

The Write Challenge Anthology

2025



Lakota★LEADS
Lakota's Enrichment and Academic
Development of Students

THE 2025 WRITE CHALLENGE ANTHOLOGY

Fire

Noun

1. The phenomenon of combustion manifested in light, flame and heat, the state of burning
2. Strong or passionate emotion
3. Brilliancy, luminosity
4. The shooting of weapons
5. Intense verbal attack or criticism

Verb

6. To cause a weapon to shoot objects
7. To remove someone from their job
8. To heat objects made of clay in a special oven so they become hard

Slang

9. Exceptionally good or impressive

Thank you to all this year's entrants. Here are the top three students in every category and their wonderful literary works...all interpreting this year's theme of FIRE!

Hosted by:



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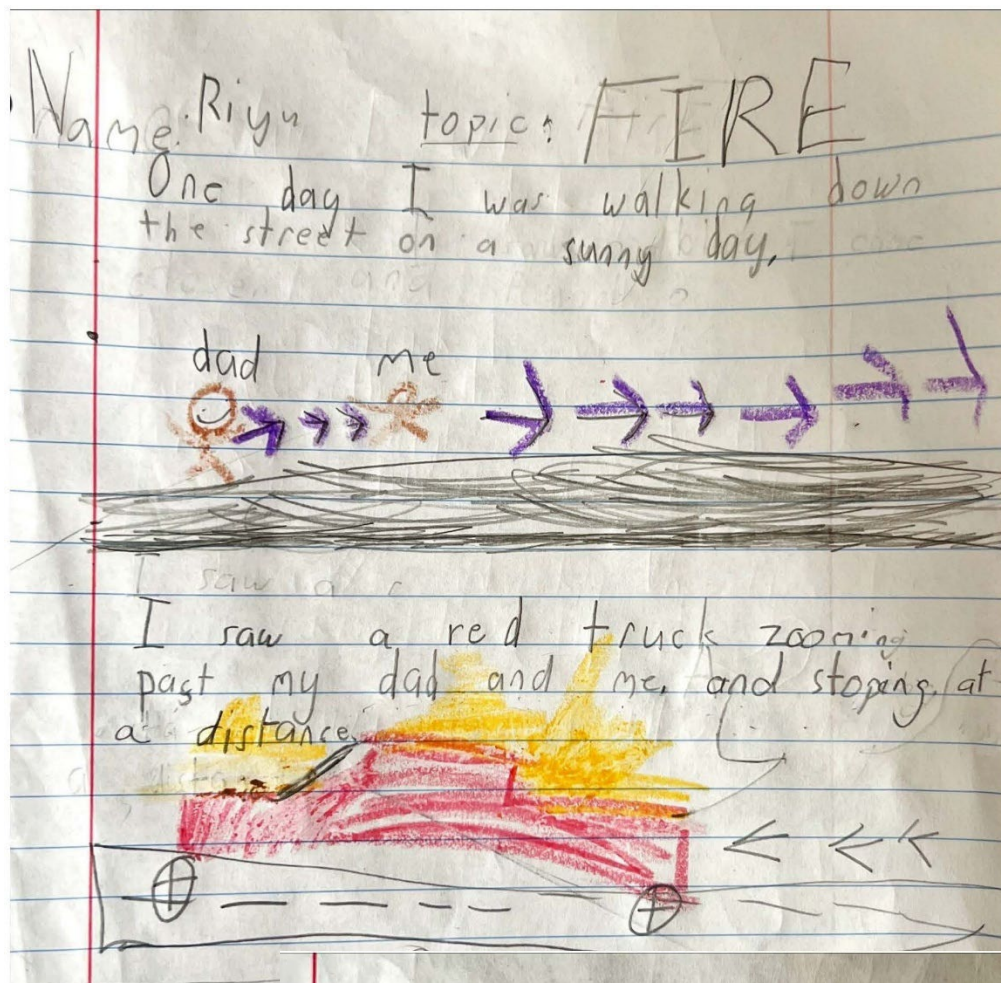
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Narrative – Grades K-2: 1st Place

By: Riaan Kaushik



As I came closer, I found out it was on FIRE! The flames were big and high, it was burning like a campfire. I was so scared, because I know fire can be dangerous.

I told my dad to call the fire truck, my dad said 'okay'. The fire truck came as fast as it can with loud sirens and blinking lights.

It was so loud that I had
to cover my ears. (Weibon¹⁴ lived



The firefighters quickly put on their gear
and ran to put the fire out. One of the
fighters named Tom came up to me
and said, "do you want to be a fire fight
er when you grow up?" Tom asked.
I said "of course!"

The next morning, I got a letter
from the fire department for a tour



(3)

I asked my mom to drive to the FIRE station. Mom said yes. Tom was waiting outside to greet us. Tom showed us the FIRE trucks and tools they use to put out different types of FIRE. Before we left, Tom gave me a fire badge and a small fire extinguisher. I was so proud that I asked my dad to call the fire truck.

(4)

Narrative – Grades K-2: 2nd Place

The Big Campfire

By: Molly Wingert



It was a night. Everyone was cleaning up the table and grabbing the s'mores stuff, the chocolate, graham crackers, and marshmallows. Tonight was the night of the campfire, and tonight was also the night that we ate s'mores and left s'mores out for Bigfoot. Everyone was so excited.



Then, everyone got the fire started, and we started roasting marshmallows. Once the marshmallows were cooked and turned golden by the fire, we put the graham cracker on the marshmallow, smooshed the chocolate on, put the second layer of graham cracker on, and put it on the plate to eat it all up. Then, we left the s'more for Bigfoot.



Then we went to bed, but I was too excited to see Bigfoot's letter. So, I went downstairs on tippy toes out of my sister's room. Then, I saw Bigfoot arrive in my house. I was watching him, and I was behind the couch. I couldn't imagine how hairy his toes were. Then, he ate all the s'more and wrote a letter back on my letter.



Then, in the morning I woke up from behind the couch. My sister was crying because she did not know where I was. She went downstairs and saw me. She said "Molly, what are you doing down here sleeping with Chase?"



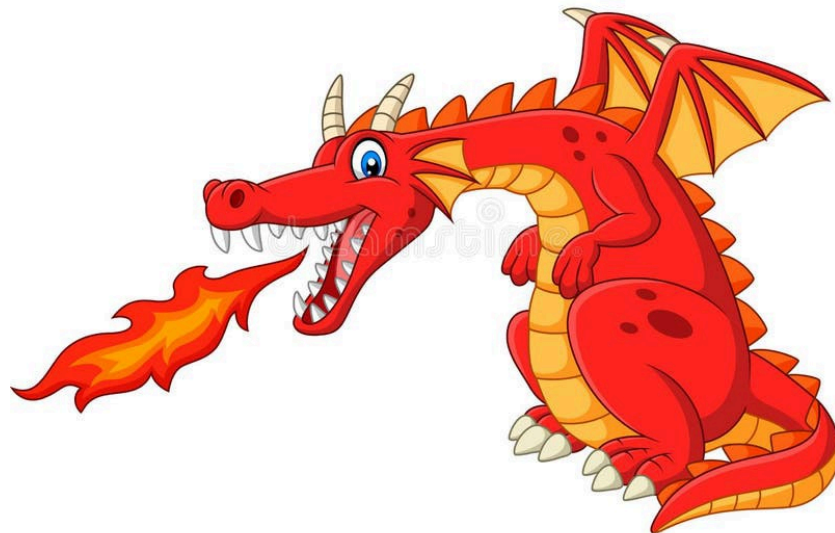
Then, everyone came down and ate breakfast. The End

Narrative – Grades K-2: 3rd Place

Never Play with Fire

By: Avery Bou

The red fire dragon breathes out orange, yellow and red flames. It's burning hot and does not like ice and water. It catches food quickly with it's flame then it flies back to it's nest to feed the baby fire dragon. The mother fire dragon was sitting on the remaining two eggs yet to hatch. The fire dragon Hunters came to steal the baby fire dragon and the two eggs from the nest. The Mom fiercely protected her babies and the Dad pushed them back with a fiery flame far into the distance. He made sure the hunters never returned and became the new elder fire dragon. The rest of the baby fire dragons hatched and they lived long happy lived ruling the kingdom.



