



dorothea mackellar poetry awards

national
presentation
ceremony



forests
feathers
fins furs

08

poetry.

1-7 September
**National Literacy
and Numeracy Week 2008**



Australian Government
Australian Government Department
of Education, Employment and
Workplace Relations

2008 poetry awards

Winner, Senior Secondary

Caitlin Richardson
Elizabeth College, Hobart Tas.

Naked

She could have weaved a poem
From strands pulled off
The blue nylon jumper she wears.
Instead,
She limes the page
With threads unpicked from the stitching
Of her heart:
Her words.
Like the squiggle of a heart-rate monitor,
Her words pulse with her blood,
Charting the stumbling strides
Of secret midnight wanderings
From joy to sorrow,
And back again by sunrise.

Her words
Spent lifetimes lilting
Uninhibited
In the soft sound-proof chamber
Of her head.
Then, they settled in closed notebooks
Unseen, unfelt,
To all outside.
Now, her words creep hesitantly from the
printer
Onto the blinding bright
Hospital=white
Paper:
Tattooed with tangibility.
Staccato-typed in
Times New Roman,
Her words can be read by
Anyone
In monochromatic starkness.

Her words
Are her limbs:
Unrobed,
Exposed.
A squinting reader
Catches a glimpse
Of what lives beneath
The blue nylon jumper.

Judges' comments

A cunningly subtle poem that explores the dangerous self-exposure of the writer. Using the analogy of a patient in a hospital, "Naked" captures the anxiety that accompanies the publication of a writer's work. The lines are short and the writing is spare, almost crystallised, but the word pictures are deft and indelible. This is a poem that rewards the reader with each successive reading.

She could have weaved a poem
From strands pulled off
The blue nylon jumper she
wears.
Instead,
She limes the page
With threads unpicked
from the stitching
Of her heart:



The tank engine bluesilver water
Stretching all the way to Heaven



Runner-up, Senior Secondary

Portia Smallbone
P.L.C, Peppermint Gove, WA

Cottesloe Beach

O Lord how we thankglorifycelebrate
You
For this ohso Wondrous
Place

The tank engine bluesilver water
Stretching all the way to Heaven

The (frostyfruit) sticky drippy yellow sand
Smearred on raw skin like indian paint

The roaring eternity of eceansandsky
United under the silent stars

The thick icecreamsundae wun
Warming bronzed backs and tummies and ears and
noses

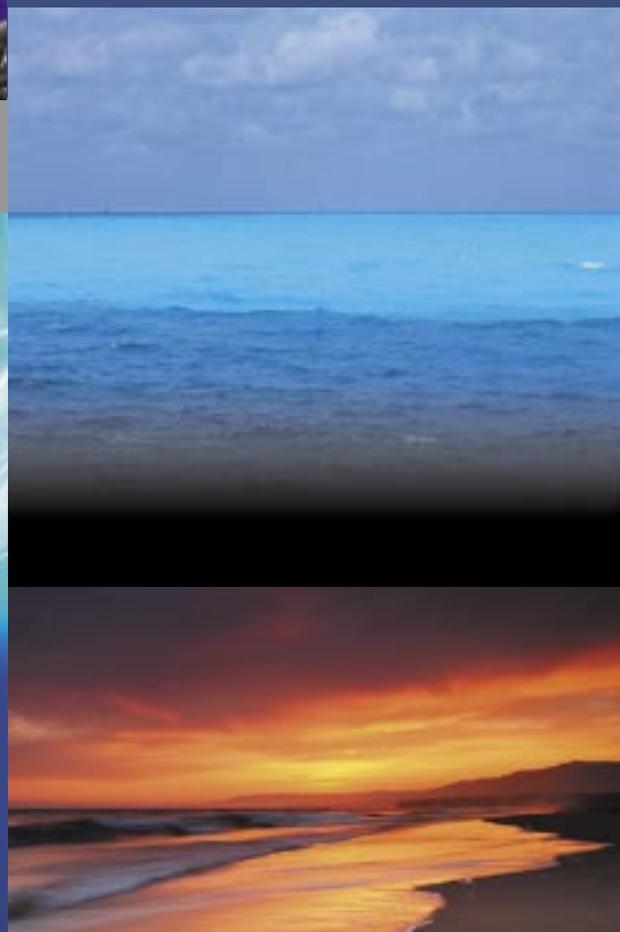
Satisfying us with
its touch

Our Dreams carried on the turrets of waves
Washing trickling falling into
Your

Ears

Judges' comments

A luscious hymn of thanks to God for the beach. Written in mock religious tones, this poem reinvents words in the manner of Gerard Manly Hopkins, runs words together and creates mouth-watering similes to convey a soaring sense of joy.



