

Celebrating 40 years

Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards

AUSTRALIA'S LONGEST RUNNING ANNUAL POETRY COMPETITION FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

LISTEN, I HAVE AN IDEA

optional theme



www.dorothea.com.au

2024 PRESENTATION BOOKLET

FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS TO NATIONAL TRIUMPH: 40 YEARS

MESSAGE FROM

OUR PRESIDENT

I AM ECSTATIC! I feel like we've crossed the line of a poetry Olympics (and yes, they really do exist!) and now we're completing a victory lap.

Who would have thought that a small local poetry competition that began 40 years ago in the NSW country town of Gunnedah is now Australia's oldest and largest poetry competition for school aged students?

It is incredible to reflect on this achievement in a time when the competition for students' attention has never been greater.

I have to admit there have been years when the future of the awards looked troubled - waning entries, galloping technology and government funding in doubt - but four decades later the competition goes from strength to strength.

This year's number of entries at 7300 are the best for several years. The committee has worked to promote the awards on all levels, using social media and the more traditional forms of media to create interest.

But ultimately it is the young poets, their teachers and parents who must claim credit. They are the



**PIP MURRAY, PRESIDENT,
AT KURRUMBEDE HOMESTEAD.**

ones who must wave their certificates and trophies aloft at this admirable feat.

This year's winners' list sees some returnees. The Redeemer Baptist School at North Parramatta, NSW has been on our honour roll for three of the four decades the competition has been running. What an astonishing and commendable record! Rowena Public School, in north west NSW (population 170) has again produced the winner of the Small Schools' Award.

Some new winners from across Australia and from schools not previously represented made my heart sing and gives me great hope for the next 40 years.



**dorothea mackellar
poetry awards**

The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society is the administrative body of the poetry awards.

Established in 1984, the society is a volunteer organisation based in the northern NSW town of Gunnedah. It comprises an eight-member committee and is primarily funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education.

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MILESTONES

KURRUMBEDE

The annual open day was held at the former Mackellar family property, north of Gunnedah on the June long weekend.

More than 1000 visitors came through the gates to enjoy a family day despite some discouraging weather.

Co-hosted with the property owners Whitehaven Coal, the open day aims to give everyone an experience of what it was like to live there.

Shearing demonstrations, heavy horse pulling, a vintage machinery display and pony cart rides were enjoyed by the crowd, some of whom dressed in the garden party theme.

Music, a circus duo and poetry reading by bush poet Murray Hartin made for a memorable day.

In the homestead's drawing room, a display of winners over the 40 years of the poetry competition drew great interest.

Plans are now advancing for the rehabilitation of the homestead garden, to which Whitehaven Coal committed \$500,000 five years ago. Historical garden consultants have delivered a report, water supply lines have been installed and the Heritage Council of NSW is now involved in discussing the project. The Kurrumbede homestead c 1910 and outbuildings were added to the NSW Heritage Register in 2022 after being nominated by the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society.



A GONG

Foundation member of the poetry awards, Anne Knight has been recognised for her Contribution to the Arts in Gunnedah with an Order of Australia medal earlier this year. The Society was delighted to share Anne's excitement when we held an afternoon tea to celebrate with her and her friends at the Mackellar Centre.

SIGNIFICANT BIRTHDAY

The Society is hyped about its 40th anniversary this year. Not only are we pleasantly surprised to have come this far but we are positively engaged in planning for the awards well into the future. We wish we could share our birthday party with all of you but on our presentation day, we are screening the virtual ceremony in Gunnedah Town Hall before local schools and supporters to be followed by morning tea.

CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOPS

Sami Bayly, well known award winning artist and author, was engaged to run a series of workshops in Gunnedah in May. Students from across the area, large and small, attended across two days and engaged with Sami's individual approach to words and verse. The feedback was Sami was a smash hit and we are hopeful of booking her again.



Photo: Taylah Maree



Photo: Taylah Maree



OUR PATRONS



DR SALLY MURPHY OAM

AUTHOR, POET AND EDUCATOR

Sally Murphy fell in love with books and poetry as a child and decided that she would never stop reading and writing. She has managed to turn this love of the written word into a career as a children's author, poet and academic.

With over 50 books published, including award winning verse novels *Pearl Verses the World* and *Worse Things*, Sally completed Doctoral Studies in creative writing with her topic being *Belonging In and For Children's Poetry*. She also uses her love of children's literature in her work at Curtin University, where she lectures in literacy and education.

Having previously been a judge for the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards she is delighted to continue her connection by becoming a Patron.



SUSAN DUNCAN

AUTHOR, JOURNALIST AND FORMER EDITOR

Susan Duncan enjoyed a 25-year career spanning radio, newspaper and magazine journalism, including editing two of Australia's top selling women's magazines, *The Australian Women's Weekly* and *New Idea*.

Susan has published two bestselling memoirs, *Salvation Creek* and its sequel, *The House at Salvation Creek*, and two novels, *The Briny Café* and *Gone Fishing*.

She also has a very special connection to Dorothea Mackellar as the former owner of "Tarrangau" in Pittwater. The historic home was built for Dorothea in 1925.

The Society is thrilled to have her as a patron for the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards.



THE HONOURABLE MARK VAILE AO

CHAIRMAN, WHITEHAVEN COAL

As Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Leader of the National party from 2005 to 2007, Mark established an extensive network of contacts throughout Australia and East Asia, his focus at home was with regional Australia and particularly northern NSW. As one of Australia's longest serving Trade Ministers from 1999 through until 2006 Mark led negotiations resulting in Free Trade Agreements with the United States of America, Singapore and Thailand as well as launching negotiations with China, Japan and ASEAN. Importantly, early in his ministerial career as Minister for Transport and Regional Services, Mark was instrumental in the establishment of the ARTC which operates the Hunter Valley rail network.

CELEBRATING A LIVING TREASURE: ANNE KNIGHT'S 40-YEAR LEGACY

THE TROPHIES

There aren't too many organisations that can boast a continuous contributor across their 40 years of existence.

The Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards is proud to have Anne Knight, artist and poet, as a life member and an active participant in our Society.

Anne continues to draw, write and printmake from her home in Gunnedah, Northern NSW.

She helped founder Mikie Maas establish the competition in 1984 and still keeps up with developments in the competition. In fact, many of our themes in recent years have been proposed by Anne.

Fittingly, this year she was awarded the Order of Australia medal for her services to the arts. Anne has no hesitation in saying the award was primarily for her contribution to the poetry awards.

It seemed highly appropriate on this 40th anniversary that we asked Anne if she could provide this year's trophy. Winners this year will receive a framed reproduction of her colourful print "Singing Our Song" featuring two of her beloved late pets Dan Dog and Alice Cat.

Anne ascribes her creative streak as being fostered on an outback sheep station where she

grew up, reading and listening to the ballads of Paterson, Lawson, Ogilvie and others.

She has been a frequent contributor to the NSW Department of Education's *School Magazine*, the oldest literary magazine for children anywhere in the world, and has run school workshops introducing children to poetry.

Her 2003 book *Muster Me A Song* was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's prize in children's poetry. Her poems appear in more than 30 anthologies including *For Keeps*, *A Treasury Celebrating 100 of The School Magazine*.

Anne's artwork has also been well represented here and in the UK and can always be found in local art shows, frequently with ribbons draped across them!

Her interest in young people and their artistic endeavours is as strong as ever, relishing any chance to read and discuss their work.

Anne is nothing short of a living treasure!



WATCH THE 2024 PRESENTATION CEREMONY



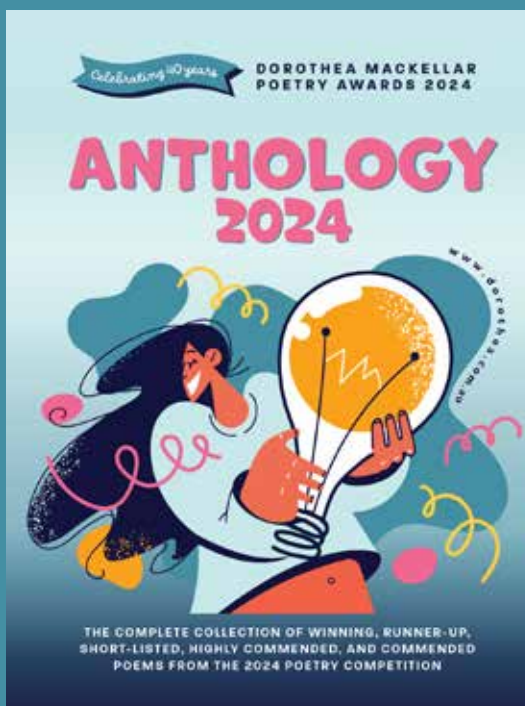
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and commended poems

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SCHOOLS' AWARDS



PRIMARY

PRIMARY SCHOOLS' AWARD WINNER

Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

COMMENDED

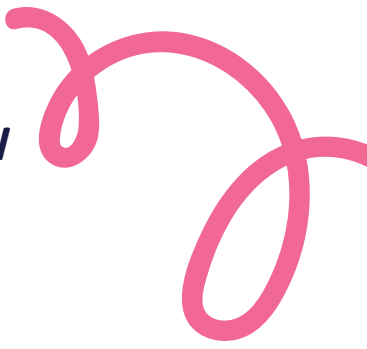
- Tamworth Public School, Tamworth, NSW

SECONDARY

SECONDARY SCHOOLS' AWARD WINNER

North Sydney Girls High School, Crows Nest NSW

COMMENDED

- Redeemer Baptist College, North Parramatta NSW
 - St Thomas More College, Sunnybank QLD
- 

'Your optional theme!'

This year **YOU** get to submit your suggestions on the 2025 optional theme!

Submit your ideas via email to executiveofficer@dorothea.com.au by the end of October 2024

The 2025 optional theme will be announced at the end of November 2024!



This was my second year judging the Primary categories of the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards, and it was heartening to find the number of entries in this category had increased since last year.

Young poets are still putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and it was a privilege to be the one reading your work. It was interesting to note that there weren't as many entries addressing the optional theme as compared to last year's entries. In general, the most successful poems that did incorporate the theme did so indirectly, without stating the phrase in the title or in the poem at all, but choosing to use 'Listen, I have an idea' as a jumping off point.

Other entries covered a range of topics and demonstrated that young writers are paying close attention to their immediate surroundings as well as events on the global stage. I read some impressive poetry about war, injustice, social justice and climate change alongside poems inspired by family, beloved pets, friendship and school. This year there were a large number of poems set in natural environments, with many poets writing about forests, the beach, snowscapes, local animals and birds, and weather events. The best poems combined poetic technique and personal passion, which allowed the poet's voice to shine through.

I had more than 4000 entries cross my desk in 2024. What was I looking for when I read each poem? I hoped for a connection to the writing in some form – a different way of looking at a popular topic or setting, an unusual description,

"The best poems combined poetic technique and personal passion, which allowed the poet's voice to shine through."

or perhaps an emotional response. Poems that caught my attention used literary devices effectively, like alliteration and imagery. It was encouraging to see many writers experimenting with poetic forms – haiku, limericks, odes and cinquains were popular this year, as well as a great many poems in free verse. It's worth



REBECCA M NEWMAN PRIMARY JUDGE

Rebecca M Newman is an award-winning poet and the former editor of *Alphabet Soup* magazine. Rebecca's poetry for children has been published in Australia and internationally in magazines and anthologies. Her flash fiction for adults has been published in anthologies and dispensed from the short story machine in Perth's city. Rebecca is the co-editor of a children's anthology – *Right Way Down and Other Poems* – out in 2024 with Fremantle Press & Alphabet Soup Books. www.rebeccanewman.net.au

considering whether your poem needs to rhyme. If you love writing in rhyme, internal rhyme is an effective tool. If you are attempting a poem with end rhymes, it can be helpful to enlist a friend to read your poem aloud to you. This way you can identify the hiccups in the rhythm that tend to appear when you are new to rhyming poetry.

