

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY PRESENTS

VOICES

THE 2020 DYER-IVES
POETRY COMPETITION

The Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition

This year, we celebrate the 52nd anniversary of the Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition, which was initiated in 1968 by poet James Allen at the urging of John Hunting, the founder of the Dyer-Ives Foundation. Its mission is to encourage excellence in writing and provide recognition for local work of high quality.

In 2016, the Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition became a program of the Grand Rapids Public Library and is funded by the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation – Dyer-Ives Foundation Poetry Fund. It is thanks to the dedicated members of our community who give their time and energy to the discovery of talent that help make this contest a significant annual literary event.

The Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition is free to enter every February for residents and students in Kent County and culminates in a reading ceremony during Festival of the Arts every June. This year, the competition was divided into eight new categories to encourage and celebrate more young poets who write and submit poems. Winners and honorable mentions are published in *Voices*. First and second place winners also receive cash prizes.

This year, we had an incredible 469 poems entered from unique poets in Kent County. 256 of these poems were submitted by K-12 students. I am astounded at the amazing response to acknowledge and celebrate young poets.

I'd like to give a special thank you to all the teachers who bring poetry into their classrooms and who hung flyers and helped students submit their work. I especially want to recognize Anne Keller, Leslie Klomparens, Kathy Vogel, Becky Turner, Meghan Donohue, Abby Zwart, and Steve Tuit for their efforts. I'd also like to thank Michael Sikkema and Kait Polzin and everyone at Creative Youth Center for their after-school literary programming for students.

Past coordinators of the Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition include Walter Lockwood, Philip Jung, Larry Manglitz, Barbara Saunier, Patty Bridges, Kimberly Wyngarden, Mursalata Muhammad, and Christine Stephens Krieger.

This year's judges worked tirelessly to read and consider each poem and thoughtfully articulated why they selected the winning pieces. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to this year's preliminary judges: Mursalata Muhammad, Shelley Townsend-Hudson, and Tyler Fleser.

A poet of national renown completes the final judging of our poetry submissions and determines the prize winners. Past judges include Anne Sexton, X.J. Kennedy, Robert Creeley, James Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Bly, William Stafford, Naomi Shihab Nye, Herb Scott, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Billy Collins, Alicia Ostriker, Patricia Clark, Linda Nemece Foster, Mark Doty, and Azizi Jasper.

Many thanks to 2020's national judge, Keith S. Wilson.

Thank you to the amazing team at Grand Rapids Public Library whose behind-the-scenes efforts make this competition such a joy to coordinate: Hannah Snow, Katie Zychowski, Kristen Krueger-Corrado, and Jeanessa Smith.

Now let's get to the poetry!

With gratitude,
Kelsey May
Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition Coordinator



Naomi James

Love is like fire

Love is like fire
Starting inside you
To warm you up in the cold
When you're Sad
It makes you Happy

Olivia Brundinz

Dream

Jumping
Leaping
Colors fly
So very Graceful
So true
So Glorious

Sounds and colors fill my mind
As I drift off to sleep

Now I am one of the Colors
Flying to a new world

I am like a shooting star,
Zooming across the sky
Faster than a Rocket

Flying
Soaring
Hurling
Tumbling

Into an unknown darkness
Never seen Before

Music invades the silence
This time Gentle and Delicate
A warmth now lifts me up

And I hover back to my soft place in my bed

I awaken

Knowing it is a new day
Apollo, like Apollo 11, flies away from me and his beanbag
He is going to Luna

My mother's strong arms
Lifting him to an unpredictable day

As my mother opens the door
A beam of light appears

And now I know that a new day has begun

William Aupperlee

The Wilderness

Wilderness is calling in the wind, the earth, the stone
In time, we all will bud, then flower
None of us will blight for we are all God's children
Listen to the swaying trees and they shall say the same phrase every time,
 "you are important!"
Don't hold back your feelings, express them to the world
Every crack and crevice holds a living bug or soul
Run and leap for you are yourself and are no one else
No one should ever tell you that you're not enough
Every living flower and bud links back to one essential PERSON
So many of us have forgotten who we are
So be happy and rejoice in the time that you have for it will end one day

Charlotte Vos

What If?

What if my head turned
into a fox and then I let
the fox run free?

Megan Middlestadt

Forget

Amongst the stones stood the spindly man.
Graves upon graves.
Nights upon Nights.
Fresh flowers a sign of funerals anew.
Man stands upon greener grass,
upon fertile ground.

A hand pulls out the tool,
Sharp, cutting, slice.
Headstone read.
Daniel O' Terence,
Hack, Hack, dice.
A headstone is missing five small stone shards. *D,*
o, n. Plus one comma, one *t.*
That is what the small stones read.
Man. Gone like a ghost.
Second stone.
Catherine Oshang, Follow her to paradise.
One capital *F*, uppercase *O*, a small *r*, and a *g*, plus
an *e*, and finally a *t.*
The man, cup of a hand with pieces inside, blows,
cleaning the tool. Sharp to his approving. Deserts
the broken stone.

Entrance of the graveyard of which the man
followed the wind. Stone by shard by stone, vice
versa. The man's message clear.

Don't Forget

Carolina Yeung

Pink is Everywhere

Pink is the color of a river dolphin
Pink is a flamingo or a strawberry ice cream
Pink smell like a fresh tulip
Pink tastes like fluffy cotton candy
Pink sounds like snoring pigs
Pink look like Valentine's Day
Pink feel like love
Pink make me calm
Pink is a color that will be best friend

MaKenna Moore

The message that broke me

My mom yelling for us to come up
A thousand thoughts fill my head
Are we going to Disney
Is there a surprise vacation
But those were too good to be true.

My dad sitting on the fireplace crying,
Me and my siblings can tell something's off
My dad won't talk. My mom's words
Feel like a thousand bees stinging me at once,
"Your dad is seeing another woman."

