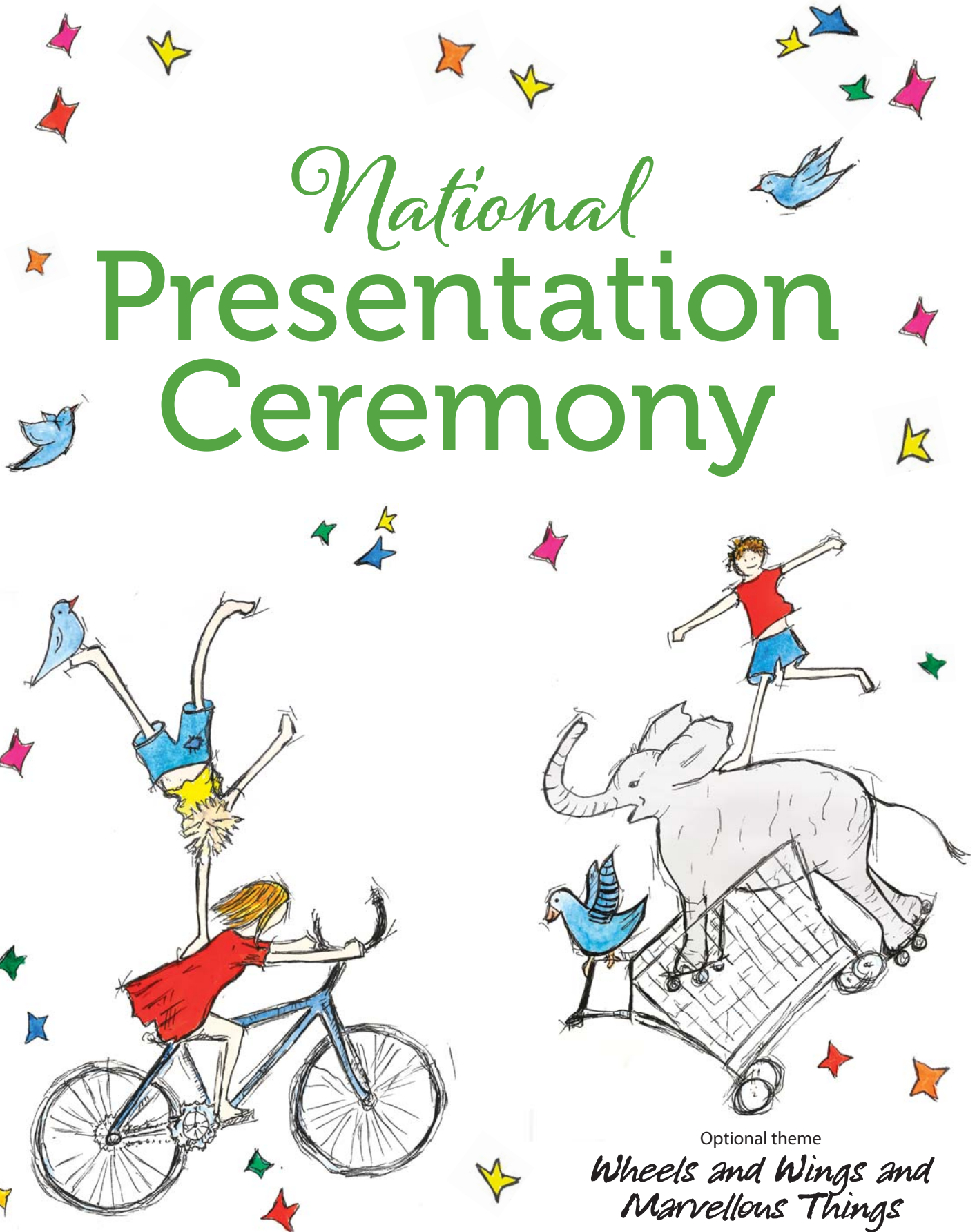




# Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards 2012



Optional theme

*Wheels and Wings and  
Marvellous Things*

# 2012 Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards

## About the Awards

The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society, which is the organisation that oversees the annual poetry awards, was formed in 1983 in the north west NSW town of Gunnedah by a group of local residents.

