

DOROTHEA MACKELLAR POETRY AWARDS

Presentation Booklet

2025

ALL THE *beautiful* THINGS

OPTIONAL THEME

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Reading this year's poems I was transported - I was the flying gymnast, the kid wanting to be home from camp, the wind was in my hair as I rode through paddocks. I was reminded of the beauty of our region and then back in my home town on the train to Clyde. I was heartbroken, a teenager, exhausted.

The written word is powerful. I was in awe of how lines of text written by children from around Australia spoke not only to their lived experience but mine too! More than that, they were brave enough to share all their feelings with us, to be judged.

I have a love for the written word and a well communicated idea. However, we are living in a time where the rights of creatives are under threat. It's a world where AI companies data mine the work of poets, writers, filmmakers, songwriters to produce a 'new' artificially generated work.

AI has been described as the defining technology of our time, the next industrial revolution. It has merits, but we can never let AI speak for us, or to speak to the human condition. The fact more than seven thousand children from all around Australia put pen to paper, fingers to the keyboard and wrote from their heart, soul and mind provides some comfort, an antidote to a world increasingly turning to AI at the expense of the artist. We celebrate all those who entered our competition this year and the teachers and parents who supported their efforts.



On behalf of the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society, I'd like to thank and acknowledge Executive Officer Vanessa Tiernan. Her passion ensures this annual competition continues to grow from strength to strength. She meets every deadline and makes sure we do too! Thanks also to the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society committee who oversee the awards and associated programs as well as our major funding partners the Australian Government and Gunnedah Shire Council. Your support ensures generations continue to write beautiful poetry and of that we can all be proud.

REBECCA RYAN, PRESIDENT



**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.

Our Committee

PRESIDENT
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Milestone

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN MINT DOROTHEA MACKELLAR COIN SET

In March, the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society hosted the unveiling of the Royal Australian Mint's Dorothea Mackellar 50 cent coin series at the Mackellar Centre in Gunnedah.

The three-coin set includes a stunning tribute to Dorothea Mackellar's iconic poems, *Dawn*, *My Country* and *The Colours of Light*.

The coins are the third in the series of Australian Poets, and with it, Dorothea Mackellar joins two other great Australian poets immortalised in coin: Banjo Paterson,

who captured the romance of Australian, and Henry Lawson, who captured our people.

Local students Georgie Wyllie, from Gunnedah South Public School, recited *Dawn*, while her older sister Charli read *The Colour of the Light* at the ceremony.

Pictured below, Mayor Colleen Fuller (Gunnedah Shire Council), Jennifer Sullivan (Royal Australian Mint), Pip Murray (Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society) and local students, Georgia and Charli Wyllie.



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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: a place for, and in, 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.

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.

Mark brings significant experience as a company director having been chairman of Aston Resources and CBD Energy Limited and is currently an independent director on boards of Virgin Australia Limited and Servcorp Limited which are listed on the ASX. Mark is also Director of Stamfordland Corp which is listed on the Singapore Stock Exchange and a Director Trustee of HostPlus Superfund and Chairman of Palisade Regional Infrastructure Fund.



Our Trophies

JULIE & FIONA LAURIE

Continuing our tradition of promoting local artists, this year's trophies are made by Julie and Fiona Laurie.

The mother-daughter sculpting duo embarked on their commission to provide the trophies for our competition with great enthusiasm, coming up with the idea of barn owls.

The owls are in the form of book ends and are made from locally sourced and recycled materials.

Working from a shed on the small family farm on Gunnedah's outskirts, the Lauries have made their parliament of owls from redgum, glass and steel.

"We tried to think of something useful and an owl conveys the idea of knowledge which I'm sure these young poets have in abundance!" Julie said.

Each owl, banded in steel, is distinctive.

Describing the four week-long project as thoroughly enjoyable, the commission adds another line into the Laurie CV.

Julie retired from nursing three years ago and about the same time her daughter



Fiona, a teacher, decided to try her hand at sculpting which has led to numerous collaborations.

Having painted in acrylics and watercolours, Julie started making wire sculptures 10 years ago in her spare time. A lifelong love of horses meant that they featured in her work and have found their way into gardens across northern NSW.

Julie says her aim is to do sculpture that people can afford: "Sculpture talks to any group".



