

## Second Place, Prose, Grades 7-9, Isaac Broderius

### The Family Craft

I pick up a stick, about the length of my forearm. I study it looking for any signs of decay or insect holes, and once I decide it looks good I take out my pocket knife.

Whittling isn't that hard anyone can do it, you just need a good stick and knife. My dad taught me when I was around five, showing me all the tricks to get a good spear. This was also the time when he passed down his knife to me, this was the knife that he got as a kid from my grandpa. Getting this knife was like a badge, a way of saying I'm ready to be shown the secrets of the outdoors.

The knife fits in the palm of my hand, the blade folds out along with the other tools it comes with. It's a light maroon red, weathered, and lightened from sunlight and time. I fold out the knife and set it on the wood: with one good push, the bark is gone. I run the blade down the stick slowly taking off the bark and revealing the beautiful grain on the inside.

Once the stick is fully naked I move my blade towards the tip slowly adding more angle and pressure. I go around the whole thing until with one last strike I have made a perfect spear. This is the hardest step because if you apply too much pressure the whole tip will come off and you have to start over but farther down the stick. The next step is making it smooth. I turn the blade so it is entirely perpendicular to the wood. Sliding it down slowly takes off tiny shavings so small it appears as dust. I hold up my masterpiece admiring the smooth texture but dangerous tip.

There is still one nub on the side. I tuck the blade back in and pull out the scissors, determined to smooth it out. I clip the nub as close to the base as possible then use the blade to smooth it out.

Standing up from the small rock I look down, the ground littered with wood shavings. A winter wood wonderland. The forest is playing. I hear the wind among the trees, bending branches like the keys of a great instrument. I look out at the lucid water, waves with white whipped caps are cresting far out. I think about how many sticks this

knife has seen and how many more it will continue to see- a family heirloom passed down to me that I will eventually pass down myself.