Poetry – Grades K-2: 1st Place

Fire

By: Jay LeMaster

FIRE

Fire is like anger
Fluttery
Crackly
Also it's like your heart
Beating with
Joy
Happiness
Warmth
Confidence
Radiance

Love
Fire is like feelings in
many different ways.

by Jay Lemaster



Poetry – Grades K-2: 2nd Place

Fire

By: Samantha Bennett

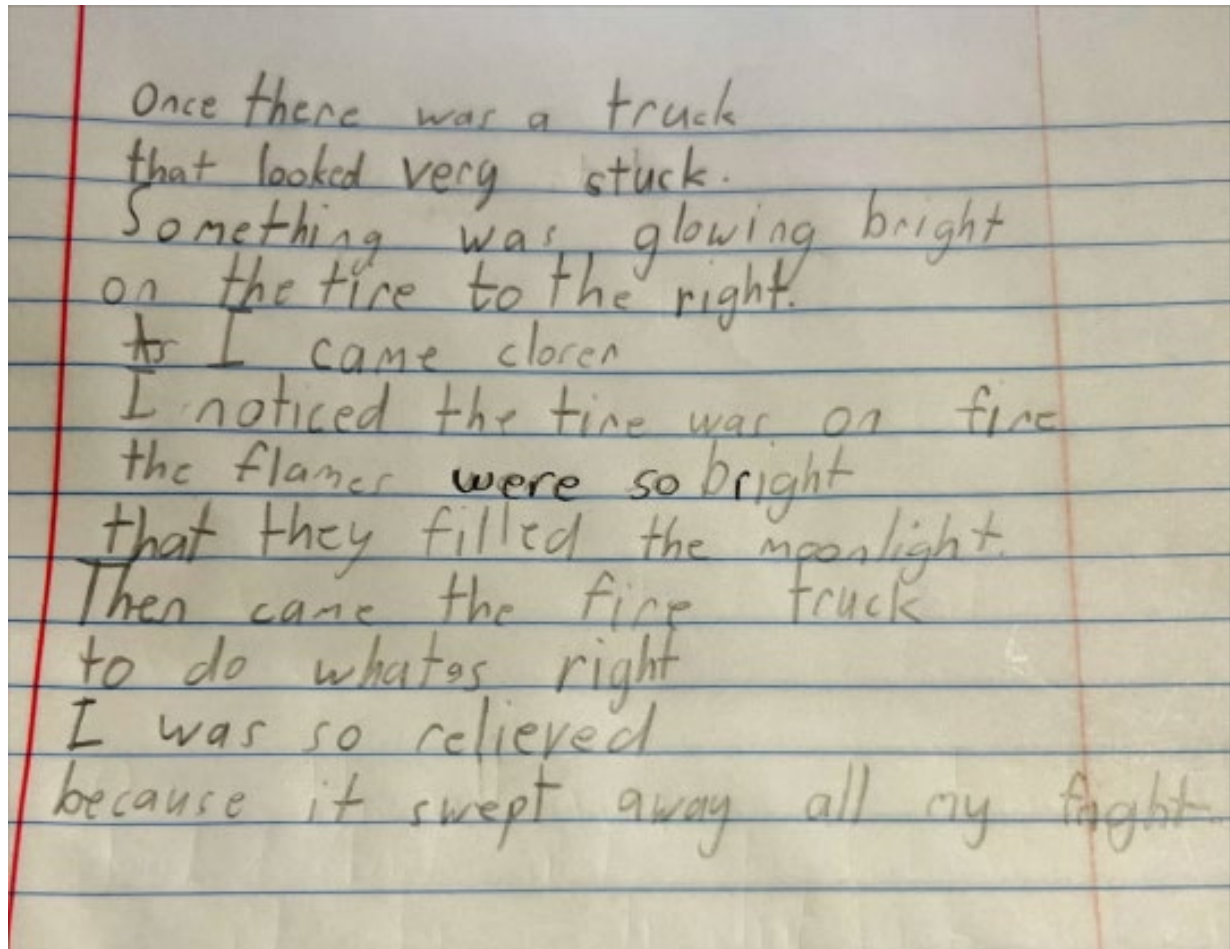
FIRE

Are you feeling sad?
Just a little bit mad?
Remember that fire
That glows bright inside you.
That makes you feel better.
Yes, makes you feel better.
Just find that true fire
That glows bright inside you,
And you'll have a wonderful
Day.

Poetry – Grades K-2: 3rd Place

Fire

By: Riaan Kaushik



Essay – Grades 3-4: 1st Place

A Special Flame

By: Henry Buckingham

Have you ever wondered how fire comes in different colors? Some of them are orange, yellow, blue and white. All the colors are special in their own ways. If you think hard enough, you will notice how similar fire and people are. People are also different from each other, just like fire. I am different because I have a disability called Autism.

At first people didn't understand me, but now they do. Just like the caveman didn't understand fire in the beginning, it takes time to understand someone with Autism. The best way to understand them is to make them feel included. This can be done by smiling and listening to what they have to say.

I compare my Autism to fire because the special flame burning inside of me is my ability to connect with others and my desire to help other kids with Autism, just like me. This is also why I think Autism maybe is not a disability at all. Instead, I think it's like a special flame that can be whatever you make it.

I also don't think special flames are just for people with Autism or a disability. Everyone can have a special flame burning inside of them, like strengths, talents or abilities. In my opinion, if someone is feeling cold (as in sad), then the warmth and light of another person's fire might be able to warm up their heart.

Essay – Grades 3-4: 2nd Place

March Madness is on Fire

By: Shaan Sethi

Did you know that March Madness is on fire? College March Madness is when 64 teams compete in knockout basketball games to win the National Championship. I've experienced a number of March Madness games myself in various forms. I have attended collegiate games and participated in several myself.

I cheered on fellow students in my grade as they competed against other Lakota teams, of the same grade. I also watched the Ohio State women's basketball team versus Duke women's team. The stadium was electrifying! That is one thing they have in common, whether elementary school or college, the crowd goes wild. The energy in the stadium is set ablaze by the players, fans, coaches, and atmosphere. When I say that March Madness is on fire, I mean that it is filled with so much energy and excitement. Whatever the players do, the fans react. The game is set afire by buckets left to right, swishes, misses, dunks, threes and free throws. One of the reasons March Madness is so exciting is because of the surprise element. Sometimes a team that is anticipated to lose, has an unexpected win against a strong team. It is called an upset.

I have also played in March Madness at Lakota. It is really exciting to play when the fans are cheering you on. One of the most unforgettable moments I remember from playing March Madness is the game when there were 16 seconds left, the scores were tied, the opposing team had the ball and therefore our team was expected to lose. However, I defended the ball, got possession and scored a basket to win the game for my team. My team, my coaches, my family and fans screamed with excitement of this buzzer beater win.

These are some facts about March Madness. It demonstrates how teamwork, practice, and believing in yourself can help you achieve great things on and off the court. Not only this but it can set a fiery momentum for improvement in your athletic abilities for the following years to come.

Perhaps one day you may have the opportunity to attend an explosive March Madness game. What do you look most forward to? I myself enjoy playing in the game and having fun. I can guarantee you will not be disappointed. As stated earlier it is electrifying and intense. So go ahead and give it a hot shot!



Essay – Grades 3-4: 3rd Place

Fire

By: Kendal Cash

Did you know fire can give you third degree burns. Fire is very hot, you can burn yourself very badly if you touch it. It has a lot of thermal energy. Fire is really dangerous, you can hurt yourself. I think that fire is very dangerous if you are not responsible, I have two reasons why fire is dangerous. My two reasons are, Fire can give you really bad burns and harm you, also it can set something on fire in your house or something else.

My first reason is, fire can give you very bad burns and harm you. My first example is, it is very bad if you burn yourself because if it is really bad it can send you to the hospital. This means that you will get hurt a lot. It can also burn your skin off and will really hurt you if you are in this situation. This tells us that it will be terrible if you burn off your skin. However, it is bad if you try to touch a campfire or something like that. This explains that it is not a good idea to touch something like a campfire. My last example is, you will be harmed if someone is using a match, It can burn down to the end where you are holding it and it will burn you. This is explaining that if you are using a match you need to blow it out before it burns your fingers. This is why fire is dangerous.

