

SLWP Writes! 2011



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2011

Edited by Jessica Kastner

Writing Contest Sponsored by
Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project

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SLWP Writes! Contest

Overview

The purpose of this contest was to promote and recognize young authors (grades 6-12) who demonstrated creative ingenuity through prose and poetry in the Southeast Louisiana region. In the spring of 2011, the SLWP received over 200 submissions to our Third Annual *SLWP Writes! Contest*. Writing Project teachers and writers read meticulously through submissions and selected 12 winners and 23 honorable mentions based on originality, clarity, language, style, and detail. All 35 award-winning pieces were forwarded to the *Louisiana Writes!* state contest, and the top 12 pieces were included in this anthology.

SLWP would like to give a special thanks to all the students who poured their hearts into their words, to the teachers who encouraged their students to submit to this contest, and to the judges who spent ten long hours reading, deliberating, and determining the winning submissions.

For more information about Southeast Louisiana Writing Project writing contests or summer workshops for teachers and students, please visit our website:

<http://www.selu.edu/acad_research/programs/slwp/>

Winners

Division I Prose (Grades 6-9)

1. Jacob Frick, St. Tammany Jr. High, 8
(Angie Beach)
2. Catherine Dunlap, Dunlap Academy, 8
(April Dunlap)
3. Mathew Hill, St. Tammany Jr. High, 7
(Angie Beach)

Division I Poetry (Grades 6-9)

1. Catherine Dunlap, Dunlap Academy, 8
(April Dunlap)
2. Matthew Myrtue, Fontainebleau Jr. High, 7
(Janice Krantz)
3. Alex Luebbe, St. Tammany Jr. High, 7
(Angie Beach)

Division II Prose (Grades 10-12)

1. Josh Ortego, Covington High, 12
(Eugenie Martin)
2. Adam Breland, Covington High, 12
(Eugenie Martin)
3. Sarah Smith, Covington High, 10
(Eugenie Martin)

Division II Poetry (Grades 10-12)

1. Camille Guillot, Mandeville High, 12
(Kathy Morlas)
2. Adam Breland, Covington High, 12
(Eugenie Martin)
3. Jade Patton, Amite High School, 12
(Renee Carpenter)

Honorable Mentions

Prose

Jordan Clark, Slidell High, 9
(Jeralyn Spiehler)

Megan Gitz, Covington High, 9
(Eugenie Martin)

Clayton McCarty, Franklinton Jr. High, 7
(Brandy Daigle)

Tiffany N. Rehm, Ponchatoula High, 9
(Anne Robbins)

Madeline Spearman, North Corbin Jr. High, 8
(Carolyn Bankston)

Kendra Watterson, Fontainebleau Junior
High, 7
(Janice Krantz)

Christine Schexnayder, Lutcher High, 12
(Carly Zeller)

Kathryn Allen, Sumner High, 11
(Lynne Vance)

Gavin Gehringer, Sumner High, 11
(Lynne Vance)

Lauren Barras, Lutcher High, 12
(Carly Zeller)

Haley McCullough, Sumner High, 11
(Lynne Vance)

Paul Givens, Sumner High, 11
(Lynne Vance)

Poetry

Catherine Dunlap, Dunlap Academy, 8
(April Dunlap)

Lindsey Potter, Covington High, 9
(Eugenie Martin)

Jenna Smith, North Corbin Jr. High, 7
(Hope Angelloz)

Auston Stephens, French Settlement High, 9
(Jennifer Draper)

Lauren Truax, North Corbin Jr. High, 7
(Hope Angelloz)

Areal Beadle, Sumner High, 11
(Lynne Vance)

Candance Castleberry, Sumner High, 11
(Lynne Vance)

Emily Coker, Sumner High, 12
(Deana Simmons)

Danielle Fauchoux, Loranger High, 10
(Kathy Lamarca)

Judy Fransen, St. Scholastica Academy, 12
(Elizabeth Tocco)

Morgan Kramer, Sumner High, 11
(Lynne Vance)

Division I: Prose—First Place Winner

Jacob Frick

St. Tammany Jr. High School, Grade 8

Teacher: Angie Beach

My Space

Today, again a jailbird, I sit in the windowless cell of mine. The cold has set and the heart of any man could freeze. The dull grey walls get closer by the hour. A pitter-patter of rats scurrying across the dripping pipes seems to crescendo like an immortal symphony of terror. Through the blur of sleepless nights and tortures past, an old iron door I see. If any thought of passing through the gateway wandered into the dreams of mine, with a crashing roar I am reminded of the impossibility. The warden stands with her Southern decorum watching with a satanic glare. I've heard the pen is mightier than the sword. Her blood red blade has struck the greatest of men. With a fatal slash the rapier will strike. The pain she induces would be bearable if a glimmer of light from the outside world could shine in my cell. Even if the dimmest candle sat in the hall, through the iron door my heart could warm once more.

