



Voices

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY PRESENTS
THE 2018 DYER-IVES POETRY COMPETITION



THE DYER-IVES POETRY COMPETITION

Spring 2018 marks the 50th 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.

The Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition is free to enter every February with cash prizes and publication awarded to the authors of first, second, and third place poems in three separate divisions. The competition is open to Kent County residents of all ages and students attending classes in Kent County, including GVSU and Kent ISD students.

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. Through the dedication, energy, and talent of our local community of writers, this competition has become a significant annual literary event.

Past coordinators include Walter Lockwood, Philip Jung, Larry Manglitz, Barbara Saunier, Patty Bridges, Kimberly Wyngarden, David Cope, Mursalata Muhammad, and Christine Stephens Krieger, who is also the 2018 coordinator. Local college professors and poets of note complete the preliminary judging process. This year's preliminary judges are Ericka "Kyd Kane" Thompson, Dr. Zulema Moret, and Z.G. Tomaszewski.

A nationally known poet 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, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Billy Collins, Herb Scott, Alicia Ostriker, Patricia Clark, Linda Nemece Foster, and Mark Doty.

The 2018 national judge is Azizi Jasper.

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ELEMENTARY DIVISION

Darkness as a Canvas

Autism Spectrum Gift

I can write a poem with

Song of the Rain

Ladders

“A lot of interesting concepts in this age group. Good understanding of language and solid themes.”

—2018 national judge, Azizi Jasper



Darkness as a Canvas

by NATALIE MOUW

Darkness as a canvas
A palette as clear as can be,
Mistakes in the darkness can't be seen,
They don't exist for me.
Moving swiftly throughout the darkness,
Nothing in my way.

I am the ruler of the darkness because it's only me
Everybody has their own
If theirs is as true as can be
With no light all seeping in
Then the darkness is your canvas,
And now you can begin.

To dance and leap and twirl about,
Inside your very own world
And paint the picture of the night
However you should choose
Darkness has its wonders,
And although the light is grand
Darkness is quite mystical
Creating its very own land

For either it seems so gaping wide,
Or else so very full,
Or as far and wide as your eyes can reach,
Or as close to your face as a wall

And whether you have the choice
to live in either world,
Or whether the dark is reality for you,
And you're confined to it always.
The land of the dark can be a wonderful place,
If you let it be so,

So leap the leap,
And march the march,
and sing the silent song.

Yes paint the picture of the night,
Where nothing can go wrong

Autism Spectrum Gift

by NORA STANDISH

I am an Aspie,
dancing, leaping, falling down the stairs.
I am high-functioning,
speaking in more words than most people know,
watching friendships I'll never understand,
connecting unrelated things
and creating something beautiful.
I am on a spectrum that no one else can see,
Light Years beyond infrared,
shooting past light-speed through Alternate dimensions,
defying everything we think we know.
I have autism,
and with it millions of words,
thousands of images,
and no social skills whatsoever.
I miss the things you are trying to tell me,
because I'm already seeing more—
misplaced bricks on buildings,
the peacock-feather colors of a cat's eye,
fallen pink leaves on my neighbor's driveway.
I have a new and different brain,
an odd array of color and perspectives,
more words and definitions
than anyone can shake a redwood tree at.
I have high-functioning Autism.
I am gifted.
I do not have a disorder.

feet tired from the
day,
a
small
smile, a half
smirk you give
to
a friendly stranger,

questions
that are
glued to my brain
waiting

for

answers.

8

Song of the Rain

by EVE ORBAN

When the gray clouds rolled over the sun
And the rain began to fall
My sister and I rushed
To the musty basement
And pulled out a plastic chest
Full of fabric treasures.
I selected a gown,
Purple and silky
Flowy and familiar
Plucked from a garage sale.
We dashed to the car stall
Snatched two plastic bags
Stringing them across our arms
Letting them blow in the breeze.
Tearing outside,
We stormed across the sodden ground
The sprinkle running down our backs,
Bags fluttering in the wind.
We pretended we were doves
Free and angelic
Soft and clean
We lay on the ground
Watching the clouds
Looking for billowy figures—
We saw George Washington
Movie Stars,
Singers—
Anything we could dream.
For that moment
We were queens
Singing the song of the rain.

