

# Freestyle!

## Winning Poems



From the 21st Annual  
John Gardiner  
Community Poetry Contest

Courtesy of  
Friends of the Laguna Beach Library

**Photo credit**

*Front cover image: photo by Jessica deStephano*



**Dedicated to the memory of**



**John Abbot Gardiner**

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## **John Abbot Gardiner 1947 - 2017**

John Gardiner was born in Hawthorne, California, and was proud to be a fifth generation Californian. He studied at UC Irvine where he received a BA in theater arts and he was an early cast member at South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa. He lived in New York for several years, where he pursued his acting career. John loved acting in Shakespeare's plays. He appreciated the complexity of the language and, much to the delight of those who knew him, could recite passages and speeches from numerous plays from memory.

John was a long-time resident of Laguna Beach and was widely appreciated as a poet, actor, teacher and raconteur extraordinaire. He read at numerous venues throughout Southern California and was invited to read his poems in Prague, St. Petersburg, and Rio de Janeiro and especially treasured the invitation to read in Ireland, home of the Gardiner clan.

John was the much-beloved leader of the Laguna Poets Workshop for the last 15 years and emceed the library's annual Community Poetry Contest for many years. He was working on his 13th collection of poems when he died on October 24, 2017.

**- Ann Brillhart and the Laguna Poetry Workshop**

**21st Annual John Gardiner  
Community Poetry Contest  
Winners 2019**

**Adult**

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“Remembering Prywa Lukowska Nuss” by Sara Nuss-Galles

**2nd Place:**

“Fading Pictures” by Barbara DeMarco-Barrett

**3rd Place (Tie):**

“Irish Farewell” by Mary Jo West

**3rd Place (Tie):**

“On the Rocks” by Nina Welch

**Eleventh & Twelfth Grade**

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“Rising Muse” by Jessica Gallegos

**2nd Place:**

“Sweet Cup of Tea” by Logan Leeds

**3rd Place:**

“Mad Hatter Day” by Erin Chang

## Tenth Grade

**1st Place:**

“Some Memories Never Leave You” by Taylor Esparza

**2nd Place:**

“Depression” by Grace Wilson

**3rd Place:**

“My Queen” by Clara Becker

## Ninth Grade

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“Painted Skin” by Christina Peng

**2nd Place:**

“The Lost City” by Katrina Wei

**3rd Place:**

“Monster in the Room” by Angelina Lyon

## Eighth Grade

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“Goddess Girl” by Joleen Bakalova

**2nd Place (Tie):**

“Holocaust” by Hailey Weng

**2nd Place (Tie):**

“Holocaust Poem” by Giovanna Palazzo

**3rd Place:**

“Two Yellow Stars” by Maximo Cossa Golia

## **Sixth & Seventh Grade**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“An Insult to the Father” by Marie Choi

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Place:**

“My Memory Tree” by Justina Cha

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Place:**

“Pele” by Zen Mir-Scaer

## **Fifth Grade**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“Thirty-Two Degrees Fahrenheit” by Elise Y. Chen

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Place:**

“Sea Dive” by Estella Cuyler Newton

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Place:**

“Hope” by Max Sauers

## **Fourth Grade**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Place (Tie):**

“I Am From” by Anna Waltersdorfer

### **1<sup>st</sup> Place (Tie):**

“I Am Me” by Marta Essen-Conti

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Place:**

“Come Help Me, My Hero” by Isla Villadelgado

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Place:**

“Tiny Black Balloons” by Angelina Choi



## Third Grade

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“If I were in Charge of the World” by Ella Black

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place:**

“The Forest Trek” by Gayatri Sivakoti

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place:**

“Getting a Haircut” by Graham Richland

## Second Grade

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“Dragons” by Ariel Mualim

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place:**

“Bees” by Maila Drescher

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place:**

“Unicorn” by Taylor Brook Jones

## First Grade

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“Snails” by Carter Z. Chen

**2<sup>nd</sup> Place:**

“Horses” by Ella Hamersley

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place (Tie):**

“My Dog” by Daniel Barriga

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place (Tie):**

“Seagulls” by Yuri Nikola Hamersley

## Kindergarten

**1<sup>st</sup> Place:**

“Sunny Days” by Brixton Perlis

**2nd Place (Tie):**

“Hamster and a Boy” by Barrett Anderson

**2nd Place (Tie):**

“Rain” by Kinsley Kesler

**3rd Place:**

“The Club 19 Storm” by Sebastian Zamorano

## Preschool

**1<sup>st</sup> Place (Tie):**

“Amelia” by Nova Rebollar Ternborg

**1<sup>st</sup> Place (Tie):**

“Captain Hiccups” by Kayla Cabral

## Adult – 1<sup>st</sup> place

### Remembering Prywa Lukowska Nuss

By Sara Nuss-Galles

Chocolate covered rum balls,  
Coarse black bread, creamy farmer's cheese  
A fine woolen blazer, never worn.  
Pleasures postponed, your credo.

Was it wanting that was dangerous?  
Did you fear desires could weaken?  
Pleasure might be sweet and irresistible  
Erasing memory.

Flight over bodies, my brother's hand in yours  
(Inside your womb another son)  
Chaos, two alone midst bombs and shooting  
A Jewess saved with his life by a Polish soldier

Seldom did you speak your losses aloud.  
I struggle to know my grandparents, aunts, uncles  
Cousins who might still have called you Tante Prywa  
Had they survived.  
I barely know their names.