Again, I sit in my windowless cell to take the lashes of an angered warden. Deep down in my soul, I remember a time when I was free. There were no chains confining me to this inferno. Unfortunately, for now I can only dream of purgatory. The fascist beasts have incased me in a sound proof box where the echoes of its past residents still ring with deafening power. Anguish is reflected and refracted but remains the only visitor to ever enter my cell.

Why do I even dream of an escape? I know if I reach the courtyard and finally find my way home, I will be back tomorrow; bound in chains again. A spiritless body I've become and so many are left empty also.

Division I: Prose—Second Place Winner

Catherine Dunlap

Dunlap Academy, Grade 8

Teacher: April Dunlap

I'm Innocent

Look, it wasn't my fault. Okay, maybe a little bit. But how was I supposed to know the kid had arachnophobia?

Maybe we should start at the beginning. My name is Webster Spinney, and I love rambling, flies, and pudding-- maybe too much. That's what got me into trouble in the first place, but let's talk about that later.

I live at 203 Left Big Maple Tree Lane, which is located on the left-hand side of the big maple tree. We spiders often use poetic names like that. It makes the woodlice realize how smart we are—if woodlice could realize anything. Stupid gnats. Anyway, back to my home. My web is nothing special, no fancy-schmancy lacework or anything, but it works well enough. As we live in a windy, high-up section of town, sometimes it is necessary to rebuild it, which is why I don't have any fancy lacework. Too troublesome. If I lived in a lower-down section, where the wind isn't so bad, I might have some, but I'm rambling again.

It all started on the day before the Autumn Maple Tree Festival. It was going to be a grand affair, with dainty dewdrops and lacy web streamers everywhere, and fat, juicy flies for everyone. All the spiders for miles around were coming—even the black widows and the wolf spiders. I don't like black widows. They give me the creeps. And those wolf spiders? Uncivilized brutes. Not that I'm an expert on the subject, like I said, my own web's pretty plain, but they don't even *have* webs. How strange is that? If you're going to be a spider, you might as well...but I'm rambling again. So sorry.

As I said, it was the day before the festival, and everyone was...I already said that. Anyway, I was going about my jobs, when I saw Little Miss Sneaky come out into the yard and sit on her little stool-thingy. Maybe I should back up a bit. The Big Maple Tree was situated to the left of a little white cottage, in which there lived a little girl. Muffet, I think the name was. Her mother made her eat this nasty concoction every afternoon; I don't remember what it's called. Curds and weigh? Cords and way? Curls and hay? Oats and hay? That's it. Oats and hay, I believe it was, and it was really nasty. No wonder. It's the stuff they feed to horses, right? Anyway, her mother made her eat the stuff every afternoon, and sometimes Muffet would switch 'em out for pudding—can you see where I'm headed with this? Deceiving her poor mother, who was just trying to make sure her little pony...er, um, girl, was getting all the nutrients she needed. And there she was, eating a bowl of pudding-- which just happened to look...very appetizing. Which means that little girls probably shouldn't have it. I mean, if you calculate all the nutrients in a bowl of pudding and those which are in a bowl of oats and hay, they just don't have the same amount. Seriously. Oats and hay is way healthier. I assure you, I was just looking out for the little darling's best interests. I am sure her mother would have thanked me, but...I'm rambling again.

Anyway, I dropped down on a thread to warn the little girl about the unhealthy decision she was making. I promise it had nothing to do with my...fondness, shall we say, for pudding. I was just concerned with her health. Honest. Anyway, I dropped down beside her to tell her to stop eating the pudding immediately, but before I could...

Did I mention that this wasn't my fault? Because it wasn't. I had no idea she was. . .

Well, you might say she was. . . scared of spiders. Okay, maybe the idea had occurred to me, but I didn't give it much thought.

She jumped up, and screamed, and ran to her mother. The thought of. . . borrowing, shall we say, some of her pudding hadn't occurred to me earlier, but since it was just lying there. . . on the ground. . . unattended. . . maybe I. . .

