



ILLINOIS
HUMANITIES

Welcome to the **GWENDOLYN BROOKS YOUTH POETRY AWARDS TOOLKIT**

This guide is designed for educators, librarians, and parents to support Illinois' young writers as they develop their poetry writing skills and prepare submissions for the Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards competition, presented by Illinois Humanities. We hope you will find both inspiration and useful information in the pages that follow.

Ready to submit a poem?

Visit [ILHUMANITIES.ORG/POETRY](https://ilhumanities.org/poetry)



GWENDOLYN BROOKS YOUTH POETRY AWARDS TOOLKIT

Gwendolyn Brooks began the Youth Poetry Awards in 1969 during her tenure as Illinois Poet Laureate and continued to administer the awards until her passing in 2000.

The original youth poetry awards were born out of Ms. Brooks' belief that a poet laureate, "should do more than wear a crown — [she] should be of service to the young."

In 2017, in honor of the centennial of Ms. Brooks's birth, Illinois Humanities joined with the Poetry Foundation, Brooks Permissions, and the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts to revive the awards to honor the tremendous legacy of Gwendolyn Brooks, the first Black author to win a Pulitzer Prize, and celebrate and amplify the words and experiences of young poets from across Illinois. In the seven years since the revival of the awards, nearly 3000 poems have been submitted by K-12 poets across the state.

Share your own poetry writing tips with us by tagging us on social media at @ILHumanities or emailing communications@ILHumanities.org — we'd love to celebrate our educators and the ways you're engaging young people with poetry!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About Illinois Humanities and Gwendolyn Brooks **2**

Poetry Advice & Prompts **3**

Sample Winning Poems **6**

Competition Timeline, Process, & Rubric **9**

Information and promotional materials **11**

Paper submission form **13**

Thank you for participating in this program. We look forward to reading the poetry of Illinois' young writers and to celebrating the hard work you put into supporting them!



ABOUT ILLINOIS HUMANITIES

Illinois Humanities is a statewide nonprofit organization that activates the humanities through **free public programs, grants,** and **educational opportunities** that spark conversation, foster reflection, build community, and strengthen civic engagement **for everyone in Illinois.**

Founded in 1974, we are the state partner for the National Endowment for the Humanities and supported by state, federal, and private funds. We provide free, high-quality humanities experiences throughout Illinois, particularly for communities of color, individuals living on low incomes, counties and towns in rural areas, small arts and cultural organizations, and communities highly impacted by mass incarceration. Stay connected with us by subscribing to the Illinois Humanities newsletter at ILHumanities.org/subscribe, and following us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn at [@ILHumanities](https://www.instagram.com/ILHumanities). Visit us online at ILHumanities.org.



ABOUT GWENDOLYN BROOKS

Born in Topeka, Kansas, June 7, 1917, Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks was brought home to Chicago after her first few weeks of life.

The first Black person to win a Pulitzer Prize (1950), she received over seventy honorary degrees as well as many other honors and awards, including Poet Laureate of Illinois, National Women's Hall of Fame inductee, an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, the National Medal of Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities' Jefferson Award and Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. Ms. Brooks published more than 20 works including several books of poetry for adults and children, one novel, writing manuals, and two volumes of an autobiography. She taught at several colleges and universities and created countless awards to inspire and support writers, young and old.

To date, five schools have been named after her, as well as the Illinois State Library and several other libraries and cultural centers.

POETRY ADVICE AND PROMPTS

In fall 2023, Illinois Humanities surveyed poetry educators from across Illinois to gather advice and ideas for how best to guide and mentor our budding, young poets. With enormous gratitude to those who shared their wisdom, here is what they offered.

Find more suggestions and prompts on our website at ILHumanities.org/Poetry.

ADVICE TO EDUCATORS

“Try to have fun with it — share your enthusiasm and interest, which can be contagious in a classroom. Focus on poems with interesting ambiguities and open-endedness that make for good discussions — get students engaged in seeing multiple meanings and tones and implications.”