A key driver in its foundation was Dutch immigrant the late Mikie Maas who was struck by Dorothea Mackellar's poetry and the local landscape which gave inspiration for many of her works.

The Mackellar family were landholders in the area up until the 1930's and Dorothea was a frequent visitor to their property "Kurrumbede." The property, which borders the Namoi River, was sold to coal mining interests in 2010 and it is understood the homestead, although having undergone substantial changes since the Mackellar's tenure, will be preserved.

Mrs Maas launched the first poetry competition which attracted 300 entries. The judges were Joan Phipson and Rosemary Dobson. The awards have grown to become a national competition for all Australian school children, drawing up to 15,000 entries.

Fund raising initiatives have resulted in the erection of a bronze statue of Dorothea Mackellar riding side saddle which sits opposite the town's Visitor Information Centre. A collection of 32 watercolours by the late artist Jean Isherwood, illustrating her famous poem "My Country", hangs in the town's Creative Arts Centre.



## About our trophies

Prize winners in recent years have been presented with highly individual mementoes, designed and crafted by members of the local art community.

This year's trophy is a hand coloured etching, "*Silent Sentinel*", by Gunnedah artist Shirley Urquhart.

Shirley works in a range of media including printmaking, watercolour, pen and ink. She always enjoyed painting but has worked in earnest in the past six years since semi-retiring from the classroom and heads the local creative arts group

Anne Knight, a founding member of the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society, has contributed a design for the 2012 theme used for participation certificates, presentation booklet and anthology. Anne is a well known children's poet (published as Anne Bell) as well as an accomplished artist and printmaker.



Above: The late Mrs Maas at last year's presentation ceremony with Anne Knight.  
Left: Gunnedah artist Shirley Urquhart with one of this year's trophies.

## Winner - Senior Secondary

Merry Li

PRESBYTERIAN LADIES' COLLEGE, PEPPERMINT GROVE WA

### *An afternoon spent at 39 Mandowie Road*

In the back room of our old house,  
in front of glass walls saturated by sunlight,  
sat my father's desk.

On it, a computer monitor and a keyboard  
with the a, s, f, j, backspace and return keys  
eroded to shiny plastic.

On the other side of the glass  
my mother watered her fig tree,  
with the fingery branches that bled white sap,  
and the furry leaves that would have made  
very prickly undergarments.  
Snaking the hose under the handprints of shade,  
she plucked the figs with a twist of the wrist,  
handed them to us, heavy with rain  
and impregnated by the seed of summer.

We tore them in half,  
squeezing from the little hole at the bottom,  
revealing the flesh: pink-tipped,  
perfectly, artfully graduated to white.  
Fig flesh, I thought, was like the alveoli of lungs  
that I had seen illustrated in the  
faded watercolours of Dorling Kindersley's  
*The Human Body*.

The alveoli came off so easily,  
we slipped our tongues and teeth between  
the soft rind and bitter skin,  
white blood dripping into the webs of our fingers  
until we were left with seeds between our teeth  
and two halves of a heart-shaped shell.

When the mosquitoes came,  
my mother slapping at her bare arms,  
we hurtled through the sliding doors.  
On my father's lap,  
our faces white in the Microsoft glow,  
I pulled at the levers of his office chair  
and pointed at the graph of Fig1 on the screen.  
My father explained that it meant 'Figure 1',  
and explained to me the nature of science.

### *Judge's Comment*

This poem takes the reader on a wonderful journey - from the interior of the house, out into the garden and back inside to the computer, with the surprising final lines which connect the interior and exterior scenes. The portrait of a loving family revelling in life together, coupled with the cleverness of the two 'figs' makes the poem a joyous whole. The use of language and the pacing of the poem shows wonderful maturity.



