

The 17th Annual SPUSA Writing Contest

**TESTING
THE BOUNDARIES**

Awards Ceremony
At the Residence of the U.S. Ambassador

June 18th, 2010

On behalf of SPUSA, we would like to thank all the contestants and sponsors for making our 17th Annual Writing Contest another success.

We wish to thank our judges, both the Education Center staff and the outside members of the SPUSA family. Their work guarantees the quality of this event.

Furthermore, we would like to express our gratitude and thanks to the Embassy of the United States for its dedicated support and co-ordination of this event.

Thank you all so much,

Štěpánka Maňhalová
Head Director
&
Christopher Drakos
Director of Studies

SPUSA
Education Center

Final-round Judges:

Jiří Stránský, former President of the Czech PEN Club

PhDr. Ivana Bozděchová, CSc., Professor at Charles
University

Neil Cairns, previous DOS of SPUSA

PhDr. Miroslav Jindra CSc, Translator and Professor at
Charles University

Bruce Richards, previous DOS of SPUSA

PhDr. Eva Škarková, Czech Academy of Science

PhDr. Karel Vala, English Teacher, Telč

Dr. Pavel Straka, Managing Director of Optima Labs

Mgr. Marek Vit, Editor of helpforenglish.cz

Howard Rokofsky, Communication and Management Trainer

Lynda Mallinger, previous DOS of SPUSA

(all the essays are intact as submitted by the authors)

Senior Category

1st place

Linda Fořtová

FF UK, Praha

I was falling asleep, feeling overworked, overwhelmed, tired and lonely from the excess of the day's routines. Thoughts came and went through my heavy head, restless and beating against the insides of my skull like birds trapped in a wooden box. I was waiting for the first blissful strokes in the honey of sleep when I suddenly heard raindrops pattering on the window pane. First they just tapped and drummed very lightly, then the intensity increased until it seemed as though there was a great cloudburst outside, the sky weeping in sympathy with me, pouring out its woes in long ropes of cool clean water...

Rain.

I found myself falling asleep to the sound of summer rain and of a countryside train hooting and chuffing across the large cornfield which in August was full of young husked sweetcorn. The room was cozy, dark, the hardwood shutters opened into the night filled with crickets' songs. Everything in that cottage was handmade. There were gold-rimmed porcelain cups embellished with beautiful faces of princesses, tucked away in the kitchen shelves. We took water from the well outside. It was cool, clean water from the spring somewhere deep in the heart of the earth. There were lots of old, almost ancient (so it seemed to me) newspapers stashed away under the cupboards, ready to satisfy my youthful curiosity. Old magazines filled with articles on various things which, when I grew up and read them over, turned out to be either completely wrong or laughably naïve. Flickering embers in the kitchen stove. The smell of the insect repellent, the smell of boiled peas for

dinner, the warm sunrays leaning against one's back when sitting on the porch steps reading cheap horror stories after a day's swimming in the lake. Summer. Rain.

Me.

When I was fifteen, I had a terrible wanderlust. I hated school and often played the truant; sitting in the classroom cramming my head full of useless information and trying to endure the feeling of displacement due to not having anything to say to my mates was so tiresome for me that I often went for a ride instead. I could buy a child's ticket because I looked much younger than I really was then. Exploring the city on my own was a great adventure. One day in June I drove downtown to buy myself a book: like a real adult. I started reading it, perched atop a low wall, crosslegged and eating a huge blood-red apple, one of those which are tender white underneath the crisp skin. It began to rain. Suddenly I wanted to be back home, cozy and snug in warmth - so I thumbed a car down and who do I see, it was a teacher I knew. She asked no stupid questions but offered me a lift. That was very cool. I sank into the seat next to the driver's one and fastened the seatbelt. It was a very adult, mature thing to do. I rarely sat in the front, so I particularly enjoyed the opportunity. I wanted to light a cigarette for in those days I already smoked now and then, the little rebel I was. It felt *so* good to do exactly the thing for which fathers box their children's ears and mothers make them do the housework. Back home I was alone: I had a warm shower, wrapped up my skinny frame into a towel and finished the book while listening to the rain drumming on the rooftops and windowpanes, until I eventually drifted off into the distant fairylands...

I fell asleep. The rain brought back a flood of comfort through these mental images. But by morning it was all washed away

again. The colours were gone, the smells evaporated, the sensations paled. I realized that this was so sad: by day you have to play the game and let people enter into your life, allow them to let you down, to irritate you, while in turn you irritate them; you have to conform, act accordingly, suppress yourself - just like school which I hated so much. And by night - you can be you. Just... you.

I was me that night.

