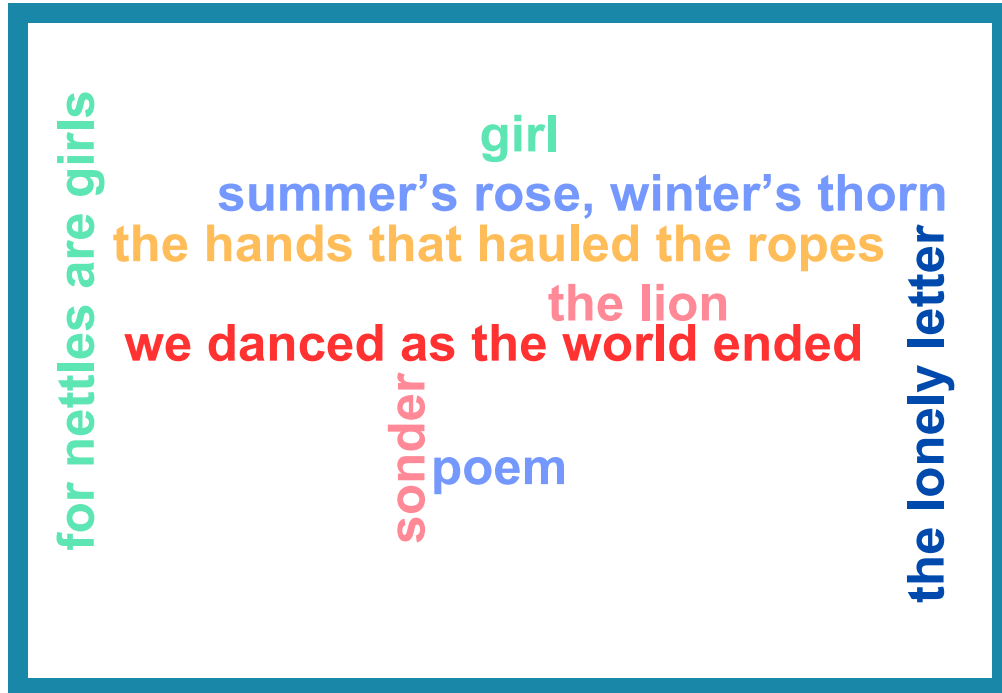




**Oide**

Tacú leis an bhFoghlaim  
Ghairmiúil i measc Ceannairí  
Scoile agus Múinteoirí

Supporting the Professional  
Learning of School Leaders  
and Teachers



# Write a Poem 2026 Prize-Giving

The Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise, Co Laois  
Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2026



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## Table of Contents

Foreword	04
<i>Girl - AI Kelly</i>	05
<i>The Lonely Letter - Jamie Power</i>	07
<i>Poem - Bryan Ogugua</i>	09
<i>Summer's Rose, Winter's Thorn - Liam McCormick</i>	10
<i>Sonder - Ogechukwu Estelle Ogochujwu</i>	11
<i>We Danced as the World Ended - Niamh Ní Thuama</i>	13
<i>The Hands That Hauled The Ropes - Jamie Anderson</i>	15
<i>For Nettles are Girls - Phoenix McEntee</i>	17
<i>The Lion - Pia El Asmar</i>	18



## Foreword

The Oide Language and Literacy team are delighted to take this opportunity to celebrate the wonderful achievements of our students and teachers in the 2025-2026 National Write a Poem Competition. The levels of creativity on display demonstrate both the resilience of our student body and teachers' continued devotion to fostering and nurturing the wonderful talents in their classrooms. We congratulate all the entries for the high standard achieved.

We received almost 500 entries from schools across the country, and it was exceptionally difficult to choose the winning poem from so many worthy entries. The variety of themes and the creative use of language and form were highly impressive. We hope that these young poets will continue to write more poetry, and we look forward to reading their work in the future.

We would like to thank the teachers involved for encouraging students to embark on their creative journey and for providing invaluable guidance throughout the writing process. We are also extremely grateful to Esther Herlihy of Navan Education Centre and Margaret Mary Grant from Laois Education Support Centre for ensuring the success of this year's competition.

