

INNOVATION



AN ANTHOLOGY

By the Winners of the First Story and London School of
Economics Creative Writing Competition 2013

Edited & Introduced by Kate Kingsley



The 2013 Creative Writing Competition is the result of a collaboration between First Story and the London School of Economics. It is celebrated in conjunction with the London School of Economics & Political Science (LSE) Space for Thought Literary Festival, which is now in its fifth year. The competition is open to students in state secondary schools in London, Nottingham and Oxford, and is promoted through the First Story, London School of Economics and Teach First networks. We are delighted to have this opportunity to involve students in a project that sources and showcases their extraordinary talent, and that invests in their futures as success stories of tomorrow.



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Innovation

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An Anthology

BY THE WINNERS OF THE FIRST STORY AND
LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION 2013

EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY KATE KINGSLEY | 2013

JUDGED BY NAOMI ALDERMAN, JAMES DAWSON,
KATE KINGSLEY, AND MEG ROSOFF

FIRST  STORY

Fostering creativity, literacy and talent

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Introduction

Kate Kingsley

'Innovation' has clearly proved an inspiring theme for the talented young writers in this book. The following pages are populated by crazy plots, experimental story structures, and unusual, arresting language. I was struck, reading these stories and poems, not only by all the rich imaginations at work, but also by the students' eagerness to take risks. Good writing takes us on a journey. It helps us see the world around us in new ways. The pieces in this anthology do just that. They ruminate on the state of things, question it, and quite often turn it on its head.

Some of the stories in this book are so wonderfully wacky that they made me laugh out loud. In 'Watermelon Wonders', the writer extols the virtues of square fruit. In 'Untitled', an obsessive farmer is cooked alive by his own prize-winning vegetable. Other pieces impressed me with their gravity. In 'The Grey', a girl scrapes out a life for herself in a post-apocalyptic city. In 'Cryogenics: Unfreeze Me', the narrator opts out of all pain and suffering, reducing herself to a disembodied voice.

Beautiful imagery crops up in abundance, making everyday things seem exotic. We have rainy streets 'acting as the city's cataract.' We have a natural disaster with 'teeth like volcanoes.' And we have 'The Storm', a lyrical story that uses impending weather as a metaphor for growing up.

It's exciting to see so many students experimenting and, yes, innovating. This is my first year working with First Story. One of the things I hear most in my workshops is, 'I'll read it out, but it's weird.' My response to this is always, 'Weird is good.' The truth of that is no more apparent than in this anthology. Congratulations to our young writers, who have made me (and, I hope, all their readers) delightfully aware of the possibilities of our world – and our books.

OVERALL WINNER

The Storm

Bochra Bourdarka

FROM KEY STAGES 4 & 5, AGED 15–18
HOLLAND PARK SCHOOL

It was summer. A long, humid summer. Made for adults to laze about and children to play. He warned us, that old man warned us that such heat would result in a storm. A storm so strong and angry, it would tear the trees apart. Would send the animals into a frenzy. Would make us cry in fear as the lightning struck. Would create dark shadows as the thunder clapped, making us whimper into our pillows. ‘You will cry for your mothers,’ he said. ‘Cry and scream as the rain comes lashing down on your little faces.’

We had laughed at him, and I, to my shame, led that laughter. For who had heard of a storm in the middle of summer? We shrugged it off, and ran away on our dirty bare feet.

OVERALL RUNNER-UP

Watermelon Wonders

Bhavina Patel

FROM KEY STAGE 3, AGED 11–14

WEMBLEY HIGH TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

A pale mint haze tints the street, as the fluorescent neon light above advertises cheap liquor. It rained heavily last night. The streets are still cold and glossy, acting as the city's cataract. Strangely enough, my attention is lured towards a vandalised wall. Sloppily drawn images and lewd quotes hug it like a rainbow, each drip of paint a testament to what our society has stooped to. As the bipolar sun's smouldering temper becomes unbearable, I seek refuge in the grocery store. Sleek, automatic, glass doors slide open, only to divulge a cacophony of noise. Children wailing. Tills beeping. Sound system booming. Floor polishers whirring. In comparison, the rumbling cars and chattering birds of the outside world are nothing. As I step in, I am enfolded by the cool, air-conditioned air.

