

# Living

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## Winners of the 2017 A.R. Ammons Poetry Contest

Poetry contest founder says 2017 contest is 'best ever'

The A. R. Ammons Poetry Contest Committee, named in honor of Columbus County's famous poet, on May 7 recognized its honorees in the 24th annual contest for the young poets of Columbus County schools. The contest was once again sponsored by BB&T, *The News Reporter* and the Reuben Brown House Preservation Society.

The contest was created in the fall of 1992 as a way of honoring Ammons, but even more so to give recognition and encouragement to the creative talents of the school children of Columbus County. An average of 700 students each year have submitted their original poems in four school age divisions grouped by grade level. Identified only by number, the poems are sent in bulging manila envelopes to two panels of contest judges who decide on the winners. Student winners receive copies of Ammons' books, cash awards or certificates of honorable mention.

In 2004, the contest marked a new beginning, a Division V, open to students enrolled in an undergraduate North Carolina college, plus any Columbus County resident enrolled in any college. This year's winning poems in this division were from Davidson College, UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State students.

Over the years, several members of the committee have been a constant. Susan Wood still serves as the original chair, and Melba Wyche, Mary Mintz and Gene Claire Gault have been judges from the beginning. Other judges are Pat Ray, Vernon Hall and Elizabeth Turner. Hilda Ray serves as the committee's fourth secretary.

Ammons was born near New Hope in a house that has since disappeared. He graduated from Whiteville High School in time to serve on a destroyer escort in the Pacific during World War II. Returning to North Carolina, he went off again to then-Wake Forest College on the G.I. bill. Marriage and a series of varied jobs took him farther and farther from Columbus County, but his poetry, for which he soon began to gain publication and wide acclaim, proved that his boyhood home was never far from his thoughts. In his oft-quoted poem "Alligator Hole Down Along Old Dock," he laments "Lord, I wish I were in Hallsboro, over by the tracks, or somewhere down past the Green Swamp around Nakina...."

Ammons' poetry gained him the offer of a position at Cornell University in upstate New York, where he resided until his death in 2001. Ammons' last public visit to Whiteville was in 1995 when he agreed to read his poems to an audience at SCC. A retiring man who shunned publicity and the limelight, Ammons was probably surprised by the warmth of his SCC visit. The openly supportive crowd at the reading, including an enthusiastic group of SCC students, called out suggestions for him to read several older poems, surprising Ammons by their choices and their fervor.

During that same 1995 visit, Ammons attended the Recognition Program for that year's poetry contest winners. He sat on the stage and personally handed out prizes and certificates to every student. Afterwards, at the reception, Ammons submitted to an endless round of picture-taking and autographs, obviously happy to meet and encourage this new crop of Columbus County poets.

Ammons had been invited to the White House for a presidential meeting with other leading poets, but he declined to read his works. His poetry has been compared to that of Robert Frost, Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson in his view of nature and its



Division I honorable mentions were from left: Kevin Aparicio, Chris Dixon, Conner Edwards, Dakota Muse, Emaleigh Rowell, Emma Grace Ward and Isabella White.



Division II honorable mentions were from left: Bryce Freeman, Scarlett Hilbourn, Bella Moore, Evan Phillips, Azaria Robinson, Merissa Shipman and Andrew Ward.



Division III honorable mentions were from left: Ashlyn Hammond, Anderiah Long, Bethany Lupo, Haley Grace Soles and Ian Williamson.



Division IV winners/honorable mentions were from left: Bailey Rector, first; Landon Powell, second; and Honorable Mentions, Mackenzie Soles and Tanner Wilson.

relationship to the soul. The awards he garnered over the years tell of his greatness as a poet. With more than 25 books of poetry to his credit (plus several posthumous compilations and reprints), Ammons won the Robert Frost Medal for Distinguished Achievement in Poetry, two National Book Awards for Poetry, the Bollingen Prize in Poetry from Yale University, the National Book Critics Circle Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a MacArthur Fellowship (with a \$254,000 stipend), the North Carolina Award for Literature and the \$100,000 Tanning Prize. He was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in October, 2000 with his sister Vida Cox of Clarkton in attendance. Mrs. Cox has been a constant attendee at the local program honoring contest winners, but was not able to attend this year.

This year's winning poems, according to Susan Wood who founded the competition, "were some of the most individual and creative we have ever received. This is a credit to the talents of local youth and the teachers who instruct them. The large numbers of poems selected for Honorable Mention, more than 10 in almost every grade level, demonstrates the quandary of the judges in selecting the place winners!" All of the honored poems will soon be posted online at reubensbrownhouse.com. Plans for next year, the 25th

year of the contest, are already underway, with rumors of special guests. Details will be announced in the fall.

