

BREAK FREE

Made for your mind to move.

Issue four:
Speak Your Truth

Quick Hits

JOKE

How does a cow cut grass?

CD - a student from Texas

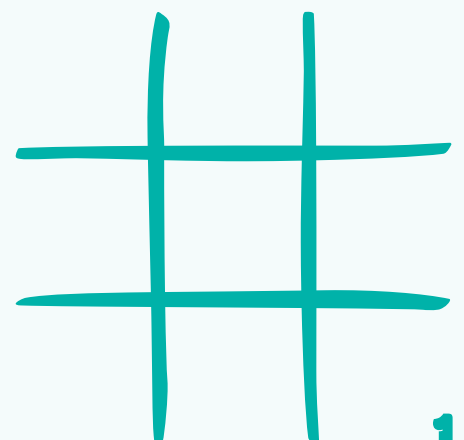
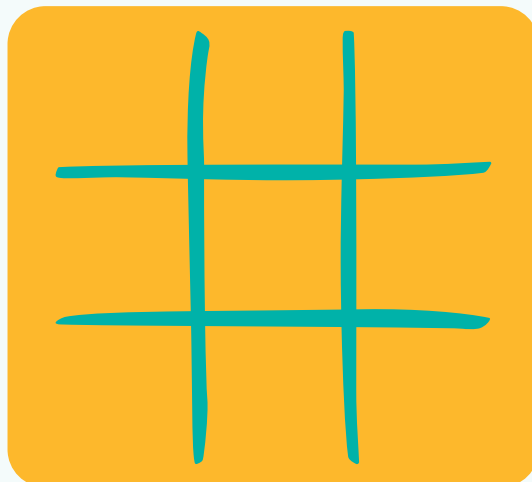
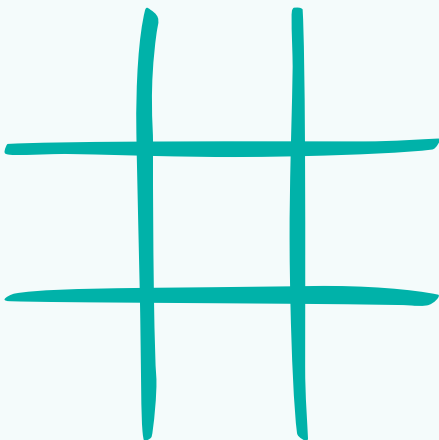
RIDDLE

I am a thing that is asleep during the day but awake at night. I am useful during times of despair and can guide you to find a brighter path. What am I?