This store, along with many others in our area, used to face a burdensome problem. Our stores are much smaller than foreign ones, with no room to waste. Watermelons – plump, mouth-watering, spherical – used to waste a lot of space. Most people

would have simply told the grocery stores that watermelons grew round; that there was nothing to be done. That is how the majority of people would have responded. Often, if you do things a certain way your entire life, sharing the same viewpoint as everyone else, you fall into the snare of the round watermelon: you likely don't even take the time to consider if there is another way. In a society where clones are spreading like a vicious disease, people don't reveal their individuality for fear of being outcasts. The desire for acceptance dominates the idea that doing what we like is a form of freedom. And that liking what we do is a form of happiness.

Back to our watermelons, then? Some farmers decided to take a different approach. If the supermarkets wanted a space-saving watermelon, they said, 'How can we provide one?' It wasn't long before they'd invented the square watermelon.

But how can this be? It's bizarre. Impossible.

Read your mind, did I not? The solution to the problem of round watermelons was solved because some farmers did not assume it was impossible. Instead, they simply asked how it could be done. They found that if you put a watermelon in a square box while it is growing, it will take on the shape of the box, growing into a square fruit. Those farmers made us question the things we consistently do. It just goes to show, impossibilities don't often exist.

WINNER OF THE KEY STAGES 4 & 5
COMPETITION (AGED 15-18)

Cryogenics: Unfreeze Me

Ayaan Mohamud

WEMBLEY HIGH TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

'All Test Subjects must now enter the bounds of the Observatory,' I heard a mechanical voice wheeze. The technology here was deteriorating.

'I repeat: all Test Subjects must now enter the bounds of the Observatory.'

I looked down again at my broken watch. Its hands were flailing, unable to stay still enough to reassure me. After this, nothing would ever be able to reassure me again.

Around me, the pristine walls glinted almost wickedly in the sunlight, reminding me of the hundreds of people outside the dome, who I'm sure were thinking about me with contempt.

I didn't blame them though; I was only doing this out of cowardice.

The chair beneath me creaked slightly as I readjusted myself. I needed to see the other people. I *wanted* to see the other people. The others who, like me, were freezing themselves for a possible future without the plague.

Oh, how awful that plague was.

I do not know how it began, and after today I won't know how it ends either. I'll be a block of ice, floating, flying, waiting for the thawing, and my new life to begin.

'Kia Ryes.'

It was the voice again. It resonated through the room. Everyone turned instinctively to find the owner of that name.

I stood, with the calm stares of my people burning into my back, and walked to the steel-enforced room. *This is where my life begins*, I thought, and pushed down on the handle.

* * *

They explained everything to me. As I lay on the cold, metal slab, they explained everything to me.

They said: 'Everything good comes with a price, and the price is not without pain.' I would take any pain gladly, if it meant that I would die before *it* caught up with me.

The white of their sterile lab coats blinded me momentarily as I familiarised myself with my surroundings. It was all chrome. I liked it.

I could feel my heart pumping away, as if aware of the procedure that was about to take place. I would miss the adrenaline, the thump of my heart and the sound of my blood. I would miss everything.

I listened to their talk for a bit more until I could feel the needle inside me filling me with drugs. There was one man in particular, Michael, tall, brown-haired, wiry, who seemed to be smitten with me.

He bent down and whispered, 'Don't you worry, sweet pea. We've got your brain hooked up to this machine that translates all the signals. It's your own personal scrapbook – you won't ever be lost.'

* * *

Memo #413

It's unusual living in darkness, ice coursing through my veins, my breath halted for decades.

They spite me. I cannot see them and I cannot hear them, yet I know they spite me.

It was an easy decision really. Live or die?

