

LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

# Poetry Contest



## Poetry Contest *Teens*

2025 Anthology



LOUDOUN COUNTY  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Thank you to our guest judge and speaker:

**Holly Karapetkova**

English professor at Marymount University and the Poet  
Laureate Emerita of Arlington County

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# Table of Contents

## Free Verse Category:

### High School

Winner: Yukta Thirumalai, "Post Me Into Memory"	Page 5
Runner-up: Charlotte Long, "My Body"	Page 7
Honorable Mention: Alexandra Blake, "On Eating (also, On You)"	Page 11
Honorable Mention: Katie Varachi, "Thank you, Places"	Page 13
Honorable Mention: Kharis Beach, "My Home, My land, My love"	Page 15
Honorable Mention: Maka Devaiah, "Chess"	Page 18
Honorable Mention: Shrika Bandi, "If Happiness Were a Flower"	Page 20

### Middle School

Winner: Samika Avvaru, "All Hail The Mule"	Page 24
Runner-up: Sreeja Dhulipalla, "The Perfect Kid"	Page 27
Honorable Mention: Abby Jones, "The Maple Tree"	Page 33
Honorable Mention: Amelia Brandt, "The True Story"	Page 34
Honorable Mention: Jaein Hwang, "September is my favorite month"	Page 36

## Poems that Rhyme:

### High School

Winner: Ramona Suter, "Chiming In the New Year"	Page 40
Runner-up: Maggie Wise, "Midas"	Page 42
Honorable Mention: Addy Robinson, "Ballad of The Pitiful Wife"	Page 48
Honorable Mention: Aradhana Ravi, "Fear"	Page 51
Honorable Mention: Isabella Silverbrand, "Everything You Are To Me"	Page 53

## **Middle School**

Winner: Pranamya Jindal, “Not Alone, But Together”	Page 57
Runner-up: Katrina Hakey, “Father”	Page 59
Honorable Mention: Ananya Anand, “What the Stars See”	Page 61
Honorable Mention: Haylee Bierd, “Ex. Best Friend”	Page 63
Honorable Mention: Manya Saxena, “Mom’s Aloo Paratha (Potato Pancake) Morning	Page 65

## **Spoken Word:**

### **High School**

Winner: Nathan Nocon, “Anxiety”	Page 67
Runner-up: Mia Duvalaus, “The Last Lemon”	Page 68
Honorable Mention: Gwentyth Mayo, “Heaven? It’s a school bathroom”	Page 69
Honorable Mention: Izzy Stith, “Reach for the top branch (Reach for the moon)”	Page 70
Honorable Mention: Scarlett Wyatt, “Springspring”	Page 71

# **Free Verse**

## **High School**

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Runner-up: Charlotte Long, "My Body"

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## Post Me Into Memory

Yukta Thirumalai

I share a thought,  
a broken shard of something larger,  
Held just right to catch the light.  
A caption that has been trimmed and rehearsed,  
But meant to look effortless.

A photo of my breakfast,  
but what I meant was: *I am still here.*  
A sunset flick,  
but what I meant was: *I wish this peace would last forever.*

We chance the dopamine in digital echoes,  
Likes captured like fireflies in a jar,  
briefly bright,  
yet always fading.

But there's something raw  
in this endless reaching –  
some deep, human emotions,  
woven into pixels and code.

See me. Remember I was here.

It somehow seems like the oldest thing of all-  
carving stories into the cave walls,  
etching names into the bark,  
longing to be forever.

## **My Body**

Charlotte Long

My body  
Does not  
Belong  
To me

It never did  
It never will  
I steer  
A stolen vessel

Only my mother  
Ever rightly owned  
Only my father  
Ever gently held

My body traded hands  
To the cloaked, deathly figure  
Who quickly gave it over  
To the clammy hands of fear

My body then belonged  
To the dark, ungodly terror  
Of simply living  
Of simply being alive

It did  
Not  
Belong  
To me

When he came  
With his threats  
And his light



Of oil and gas

When he came  
With his demands  
And stole  
My body

The body of a child  
Who belonged to fear  
And never belonged  
To me

When she came  
With her hands  
And her words  
And her weapons

When she stole  
My body  
And my skin  
And it's calluses

When she whispered  
In my frozen ear  
That my body  
Does not belong to me

When they scorned  
When they shamed  
Their winged words  
A cruel reinforcement

