



2025 Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Competition Results

PRIMARY SCHOOLS SECTION

Lower Primary (Years K-3) Section – Winner

Poet name

Elysia Roselle Woo (6)

School

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Rockdale, NSW

Poem title

The Gymnast

Poem

I am a bridge
Falling down-
Not in London,
But on a sapphire crash mat.
CRUNCH-
The sound of my body hitting the ground.
I rise again, a phoenix,
A human arch made of skin and bones.
I lift my leg,
A flag on top of my castle,
And I kick over,
The wind pushing me over an entire ocean-
I land at the other side of the earth.
I jump- my body flies,
A bird with rainbow feathers swooping.
Launching forward,
My head and back touch space
My legs plunge
Leaping over brain and spine,
To touch space in turn.
Satisfaction runs throughout my whole body,
It tickles and titillates,
And I pose,
Like a swan,
Before bowing
To the boisterous claps
Of my imaginary audience.

Judges' comment

Everything about his poem surprised me – nearly every line made me smile each more unique than the next. Metaphors, similes and so much imagery. If this poet isn't a gymnast, I'll eat my hat! By the end of the poem, I felt like I had just stretched myself from one end of the world to the other. Along with the poet, I was at the apex. The best of the best but then the third word of the last line brings us, so sweetly, back to reality that we have not just been living inside the poet's imagination, but we have felt her desire. Just so satisfying. Congratulations Elysia

Lower Primary (Years K-3) Section – Runner Up

Poet name

Ava-Li Butler (6)

School

Holy Cross College
Ellenbrook, WA

Poem title

Ancestors

Poem

A ruby from my ancestor's crown
That sparkles in the light
On a sunny day,
Red as fire and
As big as a dragon's eye.
Maybe I am a princess
And princesses are beautiful

Judges' comment

What I liked about this poem is that it is so beautifully full of hope – but we don't even realise that that is what the poet is saying until the very last two lines. I'm not ashamed to admit that I got a lump in my throat and shed a little tear when I read this poem because who doesn't want to be beautiful like a princess? A simple, yet profound poem. Congratulations Ava-Li

Upper Primary Section – Winner

Poet name

Philip Pham (12)

School

Laguna Street Public School
Caringbah South, NSW

Poem title

If I had a Castle

Poem

If I had a castle I'd build it up high
I'd spin it with clouds way up in the sky
I'd drift through the air as calm as can be
And look down on cities, islands and seas

I'd jump up and down, as light as a feather,
On cloud trampolines, bouncy as ever
But if I don't bounce, and just fall through-
Oh no, forget that, that will not do

I need something sturdy, something more strong
Let's use bamboo then, how can we go wrong?
I'd use many pandas to gather the trees
To construct a palace of bamboo for me

Lots of grand chambers will be built inside
For all of the pandas that will take reside
But what if the castle catches alight?
It'll be a bonfire, no that is not right

That leaves one last thing, that's sure to be ace
It won't be on earth, it will be in space!
A palace so grand, all glowing and great
I'd look down on earth, from my huge estate

I'd ride on shooting stars, quick as can be
And invite some aliens over for tea
But how will I breathe with no air around?
Maybe it's not great to be off the ground

So maybe it's not as cool as it seems
To live in a real castle made from your dreams
I'd rather live in something I've always known
Not space or the clouds, just my home, sweet home.

Judges' comment

This poem was a joy to read. I particularly like the structure: the poem follows the 'rule of three', discussing each of three dream castles and rejecting each idea, before deciding that home is the best. The poet uses simple, clear language, a consistent voice and lovely rhyme and rhythm.

Upper Primary (Years 4-6) Section – Runner Up

Poet name

Ayla Williams (11)

School

Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School
Tarro, NSW

Poem title

The Sky Did Magic

Poem

Last night,
the sky did magic.

Not pretend magic
like in books
real magic,
the kind you feel in your belly.

It started with just a shimmer,
like someone spilled paint
across the stars.

Green first.
Then purple.
Then pink, like fairy breath.

They danced!
I'm not kidding.
The lights twirled and swooped
like they were showing off.

The snow turned blue.
The trees went quiet.
Even Mum stopped talking
(which never happens).

It didn't make a sound,
but I could hear it
somehow.

Like a song
only the sky knows.

I asked Dad what it was.
He said,
"The Northern Lights."
Like that explained anything.
But I think
it was the Earth smiling
just for us.