Minute droplets of emotion welled  
Joy was hard for you  
And ever-threatening hovered envy  
The evil eye poised to devour a too proud moment

Lest jealousy be aroused  
You boasted not  
Expressed feelings timidly  
Praised seldom  
Then hastened with spit and a "poo-poo-poo"

I longed for June Cleaver hugs  
A high-heeled mother with feather duster.  
Instead, house-dressed,  
Your caresses were soup and potatoes  
Unfaltering strength  
Your life for mine without a thought.

Mementos evoke you  
Cherry-nubbed lipstick, a worn, quilted robe.  
Memories of that special tenderness  
Only your grandchildren would know.  
With them alone, the fierce survivor could rest.

The passing years  
Have made my face a mirror of your dear face.  
And always, rum balls, black bread  
Your cherished blazer, now mine  
Bring you and tears to our eyes.

## Adult – 2nd place

### Fading Pictures By Barbara DeMarco-Barrett

In the photograph, Naugahyde chairs hold my father and mother, who wears a wide smile, now mine, she hates because her gums show. Father's eyes glimmer, a secret yearning to be shared. He squeezes a cigarette between fingers. A photo of my brother sits on the shelf above them. I have not yet arrived.

They seemed so happy then, before my father spent his money on women, before my brother grew too old for his dreams, before I married beneath an oak tree, convinced I would save my children from the earth by having none.

My father has long passed and Mother is far gone. Alone in her tract home with an upstairs she doesn't use, she boils chicken wings for her red Pomeranian that spins as it barks.

In another photo my mother waits at her kitchen table. She clutches a cigarette and gazes through blinds at the barren winter landscape. Empty chairs accompany her and I have to look away from this already fading Kodak color.

My mother's diamond pendant, now mine, would stick

to her cleavage and men could not look away.  
With my small breasts, I can offer no place  
in which to wedge that stone.

## Adult – 3rd place (Tie)

### Irish Farewell By Mary Jo West

*Early morning drizzle  
in Dingle Peninsula  
gives way  
to a faded blue sky*

*Peering over the cliff,  
jagged coastline  
looks as if the ocean  
has taken an angry bite  
out of the land.*

*Sea winds swoop up  
to greet us.  
My daughter and I  
climb down to shore,  
keeping our promise  
to scatter my mother's ashes  
in Ireland*

*Together, we watch  
gentle ocean waves rise  
in small gray curls,  
then subside  
into soft, white foam.*

*Diana settles on a  
large, protruding rock  
embedded in the surf.*

*Sea flattens out,  
only echoing cries of gulls  
circling above,  
break the silence.*

*She leans over  
to empty Mom's ashes from  
a radiant mahogany urn.  
A surging wave swells and crashes  
over the rock,  
soaking her from head to toe.*

*I smile,  
"That's Mom."*



## Adult – 3rd place (Tie)

### On the Rocks By Nina Welch

He told them we were separating  
after eating fried eggs and  
hash browns at the Brig  
down at the harbor.  
He told them this after they  
sloshed around the tide pools,  
and poked sticks into sea  
urchin's faces.

The sun streamed through the clouds  
like a spotlight on the rock  
where my boys removed their  
soggy shoes and socks.  
I sat across from them  
with my heart breaking.

“Mom, what does separating mean?”

He should have told them.  
He should have told them the truth.  
That he didn't want to come home  
every night to a boring life  
of family dinners and homework.

“Mom, what does separating mean?”

I didn't want them to see me cry.  
I couldn't look at their faces.  
I looked at their feet.  
We used to kiss their pudgy  
toes when they were babies.

A shadow covered a rock as the sun  
glided behind a cloud.  
Both boys shivered in unison.  
Their dad stood there like a mirage  
so we left him there like he wasn't there.

## Eleventh & Twelfth Grade – 1st place

### Rising Muse By Jessica Gallegos

In a night sky  
The mountains gleam  
Seeming of Van Gogh's dream  
Strokes of clouds adorn the sky  
In an otherwise seemingly stay night.  
All living sleeps  
Except for me  
A muse of a different dream  
I stand out, unique  
But comprehension for me is meek.  
No matter, I speak  
For all my thoughts are free  
And mine alone are me  
Let society believe otherwise  
For I do not conceive  
How the silent poets of the night  
Will paint the sea of their minds  
If they maintain their minds encaged.  
Rise up, rise up  
And take in the view  
For the stars are singing tonight  
And no one can dream for you.

## Eleventh & Twelfth Grade – 2nd place

### Sweet Cup of Tea

By Logan Leeds

Many thoughts guide me but life reminds me,  
Of the person, I once was and can be and should be.

Elegant and refined – but then what I lack!

Like coffee, my life is bitter and black

But now...

Your rose flavored taint now comforts my somber soul.

Sparkling like a diamond that had sprung from a coal,

Like a newborn egg that pierced its first crack,

Or a oaken bow that after all these years releases its string to  
lay slack,

For now, it lies alive with you, relieved and carefree.

My soul is a sweet cup of tea.