That my body  
Does not  
Belong  
To me

When the men  
On their high horses  
Unable to walk  
Under the weight of their crowns

When they wrote  
In blood ink  
on scraped and shredded  
Skin

That my body  
Does not  
Belong  
To me

If my body  
Does not  
Belong  
To me

What right  
Do I have  
To call it mine  
At all

You have stolen  
A body  
And left me unable  
To walk away

Without feeling hands  
Pull  
This body  
Backwards

What would it feel like?  
To own a body

To own a sliver of earth  
To own muscle and bone

To own a chest  
And a tightened throat  
To own  
Something

Just  
To  
Own  
*Something*

## **On Eating (also, On You)**

Alexandra Blake

Hunger, I've since come to  
realize, is not the best seasoning.  
Really, it's not seasoning at all.  
It's more like a leavening agent:  
needed in small quantities, but,  
when mismeasured,  
disastrous—the enemy of appetite. No  
body wants for a cookie that's  
half-baking soda, to break  
bread that's half-yeast.

Hunger is the grim visage of  
a reaper, a pulsing alarm that quietly,  
quickly, infiltrates your own blood—  
not to kill you, just to whisper in your ear:  
Memento mori. It turns cuisine into food,

food into eating, into  
consumption, that disease  
called mortality.

The best seasoning is  
not hunger's cold hand, it's  
warmth, it's your  
touch, your caress, your breaths,  
your mindless chatter and  
the laugh that bubbles up.

The best seasoning is  
not what makes you remember;  
it is that which helps you forget.  
That which heals you.

## **Thank You, Places**

Katie Varachi

I always hear people wonder

“If these walls could talk”

But I don’t only think walls are the ones that talk

If walls mutter secrets under their breaths, I think that ceilings cry out with joy  
from things

they’ve seen, windows have a clipped, muted way of speaking

That kind of thing happens, when life is viewed only through glass

But floors? I think floors would whisper in gentle, musical tones

The floor of the stage of Freedom Theatre

Is covered in layers of paint

There are lightening bolts and swirls and stars

Visible, but just barely

Covered after a years ago production

There is an outline of tree roots on the floor of our stage

The last remnants

Of the beautiful masterpiece we built

If these floors could talk they would speak of long nights

And laughter

Kindness that sweetened exhausting hours like a warm blanket

(and of actual blankets too)

“What do you need?”

“Would you like a hug?”

“How can I help you?”

“How can I be a friend to you?”

“I’m here”

“I’m not going anywhere”

These floors would speak of dancing

And talent

They would speak of whispered encouragement behind thick curtains

And the strength of the bonds of an ensemble that knows each other

Protects each other

They would sing

Because a floor cannot hear so much music and not sing too

These floors have held all of us up

In more ways than one

For years

Catching us when we fall

Holding us when we cry

A guardian and a safe haven

If these floors could talk they would tell us how loved we are

If you stopped to listen

They would tell the most beautiful stories

Of them all

## **My home, My land, My love**

Kharis Beach

Closed eyes,

Soft breath,

Precious soul.

(A quiet smile) *Oh! Oh!*

*My own, my sweet, my joy! I shall love thee all my days.*

*I will protect thee as fiercely as a lioness,*

*and as gently as an elephant.*

*We shall travel the world together and sing of it's wonders!*

*I love you.*

\*\*\*

(The sun is warm, the breeze pleasant.

The song of bird and rustling leaves

Intertwines.

Everywhere – glorious creation! As far as they eye can see.

Rolling hills of lush, soft grasses!

Merry little flowers of the rainbow

Waving their flags.)

\*\*\*

Hunter crouches,

Hunger preys,



Legs propel.

(A loud roar) *OH! OH!*

(growing faint) *My own, my sweet, my joy! I shall love thee all my days.*

*I will protect thee as fiercely as a lioness,*

*and as gently as an elephant.*

*We will see each other in a new world,*

*And we shall travel the world together and sing of it's wonders!*

(whispered) *I love you.*

\*\*\*

Open eyes,

Sad sigh,

Lonely soul.