My second reason is, It can set something on fire in your house or something else. My first example is, If you are cooking and you leave it just for a little while it can set something on fire. Like if you are making a cake in the oven you may leave it and go to do something else and forget about it. That means it could catch a towel on fire and it may spread to something else. Another reason is if you have a candle lit and you let it burn for a while or when you are sleeping it might catch something close to it on fire it may spread and your house may be on fire. This is how fire can set stuff on fire and it becomes a big problem.

As you can see, fire is dangerous if you are not responsible enough. I have two reasons to support my opinion, the first one is, fire can give you very bad burns and harm yourself. My second reason is, it can set your house on fire or something else. What do you think, is fire dangerous?

Narrative – Grades 3-4: 1st Place

Why Monarch Butterflies are Black and Orange

By: Reagan Becker

Long ago in a beautiful woodland forest there lived a caterpillar named Frenchy. She was a Monarch Butterfly caterpillar with cheerful yellow and white stripes. All of the creatures in the forest thought she was so beautiful and lovely they wanted to be her friend. Frenchy and her friends liked to eat leaves, climb trees and lay in the beaming hot sun together.

One day there was a fire in the forest. All the critters were scared and started to dash away to a safe place. “Fire! Fire!” yelled Nibbles the squirrel as he scattered up the nearest tree.

All the animals darted away trying to escape the large flaming fire. The red and orange flames could be seen a mile away. Birds were chirping in horror and flying away from the burning trees.

Frenchy, wanting to escape, climbed up the highest tree she could find. The gray puffy smoke rose into the beautiful bright sky that was now turning dark and cloudy. It was hard for Frenchy to see and the air smelled like burning ashes. If I climb to the highest tree I can get to safety, she thought.

As she was crawling up the tree several burning leaves fell on her beautiful white and yellow body. “OUCH!” she yelled. “Ahhhhhhh! These burning leaves hurt!”

She finally made it to the top of the tree, but fell to the ground due to the strong oncoming winds. She landed with a thud and a puff of smoke rose into the air.

Suddenly it started to rain and the fire slowly died out. All the woodland creatures felt relieved and started gathering around one another. All at once every critter gasped when they saw Frenchy.

A little butterfly named Flappy asked, “What’s wrong with you? Are you okay? You don’t look right?”

Frenchy looked at her reflection in the pond and realized she had black markings all over her body. “My skin turned black from the burning leaves.”

Everyone looked at her and was astonished. Slowly they left her all alone, not wanting to talk to her or be around her anymore.

A few days passed and Frenchy wiggled into her cocoon feeling lonely and upset.

Weeks later Frenchy hatched out of the cocoon and turned into a beautiful Monarch Butterfly. All the animals were shocked to see how lovely she looked with her colors of black and orange. Soon everyone wanted to be her friend again.

Frenchy forgave them for whispering and not talking to her because of the black marks the fire had left on her body. Her friends learned that it isn't nice to make fun of others because of the way they look.

Now you know how the Monarch Butterfly got its black and orange colors.

Narrative – Grades 3-4: 2nd Place

Anne and the Boston Massacre

By: Reagan Skidmore

“Goodnight Mamma and Papa!” I’m Anne Jones Smith. I’m 12 years old and I live in Boston. My parents, Mary and Jack Smith, are both in the Patriot Cause.

Mamma just yelled to blow out my candle. I lay in bed for hours. I think about all that has been happening recently. It’s been really tense these past couple of years. Between the fights on the streets, all the taxes put on us by the British king, and the British soldiers living in Boston.

My parents talk to each other late at night about that stuff. Sometimes I’ll leave my door open a crack so I can hear what they’re saying. Tonight, I hear them whispering in the kitchen so I decide to get up and investigate. “Anne! What are you doing awake so late?” Mamma asked. “I couldn’t fall asleep. What are YOU and Papa doing?” I replied. Mamma explained what was happening. She said they heard screaming and yelling from the Customs House. A crowd was carrying torches curious of what was happening. Apparently, Papa wanted to see what the commotion was about.

Mamma reluctantly let Papa go. “May I go too? Since I’m already awake.” I asked. Papa agreed to take me. We put on our coats and boots and hurried outside to the Customs House. There was a large crowd around one single British soldier on the porch. “Papa, what’s happening?” I asked. We found out that British soldiers are sleeping inside the Customs House. This soldier happened to be on the porch and a group of men were passing by and started calling him names and throwing things at him.

Then other people heard and came outside. People were throwing rocks, sticks, and ice and would call the soldier names. The soldier backed away and aimed his musket at the crowd. Papa took my arm and backed up. The crowd didn’t seem to fear the soldier’s gun. It only fired them up more. The soldier called for help. More British soldiers came with their muskets. The crowd was fed up. They saw this as revenge against Great Britain.

The captain came and told the soldiers to load their guns. The crowd would not back down. A man from the mob threw a snowball and hit one of the soldiers. The soldier fell but the other British soldiers thought they heard a command to fire. Everyone was shocked and froze in place. Five people were shot in main square!

The mob started to riot so the captain ordered for more troops to load their guns. Suddenly the fire bell started ringing and more people came outside with knives and anything that could be a weapon. “Anne, we need to go home. NOW.” Papa told me.

The whole walk home we could hear the commotion. The only thing Papa said to me was, “That really lit a fire in our Patriot souls.”

Narrative – Grades 3-4: 3rd Place

The Fire, The Owl and The Forest

By: Sebastian Smith

Flickers in the dark,
Glowing with orange light,
Warmth is provided

One bright evening, a fire began to spark in a dry forest. The fire spread quickly, crackling and roaring with excitement. It was proud of its power, and what was once a flame became a hazard to anyone and anything caught in it.

A wise old owl perched on a branch, watching the fire with concern. He had seen fires like this before and knew they could cause great destruction if they weren't controlled. The owl called out to the fire, "Oh, powerful fire, you are strong and bright. No one can compare to your flames. Would you show your true strength in a less dry forest"

The fire, who didn't care grew even larger, It leapt higher, reaching out to the trees and the grass. The flames glowed brighter, and the fire raged on, ignoring the owl's warning.

But as the fire spread, the forest began to burn. The trees turned to ash, and the once beautiful forest was now consumed by the flames.

Realizing too late, the fire began to fade, its power leaving it weak and regretful. As the fire died, the owl, saddened by the destruction, flew away, and it lived to tell the tale.

Poetry – Grades 3-4: 1st Place

The Fire of a Heart

By: Victoria Laub

Kindness is a spark that can ignite a fire in the heart. The fire of a heart can spread through the whole world one person at a time.

Sometimes that kindness comes from different places like your actions or words. The fire of a heart shines wherever you are on a playground to a classroom. I know that the fire in my heart shines in me and radiates kindness, Joy, and Love.



Poetry – Grades 3-4: 2nd Place

Fire

By: Ella Capone

Surrounded by trees,
And firefly light,
I feel so free,
On this dark, dark night.

Leaves dancing to the ground,
Around the bright red flame,
Somehow, I feel found,
On this dark, dark night.

The fire is warm,
The embers are bright,
Glad there is no storm,
On this dark, dark, night.

