

Pop Up Poetry in the Park Submissions 2022

Thank you to the creative writers from Oswego
High School and Oswego East High School
who shared their work!



Mariel Herrera

“What It’s Like To Be A Mexican-American Daughter (for those of you who aren’t)”

When you are a Mexican-American daughter,
it’s a little bit of a lot of things,
and a lot of the little things.

It’s things like
flipping tortillas over on the comal without burning your fingers,
it’s stepping outside for a few minutes and
getting a glowing tan the color of sun-kissed bronze.
It’s a love for chiles, ajo, tajin, goya and more
a palate for only the most flavorful and hearty food.
It’s dark eyes the color of Abuelita’s hot chocolate,
thick, unruly, neverending hair
and a bumpy nose: a reminder of your Azteca heritage
stark against colonized features.
It’s feeling more Mexican when you’re in America
and feeling more American when you’re in Mexico
and feeling more misplaced inside and out than ever before.

It’s being a translator at the ripe age of 7
and learning nonsensical English grammar

by yourself

at the same time.

It’s listening to Bachata and Cumbias all day long
and it’s not knowing the names of all your extended family.
It’s greeting each and every relative with a warm hug
and it’s having 6 cousins named Juan
and giving them all nicknames.
It’s being told to serve your dad and brothers
before you can sit down yourself
and it’s loving your father,
but wishing you never marry a man like him
who doesn’t know how to do his own laundry
or serve his own food
because as a daughter
that’s your job
and not his.

It’s scratching your head in confusion
when you don’t see Hispanic as an option on forms,
do I want to be included in a bubble
or do I want a bubble of my own?
and it’s the consequent inner turmoil
and the evershifting scale

and

What and who am I?

if my skin is pale in the winter
and if I get dirty looks for speaking anything but English
by the little old sheltered ladies in the grocery stores.
If I finished elementary school
and got further than my grandparents ever did,
and if I didn't know English when I first started school.
If I pass perfectly as a white girl
and if I had to claw my way to where I am now,
because unfortunately my parents did their best
but were late to the race
and my starting line was years behind the white girl's line.
If you ask yourself all of this and more,
then you might know
what it's like to be a Mexican American daughter.

Venus Tapang

“This is a Love Letter”

to the friend who carries
bandaids in their bookbag
for scraped knees and
mindlessly picking at hangnails;
the one who helps to superglue
the broken pieces of my
plaster puzzle back together
even when I’m difficult.

This is a valentine
to blue Crest bubblegum toothpaste
with bits of white confetti,
the kind that gunks up your
bathroom sink and
to the almost-empty bottle of
pink cotton candy perfume
from when I was eight.

This is blown air kisses
to the taste of childhood summers
where you weren’t scared
of what you looked like
in Old Navy jean shorts,
to nutella sandwiches made from
a single piece of white bread
folded in on itself,
to tall glasses of
Hershey’s chocolate syrup
spoon-stirred with two percent milk.

This is a heart-shaped
box of chocolates
for the adults who
feel like children and
the children who
feel like adults and
for the stray dogs
aimlessly wandering,
wondering when they will
finally find home.

This is a love letter.

Bea Vogley

“Slow”

Slow,

Like a bug trapped in amber

The honey glazed fatigue

I feel in my tired mind.

Slow,

My fingers are formed of granite,

My feet of weathered lead.

They ache, heavy against the dirt.

Slow,

My soul is a rumbling storm,

The smell of rain in the grass.

The bumbling clouds,

Encase my spirit,

Move me along the plains and valleys.

Slow,

Like molasses the drops fall

Warm and sweet

Against the grass,

I yearn for home.

Nuria Kim

“Seraphim Wings”

Power was once a silent drum.

It waited for the hands of the conductor to fly their seraphim wings
that taste as ambition does for vengeance,

which is to say a roaring river renders its spectator breathless.

And when the world no longer could harmonize with one another,
it pumped the sapphire blood of destiny into the hearts of the weary.

