ASIBA Poetry Competition 2026

ASIBA is pleased to announce the results of the 2026 POETRY COMPETITION:

Roots

Book prizes in the form of poetry anthologies have been awarded to four prize-winners in each category, 'Senior' (Première -Terminale) and 'Junior' (Troisième - Seconde). Winners and finalists are listed on page 2, followed by the poems.

Entries were read with great care by juries of teachers from the Asiba community, who compiled a shortlist for Dr. Celia O'Donovan, Oxford AQA Inspector: She then selected the winning poems. We are especially grateful to her for giving her time and thoughtful attention to the competition during an exceptionally busy exam season. Here is her message to the community:

> *The theme of Roots stimulated some very thoughtful and impressive poems. Some poems explored roots in nature holding up giant trees, others spoke of personal roots linking them to their heritage and others combined the natural and the cultural. There was often a wistful and nostalgic air to the poems, but some demonstrated a desire to break free and not be attached too tightly to family and expectations. The shortlisted entries were of high quality and trying to rank them was very difficult. All of the poems had significant merits, with some excellent use of vocabulary, metaphor and poetic expression. I enjoyed reading them and allowing myself to be taken on a personal emotional journey with each of them. The winning poems were those that related clearly to the theme and were especially sensitive and thoughtful.*
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> *All of the shortlisted poets should be very proud of their work. It is not an easy task to convey one's emotions and thoughts in poetic form. It is, however, an excellent skill to acquire as it requires both precision and control in language as well as a reflective and sensitive approach to life. These skills are very important in all writing tasks as well as in other areas of life both in school and later.*
>
> *Thank you to the poets, teachers and judges who have been involved this year. This competition is a very important part of the BFI year, and it is one of the things that binds us together as a community. Thanks are due to Olive Kavanagh who really believes in the power of poetry and has once again done a splendid job in organising the competition.*
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> *Dr. Celia O'Donovan, Oxford AQA Inspector for BFI*

	SENIOR Première - Terminale.			
1st place	*Roots 'I once thought roots were meant to stay'.*	Juliette Correia Brisson	1e	Lycée Français International de Zurich
2nd place	*Germ*	Daria Cirlioru	Tle	Cité Scolaire Internationale Europole, Grenoble
3rd place	*The Little Oak Tree*	Emeline Said	Tle	Lycée Mémona Hintermann Afféjee, Saint Denis, La Réunion
4th place	*In Borrowed Light*	Sophie Pettini	1e	Lycée International Victor Hugo Colomiers (Toulouse)
Finalist	*Fu-Future*	Athina Germoni	1e	Lycée Louis Massignon, Abu Dhabi (UAE)
Finalist	*Transplanted*	Jawad Abou Chedid	1e	Lycee Francais International Jacques Prevert d'Accra, Ghana
Finalist	*Raised by Roots*	William Depré	1e	Cité Scolaire Internationale Europole, Grenoble
Finalist	*At Which Point Will You Kill the Tree?*	Sam Gord	Tle	Lycée St Charles, Marseille
Finalist	*Roots (Hold my hand)*	Lila Porphyre	Tle	Cité Scolaire Internationale, Lyon.
Finalist	*Roots (We're in a reflection chamber)*	Lili Steib- Weber-Carter	Tle	Cité Scolaire Internationale, Lyon.
Finalist	*Identity*	Chloe Delouvée	1e	Groupe Scolaire Sainte Anne, Brest
Finalist	*Intertwined*	Helena Rocha Alves	Tle	Lycée Camille See, Paris.
	JUNIOR Troisième - Seconde			
1st place	*I come from something*	Lucie Miguel	2de	Lycée Georges Duby, Aix-en-Provence
2nd place	*Below the Surface*	Ioannis Valasopoulos	2de	Lycée Franco-Hellénique Eugene Delcroix, Athens.
3rd place	*Roots 'I don't really know'*	Diane De Mortemart	3e	Lycée Français Jean Monnet, Brussels.
4th place	*Roots Worth Painting*	Mayuko Levy	2de	Lycée Franco-Allemand, Buc
Finalist	*Stellar Genesis*	Isla Hardy	2de	Cité Scolaire Internationale Honoré-de-Balzac, Paris
Finalist	*Where I Come From*	Isaac Kassahun	2de	Lycée International Montebello, Lille
Finalist	*Roots: Look at the Tree*	Léah Rider	2de	Lycée International Montebello, Lille
Finalist	*The Oak and the Leaf*	Hélèna LeVerge	2de	Groupe Scolaire Sainte Anne, Brest
Finalist	*Our Roots*	Tasnime Ghriss	3e	Grand Chêne SI, Lycée Corneille, La Celle-Saint-Cloud
Finalist	*Roots Eternal*	Mara Posescu	3e	Cité Scolaire Internationale Honoré-de-Balzac, Paris

