

Express Yourself!
Youth
poetry
Competition

Express Yourself!
Cover
Art
Contest

2026 Finalists' Anthology

September 15, 2025–January 31, 2026



Dallas Public
LIBRARY

Express Yourself! 2026

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Joe M. and Doris R. Dealey Family Foundation
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About the Youth Poetry Competition and Cover Art Contest

Students in grades 2 through 12 who live in Dallas or attend a Dallas school are invited to submit original poems and artwork to be judged by Dallas Public Library staff and members of the community.

Judges are asked to choose the best poems from the following grade categories: 2nd-5th, 6th-8th and 9th-12th. A panel of judges selects the Joe M. and Doris Russell Dealey Award of Achievement and three Grade Category winners from the 60 finalists.

For the Cover Art Contest, judges are asked to choose one winner and two finalists from the following grade categories: 2nd-5th, 6th-8th and 9th-12th.

A panel of judges selects the Joe M. and Doris Russell Dealey Award of Achievement in Art.

The inaugural Dallas Poet Laureate Joaquin Zihuatanejo created the Rising Star Award to honor budding talent from the 6th-8th grade category. The winner is specifically selected by the current Dallas Poet Laureate.

All finalists are invited to the April award ceremony where each published poet and/or artist receives a medal.

Dedication

Welcome to the Annual Express Yourself! Youth Poetry Competition

In 1995, Doris Carolyn Russell Dealey partnered with The Dallas Foundation, Dallas Public Library, Friends of the Dallas Public Library and Dallas Independent School District to honor the memory of her late husband, Joseph “Joe” MacDonald Dealey, Sr., and his passion for language and self-expression. The result was the initiation of what is now the annual Express Yourself! Youth Poetry Competition.

The Dealey family and the trustees of the Joe M. and Doris R. Dealey Family Foundation extend our appreciation to those parents, teachers and students who were, are and will continue to be sowers responsible for seeding, cultivating and growing our city’s flowering garden of verse over the last quarter century, and we hope to perpetuate this relationship well into the future. We are excited to be able to expand our support of poetry through the Youth Poet Laureate program and cannot wait to see how the young people of Dallas use their voices in this role.

We also wish to recognize the leadership and staff of Dallas Public Library, Friends of the Dallas Public Library, Inc., Dallas Independent School District, area private schools, and the community for fostering an appreciation and understanding of poetry as an outlet for self-awareness and expression as well as a literary vehicle for myriad poetic entries describing emotions and observations of young and maturing minds.

On behalf of the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of Doris and Joe Dealey, please accept our congratulations on your selection as a finalist in this year’s competition and all good wishes in the years ahead. Your entry in the anthology cover art or poetry categories reflect great credit on your parents, teachers and most especially yourself.

The Trustees of the Joe M. and Doris R. Dealey Family Foundation

Foreword

Poetry opens people up. Kids, adults, all of us. There's something about the rhythm and the playfulness of it that makes language feel alive instead of something you only meet in a classroom. Sure, kids learn grammar rules at school, but poetry is where they learn they're allowed to bend those rules, break them, flip them upside down, and make something new. Poetry helps us find words for feelings that don't fit neatly into sentences—joy, heartbreak, confusion, excitement. It gives young people a way to talk about their own big emotions without needing everything to be perfect.

When I was a teenager, slam poetry changed everything for me. It was the first time I realized that poetry wasn't just something written by dead people in textbooks. It was people—real people—talking about their lives and their struggles and their dreams. Slam poetry made me feel connected, like suddenly I wasn't the only one trying to sort out the world. And it's where I finally understood that rap is poetry too. The rhythm, the wordplay, the storytelling; it all fits. That experience shaped how I think about language, creativity, and self-expression.

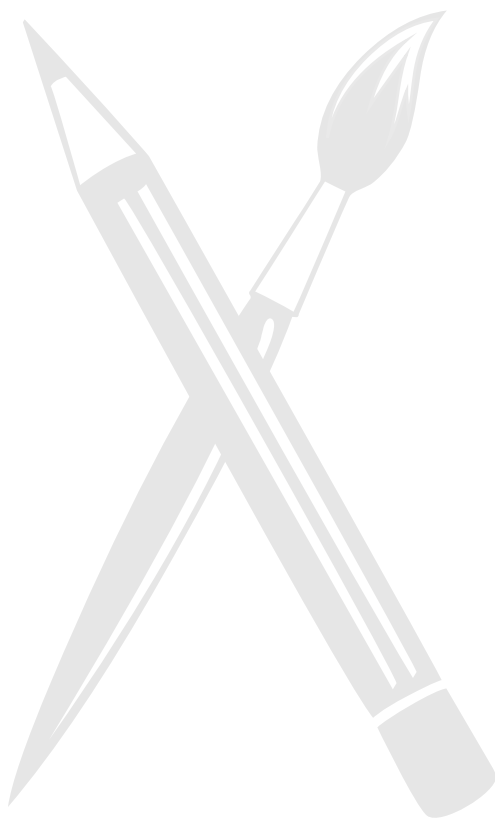
That's why I love seeing young people write. When they write poetry, they're figuring out who they are. They're shaping their voices. They're discovering that their words matter. The poems in this collection show just how much talent and honesty young writers in Dallas have. They remind me that our city's creative future is in very good hands.

We're especially grateful to The Joe M. and Doris R. Dealey Family Foundation for making the Express Yourself! competition possible year after year. Joe M. Dealey Sr. spent his life rooted in Dallas — from starting in the mailroom at The Dallas Morning News to eventually becoming its publisher — and he poured his energy into serving the community through hospitals, nonprofits, and civic organizations. After he passed, Doris Dealey created the family foundation to carry on that spirit of giving. One of the first things she chose to support was youth poetry at the Dallas Public Library, because she believed young people deserve spaces to speak, imagine, and be heard. Today the foundation is still run by their family and continues that legacy, helping lift up the next generation of Dallas voices. Their belief in the power of language isn't just history — it's the reason this collection exists

Manya Shorr
Director of Libraries

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**2026 Joe M. Dealey and Doris Russell Dealey
Award of Achievement in Art**

