

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY PRESENTS

VOICES

THE 2021 DYER-IVES
POETRY COMPETITION

The Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition

This year, we celebrate the 53rd anniversary of the Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition! The competition was initiated in 1968 by poet James Allen at the urging of John Hunting, the founder of the Dyer-Ives Foundation. Its mission was and still 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 the dedication and talents in our local community who are committed to dedicating their time and energy to the discovery of talent that make this contest a significant annual literary event.

The Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition is free to enter for residents and students in Kent County and culminates in a reading ceremony during Festival of the Arts every June (although the timing this year is different due to the pandemic). The competition is divided into eight categories, and winners and honorable mentions have their work published in *Voices*. First and second place winners also receive cash prizes.

A heartfelt thank you to this year's preliminary judges: Michaeleen Kelly, Frankie Spring, and Jamie Roelofs.

A nationally known poet completes the final judging of our poetry submissions and determines the prize winners. Past judges include Anne Sexton, Robert Creeley, James Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Bly, William Stafford, Naomi Shihab Nye, Herb Scott, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Billy Collins, Linda Nemeč Foster, Mark Doty, Azizi Jasper, Nancy Huang, and Keith S. Wilson.

Many thanks to 2021's hardworking, supportive, and incredibly thoughtful national judge, Safia Elhillo.

I'd also like to thank Anne Keller, Abby Zwart, and Steve Tuit for their efforts to bring poetry to the classroom and to everyone at Creative Youth Center for their after-school literary programming for students (even if the pandemic derailed things a bit).

Lastly, all of this would not have been possible without the dedication of incredible GRPL staff members Jeanessa Smith, Katie Zychowski, and Kristen Krueger-Corrado. A special thank you to Hannah Snow for taking my colorful ideas and designing the beautiful and artistic publication you're holding. On behalf of everyone whose work was published, read, and celebrated, thank you for making this happen!

Now let's get to the poetry!

With gratitude,

Kelsey May

Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition, 2021 Coordinator

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Grades
K – 2

Buttercup

Mavy and the Sock

Dude the Dog

Cecilia Magnone

Buttercup

Horses gallop, horses run
Horses are a lot of fun.

I'd buy a horse just to run
It would be a lot of fun.

I'd name her Buttercup
And I would win the gold cup!

Mason Wietfeldt

Mavy and the Sock

You are so funny.
A sock hanging in your mouth.
Yes, you make me laugh!

Mercy Steed

Dude the Dog

Dude the dog digs up donuts
dancing in the dirt
Dirt went so high
it touched the sky
He got it on his shirt

He forgot to set the plot
He got some dishes, decorations and a plate
He was ready, very ready
For his big, big doggy date

Grades
3 – 4

The Dangerous Storm

Orphan Train

Black Fire

Oliver Nelson

The Dangerous Storm

The shadowy cloud
of dust is raging
in at high speeds
showing no mercy.
The dust from the unprotected
fields attack me
with high ferocity,
piercing my body
while the dust and mud
are hurling at me.
People are screaming.
It is a matter of life and death
for these people.
Stay safe. or die.
People all over die
from this horrific storm
and soon will I.
The dust devours me and
I
am
gone.

Pabegg Anyijong

Orphan Train

The train.
Preparing to get going
I hop on
And I look back at my parents
Who are soon to no longer be my parents.
Later on I will meet my
New parents.
My parents were doing it for the right
Cause
I think
Or
They just wanted me gone
I arrived at my destination.
Some people told me to switch clothing.
They said they would give me food...
They lied.
It
I got a letter from my mother
It said my father had just
Died.
That's the last I hear of my
Mother.
We get back to the train
And arrive in New York to perform
For the parents
I try impressing the parents with my tricks.
They think for awhile.
I'm picked.
I'm finally free from the train,
The orphan train.

