

A SCENDENCY



Aspirations 2022



# Aspirations 2022

A Literary and Arts Journal for  
Mercer County Area  
High School Students

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Aspirations 2022, a literary magazine published by Mercer County Community College, is proud to celebrate and present the talents of area high school students. For decades, the literary and visual works collected in Aspirations have showcased students' hopes, dilemmas, questions, and insights. This year, once again, the creativity within these pages helps us see both the familiar with renewed attention and the unfamiliar with a satisfying sense of recognition.

A distinguished panel selected these works from among many entries. We thank them for their discerning sensibilities and commitment to the students in this area.

Still others have contributed to this publication in important ways. We would like to thank the parents, friends, family, and teachers who supported the development of our writers and artists. Thanks go to MCCC Interim President Barbara Basel and our Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Robert Schreyer for their support; to Francis Paixao and Nicholas Lucarelli in Mercer's Publications Office for their work designing and laying out this journal; to Brad Kent for setting up and maintaining the Aspirations web page; and to Shana Burnett for the dependable and effective way she managed submissions, contact with schools, and the many details of the selection, editing and proofing process. Finally, I want to thank Robert Kleinschmidt, Dean of Liberal Arts, for his generous help to me and his coordination of all phases of this publication project. His commitment to the arts makes projects such as this one possible.

Nicole Homer

Associate Professor of English and Editor, Aspirations 2022  
Mercer County Community College



**Cormac Dow**

Hopewell Valley Central High School  
Grade 12

Cormac is a determined student. In and out of school he is the track captain, an Eagle Scout, a member of NHS and NAHS, and is looking forward to college life.

## Ascendancy



**Lina Abtouche**  
Ewing High School  
Grade 11

Lina Abtouche is an avid reader and loves to write poetry. To her, making a positive change in society is the most important thing of all. She loves to express herself through this medium and hopes to inspire others through her writing.

## La puissance de l'automne (Autumn's power)

the stillness of the blue sky  
like nature's canvas  
gives me hope for the day  
knowing that the possibilities are indeed possible  
removes the trepidation from the heart  
it is casted farther and farther away

Oh, how long has it been since I have seen the world this clearly?

the longing has made me weary  
gives the auburn leaves on the trees  
near the window  
purpose as they are laden in the sun's kiss

Yet, none will take the blame when the branches are bare  
and they discover autumn has been granted to us like a prayer  
the crisp air welcomes me to its humble abode  
time cares not for my desires  
as it expires  
when the moon has come alight  
signaling the long night

my tea is warm and soul cold.  
isn't this getting old?  
when your absence  
comes to an end.

the sun will never come up again  
and strife shall never know its place  
because the pure clouds will paint the clear skies  
and only then will I know what I face



**Madison Gillespie**

Hopewell Valley Central High School  
Grade 11

Madison Gillespie likes to draw and create stories. She is planning to go to school for character design and cartoons.

## picture perfect

**Nicholas Geary**

Hopewell Valley Central High School  
Grade 12

Nicholas Geary is a student of Ms. Dykty.

## Lost in New York

God I have no clue where I am,  
But just look at this place.  
Metal and screens and people,  
For as far as the eye can see,  
Yet I feel like I'm lost in a forest.  
Everyone else seems like they know where they're going  
Except me,  
How does one even know where they're going?  
Where do I even begin,  
This man in front of me might know what's going on.  
Maybe he knows how to escape the forest.

Cormac Dow  
Hopewell Valley Central High School  
Grade 12

# Egotistical



Lina Abtouche  
Ewing High School  
Grade 11

## Rain

During a rainstorm  
I always take the time to admire each droplet  
all of them running through  
Seeping through  
Disappearing to  
everywhere and nowhere  
in my back garden, in the red roses that then dry  
to the roads, the insignificant roads, insist  
on a touch from them, a blessing in their cracked soul  
racing down the clear glass of my window  
Capturing every reflection in their bodies as if it may be  
their  
last, it begs  
to find a home  
meeting the fertile soil, its form melts into a puddle  
the roots of the sacred tree claiming sustenance  
dancing with it, worshiping it, honoring the simplicity  
all the while favoring life, the complexity it allows.  
standing in the rain, the urge to selfishly gather  
each raindrop to put in my heart  
ushers forth.

As frustrating as the crash of an ocean's wave on shore  
and the shallow waters farther out  
where the blue deceives the clarity in my hands.

