

2026 Participating Poets

Josephine Bassetti

The Clearing

Kirsten Schulle Desai

Meg Diedrick

Skye Eichel

Jade Erickson

Nafsaniath Fathema

Lillian Gantzer

KD Hack

Jaycee Kienast

TJ Kienast

Penni Klein

Claire Kroening

Christel Maass

Chloe Mayer

Mike Mezera

Jenna Mood

Michael Mood

Isabella Grace P

Jacquelynn Schauf

Asher Schroeder

Richard Sund jr

Ella Tschopik

Harriet Vermeulen

Lexi Wilburn

JB Wocoski

Thank you to all the poets for
sharing your creativity &
making this possible!

First Place, Youth Category

Nightmare of The Fox

I don't know what to do
I can't tell what's real
and what's not

I think I fell down the hole of the fox
and the way out is locked

Strands of hair scatter around me
but I can't tell which are mine

I hear crunching under my feet
why did the forest betray me

Suffocating dust floats down
the walls hard, like a casket

Something is coming!
but there's no further to go

My nose twitches
at the stench of my own fear

Speed now useless
in this shallow grave

- **Isabella Grace P**

Second Place, Youth Category

JOURNEY

I look at the tree

I press my hand against cold bark

Turn around and see a lilac tree

Since when is that there?

Last year it wasn't

Has it been that long?

I look at it

And see a whole journey

Wind

Sunshine

Rain

And now this

Smell the lilacs

And long for home

It smells nice

And that's all I can say

- **Josephine Bassetti**

Third Place, Youth Category

Great
River
On
Woodlin Drive.

Nothing is greater
than to see plants thrive.

So please bring some joy
to my road.

It would be wonderful
to see plants grow
on my road.

On top of that hill,
working so hard
to grow.

Some plants need your help
So please help them **GROW**.

- **TJ Kienast**

First Place, Teen Category

Favorite Thing to Watch for on the Roads: Overcompensation.

| Without cruise on the highway, mindlessly dipping miles, one-two tires pressing on a rumble strip; drifting. Come back to life and hit ultraspeed, flying from barely seventy-three to well mid-eighties. The passing lines now taste tire for a moment before re-re-correction. | Catching on a bit late through the poorly-plowed country backroads to snow drifts stretching to the road's center, almost plunging into tall banks. Break through to the other side of the pavement, too eager for escape. |

Driver.

| You need not try so hard to right your wrongs. | Subtle correction is best, most effective, least overwhelming. You prove nothing by swerving wildly, flipping wheel opposite way. You prove nothing but the danger of eagerness, careless correction following careless mistake. | Wetting the wound before the bandage. You can't skip wiping soreness dry just because it takes time. |

- **Asher Schroeder**

Second Place, Teen Category

Planting Seeds

What's done is done
Words remain the silent one
Actions scream with untested fury
I planted a seed today
Thinking it would wither away
Instead, it sprouted amidst the choke of weeds
Basking in rays of a falling sun

What time has broken, can't be fixed
Reality doesn't care
If we mourn
Or turn to indifference
Fresh rain lingers in the air
Soon the touch of spring will be born
and my seed will meet the breath of the wind

I planted a seed that day
Many moons ago
Now the branches reach for the sky, like a child to their parent
And I don't know what will happen with actions
If we shall rise against injustice
Or fall to the lies they teach us

We planted seeds that day
Individual sprouts
Rooting together as one
What's done cannot be undone

- **Lillian Gantzer**

Third Place, Teen Category

Returning Library Books

Never let someone return and pick you up six times.

For the sixth time, the same book
drops in the library exchange box,
returned by the same person's hands
each occasion. When those palms

come back inside to snag it
from the shelf again, they grip
softly. Stark contrast to the chucking
experienced when returned in due-back;
junk barely worth the effort of lifting.

Regardless of wear and unwanted,
the book is allowed its space
placed again on shelves if so desired,
where anyone may take it back
down and smooth through its contents.

What knowledge is unhelpful to one
saves another; complex or linearly-lined,
it should not hide, stashed in plastic bins
in the library annex, or beneath shelves
collecting dust unseen where others
need not fuss between papers
hopeful for repairing.

After all, pages do tatter,
covers indeed scar, pieces
of delicate paint
peeling their parts–

the only thing truly and
wholly unappealing,
turning away hands worthy
of page turning,
is keeping each edition locked away
where no one can reach.

- **Asher Schroeder**

First Place, Adult Category

Benjamin's Garden

Spring rolled in softly,
resting warmth on our cheeks,
and creating space for little hearts
to grow into tomorrow.

So when spring offered my son soft soil—
he answered with a seed.
He watered it with compassion
and befriended the earth beneath him.

Spring's gentle breath
carried the days forward,
and my son still watched
his companion grow.

It grew,
and grew,
and grew—

In his awe, golden petals unfolded,
blossoming to finally meet his gaze.
As if Mirroring his own becoming,
and tending him in return.

The life I nurtured,
whose hands I once held—
now reach out,
nurturing life beyond me.

- **Jade Erickson**

Second Place, Adult Category

Troublesome Toads

I heard a pounce
in the dewy grass—another toad
that had been snuggled up
beside the squash seedlings
caringly transplanted
and watered at dusk.

I had to keep an eye on them,
for those toads could be trouble,
inadvertently uprooting plantings
when they hunker down
into worked, wet soil they so love.

They didn't know those tender squash seedlings,
properly nurtured, allowed to grow,
would provide cooling shade they'd seek
when summer blazes its hottest.

- **Christel Maass**

Third Place, Adult Category

Springtime Reed

As it warms, life returns, his wonder grows
He sees young grass reaching towards the sun's rays
Reeds dancing with the wind – look as it flows

Staring at tiny white flowers, time slows
Spider inches across the muddy clay
See it! A squiggly worm, she burrows

Robins at the feeder, there's two swallows
Chirp, tweet, caw, squawk – they have so much to say
Dropping seeds to the ground, a squirrel shows

Mama! Mama! There the ladybug goes
A short trail of ants, one leading the way
Bumblebees leaping between the meadows

A bunny looks up and wrinkles its nose
In the marsh, frogs croak as loud as they may
Buds pop open, leaves now casting shadows

Just as humid storms give way to rainbows
And the snow recedes to a brighter day
I look to him with hope, new tomorrows
As it warms, life returns, his wonder grows

- **Meg Diedrick**