Now my time as a judge has ended, I'd like to thank the teachers and parents for your continued support of young writers. And to the writers – thank you for sharing your passions, joys, humour, fears and fury through poetry. It has been an honour to read your poems. Whether your writing was selected for an award this year or not, I enjoyed reading your work immensely. I hope you continue to write.

Congratulations to the 2024 award winners and to everyone who finished a poem and entered it in this year's competition. Write on!

WINNER

LOWER PRIMARY (YEARS K-3)

Annabelle Gervaise Woo, 8, St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Rockdale NSW

MAGICAL WORLD

Damp bark, wet leaves, a mass of green-ness.
My fingers graze pillowy moss.
A butterfly flutters,
A gentle breeze from her gauzy wings
Against my cheek.
She glides towards a rushing waterfall
The murmuring of the water hushing me
Like a mother singing me to sleep.
A red-browed finch chirps, its long pointed sapphire tail
Twitching to the beat of the waterfall's gush.
The corner of its beady eye catches a worm,
A pink wriggle in the dirt,
And it plunges- too fast, it's a blur.
It scoops, spaghetti in its beak, and lands
Softly on lush algae, emerald sprouts on a branch.
Down below, a crocodile floats
Like a raft,
 And I drift too
Through the magical world
Of the Daintree.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

Reading this poem is an immersive rainforest experience and a feast for the senses. A range of literary devices is skilfully employed to paint the scene, including descriptive writing, alliteration, simile and metaphor. Of particular note: 'a pink wriggle in the dirt' - what a vivid (and utterly delightful!) image. In the final lines, fricative alliteration conjures up a sense of tranquillity

Ibby Yeung, Frankie Peacock & Florence Jones, 4, Fahan School, Lower Sandy Bay TAS

THREE CHICKENS

Brainhead, Polly Popcorn and Maree
They live in a fence house in the middle of
the night.
Safe so the wind doesn't blow them away.

In the day they are out in our garden
They walk with their skinny, red little legs.
Searching for and worms and ants.

Visiting us when we are playing
In our garden
Swinging, sliding, spades and sand

Brainhead with squiggles on his face,
and feathers dusty white.
Smarting his feathers with his beak.
Going 'boork!'
Always watching us.

Polly Popcorn, white feathers and a red
face.
A beak that curls round the corner.
Baby eyes.
Always squeezing herself through the
gate to get close to us.

Feathers of black, she is making a hole
and sitting in it.
Our Maree digging a hole with her feet
and beak.
Moving dirt to sit in it.
Is she laying eggs?
Is she finding something to eat?
I think she lays her eggs in her home.

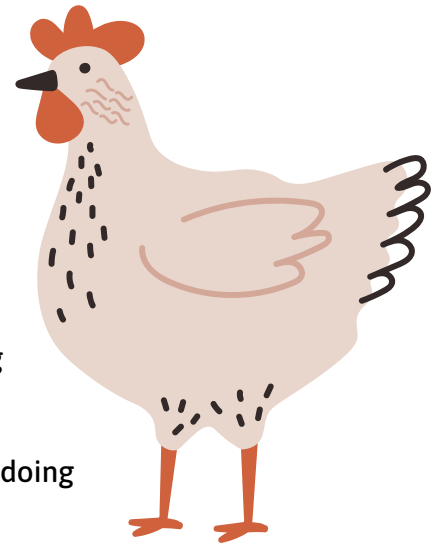


Her home is close to
where we get dropped
off
A white fence on the
grassy hill.

We have been watching
We know what they are
doing
I wonder what they are doing
now?

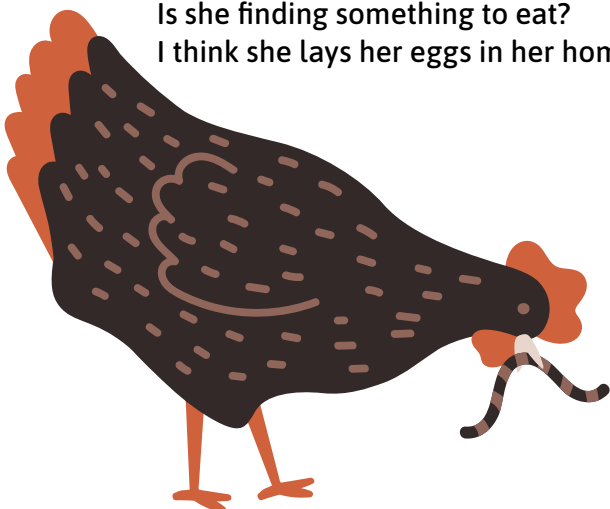
Grapes and grapes and grapes
Blueberries and strawberries
They like to search for our fallen fruit.

Standing together watching us while we
are watching them.



JUDGE'S COMMENT

Alliteration and descriptive writing capture the sounds, personalities and behaviours of these feathered friends. The repetition in 'grapes and grapes and grapes' is reminiscent of chickens pecking and foraging for food, as if from the chicken's point of view. Two especially wonderful lines to return to: 'They walk with their skinny, red little legs' and 'A beak that curls round the corner'. This is an endearing snapshot showcasing the three beloved chickens.



WINNER

UPPER PRIMARY (YEARS 4-6+7 IN SA)

Faith Kim, 11, Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

GAYAMBULA

A coarse cry shatters the clear blue sky.
Strong white wings soar to Boodjera.
Its handsome yellow crest shines,
In the shadow of Jarrah.

Gayambula. It stands on the branches.
It watches me from afar.
Wind sways the leaves of Jarrah,
Yet, Gayambula is unfazed.

Gayambula. It cracks open nuts,
With its black, bold beak.
Its sulfur crest shines as it dances,
With the Earth and the Sky.

