



the

life

of

words

ANTHOLOGY 2018

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The Life of Words  
Poetry Anthology

VOLUME III

2018

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## Preface



*The Life of Words* is an ongoing research programme that investigates the mutual influences of poetry and dictionaries. Each year we hold a poetry competition, open to all Ontario high school students, with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation and the English Department of St Jerome's University. The broad theme this year was "Write a Poem About the Meaning of a Word." We received more than two hundred entries from across the province, and read them all with interest and admiration. Here we present the twelve poems we thought best answered the challenge of the competition. Each thinks beyond simple denotation, to encapsulate in poetic form a broad range of lexical "meaning." 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: Cosmin Dzsurdzsa, Chris Giannakopoulos, and Danielle Griffin.

David-Antoine Williams  
May, 2018

Wardha Malik's poem, "Alexithymia", was selected as the winner of this year's competition. She receives \$100 to spend at a national book chain, and both she and her school's library receive copies of *The School Bag*, an anthology of essential poems edited by Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, and a one-year subscription to *The New Quarterly*.

## *Alexithymia*

the lexicon is  
exhibiting dysfunctional vehement  
and colorless dreams which are convivial,  
an (inability) to reveal texture  
that there is trauma psychologically existing extensively  
towards verbalizing  
impressions and style of thinking “hypersensitive neuroplasticity”  
and there are  
obscure purposes and sunburnt afternoons (appreciation vs. appeal)  
among asphyxiating circulations  
and alexithymia has portrayed  
a purpose and conclusion in search  
of a complex infrastructure

WARDHA MALIK  
Grade 12  
Holy Trinity Catholic High School  
Kanata

## *A Silentious Sonority*

It begins as a soft hiss,  
Slipping softly across the tongue,  
The lonely *l* lamenting  
In the space between vowels,  
A subtle isolation,  
A near inaudibility.  
The French know it best—  
*Si lent*—  
'So slow',  
A slow sigh  
Whispering through idle lips  
Until the final *t* is left  
Unheard,  
Waiting  
For another sound...

But in English,  
The *t* is sharp:  
It closes off the floating end,  
And echoes through  
The empty air.

OLIVIA HEPPNER  
Grade 10  
Hammarskjold High School  
Thunder Bay

*Olivia Heppner's poem was selected as a runner up. Both she and her school's library receive copies of The School Bag anthology and a one-year subscription to The New Quarterly.*

## *Sha la la*

Sha la la  
Dippidy doo  
Darfunkle bits  
And also hullabaloo  
Sippity sop  
Rippity roo  
Klippity klop  
Bippity Boppity Boo  
  
A fellow binglejangled into  
A hangy fricky mangle  
He langled and langled  
Until his feet were all but fangle  
  
He sang his flappy flapper  
Clapper came to snapper  
And the chap went to chapper  
But The Man wasn't mapper  
In fact he was very vartiple  
So varitple it was carsipal  
It may even be bartipal  
But never ever sarsrical  
  
Bleep blop blip blap blup  
Shup shup shup shup  
Wup wup wup  
The Man is a plup!

Meow

Pow

How?

Ow.

NEEBING KUPER  
Grade 11  
Superior Collegiate and Vocational Institute  
Thunder Bay

*Neebing Kuper's poem was selected as a runner up. Both she and her school's library receive copies of The School Bag anthology and a one-year subscription to The New Quarterly.*

## *Building*

Why is a building called a building  
when it's already built?

Spring, year 1. Condo construction begins.

Baby poet me  
reads out seven minute piece  
in library.  
I playfully rhymed before reason,  
saw construction as art,  
a stellar installation,  
massive in comparison to  
demolished townhouses from  
the year before. As leaves grew,  
I grew too! Found my foundation,  
started the engine, and then  
summer break.

Time jump. Fall, year 2. Construction continues.

I staggered past, stared aghast at that vast crater, blasted out by churning wheels  
of time mashing boulders passing through a broken hourglass, a pothole the size  
of my head was made by heavy dump trucks.  
Cars swerved around it, ignored it, never bothered until someone showed me and  
I saw the cracks and flaws. I went over blueprints and revised.  
Meanwhile, the crane got taller.

