



Dorothea Mackellar  
Poetry Awards 2014

# NATIONAL PRESENTATION CEREMONY

OPTIONAL THEME

What shall  
we tell you?



# Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards 2014



## About the Awards

The Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards are celebrating their 30th anniversary, having grown into the largest and best known national poetry competition for school students. Run by a volunteer committee in Gunnedah, north-west NSW, they aim to foster creative writing and a love of country among young Australians.

Dorothea Mackellar's connection with Gunnedah came from visits to family properties, "Kurrumbede" and "The Rampadells", from her home in Sydney. The landscape is beautifully reflected in her poems, in particular, "Burning Off" and "Dawn."

A life size bronze statue of the poet is located in the park near the Visitor Information Centre. It was erected after a national appeal led by the society's founder, the late Mrs Mikie Maas.



*'The best of birthday wishes, Dorothea Awards, and for fair weather in the future. It has been an exciting trip, with times when I beat my head in frustration and others when my heart flew - and I wouldn't have missed it for worlds.*

*Huge thanks to all those who have travelled with us, in any guise, for "no man is an island" and there have been many helpers.*

*A big hug to the dazzling line-up of judges, who brought back-packs laden, not only with knowledge, but also with appreciation, understanding, compassion and encouragement.*

*But the biggest hug of all for those who have written poems to enchant us during the last 30 years, whether prize winners or not - you are our communicators, our visionaries and dreamers, our future movers and shakers. Thank you and good luck'.*

**Anne Bell (Knight)**

Founding committee, Life member

## From the President

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the national Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards. I would like to extend a warm welcome to those of you celebrating such a special milestone with us. The longevity of this competition owes so very much to our founder, Mrs Mikie Maas.

There is one other person I would like to thank who has been a guiding light and an inspiration to our society and the competition. That is Anne Knight, who has been there every step of the way. Thank you Anne. Our society is empowered by each and every one of our volunteers over that time and I want to express my gratitude for that contribution.

However, the most crucial and essential part of this equation is the many students who have participated in our competition over the last 30 years. Without them and their enthusiasm and talent we would have no competition. My thanks and appreciation are extended to all of them on behalf of the society.

May this legacy endure for another 30 years and more.

John Lemon

## 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 trophies are hand coloured etchings titled 'Shearings Over' by Gunnedah artist Shirley Urquhart.

Shirley works in a range of media - printmaking, watercolour, pen and ink. She has always enjoyed painting but has worked in earnest in the past six years since semi-retiring from the classroom and heads the local visual arts group. Shirley also regularly conducts local workshops sharing her knowledge with others in the community.



## Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society – 30 Years On

I am very proud to be associated with the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society which is celebrating its 30th anniversary. Although the society has, over the years, developed many projects designed to highlight the significance of Dorothea Mackellar and her place in the history of Gunnedah, arguably, it is the poetry awards that have had a tremendous national impact.

As a teacher I strongly believe that once students have read or heard poems they should all be given the opportunity to write poetry. They should be encouraged to write about a wide range of topics and feelings in a variety of forms and styles. Their completed poems need to be read as widely as possible, and that means publishing in some form (e.g. displayed in the classroom, included in a school magazine or class anthology) for as one student recently remarked, "I only believed it was great after it was published."

By organising the competition and by publishing an annotated anthology, the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards has, over 30 years, filled a void and provided a much needed wide audience for students' poems. The popularity of this venture is reflected in the thousands of entries it receives each year from all over Australia. By creating numerous categories and acknowledging the range of students with diverse backgrounds and abilities, the society ensures that entries are not restricted to the academically gifted and

talented. Also, very pleasing is the fact that every student who enters receives a certificate. I heartily congratulate the society for its splendid initiative.

There are so many people who must be congratulated on this auspicious occasion. The members of the society's committee and its hard-working Project Officer are drawn from the local Gunnedah community and for many years Anne Bell (another fine Australian woman poet!) has served on the committee which works tirelessly overseeing the implementation of various projects as well as the awards. The supportive sponsors, without whom many of the plans could not be achieved, must be acknowledged and commended as well as the many, many judges (authors and teachers) who not only read all the entries but also have to make so many difficult decisions! Thank you all for your dedication and commitment. I look forward to the next anniversary!

"Something attempted, something done,  
Has earned a night's repose."

Mandy Tunica

: Mandy Tunica has a wide background in education, holding various senior positions at school, government and university levels. Her abiding passion is literature and particularly poetry, on which she has written several inspirational books for teachers. Mandy is also a proud patron of the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards.