dorothea machellar poetry awards 2008

Winner, Lower Secondary

Jack Burnham
Caloundra Christian College, QLD

Moffatt Dragon

On Moffat Beach
Cerulean skies meet azure ocean depths
In an infinite vista of blue.
Primeval currents swell, pulsing rhythmically,
Sending white-capped waves
Rushing towards land.

Waves pound and crash the rocky shore
Beating their salty tattoo against
The humped and weathered stone,
Buckled, crackled, crazed,
Gigantic puzzle pieces artfully assembled
To form a windswept mosaic.

Simply stone and sand and sea
Or harbour for something
Infinitely older, wilder, wiser?
Does a mythical creature, feted and feared,
Ancient, powerful, knowing
Hibernate ocean-side?

Ruby eyes glow behind shuttered lids
Nose tucked beneath scaly foreleg
Gently exhaled smoky breath
Rising to mingle with foam and spray,
Tail circling round body
Curved back rising, rounded and high, above the sea.

Excalibur rests uneasily, gleaming softly
In the murky green depths
Half hidden by waving weed and waning memory.
In fabled Avalon, midst slender towers and faded chivalry
Arthur slumbers fitfully
Awaiting his call to arms.

And when the clarion call is finally sounded
Arthur, mighty lord, once and future king
Will rise from his couch of stone
Retrieving helm and gauntlet.
Excalibur, freed at last from watery captivity
Will home to his gloved hand.

And in the sun-baked Antipodes
On peaceful Moffat Beach
A dragon, fitting mount for legendary lord,
Will stiffly rise, massive wings unfurled
And lumber down the strand before
Launching skywards in response to his master's summons.

Cerulean skies meet azure ocean depths
Primeval currents swell, pulsing rhythmically
Beating their salty tattoo against the sandy shore.
Waves ebb and flow, returning sand to pristine perfection
Smoothing, filling, finally erasing a massive sandy depression...
And taloned three-toed footprints.

Judge's comments

The writer has wedded European mythology and primeval nature to come up with a poem that takes the breath away with its imaginative flair. From one end of the earth King Arthur responds to his call to arms and, at the same time, here in the Antipodes, a dragon rears up out the sand of a Queensland beach to join him. With beautifully controlled metre and economical use of words, the poem's wonderful conclusion makes the central premise magically believable.

Runner-up, Lower Secondary

Jake Howman
Carine Senior High School, WA

The Crow

The crow sits staring.
His steel claws embedded in the dry bark of a tree,
He see – saws back and forth maintaining balance on his perch.
Charcoal eyes cut the horizon like a surgeon's scalpel,
Watching cautiously for the slightest action to occur.

In the cloudless sky he sees a pigeon fly fro its nest
For the bird, he holds no concern,
The treasure, now trapped in its home, is what the crow seeks.
He releases his iron grip, lets free his muscular wings
And flies towards the exposed riches.
The wind rushes through his ruffled crest, his glossy black feathers
Glow dimly in the morning sun.
He slashes the air as he swoops.

With a flick of his wings, he comes to a halt.
His eyes remain fixed on the vulnerable, pale spheres.
With a tap of his sharp beak, he breaks through the feeble barrier.
Crystal clear liquid flows through the cracks, revealing marble walls
As white a milk
Lined with a silky skin lies his prey, gasping for survival.

A few quick gulps and the chicks were no more.
At that, the crow lifts off, leaving the shrapnel of his vile act.
Carrying a cold stone heart, he soars back to his home.
He lets out a cry of victory,
Letting the final drop of goodness run down his throat.

The crow sat staring.

