, and when I get tired, I can sit by the pond and watch the family of ducks that lives there. They usually ignore me and go about their waddling business, but sometimes the ducklings will come closer to quack at me. They toddle around in wobbling herd of curious yellow feathers. After school, Aunty lets me feed the seeds or leftover lettuce from her garden.

There's usually leftover lettuce because I don't like it much. I like corn and peas, but only if they're mixed because the green and yellow looks prettier together, and I like my potatoes mashed. I also like snickerdoodles. Aunty usually gives me one after dinner, but sometimes she says no and I have to use my mind control on her.

It takes a lot of concentration and effort. I have to scrunch my nose up like a rabbit and squint my eyes, then I have to think at her. The mind control works like a finger pointing her towards the cookie jar on the top shelf of the pantry. I can almost feel my palms tingling as if I was behind Aunty and pushing her to get me the snickerdoodle. My mind control can also be used to convince Aunty to let me wear my favorite blue tutu with

the white ribbon. It helps if I think *please* at her. It never lasts long though, and it makes my hands shake afterwards.

I try to take my mind control seriously. I never use it to blame my spilled milk on my dog Pepper or even to make her lick it all up. Usually, I don't use it in public, but that's partly because I can't concentrate enough with lots of people around.

Sometimes it makes me sick. Once, I was alone in the snack corner with my best friend Annie when I used it to push her to give me her blueberry gummies.

"Annie," I said, "you don't want those, do you?"

Her head remained bent over the package as she tried to open it. "Yeah, I just need to get to them first," she said without looking up.

The fluorescent classroom light kept hitting the plastic and catching my eye like an ant-sized lighthouse, so I started to focus on mentally pushing her by thinking about a finger between us that pointed towards me, so she would know where to give the gummies. *Please*, I thought. My face started to scrunch up and my mind control started to work. Annie finally ripped open the gummies and looked up at me in triumph. She caught a look at my face and started to laugh, but stopped herself as my imagined pointing finger worked. One blue gummy shaped like a star fell onto the table as she handed me the gummies. I tried to pick it up, but my fingers were already shaking so much that they wouldn't work. Annie was staring at me, or at the space where I had imagined the finger. Her eyebrows were up raised as far as they could go and her green eyes were wide, but they weren't actually looking at anything. Usually, the mind control wore off Aunty after I got what I wanted and she acted like nothing had happened, but this was different and scary. I didn't

know how to make her normal again. I left the remaining gummy and hurried back to my desk at the front of the room where I didn't have to see her wide, blank eyes.

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But one day, I broke all my rules.

That day, I dropped off my backpack after school in the house and ran out to the pond, but I skidded to a stop at the bottom of the hill and almost slipped in the mud. There were five kids already at the pond, and they were passing a loaf of bread around and throwing crumbs to the ducks. Aunty had taught me that feeding the ducks was nice, as long I wasn't giving them bread. Bread is terrible for ducks, and especially the growing ducklings because it fills them up but it doesn't give them any of the nutrients they need. It can also give them horrible tummy aches. The whole family of ducks was already making its way across the pond. The green heads of the greedy adults shone under the sunlight as they raced past their babies to be the first to gobble up the crumbs. Webbed feet paddled and caused waves on the pond that slowed down the duckling's process. The poor ducks didn't know any better.

I had to do something. I had to stop this. My feet started taking me towards the kids. They probably didn't know they were hurting the ducks. I filled my lungs and gathered my nerves. I was going to shout at the kids and tell them to stop, but when I looked up from the frenzy on the pond, I recognized them. My breath whooshed out and I lost my nerves. These weren't neighborhood kids, or even kids my age. These were middle schoolers.

I stopped what I was doing and froze in place. Panic rose in my chest and my heart started to hurt with all its thumping. The small quack of a nearby duckling snapped me out of it, and I ducked behind the grass to hide. From here, I couldn't see middle schoolers, but I had a clear view of the ducks as they began their doomed feast.

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When I looked up, I found the scene exactly as it had been except for one straggling duckling floating in the middle of the pond like a fluffy, yellow cork. It bobbed on top of the waves with its beak stuck open mid-quack.