Winner - Senior Secondary

**Jehannah May**

HORNSBY GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL, HORNSBY NSW

## ***Breathe***

I want to crawl  
inside you. Excavate  
your lungs until there's nothing left  
for you to breathe  
but me.  
I want to be  
Gasped and  
Gulped and  
Guzzled  
Nuzzled safely inside your ribcage.  
I want to strut  
across the stage of your collarbones,  
Swing my legs into the  
dent  
of your manubrium.  
I want to be off balance,  
Uncoordinated  
as I tread the tightrope of your eyelashes  
trying to watch the world  
the way you do:  
with all its ricocheting cries of chaos  
and ecstasy. All its flashes  
of brilliance.  
Every blink threatens to dislodge me  
but the view is so breathtaking  
I stay as long as I can until  
your tears slip me away.  
I want to ski  
down the slope of your stomach  
then carve it out  
like a canoe. Curl up with  
a book and a promise,  
set you adrift  
and just float away -  
Earthbound clouds.  
I want to break your brittle bones until they're tinder -  
set you ablaze.  
Convince you  
Show you what it feels like to be warm  
inside.  
I want to rock climb the ladder of your spine  
Trace the freckled constellations flung  
haphazardly  
across your cheek  
Occupy the hollow in the curve of your neck  
and teach you how to breathe  
slowly.  
And kiss you till all air is gone  
and there's nothing left for you to breathe  
but me.

## **Judge's Comment**

The immediacy of the words in the first lines of this poem literally make me breathless. Such images; perfectly chosen words taking the pace and cadence of the piece from knife-edge pauses and searing, searching stretched out moments. Aagh, the beauty.

Runner Up - Senior Secondary

**Gemma Christensen**

OXLEY CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, CHIRNSIDE PARK VIC

### ***Bird of Paradise***

Here in the woods lies an abundance of trees,  
Some pure-blooded and strong and some shaky like weeds.  
The floor beneath is covered with treasures and traps,  
With hidden trails, long and short, that wind snakely off maps.

A sheen of fine silver and a glistening eye,  
Holds the hope of a young bird who is ready to fly.  
She craves to find freedom and seek all that she's worth,  
She wants to taste for herself the bittersweet of the earth.

But there's a price for this bird to seek what she yearns,  
For if she leaves the nest now she can never return.  
Or if she finds her way back it will not be the same,  
For adventure and loss can taint what remains.

But she turns down her feathers and prepares for the journey,  
She cares not if she gets homesick or lost or lonely.  
She darts down through the trees with precision and grace,  
With a heart full of wonder to explore some new place.

She now walks with her legs on the densely packed leaves,  
What she feels, what she sees, she can hardly believe.  
There's new life, different people on this land down below,  
And if she hadn't left her nest she would never have known.

She hears a voice in her head, "there's danger down there,  
There's tricks, traps and crooks so you better beware.  
Those strangers you'll meet, they won't like who you are,  
Just stay here at home, please don't stray very far."

She brushes off the bad thought and with a pride-filled look,  
Sets off to find the great streams and the babbling brooks.  
She regrets not what she's done, she'd do it twice, even thrice,  
For now this unremarkable bird is a bird of paradise.

### **Judge's Comment**

The forest in this poem, so beautifully described, slips so seamlessly into a metaphor for life that you could be forgiven for overlooking it. The 'unremarkable bird of paradise', a well-chosen contradiction, reveals layers of meaning hidden among 'the densely packed leaves'. Then, our bird 'walks' - in this one word we sense the trepidation of the new traveller in paradise. A masterpiece of poetry.

Winner - Junior Secondary

**Jemma Gray**

ST LEONARD'S COLLEGE, MELBOURNE VIC

### *The Cleaner*

Our past washed away,  
Our history is being dismissed  
My background is being wiped off  
Their life, gone.

The past is bleeding across,  
A clean and white new slate.  
The strands that drip down  
Show those who still remember.

They remember our history with pride not displeasure,  
They remember even after it being wiped clean  
They remember everything,  
Their life without dictation.

### **Judge's Comment**

Ah, what can I tell you about this poem. What an image to choose to convey, so succinctly, the bitterness of hidden histories! How cleverly we are forced to consider our related histories when 'the past is bleeding across a clean and white new slate'. If a poem can pivot on its last line, this poem is a masterpiece; 'their life without dictation.'

## Runner Up - Junior Secondary

**Saraya Muxlow**

ST PHILIP'S CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, WARATAH NSW

### *Underage Marriages*

She died when I was 3  
My mother  
He died when I was 4  
My father  
Baby Nujood died when I was 6  
All dead

It's hard on your own  
Taking care of a baby  
It's even harder  
When you watch their little brown eyes  
Roll to the back of their heads  
And their bodies become listless like a rag doll...  
Lifeless... Loveless...  
Silent

I walk the long dirt streets asking, begging people for money  
But they ignore me or command me to move out of their path  
I stand here empty as a vacuum  
Invisible to the thousands of piercing eyes that brush past me daily  
If only they heard me screaming from within  
Imploring them to see how I ache to be loved  
Engulfed by misery

A figure appears over my enervated body  
Promising a better life  
One where I will be loved and live in a house with a family  
A place where I could call home  
Finally, Allah answers my prayers  
I'm saved. Taken from the streets,  
Cleansed and hopeful  
And live the life that was planned for me...  
Hulleluah!!!