Tears filling my eyes like waterfalls
Me trying to hide my face trying
To wake up from this horrible dream
This can't be happening
We were the perfect family.

Kaydence Gonzalez

Raspberries and Sugar Plums

Raspberries and sugar plums,
that's what it smelled like,
right before the sun came up
and their scent filled my lungs.

Pine needles and blueberries,
from when we danced,
in the rain.

Marshmallows and fire,
that's what I remember,
from when I said I didn't love them
then called myself a liar.

Cigarettes and Sprite,
when I kissed them for the first time
and it just felt so right.

Salty tears and mint,
when I said good night,
and said goodbye,
for the last time.

Chocolate and cookie dough,
from when I finally decided
to let go.

Dia Sriram

My Friends on a Typical Night

I don't think it gets lonely in my suffocating bedroom.
It would be if I were alone with lamplights,
Because they don't like me very much.
I think the cold is my friend, though. I think...
Curtains tell me that if
TRUE friends have a "sleepover,"
They stay up all night.
The cold definitely keeps me awake.
There's also the wind.
He's kind of a downer.
He always says stuff like,
"How will you do things tomorrow, like passing that test, or talking to
that boy, if you are simply DELIRIOUS from sleep deprivation?"
He's also a little dramatic.
I always just think of that one Bob Dylan song
When he asks me questions.
And then sheets are just passive.
Tonight they sit here. Like always.

Isabella Tardani

Numbers

Numbers are things I see every day.
I see them when I read, when I write.
I see them from the start of day to the end of night.
Numbers are things I see every day.
But numbers and I don't get along.
Numbers give me a hard time.
In class, they give me stern looks.
They criticize me by saying things like,
"C'mon! Just pay attention!"
and
"Why don't you get it like everybody else?"
and
"Another test has been failed! You're a disgrace, did you know that?"
Numbers give me stress.
Every day, they attack me.
They send me in tears, a hurricane of them whirring in my ears.
Numbers give me frustration and confusion.
I see them floating in the air
Each one small and faded.
I try to grab reach of them.
But they slip away
up,
up,
up,
until I can no longer see them.
I sit there,
empty and flustered,
angry and light-headed.
I open my mouth to say something,
anything that will make me feel less alone,
But nothing comes out.
Finally, I stand up.
My lips are quivering,
my legs are shaking.
And suddenly, I cry.
But this time I'm crying of joy.

I never realized it,
 but I loved numbers.
 They were the reason I had words and letters
 To fill the endless pages of books.
 They were the reason words even existed.
 Numbers and I don't get along.
 Sometimes I hate them,
 Sometimes I love them.
 Numbers have given me
 Anxiety,
 Frustration,
 and
 Confusion these past few years,
 but I'm trying my best to love them,
 even if they can be the worst sometimes.
 And I know numbers are trying, too.
 Numbers and I don't get along.
 But I hope one day, we will.

Zoe Paskewicz

teeth

my mother made me with her hands,
 kneeled on the bedroom floor
 with strips of paper and shards of glass,
 with broken promises and flaming mistakes.
 she took a glue stick
 and pasted each regret together,
 a collage of ugly things.
 some nights
 i stand before a mirror in the dark,
 and pull the skin back from my mouth.
 my teeth are made out of the lies
 my father would tell my mother
 to keep her quiet.
 he left a long time ago,
 something about an open window
 and a lonely driveway,
 at least now he doesn't have to try
 to pretend that he doesn't want to strangle us.
 maybe i should feel sorry,
 but i'm the one with the plaster and the cardboard,
 struggling to fill the holes in the walls that his fists left.
 maybe i should go back to the kitchen floor
 and find the big pliers,
 so i can pull out my teeth.
 maybe that way a boy will kiss me again.
 i think my mother is trying to make another sin like me.
 some days i find her with her kneecaps buried
 in the spaces between the floorboards,
 the palms of her hands wailing.
 i think my mother is a whale
 singing through its split stomach.
 my mother is a warship, and i think my father is a harpoon,
 a black rock jutting from the sea.
 or maybe my mother is a swarm of plankton

and my father is a whale,
or maybe he is a hollow chest
echoing with the memory of music,
my mother is the memory of music.
some nights i think he might be coming back,
but his footsteps sound a lot like gunshots,
so i get them confused.
and some nights i think my mother might be crying,
but that might be sirens.
maybe it's both.
most nights, i tuck my fingers into my mouth
and count my teeth.
i wonder if my father will ever be forgiven,
i wonder if he deserves to be.
maybe if my father is forgiven,
my teeth will stop being his lies.
for now, though,
i push my fingertips against my tongue
and hope that my own mouth doesn't
eat me in my sleep.

Shakhira Seawood

Sirens

Mr. Recoil turned my people into martyrs
who were shot, beaten, hung, jailed, or blasted just for starting
to reform and fixate our eyes on light emerging from the dark,
to unite the black and the white, and ignite a flickering spark.

i sense bitter boiling blood
that takes advantage of the chance to crush bones of love,
with a menace of a mind
Mr. Recoil, do not further waste my time.

my brothers were hanging in the trees just last century
with stone cold laughing faces surrounding them, blood f-f-faucet of the leaves.
my brothers' blood, now p-p-pumping in the streets.
shooting at each other and getting shot by the police, both so foolishly.

i hear the hangover noise of
petty violence,
excruciating silence,
bloody riots,
and New York Night Sirens.

Samarrah Garrison

The dark scares you, admit it

based on "Those Who Don't"

I scare you. No my "breed" scares you. Not because we've done anything. But still, when you see me you feel the need to clutch your purse or cover your children like I'm a newfound disease. My body screams for forgiveness, though I have nothing to feel sorry for. Maybe it's more so the thought of my freedom that scares you. Maybe you think we want revenge, but we don't. So now my body screams in aggravation with the recurring thought, what are you afraid of? I mean, for you to feel so much disgust you sure do copy us a lot. Calling cornrows boxer braids and making your edges look like octopus legs. I can't breathe, my chest and my stomach hurts and I'm rolling on the floor. So explain, how do I scare you just enough for you to put a bullet through my head but not enough for you to keep your own style? I don't get how half of you are vegan yet you butcher our souls like the kids who show up missing in the newspaper. At first it was hard to get, but now I see. The dark scares you, admit it.

