

August 2022



THE SIXTH ANNUAL GWENDOLYN BROOKS YOUTH POETRY AWARDS



A Message from Governor JB Pritzker

“Congratulations to the winners and honorable mentions of the Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards.

In the words of the late great Gwendolyn Brooks, ‘poetry is life distilled.’ Thank you for sharing a slice of your lives with us. I couldn’t be prouder of each and every one of you. May you never forget the power that language has to inspire hearts, move minds, and change worlds. Here’s to the next generation of Poets Laureate and Pulitzer Prize-winning writers.”

— Governor JB Pritzker

2022 Awardees and Honorable Mentions

Table of Contents

★* KINDERGARTEN - 5TH GRADE

The Stars and the Sun and the Moon Sherlin Dominguez 10

Lion Pet Willa Bedwell 11

My Sister and Me * Harper Causley 12

I See Something Yellow Samantha Chansiri 13

There are bunnies Lucy Orr 14

Sunset of the Flowers * Charlotte Tyler 15

A Wonderful Morning Aiden Hampton 16

Dear America Emily Watkins 17

The Way * Violet Locke 18

Venus Sofie Pop 19

Life of Loneliness Mathew Bohanon 21

The wind is wishing * Olive Morton 22

Space Jackson Best 23

Sunrays Rayaans Ansari 25

The Valkyries' Silken Touch * Caroline Field 26

King Cobra Taksh Taware 27

White Rabbit Laila Garay 29

The bloomy, gloomy forest * Julian Liss 30

★ ★ 6TH GRADE – 8TH GRADE

We Are All Americans: My Grandma's Story Lyra Rivera 32

So you want to be a hustler! Julian Cromwell 34

On the Kitchen Table * Luke Sindt 35

Frolics of Spring Hannah Hufana 36

The Little Things Maddy Lehman 38

The Concrete Jungle * Shawn Dengler 40

Earth Nathan Louie 42

I speak to the twilight MiKaylah Brown 43

Front Row Seat * Daniela Kasalo 44

★ ★ 9TH GRADE – 12TH GRADE

Staring at Pretty Magazines Angelina Wyrwas 46

Home, said I, a Thing of Central Franklin Hughes 51

The Mindspace Reginald Armstrong Jr. 52

Joy FC vs. Abyss United * Brooks Lansana 54

Great-Grandmother Trinity Arias 56

An Ode to Whiskey and Cigars Allie Petraitis 58

Putting a Tie on a White Tee * Michael Hightower 61

A Sinner's Confession Kaleena Vose 62

jesus to blk boys Kae Osei 64

Life in Key of C * Katie Dunn 67

* Honorable Mention

The Sixth Annual Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards

Illinois Humanities, in collaboration with the Poetry Foundation, Brooks Permissions, and the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, is proud to present the 2022 Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards. In 2017, Illinois Humanities, in partnership with Our Miss Brooks 100, the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, and the Poetry Foundation, revived the youth poetry awards that Gwendolyn Brooks began in 1970 and continued until her passing in 2000.

Gwendolyn Brooks summed up the contest best in a note in 1977: ***“All the children who entered the contest are winners ... They worked hard. They created. And that is what is important.”***

With this spirit in mind, we'd like to thank and honor everyone who submitted a poem. We'd also like to thank all of the teachers, librarians, parents, caregivers, mentors, and others who supported and nurtured young writers throughout Illinois: you're supporting the next generation of Illinois poets.

A special thanks to the Poetry Foundation for their work and support in making this competition possible.

We invite you to read, reread, and enjoy the poems of the 2022 Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awardees and Honorable Mentions.



Gwendolyn Brooks,
by Nora Brooks Blakely

Born in Topeka, Kansas on June 7, 1917, she was brought home to Chicago after her first few weeks of life. She married Henry L. Blakely II in 1939. They had two children, Henry L. Blakely III and Nora Brooks Blakely.

The first Black person ever to win the Pulitzer Prize (1950), she received countless honorary degrees as well as many other honors and awards, including Poet Laureate of Illinois (30+ years), inductee of the National Women's Hall of Fame, an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, the National Medal of Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities' Jefferson Award, and Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. However, Ms. Brooks did not just receive awards. She sponsored numerous one-time and on going awards at elementary schools and high schools. She also developed awards for adult writers (young and established) and was well-known for her generosity and support of individual artists. Her published works include several books of poetry for adults and children, one novel, writing manuals, and two volumes of her autobiography.

Ms. Brooks taught at several colleges and universities. To date, at least five schools have been named after her, as well as the Illinois State Library Building and several other libraries, award programs, and cultural centers.

The History of the Awards by Mark Hallett

The Youth Poetry Awards were first announced in an October 8, 1969 press release. For the next 30 years, Gwendolyn Brooks, poet laureate of Illinois and the first Black poet to win the Pulitzer Prize, personally stewarded the awards. She wrote guidelines, sent out flyers to schools across the state, supervised the selection process, notified winners, spoke at the awards ceremony, and, most importantly, corresponded with hundreds of student poets, parents, teachers, and administrators impacted by this experience. *The New York Times* reported Gwendolyn Brooks spent \$2,000 or more of her own income annually on the Awards.

Why host a youth poetry contest in the first place? For Ms. Brooks it was firstly rooted in a desire to imbue “a continuing interest in the health of poetry,” and, secondly, her belief that “a ‘poet laureate’ should do more than wear a crown — should be of service to the young.”

Gwendolyn Brooks reviewed and selected winning poems for more than 30 years. She searched for poems with “vitality, language surprises, bright contemporaneity, technical excellence, evidence of suitability for the ‘long haul,’” but winning poems did not require “all such virtues in combination.”

