



2026 Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Competition Results

Primary Schools Section

Lower Primary (Years K-3) Section – Winner	
Poet name	School
Lewis Arkinstall Age: 9	Our Lady Star of The Sea Catholic Primary School - Terrigal, NSW
Poem title	
The Traveller	
Poem	
Splish! Splosh! Splash! The leaf glides along the river, like a lazy crocodile. The leaf wafts gently, through the water course. Swept into the main channel, the leaf darts forward, like a miniature, reckless speedster. Toppling, tumbling and trembling at the mercy of the current. It jolts into a jagged rock, smothered in algae like autumn leaves lingering across the valley. The buoyant leaf halts and sinks. Traversing into the dark abyss, it descends to the depths of the riverbed, plummeting like a comet through the sky. The leaf settles and disintegrates on the floor.	
Judges' comment	
I like how this poem played with the theme and surprised me with the subject matter. Instead of a person, the traveller is a leaf! The poem starts with onomatopoeia to draw our attention. The leaf is personified through its travels, which are described using lovely similes and alliteration, before the leaf reaches its inevitable end.	

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

Meredith Butler
Age: 7

School

Normanhurst Public School
Normanhurst, NSW

Poem title

The Traveller

Poem

The sun rises,
I'm excited for my journey.
I'm curious,
but that's fine..
What will I find?
Where will I go?
I've no need to pack,
I carry my home on my back.
I slither away,
a trail of moondust behind me.
I'm as slow as dollop of mustard sliding down your chin,
I reach the end of the garden,
Excitement.
A beautiful new world awaits.
Can you guess what I am?

Judges' comment

This poem made me laugh out loud when I realised who the traveller was: the poet wrote from the point of view of a snail! While we are never explicitly told it was a snail the identity is made obvious by the descriptions. The poet uses a beautiful metaphor to describe the snail's trail, but what I most love is the simile describing how slowly the snail moves.

Upper Primary Section – Winner**Poet name**

Pearl Wong-Francois

Age: 11

School

Reddam House Sydney

Woollahra, NSW

Poem title

The Funeral

Poem

The funeral day arrived quietly like it didn't
want to disturb anyone.

The sky was grey not stormy just tired.
As if it understood why everyone was
walking slowly.

People gathered in a room their voices were low and careful.
Grief was among us all. The air felt heavy
as if it was holding memories not air.

The flowers stood still pretending to be brave.
Their colours bright almost too bright, like if
they were trying to cheer us up just
didn't know how to.

The candles flickered nervously whispering to the shadows
on the wall.

When stories were shared sadness loosened.
Laughter slipped in quietly like sunlight through a
crack of a cloud. Memories moved around the room
touching everyone gently, reminding them of who has been loved.

By the end the room felt different.
Not empty, not fixed, but softer.
The goodbye lingered, like an echo that doesn't
fade right away, but stays just long enough to be
remembered.

Judges' comment

I was immediately drawn into this poem from the very first line.

The funeral day arrived quietly like it didn't want to disturb anyone.

I sat up and leaned forward. I might even have made myself another cup of coffee!

There are no extra words in this poem, there are no fancy words. It is clear to the reader what the poet is saying.

The poet, while describing the day, expertly intertwines metaphor, simile and personification. Throughout the poem, they sometimes liken a thing to a person - *The flowers stood still pretending to be brave*. They sometimes liken a person to a thing - *Laughter slipped in quietly like sunlight through a crack of a cloud*.

And while the topic is one of sadness it ends in a glimmer of hope - *By the end the room felt different. Not empty, not fixed, but softer*.

This is definitely a sophisticated poem, but it still feels authentic as there are no convoluted or muddled up thoughts. There are no long arduous lines and no frilly language. It flows beautifully, the language not only suits the mood, it suits the age group.

Congratulationsfor me, this poem was an absolute stand out.

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

Abbey Fu

Age: 11

School

Roseville Public School

Roseville, NSW

Poem title

The Nomadic Traveller

Poem

I have a backpack full of squashed sandwiches.
One of them has been squashed so badly
It looks like it's already been eaten.

I'm like a nomadic kid in a story,
No horse or map,
Just moving because the air told me to.

My legs ache and my socks are sliding,
But the houses packed along the horizon
Look like toys
And I'm a giant for a second.
I wonder if the people
In those tiny kitchens
Have a chair that's always theirs.

