

The Winning Poems 2007

Winner, Senior Secondary
Robert Hortle, 18
Hobart College, Hobart Tas.

The Old World

Papa is
uncomfortable
in his old man shape.
Tinkering
salt cured hands
twitch for
wire to solder,
rope to lap,
metal to twist.

Papa stopped smoking.
The old pipe
stays on the bedside table, and
the greasy smell
stays in
his clothes,
his paper bag face,
his waterproof hair.

Papa
kept the sea,
sold the boat,
kept the stories,
sold the boat,
kept the sea
in a blue knit jumper
and a roving telescope –
water
trickles into the lounge room,
yachts sail past his chair.

Papa knew the man
who could swallow wine glasses,
who floated naked down the river,

who ate a car – one spoonful
at a time.
We believed his
murky eyes, his
wheezing roar.
But mum looked
Skep-tik-al.

Papa surveys the old world
From his armchair,
spinnaker set.
He doesn't believe
in email.

Judges' comments

Robert has mastered some of the most difficult poetic crafts: the marriage of emotion and rhythm. The magic of poetry at its best is that it is able to crystallise an idea and, through that marriage of emotion and rhythm, and clever repetition, allow it to flower into something that moves the reader. This is exactly what Robert achieves. It is significant that Robert never strays into grandiose language ornamented by adjectives. His words are simple but translate his clever metaphors into ideas and pictures that make you catch your breath. There is something else apparent in his writing. Where many other young poets stray into melodrama, angst and darkness because they can "milk" it for effect, Robert remains grounded in simplicity, and in doing so he celebrates the miracles of everyday life with both humour and love.

Runner-up, Senior Secondary
Sophie Clark
Ogilvie High School, New Town Tas.

Pollock

Caked alabaster,
Textured like bird droppings on
struggle-worn hands.
His skin is wild animal hide,
Gripping, thrashing, splattering,
Deceitfully chaotic,
He tracks the canvas,
Shoulders hunched,
Eyes tight and piercing as an eagle,
Desperate to feed its young.
Always one step ahead of his prey.

Stick for a paintbrush,
Splintered and precise,
like the contents of a grandfather's
shed.
Hovers above,
Teasing,
Taunting,
Gravity's will.
The stick never touches,
Just guides.
Tempting gravity's bond,
The canvas succumbs as it always
does,
Like an exhausted bull to sleep.

Strong as the steel of a samurai
sword.
His stick cuts and slices.
He massacres the colours,
The canvas is merely the ground
beneath the victim.
He wears the violence on his leather
shoes,
He wears the violence on his mind.

"A real broken cowboy, that Pollock."
They snigger,
Sucking down tobacco,
Laughing like hyenas,
Laughing like throat cancer.
"A walking icon, that man."
With his very own Jimmy Dean

swagger.
Jackson staggers on.
Trips along,
Whipped raw by yesterday's
heartache,
It's a long pilgrimage,
Shame no one told him,
To bring water,
Not wine.
Still,
Everybody loves a car crash.

Lee warned him about it,
Krasner, that is,
Warned him about getting caught up in
it.
Bottles, bottles, bottles,
Down his throat,
Down the sink,
When she could.
Lee's gone now,
Her psych warden smile couldn't
sustain,
Less painting than bottles.
He's gone now too.
Like all the real cowboys.
Pollock.

Judges' comments

This is a poem that is both sophisticated and crackling with energy. Sophie has recognised the power of the verb to create an action poem that brilliantly parallels the chaotic painting technique of the great American artist and his dissolution. She captures the raw, unstoppable drive that gave him both his talent and his downfall. We see the paint flying off the artist's stick and onto the canvas as an act of violence. The language is laconic, ironical, tight and surprising. The clever use of enjambment leads the reading eye into suspenseful pauses before carrying us forward into phrases that explode off the page.

Winner, Junior Secondary
Edwina Murray, 13 years
Taroona High School, Hobart Tas.

The city, come 5:30

A sky like the sea
Broken with grey
A smoking, desperate city
Jutting up into the day.

A small bag on my back
My little hand in his
He took me
To see all of this.

Wild city streets
Tangled like hair
Overpasses, roundabouts, bridges and
stairs.
Vacant, driven people
Completely unaware.

Strung and woven through the streets
Are the powerlines.
But how do they keep
The city from falling into the sky?

Through streets
Smokey traffic streams.
Seagulls coo and rasp,
While below the tyres scream.

