



Friends & Foundation *of the*
Rochester Public Library

April 25, 2024

38th Annual Sokol High School Literary Awards

SOKOL 2024 WINNERS!

Sokol



John Hall

Performance winner
Grave Playground
School of the Arts



Claire Baek

Prose 1st prize
Break Up Letter to 2023
Pittsford Mendon H.S.



Grayce Peltz

Prose 2nd prize
The Landing
School of the Arts



Hailee Grove

Prose 3rd prize
The Honey Man
School of the Arts



Audrey Cleveland

Poetry 1st prize
Inconsistencies
Homeschool



Kianely Otero

Poetry 2nd prize
Senescent
School of the Arts



Adelaide Larson

Poetry 3rd prize
Like
School of the Arts



FFRPL is the 501(c)(3) charity that raises funds, presents programs, supports special projects, helps create specialized spaces, and purchases supplemental materials & equipment for the Rochester Public Library.

The Sokol High School Literary Awards Contest is one of FFRPL's Legacy programs.

2024 SOKOL HIGH SCHOOL LITERARY AWARDS

Since 1958, the Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library has sponsored a creative writing contest for Monroe County high school students. Entries from public, private, charter schools and Home Schools are welcomed.

In 1985, Eli & Mildred Sokol established an endowment through the Community Foundation, which makes it possible for FFRPL to award monetary prizes to the winners, and honoraria to the judges. The Sokols' foresight and generosity ensures that FFRPL will be able to maintain this legacy program for young writers in perpetuity.

CONGRATULATIONS to the 2024 Sokol WINNERS!

PROSE



First prize: *Break Up Letter to 2023*, **Claire Baek**, 11th grade, Pittsford Mendon H.S.

Claire is a Junior at Pittsford Mendon High School. Besides reading and writing, she enjoys playing soccer, drawing, road trips, and any outdoor activity, including skiing and camping.



Second prize: *The Landing*, **Grayce Peltz**, 11th grade, School of the Arts

Grayce is a creative writing major at School of the Arts. She loves the outdoors, playing sports, and her dog. She runs cross country, plays ultimate frisbee, and participates in Model UN through her school, and takes pottery classes in her free time.



Third prize: *The Honey Man*, **Hailee Grove**, 10th grade, School of the Arts

Hailee is a sophomore creative writing major at School of the Arts. She has a passion for baking as well as photography, and an even bigger one for writing. She is currently writing a fantasy novel.

PERFORMANCE



(Only one prize given in this category)

Grave Playground, **John Hall**, 9th grade, School of the Arts

John is a freshman creative writing major at SOTA. He enjoys being on the track team and is a provisional black belt in taekwondo.

POETRY



First prize: *Inconsistencies*, **Audrey Cleveland**, 12th grade, homeschool

Audrey is a senior who is homeschooled and lives in Fairport. When she's not writing or daydreaming, she enjoys reading mystery novels, researching ancient civilizations, and watching romantic comedies.



Second prize: *Senescent*, **Kianely Otero**, 12th grade, School of the Arts

Kianely is a senior creative writing major at School of the Arts. In addition to writing, she loves painting, figure skating, and culinary arts. She plans on attending MCC this year to continue writing and pursue dreams in culinary programs.



Third prize: *Like*, **Adelaide Larson**, 11th grade, School of the Arts

Adelaide is a junior Creative Writing major at School of the Arts. She spends most of her time hanging out with her friends and watching movies at the theaters.

2024 Sokol committee and judges

The committee members read all entries, and then selected a handful of **finalists** that they passed along to the judges to determine the winners in each category.