AV - a student from Texas

TIC-TAC-TOE

Inspired by EH - a student from Texas

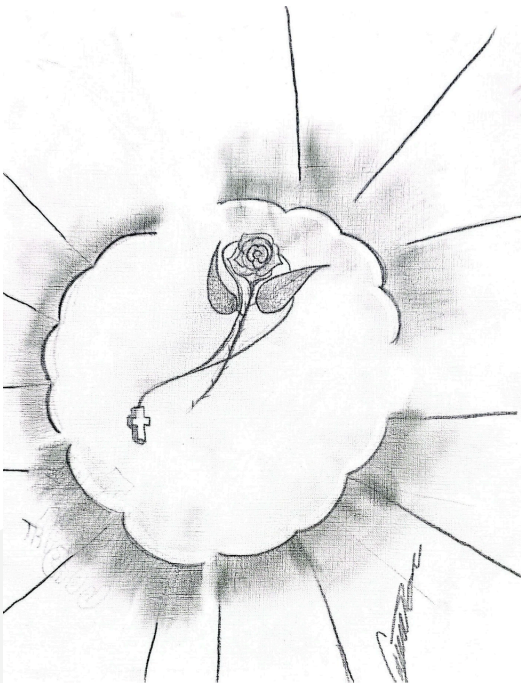


Words of Advice

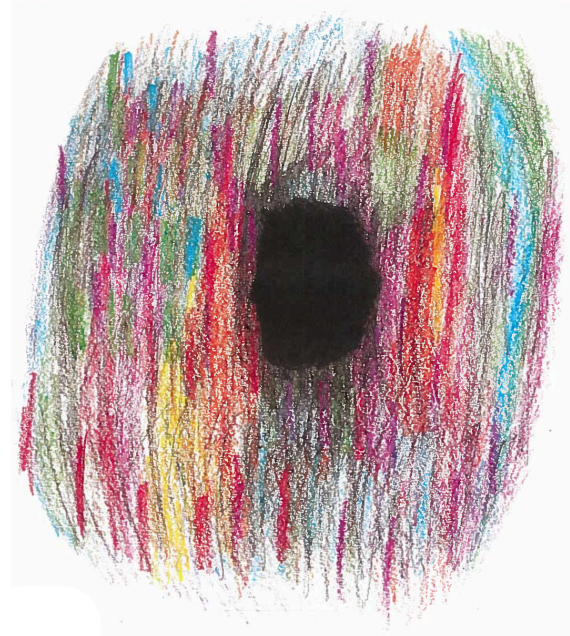
Tanner, a student from Indiana

Growing up, I was a very angry person. I would get mad at the smallest things and take it out on the people I loved most. The hardest part was knowing I was hurting them. I would regret every word I said, but the next day, I would do the same thing. It was just a cycle of emotions I felt I had no control over. I still think about all the people I have hurt and all the bridges I have burned. It still makes me sad and makes me emotional. If I could change one thing, I would have apologized to my family years ago. I would have apologized for my rude ways of going through life carelessly.

I am who I am today because of my friends. They shaped me into a person I didn't want to be. To this day, I still care about them and love them, but it's the fact that they would pick on me because I was the youngest of the group. And it hurt because I looked up to them, they were like the brothers I never had. I was doing things I should not have. I thought it was cool because my "brothers" would do it and eventually I started creating habits of my own. I got very dependent on things I should not have. One piece of advice I would give anyone in my situation is not to be a follower, but to be a leader. The one good thing I have learned from them is that not everything needs a reaction. People will criticize you or judge you for speaking your mind or just simply talking "too much". If you feel what you're saying is helpful for the situation, then speak up.



Art by CD a student in Indiana



Art by BM a student in Oregon

I feel that being where I am today helps me a lot with my anger because I needed to manage it to go where I want go in life. Just remember, it is okay to be mad or angry. But taking it out on people is not. You will regret it one way or another. It always comes back to you. I feel like being away from home gives me a break from everything and a chance to learn from my mistakes. Put your pride to the side. You don't have to have the last word in everything. It will be okay to lose an argument or two. Give yourself credit for the things you do, not the things you don't do. Think of the positives because at the end of the day, it's about you. It's about how you did today, how you felt today, and what YOU can do better. This is just the best advice I can give for someone going through the same journey. But just know, everything will work out if you let it. You have to want to get better to do better, you have to put your heart into everything and if you say something isn't going to happen... it won't.



CRYPTOGRAM

by HW, a student in Texas

14 5 22 5 18 2 5

1 6 18 1 9 4

20 15 6 1 9 12

ANSWER KEY

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z



Poems

People don't speak,
but people do seek peace.
How will they ever get such a thing
if they don't speak?
Riddles be here, riddles be there,
but they still don't speak,
so people don't care.
No one knows when their time is here,
but they watch all these people just get spared.
Yet they still sit scared,
they wait for someone to speak,
but everyone is scared.
They don't speak up for no one—
not even themselves.
Closed mouths don't get what they need,
so try to help.

Poem by IM, a student in Texas



Photo by JF a student in Oregon

Silence... What is silence? Silence is when you feel unheard. Silence is when you want to speak up, but you can't. Growing up, I was always told, "You live by the code, you die by the code." Silence. Most people today think that if they speak up about wrongdoing, it's "snitching." But does that mean that you should stay silent?

For example, someone who sees their neighbor's house getting robbed and is too scared to speak up about it. That's silence but speaking up about the wrongdoing is the right and truthful thing to do. Studies show that about half of teens and adults stay silent about things that have happened to them, even if those things are terrible crimes.

