

# CATALYZE

a collection of poems by the students of New Voices Are Rising



And

Before we go into the beautiful poems made by Youth, we would like to give a

Thank You To our Program Director:

**Katherine Funes**

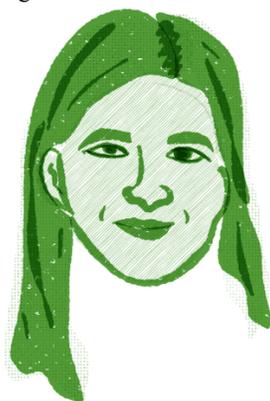


Katherine, The New Voices Youth and Staff, would like to thank you for the continuous hard work, effort, and commitment you have put into this program. You have watched many of us grow into the people we are today and we appreciate your guidance and love through it all. Without you, we would have never gotten the opportunity to become published poets or community activists. You gave us the confidence to turn ourselves into great people!

Furthermore, we would like to give gratitude to the summer academy Co-Coordinator, **Andrea** and **Qin**, along with Youth Coordinator **Mars** for the amazing artwork and the creation of this poetry collection “Catalyze. They put in amazing work this summer!



Last but not least, special thanks to **Mona Shomali**, Director of the New Leaders Initiative and New Voices Are Rising Advisory Board member, for being a great supporter of our New Voices Are Rising Summer Youth Poetry Slam and book. She has played a huge part in empowering the young voices of Bay Area youth for years. Without her support in providing a poetry workshop and her skills in co-hosting the slam, we would be lost!



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A baby born healthy,  
Taken into a family much less than wealthy.  
She grows up to know no more than a burger king and a liquor store.  
Her single dad struggles to stay afloat,  
He grows to cherish the Chevron fires as that's money he's never known.  
The child grows older...  
As trains go by, she wonders why her chest is on fire,  
For once...she speaks up on behalf of her community and gets shut down like a liar.  
She asks, "Why do the ones who look like me suffer the most?"  
As a white man calls her "incompetent" and goes back to his \$2m home.  
A fire breaks out, she gets compensated and stays blind.  
The workers keep working....  
For as long as we don't know, this is why our people have been dyin.  
A quick paycheck for them is another death in our homes,  
One generation gone...it's like they wanted me to fight alone.  
They take away our access to healthy living and basic human rights,  
Then call us lazy and unhealthy and expect us not to fight.  
One more refinery....the air it makes me choke  
We complain and campaign and yet get treated like a joke.  
A quick paycheck for them is another death in our homes,  
One generation gone...it's like they wanted me to fight alone.

Ahnaya

Homes are a right we all deserve  
A roof shouldn't be taken away  
Just because you are unable to pay  
Tenants are decreasing as rent is increasing  
Oh no it's being raised, I hear my mom say  
As she comes home, exhausted from a long day  
The fear of sleeping on the streets motivating us to work  
How wrong is that?  
Everywhere prices are soaring  
People are kicked out because of a deadline  
These people are humans who are starving  
Starving for warmth, for food, and security  
I walk around and all I see are people struggling  
Please spare change, please spare change  
They continue to cry as people pass by  
Please spare change, please spare change  
People give them a dirty side eye  
Homes and communities can be built  
People can come together  
These people deserve a second chance  
A second chance to live and a second chance to thrive  
After all they're humans  
Just like you and I

**Alitzel**

When you walk outside, it feels like suffocation  
Grounds aren't green, skies are gray  
Seems like you don't take your future into consideration  
All kids should want to do outside is play

Although it may not appear  
Because you all always austere  
The Air Is Not Clear  
So you should all fear

Fright, tension, anxiety may worry forever  
Happiness, peace, pleasure and joy never  
Your lives are essential and so is the land  
You should give it all effort so that you can all stand

Your minds pollution  
May deny solution  
But all it takes is one person  
To act an eversion

It is the choice you make  
To take on your roles as humans who have fate

Now I must say goodbye as a tree in the light  
As this man walks around me with great smile

Angalic "Gigi"

Large corporations are at the root of it all  
 Life has a rising price  
 Many can't afford  
 Those price tags and green paper more important than POC life?  
 More Money  
 More Power  
 More  
 More  
 More  
 POC get poorer  
 Losing money that's all that matters  
 White people get rich  
 Get money that's all that matters  
 Greed and Power consume us  
 The Earth will be for sale to buy  
 For the White Rich to Bleed Dry