And I smiled back.

Judges' comment

When I read this, I was transported to the Northern Hemisphere, standing with a family and being spell bound by the beautiful sky. (I was the mum in the poem, who rarely stops talking.) I love the short lines and mix of long and short sentences, so the poem flows and is easy to read. But its simplicity is a ruse. The poet uses personification, similes and humour to create a memorable poem.

Assisted Learning Primary Section – Winner**Poet name**

Reinhardt Human (9)

SchoolHay Public School
Hay, NSW**Poem title**

Cars

Poem

They're as sleek as the shiny feathers on a bower bird
As fast as the wind
The engine purrs as quietly as a sleeping cat
As luxurious as a cruise liner
Paint as shiny as an opal glinting in the sunlight
Lights are like two mini suns guiding the car to its destination.

Judges' comment

It was definitely the first line that grabbed me with this poem and similes tumbled beautifully from then on expressing not only the physical elements but also that this car represented, gentleness and reliability, very human qualities. The poet loves this car and by the end of the poem, I loved it too, I wanted this car this car felt like a big, warm, shiny, hug. And who doesn't want one of those. Congratulations Reinhardt.

Assisted Learning Primary Section – Runner Up

Poet name

Justin Cannon (10)

School

Redeemer Baptist School
North Parramatta, NSW

Poem title

Solo, Opal, Skywalker and Amidala

Poem

I love my little birds: Solo, Opal, Skywalker and Amidala

Solo,
His soft feathers warm as a blanket
Eyes are glittering at me making me warm.

Opal,
a good companion who loves giving kisses.
He even makes me want to cry.

Solo,
First as an egg,
POP, he is born.
That made me overjoyed.
Now, growing up into an adult,

Skywalker,
nippy and pecky
Charging around
Peck, Peck, Peck
He chirps and interrupts during dinner time.
He makes us giggle.

Amidala,
He is scared and frightened and confused
But he is wonderful.
Colors of every kind.
He is beautiful.

These are my birds
They make me happy.
I love my little pet birds.

Judges' comment

This poem contains so much heart. The poet states they love their birds, and that love shines through in every line. Each bird is introduced in a new stanza and each bird's personality quickly becomes clear. The use of similes and onomatopoeia adds to the beauty of the poem.

David Maher Award – Winner**Poet name**

Jorge Firth (12)

SchoolMullaley Public School
Mullaley, NSW**Poem title**

Dirt Bikes

Poem

The big red machine,
Flying down the road.
Through the lush, green grass
Throwing up mud from the tyre
And out the rear end.

On the track,
Sending monstrous jumps.
Whips and backflips off mx ramps.
And landing on light brown dirt.

Rounding up cattle and sheep,
As big as two quad bike stacked on top of each other.
Pushing them through freshly ploughed paddocks, and into the cattle yards.

Loading up your bike on the back of your ute,
Travelling to your friends place.
Unloading the bike and riding away.

Going down to the creek and having a swim,
In the one pair of shorts you brought.
So you have to ring your mum and get her to bring some more.

Judges' comment

I've never lived on a farm but reading Dirt Bikes put me right there amongst it all, the dirt, the dust, the cattle. I've never ridden dirt bikes, but thanks to this poet my muscles are sore. What I could relate to personally was after a hard day's work, being excited to hang out with my friend but what clenched it for me with this poem was the last three lines, the brilliant revelation that after all of that excitement, the poet ends up needing a dry pair of shorts from his mum. So endearing, so organic, so funny! Congratulations Jorge.

Kurrumbede Award Primary – Winner

Poet name

Oliver Munro (11)

School

Tamworth Public School
Tamworth, NSW

Poem title

Kamilaroi Country

Poem

In the cultural heartlands of the Kamilaroi
There are many beautiful places

From the wet, damp forest of New England National Park
Where lyrebirds mimic the sounds of the rainforest
Like a book, every day a new page, a new sound

All the way down to Copeton Dam
Where monster cod lurk in the depths
And playful platypus emerge in the thick river fog

Then all the way up to the pine forests of Nundle
Where wombats sleep in their burrows, waiting for the blessing of night
Emerging to graze on the snow-touched fields

On the wintery alpine days on the slopes
Rosellas munch on the pine tree nuts
Red dots on dark green branches, flying from tree to tree

And, finally, all the way down to Tamworth
The heart of Kamilaroi Country
With roads like veins, stretching throughout the country
Pumping the life blood through the land

Judges' comment

In this poem, the poet shows their love of their country. I like how each stanza mentions a different place, each with a different landscape and animal. The use of similes, metaphors, alliteration and interesting adjectives makes it a delight to read. The final stanza breaks the pattern by not mentioning an animal but instead personifying the roads, which makes the ending more memorable.

