

☒ Middle School (Grades 6-8)

☐ High School (Grades 9-12)

I understand that THIS FORM IS FOR the Literature Arts Category (Check ONE only) *

☒ Literature

Title of Artwork (REQUIRED) *

Lovely

DETAILS Include word count for literature. Describe technology/platforms used in the creation process, including any generative elements. *

Word Count: 947

Artist Statement (REQUIRED) In 10 to 100 words, describe your work and how it relates to the theme. (Please DO NOT exceed 100 words.) *

My piece is a short story about a girl who has to accept her imperfections and genetic disorder. This relates to the theme because she has to accept the parts of herself that are flawed.

Title: Lovely

"Wow, what a freak!"

"She looks so weird,"

"I wonder what's wrong with her?"

I've gotten used to it. The whispers and stares. The nasty people who look at me sideways and the loud boys who tease me. The girls who always pick me last in PE. Teachers with tears of pity in their eyes.

I was born with Kabuki Syndrome, a rare disease that affects all systems of your body, causing misshapen limbs and facial deformities. My eyelids turn outwards, my nose is broad and flat, and my face is far too small for my body. My hands are fleshy and my toes are all very long. I will never feel pretty. I don't get asked to dances, I don't get signed to modeling agencies, and I'm never even mentioned for homecoming queen. I dread school, and feel most comfortable alone with no one to judge me.

Beep-beep, goes the alarm at 6:15. I groan and heave myself out of bed, fragments of my dream slowly dissolving. I slowly open my eyes and find I am looking in my mirror. I quickly shut my eyes and turn away. I hate all mirrors, but I'm not allowed to get rid of this one. It belonged to my dead grandmother and is a family heirloom.

I get dressed and eat my breakfast quickly, then set off to walk to the bus stop. My mom has to go to work early today, so I don't see her on my way out.

It's chilly out. The early winter frost is beginning to set in. I'm freezing and I'm not happy about the prospect of school. Just make it through today, I think, and pull my hoodie strings tighter.

A few minutes later, the bus comes and stops. I get in and, to my horror, every seat has a person in it. I feel tears coming to my eyes. I can't sit next to any of these people- they're all so mean.

"Hey, there's an empty seat over here!" Says a voice a few rows down. I look up. It's a boy, a grade ahead of me, smiling and beckoning me towards him. A pair of boys behind him snicker. The boy rolls his eyes.

"Ignore them," He says again. I begin to walk towards him, eye on the ground to spot any legs extended to trip me. This time there aren't, but I'm cautious. I sit down beside the boy. He's still smiling.

"I'm Joshua." He says and reaches to shake my hand.

"Demi," I say quietly and shake his hand. *This is so weird.*

"I notice you every day, you know. I've tried to talk to you before but you seem caught up in your thoughts."

I blush furiously. He must be pulling my leg. Nobody likes me- I'm ugly and I'm an outcast.

"Seriously," Joshua says. He must sense my denial. "I wanted to ask about your backpack, It's really cool!"

My backpack is a basic black one, but covered in pins that I've found anywhere. From bands, to slogans and advertisements, to ones I've drawn on myself- I've got them all.

"Thank you," I manage to say.

There's a pause. A minute passes and Joshua looks out of the window.

"You are very pretty,"

"What?!" I blurt out.

"Yeah, you are."

I stand up. "Yeah, right."

I move to go sit by another quiet girl. Joshua looks hurt, but I can't be friends with a liar.

I take the bus home that afternoon and sit alone at the back. I'm zoned out and perfectly content alone when someone walks up to my seat.

"Can I sit here?" It's Joshua.

I sigh. "Sure,"

We sit in silence. The rolling hills and tall looming trees pass in 4 o'clock sunlight. I lean my head against the window.

"I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable this morning, I didn't mean to."

"It's alright, I know you were lying."

"I wasn't! I get you aren't used to hearing it, but it's true!"

I sigh once more. The bus reaches my stop and I get off.

I get home, grab an apple and go on a walk around the neighborhood.

Am I pretty?

I'd never even considered it before. I thought that my disorder was a life sentence, condemning me to a life of self-hatred and ugliness. I've never once looked in a mirror and thought that I could be confident in my body. I hurriedly turn around and rush back to my house. I reach the mirror in my bathroom.

Am I pretty?

I stare at my reflection. Maybe my flat nose isn't so bad. Maybe my curved eyes are kind of... cute. I stand at the mirror and look at myself until I feel lovely. And for the first time... confident?! What am I doing in these lint-covered hoodies and worn-out leggings? Why am I ungrateful for this incredible body of mine?

I am pretty.

I spend the rest of the evening smiling, keeping my knowledge to myself and holding on to that pretty feeling.

The next day I wake up early, dress my best, brush my hair, and even put on a touch of makeup. I eat a good, filling breakfast and climb onto the bus.

People stare at me.

"Wow, she looks different."

Some smile genuinely, while others laugh and make snarky comments. I don't care. I've accepted myself for who I am. I sit beside Joshua.

"You were right, you know," I say to him, "I am pretty."

He grins. "I'm glad you finally realized."

The bus starts and I smile. I sit and talk to my new friend as the sun casts a warm glow on my face. The birds chirp. Trees sway in the wind, and I know that I am lovely just the way that I am.