



20th Annual RRAS Nature Writing Contest

*Results for 2025: Winners & Honorable Mentions for
Junior (Grades 4-7) and Senior (Grades 8&9) Divisions*

Entries of essays and poems were significantly up (from last year's 25 to 75) submissions. RRAS awarded six cash prizes (totaling \$100) plus five Honorable Mentions to the following students who explored the topic, "What Nature Means to Me."



***First Place,
Junior Division
Annika Terry
Grade 5,
Garfield
Elementary***

"Listen"

The Earth. The sustainer of all life sources.
Nature, the thing our species is destroying. Maybe
one day we will have to fly to another planet, flee
the home that we have destroyed.

Mother Nature is trying to tell us something, so I
try to listen.

The forest feels gentle when I am angry. As if
trying to soothe me, to say "Child, there is no need.
Be calm." The ocean flows with my emotions.

Washing away the tears I cry. A thousand winds
whisper in my ear when I feel I am losing. They
say, "One tiny breeze in a million gusts, if it just
speaks up, it can make a hurricane."

A fire. Warming me and my friends and family.
Bringing us together. We repay the fire by listening
to what it has to say. It tells us that there is
nothing holding us back, that we can forge a path
forward to whatever destination ignites our hearts.

A meadow. The flowers dance in the breeze. Their
whispery voices sing songs that carry on the wind.
Washing through you like a wave of sounds saying,
"Don't wait to grow, no matter what they say."

A river. It flows like happiness. It ebbs like fear.
It eddies like confusion. It is a home to many. It

tells us to be open to change, to take the road less
traveled, to be made up of many different things.

A tree. The feeling of the bark under your fingers,
rough but soft. The roots thread through the
ground, connecting to the other trees. They create
a forest. The trunk, worn and weathered, but still
hard and sturdy. Big and strong, the trunk tells us
that it may take time, but you will be brave.

A meadow, a river, a tree. They all have something
to tell us. And we should listen. Many people
get stressed and do not see the beauty that is all
around them. I try to see the beauty.

That is what nature means to me.



***Second Place,
Junior Division
Penn Kerhoulas
Grade 5,
Garfield
Elementary***

"What Nature Means to Me"

Cool coarse leaves shift under me as I lie back in
the mountain of wild ginger that surrounds me.
White yellow flowers spill from the leafy heart of
the unruly green heart-shaped leaves. A red bristly
redwood needle floats down through the warm
summer evening, the smell of wood smoke weaves
through the tall redwoods and flows through my
nose. Hundred-foot-tall trees tower above me, the
rich color of the lavish red-brown bark fills my wide
blue eyes.

(continued on page 2)

A monarch butterfly flutters its silky orange and black wings as it glides over me and lands on a nearby huckleberry bush laden with sweet, black, juicy berries. As I lie in the soft summer twilight I think of the ground beneath me, how many generations of spiky redwood leaves lie under me? Even now they are slowly deteriorating into the moist brown soil.

My dark silky hair is splayed around me. I carelessly brush a piece behind my ear and feel a stray redwood needle caught in the soft strands. The dampness of the ground is slowly spreading up through my shirt to my back. Far above me tiny water drops glisten as they revolve slowly around themselves.

Thick golden light is spread as though by a butter knife along the trees surrounding me. I feel eyes watching me and sit up to see the dark quick eyes of two young deer who have been coolly regarding me for the past few minutes, their small brown bodies laid under the shade of a young supple hemlock tree. They watch me for a moment and then return to their grazing low grass.

I let my breath out slowly and then pull it back in. I breathe in the sharp smell of the wild ginger around me, with its soft full flowers encasing me. I feel the wet leaves under me that are cooling me from the warm mid-August air. And I hear, I can hear everything, fluttering wings above me, the crawl of insects around me, the rustle of the rough ferns, the trickle of the spring, the drip-drip of orange clay that has formed a tunnel after years of the spring water flowing down it, the hazy buzz of flies, the careful steps of the young deer, and breath, my breath, my breath intertwines with the other magical noises of the forest.

