



**the**

**life**

**of**

**words**

**ANTHOLOGY 2016**

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The Life of Words  
Poetry Anthology

VOLUME I

2016

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## Preface



**A**t St Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo, I lead a small research team dedicated to thinking about the exchanges between poetry and lexicography in the modern period. With funding from the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation and St Jerome's University, this year we inaugurated a poetry competition for Ontario secondary school students. The instruction was to "Write a Poem About a Word," and the challenge was to think primarily about the thinginess of the word itself, in addition to what it might mean or signify. We received several dozen poems from across the province, and read them all with interest and admiration. Here we present the fifteen poems we thought best answered the challenge of the competition. My thanks go to all the students who wrote in, and to the teachers who advised and guided them. Special thanks too to the members of *The Life of Words* research team who helped in spreading the word, adjudicating the competition, and assembling this anthology: Adam Bradley, Chris Giannakopoulos, Cosmin Dzsurdzsa, and Danielle Griffin.

David-Antoine Williams  
May, 2016

## Somewhere Between *Abaft* and *Abate*

To desert.  
To withdraw from.  
To leave completely and utterly.  
Seven letters and three syllables, but it always sounds like you leaving —  
slamming doors and insincerity.  
So desperate for freedom that you blindly took an axe to your own family tree.  
Memories swept under rugs of distance.  
You tried to cleanse yourself of guilt, but you just washed your hands of me instead.  
I'm still pouring down the drain.  
Vowels soften the endless blows of each goodbye.  
Nearly.  
Severed ties reconstruct themselves into heart strings, wrapping around your ankles  
and pulling you towards the exit ramp.  
It turns out blood is just as viscous as water.  
Lines curve and bend peacefully, but still hack at my trachea as they leave me.  
When you taste blood, stop.  
Leave me stranded —  
a hitch-hiker.  
But know that my arms are getting tired.  
Run away from me and find happiness at the finish line.  
I am an empty house – you evicted yourself.  
Windows boarded, roof sagging,  
your departure began my demolition.  
So, you can erase me from your to-do list.  
You can slight my every creak.  
To leave completely and utterly.  
To withdraw from.  
To desert.  
*Abandon.*

LEAH KUIACK  
Grade 12

*Leah Kuiack's poem was selected as the winner of The Life of Words Poetry Competition, 2016. She receives \$100 to spend at Indigo.ca, plus copies of The School Bag poetry anthology and a one-year subscription to The New Quarterly, both for herself and for her school library.*

# Lead

Loud voices demand attention.  
Words are boots of lead being tossed around.  
You must think before you pass them on  
because a misuse of lead can weigh one down.

And how can one lead when weighed down  
with lead? They can't — and instead  
they're led around and around  
'til the plumbing becomes clogged at the head.

But how can you give lead and lead?  
An army of well-worn soles can't see  
past the hot lead striking a beat.  
Minds of lead are a one way street.

Lead only leads to conflict in the brain,  
poisoning minds once meant to follow.  
Clouded judgement and upbringings  
where people are drained, left hollow.

The more the lead is tossed,  
the less potential there is to lead.  
Feathers float, but lead drops  
once exposed to the air.

No one saves lead; it's used  
until all that is left is a nub.  
Silver and bronze are not hard to bear  
because they're of value and extremely rare.

The subtle adversary does the most harm,  
leading silent revolutions when the time is near.  
With lead and a ruler you can draw a straight line,  
but a laden mind won't get you too far.

MATTHEW EMMONS  
Grade 11

*Matthew Emmons's poem was selected as a runner up. He receives the The School Bag poetry anthology and a one-year subscription to The New Quarterly, both for himself and for his school library.*

## *Propinquity*

A word not often spoken,  
but which explains so much:  
kinship and closeness,  
human bonds.

Its cousin is *proximity*,  
related by the Latin  
word for “near” —  
*prope*.

A sociology and  
psychology term; a theory  
not often taught  
to the young minds of today.

A perfect word to replace  
the phrase, “I just do!  
Can’t explain how  
or why.”

Perhaps to explain,  
“I don’t know, I just feel  
an incredible bond. I just  
can’t feel another way.”

