NINETY YEARS

In 2021, a young entrepreneur named Maurice “Robbie” Robinson had a hunch. He envisioned a future in which creativity, artistic expression, and a greater appreciation for art, literature, and “things of the spirit and of the mind” would become intrinsic American values. And he set out to make that future a reality.

During his first few years as the determined and tenacious publisher of The Scholastic—the first national weekly magazine for motivated and intellectually engaged high school students—Robinson was “distressed” by the lack of public recognition he observed for creative teenagers at high schools across the country, especially when contrasted with the number of awards given to athletes each year. He recalled writing to “shock the general public and the average high school student to the desirability of treating our intellectual and artistic achievers with the same passionate fervor that they tailgated varsity football games, the same economic rewards to positively reinforce the bold ideas of burgeoning young artists and writers, until the day might come when such a system would no longer be necessary.”

Robinson not only wished to rescue artistic teenagers from an educational system and culture that had little interest in their innate talents and even less tolerance for their eccentricities, but he also wanted to place them on a pedestal as exemplars of human potential. If Americans did not value the creativity of their children, he reasoned, why not set up a system of rewards to positively reinforce the bold ideas of creative and literary creation with cultural value. Based on his understanding that the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards were born.

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The Scholastic Writing Awards grew organically out of the early audience-building activities of The Scholastic, which, in 1923, during its first year as a national magazine, announced a short-story contest aimed at deepening the engagement and readership of students and teachers across the country. The contest offered the incentive of cash prizes, as well as an opportunity for students to be published. That first year, roughly three hundred submissions were sent in by high school students hoping to see their works in print, and Horace Liveright—one of the most influential publishers of his time—agreed to serve as a judge. Unfortunately, the quality of the stories proved so low that Liveright recommended none of them for publication. In a letter to Maurice Robinson, dated April 30, 1923, he pulled no punches, stating unequivocally:

“I can only say that I have never in my life read such a collection of inexcusably poor stuff. I can’t with any conscience vote for any of these stories as being worthy of publication even in a magazine edited by five-year-old girls and boys subscribed to by morons.”

Six of the stories received obligatory cash awards that year, but—to Robinson’s disappointment—one could be conscientiously published in the magazine. In the years that followed, as subscriptions to The Scholastic rose, so too did the number of submissions to the competition, as did the overall quality of the student works. Corporate sponsors, such as Collier’s magazine and the Carnegie Corporation, joined the cause, and the cash prizes, in turn, grew in number and quantity.

In May of 1925, The Scholastic published its first annual student-written issue, featuring works by award-winning student writers, and in 1926 the company published its first anthology of student writing—Saplings—showcasing a geographically diverse selection of the best writing by teenagers that year. Both the student-written issue and Saplings made good on Robinson’s early editorial promise to treat high school students as members of The Scholastic and give teachers the opportunity to “prove the prowess of their students.”

With the announcement of the student-written issue in 1925, the Awards were also born, because students were encouraged to submit cover designs for the May issue. Based on the instant popularity of the cover-design contest, the George Bellows Memorial Prize—named after the iconic American painter—was announced in 1926 as a catchall category for pieces of “creative art.” And yet nothing could have prepared the staff of The Scholastic for the thousands of creative-art submissions they would receive at their Pittsburgh office that winter.

The most significant change to the Awards that winter, however, was the introduction of Blind judging, which leveled the playing field, providing recognition for many girls and for students from every income level. Once selected students were notified, they mailed in their head shots for publication.

The Awards proved so popular that by 1927, the Scholastic was receiving over twenty thousand entries from students and teachers across the country. As one writer noted in his review of the Awards in the New York World-Telegram, the Awards “are the only way to sell high school magazines and to keep the class alive.”

The Awards were so successful that within a few years, they had exceeded Robinson’s wildest expectations.
Maureen Daly '37 '38

As a teenager in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, shy and self-conscious Maureen Daly found that writing gave her a way to “relieve the tense, hurt feeling inside.” While attending St. Mary’s Springs Academy in 1937-38, Daly submitted her first story to the Scholastic Awards. “Fifteen” earned Daly’s first award, and in 1938 “Sixteen” followed suit. She published her first novel, Seventeenth Summer, shortly afterward. It has sold more than one million copies, has never been out of print, and is considered the first young adult novel.