Sokol committee members: **Committee Chair**, the Honorable **Renee Minarik** - FFRPL Board Member and Retired Judge of the N.Y.S. Court of Claims; **Patricia Uttaro** - Director of the Rochester Public Library and Monroe County Library System; **Andrew Iseron** - Senior Project Director/Attorney for Maximus Federal Services; **Chad Cunningham** - Central Library Circulation & Information Center Supervisor; **Cynthia Dana** - Central Library Administrative Manager; **David Hou** - Boylan Code Attorney and prior FFRPL Board Member; **Emily Hessney Lynch** - Monroe County Library System Board Member and nonprofit digital strategist/content writer; **Jeffrey Tucker** - RPL Board member and Associate Professor of English at the University of Rochester; **Jim Kraus** - retired Wilson Magnet English teacher, FFRPL Board Member and liaison to the Rochester Public Library Board; **Elani Spencer** - three-time Sokol award-winner from School of the Arts, Hollins University class of 2027, Roanoke's first Youth Poet Laureate, and the first student to participate on the committee; and **Susan Chekow Lusignan** - FFRPL Director of Marketing and Program Development, who oversees the Sokol Awards.

Poetry judge: **Charles Coté** is a Psychotherapist, poetry instructor at Writers & Books, and author of *Flying for the Window* (published by Finishing Line Press) and *I Play His Red Guitar* (published by Tiger Bark Press).



Prose judge: **Dr. Tokeya C. Graham** is a Professor in the English/Philosophy Department at Monroe Community College and Vice-Chair of the African American Affinity Group, 3AG.



Performance judge: **Joshua Pettinger** is the owner and operator of Wicked Squid Recording Studios. He specializes in remote audio recording and mixing as well as artist development and management.



Thanks to **Mary Jo Orzech**, Scholarly Communications Librarian at the College of Brockport Drake Memorial Library, for including the winning Sokol submissions on Brockport’s online, open access repository. **The complete collection** of Sokol award-winning entries (**2015 - 2024**) can be [viewed and downloaded](#). **Cumulatively, winning entries have been viewed 2,387 times, from 63 countries!**

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PROSE

1st prize: *Break Up Letter to 2023*, Claire Baek

Dear 2023,

After parting with 2022, I was gazing into the imminent beyond with feverish anxiety and harrowing anticipation, perched on the threshold of a waning plane of time, the little hope I had conserved over the year flickering feebly in its hearth. As my hope diminished into obsolescence, I spotted you, emerging from the hazy darkness, brandishing an alluring grin, extending your hand and ushering me across the chasm into the realm of tomorrow, right as the clock struck midnight. You rekindled my dying hope into a roaring inferno, you illuminated new goals, enlightened me with new possibilities, and in doing so, made everything seem – achievable. I woke up every morning exhilarated, eager to see you and seize the day, to take my strides towards realizing my aspirations, the resolutions that we jotted down together in the beginning of us.

However, after each awakening, my enthusiasm would begin to ebb; each day, it would take more and more will to drag myself out of bed and face you. My ambitions soon evaporated as you brewed anxiety inducing concoctions – served daily – with a side of breakfast. Every time I felt like I was breaking through the surface, you dunked me back under again. Time with you was Chutes and Ladders, every time I gained my footing, every step forward, you sent me tumbling ten spaces back. You let me gullibly conquer a hill, only to conjure a mountain in its wake. Every victory, every moment of happiness flitted away just as soon as I grasped it. Every time I sought solace, every time I found inner peace, you would shatter it with another hurdle.

I have never felt so aggravated and frustrated before I met you, I cannot count the number of times I wanted to abandon you for elsewhere. Why did I stay? Because of what you promised me in the beginning, I somehow still believed that you could fulfill my aspirations. That sliver of optimism empowered me to endure you throughout our entire cycle around the sun. I should have known that you only sought me out just to break me like the promises you made me.

I began to harbor tremendous loathing for you, your deceiving facade, for the crushing pressure you subjected me to. I began to internalize my resentment for you until I began to crack. Eventually, you yourself had to heave me out of bed just to force me to look you in the eyes. I tried to avoid you, to retain control, but you kept pulling me out like the tide. I could never rest with you perpetually convicting and sentencing me for every misstep.

Don't get me wrong though 2023, we had our moments, some of the highest highs in my life, as well as some of the lowest lows, both with you. Even though we had a mostly rocky relationship, by the end, we were on the same frequency, and we found a balance. You drove me forward, the perpetual fear of what loomed over me drove me forward, and even to new heights. We could have been great, but our respective cruelty and stubbornness stunted our vast potential, but in the end, we found ourselves.