9

Ladders

by EMMA MARTIN-SHARPLES

We all have goals
that we may never reach.
We want to fight like Jackie Chan,
sing like Whitney Houston,
be as smart as Einstein.
These are the things on the top shelf
that we want.
I want equal rights for women,
I want equal rights for everyone,
no matter how different they are.
I want people to have enough money
so they can live another day.
I want everyone to walk down the street
and for once not be shamed or bullied.
Wouldn't that be nice?
But those wants are on the top shelf
that we need a ladder to get to.
And in this world of cruelty
there are no ladders—
not a step stool in sight.
No stairs to climb up
so we all just tumble down.
Nobody helping one another.
We need someone,
no wants anymore.
If nobody's going to help—
I guess we'll have to build our own ladders.



STUDENT DIVISION

The Heart of a Country

They Say

Bigger, Bitter Hunger

Self Harm Poem

I don't know why vinyl works

“This was my favorite division. It’s imagination over pedantics and such an activist spirit in so many pieces. Truly enjoyed these selections. Our future is in good hands.”
—2018 national judge, Azizi Jasper



The Heart of a Country

by DARYL ESESE

He called me beautiful
Said I was a
“Lost Wonder of the World”
It was a tragedy,
I guess,
He hadn’t found me sooner
He marvelled at my wide hips
And full lips
More to grab at,
I guess.
He called my body
“Absolutely breathtaking”
Then stripped me of all of my crown jewels

He kept asking for more
And more and more
Of me
Never having enough
I gave and gave and gave
Till there was nothing left to give/ I gave too much
But that still wasn’t enough
No amount of me was ever enough
He dug his fingers in my body
Scooped me out like cantaloupe
Taking the deepest parts of me
For his own gain

I forced him out of me
My body
My home
He was not welcomed here anymore
He forsook his privilege of knowing
What my hips felt like
What my skin looked like
What I tasted like

He left
And took everything with him
All that’s left is what he did to me
The scars on my back
And the bruises that won’t go away

I am just a shadow
Of the beauty
I once was

My dear children,
When you look at your skin
Or at the shape of your nose
Or feel the texture of your hair
When they ask
“Where are you from?”
Point back to me
Tell them how
Kings and queens fought for me
For the privilege to have me
Whole kingdoms were willing
To die for me
I once was a prize to be had
I carried ancient civilizations on my back
I am more than what is left of me
I am more than what they see
Please keep this in your heart
Wherever you go
No matter how far you’ve traveled
When you find yourself in a stranger’s land
Please know
I’ll always be your home
You belong to me
And I belong to you
There’s nothing they could do
To change that

They Say

by KRISTY NIKOLAJUK

They say that this is what being a teenager is all about
Nights like these
Parties like these
Where the only desire is to fill your body with as much color
as possible
Tye-dyed drinks swirl into kaleidoscopes of liquid lies
Bubbling bushels of euphoria
Cherry red cups spilling nighttime secrets
They say a few puffs will tranquilize your body and soul from
its inner demons and pains
That a few drinks will make you so numb you don't even have
to feel anything at all

They say it's fun
Let your constant sorrows and insecurities loose
Peek inside of Pandora's box
Live your life on the edge for once
Show a side of you that has never been seen.
They say it's fun
Get wasted
Take a few too many hits
Feel as though the fabricated contents have become the
puppet master of your soul.

Yet I sit here
Watching boys fling their fists at their falsified friends
Delicate objects as fragmented as their dignity dispelled on
the ground
Violent sounds of spewing into trash cans
Clouds and clouds and clouds of thick poison the air
Boys and girls senselessly physical
Hands drawn to bedrooms
Hands reach for the car keys
Hands pour another drink,
Minds take another hit.

Is this what it truly means to feel alive?
To rely on stimulants for pleasure that your sober life is
not fueling?

I say
It is beyond heartbreaking to see
How teenagers are enamored by suppression
Suppressing anguish
Suppressing heartache
Suppressing healing
Suppressing worries
Suppressing self-love
Bury them
Deeper
And deeper
And deeper
Let the color do the rest
Sure your mind may be black
But at least they'll say you were bright.

