

Ligonier Valley Writers'
thirtieth annual
Student Poetry Awards
April 2021

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A. Kathleen Brittain and Paul Spencer Poetry Award

Grades 4-6: rhymed verse, any subject

Sponsored by Paul S. Brittain

First Prize

2020 . . . by Marlee Miller

Ligonier Valley Middle School

Worst year in American history
You never knew what was next
Each day it was something new
With more people gone by noon

School from home was the new norm
Because the virus was still brewing a storm
Families all worried in their homes
Waiting for a miracle to form

In the blink of an eye 2020 is far behind
2021 is here now; let's be brave
This year.

Second Prize

Tourette's Syndrome by Jayde Roble

Ligonier Valley Middle School

It's annoying my body feels this way.
I wish it would all go away.
I try to fight the urge in me to tic.
Wish it would be over quick.
Making faces and strange sounds
While my body also moves all around
Is like a jolt inside of me
That I can't control and have to flee.
I don't like the stares and all the attention.
I wish they'd know it's nothing to mention.
Even though some days my mind and body don't stop,
I refuse to let it get to me and make me drop.
I hold my head high with might every day
Because in the end I am strong and will be okay.

Third Prize
Friends You Can Trust *by Parker Hannah*
Ligonier Valley Middle School

I have a lot of friends,
But sometimes it depends.
Some will defend, others will pretend,
Others might offend, and that's how friendships end.
I've been there before
When friends shut the door.
I never want to go back
Because I feel like I've been attacked.
Your heart will break
And you can't escape.
The feeling of being sad
Might make you feel mad.
You are now depressed
And also stressed.
You feel down, like
When friends are not around.
Friends are important: the ones you can trust,
The friendships that don't bust.
Pick the right ones so you're never mad
But always glad and never sad.

B. Chestnut Ridge Literary Poetry Award

Grades 4-6: unrhymed verse, any subject

Sponsored by Lou and Barbara Steiner

First Prize

The Court *by Liam McMahan*

Derry Area Middle School

The rhythmic *thump* of the ball,
The silenced crowd,
The players' breath, heavy,
And most of all, the tension.

I'm in control.
It's up to me to handle the rock, to dribble it, to feel it.
The defender relentless, but against perseverance, no chance.

The swipe and the move,
The mistake and the chance, and I slip past.
The trees dare me to shoot over them. It's do or die.

Hesitate, go, I am elusive.
The shot is taken, no going back, no time left now.
The crowd starts again, like an engine sputtering to life with hope.

The ball seems to stop in midair, seconds turning into eternities,
The most satisfying sound,
Plushh, as the ball falls through the rim and flicks the net.
The crowd, stunningly silenced.

The crowd, delightedly silenced.

Second Prize

Life by *Nathan Beech*

Ligonier Valley Middle School

Life is like a brick of ice,
melting slowly, eventually gone.
Slowly deteriorating, like the bones of an old man.
Just like ice, life can be cold.
Robbers, scammers, swindlers, and thieves,
Stealing, conning, ruining our day.
But like life, you can carve the brick of ice
Into anything you want it to be.
Right now, we can laugh and smile, love and dream,
And mold life into anything.

Third Prize

The Baseball by *Roman Simmons*

Ligonier Valley Middle School

Rumbling and tumbling, coming through the air,
Infield, outfield,
Out of the park or into the river.
No matter where it's hot, it's always a trip.
Lost in the stands
Or in a fan's hand,
Fresh out of a box, thrown into a bucket,
Brand new or battered,
The ball is beautiful to the batter.

C. Hayden Savinda Memorial Award

Grades 4-6: haiku, any subject
Sponsored by Ronald J. Shafer

First Prize

Spectacles by Sarah Daniels
Latrobe Elementary School

Painting a canvas
Of a mountainous landscape
The river runs still

Second Prize

Wonderful Winter by Lila Smith
Ligonier Valley Middle School

A blinding blizzard
Cold crystalline wonderland
Nature's soft blanket

Third Prize

Park Pals by Callen McPherson
Ligonier Valley Middle School

Fluffy, furry friends
Barn and woof while playing games
Until they all leave

D. Highview Farm Award

Grades 7-9: traditional verse, any subject

Sponsored by Sally Shirey

First Prize

Memory by Abigail Showman

Belle Vernon Area Middle School

My brain feels puzzled,
Like my thoughts have been muzzled.
I stare at the clear blue sky and ponder
As my brain begins to wander.