My fingers began to tingle and I realized that the bird was frozen because of me. I hadn't meant to use my mind control. I didn't even know it worked on ducks. This discovery unbalanced me and I nearly fell over into the mud. My hands dug into the earth, and I caught myself just in time to watch one of the bread crumbs float towards the duckling. It still didn't move. Maybe this was good, maybe this was how I could help the ducks.

If I could use my mind control on them to tell them to stop, they wouldn't eat the bread, but I'd never controlled any ducks before, let alone more than one. This was going to take all my concentration. I squinted my eyes at the rest of the ducklings closest to me and imagined a giant hand above the pond holding its palm up at the ducks. *Stop*, I thought at them, *stop!*

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One by one, my mind control worked on the ducklings. Each froze in place. I even saw a crumb fall from an orange beak. It was working, but the adults that remained were still eating up as much of the terrible treat as they could.

I risked a glance at the middle schoolers. They were laughing with each other and still throwing crumbs into the pond. One of the girls grabbed the fuzzy top of a cattail and started breaking it up so the fluff floated into the air and away on the breeze. This was the distraction I needed.

I stayed ducking behind the tall plants that hid me, but started to crawl on my hands and knees closer to middle schoolers and closer to the ducks that were still able to eat. The mud squelched under my hands and knees, but I ignored it and the wetness that seeped through my jeans. Aunty would be annoyed at the grass stains she'd have to clean, but she'd understand that this was for the greater good.

I put that out of my mind and focused on flurry of feathers in the water. My imagined hand was still floating above the pond. *Stop, stop, stop* was all I would let myself think. The closer I got, the more ducks stopped what they were doing.

It was only when the nearby middle schoolers began to grumble and mumble at this new odd-bird behavior that I really looked up at the scene I had caused. The older children grew annoyed that the birds had stopped eating their bread. More than that, the ducks had stopped doing anything at all.

Each one floated on the water, which had turned calm without their splashing. They held poses as if they were waiting for a camera to flash. The middle schoolers' muttering grew louder. I couldn't see them, but from my place in the mud I watched a stone fly into the middle of the pond and splash two of the ducklings. Not a squawk, not a peep, not a quack or flap was made by the birds. They remained frozen on the water and let the ripples push them away from each other. Another stone landed near an older bird, but it was met with the same still silence. The middle schoolers had moved past throwing bread, and now a bird was really going to get hurt. My heart once again felt like it sank all the way to my stomach. There was no way I could save the ducks from this. The older children started laughing again and I racked my brain for a way to stop them that didn't include breaking my rules.

I took another look at the statuesque birds in the water. The stone throwing had distracted me, and I had stopped imagining the giant hand telling them to stop, but they still weren't moving. This was Annie and the gummies all over again.

How long would they stay frozen like that? This was all my fault. The birds had only stopped because I told them to. I didn't even know I could control that many birds, and I didn't know what to do now to change it. My face grew hot and my eyes stung with tears of frustrations. My hands were dark with mud and shaking so much I couldn't use them if they were clean, so I used my sleeve to wipe my nose and dry my eyes.



When I looked back up, a massive rock the size of a full loaf of bread was hurtling through the air. *Duck!* I didn't know if I thought or shouted the command, but that was all I had time for.

Chaos broke loose.

Before the rock hit the water, the glassy surface erupted. Every duck that could fly took off in a different direction. Water and feathers flew. The ducklings started paddling with all their might away from the flurry. The rock landed a few feet behind them and the wave it created was a tsunami of a splash that pushed the little peeping fluff balls all the way to shore.

Meanwhile, the flying ducks were still thrashing their wings and flapping around the pond. I watched the middle school kids run away from the mess. They were each bending over and ducking their heads down to escape the birds. It almost looked like they were flapping their arms around to keep the ducks away.

It took some time, but when the ducks finally settled down and all the quacking had quieted, I was still sitting in the cold mud behind the tall grass and cattails. I clasped my hands in between my knees to try to stop them from shaking out of control, but my legs also felt weak and shaky. By the time my heart beat slowed to a normal pace and I was sure that legs would work, the ducks had gone back to doing normal duck things as if nothing had happened.