Roots

I once thought roots were meant to stay,
To grip one patch of earth, one name, one way
But mine run loose beneath the ground,
Like quiet doubts that wander, unbound.
Not looking for a road or sign,
Just something real, something that feels like mine.
A voice that says I'm safe, I'm known
Not chosen out of fear of being alone.
No place has ever felt like home for long,
Each one sings softly, then moves on
Living somewhere between hello and goodbye
Learning how to belong without asking why.
My heart beats loud in terminal halls,
In passing glances and last calls
Drawn to maps and lines unseen,
To what might be, not what has been
Every place I leave pulls at me still,
Stretching my roots against my will.
I carry a warmth, a restless ache,
And a hope that I can't seem to shake
Maybe I'll never belong to just one place,
And never fit perfectly into one space
Yet every place I've loved, even briefly,
Lives inside of me quietly but deeply.

Senior section, 1st place.

Germ

I am the seed of withered vines
I grew from something cracked and old
I drag its weight, I bear its hold
I've learned to hate those twisted veins
that choke my throat
that stunt my growth

I am entrapped in lifeless leaves
yet try to bend, seek harmony
it almost works when I give in:
You start to smile but then You scream

oh, how I wish some calloused hand
would pull the weeds, would clear the ground
but I mistook distance with release
and Silence for a kind of peace

I said I wished that You were gone,
but freeze the time.
I am afraid.
Your roots were once a brighter green,
You dimmed Yourself so I could gleam

I want to die as Your daughter
not just as a mass of matter.

Senior section, 2nd place.

Poem contest

The little Oak Tree

At the edge of the world I stand,
Barefoot in the quiet land;
An old oak watches from the hill,
Its pink leaves lulling, hushed and still.

I graze my palm against its bark,
Rough as the past, deep as the dark,
A memory sparks, soothing inside,
Of those who walked through the nights with pride.

Bleak and cold, they swam through the floods,
Chasing dreams the world still hoards;
Left their names in grim shadowed places,
Carved in time, in hidden traces.

Like secrets carried through the leaves,
I hear their voices in the breeze,
Their stories travel into mine;
Roots that transcend earth and time.

And when I rise to leave the tree,
A piece of it remains in me;
We become the future of those roots,
Not bound by soil but by the truth.

Senior section, 3rd place.

In borrowed light

They praise my blossoms in borrowed light,
learn the names of my flowers, not my roots.
So when autumn empties my hands,
they panic at what remains
when the petals fall.

Stripped bare, I stand for all to see:
bent branches, bark carved by time,
a two-masked face, a double-tongued mouth,
inheritance written into my skin.

Two flags pulse through my blood,
two anthems learned at different tables.
My history lives in habits and silences,
in what we kept,
and what we were forced to leave.

My roots live in what I carry quietly:
memory, resilience, unfinished grief.
They are the reason
I still stand here-
even without the flowers.

Senior section, 4th place.

I COME FROM SOMETHING

I come from something.
Even though no one stayed around to explain it.

From names that dissolved with time,
From faces blurred by memory,
From stories that ended
Before I learned how to listen.

There's a history in my blood
That doesn't ask permission.
It shows in the way I'm watched,
In the way fear reaches people
Before I do.

I didn't choose what I carry
It chose me.
Sharp edges,
Silence,
A weight that feels older than my body.

They ask who I am,
As if the answer were simple.
As if I weren't built
From fragments,
From inherited shadows
And unfinished beginnings.

I'm not nothing,
I'm what remains.
Proud that something existed before me,
And continues.
Quietly.
Every time I breathe.

Junior section, 1st place.

Below the Surface

Roots hold me gently, the way someone holds your hand in the dark.
They remind me where I came from when I forget myself.
Under the ground, they keep all the stories I'm scared to say aloud.
They grow slowly, like trust.
Sometimes they shake when I shake.
Sometimes they stay strong when I can't.
Roots know the truth before I do.
They pull me back when I drift too far away.
They tell me I'm not alone, even when no one's around.
They rise in me like a quiet breath.
Roots soften the weight of days that feel too heavy.
They hold my fears the way soil holds rain.
They whisper that healing takes time.
They whisper that it's okay to stay.
Roots remember every version of me.
They keep them safe beneath the surface.
And when I fall, they wait patiently for me to stand again.
They remind me that growing is never a straight line.
They teach me to begin again.
And they promise they'll never let go.

Junior section, 2nd place.

Roots

I don’t really know where I’m
from I know the facts,
the places written down,
but home seems over there…

I feel like a flower,
lifted from the ground too early,
soil still clinging to my roots,
Foreign air oxidising the clutter

Twice,
I was placed into new earth. new streets, new
languages. The hands were careful, but still I shifted,
Uncomfortable in the new pot.

Some roots stayed behind.
Some broke.
The most resilient learnt to adapt.

