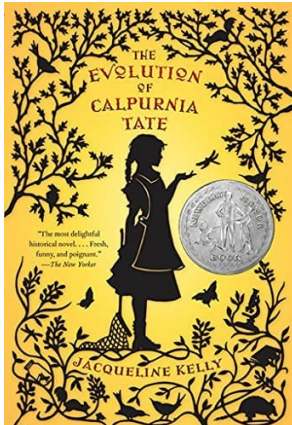


## ***Finalist, Middle School Category***



Essayist: Mina, age 12, Haycock Elementary School

Advocating for: *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate* by Jacqueline Kelly

Over the years, I have noticed that girls have numerous limitations placed on them by society. These limitations often discourage girls from following their dreams unless they find ways to be strong. I want to know how girls can go past society's limitations to become powerful individuals who follow their dreams. I came across a book that addresses this issue, *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate* by Jacqueline Kelly. Even though this book is set in 1899, it shows that the problem of limits still exists and girls have to combat it in different ways. This book explores the question of what it really means to be a girl then and now.

The main character, Calpurnia Tate, is an intellectually curious girl growing up in a house full of brothers. She's caught between pleasing her mother by acting how society expects girls to behave while following her growing interests in science. Her grandfather, who is a naturalist and worked with Charles Darwin, encourages Calpurnia to learn all she can about the natural world and to believe in herself, even if following her dreams means standing out from others.

Calpurnia struggles to make her way through a maze of rules. Everything in her life seems bound by society's expectations and hinges on her gender. Calpurnia doesn't realize that being a boy is just as hard as being a girl. One day, while exploring with her grandfather, Calpurnia finds a rare caterpillar. She wonders if caterpillars come in a specific gender or turn into male or female in their cocoons like wasps. Calpurnia comments that she would definitely choose to be a boy. Many of her misunderstandings come from this viewpoint but they gradually change over time, like a caterpillar in a cocoon. Eventually Calpurnia understands that she is the one holding her back from being a scientist, her gender as well as the rules of society aren't the reason. When she believes in herself and follows her dreams, then she is truly free.



Nowadays, things have changed but growing up and learning your passions is still a challenge. Girls still struggle with overcoming society's expectations and stereotypes. I think we can all learn from reading this book, no matter our age or gender. Girls can be more inspired to be themselves instead of always being inside limitations. Boys can understand how girls feel and the challenges they face. Adults can better advocate for girls and understand how they feel. The fact is that growing up is challenging for girls and boys. All children need their dreams to be noticed and encouraged. This novel reminds me of how privileged I am to have daily chances to explore and be myself. Unfortunately, many girls in the world don't have choices and are not free to pursue their dreams. It's important for everyone to realize this and find ways to help so the future of all girls can be bright.