



**36th ANNUAL
CARL SANDBURG COLLEGE
POETRY COMPETITION**

Spring 2025

“Poetry is a fresh morning spider-
web telling a story of moonlit hours
of weaving and waiting during the
night.”

**Carl Sandburg,
from “Good Morning, America”**

The 36th Annual Carl Sandburg College Poetry Competition

In *Good Morning, America*, Carl Sandburg provides thirty-eight definitions of poetry, including the one above. As I read through the wonderful, unique, expressive pieces submitted to us from all across the Sandburg district, as well as alumni from various scattered states, I cannot help but think of the "moonlight hours" of "weaving and waiting" behind each poem. Poetry is such a powerful art form that expresses, in infinite variety, glimpses of what it means to be human. Meghan and I are pleased to be able to continue the work of providing this annual Sandburg competition which celebrates this artform and keeps alive the spirit of our college's namesake.

— *Sharon Trotter-Martin & Meghan Angle*
Poetry Competition Coordinators

Table of contents

Elementary Division.....	5
Poetry and a dragon named Dave.....	6
A New World.....	8
Lombard.....	9
Basketball.....	10
Brother.....	11
Junior Division.....	13
Cry Me a River.....	14
Underneath the Willow Tree.....	15
The Lunchbox Kid.....	16
I Have Everything I Need.....	18
Midnight Slowly Approaching.....	19
Intermediate Division.....	23
Compared to Others.....	24
The World Continues On.....	27
Nerves.....	28
Welcome to Society.....	29
Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall.....	30
Adult Division.....	33
Earl.....	34
Welcome Home.....	35
burn // my baby.....	38
A Feral Garden.....	40
circus director.....	42
Prizes.....	45
Judges.....	46

Acknowledgments 47
Poetry writing prompts..... 48

Elementary Division

First Place

Poetry and a dragon named Dave by Addison Shinn

Second Place

A New World by Connor Patterson

Third Place

Lombard by Deklan Spalding

Honorable Mention

Basketball by Finley Irons

Brother by Jaxton Edwards

Poetry and a dragon named Dave

By Addison Shinn

Poetry is a game
That may lead you to fame
Some people may think it's lame
To tame
A dragon that likes to put a flame
In a hot air balloon
That may kill him soon
He also likes to splash in the lagoon
While listening to his favorite tune
His name is Dave
He likes to save
Money
By being funny
Now this dragon dave
Likes to misbehave
And when he misbehaves his mom sends him to the timeout cave
When he's in that cave he likes to cry
While he's crying because he was lying
And he starts
Then he had to mop
And his mom rewarded him with a spinning top
And it was a lot
Dave loved a dragon name Dove
He swore she was from above
Then he found out that she loved him back
So they hugged and they kissed and then she got squished
Then they had a kid
His looks were pretty mid
But he was a poet
His parents said lets go It because it was his name
And then poetry the game led him to fame

So that was the life of a dragon named dave who liked a girl they had a kid and he was lead to fame because of poetry the game

A New World

By Connor Patterson

A world is discovered all the time

New ones, old ones are all different

Every planet is unique

Wonderful worlds, big and small

With bone trees or magma mountains

One with life one with none

Round planets or square worlds

Large ones or medium ones

Devoured worlds or not, all planets are different.

Lombard

By Deklan Spalding

Lombard a courageous place to be
Over Joyful kids all around
Making responsible choices while here
Intelligent minds of students everywhere
Active people trying their best
Responsible school doing everything they can
Dependable dedicated place making the school stronger.

