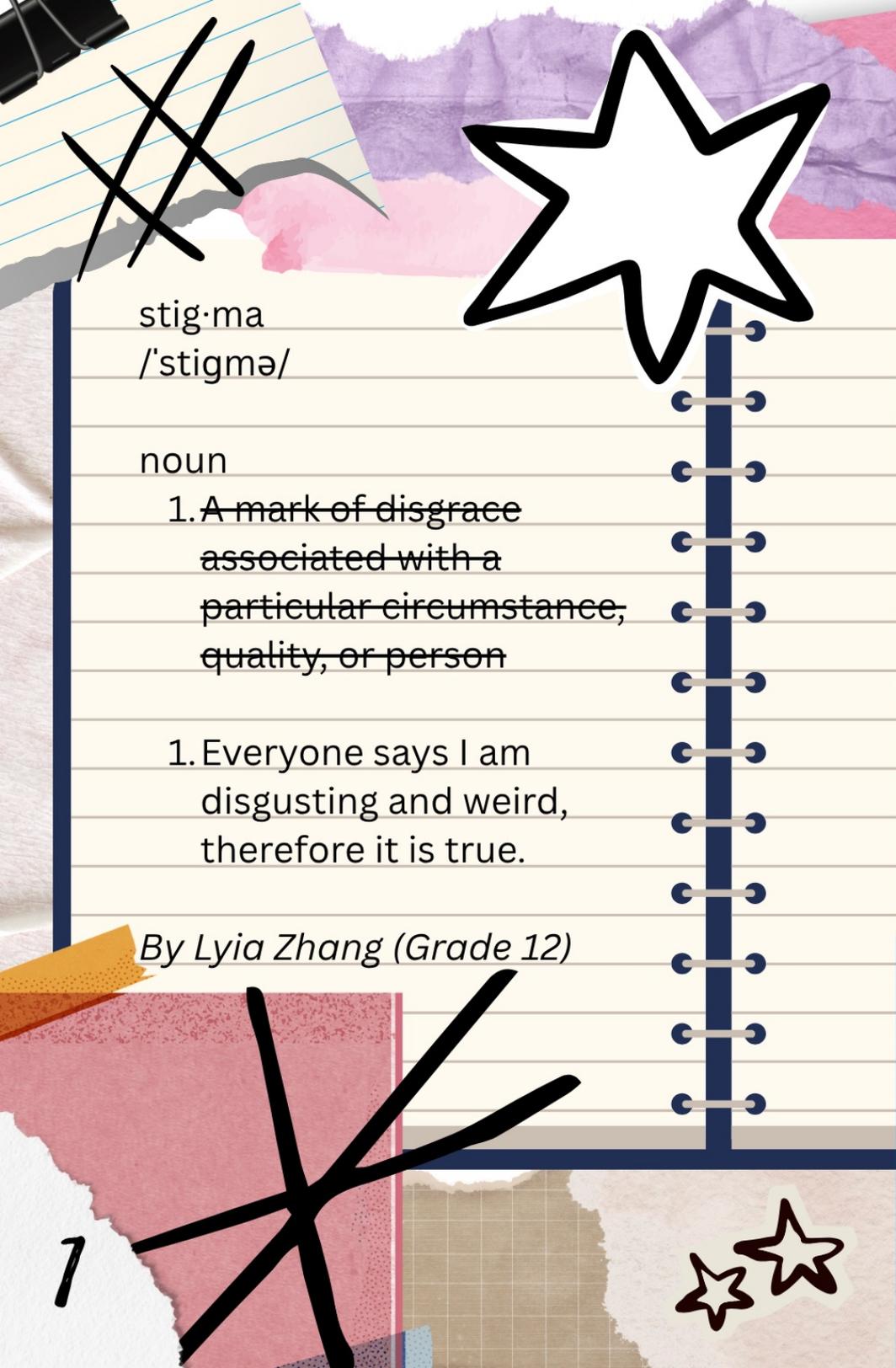


**BR**AIN

**GU**NK

*A teen mental  
health zine*



stig·ma  
'stigmə/

noun

1. A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person

1. Everyone says I am disgusting and weird, therefore it is true.

*By Lyia Zhang (Grade 12)*



# SAFETY?

BY REN ESPINOZA  
(Grade 12)



# The Ethics of Looking Away

I watched the video not once,  
but twice—  
not because I wanted to,  
but because it autolooped.  
In five seconds, I saw too much.

Some days, I watch it all:  
blurred faces,  
captions,  
someone whispering “*Please.*”  
Other days, I scroll past—  
same smoke,  
same scream,  
different country.

I ask myself:  
Is it wrong to look away?  
Which version of me is more moral?

We’re told to witness.  
To care.  
To stay informed.  
But sometimes it feels like  
I’m carrying the grief of the world

Tragedy has become content—  
Sandwiched between selfies and snack reviews.  
We’re taught to mourn—  
but not too loudly,  
not too long.  
Then move on.