The boundaries were gone that rainy night, the boundaries which keep me a prisoner inside my own life and not allow me to be free just like I used to be. They were pulled down and I once again felt the ecstasy of childhood freedom - I was Huckleberry Finn and I didn't have to pretend and put on masks to carry me through the day safely and without harm. Why did I start to play the game? On the threshold of maturity I realized it would not be any different anymore. I can be me only when I'm alone in the night, alone with myself, in the dark and with the rain pattering on the window panes like tribal drumming on an African night.

Why do we have to make all these boundaries to turn ourselves into prisoners?

Ivana Bozděchová: “Imaginative, clever and full of thinking and thoughts. Proving a very good command of language, especially its rich vocabulary, as well as good observation and ability to catch and describe the atmosphere and feelings.

Miroslav Jindra: A rather gloomy, but persuasive depiction of the complicated relations between the individual and his/her surroundings.

2nd place
Bára Adlerová
Open Gate, Říčany

Four students, four minds, one lesson
To my history teacher

„From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent...”

„Maria, who’s this?”

„No idea, I don’t even know, if the speech’s held in the US or GB!”

...

Bo-oring. Gee! It’s Monday five o’clock in the afternoon and we’re sitting here, in the dungeon, listening to some blabber. Who cares about some Cold War, when the weather is so nice outside?! Look, the seniors are playing football. Nice! UuuYah, strip off the T-Shirt, Rob! Shoot, the teacher’s looking at me. Smile. Look away. And gaze in front of you, pretending you’re listening. But Rob...

...

„Greece with its immortal glories is free to decide its future at an election under British..“

...

Yeah, Greece.... Sun, beach, sleep, Jeff ... and sleep. Sleep. Oh no, don’t sleep. No, just keep your eyes open. Oh my, does anyone here have toothpicks? OK. Just a little nap on the desk. No, you won’t sleep, you just shout your eyes and you will listen to the speech. Jeez, why is it so hard to understand! No, you won’t sl...

...

„Keep your heads up, kids. Let the blood flow to your brain!“
„...at the end of the fighting last June, the American and British Armies withdrew westwards..“

...

26 minutes left. Oh man, look out the window, they're playing football! It's not fair. Stupid boundaries. Stupid IB.

25 minutes left. Martin passes the ball to John, John back to him and then Martin shoots! Goal! Rob is a real jerk. Why is Maria always staring at him? 23 minutes left. Oh, „I have felt bound to portray the shadow...“ Blah blah blah, your mom's a shadow. Oh man, why can't they just speak normally? 21 more minutes...

...and that the League of Nations would become all-powerful...“

Man, that's REALLY fun! If we could at least have the transcription! Wait, I have something in my teeth. Gee, it's a carrot from lunch. Damn braces! Thank you, my dear friends, how long have I had it there? Whatever. Let's see, how much can I turn my head and still see my reflection on my computer screen. Huh. A little bit more. Yeah, I can even see the doors! And now the map. Turn a little bit more over. Yes! I can still see myself and look over the map!

„(...) not only for our time, but for a century to come.“
An unclear voice was heard from the speaker for the last time and silence descended in the class. One, two breaths. As the first one, the teacher woke up from the transe.
„Thank you for your attention, guys. You were really excellent. I saw you trying really hard to listen to it.”

Four quiet laughs could be heard amongst the pushing in of the chairs.

Bruce Richards: A nice little slice of life. Good use of different fonts to represent different voices, though voices not very different otherwise. Well-sustained.

Ivana Bozděchová: Written with a great sense of humor and “overview” (*Stupid boundaries. Stupid IB*). Presenting an interesting, innovative and well composed structure, including the dedication in the beginning. Proving a good sense of vocabulary and its nuances in stylistic value (terms, slang expressions, colloquialisms). Quite readable!

3rd place

Lukáš Vlasák

Gymnázium Lovosice, Lovosice

Warm-up riddle

It was May, the tenth year of the twenty-first century. I was lying on a pier and the river Labe was flowing below me. I felt every single wave caused by ducks, wind or motorboats. Kingfishers and tits were flying over my head and darkness slowly crept in the river surroundings. I was having a rest with my mp3 player on. Prodigy song *Out of space* started to play and I saw the first star.