Reuben Rodenhouse

Black Fire

The dust is
blowing fiercely
wildly consuming everything in its path.
The hard, painful dust
Is pounding on me
as I'm running to escape it
The bitter, unpleasant smell of the dust
tells me
it's getting closer
I'm sprinting for my life
I look back
it's an enormous black cloud
people running
they look frightened
the cloud is chasing them
They can't escape it
Nothing can
It's black fire
I need to run too

Grades
5 – 6

Wind

A Poem about Shoes

Stinky Soup

Ruby Parler

Wind

A sound unknown,
goes through the trees
many a different tone
I may sound like the bees

I might be silent
that you can only see
I can be harsh and violent
swinging, laughing, dancing through many trees

In the winter
I still will sing
The sound might differ,
but I still will sing

I will blow South or North
but I will blow, so on forth

Eliana Parler

A Poem about Shoes

Shoes come in many colors
Blue and red among the others
They come in many shapes and sizes
Some with heels, also rises

Some shoes have laces
Some shoes come with braces
Some slip on and off
Some you can hardly tie them up

Some have lights that flash all around
Some help you jump up and down
Some are purple, some are pink
Some help you kick a ball, I think.

Shoes are very interesting, you see
Maybe not for you, but definitely for me!

Disha Sriram

Stinky Soup

That stinky soup smelled like skunk
That stinky soup tasted like black licorice
That stinky soup fell on the floor
Mother yelled at me
But it was still stinky soup

Grades
7 – 8

Zoo Tiger

Rare Sight

But she can't

Dia Sriram

Zoo Tiger

Someone once told me to be a jungle tiger,
Proud and fierce- solving their own problems.
Hunting wild and free,
Being resourceful and having the will enough to survive.

Then what am I?
Nothing more than a zoo tiger,
Being fed through iron bars and dozing in synthetic bushes.
Adored and loved.
You would think that this is all anyone could wish for.

I remember our sisters and brothers,
Who left in search of something more.
For months, I longed for the day to escape like them,
Only to realize that my brothers and sisters
Were the same ones being fed to the mouth
Of a gun.

Learning not to envy the jungle tigers,
Being "technically" better off than them,
I looked up at the dome above me instead,
Knowing that there would never be a cloudy day for me
When the ceiling was permanently painted blue.

I understood that this easygoing existence could disappear in an instant,
But never thought that it would be my own
Devoted and loyal caretakers that would cause
The epiphany that pushed me
To strive to be a jungle tiger.
All they did was open a new door.

Stepping out for the first time,
I notice the heat and pressure
Somehow I'm glad.
Escaping to this dreamworld,
My own choices are the ones leading me, believing in me.

In the moment,
Nothing is holding me back.
Every rational thought is abandoned to my first cloudy sky.
Where can I go, now that my feet and mind can carry me farther than I've ever gone?
Where can I go when my feet and my mind are holding me back?

Everyone faces the choice where you can run towards the distant lamplight,
Never knowing what it will show you and what lays beyond,
Or turn back to the red light of the lasers that line your back,
Ready to strike.

I don't know any better.
Looking into the eyes of the only living things I have ever known for the first real time,
I see that there was never any love or adoration.
Only pity.
They were the same that fed me,
And even opened my door to a new world.

Retrospection in the small moments you have left is never a good idea,
Because you are permanently left with doubt.
To see a small zoo tiger mistake nonchalance for loyalty,
And beg for compassion in a world where the idea doesn't exist,
Only makes the narrative one of reality,
And not the worst case.

Jonathan Locke

Rare Sight

The lush green pierces the bleak grey.
The sky makes way
And I am above the sun, having a good day.
Everybody is out to play!
What a rare sight, more rare than gold, if you may.

In the town,
In the meadows,
Glee is bouncing off the walls,
And ringing down the halls.
What a rare sight, more rare than gold, I'd say.

How I love the green, the blue
The yellow, the white
The colors of the world bring a tear to the eye.
What a rare sight, more rare than gold, what a thing to behold.

Author's Note: The lyrics of the second verse are inspired by Tally Hall's "Ruler of Everything."

MaKenna Moore

But she can't

As her teacher calls her name,
Every fear coming over her,
Feeling tight in her stomach,
Like shes drowning in quicksand,
Her leg bouncing faster than imaginable,
Face is red like a tomato,
Everyone staring
But she can't seem to get a word out
Not one,
Out of 170,000 words she couldn't think of one
Sweating through her shirt
Heart racing faster than a bullet can shoot
But for some reason everything can move,
Except for the words she wants to come out,
She just has to open her mouth and say one word,
"here."
But why can't she?

