The Fourth Annual Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards
# 2020 Awardees and Honorable Mentions

## Table of Contents

### KINDERGARTEN - 5TH GRADE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mama</td>
<td>Hannah Ludlam</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You With Me</td>
<td>Asan Truss-Miller</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Dollars</td>
<td>Data Hunting</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ducklings</td>
<td>Charlotte Chung</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Rug</td>
<td>Catherine Stanislawski</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Green Room</td>
<td>Elise Brand</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Water's Daughter</td>
<td>Holly Murphy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Rink</td>
<td>Luke Hong</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frenemy</td>
<td>Keya Dhungana</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Stuff</td>
<td>Ava Rucker</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wait and Wish</td>
<td>Daniel Hyde</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination</td>
<td>Tal Margot Neiman</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear Dodge in Green Leaves</td>
<td>Luke Sindt</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World of Light</td>
<td>Megan Pham</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of Those Days</td>
<td>Athena Gottlieb</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ganges</td>
<td>Karlina Tolksdorf</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6TH GRADE - 8TH GRADE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Remember</td>
<td>Daniela Kasalo</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Shall Overcome</td>
<td>Vedansh Wadhwani</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Made of Mess</td>
<td>Zoe Harris</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Grandfather's Broken Camera</td>
<td>Noa Stern Frede</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing to Reality</td>
<td>Natasha Stoper Friedman</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>Liron Helmer</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Sophia Memon</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed People Poem</td>
<td>Katerina Isabella Catala Krysan</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Eleanor Ross</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 9TH GRADE - 12TH GRADE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pandora's Box</td>
<td>Anaitzel Franco</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Room</td>
<td>Jolin Li</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climbing Trees</td>
<td>Nico Crabtree</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Don't Need a Body to Bury Something</td>
<td>Annie Wu</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Dad</td>
<td>Kaleena Vose</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys With Missing Flowers: Endangered and Growing</td>
<td>Kamari Copeland</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living With Purpose</td>
<td>Holly Wood</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How I Use My “Black Privilege”</td>
<td>Daysha Straight</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Oreo LP</td>
<td>Allen White</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Name Is Madison and Yours Probably Is Too</td>
<td>Madison Sniegowski</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Etching Your Legacy</td>
<td>Aanika Pfister</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fears in Exile</td>
<td>Sonam Yangzom Rikha</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bastards</td>
<td>Jasmine Connolly</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or Don't</td>
<td>Aimee R.</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Honorable Mention
The Fourth Annual Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards

Illinois Humanities, in collaboration with the Poetry Foundation, Brooks Permission, and the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, is proud to present the 2020 Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards. In 2017, Illinois Humanities, in partnership with Our Miss Brooks 100, the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, and Poetry Foundation, revived the youth poetry awards that Gwendolyn Brooks began in 1970 and continued until her passing in 2000.

Gwendolyn Brooks summed up the contest best in a note in 1977: “All the children who entered the contest are winners ... They worked hard. They created. And that is what is important.”

With this spirit in mind, we’d like to thank and honor everyone who submitted a poem. We also thank all of the teachers, librarians, parents, caregivers, mentors, and others who supported and nurtured young writers throughout Illinois: you’re supporting the next generation of Illinois poets.

We invite you to read, reread, and enjoy the poems of the 2020 Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awardees and Honorable Mentions.

Gwendolyn Brooks, by Nora Brooks Blakely

Born in Topeka, Kansas, June 7, 1917, she was brought home to Chicago after her first few weeks of life. She married Henry L. Blakely II in 1939. They had 2 children, Henry L. Blakely III and Nora Brooks Blakely.

The first Black person to ever win the Pulitzer Prize (1950), she received countless honorary degrees as well as many other honors and awards, including Poet Laureate of Illinois (30+ years), inductee of the National Women’s Hall of Fame, an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, the National Medal of Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities’ Jefferson Award and Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. However, Ms. Brooks did not just receive awards. She sponsored numerous one-time and on-going awards at elementary schools and high schools. She also developed awards for adult writers (young and established) and was well-known for her generosity and support of individual artists. Her published works include several books of poetry for adults and children, one novel, writing manuals, and two volumes of her autobiography.

Ms. Brooks taught at several colleges and universities. To date, at least five schools have been named after her, as well as the Illinois State Library Building and several other libraries, award programs and cultural centers.
The History of the Awards by Mark Hallett

The Youth Poetry Awards were first announced in an October 8, 1969 press release. For the next 30 years, Gwendolyn Brooks, poet laureate of Illinois and first Black poet to win the Pulitzer Prize, personally stewarded the awards. She wrote guidelines, sent out flyers to schools across the state, supervised the selection process, notified winners, spoke at the awards ceremony and, most importantly, corresponded with hundreds of student poets, parents, teachers, and administrators impacted by this experience. The New York Times reported Gwendolyn Brooks spent $2,000 or more of her own income annually on the Awards.

Why host a youth poetry contest in the first place? For Ms. Brooks it was firstly rooted in a desire to imbue “a continuing interest in the health of poetry” and, secondly, her belief that “a ‘poet laureate’ should do more than wear a crown – should be of service to the young.”

Gwendolyn Brooks reviewed and selected winning poems for more than thirty years. She searched for poems with “vitality, language surprises, bright contemporaneity, technical excellence, evidence of suitability for the ‘long haul,’” but winning poems did not require “all such virtues in combination.”

In 1979 the guidelines for the contest changed slightly to encourage poems that both “rhyme or rhyme less.” This change may have come in response to a letter from a thirteen-year-old poet, who was deaf. He wrote to Ms. Brooks that his entry was rejected by his teachers because its lines didn’t rhyme even though he’d noticed that the lines of poems by Carl Sandburg, Ms. Brooks’s predecessor as Illinois Poet Laureate, didn’t rhyme either. In the margin to of the student’s letter, she wrote, “These teachers are ‘criminals,’” reflecting her sustained belief in taking youth seriously as both writers and individuals.

