

**Junior First Place — Luke O., Clay County*

Dear Tongass

Oh my Tongass,
I miss you dearly,
The way we used to play.
Running through you
To discover inside,
Was the best use of my day.

The tall trees with their looming heights
Beckon me to climb,
Brackets all along to guide my steps,
I will be up in no time.

Swinging from a branch up high,
On a green spruce tree,
Thinking of all the delicious berries
I might get to see.

Berries, fresh, sweet berries,
Huckle, salmon, and blue
I eat and eat and devour
Until my tummy is full of you.

With purple stained fingers and pine needle clothes
I continue the journey ahead.
Salmon are splashing, the smell really reeks,
Wow, so many are dead.

Heading downstream to the peninsula,
The beautiful magical land,
The tide reveals the secret passage,
Across the Pacific sand.

The crunch of the barnacles beneath my feet,
I feel like I can fly,
I hear a “phfft” of salty sea air,
A humpback is breathing nearby.

I cascade the rocks in hope to see,
The creature from the deep,
The green blue sea, herring arise,
The whale is not asleep.

Hungry and eager, it bubbles below,
My excitement bubbles inside,
Its large tongue and blubbery skin,
In awe I am wide-eyed.

The ocean calls with its lapping waves,
The tide is coming in,
Hurry, hurry, I must turn back,
Through the forest herein.

There the bald eagle makes its way,
In the trees lies its nest,
The call of the wild, untouched at its core,
Truly this land is the best.

Bring me back oh Tongass,
Bring me back there soon.
I cannot wait to meet again
Under the aurora moon.

**Junior Second Place — Benjamin B., Pinellas County*

The Live Oak Tree

Live oak tree—huge, tough, old
with its leaves very gold
some are sun, some are shade
not alike how they're made.
Squirrels so busy gathering nuts
with fuzzy fur that covers their guts.
Mockingbirds teasing the others
even badgering their own brothers.
The ancient oak tree always sheltering
animals from the heat that are sweltering.
We need trees because they give oxygen
and so much more, where do I begin?

**Junior Third Place — Annabel S., St. Lucie County*

Mystery Dancer

As she dances as yellow as a daffodil,
She is as graceful as could be.
Slowly dancing, Slowly dancing.
Over the hill,
Through a secret passageway,
Till she lands on me!
Why what is she, a beautiful
Butterfly.

**Honorable Mention — Knox M., St. Lucie County*

Always on the hunt
Looking for his next meal.
Laying on the bank,
In the mood for a nap.
Get up and go!
Armored reptile on the attack,
Time to eat!
Onward he swims
Ready for his next tasty treat.