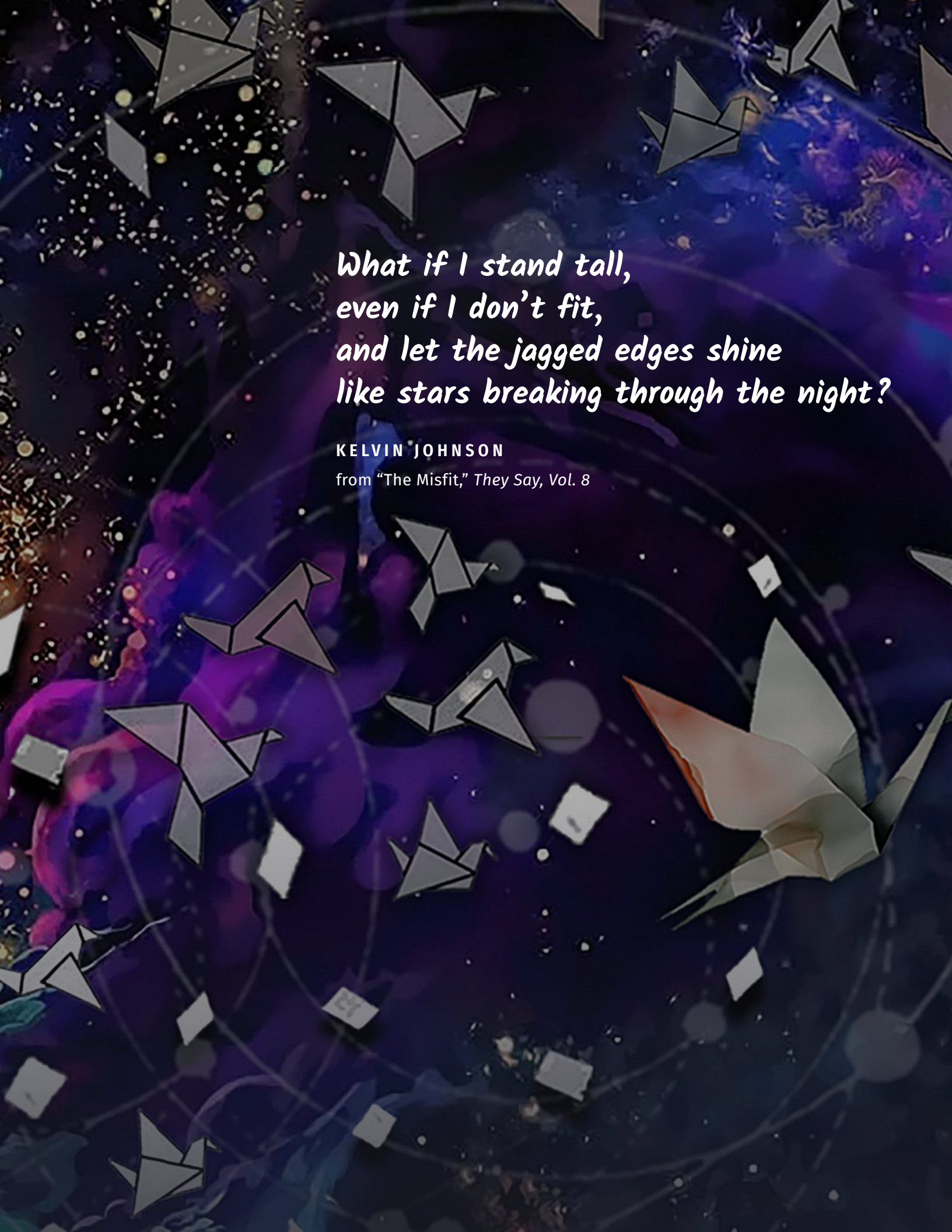
ICONOCLAST
ARTISTS



Every story deserves to be heard.

ANNUAL REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR 2024–2025



What if I stand tall,
even if I don't fit,
and let the jagged edges shine
like stars breaking through the night?

KELVIN JOHNSON

from "The Misfit," *They Say, Vol. 8*

ICONOCLAST ARTISTS

ACADEMIC YEAR 2024–2025

AT A GLANCE

THIS YEAR

1,200+
STUDENTS

15
SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY SITES

755
INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS

75
STUDENT WORKS PUBLISHED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the Executive Director 4
Mission & Vision 5
Who We Are 6
Our Curriculum 7
How We Teach 8
Why Our Work Matters 9
Who We Serve 10
Our Impact 11
THEY SAY 12
Scholarships 13
Financials 14
Board of Directors & Staff 15

GREETINGS

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



"When students believe in the brilliance of their own future, they begin to create it."

— David Lopez

Dear Friends,

This year, Iconoclast Artists has continued to walk alongside students in Houston, Spring Branch, and Galveston, not only providing lessons in creative writing but also creating spaces where young people can discover their voices, sharpen their minds, and take ownership of their stories.