Power, once a silent drum,
now, an amateur trumpet of chaos.

A dance of death is not sadder

than a dance of life.

For its bolero is one

of wordless resolutions,

free of earthly desires

being poured in its foggy ears.

The ballet of life is a tragedy,

A fatal flaw of mortality,

A cry for help in its reality

of the breath for which it did not bespeak.

Oh, you mournful soul.

How broken is the drum that you may hold it in your heart?

Sarah Wierschem

“The Field”

The crow ran through the field,
rows of sunflowers passing it by
as it pounced into the cracked dirt.
The sun gleamed off it's glazed
eye, level with the ground to keep cool
in the summer air.

Roots burst through the ground,
beetles and worms wrapped and weaved around
like a dull, metallic rope.
Poking its head through the gaps,
twisting its twitching beak
underneath the lime canopies.

It flapped its wings,
stomping claws of straw
into the impressionable spots of mud
beneath the golden petals of the
thousands of other stars blending with the sky.
The sky where palm-sized
feathered chestnuts fluttered and chirped
at the shadow tucked under
the undergrowth.

It called too, a shirl
cough piercing through the brilliant
stalks. It dulled the colored filter
and drove the tiny bodies into
the only tree for miles.

An ink blot on a blank page,
the pupil of an eye.
A crow can't belong among
the oversaturated rows.

Not within the cool breeze
nor the earth from which exoskeletons sprout.
Not even on the ground or
perched atop the radiant horizon.

Only the graveyard, locked behind
mold and rot, may be the only place
where it cannot trespass.
Because crows don't belong among the sunflowers.

Cian Perez

“Ode to Baby Pooh”

Mami said that you came out of the womb purple
Looking like midnight roses kissed your skin
Like plums tickled your fingertips damn near blue-

You were choking on your umbilical cord
Accidentally, clumsily, enveloping yourself in what could have quite possibly been your demise
You were deemed a miracle, a gift from the skies

No dictionary provides the words to describe the ways in which I love you

Though if I had to put a name to it, you annoy me
You are the only person capable of pushing all my buttons
As if you were purposefully losing a game of operation just to get a reaction out of me,
Buzzers finitely firing off with every petty argument

I hate how you snore and talk in your sleep,
I hate the way you laugh, loud and obvious
I hate how you like barbecue sauce with your fries instead of ketchup
I hate the way you manage to routinely pepper our room with trash
-After I just finished cleaning it
I hate how you think you know all the answers when you're only 12 therefore you clearly don't

In other words, you couldn't be more perfect to me

Mami said that you came out the womb purple, cheeks flushed pink afterwards
Called you our pequena milagro
Never forget that you are a marvel to me

Hermanita, I don't say it enough
But I love the way you trust me, holding your secrets dear
I love how you smile, big and toothy with your hand over your mouth
I love how brave you are
I love how you're always there
I love how I'll never have a connection as powerful as the one I have with you

I promise that when I leave these walls, I'll take all those pieces of you with me

Diana Hernandez Gomez
"A letter to my Future Child"

Querida, I want to explain to you that it's not your fault. I'm sorry mi hija if I am maybe not the most stable and controlled human being.

I'm sorry if the chemical imbalances have ever scared you. And I'm sorry that the only inheritance you will ever get is an interesting soundtrack to follow you along and a warning list of possible diagnosis, explaining your self destructing DNA

See I was the product of puppy love and hormones.

The consequence of two idiots in love

Too broken to be loved but too loved to get rid of

baptized by life as a sin, a symbol of when things started to change

Everything spiraled downhill the second my heart started to beat

The reason that Mami had to leave her career and my Papa never finished school.