Their windows glow yellow;
Maybe they know where they're going tomorrow.

Maybe I'll find a barn to sleep in.
Actually, I hope I don't.
Barns probably smell terrible.

It's scary when the shadows grow long,
But a traveller doesn't turn back
Just because the sun is slowly drifting down the horizon.

The road bends again.
I can't see what's on the other side.
That's annoying.
But I keep walking anyway.

Judges' comment

Now this poem elicited the opposite emotion in me. While The Funeral filled me with melancholy, this poem made me laugh.

Again, I sat up straight, made a coffee and settled in.

The theme this year was The Traveller, so I read many poems about epic adventures, discoveries, quests etc. so when I read the first line - *I have a backpack full of squashed*

sandwiches. I laughed out loud. Immediately, I was right there with the poet – I thought, this is definitely an upper primary school authentic experience.

The poet again, used poetic tools to clarify, not confuse - *But the houses packed along the horizon*
Look like toys.

The language feels authentic. There are no extra, flowery words. I won't give away the ending which is so perfect.

Congratulations..... you tackled the task brilliantly.

Assisted Learning Primary Section – Winner	
Poet name	School
Alexander Antanios Age: 9	Redeemer Baptist School North Parramatta, NSW
Poem title	
Moon Walking	
Poem	
I looked back at the blue planet, My home. Eye-catching, breath-taking, magnificent. Smooth, swirling, alive. Here it's different. Foreign. Dreary, dull. A rocky, rough dead land. Toxic air, Space suit and helmet. I feel light, yet restricted, This suit is heavy. I wish for home So far away.	
Judges' comment	
In the poem Moon Walking, the poet starts by looking back at Earth and describing it with lively adjectives, before contrasting with the moon's dull surface. This contrast makes the poem's conclusion, of the moon walker wishing to be home, more heartfelt. The use of alliteration makes the descriptions more powerful.	

Assisted Learning Primary Section – Runner Up**Poet name**

Ashton Thorne-Small

Age: 12

School

Dubbo South Public School

Dubbo, NSW

Poem title

Cloudy Train

Poem

A chimney on the front of the train spitting out clouds.

Clouds are flying high and higher.

Chuga chuga, choo choo!

Soaring in the sky like a kite, high above the clouds.

The engine churning, powered by fire.

Chuga chuga, choo choo!

Passengers boarding the carriages in a line.

A coal eating machine.

Chuga chuga, choo choo!

Travelling down the long distance coastline.

Taking us to places we've never seen.

Chuga chuga, choo choo!

Our Steam Train Machine!

Judges' comment

I was drawn to this poem initially by the title, as it immediately brought a clear picture of a steam train to my mind, even though I've never heard them called 'cloudy trains'. The repetition of the onomatopoeia phrase throughout the poem gives the feeling of being on a journey. The use of descriptive language, personification, a simile and a metaphor made the poem more enjoyable to read.

David Maher Award – Winner	
Poet name	School
Arjay Wark Age: 11	Urbenville Public School Urbenville, NSW
Poem title	
Bushfire Raze	
Poem	
Fire burning in the light. Hiss, pop, rustle and snap, Leaving sweeping ruins. Smoke scorches the forest floor. A burning inferno, clouds of fire billow, Grass shrivels, wrinkles and dies, rubble everywhere. People scream, trees wither, Flames dancing across the black earth. Smoke blankets the inky sky. Animals perplexed and petrified. Country blackened and blistered. Fleeing cars evade. Waves of water, fortify from the invading flames. Smoke rises, fluttering in the sky like a white flag. The fiery campaign is over.	
Judges' comment	
This poem brings the reality of a bushfire directly to the page. The descriptions of the fire are evocative. The short lines with powerful verbs make the poem feel immediate and intense. Onomatopoeia and alliteration are used with effect. The simile at the end of the poem, of the smoke as a white flag, is my favourite image.	

Kurrumbede Award Primary – Winner**Poet name**

Adele Rankmore

Age: 11

School

Tamworth Public School

Tamworth, NSW

Poem title

Autumn Dancers

Poem

The tree is a stage
The leaves its performers
Flickering, flying to and fro
Darting flames of crimson, gold and bronze

They are a troupe of jazz dancers
In kaleidoscope costumes
Of amber, cinnamon and lemon
Shimmying, prancing and leaping
As the wind carries them across their open stage

They take a bow and float down
Down, down, down to the ground
To create a golden-red carpet
Worthy of the world's greatest movie stars

Judges' comment

I love the extended metaphor and personification of the autumn leaves as performers. The poet uses evocative descriptions of the colours and movement of the leaves and adds alliteration and repetition. The description of the golden-red carpet is a lovely finish to the poem.