— Matt Mitchell, University Laboratory High School, 9th-12th Grades,
English/Language Arts

“Educators should feel free to have a balance of thematic topics for students to explore. A multitude of topics allow students to create a diverse portfolio of poetry, and it welcomes them to examine who they are while using a variety of styles and tones. Most students get stuck in the cliché that poems have to be sad or rhyme; in actuality poetry can be any format that helps encapsulate a moment in time or examine who we are.”

— Tim Ochoa, Oswego East High School, Oswego, 10th-12th Grades, Creative Writing,
Spoken Word, English/Language Arts

“Many students think that they are not poets. Get them to write freely, then work with them to arrange the words on paper to create form and rhythm. It’s really easy. Also have students keep a folder of their poems. [Have students] write what comes to mind without thought of punctuation or spelling. Poetry doesn’t have to rhyme.”

— Georgette Lee, Thurgood Marshall Alternative High School (IDJJ)

“It is fun for students to identify poetic structure and patterns then be able to break those rules (but have a reason for doing so). Students enjoy the power to make their own line breaks, stanza length, shape poems.”

— Scott Merrill, Lorca Elementary, Chicago, 3rd-4th Grades, English/Language
Arts/Social Studies

ADVICE TO STUDENTS:

“READ a lot of poetry, take note of what your favorite poems do and how they do it, and try to imitate that.”

— Matt Mitchell, University Laboratory High School, 9th-12th Grades,
English/Language Arts

“Think of each poem as a moment in time and capture everything that’s happening in that moment — sights, sounds, and emotions.”

— Lauren Beitler, Chicago Free School, Chicago, 4th-8th Grades, All Subjects

“I would let them know that what they write at first does not have to be a finished perfect product. Just get your thoughts and ideas down. The poetry process is one that includes sharing, feedback, and revision. Nothing good is written in one sitting. You have the rest of your life to tweak it.”

— David Mathews, Chicago High School for the Arts, 9th-12th Grades, Creative Writing

“Try several forms & write about what you know about. Concrete poems are always a hit. I love a poem about flamingos shaped like a flamingo!”

— Sheryl Miller, Brown County High School, 10th-12th Grades, English/Language Arts



TRIED AND TRUE WRITING PROMPTS:

“Prewriting or Brainstorming: Have you ever had an experience and thought to yourself, I know I’ll never forget this? Or maybe when you’ve done something fun or funny together, your best friend once told you, ‘We have to remember this!’ Or perhaps your parents or grandparents took you to a special place and said something like, ‘I hope you’ll remember this place.’ What kinds of things do you remember from the past few years? What kinds of people or things do you know you might never want to forget? For prewriting, make a list of 6 to 10 people, places, pets, toys, games, events.....anything that is important to you. Then beside the name of each of those things, write a phrase or a few words saying what it is you want to remember about it. People, things, pets. Inspired by Joy Harjo’s poem, ‘Remember’.”

— Kevin Freed, Catherine Cook School

“When starting students with poetry, I really like using the book The Sky Tree. It’s important for students to have catalysts that inspire writing, and they need to have choice. In this first-time writing activity, students can select from different trees and it’s interesting to see how they connect with the mood of each picture. This was an activity that I learned from a creative writing professor. I also like to connect literature with art so I use artwork and develop activities from the Smithsonian Learning Lab to help students with their writing. [LearningLab.si.edu](https://learninglab.si.edu)”

— Yolanda Toni, Fairview South School

“Hear talk in the street. There is much real poetry coming out of the mouths of people in the street. Many cliches, yes, but also vitality and colorful strengths. Your poem does not need to tell your reader everything. A little mystery is fascinating. Too much is irritating.”

— From *SEASONS: A Gwendolyn Brooks Experience*, edited by Nora Brooks Blakely and Cynthia A. Walls. Brooks Permissions and Third World Press Foundation, 2017.

“Poetry HAS a future! You MAY initiate new forms. You MAY create. You do NOT have to consider that ‘everything has been done.’ You do NOT have to write sonnets, villanelles, heroic couplets, haiku, tanka, simply because centuries of poets have written such. Dare to invent something. Understand that somebody invented the sonnet. Understand: the day before the sonnet was invented there was no sonnet.”

