



Creative collaborations

Students combine fact-finding with imagination

Story by Jolaine Collins

When teams of art students from Sacramento-area high schools set out to illustrate stories penned by young authors in the 2019 “Imagine this...” Story Writing Contest, they discovered it involved more than just putting paintbrush to paper.

Each fall, hundreds of California students in third through eighth grades write stories for the contest. Then Sacramento art students have the opportunity to bring the winning stories to life for a paperback compilation (see Book Reviews on Page 16).

Before embarking on their projects, the teen artists researched the agricultural topics of the stories to better understand the products and farming operations featured. The students worked to ensure their illustrations accurately depicted the authors’ subjects, including avocados, oranges, kiwifruit and redwood trees.

The three-person team from Florin High School in Sacramento, for example, recognized they knew little about farming. So before dividing up art tasks for “Friend of a Farmer,” team members dove into research about egg-gathering in chicken coops and the process of milking cows.

“It was a good opportunity for us to learn more about agriculture, develop skills and connect with others,” said Florin’s team leader, Wendy Liang.

The students’ efforts exemplify the goals of the contest, according to Judy Culbertson, executive director of the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, which

sponsors the annual story-writing competition.

“Our mission is to increase awareness and understanding of agriculture among California’s students and educators,” Culbertson said. “Every year, we are impressed by how these creative young authors and illustrators delve into their topics.”

The art students and their teachers agree it was a positive growth experience.

“The creative process of visualizing the author’s ideas was challenging,” said Peiqi Zhu of Franklin High School in Elk Grove.

“The real-world experience of working as a team and meeting a deadline was valuable to me,” added teammate Malak Abdulmajeed.

The Franklin team illustrated “Drip’s Adventure”—a story about the water cycle—by bringing their individual talents to the process. After working together to create the storyboards, one student developed the images and the others outlined them in ink and finished the details in watercolors and colored pencils.

“I like being able to watch the growth in my students as they work toward completing the images for the story,” said Scott Coppenger, an art instructor at Woodland High School in Woodland. “This is the first opportunity to get their images published and it is a pretty big deal for them.”

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‘Imagine this...’ story-writing contest 2019 state winners



“My favorite part of the story was having the kiwis talk to Gracie and teach her that kiwis are yummy.”

Gracie Changes Her Mind by Gabrielle Warmerdam

Third Grade, Archangel Academy, Kings County

Teacher: Christiana Warmerdam

A dream about kiwifruit convinces Gracie that what makes them different also makes them delicious.

Illustrated by: Ryanne Green and Gladys Padilla

Woodland High School, Woodland • Art instructor: Scott Coppenger



“I was inspired by my grandpa, who farms almonds.”

Friend of a Farmer by Nicoletta Dowd

Fourth Grade, Gratton Elementary School, Stanislaus County

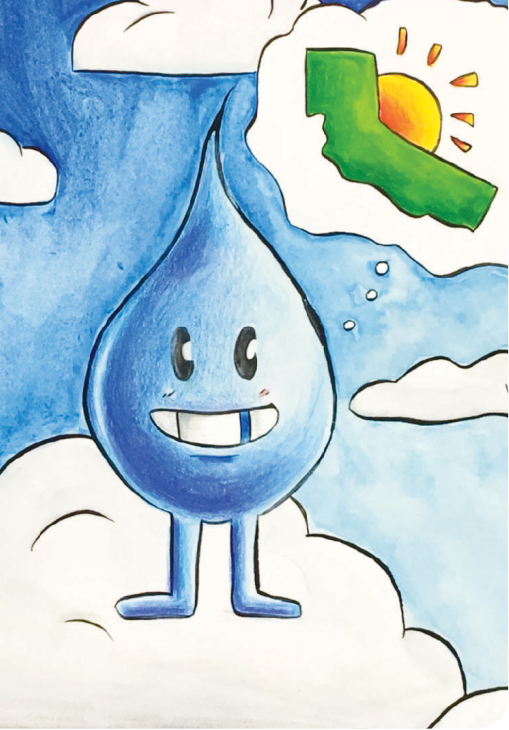
Teacher: Sheila Amaral

A young boy discovers his future vocation by helping his grandfather on his farm one summer.

Illustrated by: Wendy Liang, Angelica Lumbang and Jennifer Sotelo

Florin High School, Sacramento • Art instructor: Alexandra Pease





"All agriculture needs water. Plants, animals and people need water to survive."

Drip's Adventure by Katelyn Warmerdam

Fifth Grade, Archangel Academy, Kings County

Teacher: Christiana Warmerdam

Drip the water drop gets his wish when he becomes part of California's agricultural scene.

Illustrated by: Malak Abdulmajeed, Isabella Hofsdal, Kristina Tran and Peiqi Zhu
Franklin High School, Elk Grove • Art instructor: Derek Bills



"My grandma always wants me to eat avocados because she says they're super healthy, and I like them—so that's why I wrote about them."

The Gift by Cristian Perez

Seventh Grade, Sacred Heart School, Stanislaus County

Teacher: Elaine Magni

After accompanying her grandfather to his Hass avocado farm, Marianna receives a birthday surprise and a delicious treat.

Illustrated by: Ariana Cisneros, Stephanie Estrada, Nicole Martinez and Janeth Varela

Delta High School, Clarksburg • Art instructor: Corrie Soderlund

"I learned a lot about smudge pots by writing this story."



Saving Grandmother's Tree by Catherine Gruen

Sixth Grade, Signum Crucis, San Bernardino County

Teacher: Ingrid Gruen

A trip to the California Citrus State Historic Park in Riverside inspired this story, based on agricultural innovator Eliza Tibbets and the use of smudge pots.

Illustrated by: Sherly Angulo and Vy Nguyen

Sheldon High School, Sacramento • Art instructor: Kelsey Dillard



"My favorite part about writing the story was going to a wood mill with my dad."



Randy the Redwood by Matthew Dunn

Eighth Grade, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School, Stanislaus County

Teacher: Star Pedron

Readers follow Randy the Redwood's life cycle from forest to lumber mill and finally to a playground, learning about the forest industry along the way.

Illustrated by: Gabrielle de Leon, Nena Salhotra and Holly Velasquez

Inderkum High School, Sacramento • Art instructor: Rachel Rodriguez



Stories encourage creativity, learning

"Imagine this..." is an annual story-writing contest for California students in grades three to eight. It encourages creative ways to learn about agriculture.

Each year, the top stories, with illustrations, are featured in a book. Winners also are celebrated on California Agriculture Day at

the state Capitol in Sacramento, where they are honored by state leaders. They receive e-readers and medals for their work.

There are six winners at the state level, and more than 48 winners at the regional level. The deadline for this year's entries is Nov. 1.

Contest details can be found at www.LearnAboutAg.org.