Gayambula. Its wings soar to Boodjera,
Its crest shining in the shadow.
Under the large Jarrah,
A coarse cry shatters the clear blue sky

JUDGE'S COMMENT

A portrait of a self-assured bird, perfectly at home. After the scene is set, the repetition of 'Gayambula' centres the bird in every stanza. Descriptive writing and alliteration are used effectively to keep the reader zoomed in on this character admiring. In the final stanza, echoes of earlier phrases bring the sense that the poem is experienced as one long moment in time. It's hard to tear our attention away from Gayambula, living life to the full.



Malia Pring, 10, Dubbo South Primary Schools, Dubbo NSW

THE WHISPERING LEAVES

In the quiet of dawn,
When the sun tiptoes across the
horizon,
The leaves awaken from their slumber,
And the forest stirs with anticipation.

Each leaf, a delicate instrument,
Plays its part in this ancient orchestra.

Their rustling, a soft murmur,
A lullaby for the awakening earth.
The wind, the conductor unseen,
Guides their dance with gentle hands.

They flutter, they sway,
A ballet of chlorophyll and light
The oak leaves, sturdy and wise,
Sing a deep bass note,

Resonating through the centuries.
Their veins, like ancient manuscripts,
Tell tales of storms weathered,

Of seasons passed, and secrets kept.
Maple leaves, flamboyant and fiery,
Chime in with a soprano trill.

Their crimson hues a crescendo,
A celebration of life's fleeting beauty.

And the willow leaves, weeping
gracefully,
Whisper their melancholy ballad,
A haunting melody of loss and longing.

Their tears falling like dew on the
grass.
Together, they create a symphony,

A harmonious blend of sound and
silence,
A reminder that nature's music is
always playing,
if we listen.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

A forest setting is brought to life for the reader through the use of personification, sibilance, alliteration and extended metaphor. Much like an orchestral concert, the stanzas swell and drop away in various passages, with a variety of 'instruments' having their moment in the spotlight. Terminology drawn from the world of musicians and dancers brings added drama to craft an expressive performance.

WINNER

ASSISTED LEARNING PRIMARY

Justin Cannon, 9, Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

OCEAN ANIMALS

Deep, dark, cold
Midnight zone
Squid ink black as night
Angler fish
Sharp toothed hunters.

Cool, quiet, dim
Twilight zone
Sharks deadly grins
Beautiful humpback whale song.

Blue, sparkling, warm
Sunlight zone
Joyful dolphins squeak
Shining scaled fish
Swimming, circling, splashing
Crystal coral
Turtles gliding gracefully

Sunny, bright, fresh
Sandy beach
Busy crabs scuttle like traffic
Pinching, snapping, digging
Hungry seabirds
Ducking, diving under water
Bringing dinner back to the surface.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

Facts about what can be found in our ocean's zones are woven through this delightful poem. Descriptive writing, an entertaining simile, and the speaker's clear passion for the ocean environment all make for an engaging piece of writing

Vera Trevitt, 10, Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

OCTOPUS SHIRT

When painting, I always wear this shirt.
Sunflower yellow, octopus purple, sparkly sequins.
I wear it on hot days.
It's rough and bumpy like sandpaper.
It makes me feel creative.
It forces my imagination to come alive.
When I get home at twelve
I put my shirt on
And the cogs on the imagination clock begin to chime.



JUDGE'S COMMENT

A celebration of creativity, painting and free time. This makes me wish I owned an octopus shirt. The speaker clearly revels in what the shirt brings; a list of the shirt's positive attributes is rounded off with a wonderful final line.

WINNER

DAVID MAHER AWARD

Best individual entry from a small school with 30 students or less (Primary only)

Jock Harris, 12, Rowena Public School, Rowena NSW

DIRT BIKES

Ready to go,
I'm out the door.
Ready and rearing,
Quicker than before.

Boots, check!
Jeans, check!
Helmet, check!
Goggles, check!

Top up the fuel,
That's dad's rule.
Look after your brother,
Says my mother!

Chasing roos,
Through long grass,
Turn on to the track,
What a blast.

Bump after bump,
Crack after crack,
Popping wheelies
Time to head back.

Knees all scraped,
Prickles in my hand.
No better way,
To see this great land.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

The use of short sharp lines sets the pace of the poem, evokes the excitement of the riders and the bumpiness of dirt bike riding. The closing stanza is satisfying, with a surprise list of what could be negatives in another situation! These are celebrated here – proof of a day well-spent in a place the speaker loves



WINNER

KURRUMBEDE AWARD (PRIMARY)

Best entry from a school within 100km radius of Gunnedah

James Perrett, 10, Gunnedah South Public School, Gunnedah NSW

GUNNEDAH

The air flows over the plains of Gunnedah.

The wind rises for the first kiss of rain to come.

The bandaar waits to hear the heavy and light syncopated music.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

The build-up in anticipation of rain is beautifully captured in this seemingly simple poem. The sound of rain – still a memory at the close of the poem, but expected, wanted – is an unusual and lovely description

Imagine spending a month or so with some of Australia's sharpest thinkers, warm-hearted observers, brilliant wordsmiths, passionate activists, knowledgeable historians, articulate memoirists – that has been my privilege while reading over 2,000 poems written by Australian secondary students.

Australians, take note – the next generation coming up to lead us, care for us, educate us, manage us, advocate for us – they'll do a good job!

If poets are outliers, keen observers with a curious mind and the ability to express their thoughts, then we all need to pay attention to the writings of our poets. Our student poets are writing about the big topics of climate change, war, nature, families, death, friendship and love. They're also writing about the small yet significant moments

I was pleased to see that quite a few poems made reference to poems by well-known poets – I applaud your taste in poetry!

of dance, food, reading, sport, city streets, rural life, pets and school. Both are important – the universal and the local.

It was clear to me that these students – and their teachers – are well-read. This gives me hope! Reading literature broadens our ability to be empathetic. Reading poetry broadens our skills to express ourselves. I was pleased to see that quite a few poems made reference to poems by well-known poets – I applaud your taste in poetry!

I appreciated the many revisions students made to their poems, no doubt encouraged by their teachers. Revision is key to all good writing – editing is caring! Each word needs to be considered, as well as the rhythm. Reading your poem aloud is essential so you can hear the lines that sing, as well as the clunkier lines that need tweaking.