After intense reflection and recollection, I am still thankful for you; despite the frustration I harbored throughout our time together, despite the setbacks, I grew. I grew stronger, smarter. I became more at peace with myself, more forgiving to myself and to others, including you. So, thank you. Thank you for conjuring all the bad so that after the dust has settled, I still stand, okay with myself. Thank you for introducing me to the bad so that I can now tame the anxiety that festered at me for so long. Thank you for proving that, even after everything, I can still look at myself in the mirror. Thank you for pushing me to a new zenith, which always arose from adversity.

From now on, I will expel your self-deprecating influence, your unforgiving disposition, your perpetual distressing air, and the anxiety tank you never failed to overflow. However, I will preserve the pearls of wisdom you dispensed throughout the year, and I will learn from the lows, and cherish the sky-high peaks I triumphed over, with your help. With 2024, I hope to sleep, to indulge in rest, to enjoy my victories, and to love myself. Goodbye, 2023, it was a ride.

Love,
Me

Remarks from Dr. Tokeya C. Graham, Sokol Prose Judge

1st prize: *Breakup Letter to 2023*

Claire,

Congratulations for winning the first place prose award in the 2024 Sokol H.S. Literary Contest. Your essay "Breakup Letter to 2023" displays your acumen for sophisticated and clear writing. Kudos for such a dynamic submission.

Your decision to use "2023" as a character and speak to it as if it were a living being is commendable. Each arc of your thoughtful goodbye stirred up new feelings as I rode every wave of your powerful send off. I felt like I was in step with you throughout your journey, from "I was gazing into the imminent beyond with feverish anxiety" to "after intense recollection and reflection, I am still grateful to you." Your point of view offers a fresh narrative lens. It reminds us that we are in an intimate relationship with time.

Your writing talent has placed you in an elite club of Sokol awardees. Enjoy these accolades and bask in this well-deserved achievement. I hope that you continue to write creatively. There is a distinct authenticity in your words that is uniquely yours; never lose sight of your voice. Again, I celebrate your accomplishment and wish you all the best.

Write on!

Dr. Tokeya C. Graham, Prose Judge

PROSE

2nd prize: *The Landing*, Grayce Peltz

The sky was darkening, and the alcohol was making her footsteps shaky and out of order. She moved as though underwater, slowly and weighted down. She couldn't see much, the street lights were off or flickering, and her vision had small white spots in the corners. The street slowly tilted down, towards an even darker spot than its surroundings. She walked towards this spot, oblivious to the sloping street and the construction barriers in the way. It gaped at her and she passed the barriers, the pavement around the edges ragged and sharp, and slowed, but still didn't see the darkness. If someone had been watching from the street, they would have just seen her disappear. The darkness would have swallowed her and she would be gone. They would move on with their night and forget that they had seen a woman walking down a street and disappear. For her though, she brought one foot down on the jagged edge and stepped forward into the darkness. And then she fell.

Sweet tea. Grass stains. Birthday hats and confetti. She was happy here. Her tights had golden stars on them and there were dirt stains on her knees. The sun was twinkling and children shrieked and ran around, ribbons trailing from their hair. Stella stood by the picnic table, watching as bees hovered around the lemonade. They buzzed and hummed around the rim, occasionally dipping down to skim the surface of the drink. Stella didn't like the way that children screamed all the time; she felt that it was unnecessary. Nevertheless, she tried to enjoy herself at this party, knowing that there would at least be cake. She hadn't been paying attention to the lemonade or the bees at that moment though, she was preoccupied with visions of chocolate cake and whipped frosting. A cry came from the girl next to her at the table, and Stella saw a glass of lemonade in her hand. The girl's lip was very red and had begun to swell. She looked at Stella with a look full of hurt and betrayal, but Stella wasn't sure why. The girl was surrounded by adults quickly and Stella could no longer see her or the hurt on her face.

