2018 Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards

Honorable Mentions Poems

presented Saturday, August 25, 2018
by

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#GBYPA2018  #GwendolynBrooks  #Poetry
Principals (NTA)

Mr. Castelaz is
the sun
leading the stars.
Although he is the fifth
of all suns,
he rules over those who are
shiny and bright but won't leave one out.
It is so
that his pupils fight but always
manage to
get it
right. This is
Mr. Castelaz
the fifth sun.

“Principal” by Nikhil Sengupta (2nd Grade) – National Teachers Academy (NTA), Chicago
Monkeys

Little chunky monkeys
Eating bananas
This happy morning
In the fancy jungle
They are glad

“Monkeys” by Khannon Jones (2nd Grade) – Stockton Elementary School, Stockton
I'll keep going
Finding out my mom lost the baby
was like a stab in the heart.
My whole world came crashing down
and I couldn't build it back up.
My heart cried, and the fact no one had emotions
made things worse.
The way my heart ached
made it feel like a knife had stabbed it.

I couldn't pinpoint how a person's
Death I didn't know could hurt me
so much, maybe that's the reason it hurt.
I didn't get to know you or feel your touch.
To at least have something left of
you, nothing hurt more than this.
The sun only brought darkness,
and darkness seemed to bring me light.

I hate that you aren't here,
I hate I didn't get to meet you,
I hate how you didn't get to
experience the world,
but most importantly I hate
how you made me love you.
My tears were a cloud that
were no longer full
I imagine how you would look
sometimes, if you'd have hazel
or brown eyes or curly hair with tiny feet.
How many pounds you'd be.
I wonder how you'd giggle
and if you'd laugh when
I made silly faces or burst out in Tears.

I'll keep going. I'll keep going if it
makes you happy.
I'll keep going to move forward
from your death,
but I'll never move past it.
I'll get stronger and when I think
of you I'll be lighthearted
and not broken.

I promise I'll keep going for you.

“I'll Keep Going” by Kristi Osborne (6th Grade) – John C Haines Elementary School, Chicago
An Assassination in the Presence of a Diplomat

We both stood,
Silent,
For at least a year

I in the center,
The queen
On the old, gold throne

She,
Eyes wary,
Motions for me
To speak

I speak my piece
To beg:
Please help.

In the air
Between us
An arrow whistles through
No!

It snapped
Like a twig
On the wall
Next to
The Queen's head.

“An Assassination in the Presence of a Diplomat” by Alexander Recchia (7th Grade)
– The Avery Coonley School, Downers Grove
When u hear the word, everyone screams
The one and only, amazing... ice cream!
When it hits your mouth, it feels so cold
The flavor so amazing, the taste so bold
I would eat it breakfast, lunch and dinner
Whenever it hits my tongue, I feel like a winner
The texture is nice and feels so soft
It makes u feel warm, just like a loft
I would eat this each and everyday
I don’t know why I feel this way
I wanna just, have a taste
Never let it, go to waste
Make sure to lick, each and every drop
Keep doing that and never stop
It’s the feeling of ice
Though, it feels so nice
On a hot summer day
Ice cream makes the heat go away
It’s amazing, the best!
Wraps around me, like a vest
When you hear the word, everyone screams
The one and only, amazing... ice cream!

“Ice Cream” by Wilson Hinchsliff (7th Grade) – William Howard Taft High School, Chicago
Layers of me

The first layer of me you see is a girl of breeze
She is polite and nice and basically whispers IF she speaks
But...as they say-the more you see the more you know
She will high five you and jump AND skip through the halls with an insured small fumble
And is loud but, never to mumble
Very distinctive in animal noises when there is even a giggle
May or may not wiggle
She is rarely the one to get mad
Barely even gets sad
Nor does she like her friends in that mood
And does NOT like when people are rude
When you get to know her more,you might even call her bad...
She might crack a few jokes here and there
But not enough for parents to pull their hair

So as you have heard and maybe even seen
There are a few different layers of me...gee, now that I have thought about it...
What layer did you meet?

“Layers of Me” by Jazmine Neely (7th Grade) – Yorkville Middle School, Yorkville
Low Life
A Frederick Douglass Inspired Poem
By: Alexis Dunaway

Tuckahoe, Maryland; Born into life
A baby slave boy; Livin Low Life

Harriet Bailey; My dear mother
Separated at birth; To not know each other

Came in the night; “Oh how you’ve grown…
Run back to cabin; Again, alone

Called by the bell; If not up
To be punished by overseer; You must have luck

Work in the fields; Dawn till dusk
Judged by color; Feeling like dust

Back and forth; Field to field
No say from me; Keep moving, no yield

“Listen to me; You black cow,
You are inferior; I’ll tell you how”

“God made you slaves; Not equal as us
Don’t disobey; To be punished thus”

Whipped and whipped; Scars upon scars
There’s no way out; From these steel bars

Unless a way; I only know
Escape from here; Then I’ll go!
Attempted escape; Failed to be free
But another way; Soon I'll see

Take the boat; Up the river bend
Meeting of the Abolitionists; I will attend

Escape from slavery; A sight to see!
Finally made it; Finally Free!

