



A Note from the Chief Advisor

Rajiv Khandelwal, Chief Advisor, Afflatus Creations

The Young Voices platform is committed to giving every participating young writer a published voice. Accordingly, all eligible submissions received for the National Poetry and Short Story Writing Competition 2026 are carried in this anthology, including a small number of poems and short stories whose content does not directly engage with the given theme of Nature.

As a one-time relaxation extended to the inaugural edition of this competition, these entries have been published on the Young Voices platform in the spirit of encouraging young writers. They have not been assessed by the panel of judges under the competition criteria, which require relevance to the theme of Nature.

Afflatus Creations acknowledges that writing on a prescribed theme is a developing skill, and that the primary purpose of Young Voices is to motivate, publish, and recognise young literary voices at every stage of their journey.

A literary platform becomes meaningful when it does more than publish finished work. It becomes meaningful when it gives new writers the confidence to begin, the opportunity to be heard, and the encouragement to continue. It is with this belief that Afflatus Creations has taken its first steps towards creating a dedicated space for young writers.

Young Voices is conceived as an ongoing initiative, not as a one-time competition. We want young writers to have a place where their ideas, observations, imagination, and creativity can reach readers beyond their immediate circles. The National Poetry and Short Story Writing Competition 2026, organised by the Department of English, Jawahar Science College, Neyveli, in association with Afflatus Creations, is the first organised expression of this initiative.

Afflatus Creations, under its Young Voices initiative, accepts submissions as a matter of policy through schools. It has, however, agreed in principle that it may also accept direct submissions from young writers, provided such submissions are accompanied by written parental or guardian consent and meet our publication standards. Two essays by Nivritee Khandelwal appear in this inaugural issue. They were received directly from the young writer with the consent of her parents, and are a welcome example of the writing we hope



this platform will continue to receive. Any formal adoption of this secondary route will be announced on our website.

For this inaugural issue, we have chosen to open our doors wide. The competition will recognise excellence, but Young Voices is intended to recognise participation as well. Every participant whose submission meets the competition requirements, whether received through a school or directly from the young writer, will be given space in this issue. Every eligible participant will see their poem, story, or essay published.

This decision is deliberate. We are not simply judging young writers; we are making room for them. A prize may recognise a particular achievement, but publication offers something equally valuable: the experience of seeing one's own words reach readers beyond the classroom, the school, and the immediate circle of family and friends.

This competition is not the destination of Young Voices. It is its beginning. We hope that participation leads to publication, publication to confidence, and confidence to a continuing habit of writing. We hope, too, that the doors opened through this initiative remain open for young writers in the years ahead.

To every young contributor, our message is simple: write honestly, observe carefully, imagine freely, and keep writing. Your voice does not have to sound like anyone else's. It only has to be yours.

Read · Think · Express

Rajiv Khandelwal
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