



**wood buffalo regional library**

# Words in Motion

**2026**



# Welcome to Words in Motion 2026



Poetry has a unique way of expressing life's biggest ideas through the simplest forms, turning a few lines into something deeply meaningful and lasting. It captures fleeting thoughts, quiet observations, and powerful emotions in a form that invites us to slow down and listen.

To everyone who contributed to this year's Words in Motion competition at the Wood Buffalo Regional Library - thank you so much. Your willingness to share your perspective adds depth and character to our community in ways that cannot be measured.

This collection reflects our commitment to sharing stories that inspire and bring people together. Through these poems, we celebrate creativity, encourage discovery, and create space for voices from across Wood Buffalo to be heard. Each piece contributes to a broader sense of connection—linking ideas, experiences, and perspectives in ways that support learning, openness, and inclusion within our community.

We extend our sincere appreciation to our judges  
- Gloria Abada, Melissa LaRose-Wark, and Amanda Dafoe -  
for the care and attention they brought to this process.

As you move through this collection, take a moment to pause between poems. Let them linger. Return to them. Discover what they reveal, not just about the writer, but about yourself.

With appreciation,

**Dr. Pratik Tripathi**  
**Chair, Wood Buffalo Regional Library Board**

# Home

Shahzain Awan

*1st Place Overall*

Home is a place full of light,  
Home is a place where laughter fills the night.  
It is where I feel strong,  
Home is where I truly belong.

It is where I feel safe, it is where I belong  
It is where I can go when something is wrong  
The love I receive, the love that I give  
Nothing feels greater than the love within

The beautiful house where I learnt how to walk  
Where I grew into myself, even when I couldn't talk  
Where my parents show me their care each day  
I can't take it for granted, not never, no way

Through all of my sufferings, all of my meltdowns  
Home is my place, where I find my crown  
The day I move out, ready to begin a new chapter in life  
Is the day my heart is pierced harmfully with a knife.

# Moths

## Kiefer Daley

*2nd Place Overall*

Moths fly around the hollowed out cavity of my stomach,  
The feeling of anxiety lingers long after it should.  
Sometimes the moths land and i'm left feeling empty,  
Sometimes the moths are replaced with a sickening twisted knot.  
I dread the moths.  
The moths feed on my dread and fly faster.  
They make my hands tremble and my nerves ache.

Sometimes the moths get distracted,  
Staying still rather than landing or replacing themselves.  
Those are the moments I look forward to.  
The brief moments where the feeling of thousands of moths ceases is pure ecstasy.  
However when the good moments end,  
The moths return tenfold and whisper into my ears  
"You can't get rid of us".  
They make me hopeless.

The hardest thing to do seems to be resisting the moths,  
No matter how much they whisper.  
If I listen to them they grow and multiply.  
If i ignore them they come back,  
Swarming to the point that it nearly hurts.  
One day the moths will leave me.  
They might decide that i'm no fun anymore,  
Or maybe they'll burst from my stomach after they grow too big.

# Mastered Letting Go

Lilah Walsh

*3rd Place Overall*

I didn't cry when you left for the second time  
Because I put my heart on the line  
Told myself I'd be fine,  
But deep inside, I knew the climb.

You took your things and left the door wide,  
But I wasn't surprised,  
My eyes had long since learned to hide,  
The tears that flowed from the inside.

The first time, I begged you to stay,  
But this time, I just let you walk away,  
I've mastered the art of letting go,  
Hiding the pain, making it slow.

I said I'd forget you—  
And maybe I will,  
But each goodbye is an echo,  
A void that no one can fill.

I'm too good at goodbyes,  
Each one cutting deeper, unseen,  
Yet I wear my smile,  
As if nothing's ever been.

You may never know,  
How I hold the pieces together,  
How your absence is a weight I bear,  
Yet I'll let you go forever.

And when it's time to leave again,  
I won't cry, not even when—  
I'll be too good at goodbyes,  
A master of the pain I deny.