Sincerely,
a dark brown girl with a jet black coat,
who only writes in bold, black pen.

Chloe Earegood

Sepia

The gentle flow of paper as I knock it down.
Carelessly I pick up the picture,
My grandmother and my mother without any worry.
The sepia tone holds my attention.
My eyes focus on the unknown, the woman I have never met.

Her hair fell with a perfect wave, just like the ocean.
Chestnut brown, with a perfect shine.
Cut off just above her shoulders, the length of mine.

She looked down, her eyes full of love and adoration.
She looked down at the baby who is now my mother.
The color of her eyes I have yet to find out.
The way they sparkled and glistened I will never know.

Her hands which hold my mother,
The hands of an artist, rough and calloused I imagine.
Her artistic ability passed down to me like a forgotten heirloom found in the attic.

Her voice, which I have never heard.
Her smile, which I have never seen.
Her touch, which I have never felt.

Who is she?
I listen to the voice whispering in my ear, but is it true?
Who is this woman in the sepia tone picture?

She is as unfamiliar as a star you see in the dark of night.
Up in the sky, far away from home.
A lonely star, beautiful and mysterious.

Who is she?
Can I really ever know for myself?
Or will I just be left to wonder my whole life?

Dreams taken and forgotten,
Wondering what could have been,
Wondering who I could be.

What is death?
Is it something that comes at night, hiding in the shadows,
Waiting for the right time to act?

I hang up the picture and hope to forget.

Emily A. K.

Waiting for the Clockmaker

My life could begin at any moment,
But fate's not in my hands,
I am this clock that oddly ticks,
That no one quite understands,
And if they could just catch a tick,
Then they could figure me out,
My hands they've never seen before,
No one knows what I'm really about,
They asked me to open up,
So I showed them my bolts and gears,
He took one look and shook his head,
"I'm afraid you're beyond your years,
These gears were for a little child,
Not one that's experienced this lot!
There's a time you will get help,
But this is not the one you thought,
Your hands and gears and bolts,
Is not on our clock's time,
But it does not mean you're broken,
It means you must pause to chime."

Haleigh Colombo

You Had a Bench that was Covered in Straw

You had a bench that was covered in straw.

Maybe it wasn't so much that it was covered, but the strands were braided together.
At one point, the straw was lined up in perfectly twisted little rows.
Even, strong, symmetrical.

As you grew older, your home fell into disarray.

Red wine that stained the furniture and floors was left to dry, unable to be cleaned
up or removed. There was a leaking pool, which constantly stayed vibrant Kelly green
due to neglect. Black mold grew up from the basement and consumed the entire
home, making the air toxic and putrid.

And the bench in the kitchen. Straw rows that were once uniform and neat began to
shred and poke.
Even just sitting was painful.

The lines unwound, making smaller branches.
It would shed, shards slotting perfectly in between toes. Straw would stick into our
skin, well into the dermis, bleeding when pulled out.

On rainy, overcast days she would lay with a blanket on top of the bench to
protect herself.
(If you had been old enough you might have seen the symbolism. But you were just
a child. Too scared and in pain, pulling long strands of hay out from your hands.)

With skinny girl margarita on her breath, she pulled you in close and cried in your
ears. It was a crushing hug, one that left you unable to breathe in the lethal air.
More for her than you.

When she let go of you, it was just as much of a blessing as it was a curse.

And then, one day, without warning she threw out the bench, and you cried – not
understanding why.
It had hurt you, but you loved it.
And now it was gone.

Hope Donovan

Rare Quartz

I desire to be like one of the rarest forms of quartz.
To be shattering and sharp
Yet beautiful and ethereal
And glossy in its own imperfect manner.
I no longer want to be a common tumbled crystal,
Worn down from its raw state,
And scrubbed until smoothed out.
I am steadily stopping my falling patterns
In their behavioral tracks.
I'm becoming my own again,
Gently shaving and sharpening my years of conditioning,
Slowly rebirthing into my natural geometry.
One may call it healing,
In a sense it is
And speaking of
Which many say healing is simply pasting together the broken pieces.
But I believe
True healing melts one down entirely,
Forcing them to become a new shape.
Sometimes we forget that our skeletal stones are sensitive.
Sometimes we forget we can restructure,
So we forget to surrender to the system of regrowth.
And I no longer wish to be a shiny or smooth crystal.
Let me be a gorgeous dagger
Formed as a rare jagged quartz.

Cecelia Brooke

Unraveling Hours

In the late hours of the night
when life seems unraveling,
I go to my mother.
Always on the edge of sleep but never dreaming.
I crawl on the bed and lay there,
our backs together.
I close my eyes and drift,
my mother's warmth and presence protect me.
And while I'm there, lying by my mother as she finally rests,
in these unraveled hours of the night,
I am consoled and reaffirmed that life will not go ahead of me.
That life and I are intertwined,
and I will not be left abandoned.

Halle Mikula

BAMBI LIVES IN MONTENEGRO

to the kid called bambi:
one day your heart will break and the angels will sing
your stone chest will crack and Heaven will rejoice at the sound of its shattering
it will be music to the ears of the saints
and those in the Glorious Kingdom will watch the face of the Lord
the same way i watch you when i show you my favorite movies
eager for a reaction

Christ will knock and you will let Him in
trumpets will sound
and we will hear the sounds of joy all the way from the land of the living

maybe it will rain that day
maybe it will be a stormy morning
or maybe i will be in Heaven already
and i will sing the loudest-
but no-
i bet there is no "-est" in Heaven
there will be us/
and there will be God.