The hole's walls quickly swallowed her up, wind rushing into her nose, burning her throat, and whipping her hair around. She screamed, then choked on the air that filled her mouth. The walls of the hole were jagged and rocky, like pavement that had been churned in a cement mixer. She was bewildered and scared and she didn't know what to do or when she would stop falling.

The phone almost never rang. It made Stella feel a bit lonely sometimes, the fact that no one called her on this phone. It was an old phone, one that was still attached to the wall with a cord that looped down towards the floor. When it did ring, the call was harsh and static. It would ring so loudly that the phone would vibrate on the wall, threatening to come unhooked and fall towards the floor, which it always did. The phone would never hit the floor, but each time it jumped from its perch on the wall, the cord stretched a little bit more towards the hard wood of the kitchen and it would bounce a little uneasily before slowly swinging to a stop. Stella was a little worried about the phone, she knew how much her grandma liked it, so she had taken to leaving a small pillow underneath the spot where the phone might bang against the floor one day. It was a little inconvenient but it gave her peace of mind when she left for school. One day, the phone rang, and as always, the phone jumped from its hook. It swung, still ringing and Stella came running to the kitchen to see who it was. No one was on the other end of the line, and as Stella returned it to the hook, she felt a part of her close up like a phone line being cut. But she continued about her day and tried not to think about it.

She felt lightheaded now, the air moving around her felt thinner and colder. She began to feel like she was being sucked down, and she had lost track of how long she had fallen. It could have been ten seconds, twenty seconds, even forty seconds, and yet she still was nowhere near the bottom. The wind whistled and she felt dizzy. It began to grow very dark.

Stella reached out, holding her hand out to her mother, clasping onto her wrist in the crowd. She was overwhelmed and the people were tall and hot and loud. She clutched her mother, only walking when she walked, only stopping when she stopped.

Waves of people pushed against her, moving like fish in a river, darting together, in and out of currents and calm places. The crowd parted slightly in front of Stella, the jumble of legs in front of her slowing, separating, and thinning out. She could see ahead now, to the edge of the platform, watching as a train pulled up. Its doors hissed open and the tunnel between people, her peephole, disappeared. Her mother guided her towards the open doors and helped her sit. Stella watched her mother sway, holding onto the loops hanging from the ceiling, and felt the train move around her.

The darkness of the hole seemed to swallow her. She had sparks in her vision and memories danced before her eyes. The pavement walls were glistening now, a build up of condensation that made them sparkle, like there were little gems that had been churned with the cement. She couldn't breathe very well, her lungs felt like they were collapsing and she continued shooting down this hole. Her thoughts were fuzzy and she had no sense of time or where she was in space. She thought of a childhood myth, that you could dig a hole all the way through the earth and reach China. She wondered if that was where she might end up.

Stella's father brought her to the playground. It was the neighborhood playground, and the range of ages there was so vast that Stella couldn't put a number on it. She stopped as her father talked to a few of the neighborhood guys, also fathers, here to take their respective sons and daughters to the playground. Stella ran off to play with those children, getting bored with the adult talk of her father. Eventually, Stella and her father made it to the swings. They pumped their legs in unison, swinging higher and higher, until her father jumped. He was an expert, moving through the air with precision and skill. He landed as though he was a feather, or a butterfly, or something else that didn't know the pains of gravity. Stella kept swinging, scared to let go, as her father encouraged her to jump. She could do it, he said. He was right there, he said. Stella flew from the playground swings. Her father had taught her how to float, how to tilt her body into the wind, how to release the swing at the highest point in the air. She released the swing and soared and the wind rustled beneath her and the earth fell away.

The air was very cold here, and the light had practically disappeared. She had been falling faster and faster, her breaths coming in quicker and quicker as the air thinned. She tried to twist her body to see above her, to see the opening of the hole, so far above her now. She flipped and her hair whipped in her face and she couldn't find the top or bottom of the hole anymore. She was simply floating now, wind whistling and shooting by her, but she couldn't tell which way was up, and to her, that made it feel like floating. Floating, but knowing there was an ending coming, and coming soon. She screamed again, and this time it echoed back at her. It was approaching quickly now the landing. She braced for impact.

