

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY PRESENTS

VOICES

THE 2022 DYER-IVES
POETRY COMPETITION

The Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition

This year, we celebrate the 54th anniversary of the Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition! The annual competition was launched 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.

The dedication and talents shown by folks in our community astounds me. Thank you to all those who give their time and energy to nurturing young poets. You make this local competition a significant annual literary event! I'd like to recognize Anne Keller, Abby Zwart, Kathy Vogel, Nancy Hoffman, Steve Tuit, and Susan Kraus for their efforts to bring poetry to the classroom.

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 the Festival of the Arts every June. The competition is divided into multiple age categories, and winners and honorable mentions are published in *Voices*. First and second place winners also receive cash prizes.

A heartfelt thank you to Hannah Snow for designing the snazzy publication you're holding, as well as all the competition's promotional materials.

A gigantic, enthusiastic thank you to this year's preliminary judges: Amanda Zerilli, Megan Klco Kellner, and Tae Scott! We had a record-breaking 415 entries this year, and y'all carefully considered every single one.

A nationally-known poet selects the winners each year. Past national judges include Anne Sexton, 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 Nemeč Foster, Mark Doty, Azizi Jasper, Nancy Huang, Keith S. Wilson, and Safia Elhillo.

My utmost thanks to 2022's dedicated and attentive national judge, José Olivarez.

Lastly, all of this would not have been possible without the dedication of incredible GRPL staff members Megan Biggins, Tyler Davis, Kristen Krueger-Corrado, Jeanessa Smith, and Katie Zychowski. 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, 2022 Coordinator

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Grades
K – 2

the fastest poem in the
whole wide world

The Glorious Poem

My New Car

Xander Tap-Howell

the fastest poem in the whole wide world

I am a race car,
fast as can be!
I'm fast as a jaguar, cool as a tree!
I really like to drive in tar!

Daedalus Shipman-Smyrniotis

The Glorious Poem

Kittens are wearing mittens.
Cats are wearing hats.

The snow is snowy.
The wind is blowy.

The day is bright.
Dark is the night.

Owen E. Sullivan

My New Car

One Christmas my aunt got us a car.
But our new car
didn't go that far
until it broke down.
My sister cried countless tears
so I said, "Have no fears!"
I went to a dealer
got some parts
then I was out of there.
I fixed it up
and prayed it would cruise.
Just thinking it wouldn't,
gave my brain a bruise.
And what do you know...
it worked!

Grades
3 – 4

The Colors of the Earth

Deep in the Forest

Hands Like Trees

Jubie Steed

The Colors of the Earth

Brown, yes brown, is a color in the earth
Is it the color of death or the color of birth?
Or maybe it's true, I need to try something new
Like blue

Blue, yes blue, is a color of light
And the question is: Is blue the day or the night?
Or maybe, come on, let me think
Maybe, just maybe, I should try pink

Pink, yes pink, is the color of a pig
And even though I like to write
This poem is rather big!

Lumi Ehlich

Deep in the Forest

The leaves shake.
The trees awake.
The forest is alive.
Under the trees.
Through the breeze.
The forest is full of wonder.
The twigs crack.
The sky is black.
The forest is whispering secrets.
The snake hisses.
The wind swishes.
The forest creatures speak.
The crow flies.
The eagle cries.
The sky is full of life.
The pines sway.
The mouse is prey.
The forest calls the night.
Darkness falls.
The cat calls.
The forest trees are dancing.
The squirrels skitter.
The chipmunks chitter.
Deep in the forest.

Ramona Scurek

Hands Like Trees

My hands are really long.
They reach past my knees.
And when I entered the play
The director said I'd be trees.

"That job is too easy,"
I stubbornly said.
"Even thinking about it
Puts me to sleep in bed!"

But the director didn't listen.
He just shooed me away.
I am never ever again
entering a play.

Grades
5 – 6

Our Climate Creation

A Flower

Voyage to the
Great Unknown

Liam Milzarski

Our Climate Creation

A hotter earth for us to walk,
less clean air to breathe.
Every season,
We commit treason
Against OUR earth.

Wildfires combust out of control
while we just take a stroll.
Ozone layer depleting;
It's taking quite a beating.
Now it's fleeting.
Fleeting away from us.

No
More
Air
to
Breathe.

We are like fishes on dishes.
Gasping.
Choking.
Stoking our fear.

We burn fossil fuels.
It saves a couple pretty jewels.

Yet...
Sea levels rising.

UP,
UP,
UP,

Up to a dangerous height,
causing quite a fright.

Dazed, we walk through the haze of our days.
Unaware, we stare into the void of despair.

Now, the brave must engrave upon destiny
and show the future what they gave
To SAVE humanity,

So let us use less of it!
Less of the inky oil that comes from the soil.
In fact, it's quite cheaper, I say,
To use sunlight from day
with solar panels
made by those who wear flannels.