I should have known better  
He was older  
He came to me  
And stripped me of my clothes and my innocence

I am Parvana  
I am 9 years old  
I am married

### **Judge's Comment**

This work astounds me. The subject matter is so confronting but is related in such a way that we are initially distanced from the anguish. The final verse, reflecting the style of the first, slams the message home with so few words. They are perfectly placed.

Winner - Assisted Learning, Secondary

**Simione Lua**

REDEEMER BAPTIST SCHOOL, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW

## *Dream*

I sit and think,  
What's a dream?  
What do they tell me?  
What do they mean?  
Sometimes they tell the future of me.  
Sometimes taken to places I'd like to see.  
Day or night, happy or fright.

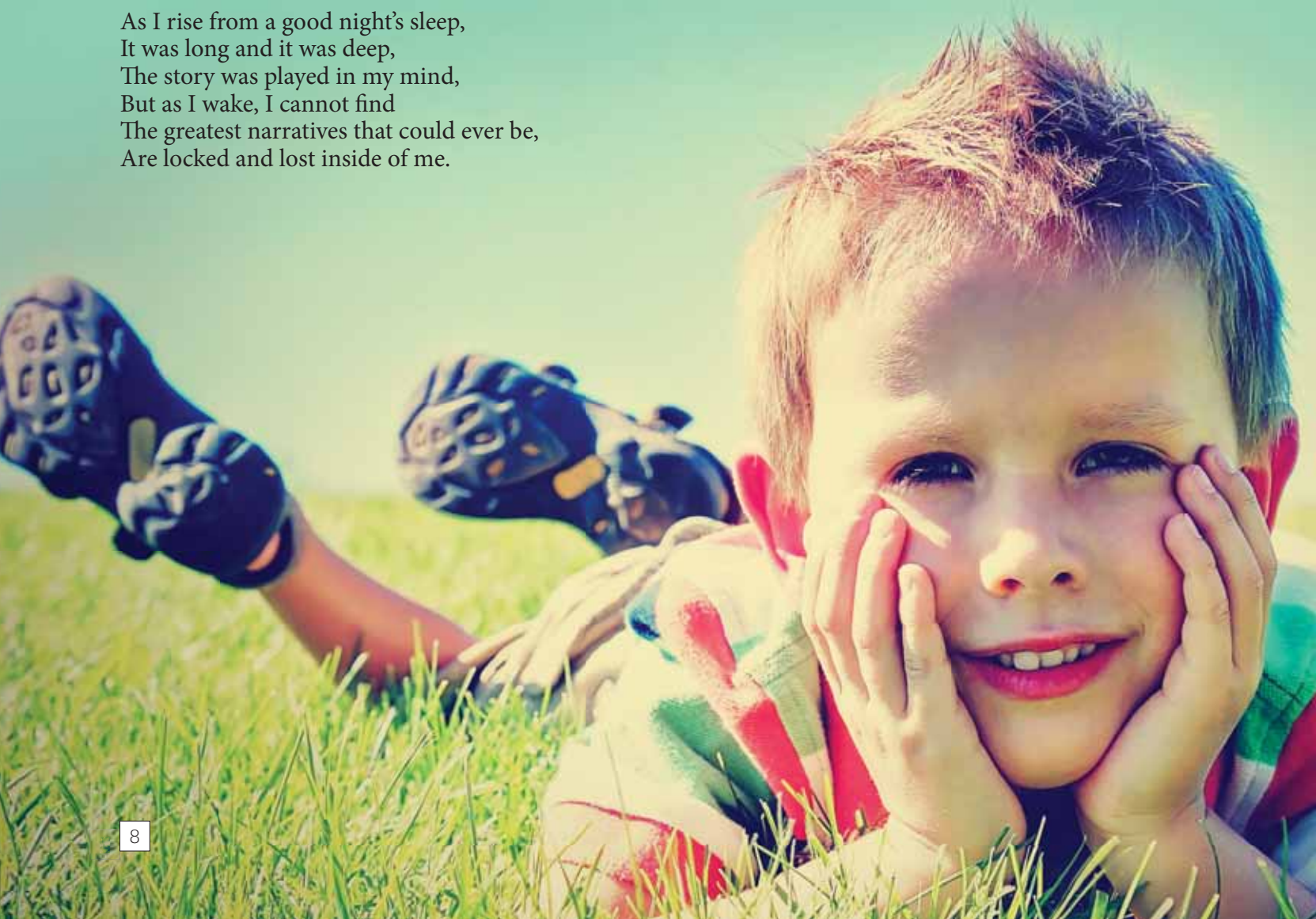
As I sit in class today,  
My mind starts to run away,  
Out onto the field it strays,  
Where I'd much rather go and play,  
My daydream the teacher did take,  
Thud! Now I'm wide-awake.

