

**Rural Oklahoma Museum of Poetry  
2021 OPEN POETRY CONTEST  
Winners:**

**K-5<sup>th</sup> Grade**

1<sup>st</sup>, Teresa Manimala, Stillwater OK  
2<sup>nd</sup>, Lily Klassen, Locust Grove OK  
3<sup>rd</sup>, Emmalyn Ragsdale, Locust Grove OK

**6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade**

1<sup>st</sup>, Lenna Abouzahr, Stillwater OK  
2<sup>nd</sup>, Serenity Cross, Carthage MO  
3<sup>rd</sup>, Jasmine Bark, Locust Grove OK

**Adult**

1<sup>st</sup>, Julie Jeannene Rickard, Fayetteville AR  
2<sup>nd</sup>, Melissa Heath-Lee, Red Oak OK  
3<sup>rd</sup>, Dee Dee Chumley, Edmond OK

**Professional**

1<sup>st</sup>, Kenneth Weene, Tucson AZ  
2<sup>nd</sup>, Ken Hada, Ada OK  
3<sup>rd</sup>, Vivian Finley Nida, Oklahoma City OK

1<sup>st</sup> Place, K-5<sup>th</sup> Grade

Teresa Manimala  
Stillwater OK

I'm a Tree

I'm just some wood in a cargo box  
Carried by a fellow ox  
But they don't care what's inside  
They just take me with pride

I'm a tree, I'm a tree  
I long to be free  
It's me, It's me, It's me

You can use some of me, some...  
But you use a lot to get the job done!  
What if you were wood,  
And couldn't do what you could?

It's me, I'm a tree  
I long to be free  
You just see half of mee

I give you air and care  
But you just take me for granted  
I have green leaves  
But don't make me lean to the ground

I'm a tree, I'm a tree  
I long to be free  
It's me, It's me, It's mee...

2<sup>nd</sup> Place, K-5<sup>th</sup> Grade

Lily Klassen  
Locust Grove OK

The Swing

Here sits a swing,  
A swing untouched.  
No child has sat,  
No child has swung.

It sits and waits beneath the tree  
And waits, oh, for some company.  
The swing is waiting,  
The tree has blossomed and borne fruit,  
And still the swing waits.

“Oh, don’t lose hope,” says the tree,  
“Just wait . . . and you will hear a child sing!  
Hurrah!!! Hurrah!!!  
A swing!!!!”

3<sup>rd</sup> Place, K-5th Grade

Emmalyn Ragsdale  
Locust Grove OK

The Seedling

A seed became a seedling.  
No one noticed.  
It peaked over the soil.  
No one noticed.  
It towered over the grass.  
No one noticed.  
Alas, berries fell from its blossoms.  
They noticed.  
With fruit, the unnoticed became cherished.

1<sup>st</sup> Place, 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Lenna Abouzahr  
Stillwater OK

In Lebanon

swarms of vendors storm outside with the sweltering sun  
Their dates piled high like termite mounds,  
lanky boys climbing slippery banana trees  
Arabic spills from the tips of our tongues  
and rides the waves across the crowds  
but I can't pull the crisp pink and orange  
and blue and greens out of my wallet fast enough.  
Sweet sugarcane juice dribbles down my chin as  
Butchers grip their knives, knuckles bulging,  
Eyeing the skinny and starving but street  
cats eyeing the dead cows that hang limply, loosely from the ceiling  
Wet blood splattering the shiny white floors,  
fires roaring and spits turning  
slowly as the meat cooks. And cooks. And browns  
until the smell is drowning out the tinkling and  
clacking of the coffee cups that ring through the streets  
and the fading of the sky has gone  
unnoticed as I shove the money into his hands  
and rip out a chunk of meat from my shawarma sandwich  
Toss it to the hungry mouths to stop the helpless mews  
and run away with my heart in my throat before mama can see  
And as I lounge by the sea under sprinkled sprays of salt  
I think about how all I am left with is a limp and faded green bill.

2<sup>nd</sup> Place, 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Serenity Cross  
Carthage MO

Deep Into Leaves

I begin writing,  
Falling deeper  
Into leaves of thoughts I think as I  
slump down, sitting,  
On this branch of reality, at the edge of this bridge

I make an escape route, root.  
To escape branches of reality into leaves of thoughts,  
My own thoughts.  
As I begin to shout and dispute,  
nothing seems to sprout out.

