



69th Annual Otero Arts Festival Creative Writing Winners, 2025

Overall Best Work, Senior

- **Drayton Grasmick** - *Gambling the World Away* - Grade: 12, Essay - Rocky Ford Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas

Overall Best Work, Junior

- **Violet Thorn** - *I Am* - Grade: 8, Poem - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford

Otero College Creative Writing Scholarship

- **David Pentlicki** - *Waltz of Life, The Catalyst, Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Days* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas

Otero College Creative Writing Scholarship Alternate

- **Presley Manchego** - *Grandma's House, How To Play Your Golf Clubs, A Loving Poem* - Fowler Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower

Creative Books

Best Overall Book

- **Maria Lavin** - *Days of Life in a Week* - La Junta Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson

Most Original Book

- **Josslyn Marx** - *Clean Up Bentley* - La Junta Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson

Most Creative Book

- **Jaqueline Becerra** - *Poor Elvis* - La Junta Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Julie Meiklejohn

Best Storyline Book

- **Madalyn DePriest** - *Seasons Will Change* - Rocky Ford Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas

Honorable Mention Book

- **Donavyn West** - *An Ode to Livestock* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas

Senior Portfolio

- **1st place: David Pentlicki** - *Waltz of Life, The Catalyst, Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Days* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas
- **2nd place: Presley Manchego** - *Grandma's House, How To Play Your Golf Clubs, A Loving Poem* - Fowler Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower
- **3rd place: Meadow Holmquist** - *Pippy, Hanna, Is Life Like A Book?* - Fowler Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower
- **4th place: Nicolas Higgs** - *The Shot, Who In My Life Is My Hero, The Kid That Shocked Them All* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas
- **Honorable Mention: Rylee Rodriguez** - *Tina, Cyberbullying, Sara* - Fowler Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower

7th Grade Poetry

- **1st place: Giovan Figurelli** - *Fading Footsteps* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Veronica Leitner
- **2nd place: Myraya Vigil** - *Whispers in the Quiet Square* - Rocky Ford Junior Senior High School - Teacher: Tamara Mamede
- **3rd place: Sophia Coffman** - *Whom I Love* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Veronica Leitner
- **Honorable Mention: Julissa Maya** - *The Ancient Tree* - Rocky Ford Junior Senior High School - Teacher: Tamara Mamede
- **Honorable Mention: Anthony Lujan** - *Freedom* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **Honorable Mention: Kenzee Wright** - *Humanity* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford

8th Grade Poetry

- **1st place: Violet Thorn** - *I Am* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **2nd place: Maximiliano Flores** - *The Art of Nothingness* - Rocky Ford Junior Senior High School - Teacher: Tamara Mamede
- **3rd place: Ariel Marquez** - *Hands of Love* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Kellie Buhr
- **Honorable Mention: Kolbi Engebrecht** - *Warmth in Winter* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Kellie Buhr
- **Honorable Mention: Gregorio Diaz** - *Summer Ocean* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Veronica Leitner
- **Honorable Mention: Bella Martinez** - *Me and Father Crow* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Veronica Leitner

9th Grade Poetry

- **1st place:** Kayla Ybarra - *Does Blood Equal Family* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School
- **2nd place:** Ava Camacho - *Blanket* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **3rd place:** Amani Gallegos - *To be Loved* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **Honorable Mention:** Lyrika Gallegos - *Heavy Hearted* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **Honorable Mention:** Michael Trujillo - *Repeat* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **Honorable Mention:** Nate Nesselhuf - *Flying* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland

10th Grade Poetry

- **1st place:** Savannah Maes-Kiefer - *Freedom* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **2nd place:** Elijah Weir - *Thoughts of the Night* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **3rd place:** Danner Carroll - *Ode to the Mustard Seed* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **Honorable Mention:** Syriah Alvarez - *The Difference Between Love and Anger* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **Honorable Mention:** Kadin Huckaby - *Lover's Death* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **Honorable Mention:** Layton Sharon - *Hunting* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower

11th Grade Poetry

- **1st place:** Adrianna Torres - *The Flicker of Hope* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **2nd place:** Santos Nunez - *The Longest Search* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **3rd place:** Nathaniel Ritter - *Is* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **Honorable Mention:** Silas Moreno - *OG Bus Ride* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **Honorable Mention:** Emily Malec - *Balance* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **Honorable Mention:** Jasiah Smith - *Phantom Embrace* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas

12th Grade Poetry

- **1st place:** Sawyer Menz - *Fallen* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jea Viescas
- **2nd place:** Zoey Montoya - *The Mature* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Julie Meiklejohn
- **3rd place:** Sadie Buhr - *Falling In Love* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Julie Meiklejohn
- **Honorable Mention:** Drayton Grasmick - *The Breeze* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Baejae Viescas
- **Honorable Mention:** Joshua Zanao - *IS IT TO LATE?* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **Honorable Mention:** Sadie Hearington - *Come on In* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Julie Meiklejohn

7th Grade Essay

- **1st place:** Lucy Freeland - *The 1793 Outbreak of Yellow Fever* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **2nd place:** Aubrey Tristan - *Covid-19* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford

8th Grade Essay

- **1st place:** Kolbi Engebrecht - *I Am No Longer* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Kellie Buhr
- **2nd place:** Audriana Barela - *The Rocky Ford Fair* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Kellie Buhr
- **3rd place:** Gianna Ayala - *Backstage Buzz* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School
- **Honorable Mention:** Elizabeth Strieter - *Christmas Time* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **Honorable Mention:** Jarae Aragon - *Time is Precious* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Kellie Buhr
- **Honorable Mention:** Shelby Klein - *First Heartbreak* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Kellie Buhr