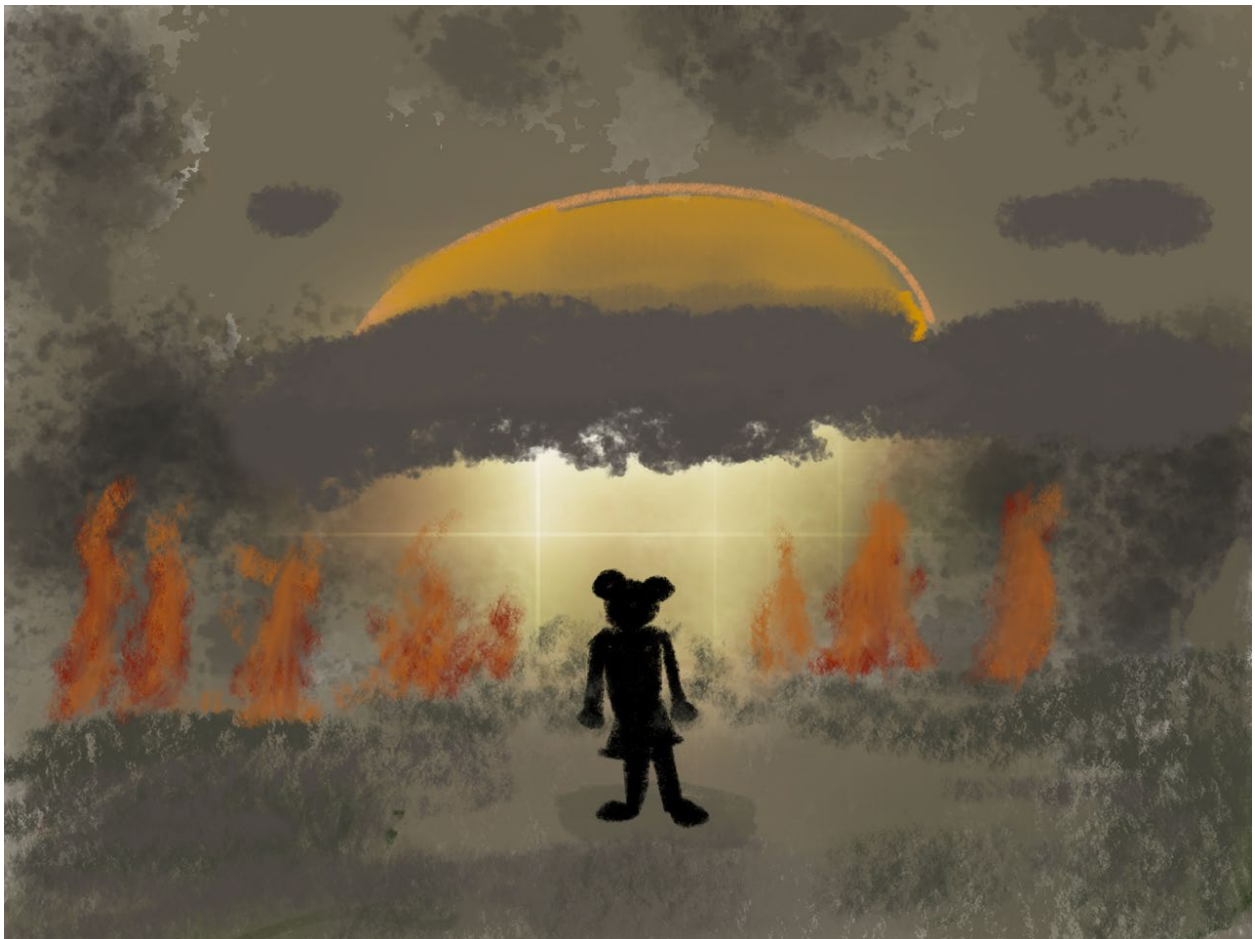
I need no lamp,
For there's a fire,
To light the camp,
On this dark, dark night

Poetry – Grades 3-4: 3rd Place

Fire

By: LaKhi Long

Flames burning everything in its path
Illuminating a darkened sky
Raining ashes on everything
Extinguishing the past, start fresh tomorrow



Essay – Grades 5-6: 1st Place

How Fire Affects Me

By: Tyler Rahl

Fire, the joy it gives me on a chilly autumn night with family and friends as we watch it burn and burn. Fire makes me feel like I belong, it gives me some sort of feeling I can't ever feel again. The nostalgia of Christmas morning opening presents just me and my family with hot chocolate and the key thing to Christmas, a fireplace.

Fire, the thing that lifts my spirit and gives me joy when I don't have it, the thing that connects me with others, the thing that makes me feel warm and cozy when I'm not feeling the best or when I'm feeling cold, the thing that many take for granted, but the difference is that I don't take it for granted. I savor the moment and enjoy the snap, crackle, and pop of the fire as I hear and smell the nature around me.

That smoky woody scent that always lifts me is fire. Letting that soft and Ooey Gooney marshmallow toast around the campfire as us friends and family tells stories to each other. Fire, the thing that glows like a lantern in the dark night. That flavorful s'more filled with chocolate and marshmallows would have not been possible without fire. Fire is the one of the things the world has to revolve around.

Fire, the thing that gives you autumn/winter spirit when you don't have any. Without fire I know my life would be different in a bad way. The steam coming off of the fire is like coming out of a sauna. The black and grey smoke coming off of the flames like smoke in the chimney, oh the nostalgia and memory fire gives me can not be taken away. Feeling the breeze of the fresh autumn air, that feeling makes me care. Fire, the thing that takes my mind off of the bad things going on in my life. Oh fire, I hate it when you are not there.

Essay – Grades 5-6: 2nd Place

Fire and Propulsion: How Rocket Engines Harness Flames for Space Travel

By: David Gilmore

When people watch a rocket launch, they often focus on the scenery, the flames, the piling smoke, and the sheer power of liftoff. At the core of it all is fire, the force that makes space travel and going through the atmosphere possible. Rocket engines are the things that are attached to the bottom of a rocket, and they can propel the rocket at speeds up to 25,000 miles per hour or 11.2 kilometers per second. Rocket engines are very important, and they use many types of propulsion such as liquid, solid, and hybrid.

To start, liquid rocket engines use combustion to generate thrust to propel the rocket. Liquid rocket engines are used for most launches worldwide, including missiles. Most Liquid rocket engines use a liquid oxidizer and a liquid fuel, which are held in their respective tanks. Pumps raise the pressure to higher than the operating pressure of the engine, then they are put into the engine in a way that guarantees atomization and fast mixing. Liquid rocket engines offer higher exhaust velocities, better mass fractions, and more flight control, sometimes including stop and restart and emergency shutdown, unlike solid rocket engines.

Next, solid rocket engines use solids as fuel and oxidizer. A simple one consists of a casing, a nozzle, a grain (propellant charge), and an igniter. The solid grain burns in a way that produces exhaust gases. The nozzle is made to maintain cabin pressure while being propelled by the exhaust gases. A simple way these work is first, the solid fuel and oxidizer are packed into the rocket, then an igniter sets the grain on fire, creating exhaust gases. Then, the exhaust gases exit the rocket to propel it. While solid and liquid rockets have strengths, engineers combine their advantages to make hybrid rocket engines.

Furthermore, engineers combined solid and liquid rocket engines to make hybrid rocket engines. They are propulsion systems in which the oxidizer and fuel are stored in two phases. Hybrid rocket engines contain a tank containing the liquid oxidizer and a combustion chamber containing the solid propellant. When propulsion is desired, a valve separating the two is opened after introducing an ignition source into the combustion chamber. The liquid oxidizer then flows into the combustion chamber, vaporizing and reacting with the solid leading to acceleration. Each type of rocket engine uses fire for combustion in different ways, making rocket engines possible and showing the significance of fire in space exploration.

To conclude, liquid, solid, and hybrid rocket engines make space travel possible. Liquid rockets have more combustion efficiency and throttability. Solid rocket engines are less complex. Hybrid engines combine solid and liquid rocket engine strengths for a balanced propulsion system. Fire plays a key role in all these engines,

transforming from something destructive into a force that propels humans into space. Rockets are so incredible that the same fire that can burn and destroy is also what pushes rockets into space, making exploration possible.

Essay – Grades 5-6: 3rd Place

Flame of Excitement

By: Mia Premdas

This essay is made to show an event that happened in my life through the perspective of a different meaning of fire. The most common meaning of fire is something burning, giving off light, heat, and sometimes flames, while I used the symbiotic meaning of fire (excitement, joy etc.) which helps tell the story better emotionally.

As I walked to my first meeting of DI, I was nervous. Just as I walked in, coach Emily greeted me and when we all got there, she told us about the tournament and sparked many ideas for the project. When she was done, we all simulated ideas among each other, and we awakened more. As the second meeting came by, there was a flare of creativity. Then we all wrote down our ideas and started to write the story.

The next few meetings came and went. As the tournament approached closer, all of us had a glow of excitement in our eyes. We had our costumes together and the script was almost done, and everyone was persistent to get all the work done. By the last meeting, because we were fueled by our determination, we got everything finished in time.

The tournament came by, we all were ready to present our skit to the appraisers. We got to a place in the hall where we could put all our stuff and could practice reading our scripts once while we waited till our check-in time.

After we went to a check-in room and got checked in so we could present our skit, we went into the performance area. My head was on fire because of the tension building up in me. I also could feel my hands getting warmer. As we started to perform, the fire inside me got more intense. But seeing how well it was going it started to ignite some courage inside me. When we were done, the fire inside me intensely sprung as I waited to see if our team moved on to the next tournament.