Basketball

By Finley Irons

Be balanced when shooting a jump shot
Attitude toward teammates and coaches is important
Sprint down the court for a wide-open layup
Kit Kats are a horrible snack before games
Every player should be nice to each other
The bench people should fill up water bottles
Basketball is an active sport
After school, you should practice dribbling every day
Layups are a very easy shot to take
Lie down and rest before games so you're not tired

Brother

By Jaxton Edwards

Caring

Loving

Hugging

Helping

Junior Division

First Place

Cry Me a River by Stella Bennett

Second Place

Underneath the Willow Tree by Persephone Reed

Third Place

The Lunchbox Kid by Elizabeth Martin

Honorable Mention

I Have Everything I Need by Elliotte Surprenant

Midnight Slowly Approaching by Heidi Amschler

Cry Me a River

By Stella Bennett

They say that “you have gone through so many storms—
surely the raindrops barely sting anymore.”
But they are wrong.
I know they are wrong,
Because I have been through the same storms.
The same lightning,
The same raindrops,
The same drenched clothing.
But over the years, my storms became bigger,
Stronger, even.
The raindrops felt like knives poking against my skin,
The lightning roared louder and louder each time.
Soon, my storms were no longer puddles, they were floods.
Then soon floods turned into lakes,
Then oceans,
Then before I knew it, they were tsunamis.
I can no longer leave my bed,
Not because of the raindrops,
But because of the entire blue sea waiting for me outside my
bedroom.
My bed is the only thing keeping me safe from having it swallow me
whole.

Underneath the Willow Tree

By Persephone Reed

Underneath the willow tree
I lie here, new and free
Thinking back,
And laying there,
The past comes pouring
Back to me.

I used to want to be
Free,
Away from rules and
Laws,
But now I understand, laying
Underneath this willow tree.

Rules are now my own
To bend,
But laws hold us together.
As I watch, my life passes
Me by,
As new lives enter my eyes.

My own rules form
As I hold a little life
A ball of gentle
Light.
Underneath the willow tree
I lie here, new and free.

The Lunchbox Kid

By Elizabeth Martin

There is a kid with seven different lunch boxes
who takes pride in each of them.
This kid is seen with one everyday
at school
at friend's houses
at a wedding.
People always ask
"Why did you bring a lunch box
When food is already being served?"
The kid just has to nod and explain
the usual spiel
the nut allergy
and they say okay and don't think about it.
They do not stop to think about the kid
or the kid's lunch boxes
or the kid's stress when they enter a restaurant
or the kid's Epi-pen they carry with them everywhere
or the consequences if they forgot the Epi-Pen at home
like the kid has to.
But that's okay. They don't have to understand.

See the kid with the lunch boxes gets tired
of nodding and explaining
and giving the usual spiel
about the nut allergy.
and the kid gets tired of people
not understanding the risks.
because nobody thinks about
the kid
or the kid's anxiety when they see a Reese's wrapper
or the kid's sadness when they have to decline someone's homemade
cookies

like the kid with the lunch boxes has to.
Because to everyone else
that's just the Lunchbox Kid.
And that's okay. They don't have to understand.
It's just nice when someone does.

I Have Everything I Need

By Elliotte Surprenant

I sit on my porch,
like I do every Sunday at noon.
I see the same old couple as I always do.
They're singing and laughing together;
living in the moment.
I look through my front window,
and there is my family.
I realize I have everything I ever need.
The next Sunday I keep a close eye on the couple,
but they did not show.
Nor the next
or the next.
The next Sunday arrived;
and their minivan was coming down the road.
But something was different,
not the car
or the weather
but where was the old women?
The man was driving
by himself
all alone.
I have everything I need.

Midnight Slowly Approaching

By Heidi Amschler

Midnight slowly approaching
The sounds of night echoing in my mind
Listen
Listen
Listen to the rhythmic pulsations of the stars.

Midnight slowly approaching
The smells of night
Never captured
The coldness
The sensation
Smell
Smell
Smell the candle of night, never truly copied

Midnight slowly approaching
The look of night
The stars,
The moon guiding a lost soul's path.
Pure darkness is a true beauty.
See
See
See how calm the night settles at midnight.

Midnight slowly approaching
Taste the fresh air of the next morning
Taste
Taste
The cold luck of the air

Midnight slowly approaching
Feel the cold air

Feel the warmth of a true promises arms
 Feel
 Feel
Feel the hopes and wishes of all people prayers
 For the future

Midnight slowly approaching,
Not a sound breaks the cacophony of night
 Not a smell forgets that of true night.
 Not a single sight outlooks that of night.
Not a taste more true than the freeze of night
No touch better than the calming cold of night
 The only thing that breaks
 This still of an hour
 Is the cry of morning
 Fast approaching
When we must throw ourselves to the sun,
 To the toils of the day.