===== **Jaswanth UdayaKumar** =====
*Uplift North Hills Preparatory
2nd grade*

Winners

Julio Mendez
*Mary McLeod Bethune Elem
5th grade*

Ariadne Gutierrez
*Irma Lerma Rangel YWLS
8th grade*

Allison Jacqueline Perez
*Booker T. Washington HPVA
9th grade*

17th Annual
Express Yourself!
Cover
Art
Contest

Finalists



Matthew Monsivais

Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary School
3rd Grade



Aiden West Buckley

K. B. Polk Center for Academically TAG 5th
Grade



Emily Olivares
Irma Lerma Rangel YWLS 6th Grade



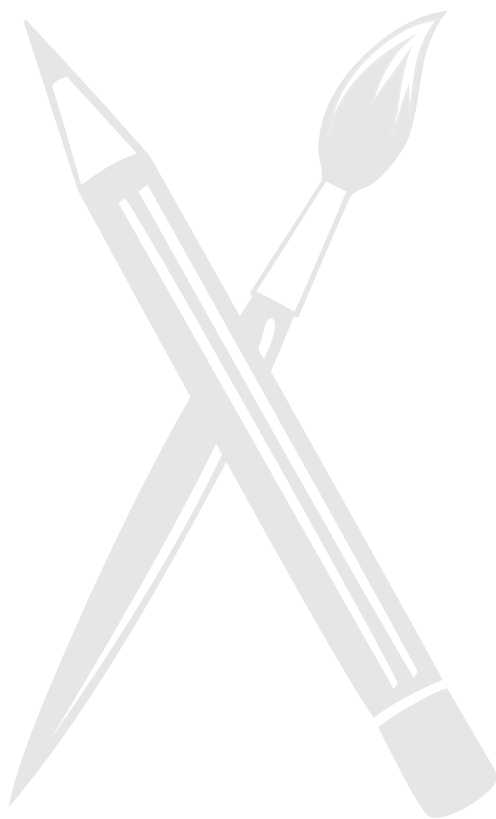
Sofia Arevalo
Irma Lerma Rangel YWLS
7th Grade



Elenor Duncan
Booker T. Washington HPVA
9th Grade



Reagan Nguyen
The Hockaday School
11th Grade

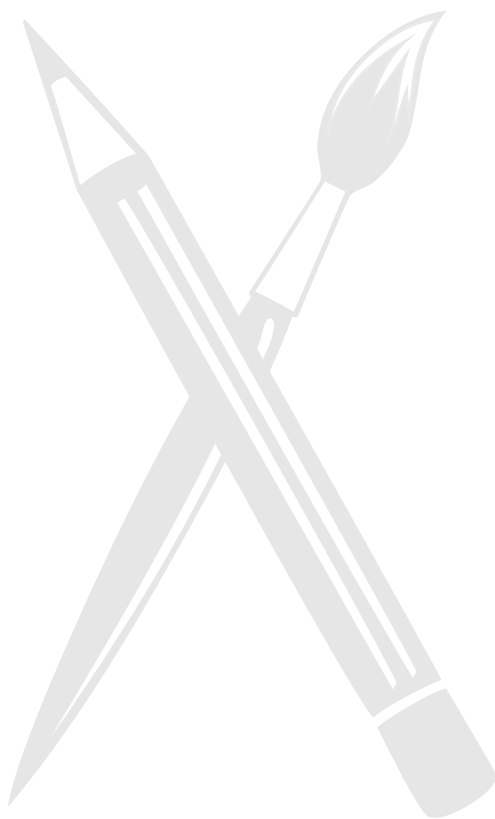


2026
Joe M. and Doris Russell Dealey
Award of Achievement

———— **Carlos Guzman** ————
Daniel Webster Elementary School
5th Grade

El sueño inmigrante

Con una mirada fascinante
Podrá ser tu amante.
Pero, con la sangre fría,
Él te deportaría.
Tendrá que ser cruel.
No siempre vivirás en un carrusel.
No confíes en nadie,
O la soledad te invade.
Todo ese esfuerzo
Se fue como un almuerzo.
Todo tu sacrificio,
tendrá su juicio.
Todo ese amor,
perderá su sabor.
Y toda tu amistad,
se parte en la mitad.
Y la verdad,
Esa persona estaba llena de maldad.
Pues el sueño de todo inmigrante,
Es pasar adelante.



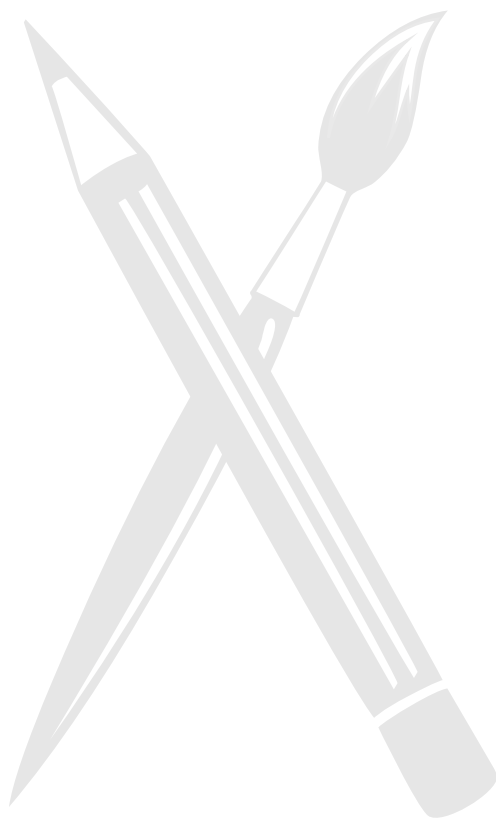
Rising Star Award

===== **Scarlett Hardin** =====

Eduardo Mata Montessori
6th Grade

Out of Order

I express myself in fragments.
Jumping topics.
Unfinished sentences.
Thoughts arriving out of order.
I speak with my hands,
with my tone,
with urgency.
I blurt truth before it is polished.
I overshare,
then retreat.
My mind moves faster
than my mouth.
So my words spill...
loop... try again.
I don't speak in straight lines.
I speak honestly.
That's how I express... ME!



**2026
Winner
Grades 2-5**

===== **Akshara Garudas** =====
*George Bannerman Dealey Montessori
3rd Grade*

Flower

Like us
The flower brings
Joy to the ones
Who are worried

The flower takes
Time to grow
Like us

The flower faces
Challenges in the world
Like us

The flower is
Powerful and strong
Just like us

2026 Winner Grades 6-8

===== **Nadia Nicole Meyrat** =====

*William B. Travis Vanguard Academy
7th Grade*

My Place

I belong not because I'm perfect
But because I'm here and I try.
I'm here rain or shine,
Even when days feel gray and heavy.

I belong to a hard-working community
Of people who fall down but get back up.
I belong to moments of laughter,
Even when the day tempted me to fail or cry.

I belong in the hallways of my school
And on my friendly neighborhood streets.
I belong when I listen,
Even when no one else will.

I belong when I try my best,
Even when I'm about to fall apart.
I belong not for what I've proven,
But for the love I choose to show.

I belong not because I'm perfect,
But because I show up; I stay.
Today, tomorrow, and always!
This world is my place!