(Sweet memory and bitter tears) *Oh! Oh!*

Hunter's hunger,

my mothers killer. She

loved me

as fierce as a lioness, as gentle as a great elephant,

and,

died to show me. As I lay there in ignorance and youth.

*Dear mother, I sign this song for you:*

*My home, my land, my love! It shall be empty*

*without thee*

*All my days.*

*I will love thee as fiercely as a lioness,*

*and as gently as an elephant.*

*We will see eachother in a new world,*

*And she shall travel the world together and sing of it's wonders!*

*I love you.*

## **Chess**

Maka Devaiah

I am like a pawn  
Sacrificed by the will of the warriors  
Died at the command of the very king  
Who broke my heart.

But my dear  
Before your death  
You could reach the other side of the board.

I don't understand.

If you dodge your enemies  
And reach the opposite side of the board,  
You could become a queen.

I am like a bishop  
A piece of little value  
I can only stay on black  
Or only stay on white.

But my dear  
You attack from afar,  
And take your enemies by surprise.

I don't understand.

Don't you see?  
You contain the element  
That could turn the tables.

I am like a knight  
Restricted to a pattern  
No surprise within me

You can always see me coming.  
But my dear  
You can leap  
Above any obstacle.

I don't understand.

You can fly above  
All those who stand in your way,  
No one stands a chance.

I am like a rook  
Not even a person, a castle,  
I may be able to go far  
But only back and forth.

But my dear  
You can turn sideways  
And ambush all those who dare  
Oppose your mighty strength.

I don't understand.

You may be a castle  
But your walls  
Cannot be broken.

Can't you see my dear?  
You are a bright, shining queen,  
You are worth it  
You are worthy  
You will win us all the game.

## **If Happiness Were a Flower**

Maka Devaiah

If happiness were a flower,  
she'd blossom.

She'd be the biggest of them all,  
her petals bustling with colors of ruby reds, golds, and violets-  
radiating a fresh, intoxicating scent of vanilla.

She'd make all the other flowers envy her.  
but happiness, a free spirit, remained unfazed.

Because she was once the ugliest flower in the garden.  
They called her hideous,  
wretched,  
wicked.

Their voices would gnaw at her,  
screaming with unfiltered, unrepentant fury.

It would haunt her petals,  
Consume her, wondering where she went wrong?

*"Is it me, or is it them?"*  
She'd often ask, but never tell.

She knew they'd wither before her-  
so she waited with virtue.

She mumbled gently,  
*"Tick... Tock..."*

Every second, every hour,

she hid behind her shadow.  
But how could the beautiful flower do so?

She outshined the other flowers gradually,  
glowing with her radiant light.

They called her dreadful,  
yet she was the liveliest!

And as the others broke,  
one petal at a time,  
she grew.

Her vines,  
greener than spring grass,  
and her roots, stronger than diamonds.

Day by day,  
by the grace of her light,  
she rose,

until she towered above them all.

And when the others drifted home,  
bruised  
embarrassed,  
humbled.

she opened her petals and welcomed them in.

*"I wish I could just share it all!"* she cried.

But how dare she?  
How could she give away the very thing  
that made her bloom so gallantly?

Happiness stays happiness

because she's the most beautiful of them all-  
Too bright to hold,  
Too wild to mimic.

Oh to be misunderstood,  
then lovely by everyone else.

## **Free Verse**

### **Middle School**

Winner: Samika Avvaru, "All Hail The Mule"

Runner-up: Sreeja Dhulipalla, "The Perfect Kid"

Honorable Mention: Abby Jones, "The Maple Tree"

Honorable Mention: Amelia Brandt, "The True Story"

Honorable Mention: Jaein Hwang, "September is my favorite month"



## **All Hail The Mule**

Samika Avvaru

All hail the mule

Because although your eyes blink slow

And your snout droops down

Because although you are regarded as nothing more

Than someone, something

To toil under the sun

Like another piece of machinery

Like another simple beast

What they do not see is that

You preserve like no other

You push through the labor with your head high

And your hooves steady

All hail the mule

Because you are determined to

Keep going

No matter what

Every day you take a load and carry it

Up the steep slopes of the mountain

And you do it all over again  
Hours upon hours upon hours  
Of work are placed on your back  
But you do not falter, and you do not delay

