

2023 Peace Poetry Contest

Alachua County Schools *Grades K-12*

A collection of the winning poems from the thirteenth annual Peace Poetry Contest in Alachua County schools, grades K-12, sponsored by the Gainesville Chapter 14 of Veterans for Peace.



About the Peace Poetry Contest

This is the thirteenth year that Gainesville Veterans for Peace has organized the Peace Poetry Contest in Alachua County, where all students, grades K–12, are encouraged to submit one original poem focusing on their interpretation of “peace.”

Veterans for Peace members believe that peace-making and hope for a peaceful world begin in our community, our homes, and our schools. That is why we invited students to participate in the contest this year; a peaceful possibility lies in the younger generations of today who will be leading, transforming, and inspiring the world tomorrow.

Though this contest holds no formal position on the current state of world affairs, we still want to honor the ideal of peace through the perspectives of young people. Peace is a uniquely human conception and affirms the human spirit. It is especially important to remember that peace is not merely a goal but a human right. In that spirit of reflection, we are very pleased with the success of this year’s contest.

This year we received over 200 poems from all grades, and the poems were judged by a panel of community and Veterans for Peace members. The winners were asked to read at the Peace Poetry Reading, and their poems are published in this book.

Veterans for Peace would first and foremost like to thank all of the participants in the Peace Poetry Contest. Without the poetry submissions, there would be no Peace Poetry Contest and none of the dialogue that comes with it.

Parents and teachers also play a large role in the Peace Poetry Contest every year by encouraging their children to participate, sometimes awarding extra credit and providing other incentives. Thank you for helping make the Peace Poetry Contest a success.

Because of the trying circumstances over the last few years, due to the pandemic and distance learning, we are especially grateful for the students and teachers who still felt inspired to submit Peace Poems

The lead community judge and Reading officiant, Melanie Hobson, was integral to this year’s contest. Thank you.

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Gainesville has hosted the Peace Poetry Contest for thirteen years now, and Veterans for Peace is grateful for their support and continued cooperation. Specifically, thank you to UUF and VFP member Mary Bahr who helps with the arrangements for the Reading.

About the Peace Scholarship

Earlier this year, Veterans for Peace announced the annual Peace Scholarship award, a college scholarship program for Alachua County students. The scholarship competition was open to eligible high school seniors, college students, and adults who need financial support to succeed in college and who have demonstrated a commitment and leadership in activities involving peace and social justice and/or nonviolent social change.

Peace scholarship applicants were asked to provide a brief autobiographical statement and evidence of leadership and/or personal initiative in activities in an organization (including volunteer or paid work) relating to peace and social justice, conflict resolution, and/or nonviolent social change. Applicants were also asked to provide two letters of recommendation. In the end, VFP awarded peace scholarships to four students in the amount of \$1,500 each. The scholarships were awarded to the individuals below.

Miryam Elshaer is a double major in political science and women's studies at the University of Florida. She is a member of Students for Justice in Palestine, Dream Defenders, and is president of Pride Student Union. Through her position on the anti-racist and trans liberation committee of National Women's Liberation, Miryam works to educate people about the importance of queer and trans intersections in social justice organizing. Her goal is to become a social movement lawyer. She writes, "I do not believe in using the law to solve issues in the traditional way that strips people of individual power. Rather, change is created by the resistance of the people."

Isabella Macias is a first-generation college student. She is currently a second-year astrophysics major at the University of Florida. She served as a student ambassador with UnidosNow, a non-profit organization, on their voter education initiative. The goal of Isabella's work was to encourage first-generation Latinx voters to participate in the 2020 general election and to spread the urgency of the need to vote. She worked especially with young women, predominantly Latinas, to help their peers and family members learn about how to most effectively participate in the political process. Isabella's goal is to pursue a career as an astrophysicist at NASA and to encourage more women of color to pursue STEM-related careers.