*I'm gonna send him to outer space
To find another race
I'll take your brain to another dimension
Pay close attention...*

Yellow flowers were dancing in the spring breeze on the shore and suddenly their dandelion snow started to burn. The flare reflected on the sky, a silver laser ladder was created and I climbed up. In the sky I found a fountain full of bright orange mud. It looked like a living pudding. I was watching its movements and I saw how it was formed into the shape of an old man's face. He told me a riddle:

*If I was a man on the edge
With voices in my head counting down
Lizards of the Sun I would catch
But not the lizards as we know*

*Is the end coming closer?
Tasmanian devil wants to answer:*

*„Three!“
Three years of squeezing lemons in my eyes
„Two!“
Two days between the daily routine and a neverending trip to
Wonderland
„One!“
One step for a man, but what does it mean for me?
„Jump!“
Free fall to the open Phobos's arms
Right in the middle of the galaxy
Where Dark matter sets the rules*

*If I was a man on the edge
With your face in front of mine
You would be the one who will catch
Me and my treasure – hot summer shine
Who am I?*

Who was he? I didn't know. Mud, fountain, ladder and stars – it all disappeared and I was back on the pier with evening dew on my face. Three steps from me was a source of light – a smoldering parchment with a solution to the riddle written on:

*Fear and Scream
That is me
What will be
Truth and dream?*

*Am I able to find out?
What? When? Where?
Not in our atmosphere
Find the lost and lose the found*

Let this episode of my early life be forgotten. Now we will focus on a story which happened fifty years later. I was a sixty-nine years old man on a family trip in Koněprusy Caves in Bohemian Karst. Stalagnates, stalaktites and stalagmites created in limestone of Devonian age were everywhere. There was some special kind of atmosphere – the air was full of ions of calcium carbonate and dihydrogen monoxide.

At one moment I was left behind the group of tourists. Suddenly I was alone in a dark cave. There was a little pool of water and at the bottom of it was orange clay which seemed familiar to me. I looked into the water and when I saw that youngster on the other side of the surface mirror I understood it all. It was me and that old man in the fountain fifty years ago it had been me, too.

Then, in the deep underground I expanded my horizons by the realization that horizon can't be expanded. I can't be anyone else but me. With all my fears and phobias. Enlightenment came to me through the darkness.

A little lizard which was sunbathing on the hot rock seventy meters above my head set its face to the Sun and enjoyed the rest of its lazy Sunday afternoon.

Miroslav Jindra: A poetic fantasy based on an evidently real experience.

Ivana Bozděchová: Very readable! Great sense of proportions in combining narrating story, (action), presenting ideas, catching atmosphere and expressing individual as well as common ideas and feelings. Effective use of prose and poetry – side by side and naturally transferring in one another. Imaginative, clever, smart and wise

4th place

Roman Jakubík

Gymnázium T.G.Masaryka, Hustopeče

I don't wield the feel for rhyme,
now and then I make a crime,
sometimes I feel I'm free to go,
but now you've got me in a vertigo.

I'm standing upright on the ground,
going straight, no turning round,
there's no stopping, wanna have a go?
Maybe we'll both end up in that vertigo.

I'm a man of a veering mind,
a secret tape about to rewind,
if you want to, I'll get on my knees,
for you, my love, I'm testing my boundaries.

That's me-an empty carriage off the railway,
resembling sunken treasure of no good avail,
no hope there where I'm bound to be,
no way from this realm of the dead-to-be.

But then you look me in the eye,
I hear your voice, I cannot hide,
we'll be through the lows and so through the highs,
give me your hand, we'll soar to the skies.

I've never felt this way before,
so much to say, so much to know,
I feel like bursting, but sense no release,
for you, my darling, I'm testing my boundaries.

I wanna take you on a rainbow ride,

we'll go on slowly, no hasty stride,
in a cloud-like cart we're gonna cruise,
should we once fall, there'll be no bruise.

I wanna take you to the Milky way,
I have no map but we'll not stray,
along the road I'll pitch a tent,
I wanna cherish, that's what I meant.

We've had our ups, then came the downs,
what's left is a graze where there was a bounce,
our tears merge in an estuary,
I guess I've just reached my boundary...

Bruce Richards: Some neat original rhymes but some feel strained – some rhythm lost in order to fit the rhyme. Similarly, some excellent images but also some messy ones where a word was chosen only for its rhyme. Rhyme scheme not consistent. A good attempt but in need of polishing.

Miroslav Jindra: An admirable mature poetical achievement, for me the best contribution.

5th place

Martina Šimová

FF UK, Anglistika-Amerikanistika

Mirror Problematic

When we stand in front of a mirror, how do we know with certainty that the reflection we face is not the real us and that we are not mere doppelgangers of our tangible entity? What gives us the right to think that the world on our side of the mirror is the real one and the other its inverted reduplication? What to do with such assumptions? To answer these questions we must initially give a name to the constantly appearing phenomenon we regularly, with a 100% certainty, encounter in the mirror. What is it that we actually see? Let us abandon the scientific level and understand the following analysis in terms of a pure and hopefully creative hypothesis; we may for the present accept the archetypal believe of a soul and its environmental location being displayed as the reflected other side (this is indeed connected with a superstition claiming that vampires do not appear in mirrors as having no soul, a fact that needs not trouble us at this junction). To be even more concrete, let us add that the soul as it appears on the other side (the sides being of the same value) is not complete but rather endowed with qualities restricted and not remarkably developed yet primordially present in our character. The reflection we are talking about thus acquires features of the Jung's "Shadow."

