



17th Annual RRAS Nature Writing Contest

*Results for 2022: Winners & Honorable Mentions for
Junior (Grades 4-8) and Senior (Grades 9-12) Divisions*

Entries this year matched the 2021 participation level, with 93 poems and essays submitted, tying our second-highest total. RRAS awarded \$100 in prizes to the following schoolchildren who explored the topic, “What Nature Means to Me.”



Junior Division winners (left) and Senior Division winners (right) at award ceremony. Photos by Paul Johnson.



***First Place,
Junior Division
Bony McKnight
Grade 5,
Coastal Grove
Charter School***

“Crashing Waves”

The past two years have been really hard for me. Nature has been the main way I’ve dealt with all the difficulties Covid has brought. Hanging out with friends is way more stressful with masks and social distance, and there’s so many boundaries for everything, with the threat of Covid hanging over us all, even if we’re vaccinated. Getting outside, away from all my troubles and difficulties has something really calming about it. It’s like waking up and realizing I can just step away from everything for a minute, and when I come back I’ll be calm enough to carefully sort everything out, and not get frustrated half-way through.

I’ve been really anxious lately, about almost everything, and I don’t have much patience with any-

thing. School, accidents, arguments, so many things I just don’t have patience for. Nature helps calm me down, and center me. In some ways nature also reminds me of the world of Covid we’re living in right now. Mainly the ocean. Sometimes you have to let the waves of fear crash over you, before you can reach calmer water. But you have to be strong mentally, and physically, to pull through. Not everyone makes it. Wearing a mask and getting vaccinated is like starting to swim through the waves of fear and confusion and work your way to calmer water. There’s so many things to be worried about, but for me nature’s not one of them. It’s a whole world of calm and wonder that I can let myself relax in.

I remember running my hands through the sand at a beach looking for shells. And then I saw a shell, a very small shell, rolling around right where the waves were crashing. It’s just very magical, seeing something so small and fragile not being destroyed by something so big and powerful. Seeing it made me think “I can do this too. I can be strong enough to stay strong during such overwhelming times.” You don’t need to be physically strong, you just need the strong thought of “I can do this,” and you just need to believe in yourself.

Nature has taught me to believe in myself, and I’ll do everything I can to help it, in return.



***Second Place,
Junior Division
Trillium Pitts
Grade 6,
Alder Grove
Charter School***

“The Pine Siskin”

He was cold as ice when I found him.
 Glassy eyes, staring
 Black, blank, unblinking.
 Cold, curled little talons.
 Stiff wing feathers, ruffled, shafts broken.
 Beak open, gaping, groping, grasping
 For one more breath.
 Behind him, reflecting the cherry tree,
 Bare and bent.
 The window.
 A pane of pain, standing like a sentinel
 Over the bird’s broken body.
 Gently, I hold the battered bird in my cupped,
 careful hands
 Feeling its feathered chest, feeling a feeble flutter
 of a pulse.
 Hope.
 The bird stirs, struggles to stand.
 Grips my frostbitten flesh with its tiny claws...
 A flash of wingbeats, and I watch it fly away.
 A colorful blur disappearing into the burning,
 hopeful horizon.



***Third Place,
Junior Division
Indumati Stewart
Grade 5,
Coastal Grove
Charter School***

“Nature’s Truth”

Nature our home
 Our mother
 Our existence
 Dying away from a cruel line
 When we see Earth, we see home
 We see a place where we can write a story
 A place of plants
 Of life, of hope
 And we have done that

We have
 But time is shifting
 This draft is changing
 And all can see the writing being erased
 A new beginning will come
 And I’m not sure it’s a good one
 But I believe we can change
 We have written a good beginning
 Now let’s remember to write a good end
 This is what nature means to me
 It’s not just a place to roam on,
 It’s a place that gives us home, hope, and life.



***Hon. Mention,
Junior Division
Jasmine
Christian
Grade 5,
Six Rivers
Montessori***

“Rain”

The fog sweeps over the skies,
 and floods our forest.
 Drip! drop! drip! drop,
 The fog feels heavier than ever,
 Rain is coming!
 The drip drop turns into a pitter, patter
 on my windows,
 the swish swish of the wind passing by
 the trees,
 the soft crash of the ocean,
 out my window I see.

