

Results of the 17th Annual Northeast Texas Poetry Contest



Student Winners of the Poetry Contest: First--Emily Hamlin (\$400), Second--Isabel Tresidder (\$300), Third—Kaden Groda (\$200), and Fourth-Yahir Garcia (\$100). Photo courtesy of Mandy Smith and the Eagle

The most recent Northeast Texas Poetry reading on 6 September at the foyer of the Whatley Center for the Performing Arts revealed some arresting facets of local culture. Except for **Joe Dan Boyd**, the area’s “poet laureate,” who has now won the adult division of this contest five times, the winner’s circle of poets and photographers assembled a basically “outside perspective” of the region. These were not entrenched regionalists, but relative newcomers who in the main appreciate the area. To be sure, the first “Yankee-critique of Texas” poem by the New-York-born **Dr. Rev. Wayne Renning**, a second-place adult winner, was a seventeen-year first. But the poem’s humorous quality gave it more of a kidding tone than an air of disappointment, or displeasure. The student winner in poetry, **Emily Hamlin**, from Oregon, earnestly sought historical reasons to explain the Texas she has come to love. Second-place, **Isabel Tresidder**, whose family has come to Northeast Texas via South Africa, and Atlanta betrayed the utter fascination of an outsider for a Texas beast, the

wild hog. The rest of the winners were either from elsewhere, or were Hispanics, born in Mount Pleasant. This too is new. The largest indigenous population growing up in Mount Pleasant in the 2020s are the offspring and even the grandchildren of the immigrants who hailed from Mexico to Titus County, arriving between 1990 to 2008.



Isabel Tresidder's Sketch of a Wild Hog that accompanied her poem.

To be sure, since the de-escalation of Pilgrim's, the coal industry, and steel, Northeast Texas is no longer growing as it once had. But those coming from elsewhere again showed this year an appreciation for the area's natural, rural strongholds. Third-place winner, the West-Texas-born **Kaden Groda**, represented much of the poetry in the five places below him when he began with the words:

Beneath the canopy of pine trees tall,
Where sunlight dances, shadows fall,
East Texas whispers in the breeze,
A melody of tranquil ease.

Two speakers highlighted the upbeat, regional sentiment expressed in the poems.



Daingerfield Mayor, Wade Kerley at the 2024 Reading: Professors Sparks and Yox in Background. Photo Courtesy of Mandy Smith and the [Eagle](#)

Daingerfield Mayor, **Wade Kerley**, originally from the Houston area, noted life's capacity for sudden changes, the challenge of unscripted tragedies in unemployment and health, and the way time demands erode artistic dreams that can go unfulfilled. Still, Northeast Texas and Northeast Texas Community College, in particular, provided his family a forum to appreciate life, return to the artistic aspirations of youth, and find a way to play off limitations with new opportunities. Computer Science Professor, Dr. **Will McWhorter**, enjoyed publishing articles and teaching at an Oklahoma University, but he finds Northeast Texas personable, relaxed, and invigorating. Where friendship and understanding flourish, there is the best chance for the best kind of life.

Whereas Hamlin's poem looked to history, and viewed the region as her part of Texas, **Joe Dan Boyd**'s poem resonated with the actual, lived-regional history, evoking the cotton culture that held sway between the Red and Sabine Rivers for over 100 years. True to most of that history, cotton proved a very fickle mistress, but Boyd's poem was in the main nostalgic. The young cotton picker who later became a Philadelphia journalist noted that most of life's best lessons were learned on the cotton patch. His family picked cotton in particular for the cotton seed oil business which was an important part of the regional economy by the early twentieth century. During the Reading, Boyd also sang cotton protest songs he had come to know.

Just as Hamlin's number-one student poem defined Northeast Texas as her Texas, Mount-Pleasant-born **Estefani Garcia** submitted a winning image, evoking more of the state than the regional identity. Her rural setting with bluebonnets would make an excellent post card for the natural environment of life in rural Texas, which most poets and photographers in the contest most appreciated:



Estefani Garcia's Field with Bluebonnets

Karen Harmon of Mount Pleasant graciously covered the costs of the Texas-sized student prizes this year. The Whatley Employee Enhancement Fund grant process played an important role in the process. Other friends and patrons of *Honors Northeast* covered the image prizes and adult poetry prizes. **Steven Nelms** covered the audio and technical setup. The

poetry judges again this year were **Dr. Anna Ingram**, Associate Vice President of Instruction, **Mandy Smith**, Professor of English, and Division Chair for Communications, and **Jennifer Sparks**, Instructor of English, and Director of Sigma Kappa Delta, the honorary English society on campus. **Sparks** also hosted the Reading at the Whatley. **Mileah Hall**, Associate Professor of Art, again judged the image part of the competition.