Bryanna Michell is a graduate of Eastside High School in Gainesville. She is also a graduate of the Dual Enrollment Program at Santa Fe College. Bryanna is double majoring in women's studies and psychology at UF. She is an active member of the Wellness, Equity, Love, Liberation and Sexuality Healing and Research Collective where she is especially concerned with promoting liberation among the African American and LGBTQ+ communities. Bryanna plans to deepen her research into medical and health disparities in working-class communities. She is especially concerned with educating middle-class people about the issues that marginalized communities endure every day, including food security, domestic violence, and economic justice. She plans to either attend a PhD program or law school in pursuit of a career dedicated to social justice.

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Maria Monsserat de la Cruz Mora is a graduate of Newberry High School and is a political science major at the University of Florida. She is a leader of CHISPAS at UF and has led workshops to help DACA and undocumented individuals in Alachua County who would like to pursue higher education. Maria is the co-founder of RepresentMe, a political action committee in Newberry, and she volunteers with the Alachua County Hispanic Democrats. “In my future career plans,” Maria writes, “I would like to remain here in Alachua County, specifically my hometown of Newberry after I graduate from UF in 2023. I would like to give back to the Latinx community. From my personal experience, I am a firsthand witness to the many disparities within the Hispanic community in Alachua County.”

To learn more about the VFP Peace Scholarship so you can apply next year, visit vfpgainesville.org. There you will find detailed instructions and the application for the scholarship. If you have specific questions, contact VFP member Paul Ortiz at ortiz-prof@gmail.com or 831-334-0131.

Winning Poets

Rylee Keith, Grade 1, Caring and Sharing Learning School
Daniel Atria, Grade 2, Jordan Glen School
Henry Teaford, Grade 2, Jordan Glen School
Chu-Mei Anderson, Grade 3, Jordan Glen School
Kylie Nobles, Grade 3, Jordan Glen School
Audrey McNall, Grade 4, Chester Shell Elementary School
Sol Primosch, Grade 4, Jordan Glen School
Reyam Abed, Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary School
Maddie Deigl, Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary School
Paxton Ferry, Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary School
Parker Gunnnett, Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary School
Brock Laplant, Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary School
Nik Paranjpe, Grade 5, Jordan Glen School
Alliyah Johnson, Grade 6, Micanopy Academy
Taliyah Briggs, Grade 6, Resilience Charter School
Jayne Beaty, Grade 6, Jordan Glen School
Lucas Young, Grade 6, Jordan Glen School
Emma Zuvich, Grade 7, Queen of Peace Catholic Academy
Natalie Jones, Grade 7, Howard Bishop Middle School
Sophie Slimak, Grade 8, P. K. Yonge Developmental Research School
Isaiah Josey, Grade 8, Howard Bishop Middle School
Juan Castillo, Grade 8, Queen of Peace Catholic Academy
Katherine Scarlett, Grade 8, Queen of Peace Catholic Academy
Natalie Heard, Grade 9, Micanopy Academy
Natalie Rodriguez, Grade 11, Micanopy Academy
Skylar Scott, Grade 12, P. K. Yonge Developmental Research School

We Love Our Veterans

You are so Brave and you
are so strong. I want to
be just like you when
I am older and grown.

I love our veterans.
All of them are okay.
I love our veterans and I
pray for them every day.

Rylee Keith

Grade 1, Caring and Sharing Learning School

Save Earth!

People Pollute,
People Litter,
Earth is Dying,
Please don't let it,
Make it Better,
Pick it all up,
And let Earth Glitter!

Daniel Atria

Grade 2, Jordan Glen School

What Is Peace?

What is Peace?
Peace is Soothing,
You can't Explain or See,
But can Feel.
Peace is calm, warm and feels good.
But we can't see it, so
What is peace?

Henry Teaford

Grade 2, Jordan Glen School

What If

What if there was a girl who lived in the city
What if she picked up one piece of trash a day
What if she planted one tree a day
What if she was kind to one person a day?

What if everyone picked up trash everyday
What if everyone planted a tree everyday
What if everyone showed kindness everyday
What would our world be like then?

Forest full of trees, no pollution, and kindness spreading everywhere
This is what the little girl wants
A world full of peace.

