

## 2011 Northeast Texas Poetry Contest Student Winners

### First Place Student, \$400: Amberly Alpha

#### Battle of Texas

The radiant Sun beats down with his infinite searing temper  
He shows this place no mercy  
The amount of abundant life that once danced on these lands is no more  
Forced into solitary confinement  
The earth and luxurious grasses have turned to brittle and broken replicas of their former selves  
This is the place that drought calls home  
Texas

The sky on the horizon begins to grow dim formulating its strong attack  
Humid air emits its stoutest perfume of advancing precipitation  
This is no subtle attack as the rival rumbles headfirst  
Flashes illuminate the sky giving away the opponents position  
The battle of the skies has arisen  
Waterless cracked land is its battlefield in this place we call home  
Texas

Foes meet midfield clashing and booming as they collide  
The atmosphere is being torn between the two sides  
Commotion echoes in the far distance as the enemies brawl for control  
And then silence seizes the land  
This land that Mother Nature calls home  
Texas

Just as stillness envelopes the land the roar of a freight train begins  
With it comes utter chaos  
The rivals have created the most malice of them all, the twister  
Thrashing and deafening the unrelenting twister claims its territory  
Rampant winds engulf the land; this land drought no longer calls home  
Texas

Through all of the commotion the land finally surfaces  
Revealing the scars from the erratic visitors  
The drought has come and vanished, conquered by the rain  
The twister has cleared away all from the battlefield  
A new life has arisen on this unstable land I call home  
Texas

### Second Place Student, \$300: Rhea Siensen

#### Northeast Texas

The twelve-hour drive  
From Colorado to Northeast Texas  
Was an excruciating stretch  
For an impatient child

But the tedious ride  
Was worth the wait  
When the familiar lands of mountain views and suburbs  
Disappeared into the mysterious and exciting unknown of Texas

The summers spent at Grandpa's  
Nestled in the Northeast Texas country  
Were the best summers  
I had ever known

Quiet, early morning trips  
Observing the careful movements  
Of a majestic doe in the distance  
Grazing in the fields

Humidity making me sweat  
And sweltering summer heat  
Baking my skin as I stood  
Under the Texas summer sun

Trying to keep up with Grandpa's strides  
As we walk through fields of grass  
Attempting to memorize  
The various majestic types of trees

Learning how to fish  
Persevering through the scorching day  
Waiting for that fateful bite  
Having to throw back my small first catch

Sitting at the dining room table  
Competing for the win  
Learning new games of cards  
With country music playing in the background

Famished from long hot days  
Enjoying the aroma of  
The delicious surprise that  
Grandma has preparing in the kitchen

Sitting in the Texas breeze  
Sipping my grandma's sweet iced tea  
Watching squirrels run rampant  
And hear the distant calls of coyotes

Hating to leave the majesty of Northeast Texas  
And the wild animals and fervent heat  
To return to sidewalks and suburbs  
My summer trips always ended bittersweet

**Third Place Student, \$200: Isaac Griffin**

**The Simple Life**

A simple man  
The industrious wife  
A peaceful way  
The simple life

Shining brightly  
The sun is burning  
While the simple man  
His son is learning

To work, to live  
To make his day  
No complications  
Their simple way

Working hard  
And resting well,  
The winter's cold  
And summer's hell

A passing holler  
Some kindly babble  
Sincere concern  
With idle prattle

A friendly greeting  
And warm south smile  
Time worn hands  
Hold a bright-eyed child

Deep southern faith  
Where grace abounds  
The hymns are sung  
And church bells sound

Here coyotes howl  
The south still wild  
Boar shredded ground  
The copperhead riled

Down lonely roads  
Ten head of steer  
Turn curious heads  
From grazing there

N'er a cloud seen  
A royal blue sky

Graced by a hawk  
And its screeching cry

A long day done  
Hear joyful sighs  
For home-style chicken  
And a pile of fries

Traits so simple  
And yet so define  
Our life in East Texas  
The land of the pines

**Fourth Place Student, \$100: Kaitlyn Tackett**

**East Texas Comes and Goes**

Watching the horizon  
Darkening from the storm  
Earth's camera starting to flash  
The roaring lion shaking the walls of the older houses with every scream it releases.  
And yet, through it all, the small calf's velvety face fills my vision with light  
Such spryness, curiosity, and wonder fill this little gert's eyes.  
As the roaring ceases and the flashes stop, still she stands  
The silage dries and the tractor comes  
Cutting through her curiosity  
It is gone.

She has nothing now  
She has lost it all  
It has been weeks since the farmer has come  
Months since the last east Texas storm  
And years since her mother was taken.  
She has grown stronger as she coped with her pain  
Soon she will pass just as the seasons, come and go,  
Her season is almost up  
Time has taken its toll on her, and now...  
Like a cool autumn breeze  
She is gone.