# Birds of a Feather

## Adele Soupal

Do you see the birds that flock together?  
That's because they're birds of a feather.  
They don't split up, or fly away,  
Nor withdraw, neglect or stray.

Feathers fall leaves will wither  
Winds will howl and time will quiver.  
Seasons pass, along with years  
Birds of a feather fly through fears.

Birds are like people, you and me;  
They flock together-that's the key.  
They argue, fight, bicker and cry,  
But in the end, see eye to eye.

Bound by love, and harmony,  
Would share a life, one destiny.  
Birds of a feather will stick together,  
In winds and snow, the worst of- weather.

Some may rise with moonlight glimmer  
Others will soar in sunrise shimmer  
Snow will fall, rain will patter  
Birds of a feather will never scatter.

Sun will shine, within the clouds  
Rising birds from beneath earth's shrouds.  
Just like birds, we all may fall  
But again we rise to God's call.

Are you a bird of a feather?  
Through rain and sun. we stick together.

# A Light Within

## Ranndi Deyana Rajapakse

There once was a light so tiny, so bright  
It shimmered and swayed  
In the depth of the night  
The darkness whispered, "You're weak, you're too small."  
But the light only hummed and ignored it all

It glowed through the quiet, through fear and through pain  
Through scraped-knees and tears in the rain  
With each little step the shadow withdrew  
For even small lights know just what to do

So if you feel lost, like you don't belong  
Remember your light has been there all along  
It shines just by trying, by being, by you  
A magical strength that is steady and true

# Canticum Inter Ligna

## Sarah Ashmore MacDonald

When the frost hangs in the sky, the woods are a black and white film; scored anew with every visit.

The night sings to me; a whisper in my ear that starts in the treetops and floats down with the snowflakes and fallen pinecones.

Louder as it reaches my heart, it beats with the crunch of my footsteps on the trail.

My blood hums a tune in response.

A crescendo; the day falls away and I am lost in the music, once again.

# Halloween

Keyanah Aaby

Leaves rustling  
Wind blowing  
Children squealing  
Doorbells dinging  
Candy falling  
- halloween -  
Falling candy  
Dinging doorbells  
Squealing children  
Blowing wind  
Rustling leaves

# Motherly Love

Chloe Venter

From her womb you are made,  
Created in her image,  
Given her name,  
You are her heart, her soul,  
She sees your shining smile,  
And it fills the hole,  
The hole in her live that has frayed her mind,  
Life has been harsh to her, to your mother dear,  
Yet now she has you and it will be different,  
For she will raise you to be kind,  
To be diligent,  
To be a person chasing change,  
For you are from her womb,  
And you are created in her image

# Shale

Zachary Wood

Where are you?

I've searched the cracks and shadows,  
Trying to find the mind that once shone—

Heart pure as mountain streams,  
Words soft as spring rain.

But the world carved into me,

Drip by drip,

Erosion by the constant kiss of cruelty.

I hardened like shale under pressure,

Brittle, cracking,

Each assault sharpening my edges.

Too much.

Too much.

A mirror shattered into a thousand shards.

Cullet—

Jagged, discarded, worthless.

But the fire came.

Intense heat softened brittle fragments,

Turning sharp edges into fluid light.

Pain melted me down,

Poured me into something new.

From the ruins,

A stained glass window rose—

Beauty born of brokenness,

Fractured, yet whole.

Each crack holds the memory of fire,

Each shard, a lesson shaped by flame.

What was destroyed was not lost—

It was remade.

In the light that filters through,

I see the strength hidden in fractures,

The glow only pain could create.

Even broken things can shine.

# Candyland

Farah Abed

I entered a dome

It took me far away from home

Into a land of cand

I thought not everything here would be handy

I took a walk

I told myself not to talk

I followed a candy trace

It led me to a donut called Mace

She led me back to the dome

It took me back home

I had fun today

I have to go to sleep anyway

The next day my mom told me

Where have you been all this time

I told her I was picking lime

# Error Code 45

Jillian Sumbera

A photo is what encapsulates the beauty of a moment.