Allow ourselves to imagine what could happen if we were able to pass through the suddenly liquidized surface of the mirror (our intention being most naturally fuelled by the ever present human desire of self-knowledge) into the world behind it.

Without needlessly going into petty details, I assume there are two possible outcomes of such potential action. First that we and our opposite self correspondingly coming from the other

side merge into each other in between of the two universes. Since the qualities of these two aspects (“in front of” and “behind” the mirror) of our soul are inverted in a balanced ratio, e.g. they are the exact opposites which always eliminate each other, this process would end in neutralization; therefore, in a zero outcome. We would temporally disappear until some differently proportionate split would occur and send the two separated parts of the soul back into the opposing spheres. The second possibility lies in our actual passing into the other world (other side). This naturally goes with interchanging of positions with our other-side reflection and leaving everything connected with our former side behind. Accordingly, this may become just a location shift but even if it is not, our state of recognition does not improve as our incompleteness quantitatively remains the same. Our perception or awareness will not be extended or enriched but only inverted, and changing black for white again signifies a zero gain – the other behind the mirror half again becomes unreachable. From the physical and rational point of view the mirror image is a mere sensation. If we turn away, it disappears as the projected picture is just a composition of our physical eyes’ perception of reflected beams of light. If the optical mechanism in our eye does not provide the basis for the light dissection by merely not facing the rays, the image will not be formed (same as with the rainbow phenomenon). When applied to our initial non-scientific analysis this again demonstrates the barely tangible perception of the other half of our soul which only momentarily shines through the glass barrier. Keeping within our initial mirror side (and thus within the realistic level) should be understood as perfectly feasible and satisfactory. We cannot completely realize or develop all the hidden features of our personality. We may observe it or be somehow aware of it; total exploration is, however, impossible. The potential complementation results in the end of the process, termination of ourselves - in the elimination of the active participation. In a

healthy system the ideal can work only as an unobtainable lighthouse-like point in the distance which pulls us forward, but it is only the unideal incompleteness that makes us complete.

Miroslav Jindra: A refined philosophical pronouncement of the difficulties of self-recognition

Bruce Richards: An elegantly-constructed meditation – much in the way of Borges. The final moral paragraph felt a bit flat though – did it follow from the exploration of the nature of mirror-selves.

Intermediate Category

1st place

Vít Novotný

Biskupské Gymnázium, České Budějovice

Hi, John, have you also read the Writing competition rules? I know I did and the first thing that caught my eye was the word limit. I wrote more than three essays and I can tell you, John, that it was a hard work full of testing the boundaries and abridging, but somehow and don't ask me how, John, I always failed. The topic I'd chosen was always too wide and deep to be squeezed into the ridiculously small word limit, or... What do you mean by self-important, John? Just wait a second and then I'll give the floor to you, alright? Anyway that was it; I wasn't able to adhere to the word limit. Such was my humiliation, John, that I decided to write a short guide on how to test the boundaries safely without facing the danger of crossing them. The first and the most important rule is locating the boundaries and the tricky part – marking them. Use a pencil or whatever you like to mark the boundaries you shouldn't cross. Then choose a topic. Don't just sit here like a sheep and follow the instructions, will you? The next step requires some imagination, so I guess you'll have hard time... Hey, that was just a joke, Johnny! Anyway – you have to imagine the paper and project your topic onto it. You will see if it fits into the given boundaries, or at least that is if you marked them as I advised you. Now we have a topic and the boundaries. The third step takes a spirit of a thinking man, you have to let the topic float through you and also ... You're not sleeping, are you Johnny? Not cool, man. Ok, where was I? I know - the permeation of your spirit and the topic you've chosen. When you're done, we shall proceed to the next step. The fourth one is the easiest one, though. Filled with the appropriate spirit grab a pen and write until you reach the mark

you hopefully made. If you feel like writing a wall of text, a smaller font is your friend. And here comes the final part – expanding the boundaries. This part requires an increased caution so you'd better be conscious, Johnny. Get yourself an eraser. Ah well done, you're finally up and you have an eraser. Now grab it and discretely dislocate the boundaries. And now you can see ... Johnny? Oh my god Johnny, don't eat the eraser! He's choking, help, HELP!

Marek Vit: An interesting way of tackling the topic
Excellent command of the language.

Karel Vala: Swift, witty and mildly ironic essay-like paper
advising how to cope with any contest rules and other
limitations.

2nd place

Zuzana Mariničová

Gymnázium Nad Štolou, Praha

Such is a human nature that we test our boundaries. But if we cross it, is there a way to take it back?