Judge's comments

A stunning action poem, "The Crow" is powerfully observed and lyrically achieved. The writer utilises all the senses to bring the reader face to face with the insouciant cruelty of nature.



*The crow sits staring.
His steel claws embedded in the dry
bark of a tree,
He see - saws back and forth
maintaining balance on his perch.
Charcoal eyes cut the horizon like a
surgeon's scalpel,*



2008 poetry awards

Winner, Upper Primary

Emma Dell
Brooke Avenue Public School
Killarney Vale, N.S.W.

Chasing Rainbows

Gran slouched in her armchair...

Who knows what cogs and wheels
Were pivoting around
On the rusted frame of her mind,
Sheathed in skin of mangled leather,
Masked, by those penetrating eyes of slate?

I called her the 'Cedar Tree,'
Sturdy and gnarled, a figure of fable,
Wrinkles embroidered into her skin
By the calloused hands of ageing,
Whose fingers work all too nimbly and deft.

She told me stories, in rasping and wheezing,
Of her, taming lions, devouring fire,
Swimming into the sunset – always,
Fingers groping wisps of memory, so skilful at evading her spindly clutches.

Yet I missed her chortling magpie warble,
And the way it frolicked from her wizened maw.

She used to lean over, bleached rope tresses
Dangling limp,
And whispered to me of what it was like,
Withering,
Withering,
Locked in an infinite embrace with dreams.

Her determined putter had abated to a doleful, languid hobble,
Before she became etched into immobility, one with her throne.

Gran's fire was vanquished, ashes blown away.
My Cedar Tree's last few leaves had fallen from the boughs.
And now I ask myself,
Where is Gran now?
Well she's chasing rainbows,
To infinity above the yonder.

Judges Comments:

A poem needs to be felt with the senses and in Chasing Rainbows Emma goes straight to the heart with her astonishing tribute to her Gran, who she describes as gnarled and wrinkled and yet sturdy as a cedar tree. What sets this poem above others is the way Emma refuses to use sentimental or clichéd images of grandmothers. She describes her Gran as slouching in her chair, having skin of mangled leather, a wizened maw and bleached rope tresses. This is an old and ugly woman yet Emma knows it's not the body that makes her Gran who she is. What Emma can see shining through those penetrating slate eyes is the person who lived a life chasing rainbows as she tamed lions, devoured fire and swam into sunsets. Although this poem reaches right into the heart it has a rare honesty that shows the integrity and courage of a writer who doesn't take the easy way to manipulate our emotions. Fantastic work, Emma.



Runner-up, Upper Primary

Hayden Brewer
Sydney Distance Education Primary School
Newtown, N.S.W.

Forests, Feathers, Fins and Fur

Superb!
Superb Fairy Wren.
The boy king is crowned.
Blue diadem and sprite wings.
Monarchy restored in the gum blossom kingdom.
Vagabond mob of kangaroos drowsily assembles.
Cockatoos screech in felicitation,
While a koala slumbers oblivious to the celebration.

Warm air currents transport a convoy of yelping,
A lonely kelpie crying for its master.
Metallic caterpillars ruminant pure earth,
Reverberating drumbeats of mechanical percussion,
Boundary markers standing to attention.
Yellow flags saluting a new feudal lord.
Land for Sale
Suburb!

Judges comments:

The strength of this poem is the way Hayden has juxtaposed his two verses emphasising the links but also the contrasts to what is happening in this world that we humans share with others besides our own species. The first verse tells of a place in its natural state where fairy wrens, kangaroos, cockatoos and koalas live in their gum blossom kingdom. The second verse describes this same place being bulldozed to create a place for humans to live. There 's a sense of ruthlessness about this destruction of the gum blossom kingdom that's hinted at by the boundary markers standing at attention and the yellow flags saluting the new feudal lord. This is a poem with a message that is delivered in a clever, satisfying and richly descriptive way and we especially love the tying up of the whole package with the skilful use of the words Superb and Suburb. Excellent work, Hayden.



