

World of Wonders



Winning Poems

*From the 27th Annual John Gardiner
Poetry Contest*

Courtesy of Friends of the Laguna Beach Library

Front Cover Image: Shutterstock

Dedicated to the memory of



John Abbot Gardiner

Photo courtesy of Mary Hurlbut, used with permission.

John Abbot Gardiner 1947 - 2017

John Gardiner was born in Hawthorne, California, and was proud to be a fifth generation Californian. He studied at UC Irvine where he received a BA in theater arts and he was an early cast member at South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa. He lived in New York for several years, where he pursued his acting career. John loved acting in Shakespeare's plays. He appreciated the complexity of the language and, much to the delight of those who knew him, could recite passages and speeches from numerous plays from memory.

John was a long-time resident of Laguna Beach and was widely appreciated as a poet, actor, teacher, and raconteur extraordinaire. He read at numerous venues throughout Southern California and was invited to read his poems in Prague, St. Petersburg, and Rio de Janeiro and especially treasured the invitation to read in Ireland, home of the Gardiner clan.

John was the much-beloved leader of the Laguna Poets Workshop for the last 15 years and emceed the library's Annual Poetry Contest for many years. He was working on his 13th collection of poems when he died on October 24, 2017.

– Ann Brillhart and the Laguna Poetry Workshop

Mike Sprake

Master of Ceremonies

Reading of Winning Poems, June 7, 2025



Mike Sprake was born in Winchester, England. He studied at Winchester College of Art (1966-67) and studied sculpture at St Martin's College of Art, London, under the tutelage of many 'New Generation' sculptors (1967-70). He went on to study and make Lutes for some of the renowned lutenists of the time including Anthony Rooley and Nigel North.

He has been involved with painting and writing since living in the USA, over forty years ago, and is a member of the Laguna Poetry Workshop. He has poems published in anthologies by Tebot Bach and Moontide Press. His studio is waiting for his creative presence for poetry, painting, and sculpture.

Oh, this playground, this world of wonders, with its hidden treasures awaiting discovery, every moment awaking to something new.

All creatures pass through this life with their own unique viewpoint, be they giraffe gazing across the savanna from atop its long neck, be they Screech owl peering down from a branch in the darkness, be they human staring up at the stars as they have for millennia, wondering how this world was created and perhaps why is it here, every viewpoint as infinite as the cosmos.

To me the true wonder is we humans can step outside of ourselves and see the world and all that occurs on it as part of one universal being, a living breathing entity of life from the earth beneath our feet to the distant gravitational devouring of black holes.

Thinking about this can make one feel very insignificant yet at the same time, with our wonder of being human on this precious jewel of earth, we can contemplate our connection within this vastness and at the same time with family and friends.

"There's no place like home." Dorothy said, and it's marvelous that it is from home, not just where we reside but where each of us lives, that place of the heart and mind of every human being, where creativity and poetry arise, assisted with the wonder of consciousness, contemplation, and compassion.

And what of poetry? It waits patiently to be unearthed, to be revealed from the complexity of unspoken realms that make us human, keeping us company as we journey through this amazing world of wonders.

**From the desk of Mike Sprake
June 2025**

**27th Annual John Gardiner
Poetry Contest Winners**

Adult

1st Place:

Claire Maunders Purcell

New Mexico Blue Corn

2nd Place:

Norma Sadler

Too Many Tomatoes

3rd Place:

Ari Tran

Shark Teeth Fossils

27th Annual John Gardiner Poetry Contest Winners

Ninth – Twelfth Grade

1st Place:

Alexander Lyon

Forgetting to be Grandpa

2nd Place:

Cameron Mostofi

Beneath My Feet

3rd Place:

Skylar DiMaggio

STOP, LOOK and LISTEN

**27th Annual John Gardiner
Poetry Contest Winners**

Sixth – Eighth Grade

1st Place:

Emilee Sung

Mushrooms to the Rescue!