Grades
9 – 10

when the sun sets

Sisyphus

the magic of rhythm

Bella Grounin

when the sun sets

When I look at the moon,
I see you.
When I look at the stars,
I see our future,
And all that it holds for us.
But when I look at the sun,
It shines on our imperfections,
Our flaws.
The way that we fight when we can't agree on something,
Or how you wear yourself out when your hopes are let down,
Or when you raise your voice,
Knowing that it makes me want to run.
All of the stupid things that the sun shines on,
It all comes together.
Because at the end of the day,
The sun will set,
And even though every single tear has been wasted,
And our voices are faint.
You are still all I see in the moon,
And we are all that is in the stars.

Fiona Bergin

Sisyphus

Psychedelic
Flashes of hot
Shivering
Cursing everything
Is this real
Am I dead yet?
Dark thoughts
Invasion
Part of me
Wants this
Sickness
But there is no end
Greed
Never did a thing
My life
Spent cheating death
Now death cheats me
Sweat drips
Mixes with the blood
I'm getting stronger
But with nowhere to go
This
Is the cruelest punishment

Eisley Sandefur

the magic of rhythm

Music.

The center of emotions.

The source of comfort.

It sends waves of rhythm through your muscles.

Vibrations upon your skin.

Words that you need to hear when your body is glooming.

Something to dance to as happiness is flowing through.

An escape.

Music is magical. Music understands us.

The instruments pour into our ears. The notes dance through our heads.

Memories going through our minds. The vision of happiness reappears.

Colors dance through the song. Words attach to your heart.

A smile forms as you hear the beautiful chords.

Music.

An attachment soothing over you like a blanket.

What would the world be like without music?

Grades
11 – 12

Mother / Earth

Afraid

as I leave

Mother / Earth

i: summer

The August sun forces you to squint, as if
the loss in your puffy eyes was not suffocating enough.

Sheltered from the humid morning, you breathe sharply—you are
still
suffocating—
the air conditioning crystallizes in your lungs. You remember that walls don't
protect you from yourself and each breath pushes you closer to the glacier's
edge and you

ii: fall

Autumn is beautiful. You think mother nature is cruel for it.

You watch a child jump into a pile of leaves. Her laughter laughs in the face
of the thinning air and the shortening days and October becomes a little less
empty. Your heart becomes a little more full.

It's a wonder, you think, that
(I love you)
such a small being could be so much larger than the atmosphere itself.

Humanity is a time machine and you climb in for afternoon tea. You finish
your tea and cookies and you thank the host
(and you're gone)
and look around to see the brown grave of nature. You thank the sun
for its delayed mercy, breathing relief out in clouds.

iii: winter

You thank the snow for its merciless ability to match your heart and the silence it
commands in the world around you but soon you're sick of the night and the days
aren't getting longer and you stop thanking the snow in favor of cursing yourself,
because

You were almost there. Where?
For a fleeting moment of
redorangeyellow
You
were almost there.
(and I still
don't know where
I'm going)

The child's laughter had touched your heart more deeply than the winter cold does
your bones, the child's joy violent in its conquest. Breathing it in hurt more
(without you)
than anything you had ever known and months later you still gasp for more so you
grab a blanket and sit by the window and wait
(but I am on my way.

iv: spring

I sit in the shade under the cherry trees and thank mother Earth
for the fruits of its immortal tilt: thank you.
I thank you: I love you.
Bones soaked with warmth, I stand to greet the blinding sun. She offers me a hand
and I take it for

Joy is the most devastating part of loss. I breathe it in.)

Adam Baker

Afraid

I know a little girl who's afraid of the dark
And the monsters that may lurk therein
I know a little girl who's afraid of herself
And the monsters that may lurk within

She spends all her time curled up in a ball
Letting the whole world pass her by
People try to save her by saying they love her
But she doesn't understand why
She's stupid and ugly and scared and lonely
And she doesn't even know who she is

I just look on a bit sad when she tells me this
For I know that the little girl is me

Madi Hammond

as I leave

hourglass, hourglass,
trickling down a smooth stream, slipping through moss-covered hands
as sand melts to glass, and
glass to mirrors; mirrors to reflect
the harsh swell and undulating tides
of my own face, eroded by the years from seashells to a shell;
standing ovations to a farewell.
I steal one last glance, before
the river Lethe sweeps my opaque soul away, fated, to be one amongst
the swirling faceless.

