By and for students
in juvenile justice facilities

SEPTEMBER 2026

BREAK FREE

Made for your mind to move.

Issue Six: What I'm Carrying

Quick Hits

THE BAG CHECK

Everybody carries things that others can't see. Circle the ones you are carrying right now.

Star the one you would keep if you could only keep one. Cross out the one that weighs the most.

- A grudge
- A promise you made to somebody
- A name people call you that is not yours
- A skill nobody knows you have
- Somebody else's mistake
- A person who kept showing up
- Anger you did not ask for
- A song that gets you through
- The person you used to be
- Proof that you have changed

REFLECTION

How long have you been carrying the one you crossed out, and who handed it to you?

THE WEIGH IN

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO PUT IT ALL DOWN,
BUT YOU DO NEED TO KNOW WHAT IT WEIGHS.

NAME IT

Most weight gets heavier because it has no name.

Write down the three heaviest things you are carrying right now.

Naming it is not fixing it. It is putting the bag down long enough to see what is inside.

SORT IT

Next to each one, write whose it is. Mine. Somebody else's. Nobody's anymore.

That last one is for things that happened, ended, and you are still hauling around. You may be surprised how much of the load was never yours.

CHOOSE ONE TO KEEP

Not everything you carry is a burden. Somewhere in there is a thing that keeps you standing: a person, a promise, a skill, a memory. Find it.

Write it bigger than the rest. That is the one you carry on purpose.

1.

2.

3.

Poems

TOMORROW WILL COME

Every day I think of the air I used to breath,
All of the sights I used to see.
The days I used to be at home,
Now all I feel is alone.
As I lay in my bunk at night,
I prepare myself for the next day I will have to fight.
I wake up to relive the same day,
And to hear all of the negative things people have to say.
I dream of the day I am once again free,
So I can be the happy girl I used to be.
Until then, I sit in my sorrow,
And always hope the best for tomorrow.

RS, a student from Missouri

CHANGING

It was May twenty eight,
The day I had court for my case.
The day I was taken away,
And filled with oh so much pain.
Every day since then,
I've thought about how different life could have been.
I have been given a second chance,
So now my life I will enhance,
For my family, better I will be,
And that is a me everyone shall see.
Now because of all of the change I have bring,
Home here I come.

RS, a student from Missouri

RELIEF

Living on this circle shape so called Earth, I got a lot on my mind I can't even think, so much within my head I can barely get rest. Lots of information in the back of my mind that no one knows, in a vault, but in front of it in yellow and black big words that scream caution tape please come back. Holding it in never letting it out. It beats me up and sometimes I'm able to fight back. They tell me let it out. If I let it out will I be able to fight back? Let's try it and see. I talk about it and let my mind go free. I'm glad I opened up now I'm able to get sleep. So for anybody wondering and scared to speak just go for it I promise it will help you gain peace and relief.

AR, a student from Missouri

BACK TO SCHOOL

Back to School Advice

For going back to school,
listening is a very helpful tool.
Also, always be nice
is some other good advice.
It's important not to jest
just to make people impressed.
Find good friends;
not all people lead you to good ends.
This is just basic advice—
some that will pay you a very price.

TR, a student from Texas

Back to School

Summer has come to an end,
leaving room for the school year.
Each and every day
graduation grows a little more near.
Some classes may be easy,
others may be hard,
but keep your head up
if you're willing to go far.
You're gonna have good days,
and you're gonna have bad,
but one day you'll look back
and reminisce on what you had.

JT, a student from Texas

"Make a lot of friends; you won't regret it at all. Don't let negative peers influence you to do bad things. Instead, encourage people to better themselves. They'll love you and thank you for it."
SSB, a student from Texas

"We set goals to sustainably push ourselves to achieve a 'limit' we'd thought we'd never reach and to uplift pride and confidence within ourselves. Set goals can be achieved by pushing for consistency."

LO, a student from Texas

STUDENT ARTWORK

A student from New Jersey

A student from New Jersey

NM, a student from Oregon

THE BIRD

Featured poem by Zach,
a student in Missouri

He was seen but never heard
In his dreams he was a bird
Flap your wings put in the work
Stay in the sky I know it hurts

To stay afloat although it burns
Muscles wrecked and wings so tired
Yet still he soars much much higher
His goals to be the greatest flyer
Above the clouds where air is lighter

When he descends upon his death
Finally his wings may rest
As he lies in heavens nest
Reborn he feels just like the best
He's done his bid and had his share
He's gone mad pulled out his hair
As he realised nothing's fair

Inhale

As his last words are on his tongue
He thinks back to all songs sung
The air it waits within his lungs
As he exhales his story's done

Fly high lovely bluejay.