Live or die. Live or die. Live or die. Live or die. Live or die. Live or die. Live or die. Live or die. Saying it like this helps me; I can believe that my thoughts actually mean something. Years pass, centuries, a millennium – I am not sure. Time seems inconsequential here – although I'm still not sure where 'here' is. It is at the border of life and the outskirts of death. I am sure of that much, at least.

They froze me. Ice surged through every single vessel in my body. These, the vessels that allowed me to live, to breathe, in a few mere hours of agony, were stripped of their natural function.

They stopped my heart. They stopped the blood flowing through my brittle veins.

They stopped *me*.

I have no feeling.

My thoughts are cold and foreign.

There is no life in my shrivelled body.

I am suspended in a tank of liquid nitrogen, my only companion.

I don't know why I chose to die this way. Without the Commandments dictating my every move and thought, I am utterly lost.

I do not want to be an irretrievable shadow. No one wants their freedom to lie shackled.

I remember a time when my people were souls that followed

the trail of the winds – a time when the world was their god. Then the plague came. At first, it was a mere whisper. A whisper that could neither be heard nor ignored.

Would you choose differently?

That is, if you are actually reading this.

If you were given the chance to right your wrongs – if you were given the chance to live forever – if you were given the chance to see the world – would you live... or die?

RUNNER-UP OF THE KEY STAGES 4 & 5 COMPETITION

Instructions on How to Get There

Nina Patel

WILLOWFIELD SCHOOL

Take a left when you get to
the turning, up the stairs, around
the roundabout. Take two steps
back and you'll see the gate
of God. Take a right turn when
you get to the U-turn, go
backwards when you get to the
roundabout. Take two steps
forward and you'll see the
devil's den.

WINNER OF THE KEY STAGE 3 COMPETITION (AGED 11–14)

The Grey

Aaditya Singh

WEMBLEY HIGH TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

I woke with a jolt, my watch's alarm beeping subtly in the background. I kept my eyes closed, listening for even the slightest of hisses and creaks. The Grey was very stealthy, almost like a ghost, but not completely silent. I heard nothing. I opened my eyes and checked the ceiling for any cracks that could let it in. None that I could see. I checked the doors too, squinting. The right door, the one that was currently stopping the Grey from drowning me in radiation, had a few dents in it, but nothing major. I could almost hear the Grey bubbling behind the iron barrier, boiling with deadly radiation.

I heaved a sigh of relief; I could stay in this room a little while longer. Its cramped space was claustrophobic, but it was one of the only rooms in the complex that still had functioning air-scrubbers. The scrubbers kept the atmosphere clean, filtering out toxins and even radiation. I donned my makeshift gas mask, made of rubber padding and dust-filters. It did the job, keeping particles out of my lungs.

I opened the door to my left and stepped through it as quickly

as I could, sealing it behind me. The familiar arched ceilings welcomed me to the underground bunker complex. The air, as ever, was heavy with dust that had been blown down here through the ventilation systems. Although this dust was mildly radioactive, it wouldn't kill you. Not quickly, anyway.

I waded through it, heading towards the hallways, holding my breath so the dust wouldn't clog my filters. The lighting in the hallways was still partly functional, casting a dim, red glow over everything. It looked as if everything was covered in blood. I shook the thought from my mind, concentrating on my goal: food. I was hunting for tunnel rats, who had made several nests down here after traversing the sewers.

I passed the cast-iron doors that led to Bunker 21, the only bunker in this hell-hole that had a supply of food and clean water from above.

Bunker 21 had been my home for several years after the city had been bombed and nuclear missiles had rained upon the surface. I had been one of those lucky 523 who had made it down here. The people of 21 loathed the military, blaming them for the missile strikes. When they discovered that my father had been a sergeant in the army, they kicked me out. I had been living in the dusty halls ever since. I used to have a best friend in 21. Yarnik. Or, rather, he had been my best friend until he personally shoved me out of the bunker doors. He had betrayed me.