## Runner Up - Senior Secondary

Peter Hanlon

HOBART COLLEGE, HOBART TAS

### *Belle, I : Apostate Gatekeepers*

You said "We're not going that way."  
And you pulled me away from the bus stop.  
You said "Catch me!"  
And you darted into a labyrinth of disused shelves.  
You said "You are so uncultured!"  
And you lectured me, under the gaze of dusty King James' and spandex "God Is Deads"  
You said "I'm rectangular, I don't have any curves. "  
And then you stood up, and you owned them  
You said "If you tickle me again while I'm counting these I will murder you"  
And you pretended you weren't just giving me an excuse  
You said "They can wait, I'm not done playing with you"  
And I didn't really get it  
You said "Lemme wear your glasses"  
And you were all I could focus on  
You said "Him? No way!"  
When they asked if I was your boyfriend

You said  
nothing

And you held me

in the lift

Until the doors opened

And closed again

And we stood

suspended in our fiery microcosm of incandescence

### *Judge's Comment*

This clever poem makes novel use of visual layout to mimic the subject and events being described. The flash of white as the elevator doors open, and the twisted form of the final lines are particularly effective. Visual twists aside, the words themselves take the reader along with the courting couple in, out and around, with the interplay between 'you' and 'I' drawing us in to the intimacy of the blossoming relationship and pondering the underlying comments on apostasy and belief.

Andas  
ouryou  
saidcontours  
blenteverything  
I'dand  
missedkissed.

## Winner - Junior Secondary

Beth Downing

CAMPBELL HIGH SCHOOL, CAMPBELL ACT

### *Annegato: the "Drowned" Book I Found in Venice*

It's broken and romantic -  
I do not think I should love  
something  
So damaged.

Should it not make me sad?  
It does.  
But I am enchanted;  
I turn the pages slowly – they are transparent  
And the ink is running  
Trying to mimic, I suppose,  
The canal that tried to drown it  
(and I think of Stockholm syndrome).  
It's not the first, though –  
Gently and carefully  
I pluck seaweed from the fish-kissed pages.

But I cannot resuscitate  
This drowned book  
Written in a language I cannot understand.



### Judge's Comment

Wow. The image created here of the waterlogged book is perfect. I can see those pages with their smudged words, damaged by the canal and the seaweed. The use of the Italian 'annegato' (to drown) in the title is clever, given that the book was found in a Venetian canal. The reference to Stockholm Syndrome, with the book mimicking, empathising with its captor the canal is masterful.

A vertical calligraphy brush with a dark, textured tip is positioned on the left side of the page. To its right, large, bold Chinese characters are written in black ink on a light blue background. The characters are stylized and expressive, typical of cursive calligraphy.

## Runner up - Junior Secondary

Anna Langford

NORTHCOTE HIGH SCHOOL, NORTHCOTE VIC

### *The Art of Chinese Writing*

Some call it a tedious practice  
Blotting out inky characters  
That look like  
A field of messy grass  
Jumping off paper  
Knotting together  
But for those who see through  
This jumble of sticks  
Who see life  
Between the dots and dashes  
Mysteries unfold  
A world within...  
You'll see rice paddies  
Mountains and bamboo  
Mothers and babies  
Kingdoms and temples  
A sun and moon

A wide-angle photograph of a lush green landscape featuring terraced rice fields. The fields are carved into the hillsides, creating a series of curved, step-like patterns. In the center, a cluster of traditional Chinese buildings with dark roofs and wooden walls is nestled among the fields. The background shows more terraced fields and distant mountains under a hazy sky.

### *Judge's Comment*

This clever description awakens the wonder of Chinese writing as an art form and as a doorway to the beauties of China itself, taking the reader far beyond the confusion of lines and dots to the Chinese landscape.

## Winner - Learning Assistance and Special Education, Secondary

Josiah Toft

WYCLIFFE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, WARRIMOO NSW

### *Dancer's Feet*

The spring of floor boards  
Under lightning feet  
The graceful movement  
Of a dancer's feet

Flying high  
In crazy leaps  
Amazing strength  
In a dancer's feet

Impressive balance  
In dizzying turns,  
The swiftly moving  
Dancer's feet

Ballet turnout  
And graceful technique  
The inspiring and poise  
Of a dancer's feet



### *Judge's Comment*

The rhythm of this beautiful poem reflects the leaps and turns of a dancer's path perfectly. As I read I felt that I was moving around a stage, following those feet. The use of repetition punctuates the poem beautifully.

