Josephine Hill, age 8
Independent Entry
Grand Prize–Art–Category 2
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 submitted to the international contest for a chance to be recognized in 2023. Beginning on page 37 of this book, you will see the international finalists who were local Living River of Words finalists in 2021 and went on to be recognized at the international level this year.

Living River of Words 2022-2023 Traveling Exhibit

At the time of this printing, Pima County Libraries are open with limited hours, which means this year’s traveling exhibit will be touring the community! Although exact dates and locations are still being finalized, the following have been confirmed:

April 21 – May 31, 2022
Wheeler Taft Abbett Sr. Library | 7800 N. Schisler Drive

June 2 – June 29
Santa Rosa Library | 1075 S. 10th Avenue

For more details and locations as we add to the schedule, please visit:
www.pima.gov/riverofwords
Living River of Words: Youth Arts and Science

The Living River of Words program (LROW) sets the stage for learning, inspires science inquiry, and excites creativity for youth ages 5 to 19. Now in its 20th season, this interdisciplinary program managed by Pima County’s Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Environmental Education Office, continues to thrive, guided by the equation: Nature + Science + Art = Lasting Connections. These connections are key to knowing, loving, and desiring to protect a place and its resources.

As in past years, the 2021-22 LROW season culminated in the Youth Poetry and Art Contest whose finalists and grand prize-winners grace these pages and the annual traveling exhibit. In recent years, options for participation have broadened. In addition to online, field-based, and school residency programs with K-12 classes, many avenues and resources are now offered for independent learning.

More than 600 students and 25 teachers at 12 schools from Tucson Unified, Amphitheater, Flowing Wells, Marana, and Ajo school districts participated in full LROW residencies this season. These classes began their experience with an online session introducing a precious and limited resource – water in Southern Arizona. They explored water cycles, including the urban treatment and recycling of wastewater by Pima County, which is giving renewed life to portions of the Santa Cruz River. Finally, students practiced the skills needed for both art and science: using their senses to observe, their minds to wonder, and their memories to see relationships between the new and the familiar.

With the return of in-person field experiences, residency students got outside to visit water bodies in Pima County. They began their field days with an “I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds Me Of” activity to make observations, spark their curiosity, and find inspiration. Afterward, students engaged in science investigations of water quality and macro-invertebrates and the guided practice of poetry, photography, or visual arts.

After the field trip, the community teaching artist paired with each group continued to develop the students’ creative works through additional sessions at their schools or remotely. Students were then invited to submit their artwork, photography, or poetry to the county-wide LROW contest.

Many individuals and groups who did not participate in residencies conducted their own LROW experiences and entered the contest. These independent entries...
came from youth at Pima County’s Ellie Towne Flowing Wells and Ajo Community Centers, Pima County’s Public Library branches, Barrio Kroeger Lane/Favor Celestial, public and private schools, homeschoo, and individual families. Some entrants joined community workshops, picked up LROW-themed Nature-to-Go kits from libraries, or used resources and ideas from the expanded LROW website: pima.gov/riverofwords

The special connection between people and nature, and our deep ties to waterways like the Santa Cruz River, shine through the works selected by our judges – and in all the entries received over the past two decades. The resilience and creativity of young people in our community is again reflected in this year’s book and exhibit, along with the beauty of our local watersheds and wild places.

**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), two stretches of the river in Pima County – one flowing through northwest Tucson and Marana and one through downtown Tucson – have come back to life with flowing water, lush trees, and diverse wildlife.

In 2017, the Gila Topminnow, an endangered native fish, appeared in the Santa Cruz River near Tucson again, and its range has continued to expand. In 2021, we celebrated the allocation of additional water from the Conservation Effluent Pool to ensure healthy habitat in these two reaches of the river.

The Lower Santa Cruz Living River Project, conducted by Pima County and Sonoran Institute, measures conditions of this valuable ecosystem and tracks the impacts of our community investment. The Living River of Words supports the broader Living River Project by introducing students, teachers, parents, guardians and members of the public to the Santa Cruz River and other wetland habitats in Pima County.