Human beings need to communicate. It is a need we can't live without. But ways we use to communicate are also very important. Until the development of electronic devices, people talked to each other in a spoken word. But as the cell phones and computers began to appear, we spoke to each other less and less. I (as a young person) like to work with computers and the internet and I fancy instant messaging clients and social networks very much. It wasn't until my seventeenth birthday that I found out that these ways of communication have their darker sides. I was at home, surfing the internet and I was checking my facebook. Oh, a new notification. My dad posted something on my wall? I was so curious. And it would never occur to me what I was about to find there. My dad also surfing the net in the next room wished me happy birthday through facebook. What the hell? It would have taken about one minute longer to come to me and just say it. When I asked him about it later that day, he told me that he had to use facebook so that I would listen to him.

I have been thinking about it ever since and frankly I am a little terrified. I must admit that my dad had a point. We speak to each other in person less and less because the time we live in pushes us to live crazy busy lives and we don't have time to go grab a coffee with all of our friends. So we chat, tweet or blog or something like that to save some time. The worst case scenario is that we don't even say hi to each other. We only visit our friends' facebook profiles and read their latest status updates to see how they're doing.

The big question is also whether the electronic chat can replace sufficiently the spoken word. I mean, when you chat with

someone, you can't see his face, his mood. You can't even recognise irony and tone of his voice so it is very difficult to read between the lines. The very best part of communication is (at least for me) that I can react to my friend's emotions and we can laugh or cry together. This keeps us close. Not some kind of written message sent without any emotion.

As the technology evolves we are using electronic devices for communication more and more often and we are getting closer and closer to a hypothetical boundaries. I hope there is some kind of a breaking point we won't get past and it will make us realize that speaking with each other in person is irreplaceable.

(Author was constantly checking on her facebook, twitter and ICQ while writing this work.)

Karel Vala: Finally! I came up to a genuine mono-topical contemplation reflecting something lively and actual, presented in a quite “clean” language form.

Neil Cairns: This starts off like a general essay but then becomes more personal; I particularly liked the facebook birthday greeting.

3rd place

Klára Šarkovská

Gymnázium, Dr.Randy 4096/13, příspěvková organizace

I'm standing on a starting-post of the biggest mountain bike contest in Central Europe. I have been dreaming about this event since the first time I sat on a bike and although I was a child these days, there were no doubts that the first prize would be mine one day. I devoted whole my life to reach this goal and nothing is going to spoil it now! I'm holding the handlebars of my bike, which has become my baby in past years. We are a perfect couple – like a rider and her horse. I feel how the bike vibrates, like a horse looking forward to a race! There are only few minutes left to start and the space around me is full of girls my age. But they are only faceless people for me except for one – the face of Caroline Buttler, my lifelong opponent. But today even her talent won't be match for my determination to win. Three... Two... One... GO! I set off as fast as I could and it wasn't difficult for me to get on the top quickly. Cycling has always been as easy for me as breathing, so I was gradually losing my opponents. I focused on my breath and movements of my legs and when I woke up from the hypnosis, I realized I was alone with a huge head start. There were still about 5 kilometers before me, but I knew that this was my triumph, which nobody could take away from me. I slowly got used to the only sounds I heard – to my tough breath, my heart beating, the wind blowing around my ears and the birds singing. But suddenly, after another 2 kilometers a new sound

aperead – sound of a bike behind my back! I looked back for a second and saw the only thing I would never want to see, Caroline's triumphal smile. The track went down the hill now and I released the brakes. The speed was so high that the wind brought tears in my eyes, but it was worthy, as I left Caroline behind my back. But I wasn't happy for long, as I suddenly heard a loud crack!

I felt how the blood was disappearing from my face, but I also heard voices in my head: „It's not your bussiness, Claire! Just forget it! Go and reach your lifelong dream! Isn't it the only thing you've always wanted?“

„No! I'm not like that!“

„And are you sure? Haven't you always put cycling before everything? Do you really want to throw your dream away?“

„Yes, I do want to throw my dream away, as it's going to be for a right thing!“

I came back and stayed with Caroline till the ambulance arrived. I saved her life. And although I failed in my dream race, I've won something more worthy – I've won over myself and that's a race, where you can never be beaten.

"He who controls others may be powerful, but he who has mastered himself is mightier still."

(Philosopher Laozi)

Neil Cairns: This is quite nice; I like the idea of overcoming one aspect of your nature in order to allow another aspect to come through

Lynda Mallinger: Compassion trumps ambition!

3rd place

Petr Kabelka

Gymnázium, Arabská 14, Praha 6

“Hey, Takeda!”

“Yes?”

“Go and buy us some melon bread.”

“Yes.”

I stood up and headed for the exit from the class. When I crossed the threshold, I speeded up. Silence and cool sights were piercing my back. I felt it very clearly but I didn't do anything. Naturally I didn't, I knew what could have happened if I'd done. I obediently continued towards the cafeteria.

