

ASPIRATIONS 2025

Mercer County Area High School Literary and Arts Journal



MERCER
COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Published by Mercer County Community College
West Windsor, New Jersey

Cover art by Assa Badiallo Sylla

Editor’s Message

Aspirations 2025, a literary and arts 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.

Once again, the creativity displayed by students helps us see both the familiar with renewed attention and the unfamiliar with a satisfying sense of recognition. 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 President Deborah Preston and our Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Robert Schreyer for their support; to Samuel Guarino in Mercer’s Marketing department for their work designing and laying out this journal; to Tim Fitzpatrick for maintaining the *Aspirations* web page; and to Lyndsey Goehrig and Vanessa Johnson for the dependable and effective way they managed submissions, contact with schools, and the many details of the selection, editing, and proofing process. Finally, I want to thank Chris Cruz-Cullari, Interim Dean of Liberal Arts, for his help with this publication project. Mercer’s commitment to the arts makes projects such as this one possible. Our judges selected these works from among many entries. We thank the following distinguished panel for their discerning sensibilities and commitment to the students: Kerri O’Neil and Edward Carmein.

Nicole Homer
Professor of English
Editor, *Aspirations* 2025 Mercer County Community College

This program is made possible in part by the Mercer County Culture and Heritage Commission through funding from the Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowments for the Arts.

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Glitch Shoes

Assa Badiallo Sylla - Hightstown High School (grade 12)

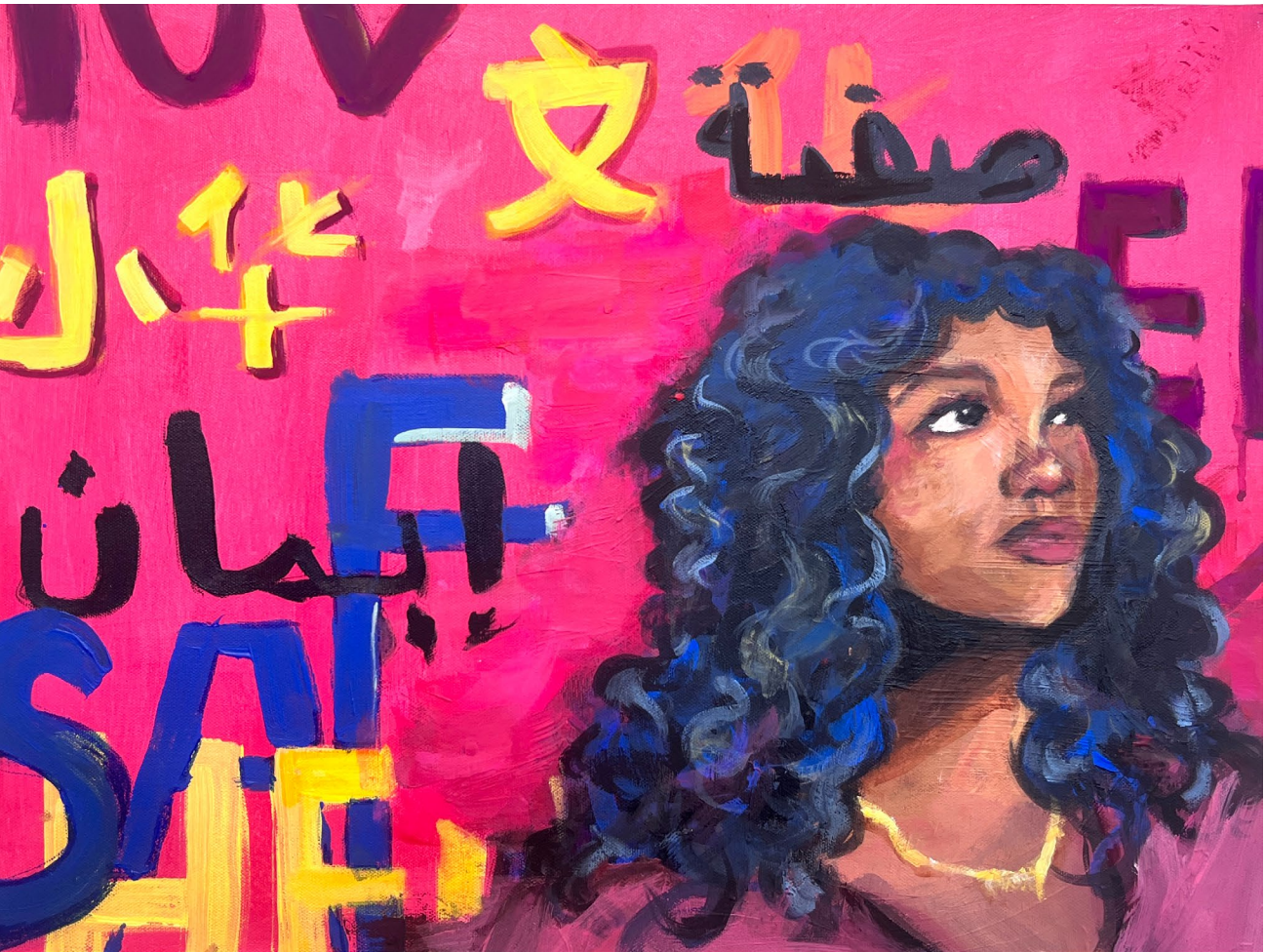
Assa enjoys relaxing and spending quality time with friends, often engaging in creative activities like painting, baking, and cooking. Her artistic side allows her to express herself while also bringing joy to those around her. In addition to her creative pursuits, she thrives in team environments, participating in various sports such as boxing and basketball. This combination of creativity and athleticism reflects her outgoing personality and love for collaboration.