9th Grade Essay

- **1st place:** Adrianna Goodwin - *Animal Testing* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **2nd place:** Carrington Tristan - *Is AI Ethical?* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School
- **3rd place:** Baylee Buford - *Untitled* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **Honorable Mention:** Bronson Damgaard - *Best Baseball Player of All Time* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland

- **Honorable Mention:** Hilario Alvarez - *Who is the Best NBA Player of All Time* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **Honorable Mention:** Holly Jackson - *Snow White* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland

10th Grade Essay

- **1st place:** David Diaz - *Growing Up* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **2nd place:** Landon Johnson - *Literary Analysis on The Medicine Bag* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower
- **3rd place:** Layton Sharon - *Invention of Shoes* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower
- **Honorable Mention:** Elena Vostrejs - *The Unexpected Turn of Skyrim* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **Honorable Mention:** Elijah Pruett - *Argumentative Essay* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower
- **Honorable Mention:** Wade Clemmensen - *Cars* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower

11th Grade Essay

- **1st place:** Silas Moreno - *Downfall of Jeffery Epstein* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Mrs. Robinson
- **2nd place:** Madelyn Bamber - *The Revolution - A Halftime Show* - Swink High School - Teacher: Lisa Bamber
- **3rd place:** Sophia Reger - *The Pressure to Achieve Academic Success* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **Honorable Mention:** Nathaniel Ritter - *Why THC Should Be Federally Decriminalized* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **Honorable Mention:** Yamani Johnson - *To Live and Learn* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **Honorable Mention:** Calvin Hill - *The Murder of Tupac* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson

12th Grade Essays

- **1st place:** Sawyer Menz - *Do Not Challenge: Systemic Issues in "The Lottery"* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jea Viescas
- **2nd place:** Josiah Chavez - *Highs to Lows* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **3rd place:** Livia Smith - *The Mischief of the Rocky Ford Fair* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Julie Meiklejohn

- **Honorable Mention:** Drayton Grasmick - *My Journey with the Trumpet* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Baejae Viescas
- **Honorable Mention:** Christopher Baca Barela - *Buster* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Baejae Viescas
- **Honorable Mention:** Sadie Buhr - *Rise of Vaping* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Julie Meiklejohn

7th Grade Short Stories

- **1st place:** Kenzee Wright - *Winter in Boston* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **2nd place:** Kaiden Schroeder - *Mercer, the God of Nightmares* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **3rd place:** Hunter Ayers - *Christmas* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **Honorable Mention:** Nick Rusler - *Stoeger* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **Honorable Mention:** Leila True - *Kosher - Goddess of Pickles* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **Honorable Mention:** Noah Ballard - *Winter* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **Honorable Mention:** Grady Woods - *Slidingus - The God of Sliding* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford

8th Grade Short Stories

- **1st place:** Allie Johnson - *Raine, the Goddess of Precipitation* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **2nd place:** Joshua Larson - *Fisheus* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **3rd place:** Ashlynn Bonjour - *Ember - Goddess of Fire* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **Honorable Mention:** Taten Phillips - *Chroclodyte* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **Honorable Mention:** Trenton Bonjour - *God of Baseball* - Fowler Jr./Sr. High School - Teacher: Yulissa Crawford
- **Honorable Mention:** Bella Martinez - *The Search for Baba* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Veronica Leitner

9th Grade Short Stories

- **1st place:** Jada Garcia - *Never Judge a Book by Its Cover* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes

- **2nd place:** Jaelee Trujillo - *Through the Storm* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **3rd place:** Dyego Torres - *Unlived Dreams* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes

10th Grade Short Stories

- **1st place:** Austin Boone - *Maus Fete* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **2nd place:** Syriah Alvarez - *I Wish I Had Spent More Time With Him* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland
- **3rd place:** Layton Sharon - *Stranded* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower
- **Honorable Mention:** Claireanna Martin - *Knife to the Back... Well, Stomach* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower
- **Honorable Mention:** Wade Clemmensen - *Mr. Knox* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower
- **Honorable Mention:** Jose Chavez - *Happiness?* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Emily Moreland

11th Grade Short Stories

- **1st place:** Xander Cushman - *The Legend of Castle Morne* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **2nd place:** Bella Ortiz - *The Chase* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas
- **3rd place:** Tyler Fehrenbach - *The Casino* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Baejae Viescas
- **Honorable Mention:** Santos Nunez - *Buried in Darkness* - La Junta Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Keri Robinson
- **Honorable Mention:** Haylee Encinias - *World War 3* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas
- **Honorable Mention:** Talula Wordell - *Mountain Range* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas

12th Grade Short Stories

- **1st place:** Drayton Grasmick - *Gambling the World Away* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Baejae Viescas
- **2nd place:** Sawyer Menz - *Graduation* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Bea Jae Viescas
- **3rd place:** Gabrielle Whisnan - *The Lato's* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower
- **Honorable Mention:** Christopher Baca Barela - *The Secret of the Barela House* - Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Baejae Viescas

- **Honorable Mention:** Emilia Torres - *The Enchanted Book* - Manzanola Jr/Sr High School - Teacher: Alanna Holmes
- **Honorable Mention:** Trent Rook - *The Story* - Fowler Sr/Jr High School - Teacher: Paige Lower