A thin, scribbly train
Sprayed and tagged with names
Filled with dirty-green lino seats
Snakes its way through the streets.

Click-clack
Click-clack
Click-clack
Click-clack
Its feet bound to an endless track.

Then one after the other
Two
Three
Four
Heartless paper-chain businessmen

Unfold out the door.
My dad does this; every day!

Neon lights burn bright
Red, yellow, and white
Busy Chinatown light.
'Come eat here!'
'Good food-dine in!'
Golden dancing dragons
Watch the New Year begin.

'Just a bit of change'
'A bit of change –'
'change'
His shouts turn to whispers
His begging arms drop to the floor
His words aren't questions.
He's the small change of the city –
Weathered and worn

And we walk
And watch
As those who are left
Are swept up
And thrown out –

With the night.

Judges' comments

Point of view is the critical factor in this poem about the city. Seeing it through the eyes of a small girl, hand in hand with her father, we see it as if for the first time. The barrage of images coming at us all at once is almost overwhelming. It is a world of contrasting sounds and confusions that the child must make sense of. And she does, poignantly, by focusing finally on a homeless man begging for change. All the sensory input of the environment becomes dwarfed beside the reality of what the city does to human beings. The writing has a deceptively childlike simplicity but the accumulation of simple lines, some only one word long, some consisting of nothing but a sound, build into a desolate reality.

Runner-up, Junior Secondary
Lewis Pascoe, 14
Kardinia International College, Geelong Vic.

Submarine

A black, razor-sharp knife,
Cutting through the sleeping waters of
the Endless Deep.
A nightmare, diving, dodging, gliding
wherever it wills.
The submarine.

It sinks, it rises.
It glides like a dolphin.
Venomous as a snake,
Lethal as a shark.
Black as night
Deadly as nightshade.
The submarine.

A killing trap,
waiting for the chance
So that it's jaws can close.
A lethal modern killing machine.
It fears only one thing.
The submarine.

It cannot breathe, but holds its breath.
It cannot eat, but sucks through a
straw.
It throws fire, but cannot catch it
Dangerous, graceful, divine.
The submarine.

A gleaming hull,
an eagles perch.

The eye slowly ascending,
Twisting, turning.
Seeking its prey.

But isn't it strange that,
of all things,
it only fears one.
A ping.
A whale afraid of shrimp
A president afraid of a voter
A god afraid of his religion.

The submarine.

Judges' comments

Lewis describes the lurking power of a submarine with ironic grace. This is a poem whose structure may be seen as a metaphor in itself. The lines of free verse are long at the surface, or beginning, of the poem and then shorten as they take us zig-sagging down to its isolated conclusion. Like the submarine, his poem dives through, and then beneath, the obvious similes, to discover vulnerability and paradox. In the final verse we see his original declarations of the submarine's invincibility slipping sideways and out of control and finally reaching the bottom, with nowhere else to hide. An original and beautifully resolved piece of work.

Winner, Upper primary
Elizabeth Waldron, 10
Haberfield Public School, Haberfield NSW

Colours

Esmé Zaffre, widow of the Blue Mountains, lounges in a scarlet seat of velvet
Embroidering vermilion thread through a satin cloth,
Rose by rose.
Outside the window red dust, red sunset sky, red kangaroo behind a tree

At the roadhouse Esmé looks in disgust at the waitress with her rosy cheeks, lipstick
and sunburn, and wonders, wonders, how bad this ochre outback will be.
Later she dreams of opal miners, opal strikes, flashing opal red.

Beryl Smalt of Dismal Swamp, lady of the land,
Strolls through leaf litter, ferns brushing at her hands,
Intertwined branches blocking out the sun.
She weaves through slim slivers of viridescent light,
As vines twine and loop above her head.
Moss blooms on rocks like verditer on a bronze statue.
Saying goodbye to the jade land, travelling where the opal waits.

Beryl and Esmé finally meet outside the bluestone hotel opposite the school.
Children in navy uniforms run to meet their parents,
As adults in denim jeans and chambray shirts babble and drone.

Beneath bluegums a shallow dam evaporates under an azure sky

The ladies share a cuppa in willow-patterned china,
Craning their necks around the hydrangeas and agapanthas in a wedgewood vase.

Together they create an opal of sorts; of red and blue and green.
When they find each other, oh, what a sight, it is a colourful world they see.