Speaking My Identity

Safiyyah Malik - Peddie (grade 11)

This piece reflects Safiyyah Malik’s journey through the languages and cultures that shape her identity. The vibrant pink background, layered with words in different scripts, celebrates the diverse influences that define her. Safiyyah’s portrait radiates pride and strength, capturing her connection to her heritage and individuality.



B&W

Joseph Cline - *Hightstown High School (grade 12)*

Joseph Cline likes to play hockey. He works a lot and goes to the gym.



Pink Flowers

Kendall Anderson - *Hightstown High School (grade 10)*

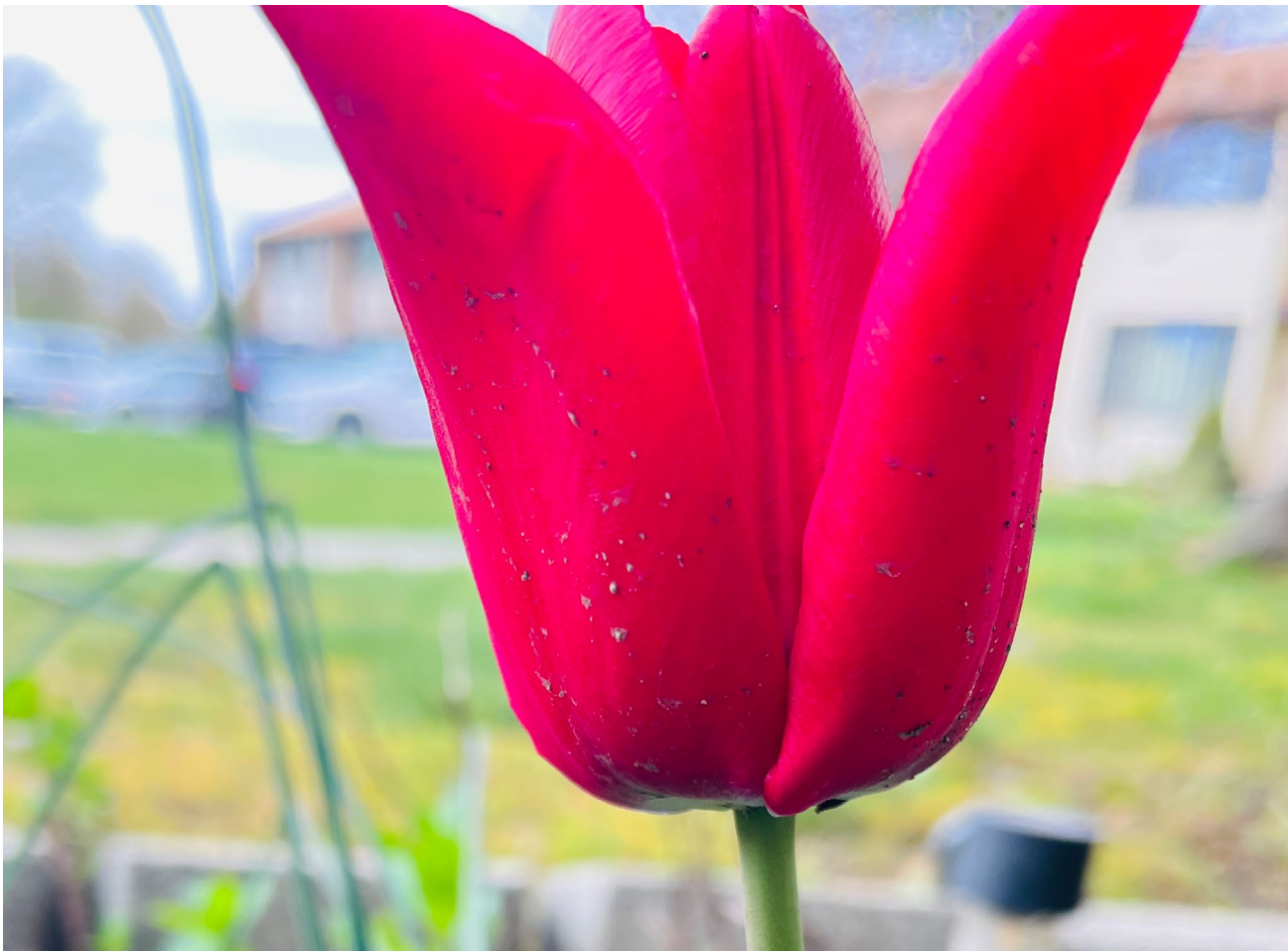
Kendall Anderson loves to play field hockey and lacrosse. She enjoys hanging out with friends. Kendall enjoys seeing her friends at school and taking photographs.



The beautiful rose flower

Ruubaika Salman - *Hightstown High School (grade 10)*

Ruubaika Salman is YouTuber, photographer, who has two rabbits and two Parkeet. They love to ride their bike and make videos on their YouTube channel. They love to go on nature walks during summer break and fresh air in spring and summer



Rainbow Rapids

Paige Fedak - *Hightstown High School (grade 11)*

Paige Fedak loves nature and spends her time cheerleading. She loves taking photos of the world around her and capturing special moments.



Bridge to Serenity

Isabella Rosamilia - *Hightstown High School (grade 12)*

Isabella Rosamilia enjoys photographing nature and spending time outdoors. Isabella plans on attending Rider University in the fall to major in Psychology.



Spiky Surprise

Adrianna Rojas - *Hightstown High School (grade 10)*

Adri Rojas has a good time hanging out with friends, sleeping, and shopping. She plays field hockey and lacrosse at the high school level. She also enjoys photography because it captures a still moment that one can look back on at any time.



Lacrosse

Sophia Acque - *Hightstown High School (grade 9)*

Sophia Acque likes to play sports and enjoys being outside. She also likes to take pictures of the little things in life. She can’t wait for the rest of high school and taking pictures along the way.



Supernatural Rebirth

Grayson Sullivan - *Hightstown High School (grade 11)*

Grayson Sullivan enjoys photography, drawing, thrifting vintage jewelry, and clothing pieces. After he graduates, he plans to pursue a career in cosmetology.



Burano’s Bright Palette

Gracie Klim - *Hightstown High School (grade 10)*

Gracie Klim is hardworking and strong, not only in school, but in her athletics. She has played varsity soccer and lacrosse since her freshman year and continues to excel in her academics on top of maintaining happy and healthy relationships with friends and family.



