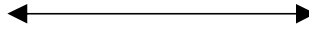


**\*\*\*POETRY – 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE\*\*\***



**3rd Place**

**The Trials of a Veteran**

**Sienna Wong**

Diablo Vista Middle School, Danville

Teacher: Bonnie Meyers

The court room was quiet. The judge stood, grave and silent.  
He gestured towards the men lying still on the floor.

Kneeling I stripped their bodies of uniforms, as evidence for the hushed-up room.  
The fabric fell between my fingers, I could feel it was cheap and very thin.  
But my senses were completely overwhelmed by the nakedness of their skin.

The wizened face of an older man who could have been my father.  
With smile lines around his eyes, and a picture of his pretty wife,  
dusted in a film of gray-black soot, tucked and crinkled in his boot.  
The thin frame of a smaller boy who could have been my brother.  
His vest was much too large, hanging off his skinny form  
in a hopeless, endearing kind of way.

Their eyes were a little too empty, no mirth in the dim, inky pools. Gently, I closed both lids.  
I just couldn't bear to see them stare, into the chilled and empty air,  
as if searching for something that was not there.

The wounds in their bodies, the bullet holes, in which my gun had ripped through flesh,  
leaving a gaping, bloodied pit of torn-up skin behind.  
There was a strange but lingering pride in the arc of the dead mens' brows,  
the openness of their grimy faces, the surrender of their slackened hands.

Both mouths were slightly ajar, as if they died, gasping how bright  
death was, how full of pain and light.

It's hard to see an enemy in a corpse, to feel honor, to feel *anything* but the slaughter.  
The spine-breaking, youth-taking weight of it all, till breath has been long-since forgotten.  
A life reduced down to bones, buckling, cracking, beneath a skin you just can't bear.

And so the judge, with a wary eye, gave me my sentence and left me to die,  
at a very old and tired age.  
My endless torture every day... my endless torture every day.

And their eyes, their *eyes*, they follow me, beneath my skin as I try to sleep.  
Murmuring, so sorrowfully, as I stand trial in the courtroom,  
the empty, deserted courtroom.