Chu-Mei Anderson
Grade 3, Jordan Glen School



Our Home

Our Earth is being destroyed.
By birds? No
By dogs? No
By the monster you think is hiding under your bed? No
Who then?

Trash is left on the ground. The Earth cries.
Plastic is swarming in the sea. The Earth cries.
Turtles get caught in the plastic and drown. The Earth cries.
It's being destroyed by humans that live on it.

When you see a piece of trash, pick it up.
When you see a piece of plastic, cut it up.
Don't just leave it there.
That's how our world can change.
One piece at a time.

Kylie Nobles
Grade 3, Jordan Glen School

Forest Execution

A mother bird goes to
find food

she's been gone for a day
she comes back from the bay

her tree is gone
where did it go?
her nest has fallen
oh no

the baby birds lie dead

everything has died away
everything will stay that way

everything lies dead
on the ground
everything is now dead and sound

if we can stop
cutting trees
if we can let the
land be free

we will have
peace once again

Audrey McNall
Grade 4, Chester Shell Elementary School

The Boy Wonders

The boy sits in the tree and drifts into a deep sleep.
He wonders if people will save or slay the world.
He wonders if there will ever be peace or a world of despair.
He wonders if one day everyone will be happy and have a home.
He wonders if animals will be harmed or will they be saved.
The boy wonders and wonders
Thinking if one day....

The boy drifts awake and sees a family of deer in a field.
He sees a flock of birds soaring overhead.
He sees no trash on the ground and no people living on the streets.
He sees the world he wondered about.
A kind world, a caring world, a peaceful world.

Sol Primosch
Grade 4, Jordan Glen School

Peace Is Out of Our Reach

Russia attacking everyday
Ukrainians lives flashing away
But we have no power to stop it
Its peace we must trace

They hid from the madness
There is so much sadness
We pray this ends soon
Its peace we must trace

Our world is full of hate
But i believe in fate
Look at them, They're all on the same bus
But don't worry, peace will come crawling back to us
Its peace we must trace

When will life return to its normal ways
And bring sunshine to these cloudy days
But all i know is that peace might be going farther and farther each day
Its peace we must trace

We pray, We pray,
That peace will come crawling soon
But who knows, maybe it's farther than the moon
Its peace we must trace

Reyam Abed
Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary

**Shut the door on
W
A
R
So it's not here any more**

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

War is for the weak
Communication is for the one at the top of the peak

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

War can destroy all places
Even the ones with the most beautiful faces

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

War can tear down city's
Wow, what a pity

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

During war resources are scarce
Even in people's nightmares

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

People that are left in tears
They are full of fears

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

Families are holding each other
During the war of thunder

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

Instead of going to school
Children are crying a frightened pool

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

Children are traumatized
From the sound of war, hypnotized

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

Children of my generation
Are now going to run the nation

Shut the door on war so its not here anymore

I am very aware
That war is out there

So open the door for peace

Maddie Deigl
Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary School

Peace

Stronger than hate
but with all the hate that has built up

Until now
When war is tearing up the world to pieces

Then they think about peace in the world And they try to change it

When we change we are better
We understand why we shouldn't be racist Why we shouldn't be unequal to genders
Why we shouldn't be unequal to other religions

The answer to everything is peace
Peace in the world
Peace in life
Peace is the key to everything

Paxton Ferry
Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary School

A Starry Night

There's a puddle of stars,
A lake of constellations without a single sound,
When a drop of hope touches the blanket of peace and hope
It sends out pieces of happiness to the person who had a drop of hope

There's an ocean of galaxies
Where we are just comets floating through space
Waiting for peace to happen
The light from the blanket
Is from a war long forgotten,
But we still fight

Yet there's still space left in our heart of flaming rage
We soon will destroy that very blanket that covers us
From the light soon will fall upon us.

And we will all regret all we've done to this tiny world
And we'll try to save the little flame of desire left in our little hearts
And if we lose that desire
All we have left is desperation, sadness, and loneliness.