Friendship in season

Sofia Buda - *Hightstown High School (grade 11)*

Sofia enjoys all types of visual arts. She also enjoys traveling and being able to capture the beauty of the world!



Malfunctioned rollercoaster

Keira Neuberger - *Ewing High School (grade 9)*

Keira Neuberger is a hardworking freshman at Ewing High School. She has played field hockey for her first quarter year of high school, following the joining of her high school's production of *Into The Woods* the musical. Keira loves to write, having multiple notebooks of homemade poetry. She would like to grow up to be a literature college professor one day and will keep trying to do so till the end of her high school career.

The tingling of water cascades my tears,
Upside down I lay,
Unconscious of my fears,
I have no choice but to stay.
Ants walk around under me,
Stopping occasionally to seek a peak,
Almost as if I was a freak.
It wasn't being in place,
In the hot breezy air,
It was the humiliation that I couldn't bear.

The sun shines along my pale legs,
Reflecting the blue luscious skies,
Though having been in vulnerability,
I didn't seek my demise.
This uninviting territory has only done me good,
It's given me time to understand,
Givin me time to realize how much life is misunderstood.

I lie off my picnic blanket meeting eye-to-eye with ants,
They took all my food supply like I was their hoster,
It brought me back to that one time,
That time I was stuck on that malfunctioned roller coaster.

8 letters, 3 words, 1 meaning

Sofia Buda - *Hightstown High School (grade 11)*



Corazón color esperanza

Diana Duerto Paredes - *Hightstown High School (grade 11)*

Diana Duerto is a junior that loves making art. Since she was a kid she has painted, drawn, and loves observing and preserve moments with her camera. She is creative and loves colors.



Neon Hearts

Assa Badiallo Sylla - *Hightstown High School (grade 12)*

Assa enjoys relaxing and spending quality time with friends, often engaging in creative activities like painting, baking, and cooking. Her artistic side allows her to express herself while also bringing joy to those around her. In addition to her creative pursuits, she thrives in team environments, participating in various sports such as boxing and basketball. This combination of creativity and athleticism reflects her outgoing personality and love for collaboration.



Tromedy & Cagedy (ka-je-dee)

Clavon Jackson - *Ewing High School (grade 12)*

Clavon lives a relatively sheltered lifestyle, but over his life has gained a deep appreciation for all things introduced to him by his family. Like a sponge, he took in all forms of media, some parts from his family, others gained from unrestricted internet access. Altogether blending to create a respectable, stoic, aspiring comedian, who spends most of his time pondering his next step in life.

Tromedy and Cagedy (ka-je-dee)

By Clavon Jackson (yes, the title is weird)

Comedy and tragedy: intertwined like a fine wine spirit,
Giving a mic to the spirit of its writer.
Tragedy lets people live in suspense.
Comedy gives people that release.
Having a sense of sadness keeps people on the fence,
but a sense of humor will keep world peace.

What I'm saying is that they go hand in hand
Like corny middle school crushes:
You may hate one or the other,
But they're always in the same place
Face-to-face, you've seen the masks
Just like the masks the comics may wear on stage
Like jesters of the olden days, modern-day clowns
Tryna drown your sorrows with a chuckle here,
A snort there (if you're unique like that).
We weave words wackily,
Rapidly writing random bits, bit by bit
Just so those bits can make you sit
And laugh. No pondering, just a laugh.

Some comics do a great job of making that comedy
Just raw comedy.
No tragedy to slap you in the face Will Smith-style
Shocking you right to your core.
Tragedy to some may seem like a bore.
Thinking about emotions might just be a chore,

The complete opposite of what you paid for.
But it's necessary to get that applause at the end of the show.
The funny dude on stage just wants to know
Whether or not they did their job
But you're not wanting to sob, it's true.
It's true, too, that These clowns have feelings too
Some of them might just be sadder than you
Yet they still get on that stage
And rip their set with their jokes off a page
And they tell their pure, raw jokes
But just like raw sugar, just raw humor
Isn't as good but it still
Made you laugh. No substance, just a laugh

I believe that we as a culture are slipping
Getting away from a joy that kept our feet kicking
Our chairs, losing air, from just how gut-wrenching
And sad, but funny,
Some stories may be.
In a world of a woke mob
And people choosing to stay asleep
I think a laugh heard 'round the world
Is what the world may need.
Comics channeling their sadness
Masterfully for the masses
To make you laugh.
To craft a core memory, and laugh.