I must seek help; For I have seen
Slavery up close; It's more than mean!

"Come one come all! We have work to do!
Slavery to be abolished! You can help too!"

And just like that, they heard my words
We will make the slaves free; As free as birds

Day after Day; Abolitionists fought
No stopping never; Freedom they sought

Aftermath of the Civil War
Northern States cheer with a mighty ROAR!

Slavery was abolished; My work here is done
For the songs of the slaves; The skies they Rung

“Lowlife” by Alexis Dunaway (7th Grade) – Oak Lawn Hometown Middle School, Oak Lawn
A Putrid Predicament

The smell had lingered for about a week,
No one could find the source of the reek,
   We called each other out by name,
But the poor, confused dog got all the blame.

The morning was tranquil, dark and soft
   And I had just woken up from aloft,
   Ready to make my morning meal,
Still groggy and unable to tell what's real.

Milk jug was empty so to the basement
   I plunged in a haze to fetch a replacement
But when I reached to grab the spare beverage,
   I had to hold the fridge door for leverage.

The fridge emitted a warm, sour stench,
   A putrid tsunami to make teeth clench.
The milk was yellow and ready to explode,
   The fruit was sickly and green like a toad.

The rancid odor of fish multiplied,
   So stinging and harsh I swear I cried,
The Ziplocs holding the corpses had failed,
For down the shelves rotten fish juice had trailed.

Needless to say, I did not clean it up,
   For I believed it would soon blow up,
You might say I'm mean for avoiding the blight
   But that's what Dads are for, right?

“A Putrid Predicament” by Cate Stocki (8th Grade) – The Avery Coonley School, Downers Grove
“Little boy.” by Gabby Dziekan (8th Grade) – Scullen Middle School, Naperville
My alien cousin, Lorenzo, doesn’t quite understand love.
My sister showed him romance movies in an attempt to teach him
But romance movies are wrong.

Love is Lorenzo’s fried space pear
All the way from his home planet
In space the taste of rancid meat
Is a moldy delicacy.

Love is my brother choking it down
And forcing a smile and saying it’s good.
My sister and I know he’s lying
But Lorenzo doesn’t comprehend human body language yet.

Love is the look on Lorenzo’s face
When my brother cleans his plate of the fungal-tasting entrée.
Space mushrooms with lemon pulp
And my sister’s saying she’s allergic to all forms of mushroom.

Love is Lorenzo offering dessert
And my sister saying yes.
Even though we know what Lorenzo will do to please his human family.
And we know that space chocolate tastes nothing like its earthling counterpart.

Love is my brother pulling my sister aside
And asking her what freezer-burned situation she’s gotten us into.
She just wants Lorenzo to feel like he’s the next Bobby Flay.
She promises that she will cook Thanksgiving dinner.
Love is Lorenzo, too tired to cook,
Running to the bakery,
Ordering an apple pie,
And saying that he made it.

Love is Lorenzo, slicing the pie
And my siblings and I looking terrified.
It smells like apples and sugar
But who knows what it tastes like.

Love is my sister taking the first bite
And smiling.
Lorenzo chokes down a piece and gags
But smiles to spare our feelings.

Some of us in this house like food that tastes like rancid meat.
Some of us prefer apple pie.
No matter what you enjoy here
Love is when you choke down what we’re making.

“Lorenzo and the Space Pear” by Ainsley Atwood (8th Grade) – The Avery Coonley School, Downers Grove
The Home

One day starts it all
Standing around the alphabet carpet
   My parents behind me
   My future family around me

A greeting from my teacher
Opening a lock after 5 tries
   An advisor
   The 7 day schedule
   The extra 35 minutes of a day

   A suit
   A tie
   A song
A handshake from the principal
   The tears
   The memories
   The family
   The home.

“The Home” by Nolan Sheehy (8th Grade) – The Avery Coonley School, Downers Grove
Love Like a rose

A rose in a field of thorns,
So red and amazing.
Covered with low self confidence as the thorns grew sharper.
A sunflower in a field of high grass,
And no danger at all.
Not as amazing as the rose,
But so much easier to pick,
Yet?
I’d still choose the rose.
Because even though my hands would be covered in blood I’d still be able to say I have what I needed.
I can’t wipe away the low confidence.
But maybe if I hold the rose by blood full of all my thoughts and feelings would wear it down.
It’s hard to find something amazing without danger.
But I wouldn’t have it any other way.
As long as the rose thrives in a glass vase on my bedside table,
Just so I could say I loved myself,
Just as the rose could not.