Thank you to the students who set out their poems in interesting visual ways. While poetry is meant to be read aloud, the way it is presented on the page is also important as it shapes our reading experience. Congratulations to the students who took particular care in considering the layout of their poem.



KAREN COMER SECONDARY JUDGE

Karen Comer is an author, freelance editor and speaker, based in Melbourne. She presents writing workshops to adults and children. Her work as a freelance editor includes fiction for adults and children, and non-fiction.

Karen writes verse novels – *Grace Notes* for young adults (Hachette) and *Sunshine on Vinegar Street* for middle-grade readers (Allen & Unwin) were published in 2023. *Grace Notes* won the CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers 2024, and was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Award (Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's Literature) and the Prime Minister's Literary Awards (Young Adult Literature). *Sunshine on Vinegar Street* was a CBCA Notable and was shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards (Children's Book Award).

The poems which ultimately made it through my selection process were poems which had a strong voice. Not only did these poems have something specific to say, but the poet had a distinctive voice – no other poet could have written on the same topic in quite the same way.

Other poems which stood out to me were poems which covered two themes. Rather than simply a plea to end climate change, the strongest poems were also unique because they juxtaposed two unconnected ideas together.

My favourite definition of poetry is by British playwright Tom Stoppard – 'The definition of poetry is the simultaneous compression of language and expansion of meaning'. Our Australian secondary school students have written poems full of emotion and substance using lyrical, evocative language. Congratulations to all the students who entered, and all the students who were awarded a place.

WINNER

JUNIOR SECONDARY (YEARS 7-9)

Sanuli Karunaratne, 14, Marist Regional College, Burnie TAS

I HAVE AN IDEA

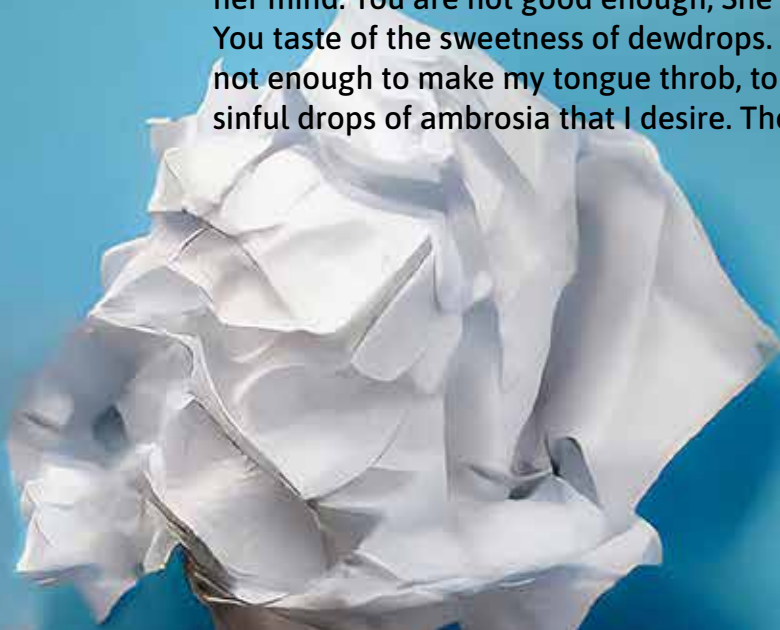
I shiver in between the margins of my page, split into red rule and blue lines. they have grown stale, yellowed, the edges curling into itself from the forceful hold of time, but it is shelter enough for me for these few moments, for the first few seconds of my birth.

Eventually, when She beckons me forward, and I leave my stationery shell of comfort, tendrils of warmth releasing their grasp on my skin, i feel unbearably real. i can feel the imperfect pounding of my heart in the bone of my head, can almost taste the iron of the ink trickling inside my veins. my flesh feels scrubbed open, pink and red with vigour. the price of life is death, after all.

Yet She looks at me with trained disdain, the menacing hold of Her pen angled at me accusingly. What have you got to show for yourself? What makes you different, unique- what about you changes something in me?

And i look up at her, tremblingly bare, the frost of judgment icing over my skin. She is my creator, my being, my life. She is my god, for she has my life dripping out of the piercing point of her pen.

She clicks her tongue, my eyes, my body, every disfigured inch catalogued with the omnipotence of her mind. You are not good enough, She says. You taste of the sweetness of dewdrops. But you are not enough to make my tongue throb, to be the sinful drops of ambrosia that I desire. There is



not enough in you for me to call home.
You do not have enough of me in you to be perfect.

And that is rejection, packaged into a polite parcel,
exchanged coolly like business details. but for me,
with Her, this is akin to the disowning of a child by
its mother. to me, this makes the pounding of my heart
come to an insignificant halt and makes the ink of my
blood freeze into cloudy red crystals inside me. my skin
turns pearly white, the suffocating colour of death,
my paper cradle is crumpled in the infinite fist of Her
hand, and i leave, becoming past tense.

.....

my only revenge is that with me, i take a thin slice of
her, a tiny shard of the mirror of her soul.

.....

