



# Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards 2019



## *Honorable Mention Entries*

### **2ND GRADE**

“Flea” by William Zhong – The Avery Coonley School, Naperville  
“My Color Poem” by David Elliott – LaSalle Language Academy, Chicago

### **3RD GRADE**

“The Commercials” by Olivier Axelrad – The Children’s School, Oak Park

### **4TH GRADE**

“The Dinky Blue Park” by Lillian Jameson – Chicago Free School, Chicago

### **5TH GRADE**

“Night” by Travis Gerst – Sacred Heart, Chicago  
“Just One” by Kalina Gandurski – Avery Coonley, Lockport

### **6TH GRADE**

“The Battlefield” by Amelia Gottschalk – Fairview South School, Skokie  
“Friends” by Alex Gerstein – Wood Oaks Junior High, North Brook

### **7TH GRADE**

“Rebecca Harding Davis” by Paul Toliopoulos – Fairview South School, Skokie  
“Beautiful city” by Afra Abdul – Fairview South School, Skokie

### **8TH GRADE**

“Mascara Running” by Alyssa Jaster – Avery Coonley, Glen Ellyn

### **10TH GRADE**

“Jeans” by Isabella Fletcher – Pontiac Township High School, Pontiac

### **11TH GRADE**

“beach homes.” by Elle Morson – Waubonsie Valley High School, Aurora  
“Bathing in Alabaster Oceans” by Micah Daniels – Oak Park River Forest HS, Oak Park

### **12TH GRADE**

“Morg-man” by Morgan Varnado – Oak Park River Forest High School, Oak Park  
“All Girls Want To Be Pandas” by Corina Robinson – Oak Park and River Forest High School, Oak Park

For more information and to submit a poem visit [www.ilhumanities.org/poetry](http://www.ilhumanities.org/poetry).  
If you have questions, contact Mark Hallett at [mark.hallett@ilhumanities.org](mailto:mark.hallett@ilhumanities.org).

# Flea

I sat down for a tea,  
and saw a flea,  
who was stung by a bee,  
which surprised me.

**"Flea" by William Zhong – The Avery Coonley School, Naperville**

My Color Poem  
By: David Elliott  
Second Grade

BLUE AS a cloudless sky

GRAY AS my fluffy gray cat

RED AS freshly dyed hair

YELLOW AS freshly picked lemons

PURPLE AS the sunset at dusk

PINK AS a flamingo that just turned pink

ORANGE AS a big juicy orange

BLACK AS a big black bear

BROWN AS fresh soil

GREEN AS a tree with fresh leaves

GOLD AS golden ingots that were just made

SILVER AS a knife that was just bought

**“My Color Poem” by David Elliott – LaSalle Language Academy, Chicago**

“The Commercials”

Agh! Why this Toyota commercial again, it's wrecking my brain,  
making it explode with non-educational commercials.

Ten days later, my brain is ok.

What's with these commercials?!

I don't want to go to Johnny's! The food is way too greasy!

My brain is dying.

Three years later, should I be dead by now?

I have had 8,192 surgeries so I'm practically a droid,  
considering the only real part of me is my brain and my upper lip.

So 22 decades later, ROBOTS RULE THE EARTH!

Stay tuned for the treachery of commercials.

**“The Commercials” by Olivier Axelrad – The Children’s School, Oak Park**

## **The Dinky Blue Park**

By Lily

A so not fun, a park so blue.  
Literally no trees, no shade,  
sunburns,  
f\*ck written  
on the ground along with other  
inappropriate stuff.  
Long-lasting poop.  
A metal canopy  
with a dirty bench, no good  
swings and a grassy area  
with a dog poo stench.  
Broken glass, not safe, not ok.  
Broken glass, a law must pass  
To save this park.  
But I come happily

**“The Dinky Blue Park” by Lillian Jameson – Chicago Free School, Chicago**

## Night

The strong sun stretches  
Across the starry sky  
The night is coming,  
The birds no longer fly.  
The sorry sun sleeps  
Sad for the sky  
The sorry sky weeps  
Sad to say goodbye.  
The day is done,  
Though the sunny summer season has just begun.

- Travis Gerst, 5th grade

**“Night” by Travis Gerst – Sacred Heart, Chicago**

## Just One

One  
slight  
motion,  
disturbance.