2026 Winner Grades 9-12

===== **Belen Salinas** =====

*Woodrow Wilson High
9th Grade*

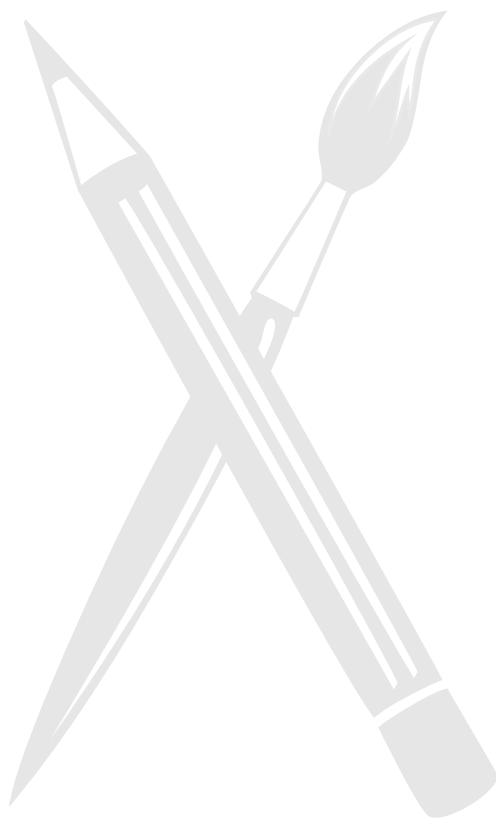
“Dear Teacher”

Dear teacher, the silence in my house has grown so loud since the plates started cracking and the gentle murmur of their voices turned into something sharp and brittle that echoes in the empty spaces where laughter used to live and I pretend to be asleep when I hear the slamming doors because facing the wreckage of their broken promises feels like trying to breathe underwater and I just wanted you to know that sometimes the only sturdy thing I hold onto is the thought of your classroom door opening.

Dear teacher, when you asked if I was okay after that presentation and I mumbled something about a headache, you looked past the easy answer and saw the dark swirling underneath the surface where I keep the heavy things that are pulling me down towards a quiet, painless place where no one has to pretend anymore and your simple nod of understanding felt like a lifeline thrown to a shipwrecked soul adrift in an ocean of teenage confusion.

Dear teacher, I know I stare out the window a lot during math, but I’m not really seeing the clouds; I’m mapping out escape routes from this constant tightness in my chest, the one that tells me I’m too much trouble, too much to carry, and your willingness to just sit with me during lunch break, not demanding words but offering that steady, unwavering presence, makes the heavy air around me feel just a fraction lighter.

Dear teacher, thank you for listening when I finally whispered about how the edges of things seem blurred and how staying afloat feels like the hardest job in the world, and even though you can’t fix the foundations crumbling at home, the simple act of hearing my messy, disorganized fears without judgment gave me a small, secret strength to face the hallway lockers again tomorrow.



Finalists

Grades

2-5

Maxwell James Sheffield

*George Bannerman Dealey Montessori
2nd Grade*

Peace Is

Peace is listening to birds.

Peace is reading with my mom and dad.

Peace is looking at the moon at night.

Peace is falling asleep with my mom and dad.

==== **Cooper Spiegel** =====
George Bannerman Dealey Montessori
3rd Grade

A Ball

I get
Thrown around
All day

I get hit
By baseball bats
It hurts a lot

I get left outside
When it rains and get
Drenched and ruined

Then tomorrow
Comes around and
It all happens again

I get battered and bruised
Then thrown away
After that, they buy more
Just so they can play

Amalia Vaidya

*The Hockaday School
3rd Grade*

Blue

Blue is born when night turns to day
When the moon and stars fly away

Blue is like a blueberry I eat
Or on books so tidy and neat

Blue feels tired and sad
Sometimes lonely but never mad

Blue looks like a recycling bin
Scissors or a sharks fin

Blue sounds like a wolfs cry
A bird singing or a persons sigh

Blue can be a button or a clip
Or a needle that goes snip snip

Blue dies when day turns to night
And the only light is stars shining bright

A lot of people say blue is for boys
But girls love blue too, in clothes and in toys.

Aliah Escajeda

*Casa View Elementary School
4th Grade*

Recuerdos amados

Recuerdo preciado
cuando mi ma
me enseñó que es el quiote
y caña por primera vez.

Recuerdo adorado
cuando mi ma
me enseñó que eran las raspas.

Recuerdo grabado
cuando mi ma
me enseñó qué eran las granadas.

Recuerdo inolvidable
Cuando mi ma
me enseñó a hacer tamales.

Mi amada ma, la amo.

Erick Herrera

*Casa View Elementary School
4th Grade*

Peluche precioso

Yo tengo un peluche precioso, se siente valioso.
Mi unico peluche es precioso, bonito y huele a mi perfume.
¿Me entiende?
¿Me ama?
Se siente bonito,
suave como una cobija.
Precioso peluche valioso
querido amor, mi negrito,
con ojos naranjas,
mi peluche es mi tesoro
que sabe mi amor,
felicidad y tranquilidad sobre él.

Lucy Kochalka

*William B. Travis Vanguard Academy
4th Grade*

Mother Nature's Sounds

Do you hear the sounds of Mother Nature,
listen and you'll see.

Listen to the sound of water,
like waves crashing on shore.

Listen to the sound of fish,
as they swirl in a pond.
Listen to the sound of birds,
as they sing to us.

Listen to the sound of leaves,
as they join each other to play.
Listen to the sound of us,
as we laugh with our friends.

Listen to the sound of the trees,
as they sway in the wind.
Listen to all these sounds,
Mother nature made for us.

Dillian Padilla Carias

*Casa View Elementary School
4th Grade*

Cuanto a pasado

Mi corazón se siente triste cada año nuevo
por saber que mi bisabuela cumple otro año
de no estar con nosotros.

Mi corazón se siente triste cada vez
que recuerdo como se fue mi perro Max
al centro de adopción para perros.

Mi corazón se siente triste y se parte en dos
al saber que no estuve con mi perro Gaston cuando murió.

Mi corazón se siente triste cada día
porque extraño a mi familia que está en Honduras.

Mi corazón se siente triste porque este es mi último año
en Casa View, después de 5 años en esta escuela.

Mi corazón se siente triste al recordar
todo lo bueno que tuve en esta escuela.

Daniella Arzate

*Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary School
5th Grade*

Grandma Elia

I still remember
the stories you told me.
The beauty mark I still see.
I miss you grandma.

I always sat next to you.
Now I just sit next to your spot and go blue.
Your hands felt like a cloud in the sky.

The brown in your eye
Is like a diamond in the sky.
I miss you grandma.

Your smell is like a perfume,
That people would die for.
I wish I can see you once more.

I miss you.
Never thought I lose you.

Iris Cruz
L.O. Donald Elementary School
5th Grade

Flores marchitas

Las flores marchitas
al viento murmuran, susurros de amores
y un eco de risas.

Las flores torcidas
que miran al suelo,
en su tristeza se nota
que les hace falta consuelo.

En sus tallos revelan
el dolor de retorcerse,
un alma en descomposición
que el tiempo convierte.

Saul Ibarra

*L.O. Donald Elementary School
5th Grade*

A TIME TO TALK

A friend is going through something
He won't say what
He is very upset
He just seems so lost.

A friend is going through something
I don't know what to do
I want to comfort him
I don't want to intrude
I just want to know; what's going on with you?

A friend is going through something
You do not know what
You try to calm the feeling
You try to talk to them
You won't give on helping them
No matter what.

