

Rural Oklahoma Museum of Poetry
2021 OPEN POETRY CONTEST
Winners:

K-5th Grade

- 1st, Teresa Manimala, Stillwater OK
2nd, Lily Klassen, Locust Grove OK
3rd, Emmalyn Ragsdale, Locust Grove OK

6th-12th Grade

- 1st, Lenna Abouzahr, Stillwater OK
2nd, Serenity Cross, Carthage MO
3rd, Jasmine Bark, Locust Grove OK

Adult

- 1st, Julie Jeannene Rickard, Fayetteville AR
2nd, Melissa Heath-Lee, Red Oak OK
3rd, Dee Dee Chumley, Edmond OK

Professional

- 1st, Kenneth Weene, Tucson AZ
2nd, Ken Hada, Ada OK
3rd, Vivian Finley Nida, Oklahoma City OK

1st Place, K-5th Grade

Teresa Manimala
Stillwater OK

I'm a Tree

I'm just some wood in a cargo box
Carried by a fellow ox
But they don't care what's inside
They just take me with pride

I'm a tree, I'm a tree
I long to be free
It's me, It's me, It's me

You can use some of me, some...
But you use a lot to get the job done!
What if you were wood,
And couldn't do what you could?

It's me, I'm a tree
I long to be free
You just see half of meee

I give you air and care
But you just take me for granted
I have green leaves
But don't make me lean to the ground

I'm a tree, I'm a tree
I long to be free
It's me, It's me, It's meee...

2nd Place, K-5th Grade

Lily Klassen
Locust Grove OK

The Swing

Here sits a swing,
A swing untouched.
No child has sat,
No child has swung.

It sits and waits beneath the tree
And waits, oh, for some company.
The swing is waiting,
The tree has blossomed and borne fruit,
And still the swing waits.

“Oh, don’t lose hope,” says the tree,
“Just wait . . . and you will hear a child sing!
Hurrah!!! Hurrah!!!
A swing!!!!”

3rd Place, K-5thGrade

Emmalyn Ragsdale
Locust Grove OK

The Seedling

A seed became a seedling.

No one noticed.

It peaked over the soil.

No one noticed.

It towered over the grass.

No one noticed.

Alas, berries fell from its blossoms.

They noticed.

With fruit, the unnoticed became cherished.

1st Place, 6th-12th Grade

Lenna Abouzahr
Stillwater OK

In Lebanon

swarms of vendors storm outside with the sweltering sun
Their dates piled high like termite mounds,
lanky boys climbing slippery banana trees
Arabic spills from the tips of our tongues
and rides the waves across the crowds
but I can't pull the crisp pink and orange
and blue and greens out of my wallet fast enough.
Sweet sugarcane juice dribbles down my chin as
Butchers grip their knives, knuckles bulging,
Eyeing the skinny and starving but street
cats eyeing the dead cows that hang limply, loosely from the ceiling
Wet blood splattering the shiny white floors,
fires roaring and spits turning
slowly as the meat cooks. And cooks. And browns
until the smell is drowning out the tinkling and
clacking of the coffee cups that ring through the streets
and the fading of the sky has gone
unnoticed as I shove the money into his hands
and rip out a chunk of meat from my shawarma sandwich
Toss it to the hungry mouths to stop the helpless mews
and run away with my heart in my throat before mama can see
And as I lounge by the sea under sprinkled sprays of salt
I think about how all I am left with is a limp and faded green bill.

2nd Place, 6th-12th Grade

Serenity Cross
Carthage MO

Deep Into Leaves

I begin writing,
Falling deeper
Into leaves of thoughts I think as I
slump down, sitting,
On this branch of reality, at the edge of this bridge

I make an escape route, root.
To escape branches of reality into leaves of thoughts,
My own thoughts.
As I begin to shout and dispute,
nothing seems to sprout out.

I begin to grasp at them desperately.
Wanting to forget about my choice.
The choice I was about to make.
As I begin to give up, relentlessly,
On trying to reach out to myself among the leaves.