I begin to grasp at them desperately.  
Wanting to forget about my choice.  
The choice I was about to make.  
As I begin to give up, relentlessly,  
On trying to reach out to myself among the leaves.

I jump back to life, reality,  
look around, blur.  
Look down, take a breath, blur.  
I decide my finale fate, and jump, for freedom that's a blur, but I feel free.  
Falling is like flying among the sky, but as I'm falling I..

I begin to reach my thoughts, as I fall endlessly.  
My happy ones, the sad ones, the distant ones.  
Ones that helped me cope through rough times.  
Now regret fills me with every water drop I've released, onto every root, ruefully.  
Along with every selfish leaf and root I've made, including this one.

As I pull myself into a tight hug.  
I look down into the abyss and suddenly see clearer now.  
The end is near as I take my final breath.  
When everything starts to absolve,  
I hit the pavement of the highway causing my final moments to be filled with regret.

3<sup>rd</sup> Place, 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Jasmine Bark  
Locust Grove OK

### My Room

My room is my safe space  
Those four pink walls and white ceiling  
The soft fairy lights and blue curtains  
The big decorated mirror on my wall by my bed  
To the pile of dirty clothes in the corner  
And the dresser overflowing with clothes  
All of my things in these four walls  
Memories, pictures, papers, and awards  
Notebooks and sketchbooks filled to the brim with  
Poems and doodles  
Collections of things with no value  
Boxes and bags filled with souvenirs and toys  
My warm bed with all my pillows and stuffies  
These four walls know my past and my present  
All of my secrets and every mood  
They have watched arguments and fights  
Friends come and go  
All of my sleepless nights and goodnight sleeps  
These four walls are my serenity  
They bring me joy  
They are my peace

1<sup>st</sup> Place, Adult

Julie Jeannene Rickard  
Fayetteville AR

Relics

Daddy saved his kidney stones  
in a pink, plastic box  
first used for needle and thread  
Sometimes, when the pain returned  
in burning back doors of his brain,  
he would take the box out of the  
cedar chest drawer and show them to me

His stones were the color of sand,  
jagged as rock salt formations  
Like common fossils found in a desert  
we had never seen, they held  
some secret of the body they travelled

I rolled his relics hard between  
my small fingers but they did not break  
I had never seen a penis bare,  
only his -hanging mysteriously  
inside fruit of the looms on  
Saturday afternoons, his hands  
stained with grease and blood from operating on one of his engines

Daddy labored in a hospital bed  
when one vicious specimen  
would not pass  
I saw a clear tube disappearing  
under the sheet  
“The pain is bad ... like hell,” he said

At home, alone and bored,  
I opened the pink box,  
spread his kidney stones on the floor,  
counted them like the quartz I found buried behind the toolshed

2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Adult

Melissa Heath-Lee  
Red Oak OK

Landmarks

Where each house was, she can't quite pinpoint.  
So different now with striped, four-lane highways,  
where her landmarks used to be.  
This turn ahead.  
No maybe the next.  
There was a rotten oak tree and a brilliant patch of Indian Paintbrush.

Aunt Laura's was definitely by a curve in the road,  
at the base of a hill, nestled in shady, thick trees.  
And Laverne's house almost straight across,  
in the wide, open field,  
bright and sunny, and not so many snakes.  
Just up the hill was Uncle Sam's service station,  
with his main attraction,  
a full-grown black bear in an iron cage,  
his menace grown weaker than his gamey, musk stench  
only able to roar his outrage and offend the senses.

Granny's long-ago home place is easier to find,  
an elementary schoolyard now.  
A slab of concrete houses a picnic pavilion.  
Was that her foundation?  
No. She shakes her head.  
Granny's floors were wood,  
torn down decades ago.

As the car turns around,  
we pass a senior center on the corner.  
That was the post office  
with its tiny metal boxes that clicked and snapped,  
as they unfurled their precious parcels.  
And across the road there,  
was the little store,  
paved under now, where the dusty two-lane outgrew its bounds.  
Each visit promised them ice cream or sodas  
from Daddy's gifted coins,  
a thin, shining dime in each sweaty fist.  
They tore to the end of the lane,  
waiting in the strip of postal grass for cars to clear.

Then bare feet slapped fleetly across the pavement  
before the bubbling blacktop could blister their heels,  
as they gulped the sweet, sultry air.