Autumn’s Sky

Ryan Sexton - *Hightstown High School (grade 12)*

Ryan Sexton is very big on art, especially photography. Outside of school, he is involved in many extra curricular activities such as the Varsity Football team and the Varsity Winter Cheerleading team to name a few. Ryan enjoys hanging out with friends, driving his jeep, fishing, and going out.



Beach Sunset

Karli Kelly - *Hightstown High School (grade 11)*

Karli Kelly loves nature and being outdoors whether it’s the beach or on a hike. She is very athletic and does gymnastics and track. She loves her friends and family and loves animals.



Nature’s Firework

Angelina Cline - Hightstown High School (grade 10)

Angelina Cline has a passion for cheerleading and spending time outdoors taking pictures. She enjoys the energy of cheer and the creativity of photography. Whether exploring new places or trying new photography techniques, she’s always looking for her next adventure.



View of the underside of a mushroom

Erika Parsons - Hightstown High School (grade 10)

Erika likes photography, drawing, and reading. Erika enjoys taking photos of her friends and family and photos of nature. In addition to taking pictures, in her free time Erika likes to hangout with her friends, sleep, and paint.



Spring Upcoming

Molly Frascella - *Hightstown High School (grade 12)*

Molly Frascella loves spending time outdoors. She also plays three varsity sports at her school and is Vice president of her class. Next year she plans on majoring in Marine Biology.



Lost in the Tides of Paradise

Lilany Urena-Abarca - *Hightstown High School (grade 10)*

Lilany Urena-Abarca loves traveling and exploring new places. She enjoys spending time with friends and family, she also loves playing with her dog Lilo.



Sky of Fire

Sanjna Suresh - *Hightstown High School (grade 12)*

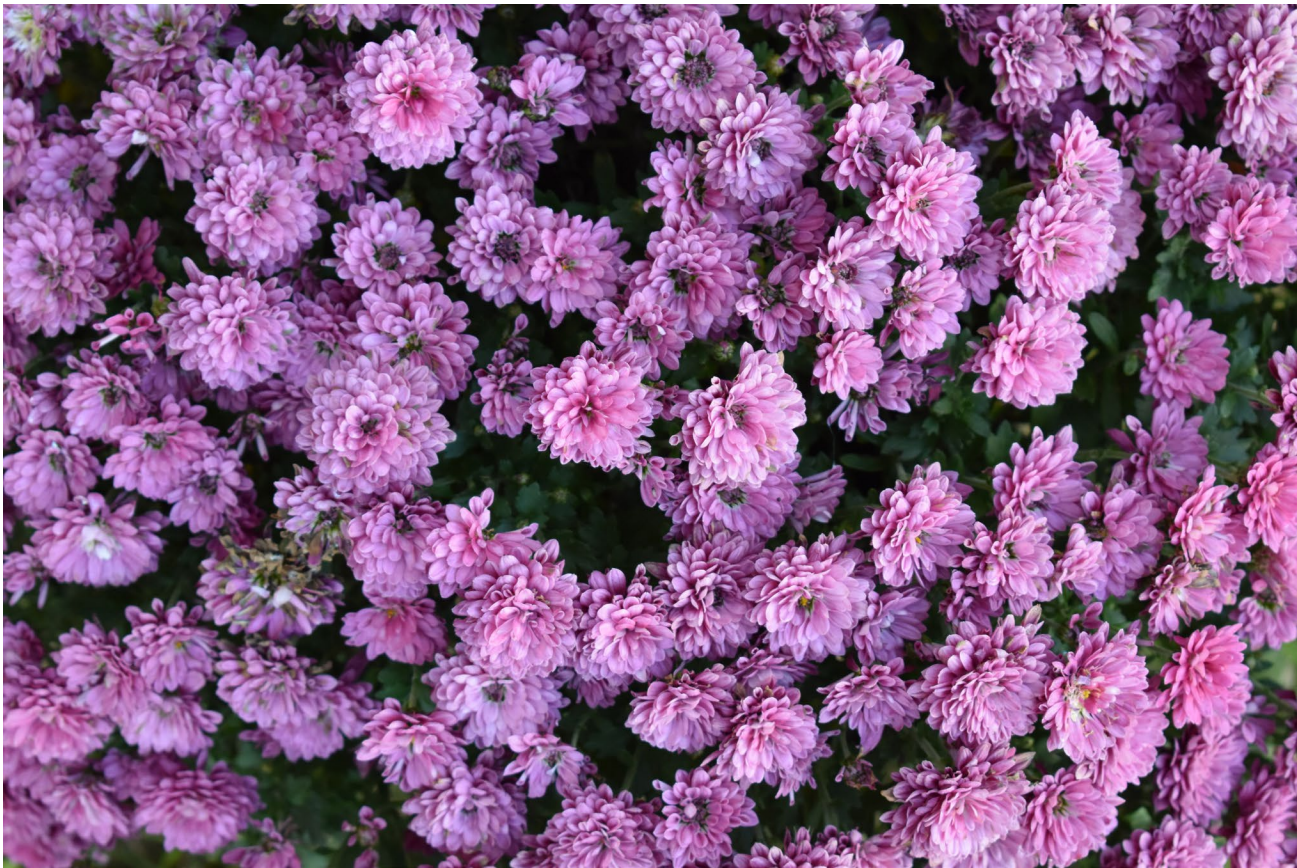
Sanjna Suresh is a student interested in psychology. She enjoys taking photos of nature, dancing, and singing.