Judge's report

LOWER PRIMARY SECTION

The first thing I'd like to say is a huge thank you to all the children that entered this competition. For me, you are all winners

Unfortunately, though, the nature of competitions is not objective. Poems are not judged by AI (yet). Poems are judged by humans and humans are tricky creatures. Imagine, for example, that the judge is afraid of water and your poem is about water or what about if the judge is feeling really hot and water poems help to cool them down? There are so many factors at play so please do not feel that if you've haven't been placed then your poem wasn't good – it just means that there are only so many places available. For me just entering your poem is a win. Know that it was read carefully. Know that it was enjoyed. And after all isn't that the point of writing – to have it shared and enjoyed.

This is the first time that I have judged a competition of such magnitude and I don't mind admitting that it was quite a daunting task. Having to find a handful of poems amongst so much talent was far from easy but I am excited to have discovered poems that spoke to me the most.

Poetry can provide such a unique way of expressing oneself incorporating not only the subject matter but also the poet's response to it. And that is what I was looking for, a poem that connected on several levels. Did it keep my attention? Did it make me sit up? Did I read it more than once? Did it make me smile or

laugh out loud? Did it surprise me? Did it stir up something visceral? Did it make me want to meet the poet?

The topics covered were diverse with poems about big things, like war and climate change and small things, like flowers and insects. There were lots of poems about favourite pets, animals, nature, seasons and families. And the poems themselves came in all shapes and sizes, epic poems, haikus, limericks, acrostic poems, free verse and of course, rhyming poems. Use of poetic tools like simile, metaphor, personification and imagery helped to keep my attention especially if wasn't cliched. If it was a rhyming poem, a smooth rhythm or metre helped me stay engaged as well as the use of unforced rhymes.

The last two months have shown me that poetry is alive and well which is so heartening. Every poem written down is a creation that takes up space. Something that wasn't there before, a thing of beauty so ultimately, for me, every poem wrote to the theme "All the Beautiful Things".

Judging the lower primary section of these awards has been eye opening and extremely rewarding. I'd like to say a big thank you to all the teachers and parents who encourage and support our upcoming poets - you're all doing an amazing job. I would also like to say thank you to the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society Inc committee for continuing to support our new poets in the making.



Jackie Hosking LOWER PRIMARY SECTION JUDGE

Jackie is a children's picture author and poet.

Her books have been published by Walker Books, Scholastic, The National Museum of Australia and Larrikin House. Jackie has four new picture books coming out this year with Walker Books. Her poems have appeared in magazines, anthologies, educational texts & websites all over the world. Jackie loves to write in rhyme and metre and when she's not doing that, she is helping others do the same and when she's not doing that she is looking after gorgeous little poppets as a professional nanny. www.jackiehoskingblog.wordpress.com

UPPER PRIMARY SECTION

It has been an honour to judge the upper primary category of the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards this year.

Thank you to all the children who came up with an idea, wrote about it from their heart, edited their words and produced a poem that they are proud of. That is an impressive achievement.

Judging your poems was one of the hardest things I have ever done. There were so many poems that I loved! How could I possibly get the almost 3,500 poems down to a list of just over fifty? But I did. And while the poems I have selected were all prize worthy, many more were as well.

The poems that stood out to me were the ones that elicited an emotional response, whether they made me laugh, smile, think, say 'awww' or even shed a tear. Through this emotional connection I was transported from my desk in my home office to places all over the world; I revisited Kununurra, walked down beaches and dived into deep water. I watched the Northern Lights and saw the most amazing sunsets. I even visited a castle in the clouds.

Poems that stood out also had a clear, consistent voice. They had a title that fitted the poem, and they stayed on topic. The poems followed a structure and ended in a way that summed everything up or rounded it off, so

that the poem felt finished.

I enjoyed reading the poems entitled 'This Is Me' where the poets told me about their interests and dreams. I liked the homophone poems - such a clever idea! - and the poems that could be read bottom to top to give an opposite message. I loved when the words literally danced across the page as the poet used well placed line breaks to add to their meaning. I read clever cinquains, succinct haiku, lovely limericks and astounding acrostic poems. I read some memorable metaphors and some surprising similes. And, if you hadn't noticed, I adore alliteration; the poets who used this poetic device always made me smile.

There were many poems that touched on environmental issues. I read heartbreaking poems about bushfires and climate change. However, I was always pleased when these poems finished with a note of hope.

With the invention of AI and the ability to produce a poem by simply writing a few prompts, I believe it is important that we don't lose the ability to write poems on our own. Writing poems, and thinking about words and meanings and what has significance to you, is a great way to process your thoughts. It is also a wonderful way to share your thoughts with others.

So, thank you for writing poetry.

Please, keep writing.



