



THE OWL'S HOOT

OFFICERS:

Official Newsletter of
The Ozarks Writers League 501(c)(3)
ozarkswritersleague.info
owlpresident@ozarkswritersleague.info
Newsletter Editor: Margarite Stever

President – Larry Wood
Vice President – Mary-Lane Kamberg
Secretary – Margarite Stever
Treasurer – Ron Smith

It's 2026 and time to pay your \$30.00 OWL dues. You may use the PayPal link on our website (ozarkswritersleague.info) or mail a check to:

OWL Treasurer, Ron Smith

2772 S. Loma Linda Dr.

Loma Linda, MO 64804



**Our Fall Conference will be held at the
Joplin Public Library on October 24, 2026**

Check out our new website at ozarkswritersleague.info

Youth Contest Director, Lia Wu, needs your help!

She's looking for theme ideas for the upcoming Youth Contest in three categories: Fiction, Non-fiction, and Poetry. Do you have a great theme idea? Please contact Lia at

youthwritingcontest@ozarkswritersleague.info

Last year's themes were:

Category 1: Fiction Short Story

Theme: THAT RINGS A BELL

Category 2: Non-fiction

Theme: WELL, THAT WAS EMBARRASSING

Category 3: Poetry

Theme: FORCES OF NATURE



OWL's 2026 Adult Writing Contest has Officially Begun!

Submission Deadlines:

Best Book of 2025 – August 1, 2026 (fiction, nonfiction, and children's)

Everything else – August 31, 2026

OWL members may enter as many of the adult categories as they wish for a flat fee of only \$15 (\$16 by PayPal)! You MUST be a member to enter any OWL adult contest.

Not a member yet? You are most welcome to join and pay your entry fee at the same time, by check for \$45, or \$46 via the PayPal button on our website ozarkswritersleague.info.

We sincerely thank all our contest sponsors. Every category you see is here because a generous person or group donated the prize money. There would be no writing contests without YOU! Sponsors are listed with their categories.

What You Get for Your \$15 Contest Entry Fee:

A chance at a cash prize!

You may enter as many categories as you like, making it much more affordable than others that charge you per category or include an expensive three-figure conference!

1. You get motivation to WRITE.
2. The categories and themes give you some guidance, so you're not staring clueless at a blank screen.
3. You can use your entries in other contests or submit them for publication afterwards.
4. Since we are a regional group and not a national one, your odds of winning something are higher!
5. Winning any prize, even an honorable mention, empowers you to use the brag-worthy accolade of "award-winning author" and a credit to add to your portfolio.

How to pay the contest entry fee:

You may pay online or via check.

Online: Use the PayPal button below.

- Please note: There is a \$1 charge to cover the PayPal processing fees.

Snail Mail: Send the appropriate fee to the address below:

- Adults: \$15 if you're a member, or \$45 to include membership and contest fee.
- High School STUDENTS: \$30 includes membership and contest entry fee.



OWL Treasurer
c/o Ron Smith
2772 S. Loma Linda Drive
Loma Linda, MO 64804

Please note: This address is ONLY for the contest/membership FEE. Contest entries sent to this address will be disqualified. Physical address and email address for contest submissions are listed further down below.

Writing Contest Rules

- Please no gratuitous or graphic violence or sex.
- Only one entry per category is allowed.
- You may only enter a manuscript in ONE category.
- All pieces need a title, except haiku. If your haiku has no title, use the first line as the title for identification purposes.
- Physical entries (Best Book) must be sent to the contest coordinator. Contest entries mailed to the treasurer or anyone else in OWL will be disqualified.
- All entries, with the exception of best published book, must be UNPUBLISHED at the time of submission and be the original work of the writer. (If your entry has appeared in any written form, such as in a blog, website (like Wattpad), or other electronic outlet, it is considered published and ineligible for entry in any OWL contest.)
- Please make sure book submissions are published in said year (2025). Any publication date other than 2025 is ineligible.
- All Book categories require an ISBN, or they will be disqualified.
- Submit all entries except PRINT versions of Best Fiction Book, Best Nonfiction Book, or Best Children's Picture Book entry categories via email to contestchair@ozarkswritersleague.info.
- Payment of the contest entry fee needs to be paid in order to enter the contest and will be verified by the Treasurer and Contest Chair.
- Once published at the opening of the contest period, these rules are fixed and final.

Special Rules: Best Book Categories

MAIL your Best Book Award Entries to the contest coordinator. We need books by August 1.