As I lie awake at night,  
The dark slowly drawing me away.  
My eyes open in my mind  
And makes me start to think of something bright,  
There was this light that was at a great height.

As I rise from a good night's sleep,  
It was long and it was deep,  
The story was played in my mind,  
But as I wake, I cannot find  
The greatest narratives that could ever be,  
Are locked and lost inside of me.

## **Judge's Comment**

There is an absolute delight in the final lines of this poem. Not only do these words resonate with anyone who has tried to capture a dream, they allude to a different text; our inner lives. It is a rare gift to be able to write something that creeps under the skin of the reader so they smile and nod in agreement as something that they, too, have experienced.



**Alamanda Mick**

REDEEMER BAPTIST SCHOOL, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW

## *Guinea Pig*

You feel like a hairy pillow in my hands:  
Desert brown and cloud white  
You wriggle, squeak and try to run away.

I still like you even though you are a fat, furry, food forager  
Your desert dirt colour reminds me of home  
Hot, red, dusty, brown dirt.

I carefully feed you every day  
Your house is a river of food  
But you never thank me.

You run from me but you will never get away  
You are smelly, sweaty and small  
I can't understand why you like it in your cage.

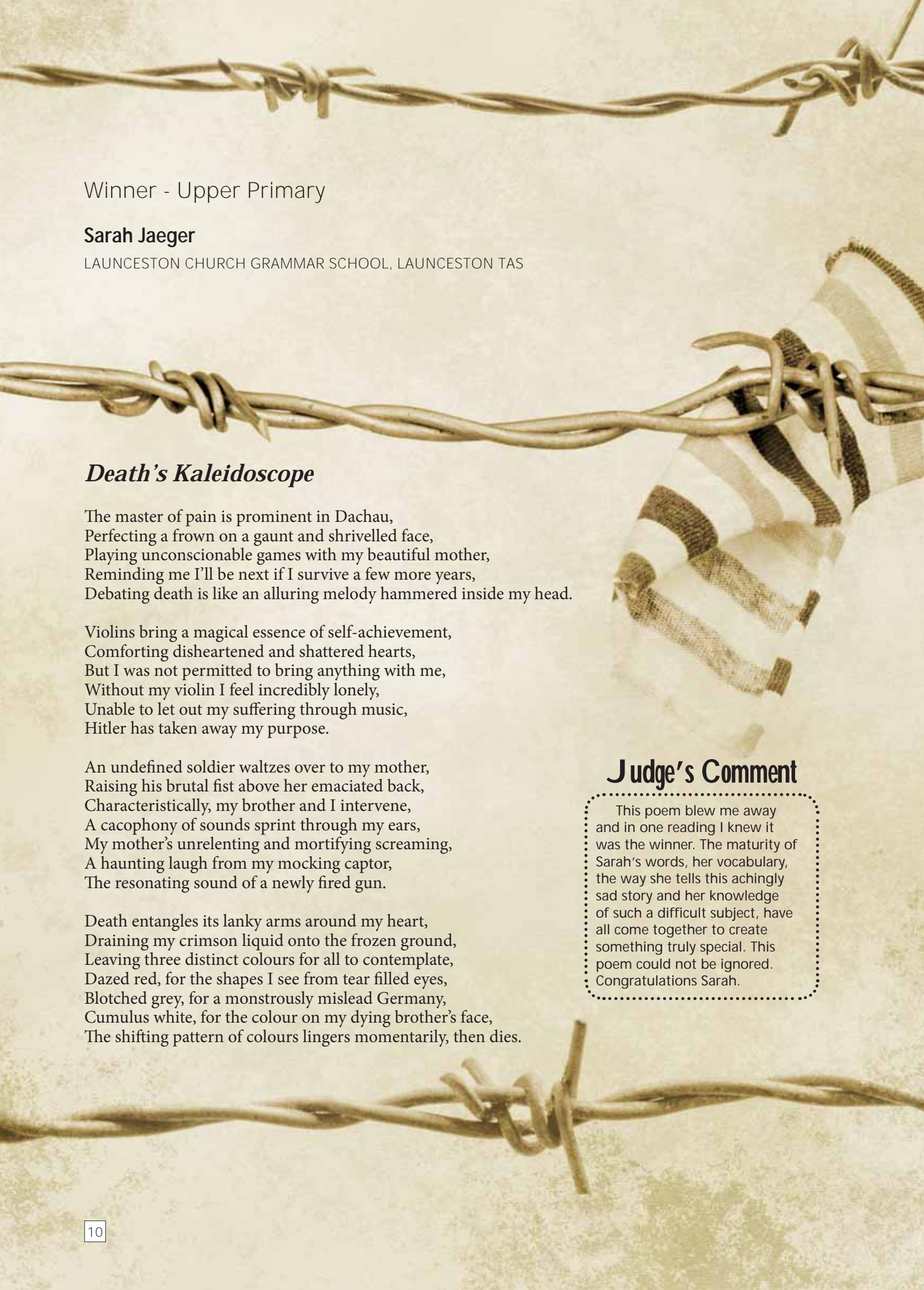
I hate seeing you in this cage  
You never smile  
Locked away from your freedom

But I never want to see you go  
I never want to say goodbye  
To this furry little puddle of fun.

