

# The Winning Poems 2004

## Winner, Primary

**Sophie Manion, Age 11**  
**A B Paterson College, Arundel QLD**

### Down Under

From fiery heat and barren ground  
That stretches far and wide.  
Through long, harsh droughts, & cloudless days  
That watch the cattle die.  
Past shearers working long, hard hours  
Dripping their continuous sweat,  
The vast outback is the belly of my land.

Past shafts of light filtering through trees  
That stretch like giants to the sky.  
In the dark realm of singing birds  
Small animals scurry by.  
Below the canopy of luscious leaves  
Ferns carpet the forest floor  
The rainforest surrounds the belly of my land.

On into a concrete jungle  
A whirling mass of grey.  
Past the Sydney Opera House  
Overlooking the harbour by day.  
The deafening horns at peak hour  
The fumes of cars galore,  
The city is the outstretched arms of my land.

Over tranquil gardens of coral  
Where marine life make their home.  
From relentless waves pounding  
A mass of salt and foam.  
Surfers ride the monsters  
Enjoying the thrill of the sting.  
The beaches are the legs of my land.

Into a world of worlds  
From Italy to Spain,  
Everywhere from East to West  
In food, fashion and fame.  
From all the countries in the world  
That create the Melting Pot  
Multiculturalism is the substance of my land.

Australia in all her contrasts.  
From water to the sand.  
Australia is Down Under,  
Down Under is my land.

**Judges' comments:**

Sophie Manion captures the many facets of Australia in her beautifully constructed poem which echoes the spirit of Dorothea Mackellar's My Country. Through a child's eyes we see a joyous tapestry of Australia, from a barren land of drought, to rainforest and beaches, and on to cities and the melting pot of multiculturalism. The way in which the poet has skilfully constructed the poem, bringing all stanzas together by the linking of the final line of each, and her culmination which reflects a personal response, is highly sophisticated.

**Runner-up, Primary**

**Lewis Pascoe, Age 10**

**Jebel Ali Primary School, Dubai U.A.E (now at The Geelong College, VIC)**

**Heaven**

The sea is a cat,  
Pouncing on its prey,  
Only to be dragged back by its owner,  
Claws digging into skin.  
A mountain is a human,  
With each year passing;  
The weight of responsibility grows heavier on its shoulders.  
The weather is a bad mood, which slowly becomes a tantrum.  
The sky is a hotel, allowing clouds to stay forever.  
I see a camel, imprisoned in a tiny cell.  
Tankers near the horizon shatter the picture,  
As they suck up oil, they slowly pollute the sea world.  
A fisherman swims across near us; his days catch on a harpoon.  
Somewhere, a Muslim prays, religion is needed.  
I breathe. Salty, slippery sea air spreads through my lungs,  
Purifying my soul.  
Shark Island lies in the distance, its fin punctuating the sea.  
I listen. Waves belly flop down on the sand.  
The leaves rustle in the breeze.

**Judges' comments:**

From the opening lines, "The sea is a cat, pouncing on its prey", Lewis Pascoe's free verse poem resounds with images and metaphors that stun the reader ("Shark Island lies in the distance, its fin punctuating the sea" and the fisherman whose "days catch on a harpoon") and show that he is acutely attuned to his surroundings. While we clearly hear the voice of a child, looking out at his world, Lewis writes with a sophistication and cleverness beyond his years.

**Winner, Secondary and NSW State**

**Alice Byron, Age 14  
SCEGGS Darlinghurst NSW**

**5, 10 and 14**

5

Stinging winds sweep up long-dead maples leaves  
Along a snow-shoveled cement sidewalk.  
Huddled in your bright purple parka  
With fresh snow

Clinging to the fake fur around  
The collar. And with little mittens  
pinned to the breast pocket, and with your glasses  
Too big for your fat little face

Frosting up with the chills, and with  
Your boots filling with water, from the  
snow melting in them, (Seeped in through  
the socks.), and with

The air so cold that you can hardly breathe,  
Let alone let the happy cries of  
“Mama! Mama!” escape your past cold  
blue-turning lips,

As you race up the front façade stairs,  
Into the house, past the living room,  
Into the kitchen, pinning a drawing with  
“Good work!” and

A gold smiy-face stuck in the top corner  
From your kindy teacher to the  
Refrigerator with a “Q” letter magnet. Mama smiles.  
That’s all she needs to do.