Mail to:

Linda Runnebaum

821 6th Street

Boonville, MO 65233

Manuscript Formatting Guidelines

- **TITLE:** Be sure to give your piece a title! First line can serve as the title for haikus.
- **WORD COUNT:** The title does not count toward your word count.
- **FILE TYPE:** All files EXCEPT for published Best Book (fiction, nonfiction, children's) must be in some normal file type (like .rtf, doc, docx, or .docs. pdf format will also be accepted, as once work is submitted, no changes are made).
- **STANDARD FORMATTING:** Use standard submission format and rules: Times New Roman, 12-point, double-spaced (except for poetry), and one-inch margins.
- **SPECIFICATION:** Put the contest ID and word count flush left on the header line. Tab over and center "Title" of work. Example: N2 Memoir, 1200 words (left margin), Story Title (centered). Categories such as haiku, poetry, and first page of a WIP, do not need a word count.
- **HEADER:** If your entry is more than one page long, you should have page numbers on the right.
- **EBOOKS:** Ebook entry for Best Published Fiction Book, Best Published Nonfiction Book, and/or Best Published Children's Picture Book must be attached to an email as either .PDF, .doc, .docx, .mobi or .epub formats. Full author information must be in the body of the email.
- **FILE ATTACHMENTS:** Please do not put any author identification details within the attached file submissions. Each must have the contest ID number (Like B1, S7) and the TITLE.

Submitting Electronic Entries

- The BODY of your email needs to have FULL AUTHOR CONTACT information and SUBMISSION INFORMATION. Example:

- Name
- Pseudonym, if applicable
- Mailing Address
- Phone
- Email
- Submission ID and story title



EXAMPLES:

- B1 My Amazing First Page
- N1 Remembering Momma

YOUR FILES MUST INCLUDE YOUR STORY TITLE IN THE FILENAME.

- EXAMPLE: Filename: N2 My Trip to Australia
- Suggestion: Put all your contest files into a folder on your computer and write the file names as follows: Contest ID, title. Example: “P1 Mountain Poem.”
- All entries, with the exception of books, should be emailed to contestchair@ozarkswritersleague.info

The Rest of the Fine Print

Neither OWL nor the Contest Coordinator are responsible for misdirected or lost entries. You will receive an email to confirm receipt.

No electronic entries will be returned, and all will be deleted after judging is final.

Those entering Best Book categories may have the book returned if a self-addressed envelope AND postage is sent with the entry. Otherwise, they will be donated.

Qualified judges will conduct blind judging.

Judges and sponsors, of OWL contests, may not enter the category they judge or sponsor, but may enter other categories. If in the case of a “group or organization” sponsoring a category, only the person or persons responsible for submitting the sponsorship money may not enter the particular category they sponsor. And any group member volunteering to judge may NOT enter a category they are judging.

First Place winners may not enter that submission in any future OWL writing contest.



OWL Adult Writing Contest Categories

Stories (Fiction)



S1 – Humorous Short Story

- Go Ahead, make me laugh but do it fast!
- Limit: 3,000 words
- Sponsor: Russell Gayer
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

S2 – Flash Fiction Story (Exactly 100 words)

- Tell a complete story with a beginning, middle, and end inspired by the photo prompt in precisely 100 words.
- Limit: Exactly 100 words
- Sponsors: Rochelle Wisoff-Fields and Jan Fields
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

S3 – Inspirational Romance Story

- Write an inspirational romance, set in any time period. Story must have the essentials of a romance, including a Happily Ever After ending.
- Limit: 2,000 words
- Sponsor: Diane Yates
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

S4 – “I didn’t see that coming!” O. Henry-Style Story

- Write a story that concludes with a “Wow, I didn’t see that coming” ending. Check out O. Henry’s “The Gift of the Magi” for inspiration.
- Limit: 2,500 words
- Sponsor: eMerge Magazine
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

S5 – Western Short Story

- Write a Western short story with a beginning, middle, and end. Must be set in America, on the frontier before 1900.
- Limit: 3,000 words
- Sponsor: Reneé La Viness
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10

S6 – Historical Fiction

- Write a historical tale set before 1970 with an ordinary person (your fictionalized character) reacting to a historical event or encountering a well-known person from that time period. For example: A boy and his dog watch tea thrown into Boston Harbor or a little girl encounters Sitting Bull at a Wild West show.
- Limit: 2,000 words
- Sponsor: Anonymous
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

