

The Winning Poems 2006

Winner, Senior Secondary

Robert Hortle, Age 17
Hobart College, Tasmania

The Wild Side

On the wild side
breakers hurl themselves onto the reef,
flower-strewn graves guard the corridors of time, and
jagged black cliffs buttress the land,
festooned with childhood names;
Merlin's Steps
where a half remembered friend twisted an ankle,
Butterfly Heaven
where homeless people slept, and
Dragon Rock
where we learnt to fly

On the wild side
The sun drowns in the horizon.
Night falls heavily, and sings dead spirits out from their salty earth.
They dance in spindly columns
across the lagoon
to the reefs edge
through the spray.
And they whisper to the cliffs.

On the wild side
daylight is woken by the gulls,
and with the tentative rays come to us,
sunblock-greasy
monsters of the not so deep
In flippers and snorkels
we venture into the lagoon's motherly arms,
and terrify fish for miles around

On the wild side
The beach is harsh
gritty
gravely
shelly
The shells!
The hours spent poring over a ragged shoreline:
sunburnt necks
tired eyes
and sand dimpled knees
And shells, shells, shells by the bucket

On the wild side
there is no silence.
The water roars, and we roar back;
laughter
screams
footsteps.

But as tides change our noise fades;
reminders echo through the cliffs.
The night spirits claim the scraps of sound,
and we are a memory,
dancing with ghosts,
the wild ghosts.
Beneath the moon
over the cliffs
through the silvery mist of salt spume
down the shimmering corridors of time.

Judges' comments

This poem is exemplary for the sheer exuberance of a poet who knows how to wield language, wield atmosphere and make it a joy to read. Again we see in the winning poem a deceptive simplicity which is the eventual outcome of crafting, accessibility of subject matter, original details and a rhythm which indeed carries us along to explore the wild side.

'We venture into the lagoon's motherly arms, and terrify fish for miles around.' The poem explores childhood's forays at the beach and such is the poet's skill that we are beside those children again using our own childhood eyes, experiencing the fantasy and the reality for ourselves. Well done.

Runner-up, Senior Secondary

Emma Hannam
Alstonville High School
Alstonville, NSW

Sugarcane Cinders

I like it best.
I like it best,

When the eating time spirit departs
And some peel from the table,
And some fall away,
Because the clean up spirit arrives.

I fold up the tablecloth,
It scrolls into a fist of roses,
And I steal through the door.

I split
From the house.
Like grass seed ticked
From the husk.

Out there,
The smell
Of sugarcane burning. Sweet as feathers,
And mosquito thick.

Up there,
Among the palm tree,
Scratches of moon,
Watery,
Flicker flicker as the wind
Chafes the fronds.

The tablecloth flaps like a dream in the darkness
It pulls me out and
Looking upwards,
Seeing upwards
I expose my throat to the stars
And all the other plumage of this night
Until the crumbs are taken
And I melt into the house once more.

In the morning.
In the morning,

Eddies of ash,
Graceful as a ruin of web
Tempting the breeze
Sift through the air,
Fragile as heaven,
Crumbles to smudge in my hand.

Judges' comments

Emma provides an access into a world unfamiliar to most of us. With poignant images such as 'sugarcane burning. Sweet as feathers/mosquito thick,' we are invited into a sugarcane landscape at harvest time. Emma uses a domestic routine to provide the backdrop for rich images which are used all the way through the poem:

'I split/ from the house/like a grass seed ticked/from the husk.'
'scratches of moon'

We enjoyed the strength of the word pictures, created in such a way that economy meant abundance of sensory experiences. We could smell the burnt sugar cane. This is what great poetry achieves. Well done Emma.

Winner, Junior Secondary

David Nolan-Isles
The Friends' School
Hobart, Tasmania

A gargoyle's tears

Standing in the warmth and looking out
on the dark shadows illuminated for the moment
by the break in my curtains
as they are pushed aside by my frame.
The cold sheet of glass settles in to a cycle
of fogging up then being wiped clear with my sleeve
and I stare enthralled by the scene outside my window:
the rain, ever relentlessly pouring down
the cluttered and boring front porch
leading to the veranda, varnish peeling away in great flakes
the higgledy, piggeldy pile of shoes
still lying, submitting, where I kicked them off coming home.
The top of our stairs, cluttered with fallen leaves and twigs
the trees, leaning out over the concrete stairs
grappling with each other for a space
while the undergrowth continues to attack the small garden bed
swelling to its full potential and dripping over the edge
only to have its brave attempts squashed by secateurs
time and time again.
The outside light is on, concealed by the side of our house
yet in its warm, soft glow, I see my gargoyle
and in that moment, the rain dripping down its face
takes on a different look
the glazing of tears, flowing down its cheeks
and as my gargoyle sits, heroic in all its glory
yet in that private moment, in that rainy night
shedding its tears
Gargoyle tears.