## Eleventh & Twelfth Grade – 3rd place

**Mad Hatter Day**

**By Erin Chang**

On Mad Hatter Day I wore a hat  
If you jumped off the top you'd land with a splat

My hat can tower over the tallest skyscrapers  
It even has upside-down elevators

The first floor showcases a swimming pool  
Where you'll find Francis, my water mule

On the second floor are my giant slides  
That twist and turn and swirl and glide

Floors three through seven don't contain that much  
Just my collection of rare slimes to touch

Floor eight is my bathroom, floor nine is my bed  
Floor ten is where I keep all my undead

Floor eleven has baby llamas on trampolines  
Floor twelve has elephants the size of coffee beans

Floor thirteen has nothing as it brings bad luck  
So that's not really where you want to get stuck

Floor fifty-one is where I keep my giant cherry pie

It's where I go to eat and cry

So of course when I saw a contest for crazy hats  
I had to enter – the prize was two bats!

But in the end, my hat wasn't picked  
I guess the judges were just too strict

In the end they picked a boring old hat  
It was a fedora.

## Tenth Grade – 1st place

### Some Memories Never Leave You

By Taylor Esparza

I wonder if you cried that night  
when the pain was too unbearable  
that i tried to cease it altogether  
tears pouring from eyes as my family is in the other room  
watching tv  
oblivious to the missing pills and blood on the scissors  
I wonder if you cried that morning  
when I was rushed to the ER by the mother who was barely  
holding it in  
needles stabbing my arm and questions being thrown at me  
90 miles an hour  
asking me “why’d you do it”  
I don’t respond  
I wonder if you cried that afternoon  
when my mother sighs in relief as the test results come back  
clean and I sigh in despair calculating the math for how many  
more pills I would need to swallow next time for it to work  
I wonder if you cried that night  
when I settled into my new house  
where the knives were locked up and encouraging posters  
plastered the walls  
as I considered smashing my head into the dresser the only  
thing not “suicide proof”  
asking the world what is wrong with me

# Tenth Grade – 2nd place

## Depression By Grace Wilson

My eyes open as her sandpaper rhythmically  
licks my cheek. Her shadow blocks the yellow  
rays, all but those on my feet. She traps  
on my skin, wanting to lie down. I hope to pull  
myself from these sheets, my refuge from this town.  
My fingers trace her dark fur and reach to roll her  
aside. Slipping to her belly, they get nipped  
for having tried.

As I finally manage to slide my foot to the floor, she  
tumbles and f

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l

s, leaving her irritated meow to echo  
in the walls. The cream-colored thing leaps  
away, and with the smell of morning dew, I find a way  
to face the day. The scent floats through my room  
and polaroids on strings dance with the wind. Crop  
tops and jeans are strewn on the floor and eyeshadow  
pawprints trace a way to the door.

I take out Nirvana.

Fixated, her head bobs as the round, black disk  
begins to spin. I am those cluttered chords.  
The ones that lessen the deafening noise that my mind  
is always in.



Today I don't have enough time. I switch off my music and the disk ceases to spin. On days like this, I never seem to win. I glance out the window and the morning mist turns to a p

o

u

r. I wince with each step as the floorboard creaks more.

She circles my leg. Her face rubs my boot. My laces are bitten. Away from the door I am moved.

I follow. Her padded pink paws pounce on my sheets. I don't worry about unlacing my shoes. I just flop down and sink into the sounds. My mattress is soft and her fur tickles my nose. My eyelids d

r

o

p down.

Light purring fills my ear. I notice the gutter trickle as if like a tear.

She then curls her tail around the nape of my neck, before getting bored and treading to my chest. I *almost* feel the imprint of her claws on my lungs. Her weight begins to hurt and my breathing is no longer my own. Despite the panther's scratch, I cease to feel *anything* at all.

The fall day wastes away and my muscles relax.

I sink deeper

and

deeper until my world is pitch black.

## Tenth Grade – 3rd place

### My Queen By Clara Becker

She was a ruler

She was my life

People bowed to her

And called her their Queen

She was respected not only for her beauty

But for her bringing times of peace

She was beloved by most

And hated by few

She brought on great honor

And her mind was a chest of wonder

## Ninth Grade – 1st place

### Painted Skin By Christina Peng

A girl in scarlet spills from a giant golden birdcage  
Her face white and set as she stumbles toward the sea cliff's  
edge

Where below, the water whirls like a wishing well

*Oh, for a wish!*

She peers over, her frozen white toes curling over the rock  
blade

Into water teal and chilling

Her tears mingle with the rain

As the wind whips her hair into a fury

Atop her head, a myrtle crown glistens,

DUTY, it bellows

She listens through a storm of unshed silver tears

Blurring a gilt-framed painting of her future in the sky above

A marriage, a queen, a fate

A besotted king nodding to her every word

What more could she ask for?

LOVE, she screams into the wind

As in her mind, her errant feet float down another road

To *him*.

And at the thought, her marble cheeks warm to soft petals

And her heart thuds like a trapped bird

Her heart flies to the forest, where in his embrace

There lives a whole world

The world he created  
Through the magic carpet ride of his stories  
*Oh, for a wish!*  
She wants to be in that forest again  
Not bumping down an endless road to her death day

There, beneath the arms of blush-pink wisterias  
His lips would quiver with stories she'd never heard  
And in the glow of fireflies, he would cast the spell of a story  
In them, she would wrap herself in the colors of the rainbow  
Not sit frozen-hearted in her golden cage  
In her pocket are his letters  
Creased from being read in silent whispers  
Standing on the cliff, she clutches them in her hands  
like white paper cranes  
Knowing if she lets them fly into the wind,  
She would be admitting there is no god

*Oh, for a wish!*  
In the fairy tales she had read, help had always come  
A frog disguised as a prince, a fairy godmother  
But as she stands, waiting, no one came  
She is so very alone

Two roads diverge atop a stormy cliff  
Which path shall she take?