*Where is Gran now?
Well she's chasing rainbows,
To infinity above the yonder.*

dorothea machellar poetry awards 2008

Winner, Lower Primary

Rory Burg, 8 years
Kingswood College, VIC

The Red Lion

Red Lion rests, luminous in cloud kingdom.
Scarlet eyes flickering in smouldering sunset skies...
He drifts on crystal ice creams
And silver slinking continents
Of Serengeti sand.
His clan are mixed up monsters
Meteors, machine monkeys of my imagination.
A rasping, ravenous roar shakes baking ground,
Famished the fiendish family
Prepare to pounce on the bush below!
A flash of bloody clawa shred
A black hole sky.
Red Lion leaps on frightened leaves
And they are gone,
Blood to flame.

Through a mottled midnight moon
A mountain wakes, sparks trickle like water
Dripping from Red Lions glistening fangs.
He chokes trees like zebras!
His claws are pyroclastic clouds!
A magnificent feast!!
He races the inferno
He is the cloud tsunami
And the bush is his prey!

Nothing is left, after he has gone.
Except the ash; the wind's friend,
Drifting up on silky feet
To join the Red Lion...
Once again.

Judges comments:

Rory writes with an exuberance that embraces all the senses and races them along on a wild ride that is both frightening and exhilarating and consumes as completely as an awful forest fire.

The vivid imagery of this poem about the devastation a bad bush fire can cause shows Rory is a writer who loves words, the way they look and the way they sound. He has an ear for the inner rhythms of each word and he knows how to use them to create an effect such as when he describes the Red Lion's claws as being pyroclastic clouds.

The skillfully repeated use of the clow sound helps build up tension. And it's this pace and tension of the poem that is such a clever reflection of the speed and terror of a fire that is as destructive as a hungry, rampaging lion. This is a breath takingly brilliant poem. Well done, yet again, Rory!



*He races the inferno
He is the cloud tsunami
And the bush is his prey!*

Runner-up, Lower Primary

Catherine Young
Redeemer Baptist School, NSW

Sugar Glider

Stretching pockets of skin,
Grey soft fur,
Like down.
Small leathery nose,
Twitching.

Scampering, leaping,
Then glides,
On its parachute of skin.
Swooshing, grabbing
The bark,
Four feet bragging,
Safe.
Cautiously then swift,
Strongly landing and,
Dashing through the wind.
Near the clouds.

At the touch of dark
In the dusky night,
Joyful.

Judges comments:

This lovely poem doesn't use clever words or startling imagery to create the sense of the happiness a sugar glider must surely feel as it swings and glides through the trees. However, Catherine uses clear, concise language that has a good sense of rhythm to convey her well observed impressions of the actions of one our nocturnal native animals. The writing shows flashes of brilliance. We particularly loved the image created of a sugar glider grabbing at the bark and its four feet bragging when it knows it's safe. Good work, Catherine!



2008 poetry awards

Winner, Learning Assistance Primary

Drago Kalinic
Katherine School of the Air, NT

Barramundi Dreaming

Barramundi Dreaming

With silver, metallic, lustrous, golden, balancing fins.
Shining so dazzling, bright –
Golden, orbit eyes as big as the moon.

With scales so aligned –
Swimming,
Agile.

Hunting julby, mugear and mandunder –
beneath the crystal, clear, reflective, cobalt, spring
Water.

Suspended –
Resting under spiky, evergreen, shady pandanus –
Living at te edge of the woubeta.

“Jaumar the water snake”
out fishing –
waiting...
expectantly,
in harmony –
and content.

Smells of the tea tree charcoal cooking –
Fiery smoke wafting,
Dreaming of tasting sweet, fresh, soft noongala.

Judges comments:

The title says it all because there is a hypnotic, dreamy rhythm about this poem that's been created cleverly by Drago's use of multiple adjectives such as when describing the fins of the fish. He says they're silver, metallic, lustrous, golden and balancing. He also applies this same technique when describing the spring water saying it's crystal, clear, reflective and cobalt. When read out loud as all good poems need to be this list like and almost repetitious way of writing is rather likes waves lapping at a shore. Also his use of aboriginal terms and names gives the whole poem a timelessness that seems to link past, present and future in a way that only can happen when dreaming.

Winner, Community Relations Commission (NSW) Award

Rory Burg
Kingswood College, VIC

For the best poem highlighting the value of
cultural diversity within the
Australian community

A Painting of the Universe

In my Dreamtime heart
There is a boy like me.
Red desert dust between his toes
In the gloom of outback sunset

He sits in chestnut sand.
His chocolate skin glows
In moonless starlight
Of an expanding universe.

