

← **PLEASE read for *updated 2026 info & code numbers*** ←  
\* *deadline: Wednesday, March 11, 2026*

Dear English/Language Arts Instructor:

As proud partners in the Hays Arts Council's Annual Creative Writing Contest for Prose and Poetry, we want to invite you to participate in this year's contest, made possible through support from the Heartland Community Foundation **Optimist Fund** and HAC member **Jo Ann Jennings**. The competition is open to all Ellis County students in Kindergarten through 12th grade. Awards will be given in the same categories as in previous years:

First, second and third in prose;  
First, second and third in poetry;  
Honorable Mentions as warranted.

Winners in each category will receive ribbons at the Awards Ceremony and Reception on Sunday, April 26, 2026. The winning entries will be published in a book, which will be given to each winner with his or her ribbon. Each instructor of a winning student will also receive a book. Schools will receive final confirmation of winning entries by Thursday, April 2.

An individual student may enter any number of times; however, each teacher must decide which works to enter in the contest from that grade or class. To minimize the burden on the judges as well as to promote the strongest work, we are **limiting entries to a maximum of 15 per each school class in each area - prose and poetry**. An instructor teaching 3 sections of 7th grade English/language arts is entitled to 15 entries of prose and 15 of poetry in EACH of the 3 sections and a 3rd grade teacher could have up 15 entries each of prose and poetry for that 3rd grade class. (please adhere to this guideline)

To assure anonymity, teachers are to identify each work with **ONLY** a code number and grade level. Each school is assigned a base number (noted at the end of this letter), and the chair, chosen by your school, will keep a master list of individual numbers assigned to entries. (master lists will be provided to the HAC to facilitate compiling results after judging – see item #12) **PLEASE be certain each entry is assigned a code number! - AND place entry info (number, grade, prose/poetry) on Front Page, UPPER RIGHT corner of submitted work.**

To facilitate the process of judging and to ensure the consistent quality of the works submitted, here are the guidelines and competition specifics:

1. 6th through 12th grade entries must be written on computer.

**\*\* Following Notification - the winning 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> Grade entries must be sent *electronically* to the Hays Arts Council NO later than **Tuesday, April 7**.** So, to save the need to retype, remind students to save their entries electronically until **after** the judging & notification. *This process greatly assists us with accuracy and enables us to prepare the winner's publication for printing much more efficiently.*

2. Images and/or drawing illustrations (original or otherwise) will NOT be part of an entry's consideration nor included in the printed book should the work be recognized.

3. Please avoid submitting multiple entries on a single topic or similar formula. The judges may tend to dismiss "canned" or formulaic entries if they see multiple copies on the same topic.

4. Any entry that has already been published or won an award in any other competition is NOT eligible for submission. HOWEVER, a work currently in submission to another project (but not yet recognized, awarded, or published) ***IS eligible*** for submission to our project.

5. Each student **must** sign a release form (*a copy is attached, copy more as necessary*), which will be numbered as is the entry, acknowledging it and attesting to its originality. **The school's chair will retain this form.**
6. To help students avoid plagiarism, please screen the entries carefully to insure the originality of the work.
7. **Limit prose entries to 1,250 words (ALL grades). All 6<sup>th</sup> through 12 grade entries MUST include a final "WORD COUNT" noted at the end of their original (hard copy) & electronically submitted work.** Because of printing costs and judging considerations, we must adhere to the word limit. Entries without a "word count" or discovered to be longer than 1,250 words **will be eliminated** from consideration and/or recognition.
8. All entries should be "proofed" and free of mechanical errors. In the past, many fine endeavors did not make the final cut because they contained serious mechanical errors.
9. Entries must be submitted by **5:30pm, Wednesday, March 11** to the Hays Arts Council, 112 E. 11<sup>th</sup> - *separated by grade and divided into prose and poetry categories.*
10. Keep in mind - *ANY* works written anytime during this 2025-2026 school year are eligible.
11. The paper copy of the prose or poetry entry submitted for judging **WILL NOT** be returned.
12. To help us more quickly compile the award info after we receive the judging results, we ask that you provide us a copy of your master lists of student names & codes. **This info will not be included with the entries or provided to the judges.** You can bring your list when you deliver your entries – OR you can wait until after spring break. We just need it by Thursday, March 26 to process the delivered results and then the book more quickly and efficiently.

To ensure uniformity in the judging procedures, the judges will use the **"Six Trait Analytical Model"** as the basic criteria to evaluate the quality of entries. Most schools throughout the area have adopted this model to assess student writing. Should you need a copy of the "Six Trait" model, let us know.

**\*\*\* *The Creative Writing publications from the last 5 years can be found on our website, where you will also find images from last year's award ceremony and reception - <https://haysartscouncil.org/creative-writing>***

We want to thank you for your continued support, dedication to your students, and the hard work and many long hours you devote to this project. We hope that you and your students enjoy participating in this contest as well as the Awards Ceremony and Reception on **Sunday, April 26, 2026 - 1:00pm in the Memorial Union** on the Fort Hays State University Campus.

Sincerely,

Morgan Chalfant, FHSU English Department Project Chair  
Brenda K. Meder, Hays Arts Council Director of School Programming

Your code numbers are:

***Project funding provided by  
The Heartland Community Foundation Optimist Fund  
and HAC member Jo Ann Jennings***

copy this form as needed – DO NOT return to HAC – retain for your records

I, \_\_\_\_\_, swear that the following works submitted to the  
(student's name)  
Hays Arts Council's Creative Writing Contest are original works and have never been published.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(teacher's name) (grade) (school)

Please list all works submitted by this student

	prose or poetry	entry number
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1. _____	_____	_____
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2. _____	_____	_____
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3. _____	_____	_____
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4. _____	_____	_____
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Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(student's signature)

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1. _____	_____	_____
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2. _____	_____	_____
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3. _____	_____	_____
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4. _____	_____	_____
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Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(student's signature)