Schools Award Primary – Winner**School**

Tamworth Primary School, Tamworth NSW

Secondary Schools Section

Junior Secondary (Years 7-9) Section – Winner	
Poet name	School
Lauren Woo Age: 13	Ravenswood School for Girls Gordon, NSW
Poem title	
Object Removed for Conservation	
Poem	
they tell me do not touch as if i've ever been safe inside glass as if my hands don't rewrite everything they peel open my body was built for fingerprints oil sweat shedding skin every person i've loved arrives already tagged like a corpse FRAGILE HANDLE WITH CARE DO NOT EXPOSE TO DIRECT LIGHT still i breathe on them anyway glass fogs names blur for a second they are just meat again and it feels like trespass i walk through rooms smelling of old glue and stagnant breath every step echoes like bone snapping under pressure the floorboards groan like teeth shifting in a skull something under them answers when i walk i stop pretending it doesn't exhibit I your laugh sealed under glass rotting fruit sweet exhibit II the afternoon we split open oil on canvas peeling like skin exhibit III my name spoken wrong carved quieter each time limestone mouthwork blunt erosion i carry a map that lies without blinking it leads me back into myself every corridor the exits are stitched shut with black thread memory permanent collection open daily closed for maintenance nothing here survives being named correctly [c. 2019 late winter gift of an anonymous donor]	

i could've sworn the walls pulsed that year
like something breathing behind paint
loss strips marrow from weather after it leaves
leaves houses standing like opened ribs
sometimes the lights fail
everything pretending to be still stops pretending
 paintings sag
 statues become blunt instruments again
 air tastes metallic like bitten foil
i don't move
i listen for the frames cracking
silence is what remains when catalogues lie

why does everything feel so old a child asks
the guide smiles too quickly
 because surviving takes time
i almost speak
but my throat remembers restraint
surviving is what happens after time finishes taking
leaving only scaffolding ribs for wind

instead i buy a postcard of something i already lost
gift shop theology
 grief you can hold without bleeding
 small enough to choke on later
i fold it anyway

i leave through the exit that smells too clean to trust
bleach thin air sterile like apology
every museum teaches leaving before arrival

outside rain turns the city into shattered glass
headlights cut through it like mistakes
people avoid each others eyes
maybe they know everyone is an exhibit not yet labelled
still breathing under plastic wrap

i press my palm against the freezing void
it presses back bruising cold
then it lets go
no alarm sounds
only uniforms filled with ash and protocol

nothing here is protected
everything is delayed damage
 paint flakes like dead skin
 paper gives up memory
 stone forgets it was held

tomorrow someone stands where i was removed
they read

 OBJECT REMOVED FOR CONSERVATION
and believe absence is another form of saving

Judges' comment

A poem that left me flawed in the way it took one metaphoric idea and fleshed it out and out and out until the poem itself became an extended metaphor, and that extended metaphor immerses the reader into an entire world. The world of a museum. I felt like I was wondering room to room, discovering the exhibits of the writer and, in turn, reflecting on my own internal exhibits. Glass, conservation, catalogues, labels, gifts shops, museum guides, frames, all these little concrete details holding together the symbolic museum landscape and drawing us into themes of grief, identity, fragility of life, memory and connection.

The temptation for someone writing a piece so embedded in metaphor is to over-explain the metaphor when they bring the abstract reflections. But in this piece nothing is over-stated, the poet trusts the reader will be able to sit in this piece and discover their own connections through it. Truly like we are being invited to wander through our own internal museum.

So many lines within the poem have a depth and an emotional weight that whacks quiet the punch. *'every person i've loved arrives already tagged like a corpse.'* and

'gift shop theology

grief you can hold without bleeding

small enough to choke on later'

These lines hold the kind of poignancy you would read in adult literary novels.

The ending then holds a pivot in the title of the entire poem. This is when we realise that the writer self-identifies their entire self as another object in the exhibition, one that is removed for conservation where *'absence is another form of saving.'* Brilliant ending.