I close my eyes and see my breath, warm golden wisps that are in a way a part of me. I can see them swirling calmly into the other noises, intertwining, I feel like I am a part of the forest's song. I open my eyes and the golden wisps of breath are replaced by strands of wood smoke curling far above me, but I can still hear the forest's beautiful song. The song of the forest is what nature means to me.



***Third Place,
Junior Division
Orion Assam
Grade 6,
Alder Grove
Charter***

"What Nature Means to Me"

When you think of amazing images of nature, what comes to mind? Majestic waterfalls? Endless forests? Stunning wildlife images? Those are all great images of nature. But you want to know what really impresses me, a kid who has grown up living among the vast mountains of Northern California and sees some of the best images nature has to offer?

For me, nature is the most stunning when it's least expected. A tiny dandelion managing to flourish along the edge of a parking lot. The tuft of moss staking its home on a piece of brick wall. A bird's nest in a building's awning. These little glimpses of nature remind me that, even when I'm far from my forest home, nature is still all around. Look closely, and her little reminders will prove that as cute and insignificant as it may seem, nature is an unstoppable force.

Nature is funny like that. At a time where technology is evolving like never before and we find ourselves more and more dependent on strong wi-fi and a full battery signal, I think we tend to forget who is in charge (hint: it's not us). Nature has taught me that while she offers a sense of peace and serenity like none other, she also is happy to humble me when I don't pay attention to her. Like me walking along a trail and getting snagged by some brambles reaching out. It's as if she says, "Pay attention and don't forget who's in charge."

Despite our material, man-made pursuits, nature will forever continue to announce herself. I'm thankful for that. She gives me a sense of calm and peace that no app can even come close to. But I know that she's not just a giver, she can be a taker too, and ultimately those who respect her will reap her rewards.

Because in the end, she's not going anywhere. Our illusions of control probably come off as a funny (but tacky) joke to her. You gotta love her for her sense of humor, wonder and creation. And ultimately, she is the one who gets the last laugh.



***Honorable
Mention, Junior
Division
Daisy Eldridge
Grade 7,
Agnes J. Johnson
Charter***

“What Nature Means to Me”

Trees swaying, water rushing, birds flying by, rubble falling, animals communicating, and the fresh sweet smell of nature, nature is where we belong. The trees swaying in the crisp wind make me feel at peace while I watch the salamanders crawl by. I feel intrigued by the sound of the rushing river, glistening through the trees. The feel of cold water surrounded by evergreen botany, the slick and slimy scales of a minnow swimming through my fingers. Nature is mysterious and magical; just like a book where you will never know what you will find on the next page.

The rubble falling under my weight as I stumble upon a flower meadow filled with butterflies and dragonflies. A dragonfly lands on my nose as a hummingbird whizzes past then stops for a drink of nectar. I hear a fox squeaking as I walk along, taking in all the beautiful sights nature created. I see a few beautiful blossoming lily trees covered by a mossy overgrowth making me think of fairies. The sound of the wind blowing in my ears makes me feel calm and reminds me that nature doesn't care who we are or what we do, nature is an accepting place where we can be ourselves without worry of being different.

Rain, of the sweet, crisp, and fresh smell filling the forest as I slip into a puddle and find myself cowering under the forest giants above me. Dew covers the flawed and imperfect mushrooms but that's what makes them special. I walk into a grove, the pine needles crunching below me, the rest of the forest being engulfed by ferns. A trash panda crawls up a tree but this tree is different. It is growing through a fence! When I saw that tree it showed me that when something happens or is trying to stop nature, nature doesn't mind. It's just a minor inconvenience after all or only a chapter in its life.

When I was walking I met a huge fallen tree and when I went around it I fell into a pond. When I came up I was in a crystal cave! I was fascinated by the cave so I decided to traverse through it. I saw the most beautiful glistening crystals, making me

feel like I was in a surreal fantasy. When I went further into the cave I happened upon the slightly blinding sea. I studied the magnificent creatures and landforms at the sea, being reminded that that was nature's wonderful work. We should respect nature as it is and not criticize it because this is what nature intended to make: imperfect landforms and creatures. Imperfection is beautiful.