Schools Award Primary – Winner

School

Mullaley Public School

SECONDARY SCHOOLS SECTION

Junior Secondary (Years 7-9) Section – Winner

Poet name

Molly-Rose Hackett (14)

School

St Thomas More College
Sunnybank, QLD

Poem title

She's Thriving

Poem

No, she's not crying, she's hydrating though her eyes, silly
she's not burnt out, she's just a girlboss on fire
she's not exhausted, she's just mysterious
she's just insistent on being the nonchalant-est girl to have ever existed
she's not spiralling, she's rebranding breakdowns into content

she's thriving™ don't you see?

wakes up at 6am
makes a matcha
does yoga with a pulled muscle and a pulled-up smile
reads three pages of a book she doesn't understand but it looks pretty on Instagram

she's thriving™ in lowercase letters
and clinically diagnosed panic

you say she's strong
but you mean she never complains
you say she's independent
but you mean she suffers silently
you say she's resilient
but you mean she breaks beautifully

her to-do list is longer than her life expectancy
she works three jobs to earn a degree
schedules therapy sessions between meetings
and answers texts with 'sorry I took so long'
when time belongs to everyone but her

because being tired is a trend
but being 'burnt-out' is a brand
the pain is palatable
if you post it right
just catch the tears falling in good lighting
not back to the sun
face the sun, because people want to see you for you
they want to see the pain
the thriving™

bleed with grace
and when you collapse, make it poetic
so, they call it raw and real

if she stops
if she breathes
if she dares to say this is calling me
she is dramatic because she has what is left of a life not hers
she is picking up the pieces of the mask they destroyed
she is walking on a tightrope between her and the world

and heaven forbid she is too much
heaven forbid she takes up space
she isn't polite to those who destroy her worth
because they don't want a woman saying 'no'
they want the 'I'm fine'
the cracked lips and 300 unread emails
because she can't carry everyone's burdens

they tell her 'it's self-care'
yet they hand her more contracts to more lives she won't be able to live
'take a bath' because 30 minutes in lukewarm water will wash away the grief
of losing herself in an ocean of helplessness with no lifeline
'you're so strong' they say as they climb onto her back, begging for support
until it snaps into the silence that keeps her awake

and when she drops a bowl on 'live'
it shatters her mask
not beautifully
or gracefully
loud and messy
everything they taught her not to be
the shards cut her hand
her blood stains her skin
not like the cheek tint she got in the PR package
it stains her hands like the guilt she didn't earn
the stories she couldn't sell
the shelter of silence because it was safer than cutting through the lies

the crimson drips down her wrist
they don't want a girl who bleeds
who cries tears until she is waist deep in every word she was told was not important
mascara runs down her face
faster than she can navigate away from the comments that haunt her dreams

but all they see is a girl who is thriving™
a girls' girl

to them
she's thriving™

Judges' comment

The conversational tone of this poem belies the anger and frustration of the poet. The clever trademark symbol and the opposing viewpoints contribute to the strong voice – a poem to remember.

Junior Secondary (Years 7-9) Section – Runner Up**Poet name**

Isabella Ho (14)