Your pace balanced against the rocky hillside  
Your stride confident and steadfast  
Every step of the way  
Resilient against the drudgery of your daily life

All hail the mule  
Your legs brawny and staunch  
Your attitude stubborn yet patient  
Like a donkey  
Your stature like a peasant's stallion  
Your coat a deep, shiny mahogany  
Like a horse  
Your parents gave you their traits  
But humans gave you your name  
Obstinate, they say  
Dumb, they say  
But little do they know  
Of your strength

And your worth  
That you have proven for so long  
Yet is always ignored in favor of clichés  
So I say this to all

All hail the mule  
The burned liegeman  
The humble creature  
Always overshadowed by the beautiful and the regal  
Always pushed to one side but  
Always doing its task with diligence and effort  
It may not be exquisite, and it may not be noble  
But the mule is tough and mighty  
A peasant's stallion indeed,  
All hail the mule.

## **The Perfect Kid**

Sreeja Dhulipalla

Room silent

Future stolen

Spark burned out

Letters, lots of them-

some small, some large,

many tear-strained.

But why would she?

She was a perfect kid.

Good grades.

Bright smile.

Well-spoken.

Good at everything she tried.

Why would she?

She was a perfect kid.

Sleepless nights studying.

Big smiles hiding the tears.

Clever words, to protect herself.

Her whole life ahead of her.

Just a kid.

A career waiting.

She had a bright future.

She was a perfect kid.

A life she could no longer handle.

A kid who went through too much.

A career path she told herself she liked.

“Why would she?”

Why wouldn’t she? She was tired.

“She gave no signs.”

Yes, she did.

Cries for help ignored.

“A bright future.”

A future she couldn’t see herself in.

“She was the perfect kid.”

She had no choice.

She waited her life out,  
for a day that only existed  
in her evolving dreams.

They didn't care if she was smart.  
A grade wouldn't stop the judgement.  
Nothing could.

She liked to draw.  
Portraits were her favorite-  
how you could trap a soul in pencil and paper.

She was good at it.  
If she wanted to do something.  
she had to do it well.

But she could never  
capture her own soul  
the way she did others.

Maybe the issue was-  
when she looked in the mirror  
she saw eyes, never a soul.

Was she just born without one?

She knew it wasn't true.  
She had one, once.  
But souls can disappear.

She liked animals.

Too much empathy to hold.

She shared it with everything.

She hated meat.

But her parents made her eat it.

She did.

She hated the taste-

a crime committed

for a girl who couldn't stomach the guilt.

She didn't want to be a bad person.

Wanting attention is bad.

You're not dying. You're just overthinking.

Yet she couldn't stop herself.

A rubber band on her wrist-

they saw it.

Extreme weight loss-

they saw it.

Scars through sleeves-

they saw them.

She hoped they saw.

She knew they wouldn't say anything.

Helped friends.

Hold it together.

Fell apart quietly.

She hoped someone would do the same.

But that's selfish-

Wanting attention.

"Death isn't painful,"

Whatever death is,

it's better than this.

Maybe she could finally rest.

Tempting thoughts clouded her head daily.

But her pain wasn't real-

she was a faker.

She wasn't starving-

just starving herself

then overeating later.

That's not true pain.

She had a warm bed-

but couldn't sleep

With thoughts that shouldn't be thought



There was this quote.

It couldn't save her,

but it teased a smile:

**"It's a permanent solution to temporary problems."**

If only they knew

her problems never felt temporary.

It's a permanent solution

to never-ending pain.

If it was the wrong choice,

she won't be here to regret it.

She looked into her eyes-

a face staring back.

Despite it all,

That was enough

to go on.

## **The Maple Tree**

Addy Jones

Forever changing,

The magician of the forest

The one that stands out

The one that tricks you up

And battles for attention

With our deep reds, oranges and yellows

dazzles

enchants

but....

the oak disagrees as *he* should be the main attraction

he gets angry, a fiery red

but.....

the maple is taller,

wiser

smarter

*trickier*

he maple will be victorious

but....

winter will end them both.