Stella flew up and over the girls she had played with earlier and towards the grass beyond them. Her father had taught her everything about jumping off a swing, the release, the aim, the soaring. He had failed to mention the landing part however, and Stella knew this was going to hurt. She braced for impact.

Remarks from Dr. Tokeya C. Graham, Sokol Prose Judge

2nd prize: *The Landing*

Grayce,

Congratulations for winning the second place prose award in the 2024 Sokol H.S. Literary Contest. Your essay "The Landing" is a well-written submission that you should be proud to have authored.

Your use of flashback interspersed with present day action takes the reader through many twists and turns without losing grasp of the plot. Stella is an intriguing protagonist, and I am still left wondering about the "darkness" that "would have swallowed her." Even with the threat of consuming darkness, there are moments of light in her memories. The reader notes a time that "she was happy here." Both ends of the emotional spectrum are woven throughout your story with great skill.

This essay showcases strong writing skills and an ability to control the story's action even through shifts in time. This is no small feat. As you celebrate this accomplishment, I hope that you continue to make stories come alive. I look forward to reading more of your work in the future. All of the best to you.

Write on!

Dr. Tokeya C. Graham, Prose Judge

PROSE

3rd prize: *The Honey Man*, Hailee Grove

It all began with a faint, frail buzz. A murmur, a soft hum. A quiet, blurred whisper.

At first, he did not pay much mind to the dim, frail buzz. Sometimes, the humming would cease its quiet, hushed rumbling. *Tinnitus*, he thought. After all, the man was growing old. Little did he know, the melodic, melancholic humming would drive him into insanity, to his fate—tainted with golden, thick, and sweetened honey.

He was a lawyer. A simple man. A dull man. It was his duty to advise his clients on legal matters. If he'd been honest with himself, he hated it. Though, it paid well, and it involved the one thing he was good at—observance. The man was a smart man, not one of those uneducated middle aged men, who slumped on their couches, indulging in their television, where their brains rotted as they endlessly gazed at the L.E.D screen. Shouting at their wives to make them a sandwich out of bread made from saturated fats, their brains rotted, serving no purpose in the world other than to be an inconvenience. Rather, he was a proper man. A single man, a lonely man, for he had no time to mingle with others. To him, relationships were pointless, as they served no purpose to the betterment of his life. The man had no goal, no discernment for a better future for his life. He did not seek wealth, nor fame. He sought no purpose in this life, rather than to just get by. Thus, the man had a rather boring, dull life, until the bees came around and transformed his entire world. The bees opened his eyes to the true world, and allowed him to see life for what it truly was.

His madness all began with a quiet murmur, a gentle hum in his ears. Oftentimes, the humming would cease at times. At first, the man assumed the annoyance to be tinnitus. A simple buzzing in the ears, no more than an illusion of the mind. Though, he paid little mind to it, as he had more important matters to attend to. The first humming did not bother him, not enough to question whether he should seek a doctor's aid.

Little did he know, a small, black-and-yellow creature had nested its way inside his body. How? Nobody knows.

Gradually, the small buzzing in his ears grew into more of an annoyance. The humming eventually began to pester him, as it began to seem as if there was even more buzzing. A louder, more defined buzz. The periods between buzzing and no buzzing shrunk. Eventually, the man began to coexist with the buzzing, as if it was a part of him. He adapted. However, it was not truly a part of him. He shoved the thought of a chance that there was something more to the buzzing in the back of his mind, as most men do. Men are filters and deflectors. It's similar to an athlete's foot, they said put the spray on it, and it goes away. When the fungus between their hairy toes appears, it is often a sign of a more systemic, serious problem. It was the same case with the very buzzing that bothered the man—it was a sign of a larger problem at hand. Often, these things are symptoms of larger things at hand, like the civilization being assembled within the man's body.