The entire poem is hugely impressive. It is moving, symbolic, ambitious, beautifully controlled, deeply memorable and full of wisdom. Every choice felt intentional. Every insight wasn't just *'an interesting thought'*, and it wasn't explained, rather it felt like embodied wisdom.

Brilliant all round and highly deserving of the first place win. Congratulations.

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

Nicole Sun

Age: 13

School

Pymble Ladies' College

Pymble, NSW

Poem title

Before I Arrived

Poem

Before I ever answered to it,
my name was already travelling.

It crossed an ocean
inside someone else's voice,
carried carefully

like the last thing
they couldn't bear to leave behind.

It arrived before I did.

Folded into documents.
Pressed into passports.
Written in careful handwriting
that hoped
it would still belong on the other side.

At school,
it stumbled.

Teachers paused over it.
Classmates bent it
until it almost sounded
like someone else's.

So, I learned to answer anyway.

At home,
it found itself again—

spoken softly
across the dinner table,

called from the back door
before the streetlights came on.

A name is a strange traveller.

It changes accents.
Crosses borders.
Outlives the people
who first whispered it.

Mine has been shortened,
corrected,
misheard,
remembered.

It has belonged
to hands I've never held,
to faces I've never seen—

yet it arrived with me.

One day,
it will leave again.

Someone else
will answer when it's called.

They'll think it began with them.

They won't know
they're simply the next place
it comes to rest—

before it travels on.

Judges' comment

Congratulations poet! This was such a beautiful and simple, well put-together poem exploring the poet's sense of identity. A name becomes not just something we possess, but something alive in and of itself. Something with its own story, on its own journey. Something that carries generations and holds a whole migration history.

The poet explores this core theme and poetic connection with a beautiful tenderness and intention. The tiny moments carry such power. *'Folded into documents. Pressed into*

passports. Written in careful handwriting. The poet doesn't reach for grandiose imagery, or universalisms, they, rather, stick to this one concept. It is restrained and controlled.

From overseas, to school, to home, the poems builds one moment to another. The poets articulation of being culturally stuck between the world their family came from and the world they are now a part of is profound. They play at this tension well. A name that is *bent* and *stumbled* over at school, then finds itself again at home.

All of these spaces, all of these experiences reveal more of the poets name-journey. A name, says the poem, is a '*strange traveller*,' but the poet essentially invites us to travel with their name for a time. To understand it better. And therefore understand first the poets story better. Before also turning to our own story, our own name.

In this way, I like that the actual name of the poet is never once mentioned. I kept wanting it to be. I want to know what their name is. But, the un-named name, allows us to insert our own name, our own history. Brilliant!

The poem ends with a lovely concept, that names, perhaps, are given for a time, and then, in the next generation, move onto another and another another. A name is eternal, even if we who inhabit it for a time are not. What a profound insight to end on. It left me thinking much about my own name. And so that last stanza really takes us from just the poets journey, to the universal journeys we are all on. Fantastic work. Thank you and huge congratulations!

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

Lily Prendergast

SchoolTamworth High School
Tamworth, NSW**Poem title**

The Voice Beneath My Feet

Poem

The earth remembered me before I remembered myself.
I didn't understand that when Nan first said it.
We were standing beside the river behind her house, sunlight breaking across the water in shattered pieces of gold.
Years earlier, Nan had told me that people spend their lives searching for who they are, while Country already knows. At the time, I hadn't understood what she meant.
Country was dirt. Trees. Grass. Bugs and dust.
That's what I thought.
Three years later, standing in the same place, I realised she'd meant something far deeper.
The city had a way of swallowing people whole.
Every morning began with alarms and deadlines. Every day disappeared beneath homework, expectations and conversations that somehow felt both constant and meaningless.
Somewhere between trying to fit in and trying to stand out, I'd become a stranger to myself.
At school, I laughed when everyone else laughed. I answered questions, handed in assignments and smiled for photographs.
Somewhere along the way, I forgot who I was.
From the outside, nothing seemed wrong. Yet every night, lying awake in the blue glow of my bedroom, I felt as though I were living someone else's life.
When Mum suggested I spend a week with Nan during the holidays, I almost refused.
Now, stepping into the late afternoon sunlight, I was glad I hadn't.
The city smelled of hot concrete and petrol. Here, the wind carried eucalyptus and dried earth, settling around me like an old memory.
Nan sat on the veranda, gently rocking in her chair.
For a while, neither of us spoke.
The silence wasn't uncomfortable.
It never was with Nan.
After a while, she encouraged me to spend some time outside. She had always trusted the quiet wisdom of the land more than long explanations.
The river was exactly where I remembered it, slipping between weathered rocks and tangled roots with quiet certainty.
I sat beneath an old gum tree and watched it wander by.
For a long time, I did nothing else.
No music. No notifications. No endless stream of messages.
Just the river.

