

The Golden Shovel Poetry Prize

STEPHANIE YEN

Winner of the Golden Shovel Poetry Prize, Middle School/High School Division.

Knead

“Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms.”

—*Gwendolyn Brooks*

You knead dough in the palms of your hands, feel the flutter in the pit of your stomach. Did Grandma do it this way or that way?—you can never remember. In your head, you see her sing, her voice unfurling threads of silk across the kitchen floor, ancient and dusty. You see the bread in the oven dancing to her aria, the lump swelling like a hot balloon, up, up—never coming down. Your mouth runs dry as the dough stales in your hands. These days are stern reminders that Grandma’s voice will never again grace your rooms.

ZOSY J. ARGUETA

Finalist for the Golden Shovel Poetry Prize, Middle School/High School Division.

Figure It Out

“Rose like a prayer above Chicago Avenue.”

—*Elise Paschen*

We are the greatest city in this state and I’m proud to be here. We are the pretty rose that is surrounded by all the same old tulips. Or a better example, we are like

the chocolate cake shakes in Portillo's (#notsponsored). We are the letter Y, 'cuz
unlike A

E, I, O, U, we can be a vowel or not. We can be whoever we want: a prayer,
an activist, Bulls fan, Hawks fan, Cubs/W.S. fan, Bears fan. We go above
and beyond, see the bean, Willis Tower or a museum on a Thursday (#itsfree).

Chicago

isn't ghetto. We are diverse. We reach from top to bottom, from tollway to avenue.

ISABELLA GONZALEZ

Finalist for the Golden Shovel Poetry Prize, Middle School/High School
Division.

(Not Actual) Strangers

"Believe me, our fables don't end like this."

—Dexter L. Booth

When I glance at you in the mirror for the first time, it's hard to believe
that stranger with smile wrinkles and a moat of plum is me.

My bone fingers trace our

veins, electrical wires built up of discarded words, forgotten fables.

There've been worse meetings, times of anguish rippling in our vocal cords that

I don't

want to recall much longer. Why can't we simply be glad to end

up burrowed in each other's bodies, our arms and legs tangled like

young lovers that refuse to let go. Yet it's I who walk past you; I can't handle the
silence of this.

CORINA ROBINSON

Finalist for the Golden Shovel Poetry Prize, Middle School/High School
Division.

Royalty

"We know the black because we come from it."

—Dexter L. Booth

My brother doesn't claim biracial in the verbal form, says we
can't be what we don't know,
says a poem can't describe the way his chest feels when friends laugh, or the
look on dad's face when he says he doesn't know how to be both Mexican and Black.
I tell him give it time, give it blood, give it body to exist, because
in this way we
pretend until that chest-feeling gets over-come
by "in the past," because we are from
that royalty of identity and confusion, and maybe that's just it.

AMRITA CHAKRABORTY

Winner of the Golden Shovel Poetry Prize, Undergraduate Division.

Cold Alchemy

"The grasses forgetting their blaze and consenting to brown."

—Gwendolyn Brooks

Long before I caught my first lightning bolt, but after the
time my brother found a kitten shivering, half-starved in the grasses
behind Rana Kaku's old pond, something rose from my throat. I am forgetting
the exact dimensions, but anyone could tell you it was gold. Their
hands twitched that night as I slept, curled around it, a haughty blaze
on my sunken twin mattress. Girl, wild girl and gold. Girl and
unearned, ransomed gold. So call me dragon for never consenting
to even let them touch it. I certainly held its small body heat-close, but more to
the point, I loved it for all that it was. I loved it back into being brown.

REUBEN GELLEY NEWMAN

Finalist for the Golden Shovel Poetry Prize, Undergraduate Division.

(B)Less(ed) Ground(ed) in Queer(ed) Sky

“Blessed ground to think gay & mean we.”

—Danez Smith

a guy with green hair calls, “I like your pin!” blessed
by his queer, I say I like his hair before skipping into the ground.
the pin is rainbow, jtyk. I don’t know how to
say thank you. in the subway, I think
about *gay*.
I dream that I am with him &
we are dancing, that we make mean
moves on the Q train, that in metallic air hurtling into nothingness there is *we*.

MARLENA WADLEY

Finalist for the Golden Shovel Poetry Prize, Undergraduate Division.

Gemini

“And remembering . . . remembering with twinklings and twinges.”

—Gwendolyn Brooks

Gemini was the second man I loved, and
I’d be lying if I say he didn’t tote two faces. Remembering
the same hands that cozied my body at night and remembering
the same hands that marred my neck with
bruise marks. Now I shackle my lips silent and replay all the twinklings
and butterflies to keep my eyes from puddling, and
to dull my heart from the leftover throbs and twinges.

CHLÖE MOBLEY

Finalist for the Golden Shovel Poetry Prize, Undergraduate Division.

Mad Boy / Sad Boy at School

“The only sanity is a cup of tea.”

—*Gwendolyn Brooks*

A Boy threatened a girl in his 6th grade class today—said he’d take her by the neck—I stop him: You can’t say things like that. He only said it ‘cause they were teasing him: He’ll lose his sanity before he surrenders his fragile self-respect; a middle-schooler’s mind is a fragile ecosystem. Threats, closed fists, and no knowledge of a different way. When he gets to your office, pour him a cup. Put down the paperwork. Bade him to sit and talk of his troubles. Maybe change is as close as a conversation over tea.