I returned to my room with a bag half-full of skinny tunnel rats. Not much meat on them, but they were better than starving. I gutted them, then rinsed them using water from the nearby faucet. Some of the faucets in the complex tapped into the autonomous filtration system that still worked, producing clean water every day. Although it wasn't completely radiation-free, and although it tasted like rancid blood, it kept me alive. I lit a fire with some wood scavenged from chairs and tables in the halls,

and boiled the rats in a metal bowl. The smoke was filtered by the scrubbers, which let me breathe normally.

Slowly, I became aware of a hissing behind me.

I turned. A black mist was pouring into the room through a brand new crack in the wall. It was collecting on the floor. It was the Grey. Frantically, I packed all my things and dashed back out through the left door. Again, I waded through the sea of blood-coloured light, trying to outrun the Grey. The heavy dust impeded my progress. It was so thick in places that I had to shove my way through.

BANG! The door I'd just escaped through flew open behind me: in my haste, I'd forgotten to seal it!

As I reached the dust-free hallways, I broke into a sprint. Suddenly, my foot caught on a metal pipe. I fell, landing on the cold, hard floor with a thump. I pushed away the pain and tried to get up, but it was no use: my ankle had snapped. This was it. I faced the Grey, which now, in the red lighting, looked like a tsunami of blood, rushing to drown me like it had so many others. I closed my eyes, terrified, waiting for the end.

It never came. I felt myself moving. No, I felt someone else moving me. I was utterly shocked; I had no idea that others lived in the hallways! I tasted metallic blood in my mouth. I realised I had inhaled some of the Grey. It had poisoned me. My vision blurred and started to go dark, but I managed to get a look at the face of my saviour. It was Yarnik. My best friend, come to save me. I hadn't forgotten his face, not yet. It's as they say: 'You don't forget the face of the person who was your last hope.'

RUNNERS-UP OF THE KEY STAGE 3 COMPETITION

Hospital

Alain Fernando

HOLLAND PARK SCHOOL

Why does stark blackness suddenly turning to light feel unsettling? Why is the room so bright? What is in my arm? Who is at the door? Why would a relative be visiting at this time of day? Sedatives? Injury? What is happening to me? Why is the stark whiteness so blinding? Is it normal not to be able to concentrate on important things or even think in a logical way when a clinical scene is being force-fed into your very core? Lunacy? Why is my every movement sluggish? Why does the sheer cold of the bare white floors feel like a thousand blades? Why is the black nightlife of London eclipsed by a small arrangement of lightbulbs? Why do the nurses even bother to put on a smile when they are keeping you from your eternal freedom? Why?

My Idea

Sara Koraganie

ROSEDALE COLLEGE

My idea, my idea,
It is the best,
It surely can pass the greatness test.

I create loads of inventions,
And being the best is my intention.
Check my blueprints, check them twice,
Make sure my plans are very nice.

Robots, cars and laptops too,
When I'm finished – ha – I'll beat you!
I will be the richest, the richest in the world,
Then I can go out shopping like a normal girl.

I'll keep on creating, it's called innovation.
Soon I'll be overtaking the entire nation!
There will be an invention craze.
Oh! The money will come rolling in, one of these days...

'Money! Money!' That's all I will say.
Time to give it a rest now, okay?
My head is whizzing with delight,
Thinking of the people I'm going to excite.

My inventions will be incredibly cool.
It will compulsory to have them in every school.
All my innovations will surely sell out,
They will make you scream and shout.

Inventions make our lives easy.
One day, I will invent robotic cutlery!
People who innovate think day and night
To check their invention is perfectly right.

My idea, my idea,
It is the best.
It surely can pass the greatness test.

Untitled

Christopher Miller

ROSEDALE COLLEGE

It all started when I had a sudden urge for carrots. I decided at that precise moment that my fate was to become a farmer. And not just any farmer – the farmer of the world’s biggest carrot.

Immediately, I set off to the shops to buy myself some seeds. To my amazement, the second I planted them, a pleasant aroma engulfed the air, compelling me to stay by their side all the time. I spent hours upon end singing and sheltering my loved ones. Weren’t they amazing? I counted them – a colossal number – and as I did, they all merged into one enormous collective seed! Feeling as bold as a king, I finally left, deserted, abandoned my farm, declaring that I would return sometime later. Many years later, as it happened...