Judges' comments

This poem gives us a simple scene yet showcases all the very best elements of poetry. Davida evokes the atmosphere through intricate details that flow from one image to another to build for the reader the same sensory outside view that the poet is seeing. For example 'varnish peeling away in great flakes, the undergrowth continues to attack the small garden bed.'

Runner-up, Junior Secondary

Katherine Tobias, Age 14
Moriah College
Bondi Junction, NSW

Backyard

The silver sea is my backyard
The horizon my back fence
The terns and gulls my sparrows
The ragged surf my lawn.

The teeming fish my earthworms
The porpoises my pets
The honeycombed cliffs my rockery
The salt spray my flowers

I lie within these wind-blown walls
Beneath a rising moon
And all nigh long north-south, south-north
Ships mow my vast backyard.

Judges' comments

Stanza by stanza, Katherine demonstrates consistency in her writing which is a hallmark of great poetry. The rhythm and lyricism of her poem can be heard clearly when it is read aloud, in fact the poem asks to be read aloud. Coupled with this is the ability to also provide us with an unusual view of her back yard. Lines such as 'the ragged surf, my lawn' 'the salty spray, my flowers' are stunning gems and we enjoyed Katherine's work very much. Well done.

Winner, Upper Primary

Kate Harding
Katherine School of the Air
Katherine, NT

My bush backyard

There are various ways to
travel around my bush backyard;
a cattle station
in the Northern Territory.

Cantering my bay Galloway
down the kilometre-long, dirt airstrip,
and pedaling my rusty bike
around the large, house paddock.

Bumping up and down
in Dad's dusty tractor,
as we feed
the hungry, cute poddies
the itchy, dry hay.

Gliding through the crystal clear water
of our in-ground pool,
swimming in the humid, bore water
as it fills the new, steel tank.

Floating in the murky, lily-covered waters
of our red-soil dam,
as we watch
the graceful, dancing brolgas
parading among the wattle.

Running with my excited dogs,
dodging them as I go,
or taking them for walks
on countless adventures.

Driving the old, rusty, ute,
changing gears isn't easy!
Speeding off on the red Quad,
revving the throttle,
and chucking it up a gear.

Every day, brings a different way,
to explore my bush backyard!

Judges' comments

The unifying theme of exploring My Bush Backyard was a winning characteristic of this poem. Kate then moves us through the sharp evocative images of the way she does indeed move around her backyard. And what a backyard "swimming in the humid, bore water as it fills the new, steel tank." 'speeding off on the red Quad, revving the throttle, and chucking it up a gear.'

We enjoyed reading about your bush backyard and found the succinct stanzas a real strength and another winning characteristic. Well done Kate.

Runner-up, Upper Primary

Miranda Allender
St Michael's Collegiate School
Sandy Bay, Tasmania

A move I remember

Remembering
A vast backyard of variety and seasons

My alarm clock, a concert of rosellas
Welcomes me to the dawning of a spring day
Sunbeams tickling my face summoning me to play
Hens waddling like little old ladies as I rattle their tin of food
Tulips in multi-coloured beds, a class of smiling faces
Wandering through my backyard of treasures
Fragrances waft on the breeze as I follow their intoxicating trail
Scented daffodils waltz across flowerbeds worshipping sunlight
Sweet smelling jasmine forms clusters of stars strangling the roos
Perfumed blossoms float in the breeze like dancers twirling around me
A startled rabbit bounds past with bunnies, little puffs of cotton
I lie on my velvet, irrigated, carpet waiting for summer

Kookaburra's raucous laughter sharing summer cheer
Blackberry picking and feasts await
While roses blooming, but the prettiest waits till last
The cupola of treetops an umbrella shading against heat
Peacock fanning the air with a burst of colour
Rabbits digging holes to escape the heat
Possum's beady eyes bearing down on me at dusk
A butterfly flutters like a fairy that living in my garden paradise
Floating in our crystal, clear pool watching

A sunset of leaves signals the setting of summer
Spreading autumn's vivid blanket
I bury myself playing hide and seek
Rising early to catch the last of the morning dew
Glistening in the flickering rays of sunlight

Before winter snow and frost paint my playground
Sucking in the elusive air, uplifting, Antarctic blown winds
Huddled in my japara, hockey stick fracturing ice
Mount Wellington backdrop wears a bridal veil
The ghost trees of winter appear
And the flowers sleep waiting to bloom in with spring's return
Swinging, climbing skywards
My rosy cheeks like the peach my orchard
Embracing Hobart