SchoolPerth Modern School
Subiaco, WA**Poem title**

The arrival of the white swans

Poem

Their unannounced presence was startling,
Trembling in silence, I hid, questioning their purpose
With their strange orange beaks and pristine white feathers,
a stark contrast to my own midnight plumage
I felt like an outcast in my own domain.
They probed the waters, intrusively scrutinised the lands,
And as swift as they came, they left.
The immeasurable relief was boundless,
My world restored to safe and familiar normality, danger expunged.
Years passed, and their presence within the confines of my mind faded
Until the white swans returned, once more
This time larger in number, more vicious and formidable
I decided to make myself known, to assert my presence over my territory
They gawked at the sight of my ebony feathers,
And honked at my smaller appearance
Belittling and shrinking my self-esteem
I fled, my pride submerged beneath waves of anxious sorrow
Praying that I could regain my fragile solitude once more
But they remained, desiring for eternal residence upon my coastal shores.
They stole my pond, my sanctuary
They degraded nature's cornucopia of bountiful resources
Revolted parasites that stole and burned what rightfully belonged to my ancestors
With no acknowledgement or recognition
There was nothing I could do
Inevitably powerless and vulnerable against these ruthless thieves
Conquered by merciless hands bent on my undoing
Plundering my land was merely a prelude
The next chapters imbued with oppression and suffering
They stole my offspring, battered and bruised them,
Mocking them for their black feathers and red beaks
They clipped my wings, so I couldn't fly, restricting and shackling my freedom
Condemning me for transgressions uncommitted
I implored them—
"Why this hatred? Are we not kin?
We share the same webbed feet
The same elongated necks
The same preference for food and shelter
The only difference between us is colour.

Judges' comment

This is a passionate poem with arresting imagery, which opens with tension and ends with a sharp observation. Its restrained tone adds to the eloquence of the poet's plea.

Senior Secondary (Years 10-12) – Winner**Poet name**

Andrew Nothdurfter (17)

SchoolSt Gregory's College
Campbelltown, NSW**Poem title**

nothing: everything

Poem**I. Light**

The house slept. I rose — sunlit,
graced. Light spilled across the carpet
like forgiveness.
I moved gently, past doors that breathed dreams
and stale smoke. This hour —
quiet as prayer,
golden as forgetting —
was mine.
The water in my glass
bent the sun
into a halo.
Mum once said,
“You’ve got poet-eyes. The type that see too much.”
I see too much now.
She was right, I learned early: how to vanish,
how to grow in cracks.
I watched a man break himself in our lounge room.
He saw me.
I saw him.
We said nothing.
And everything.

That night didn’t shatter me.
It lit a fuse. A slow burn under my skin
that taught me silence can scream.
My brother never danced
in the cracks like I did.
He bled truth too loudly.
He left early. Too early for everyone
I was eleven.
Now I’m seventeen.
Same water.
Same dawn.
Different resolve.
Time folds here —
past and present whisper through the walls.
But I hide away in the cracks, listening. Waiting.

II. Shadow

Music trembles through the drywall,
calling me to forget.
But I sit still —
book in lap, candle lit.
I've learned that beauty
doesn't always sing.
Mum slept in the bath tub again.
Her ballet shoes gather dust
in the wardrobe's mouth.
Even her dreams sag in corners
if left too long.
I remember my brother
on the roof, arms wide —
lightning kissing the sky.
He dared it to touch him.
It never did.
But death has different ways
of striking.
His room is a hush
of absence.
Curtains stir like ghosts.
I walk through it like memory does —
careful, aching,
uninvited.
Some nights, the pull is strong.
The chaos hums my name sweetly.
But I made a vow —
not aloud,
too fragile for air —
to be different.
The child in me still knocks
when the world goes dark.
I let them in.
I light a candle.
And when the sun returns,
soft on my face,
I remember who i am
Not untouched —
but unbroken.
All beautiful things
begin this way.

Judges' comment

Blending sensory images, dialogue and deft observations, this poem is both a narrative about grief and an ode to the small, beautiful things which ground us. The poet gives us a strong sense of both light and shadow through the apt description of her 'poet-eyes'.

Senior Secondary (Years 10-12) – Runner Up

Poet name

Zach Moroney (17)

School

St Gregory's College
Campbelltown, NSW

Poem title

Where her eyes took him

Poem

I. Eden Before Her

Never perhaps was the world
a shared dominion,
But an allusion he authored—
A solipsist's eden.
undisturbed
until her gaze
unwrote its laws.

II. The Language of Almost

She arrived in fragments:
a glance, a laugh, a silence
that grew full in chaos.
She arrived
gently,
like moonlight
sipping through drawn curtains

The white frangipani behind her ear
Shone with a kind of light that
didn't ask
for names.

III. Deep Waters

No longer blue were her eyes.
Exactly not.

They were impossible oceans inked with mystery,
the kind you
cascade into. And
 for the first time
he understood what it meant
 to stargaze
not upward; but inward.

The third time they met
her eyes grew violent.

Not blue,
 Not even grey.

a forbidden scarlet laced with
crimson vines. wrapping
around a grief that refused
to rot.