As we went to the gym the organizers started announcing the teams who are moving on to the next round. Then they started announcing the elementary teams that will be moving on. My heart started pounding abruptly. As they announced the winners of our category, we were moving on to the State Tournament! The fire of excitement flung inside me as we went to receive our medals.

In conclusion, the symbiotic meaning of fire can help others understand these moments in my life better than other meanings of fire. While the most common meaning of fire can be used, it would not show the story with great emotion unlike the symbiotic meaning of fire.

Narrative – Grades 5-6: 1st Place

Fire's Cruel Kiss

By: Mae Allmyer

Birdsong, a fragile thread, pulled me from sleep. I lingered, a dream's echo still warm. Then, the radio's voice, sharp and frantic. 'Anna! Come now!' A cold dread tightened my chest. 'Today,' the news lady cried, 'they're attacking.' My world, so peaceful moments before, shattered. I stood, a stationary ghost in my white lace nightgown. A monstrous roar, and then the bomb, a black sun falling. 'Anna!' Mama's voice, a desperate cry, lost in the chaos. I lunged forward, blind, the air thick with heat. Then, fire. It licked my skin, a searing pain. The world dissolved into red and ash. While throwing my arm in the air, I felt something. It felt like skin... It was Papa! He said something very softly, words I will remember 'You, my Anna girl, have to be brave. You cannot let fire rush over you, you are in control. I may not always be with you, but I will be in your heart.' And that's when I knew what he meant. He was going to die. A piece of the roof had come crashing down. My mother jumped and reached for me. I tried to bring Papa with me, but he disappeared underneath the rubble. I stumbled over the rubble, Germany's cruel handwork. Beneath the charred debris, Papa was gone. Consumed by the fire, erased. The red substance covered my nightgown, realizing most of the blood was my own. A jagged wound gaped in my hand. The stench of smoke, the screams, the searing pain—a symphony of horror. But my gaze kept returning to that wound, a raw, gaping void. Each time, a silent scream tore through me. Then, a gunshot. Mama screamed, a sound that ripped through the chaos. She fell. I stared, praying it wasn't true. But the red haze, the trail of smoke from the gunshot wound... alone. A hollow word, a cold truth. How could spring's gentle dawn become this inferno? Soldiers, like metal beasts, poured from tanks. My legs, driven by instinct, fled. No cheetah, no phantom horse, could match my desperate flight. My world, a shattered mirror, lay behind me. But where, in this chaos, was the end? How could there be one? Fire gave Anna a cruel kiss, to imagine how such a sweet morning became one heck of a bittersweet day.

Narrative – Grades 5-6: 2nd Place

The Most Dangerous Day of My Life

By: Daniel Xu

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! I'm jolted awake, and a wide grin spreads across my face. Today is the day—my science project on turning chicken poop into fuel for cars is finally going to be revealed.

I rush to get dressed, and I quickly pack up my project, double-checking that everything is ready. My dad, ever the planner, reminds me to leave early to set up, but I ask if we can test it first. He insists we need to go now. The thrill of the day is mixed with a growing, nagging worry—what if it blows up? I try to push the fear away, but it lingers. The idea of fire pops into my mind—not just because it's dangerous, but because it represents both creation and destruction. If the project works, it could change energy forever. But if it fails, it could ruin everything, including my chance at the science fair.

Noticing my hesitation, my dad gives me a reassuring smile. "You'll do great, like always. What's bothering you?"

"Nothing," I lied, trying to hide my nervousness. I force a smile and add, "Let's go."

After what seemed like an endless two-hour drive, we finally arrive at the science fair. I grab my project box and head toward the building. Once inside, I find a spot near the entrance and begin setting everything up.

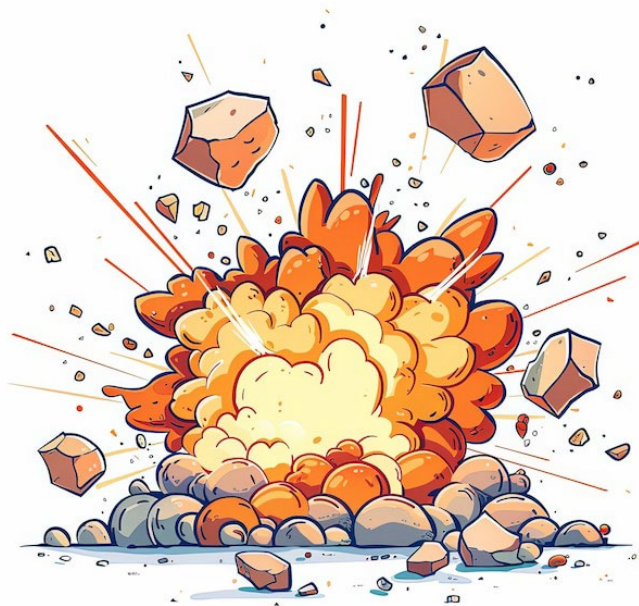
About thirty minutes later, the gym is packed with people. My nerves spike. The moment I've been preparing for is here, but my mind blanks. The noise in the gym fades as I focus on my project. I feel like I'm in a dream—until suddenly, BOOM! My project explodes. Metal shards fly through the air, and small fireballs scatter across the gym. The fire I had imagined as a symbol of innovation turns into an uncontrollable force. Instead of lighting the way to a new future, it is now pure destruction.

Panic surges through me. I turned and rushed outside, searching for my dad. "Dad! My project blew up!"

“Stay calm,” he says, his voice steady. He pulls out his phone and calls 911 without hesitation. The sound of sirens in the distance reminds me of the danger. Fire, when uncontrolled, is a force of chaos and fear. I rush back into the gym, looking for a fire extinguisher. The air is thick with smoke, and every breath is harder to take. I finally found the extinguisher, smashed the glass, and grab it. My hands shake as I pull the trigger, but panic takes over, and I lose control. The fire grows, and the smoke overtakes me.

I collapsed, disoriented and gasping for air. I lose consciousness. When I wake up, I hear rushing footsteps. Firefighters are lifting me onto a stretcher, and I see my dad by my side, explaining what happened to the responders.

The fire taught me a hard lesson. It’s a reminder that something as simple as a spark can carry both creative and destructive power.



Narrative – Grades 5-6: 3rd Place

The Wildfire

By: Peyton Snell

The dreaded moment has come.

I am standing in my bedroom window watching the neighbors huddled together, crying, shaking.

“Allana! Come on! Hurry!” My mom cries.

I grab my bag with the few things that I was able to collect in such a short amount of time. There’s so many things that I am forced to leave behind, that I will never see again.

My mom pulls me along by the hand at a pace that I can’t keep up with. She’s holding my baby sister in her other arm.

Tears are streaming down her face as we run out of the house.

When we reach the outdoors, smoke stings my eyes.

There is nothing left from the neighbors house, and soon there will be nothing left of ours.

Our huge tree catches the flames first. The rope holding up our swing frays and it soon falls to the ground, now just a ball of fire.

I remember when my dad would push me in that as a baby. Ever since he died, it’s been abandoned, nobody to push me any longer since mom was always busy with her work.

Then the side of our house catches fire, then the wall.

I see our cluttered closet. A paper that I had made flies out. It lands a few feet away from us in our front yard.

My eyes are watering, so it would be hard for anyone else to make out, but I remember the day I made that picture like it was yesterday.

It was our whole family as stick figures. I was so excited to show my parents when I got home from daycare, and it hung on the fridge for months.

But when dad died, mom took away any evidence that he ever existed.

I go to grab it but my mom holds me back.

"I know it's hard, but we have to stay strong, my dear Allana." she whispers in my ear.

It was too late anyway, for it burst to flames right before my eyes.

It's just a thing, just a paper, I tell myself. But it doesn't feel like just a thing.

Each thing I see that catches fire feels like a part of me is gone. It's painful. I try to stay strong like my mother tells me too, but it hurts too much.

One of my favorite stuffed animals catches fire.

I have a flashback to my 4th birthday. My dad had made me chocolate chip pancakes in the kitchen that is now smoke and ashes.

I remember the bag with a picture of a unicorn on it so clearly.

I remember the excitement and comfort I got from that unicorn stuffy. My dad would always make sure to kiss it on the forehead when he would come to tuck me in at night.