2nd Place:

Gavin Hadix

Dogs Barking

3rd Place:

Jubilee Sung

Second Spring

27th Annual John Gardiner Poetry Contest Winners

Third – Fifth Grade

1st Place:

Savin Tran

High Above

2nd Place:

Jordan Sung

He Is There and I Am Here

3rd Place (tie):

Mathilde Sofie Kristiansen

Pocket Pic

3rd Place (tie):

Malia Mason

My Voice

**27th Annual John Gardiner
Poetry Contest Winners**

Preschool – Second Grade

1st Place:

Rio Walker

Tiger

2nd Place:

Ella Kull-Vu

Wonders of the World

3rd Place:

Corbin MacDonald

Inside a Shark

Adult: 1st place



Claire Maunders Purcell

New Mexico Blue Corn

Boots crunch the gravel path to the vegetable garden.
At the gate, sunflower heads droop on stalks taller than a grown man.
Still wired to the fence are dry, yellowed vines loaded with pods full of
pinto beans,
and flowers filled with herb seeds.

It is time to harvest the blue corn in a native ceremony for picking the first
ear.

The woman makes her selection grown from ancient, ancestral seeds—
pure, untainted, handed down over hundreds of years and shared by tribal
gardeners.

She pulls the husks back slowly, then the silky strands,
each of which had served as a lifeline for its own little kernel.
High above her head she raises it for everyone to witness.

The color!

Deeper than the depths of the New Mexico Sky.

The precise rows!

More perfectly lined than the shoes under the portal benches.

Words are spoken, but lost in the air
for no one is able to take their attention off of the
ancient perfection,
the birth of the new,
the promise of the seed.

Adult: 2nd place



Norma Sadler
Too Many Tomatoes

Alone now, my mother
Is like my Polish grandmother.
She is growing
Too many tomatoes.

A six pack starter kit.
Two plants dry up.
She buys another six pack.

Now ten plants occupy
A very straight row,
Mounted against steel poles.

Now growing strong
With bits of egg shell
Spotting the soil.

Now tied up with torn strips
Of white sheets,
Yellow blossoms form.

Now bright red tomatoes
Hang heavy, vines droop.
Too many tomatoes.

I am there for her and the harvest.

Adult: 3rd place

Ari Tran

Shark Teeth Fossils

They say

marine biologists don't make much money
so I quit that job before I turned nine

but you can't really stop
a kid with a shell to her ear

listening for waves, always
listening for a time to ask, 'did you know'

shark teeth fossils are
not actually bone

they say
no, it's cartilage

like nails
but it's not even that

fossils, they are just a reminder
of the teeth that the sharks left

sharp things that fall from mouths
time will pass, but the memories last

there is a world of wonders
under those shores

so I stay awake and I steep in
what wonders that little girl

would find if
they didn't say

that stuff to her

Ninth – Twelfth Grade: 1st place



Alexander Lyon
Forgetting to be Grandpa

Grandpa shook my hand

“Charlie?” he asked, peering at me with a slightly puzzled look

A cloud of giggly flusterment brewed inside my heart. “Noo, I’m Alexander!”

We chuckled off together to share

A world of wonder over a basket of chicken tenders

Tossing Great Grandma’s knitted coasters

While talking about everything and nothing

To others, Grandpa was a military general and businessman

But to me, he was a fellow kid

Grandpa’s gone now. He passed on my twelfth birthday

I was on a Duffy boat ride

Oblivious it was Grandpa’s last day

It’s been four years without Grandpa calling me Charlie

And the chair Grandpa sat on to watch the news sighs alone
Grandma sits at an empty dining table
Her partner of 48 years a bronze bust in a museum
When I pass Grandpa's bust, my mind whirls like a propellor
I know I am doing less than I should and I don't know why
I know it's not what Grandpa would have done
I wonder if he's up there watching me
And thinking, *When is Charlie going to start?*
I gave him wings—chicken and otherwise

I sit on my bed and ponder how to become what he was
My phone pings. My friend has sent me another funny IG fail
It tugs on me like a fish. It's up to me whether I forget again...to be
Grandpa

