

GREATER CENTRAL VALLEY BOOK FEST

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“Voices of the Valley” Short Story Competition

A Partnership Proposal for Tom Hawkins Elementary

Prepared for Principal Charles Spikes · in partnership with Librarian Kelly Phipps

The Opportunity

On Saturday, November 1, 2026, the Greater Central Valley Book Fest will bring its inaugural festival to The Grand Theatre — a full day of authors, panels, and programming built around literacy and community right here in Tracy. We'd love for Tom Hawkins Elementary to be part of it in a way that puts your students front and center.

The “Voices of the Valley” Short Story Competition gives Hawkins students the chance to write, submit, and be publicly celebrated for an original story — with winners recognized on the Main Stage in front of a live festival audience during our Opening Ceremony, and every participating student's story eligible for publication in our community anthology. For many of these kids, it could be the first time they see their name and their writing celebrated outside the classroom — and the first time they hold a real book with their own words in it.

How It Works

Two age divisions keep the competition fair and age-appropriate:

- Grades 3–5: up to 750 words
- Grades 6–8: up to 1,200 words

The theme is “What Matters to You?” — intentionally open to interpretation, so every student can bring their own voice and their own story to it. It also ties directly into our community anthology, *As Seen Through Me* — Volume I: *It All Matters*, giving students a real thread of connection to the larger festival and the adult writers contributing alongside them.

Timeline at a Glance

Date	Milestone
Early September 2026	Competition launches — flyers and entry forms sent home / posted in classrooms
October 10, 2026	Submission deadline
October 13–24, 2026	Judging period
By October 27, 2026	Winners notified privately (school and families first)
Saturday, November 1, 2026	Winners recognized on the Main Stage during the festival's Opening Ceremony, 11:30 AM–12:15 PM

Judging & Criteria

Entries will be read by a small panel that may include festival authors, Ms. Phipps, and Book Fest staff. Judging is simple and age-appropriate, weighted toward effort and voice over technical polish:

- Creativity and originality of the story
- Voice — does it sound like the student's own?
- Structure (does the story have a clear beginning, middle, and end)
- Effort and completion

Recognition & Prizes

- Winners announced by name and division on the Main Stage during the Opening Ceremony
- Certificate of recognition for every winner
- A small keepsake prize (book or gift card) for each division winner
- Complimentary festival admission for winners and their immediate family
- Every student's story, with parental permission, will be published in *As Seen Through Me*, our community anthology — a real, printed book
- Winning stories additionally featured in the festival program and on our website

What We're Asking of Tom Hawkins Elementary

- A designated point of contact (we'd love for this to continue to be Ms. Phipps) to help coordinate with classrooms
- Permission to distribute entry forms/flyers and post information in classrooms or the library
- A collection point for submissions (physical drop box in the library, or a shared digital folder — whichever is easiest on your end)
- A brief mention in school newsletter or announcements, if possible, to help spread the word to families
- Standard parental consent for any student whose name, story, or photo we'd share publicly

What the Book Fest Will Handle

- All entry forms, flyers, and promotional materials, ready for you to distribute
- Judging coordination and communication with winning families
- All festival-day logistics — certificates, prizes, Main Stage recognition, photography
- Complimentary tickets for winning families
- Clear, simple parental consent forms for anything we'd publish or display

Next Steps

We'd love thirty minutes of your time to walk through this together and answer any questions — and to hear anything Hawkins Elementary would want to see done differently. Our hope is that this feels like it's for your students first, and a Book Fest partnership second.

Thank you for considering it, and for everything you and Ms. Phipps already do for your students' love of reading and writing.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Tamara Thomas

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