We can switch from aerosols to pump sprays,
and follow Ozone Action Days.
We can use wind — not experimentally — but intentionally.

For this, we will create

a cooler earth for us to walk,
more fresh air to inhale.
And every season,
A new, beautiful reason
To bless OUR universe.

Climate CAN change.
And WE can rearrange.

Let us BE
The Instigator,
The Innovator.
NOT
The Agitator,
The Aggravator.

Our hearts beating like a drum
— ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum —
Resonating
with
OUR
EARTH.

Echoes through the caves at night,
Our call against inaction
Reverberating
Regurgitating
Recirculating
Remotivating
Reactivating

The end is near.
We can see the light at the other end of the tunnel.
Crawling out of the cave and into the light.
The light is blinding at first,
but we can see the future
after we adjust.

Reagan Grinwis

A Flower

Just a seedling
Planted in the dirt
By a little girl
Wearing a skirt.

Day by day
That seedling grew.
It turned green
To yellow
To beautiful blue.

On that day
While the seedling grew
The little girl saw what had to be true.

Oh yes, that flower
Was the most tall
Taller than the mountains
Taller than it all.

Darshan Khandavalli

Voyage to The Great Unknown

A seed leaves its nest,
riding in the wind,
to journey to the great unknown.
Murky gray clouds fill the dark air.
Stenches of mortality and dejection linger in its path.
Giants with fire wings make deafening roars.
Should an abyss break its light?
Should darkness cover it up?

An attracting flower calls from the underbrush.
A lovely song comes out of a bird.
The phoenix sings in the night.
Must it avoid beauty?

The tears of a cloud fall to the ground, nourishing it.
The fire falls like rocks.
A beam of white lights up the ground.
And the seed grows.

Grades
7 – 8

The Ghost of My Love

Dear Teacher

Ivy

Sophia Fata

The Ghost of My Love

Instead of falling in love with people
Fall in love with life
People will break your heart
And they won't think twice
The world will always stay with you
Until your dying days
You should fall in love with the feeling of wind
Or the sound of rain
You will learn to love life
And you won't need to complain
You won't feel the sorrow or grief
Of a loved one dying
Or a pet that is deceased
If you fall in love with the world
You could stop loving me

Naiara Tamminga

Dear Teacher

Dear teacher,

Is the school system failing you or is it just me?
Did your teachers teach you the same thing you're teaching me?
I get it you say we have to learn
everything, but poverty and inequality isn't part of everything?
It's really nice of you to get a book so that every day of February we learn
about one famous black person.
You know you can buy that book anytime right?
Black people still exist March through January
When I ask you why we're learning this, you say it's the curriculum
But it's 2022 and still we don't learn enough about the black community
It's like we can't teach you about anything else if it's not the assigned month
MLK and Rosa Parks are great
But there are so many more people in the black community
I want to learn about actors, singers, dancers, poets
All a kid in our classroom needs is to hear you talk about someone like them
Now I'm not saying you're racist but you might be
How do you think a black student feels when you only teach them about
black people one month of the year?
To some teachers this question never crosses their mind
To others it's only a minor concern
Dear teacher, if the curriculum can be changed, why are you allowing
future generations to learn the same thing?
Sincerely, just a kid

Abigail Miller

Ivy

Dancing freely under a blue sky
A stress free world where I call you mine
Just ourselves we'll always be
A place where you're right next to me
Vibrant colors all around
No dead weeds to plague the ground
Just healthy plants of the deepest green
Anxiety nowhere to be seen
What a lovely world I see
With a calming melody
But imperfection clouds the sky
And to that world I say goodbye

Grades
9 – 10

Trying, Trying, Trying

I Am Home

An Ode to my First Piano

Tradey

Sara Huyser

Trying, Trying, Trying

Most days I feel like a young girl,
Balancing on tipped toes and
Tugging,
Tugging,
Tugging,
On the sleeve of a parent distracted
By dinner table conversations.
Breathlessly performing
A living room routine,
Twirling,
Twirling,
Twirling,
For half-hearted applause in return.
Learning how to write,
Pencil, all too big, in hand
Trying,
Trying,
Trying,
But never getting the letters quite right.
Desperately seeking an ounce of reassurance,
But only ever being met with the disappointment of shaking heads.
Frantically trying to grasp what seems to come to others so naturally,
But only ever being told to try harder, you'll get it someday.

I have been trying harder.
When will I get it?