But, as stated above, living by a code of silence also means dying by it. So, it makes more sense to speak up. Be outspoken. Be in control of your own life. Use your voice and be the voice for people without one.

Poem by KH, a student in Texas

STUDENT ARTWORK

Photos by students in Oregon TS, TE, & SK



FS, a student from New Jersey

Sometimes my heart feels so colorful and full of stories, but I'm too shy to share them with anyone. It's like I have this beautiful garden locked away in my head, but I'm the only one who can see it. My throat gets tight, and I keep it all inside, even though my face is telling the real story. Then, I remember that being honest about my feelings is like letting a butterfly finally fly. When I speak my truth, the whole world opens up and finally feels a little brighter.



Silence In Power

by ZR, a student in Massachusetts



There is a lot that goes into the power of silence; the silence of situations, love, hardships, relationships, and so much more define a lot about who people are and what they have been through. Becoming a silent person is something that brings out a fear in those who feel as though they aren't heard and will never be heard. Biting your tongue is different from that silence that overwhelms people and drags them down. I for one have been a person who succumbed to silence for the fact that I thought it didn't matter what I said or who I said it to.

Silence is much more than just the act of being quiet. There are times when silence speaks volumes and also when being silent has helped and destroyed things and opportunities. Moments in which the person(s) become silent have defined moments where the outcome will forever change the course of life for all those involved. To speak honestly is to be brave in the face of danger and in the moment of judgment where you could 'make or break' yourself.

People stay quiet for so many reasons; being a bystander to bullying and not speaking on it is most likely because of the fact that people think they don't want to do anything that would make the other person turn on them. This is an example of subconscious fear, that if you were to speak on something you would only make the situation worse or it wouldn't make a difference to anything or anyone.

Silence can be forced as well because the silence most people are forced into is caused by an event in their life where they had no one to tell or they were scared of telling, because they believed if they said something there was an imminent threat to them or those they love. Staying quiet can ruin relationships but also save them; telling your friend she doesn't look good in something could affect her horribly but staying quiet might not be better. Even though someone could be presented with this, most would make a split second decision to not say anything only to spare their friends feelings. Silence can be loud if only there was someone to listen to your silence.