A voice pierces her consciousness  
“You called?”  
She jumps

As a large silver eye blinks in the sky  
Silver, it is. Old, it is.  
Then shuts in a flash  
A face forms around the silver eye, then a body  
Of lithe liquid glass like a delicate chandelier  
Her smile is alluring--an old soul in a maiden's glass vase  
Preserved unnaturally in time  
But the most disturbing are the empty souls of hades,  
Singing in their mistress' stoned braids

She hears a voice in her mind:  
*For a price I can change your flesh to gold  
Or turn a maiden from young to old  
Few humans love the skin they are given  
Your wish to change can be forgiven*

Black fear fizzles on her tongue  
But she swallows the sting  
Embracing only that floating feeling of the undreamed of  
Is this her chance to love?  
*The price is just this fair trade  
Your face is what I will be paid  
Trade it in for another so you can choose  
The life you wish for, and one to lose*

The princess doesn't think, she only feels  
She forgets the Queen's warning about witches' deals

“Yes. YES!  
Any price I'm willing to pay!

You can have my face today!”

Silver Eyes chuckles  
*Is that final?* she asks through her angelic mask

The princess pauses as her adrenaline recedes  
Her mind says no but her heart has needs

*Duty—*

Screw Duty.

*Listen—*

She’s done listening.

No one can see her; no one cares  
This is no time for a princess’s airs

“Yes,” her lips part. “I want what you have to give  
As of now, this is no way to live.”

Silver Eyes smiles  
*Very well, close your eyes...*

The princess feels a tingle in her hair  
Hopefully it would not be bare  
Maybe she should have specified she didn’t want an ugly face  
But now her wish is too late to erase  
She longs for a mirror, but there’s only the sea  
Where she runs down the path quite excitedly  
And in a tidepool filled with fish  
She sees the consequences of her wish

Her golden hair is now black wires  
Her eyes, once emerald, are orange wildfires  
Her shock ricochets from her toes to her head  
As she begins to feel real dread

How would her love feel now she's no longer pretty?  
Maybe it's enough that she is witty?

She sheds her myrtle crown and blood-red wedding gown  
She drops it into the sea where it can never be found  
And in her petticoat she sets off for a new road  
For she knows her prince is no toad  
With a hopeful heart and a twinge of fear  
She longs for her true love to draw near

On bloodied feet she runs through the thickets' moans  
Past the biting crimson rose bushes she loathes  
She moves, as if captivated by spells  
Toward the theater where her lover dwells

In the wind, she hears him calling her from afar  
He is her Polaris, her North Star  
And though her feet are torn to shreds  
In her heart she feels no dread  
Only an incredible lightness of being  
Knowing it is him she would soon be seeing

Before she knows it, she is standing on the grassy knoll  
At the tip of his amphitheater where he extolls  
The sight of him fills her heart with fire



He is the one and only she desires  
She watches as he plays Romeo from afar  
As her heart awaits love like a door ajar  
And as soon as the play is done  
From the stage's wings she did run

“It’s me, my darling! Your princess, my love!”  
His grey eyes stare back blankly like the wings of a dove.

“Come, my love. The time is nigh.  
When loving means to do or die  
I have given all to be right here  
Why are you not drawing near?”

Her heart trembles as he stares at her with blank contempt  
Is this all her sacrifice had meant?  
She surges past the crowd of his well-wishers to clasp his  
hands  
Surely now he would say their wedding banns

But instead of his familiar touch and a sweet reunion  
She receives not even the smallest communion

“Who are you?” he asks with hard, contemptuous eyes  
“Certainly I would never align with such a poor prize.  
My bride shall be King Lowry's child  
A damsel with power and beauty that beguile.”

“My love, it is I. I am standing right here  
I changed my face so before you I could appear.

You know Father betrothed me to another man  
And that union I could not stand.  
So I made a deal with a local witch  
My face for hers for this love switch.”

His face stiffens at the horrible news  
As she gazes at him, terribly confused.  
“So now you have nothing...not even your face?  
And no gold or status for our table to grace?”

She slowly nods her head with a “no.”  
“But my love we have us to grow.”  
He stopped silent, then gave a sharp laugh  
“You think such things can forge a life path?  
Go away. You disgust me. Simply looking at you gives me  
chills.  
I think seeing you for a lifetime would make me ill.”

Her heart ceases as her soul falls into her bloodied feet  
Who knew this man would be such a cheat?  
She had given him her all  
And for her all gotten nil

The kisses they had shared were sewn in her heart  
And with her own hands she tears them apart  
She sees him now for who he was  
And nothing could make her unsee because  
Into her collection of happily ever afters  
Her hope had dissipated into the rafters  
In her cut and bruised heart

Excuses and abuses rip her apart  
His million oaths are terrible jokes  
Her whole love had been a cheater's hoax

She rakes her nails upon her face  
In the silence there is no space  
*No. No! NO!* it cannot be  
She had given away her life for free  
The visions of his lips brushing her hair  
Mocks her now in the blankness of his stare

And in the air she hears a silvery laugh  
A large silver eye and a very old staff  
*You gave him all, he gave you nil*  
*Now what will you do for good or ill?*  
With an upturned face, she gazes up at the sky  
At the witch who had shown her beyond his mask of lies

“Please!” she calls up to the heavens as she sinks to her knees  
“Please save me from myself, dear witch, oh please!”  
The voice comes quickly, it is rather calm  
It cradles her like a leaf in a palm

*You wish to return?*

*To the sorrow you wished to sever?*  
*To the bondage you wished to escape?*  
*To the crown you wished to leave?*  
*To the prince you wished to betray?*

“Please... I beg of thee...”