I grab my keys
Cutting through colored corpses
Sounds of manufactured laughter
Fragrances of compressed filth
I'm glad I know what being a teenager is about.

Bigger, Bitter Hunger

by SPENCER W. MILLER

[The sands of Africa are pulled into the sky
one hundred glorious stories
overlooking the barren wasteland]

The ingenious brain of the racist
cut out and put on ice
preserving the white man's burden
generation to generation
passed down into the hands of the businessman

Don't tell, it'll be our little secret
The largest little secret in the world
The elephant in the room
The tusks in your pocket
The skeleton in your closet
The bones in your wallet

Gut the earth and gut her people
Death is capital
capital is Life

And so it is.

the Phoenix rises from the ashes of the East
only to make its golden perch on the Western horizon
Oh, What a view!

But, If only it were better.

sleeker, faster, bigger, better
bigger, bitter hunger.

But just wait! Call now and we'll double your order.
Bigger, better, hunger.

A Nation, run by the people
Run faster, they're after you

Hollow as a dead man's skull
A dead man, tossed about by the masses
 Out of control, this way and that way
 Monkey see, Monkey do!

A dead Monkey, seeing and doing
No more than a puppet.
A Dead Monkey manipulated by the crowd.
Monkey sees and Monkey does

 Monkey rules with an Iron Fist,
an empty skull, and an empty stomach
 Bigger Better Hunger

Bananas from Honduras, Panamá, Guatemala, México
Feed the Monkey
Feed the Phoenix
Feed the poor?

The black women walk down Quimby street with their
 children in hand
the burning burden born unto them
born into the world, burning burden in hand
abandoned and fatherless, yelling,
"Ain't chu got nuttin' better ta do?"
No.
Aint got nuttin' better ta do.
Nuttin' better.
Nothing better?

Self Harm Poem

by ADRIANNA OVERTON

Cinnamon gum
Or white brick walls...
I'm blasting out my ear drums
not just for the experience.
The music isn't loud enough
for that yet.

White brick walls
And imaginary cars...
I stare at the ceiling
sitting in a chair.
I don't know if anyone
Realizes how long I've actually been there.

Cinnamon gum
burning tongue.
My senses are tingling
Not like spiderman
But like when your foot falls asleep
And the blood flow is back.
I need to make it stop.

Burning tongues and bleeding skulls
Everything is silent here
But mentally chaos is breaking loose
Cinnamon gum
And white brick walls

If I run into the lockers now,
maybe the voices...
If I keep moving forward maybe...
If I don't...
If I help myself and make it all stop.

Welcome.
Please leave all sharp objects at the door
And anything else that could be used
to harm yourself or others.
This is a safety zone.

Where do I check my mind in, I ask.
I leave my gum pack in the trash.
They just laugh and lock me in the back
With everyone else
They think can help help.

Cinnamon gum,
White brick walls,
Imaginary car crashes
And bleeding skull fractures.
Don't tell me that harming myself
Is purely a physical sensation
And blood is the only way people escaped mental pain.

I don't know why vinyl works

by ANNE LIVINGSTON

but once I carried a large cabinet record player
back to my house from three blocks away,
where I found it, like a pomegranate cut
open, with torn ruby velvet panels and cords
splayed out. It looked like what I imagine
surgery to be. Which is to say, when faced
with things I do not understand, like sound
jacks and the downed power lines
of veins, I know only how to shoulder weights.
Which is to say I did not ask the record player
what she wanted to play. Which is to say I lied
to you, back there on Straight Street, because it was
a woman I hauled home. A woman I saw on the side
of the road. And she is still curled in the corner
of my room, next to my pillow, where sometimes the disc
of my forehead is scratched out of sleep by her
cedar edges. Where I won't move the bed
because I am trying to see what we will sound like
if I let her needle me just a little bit
longer. Where I don't know if my arms could manage
to move her again, even if she keeps saying
how light she is.

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ADULT DIVISION

Niggas in Paradise

Iris

The Heart Failure Fan Club

Last Night

Red Thread

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“Solid pieces and perspectives that ranged from self doubt
to city perspective.”