Lauren Davis

Soundlessness

What is silence?

It's deafening –
the quiet murmur of the snow,
floating on the water, the sound echoing in my ears.
Silence is gentle –
Powerful.
Its emptiness rings through my head like silk
A gentle breeze ruffling my hair
Silence is solitude –
The sand crinkling between my toes,
The horizon flat and still.
Silence is comfortable –
A faint ringing of openness
And unspoken words left in fleeting thoughts.

Silence is seclusion in a world full of noise.

Jamie Yonker

How To Mourn Someone Still Breathing

He looked through me like a ghost from his hospital bed
As if I
The daughter
Child of addiction
Was instead the hollow one

My grandma tells me the story of when I was baptized
She said the pastor held me and walked up and down the aisles
My eyes glued to him
The pews cooed
Like pigeons in Manhattan

Oh how the roles reverse
Between onlooker
Holy ghost
Helpless body
The ever-changing arms that hold us before we sleep

Frankie Spring

[hipster shit]

read a story today in which dark matter is equated
with the heart I said please, you know
better, that transition is a bit of a stretch & isn't
physics kind of a tired-out 90s metaphor for love?
maybe i'm wrong maybe we should all be comparing
our orbits around normativity to a solar system
& her sun

*

coal-fingered boy with mustache shadow sits
across parking lot in pickup truck, smoking &
doing who knows what else, wiping forehead sweat
on the collar of reatree™ shirt, pulling
down yellow hat against the cold

can i bum a cigarette? i hear his
small voice before i realize he has re-materialized
they're unfiltered cigs, i say & what i don't say
is this is my last one so no & he shakes
that yellow-clad melon & doesn't care
it's my last one so i hand it
to him, tobacco like wood chips clinging
to my extended fingers

this cig is some hipster shit he laughs
at me walks back to truck. i see my cigarette
glow to life flick my lighter
next to the pavement hoping for some
outcome

they say if you walk into a wall
every second after a space of time longer
than 3x the current age of the universe you might
just quantum tunnel through that wall
what was i saying about probability how
physics is a bad metaphor for poetry
but do you think if i keep clicking
the lighter someday the sidewalk
will thaw & catch fire

Daria Hayward

Sounds of Starvation

Sickening sounds of spaghetti
Slipping through split lips
Slurping and smacking
Slithering through my spine
Sending shivers across my skin
Sinking deep into my psyche
An obsession with the scale
A strange fixation
Only starvation can satisfy

Choruses of crackers crunching,
Teeth clatter and clack
My fists clench closed
Clinging to my clothing,
Carving claw marks in my coat
Cringing, crying, crashing
Constantly counting calories
Careful not to get caught
Cautiously concealing the craze

Tones of a timer ticking tensely
Then of tapping metal tongs and
Teeth tearing tender meat apart
Steeped in sauce that trickles off
To taste is far too tempting
I'm trapped by a thought
That triggers my retreat
A threat that motivates tears
Tattered and twisted,
A toast to my determination

Groups of gullets gulping and gurgling
Teeth gritting and grinding
I grunt as I sit there gagging
My gut groaning and growling
Engulfed by a goal to be gracile
Gratified yet guilty

Glancing at the ghastly reflection
Green and grave
More ghost than girl

Panicked as hot oil pitters and pops
Potatoes plopped in the pan, purring
The scent permeates my septum
Pleading for me to pacify the hunger pains
Fingers poking and pinching my hips
Piercing the pronounced planes of my pelvis
Possessed by a plague
Powerless against its poison
Prey to my own perverted perception
Of perfection

The resonance of a roast ripped apart
Rackets of ramekins rattling
Rustling of dinner rolls re-wrapped
Rage radiates without restraint
Rising with each roar and rumble
Realizing I can't resist the reflex
A revulsion that wrings my ribs like a rope
A rasping regurgitation of reason
The only remedy for my repulsion

Masses of mouths munching manically
Mocking me with messy mumbles
My mind mangled by a malicious mission
The means by which I medicate and meditate
A malignancy manifests inside me
Minimizing my mass but
Magnifying my misery
A malady meant to modify
Marred by maltreatment
Not to be mended
Only mourned

Alaina Hefferan

A Good Read

Out of all the books in the world
you are my favorite read.

Your edges are torn
some pages are missing
the language is illegible at times.

I like your inconsistent plot
for mine is equally unfinished.

Erin Dwan

Half a Line

A woman walked past my window one night this summer,
and the look on her face mirrored mine as I tried to find words
for a paper for class
in the night-blackened silhouettes of my neighborhood.
Her brow was furrowed, and her jaw was set in a way that I knew meant
she was chewing on an idea.
She stepped out of the glow of the streetlight, turned the corner
and melted into the shadows,
joining the realm of half-formed ideas
and words that are just on the tip of your tongue
but you can't quite taste them.

I pictured her walking past the cobbler, half a line of verse
steeping in her mind.

Maybe she was just worried about getting home safely,
but the crease in her forehead matched the one in mine,
so I'd like to think she was a writer. I imagined
the symbols on the traffic signs mocking her,
their wordlessness reflecting the blank she was trying to fill in. Maybe,
as she walked by the antique shop,
she stole a word or two from the window.
I wonder if she took anything from mine.

Michaeleen Kelly

Marcus Aurelius Leaves his (Stoic) Heart in Oakland

"Reject your sense of injury and the injury itself disappears."
—Marcus Aurelius (Meditations)

Marcus Aurelius drives his overly-used van bearing his Stoic treatises to sell at the Oakland flea market along with several togas for the van sleepover tonight and for performances of Stoic poetry at Oakland's Friday Night festivities.

He's competing for audience attention with Chosen the Rapper, but he's confident that they'll appreciate his message. Gentrification had driven so many of them to van or truck sleepovers themselves

He warns them about the dangers to their integrity of attachment to possessions. Worse yet the threat to their equanimity from fretting over the predictable car thefts. All from being at the wrong place at the wrong time or the right place at any time.