Look, it wasn't my fault. Honest. I'm not sure who stole her pudding and scared her to death, but it wasn't me. Honest. I can't believe they made up that stupid poem without even giving me a fair trial.

Division I: Prose—Third Place Winner

Mathew Hill

St. Tammany Jr. High School, Grade 7

Teacher: Angie Beach

Fading to Black

I'm almost there, I've just got to keep on walking. The top of the mountain is close, and it feels like you've walked thousands of miles already. The twigs crumble under your tired feet. The smell of rotting flesh fills the thin mountain air. Maybe the smell came from the previous meal of some animal. Startled by the snapping of the sticks, an immense bear crawls from behind a nearby berry bush. Standing on its back legs, the bear gave a strong warning. It notices that you haven't moved and it steps a little closer. Now you're breathing awfully heavy, and attempting to run you turn around quickly and the bear charges at you as a hungry tiger would do an unlucky gazelle that just happened to cross its path.

The bear begins to tear at your shirt. You think to yourself that the best thing to do in a situation like that is to play dead, but you're afraid of what might happen if you did that. Going up the mountain was hard, and now the real challenge is going back down, with a 500-pound bear chasing you, though. Carefully running down the mountain, you're trying not to trip, but apparently, you weren't trying hard enough. You trip on a small boulder and go along tumbling down the mountain. Trying to dig your feet into the ground, you find yourself coming to a stop, not from your feet, from the tree that you tumbled ribs-first into.

The terrifying sound of your ribs cracking fills your head, ringing in your ears. Looking around, you notice the bear tumbling by. You feel sure that you're safe now, but somehow you slip from the tree and tumble down the mountain again. You notice the blood rushing from your forehead and wonder how it got there. You finally come to a stop in the middle of the road at the bottom of the mountain. You pick your head up and the last thing you saw was the front bumper of a GMC truck. Visions of stars dance around in your head. Everything goes black.

When you wake up, you end up in a familiar spot; it looks like the ice cream shop on Fifth and Broadway. You walk up to the counter and place your order, but the cashier doesn't notice you the slightest bit. You jump up and down screaming trying to get his attention, but to no avail. You swung a fist at his jaw and it went through him, as if you were..... a ghost. You even stooped so low as to insulting the little girl behind you, hoping she would notice you, but nothing worked. You attempted to throw candy jars, jump on tables, and even slap somebody, if only you weren't invisible to them. The little girl you made fun of stood there staring admirably at her perfect ice cream cone, two scoops of vanilla with sprinkles and gummy bears. Maybe if you licked her frozen treat, she'd notice you. You poke your tongue out and lick the cone as aggressively as you can. There's no sweet flavor of vanilla, sprinkles, or gummy bears on your tongue. Trying to gain attention was just about as hard as trying to run from the bear. The little girl's mother hands the cashier the fee and she and her daughter walk out of the heavy double doors at the front of the shop.

You follow the mother and her daughter anxiously out the door into the street. Just the other day the streets were crawling with excitement, but today, they were surprisingly empty. You were the only person left standing in the street, alone, isolated. A truck passes by, but not just any truck, a GMC, a GMC that just so happens to have a head shaped dent in the front bumper. It was the same truck that hit you. You scream at the top of your lungs, but you go on unnoticed.

You glance across the street and manage to find an old, dirty man clothed in rags. You yell to him and he yells back. Finally, someone notices you. He reaches out a dirty, shaky hand and you warmly accept it. As your hands connect, the dirty man starts to fade to black. The rest of the city begins to fade away, turning black and gray and white then slowly fading to dust in the wind. The ice cream shop, the bank, the alleyways, and any other structure in the city, disappear. You fade away slowly; white, gray, then black. The whole city has faded and so have you.

You wake up in a dark, cold room. You can hear the cool, calm wind outside, blowing against the window. You step out to see what was going on. You find yourself standing in another room identical to the first one. There's a door in the next room. The door flies open and you cautiously step through. In the next room, there's a key sitting on a table. It might unlock the next door. CHINK CHINK! The door opens with the turning of the key. Three figures clothed in white stand before you. The one shape in the middle turns around and stares at you. His hood prevents you from seeing his face. A white glow covers him. His arm reaches out; a white, glowing, beautiful arm. The sheer sight of it was enough, but then it touched you. The tingly feel of the hand froze you stiff and then you fainted.