— From *SEASONS: A Gwendolyn Brooks Experience*, edited by Nora Brooks Blakely and Cynthia A. Walls. Brooks Permissions and Third World Press Foundation, 2017.

SAMPLE WINNING POEMS

Below is a selection of winning poems from the past few years. Please do not view these as prescriptive! Students should be encouraged to experiment with form, content, and voice.

View even more winning poems online at ILHumanities.org/poetry.

Winter Stuff

Hot chocolate
in
my cup
I was following
the
snowflakes
warm blanket
on
my
face
gingerbread man
running
away
ice-skates
covering
my
feet

— Ava Rucker, 3rd grade (2020 winner)

I'm smiling under my mask

I'm smiling under my mask

Inspired by "Say Thank You Say I'm Sorry" by Jericho Brown

Who is the girl with the orange and pink hair,
who I compliment every time I go through the Starbucks drive-thru.
I only ever see half of her face.

Who is the man who stands at the intersection
between Hollywood and Sheridan.
His suit coat and top hat, fitted with a plume,
always dapper and singing his own tune.

Who are the girls at the track meets,
always oversharing and bonding over nerves.
We exchange compliments and lace up our spikes,
becoming best friends for a fleeting moment before we sprint away.

Who was the father who sacrificed his shoe
for our volleyball, stuck high in the branches at the beach.
We could only thank him briefly— we had to
retreat back to our separate set ups to maintain distancing
in the pandemic.

All the interactions cut short and sweet,
I long for the day when we can openly embrace one another,
sharing smiles instead of elbow bumps.

But for now, we squint over our masks at the world,
like we need sunglasses to see the state of the
globe.

— Liliana Green, 11th Grade (2021 winner)

Todos Somos Americanas: La Historia de Mi Abuela
We Are All Americans: My Grandma's Story

We
Are all Americans
Even out on seas
Mi Abuela says: "Here."
When someone asks: "Where are you from?"
"Puerto Rico"
We
Are all Americans
Remember Roberto Clemente
That baseball star?
We have your autographed picture
Hanging on our wall
Or María Cadilla Colón de Martínez
A women's rights activist?
María Cadilla Colón de Martínez high school
That's where my Abuela went to school
They Are all Americans
They Are all Puerto Ricans
Mi Abuela
Mi Abuelo
Mi Papá
Y yo
Puerto Rico
Unincorporated US territory
You flow through me from island to mainland
Like geese in their triangle formations
Coming back after a long winter
Don't forget
We Are all Americans

— Lyra Rivera, 6th grade (2022 winner)

We Left School

(In honor of Gwendolyn Brooks)

We learned for nine months straight. We
soon will graduate. Real
freedom comes. Cool
weather goes. We
all were happy and left
school real quickly. School
out of our minds. We
only think about summer, lurk
- ing late every day. Late
summer, starting school full of dismay, we
are all sad on our last days. Striking
quickly school arrives. Straight
away for the rest of our lives. We
now adjust to the new format. Singing
Sin.

— Ben Divovich, 8th Grade (2019 winner)

COMPETITION TIMELINE, PROCESS, & RUBRIC

Competition opened in January 2024.

THE DEADLINE TO SUBMIT IS MAY 1, 2024.

Submissions are reviewed in two rounds:

1

First-round judges include past Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Award winners, poetry educators, and Illinois-based students in Master of Fine Arts programs focused on creative writing and poetry.

2

Second-round judges include Nora Brooks Blakely, educator and daughter of Gwendolyn Brooks, as well as representatives from the Poetry Foundation, Logan Center for the Arts at University of Chicago, and Illinois Humanities.

WINNERS WILL BE NOTIFIED IN EARLY AUGUST 2024.