We know that for many of our students, the road to academic success is not a straight path. It winds through neighborhoods marked by economic hardship, family instability, and adult responsibilities carried far too soon. Some are working jobs to help put food on the table. Others are navigating housing insecurity or caring for siblings while still trying to keep up with their schoolwork. These are the realities we cannot ignore. And this is exactly why our work matters.

Our program is a bridge, connecting the often-difficult realities our students face with the tools and confidence they need to achieve academically. We help our students become critical thinkers, not only mastering the skills that lead to academic success, but also developing the ability to question, reflect, and see the world from multiple perspectives.

Through creativity, writing, and the arts, we offer our students the chance to reimagine what is possible. In our classrooms, they learn to translate the raw material of their lives into powerful stories. They build the courage to share those stories and the skills to shape them into something that can move and inspire others. This process is transformative, because when students believe in the brilliance of their own futures, they begin to create it.

Our community is built one student at a time, one class session at a time, one school at a time. It is a place where learning is rigorous, belonging is real, and hope is tangible. In these pages, you will see the impact of this work, measured not only in academic achievement, but in the resilience, creativity, and confidence of our students.

Thank you for standing with us, for believing in our mission, and for investing in the promise and potential of every young person we serve. Together, we are building bridges to brighter futures.

With gratitude and hope,



Matthew Russell, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Iconoclast Artists



OUR PURPOSE

MISSION & VISION

Mission

Through creative writing and the arts, Iconoclast Artists equips under-resourced students with the literacy, resilience, and confidence to thrive in school and in life.

Vision

We envision a world where all young people have the opportunity to discover their voice, develop their potential, and shape their own future through literacy, creativity, and meaningful relationships.

OUR ORGANIZATION

WHO WE ARE

Iconoclast Artists is a nonprofit English Language Arts, creative writing, and poetry program serving students in grades 6–12 throughout Houston and Galveston. Founded in 2016, we provide high-quality literacy instruction at no cost to students through in-school, after-school, weekend, and summer programming.

Our curriculum aligns with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) while integrating creative writing, poetry, and core-competency learning to promote literacy, critical thinking, and self-expression. Through a middle school-to-high school feeder model, students build lasting relationships with trusted teaching fellows who provide mentorship and consistent support for their academic and personal growth.




May
May
May

OUR CURRICULUM

English Language Arts instruction is integrated with creative writing, poetry, and core competency instruction to equip students with the academic and personal skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

Aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), our lessons strengthen reading, writing, vocabulary, communication, and critical thinking while encouraging students to reflect on their experiences and express themselves with clarity and purpose.

Students explore poetry from diverse writers and cultures and create original work that encourages self-reflection and curiosity about the world around them.



Building Core Competencies

Every lesson is intentionally designed to strengthen the habits that support lifelong success. Through writing, discussion, and performance, students develop:

- Self-awareness and confidence
- Emotional regulation and resilience
- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Critical thinking and communication
- Respectful collaboration and healthy relationships



OUR APPROACH

HOW WE TEACH

In the Classroom

- English Language Arts
- TEKS-aligned curriculum
- Creative writing and poetry
- Critical thinking



Beyond the Classroom

Our learning model extends beyond the school day. Through S.W.A.P. (Students with Amazing Potential), students participate in mentorship, creative writing, fine arts, physical activities, field trips, and enrichment experiences that reinforce learning while expanding their horizons.

Family Nights, Iconoclast Sessions, and our annual THEY SAY celebration create opportunities for students to share their work publicly, strengthen connections with their families, and experience the pride of having their stories heard.

Teaching Fellows

Our Teaching Fellows are experienced educators, writers, and mentors who hold master's degrees in English or fine arts and have years of experience working in the under-resourced communities that we serve. They combine expertise in English Language Arts with specialized training in core competency instruction, trauma-informed teaching, and youth development. Their ability to build authentic relationships with students is central to our success.

Every class begins with a brief check-in and ends with reflective practices that help students develop focus, gratitude, and emotional awareness. Writing becomes a practical tool for processing experiences, celebrating successes, and working through challenges.

By creating classrooms built on trust, encouragement, and respect, our Teaching Fellows help students develop the confidence to take academic risks, collaborate with others, and discover the power of their own voice.







THE NEED

WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Many of the students we serve face hardships that extend beyond the classroom, such as food insecurity, housing instability, chronic absenteeism, limited academic resources, and family financial hardship.

CHALLENGES IN OUR STUDENTS' COMMUNITIES*

42%
HOUSEHOLDS BELOW THE ALICE THRESHOLD

21.3%
CHILDREN WITH FOOD INSECURITY

46%
READING PROFICIENCY

25.1%
STUDENT ABSENTEEISM

57.7%
DROPOUT RATE

Students living in survival mode often find it difficult to learn. Academic success requires more than quality instruction. It requires trusted relationships and brave spaces where students can take risks, build confidence, and discover what they are capable of.