Racing winds
 Pushing and shoving,
 Trees swaying ever so pretty
 Crack! BOOM!
 The rain falls faster,
 The wind blows swifter,
 The fog gets heavier,
 But something new starts to fall.
 Clank! clank!
 Little ice balls.

Hail!!
 Then the hail turns into rain,
 And then the wind turns into a soft breeze
 But the fog turns into dark clouds
 The pitter, patter stops,

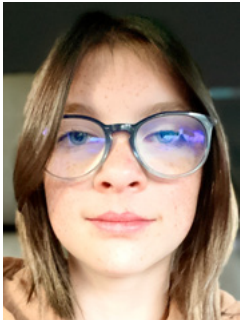
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The wind stops,
Everything goes quiet.

BOOM!
The rain falls harder than ever.

The wind crashes in to my window,
The ocean waves are higher,
The pitter, patter now a
Cling! clang!
The fog settles and in doing so,
Puts a unforgettable haziness to the sky
Gray is all around
Me and my window watching,
from the safeness of inside.

The once soft sway of the trees,
Is now violently fight to stay alive
The once quiet town is now a bustling city,
Of movement
Crack! BOOM!
Everything is now moving,
Nothing as before,
The existing thrill,
Out my window I see.



***Honorable Mention,
Junior Division
Aviva Orlandi
Grade 6,
Fieldbrook
Elementary School***

“What Nature Means to Me”

Nature is my friend waiting for me just beyond the door.
When in the domain of trees, I feel safe
like my words that breathe in there never leave.
Secrets that will truly be kept like a friend,
and when I cry, the wind is there to clear clouds.
When I'm happy, the sun shines.
When scared, the frogs croak so I'm not alone
and like a friend, I go out in the rain to be
supportive.
I know Nature is the friend no one can take away
from me
because Nature will be by my side wherever I go.



***Honorable Mention,
Junior Division
Kael Ahlstrom
Grade 7,
Blue Lake
Elementary School***

“What Nature Means to Me”

Nature is a door, nature is a gateway.
It takes what hate you have
And throws it all away.
The best moments of my life
were spent outdoors.
The beautiful trees that are worth much more than
the small plastic ones some use for decor.
The pine cones that fall.
The birds that nest.
I lie under a redwood
to sit down for a rest.
I see the geese on the drive home.
I watch in wonder at the tree-covered hills.
Nature is a place of wonderment and beauty.
A place that I hope will stay that way.

***Honorable Mention, Junior Division
Zain Moore, Grade 7,
Agnes Johnson Charter School***

“What Nature Means to Me”

I think that long ago nature was beautiful and elegant, but now I think it is mostly just trashy. The forest is where criminals hide and people kill people. As well as what the word “trashy” means — there is garbage everywhere that people put there or, in my case, bears. There have been multiple occasions when a bear takes the trash from our bin-type thing (basically a small plastic house) and drags it into the forest, then eats some of it and leaves it to rot. Now just to be clear, I don't hate nature, I love it, just as long as it is a nice place and there isn't a mass murderer in the area. I am just pointing out imperfections that we can fix (probably not the bear one, though), so that you don't think that I think everything in nature is all rainbows and butterflies.

P.S. I am sorry if this made anyone mad, but if it did, you seriously have to loosen up. I know I came off strongly, but I also hope it was a bit refreshing not hearing the whole “sunshine and rainbows, everything is perfect” junk.



***Honorable Mention,
Junior Division
Arianna Benitez
Grade 8,
Alder Grove
Charter School***

“Her Life, Her Beauty”

As I step into Mother Nature’s world, she blesses me with the sights of beauty.
I watch the cherry blossom petals fall around me like snow.
I hear the whispers of the trees as they speak to one another, swaying side to side.
I smell the fresh scent of dirt and rain water. The aroma of pine needles filling my nose.
I feel the slaps of fresh winter air against my bare skin as I walk.
I taste the explosion of blackberry fill my mouth as I pick the fruit Mother Nature gave.
I can see, I can hear, I can smell, I can feel, and I can taste the Earth, which is more than a blessing.