Alexandra VanDrunen

I Am Home

I am from divorce
I am from switching back and forth
I am from two Christmases
I am from missing home

I am from walking in the woods
I am from movies on Friday night
I am from swimming all day
I am from home

I am from abuse and fear
I am from hiding
I am from CPS and lawyers
I am from missing home

I am from mom hugs
I am from cookout Sundays
I am from 18 cousins, all really close
I am from home

I am from LGBTQ pride
I am from finding myself
I am from being proud of who I became
I am home

Robyn Tatko

An Ode to My First Piano

It stands upright and brown,
Softly decorated as a classical pillar, a beloved library.
My childhood was held in this:
Wooden blockers under the bench just so I could reach,
My hands balanced on my mom's, playing my first songs.
I learned harmonies and melodies,
Chords and arpeggios, scales and symphonies.
A dancing couple, in three-four,
A storm with snow, or a flute, a cello, a choir...
I had to learn to challenge myself before I could challenge the world.
Making me challenge myself to learn to challenge the world.
Fairy tales, crunching leaves, and battles.

One day, a lady opened its heart, so she tuned
the heart strings. I watched my own heart strings be pulled and tugged.
I played sonatinas and preludes
Clementi, Mozart, and Debussy.
My sister and I together could play a whole dancing festival,
My mother and I a grand and glorious wedding: The Golden Wedding.

But one day a heart string broke, the note I played the most.
High D above middle C, I remember clearly.
And so we got a new piano.

Simran Kaur

Tradey

Words

Big and small

Can ruin a whole world

Or save another

A four-letter word can change a life

And the same can ruin someone else's

Words are underestimated

The underdogs of ruin

They shatter, kill, and love

They are something humans will never master

Leaving us struggling

Powerful

Big and small

Words

Grades
11 – 12

Grandfather

Ode to
Christiane Génessier

The one that got away

Evelyn Sprague

Grandfather

Laying there,
Resting
He's fallen asleep again
With the volume a little too loud
Mouth wide open

I sit next to him,
Waiting
For the inevitable snore
Loud and dooming
It jolts him awake

But
It doesn't come
It never will again
It is just silent

But
He looks so peaceful
He looks like he is just
"Resting his eyes"

I hold his hand,
Waiting
For him to tell the story
Of the tiger's eye
Wrapped on his finger

Being told I have to go
Knowing,
I can't wait anymore
I kiss his head
One last time

Adam Baker

Ode to Christiane Génessier

He swerves, but too late
Your cries muffled by
The screeching of brakes
The grinding of metal
And the tearing of flesh

Your father's trophy shattered
Disfigured by his own hands
Your beauty, which he so valued
Reduced to grotesque scars and burns
Suited only by a carnival waltz
To highlight your monstrosity

Forced by him
To live a living death
And hide your face behind a mask
Smooth and fair as porcelain
To hide the shameful truth
Your face frightens you
The mask, even more

Forced by him
Into the silence of the grave
Standing silent by the phone
Your lover on the line
Hearing her voice
Was worth his reprimands

Your father
Practitioner of unhallowed arts
Experimented on you
Like a hound
To give you a new face
"For your own good
Always for your good, Christiane"
But when you stood alone at the mirror
The face you saw staring back
Was from beyond the grave

And, as if to confirm
That the face was not your own,
Even it rejected you
And began to rot
With it, your humanity
Gone without a trace
To the whole world you'll only be
Eyes without a face

Fueled by pain and isolation
You finally let slip
The dogs of vengeance
His cries muffled by
The screeching of hounds
The grinding of teeth
The tearing of flesh
And the coo of the single dove
That landed in your hand
A being filled with grace
To it, you'll never just be
Eyes without a face

Xavier Wright

The one that got away

A kid from Compton looked around.
He saw rocks get flipped to pounds.
Markets turn to black,
Boarded up, no rebound.

All this street walkin',
Gang bangin',
Guns slingin',
Fast talkin',
Pad lockin',
Necks hangin',
Nothin' changin'.

A youth with speech impediments,
Music was development,
Used to reach a betterment,
Who's to say she let him in?

Before the streets led him astray,
Drugs, sex, money, he coulda stayed.
Praise the Lord for his lovely wordplay.
"Yo, Kenny!
You the one that got away!"

Undergraduate

Mercy

They pretend to hold clouds,

I made you a playlist but
you don't know that

Plume's Choice

Chiara Nicholas

Mercy

A bird hit the glass pane of my fishbowl
house one morning, several summers ago.
I retrieved its soft body with gingerly care
the way one would cradle a chiffon
wedding veil, so afraid it might cling to fingernail and tear.

I knew the sharp thump of its impact
meant nothing good for its fragile ribs,
tiny heart broken, yet
still beating. I was unsure
how to help it, did not know how
to push enough air back into its lungs.

My dad took out a shovel, scooped up the bird,
went to the side of the house and came back,
told me he laid the bird to rest on a bed
of wilted lily bouquets.
I pretended not to notice the dirt smudged
on his wedding ring.