Her belief in the capacity for young people to write powerfully about their experiences was captured in remarks she made at the final awards ceremony she attended before her death in 2000. She proclaimed to the audience: “When you have experienced these upcoming poems you’ll identify new reasons for admiring your children and teens … Much of the time you know them … Not always do you know them.” She urged parents and teachers, then and now, “Listen to these phrases, these deliciously strange constructions. WOW. WOW.”

Over the years, the Awards expanded to honor works by students from kindergarten through college before finally settling upon celebrating poets in kindergarten through 12th grade. From 1976 onward, the University of Chicago hosted an annual awards ceremony in which these students were publicly acknowledged.

In 1987 the Significant Illinois Poets Award ceremony honored both students and Miss Brooks on her 70th birthday with readings by 32 notable poets, including Paul Carroll, David Hernandez, Angela Jackson, Sandra Jackson, Haki Madhubuti, and Henry Blakely, Ms. Brooks’s husband. Among the poets reading that afternoon was Sandra Cisneros, who had cultivated many young writers through her years at the Latino Youth Alternative High School in Chicago. Ms. Cisneros later remembered the day as “a rare Sunday. A sincere Sunday. From someone both sincere and rare.” That same year, Elsie
Adams, whose daughter had been mentored by Ms. Brooks, thanked the poet for personifying “the artist who is unselfish with her talent; one who ‘gives’ bountifully, and therefore ‘reaps’ bountifully. You believe that we owe our sisters and brothers; you fulfill that debt constantly.”

Illinois Humanities is inspired by Ms. Brooks’ commitment to youth and to the power of poetry. Through the annual statewide Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards we look forward to doing what we can to continue to fulfill the debt of all she has given to Illinois and to the world.

All the writing tips are excerpts from SEASONS: A Gwendolyn Brooks Experience; Edited by Nora Brooks Blakely, Cynthia A. Walls with illustrations by Jan Spivey Gilchrist © 2017.

Published by Brooks Permissions and Third World Press Foundation.
**Writing tip:**

Use fresh language.

Feel free to talk on your paper about anything, not just flowers and trees and springtime...

---

**Mama**

— Hannah Ludlam, kindergarten, Sor Juana Elementary School

I see the sight beside her on the counter.

Of course I touch it.

It is soft.

I hear the clicking needles.

My MAMA is teaching me
to be
done.

I’m excited for my sister
to be

— Hannah Ludlam, kindergarten, Sor Juana Elementary School
You With Me?

I dream of everyone.
I dream we are free.
Free of sorrow, singing.
Free of pain long.
I dream with everyone.
Together we dream and work.
For freedom.
The freedom.
To dream.
To breathe.
I am a Black boy.
Made of strength.
Be free.
Dream with me.

— Asan Truss-Miller, kindergarten, Village Leadership Academy

Two Dollars

There were two dollars.
They had a conversation.
About their feelings.

— Data Hunting, kindergarten, The Children's School
Ducklings

Baby ducklings are a coming,
Baby ducklings are a coming in spring.
Baby ducklings are a singin',
Baby ducklings are a singin' well.
Baby ducklings' wings are yellow,
Baby ducklings' wings are yellow and brown.
Baby ducklings see a great blue heron,
Baby ducklings see a great blue heron flying around.

— Charlotte Chung, 1st grade, Chicago Free School

On the Rug

Safe and snug
Warm and cozy
All around me
Are my friends
Teacher reads
Us a story
We are happy
I miss school

— Catherine Stanislawski, 1st grade,
Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz Elementary
**The Green Room**

She must like to read  
say the bookshelves piled with books.  
She must make art  
say the bag of markers in her desk and the clay bowl  
painted in glaze on her dresser.  
She must like dogs  
say the many dog stuffed animals and the dog poster  
avove her bed.  
And she's bold  
says the green room.

— Elise Brand, 2nd grade, Francis W. Parker School

---

**The Water’s Daughter**

I sit at the edge of the bay  
watching all the horses eating their hay  
I watch the water swishing in and out  
I love being the water’s daughter.  
I dive to the water  
I turn into a mermaid  
A beautiful tail, silver and gold  
So beautiful  
So bold  
The waves rush over me, just like the wind in a tornado.  
They crash, thrash and bash over me.  
I don’t feel them one bit.  
Clearly dad is mad.

— Holly Murphy, 2nd grade, The Children’s School
**Ice Rink**

Blades scraping on the ice,
Teachers giving students advice.
Little boys and girls twirling around,
To the jazzy, funky, and playful sound.
Kids performing tricks on the slippery surface,
And little Emma skates the furthest!
Skating, twisting, and turning about,
“2 more laps to go!” The instructor shouts.
Meanwhile on the other ice rink,
The sticks go: “clackety dink!”
The puck goes swirling around,
Bang! Crash! Number 76 topples down.