Love is like fleeting rain  
it may be abundant, yet ever so precious  
because the life it gives me reminds one of when they look  
at a rainstorm  
startled at the thunder,  
yet lured like forbidden venom in the eyes

I shall hold the seven seas in my empty heart  
if that is what it takes to keep from being apart  
Though, even when your home may alter  
Love,  
Like Rain  
Shall never falter

**Ethen Quinlan**  
Hopewell Valley Central  
High School  
Grade 12

Ethen Quinlan enjoys  
writing and chess. He  
hopes to write a memoir  
someday.

## God's Jewelry Box

My blue sky has come back yes it has,  
yes it has

Deep and rich, poked full of stars

My little Mary Lennox yard tumbles on beneath my window, and  
Vincent's trees stretch over the skyline

The ground is painted white  
Snow white, snowy skin of winter  
Gnawing my fingertips red

Deep beneath that snowy skin sleeps the earth, brown and warm  
Trusting and soft

Right under my window

And the wren in the tree next to my roof mumbles in her sleep,  
Her little birdsong, skips through the night

My hands are filled with bees tonight, red hot  
One hundred fifteen degrees

My blue sky has come back, yes it has,  
yes it has

**John Johann**  
Hopewell Valley Central  
High School  
Grade 12

John Johann is a student of  
Ms. Dykty.

## nature haiku

The crickets shout loud  
There is not a cloud showing  
The birds have moved south

**Madison Gillespie**  
Hopewell Valley Central High School  
Grade 11

## pets and plants



**Nicholas Geary**  
Hopewell Valley Central High School  
Grade 12

## Fall

Cool breeze striking through  
Orange leaves gently falling  
The sun never leaves



**Celine Edmonds**  
Hopewell Valley  
Central High School  
Grade 12

Celine enjoys spending  
time with friends,  
going to the beach, and  
getting coffee.

## The Beauty of Life

Strutting along the large leaves  
is a caterpillar crawling with white black and yellow stripes  
As it goes along it munches at the bright green leaves

The caterpillar looks as full as can be  
Soon it will be encased by a lime green lining  
Peacefully changing within

It explodes like a volcano with a reddish-orange butterfly  
The black lines that trace through like veins  
And the edge wrapped with a black border and white spots  
Before long the lifetime of the monarch has passed

It must be remembered that life is like a butterfly  
Short-lived and constantly changing  
To spend every moment well and cherish them deeply  
Like the butterflies' life, our lives are short too

**Casey Skibik**  
Hopewell Valley  
Central High School  
Grade 12

Casey Skibik likes  
drawing and wants to  
do art in college.

## Ocean

The ocean is calm  
And the tide is high  
The moon floats up in the sky  
Casting light on the still waters  
Dipping into the sea,  
The water is cold but calming  
The sound of tiny waves meeting the sand is relaxing  
While wildlife sings quietly  
The salty air has a familiar feel  
And it's one you miss the second it's gone

**Celine Edmonds**  
Hopewell Valley  
Central High School  
Grade 12

## Sunshine

The big yellow ball sits high in the sky  
With rays that illuminate the world  
It shines down on all creatures below

The park is the perfect place to immerse yourself in the nature  
The lake glistens under the afternoon sun  
The reflection white like paper

We begin to lay in the field to absorb the fresh air  
As we close our eyes, we hear the birds chirping  
Our bodies absorb the warmth as the sun shines down

The tall trees casting shadows around us  
The bees bounce between the golden flowers  
The sun bright as day

**Kelly Cianfano**  
Hopewell Valley Central  
High School  
Grade 12

Kelly enjoys music and iced  
coffee.

## Presque Vu

I told you to take care of my heart  
For it lays in the palm of your hand  
I told you to never put it down  
Or juggle it like some clown

I told you my heart was made of glass  
But you decided to kick it like a ball in the grass  
Childish, I might add  
That you had the ability to make someone so sad

You see me as some Robot  
An empty machine with no concept of emotion  
You must think I don't have feelings too  
But once again, everything is about you

You must have experienced Presque Vu  
Because you have failed to remember  
That your heart lays in my hand  
Surely you won't misunderstand

when it shatters.

Ethen Quinlan  
Hopewell Valley Central  
High School  
Grade 12

Ethen Quinlan enjoys  
writing and chess. He  
hopes to write a memoir  
someday.