—2018 national judge, Azizi Jasper



Niggas In Paradise

by LAMONT ARRINGTON

– For Jasmyn, the biracial mother of our hypothetical child.

Jasmyn, familiar and exotic like the name that you were gifted
– it's a curse –

we don't belong anywhere – black and white is not balance – yin
and yang are only natural.

Unlike saying Hello on the bus ride home
wearing timberlands and scarves from the thrift store.

The driver squints, eyes narrowed, rigid, cold, still, as if we've
stolen the world,

like Eminem stole hip hop, like Elvis stole jazz,
as if you asked for the Y in your name!

We could have been just like everyone else, Jasmine,
if anyone had bothered to ask us – but they didn't, and
they don't.

I don't have to ask, I don't want to ask, How you are, How are
you? I know

because we only deal with the extremes.

Hair too nappy or too straight, we are Thugs or Oreos, rich
or poor

looting the safety of the suburbs with echoing footsteps –
We hoist fear into our apartments where we become criminals
stranded in New Orleans.

Our lives are a hurricane so dangerous it cannot be named Isis,
but a stranger, like Christ, forgives us our sins and lets us begin
again

planted calmly in the breast of an exotic world.

University, we learn to be called nigga is insulting;

Work, we are told Happy Kwanzaa because Merry Christmas
might be insulting, too.

Like most familiar things we're not sure if we will ever be a part
of them;

family, marriage, college, work, travel, love.

We cannot be sure they were meant for us, we are only certain
of these flooded streets

because all we've ever done is fight to right violence.

Do I feel closer to you because of it? How familiar it feels,
the comfort of you gnawing on my arms – Nipping at my fingers –
while I cradle your soul.

Jasmyn,

I will kiss the scars you won't have to hide,

your laughter froths gently into me;

massages my creaking knees while I wade through mucky waters,

so I keep you close – biting at my ankles – clawing at my chest –

we don't belong anywhere – black and white is not balance –

yin and yang are only natural.

We may as well find comfort in the animals that we are.

Iris

by MELISSA WRAY

I have surrendered
to finding
my strength
in vulnerability
like watching
an iris' color
intensify
with tears
or the visibility
of a bird's nest
clear
in a dying tree.

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The Heart Failure Fan Club

by GARRETT STACK

meets informally around the polyvinyl
coffee table in waiting room B where

there is no coffee and the literature
is terrible, but membership is free

and numbers are up. Today, just one
other attendee, a young girl, a foot juggler

reading a Red Book as worn out
as Tom's myocardium and just because

she is new here, unlike we platinum
members who bear our specters silently

she will need to speak. So I arm myself
with easy-deploy comfort, soothing verbal

herbal tea, and believe I am ready
when she leans over to say,

You know,
there's a single
black glove lying
abandoned in every
movie theater
and a solitary bird
trapped in each
airport on earth.

And I wonder if perhaps in this waiting
life she's met more ghosts than me

25

Last night

by LISA McALLISTER

while you slept beside me
dreaming strange dreams of your own
I dreamt of San Francisco.
We had made it after all—
bought a huge dilapidated house in Chinatown
with water pouring from the ceiling
and moldy wallpaper peeling down in strips
graffitied walls and broken joists
doors that led nowhere
and rat nest closets full of rotten clothes.
We watched gentrification spring up like mushrooms in the damp—
pot shops between the noodle joints and strip clubs,
cell phone towers rising out of the fog.
We filled our kitchen with string bags of avocados,
California oranges and limes spilling from painted bowls
and perched on red Victorian velvet settees.
We had dreadlocks
we smelled of patchouli
we turned vegan and turned back again.
I woke with the taste of never was in my mouth
and watched you sleep
faint streetlight streak in your hair.

26

Red Thread

by SHELLEY TOWNSEND-HUDSON

The little girl is made in China
The dress is made in America
The girl is two and the dress, twenty,
joined together by common threads

How did this come about,
this ups-a-daisy over arms
down round shoulders, unveiling
a small upturned moon-face?