You smile back. You turn around.  
And your eyes light up as you see  
the same snow-flowers that you drew  
are now being caked to the window pane.

10

You’re with your daddy in the early  
Summer on the north-west coast. You  
Just got back from Portland, and Daddy’s

Taking you for a treat.

Jump eagerly out of the little yellow taxi.  
The old Gothic building looms over you, The  
MUSEUM OF HUMAN, NATURAL AND SCIENTIFIC HISTORY  
And, to you, all the greatest accomplishments of  
God and Man

Presented in little glass boxes and interactive displays.  
\$7 ticket for you, \$12 for daddy. You don't wait  
For him to pay. You just race on up the swirling flight  
Of stairs.

You follow the signs, skipping happily in your  
Little buckled-up shoes, (you never really like laces),  
To the dinosaur exhibit. Roar like imagine they would,  
As you stomp upstairs.

The looming dead skeletons stare down at you.  
You stare back, in fascinated horror, as you imagine  
The anachronistic plight of the cavemen who saw the same  
Creatures with skin and flesh.

Then comes the Apollo exhibit. You see the video of  
The "eagle" landing, (you find no such bird), and then scream,  
Cling to daddy in shock, as masked robot men bounce around  
The black & white moon.

You had a nice day in all, but the visions of T-rexes,  
And B-grade movie robots come to life, still mingle  
In your head as a cab with Miles Davis on the radio drives  
You and daddy home at 8.

The later it's nighttime there in Washington. Your dreams recount the  
days events, you are chased by dinosaurs, and then  
carried off by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin to their moon palace  
Where they eat you.

You wake up, rush to the kitchen for some cold milk  
to calm down, and unconvincingly  
Reassure yourself it was all  
A bad dream.

14

Jealousy and insecurity ravage you like distorted  
Hungry wolves every second of the day. You try to  
numb the pain with a kind of  
cold egotism.

You're tantalized by the notion of your so-called  
Intelligence. The taste of supremacy is still  
Fresh and sweet in your mouth, but responsibility  
Is still too hard to swallow.

You're at home in Woolahrah. A note sticky-taped  
To the inside of the door, from mama, says she'll be late home.  
There's some money under the fruitbowl. Go buy  
Some fast food.

7:45pm. Still light. Bats make their nightly  
Migration from the botanical gardens to  
Various places around the city. Vampyrically  
Draining the blood

From planted fig trees in Centennial Park.  
You're feeling so lonely and neglected,  
Though you know you have no right to.  
You're being eaten

By cliches of teenage existential angst.  
You catch a bus to the harbour, and stand,  
And watch as the starving sea gobbles up the  
Last few drops of the day.

Eating some done kebabs and chips, you sit on a  
Convenient bench. The sun has long set, but  
The sky still lingers and remains a familiar shade of  
blue.

Sitting there, third-last day of the hols, you  
Watch the summer fade away. Cast your  
Thoughts back, like a fishing hook  
In the sea of time.

And remember the drifting white snow,  
And the dinosaurs and moon men.  
And other daydreams and nightmares that seemed  
so important then.

**Judges' comments:**

Alice Byron's poem of growing up is an ambitious and well-executed free verse poem which is constructed by piecing together fragments of memorable moments from childhood. Every line is a treasure of clear, detailed sensory images as she takes us on a journey from the wonderment of joy of a child at five, to a girl of fourteen "being eaten by cliches of teenage existential angst."

**Runner-up, Secondary and QLD State Winner**

**Zenobia Frost, Age 15**  
**Clayfield College, Clayfield QLD**

**9th November 2003**

Soft grey dust  
Mixed with charred clumps  
In a small plastic bucket  
In my aunt's trembling hand.  
Unwillingly  
I take that teaspoon  
And scatter death  
To the wind.  
One chunk landing  
Unceremoniously  
At my feet.  
I feel sick inside  
And inconspicuously rush  
To scrub my hands of that death,  
To remove the thought that this person  
Is stuck to my skin.  
To me  
It does not matter who this was;  
This body  
Is just an empty casing,  
That echoes rotting death,  
I hate it  
That the last memory I have  
Of my nana  
Is soft grey dust  
Mixed with charred clumps  
In a small plastic bucket.

**Judges' comments:**

Zenobia Frost touches deep emotions in this free verse poem concerning the loss of a loved relative and the scattering of her ashes. We feel her revulsion, her helplessness and her hatred at realising that the woman she loved has been reduced to a meaningless clump of ashes. This is a mature and moving poem that any adult would be proud to have written.