Midnight approaching,
When the moon is above all.
 Midnight prayer
 Witching hour
 A mystery no one person can solve
 A call to God for a moment of pure bliss
 For when morning rounds
More death happens than in any other hours.

Midnight
 Pure
 Loving
When even the alone are wrapped in a hug
 And settle for the night.
 The hour on which sugarplums dance
 in those children's heads
And God's perfect creation is seen by all.

The stars telling stories,
And even the moon shines with the hope of tomorrow's sun.

Morning

Sunrise

Night not gone

Shadows of the night's memories memorized

And the moon seen by the other side of the world

How we see an idea of the night's moon

In the day.

And as the day goes by,

Midnight slowly approaching

Again

A cycle of beauty.

Midnight slowly approaching.

Intermediate Division

First Place

Compared to Others by Amaya Savage

Second Place

The World Continues On by Angelina Comandini

Third Place

Nerves by Desiree Morse

Honorable Mention

Welcome to Society by Gracie Yelm

Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall by Stephanie Heiden

Compared to Others

By Amaya Savage

"Be yourself," you've heard it countless times:
"Don't change yourself for others."

But when you see a gorgeous girl,
 Someone you admire,
 Someone you want to look like,
 Someone you want to be.

How could you listen to someone say "Be yourself?"

You'd do anything to look like her.
Her clear skin,
Slender body,
Her perfect life.

You slowly start to question your worth.

Am I good enough?
 Am I pretty enough?
 Am I worth it?
 Do I fit in?

You scroll for hours upon hours,
Looking for the secret ways to look just like them.

Their perfect hair routine,
 Flawless makeup,
 Trendy outfits.

You can never escape it.
They're everywhere:
On TV, online, and in magazines.

"I have to be perfect."

You say constantly, desperately wanting to be someone you are not,
Wanting to change everything about yourself.

Our generation sits,
Scrolling,
Analyzing every picture,
Craving validation,
Wanting to be just like the celebrities we see.

We spend hours making the perfect post,
 Waiting for approval,
 Wanting to be seen.

Our anxiety grows as we wait for people to see our posts,
Refreshing our pages every five minutes,
Looking for what people will say and think of us.

We can never escape our brains.
Our thoughts consume us in every comparison,
Draining us.

This is the life of a teenage girl on social media,
 A struggle for one to accept who they are,
 To find peace in our bodies,
 And in our minds.

But maybe there's more to life
Then our phones and the likes we get.

Our differences are what make everyone unique,
In their own way.

Seeking out our best selves is not defined by
Our bodies or perfection,

But by our character.

And that,
Is more than enough to prove we are worthy.

The World Continues On

By Angelina Comandini

A gleam of light shines across your face
Doctors rushing all around, the world spinning
You feel the soft touch of a motherly embrace
All becomes still, you are calm
And the world continues on

Bruised knees with scraped elbows
Crayons across the wall, a shirt stained with juice
Ringing bells and outside recess
School will be out for Summer soon
And the world continues on

Graduation with raptures of applause
Your room is packed, the moving van here
College is next, but will soon be over
All focus is on your career
And the world continues on

Years of work start to show
Hair thinning and your speech slow
Flowers are placed over your head
In the distance, a baby's cry is heard
And the world continues on

Nerves

By Desiree Morse

Thoughts are racing
Palms are sweaty
Looking at your, judging faces
Telltale signs im
Terrified I
Try to talk but, I am speechless
Want to sing cant
Find my voice i
Want to play my, fingers tremble
Indicators
Of my worst fears
Can't swallow my
Nerves

The devil couldn't reach me so he
Gave me big ideas but not the
Confidence to share them with the world
He gave me the mind he gave me
All the motivation but he
Took away my guts and he
Replaced them with a belly full of
Nerves

The nerves
The nerves
The nerves

Welcome to Society

By Gracie Yelm

Welcome to Society,
I hope you enjoy your stay,
Please feel free to be yourself
As long as it's in the right way,
Also, make sure you love your body,
But not too much, or I'll tear you down,
I'll bully you for smiling,
But wonder why you frown,
I'll tell you that you're worthless,
But do not make a sound,
Cry with all the others,
As I bury you in the ground,
Oh, and you can fall in love with anyone,
As long as it's who I choose,
I'll let you have your opinions,
But shape them to my views,
So yes, Welcome to Society!
I promise I won't deceive,
Oh, and one more rule,
Now that you're here, there's no way you can leave,
But smile,
Head up,
Take a look around,
There's far more to enjoy,
Then to make a sound.

Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall

By Stephanie Heiden

Why?

Why do people

Call me names?

Disgusting,

Freak,

Fat.

I only hang on the wall,

Minding my business.

Every once in a while,

I get compliments.

They tell me I'm

Confident,

Strong,

Pretty.

I only hang on the wall,

Minding my business.

I see the tears of many.

Why so many tears?

I never meant to

Make you cry.

I only hang on the wall,

Minding my business.

I'm reflecting, pondering

Why people cry when they

See me.

Why do they trust me

To see them as they are?

I only hang on the wall,

Minding my business.

For now, I'll wait
And let them tell me.
I'll understand someday
Why some cry at the
Sight of me.
Until then,
I only hang on the wall,
Minding my business.

Adult Division

First Place

Earl by Kacie Moore

Second Place

Welcome Home by Michael Bennett

Third Place

burn // my baby by Jade Albright

Honorable Mention

A Feral Garden by Marie Smysor Watson

circus director by Carli Starr

Earl

By Kacie Moore

I am black tea steeping
with the honey mixed in
sweetening this drowning
the boiling of sin.

Star anise dangles loosely in ten-dollar bags
brushes hands with itself
a shelf full of curables and yet
they may never know the blessing.

I steep to burn
to feel

the steam of something other than shame.

The cleansing of me
is a flood through the seams.

Welcome Home

By Michael Bennett

If you were looking to fight,
Just know
A war
Is something
I never intended on partaking
I felt we could
Come together
Be strong
While ripened fruits
Of discordant loins
Continue to thrive on the vine
Yet you couldn't leave
Alone the well enough
Always trying to sate an
Unquenchable thirst.
Avarice incarnate
A green-eyed beast
Of burden drifting
Decaying.

I did not want a war
But the fight is in me
My laurels have never
Been meant for resting.
And true motivation is uniquely
Euphoric
When the naked self
Is constantly watching
The hand of the divine
Feels near
Guiding my actions
Making my aim true

Where doubt no longer lingers
And effervescent rays crack
Through the din
All the petty lies
And makeshift chicanery
Will indeed make
A story for another time
It is so important
To know
For me maybe
Even more than you
That I did anything and everything
In service of you

I need a plan
Humanity has failed
Yet again
To prove its worth in defense
But fight or flight
Is not a way of life
Feeling not long
For a world that turns
Unjust
Strike a motion
Of hope
Less liturgy
An imposition
Improperly defined.

I came here with
Truth
I am staying with
Truth
That will be my war cry
And my yawp
Will deafen injustice

With shrill precision
Of surgical proportions
While I pierce the very
Hearts of my opposition

And the banner will read,

“Welcome Home”

burn // my baby

By Jade Albright

You will die here.
I'm sure of it.

And when you go it won't
be cold.

It will be like growing too
big for your mother to
carry.

Tender.
Proud.
Relief.

She'll shout
'look at you, going
all on your own'.
so courageous.

Not the lion
not the mouse
but the thorn-
removed from her
chest,

spit through the
clouds and into the
sun.

Emerging crispy and
ready for a
nap.

And im sure she'll
tuck you in, ladybug.
no matter how big
you've gotten.

