16th Annual RRAS Nature Writing Contest

Results for 2021: Winners & Honorable Mentions for Junior (Grades 4-6) and Senior (Grades 7-12) Divisions

In this second year of COVID-19 shutdowns, students ramped up their participation to exceed 90 poems and essays entered, our second highest total. RRAS awarded $100 in prizes to the following schoolchildren who explored the topic, “What Nature Means to Me.”

First Place, Junior Division
Bony McKnight
Grade 4, Coastal Grove Charter School

“On Hummingbird Wings”

I am going for a walk with my family. We’re visiting Berkeley, and it’s raining, and it’s been raining the whole time we’ve been here. I’m feeling grumpy because my mom insisted that we go out and get exercise, even though it’s soaking wet. We were walking on a path in between houses. The path was made of cobblestones and the rain made them slippery. I feel so grumpy I think I hate nature.

I wish I could’ve been inside, reading a book and drinking tea or hot chocolate. But I’m not. My rain-gear is wet on the inside, and I can’t take it off because it’s clinging to my skin.

We’re finally walking back, and I’m feeling even grumpier, because I’m even wetter. And wetter. And wetter. Suddenly a hummingbird zips out of a nearby loquat tree and hovers a few feet away. “That’s suspicious,” my mom says. She walks over to the loquat tree and pulls down a branch, lifting up the leaves. Everyone comes over and gasps when we see what’s underneath the leaves: a perfect nest, constructed of lichens and lined with soft feathers.

Inside are three pure white eggs, smaller than marbles.

I’m so amazed I just stare at them for a while. Everyone does. I’ve never seen a hummingbird nest before. It’s so small and perfect. It’s amazing it doesn’t get blown away by the wind. I feel so awed by how one hummingbird could build that and lay her eggs and take care of the eggs and then the young hummingbirds as they grow without ever letting the world know. Being able to hide them so well in places that people would never normally think to look.

And I think about what I thought before about how much I hated nature when it was so dripping and wet. But now I feel glad to be outside in the rain. I’m glad to have found the nest. And I’m not even feeling how wet my rain gear is anymore.

And so I realize that even if I’m not happy about the rain, I can find something I love about nature in whatever I’m not liking about nature. I don’t feel like reading a book anymore. I feel like being outside and enjoying nature. With the hummingbirds.

Second Place, Junior Division
Trillium Pitts
Grade 5, Alder Grove Charter School

“Nature”

A long time ago, there were no people
And the forests and seas
Were the world’s great steeple
But now that we live
We’ve got to give something
To the body that nourishes us all
So we can find the gall
To let generations to come
Revel in the wild, the wild of evolution
It should be a resolution
A revolution

(continued on page 2)
To let our children love
The earth below and the sky above
Kids can only grow
When they know
Where it all started
And where it will end
If we have something to lend
To our youth
It should be the truth
That the world is the mother
Who smiles on everyone
We must cultivate the trust
In our children that lets them
Live freely, knowing
That they can keep growing
Their own way, the way of the world
With the knowledge that their wings
Will not be clipped, but unfurled
“Kids deserve to live... in a place
That’s as wild as they are,”
As so many say
So let us fight another day
To give the life free of strife
That our children must know
We must rise up
Together
And tear away the tether
That binds our children to the shell of the egg
Because nature,
Nature
Is calling to them, as it did
To us
When we were children
Nature is calling, with her streams and rivers
That cut the slivers in the span of the land
Nature is calling
To them
Let us help to answer
With a willing smile
Let us plant the seed
Of happiness
In every child
Let us release them from the trap
And set them free
To be as themselves
In a world that is their own
A world that can never be
Mown down
It’s the world where they belong
Of gurgling brooks and birdsong
Where they will grow strong
Loved by the trees that give
Branches for them to climb, to live in
Loved by the sunlight that dances
In the palms of their hands
Loved by the land

And the earth
That has cared for us
Since birth
Will care for them too
The earth will make them true
When we see
Our children laugh in the grove and glade
Rejoicing in the happiness
Of being free
We understand that the land
Has done something we
Could never do
Because although we can cultivate
Happiness
We must repent, relent, realize
That the size of the joy
Mother Earth gives to each child who walks upon
her soil
Is of a capacity
That is beyond our reach
And so I beseech you
Let the earth teach you
That the world gave our children
The joy of nature.

[Text in quotation marks from Nicolette Sowder.]