Kristin Martin UPPER PRIMARY SECTION JUDGE

Kristin Martin is a poet, picture book author and primary school teacher from Adelaide, South Australia. Her books include *Honey Possum's Bush Café*, *Banjo Frog's Concert Spectacular* and her children's poetry collection, *To Rhyme or Not to Rhyme?*

Her poems also appear in magazines, anthologies, art exhibitions and websites around the world. Kristin lives near the sea with her family, frogs, turtles and a bearded dragon named Ash.

www.kristinmartin.net

SECONDARY SECTION

It was such an honour to read 2,300 poems by Australian secondary school students, and such a thrill to know that there were 2,300 students who used their voices to express their ideas, thoughts and emotions.

In choosing the winners for the awards, I asked myself – does this poem move me? Does it make me feel something? Has it encouraged me to read it again, to understand it a little more, to expand my own heart and mind? There were many, many poems which did just this.

At times, I wanted to talk back to the poems – they invited me into a conversation. Some of the beautiful and startling imagery stayed with me for days. There were many strong, authentic voices.

There were brilliant poems which focused on both the local and the universal. They expressed a personal experience or emotion, yet also made it universal so it would resonate with all readers.

The best poems told it slant like American poet Emily Dickinson advises in one of her poems – ‘Tell all the truth but tell it slant’. These poets talked of big topics but often talked around these ideas, rather than preaching or giving us moral lessons.

To all the students who submitted poems, I want you to know that you're not alone. After reading your poems, I can see that

there are many poets interested in the same topics of friendship, love, war, family, school, loneliness, nature, belonging, fitting in, betrayal, expectations. You're not alone. There are other people out there who feel the same way you do. If you haven't quite found your tribe, haven't fully explored your passions, don't quite feel you belong or feel consumed by your worries, you're not alone. And this is the beauty of poetry – it makes us feel less alone. We can always turn to the poets for wisdom, comfort and understanding.

Thank you to all the teachers who encouraged their students, introduced them to new poems, taught them poetic techniques, helped them revise their poems. You are doing outstanding work!

I would encourage you all to keep writing poems. In this increasing AI world of generated content, we need to trust our voices and share them. We now live in a world where information and data can be churned out in an instant, so authentic voices who care about a range of ideas need to be valued even more. Keep reading, keep writing.

Whatever you choose to do in the world, wherever you end up, your ability to grapple with ideas, express them and share them will be a gift for yourself and others.



Karen Comer SECONDARY SECTION 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). www.karencomer.com.au

Schools' Award

Primary

PRIMARY SCHOOLS' AWARD WINNER

**Mullaley Public School
Mullaley NSW**

COMMENDED

**Dubbo Public School
Dubbo NSW**

**Tamworth Public School
Tamworth NSW**

Secondary

SECONDARY SCHOOLS' AWARD WINNER

**Redeemer Baptist School
North Parramatta NSW**

COMMENDED

**St Gregory's College
Campbelltown NSW**

**St Thomas More College
Sunnybank QLD**



LOWER PRIMARY (YEARS K-3)

Elysia Roselle Woo, 6 St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Rockdale, NSW

The Gymnast

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.