— Luke Hong, 2nd grade, Avery Coonley

**Frenemy**

Look up at the sky, the darkness descends
I wish that this grim boredom would just end
The world is so overwhelmingly grey
Time feels like it is running on delay
Boredom makes my mind blank, like a plain sheet
But this is the feeling that I will beat
Sitting here staring at the dreary wall
But I will never ever give up or fall
Boredom will never ever be my friend
My joy and happiness will never end
Even the dark clouds have called it a day
My sense of adventure whisks me away
Everyone look at what’s on arrivals
My joy is back it is a revival

— Keya Dhungana, 3rd grade,
Lyman A Budlong Elementary School
**Winter Stuff**

Hot chocolate  
in  
my cup  
I was following  
the  
snowflakes  
warm blanket  
on  
my  
face  
gingerbread man  
running  
away  
ice-skates  
covering  
my  
feet

— Ava Rucker, 3rd grade, Lyman A Budlong Elementary

---

**Wait and Wish**

I am hardworking and determined.  
I wonder when I will be at school again.  
Playing football with my friends, in the blossoming park,  
Or sledding down the hill, in the chilly winter.  
I miss having lunch with my friends,  
Deep in conversation.  
I hear the insects chirp outside my room while studying.  
I see my garden from my window and long to be at school.  
Delicious meals of steak fill my mind as I dream of being at a restaurant.  
I feel my book as I sit, reading endlessly.  
I worry that quarantine will never end, lying down on my bed  
After a day of hard work.  
I dream of slicing the water when the pools open.  
Free in the cool water, at last.

— Daniel Hyde, 3rd grade, Lake Forest Country Day School
**Imagination**

She swims in the air,
Flies in the sea,
Leaps onto the lemony drops of
Golden rain.
She whispers to the clouds,
Calls to the wind,
Reads the dents written into the
Petals of the rainbow flowers.
She seeks the smell
Of burning parchment,
Sings at the top of the redwood,
Just over there,
She lives where she wants,
For imagination takes her everywhere.

— Tal Margot Neiman, 4th grade, University of Chicago
Laboratory Schools

**Linear Dodge in Green Leaves**

Bright red cardinal, sitting in a walnut tree. He’s gazing serenely over the landscape.
I saw him with binoculars. Tree trunk like a tube,
It’s smooth with a lot of little bumps and rough in places.
And this one is a melted candle, its bark is like shredded paper that’s been pasted back on.
This old redbud with its crispy seed pods has about 500 blossoms. Here’s a shady tree
Full of summery leaves even though it’s only May first.
Radiant, neon, this color is saying ‘Linear Dodge’ to me. A robin flashing through the sky, so close to my face.
This cardinal’s call is like an arcade game laser gun,
Peeeeeew, pееееееew, pew-pew-pew-pew-pew.
The Norway maple has holes in its sides where branches used to be. The English Oak has
Tiny buds that look like magnets from here. I’ll go back across the field. Earlier, in the winter,
There were red berries on this tree, but these little white buds are prettier. There’s so much

- continued on next page -
Shade under here. The leaves are soft, not like chenille, but silkily smooth like flower petals.
This leaf smells like it looks. I’m immersed in green. I can kinda see the view, but the branches block
Out all the bad parts. Wonder what kind of bird that is, sounding expectant and annoyed,
Like it’s saying, Come on! What are you waiting for?
Get that.

— Luke Sindt, 4th grade, The Children’s School

World of Light

Space glows like a firefly.
Sparkling stars shine and traverse through the tender universe.
It is a painting that can just hypnotize you.
Reach for stars.
Space is infinite.
The moon lights up like a lamp
Its pure white gleams blinds you.
Space is breathtaking as the
Milky Way leaves you with a face of surprise.
Sometimes, when you feel melancholy,
all you have to do is look at the colors around you.

— Megan Pham, 4th grade, Fairview South School
One of Those Days

It’s one of those days. You know the type. Air so thick it makes you sleepy. A day where temperature and anxiety fall in a blender on puree mode. A day where false warmth blankets the air, but the chill still creeps up your back. You shiver violently. It’s one of those days where you open your mouth, to greedily suck up the moist air, but it leaves you more parched than before. It’s one of those days where there was a storm, and the ghost of lightning hangs in the air, making your hair stand up as you walk. It’s one of those days where there’s no sun, but your shadow stalks you anyway. It waits for the right moment to peel up off of the ground and strangle you, yanking you down, down, down...

— Athena Gottlieb, 5th grade, Whitney Young

The Ganges

The people’s prayers flow through the Ganges like a dolphin gliding through the sea. The river shimmers as the sunset glows via heavenly light touching all souls. Ganga watches carelessly from the clouds as cozy as a pillow. The river of the Ganges flows as soft and silent as the hum of a hummingbird. Ganga’s lotus flower slowly floats from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. SPLASH! The luminous and spiritual catfish dance out of the water as delicate as a ballerina. The waves clash together like Shiva’s hand and drum. Ganga’s spirit will always flow in the glistening water of the Ganges.

— Karlina Tolksdorf, 5th grade, Fairview South School
**Writing tip:** Hear talk in the street. There is much real poetry coming out of the mouths of people in the street. Many cliches, yes, but also vitality and colorful strengths.

Your poem does not need to tell your reader everything. A little mystery is fascinating. Too much is irritating.

---

**I Remember India**

I remember sunny India in December.

I remember the lush, juicy mangoes from the fruit vendors. My mom told me the vendors lived on those carts due to poverty in India. I felt so sad that night.

I remember all the cooking transpiring, one floor, another, and another, all cooking dahl and rice. I could hear the water bubbling with the flavorful dahl inside. The dahl talked to me, beckoning me to devour it, but I refused.

I remember being picky and only eating oatmeal for breakfast. Everyone wanted me to eat dahl but I refused. I was like the ugly duckling, sitting in the corner, eating oatmeal with more than enough brown sugar.

I remember talking day and night to my eager family all wanting to know about what has happened in America. I felt bored but realized how interesting life is in India.

I remember all the dogs barking as if the world was ending. My mom kept on complaining about all the dogs. People were yelling in languages I could not understand outside our house. I could hear my cousins, aunts, and uncles, praying through the night.