Harry Bertoia ‘34 ‘36

This colored-ink drawing by Harry Bertoia earned him a Scholastic Art Award. With funds from a Scholastic scholarship, Bertoia enrolled at the Art School of the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts. Bertoia later became an abstract sculptor and a modern furniture designer. He arrived in the United States from Italy at the age of fifteen.

Ezra Jack Keats ‘34

Long before becoming a Caldecott Medalist for writing and illustrating unforgettable books for children (The Snowy Day), Ezra Jack Keats earned a Scholastic Gold Key for this 1934 oil painting Shantytown. Over the course of an eclectic career, Keats also designed camouflage patterns for the United States Army; was an illustrator for the Captain Marvel comic book series, The New York Times Book Review, and Reader’s Digest; and painted murals under the Works Progress Administration.

First Prize in Colored Inks
By Harry Bertoia
Cass Technical High School, Detroit

ALUMNI FEATURE

SIXTEEN

By Maureen Daly
St. Mary’s Springs Academy, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

First Prize, Short Story Division

N A N T I O N A L S C H O L A S T I C A R W A R D S

1938

This is a story about
My friend, Steve, and I went to the movies to see a new movie. We decided to go to the Space Theater, which was located on the other side of town. It was a big theater with a lot of seats, but it was always empty on weekdays. We bought our tickets and went inside. The theater was dimly lit, and we found our seats. We settled in and waited for the movie to start.

As we waited, I noticed that the door to the projection room was open. I asked Steve if he had seen the projectionist, and he shook his head. Suddenly, we heard a loud noise coming from the projection room. It sounded like a machine was breaking down. Steve and I looked at each other in horror. What if the movie was being destroyed? We decided to go and find the projectionist to see what was happening.

We ran through the lobby and into the projection room. It was dark and empty, except for the projectionist. He was standing in front of a machine, frantically trying to fix it. We ran over to him and asked what was going on. He told us that the machine was just breaking down and that there was nothing he could do.

We watched anxiously as he tried to fix the machine. It seemed like an eternity passed before he finally succeeded. He turned off the machine, and we all breathed a sigh of relief. We thanked him for saving the movie and left the theater.

As we walked out, I noticed that the sky was a beautiful shade of pink and purple. It was a beautiful day, and I realized that sometimes the most unexpected things can happen. We had had a great time, and I knew that I would never forget this experience.

MAY 9, 1938

SIXTEEN

By Maureen Daly

A movie was being shown at the North Shore Theater, and I asked my boyfriend, Steve, to go with me. We arrived early and found our seats. The theater was dark, and we could hear the sound of the projector in the distance. Suddenly, we heard a loud noise coming from the projection room. It sounded like a machine was breaking down. I asked Steve if he had heard it, and he shook his head.

We decided to go and check on the projectionist. We ran through the lobby and into the projection room. It was dark and empty, except for the projectionist. He was standing in front of a machine, frantically trying to fix it. We ran over to him and asked what was going on. He told us that the machine was just breaking down and that there was nothing he could do.

We watched anxiously as he tried to fix the machine. It seemed like an eternity passed before he finally succeeded. He turned off the machine, and we all breathed a sigh of relief. We thanked him for saving the movie and left the theater.

As we walked out, I noticed that the sky was a beautiful shade of pink and purple. It was a beautiful day, and I realized that sometimes the most unexpected things can happen. We had had a great time, and I knew that I would never forget this experience.
I was in the eleventh grade at Taylor Allderdice High School when I won first prize for oil painting in the National Scholastic High School Art Contest. The exhibition of the works accepted by the jury that year, 1941, was held first at the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh. Then the exhibition was shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and it was sent up to Life magazine. Suddenly, I was over the rainbow. My two paintings were reproduced in full color in the foremost national publication of the time, and I had a moment of revenge against my uncles who had always made fun of my art-making.” — A War and Two Paintings

Pearlstein has long been regarded as one of the most important American realist painters of the 20th century, and is best known for his paintings of static nudes. Carousel, for which he won a Scholastic Art Award at seventeen while a student at Taylor Allderdice High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is clearly a work of a different sort. This painting was exhibited once again at the Montclair Art Museum in New Jersey in 2009. Carousel was the first piece on display in his career retrospective.

Before celebrated fashion photographer Richard Avedon dropped out of DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, New York, to join the Merchant Marines, he won a Scholastic Gold Key in 1941 for his poem “Wanderlust.” Upon his return to the United States in 1944, Avedon found work as a photographer at a department store—and within two years was shooting for Harper’s Bazaar, Vogue, and more. In 1997, Avedon wrote an encouraging letter to creative teens that said, “To be a young artist is to ignite and thrive on the volcano of your imagination.”