Though still, my roots don’t form a clear silhouette.
some are tangled, misplaced,
carrying pieces from many soils.

And even if I don’t fully know where I belong,
I’ll always have the map anchored in my heart, leading me home.

Junior section, 3rd place.

Roots Worth Painting

Today I am painting roots.

Not just any roots. Anyone can paint a tree!

My roots. The reason why I am.

I stand there empty canvas in hand not quite knowing what to put…

Where *do* I come from ?

Suddenly, my parents' voices are like a wind

Pushing my paintbrush forward, getting my hand started.

All the tears ever cried in all this time flow in

Splattered droplets of desolate blue.

A straight line, then a sharp angle,

Some odd shapes added to splotches of childish memories

In the mess, in the blur, more faces start to show

And before I know it, with a sense of duty accomplished

I hold up and see my painting.

It is beautiful.

A mix of lines, shapes and colours, each with their own past, their own story

All entangled like

Roots

Junior section, 4th place.

Fu-Future

I am on one side of the world
One you may know of
Snow, Rain and Wind curled,
While Parsnips and carrots were sautéed in a stainless pan, that I had to coat with sauce to endure
In my other part: endless same sun, so pure
Yams and Cassava tossed in a huge copper pot
The sweet burning fire consuming wood
Endowing the heat to mix the flavours a lot
And the roots cooked, stewed
As I only think of
Exploding tastes in my mouth
I look at it with love
Those tastes I can only find deep south
Those who remind me of who I truly am
Those who remind life is not meant to be plain
Let alone all cursed delicatessen like jam, and delect me with sweet plantain
Let me tell you my story
And both sides
Which without I am not surely
Half the Man I am

Finalist, Senior section

Transplanted

I am a cedar sapling, unfurling in foreign soil.

My roots extend; in subterranean coil,

A living anchor against all spoil.

Emerged in the deep, damp lands of Mount's slope,

Tastes of pine in evergreen windflow.

Matured in the humid, haggard plains of Sun's scope,

Learning the strength of a steady glow.

My roots navigate new dirt tenaciously,

Not to erase, not to refrain;

But to weave the transcultural tapestry

Even as they drink from foreign rain.

They hold memory of every place.

They hold the whole world in a single embrace.

They form a pact no other can displace.

Transferred and transformed,

Transnational – transplanted

My roots do not forget, do not die.

They are archivists of earth and sky.

A network of silent, seeking ships

That hold two worlds in a single, steadfast grip.

Finalist, Senior section

Always. Everywhere. Forever.

Raised by Roots

If I am here today,

It is because of them.

The ones I cannot see,

But feel in every step I take.

They are the hands in the soil,

The wind that pushes me forward

When I want to stop,

When the path bends and I stumble.

Their voices are in the quiet,

Their laughter in my chest,

Their scars in my skin,

Reminding me I am not alone.

Every step remembers.

Every breath carries them.

I walk, they hold me.

I fall, they lift me.

Roots are alive beneath me,

Carrying me.

And I carry them.

Finalist, Senior section

At which point will you kill the tree?

Six feet under,
Maybe eight.
A coffin so tight it makes you ache.
You picked at nails, until your fingers bled.
Skin or wood? What difference does it make.

They handed you a shovel and expectations.
« A brilliant girl! The best » they said.
Or at best a good gardener, with the promise of an oak tree.

Go at the root of your problem and. Tear it off.
You dug its tomb.
You looked at the epitaph.

Before you knew it your words
The ones you struggled to form
Were written in stone.

Now it grows above you.
Beautiful leaves that could have been feathers
The weight of hair on your shoulders
The weight of dirt all over
And as you extend below you wonder
What was the question?

Finalist, Senior section

Roots

Hold my hand.

Let my roots seek the gentle warmth of another
Let them slip between your fingers and dig into skin.
Let them find their way into your heart.

It is lonely down here, under dirt and soil. Where the leaves conceal all
And the voices above are muffled and warped. I wish for sunlight,
Where all is uncovered.

We can thread daisy crowns upon our heads
We can raise our hands high in childlike joy.
We can trade stories inside stick forts, where you describe to me
How fish divide the waters and foxes slip through gated grounds,
How robins nest on picked branches, and how each act
Teaches the earth beneath our feet how warm the light is.

Let these roots of mine lay claim to every word; to learn all,
Where all is loved because it's known and understood.
Hold my hand, because sometimes I hold my own, like a lost child.

Finalist, Senior section

Roots

We're in a reflection chamber marred by dark vines
That embrace till for air we pine;
They crack the frame of memory,
Suffocate in the name of history.

They're an armature and a cage, soft bars
Holding us but always hiding the stars;
Anchoring in times of roiling turmoil,
But clutching freedom's wings in one long coil;

To cut roots is to be free – from old tales,
From family secrets, a necrosis so pale.

