

CDCPS Students Win 2011 Scholastic Writing Awards

Four CDCPS students have been recognized for their writing with Scholastic Writing Awards, which celebrate the creative achievement of America's teens. Please join our school community in congratulating these students for their creativity, hard work, and accomplishment in being recognized in this highly competitive contest.

- **Alba Disla** awarded the Gold Key in the Personal Essay/Memoir category for "*No Excuses*"
- **Ashley Portorreal** awarded the Silver Key in the Personal Essay/Memoir category for "*Not a Thing Missing*"
- **Yeimi Soto** recognized with an Honorable Mention in the Poetry category for "*My Arrival*"
- **Angelidi Monegro** recognized with an Honorable Mention in the Poetry category for "*A Long Time Gone*"

(Read work on following pages)

For more information about the Scholastic Awards and the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers, visit <http://www.artandwriting.org/Awards>

Students' names were included in the print edition of the Boston Globe on March 6, 2011.

No Excuses

I'm almost there. But I can't reach. This trail, although so familiar from the previous year, seems like it's twisting in the new ways, trying to tease and cajole me into giving up. Beads of sweat trickle down my face, leaving new trails of exhaustion and frustration. Blindingly hot fire shoots through my legs with each pounding step. The trees begin to sway and dance before my eyes. The edges of the world as I knew it fuzz and blur to the point where I see colors meshing, becoming one and creating new shapes and forms. Brown menacing knots threaten to send me to the ground. Keep fighting I tell myself, but it is much easier said than done. I can just see the finish line, peppered with screaming teammates and opponents restrained by two neon orange cones. Two runners from Kipp Academy whiz by, and that's exactly what I needed to finish. My motivation, just some type of incentive was all I was asking for. And, unknowingly, they had given me just that. Before I lose sight of the blond-haired girls, I pick up speed and take off.

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Today's the big race. Oh, joy. I force my unwilling legs out of the comfort of my bed and into the shower I go. The steamy spray invades my nose, making me take deep, measured breaths, waking me up. Now that my grogginess was washed away, I could eat without falling atop my food, fast asleep. As I slice my banana into my cereal, my mind and body prepare for the meet. With a mind of their own, my muscles contract and tense as if they know what was ahead. Inevitably, I end up asking myself why I signed up in the first place, and then I get on the bus and remember. Never a dull moment on the bus ride to the park or reservation. Rarely quiet, conversations about homework and friends and above all, laughter, is projected into the air and bounced off the walls of the yellow enclosure. Now, I mentally prepare myself for the race, the most important one, and the one to give my all to. I know the strategies; I have the support and motivation from everyone so strong I can almost feel the warmth, a golden glow. I smile secretly to myself as we take a sharp turn onto the entrance road of Winnekenni Park.

As soon as I step off the bus, a cold harsh wind whips at my face. It was a shock to my body, the contrast between the coziness of the bus and the frigid cold of the outside world. I immediately want to go back into the warm, inviting haven. I shake that feeling off and I feel it blow away with the wind, leaving me with a sense of confidence. I'm awestruck as I gaze at the scenery before me; a grand lake at its center surrounded by lush green trees and plants. This is what we've prepared for; all those practices have to carry some value. A distance voice reaches my ears and I happen to hear that this trail is one point nine miles! My initial feeling is pure fear. I haven't run that much in any race, let alone the championship. A million things run through my mind making it grow, compressed to my skull. My head starts to throb; tingling tendrils creep up my fingertips. I shut and open my eyes and the sensations vanish as soon as they began. A sharp intake of breath clears my head and I drop back into reality with my team. Sure, the number is

overwhelming, but I always repeat the same line in my head: I don't have to finish first, but I am *not* going to remain at the back where the population of runners is less dense. With this, I shove my hands in my pockets, balled into fists to trap as much heat as possible, and begin the walk-through with all of the runners. We'd never arrived with so much time to spare that we got the chance to have a walk-through with everyone. No hills, very mundane, not paved as I had hoped for, but good enough, it doesn't look too difficult. And I say it all too soon. We take the curve to make the circle and I notice how my legs start to burn. It takes more and more effort to go through this path and I look to the ground. Under the sea of slick leaves swim jagged rocks and gnarled twigs and branches. Violent waves of dirt and trees snip at my exposed legs and I start to complain. How am I ever going to keep a regular pace in this jungle? , I keep asking myself. Each step is a new excuse in my head for me not fulfilling my goal. I know from this moment, this is going to be a battle, not only between the ground and myself, but the never-ending war between my body and mind. My body would be exhausted, my mind pushing every limit I had. Hopefully, from here to the start of the race I'll think of something to get past the all-mighty frontier. After what seems like five minutes, we are back to square one. Maybe I'm making a big deal out of this, I tell myself. Even though this relaxes me a little, when that short man shot his gun to send off the runners, my fingertips began to tingle.