That day was a mess.
All happy and dressed
For church and some brunch.
What a happy little bunch.

Nobody saw the truck.
We finally ran out of good luck.
It hit the car like an ocean wave
And the metal began to reshape and cave.

Off the road so fast
The trees zoomed past.
Red stained the light of dawn.
My poor parents were too soon gone.

The day is so clear,
Yet as I stand on the pier
I stare at my shoelaces.
Why can't I remember their faces?

Second Prize

The Waters by Cortni Tinkey

Verna Montessori School, Mt. Pleasant

A drop of rain, so small and clear
A single lonely, dismal tear
A trickling stream, its waters cool
The swirling vacuum of a vicious whirlpool
The roaring rapids of a river wild
A massive lake with waters wild
A fine damp mist wet on my face
A quiet spring, a calming place
A sheen of dew on grass so green
A blanket of snow, pure and clean
All forms of water have beauty, but nay,
Nothing beats a cold glass on a hot summer day.

Third Prize

Addicted by Cole Browder

Belle Vernon Area Middle School

Looking at the green kelp,
Feeling like I'm trapped, I just need help.
I'm so high, so much more
I'm high above but on the floor.

I need to let go, but the pain it brings
It's like I'm tied to little strings.
I'm trying to get a good description.
I just can't, because it's my addiction.

It's not a habit. I feel alive.
I feel like without it, I can't survive.
I'm not an addict, but I can't say bye.
I'm not an addict. Maybe that's a lie.

E. Shirey Poetry Award

Grades 7-9: free verse, any subject

Sponsored by Sally Shirey

First Prize

Into the Storm by *T. J. Sedlak*

Belle Vernon Area Middle School

A small boy bundled in clothes
Lies awake in bed.
He snaps an icicle from the windowsill
And puts it to his shivering lips to quench his thirst.
Just yesterday he marveled at the winter scene,
lifting his wide eyes to the southern sky
To catch white snowflakes on his tongue.
He raced through the yard, leaving cowboy boot prints in the snow.

But then the air turned colder.
The wind picked up.
The lights went out in Texas.
The boy hears a shudder from down the hall
As water sprays from the frozen pipes.
His mother appears and carries him
Through the darkness—
Outside,
Into the storm.

Second Prize

Diamond Love by Taylor Walsh

Chartiers Valley Middle School

Do you love softball?
I love softball. In fact, I live for softball.
My cleats touch the dirt and I'm transformed into the game.
The energy rises through my cleats and infects my soul.
Entering the pitching circle, I'm intoxicated.
The feel of the leather on my fingertips sends jolts through my veins.
If I hit my spots and work the batters, I could shut their team down.
Strike 1 . . . Strike 2 . . . Strike 3! Next!
Batter two approaches the box nervously.
Are you afraid?
You should be. I am on my A game.
Two heaters missed. She chokes up and settles back deep in the box, hoping.
Low, out, and away. She chases, but it's not use.
Step in the box if you are, batter three.
If I were you, batter, I'd start swinging now. Fire is coming.
Line the seam in my grip, wind up, stride, release, snap!
Full count, focus, win the battle.
You thought you knew me? Looking for a fastball?
Drop curve. K, batter three, battle over.
I wish for my dream of diamond love in a college circle.

Third Prize

I Am Still Me by Alana Mitchell

Belle Vernon Area Middle School

Let's get one thing straight.
I'm not.
But it's not my defining personality.
I am still the child you raised,
I am still the same person you know.
I need you to love me as I love you.
And I need you to respect me.
The way you treated me before you knew
Is the way I want you to treat me now.
Nothing has changed after all.
I just came out of the closet,
And no matter whoever I may love,

I am still me.

F. Ogden Nash Award

Grades 7-9: light humorous verse, any subject

Sponsored by Anita Staub

First Prize

Contemplating Thoughts *by Ava Scalese*

Belle Vernon Area Middle School

Pondering random thoughts:

If a spoon was made out of gold, would it still be called silverware?

Is the *s* or the *c* silent in the word *scant*?

