

BCTRUST AND BLANCHARD MEMORIAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CONTESTS

Every year the Boxborough Conservation Trust sponsors a writing contest and an art contest at the Blanchard Memorial Elementary School to encourage students to think about the natural landscapes and wildlife in their community.

WRITING CONTEST

The writing contest currently features Grade Six contestants. Three winners are chosen for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place, with Honorable Mentions awarded if merited. All 6th grade students are asked to write an essay or a poem about a particular theme. Past themes are listed below. Winning essays/poems are published in Common Ground (links to each below):

2025:

2024: **Living with wildlife** Here in Boxborough we are lucky to have conservation land at many of our doorsteps and throughout our community. Through this benefit, we have the opportunity to observe nature's beauty on a daily basis. We also have the responsibility to take care of our natural spaces that our non-human neighbors call home. This Summer/Fall we have heard numerous stories, and maybe even had our own personal encounter, with two black bears taking residence within Boxborough. Write a poem or personal narrative about what it means to have a harmonious and peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife in our community. Consider what measures we need to take in order to keep wildlife wild.

<https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/BCT-Winter-2024-CG-for-Web.pdf>

2023: **Theme: Birds and Their Habitats** There are birds flying, swimming, running, diving all around us in Boxborough and beyond. This year the theme at Blanchard is “NestED: A Safe Place to Land.” In the waters, fields and forests around Blanchard, in conservation areas around town, and in your own backyards there are habitats that are “safe places to land.” Think about what makes different habitats good for birds, especially during the Spring/Summer nesting season. Some birds come back from a long migration from South America



and find Boxborough as a safe place to build a nest and lay their eggs. At Blanchard, we often see killdeers running around in April-May trying to find a safe place to nest on the playground or parking lot, and hopefully they can find one that doesn't get stepped on or run over. Behind Blanchard, wood ducks and hooded mergansers are looking for hollow trees or large nest boxes where they can lay their eggs. In your backyards and the woods around Blanchard you'll see songbirds using twigs and other materials to build nests. These habitats have to have the right structure, safety from predators, and food resources. Think about what makes good habitats for different birds, and why birds rely on us conserving land, not using pesticides on our properties to make sure they are able to nest and raise their chicks safely. https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BCT-Winter-2023-CG_2.pdf

2022: **Theme: Wildlife in Our Own Backyards** At Town Meeting in May, Boxborough voted overwhelmingly to support buying over 21 acres of new conservation land on Sargent Rd. so that it will be protected forever. This land will become part of a network of conservation land with connected trails. These habitat connections (also called corridors) linking large areas of habitat are vital for wildlife, especially large mammals. In Boxborough, we are lucky to have many species living among us, including bobcats, coyotes, deer, fishers, long-tailed weasels, raccoons, opossums, flying squirrels, river otters, and foxes. Many of them roam over many miles and require large tracts of land. Write a poem or essay inspired by the wildlife and their habitats in Boxborough.

Please check out this link to see photos and videos of wildlife and their tracks, all taken in Boxborough on both private and public conservation land:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/MuAupNjMJEkfKjHn8>

<https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/BCT-Winter-2022-1.pdf>

2021: This year, the theme at Blanchard is 'ReUNITED'; we are grateful to be back together in our school! Over the past year and a half, many of us also have found a new appreciation of our natural spaces and conservation land, which have even provided us with safe spaces to learn when we couldn't all be inside together. We are lucky in Boxborough to have a lot of natural areas, hiking trails, and agricultural land. As recently as about 70 years ago, the majority of Boxborough's residents were farmers. When you spend time outdoors in your neighborhood or on local hiking trails, you can see the evidence of our shared rural heritage all around you, in the old stone walls that rimmed the farmers' fields. There are about 30 miles of hiking trails throughout town, and BCTrust is holding a "I Hiked Boxborough's 30!" challenge: hike all of the trails in town and get an iron-on patch or button. Maybe you would like to reunite with Boxborough's rural heritage and write about some aspect of Boxborough's history as a farming town or its current status as a beautiful place to live, surrounded by nature (fiction, non-fiction, or poetry). https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/BCT-Winter-2021_vol24-issue2_FINAL.pdf