But his own center of balance and mindfulness are disturbed when he realizes that his traveling emporium is not where he parked it on that fateful Friday night. He'd been kicking these ideas around for over 1900 years and it took that long to get this sorry van and its irreplaceable contents: a signed Jus Imperium scroll from his predecessor Emperor Hadrian and diaries documenting his moral growth based on his fine-tuning of Stoic ideas and practices of detachment.

Returning to the party, he grabs a mic and proclaims, "Citizens of Oakland, You should be grateful that I can't take you back to second century Rome. I'd have you treated like I did any lower caste thieves who dared to ride off with my chariot. Thrown you to hungry lions and starving wolves."

Tina Anderson

Moon Phases

In the early mornings before dawn
You crawl into our bed,
Wrap your small muscly legs around mine
Like a vine,
My head nestled in the small crook of your elbow.
Your five-year-old skin is smooth and soft.
Your face round and open like the full moon
I named you after.

We sleep this way
Until the morning duties are nearly overdue:
Dressing, eating, washing, packing.

We arrive in the world
As the bell rings,
Running to line up amidst the sea of children.

In the pause before our goodbye

I watch you put on a different face.

Your hands move across your features as if
You are wiping something off.
Your moon face wanes.
You dim the light of your eyes
And set your jaw.
Your expression is a guard for the soft muscle
Inside your birdcage chest.

As I watch you
grief like a wave hits me
For the many deaths of myself
When I didn't know how to be in my own skin.

I stoop down and tell you how brave and wonderful you are.
I want to sweep you up out of this discomfort
And hide with you under the covers.

I watch you walk away, into your classroom,
Forgetting to hug me goodbye.

Blue backpack,
Black boots,
New moon face.

Michael Mohan Joshua

A Moving Scene

Moses sat sad in an Ambassador Nova
Indira Gandhi was buying a sari
I was saying sorry
to a cameraman from Delhi
My neighbors were not enemies
Friends were in another world
Jesus was a pearl
the driver of a rickshaw
A beggar boy asked for help
The police said not today
kindly go away
Crows kept cawing
Mahatma Gandhi rode a bike
A young man stank of sweat
Hindi music loudly blasted from a cornershop

Raja Rani

A terrorist kissed his wife
Kahlil Gibran was on guard
A baby gave an eyebrow frown
An old man confessed
"I have not eaten in a month"
My parents bought some clothes
A five-year-old beggar
carried his little sister
to attract
sympathy
his sister said to him in Marathi:
"Man, this is fun!"
A Pakistanian sat in India
in love with nothing
hoping
America would stop helping the world
making the world help itself
and America could get rid of the stress of having to be number one

Jamie Roelofs

Emphysema

The machine whirred and spun
communicating in a series of beeps devised in a foreign language.
The bright display splashed with changing color
a moving script of hieroglyphs flashed in a near cheerful fashion.
Autumn leaves lay frozen above, laser carved into a paneled sky.

We congregate beneath them, a link of unease tying us together.
Our mother was in a coma again. Only two months from the last.
This time it felt real. This time it felt final.
Her lungs now moved by a machine's hand
Contracting and expanding in its grip.

Air moving in and out. In and out.
30 years of smoke removed the exit signs
that hung in her airways, forcing carbon dioxide to linger
and place its gnarled roots into her lungs.

She lay fighting in the trenches of her own body
staving off invading forces. Yet still it feels final.
But somewhere deep in the reaches of our
cacophonous pleading and prayer sat hope.

Aloft and rising, a morning sun bleeding through
through the plaster and dread, rendering the dull
artificial lights above a sliver of flame in its burning mass.
I sit with my siblings and burn with hope.

Memories of my father arrange themselves
Forming with flashes of his hands and crooked face
It's been four years since his death, and my mother's admission
re-sparks his presence and I'm left fragmented
the missing parts and gaps I've repaired spill out
and the bitter wind blows through.

I brace before it and to my surprise, I do not shutter.
I do not clench. I endure. The air a brisk spring gust,
warmed by that burning sun. And as I sit, listening
to the indecipherable machines babble and swirl I feel comfort.

A comfort only hope provides. So here I'll sit
beneath the frozen fall leaves and wait for them to part
and give way to hope's bursting bright star.
To feel warm again.

Kat Neis

Perihelion

Beyond the valley, there were cars covered in snow
& on the road, there were hitchhikers
trying to get rides. No moon in sight that year,

so we tilted our heads up to find ourselves covered
in mica, in hydrogen, in the unseen. I might have dreamed
something like this but I still think it must be true.

We are all in orbit around another body. This morning,
the finches in the pine surprised by the movement
of the branches under their weight—like the hitchhikers startled

by sudden spring snow. I realize there are so many motives for leaving.
Take the robin's wanderings. Not for warmth but hunger.
My own home empty of forage, I used to hoard piles of clothes

& mementos for you but you had already moved skyward.
In the bathroom, I saw my arm & felt it did not belong to me,
so I buried all the mirrors in the backyard. Eventually,

we will all join other flocks, & someday, this tree—either birch or maple,
coated with snow—will grow empty of birds. When the earth warms
us & everything around us, will we see the impressions our bodies made

lying in the grass, or in the deep traces left behind by another's leaving?

National Judge



Keith S. Wilson

Keith S. Wilson is an Affrilachian Poet and Cave Canem fellow. He is a recipient of an NEA fellowship as well as fellowships/grants from Bread Loaf, Kenyon College, Tin House, MacDowell, Vermont Studio Center, UCross, and Millay Colony, among others.

Keith serves as Assistant Poetry Editor at *Four Way Review* and Digital Media Editor at *Obsidian Journal*. His first book, *Fieldnotes on Ordinary Love*, was published by Copper Canyon. Keith's work has appeared in *Poetry*, *Elle*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Adroit Journal*, *Boston Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Narrative*, *32 Poems*, *Arts & Letters*, *Rhino*, and *Vinyl*.