In time, he grew to be more hive than flesh. Patches of skin, riddled with deep, black holes, golden honey oozing from each, gaping hole. When he walked, there was a faint splish splash where his feet pressed, honey saturating into his formal, leather shoes. A thick stream of that golden, sweetened ooze trailed behind him wherever he walked. His hair, in time, grew thick, mingled with clumps of thick, dark golden produce. Gradually, his brownish, canary-toned, fluffy hair shifted to a honeyed sheen, where his once-luscious locks hung, dripping golden honey, as if it was banana pudding. He took pleasure in visiting gardens, especially those with lush, expansive thickets of flowers. Where the bees took delight and enjoyment in their bountiful, golden fields of nectar, like a moth being engulfed by a million suns, where they bathed in a soft haven of flowers and floating nectar. Gradually, he learnt to communicate with the bees, as if they were his children.

In the winter, the bees were devoid of their hive, intertwined into his flesh and bone. Rather, they nested in the heart of their hive—the honey man’s own heart, where the queen bee, the empress, rested. There, in his heart, they coexisted with the soft humming of pumping blood, like a tick nested onto a deer’s rear. He was the host of the hive. They thrived from the warmth of his blood, where surprisingly, the vessels did not interfere with the bees. Honey, over time, grew mingled with his own blood... Now, the bees were a part of him, intertwined with him.

When his clients walked through the door, he would spin around in his large, leather chair, tainted with honeyed stains and face them. Most would simply leave at the revolting sight. Though, the bravest would sit in their chair, in silence.

Once, a fair, proper woman entered his office. Most would be revolted. Yet the madame remained proper, for she was taught to be proper.

The soft murmur of the bees would just barely echo over the buzzing of the fan in the corner. In all honesty, the scene was ominous.

A bee would emerge from the depths of a neck-hole, perched in its opening from which it oozed honey. The bee would stare at the madame, their emotionless eyes staring into her soul.

“They certainly seem to like you,” the honey man spoke, his head tipping towards the lady. “Perhaps they ought to burrow in and make a new honey girl.”

“Who are you?” The woman questioned, her voice slightly tinged with disgust. Though, she kept things proper and fair.

“I am one with the bees,” the man spoke with a gentle tone, as he lifted his gaze towards her. Oozing honey began to drip from her golden-brown hair.

And then, in nearly an instant, the woman was consumed whole.

Remarks from Dr. Tokeya C. Graham, Sokol Prose Judge

3rd prize: *The Honey Man*

Hailee,

Congratulations for winning the third place prose award in the 2024 Sokol H.S. Literary Contest. Your essay "The Honey Man" is a vividly written submission that drips with creative description.

This essay is horrifyingly beautiful with vivid imagery that stayed with me long after I read the final word. I felt that I could actually see each physical change: "in time, he grew to be more hive than flesh." Your description of the "honey-ing" process was gruesome, yet so elegant. I was a cautious, but intrigued reader and could not look away.

As you accept this honor, I know that there is more great work coming from you. Celebrate yourself and continue to write stories that stay with us. Congratulations again and I wish you all the best.

Write on!

Dr. Tokeya C. Graham, Prose Judge

PERFORMANCE

Performance prize: [Grave Playground](#), John Hall

(Transcript)

The once joyful loose swings hang silently

low with dead weight

Their daily customers have grown up.

Class of 2024 signs are staked into the grounds of the playground.

The sandpit has hardened from isolation.

The slide no longer has takers for bumper cars.

The playground is silent. Morbid.

“Beeps” and “Honks” don't fill the dead air.

For years the rain has been its only company.

Until a baby stroller waddles onto the paved path.

It's cries and whines cut through the cloud of death.

Those wails are music to the swing's and slide's ears.

And old but familiar tune.

That baby is a pinch on the arm, waking the playground from its hibernation.

That baby is hope of a new generation of kids rising.

Remarks from Josh Pettinger, Sokol Performance Judge

Performance prize: *Grave Playground*

John,

The imagery in ***Grave Playground*** is dark, intense, and gives the audience a palpable sense of dread. The piece outlines both the inevitable end of childhood and its subsequent rebirth through the veins of new generations. The personification of the playground pulls at the heartstrings of the audience and drives the feeling of loss of a universal childhood companion.