— Joaquin Lannoye, 6th grade, Fairview South School
I Was Told to Write a Poem

I was told to write a poem, for Poems in your Pocket
It was from Ms. Smith And I knew I couldn't drop it
I tried to write a poem While sitting in bed
But I couldn't think of one So I tried the floor instead.
I thought about it hard, But one didn't come to me
So I tried to change the subject A poem about what I see.
But I couldn't see much, Because my eyes were closed.
And my room is kind of lame So I didn't want to be exposed.
Then I just sat there, Wondering what to do.
When it came to me, a poem! From a certain point of view
A poem, Where you can see in my head,
And I thought of that poem, The one you've already read.

— Liana Smith, 6th grade, The Children’s School

I Remember

I remember the hot concrete against my feet.
The blue pool water splashing everywhere as I jumped in.
When I walked out of the pool, the warm air turned into an icy breeze, slapping me in the face.
I remember the juicy hamburger that I ate at a restaurant close to the beach.
Its juiciness made me want to devour every last bite of it.
We went to the gift shop and I saw the most beautiful bracelet.
It had radiant round beads and glistening charms.
Its colors were just like the cool and breezy beach everyone loves.
The emerald green, dark blue, and sky blue.

— Daniela Kasalo, 6th grade, Fairview South School
**We Shall Overcome**

I stand there, next to the Washington monument. A giant obelisk, shining in the sun’s hopeful Light which peeks through the dark clouds. The voice of Martin Luther King Jr. rumbles through the audience. He inspires us by slicing the darkness using the blade of hope that he gives us. We will overcome the darkness not because we are strong and intelligent, not because we crush our enemies, but because we have hope and we befriend our enemies and help them see the light.

This poem was inspired by the painting “We Shall Overcome” by Lois Mailou Jones.

— Vedansh Wadhwani, 6th grade, Fairview South School

**I am Made of Mess**

I am made of mess, Of cats always underfoot Made of the scrape and blood of falling off a bike I am made of the little trees outside the window, Made of the snow mountain in the parking lot every winter I am made of books I finished in a weekend And of never finishing movies. I am made of “it’s too late” And “don’t slam the door”. I am made of soccer on the midway Where I would climb every tree. I am made of obsessing over shows Of bootlegged websites to watch them on I am made of wandering the neighborhood Until I have to rely on my friend to get back home.

I am made of musicals, Of particular songs I love And being brought back in time By things I saw or heard months ago I am made of games Of movies Of people Of places.

— Zoe Harris, 7th grade, Ancona School
**My Grandfather’s Broken Camera**

I am from my grandfather’s broken camera.
You know, the one that used to take pictures, oh so long ago?
I am from games -- word games, and decks of cards that are never full.
I am from the dent in the wall from when I roller skated indoors and fell.
That dent that we have tried to patch too many times, and now it’s just a lump.
I am from discarded tiles from construction,
Tiger lillies overflowing the backyard,
And the bird feeder that is always emptied by squirrels.
I am from the cafe with the chair that no one ever sits in.
From the street corner that held so many bake sales,
From the dry cleaners with the Guatemalan woman who always has a smile.
From “dial it back’s” and “you’re at a level 10’s”
These things make me who I am.
I am from crispy fried eggs,
Butterscotch apple pies,
Muffins that aren’t really muffins, but we love them anyway.
And I am from that big book of pictures that documents our lives.
And with every freshly printed photograph, we slip it into its folds.
As well as the pictures from my grandfather’s broken camera.
We slip those in there too.

— Noa Stern Frede, 7th grade, Ancona School

**Writing to Reality**

henry dumas, 1934 to 1968
age 33,
writes a letter to himself,
talks about
when he dies,
he wants to be remembered
for his
writing.
the circumstances are unclear
but
but we know
we know that
as he was walking through a turnstile,
a turnstile in a new york city train station,
his life ended.
how it happened
was shocking,
was disgusting,

fills people with rage,
with sympathy,
with frustration,
he
was shot
by a
new york city transit policeman.

afterward
his writer friends
at the party
toni morrison
threw for him
sitting and talking
about his achievements,
just as he wanted,
laughing and smiling
while crying
inside.

they were talking
about
his books

- continued on next page -
which
were
about racial tension,
about white supremacy,
even about science fiction,
they were talking
about his life,
not his
death.

— Natasha Stoper Friedman, 7th grade, Ancona School

Wind

Wind is the earth’s breath when it is lying down for sleep.
Wind sounds like nature’s whistle rippling through the forest.
Wind looks like an arrow splitting the air.
Wind remembers when the earth was forming, and the ground
was rising.
Wind is a memory of a time when the earth was empty and covered
with forests.

— Liron Helmer, 7th grade, Midwest Academy for Gifted Education
If loneliness had a scent
It would be harsh smoke and sweet roses.
The sound of laughter from afar and
The sight of cars driving away.
A community of people who don’t know
Each other’s names.
Trees lining the streets, as far apart as we would be
Even without a virus to keep us that way.
Nothing more than a
“Hey,
   How are you!”
Without a question mark at the end,
A divided society with society to blame.
If loneliness had a taste
It would be the meals we eat by ourselves
When we don’t have a virus to blame.
And if you could hold loneliness in your hand
It would be the thorns of the rose
Scarring you with shame
For the times you’ve said
   “Hey,
   How are you!”
To a nameless face,
Without a question mark at the end.
— Sophia Memon, 8th grade, Ancona School

*Mixed People Poem*

To the white boy in the back of
the room — who saw me walk up
with my natural hair and my
‘cite black women’ shirt --
I know what you’re thinking.
Not another inequality poem.
Not another oppression poem.
Not another black-boy-shot-by-a-police-officer-because-he-had-his-
Hood-up-poem.
Not another black people poem.
Well guess what.
This is a mixed people poem

[A white chocolate and dark chocolate taste better together poem]

This is a what-even-are-you poem.
This is a too-white-to-be-black
too-black-to-be-white-poem.
And just because My skin tone is closer
to the one on your face than the one
on my father’s, does not mean you
can touch my hair.