Oide Language and Literacy Team

*Poetry is the human soul entire,  
squeezed like a lemon or lime,  
drop by drop, into atomic words.*

- Langston Hughes



## Junior - 1st Place

### Girl

They keep handing me girl  
Like it's a coat I can put back on  
Draping it across my back  
Buttoning it up  
Keeping me in  
Rolling their eyes when it slips off  
My ragged rough edges

Sweetheart they whisper  
Darling they coo  
Pinkwrapping every syllable  
Until I choke on femininity

I try to tell them  
My gender  
is not a thing they can decide  
My voice is not a dial  
they can tune to girl  
But the words turn to dust  
When their eyes close over  
Already tuning me out

So I become a ghost  
In my own body  
Letting the she pass by  
The her slip through me  
Like bad reception  
Wincing at the ladies  
Crying at the miss  
That hangs upon my name  
A formal title  
A lock without a key  
Girl, girl, girl  
A nightmare I can't wake up from



In the mirror  
At the darkest of hours  
I practice rebellion  
Cropping my hair into flames  
Binding my chest  
Into something truer  
Something me  
Painting my nails the colour of rainy days  
But the world insists on glitter  
On pretty, on soft  
On all the words that fit a dancer  
Told never to fly

So I dream of my words  
tearing away the ribbons  
They keep on tying  
Around my life  
Stripping away my entire life story  
Until these words remain  
finally fluid, finally free, finally, finally me

But for now I am a mirage,  
The ripples on a still pond  
Distorting my face out of shape  
What they see instead of who I am

One day I'll be solid  
One day I'll be seen  
Until then I keep whispering  
To my reflection  
Hold on  
Be strong  
They cannot misgender  
What refuses to be contained

Student: **Al Kelly**

School: **Greystones Community College, Co. Wicklow**



## Junior - 2nd Place

## The Lonely Letter

iiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

Together they stand, aligned and still,  
Each upright mark with iron will.

iiiiiiiiiiii

Their rows are neat, their spacing true,  
A perfect world of white and black hue.

iiii iiii iii iii

Groups take shape, the pattern's neat,  
Small clusters hum with steady beat.

jiiiiiii

A curve arrives, a stranger's start,  
A softer line, a different part.

iiiijiii

They glance, unsure of what to say,  
One tilt is all that breaks their way.

iiii j iii

A space appears — the gap is wide,  
A quiet ache begins inside.

iii j

The silence hums, the eyes all turn,  
A subtle sting begins to burn.

iii

j

The drop, the drift, the turning cold,  
A lonely shape left to unfold.

iii

j

The distance grows, a blank divide,  
Where whispers hide and hope has died.

iiiiiii

j

The crowd moves on, unchanged, the same,  
While j dissolves beneath their frame.



j j

Two shapes stand, but far apart,  
No gentle touch can warm the heart.

j j

They drift like shadows through the air,  
Alone, unseen, with none to care.

iiii

The crowd resumes its steady hum,  
Unbroken walls, where none feel numb.

j

A single curve in endless white,  
A fallen mark without its light.

...j...

The hush arrives, a breath, a pause,  
The world forgets what difference was.

i j i

A tremor stirs, a reach, a glance,  
Two shapes align by fragile chance.

i j i

The courage blooms, the fear gives way,  
A gentle arc begins to sway.

ijji

A harmony of line and curve,  
Together now, they start to serve.

iiijiii

Not the same, but still they stay,  
The lines forgive what curves convey.

ijijijij

And in the end, they stand as one,  
All marks beneath the same bright sun.

Student: **Jamie Power**

School: **Abbey Community College, Ferrybank, Co. Kilkenny**



## Junior- 3rd Place

### Poem

When the stars blink slow and the rivers stall,  
When the cities echo with nothing at all,  
When the clocks all whisper, "You've had your time,"  
Will the wind still carry our unspoken rhyme?  
We built our kingdoms from borrowed sand,  
Lit fires of wonder with trembling hands,  
Sang to the heavens of glory and gain,  
But never once listened to the song of the rain.  
Now roots reclaim the roads we paved,  
And ghosts of forests softly wave,  
They hum of love, of loss, of blame -  
Of how the Earth forgot our names.  
Yet somewhere beneath the sleeping stone,  
A single seed still dreams alone,  
And if it wakes beneath the sun's warm flame,  
The world might whisper our names again.