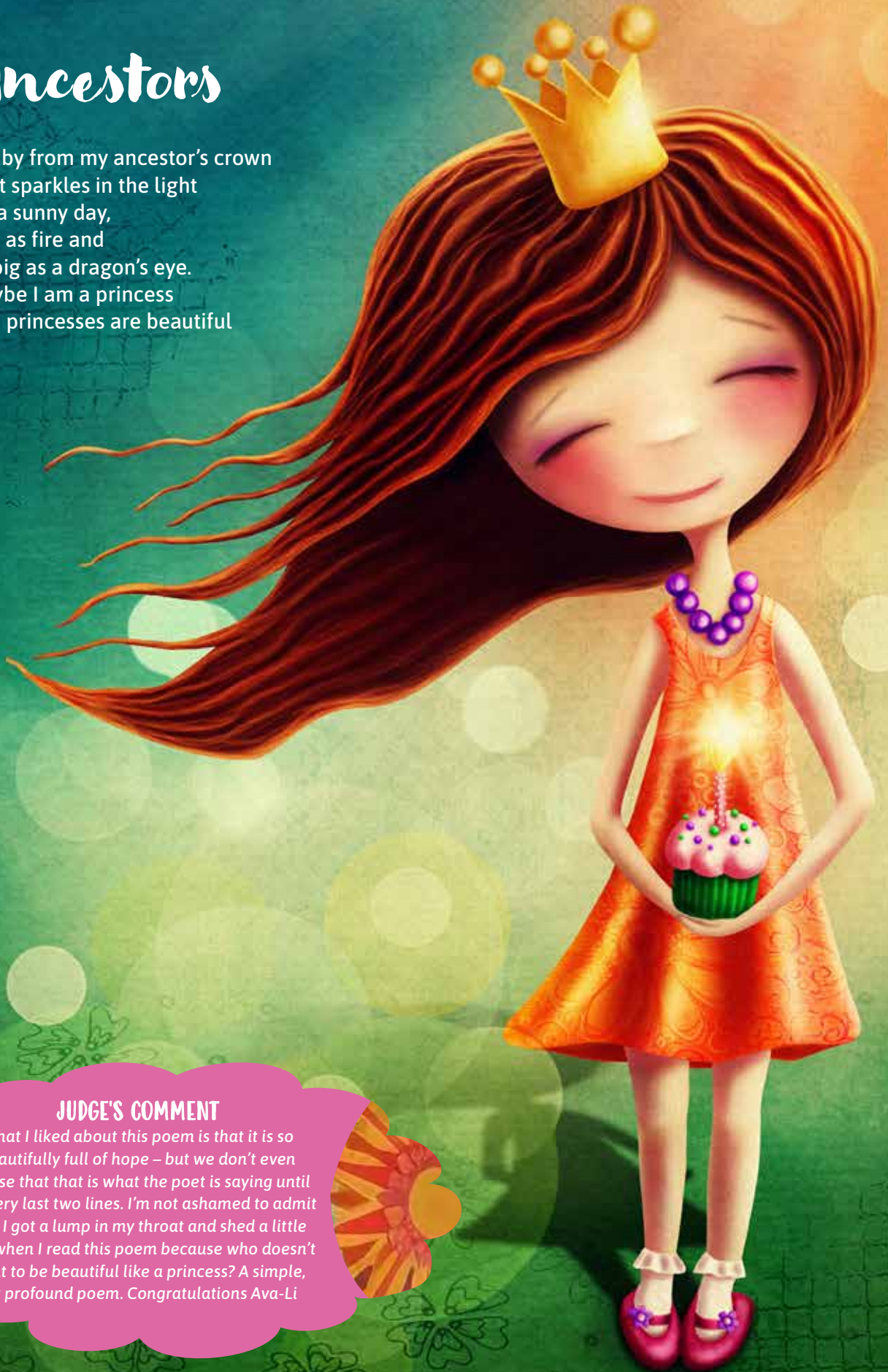
JUDGE'S COMMENT

Everything about this 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.



Ancestors

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



JUDGE'S 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



WINNER

UPPER PRIMARY (YEARS 4-6)

Philip Pham, 12 Laguna Street Public School, Caringbah South, NSW

If I had a Castle

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.



JUDGE'S 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)

Ayla Williams, 11 Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Tarro, NSW

The Sky Did Magic

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.

JUDGE'S 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

Reinhardt Human, 9 Hay Public School, Hay, NSW

Cars

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.



JUDGE'S 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.



Solo, Opal, Skywalker & Amidala

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.



JUDGE'S 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.





KURRUMBEDE AWARD PRIMARY

Oliver Munro, 11 Tamworth Public School, Tamworth, NSW

Kamilaroi Country

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

JUDGE'S 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.