Third Place,
Junior Division
Glenys Stockwell
Grade 5,
Union Street
Charter School

“The Marbled Godwit”

Soaring high through the sky
Showing to the world
Their cinnamon wing lining
Swooping and curving
Landing in the water
Long beaks to pierce the ground
To get all the nutrition they need
Stabbing the ground
For their food
Bristle worms, earthworms, and much more
Raising their head
A sound like no other
Rip from their throats
Stinging the air with sound
These beautiful birds
In the winter
Call our home
Their home
“What Nature Means to Me: Trinity Love”

OH TRINITY, OH TRINITY,
HOW I LOVE YOUR LAKE.
YOUR AIR IS HOT AND CRISP.
YOUR WATER IS FROZEN IN THE WINTER
AND WARM IN THE SUMMER.
YOUR SAND IS SOFT AND DAMP.
YOUR TREES ARE TALL AND STRONG.
YOUR ATMOSPHERE IS SO LOVELY.
YOUR SKY IS CLEAR AND BRIGHT.
YOUR NIGHTS ARE COLD AND CALMING.
I WOULD GIVE ANYTHING IN THE WORLD TO
SEE YOU EVERY DAY.
FOR I LOVE YOU.
TRINITY.

Nature is going on a walk and counting all the
different kinds of mushrooms you can find.
It means getting cherry blossoms in your hair on
a windy day. Nature is the feeling of your body
absorbing the sun’s light, going to the river and
feeling the currents pushing you back.
What nature means to me is swimming out past
the breakers and swaying side to side to side...
Nature means a healthy planet.

First Place,
Senior Division
Naomi Harrison
Grade 9,
Academy of the
Redwoods

“Moonlight Escapade”

I bathe
In the moonlight, I bathe
The light flows down around me like a pool of
water
I am still
Silently my wings rise
I tip forward, at the very edge —!
Glide into flight
A dark shape swishing through the trees

My eyes peer into the darkness
Searching
I need no light to guide me
I can see

A rustle catches my ear
The wind?
Or something more?
I swoop around just in case

Twitching
The sound of soil
Nervous chatter vibrates through the forest
I can hear

Shadows fall
Rise
The distant crickets chirp sadly to an unknown
pattern
I circle around the area

The wind changes
Scents shift
There it is, what I am looking for, my very purpose
I can smell

Wings, hovering
Air pushes me up
The cool night air has no effect on my warm
feathers
I make sure of its place

(continued on page 4)
There
I swoop, fast and silent
Crushing through the hiding place my claws meet fur
I can feel

A short battle
Desperate tiny claws
The place is too cramped to fully spread my wings
My teeth and talons do the work

I prepare myself
C-r-a-c-k
My beak comes back stained with blood
I can taste

I see the bright moonlight
It is quieter now
The smell of death is pungent in the air
My claws clamp
My tongue still stained

Floating silent
Through
The
Air

Second Place,
Senior Division
Malia Andersen
Grade 7,
Northcoast Preparatory Academy

“Thirteen Ways of Looking at Rain”

I
As the people moved on,
Bustling down the streets
Up in the sky, time seemed to stop
As the rain fell

II
The clouds rolled in
Like seeds of doubt
In the human mind
Creeping stealthily, then
Pounce!
The noise is deafening

III
As the wetness seeps into our clothes,
Chills our bones,
We wonder
What is causing the gods to weep like so?

IV
At 5 a.m., when it has just rained,
I awake
To find myself
In a new world entirely

V
From afar, it is ugly
But as I look closer,
There is beauty in every drop

VI
It is a strange type of magic
People who choose to believe
Are the ones it shows itself to
It isn’t usual magic
It is one of a kind, unique,
Unseen magic

VII
As a fox walks,
The rain falls down,
Creating a shine on its coat
It falls softly,
Muffled by the soft carpet of pine needles
On the forest floor
An owl hoots, from its perch on a nearby tree branch
Confused by the darkness as to
What time it is

VIII
The brave boy opens the door
To his safe home
And slips outside
He begins to dance
He is free, graceful,
The rain washes his cares away
It washes him away too
He fades out of existence
Swallowed up by the abyss of the water
Never to return
He is happy

IX
I don’t want to take my dog for a walk in the rain
I growl, grumble, scream and cry
But when I look at her, I smile
She is frisking, playing in the grass
She shakes out her fur
And it billows
Like waves on a stormy sea
She is wet, but she is happy
Maybe I should be too

(continued on page 5)
Life is too short
to be ruined by the rain
Rain makes life more enjoyable

X
The raindrops hold
Secrets inside
Little fairies within each one
Making their journey to the ground
Beating their little fists
On the surface
Wanting to get out

XI
Drops on the leaves
They feel young and fresh
They stretch up to the sky
And are young and
wet awash with dew
Again

XII
The rain is getting tired
It has done its job
The gods are done crying
They think the people deserve a reward

XIII
The clouds part like curtains
The clear sky is like a window
The sun mixes with the still wetness of the sky
Colors brighten up people’s days
A rainbow is the sign of happiness
And better days to come

Third Place,
Senior Division
Mirianna Ennis
Grade 11,
Northern United
Charter School

“What Nature Means to Me”

Life gets crazy, it pushes you to your limits. I’m constantly getting caught up in it all, getting spread too thin. But there’s something I always come back to, something I always seem to find peace and comfort in. And that’s the natural wonders of the outdoors. The moment I step into the woods I feel my worries flush away. The second I dive into the freezing ocean waters, I feel the stress that’s been building up leave me. My heart beats with the steady rhythm of the warm breeze that carries my anxiety away and fills me, instead, with the feeling of wholeness. All I can focus on is the steady inhale and exhale of my breath when I run through the woods. My bare feet pound against the soft coverage of leaves below them and my hair always finds a way to collect redwood needles as it dances behind me.

