



School Awards 2025-2026

Poet Laureate Contest

Every year, Providence challenges its Upper School students to pursue beauty in their writing, and one of the ways we do this is by encouraging them to submit their best poems to the Poet Laureate Contest. Poems may be either rhymed or free verse, and they are judged by a committee of faculty members based on the quality of the writing as well as the authenticity of the content. ***You can read the winning poem below!***

2026 Poet Laureate: Luke Williamson

Best Free Verse: Caris Flanakin

Honorable Mention: Carter Self

Best Formal Poem: Tressie Edwards

Honorable Mention: Jax Pickle

Best Logic School Poem: Symphony Compton

“The King”
By Luke Williamson, 12th Grade

Upon a whim I thought I'd see the City 'fore I died.
I'd heard they don't let many in but it wouldn't hurt to've tried.
A stranger told me years ago that therein laid the one,
The man who held the key to life and all under the sun.

That man had conquered mountains high-or so the traveler said.
He'd found all the world's knowledge and kept it in his head.
“And everyone who travels there will get to meet the king,
But only those that make it in, because that's just the thing.

“They don't just let old anyone stroll through the City's gate.
A real man is the only one who'll meet the sovereign great.”
“A real man?” I asked, discouraged by this great and daunting toll,
For I was just a boy back then, with childish dreamings full.

Now I'd grown old and just recalled that story from my past.
Oh, to meet that glorious king, to spend my moments last!
I'd lived a life too long and now I'd liked to share an ending
Abiding with a man who was a man without pretending.

And so, with aching limbs and joints I roused me from my bed
And went to walk upon the road where all the seekers tread.
I left my things behind at home; I wouldn't need them gone.
I wore my best assured my final journey would be long.

I started on the road and soon I felt the heat of day
Alighting on my fragile heart upon my winded way.
The bright sun gave a college try to turn me round back home,
But I had learned from life long lived that quitting is a tomb.
It's there the dreams of men will go to wither and to rot.
I knew this well and so I was contented with my lot.

And then the road grew steep and tall, becoming more a climb,
But these old bones had learned some things in all their aging time.
They'd learned to hold on tight to that which to them is most dear,
To venture forward even while their options disappeared.
And when there seemed to be no place to hold and clamber higher,
You make one for yourself to grab to pull you out the mire.

I crested over top the peak to find my end in sight.
A scant few hours of sun remained and soon it would be night.
I noticed then, in search of strength, that all I had was dearth.
'Twas then I knew that when sun set I would depart from Earth.

The wind blew hard, and with it came the memories of my dears,
The ones who'd I'd been blessed to know throughout all of the years.
That wind sought out to halt my course with memories of the lost,
But those were ones who taught me to ignore the worldly cost.
"To do what must be done," I'm sure they would have told me there,
To sacrifice my comforts and my body on that stair.

I soldiered on, what could I do but keep my restless pace?
The sun hung low and there was not much road left 'til the place.
Pristine walls of ivory and of silver glowed at me,
Tall towers standing sentinel before a glassy sea.
I reached the gate with just about an hour left of light.
I had to see the king before my own eternal night.

There was a line up to the gate, and three stood before me.
I watched and heard as they were judged for masculinity.
The elderly one at the gate stood long and heard their tales.
He was the man, it seemed who deemed them worthy males.

The first stepped up, dressed all in gold with splendid robes to match.
He seemed to be the most entirely suited of our batch.
"I am a lord," he cried, "Of some accrued renown.
I rule the lands and subjugate many a large town.
When I speak, a hundred servants come to do my will,
And none of what I wear has ever lacked in lace or frill."

The judge peered down his nose at the proud man before his seat.
He scoffed and heartlessly called out "You will not walk our street!
You look like one who knows a score of money and of pride,
Yet I'm afraid that's not enough to pass through to this side."

The next walked up, arms full of books and clad in cap and gown.
His head set high, a nose worn thin from on men looking down.
"I must come through, I've got important matters to discuss,"
He said, with grandeur and no lack of gesturing but thus,
He could not budge that awful judge, nor cause him bat his eye.
The educated man there left despite his every try.

"Your books and treatises serve purpose, yes, but don't provide me proof,
That manhood lies within your soul, so leave from this fair roof."
He went away and looked dismayed, embittered by this news.
I watched and lo, a third man tried to join the lucky few.

"'Tis I!" he said, all full of strength and brandishing a sword.
He swung his mighty blade around and cut with every word.
He told of valiant battles that he fought in lands far off.
His tales of glory and of pain were nothing earning scoff.

Yet still the judge was unimpressed by this full man of might.
I'd finally reached my turn with him near the dying of the light.
"And you?" he asked, "Have you the proof that does a real man make,
Or has your hard long journey been but one hard long mistake?"

I cleared my throat and steeled my nerve, forgetting my planned speech.
My mind went to the truth alone, my instincts to beseech.
"I am not grand; I am not wise; I am not strong and tried.
I'd simply hoped to see the king one time before I died.
My greatest feats are not fight nor in a testing room.
The bravest thing I ever did was leave my lifelong home.
I live a life of simple goal, of no great acumen.
I know I am not worthy sir, but please, may I go in?"

The gate's guard sighed and for a flash he looked as old as me.
"It's been too long since I have heard a truer man than thee.
The king has waited long for you, so go and don't delay.
The time is short but there is still a wee bit left of day."

I thanked him and I hurried in; there was no time to spare.
If that true man who they described was really waiting there.
They say he'd suffered long and hard and learned what life's about.
He'd laughed and cried and fought and tried and loved there was no doubt.
If there should be a man like this to greet me as I passed,
I'd know I lived a life worth living, at long last.

I raced up stairs, sprinting past all kinds of wonders, searching for the top.
I reached the tallest tower and I only then did stop.
"They said he'd be here!" I cried out, thinking I'd been fooled,
For all there was was a small ring, and in the stone a pool.

I paused and stayed a second long and gazed at my reflection.
It'd been awhile since any deep, renewing self-connection.
I saw the years upon my face and there I understood.
I knew the truth I'd always lacked; I'd sought and never could.

The king was me and I was he; I was a real man yet.
I turned my eyes up to the sky and towards the red sunset.
The sky was burst with color; the world was burst with song.
The man I'd sought of truth and grace had been here all along.
He held me from the heat; he helped me up the climb.
He sheltered me from weeping winds and kept me all the time.

And so I died, a man fulfilled to look upon the day
And know he would not have his life end any other way.