Memories of Corroboree Chorus,
Stomp and stamp inside his soul.
The dreaming visions of a murky cave
Come down from black hole night.

Fingertips stroke the stones silver surface
Opal jewels of the universe shine at him,
Colours of never-ending beauty.
His spirit is lost there, waiting forever.

We sit together; 2000 years apart.
The same meteorites cross a shining sky.
Gum trees burn and wattles bloom.
And he is not forgotten.

Inside an opal cave
My friend's imagination lies
Like a Dandenong breeze
Or the peppermint taste of rainforest.

We hold hands in ginger sunset skies
And meet in bronze storms on Jupiter.
My ancient brother will always live
Inside me.

Judges comments

The amazing thing about his poem is that it creates a sense of community, not only across race but across time and places humanity within the extraordinary mysteries of the universe.

The maturity of this poetic young voice amazes, and totally belies his years.

Runner-up, Learning Assistance Primary

Lucy Raffaele
Bungendore Public School, NSW

Kangaroo Day

Ahhhh....the sun
Warming up
Nibble nibble munch munch
Yummy grass
Bounce bounce bounce
Boing boing boing
Nibble nibble munch munch
Box box boom boom
Wrestle wrestle
Munch munch nibble nibble
Ahhh...snooze
Sun high in the sky
Ahhh...sun going down
Bounce bounce
Nibble nibble munch munch
Yummy grass.

Judges Comments:

A sense of freshness and originality are the first impressions when reading this delightful poem about a day in the life of one of our iconic Australian animals. Because kangaroos are one of our favourite creatures creating a poem that doesn't use clichéd images and ideas isn't easy so Lucy's done a great job with her fun but apt description of what a kangaroo does in a day. We also like the title very much. Wouldn't it be fun and so yummy if every day was Kanagaroo Day for all of us?

Winner, Special Education Senior

Elizabeth Smith
Home School
Pennant Hills, NSW

Malicious Subtext

You're funny, you're so, so, so, so
Funny.
You know that?
I could laugh out loud you're so
Funny.
I could fall to the ground in violent fits of hysteria
Twist your words around my little finger, laughing all the
time.
And you would stand there, your face, unchanged,
unmoving.
Shock filling your veins, flowing down your body,
Bringing with it a milky haze that would freeze you solid.
But I don't.
Instead, I let you put your arm around me, let you kiss
me.
Let you squeeze my hand tight, s we watch the
remainder
Of an old 1970.s horror classic, in an abandoned
cinema.
Yummy grass



*With scales
so aligned -
Swimming,
Agile.*



dorothea machellar poetry awards 2008

Runner-up, Special Education Senior

Alexandra Smith
Home School
Pennant Hills, NSW

ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis)

Morning again,
And I am waiting for
My body to
Perhaps, maybe, decide
That today
Is a day, where
I can go
And do
Something.
And stop being nothing
Like the lint in your pocket
Or the paint on the walls;
Peripheral,
And motionless,
And silent,
Almost.
But crying out
Inside.

I must escape.
Escape from madness
Known as four walls
And known as four sides
Of my bed.
My bed, which I know too well.
That I hate, and love and am pathetically grateful for.

If I walk out of here,
My house and my room, and away from my
problems
I'll go down, into the green
And wait for everything inside me to stop
And listen to things that people are saying
Echoing from far away.

If I walk down, past the street out of here,
Through the artificial paths and roads and houses
and telephone wires,
I can disappear amongst the trees.
And no one will ever find me,
And I will be free.

Schools' Awards

Winner Redeemer Baptist College
North Parramatta
NSW

Runner Up Hobart College
Hobart
TAS

Special mention to the following schools for their quantity and quality of submissions:

Katherine School of the Air - Katherine NT
Mayfield East Primary School - Mayfield NSW
Mowbray College - Melton VIC
Mary Mckillop College - Kensington SA
Pymble Primary School - Pymble NSW
Billanook College - Montrose VIC
Arden Anglican College - Beecroft NSW
Distance Education N.S.W - Newtown NSW

Project Officer's Report - Helen Green

Members of the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society were once again pleased with the number of entries submitted in the 2008 poetry awards.