Now we'll soar through the cosmos as stars
Instead of hiding in our comet shells
And we'll shine like a supernova spreading hope and happiness

Parker Gunnett
Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary School

Why Fight

Why fight when we can write
As a free bird in the wind i can fly

Soon the future may end.
Bombs ticking like pens clicking to send in the next move

Are all the lives of the men and women worth it

Why use war when we could use peace.

As the buzzing sound in the distance i ask why do we do this to are selves
We are all human hurting each other
Why let the man in the chair plan and bomb each other

When the timer hits zero do they think of what harm they are doing

Why fight when we can write

Peace Peace Peace

The timer is low and i am tired so all i ask is

Why fight when we can write.

Brock Laplant

Grade 5, Hidden Oak Elementary School

Peace Poem

Peace is food and friends
Peace is cats and happiness
War doesn't have cats

Nik Paranjpe

Grade 5, Jordan Glen School

Gun Violence

Let's have Peace, Let's be Smart.
Don't hurt, Let's have a heart.
A Gun won't solve Your Problem.
All this hurt makes me solemn.

Families get hurt and torn apart.
All You need to do is restart.
All this violence come to a halt!
It May or may not be your fault.

Alliyah Johnson

Grade 6, Micanopy Academy

Our Freedom, You Have Earned Us

The roses are bloodied, their dying fast
Theirs not much time for us, it's all in the past
The violets are dead
Finally
Alas my freedom I do not have
But I wish it was in my grasp

The world is growing dark, the light is fading
I see no end, a life I've been trading
The life I yearned for, the life I earned for, the life I needed
Yet my needs were not met
Not much time is left
The pain has finally faded
I see no more light
As all has finally been graded

The world is frozen, a great life is in my grasp
It's all a matter of if I grab it
Finally, alas
The colors are done fading
The dark is now shaking
The colors are slowly coming back
Oh, I've been waiting

Finally, what we deserve, a healthy happy life, like the roll of a dice
You have done so much for us, so here are my thanks
Thus I owe you my thanks, my life, my mind, and my soul, for all you deserve of me
Life no more dull, thank you for your hard work
Thus I still owe my soul, I give you my thanks and everything whole

My freedom is deserved
Rights have been earned
We owe you so much but everything of us has been burned
We still owe our thanks
For our freedom you have earned, thank you so much for giving us the life we yearned

Taliyah Briggs
Grade 6, Resilience Charter School

War's Lullaby

War sings peace its twisted lullaby
Putting it to rest
Among the bodies of fallen soldiers

Jayne Beaty
Grade 6, Jordan Glen School

Peace Poem

Peace is shattered on the floor
As bullets ring through the corridors

As the students scream
The man with the gun continues to beam

The man disappears as he hears the siren
A large investigation has started

10 kids dead
When will the bloodshed end

As the parents bury their kids in the ground
The shooter has finally been found

They want justice and want him to pay
But he feels no guilt and has nothing to say

As their parents only have memories from the past
The murderer never reminisces on what has passed

Lucas Young
Grade 6, Jordan Glen School

Us Fools and Scholars

Hope and light and motion;
Hope and formation and fusion.
The miracle of transformation
All made in peace.
Where each precious thing is destroyed
And each precious thing is saved.

This peace has no wing;
This peace does not run
Nor blow, nor skitter, nor falter.
This peace is the swell of the ocean;
This peace is the sigh of the mountain;
This peace is the descent of the land;
This peace is the chorus of stars
Infinitely singing
That we have denied listening to.
This peace is how we have separated ourselves into fools and scholars.

But when the fool is removed from solid ground,
He leaps—
With peace and grace
From mountaintop
To burning star
To black, black space
In an essence of joy.
Yet the scholar
When bereft of his scroll
His quill
His heavy tome
Falls
And cannot be found.

The fool has a heart that the scholar does not;
Not one beating in his chest,
But one made of starlight
And time;
A pinprick of longing lost in the dark,
An unbroken chord linking the infinite to the infinite.
Meanwhile the world spins;
Meanwhile the universe expands;
Meanwhile the mystery of love reveals itself again and again
To us.
This mystery which we try to explain,
But we are cut off by the world.

