FOR THE HEART OF FRISCO
MONOLOGUES BY
AUTHORS AGES 16 TO 19

FROM 826 VALENCIA’S IN-SCHOOL PROGRAM AT DOWNTOWN HIGH SCHOOL’S
ACTING FOR CRITICAL THOUGHT PROJECT – FALL 2020
FOR THE HEART OF FRISCO

“The life you choose, the lives we lose . . . no more!”

IN-SCHOOL PROGRAM
DOWNTOWN HIGH SCHOOL: ACTING FOR CRITICAL THOUGHT

FALL 2020
FOR THE HEART OF FRISCO

“The life you choose, the lives we lose . . . no more!”
This book contains mature content.

826 Valencia encourages students to write pieces that are meaningful to them. In this vein, these works by high school students address a range of issues. Several pieces raise difficult topics, including substance use, death, and racism. This book is intended for mature audiences, with topics, themes, and language that may not be suitable for younger readers. Recommended for readers fourteen and up.
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MONOLOGUES
SUNNYDALE

Justus Pierce

This trend is ridiculous and it CANNOT continue! They have been building new homes in the neighborhoods to make them look better, but . . . only one building has been built in Sunnydale! Some of the people living there had nothing to do with the old part of this community, while others who have been there, their houses are being torn down. Instead of getting moved in before anyone else, some are still living in hotels.

Rent is also becoming too high. I predict that the rent will go up in five years and might have some falls in between, but for the most part I think it will be around $4,500. Over the course of these years, it was going up but it was over a longer period of time. Between 2008 and 2010, rent went down only $107 so there was a small drop, but then in 2015, rent went up by $1,401. HELL NO! In 2016, rent had a fall of $290 and from then to 2018 there was a rise of $90. As you can see, there is constant up and down with the rent, and I think it will continue to do that.

If you’re going down Third, there are people all down the blocks. You can see people outside and even more people at night—you have to move around them. Bums and drunk people at the bus stops try to make conversation. The ladies thinking they’re your aunties—saying “Niece! Niece!” It’s embarrassing. Sometimes makes me smile and laugh, but most of the time makes me annoyed. People are just hanging out on my street, playing music. It’s loud. My grandpa’s down on Third, playing cards and dominoes. It’d be weird if you didn’t see anyone. Everyone talking to each other, saying “hi,” even old people out on their porch saying “good morning.” Hella kids riding bikes and scooters, honking at the kids telling them to get out of the streets. They respect me because my little sister plays with them. There are often parties and people outside. If you go past Third, you can see stands, karaoke, Joe Lee, and block parties on Oakdale. I don’t go to most of the events. I just see them. This is what home is to me.
When I’m asked where my favorite place is in San Francisco, California, Fisherman’s Wharf is the first place that comes to mind. It’s full of so much beauty and serenity. The sunshine breaking through gray clouds makes you appreciate the sound of the salty waves and the feeling of soft sand.

I raised myself around that area. My last four or five years have sort of revolved around that area. I went to school near Fisherman’s Wharf; I would bike ride to school and work every day. It’s kind of like a safe haven. I’ve had my fair share of just being a kid, going out, making a fool out of myself, and just having fun moments. This all happened in that area. I’ve taken off my clothes and just jumped in—that’s what I mean about hoodlum stuff. I wouldn’t do that now. I just kind of go think and be by myself. I spend a lot of time alone thinking there.

It was around the time I had lost an uncle. You’re in such a depressed, grieving state and you’re trying not to be depressed, but it’s just always sitting on the back of your spine. I couldn’t care less about the crappy minimum wage job or school. I just wanted to get lost by myself and stare at the abyss. You never see the end of the water at Fisherman’s Wharf. That’s what I appreciate most. You never really know what’s out there. What’s past the horizon and mist—I don’t know, but I’m okay not knowing. When I was facing my uncle’s death and everything, I was like, you don’t know everything. You have to figure out what you’re going to contribute to the world.