- continued on next page -
Mixed People Poem

To the white boy in the back of the room who saw me walk up with my natural hair and my 'cite black women' shirt -- I know what you're thinking. Not another inequality poem. Not another oppression poem. Not another black-boy-shot-by-a-police-officer-because-he-had-his-Hood-up-poem. Not another black people poem. Well guess what. This is a mixed people poem [A white chocolate and dark chocolate taste better together poem] This is a what-even-are-you poem. This is a too-white-to-be-black too-black-to-be-white-poem. And just because My skin tone is closer to the one on your face than the one on my father's, does not mean you can touch my hair. Does not allow you to talk about my people--half of them--like they are nothing. Like they are just another page in your history books,

just another forgotten thought In your head

And I know if we were in a room full of black people I'd be the first you’d talk to because I look the least threatening the least angry.

Just because I’m not the 'angry black girl' the world expects, doesn’t mean I can’t be. Doesn’t mean I’m a docile animal you can talk to like I’m stupid.

I’m not stupid.

— Katerina Isabella Catala Krysan, 8th grade, Montessori Academy of Chicago

Girl

Some days, it can be nice to forget that I am here, Too. To mistake myself for what can be changed. Girl is powdered sugar, pixie sticks without tang, or, even slight unpleasantness of paper packaging left to dissolve on the tongue. I am told: Girl sheds. Shedding, peeling, sticky paper layer, Nuisance. Wonder why I have never really been able to get rid of the tang, or the paper, or whatever turns mouths blue. I imagine this longing of girl lingering. And the music — Kim Deal's voice like smoke on lemon, dancing, rosy cheeked,

- continued on next page -
sunlight humming on skin.
These things are loyal —
Never to let hair fall loose out of pig tails, even
when skin folds into prune.
This, I forget, is also the skin of a girl.
An extension.
It can be nice to remember
that I am there,
Too.

— Eleanor Ross, 8th grade, Alcott College Prep

**9TH GRADE – 12TH GRADE**

**Writing tip:**

Poetry HAS a future! You MAY initiate new forms. You MAY create. You do NOT have to consider that “everything has been done.” You do NOT have to write sonnets, villanelles, heroic couplets, haiku, tanka, simply because centuries of poets have written such. Dare to invent something. Understand: that somebody invented the sonnet. Understand: the day before the sonnet was invented there was no sonnet.
Pandora’s Box

Here it is.
Shiny and new.
With bundles of lace and pieces of glitter going around the side.
An amusing sight of undiscovered glory with bits of subtle accents along the rim.
What’s inside?
Tell me, is it a garden of shining stars?
A collection of bouncing red VY Canis Majoris’?
Or bunches of bright blue Vegas that sparkle across long fields of constellations?
Are there different weeds of twinkly lights that grow next to Astraueus’ sensational creations?
Or, do you hold the sky like a canvas with painted winds?
A synchronized pattern of stratocumulus masses with a splash of pastel cirrus clouds.
Is the sun designed with eccentric shapes,
or is it carefully traced with crayons?
Zeus, please, give me a hint.
Is this simply a senseless box?
An assortment of unanswered questions.
Am I observing hidden secrets whose truths are too hard to comprehend?

Be honest, am I holding a capsule full of empty space that you no longer need to defend?
I beg of you!
Your mystery would be kept with me.
Tell me, are there raging fires that can boil the concrete into bits of dust?
Is there an unbearable pressure that can so easily crush the drums of our ears?
Are there turbulent winds that can so easily peel off the layers of the ground?
Do you hold spirits that can silence the buzz of the streets by setting spells and casting curses?
Or, violent waves that hold creatures whose claws have scratched up the ocean floor?

Can these concealed mysteries be so bad?
What can possibly be held in this chest that you can’t disclose to me?
Are there tiny nuggets of gold or a river of glistening silver?
Consider me as one of your own.
I’ll deliver your mail, clean off your swords, or even dust off your throne!

- continued on next page -
Hera, reason with him.
Tell him he’s wrong.
Athena, let me borrow your sword to crack open the latch.
Fortuna, promise me my luck has stacked upon itself.
Flip the coin.
Spin the wheel.
Declare me the successor.
I am just like you.
Don’t take my curiosity as hidden animosity.
I promise I’ll share.
I just want to take a peek.
A quick glance.
A glimpse of the grandeur you have guarded for so long.
I can take the weight off your shoulders.
A look inside is all I need.
My fingers can easily grip onto the sides as if it were carved for me to hold.
Blinding lights and shrieking cries creep underneath the tiny opening.
You said it was dangerous.
You warned me of the danger the secrecy closed within this contraption holds.
Well, I guess you get what you ask for.

— Anaitzel Franco, 9th grade, The Latin School of Chicago

**Paper Room**

You never know what you will find.
Seated in a chair made of cowhide,
Cold metal armrests still shiny, as if never used.
Warm seat worn from days long spent on it.
Pens and pencils in every color.
Dusty textbooks that line the shelves,
Lacking creases and cracks.
The scent of old books fills the room.
Frames, each one carrying a relative’s face
Frozen in time, forced to smile all day.
Rain crashes into the window,
The green of the leaves that lure you,
And the red of the bricks that confines you
In the leathery seat, time passes quicker,
Peace envelops me.
At least here, no voices call to me, nagging.
The only visitors, while infrequent, are those who come for sanctuary.
The gentle sound of computer keys being tapped,
The sound of the pencil scratching against the paper,
And I remember everything.