I’ve learned to perform grief:

Click.      Repost.      Heart.      Cry.

by Zahra Ali (Grade 12)



But what happens  
when I feel nothing?

There’s guilt in going numb.  
If I were stronger,  
I’d keep watching.  
But breaks feel like betrayal.

Still, some days I don’t watch.  
I think of those who can’t—  
because they’re living it.  
And I think of those I love:  
a friend,  
a teacher,  
my brother.

Maybe looking away  
isn’t apathy.  
Maybe it’s survival.

Some days,  
I water a plant.  
Read a poem.  
Call someone.  
And that doesn’t feel like looking away—  
it feels like remembering  
why it hurts.

Joy is sacred.  
Setting boundaries is not withdrawal  
it’s survival.

Looking away doesn’t mean I’ve stopped caring—  
It means I care enough to come back whole.



# Stigma...

...is the negative attitude that people can have towards mental health. Now, stigma is a known buzz word that has been thrown around, but...

**...why is it important?**

Stigma is something that can negatively impact someone that has mental issues because it puts a stereotype onto them. It constricts them into a box of what mental health is supposed to be and it lets there be more room for discrimination with people that have mental health issues.

An example of Mental Health Stigma is saying that people with mental illness can 'snap out of it'. They can't! Saying you can snap out of a mental illnesses is like telling someone with cancer they can just 'snap out of it'. That's completely ridiculous! A mental illness is as serious as something like cancer, because both affects someone in their day to day life.

So, just remember that mental health stigma is so unhealthy! And you should continue to treat people with mental health issues with **grace**.

You never know what someone is going through, so **spread love wherever you go!**



*by Alyssa Pendon (Grade 11)*

# All That There Is

by Jocelyn Chou (Grade 11)

It settles in the pit of my stomach  
and I welcome it  
Like an old friend  
Like a warm hug

Like something wonderful, something helpful  
And in doing so, it seeps its poison through  
my lungs



Too late to weed it out  
It grows  
and builds upon itself  
Reinforces its feelings  
Roots deep into my being  
becomes me, sometimes

I hate it  
I despise it more than anything  
Hate how it twists words  
(mine and those of others)  
Hate how it distorts my vision  
Hate how it makes me see things that aren't  
there  
(-or are they?)



But sometimes I think I love it  
sometimes I think I appreciate it  
How it warps my being  
how it shapes me  
How it turns me inside and out  
until I can't tell up from down

It's a strange dichotomy  
I can't seem to live without it  
But am I truly living with it sitting inside me?  
Deep, in the pit of my stomach?  
High, above my head, whispering?  
Leaning onto me with the weight of the  
world?

How am I meant to live without something  
like that?  
Something that has become so close to my  
heart  
And then proceeds to tear it out

Something that lives within my brain  
And then blocks out my thoughts

Something that becomes my world  
and burns it down to ash?





despite everything”

“It’s still you

by ren espinoza (Grade 12)



# They Don't Know What It's Like

*By Lyia Zhang (Grade 12)*

They don't know what it's like  
In a silent storm, all alone,  
Battling the whispered words,  
Behind the curtain, everything shows.

They don't know what it's like  
To fake a smile,  
To be tossed to the side,  
To bandage the wounds.

They don't know what it's like  
To wish for acceptance,  
To crave the freedom,  
Without the labels.

They don't know what it's like  
The struggle for freedom,  
A flame burning bright inside,  
The deep dark cave, seeking the sky.