## **Judge's Comment**

There is a delicious honesty in this work. I can almost feel the guinea pig as it is held. Words are carefully selected to bring the images into view effortlessly. A great effort.





Winner - Upper Primary

**Sarah Jaeger**

LAUNCESTON CHURCH GRAMMAR SCHOOL, LAUNCESTON TAS

### *Death's Kaleidoscope*

The master of pain is prominent in Dachau,  
Perfecting a frown on a gaunt and shrivelled face,  
Playing unconscionable games with my beautiful mother,  
Reminding me I'll be next if I survive a few more years,  
Debating death is like an alluring melody hammered inside my head.

Violins bring a magical essence of self-achievement,  
Comforting disheartened and shattered hearts,  
But I was not permitted to bring anything with me,  
Without my violin I feel incredibly lonely,  
Unable to let out my suffering through music,  
Hitler has taken away my purpose.

An undefined soldier waltzes over to my mother,  
Raising his brutal fist above her emaciated back,  
Characteristically, my brother and I intervene,  
A cacophony of sounds sprint through my ears,  
My mother's unrelenting and mortifying screaming,  
A haunting laugh from my mocking captor,  
The resonating sound of a newly fired gun.

Death entangles its lanky arms around my heart,  
Draining my crimson liquid onto the frozen ground,  
Leaving three distinct colours for all to contemplate,  
Dazed red, for the shapes I see from tear filled eyes,  
Blotched grey, for a monstrously misled Germany,  
Cumulus white, for the colour on my dying brother's face,  
The shifting pattern of colours lingers momentarily, then dies.

### **Judge's Comment**

This poem blew me away and in one reading I knew it was the winner. The maturity of Sarah's words, her vocabulary, the way she tells this achingly sad story and her knowledge of such a difficult subject, have all come together to create something truly special. This poem could not be ignored. Congratulations Sarah.

## Runner Up - Upper Primary

**Alice Clark**

MOUNT CLAREMONT PEAC CENTRE, MT CLAREMONT WA

### *Shades of Eternity*

As night moves on, the city sleeps  
And through our minds the dream-haze creeps  
Like spreading fog, By midnight's chime  
We dream of worlds long lost in time

Whole worlds of wonders to behold -  
Of mystery, of long-lost gold?  
Or verdant wilds, and in its sky  
Might jewel-bright birds and dragons fly?

Dangers in dense jungles hide  
The ancient ruins deep inside -  
Time-worn remains, now overgrown  
Where skulking shadows roam alone.

Jagged mountains capped with white  
Mark land's sheer cliffs bathed in light  
Where roaring waves swamp ships at sea  
In tides of blue eternity.

A world where magic fills the air  
From sunlit glen to dragon's lair  
A thread of music weaves its way  
Through every dream-lit night and day.

And yet, as strange as it may seem  
You had but glimpsed this world of dreams.  
If only you could be there still!  
Although you try, you never will.

We find such vibrant fantasies  
Live but in fleeting memories  
Of worlds we cannot recreate.  
Worlds gone forever when we wake.

### Judge's Comment

This is a powerful poem and takes the reader away into a world of dreams with lovely use of simile, metaphor and rhyme. 'Where skulking shadows roam alone.' Wonderful!

Winner - Lower Primary

Jenna Rogers

ST MICHAEL'S COLLEGIATE, HOBART TAS

### *Fire*

Hills bleached gold,  
a baked blue sky,  
leaves lay limp in the air,  
sucked dry.

The burning fire, licking trees,  
turning them to ash,  
fire flared, flames cracked.

Fire, a beast, ate it all,  
then ordered more.

