



18th Annual RRAS Nature Writing Contest

*Results for 2023: Winners & Honorable Mentions for
Junior (Grades 4-8) and Senior (Grades 9-12) Divisions*

Entries of essays and poems remained steady for the third straight year, at approximately 90 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
Trillium Pitts
Grade 7,
Alder Grove
Charter School***

“Winter Dream”

The cold accosts me the second I step out of the car.

Icy fingers claw at my cheeks, leaving them raw and red. Frosty fangs bite through my jacket and scrape my arms, injecting the winter wind into my bloodstream. I shiver, my hands tucked deep into my pockets, my frozen feet buried under a mound of soft snow.

Winter in the mountains is a quiet thing. The silence makes me feel like the whole world is sleeping.

The muffled thump of snow hitting the ground, dumped off a heavy-laden branch, breaks my reverie. But the world keeps sleeping, blanketed in an unblemished layer of pure white snow.

I take a step, and a thousand perfect ice crystals crunch and compact under my boot. My tracks are like unkept secrets, flitting guiltily where they're not supposed to go. Leading away or back, I can't tell.

The trees stand tall and silent, bearing the weight of a hundred snowfalls. Their proud green colors are muted and muffled by their heavy burdens.

The rocks lie still and sleeping along the river, coated in soft snow. The stream is the only thing moving. Its icy-cold waters trickle tentatively through the pristine white landscape, flowing towards a greater river, flowing towards the sea. It gurgles

softly, afraid to disrupt the silence. It is a breath of life in this still world.

I follow the stream downhill. The trees thicken around me, hardly moving. My sister's laughter floats along the wind like a ray of sunlight, making the snow glimmer for a millisecond...the trees stir with hope, then lapse back into a stillness as deep as the snow.

A junco sends its trilling song into the still air. At the first frost, it donned its winter title of 'snowbird', trying to fit in with the newborn whiteness that has swept across the mountainside. A woodpecker responds with its sharp tapping, breaking the silence in staccato beats like hammer strikes. A Steller's jay flies swiftly across the cold sky, searching for a haven from the cold. It lands on an evergreen bough and fluffs its feathers, looking like an ornament on a Christmas tree.

I reach my destination—the giant boulder. It stands like a sentinel on the edge of a rocky ravine, separate from the swath of snowy trees from which I've just emerged. The wind, not so unfriendly now, plays curiously with my hair and brushes my face softly.

I climb up the boulder, fitting my hands and feet into helpful crevices worn by time and wind and a thousand other winters. When I reach the top and look out on the world spread out before me, I catch my breath in awe.

It goes on forever—this wintry wonderland stretching across the mountain, turning bare rock and dirt into a shimmering expanse of pearly white. The snowdrifts are accented with blue shadows and golden swaths of sun-soaked snow. Its brilliance almost blinds me. And the trees—tall, stately, bearing their burdens boldly—stand still and quiet, imprisoned in a deep and silent slumber.

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This winter dream stretches to the sea, glimmering faintly on the horizon. Its sapphire-blue waters are a stark contrast from the snowy world spread out before me, but somehow they fit together like puzzle pieces—all the colors and shapes of this view of the world.

Its vastness makes me feel immeasurably small and unimportant. But still—I, a little speck in this sleeping winter dream—I am a part of this. This vast, silent world has accepted me, folded me into its frosty embrace. I stand still and quiet, imagining that I am a tree, regal and tall. Waiting for the snow to melt away, leaving spring in its wake. I imagine that I am winter, biding its time till next year, when it can turn the world into a silent, glimmering dream once again.



***Second Place,
Junior Division
Thea McKnight
Grade 6, Coastal
Grove Charter
School***

“Skyward”

Recently I’ve been caught up in my own unnecessary desires. It’s really hard to see past your own needs and wants, to what others need and want.

But just earlier today, I looked out the window, and it was snowing. I’d known that it was supposed to snow, because of the forecast, but I hadn’t gotten my hopes up. I thought it might snow, but the rain would wash it away before morning.

I live in Arcata. My house is about 30 feet above sea level. I had only experienced it actively snowing two times before now, only one of them at my house. I can barely remember when it last snowed where I live. It was a really magical experience, looking outside and seeing this beautiful, natural phenomenon.

I ran out into my front yard barefoot, and immediately started taking selfies with snow falling in the background. And then I thought *why let technology have all the fun?* I don’t want to look at a picture and think *oh, it was so fun taking photos in the snow!* I want to remember this day and think *I’m so lucky I got to see the snow!*

So I just stood there, and watched the snow falling. It brought me a strange sense of joy and serenity.