Dashawn Moten

*Daniel Webster Elementary School
5th Grade*

The Day We Raised Our Voices

Quiet town, quiet girl
Elara, the girl who spoke through her words
Her voice caught in her throat
Pens, pencils were all she knew
While others shouted, she drew
Rain felt like sharp silver needles
"Judge me."
I know you do

Quiet town, Quiet boy,
Sam, the boy who speaks through his words
A single lonely line
The light has no place to shine
"Judge me."
I know you do

Elara met his eyes
Their words collide
Old oak trees released their breath in the wind
With voices raised,
Judge me not

Quinn Owusu

Sudie L. Williams TAG
5th Grade

A Lot

I've been called a lot.
I've been called a headache,
A pain,
I've been called annoying,
and even disruptive.
They told me,
"Truth hurts," and "You're no good."

But even when you're joking,
it doesn't mean it didn't hurt.
So I stepped up my game,
and made myself turn.
And with every step,
I gained strength.

I've been called a lot.
I've been called strong, and brave.
They say that I lead my own way.
Because a lot is good.

Allison Marie Rodriguez

Maria Moreno STEAM Academy

5th Grade

My Siamese

My little princess stands tall
She likes to scratch her paws on the wall.
With brown ears and a tiny mouth,
She runs with zoomies, north to south.
My noisy, curious friend,
Her big eyes are sparkly blue.
She's always there to play,
And watch everything I do.
She sits at the window, watching the street,
And suddenly lets out the cutest purr to greet.
When she wants dinner, she lets out a GIANT meow, It's so loud, it
makes me yell out, "Holy Cow!"

She wiggles and wobbles across the floor. Then stops to meow at my
bedroom door.

Every night, at bedtime, she curls up to my knees, She is my perfect
princess, my Siamese.

Mia Sanchez Ledezma

*L.O. Donald Elementary School
5th Grade*

Mi gallina

Mi amiga fiel de cada día,
me das con tu presencia la alegría.
Sin voz, de todos modos te puedo oír,
tu manera de mirar me hace reír.

Me da tristeza cuando te vas,
porque me haces sentir segura de los demás.
Te busco cada tarde,
para amarte y cuidarte.

Me haces el corazón que lata rápidamente,
porque estás allí presente.
Eres mi compañera para siempre,
y por esa razón te acaricio suavemente.

Más que una mascota, eres mi encaja,
la gallinita que me robó el alma.

Liliana Villarreal

*Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary School
5th Grade*

Whisper

A whisper here
a whisper there
People think I don't know
But I actually do
I wish people can see
How obvious they are

Josephine Willingham

*Solar Preparatory School for Girls
5th Grade*

Where The Map Begins

The parents give the house its steady floor,
The ones who open every door,
They are the roots that keep the garden fed,
The quiet voice that soothes the heart ahead.

When siblings come to share their childhood years,
To divide the chores and double the cheers,
They are the friends who knew us from the very start,
The second pulse within a single heart,
We grow away, yet never grow apart,
Bound by the maps engraved upon the heart,
Through the changing tides and yards of shifting sand,
I will always come home to a strong, helping hand.

A compass found within embrace,
Reflected within the lines of every face,
A thousand chapters to be unrolled-
The greatest story ever told.

Finalists

Grades

6–8

Evelyn Balderas-Esquivel

*Annie Webb Blanton Elementary School
6th Grade*

Love

I love and love again
I forgive before I'm asked
I hope they'll be gentle
Knowing they won't

I give chances
Until it feels like my kindness needs permission
They use me when they need to,
And ignore me when I need to be heard.

I bend.
I get sad.
I disappear.

And still,
I call this love
But love should not cost me my voice
Love should never leave me empty.

Victoria Barajas Segura

*Annie Webb Blanton Elementary School
6th Grade*

My Cat

The way you are makes me melt with tenderness every time
I spend time with you.

Your eyes are green like emeralds
Your fur is white like snow
Your spots are black like coal

Your nose is pink like a peach
Your whiskers are like the soft threads of a blanket
Your little feet as soft as cotton

Your furry ears like plush toys
Your little tail as soft as wool
Your meows, even on the darkest day, you make it bright and full of joy
I love you, my cat.

Carter Darien Butler

*Dallas Hybrid Preparatory
6th Grade*

Gerascophobia

Growing older seems nerve-wracking,
With everybody wanting money
Bills stacking
It's very unfunny
Losing touch with a childhood friend
A relationship you thought would never end
The thought puts butterflies in my stomach
And leaves my head flummoxed
While staying young seems like a dream,
That's far from the truth
Because growing older is better than
Forever staying a youth

Keidi Berrum Dominguez

*Annie Webb Blanton Elementary School
6th Grade*

Mi Prima

Mi prima tiene un corazón de oro
Es muy dulce y su nombre "Melissa" es precioso
Es una persona maravillosa, amable y tiene mi mismo humor Su
carcajada "jajaja" me llena de alegría el día
Mi vida mejoró cuando ella llegó.

Gracias por alegrarme todos los días
A pesar de que este triste siempre me sacas una sonrisa
Para mi la distancia no importa,
Tu para mi eres única y perfecta, no hay una igual que tu.

No sabes lo muco que te adoro
Hasta puedo decir que paraces una estrella
Brillas como una y eres perfecta como ella
Brillar de noche y de dia no importa en donde estemos
Tú siempre brillas.

Tu eres la mejor de todas, a que mas quiero,
la que más aprecio y adoro.

Isabela Gonzalez

*Irma Lerma Rangel YWLS
6th Grade*

Gracias al “no”

Gracias al “no”
Antes, no me gustaba la palabra “no”
Ahora me arrepiento
Gracias al “no”, pude aprender a leer
Gracias al “no”, estoy aprendiendo álgebra
Nunca pensé que el “no” me ayudaría
Ahora lo quiero apreciar
Gracias al “no”, siempre iba a la escuela
Aunque no quería
Aprecio a mis padres por decirme “no”
El tiempo cambia las cosas
Y uno empieza a valorar el “no”
Llevo cien días en esta nueva escuela
Gracias a mis padres, a sus sacrificios y gracias al “no”

Clara Snedden

*Irma Lerma Rangel YWLS
6th Grade*

The Ocean

When I close my eyes I hear the ocean
the waves crashing
the wind swirling
the little hermit crabs crawling
the sand crunching under my feet
the water splashing
Then I open my eyes
I'm back in my chair
With my pen and paper

===== **Nur Wahida** =====

*Sam Tasby Middle School
6th Grade*

I am a Pencil

I help you draw or write
Hold me properly
Not too loose or tight
You can use me on paper
Don't worry if you mistake
Rub it off with my eraser
Sharpen me if I break

===== **Emily Garcia** =====

Irma Lerma Rangel YWLS
7th Grade

Raccoons

In the night they scour
With their fur like masks, they hide
Treating trash like gold

Zoe Nicole Manning

*TVAH
7th Grade*

poet, have you ink enough

poet, have you ink enough
to portray me as your muse?
poet, have you ink enough
to write my name in raven hues?

oh, poet, have you ink enough
to let your words - your similes - fly?
have you time enough at hand
to know the creative hour's nigh?

if I must be your repertoire -
to have my hair ebony-dark
to have my eyes russet-brown
to have my voice sweet as a lark's

then I shall sit upon the stool
to let you do your poet stuff,
but I have just one question more;
oh, poet, have you ink enough?