I always use the phrase “Dancing on my graveyard.” ‘Cause this world, this is like our graveyard, we’re just dancing on it and figuring it out.
These tourists, this is what they see. They’re like, “Wow, this is from Full House.” This is so wild for me. I wanna show that this is a place where people go to just appreciate their lives.

With everything going on now, I am a hundred percent sure that it’s going to be more gentrified. Even just looking at the Haight, it has started to change in the last two or three years. In Fisherman’s Wharf, it has begun. Right off the bat, why would you want to do anything to Fisherman’s Wharf? It’s very historic. It has been a part of so many people’s lives. I personally know people who’ve been working there for years and years. People who are dedicated to the family they’ve made, the restaurants they’ve worked in, the warehouses they’ve worked in. Whether it’s the place where you get clam chowder outside or the fancy bookstore, from my experiences at Fisherman’s Wharf, it’s like you know somebody even if you don’t know anybody. When I had my first job over there, I met coworkers, and through coworkers, I met other people at the other end of the Wharf. That’s one thing that should be protected. There’s a lot of effort.

But Fisherman’s Wharf will always be Fisherman’s Wharf, even if they’re always going to try to make something new. Even if it’s little. In ten years, twenty years, there will be a lot of change. I can see myself walking with my kids, showing them pictures. Them saying, “Wow.”

I think that just like any other place, this specific place should be protected because it’s home. It doesn’t matter where it is. I could be talking about the Haight, the Mission—it’s someone’s home. It’s someone’s gathering place. Just because I’m not talking about it doesn’t mean that there’s not another woman grieving over the loss of a loved one. I’m just a small fraction of it all.
Police sirens everywhere. Twice a week, people drive down the hill shooting around 8:30 p.m. My mom thinks it’s fireworks, but I know it’s guns. Police come so late, not until 9:00 or 9:30. Even though the station is right down the street. Why do they take so long? When they respond to our neighborhood, they just take their time. They grab donuts. Lots of cars driving by. I’m always in the house so I don’t go out that much—especially because of quarantine. See my friends—they’re responsible for themselves. I feel relaxed around my friends. We go places—we go downtown (obviously)—we take the bus—catch the 44 and take the 9. When we wait for the bus, we make each other laugh by how we talk, we tell jokes—I sit in the front. We walk around downtown on Market—went to Union Square once for ice skating. My friend lives downtown so we go to his place and chill and play games. I see people I know when we’re down there.

I was in the living room, but it was too crowded so I went upstairs to my room. There’s cats around—always cats sleeping on my car. Hip hop music. I hear it from our room or sitting on the couch, the floor is rumbling from the music outside and from cars driving by. This place is special to me because I made more friends here than where I used to live. I grew up over here and I have a lot of childhood memories. A memory that sticks out: I fell off my bike and rolled down the hill when I was little—it was fun—I still remember that day. There were a lot of people around, my cousins. Grassy, pointy hill. Got scraped up on my leg, but it’s okay now. Cloudy, foggy day. They set up events for us, they help us with school supplies—backpack with a laptop. A lot of people around me are really, really nice people. They helped us a lot when we first moved in. There wouldn’t be any stores around to help us.
The main streets are usually crowded with a lot of positive people, always welcoming each other and stopping to have conversations, and street vendors selling anything. It smells like burnt (at the moment). It’s really sunny with no big buildings, so the sun gets to it. There are people talking and some places that play music. It’s a place filled with joy, especially when you know the people. There are a lot of pretty alley murals. The Mission is special to me because it’s home, it’s culture, it’s my people, it’s where I was born and raised. To keep the culture alive, we have buildings, houses, murals, and food places that have been there for YEARS. Now there are new people not contributing to the community. New people trying to take your home, our people have been helping or giving to those who need it. You like everything about us and you don’t feel safe with the people around you. We’re a family. We accept everybody. Our people deserve to keep the culture alive. We’re friendly and outgoing. So if you decide to move here, bring something to the community and contribute.
See, I’m from West Point. A place in the city that feels like me, like home. Most of my family lives here, it’s home. Tall buildings, apartment complexes. I can see a group of people always shooting dice, talking to each other. They always say “hi” to me when I walk by, and I say “hi” back. There are always people at the ice cream truck, the same truck that’s been coming up here for years.