The winning Poems and Images are shown below:



Emily Hamlin Reading Poem

Photo Courtesy of Mandy Smith and The Eagle

“Come And Take It”

By Emily Hamlin

Once upon a time, in a Texas from the past,
Years and years ago, in the century before last.
When America was younger and stood bravely on her own,
The land that stretched across the south likewise stood alone.

Endless golden prairies and forests full of trees;
A haven for the pioneers that fled from overseas.
Promising and lavish, Texas quickly stole the stage
And the quest for freedom introduced a dangerous new age.

As her land became more valuable and tension filled the air,
Discord began to sow itself and kindle disrepair.
Texans wanted liberties; Mexico would give none.
The noble lone star state became a battle to be won.

In time the land divided; a revolution started.
Terms were non-negotiable and peace quickly departed.
Texans rallied far and wide to protect what they earned;
The right to own artillery must at all costs be returned.

Then one morning in October, 1835,
While the men prepared and waited for more soldiers to arrive,
Two women sewed a message in a worn out ivory rag
And the dare to “come and take it” forged the revolution’s flag.

Gliding through the fog that night, despite the autumn chill,
Their banner flew a testament to bravery and will.
The battle didn’t last a day, and Texans fought with pride-
Independence won if only by the courage on her side.

To carry weapons is a privilege that every person holds,
And Texas will defend that right no matter what unfolds.
Some believe this cannot come without a rule or permit,
But truly it’s the hearts of those who answer, “come and take it.”



*Isabel Tresidder Reading
Poem: Courtesy Mandy
Smith*

“Pig's Conquest”

By Isabel Tresidder

In the depths of East Texas, where the river birch sway,
A soft pattering of hooves beckons the break of day.
Deep in the thickets and woods, where wild things roam,
Wild hogs wake to another day of conquering the place they call home.

With pelts like a soldier's armor and tusks that gleam,
They huddle through the underbrush and sip from the stream.
The dawn's restless wind in the heavy morning mist,
The pigs revel in its presence, its cool, cold kiss.

In muddy wallows, they find shelter from the heat,
As the sun rises high and the day turns complete.
Their snouts dig and furrow deep into the earth,
The other animals know to give them a wide berth.

Scattered in the meadows, they stand as fierce ward,
The herd positioned alert and sharp as a sword.
For low in the foliage, within the leafy frame,
A young sow labors, to increase their fame.

Along the wildflowers searching for a snack,
They wander through with no fear of attack.
Their marvelous weight heard in every snort and grunt,
Regardless of their strength, they will face their enemies upfront.

As the sun dips behind the expansive fields,
The hogs finish their daily yields.
They hustle back from whence they came,
Knowing that of their land they've made their certain claim.

Third-Place Student Poem

“Whispers of East Texas”

By Kaden Groda

Beneath the canopy of pine trees tall,
Where sunlight dances, shadows fall,
East Texas whispers in the breeze,
A melody of tranquil ease.

The mornings draped in misty veils,
Soft as the whispering nightingale's tales,
Dew-kissed meadows, fresh and green,
Where nature paints a serene scene.

Fields of bluebonnets, wild and free,
Stretch like waves of a quiet sea,
While dogwoods bloom in soft array,
Heralding the dawn of a new day.

Cypress knees by quiet streams,
Reflect the sky in endless dreams,

And in the stillness, you can hear,
The heart of Texas, strong and clear.

The rusty hue of autumn leaves,
The golden fields, the farmer's sheaves,
Each season brings its own delight,
A canvas brushed with morning light.

Oh, East Texas, land so dear,
Where every sunset brings you near,
In your embrace, I find my peace,
In your beauty, my soul's release.

Fourth-Place Student Poem

“Where the Wild Wind Whispers”

By Yahir Garcia

Where the Wild Wind Whispers

In the land where the wild wind roams,
Across rugged plains and skies like domes,
Theres a story etched in the ancient stones,
Of wanderers chasing their dreams, far from their homes.

The ground is cracked, yet holds its might,

Under boots that seek the light.
From dawn to dusk, they tread the dust,
In the heat of the sun, their spirits ignite.

The cacti stand like silent guards,
Their thorns sharp, their beauty hard.
Where few dare to tread, they bloom so bright,
In deserts harsh, they show their might.

Rivers carve through stone, unyielding and true,
Flowing with purpose, a path they pursue.
They whisper of those that came before,
And carry the hopes of those who endure.

The stars above like lanterns gleam,
Guiding souls in the night's quiet stream.
A beacon of light, a map in the dark,
In the vast unknown, they leave their mark.

This is Texas, wild and free,
where dreams are forged in dust and glee.
A place where hearts beat loud and fierce,
With courage true, they persevere.



Image Winners: First—Estefani Garcia for \$70, Image of Bluebonnets shown above, Second—Emily Hamlin for \$20 for Mount Pleasant at Night, below, and Third—Araceli Landaverde for \$10 for