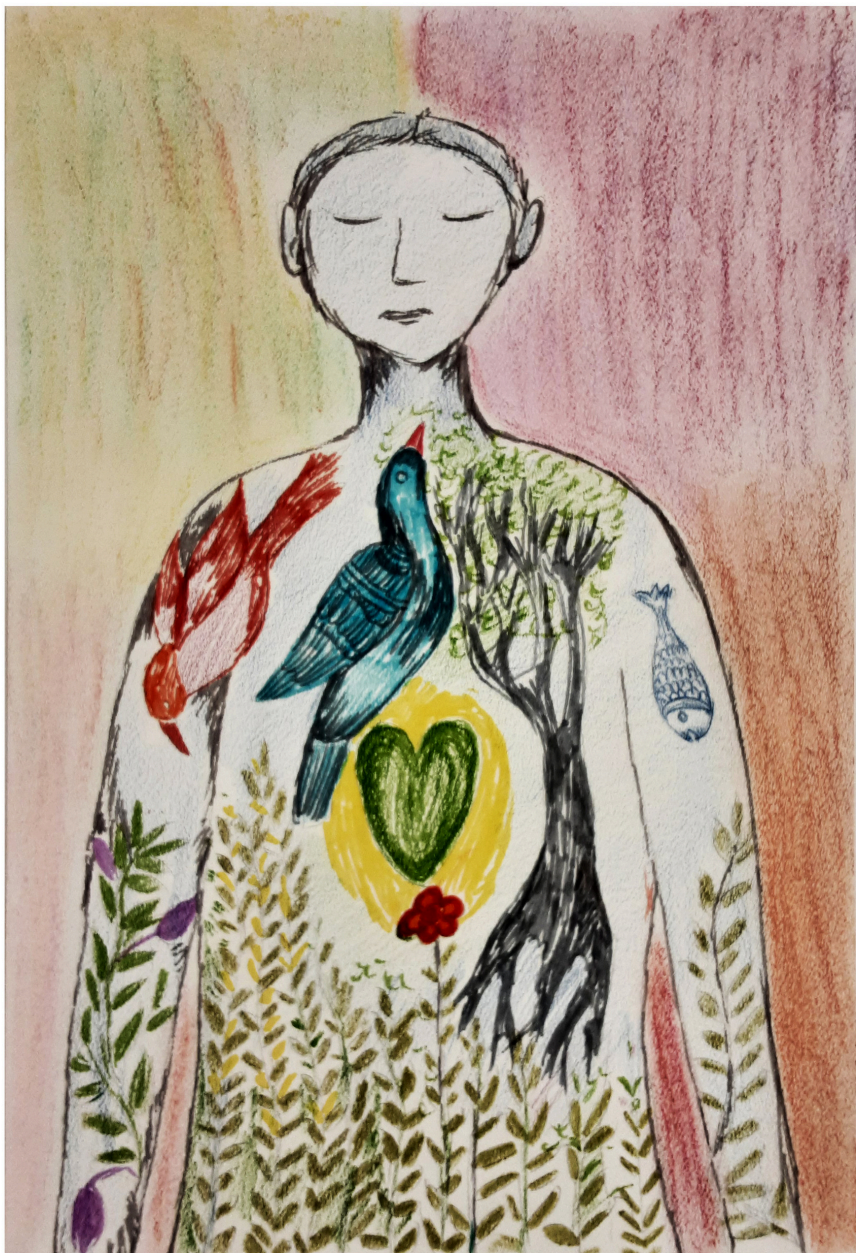
Protection, strength, power, a catalyst, a burden; these are all things that can come from the silence of others. Carrying around a silence that speaks volumes is one of the heaviest things a person can go through because it can tear them apart mentally, emotionally, and physically. The quietness of someone who is holding onto a secret that scares them is different from the suppression of noise of someone who is carrying the weight of knowledge they wish they didn't have. People stay quiet about things when they don't think they can make a change from being quiet or saying something. People go through things that make them put an end to the feeling of importance that speaking out could do for them. I have stayed silent on a lot of things that I wish I didn't, from things I didn't want to do to the things I wish I could forget for they only brought me suffering. The memories that constantly run around my head are like hurricanes to those who have never seen or even heard of some of the things I have been through. There are moments in my life that I would give anything to forget because even these memories and moments were things that you would think only happened in movies. I have hatred in my heart that I wish I didn't have but that I cannot get rid of, for it shaped my life in ways unchangeable.

Staying silent has helped me, broke me, hurt me, and saved me. I have regrets and remorse for situations I had no control over because I have come to terms that there was nothing I could've done to change what happened to me or around me or because of me. I have love in my heart for those I have stayed quiet for because I think they had a hold on me that only I could free myself from, and when I finally did, it brought a new appreciation for them that I would never have thought to have unless I went through things.

Everyone has always told me that there are going to be things in this world, this lifetime, these moments where there is absolutely nothing I could do to change the outcome. I take that as nature running its course. There are going to be a bunch of moments in life where you wish you didn't have to speak but only you can change the outcome with your choice.



Student Artwork



Artwork and statement by JR,
a student in New Jersey

Inside of me, there is a whole world of feelings that most people never get to see. Sometimes I feel like a quiet bird waiting for the right moment to finally sing its song.

"Speaking your truth" means letting all those hidden colors and ideas out into the air. Even if my voice shakes, sharing what's in my heart helps me grow like a tall, strong tree. When I am honest about who I am, I feel like I am finally blooming from the inside out.



Crochet hat by TS, a student in Oregon



WHERE I'M FROM

By KB, a student in DC

I am from Washington, DC,
from Brentwood Northeast and Saratoga.
I am from a part of this city that's dramatic,
where it's a lot of violence and a lot of drug wars.

I am from my grandmother's chicken,
from Little Rascals on the TV
and from playfighting with my brother.

I am from the way I care about people
and the way I have sympathy for others.

I'm from annoying my brother
and running around the streets,
from playing "I declare war" and Monopoly games.

I am from the old family reunions
with baked mac and cheese and baked beans.