Why is a building called a building when it's already built?

Billboard walls block the view from street level and I am writer's blocked.

We are blocked for three more seasons until a tower of concrete Jenga ascends,  
cubism of an empty beehive in the sunlight.  
I can't count the stories without losing track of my stories. The bare bones ex-  
posed to the elements,  
one day  
it will become a home. Then the building, my writing, will be...

Finished? Year 3. Moving day.

The mother stabs new drywall, nails up baby photos while arguing with her spouse between bouts of laughter about art as a career for their daughter eavesdropping in the bedroom curled up with a book. She likes the writing.

Why is  
writing  
called writing  
when it's already written?

A word in the now.

It is present it is tense  
ready  
for action,  
reinforced  
for the future.

For change.

This is what I've built. A carving of my thoughts, still being carved. A piece of writing writes, long after the neverfinish.

LIN LUNE  
Grade 12  
Ridley College  
St. Catharines

## *Murmure*

Des sons qui voyagent dans l'air,  
Les cris d'un hibou et le hurlement d'un loup,  
Balayé par le vent qui les transforme en murmures silencieux.  
Le petit bruit du fond d'une rivière à proximité,  
Et le doux bourdonnement d'une abeille,  
Le son des feuilles, écrasées sous les bottes d'un randonneur solitaire,  
Qui, bien que seul, murmure à lui-même,  
Juste assez fort pour que ses propres oreilles entendent,  
Murmurer, murmurant,  
Murmure.

ALAINA WOOD

Grade 9

St. Stephen Catholic Secondary School

Bowmanville

## *One Word is a Thousand Pieces of Gold*

*Yāt jih chin gàm,*  
Cantonese.

Words spiral. Accents pop.  
The phrase reels out a tapestry  
Woven to a modern scale  
Of ancient narcissism,  
Things you can do with money,  
Wealth's frivolity,  
Art's gullibility,  
The weight and worth of one word,  
Measured out to fit the public eye,  
Growing listless on a common pedestal,  
Losing meaning as times and cultures shift.  
Mispronounced by Westerners,  
Misinterpreted by racism,  
Missed by erasure.  
It's hard to see beyond the rust,  
But these words hide stories,  
Writers,  
Dynasties,  
Emperors,  
A lesson in the perfection of literature.  
An indignant middle finger to celestial power. A brief echo  
Of the way things were  
Before times and cultures shifted  
And the words went silver.

*Words of gold,*  
English.

MAYA LINSLEY  
Grade 10  
Eastwood Collegiate Institute  
Kitchener

## *Stamp*

Stuck on, pressed down, trampled, and a slim slip of paper,  
a well traveled expeditionary, the action and the object,  
a verb and noun according to the dictionary.  
That's what a stamp is, but what does it mean?

Stamp means  
...pressed down, trampled, and a slim slip of paper...  
and repeat;  
from essays of philately to every step people take exemplifies a  
stamp.

The action  
from its roots is a crushing and a pounding, like  
tea leaves between mortar and pestle  
for sweet flavour seeping pure.  
Also, harsh pressing and misuse, to bruise, abuse,  
to place underfoot and level it with the ground,  
flat.  
Some people are stamped from the  
elements of nature called humanity.  
Marks made by menaces and  
memories melded by morons.  
Stories told always matching people.

An act of expression venting frustration  
or jovial participation.  
Stamp your feet to the baseline beat.  
The walk of life to stamp like an elephant, ox, or horse,  
to let loose in a stampede.  
A boisterous trail, independent collective, of downbeats.

Tango on the perforated line of sound.

Look at the makeup of the word.

Stamp

How the 'st' holds a tickling sharp start,  
the quick draw of muscle pulling up for a shot.

'a'

Open pause as air floods the gap.

Then ample 'mp' swamping down at the word's end.

