Worms Eye View of the Desert
Abrielle Zoucha, age 8
Independent Entry
Grand Prize–Art–Category 2
The 2021 Living River of Words book is dedicated to all the parents, guardians, family members, neighbors, club leaders, librarians, teachers, and other community members who – even during this extraordinary year – helped inspire young people in our community to connect with nature and express their creativity. Thank you!

International River of Words Project

Pima County's Living River of Words program serves as a regional coordinator for the international River of Words, a project of The Center for Environmental Literacy at Saint Mary’s College of California. Artwork and poetry created by this year’s local finalists will be entered into the international contest for a chance to be recognized at the next level in 2022.

Beginning on page 32 of this book, you will see the international finalists who were local Living River of Words finalists in 2020 and went on to be recognized at the international level this year. We are very proud to have these students and their creative work representing Pima County and Arizona!

Living River of Words Traveling Exhibit 2021

At the time of printing, Pima County Libraries have reopened with limited capacity and services. Although we will not be able to host an in-person awards gathering this year, the Living River of Words traveling exhibit – featuring the artwork and poetry of this year’s local and international finalists – will be displayed at local libraries and other venues throughout the coming year.

Please check our website for a schedule and more details: www.pima.gov/riverofwords
It has been a challenging year-and-a-half for all of us. Some of us have lost jobs, become ill, or lost loved ones. Many suddenly found ourselves acting as workers, parents, and teachers – all at the same time. We have all had our daily routines, favorite activities, and social supports disrupted. And we have all watched the news with dismay as the pain and stress of illness, injustice, natural disaster, unrest, and isolation confronts us and our neighbors.

And yet…

We have also come together to support one another and solve problems in ways we never imagined, navigating uncertainty, disappointment, and tragedy. Many activities moved online. School. Work. Graduations. Birthday parties. And we often found ourselves both connected and disconnected through our screens. For many, the joy of spending time outside in nature is one thing that remained a source of solace during all of these challenges.

The 2020-21 Living River of Words (LROW) season was drastically different than any other in the program’s nearly two-decade history. As the COVID-19 pandemic gripped our community, we were not able to display last year’s traveling exhibit in libraries. As the new school year began, we could not visit classrooms, take students to explore the Santa Cruz River, or send community artists into schools.

Instead, we too adapted and adopted contactless and online methods for reaching students and families. Through our website, online workshops, and Nature-to-Go kits, we reached more than 1,300 young people with science and art programming and received more than 230 entries to the Living River of Words: Youth Poetry and Art Contest.

The special connection between people and nature, and our deep community ties to waterways like the Santa Cruz River, shine through in the works selected by our judges – and in all the entries we received. Indeed, the art, photography, and poetry in this year’s book and exhibit reflects not only the beauty of our local watersheds and wild places, but also the creativity and resilience of young people in our community.

Thank you to all the community partners, teachers, schools, families, and talented young artists and poets who helped make this exhibit possible. It is a bright light
in our community during some very challenging times and a testament to the power of nature, science, and art in our world.

**Our Living River: The Santa Cruz**
The Santa Cruz River has long been the lifeblood of the region, attracting the first humans over 12,000 years ago and sustaining agriculture and communities along its banks ever since. Today, many parts of the river flow only when it rains. But thanks to the release of effluent (highly-treated wastewater) into the riverbed, two stretches of the river in Pima County – one flowing through northwest Tucson and Marana and one downtown – have come back to life with flowing water, lush trees, and diverse wildlife.

In 2017, the Gila Topminnow, a native fish that had disappeared from the Santa Cruz, was discovered in its waters again. This year, we celebrate Pima County being awarded additional effluent from the Conservation Effluent Pool to ensure healthy habitat in a northern reach of the river.

The Living River Project, conducted by Pima County and the Sonoran Institute, measures conditions of this valuable ecosystem and tracks the impacts of our community investment. LROW supports the broader Living River Project by introducing students, teachers, and parents to the Santa Cruz River.

**Thank You!**

*Living River of Words* can only succeed with in-kind services and financial support from: Pima County Regional Flood Control District; Pima County Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department; Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation; Pima County Public Library; Pima County Department of Environmental Quality; Pima County School Superintendent’s Office; Marana Parks and Recreation; Environmental Education Exchange; The Stewart L. Udall Parks in Focus Program; Friends of Agua Caliente Park; Arizona Project WET; Pima County Master Naturalists; The University of Arizona Poetry Center; and Sonoran Institute.

