



DOROTHEA MACKELLAR POETRY AWARDS 2015



OPTIONAL
THEME

the *open* *door*

NATIONAL PRESENTATION CEREMONY

From the President

As we mark the 130th anniversary of Dorothea's birth, it is refreshing to re-visit the legacy of our Australian cultural and historical icon.

Dorothea was imbued with a constant sense of adventure and awareness of nature's moods and rich bounties. Her ability to paint a picture with adjectives and rhymes and to re-create an emotion with well-chosen phrases has been an inspiration for countless readers and students of her work.

The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society continues to share the vision of founder of the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards, Mikie Maas OAM to inspire schoolchildren, using Dorothea's legacy, to foster "creative writing ... love of country ... and a better understanding between young Australians from various backgrounds, who live in vastly different circumstances throughout our great continent".

For 31 years now, students have followed in Dorothea's lyrical footsteps using this national competition as their platform to

express, with artful insight, the human experience. Our warmest congratulations go to all participating schools, teachers and students over the years. We especially salute those talented young poets who have won the hearts of our distinguished judges,

whose expertise and enthusiasm is so much appreciated. I look forward to acknowledging and celebrating all those involved in this year's poetry competition.

Jenny Farquhar



Senator Scott Ryan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Ms Susan Duncan, the award winning Australian author of "Salvation Creek" officiated at this year's launch, joined by representatives from the Department of Education, Canberra schools, National Arboretum and the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society.

About our Trophies

Emily Simson continues an awards' tradition of local artists creating individual trophies which have found their way into homes across Australia.

A fine arts graduate from the University of Newcastle and an award winning TAFE student, Emily has been painting and printmaking for more than 30 years. She has exhibited successfully at shows and galleries throughout northern NSW and in Sydney.

From a studio on her family farm near Bundella, 100km from Gunnedah, she draws inspiration for much of her work. Birds, animals, landscape and domestic scenes have all featured in her body of work.

"Under The Pear Tree", a limited edition linocut print which is presented to this year's winners, has been made specifically for the awards.

Watching the peewees in the trees near her house playing with Sunny, the

family kelpie, provided the idea for the work.

"The dog is always looking up, the birds are divebombing her while she tries to catch them, she has no hope. It is a playful image of a daily scene, one that involves children and animals," Emily explains.

In many ways, the print represents the spirit of the awards - it encourages flights of thought, freedom and movement.

Emily says she loves experimenting with subjects and incorporating movement into her work. "Sometimes the subject matter becomes a vehicle for colour," she says. Her bold use of colour and clarity of images, particularly in her printmaking, are hallmarks of her work.

Work on the trophies comes amid a busy year for the artist with three joint shows planned before the end of the year.



Artist Emily Simson with her print "Under the Pear Tree" which will be presented to winners in this year's awards.

WINNER - LOWER PRIMARY

Charlie Carroll

OXFORD FALLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL, OXFORD FALLS NSW

Imagination

Blurred colours and shapes morph
into kaleidoscope images of fun.
Ideas flow, rushing through my head
like a river, destroying evil memories.
Nightmares fade.

Imagination.

Curious dreams dance, tumble and turn
all around.
I am smothered by happiness as a mural of vibrant light
spreads across a blank canvas.
Creativity unleashed.

Imagination.

Twisted pictures cascade like a
waterfall... transporting me to a
breathtaking place.
Their power cannot be quelled.

Imagination.

Judge's Comment

Congratulations Charlie.
What a wonderful subject -
imagination - which I believe is a
precious gift for a writer. Lovely
use also of similes and metaphors,
imagery and strong vocabulary.
Creativity unleashed -
indeed.

RUNNER UP - LOWER PRIMARY

Kiersten Ciastkowski

BRINDABELLA CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, LYNEHAM ACT

Poppies

The ones who lay down by the cross;
The ones whose hearts have been lost.
In the fields where poppies grow,
Young ones play, remembering so.

Judge's Comment

A few spare and beautiful words.
A wonderful example of a short and
perfect poem with a strong sense of
place. I love the idea of life moving
on, in a place where memories are
treasured.



