

The Winning Poems 2005

Winner, Lower Primary

Liam Gerritsen, Age 8
Mayfield East Primary School, Mayfield NSW

Water

there's water
in our classroom
in our turtle tank
and around our ant farms (to prevent escape)
water in the cichlid tank and
the hyacinth jar that has
roots like
spaghetti or white wire
straws to drink, I think

there's water bubbling and
frothing as it
vibrates around the bloodworm
our turtles playing
hide and seek
sometimes
playing dead

then the yellow cichlids
dizzy and darting
as yellow as bananas
as lemon yellow as
sunflowers
daffodil yellow

in between there's a succulent
it leans toward the window
waiting for a drink
doesn't need much water
it's a water saver

then the tadpoles like commas
shaped like mandarine seeds
they cling to lettuce islands

last of all
there's me
sixty per cent water
and like the tadpoles
cichlids, the turtles
and the succulent

I need it to live

like you do too

Judges' comments:

Liam immediately invites us into a detailed, authentic water world. Specific details, originality and sustained energy lifted this poem from the many other entries. We particularly liked the use of vibrant imagery, especially the stanza where the yellow shades of the cichlids are gradually modified. The verbs used are strong and show us the qualities of water in an everyday situation. It is often the strength of the specific that windows the bigger global picture. Specific details, names of animals, plants, sensory qualities, strike and arrest our attention. These make more enjoyable our banquet of poetry.

Liam has used words like 'dizzy, succulent, darting', as well as images such as 'tadpoles like commas', 'lettuce islands', 'roots like spaghetti'. These all contribute a layering of rhythm, a layering of individual voice, which in turn make us sigh with satisfaction and appreciation of a first class poem. Well done Liam!

**Runner-up, Lower Primary
Entry withdrawn**

Winner, Upper Primary

**Samara Flynn, Age 12
Grafton Public School, Grafton NSW**

The Clarence

Fishing boats float like waiting ducks
Tempting jumping mullet.
Overhead a snaking bridge sits in the sky,
Carrying noisy cars and trucks
Logs float by, sea drawn
The golden sun sets in the sky
Fish partying on the water surface
Bats fly in at island dawn
Jacaranda tree melting in the haze
Water reflecting-beauty itself
Ripples go through and wrinkle the jacaranda
And always a rainbow serpent remembers ancient days

Judges' comments:

This poem embodies the water theme, but stood out from the record number of entries at this age level, in several important ways. It is not a random list of water images, but a harmonious flowing of original word pictures about a particular river - the Clarence River. 'The Clarence' represents many rivers around Australia in their role as a hub of human as well as natural traffic. Samara has allowed each image to

ripple across the river's surface. We found the lines 'overhead a snaking bridge sits in the sky,' 'Jacaranda tree melting in the haze,' and 'always a rainbow serpent remembers ancient days' particularly striking and clear winner's lines.

Samara, has achieved unity and flow in this poem which is the hallmark of a great poem. The beginning and closing lines in this poem do much of the unifying and we as readers are left with a second layer of meaning when the poem finishes with 'and always a rainbow serpent remembers ancient days'. Well done Samara!

Runner-up, Upper Primary

Miranda Allender, Age 11
St Michael's Collegiate School, Hobart TAS

As I Sit

Once

I looked out

On a world where water was life and hope

Laughter, fun and games
Flowed through grassy fields
Smiles spread across my parents' faces
Dams overflowed
Corrugated tanks brimmed
As water trickled down the side
Magnificent marsupials with coats of chocolate
Leapt with glee, nibbling on lush pasture
Happy conversation at dinner
Food was abundant and varied
Satisfied sheep thrived on fertile terrain
Lambs frolicked, joyful and carefree
Wildflowers dotted the bushland
Like vivid stars in the sky
I remember picking a velvet flannel flower
And placing it between the pages of my book

But now

As I look out

On a world marked by fears and tears

The sun's blazing rays burn the outback
While the vibrant sky never cries tears of rain
Gums stand on stiffened, sunbaked soil
Once majestic, but now stark

A cracked, clay dam bottom revealed by drought
Hollow, water tanks echoing
Bare feet pattern dry dust that
Sifts through fingers like flour in a sieve
While parched kangaroos with joeys
Seek the canopy of a tree
Solemn sheep in powdery, ochre fields
Feed on shortened tufts of arid, yellow grass
“Fifty cents a sheep,” the auctioneer cries
But a bullet is cheaper
Cheery wildflowers have vanished

I look inside

To a home wrapped in pain

Raised voices echo throughout corridors
Fear in my parents’ eyes
Our farm under death’s veil
Tension and furrowed brows at the dinner table
I go to bed hungry and invisible
Praying constantly for rain
My spirit crushed
Like the pressed flannel flower
I hold in my open book
I have withered and wilted
Like the beauty of its faded petals
Curling in agony in the corner of my bed
Waiting for the sound of pounding rain
And the taste of fresh water
With fading memories of my past world
Where water was plentiful

If only...