## Runner Up - Learning Assistance and Special Education, Secondary

Connor Mishalow

REDEEMER BAPTIST SCHOOL, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW

### *A Special World*

An imaginary place  
In an imaginary world,  
An imaginary universe.  
A place of action,  
Sacrifice,  
Heroes,  
War,  
Life,  
Where every man fights not to die,  
But to save.  
They are out numbered,  
Outgunned,  
And they still don't stop fighting,  
They will fight not to be heroes  
But to be human.



### *Judge's Comment*

This touching poem on the themes of war and of human spirit delighted me. The final two lines left me thinking long after I read it. The contrast between the negativity of fighting and the positive reasons for doing so is food for thought.

## Winner - Upper Primary

Salina Ai

ABLE EDUCATION AUSTRALIA COLLEGE, EASTWOOD NSW

### *Sunstorm*

When the Sun touches the Sea  
Tis' the sun has fall'n from the dapple-grey back  
Of the wide-eyed prancing pony,  
Touch far mid-wave of azure mist  
Leaf-gold fire flares.

Cry of the baying hound  
ripping at the sheen of rocks  
crashing and raging at thy cliff.  
Insurmountable splash of colours flash,  
flash across the finching mane.

Howl of the sea-wolf,  
Whinny of the sky-pony,  
Parting of the whirling mist.  
Out comes the flickering hair  
Dancing on the land.  
Then it is gone.

A young moon shines over  
A trotting poem pony,  
Moonbeams radiant, soft, glowing.



### *Judge's Comment*

This dramatic poem is exceptional in its use of metaphor, verb and adjective and is filled with mystery and magic.

The first stanza gently introduces us to the topic, the second flings us headlong into a storm of words, a maelstrom. Part way through the third, the poet allows us to catch our breath and then in the finale calms and reassures us.

This is a drama that begs to be read aloud and a painting to be viewed with the mind. It is a marvellous thing.

## Runner Up - Upper Primary

Kate Soonius

PYMBLE LADIES' COLLEGE, PYMBLE NSW

### *Death of Peace*

Wrapped in wintry sheet,  
Lies the orphaned dove of peace:  
Sadly forgotten.



### *Judge's Comment*

The apparent simplicity of this poem is deceptive. When every word is chosen as carefully as this, there is nothing left to say. A perfect poem in the tradition of Haiku. A perfect description of loss. Extraordinary.

## Winner - Lower Primary

Holly Grainger

ST MICHAEL'S COLLEGIATE SCHOOL, HOBART TAS

### *The Mouse*

Scurrying across open roads,  
titter, tatter, titter, tatter.  
Using salmon pink claws,  
white teeth,  
munching on insects and seeds.  
Ears like the back of a shell,  
violet eyeliner,  
small as a handful of sand,  
whiskers that curl,  
a cottonball,  
a body white as snow  
and a rusty brown top,  
black as night ears.  
Scuttering back to its burrow  
in the dunes.  
Closing its dark, velvety eyes.



### *Judge's Comment*

The imagery used in this poem is wonderful. I was particularly taken with the following descriptive passages: "Salmon pink claws", "ears like the back of a shell", "violet eyeliner" and "dark, velvety eyes".

The phrase, "small as a handful of sand", tells the reader exactly how tiny the mouse is. The verbs, scurrying and "scuttering" and "titter, tatter", the words used to describe the sound of these activities, perfectly portray the mouse. A beautiful poem.

## Runner Up - Lower Primary

Eleanor Adams

BIRRALEE PRIMARY SCHOOL, DONCASTER VIC

### *Little Mouse*

In comes the blackness of the night,  
Out goes the final light.  
Out comes a little mouse,  
Out from his hole of a house.  
Scamper, scurry  
Leap and hurry,  
To the kitchen, where the food is kept.

The fridge and the pantry carelessly left open,  
Just as the little mouse was hoping.  
The fridge is full of yummy treats,  
Like cheddar cheese and half cooked meats.

What a feast the pantry laid,  
a sandwich the little mouse made.

Now after all the fun,  
the little mouse is finally done.  
Scamper, scurry, leap and hurry,  
in goes the little mouse,  
into his hole of a house.  
Out goes the blackness of the night,  
in comes the morning light.