All he said was that the bird was gone,
out of its misery. Sometimes there is humanity
in killing things and you have to know
when to let go of the things already gone.

Brooke Shannon

they pretend to hold clouds,

(after *Yellow Rows*, Winfred Rembert, 2014)

the cotton, that is.
black bags cling
intrusively to their bodies;
weigh as heavy
as children but are
better than chains,
they feel. they swiftly
gather Southern economy
at its base, careful not
to shred the deepened
shades of brown. sweat
gathers at their lips,
spirituals escape them.
they grasp onto faith
massa's Savior encourages.
and in the white sea in which
their brown hands labor
lies a haunting hope
that one day,
their children
would not know
life amongst
the yellow rows.

Brooke Rempalski

I made you a playlist but you don't know that

I know you hate
where you are and that brings me
the utmost joy.

I don't wish you ill but
I wish that you'll think about me and it'll make you sick.
You better cover your bathroom in vomit
that you'll have to soak up in your takeout napkins.
Your fever will run so hot and high
that you'll burn
the whole place down.
You'll wake up surrounded by ashes
and know that it's your fault.

I served you all that I could make.
Gray clouds with silver platter linings,
if you held your awful perfect sharp terrible pitiful nice face
to the plate,
if you pressed your cheeks
into the forks and knives,
and dug your spoon in,
and ate your heart out,
could you see what I do?

I shed too much
and not enough,
I shaved myself down,
I lost my edges,
so I could be your perfect sphere.
I've carved myself immovable now,
you never had any reason to touch me.

You never touched me,
You *never* touched me.
If I look like poison, couldn't
you try to pick me?
Couldn't you drink me down,
I wanted to travel down your gullet
and sit in your stomach
and rock around with the bugs down there.
I wanted
I wanted.
You're so easily forgettable
that I've already forgotten
which one this is to

I remember now

You should have kissed me
before I wanted you
to bite your tongue off
so I never have to hear you say
anything else

Brenna Newhouse

Plume's Choice

Can we be the cardinal couple
shivering in the tree?
There's one branch for you and a
splintering one for me.
I'll stare at the fence, the warm
hearths beyond.
The leaves of 21 falls will be
our bed underground.
My beak snuffs bright towards
the sky to yank it low.
A curtain of stingers drags
our wings to ground.
Everything topples, except for the
sun,
I want her here to warm my red
plume because you are not the one.

"I know how you feel," I say to the bird,
and his pointed head turns.
You try while her tail shakes,
but you can't stop writing the end.
I was dreaming you could see me
for who I really am
In the middle of the lake, the
one Effy retreats to when
She's feeling bored or down and
the shed is taken up.
You peddle down South when things
hint at getting dicey
Learn pretentious nicknames
and yell at a dinner date,
"I'm proud of you," and
smack him over the head
with all the winds coming to him.

Swallow the tail, maroon beauty.
You don't know what's coming.
Garage smithing
Window biting
Buds strangling
or strangled,
by you?

The moon soars each night, watching
us prepare the nest
An engine turns over as I notice
your empty branch
The zigzag you said was always mine,
which my wings never crest.
Your branch points north, I marvel
at your boldness,
But only when you're gone.
I was hoping you wouldn't notice.

Adult

To Whom it May Concern

Again and again

Overextended

Every Good Man Attends
His Own Funeral

Amy G. S. A. Brooks

To Whom it May Concern

This is to let you know
I will no longer be engaging in the economy
of Making it Look Easy.

I am now fully invested
in Making it Look Hard.

Hard like the diamonds that drip from my eyes,
like my muscles, tensed against the strain,
like the rebar of my spine.

I will draw dividends from the account
of Making it Look Soft.

Soft like the marrow at the core of my bones,
like the blood magic in my veins,
like the forest of nerves
daring to spread branches
into my epidermis.

I realize the fullness of my humanity
inconveniences your inclination
to shove me into your wallet, but

I do not owe you the appearance
of the absence of effort.

Bear witness: my labor is precious.

I have poured too much of myself into this endeavor
to ever have anyone mistake it
for easy.

Hannah Marshall

Again and again

an infant strains her head upward,
her neck a green shoot,
a tomato seedling released to the wind.
The first muscles
each of us honed were those buried
deep in our chests, and the last
were the ones we used to reach out,
curiosity building hot within us.

My grandmother is the last of her sisters
to still be reaching out, to still
be out in her backyard
with a wheelbarrow of mulch
she's no longer strong enough to tread down the hill:
she sits and pushes it with her legs
until the neighbor sees from his window
and comes to help.

Again and again the snow comes and with it,
loss. The white is bleak
but patient. I have never seen a body
which could remain unchanged. Houseplants
lean one way, then the other, gathering light.
The toddler bends her mouth around the word giraffe.
Cars skid along roadways, and the cedars keep
the deep green of dreamers.