In order to fall asleep, we have to pretend to sleep.

Why is it called quicksand when you sink in it slowly?

Pizza is a circle in a squared box, but we eat it as a triangle.

Your mind moves 24/7 and never stops.

Second Prize

Best Friend *by T. J. Sedlak*

Belle Vernon Area Middle School

I ripped up your hoodie

And ate all your socks.

I chewed all your shoes,

Your Converse and Crocs.

I knocked over your bowl

Of Chef Boyardee.

It was delicious!

I'm sure you'd agree.

I buried your AirPods

Somewhere in the yard,

With the TV controller

And Mom's credit card.

I threw up a little,

Then gave you a smooch.

But you never said, "Bad boy"

Or "Nasty old pooch."

And though I leave smells

That are sure to offend,

I know that you love me
'Cause you're my best friend.

Third Prize

Life of Grass by Braden Andrews
Belle Vernon Area Middle School

It's a brutal one, the life of grass,
With dogs using me as a litterbox
And deer constantly eating my friends and me
And the most horrifying threat of all, the lawnmower.

And the rain. Why do I have to live where it rains every other day?
Don't even get me started on the wind. I hate being thrown around all the time.
It's tough being beaten senseless by the hail too.
The snow may be the worst of them all.
I die for anywhere from days to months, just to be brought back
right when it starts to rain constantly.

Not to mention that in the fall and winter I get covered in frost every morning,
And every morning in the spring and summer I get soaked by dew.
If it's too hot I die, of course.
If it gets too cold, I die.

I just can't deal with this any more.
The animals, lawnmowers,
Weather and temperature.
Oh, now here comes the dog!

G. Dr. Len Roberts Memorial Award

Grades 10-12: traditional verse, any subject

Sponsored by Ruth McDonald

First Prize

Admission from Girl to Girl on Opposite Sides of the Altar *by Kathryn Mi*

North Allegheny High School

Sing, and sing me to blooming
Conjure a memory akin
 to our virtues, consuming
 all of the spirit of sin.
and in the temple of a setting sun
 (in reverence of our dying light)
come name the brazen deeds we've done,
"faithless" where the moon is bright.
Now sing, and sing me away
Scar the picture sealed with shame
 by the mouths of laws that weigh
 heavy on our mortal name
in the church that claims our love is wrong
 (born of a single desperate night)
And hollows out our dream-bowed song:
"faultless" in immortal sight.

Here, our defiance lies aching true
in the hymns of our liberation—
but silence sits in our chapel's pew,
for we are our own salvation.

Second Prize

I'm Going to School Today *by Kylie Landis*

Somerset Area High School

I'm going to school today.
I'll see lots of people today,
Black kids, White kids,
Kids who don't know what safety is.

I'm going to school today.
I'll see lots of people like me,

Students who don't know what it's like to be . . . free
From this threat.

I'm going to school today.
At school they teach us how to add, subtract, and multiply,
But we know how quickly this world can . . . divide.

I'm going to school today.
When I was six, this used to be fun.
But that was before I knew the power of a gun.

I'm scared . . . and I know that I'm not alone.
We're all going to school today,
And we DON'T know if we're going to come home.

Third Prize

Green by *Angel Brennsteiner*
Albert Gallatin High School

I look upon a hill so green,
I see a sky so blue,
And yet, I still remain unseen.

The white clouds move with no routine.
I lie with naught to do,
I look upon a hill so green.

The hill and me you stand between,
And so I look at you.
And yet, I still remain unseen.

The world is but a jewel-toned scene,
Alight with every hue.
I look upon a hill so green.

I watch as you begin to preen,
Then call out, but to who?
And yet, I still remain unseen.

I should step forward and come clean;
That much, I know, is true.
I look upon a hill so green,

And yet, I still remain unseen.

H. Henry Clay and Gladys Maas Pruitt Award

Grades 10-12: free verse, any subject

Sponsored by Candace Green

First Prize

Flying Is Better When We Do It Together *by Angel Brennsteiner*

Albert Gallatin High School

My wings pulled open
For the first time,
Offering a freedom I had never known.

My ecstasy was overwhelming
As I stretched them, tested them, worshipped them!

But they were new—and weak—
and couldn't hold my weight.