### *Judge's Comment*

Lovely use of meter and rhyme. I particularly enjoyed the way the poet made excellent use of the words 'coming' and 'going' and 'in' and 'out', at the commencement and conclusion of her poem. The departure of light, the arrival of darkness and the mouse, the excitement of its undercover adventure and then, in the final stanza, the reverse occurs to neatly finish this poem.

## Winner - Learning Assistance and Special Education, Primary

Dergam Salah

REDEEMER BAPTIST SCHOOL, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW

### *Fear*

He is unaware that he is the prey,  
Stalking him is a silent killer  
Ready to pounce the beast waits,  
In an instant he attacks,  
Fear's dagger-like claws tear at his throat,  
His heart racing,  
His skin wet,  
The battle is on.  
Feeling the shock of the surprise,  
Feeling the beast's breath on his cheek,  
The strength of his muscles on his neck,  
The predator never gives up.  
But the prey is also determined,  
To win the battle.  
Drawing strength of a source so deep,  
With shoulders squared,  
He rises from almost certain death,  
To win the battle.

### *Judge's Comment*

This poem might have been one of dark tragedy and defeat, instead it becomes a beacon of hope and a triumph. It is a beautifully paced piece of writing commencing with an immediate sense of impending danger and the vulnerability of the unwary victim. Each word has been chosen carefully and much has been distilled, much into little. I particularly enjoyed the three short lines;

'His heart racing,  
His skin wet,  
The battle is on.'

A poem of sixteen lines of free verse, each of the first twelve lines is tense with struggle and impending doom. Surprisingly, the thirteenth injects an element of hope and leads to unexpected victory.

This is a poem which can be read and experienced on a number of levels. The title is 'Fear', but the word fear is not mentioned in the body of the poem. This adds to the intrigue. Fear might be the 'beast', the 'silent killer' or it might be the outcome of a more physical threat.

## Runner Up - Learning Assistance and Special Education, Primary

Justin Kwon

ST VINCENT'S PRIMARY, ASHFIELD NSW

### *Wheels, Wings and Marvellous Things*

I wish I had wheels, wings and marvellous things!  
I wish I had wheels,  
So I can be as fast as a car,  
I can go near and I can go far.

I wish I had wheels, wings and marvellous things!

I wish I had wings  
so I can fly:  
I can take a trip to the blue sky!

I wish I had wheels, wings and marvellous things!

I wish I had a shell,  
So I can hide,  
when I am scared...  
or when I'm sleepy inside...

I wish I had wheels, wings and marvellous things!

I wish I had gills  
to breathe in the sea,  
to conquer my swimming,  
to be a different me.

I wish I had wheels, wings and marvellous things!

I wish I had springs,  
so I can jump high  
to feel the clouds  
and the beautiful sky

I wish I had wheels, wings and marvellous things!

I wish I had muscles so I can be strong:  
I can carry people all day long  
I wish I had a tail, fins, a magic ring  
and all sorts of marvellous things!

I wish I had wheels, wings and marvellous things,  
wheels, wings and marvellous things!



### *Judge's Comment*

Many of the entries in this year's competition were based on the suggested theme of *Wheels, Wings and Marvellous Things*. Justin's entry captured the spirit of the title and made good use of rhyme and rhythm.

I found the use of the words 'I wish' at the beginning of each stanza very significant and the following poignant lines particularly moved me.

'I wish I had a shell  
So I can hide,  
when I am scared...'

And these;

'I wish I had gills,  
to breathe in the sea  
to conquer my swimming,  
to be a different me.'

I felt that the magnificent things Justin wished for in the poem were heartfelt. Whether or not they were is not relevant - what is, is that the poem made me feel that way. Well done.

## Community Relations Commission (NSW) Award

Alexander Maloof and Rhys Halkidis

TRINITY PREPARATORY SCHOOL, STRATHFIELD NSW

### *Silentio ad Mare*

Heads under hands and not a single breath audible,  
The boat at a creak with every wave.  
Forced to flee and left with nothing,  
The conflict has taken it all.  
Haunting memories with no one to trust,  
Families, treasures and memories are gone.