Again and again, consciousness,
halving the avocado, giving it to my body
for what I will touch and do and speak today.
Cake pink with buttercream,
the spicy florals of oolong, the window which promises
the world, all icicles and stray cats and
berms littered with disposable masks.

I change from one body to the next. From
one awareness to another, the scent of wet mittens
on the heater, the click-and-shuffle
of the upstairs tenants returning home.
The slip of soap over palms. Lift your head and see
what you once were so eager for.

Todd Mercer

Overextended

I let them take it, everything, since they want it so much.
It required Two Men and A Truck. It took warehouse storage
to hold it until auction or redemption. 'Til Christ returns,
if they need it that long. Karma comes to repossessioners.
Don't work in that field if your soul is uncorroded,
if you're clean or close to clean. The ledger measures
receipts minus expenses. It indicates negative totals
too often for me to retain my main belongings. Enough said
on a subject that's surely and sadly familiar
to half of everybody: the flat-broke,
near-broke, the working-broke, the screwed
and the screwed-next-month. If this isn't you,
it's your neighbors, cousins, classmates:
s.o.l. and up a creek, now unqualified
to retain title to their property,
their self, name, likeness, image.

Amanda Pszczolkowski

Every Good Man Attends His Own Funeral

I'm trying to remember if I died
between the bars on Bridge Street.
Lucas asked me,
 one day over a Rams game,
 because, see, Stafford joined the team,
asked if I'd seen the car that ran up
the electrical pole outside Bridge Street
Market. Straight up the pole
like it was reaching up for the streetlight.

 The intersection closed following
 the accident, at least a half a day
 following the accident, in order to unstick
 the car that was stuck standing up the pole.
 Wrapped around the pole,
as he described it. See, I don't remember a lot
of that autumn. I fall asleep to scrolling
through photos, attaching red strings
across screenshots and pictures.
 Parker said he wanted to buy
 you a funnel for Christmas
 as we saw you pour oil into the carcass
 of your car from a couch.

Every good man owns a funnel.

Parker ripped his pants at a wedding
Waltzed his bare ass in the morning after,
two mornings after a cop saw Lucas shower
the shrubs of a hotel front entrance.
 And you made pancakes for me
 and the girl you slept with the night before,
 all that autumn, if I remember it correctly,
 and in December, you never got a funnel.

I think there was a funeral.
 I started writing invites to yours:
 Here you lie.
There was water,
 and stumbling
 home as you peeled socks and sand
 from between your toes. You hung on
 my shoulders. I watched myself die
 over and over
 between the bars on Bridge Street.
Each time you joked about jumping
into the Grand River, I thought you might
do it.

National Judge



José Olivarez is the son of Mexican immigrants. His debut book of poems, *Citizen Illegal*, was a finalist for the PEN/Jean Stein Award and a winner of the 2018 Chicago Review of Books Poetry Prize. It was named a top book of 2018 by *The Adroit Journal*, NPR, and the New York Public Library. Along with Felicia Chavez and Willie Perdomo, he co-edited the poetry anthology *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 4: LatiNEXT*. He is the co-host of the poetry podcast *The Poetry Gods*.

In 2018, he was awarded the first annual Author and Artist in Justice Award from the Phillips Brooks House Association and named a Debut Poet of 2018 by *Poets & Writers*. In 2019, he was awarded a Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation. His work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, and elsewhere.

Preliminary Judges

Megan Klco Kellner is an artist, writer, and museum educator with an MFA from Kendall College of Art and Design and a BFA from Truman State University. Her paintings have been exhibited regionally and nationally. Her poetry chapbook *What Will You Teach Her?* won the 2019 Michigan Writers Cooperative Press Prize. She and her husband are birding, planting flowers, and trying to raise two good humans in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Taylor Taylor, also known as **Tae Scott**, is a spoken word artist who will bring you to tears and laughter with the performance of a single piece. Her raw emotions captivate the audience and immediately bond them to her life experiences. This incredible energy won Taylor a spot on the first team to represent West Michigan in a National Poetry Slam in over a decade. Her body of work focuses on finding God's peace and healing during and after life's storms. Although she loves poetry, her main focuses in life are being the best mother she can be to her daughter and helping others on their journey to healing.

Zerilli is a spoken word artist that claims the stage. She creates space for complicated cultural subjects through her autobiographical poetry. She has competed in national poetry competitions, including the Individual World Poetry Slam in 2017 and the National Poetry Competition in 2018, where her team placed third in group finals. While competitions are exciting, her biggest accomplishments have been personal growth through writing, using poems in therapy to heal, and providing support and encouragement to others. Everyone can be a poet, and there should be no gatekeeping in education. Her dream is for people to realize their own power and how much their voices matter, both on and off the page.