Judges' comments

In this poem Elizabeth has created wonderfully colourful word pictures of two larger-than-life characters – ones who could fit around the same table and find much in common with Dame Edna Everage. Esme Zaffre and Beryl Smalt are vibrant and alive and the whole piece fizzes with the excitement of the dazzling and sometimes, startling imagery. Only the last line leaves a slightly jarring note but overall this is an outstanding poem and shows a great sense of originality that is exciting with a lot of promise for the future of poetry and literature in general.

Runner-up, Upper Primary
Sandy Bauer, 9
Katherine School of the Air, Katherine NT

Days in the paddock

Outback, dusty, capsicum, red plains
Mallard, grey, Brahman cattle roaming
free -
eating lush, plantain, green grass
high as the ute's bonnet.
Secret, cave, grey, clouds rain and
rain
producing smooth, boggy, brown mud.
Come the dry season,
nothing but foot prints are left in the
mud.
The sierra, red, desert dries up -
wavy, whispering grass turns to an
elusive, gold color.
Cows give life to their small, sleek
calves.
The manager's duty is to check the
camp.
Mustering the herd -
a domino, black helicopter
yarding up the cattle -
to the steel, rusty, Indian, red yards.
Blowing raw, umber dust -
Peplum, white bellowing calves
Workers branding -
Clanging Indian, red gates
Kidman horses stand patiently.
Charcoal, mist clouds

Winner, Lower primary
Rory Burg, 8
Kingswood College, Boxhill Vic.

Galaxy of sleep

As I fall into the darkness,
I am a ghostly shadow,
Flying like an emerald bird
On my solar wind.
Whirl through midnight milky way...
Star dust heaven.
Ruby apple suns,
Diamond giants with fairy sprinkle rings,

Deep, ocean, blue rain pouring -
Holidays starting
Relaxing, peaceful days in the solar,
burst sunlight
No-one around.

Judges' comments

Dorothea Mackellar, herself, would have been pleased to have created this evocation of outback Australia but the striking feature of this piece is the contrast between the modern images of a 'utes bonnet' and the 'black, domino helicopter' with the seemingly changeless scenery of the outback that Sandy describes quite hauntingly as 'dusty, capsicum, red plains' with 'raw, umber dust' and 'charcoal, mist clouds' where 'Kidman horses stand patiently and 'mallard grey, Brahman cattle roam free'.

This is a poem about place and the deepening love of the land that is now being bred into our bones.

Flap towards black hole a never-ending pull,
My bubblegum body stretches into the rainbow future.
I am a dizzy tornado,
Silver like the wind,
My world moves around me.
Drifting like a luminous pearl ball,
The universe explodes into space,
A stormy brilliant supernova
Warms my eyes as...
Suddenly butter sunshine
Hits into honey crumpets like an asteroid!
I wish you could see,
What I have seen
In my galaxy of sleep!!!

Judges' comments

Rory wishes we could see what he has seen in his galaxy of sleep but luckily for us he is able to describe his strange world using vivid, exciting imagery and fabulous words that sound so good when they're read out loud as all brilliant poetry should be. This is a clever, thrilling poem that delights not only the eye and the ear but touches the soul as well.

Runner-up, Lower Primary

Georgina Clark, 7

Mayfield East Public School, Mayfield East NSW

Monarch Butterfly Net

I've a loom of cardboard it's
White and brown
Thick and strong with
Five strands of string
I began with wool threads
My first colour
Pink
In and out
Of the strings until
It looks like a basket but really
It's a mess so
I'm using gold
And then it will look like a chrysalis.

Judges' comments

The strength of this poem is in its structure because like a butterfly inside its chrysalis it emerges, line by line until the final magical moment of transformation. Georgiana has also cleverly created a rhythm that echoes the weaving process of making her chrysalis which adds to the delight of this charming poem. It should also be mentioned that Georgiana uses simple, everyday language to create her effect and that every word is exactly right.

Winner, Learning Assistance Secondary
Elizabeth Smith, 13
Home School, Pennant Hills, NSW

Pyromania

Abstract thoughts sizzle along its burning horizon.
He's trapped inside its beauty.
Unwilling, unable to escape, to leave its mesmerizing safety.
The home he thinks he knows so well.

Judges' comments

Like all really good poets, Elizabeth is able to distil the essence of a story into a little gem. It is only a four-line poem and yet it accomplishes a great deal with its few words. She manages to convey all the seductive force of an obsession and cleverly hints at how the obsession may turn upon the pyromaniac eventually. Image and meaning are beautifully crystallised. The subtle and enigmatic ending is left for the reader to decode and this is part of the pleasure: we are led to think more deeply about what the poem is saying.