In 1979 the guidelines for the contest changed slightly to encourage poems that both “rhyme or rhyme less.” This change may have come in response to a letter from a 13-year-old poet who was deaf. He wrote to Ms. Brooks that his entry was rejected by his teachers because its lines didn’t rhyme even though he’d noticed that the lines of poems by Carl Sandburg, Ms.

Brooks's predecessor as Illinois Poet Laureate, didn't rhyme either. In the margin to the student's letter, she wrote, "These teachers are 'criminals,'" reflecting her sustained belief in taking youth seriously as both writers and individuals.

Her belief in the capacity for young people to write powerfully about their experiences was captured in remarks she made at the final awards ceremony she attended before her death in 2000. She proclaimed to the audience: "When you have experienced these upcoming poems you'll identify new reasons for admiring your children and teens ... Much of the time you know them ... Not always do you know them." She urged parents and teachers, then and now, to "Listen to these phrases, these deliciously strange constructions. WOW. WOW."

Over the years, the Awards expanded to honor works by students from kindergarten through college before finally settling upon celebrating poets in kindergarten through 12th grade. From 1976 onward, the University of Chicago hosted an annual awards ceremony in which these students were publicly acknowledged.

In 1987 the Significant Illinois Poets Award ceremony honored both students and Ms. Brooks on her 70th birthday with readings by 32 notable poets, including Paul Carroll, David Hernandez, Angela Jackson, Sandra Jackson, Haki Madhubuti, and Henry Blakely, Ms. Brooks's husband. Among the poets reading that afternoon was Sandra Cisneros, who had cultivated many young writers through her years at the Latino Youth Alternative High School in Chicago. Ms. Cisneros later remembered the day as "a rare Sunday. A

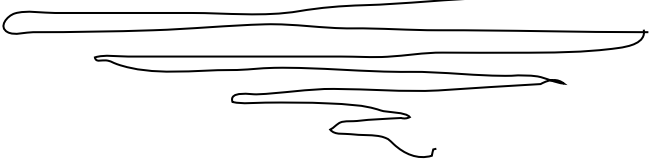
sincere Sunday. From someone both sincere and rare.” That same year, Elsie Adams, whose daughter had been mentored by Ms. Brooks, thanked the poet for personifying “the artist who is unselfish with her talent; one who ‘gives’ bountifully, and therefore ‘reaps’ bountifully. You believe that we owe our sisters and brothers; you fulfill that debt constantly.”

Illinois Humanities is inspired by Ms. Brooks’s commitment to youth and to the power of poetry. Through the annual statewide Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards we look forward to doing what we can to continue to fulfill the debt of all she has given to Illinois and to the world.

All the writing tips are excerpts from SEASONS: A Gwendolyn Brooks Experience; Edited by Nora Brooks Blakely, Cynthia A. Walls with illustrations by Jan Spivey Gilchrist © 2017.

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perfection
 rainbow midwest snow
 room beauty summer home sisters
 stars abyss invisibility see home covid
 staring break school green see new gloomy
 freedom something morning
 space creature beginning end america cat
 earth free beginning afraid red story
 something love
 dreams waiting view lion night voice someone bread light words
 flowers waiting view lion night voice someone yellow feel said
 saw feelings future hear afraid red story
 poem
 tree american time
 heart pink rain world ode day dark like
 waves front dream seasons white day lost just wante
 mirrors nature soccer moon eyesthings star
 read gargoyle sky snowy blue war help invisible wind past changing wings
 reality sun



To Young Writers

You are an ordinary child no more.
The invisible shoulder bumps that
 set you apart
hunched over books and books, open like
roses, and out of roses smooth blades slide
out like the sides of a song
 These are your wings.

You will peel your own eyes. Always.
And this will be your first meal:
what you see inside
what you see out.
You will eat like a saint, like a bird.
You will feast on dreams
Though you will be thin or fat
 in the body.
Not your honest heritage.
You will mind your eyes.

By the power of your wings
and the
endless supply of your eyes, you will
cut your flight and fly.

Take what earth you want. And your share
 of sky.

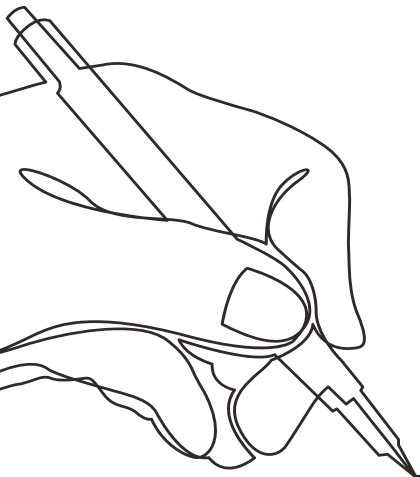


— Angela Jackson, Poet Laureate of Illinois, 2022

Angela Jackson

Angela Jackson, the fifth Illinois Poet Laureate, is an award-winning poet, novelist, and playwright who has published three chapbooks, four volumes of poetry, two novels, and three plays. She is also the author of the significant biography *A Surprised Queenhood in the New Black Sun: The Life and Legacy of Gwendolyn Brooks*. Born in Greenville, Mississippi and raised on Chicago's South Side, she was educated at Northwestern University and the University of Chicago.

KINDERGARTEN – 5TH GRADE



Writing tip:

Use fresh language.

Feel free to talk on your paper
about anything, not just flowers and
trees and springtime...

The Stars and the Sun and the Moon

Do you know where the stars go in the daytime?
They go nowhere.
Cause the sun is too bright
That you can't see them.
It's the people's turn to be daytime
Then the moon comes to us
Because it's her turn to be nighttime.