The longer I sat, the more I noticed.
 The distant call of a magpie. The whisper of water against stone.
 The earth seemed alive with voices too soft to hear unless you were willing to be still.
 For the first time in months, my thoughts slowed.
 I looked down at the roots twisting through the soil beside me.
 Despite storms, droughts and time itself, the tree stood firm.
 Its strength came from what lay hidden beneath the surface.
 Something inside me shifted.
 For years, I had treated belonging like a destination—something waiting somewhere ahead.
 But the roots weren't searching for the earth.
 They were already part of it.
 Perhaps I wasn't searching for belonging either.
 Perhaps I had simply lost sight of where my roots began.
 By the time I returned to Nan's house.

Judges' comment

Congratulations on this beautiful story poem. I loved the way this poem drew us deeply into a multitude of the poets relationships. We are welcomed to look at their connection to country, to to their history, to family and to themselves. To hold all of these together and write it in this narrative form and to not make it feel too full or overstated in its message, that is incredible. This is what made the poem so distinct in its highly narrative format. Rather than relying on elaborate supposedly *poetic* language, the poet simply tells their story, observes their world, and through it, gradually draws us into profound truth.

The theme of the poem is clearly stated in the very first line. It holds the whole heartbeat of the poem. This thesis line is then explored in the following story. I liked this structure. That we are given the theme and then showed its embodied proof in lived experience.

The relationship between the poet and her Nan is authentically shared. It's not over-explained. Two people standing looking at a sunset that then opens out to reflective memories, to the tension of city life, and all that it can take from us. All the while simple poetics nailing home the themes, like the personification of *'The city had a way of swallowing people whole.'* And the beautiful descriptive nature of *'The city smelled of hot concrete and petrol. Here, the wind carried eucalyptus and dried earth,'*

The reader is invited to slow down with the author and let their own conflict and their own invitation to open themselves to country, also become an invitation for us. The external landscapes that mirror the internal invitation. And so, like the Nan, the poet does not offer *'long explanations'*, but rather the *'wisdom of the land.'*

The poet, in offering the very moment that changed her thoughts, is also offering us to find our own moment. After reading this poem, and sitting with it, I walked down to the beach and I did as the poet did. Stopped. Looked. Waited. Let the waves speak to me of who I was. The best poetry takes the individual, specific story of someone and through that story connects us to deep universal truth, deep universal truth that then connects back into the individual, specifics of our own life. This piece is an exemplar of such a profound movement.

Poet, you should be so proud of this deserving win. I have no doubt that many will be challenged to think about their own life and too walk out their door and listen to country. Brilliant poetry. Well done and congratulations.

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

Caroline Brown

SchoolLoreto
Kirribilli, NSW**Poem title**

Paper Cuts

Poem

They write their stories in inherited ink,
his-stories, bound in leather and certainty.

The names of men embossed in gold;
the women—unnamed and unwritten—
carried their stories in shadow,
left to the margins of history to forget.

But I have learned to read silence;
to stitch meaning from what is missing.

And so, I reach for the paper.

I write
for the innocent burned at dawn,
their flames licking away generations;
for poets erased from tongues and tomes,
their art silenced and hearts erased;
for daughters erased from scroll and scripture—
their names lost to memory.

I write for the women
who spoke too sharply,
who dreamed too loudly,
who loved too freely,
and were torn from the narrative—
their stories snatched like birds in flight,
plucked before they could sing.

I write for the women
who bled into the earth
without a witness,

whose wounds were hidden beneath dirt and dust,
forgotten by the history books
that failed to hold them.

Their stories are not gone—
just crumpled, folded, buried deep.
They pulse beneath the surface,
creased into the shape of resistance.

I press my pen to those folds,
unearth them with every line,
pulling echoes from silence,
breathing life into forgotten ghosts.