Judges' Comments

KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 2

First Place | "the fastest poem in the whole wide world"

I love a hyperbolic claim. Is this poem the fastest poem in the whole wide world? I don't know, but this poem is fast, and its rhymes are sharp. A true joy!

— José Olivarez

Second Place | "The Glorious Poem"

I'm incredibly impressed with the style and energy of this first-time poem! I read it multiple times, and each time, I laughed and smiled. An absolute joy to read! I can't wait to read your second, third, fourth, and beyond.

— Amanda Zerilli

Third Place | "My New Car"

This writer built a story with suspense! I loved the twisty use of language in rhyming cruise with 'gave my brain a bruise.'

— Megan Klco Kellner

GRADES 3 – 4

First Place | "The Colors of the Earth"

This is a beautiful poem. It gives depth and possibility to the colors mentioned and ends on an observation of itself that is a joy to read. I love it.

— José Olivarez

Second Place | "Deep in the Forest"

This poem is dancing with life! It moves quickly and rhythmically and paints a vivid picture of a whole, dynamic world from sky to forest floor. I was so impressed by the richness and rhythm of this poem.

— Megan Klco Kellner

Honorable Mention | "Hands Like Trees"

Everyone has a least favorite thing about themselves. I like that the person in this poem did not allow themselves to be limited by their appearance. This piece reflects such a mature topic and is very relatable. Many of us have been at a point in life where we refuse to try something new, in fear of it bringing forth our insecurities.

— Tae Scott

GRADES 5 – 6

First Place | “Our Climate Creation”

This poem succeeds as a call to action and in its music and language. The writer delights and educates equally. This is a poem to read aloud and share with each other.

— José Olivarez

Second Place | “A Flower”

When writing a specific type of poem, it can be hard to find resolution. I was happy to see this poem do that while sticking to the pattern.

— Tae Scott

Honorable Mention | “Voyage to the Great Unknown”

The journey of a seed inspired me to search deeper and consider my own journey. Adversity brings blooms, and this poem does a considerable job bringing that home. Beautiful work!

— Amanda Zerilli

GRADES 7 – 8

First Place | “The Ghost of My Love”

I love how sensory-rich this poem is. It is delightful to read and the twist at the end is forceful. This is a beautiful poem.

— José Olivarez

Second Place | “Dear Teacher”

“Dear Teacher” is a reminder to all that structural racism is alive and looming. This poem emphasizes that in order to create change, we must change the literature and tools used to teach our youth. This writer is an activist in the making, and I look forward to everything they will engage in. They are indeed someone to look out for.

— Amanda Zerilli

Honorable Mention | “Ivy”

This poem reminds me of every ‘feel good’ coming-of-age movie I’ve ever seen. In just a few lines, the artist took us from being in bliss to learning to live in and accept reality. This was very well-written.

— Tae Scott

GRADES 9 – 10

First Place | “Trying, Trying, Trying”

The repetition in this poem gives it a rhythm and urgency I admire. The language is simple and restrained, but the poem moves quickly and produces a sense of desperation. By the time the last couplet arrives, we are there with the speaker echoing their question.

— José Olivarez

Second Place | “I Am Home”

A true gem of a statement poem. The writer weaves this story with a strong voice throughout the piece. The blunt honesty and frankness create trust and empathy between the speaker and reader. I truly enjoyed the way the poem crescendos into self-awareness and acceptance. This is a writer that needs to be cultivated and invested in.

— Amanda Zerilli

Honorable Mention | “An Ode to My First Piano”

I loved the tenderness of this poem and the way the piano lives in it as a silent, steadfast character. I felt a real pang of sadness when the piano string broke. That’s how vividly this writer paints her piano as a friend.

— Megan Klco Kellner

Honorable Mention | “Tradey”

Words can create actions. This poem takes the common phrase “A four-letter word” and refreshes it to remind us of the power of words, not just in language, but in the action they can inspire. Words are powerful, and it is our job to handle them responsibly. Such a phenomenal poem that makes us pause and reflect.

— Amanda Zerilli

GRADES 11 – 12

First Place | “Grandfather”

This poem uses simple language to convey the complicated truths of grief. Reading this poem made me want to cry and feel and release all of my own grief. I’m grateful for this poem.

— José Olivarez

Second Place | “Ode to Christiane Génessier”

“Ode to Christiane Génessier” is truly haunting: the main character becomes a science experiment at the hands of her father, who should have protected and supported her instead. She is “Forced by him / to live a living death” and eventually, his surgical attempts fail and horrifyingly “rot”. The vengeance sought in the final stanza isn’t a happy ending in the least; instead, I feel saddened that mistake after mistake resulted in such disaster. This poem tackles tough issues using the genre of horror but still manages to offer a dignified perspective instead of only dealing in stereotypes.