Student: **Bryan Ogugua**

School: **St. Benildus College, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin**



## Junior - Highly Commended

### Summer's Rose, Winter's Thorn

As Apollo's chariot nurtures Summer's rose,  
A warm and gentle breeze it blows,  
The gentle pulse of grass rippling through fields,  
Heat's caring embrace never yields.

Tumbling leaves of Autumn's day,  
The dizzy gale in a state of play.  
Amber scents and pumpkin glows,  
The dance of the willow tree slows.

The harsh dark envelops Winter's morn,  
Almost as sharp as the biting thorn.  
The King of the North awaiting his eve,  
The Pumpkin King has taken his leave.

For every warm rose of the fleeting year,  
There is a sinister and numbing fear.  
The thorn of Winter pierces the night,  
But the Spring Cherry brings a cheery delight.

Student: **Liam McCormick**

School: **Moville Community College, Co. Donegal**



## Senior - 1st Place

### Sonder

I am a mosaic of all I've ever known.  
Smooth and jagged shards etched in  
bruise and bone, woven into my  
golden web of narratives.  
Yet they forever only see the shadow,  
never the shine between the cracks.

He carries a cross too heavy to bear,  
lives a life just as absurd as I.  
Alone in the night sky, the moon illuminates  
little beyond the shiny tiles they all see.  
His silent battles never shown, yet  
his mosaic echoes all he's ever known.

She is an amalgamation.  
This complicated creation, which destiny determines to remain unknown in her station.  
She lifts her voice and is cast into darkness,  
Yet inside her chest, quietly aglow  
beats a mosaic of all she's ever known.

They fractured our narratives into fragments.  
Jagged. Stinging. Piercing.  
Solitary anomalies we're used to being,  
but perhaps there's more to what we're seeing.  
Perhaps like kintsugi, with veins of gold,  
Could we discover the cracks of the stories untold?

If only I could open my eyes and enlighten myself -  
If only he could cease to judge and make haste to listen -  
If only she could embrace their iniquities as well as her own -



## Senior - 1st Place

Then—Perhaps we could truly see it.

Not just the fleeting narratives we appear to be, but the shimmering stories which wail beneath  
And shard by shard and piece by piece,  
we become this broken masterpiece,  
through a colourful new looking glass.  
Its most complex of shards reflect  
her pain, her pride, his sorrow, his solace.

No longer shadows, we diverge into our own epic narratives.  
As she endures this world of blunder,  
As he discovers earthly wonder,  
As I lay at night, astill and ponder;  
How thrilling it may be, a world of sonder.

We are mosaics of all we've ever known.

Student: **Ogechukwu Estelle Ogochujwu**

School: **St. Dominic's College, Cabra, Co. Dublin**



## Senior - 2nd Place

### We Danced as the World Ended

The heavens tore open like wet paper.  
Flames licked the spines of cathedrals.  
Somewhere, oceans swallowed names we'd never learn.  
And you—  
you reached for me,  
as if there was still time.

Your hand found mine  
like it always had—  
not desperate, not rushed,  
but certain,  
like gravity,  
like breath.

The ground trembled under our feet.  
Birds flew backwards,  
the stars blinked out  
one by one—  
like someone upstairs  
was closing the shop.

But your eyes—  
God your eyes held a sky I could live inside.  
We didn't speak,  
for what could be said,  
when language had cracked open  
like the earth behind us.



So we danced.  
In bare feet and ruin,  
on asphalt still warm  
from what used to be sunlight.  
You hummed something soft—  
was it the lullaby your mother sang,  
or the one I sang that night,  
you told me your pops died.

It didn't matter.  
The tune held the shape of home.

Around us the world let go—  
towers falling like tired kings,  
sirens fading into ash.  
And we—  
we turned slowly,  
like planets pretending there's still a sun.

