

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

Waterston
DESERT WRITING PRIZE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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High Desert Museum's Waterston Desert Writing Prize Kicks Off Student Competition

BEND, OR — Young writers from Crook, Deschutes, Harney, Jefferson and Lake counties are now invited to submit essays exploring desert landscapes to the High Desert Museum's Waterston Student Essay Competition.

The Waterston Student Essay Competition, now in its second year, is part of the Waterston Desert Writing Prize. It's open to students in grades nine through 12, in public or private school, or home-schooled, who live in Crook, Deschutes, Harney, Jefferson and Lake counties. Submission is free. Students may submit essays of 750 to 1,000 words of nonfiction prose to waterston@highdesertmuseum.org from now through May 1, 2021. The submissions will be judged on originality, clarity of expression, accuracy, and their contribution to the understanding and appreciation of desert regions.

"Opening a Waterston Prize to students fosters young writers and helps them grow a new appreciation for this region," said Prize founder Ellen Waterston. "We received some thought-provoking submissions last year, and we can't wait to see what this year's young voices will share."

Author and poet Ellen Waterston started the Waterston Desert Writing Prize in 2014. Through six years of growth, the High Desert Museum has been a strong partner to the organization, promoting the Prize and hosting the annual awards ceremony and reception. On September 17, 2020, the Waterston Desert Writing Prize announced another huge step — its official adoption by the High Desert Museum.

The mission of the Prize is to strengthen and support the literary arts and humanities in the High Desert region through recognition of literary excellence in nonfiction writing about desert landscapes, through community interaction with the winning authors of the annual prize, and presentations and programs that take place in association with the prize.

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“The Waterston Desert Writing Prize speaks to the core of the Museum mission — to celebrate and expand the knowledge of the High Desert landscape,” said Museum Executive Director Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D. “The adoption is an incredible honor for us and we will continue its mission, vision and legacy in perpetuity.”

The winner of the 2020 inaugural Student Essay Competition was Al Lehto of Redmond Proficiency Academy. The winning essay, “Badlands,” told the story of the many hours the author spent with their mother painting in the Oregon Badlands, now a federally recognized wilderness area just east of Bend. Lehto now attends the University of Oregon, majoring in early childhood education.

The submission period will open for the signature Waterston Desert Writing Prize on January 1, 2021. Emerging, mid-career and established nonfiction writers are invited to apply. The Prize honors literary nonfiction that illustrates artistic excellence, sensitivity to place and desert literacy with the desert as both subject and setting. Inspired by Ellen Waterston's love of the High Desert, a region that has been her muse for more than 30 years, the Prize recognizes the vital role deserts play worldwide as ecosystems and in the human narrative.

For more information about the Waterston Desert Writing Prize, visit highdesertmuseum.org/waterston-prize. For the Student Essay Competition and how to submit an entry, visit highdesertmuseum.org/waterston-student-prize.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM:

THE HIGH DESERT MUSEUM opened in Bend, Oregon in 1982. It brings together wildlife, cultures, art, history and the natural world to convey the wonder of North America’s High Desert. The Museum uses indoor and outdoor exhibits, wildlife in natural habitats and living history demonstrations to help people discover and appreciate this diverse region. The Museum is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, is a Smithsonian Affiliate, was a 2018 finalist for the National Medal for Museum and Library Services and is the 2019 recipient of the Western Museums Association’s Charles Redd Award for Exhibition Excellence. highdesertmuseum.org

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