I'm from the way my grandma loves her bed
and the way I put socks on her cold feet.

From "Stay out of trouble"
and "You're a smart young man."

I'm from pushing toward my goal to go to college
and changing my ways.

I'm from an established family that raised a smart young man.

From peaceful and sensitive.

I am from the best family there is.

**I'M FROM AN ESTABLISHED
FAMILY THAT RAISED A
SMART YOUNG MAN.**

What's Not Being Said

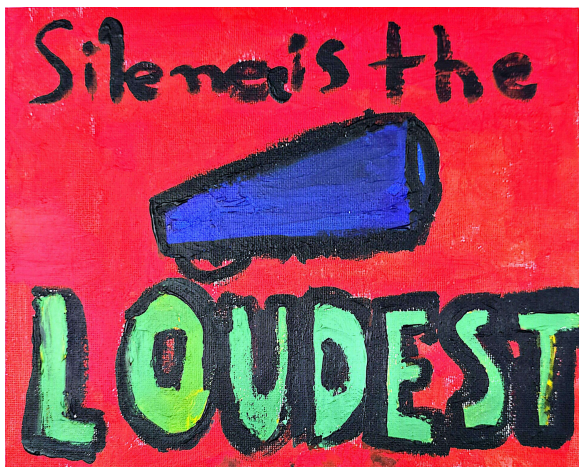
by TS, a student in Oregon

I am [TS], a youth in the system. I am one of many, but also one of a few. As a transgender youth, I have my own things to say. I grew up within a home that was unfair, wrong, and hurtful. Where I was locked away inside myself, unaware of the damage it was causing. In response, I became... me. I became [honest], despite the lies I had grown up with, became truthful to [myself]. It's tough, being honest, because it tends to make others dislike me, but it's also fulfilling at the same time. Once I began my story, I realized that it's that: my story. I can choose to be someone else... or choose to be who I want to be. If that's something against the grain, so be it. I found out a long time ago going against oneself is like pushing against the [tide]. Eventually it's gonna drain you of all the energy you have, fatigue you.

[Running] inwardly is never an option for me. I watch others do it, hiding behind the [mask] of fear rendered as pinpricks of hatred. They don't know how to walk in my shoes. And I wouldn't want to give them that [pain]. It is unbearable, to the point I cannot feel it anymore. I wish they would understand, even for a moment, how I feel.

I express myself freely now, with some adjustment for how I feel. I look like [me]. I sound like [me]. Over time, it has begun to push me [forward]. It has begun my fervent battle to be less [ignorant] about who I am. The exploration of myself has been exhilarating, if [embarrassing].