— Sherlin Dominguez, Kindergarten

Lion Pet

I want a lion.

My lion is a pet.

I want my lion to be a pet.

I would sneak my lion into my closet
even though my closet isn't that big.

Sometimes I'd leave the light on
and leave the closet door wide open for the lion.

My lion says *Turn that light off!*

What do you think, do you NOT want me to be a pet?

And I say, *I love you, Lion!*

And he says, *Well!-wel!-wuh-wu-!!*

and then he cries.

My parents are fine with me having a pet lion,

As long as I don't touch it or pet it.

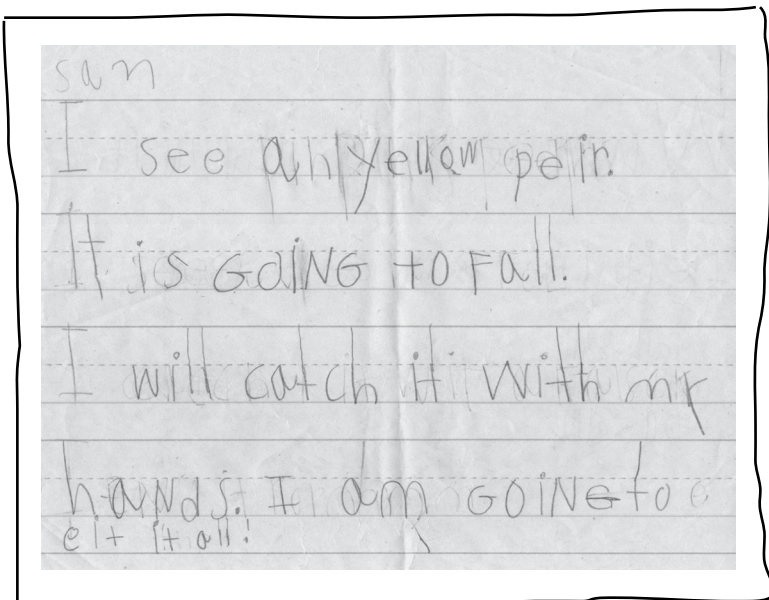
— Willa Bedwell, Kindergarten

My Sister and Me

I stop my sister from talking to strangers.
We dance together.
We dream together.
When my sister needs to write a sentence
I help her.
I protect my sister from bugs and danger.

— Harper Causley, Kindergarten

I See Something Yellow



I see a yellow pear

It is going to fall

I will catch it with my hands

I am going to eat it all!

— Samantha Chansiri, 1st grade

There are bunnies

There are bunnies in my backyard.
I saw them last weekend when they moved in.
I saw the top of their nest in the ground
and Daddy pulled back the roof of it
and I saw the ear of a baby bunny,
pointy and brown.
Daddy pulled the roof back one more time
and I saw something move.

— Lucy Orr, 1st grade

Sunset of the Flowers

The sun sets at dusk.
The moon comes out at night
And the flowers close.

In the summer and spring
The sun does more.
It stays out longer
To make the flowers grow.
The flowers grow and grow

Until winter comes
And then the flowers start to die
And after a few months
The sun will rise again.
But now
Winter is the night.

— Charlotte Tyler, 1st grade

A Wonderful Morning

It was a wonderful dawn on a warm, sunny summer day and I was sitting on my patio, enjoying the wind and the breeze. Over in the distance I could see a river shining in the morning sunshine, fish jumping out of it, their scales glittering like the sun. Trees were swaying, dancing to the wind, their leaves green as the grass on the flat countryside. There was a crimson barn, its cows grazing, thankful for the gracious grass, in the sun.

The farmer was growing fresh fruit and vegetables of all sorts, from apples and oranges to broccoli and carrots, which had grown like crazy since the last time I saw them. Small houses were nestled on the river bank, where People were walking around, buying food from the local food stores. As the sun rose into the sky, which was a wonderful mixture of red, pink and a little bit of yellow, I sat, still as a rock, looking around at the flowers growing in my garden. And I thought to myself what a wonderful day it was.

— Aiden Hampton, 2nd grade

Dear America

The flag flies high
Like the birds in the sky
But people will die
While May passes by

— Emily Watkins, 2nd grade

The Way

The way the water flows
Is the way it dances
The way I dance
Is the way the bunny hops
The way I see the stars
Is the way I'm singing
The way the sun sets
Is the way I sleep.

— Violet Locke, 2nd grade

Venus

I am alone.

I am Earth's evil twin.

Nobody lives on my surface.

I am not inhabited.

The acid rain stings my skin, like drops of lava,
and burns me like one million mosquito bites.

I try to create life, but I will always be alone.

The humans send spacecraft to examine me.

It's like going to the doctor's office,
but the doctor comes to you.

My atmosphere-- my skin is beautiful because
of the chemicals that live inside of it.

No human has ever tried to travel to me, and if they landed,

I would accidentally burn them up
because of the extremely high temperature of my body.

The yellow clouds block me from meeting my friend, the sun.

But the light never reaches me.

I rotate around my friend the sun
like a human running on a hamster wheel.

I slowly run out of energy, from trying to catch the sunlight.

It is always raining, and I can never catch a break.

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The sun never comes out and I am sad,
and I cry the acid rain drops, as they burn my face.
I will always be alone and sad.
I will always be Venus.

— Sofie Pop, 3rd grade

Life of Loneliness

I am lonely

No one notices me

Socialization is like trying to catch the wind

I feel like a tree in a open meadow

People bump into me without acknowledging me

I am a ghost and they think I am the wind whistling

I walk into a door that leads nowhere

It's calm... I like not being noticed

When someone cares it is like

they pull me back out through the doorway of loneliness.