It was a nice sunny day. Spring has come with new beginnings, new hopes and possibilities. And as always, with blossoming sakura trees and their cherry petals everywhere in the air. I was overflowed with optimism as I was walking on a road covered in light red.

“This day is the true beginning of my high school life,” was what I kept repeating to myself again and again while the distance towards the school gate was slowly shortening. My whole body was overwhelmed by some kind of nice nervousness.

It started when we were introducing ourselves, I think. By some mysterious twist of fate all of the nice nervousness turned instantly into a very uncomfortable one. So when I stood up, it was like my throat prevented the air from passing through. I nearly didn't say a word but after pushing myself really hard I fortunately did it.

“Wonderful... Great beginning of my happy high school life about which I was dreaming at middle school.”

I sat down again with a long sigh like I was exhausted after running a marathon.

And after a few seconds, I realized that something different from happy high school life was about to start. It came into my

mind while I was trying to deal with a chewing-gum on my trousers.

It was exactly what I was thinking when the introductions took place. After a few days some boys started to approach me while I was sitting quietly behind my desk during lunch breaks and wanted me to bring them food from cafeteria. I didn't want any problems so I obeyed without uttering a word. Of course it wasn't pleasant for me at all but something inside of me couldn't oppose.

"I've brought them all," I said balancing with hands full of drinks and food when I came to the roof. It was where they were assembling every single lunch break. I had a suspicion that they were doing it in order to make it harder for me.

"Ah, thank you for your hard work," said one of them ironically when I carefully came to the other side of the roof.

"But what's that?" he said after he looked over the food.

"Where's my curry bread?"

"You said that you wanted melon bread," I insisted silently.

"What did you say?!"

"I'll be right back."

I remained silent for a while when I came to my desk.

It had been already a few months since the opening ceremony at the start of the school year. My desk was full of some unreadable scribbles – except notes such as "Die!" or "Idiot" – and my bag was overflowing with garbage.

The day before I had found pins in my shoes. A few days ago I hadn't even found them – they had been lying in inflammable trash bin... Recently I have been feeling that I was reaching my limit.

While I was looking at the mess in front of me I felt it. I felt that the extent of my boundaries couldn't go any further. It was simply impossible.

I fell on my knees and started to cry uncontrollably.

Today was found a dead body of young student Takeda Souichirou who had hanged himself in the park on the edge of Ikebukuro district...

Marek Vit: Fluent, dynamic, easy to read. Sad, though, How one can be pushed too far.

Neil Cairns: A little bit melodramatic but it does deal with the topic in a very individual way; the initial testing of boundaries in a spirit of optimism, but before long the idea of testing boundaries takes on a whole new meaning. An ambitious attempt to tackle a serious subject

4th place

Martin Jarošinec

Praha

There are many boundaries in the world and each one can have a different meaning. I would like to introduce you the one, which I call „the boundary of possibility“, which is related to the evolution of the humanity and its inventions.

Throughout the history of humanity we could convince that the boundary of possibility has still been pushing forward. For example during the primeval era, a primeval men had to fight for every bit of meat , they were fighting to survive all the time and that is what forced them to improve their lifestyle and social communication. Later on, when they learned how to use fire, they thought it was a miracle and the best thing people could ever do. They thought it was the boundary of possibility. As the time passed they developed more advanced hunt tactics as well as other important tools. Every time they increased their level, they were more and more curious about upcoming improvements. At this moment, the people began to be obsessed by inventing even more useful items. Although the primary goal was still the survival itself, they started to focus on making their lives more comfortable, easier and longer too. As their imagination rapidly grew up in the medieval and modern times, they started to invent things which minimize their performance while increasing the efficiency.

It's not much different nowadays. People in the present are playing with the boundaries too, however unlike the primeval men; they don't do that to survive any longer. The prestige of inventing has grown mainly because it sounds impossible to make something new these days and people do like challenges. Also the people became much lazier than before. The most recent inventions are just as useless as a whale stack on a

beach, nevertheless it is a great aid in marketing...ordinary people like buying high-tech kitchen appliances, pillows that were used by astronauts and all these commercial products. Now seriously, most of the useful inventions used to happen accidentally. The apple, which fell down from the tree on Isaac Newton's head at the right moment, reminds me just the pure luck. Due to the accident, Newton found out the secret of gravity. Today's inventors want to show us who can invent the strangest thing, or who is the cleverest person on the whole planet. I call it „human conquering contest complex“, because it looks like the people want to dominate the Earth all the way at any cost. It gets worse; people are not just competing against the nature but against each other too. They want to know everything and to have everything. Their hunger for knowledge will ruin all the people; however the results will be outstanding. We can make almost everything independently. We've got clean water anytime we want, if we are hungry, we go shopping or we just open our beloved fridge.