The park I used to play at got torn down. Sometimes you can see kids riding their bikes at the new park. The old park had a basketball court and it came with more freedom. You can’t be at the park past six o’clock because the manager made a time. The whole neighborhood has changed: all the old got torn down and everything was rebuilt. A lot of people that carried our community passed away. That changed my community because we don’t do anything as a community. It’s like everybody does their own thing now. We used to have Easter egg hunts, Christmas parties where everybody got at least two gifts, Halloween parties, random community events, and a food bank every Friday. If I could go back, I would. We had more freedom back then. The manager has created more rules. The John Stewart Company is the person who wanted to rebuild the neighborhood. I don’t know him personally, but he wanted to rebuild the neighborhood. He has the money for it. He gave us these managers who create these rules. The streets are positive energy and negative energy, a lot of divisive people. This neighborhood feels like my home, and I feel welcomed and safe without anybody judging me or trying to start drama. This place is special to me because I have been here for seventeen years. Me being here for that long and seeing and going through a lot of stuff, I can say my neighborhood made me who I am. It showed me what’s right and what’s wrong. The people
you surround yourself with can affect how you act. I had a lot of positive people in my community, but over the years as people you love and care about die, it can change you to do better or not do better and that changed me to do both. In Hunters Point, we had a population of 33,996 from 2010 to 2014. One thousand seven hundred African American residents moved out of the city. I think it was because they started building the new houses and the rent went up. I also think that it could be gentrification.

Fighting for our homes. Fighting to keep our community. Fighting to let us be us in our own community. It’s changed a lot already. We are not fighting for the place we had, we’re fighting for a new place. If I could fight for the place we had, I would.

Now you can’t do the same thing you could do back then. We were free then. It was our community, and we could do what we wanted. Now we’re fighting to keep what’s left.
The Mission is a very loud, crowded, and colorful place. You’re surrounded by shops and murals. I don’t know the mural names, and if you ask me what they look like, I may not be able to tell you, but I know they decorate the place beautifully. Going to the Mission with my grandmother is a big part of my childhood. I love accompanying her when doing simple tasks like going to Walgreens and running errands. There are always people trying to hand out flyers for stuff—Jehovah’s Witnesses, I think—though people usually just ignore them or throw the flyers away later. When you get close enough to the BART entrance, you can hear the preachers talking about God on their microphones. Whether people actually listen to the preachers or not is a mystery to me. On Saturdays, street vendors set up stands to sell a variety of different things. It doesn’t always have the best smell, especially when you’re passing by the meat and fish markets. However, the aroma of the taquerias make up for it. There are people bustling through the streets everywhere you turn. They’re talking, taking the buses, coming in and out of the BART station, selling children’s toys, elote, and jewelry; they’re the heart of the Mission without even realizing it. Unfortunately, this place is facing a lot of gentrification. As for the new buildings? Well, they’re sticking out in a bad way. A lot has been taken down and replaced, and after a while we forget what was there. This place gives so much to the people who live here. They rely on it for food, clothes, jobs, transportation, and a lot more. This place may not seem like much to an outsider, but this is our home and I’m going to fight for it!
My home, these dirty projects. I remember being young and playing outside, constant water fights, and flashlight tag. It often smells like lighter fluid when it first starts burning. It smells like whatever your neighbor is cooking, and if it’s love, they’ll bring you a plate.