— Mathew Bohanon, 3rd grade

The wind is wishing

The wind is wishing side to side
as the hurricane rolls in.
My papa yells, *Get down, get down!*
I get into the basement without a sound.
It is quiet there as I wish for the storm
to stop screaming its dreadful sound.
It seems like hours.
I wait in the darkening light.
Then the storm stops screaming
and the wind stops whistling.
I walk upstairs to the sound of my cat's
meow meow meow.
I call, *Beau, come here!*
He runs to me like a bolt.
I pet him as I sit
down, down, down.

— Olive Morton, 3rd grade

Space

Earth.

A beautiful planet.

To us it is bigger than one thousand suns.

But from a view from space, it is no bigger than a marble.

Just a speck of blue floating in the middle of space.

The earth ends, but space goes on.

The earth is a sphere, space just keeps going.

Space.

An abyss of stars and planets.

Stars pervade the galaxy.

They glide through space like a river.

There are millions of planets in this miraculous place.

Earth is one of them. Water, land, grass, oxygen.

It is a blessing we live here.

Humanity has always been searching.

From looking for the TV remote in the couch,

to explore the deep depths of the ocean.

So much exploring.

Yet we will never be able to explore all of space.

It is impossible.

Then there are the dimensions. There are so many.

All so different yet all so similar.

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There are many beautiful things in the galaxy.
Space, the stars, planets, humanity, earth.
Oh God, How can we ever repay you?

— Jackson Best, 4th grade

Inspired by the painting *Snoopy — Early Sun Display on Earth*
by Alma Thomas

Sunrays

The sun rays beaming down
Dividing the mountains in half
Light glimmering,
But weather simmering
Soon the sun flies down in the night sky
Then the night comes by
The moon still bright
Watching it at the campsite
The stars appear
And midnight is near.

— Rayaan Ansari, 4th grade

Inspired by: *Blast Off* by Alma Thomas

The Valkyries' Silken Touch

Swan feathers soar through the
azure blue of the morning,
euphoria, navy, gray, black, ghost on the horizon,
screaming, moaning, winds
hurry to announce the coming of war!
Battle cries pierce the once
bejeweled blue of the morning
We dive, soar, down, down
The Valkyries touch, like silken water droplets,
dripping down, down, soothing,
as realization falls, the trumpet of their hearts
fading, fading, gone.
Plucking the weak limp feather of the heroes,
from their place in the world,
soaring, drifting,
feathers smooth as cream,
guide the whittle of our heart's desire,
to the slick chestnut podium of our beloved horses
floating, drifting, dreaming, upwards,
to the land of free-floating souls.
Awaiting triumphant trumpets are ready to hail welcome,
harps strum a lavender embedded tune,
sweet amber mead to be slurped,
salmon-fresh pork to be gobbled,
Heroes to be loved by all!

— Caroline Field, 4th grade

King Cobra

Soul of degeneracy
A serpent slithering with corruption
Orbs of the head
Is the hue of the void
Colors colliding that are shown
Protects its home with spirit
Is not a social one
When lush is destroyed
Thinks for itself only
Doesn't care about others
Empathy at zero
Cannot come back up to be revived
Can only stay in the Underworld
Shows that it is the only one
That can be fitting for the title
King
A beast that cannot be defeated
Hunger made up of greed
With no end for it
The sense of sight has no light

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It has no limit for its vengeance
Darkness with no mercy
Feels as if it has no clemency
Bares its fangs and strikes without anything

— Taksh Taware, 5th grade

White Rabbit

The
white
rabbit
is docile
as can be.

Benignant to nature
even in **its** darkest hour
against the wild fox and
keen eagles in the sky.

They shoot down
as shards of hail
to catch the rabbit from
its tower of terror. "Oh rabbit,
rabbit, so sweet and soft, so nice
and smart, so lean and agile." but
they are wrong. As the sun dies, and
the moon's army of stars prepares their
journey to the sky, the rabbits linger in the
night, hidden in a veil of secrecy across
the grass. Their fur matted and bruised,
cut and uneven. Deadly eyes the color of
blood waiting in the dead of night to strike the
grass again. They pound their feet against the ground
not to alert the other rabbits of danger, but to blurt their
war cries. "Rabbit so docile. So sweet." But that is wrong.

— Laila Garay, 5th grade

The bloomy, gloomy forest

The bloomy, gloomy forest is a mystery.

You can only see
what the eye can meet.

You can only feel
what the eye can reach.

You lightly push some pine trees
out of the way,
the sun brightly shines on your face.

Then you see
the beautiful deep, lotus-colored sea.

You look up at the sky, violet and charcoal
as the sea underneath the sea
says, you shall come with me.

— Julian Liss, 5th grade

6TH GRADE – 8TH GRADE

Writing tip: *Hear* talk in the street. There is much real poetry coming out of the mouths of people in the street. Many clichés, yes, but also vitality and colorful strengths.

Your poem does not need to tell your reader everything. *A little* mystery is fascinating. *Too much* is irritating.



**Todos Somos Americanas: La Historia
de Mi Abuela**
We Are All Americans: My Grandma's Story

We
Are all Americans
Even out on seas
Mi Abuela says: "Here."
When someone asks: "Where are you from?"
"Puerto Rico"

We
Are all Americans
Remember Roberto Clemente
That baseball star?
We have your autographed picture
Hanging on our wall

Or María Cadilla Colón de Martínez
A women's rights activist?
María Cadilla Colón de Martínez high school
That's where my Abuela went to school

- continued on next page -

They
Are all Americans
They
Are all Puerto Ricans

Mi Abuela
Mi Abuelo
Mi Papá
Y yo

Puerto Rico
Unincorporated US territory
You flow through me from island to mainland
Like geese in their triangle formations
Coming back after a long winter

Don't forget
We
Are all Americans

— Lyra Rivera, 6th grade

So you want to be a hustler!