2020: This year you may have found yourself with more time to spend outdoors as school shut down in the Spring, and the pandemic limited the places we could go. Researchers have long touted the importance of spending time in nature when we're stressed or feeling down. Our conservation lands have been places to clear our minds, de-stress, and connect with nature. There are many physical and mental health benefits of conservation land, and maybe you've experienced these over the past several months. You are encouraged to write about a local natural area where you enjoy spending time, and perhaps how spending time in nature has helped you (fiction, non-fiction, or poetry). You can include references to familiar places like Steele Farm, the Hager Land near Blanchard, Patch Hill, Flerra, or other conservation land or natural areas. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Common-Ground-2020-Winter-Final-1.pdf>

- 2019: This year, the theme at Blanchard is ‘CommUNITY’, the idea of inclusiveness and shared sense of place. Think about time spent outdoors with your friends, family, and classmates at local natural areas and write about a shared experience (fiction, non-fiction, or poetry). <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BCT-Common-Ground-winter-2019.pdf>
- 2018: This 6th grade writing contest incorporated the themes of mindfulness and nature. Students were asked to imagine they were a falling autumn leaf and to write about their journey of exploration as they fall from their tree. https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/BCT-DEC-2018_lo-res-REVISED-for-web-FINAL.pdf
- 2017: This year’s topical theme is protecting our water resources—including underground aquifers, wetlands, ponds and brooks. https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Common-Ground_Spring-2017_final.pdf
- 2016: For this year’s contest, sixth grade students were asked to write a creative story, poem or essay that sends a strong message to Boxborough residents that this important issue of climate change needs our attention and we need to work together to use less energy, use alternate forms of energy that won’t harm our future, and to support the preservation of nature. https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/bctrust_cg_sum2016_final_26jun.pdf
- 2015: For this year’s writing contest, we asked students to visit conservation land near their home or Blanchard Elementary School and use their senses to experience the land and the plants and animals that live there. Using prose or poetry, students described what they saw, heard, smelled, touched, or tasted and how it made them feel. We challenged them to create a mental picture for the readers of Common Ground; so through their experiences and their written words, perhaps you can experience and better appreciate Boxborough’s beautiful conservation and farmlands. (6th graders) <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/summer-20152.pdf>
- 2014: Global Warming is on everyone’s mind, and today’s youth want to do their part to reduce the warming trend, so the BCTrust asked students to write a persuasive essay, poem, or narrative to convince townspeople to make preserving undeveloped land, especially trees, a priority. See what our four winners had to say about how trees not only remove carbon from the atmosphere, but also benefit us in countless other ways—from providing habitat for wildlife to creating fantastic views for all to enjoy. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2014-01-summer.pdf>
- 2013: The theme of this year’s writing contest was commemorating the BCTrust’s 15 years of existence! Students were asked to tell the town, in a poem, essay, or letter, what they value about having conservation land in our community, and why it is important to have people working together in an organization like the BCTrust to accomplish an important goal to

