In the Archives

Jules Silver — Topical winner, American High School Poets, Winter 2026

In the archives, we were surrounded by the whispers of the past. We rifle through the dust of long forgotten records. Carefully turning delicate pages that threaten to crumble under our very touch. Some of us came looking for ancestors who long ago crossed oceans far and wide, fleeing war. Some of us had no names, only a whisper of a faint memory passed down from great grandparents. Like breakable china they were. Perhaps we have always been searching for these pieces of identities. Perhaps we had not known what we were looking for until we found it. We sit there, staring at worn ink in a foreign language. Searching for an old census among a sea of thousands. In the archives, we would often lose track of time, wondering; Who were they? Why did they leave? In the archives, we carried with us not just our hope and frustrations, but our need to connect to something larger than ourselves. We carried the weight of forlorn histories, of the missing branches of our family. In the archives, we would sit for hours in silence, searching over birth dates, death certificates, passenger lists, wondering if today would be the day that we found the knowledge that would fill the gaps in our own identities. In the archives, we never knew that with each discovery we found would bring more questions than answers. In the archives, each name leads us deeper into the labyrinth of life, each one connecting us more to our identity.