

PROGRAM TITLE: Dover Public Library's Poetry Contest

Why? I decided to organize a poetry contest, for kids in grades k-12, as a way to broaden the community's perspectives of our library functions, and to build stronger working relationships with our local school librarians. In our first year we received 300 entries, and this year we have 400.

When? I like to have the contest going on during April which is National Poetry Month. I also research what is going on in the schools and the community during that time period so as not to conflict with other events.

How? The first year of organization was obviously the most difficult, but I learned from my mistakes and years 2 and 3 have been easier.

Publicity: I send publicity to the local papers, local radio stations, school newsletters, and to school administration for morning announcements. I also create signs which are posted at all the schools and in our library. I also draft a letter to teachers, and ask the school librarians to distribute them to appropriate teachers.

Judges: I have 5 judges that evaluate 6 grades categories: K-2, 3&4, 5&6, 7&8, 9&10, and 11&12. We have the fewest entries in the upper grades so one judge looks at 9-12. I located volunteer judges by asking community members and school librarians if they knew of qualified people. I have had no problems finding qualified judges that are thrilled with the project and are eager to donate their time. The New Hampshire Poetry Society has also been a great help, and a good place to find poets in your area.

Prizes: We award prizes 3 deep in each category, and also award an honorable mention. The first year I obtained donations from local businesses for all prizes, and in subsequent years our Friends of the Library group has budgeted money for the prizes. I also create certificates for all winners.

Evening of Poetry: We have an Evening of Poetry as our final wrap event. This event has proved to be extremely popular and has drawn crowds of 175 people. We invite any student who has submitted a poem, whether it won a prize or not, to come and share their poem with the group. This is a purely volunteer arrangement and we usually have about 40 readers. Many of the people that attend the event are not our regular patrons and this is a wonderful way to introduce them to our library. Many of our local school librarians volunteer to help at this event as we need several people to help with food, organization, etc. We have invited the press to this event, and an article with pictures was included in the paper.

Winning Poems: I create a booklet of the winning poems that I present to the students. We unfortunately get too many entries to include all the poems in the booklet. Winning poems are also published in our local free paper, in our library newsletter, as well as on our website.

Cost: I do not have an exact figure, but most of the expense comes from printing entry forms, signs, letters, prizes, and food for the final event. Many of these items could be obtained through donations from local businesses. All of the people who help with the contest, outside of the library, are volunteers.

Overall the contest has been a big success for us and we have patrons asking us for information each year before the contest even starts. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me:

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