One life changed. Yet one  
more left to spare. One in danger.

One motionless. One  
more thought. One  
last chance.

Just  
one.

**"Just One" by Kalina Gandurski – Avery Coonley, Lockport**

# The Battlefield

By: Amelia Gottschalk

The Battlefield  
streaked with red  
Were we ever safe?  
Why aren't we?  
Something is  
wrong

The government protects us,  
but do they?  
Why are we fighting?  
Where are they?

The battle rages on  
Both sides fight desperately for their lives  
But,  
Their fate is both treacherous

I sit and breathe  
What else is there to do?  
I sit frozen  
like a lamb to the slaughter  
The shots fire  
My heart beats  
Bang  
Beat  
Bang  
Beat  
How different are they?

I'm caught unaware  
I still can't move  
I fall  
The shot echoes  
Bang  
Crash  
I'm on the floor  
I stare back at my desk  
I thought I was safe.  
The classroom turns black.

*Friends* by Alex Gerstein

They really don't get it, do they?  
All those days where I came downstairs,  
So hopeful, convincing myself that today will be better.  
I spend my lunchtime picking at my food,  
A book in my lap,  
And they take it for silence.  
All the times I told them I'm fine,  
I had thought they could see through me.  
I used to be transparent, wearing my emotions on my sleeves.  
Now I'm opaque and blank as a clear sky.  
They'll never understand me.  
They're used to being surrounded by friends,  
Craving their approval.  
Well, that's not me.  
If my lunch period was a canvas,  
They'd be bright colors, the ones you notice first.  
I'd be white paint.  
If you don't look hard enough, you'd never know I was there.  
That's friends for you.  
Things used to be fine, until they weren't,  
And we became divided.  
But I can't help worrying that it's because of me.  
It's all my fault.  
I'm my own scapegoat, I tear at what's left until there's a shell of myself;  
Hollow and made of doubt.  
Did I make a mistake?  
An unknown slip-up that cost me my spot  
At the table where I used to feel at home.

**"Friends" by Alex Gerstein – Wood Oaks Junior High, North Brook**

# Rebecca Harding Davis

By Paul Toliopoulos

Not a day goes **by**  
where I don't work past the **night**,  
where I don't lose my blood, sweat, **and**  
tears, where I don't wake up early in the **day**.  
Hear the birds tweet "chirp chirp." **The**  
loss of sleep because of **work**,  
being nocturnal like a owl. "Everyone **goes**  
through this," they say. Why do others go **on**,  
and not go through **the**  
nights I go **unsleeping**?  
The heat I deal with from the **engines**  
make me **groan**.  
I am tired and sick of it **and**  
not a day goes by I don't want to be a hyena and **shriek**

"Rebecca Harding Davis" by Paul Toliopoulos – Fairview South School, Skokie

# Beautiful City

By: Afra A

As the sun watches and weeps  
The fire inside me grows  
I have watched over Paris, protected Paris  
Surviving two world wars, but I couldn't survive you  
As I watched over Paris  
For what I thought would be the last time  
I saw how beautiful it was  
The people look like ants  
The buildings sparkle like jewelry  
Stunning accessories to a lovely city

\*In honor of Notre Dame

**"Beautiful city" by Afra Abdul – Fairview South School, Skokie**

## Mascara Running

The only real dangers of makeup are when you accidentally stab yourself in the eye with your mascara brush.

Or accidentally inhale powder.

Or when it runs into your eyes.

That's really all of the damage makeup can do, right?

The truth is, there are more dangers.

More than you'll ever see on a package or in an article.

Makeup can become an addiction.

Once you start using it, it can be impossible to stop.

I started using it in fifth grade when I decided to buy an eyeshadow palette from Claire's.

This dingy little palette wasn't much, just a few basic colors.

But it made me feel grown up.

It made me feel pretty.

I didn't see the harm in a little eyeshadow, and in my head, I felt so cool.

I would walk into school with fallout covering my eyelashes and the area under my eyes.

It would look like blocks of different colors unevenly blended on my eyelid.

But I didn't care because I was wearing makeup just like my sisters and their friends.

Fast forward a year, and I discovered the power of mascara.

Before putting it on, I would look in the mirror and see tiredness.