On behalf of the Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library, it is my privilege to present you with your cash prize, as well as a personalized, engraved plaque in celebration of your 1st place Sokol Performance award.

POETRY

1st prize: *Inconsistencies: A Poem Inspired by Nikki Giovanni, Audrey Cleveland*

i could find an inconsistency in everything

i could find it in the wind

stop start blows then stops

then blows again

i could find an inconsistency

in a painting done by a master

who forgot a single

dollop

on their cheek

i could find it in a novel

i treasure

then it would metamorphosize

backwards from gold to iron,

no longer holy in my hands

i could find one in myself

my hands are too dry, so i need lotion

or i trip up or mumble when i speak

so i need to speak clearer

or my eyes are tooclosetogether or too far apart

is that who people are

fixers of broken things
or plumbers of drainage conundrums
truly believing we are only here
to unclog all the faults in all of us

should we not accept all the inconsistencies
we can't change and recognize
that they are
the jewels that glow brightest
in the fractured moonlight
i wonder about this as i watch a petal fall
from a plum blossom tree
shedding her leaves for the season
bare against the cold

the petal drops
stunning and yet
has dents scratches inconsistencies
but immaculate just the same
and i smile
because by then i realize
that's okay

Remarks from Charles Coté, Sokol Poetry judge

1st prize: *Inconsistencies*

Audrey,

Your poem, inspired by Nikki Giovanni, captures the essence of human existence with a profound and poetic lens, exploring the theme of inconsistency with both depth and clarity.

One of the most striking aspects of your poem is its ability to find beauty in imperfection.

Through vivid imagery and introspective reflections, you artfully depict how inconsistencies permeate every aspect of life, from the fleeting nature of the wind to the subtle flaws in art and literature. Your exploration of personal inconsistencies, portrayed through the narrator's self-reflection, adds a layer of vulnerability and authenticity to the poem, inviting readers to contemplate their own complexities.

Moreover, your use of metaphor, particularly the comparison of inconsistencies to "jewels that glow brightest in the fractured moonlight," is both evocative and thought-provoking. This metaphor not only encapsulates the central theme of the poem but also offers a profound insight into the beauty of imperfection and the acceptance of life's inherent flaws.

As I read your poem, I was deeply moved by its poignant message and exquisite craftsmanship. Your mastery of language and keen poetic sensibility are evident throughout, making "INCONSISTENCIES" a deserving recipient of this prestigious award.

On behalf of the Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library, it is my privilege to present you with your cash prize, as well as a personalized, engraved plaque in celebration of your 1st place Sokol poetry award.

Once again, congratulations on this well-deserved honor. I have no doubt that your talent and creativity will continue to inspire and captivate audiences for years to come.

POETRY

2nd prize: *Senescent*, Kianely Otero

It is not the reddening pinch of my cheeks,
or the 30 annoying wet kisses I'd wipe off every visit.

It is not the gray hairs left on the bathroom sink
or the ones found in the bowls of *arroz* she'd feed us after school.

It is not the sliding doors of her apartment
we'd step past to get to the playground,
the spiraling stairs static shocking my skin every climb.

Not the rag she'd wipe my hands with after bruising through the monkey bars.
Against the dirt between my fingernails,
past the calluses,
the *cicatrices* of plucked thorns.

Not the winning of an argument between her and *mi mama*.
"Dejala" is all she'd say,
and I'd get another cookie,
another hour to play.

It is not the cold lemon Iced tea she would pour from a large green pitcher
or the pulped orange juice she would buy us every trip to *Gual-mart*.

It is not the whiff of dinner I'd get after waking from a nap,
drifting off on the couch, now wrapped in between her *frisas*.

Or the stain on her blanket,
browned from the exposure of the coffee beans she'd spilled
cussing out her *novelas*.

Not the jar of peppermints,
or hard candies placed on the countertop next to the stove,
handfuls I'd steal and pocket.

Not the song she sang
the words she'd whisper
the money she'd shoved in my hands now fisted.