Ying-Ying in a hand-me-down
from a grown cousin, with delicate
embroidery on the pinafore, sewn by
a grandmother she'll never know

who tongue-moistened a red thread
guiding it into a needle, never dreaming
of a shiny-haired child, twirling
in a mirror, in a dress made in America

Who ties these invisible threads, ankle to
ankle, pinky to pinky? Deity Yue Lao
who, adopting us, pieces us together
at a certain time, in a particular way

with bonds that stretch, tangle, knot,
but never break, stitching mystery to
to mercy, desire to destiny, the likely to
the unlikely. Handmade on this patched planet

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The 2018 National Judge

Author, community organizer, and cultural advocate, **Azizi Jasper** is a dynamic performer and a passionate advocate for social justice. He has shared the stage along-side a who's who of influencers including rapper/actor Common, the great poet Gil Scott Heron, Grammy winner Marvin Sapp, Detroit super-group Slum Village, renowned poet Saul Williams, and Minister Louis Farrakhan to name a few. His presentations are lively, powerful, and thought provoking. Jasper gave the keynote at the Grand Rapids Rosa Parks statue dedication, as well as recently dedicating a poem to Detroit Superproducer J-Dilla's mother during the 5th annual Dilla Day at The Filmore.

Jasper has been featured alongside former Grand Rapids poet laureates in the acclaimed compilation *Song of the Owashtanong*. He is the founder of several open mic's in his native Grand Rapids, including the longest running spoken word open mic in West Michigan, Smokin Spoken Word. Jasper is one of the founding members of the poetry collective "The Diatribe," unveiled at the first "Spoken Word Artist Exhibit," which was also a blind/deaf-friendly exhibit that included Braille and sign language in order to be inclusive of a broader audience. He was one of the hosts of the largest weekly open mic set in Detroit (The Retort), and also curates a Thursday night show that showcases worldwide talent in his adopted home of Detroit at the world famous Nandi's Knowledge Cafe.

During the day, Azizi works in Detroit as a social worker for Wayne County's Right Track Program helping teens 13-17 navigate through troubling circumstances. He is also a political organizer having assisted on more than 30 regional campaigns. "I enjoy writing about the troubles of my generation," says Jasper, "but not nearly as much as I like working to change them."

The 2018 Preliminary Judges

Ericka "Kyd Kane" Thompson is a writer, artist, teacher, spoken word poet and performance activist native to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Kyd Kane uses her poetry to highlight issues plaguing our community and provides positive options for overcoming them. Understanding that the systems behind our struggles are deep-rooted, Kyd speaks about using the power of self-acceptance and positivity to bring about change within. In 2017, Kyd Kane became the first vocal artist to be named as a finalist in ArtPrize 9. Currently, she can be found performing at events locally and throughout the country and at Creston Brewery every second and fourth Sunday as co-host of their open mic series, Creston Vibes: Open Sessions.

The life and work of **Z.G. Tomaszewski** is the mold of a confidence that is fragile and learned. A spiritual wavering of breath exhaled, a dream cross-hatched through memory. Tomaszewski is the author of three books of poems: *All Things Dusk*, *Mineral Whisper*, and *River Nocturne*.

Dr. Zulema Moret was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. As a poet she has published *Cuaderno de viaje solitario* [Notebook of a Lonely Journey, 1985], *Cazadora de Sueños* [Dream's Catcher, 2003], *Un ángel al borde del volcán ardiendo* [An Angel at the Burning Volcano, 2008], *Lo gris* [Grayness, 2012], and most recently her complete poems, *Poesía Reunida – La mujer de la piedra* – [The Woman of the Stone, Ed. Arte Poética Press, New York, 2014]. She has read her poetry at national and international festivals and conferences, and since 2004 she is a professor of Latin American Literature and Culture at Grand Valley State University.

Judges' Comments

ELEMENTARY DIVISION

Darkness as a Canvas by Natalie Mouw

"Heavy concept. The name is poetic within itself, though the explanation within the poem is also very well executed."

—Azizi Jasper

Autism Spectrum Gift by Nora Standish

"Giving poetic voice to the oft' times misunderstood."

