

## 'Play' by Zakary Y. (4ths)

Play used to be everything.

We turned sticks into swords,

cushions into castles,

and the floor into lava.

We made up the rules

and changed them halfway through,

just because we could.

It was loud, messy, full of magic.

We didn't care how we looked,

or if we were "good" at it.

We just played.

Because we wanted to.

Because the world felt big,

and we felt free inside it.

Now, things are different.

Play is quieter.

It hides in the corners—

a sketch in the back of a notebook,

a song hummed when no one's around,

a daydream on the way to school.

We still play,

but it's harder now.

There's more to carry.

Pressure.

Expectations.

The feeling that we have to grow up  
faster than we want to.

Sometimes, I miss

not knowing what I was supposed to be.

I miss believing that dragons could be real,  
that I could fly if I just tried hard enough.

I miss being wild

without feeling wrong.

I look at adults

rushing through their days,

faces full of to-do lists and tired eyes,

and I wonder—

do they remember

what it felt like

to lose track of time

just chasing the wind?

Maybe play never left us.

Maybe it's waiting,

just beneath the surface,

ready to come back

when we finally let go

of who we think we have to be.

Maybe play is who we were—

and who we still are,

when the world is quiet

and no one's watching.