The figures ran through your head all the while you were unconscious. You wake up to a heavy wind pounding against your tent. You were finally back at your campsite, and it seemed as though it was all a dream. You still questioned, was it in fact a dream, or did it really happen?

Division I: Poetry—First Place Winner

Catherine Dunlap

Dunlap Academy, Grade 8

Teacher: April Dunlap

The Fall of Adam

He sat,
on a stool,
rocking
back and forth.
A mischievous smile twitched
at the corners
of his mouth.
He rocked.
He
lost
balance,
falling
backwards,
gesturing madly
with his arms,
clutching at air,
face grim
with determination,
He rocked.
Forward,
backward.
His eyes turned
heavenward
as realization
of the inevitable
flooded his mind...

Plonk!

Division I: Poetry—Second Place Winner

Matthew Myrtue

Fontainebleau Jr. High, Grade 7

Teacher: Janice Krantz

Start With an Epigraph

“Imagination is more important than knowledge”

—Albert Einstein

No matter what happens
and comes from behind.

Try to have fun
and keep an open mind.

Whatever you remember,
and whatever you learn.

That won't really matter.
Imagination is what you'll yearn.

When faced with a problem
or an unwanted fear.

You want your imagination
to be somewhere near.

You will not need books
or a valuable education.

All you really need is
an expansive imagination.

Division I: Poetry—Third Place Winner

Alex Luebbe

St. Tammany Jr. High School, Grade 7

Teacher: Angie Beach

Night

So Dark So Silent

Your only friends in the fear filled world of night
The cold menacing glow of the unobscured moon
The dull dim fluorescence of the stars
The cold mind piercing wind

So Dark so Silent

The lonely strand of light streaking through the curtains
A pair of sleek serpent eyes, staring at you from the closet
The silent snake like hissing of a curious monster
The slow suspenseful creaking of the door.
Your only friends in the fear filled world of night

So Dark So Silent

A loud shrieking filled the air
Big things, little things all creeping
Bats lined the window
Low paranormal murmurs from all around
You Shift under your covers and Night attacks
Little speedy shadows flash about
Monsters fly from the closet
Green-eyed men crawl on the ceiling
Ghastly ghost girls screaming bloody murder
A luminous glow comes from the east
The haste of night quickens
Every last miscreation returned to their hiding places
To wait for the devilish sun to fall to the moon
The warm cheerful rays of the sun peek above the horizon

So Dark So Silent

Division II: Prose—First Place Winner

Josh Ortego

Covington High School, Grade 12

Teacher: Eugenie Martin

Becoming Bob

In my younger years, I thought I could handle any situation. I lived life on the edge and took on any opportunities. I had it all: charisma, money, and companionship. I was living the life. I had just moved into my new house on Broad Street. Being only twenty-eight, I was quite proud of myself for having my own home. I had signed a fat contract with a new money-management company All-Save, and they gave me a nice bonus and a big raise. Things were going great in every area, yet my neighbor Bob could not tolerate me. Bob Fields was a scraggly man somewhere in his sixties. He had a salt-and-pepper beard with a receding hairline. He was about six foot two whenever he wasn't slouching, and he always walked with a cane. He had a decent retirement plan from his long career at the hospital, yet from his sullen eyes, you could tell that Bob was always miserable. He didn't like people, and he especially didn't like me. According to him, my "youth-induced ignorance" didn't mix with his "wisdom".

The first time I tried to talk to Bob was a disaster. I was trying to be a good neighbor and say hello, but he wasn't having it. I stood there for three long minutes while I waited for him to answer the door. When he opened the door, he looked like he had just woken up.

"What do you want?" he grumbled.

"My name is Nick Ortego. I just moved in next door." I said as politely as I could.

"And?"

"Well I was just coming to greet you."

"Okay." He said bluntly, and then he closed the door.

I walked back to my house, embarrassed for being so naïve. There I was thinking that he was a friendly guy who would appreciate my friendliness. I went home to start my dinner and sulk over my own foolishness.

A peculiar thing happened while my noodles were boiling; the windows were vibrating. I opened one to see what had caused this disturbance, and then I heard it. Bob was in his bedroom, playing his piano. As he played, my head swam through the music and I could feel Bob's passion, feelings, and misery. I decided not to watch my sitcoms and eat my spaghetti like I usually do, but instead I cracked the window and ate to Bob's rendition of "Georgia on my Mind."