- preserve as much land as possible. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2013-01-summer.pdf>
- 2012: The BCTrust wondered what our youth are thinking about Boxborough’s farming past, present, and future, so for this year’s writing contest we asked them to write a poem, essay, or narrative letting our readers know what they think is special about farming in our community. There were 140 entries submitted for consideration by students in grades 3 through 6. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2012-01-summer.pdf>
- 2011: For this year's contest students in grades 3 through 6 answered the question, “What are the “little things” that you will do to preserve and protect the environment here in Boxborough?” Three winners and four honorable mentions were selected from 142 entries, the most ever received in one year. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2011-03-summer.pdf>
- 2010: Every year the Boxborough Conservation Trust sponsors a writing contest and a design contest at Blanchard Memorial School to encourage students to think about the natural landscapes and wildlife in their community. The writing contest, now in its 8th year, is open to students in Grades 3 to 6. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2010-03-summer.pdf>
- 2009: Every year the Boxborough Conservation Trust sponsors a writing contest and a design contest at Blanchard Memorial School to encourage students to think about land conservation in their community. The writing contest is open to students in Grades 3 to 6, while the design contest is for Grade 4 students only. This year, fourth grade students took the top three prizes in the writing contest, giving Grade 4 a complete contest sweep. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2009-03-summer.pdf>
- 2008: Forty-eight students from grades 3, 4 and 5 at Blanchard Memorial Elementary School submitted essays and poems this past spring to the 7th annual BCTrust Writing Contest. In recognition of Boxborough’s 225th birthday, students were asked to write an essay or poem describing the natural landscape in Boxborough – how it may have been 225 years ago, how it is now, or what it might be like 225 years from now. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2008-03-fall.pdf>
- 2007: Forty-seven students who attend Blanchard Memorial School in Grades 3, 4, and 5 participated in the fifth annual BCTrust Writing Contest. This year, they were asked to write an essay or poem about the beauty of Boxborough’s wetlands and the importance of preserving this diverse habitat. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2007-07-jul.pdf>
- 2006: More than 90 students from grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 at Blanchard Memorial Elementary School submitted essays and poems this spring to the fourth annual BCTrust Writing Contest. For their topic this year, students were asked to explain why we all should recycle and how it benefits the environment. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2006-09-sep.pdf>

- 2005: "Students in 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grades were invited to S "share your short essay or poem with everyone in Boxborough - tell them what you enjoy most about being out-of-doors and in contact with nature . . .on conservation land or private property such as your backyard."
<https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2005-03-mar.pdf>
- 2004: Students were asked to write about what they find most interesting or inspiring about protecting our open land, wildlife, and natural resources. <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2004-02-feb.pdf>
- 2003: Fourth-graders in Ms. Jean Oviatt's and Mrs. Lauren Grady's classes at Blanchard submitted poems and essays to the BCT for publication in Common Ground. A small BCT committee selected two entries for this edition, with thanks and honorable mention to the following students for their very thoughtful work: Darcy A., Jessica D., Karishma P. and Jasmine J.
<https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2003-05-may.pdf>

ART CONTEST

The design contest is for students in Grade Four and has varied with 1st place winner's art work being used for t-shirts, tote bags and stationery. More recently, four winners have been chosen and the four entries are placed on the back of a t-shirt with the BCTrust's logo on the front. Past winners and themes, if any, can be found using the links provided below. The art contest is now held each Spring.

2025: Tiny Worlds: Small Ecosystems that Make a Big Difference! <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/BCT-Summer-2025.pdf>

2024: Birds Around Blanchard: Nested or on the Wing
https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/BCT-Summer-2024-CG-NL_for-web.pdf

2023: Reptiles and Amphibians of Massachusetts
<https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BCT-Summer-2023-11.15.pdf>

2022: Traces of Wildlife Surround Us
<https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/BCT-Summer-2022-final.pdf>

2021: Protect Pollinators!
https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/BCT-Spring-2021_PDF-WTH-Links.pdf

2020: Plants and Fungi
<https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/BCT-May-Day-2020-final.pdf>

2019: Insects
<https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BCT-JUN-2019-final-again-6-25-19.pdf>

- 2018: Preserving and Protecting
<https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Common-Ground-Spring-2018.pdf>
- 2017: Birds
https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Common-Ground_Spring-2017_final.pdf
- 2016: Plants or Animals
https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/bctrust_cg_sum2016_final_26jun.pdf
- 2015: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/summer-20152.pdf>
- 2014: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2014-01-summer.pdf>
- 2013: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2013-01-summer.pdf>
- 2012: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2012-01-summer.pdf>
- 2011: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2011-03-summer.pdf>
- 2010: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2010-03-summer.pdf>
- 2009: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2009-03-summer.pdf>
- 2008: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2008-03-fall.pdf>
- 2007: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2007-07-jul.pdf>
- 2006: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2006-09-sep.pdf>
- 2004: <https://bctrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2004-05-may.pdf>