“Love Like a Rose” by Dylan Fletcher (9th Grade) – Pontiac Township High School, Pontiac
Mexico’s hard work and love

Mexico loses 2 year in a row
Mexican fans cry very low
They cry like a rainstorm
Mexico gets a new coach
Mexico trains when the wind will blow
Mexico trains as hard as if they were going to war
Mexico shoots to be the best
Mexico is proud and will try to glow

“Mexico’s hard work and love” by Juan Cardenas (9th Grade) – George Washington High School, Chicago
Parkland Shooting: Verse Journalism

Cruz dressed in black
Entered the school, February,
Wearing a backpack
And carrying a duffel bag
With intents of shooting,

Seen by a baseball coach,
Andrew Medina,
Shooting happened later,
Marjory Stoneman,

Drugs hurt,
Guns hurt,
Death hurts,

Fast shooting;
Fast killing,

The fear of families,
The flashing memories,
Before the shot one’s eyes,
And the hearing of last beats,
In the ambulance,

The trauma of surviving
Leaves many stigmatized
Their whole lives.

“Parkland Shooting: Verse Journalism” by Taiwo Onibokun (9th Grade) – George Washington High School, Chicago
Loving Soul

I picked my grandma
she is always on my team
never gives up
even when stuff gets rough
one thing I know
she will always be right by my side.
Also Grandma has a good head on her
she makes everyone happy
    some how.
    some way
my grandma is never want for anything
she is positive & has a good loving heart.
She was there when I wanted to give up.
    Now she is still on my team.

“Loving Soul” by Raziyah H. (10th Grade) – Nancy B. Jefferson
Alternative School / Free Write Arts & Literacy, Chicago
it looked like a prison cell
cold concrete, barren walls
water dripped through cracks in the ceiling
mold spread like a parasite
wet, pools and guilt and dreams
the stench of aromantic sex, acrid
bitter drool and wine-stained mouths
the girl, splayed and shivering
eyes dilated
needle puncturing paper wrist
fake dopamine bloodstream
fake dopamine brain
clenching thighs and shallow breath
restless, desperate, tortured moans
bruised rib cage, swollen lips
from when he kissed her
when he gripped her
whimpers fell silent and
her struggle turned paralysis turned shame

once,
he called her a goddess and
she fell in love
he held her fragile limbs with featherlight fingers
until she melted into the touch

she was born out of her mother’s drowning body,
took her first breath with saltwater lungs and
lived the rest of her life with an emptiness
left where the ocean once was but
god, the ways he filled her head
with fantasies of forever
then wrapped her wrists with rope and
pinned her down and
watched her chest cave in
stripped her and
whispered, “you’re not a goddess,
you’re a whore”
tied her to a pedestal and
called it a monument,
a shrine to the damned
painted her with humiliation and
left her, exposed
then carved “venus” into the stone

if the scene were a painting
the men would stop and
the men would stare and
the men would call it beautiful and
the men would call it disgusting and
the men would discuss its social implications
and the men,
they would burn it

“modern venus” by Elliot Kraft (10th Grade)
– Wheaton Academy, West Chicago
My City

House of lost souls,
house of guns and drugs
and women with thick thighs.
City brings money & blood.
City so Chicago-city take your shirt off
winter was too short.
I keep my 40 so I won't feel lonely.
City cold.
  City bad.
When I say city rumble,
  I mean the OJ,
  I mean riding down the 3rd.
I mean hearing gun shots in the hood.
City tries to stay right
  but city can't stop the wrongs.
In the city young people die
  & some don't
Let's just say...
  don't lose hope.
City bad..... City bad... City bad.

“My City” by Sergio B. (10th Grade) – Nancy B. Jefferson
Alternative School / Free Write Arts & Literacy, Chicago
Annie

It's a hard knock life for me,
only 17 god knows some don't believe in me.

Got my hands dirty, 17 reasons why the police looking for me.

Been through hell and back!
You say you been there done that,
well... I did more!

Been through too much to tell,
life was never a bore!

I'm a girl I shouldn't be in jail.

But, it's a hard knock life for me.

Not an orphan, but my parent name is streets,

I've been doing what I want since age 15.
mom always said do good you get what you want,
but, I became a product of my environment and got what I need.

From picking up books to cases.