I had a hard time falling asleep that night. My mind kept going back to Bob at the piano, the pure emotion I felt, and the surreal moment of the music's connection with me. I finally drifted off to sleep but even in my dreams, I could still hear that song.

The next day at work was long. All the coffee in the world couldn't have prevented my constant dozing. Staying awake was hard enough, but trying to concentrate on budget sheets with bluesy piano playing softly in my mind was nearly impossible. When that midget hand finally got to five, I was more than happy to get out of that office and back to my house.

The drive home was quite therapeutic. It gave me a chance to clear my head and put my focus back on my career. I thought of all kinds of management schemes and investment strategies and even long term pensions that could possibly work out. Yet even as I thought of this, "Georgia on my Mind" came on the radio. I could not escape the music.

When I pulled up at my house, Bob had started without me. I walked in and unwillingly went through my rituals trying desperately to tune the tune out. Yet even as I started to eat, the music wormed through my defenses and took a hold of me. Yet this time I was determined to get some sleep. I needed a clear head for the morning to prepare for my eight o' clock business meeting.

I went to the window to ask Bob to close his window, but when I got there I was enraptured again. Bob was facing away from me playing his cherry-wood baby grand piano. Even with his back towards me I could tell that he felt every note he played. Again, I experienced his passion, yet this time I witnessed it.

I walked away from the window and went back to my dinner. I quietly ate my lasagna, washed my plate, and got in bed. That night was just like the previous night; I could not get to sleep. I finally got to sleep but only after taking a few sleeping pills.

The next day at work was also just like the previous day. My business meeting was a disaster; I had woken up late due to a lack of sleep and left all of my notes at my house. When I got home that evening, Bob was at it again.

The rest of the week followed suit. Every evening when I got home, Bob was playing. Every night I ate in silence and listened. I never fell asleep in a timely manner, and my mornings were hectic as I scrambled out the door. I was even beginning to develop a hip pain from the constant tossing and turning every night. Work was beginning to be a chore; I was no longer interested in stock market portfolios, and I could have cared less about estimated profit margins.

Though work was a drag, I fulfilled myself with a new hobby; I liked to study people. All around me in the office were people going about their daily routines. Nameless faces walked by me, and none of them seemed to notice me. The more I watched them, I realized they didn't seem to notice anyone else either. I was in an office full of selfish people who were all willing to step on each other to get to the top. I got up from my lonely desk and walked to the coffee station to get more fuel. I fixed my coffee, no cream and thirteen sugars, turned around, and walked directly into a mirror. My eyes were sunken in, my hair was a tangled mess, my clothes were wrinkled, and my face was a stubbly mess. I limped back a few feet trying desperately not to agitate my hip, and looked at myself again. Who was this man in the mirror?

I realized that I was becoming Bob. I had his grumpy face, sunken eyes, and even the gimped limp. As I looked at all the people around me, I realized that I was also starting to think like him. I could never be happy with the trifles that these people thrived from. All of these things became meaningless. I wanted the truth and the light that Bob's music made me feel.

I went home that night, eager to tell Bob how I felt. I nervously limped up to his door and knocked.

"What?" he grumbled.

"I was wondering if I could come in, and talk to you." I grumbled back.

"You can't." He huffed.

"Well can you at least play that song from last night?" I asked.

"What song?" he said, and then he shut the door in my face.

I walked home embarrassed. How could I have been so naïve? That was not my song; that was his song. That was not my music; that was his music. The more I thought about Bob I realized that he was a phenomenal piano player, but he was not an entertainer; he was a minister. Bob played for no one but himself. His music was for him and meant to help him deal with his own struggles. I was not listening to Bob play his piano every night; I was merely eavesdropping on his self-reflections.

Bob closes his window whenever he plays now. I never heard that music since that last talk. I still yearn for the experience I had whenever he played. I think I might learn piano.

Division II: Prose—Second Place Winner

Adam Breland

Covington High School, Grade 12

Teacher: Eugenie Martin

A Twisted Fairy Tale

There lived a little girl once, a little girl with an insatiable thirst for knowledge. As privileged as she was, she could have had an obsession with dresses made from the finest silk, or Shetland ponies, or jewelry, but what she hungered for was stories.

