



# 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



***Honorable Mention,  
Junior Division  
Cooper Black  
Grade 4,  
Morris Elementary  
School***

***“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.



***Honorable Mention,  
Junior Division  
Tallulah Grantham  
Grade 5,  
Jacoby Creek  
Elementary School***

***“What Nature Means to Me”***

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...  
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.



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

***“What Nature Means to Me”***

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  
Shuhan Hunter  
Grade 7,  
Northcoast  
Preparatory Academy***

***“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

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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



***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.

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  
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...

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~Robin~

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."



***Honorable Mention,  
Senior Division  
Grace Talty  
Grade 11,  
Arcata High School***

***"No More Fishbowl"***

Being locked inside a house like a puppy stuck in a kennel or a beta fish in a bowl is the way many people are living during this pandemic. However, thankfully, that's not the situation we are in, living in Humboldt, California. Nature is our haven, our escape from the ultra-complex reality we are living in. The redwoods, our thoughts can be lost in their strength and security. In the ocean, our worries can be rolled away through the tides. On the trails, you can transcend into a new world, like being an animated character in a video game making its way through the levels on a Nintendo-Switch or an Xbox

One. I find myself going to all three of these places repeatedly in search of fresh air, it's an oasis from the world of twisted facts and twisted people. I pity the people that live in crowded cities without nature, who can't look out from Strawberry Rock and overlook the redwoods or watch the sunrise from Top of the World Rock. Humboldtians, if that's what they call them, have the opportunity to embrace nature and embrace the readily available opportunities. If you don't have to live like a constricted beta fish or the millions living in towering cities don't. Nature is essential for one's mental health and is the greatest resource to anyone without having to spend a penny. Taking in fresh air is rejuvenating and that doesn't have to mean climbing up to the top of Mount. Everest. For me, that's walking to my next-door pig farm with my dog in between zooms. Some may not think that's nature, my next-door pig farm because it's not extreme or extravagant enough. Nature, to me, is getting off my overused computer and my worn-down house and being able to open my door to the fresh air. That's it. Simple. When you get out of your house, open the door to the fresh air that awaits, the buzzing bees, and the diverse plant life you are in nature. Embrace nature if the opportunity is available, walk outside to the fresh air, and get out of the fishbowl that has become your life.



***Honorable Mention,  
Senior Division  
Chiara Ennis  
(aka Kiki Raindrop)  
Grade 12,  
Northern United  
Charter School***

***"Heartbeat"***

I sigh in content, grateful for the awe-striking place that I get to grow up in and for my parents who risked everything to make sure that we could have it. Ever since I was young, I have loved running through the woods barefoot, covered in leaves and dirt. Becoming a native Chief helping build shelters for my people, or a wolf howling at a full moon. Nature became my friend. I was always shy towards other people, but nature and all of its creatures always seemed so welcoming to me.

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

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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.