**Adult First Place: Hannah Collier**

**Waiting:**

waiting,  
my heart clutched by exhilaration

I love this time of year

hoping and praying

with tremulous anticipation  
waiting  
I fear this time of year

sighing  
parched and panting  
I wait  
aching, I wait  
like the earth  
like the trees  
dry, brittle  
longing for that which is not here  
forgotten like lost lovers  
whose companions have long since  
turned to sweeter sins  
who'll surely soon turn again  
I loathe this time of year

slyly  
that unfettered gypsy  
wanders close to me  
sauntering back from his travels  
seeking to seduce  
his voice beguiles  
it's soft  
and so cool like the mountains  
cool like the deeps  
it whispers  
and it promises  
such lovely things  
that I'd falter whole-heartedly  
save for that I would be a fool  
to trust such, this fickle wind  
that, empty-handed, leaves me here

I detest this time of year

Helios  
why punish so mercilessly  
withering that which  
depends on your bright face for its very life  
why unleash this abhorrent assault  
onto your celestial kin  
I wipe my beaded brow

I despise this time of year

yet  
just when hope seems forsaken  
the world shivers and catches its breath  
for against the horizon looms a somber wall  
building ever upwards, slate and indigo

bloated clouds creep closer

rains come  
thunder shakes the ground and lightning blinds  
caught in the throes of their heavenly opera  
enacting scenes from distant memories to awe the crowds  
and rivers burst and overrun  
unaccustomed to the deluge

rain pours  
washes away the sweat and dirt and worry  
and rain drowns  
the fear and weariness  
it comes to comfort and refresh  
comes to bring life again

winds tug at my hair, my clothes, my soul  
and these liquid kisses from heaven caress my face  
my eyelashes, my cracked lips  
my no-longer-furrowed brow  
my outstretched, upturned palms

I breathe in the scent of life and of beauty  
I relish this time of year.

**Second Place Adult: Angela Wylie**

**DEEP SOIL**

As a small child I watch the dense grassy turf  
Plowed up by cutting, turning metal disks  
Must not get too close!  
Vibrating dark diesel exhaust  
Scents the late spring air  
Hanging over the nostalgic scene  
As the tractor engine strains  
And the ground is laid open.

Damp, brown, and rich with promise  
This, the sweet deep soil.  
I walk behind the tractor,  
Digging my bare toes, scrunching  
Down deep into the fresh coolness.  
The scent of damp earth fills my nose  
And excitement rises up  
A primeval memory stirs inside

Time passes and I am older and helping work  
My grandfather's 'truck patch', as it was called  
The soil is hot sand now, crystalline and white.  
I bake in the humid morning sun.

There are rows upon endless rows of peas.  
Bushel baskets drug behind, filled to overflowing  
Purple Hull, Black-eye, Red Ripper, Cream Crowder pods.  
My young back aches, my feet burn, my arms are tired

Up early at the break of dawn to dig potatoes,  
Rousted out of my lazy summer sleep  
Up the sand hill I go, into the cool morn.  
Digging out the fist-sized red-skinned potatoes,  
Tender of skin and damply clinging to their secret place  
Rudely laid open by the plow's ruthless swipe.  
Yes, it is hard work, but it must be done  
For it is for family that the harvest is made

Adult now and the garden is my own  
A tiny small garden in the edge of the yard.  
Not a giant truck patch with endless rows  
Oh no! I am no farmer like my grandfather  
Yet, I take the knowledge that he bequeathed  
That which he learned from his own parent  
Who received it from grandparent and grandparent before,  
Stretching back to the eve of time.

I carefully make my rows and plant my own seed,  
Planting by the moon as one must do,  
Dropping each small dried kernel of life carefully  
Into the open fertile earth,  
Spacing them just so that they may grow strong.  
A whispered prayer for increase as I tuck them in  
Tamping down the cool damp soil covering over  
I wait eagerly for them to grow

My garden is much like my life  
I am deeply rooted to this place in the world.  
This tiny corner of Eastern Texas beneath the deep blue sky.  
I am a result of generations of experience and time  
Memories harvested, some joyous, some that hurt.  
We grow and we spread and each has their season  
Their time in the sun and their time in the earth  
And we all seek that the harvest-time be bountiful

Deep soil  
The first memories endure  
Digging bare child toes into the dirt  
Filled with the primal scent of fresh-turned earth.  
Placing small footsteps in those of my daddy's  
As he walks across the fresh-tilled ground  
My bare footprints in the center of his large boot tracks  
Stretching my legs long to match his stride

Small child, young girl has passed by  
Woman and grandmother I now am

The garden comes again each spring  
The soil is turned and the seed planted with hope  
I wait for that first tender shoot to emerge  
From the pungent fresh-turned earth.  
There is joy in seeing that first hint of green  
Push up and crack open the crusted soil.

There is anticipation of generous fresh vegetables  
Salad greens, tomatoes, peppers, peas,  
Okra, potatoes, beans all in a row  
Food for the table and satisfaction in the knowing  
That I am a continuation of a long line  
Of dirt diggers and weather watchers,  
Praying for rain, hoping to enjoy that which  
I have brought into being with my own labor.

I am the result of generation after generation  
Following the same steps.  
Planting and harvesting and working the land.  
Large fields or small plots,  
It matters not.  
We all tread in the big steps of those  
Who showed us the way  
We all dig deep into the loamy experience of the past.

And from that wealth,  
Love for the land and love for each other  
We will hopefully plant seeds.  
For others will stretch out their stride  
To tread in our footsteps  
As we lead the way  
Across the plowed furrows  
Of deep soil