Judges' Comments

KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 2

First Place | "Love is like fire"

This poem is exactly right. Love is like a fire that starts inside of us, and this piece makes us as readers feel it. I am so impressed by the talent of this young poet and glad not only that she felt love and thought to write about it, but that she did it so well. I hope we all can warm ourselves from the coldness of the world with love, and I am grateful for this poem reminding me to do that.

— Keith S. Wilson

Second Place | "Dream"

Such movement and light, color and joy in this poem. The natural exuberance and energy in each bouncing line makes bedtime an adventure. The poet has a great approach to life that is a good reminder to us older folks. Always be joyful in your rising and retiring! Thank you for this poem.

— Shelley Townsend-Hudson

GRADES 3 – 4

First Place | "The Wilderness"

The message of this poem is one that adults and children alike often forget, and here it is expressed so skillfully, with fantastic attention to the beauty of the natural world. "Every crack and crevice holds a living bug or soul" is a tremendous line, and I love that it is part of a poem reminding us that because of all these little souls, we should remember our place in the world and be grateful for it. And of course, it is an acrostic poem, so the challenge of writing a formal poem has been taken on as well— and with such wonder and beauty.

— Keith S. Wilson

Second Place | "What If"

This poem packs energy and motion in a few lines. The movement comes from pairing plain, simple, concrete words like "head" and fox" with momentum of "run free" – a combination that thrusts the reader into action.

— Mursalata Muhammad

GRADES 5 – 6

First Place | "Forget"

This poem takes a moment and dramatizes it in such a wonderful way. The final message, "Don't Forget," is not just told to us, but given to us by the actions of the "spindly man," in this graveyard of "Graves upon graves / Nights upon Nights." It is such an evocative, creepy, lonely place, and because of the fantastic pacing, we are given time to almost sit there in the graveyard, contemplating what the lives must have been like for these two lost souls. It is all the best parts of a short story and a poem!

— Keith S. Wilson

Second Place | "Pink is Everywhere"

I cannot help but have the warmest smile while reading this poem. The text paints pink in a way that is both familiar and thought-provoking. Making its reader picture a pink river dolphin as a primer is a fantastic way to let the poem fall into sentiment without relinquishing its heart. I am a fan of every simile used throughout the poem, but "pink as snoring pigs" must be my favorite.

— Tyler Fleser

GRADES 7 – 8

First Place | "Raspberries and Sugar Plums"

I love how this poem shares with us such strong sensory memories, often tastes and smells, which writers often forget about or ignore. "Pine needles and blueberries, / from when we danced, in the rain" makes ME want to dance in the rain, and "Salty tears and mint" is something I can almost taste myself in that moment of having to say goodbye. What a canny, bright way to bring the reader into these emotions!

— Keith S. Wilson

Second Place | "My Friends on a Typical Night"

This poem is distinct and original in voice. It uses the images of ordinary life to draw the reader into the sense of isolation, loneliness, and deprivation. The very apt images with a dash of humor here and there is haunting and palpable. The reference to Dylan's *Blowing in the Wind* is a nice touch.

— Shelley Townsend-Hudson

GRADES 9 – 10

First Place | “teeth”

There are so many lines I read over and over in this poem. It is filled with such sadness, and communicates hurt and an inheritance of abuse with such evocative imagery that it's sometimes difficult not to gasp. Lines like “my teeth are made out of the lies / my father would tell my mother / to keep her quiet” (which is heartbreaking and gorgeous) and “I think my mother is a whale / singing through its split stomach.” And I love the interplay there. The speaker and their mother, both with mouths that find a way to sing.

— Keith S. Wilson

Second Place | “Sirens”

Writing a poem about something as nuanced as racial injustice and as raw as righteous frustration is a tall task, but “Sirens” does so by imbuing itself with blunt, kinetic energy that leaves the reader reeling by the end. It is impossible for me to not hear a crescendo as I read each line. Whether it is because of the poem's clever double-entendre, close attention to anaphora, or fiery language, “Sirens” demands attention and more than earns it on each re-read.

— Tyler Fleser

Third Place | “The dark scares you, admit it”

This poem uses plain language and descriptions of specific human behavior to shine light on dehumanizing practices. The cultural envy and race-based violence presented are inescapable. The declarative final statement leaves no room to sidestep the narrator's claim.

— Mursalata Muhammad

GRADES 11 – 12

First Place | “You Had a Bench that was Covered in Straw”

There is a narrative here, with the bench as a kind of character; if you grew up with something, anything that was always there, it is easy to understand how a chair can be charged with personal meaning, but imparting meaning to a reader is another thing. It happens in little moments in this poem, in the quietest and shortest lines that follow much longer ones: “Even just sitting was painful” and “More for her than you,” which communicate with deftness and beauty how that which supports us might also hurt us and how we might miss even hardship when it is gone.

— Keith S. Wilson

Second Place | “Rare Quartz”

The poem uses perspective to snag the reader's attention. Reading the narrative, which begins with first-person, the events of self-discovery prove to be inclusive. The use of third-person perspective and repetition of the “we forget” phrase provide the moment of transformation needed for the narrator to emerge “gorgeous,” “rare,” and “jaggeded.”

— Mursalata Muhammad

Third Place | “Unraveling Hours”

This poem struck a chord because I recall my struggle as a child with the “unraveling” at bedtime. I too would lie “back to back” with my mother to find comfort. And I did the same for my own daughter. The presence of love, attachment, and mutual comfort is strong all over this poem. To feel that “life and I are intertwined” is a gift the mother gives her child and, no doubt, receives in turn. Beautiful!

— Shelley Townsend-Hudson

UNDERGRADUATE

First Place | “How to Mourn Someone Still Breathing”

There is not a moment in this short poem that isn't dense with fraught emotion and difficult truths. There is a whole poem in the title, and “The pews cooed / Like pigeons in Manhattan” is the kind of image that carries with it the weight of oft-missed beauty. And that final line! How do we come to terms with loss that is not wholly loss, or with the terrible beauty of being held but only for just so long? This is certainly a poem to spend time with.