Ninth – Twelfth Grade: 2nd place



Cameron Mostofi
Beneath My Feet

Waves splash at my feet

The cold salt water causes shivers up my spine

The same cold water that gives life to the sea

Gives life to the plants

Gives life to the world

The same water that graces my feet

Gives life to giant, mountainous whales spanning the size of homes

Gives nutrients to miles of plants on the ocean floor

Each wave tells a story of where it has been

Across the vast expanse of the glorious ocean

Being called home by millions of creatures

I breathe the air of the sea

Lying, watching

The World of Wonders pass by

Ninth – Twelfth Grade: 3rd place

Skylar DiMaggio
STOP, LOOK and LISTEN

And you will find me.
It may be high in the sky,
Or as close as a nearby tree.

Some may travel great distances,
To reach the tallest mountain top.
But all you really need is a moment,
To take notice of a hummingbird's flip-flop.

Parading my spectacular colors,
Across the horizon's sunset.
Waiting to be captured in a selfie,
How lucky can you get!

There are no Crayola crayons,
From the brightest yellow to the deepest blue,
That can match the awe I draw,
After a rain, when the sun shines through.

Look for one moment, and you will see,
There is true beauty from day to night.
Every tree, leaf, and rock is quite unique,
And at every dawn, there's a new sight.

My starlight rolls back the darkness,
To begin each and every day.
Serving as a wake-up call,
My wonder is here to stay.

Sixth – Eighth Grade: 1st place



Emilee Sung

Mushrooms to the Rescue!

There once was a girl who loved the Earth
She knew how much having a home was worth

She loved to garden and grow her fruits
She sang to her plants to grow their roots

One day she found out fungus could save the Earth
There was a mushroom that could spark rebirth

This mushroom grew in the rainforests of Ecuador
“It eats plastic!” the natives swore

“It needs neither sunlight nor air
It’s what you need for Earth’s repair.

You can put it in landfills and it will eat your plastic.”
“Are you kidding?” she cried. “That’s fantastic.”

It was a group of Yale students who found this special shroom
Thanks to them, our Earth is not doomed

It’s called *Pestalotiopsis* and tastes beautiful and sweet
Can you believe it is nice to eat?

It smells like licorice even though it eats trash
Let’s save our world from becoming ash

Sixth – Eighth Grade: 2nd place



Gavin Hadix
Dogs Barking

At dawn's first breath A bark erupts in the garden. Another joins then two
A canine choir starts to roar.

Their voices rise both sharp and deep Disturbing dreams and stealing sleep.
Yet in that sound With tails that wag and wide-eyed.

They bark at ghosts we cannot see At fluttering leaves or memory. A
squirrel's dash a passing breeze To them the world is never at ease.

Some bark for joy some bark to warn Some just proclaim "I've been
reborn!" Their chatter fills the empty air With tales of scent and fur and
flair.

We hush we scold But still they bark they will not wait. For dogs must
speak in bursts and yelps
It's how they guard, it's how they help.

So let them bark beneath the moon: A ragged song, a loyal tune. It's not
just noise it's something more: A love that growls in a woofed folklore.

Sixth – Eighth Grade: 3rd place



Jubilee Sung
Second Spring

She was a lost soul in a sea of beauty
to which she was blind
In her dress of broken embers she wandered
Seeing only murks of ink
Ink black roses when in truth they were
sparkling yellows and melodies of red
For even though bulbs of glowing daffodils
sprouted beneath her slippered feet
She saw them as a swamp of pus
squelching between her toes
And so as she told herself the tale of *loss, less, and never*
That she had *lost* something,
had *less* of something than she deserved,
and would *never* have something again
And it was not until she learned to see these words as lies
That beauty bloomed in her heart
Like a second spring

Third – Fifth Grade: 1st place

Savin Tran
High Above

High above
The earth
Twinkles blue and green
From a camera
On the ISS
Many things are seen
Clouds, seas, whales,
Mountains, valleys, rivers,
And the North Pole too
And a kid
Looked up
With a telescope
And saw the ISS
And a scientist
On the ISS
Looked back

