

Judges Report 2026

A free verse poem is a type of poetry that does not follow a strict metrical pattern or consistent rhyme scheme. Instead of adhering to traditional, rigid structures, poets rely on natural speech rhythms, striking imagery, and strategic line breaks to convey emotion and meaning.

The writer avoids grand, sweeping statements and instead trusts small, concrete domestic details to carry the emotional weight. The lack of formal constraints gives the honest, conversational voice room to breathe and surprise the reader.

The challenge for the judge is to read each carefully, listening for potholes. Does the title, the banner for the work, fit the style chosen? Are the word pictures too elaborate?

But most important of all is the question, does it have the musicality that all poetry should have? Poetry is meant to be read aloud, it should have a flow to it that makes it a joy to both read and be heard.

The pleasure for me in judging this competition was to find three such poems that ticked all these boxes. There were others worthy of mention but small details needed the attention of a minor rewrite.

1st Prize – Playing With Words.

A pleasure to read aloud, No words were wasted here. The reader follows along with the author's thoughts and feelings. The imagery of what the words are saying tells the story. The author uses white space and pacing to guide the reader through.

2nd Prize. – Missing

Grief is a private thing, and the author gets the thoughts and feelings out well without ever revealing the private sadness. The writer avoids grand, sweeping statements and instead trusts small, concrete details to carry the emotional weight.

3rd Prize – Fury of Fire

The reader can feel themselves facing the heat of fire. An emotional look at being apart of a community that has lost almost everything. The twinkling lights add to the horror of the event, the reader can almost feel the exhaustion of the fire fighters.

Well done to all three winners.

If your entry was not successful, please remember this is simply the opinion of one judge and poetry evokes a personal response in us all. Have someone you trust read your poem aloud to you, pick up any changes that need to be made. Then submit it elsewhere for a more favorable result.

Respectfully, Jan Foster.