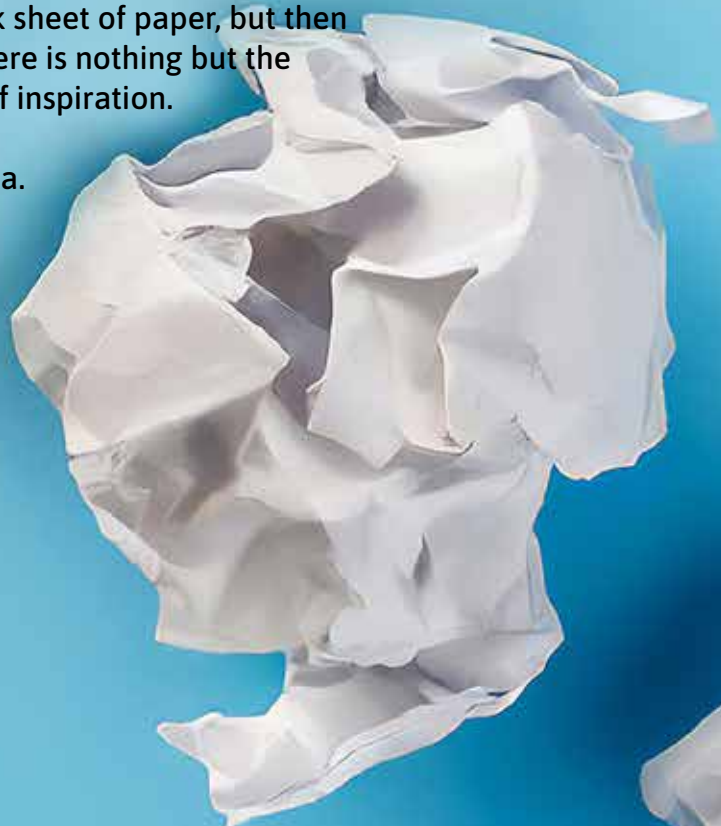
She sighs, in my aftermath. a graveyard of crumpled
paper lies around her, a field of my slaughtered siblings
leaking ink onto her floor.

Again, She says, taking Her pen, brandishing it
dangerously over another blank sheet of paper, but then
She hesitates. for a moment, there is nothing but the
echo of silence, and the musk of inspiration.

Oh, She says. I have another idea.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

A unique viewpoint with descriptive
language and clever use of the
suggested theme in the last line.



Isabelle Boardman, 12, Perth College, Mount Lawley WA

EULOGY FOR A WILD SOUL

Time flew on your iridescent wings
until you outgrew their childish naivety.
now they lay on the ground in a sad heap of fading rainbows.
without them, you plummeted to the harsh reality of solid ground.

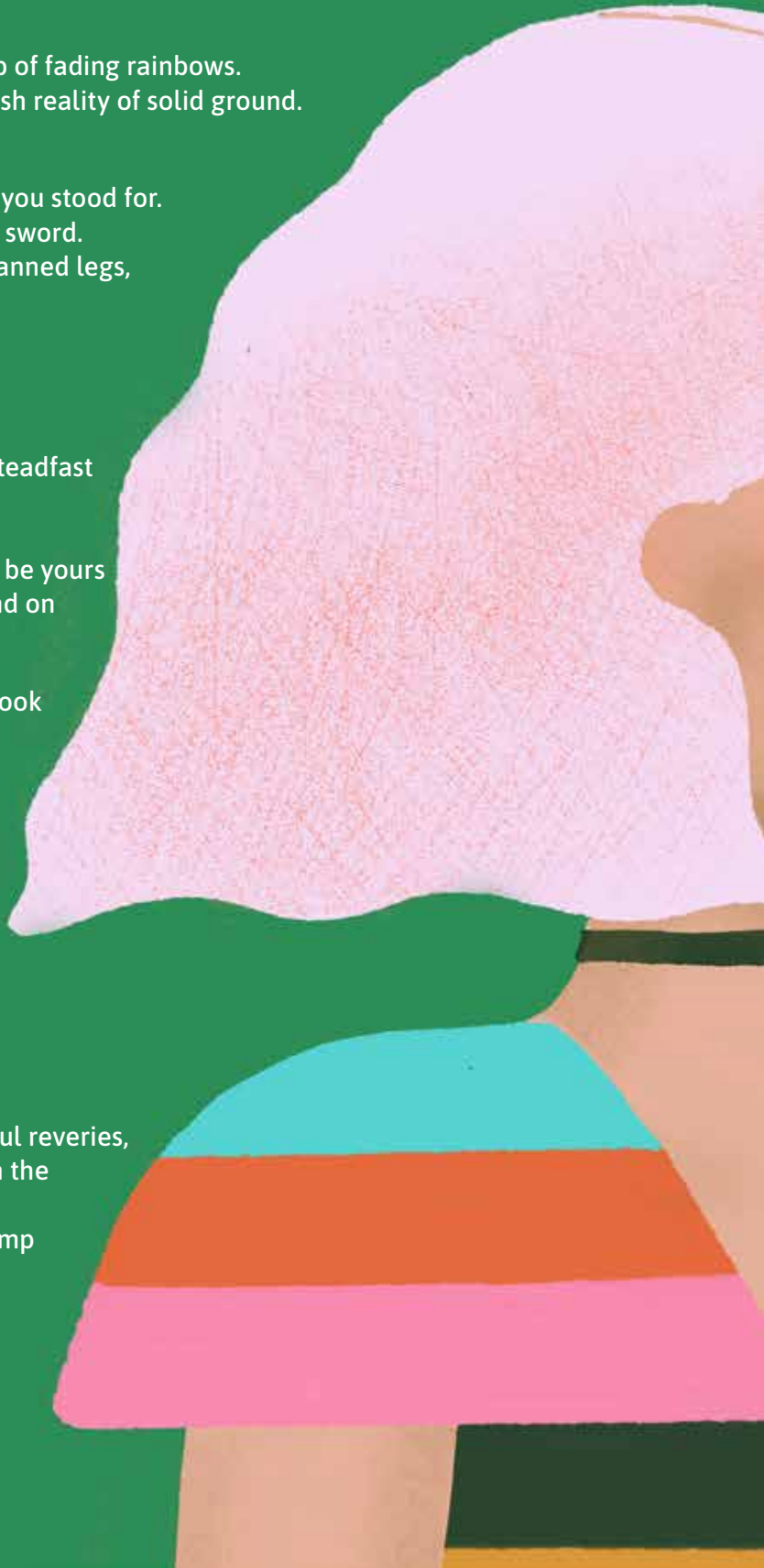
You were a wild one.
quite shy sometimes, yet you knew what you stood for.
a warrior for justice with your cardboard sword.
with mud stains all the way up your suntanned legs,
like black patches on a leopard's skin,
you could be invincible.


With your plastic crown on your head,
you could rule the whole wide world,
and no mountain was too high for your steadfast
persistence.
you were a dreamer,
and every possibility that would one day be yours
was a path stretching into the horizon and on
over the edge.