After a little while, the snow started falling harder. I don’t know what led me to do this, but I looked skyward. For a minute, I could see each individual, unique snowflake as it fell a great distance. It was incredibly beautiful.

Then a snowflake landed on my eyelid, instantly melting as it hit my skin. I looked down, rubbing my eye.

And that’s when I realized—humans aren’t too different than snowflakes: we are both unique, small, and, in the big picture, have a short lifespan. But we both can have a huge effect on nature. Just like the saying “no two snowflakes are ever the same,” no two humans are ever the same. We are all unique in our own way. Still, with all the similarities, there are huge differences, too. Humanity has so much to learn from snowflakes. We are always on our devices, caught in the past or worrying about the future. We depend on technology for many things.

For snowflakes, there is only now. A simple sense of peace and acceptance that nothing lasts forever. Including themselves.

For me, nature is the greatest teacher there ever was. In a world full of despair, nature brings me hope and joy. It guides those who know how to listen, telling them to live in the moment.

“Never worry,” it whispers, “everything will be solved in due time.”



***Third Place,
Junior Division
Rootsy Quinn
Grade 6,
Agnes Johnson
Charter School***

“What Nature Means to Me”

When someone asks me “What does nature mean to you?” my first thought is that nature is one of my reasons for living. The middle of the woods is my home, and if nature was a person, it would be my soulmate. My mother was a tree-sitter for many years, so I fell in love with nature just like she did. I especially fell in love with the amazing trees that surround my home. I have also had many special experiences with nature. My favorite thing to do is go in the woods and listen to all the different types of animals and birds scurrying around me.

(continued on page 3)

When I go out there, I feel at home. I would lie down on the soft ground and watch the different types of birds flying from tree to tree. My dad, me, and my two siblings love to go mushroom hunting and harvest our own food. We hike deep in the woods and soak up all the life around us. When we leave, we come home with a full meal from our special forests. My life is such a blessing because I live right in the woods and it makes me think more about how I am so fortunate because so many people come from all over the world just to see the redwoods that are there in my everyday life, giving me the oxygen that makes me healthy and makes me wake up happy every single day. During the fires that sadly were all around where I live, there was a huge flock of red-winged blackbirds sitting right in my yard and nesting in the cattails in our pond. It was such an amazing thing to see and my oldest sister—who is 16 and obsessed with birds—was just so happy and overwhelmed with joy to see them finding a home during all the chaos, especially at our little home.

A couple of weeks ago my family was driving my brother to martial arts and I saw the saddest thing. There on the road was a hit baby skunk. Even though they smell bad, it was very sad and I cried and cried. It was so upsetting to me that someone would just hit an animal and drive right through, not even stopping for a poor animal that is just trying to get to its home or find something to eat or drink.

As I expressed in the essay, nature means so much to me and I hope my words inspire more people to take better care of nature and love it way more.

***Honorable Mention, Junior Division
Aleah Moschetti, Grade 6,
Agnes Johnson Charter School***

“What Nature Means To Me”

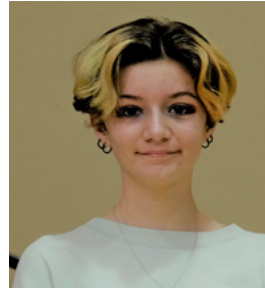
It was dark and windy. I was riding my horse in the wet, cold, grassy meadows. I was sitting there with my horse Levi when suddenly I heard a rustling sound in the bush. I looked over and I could not believe what I saw.

It was a big brown bear with two beautiful young brown cubs. I pulled out my binoculars and looked at one of the brown cubs closer, and I realized one of the cubs was hurt. The fluffy little cub had barbed wire stuck to its neck and looked miserable.

So, I immediately called a local vet and asked them to come and help the poor little animal. Soon after I got off the phone with the vet, they arrived. They

came over, assessed the situation, and then decided to tranquilize the mom and the cubs. After 15 minutes, they finally fell asleep. The vet was able to go in and surgically remove the barbed wire from the cub. The poor little cub soon had a full recovery and was put back into the woods.

In conclusion, if you ever see an animal that looks hurt, call a vet and get help because animals that we have in life help us so much more than we realize and they deserve to be here just as much as us humans do.