**Winner, Senior Certificate**

**Naomi Christopher, Age 17**  
**Covenant Christian School, Frenchs Forest NSW**

**Headphones**

We sit silently side by side,

Only move to sway with a rickety old train.  
Outside a constant whispering can be heard  
Of spinning silver discs  
That we clutch tightly in our hands.  
Inside, soulful notes and angry voices  
Scream the songs of our lives  
Through tiny black tunnels seeping into our ears.  
My headphones are a disgruntled, chaotic mess-  
Torn and tattered in places  
From ill and apathetic use.  
Hers are two neatly ruled lines  
Hanging vertically from her ears,  
Meeting in her lap in the tight embrace  
Of a sophisticated tiny bundle.  
As I sit, I contemplate.  
The state of our headphones  
Mirror the state of our lives.  
Mine.  
A distorted disruption of order  
Fringed with fraying threads of  
Dysfunctional boyfriends  
Failed expectations  
Unfinished cigarettes.  
Hers.  
Pristine perfection.  
A life filled with neatly folded sweaters  
Straight A report cards  
Freshly packed lunches.  
I take the time to wonder  
Why?  
Why did my cart ramble off the rails,  
Plummeting down into the hill of depravity?  
Somewhere along life's journey  
I took a detour-  
The wrong one so it seems.  
I wonder why  
I didn't notice where I was going?  
I was seduced by the thrill.  
Blinded by the bright lights.  
Loved the feeling of the wind  
Viciously blowing in my hair  
As I speedily zoomed down  
This twisted, broken down roller coaster.  
I loved it a bit too much.  
I scream out to her-  
Desperate, undignified cries  
But she doesn't hear me.

I'm sure one time, not long ago  
We weren't so different, her and I.

We might have laughed at the same jokes  
Cried during the same movies  
Played with the same Barbie dolls.  
And I'm sure we still dream the same dreams  
We both dream for hope.  
Hope in this forsaken shrivelled mess  
We're forced to live in.

And to look at us now-  
You wouldn't be able  
To tell our lives apart.  
We sit adjacently,  
Our faces expressionless,  
Bodies motionless  
Besides our rhythmic rumbling  
To the rattle of a train.  
Both listening to our Discmans,  
Both awaiting the same destination.  
The only thing that separates us  
Is the state of our headphones.

**Judges' comments:**

Naomi Christopher's poem is a study of two young women sitting side-by-side on a train, the state of their respective lives weighed up by the state of their dangling headphones – one chaotic and distorted, the other hanging like “two neatly ruled lines”. Carefully constructed, with memorable lines and poetic devices such as alliteration, rhythm and internal rhyme, Headphones touches on the confusion of youth, and the regret for choices made – “why did my cart ramble off the rails?” We, the reader, may well look at our own lives and ask these same questions after reading this thought-provoking poem.

**Runner-up, Senior Certificate & TAS State Winner**

**Amy Tritton, Age 17**  
**St. Michael's Collegiate, Sandy Bay TAS**

**The Echidna**

I saw an Echidna cross the road.  
I waited and waited as he wobbled and  
Toddled over the black stream,  
Oblivious to the hollering cars.  
A ball of razor-sharp caramel spikes,  
With wee black droplets of ink for eyes.  
He scuffled on that road for ages,  
Determined to reach his destination.  
His long hoary snout wisely sniffing  
The bitumen, sensing the tang of ants.  
Beneath the quills on his back

Was a thick, bushy fleece. Russet in colour  
Like the fur of a teddy bear. I felt  
Like scooping him up and cuddling him.  
When he reached the other side  
He stopped. Why? I wondered,  
Why stop now? And then I saw it.  
A heap of brown like an old towel dumped  
On the bathroom floor and red –  
Blood red.  
I watched him curiously circle the clump  
Of fur and spikes drenched in crimson.  
Looking into those tormented beady eyes  
I sensed his pain and heard his small  
Sighs of hurt and complaint.  
His slender tongue lapped a sample  
Of the raspberry syrup. He shuddered and withdrew  
He nudged the neglected soul  
With his nose, but no paw responded and no  
Heartbeat was heard. Inching closer he felt  
No warmth.