Angela



I think these animals should be free  
 These animals can feel like us  
 They have feelings too  
 Get these animals out of cages  
 Or else  
 We will riot  
 We should care! They get hurt too, no matter their size or shape  
 Animals should be free

Betzaida

I believe there should be equal access to education.  
Opportunity is a bottleneck, pulled tight by money and education  
And the neck isn't as wide as the bottle  
Knowing that so many are left behind makes the world feel hard and cold,  
As if I am pressed against the glass  
Stuck against the glass  
Stuck  
At the bottom  
Stuck  
In the bottle  
If you can't pay it up  
There are people who don't even want to go up, they just want to go out,  
To step out of the bottle and out of the box,  
But it takes money to buy the ticket off of the tracks that go towards traditional "success"  
Have you ever heard of the starving artist?  
If you want that ticket off of mass transit, off of the path everyone is "supposed" to take  
You better have a trust fund  
Break the bottle and set us free,  
Or we'll all be stuck climbing glass  
With no coin stack to stand on

Corinne

There's litter all around us.  
There's litter on the streets.  
There's litter in the bushes.  
There's litter at your feet.

This is a problem so common, yet so silent.

So please when you see litter in the streets  
And the air smells of pollution  
And you feel like its all piling up  
Remember there is a solution

There's something each of us can do to keep the rivers clean  
To keep fresh the air we breathe  
And keep the forests green

Help clean a beach  
Or recycle bottles and cans  
Learn about the problems we face and help others understand.

**Dariana**

I feel the youth of our nation being choked out and smothered  
We deserve to have our lives be full and long but we are forced to fight for these issues that have been  
pushed onto us

My life has not been warm rain on a summer day,  
I strive to be able to wake up and have the feeling of baking warm cookies in a cold winter night  
I scream to myself everyday it gets better  
Everything is always, "It gets better"  
Everyone says, "It gets better"  
but it never does

I'm labeled as a crazy youth for striving to make our world survivable for everyone.  
As we sit here working and stressing about our future  
Manufacturing companies profit off of suffering  
As we stand up to fight for injustice it feels as if we are being handcuffed down and muzzled  
So these corporations can continue to pollute our communities  
Sometimes I think.

It will never get better.  
Sometimes I feel as if these youth pleas for justice go unheard  
We scream and yell at board members yet are pushed aside like old food  
We are seen as just a couple of kids from the hood.  
But I refuse for that to be my mark on this Earth  
I refuse to let people see me that way  
I refuse to sit back and be quiet.  
So I will fight till the day I die

David

I see trees;  
Being sliced, diced  
For the happiness of capitalism.

I see rivers, oceans, lakes;  
Being polluted with trash, chemicals  
And harming the things living in it.

I see the air;  
Being contaminated with gasses, chemicals, particles  
But it would be rare for the rich to care.

I see the earth;  
Getting harmed by us,  
We are destroying our home,  
The clock is ticking Tik-Tok, Tik-Tok  
When will we change our ways?

When will I stop seeing?

**Diana**

It shouldn't be so hot  
 The temperature keeps increasing  
 Forests on fire, droughts, hot days, animals dying  
 I guess it doesn't matter if they all become extinct?  
 We don't have to predict what will happen  
 It's already happening  
 People losing their homes, frightened, losing their lives

A red sky A red sky  
 Smoke in the air  
 Ashes falling down which holds all the cries and screams  
 If we keep this up all we will see is red skies

Erika



Everyday goes day more POC die  
 People cry to see their family members die  
 In pain we watch, in social media we relay  
 Police need to stop so we can all survive  
 How many more of us need to go before there is change

I don't want my kids to grow up in a world full of pain  
 As time goes on I hope to see a change  
 I don't want to be afraid of who I am  
 Though I live in a good neighborhood, that comes with a cost that blue lives matter flag makes my  
 heart race

We are the future and have a voice, as youth we learned to speak our truth  
 It's 2021 I'm tired of waiting, our opinions matter and we shall say it

Giovanni

I believe that everyone deserves clean air to breath  
Because people's lives are at risk  
It scares me to know that our lungs and air are clouded with chemicals  
And people are not aware of these issues  
People need to stop thinking its fine  
And start looking at what is on the line

Hannah



There are people dying  
Yet no one will help these people  
Vacancies in hospitals and available resources  
Doctors and nurses equipped with the most advanced technology  
Money makes the world go round  
And if you don't have it you're nothing  
A sick walking burden waiting to painfully perish