Undergraduate Division

Case Study of a Sunday

visiting our lady of the angels

At a Shanghai Platform

Blueberry Eulogy

Jamie Yonker

Case Study of a Sunday

I was never good at public speaking.
Hushed around a Sunday supper,
Who wants to pray aloud?

I'm six years old,
tight lips,
bowed head.

Twenty years later,
kneeling on a bathroom mat
begging as if I'm at the Lord's table or
weeping at his feet.

When does the word please
become a prayer of its own?
Chanting:
Come on Dad, you can do it
Like I'm reciting Hail Marys or
rooting at a child's baseball game.

Even scarier than death
by rotten lungs
is a full recovery
just to return home,
sit on the couch, and
begin to drink again.

Guardian angel fly buzzes and
bumps into the mirror,
vermin intruder
Or godsend himself --
wings humble and soft as
hope.

I remember phantom Sundays,
stationed in place longest,
Mom insisting I finish my steak
before I leave the table, so
I drown it in ketchup and
swallow it down whole.

Elizabeth Walztoni

visiting our lady of the angels

i was sitting in the window with my eyes wide open
before we heard the shooting and crouched on the floor.
it was snowing, just a little, i could only see it
turn under orange streetlamps
before disappearing into sidewalk or night.

once this convent caught fire,
not with the holy kind like they have up in wisconsin,
where i saw an angel once and forgot about it shortly after.
a car pulled into an alley across the street, flashed its headlights,
and a lamp blinked back some signal.

i used to live here, and before that my father used to live here,
and we couldn't stay put or away.

a boy came home on the corner
and upstairs windows went dark.
someone knew his hand on the door,
someone knew their waiting was over.
i didn't see his face,
but his chin was weaker and his nose sharper than i thought,
and his father was dead or almost divorced.
one hand pulled another fire.

outside came in through the glass.
i couldn't make a place mean anything
without someone else's memories to tell me how.
the floor felt too smooth and too cold.

a rabbit pushed through chain link
looked around with its nose twitching
and crossed the street.

Francesca Duong

At a Shanghai Platform

The dinging sound of the train door
Of the muted voices when I stepped out
Stepped out and saw you.

For fleeting five fenzhong (分钟),
We starred in our own drama
And loved like we were alive.
Our eyes hazed by pollution
Glimmered brighter than Shanghai's neon signs.

But then we stepped back,
Stepped back into our trains
Our trains of opposite directions
Directing our vision into a 267 mile blur.

One minute you're all that I see —
That I am.

The next I see
I seem

I

Kipp De Man

Blueberry Eulogy

Oh deep blue orb
of spring-born hope,
thinly veiled and generous
with sweet or sour tones,
a thoughtful, simple sincerity.
Perhaps consistency is
its own species of perfection,
brought forth by a planted bush
branching with shoots twisting
betwixt clear dew and
an empathetic, invisible spectrum.
If the truth were in season,
you would be its fruit.

Adult Division

Letter Written From
My Kitchen Window

The Epic of la Morena

Ichor

We'll Watch the Rain

Megan Klco Kellner

Letter Written From My Kitchen Window

I have a hard time keeping everything in its place
– deodorant tossed on the table, loose thumbtacks rolling about.

Remember the guy with the ponytail who crashed our potluck
back in college? I'm trying to squeeze him into a neat line again.

The neighbors' yard is being ripped up by backhoes right now
because the wife wants something to think about that isn't cancer.

Why when you cut the black eyes from a potato does it still
taste like rot? It's turned tarry deep in its belly, deep in its cells.

*

I love getting your letters, even if I don't respond.
I don't know what to say when your mother calls you ugly.

There's this crow in the yard who's been leaving ripped organs
to soak in our birdbath – I'd like to think as gifts for his mate.

I'm sure that doesn't help. Can art lift anything at all?
Consider this letter a flimsy lever for your sinking heart.

My son sat in the grass all morning and watched the trucks
smush dirt along the sidewalk, waving and waving.

*

I should have been afraid of the ponytail guy – his angelskin
shining, cut rivers of scars he said he dug out to get free.

Most threats don't stroll up in bodies you can point to,
don't settle themselves down on your stoop and sing.