This term to explain  
these common phrases,  
and the depth of why  
they feel this way.

This one simple  
word to explain the  
bonds between parent  
and child.

Siblings to siblings,  
friends to friends,  
enemies to lovers, and  
so much more.

*Propinquity*:  
kith and kin,  
common interests,  
and time spent together.

To explain the bonds  
created between people,  
and how crushes  
are formed.

JADE-MARIE MULDER  
Grade 11

*Jade-Marie Mulder's poem was selected as a runner up. She receives the The School Bag poetry anthology and a one-year subscription to The New Quarterly, both for herself and for her school library.*



## Alone

It was deserted,  
The only one there;  
Isolated by the rest of them,  
Not another presence.  
It means to be the only one there,  
To be isolated and lonely,  
Deserted by your kind.  
It also means single-handedly  
Leaving behind people,  
Secluding one from the other,  
Neglecting your kind,  
Pushing away existence.  
It is called being “alone” —

MARSHALL ABBASI  
Grade 12

## A Poem to my Deer

Oh, I write a poem to my dear,  
My dear that I did love so.  
She as beautiful as a deer,  
And like a deer she must go.

BANG! And she was gone.  
It hurt like the blast of a gong.  
It rang my head, it rang my heart,  
It rang my heart till dawn.  
I wrote this poem like a song.

A song,  
A song to my dear that is gone:  
A deer running into the dawn.

KENDRICK TRAN  
Grade 11

## Catalyst

1.

Catalyst.

“A substance that increases the rate of a chemical reaction

without itself undergoing physical change.”

This is what Google told me,

a word and its corresponding definition.

But what is a word

if it cannot transcend the shackles of science

and glide along the abstract nature of language?

2.

Definition:

“A substance that increases the rate of a chemical reaction...”

Reaction—

trillions of ideas percolating from a geyser

onto a digital plain.

The catalyst?

The plain:

an empty canvas for the potential of thought,

fragmented or complete,

“...without itself undergoing physical change.”

3.

Catalyst,

such a euphonious word,

a pleasant sound rolling off your tongue,

marking the end of a blank document.

Is it not synonymous with inspiration?

It is the fulcrum of creativity,

for inspiration spawns an idea,

an idea being the seed,  
inspiration the hand dug within nurturing earth  
giving the plant an opportunity to grow.

4.

Catalyst:

a defining role

where any actor is qualified.

A memory stained by adolescence,

an intrinsic desire for ubiquity,

a kiss from the angel in your bed,

a short excerpt from a dictionary,

catalyst.

When you pull a bowstring in the dark,

where will the arrow land?

5.

Catalyst:

where the cold touch of frost lays its fingers to the  
ground,

and the orange glimmer of the sun hangs high

to release the green of spring

from her locked cage.

JARED J. S. MARSHALL

Grade 12

## Fuck

On days like today,  
when I am behind on work,  
I groan and complain  
and use my favourite word: “fuck.”  
When I drop something,  
and don’t want to pick it up,  
I roll my eyes and  
under my breath say: “fuck.”  
When my parents mess up my plans  
or I forget something important,  
I yell and yell and use my  
word once again: “fuck.”  
Fuck! my alarm is going off again.  
Annoyed and angered before 6 am.  
5 days a week, 38 weeks a year—  
will this ever fucking stop?  
But, when I accomplish something big,  
that everyone said I couldn’t do,  
I say it with enthusiasm:  
“Fuck yeah, I did it!”

TAYLOR DUQUETTE  
Grade 12

## Two Haikus and an Acrostic

### A Briefing

I will keep this brief  
Your breezy briefs can't be seen  
Not even briefly

ABDIRAHMAN FARAH  
Grade 11

### Fly

Fruit flies  
Like to  
Interfere with  
Everyone's  
Salad

ADAM CHOLES  
Grade 11

### Leaves

The leaves leave the tree  
Daddy starts to go on leave  
Leaves never come back

ABDULLAH-AL JUBAIR  
Grade 11

## In *I* Alone

Is it not strange  
That the smallest words are used  
To represent  
The most complex things?  
These words written  
So casually, carelessly.  
For instance, *I* —  
Haphazardly,  
Abruptly, a mark upon a page.  
A simple slash,  
A thoughtless scratch.  
The word remains  
But a single letter, for that is  
All that it takes.

