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Sept. 6, 2020

Tacoma Ocean Fest Youth Story Contest announces 2020 finalists

Tacoma Public Schools students shine in poetry and film, despite COVID-19.

Winners announced Sept. 12-13 at festival

Tacoma, WA: Think Tacoma student creativity could be stopped by COVID-19? Think again.

Says Mackenzie Walker (Truman): “Loneliness is like the ocean/it comes in waves/ebbing and flowing...”

Says Tara Ryan (Foss): “A spider crab spins a web of stories so great/that they would tear away the greed like a riptide.../open their hearts to the saltwater...”

And Henry Johnson (Stadium): “The ocean is our planet's heart/Our planet is our life.”

The Tacoma Ocean Fest Youth Story Contest has announced its 2020 finalists – 6 filmmakers and 21 poets from Tacoma high schools and middle schools, in the ocean-themed contest’s third year. [Finalists are listed here.](#)

The contest, sponsored by Tacoma Sunrise Rotary, is a vital part of Tacoma Ocean Fest, a free festival that brings together arts, sciences and water sports to help the city celebrate the ocean, learn about its threats and get inspired to protect it.



A scene from the finalist film by Myles Johnson of Jason Lee Middle School.

Rescheduled and online due to COVID-19, Tacoma Ocean Fest is now 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Sunday Sept. 13 at tacomaoccanfest.org, with art, music, dance, science, prizes, games and more.

Winners will be announced by Deputy Mayor Keith Blocker and Port Commissioner Kristin Ang on Sept. 12 at a Zoom Awards Ceremony just for finalists, families, judges and sponsors, followed by a public announcement on tacomaoceanfest.org Sept. 13. Prizes total over \$800 cash, and every entrant received a pizza coupon from Round Table Pizza.

All Youth Story finalist poems and films will be online for people attending the virtual festival at tacomaoceanfest.org/film-finalists/ and tacomaoceanfest.org/poetry.

The theme of the 2020 contest, open to all Tacoma and Chief Leschi middle and high school students, was “We Are Ocean”, aligning with the festival’s environmental drive to inspire people to act on ocean threats like pollution, climate change and species extinction.

To help students and teachers create and submit work despite the coronavirus stay-at-home order, Tacoma Ocean Fest held several online workshops in poetry, filmmaking and marine science in May. The deadline was also extended through June 1.

As a result, entries were submitted from eight schools, including Lincoln, Foss, Wilson, Stadium and SOTA high schools, and Truman, Wainwright and Jason Lee middle schools, plus homeschoolers. Poetry judges were poets Erin Tail, William Kupinse, Josh Rizeberg and Christina Butcher. Film judges included filmmakers Thomas Xou, Jamika Scott, Amy Ryken and Damico Clark. All judging was done anonymously.

“The Youth Story Contest helped my kids to extend beyond my classroom and really boosted them after our rough spring,” said Marguerite Walker, a teacher at Lincoln High School.

“Every year these students continue to take our breath away with their creativity and passion for the ocean,” said festival director Rosemary Ponnekanti. “And they did all that this year despite the restrictions and devastation of COVID-19. In their hands, our planet has hope for the future. We need to listen to them, and act.”

In Mackenzie Walker’s final words:

“When the stay at home order is lifted
Our At the Ocean Order will be:
Take care of ourselves,
Take care of each other,
Take care of our Oceans.”

Information: tacomaoceanfest.org.

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