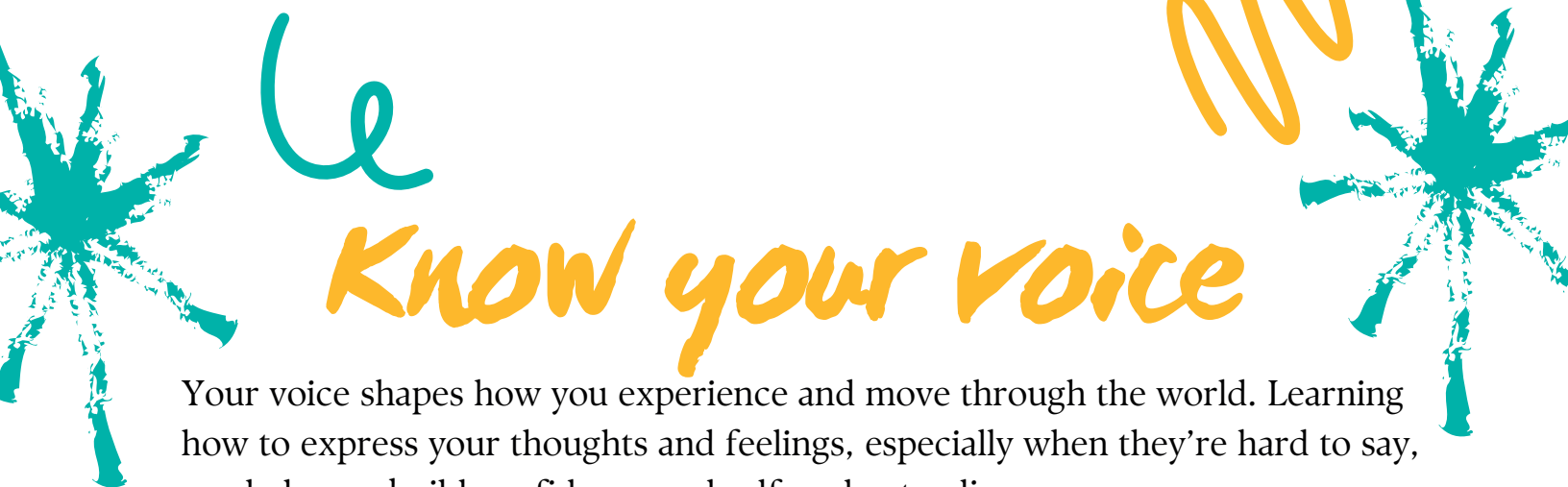
But with all of that, comes its own downfalls. I am lonely, misunderstood, and misjudged. I have few that I can talk to about my issues, whether because I'm a [girl], or because I simply have no one else that understands. I hear voices saying they're trying to help, but all I hear are my internal pleas, screams, and whimpers for someone, [anyone], to hear me. Connection is missing, fragmented. I cannot be as [honest] as I'd like to be, cannot be open as I wish I could be. Where is the [connection], the ties that I was supposed to have while I was [younger]? Lack of direction, lack of knowledge, lack of understanding.



Artwork by KC, a student in Indiana

In spite of that... I find being myself [invigorating]. I tore myself apart when I was younger living as someone else, and being me is [freeing]. The judgement is there, the... damage is there, yet I feel more like I'm alive than before. All the [scars] on display, all the differences out in the open. Does anyone else feel trapped by society's "norms"? Trapped against the wall of someone else's [beliefs] and a cliff of being a loner? **I have found the "norm" to be what we make it to be. We, the ones of the world, can change it. And I plan on being [myself], flaws and all,** and may any who hate me for it find the help they need. Because... who are we, if not ourselves? Ghosts, living another person's life.





Know your voice



Your voice shapes how you experience and move through the world. Learning how to express your thoughts and feelings, especially when they're hard to say, can help you build confidence and self-understanding.

These prompts are an opportunity to slow down, check in with yourself, and reflect on what feels true for you. Speaking your truth isn't about being perfect or having all the right words. It's about being honest, growing, and learning how to express yourself in ways that feel real. Your voice matters even if it's something you're still discovering and learning how to use.

Choose at least three questions to answer in the space below.

Reflection Prompts

- What is something you've been wanting to say but haven't yet?
- When do you feel most comfortable expressing yourself?
- What makes it hard for you to speak your truth sometimes?
- What helps you feel heard or understood?
- What is one boundary you want to set or express?
- When do you feel most like yourself?