I am a shotgun wedding and a two bedroom apartment

I am 3 different jobs and overflowing time stamps

Overtime and empty stomachs

Tired feet and scarred hands

I am 3AM emergency room visits and panic attacks coated in sugar

I am the sacrifice my parents made in order to push us forward

The guinea pig a science experiment of a first child

I am weekends at abuelitas and my mother's tears

I live knowing that I was the unexpected valentine's day gift wrapped with a ribbon and shame

But I am not a mistake

How could I ever be a mistake if I come from two of the most loving and complex human beings

I am a chemical reaction

I am my dad's messy but hardworking hija

I am my mother's stubborn but creativa daughter

I am loved

I am singing in the car with Mami, as we blast her sunday cleaning music "musica de Sra. Dolida", she says

I am syrup and whipped cream drowned pancakes at the dinner downtown where mi and papa would get lunch on wednesdays in the summer

I am an older sister playing house

But you, oh you mi vida, you are magia

You are a potion, a mix of the best parts of every woman before you

You are abuelitas patience and Tatas humor

You are positively sarcastic and a handful

You are generations of women slowly breaking down in order to give you a little piece

You are the reason I keep going everyday

The reason I didn't die before eighteen

You are a masterpiece, you make everyday worth living

You are my light

You are my future and the reason I will keep trying because I can't wait till the day I am ready to meet you

“Handmade Galaxy”

I will not write a stereotypical romance poem
I won't write about how
I looked at you like you had hung the very stars in the sky,
our own personal galaxy that can't be destroyed

I won't mention how
I have a habit of surrounding myself with bad people
and I think you're the exception to that or how
I've never been the type to like physical touch
Whether that distaste was from personal preference or self preservation
I could never tell
but when I held your hand I felt safe,
the chemical burn that usually comes with physical affection
reduced to sunlight kissing my skin

I won't talk about fear
because fear and doubt doesn't belong in our galaxy
that's my own monster to fight
This isn't a love poem,
it won't have overused metaphors like
“you are the sun and I am the moon”
even if you really do remind me of the sun,
the way everyone thrives when around you,
the way when you smile you glow,
the way you radiate joy
I am the moon, waiting until dark to thrive but still working perfectly with you

I won't say you are a prince charming
because I am finally at a point where I don't need a significant other to “save me”
This poem won't talk about how being around you makes me finally feel safe for once
Not the fake kind of safe where because i'm not in physical danger
but real genuine safe
I won't say any lines about how I think we are soulmates even if one day it's just platonic
because even if the sun and the moon aren't together
you still need both to exist
in our handmade galaxy

Madolyn Greenwood
"Let Me Help You"

Dancing around our family room
Nothing but a pajama shirt and striped underwear
One foot replacing the other to the beat
Her curly brown hair bouncing in all different directions
One by one, each of us get up to dance with her
There is so much love here
Laughing so hard our stomachs hurt and tears stream down the sides of our rosy cheeks
Overwhelmed with the feeling of being safe and connected
It wraps around you like an unexpected hug from behind
You wouldn't know what she has going on behind her beautiful brown eyes
This is who we know she is
Not someone who struggles

A family who loves and cares for each other
My mother is more than her family
Putting everyone before herself
As if her problems are miniscule to ours
We complain of a scratch on the knee or a bully
She puts bandages on us, while she keeps her wounds covered
But she is happy with a family who loves and cares for each other
Why doesn't she tell us what's going on?
Why doesn't she show us how she feels?
Because she is happy with a family who loves and cares for each other
You wouldn't know what she has going on behind her beautiful brown eyes
A mother, a cancer patient, a person affected by mental health, a human.

I want you to be healthy and happy
But what I really want is you to open up
You take on the weight of everyone else's issues
The guilt you hold onto because you have problems and feelings of your own
It is okay to not be okay
You are more than the people around you
You have a family who loves and cares for each other
No one would know what she has going on behind her beautiful brown eyes
This is who we know she is

Allie Petraitis

“An Ode to Whiskey and Cigars”

Little hands working behind the bar
as Daddy reaches into the mahogany box that’s carved into the wall.
His hand goes inside the drawer
and he pulls out Stick .

“Daddy, I heard those do bad things to your lungs”,
she shouts.

Daddy shrugs it off .

He reaches over the bar near the fast hands to grab the ash tray.