If I forgot to cack it on some mornings, I would be self-conscious and cover my face at school.

It became a necessity.

In seventh grade, I began to use eyeliner.

I woke up an hour earlier each day to try to learn how to do it.

If I didn't finish putting it on before school, too bad, I would be late that day.

At one point, I couldn't even picture myself without it.

But when I realized how bad these little uneven lines around my eyes truly looked,

I noticed that I had chosen to ignore it.

At first, I looked back and remembered trying my best to make sure it was good enough.

I wouldn't have wanted to change my whole routine either.

But then I remembered how stressed I would be if I overslept and didn't have time.

I would begin to shake or panic or have an anxiety attack just because of the thought that I would have to show my real face at school.

I would cry because of the stress and need to redo it again.

But really, what was the big deal?

The big deal was that I had been training for many years to hate what I looked like without makeup.

Each year, I moved on to a new product and whenever I got used to it, changed it to make sure people would focus on that and not on my actual face.

No matter how awful it was, at least no one would have to look at me.

At least I wouldn't have to look at me.

I wondered how I could stop the addiction. How I could learn to love myself.

But I never tried to figure it out because then, I probably would have started crying.

My mascara would have ran into my eyes and it would have stung.

That's really the only damage makeup can do, right?

**“Mascara Running” by Alyssa Jaster – Avery Coonley, Glen Ellyn**

## Jeans

You found me in an aisle, unexpectedly, but it was a good sense of relieve when you had walked out those automatic sliding doors with me, It felt so nice to have found someone to take care of me. You soon wore me almost every day, you made me feel like I was the only one you needed. You fell wearing me, there was a small hole, but nothing you couldn't sew up. We kept on our journey together through the rough patches. You started seeing the worst in me, my tears, my split seams, all of my insecurities, they had become a real problem. You promised you'd have me forever, that I should be "More than good enough" which is what you told me before your first day of Senior year, but then, you used me for everything I had and only pointed out the flaws that were caused by every stupid thing you did, but I guess it was my fault, I wasn't good enough. So you got another, but still wore and used me along the way. Near the end I couldn't keep it together, the holes got bigger...and well, I fell apart, right in front of you. You saw nothing but destruction and ugliness fall out of the back pockets. Then, you threw me away, you gave up, you used me, you hurt me and you didn't care. I was your pair of jeans.

**"Jeans" by Isabella Fletcher – Pontiac Township High School, Pontiac**

i sit in the sand.  
plastic shovel in one hand,  
sandcastle bucket in the other.

i build houses.  
a delicate placement of shells and seaweed,  
intricately carved out doors  
and windows made of sticks.  
on this beach,  
i turn slices of shoreline  
into a magnificent array of little homes.

i come to this beach every day.  
i have done so for a while now.

some days, as i return,  
i find that all my little houses are gone.  
they have been swept away with the atlantic tide,  
or destroyed by some tourist,  
who does not understand that  
this is my beach,  
and i can make my homes where i please.

those days,  
i sit in the sand.  
plastic shovel in one hand,  
sandcastle bucket in the other.

and i build again.  
and i build again.  
and i build.

**“beach homes.” by Elle Morson – Waubonsie Valley High School, Aurora**

Bathing in Alabaster Oceans

By: Micah Daniels

White-washing wasn't fast enough  
I drowned quick in alabaster oceans  
Tried to suffocate the black out of me  
Thought straightening my hair enough  
would make them forget the melanin that stained  
I craved for them to see height  
as our greatest difference  
not the depth of my skin  
And shallowness of theirs  
"I don't see you as black"  
Ignorance became praises  
and I was addicted  
Their holy water was laced with salt  
that I thought would keep me quenched  
It ended up just dry me out  
My Sundays were spent  
asking god to cleanse me of my sins  
But on Monday the brown of my skin was still there

**"Bathing in Alabaster Oceans" by Micah Daniels – Oak Park River Forest High School, Oak Park**

Morg-man

My name is a chore. A thick sock rustling into a boot  
A rake lugged through the garage door. A task that eats at an afternoon  
Manhood is a boot. A thick afternoon rustling under a rake  
The name you call when you have a task to complete  
Something in need of being finished

People love to pet name me. Whisk over the lawn  
pluck out a new me and watch it crunch in their hands  
Morgan gets translated to Mugu, or Momo or something  
else you can pin to your wall and poke at when you're restless  
Whatever you call me let it not be to work I have too my names

that mean effort. Some white boy calls me a girl and I think they mean,  
"Why aren't you raking?" My father clamps my shoulder and calls me a man  
and it sounds like a list of things I have to force myself to do in the morning  
The only nickname me I accept is the one from my Nana: *Morg-man*  
Something adult I've been branded as since I was a baby.