Now it's gone... just gone.

I feel like there is nothing left. My whole past life is now burned to the ground.

There is no hope left anymore.

Poetry – Grades 5-6: 1st Place

Fire

By: Gavin Buckingham

a spark fell into a forest
then a fire started

he twitched with burning malice
fire latched his blazing tendrils onto the trees surrounding him
he greedily stuffed the trees into his red-hot mouth
they fueled fire's glowing core

fire fed on more trees
he grew larger
the forest grew smaller
eventually the forest disappeared
fire wasn't satisfied

fire began moving towards the city
the sky turned fiery shades of orange, red and yellow
the air grew sweltering

his flickering body loomed over the metallic skyline
fire wrapped his red hot arms around the city's tall metal towers
the buildings exploded into an inferno of molten metal

fire danced gleefully atop the dying city of mangled steel
then the city disappeared
all that was left was fire
he was satisfied

then fire felt something moist brush against his scorching body
fire looked up at the night sky
it was raining

first a drizzle
then a monsoon
lightning streaked the inky night sky, crackling with electricity
the thunder clouds roared mockingly at his agony

each drop felt like a blade ripping through his flaming flesh
he writhed in indescribable pain

he began to sizzle
then he faded away

all that was left was a tiny spark
the wind started to blow
the breeze carried the spark

the spark fell into a small forest
then a fire started

Poetry – Grades 5-6: 2nd Place

Fire

By: Anmol Siwakoti

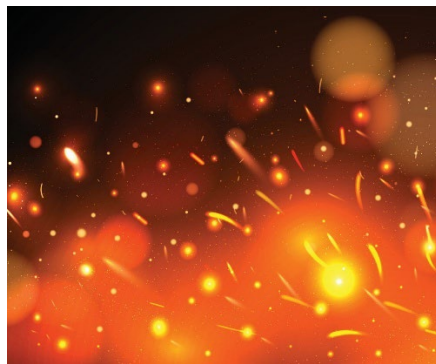
A spark ignites, a flare, a glow,
It whispers warmth, then starts to grow.
Crackling tongues, they leap and sway,
A dance of flames, both wild and stray.

Flickers kiss the midnight air,
Turning darkness into flare.
Red and gold, a fierce embrace,
A fiery heartbeat, burning grace.

It roars and rages, wild and free,
A raging storm in majesty.
Yet with a breath, it can be tamed,
Or burn through all, forever framed.

In fire's eyes, both light and shade,
Creation born, and worlds betrayed.
From smolder's spark to blinding light,
The fire thrives, both dark and bright.

It burns within, this powerful force,
A symbol of life's endless course.
Where there's fire, there's hope and pain-
And in its ashes, we rise again.



Poetry – Grades 5-6: 3rd Place

Words Like Wildfire

By: Disha Sharma

Words are like wildfire, blazing and bold
They can give you hope or leave you out in the cold.
A spark that begins small, just a tiny flicker of light,
But given fuel and power, it can burn throughout the night.

A gentle word is like a bright, shining ember,
It gives you hope and happiness that you'll always remember.
But a cruel and harsh word can leave you feeling attacked
So choose them carefully and consider the impact.

Words can be nice, like a delicate and gentle flame
It can show you the way and call your name.
words can also go wild, meant to offend
they can burn the heart, leaving scars that aren't easy to mend.

So handle words like you would a blaze
And don't leave others' hearts in a maze.
Words can heal like a fire's soft and gentle glow
Or burn every single thing that you know.

Poetry – Grades 7-8: 1st Place

Up from the Ashes

By: Leo Wingert

By the time the Spring had come and gone,
And the heart of Summer was nigh,
A lush green lawn lay underfoot,
Though the night was hot and dry.

The mountains rose in majesty
Beneath the twinkling stars of night,
When upon the fading gray horizon,
There awoke a harsh red light.

Mother Earth screamed in panic;
Her creatures turned and fled,
As the flames leaped from tree to tree,
Filling my heart with dread.

A shadow loomed before me,
As the sky was drowned in smoke,
While the world below was choked in flames,
And all things were engulfed.

With an insatiable appetite,
It devoured everything in its path
Leaving in its wake
Only desolation and scattered ash.

I wept to see such beauty perish,
But even in my dismay,
I knew that all was not lost,
For nature would find a way.

Up from the ashes
A new world will arise
The trees will feed on cinders
And, in doing so, will thrive.

The animals shall return
To the valleys at long last.
And now with evil burned away,
All the world will flourish.

Poetry – Grades 7-8: 2nd Place

Ode to Fire

By: Caleb Abbs

Oh fire, with your warmth and glow
We believe you will lead us with your light
We follow you with fiery passion
Just like Evander with his brilliant smashing (of the soccer ball)
However, some unfortunately choose to use you in other ways
Such as killing people everyday
Or trying to bring people down with criticism
Or trying to maybe hit them?
However, if you remove them from their job
They're just like every other Bob
However, if they get into art
They hopefully will make some clay hard
I know, I know,
We hold you dear
Though some of us have a little fear
Though through a couple smores
You might lead people to want more!
Because of your excellence
You might cost people a few thousand cents!
All though you have so many definitions
You will lead people to get some ambition
To become great at whatever they do
And that is all because of you!
They might want to be an athlete,
A singer,
A CEO,
Just don't be like Prometheus though
For you should never defy
But also maybe not rely

Because if you go down the wrong road
Someone might want to make you a toad!

Just don't attack, whether by firing a gun, or verbally assaulting people,
Or else you might get fired!
And then people will be tired
Of you being rogue
We don't want hate to be vogue
If you are an athlete,
Try to get on fire and score,
And always be thirsty for more!
Why are the best athletes the way they are?
Because they really want to go far
Messi, Ronaldo, the Great One all know
What it's like to be the GOAT
Brady, MJ, Tiger, and more
Always were thirsty for more!
Please don't let this talk disappoint,
For I really hope I made a good point!
However, I think it is time for farewell, and I hope you guys all do well.

When I created this I was inspired by all of the definitions of fire. I wanted to combine every definition of fire to create a poem that covered a few aspects of the world and was kind of like a pep talk, which I feel I succeeded in. I included some aspects, such as the Evander reference, because he has been on fire with FC Cincinnati. I included the Prometheus reference because I feel he is a good lesson of why to listen to your elders and he has his whole myth based around fire (although obviously listening to your elders isn't an eternal life decision). I included the reference to some of the GOATs of sports because they all had to have been on fire at some point during their careers to be so good. I hope you enjoy my poem and can take something away from it.

Essay – Grades 9-12: 1st Place

Fire

By: Diya Pestonjee

I akin fire to challenges and difficulties faced in life and how we can use this to make us stronger. I believe earth is a school and we come here for the purpose of learning, growing from our mistakes and from the challenges life presents to us. Life's challenges, though difficult, can be opportunities for self-introspection and growth, while allowing us to develop resilience, problem-solving skills, and a stronger sense of self. There is a famous saying that goes "The same fire that melts butter hardens steel." Life is about what you make of it, irrespective of the hardships and circumstances you face.

A potter takes clay and molds it into a utensil of his creativity. Clay at first is soft, so it can be shaped. However, to be useful it needs to be hardened. Objects made from clay are passed through fire, before they can be used as a utensil capable of holding water or grain. Life's challenges help mold us into developing our character as adults. When we are young, we are as malleable as clay and life itself is the fire that hardens and forms us in to stronger individuals. Difficulties force us out of our comfort zone and encourage us to discover new skill sets, ways of doing things better, have new experiences and improve our overall sense of well-being.

Life is not meant to be always easy. If that were the case, we would never find a need to change or come up with creative solutions to any problems. We develop a set of beliefs about the world around us based on our culture and traditions. These beliefs often become the foundation we build our lives upon. When we experience challenging times, it can often shake that foundation and leave us feeling insecure and vulnerable. If we are willing to let go of our old beliefs, roles, and aspects of identity that no longer serve us, we can then grow into more authentic individuals. Struggles force us to confront our fears, insecurities, close mindedness and overcome obstacles. This ultimately helps us become stronger individuals both mentally and emotionally. It is through adversities that we develop important life skills such as problem-solving, perseverance, and adaptability, which can be applied to future challenges.