So you wanna be a hustler!
So you want to be a hustler,
Then you better use your brain
Or you could change to a customer
I can see you now, outside of a store
Asking change from every customer
Or got 4 quarters trying to exchange it for a solid buck
And you just might be out of luck
Cause those young dudes don't take money that don't fold
They say the worlds fare, I swear
It's so cold
Why you see users in the summer with coats on
The winter bring teens to them hot blocks to keep warm.
So you wanna be a hustler, good!
Just make sure, whatever your hustlings understood,
Cause once you make it in, it's hard to make it out the hood
Some make it to jail,
Others lay out in wood.
Those who didn't make it big, we label aunty or uncle,
With memories of when aunty was humble,
But now she like a beast to get a piece,
All from what, she learned, hustling in the streets!

— Julian Cromwell, 6th grade

On the Kitchen Table

The lightly spotted purple petals of the flower
subtly glisten in the window-filtered kitchen light.

Angled green stalks rise up
through the clear glass vase, becoming magnified
and distorted in the water.

Below the water line, on one of them,
a single green leaf with rivulets of indentations running
its length stretches up almost, but not quite, reaching
its canopy of lightly spotted purple petals
belonging to the form of a flower.

— Luke Sindt, 6th grade

Frolics of Spring

Raisin poppies and redwood peonies line the blissful garden
As we step and trudge throughout the forest
colors of pinks, yellows, and greens shroud our vision
and we walk further into the colorful abyss

An aroma of delicate dandelions float throughout the air like a love letter to
Aphrodite
Sunlight caresses the golden clips of gleaming dewdrops
and tall trees and trilliums reach for the sky as bees cry out their secret songs
hoping for our applause

The rolling hills of mossy rivers soon run regular
and we stop to sit in the fields
The evening breeze flaunts our hair in waves
while we lay down our blankets before our feet

Ruby carnations flood the gardens of golden green
Puddles of pallid tears melt in the fields
We spread our food on the checkered tiles
and release our sandwiches from their prison

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The sun toasts our evening meal
The trees dance in their new myrtle garments
The first day of spring has blown away the winter air
and we loll in the frolics of spring days

— Hannah Hufana, 7th grade

This poem was inspired by the photograph *Spring Bulbs in
Wooded Setting* by Molly Adams

The Little Things

My mom floats around the house like a bee
Leaving joy and kindness in the little things she does
The way she fills up our water bottles
The extra shifts she took at the diner to get my brother the bike he
always wanted
Her gentle hands as she braids my hair

She is safe.
She is the person we go to as we rest our heads on her shoulder
When we feel broken
She pieces us back together

And every time she grimaces,
And holds her forearm
Covered by her long blouse hiding the bruises she is so ashamed of
I can see the broken in her face
I know she hides it
To keep us happy
And hide her pain

- continued on next page -

And every time she feels this pain
She takes a moment
Breathes
And smiles
Looking into her life now
And blocking away the memories
She places one foot in front of the other
And goes to bed at night dreaming of her childrens' glory
And as she pieces us back together
She is slowly healing herself

— Maddy Lehman, 7th grade

The Concrete Jungle

A concrete jungle. Somewhat populated, past it's peak, and it will never be the same.

The air quality isn't all that good in the concrete jungle, the rain turns brown as it hits the ground, but not from the dirt.

Deforestation in the concrete jungle occurs everyday so we can have nice furniture. Hey look at my handcrafted table. Man I hope that kid's fingers don't hurt that much, maybe now he can provide for his family.

Black smoke in the concrete jungle from factories which clouds our air for our entertainment, but we hope the ice doesn't melt, we like polar bears. Hopefully CA doesn't sink.

The gray clouds in the concrete jungle are filled with tears of single mothers that can't afford to give their children the benefits that they didn't have as a kid. These little kids just have to ask as their mother holds back tears, "When is daddy coming back?"

Prices of medicine are higher than the teenagers that find the dealer, but the police can't? Anything for a quick dollar, right? The next day you see on the news, a kid has overdosed because of somebody with special candy off of the streets of the concrete jungle.

- continued on next page -

Racists are common in the concrete jungle, it's highly populated with people of color, different colors like a rainbow, but a rainbow's colors are united. Could've been someone just like you, but they don't have the same skin color as you, what a monster.

In the concrete jungle, some people are made fun of because of who they choose to love, it's like they can't understand, but when they take their lives, they question, maybe they could've.

A global virus takes over the planet in a couple of months, but I don't wanna wear a mask, I don't wanna stay in my house for a couple of weeks, I want my freedom. Ok, let's see how much you're willing to fight for that "right".

We fight for our rights, but all we end up doing is fighting each other. We are all the same race, the human race, some with different skin, and some with different preferences, but that makes us who we are, that is what makes everyone special.

Life is a lot like Spring, it's dark and stormy, but that's where flowers, animals, sun, plants, and life begin to rise. The flower that blooms later is always more beautiful. We can be that positive result out of a dark time. We can be the change we need, we can be the best person we can be for a better future, in the concrete jungle.

— Shawn Dengler, 7th grade

Earth

The sky blankets the Earth,
providing warmth and comfort with its blue hue.
The ocean envelopes the land with its striking tides,
yet it is dwarfed by the sheer scale of space.
A planet filled with a multitude of colors,
appears like a yarn ball,
made from tiny tiles of wool and cotton,
ready to be unraveled and explored.