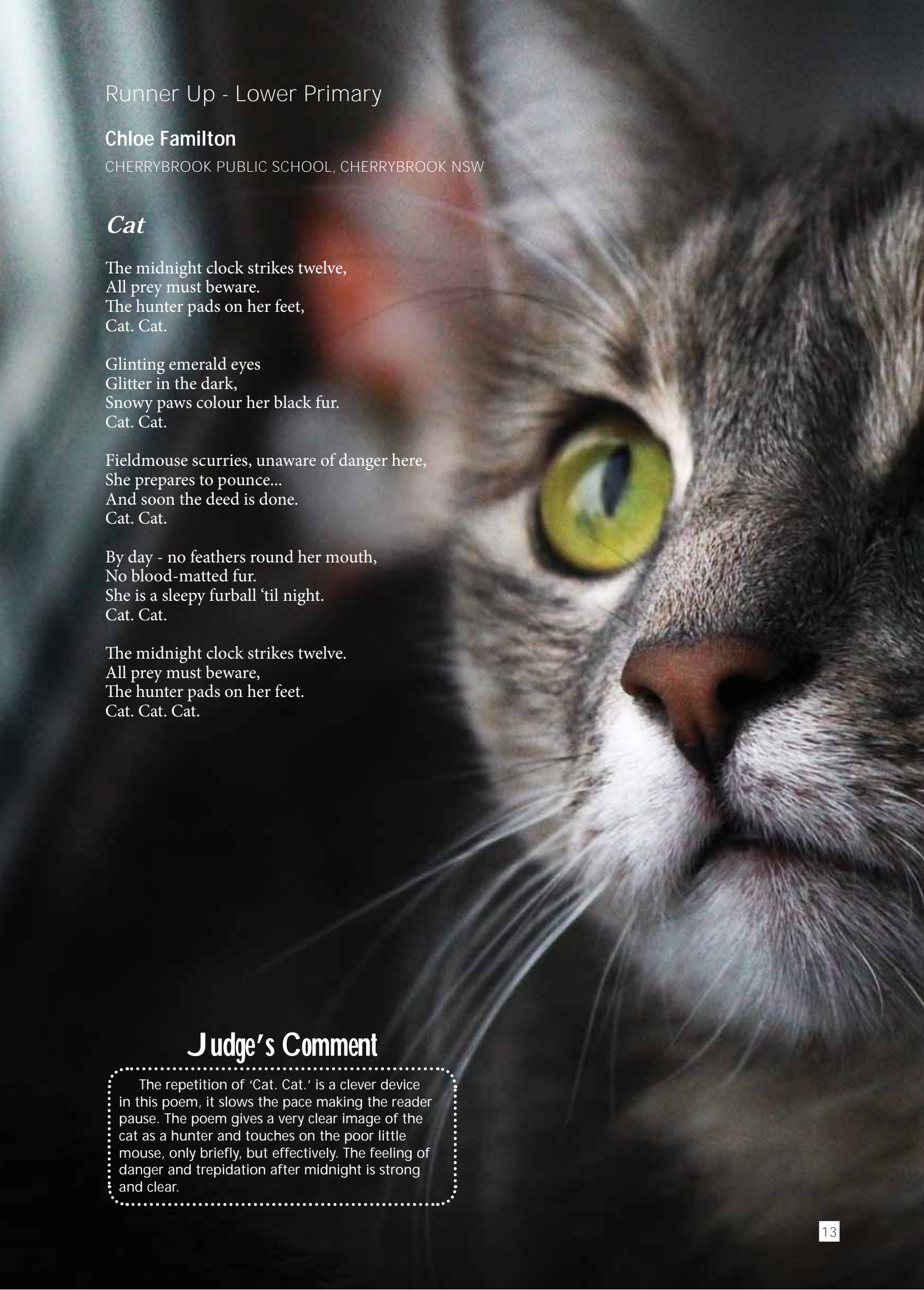
Leaves like tissue,  
trees like cardboard,  
the burning sun,  
the howling wind,  
air too thick with smoke to see,  
nothing calming this fire sea.

The fire cleared, revealing the dead,  
grass singed down to dirt,  
not a thing spared.

King Fire has had his word.

### Judge's Comment

What could be a clearer description of a bushfire more than this young poet's words - 'Fire, a beast, ate it all, then ordered more.' There are many wonderful descriptive passages in this poem, with its personal response to what I believe is Jenna's experience. The last line is a powerful statement saying much in a few honest words.



Runner Up - Lower Primary

**Chloe Familton**

CHERRYBROOK PUBLIC SCHOOL, CHERRYBROOK NSW

*Cat*

The midnight clock strikes twelve,  
All prey must beware.  
The hunter pads on her feet,  
Cat. Cat.

Glinting emerald eyes  
Glitter in the dark,  
Snowy paws colour her black fur.  
Cat. Cat.

Fieldmouse scurries, unaware of danger here,  
She prepares to pounce...  
And soon the deed is done.  
Cat. Cat.

By day - no feathers round her mouth,  
No blood-matted fur.  
She is a sleepy furball 'til night.  
Cat. Cat.

The midnight clock strikes twelve.  
All prey must beware,  
The hunter pads on her feet.  
Cat. Cat. Cat.

**Judge's Comment**

The repetition of 'Cat. Cat.' is a clever device in this poem, it slows the pace making the reader pause. The poem gives a very clear image of the cat as a hunter and touches on the poor little mouse, only briefly, but effectively. The feeling of danger and trepidation after midnight is strong and clear.