You and your family can visit the LROW field trip sites: beside the main pond at Agua Caliente Park, lakeside at Historic Canoa Ranch, and along the Santa Cruz River by Mission Garden or Crossroads at Silverbell District Park. We hope reflecting on the creativity in these pages inspires you to visit these and other natural sites in Pima County to create your own nature connections.
The Water Cycle

Blue, moving water
From oceans, lakes and streams.

It warms. Water goes up.
Evaporation.

Droplets join together in a group hug.
Heavy. Rain falls to the sky.
Precipitation.
Surface runoff by waterfalls, and streams.
Rushing down and collecting.
Ready to do it all over again.

Aeneas Pedregó, age 7
Independent Entry
Grand Prize–Poetry–Category 1

Living River of Friends
Hadley Wendt, age 10
Hendricks Elementary School – Janet Slingerland
Grand Prize–Art–Category 3
Observation of a Barrel Cactus
I saw a glimpse of a barrel cactus that has yellow fruit that looks like a pineapple.
I felt the skin of the fruit and it felt smooth and waxy like the shell of a desert tortoise.
I hear nothing like the sound of cement.
I wish I only smelled the air of the desert but the faint gassy air from cars around it, with a small bitter smell of pollution.

Fernando Contreras III, age 10
Manzo Elementary School – Daniel Stoner and Sarah Flanary

Cactus in Spring
Aolani Martinez, age 8
John White Elementary School – Patrick Brennan and Kevan Chuc
Wings
Gabriel Cooper, age 11
Ajo Elementary School – Reylee Melendres Bermejo
Grand Prize–Photography–Category 3

The santa cruz river is beautiful
I see the pretty dragonflies
their red and green if you close your eyes you can
hear the wind going through the trees it smells like
the forest it’s like we’re not at tucson I feel relaxed
and happy the sun shines down on us I think the
river is beautiful.

Gabrielle Garcia, age 8
Innovation Academy – Lori LaRussa
Rain Light
Calm sky
Clouds come and thicken
Raindrops fall
Breathe the breath of life
Birds and bobcats
In the falling rain
Rejoice!

Light flashes
Before their eyes
Plants drink
The precious life source
Sprouting, flourishing the land

Coyotes howl delight
Animals cheer
Rain ends
Sun appears
Life enriched!

Tegan Kwan-Daley, age 8
Mesquite Elementary School - Janice Mortensen and Paula Maxwell
Grand Prize–Poetry–Category 2
Desert Beauty
Adilyn Morse, age 6
Independent Entry

Samantha Bass, age 11
Ajo Community Center – Khalil Bratton
Raccoon playing with water
Mia Basurto, age 15
Tucson High Magnet School – Marea Jenness

Tracks and Moss
Listen. I hear water.
Breath. I smell mud.
Feel something. I feel moss.
Look. I see tracks.
Which animal is that!
Is it a deer? No!
It’s a Raccoon!
Now isn’t that awesome!
BEST DAY EVER!!!

Emma Hughett, age 8
Innovation Academy – Pam Barrett
Carried Away
I see a leaf fall into the river
It’s carried away with the current
Will the water supply soon wither
Water carried away through pipes and drains
And when we finally get monsoon
it rains
But even the falling rain can’t stop this great drought
I bow my head in doubt
In doubt that we can carry on for years to come
Acting just as we do now

Kyrie Knapp, age 12
Satori School – Tina Love

Where’s Froggo?
Gloria Brooks, age 17
Independent Entry
Grand Prize–Photography–Category 4
Cooper’s Hawks
Miranda Sanchez, age 15
Tucson High Magnet School – Marea Jenness
Grand Prize–Art–Category 4
What Once Was

I remember when my banks were full of water
Whispering the stories of our ancestors
When vegetation surrounded me like a soft warm cozy blanket

I remember my banks slowly receding
Taking back the promise of life
Leaving me to be nothing but a bit of mud

I remember the monsoons,
Wetting my banks once more
A reminder of the forgotten
That left me many years ago

I remember when it was just talk
A murmur of hope
That humans might find a way
To bring back my “me”

I used to scoff at this idea
As litter filled my banks day by day
But now it’s set in motion
Slowly bringing what once was
Back to life
Slowly bringing back my world
But will it be enough?

