



**Teacher Guide**  
**Milwaukee Public Library/Milwaukee Public Museum**  
**Youth Poetry Contest 2019**

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**The Theme**

The contest theme is: **How do you see yourself in the natural world?**

Believe it or not, we all see ourselves in nature every day -- whether you live on a farm, in the suburbs, or in the middle of the city.

You live in the city and don't get into nature much? You're immersed in it more than you think. Every time you look out the window, you see it. Every time you step outdoors, you're surrounded by it. By one viewpoint, even cities are considered "natural."

Even if you live in the city, you'd likely be amazed at the number of different kinds of wild animals that live there, too. Some examples are hawks, owls, raccoons, opossum, turkeys, deer, and even fox and coyote.

Is there an urban forest near you? Is there a park in your neighborhood? Does it have a pond or swamp or creek? Is it near a river or Lake Michigan?

As noted above, nature surrounds us, and we're all a part of it, always.

**Competition Overview**

This year, the Milwaukee Public Museum and Milwaukee Public Library will co-sponsor a student poetry competition as part of the Field Work MKE Project



(<http://www.fieldworkmke.org>). This project is presented in partnership with Poets House, a national literary center in New York City, and is funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

The competition welcomes submissions of original poems from Milwaukee County students ages 7-18 from March 1 through April 15, 2019. Students are encouraged to explore the natural world through the lens of poetry by writing an original poem answering the guiding question: How do you see yourself in the natural world?

The contest culminates with a poetry slam inviting participants to read and share their winning poems.

### **Student Objectives**

1. Students will explore the natural world, and their place in it, through the application of creative language arts, writing and crafting an original poem in response.
2. Students will engage in poetic expression through a competition format.

### **Assessment**

1. The student can identify and provide contextual background on a specified theme used as the subject, or inspiration, for an original poem.
2. The student can compose an original piece demonstrating creativity, imagery, artistic quality, and a sense of poetic expression.

### **Teacher Preparation**

This contest provides teachers with a context to construct an interdisciplinary approach to achieving learning objectives. Curriculum framed around the competition can support literacy, the writing process, research skills, and critical thinking. Collaboration and small group work experience are also supported through this activity.

Teachers are encouraged to review the Poetry Contest Teacher Guide, including the submission guidelines, and cover it with the students. Any style of poetry is acceptable. Please note, however, that all poems must focus on the competition theme, and may not exceed 30 lines in length (see “Submission Guidelines” below).

Teachers are also encouraged to review a selection of winning poems from past MPM competitions, which may be found at <https://www.mpm.edu/poetry>.

### **Suggested Texts**

The following books may be useful in inspiring students to contemplate the natural world—and one’s place in it—through creative language arts:

- *Art & Nature: An Illustrated Anthology of Nature Poetry* by Metropolitan Museum of Art (Contributor), Kate Farrell (Contributor)
- *Earthbound* by Dee LeRoy
- *National Geographic Book of Nature Poetry: More than 200 Poems With Photographs That Float, Zoom, and Bloom!* by J. Patrick Lewis
- *Nature Poetry: An International Anthology of Poems on the Natural World* by Z Poetry
- *News of the Universe* edited by Robert Bly
- *Sing a Song of Seasons: A Nature Poem for Each Day of the Year* by Nosy Crow, edited by Fiona Waters, illustrated by Frann Preston-Gannon
- *Talking to the Sun: An Illustrated Anthology of Poems for Young People* edited by Kenneth Koch and Kate Farrell

Following are three poems in which the poet writes about seeing him or herself in nature. Note that not all the poems are set outdoors. In fact, in one of them, the poet sees himself as part of nature while standing at the kitchen stove. Notice, though, how in each poem, the poet finds him or herself either entering the natural world, or standing just at its edge.