DAVID MAHER AWARD
Jorge Firth, 12 Mullaley Public School, Mullaley, NSW

Dirt Bikes

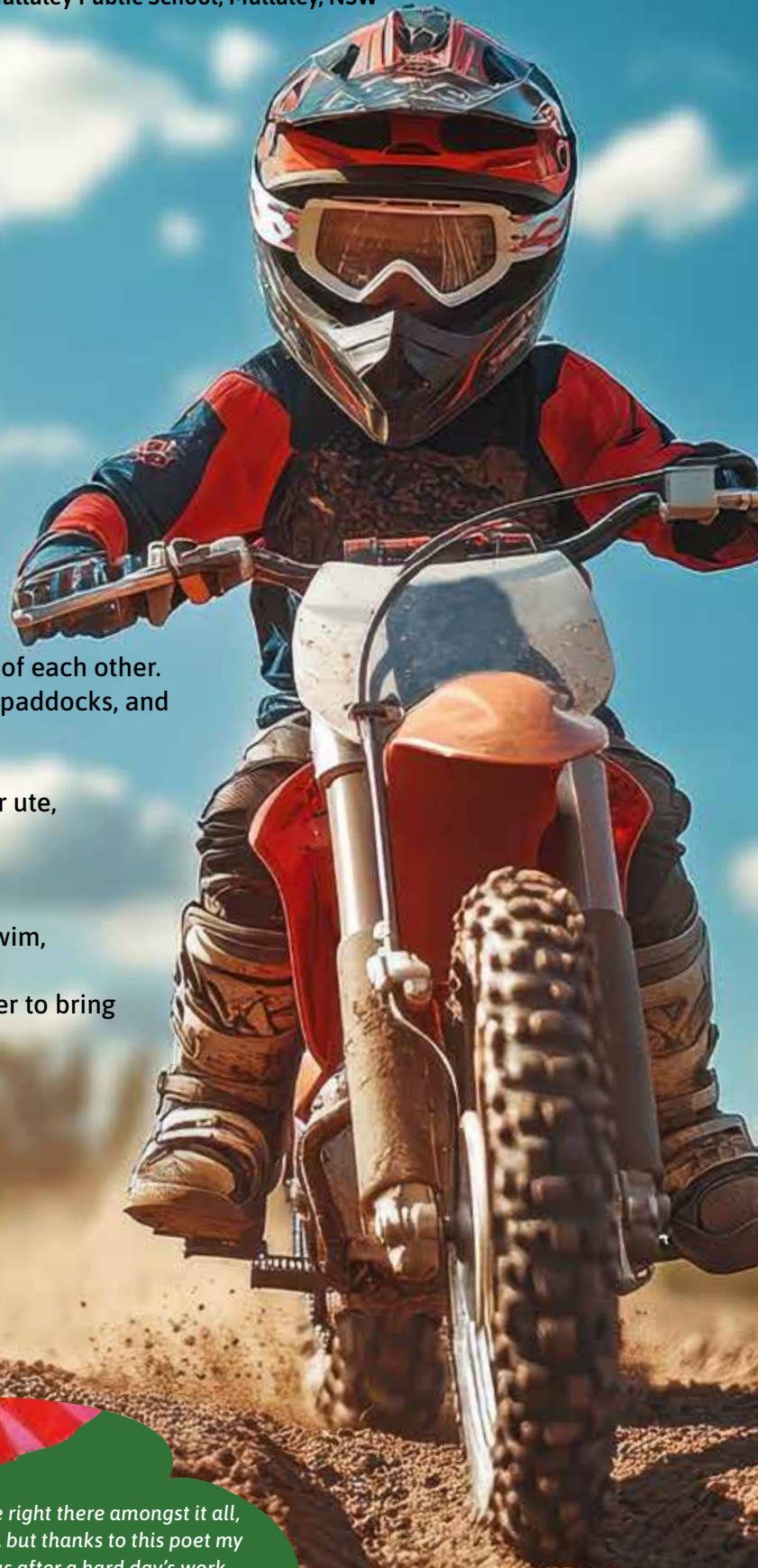
The big red machine,
Flying down the road.
Through the lush, green grass
Throwing up mud from the tyre
And out the rear end.

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 bikes 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 friend's 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.



JUDGE'S 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.



JUNIOR SECONDARY (YEARS 7-9)

Molly-Rose Hackett, 14 St Thomas More College, Sunnybank, QLD

She's Thriving

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 women 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™

JUDGE'S 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)

Isabella Ho, 14 Perth Modern School, Subiaco, WA

The arrival of the white swans

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
Revolting 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.

JUDGE'S 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)

Andrew Nothdurfter, 17 St Gregory's College, Campbelltown, NSW

nothing: everything

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.

JUDGE'S 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'.

Where her eyes took him

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 Lilac. Not Amethyst.

Eyes that were a bruise on his sky.

Not Soft. Not 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-

JUDGE'S 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.



Track Changes

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.

JUDGE'S 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.



The Storm

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.

JUDGE'S 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

Claire Gardner, 14 Tamworth High School, Tamworth, NSW

Glimpse into me

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.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

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.



Gunnedah

Where the Namoi stirs,

Dorothea wrote in verse –

Gunnedah, her muse.



Step into the landscape that inspired a poet

Follow in the footsteps of Dorothea Mackellar, where golden paddocks, wide skies and poetic echoes await.

Gunnedah isn't just a place — it's the heart of "a sunburnt country". Come and feel the verse beneath your feet.



For more information and insider tips, visit our friendly staff at the Visitor Information Centre at 83 Chandos Street, 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