Nia Meredith, age 11
Independent Entry
Grand Prize—Poetry—Category 3
The Delightful Mystery Desert Bush!

Small, sticky, rough leaves
Although I do not know the plants’ name, it still attracts me.
There are clusters of spikey plants surrounding the green bush.
When the heat meets the leaf shaped like an upside-down spade a nice
smell comes to a meet my mystery shrub; but then I cannot describe the
smell.
While then the ground is covered with small rocks and dead brown and
yellow leaves from my bush
That is why I like the nice, delightful, desert bush.

Donovan Cain, age 9
Manzo Elementary School – Daniel Stoner

The Macroinvertebrates
Melissa Perez, age 9
Safford K-8 – Nalda Francisco
Connor Coody, age 7
Butterfield Elementary School – Michelle Roberts

Look Up
Jaiden Lara, age 13
DeGrazia Elementary School – Janine Tech
Change
The flow of the river is calming,
like a cool breeze in the hot sun.
At a time when it was very cold outside,
the river was surprisingly warm and relaxing,
but it will never be the same.

We try to give back what we have taken from the land,
but it will never be like before.
The new water won’t bring back the thousands of animals that died
without a home
because of us.

And yet,
some still say that things are better than ever,
and nothing has changed.
How many more must die
before they admit that we are killing our home
and the homes of others?
How many more species will go extinct
before they stop creating more damage
and start helping us change?
How much more time will pass before the damage is irreversible
and there is no hope of things getting better?
Has that time already passed,
or can we change?

When people who tell us that it is not real are in charge,
they will not let us change.
When the past generations leave us with so little,
I am forced to ask:
if we all decide the selfish people like them should lead us,
is it possible to change?
Or are we so blinded by our small differences
that some think makes one of us better than the other
to change?

Sydney Brown, age 13
Satori School – Tina Love
Grand Prize–Poetry–Category 4
The Cactus Hotel
Pierce Zoucha, age 6
Independent Entry
Grand Prize—Art—Category 1
The Desert Night and Day
The skeleton of the cactus rattles in the night.
The coyote howls in the night.
The scorpion starts crawling in the night.
The owl soars in the night.
The snake rises from the sound of the flute.
The turtle hums in the day.
The snake rattles in the night.
The lizard wakes from the night.
The stars shine in the night.
The snakes sleep during the day.

Braxton Brown, age 8
Soleng Tom Elementary School – Rachel Howe

One With the Desert
Rivka Jones, age 9
Coyote Trail Elementary School – Cheryl Case
The monsoon day
Nyla Lainhart, age 7
Independent Entry

Fish of the Desert
Wade Patrick Olsson, age 12
Olsson Homeschool – Jeannette Olsson
Santa Cruz River
The Santa Cruz River is quiet and you smell the misty air
mosquitoes buzz, water striders on the move
nice and windy the cool air breeze, no chance of rain
the main place to meditate
Whoosh goes the water!
mossy rocks
no hawks in sight
everywhere so neat feel some heat
plants look like spinach, really green, not like here
really muddy
can be cold can be hot
1 cloud in sight
Water flowing water flowing
flowers bloom in some places

Adam Eager, age 7
Innovation Academy - Lori LaRussa

Me at the River
Helena Gallo-Quiroz, age 9
Barrio Kroeger Lane-Favor Celestial – Josefina Cardenas
Life is Good
Jayce Humburg, age 7
Butterfield Elementary School – Laura Rios
Duck #1
Johnny Paul V, age 12
Independent Entry
Winged Warriors
A feathered friend of joy
Elegance overpowers the watching koi

While there are many fish in the sea
None compare to the beauty in front of me

Ducks.