The solitude of a mountain, a garden laden with life,  
Or the strength in architecture hundreds of years old—  
the things we find wonder in.  
There's beauty in every little moment of life,  
It's impossible to capture every moment.  
Though it doesn't hurt to try.

Coming back home, you download every picture  
From your little digital camera on your computer,  
Grabbing the cord you always use.  
But you plug it in just to find an error code.  
And least 45 times you've tried, only for the alert to  
Mock you time and time again.

You spent hours, degrading time and bending  
The wire every which way, waiting for the moment  
It decides to start working.  
It frays and it rips, the sheath splitting open from unrelenting effort.  
And it shocks and burns till it's bandaged to work—  
But still it comes up with the same thing.

Your little digital camera is connected, however, not recognized.  
The images sit in front of you; a wax figure smiling.  
Each picture, old and new, carry something far  
Reminiscent of the original passion.

Or maybe that's just what I saw.

Sometimes I wonder if I walk around with the same  
anomaly plastered on me.

# Cheers

## Jaine Rose

I'm here because my sister made me go  
I had the shakes last week  
after two mickeys a day on the good days  
I never told her about the bad ones though

I'm here because it made my sister cry  
To see me fall over in the pharmacy and not stand up  
And watch the shoppers skip that aisle  
On their way to find the things I'm too broke to buy

I'm here because my sister made me a deal  
That if I can finish the program, all the way to the end  
We'll go see a play on Friday  
Like we used to do when our family was still real

I'm here because my sister is all I have left  
Dad was my best friend, but he died last fall  
And mom doesn't notice us anymore  
So, my shrink says I'm coping with drinking and theft

But my sister says I can't anymore  
Or I'll lose her too  
So, I'm trying, I'm here  
And I want her to know that she's who I'm doing this  
for

# Chips

Genevieve Langevin

Cheesy spicy pickled and more  
Chips have always been there since 1994  
You eat them on a movie night  
You eat them while the sun shines so bright  
I'm always craving their salty glow  
I just want to eat them as the winds blow  
Doritos, Lays, Old Dutch and more  
I would jump out a window on the highest floor

I open a bag and smell all the goodness  
Chips are my one and only weakness  
Ruffles , Sun chips, Takis - I could go on forever  
It will be ok as long as we're together

When I eat them they sit in my tummy  
Everyone should know they are so yummy  
You can find them in a bag  
Just make sure you read the tag

Tostitos, Cheetos, Pringles and more  
You will see me at the door  
Waiting for my glorious chips  
Ready to dive into crunchy bliss

# Beckoning

## Naisha Junnuru

Even in my dreams, she lingers  
With a digit trailing over my chin, nails scraping  
But never enough to leave a mark.

I give her a room in my house, the walls harboring a sort of  
Putrid, titanic mess of a floral  
Only the corners give space to a healthy patch of clovers.

She may drink my tea, my vibrant saffron in a cracked mug  
That I do not recall washing after my last use.  
Her feet are kicked up on the armrest of my beat couch.

When she spills the drink, all over the battered cushion  
I tell her she can take off the cover, toss it into the wash.  
She spits in my face and throws it out into the street.

And with it, she disappears.  
I scold the mug for being so flimsy.  
I never want to see her wretched face again.

If my house is just so appealing to her, and she must return  
I tell myself I will throw myself into the cold night,  
Before she can dispose of any more decor.

But when she does, her polished boots next to my torn up sneakers,  
The icyness of the outdoors is already within me, and I can do nothing.  
Nothing short of opening the door wider  
And washing all of my mugs.

# Exploding Girl

Ellianna

What could be fair in love or war?

The sidewalk by my building tore

An ugly break up on the carpetbombing floor.

What fairness, beauty furls in kindness.

No more warring men who only know to fight, to fuck, to  
force, to make love

once theres more land to subjugate.

Twin concrete cracks,

A white, delightful flower growing.