My son was crying cause the operator didn't wave back to him.
I gathered him, his little hands around my neck smelling of dirt.

My husband keeps nagging me to fix the starter leaking gas
below the oven, but instead I light a match on my knees.

*

Do you remember that zombie party where we bathed
in red corn syrup? I walked home alone a red ghost.

In my dream, I wait for the man to appear on the back porch,
crack him good with a bat so his head sprouts red daffodils.

They've torn up the roses, the azaleas, the ferns. I keep
my son busy plopping cut potatoes in the water, crying still.

I don't know where this was going. Didn't you ask me if I
felt free back then? I didn't. I miss you. I don't.

Ricardo Tavárez

The Epic of la Morena

Abuela sweeps her hair back
Ties it up
Soy fea. I am ugly.
She says.

Such a common refrain.

I watch her hands
Weathered, but unwrinkled
Her fingers chorus
A more ancient verse
Of waters pulled
By an invisible moon
Onto a sand formally known as
Unknown
Formally known as
Hispanola
Formally known as
Ayiti

These hands
They sing for days longer
Than her words
Of the epic called
Morena. Black.

We used to have
Good hair
Esta familia. This family.
She says.

Such an unusual instruction.

Stay out of the sun.
But the sun is where I play.

Marry a white woman.
But my sisters are morenas.

For your babies. For the hair.
But I delight in my waves.

She tries to erase herself
Powdering her chest
Her hands laugh at her
Controlled but undefeated
With the divine wrapped in all their color

As we go
They hold me.
When I cross the street
When we go to buy plantains
When we smash them. Fry them.
Guiding my cursive, when I learn to write.
And when I say my prayers
Searching for God.

Sara Kyoungah White

Ichor

The blood of the gods runs
through the bodies of spiders;
Inhuman excess of legs and silk,
holy fear,
a smudge on the paper.

The bluest blue I have ever seen was
on the body of a mosquito magnified
a thousand times,
shimmering ethereal.

I lift a rock in the garden and
the swarm of mites
recalls a throng of children at recess,
all movement without sound,
a god's eye view.

The raspberry breaks apart in my fingers
like a large ant dismembered;
I find the pink heads and thoraxes
of its friends and lovers
bobbing on the water,
wedged in the crevices,
rolling around the bottom.

In the heavenly Jerusalem
all the insects of the world
will become the jewels paving
the road beneath the saints.

Matthew Luther

We'll Watch the Rain

The clouds are loud tonight
and I think this rain has fallen before

This is the rain that fell on the Ojibwe
and on their unnamed and forgotten ancestors
who mined copper in the North

It fell on Marquette and Pontiac
when they were men
Now they are cities
and it falls on them once more

It nourished the ice sheet
that sculpted the Lakes
200 million years
after it moistened the armored backs
of a thousand trilobites

-

We're in Michigan now
Let me touch the place on your belly
where they cut you when you were born

We'll watch the rain

Remember it does not fall for us
It falls on our flesh, and will fall on our dust

National Judge



Safia Elhillo is the author of *The January Children* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017), which received the Sillerman First Book Prize for African Poets and an Arab American Book Award; *Girls That Never Die* (forthcoming from One World/Random House; and the novel in verse *Home is not a Country* (Make Me A World/Random House, 2021). With Fatimah Asghar, she is co-editor of the anthology *Halal If You Hear Me* (Haymarket Books, 2019).

Sudanese by way of Washington, DC, Safia received the 2015 Brunel International African Poetry Prize and was listed in *Forbes Africa's* 2018 "30 Under 30." Her work has been translated into several languages, and her commissions include Under Armour, Cuyana, and ILIA Beauty. In 2018, she was awarded a Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation. Safia is currently a Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University and lives in Oakland.

Judges

Frankie Spring (pen name Popemodernist) lives in Grand Rapids, studies writing at GVSU, and is a writer, avid reader, and frequent performer of poetry. Frankie loves bringing local writers together and hosts regular poetry workshops, as well as poetry, art, and music shows. You can find them on social media @popemodernist.

Michaeleen Kelly is from the Little Warsaw neighborhood of Chicago and was the first laywoman to receive a PhD in philosophy from the University of Notre Dame. Her favorite poets include Stanley Kunitz, Czeslaw Milosz, Wyslawa Szymborska, and Maggie Smith. She has a very large family who keep her very busy! She encourages writers to read the works of a variety of great poets, determine what they like in the poetry they've read, and then start writing their own unique poem inspired by what they've read.