I escort my Nana across the parking lot and she gawks at how much  
her Morg-man has grown since yesterday  
I offer to help her into the car and she laughs  
"I don't need your help for everything Morg-man"  
We walk across the cemetery grass and she whispers

"I'll cry for Jamie too, Morg-man"  
My Nana is the only person who can call me a man without me wincing  
By this I mean she is the only person who sees that I'm tired  
I wonder when men will let me stop working  
Will stop adding leaves to the yard. I'm still

outside, and it's been cold but the bits of manhood  
pushed into my ears tell me I will never do enough  
to be worth calling back in  
I still see men in the yard and they label themselves by the amount  
of leaves they've wrestled into their tines

They bleed and they laugh and they are convinced  
that they are the same thing. My Nana knows men  
who won't stop working. Watch them get lugged  
through the door and never return. She looks out her window  
and watches them work themselves into dried leaves

She's watched family transform from a man to whiskey  
To something without a name to call  
I am done with names that demand sweat, Morg-man is the only name I need  
Morg-man knows raking isn't about the muscle or the grip  
It's about coming back inside to something warm on the table

I don't want to become a man that isn't kissing my Nana's forehead  
Don't call me a man unless you're willing to keep the door open  
My Nana calls me Morg-man and the leaves forget themselves  
They pull themselves back into the trees. They wrap themselves  
in their scarves and let themselves retreat home

My Nana calls me Morg-man and I remember there are homes  
that are willing to let me rest. There's a masculinity that doesn't demand  
of my back. That helps me take off my boots. That commands I take a blanket  
That only wants her Morg-man warm  
He's done enough for the day

**"Morg-man" by Morgan Varnado – Oak Park River Forest High School, Oak Park**

Dear feminine product companies:

do us all a favor and stop investing in commercials starring: Golden girls doing yoga!

It's going to take battlefields of blood for me to arm myself with your tampons.

No more flowers, blue silk, or music that really belongs in Barbie commercials.

Give me Walking Dead level screams of terror. I want the real.

Stop hyping up how thin and discreet your period products are,  
when the packaging has a Jurassic Park in every crinkle.

I want a company that knows

it is every girl's dream to be: a female panda.

The only animal that ovulates for one week, once a year.

Quit acting like you don't have the money

to make this happen.

Give me less ways to offend a classroom when I ask to use the bathroom  
while pulling out a magic wand of cotton.

And more ways to apologize for that thing that will happen  
to every person with a vagina.

When the boy in my class asks how to get a period

I tell him it's simple: wear your nicest,

fanciest underwear and wait for karma to do the rest.

Dear feminine product companies:

There is a woman at the Food Pantry

I volunteer for with 5 daughters.

I have been sneaking extra tampons into her cart faster than a retreating switchblade.

My manager scolds me and forgets that he has daughters too.

The cost of existing while female

never cared about her income.

Take my money and make use out of it.

Fund the research that will turn them into pandas,  
that kind of woman for only one week out of a year.

Dear feminine product companies:

my mom and I talk trash about you weekly.

This should terrify you.

She knows everything you've done and has kept a list.

You monetize my body without remorse.

Make hypocrites of yourselves and say it is empathy.

I'm done paying extra for my razor, my underwear,

my lotion, shampoo, conditioner, your paycheck.

You think reparations come in the color pink, and the scent of exotic fruit.

Like your body odor doesn't need just as much help as mine.

You tax me for my tampons but not for your condoms,  
and don't they end up in the same body part anyway?  
Doesn't that body part belong only to me?  
You call my body a business plan. Make a trajectory of nature  
and all the ways you can manipulate it,  
as if women didn't give birth to you.  
As if your daughters don't bleed too.

**"All Girls Want To Be Pandas" by Corina Robinson – Oak Park and River Forest High School, Oak Park**