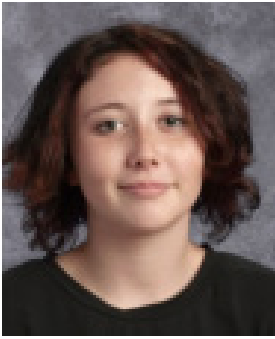
***First Place,
Senior Division
Abigail (A.J.) Garcia
Grade 9,
McKinleyville
High School***

“Nature”

But what would Nature matter to the world that may destroy it?
Why would we write poems or essays,
Documents, legal instruments
On the topic of Nature when we in fact
Do not give a single care
A single drop of sweat on what Nature means to us?
We are not dreary or morose
Because we ourselves as the human race do not care about Mother Nature or what surrounds us.
We have instead built walls and Eiffel towers in place of garden walls
We have polluted the seas with plastic and empty beer cans
Homo sapiens inhabit this Earth with arrogance and egos.

We flood our streets with epicaricacy*, burn our homes with the heat and radiance of global warming.
Would you care about the dying Earth if no one else did? Why are we so focused on what the majority of us think?
Would you behave so cold and wretched like the King of Kings, Ozymandias?
I wrote this poem because it wasn’t an essay.
I wrote this poem because I was told I had to.
I write this but I actually seem to derive joy in writing this poem
Because I can use words
Like how protesters can use words
Weapons
Fancy declarations of compassion to Gaia
But we use these declarations to present war as well
So at what cost are we going to go to save what Nature means to us?
When the world is crippling and crumbling
Will we cry? Or beckon upon our “God” to save us?
To take back our sins to what damage we have inflicted.
It’s all about politics or war or walls
Garden walls.
Sacred garden walls might save us from this cruel dying world.
But it doesn’t quite matter when the ocean is choking up bleach.
Or when rhinos are being wiped out of existence.
But words
And long documents help
Poems help — difficult, hard-to-understand poems.
The line is blurred from what Nature means to me, and how Nature might not mean anything when we are through with it.
Where are the resplendent azaleas, or the insouciant owl?
Where may I bask in the sun and not worry about Nature?
What Nature means to me.
But what would Nature matter to the world that may destroy it?

*The judges had to look this one up. Epicaricacy means “rejoicing at or derivation of pleasure from the misfortunes of others.”



***Second Place,
Senior Division
Jadalyn Weber
Grade 9,
McKinleyville
High School***

“The Stars”

Have you ever looked up into the sky and wondered what lies beyond the stars? Well for me I wonder that every time I step outside. It all started last summer, when the full moon rose to the top of the sky, and the stars and galaxies shined as bright as the sun.

Stargazing has always been an important part of my life, because when I see the stars I feel at peace. One night specifically I felt at peace with everything. I realized how some people make me feel, or how nature has always been there for me when no one else was. As I looked up into the sky the feeling of worthlessness instantly went away, and the feeling of peace and love washed over my body. The stars show us that no matter how many there are, you always shine brighter.

That night I saw the beauty of nature around me. I remember hearing the sound of the river, the birds singing, and the frogs croaking. There was a light misty rain, and a small breeze. The smell of rain was in the air, and the sight of tall trees filled the landscape. The moon was shimmering against the rapids of the river, and the stars were shining brightly against my skin. Everything in that moment was perfect, and as humans I believe we should appreciate the feeling of nature and its beautiful sights.

I have never felt angry with nature, but when people interrupt my time with nature, I get mad. As I was enjoying the breeze and all of nature’s beauties, my sister had to ruin the moment. But I guess it was a blessing in disguise because she then handed me a new rose quartz crystal. Since it was a full moon I decided to charge the crystal. This made me feel loved, and so appreciated. I guess we shouldn’t just appreciate nature but also what nature can bring to us.



