

Announcing the Results of the 2025

William George Prize for Poetry

Named for English teacher Bill George, whose poems have moved the SLUH community with their wit, their honesty, and their generous good will, this prize is given annually to recognize excellence in student poetry at St. Louis University High School.



First prize: \$100 and a subscription to *Poetry* magazine.

Second prize: \$50 and a subscription to *Poetry* magazine.

This year eighty-two poems submitted by thirty-six students were judged anonymously by Travis Mossotti, the program coordinator for Poetry in the Woods and the author of five poetry collections including, most recently, *Apocryphal Genesis*, winner of the 2025 North American Poetry Book Award.

First prize: “Visits from Cardinals” by Paul Thibodeau

Second prize: “the trials and tribulations of trying to pee when your queer” by Cooper Capdeboscq

Honorable Mention: “It’s Really Not That Deep” by Franklin Buckeridge

Honorable Mention: “Psychoanalytic” by Jaden Yarbrough

Honorable Mention: “The Potato Eaters” by Otto Reitenbach

Honorable Mention: “Ferguson” by Gavin Simon

Honorable Mention: “A Tree’s Mental Life” by Jaden Yarbrough

Honorable Mention: “Rocks” by Joe Mannello

Honorable Mention: “noon on door county” by Will Hamlin

Honorable Mention: “Cold Bacon” by Osvin Alaphat

Visits from Cardinals

Miraculously, I see sunlight everywhere now,
even when He slips past the fence, past Jamieson,
past the pool-water horizon I see with my nose beneath the surface.
Moonbeams are sunrays, too, you know,
He tells me,
and just because they've been diffracted
doesn't mean they're any further from
the Real Thing.
I, too, wake up glowing, all pink and orange;
I revel in the joy of coming alive.
The world I once saw through fingers appears stretched out and dreamy,
shimmering like mosaic tiles on the roof of my mouth —
icy pain soothed by a single touch.
Yes, the pieces are coming together,
and they look a lot like a meteor shower as they do.

—Paul Thibodeau, 1st Place

the trials and tribulations of trying to pee when your queer
(a political piece for just being)

glitter and blush blinding the boys
cracked mirror- someone told me there was a stash
of booze beneath here, the right sink below in the white cupboard.
lip liner, too expensive, sits in my pocket,
its cap trying to escape down the cut fabric- but
i catch it before losing another.

looks agaze, spritz spritz spritz - *YOUR TURN*, by billie eilish.
eyes roll, giggles travel down the salmon walls.
just ignore, keep applying, hit and jab, press and pull,
curl and swirl, the sunlight hits perfectly on the dust-floor.
i don't go yet, because when I'm facing a urinal with boys
inside, i feel my femininity stripping to die.

i've heard stories- "homosexuals" "man-lovers" being
pushed onto their knees and heads smothered in sewer water
gasping for air while the ones behind them enjoy the act.
there's a pact here -*AMDG*- for the greater glory of god in
brotherhood. people say they feel it, see it. but is
everyone in that brotherhood?

the boys leave. i enter the stall, the one that has
"toñito" scratched in the wall- just one of many racist remarks
dented onto these pink stalls. i don't know how long i stayed but
when i look back at the cracked mirror, my mascara has melted
into a blacked waterfall, a quiet protest running down my face.

—Cooper Capdeboscq, 2nd Place

It's Really Not That Deep

A poem really doesn't have to be that deep.
Blood isn't a necessary image to
come up in most poems.
Don't worry about the thick blackened cloud that looms over
every poem you try to write. Only
follow the light. Write what you can see.
Guessing is useless.
Hold onto what's true.
It doesn't really have to be very hard.
Just focus on what comes to mind.
K is a hard letter to start a line with. Isn't it?
Love is even harder to write about.
Many have tried. Many have failed, me included.
Not because they are stupid, bad poets, or not truly in love
only because they are overcomplicating things. In this
poem for instance, I haven't
questioned myself once. I am only allowing my thoughts to
Roam around and graze. It's really quite a natural process.
Stick to what you know. Even if you don't know it.
This is just my opinion. Maybe I'm
under that black cloud right now. However I do think there's a
Very low chance. I know
what has led me to find meaning in my poetry.
x-rays are like poems. They pierce through, finding one truth.
yet they somehow tell us about a person's life, past, and future.
Zero assumptions are made. Not until the X-ray is already finished.

—Franklin Buckeridge, Honorable Mention

Psychoanalytic

I'm free to wander and wonder
and sense the fresh foam
as I shave my scraggly beard.
To feel everything I feel
without thinking twice
or three times
about why.

But I'm caught, captured,
in a black box.
Input, some bullshit, then output.
What's in the box?
Nothing, really.
If I can't see inside, nothing really matters.
I'm merely electrical impulses and erotic desire.
I'm a robot, a sophisticated ChatGPT,
but a fucked up mind.

My dangling feet swing
forward and backward, forward, backward,
as I talk about anything, everything, all of it.
He scribbles notes in an old yellow padded sketchbook.
He tells me who I am, why I hate my parents,
why I want to kill myself.
But what if I don't?
Planting seeds that should've never left the bag,
seeds that weren't meant to sprout.