“That looks good”,

he says as he makes his way over by the stairs.

Little hands scurry as they finish mixing up
whiskey with bitters and soda water,
finishing with an orange garnish.
They feel proud glancing down at the drink.
Daddy will like it.

Little feet hurry as they follow Daddy up the stairs;
they don't want him waiting.

Little feet watch each step as they go up,
carefully examining for danger that could compromise the mission:

Don't spill the Old Fashioned.

Little hands open the sliding glass door
to see Daddy lighting up the cancer stick.
Second hand smoke begins to fill the air,
and then into the little lungs.
She’s used to it, though.

Smoke continues to travel,
seeping into the Second hand sweater that’s way too big for her.
She found it in Daddy’s closet one day,
and wore so dry,
that the tiny holes in the sleeve became fully functioning thumb holes.

She passes him the old fashioned.
He doesn’t use a coaster again.
Condensation drips down the side of the whiskey glass,
leaving behind a perfect ring,
tiny enough to fit her hand.

Time passes,
the cancer stick becomes smaller
and the glass more empty.

Little hands working to clean up
as Daddy continues to snore.
She puts the cigar out in the fire pit,
and the glass back into the cabinet.
She knows where everything goes.
Little Hands are tired,
but not as tired as Daddy.

Faceless

After Edvard Munch's *The Girl by the Window*

By Nailah Brown

white gown brushing my shins,
I stare out the window
not wanting to be in,
or do I?

faceless girl,
showing more expression in my
left toe

blue light fills my room
leaving it just dim enough
to only highlight
me and my floor

a glass shield thickened to
keep me in,
to keep out the cold and
danger

a glass shield thickened to
hide myself, but
thin enough to see
right through it,

but not right through me.

lights click off
as I avoid my bed.



Pink

In Response to Nightlife by Archibald John Motley Jr.

By Trinity Arias

The faint aroma of wine mixed
With the sharp tang of brandy
Floats
Through the open door, *dissolves*
When it hits the cool night air.

The heat of swaying limbs,
The jostling of too many bodies for space.
The flirtatious attitude of the men
With newly purchased top hats,
Dancing through the air to create
A rosey cloud that no one can come down from.
A rosey cloud that no one can come down from-

But wait.
Amongst the smiles, the dancing
Sit a few figures alone
They are not on the rose cloud,
They are
Sinking
Back down to earth,
Back to their obligation to loneliness,
Back to being the only one truly there.
While others float around them in their own heads,
Their own dreams.

A statue watches with them,
Made of stone, unable to be free.
To dance, to sing, to taste the grapes and sweat.
The lonely head stands to remind those who see
That there is a blue hue as well.
People carry it around with them now,
Pops of green and turquoise soon to be blue.

Yet for now,
The small clock on the wall is forgotten.
Time is frozen in this safe haven
And life is colored pink.



Our Kingdom
By Perseus Jackson

You see us as a galaxy,
Our own Milky Way or Andromeda,
And I love that.
I've always loved outer space.
You captured me like the stars above
Always seem to catch my eye.
But I have a different view of us together
To me,
It is a kingdom.

It's a kingdom in a far away land,
One that doesn't reach the eye.
You are the prince,
Because the best way I can describe
How I see you is royalty.
And I am the jester,
A fool for you.
I love to make you laugh,
and I smile when you do.
So late one night
We snuck away together,
Out to a field full of long vivid grass,
Where the moonlight hid us from others,
But not from each other.
We laid in the grass and talked for hours,
Hand in hand beside one another.
And I could swear to you,
There was no place I'd rather be
Than in that moment.

When the sun rose
We went our separate ways.
But letters from doves filled our windows,
Planning the next time we escaped,
Wondering how was one another's day,
Loving the times when I came down to Jest,
And you were in the crowd.
The sun somehow making your glowing self
Even brighter than before.
And we'd do this routine for days,
Until the nights would come again
When we admired the stars.
I looked at ones above,
And the ones I found in your eyes.