## Instructions for Keatlings

Dear Mystic,  
rugged,  
Mystic  
let yourself be plagued with Thought,  
with Speech, with Light  
surrender yourself to the cosmos

let Words seep into your arteries,  
into your Heart, allow them to fill your soul

then claim those words,  
quick now, quick! don't let them leave just yet  
those words- borne, once of the heavens, now,  
Yours.

embrace them, with the strength of the sun  
hold them to your chest, grip them tightly  
pocket them, mold them with your hands, your lips,  
turn them into freshly butchered pieces of raw Thought,  
let them grow wider, and louder, until they rip at the seams

let them spill, let them ring out  
for there will be many who listen to you preach,  
whether it be a mole, or mouse, or microphone

your saints were heretics,  
for they opposed tradition  
and you shall follow in their footsteps

but for they now, they sleep eternally  
quiet, and still  
yet the hands of time could never silence them,

we didn't have to dig up their words from Elysium,

the roots of their work climbed up out of the ground,  
infecting textbooks, galleries, time, life,  
never prune their garden

(Cont.)

they left their works upon the chopping block to be marvelled at,  
to have the marketplace scramble to get a look, to be chewed up delicately,  
and spat out into the faces of those who will listen

we must keep their words alive  
we must let them thrive,

we let heretics beat sense into us,  
and their words just as ours, were fruitful,  
we sowed their poems, words, letters, into the earth  
again and again,  
until it blew  
fresh citrus,  
dripping with bitterness and sweetness,  
so much that we could swim in it

Confine and conform as you please,  
just leave us with something, dear mystic  
leave us something to keep alive,  
to worship, to chew, to swim in,  
plague us,  
with your words.

John Johann  
Hopewell Valley  
Central  
High School  
Grade 12

## Nature VILLANelle

The rain is falling  
The clouds will not go away  
The birds are calling  
The wolves are mawing  
The wind is begging me to stay  
The rain is falling  
The bugs keep crawling  
With this rain, the bugs cannot stay  
The birds are calling  
When the rain tapped my hood I am suddenly recalling  
I now am ready to play  
The rain is falling  
I now recall that I am balling  
The baller is off his game today  
The birds are calling  
I get back up and snap out of this delusion caused by galling  
Now that I've been hit in the head with the ball I am no longer going to obey  
The rain is falling  
The birds are calling

**Megan Silberberger**  
Hopewell Valley  
Central High School  
Grade 12

Megan enjoys reading  
and writing, as well as  
playing volleyball.

## Admire the Sunshine

Admire the falling snow; the deer tracks  
The crisp wind, the crunch of ice-  
Admire the pain; the cracks along the sidewalk  
The fallen trees, the end of a song-  
Admire the light; the gleam of sunbeams  
The birds chirping, the warmth-  
Admire the rain; the misty feeling  
The smell of nature, the wetness-  
Admire the colors; the radiance  
The electricity, the vibrance-  
Admire the water; the trickling stream  
The monstrous waves, the scenic waterfall-  
Admire the night; the glittering moon  
The silence, the navy sky-  
Admire the intensity. Admire the sorrows.  
Admire the earth that we experience every day.  
Admire the wind and the weather.  
Admire the start; Admire the finish.  
Admire the book and admire the author.  
Admire the sunshine; it brings more sunshine.  
Admire the sunshine; it brings more sunshine.

**Kelly Cianfano**  
Hopewell Valley  
Central High School  
Grade 12

## Beyond the Shadow

They laid hidden in the shadow  
The shadow behind the light  
They adored this shadow  
Never leaving it's extremity  
It hid them  
From fear  
Pain  
The world  
but one day  
They became afraid of the dark



**Cameron Confer**  
Hopewell Valley  
Central High School  
Grade 12

Cameron likes to skateboard, and do art in his free time. He works as a gardener and loves to make short films.

## Grandma's House

I wake up surrounded by soft pillows.  
The deep couch stretches its arms,  
offering to hold my weight comfortably.  
I extend my limbs over its worn shoulder and take a deep yawn  
Around me  
A fan slowly turns air through the room.  
Electric static coming from thick amber lamps,  
The cabin's soft dark wood silences a rumbling storm,  
tapping on the glass.  
At night,  
Windows around the couch, flash white lightning.  
And out by the gust front,  
Black waves roll in to please an empty shore  
I sit up,  
my mind oscillating with the fan.  
Eyes bobbing in and out of sleep.  
A slow morning with vibrant plants to bring refreshment to the mind.  
Night is blissful  
but the smell of pancakes is nostalgic  
Sizzling on a buttered skillet  
It's a beautiful day at my Grandma's house.