Esteban Alvarez

*W.E. Greiner Exploratory Arts
8th Grade*

¡Nadie Como Mexicanos!

Dentro del mundo, muchos humanos
¡Nada como mexicanos!
Nadie con tanto amor que ellos.
Nadie con tanta alegría que ellos.
Nadie con tanta paz que ellos.

¡Nadie como mexicanos!
Somos fuertes, y sin miedo.
No entendemos la palabra rendir.
Sabemos perder y ganar.
Con mucho coraje.

¡Nadie como mexicanos!
Celebramos juntos,
Comemos juntos,
Pelearnos juntos.
Porque somos mexicanos.

¡Nadie como mexicanos!

Amaury Arellano

*W.E. Greiner Exploratory Arts
8th Grade*

Escucha mi oracion...

¡Escucha mis oraciones,
Que están llenas de muchas emociones!
Tu voz, tiene un dulce sabor,
Que a mi me llena de gran amor.

Tu mirada tiene un gran pasión,
Que me despierta mi corazón.
Tus ojos, café de color y tan bellas,
¡Cuando los veo se miran como dos estrellas!

Mi corazón siempre te cantará
Por ti siempre viajará,
Nunca te olvidará,
¡Porque yo siempre te voy a soñar!

De ti yo nunca sería lejano,
Por ti siempre me voy a despertar temprano,
Como el calor en el verano,
¡Mi amor siempre será cercano!

Suheyra Ates

*William B. Travis Vanguard Academy
8th Grade*

lady sunshine

tendrils of young sun,
fall onto my head,
and tickle my nose,
tearing me from my dreams.

her touch is tender and warm,
yet it makes me shiver.

why, oh why?
did that amber light,
fall through the slip in my curtains?

i would have dreamed of love forever
without her graze.

do i thank you,
lady sunshine,
for waking me up to pain?

or do i cry again?
for all my dreams are lies.

i would rather live in darkness forever,
than hurt in light,
lady sunshine.

Abby Sophia Carcamo-Ponce

*W.E. Greiner Exploratory Arts
8th Grade*

Strict Parents

Locked inside a cell, with the key thrown away, with each passing morning, evening and day watchful eyes scanning my every move.

Looking out the window
watching birds fly freely

Wishing I could be as free and happy,
and not in a mood.

Little to no interactions with many clueless of what is outside. Already born, currently rotting, and sooner or later, Die.

But the prizes of bearing this makes me stay,
With each day trying to be a good kid
Hoping to be praised
Even though it isn't the prize that is raised,
I'm prized with something greater.

I see the world from a different angle,
I live the world in a different dimension,
And I feel the world with a different heart
Thus, strict parents is a blessing
Disguised as a curse.

===== **Samantha Claus** =====
Henry W. Longfellow Career Exploration Academy
8th Grade

10 pm

people live like they've done this before
while most nights you find me crying on the floor
people laugh at my hair being frizzy
but they don't know i starve myself until i get dizzy
i wish that at school it could all be normal
but people say pull it together and act formal
at 10pm i try to drift asleep
but peoples words cut too deep
i think of all the times i messed up
and about how now i think i need makeup
i listen to music and look at the skies
but even then all people do is criticize
people's grades resemble diamond gems
but all i know is 10pm

Evelyn Frias De Leon

*W.E. Greiner Exploratory Arts
8th Grade*

Mi Querido Pueblo

Todos los recuerdos de mi pueblo viven en mi corazón.
Desde que llegué a Estados Unidos, mi alma se hizo pedazos.
La persona que yo era cambió al cruzar esta frontera.
Hace dos años mi vida se partió en dos.

Dejé atrás a mi querido pueblo.
Dejé sus fiestas y sus altares.
Dejé personas, sonrisas y abrazos.
Mi pueblo era mi familia.
Y siempre será mi familia.
Allá yo era feliz.
Yo misma rompí mi vida al venir aquí.
Desde que llegué, mi vida no ha sido la misma.

En la escuela me miraban y me criticaban.
Me observaban de pies a cabeza.
En mi pueblo no era así.
Viví con miedo y desesperación.

Mi madre me dijo que el karma llegaría.
Cuando regresé, ya nada era igual.
El río estaba seco y mi corazón volvió a romperse.
Por mi querido pueblo sigo adelante.

===== **Xavier D Hebron** =====
Henry W. Longfellow Career Exploration Academy
8th Grade

Song Of Xavier Hebron

I hate that I lost my grandmother so soon,
at 13 going on 14 , with a grief too big to carry.
I hate how 2025 stretched long and thick,
each day echoing your chair, your laugh, your gold.
I hate that the world kept turning without you,
I hate while my steps stumble , relearning how to walk.
I love the way your stories still warm my hands.
I miss your wisdom folded into gentle words,
your kindness woven into every goodbye.
Some days I feel sad, folded within myself,
wondering how love can hurt and still be kind.
But you taught me strength grows in soft places,
that tears can water roots we cannot see.
So I carry you forward in who I'm becoming,
a light that remains, even on the longest nights.

Gabriela Medina Isabel

*Henry W. Longfellow Career Exploration Academy
8th Grade*

Song of Gaby

I am the soft glow of my phone at night
The carefully chosen outfit laid out for tomorrow
My sweater, a comforting shield against the world
The scent of my favorite perfume, a subtle declaration

A playlist of my favorite songs blasting through my headphones
The endless scroll through my feeds, watching other lives
My messy hair, I brush before rushing out the door
A half finished project gathering dust on my floor

But deep inside I am a whirlwind of unspoken thought

I am the quiet observer
analysing every glance and word
The constant ache of wanting to be seen for who I really am
I am a dreamer, curious and resilient

I am yearning for genuine connection
Beyond the likes
And the hopeful whisper that someday, I'll truly belong

Evelyn Lozano

Irma Lerma Rangel YWLS

8th Grade

Liberty for Some, Justice for None

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America"

The same flag that has torn apart many families

And driven them all to their maximum capacities

Whilst disregarding its formalities to the people that raise it.

"and to the republic for which it stands"

But the republic is arguing over who should be welcome on these lands

Kidnapping people that have worked with their bare hands to be here.

But of course, legal citizens shouldn't fear when ICE comes near,

You'll be fine as long as you have papers that prove you belong here.

"One nation," yet the nation is separated by red and blue,

Everything has gone askew with nobody knowing what to do.

And the children scream through the streets as murder is normalized,

But nobody dares tell the government otherwise. "It'll blow over" they say,

"Turn your head, close your eyes, do exactly as I advise and maybe it'll be okay."