So perhaps we can compromise.
We can live in a hidden kingdom,
In a far away galaxy,
One that is completely our own.

up is down and left is back and right is nowhere to be found
by Ollie Wayer

i feel like i was dropped in the middle of a staircase surrounded by other staircases but i try to go up and then
all of a sudden my foot falls until i hit a step that's lower than the one i just tried to escape
and i look up and the next step is twenty feet high and i try to find another staircase to jump to but there's
nothing but darkness on one side and blinding light on the other and i finally see a staircase at the top that
leads to the door that says EXIT in big red letters and its steps go
(home, safety, love)

a
c
c
e
p
t
a
n
c
e

and finally the a is in sight and i smile as my foot falls onto it but then i'm flipped upside down and suddenly
a

t
r
o
c
i
t
y

(hell, hatred, disgust)

and there's no way to go but down
but i don't want to go down because it's straight into my fears leading a rotted train down broken tracks down
the steepest mountain face first
i don't want to be an atrocity
the a minus at the end of the sentence
but first i have to stop avoiding
the a at the beginning of acceptance

An Ode to Oranges
By Reagan Sanders

The radiant citrus that grows on the trees
With a divoted, dimply exterior
This dense outer shell to protect you from predators
Like the shields that protected
The soldiers in ancient Athens
Preventing even the toughest of bugs
From penetrating through your skin.

Your color stands out,
brighter than the shimmering gold
In chests pirates try so hard to find.
A natural defense
Protecting the sweet nectar inside
From the various diseases thrown at you
The polyphenols produced leave you prepared
Prepared for dangers that may come
Prepared for the hurt the world may bestow upon you.

Your fiery carapace drives people away
It is too hard to peel
Leaving behind a white, bitter residue
Flakes of your rind get crammed under fingernails
Taking weeks to remove and multiple hand washings.

Only those brave enough to break through
And those patient enough to remove your exterior
Get to see the unique identity within,
The sweet pulp that make taste buds
hula dance on the tongue
Refreshing juices that bleed out with each bite
And the vitamin C that enriches the body

People underestimate you
They shy away from your lumpy outsides
And never wait to see what lies beneath

Hair

by Madden

This is a thank you to
The one curl in class
That volunteers before I do,
Eager to show my peers
I am as smart as them.

This is a funeral for
The two-strand twists
That thrive in memory,
Always jeweled with
plastic butterflies to
Match my outfits.

This is a navigation
Of the three sections
I divide my hair into,
Separate jungles to
Be conquered.

This is an acknowledgment
Of the hair ties I need,
Forever four times bigger
Than what people
try to offer me.

This is the prison sentence
Of five hours in the stylist's chair
Retelling All the ways the
world may never change.

This is the purchase of a
6-day trial of a sore head,
The small price paid for
Culture to snake down my
back and over my shoulders.

This is an appreciation
For the seven silk bonnets
In various colours to
Match my mood, attitude
And style.

This is a warning for
The eight people a day
I have to tell not
to touch My hair.
Yes, it is my natural hair.
I know it's soft.
No, you cannot pet me
Like I am a dog passing by.

Revenant

By Lee Kesheimer

They always thought about the morning fog
How it starts and obscures the view
A hollow hole in time and space
A green and wretched beast,
Don't wander into the fog they said
It will come to get you.

The mystery remained in the air
A friend to guide you home on a cool rainy day?
A parent to hold your hand as you learn to cross the road?
No.

The Revenant

To sweep the foolish into the afterlife

Don't go in the fog.

The peering eyes
Snake tongued creature
Bones exposed to the sky,
Undead menace
Being of wrath
Causing one to die

O' ghostly presence, summoned through fire and brimstone
Heed thy word and cover your mirrors well.

Burn sage in the air
Children beware
The Revenant is out tonight.

My Home
By Abby Miller

It's stuffy and old.
The only use it has is to
provide warmth during the Christmas Walk.
Why go there when we have one at school?
Because it's home.
I could make a map of the
whole layout of that building
with both eyes closed and
two hands tied behind my back.