Winner - Assisted Learning, Primary

**Maryam Sathat Sobhani**

FOOTSCRAY NORTH PRIMARY SCHOOL, FOOTSCRAY VIC

***Me***

I wonder who I am?  
Or where I am meant to be?  
Or where I could be?  
Or how to leave?  
Or how to be a true person?  
I wonder!  
I wonder how I can fit in this world  
Or how to be right?  
But no one can answer my questions.

**Judge's Comment**

Beautiful. Simple and heartfelt. This poem is a universal question which has been asked by generations of people from all over the world for as long as time. This young student has expressed it so succinctly and so well that it makes the reader stop and wonder.

Runner Up - Assisted Learning, Primary

**Zoe Fogarty**

SCEGGS DARLINGHURST, DARLINGHURST NSW

***Child Abuse***

Good turns to evil,  
I scream but no one hears,  
My body turns cold.

**Judge's Comment**

This is an excellent poem -  
once again, so much said in so few  
words. Oh, so powerful.



Joint Winner - Community Relations Commission (NSW) Award

**Yash Goel**

CASTLE HILL PUBLIC SCHOOL, CASTLE HILL NSW

### *Being Nani*

My Nani was born in India,  
And now she lives in Australia.  
I love my Nani,  
Because she cares for me.  
She has black hair and brown skin.  
She is tall and very thin.  
When my Nani wears a sari,  
She looks very, very pretty.  
Nani always wears a bindi on her forehead.  
It is round and the colour red.  
I like to wear the bindi for fun.  
It makes me feel like I am an Indian.  
My Nani cooks me Indian food.  
Her cooking is very, very good.  
Nani calls me 'Beta' in Hindi.  
'Beta' means 'Son' she told me.  
Nani goes to the temple to pray.  
She prays to statues made of clay.  
I watch my Nani as she chants.  
I stand with her and clap my hands.  
I have fun learning about our Gods,  
And all of their different jobs.  
My Nani does lots of fun things on Diwali.  
She makes colourful patterns called 'rangoli'.  
We eat lots of Indian sweets,  
And I get lots and lots of gifts.  
My Nani tells me about India,  
Because it is different from Australia.  
She wants me to know,  
That although I am Australian, I am Indian too.  
I love you Nani, thankyou.  
I am proud of being like you.

### **Judge's Comment**

This poem has such a gentle honesty about it. Told from the heart this young poet shares with us a precious aspect of his cultural heritage and the line 'although I am Australian, I am Indian too' says it all.

Joint Winner - Community Relations Commission (NSW) Award

**Naomi So**

LINDFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOL, LINDFIELD NSW

## *I Am a Refugee*

What shall we tell you?  
The ear piercing cries that went through our ears  
Or the heart breaking bangs of gunshots in war.

What shall we tell you?  
How we fled?  
How we survived  
Or why we fled?

What shall we tell you?  
The anxious feeling of getting on a boat with no clue  
what you're doing or why you're doing it,  
Or when we were dragged on a boat drifting off to sea,  
Clueless of what's coming

What shall we tell you?  
The rough boat trip with hundreds of anxious people  
Or children sitting lonely and depressed to leave everything?

What shall we tell you?  
The sensation of relief as it is an island we see  
Or how we tremble with fear hoping we're not caught.

I struggled,  
I survived,  
I am a refugee.



## Judge's Comment

Such powerful imagery in a few words. Attitude captured in the use of questions and finally, the simple lined contradiction creates a powerful conclusion. It encompasses the fight and bravery to be classified as someone starting out all over again. Brilliant!

## Schools' Award

### Winner - Sheelah Baxter Schools' Award (Primary)

Footscray North Primary School, FOOTSCRAY VIC

### Winner - Schools' Award (Secondary)

Dubbo School of Distance Education, DUBBO NSW

## Commendations

Applecross Senior High School, ARDROSS WA  
Cherrybrook Public School, CHERRYBROOK NSW  
Dural Primary School, DURAL NSW  
Fitzroy Community School, NORTH FITZROY VIC  
Girton Grammar School, BENDIGO VIC  
Kenmore State School, KENMORE QLD  
Kingswood College, BOX HILL VIC  
Launceston Church Grammar School, LAUNCESTON TAS  
Lindfield Public School, LINDFIELD NSW  
Montague Continuing Education Centre, SOUTH MELBOURNE VIC  
Moriah College, QUEENS PARK NSW  
Mount Claremont PEAC Centre, MOUNT CLAREMONT WA  
Redeemer Baptist School, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW  
SCEGGS, DARLINGHURST NSW  
St Brendan's Primary School, ANNANDALE NSW  
St Patrick College, SUTHERLAND NSW  
St Paul's College, WALLA WALLA NSW  
The Cottage School, BELLERIVE TAS

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## Judge's Report (Secondary) – Nette Hilton



Nette Hilton, senior sections' judge, is a full time author of 70 books including some award winners and translations. Her poetry has bridged across to song-writing and features on an album by James Thornbury, 'Like At First Sight'.