She can feel the heat now, can smell the tar,  
the honeysuckle bushes,  
her tongue musters the cold, chocolatey cream,  
sticky as it dribbled onto her chin.  
The stiff muscles of her legs remember the desperate sprint,  
to catch up with the older kids.  
Being the baby would make her an athlete,  
a runner,  
a jumper, strong and fast.

Wait. Is that Granny's fencerow,  
still there behind the gym?  
Always laden with blackberries,  
sun-hot and ripe, bursting on her tongue.  
She tastes the tangy sweet,  
the grit of seeds,  
rubs at the purplish stains, almost there, on her fingernails.  
She closes her eyes to see it real,  
as it was.  
Their joyous shouts and laughter rising and ebbing,  
the aromas of blooms and berries and the acrid, filthy bear,  
the dimes and the grass and the fierce, fast hold of Granny's embrace.

It was all here,  
as certain as any road or house or tree.

And she tells it to me,  
so that maybe it will last.

3<sup>rd</sup> Place, Adult

Dee Dee Chumley  
Edmond OK

Transplanted

With leaves anemic green  
and ne'er a blossom grown,  
in stingy dirt beneath the eaves,  
I'd found my comfort zone.

I held the trellis fast  
with tendrils tightly wound.  
I forwent possibility  
to cling to safe and sound.

The Gardener hid from me  
the plans He had in store.  
He ripped me from complacency  
to give me something more.

Misgivings plagued my rest  
in foreign soil entombed.  
But rung by rung, I sought the sun,  
and bud by bud, I bloomed.

1<sup>st</sup> Place, Professional

Kenneth Weene  
Tucson AZ

We Sit Alone

We sit alone on a worn park bench  
caught by long-agos and might-have-beens;  
this is our time for deep regrets  
for all the tears we've never spent.  
Old, frayed, apart, we roost  
abandoned in the unkempt park  
and watch the world hurry by  
whilst we grow old, dark and die.

The crumbs with which you feed the birds  
who gather by your feet each day,  
the news I fetch from metal cans  
unemptied by the city's men—  
these are our final little dignities,  
unimportant signs that we still breathe,  
have minds and thoughts still underneath.

The recollections we now mourn  
cannot by sorrow be erased.  
They were built in another time,  
created in another place.  
The Furies who attend our guilts  
are not from gods, but from ourselves—  
the sorrow of mistakes we've made  
recast, rehearsed, and then replayed.

When night comes, we'll stumble shuffle  
from the park and through the streets  
to find a lonesome, cardboard space,  
where we can dream of penthouse lives,  
and celebrate what we've not achieved.  
There we can stare past memory's walls  
and long-gone dreams with dread recall.

2<sup>nd</sup> Place, Professional

Ken Hada  
Ada OK

No Argument

There is nothing I can say.  
I have been found out,  
reduced to the dust  
from which I have tried to mold  
a fortified life – to defend  
myself by being good enough.

My words fly back in my face.  
I swallow them,  
and though I have determined  
to shun self-pity,  
it is a lonely feeling  
to be left alone with your bouquet  
tight-fisted, wilting

with nothing to say,  
no option but to admit  
the rightness of her claims,  
and thus, the wrongness of yours.

The dust never seems to settle  
the way you imagine;  
but then, how foolish to try  
to make anything from dirt

something only a god might try.

3<sup>rd</sup> Place, Professional

Vivian Finley Nida  
Oklahoma City OK

The Metronome

The other day, spring cleaning in the den,  
I dusted shelves, then wiped piano keys,  
picked up the metronome, closed front and latched.

I ran a soft cloth over walnut case,  
square pyramid in shape, and ancient too.  
It started ticking my first year in school

to "Porky Pig Swings on the High Trapeze."  
I yearned to play that on the radio  
the night our school sang there, but sister said,

No! Never play recital piece before.  
I missed my chance (I didn't make this up).  
Hymns, weddings, funerals busied metronome

until it clicked through daughter's merry tunes.  
At Leaning Tower of Pisa one hot day,  
we ducked into cathedral to cool off.

Guide pointed to a chandelier that swayed  
just as it had when Galileo watched.  
He saw that pendulums, freed high or low,

end path same time, up fast, and downward slow.  
In Florence we had seen his finger saved—  
the middle one, right hand, quite famous now.

Bright daughter won at trivia with that.  
For me, since Pisa, it wags left and right  
like metronome with steady rhythm set

to circle sun, bring in the tides, and count.  
Two or three seconds pass and now is then,  
yet then, by memory, plays evermore.