Because some of the stories left untold
are the ones that could have changed the world
if given the space to soar.

And so, we will write.
And we will write loudly.
Because silence is a death sentence.
Because we must ensure that paper, even when torn,
will hold the truth.

Let the blood from the wounds of the women before me
ink my witness statement—
their pain etched into every word I write,
a testament to what was stolen,
to what was never allowed to be told.

But, for now, they write their stories
in inherited ink,
bound in leather and certainty.
My words are torn apart by their greed.
After all, I am but
a paper cut—
too small to notice,
but deep enough to bleed.

Judges' comment

A profound feminist poetic piece that EVERYBODY needs to read. I loved this poem. I loved the passion. The clear social reflections and challenge. It is powerful and it is thought-

provoking and brings inspiration for others seeking to use their pen to write for those whose story was silenced.

His-story being written in *inherited ink* kicks us off into a bookish exploration of power dynamics and patriarchal society. What is brilliant about this poem is that it doesn't kick off from this place and seek to get a message across whilst leaving behind this initial concept. That would have been easy to do, but the poet holds fast to the thread and does not stray. All other reflections get pulled into this lens of 'written history' of paper, ink and pen, in quite literally every single stanza. Having one concept/thread that is built upon and built upon makes this piece incredibly powerful.

The repetition of '*I write for...*' builds the momentum and intentionality and rhythm and force of the poem. Any other writer who is reading the work hears it as a rallying cry, a collective act of witness, not just an individual's reflections. The poet names these historic motifs and then draws them into the central image of stories being '*crumpled, folded, buried deep*' only to be '*creased into the shape of resistance.*' This image of under-the-earth transformation brings a strong message to those who too feel pressed into the ground and forgotten.

There is such strong metaphoric work all through this. In fact, this is my favourite aspect of this poet. Their use of strong metaphoric language and imagery that builds atop each other until I, and lots of other readers, would want to join the resistance movement that could bring change to this power imbalance throughout history. This becoming even more apparent as the poet changes from the individual 'I' to the collective 'we.' They are championing a cause. And it is powerful.

Then, as it finishes, the poet draws us back from the '*WE*' into the '*I*' once more, as they cyclically explore the current reality that is faced. The reality that their words are *torn apart*. The final image is profound, profound enough to become the title of the poem. A double meaning image. A paper cut that is easily dismissed, yet capable of leaving a bleeding wound. It is a clever and poignant image encouraging the reader to know that even the smallest act of writing can leave a lasting mark. It may not be able to change the entire situation, but this championing of the power of words is a stunningly fitting end to the poem.

Congratulations on this fantastic call to arms. A thoroughly deserving runner-up.

Assisted Learning Secondary – Winner**Poet name**

Sean Zhang

SchoolRedeemer Baptist School
North Parramatta, NSW**Poem title**

The Malfunction of Time

Poem

I've always wondered of a fulfilled world,
Filled with astonishment, joy and excitement.
This shattered world deserves more love,
Times to never forget, years of forgotten memories.

The heat of blazing light shines and burns,
As children run and birds chirp,
Nature swings to sounds of pure joy,
The summer goes by, yearning for a great future.

The wind whistles, weaves and wanders,
As the leaves dance to the beat of time.
The sound of the rhythmic wind sojourns,
The autumn goes by as the past starts to crack.

Blitzing winds breeze through the bleak
As the air turns cold and land forsaken.
The trees bend with no heart and no soul,
The winter goes by, shattering what once was hope.

As all hope was lost, tranquillity rose,
Trees started breathing; Meadows opened their eyes.
Sun becomes bold again, as if were the start of time,
The spring goes by, as hope and peace becomes alive.

Judges' comment

I loved the journey through the seasons that this poem took us on. A beautiful and hopeful poem. An introductory stanza that invites the reader to think about the world that we all inhabit. To see both the beauty and the broken within this world that '*deserves more love.*' It is a juxtaposition then upheld through the following seasonal stanzas as we move from blazing summer, sojourning autumn, forsaken winter and into the hope of spring. The reader is taken on a profound journey through the seasons as nature is brought to life through description and personification. It truly does make us feel as though the natural world is alive alongside us and that it symbolically mirrors our own seasonal experience of life and emotion.