The 8th Annual Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards ceremony will take place at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at University of Chicago on **Saturday, September 14, 2024.**



GWENDOLYN BROOKS YOUTH POETRY AWARDS SCORING RUBRIC

Question	1-2 points	3 points	4-5 points	Points Awarded
How proficient is the poet in technical skill, such as using figurative language (imagery, metaphors, similes), poetic form (acrostic, sonnet, golden shovel, etc.), grammar, and word choice?	The poem's lack of technical proficiency is a significant distraction for the reader.	The poem demonstrates some familiarity with figurative language and/or form and an intention to use these technical skills.	The poem demonstrates an understanding of the technical aspects of poetry and applies it successfully.	out of 5
To what extent does the poet express emotional, intellectual, or imaginative proficiency to engage the reader?	The poem lacks emotional, intellectual, or imaginative proficiency and does not engage the reader.	The poem demonstrates some emotional, intellectual, or imaginative proficiency, but is not particularly engaging.	The poem is especially expressive and engaging.	out of 5
To what extent does the poet convey their own originality, whether through word choice, voice, theme, or observation?	The poem is unoriginal or clichéd.	The poem has elements of originality and personality but is ultimately lacking impact.	The poem could only be written by this author. It is fresh, original, and impactful.	out of 5
Does the poem present a clear theme or message?	The theme or message of the poem, if it exists, does not come through.	There is a theme or message, but it is unoriginal or clichéd.	The poem's themes or message come through clearly and are powerful and/or thought-provoking.	out of 5
Total (This is your final score):				out of 20

SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT THE GWENDOLYN BROOKS YOUTH POETRY AWARDS



Download designs for web and social media by scanning the QR code or visit bit.ly/DownloadGBYPA.

Print the following flyer and share it at your school!





ILLINOIS
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The 8th Annual **GWENDOLYN BROOKS YOUTH POETRY AWARDS**

*Celebrating the power of youth
poetry and honoring Gwendolyn
Brooks' enduring legacy*

DEADLINE: MAY 1, 2024

Win up to \$300 in cash and other prizes!
Submissions are open to all K-12 students in Illinois.
Winners will be celebrated at an award ceremony
in September 2024.

Visit [ILHUMANITIES.ORG/POETRY](https://ilhumanities.org/poetry)
to submit your entry and download
resources for writers and K-12 educators.



Presented by
Illinois Humanities
with support from



UCHICAGOArts



Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards

2023-2024 Submission Form

The contest is open to youth poets currently in kindergarten through 12th grade across the state of Illinois. Participating poets can be affiliated with any school (public, private, home, etc.) or other institution.

1. Each student can only submit **ONE** poem and the poem must be written by only **ONE** author (sorry, we do not accept jointly or co-written poems for this contest).
2. Poems cannot exceed 16 lines for poems submitted by young people in grades K-5 and cannot exceed 50 lines for poems submitted by young people in grades 6-12. Poems containing visual elements are allowed, if all images/visuals are original to the poet.
3. Please only submit poems that were written between August 1, 2023 – May 1, 2024, since poems are judged based on grade level. **Submissions are due by May 1, 2024.**
4. All entries must be the original work of the young person submitting the poem.
5. Youth poets can submit their poem on their own or the poem can be submitted by a parent/guardian or teacher using the online submission form at ilhumanities.org/poetry
6. When submitting a poem, please only enter your name on the entry form and do not include your name or identifying information on the poem itself, since the judging is anonymous.

Contest winners will be notified by early-August, 2024. Winners will receive a cash prize, a gift package, and a certificate from Illinois Humanities. Winning poems will be read at an awards ceremony at the David and Reva Logan Center in Chicago on September 14, 2024.

Submissions are due by May 1, 2024. Please send submission form and attached poem to:

125 S. Clark St, Suite 650, Chicago, IL 60603

Name: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Home Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

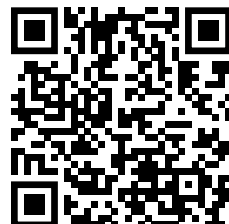
Age: _____ Gender: _____

School Name: _____ Grade Level: _____

Teacher's Name: _____ Teacher's Phone: _____

Teacher's Email: _____

Scan the QR code or visit ILHumanities.org/poetry to submit your form online





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