## **The True Story**

Amelia Brandt

The pressure in my head

In my heart

In my soul

A weight starving the whole

A beautiful beast of words inside, trying to break free of the walls that bind

All these words in my head

Dying

Trying

To be free

Longing for one to hear all that they are

And could be

Hoping so they will be set free

Free of the muzzle on their secret story

That grows bigger and braver every day

And as the struggle wages

Turning from a battle to a war

The walls start to shake and crumble

Not fall but let light in once more

A war born of three words of truth

A war of beauty  
And of doubt  
That someday will all be washed away  
And in the ruins  
A rainbow will be born again

## **September is my favorite month**

Jaein Hwang

My birthday is engraved with a “9”,  
standing for September.

The wind, sharply, tries to sting me  
but September’s warmth keeps me safe,  
wrapped inside its kind heart.

Beautiful amber leaves fall,  
but September nurtures  
every leaf,  
every echo,  
every sigh.  
They are not afraid to fall.

Oh, September...

You cradle the summer skies  
and breathe in the autumn air.

From the ice cream trucks singing to the birds soaring, chirping, traveling.  
From the emerald green grass to the golden rays of sunlight

steaming through my windows.

September is my favorite month.

Countless days breeze by without a trace of sadness in my soul.

Your heart is filled with secrets,

hidden in the beauty of nature.

September, what kind of magic do you hold within?

When the sun begins to set

earlier in the day,

I walk alone, unafraid.

September has my back,

and I'm okay.

With its beautiful messages and its captivating scenery,

I watch as the sunset fades

into the deep sapphire September night.

Fresh, enlightening days and serenading memories

the world seems a mess but in September,

it feels that everything is right.

When I feel a bit blue,

September comes up to me

and gestures toward the breathtaking view of life.

Oh September...

I smell your warm pumpkin in the crisping autumn air,  
I taste your sweet apple cider trickling down my throat,  
I see every inch of your mesmerizing beauty,  
your every hue.

I feel your smile and energy with every step I take,  
I hear people's laughter and joy,  
Ringing through my ears.  
Oh, September, you're too kind.

September is my favorite month.

## **Poems that Rhyme**

### **High School**

Winner: Ramona Suter, “Chiming In the New Year”

Runner-up: Maggie Wise, “Midas”

Honorable Mention: Addy Robinson, “Ballad of The Pitiful Wife”

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Honorable Mention: Isabella Silverbrand, “Everything You Are To Me”



## **Chiming in The New Year**

Ramona Suter

An invisible clock ticks down, in a few months it will chime  
Hopefully by then, I'd have productivity used my time  
In less than a year, I'll become an adult  
It should feel like a reward, but to me it just feels like an insult  
I lived a life full of bliss and contentment  
But now I feel nothing but resentment  
I resent that blissful ignorance, because it failed me  
Failed to prepare me for a life where I will be somewhat free  
My future is uncertain and frightening  
Its hold on my neck ever-tightening  
So many things to do, so many things to think about  
And to make things worse, all these thoughts are accompanied by doubt  
I'm not used to taking risks, I'm used to being secure  
Risks let me move forward, but I cannot resist safety's allure  
Instead of moving forward or moving back,  
I simply stay put as if held in place by a tack  
The invisible clock is still ticking down, all efforts to slow it useless  
Funny how time can be slow and kind, yet can also be fast and ruthless  
I want to be excited, I want to feel liberated

But I have no idea what kind of life I am fated  
The feeling of dread is a powerful thing  
And to me it becomes stronger with aging  
But despite all the darkness, there remains some light  
For something within me knows I will be alright  
Someday I will be truly, undoubtedly free  
Free of shame, free of guilt, and filled with glee  
My life will be whole, my life will be complete  
And pain, sadness, shame, and guilt will be obsolete  
The invisible clock is still ticking down, but I no longer fear its chime  
For I know I will have wisely used my time.

## **Midas**

Maggie Wise

There once was a man

Who had all he required,

Food, clean water, a home,

No concern was dire.

Then one day,

He tripped over a table,

And fell through his wall

Into a long forgotten stable.

There, he met a magic horse

Who whinnied in surprise

“Release me into the summer fields,

And I will give you a prize.”