When you pull in, people stare if you’re not recognizable. But if they recognize you, they welcome you before you even get to your house door by making sure you’re straight. It’s different from what it used to look like. There’s hella people now. It’s crowded and there’s no parking. These buildings used to be brown and beige. Now they’re painted ugly blues and grays. I guess they were going for depression modern, but at least we got to keep the murals. Murals of kids playing outside and Black activists to remind them of their innocence and the powerful people they aspire to be. People of all ages fighting to keep what’s left of our home. Now we’re always being questioned about who is coming in and out of our home. With the remodeling changes came more rules and restrictions on what you can do. I feel like they do it on purpose to evict us. Kicking out the communities that were there so white people can move in and make more money. It’s home and it’s a place that other people dread to live in. To me, it’s the most comfortable place. I can’t go anywhere else and feel this safe. It’s all I’ve known. The memories make it special, people that I’ve met, sisters, brothers, and aunties not by blood, but by love.
THE SHACK

Jamir Pulliam

The Shack has a red roof saying “The Shack,” with white in the middle, a pizza logo, and a blue bottom. It’s not like a store where you walk in. There’s a little window where you can walk up and get your stuff. You can hear machines running from all the sodas and slushies being made, the T train passing by, cars driving past, and loud music on the daily. The air smells like taffy, coffee, like burgers in burger heaven, and the pizza they serve tastes like cheesy goodness with pepperoni on top; and on the street—the homeless piss, the usual stuff. On a Friday night, it might be crowded, but most times it isn’t as busy as it is on the weekend. A store where you can buy anything—The Shack is where to go.

The Shack feels like home, but you have to watch your back. When you are there, it depends, you could see anybody—your friends, whoever you don’t know, whoever you don’t like. Just a lot of people. There are always people around the area chilling, drinking in front of the store, or just waiting in line.

The Shack owners have been there so long that they know everybody in the Point—it’s legendary. They know everybody, and it would be sad to see them go down. This place is worth fighting for because I grew up going to that store. My family has been going there for generations too. It is a community store and it has been here the longest. That place is the only thing, one of the oldest places still in the Point. It’s a spot I grew up going to. This place represents the community. I would hate to see it go.

This trend cannot continue! I can barely survive in the city. Making money and not keeping anything because most of your check is going to rent. How are people going to help their kids when their money goes to bills? That’s why people struggle a lot in low-income places. Rich people buy the hoods and raise the rent; then, they build a whole new building with higher rent. They try to offer a deal to a person that has lived in their home their whole life.
If you don’t got money, it’s hard to stay positive about situations outside of home ‘cause the real problem is trying to pay your bills for your kids.

I cannot see how it won’t just continue to grow. If this continues, five years from now rent will be $4,000. In five years, the rent will shoot up because the value in certain areas is going to keep going up because the rich keep tweaking it up. It’s just like putting makeup on a dog. What I mean by that is you can change the hood, but you can’t change the people in it. The only way of doing that is by increasing the rent for the lower-income people and trying to remove people one by one until the whole community is depopulated. The more wealthy people there are, the better the community changes income wise.
I see a lot of people talking to each other and hanging out in front of the stores. Corner stores and dudes talking to each other, but I don’t really listen (talking about women, drugs, memories). The smells of smoke, weed, and beer blent together doesn’t smell good. If a techie or someone who didn’t know about the neighborhood moved in, we’d respond by getting angry. We’d start by saying they should go back to their neighborhoods, and they shouldn’t come to someone else’s neighborhood and try to change stuff. If someone said this part of the neighborhood was ugly, how would you flip that? Wouldn’t even talk to them. Why are you even here? You don’t have to be here, you can’t just come changing people’s things. This is how our community is, and you just can’t come change stuff because that’s how you want the community to be.
THE CASTRO

Zyaira Chisholm

My place in the city smells like a bakery. It always smells like cookies or cakes. My place in the city tastes like candy. It makes be happy because I am bisexual. In the middle of the day you can taste love, joy, and happiness in the air. My place in the city sounds busy. You hear cars and buses. My place in the city feels like the North Pole. It’s cold, especially over there. It makes me happy. I always be myself, but here I feel like I can actually be myself. My place in the city looks colorful. The streets are colorful. The crosswalks are colorful, and I love the flags. And I love LGBTQ people because I love when people can just be themselves.
ABOUT 826 VALENCIA

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

826 Valencia is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting under-resourced students ages six to eighteen with their creative and expository writing skills and to helping teachers inspire their students to write. Our services are structured around the understanding that great leaps in learning can happen with one-on-one attention and that strong writing skills are fundamental to future success.