— Keith S. Wilson

Second Place | “[hipster shit]”

“[hipster shit]” reminds me of the realm I want my own poems to inhabit — that weird dimension between reality, perception, and scene. What stands out about the text is the way it houses a sincere snark for trope and metaphor. The speaker pleads with their self to retire the traditional, describes only scene for most of the poem, then gracefully and subtly succumbs to a physics metaphor of the speaker's own making. It is a masterclass in how to talk about trope reverently and poke fun at it at the same time.

— Tyler Fleser

Third Place | “Sounds of Starvation”

“Sounds of Starvation” contains striking images and sickening sounds necessary to convey the dark message of this poem. It is a testimony to the violence the speaker enacts upon the body—“a toast to my determination.” Powerful alliteration drives the poem, articulating the speaker’s internal struggle—the “mind mangled by a malicious mission.” The reader is forced NOT to look away and that is this poem’s intention.

— Shelley Townsend-Hudson

ADULT

First Place | “Marcus Aurelius Leaves His (Stoic) Heart in Oakland”

One of the things I love about this poem is how it subverts the poetic tradition of referencing Greek myth in favor of Greek history and thought and how it uses this framework to critique dangerous American preoccupations. We need not imagine too much what it would be like to hear a rich ruler who has downplayed his own power and wealth tell us that he would love to punish us for our impudence by throwing us “to hungry lions and starving wolves.” Much of the best poetry is in some way rhetorical, and this is a work that has in its formidable arsenal not just beauty but judgement as well.

— Keith S. Wilson

Second Place | “Moon Phases”

I have always seen the second person “you” as a way to grip the reader’s collar and pull them close; “Moon Phases” only proves this analogy. Whether waning or waxing, the poem’s language is imbued with a worldly, visceral, effervescence. Every stanza is a breath of fresh air that I have breathed before, so I never have any qualms with the speaker gripping my collar and telling me what “we” do.

— Tyler Fleser

Third Place | “A Moving Scene”

References to historical figures in everyday contexts intertwine with ordinary people engaged in a variety of activities. These contextualized snippets of life create tension through fragmented images. The tension culminates with the revelation of the global effects of American actions, leaving the reader feeling as though the chaos is oddly familiar.

— Mursalata Muhammad

Poet Bios

Alaina Hefferan writes poetry because language is something she can connect to and she can always confide in her writing. She attends Grand Valley State University and is originally from Shelby Township in east Michigan. "A Good Read" is about appreciating people's imperfections and embracing the unknown that is ahead.

Cecelia Brooke graduated from City High School in Grand Rapids and plans to attend Grand Valley State University to be become an expressive art therapist. Cecelia hopes to continue writing as it "is the only way to express the depths of her heart" and eventually to publish her own collection of poetry.

Charlotte Vos attends Congress Elementary and participates in programs at the Creative Youth Center.

Chloe Earegood goes to Wyoming Junior High and just completed ninth grade. "Sepia" is written about a picture hung on her refrigerator.

Daria Hayward is a junior in the Medical Illustration program at Kendall College of Art and Design. She became inspired to write poetry after taking a creative writing class in college. In addition to writing, she enjoys drawing, painting, sculpting, fiber arts, and beadwork.

Dia Sriram finished 7th grade this year and goes to Central Middle School. She has a lot of fun writing poetry and gets inspiration from her everyday life and the many instruments she plays.

Emily A. K. is a very expressive person. She dances nonstop and recently has had some difficult health issues that don't allow her to dance the way she wants to because she can't breathe like she wants to. She loves the arts, music, painting, dancing, and photography. Emily is homeschooled and loves the view homeschooling has given her. "Waiting for the Clockmaker" is about being different, being one of a kind, feeling like it won't ever get better, and having to wait nearly forever to be okay. But it's also about having hope that there will be an end, if someone can just figure out what's exactly wrong and fix it.

Erin Dwan is a senior at Aquinas College studying English Literature, Community Leadership, and Women's Studies. She enjoys cooking, reading, and walks in the sunshine.

Frankie Spring likes to engage many senses with their work & goes by the stage name Popemodernist. They are currently becoming a better writer at GVSU while working night shift at the Bitter End.

Haleigh Colombo is a senior at East Grand Rapids High School. Although she normally keeps it to herself, she writes pages upon pages of poetry each year to help process the difficult time of life that is adolescence. In the future, she hopes to get into medical school and own a three-legged cat.

Halle Mikula attends Forest Hills Eastern and loves to write because she can convey a feeling into words. The title, "BAMBI LIVES IN MONTENEGRO," stems from a personal phrase that she uses; Montenegro, to her, is a utopia. Montenegro is another word for Heaven.

Hope Donovan graduated from Grand Rapids City High this year. She loves writing poetry to express her feelings. She also plays viola in Grand Rapids Youth Symphony and does sketchbook art. In addition, she eats too many avocados.

Isabella Tardani wrote "Numbers" because of her struggle with math and dyscalculia, and she wanted to share the poem so others who struggle with math can know they're not alone.

Growing up, **Jamie Yonker** never saw her father in literature. She enjoys writing stream of consciousness poems, this one ("How to Mourn Someone Still Breathing") being written while at her father's seventh hospital stay in a year. When not taking classes at GRCC, Jamie enjoys sharing healthy snacks with the pigs, sheep, chickens, and ducks at her place of work.

Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan, **Kat Neis** is a freelance writer, poet, and editor. Her poetry has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *Zone 3*, *Glass Poetry*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Equinox: Poetry and Prose*, *Lake Effect*, and others. She is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Siblińi Journal*.

Kaydence Gonzalez says, "I think I've always liked poetry, but I just didn't know how to write poems. I haven't been doing it for long, a year at most, but I think I'm content right where I'm at."