Out he lead the bizarre stallion,

Who neighed at the sight of the sun,

“I will grant you one wish,

The restrictions are none.”

“I want all I ever ask for,

As soon as I request it.”

“So it is done”, said the horse,

And gave the man the power blessed.

He went back into his home,

And glared at the hole in his wall

“If the stallion’s words are true,

For thicker walls I call!”

With a whoosh and a flash

The walls extended in size

But the man yelped in alarm

As his halls shrunk to a foot wide!

He crawled out of the crowded den

Over broken furniture he climbed

“Note to self,” he said in the yard,

“Be more specific next time!”

Upon dusting himself off,

He said to himself “Alright

I wish for strong thin walls,

Unbreakable against the greatest might!

Up came four walls from the ground,

Trapping him like a cage,

He stood there, shaking

In a complete and utter rage.

“No more walls!” He bellowed out

Then realized what would elapse.

He looked to his home, horrified,

As the whole place collapsed.

“Fine!” He fumed,

“A new home it will be,

Large and spacious and nice!”

As he grinned in victory

Up from the grass,  
Sprouted something to behold  
Standing in the field now,  
Was a huge tent of gold.

The man then cursed,  
Before falling to the ground.  
He began to cry and weep,  
For the trouble he had found.

“Give me a sign!”  
He cried to the universe  
And then fell to the ground, concussed.  
And early sent to a hearse,

By a metal pole,

Attached to a red octagon

Reading STOP.



## **Ballad Of the Pitiful Wife**

Addy Robinson

In a quiet town where shadows play,  
Lived a kind-hearted wife, with a heart in sway  
With laughter bright, she loved her man  
But whispers grew like a darkened plan

One fateful night, she came to know,  
That her husband's heart had begun to sow  
Deceitful seeds with another's grace  
A fair woman had taken her place.

With eyes aflame, her heart turned cold  
Betrayed by love, a secret to unfold.  
She gathered her strength, with her sorrow deep

For justice sought, and her heart to reap

Under the moon, with a dagger gleam,

She crept through the shadow, it felt like a dream.

To the lovers' lair, where passion thrives.

A storm of rage, her heart contrives.

The door creaked wide, and there they stay,

In lover's grasp, so bold and gay.

With a cry of pain, she struck them down,

In the silence, she wore a crown.

A heart once tender, now filled with dread.

In the name of love, two souls now dead.

The stars looked down, their light turned gray,

The call for vengeance had led her astray.

Now she wanders in the night alone,

For love had turned to rage and claimed her throne.

With every step, her heart does cry,

In the shadows of love, where dreams now die.

So heed this tale of love's cruel fate,

For trust once broken seals a bitter state.

In depths of despair, where darkness thrives,

A heart betrayed, may extinguish lives.

## **Fear**

Aradhana Ravi

From birth to growth we see a pattern  
Dreams ranging from home to satum  
But who decides the end that happens?  
Well destinies to blame if you feel old fashion

But what if another reason exits of late  
A reason your dreams seem to halt at the gate  
A reason for sorrows a reason for woes  
A reason you didn't achieve most of your goals

This reason may well be a physical being  
One that will tempt you, naïve and freeing  
The darkest corners of everyone's minds  
Praying plotting that you won't survive  
It comes in forms and it come in waves  
But a one word encompasses most of its daze

It is evil, it is cruel? I cannot say  
But one thing stays clear, it will get its way  
All of your passion, all of your talent

All of your hard work, ending ungallant

A mysterious force works against human tide

To those who have cheated, stolen, or lied

This word is a synonym, a noun, or a verb

It's whatever you wish, so it stays undisturbed

At this point you wonder, what is this being

And to that I tell you, the truth isn't freeing

It will hold you burdened, forced to carry

To the end of your days, eerie and scary

As we near the end, I'm here to tell you

It's not expected, yourself if we skew

you wonder now, who is the breaker of dreams

The diminisher of hope, the tempting voice

And to that I respond, it is your making

Your fear, your choice.

## **Everything You Are To Me**

Isabella Silverbrand

You are my hero, flying from across the sky

You can carry me over any height, no matter how low or high

You are so incredibly strong and brave

Moving me through the pulling currents and over each crashing wave.