She loved her mother, she adored her father, and her brother wasn't all that bad, as brothers go. But she loved her grandmother the most, because she was the one who had all the stories. One night, when the little girl had been properly tucked into bed by her parents, her grandmother decided to tell her a story. Her parent's loving hands had brushed her hair and braided it down her back, and hugged her goodnight. But her grandmother stayed up to tell her a bedtime story, as is tradition. Her grandmother, a woman whom time had been kind to, loved her granddaughter with a powerful intensity. She wanted to tell her favorite grandchild a tale that would teach her a lesson in life. Cinderella and Snow White were nice, but they weren't real. And Beauties, Sleeping or otherwise, were rarely as kind and gentle as they were in the stories. So the loving grandmother decided to recite for her granddaughter a story that she knew by heart.

She sat down on the bed beside the little girl, and began weaving the story she knew she had to tell. It began normally enough:

There was once a handsome prince. Like handsome princes often do, he married a beautiful princess. They lived in his father's kingdom, in a beautiful castle surrounded by a crystalline lake. When the prince became King and his wife the Queen, they decided to have a beautiful princess of their very own, a daughter named Ebony. There was just one problem with their plan, and that was Ebony herself.

Ebony was, in absolutely no way, beautiful. She had hair of darkest night, and it curled in an untamable fashion around her head like bristly wires. She was rather plump, and a certain witch in the woods would have loved to stick her in the oven. Her face was unsightly, with pimples and sores all around. Her eyes were clouded over all the time and so she looked rather dim, like one whose head has hit too many branches of the stupid tree.

She was an ugly baby, who grew into a fearsome child, who grew into a hideous young woman. By the time she could be conceivably rescued by a handsome prince, Ebony was too ugly to be touched by most of them. The princes who could look past her disgusting features found that she was too bitter to deal with. She knew she was ugly, but she tried everything she could to become pretty. Lotions, potions, elixirs, none of them worked on her.

But then an old woman stopped by the castle one day to look at Ebony. Many people wished to see the Ugly Princess, so this was nothing new. But when the old woman saw her, she told Ebony that there was a way to make her beautiful, if only she would leave the castle and come live with her.

Ebony asked her father and mother, and they thought the woman might be a witch who would take Ebony and put her in a tower to be rescued or something. That would be wonderful, they thought, and so allowed her to go. Ebony didn't think she was a witch, and was happy to go, to get away from all the staring of strangers, and of the disappointments of her family. The old woman took her to a cottage in the mountains. Ebony slept on the floor, because of the woman's back. Ebony got the snow from outside to make the woman a bath, because of her arthritis. Ebony caught and cooked every meal, because of the old woman's eyesight. After this was done every day, the woman would teach Ebony one lesson of beauty.

The first lesson was to comb out her hair every night 200 times until her head hurt. It would make her hair soft and shiny, the old woman said. The second lesson was a tooth brace that the old woman produced. She said that given enough time, it would straighten Ebony's smile. The third lesson was a corset, which the old woman said "increased her womanly virtue," and Ebony felt that the way it shaped her figure was worth the difficulty breathing. And so on and so forth it went, Ebony helping the old woman in many ways, the old woman giving her lessons in beauty. And doing all this work, Ebony began to lose her plumpness.

After a long time, Ebony asked the old woman when she would be allowed to see her reflection. The old woman didn't believe in keeping mirrors for ugly people, you see, and the princess was definitely still one of those. The old woman told her soon, and that night gave the girl a beautiful dress that didn't fit, saying that when the girl had become skinny enough, she could wear it and look like an angel.

Ebony learned to always bathe in boiling water but to rinse in ice water, as it kept the skin firm and clean. She learned about a few herbs that gave her pains in her stomach, but that would clear away the cobwebs

from her dim eyes and make them shine and sparkle. She learned to make an ointment that she could cover her face with, and even though it burned, when taken off it gave her a healthy glow. She learned to cover herself in intoxicating scents that she was allergic to, and also that whenever she had a cold, her voice became more sensual and seductive. She learned that no girl was really pretty without makeup. Ebony was allergic to most rouge and all paints and oils but the old woman didn't care, saying it was worth a few hours of itching and prickling to look pretty for a day.

But one day Ebony told the old woman that she hurt all over, that the combing had hurt her head, that the sores ached all over her face underneath the makeup, that her chest and back hurt because of the corset, and that almost all of the old woman's lessons ended up hurting Ebony in some way. In response, the old woman took out a mirror, and gave it to Ebony. As Ebony looked at the beautiful woman she had become, the old woman proclaimed that her last lesson to the princess was that beauty IS pain.