WINNER - UPPER PRIMARY

Lucia Gelonesi

SCEGGS, DARLINGHURST NSW

Meeting Helen Keller

At first I did not think we could be friends
The weight of your will
Overwhelmed
Intimidated
Reading about you
And your preposterous accomplishments
So swarming with fantastic feats
From riding horses to learning Greek
Rendered me scrawny
Insufficiently unique
But after a while
I began to feel safe with you
And you shifted what I understood
To be human
Of course now I see
You are the most alive thing imaginable
Quietly uproarious
A thrashing soul
A universe flipped inside-out
Once in the bath I tried to feel what it was to be you
My head submerged
My eyes sealed
My ears filled with water
I waved my arms in front of me to fumble the universe
Inconceivably, you learned to caress it
To coax the world inside
But I am too alert and too inquisitive
To slide into adoration
My favourite story about you
The one I was so pleased to discover
About your eyes, so admired for their warmth and intelligence
Were in reality
Only cool pools of glass
Fashioned by a craftsman
Perhaps it was a gift you gave yourself
A secret
A private joke
In such a public life
The world was not entitled to know everything
I can imagine, when you laughed
Your whole body rippled with pleasure
And the exquisite irony is
You taught me
How to see



Judge's Comment

This poem is incredibly mature and insightful for a 10 year old and the subject, well, how wonderful to be reminded about the incredible Helen Keller. It is clear that much time and thought, drafting and redrafting, has gone into this poem and each word chosen is perfect for the place. The spacing, pauses and line breaks only add to the poem's strength. Congratulations Lucia - a wonderful piece.

RUNNER UP - UPPER PRIMARY

Saskia Fleming

PRESBYTERIAN LADIES' COLLEGE, PEPPERMINT GROVE WA

Lake Benji

The surface quivers
hooded plovers stand
black and red
against the white crust
paperbark trees envelop
kangaroos at guard
a black barb attacking the sky
the algae rests
on a stage of salt
clouds smother the light
and from the lake, a blush

Judge's Comment

Once again, very mature writing for a 10 year old which gives a perfect sense of place - being at the lake. Wonderful use of poetic and imaginative words, but it was the final line which caught me. Congratulations Saskia.

WINNER - ASSISTED LEARNING, PRIMARY

Aasha Rahman

OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL, WATERLOO NSW

My Life

The sky is full of darkness.
Dark clouds surround me.
People cry.

The streets are empty.
The shops shut down.
It is dark like a black cat.
People are sad like crying babies.

BANG! My heart is lit blooming with red.
Joy is here.
I laugh again.

My door is open.

Judge's Comment

There were many poems which used the theme of the open door, but in this poem Aasha has made it personal. From darkness and despair she moves to a joyous place, lighting her heart . . . and her door is open. Congratulations Aasha.

RUNNER UP - ASSISTED LEARNING, PRIMARY

Chloe Webster

NORTH COTTESLOE PRIMARY SCHOOL, COTTESLOE WA

Judge's Comment

I believe there is much more to this poem than meets the eye. To me it is a metaphor for friendship - perhaps even leaves need friends and family offering love and support. Well done, Chloe.

The Gentle Leaf

One gentle leaf danced by itself
Down off the branches
With the light wind
To be with its friends
On the leafy floor below

WINNER - JUNIOR SECONDARY

Lily McCann

THE FRIENDS' SCHOOL, NORTH HOBART TAS

Stolen

Death beckoned and to his fingers flew
Her last and final breath.
He gathered it up and sucked the warmth
From her white, still, silent flesh.
He painted with care across her skin
A wash of horrid blue
And lastly from her lips he took
The sweet red glowing hue.

And so she lay, his maiden white
Lips parted in surprise,
Eyes sweetly blank, fated not
To view the next sunrise.

Judge's Comment

There is a distinctive voice to this poem which is reflected in the astonishing choice of words for the first two lines. The images are deftly painted with words that sustain the sombre mood of the piece. An outstanding work on a difficult subject.

RUNNER UP - JUNIOR SECONDARY

Abbey Hill

ACADEMY OF MARY IMMACULATE, FITZROY VIC

Pop's Teeth

An amazing thing happened
One lovely sunny day
When Pop and I went fishing
Out on the bay.

My pop's great at catching fish
He whistles while he waits
For a great big fish
To gobble up his bait.

Nanna's fab at cooking fish
She tosses them in the pot
Squeezes them with lemon
Then serves them up to Pop.

I dig up worms from the garden
The ones we use for bait
And watch them wiggle in the bucket
While we sit and wait.

But this particular day
Right before my eyes
I had an amazing
Unbelievable surprise.

AAAAACHOOOO!!!!
Pop did one huge big sneeze
And his teeth flew into the air
Away with the breeze.

KAPLONK!!...Into the water
Went his pearly whites
It certainly was a sad
And sorry sight.

Then Pop turned to me
And it was a little funny
When he said without his teeth,
"No more fithing today honey."

So without a fish in our bucket
Or Pop's teeth in his mouth
We started up our motor
And headed on south.