The clear structure provides us with a strong emotional journey. Each season transitioning to the next until we are left with the optimism and hope of spring. The poem is profound in insight, thoughtful in observation, it is warm and inviting and beautifully written. Well done poet. Hugely deserving of this win!

Assisted Learning Secondary – Runner Up**Poet name**

Amrut Mogarkar

SchoolRedeemer Baptist School
North Parramatta, NSW**Poem title**

The Ibis

Poem

The Ibis' katana shaped beak
And arrogant attitude
Scares me sometimes.

Invaders of picnics,
Coloured in silent film they walk,
Stalk
and scavenge.

Sneaky robbers of food,
Apathetic city squatters who filch,
Steal
and plunder.

Lesser abled vultures,
They are harbingers of litter,
Debris
And waste.

Makes me wonder-
What greater purpose does he serve?

Yes, the Ibis,
In all his pompous,
unconcerned,
callous,
uncaring attitude-

Scares me sometimes.

Judges' comment

Congratulations on a wonderful poem. The poem takes an ordinary bird, one that is seen often around the seaside, and the poet transforms it into something dramatic and larger than

life. Through humour, exaggeration and very vivid description it is as though we are re-introduced to the bird.

The initial opening, with its specific detail and built in metaphor, 'The Ibis' katana shaped beak,' is a brilliant beginning. The bird is then given many human attributes like being arrogant, sneaky, pompous, unconcerned. We are shown this bird through the lens of human emotions and so it becomes both humorous and poignant.

The visual layout of this piece adds to the reading. The separation across the page creating a sense of movement to match the birds movement, creeping, stalking. Many don't think for long about the visual layout of their poetry, but this was intentional and fantastic.

The thing I liked the most was the descriptive language sitting alongside the very humorous. It was a playful description of the bird, but also dropped into more reflective questions, of '*What greater purpose does he serve?*'

It's a poem full of confidence, acute observation and vivid personality. Great work poet! Well done.

Kurrumbede Award Secondary – Winner**Poet name**

Lillian Smith

Age: 14

School

Tamworth High School

Tamworth, NSW

Poem title

My Name

Poem

My name,
was never my own.

I answered to it,
but the voice that answered wasn't mine either.

It belonged to someone else—
someone smaller,
someone constantly anxious,

someone afraid to break.

I tried to hold it—

my name, my voice, Myself,
but it shattered, like thin glass

under the weight of years
of pretending,
of bending,
of hurt, Of silence.

And then—

almost invisible,

almost too fragile to touch,
it stirred.

My name.
It trembled.

Fragile. Shaky.

But it was mine.

It landed in my chest,
like fire,

like sunlight through a cracked window,

like a door finally opening,
after years of silence.

It fit, It belonged.

I belonged.

Now, I answer it without fear.

Now, I speak it without apology.
Now, I carry it,

no longer letting others shape me.
It is mine, finally.

Judges' comments

This poem is an exploration of the power of a name. It is moving and it is honest. From the very start there is almost a confession. A naming of separation from the poet and their name. From the poet and their own voice. What is profound though, is the poet is able to name that the *smaller, anxious, afraid to break voice*, is not who they are. This is profound personal insight that does exactly what poetry is meant to do for the writer. Allows them to name something about their own life that they may not have realised otherwise.

The poem explores themes of identity, belonging and courage through the motif of the poet's own name. The use of imagery to explore this is beautifully chosen. *The shattering thin glass. The sunlight through a cracked window.* Each profound realisation about the poet's name and sense of self is accompanied by a metaphor that allows the reader to delve deep into what the poet is seeking to say about their name. We are not just told about when they realised their sense of self, we are invited into the moment. Beginning with the turning point of the poem of simply stating, My Name. Then through the following imagery as their name *landed in their chest, like fire, like the sunlight through cracked window, like a door finally opening.* Image upon image builds so that we too can feel the freedom this realisation brought. The poet seeks not to communicate the freedom of being authentically their self, they, through this imagery, invite us to feel what it felt like. This is profound. And the transformation that occurs through this poem is heartfelt and full of courage.

The final lines finish this powerful self-declaration. Their name spoken without fear or apology and its final self-ownership. This is a poem about courage and it reminds us reading it that our name, our story, our identity is also worth claiming and owning. A celebration of the journey of becoming fully oneself. Brilliant work. Congratulations poet.

Schools Award Secondary – Winner**School**

St Mary's Anglican Girl's School

Karrinyup WA