

*\*Senior First Place – Jocelyn W., Pinellas County*

## **Growing Old**

“How are you?” the cypress tree said to the pine.

“Well, I can't honestly say that I'm fine.”

“I have known you since we were mere sprouts.  
You can tell me what you're worried about!”

“I'm growing old, and my cones now have cones.  
They've left me here to be sad and alone.”

“I understand,” the cypress replied.  
“When I was young, I would reach for the sky!  
I dreamed of being the tallest around.  
Now I grow only to cover more ground.”

“I've got six rabbits, 8 squirrels, and a skunk.  
Not to mention this terrible pain in my trunk!”

“I've got the pain in my cypress knees.  
Don't get me started on losing my leaves!”

“Mine's a receding canopy.  
Next week's my first xylemoscopy.”

“I'm growing moss everywhere on my back,  
Thick in my branchpits and in every crack!”

“Bark on my trunk gets more cracked by the day,  
Wrinkled and crinkled and spotted and gray.”

The two disagreed on whose tale was more blue.  
All that it did was just waste CO2.  
They could live centuries more in despair.  
However they felt, they'd still become chairs.

*\*Senior Second Place – Kassandra M., Polk County*

### **The Spoonbill's Portrait**

Nearby the base of infamy on which flamingos stand  
Lives another, which, if seen, envelopes like a trance.  
Is there one else, as it flies in, that could be quite so grand,  
Yet equally as peaceful, as if by happenstance?  
And as it edges closer, by the water's thankless banks,  
It brings a sense of peace and awe, as it rejoins its ranks.

Once rejoined they search for shrimp, as they swiftly get to work,  
Searching with their rounded bills amidst the noonday light.  
Then glow a pair of fiendish eyes beneath the water's murk,  
Yet the birds don't squawk or seem concerned, nor do they take flight.  
For they are scarcely worried, more indifferent it seems,  
But then they promptly turn away as the gator's bright teeth gleam.

Still, they don't drift far away from his guard in the cove,  
As with him they have long employed a sort of armistice.  
The gator lingers distanced as they splash beneath mangroves,  
So, while they wade they can now rest amongst the water's mist.  
What more is there for them to do than view the sun's bright glare,  
And watch the fish try to evade the osprey's piercing stare?

Later on, the flock takes flight and contemplates the day.  
As they glide with bursts of fuchsia, like a sunset passing by,  
They reach above the foggy marsh to reside beyond the fray.  
Then below the stars they soon retire, swooping as they fly.  
Yet we still watch in wonder, which the birds seem to implore,  
As now this glad scene fades away, beneath those mossy shores.

*\*Senior Third Place – Emmerson R., Pinellas County*

### **Florida Nature Hike**

Beneath the Florida sun, a majestic hike unfolds,  
Through landscapes rich, where tales of nature are told.  
Palmettos whisper secrets in the gentle breeze,  
As Spanish moss dances among the many cypress trees.

Step by step carefully on trails where animals roam,  
In the heart of nature, you'll find a second home.  
Mangroves stand tall, guardians of the shore,  
As the fiddler crabs scuttle, a magical encore.

The air is alive with the calls of herons in flight,  
A symphony of nature, a harmonious delight.  
In the marshy expanse where turtles and alligators sun,  
Nature's artwork is painted in each and every one.

Through sawgrass prairies and wildflower blooms,  
Florida's wilderness is where adventure looms.  
Underneath the hardwoods, a canopy of green,  
Nature's cathedral is a tranquil, serene scene.

The chorus of frogs serenades you at dusk,  
As the sun dips low, leaving hues of musk.  
In the heart of Florida, where ecosystems intertwine,  
A nature hike becomes a journey, every moment so divine.

*\*Honorable Mention – Sophia M., St. Johns County*

### **A Symphony of Waves**

The whispers of the tide, a true rhythmic dance. A liquid trance.

The sunset colors twinkle on the water's horizon. Moonlight, dancing with grace over the ocean. Birds soar, a forever flight. A world where day meets night.

The depth hides stories untold, treasures in corals, silver and gold. Whales sing stories of centuries ago. Waves echo on a distant shore.

The salt breeze whispers a song. Seashells tell where they have been and gone. Sands move, footprints fade.

The endless horizon.

The heart of the ocean. A blue canvas for the wild and free.

The place I want to be.