*I shall return you to your rightful place  
But this is the price you must embrace  
Upon your death your soul shall be mine  
Trapped in my braids for eternity's time*

With a flick of a brush the princess's crown reappears  
Her scarlet wedding gown, her footmen--all she never held  
more dear

And once again, her life wraps in different chains  
Not the chains of betrayal but that of a rein

But isn't life a series of thorns and rain  
And just a bit of sunlight flickering between shadows again?  
She squares her shoulders and raises her chin  
As her old life she assumes with a morbid grin

## **Ninth Grade – 2nd place**

### **The Lost City By Katrina Wei**

Beneath the crash of silver waves and seafoam  
Is a place we once called home  
Now the home for stingrays and wolffish,  
Who weave in and out of grey cement highways  
Covered in lichen and moss  
The Hollywood sign  
Once a proud beacon atop a hill  
Is now a gloomy playground for sharks  
The real kind, not the human  
Over time, the 45 foot high “Y” toppled over  
Down below to the white coral bones on the seafloor  
Where a hungry shark beheaded the “O”  
So only a half moon remains like a sad cradle  
Until the seaweed, with its eel-like tendrils  
Made the “O” into an “E”  
HELL WOOD  
Is home

## Ninth Grade – 3rd place

### Monster in the Room

By Angelina Lyon

There was a monster in her room  
Again  
Her hands froze just as Teddy was about to take a sip of tea  
And as the grunts and screams began, her Wonderland  
shattered  
She ran to her mom who was stirring a pot of chili on the  
stove  
One sweaty dirty blonde tendril escaping from her messy bun  
She tugged on her mom's worn apron string  
As her mom sighed  
*Interrupted. Again.*  
She was already late for work  
“Charlotte, it's just your imagination.”  
The little girl's eyes were twin pools of devastation  
As she shuddered with the dark purple storm of being alone  
Once again she tugged on her mother's apron  
But her mother shooed her away  
And Charlotte once again tiptoed back to sit with the  
Monster

The next day  
When her mother walked into the Room of Shadows  
To wake her daughter  
She was startled by the grunts and screams that reverberated  
from the walls

Charlotte, purple shadows beneath her eyes, was staring at the  
black Nest camera  
On her bureau beside Teddy  
With one tiny tremulous finger, she pointed  
“Monster in my room.”

A wave of black horror crashed over her mother’s face  
As she realized there WAS a monster in the room  
The people she had trusted when she bought her camera  
A camera meant to keep her daughter safe  
Was the source of her living nightmares

## **Eighth Grade – 1st place**

### **Goddess Girl By Joleen Bakalova**

I became a goddess when I was eighteen years old  
Indira, they call me  
*Hail Sati Mata*  
*Hail Goddess Mother of Satisfaction*  
*Om Jai Jagdish Hare*  
Everything is gone

I sit in a rohida tree  
Whose flowers are the hue of flame  
Gazing at the spot where yesterday  
I held Maal's cold head in my lap  
Dressed in the same crimson and gold sari I wore  
Eight months ago as a bride

A page of the *Rashtrdoot* blows  
Like a giant dusty leaf  
I catch it in one transparent hand  
"Chaste Widow Voluntarily Burns for Husband."  
I snort, remembering how they tied me to the pyre  
And forced a tube of opium into my quavering lips  
So I would forget  
So I wouldn't know  
So I would burn

I remember the smoke slithering into my lungs



Like black pythons

I am no goddess. Only a ghost. Only a girl who  
wanted more time

“We are happy with the way Roop died,” Kanwar’s family said.  
“She has blessed us all for seven generations.”

I watch my family drape golden marigolds over my stone  
marker

Wanting to shout but finding my voice is now part of the  
wind

They come in droves to pray to me.

This girl whose feet burned first

Who could not endure the pain and jumped from the fire

They broke my legs and tied me back

My own brother, my mother, my father

How can it be

That the only chaste widow is a dead one?

The skeletal hands on the temple wall of the widows who  
burned before me

All tell the same tale

## **Eighth Grade – 2nd place (Tie)**

### **Holocaust**

**By Hailey Weng**

1939. The day lives of millions would change forever.

We played,

We laughed,

We loved,

We were taken to be thrown into the pit of flames.

I was only a child

I should have been learning

I should have been playing games

Instead, I smelt the scent of flesh

Instead, I submerged in the dirt as soldiers came to slaughter  
me.

I had a future.

Where was the help?

I was taught to always have hope.

To never lose faith.

To always believe.

Where were you when my sisters were being burned in  
ovens?

Where were you When my dad was abducted never to be  
seen again?

Where were you when my life shattered into millions of  
pieces?

Eyes gaping over us

as we marched miles after miles

Constantly, watching corpses hit the ground

I am going to die I thought.  
this is the end  
But could death be worse than this?  
People say this tragedy never happened  
If that's true  
Where are my sisters?  
Where is my dad?  
What happened to my aunts and uncles?  
What became of the city I grew up in?  
What did I witness when thousands of innocent people died  
in the hands of Auschwitz?  
Don't give me your pity  
Give me your word  
It is our duty to never let this happen again.