Bows to nurse dawns dewdrop,

Only such frail roots hug the earth below.

Bomb blasts that bloom

Like blacktop blossoms, love in wake.

Your fuse-lit smile, french dimples await.

How beautiful you are, exploding girl.

# Puzzles

Kate Emily Platt

A piece of the puzzle is missing  
Not a important one  
But it makes it incomplete  
Only one piece  
But it's garbage now  
How can this be  
Only one piece is gone  
How can it be thrown away  
Is the piece even important  
Does it matter whether or not it's there  
It does  
Without the piece its incomplete  
Considered garbage  
We can make a new piece  
It won't be the same  
But it can fill the void  
But it won't last as long as the real piece  
And then it will be garbage again  
We worked hard to put it together  
I don't want to restart  
The piece is irrelevant if you ask me  
But the picture doesn't make sense  
I don't want to start all over again  
With a new puzzle  
But I guess it's how it goes  
Just one piece  
It's only missing one piece  
Or is it missing all but one piece

# Bumble Bee Stings

Brooke White

Bees are neither feared nor liked.

Fluffy, Furious and Finely Striped.

Hardworking until the end, but still your most faithful friend.

Like the old man you knew that would never stop working,  
even when his heart began hurting.

Would he long for a life as sweet as honey,

To see his wife who was ever so funny.

Being youthfully free, diligent as a bumble bee.

Finding merriment in existence, long before the warm awakening  
spring

Before a labored final breath and the pain of life's final sting.

# Pellucid

Lara Joan Mackay

The thinness of paper  
which carries more depth  
Than a hollow mind;  
Than a thoughtless thought.

On the brink of laughter,  
a jokesters cleft,  
unveil a creature  
enveloped in visions.

Lamented things,  
surely not living,  
Encased in paper and sight  
Carving their marks on the walls.

On the canvas of quiet  
should I present my mind?  
On a deafened ear  
should I pierce my words?

Could my blindness take  
this hardened faith  
and crystalize my mind?  
and free my passion?

# Ghost of Basho

## Graham Chamberlain

By the pond I wait

No frog, only water sounds

the ghost of Basho

# Good Boy

Dwayne Quintal

Good sun  
Getting dizzy  
I'm a healthy person  
Getting hungry

# Changing Softly

India Penafiel

Kids grow up.

They get taller, older, quieter

yet no one can really see the real change that happens inside them.

I still remember looking out the window,

watching the seasons change,

while I stare at my book, reading at every page.

My parents grow more tired and tired as the years go by,

you can never really notice how quickly seasons fly.

You get taller, you get older, you get smarter,

you get more mature, you get more fond of your surroundings,

Yet adults forget one important thing when you grow up, emotion.

When you grow up,

you're taught to suck it up,

you're taught to put on a smile as a coverup.

You look in your drawer, digging up all the report cards,

medals and drawings you haven't touched in forever,

but just looking at all that reminds you of the memories you can't seem to disremember.

It never felt like changing to me,

Not maturing,

Not growing,

but growing up instead makes me feel like a completely different person,

Completely different from the old self I used to be.

# A moment in darkness

Kayla Cameron

I wake up heavy, lungs full of stone.

Fighting a battle I fight alone.

Every step feels like a chore, even when I know there's more, more to reach for, more to claim.

The fire I want won't spark into flame.

I say to myself "You've got things to excite you!"

I relish, but the truth is the dark still invites me in.

Joy feels like a brick wall, a brick wall that I built, a wall that I can't unsplit.

I stretch my hand out but I always fall, not like a feather drifting slow, but like an anchor deep below.

Sadness stains the air I breathe, it clings like shadows that never leave.

It's on my tongue, it's in my veins, a quiet storm, a drip of pain.

I scroll through the life I should adore, but wanting to want just hurts me more.

Still - somewhere, a flicker stays, a fragile light though the endless haze.

A match in a cave, a pulse, a song, a whisper that says you still belong.