— Jolin Li, 9th grade, Walter Payton College Prep
Climbing Trees

“A tree’s were always permanent. They were access to the aether, but still deeply rooted in the ground.” – Brit Marling

A place forgotten. Memories shattered like glass, cutting through thin-skinned hands that scrape this sidewalk on a street I know I will leave.

I asked my father for climbing trees every time we moved.

Trees where my small feet can push off the dry moss and fly like dust, becoming one with this streaming air I breathe.

Trees where I can climb to the top and feel held by these solid branches.

Trees where I can climb to the top and feel held by these solid branches.

Trees where I inhale the divine wind that’s given to me by the aether, and I still feel grounded through these roots.

Trees that, can still stand tall in my mind despite the chaos of a scattered assortment of recollection.

And I can remember a split second where I felt cosmic.

— Nico Crabtree, 9th grade, The Chicago High School for the Arts
**You Don’t Need a Body to Bury**

**Something**

I.
i like to picture that eternity is the absence of
some people say it wears the face of death
bloody and devouring; neverending
maybe that’s why grief is so daunting
the concept of loss in five stages
never done for once
always repeated in rebirth and recycle
eternity in grief and loving people that no longer know it
love isn’t supposed to be a finite resource
I guess that’s why it’s so caught up in death.

II.
the sun is forgiving, honey sweet, almost golden
snow blankets in powdery layers
(I wonder if the ash of Pompeii looked like this when it
buried bodies.)
grief slips into cracks and widens them in chasms.
the clock does not stop ticking.

III.
life goes on, after a newspaper obituary,
or as close to one there is these days
they only gain passing sympathy from a silent stranger
there is loss in that too.
maybe there’s a funeral some lost summer day—

IV.
death does not chase after bodies
I suppose it’s strange anyways, the idea of a coffin
who would’ve of thought:
another box to fit in.

V.
mourn too, beyond a graveyard
I am mourning every time I gaze into a mirror
childhood has always been less of a skin to shed
and more of something to bury.

— Annie Wu, 9th grade, Walter Payton College Prep
My Dad

My dad has the mind of an architect
The body of a friendly giant, the spirit of a bird and the job
of a handyman
I love my dad, because of all of the sacrifices he made for
me
All the times he was there for me when he didn’t have to
be
My love for my dad comes from his pain tolerance
For saws cutting his fingers like little pricks in the back of
his mind
So he can come home and put a few more pennies in my
piggy bank
I love my dad because he ignored his aching bones after a
ten hour work day
So that I could sit on top of his shoulders and watch the
fireworks on 4th of July
My love for him comes from him rolling lemon oil on my
forehead
At 1 o’clock at night when I have a bad dream
Even though he hasn’t slept in weeks, In fear of my mom
coming home and causing a scene
He protected me from her words thrown like daggers, Cut
like long gashes

The words “I hate you!” made scars, But they don’t bother
me now
Because I had a dad that made up for her lack of affection
or my lack of remembrance
And when she threw a remote at the wall near my head
he covered my ears and prayed over me
and when things got worse and my sister became my
mother, my dad supported us through it all
Now he’s older and he still pushes himself to feed him, his
second family, and me
Sometimes I wonder when his body will break down
Like the rusted pickup truck that my dad loved, that he
had to sell
I wonder when his legs will fail him and he won’t be able
to go on walks with me
And I hope he’ll be able to walk me down the aisle and
dance with me on my wedding day
But I still wonder when his countless surgeries will be
pointless
And he won’t be able to kayak in the fox river because of
all the weight he put on his body
Because of all the times he took jobs that killed his
shoulders and knees
so he could pay the bills

- continued on next page -
So he could buy me battered teddy bear that said ‘God danced the day you were born’
So that I would know I was loved and had a purpose
And that I wasn’t doomed because of the environment I grew up in
My dad taught me that love isn’t just telling it’s showing someone you love them
Because every day that I can remember he showed me he loved me
I wish I could take away every scar he got for me
That he covered up with duct tape because he didn’t have band-aids
I wish I could take away every ounce of pain that he feels because of me and endure it myself
I wish I could give him the 33 years of his life back
So he could go on mission trips like he’s dreamed of
And as I watch him get stepped on again and again By his own customers
Stabbed in the back too many times to feel it anymore
I wonder if heaven is the only place he can rest
And as selfish as it is, I don’t want him to rest, I don’t want him to leave me
So I wish god would recognize everything he’s ever done, every obstacle he’s overcome
And reward him with the happiness he deserves

Because there has to be a reason why he’s going through all this pain
There has to be a reason and it couldn’t have been just for me, because I don’t deserve it
I think about all the money that he saved up for retirement
That was washed away from shopping sprees, all 33 years of hard work gone
Because she spent it on things we didn’t need
And he still tells me to this day, That he’s saving up for my degree
So that I can have a better life and not have to work like he did, at age 14

— Kaleena Vose, 10th grade, Walter Payton College Prep
Boys With Missing Flowers: Endangered and Growing

i’m daydreaming about gardens and flowers
but when a girl says “like when boys get raped”
the earthy scent disappears
how can you have a conversation about boys being raped without a boy that was raped?
i wonder if every male survivor heard it too
i wonder if she knows i am here
or if the class can feel my presence fading
i wonder if i will get my points for being present and engaged
when the girl says “like when boys get raped”
i don’t know if i should be the living testimony or be alive at all
i would never throw my own pity party
or put myself in the position for the boys in class to call me weak
i’m already gay enough
i sit there and listen
close my eyes and try to go back to the garden but i’m taken somewhere else

i am a little boy again
scared and innocent and dazed and a virgin
i’ve never felt so uncomfortable in my own home
these floorboards watched me scream
and i wished they had done something about it
i wish they had told me
that my flower could be picked too
whether i like it or not
i wish i knew other boys with flowers stolen from them
maybe they could remind me what a full garden feels like
take the patches left in us and make a safe haven
but when the girl says “like when boys get raped”
i feel like an endangered species
afraid to stand on my own two feet
all i can say is nothing
all i can do is replay that quote again and again and again
and hope for a topic change