You are my teacher, guiding me through each lesson life holds

You explain how to build and repair each idea's tears and folds

You study and find endless possibilities on what others see as blank and white

Your exceptional mind moves between complex subjects and to discoveries  
so bright

You are my friend, listening to my thoughts and giving me purposeful advice

You help me stand straight and balance so I can gracefully glide on ice

Support and care is all you give me every day

I trust your every word, and will always pay attention to what you say

You are my partner, living through each adventure with me

You move me, opening my eyes so that I can finally see

We stick together, you never leave me behind

You walk me through the dark, not letting me become blind

You are my soldier, protecting me from the dangers outside  
You free me from the ropes that hold me down and keep me tied  
Honoring our country and still making sure I am more than okay  
You have so much to do, but you never stop helping me find my way

You are my role model, I want to be as amazing as you some day  
You work so hard, your accomplishments should be on display  
You are my definition of perfection, and know every answer I could ever need  
I want your mind with a limitless capacity, and a brain power with light speed

You are my king, so humble and caring to everyone you meet  
I am your princess, you spin and lift me off my feet  
Every move on your board is mindful and smart  
You make changes for the better, and have an enormous heart

You are my everything, without you I would be along and lost  
You give me energy, lighting my fire, not letting me shiver in frost  
My heart is filled with love and great appreciation for you  
Piecing my life together, you take me to explore each wonderful view

You are my father, and bright light to my days  
You are outstanding and make me stare and gaze

You lift me up, soaring with me far and high

You live my life with me, and I am forever grateful to see the work with you,  
that you let me fly



## Poems that Rhyme

### Middle School

Winner: Pranamya Jindal, “Not Alone, But Together”

Runner-up: Katrina Hakey, “Father”

Honorable Mention: Ananya Anand, “What the Stars See”

Honorable Mention: Haylee Bierd, “Ex. Best Friend”

Honorable Mention: Manya Saxena, “Mom’s Aloo Paratha  
(Potato Pancake) Morning

## **Not Alone, But Together**

Pranamy Jindal

Look down at the crystal lake  
Within its clear depths  
Down in the pond swims a fish all alone  
Nothing to take away your breath

The lonely fish has no color  
As dampened as its soul  
Slowly it has been washed away  
Tired of fighting, no longer does it feel whole

Look down the muddy pond  
There are so many at home in its murky depths  
Every fish different, even smallest fish hold power  
It takes away your long held breath

They say there's strength in numbers  
But what does this mean  
For each person knows their strength  
And pursues their own dreams

A shark without its pack is invisible  
A stick without its bundle is brittle  
A leaf without the tree holds no spirit  
An ant all alone is too little

They say nature holds our secrets  
The truths hidden behind our veils  
If something cannot be explained  
Then nature will lead you on the right trail

But what does nature tell us  
In this time old tale

A shark, a stick, a leaf, an ant,  
All alone they are all frail

A shark in a pack is formidable  
A stick in a bundle is unbreakable  
A leaf on a tree is bursting with life  
And an ant in a colony is unstoppable

Something beautiful, like a diamond, is precious  
But alone, a diamond is worth the same as coal  
With no one to share it with  
It may be better stole

They say diamonds are the strongest things  
But there is only one thing more, light as a feather  
We are incredible all alone  
But we are invincible all together

## **Father**

Katrina Hakey

You say it was just one rough day

But that one turned into many

Children aren't allowed to express their thoughts

But adults have outbursts of plenty

Mother says to give you some grace

With irritation written all over your face

Family dinners ridden with tension

My food loses its taste

I wish home was a place I could drop my filter

My carefully curated mask

If home is supposed to be a place of true peace

Then why does just existing feel like a task

Mother says that you're just scared

Because your heart is skipping beats

But that doesn't excuse half of your behavior

Blaming it on random inconveniences feels like a cheat

## **What the Stars See**

Ananya Anand

I lay among stars, watching them gaze.

I see people pointing at me, laughing when they see my face.

Oh, look at that! Look how that star shines! I hear them say.

They all gawk at my marvelous rays.

I'm older now, sitting on the side.

Still noticed, but more people tend to the new star in the sky.

Why does no one notice me, I sighed.