I crashed to Earth, tumbling, stumbling,
In pain,
But I tried again
And again. And again and again.

I couldn't get off the ground, so I cut off my wings instead.
Flightless life was worse after a taste of the sky.
I held my wings and cried, wanting nothing more than to fly.
But my wings couldn't.
So they didn't.

But *I* did!
I picked myself up, and called you to help, and we
Made them new.
A pair of wings that worked for Two.

Second Prize

Recipe for a Difficult Decision by *Kylie Landis*

Somerset Area High School

Begin with a whisper of raw courage from someone who matters.
Align this with the twinkling galaxy of values you have established.
Sprinkle a few bits of delicate lessons over these contents,
Adding a dash of self-conflict that is bound to be nearby.
Separate what is easy from what is right,
And place the latter next to the chance to feel better someday.
Imagine one very motivational story printed on crisp white paper,
Telling you that your horizon is broadening and your stars continue to shine.
Add a tangible pocketful of sunshine, because you are the break in the darkness.
Mix together the tiniest remnants of hope and a moment of simply saying, "Okay."
Allow yourself to remember all you have created here.
And watch as a perfectly intact tear falls from your pink cheek,
Bringing the decision to life.

Third Prize

Sorry, Barbie by *Addy Shapiola*

Derry Area High School

Why can't we stop cutting girls up like pictures from magazines?

Have we forgotten what it really means when we say "pretty"?

You look at me and what do you see?

What do you say?

Do you say,

"She has a nice smile.

Too bad you never see it."

"She's got a nice body.

Too bad she has a stomach."

"What a shame she doesn't wear makeup.

She could be pretty."

And that's that.

"Oh, what a shame . . ." "Too bad . . ."

Well, I'm sorry we don't look like the pictures, but
it's not our fault that we're not enhanced by plastic surgery.

Half human. Half Barbie.

If that's what you want, then sorry, I can't help you.

See, while you've been dissecting me from the outside, you didn't care to look farther.
Didn't dare to use the knife you wield like a carver to look inside and see me as a human being.
You didn't want to see my mind, my heart, my soul.

You just wanted to see the flawed macabre doll you've made me become.

I. Marie Martin Memorial Award

Grades 10-12, Romantic Poetry, any subject.

Sponsored by Phil and Mary Lou Fleming.

First Prize

love dream by Kathryn Mi, North Allegheny High School

first, you tell them you are a dreamer.
to this, they tangle their hands in your hair and echo in you a divine kiss,
calling you starlight, you sweet splinter of serendipity
(*so, then, their words are a melody on your lips,
full of a heart-formed, wing-shaped adoration.*)
here a sharpness spills beneath both your hunger,
soft-edged silvered light resting on your tongue and
burning on their offered mouth, your blessed altar made flesh—
and *oh*, there is an ache in your chest nested right below your collarbone,
this ghost of an ember heartbeat, singing of a galaxy you call desire.
first, you tell them you are a dreamer and to this they say,
darling, i have loved you since before this universe was stardust.
here the painted atlas of your heart comes reaching,
describing an outstretched constellation
that maps the timelessness of this dream,
where they fold joy into the space between your ribs
(*breathing in your heart-formed, wing-shaped melody*)
—a song that speaks of starlight and a ceaseless life,
in which you are a galaxy burning for them,
so lovingly, so *achingly* tender.

Second Prize

My Universe by Aleena Martin

Blairsville High School

My universe was dark before you shot across my sky.
Before you I had no sun and no feeling of warmth.
There were stars in my sky that I could see but couldn't feel.
Until you barreled through the darkness like a meteor shower, lighting my whole universe,
and showed me the beauty I was missing.

In those moments you became my earth, my home. I saw your beauty and knew that I needed you.

You became my sun, my warmth and comfort. You brought me light in the darkness and got me through each day.

Most importantly, you brought me so many stars.

So many things to love life for.

So many things to love.

By falling in love with you and feeling your love for me, I have found the beauty in our small but true reality.

Third Prize

You by *Kylie Landis*

Somerset Area High School

So carefully, you took me in your open arms,
And you put your strong hands in the places where something about me
was missing,
And you held me together.

Delicately, you handed me a precious gift wrapped in a silver lining;
You told me it was a smile and it would look great on me.
You gave me happiness.