Jieun

I believe this world can be moved further away from its coffin,  
 And to stop the suffocation like a knee on its neck  
 This affects my community because it is making my life a wreck  
 Be the flame in the land of darkness  
 Be the flame in the land of darkness  
 Be the flame in the land of your darkness  
 We are stealing ourselves by the people in power  
 There are levels to this shit like a tower  
 But then again, we remember that money is power  
 And our life is ours  
 The Earth is dying and we are proving time and time again  
 That we are here to hurt it  
 That's why we get showers, we're cowards  
 We have no choice to move forward, but each step, we take reduce a year off our own lives  
 We are putting the knife on our necks because everyday we wake up and think  
 Why are we pissed?  
 Every day, year, or week, another victim in the hidden mist  
 People of color suffer and wake up pissed  
 When does it end?  
 I just wish the health of this Earth mattered when it didn't  
 That we could've done something before it became a problem  
 But the question still stands:  
 Will you take a stand or will you sit down and let the world crumble in your hands?

Joseph



I'm angry that my people are being killed and beaten  
 The color of my skin should not determine whether or not I am a threat  
 It makes me sick to see the lives we've lost to these pigs we call cops  
 They are meant to protect us yet they murder our fathers, brothers, sisters, mothers, and children  
 No justice no peace I will not rest  
 No justice no peace I will not rest  
 The streets will run red with the blood of these crooks

I hope you rot in hell for the pain you have caused my community  
 These helpless families scream in agony holding lifeless bodies  
 No justice no peace I will not rest  
 No justice no peace I will not rest  
 Shoot first ask questions later  
 I lost my uncle to you pigs  
 "I saw his gun"  
 It was a hair brush  
 "I felt threatened so I shot him"  
 His rightfully owned and registered gun never left his glove compartment  
 You killed him and watched him die  
 "I had a warrant to search the property"  
 But u enter with no warning then  
 You killed her in cold blood  
 You watch him struggle to breath for 10 minutes  
 "I can't breathe please don't kill me"  
 He screams as the fear of dying on the cold concrete fills his mind  
 You loaded his lifeless body onto a stretcher and claimed he died in transportation to the hospital  
 No arrests made No punishments given  
 No justice no peace I will not rest  
 No justice no peace I will not rest  
 I can't help but wonder who will be next  
 The constant fear that it could be someone I know I hold in my arms as they take Their last breath  
 All because the government gives trigger happy racist pricks guns and  
 Expects them to protect our people  
 No justice no peace I will not rest  
 No justice no peace I will not rest  
 Another life snatched by this messed up system  
 You people need to open your eyes we can not fight by ourselves  
 Change won't come unless we fight til the very end  
 The black community will never be silenced  
 We will get justice for the angels whose lives were taken by selfishness and stupidity.  
 No justice No peace  
 WE will not rest.

Kayona

They give and they give  
 We take and we take  
 Doesn't matter if its real  
 Doesn't matter if its fake  
 If it turn away  
 It is of no use  
 I am trapped back in  
 And handed a noose  
 Puppet strings guide me to the register  
 To force me to hurt by spending  
 I cannot escape  
 Speeding up our unwanted ending

**Laila**



I feel happy when everyone is treated the same  
 It matters because equality is a human right  
 It Hurts my head when equal opportunities are not equal  
 Justice for Inequality  
 I see the slow growth and improvement  
 but the growth of improvement cannot come any faster  
 Justice for Inequality

**Manuel**

Have you ever cherished the serenity of a lake  
     on a peaceful day  
     with a light breeze  
 where the leaves of trees mirror onto the water  
     designing a flawless painting of nature?  
 Though it may not seem like it, different shapes in nature speak.  
     They can cry.  
     They, too, can have anger.  
     They, too, can scream.  
 Take the tall glaciers in Greenland--  
     They're streaked, burnished whites  
 with mystical crevices and toothed peaks, and yet  
     even these huge shapes of nature speak.  
 They speak in supernatural, shifting forms--  
     in aisles that drift and lament  
 With their screams, generate calving from melting ice.  
     And with a sudden, clamorous explosion  
 in a flash, this large calved slice gets dumped into the sea at a faster rate than ever before.  
     All because of *us*.  
     All because of climate change.  
 Trees are another shape in nature that speak.  
 Trees are said to be the arms of earth, reaching out to the heavens.  
     They are gracious giants  
     keeping a tender eye over the critters far below them.  
     They are literal living antiques.  
 But when they are rapidly being chopped down by us, there is a distinct lonely mourn in the forests.  
 You see-- nature is always perceived as quiet, but because of us, it is a lot louder than ever before.  
     Their screams are more than just voices  
     they will prove to be the end of us.  
     To achieve peace, we need balance.  
 And to do so, we need to achieve human satisfaction  
     without the expense of our earth and our lives.  
     So the question is for you to think about--  
     How can we get this balance?