ALUMNI FEATURE

Philip Pearlstein ’41, ’42

Wanderlust

You must not think because my glance is quick
To shift from this to that, from here to there,
Because I am most usually
The way is strangest and the wonders thick,
Because when wind is wildest and the bay
Swoops mildly upward and the gulls are few
And I am doing as I want to do,
Leaving the town to go my aimless way;
You must not think because I am the kind
Who always shunned security and such
As bolder the responsible of mind
That I shall never total up to much;
I know my drifting will not prove a loss,
For mine is a rolling stone that has gathered moss.

AWARD RECIPIENT

Richard Avedon ’41

Before celebrated fashion photographer Richard Avedon dropped out of DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, New York, to join the Merchant Marines, he won a Scholastic Gold Key in 1941 for his poem “Wanderlust.” Upon his return to the United States in 1944, Avedon found work as a photographer at a department store—and within two years was shooting for Harper’s Bazaar, Vogue, and more. In 1997, Avedon wrote an encouraging letter to creative teens that said, “To be a young artist is to ignite and thrive on the volcano of your imagination.”

THE SCHOLASTIC ART & WRITING AWARDS A YEAR AT A GLANCE

SEPTEMBER

Registration opens for all students enrolled in grades 7-12 in public, private, parochial, or home-school programs

Outreach to every US middle school and high school

Winners of the National Student Poets Program appointed at the Library of Congress’s National Book Festival in Washington, DC

DECEMBER–JANUARY

More than 200,000 works submitted to more than 100 regional affiliates across the country

Regional adjudication

JANUARY–FEBRUARY

Regional awards, exhibitions, ceremonies, and readings

Approximately 60,000 Regional Awards: Gold Key, Silver Key, and Honorable Mention Gold Keys are forwarded to New York City for national adjudication

FEBRUARY

National adjudication. All Gold Key works are reviewed by notable artists, journalists, curators, and educators

MARCH

National winners notified

7 of Gold Keys receive national Gold and Silver Medals

45 cash scholarships to Portfolio Medalists

More than 50 additional cash awards are provided by program sponsors

APRIL

Winng students qualify for more than $8 million in scholarships from top colleges, universities, and art schools

National Ceremony at Carnegie Hall

ART WRITE NOW! National Student Exhibition opens in New York City at Parsons, The New School for Design

SUPPORT THE NEXT PHILIP PEARLSTEIN BY VISITING WWW.ARTANDWRITING.ORG

Parsons, The New School for Design
In 1952, Maurice Robinson oversees a panel of jurors as they determine what artwork should advance to the next round.

**“THE GREATEST ART PROMOTION OF THE CENTURY”**

“...in 1950s...”

The company would continue to forge and maintain connections to the Awards over the decades to come—publishing and distributing award-winning student writing in print and online with names like Bitterroot, Peppermint, and Teenspell; developing imprints aimed at teenage readers; and launching a still-running magazine called Art, featuring the works of contemporary, classic, and student artists. In May of 1958, the National Student Art Exhibition was displayed at the Riverside Museum in New York City. Following the opening of the exhibition, Scholastic held a dinner in honor of the senior high school students who had received scholarships and other national awards that year. The nation’s top seven teenage artists were present that night to accept their scholarships to prominent art schools, and Robinson took great pleasure in reading off their names before a crowd of fans, sponsors, and supporters. Before doing so, however, he paused to reflect upon the impact of the Awards on American culture. “I think that intellectual, academic, and creative achievements are given...”

**Art at the Riverside (1958)** Scholastic Award-winning work on display at New York City’s Riverside Museum in May 1958—one of many hosts of the National Student Art Exhibition over the years.
for greater recognition than they were thirty-five years ago,” he said. “But I doubt if any in this room believe we have yet sufficiently stabbed awake the general public and the average high school student to the desirability of treating our intellectual and artistic achievers with the honor and respect they deserve. I don’t agree with the critics of our young people who say there is an anti-intellectualism among them, or that young people think it is necessary to appear dumb to be popular. But I’m sure we cannot do too much to encourage our young people and the general public to honor the superior, talented, and intellectually ambitious young men and young women. And that is why—in a few words—Scholastic magazines sponsor this and numerous other activities designed to honor youth.”