Astonishingly, when I returned, my carrot was eight feet tall! My heart pounded faster than light. My eyes glistened in the piercing cold wind. In the blink of an eye, my carrot grew arms, legs, feet, even eyes! I gasped as loudly as a drum. The carrot started to dance and jog. I *had* to tell people about this. Then out of the blue, all of its human features inverted back in. Was I just imagining this? Straight away, I signed myself up to a Biggest Vegetable Competition. I was sure to win – even if my carrot was part-human – wasn’t I?

Several weeks passed and finally it was the big day. I struggled

all the way to the contest, due to the extreme weight of my carrot. When I arrived, hundreds of people's faces lit up in shock. I was proud. I was the best. I was a farmer! I was against posh people with their legs crossed and their tea neatly balanced on their laps. Ooh – so grand! I would win this by a mile. In the final, my competition was pitiful – a puny watermelon and a tiny turnip. Please! Even though I'm not the world's greatest genius (I call myself a clever idiot), I still know the best farming techniques.

It was time to reveal the winner...

I WON! WE WON! Jubilantly, I stuck a No. 1 badge on my carrot. Suddenly, a blood-curdling scream flooded the air, shattering people's eardrums. I turned around, only to see my carrot in human form... again. Was I going insane? It was on its knees, begging me to remove the sharp badge and not to cook it. I would never cook it! How cruel would that be?

I ran home, destroying everything in my path just to soothe the carrot. My carrot! How could I so treacherously harm what I had come to see as my own child? I begged for my carrot to forgive me, and retired to bed.

Looming over me, my carrot pricked me with my garden spade – the spade that had tended to him so lovingly. Grabbing me, he cruelly crammed me into the oven. What kind of sick vendetta was this? I had raised him. The heat rose and I felt...

Crisis in a Single Teardrop

Moyosore Lemboye

ACLAND BURGHLEY SCHOOL

The pain was intense
Fire everywhere
Pictures were burnt
And smoke was in the air.
We walked outside and then we stopped—
Now crisis was in a single teardrop.

My village was flooded
Lives were lost.
Homeowners were weeping
And screaming about cost.
As the speedboats arrived with sitting cops,
You could see there was a crisis in a single teardrop.

The face of crisis was rigid and unclear,
Teeth like volcanoes on a desert island,
And tongues like a fish in the claws of a bear
Lost in a world like Sainsbury or Iceland.
Crisis was something like that. It could come and go,
Respected by all, either together or solo.

Never insulted for how could it be,
It wasn't a person or a thing people could see.
It was an expression of peril and despair,
Even if the situation wasn't fair.

The world was destroyed,
No one left to tell.
The atmosphere was dense
And the deceased did smell.
No more animals, no more crops.
Crisis was everywhere, but not in a teardrop.

Innovation

Naaila Muhammed

HIGHBURY GROVE SCHOOL

School had ended and I made my way home, cautiously stepping on the thick blanket of leaves. As I walked past the bleak alley, I noticed a radiant luminosity coming from it. Anxiously, I stepped towards it.

‘Beeellaa,’ an eerie voiced called my name.

I gasped at the sound, clumsily tripping over my own feet. Was this real? Irrationally, I sprinted deeper into the alleyway, shredding the leaves as I went.

I stopped. In front of me stood a woman draped in a long, billowing, black dress. Her pale skin leapt out against the dark material and her glistening, green eyes flickered. Her hair followed the wind as she spoke.

‘I have what you need, Isabella.’

I kept my eyes focused on her. She looked down briefly, revealing heavy black eyeshadow and kohl.

‘How would it feel to know what everyone is thinking?’

I jumped at her words, quickly muffling a gasp. ‘Amazing’, I retorted.

She toyed with the mysterious object in her hands. Then she threw it into my grasp. I caught the object and let its cool metal touch my skin.