It was wonderful to continue to receive entries from so many schools right across the country, and impressive to note that our competition is available to all children from the largest cities to the most remote areas of Australia. This year we were very pleased to see an increase in the number of entries being submitted on-line. While most entries still arrived via the post, the Internet provided a fast and efficient means for lodging nearly 1400 entries. The website also provides teachers' notes, writing tips and judges' criteria.

Students who submitted poems in previous years and those entering for the first time tackled this year's suggested theme of 'Forests, Feathers, Fins and Fur' with gusto. We also received many wonderful entries on other varied and inspirational subjects.

On behalf of the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society, I would like to thank our judges, Prue Mason and Sue Gough who again demonstrated their dedication and ability to take up the challenge of sorting through and assessing the thousands of entries received.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to our funding partners, in particular the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. This support and commitment has allowed the poetry awards to continue to grow. Our link to National Literacy and Numeracy Week also adds significant value to the competition. I would also like to thank Gunnedah Shire Council, BHP Billiton, Namoi CMA and QantasLink for their continued and invaluable support.

A special thank you to all the teachers who continue to inspire and ignite imaginations through teaching and discussing poetry in the classroom and who encouraged their students to participate in these awards.

Last but certainly not least, congratulations to all the students who submitted entries, and in particular to the winners and runners-up for writing such memorable, creative and beautiful poems.

Judges' Report - PRUE MASON and SUE GOUGH

When the boxes that held over 7,000 entries for the Primary section of this year's Dorothea Mackellar national poetry competition arrived on my doorstep they were so heavy they landed with a thud.

But it was wonderful to know that inside those boxes were hundreds and hundreds of poems written by children from all around Australia. What was even more exciting for me was to know that inside those boxes I would find some incredibly sparkling gems and, after days and days of digging through the piles of poems, I've not been disappointed.

The hard part was making the piles smaller. And smaller.

The ones that I kept in the smallest pile of all were the ones that made me feel excited when I read them because they were the ones that showed an originality or a fresh way at looking at a subject or used amazing imagery and that also told me a story or gave me something to think about.

I also love a sense of rhythm in poems and this doesn't mean just on the end of the line. Poems can rhyme in the middle as well and this is done using similar sounding words. Most of all though the ones I kept were those that made me want to sing or dance or maybe even cry quiet tears.

This is what terrific poems do - they work on your emotions and reach right into your heart. These young writers, I hope, will be our future poets and people who will continue to write with passion and courage and integrity and speak out as thinkers of the world.

Overall though it was wonderful to see so many children show such sensitivity and an awareness of their world. It makes me feel very optimistic knowing the future of our planet is in your hands.

I would like to make special mention of a few of the schools that obviously have brilliant English teachers who are nurturing young talents.

Although entry numbers were down this year, we still saw some excellent poetry.

It is particularly encouraging to see the evidence of some wonderful English teachers who have been able to take their students beyond the realm of doggerel and into the difficult terrain of abstract thought, fresh imagery and more difficult conceptual ideas which are best expressed in poetry.

This contrasts strongly with the entries that stated the obvious in inflated language or sacrificed meaning to rhyming (under the misapprehension that this was poetry).

While primary school entries may have benefited from being given a theme, it is interesting to note that at senior levels the best entries were written from personal perspectives or original ideas.

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Besides the Redeemer Baptist College and Hobart College that entered poems of a very high quality other schools include Katherine School of the Air, Mayfield East Primary School, Mowbray College, Mary Mckillop College, Lyneham Primary School, Pymble Primary School, Billanook College, Arden Anglican College and Distance Education N.S.W.

2008 poetry awards



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- University of Queensland Press

2008 Entry Figures

Total Entries	11908
New South Wales	5118
Victoria 2963	
Western Australia	1013
Queensland	1001
South Australia	756
Tasmania	520
Australian Capitol Territory	427
Northern Territory	110
Lower primary	2627
Upper primary	6651
Junior secondary	1834
Senior secondary	682
Learning assistance primary	78
Learning assistance secondary	36



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