## **Eighth Grade – 2nd place (Tie)**

### **Holocaust Poem By Giovanna Palazzo**

She was an only child  
Who was beautiful when she smiled  
Then in 1939, the war broke out  
She didn't know what was being shouted about  
Blood and turmoil spread lots of terror  
The Jews were told that they were an error  
Hitler said he wanted them gone  
He treated them like they were chess pawn  
While they were home  
Eva wanted to roam  
She went to school  
Her yellow star was not cool  
Her grandparents were taken  
Leaving the rest of the family shaken  
Forced to go to the ghetto  
The sound of their cries was anything but a libretto  
The Germans came to take them away  
The carts they were put on kept them at bay  
They were dying of thirst  
There was no room for those whose heart's had burst  
A woman was screaming for water  
A cup of rainwater came from Eva, not her daughter  
Through the shower then shaved bald  
Go to your barracks was called  
A beautiful child passes the test

Her mother thought she wouldn't be next  
Down the hill rolled her shoes  
Eva ran down and gained a bruise  
Their work was for nothing  
As the Germans knocked it down smirking  
Each day they ran to catch the train  
Each time they were going in vain  
Many years past each worse than the last  
One night they were awoken by a blast  
The death march started  
And they thought that from their horror they had departed  
Then they saw the mountain  
They also saw the blood fountain  
Into the shelter, they went  
Where even a finger could not be bent  
They were squished and shoved  
Treated like animals that were unloved  
A woman was calling for help  
And when her baby was born she had to yelp  
One day they heard the guns  
They were told they were the ones  
The British said they'd come back in three days  
The whole camp was in praise  
On April 15, 1928, Eva was born  
On April 15, 1945, the Jewish community was reborn  
The British freed them and did it well  
And the camp was expelled  
All was swell

## **Eighth Grade – 3rd place**

### **Two Yellow Stars By Maximo Cossa Golia**

The Holocaust - miserable, depressing, terrifying, confusing

1940s Germany in the middle of World War II

Hitler - crazy, lunatic, frightening, powerful

Two innocent young girls wearing two bright yellow stars

Before they know it their lives are totally different

Soldiers, all around the city, knocking on Jewish doors

Anne, whose family flees into hiding

Who's family ends up in a concentration camp

Who died of typhus at 15

Hana, missing school, embarrassed to wear the yellow star

Suddenly her parents are out of her life

Takes her last breath in Auschwitz

Two lives cut short

Why?

## Sixth & Seventh Grade – 1st place

### An Insult to the Father

By Marie Choi

She trudges down the empty road  
Her eyes steel, her heart fluttering like a butterfly's wing  
They are watching her, always Watching  
In her life which is an endless monotony of days

It is quiet in this grey cement city  
There are no shops or restaurants,  
rumbling cars or laughing couples  
lining the dim streets  
Only soldiers and grey despair

She feels His eyes like an iron fist  
But she never cringes  
In a life with  
No color, no sound  
No opinion, suggestion, or hope to be found  
She has no memories she wants to remember  
Only nightmares she wanted to forget

She is going to the Children's Palace  
That marbled hall with pillars like redwoods  
Shooting up to the unseen sky  
"Min-seo, wait up," her little sister whispers  
Ji-yeon is only four  
Her eyes still light up with questions like smoked quartz

As her head hasn't yet hit the ceiling of her dreams  
She doesn't yet know  
That one man was God in this country

A slight smile cracks Min-seo's cement face  
In her sister's excitement, she remembers the old flicker of  
her own

“Hey Min-seo, why is our world so quiet and boring?”  
“Shush, the police will hear,” Min-seo whispers  
Fear like black lightning streaking through her veins  
She claps her hand across her sister's pink mouth  
As Ji-yeon protests  
They could both end up  
Like bloodied broken dolls  
On the interrogation room floor  
For to even *think* your grey life was less than heaven  
was an insult to the Father



## Sixth & Seventh Grade – 2nd place

### My Memory Tree

By Justina Cha

In spring

A tree sprouted in my backyard one day

Her leaves were pink, her trunk chocolate brown

She sang to me, of things that happened before and things  
that were to be

And when I drew closer, I saw all my memories and dreams I  
had as a kid on her

leaves

And as each memory fell like a leaf from my mind

I crunched it beneath my feet

Only to see a new one blossom

## **Sixth & Seventh Grade – 3rd place**

**Pelé**

**By Zen Mir-Scaer**

The greatest player ever  
An affinity for ball  
Surging through adversity  
Working very hard  
Juggling with a mango  
Raising up the bar  
Style unconventional  
Causing so much awe  
Insatiable need to play  
Meticulous dexterity  
He is Pelé

## **Fifth Grade – 1st place**

### **Thirty-Two Degrees Fahrenheit**

**By Elise Y. Chen**

Cold, chilly, freezing, slippery

A tile kitchen floor in winter, when you forgot to wear your warm slippers out of bed

Water, with 100 ice cubes dumped on my head while in a deep sleep

Chills, between the fevers that ignores how many blankets I add

Fear, in a penguin's heart when a Leopard Seal is spotted

My heart, if someone stole my best ideas

Crystals, in Saturn's rings light years far away

A place, where the sun hasn't risen in millions of years

Ice, the fuel beneath my powerful, gliding blades.