What can I tell you? Apart from the fact that I have groaned, grizzled, laughed, read, thought, smiled, shuddered, marvelled, imagined, talked and walked poetry, I have 'growned' to be more of a poetry lover, more than I thought possible. This is a precious gift and to all of you, I am eternally grateful.

I can tell you that I have accompanied poets on their journeys through subjects and content ranging from war and soldiers and loss, grief, day-dreams, spiritual journeys and philosophical comments of life and living it. I have had the opportunity to read mirror versions of Australian bush poetry – my goodness, 'Harry Dale the Drover' rides again – how brilliant they were. I have ridden quad-bikes in the bush and watched life in distant places through the eyes of others. I have experienced

a snap-shot of what it is like to be young and, I can certainly tell you, that politicians and world leaders, merchandisers and media magnates could do a lot worse than sit down and read this collection. They couldn't fail to be impressed but, more importantly, would be bearing witness to how they are observed, considered and critiqued. Nothing has escaped the analysis, judgements, observations and exuberance evident in these works. The hopes and needs, fear and apprehension, love and passion are all here and, on a special note, those responsible for caring for the environment and the state of the world have been put on notice; this generation of new, young, vital poets are counting on you to fix it or, by golly, by the time they get there, they'll be doing it for you! Actually . . . they already are.

What else can I tell you . . . that it has been an honour and

a privilege to have been on this journey. The winners and the runners-up tore off the page, bold and undeniably heaving with talent, and the others – oh, how glorious they were and how truly, truly desperate I was trying to keep them from sinking to places they shouldn't have been. Every single one of them, every single poet who sat down and penned a poem, whether you did it voluntarily, happily or under the thumbs of

a handful of teachers (I know because there's a poem or two that have grabbed that moment as well and made me live it) your work deserves to be kept afloat, on top of the sea of wonderful words to remind us of your willingness to put your feelings, your life and your incredible thoughts into poetry.

Finally, my last 'tell-you' is borrowed. I heard once that writing forms a pyramid, with

novels and long works providing the base. On the next level are short-stories but up there on the pinnacle, the absolute peak of all the most beautiful words is . . . poetry.

Thank-you for letting me climb to the top of your pyramids with you.

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## Judge's Report (Primary) – Corinne Fenton

It has been an honour and a privilege to be involved in such an important part of the learning of Australian children, as the 2014 junior categories' judge of the wonderful Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards.

'My Country' has always been a poem dear to my heart and my memories of reciting it out loud is something which will remain with me always. Writing and poetry were my favourite subjects at primary school and reading the creations of today's primary school students has been both a challenging and rewarding experience. I cannot think of a better way to start each day than by opening the judge's page of the Dorothea Mackellar competition to find word-treasures from 4 – 12 year olds, poems that started with a tiny precious seed then grew and blossomed into a story-poem, told from the heart, from children all across this spectacular country. One moment I'd be reading a poem from a child who lives in a far away and remote outback area where peace and a slower pace of life reign supreme. A moment later I would be looking at the words from a student at an inner city school, close to traffic and chaotic busyness. I would like to thank all those wonderful teachers who encouraged their students to pick up their pens, pencils, lap tops, iPads or whatever electronic device

I've forgotten and let their words take flight. I could see as I was reading, some of those flights were more difficult than others. Some flew easily while others struggled to take off.

One specific comment I would like to make is that many students started out with strong words, strong messages which often petered off by the end. To me, good writing is about writing, then rewriting and rewriting, looking at our words over and over again, making every line, each word, as perfect as it can be. This always takes time. So I often looked for poems where students wrote through to the end, retained their focus and passion for their subject and a passion for their words.

There were acrostic poems, rhyming poems, free verse and diamante poems to name a few. Strong themes were darkness, saving the world from bad things, and the environment, with topics about refugees, dance, memories, food, the seasons, spiders, Minecraft (whatever that is), Lego, bullying, family, depression and there was a thread of sadness. The history of war was understandably strong this year, the Anzacs particularly, but there was also an overall worry and concern about what is happening now and asking why does war have to be? The contrasts in subjects made each opening a surprise. There were

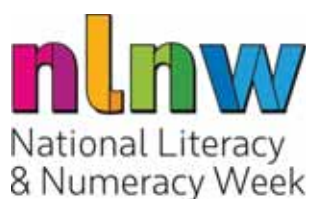


Our judge for the Primary sections, Corinne Fenton, is a full time author who has a passion for picture books. Corinne has 20 educational books and seven picture books published, with three more coming in the next few months. She lives in the bush on Melbourne's doorstep.

powerful, funny, very strong and not so strong poems – some made me laugh out loud and others caused tears to trickle on to my keyboard.

To me poetry is often about letting your feelings, your fears, your inside-of-you-thoughts run free. Some were written in a flash, others clearly worked on for a very long time but all of them, were precious, a pleasure and an honour to read. Thank you.

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