— Kamari Copeland, 10th grade,
Gwendolyn Brooks College Prep
Living With Purpose

They say
To seize the day
For the time will pass regardless
And you choose how you use it
Is the answer to lay around and sit
Playing digital games and watching Netflix
Or is there something more important in life
Than GTA and stabbing someone’s avatar with a knife
Reload, reset, enter game
These words mark a new start
Another chance for users to play the part
But life has no controller
What is done is done the past has passed
Every day waking up is a miracle that is never guaranteed to last
They fear that an unlive life is more terrifying than death itself
Just another deficient fifteen-page novel lying on a shelf
They are wise
For your troubles are troubles which dying men yearn for
Your exploits are birthed from choices you deplore

Regrets stand by faulty actions you have made
Yet acting was not the fault which causes the dismay
So before you need be reminded of why you shan’t delay
Do as they say
Seize the day

— Holly Wood, 10th grade, Crystal Lake Central High School
How I Use My “Black Privilege”

Imagine not using your real name on applications
Because your name contains too many syllables
And you’re afraid your race may seep through the page
Imagine being a minority
Being a minority makes everything about me minuscule
Victim turned into defendant
Freedom of speech turned something more tasteful
Something that you can more easily digest
Why is my saying the n word an invitation for you to say it as well
Is it because
In your eyes, Saying the n word is the only privilege I have
The one thing I can do that you can’t
So you want to take that from me as well
Can we please have one thing to ourselves
If this word was used to oppress my people
Why can’t I use it as a way to reunite my people
Why can’t I turn it into some more tasteful as well
So I season this word with lemon pepper and liberation
And cook it so hot that it burns my tongue like whips enclosed in white knuckles
So if I choose to regurgitate the word that used to hurt like alcohol on open wounds

Then I should have the right, Not anyone else
My people have to dig graves deep enough to bury their black vernacular
When you use my slang like you created it
You just like my culture
Or the parts that make you look good
So you get blonde boxer braids
And do your edges with our blood, sweat, and tears
Can you imagine having to wear your hair in protective styles
Because you natural hair showcases too much of your race
Identifies too much with your hard owned roots and culture
There’s nothing in your hair that you need to protect to be get a job
2019 looked more like 1920
The only difference is
You don’t have to sing songs loud enough to overbear slave chants that echo in your head
You only have to rap songs loud enough to overbear the word nigga that echoes in you head
And questions like when it’s okay to say it
Or if it ever is and it’s not
skin beaten black and blue with this word

- continued on next page -
So you don’t have the the right to write, sing, or say the word nigga
Unless you suffered the same fate
Unless this word was ingrained in the scars of your ancestors
Not engraved in the whips in the hands of your ancestors
You cannot say it
Not for education purposes
Not because the kids at your old school were ignorant enough to let you say it

No, My oppression is not the punchline to your joke
It’s not the plot twist in you dark humour
Unless this word was hung from the same tree that you were
Never got my 40 acres, so I took a 5 letter word
You cannot say it

— Daysha Straight, 11th grade, Walter Payton College Prep

The Oreo LP

I never really asked for the record I was given
Say it ain’t my fault, “I was born a little different”
Bumping to my own mixtape of mental illness(es)
Passed down like an heirloom, and I’m just the remix
Welcome to the Allen White LP
Fun fact: play it backwards, and you’ll hear all the “help mes”
There’s no satanic message just impressions of depression
That were left from drummin fingers ‘stead of listening to lessons
Feelin nervous, lackin purpose, and my tracks are all erratic
Prescription pills don’t really fill me, they just multicolored plastic
Depression was the very first track on my album
Learned the lyrics in 7th grade, wrapped me up and stuck like gum
Too broke to pay attention when I started going numb
Couldn’t even count my blessings cuz my grades proved I was dumb
Attention: Deficit High Definition television
Gets inside your mind and rots it like bananas in your kitchen
Second song on my record, and its beat is always skipping
It’s when your brain decides your fate ‘fore you give it permission

- continued on next page -
Doubt makes you feel like all your words are songs that won’t be heard
Feels like you’re forging broken bars with butterfinger words
You murmur to yourself that “tomorrow you’ll get help”
But the second you wake up, mourning hits you like a belt
You dug your dreaded roots as soon you screwed all your deadlines
You pulled until you gentrified your scalp like it was redlined
They found you barely breathing like a Still Great White
Always think about that night, can never keep it off the record
Reverbing regrets like a lyrical mess,
regressing to all your old songs
Hit the track like a race, feel it’s freezing embrace, as the artists of past sing along
Say I’m a mic with no Stan, bars I spit dry as sand, tongue twist and tells me “I’m wrong”
But my beat is defeatist, satisfactions elitist, tongues weakened, can’t seem to grow strong
How can you drop an album and have it not feel like a flop?
Why do I play the fall, but skip all the rising to the top?
Every lyric that I got was a better artist’s sample
How can I ever lead if I follow by example?