Nature is like a teacher; it teaches us that no one is perfect. We all have a few flaws, but it's okay because no one has to "fit in." We find people who love us for who we are. Nature is birth, death, and rebirth, so we should respect it like it's mother.



***Honorable
Mention, Junior
Division
Cedar Farrell
Grade 6, Garfield
Elementary***

“What Nature Means to Me”

Birds twittering outside with the rosy morning light
The roar of the Pacific Ocean and the smell of salt on the breeze
The calm quiet of the morning and the cool sand under your feet
The shocking cold of the water
Waves splashing around you as you paddle out past the breakers
A swell rising up in front of you
Spinning around, waiting, waiting...paddling as hard as you possibly can
The wave catching you and thrusting you forward
Standing up and shooting down the line as spray stings your eyes
Surfing until lunchtime
Sweet watermelon juice dripping down your chin as you bask like a lizard in the heat of the day
Back in the water, hungry for the thrill of catching a wave
Delicious rockfish dripping with lemon and butter for dinner
The ocean singing you goodnight



***First Place,
Senior Division
Asriel Martin
Grade 9,
McKinleyville High***

“A Crow’s Memory”

Did you know that crows can remember people? Well, they can; crows have extremely impressive memories. They can even hold grudges and pass along information to other members of their murder. They are very intelligent, interesting creatures. My story is about how I learned that.

I was nervous the first day of high school, especially knowing it’d be my last school before college. I noticed the crows as soon as I got there, in the field near the entrance, a few of them turning their heads up before going back to what they’d been doing. It was almost a week later that one of the crows approached me, outside of the library on a bench as I ate my breakfast. I had gotten there early and hadn’t seen many kids in the halls when I had come in, so the feeling of something hitting the side of my arm was enough to startle me.

However, when I turned around to look, I found a small blue-eyed crow perched on the bench beside me, staring up at me expectantly and waiting. I wasn’t sure what to do at first. I silently stared back at her for a moment before realizing that the thing she seemed to want was most likely my own breakfast. Curious to see what would happen, I broke off a piece and tossed it onto the ground. Her attention quickly turned from me to the food, hopping down from the bench and pecking at it before picking it up in her beak, tilting her head up and flying away.

After that I figured if just one of them was hungry enough to hit me the others must be too. I started picking up extra bags of grapes from the cafeteria at lunch and heading outside to feed the crows. A couple weeks went by and they started showing up before I did, following me around the school, and bringing small trinkets for me—one of them even managed to follow me into a hallway outside the school gym. After a while it became a sort of routine, me bringing them food and them leaving gifts. One day, I realized that I’d lost one of my rings, a small silver one in the shape of two leaves that a friend gave me the year before.

I spent all day looking for it but no matter where I looked I couldn’t find it anywhere. Two days later, I’d just finished setting out fruit for my crows when I noticed they’d left more of their “gifts.” As I kneeled down I noticed something else along with the other gifts they had brought me: my ring! Since then I have continued to visit and feed the crows every single day.

So, to answer in short, what nature means to me is that if you care for something it will care for you in return.



***Second Place,
Senior Division
Thea McKnight
Grade 8, Sunny Brae
Middle School***

“The Other Side of the Storm”

I love storms. The swirling clouds spreading across rain swollen skies hypnotize me. The jagged slashes of rain falling haphazardly across the heavens seem almost like a message, left behind from some long-forgotten god. The sound of rain lulls me to sleep, lightning the frenzied stroke of a master artist’s brush. Growing up in Arcata, you’d think I’d grow tired of the rain, and long for a warmer climate. And sure, there are those gloomy grey days of constant downpour where I wish for sun. However, I never tire of the storms. I love howling winds and ice-cold nights. But I wasn’t always this way.

I still remember how afraid I used to be. But everything changed one cold day.