***Third Place,
Senior Division
Talon Rodriguez
Grade 11,
McKinleyville
High School***

“Nature’s Road”

Walking down nature’s road, you see, and hear,
See the towering Redwoods sway,
Hear the symphony of the wind’s bellowing tones.
Walking on nature’s road, you experience and embrace,
Experience the History in the Grand Canyon’s layers,
Embrace the views from the mountain’s peaks.
Walking on nature’s road, you feel and watch,
Feel the rumbling of Yellowstone’s aching lands,
Watch the geysers rupture and burst at the seams.
Walking on Nature’s Road, you run and chase,
Run through the shifting tides from the ocean’s waves,
Chase the Sunset, until it disappears over the vast ocean Horizon.
At the end of nature’s road, you find and Inspire,
Find the nature within yourself,
Inspire others and prepare them
For the journey Down Nature’s Road.

***Honorable Mention, Senior Division
Asa Ryce, Grade 9
Academy of the Redwoods***

“The Buckeye”

Nature is a beautiful thing, full of wonders. Ancient groves, colossal mountains, crystal blue lakes, and the most intricate, prideful birds you could ever imagine. In my eyes, one of its most amazing pieces of magic is the buckeye tree. A fascinating tree that lives in the rolling valleys near my home. The buckeye tree looks similar to a very old, branchy white oak, only smaller. It almost looks like a giant bush, because from the very base it splits into many different large branches. It makes the tree look portioned when it’s grown. These branches constantly grow off into new branches, up to the very tip. At the tip of a branch, there are over a hundred thin, spindly, white branches. They all drape to the ground, making the tree look weighed down. It gives

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the tree a most elegant appearance. In the winter the buckeye tree casts a dancing shadow, waving its abundance of branches in every which way. My favorite time to see a buckeye tree is in the spring. In the beginning of March, the buckeyes start to leaf out. It is truly one of the most stunning sights. All across the branchy, naked tree, small emerald buds appear and slowly open up. Tiny, verdant specks that make the trees pop in contrast to the golden meadows. Each day the buds will slowly unfold, daringly reaching out until they've become splendid, lime green fan leaves. To watch a buckeye tree slowly be enveloped in a prolific, emerald blanket is one of the most amazing miracles. Simply imagining it makes me feel the essence of spring. I think of those golden days in the meadow, sitting under the thick, leafy umbrella of a buckeye. The sun shining brilliantly through the leaves, a balmy breeze passing through, rustling leaves. There's songbirds in all of the trees singing harmonious melodies, and ethereal butterflies fluttering all around in the most graceful manner. All of the wildflowers are reappearing, small gems of purple, pink, and red hidden in the grass. It's a beautiful thing, never once have I felt so peaceful.



***Honorable
Mention,
Senior Division
Olivia Horn
Grade 9,
McKinleyville
High School***

“What Nature Means to Me”

I personally enjoy observing nature. And by observing nature I mean I wander around outside pretending to be a wood nymph and make offerings to the goddess of nature. Honestly, it's all I do when I go outside with my friends, really.

For example, one time my friend and I were at the beach and we climbed a small mountain/hill, where we found some stuff that people left behind. We then went to a secret cave we found and decided to hang up our treasures there and make it our fort. We then were terrorized by some brats, so we did the completely rational thing and tried to tell them that we were “evil witches from the dark seas, who have crawled onto this Earth and taken residence here, to **eat small children.**” Needless to say, they left us alone after that.

There was another time when my friend and I (different friend) decided to put her journal that we were supposed to mess up inside a tire and roll it down a hill. I don't exactly know how that counts as observing nature but we were outside so I'm going to count it.

There was another incident that happened a while ago, where “beach friend” and I were on a nature walk, and we decided to grab random things from nature. Things like a fern, an acorn, a leaf, etc. When we got back, we chose to do the thing that any completely sane person would do in our situation. We sacrificed our findings to the nature goddess and became Faeries for the rest of the day. Then we went swimming and we kept trying to drown each other with our inner tube, so that was definitely fun.