**Sophia Noto**  
Hopewell Valley  
Central High School  
Grade 7

Sophia Noto is an imaginative and attentive writer inspired by the small experiences of daily life. In addition to writing, she enjoys drawing with her younger sister.

## The Sun

The reflection of my mother's daughter  
gazes back. Her irises rebound, regretful.  
And the facade is fractured, unlike the present glass.

Pupils tumbling through void, blacking out the corners,  
burning out her vision. Colder than the sun, just warm enough,  
like my childhood home or my mom's cooking,  
the crimson blanket she was given for Christmas,  
the clothes I wore on the school playground  
in December when the sun didn't touch my face.

I am in my house. I am in my home but I am not home,  
and I cannot go back honorably,  
the sun inside me is searing and someone is bound to notice before long.

**Sarah Mian**  
Hopewell Valley  
Central High School  
Grade 12

Sarah Mian likes rock climbing and playing sudoku.

## Decisions

“What’s for lunch today?”

“No idea.”

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t know.”

Same conversation with the same outcome happens every single day. Everyone wants to make their own choices for what they’re going to eat for lunch, but don’t know what to choose. People also refuse to eat the same thing for lunch every day, even though the original everyday option isn’t bad, because if they choose what to eat, then choosing the same thing is boring and nobody wants to see themselves as boring, especially when it comes to food. People desire to make their own choices as it allows them to feel in control of their life. Conforming to a set lifestyle limits the freedom people have even if it doesn’t make much of a difference.

We get to choose what we eat for lunch everyday, no matter how difficult the decision may be. We accept recommendations from others, but not the choices they make. If we were to follow the choices of others, then we would lose the ability to make our own choices when we need to if we haven’t practiced the skill.

There are instances where people will follow other people. Toddlers follow things that adults do because toddlers think that it’s fun, and these toddlers are too young to make all of their own decisions. When needing to find an exit in case of an emergency, people will generally follow those around them, because following others will probably lead to a higher chance of safety. Both of these examples are understandable and logical reasons to follow and conform to others’ decisions. However, some people regularly make the choice to omit their own opinions and follow trends. If a certain sneaker is released, and everyone a person knows gets that sneaker, then maybe getting that shoe would be a good choice. Although the person is still making the decision to get the shoe, their motivation to get the sneaker is to conform with what others are doing, rather than getting the sneaker because they genuinely want the sneaker.

At this point, we make decisions that don’t reflect our own opinions. Even though it seems like a simple decision to make, the person didn’t really make it. They let those around them make the decision.

In a way, the person indirectly conformed to the decision of others. The person let go a bit of their freedom while conforming to their peers' sneaker decision. Granted, it seems easier to choose the same things others chose, but if these decisions don't personally please you, then it wasn't really the best choice to make.

Why can't we alleviate ourselves from the pressure of always making the right decision if there's an easier way? Why can't we let others make some decisions for us? Why can't we let others decide our next meal?

We have so many problems, and sometimes the shortcut should be the way to go. Let go of our opinions to make life a whole lot easier. But what's the fun with that?

What makes life interesting is the ability to do every day differently. One day you can be surfing giant waves on the coast of Hawaii and the next day you can be skiing down a mountain in Maine.. If somebody else made decisions for you then, you might be stuck in the same loop over and over again with the same activities planned for every day. Why have a peanut butter and jelly lifestyle if you don't need to?

Although making choices can be a burden at times, they allow us to live. We get to add flavor and excitement to our lives by deciding to coast off the track we started on to end with memories and experiences that let us decide what makes us happy. Sticking to a simple schedule may be practical, but it wouldn't be memorable. The longer you live, the less you remember. We remember activities that we were happy in or when something unusual happened, not the mundane.

Eating the same sandwich every day seems reasonable. Uninteresting, but reasonable. However, if eating the same sandwich every day makes a person happy, then they should stick with that decision. Decisions that make us happy are always worth going for in the long run. Decisions that don't can lead to more decisions that make us unhappy with our lives if we don't do what's needed to make life better.

The next time you have to decide what to eat for lunch, just choose whatever meal that makes you happy. It could be a tuna sandwich or it could be a steak and lobster. The only thing that matters when you make that decision is that you are happy with the choice you made and that it was purely your decision.

**Evelyn Lansing**  
Hopewell Valley  
Central High School  
Grade 8

Evelyn likes dogs and enjoys  
drawing in their freetime.

# Self Portrait