A year later

An eternity
In a place I don't belong

Seasons merge in my Paddington terrace
Endless soaking in heat, humidity and heavy rain
Pigeons flood the air with their monotonous song
Below lizards on rocks sunbaking
My rectangle has no room for dreaming and roaming
Ochre coloured bricks resembling the outback burn blisters to my heels
A parched gum tree with twisted arms searching for rain clouds
Toxic car fumes and blaring horns
Smoky haze warning about the heat
Fragrant frangipanis replace the twirling blossom releasing foreign scents
Beneath a twilight cloud of fruit bats darkness is nearly absolute
A carpet of wandering dew itching my inflamed legs
Temporary relief comes with torrential rain,
Before humidity
For me life has changed

I have crossed a nation
Trapped in another world
In a prison of earthy tones
Unsmiling
Nowhere to swing, run or climb to the sky
My ghostly cheeks raining
Yearning for my past life
When my backyard was a tapestry of seasons

Judges' comments

Miranda has used rich descriptions to portray two very different backyards. Her emotional response to each shines through the sharp images she uses. For example:

'ochre coloured bricks resembling the outback burn blisters to my heels' 'huddled in my japara, hockey stick fracturing ice.' Miranda has provided the reader with two layers of response, one to the images themselves and the other to the personal feelings of place which the word backyard elicits. Well done Miranda.

Winner, Lower Primary

Joseph Hanson
Kenmore State School
Kenmore, Queensland

Grandpa's backyard

When I think of the backyard at my Grandpa's

I see...

Pumpkins lying on the ground waiting to be picked.
Beanstalks struggling to stay up with the weight of all their beans,
Tomato plants with fruit so juicy they need poles to help stand up,
Dare-devil flies that stick to your mouth, your cuts, everything!

I hear...

The tractor chugging along, spluttering as it misses a beat,
The hens announcing to the world they've laid an egg,
Cows mooing against being locked up in the yards,
Dogs barking, as they jump about playfully.

I taste...

The freshness of crisp, crunchy beans,
A sweet, ripe tomato as its juice dribbles down my chin,
The warm creaminess of milk squirted straight from the cow's teats
And the flush, fresh country air.

I smell...

Spilt soured milk mixed with iodine and soap,
The rotting grain spilt by the cows forgetting their manners,
The 'fleshie' smell that is the farm
(all farmers smell like this!)

I feel...

'Shimmery' as I put the machines on the cows teats,
Excited as the wind hits my face
Riding down the lane on the back of the ute,
And the grime on my skin after a hard day's work.

As I go to sleep, the moon shines on the backyard.
I hear peaceful sounds of birds chirping,
Cows mooing gracefully, and
Dogs barking at the moon and each other.

Uncle Peter gets up so early we're still fast asleep,
My brothers stir, waking me up to turn the lamp on,
We talk about the first thing that comes to our heads – usually nonsense!
We try to be quiet,
Then we hear Grandpa getting up for a cup of tea,
At last, it's our turn!

Judges' comments

The exuberance of 'Grandpa's Backyard' confirmed this as the winning poem. There was so much more than a listing of the contents - as readers we were able to experience Grandpa's backyard first-hand through sensory images. This is a backyard wide enough to encompass a dairy farm, yet never once is this spelt out. Instead it is built image by image.

Just listen to these lines: 'the tractor chugging along, spluttering as it misses a beat,'

or 'the hens announcing to the world they've laid an egg.' Well done Joseph Hanson.

Runner-up, Lower primary

Charlie Gates
Chatswood Public School
Chatswood, NSW

The Reef

Living jewels dart through the corals
Emerald, lemon, scarlet and vermillion
A flash of colour, a swooping rainbow
Dancers on a natural stage.

Black and purple thorny predator
Grey lumpen shapes after it passing
Hollow and lifeless
Mourning moonscape.

Judges' comments

Charlie has given us a panoramic view of a reef in two small stanzas. We are shown the freshness of a reef before a predator attacks and then the devastation the predator leaves behind. The last line of each stanza is particularly strong. 'Dancers on a natural stage, mourning moonscape.' Well done Charlie.

Winner Learning Assistance and Special Education Secondary

Robert Kennedy
Camberwell Grammar School
Balwyn, Victoria

My backyard

In my backyard...
There are so many types of land
Desert, forests
It is never bland

Yet to a slug it seems a lot bigger
Across the desert I slither
And into bushland I fearlessly tread
An adventure just to walk through
For we are just...slimy slugs who slither
On a cold and wet winter's day

Birds flutter down to eat us
As we try to slither away
For we are just juicy meals
Of bird's prey

A giant walks over the land
An earthquake!
Chaos
All our hard ant work has come to waste
Our nest has crashed and crumbled then shall break
Yet one objective still comes to mind
Save the queen's life, not mine

The quake getting bigger and bigger
The enemy nearer and nearer
My ant brothers running for the exit
Yet we all know there is no escape
For when the floods come
The damage is done
And we're back to the start again

In my backyard
So many creatures
All of them...wonderful features
I love my backyard.