So I WILL clutch that spark with I got, even if it burns i'll hold it hot because thought im falling, i'm not through yet.

One day the weight will lift, I'll rise, I'll trade these tears for brighter skies.

But until then, I'll rhyme this pain, and turn gravity's grip into something I can name.

# God-Mother

## Elliot Finch

Your Mother's hunting knife dents up a plastic cutting board while she slices through the heart of a stag.  
The soft hands that cradle your face when you cry are red and reverent.  
Your Mother tells you what it's like to kill.  
You do not tell her about the centipede in the bathroom,  
Because you didn't have to butcher it.  
She shows you where the bullet  
Turned Life into Meat.  
You bite the blood under your nails.  
It tastes like Earth after rain. Fur and metal. The smell of dead things.  
Like life,  
Cold and thick as a scab  
Congealing  
On Dollarama white.

Your Mother whispers, Thank you, to the blood on her hands.  
You feel your heartbeat with dirty fingers,  
And imagine you are her deer in the underbrush.  
Your Mother's bullet  
Rips the life  
From your body.  
Her startled laughter is the last thing you hear.  
Her laughter, and your father shushing her.  
Her laughter, and her soft voice  
Asking for a gut hook  
To unzip your insides.  
Creation and Destruction are in her hands  
When she lovingly parts the flesh  
And turns one heart into dinner for six.

God must be a Mother.

# Camping

## Tucker Van Lingen

We travel to Lake Louise to tent,  
They only charged us one hundred dollars and one cent.  
When we camp we don't have chores,  
But we do have smores.

We don't have our own land so we rent,  
And we don't travel during lent.  
I hope there isn't a down pour  
In the distance I hear thunder roar.

# Colours

Vianna Dietz

Red is anger and hatred but is it also love?

Purple is confidence but is it power?

Yellow is happiness but can it turn into jealousy?

Green is luck but is it envy?

Blue is calm but is it sadness?

And what are the emotions felt deep inside you

Ones that can't be named or explained?

What is love?

What is nostalgia?

What is grief?

Maybe there is an emotion that holds them all at once

Maybe that's why all the colors mixed turns into black

But black isn't nothing

It's everything, layered at once

But maybe emotions aren't colors after all

Just seen through different weathers

And we are only meant to feel them, not label them

# Organ Thief

## Amira Youssouf

My hip is a portrait. And in the canvas,  
stapled to the loot of pine I am merely a  
bonsai at the mercy of my sanctuary.  
Walnut complexion, twisted, contorted,  
pruned at the unsightly, smoothed, and  
watered staggeredly.

Displayed, being taken care of while it  
lasts, while my flowers are still  
blooming, before the biological clock  
strikes 12.  
I have been demoted to a work of art, a  
forever muse.

Am I being gawked at or admired?  
Ever since my seed was planted I  
thought eyes were permanently widened.  
That's how people have always judged  
my soil.

My soil is nutrient dense and rich,  
but you'd never know just looking at the  
striated surface.  
The bottom of my terracotta pot  
contains nipped and tucked overgrown  
roots that ache for something bigger, for  
more air but I've been groomed to be  
stationary.

My mother, the rake comes by and  
sweeps my mess gracefully.  
I feel the guilt, reminiscing the repetition  
of the many times I was begged to pick  
off my leaves. She doesn't know I beg  
them not to fall.

My opinions are drowned out by my father  
the leaf blower,  
He only grooms the redwoods who are  
pervertedly waiting, their corneas  
pulsating, watching each leaf gasp for air  
as they land face down after departing my  
open wounds.  
I contribute to the cycle and the rake may  
do her forever task.

I angle my branch collar to ignite a signal.  
To alert someone "I'm here!" I capture the  
attention of flash photography and nothing  
more than cryptic answers and mumbles.

I ask the passers by, I plead with  
everyone I encounter, who will provide the  
salvation of my life long question of when  
I'll be allowed to have my skin back?  
The redwoods answer from above.

"When your last name wilts."

