

2024 Oklahoma Poem Contest Winners

K-4th Grade

1st, Vivian Williams, Alva

2nd, Bostyn Shepherd, Enid

3rd, Leyton Lea, Enid

5th-8th Grade

1st, Hartley Burchardt, Chandler

2nd, Evie Smith, Elgin

3rd, Eli Elliott, Davis

9th-12th Grade

1st, Laney Henry, Pawnee

2nd, Steven Vuong, Moore

3rd, Kadence Morris, Owasso

Adult

1st, Paul Juhasz, Oklahoma City

2nd, Corinne Gaston, Tulsa

3rd, Mason Turner, Howe

K-4th, 1st Place

Vivian Williams, Alva

Farm Life

When I am at home,
I smell wood from the fire
And see the drops of morning dew.
I can hear the barn cats mew.
The old donkey calls.
I see the beautiful Oklahoma sunset
Reflecting off the barn.

K-4th, 2nd Place

Bostyn Shepherd, Enid

Oklahoma State Monument

Grease

Oil field

Lubricate

Digging

Enormous

Needful

Dangerous

Really helpful

It is a good thing

Lube

Luxurious

Earth

Really useful.

K-4th, 3rd Place

Leyton Lea, Enid

Sooner State Oklahoma

Oklahoma is such a beautiful place.
Kites flying in the air left and right and back and forth
Little kids playing in the driveway with chalk
And the older kids playing in the fields
With their bats, helmets and gloves.
Home sweet home.
Older adults watching their grandkids
Moms inside cooking spaghetti for the kids
And again home sweet home.

5th-8th Grade, 1st Place

Hartley Burchardt, Chandler

The State that Never Fails

The turn of a windmill
The flash of a front porch light
The swish of the Oklahoma flag
The tracks of deer in the red dirt
The awakening of the sun
In early morning silence

The quite large trees
With their sunbaked bark and leaves
And the scissortail bird
That takes flight
The sun falls steadily
As the day bleeds into night

Accompanying the moon
Are the bright blazing stars
All carefully placed into a picture
Framing the galaxy
With pleasure and delight
The moon soon turns into broad daylight

The open rose grows
Deep in the thorns
Entangled by the vines
That hold it hostage
A small honey bee
Invades the beautiful prisoner for its pollen

Hay spread thin
Into golden sheets
Blending the field
Waiting patiently to be baled
Oklahoma is a state
That will never fail

5th-8th Grade, 2nd Place

Evie Smith, Elgin

The Hike

When you journey on a hike to explore,
you can't help but remember the lively days of yore.
The wildflowers sway as you pass by.
The sweet scent of their nectar longs to say goodbye.

The grasses slumber, waiting to be eaten,
for they will not survive in the coming season.
Their job of giving breath is done.
Now little furry creatures' hard times have begun

The fuzzy animals, cautious and alert,
watch as you pass by, careful to not get hurt.
For they too have exploring on their mind
similar to the curiosity of humankind.

Birds fly south to find more food
while the animals below are having a feud.
The earth whisks by in a speedy glance.
It must take time to traverse this deathly expanse.

Seeing all this loss really forces you to ponder,
"Does this only happen here, or does it advance yonder?"
Whatever happens next will not be the end,
for the season of Spring will come again.

5th-8th Grade, 3rd Place

Eli Elliott, Davis

Oklahoma the Great State

The beautiful swaying wheat
blows as quietly as a whitetail moves its feet.
The bright sun shining over the Great Plains
oh, how great it smells after it rains.

The sweet smell of hay
can really brighten your day.
Maybe you'll see a spotted fawn in the spring
or hear the thunder that makes your ears ring.

With lots of farming
that makes our land charming.
Now one last thing before you leave
in the fall you should really see our trees.

9th-12th Grade, 1st Place

Laney Henry, Pawnee

Tulahassee Creek Indian Cemetery, Sand Springs, Oklahoma

Loved ones lie here,
In their eternal beds, they rest,
Despite their religion, their upbringing, what they believe,
Their bodies are buried six feet underneath,

The Earth.
Maybe a field at one point,
A sea of green surrounded by trees,
Turned into the midwestern version of a concrete jungle,

Were they around to see the mutilation?
Did they watch the grass become strangled with asphalt?
The trees cut to the root and left to lie bleeding?

Did the land shake around them,
When they brought in the bulldozers and the excavators?

What do they hear in the windy Oklahoma night?
Do they hear the voices of their ancestors?
Or do they hear the dull roar of the cars against the highway?

Are their souls tied to this patch of land?
Like some religions proclaim?
If they are,
Stuck to this shopping center for eternity,
Then I pity them.

Looking at the cemetery guarded by a chain link fence,
I can practically see them,
Leaning against their gravestones,
Looking up at the fluorescent signs

When they stare at the neon glow,
Do they see their god?