## Fifth Grade – 2nd place

### Sea Dive

By Estella Cuyler Newton

Wadding into the clear water, I dive in.  
Swishing, swirling, twisting, frolicking.  
I swim alone at first, in turquoise water.  
Before long, sea grass glides under me.  
Swishing, swirling, twisting, frolicking.  
Dancing in the tide.

A rainbow of fish swim through it.  
Swishing, swirling, twisting, frolicking.  
Orange garibaldi dart in and out of sea grass.  
Gray and yellow ones circle my legs.  
Crazy as a river otter.

Little red ones scatter at my touch.  
Tearing my eyes away from the fish, I round the bolder.  
It's as rough as elephant skin.  
As I reach the other side, the current pushes me against the  
rock.

But I won't break.  
Unable to walk, with fear of crushing a fish, I fight out of the  
current.

Swishing, swirling, twisting, frolicking.  
The seagrass parts, forming a sandy path back to the beach.  
The sand becomes shells when I see a wonder.  
A white and yellow striped butterfly fish slowly swims out of  
the sea grass,  
Then darts back out of my sight.

I resurface, gasping. Slowly I wade back to shore.  
I have returned from a Sea Dive.

## Fifth Grade – 3rd place

### Hope

By Max Sauers

The most beautiful thing that has sprung last spring,  
but now it is so beautiful and brown,  
a dead garden.  
It has rested, inactive, since December.  
Though the garden is cold and dead,  
a pearl  
stands out of the dormant oblivion –  
a pristine flower  
standing high –  
trying to persuade its fellow beings  
that spring will come and bring  
joy and life to the garden.  
No longer will it be cold and dead,  
but luscious and green.

## Fourth Grade – 1st place (Tie)

### I Am From By Anna Waltersdorfer

I am from radio news report and newspaper on the table  
from Bose and Keirier.

I am from the big smoky fireplace and long comfy sofa.  
Cozy, welcoming, colorful and squeaky floor.

Pots and pans clanking.

I am from the freshly cut and watered grass,  
And the shade providing walnut trees facing the sun, many  
little seeds and yellow as bright as the stars.

I am from putting boots out on St. Nicholas day and  
nature loving, empathy for others for Michaela, Robert,  
Noah and I.

I'm from mom asking me if her clothes match and working  
on the dinner table.

From go eat the dirt and bruises are a sign of great  
adventure.

I'm from kindness, help each other, christianity.

I'm from Linz, freshly baked black bread and  
kaiserschmarrn.

From a 94 year old and I have never heard her complain  
and her name is Anna.

The going to the bathroom when I'm about to brush my  
teeth.

I am from cheerful, happy, kind, forgiving, and smart.

## Fourth Grade – 1st place (Tie)

### I Am Me

By Marta Essen-Conti

I am from chew toys and dog beds  
from baking bread  
and neosporin

I am from the sounds of a waterfall  
foaming and frothing the color of ice

I am from bamboo leaves and bamboo forests  
so strong and full

I am from the Tooth Cow  
from azure eyes and golden locks  
and from Jon and Juliana

I am from the theatre and Butler Conti Dodge

I am from “Peel the rabbit” and “stop crying or I’ll give you  
something to cry about”

I am from protestants and catholics,  
from vikings and innocent villagers  
and from rotisserie chicken and anything homemade  
From my dad cracking his head open and giving me the  
needle to stitch it up

and being woken up by my dog at 5:00 in the morning  
I am from reading books, crafting, building, healing, helping,  
caring, selling, and anything organic.

I Am Me, The One And Only!!!



## Fourth Grade – 2nd place

### Come Help Me, My Hero By Isla Villadelgado

Sometimes I don't know what to do  
Wanting to put myself out there  
Hiding from whom I really am

I just don't want to put myself out there  
The Earth's gravity is always holding me down  
But the moon's light lifts me up with its gentle glow

So come help me, my hero  
You are the one I am looking for  
Don't hide from me; I need you

I see you in the pitch-black darkness  
Don't go away, just come out...

I see a shadow and I move closer  
Finally, I found you  
My heart beats like a hummingbird's wing  
As I see my reflection looking back at me in sunlight  
After all this time  
Now I see  
I am my own hero

## **Fourth Grade – 3rd place**

### **Tiny Black Balloons**

**By Angelina Choi**

I float in the dark grey winter of my heart  
Searching the whole ocean for one friend  
But all I see is blackness  
Still fins, glassy eyes, tiny black balloons  
Instead of golden voices, silence screams  
And I know that I am absolutely  
Alone

## Third Grade – 1st place

### If I Were in Charge of the World

By Ella Black

If I were in charge of the world  
I'd cancel school, fortnite,  
Braces and also  
boys.

If I were in charge of the world  
There'd be healthier pets,  
No poor people and  
Puppies that stay young forever.

If I were in charge of the world  
You wouldn't have allergies  
You wouldn't have icky litter  
You wouldn't have shoes  
Or "Don't punch your sister!"  
There wouldn't even be sisters!

If I were in charge of the world  
A neapolitan milkshake with gummy bears, popping boba,  
chocolate sauce and a cherry on  
top would be a vegetable.  
All Star Wars movies would be G.  
And a person who sometimes forgot to brush their teeth  
And forgot to say "Thank you!"  
Would still be allowed to be in charge of the world!

## Third Grade – 2nd place

### The Forest Trek By Gayatri Sivakoti

Trekking in the forest,  
under the shady trees,  
we glanced at spooky shadows  
in which everyone sees.