And when you couldn't quite reach the book
on the top shelf,
there was always a friendly arm to bring
it down for you.
you loved the subjects of your kingdom,
sharing your every exploit with them,
as you sat around a massive table and
indulged in your feasts,
you hoped this would last forever.

Forever.
what a fickle little word.

To someone like you, and all your youthful reveries,
forever was a luminescent streetlamp on the
horizon,
casting a beam of safety across some damp
bitumen road.
and when you found your way to it,
everything in the whole entire universe
would work out.
But time is too cruel a master for that.





time stripped you of your sword,
usurped your throne,
and left your kingdom in ruins.
time tore your wings off your back
and placed them behind a glass case,
an artefact of an era now lost to memory.
And now the sun has set on your glorious realm.
as buildings crumble to dust,
the last brilliant rays of light fade to pure ebony.
your empire is falling beneath that radiant finality.
no lone hero stands atop a hill in the disappearing glow,
preparing to avenge the death of your kingdom.
no one will ever resurrect you from your funeral pyre.

But as you were finally conquered,
reduced to cinders and memory,
life sprung from the ashes to take your place,
some tepid imitation of a phoenix.

This was not the second coming of a great ruler.
for your successor rules over her desk,
strewn with crumpled papers trying to rebuild your palace.
your successor quivers at the notion of talking to strangers.
your successor will never be invincible.

No, she is no phoenix.
the flames that illuminated her wings
were merely a trick of the light.

And as she writes these very words,
she combs through her filing cabinet soul
for any last fragments of you.

maybe some morning,
when the grass is damp with fresh dewdrops
and the sky is bright with the promise of new beginnings,
she'll find your sword in the back of some musty
cupboard,

run barefooted into the backyard,
and swing it around with the wild joy that was once yours.
and for one fragile instant, your empire will be restored.

Because though you had no choice but to grow old,
you never

ever
had
to
grow
up.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

A strong, intimate voice with a different take
on childhood, using wonderful imagery.

WINNER

SENIOR SECONDARY (YEARS 10-12)

Lucinda Ferguson, 17, Erindale College, Canberra ACT

EAGLING

The oak tree, rough bark
My sister below looks up to me
Branches naked
Against pale winter sky
Their clear unknowable patterns
Trace the order of things

Carving eagles

I wanted to be an eagle

So then:

Loops around the house
Fast Running
Nothing was even close but
Adrenaline
Step-after-step
 turns movement
 turns flight

Now I swing my paper plane through glorious velocity

Velocity, the beauty of physics
Wings wouldn't be such a wonder without gravity
For them to defy

And from the bus stop
The driveway endless goes on and on
Rising the hill to see another hill
That final tumbling sprint
down gravel to the
house

Slide the window-door open and step into warmth
Ever oppressive after winter chill
The embrace of woodfire smoke
Almost claustrophobic
But smell those cooking onions

A wizard, I was
In the morning then, out in that new silver world
Huffing my clean dragon breath into frozen air
Breath
Always swirling away from me
Inconceivably
It wouldn't hold





Honestly,
I would have made a good eagle
I would even have given up onions
Given up anything
But my grandmother's heartbeat in the dark

...

Summer
We spill from the bus panting
Hot hot hot
School bag straps sweaty and heavy
Scattering kangaroos
From their tea-tree shade
As we race for the river

Then the transcendence
Of that cool brown world
Surfacing
To the smell of decomposition
To my grandmother pulling honeysuckle
From the mouth of the island
So light-drenched and green
It sends little light-lines wandering
Like cracks in the water
Up the shady bank

And floating
Face-up in the sun
I close my eyes
And the blood in my lids moves
Its redness

But drifting in the shade of the poplars
I open For that myth blue sky
And watch the eagles circle

JUDGE'S COMMENT

A distinctive voice, using the symbol and imagery of eagles in contrast with a description of family.

Kara Wong, 15, North Sydney Girls High School, Crows Nest NSW

● ● ●

Once
 The remains
 Of a universe
 Woke up from its
 long eternal slumber,
 God said, "Let there be light"
 And so, there was light amidst
 A barren existence. Incompleteness
 and so birthed the fecundity of creation-
 At some point humanity took its first steps
 And went to work. We sought for achievement
 To escape the inevitable abyss, a star in the distance
 Hopeless meandering until we reach the door to infinity.
 All the while aware that Thanatos had sent a silent asteroid
 Coming and arrived at the end of time; and with enough seconds
 Nothing will matter. some will look in the face of the cosmos and cry
 will i ever be good enough will i ever be good enough will i ever be a god?
 Yet all I'll be able to say to you is, "Please have a rest, .. .- - - - - ..- - - - - .."
 Homo Sapien. To be the ever only animal conscious of the universe's bedtime
 And to still live in a state of constant ignorance of the fact that for 100 years,
 Matter even knew it was matter at all. if one is too cautious about pursuing
 an unusual path: your failures will be forgotten just as the cynics likewise-
 one day we'll disappear, and the ones remembering us will be gone as well
 Maybe tomorrow, we'll have two lifetimes, and kill death with two hands
 But not now. I am tired. Walk past the bustling traffic and vineyards
 The big dipper bows its goodbyes and Antares nods off to sleep-
 The Milky Way and Andromeda collide in a romantic embrace
 finally, the mayfly arrives gently on the surface of a lake
 If nothing truly matters, would that even matter at all?
 The universe rests again in limitless, perpetual dark
 To appreciate the simple nature of being alive,
 The interminable rise and fall of generations
 How many of us were here since dawn?
 Lying in bed, I dream about what a
 weird honour it is to be human
 And what an awful decision
 It would be to waste the
 precious moments
 Matter woke up
 Amidst the
 fleeting
 light.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

Both formal and personal, this poem uses visual imagery both in the presentation and language.

