

Contest Judging Information

Write Michigan Short Story Contest

Presented by Kent District Library and Schuler Books

Category:

- Adult: ages 18 and older**
 - Teen: age 13-17 years old**
 - Youth: ages 12 and under**
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Judging Criteria:

1. Characterization

Does the author create believable, memorable characters with the uniqueness, complexity, and individuality of real people? Do you respond to the characters either positive or negatively? Does the main character respond to and influence events? Does the dialogue contribute to rich, vivid, unique characterization?

Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:

10 points: The author fully and richly develops characters through description, dialogue, and action and does not rely on telling you about the character.

5 points: Characters are not deeply developed through detail or dialogue. At times the author reverts to "telling" you about the character as opposed to "showing" the character through detail, action and dialogue.

1 point: Characters are undeveloped puppets going through the motions and either do not change or change without motivation. Some may be stereotypes and either all good or all bad.

2. Plot

Has the author constructed a clear, convincing and compelling storyline with a recognizable arc of conflict, crisis and resolution? Are obstacles to be overcome sufficiently challenging to the protagonists? Do you feel tension mounting in the story? Is the resolution innovative, credible and authentic?

Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:

10 points: The story contains enough creative development to maintain interest. Even with multiple story lines or plot twists, all pieces were woven together into a single whole.

5 points: The story is interesting and doesn't feel contrived but lacks sufficient unique twists to lift it above the level of average.

1 point: The storyline is either difficult to follow, or simplistic and predictable. Pacing is poor and the text is padded with irrelevant material.

3. Theme

Does the story contain a central or dominating theme? Does the author make this idea concrete through the characters and their actions? How well is the message integrated into the story? Is the story an agenda-driven platform?

Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:

10 points: The story's message rises naturally out of the plot and characters. The message may be subtle or overt, but either way it is interwoven into the story so that neither plot nor characters nor theme could exist without the other.

5 points: The theme is present but not thoroughly integrated into the other elements of the story, such as plot and characters.

1 point: After reading the story, you aren't sure what the author intended to communicate, or recognize a message that isn't consistent throughout.

4. Setting and Atmosphere

Are historical and geographic details sufficiently and accurately developed to give the story realistic or appropriate atmosphere and setting? Can you visualize the places being described? Does the story contain anachronisms?

Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:

10 points: The author vividly and accurately describes the setting so you are fully immersed in the time and place and action. The setting is an integral part of the story and contributes to the mood and emotions of the characters.

5 points: The story conveys an adequate sense of place, but the setting is not an integral part of the story. The setting could be changed without changing the story.

1 point: The physical setting is seldom described so you have little sense of time and place. The story includes descriptions that are inaccurate in terms of time and place. Conversely, the author gives so much time and attention to setting that you lose track of the story in the detail.

5. Mechanics

Are there errors present in spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and punctuation? Are words used incorrectly? Do typographical errors mar your enjoyment of the story?

Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:

10 points: The vocabulary fits and enhances your understanding of each character, as well as the setting. Language and grammar are authentic. Reading the story is a pleasure.

5 points: Vocabulary is acceptable but does not serve to make the story unique. There are a few, but not many, errors.

1 point: The story is poorly written with limited vocabulary. Words are overused or used incorrectly, making the story difficult to read. The story contains spelling, grammatical and/or typographical errors.

6. Writing Quality

Does the quality of the author's prose and deftness in handling point-of-view enhance the story? Do specific details appeal to your senses and hold your attention? Does the author use precise, active verbs? Does the rhythm of the prose enhance the meaning? Are metaphors and similes skillfully employed?

Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:

10 points: The author uses language in a skillful manner to express the character, theme and setting. Attention to detail, precise word choices, the rhythm of the prose, use of the active voice, and original metaphors, similes and symbols all highlight the quality of writing.

5 points: The author adequately uses language, but the story is not marked by “prose that sings.” Metaphors and similes are not unique and well-placed. If symbolism is present, it is either heavy-handed or arbitrarily vested with meaning.

1 point: The prose flows awkwardly. There is insufficient detail, excessive use of abstraction or use of the passive voice. Metaphors and similes are cliché. The perspective drifts or is marked by confusion.

7. Passion

Does this story engage your emotions? Have you come to care deeply about the characters and what happens to them? Is your mind and spirit stimulated and enlightened by the experience of reading this story?

Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:

10 points: I will remember this story and these characters long after reading. The story resonates in ways that astonish me.

5 points: The story was okay. I chuckled in parts, or thought that certain scene was poignant, but overall probably won’t remember many details.

1 point: My emotional engagement with this story is irritation. I read it because I had to.