Through the darkness, we used our lanterns,  
but sometimes, it wasn't enough.  
So a scout said,  
“We need to be tough.”

We took his advice,  
then tried avoiding some mice  
that scurried to a hole,  
and stole our food whole.

As the rest of my group went further,  
I stayed behind,  
just to make sure  
that the animals were kind.

Right then,  
a lovely forest wren  
came to my aid  
for a fee of seeds I located and paid.

After my friendship with the bird,  
I continued my journey without saying a word.

Suddenly, a bear came across me!  
Gah! I needed a plan-to-be!  
Then I realized, it wasn't a bear at all.  
My help-scout dropped the mask with a fall.

## Third Grade – 3rd place

### Getting a Haircut By Graham Richland

Optimistic at first  
In the end you feel cursed  
But you have no one to blame  
That your haircut is lame  
You try and try to comb  
While you're still at home  
When you go to school  
You feel like a fool  
Uh oh school play  
Ruined my chances yesterday!

## Second Grade – 1st place

### Dragons By Ariel Mualim

Dragons,  
Fierce as a fox  
Its fiery fire can light up the fog  
These dragons can fly  
Oh so high  
All the way into the eternal sky

Dragons, dragons  
Wise as a raven  
Ravenous as a rattlesnake  
Precious treasures in clandestine haven

Shiny scales swooping here and there  
Flying in the cool, misty air  
Painting the bright blue sky  
Dancing, twirling, gliding way up high  
Powerful and monstrous

Mighty loyal creatures  
Forever fabulous

## Second Grade – 2nd place

### Bees

By Maila Drescher

He flaps his wings.

When he stings

And he makes a buzzing sound

When he flies around

If you bother a bee

They will sting you and me

Be grateful because they give me honey

It is sweet and yummy!



## Second Grade – 3rd place

### Unicorn By Taylor Jones

Under the rainbow, up in the sky,  
it will fly, fly, fly...

Nothing but sparkles, nothing but sky,  
nothing but a unicorn flying high.

In the sky, way up high, you see a  
unicorn passing by.

Corn and uni + uni and corn, add them  
together and a UNICORN was born.

Over the sea, up in the sky, you  
will see a unicorn flying by.

Rainbows are made of colors of love,  
as they soar through the clouds above.

No two unicorns are ever alike,  
full of glitter and sparkles,  
everything I like!

# First Grade – 1st place

**Snails**  
**By Carter Chen**

SLIMY, SLOW

HOUSE ON BACK

HANGS ON TIGHT IN AN EARTHQUAKE

RAINY DAY

SLITHERING AROUND

SNAILS CLIMB TREES

NOT RUSHED

LEAVES DOTTED LINE TRACKS BEHIND

# First Grade – 2nd place

## Horses

By Ella Hamersley

Galloping, rearing, through stable  
doors,

Stomping on long weathered  
floors.

Brown horses, black horses, stallions, mares,  
Manes blowing in the airs.

## **First Grade – 3rd place (Tie)**

**My Dog**  
**By Daniel Barriga**

She is playful and sweet  
and she is cute to meet  
and hyper and neat.

## **First Grade – 3rd place (Tie)**

**Seagulls**  
**By Yuri Nikola Hamersley**

Seagulls fly, seagulls soar,  
Seagulls hit the door of a mouse,  
That is in the house,  
With some lice,  
That are in freezing ice.

# Kindergarten – 1st place

**Sunny Days**  
**By Brixton Perlis**

Sunny days remind me of  
Snow cones topped with  
bubblegum  
Popsicles of different colors  
And  
Easter joy

## Kindergarten – 2nd place (Tie)

### Hamster and a Boy By Barrett Anderson

A boy in the forest  
Sees a hamster in his hole  
He asks, “Do you want to  
come home?”

The hamster crawls into his  
hand  
And the boys takes him home.  
Hamster digs a hole  
Close to the boy’s home

## Kindergarten – 2nd place (Tie)

### Rain By Kinsley Kesler

Rain comes  
Down from the sky  
Lightning comes  
Down from the sky  
I snuggle with my mommy  
and daddy.

## Kindergarten – 3rd place

**The Club 19 Storm**  
**By Sebastian Zamorano**

Rain falls from the sky  
I watch the clouds as they  
float by

When I heard the thunder  
crash  
And I see the lightning flash

I go and jump in a puddle  
Then I go to sleep and cuddle

## Preschool – 1st place (Tie)

Amelia

By Nova Rebolgar Ternborg

Amelia, you are beautiful like a bird  
I am so in love with you  
I want to marry you  
I want to have babies with you  
I love you

Amelia, when I see you on the train  
I will give you a necklace  
I made it myself especially for you

Amelia, I want to give you  
a rainbow flower  
I will make a rainbow leaf for you  
I am going to pick a leaf  
paint it with the colors of a rainbow

Amelia, I am going to protect you  
You will never have to be afraid  
If a car comes  
I will save you  
If a thief comes  
I would put a spell on the thief



## **Preschool – 1st place (Tie)**

**Captain Hiccups**

**By Kayla Cabral**

He can hiccup each day  
And he can fly in the sky.  
He can fly ships and he can eat bones.  
And he can jump really high.  
He's a scaredy cat.  
His face is like a belly and his eyes are made out of glasses.  
He can color on water bottles.  
And he can jump though roofs.  
His crew can hiccup too.

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*We look forward to your participation  
in next year's  
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*Next year's theme is*

***“Believe”***

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