

I Love Leaves

The leaves go up in the sky,
And they go so very high.
My leaves are bright,
even at night.
They twirl and swirl,
And inch by inch
They fall
As they hear the wind call,
“Winter’s on its way.”

-GANNON INMAN

Winter

Children look like penguins in the winter
with all their bundled gear on.
When they come inside, they drink hot cocoa,
then they rush outside again.
They build snowmen and snow forts,
and then they are back inside.
They play inside, and then they go to bed.
I love winter.

-LILA MILDEN

Springtime

The smell of fresh air fills my lungs.
A breeze is lapping at my back.
The sound of a woodpecker stirs.

Animals come out of their burrows
to see what’s happening.
They gather beneath a dead tree.

Woodpeckers peck,
birds chirp,
rabbits hop.
The hedgehog is back.

-AVERY PECK

Ode to an Icicle

O, icicle,
I see you hanging
with a glistening shimmer.
Your elegant, diamond shape
glitters in the sunlight.
You stand up
straight and tall
like toy soldiers
with your friends.

Your clear drops
fall down on me,
and I step away.
Your silvery light
penetrates the cold air.
I have to look away
from your brightness.

Your shiny, transparent
sharp point
falls to the ground with a crash.
I pick you up
and feel you melting in my hand.

O, icicle,
I take a bite
and let your smooth coldness
fill up my mouth with happiness.
You, icicle,
are my favorite icy treat.

—JACKIE BRANCH

Braiding

I remember the way it felt in my small hands—soft
but coarse. Thick
and long and almost infinite.
I remember the way Theona taught me: left
over middle, right
over middle, and left
over middle again. I remember
how I knelt behind Ms. Cate, wove her hair
beside Theona, separated the deep

blond strands into uneven sections. Sometimes,

on days when we felt up to a challenge, or when
rain slid down the windows and we weren't forced
to head outside, we would divide Ms. Cate's hair
into thirds, and thirds again. We took the time to twist
the sections into nine small braids,
then three, then one. One long, thick, braid,
made of many,
which swayed against her sweater when she moved.
She would thank us,
tell us she loved it, wear it with a smile
for the rest of the day.

I remember grinning with pride
beside Theona, grateful for my new skill and elated
that we were able to accomplish
such a tiring task, one with such
a satisfying outcome.
I remember Ms. Cate's patience.

It's hard know if the blurred colors
around the edges of this memory are true,
but I remember crouching there, at the front
of the classroom, as our giggles
filled it
and subsided, the gentleness in her voice
as Ms. Cate whispered,
"Quiet down, girls."
And Theona and I would turn back to her hair,
our eyes aglow with play,
and thread it together
while the rest of the kindergarteners did their work.

I smile as I remember. I loved the way it felt
to be not just a student
to my teacher, but a friend, as well.
I miss laughing with Theona.
I miss the feeling of Ms. Cate's hair
between my fingers.
I miss my close friendship
with both—faded,
along with the broken-off edges
of the memories from when I was five.
But I'm careful to cling
to the large, important pieces
of these memories. The ones that mean the most—
that I never
want to let
slip.

I pull my neat brown braid
around my shoulder,
tying it off—my technique nearly
perfected after many years of practice.
I smile at myself in the mirror,
hold the memory in my mind a little longer, wishing
I was seated beside Theona,
braiding Ms. Cate's hair
instead of my own.

—ISABELLE EATON-NEUBERT
FIRST PLACE, 6-8

The Road of Life

A father and daughter, hand in hand,
walk down the winding road of life—one that's unfamiliar.
The little girl's small pink shoes toddle along
as she picks up acorns lying on the ground.
She wipes the dirt off of them
onto her brand new pants and glances up at her father,
prepared for an angry glare.
Instead, he gazes down at her and smiles.

"I see it!" she declares, pointing at the streaks of blue
shining through the chrysanthemum bush.
Her chocolate eyes glisten as she scampers
along the dirt trail, peeking back every now and then
to make sure
her father is still with her.
They trudge down the rickety ramp.
Sounds of a motor boat echo through the air,
leaving the father with not just a grin,
but a new wish on his Christmas list.

The cool breeze blows the little girl's curls
against her rosy cheeks,
as she piles up the collection of acorns
onto a wooden plank below her.
She listens to them plop
into the emerald water.

One lands, and floats under the dock,
disappearing into liquid darkness.

As her father holds her arm tight,
she peers over the wooden railing and stops.
“Look, daddy!” she squeals,
pointing to the water below them.
The father glances down with her
and they both giggle.
They gaze upon their reflections together,
implanting the core memory
of the young girls childhood,
watching, as it slowly ripples away
with the sun.

*A young girl walks down the winding road of life,
one she's been walking down for years.
It's just her this time:
picking up acorns off of the ground,
and stuffing them in the pockets of her new pants.
Gray clouds illuminate a warm glow above her,
and the sun's rays
shoot through the leaves
of the old chrysanthemum bush.*

*She smiles,
tugging at the sleeves of her woolen sweater
as she steps onto a beat up wooden plank of the dock —
her dock—seeing the moment
as if it were all a dream.
She listens to the rumbling sound
of a motor boat pass by, wondering why time
has caught up with her so quickly,
leaving her father still
with an empty space in the shed.*

*As she pulls a small, helpless acorn out of her pocket,
she tosses it into the blue waves,
examining her reflection below
as she leans over the railing.
Who is this young lady staring back at me?
She thinks to herself,
wondering how it feels like only yesterday
when there was a little girl
looking back at her
instead.*

—SOPHIA SCOTT

THIRD PLACE (tie), 6-8

Grounded

My fingers pursue the ripples
in the damp,
uneven surface.

They say
some sequoias take twelve people
holding hands
to reach around their massive trunks.

A gentle breeze
sweeps through, tickling
the sea of emerald ferns.
I am flooded by calm silence
that echoes throughout these woods.

Warm California air comforts me
as I wander deeper into the maze
of moss-coated pillars.

Magnifying water droplets
chase one another
from the canopy two hundred feet above,
embraced with a *plop*
by the wood chip path.

I admire the birds darting
from tree to tree,
but I scan the ground,
determined not to trip
on the uneven surface.

Furry shadows scamper
from hole to hole.

Their tails are the last
to disappear
into the tangle of roots.

Here I am,
among peaceful giants,
but somehow

I don't stand down and cower,
I am supported by these ancestors.
I am grounded in this moment.

—AYMERIC DAUGE-ROTH
THIRD PLACE (tie), 6-8