### *Sleeping in the Forest*

By Mary Oliver, from *Dream Work*

*I thought the earth remembered me,  
she took me back so tenderly,  
arranging her dark skirts, her pockets  
full of lichens and seeds.  
I slept as never before, a stone on the river bed,  
nothing between me and the white fire of the stars  
but my thoughts, and they floated light as moths  
among the branches of the perfect trees.  
All night I heard the small kingdoms  
breathing around me, the insects,  
and the birds who do their work in the darkness.  
All night I rose and fell, as if in water,  
grappling with a luminous doom. By morning  
I had vanished at least a dozen times  
into something better.*

### *A Cup of Tea*

By Richard Hedderman, from *The Discovery of Heaven*

*When I stand at the stove*

*and pour you a cup of tea,*

*I am a tree bending low  
over swampy ground.*

*All around me, leaves steep  
in a cold mist.*

*Steam swirls quickly up  
into the air,*

*unravels its first sentence.  
Rising, it turns into light,*

*and the light becomes chill air  
leading me*

*into black night  
and the vault of stars beyond.*

*This is the first lesson  
of true living*

### A Blessing

By James Wright, from *The Branch Will Not Break*

*Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,  
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.  
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies  
Darken with kindness.  
They have come gladly out of the willows  
To welcome my friend and me.  
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture  
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.  
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness  
That we have come.  
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.  
There is no loneliness like theirs.  
At home once more,  
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.  
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,  
For she has walked over to me  
And nuzzled my left hand.*

*She is black and white,  
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,  
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear  
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.  
Suddenly I realize  
That if I stepped out of my body I would break  
Into blossom.*

### **Poetry Vocabulary**

Alliteration—repetition of initial consonant sounds in a group of successive words.

Ekphrasis—poetry or other literature written about works of art such as a painting, sculpture, vase, etc.

End-stopped line—a line of verse which ends with a grammatical break such as a comma, colon, semicolon, or period, for example.

Enjambment—the continuation of a sentence or phrase across a line break, as opposed to an end-stopped line.

Free verse—poetry that does not follow a fixed metrical pattern.

Iambic pentameter—a line of verse that consists of five iambs (an iamb being one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed, such as "before").

Imagery—the creation of visual images using words in a poem or other literary form.

Line break—the end of a line of poetry; the technique with which a poet decides where to end a line of poetry.

Metaphor—a direct comparison of unlike things without using the words "like" or "as."

Meter—the regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that make up a line of poetry.

Onomatopoeia—a word that imitates the sound it represents, such as "pop," "boom," or "bang," for example.

Personification—giving human qualities or characteristics to objects.

Repetition—using the same words or phrases in the same poem or stanza of a poem.

Rhyme—a pattern of words that contains similar sounds at the end of the line.

Rhyme scheme—a repeated pattern of rhymed words at the end of the line.

Simile—comparing two dissimilar things using “like” or “as.”

Stanza—a group of poetic lines.

Verse—either a definite number of lines of poetry, or a general term for poetic composition.

### How to Enter the Competition

- Submit poetry electronically, only, through the following link:  
<http://www.mpl.org/poetrycontest>
- *Please do not send hard copies or email submissions!*
- Submissions will be accepted from March 1 through April 15, 2019. Submission received after this date will not be considered.

### Submission Guidelines

- Submissions will only be accepted from Milwaukee County students ages 7-18.
- All submissions must be word-processed. Single-spaced text is acceptable.
- Poems may not exceed 30 lines.
- All submissions must show the student’s name, age, town or city, and email address at the top right corner of the page.
- If the work is submitted by the student’s teacher, the name of the school, the teacher’s name and e-mail address, and school phone number must appear at the top right corner of the page.
- Each poem must have a title.
- Poetry must be the original work of the student and may not have been previously published anywhere.
- **Please avoid:** Decorative fonts, illustrations, and colored paper, which make submissions more difficult to read.
- **NOTE:** Each poem *must* reflect the contest theme “How do you see yourself in the natural world?” Poems not focusing on this theme will not be considered.

- We are sorry, but we cannot return original entries or comment on submissions.
- Winners will be notified by email. Teachers of winning students will be notified by email.

### **Contact Us**

For more information, please contact:

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