Jamie Roelofs loves camping, his cat, and used bookstores. He encourages other writers to avoid distraction if they can and read, read, READ! Fuel your brain with things other than Facebook posts and Twitter feeds. Be patient and kind to yourself. Learn from your mistakes, breathe, and keep going.

Judges' Comments

KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 2

First Place | "Buttercup"

I loved the rhythm of this poem, and the way the images of the horses transform from a larger, imagined landscape describing horses in general, to imagining the single, beloved horse named Buttercup.

— Safia Elhillo

Second Place | "Dude the Dog"

This poem put such a big smile on my face and in my heart. A poem that concludes with a doggy date?! Yes, please! Alliteration is sometimes funny, sometimes absurd, and this poem masterfully combines the two purposes! Now excuse me while I watch YouTube videos of dogs digging outside and getting into mischief!

— Kelsey May

Honorable Mention | "Mavy and the Sock"

This haiku is relatable to anyone who has pets. I have a little cat who likes to carry socks around and she looks so funny when she does it! The poem made me think of my cat, and it made me laugh, too.

— Frankie Spring

GRADES 3 – 4

First Place | "The Dangerous Storm"

This poem's superpower is its use of striking, interesting verbs. I was instantly drawn in by the action, and encountered vivid images in every line.

— Safia Elhillo

Second Place | "Orphan Train"

This young child's poem about the frightening experience of being a child refugee reveals a great deal of maturity and understanding in his realistic imagining of this awful situation. The reader empathizes with the abandoned child's frustration in figuring out why beloved and trusted adults act so arbitrarily in decisions about a child's destiny, while they navigate life in the best way they can in the nowhere's land of refugee children.

— Michaeleen Kelly

Honorable Mention | "Black Fire"

I love how many different ways this poem finds to describe dust. It tells me how dust feels on the speaker's skin, how it looks as it takes over the sky, and how it smells as it swallows things in its path. This poem is so descriptive, the dust storm feels alive.

— Frankie Spring

GRADES 5 – 6

First Place | "Wind"

What a beautiful, lyrical meditation! The cadence and the rhyme create the feeling of a gentle breeze. This poem is so soothing. Also, a sonnet!

— Safia Elhillo

Second Place | “A Poem about Shoes”

I really enjoy the rhythm of this poem! There’s so much energy being tossed around, and it certainly fits the content. This poem reminds me that I have shoe envy for a pair of light-up sneakers!

— Kelsey May

Honorable Mention | “Stinky Soup”

This poem focuses on using the sense of smell to overwhelm the reader and create sympathy for the speaker. I totally understand why the speaker didn’t want to eat that stinky soup!

— Kelsey May

GRADES 7 – 8

First Place | “Zoo Tiger”

This poem does such important questioning work, and I was captivated by its use of allegory. I am drawn to the way it raises questions about freedom, and about privilege.

— Safia Elhillo

Second Place | “Rare Sight”

The colors and places in this poem are so welcoming; this poem truly encompasses the mood many of us are seeking in the wearying on of this pandemic. How I’ve missed days when “Everybody is out to play!” Thanks for this poem and cheers, Jonathan! (And you have excellent taste in music!)

— Kelsey May

Honorable Mention | “But she can’t”

This poem uses frustrated thoughts and vivid images to show a time when the speaker’s mind was racing, but her body wouldn’t respond. It uses written words to tell me all the things the speaker is too nervous to say out loud. I love this poem because it can help people with social anxiety feel less alone.

— Frankie Spring

GRADES 9 – 10

First Place | “when the sun sets”

I love the tenderness of this poem! I love its interplay of striking plainspokenness and sweeping, sky-sized images.

— Safia Elhillo

Second Place | “Sisyphus”

The body of the poem is full of internal monologue and emotion, without background on who the speaker is, but the title references the well-known myth of Sisyphus. I love this because it gives me more context, saying something the poem itself doesn’t say. That’s what the best titles do, I think. They give you something extra that changes the way you see the poem.