Runner-up, Learning Assistance, Secondary
Alexandra Smith, 16
Home School, Pennant Hills, NSW

Firestorm Whisper

Forever as one, twin intertwined, no more, eternal, the end of all time.
The hours like seconds and warm breaths of air,
They leave me and take me, all without care.
The moon, tinged of crimson, hangs dead in the sky,
The leaves of the trees are dead, so am I.
But the ground of burnt red, like a nightmare or dream,
Could never capture what I have seen.
The dead weight of ash, upon wasted limbs,
Pulls at me, taking, I feel the light dim.
I'm drowning in time, a leaf on the wind.
Soon I will go back to where I begin.

Judges' comments

This poem has the feeling of a meditation that plays with time. In the aftermath of a firestorm we are led to see how destruction is an inevitable part of the cycle of nature. Alexandra writes in a way that is both enigmatic, touching and tinged with hope.

Winner, Learning Assistance Primary
Angela Huang, 10
Abbotsleigh Junior School, Wahroonga NSW

There's an Animal in Me

There's a beaver in me,
Strong teeth to gnaw wood,
A Scaly tail for a rudder,
Webbed feet to swim quickly underwater when enemy attacks,
I keep this animal
To express my intelligence.

There's a shark in me,
Sharp teeth to rip its prey into pieces,
Pointed tail to control it in the water,
Massive fins to make it swim from enemy when being captured,
I keep this animal
To express my viciousness.

There's a butterfly in me,
Delicate wings to fly freely,
Long proboscis to suck nectar,
Thin legs to land safely on flowers to feed quickly,
I keep this animal
To express my freedom.

Judges' comments

This is a satisfying poem not only because it's well structured and has an excellent rhythm and good use of language but it's also got that all important X factor which sets it above the others in this category. The X factor in this piece is the way Angela effectively expresses the three fundamental needs for the survival and well being of any living thing in our world. That someone as young as Angela understands this shows she has a mature understanding of life and it will be interesting to see if she fulfils her potential in time to come.

Runner-up, Learning Assistance Primary
Dakota Lennon, 10
Crossways Lutheran School, Ceduna SA

Jellyfish

Round like a moon
Tentacles like string
Moves with the waves
Gently opens
and closes
Reminds me of a tree.

Judges' comments

A poem is a rhythmical pattern of words that captures an image or feeling. What a good poet can do is make a reader look at a common place object and see it as something precious and beautiful, as through a poet's eyes. This is what Dakota manages to do with just twenty words when she describes a jellyfish. After reading this poem a jellyfish can no longer just be a jellyfish – it becomes the moon and string and a tree. A fabulous effort, Dakota!

Winner, Community Relations Commission (NSW) Award

Evelyn Hicklin, 11
Mayfield East Public School, Mayfield NSW

Colour it like yours

our school's
like most others
except for our Rwandan wall
painted in 1994

because of the war there
triangles and squares of
orange, yellow blue and red

go around the corner and it's
just like any other corner but for
our elephant
an African elephant
painted in the pattern of
orange, yellow blue and red

then in front there's a garden
if it wasn't for the hands it's
like most other gardens
hands of clayterra cotta
made for Sorry Day
some years ago now

in front there's our school canteen
sells food like they all do
but on the outside
there's an image
done by an aboriginal elder

come inside our school
climb the stairs and walk the corridors
it's lined with photographs
of children cooking
in front of Tongan cloths
bark painting tunga bags

further on
a calendar
on it
a drawing of a girl, a

refugee from Africa
from a camp there
she travelled here
and it took four years
to find peace at our school

keep going
walk into our room
just like other classrooms
but then there's the Mexican angel
made for Christmas last
to raise money
for a sponsored African boy

look out our window and there's
the sky
my sky
your sky
everyone's sky

everyone's world
everything's different

but some things are the same.

Judges' comments

This is a powerful poem with a strong message but it's given in a subtle and almost teasing way that is both clever and charming. Written in a free form with little punctuation this is a poem that entices the reader on and on with a new surprise around each corner. It's cleverly constructed so that it does feel like a tour through an interesting school and end of the tour and the poem is completely satisfying. Best of all, the message is as clear as a blue sky day yet there's never a hint of a lecture in this class room.