— Kelsey May

Honorable Mention | “The one that got away”

This piece gives me chills. The poem is fast-paced and takes readers on a journey through a reality that many face — even individuals who have had the privilege to not know that life. The language and imagery team up to carry us through an experience that ends too early and leaves a delicious shiver of pride in the author.

— Amanda Zerilli

UNDERGRADUATE

First Place | “Mercy”

The details in “Mercy” are unforgettable — “the dirt smudged / on his wedding ring” stands out. This poem is layered and demands multiple reads. For the tiny bird in the poem, for all of the implied heartbreaks in the poem, and for all its wisdom.

— José Olivarez

Second Place | “they pretend to hold clouds,”

‘Pretending to hold clouds’ works so well as both a description of cotton and a metaphor for the feeling of holding onto hope. I love it when a poem’s form is the right match for its meaning. This poem has the slow cadence of the brutal work it’s describing. Its short lines give it a determined, measured rhythm.

— Megan Klco Kellner

Third Place | “I made you a playlist but you don’t know that”

There was an element of surprise in every stanza. The verbiage used made me feel the raw emotion of loving someone until you hate them. The metaphors in this piece put the cherry on top.

— Tae Scott

Honorable Mention | “Plume’s Choice”

I enjoy the personification of nature intertwined with the natural world. The introspection in both worlds collides to create a depth that penetrates both. The poem weaves in and out, sprinkled with one liners that had me pause to give space and question how they relate to the poem and to myself. A truly phenomenal piece that creates an appreciation for nature and the human experience.

— Amanda Zerilli

ADULT

First Place | “To Whom it May Concern”

I love this poem for so many reasons. Sly and rebellious, this poem makes me want to rob a bank. This is a powerful poem that will resonate with anyone over the way capital dominates our lives and then demands that we suffer quietly.

— José Olivarez

Second Place | “Again and again”

This poem lives delightfully in the present. Its sensorial meditation on the rhythm of ordinary life felt like prayer to me. Reading this did for me what the last lines ask of the reader: after reading it, I lifted my head and more fully experienced my world.

— Megan Klco Kellner

Third Place | “Overextended”

Repossession can be seen as a taboo topic. It was refreshing to read about. The emotion was beautifully captured.

— Tae Scott

Honorable Mention: “Every Good Man Attends His Own Funeral”

The voice and tone of this poem stood out to me. It’s frank and conversational. It stops and starts like someone fumbling to recall a story to a friend. There’s an uneasy mix of freedom and foreboding in this poem that stuck with me long after I read it.

— Megan Klco Kellner

Poet Bios

Abigail Miller is in eighth grade at Cross Creek Charter Academy. She likes music, whether listening to it, making it, or writing songs. She writes poems on a pretty regular basis and uses them for lyrics. "Ivy" is actually the chorus for a song she wrote with the same name.

Adam Baker is a high school student in Grand Rapids. His poem "Afraid" placed second in the 11th-12th Grade category of the 2021 Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition. His poems express deeply emotional experiences and are often inspired by pop culture, music, and others' poetry, including work by Roger Waters, Yoko Ono, and Audre Lorde. "Ode to Christiane G n ssier" explores feelings of inadequacy and self-loathing using the story of the 1960 film *Eyes Without A Face*. The poem embraces the film's parallel structure and contains quotes from the film and allusions to *Frankenstein* and *Julius Caesar*. The poem likens Christiane's experiences to those of a girl whose father is abusive and unsupportive; one of its central themes is the injustice of having one's humanity denied based on some superficial aspect.

Alexandra VanDrunen loves writing poems and song lyrics, which began as an outlet to get their anger and stress out! Writing helps them express who they are without judgment.

Amanda Pszczolkowski is a recent graduate of Grand Valley State University, living and working in Grand Rapids. She spends her days with her friends, more or less to visit their pets, and her nights finding stories to tell.

Amy G. S. A. Brooks is a cisgender, queer, Australian-born immigrant to the United States who loves a good cup of hot tea and hates mornings. She is the author of *Another Scroll: Defiant Readings for Lectionary Year C*. She is a Unitarian Universalist minister, and she also works as a library page within the Grand Rapids Public Library system.

Brenna Newhouse is from Grand Rapids, where she loves to garden, hike, and bicycle. She feels most connected to her community while caring for neighborhood children, leading Geography Club, and going on camping adventures. Brenna attends Grand Valley State University and studies Geography, Sustainable Urban and Regional Planning, and Writing. She aspires to be a leader in communities by inspiring love and care for our people and environment.

Brooke Rempalski is a freshman at Grand Valley State University. She is pursuing Writing as a major and enjoys reading and writing in her free time.