I jump back to life, reality,
look around, blur.
Look down, take a breath, blur.
I decide my finale fate, and jump, for freedom that's a blur, but I feel free.
Falling is like flying among the sky, but as I'm falling I..

I begin to reach my thoughts, as I fall endlessly.
My happy ones, the sad ones, the distant ones.
Ones that helped me cope through rough times.
Now regret fills me with every water drop I've released, onto every root, ruefully.
Along with every selfish leaf and root I've made, including this one.

As I pull myself into a tight hug.
I look down into the abyss and suddenly see clearer now.
The end is near as I take my final breath.
When everything starts to absolve,
I hit the pavement of the highway causing my final moments to be filled with regret.

3rd Place, 6th-12th Grade

Jasmine Bark
Locust Grove OK

My Room

My room is my safe space
Those four pink walls and white ceiling
The soft fairy lights and blue curtains
The big decorated mirror on my wall by my bed
To the pile of dirty clothes in the corner
And the dresser overflowing with clothes
All of my things in these four walls
Memories, pictures, papers, and awards
Notebooks and sketchbooks filled to the brim with
Poems and doodles
Collections of things with no value
Boxes and bags filled with souvenirs and toys
My warm bed with all my pillows and stuffies
These four walls know my past and my present
All of my secrets and every mood
They have watched arguments and fights
Friends come and go
All of my sleepless nights and goodnight sleeps
These four walls are my serenity
They bring me joy
They are my peace

1st Place, Adult

Julie Jeannene Rickard
Fayetteville AR

Relics

Daddy saved his kidney stones
in a pink, plastic box
first used for needle and thread
Sometimes, when the pain returned
in burning back doors of his brain,
he would take the box out of the
cedar chest drawer and show them to me

His stones were the color of sand,
jagged as rock salt formations
Like common fossils found in a desert
we had never seen, they held
some secret of the body they travelled

I rolled his relics hard between
my small fingers but they did not break
I had never seen a penis bare,
only his -hanging mysteriously
inside fruit of the looms on
Saturday afternoons, his hands
stained with grease and blood from operating on one of his engines

Daddy labored in a hospital bed
when one vicious specimen
would not pass
I saw a clear tube disappearing
under the sheet
“The pain is bad ... like hell,” he said

At home, alone and bored,
I opened the pink box,
spread his kidney stones on the floor,
counted them like the quartz I found buried behind the toolshed

2nd Place, Adult

Melissa Heath-Lee

Red Oak OK

Landmarks

Where each house was, she can't quite pinpoint.
So different now with striped, four-lane highways,
where her landmarks used to be.
This turn ahead.
No maybe the next.
There was a rotten oak tree and a brilliant patch of Indian Paintbrush.

Aunt Laura's was definitely by a curve in the road,
at the base of a hill, nestled in shady, thick trees.
And Laverne's house almost straight across,
in the wide, open field,
bright and sunny, and not so many snakes.
Just up the hill was Uncle Sam's service station,
with his main attraction,
a full-grown black bear in an iron cage,
his menace grown weaker than his gamey, musk stench
only able to roar his outrage and offend the senses.

Granny's long-ago home place is easier to find,
an elementary schoolyard now.
A slab of concrete houses a picnic pavilion.
Was that her foundation?
No. She shakes her head.
Granny's floors were wood,
torn down decades ago.

As the car turns around,
we pass a senior center on the corner.
That was the post office
with its tiny metal boxes that clicked and snapped,
as they unfurled their precious parcels.
And across the road there,
was the little store,
paved under now, where the dusty two-lane outgrew its bounds.
Each visit promised them ice cream or sodas
from Daddy's gifted coins,
a thin, shining dime in each sweaty fist.
They tore to the end of the lane,
waiting in the strip of postal grass for cars to clear.

Then bare feet slapped fleetly across the pavement
before the bubbling blacktop could blister their heels,
as they gulped the sweet, sultry air.

She can feel the heat now, can smell the tar,
the honeysuckle bushes,
her tongue musters the cold, chocolatey cream,
sticky as it dribbled onto her chin.
The stiff muscles of her legs remember the desperate sprint,
to catch up with the older kids.
Being the baby would make her an athlete,
a runner,
a jumper, strong and fast.