And so I ask,
If we are fools
Living in peace
Then who are the ones who cannot seem to find it?

Emma Zuvich
Grade 7, Queen of Peace Catholic Academy

Flames of Ice

It starts to build up, burning hot
Stopping in my tracks as I realize it's not
I can't feel my body, stop it please
The world around me is starting to freeze
I don't know what everyone else sees
I'm just a little girl crying on my knees
Then it's hot again, it's burning, I'm ashes
As my whole reality ignites and crashes
It's too hot, It's too cold, you know it's really not nice
To be a trapped body, forever encased in ice

I open my eyes, awake feeling fine
Thinking, what an interesting dream of mine
I'm sweating under the covers, though the AC is on full blast
Mother was right, the fever didn't last
I look around, turns out I'm not home
It's a barren wasteland with nowhere to go
Then the flashbacks hit, seizing me
I want to cry as I remember the heat
I am stuck here in this eternal rest
With fire as cold as the ice of death

It happened too soon
I wasn't yet ready
I didn't realize the fire was deadly
I'm sadly upset, though there is some peace
In being an eight year old, deceased.

Natalie Jones
Grade 7, Howard Bishop Middle School

Everything Moves

Nothing stays still for long
The next bar of the same song
Widespread normality starts to skew
Fair even only to the few
As soon as sound is silence
And as soon as peace is violence
And as soon as rough is smooth
Because everything moves

And I think I'll safely say
That we've come a pretty long way
Where a little dreamer girl like me
Can bring truth to her fantasies
But the world isn't like our reverie
It's dark and dusty and grimy
But you ignore that, don't you?
Because everything moves

And lighting the darkness with a flicker
Takes more than a slogan on a bumper sticker
It takes action, hope, and grit
So stand up and stand for it
It takes more than petty thrill rides
Between rich politicians and their sides
Voices lost against the few
Because everything moves

For those who suffer to help our nation thrive
And for those who fight and give their lives
And for those who every day die
Because we the people never try
To reach out unless a camera's on us
While crises are here upon us
So what matters is you
Because everything moves

Stuck trying to balance on a treadmill
Because we're never at a stand still
We've changed a lot since our dark past
So let's make those changes last
And instead of pointing fingers at those
Who are trying to help understand your woes
And instead of looking down
Get off your high horse, take off your crown

The smallest and biggest change may well be you
What stays the same is that everything moves

Sophie Slimak

Grade 8, P. K. Yonge Developmental Research School

The Shining City on the Hill

As the sun rises through the fog
The residents inhale the smog
What have we become?
We were once the shining city on the hill
But now the river in the valley below is flooded with trash
And unable to flow
Even still the residents remain ignorant

The oil tycoon sits at his table
Eating a steak that is medium rare
Whilst drinking his sparkling Perrier
But this man is not ignorant
He knows the destruction he causes
Yet he does not care

Trash piled so high it looks like mountains
All as the oil tycoon enjoys his fondue fountain
He takes land that is not his
And Strips it of life
All in exchange for solitude and loneliness
Only his money to give him company

A boy sits in a mud hut staring at the wall
Thirsting for water not a car
Unable to think over the sounds of his growling stomach
But the oil tycoon is no longer hungry
He leaves his food unfinished

Earth's rivers run brown
So dirty they reek with the smell of despair
So dirty they cannot be drunk
But the rich man will only discover he can't eat gold and drink oil
When earth's last river runs dry

Isaiah Josey

Grade 8, Howard Bishop Middle School

Our Narrative

The book is opened.
The pages flip with ever increasing tension,
Each page fanning the air with a stronger gust than the last.
The rising voice of its narrative reaches its crescendo.
It lands from its flight with a quiet thrum of its last page.
Its cover crashing against its arid body,
The book is closed.

And then?
A haunting silence.
A certain peace is achieved.
At the cost of thoughts alone filling the mind.
Lacking the company of literature to guide it.

Another distraction is searched for,
Fulfillment becoming a fantasy.
Turmoil becoming the norm.
Peace?
A foreign concept.
Calm before the storm has taken its place.