Ducks are the little animals outside your window
When you will see one, you never know

So look good and look well
For the tiny bird in a feather shell

Marisa Chaidez, age 15
Independent Entry

Yazlin Galvan, age 10
John White Elementary School – Monica Arriaga and Kevan Chuc
Anna Bass, age 13
Ajo Community Center – Khalil Bratton

Under the Willow Arch
Garrett Fry, age 13
Emily Gray Junior High – Brittany Baechler
**Fresh Air**

Cold fresh air
steep tall mountains
cold, frozen pine leaves
needles falling on deep dirt roads
small little cabins
twisty turny roads
snow is falling
kids are playing.

*Zane King Burge, age 7*

*Innovation Academy – Pam Barrett*

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*Blake Palmour, age 6*

*Sam Hughes Elementary School – Jane Gariepy*
Desert Deluxe
Beverly Van Deren, age 9
Independent Entry
Rain
Wind blowing
Cloudy sky
Animals running
While birds fly
Rustling leaves
Drip, drop
Water falling
Plip, plop
Thunder, lightning
Boom!, boom!
Water stops
Sun sets
Grasshoppers chirp
Time to get some rest!

Alyssa Lai, age 11
Mesquite Elementary School – Janice Mortensen and Paula Maxwell

The Rainbow Santa Cruz
Kourtnie Green, age 8
Coyote Trail Elementary School – Susan Quinn
Flowi Monarch
Isela Coleman, age 16
Tucson High Magnet School – Marea Jenness
Desert Reflection
Ed Olsson, age 8
Olsson Homeschool – Jeannette Olsson

Oscar Armando Calderón Lobatos, age 11
Ajo Elementary School – Reylee Melendres Bermejo
The Story of a Garden
Kaiyah Crosby, age 7
Safford K-8 – Robin Gilbert

Hunting Season
Leticia Lugo, age 15
Tucson High Magnet School – Marea Jenness
Milo Crandall-Swanson, age 6
Sam Hughes Elementary School – Kathleen Patterson
Lonely Footprint
Kayla-Ann Johnson, age 12
DeGrazia Elementary School – Aimee Katz

Sunny and Stormy
Grant Peterson, age 8
Coyote Trail Elementary School – Katie Johnson
The Damselfly

Born at the bottom
Of the river,
Do you spot ‘em?
The ones who do not wail
The ones with two tails
The ones speckled with a glowing glint
Through the mud
Gives a hint
When they crawl up from the bottom,
On the reeds,
Do you spot ‘em?
The Damselfly, emerging,
The Damselfly, diverging,
The Damselfly, hunting,
Soars into the sky,
Leaves its old home,
Waves goodbye,
People couldn’t understand why,
The Damselfly

Anand Karra, age 13
Satori School – Tina Love
Roadrunner
Isabella Davila, age 15
Santa Rosa Library – Elma Shaffer
Turtle

Ezra Spivey, age 12
Santa Rosa Library – Elma Shaffer

Lemon Drops

Olivia Shepherd, age 11
Independent Entry
Hole
Samuel Downey, age 11
DeGrazia Elementary School – Matthew Lange

Makayla Collins, age 15
Tucson High Magnet School – Marea Jenness
Butterflies
Landon Nash, age 9
Agua Caliente Elementary School – Kathryn Tompkins
Desert Bloom
Sadie Brown, age 15
Tucson High Magnet School – Marea Jenness
Local Finalists in International River of Words 2022

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.

On the following pages, we honor local student finalists from Living River of Words 2021 who were selected as finalists in the international River of Words 2022 Youth Poetry and Art contest. We are proud to have these students and their creative work representing Pima County and Arizona!

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
International River of Words Finalist
Monsoons

Pebbles are wet, Clouds are grey. The rains 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
International River of Words Finalist

Santa Cruz

A river of restoration for all of natures 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
International River of Words Finalist
**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*
*International River of Words Finalist*

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**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*
*International River of Words Finalist*
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
International River of Words Finalist
Thank you!

Enormous gratitude to all the partners, teachers, schools, families, community leaders, and talented young artists and poets who help make Living River of Words possible.

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Green Heron at Sweetwater. Photo: Nia Meredith
For more information about Living River of Words: Youth Arts and Science contact:
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Regional Flood Control District
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