What are you carrying?

By the BreakFree team

There is a thing that happens when you walk into somewhere new. You might arrive with everything you own in one bag and think that is all you brought with you.

It isn't.

Some of what you carry will never show up on a list.

The last argument.
The person who said you would never make it.
A name somebody gave you years ago that you are still answering to.
Someone else's mistake that somehow became yours.

But there are good things in there, too.

The person who kept showing up.
Something you know you are good at.
A promise you made and still intend to keep.
The part of you that refuses to quit.

Nobody checked that bag at the door. You are carrying it right now.

And when you do not know what is in your bag, the weight can show up in unexpected ways. You get tired and cannot explain why. You get angry at the wrong person. Sometimes you even put down the wrong thing. You drop the promise and keep the grudge because the grudge is louder.

You only have so much room. You get to choose what you carry.

Some things make the load heavier. Other things help you keep going. Hold on to the people who believe in you, the lessons you've learned, the things you're proud of, the goals you're working toward, and the parts of yourself you want to grow.

You don't have to carry every mistake, every opinion, every grudge, or every bad moment with you.

And you don't have to empty the bag. That's not the point.

The point is to know what you're carrying. To recognize what weighs you down and what keeps you going. To decide what deserves to come with you and what you're ready to leave behind.

You get to choose what you carry forward.

Reflection questions

- What are you carrying that belongs to somebody else?
- What is the one thing in your bag you would refuse to put down?
- What have you carried so long you forgot it was there?
- Who helps you carry the bag?

Answers

STUDENT POETRY

NO LONGER HOLDING ON

I once thought I was Strong.
Yet I get this deep dark feeling that something is holding on.
We argued, cried and we tried to let go of each other.
Not knowing the fate of one another.
But It tugs and I try to break free, it won't release its grip on me.
I try not to accept my fate, but it's too late.
It makes my stomach feel woozy and ill, but I am fighting still.
I try and let go of all the pain because there is nothing to gain.
My heart hurting, bleeding and pleading for the rain to go away, but here I lay.
I try and do new things to explore this feeling.
What is it?
It me holding on to the thought of you.
No, it's me holding the ghost of you.
Trying to keep what I loved most of you.
It feels so far away but the scars are here to stay.
It takes time and letting go feels like a crime.
But acceptance is the start and letting go is the end.
I will not break but I may bend and I will find the message I am trying to send.
I am sorry for all the errors, trials and the piles of this feeling that we had.
Sadness is what it would show yet it would help us build and grow.
Even though it happened apart, we were the start of it.
We are no longer holding on and our future is unfolding farther on.

GO, a student from Oregon

SO MUCH LIFE AHEAD

So much life ahead yet so far to go
I am scared how far it goes
Make mistakes as I go
I can only move forward with life and goals
Learned my lesson from correction
Had to stop and let go I'm tired of stressing
Found new hobbies to keep away from the present
My coping skills will keep me away from the hills
The fight is worth it life is perfect
Struggles are real bumps of steel
Just let go don't fight the wheel
I have been through a lot but more to go
Like this poem it will flow
now move along with the crow