— Allen White, 11th grade, Oak Park & River Forest High School

My Name Is Madison and Yours
Probably Is Too

My name is Madison,
bet you haven’t heard that one before.
Madison means “son of Matthew”
when really it should mean “daughter of everyone”.
So what’s it mean to be named Madison on the off chance that you’re not?
It means that you know at least six other people who share your name
and you are probably friends with three of them.
It means never turning around when your name is called because you know you’re not popular enough for them to actually mean you.
It means hearing someone ask “Which Madison?” and hearing someone else answer “The blond one”.
And as if it couldn’t get any worse, they still don’t know which one.
It means searching for what makes you stand out a lot earlier than everyone else as you automatically lack the uniqueness many are born with.

- continued on next page -
It means a sub asks the class if all the Madisons are here and just like that you become a group instead of a person.

So, would I change my name, my first form of identity?
No, I would not.
I am not basic even though my name may be.
I may have been forced into a group, but aren’t we all?
Changing my name won’t change me.
So, to all you Madisons out there (and there certainly are a lot),
you are not basic just because your name is.
Next time you find yourself trapped in the prison that is your identity,
Remember that the cage that confines us does not define us.
We are what makes us feel free.

— Madison Sniegowski, 11th grade, Oswego East High School

On Etching Your Legacy

Rip the waves and the water
Into a spitting image of your face
Toss the chieftain into the ocean
Make each straight palm tree bow
So its bark gets a backache
Crush beach rocks until they match the texture and color of your skin
Fill coconuts with sweet milk then shut them
In beige trap
Hard as your kneecap
Sip from them like sherry and
Grow strong and
Conquer
And do not thank them
And begin etching your name into limestone
Sink your goddess fingernails into the sand and
Heave up all the precious ignatius rocks humanity shall never touch
And find, hiding in the dunes
An oyster

- continued on next page -
You are its righteous, heroic
Dictator-Queen-Savior
For how many centuries was
Oyster talking over you?
Tiny and Sheltered and Opinionated
Ask it if it knows that your potential
Pulls the current and rules the tide.
If it’s ignorant and incorrect
Abandon it at sea.
Kick the sand into submission
And for its insolence
Make it stink of fish
Fill your kingdom with loyal finned citizens
And have each one of your decrees be so
Revolutionary
The seashells whisper your name for centuries
Goddess,
Etch your name into limestone
So the sea can soak it up
And will never forget you.

— Aanika Pfister, 12th grade, Lane Tech College Prep

Fears in Exile

Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that you won’t be able to return to the home you left
Where the towns once filled with gorshey
Are now filled with silence and the hum of Chinese surveillance
Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that the Buddhist monasteries with playful monks
And libraries of ancient Tibetan scrolls
Are now empty
Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that the history of our people
Our resilient, loving people
Will be rewritten and forgotten
Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that my native tongue has now turned foreign
Where I stumble and struggle to convey simple thoughts
In my broken Tibetan
Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that when fall comes and you join your friends
Finding new life in an never ending cycle of being
I too, won’t be able to return to your home.

*Momola = Grandma
*Gorshey = Tibetan tradition circle dance

— Sonam Yangzom Rikha, 12th grade, Walter Payton College Prep
**Bastards**

My sentences are children.
Tiny, helpless,
Little bastards
Whose fathers I never met.
I get around with verbs
Sleep with nouns, adjectives.
Linguistic slut.
Never the same one.
I carry my sentences in my skull.
Nowhere near soft, there.
Calcified cranium.
They find no comfort, no warmth.
I do not love all of my children.
Some disappoint
Hopeless infants
Sown by bum fathers; sloth begets sloth.
Some cave under the pressure.
I demand perfection; accept nothing less.
Impossible standards.
I am not a kind mother.

— Jasmine Connolly, 12th grade, Dixon High School

**Or Don’t**

She’s flying solo
feet don’t stop for nobody
free the mind from this xanex bared cell
to fall is to drown in a promethazine pool of bitterness
turn around....
you forgot your baby’s father
he’s too deep
he’s drowning
you can’t bare to leave him so you drown with him
you found someone your feet are worth stopping for
why can’t you stop for yourself
you can’t find anything to love
look harder
why can other people see your beauty but you can’t
be okay with being alone
be okay with yourself...
but how
where do I start when I can’t escape this cell
free me from my mind
no
free yourself
or don’t
even hell gets comfortable.

— Aimee R., 12th grade, Nancy B. Jefferson High School
Illinois Humanities strengthens the social, political, and economic fabric of Illinois through constructive conversation and community engagement.

We are committed to ensuring access to free, high-quality humanities experiences in Illinois, particularly for individuals living on low incomes, counties and towns in rural areas, small arts and cultural organizations, and communities highly impacted by mass incarceration.

Brooks Permissions was founded in 2001 and manages the literary works of acclaimed poet Gwendolyn Brooks.

The company processes numerous requests for Ms. Brooks’ works annually, working with mainstream, educational, and independent publishers, as well as individual artists for projects ranging from literary anthologies and academic course packs to theatrical performances, multimedia projects and more.

In 2015 Brooks Permissions expanded to include programming and products which help to shine a well-deserved and continuing spotlight on Gwendolyn Brooks’s life and work.

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of Poetry magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in American culture.

It exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary prizes and programs.

The Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts advances arts practice, inquiry, and presentation at the University of Chicago, and fosters meaningful collaboration and cultural engagement at the university, on the South Side, and in the city of Chicago.
Asha A Edwards (illustration, cover) is currently an undergraduate student attending UIC. She’s an abolitionist artist and feminist. Asha engages in community-organizing, abolitionist campaigns, and mutual aid as a member of a community-based grassroots organization in Chicago. She hopes to help establish community gardens as well as free, sustainable, and Earth-based housing on the South Side of Chicago as part of the struggle for Black self-determination, indigenous sovereignty, and the eradication of global oppression.

“Does poetry make anything happen? Poetry has been known to alter opinion. From altered opinion ‘happenings’ evolve”

— Gwendolyn Brooks