In 1959, the Art Awards alone received a record-breaking 165,000 submissions. Of those, more than 25,000 earned Regional Awards and were displayed in local exhibitions. The regional network had grown to thirty-two sponsors, spread all throughout the country, as well as a catchall region for students who lived in areas that were not served by a sponsor. Students now submitted works of art for recognition in twenty-five categories, which yielded $40,000 in national awards and an additional $75,000 in scholarships offered by colleges, universities, and art schools. Corporate sponsors continued to help sustain the program, along with Scholastic, by underwriting national categories that were tied to their products. Contributions from companies such as Strathmore Paper, Venus Pen and Pencil, Crescent Cardboard, the American Crayon Company, and many others had kept the enterprise afloat. Finally, an article in Art Material (Art USA) magazine in May 1959 called the Scholastic Awards “the greatest art promotion of the century,” praising Robinson for his “dogged, persistent, and long-range view of culture in America.” However, from the impassioned tone of Robinson’s speech at the 1958 exhibition opening, he clearly had no plans to rest on his laurels. He believed the Awards had important work to do, despite their many successes.

Identifying the exceptional creativity of our nation’s youth...
National High School Art selections from the 52nd of film images documenting 1979 include three canisters of this box from archiving the Work: Nine decades of students, teachers, and history, 90 years of creativity. The as the title sponsor of a stand-alone division, which Scholastic’s Photography Awards and signed on for $20,000 high school photography contest in 1962 with Scholastic national sponsors, Eastman Kodak, had merged its tens of thousands of dollars. Eastman Kodak to increase their contributions by keeping submission of art and writing through sixty regional judging, awarding, and exhibiting more than 250,000 by the end of the decade was receiving, processing, shipping during the 1970s. Because of the increased costs Robinson rallies his vast network ... to the challenge of serving the needs of creative teenagers ... Through his tenacity of spirit, far-reaching vision, and inimitable leadership, the Awards had survived and flourished for nearly sixty years. Following his example, the program would reinvent itself again and again in the decades to come. During the 1979-80 program year, frustrated by the challenges of raising enough money to administer the Awards, Maurice Robinson convened a meeting with representatives from all sixty regional sponsors at Scholastic Headquarters in New York City, setting out to convince them to contribute even more. “He was upset,” remembered Richard Robinson, who, along with Howard Adams, also attended the meeting. “He did what he often did in his career. He would tell people, ‘This is the situation and we need you to pay a little bit more.’ There was an argument about how much they should pay to the National Awards. He became convinced that they needed to pay more. Everyone was sort of dancing around the thing. He just come to the meeting and said, ‘Look, here are the facts.’ Of course no one understood what he was talking about, even though he was transparent with the information. Nobody knew the context of how big or how little it was. He said, ‘You just have to pay ten percent more.’ And they said, ‘Okay, Bob, we pay it.’ It was one of those things... He did that at least fifty times in his career. He would say to the staff or lenders or whoever else, ‘Here’s our problem. You’ve got to help.’” As one of the final acts of his career, Maurice Robinson rallied his vast network of teachers, parents, students, and civic-minded organizations once again to rise to the challenge of serving the needs of creative teenagers. He died at age eighty-six on February 9, 1982, just two years after the famed sponsors meeting in New York City. Through his tenacity of spirit, far-reaching vision, and inimitable leadership, the Awards had survived and flourished for nearly sixty years. Following his example, the program would reinvent itself again and again in the decades to come. Robinson rallied his vast network. . . . to the challenge of serving the needs of creative teenagers. . . . Through his tenacity of spirit, far-reaching vision, and inimitable leadership, the Awards had survived and flourished for nearly sixty years. Following his example, the program would reinvent itself again and again in the decades to come.
In 1991, jurors review student artwork by poring over slides atop a lightbox. Previously, stacks of physical artwork piled into mailrooms.

The most important events in the history of the Awards, since their founding in 1923, was the establishment of the nonprofit Alliance for Young Artists & Writers in 1994 to take on the duties of administering and—most importantly—raising money for the program. Under increasing pressure from his board to justify Scholastic’s contribution of staff time and money to the Awards against the company’s bottom line, and facing an ever-dwindling landscape of corporate sponsors, Richard Robinson decided to re-examine the relationship between the company and the program by establishing a nonprofit organization. He did this at the urging of a fresh new proponent of the Awards, Susan Ebersole, who had been pushing the program into the gallery world of New York City. By creating a nonprofit organization, she argued, with its own independent staff, Scholastic would turn the Awards into its primary philanthropic activity while simultaneously attracting board members, foundations, and new corporate sponsors to share the costs of running the program.