JO, a student from Oregon

I am Art
by SJ in Florida

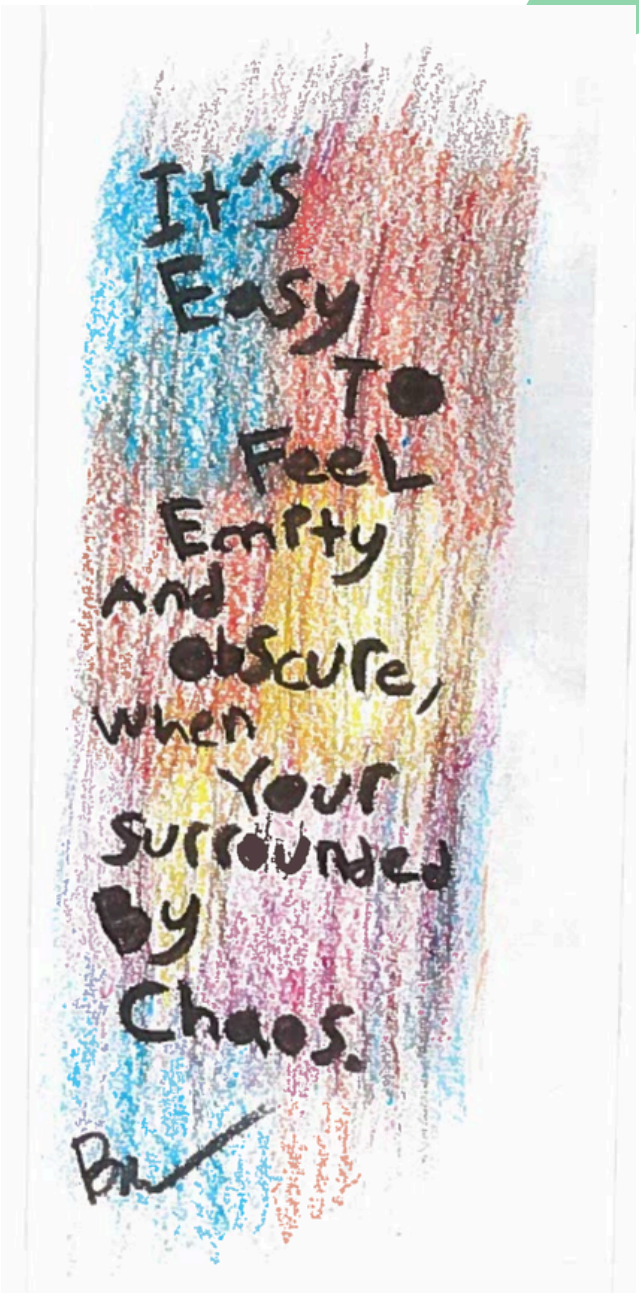
I am ART
because I am diffeRent
I don't have the same exact Features as anyone Else.

My eyes are NOT the same COLOR as Yours
My NOSE is not the same SHAPE as YOURS
My hair is not the same TEXTURE as yours
I am not the same color as YOU