—Azizi Jasper

I can write a poem with by Alayna Williams

"Creatively structured piece. Easy to read. I enjoy the layers within the texts." —Azizi Jasper

Song of the Rain by Eve Orban

"I love the movement of the poem, the development of the theme, and the representation of daily situations, a kind of joyful playing and transforming of reality. I love this image: 'We lay on the ground / Watching the clouds' and at the end: 'For that moment / we were queens / Singing the song of the rain.' The presence of music and rhythm is strong all over the poem." —Dr. Zulema Moret

Ladders by Emma Martin-Sharples

"I appreciate this young writer for having a desire to see change in the world. This is a very powerful piece."

—Kyd Kane

STUDENT DIVISION

Heart of a Country by Daryl Esese

"Loved the consistent metaphor between places and people. The author made struggle relatable by giving land masses human traits." —Azizi Jasper

They Say by Kristy Nikolajuk

"Rhythmic and gripping. I love the story, the lesson, and the irony at the end. Very well written complete with 'moral of the story.'" —Azizi Jasper

Bigger, Bitter Hunger by Spencer W. Miller

"Very interesting read. I truly enjoyed the question mark at the end statement 'Feed the poor?' It showed the irony of where our priorities as humans often lie." —Azizi Jasper

Self Harm Poem by Adrianna Overton

"Wow, this poem grabbed me instantly and forced me to take a look deep within for reflection. It put me in a space of self acknowledgement for growth." —Kyd Kane

I don't know why vinyl works by Anne Livingston

"I'm immediately drawn in by the strangeness and yet the matter-of-fact tone of the poem. Its subject sustains my attention, the way the metaphor takes shape and then folds back on itself revealing a wonderfully dark and beautiful experience. It explores and conceals its own mystery. Bravo!" —Z.G. Tomaszewski

ADULT DIVISION

***Niggas in Paradise* by Lamont Arrington**

“Vivid piece. Reminds me of some Gil Scott/Last Poets type jazz. Great imagery, raw, and vivid. Urban, hip, and unapologetic.” —Azizi Jasper

***Iris* by Melissa Wray**

“I admire the author’s ability to say what they mean, and get out. There’s something beautiful in the confines of well executed brevity.” —Azizi Jasper

***The Heart Failure Fan Club* by Garrett Stack**

“Gives an interesting, almost awkward vantage point of a revelation had amongst strangers. I appreciate how much this piece put me in the moment.” —Azizi Jasper

***Last Night* by Lisa McAllister**

“Outside and inside, the couple sleep and dream together scenarios from their imaginations. An inventory of objects, food, and the ‘faint streetlight streak in your hair’ remind me of a painting by Hooper called *The Streetlight*, how painting and poem capture a landscape both intimate and urban.”
—Dr. Zulema Moret

***Red Thread* by Shelley Townsend-Hudson**

“There’s a quiet music that keeps the poem moving, the poet having worked to find the language that matches the experience, and letting us in on some of the sensory details this world has to offer. It’s a poem that provides the reader a new way of seeing, using juxtapositions that question and inform.”
—Z.G. Tomaszewski

Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition Guidelines

The annual contest is open to Kent County residents ages 5 through adult and students who are attending Kent County Schools, including GVSU and Kent ISD. Winners selected in three age categories have their poems published in *Voices*, receive a cash award, and participate in a reading during the Festival of the Arts in June, held at the Main Library.

DIVISIONS AND AWARDS

First Division – Kindergarten through Eighth Grade:
1st Place: \$100, 2nd Place: \$75, 3rd Place: \$50

Second Division – High School through Undergraduate:
1st Place: \$125, 2nd Place: \$100, 3rd Place: \$75

Third Division – Graduate Student through Adult:
1st Place: \$150, 2nd Place: \$125, 3rd Place: \$100

SUBMITTING A POEM

- Poems accepted every February.
- Free to enter.
- All ages.
- One original and unpublished poem per person will be accepted.
- Poems must be typed.
- Poems accepted via mail, email, or hand delivery to the Main Library.

For complete guidelines, visit grpl.org/dyer-ives.



www.grpl.org • 616.988.5400



Dyer-Ives Foundation Poetry Fund

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