— Nathan Louie, 8th grade

Inspired by: *Snoopy* — *Early Sun Display on Earth* by Alma Thomas

I speak to the twilight

I stand and speak to the twilight
My arms wide open in hope of a response
I wait for the feeling of wonder to wrap around me
But all I receive is the cold silent stare of
A million stars in the night sky
My heart yearned for the knowledge of the cosmos
And my soul longed for the power of the gods
But I knew my fragile mind couldn't withstand such knowledge
My mortal body would crack under
The sheer weight of my might
Yet still I want the wisdom of the heavens
But I will wait for the bright light in the sky
And the beautiful sound of trumpets

— MiKaylah Brown, 8th grade

Front Row Seat

The quiet night throws a blanket over the world,
careful not to wake the inhabitants of the world.
Billions of vivid stars look down at me from above,
but they are only revealed to me in the darkness
of a field, barren of the fruits of life.
I am granted a seat to a display of enthralling constellations,
dancing around the sky like ballerinas.
they've put me in a trance, and I can't look away.
their dancing turns into luminous rays,
sprouting down from the sky and carrying me up to the stage.

— Daniela Kasalo, 8th grade

This poem was inspired by the painting *Grey Night Phenomenon*
by Alma Thomas

9TH GRADE – 12TH GRADE

Writing tip:

Poetry HAS a future! You MAY initiative new forms. You MAY create. You do NOT have to consider that “everything has been done.” You do NOT have to write sonnets, villanelles, heroic couplets, haiku, tanka, simply because centuries of poets have written such. Dare to invent something. Understand: that somebody invented the sonnet. Understand: the day before the sonnet was invented there was no sonnet.



Staring at Pretty Magazines

You're so pretty.

I cannot stop staring at you.

And it pains me to realize this, because if other people notice me looking, it's going to look the wrong way.

Especially if you notice.

I'm not supposed to like you.

That's *so* weird, right?

I feel like a fish out of water everytime I'm reminded.

I notice everything about you, and it's funny cause you didn't even know my middle name until today.

I notice how you always cross your left leg over your right knee, and not the other way around, because it feels weird when you put your hands in your lap after balling them into fists.

You're so effortless. Like a magazine cover.

I can't stop looking at you.

I need to know more.

So I picked you up from off the rack, where you were with the other magazines, and I flipped through your pages.

Your pages were so interesting, that I stood there in the grocery store for at least an hour just

studying every detail, every character, every picture there was to offer.

- continued on next page -

I found you so fascinating,
that I just had to take you home with me and the rest of my groceries.
I couldn't let you slip away.
Even to this day I still find new details about you.
Like how you have a poodle, who I don't quite remember the name of,
but that's okay.
All the other magazines around you were almost carbon copies.
All covering the same, dull stories, just with different colors.
You stood out.
Instead of talking about the Kardashians or the Royal Family, you were
interested in the soap operas that play on ABC.
You're so cool.
I can't put into words how you inspire me.
Sometimes when we are in class, I watch how you talk.
You stutter when you're making a good point and you have too much to say.
But you're really smart.
And your eyes are so pretty, just like you.
I look into your eyes a lot, and so deeply.
I feel like a fish out of water then too.
So suffocating being near you.
I can tell just by looking into your eyes you don't feel the same for me in
comparison to how I feel about you,
and I'm okay with that.
Having you in my life, putting you in my shopping cart, was all I needed
from the beginning.

- continued on next page -

I love how you empower me to do more with my life, and how you
subconsciously push me to put in the effort.
How you push me to carry that last bag of groceries up the two flights of
stairs.
You give me something to look forward to when all the groceries are put
away.
I don't feel like I need you,
cause I really don't.
Just like a magazine.
I didn't need to buy you and take you home with me.
And I didn't need to pick you up off the rack in the first place.
But I wanted to.
You looked like the type of magazine that I could get lost into for hours,
when there's only like 6 articles to actually read through.
What I absolutely dread is when I rip one of your pages, or when you
give me a papercut.
You seem to do that a lot, without even realizing it.
But I absolutely love reading you,
which makes me wonder if I could even love you as a whole,
instead of a past-time.
I know if I ever told you,
it would ruin my chances of ever uttering a word to you again.
Because it's *so* weird to like your friend.
At least to you,

- continued on next page -

and if I have any chances or hopes of still being in your life, I have to achingly accept that.

Throughout my 15 years of being on this earth, I have learned two of the most important things to prevent a person from going absolutely insane from their own thoughts.

1, what is meant to be will be,

2, don't focus your energy on the past or future, just the present.

Living in the present is the most invigorating thing you can do in your life.

And when I stare at you,
and the world behind me goes silent,

That's exactly how it feels.

But I wrote this poem for a reason.

You could call it an ode even, for how desperately I express my love for an entity that could never accept me in that viewpoint.

Thus, leaving my ode to you as nothing but a wish.

Power can only go so far, especially for someone so feeble.

I wish you happiness, I wish you success, I wish that you earn everything you deserve.

Now that I think about it, I'm not on that list,
but that's okay.

I don't want this to end, so I will do what I can with my limited amounts of power to prevent myself from getting into a situation that permits that outcome.

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Having someone like you in my life has taught me more things than
my parents can own up to. I don't need you,
as I said before,
nor do I depend on you,
but I feel this *pull*, this inevitable magnetizing force enabling me to
constantly think about you and wonder what it would be like to be
with you.

The same pull that made me want to pick you up off that rack.

I had a dream about you and I just the other day.

Made me feel as if I took ecstasy.

I almost believed it was my reality.

The happiness consumed me more than my hunger for your attention,
and at this point in my knowing you, all I can wish is that someone can
make you feel that way too,
even if it'll never be me.