— Frankie Spring

Honorable Mention | “the magic of rhythm”

This poem succeeds beautifully in opening the reader’s mind to the tremendous power music has on our psyches and our life instincts. In the idea “Music understands us,” she suggests that there’s a real synthesis between our desires and values and a transcendent mind which gives listeners an opportunity to engage in a vital cosmic dance which can comfort or exhilarate them depending on own needs for music.

— Michaelleen Kelly

GRADES 11 – 12

First Place | “Mother / Earth”

The lush dreamscape of this poem contains so many fascinating images and is so sharply observed. The use of parentheses, the switches from second to first person—this poem has so many moving parts, all expertly managed.

— Safia Elhillo

Second Place | “Afraid”

The emotions in this poem are so moving and relatable. The lines “People try to save her by saying they love her / But she doesn’t understand why” especially stand out to me. I wish sunshine and confidence to this poem’s character — and to the uncertain children in all of us.

— Kelsey May

Honorable Mention | “as I leave”

This poem expresses a provocative view on the acceptance of time as a force that wreaks ineradicable changes on one’s life. The ending provides her with a solution recommending immersion in the mysterious living collectivity of spirits existing across time’s reach.

— Michaelleen Kelly

UNDERGRADUATE

First Place | “Case Study of a Sunday”

I am fascinated by the work of time travel this poem is doing and the unexpectedness of each new stanza. The closing image is so vivid, so haunting, and, yes, so unexpected. I love it for its refusal of neatness, its refusal to tie the poem up with a little bow.

— Safia Elhillo

Second Place | “visiting our lady of the angels”

This poem astounds me. So much is at work here: the language, the movements from observing snow to a convent on fire to the final stanza where we watch a rabbit pushing itself under a fence. Our gaze turns outward in amazement and curiosity: “i couldn’t make a place mean anything / without someone else’s memories to tell me how.” Outstanding piece, Elizabeth!

— Kelsey May

Honorable Mention | “At a Shanghai Platform”

This piece feels like a microcosm of a relationship, skillfully represented through syntax. Charged initially with passion and significance, sentences extend long through lines and stanzas. Then the connection is broken and passion shifts to loss, but in such condensed form, this loss cannot be sustained. Sentences fragment as the mind loses focus, until the moment fades entirely and all that’s left is the self.

— Frankie Spring

Honorable Mention | “Blueberry Eulogy”

This poem provides a persuasive view of the complexity of the simplest fruits of nature, which have an ongoing symbiosis with Nature viewed as a whole. What makes this poem remarkable is the metaphysical leap made here: that truth about all beings in Nature can be discerned in the perfection of even the smallest being as its complexity and relationality unfolds in time even the most commonplace observations about blueberries.

— Michaelleen Kelly

ADULT

First Place | “Letter Written From My Kitchen Window”

I love the way this poem collages, with its stunning eye for detail, snapshots of a life, of longing. Its epistolary form aches in its intimacy. The whole thing aches, beautifully. I’ll be thinking about this poem for a long time.

— Safia Elhillo

Second Place | “The Epic of la Morena”

The poem’s power to inspire a spirit of mindfulness in the presence of elders and gratitude for such interactions lies in his tender account of his grandmother’s hands and touch. He describes in loving detail the seemingly autonomous capacity of her hands to carry him through the obstacle course of childhood and ultimately to a state of adult blessedness.

— Michaelleen Kelly

Honorable Mention | “Ichor”

Not only is the connection this poem makes between insect and deity fresh and surprising, it implies more than what is said: If spiders and gods, the simple and the grandiose of the universe, blend together, so does everything in between. In this sensory kitchen sink of particulars, all of them overlapping and becoming each other, a raspberry has a thorax and is capable of love, and every moment contains a constellation of wonder.

— Frankie Spring

Honorable Mention | “We’ll Watch the Rain”

Right from the first line, I’m hooked. Many of my absolute favorite poems combine scientific information with landscape and plot. The final section of the poem feels so tender after the icy history that was unveiled in the previous stanza. Thank you, Matthew, for writing a Michigan poem that honors those who lived here before the land was seized, that creates intimate awareness out of violent beginnings, that reminds us gently of our destiny to become dust.

— Kelsey May

Poet Bios

Adam Baker is a high school student in Grand Rapids. One time, a waitress at IHOP complimented his eyebrows. Some of his main inspirations are Audre Lorde, Yoko Ono, and Roger Waters.