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Full speed, I spot the halfway sign. Subconsciously, I check off items off of my goal list. I passed my competition. The simplicity of it makes it all the more better. It drives me forward, my feet making temporary impressions on the soft, awaiting ground. For all of the past races I've tried to catch up to my teammates Coraima and Ashley. They were what seemed ten steps away, but impossible for me to reach. I did the impossible; at this point I'm invincible. As I anticipate the turn into the narrow strait, I slow down. I must proceed with extra caution for I will not let the horrid sea creatures engulf me. I break into a slow jog and catch my breath. Although I can see my breath puff out before me, my body is unnaturally warm. Blood roars in my ears making them a bright flaming crimson at the tips. I soar over the sea. Each step feels as light and graceful as a hawk lands atop a building to amaze its spectators. Shock, disbelief, amazement, power; all run through my mind in one moment. Then, up ahead I spot something unbelievable. I see one of my teammates Roberto running up the slope. Up until this race I've never seen Roberto because he was always much too fast and I thought I could never catch up. Here I am today with a mere fifteen strides away from him. His dark wavy hair bounces with every step and I remind myself that I must not lose sight of the bobbing black shape. As long as it is in my line of vision, I know I am close. The back of my throat tastes metallic, bloodlike, my legs feel absolutely weak, but I have to finish strong. Just the sound of the finish line gets me to pick up my speed. I hear and feel the end approaching. Finish line here I come. The trees begin to space out and more sunlight finds its way into the wooded area. I see more and more cars and jumping shapes. It feels as if my legs just might give out right then and there, but some superhuman strength came over my legs as if Superman had given them to me himself. I hear my time and number shouted out, I see my coach grin and high-five me and I feel on top of the world.

I don't think I'm going to forget that race for a long time. It showed me just how far I can push myself to succeed. Comparing it to my previous races, I noticed that I am my own obstacle. I complain and make excuses for myself, putting myself down. I saw that I needed to get past myself before I could overcome any more barriers. I laugh at how I reacted when I heard the distance and almost immediately I wonder how I do this not only in sports, but all the time. Now I wish that I looked at that terrifying sea and dove into it instead of skimming it with hesitation like a skipping rock. When I passed that orange-coned finish line, I felt a certain energy fizzing throughout my entire body. I had never run a race like that. My world was spinning, thinking it was all a dream, I blink rapidly only to reveal the same scenery. I smiled and when they gave out the awards, knowing that I wouldn't receive any, I gave myself one in my head. Hey, it may sound corny, but I won in the battle against myself in my head. After the race, I told everyone I saw about it until they got sick of me, but I knew by of the gleam in their eyes, that they were just as proud as I was.

Ashley Portorreal

11-17-10

Not a Thing Missing

I placed the white bow in my hair. The grin wouldn't wipe off my face. My red skirt ruffled as I stood by the door and saw the snow piled up by the smudged window. I smelled it, saw it, felt it. Christmas was here. I heard my mom's high heels tap as she came down the wooden stairs. I gave one more look in the mirror as I ran my fingers through my hair. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my mom reach into the closet. I noticed as she pulled out our *guira*; a metal, man-made instrument for Latin American music from the Dominican Republic. Right then and there, I knew that this year's Christmas was going to be special.

We slowly pulled up to my grandmother's house in Methuen, Ma, and parked behind my aunt's short, white, round Toyota. To this day, I still go around saying the car fits her perfectly. The cars were lined up far behind my grandmother's driveway and seeing all of the familiar vehicles increased my excitement. I saw Tío Juan's old green minivan, which was been passed down from generation to generation and Maria's shiny, new yellow jeep surrounded by falling snow on both sides. My brother and I raced to the glass door decorated with a bright Christmas wreath. It was amazing to see how fast I was able to run in tights, on icy, snow-covered, unlevelled cement! I barely noticed how cold it really was until I saw my mom shivering at the top of the stairs. Through the window I was able to see the huge Christmas tree covered with gold and maroon ornaments. My grandmother opened the door with a huge smile on her face. She hugged us with such passion, as though she felt this Christmas was different.