To cut roots is to have neither start nor end as we fly,
But never to set foot when darkness reaps the sky.

Cutting roots is leaving a name transmitted
Is spitting on a story whispered to stay united,
Is forgetting lessons transcending memory,
Is ignoring a perhaps tragic origin story.

Mercenaries of preservation,
Chains of history's repetition,
Caregivers of an endless rot,
Tangible source of all we wish we were not.

Roots, weaving our cloths, preserve our unwanted identity
Persist in supporting an endless dichotomy.

Finalist, Senior section

Identity

I'm a sick tree.
I grew up too fast,
My roots are unsteady.
They touch the ground, not me.

I'm a special tree.
I'm trying to detach from my roots,
To weaken what holds,
To pull myself free.

I'm a lonely tree.
Even my roots hate me,
Reject me.
Every soil I touch pushes back.

I'm a strange tree.
I'm trying to grow new roots,
Human roots,
But I'm a tree, I don't fit in boots.

I'm a lost girl.
People take space inside me.
There's no room left to stand.
Sometimes I wish I was a tree.

Finalist, Senior section

Intertwined

Roots are never singular.
They cross, borrow, remember.
Some grip stone, some drink silence,
Some are words waiting underground.

Mine began with my parents' hands,
steady, unannounced,
teaching the ground how to hold me.

Music spread next, thin threads of sound
Vibrating through the dark,
Teaching my chest how to echo.

Books followed :
Paper roots, fantasy-deep,
Maps to places that didn't exist
Until I needed them.

Movies flickered like rainfall,
Light soaking into thought,
Stories teaching me how to see sideways.

All of it knots below me,
Like veins in the earth. So I stand.

Finalist, Senior section

Stellar genesis

Bare bodies, against one
another,
fallen stars, I’m asking of you,
watch, for I burn.

I look on as you trace us,
we stand with the dead, dying,
and weave, from their corpses,
the fabric of your skin.

Come home, children,
show us how bright you are,
blind us with your light,
fill the sky with your song,
become one of us.
Crease the fabrics of the universe,
for you, too, will be forgotten.

Finalist, Junior section

Where I come from

Sitting next to a tree
It suddenly starts to talk
Said what it thought of me
Asked to know a bit more
What is your mentality?
How are you supposed to grow?
I talked about my family
And let the past take control
But then my ocean eyes
Stole the role of my mouth
They spilled out all my lies
Truth drowning me down south
Roots tangled in my veins
Names carved into my skin
I carry inherited pains
From places I've never been
I got out of my dream
But not out of my past
Now I grow, slow and real
Learning which roots will last

Finalist, Junior section

Roots

Look at that tree, on the hill
It is not moving, so still
Its branches stretch high,
In the sky

Mirroring them, below ground,
They stretch deep, without a sound,
Their presence unacknowledged
Their beauty unsuspected.

Cannot see them
Cannot hear them
Cannot smell them
Cannot feel them

Yet they are there, always there

Finalist, Junior section

The Oak and the Leaf

The oak and the leaf
In a bleak, cold winter was a wood asleep.
Flowers, berries, and animals had disappeared.
Like the wood, an oak was doing the same.
Its knotted body was brown, reserved.
On the lonely oak, a joyful leaf sings
“How lucky I am to be a leaf !
I may be small but small is always better than
Enormous trunk, boughs or even roots.
My appearance is pretty, green, and colorful sometimes."
Disturbed by the sound of its voice, the oak was awake.
“When your life lasts one season, responds the tree,
Symbol of eternity, my roots are messengers of solidity.
How can you live without their help ?
They relate the story of this tree, of this wood.
They play the most important role in representing ourselves.”
A blast of air takes the gracious leaf,
lost, minuscule among the other residents of the dark wood.
Its small life, reduced to a single movement.
Only stayed the wise oak and its hidden tale.

Finalist, Junior section

Our Roots

Our roots spread from east to west,
Up the highest hills,
Down the ocean depths.

Through the winter chills,
We must keep on going,
Now, and then, and still.

I can hear my own heart slowing down,
Breathing with the beats,
I repeat.

Newrose, oldrose, Queen Anne's lace.
Water, river, stone, and sun.

Wind over hill, under trees.
Where past the border none can see.

Climbing up to the skies for you.
Will you wait in the stars for me?

Finalist, Junior section

Roots Eternal

The transient sun beams
On the surfaced roots of great trees
That have stood in this ancient forest.
But the sun will fade
And in its place will be rain.
For, in this town
Sun doesn’t stay for long.
Only rain, falling on the roots of great trees.
People will stumble and they will fall,
They will be sad and they will be happy,
The sun will come and go,
Replaced by either rain or snow.
But the roots will stay the same,
Old and worn and torn,
For they are the roots of great trees,
And unlike the sun,
They are eternal.

Finalist, Junior section