***Hon. Mention,
Junior Division
Alysse Gildea
Grade 6,
Jacoby Creek
School***

“Home”

Nature is a being
Constantly taken advantage of
Nature was the dead wooden floor of my home
Not yet ready to be cut down
The last words coming from a killer with no mercy
pretending it's not murder
Because there's no protest
Timber
And they all fall down
We pretend it's possible
to rationalize the amount of nature humans
destroy
We say it's ok but it's not

Nature is a force
Nature can take the form of a stretch of land
not made for constructing corrupt cities upon
Nature is constantly giving without regret
and never receiving recognition
Nature is the oceans we pollute

The planet we should salute to
The planet we one day may evacuate
because we made Earth unstable for us
We pump fuel into the air
so that we can go wherever we deem more
important
The air we inhale is becoming unbreathable
slowly but not unnoticed
Nature is starting to sweat under the pressure

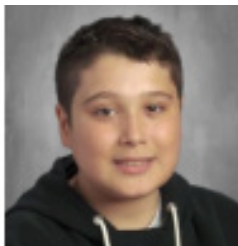
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and surely you and I would too
Certainly under the dire circumstance and
pressure
we assume nature can consume
We are turning up a giant thermostat in the
environment we live in

Nature is a clear blue sky we could admire
if not fogged by the smog we created
The only way to coexist is if the destroyers
become the saviors
Or there will be no more survivors
Yet we look away, say maybe another day
Us, we, you, me
Don't give in to the temptation to do nothing
Speak up, stand up, start to think long and hard
about the situation we stand in

Nature is beautiful, alive, and generous
Nature is a being that deserves more than we've
been giving
Nature needs to start taking the required
rudiments to remain
Let's make a promise
A promise to protect, preserve, and if needed
protest, but peacefully
For nature is needed
This problem won't disappear or go away
And no matter what, it IS your problem, my
problem, our problem
The problem we created
The fires destroying the forests
The fish killed by fictile plastic
The air being adulterated by invisible acid

Nature is still somehow superior, still somehow
here
Nature is a being
The habitat I was born on
The haven I accredit
The home I will fight for in hopes I can help



***First Place,
Senior Division
Braden Stevens
Grade 9,
McKinleyville
High School***

“Fishing Trip With My Dad “

I was fishing out in the bay, and there was a big
tug on my line. I dropped my hat, pulled hard, and
reeled in my fish. There was something magical
about it.

Early one morning on Father's Day, my dad and
I got ready to leave with my uncle to go fishing in
Humboldt Bay. I was so tired from waking up so
early that I fell asleep in the truck. When we got
there, I woke up and got my pole while my uncle and
dad loaded the boat into the water. My dad's friend
showed up to fish with us, and finally, after 20 min-
utes we got on the water. We motored around for a
while looking for a spot to stop and put our hooks in
the water. While I was sitting there, I was looking
at the birds, the sun, and the boat bobbing through
the water.

The sun was dancing on the water, it was hot, and I
was melting like popsicles on a baking summer day.
We got nothing, so we decided to go elsewhere. We
found a nice place to stop, and there was a cool af-
ternoon breeze. I was finally cooling down. I threw
out my line and waited for a bite. Nibble after nib-
ble and nothing. Then, all of a sudden, there was
screaming. My uncle shouted, “I got something!” He
was happier than a kid on Christmas. It was a big
one, 28 inches long! I was as mad as a bull that I
got nothing. Left and right people were getting fish
except me. I was furious because I was getting noth-
ing.

I was starting to give up when all of a sudden *yank!*
A fish bit my hook. I was pulling and reeling for
what seemed like an hour, but it was more like 15
seconds. I was dreaming about how big the fish was,
and I was hoping that it was going to be bigger than
my uncle's fish. I doubted that I was going to catch
it because I had no luck all day. When I felt my pole
about to slip out of my hands, I pulled back.

I began reeling like a madman. The fish was squirm-
ing at the end of my line, and I put it in the boat. I
then whacked it with a piece of wood to kill it. Its
blood splattered me, but I didn't care because I was
so happy. I finally got a fish. I was jumping up and
down, and I almost fell off the boat. It was a big
sucker, weighing in at 32 inches!

Finally, my patience paid off. It was the biggest fish
that day. We fished a little more that day, and my
dad caught one, but my fish was still the biggest. We
all got a snack, and then we started loading the boat
back on the trailer. After we got the trailer loaded
up, we got some ice cream and headed home.

Because it was such a peaceful day, because the wa-
ter was so still, and because I was with my dad on
Father's Day, this remains my best day fishing.

Second Place, Senior Division

K.M.