S7 – The Family Reunion

- Write a humorous invitation to your family reunion using the following words: Horsefly, Whiplash, Tango, Chicken soup, Gladiator, Firmament
- Limit: 500 words
- Sponsors: Richard and Bonnie Tesh
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$1

S8 – Surprisingly Funny Paranormal Short Story

- Make it paranormal...and make it FUNNY. Your story might also be a little absurd, spooky, or weird, and that's fine. Just be sure it makes readers laugh. Your tale must be a full story with character development and a plot.
- Limit: 3,000 words
- Sponsor: Ronda Del Boccio
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

S9 – Romance Short Story

- Write a story about finding unexpected romance on a planned adventure, whether it's fishing on a local pond or skiing in the Swiss Alps. There's a whole world out there. Have fun.
- Limit: 2,000 words
- Sponsor: Anonymous
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

S10 – Juvenile Short Story-Fiction

- A fictional story targeted toward young readers ages 9–12. The subject matter may be informative but should also be entertaining and feature themes of interest to youth.
- Limit: 2,500 words
- Sponsor: eMerge Magazine
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20, HM (3) – \$10

S11 – A Spoof About Writing

- In no more than 500 words, begin story with “A funny thing...” and end with “I wrote it”. Judging will be based on humor and creativity.
- Limit: 500 words
- Sponsor: Michael Don Fess
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, and 3rd Place – \$20

S12 – Humorous Memoir

- Write a short story of a humorous memoir.
- Limit: 3,000 words
- Sponsor: Rose Heaser
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10



S13 – Whodunit?

- Write a murder mystery. Can be any genre...crime, paranormal, cozy, historical, fantasy, etc.
- Limit: 2,000 words
- Sponsor: Linda Runnebaum
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$30, 2nd Place – \$20, 3rd Place – \$10

S14 Go Team Writers!

- Write a motivational speech given at a writer's conference by a former sports coach who thinks the audience of writers contains his old sports team. Must contain at least 12 sports clichés put into a writing context. Make me laugh before I start to bang my head on the table.
- Limit: Exactly 444 words
- Sponsor: Kelly Reddin
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$40, 2nd Place – \$25, 3rd Place – \$10

S15 – Gene Andereck Short Story

- About Gene Andereck: Gene Andereck was a Springfield attorney and novelist who died in Republic, MO, in 2004. He was an avid OWL member for many years, savoring the friendships and mentorships found within its diverse membership. As an author, most of Gene's novels were set in the Northwoods and Gunflint Trail area of Minnesota. These adventure books of Indian boys, fur trappers and voyagers were the inspiration for his best-known work, Trial at Grand Marais, now in its second printing.
- Prompt: The young cowboy dropped his bag on the railroad platform and loosened the cinches on his saddle. After slipping the bridle over the old mare's ears, he slapped her on the backside, sending her on the familiar journey home.
- The boy hurried to get his saddle onto the baggage car as the engineer began building steam. Dusk was falling when the 20-year-old boarded the westbound train to Kansas City, then on to a ranch job he'd been offered in Wyoming.
- The year was 1916, a time when the "Old West" had already moved on from Missouri. He'd heard the tales of cowboys and cattle ranches, roundups, and rodeos. And today, the journey of a lifetime and a series of adventures lay ahead.
- Criteria:
 - Fiction
 - Focus on interactions, feelings and new experiences
 - Flexibility to change or enhance history for literary effect
- Limit: 1,200 words or less
- Sponsor: Kim Andereck of San Antonio, TX (Gene's son)
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$300, 2nd Place – \$200, 3rd Place – \$100



S16 – Women's Fiction

- IN HONOR OF KIMBERLY PENNELL OF PEN-L PRESS. Your piece should include a woman's emotional journey of self-discovery as she navigates her world through a day, month, or lifetime. The protagonist's name must be Kim or Kimberly.
- Limit: 2,500 words
- Sponsor: Brenda Clem Black
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

Nonfiction

N1 – Memoir & Creative Nonfiction

- An interesting true story or essay about something you have experienced or witnessed.
- Limit: 3,000 words
- Sponsor: Writers Guild of Arkansas
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

N2 – Travel Article

- Take me somewhere I've never been or make me want to go back. Can be about any destination, local or worldwide.
- Limit: 1,200 words
- Sponsor: Larry Wood
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10

N3 – Hometown Newspaper Column

- Write a nostalgic article about the Ozarks that is suitable for a newspaper column. The article should have a headline (title) and give your column a name.
- Limit: 500–1,000 words
- Sponsor: Lonnie Whitaker
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10