**Judges' comments:**

An observing narrator recounts a simple story, that of an echidna crossing a road. In the telling, simple language is used – sometimes with flashes of imagery and occasionally with full and half-rhyme. The slow, steady movement of the creature underscores the way in which humans regard animals and builds a certain expectation: however, the powerfully understated last lines which conclude with: “Inching closer he felt/no warmth”, leaves the reader charged with emotion for the plight of the echidna as it nudges the remains of one of its own, and also for the person who has witnessed the poignant drama. Amy has constructed a small masterpiece of pathos.

**VIC State Winner**

**Jiaying Zhang, Age 15**  
**Fintona Girls' School, Balwyn VIC**

**Firecrackers**

In quilted pyjamas and slippers  
I rushed down the endless flights  
Of a seventeen-floor Shanghai apartment  
The patter of my footsteps muted  
By firecrackers outside  
Each thunderclap exploding in my ears  
Echoing through my head before  
The next one struck.

I passed barred doors

And windows dimmed by fluorescent lights  
Long trails of mingled smoke  
Of cigarettes and incense.  
It's cheap communist charm!  
This is where the patriotism for the motherland  
Pushes mothers into their cells  
Whilst pushing soldiers out of their mothers.

But for a moment I thought I saw  
Willow branches tapping the surface of ponds  
Against an opulent moon.  
Ancients trunks, twisted in broken beauty.  
Mists lingering in jaded mountains  
With rivers creeping in between;  
The gushing waters  
Carrying rickety boats.

The thought lingered for a moment  
But I ran away from it before  
My mind got washed away.  
I continued, panting  
Rushing down to greet  
Our last thread of identity  
Lit by the flame  
Of a New Years cigarette lighter.

As I reached the last step  
Night came alive  
Illuminating the shadows  
In rapid blasts  
By the ferocious chain of clanging –  
Each stick of red gunpowder  
Erupting into thousands of sparks  
Wisps of smoke  
And burnt charcoal.

### **WA State Joint-Winner**

**Anna Dunhill, Age 15**  
**St Hilda's Anglican School for Girls, Mosman Park WA**

### **Meditation on the properties of water**

i am seeing you  
as if  
through water     floating  
vaguely unsolid

you are  
detached

and this is what numbs the touch  
of your hand always warping my vision (as happens  
so soften in dreams) but an act of violence  
is weakened more than an act of love

yes i feel you blurred

am i also in the water can you see  
me

does the motion of my hand (dragged  
through fragile bubbles arm raised floatingly) mean  
anything to you

are we perhaps drowning together  
and who will save whom you are the better swimmer  
but tired i think  
for you have rescued me before or do i flatter myself

is it that you (like me) have surrendered  
or is it that the water itself is drowning  
and us with it

do not fight the current  
drift hold my hand

hold

me

**WA State Joint-Winner**

**Caitlyn Vigus, Age 6  
Kingsway Christian College, Darch WA**

**wot is love**

Love creeps up and hugs you  
Wen youre filing sad.

Love is like a kiss wen you are bad.

Love is like a holaday.

Love is kinde.

Love will wrap you tite.

I do not care if you don't  
Buleef me.  
Love is good to hav.

The end of wot is love.

### **SA State Winner**

**Madeline Boorman, Age 14**  
**St. John's Grammar, Belair SA**

#### **Murder in the Dark**

With graceful poise and wings of lace,  
A delicate moth lifts its face,  
Floats and darts at a lofty height,  
Eerily fluttering into the night.

A bat waits to swoop, veiled with gloom,  
Its prey unaware of its lurking doom.  
It hides away from the glaring light,  
Twisting and twirling in dazzling flight.

Silent movements of a silken wing,  
To the ears of the bat, a piercing ring.  
A sudden swoop, a swift descent,  
The hapless moth's short life is spent.

The wind is still, the night serene,  
The moon shines down on the murder scene.

### **ACT Winner**

**Madeleine Boxall, Age 9**  
**Canberra Girls' Grammar School, Deakin ACT**

#### **Dragon Dance**

A fireworks display surrounds the open air,  
While a red, ancestral dragon swirls around me  
here and there.  
The smell of cooking rice and sauce makes my blue  
eyes shine,  
While adults stand at a distance, talking and  
Sipping wine.

I step through the dancers whirling 'round and

'round,  
And dance into the festival that has a joyful sound.  
Then retiring from the midnight dance I make my  
lantern fire,  
It sways around my head; the side held up by wire.

