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Harris County teen writers, artists earn 80 National Scholastic Art & Writing Medals, Scholarships

May 4, 2021 — The creative works of 70 teen writers and artists from 13 Harris County school districts and 10 private schools were recognized this month during the 98th annual National Scholastic Art & Writing Awards 2021, judged in New York City. Seventy-five national medals and five scholarships were awarded to the area youth who earned regional Gold Key Awards earlier this year during a competition sponsored by Harris County Department of Education.

The national medalists come from the following Harris County districts: Alief, Clear Creek, Cy-Fair, Deer Park, Pasadena, Pearland, Houston, Humble, Katy, Klein, Spring, Spring Branch and Tomball. Private schools include Emery Weiner, Episcopal High, Kinkaid School, River Oaks Baptist, St. Agnes Academy, St. John's School, Veritas Christian Academy and the Village School.

View list of area teen recipients at <https://www.hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards>.

Special awards earned include the American Voices and American Visions Awards, two medalists chosen from five student nominees in each region in art and writing categories. Honorees each earn \$1,000 scholarships as “best of show” in their local programs. Awardees include:

- Natalie Dinh, Kerr High School, Alief ISD
American Voices and Gold Key Medalist
short story “Mother” submitted through teacher Kathleen Harrison
- Landen Tran-Nguyen, League City Intermediate, Clear Creek ISD
American Visions and Gold Key Medalist
illustration and drawing “Power,” submitted through teacher Sherry White

The \$1,000 New York Life Award sponsored by the New York Life Foundation is given to six students across the country who explore personal grief and loss through their works.

- La’Zavia Joseph, Hastings High School, Alief ISD,
New York Life Award
poem “Am I Next?” submitted through teacher Mashayla Nash

Two “Best in Grade” awards of \$500 go to 24 Gold Medalists competing throughout the nation in each grade level in art and writing categories:

- Jerry Tong, Pearland Junior High West, Pearland ISD
(writing) personal essay and memoir “Our Anthem,” submitted through teacher Olivia Cole
- Mikayla Villafuerte, Veritas Christian Academy,
(writing) science fiction and fantasy “Stars in the Dark,” submitted through teacher Laura Arrazolo

Clear Creek ISD artist Tran-Nguyen, 14, admits that art helps him with his identity. He was particularly inspired to complete his drawing/illustration called “Power,” which earned him the American Visions Medal.

“I had realized it was a piece I had liked especially because I had insane amounts of motivation to finish it,” he said.

In questioning his sense of purpose and identity of who and what he is, he often turns to art.

“I can never answer the question, but in some ways, art answers it for me,” the eighth-grader said.

American Voices Medalist Natalie Dinh, 17, turns to writing as a form of expression and enjoyment.

“I take inspiration from real experiences around me and from my observations of universal issues,” Dinh said.

Her short story “Mother” deals with family dynamics. She gives due credit to her teacher for online support and encouragement during the pandemic.

This year, challenges resulting from the pandemic required the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards to be 100 percent virtual – from submissions to judging to celebrations.

“We understand that young people may not have had access to the same resources they had in previous years due to COVID-19,” HCDE Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Coordinator Andrea Segraves said. “Our jurors were in awe of the resilience and talent that shone through each piece in light of these challenges.”

Segraves said she was impressed by the quality of the entries submitted by teen artists and writers which was encouraged and orchestrated through area teachers.

“This year, we received a high volume of competitive entries, and judges had to make difficult decisions based on three criteria which included originality, technical skill and the emergency of personal voice or vision.

Medalists traditionally invited to New York City’s Carnegie Hall will be recognized through an awards ceremony via YouTube. More details about national recipients and the link to the celebration may be found at www.artandwriting.org.

HCDE has sponsored the awards in Harris County since 1983. For more information about entering, judging, or supporting HCDE’s Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, access www.hcde-texas.org/scholastic-awards or email Andrea Segraves at asegraves@hcde-texas.org.

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