



Riley Festival

PO Box 925, Greenfield, IN 46140

August 2025

Dear Junior High and High School Teachers in Hancock County:

The Riley Festival is the largest four-day festival in the state of Indiana and it is named in honor of the Hoosier poet who was born and raised in Greenfield, James Whitcomb Riley. Again this year, the festival is hosting a poetry contest geared toward seventh through twelfth grade students. We hope that you will encourage your students to write a poem and enter it into the contest. The poem writing could be done as a class exercise, optional exercise, extra credit, take home option, etc. – whatever you think works best should you choose to allow your students to participate.

Please find included with the contest materials:

- **A handout in PDF form for the students.** The handout has information about James Whitcomb Riley.
- **Entry Form.** The entry form should be used by students to handwrite or type their poem.
- **A copy of the poems, *Little Orphant Annie* and *The Yellowbird*.** We would suggest you read one or both of these poems to the students. *The Yellowbird* is this year's theme for the 2025 Riley Festival.

Once you've gathered all of your students' poems written or printed on the entry forms, scan them (they can be scanned in a batch) into PDF form and email them to JWRileyPoetryContest@gmail.com no later than **Monday, September 22nd**. There will be two categories this year. One will be on the poem that best represents this year's Riley Festival theme and one will be the best original poem. From there, one poetry winner will be selected from each category and will receive a ribbon, a cash prize and a book of James' Whitcomb Riley poetry. We will deliver these items to you at the school if your student is the winner. All poetry participants will receive a participation ribbon that we will mail to you at the school.

Forms and materials will also be available on the festival website at rileyfestival.com. Click on Forms and Applications and then on 2025 Poetry Contest. Questions can be directed to Katie Scott at the email address above or (317) 501-0400.

THANK YOU!

Katie Scott

2025 Riley Festival Poetry Contest Chairperson



Who was James Whitcomb Riley?

James Whitcomb Riley was born in the year 1849 and died in 1916. He was and still is a famous author of *poetry*. He was born in the City of Greenfield in Hancock County, Indiana. As a young boy, Riley lived on Main Street in a two-story white house that is still there today. You can visit the Riley home to learn more about his life and career.

Tales that James Told Through Poetry

As James was growing up, he had many experiences in and around Greenfield that he later wrote about in his poems. James' poems became famous worldwide. He had many of his poems published in books. People still enjoy reading Riley's poetry, such as his poem, "Little Orphant Annie," which tells about a young girl who stayed at James' house and who would tell the younger kids ghost stories while sitting around the fire after supper.



What is Poetry?

Poetry is a way of storytelling or expression.

A *poet* is someone who writes poetry. When poets write poems, they often choose their words selectively to have a rhythm or rhyme.

Riley Festival Poetry Contest

Because of his fame, there are many places named after James Whitcomb Riley, such as Riley Park in Greenfield, Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis, and the Riley Festival. The Riley Festival is held in downtown Greenfield each year in early October as a way to honor and remember Mr. Riley. This year's festival will be held October 2-5. The festival is a fun event for people of all ages. There is food, entertainment, shopping, *and* contests that even kids can enter — photography, fine arts, pumpkin decorating, and *poetry*!



Riley Festival Junior High and High School Poetry Contest 2025

Name of Poet: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

ELA Teacher Name: _____

School: _____

Poetry Type: Theme or Original: _____

Little Orphant Annie

James Whitcomb Riley 1849-1916

Little Orphant Annie's come to our house to stay,
An' wash the cups an' saucers up, an' brush the crumbs away, An'
shoo the chickens off the porch, an' dust the hearth, an' sweep, An'
make the fire, an' bake the bread, an' earn her board-an'-keep; An'
all us other childern, when the supper things is done, We set
around the kitchen fire an' has the mostest fun
A-list'nin' to the witch-tales 'at Annie tells about,
An' the Gobble-uns 'at gits you
Ef you

Don't
Watch
Out!

Onc't they was a little boy wouldn't say his prayers,—
So when he went to bed at night, away up stairs,
His Mammy heerd him holler, an' his Daddy heerd him bawl, An'
when they turn't the kivvers down, he wasn't there at all! An' they
seeked him in the rafter-room, an' cubby-hole, an' press, An'
seeked him up the chimbly-flue, an' ever'wheres, I guess; But all
they ever found was thist his pants an' roundabout-- An' the
Gobble-uns'll git you
Ef you

Don't
Watch
Out!

An' one time a little girl 'ud allus laugh an' grin,
An' make fun of ever'one, an' all her blood an' kin;
An' onc't, when they was "company," an' ole folks was there, She mocked
'em an' shocked 'em, an' said she didn't care! An' thist as she kicked her
heels, an' turn't to run an' hide, They was two great big Black Things
a-standin' by her side, An' they snatched her through the ceilin' 'fore she
knowed what she's about! An' the Gobble-uns'll git you
Ef you

Don't
Watch
Out!

An' little Orphant Annie says when the blaze is blue,
An' the lamp-wick sputters, an' the wind goes *woo-oo*!
An' you hear the crickets quit, an' the moon is gray,
An' the lightnin'-bugs in dew is all squenched away,—
You better mind yer parents, an' yer teachers fond an' dear,
An' churish them 'at loves you, an' dry the orphant's tear,
An' he'p the pore an' needy ones 'at clusters all about,
Er the Gobble-uns'll git you
Ef you

Don't
Watch
Out!

The Yellowbird

By James Whitcomb Riley

HEY! my little Yellowbird,

What you doing there?

Like a flashing sun-ray,

Flitting everywhere:

Dangling down the tall weeds

And the hollyhocks,

And the lordly sunflowers

Along the garden-walks.

Ho! my gallant Golden-bill,

Pecking 'mongst the weeds,

You must have for breakfast

Golden flower-seeds:

Won't you tell a little fellow

What you have for tea? —

'Spect a peck o' yellow, mellow

Pippin on the tree.