Life also presents us with many options. We always have the choice in how we respond to difficult times. We can choose to either stagnate in fear, shut down emotionally, become hardened by self-internalizing our anger and choosing to be victims of our fate or learn and grow from our experiences. People often experience positive psychological growth from challenging times, such as a deeper sense of self and a renewed sense of purpose, a greater appreciation for life and loved ones, and an increased capacity for empathy and desire to act for the greater good. I believe we can all rise from adversity, transform, and experience renewal, like the mythical phoenix rising from the ashes.



Essay – Grades 9-12: 2nd Place

By: Jayden Marlow

Fire – the chemical reaction known as combustion – has paved the way for civilization since its discovery 2 million years ago. These chemical reactions are a vital source of heat, allowing for endless functions and possibilities. The simple process goes unrecognized for most of daily life, although its fundamental principle has unlimited purpose and effect on the world. From the cooking of food, to the aromatic candles lit at night, and even shaping the metal used in almost every design, fire is vital for human life.

Historically, being able to harness fire has allowed humans to alter their cultural landscape; it was the very thing that set early Homo sapiens apart from the rest of humanity. Early humans were able to control their cold climate and alter it to better suit their daily lifestyle. The harnessing of fire simultaneously slowed the spread of disease in early civilization as the act of cooking food with flames breaks down the protein and cellulose in food, making it more nutritious and easier to digest. The ability to cook food has been discovered to play a crucial role in the development of the human brain. The mastery of fire's capabilities also offered protection, as its heat could ward off dangerous animals and provide warmth in the dead of night. In today's

world, fire has been utilized in industry since the 18th century, in the act of smelting iron and powering steam engines. The source of heat also brings humans together in society, as a source of social interaction 'by the fire'.

While fire has limitless potential for good, its capabilities can often become too powerful, allowing for fire to cause harm. Left unchecked, fire can rage free, destroying everything in its path: homes, lives, habitats, and families. In the process of destruction, fire can destroy the already scarce supply of natural resources, taking years to recover. This powerful source doesn't care what it destroys in its path and is almost impossible to take out once it becomes powerful enough. Luckily fire requires 3 elements in order to thrive: heat, fuel, and oxygen. Removing just 1 of its components eliminates the raging threat entirely.

Even with the negatives of fire, it is essential to human life. Everything you have ever done has been shaped in some way by the chemical combustion of fire. To be completely safe while harnessing the substance, preventative measures must be taken. Supervision, using a fire extinguisher, maintaining a safe distance from the flame, following local regulations, and being educated on how fire works are all crucial for fire safety.

Essay – Grades 9-12: 3rd Place

By: Armaan Megada

Fire. I toyed around with how to interpret the concept for a while, but, as with all things, inevitably returned to you.

Fire. People tend to visualize this great big blaze of glory, engulfing all in its path -and maybe we had something like that once- but the dull glow atop an almost spent candle is a fire too. My heart burned once, burned with a passion so limitless it seemed as though it reached the stars. My passions flickered and pulsed: bright and furious, then soft and timid. At the height of these passions, I resolved to win you back.

I figured I'd find you after a performance of *Hadestown*. I knew you'd have to see it eventually; one of your friends had a sister in the show, another played the bass, a third was dating the guitarist. Regarding the guitarist, he recently followed me on Instagram completely unprompted. I returned the gesture. A story popped up, and I took the bait. I ended up scrolling a little while before remembering a name, vaguely associated with yours in rumors and whispers. Curiosity having gotten the better of me, I sought for the subject in mind.

Fate has a way of brilliantly executing the downfall of man by his own hand, for in the profile picture of that account were two people, smiling, standing side by side, wholly unconcerned with what the world had to say, and happily letting time pass them by in the moment.

I didn't know you had a girlfriend.

I shut my phone off instantly. I couldn't bear to see more. I deleted that accursed app, turned off the lights, and screamed into my pillow until my voice gave out. What hope could I possibly have left?

Hadestown came sooner than expected. It was a brilliant show. I'm writing this following the last performance. In spite of everything, a dull flicker remained in my heart, and each night I went into the crowd expecting to see your face. I saw almost every one of your friends; nearly the whole band had come. We sold out three nights in a row, but you weren't there. Here's another thing about fires: they're never satisfied. They consume, and they consume, and they consume everything in their path. None of what I had accomplished mattered, because you weren't there.

I feel empty. I feel an immeasurable sense of longing. I feel lost. I used to be driven by a need to fix things and return to the past, but that seems impossible now. We don't laugh. We don't talk. We can't even bear to look at each other. And yet, in spite of everything, my fire hasn't gone out. Embers reignite. I see a light at the end of the tunnel, and feel myself reaching towards it. I have hope, hope that I can fix things, hope that there is a better future, and it's just barely out of reach. I believe in the green light.

Narrative – Grades 9-12: 1st Place

The Lone Fire

By: Ruthvik Kotagiri

He smiled at his company's foolish jokes as he took a sip of glowing nectar from the crystal wine glass.

"Hah! Remember when we strapped that boy to a chariot's wheel and flung him into the sky?" laughed the one with the spartan helmet.

"Or the one that scorched the world with the sun chariot?" said an astoundingly pretty woman. In the far end of the long marble table, a literally radiating, muscular man sneered at the lady.

The bright white marble room had such a pleasing ambience, even in the dark night. Though they were above the clouds, they were just like those below, they simply didn't know it. Or maybe they did, but they didn't want to admit it.

The domed glass roof revealed a silvery moon that temporarily replaced the man at the end. The world was beautiful, the others simply refused to say it. He believed it was only a matter of ego and selfishness that split them apart.

As dinner departed, he stood up. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye to the left, in the center of the rotunda that connected to the room, he spotted the only source of light - a blazing Fire. It burned brilliantly.

He waited for the others to leave. However, one stayed. The one by the Lone Fire. "I understand what you think," she said kindly.

He felt like she was telling the truth. No one else did that.

As she continued to tend to the Lone Fire, he stood up and slowly walked to her. She didn't react.

"Then why don't you do it?" he asked.

"It is not my purpose," she countered. The Lone Fire blazed brighter.

He thought about saying something, but he figured it wasn't worth it and retreated to his room.

As he attempted to lie down, he couldn't stop thinking about it. Sure, he had thoughts like this before, but none like this.

Figuring it was a sign, he returned down the long white hall back into the dazzling chamber. Hiding behind a smooth marble pillar, he peered over the side and spotted the maiden facing the opposite way, toward the flame. He knew this was the chance. But first, he had to get her out of the way.

To the left was the dining area. Above the great table was the crystal dome. Using his mind, the dome shattered, and crystal shards fell onto the solid table.

As intended, the goddess turned away. With his bare hand, he lifted an ember from the raging mythical Lone Fire and walked to the balcony. As he held it over the edge, he sensed someone behind him.

But that didn't stop him, as he opened his hand, allowing the glowing cinder to fall to the inferior world, moving away clouds, and allowing the planet below to at last, glow. Though he would face consequences, the people below would prosper, thrive, and expand, just like the Fire



Narrative – Grades 9-12: 2nd Place

Embers to Ash

By: Adam Chambers

I started small, just as an experiment performed by some kids in a small barrel. The moment I was born, they all cheered. I was young and vulnerable. The children had to feed me constantly, otherwise the cruel breaths of the Earth would end me. Then, I spoke for the first time. I started only by hissing, but as I got bigger, these sounds grew too.

Slowly, I expanded. The children fed me, and I became stronger and stronger; the breath of Earth no longer a concern of mine. I kept getting bigger and stronger. The children stood there and watched, with their hands extended in front of them, palms facing me.

As I continued to grow, the children started feeding me bigger and bigger pieces of food. Before long, I had grown to be taller than my creators. I continued to reach new heights. My creators just stood there watching. Now I was no longer hissing, I was *crackling*, and occasionally *popping*. My food now had more moisture, something that would have certainly killed me early on.

Next to me is a huge supply of food. I tried to reach it, but it was too far away. Then, a miracle happened. The once cruel breaths of the Earth pushed me into this supply of food. Quickly, I ate everything, and I grew. I looked back at the children, who were running away from me, making strange, loud noises.

This saddened me, but I continued to grow bigger and bigger, engulfing everything in my path. The Earth's breaths were no longer my enemy, but now were rather my friend. They pushed me farther and farther away from my creators, and deeper into my seemingly endless supply of food.