Many thanks to the community partners; teachers; school administrators; science, poetry, photography, and art instructors; judges; volunteers; and graphic designers who worked diligently to bring *Living River of Words* through the annual cycle of activities, including: Christine Hoekenga, Yajaira Gray, Marsha Colbert, Alex Wolfe, Jeffrey Babson, Sandy Reith, Axl Muñoz, Julie Strom, Barbara Goenaga, Sevi, Bret Muter, Mike Kruse, Mely Bohlman, Edie Price, and Doris Evans.
The Drought
The water trickles though my toes as I gaze at a new baby sapling. I wonder what it’s going to look like when the stream I’m standing in is big and wide. Then I remember the drought, That wretched, mournful, bitter, down cast, gloomy, unhappy, thing. The drought is all ready a horrible word. sometimes it can last for weeks or months even. Thats why it’s such a relief when the monsoons come.

Cecilia Nichols, age 9
3rd Street School – Anna McCallister-Nichols
Grand Prize–Poetry–Category 2

A Visit to Saguaro National Park
Ileana Valentina Borquez-Rojas, age 7
Academy of Math and Science - Prince – Delanie Ornstein
Grand Prize–Art–Category 1
Monsoons

Pebbles are wet, Clouds are grey. The rain has come. The desert is green, the sun is dappled. The monsoons are here. Clouds fly fast, trees move in the gale. The winds have arrived. Puddles are choppy, Birds struggle to stay in the air. The gusts are blowing. The rain calms, the wind dies down. The storm will come again.

Zoey Fuchs, age 8
3rd Street School – Anna McCallister-Nichols

Cacti Reflecting in Monsoon Waters
Violet Roop, age 8
Independent Entry
In the Wash
We go in the wash
And see ants collecting food
We even smell some beautiful flowers.

We see water which makes the flowers grow
And sometimes when it rains
The sun is shining with a glow.

Sometimes we can’t go to the wash
It’s maybe raining
A bit too much …
Oh no,
There’s a flood!

Trevor Malone, age 6
Independent Entry
Grand Prize–Poetry–Category 1
Santa Cruz

A river of restoration for all of nature’s animals at the bank.
A mountain like a sentinel, standing proud and tall.
‘A’ mountain watching over us all.
River water returning for Santa Cruz River.
Roaring and surging forward in its grand mass.
Hollering in joy as it flows forward and comes back.
Its waves charging onward over rock, pebble, and dirt.
Coming for all of nature’s children to settle around and enjoy.
Roadrunners dashing across the river, briefly taking flight.
Cardinals soaring, flitting down in a blur of red.
Coyotes howling, a chorus of happy barks.
Bluejays singing, sitting on cacti.
Javelinas’ snort and squeal, leading young ‘reds’ to returning river.
Hummingbirds humming and flapping their wings.
Butterflies dancing in the air, displaying their glory for all to see.
What a beauty it all is!
Watch the water fill.
Watch it surge.
Look on to see nature’s return.
How all the animals celebrate its coming.
How gorgeous the sight is!
Santa Cruz River, flow for us all again.

Angel Osegueda, age 14
Independent Entry
Grand Prize–Poetry–Category 4
Sundown on the Santa Cruz
Harrison Hitchings, age 8
Hendricks Elementary School – Melissa Siegel

The Desert Life at Night (Wolves)
Lena Carson, age 12
Independent Entry
Grand Prize–Art–Category 3
Riddle Me This

My limbs stretch out like a sunray.
Flowing through Tucson is my history.
Though I house organisms, both predator and prey,
Why life buffers within me is a mystery.

I pass the border twice between the US and Mexico.
People in the past almost dried me up,
Yet I still carry their dreams like an echo.
Luckily they realized their harm and began to clean me up.

They stopped overgrazing, overusing, and
Began reconstructing, began preserving me.
My bed restored, so future me can see offspring.
Thanks to them, I am healthy as can be.

To natives around me, I am a caregiver.
By name, I am the Santa Cruz River.

Katherine Wei, age 16
Independent Entry
The Desert Moon
The Sun rises.
Animals come out as pink as roses.
But the Night creatures are as silver as diamonds.
They call to the Moon
For Aid and rest.