Robinson appointed Ebersole the first executive director of the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers and charged her with the task of launching the new organization, developing its board of directors, and defining its distinct mission, which was articulated in the 1995 national catalog with the following statement:

“The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, the not-for-profit organization that administers the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, is dedicated to encouraging and recognizing excellence in the visual arts and writing, to offering a forum that supports experimentation, By creating a nonprofit organization with its own independent staff, Scholastic would turn the Awards into its primary philanthropic activity, while simultaneously attracting board members, foundations, and new corporate sponsors to share the costs of running the program.

THE ALLIANCE FOR YOUNG ARTISTS & WRITERS

In 1991, jurors review student artwork by poring over slides atop a lightbox. Previously, stacks of physical artwork piled into mailrooms.
To those who bewail a so-called cultural decline in our country, I want to say: Look no further than these young people to see how limited your perspective has been.

and to fostering an environment that preserves the creative spirit for the next generation. The Alliance is founded on the belief that recognition is essential for thwarted ambition and a life-long difference between thwarted ambition and a life-long commitment to the arts.

The National Student Art Exhibitions of 1994 and ’95 were held once again at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Building upon the momentum of the grassroots ‘95 were held once again at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Building upon the momentum of the grassroots

At a critical point in a young person’s life, can make the

evening events such as readings of student writings at the Annual Awards ceremonies and other public
gathering that first took place there in 1983, the Ali-

tance also held its Awards ceremonies and other public

events which author and radio personality Garrison Keillor

The young people represented here have chosen to

channel the complex coremata of their world— their

hopes, ambitions, dreams and fears, nagging doubts and

agencies— through the amoral lens of art. To those

who have a so-called cultural decline in our
country, I want to say: Look no further than these

young people to see how limited your perspective has been.

The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, by

advocating the process of creativity in education, en-

terface the needs of humanistic inquiry which will

bear the fruit of the future. The young people served by the

Alliance offer hope for cultural legacy, and the creative

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outpourings of the Alliance’s Scholastic Art & Writing

Awards present proof positive that this cultural legacy

is in good hands indeed.

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Awards present proof positive that this cultural legacy

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With the launching of the Alliance, the cultural

world discovered the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and, under the umbrella of the nonprofit Ali-

ance, the scope and ambition of the program grew with an infusion of new support and opportunities.

In 1994, the Alliance and Scholastic collaborated on an infusion of new support and opportunities.

Finally, at the National Awards Ceremony in

Washington, Richard Robinson announced the

appointment of a new executive director, B.J. Adler, with an established background in arts education and

nonprofit management, who would be charged with growing the organization, expanding the network of

Alliance students and alumni, recruiting, raising money and, taking the program and its administration into the

digital age.

Hugh Gallagher ’99

Hugh Gallagher received a Scholastic Writing Award in 1999 for “3awl Essay,” which won second place at Randol High School in Randol, Pennsylvania. Drawn from the most common content on internet dating profiles, this essay—which Gallagher submitted to several online dating services applications—became a popular internet phenomenon in the late 1990s.

Hugh’s essay continues on page 73.
In 2012, the ART. WRITE. NOW. National Student Exhibition was held at the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center at Parsons The New School for Design.

The digital age and beyond

In recent years, the Alliance has also responded to the ever-evolving aesthetic and cultural landscape with the addition of new categories. From the 1920s to the 1990s, Awards categories have ranged widely, including many that have been long lost to the program, such as Cartooning, Linoleum Block Printing, Health and Nutrition Posters, Lettering, Felt Pen Drawing, Soap Carving, Metalry, Leather Craft, Enameling, Polymer, Opaque Water Colors, Costume Design, and many more. In 2009, the Alliance added Comic Art to the list of current Awards categories, and in 2010 it added Video Games. In 2012, the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and the Institute of Museum and Library Services have partnered with the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers to present the National Student Poets Program (NSSP), the country’s highest honor for youth poets presenting original work. Finally, with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Alliance has resurrected the traveling exhibition program that Maurice Robinson and Andrey Avinoff first modeled in 1933. The current tour—titled ART WRITE. NOW.—exposures audiences nationwide to top award-winning work from the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.