Patiently, you took me by the hand
And guided me up a mountain I didn't know I could climb.
You showed me adventure.

Faithfully, you picked up my pieces that had fallen
And made me look at my reflection in them.
You told me I was worth it.

With grace, you recognized my flaws
And enhanced them until my imperfections
Became my best features.

Undoubtedly, you loved me
And still do.

And for all of the love and effort you have instilled in me,
Eternally, I will love you.

John T. Naccarato Memorial Award
Sponsored by Michele Jones.

The Best of the Best in Grades 4-6

The Misfit Shape by *Dominic Dongilla*
Horace Mann Elementary School, Grade 4

I'm a star.
I wanted to be a circle, but
My 5 points are too sharp, and happiness too dull.

I want to be like my good friend the circle,
But I was made the way I was.

I do not want to dance across the night sky,
I do not want to perform music in front of thousands,
Not do I want to be the spiny shape.
I do not want to have 5 sharp points.
I want to roll.

I want to have no corners,
No points,
Nor any lines.
I want to be smooth,
A circle.

An oval's too wide.
Squares are too sharp.
Do not want lines, corners, or flat parts.
I'm already too sharp.

I don't want to be made of 10 lines
Or have sharp points.
I want to be round,
Circular,
Smooth,
And look different.

I don't like lines.

A circle I should be.

The Best of the Best in Grades 7-9

The Hidden Half by *Anna St. Clair*
United Junior/Senior High School

In order not to pass our germs,
Face masks we must wear.
But now your nose and mouth and chin
Are hidden under there.

So when I come to greet you,
A smile I cannot see.
Is there a grin, a frown, a smirk?
It's all a mystery.

Are your nostrils flared in anger
Or wrinkled in disgust?
As long as you've a mask on,
Some signal is a must.

If you're happy when you see me
And grinning ear to ear,
A nod, a wave, a big thumbs up
Will tell me not to fear.

With half your face in hiding,
I just need a clue
To help me understand what's up
And how to talk to you.

The Best of the Best in Grades 10-12

sparrow by Kathryn Mi
North Allegheny High School

late at night, i find a sparrow trapped in my stomach, waiting to be freed.
so it is a dead weight, so it is a living weight, so it is
a weight of sound, a wild, writhing things,
wrestling inside of me, wrestling to be outside
of me, to unfurl itself from the sheet of my skin,
promising a resurrection from my ribcage,
an open-closed eternity spiraling around in the dark.
here is the ache in me, struck deep into my heartstrings:
i am obsessed with a story called flight.
in my visions my feathers are flecked with stars
and the birdsong in my spirit breathes *legacy, legacy*.
so it is a dead dream, so it is a living dream, so it is
a dream in which I fly away, in which i claim a life without fear, without
sorrow, without all the heaviness that marks the souls of men.
late at night, I am a sparrow trapped in the mouth of the universe, waiting to be freed.
so i am dead, so i am alive, so i am
in love with liberation, soaked in a silhouette craving light.
here is the ache in me: i am obsessed with a painting called wings.
the skies push for a transcendence of self, so here i am, star-flecked,
shadow-stained, singing.

***Congratulations to all the winners
of LVW's Student Poetry Contest!***

Ligonier Valley Writers thanks
all of the students who submitted poems
to this year's Student Poetry Awards.

Participating Schools

Albert Gallatin High School
Belle Vernon Area Middle School
Berlin Brothersvalley High School
Blairsville High School
Chartiers Valley Middle School
Conemaugh Township Middle School
Derry Area High School
Franklin Regional Senior High School
Greater Latrobe High School
Greensburg Salem Middle School
Hahntown Elementary School
Hempfield Area High School
Horace Mann Elementary School
Indiana Area Junior High School
Keystone Oaks High School
Latrobe Elementary School
Ligonier Valley High School
Ligonier Valley Middle School
North Allegheny Cyber Academy
North Allegheny High School
North Star Elementary School
Norwin High School
Penn-Trafford High School
Somerset Area High School
Southmoreland High School
Southmoreland Middle School
United Junior/Senior High School
Valley School of Ligonier
Verna Montessori School, Mt. Pleasant
Wendover Middle School
Various homeschools

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