# Fire

## Brad Sherk

A man sat alone beside the fire he had made hours ago, watching the stars on a diamond sky night as he done many times, when he noticed a stranger walking towards him and the fire.

The man was clearly cold, clearly wet, clearly lost and clearly not at his best to walk unsurely towards the man and the fire. He had followed the smoke for a while and knew the perils in this decision. But he had no choice.

Upon eye contact with each other it was clear to both men that they would not speak the same language, not share the same culture and not share much between them for commonality.

But the host motioned with his hand to sit down on the rock across from him and the stranger did so and felt the warmth of the flickering fire on his cold body and his outer clothing taken off to dry on the rocks beside.

For hours the men did not speak, but there was a vivid understanding between people that would never utter a word and never see each other again. An unwritten ancestral bond of the senses of sight, sound, touch and feel. A hypnotic journey lost in the embers where time has no meaning, even if for split seconds.

This moment shared by two, could have been thousands of years in the past, or thousands of years in the future, it didn't matter. It spoke of the spark that fire gave humanity, the first step in a spiralling journey to discover, attain knowledge and push boundaries. To call fire primitive is true but not accurate. Fire is best described as fundamental. To our sprits and embedded in every line in our DNA. Always pure, best unspoken and always human.

The stranger now dry, put back on his clothes and looked to the stars to align himself. He nodded to the man to give thanks. He would live now and would think of this kindred moment with this host with no name until the day he died and would recall the tale on nights of similar circumstances to his attentive kin many times.

As would the host to his kin.

# Nature's Melody

## Stephanie Boakye

Nature has its own melody

We just need to listen for it

Have you heard

The rainwater dripping down a wet trunk

Have you heard

The birds songs at the crack of dawn

Have you heard

The whistling wind carrying the fresh scent of spring

Have you heard

The dandelions stem swaying slowly

Have you heard

The tapping berries in the bushes

Nature has its own melody

We just need to listen for it

# Wildflowers at Residential School

## Shaylean Gladu

Primrose withers when picked,  
pulled from their beds  
at 3:00am, by rough hands  
Rotting roots are left behind  
to whisper words of grief

Small bright petals scatter across  
planks of cold wooden floor  
Separating strands of long dark braids  
after they've been cut,  
caught in blowing wind

Dried stems splintered,  
like broken legs, not healed  
under weight not meant for flowers  
Pressure fragmented bones  
buried beneath earth and stone

Wildflowers used to bloom here  
Danced to heartbeats on drums  
Hands once held by *okâwîmâw*  
grow thorns with passing time  
Perennial loneliness endures

*Nimosôm* doesn't smile  
when he talks about springtime  
Headstones congregate in his Eden  
Through his garden he limps,  
humming lullabies for primrose

*okâwîmâw* – Mother

*Nimosôm* – My Grandfather

# Petals Between Pages

## Stacey Grant

The pages of this story,  
of the chapters I have lived,  
have been speckled  
with love, loss, and longing —  
Ink blots and tears,  
feathered, flowing through the grain.

For I loved a boy  
who carved pieces from me,  
meticulously making me smaller  
so his frail form  
could hold me  
in place.

And I grew up  
with three grandparents,  
one in the ground  
before my birth —  
and now, only one  
still breathes.

Or the man  
who lived twice the time as I,  
who saw value in watering me:  
A mentor in seeking sunlight,  
before his lover thought me a weed  
and plucked me.

Plus the angel,  
who once played hockey  
and led me from the shadows;  
his golden hair, that missing tooth,  
now watching over me  
where I cannot reach.

My children,  
and their father:  
We witness our family flourish,  
nurturing one another,  
knowing the finish line  
is just their leaving.

Adoration,  
tucked like drying flowers  
between yellowing parchment,  
memories carefully preserved,  
only for crumbling petals  
to fall into pastel piles.

Still beautiful.

Even crushed,  
the seeds survive —  
and in the mess,  
they, somehow,  
still remember.