Grade 9, McKinleyville High School

“Fantastical”

We went up to the mountains for snow last week, it was all so beautiful. Sadly I could only play on the side of the road for a few minutes before we had to go back, I was really sad because we couldn't even make it to where we wanted to go before it got dark and we had to go home. The whole ride there I was reaching out the window to the trees and knocking the snow off, imagining myself frolicking and playing in the snow when we got up to the mountains.

I've always loved natural nature, so pure. I used to go into the woods near my house every day when I was younger, I'd sit on a bench and read for hours before having to leave, it was my little escape from my abusive home life. My dad always ruined nature whenever we went out with him, saying that they needed to cut down the trees or hunt the wildlife. He never saw the beauty of it all, I don't know how he didn't.

The sound of creeks and serenity of how peaceful the animals were or light shining around the leaves above our heads. I tried to take up birdwatching, they're my favorite animal, but my dad wouldn't let me sign up or join a club. Eventually, for my birthday he let me get a bird of my own but just 2 years later he stopped buying its food and I couldn't afford it in time, my sweet little Neon died. I cried for days and buried him in one of our plant barrels, marking his grave with a decorative rock.

I'll never forget him and no bird will ever replace him. Birds are beautiful creatures and I've recently taken up bird watching again and I wanna try to learn some bird calls too. I have a nature trip planned for next weekend and I can't wait to see all the nature I've longed to see again for so many years. I'll go back to the woods from my childhood and read again, enjoying life to its fullest for the first time in forever in that familiar serenity of nature.

This has been an amazing natural journey for me.



***Third Place,
Senior Division***

Chris Zetter

***Grade 9, McKinleyville
High School***

“Quick to Learn How to Ski”

A stiff mountain breeze hits me in the face as I step out of the dark-cherry colored car. The ice in the parking lot is thick and I almost slipped. My little brother jumped with excitement as we made our way up to the ski lodge. My dad quickly calmed us as he stood singing papers (Our agreement for the ski resort) at the front desk. We went down stairs and got fitted in our gear helmets, ski boots, skis, poles, and so on.

Finally we stepped outside, my brother and I put our skis on and got ready for the first ski lift up. As we went up a crackly gust wind struck me like ice cycles pierced my face and made my skin lumpy like a fresh butchered chicken. Of-course my brother needed some teaching and the simple instructions he learned years ago were useless.

The snow crunched beneath my skis, the slop was smooth and straight as if it was misty glass. We started our descent each time going faster and faster like a newborn learning to walk then to a run. I soon moved over to the more difficult ski runs. They were tight sharp cornered trails that twisted like watercolor on white paper. The jagged rocks lunged at me causing me to twist and rip the snow.

My heart was racing and the danger wasn't getting any further, there was nowhere to stop then a bright light loomed out as it came to a clearing. I turn to look behind me and see my brother just barely straggling behind like a duckling to its mother. He followed, and we went down. It was undisturbed where we were and the snow felt as if we were sliding down a red carpet of velvet.

When we got to the bottom my brother suggested getting off at the right of the ski lift and going down ¼ of the black diamond. We did and it was fast, so fast I couldn't hear anything. I nearly flew off the cliff but I kept my sharp turn, my arm slicing through the snow like a shark's fin.

I waited at the bottom, yet he was nowhere to be seen. 30 minutes passed and I decided to take the lift back up to see where he was. I did end up finding him, just on a stretcher pulled by the ski medics. I followed them as he was strapped on behind a snowmobile, I found my dad waiting at the emergency center. Luckily it was just a sprained shoulder and there was nothing to worry about.

In the end it was fun, more fun I got to hassle my brother...



***Honorable Mention,
Senior Division
Theodore Yarbrough
Grade 9, McKinleyville
High School***

“My First Four-Point”

It was September 20, 2022, the day before my birthday, I was trying to convince my mom to let me go hunting. After a long debate, I finally convinced my mom to let me go. That night, my dad and I went over to my grandpa’s house for dinner and made a plan for where we were going to go in the morning. We decided to go to a spot we call Horse Valley. So that night, we loaded up the truck so we did not have to do it in the morning.

That night, I could not sleep at all, I tossed and turned all night. Finally at 4:30 am, my alarm went off and I sprang out of bed, put my pants on, and woke up my dad. After we were ready, we picked up my grandpa and we hit the road. After a 45-minute drive, we were finally there.

After we got out of the truck and stretched our legs, we had a quick discussion about where the three of us were going to hunt. We decided that my grandpa was going to walk the road, my dad was going to the bottom field, and I was going to the top field. My grandpa left first and walked to where we were going to split up. My dad said to meet up here at about 12 o’clock and we went our separate ways.