Maryam

I believe given the gift of the human race, we are all similar in our own ways.  
 Yet we continue to fight for our basic human rights.  
 Watching people of color continue to suffer in a fight against our own, this must be known.  
 Shedding these tears and forced to cover my ears from the pain we all sustain.  
 Yet we're told we're the same  
 We're all the same

Fighting against those who have sworn to protect us, fighting against the system  
 They see us as prey, it shouldn't have to be this way.  
 Yet we're told everything is okay.  
 We're all the same.

Does our skin tone really divide us?  
 So much so that we're thrown in the dust.  
 History has been repeating which is strange  
 But it's finally time for a change  
 To acknowledge one another as equals,  
 With no differences between skin tones.  
 That is the aim since we're all the same

### Mehik



Click Click Click  
 Add to cart  
 Go to checkout quick  
 Then press restart

What do I want to do  
 With all the money in the world  
 Click Click Click  
 What would Jeffery do?

Should I end world hunger?

With my however many trillion dollars?  
 Throw money at the protestors at the warehouses?  
 Widows crying at my doorstep over deceased spouses

Click click click  
 Add to cart  
 Next page

Should I solve the homelessness problem?  
 Surely if I'm tired of people being bailed out by the government  
 I should do something  
 But we aren't controlled by some evil tyrant  
 So in the meantime  
 Click click click  
 Add to cart  
 Refresh

Now what would Jeffery do?  
 Will all the money in the world?  
 Cancel student debt?  
 Or offer college students discounted prime memberships?  
 Click click clicking  
 Adding to cart dorm decorations

What would Jeffery do?  
 With protestors outside demanding he give the Amazon's back it's trees?  
 With people choking in the streets?  
 Complaining about my factories and warehouses  
 How could they bite the hand that's feeds them  
 And pulls on their leash to make them obey?  
 What would Jeffery do?  
 When children cling to their mothers  
 Milked dry they're watering down their cereal  
 What would Jeffery do  
 When the children who buy cheap,laced pods  
 Heave breaths in an already contaminated neighborhood

What would Jeffery do  
With the rising mortality rates of black and brown folk  
At the hands of his corrupted corporate greed  
His life stock being bled dry  
By his own doings  
What would Jeffery do?

Click click click  
Add to cart  
Item name “undocumented immigrants”  
Price: However much it takes to bribe officers

Click click click  
Add to cart  
Item name “underpaid minimum wage worker”  
Price: the bare minimum

Click click click  
Report item  
Item name “black and brown communities”  
Reason for reporting: none

What would I do  
If I had all the money in the world?

Click click click  
Add to cart  
Continue to checkout  
Repeat

**Michelle**

Society makes women put on facades  
 The unattainable standard that are set for girls  
 With figures like a pin-up, and features like a doll  
 “Blonde hair, and blue eyes!”  
 “Petite like an hourglass”

Men expect the most from us  
 And we'd give up anything to be enough  
 But why do we,  
 When men manipulate,  
 Steal from, hurt, and rape us?

Like tigers hunting on prey,  
 They sexualize us,  
 Do they see us as nothing more than a source of relief  
 For their sexual pleasures?  
 Lead on, then abandoned when I no longer have my purity left to offer  
 Only seen as an object of no value besides what's in between my legs.

It's, “not all men.”  
 Then why don't I have open drinks around them,  
 Wary that it might get laced?  
 Why do I feel the need to carry mace?  
 Why do my friends ask me, “have you gotten home safe?”

“It's not all men”  
 Why am I told that,  
 I have to cover my shoulders, cover my thighs,  
 Like they weren't meant to be seen with human eyes  
 Like they're the reason you're hard  
 Like I'm the reason you can't control yourself around me.  
 Is my skin distracting?

Going into the school's bathroom stall,  
 Crying uncontrollably like a kid throwing a tantrum.  
 Asking, “Mommy, did I do something wrong?”

“Does my confidence make me a slut?”  
 Why did I get sent home from school?  
 When I’m not the one to blame.

I’m  
 Sorry for being inappropriate.  
 I didn’t know that wearing crop tops,  
 Shorts higher than my fingertips,  
 And not wearing a bra  
 Gave you the consent to fuck me.