Judges' comments

Robert has taken an insect's perspective of a backyard with humans as the intruder! Lines such as 'Birds flutter down to eat us/as we try to slither away/for we are just juicy meals/of birds prey.'

Robert has selected one aspect of the backyard and explored that very well. This is the strength of Robert's poem and makes it a well-rounded view of destruction and rebuilding; a constant activity in an insect's life. Keep looking at life's details Robert- another great strength of poetry. Well done.

Runner-up, Learning Assistance and Special Education Secondary

Alex Yu, Age 14
Camberwell Grammar School
Canterbury, Victoria

Backyard

Spring is coming and life starts to strive.
In the backyard, flowers shoot, birds sing, colour explodes.
Excitement is in the air.
Summer arrives, it is warm, the trees are green the grass is thick, the sun is hot and burns the ground.
Bloody red autumn comes stealthily, the wind blows the leaves from the trees, and

the ground is a thick carpet of red, yellow and brown.
Autumn changes to winter, the cold cuts sharp as a knife.
Life in the backyard, silence but a bleak beauty.

Judges' comments

Alex looks at seasons in his backyard using short, active images such as 'colour explodes', 'autumn comes stealthily.' These images start with spring and take us through to the 'bleak beauty of winter.' Well done Alex.

Winner, Learning Assistance and Special Education Primary

Joshua Wood
Redeemer Baptist School
North Parramatta, NSW

Through my window

Through my bedroom window I sit
Looking at the tall Australian gum tree.
Looking at the strong green tree, with
its mottled bark.
Its arms open wide, like a father greeting
his children.
Sitting in his arms are three cockatoos,
Telling each other of their adventures.
Wind blowing through the leaves
Rustling, rustling, rustling
Arms swaying in the wind
Birds safely nestled within.

Judges' comments

We enjoyed the strong metaphor of a tree as a father developed throughout the poem. Joshua has provided us with an authentic voice of his own backyard- a snapshot through a window. We applaud Joshua for his use of specific details like 'sitting in his arms are three cockatoos.' Real details make real action- filled and fulfilling poetry. Well done.

Runner-up, Learning Assistance and Special Education Primary

Kirsten Spencer, Age 12
Living Waters Lutheran Primary School
Alice Springs, NT

What I am

I am kept very clean
Grass covers most of me,
But I have nice patches of red sand too.

I started off very plain,
But Jillie spent lots of time with me,
And had to feed every day with drops of waters,
She gave me new life.

I am well protected every day,
Sometimes my protection keeps things out
And sometimes it keeps things in,

Back when I was young, children always visited me,
They played and enjoyed being with me,
Now they just leave broken toys.

During summer the sun burns my coverings,
But during winter I hate frost bites,
In spring I get all of my new layer back,
But in autumn I get covered up with leaves.

I miss all of the children that used to visit me,
On school holidays when they come back from boarding school,
We have lots of special times again,
Just the kids, their parents and me...their BACKYARD!

Judges' comments

Kirsten has taken the unusual angle of writing from the point of view of the backyard itself and building up to a surprise ending. Each stanza develops the picture of the backyard, beginning with a grass patch. Details escalate as each stanza unfolds and as we complete the reading of the poem we are given the view of a detailed backyard. Well done.

Winner, Community Relations Commission (NSW) Award

Jeffrey Ha, Age 17
James Ruse Agricultural High School
Carlingford, NSW

Cultivarcultura

White gossamer enslave the
Black skinned flies
Within the spider's web,
A mirror reflecting
A myriad of colours.
Meandering vines
Entwine
And unite
The trees,
Beneath which a venus flytrap

Lurks,
Ready to
Devour
The black aphids
Still cowering in fear
Beneath its leaves.

But butterflies flutter among the daisies,
The Japanese cherryblossoms and
The yellow skinned daffodils which
Soak in the chow mein of compost
Nourishing life and soul.
French snails leave slime among
The tomato and basil,
Basking in the warm multifaceted
Rays of sunshine
With its full spectrum of colours.
A concoction,
A rich plethora
Of culinary delights is conjured.
Bellissimo. Tres bien!

Judges' comments

Jeffery has used an agricultural metaphor to write about multiculturalism. It is not overtly expressed, but gathers momentum through imagery like 'the butterflies flutter amongst the daisies' 'basking in the warm multifaceted rays of sunshine.' We particularly liked the concluding imagery of 'cultivating a variety of cultures in our own backyard'. Jeffrey brings the poem full circle to re-read the title again 'Cultivarcultura.'

Well done Jeffrey.