That morning I tried to get up the mountain faster than normal because I was trying to get to the field before the deer moved into the timber. So after I got to the edge of the field, I slowed down and I was being as quiet as a ninja. I came over the first part of the field and didn’t see anything. Then I moved to the middle of the field, so I could see both sides of the field. After about five minutes of moving, I spotted something in the corner of my eye. It was a white patch on a deer’s neck. I looked through my scope and it was a buck, so I took a deep breath, steadied my nerves, and squeezed the trigger.

The buck dropped. I was so excited because it was the biggest buck I have ever shot. After a couple of minutes, I started to walk over to find the buck. When I found it, I was pumped. It was my first 4-point buck. Then I cleaned it and started to pack the buck out a mile back to the truck by myself.

The reason I wrote about this story is because it was the place my Uncle Johnny shot his first buck but sadly a few years back, he went missing. That is why that place is so special to me.



***Honorable Mention,
Senior Division
Jimi Bradshaw
Grade 9, McKinleyville
High School***

“Sitting on the Colorado River”

Imagine sitting on the sparkling shore of the Colorado River, sifting sand through your fingers. The best time to go down to the river was sunset when everything had an orangish hue. That was probably the best though at any time of the day you went it was just magical and nostalgic.

I have not gone in about a year now, so this is just a collection of memories. The river, the spot that I went to, had a certain feel, smell, and sound. The sound was waves crashing, country music. Bugs and birds flying. Hearing the wings of the bug buzzing always scared me so badly that I would run into the water and stay underwater until I couldn’t hold my breath anymore.

The smell was sunscreen, that earthy river grass smell. The feel was wet hair, wrinkling fingers, and sand on the back of your legs. I love this river. I’ve learned so much there, how clay is a natural thing, how to not go past the drop-off, how to not be scared when rafting down the current or when tubing.

I learned that nothing lasts forever, and sometimes you have to let go. When I moved from Arizona north to McKinleyville, I saw the river only once a year. Then a few months ago, I learned that the river levels were lowering and the water had reached a crisis level. I have to come to terms with the fact that humans just overuse and destroy. I have learned that nothing lasts forever and that makes me upset because I didn’t get to spend too much time with it.

In an ideal world, I would go to the river every day, swim in the river, tube down the river, build sand castles on the beach, look for crawdads, and hide from wasps and horseflies. Life is sad and the water level is going down, but I realized that I have to go with the flow of things, just like the river.



***Honorable Mention,
Senior Division
Myrsadies Hufford
Grade 9,
McKinleyville
High School***

“The Seal”

Imagine you and your cousin out in the ocean swimming with the heat of the sun against your head. With the sound of the waves crashing over your heads and then suddenly out of nowhere a gigantic seal appeared, but before I excite you too much, let us start from the beginning.

It was a beautiful sunny day here in Mckinleyville. My grandma and cousins were here from Redding to visit. They ended up taking my two brothers and me to the beach with them for the day. We got to the beach and the sun was shining. There was no wind... only the heat bouncing off our skin. Before we could go and play, we had to help our grandma get settled in her spot on the beach. After what seemed like an hour, we were off running, playing, throwing sand, and having the best time chasing each other.

Around the middle of the day, we had all been in and out of the ocean several times with no prob-

ems whatsoever. My brothers started to complain about being hungry, so we decided to eat lunch. After lunch, we ran around again, throwing sand, and playing hide and seek in the water by jumping off rocks. We played hide and seek for a long time, with the hot blazing sun bouncing off the water. Eventually, we started to feel the heat radiating off our backs, realizing that we were all burnt to a crisp. My cousin then asked me if we could go out to the ocean.

She fought with me and begged me, “Please, c’mon, it’ll be fun, and I don’t get to see you often.” I couldn’t help but give in and join her. The ocean was frigid, and it stung like a million microscopic icicles as it made our legs go numb. We were out jumping over the waves as best as we could.

Every once in a while, one of us would get pushed under by a big wave. There weres fish flowing between our feet as we swam in the water. From where we were, we could see the houses on the hill in Trinidad. Out of nowhere, a seal popped up. It was only 15 yards away from me. I screamed, “Go back to shore!” As we were swimming back, it was swimming with us, getting closer and closer. My was yelling at me to wait for her, so I did. I then noticed that the seal was gone.

That was our day at the beach, and it made me more brave because riding waves back to the shore can got me out of a frightening situation. I learned that I feel safer on land.