Though of course,  
 “When you dress like that, you’re asking for it”  
 Were my screams not enough?  
 No, I don’t want to go home with you  
 No, I don’t want your number  
 No, I can’t, I’m just fifteen.

I’m a minor!  
 So why do I go out and get catcalled?  
 Go to school to get sent home?  
 Made to feel like everything I do is my fault.  
 I’m the reason I got hurt!  
 I’m the reason why men want to touch me.  
 I’m the reason why boys can’t control their desires.

You should just take it and enjoy it.  
 Doesn’t it feel good?  
 “That means he likes you! Don’t like when boys tell you you’re beautiful?”  
 Well isn’t it their fault I feel this way?  
 Objectified, and then tossed aside.  
 I can barely find myself beautiful.

Why do I only consider myself pretty when  
 I haven’t eaten in two days?  
 I’ve always been told...

“Men like women with this, who act like that”  
 Why do I feel the need to seek your validation?

Yet I..

Dyed my hair blonde.  
 Put on contacts to make them blue,  
 I made my Asian eyes look bigger  
 And I cinch my waist to feel smaller  
 I guess I do want to be enough for you.  
 Do I look pretty yet?

Nicole



I believe we need to make a change and help the homeless before they start to go insane  
 People preaching they're trying to make a change  
 But in reality it's still the same  
 Claiming they're bringing down housing  
 But yet the Bay Area is still the the third highest ranked  
 Make a change  
 Make a change  
 Make a change  
 Understand this problem won't change  
 Unless we open the door to a new way  
 Tired of seeing families sleep on the streets  
 And have to worry about what to eat  
 Make a change  
 Make a change

Rylei

I believe in radical love  
 Because it's good for the heart  
 Because it's good for the soul  
 And were all connected at the hip  
     And heart  
     And soul  
 We are drops in the sea  
     Knots in the net  
     Links on the chain  
     Interconnected peace  
 We are not free until they are  
 I am not free until you are

Sabine



I feel categorized.  
 Let me and my fellow black and brown youth dream of being something one day.  
 WE WILL NOT FALL INTO YOUR RACIST EXPECTATIONS.  
 Hearing you scream into my ear but yet be soooo far away makes me want to  
     give up and let you win.  
 Hearing you say you will be nothing just like your people, you will be nothing just like your people.  
     My blood no Our blood is in your hands.  
 White supremacy will continue while our black and brown people work their ass off just for minimum  
     wage or even worse get put into jail.

Siurave

I believe the system is corrupt  
 It's basic human decency to care  
 Why should it cost to live?  
 It makes me mad that all of our needs got a price  
 Don't got enough money?  
 Oh well  
 You didn't work hard enough  
 We all suffer at the hands of greed  
 Just to benefit the rich white man  
 I refuse to be a slave to the system  
 Fuck Capitalism

Stephanie



It hurts me to see what's happening to my home  
 The sun shining  
 Birds flying

My home was once beautiful  
 What did we do  
 Littered with trash  
 Breathing in toxic gas  
 Beach floors once sandy white  
 Now littered, brown, pollutants plight

Let's make it better  
 We need to make progress  
 By polluting less and less

Saving the environment  
 Is bigger than you think  
 Or else it will be gone

Faster  
 Than  
 You  
 Blink

Tyodus



I believe in the gift of freedom;  
 A gift that has been broken and ripped down without permission.  
 Some that have forgotten of the beginning cuz their minds have elevated  
 Like a tree without leaves and life,  
 Taking advantage of the sweat of the ones below.

It haunts me when I see the clear window and see the new fruits bleeding.  
 But there is time!  
 Yeah!!!  
 There is time!!  
 For you and I to change what has been ripping down.  
 It is on us to care for the bleeding;  
 For us to  
 Change death for life!

Cuz if we forget like the ones before  
 our Earth  
 Will burn and slowly die in pain..

Yennifer

I feel the blood, sweat, and tears which belong to sweatshop workers, on garments that are advertised as ethically made.

The cost of human greed leads to people working unpaid.  
How are people expected to survive with no money, horrible conditions, and no aid?