*Isla* (1<sup>st</sup> Draft)  
By  
Emma Hutchinson

Isla was an only child who lived with her aunt Betty. They lived together at the top of the hill. At the bottom of the hill was a small pond. Since Isla didn't have any siblings to play with she would roll down the grassiest part of the hill until she came to a stop at the bottom. Isla liked to stare up at the clouds until the dizziness subsided and then she would squint up at the first cloud she could focus on until an image appeared. This was how she decided which game to play that day. Isla ran wild around the small pond, following her imagination wherever it directed. Isla liked her potatoes mashed, her corn and peas mixed, and a cookie from the box after dinner. She could play with a hula-hoop for what felt like hours but was really 15 minutes.

Isla could also control her aunt's mind when she tried really hard.

It never worked for long, but for instance once in a while she could convince Aunt Betty to let her leave the house wearing her favorite blue tutu. She didn't even need to speak to use her power. Sometimes all it would take was focusing really hard on what she wanted while looking at her aunt.

This was a talent that Isla took very seriously. She never tried it to blame her dog, Pepper for spilling her milk at dinner. She never even thought about using it on someone she didn't know. And she definitely didn't try to control minds in public.

Once, she used it on her best friend Annie to get her to share some gummies. It had worked, but the look on Annie's face made Isla so upset that the gummies made her nauseous. She was haunted by guilty feelings and an upset stomach so much that she chose

to swing alone during recess instead of face Annie again. After that day, she decided not to use mind control on her friend either.

After school, Isla liked to stop by the pond at the bottom of the hill to watch the ducks swim around. They knew her well at this point and liked her enough to ignore her quiet presence as they went about their waddling business. Isla would sit and watch them swim around. Sometimes the ducklings would venture closer and quack at her. They were more curious than the adult ducks. The ducklings toddled around in a wobbling heard of yellow feathers. Isla got the most joy from watching these rowdy ducklings.

One day, Isla went outside to visit the pond after school, only to find some of the neighborhood kids already there. The five of them were passing a loaf of bread around and throwing crumbs to the ducks. Feeding the ducks is good, but feeding them bread crumbs is bad. Aunt Betty had told Isla that the bread hurts the ducks' stomachs. She didn't want the ducks to get hurt. She ran down the hill towards the pond to help the ducks and stop them somehow. However, by the time she reached the edge of the pond, she was out of breath and out of nerves. These weren't kids her age. These were middle schoolers.

Isla grew scared for the ducks as she watched first the adults and then the ducklings swim towards the harmful offering. They were going to gobble up as much as they could and they didn't know any better. The closer the birds got, the more bread the middle schoolers threw into the water. This was going to be a disaster.

Isla couldn't yet all them to stop. It would draw way too much attention to herself. She considered using mind control on the kids, but she remembered the feeling she got after controlling Annie and decided not to. She wouldn't do it.

By now, time had run out and the ducks started pecking pale crumbs on top of the water. They quacked at each other and squabbled over who would get the most. Isla hated to stand by and watch the ducks get sick. She felt helpless. She squeezed her eyes shut in despair. She wanted them to stop. She wanted to speak, to say something. She needed everyone to just *Stop!*

When she dared open her eyes again, she found the scene exactly as she expected, except with one straggling duckling floating in the middle of the pond like a fluffy, yellow cork. It was bobbing in the water, but it had stopped mid-paddle and its beak was stuck open mid-quack.

This was bad, very bad. Isla hadn't wanted to use mind control. The duckling remained frozen a few inches away from a breadcrumb floating past. It looked like some game of red light, green light. Here was her solution. All she had to do was tell the ducks to not eat the bread. Isla scrunched up her nose and squinted her eyes hard at the rest of the ducklings closest to her. She had never controlled more than person before, let alone on ducks. This was going to take all her concentration.

*Stop!* She thought, *Stop!* She sent the thoughts towards the ducks who had already started eating. Another couple of ducks froze. One even let a crumb fall out of its beak. The plan was working, but it still wasn't enough. There were ten other ducks still greedily gobbling up as much as they could.

