The River of Life Aniruddha Rajesh Third Place-High School

The small raft hurtled towards the next set of rapids with unprecedented speed. "Get ready, this is the big one!" came the cautioning voice of the River Guide. A young boy aboard the raft, who was previously smiling, assumed a timid countenance as he dug his foot deep into the safety leash that tethered him to the vessel. The raft sped through the beginning of the rapids seemingly unscathed, but without warning, the bottom of the raft connected with the tumultuous epicenter of the rapid. A colossal wave rose out of the murky depths of the whitewater and loomed over the unsuspecting crew. It was almost surreal how time seemed to slow in this very moment. The boy seated in the front of the raft turned slightly to face his friend. In a split second, he searched his companion's eyes for fear, or for excitement, but to his surprise, he found a glare of cold determination. It was as though someone had pause on a remote, and had now decided to press resume. The thunderous wave crashed down upon on side of the raft, threatening to capsize it at any moment. The boy was thrown violently from his perch as the safety leash became disengaged. He scrambled in vain to cling onto the raft as it bucked spastically in the current. But it was far too late, and with another heavy wave, the rapids forced the boy to relinquish his grip upon the slippery rubber surface. The frigid water of the river cut into his body like an unforgiving blade. He was experiencing a plethora of emotion all at once, first panic and fright, and then calm understanding. He remembered that fighting the current would be futile, so he allowed himself to be carried under again and again by the raging river. After what seemed like an eternity, the river spat the boy out on a muddy shoal. He immediately convulsed into a coughing fit as his lungs tried

valiantly to empty themselves of the cursed water. Finally, he was able to collect himself, and reflect upon what had just happened. The river had taught him many things, it shown him the importance of determination, and that although he could not win all his battles, effort is of paramount importance. It had taught him to be calm in the face of adversity, and to be brave in the most difficult of times. The river had taught the boy many things indeed, and this is what he ruminated upon as he walked back to the main road.

I gazed out the hazy car window as I tried to make out the rolling hills that were sliding by. Gradually, the hills were replaced by dense sections of luscious green forest that covered the bottom of a deep valley. At the center of the landscape lay the infamous Russian River. A fast moving and fairly wide tributary, the Russian River was a mecca amongst whitewater rafting enthusiasts. Over the years, the river had also gained infamy as being unpredictable and treacherous. I considered all this as I watched the rising sun cast an angry red glow upon the valley basin. Before long, our small van pulled in at the raft deployment site. As we waited for our equipment and guide, I watched the river uproot a small sapling that was growing in the riverbanks. I began to wonder why I had signed up for this in the first place. Many of my friends had come along and they all reassured me, but for some reason, I was still innerved. Nonetheless, it was too late to turn back now, so I comforted myself by tightening the straps on my life vest. After everyone received brief safety instructions, we set out on our river expedition. I began to enjoy myself as I allowed the rapids to carry the raft faster and faster. Suddenly the river guide hollered, "Get ready, this is the big one!" My smile vanished as I prepared myself.