All I can really thank you for in the end, was helping me realize that
living my life was as simple as accepting reality, even if my reality is
staring at you when I get the chance, when nobody else is looking.

— Angelina Wyrwas, 9th grade

Home, said I, a Thing of Central

Home, said I, a thing of central
I sought my Old Home, The location brought such sorrow.
Back into my memories occurring,
deep into that darkness where I was all alone
where the drapes were ripped
and the bed was dark
afraid of my thoughts that flies into my head to scare me
and the nights I snuck out of bed just to be by the family fireplace
The fireplace gave me comfort
that no harm will come to and that everything will be ok
'Home!' said I, 'thing of central.' There I sought my old Home
The location brought such joy
the days I spent playing with my toy cars and having trains and train
tracks to build with
and having a loving father and mother who often spent time with me
and a grandmother who taught me the way
Thinking back on it gave me peace of mind, that on bad days,
everything is going to be ok.
And that I am an overcomer
That's all in the past now.
I am forever grateful
Home said I, **will always** be a 'thing of central'

— Franklin Hughes, 9th grade

The Mindspace

Black child
Your head ignited
Papers and fruits of your labor
Through hard work and dedication
Still reside in your mind
But your skin starts to peel away
Like dry wallpaper

To gain knowledge
Is to gain power
But at what cost?
Is it to lose yourself?
Is it to give up your identity?
Is it to spit out your heritage like tobacco?
So you can survive on your own?

Don't let them burn you out
You are the future
Not the pitied
Your beauty
Your smarts

- continued on next page -

Your personality

You are

The new negro

— Reginald Armstrong Jr., 10th grade

Inspired by the painting *Mystery* by Stacie Monday

Joy FC vs Abyss United

The 1st half begins. Whistle screams in excitement

I see Failure, the opposing coach
7 feet skyscraper sporting a devilish demeanor.

I inform Optimism to run across the slick grass
and pass the noir soccer ball to Kindness.

Kindness, quick on the ball, settles with assurance.
She sprints like a cheetah
People chant her name as she preps
for the critical shot against the opposing goalie, Regret.

Kindness strikes the ball smoothly
towards the bottom right corner of the goal.

1 - 0 Joy FC

Whistle blows again and the game advances.

Sadness gets the ball and spirals past
Compassion, Courtesy, and Comfort smooth as Maradona.

Cheer, our top goalie, runs to prevent the tying goal

Sadness nutmegs him straight through the legs & into the net.

1-1 tie game

Halftime whistle blows and my players come back to me
I take a deep breath and say:

There were times when I was bullied for sounding like a five year old at nine. It made me question why I was a 5th grade Kirby. Ridiculed for my big body Reduced my being to a bleak boy. Constant rage because no one Understood my abyss. My voice silenced by the simple minded, wallowed beneath shame's thick shadows.

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I'm tired of the jabs trying to knock me off. I'm tired of hiding my true self. I won't stop working until I shatter every limit. I broke out the abyss, now I'm ascending into bliss. So break free of your fears! Slide tackle your own barriers. Do what no one thought you could. You were destined to win this!

Whistle blows again, the ball back in our hands

Late in the game. Opportunities miles away
Hope, our shining star, finally gets the ball
He dribbles with determination painted on his face.

Doubt and Despair couldn't keep up with his lightning speed

Hope crosses the ball over Fear, Hate, and Horror

Kindness positions herself confidently
Ignoring the winds in her face, she takes the volley

The ball soars with grace straight into the top left corner

Full-time: Joy FC - 2 Abyss United - 1

Abyss United jaunts off in humiliation
Our fans scream in delight
Kindness milly rocks in mid-air
Hoisted up by her teammates

Joy FC shaping a new legacy
Leaving any abyss to rot

— Brooks Lansana, 10th grade

Great-Grandmother

White porcelain sits on my dresser
Holding small memories that glisten in the soft light.
Gentle whispers and the creak of worn floorboards
Float around me in a grand symphony.

Sweet berry popsicles bought with precious pennies
Bite into our teeth.
Hair curls gently until
A burst of humidity from the open window throws it into chaos.
Stuffed dogs play in front of round glasses and a fragile smile.

Leaves change from green into
Garnet red, amber yellow.
Flying aimlessly until they settle in the ground.
Crisp laughter starts to lose its voice,
The room can't find its color.
The leaves stole it.

A lap loses its warmth from the chill,
The deck of cards only has one shuffle left,
Lips flutter without words.

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A basket of flowers takes over the counter,
Along with doves on a jewelry box and fine china.
The small significance of white porcelain
Stands out amongst the distractions.
Carefully painted flowers lay on the surface,
A shallow hole lost its golden loops of the past,
I gather rings of memories to make it full again.

— Trinity Arias, 11th grade

An Ode to Whiskey and Cigars

Little hands working behind the bar
as Daddy reaches into the little box that's carved into the wall.
His hand goes inside the drawer
and he pulls out a long brown stick
embedded with cancer causing material.

"Daddy, I heard those do bad things to your lungs",
she shouts.
Daddy shrugs it off.
He reaches over the bar near the fast hands to grab the ash tray.
"That looks good",
he says as he makes his way over by the stairs.

Little hands scurry as they finish mixing up
whiskey with bitters and soda water,
finishing with an orange garnish.
They feel proud glancing down at the drink.
Daddy will like it.

Little feet hurry as they follow Daddy up the stairs;
they don't want him waiting.
Little feet watch each step as they go up,
carefully examining for danger that could compromise the mission:
Don't spill the Old Fashioned.

- continued on next page -

Little hands open the sliding glass door
to see Daddy lighting up the cancer stick.
Second hand smoke begins to fill the air,
and then into the little lungs.
She's used to it, though.