Bella Grounin attends Forest Hills Central High School, and she wrote “when the sun sets” to describe her feelings.

Cecilia Magnone is in second grade and goes to school virtually in Chicago, where she recently moved from. Cecilia writes poetry because she thinks it is really fun, and she’s talented at it. Cecilia’s hobbies include singing, drawing, and reading.

Dia Sriram just finished eighth grade at Central Middle School. She has a passion for poetry and loves to write about her feelings and things she thinks should be talked about. She likes learning, playing instruments, and practicing tennis. She really enjoys listening to music too!

Disha Sriram is in fifth grade at Central Woodlands. She likes playing with LEGOs, singing, and being outside.

Eisley Sandefur was never really into poetry until she wrote a poem for class and felt her fingers flutter over the keyboard. She decided to submit the writing over music. She falls in love with music every day, and “the magic of rhythm” shows that. She attends Forest Hills Central and is in ninth grade. She loves cheering, golfing, and spending time with her family.

Eliana Parler finished sixth grade at Living Stones Academy. She is 12 years old, the oldest of six, and incredibly talkative. She loves to write and rhyme, so poetry is perfect for her! She has always wanted to be a writer so she could write an author’s note about herself.

Elizabeth Walztoni graduated from Aquinas College with a major in geography and a minor in writing. She writes poetry to take a break from fiction.

Fiona Bergin is going into eleventh grade at Grand Rapids Christian High School. She enjoys writing poetry and short stories, as well as reading fantasy. She hopes to pursue nursing and is also interested in acting.

Francesca Duong is a rising senior at the University of Michigan studying Asian Studies and Computer Science. Outside of writing, she loves drawing and binge-watching Netflix TV shows.

Jamie Yonker is still (yes, still) an undergrad student in the Grand Rapids area. She keeps her father’s original poems hung in her apartment as a reminder of the generational gifts we pass on when everything else feels like it has left us.

Jonathan Vincent Locke is 14 and enjoys (nearly) every aspect of writing. When he’s told writing is his strongest subject, he doesn’t let it go to his head. He likes being appreciated and surrounded by his friends.

Kipp De Man is a sophomore at Calvin University, pursuing a degree in Film Studies with Minors in Writing and Dutch Language. He finds that writing poetry is an excellent way to process or ponder the wonderful complexity of life.

Madi Hammond attends Forest Hills Eastern. She writes poetry to express emotions that she can’t convey through normal speech.

MaKenna Moore attends Forest Hills Eastern Middle School. Last year, MaKenna had an amazing teacher Dr. Keller who helped inspire her to write poetry. “But she can’t” is based on how hard it is for MaKenna and a lot of other students to deal with social anxiety.

Mason Wietfeldt is 8 years old, homeschooled, and likes writing poems about his dog. He is cute and funny. He likes to build LEGOs, play Minecraft, read, and write. He is notorious for finding cool rocks and fossils everywhere he goes.

Matthew Luther is a writer born and raised in West Michigan. His work is inspired by the history and natural beauty of the area.

Megan Klco Kellner is a writer, artist, and museum educator who falls in love with all the small details in her life daily and has a terrible time keeping anything organized. Writing poems is a good cure for jumbled thoughts. Her chapbook *What Will You Teach Her?* won the Michigan Writers Cooperative 2019 prize.

Mercy Steed writes poetry because she learned a lot in class. Mercy is in second grade, and she likes to go on the swings. Mercy's poem is about a dog named Dude.

Oliver Nelson attends Grand Rapids Christian.

Pabegg Anyijong attends Grand Rapids Christian.

Reuben Rodenhouse attends Grand Rapids Christian.

Ricardo Tavárez is an Afro-Latino writer of Dominican and Puerto Rican heritage. He interweaves themes of faith and race into his writing. His poetry often includes a "Spanglish" flavor, reflecting his cultural upbringing.

Ruby Parler likes writing poems because they are beautiful, like a warm breeze flowing or a young stream. She also loves dogs, just finished fifth grade, and is homeschooled by her mom.

Sara Kyoungah White is an editor and writer living in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Tananya Prankprakma is a high school student trying to make the most of her suburban life. She enjoys sharing good food with friends, watching foreign films, and reading in the sun.



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