Third – Fifth Grade: 2nd place



Jordan Sung

He Is There and I Am Here

I stare at my friend's battered blue Crocs
Beneath the gurney where he lies broken
Wishing they could talk to me
And tell me why he is there and I am here

In my head, I hear him scream as we rumble over the cracking road
Agony erupts in our bones, and we become trembling flashes of red
Until beams of shining yellow hit me, and I awake to this nightmare
Where he is there and I am here...alone

Despair tastes like hospital cherry Jell-O
And an IV drip of black guilt
I sit here...staring at my friend's pale face
The pain of all I've lost sitting on me like a haunted mansion

It is time that teaches me
That there is not always an answer
To why bad things happen to good people
Or why he is there and I am here
Sometimes there is no reason
Maybe I just have to become the reason

Stars fall like rain from the sea blue sky
As a million glowing moons quiver on the beach
My sister and I hold a golden paper moon in our hands, breathing with fire
I have written a wish for my friend to come back to me
I release my dream into the air
A cloud of creamy, cool calm rushes toward me
And taste the starry rain

Third – Fifth Grade: 3rd place (tie)



Mathilde Sofie Kristiansen
Pocket Pie

Grab a slice of peach
and put it in your pocket
stir in some pumpkin seeds
then put it in a bucket

Mix in water, dust, and sand
and stir your mighty dough
pour it in your little hands
and eat it on the go.

Third – Fifth Grade: 3rd place (tie)



Malia Mason
My Voice

My voice is like a song in every way
I can sing like a bird
My voice is loud when my brother ignores me
When I am sad, my voice is the quietest

My voice began when I was born
That was the beginning of my voice's journey

In the future I want my voice to save animals
I want my voice to make the planet better

My voice makes me, me
My voice is strong
My voice is loving
With my voice, I can do anything
My voice is for goodness.

Preschool – Second Grade: 1st place



Rio Walker
Tiger

I like the stripes of the tiger.

I like the orange from the tiger, please.

I like the tail.

I like the teeth because I'm going to keep you safe from them.

Preschool – Second Grade: 2nd place



Ella Kull-Vu
Wonders of the World

There are otters in the ocean blue
And mice
That are faster than you
There are trees
Big and bright
And stars that glow all night

Preschool – Second Grade: 3rd place



Corbin MacDonald
Inside a Shark

Slimy, smoothy, squishy too

That's a shark!

I shrunk inside a shark,

Sharp teeth, squishy insides,

I am inside a shark mouth

Acid, fish, fish bones too

Come with me and

Adventure too!

The Annual John Gardiner Poetry Contest
is made possible through the generosity of:

Friends of the Laguna Beach Library:

<i>Karyn Philippsen</i>	<i>President</i>
<i>Justin Myers</i>	<i>Vice President</i>
<i>Susan Kent</i>	<i>Treasurer</i>
<i>Angela Irish</i>	<i>Secretary</i>
<i>Jackie Hall</i>	<i>Book Shop Manager</i>
<i>Simone Adams</i>	<i>Board Member</i>
<i>Helena Hounsel</i>	<i>Board Member</i>
<i>Sandra Hovanesian</i>	<i>Board Member</i>
<i>Ellen Girardeau Kempler</i>	<i>Board Member</i>
<i>Chip Lydick</i>	<i>Board Member</i>
<i>Owen Orgill</i>	<i>Board Member</i>
<i>Valerie Schimel</i>	<i>Board Member</i>
<i>Lynne Shain</i>	<i>Board Member</i>
<i>Kim Shields</i>	<i>Board Member</i>
<i>Andre Shields</i>	<i>Board Member</i>

*We look forward to your participation
in next year's
28th Annual John Gardiner Poetry Contest.*

*Next year's theme is
Unexpected Encounters.*

Booklet and Prizes
Courtesy of
Friends of the Laguna Beach Library
and Glenda & Patrick Curran
2025