People packed tightly no space to breathe,  
Any movement will result in peril.  
Stomachs are starved no time to eat,  
Water as far as the eye can see,  
Any second might be your last.

With these thoughts in mind your home is far,  
And sickness draws near as hopes run free.  
Your safety is like a thread,  
Once cut can't be restored.

When the flashing lights appear at sea,  
The blankets are drawn and all is still.  
For getting caught is not intended.

Heads under hands and not a single breath audible,  
The boat at a creak with every wave.

Silentio ad mare (meaning silence at sea)

### *Judge's Comment*

*Silentio ad Mare* is a powerful and timely poem. It gives the reader a harrowing glimpse of what it must be like to leave all that is familiar, of great loss, fear of the unknown and hope for the future. The poets' use of the analogy of safety being like a thread evokes the fragility of the situation for the occupants of the boat. The flashing lights might be symbolic of hope, but even then the terror of being caught is dominant. The repeat of the first line at the conclusion of their poem reinforces the breathtaking fear of those seeking refuge.

## School's Encouragement Award

For schools that demonstrate effort, achievement and a high standard of entries

### *Winners*

Primary        Sydney Distance Education Primary School, SURRY HILLS NSW  
Secondary     Wycliffe Christian School, WARRIMOO NSW

### *Commendations*

Applecross Senior High School, APPLECROSS WA  
Dromana Primary School, DROMANA VIC  
Fitzroy Community School, NORTH FITZROY VIC  
Hilder Road State School, THE GAP QLD  
Holy Spirit College, CORRIMAL NSW  
Redeemer Baptist College, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW  
St Paul's College, WALLA WALLA QLD  
Tarremah Steiner School, KINGSTON TAS  
The Essington School Darwin, NIGHTCLIFF NT

## About our Judges

**Sally Murphy** is a poet and author of verse novels, picture books and more – thirty two books in total.

Her first verse novel, *Pearl Verses the World*, was a 2010 Honour Book in the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Children's Book Awards, and her second, *Toppling*, won the Children's Book Category in both the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards and the WA Premier's Book Awards for 2010.

Sally also runs popular book review site, *Aussiereviews.com*. When she's not writing or reading, Sally is a busy mum, with six kids, a husband and a dog.



**Glenda Millard** was born in the goldfields region of Victoria and has lived there all her life. She left school when she was 15 and didn't begin writing books until her four children were teenagers.

Her first published book was a CBCA notable book in 2000. Glenda is now a full time author with 24 published books including 14 picture books, seven junior novels and three young adult novels.

Among the latest: *A Small Free Kiss in the Dark*, in 2010 won Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) – *Crystal Kite*, shortlisted for NSW Premier's Awards, and in 2011 included in the list of Outstanding Books by US Board on Books for Young People. *Isabella's Garden* was 2010 CBCA honour book and shortlisted in the Queensland and SA Premiers' Awards.

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## President's Report

What a year of progress and consolidation we have enjoyed. Entry numbers, at almost 10,000 - the highest in four years, are proof indeed that the organising committee's hard work and direction are reaping rewards.

The response also reflects the importance of some strategic building blocks laid in place during the last two years.

With the ongoing and invaluable support of the federal government, through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Training, this year through the awards' website, we were able to offer poetry workshops via podcast for both primary and secondary students. This provided an important tool for both teachers and students across the country to tackle poetry writing.

The other wonderful asset that has raised awareness of the competition was an initiative sponsored by resource giant Santos which has allowed poetry workshops to be run in schools across northern NSW.

A poetry teacher took this form of creative writing into schools in places such as Scone, Gilgandra, Pilliga and Moree and the response from students, many of whom had never written poetry before, was exhilarating.

To realise how far and wide the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards are known, I recount a story from a family camping trip in April. I ventured into the Marree Aboriginal School on the edge of Lake Eyre, South Australia with some flyers for this year's competition. No further explanation was required - I was immediately ushered into the library to meet the school's single entrant last year who seemed to think I had come a very long way to chat about his poem! It was a great thrill to think of the reach of these awards and that they provide a rich literary resource for so many students across the country.

With the competition approaching its 30th anniversary next year, it may well be welcoming a third generation of poets. Thank you to all those poets and teachers for their continued support.

