

Poetry & Music Project 24/25 Call for Submissions

Students in grades K-12 from Nebraska and Iowa are invited to submit works of poetry on the theme of Neighborhood. Selected poems will be set to music and premiered during a public concert in May, 2025.

Theme for Poetry Submissions: My Neighborhood

The Opera Omaha Poetry & Music Project is a statewide program run in partnership with the Nebraska Writers Collective to amplify the voices of youth poets, both urban and rural, across Nebraska and Iowa. Last year, over a hundred poems were submitted to the Poetry & Music Project. These poems varied in topic, but one thing was very plain to see and that is the young writers in our region have both immense talent and unique perspectives.

This year, we want to see poems that explore how even though we all may be Nebraskans or Iowans, where we come from still has a profound effect on who we are. We want to see poems about your neighborhood, we want you to think deeply about what community means to you and how it is formed. We know that it doesn't matter if you grew up in Beatrice or Benson, McCook or Millard, Cedar Bluffs or Council Bluffs, we are only ever a collection of the places that we reside in, and our stories of these places help paint the full picture of what it means to be from the Midwest.

If you need inspiration, check out the project prompts.

Submission Guidelines

- Open to All K-12 Students in Nebraska and Iowa
- Students may only submit one (1) poem
- All work must be original
- Poems should connect to the project theme
- Poems should be in Google Doc or Word file format
- Poems should use Times New Roman, Helvetica, or Arial font
- Poems may be in any structure, but may not be more than 250 words or 1 page in length
- Poem submissions should not include images
- Poems can be submitted via the online submission form
- Poem Submission Deadline: November 30, 2024

Submission Instructions

Poems may be submitted via the online form on operaomaha.org/poetry

Submission Deadline: Thursday, November 30, 2024

For More Information Visit [OPERAOMAHA.ORG/POETRY](https://operaomaha.org/poetry)

Opera Omaha Poetry & Music Project 24/25 | My Neighborhood

Prompts

The following prompts will help you explore your neighborhood and hopefully inspire you to write something that a composer can bring to life and shine light on wherever it is that you call home.

The People

A community is a group of people living in the same place and having common experiences. We want you to bring the people of your community alive. Make a list of all the people that come to mind when you think about "Your Neighborhood" even if you don't know them that well. Who is well known and who isn't? How do these people interact with you on the day to day? How are these people the same as you and how are they different? Explore all of these things and share the stories of the people in your vicinity and share their stories.

If you get stuck maybe look at this poem "[Neighbors](#)" by James Crews in which the poet chronicles all of the people he is likely to encounter while talking a stroll through his community. Think about the people in your neighborhood and write a little about what you know about them. Explore how these people are the same and how they are different or how they fit or don't fit into your neighborhood. Tell the good, bad, strange, and otherwise funny things that you notice about these people.

Or consider "[Neighbours](#)" by Benjamin Zephaniah where he compares and contrasts what people think about him when they first see him and the things that people come to understand once they get to know him. Who is unlike you in your neighborhood? How are they unlike you? What is something you previously thought about them that you no longer believe? What is something that you think people would miss about this person upon meeting them? Set up a comparing and contrasting poem for one or multiple people around you.

The Places

One of the things that makes your neighborhood distinguishable, regardless of how big or small, is the landmarks. The corners, and parks, and playgrounds, and stores you grew up going to largely shape who you are and are full of nostalgia because many of them have been around for longer than we have been. Think about all the places you hang out or that people congregate in your neighborhood. Write a poem that is a love letter to these places. You can share their history or what they mean to you and your family/friends. You can use your own specific memories to create a timeline of this place or just pick one specific moment to write about but make sure you describe the space and its meaning in as much detail as possible.

If you need inspiration check out "[Good Hotdogs](#)" by Sandra Cisneros. She vividly remembers her favorite hotdog shop in town and how she would frequent it as often as possible. She describes the hot dog in detail but also, she describes the shop and how this food memory still resonates with her all those years later. Do you have a favorite restaurant? Or Snack shop? Or vending machine? Or place to take your food to eat it? Write a "five senses" poem using all five senses to describe what this place looks, feels, smells, tastes, and sounds like.

Or perhaps this "[What It Looks Like To Us and the Words We Use](#)" by U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limon which explores not just an individual place but rather the open space we occupy. Think of the nature around your neighborhood; think of the trees, the grass, the parks, the skies, the clouds, all thing things that occupy this place. Think about these things influence how your neighborhood looks or how you've interacted with your space. Explore what is missing or how the passage of time changes these things from season to season or year to year.

The Things

Sometimes our neighborhoods can feel like they are too big to navigate and sometimes they are too small, and we want bigger adventures. We take souvenirs home from vacation and put them on our shelves to remind us of these times. Think of your neighborhood like a vacation, step outside how you see it every day and think about the things someone would want to collect from it if they came to visit for the first time. What item or items best represent where you are from? Would it be a souvenir cup? A random rock? A trinket from a store that you know well? Pick an item and write a poem from its perspective of your neighborhood. Think about how this object will travel to see new places but it will always remember where it came from.

The poem "[POT \(MUSEUM ARCHIVE\)](#)" from Shamshad Khan describes a piece of pottery in a museum and the author tries to explore its back story and how it must have gotten from wherever it was from to here. She uses the pot to describe so many people's stories of relocation and how moving from place to place changes us. If you can't decide what to write, pick something from your neighborhood and explore how it got there like Shamshad does in this poem.

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About the Poetry & Music Project

The Opera Omaha Poetry & Music Project is a statewide program run in partnership with the Nebraska Writers Collective. Now in its 8th year, the Poetry & Music Project connects student writers and their words with composers to create original scores and explore the connections between poetry and music. Students are invited to submit poems on the project, and free Poetry & Music writing workshops are available in the fall. Professional composers select poems that move them from a robust collection of writing submitted by young writers in grades K-12 and create original music inspired by the selected poems. This program culminates in public performance of the selected poems -now songs- with the poets, their families, and community partners in attendance so they can see the fruits of labor that come from this season long project.

Poetry Book

All submitted poems will be printed in the Poetry & Music Project book which will be distributed to all poets, teachers, concert audience, and available online. The Poetry & Music Project book is also part of Omaha Public Library's collection.

Writing Workshops

Opera Omaha and Nebraska Writers Collective offer FREE writing workshops focused on adding musicality to students' writing. Facilitated by Nebraska Writers Collective Teaching Artists, these workshops aim to help participants understand the connection between poems and songs. These workshops cover a variety of poetical devices such as Alliteration, Assonance, Consonance, Anaphora and others and show how these devices make a piece of writing more sonically pleasing. The workshops add an additional layer of understanding for students who are interested in participating in the Poetry and Music Project. Workshops can be adapted to various classrooms but are best for students in 4th grade and above. **Teachers interested in scheduling a workshop can register at operaomaha.org/poetry**

For More Information

Visit: operaomaha.org/poetry

Email: Engagement@operaomaha.org

Call: 402.346.7372 x400