That's when I saw some larger children, all of them had these weird stripes on them that reflected my light. They were lined up, holding what looked like a snake, when they aimed the front of the snake right at me. They all shouted at each other, and the other's standing by who were watching.

Suddenly, there was a great *Whooshing* sound, and I felt pain. I was hit by something. I looked over, and something was coming out of the snake's mouth. I was in pain, slowly growing smaller, but I wasn't going to give up. Despite the pain, I kept moving, engulfing the food in my glow. Eventually, I was out of the snake's reach. I was safe! Or so I thought.

There was a deep rumble, and suddenly Earth began to cry. This pained me, much like the snake did. These tears were coming from above and were everywhere. I tried to keep moving, but I couldn't. I was trapped. Slowly, I began to shrink, still crying out in pain each time a tear touched my glowing skin.

Before long, I was back to the size I was when I was created. Then, as quickly as I entered this world, there was nothing.

Narrative – Grades 9-12: 3rd Place

By: Sadie Hodgeman

“Mom?”

“Mommm! It’s really hot.” I start to open my eyes and wake up. I look at my clock, it’s 3:06am. It’s unusual for my kids to be up in the middle of the night, much less screaming for me. It quickly starts to set in why they are awake. The scent hits me first. Smoke. As it infiltrates my lungs, I begin to cough. It quickly becomes harder and harder to breathe. Then the visual aspect hits. I look over to my door where I see the outline of a dim light. We sleep with the lights off. This quickly solidifies it for me, there’s a fire.

As a child I was always taught in school how to act in a fire. Stop, drop, and roll, touch the doorknob with the back of your hand instead of your palm, etc. However, no one and nothing can prepare you for the pure panic. Who do you get first? How do you get everyone to safety most effectively? The adrenaline does nothing for me, the panic overruns my brain and all it draws is a blank. All I can think about is this: I must get my kids out.

Henry, my son, and Lucille, my daughter. I completely bypass the touch-the-doorknob-with-the-back-of-your-hand thing. I whip it open, and look around. The fire is on the steps, but hasn’t made its way upstairs. I run to my daughter’s room, who’s crying. She tells me that she’s scared, but there is no time for gentleness. I run to her, and as she slightly fights me, pick her up. “This is important, honey. I need you to work with me.” I then run to the closet on the way to my son’s room. I know there’s a ladder somewhere in here. I have to dig around a bit, and by dig around I mean throw anything in sight out, until I find it. I grab it and run to my son’s room.

He’s younger than my daughter, only seven. He doesn’t quite understand what’s happening, so he only stands there, confused. There’s no time to explain, so I tell him one thing: we need to get out, now. I need you to be strong. I open the window and reach out with the ladder. I have a moment of panic as it doesn’t open. “Please, please. Please don’t do this, not right now.” It finally opens, which gives me little to no relief. I secure it as best as I can, and then I turn around. Who do I send first? Not me. I tell my daughter, “come here, honey. I need you to climb down this ladder. I will be down in just a second, I promise.” She’s hesitant, but understands that it’s an urgent matter and climbs down. Next comes my son. I lift him onto the ladder and tell him to go. My back suddenly gets so hot, and as I turn around, it’s already too late. It’s here. Fire.

Poetry – Grades 9-12: 1st Place

Alzheimer's with Dementia in Her

By: Avery Weisenborn

Burn, burn, burn,
The spark started off small,
Barely noticeable by those who knew her best,

Burn, burn, burn,
Questions were repeated,
Answers were forgotten,
The change of emotions began,

Burn, burn, burn,
Sometimes the fire would tell her that she needed to be mad or scared,
Although it was rarely necessary,
We thought it was nothing,
Just a phase,

Burn, burn, burn,
As the string of time shortened,
Her memory followed a similar pattern,
She would forget the names of things,
Even people,
She couldn't remember how to do certain tasks,
We helped her out all the time,
Especially my mom,
My mom's love for her was always unconditional,
She showed up when Meemers needed her the most,

Burn, burn, burn,
The paranoia was in sync with the flame,
They became more noticable each day,
The smoke from the flames clouded her brain,
She couldn't understand all the time,
She wanted to talk but words never came out just right,
Her love for stories was always there though,
Every time we saw her she would tell us many of them,
We tried to follow along but sometimes the flame wouldn't let us,
The flame made her walk around all the time,
And never let her sleep,

Burn, burn, burn,
The flame was fueled with cans and cans of lighter fluid,
When she came back home from the hospital she wasn't the same,
She'd reach out for comfort,

To see if you were still there,
Her head would swivel in a circle just like the flame that was overtaking her mind,
She wondered if someone was there to hurt her,
I did my best to comfort her,
To take her mind off all of it,
She and I tried our best,
Though her mind was still full of fire,
We hoped that our love and prayers for her would be enough to heal her,

Burn, burn, burn,
The fire became extremely large,
No longer allowing her to stay in the place she once called home,
They moved her to a place that could house the flame,
Nurses became the water that was supposed to stop the flame from growing,
The water didn't end up helping though,
We came to visit her a few times,
It was painful the first time I saw her there,
Whispering words filled with pain while she dreamed,
We came another time because we missed seeing her,
We brought her pictures and flowers to remind her of home,
We read and talked to her,
Helping her remember how much she is loved,
She never got the chance to open her eyes to see all we had done,
She never got the chance to say more to us,
The flame was just too big that it swallowed her whole,

Burned, burned, burned,
I'll see you in heaven one day,
Goodbye my sweet Meemers, Goodbye



Poetry – Grades 9-12: 2nd Place

The Flicker of My Life

By: Ella Witkowski

How do I tell them the fire inside of me is burning?
A wildfire of emotions, a great storm churning.
Everything left is a dwindling flame,
With whispers of hope that feel so mundane.

I long to be the flicker wanted to be kept alive,
Not the one forced to fizzle, struggling to survive.
To dance in the hearth, with warmth and grace,
To be cherished and entwined in a safe embrace.

But no one sees my heart, my personal blaze,
The fireplace they use, forgotten for days.
They dump their ashes, their burdens, and their fears,
While I quietly steam, hidden behind tears.

I can create warmth like a hug at the strike of a match,
But no one notices the glimmers, the constant fight for a catch.
The dried tear marks that tell tales untold,
How my spirit is burning, leaving me out cold.

How everything in my life right now is ablaze,
A consuming fire, engulfing me for days.
Yet within the chaos, there's a flicker still bright,
A small hope that perhaps, I'll emerge from this fight.

So I'll tend to my fire, nourish the spark,
To rise from the ashes, brighten the dark.
For in the heart of the struggle, through time I find,
The strength of the flame of my life that can never be confined.

Poetry – Grades 9-12: 3rd Place

A Bonfire Tale

By: Akyedzi Acheampong

A balmy summer evening
Sun setting into an **ember-filled** sky
Eating hot dogs, burgers, kababs
All freshly **grilled**.

Bonfire lit

Hazing the surrounding air
Fireside stories for hours
And mouth-watering s'mores
Sweet chocolate and gooey
marshmallows
Warming the soul.

Mosquito bites

Itch and **burn**

But **fireflies**

Glow and **flicker**.

Zippering through the air

Like tongues of **fire**.

Fireworks climbing up through the sky

Bursting with **energy**

Sparks flying across the sky

Dissipating like stardust.

Kids running around with **sparklers**
Cheering at the ongoing spectacle
Parents conversing
Barely able to hear each other
Over the screaming children
And **explosions** that fill the air

As the **bonfire** dies

We all head inside

One of the best days of our lives

The Fourth of July.



Thank you...

This 2025 Write Challenge would not have been possible without the support of:

- Lakota's Gifted Services Department
- LEADS Board
- Lakota Students and Parents
- Lakota Classroom Teachers
- Lakota's School Board and Administrators
- And an extra big thanks to LEADS Write Challenge Organizing Team and all of our Judges

About LEADS

Lakota's Enrichment and Academic Development of Students (LEADS) is primarily aimed at the parents of children identified as gifted, but welcome ALL families in the Lakota School District.

LEADS mission is to identify, provide and/or sponsor enriching academic and social opportunities for students of the District. www.lakotaleads.org



Lakota★LEADS

Lakota's Enrichment and Academic
Development of Students