Isla risked a glance over at the middle schoolers. They were laughing with each other and still throwing the bread into the pond. One of the girls grabbed the fuzzy top of a cattail and started breaking it up so the fluff floated into the air and away on the breeze. This was the distraction Isla needed. She ducked behind the tall grass and cattails on her

side of the pond and started to crawl around the edge towards the other children and remaining ducks. She just had to get close enough to help them all. The mud squelched under her hands and knees, and she tried to ignore thoughts of how annoyed her aunt would be about more grass stains to clean. This was for the greater good. If any of the ducks got sick because she couldn't help them, she would never forgive herself. But she couldn't let the middle schoolers see her, or they might suspect something, but more than that, they scared her.

Isla continued on all fours around the pond and focused her attention on the flurry of feathers in the water. *Stop, stop, don't*, was all she would let herself think. The closer she got, the more birds froze. It worked!

It was only when the older children began to notice and mutter among themselves about this new odd-bird behavior that Isla really looked around. Not only had the ducks stopped eating the bread, they had stopped doing anything at all.

Each one floated on the water, which had turned calm without their splashing. They held poses as if they were waiting for a camera to flash. The middle schoolers' muttering grew louder. Isla could hear their annoyance that the birds had stopped being fun. She couldn't see them, but from her place in the mud she watched a stone fly in the middle of the pond and splash two of the ducklings. Not a squawk, not a peep, not a splash was made by the birds. This was not good. Another stone landed near an older bird, but it was met with the same still silence. The middle schoolers had moved past throwing bread, and now a bird was really going to get hurt. Isla felt her hopes sink like the stones. There was no way she could save the ducks from this. The older children started laughing again and Isla racked her brain for a way to stop them that didn't include confrontation or mind control.

She took another look at the statuesque birds in the water. How long would they stay frozen like that? This was all her fault. The birds had only stopped because she told them to. She didn't even know she could control that many birds, and she didn't know what to do now to change. Isla's face grew hot and her eyes stung with tears of frustrations. Her hands were all muddy from crouching on the ground, so she used her sleeve to wipe her nose and dry her eyes.

When she looked back up, a massive rock the size of a full loaf of bread was hurtling through the air. *Duck!* She didn't know if she thought or shouted the command, but that was all Isla had time for before chaos broke loose.

Before the rock hit the water, the glassy surface erupted. Every duck that could fly took off in a different direction. Water and feathers flew. The ducklings started paddling with all their might away from the flurry. The rock landed a few feet behind them and the wave it created was a tsunami of splash that pushed the little peeping fluff balls all the way to shore.

Meanwhile, the flying ducks were still thrashing their wings and flapping around the pond. Isla watched the middle school kids run away from the mess. They were each covering their head with their hands and bending as they ran. They were all ducking from away from the birds.

It took some time, but when the ducks finally settled down and all the quacking had quieted, Isla was still sitting in the cold mud behind the tall grass and cattails. She was too stunned to move. It turned out all she had to do was let ducks duck.

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## AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Emma Hutchinson was born in Lewiston, Maine. She grew up in Topsham, Maine and graduated from Mt Ararat High School in 2015.

Majoring in English with a concentration in Professional and Technical Writing, Emma also has a minor in Creative Writing. She worked as a tutor in the Writing Center for her last two years. Throughout her writing career, Emma's work was published in *The Open Field* and *Dwell*. She received the 2017-2018 Abby Sargent Neese Kelly Scholarship for excellence in creative writing.

She was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, Delta chapter of Maine as a sophomore. She was an active member of the Honors Student Advisory Board and served as Vice President and President for a time. As a result, Emma was also involved with the Maine Day Meal Packout. She managed the third annual Maine Day Meal Packout, and over 200 volunteers joined in to help pack 75,000 meals in under three hours. Emma was a student representative on the Honors College Curriculum Committee and the Honors Council. She earned the 2019 Honors College Service Award. Emma was also a co-Vice President of the 2019 class of All Maine Women.

Emma is going on to work as an Operations Assistant for Redfin Solutions, LLC in Portland, Maine.