From the cold precipice all the way to the warm resonant release,  
simple tones and melodies playing.

The object

both the creator and the creation.

A stamp makes a stamp.

As a world begotten unto itself,  
signs, seals, stickers, single signal pieces posted  
to govern the world from the box office.

Symbols tossing along meant purpose.

Solemn letters, travel papers, memos, personal notes,  
a world held together by a stamp.

Overlooked cornerstones of structure.

A visual punctuation for the grammar of society.

A stamp is for...

a collection,

weather on the heart, in albums,

or a solitary moment of a footstep going forward.

DANIEL GOLOVENKO

Grade 12

St. Anne Catholic High School

Windsor

*Yes*

one tug backwards as they question

Y

followed by another jerk filled with

Expectations,

and a final yank to feel

Safe.

the outcome of the word stalks me like shadows

on sunlight,

beats me down,

tortures my soul,

reminding me of the power resting on my tongue.

I force it down,

swallowing discomfort.

Like a gulp of bitter coffee it boils, burns, and settles.

Still I mutter the word.

I am a rubber duck

adrift in the ocean,

ready to discover,

seeking

the unknown.

KAITLYN LEMAY

Grade 11

École secondaire catholique Nouvelle-Alliance

Barrie

## *Murmur*

A stream over rocks  
mimics the way  
A breeze brushes past trees  
And taps at my window sill.

It's an indistinct profession,  
Like a stumbling heartbeat  
—*Entre deux murs*—  
Hiding syllables I might have said twice.

I wanted to tell you,  
But then changed my mind,  
So inopportune words  
Hang shapeless overhead,  
To melt into murmuring rain.

JESSIE HO  
Grade 11  
Eastwood Collegiate Institute  
Kitchener

## *Mono No Aware*

It is the bittersweet feeling  
when time forces you to leave home,  
whether home is an actual place  
or the warmth that a certain person evokes.  
It's the rush of memories  
when you close the front door,  
take in a few shaky breaths,  
trek towards the unknown  
and away from familiarity.

It's watching a sunset  
as ethereal rays of orange, pink and red  
melt into the black of night.  
It's the fleeting feeling of warmth leaving your skin  
and the slight fear that  
if you so much as rub your eyes  
the light will vanish.  
And all that will remain  
are the phosphenes that danced  
across the second of your own dark expanse.

It's serendipity.  
It's that moment when you lock eyes on the one  
that makes your heart flutter,  
your cheeks flush,  
your words tumble.  
Whether or not your lips touch the other,  
the uncertainty if this love is real yet lingers.  
Is it true? Is this love everlasting?  
Or will it end?

It's losing yourself in a vast sea of green  
where the trees stretch to the skies.  
It's listening to the sound of water rushing  
from the streams and creeks that pass through.  
It's knowing that years from now,  
this boundless nature will be replaced  
with a concrete jungle.

It's holding a small life in your arms,  
as you see it in a kaleidoscope  
of various patterns, colors and light.  
It's knowing that to keep it, you must release it.

It's staring at the ceiling of your bedroom,  
letting the dark guide your thoughts  
about how everything you see now will end.  
The young woman that you saw on the bus today  
will one day grow old and fade away  
as slowly as the light of the sun,  
but as quickly and clearly  
as cutting the trees of a forest.  
It's the realization that, like you,  
she had a long, yet short life as intricate as yours.  
And like her,  
you, too, will fade away.

It's the wistful knowledge that nothing,  
no matter how hard we wish otherwise,  
nothing lasts forever.

But

it's this somber beauty,  
this awareness, this melancholic appreciation  
of the passing, the transience, the impermanence  
of our existence and reality  
that makes living life,  
and the memories that were created,  
worth more than anything that we can ever possess.