Philippa Murray

## Judge's Report - Secondary

How wonderful that in the National Year of Reading, there has been an increase in the number of entries for this competition. For although writing and reading are sometimes seen as separate entities, the two must go hand in hand. The love of the written word leads to better writers, and the love of writing makes for better readers. And with pressure on teachers and schools to cover more and more curriculum areas and skill sets, it is too often the creative pursuits which are pushed out. So bravo to those schools (and parents) which have chosen to engage with poetry by encouraging their students to enter this contest.

The standard of entries in the secondary sections this year was high, making the judging task a difficult – though pleasant – one. There was a wonderful range of poetic forms, from cinquains and haiku, always popular, to sonnets, ballads and great examples of free verse and experimental forms. It should be noted that whilst some poetic forms, such as the cinquain and haiku, may seem to be very simple to write, it is a rare pleasure to find one which is superbly crafted, showing adept use of poetics to make it speak to the reader. And, whatever form chosen, those poems which had been well crafted really stood out, with every word, every rhyme (where used), every line break carefully chosen and adding to the whole.

The range of subjects also varied, though war and death were both prevalent, along with poems about different forms of transport, reflecting the theme. Again, those poems which did well showed careful consideration of the topic, generally by choosing an aspect of the topic, rather than trying to cover every element. Humour and happy poems were represented, always a good sign that young poets grasp that poems can be about anything. One sad note was an increased number of poems which were not the poet's own work, indicating perhaps a lack of confidence in their ability and a fear of getting it wrong. It would be nice to be able to reassure these self-doubters that every attempt at poetry is praise-worthy – there is no 'wrong'.

But back to the positives. I'd like to stress how excited I was by the breadth and depth of the poetic talent among Australia's teens. Throughout the judging process my desk was the scene of laughs, sighs of bliss, tears, and utter amazement as I wondered at treasure after treasure. Wonderful things indeed!

Sally Murphy

## Judge's Report - Primary

A suggested topic is a common and reliable tool with which to fire the writer's imagination. After reading the many thousands of entries from primary school students, it is clear to see that this year's theme has done its job.

*Wheels* have been set in motion and imaginations have *winged* their way to new heights to produce an astonishing array of *marvellous* entries! It is always a source of great pleasure to me to observe the extraordinary range and variation of work produced from a single topic or theme. This year's Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards has been no exception in that respect. And among those many students who chose their own topics I'd like to ask each one the question that writers are so often asked; '*Where did you get your idea from?*'

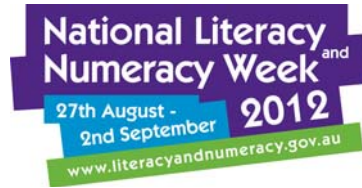
There were humorous poems that made me laugh out loud, poems that expressed love of friends, family, pets and place. Some expressed great sadness and longing. While some poems rhymed, others didn't. Poetic devices of all kinds; simile, metaphor and alliteration were used, and used well. Extensive vocabulary, comprehension and knowledge of poetic forms were evident in many of the upper primary entries.

This is the first time I have judged a poetry competition and on many occasions I found myself doing things judges are probably not supposed to; trying to read between the lines, wondering if a particular poem has its roots in fact, looking at the tender ages of the poets, thinking about how much effort went into the words before me, trying to recall how I felt, all those years ago, when something I had written was printed in Corinella Sunbeamer's Club, the children's pages of the Weekly Times. I have been hoping this year's entrants won't be too disappointed if they don't win and wishing I could tell the beginner poets just how good those two words sound together, or share with them how that one line they wrote sang to me. I wish there was another word for my role, perhaps then I wouldn't feel so bad that not everyone gets a prize.

But it is clear to me by the poems submitted, that there are people scattered all over this nation that Dorothea loved so much, who share the joy of poetry with children. These are the teachers who nurture first efforts, rejoice in two perfectly chosen words or one rhythmic line, in the Haiku, the list poem, the sonnet or the ballad. I am honoured to have been asked to read these poems and delighted that The Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards exist to encourage and support the emergence and development of young Australian poets.

Glenda Millard

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