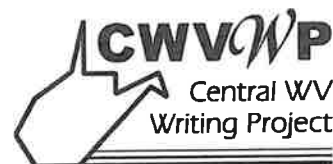


West Virginia Young Writers Contest
COVER SHEET FOR SCHOOL/COUNTY ENTRIES



DIRECTIONS FOR SCHOOLS:

Schools need to include a cover sheet for each entry submitted to the county for judging. All school entries are to be submitted to County Coordinators **by February 13, 2023**. Entries for state judging must be submitted **electronically** by the Young Writers County Coordinator through the Marshall University Blackboard system by **February 27, 2023**. Faxed or mailed entries will not be accepted.

Each entry must have a title. Do not write the student's name or any other personally identifying information on the entry. Do not include graphics in the entries. Only prose entries will be accepted; entries of poetry will be disqualified.

Please enter the student's and teacher's name as each wishes it to appear on the WV Young Writers Day Program. Please type or print legibly. An MS Word version of this document can be downloaded from the website at the bottom of this page.

Title of entry: The Epic Lows of High School Graduation
Contest level (Circle one): 1-2 3-4 5-6 7-8 9-10 11-12

Student Name: Trista Steinemann Gender: M ☐ F ☒

Student Grade Level 12 School: Hampshire High

Teacher Name: Ms. Stehle

Teacher E-mail: meaghan.stehle@k12.wv.us

County: Hampshire County Coordinator: _____

Contest forms and information: <http://www.marshall.edu/cwvwp>

Contest Contact: Dr. Barbara O'Byrne: bobyrne@marshall.edu

The Epic Lows of High School Graduation

The blinding lights almost made me forget about what happened before graduation. It replays in my mind as my classmates' names get called one by one. I hear her name, Josephine Fletcher, and my heart skips a beat. I look up, take a breath, and look away. My last look at her, for good. The fight replays again.

"Josephine!" I shouted her name, and she stopped in the middle of the hall. I see her shoulders rise and fall.

She turns and looks at me. I can see it on her face-- it's over. She hangs her head, then makes her way over to me. I'm not sure what to do next. She takes a shaky breath and tries to speak. I reach to stop her from turning away.

"So, you're leaving for Candor tomorrow?" she speaks harshly.

"I tried to say goodbye to you yesterday, so don't start." I spat back, turning to face her.

She takes a breath, "I'll follow you anywhere. You know that."

"Of course, I know that! I don't want you following me. I need to figure out who I am, and I can't do that with you attach to my arm!"

"So, you think I'm what? Just some arm candy you don't have a use for anymore? I am so much more than that."

"No, you were never arm candy. You were the person that kept me alive and going when I didn't have a reason to. You saved me. But I need to get away, Jo."

"I deserve more than this."

"You don't, actually. This is my life. I will live it how I see fit." I turn, ready to walk away.

"Was this all just a joke to you? This thing we had? I'm in love with you and you're what? Infatuated with me?" The rage seeps through her voice.

"No, I loved you too. I don't want you to have to follow me. You want to stay, remember?" I sigh. For a moment, neither of us says anything and everything is almost perfect again. When I finally get the strength to walk away, I glance back. This time, she's looking at the ground.

Her voice fades from my mind as more names are called. I close my eyes and let myself remember everything we went through. I remember our first date and how nervous I felt. The memory replays in my mind.

I smile over at her in the darkened movie theater. I want to grab her hand, but I'm scared. I've never made the first move, let alone with a girl. I turn back to the movie, leaving my hand on the armrest. In a split second, Josephine slides her hand next to mine. Biting back a smile, I interlock our fingers.

Slowly, I turn to face her again. She puts her hand on the side of my face, rubbing my cheek with her thumb. I feel weightless. Inches apart, I can feel her breath on my lips. Without thinking, I kissed her. 15 seconds of pure bliss, then she pulls away.

"This is a bad idea, isn't it?" I ask, looking down.

"Only if we let it become a bad idea." She kisses me again.

I'm taken out of the memory when my best friend, Toby's name is called. I holler, louder than his family could ever wish to be. He's spent the last three Christmases at my house, including the one where Josephine met my mom, and I met her parents.

"Oak, are you sure? I mean, what if your mom doesn't like me?" She huffs, obviously nervous.

I grab her hand, smiling. "Yes, honey, I'm sure. Mom is going to love you. I promise. Don't forget, your parents are in there too."

She laughs and, momentarily, we both forget how nervous we are. When she looks ready, I open the door to the restaurant. Our families sit together, already laughing. When my mom spots me, she waves. I look at Josephine and squeeze her hand.

As we made our way over to the table, her dad whispered how happy he was that she had found someone that loved her. We spent dinner laughing and connecting on a level neither Josephine nor I thought possible. I knew then I was going to love her forever.

As the principle starts reading the S's, I take a breath. When my name is called, I stand and search for Josephine. When I find her, her head is down. I walk onto the stage in a daze, grabbing my diploma.

As I sit back down in the crowd, I remember when we applied to colleges together. She never wanted to leave town. She hated that I wanted to go to Candor, but I applied anyway.

I snap out of my haze just in time to flip my tassel. I walk through the rest of the day numb. When Toby messages me to remind me of his party, I almost don't answer. Unsure of why, I asked what time. I spend the next three hours flinging through what's not packed of my closet, settling on a short black skirt and a loose grey shirt partially tucked in.

Before walking inside, I hear the music blaring. I take a deep breath and open the door. Waiting for me is Toby, already tipsy.

"To our first night of freedom! How are you not already drinking?" He screams in my ear.

"Long story!" I scream back.

"Well let's get you one now!" He drags me into the kitchen.

Unmistakable laughter fills the kitchen: Josephine. I stop in the doorway, watching her talk with someone. She laughs and puts her hand on the girl's shoulder. Walking into the kitchen, I clear my throat. Avoiding looking at Josephine, I pour a drink, grab Toby's arm, and leave. I signal to go upstairs, and he nods.

As we get farther from the music, I can finally think. I can also feel Toby's eyes on me. I head for his room and close the door once he's inside. I pace, preparing to tell him about this morning. He sits on his bed, never taking his eyes off me. He's concerned, I can tell.

"We broke up. This morning, before graduation," I say in one breath. Still pacing, my eyes start to sting.

"Oak, are you okay?" Toby stood and grabbed hold of my arms.

"No, of course I'm not okay! I love her and I lost her because I can't stand this stupid town!" I cried and fell to the ground, taking Toby with me.

We sat on his floor till we both fell asleep. Toby, holding my arms and me, silently crying. When we wake up the next morning, all last night's guests are gone. After checking my phone, Toby and I headed over to my house.

"Mom? I'm home. But I leave in a few hours. It's college time!" I holler into the empty house.

"Oh, honey! I missed you last night! Please tell me I get to drive you to the airport." She bustles through the house, not really looking at me.

"Yes, mamma. You get to drive me." I say with a smile.