Blossoms Elegance

James Cordero - *Hightstown High School (grade 12)*

James Cordero likes playing soccer. He enjoys going to new places to explore nature where he can take photos. James favorite food is crab, he likes to play video games, and is into fashion



Heart of the Shore

Isabella Rosamilia - Hightstown High School (grade 12)



pink color sepia

Laura Roffe - Hightstown High School (grade 10)

Liam/Laura Roffe likes to take photos in low aperture. She likes to take photos of sunsets, beach scenes, and traveled to places. Liam loves to edit and entertain people.



Fall Beauty

Sophia Acque - Hightstown High School (grade 9)



Ballet of Blossoms

Myra Kumar - Hightstown High School (grade 11)

Myra Kumar is an enthusiastic and hardworking student, in and outside of school. She works at her local farm while playing for her school’s tennis team and on top of that, she also volunteers every week to serve her community. She spends ample time with friends and family while also being academically driven in her studies.



Golden Tranquility

Sofia Buda - *Hightstown High School (grade 11)*



Beautiful sunrise at the beach

Ruubaika Salman - *Hightstown High School (grade 10)*



Violet Bloom

Angelina Cline - Hightstown High School (grade 10)



Zoom in on red and green fall leaf

Erika Parsons - Hightstown High School (grade 10)



