

Stars at Fairchild

Students shine in Fairchild Challenge competitions

D. Whitman



B.J. Duncan recites his poem for television at Fairchild.

Botanic Art and Poetry

“The special place in one Boca Raton boy’s heart for the little guy has won him a first-place finish in poetry,” reported the *Boca Raton/Delray Beach News*. Joe Grossman, a ninth-grader at SEK Preparatory School, tied for first in the poetry division of the Fairchild Challenge botanic art and poetry competition. The first stanza of his poem *Grass* challenges readers:

Nobody cares about a blade of grass,
It simply gets treated without any class.
It’s just one blade of grass people say,
How about you be a blade for a day?

“My inspiration was that no one cares or talks about grass,” explained Grossman. “I thought it would be really cool to write about something that gets stepped on. I didn’t know much about the environment, but the Challenge has really opened my eyes. It is teaching me to think about the ways that I may be affecting the environment.”

Sarah Delaney, a ninth-grader at Robert Morgan Educational Center in Miami, shared first prize for her poem *The Old Iguana*, which starts:

It’s a balmy winter morning	He chews it so intently
Here deep down in the south	His scarred head rocking to and fro
By my fence sits an old iguana	I’d guess the pink’s his favorite
A pink hibiscus in his mouth.	But I really never know . . .

Praise for the Fairchild Challenge

“We have noticed an increase in teens doing research on the various subjects in the Fairchild Challenge. Your topics are impressive,” commented Ellen Book, manager of the South Miami Public Library.

Although only in its second year, the Fairchild Challenge is already attracting interest far beyond South Florida and may soon be adopted by other botanic institutions. In March, representatives from the Chicago Botanic Garden, Desert Botanic Garden, Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, Missouri Botanical Garden, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum attended the Challenge Everglades poetry/rap competition and workshops conducted by Fairchild’s Director of Education, Caroline Lewis.

Spreading the Message

The authors of the winning poems, B.J. Duncan and Stavros Moysidis, took their powerful messages about the Everglades to their peers through interviews and performances. Public radio station WLRN invited the students to perform for broadcasts in April, National Poetry Month. Duncan and Moysidis also appeared on television, at the Challenge awards ceremony and in a video.

Poetry/Rap on the Florida Everglades

From quiet reflections on Florida’s river of grass to protests against reckless development, the original verse performed by students in the Everglades poetry/rap competition revealed their concern for a fragile environment under siege. *Protection Hypocrisy* by B.J. Duncan (Coral Reef High) and *Win the Race* by Stavros Moysidis (Miami Killian High) tied for first prize.

“Rap is usually associated with a negative vibe, as it tends to present vulgarities,” observes Moysidis, who spontaneously delivered his rap at a college interview. “However, it sprang from positive feelings and messages. It is, after all, at its very root, simply poetry—poetry that has been given a jingle, a beat. When I was deciding between writing a poem or a rap song, I figured that if I gave my message a captivating tune, my peers would like to hear it again.”

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Stavros Moysidis performing his “Win the Race.”

Persuasive Speech

Jonathan Jaffe, of Key Biscayne Community School, won first prize in the persuasive speech competition. He presented a compelling case for his neighbors to landscape with native plants rather than exotics, saying "Native plants are the best choice for attracting and nourishing our native wildlife. Native plants leaf-out, bloom, and fruit when our native species need them most, and provide the nutrients that our native animals have adapted to through millions of years of co-evolution."

Research Reports

Environmental Justice by Haley Kornfield of Miami Palmetto High was awarded first prize in the research report competition. Dr. B. Jack Fisher, Fairchild's senior research scientist and administrator of graduate studies, chaired the panel that evaluated students' 2,000-word reports on five environmental topics. "Please take environmental justice seriously," urged Kornfield in her conclusion. "It's not an issue that merely appears on paper. It appears in a dying child, a community that's lost hope, and in the soul of America."

Environmental Debates

Haley Kornfield also received the Judges' Award in the student congress division of the environmental debate competition. Tabisa Walwema, a student at Miami Killian, was elected presiding officer by her peers and conducted the lively, all-day session with grace, humor and discipline. Miami Palmetto's Alix Hattler tied for first prize with Coral Reef's Tom Carroll. Among the ten topics, the student congress debated bills banning the patenting of genes in agricultural crops, requiring minimum auto-fuel efficiency of 25 miles/gallon, and levying a countywide gasoline tax to support mass transit. In the intense, one-on-one Lincoln-Douglas format, first prize went to Brian Bernstein of Ransom Everglades Upper School. The topic: When in conflict, the needs of humankind ought to take priority over the need to preserve or restore Florida's wetlands.

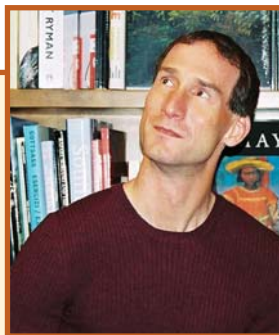
Creative Writing

"With the light blue sky above me and the sea of grass below, I sit in my tree waiting day after day to be picked . . . You must be thinking it is weird that I am a talking fruit." So begins the first-prize essay by Anna Koehn in the Fairchild Challenge creative writing competition, in which middle school students, using all their senses, described a tropical or subtropical fruit. Koehn, a sixth-grader at Key Biscayne Community School, charmed the panel of judges with her imaginative autobiography of a lychee fruit. "I am a very neat fruit, and am very proud of it."

David Whitman, Education Outreach Coordinator

Gabriel Spera

California poet Gabriel Spera made his Florida debut at Fairchild in March, chairing a spirited panel of judges for the Fairchild Challenge Everglades poetry/rap competition and reading the next day at Books & Books in Coral Gables. Copies of his National Poetry Series book, *The Standing Wave*, were presented to the award winners and panelists.



D Cortese

Creative Writers Describe Tropical Fruit

A lime is twice a lemon. ~ I am vital to Worcestershire sauce (declaration of a tamarind) ~ When you shake a coconut, you hear the motion of the ocean. ~ The pineapple looks like an alien with an outrageous hairdo on top. ~ The mango is one of nature's paintings. ~ Bananas are very delicious but there are many weird things about them. ~ When you peel a lychee open, it sounds like Velcro. ~ Its shape reminds you of a human heart, and like your heart, a mango is something you can't live without. ~ The soursop has an aqueous sound to it. When you bite into the fruit it sounds like a river. ~ I once had a pineapple plant . . . but my dogs ate it.



"Nam Doc Mai"

Watercolor by Karen Frey to be auctioned at the International Mango Festival

On January 22 and 23, 2005, Fairchild will present an outdoor weekend workshop with California artist Karen Frey. A solo exhibition of her tropical watercolors will open at Fairchild on January 24, coinciding with the first Moonlight Tour of the year. Later that week, she will work with high school students who are painting watercolors of tropical fruit for the Fairchild Challenge 2005 art competition.

Frey's work has been published in *Painting the Many Moods of Light; The Best of Sketching and Drawing; Painting Light and Shadow; Best of Watercolor-Figurative; Best of Watercolor; Understanding Transparent Watercolor*; and in *Artists and Watercolor* magazines.

This past June, she painted at Fairchild in preparation for her January exhibition.