Ebony left the old woman then, went back to her father and mother and showed them who she had become. Right away they set up a marriage with a handsome prince from a far away land, who hadn't heard of her and who was eager to see her. They married of course, and moved into one of his castles, and had several children who had luckily received their father's good looks. One day, however, Ebony felt that being beautiful might not be worth the hurt she had put herself through, and so did not perform any of the painful lessons she completed on a daily basis.

But the very next day, her husband, her children, even her servants refused to look at her for her ugliness. And so she became beautiful again through her hurtful rituals, and everybody loved her, and she knew it was worth it. She learned the hard way that it was better to be beautiful and loved and in pain, than ugly and despised.

The grandmother, her tale told, looked at her sleeping granddaughter. The child had fallen asleep sometime before Ebony went back home, the old woman supposed.

So she woke the little girl up. She told the whole story over again, so that the little girl could absorb the lessons contained within it. But her granddaughter fell asleep before the tale was done a second time. The old woman sighed. She reasoned that she could always tell the story tomorrow night. There was always time to share your past with your family, the old princess supposed as she removed the brace from her mouth. It really had given her a sparkling smile, but it hurt like hell. As Ebony walked to her chamber, she undid her hair. A thousand pins stuck onto a cap had been wound into strands of her hair, and it pulled her face back, so she looked years younger than she was, and even when she smiled she was miserable. She had used the old woman's lessons after all, every single one. Regardless of the pain involved, and Ebony did know the meaning of the word agony. She just didn't want her precious granddaughter to have to learn the same lessons, though there was truth to the last lesson Ebony learned.

Eventually, everyone needs to learn that beauty is pain.

Division II: Prose—Third Place Winner

Sarah Smith

Covington High School, 10

Teacher: Eugenie Martin

Her Story

Mamma and Daddy wed in the summer of 1909. They had me December 15, 1910, which put me at 18 when I took Max's hand. We ran away scared and ran back married. I waited in the buggy until daddy stepped out to deny me, but he didn't. He cried first, and then I did from pure relief. "It's done," he said in his daddy voice. "Ain't nothin' we can do 'bout it now."

The very next summer Obie was killed. Shot by a man in his fifties who owned a shop in town. We heard it from inside of the California Café. Everyone ran out, including us waitresses on account of everybody knew everybody in Durant, Mississippi. And this time the person doing the knowing was me.

Obie lay on the sidewalk between the café and the doctor's. His face was towards the ground and blood soaked his back. I pushed through and the people resisted until they saw the look in my eyes. I sat beside him not touching while the doctor pronounced him dead. Max got there in time to carry me away, just as they did my brother and the man that shot him. Officer McFerrin stood as a physical barrier between Browne and me for fear of my emotions getting the best of me, and in turn, me getting the best of him.

We stayed at my parents for three nights while they made their way home from Little Rock. Somebody had been sent to fetch Mamma, Daddy, Gin, and Elsie from the railroad camp Daddy was inspecting. The murderer was moved from Lexington; about twelve miles from us, to Canton; about fifty because, as the paper said, "feelings ran high." We buried Obie five days later and Browne's court date was set for October 27 by five justices in a Lexington court room packed to the galleries. I didn't attend, Max did. He said it wasn't a place for a lady, especially when that lady had a tendency to speak her mind. Browne was released on a \$5,000 bail. We didn't really know where he went, just knew it was a good thing he didn't stay here.

October 27 came just as fast as it left and still no one saw a sign of Browne. His attorney showed in Lexington on his behalf and explained how he had been admitted to the hospital. Admitted by the same doctor whose office sat next to Browne's shop for twenty years. The same doctor who had pronounced my brother dead on the scene. Convenient, that's what I thought of it. The bail was forfeited, by force, the trial was postponed to the following year, and a new bail was set and paid. The only difference now was that Browne reopened his store. I passed by every day. Words can't describe the rage that grew inside me. Again we fell into routine, just a more bitter one this time. Pain became a part of who we were. We lived it.

Momma sewed a pocket inside of Daddy's warm coat. We didn't speak of it then, and never did. I know I wasn't supposed to know about it but I had walked in the house one day while she was sewing. She put it away quickly enough that I knew it wasn't something to be talked about. It wasn't until later that I came to the realization of what the pocket was for.

I found out on the day of my 20th birthday. It was if everyone knew about it before it ever happened. Everyone except me, of course. I guess it was their way of protecting me. We had all been holding our breath and didn't even realize it until he was gone, for good. Browne was shot on the steps outside of his home. The gift I had never asked for, but somehow, the one I had always wanted.

