

**Walt Whitman Birthplace Association**  
**THIRTY-FOURTH ANNUAL STUDENT POETRY CONTEST 2020**

**Theme:**     *“The ship is clear at last, she leaps!” WW*

**Contest:**    Write a poem about “Leaping” into a “Leap Day”

The year 2020 is a Leap Year, so the month of February has one extra day! What activity would YOU “Leap” into if you had one extra day to do whatever you wanted? Or use your imagination and describe in a poem the day a person, place, or thing would leap into!

Leap days are needed to keep our calendar in alignment with the Earth's revolutions around the Sun. Without an extra day on February 29, nearly every four years we would lose almost six hours every year. After only 100 years, a calendar without leap years would be off by approximately 24 days. So, we must Seize the Day!

The theme above comes from Whitman’s poem, “JOY, SHIPMATE, JOY.”

**JOY, SHIPMATE, JOY!**

Joy, shipmate, joy!  
                  ...our life begins,  
The long, long anchorage we leave,  
The ship is clear at last, she leaps!  
She swiftly courses from the shore,  
Joy, shipmate, joy.

Walt Whitman, “Leaves of Grass” (1881-1882)

Whitman’s excitement of the joy of “leaping” is personified with the ship, who has pulled up her anchor, and when she “is clear at last, she leaps!” She courses swiftly from the shore into her joyous freedom. We can imagine the ship’s freedom - what is YOUR image of a joyous freedom for your Leap Day?

Write a poem about the Leap Day you envision – for yourself, for another, or for an inanimate object like the ship. Don’t “tell” us about your image, but “show” us with vivid pictures and action words. You don’t need sentences for every line - try using repetition of words, phrases or sounds for alliteration or assonance which make it poetry and not a story. Notice Whitman’s repetition of “Joy” above. Use musical “beats” with your lines to create a rhythm and find uncommon words that will “leap” off the page. Listen to Whitman’s rhythm. Like Whitman, use “free verse” and do not rhyme. Use your five senses to describe the leap day – what do you see, hear, touch, taste, or smell? For instance, the ship might leap from the shore into the sea, and taste the salt, feel the wind on her face, hear seagulls overhead or the whale song beneath her, or befriend a lifeboat. If the ship could speak, what would she say, dream or imagine about her leap day? Perhaps you have an interesting inanimate object – a violin, a favorite piece of clothing, a treasured object – personify this object and have it “leap” into its joy, whatever that would be. In 30 lines or less, let your poem leap off the page!

Good Luck!

**WALT WHITMAN BIRTHPLACE ASSOCIATION**  
**IS PROUD TO PRESENT ITS THIRTY-FOURTH ANNUAL STUDENT POETRY CONTEST**

Walt Whitman Birthplace State Historic Site is the home of America's great poet, Walt Whitman. Walt Whitman Birthplace Association operates the site for New York State. Our Mission is to preserve and promote the legacy of Walt Whitman. All poetry lovers and contestants are encouraged to visit the Birthplace and walk in Walt's footsteps. School groups may participate in a variety of unique educational programs. Contact Dr. Kelly Ronayne, Education Director, at 631.427.5240 x113 or [educator@waltwhitman.org](mailto:educator@waltwhitman.org) for reservations or contest information.

**GUIDELINES**

**THEME: "Leap Day"**

**ELIGIBILITY:** Students in grades 3-12

**ENTRANCE CATEGORIES:**

Category A – Individual poem, grades 3-4  
Category B – Individual poem, grades 5-6  
Category C – Individual poem, grades 7-8  
Category D – Individual poem, grades 9-10  
Category E – Individual poem, grades 11-12  
Category F – Individual anthology

Category G – Class anthology, grades 3-4  
Category H – Class anthology, grades 5-6  
Category I – Class anthology, grades 7-8  
Category J – Class anthology, grades 9-10  
Category K – Class anthology, grades 11-12  
Category L – Multi-media

**FORMAT:**

1. Print or type a poem of up to 30 lines or less. Longer poems will be disqualified.
2. Multi-lingual poems welcome, with English translation.
3. Individual poems **MUST** have the following information on **EACH** page or **poems will be disqualified:**
  - **poem title and entrance category**
  - **entrant's name, complete address, home phone number, age and grade level**
  - **school name, complete address, school phone number, and teacher's name**
  - **for multiple entries by a teacher: poems must be noted by grade AND class period**
4. Class anthology **MUST** have the following information or **anthologies will be disqualified:**
  - **anthology title**
  - **title sheet with the entrance category, teacher's name, grade, school name, school phone number and complete address**
  - **the student's name on each poem; student may enter a poem in an anthology and as an individual poem**
  - **all anthology poems should be in binder or book form**
  - **for multiple entries by a teacher: anthologies must be noted by title, grade AND class period**

**DEADLINE:**

Entries must be postmarked by **March 20, 2020**

**AWARDS:**

- All poems and anthologies are judged by a panel of published poets selected by the Birthplace Trustees.
- **Winners Notified** by mail in late-April.
  - **Winners' names published in WWBA Award Program distributed at Award Ceremony.**
  - **Awards Distributed on Sunday, May 31, 2020, from 12:00 noon – 2:00 PM, at the annual Walt Whitman Birthday Celebration held at the Walt Whitman Birthplace.** This is Walt's 201<sup>th</sup> birthday.
  - Nationally known Poet in Residence officiates at award ceremony.
  - Grand Champion and multiple prize winners awarded in each category.
  - Grand Champions: poems will be posted on the WWBA website with permission.
  - Individual entries will **NOT** be retained or returned.
  - Awards held for pickup at the Walt Whitman Birthplace **May 31, 2020. They will not be mailed.**
  - Winning and non-winning anthologies will be held until **May 31, 2020. They will not be mailed.**

**All submissions become the property of WWBA.**

**MAILING INSTRUCTIONS:** Walt Whitman Birthplace Association

Attn: POETRY CONTEST

246 Old Walt Whitman Road, Huntington Station, NY 11746-4148