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Long Middle Student Named Finalist in International Poetry Competition

Sharice Hatton, a student at Long Middle School, was selected as a finalist in the 15th Annual River of Words Youth Environmental Poetry and Art Awards, a prestigious international student contest. About 100 poems and artworks from both U.S. and international entries are selected as finalists each year.

Poetry submissions are judged by River of Words co-founders Robert Haas, who served as U.S. Poet Laureate from 1995-1997, and writer Pamela Michael. The contest is designed to help youth explore the natural and cultural history of the place they live, and to express, through poetry and art, what they discover. All winners receive ribbons, books and/or art supplies, t-shirts and other prizes. Winners were announced at a gala at the Library of Congress in April.

Sharice was selected as a finalist for her poem *Just Be Brave*. The poem was written as part of her work during a Fall 2009 in-classroom program on *Self-Discovery through the Visual and Poetic Arts* led by St. Louis Poetry Center poet Susan Grigsby in partnership with Jonathan Loesch, a visual arts specialist at Long Middle, and the Saint Louis Art Museum. The residency was made possible by Interchange, a collaborative program of COCA that partners St. Louis Public School classroom teachers with teaching artists in the community to engage students and improve learning in and through the arts.

Just Be Brave
by Sharice Hatton

I am brave,
I write poetry.

I don't care
if anyone
makes fun of what I write.

I'm not afraid,
I'm brave.

I speak the truth.

I'm not like you.

I write poetry.
You fight people.

You solve your problems
by fighting.

I solve mine
by writing.

You listen.
I learn.

You reach.
I'll teach.

Just be brave,
like me.