Gaining peace rather than being a mere puzzle
Having become a cryptic tomb, untraversable,
Inconceivable.

Yearning for the initial peace from the past closing,
The book is opened once more.

Juan Castillo
Grade 8, Queen of Peace Catholic Academy

Opposits of One Another

Birds chirping,
Such a sweet sound
Sun shining down,
Such a beautiful feeling
Fresh berries,
Such a wonderful taste

Vast land,
Such an amazing sight
Wild flowers,
such a delightful smell

War cries,
A hateful sound
Guns aiming,
A terrible feeling
Foul water,
A bitter taste
Destroyed buildings,
An unimaginable sight
Smoke in the air,
A suffocating smell

Life and War
Opposites of one another
One brings joy
The other brings fear

Peace is what we need
From destruction comes growth and realization

Katherine Scarlett
Grade 8, Queen of Peace Catholic Academy

I pass benches with bars through the middle.
Slabs with spines stuck to them
Heating grates with an uneven platform
I curl up beneath a tree.
Drifting to sleep as I close my eyes.
I finally find my only escape.

Natalie Heard
Grade 9, Micanopy Academy

I Can See It Now

I miss the way I once viewed this place.
When I was young and was met with a smile on every face.
Now I've grown and now I see,
All the cruel injustices surrounding me.
Why do people always say one thing but mean the other?
Can't we just care for our sisters and our brothers?
We're called man-kind but are we really that nice?
While we find more ways to melt all the ice?
People starve and people die;
But others choose to turn a blind eye.
In what ways could we fix all this?
And one day experience true bliss.
How could we ever make it right?
And bring these problems to the light.
We lie and we cheat to get our way.
But what will save us at the end of the day?
Must we claim a need for peace but wage a war to achieve it?
And if we ever truly had peace would we even believe it?

Natalie Rodriguez

Grade 11, Micanopy Academy

Peace Cannot Come in Pieces

A 13-year-old black boy was shot
And I thought I was desensitized to violence
But he smiled just like my little brother
Was dark just like my little brother
Was vulnerable—just like my little brother

5 girls were arrested in Iran
Because they had the audacity to dance in public
I danced to music only I could hear
In a stadium full of people I don't know
As a prayer to them

In 2021
A school burned down in Afghanistan
Because the girls that studied there
Were in danger from the Taliban
And I think about them as I write my university applications

The dwindling numbers of Indigenous Americans
Are our strongest fighters
Against climate change and oil pipelines
That strip them of their autonomy
And I can't go out to support them without filling my car with the oil that's killing
them

My governor wants to kill me
I'm not in charge of myself
Going to school is the leading cause of death for minors in the US
But even if I had no worries in the world
I still would not be at ease

I may not hear them
I may not see them
I may not be standing by their side
But I have no peace while they are still screaming

Skylar Scott
Grade 12, P. K. Yonge Developmental Research School

Thank You, Teachers!

Without the teachers of Alachua County who encourage their students to participate in the contest each year, there would be no Peace Poetry Contest. Veterans for Peace would like to publicly recognize those teachers who participated this year.

Blake Beckett, P. K. Yonge Developmental Research School

Nicole Christie, Jordan Glen School

Katherine Comfort, Alachua Elementary School

Hayley Delapena, Hidden Oak Elementary School

Deanna Flemming, Caring and Sharing Learning School

Jessica Garcia, Caring and Sharing Learning School

Felicia Hanley, Chester Shell Elementary School

Amy Kim, Hidden Oak Elementary School

Marissa McDonald, Queen of Peace Catholic Academy

Gowri Navaratnam, Jordan Glen School

Jay Nixon, Resilience Charter School

Laura Parrinello, Howard Bishop Middle School

Annette Roberts, Queen of Peace Catholic Academy

Ann Smith, Micanopy Academy

Kim Smith, Jordan Glen School

Whitney Veras, Howard Bishop Middle School

*Veterans for Peace would
like to specially thank
Gainesville's own*

Alivia Regan Hunter

*for performing at the
2023 Peace Poetry
Reading*