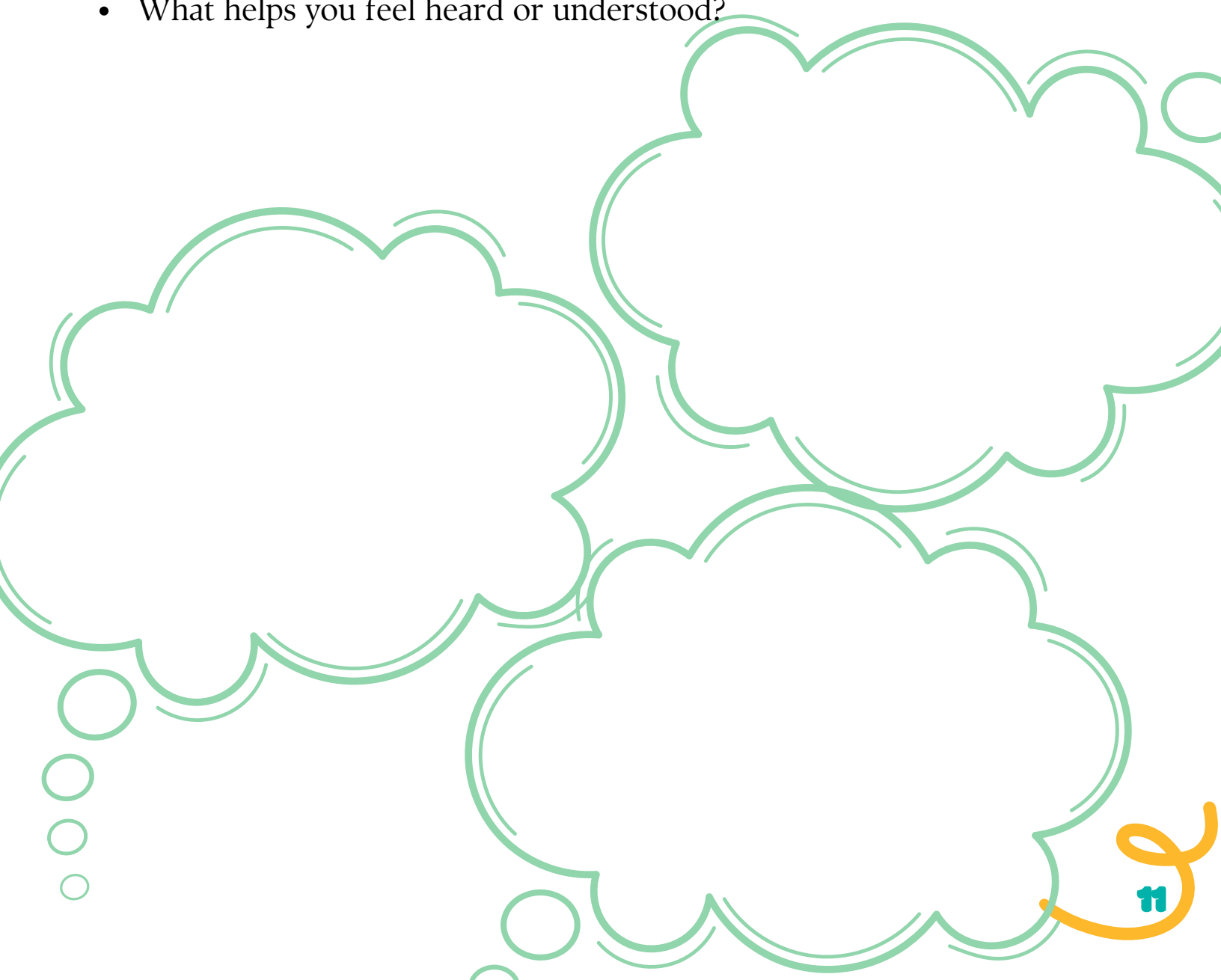


MINDFUL DOODLING

Expressing yourself can help you better understand your thoughts and feelings. There's no right or wrong way to do this. Use shapes, colors, symbols, or words to show what's true for you and what you want to say.

As you draw, think about:

- What is something you've been holding in?
- What do you wish you could say out loud?
- What helps you feel heard or understood?



Quick Hits Answers

JOKE ANSWER

Answer: Lawn moo-ers

RIDDLE ANSWER

Answer: A Lantern

CRYPTOGRAM

Answer: Never be Afraid to Fail.

Shoutout!

Special shoutout to the students and teachers whose work is featured in this issue!

Allison Forger, Maya Angelou Academy (YSC), DC
Alex Morrison, Elkhart County JDC, Indiana
Robert Selwitz, Winsor Hill Academy, Massachusetts
Srinath Vadapalli, Turning Point Academy in New Jersey
Lisa McCready, Trask River in Oregon
Kimberly Molidor, Academy for Academic Excellence in Texas

Get Ready for Our Next Issue! Submit Your Work!

Have something to share?

We want to hear from you!

The next issue of Break Free is coming soon, and we're looking for your stories, art, and ideas. This is your space to celebrate your journey, creativity, and voice.

To submit your work,
head to our website:

www.breakfree-ed.org/magazine.