"Under god, Indivisible, with liberty and justice for all"

But all I see is division. Division by race, the color of your face,

the place you were born, you name it.

If you're not a rich white man there's no point in taking a stand

Because before you even began to open your mouth

Some guy in the south has already shot you.

In reality, It's liberty for some and justice for none.

===== **Valentina Nieto** =====
Henry W. Longfellow Career Exploration Academy
8th Grade

Song of Valentina

I ride the bus while watching the
world pass quietly,
Why are you so quiet? they ask but they
just don't realise that i've always liked observing,
I get to notice small things others don't
while those close to me really see who I truly am
I love my pets family and music
I will always be so proud of myself for little things

I chose my path and with every mistake made I learn something new,
trusting myself and my instincts
I don't let anyone pull me down, even my grades
My greatest fear is that by wishing to be perfect at everything ill just
end up being average in everything I do but I'll remember that grades
don't define who you are but the effort you put
Every day teaches me something new
I learn from small moments around me
And realized that the is only one path and
that is being yourself

Alexa Berenice Ramirez

*Henry W. Longfellow Career Exploration Academy
8th Grade*

The quiet weight of expectations

I wake up tired before the day even begins.
I drag my backpack like it's filled with more than books.
I stared at the clock, watching minutes disappear without mercy.
I write notes fast, afraid my mind will fall behind my pen.
I check my grades like they are verdicts, not just numbers.
I swallow stress and call it motivation.
I sit still while panic surges under my skin.
I keep moving because falling apart takes too much time.

I carry pressure that tightens every breath.
I feel trapped between expectations and exhaustion.
I question my worth when I can't keep up.
I push forward even when I feel empty.
I want rest without guilt chasing me.
I learn pain can be quiet and constant.
I survive days that ask too much of me.
I am more than school even when it feels like it's everything.

Xochitl Renteria

*W.E. Greiner Exploratory Arts
8th Grade*

Te perdono

Aunque no me lo pidas, te perdono.
Desde el día en que nací, conocí tu odio.
Nos mudamos de casa en casa, de estado
en estado pero nunca pudiste escapar del enojo que te consumio
Y aunque no me lo pidas, te perdono.

_____ **Jose Andres Reyes** _____
School for the Talented and Gifted in Pleasant Grove
8th Grade

A name still becoming

I am attempting a new version of myself.
One my younger self would stop and recognize
I want a name that carries a story, not just a sound.
I lost my childhood before I learned how to keep it.
Innocence left quietly, without asking permission.
Art once saved me, until I was taught survival mattered more.
Friendship taught me how easy loyalty lies.
I learned too late that I was the one enduring, not failing.
At home, being myself was never a safe language.
They know my name, but not my favorite color.
They say im just like them, and it fractures something in me.
I am misunderstood, where I should have been protected.
They call me worthless, without hearing my side of the story.
I stopped trying, and they took it for inability.
Pride is something I have not learned how to feel yet.
Night, is where I exist without judgement.
Music, is the only place that lets me disappear safely.
I learned early that everyone leaves eventually.
So I keep walking asking why life is cruel, and still becoming.

Jose Andres Reyes

*W.E. Greiner Exploratory Arts
8th Grade*

School

Es un lugar
Al que vas 8 horas a trabajar
Sin ningún tipo de receso
Dónde te hagos por tareas en exceso

A los niños no puedo soportar
Son ruidosos y no te dejan de molestar
Solo cuando veo a mis amigos
Mi día se vuelve bonito

Me dicen que la escuela debo disfrutar
Pero como si ni un minuto tengo para descansar
Con clases que se repiten cada semana
Y que en el futuro no me van a servir de nada

Lo único que hago es ver el reloj fijamente
Como un león viendo a su presa de frente
Esperando a que marquen las cuatro
Para llegar y recostarme en mi cuarto

10 meses este proceso se repetirá
10 años de mi vida tendré que dedicar
Pero aún así yo voy por voluntad
Para que en el futuro nada me valla a faltar.

Rene Suarez

*W.E. Greiner Exploratory Arts
8th Grade*

Viñedos

Viñedos, mi querido.
Mi gran fraccionamiento.
Ubicado en la zona noreste
De la ciudad de Querétaro,
Junto al Libramiento Nor-Poniente,
Está bien rico el ambiente.
Por eso me gusta ir a ver las vacas.
Ah, y las casas de Vianney.

Al costado de ti, está Sonterra,
Pero no se compara con mi tierra.
Del Circuito Merlot, a la Avenida Malbec,
Y de la Calle Roma, a la Carretera a Tlacote.
Mi Viñedos, estás bien grandote.
Lo tenemos todo,
Excepto un camión.
Pero ya ni modo.

Otros quieren ser cómo tú,
Tres Cantos, Puerta Verona, y Cantú
Pero ninguno es cómo tú.
Mi Viñedos, mi gran fraccionamiento.

Camila Vicente Hernandez

*W.E. Greiner Exploratory Arts
8th Grade*

ERES FUERTE

Sea lo que sea que estás viviendo,
eres fuerte.

Si la carga que llevas es pesada,
te fatigas, te cansas,
lo quieres tirar todo por la borda,
pero eres fuerte.

Nunca te has rendido.
Se vale descansar,
pero no rendirse.

Nadie te enseña a ser fuerte
por cosas que no sabías que pasarían,
pero no olvides
que eres fuerte.

Finalists

Grades

9-12

Isabella Xochitl Hernandez

*Judge Barefoot Sanders Law Magnet
9th Grade*

Undefined Doubt

I've been lost In undefined Doubt,
Doubt threaded together by silver strings,
Ones meant to wither and rot,
To burn my skin and to burn my pride,
But I refuse to let them coincide.
Scars and patches, some too deep to fill,
Can be matched with love as equally deep of a drill.
But I know this world won't give in for you too quick,
They will bleed you dry, until your living drip by drip.
But did I take it too far, even though I know who you are?
The sick and twisted games you would play,
Just for me to be seen as only a resume.
I refuse to bow, to give into your sin,
I refuse to live by this life or death line that's oh-so thin.
For I wish your ears would open like flowers,
To hear our screams, our words and to not cower.
I may never know each one who lives by that line,
But I do know that in dear time; that there own ears will morph into
cocoons, to leap into the light.
To release from their shell, in one swift bind.

Olive Mae Kennedy

*Booker T. Washington HPVA
9th Grade*

The Power of Water

I find a lot of beauty in water,
Water holds a sort of quiet elegance,
Cleaning and cooling us on days when the world just couldn't be hotter,
Water sustains us and expects no reverence.

Water has many superpowers,
Shapeshifting with ease,
From majestic, sharp glaciers to plentiful rain showers.
Water may even come in the form of a thick breeze.

Water is a home.
Holding sanction to millions of creatures,
Big and small, dark and light,
Taking form as little towns under the sea.
Water has many features.

Water is our prosperity, water holds memory.
Flowing on, remembering us silently.