I’ve been beyond blessed to grow up in such a nature-filled area; the Redwood Coast of Northern California. Just behind our house stands acres of vast redwood forests, featuring ponds, creeks, and lots of wildlife. My siblings and I would spend hours upon hours collecting logs and creating huts on stumps with only the resources around us to aid our efforts.

Heading the other direction, just down the road, lies the beach and its ocean, which we’ve gotten to connect with immensely through surfing. My favorite time to surf is the golden hour. The sun is making its way beyond the horizon and fills the tubs of waves with this golden glow. Out there is my definition of peace. There are no phones, no worries, just you and the ocean.

So if someone were to ask me what nature means to me, well I’d say everything. Nature means everything to me. It’s what keeps me happy. Life wouldn’t be quite worth living if I didn’t have nature to come back to. I don’t feel alone when I walk through the woods, I feel whole. All around me is life, life below me, life above me, life beside me, and all around me. God poured all his passion into nature when he created it. You can see the vast detail of the outdoors when you pick up a leaf or the shell of a snail. Patterns dance across their surfaces and align together to express incomprehensible beauty. Nothing could replace the special place that nature holds in my heart. As long as I live, I’m going to keep adventuring and finding new spots of nature to admire. I’m going to keep watching the sunset display colors across the evening sky. Because I know I’ll never get tired of it, rather be amazed over and over again.
What does nature mean to me? That's a very good question. I've been growing up in the little town of Trinidad all my life. We live right up the road from the beach and are surrounded by redwoods. Every day when I look out my window and see the beautiful nature God created; I feel ready to take on the new day. Nature inspires, I mean when you just look at one leaf it’s like a whole new world has opened. Every little piece of nature always has something more to explore. Taking one step into nature can bring you so much joy. One of my favorite things to do in nature is, take my board and wetsuit and go surfing. Even if I don’t catch that perfect wave just being out there in the ocean is worth it. It makes you feel so alive and at the same time so at peace. Sometimes nature is hard to accept, not all nature lasts forever. There has to be a time when it comes to an end and the cycle continues. I don’t just mean a plant or an animal. Humans, also, one day have to say goodbye.

My older brother Malachi passed away a few years ago from epilepsy. It was a very hard time for our family and still to this day I feel the pain. But Malachi was always encouraging me to go outside and to really appreciate nature. He was always taking me on walks, wanting to share new discoveries of nature, and he taught me that if you listen to nature, it always sounds like a symphony. So when I look at nature it always reminds me of him and that’s why nature means so much to me! Throughout my life, many of the beautiful memories I’ve made are out in nature. I love taking backpacking trips, going camping, river days, beach days, snowboarding, and hiking. All of these fun activities we enjoy because of mother earth. Today in this society many people have their minds on other things such as money, that they forget how important it is to protect our ecosystem. Money may be helpful in many ways, but we can’t take it so far as cutting down all the trees and creating so much plastic that it hurts our earth. I have hope that people will start to notice and care more about our environment. Our earth deserves to be treated right since it’s our home. Remember to take time to watch the stars, enjoy the sunset and sunrise, take a breath, hold your loved ones dear, and appreciate the wonders of nature.

Honorable Mention, Senior Division
Lily Pearl Ennis
Grade 8, Northern United Charter School

“The Colors of Nature”

Nature is red
The red roses
Her thorns almost deadly
The blood red saffron
The smooth, sweet cherries
The ripe tomatoes

Nature is orange
The vivid sunsets
Of the stretched-out sky
The California poppies
The leaves of the maple tree in autumn
The koi in the pond
Of my godmother’s house

Nature is yellow
The bright sun rays
And the daffodils
In the garden
The bumblebee
Buzzing on the honeysuckle
And don’t forget the buttercups
Popping up on my lawn

Nature is green
The grass and the fern
The leaves of every tree
And the moss on the roof
The pine needles
Outside the building

Nature is blue
The bright blue sky
And the calming ocean
The bluebells by the willow tree
The butterfly
Flapping its wings

Nature is purple
The violets in the garden
The lavender
That my mother uses
To hang in our house

(continued on page 7)
Nature is white
The puffy clouds
And the daisies
The swan
On the lake

Nature is gray
The fog that lays in the morning
The rocks in the river
The old wood
In a pile
In the shed

Nature is brown
The strong oak tree
And the redwood
The soft soil
And even
The godwit

Through these trees and down over the hillside,
water trickles down to the beach.
Smooth curves carved into the sand,
where the little stream flows down to the water’s
edge.
Small waves lap the warm sand,
icy to the touch, and breathtaking to the eye.
Here the soccer ball bounces across the sand
and the frisbee spins through the air.
Here, laughter and good times radiate from the
warm sun
and the bright blue sky.

