CATALYZE
a collection of poems by the students of New Voices Are Rising
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-Coordinators, 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 breathe
   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 it’s real
Doesn’t matter if it’s 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 sinch 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 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 we're 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

Tydus

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 thor 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
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.