Lauren Davis attends Grand Rapids Christian High School.

MaKenna Moore attends Forest Hills Public Schools.

Megan Middlestadt attends Northern Trails Elementary School. She loves to read horror books, pet cats, and travel. She likes how Edgar Allen Poe wrote, and her poem is a reflection of that. She wrote this poem to make the reader think deeply about what they're reading.

Michael Mohan Joshua was born in Lahore, Pakistan and trained in creativity in the United States. He has been writing poetry for 25 years. You can visit him online at talkingwithgodfornoreason.com.

Michaeleen Kelly is an Emerita Professor of Philosophy at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her poetry has been published in *Grey Wolfe Press*, *Dunes Review*, *Main Street Rag Anthologies* and *Blue Collar Review*. She has won the Dyer-Ives Poetry Contest three times and is working on her third poetry-instrumental CD.

Naomi James is a sweet 7-year-old girl from Grand Rapids, MI who just finished second grade at Grand Rapids Christian Elementary School. She is in the Spanish Immersion program.

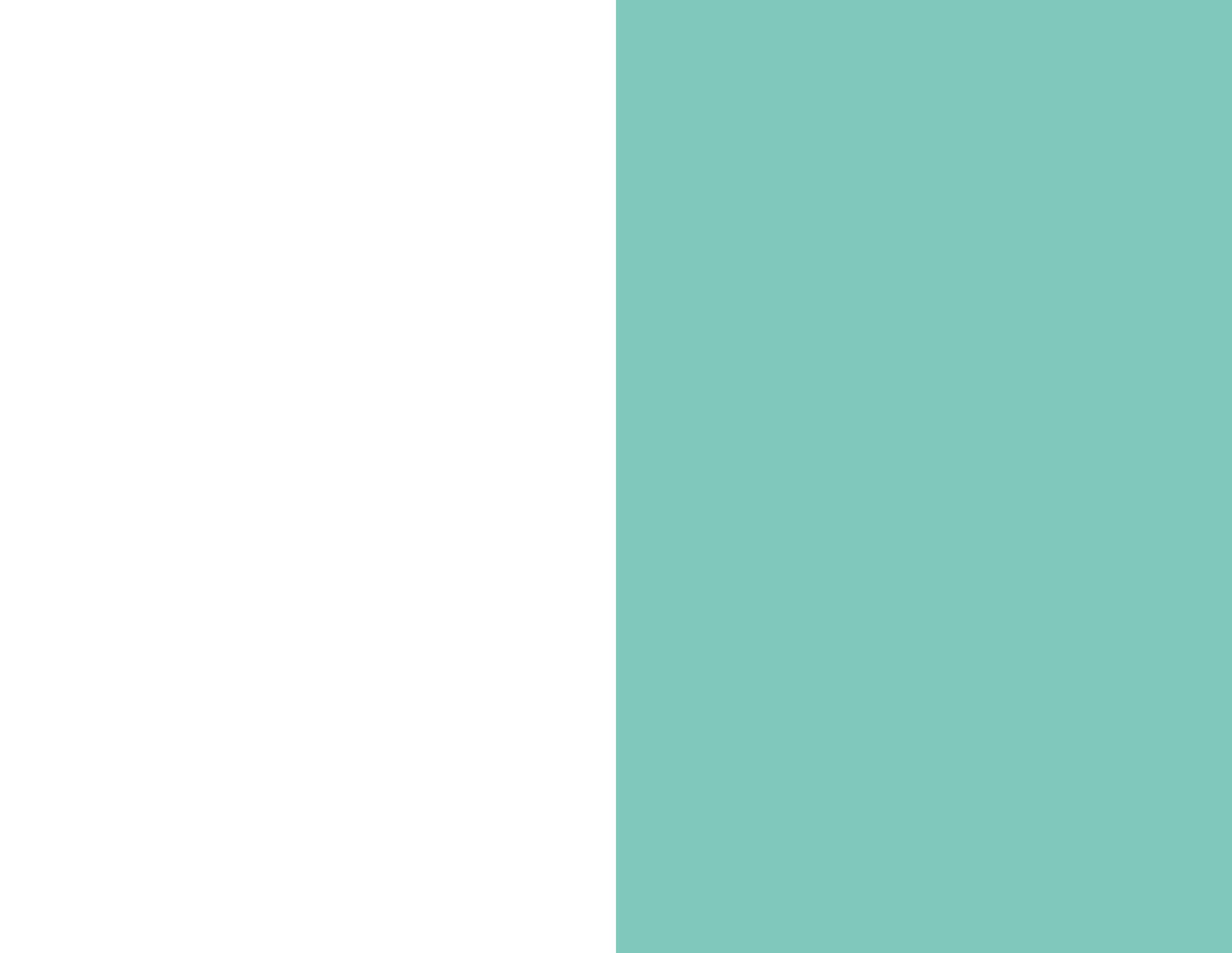
Olivia Brundin writes poetry because she likes creativity. She goes to Lakeside Elementary and just finished second grade. She likes to read and play outside, and she loves animals, especially her dogs, Apollo and Luna.

Shakhira Seawood is a 9th grade student at City High Middle School. She likes art, music, films, and poetry. She writes poetry as a way to express herself.

Tina Anderson has been writing poetry since she was young but mostly kept her poems to herself and those in her very inner circle. Poetry offers Tina a sacred space to linger within the everyday, a way to experience the cosmic beauty and grief of living that we too often hurry through.

William Aupperlee is nine, was born in Canada, and lived for a while in the U.S. before moving to his mother's country, England. Earlier this year, he moved back to the U.S. He particularly enjoys writing acrostic poems.

A rising high school junior at Kenowa Hills High School, **Zoe Paskewicz** enjoys writing poetry and has been writing for over three years. She also enjoys reading, pole vaulting for the school's track team, and competing on her high school forensics team.





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