Daddy had a stroke and died the next year. I guess two killings in one year have a way of aging a man. Once again, we moved on as much as we could. Max and I had two children not counting the one that died when it was still inside me. I lost Max when I was fifty-one. His death affected me, but not how it would usually affect someone. I was used to it. I was numb.

I am older now, and alone. When my family comes for the annual visit I try not to speak. My words are bitter. Like I am spitting out all of the horrible emotion that has built up over the years.

Division II: Poetry—First Place Winner

Camille Guillot

Mandeville High School, Grade 12

Teacher: Cathy Morlas

Imaginary Gardens

“Imaginary gardens with real toads in them”
—Marianne Moore, line from abandoned draft of Poetry

In April when the trees quit their winter
jobs as skeleton fingers, sprout
leaves like flags, joy-green, my hammock—
pollen spliced to every rope—
is a ship’s sail
billowing with our bodies
to cruise the backyards.

In April when the ground takes off
its mourning-clothes, grows clover and forgiveness
and crabgrass prickles up for everyone
who dares fresh air for the first time
since the last equinox and sunburns,
my hands are birds,
trilling
spring birdsong to you.

In April when the sky’s easy
to love, so clear we laugh, and you’re friendlier
to the dirt than anyone’s been since Puck,
when every grove, every shrub
could be a bower for Jack
o’ the Green and the Green Lady
on this, their wedding morning—

On days like this, in April, I
am a garden and you are a
garden and together we’re poetry and if
we have toads
they shine with dew.

Division II: Poetry—Second Place Winner

Adam Breland

Covington High School, Grade 12

Teacher: Eugenie Martin

Winter

When the wind blows and the flowers die,
The sun begins to fade,
And leaves Autumn with a sigh.
Clear streaming light, cutting through the air.
Frost, cold and bright, blue and white growing from the ground.
She is so old, Father Time's eldest child.
Winter is beautifully stark.
She wears dresses of harsh light fading into soft dark.
In her presence, trees dance naked and Orion arrives in the sky.
Great beings walk in wind, snow, starlight.
Being saved for last,
She is the best to bring salvation of mind, body and soul.
Her graceful breath brings sleep for many.
She takes the earth unto her bosom and saves it for Spring .
Her fey laughter is midnight's lullaby.
Her lips caress those wrapped in forever leaving us.
Her darkest mercy, when the chill rainbows scatter bright on the horizon,
Is Summer's shining envy.
Her smile is a delicate eternity.
Her dazzling eyes like icicles piercing the heart of pain,
Leave no trace of their existence.
Her love for us will never wane.
Though we leave her and travel onwards,
She will always be ready to receive us the next year.

Division II: Poetry—Third Place Winner

Jade Patton

Amite High School, Grade 12

Teacher: Renee Carpenter

Remembering: For Haiti and Japan

When did empathy become such profanity?

What turned our humble hearts so vain?

As the waters ebbed back,

We proudly paraded our marks of Cain.

Kiss us tenderly sweet grace; Wipe the pride from our face.

Softly shake us from our pretentious sleeping,
That we might wake to the other nations weeping.

Oh how the demons praise us, for placing ourselves above all,
A favor to them that we stack up our conceit,
For the higher we rise, the harder we'll fall.

Satan whispers lies to our egos, that we're safe from the earthquakes and pain.

Like newborns in a puddle, we'll thrash and we'll tumble,
As our vain lungs fill up, with the first drop of rain.

As Mr. Hughes said, Let America be what it was,
Let's step outside of our "I's" and make a future for "US"

Oh please don't destroy us for our own selfish contempt'
Rather strip the scales from our eyes that imply us exempt.

Let us realize how easily the waters could've swept "US" away,
But Lady Luck dealt the cards and for now we'll remain.

Don't we remember when the towers burned?
Our pillars collapsing as the world ceased to turn?

Isn't it familiar? The sound of heartbreak?
As the floodwaters left us to mourn in their wake?

Katrina! Katrina! Carve her name in our hearts?
Did our compassion for each other fade with the scar?

September 11th, is the date just the past?
Can nothing impress us with benevolence that lasts?

America! Stand! Hush your self-righteous chiding.
Rather, thank God we weren't the first struck in this plague of lightning.

Remember. We're all humans. We all bleed just the same.
Remember, and reach out in tenderness to soothe the world's pain.

So let's step down into humility, lend the broken a hand,
For the compassion we sew, will reap the futures soft land.