The sun filters through the windows
illuminating each book it touches.
The clear glass of each window
creates a portal to the world
behind the library.
To the place with the big rock
beside the stream where
my mom read *Anne of Green Gables*.

Each book that rests on the
tan metal shelves is unique.
All representative of someone's ideas
that they were brave enough
to share with the world.
Now I hold these words
in my hands.
The ink seeps into my brain
where it will find a new home
with me forever.
Our favorite characters become our home.
And therefore, our family.
My home will forever be
with those books at the library

Ode to Clocks
By Ethan Rhoades

One of the most mysterious things to ever come to the earth.
You control the very people that made you.
Your mere presence makes the men that made you scared.
For you are a reminder of life.
You remind everyone that the gift given to them has an end

Yet your two hands never change
You are forgiving, you are fair
No matter the desperation from the cries
You stay balanced.

Knowing that you exceed the three parts of man
Their minds can't seem to alter your affects
Their bodies succumb to your powers
And their souls at the mercy of when you wish to take them.
You stay humble in your ways.

Your four pillars stand as pantheons
Becoming the foundation on all actions that we conduct
The world is set by your pace
The passing of your hands control when event are planned
When life is brought in and when those once alived are sentenced to death.

But 5 more minutes
That's all you here.
No matter how much you give
Man will never be satisfied
You are the garden of eden
And the promise of living is our reward.

Yet the tempting apple driven by our desire always will succeed you.
As if 666 is pushing us towards death.
Leaving you with what?
No rewards no praise
The only thing we can give you as the imperfect animals we are is shame.
Shame that you can't cure an illness you were never meant to know.

But that shouldn't be how it is.
The world is not made of lucky 7's
Gold does not line the street
Horses do not fly.
You are merely a reminder.
You take that infinite dream and stand it upright to make the 8
You show your viewers that you are not stopping.
You are showing them to make the most of what they are given.
That the time given is not meant to be a calling card to the railroad track.
You are the holy spirit revised.

That Which You Did Not Do

After Ivan Albright's *That Which I Should Have Done I Did Not Do (The Door)*

By Azrael Parduhn

You scratch at a door worn down by many
Nails fragile and weak
From a lifetime coated in dust and dirt.
You worked till the chill drenched your
bones
And your eyes fogged with the frost
Of a thousand winters
Yet you still struggle
Against the crushing weight
Of the oaken door
That marks your fate.

You hear a soft hymn
Floating through stale air
With a warmth that cannot reach you
Where the roses end and asphodel begin
Where the ribbon is cut
Faded and aged
Where mint drowns out
The scent of the dead
Your story set in mighty stone
One day to be worn away
With your memory.

The flower petals crunch
With the creak of your wheelchair
As you still struggle
Grasping for waxen leaves
For the doorknob
Though the other side is no longer yours
to see
Deep down you know this
But who could accept so eagerly
The dying light of our waning time.

From a lifetime coated in dust and dirt
You wonder what could have been
If instead of this sand slipping out the
hourglass
Sugar could bring nearer peace
If pearls clung to your neck
And diamonds hung from your ears
Would release truly be so sweet
Though still would stand
The wooden door?

With billions of stories told
Dying in dimming sunlight
Could your's have been told any
differently?

If your footsteps left gold in your wake
If not a single tear ever needed to fall
If every moment you filled with charity
If you had the perfection of the heavenly
Could those final grains in the glass
Be looked at with a grin?

Nevermore
Would it matter
Would it.

With jewels and only laughter all the way
With sunlight marking every day
With the heavens always opened
And the gods always full of love
That would not change
The human fear
Of our errors and looming ends.

The door stands evermore
Impassive and cold
Only for what we lack
To understand
No matter life
No matter the choices made
Our mortal quarrel is meaningless
For that which never crumbles
And never grows old
Is not in our control
So we must fight
Some of the hardest human urges and
Accept
That which you did not do.