A Feral Garden

By Marie Smysor Watson

No one told me that
After the last diapers were loosened
After the mountains of Legos had tumbled down
And all the lost or dropped binkies had been found
below sea level

No one told me that
this bright everything would blind me

No one told me that one day my husband would talk
And I would either listen or not listen to him, that sonorous voice
But there would be no more high-pitched rebel yells
Competing, bleeding
Instead, reverting to a woman's right to choose
whether or not attention should be paid
to this man whom I did not birth

Once upon a time, I brought forth several
Men-children, hidden in the folds of my side
Pulled from my ribs
A feral garden we made
Mud, blood, infinitely good
Until, it was time to cast them out too
They knew
too much

No one told me that we are detained
by the years we have passed

No one told me that
They do not last
We make beautiful ruins

Trapped beneath the memory of
The better angels we wished we might be
if only there were someone else to fold the laundry

circus director

By Carli Starr

my mind is like
a circus

too much going on
all at once

the actors and stuntmen
are underpaid, abused,
overworked, and angry

they stay,
for they have
nowhere else
to go

"while we're here,"
they sneer,
"let's give 'em
hell"

and they do

they scream
and cry
and break
anything
they can get
their hands on

they seek fear,
power,
and vengeance

they know there's
no escape
so they make sure
the circus
goes on
a horror movie
in the
making

they cackle,
as they pierce
themselves with knives
and swords

around the merry-go-round
they go

they spin and spin
and contort themselves
into freakish creatures

clowns and lions
and acrobats

they throw themselves
off high beams
and pillars
with no net in sight

they skate and slide
and do tricks on
trampolines and
pogo sticks

too many acts
at once,

and not enough space

and yet,
i've never even learned
how to juggle

Prizes

Elementary

Firefly July: A Year of Very Short Poems by Paul B. Janeczko

Junior

Imperfect: poems about mistakes: an anthology for middle schoolers by Tabatha Yeatts, MS Margarita Engle, Buffy Silverman

Intermediate

Respect the Mic: Celebrating 20 Years of Poetry from a Chicagoland High School by Peter Kahn, Hanif Abdurraqib, Dan "Sully" Sullivan

Adult

The Best American Poetry 2024 by David Lehman, Mary Jo Salter

Judges

We thank the following individuals for judging.

Sonrisa Nolan

Sonrisa "Sunny" Nolan is a Speech Instructor at Carl Sandburg College. She has been teaching Speech and English for 25 years. She enjoys poetry because of the way it allows writers to express themselves through sound, rhythm, and words without being confined to more traditional prose-writing techniques. She admires the link between the spoken and written word captured uniquely by poetry in its various forms.

Kylie Price

Kylie Price is a Professor of English at Carl Sandburg College. In her writing courses, she emphasizes three components: the development of critical thinking, the importance of revision, and the power of writing communities.

Marla Turgeon

Marla Turgeon is the Instructional Librarian at Carl Sandburg College. She has been a community college librarian for 20 years. She enjoys poetry because it moves along quickly and leaves room for personal interpretation.

Jenny Wright

Jenny Wright is an Associate Professor of English and the English & Honors Coordinator at Carl Sandburg College. She is passionate about helping her students become more critical readers and writers in her various composition and literature courses.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the following people for making this competition possible: HFA (Humanities and Fine Arts) faculty members Sonrisa Nolan, Kylie Price, Marla Turgeon, and Jenny Wright for judging this year's competition; HFA Support Specialist Meghan Angle and English instructor Sharon Trotter-Martin for coordinating this project; Barb Nicholson for printing; the Marketing and Public Relations department for its assistance in promoting the event; and HFA Chair James Hutchings and Dean of Transfer Michael Patilla for believing in and for supporting this endeavor.

Poetry writing prompts

- Imagine that you loaned a superhero an item many years ago. Write a poem that describes how the superhero has now returned and is at your front door, returning the item.
- In the poem "Phizzogs," Carl Sandburg wrote, "This face you got,/This here phizzog you carry around" describing the different types of masks we wear. Write a poem about a type of mask, or masks.
- Flip open a book or magazine near you to page 27. Close your eyes and point a finger to a word on the page. Whatever that word is—write a poem about that word.



SANDBURG

Where dreams come to life and lives come to change.

EXCELLENCE / COLLABORATION / INTEGRITY / RESPECT

Our mission is to provide all students with opportunities for success.

Photo by Bill Gaither, 2025