Nauclea Plant

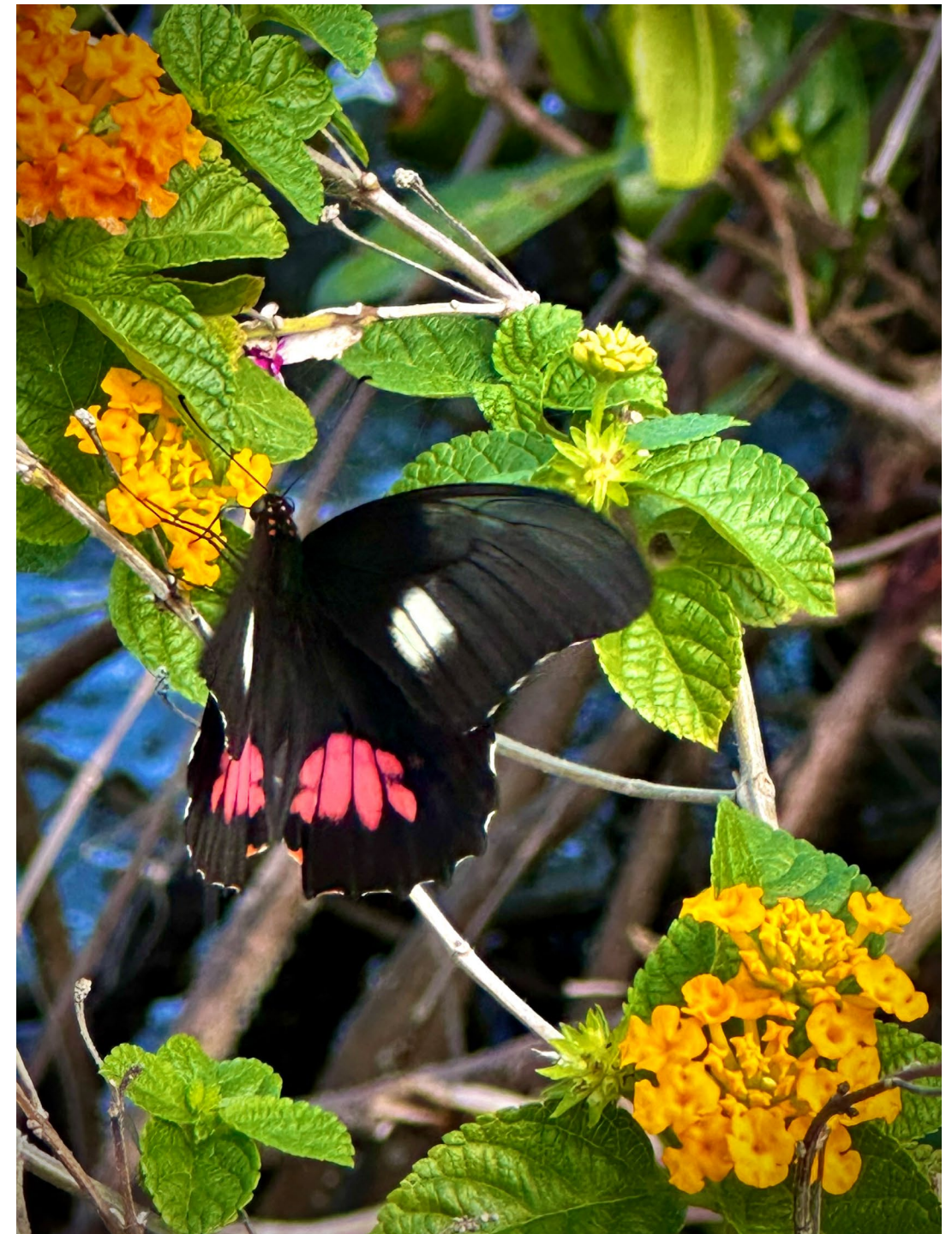
Peyton Kochberg - *Hightstown High School (grade 10)*

Peyton Kochberg is a 10th Grader who enjoys taking pictures. Peyton loves to hang out with her friends, play soccer, go shopping, and spend time with her family.



Hidden Among the Leaves

Sanjna Suresh - *Hightstown High School (grade 12)*



Pink and Blue

Diana Duerto Paredes - *Hightstown High School (grade 11)*



Natures Glow

Peyton Kochberg - *Hightstown High School (grade 10)*



rainy day beach
Laura Roffe - *Hightstown High School (grade 10)*



the sky is falling
Sebastian Rincon - *Hightstown High School (grade 12)*

Sebastian Rincon enjoys playing soccer and training in his free time. He enjoys random walks and the beauty of the world around him. He enjoys exploring new things and having fun.



Autumn’s Contrast

Gracie Klim - Hightstown High School (grade 10)



Waving Over Paradise

Myra Kumar - Hightstown High School (grade 11)



A Step in Time

Christian Rokose - *Hightstown High School (grade 11)*

Christian Rokose likes Meteorology and studying weather patterns. He enjoys biking on newly discovered trails on different terrains.