And seemingly,  
People quickly forget, the weight  
Of that letter.  
*I* – seeming so insignificant.  
Yet to write *I*,  
Is to inscribe one's completeness  
In a tiny word.

How bold it is  
To scrawl one's entire being,  
Entrusting it  
In the grasp of a lone letter.  
Few consider  
The power to contain so much  
In *I* alone.

MICHELLE ROBINSON  
Grade 11

## A Word with many Faces

How I look when I'm surprised—  
Though surprised doesn't explain it,  
Not quite,  
A sudden movement,  
One expression to the next,  
Might also mean that I'm impressed,  
Or that might not be it.  
A word that reflects many feelings,  
(That is, depending on the situation).  
While pronouncing the word,  
My mouth obscured,  
Mirroring its sound,  
I'm *shocked*, and you can only guess why.

ANAM ASAD  
Grade 11



## My First and Favourite Word

My first and favourite word,  
A word that speak of many moments;  
Play-fighting, conversations, going out,  
Or simply enjoying life,  
All of which are irreplaceable.

A word of many relations:  
Family, rivals, mentor,  
And best friend —  
All who form close bonds.

A word shared by many in this world:  
*Zeh-zeh, onee-chan, soeur.*  
All speak of adoration, respect,  
Sometime in friendly rivalry.

My first and favourite word,  
The word I hold dear to my life,  
The word that used to hide my “I love you”s,  
Will be forever you,  
My dear sister.

TINA HUYNH  
Grade 11

## Imbue

What a funny thing it is, to imbue.  
To infuse feelings, thoughts, or some view.  
Infiltrating the minds of folks around  
With writing, speech, or musical sound.

That we let our minds be inspired  
By qualities we once desired.  
But to be pervaded with fear and hate,  
Is to permit a cold and bitter fate.

Such power in a tiny word: *imbue*.  
Have you let its influence stir in you?

JUSTIN STIVER  
Grade 12

## Poem: Dictionary

Woman

**noun** [woo m-uh n]

1. An adult human female.
2. A man's girlfriend, wife or lover
3. A female who is paid to clean someone's house and carry out other domestic duties.
4. A peremptory form of address to a woman:  
'Don't be daft, woman!'

Strong

**adjective** [strawng, strong]

1. *see* **woman**

CHLOE COOK

Grade 12

## 2016 Competition Flyer

A P R I L I S P O E T R Y M O N T H !

### *The Life of Words*

# POETRY COMPETITION

Write a poem *about* a word



#### IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

- ▶ Think about how a word sounds, and whether it sounds like what it means (or not).
- ▶ Find a word that has an interesting double (or triple!) meaning.
- ▶ Try to explain the significance of a word you know in another language.
- ▶ Research how a word has been used in the past, maybe by particular people or groups.
- ▶ Describe how a word looks on the page.

#### RESOURCES & EXAMPLES

- ▶ The *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- ▶ Regional and dialect dictionaries.
- ▶ Frances Leviston, “Gliss”
- ▶ William Shakespeare, “Sonnet 135”
- ▶ Emily Dickinson, “There is a word”
- ▶ Paul Muldoon, “Anseo”
- ▶ Carol Ann Duffy, “Syntax”

#### PRIZES

- ▶ Winner: \$100 gift-card to spend at Chapters.ca, plus:
- ▶ Runner(s) up: Inscribed prize copy of *The School Bag* anthology and a 1-Year subscription to *The New Quarterly* for you and your school library, plus:
- ▶ Honorable mentions: Publication of your poem in *The Life of Words Anthology*.

#### HOW TO ENTER

- ▶ Send your poem\* to [thelifeofwords@sju.ca](mailto:thelifeofwords@sju.ca) before 15 April 2016.
- ▶ Include your full name, school, and grade.
- ▶ All participants must be Ontario secondary school students to be eligible.

\* Note: by submitting a poem you agree to its publication, online or in print, under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives license. Submission does not guarantee publication. No correspondence will be entered into.

~ Questions about this contest and its rules may be directed to Prof. David-Antoine Williams (St. Jerome's University).