Iconoclast Artists helps to bridge the gap between the challenges students face and the opportunities they deserve. Our students have unique skills and talents, and we nurture these gifts and help them build the confidence to thrive academically and personally.

** Data from United For ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), Galveston Co., TX; Feeding America 2025; Texas Education Agency.*

OUR REACH

WHO WE SERVE



Site locations verified with Google Maps; major roads shown for orientation (positions approximate). Base map: GSHHG shorelines, Natural Earth, U.S. Census county boundaries.

Spring Branch ISD

1. Spring Oaks Middle School
2. Landrum Middle School
3. Northbrook High School
4. S.W.A.P. at Fair Haven UMC

Houston ISD

5. Cesar Chavez High School

Galveston ISD & Community Sites

6. AIM College & Career Preparatory Academy
7. Odyssey Academy
8. Ball High School
9. Central Middle School
10. Upward Hope Academy
11. Urban Strategies
12. Galveston Urban Ministries
13. Galveston Children's Museum
14. Wright Cuney Recreation Center
15. Freedom School (Nia Cultural Center)

OUR IMPACT

We evaluate student progress with a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures collected throughout the school year. Pre- and post-assessments, literacy benchmarks, behavioral data, student surveys, classroom observations, and administrator feedback help us understand the academic progress and personal growth of our students.

31% → 10%
EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS REDUCED

33% → 65%
STUDENTS FINISHING THEIR WORK

52% → 20%
STUDENTS' WORRY & NERVOUSNESS

+20%
SELF-AWARENESS

Principals and administrators reported significant student improvements during mid- and end-of-year evaluations, citing:

- Improvements in reading, writing, and vocabulary
- Higher attendance rates
- Fewer disciplinary actions needed
- Less isolation: students interacting more with peers
- Increased confidence: students sharing their stories in front of the class

> *Administrators reported that many students who struggle with mental health benefitted from using creative writing as an emotional outlet.*





ANNUAL STUDENT SHOWCASE

THEY SAY

Each spring, Iconoclast Artists celebrates our students' hard work and achievements at THEY SAY, a poetry showcase where students perform their original work, as published authors, for a large, diverse audience.

In 2025, hundreds of supporters attended THEY SAY at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Grand 1894 Opera House in Galveston. The evenings' festivities also included a live DJ, keynote speakers, and opportunities for families to connect with resources to help their students.

THEY SAY 2025 featured the unveiling of our latest anthology of student poetry, *They Say, Volume 8*. Proceeds from all book sales help fund scholarships for students to pursue higher education or career training.









FEATURED STORY

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

The students who participated in our program this year went above and beyond expectations.

Whether they were first dipping their toes into the waters of creative self-expression, or high-diving back into familiar territory, the passion and unpredictability with which they approached the page were something that even seasoned authors wish they could bottle.

Although there are plenty of worthy young writers in our program, few illustrated the values we espouse more than this year's scholarship winners:

Alyssa Saenz

writes the same way a heart beats: to keep going, and at all times of the day. She often handed in brilliant poems that she wrote late the previous night, when the rest of the world was asleep.

Lilly Mosher

writes from a place of pure joy and fun, stumbling not-so-accidentally into profundity.

Elena Palomarez

has a creative and brave presence in class, that is simply undeniable.

Angel Llanas and Ximena Acosta

both wrote poetry that so uniquely demonstrated ownership over language and their own stories.

It was our privilege to teach these students and every young writer in our program, and we look forward to seeing who shines just as brightly next year.

Bill Moran
Director of Education, Iconoclast Artists



FINANCIALS

REVENUE, EXPENSES & ROLLOVER

TOTAL REVENUE

$561,734

TOTAL EXPENSES

$360,720

NET REVENUE ROLLOVER

$269,468

Includes $68,454 rolled over from the prior year.

WHERE THE REVENUE CAME FROM

FOUNDATION GRANTS
$430,000 76.5%

INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS
$131,734
23.5%

Bars are drawn to scale. Percentages are shares of total revenue.



Thank you to every foundation, individual donor, and partner who invested in our students this year. Your generosity made this work possible.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS & STAFF

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Susan Ferrer

Bill Moran

Holly Hudley

Miguel Russell

Cristina Martinez

Jasminne Mendez

Fernando Villagomez

Shiarnice Burton

Kelly Ellis

Collin Sturdevant

David Lopez

Cora Moore

Phylicia French Dupard

Thank you

for standing with us, for believing in our mission, and for investing in the promise and potential of every young person we serve.

ICONOCLAST
ARTISTS

www.IconoclastArtists.org

Instagram: **@iconoclastartists**
Facebook: **@iconoclastsessions**

SCAN TO VISIT