### Division I K-2nd grade

#### First Place

##### "Papa"

I think about you every day,  
Since the time, you went away.

Our loss was Heaven's gain,  
But my world has never been the same.

You gave the best hugs, and loved to read books,  
And when I misbehaved you gave me "The look."  
You loved you family, your friends and your boots,  
Your love for Jesus had no substitute.

My world is so different since you've gone away.  
I miss our time together and fun when we played.

Sometimes, I wonder why Jesus would not let you stay,  
On earth with me for a few more days.

A little bit longer to help me grow up,  
And face this world, cause it sure is tough.

But because of your lessons and Jesus' love,  
I will see you in Heaven above!

**Morgan Boyd**  
*Old Dock Elementary*

#### Second Place

##### "Oh, How God Created Spring"

Oh, how God created spring.  
He made the birds to sing.  
He made the buzzing bees.  
He made the tall green trees.

He made the blooming flowers  
That seem to grow for hours.

He made the green grass  
And the fluffy white clouds to pass.

He made the sun's warm heat.  
He made the hopping bunny's furry feet.

He made the majestic bird wings.  
Oh, I thank God for creating spring.

**Lenzy Callahan**  
*Old Dock Elementary*

#### Third Place

##### "Fall"

Fall was here,  
Now it's gone away.  
I wait and wait,  
For the next fall day.

When the leaves are brown,  
And falling to the ground.  
Getting to ride rides because the fair is in town.

Fall was here,  
Now it's gone away.  
Time to paint my hair for Halloween Day.

Softball tournaments that I love to play.  
Oh I can't wait,  
For more fall days.

**Ciara Hewett**  
*Old Dock Elementary*

#### Honorable Mention



Division I winners were from left: Morgan Boyd, first place; Lenzy Callahan, second place; and Ciara Hewett, third place.



Division II Winners were from left: Kaylee Waggle, first; Keith Boyd, second place; and Maddie Edwards, third place.



Division III winners were from left: Nyasia Singleton, first and Danielle Mills, second.

"All About My Ten Hens"  
I have a lot of hens  
As a matter of fact, I have ten.

I saw a big pen.  
I made it comfy then.  
Now my ten hens live in the pen.

**Kevin Aparicio**  
*Whiteville Primary*

"Books"  
I will always read a book.  
I like the way they look.  
The books I read are fantasy.

They make me feel happy.  
I will read books at school  
I think that's very cool!

**Jaelyn Bennett**  
*Tabor City Elementary*

"Basketball"  
Basketball is really fun.  
I think I'm number one!  
I love to dunk it hard,  
When I'm playing in my yard.

I can shoot and score.  
I always try to score more.  
I dribble the ball to the beat.  
And I stomp with my feet.

**Chris Dixon**  
*Old Dock Elementary*

"Basketball"  
The game is about to begin.  
My team is hoping to win.  
When we run out on the court to start the game.  
We cannot wait to hear the crowd cheer our name!

When the ball hits the ground, it makes a pitter patter sound.  
As the ball flies toward the goal, it really excites my soul.

My heart begins to skip a beat, as the crowd jumps to their feet.  
The ball went in.  
We got the win!

**Conner Edwards**  
*Old Dock Elementary*

"Softball"  
Some say it is just a game.  
But without it my life wouldn't be the same.

First base is where I play,  
but not where I always stay.  
The coach, he is my dad.  
He still loves me even if I play bad.

When I hit the ball I'm busy running that I don't see where it is going to fall.

I may not always be the best, but I always give it my all. This girl loves the game softball.

**Lakyn Grice**  
*Old Dock Elementary*

#### "Blaze"

My dog and I like to play,  
We play Frisbee all day.  
Blaze and I get a snack to eat,

Then we play music and boogie to the beat.  
When we take a nap,  
I always pat Blaze on the back.

Sometimes we go for walks,  
And together we have long talks.

I love Blaze  
In so many ways!

**Dakoda Muse**  
*Old Dock Elementary*

"My Imaginary Friend"  
Katy is my imaginary friend,  
She always makes me grin.  
We read book a lot.

She always helps me with the plot.  
Katy sleeps on the floor,  
Right by my door.

We paint art at school,  
She helps me gather the paint tools.  
Katy is always there with me,

I wonder what we will grow up to be!

**Yadira Rodriguez**  
*Old Dock Elementary*

#### "Puppy"

Puppy, puppy in the house  
You are so cute as a mouse.  
You run, bark and play all day

Sometimes you get in my

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