

APRIL IS POETRY MONTH!

POETRY COMPETITION

2017 COMPETITION THEME

Write a poem about some aspect or aspects of

language

T H E

L I F E

O F W

O R D S

IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

- Aspects of language may include words, phrases, sayings, grammatical features, and sounds. Think about what makes these special, significant, or meaningful.
- If you know another language than English, try to convey the true meaning of a favorite word or saying in that language.
- Write a poem about a word or saying with an interesting double (or multiple!) meaning.
- Research how a word has been used in literature in the past.
- Research how a word came into English and the changes in its meaning and/or pronunciation over time.

RESOURCES

- The *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- Regional, dialect, and foreign-language dictionaries.
- Etymological dictionaries.
- Poetry collections and anthologies.

* Note: by submitting a poem you agree to its publication, online or in print, under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Submission does not guarantee publication. No correspondence will be entered into.

Questions regarding this contest may be directed to Prof. David-Antoine Williams (St. Jerome's University).

PRIZES

- Winner: \$100 gift-card to spend at Indigo.ca, plus:
- Runner(s) up: Inscribed prize copy of a poetry 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 2017*.

HOW TO ENTER

- Email your poem* by 21 April 2017 to: thelifeofwords@sju.ca
- Include in your email: your full name, school, and grade.
- All participants must be students at an Ontario high school to be eligible.
- For information and news, and to download a .pdf of this flyer, visit thelifeofwords.uwaterloo.ca/competition-2017/
- Follow us on twitter [@thelifeofwords](https://twitter.com/thelifeofwords).



SOME EXAMPLES OF POEMS ABOUT LANGUAGE

From the Irish

by Ian Duhig

According to Dineen, a Gael unsurpassed in lexicographical enterprise, the Irish for moon means 'the white circle in a slice of half-boiled potato or turnip'. A star is the mark on the forehead of a beast and the sun is the bottom of a lake, or well.

Well, if I say to you your face is like a slice of half-boiled turnip, your hair is the colour of a lake's bottom and at the centre of your eyes is the mark of the beast, it is because I want to love you properly, according to Dineen.

Broagh

by Seamus Heaney

Riverbank, the long rigs ending in broad docken and a canopied pad down to the ford.

The garden mould bruised easily, the shower gathering in your heelmark was the black O

in Broagh, its low tattoo among the windy boortrees and rhubarb-blades

ended almost suddenly, like that last *gh* the strangers found difficult to manage.

T H E ☸
L I F E
O F ☸ W
O R D S

There is a Word

by Emily Dickinson

There is a word
Which bears a sword
Can pierce an armed man —
It hurls its barbed syllables
And is mute again —
But where it fell
The saved will tell
On patriotic day,
Some epauletted Brother
Gave his breath away.

Wherever runs the breathless sun —
Wherever roams the day —
There is its noiseless onset —
There is its victory!
Behold the keenest marksman!
The most accomplished shot!
Time's sublimest target
Is a soul 'forgot!'

Linguist

by Norman MacCaig

If we lived in a world where bells truly say 'ding-dong' and where 'moo' is a rather neat thing said by a cow, I could believe you could believe that these sounds I make in the air and these shapes with which I blacken white paper have some reference to the thoughts in my mind and the feelings in the thoughts.

As things are, if I were to gaze in your eyes and say 'bow-wow' or 'quack', you must take that to be a despairing anthology of praises, a concentration of all the opposites of reticence, a capsule of my meaning of meaning that I can no more write down than I could spell the sound of the sigh I would then utter, before dingdonging and mooing my way through all the lexicons and languages of imprecision.

Words

by Edward Thomas

Out of us all
That make rhymes,
Will you choose
Sometimes —
As the winds use
A crack in the wall
Or a drain,
Their joy or their pain
To whistle through —
Choose me,
You English words?

I know you:
You are light as dreams,
Tough as oak,
Precious as gold,
As poppies and corn,
Or an old cloak:
Sweet as our birds
To the ear,
As the burnet rose
In the heat
Of Midsummer:
Strange as the races
Of dead and unborn:
Strange and sweet,
Equally,
And familiar,
To the eye,
As the dearest faces
That a man knows,
And as lost homes are:
But though older far
Than oldest yew, -
As our hills are, old, -
Worn new
Again and again:
Young as our streams
After rain:
And as dear
As the earth which you prove
That we love.

Make me content
With some sweetness
From Wales
Whose nightingales
Have no wings, -
From Wiltshire and Kent
And Herefordshire,
And the villages there, -
From the names, and the things
No less.
Let me sometimes dance
With you,
Or climb,
Or stand perchance
In ecstasy,
Fixed and free
In a rhyme,
As poets do.