9th-12th Grade, 2nd Place

Steven Vuong, Moore

Beyond the River that Runs Red

Out beyond the river that runs red,
Where tornadoes cling to dream and prayer
And taste the feet of tribesmen
Who've kissed their old lives behind,
Still are the undying songs
That haunt this stolen land
Of which both you and I have forgotten
But something mother nature never will
Because the aging oaks of Tulsa—
A black Wall Street big and grand
Never forgot the sting of smoke
Nor grief's voice of agony
Resounded nearly 30 years later
From Clara Luper and her NAACP,
Reminding all humans that the trial
Of god would be the white man's next jury
And I can still hear the singing, no,
The dancing of tribal ancestors,
Their feet etched into the land
For which they've traced there,
Solemn from the southwest,
All the way to the land beyond
The river that runs red—
A land that bore witness to
Justice and grief's ultimate marriage.

9th-12th Grade, 3rd Place

Kadence Morris, Owasso

When The Kingbird Sings

tweet, tweet
not just a bird
snip, snip
it's the scissor-tailed flycatcher
flip, flap
the Texas bird-of-paradise
few, few
but the wings of Oklahoma
tee, tee
take flight forked fowl
weet, weet
and nest in the mid-western countryside
coo, coo
snatch spiders and snip at the sky
pew, pew
see the long-tailed kingbird
cheep, cheep
beautiful ruler of the heavens
chirp, chirp
heal the Oklahoma winds
tweet, tweet
twee, twee
tee, tee
snip, snip.

Adult Category, 1st Place

Paul Juhasz, Oklahoma City

Murrah

The marathon route goes right by my apartment,
adding an unusual cheering section to my morning ritual
of coffee and poetry on an otherwise solitary landing.

A carnival of plastic horns and New Years' noisemakers
challenge my reading. Spectators carry picnic baskets and signs,
fathers give sons piggyback rides,
echoes of phantom pressure on now solitary shoulders.
Someone has turned their lawn sprinklers outward, bathing
the runners in cooling mist. Some of them are just walking
at this point, fatigued far from the finish,

It's hard not to think of Murrah and McVeigh today.
Perhaps because he kept the name of a child until the end,
or maybe because I have too much darkness in my life already,
I try to think of him as a small boy,
lacking the applause that should accompany childhood.
Those communal celebrations of Little League and birthday parties,
where it did not matter if you got a hit, or what you wished for,
because it is never the result we applaud,
because so much can be achieved by the placing together of hands.

I put down my book and go inside for a better view of the celebration.
I want to write about this pushback against the darkness,
this reclaiming of a nightmare, but divorce relocated me here
only four years ago.
To me, the bombing was a tragic news story, played out on a TV screen.
I feel this is not my story to tell, not my poem to write.
There are griefs, and responses to that grief, that should not be appropriated.

I'll watch from the window for a while longer, I decide,
then return to my cramped landing and to my reading,
grateful for the company, and for the applause,
even if it is not for me.

Adult Category, 2nd Place

Corinne Gaston, Tulsa

Coming Home

I come from the womb of these starry woods
The ancient mountains, the mesas, the plains
I come from the tempests that rise in my bones
A frost feathered night that thaws into spring

I come from those coming home again.

I come from a gate snapping shut in the wind
A ring of thunder – endless in might
Flickering Bluestem and switchgrass and reed
I come from the pinelands and hills full of light

I come from those who grew mountains from seed.

I come from the marsupial warmth of the marsh
The loam and the froth, the earthsmell and musk
The mouth of the stream where power is drawn
The birds on the Arkansas River at dusk

I come from those who call back the dawn.

I come from the rose rock and moon and the wild
The fox and her kits who nest in the shed
I come from the field where the bergamot grows
The stars and the sunsets, piercing and red

I come from those who say we are not dead.

*The wanderers who go, who return, who begin.
Who say we are here, we are home again.*

Adult Category, 3rd Place

Mason Turner, Howe

Native Land

I'm from Oklahoma, the promising Native land;
I wear her crown of feathers that rest in my hand.
The wolves and birds sing their sorrow
Of the changing of tomorrow.
I see the soft, forgiving fur,
And all the love I give to her.
Perhaps, this land is not the one
I knew when I was young.

Oklahoma, like all lands, lives
Through the heart and through the soul
Of those it gives
Its love to.

I'm from Oklahoma, the land where Natives cry,
The resting of the river, the wind that helps it dry.
I live the lives of those who came before;
I sing the songs of the birds and wolves.
Like those birds and wolves, I shed my tears
For nature, and watch as Oklahoma hears.
I hear too and listen as she speaks my name.
I feel the touch of the moon as she wanes.

I feel the Natives and their ancestral stride
Caress me with their primal pride.
I take the scissor-tail's golden strand;
I'm from Oklahoma, the promising Native land.