I'm locked in a box that has no key.
Except God has the key.
But he's outside the universe
and there is no key.
There is no God, and no black box.
It's all fabricated,
lies wrapped with beautiful brown bows,
like machines that find themselves convinced
they're making a difference.

—Jaden Yarbrough, Honorable Mention

The Potato Eaters

I wonder what color of paint
Van Gogh begged his patron brother Theo
To scrounge from his artist friends,
What shade of putrid pungent green to mimic
French peasants basking in single-flame glory.
Did he share in their solemn Eucharist?
Did he, as Vincent rapidly obsessed over the Arles
Proletariat, long to join their gaunt cheekbones and
Lamp-kissed jowl? Yes, the windows lead only to a sewage-tinted horizon.
Yes, the right-most woman glares loathingly at the sodden tea she streams.
Yes, my first intention is to pity.
Van Gogh must have wanted to be them.
(Long before the fame, long before accolades, long before any semblance of debt Fulfillment could
reach his generous brother, Van Gogh died.)
He must have longed to partake in their daily sacrament, their feast of ground and peat,
Their spoils of cataracts and cracked hands.
A revelation of decrepit communion springs forth from
The canvas his woefully brilliant hands painted.
For all the talent in the world, Vincent simply couldn't escape
The loneliness and the revolver bullet piercing his chest.

—Otto Reitenbach, Honorable Mention

Ferguson

The same blue sky that I see from my childhood
window is different tonight.

The sky is burning, burning a bright orange.

“Mom, why does the sky look like that?”

“Because orange skies mean the next day will be a better one, silly.”

Isn't that the hope?

Tonight, I'm not allowed to watch TV like I usually am.

Tonight, my mom said I can't play in the street.

Tonight, the orange sky looks back at me and asks me
which side I am on. But I couldn't tell you.

I play four-square at school with the cousin of a dead man.

I rollerblade with the son of the man who made the dead man dead.

But I don't know all of that yet.

All I know is that the sky looks different tonight and I can't play in the street.

—Gavin Simon, Honorable Mention

A Tree's Mental Life

My favorite oak tree is a fiery canvas of fall colors, painting rapidly dimming skies with starlight. Through the dense canopy of a summer-stricken willow I once spotted long crinkled brown leaves, a nest of gnarled limbs, and shattered shells, reminders of what could've been or perhaps what already is. Corinthians speaks of believers being "born again," something trees do instinctively, without a doubt that they can rise again. In what feels like days, blazing red tapestries become finger-numbing, winter-washed ice, life-giving to life-taking. I see the restructured nest through the tree's intricate weaving miles away, blood now drained from its delicate veins, as wintry wind smears the life off its limbs. Yet the shattered shells have turned into shelter, a mother shielding a small chickadee, her lifeblood, underneath her frozen feathers. Shivering steadfast, eyes gazing toward the sun poking through thick white clouds, she's hopeful of better days to come. Though bountiful in life, the tree itself knows no life. White powder coats its limbs, yet it knows not what it means to be 'cold', to be 'warm', to be 'loved'. Still the radiance of a spring afternoon sun seems to prove me wrong. Vibrant green bursts of chlorophyll regenerated from nothing, or everything, protrude out of its wooden periphery, inviting me in with open arms, inviting me into life.

Quiet brown oak tree,
Who knows the joy of redemption,
Can I know it, too?

—Jaden Yarbrough, Honorable Mention

Rocks

Gotta text this morning
I texted sorry
Sorry for what
What's in the darkness
Nothing is observed in the darkness
People can be observed
It feels weird to watch people
Without a purpose people watching is uncomfortable
I'm sure that it is weird to experience someone watching.

I'm still youthful
I can change my behaviors
It's not set in stone
Stones are strange
Stones are like people
They take a lot of blunt damage but something sharp
Pierces to the heart
Why do we try
To be like stone

It's not like it's special
But rather it's common
I try to be like stone

It's hard.

Words seem blunt
But most can be sharp
Stones are greater than trees
Not in stature but in endurance
Stones have been around forever
Trees grow and die
We are like trees.
We seem big
We aren't.

Trees fight like humans
They need water and food

Stones are peaceful
They are content
We act like stones
But we are the trees
I feel like the Lorax
I speak for the trees
But the people

Stones are everlasting
Unlike our names
We fade away

Names are our self.

—Joe Mannello, Honorable Mention

noon on door county

white sail waves
on a summer's day
wind in my sail
and boats in the bay

marina sparkles
with bright white hulls
lapping waves
and singing gulls

sun beats down
on my eyes
around the clouds
from the skies

back laid flat
my music stopped
eyes laid shut
and anchor dropped

—Will Hamlin, Honorable Mention

Cold Bacon

What if I said I liked cold bacon in the morning?
What if I didn't?

The early sun mourns behind tears of clouds.
Maybe, they're tears of joy.

The birds yell awakening screams.
Maybe, they're singing.

I can wake up at night and live the rest of the day in darkness.
I can close my eyes and pretend it's bright until sunrise.

But for now, I'll just twirl the bacon on my fork
and pretend it's the best meal I've ever had.
It is the best meal I've ever had.
Maybe, I'll have a good day.

—Osvin Alaphat, Honorable Mention