N4 – Creative Nonfiction: My Favorite Hobby

- Through your prose, make me want to take up your hobby, whether it's golf, gardening, cooking, sewing, or tinkering on car engines. Make me see it, feel it, taste it, smell it, or hear it, whatever is appropriate to your hobby.
- Limit: 1,000 words
- Sponsor: Linda Apple
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10

N5 – Ozarks Article

- Write an article about some aspect of the Ozarks. It can be historical, travel related, or a profile of an interesting person, as long as it pertains to the Ozarks.
- Limit: 1,200 words
- Sponsor: Larry Wood
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

N6 – Growing up rural

- Write a personal experience essay about growing up in a rural area.
- Limit: 1,200 words
- Sponsor: Carolyn Hall
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10



N7 – Creative non-Fiction: what i left behind

- Write a personal experience of leaving home for college or a new job. Tell about your fear or anxiety and excitement. Talk about the family and friends you missed, the food from home you couldn't get and the different climate. Tell who you wrote and called. Were you able to take a pet? Make me wonder if you stayed.
- Limit: 1,500 words
- Sponsor: Julie James
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10

N8 – travel tales SS: adventures i didn't sign up for

- Every trip has its surprises – the detours, the mishaps, the wrong turns, the “this wasn't in the brochure” moments. I want the stories that went sideways and made you laugh later (even if you didn't laugh at the time). Humor required.
- Limit: 3,000 words
- Sponsor: Rose Heaser
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10

Poetry

P1 – Haiku

- Set a vivid scene while making me feel something. Five-seven-five format.
- Limit: 17 syllables
- Sponsor: Jan Morrill Vanek
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10

P2 – Magical ozarks moments

- Bring a magical Ozarks moment to life in 300 words or less of poetry or prose.
- Limit: 300 words
- Sponsor: Ozarks Writers League
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

P3 – Legacies

- This category honors poems that explore what is passed down through family, history, place, culture, memory, or time itself. Poets are invited to examine inheritance in its many forms: tangible or intangible, cherished or burdensome, chosen or unavoidable. Subjects may include ancestors, generational stories, letters, objects, traditions, land, war and peace, migration, language, identity, or the shaping forces that travel from one life into another.
- -All forms welcome
- -All entries will be eligible for publication in eMerge
- -All prize winners will be featured on eMerge social media posts
- -The top three will be considered for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize
- Limit: Max line limit – 30 lines
- Sponsor: eMerge Magazine
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20



Books

B1 – Best first page of a fiction book in progress

- Share the first page of your work in progress and be sure to draw us into the story. You can start near the top of the page. Be sure to give the book a title.
- Limit: 1 page (double-spaced, 12 pt, Times)
- Sponsor: Margarite Stever and Bonnie Tesh
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$25, 2nd Place – \$15, 3rd Place – \$10

B2 – best first chapter of a fiction book in progress

- Share the first chapter of your work in progress. Be sure to give the book a title and include a short synopsis, resembling the back blurb of a book that tells the main characters and conflict.
- Limit: First chapter, NOT TO EXCEED 20 pages (double-spaced, 12 pt, Times)
- Sponsor: Penny Richards
- Prizes: 1st Place – \$50, 2nd Place – \$30, 3rd Place – \$20

B3 – best published fiction book of 2025

- Best fictional book in hardcover, paperback or ebook published during the calendar year of 2025 (book must show a copyright date of 2025 and have an ISBN).
- Sponsor: Billie Holladay Skelley
- 1 prize of \$100

B4 – best published non-fiction book of 2025

- Best nonfiction book in hardcover, paperback or ebook published during the calendar year of 2025 (book must show a copyright date of 2025 and have an ISBN).
- Sponsor: Veda Boyd Jones
- 1 prize of \$100

B5 – best published children's picture book of 2025

- Best children's picture book in hardcover, paperback or ebook published during the calendar year of 2025 (book must show a copyright date of 2025 and have an ISBN).
- Sponsor: Solander Press
- 1 prize of \$100

Once again: SUBMISSION DEADLINES:

Best Book: August 1, 2026

Everything else: August 31, 2026

Happy Writing... and Good luck!

**OWL is in need of a Social Media
Chairperson and a Fundraising
Chairperson. If interested, please see a
board member. We would love to have
you join us!**



We had a great time at the OWL 2026 Spring Conference! Here are a few photos.