They only pay attention to that guy.

I'm terribly old, no one sees me now.

They only notice that one star, stealing the light that was mine.

I realized that the star had a glum face-wow.

That was because he didn't beam like how he used to shine.

I'm on the verge of death, and I'm still watching that star.

He's crying now-I wish he's stop.

I wish to tell him not to feel glum.

I wish to tell him it doesn't matter if attention was drawn by another chum.

Spending your time worrying about will nod do you good.

You should be grateful for all the time you stood.

I wish to tell you all that I know.

But I don't have any energy now-you are on your own.

## **Ex Best Friend**

Haylee Bierd

Dear ex best friend

You used to be my ride or die till the end

Then you started treating me poorly

I noticed we were coming to the end of our story

I pass you in the hallway and I wave to you

You pretend I'm a stranger and look very blue

It's as if we never knew each other

So I cry using my hoodie to cover

I know I wasn't always the best

But when we'd hangout we always confessed

Secrets, and gossip, and much, much more

It's hard to believe I walked right out of that door

I miss all the sleepovers we used to have

Now every time I think of you I start feeling sad

Text messages we sent at three a.m.

And all the lazy afternoons that we'd spend

Summer nights spent making smoothies

Chasing sunsets with our hearts beating smoothly



Doing tiktok dances in the back of the classroom  
Spreading good vibes, it was always such a mood.

Before and also after school  
Watching movies and sharing our makeup too  
We'd paint our toe nails pink and yellow  
And now in the mornings we don't even say hello

Making bracelets until midnight  
When we were tying knots everything just felt right  
Oh how I miss the good old days  
We'd spend picturing us when 29 is our age

I always thought you'd end up my maid of honor  
But now I doubt we will be at each other's graduations to support one another  
Why did our story end like this  
All our fond memories falling into the abyss

So if you're seeing this, I miss you a lot  
Your probably not thinking of me or our plot  
Maybe you can be friends again in another life  
And everything will always and forever just feel right

## **Mom's Aloo Paratha (Potato Pancake) Morning**

Manya Saxena

Happiness is waking up with the sun,  
A warm morning breeze, and the day's begun.  
But the best part, oh, you've got to see,  
It's the smell of mom's aloo paratha calling me!  
Golden, soft, with potatoes inside,  
A little butter melting, it's a heavenly ride.  
Crispy on the edges, fluffy, and hot,  
One bite, and I forget what I forgot.  
The kitchen's filled with that savory smell,  
Like a secret spell that works so well.  
A plate in my hand, the day feels right,  
Happiness is mom's aloo paratha in every bite!  
The world can wait, I've got my feast,  
No need for anything, this is the least.  
With every crunch, my heart's at rest,  
Mom's Aloo Paratha for breakfast? YES, that's the best!  
So, here's to mornings where joy's on the plate,  
Aloo paratha's love, you just can't hate.  
Happiness is simple, no need to stress,  
When the day starts off with a breakfast blessed!

# Spoken Word

## High School

Winner: Nathan Nocon, "Anxiety"

Runner-up: Mia Duvalaus, "The Last Lemon"

Honorable Mention: Gwenyth Mayo, "Heaven? It's a school bathroom"

Honorable Mention: Izzy Stith, "Reach for the top branch  
(Reach for the moon)"

Honorable Mention: Scarlett Wyatt, "Springspring"

## **Anxiety**

Nathan Nocon

Google Link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/187PeopKXkVLl8L23JR8BH5iHM6GovZRa/view?usp=sharing>

## **The Last Lemon**

Mia Duvalaus

YouTube Link: [https://www.youtube.com/shorts/\\_g\\_u1wV\\_mJA](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/_g_u1wV_mJA)

## **Heaven? It's a school librarian**

Gwenyth Mayo

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olx4ioboJ2Y>

**Reach for the top branch (reach for the moon)**

Izzy Stith

YouTube Link: [https://www.youtube.com/shorts/L\\_nBoJqgXbU](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/L_nBoJqgXbU)

**Springspring**

Scarlett Wyatt

YouTube Link: <https://youtube.com/shorts/USKUXnywMhE?feature=share>



*Thank you to  
everyone who  
participated in  
our competition  
this year.*



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