Then right before my eyes
as we headed for the shore
I really couldn't believe
what I actually saw

It was a gummy shark
To be precise
Wearing a big grin
Pop's teeth had fallen out
And he had put them in.

Now there's a happy gummy shark
Wearing a nice set of teeth
But Pop swears one day
He'll catch that thief!!



Judge's Comment

It is hugely difficult to create a work that will make others laugh. This is a superb example. The cleverness of the rhyme, and the sparkling, skipping meter add to the absolute joy that it delivers. A wonderful tale cleverly told in verse.

WINNER - SENIOR SECONDARY

Aryanne Caminschi

ST MARY'S ANGLICAN GIRLS' SCHOOL, KARRINYUP WA

Riverstone

It could have been any other stone, at the beginning,
When it was
Plucked from amongst icy riverwater,
in curiosity and tucked, a treasure,
Into an orange polar fleece coat pocket, warm

But it stayed in that pocket longer than one might think,
and became smoother every time
It went through the wash
And the child who picked the pebble from the rest
Grew accustomed to the warm glassy reassurance in the right pocket
Of whatever he was adorned with for warmth that day

And as the polar fleece pocket changed from orange to navy
And navy to black
And polar fleece to leather and leather to silk

The black riverstone went from a souvenir of a walk,
To a relic of child's wandering,
To a token inadvertently grasped in moments of alarm
Or sometimes nostalgia for times simpler

But as the pocket changed, as the child grew

The pebble stayed.

Judge's Comment

The pebble here is used so effectively to become an anchor on the journey through life. Words are carefully placed and selected to force the reader into a rhythm which reflects this journey.

The personal tone of the work invites the reader as a listener - a very intimate sharing.

RUNNER UP - SENIOR SECONDARY

Chris Lamboa

REDEEMER BAPTIST SCHOOL, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW

Djäpana

The elders sat down on the sandy beach
Looking at djäpana.
Yapas & wawas,
Narritj and narritjans
All sat down admiring djäpana.

The baru in the sea,
The guya in the reefs,
Stood still to see djäpana.

Oh djäpana, oh what a wonder!
Leaving the sky in its beauty and colour.
So stand and wait for djäpana's sake.
Do not look away now, do not forsake
Djäpana:
'The glory of the sunset'.

Judge's Comment

There is a tension created in the structure of this work that is compelling. It is almost a song and, like a song, begs to be sung. The revelation of sunset after the journey, cleverly placed in an alternate language, is as satisfying as the mystery of the unknown words.

WINNER - ASSISTED LEARNING, SECONDARY

Evan Feng

REDEEMER BAPTIST SCHOOL, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW

People and Doors

People like doors
And people are like doors.

People open their doors
To new people and
New experiences.

People open their doors
To new opportunities and
Things that will make them feel secure
Or launch them into success.

People are like closed doors
So they can keep themselves
Free of unruly things like
Feelings and protect themselves
From getting hurt.

People also close their doors
Behind them so you can't follow
When they decide that you're not good enough
And walk away from you.

People like doors
And people are like doors.

Judge's Comment

Such lovely words - 'free of unruly things', almost like a Sendak sequence. I love the insight contained in the last verse and the way it creates a shared intimacy. A very special poem.



RUNNER UP - ASSISTED LEARNING, SECONDARY

Jessica Campbell

KYOGLE HIGH SCHOOL, KYOGLE NSW

The Silent Story

all dark and silent
not a thing in sight
trees with no leaves
sky with no clouds
all ground caved in
old dead leaves
nothing around me
I can't hear anything or anyone
the town was destroyed by bombs from the war
houses burnt down
no people around
not a person to be found
dark and silent

Judge's Comment

The careful selection of words to paint bleakness creates a haunting quality in this poem. The interruption of the two longer lines breaks the mood. They are unemotional and factual. By doing this, the sorrow and loss is made more poignant. Beautiful work.

SCHOOLS' AWARD

Primary Winner (Sheelah Baxter Award) - St Stephen's Primary School, TAPPING WA

Secondary Winner - Cammeraygal High School, CROWS NEST NSW

Commendations

Brisbane School of Distant Education, BRISBANE QLD
Bullsbrook College, BULLSBROOK WA
Eltham East Primary School, ELTHAM VIC
Fairfield Public School, FAIRFIELD NSW
Hobart College, MT NELSON TAS
Manilla Central School, MANILLA NSW
Merewether High School, BROADMEADOW NSW
North Fitzroy Primary School, NORTH FITZROY VIC
Oxford Falls Grammar School, OXFORD FALLS NSW
Port Elliott Primary School, PORT ELLIOT SA
St Hilda's Anglican School for Girls, MOSMAN PARK WA
Tara Anglican School for Girls, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW
Thomas Mitchell Primary School, ENDEAVOUR HILLS VIC
Waverley Christian College, WANTIRNA SOUTH VIC
Woollahra Public School, WOOLLAHRA NSW

WINNER - COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION (NSW) AWARD

Katja Dedekind

KENMORE STATE HIGH SCHOOL, KENMORE QLD

The Open Door

I am a Refugee.
I'm homeless, poor, sick, and alone
And scared.