Smoke continues to travel,
seeping into the Second hand sweater that's way too big for her.
She found it in Daddy's closet one day,
and wore so dry,
that the tiny holes in the sleeve became fully functioning thumb holes.

She passes him the old fashioned.
He doesn't use a coaster again.
Condensation drips down the side of the whiskey glass,
leaving behind a perfect ring,
tiny enough to fit her hand.

Time passes,
the cancer stick becomes smaller
and the glass more empty.

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Little hands working to clean up
as Daddy continues to snore.
She puts the cigar out in the fire pit,
and the glass back into the cabinet.
She knows where everything goes.
Little Hands are tired,
but not as tired as Daddy.

— Allie Petraitis, 11th grade

Putting a Tie on a White Tee

I miss when we played in parks
Everyone bronze and smiling the times were sweet
We used to have fun after dark that is until they put the tie on our white tees

You see blackness is a beautiful blessing
Everyone in our community to lean on if we stressing
Kids used to grow up together and learn lessons
Until Molly moved in with her vegan dressing

You see Sarah's salad bar closed the town's barber shop
We not talking bout salads when we say we want a chop
The courts were torn down where we prided ourselves in being Black
The public schools became magnets now it's new people they attract

And all of us will leave when the price of living gets too high
And the ones that can't leave we fall under and left to die
Our communities would be white tees how we would be so tight
But Uncle Sam had a plan to suffocate us so he gave the white tee a tie

— Michael Hightower, 11th grade

A Sinner's Confession

Forgive me father for I have sinned
I don't believe everything in the Bible.
I don't believe that being gay is wrong,
That love between two people can be
Disgusting.
I don't believe the pastor when they say
That it's not natural,
Even though it exists in nature.

I don't believe the Bible is perfect,
Because scriptures of sin
Written by sinner's themselves
Already shows a flawed pattern.
And a book that says ignore
the first few chapters
Must have more mistakes
That can be counted.

I don't believe what religious people preach,
I believe on the first day man created hate
And rested on the second day.

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Protect your children from the people
That kill the people they were told to love.
That send their sons off
Like a lamb led to be slaughtered,
Shield your child's eyes from
the disgusting acts
Of hypocritical christians
That talk of sin
While sinning.

The Bible is not a rough draft
That you can edit to your liking.

— Kaleena Vose, 12th grade

jesus to blk boys

(dedicated to G. & B.)

listen to me.

the library is an amazing place to hide when nobody is seeking you there
because why would somebody like you be in a place like this?

here they look at you with awe & wonder. you like it here 'cuz it's easy—
easy enough to forget that danger is waiting for you just down the block

grown men who would gladly tell your mother that you
[standing just under four feet tall]

are a danger to them & society

that you can't wear a Woody costume on Halloween

because the toy gun sewn to your side looks a little too real for them.

you never wanted to be Buzz Lightyear.

listen.

they will take your blood & drink it like communion wine if you let them.
that is to say, don't associate with the Black boys who feel a little too free in
their own skin.

it is only a matter of time before they're made to crawl into the pipelines
running under the school.

it is only 2012. immigrants in this GOD-forsaken country,

your parents worked too hard just for you to end up like the others

- continued on next page -

you thought he was doing you a favor.
you didn't realize it, but everyday that dad stowed you away in the library
was another day he could guarantee he would be able to take you home.
it is the only slice of solace he would ever know.
it is all that mattered.

listen. to. me.

Trayvon Martin died on a [cross]walk
not for your sins,
but to remind you that you-are-next.

that even though you are only eight years old,
the playground is no place for you to run about
little Black boy

don't forget the atrocities they commit in the name of ~~GOD~~ law
enforcement.

don't forget they cut parts of the Bible to justify keeping you in chains.

don't forget it was decided before you
could even speak or defend yourself
what you are & what you will become.

[you don't want to be a martyr, trust me.]

- continued on next page -

now hush. listen.

this is the final warning.

i say unto you: run.

if not for yourself,

then your freedom.

you need to shake & shiver;

meditate, wash & repeat.

you need to melt & reform like a crayon,

take on the image of GOD Herself

& know that She

is Black just like you.

nothing else matters—

hide your bones

& maybe they won't crucify you too.

— Kae Osei, 12th grade

Life in Key of C

The only alphabet I know runs from A to G
Waltzing with flats and sharps
In between bar lines
and crooked time signatures
Stepping on the toes of rests and
Dipping with a key change

I'd rather spin among chord changes
Compose myself in bass clef
Grounded by a solid root
And lowering the third when life
Tries to diminish the symphony

Two-step over the worries as they float away
Like ash
disintegrating into the distance
Climb the staff with pointed toes
And take a leap to dance with the stars

— Katie Dunn, 12th grade



***“Does poetry make anything happen?
Poetry has been known to alter
opinion. From altered opinion
‘happenings’ evolve”***

— Gwendolyn Brooks



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Brooks Permissions was founded in 2001 and manages the literary works of acclaimed poet Gwendolyn Brooks.

The company processes numerous requests for Ms. Brooks' works annually, working with mainstream, educational, and independent publishers, as well as individual artists for projects ranging from literary anthologies and academic course packs to theatrical performances, multimedia projects, and more.

In 2015 Brooks Permissions expanded to include programming and products which help to shine a well-deserved and continuing spotlight on Gwendolyn Brooks's life and work.



The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in American culture.

It exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary prizes and programs.



The Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts advances arts practice, inquiry, and presentation at the University of Chicago, and fosters meaningful collaboration and cultural engagement at the university, on the South Side, and in the city of Chicago.

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