I think I smiled.  
I think you did too.  
Or maybe we were just crying,  
the way people do,  
when there is nothing left  
but love;  
and time has run out.

And when the fire reached us,  
we didn't scream.  
We held each other closer,  
and kept dancing,  
like fools  
like Saints  
like the only thing,  
left worth saving.

Student: **Niamh Ní Thuama**

School: **Coláiste Íosagáin, Booterstown, Co. Dublin**



## Senior - 3rd Place

### The Hands That Hauled The Ropes

When berths were once as plentiful as hands to work them,  
mornings arrived with diesel and shouting.

The bay thudded to life with engines waking,  
nets came up heavy with the sea's first silver,  
hauled by hands thickened by decades of rope and cold.

Steel toes rang sharp on wet deck-plate  
as gulls stitched sound into the morning's breath.

Every door opened toward the tide.

Even the houses leaned forward a little,  
as if waiting for their sons in the lift of the tide.

Then the numbers tightened.

Tonnage trimmed to the width of a pen stroke,  
signed off by hands that had never touched a net.

Quotas carved by offices far inland,  
in rooms that knew only mahogany and ink,  
not diesel nor herring.

They called it capacity adjustment,  
a phrase that left the harbour colder each year.

Boats that once braved storms sat tethered and idle,  
rust rising slowly along their hulls.

The auction hall learned a thinner echo -  
fewer crates, fewer bidders, fewer futures.

Some men left for Aberdeen,  
others stayed just long enough  
to witness the end of what raised them.

The harbour remained, but the work that named it was gone.

Now dawn comes quiet over the water.

The boats lie moored at the pier,  
their masts ticking like clocks  
measuring the months the engines sleep.

Shutters lift late, if they lift at all.



## Senior - 3rd Place

No voices rise across the morning  
only the slow cooling of metal,  
and gulls pulling at frayed rope  
that no hand will haul again.  
The town still faces the tide,  
built for a fleet that doesn't leave home,  
left holding its breath for a country  
that forgot the first thing that ever fed it.

Student: **Jamie Anderson**

School: **St. Catherine's Vocational School, Killybegs, Co. Donegal**



## Senior - Highly Commended

### For Nettles are Girls

Peaceful she swayed  
in the soil she stood  
for she was a nettle  
in a freshly blooming wood

For what life gave her, she gave back  
in bounds of natural beauty  
All ailments could be cured  
from sipping on her sweet tea

However, when she was disturbed  
by the unwanted touch of man  
stinging, searing pain  
was her first and only plan

Then she was known  
as villainous and cruel  
She hurt that poor man  
twas not the liability of that fool

It was not the fault of the sir,  
but the nettle's fault for her allure

Blaming the hurt on the peaceful leaf  
instead of the hand that gave her grief.

Student: **Phoenix McEntee**

School: **Rosemount School, Sandyford, Co. Dublin**



## Senior - Highly Commended

### The Lion

“The lion is the king of the jungle,” the animals exclaimed.

The lion – crowned by whispers,  
Not by choice, but by expectation.

A title forged in others’ fear,

In the trembling hush

Of the jungle’s breath.

Majesty mistaken for peace.

Perfection mistaken for strength.

Behind the golden eyes –

A storm kept silent,

A fracture veiled in flame.

It swam one day –

Not through rivers,

But through thought.

Each current tugged at its mane,

Each ripple a reflection

Of what it could never be.

Splash. There, it drowned –

Quietly,

As the jungle bowed its head.

Alive, yet hollow.

A crown heavier than bone.

The echo of a roar

Trapped between pride and pain.

It never asked to rule,

Only once stood tall –

And the world mistook that stance

For a promise.



Now perfection is a cage  
Built from applause.  
Doubt slithers through the grass –  
Soft, unseen.  
What if strength was never  
Measured by might?  
What if the crown  
Was never meant to fit?

So the lion exhales –  
Lets the gold fall from its head.  
The jungle does not stir.  
No thunder, no defiance –  
Only stillness.  
In that silence  
It is free.

“The lion was the king of the jungle,” the animals sighed.

Student: **Pia El Asmar**

School: **St. Mary's Secondary School, Macroom, Co. Cork**





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