IV. Rewritten Solitude

She stitched herself
into the garden of his mind,
not Eve, she was the fruit itself- forbidden knowledge of
absence
in the shape of a woman.
He tasted, and was
exiled

V. The Bruised Return

When next she returned
Her eyes then were
purple.

Not Not
Lilac. Amethyst.

Eyes that were a bruise on his sky.

Not Not
Soft. Metaphor.

just the colour grief turns when it still hopes.
everything hushed:
traffic.time.breath.

she wasn't returning; she was reappearing.
and in her eyes
That bruised violet storm.
I saw every version of myself
I'd buried
just to survive her.

VI. The Collision

No words,
no declarations,
nor constellations

VII. The Chapter That Changed the Ending

He walks beneath the same sky,
no longer searching for constellations
But for the space
Between.

If absence enlarges love,

what is memory but devotion's parasite—
feeding on a ghost?

She was the chapter
that changed the ending—

Judges' comment

This epic narrative poem focuses on the eyes as a descriptive device to show the unfolding relationship between the two characters. The headings for each part frame the narrative, and the descriptive language, particularly for colour, add drama and detail.

Assisted Learning Secondary – Winner

Poet name

Torrance Liu (14)

School

Redeemer Baptist School
North Parramatta, NSW

Poem title

Track Changes

Poem

The old trainline is gone for good,
Where sleepers lay, where trains once stood.

The clatter - rail racket - has changed to hum,
As modern trains glide smooth and numb.

No more the wait at Clyde's slow bend,
Now Parramatta feels like a friend.

The ghosts of guards and station calls
Have vanished into shopping malls.

New wires stretch where gumtrees grew
The past replaced by glass and blue.

Though change rolls on in every wheel,
There's something here I'll always feel.

From silver steel to shiny glass
Our new experience - all first class.

We're sleeping no more in the station,
We're riding in this new creation,

A suburb shifting,
yet it stays –

Carlingford dreams
through modern days.

Judges' comment

This descriptive poem about the changes over time for a railway line has gentle rhyme and lovely imagery. The poet's affection for their surroundings is shown in observant and thoughtful images.

Assisted Learning Secondary – Runner Up

Poet name

Metin Yalaki (13)

School

Redeemer Baptist School
North Parramatta, NSW

Poem title

The Storm

Poem

The dark storm rages through the night,
A rough, rushed painting of cloud and water,
As if the artist has used too much black,
Too much grey,
Too much red.

Lightning strikes between boat and sea,
Like a foot stomping to the ground,
And thunder roars with too much anger,
Too much strength,
Too much power.

As the water splashes around the ship,
It hits the deck like a blanket,
But it doesn't bring warmth; instead, too much coldness,
Too much shivering,
Too much frost.

Freezing wind hits the crew with terrifying face,
As it pushes through the ship's sails,
And carries people with too much vigour,
Too much might,
Too much fury.

Judges' comment

An intense poem with repetitive lines in each stanza – this adds tension and chaos. The image of an artist with a rushed painting is a unique opening description.

Kurrumbede Award Secondary – Winner

Poet name

Claire Gardner (14)

School

Tamworth High School
Tamworth, NSW

Poem title

Glimpse into me

Poem

A gaze into the mirror,
A glance into the past,
A fleeting look at the girl I once was.

Youthfulness dazzles in her eyes,
Freckles imprinting her skin like constellations,
Laughter so abundant it leaves its marks.
Joy, the only thing running through her veins,
Pulsing deep into her heart,
Carving itself into her soul.

A gaze into the mirror,
A glance into the present,
A quiet look at the person I've become.

Tiredness stains her eyes,
Freckles fading like forgotten stars,
Loneliness her only armour.
Brick by brick, building the walls so high,
Heaven's rays grow short and wither.

A gaze into the mirror,
A glance into myself,
A lasting look at the person I will always be.

Hope engraves itself in her eyes,
Every freckle, every "imperfection" a reminder of her individualism,
Like a signature written by her spirit.
Veins carrying tales yet to be told,
Circulating life, love, and the promise of more.

Judges' comments

The tone of this thoughtful, reflective poem changes from positive to negative to positive. It takes the reader on a journey of joy in the past, concerns in the present, and to possibilities in the future.

Schools Award Secondary – Winner

School

Redeemer Baptist School