ANGELICA CHLOE FAITH MANANSALA  
Grade 11  
St. Augustine Catholic High School  
Markham

## *Wander*

Wander—to walk or move in an aimless way.  
Wander—to roam without any purpose, per se.  
Wander—to be mocked, as though your head were hollow.  
Eyes fixated as they whisper, but dare not follow.  
Is his mind truly empty as he wanders?  
Is there a purpose or idea he ponders?  
Ask of him his abstract thought,  
Perhaps he thinks what you cannot.  
Wander—an empty word which they use cruelly,  
Calling his roaming ways unruly.  
They call him “fool,” with spiteful glares,  
But he neither replies nor cares.  
For if they opened up their eyes,  
Maybe one day they would realize,  
That “Wander” is no word of shame—  
To travel free, without constraint.  
He goes about the forest trails,  
Unknown just what his path entails.  
He thinks up new thoughts never pondered,  
All because this young man wondered.  
He knows much more than those who stare.  
He imagines what the rest won’t dare.  
He builds a world inside his mind,  
A world the others cannot find.  
He knows not one Shakespearean play,  
But hears the words the old trees say.  
Unaware of mathematics,  
But his words so charismatic,  
Tell of a place beyond our eyes,  
Though he walks the earth beneath the skies.  
The man does have a destination,  
A land without these limitations.

He wanders in his mind and soul,  
And here is where he will reach his goal.  
The wind tells tales, the clouds can cry.  
The birds sing symphonies up high.  
Why segregate the truth from fiction,  
When false truths cause a contradiction?  
Why place limits on your mind,  
With such endless routes to find?  
He who wanders, knows this well.  
Ask him, and perhaps he'll tell.  
Trace his footsteps miles yonder.  
In the forest, go and wander.

GEORGEA JOURJOURKLIS

Grade 11

Blessed Cardinal Newman Catholic High School  
Scarborough

## *Censored Poem*

They censored this poem.  
I—I was expressing my emotions,  
Music is like a remedy, a secret potion,  
Crafted to reach the deepest parts, crafted with devotion,  
So I ask, what is all the Censored commotion?  
“That’s inappropriate,” they say,  
But need I say, they swear all day!  
So what’s wrong when I say it rhythmically,  
When I’m not angry, but have things to say,  
*Still*, they felt the need to CENSORED this poem!

You see, a painter can’t paint without different colours,  
And some are more aggressive than others.  
You can’t connote without those words,  
Drive powerful messages without powerful words!  
But still, they **CENSORED** this poem.

We are proud supporters of “Freedom of Speech,”  
So that you can express your opinion and debate,  
I wish you could understand this before it’s too late!

██████████ I ██████████ wish ██████████  
██████████ you ██████████ could understand! ██████████  
They ██████████ me.

FARHAN AHMAD CHOUDHARY  
Grade 11  
Tommy Douglas Secondary School  
Woodbridge



## 2018 Competition Flyer

APRIL IS POETRY MONTH!

# POETRY COMPETITION

### 2018 COMPETITION THEME

Write a poem about some aspect or aspects of the

*meaning of a word*

T H E  
L I F E  
O F  
O R D S

### TIPS TO GET YOU GOING

- Aspects of “meaning” include definition, connotation, and impression. What does a word “mean,” beyond its dictionary definition?
- Think past what a word means to *just* you — what has it meant to others, or what *could* it mean?
- If you know another language than English, try to convey the true meaning of a favorite word in that language.
- Write about a word with a double (or multiple...) meaning.
- Research how a word came into English and the changes in its meaning from the donor language to ours.
- Research what a word has meant at different times in the development of the language, and write a poem about it.
- Make up a new word and write a poem to define its meaning.
- Does the sound of a word contribute to its meaning? Explore.

### RESOURCES

- The *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- Regional, dialect, and foreign-language dictionaries.
- Etymological dictionaries, like [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com).
- Poetry collections and anthologies.

### 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 2018*.

### HOW TO ENTER

- Email your poem\* by 27 April 2018 to [thelifeofwords@sju.ca](mailto:thelifeofwords@sju.ca)
- To be eligible, 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-2018/](http://thelifeofwords.uwaterloo.ca/competition-2018/)
- Follow us on twitter @thelifeofwords

\*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 Professor David-Antoine Williams (St. Jerome's University).