Alaya Rifat

*The School for the Talented and Gifted
at the Yvonne A. Ewell Townview Magnet Center
9th Grade*

The Savior's Secret

She mended their wounds, barely a haze while they watched
Something shining and ethereal, a presence half-seen, veiled and soft
Streaming to and fro from one being to the next
A brilliant Silver Savior, trailing spirits behind her back
A shining thread of mercy, knitting soul to soul
She is the one they turn to, a mystical essence set a glow
Even as she weeps, her tears they till the Earth
The plants respond in kind, setting off new birth
Still, something seems peculiar, buried deep inside
Masked by pretty whispers
The something tries to hide
Beneath those shining wings
A secret coils in shame
In depths seemingly weaved with gold, shadows play with flames
Hands gnarled and twisted, roots entwined with weeds
The Silver girl did not choose this fate of aiding those in need
For our saviors path was forged in sin
A cursed and hallowed sentinel
Forced to pay the penance
Of the life she could never win

Aylasia Rosa Rios

*Skyline High
9th Grade*

Walking into a field of imagination

I step beyond the rusted gate,
Where logics rules no longer hold.
The grass is made of violet light,
And in a soft delight, it pulses.

Below my feet, the pebbles light up,
With secrets that only children know,
As glass trees start to flower,
Standing against the darkness.

The breeze is singing ancient songs,
In silver words and liquid gold,
And all the thoughts I dare to send up,
Fly as birds across the sky.

Here, the “maybe” takes a breath,
And defies the frozen silence of death,
A limitless land of wild invention,
Where all my dreams become reality.

Rajon Andre Starks

Skyline High

9th Grade

When Silence learns My Name

I fold the night into my pocket
so it won't wander without me.
The moon hums like a secret
only cracked sidewalks understand.

I walk past futures that blink once,
then pretend they didn't see me.
Every breath feels borrowed,
yet somehow signed in my handwriting

Hope nocks softly-
not to be polite,
but to make sure I'm listening.
I open the door with both hands.

Nataly Ramirez

*Woodrow Wilson High
10th Grade*

La Luz del mundo

Antes estaba perdida,
pero no lo sabía todavía.
Buscaba una salida,
en cosas de cada día.

Ahora, Él es el que me guía,
y trae verdadera alegría.
Él es el camino y la vida,
su gracia siempre concedida.

Antes, dependía de mí misma,
tratando de ser realista.
Pero la verdad, es que no puedo,
porque el mundo da miedo.

Ahora, se que no estoy sola,
y que nunca lo he estado.
He conocido al que me ha creado,
quien también me consola.

===== **Emmy Richardson** =====
Ursuline Academy
10th Grade

Who I Am

People usually ask me what a woman is.
To explain, first I show them me.
Who loves books, and reading, and poetry,
And who joined the robotics team just for fun.
Secondly, when they ask me what a woman is, I show them my sister.
Who loves pink, and make-up, and girly things,
But loves to read just as much as I do.
Thirdly, when they ask me what a woman is, I show them my mom.
Who works one job, though it feels like six.
But she never complains, never puts the burden on us because she loves us.
Next, when they ask me what a woman is, I show them my grandmother.
Who was pregnant in college and worked hard as a single mother.
Getting a master's in engineering and who designed her own house.
Lastly, when they ask me what a woman is, I show them everyone else.
Every woman from every country, idea, culture, and aspect of life.
Who are so full of joy, and wonder, and goals.
When you ask me what a woman is, you are asking me who I am.
For I am made by the support of woman who have come before,
and who will come after.

Presley Tomatis

*Bishop Lynne High School
10th Grade*

I Am Home

My favorite little house, a great getaway from the cruel world outside
My favorite little room, the cloud-covered walls that I have known since
the womb
My favorite light shines through the stained glass windows and is refracted
on my heart's everlasting sorrows
My favorite homemade dishes, prepared with love and sent off with kisses;
It's hard to think that this place so full of love
Would have ever seen the darkness of her memories up above
Why must this place mean so much to me?
It's not like it's my island while tossed around at sea
The pain of our "goodbyes" has tied our lives like a knot in rain
It was you who wrote that my beautiful mother was a beautiful butterfly
with a broken wing
It was you who gave me the strength to brave the strongest storms and
believe that I could brave anything
You are my anchor, always have been, and always will be;
From now on, butterflies will seem different, and I will think of us
From now on, love will seem different, and I will think of us
From now on, I will be different, and I will remember you
You made this place, this house, a home
And I will never, truly, let it go
For now, forever and always, I -
I Am Home
with you

===== **Alany Rodriguez** =====
Woodrow Wilson High
11th Grade

Pato me Gato

Yo tengo un gato de pelo blanco
Cuando lo espanto salta muy alto
Me mira y maulla muy enojado
Sus bellos ojos color Azul dorado
Son tan hermosos, lo quiero tanto,
Pasa su enojo, cuando le canto,
Mi bello gato llamado pato, mi bello gato
canto que canto.
Su nombre es pato, es gordo y blanco
Y ojos Azul dorados., mi bello Gato llamado Pato.
Mi hermoso gato, mi bello Gato su nombre El Pato

Camryn Marie Ross

*Irma Lerma Rangel YWLS
11th Grade*

Dissociation

I walk by her gaze,
The world is real.
She's gone from my view,
Why can't I feel?
I taste her lips,
I feel her eyes,
And when she's gone,
So are my highs.
Her smiles like ice,
They numb my mind,
Without them, I'm frozen in time.
Say I'm yours,
And I'll be fine,
The world is real,
When you are mine.

===== **Joy Victoria Jones** =====
Uplift Wisdom Preparatory
12th Grade

Awaiting Strom

I waited.
Powerless, silent, scared.
I waited.

No raging, No speaking
just...silence.

Yet inside me, a storm rages.
It's thunderous sound awaiting its release.
My fear of rage dissipating as my facade slowly fades.

I forget to wait
I forget to be powerless, silent, and scared

Then I begin to speak.
The storm is no longer a thing to be feared,
no longer a darkness to hide away and rot.
The storm erupts, it roars, and rages.
It will not be silenced, it will be forever heard.
I will not be silenced
I will be heard.

A forever raging storm thundered, waiting no more.
I became that storm, that thunderous sound.

John McKenna

*Woodrow Wilson High
12th Grade*

Una Navidad Blanca

La ciudad se queda en silencio,
el humo ya dejó de estar.
La niebla desapareciendo,
Todo se empieza a llamar.

Es mágico este momento,
que se puede oír
un copo tocando el suelo,
cayendo lento al venir.

El gris de calles y concreto
se vuelve blanco con nieve,
como si tuviera un secreto,
nadie nunca se hable.

Llega la sol de mañana,
el mundo entero brillante,
la solo sonido es la campana,
será un día importante.

Una navidad blanca.

Alexa Oro

*Woodrow Wilson High
12th Grade*

No Me Rendí

De niña, los números eran algo que no podía entender,
y mi mente se quedaba en blanco sin saber qué hacer.
La maestra exigente ponía su mirada como peso sobre mi,
y al compararme con otros, mas pequeña yo me sentí.