I find testing and pushing up the boundaries of possibility a nice way of getting the humanity to a higher level. Knowing this, we can certainly say, that the potential of humanity is infinite, so are the „Boundaries of possibility“.

Karel Vala: Pseudo-philosophical explanations of the stated “boundaries of possibility”. Coherence collapsed in the second part. Good language showing great ambitions.

Marek Vit: Very sophisticated, shows critical thinking
And ability to argue.

Junior Category

1st place

Anna Boučková

ZŠ U Parkánu, Praha 8

Hey! I'm sitting in our room in hospital and I'm writing about my feelings. My name is Jane. I'm 14 years old and my life is in the end. I'm really ill- I've got cancer. Leukemia. Yeah, That's difficult. My hair is gone. My beautiful, brown and curly hair is gone. And other things. But I'm glad I'm still alive...

I hate hospitals, but this hospital I hate the most. Here is a silence, because everyone is really sad. But I want so much fun! I'm not a pessimist, but I haven't got any friends here. There are only older people and one younger girl. Sometimes I talk to her, but she isn't too talkative. So I must to read or sleep. But it is boring. I'd like to go to our school, to my friends and have some fun. But my friends are far away...It's a pity.

I love snowboarding, but I'll never go to mountains. I love swimming, but I'll never go to swimming pool. I love music, but I'll never go to some concert. I have to stay here, in this hospital and I have to eat only boiled carrot. Everyone has got own boundaries. And now I know where ends MY boundaries. It ends behind the doors of hospital...

Leukemia is terrible. It makes me cry. I had one dream. Big dream. But now I don't care. I wanted to travel. I wanted to study. I wanted to be successful. But now I don't care. Teachers, Thank you for your lessons, you've taught me. You taught me, how I have to live. But now I don't care. You didn't

tell me how I should to live with this disease. With leukemia I can't do everything, what I wanted...

Jan Vodňanský: *I give this one the highest mark because of the very good level of language, and also for the original interpretation of the topic. (translated)*

Eva Škarková: Great message, well organized

2nd place

Anna Havránková

ZŠ a MŠ Prostějov, Prostějov

If someone says the word “bound” it associates me unknown dimensions, rifts in spatio-temporal continuum and parallel worlds in interspace. Maybe it’s because of my fascination with sci-fi and fantasy, maybe it’s just me... but although I’m not able to believe in some kind of higher force, just idea of discovering new worlds makes me really excited. If there is something I really love to write about, it is my inner world and I’d like to test boundaries of my imagination. If I have to play the god and create new ecosystem, how could it look like? How could it work? And what laws of nature could function there?

If it all can really depend on me, in Maffei 1¹ galaxy deep in dark universe billions kilometers away from Earth, a new star Fictus II² will be born. Beyond a few smaller planets too close to its lethal broiling nucleus, is there one, which is close enough to be held with its monstrous gravitation and doesn’t get lost in surrounding infinity, but far enough to elude its dangerous radiation. However, the atmosphere of AquaLocus³ is made of strange gas Ria⁴, which is able to filtrate IR and UV rays and it can transform itself to liquid, which is the whole planet made of. Firm land itself is only thin shell of cosmic metal which is folded with thousand of mountains; volcanoes and tectonic shifts, enormous gateways to the abyss of the planet. Because of gravitation of three moons of AquaLocus, big amount of water overflow every two years and devastate part of flying cephalopod population, that lives on the foothills of the mountains. Then they are caught by amphibians living in shallow swamps on the undersurface. The abyss is a place of never-ending armory contest between colossal giants inhabiting dark waters of Aqua Locus. They can transmute surrounding liquid back to Ria with exothermic reaction, so

they create heat on the planet and they carry the gas into the big bags, so they don't go down to the nucleus. But if some monster dies, the Ria will get off and giant is sucked in the middle of the planet and crushed with high pressure. It drops some micro minerals which are necessary for algae on the undersurface, algae are eaten with cephalopods and amphibians... and the circle is complete.

So what do you think? Is it possible? Or did I move the boundaries of reality too far? I don't know. But wasn't it interesting?

Notes: ¹-It's probably the only thing, which really exists.

²-Fictus because it's fictive and II, because I like it.

³-It's from Latin. Aqua=water, locus=place.

⁴- It can sound really exotic, but try to inverse air.