So after the dragon's dance – a parade starts  
through the streets,  
Once around the town square then both end start  
to meet.  
This time of celebration shows our special unity,  
the way our country joins together in sources of  
serenity.

### **Northern Territory Winner**

**Morgan Hartley Richards, Age 16**  
**St. Phillip's College, Alice Springs NT**

#### **“A glint of sun....” (Untitled)**

A glint of sun  
at the end of a shining steel rail  
catches his eye.  
The voices of his friend,  
the indifferent glances of passing pedestrians,  
lie muted at the back of his mind.  
The fiery shards of pain in his wrist,  
the shallow rapid breaths.  
These too have escapes his world.  
Even the insistent clatter of the wheels against the crooked pavers  
is drowned out  
by the roar of concentration.

The rail nears.  
He hardly notices  
as his back foot slams the tail of the board  
in to the ground.  
The sound of Canadian maple  
striking rough concrete pavers.  
His feet drag upwards against the board  
levelling it out as he gains height.  
The board rises over the rail,  
hovering.  
Time stand still.  
Then, with a war cry of rushing wind in his hair  
he descends.  
Like an eagle he swoops,  
unbeknownst to his prey.

With all the fury  
of the first clash of swords in a desperate duel,  
his trucks hit the rail.

The people are interested now.  
Gathering around,  
amazed,  
at the boy riding his skateboard  
down the handrail of a set of twelve stairs.

The rail resists his grinding trucks less now.  
Its spirit nearly beaten.

He glides along  
the rail.  
mind,  
body,  
and spirit.  
Focused on the rail's end.

The designer of this rail  
may have thought that the kinked end  
was a stylish fine'  
a delicately shaped, yet sharply dipping bend  
to an already fine piece of work.

The skateboard, however  
knows better.

He knows that the half-foot  
of gleaming metal,  
the upturned nose of a proud noblewoman  
will mean the difference between victory  
and defeat.

Suddenly

His balance is thrown.  
Equilibrium stolen away  
By the small rounded head  
Of a bolt protruding from the rail.

Perhaps the architect's trademark addition to all his work  
Or maybe just a little joke.

The rail laughs, sensing victory.  
The assassin's dagger  
plunged deep into the back  
of the would-be hero

He can feel the poison of distraction  
flowing through his veins.  
Upward into his brain.  
Doubts,  
fears,  
anxieties,  
ripping and tearing at  
control,  
balance  
and purpose.

However, he is not beaten so easily.

Like the hammer of a paladin  
righteously smiting the forces of darkness  
the desire to succeed  
drives out all else from his mind.

The small crowd gathered  
watch in silence as the board gives a precarious  
wobble,  
inwardly gasp.  
sigh of relief  
a balance regains control.

He rides the kink to freedom  
soaring out past all expectations.  
Comes to a crouch at the moment of impact.  
A welcome from the blessed earth.

Rolling away,  
propelled by the cheers and whoops of friends  
and the clapping hands of people he doesn't know,  
and his own achievement.

Behind him,  
the rail lies still,  
conquered.

**Winner, Community Relations Commission (NSW)**

**Caely Stevens, Age 11  
Strathfield South Public School, Enfield NSW**

**Colours**

I can feel  
the coolness of the monkey-bars beneath her hands

and the thump of the soccer ball hitting his foot.  
I can smell  
his worn, dirt stained sports t-shirt  
and sweat falling down under her nose.  
I can taste  
the sweat dripping onto her tongue as she opens her mouth  
and the grass in his mouth as he gets up from the ground.  
I can hear  
his heartbeat pumping as he runs  
and the shouts, cries and laughter of children  
echoing over me,  
as I sit, watching, drinking it all in, storing in my mind what  
I can see –  
A rainbow of children, not caring what country  
the others are from; coming together  
to enjoy life, celebrating  
freedom.

**Judges' comments:**

Caely Stevens' sensory poem evokes the spirit of the playground; children everywhere with the poet "drinking it all in". Caely eloquently brings to the page the joy of those she sees. They are not black or white, Greek or Chinese, but "a rainbow of children", who celebrate their freedom. This is an understated, warm and wise poem.

**Best Overall School**

Chatswood Public School, Chatwood NSW

**Judges' comments:**

This school's entries demonstrated a high overall standard, an indication that its teachers are working with students in developing poetic language and encouraging them to think about different ways of skilfully expressing their ideas in a range of different subjects.