So in conclusion, my connection with nature is my connection to the waves. My friend and I were at the beach, and we were playing in the waves. My feet were so cold it was like they were dead. Then we named the waves. Pepito is the smallest (and our favorite) and Stacy was bullying him. (We don't like Stacy.) We were playing fetch with the waves, and we were feeding them. Honestly, it was really fun. So there, that's the end of my essay, I hope you enjoyed it!



***Honorable Mention,
Senior Division
William Hufford
Grade 9,
McKinleyville
High School***

“Duck Hunting in the Snow”

Have you ever asked yourself, what is it like to duck hunt in the snow? Well, if you have, I'm about to answer your question in this narrative about the experience my Dad and I had.

The first interesting thing I remember super clearly is what it was like when it first started snowing. It was pouring down rain on us, then it stopped for a minute or so. Then I started feeling something but it wasn't wet and fast. It was mellow and the snow wasn't awesome. It was slushy and freezing when it touched your skin. Since we were right next to the ocean, the air smelled very salty.

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After a while when the ducks started to slow down their flying, my dad and I decided to walk to the other fields that we have. Walking through the grass and water was really weird compared to what we were used to. Since the snow was really slushing it made the water thick. Walking through it made clumps of ice form on our waders. The grass crunched under our feet from the cold. When my dad and I were walking we saw some ducks. The ducks were in a little pond surrounded by bulrushes. So, me and my dad figured out a plan. Since I was little and didn't have my hunting license, I was going to go around and scare the ducks toward my dad so they would either swim closer to him, or fly over him. The plan worked and he shot one of them. I was super excited, so I ran out into the pond and grabbed the duck. His feathers were cold but they were still soft. They weren't crunchy like my hair, or the grass.

The ducks landing in the water in front of us was the most satisfying thing. The squishiness of the water rippled out in front of them. Or the slushy water flying off their wings when they flew off. The sounds of the gunshots cracking out in the sky. The tiny flame you see comes out of the barrel. It's all the craziest experience. The locals often say that in Orick, it only snows every 10 years. Now I can see why they care so much.

I hope now that you know a little more about what it would be like to duck hunt in Orick when it's snowing. I really hope that someday someone gets another experience like the one I had. I hope someday in the next ten years I will get another chance just like that one. Good luck out there.



***Honorable Mention,
Senior Division***

Lauren Guynup

***Grade 11,
McKinleyville
High School***

“What Nature Means to Me”

I grew up on a ranch, above the valley, spent every morning watching the fog settle below us, down the mountain. I saw animals every day, from the baby bears crawling past my Grandmother's living room windows every spring, to the ducks swimming across the pond. I watched out my window when we had bull elk sleeping in our yard every morning for months at a time. I watched my puppy chase,

hate, and ultimately love the company of his one fellow elk. I saw deer in the yard on the way home from school. I saw little bunnies scurry across the gravel road to cross. I looked forward to seeing the bear cubs crawling up the trees to reach the apples and watching the crows eat the cherries as the tree started to blossom.

There were always people and their horses on the trails and fish in the pond. I looked forward to the nights my Dad would take me for a ride to drive the trails, to see a bear or mountain lion out walking around. I would watch for the new fawns with the doe in spring. Walking home from school, I would sing to warn the mountain lions that I was there. Because I had always been told to make yourself known before walking by yourself in a dark forest. I especially practiced this after stumbling upon a bear just a little ahead on the trail from me. As I got older, my Dad would occasionally let me cut and limb out the way with the chainsaw and let me drive the side-by-side. The place I was raised in was definitely taken for granted a couple times as I got older and had made friends nowhere in walking distance, but I never resented it. I knew it was such a privilege to have these experiences that were so beautiful to me.

Nature became a calm place for me, an escape when the house felt crowded or got a little rowdy. Looking at the stars while holding my puppy was such a calming feeling that I never really felt anywhere else. Going on walks in the forest was so peaceful, a place my mind would stop racing with thoughts, a place that I felt free from as much worry. Spending time outside the doors of my home always allowed me to feel completely myself, and that is what nature means to me. It means nostalgia, peace, and independence. So without it, I fear I would have never found my place within my mind.