I AM UNIQUE

Just like ART

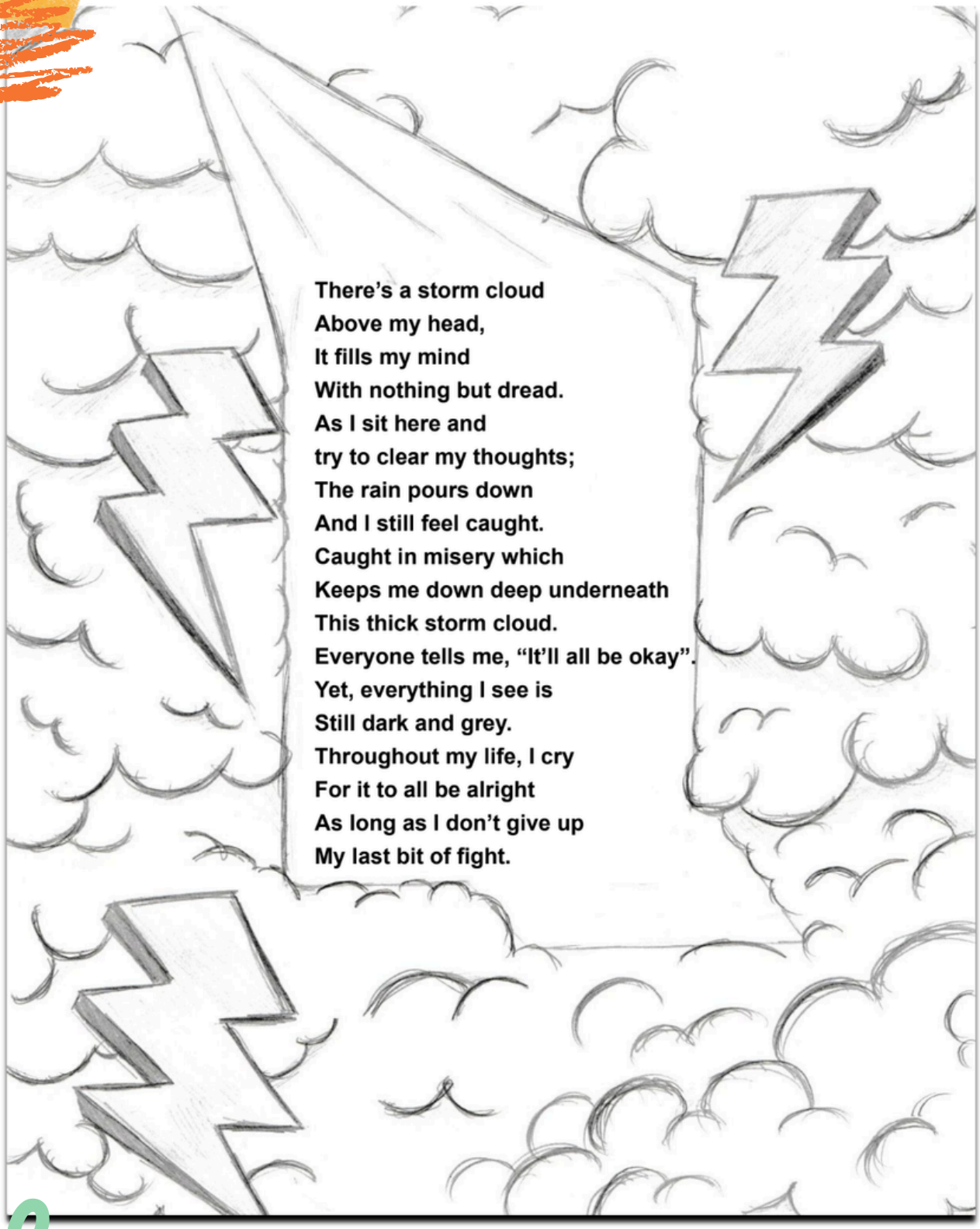
SJ, a student from Florida



BM, a student from Oregon

A student from New Jersey

THERE'S A STORM CLOUD



There's a storm cloud
Above my head,
It fills my mind
With nothing but dread.
As I sit here and
try to clear my thoughts;
The rain pours down
And I still feel caught.
Caught in misery which
Keeps me down deep underneath
This thick storm cloud.
Everyone tells me, "It'll all be okay".
Yet, everything I see is
Still dark and grey.
Throughout my life, I cry
For it to all be alright
As long as I don't give up
My last bit of fight.

AC, a student from North Carolina

The Inventory

Everybody is carrying something. Most people never take inventory. They just get used to the weight.

Some of what you carry was handed to you by somebody else. Some of it you picked up on purpose. Some of it is holding you up, and some of it has been dragging for years and you stopped noticing.

These prompts are a chance to set the bag down, look inside, and decide what goes back in. You do not have to empty it. You only have to know what is there.

Reflection Prompts

Choose at least three prompts and answer them in the space to the right.

- What am I carrying that I did not choose?
- What am I carrying that I chose, and would choose again?
- What is the oldest thing in the bag?
- Who handed me the heaviest thing, and do they know I still have it?
- What would somebody who loves me tell me to put down?
- What is one thing I want to be carrying a year from now that I am not carrying yet?

MY INVENTORY

MINDFUL DOODLING

Some weight is easier to draw than it is to explain.

(1) Draw a figure in the middle of the page. A stick figure is fine. It is you.

(2) Draw what you are carrying. A backpack, a box, a sack, a cloud, whatever fits. Make its size match how heavy it feels.

(3) Inside it, draw or write what is in there. Shapes, words, weather, faces. Do not sort it yet.

(4) Pick one thing and go over it in a different color. That is the one you carry on purpose.

(5) Pick one thing and draw it again on the ground next to the figure. That is the one you are setting down today.

If you get stuck: start with the bag, not the person. Draw its outline, then decide how full it is. There is no wrong way to do this. The bag is only yours.

Quick Hits Answers

The Bag Check is personal to each of you, so answers will vary. Whatever you starred, carry it on purpose.

Shoutout!

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

FL: Denise Barnett, Escambia County School District Jail
MO: Kelly Boley, Watkins Mill Park Camp
NJ: Srinath Vadapalli, Turning Point Academy
NC: LeeAnn O'Neal, Eckerd Connects, Kerr Lake
OR: Lisa McCready, Trask River
TX: Kimberly Molidor, Academy for Academic Excellence

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