How far will our greed take us simply so we can wear nice clothes  
How far will our greed take us simply so we can stay in trendy roles

I loathe those who make jokes about human suffering  
They claim to be woke but are the same ones muttering jokes

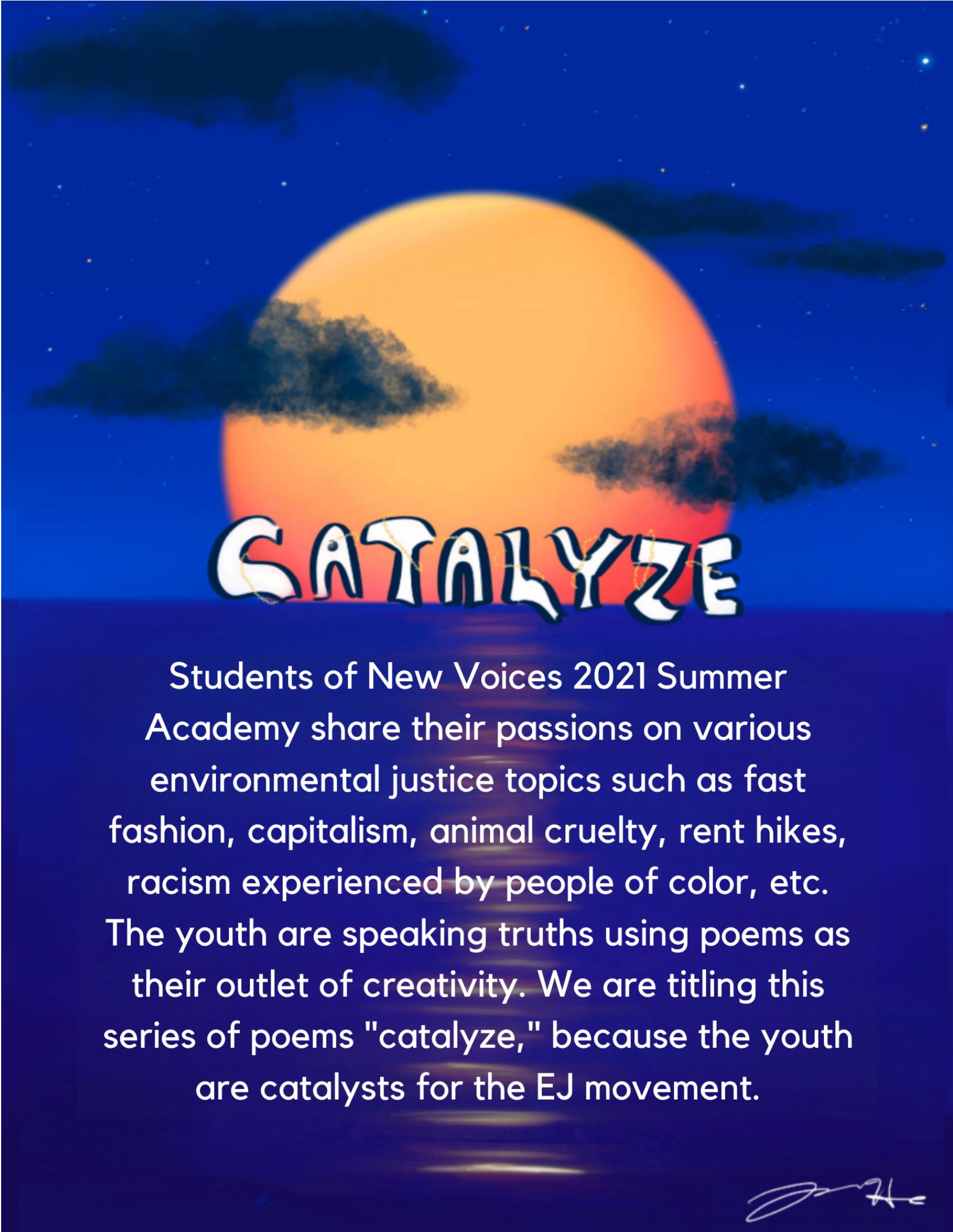
They joke and tell the children to stitch their clothes faster, and if they don't there will be a disaster  
Why are struggling people the baseline of your jokes?

Stop hiding under your cloak - the cloak that leads you to think what your saying is only a joke

How far will humans go for their selfish game?  
Far enough to sacrifice their morals and lose empathy?

Why are you afraid of sweatshop wrongs buffering  
Use your voice and contribute to the uncovering of the harmful effects of workers suffering

Zoya



# CATALYZE

Students of New Voices 2021 Summer Academy share their passions on various environmental justice topics such as fast fashion, capitalism, animal cruelty, rent hikes, racism experienced by people of color, etc. The youth are speaking truths using poems as their outlet of creativity. We are titling this series of poems "catalyze," because the youth are catalysts for the EJ movement.