**when I was younger**

**my family always used to joke**

**“wow, she needs a Xanax.”**

**no one wants to medicate an eight-year-old**

**but**

**I did.**

**I really did need a Xanax.**

**I needed anti-anxiety medicine.**

**I needed help.**

**but no one wants to medicate an eight year old**

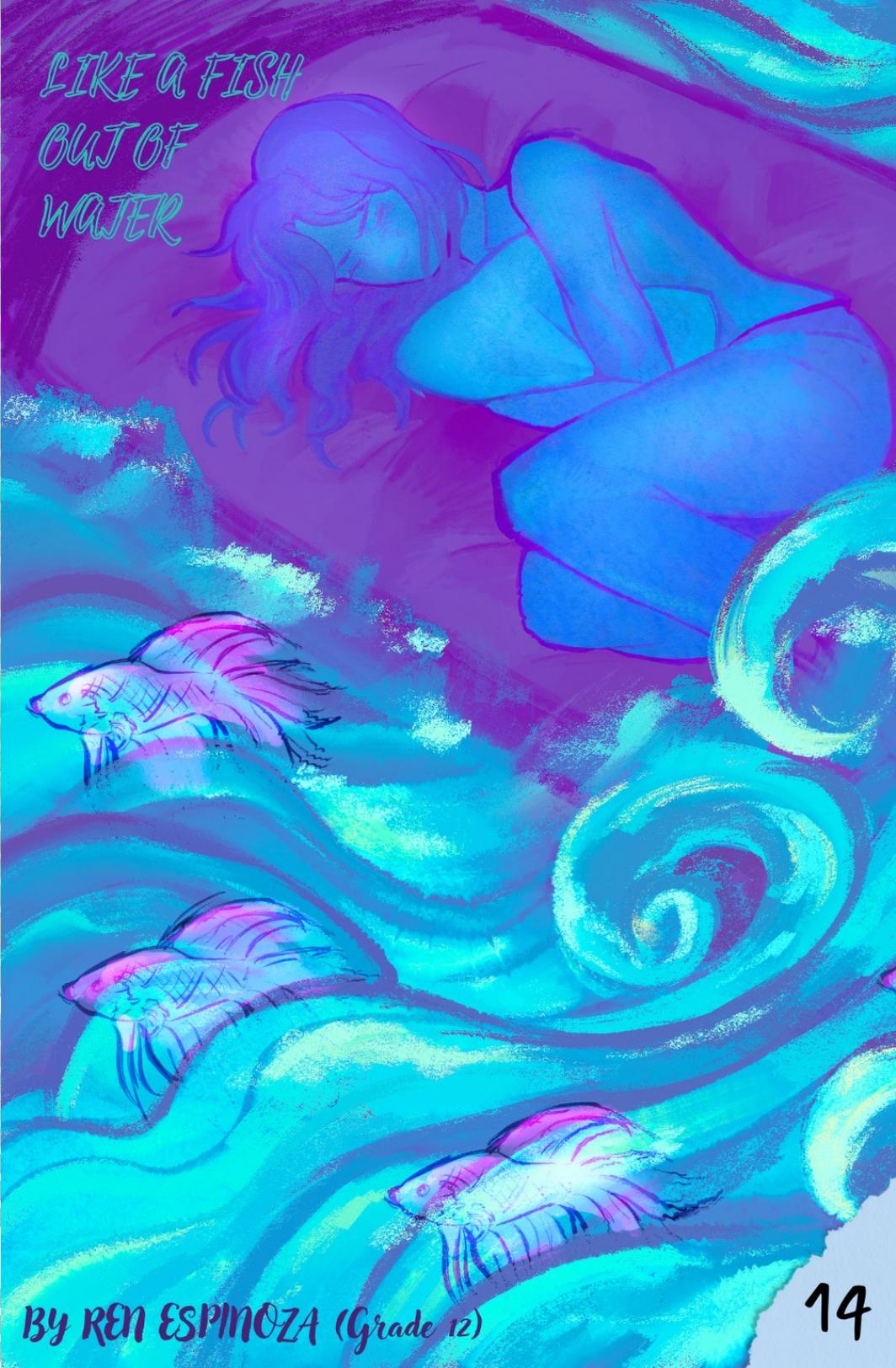
**even if she needs it.**

**no one wants to actually admit a kid**

**can have an anxiety problem,**

**but I guess they can joke about it.**

LIKE A FISH  
OUT OF  
WATER



By REN ESPINOZA (Grade 12)

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# Dear Stigma,

Thanks for making my mental health journey sooo  
easy!

When maybe I could have recovered without any  
bumps in the road

Or maybe my parents would still be around

But no.

You just had to come make my life harder  
You've embarrassed me in front of everyone

They think im weak,

Pathetic,

Dangerous,

A psycho.

I mean they've called me everything under the sun.

But besides the things I've been labeled as just  
because I'm dealing with things people aren't,  
You've denied me a chance to live my life 'normally'.

I guess that's just how you are,  
Not letting anyone else be the person they want to be  
So thanks for everything  
At Least you haven't killed me -

**S**ilent voices,

**t**rapped inside

**i**gnored and forgotten for  
what we hide

**g**uard up, can't drop it now

**M**y mind is spinning, in search  
of what?

**a** comforting warmth that  
stays by my side

-Lyia Zhang (Grade 12)

# **Suicide and Crisis Hotline**

Available 24/7

Call 988

# **Teen Line**

Wanna talk to a supportive teen?

Call 800-852-8336, 8 PM-12 AM CST

Text "TEEN" to 839863 8 PM-11 PM CST

# **SAMHSA's Helpline**

English + Spanish, for individuals/families  
facing mental and/or substance use

Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

# **Crisis Text Line**

When calling can feel like too much

Text "HELLO" to 741741

# The Trevor Project

Support for queer and trans youth

Call (866) 488-7386 or Text “START” to  
678678

## The Living Room

24/7 – 7 days a week

Call 773-537-3601

Visit 4423 N Ravenswood Ave, Chicago IL 60640  
Offers in-person peer-led mental health crisis  
support as a safe, alternative to psychiatric  
hospitalization, run by those in recovery.

## Child Abuse and Neglect

If you don't feel safe in your home, speak up.  
There's a lot of misinformation around DCFS, but  
they do want to keep families together and  
intervene with resources and therapy.

1-800-25-ABUSE



Do you have something you'd  
like featured in Brain Gunk?

If you are a teen and would like  
to submit something for the next  
publication, email us at  
[Braingunkzine@gmail.com](mailto:Braingunkzine@gmail.com)