Go-carrting to high speed chases.

Dressers to joggers.

It's a hard knock life for me,

communication is key, it's alright to ask for help...

attitude on point, mistakes on repeat.

Lord knows I can stand on my own two feet sometimes I just do what I want
not what I need

It's a hard knock life for me.

There isn't any justice!
Fighting one too many cases!

Judge kinda racist,

going down the wrong path, but it's not too late to fix the rates,

and,

it's a hard knock life for me,

but I try to make an effort,

pushing to the limit is something I am the best of..

I'm just saying.. it's a hard knock life and hard is beyond enough for me..!

“Annie” by Veshonae H. (11th Grade) – Nancy B. Jefferson
Alternative School / Free Write Arts & Literacy, Chicago
One day you’ll be alone
And regret not being there. You’ll regret the birthdays and holidays missed. You’ll regret not watching me grow up and being in her life you’ll regret everything and by than it will be too late.

One day he will come back and I should be mad he left us years ago I’m bigger now he missed it all- every game and show.

My mom was here
My mom was strong
She loved for two and worked so long
One day he will come back
But it will be too late.

“One Day” by Ashley Soto (11th Grade) –
George Washington High School, Chicago
Suicide is frowned upon
not for the end of a life,
but for the pain that life just created.
No one thinks about the pain
that life wanted to escape from.
We all get selfish
when it comes to suicide.
The life ending
only wants the pain to stop.
The life being affected
doesn’t want the pain that is to come.
Does Everyone know what the word love means
   Or is it a word people use in France
   Is it a word to describe my new jeans
   does L-O-V-E make you want to dance

   Will everyone find love or just my parents
   Have I found love because I visited guam
   Do people find love cause they found a guy named terence
   Does love make you want to go to the prom

   Will you experience love when you find hatred
   Or will you find love things fit like a glove
   Have you found love because you dated
   Will you find love when you see a white dove

   Is love when you find your happiness
   Or is love when you fill your emptiness

“what is love” by Ariana Raygoza (11th Grade) – George Washington High School, Chicago
YOUR BROWN SKIN
WHERE DO I BEGIN?
YOU HAVE BEEN KISSED BY THE SUN
IF ONLY YOU KNEW WHERE YOU CAME FROM
THEY SAY “YOU’RE TOO DARK”
BUT YOUR FACE IS FULL OF BEAUTY MARKS
THEY QUESTION YOUR HISTORY
BUT
YOUR SKIN IS FULL OF MYSTERIES
THE SKIN YOU ARE IN IS WORTH MORE THAN GOLD
THE SAME GOLD FROM YOUR ANCESTORS
AND THE STORIES UNTOLD
YOU SPEAK
THEY SHUN YOU
YOU WALK BY
THEY STEP AWAY
ALL YOU HEAR IS SNICKERS & LAUGHS AS YOU GO A STRAY
SOME SAY YOU ARE AS BLACK AS COAL
BUT THAT DOES NOT DEFINE YOUR HEART & SOUL
THIS BEAUTIFUL BROWN SKIN
YOU ARE AS SWEET AS A HERSHEY’S KISS
IT’S SOMETHING EVERYONE SEEMS TO MISS
BUT
YOU ARE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL
YOU ARE SOMETHING ECCENTRIC
HONEY, LET ME TELL YOU
YOUR SKIN IS MAJESTIC
MY BEAUTIFUL BROWN

“Brown Skin” by Janiyah Branch (12th Grade) – Metea Valley High School, Aurora
The Case Won’t Close

My father told me that he had to provide for the kids of the Archer Courts.

He told me providing for the hood landed him seventeen years.
He told me he sold weed.
He told me he got caught.
He told me that is why the cops took him away.
He told me he only served nine for good behavior.

I never read the case.
His words were the case.
When he finished…
When his mouth closed…
So was the case.

I am eighteen now.

Weed is becoming legal now.

So.
I made an art piece.

Right now it sits for the world to see in an art gallery.
The main caption...
“Can I have back the nine years you took my father now that marijuana benefits capitalism?”

I sent a photo to my mother.
She told me.
“He didn’t go away for weed.”

She told me to read what happened online.
She simply opened the case with a text message.
She undid my father’s words with each syllable, making the case unfurl.

But she wouldn’t reveal the verdict.

She put my father on trial.
But this time she made me the judge.

My father fell victim to recidivism.  
And now his words are trapped behind steel bars, barbed wire, and brick.  
And can’t close the case no more.

“The Case Won’t Close” by Zaria Brim (12th Grade) – Whitney M. Young Magnet High School, Chicago
For more information and to submit an entry for next year, visit https://www.ilhumanities.org/poetry.