The sky is my roof,
reaching farther, reaching higher than any
world I can dream of.
Nature is my source of exploration,
where I seek the secrets of the stars.
Nature is my happy play,
my home,
and my freedom.

Honorable Mention,
Senior Division
Bohdi Jennings
Grade 8,
Northcoast
Preparatory Academy

“My One True Home”

Nature is freedom.
Like the wings of an eagle, it is the place
where I can soar freely into the sky.
It is where I can escape
into the world of wildflowers and dazzling sunsets,
and away from the busy streets and large gray
buildings.
Nature is my one true home.
Not the cities where millions of people live,
but where the foxes run, and the swallow flies.

Reaching high into the sky are the trees of my
childhood.
Their roots are the foundation of my life
and their branches are the dreams of my youth.
Morning rays of sunlight shine through their
leaves and needles,
lighting up the forest with a golden glow.
Here, ferns and moss are my pillow and blanket
while the old growth stump is my home.
Here, everything is tranquil and life moves on in
harmony.

Honorable Mention,
Senior Division
Ace Chivrell
Grade 10,
Academy of the
Redwoods

“The American Robin:
A Fictional Short Story”

When you’re hurt, sometimes all you can think about
is the pain that haunts you. You live Every day with
that hurt, you smile and grin, and try your hardest
to seem like you’re not hurting. You don’t want oth-
ers to know that hurt, because you’re afraid it will
come back to haunt you even harder than the pain
itself. You’ve tried to open up, you tried to tell your
 guardians that you hurt so bad that you just want
to end it.

They shut you down though, they laughed and said
“Other people have it worse,” so you shut it out.
You shut everyone out. That smile on your face, is
all fake. Some days, the pain hurts so bad that you
become numb and your body shuts down. Each day
gets worse and worse. Your past is catching up to
you, it’s drowning you. The pain begins to get too
much. Living is getting harder to do as the days
pass...

(continued on page 8)
I laid in bed, staring up at the ceiling with empty aching eyes. Another sleepless night, again. I’ve been away for 48 hours now, unable to close my eyes and rest my poor brain. Instead, I stay up all night, letting the thoughts get to me. I sat up, looking at my digital alarm clock on the end table next to my bed. It read 4:30 in bright, blinding, red lights. I groaned, sitting up and gently pushing the blankets off. My body ached, a hollow pain that haunted me every day. I let a tear slip down my face, and for the first time I thought about praying.

I already tried the big kid candy, almost any kind you could think of, and all those did was make me numb for a while, and then hurt worse as I came down. I’ve tried everything anyone could think of. At this point, at just 17 years old, I was breaking. I stood up from my bed, and then slumped down to the hardwood floor, more tears streaming down my round face. I looked up to the ceiling again, and then put my head down and closed my eyes.

“Please, send me an angel to heal me,” was the only prayer I spoke. That’s when I heard fluttering, the soft flapping of wings. I hesitantly opened my eyes, and on my windowsill, sat a red robin. It gave me a soft nod, and suddenly I felt the words she was trying to speak. Its small, beady eyes bore into my soul, and it said, “It’s going to be okay, let nature heal you, I’ll take care of you. We’ll heal you. It’s not over.” CHECK ENDING
days role-playing ‘make-believe’ characters with my best friend, playing capture the flag, listening to my older brother as he tells me magnificent stories that somehow always seem meant for me, as they always related to my feelings in one way or another. I miss those days.

Most of my favorite memories were made in the woods surrounding our home. Dancing in the rain, then covering ourselves in the mud. Spending my days role-playing ‘make-believe’ characters with my best friend, playing capture the flag, listening to my older brother as he tells me magnificent stories that somehow always seem meant for me, as they always related to my feelings in one way or another. I miss those days.

So much has changed since then... sometimes, in ways that I never would have ever even thought possible. My life gets busy and chaotic, distracting me from nature and all its wonders. I have been hit with great sorrow, losing someone very precious to me. Though after all this time, the forest still opens her arms wide to me, ready to embrace and comfort me.

The wind intensifies, bringing me back to the present moment. I tighten my grip on the branches, feeling the sway of the ancient tree. The cold wind fills me with wonder and energy as my heart drums against my chest, in perfect rhythm with the dancing branches. The organ that pumps blood throughout my entire biological vessel that I use daily to exist upon this earth. The reminder that I am still alive; my HeartBeat.