Eva Škarková: Very imaginative, ambitious language

Jan Vodňanský: *Quite well done with a great range of metaphorical vocabulary.* (translated)

3rd place

Antonín Drozda

Ústí nad Labem

Boundaries ... what is it? In fact, they don't exist, but we can imagine them. In sport, we can beat some records again and again so it isn't boundaries. Boundaries of countries are absurdity too. We are one kind of animal and we live on one planet, on Earth. It doesn't matter if we are white, black, yellow or half-breeds, we are the smartest animals called „humans“ in Milky Way, maybe across in wide space. But we are stupid too. One day we will destroy our planet, one day our civilization be abolished. Why? Because they are too many people; we cut tropic forests, war and many, many other problems. So if we can test the boundaries, we must there. We must save our planet! There are boundaries to destroy our Earth, but we can't beat them. We are depending on energy, so we must target to renewable resources, for example solar energy, wind energy or hydraulic energy. If we cut trees and we destroy „Earth's lungs“ we can rescue them and us if we plant new trees. One cut, two plants. How simple! Global warming is problem too ... Can we stop greenhouse effect? Maybe yes, maybe no. It's on me and you too. It's on us, on every human on the Earth. We can use city transport, we can save the energy and many other things ... But back to testing the boundaries. Petroleum isn't renewable source, so we must look forward to the other type of energy. There are a few of problems. But I'm optimistic, we solve all. Imagine some incredible world and go to observe it to the reality. How amazing! Maybe you and other will take these words into yours hearts. Maybe only with three hundred thirty eight words I can change our world. Maybe I will win this competition, but it really doesn't make any difference. One of all, all for one! Remember it! ☺

Eva Škarková: A valuable message.

Christopher Drakos: Unique interpretation of the topic,
one of my favorites this year.

3rd place

Kateřina Šafařiková

Ústí nad Labem

That day was very special... I went to the river with my uncle and my aunt. When we arrived, I sat on the grass and ate a cake. When I finished... I took a fishing rod and threw it into the water.... and suddenly... I pulled it out and there was a goldfish...Wow, I have never thought that I would see a goldfish... She said "If you let me go, you can have three wishes". ... I was very surprised.... I thought about it. Three wishes... I had many wishes... but then I said "I would like to be able to fly"... And she said "No problem". It was amazing... I started to fly up into the sky... „I can fly“ I yelled... Then I landed on the ground... The fish said „Now you have only two wishes left“ ... „I don't now what else to wish“ ... She told me... „anything“ „I want to travel around the world and see the wild animals in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and America“. The fish said,„ This is a very big wish, but it may be“. Nothing happened... „What is happening? I couldn't have such a wish??“ „ You could if you say a lollipop“ „ Lollipop, why lollipop?“ „Because a lollipop looks like a world“ „Oh yes, the lollipop is too round and interesting“ „And what is your last wish?“ „I don't now, I'm happy and my family is too and this is the most important!!!“ „ I saw that many people and children are sad- and I don't want them to be sad... I want all of them to go to school (mainly in Africa), have a job and everybody is happy and healthy!! And that is very important. The fish said "This wish is the nicest ♥ wish, which I will make come true" ... Then I said to her... „It is too late, I have to go. It was nice to meet you.“ ... „Thank you and enjoy your journey“ „ Do not thank to me, I thank you“ ... Then she said „ Goodbye“... „ Bye-bye“ and she disappeared in the river....Two months later I said the word LOLLIPOP... and I flew around the world... It was amazing... I saw the children

going to school... people doing their job and hospitals were empty... I was and still I am happy!!Now I am going to fly home....

Jan Vodňanský: *A good level of language. The author presents the well known fairy-tale about the golden fish in a witty style. With more focus it could be even more original.*
(translated)

3rd place

Jakub Tomášek

Matiční Gymnázium, Ostrava

At the beginning of the essay I want to stop over what exactly the boundary is? For each person it probably means something else. It may be such frontier of controls, boundary of state or understanding. For me it means the boundary of things that I can do. I mean for example adrenaline experience, the implementation of the wildest dreams, overcoming fear and other similar things.

I try to overcome this boundaries every day, in every possible way. Because I am just 14, it is clear that the performance of my crazy dreams is still not very realistic, but some of things I manage to do.

In my life I began to test the boundaries and overcome it step by step as a young boy. Then I began to overcome fear of the dark, far of staying at home without parents or the first days in the kindergarten or the first bike ride. Later I overcame the fear of meeting new people, adrenaline adventures like mountain climbing, free ride on the bike and many other things.

I tested my boundaries, not only in sports, or fear, but I've also tried to overcome the stage-fright of the piano performances with I have got for today. But I´am still trying to overcome, and each performance is better and better.

I think that everyone should let him self go once and fulfill his craziest and wildest dream. Even if it means to climb the highest peak of the world, or to swim with sharks. Everyone should know what that feeling to overcome something or at least try to it.

I hope there are people who are testing boundaries and trying to overcome them as I am. And they are successful. Because what didn´t kill you, it makes you stronger.

Jan Vodňanský: *The charm of this work comes from developing the topic based on personal experiences. It leaves room to be developed further. (translated)*

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