Not her *apartamento 3D en el primer piso*,
her echo that emanated through the emptied hallways.

Not the sound of the handle clocking,
or the view of the walls laminated with dust.

It is not her absence,
or her scent of marmalade,
cinnamon, and beans on rice.

Not the warmth of her *abraço* I am burdened with.

Remarks from Charles Coté, Sokol Poetry judge

2nd prize: *Senescent*

Kianely,

Your poem is a poignant and evocative exploration of memory, love, and loss, woven together with exquisite imagery and profound emotion.

One of the most compelling aspects of your poem is its ability to evoke a sense of nostalgia and longing through sensory details. From the reddening pinch of cheeks to the scent of marmalade, cinnamon, and beans on rice, each image is imbued with a visceral quality that transports the reader to the heart of the narrator's experience. Your use of specific details, such as the sliding doors of her apartment or the stain on her blanket, adds depth and authenticity to the poem, creating a vivid portrait of the speaker's relationship with their grandmother.

Furthermore, your poem captures the complexity of familial bonds with sensitivity and insight. Through moments of tenderness and conflict, you explore the nuances of the narrator's connection with their grandmother, from the simple pleasure of receiving another cookie to the weight of her absence. The repetition of "It is not" throughout the poem serves as a poignant refrain, underscoring the speaker's struggle to come to terms with the inevitability of loss.

As I read your poem, I was struck by its emotional resonance and lyrical beauty. Your mastery of language and ability to evoke emotion are truly commendable, making "Senescent" a deserving recipient of this prestigious award.

On behalf of the Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library, it is my privilege to present you with your cash prize, as well as a personalized, engraved plaque in celebration of your 2nd place Sokol poetry award.

Once again, congratulations on this well-deserved honor. Your talent and creativity shine brightly in this remarkable piece, and I have no doubt that your poetry will continue to touch hearts and inspire minds for years to come.

POETRY

3rd prize: *Like*, Adelaide Larson

Like

The words trail along into the path of a continuous sentence
and run on additions that no one really cares about like

the stories you've heard your grandmother tell every year when she talks and no one listens,
although they all look like they are riveted like

people in the stands watching the winning point of the game go down,
when reality this play has been the most exciting part of the tournament like

the players who have been running endlessly for hours waiting for the final whistle
saying they can get off the field and go lay down like

a tired cat with a free schedule taking up the smallest part
of the biggest bed in the house like

the only little kid sitting at the dinner table with their parents and other fancy adult friends
who still continues to add nonsense comments to the conversation like

the teenagers who talk on the phone all day long to their friends:
Like this like that like like LOVE, like

how this poem won't stop and how I
just can't stop writing the word *like*.

Remarks from Charles Coté, Sokol Poetry judge

3rd prize: *Like*

Adelaide,

Your captivating piece, "Like" is a delightful exploration of language and communication, skillfully weaving together imagery and repetition to create a vivid and engaging narrative.

One of the most striking aspects of your poem is its playful and innovative use of the word "like." Through clever comparisons and analogies, you artfully convey the ways in which language shapes our perceptions and interactions with the world around us. From the familiar cadence of a grandmother's stories to the relentless chatter of teenagers on the phone, each example offers a glimpse into the multifaceted nature of human communication.

Furthermore, your poem invites readers to reflect on the role of language in our lives, from the mundane to the profound. The repetition of "like" throughout the poem serves as a rhythmic refrain, drawing attention to the ways in which we use language to connect, express ourselves and navigate the complexities of everyday existence.

As I read your poem, I was struck by its wit, humor, and keen observational insight. Your ability to find beauty and meaning in the seemingly mundane is truly commendable, making "Like" a deserving recipient of this prestigious award.

On behalf of the Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library, it is my privilege to present you with your cash prize, as well as a personalized, engraved plaque in celebration of your 3rd place Sokol poetry award.

Once again, congratulations on this well-deserved honor. Your talent and creativity shine brightly in this remarkable piece, and I have no doubt that your poetry will continue to captivate and inspire readers for years to come.