Wait. Is that Granny's fencerow,
still there behind the gym?
Always laden with blackberries,
sun-hot and ripe, bursting on her tongue.
She tastes the tangy sweet,
the grit of seeds,
rubs at the purplish stains, almost there, on her fingernails.
She closes her eyes to see it real,
as it was.
Their joyous shouts and laughter rising and ebbing,
the aromas of blooms and berries and the acrid, filthy bear,
the dimes and the grass and the fierce, fast hold of Granny's embrace.

It was all here,
as certain as any road or house or tree.

And she tells it to me,
so that maybe it will last.

3rd Place, Adult

Dee Dee Chumley
Edmond OK

Transplanted

With leaves anemic green
and ne'er a blossom grown,
in stingy dirt beneath the eaves,
I'd found my comfort zone.

I held the trellis fast
with tendrils tightly wound.
I forwent possibility
to cling to safe and sound.

The Gardener hid from me
the plans He had in store.
He ripped me from complacency
to give me something more.

Misgivings plagued my rest
in foreign soil entombed.
But rung by rung, I sought the sun,
and bud by bud, I bloomed.

1st Place, Professional

Kenneth Weene

Tucson AZ

We Sit Alone

We sit alone on a worn park bench
caught by long-agos and might-have-beens;
this is our time for deep regrets
for all the tears we've never spent.
Old, frayed, apart, we roost
abandoned in the unkempt park
and watch the world hurry by
whilst we grow old, dark and die.

The crumbs with which you feed the birds
who gather by your feet each day,
the news I fetch from metal cans
unemptied by the city's men—
these are our final little dignities,
unimportant signs that we still breathe,
have minds and thoughts still underneath.

The recollections we now mourn
cannot by sorrow be erased.
They were built in another time,
created in another place.
The Furies who attend our guilts
are not from gods, but from ourselves—
the sorrow of mistakes we've made
recast, rehearsed, and then replayed.

When night comes, we'll stumble shuffle
from the park and through the streets
to find a lonesome, cardboard space,
where we can dream of penthouse lives,
and celebrate what we've not achieved.
There we can stare past memory's walls
and long-gone dreams with dread recall.

2nd Place, Professional

Ken Hada
Ada OK

No Argument

There is nothing I can say.
I have been found out,
reduced to the dust
from which I have tried to mold
a fortified life – to defend
myself by being good enough.

My words fly back in my face.
I swallow them,
and though I have determined
to shun self-pity,
it is a lonely feeling
to be left alone with your bouquet
tight-fisted, wilting

with nothing to say,
no option but to admit
the rightness of her claims,
and thus, the wrongness of yours.

The dust never seems to settle
the way you imagine;
but then, how foolish to try
to make anything from dirt

something only a god might try.

3rd Place, Professional

Vivian Finley Nida
Oklahoma City OK

The Metronome

The other day, spring cleaning in the den,
I dusted shelves, then wiped piano keys,
picked up the metronome, closed front and latched.

I ran a soft cloth over walnut case,
square pyramid in shape, and ancient too.
It started ticking my first year in school

to “Porky Pig Swings on the High Trapeze.”
I yearned to play that on the radio
the night our school sang there, but sister said,

No! Never play recital piece before.
I missed my chance (I didn’t make this up).
Hymns, weddings, funerals busied metronome

until it clicked through daughter’s merry tunes.
At Leaning Tower of Pisa one hot day,
we ducked into cathedral to cool off.

Guide pointed to a chandelier that swayed
just as it had when Galileo watched.
He saw that pendulums, freed high or low,

end path same time, up fast, and downward slow.
In Florence we had seen his finger saved—
the middle one, right hand, quite famous now.

Bright daughter won at trivia with that.
For me, since Pisa, it wags left and right
like metronome with steady rhythm set

to circle sun, bring in the tides, and count.
Two or three seconds pass and now is then,
yet then, by memory, plays evermore.