I was crying. I was only five, huddled in my bed like it was my only safe haven, and I was terrified. I don’t know if my small heart associated the sounds of thunder with pain or war. I don’t know if my tiny hands were wrapped fiercely around my favorite stuffed animal. But I remember the fear.

After a while, my mom came to see if I wanted to sit on the porch swing and listen to the thunder. I shook my head. She even offered to read to me.

“No!” I refused, overtaken by mindless fear.

Eventually, the rain lessened. Miniature rivers of water flowed down the street; the thunder was perhaps more subdued. Somehow curiosity got the

(continued on page 5)

better of me. I slipped out of my room, and in an uncharacteristically quiet voice asked my mom if she would still read to me. She agreed.

So I sat outside with my mom, on the old porch swing with its peeling paint, under the overhang of the roof. Halfway through the book I had relaxed enough to look up at the sky. A book and a half later, my tears had dried. Several pages after that, my fear was replaced with curiosity.

And I learned to love storms. I learned to see the skies like a story, nature in its purest form. Nature, to me, is something unpredictable and wild, something wonderful that no one can control or harness.

Every storm will teach you something, if only you are brave enough to face it. When everything feels like it's crashing down, find the beauty in little things, like flowers outside your window, or the smile of a stranger. Before you reach the top of the mountain, there will be a storm, but nature is both storms and sunshine. Without one there can't be the other, so if you've hit rock bottom and the walls are closing in, just remember that on the other side, there is happiness, and all you must do is face the storm.

I looked up to the skies, and I wasn't afraid of the torrents of rain, or the lightning and thunder. The clouds parted and a ray of light shone through. On the other side of the storm, the sun always shines.



***Third Place,
Senior Division
Easton Pifferini
Grade 9,
McKinleyville High***

"Measuring Redwood Trees"

Redwood trees are basically fire resistant, which I learned during a school trip to Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. Although I lived near redwoods my whole life, I never took the time to appreciate them until this trip.

It was almost noon, I just sat down in my science class, the bell rings and everyone settles down. I watch as my teacher Mr. R walks to the front of the class. He starts announcing that we will all be going on a field trip in a few days to Prairie Creek. I instantly felt uninterested and looked at my friends. I expressed how I was uninterested and the field trip may be boring. My friend Emily looked at me and answered, "You're acting like you will be bored out of your head, don't be a baby." I sighed and looked

at my friend Lilah. Lilah mentioned, "It's only a couple hours, we might see elk." I could tell Lilah understood why I didn't want to go, but she didn't want me to miss out on the field trip. I was more interested to go on a fun field trip but I told myself a couple hours wouldn't hurt.

On the day of the field trip, I was initially still uninterested, but my friends Lilah and Emily encouraged me to join. After a forty-minute hot bus ride, we arrived to find massive trees and a refreshing breeze. Our teacher, Mr. R, split us into groups, and I was with Mr. Kapp, my English teacher. We found a calm spot in the forest where we wrote about the sounds of nature.

Later, we hiked up a steep trail where we saw fascinating plants, including trillium flowers, which I had never seen before. The trillium flowers had large white petals. I was amazed to see such an interesting flower. Afterward, we measured a redwood tree with Mr. R. While doing this, I spotted Roosevelt elk laying in the field. As we shared our height estimates for the tree, Mr. R humorously revealed the actual height, leading to laughter. We were all very far away from the real height. Mr. R began telling us some interesting redwood facts. That's when I learned redwood trees are fire resistant because of a chemical infused into the bark.

Suddenly, the elk rose and stared at us, causing some panic. We walked slowly back to the bus, and I felt sad to leave after such an enjoyable experience. Reflecting on the trip, I realized that my initial lack of interest had kept me from discovering something amazing.

I now remind myself to try new things, because I could be missing out on new experiences or opportunities. If I didn't go to Prairie Creek I would have missed the interesting nature and fun activities. I learned that trying new things can lead to great discoveries about yourself and the world around you.