Diego Fatás-Belous, Age 7
Independent Entry

Through the Looking Grass
Dahlia Schorr, age 15
Sky Islands Public High School – Amy Wood
Grand Prize–Photography–Category 4
From the Riverbank
Aleena Rafiyath, age 13
Independent Entry
Grand Prize–Art–Category 4
To the River

Down the mountains, through the plains
Around the cacti and o’er the hill
To the river, the peccary goes
Down the path, past the tree
And the bobcat joins the trek
Under the Arizona sun
Around the cacti and o’er the hill
To the river, they go
And here comes the rabbit
And above, is the cactus wren
Under the Arizona sun
And as the human walks by
To the river, the creatures go
Under the Arizona sun
To the river, they go
To the lessening stream, they go
Under the Arizona sun
And as the day departs, and the night arrives
The river, they have reached
And from the Santa Cruz, they drink
Peccary, bobcat, rabbit, and bird
Around the cacti and o’er the hill
To the river, they went
To the river, they went

Jake Fraser, age 12
Independent Entry
Grand Prize—Poetry—Category 3
The Santa Cruz River
Stream, stream, large stream
Abundant river bring water to drink
Natural resources are important to live
The Santa Cruz River
Alive, we have to keep

Conserve nature is our dream
Revitalization initiatives are needing to bring
Union, union, union forever a team-
Zounds! 12,000 years giving us water to drink

River, river, large river
I want you to live
Valuable aid is ready, I think
Ever, ever, ever believe
Regions are stick forever to win

Roberto Duran Carrion, age 6
Academy of Math and Science-Prince – Delanie Ornstein

Bird with a Cattail
Portia Cooper, age 16
Independent Entry
The Flying Carrot
Milla Jacobs, age 5
Independent Entry

Life in the Sonoran Desert
Sylvia Peebles, age 8
Innovation Academy – Brenda Mendez


Summer Storm in Sonora

Clouds gather above,
Blocking out the sun,
While my hair curls at my temples.
The temperature goes down,
As the humidity goes up,
Making the air thick and heavy.
I wait in suspense,
Wishing for a heavy rain,
To relieve me from the desert heat.
A breeze rolls by,
Cool, damp air,
Raising goosebumps from my skin.
I feel a drop,
A single fat ball of water,
And I wait excitedly for the next.
In a few minutes
The sky has opened up,
It is raining cats and dogs, as they say.
My hair is soaking,
My skin, drenched,
But still I stand in the rain.
I turn my face up,
Let the drops splash my cheeks,
Then I walk to my dry house.
I fall asleep
To the soothing melody,
Of rain on the roof above me.
The next morning,
The beauty is gone,
The bright sunlight erasing the storm.
The wet pavement of the street,
The aromatic creosote,
The critters frolicking on the damp ground.
All fade in the harsh glow,
Of the sky-bound orange globe,
Which chases the residents to their ACs.
I am left to dream
Of the beautiful droplets,
And to wait for the next monsoon.

Lindsay Gaines, age 14
Emily Gray Junior High School – Brittany Baechler
Life
Gwyndolyn Balman, age 15
Educating Children Outdoors – Kathy Balman
**Killdeer**

A curious little fellow
with copper jacket
alabaster waistcoat
and ebony stripe

A funny little fellow
with quick stride
darting glance
and twinkling eye

A picturesque little fellow
piping his melancholy note
silhouetted against the blinding sheen
of the evening light
reflected on the water

* Cecilia Appel, age 14
  Independent Entry

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**The River**

* Jing-yi Genevieve McFatter, age 10
  BASIS Tucson North – Carrie Vonier
Fish on a Mission
Fiona DeWald, age 14
Sky Islands Public High School – Amy Wood

Diamonds
Wade Olsson, age 11
Olsson Homeschool – Jeannette Olsson
I See
I See water, the blue Shining reflection off The Sun, I See the nature and living Life as if it was a village with happy People. I See the rocks with their own designe It’s almost like you can see the years Put in almost like a story. I See cowboys with horses walking on the soft shining Yellow like sand.

Anyssa Catalan, age 15
Favor Celestial – Barrio Kroeger Lane – Josefina Cardenas

Bumpy Lizard
Grayson Matlock, age 8
Innovation Academy – Pam Barrett
Cloudburst
Up from the azure helping hale plants
Making branches very long
A lot of wishful gloom
Refreshing Rain

Kate Valenzuela, age 13
Mary Belle McCorkle Academy of Excellence – Alejandra Alvarez and Kevan Kiser-Chuc
Resilience During COVID
Ryann Odum, age 12
Roskruge Bilingual K-8 – Alejandra Alvarez and Kevan Kiser-Chuc
The Heart of the Desert

Dear Desert Sunset,
The sun goes down
and the moon comes up.