‘Wish granted.’ She turned and walked down the alley, her hair dancing in the wind. Then she was gone.

I stood there until my hands felt like the ice-cold metal. Until the odd smell that wafted into my nose brought me back to reality. Then I kept on walking, through the leaves that crunched in protest.

In the safety of my bedroom, I pressed the button.

The tiny object had more power than I'd ever imagined.

Untitled

Mohini Ramgi

ROSEDALE COLLEGE

Billy Bonka, Billy Bonka,
Was the younger cousin of Willy Wonka.
When Willy Wonka retired,
Billy Bonka was hired.

The luscious, scrumptious chocolate he made,
Even when it was eaten, the taste didn't fade.
Yellow-Mellow-Chocoberry-Fudge
Was a chocolate he invented.
Children in line wouldn't budge.

Billy B's assistants were Oompa-Loompas.
They were making Pop Balls, when suddenly one went, 'Oompa-
doompos!'
Into the chocolate that flowed like a river.
But the special recipe didn't harm his liver.

Pink Flurry Bangos,
Balls of Merry Mangoes,
Infinity Bars,
Little Sour Cars.

Crazy Fizz Lollies,
Yummy Flower Pollies,
Aftertaste Candies,
Ooh Dillie-Sandies.

Billy Bonka, Billy Bonka,
He was a little silly, Billy Bonka.
He was the new chocolate inventor,
His oven was right at the Earth's centre.

Extremeiweatherius, Our Planet

Saba Shafi

WEMBLEY HIGH TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

The weather is just too unpredictable. Innovatives* are bustling with umbrellas and wellies, sunhats and sunglasses. Warm clothes for summer minutes, and short clothes for winter minutes. This is a typical day on Extremeiweatherius.

During the summer minutes, we wear warm clothes because it's so cold. And during the winter minutes, we enjoy the sun. What bliss! But it never lasts long. Just ten minutes. Ten Extremeiweatherius minutes. Yes, every ten minutes the weather changes. Basically, every day, we get every type of weather in the Earth year.

And now? Now it's raining bucketfuls, really hard and really loud. I can't even concentrate. Great. But in two more minutes, the weather will change. Hooray! The rain is being poured out of the sky. Crystal-clear water, huge diamond droplets plopping down, miraculously not damaging any of the plants. Planes are trying to keep their balance, but are failing at it miserably. Even umbrellas are breaking under the harshness of the rain. And mind

** Our people, similar to humans or Earthlings. Oh, and very innovative people we are! Better than you, anyway :P*

you, our umbrellas are really strong; they're made of a sheet of platinum, specially designed for extreme weather. Yes, this rain is unbearable. But that's okay, because the weather will change in ten seconds. Nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one...

WOW! In a sudden blink, in a flash, the rain stops and out shines the sun, ever so bright. Everyone is squinting at the sight.

Hey, that rhymes! Wow, I am so cool. I'm the first one ever to invent rhymes on Extremeiweatherius. But like I said, this is just a typical day on our planet, home to extraordinary Innovatives, weird creatures, and flying objects. It's where I live. It's where my home is. It's where my spirit is. Innovations.

FIRST STORY

Fostering creativity, literacy and talent

The following pages are populated by crazy plots, experimental story structures, and unusual, arresting language. I was struck, reading these stories and poems, not only by all the rich imaginations at work, but also by the students' eagerness to take risks.

KATE KINGSLEY, author of *Young, Loaded & Fabulous*, a young adult series and First Story Writer-in-Residence

First Story is delighted to be working in collaboration with LSE once again to help showcase such a fantastic collection of work. *Innovation* is stuffed to bursting with talent and features such a broad range of fresh, ingenious ideas and voices.

KATIE WALDEGRAVE, Executive Director, First Story

The ability to successfully communicate ideas and think creatively about problems, both of which are showcased in this anthology, are central to the LSE student experience. Each one of these young authors demonstrates an articulacy and originality that deserves to be commended.

LOUISE GASKELL, Deputy Events Manager and Literary Festival Organiser, LSE



THE LONDON SCHOOL
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