***Honorable Mention,
Senior Division
Bowdy Hicks
Grade 9,
McKinleyville High***

“My First Buck”

As the opening day of hunting season approached, I was getting very excited. Would I get a buck this year? I get to hunt Grandpa’s new property and get to check out a bunch of new spots. Hopefully I will be ready if I see one; sometimes things happen when you least expect.

It was a Sunday around 4:30 pm and it was about 65 degrees. Me, my dad, and grandpa were driving a side-by-side in the woods. We were on a drive around the land looking at the new equipment that my grandpa just brought.

As we drove down the dirt road, the sun was shining and it was peaceful outside. We were surrounded by nature. I had grabbed my rifle before we left the house in hopes that I would be lucky enough to shoot my first deer. Just as we were going over a hill, my grandpa said “Oh look, a buck.”

I hopped out of the side-by-side, quietly crouched behind a stump, raised my rifle and pulled the trigger. The feeling I felt was intense, adrenaline was rushing and I couldn’t believe I just shot at my first buck. My dad, grandpa and myself ran up the hill to where the deer was laying. I could tell how proud my dad and grandpa were of me. They both got out their cameras and took pictures of me and my first buck and sent it back to the house where my mom and grandma were.

As the rush of shooting my first buck was wearing off I realized that the work wasn’t done yet. We dragged the deer to the road and loaded it in the side-by-side. Then we drove it to where the excavator was sitting and were able to use the equipment to help gut out the deer. My dad called my cousins to let them know I got my first deer and they agreed to help skin and prepare it to be sent to the butcher. We drove the deer to my cousins and seeing the look of excitement on their faces made me realize that they were as happy for me as I was for myself.

Since I was little I have been watching my uncles, cousins and friends shoot bucks, I always imagined I would shoot one but didn’t know when it would happen. I think it was extra special to be in the moment with my dad and grandpa, to be on his

property that he is taking care of for our family. I will never forget the intense feeling of pulling the trigger and shooting my first buck ever. Buck fever is something that I know now exists. There is something special about your first deer and sharing the memory with those closest to you.



***Honorable Mention,
Senior Division
Molly Everett
Grade 8, Agnes J.
Johnson Charter***

“What Nature Means to Me”

Solitude can be bitter, like burnt, sour lemons.
Or it can be sweet, like the flavor of toasted caramel.

Solitude can be the harsh, piercing winds of winter.
Or it can be the warm, gentle whoosh of a summer breeze.

Whichever opinion you may contain, solitude to me is the absence of pressure and guidelines. And the only place I find such qualities is raw, alluring nature.

Nature has many sides to itself, much like humans. It could be cold and unforgiving, or it could be warm and liberating.

But it is always itself, I can rely on nature. Even its uglier qualities.

Its teeth-rattling cold streams, for example, its frigid waters soak into your flesh, blood and bone. And its overwhelming heat that sets your rib cage and heart ablaze.

But nature can also listen.

Its winds may hum into your ear as your body lay still on the forgiving grass.

And you feel that you belong.



***Honorable Mention,
Senior Division***

Vida Walsh

***Grade 9, Academy
of the Redwoods***

“What Nature Means to Me”

To me nature means jumping into the river at the beginning of summer as the heat of the day is at its peak and diving down until pushing off the bottom to come bursting out. Hunting for odd-colored rocks, seeing the ducks bobbing on the water, the occasional bald eagle or kingfisher swooping by, getting out of the water to climb up a little sandstone ledge and get ripe blackberries.

It means smelling the redwoods and finding a hidden grove of redwood lilies, waking up to birds singing, sometimes annoyingly loud. Nature is where I'm at home, it's where I grew up surrounded by trilliums, huckleberries, and thimbleberries. Rain and snow, warm breezes, the smell of the first days of spring in the air. Mosquitoes, deer, and pileated woodpeckers.

To me nature means love, light and calm. Summer stargazing, fun, and friendship. Nature is where I grew up, it is where I have always felt at home. To me it's part of who I am and where I get to be myself in a way I don't anywhere else. Joy, fun, sadness, pain, and everything else can be found in it. Nature is all encompassing.