En la puerta del salón el miedo me hablaba sin parar,
y los problemas rápidos pasaban como un rayo sin esperar.
Por eso decidí estudiar y no dejar de intentar,
cien multiplicaciones cada día para poder mejorar.

Mi mamá fue mi apoyo, una luz que me abrazó como guía,
y su carta sincera brilló como un sol con alegría.
Hoy quizá no soy perfecta, pero logré aprender,
porque no me rendí y pude crecer.

==== **Johsel Tejada Camacho** =====

*Woodrow Wilson High
12th Grade*

Para ti

Tus ojos marrones como el café profundo en las mañanas

Tu pelo dorado como un rayo de sol que entra por mi ventana
en las mañanas

Tu piel tan blanca como la nieve que cae por mi ventana

Tus labios rojos como las rosas que salen en primavera

Tu sonrisa tan alegre que das cuando te saludan

Con un corazón tan grande como el mar profundo que nunca
se agota

Eres el tesoro que el tiempo no ha de borrar

Y así es como mis ojos te ven mi amor.

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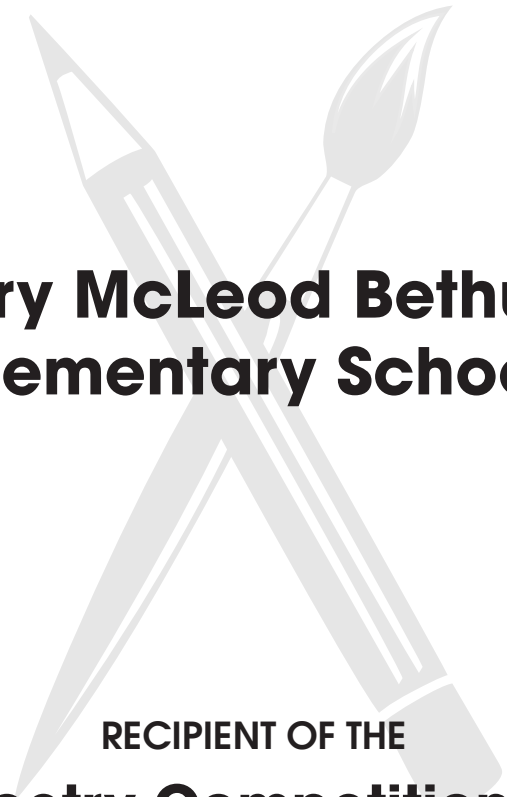
Participating Schools

Schools in bold have a finalist published in this anthology or on the cover

Alcuin School
 Arcadia Park Elementary School
 Benjamin Franklin International Exploratory Academy
Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary School
 Bishop Dunne Catholic School
Bishop Lynne High School
Annie Webb Blanton Elementary School
Casa View Elementary School
 St. Cecilia Catholic School
 Classical School of Dallas
 Collegiate Prep Elementary School
 Coppell Middle School-West
 Coram Deo Academy
 Dallas Environmental Science Academy
Dallas Hybrid Preparatory
George Bannerman Dealey Montessori
L.O. Donald Elementary School
 Downtown Montessori at Ida B. Wells Academy
 Duncanville High School
Eduardo Mata Montessori
 The Episcopal School of Dallas
W.E. Greiner Exploratory Arts Academy
 Hamilton Park Pacesetter Magnet
 N.W. Harlee Early Childhood Center
 HEB collegiate academy
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The Hockaday School
 Holy Trinity Catholic School
 D.A. Hulcy STEAM
 Thomas Jefferson High
 Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas
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 Mockingbird Elementary School
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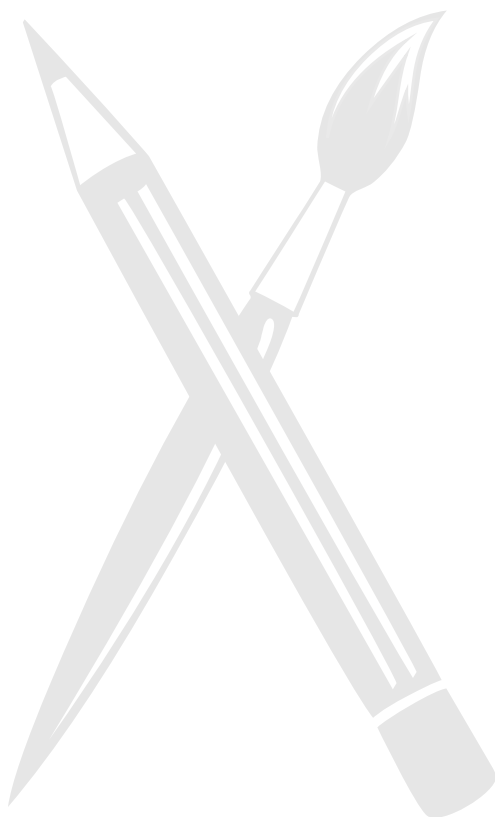
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 Nova Academy Prichard
 Parish Episcopal School
 J.J. Pearce High School
 John J. Pershing Elementary School
 Pioneer Technology and Arts Academy, North Dallas
 Pleasant Grove Elementary School
K.B. Polk Center for Academically Talented & Gifted
 Oak Cliff Faith Family Academy
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 Rice Middle School
 Richardson West Junior High Arts and Technology Magnet
 Marvin E. Robinson School of Business and Management
 at Townview
 Rosemont Upper Campus
Sam Tasby Middle
Judge Barefoot Sanders Law Magnet
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School for the Talented & Gifted at Townview
 School of Health Professions at Townview
 School of Science and Engineering at Townview
 Scofield Christian School
Skyline High School
Solar Preparatory School for Girls
 Spanish World School
Booker T. Washington HPVA
Daniel Webster Elementary
Sudie L. Williams TAG
 Sunset High School
TVAH
 UME Preparatory Academy
Uplift North Hills Preparatory
Uplift Wisdom Preparatory
Ursuline Academy
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2026 Poetry Competition Award
FOR THE **DALLAS SCHOOL**
WITH THE **MOST POETRY ENTRIES**



**Thank you to this year's judges and workshop presenters.
Without their dedication and insight, this volume would not exist.**

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Jennifer Condon	Edith Preciado
Monica DeAvila	Josy Reyes
Alfredo Delgado Rivera	Daisy Rodarte
Jason Derfus	Sarah Rodriguez
Empowering through the Arts	Carlos Roque
Tori Forte	Kristal Ruiz
Joelle Grabowski	Edward Sanchez
Ashley Hackel	Faridd Sierra
Brittanie Heathington	Shante Smith
Raul Herrada	Nick Susa
Yesenia Herrera	Izzy Williams
Guadalupe Hinojo-Aguirre	Hannah Winkler
Caitlin Hughes	The Writer's Garrett
Giselle Hunley	Acenet Zaragoza
Jenny Ibarra	Emrys Zimmerman
Danielle Jeffery Molina	
Amy Jensen	

