

2024 Arbor Day Creative Writing Contest Winners Selected

Sydney Johnson of Avon, Dailyn Maquin of Plankinton, and Kailey Charles of Howard are the winning authors selected from the 778 entries in the 2024 Arbor Day Creative Writing Contest. Sponsored by South Dakota's conservation districts and the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources-Division of Resource Conservation & Forestry, the contest provides fifth and six grade students the opportunity to write about the importance of Arbor Day and tree planting in South Dakota.

For their efforts, the students win awards and cash prizes in addition to learning more about trees. As first place winner, Johnson receives a plaque and \$125 in cash. Her school, Avon School, will receive \$150 for the purchase of supplies or equipment. Maquin, the second place winner, receives a plaque and \$100 cash while Charles receives a plaque and \$75 for her third place creative writing. Johnson, Maquin, and Charles will read their creative writings and receive their prizes during special Arbor Day celebrations in their hometown areas. All students who entered the contest will receive a packet of tree seeds courtesy of the SD Dept of Agriculture and Natural Resources-Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry.

South Dakota celebrates Arbor Day on the last Friday in April; in 2024 this is April 26. Nebraska newspaper publisher J. Sterling Morton proposed the very first Arbor Day in 1872. On that first Arbor Day, over one million trees were planted in Nebraska.

The Creative Writing Contest has been held in South Dakota for 47 years.

Note: Creative writings appear below.

First Place – Sydney Johnson of BonHomme Conservation District

The Wisdom Tree

What is Arbor Day? It is a holiday to celebrate the trees in our world. In 1805, the first tree that was planted was a poplar. Who am I? The first poplar telling my story.

Down in the deep soil, a small seed will grow. That small seed will flourish and grow. When that small seed is grown, it shoots into the air. And, really, that is how I am here. I grew and flourished and grew some more and that is how I am here.

When I was a sapling, I could see oh so little. However, today I am tall and I see the world from great heights that you could only imagine. Today, I see young little babies still crying out loud, hand-in-hand couples in the crowd. Then I saw you. Not very old but not quite young. Not very bold but oh, how strong! That's what everyone should be whether you're a giant General Sherman, a tiny dwarf willow, or a poplar like me.

In this world, you may not see like I see, you may not be celebrated across the world or rid the air of carbon dioxide. However, you are like a tree in many ways you may be. You could help save our habitats, or help clear our air and you are already pretty. So, you may not see it but you, too, are a key.

As you can see, you play a role just like the trees.

Second Place – Dailyn Maquin of Aurora Conservation District

Arbor Day

Trees are tall with many leaves.

As Autumn gets near they fall with the breeze.

They can be lively when spring bursts,

They can be loud when the wind blows.

Shaking their leaves, they make a roaring sound

As their leaves one by one fall to the ground.

Everything is dry, winter is here, all of them say good-bye.

Months pass by, still no sign of life.

Each tree gets covered in snow, hoping that a miracle will show.

Months keep passing by so slow, their hope is now no more.

Finally the snow starts to melt and birds start to appear.

A hundred of sounds you can hear,

With no more doubt Spring appeared.

Spring passed quickly and now it's Summer.

Rain keeps pouring, the trees are growing.

During the summer, trees are used as shade,

But no one uses or looks out for them as they fade

And the process starts all over again.

Third Place – Kailey Charles of Miner Conservation District

My Tree Planting

I love to enjoy the fresh air outside. I told my dad we should plant some cedar trees in the shelterbelt. He said it would be a great idea. I love spending time with my dad. Our shelterbelt is filled with all kinds of trees - cedar, pine, and many more.

We bought about 50 trees to plant. We plant the South Dakota tree every five years. Once he picked up the trees, we waited for the perfect day that was nice and moist. My dad is a pro at knowing when it is the right time to plant because he is a farmer and he plants corn and beans. We grabbed all of our gardening supplies and started digging.

I had to carry the box of the trees while my dad dug the holes. My dad let me know that, once we were done, we had to plant a maple tree for my mom. My mom has always wanted a maple tree. We were almost finished with our job but we had to go eat lunch.

We were on the last tree, so we made sure it was perfect. I love that we have a lot of trees around our house so that the wind doesn't do damage to our house. That day was amazing. All of my favorite things in one day: fresh air, trees, my dad, and digging in the dirt. Next year, we will have more trees to plant. Trees are very important in our lives.

Pictured in attached photos:

BonHomme photo: Angela Ehlers, SD Assn of Conservation Districts; Sydney Johnson, winner 2024 Arbor Day creative writing contest; Becky Haenfler, Avon 6th grade teacher; John Hartland, SD DANR-Resource Conservation & Forestry Division

Aurora photo: Chris Hill, Plankinton 6th grade teacher; John Hartland, SD DANR-Resource Conservation & Forestry Division; Dailyn Maquin, 2nd place 2024 Arbor Day creative writing contest; Angela Ehlers, SD Assn of Conservation Districts; Jody Hauge, Aurora Conservation District.