826 Valencia comprises three writing centers—located in San Francisco’s Mission District, Tenderloin neighborhood, and Mission Bay—and three satellite classrooms at nearby schools. All of our centers are fronted by kid-friendly, weird, and whimsical stores, which serve as portals to learning and gateways for the community. All of our programs are offered free of charge. Since we first opened our doors in 2002, thousands of volunteers have dedicated their time to working with tens of thousands of students.
PROGRAMS

FIELD TRIPS
Classes from public schools around San Francisco visit our writing centers for a morning of high-energy learning about the craft of story-telling. Four days a week, our Field Trips produce bound, illustrated books and professional-quality podcasts, infusing creativity, collaboration, and the arts into students’ regular school day.

IN-SCHOOLS PROGRAMS
We bring teams of volunteers into high-need schools around the city to support teachers and provide one-on-one assistance to students as they tackle various writing projects, including newspapers, research papers, oral histories, and more. We have a special presence at Buena Vista Horace Mann K–8, Everett Middle School, and Mission High School, where we staff dedicated Writers’ Rooms throughout the school year.

AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING
During the school year, 826 Valencia’s centers are packed five days a week with neighborhood students who come in after school and in the evenings for tutoring in all subject areas, with a special emphasis on creative writing and publishing. During the summer, these students participate in our Exploring Words Summer Camp, where we explore science and writing through projects, outings, and activities in a super fun, educational environment.

WORKSHOPS
826 Valencia offers workshops designed to foster creativity and strengthen writing skills in a wide variety of areas, from play-writing to personal essays to starting a zine. All workshops, from the playful to the practical, are project-based and are taught by experienced, accomplished professionals. Over the summer, our Young Authors’ Workshop provides an intensive writing experience for high-school-age students.
COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS
We offer a roster of programs designed to help students get into college and be successful there. Every year, we grant several $20,000 scholarships to college-bound seniors, provide one-on-one support to two hundred students via the Great San Francisco Personal Statement Weekend, and partner with ScholarMatch to offer college access workshops to the middle- and high-school students in our tutoring programs. We also offer internships, peer tutoring stipends, and career workshops to our youth leaders.

PUBLISHING
Students in all of 826 Valencia’s programs have the ability to explore, experience, and celebrate themselves as writers in part because of our professional-quality publishing. In addition to the book you’re holding, 826 Valencia publishes newspapers, magazines, chapbooks, podcasts, and blogs—all written by students.

TEACHER OF THE MONTH
From the beginning, 826 Valencia’s goal has been to support teachers. We aim to both provide the classroom support that helps our hardworking teachers meet the needs of all our students and to celebrate their important work. Every month, we receive letters from students, parents, and educators nominating outstanding teachers for our Teacher of the Month award, which comes with a $1,500 honorarium. Know an SFUSD teacher you want to nominate? Guidelines can be found at 826valencia.org.
826 National’s success has spread across the country. Under the umbrella of 826 National, writing and tutoring centers have opened up in eight more cities. If you would like to learn more about other 826 programs, please visit the following websites.

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For the Heart of Frisco is a selection of monologues from the Fall 2020 Acting for Critical Thought Project at Downtown High School. Throughout the semester students explored what it means to be from a city that often is unrecognizable to them. What does it mean to be from a city that continues to push your community out? How do you protect the parts that haven’t changed? These are questions our students have begun to explore in their writing. Our students write to help us understand their desire to protect and fight for what is left of the San Francisco they grew up in, from beautiful views of Hunters Point to the colorful murals in the Mission.

AUTHORS

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826 Valencia is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting under-resourced students with their writing skills. For over a decade, we have partnered with Downtown High School, located in Potrero Hill, which offers project-based learning that emphasizes critical thinking skills across curricular areas.

Get involved at 826valencia.org