I'm on an old wooden boat.
It's unstable, cramped and leaking.
It's falling apart as we are moving.

The sea is so murky.
Nobody can see the bottom.
Everyone thinks there is no bottom.

I can see fish swimming.
Birds flying,
Every now and then.

We are no longer stranded.
We are in a huge detention centre.
It's so hot because we are in the desert.
I wish we were still on that boat.

After being in this place.
This barbed-wire prison.
I am free.

Freedom is amazing.
I feel like an eagle soaring high,
Above the clouds.
Out of the reach of everything and everyone.

Judge's Comment

Told in simple words and through the use of present tense, the poet transports us and we journey with her. Her last reference to freedom reveals how strongly her life has been confined and we celebrate as well as feel her release.

Primary Judge's Report - Corinne Fenton

I would like to begin this report by saying thank you to all those students for writing, teachers for guiding and parents for glancing over their children's shoulders, in this year's Dorothea Mackellar Poetry competition.

As was the case last year, it was very difficult for me to choose what I believe are the very best poems out of the thousands I read and re-read and I'd like to say that if your poem isn't among those winning, highly commended or commended ones, that doesn't mean that your poem wasn't good - so please don't ever stop writing poetry.

For me, at times the task was daunting, but as was the case last year, I made sure that daily entries were read every night before I went to sleep. I was plagued with the horror of missing a 'gem' when I was often struggling to keep my eyes open.

Once again, it was a special privilege to hear the voices of Australian primary school children sharing their joys, worries, celebrations and concerns, large and small pieces of their lives, captured in the words they shared in their precious poetry. In the awarded poems, I have chosen a broad-brush of subjects which express the trials, hopes and dreams of this young generation. I have always believed poetry is an excellent vehicle for sharing and airing self-expression and this year's entries, once again, confirmed that.

The Upper Primary Category had a particularly large number of strong entries this year and conversely submission numbers were down for the Assisted Learning Category. Poetry styles, subjects and themes were diverse with many students choosing this year's theme of The Open Door. While some poems showcased extensive vocabulary and comprehension, there were others which, although beginning strong, were not written through to the end. But that is, I hope, only one small piece of constructive criticism.

I am already missing the daily word-gems falling into the Judge's inbox, but what a precious privilege it has been. Thank you.



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.

Secondary Judge's Report - Nette Hilton

Here is the thing - poetry is an awakening. There is no way to escape seeing the world in a different way having been immersed in it - seeing its beauty, confusion and complexity. It is a basis on which judgements and generalisations can be made. It is a basis for forming opinion that has been well considered because poetry forces you to consider language and to go and seek and find the best word for the best time to reveal your deepest thoughts. And then, having undertaken this journey, insight and epiphany travel side by side.

A friend of mine used to take herself down to St Kilda Baths to photograph dawn. She was mesmerised by the beauty of light on water. A swimmer who'd noticed her daily appearance, looked to the horizon with her. 'What's there?' he asked. 'What do you take photos of?' She told him and he stood with her and watched the sun rise. He'd seen it before but never really looked. Similarly we need to learn to hear. Having your eyes opened by seeing life as art, and learning to hear the world through poetry begin the journey.

These students have astounded me with their understanding of the power of words and have used it so effectively and efficiently to involve me in their journeys. I have walked many walks and heard many tales. I have seen evidence of pain in the imagined journeys of refugees, I have witnessed the outrage at inequality - if it was left to these poets there'd be no such thing as racism, or refugees or gender inequity. I have laughed out loud at some of the humour and the wickedness of implied meanings.

This year these students have surpassed themselves. My hardest task was dividing them into categories and then having to re-arrange them when I had 164 highly commended into ten! Honestly, ten!

I will be sorry to end my time with the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards. I have loved the poetry which has entrenched my belief that it is the absolute beginning for seeking deeper meaning.

Remember, educators and curriculum makers and poets and singers and artists. Poetry begins it - you cannot begin at the end. It's like unravelling a sweater to see how it fits.



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'.

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