

# 2016 MCC Creative Writing Contest

## Essay Category

**First Place:** “Making Applesauce,” by Michelle Nichoson

Apples run the show from August to October in Michigan. They are the center of attention for tourists, locals and business owners all over the mitten state. Families spend hours of their day at apple orchards picking apples and leaving with a sticky caramel apple in hand. Apples come in many shapes and sizes and are enjoyed multiple ways, from eating plain to applesauce. Not only do apples provide people with tons of fun, but they also bring people closer together and create long lasting memories.

Homemade applesauce. Those two words conjure up many things for people in Michigan. The act of making applesauce is more than just smashing some apples in a pot. It is a long process that has many steps. Making applesauce requires patience and close attention. On the flipside, one also must be quick and efficient when canning the applesauce (if one decides to can) because the sealing process is something that cannot be done lackadaisically. One should be able to get the warmed jar out of the over, fill it with steaming hot apples, and screw the boiled lid onto the jar in under a minute. The different steps of making great applesauce are much more detailed than people tend to realize and the first step is the most important.

The first step in making a great applesauce is picking the right apple. Some apples will make for a very runny applesauce, and some will create a stringy, almost hard texture that is not desirable. The perfect apples for applesauce are the Cortland and the McIntosh. They are both full of flavor and provide the perfect texture for a homemade applesauce. They are easy to find and can often times be obtained for free if you talk to an orchard owner and if they allow people to pick up the drops.

Physically going and getting the apples is the second step in the applesauce process, and can be one of the most enjoyable. Being outside in the orchard with family and friends to pick up apples adds to the fall experience and creates long lasting memories. The gathering of apples allows a person to know what quality of apple they are getting, which in turn allows them to be more invested in the process.

After the apples are home, they are ready for the third step. The third step is peeling and coring the apples. Now this is the most tedious step. The process of peeling and coring can take hours depending on how many apples you bring home. To pass the time while peeling and coring, one must find something to entertain themselves. Because it is fall, settling in to watch a good movie with the fire roaring makes the experience much more enjoyable. Once all of the apples, minus the ones eaten, have been prepared for the cooking process, it is on to the next step.

The fourth step, and the easiest step, is simply putting the apples, now cleaned and ready to be cooked, into the pot with a half cup of water and a half cup of sugar. After about

two to three hours, with a good stirring every thirty minutes, the apples should be ready to be sauced. All one needs to do for this step is have a little arm strength and a potato masher. If the apples are soft enough, mashing the apples into a sauce is not difficult. Now if someone wants their applesauce to be less chunky and smoother, a hand held mixer is the perfect tool. After this step is complete, the final step begins.

The final step in making apple sauce is the canning. This is often the most daunting step for many people. If this step is not done correctly, the apple sauce spoils and all the previous steps are negated. This step requires know how and a certain amount of quickness. One must first get mason jars, clean them, put them in the warmed oven then boil the lids and screw tops. When everything is warmed and ready to go, the canning begins. The steps of canning begin with filling the warmed jars with the recently made applesauce. After the jar is filled, the boiled lid is placed on the top of the jar and secured with the boiled screw top. Because everything is warmed and malleable, the seal should stick and hopefully keep the applesauce from molding. After about thirty minutes a loud popping sound should be heard. This means that the seal was successful and the applesauce is ready to be shelved.

The process of making applesauce, while sometimes tedious and rather arbitrary, is so rewarding throughout the year. Being able to grab a jar of applesauce any time of the year brings back memories of fall and the process of making the delicious treat. Not only is making homemade applesauce healthier, but also allows one to reap the benefits of their labor. This makes the product much more enjoyable, appreciated and worthwhile.

### **JUDGE'S COMMENTS:**

The writer coherently guides the reader through the step-by-step process of making applesauce. Though the task may seem mundane, the writer's use of warmth and thought beyond the actual process makes the piece enjoyable as well as informative.

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*Kyleigh Ritter is a 2009 graduate of Michigan State University, where she earned a Bachelor's degree in creative writing and was the recipient of the Jim Cash Creative Writing Award. She currently works as a professional writing consultant in the MCC Writing Center.*