I stepped into the house, into an aroma of Latin American food and deserts. My stomach began to grumble right away, as the smell of the sweet milk from the *arroz con leche* on the stove, reached my nose. The fact that the excitement hadn't let me eat all day finally hit me. As I stepped in, my foot slid forward on the new hard wood floors; filled with anxiousness, I forgot to wipe my feet on the mistletoe-shaped doormat. My mom pulled on my arm and whispered in a humorous cartoon-like voice, "We have a little surprise for you." Right away I thought, "We're opening gifts already?!" She led me into the living room, and that definitely was a huge surprise. With a smile on my face, I circled the entire room. Everybody looked fake to me. It was unbelievable. My night began with the gift of being able to see my aunt, Eury, my uncle, Eliezer and their four kids from the Dominican Republic. I ran over and hugged them all. My aunt's eyes began to shine; it was obvious she was holding back the tears. I had missed them so much for the past six years. In their arms I thought, "Wow, my first holiday with no one missing."

The door kept opening and more and more people filled the house. It was hilarious to see Abuelita Ana arrive with a huge, black, trash bag filled with gifts for all of her grandchildren. She looked like a female Santa Claus! With every person who arrived, a hug came with them. I saw family members I hadn't seen for months and other family members who after arguments had been able to settle their differences. All the younger

kids swarmed into the house like the lucky golden ticket winners from Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory!

Everyone pitched in for the food. It was great trying all the different styles of cooking. My aunt Diana's baked ham went great with Abuelita's homemade bread. The food was great, no one judged--everyone just appreciated the night itself. The night came down to time for opening gifts. At that point, I didn't care if I went home with one gift or 50 because the night was going perfectly and I felt I wasn't missing one little thing. The expression on the faces of my less fortunate cousins whenever they got a gift was indescribable. It was funny seeing five-year-old Jasmine's face when she asked if the gift she opened was hers to keep. She still didn't really understand the concept of Christmas gifts. Seeing how the kids, teens, and adults from poverty in the Dominican Republic were so appreciative to get one little gift made me smile.

This Christmas was filled with appreciation from everyone in the building. The night ended with a family chorus. Every soul in the room was singing; especially when we sang the classic, "*Feliz Navidad*." I heard some great voices...and some attempts at singing. We started off with Christmas songs and for some reason, ended up with some country music! My Tío Juan pulled out his guitar, my mom's cousin pulled out her *tambora* and my mom played on her *guira*. In between songs we shared stories and memories. Some made us laugh, some made us cry, and others just made us look at all the faces in the room and be thankful for all these wonderful people we had in our lives. My aunts made fun of how all the cousins used to trade pacifiers as babies and my mom spoke about how my grandfather would always fall asleep in the middle of conversations.

It was great being enclosed by the warmth of my very big family. You can tell everyone wouldn't rather be anywhere else but here. The best part was seeing a smile on everyone's faces throughout the night. Until this day, I can truly say that was the most perfect day in my life; Christmas of 2009, when I was able to see everyone in the family happily spending time together. I would love to re-live that special night anytime.

Yeimi Soto

“My Arrival”

Once I walk out those big black doors,
it’s going to be the beautiful,
tropical Dominican air.

I look for him,
feeling a little lost.
Is he late? Did he forget?
It wouldn’t be the first time.

There’s a man
staring at me,
covering his face with a Red Sox hat.
There I felt an initial awkwardness towards this stranger.

When I squint,
I see it’s him!

I hug my dad
for the first time in nine or ten months.
Oh how I missed his bear hugs.

Something about that father-daughter moment
was so comforting.

My vacation
has finally begun.

Angelidi Monegro
A Long Time Gone
12-6-10

I stand there...

Waiting till she can't see our car
anymore.
She gets teary-eyed,
as she hears mother cry loudly in the car.
I wave good-bye to her as she walks away.

Daily,
my mom cooks the food she always loved,
"arroz con vegetales y bistec seco."
We both loved that meal, so I guess that's one thing
we have in common.
Surprisingly,
the corn doesn't taste as good as when she'd sit by me and say,
"Mmm Mami esto esta tan bueno, quiero mas!"

She isn't here anymore.
So now I have my own room and do the laundry.
Every time I drop an old shirt of hers that is now mine
into the washer,
my eyes drown into a pool of water as I see her presence
in front of me,
wearing the shirt better than me.

I miss her like I miss taking naps in
kindergarten.
It's not like I won't ever see her again....
It's just that...
She's a long time gone.