Brooke Shannon is a third-year student at Grand Valley State University, studying Writing, African and African American Studies, and Psychology. She uses poetry to tell stories of Black experience. Outside of reading and writing, Brooke enjoys conversation over Earl Grey tea and watching cooking videos.

Chiara Nicholas graduated from Grand Valley State University in April 2022 with a double major in Writing and Psychology. Her work focuses on advocating for mental health and connecting people in our shared, and sometimes unpleasant, life experiences.

Daedalus Shipman-Smyrniotis is homeschooled and in kindergarten. "We often read poems, but this was the first poem I ever wrote."

Darshan Khandavalli likes to write poems with meanings that people can interpret differently. Darshan also loves to play the piano and learn new things. He is in sixth grade and attends Central Woodlands.

Evelyn Sprague is a senior at East Grand Rapids High School. She is involved in the drama program and plays field hockey. She enjoys writing poetry to help understand her emotions and to talk about difficult experiences in her life for people to relate to so they know they aren't alone.

Hannah Marshall lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she works at Grand Rapids Public Library and as the poetry editor for *South 85 Journal*. Marshall's poem "This Is a Love Poem to Trees" appears in *The Best American Poetry 2021*. Her poems have also been published in *New Ohio Review*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *I-70 Review*, *Poetry Daily*, and elsewhere. Her manuscript *The Shape That Good Can Take* was a finalist for the 2021 St. Lawrence Book Award. She received her MFA in creative writing from Converse University.

Jubie Steed loves singing and writing songs. Her sister Mercy inspired her to write poems, and she sometimes turns her songs into poems. She hopes to become a singer.

Liam Milzarski is a sixth grader at Zoo School (Grand Rapids Public Schools). He loves building with LEGOs and playing Minecraft. He also enjoys nature and spending time with his family. "Our Climate Creation" was written as part of his environmental issues project in school, for which he had researched many aspects of climate change policy, science, and leadership. He feels a deep emotional attachment to the problem of climate change and the effects it will have on his generation. He paid close attention to the final formatting of his poem to create movement.

Lumi Ehlich is 10 years old and is in fourth grade at Lakeside Elementary. She wrote "Deep in the Forest" with her own inspiration last year. Lumi loves to read, write, and draw. She loves animals and nature and would like to be a scientist when she grows up.

Naiara Tamminga is 13 years old and is in eighth grader at City High Middle School. She is a biracial, bilingual poet. Her favorite things to write about are equality, justice, mental struggles, and really anything that comes to mind.

Owen E. Sullivan is a second grade student who loves reading, writing, and animals. He likes poems because they are funny and fun to read. He is very excited to enter his first poetry contest!

Ramona Scurek wrote "Hands Like Trees" at age eight. She started to learn algebra in second grade and enjoys reading and writing poetry. She is in third grade at Thornapple Elementary. She dreams of being an astronaut when she grows up and might want to try traveling to Japan. She also plays piano and likes to ice skate. **Ramona** is hard working; **And** she is clever; **Moved** houses at age one; **Olive** is her sister's name; **Nice** and loving; **And** creative.

Reagan Grinwis is an 11-year-old girl who goes to West Elementary. She really enjoys poetry and thinks it's a talent of hers. "Writing poetry makes me feel free and relaxed," she says. Reagan is also a gymnast and loves crafts. "A Flower" represents her grandma's garden. Reagan once lived with her grandma, and they planted flowers together. To this day, Reagan and her grandma are very close. Reagan's poem also represents her self-growth and how it takes time.

Robyn Tatko is in tenth grade at Grand Rapids Christian High School. She plays piano, which is what inspired her to write "An Ode to My First Piano." This poem is about her early years of learning to play. The metaphors connect to real pieces in her life.

Sara Huyser attends Grand Rapids Christian High School.

Simran Kaur likes to read and write poetry in her free time. She is in tenth grade and enjoys learning.

Sophia Fata is 14 years old and is in eighth grade at Duncan Lake Middle School. She has always loved reading and writing poetry, though she finds it a bit intimidating to share her work with others. She hopes for someone to be able to read and enjoy her poetry, just as she does for others.

Todd Mercer's short collection, *Ingenué*, was a winner of the Celery City contest. His digital chapbook, *Life-wish Maintenance*, is available free at Right Hand Pointing. Mercer has been nominated for multiple Pushcart and Best of the Net awards in Fiction and Poetry. Recent work appears in *Fictive Dream*, *Flash Frontier*, and *MacQueen's Quinterly*.

Xander Tap-Howell is in kindergarten at Ridgemoor Park Montessori. He likes to draw, read (especially Harry Potter), and play. He has three brothers: Rory, Liam, and Cole. He also has a friend at school named Advik. He likes to play with his moms.

Xavier Wright is a student at Grand Rapids Christian. "The one that got away" is in the style of Kendrick Lamar and references his life as a child.



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