In between
cacti are starting to sleep and the mountains are growing dark.
The sky is the color of ocotillo flowers
Owls watch the sun set while coyotes
howl.

Azalea Martinez, Age 7
Independent Entry

Sunset Reflection
Zahra Rafiyath, age 7
Independent Entry
Down at the Stream
Omar Sahtout, age 7
Academy of Math and Science - Prince – Delanie Ornstein

Flower Silhouettes
Jennica Lugo, age 14
Roskruge Bilingual K-8 – Stacy Redondo and Kevan Kiser-Chuc
Santa Cruz
The old Santa Cruz!
That mighty brood,
That we drained, damned, and pillaged
So we could make more food.

Past the Santa Ritas!
But we wouldn’t let it beat us,
So we took the blood of that river,
And passed the murder off as ideas.

And so we are the guilty host,
To an old dry ravine’s river ghost.
So beware all who settle here
Of the life that offers “most.”

Cameron Hagerty, age 15
Sky Islands Public High School – Amy Wood

Black-footed Ferret
Cecilia Kramer, age 11
Vizzini Art Studio – Kristin Vizzini
In the Desert
Aliah Kiwanuka, age 6
Independent Entry
Desert Rain

A single raindrop can make a huge difference. First, it falls on a plant. It’s brothers, sisters, mom, dad, aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandpas and cousins go down with it.

Over time the plant grows. Wind, water, and snow move the seeds of the plant and more plants grow. Until finally people can live on the earth with the oxygen the plants produce. The rain comes from heaven and flies to the ground. It feeds the plants that grow and helps them breathe. Plants, animals, cacti, need it.

We seek water to have life for the universe.

Gabriel Cooper, age 10
Ajo Pima County Community Center – Khalil Bratton

The Lizard

Sophia Rocker, age 7
Innovation Academy – Lori LaRussa
Lady Bug on a Rock
Ava Mariñez, age 6
Independent Entry
Sonoran Desert
Mizelle Navarro, age 7
Academy of Math and Science - Prince – Delanie Ornstein

Life in the Creek
Karla Togawa, age 18
Independent Entry
The Snake Desert Habitat
Parker Bedyk, age 8
Innovation Academy – Lori LaRussa

Santa Cruz Life
Inesh Wijeweera, age 8
Innovation Academy – Brenda Mendez
A Sunset in the Saguaro
Nyla Lainhart, age 6
Independent Entry
The American Coots of Sweetwater  
Gloria Brooks, age 17  
Independent Entry

One Lonely River: The Santa Cruz  
Mary Appel, age 10  
Independent Entry
Life by the River
Railyn Stamp, age 8
Innovation Academy – Brenda Mendez

After It Rains
Adrienne Howard, age 13
Desert Sky Middle School – Lisa Nussmeier
Local Winners in International River of Words 2021

Living River of Words is a regional coordinator providing local support for River of Words: a project of The Center for Environmental Literacy at Saint Mary's College of California. River of Words is its own watershed: a linked network of people throughout the United States and the world who are committed to teaching the art and poetry of place to young people.

In the pages to follow we honor local student finalists from Living River of Words 2020 who went on to be selected as finalists in the international River of Words 2021 Youth Poetry and Art Contest.

Bethel Eyasu, age 7
Cragin Elementary School – Heather Wenning
International River of Words Finalist
Blue Skies in Tucson
Isabella Owens, age 10
BASIS Tucson North – Carrie Vonier
International River of Words Finalist
Aniyah Dunn, age 6
Cragin Elementary School – Ellan Price
International River of Words Finalist
Maia Garcia, age 15
Tucson High Magnet School – Marea Jenness
International River of Words Finalist
Rey Compos, age 18
Tucson High Magnet School – Marea Jenness
International River of Words Finalist

Benjamin Castañeda, age 8
Innovation Academy – Lori LaRussa
International River of Words Finalist
Multidear
Angelleena Hoover, age 12
Hollinger K-8 – Rebeka Denson
International River of Words Finalist
For more information about *Living River of Words: Youth Arts and Science* contact:
Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation
Environmental Education
Phone: (520) 724-5375
Email: eeducation@pima.gov
Website: www.pima.gov/riverofwords

Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation
Regional Flood Control District
Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department
Pima County Public Library
School Superintendent’s Office

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