WINNER

ASSISTED LEARNING SECONDARY

Emu Class, 13, G S Kidd Memorial School, Gunnedah NSW

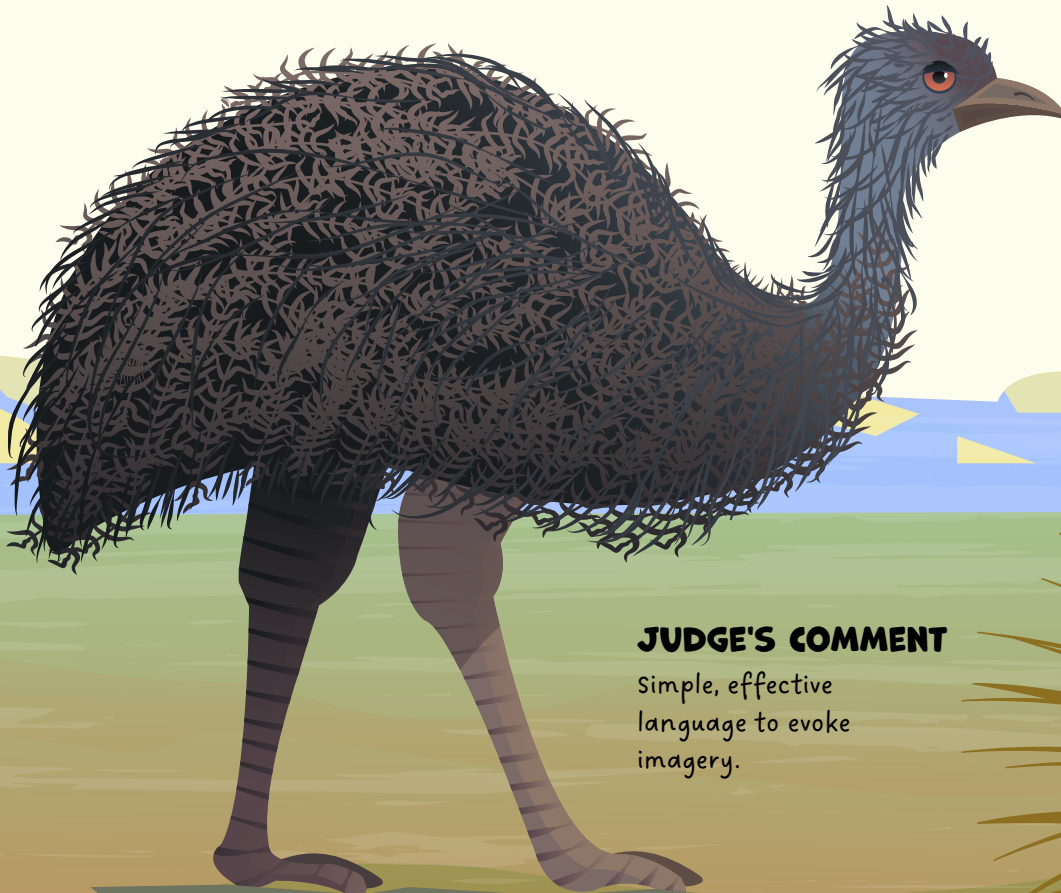
DHINAWAN

Magnificent and bold,
He walks dignified through the bush.
Feathers as dark as the night sky,
Fluffy like a buzzcut.

Quiet and sneaky,
He searches for food.
Eyes like glossy brown marbles,
Observing during daylight.

Smooth and strong,
Beak sharp as stalagmites.
Long lean legs,
Clawed feet like a pterodactyls.

Calm and protective,
He sits gently and delicately on the eggs.
Concentrating on his job,
Waiting patiently for the eggs to hatch.



JUDGE'S COMMENT

Simple, effective
language to evoke
imagery.



Xavier Bransby, 13, Holy Cross College, Ellenbrook WA

DOGS

In fields of grass where sunlight gleams,
 Loyal friends begin.
 With bounding joy and wagging tails,
 Their love, a bond that never fails.
 Through laughter shared and tears unbidden,
 In every storm, they're there, unhidden.
 With every step, they walk beside,
 In them, our hearts forever,
 Every day, every night.
 In fur of gold or midnight black,
 Their existence fills our hearts intact.
 With every bark, a melody,
 Of unconditional loyalty.
 Brown eyes, black fur,
 Fluffiness intact.
 Play dumb, play dead,
 Everyone knows they're man's best friend.
 Try to turn them, they will resist,
 Loyal, won't turn on their pact.
 They're the loyalist animal there ever was.
 If you love them truly, with all your heart, with all your might,
 They will love you back, forever, from break of day, to dusk of night.
 So here's to dogs, our cherished kin,
 In every journey, they begin.
 The souls they touch, forever keep,
 From wolves, to puppies,
 Our best friend in the pack.



JUDGE'S COMMENT

A heart-warming poem with lovely imagery.



WINNER

KURRUMBEDE AWARD (SECONDARY)

Best entry from a school within 100km radius of Gunnedah

Maggie Shannon, 15, Coonabarabran High School, Coonabarabran NSW

STATIC PAROXYSM

Meet me within the tumbleweeds

Follow the talons that carry hues of summer

That land in the silent trees

Where we shall relive our souls burning in a ravenous fire

Till then I must ponder about your luminous smile,

Which swirl the dull moth wings with light and colour,

Oh, how they endear to flutter,

The autumn wind we both adore carries sighs of longing

I'll reminisce our memories in echoes of hope

How a thought of you lingers in my mind

And taints my ghost lips in a tattooed smirk.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

An intimate and conversational tone with striking images and a wonderful closing line.

*Dust flies high in the sunburnt sky,
desperate farmers ready to cry
as clouds gather, ready to burst
to quench the wide, dry land's thirst.*



Gunnedah

When you visit Gunnedah you will delve into Mackellar country and experience what she so beautifully put into words: the beauty of this country and the stories to go with it.

Discover all this through our artworks, museums, sculptures and lookouts.

It will leave you breathless.



For more information and insider tips drop in to visit our fabulous staff at the Visitor Information Centre at 83 Chandos St, Gunnedah NSW 2380 or give us a call on 02 6740 2230 from 9am to 5pm on weekdays and 10am to 3pm on weekends.

www.visitgunnedah.com.au