Judges’ comments:

This poem tracks the experience of drought through a child’s eyes. It leads us gently into details of first hand experience – shows us first a time when ‘corrugated tanks brimmed/ as water trickled down the side’, ‘magnificent marsupials with coats of chocolate/leapt with glee’.

But as drought strikes, the emotional landscape of the poem as well as the physical landscape changes. We read lines like ‘solemn sheep in powdery, ochre fields’, ‘fifty cents a sheep, the auctioneer cries’.

It is indeed the rich use of details that make this poem award-worthy, so also the repeated motif of the pressed flannel flower. We are left with the poignant image of ‘I have withered and wilted/ Like the beauty of the faded petals’. Well done Miranda!

Winner, Special Education Primary

**Class K/2U, Ages 5-7
Willans Hill School, Wagga Wagga NSW**

Let's talk about water

Let's talk about water
Oh! the water
Water drop
Water spray
Water cold
I need a drink

Let's talk about water
Sprinkling
Splashing
Paddling
Eyes opened
Scared

Let's talk about water
Boy reflection
Boy shaking
Boy wiping
Girl washing
Something wet

Let's talk about water
Uh! Oh! Spilled!

Judges' comments:

This poem was written by a group of 8 students and reflects the theme of water. What we enjoyed about this poem was the different aspects of water highlighted such as the properties of water, the noises it makes, the uses we make of water in everyday life such as reflection, washing. The surprise at the end of the poem was satisfying also. Well done class K/2U!

Runner-up, Special Education Primary

**Anthony Glick, Age 11
Mt Sinai College, Maroubra NSW**

The Surf

The ocean has a crystal blue
The sand is soft and sparkling too!
There are lots of fish, birds and waves
Don't forget your sunblock!

Surf's up man
My name is Dan
I like surfing in tubes
Surfing in tubes is good for you.

I love to stand up on my board
When I see a big wave come my way
I love to jump on my board
Then jump off the back of the wave.

I like surfing because I'm good at it
And it is my favourite sport
My talent.

Judges' comments:

Anthony chose to write about the ocean from different aspects. In the beginning stanza Anthony introduces us to the ocean's attractions, then goes on to talk about his personal involvement with the surf. We enjoyed the colloquial use of 'Surf's up man' and 'don't forget your sunblock'. Anthony concludes his poem by citing his reasons for surfing because this is his talent. Well done Anthony!

Winner, Junior Secondary

**Friyana Billimoria, Age 13
Kingswood College, Box Hill VIC**

Who am I?

I am a migrant

Born in Bombay
Poverty, slums
Plenty of money
Parallel universes

Monsoons flooding the streets
Stifling heat, choking
Overflowing sewers
Cramped sidewalks

Too many people
Too little space

Aroma of greasy fried pakoras, spicy samosas
smells of urine and faeces
smeared on the walls

Stench of dead rats, rotting vegies
Fragrances of rich women hunting for antique furniture

car horns blaring
road rage explosions
street vendors hawking their wares
beggars hurling abuse at passing motorists

raucous bollywood music from ancient radios
mtv playing in the modern bungalows

slums and shanties
as welcome as weeds
naked babies with swollen bellies
women selling their misshapen bodies
drunk husbands rolling in filth
rabid dogs howling

shops open till midnight
selling gaudy treats

High rises blossoming
society penthouse parties
champagne and caviar
moneyed men with no teeth
sleeping with young flesh
other men's wives
fake smiles, kisses in the air

shining swarovski
Chanel and Versace

love of my family
enveloping hugs of my grandparents
cacophony of cousins
all loud in their affection

family celebrations
singing into the night
flamboyant dancing
food of my roots
colour of my culture

Bombay

Contrast
Compare
Conundrum

I lived there

Migrated to Melbourne

First thing that hit me
Freezing cold
Unexpected rain

Forty-degree heat
Hailstorm to boot
What to wear?
T-shirt or suit????

Melting pot of
Culture
Colour
Cuisine

Roast, sushi, pasta, curry?
Ni hao, namaste, bonjerno, oi?
Every language used
Rather confused

Shops closed by five
Only Friday open till late
Sterile, hygienic,
labelled goods
Government approved
Not a cockroach in sight.

Brightest colour denim blue
In the train
Mum shines like a butterfly
Colourful saris, rainbow hues
Tie dyed shawls, dainty bindis

Caucasian freckles
pale dry strands of hair
earthy tones
rich black tresses
olive skin
auburn curls

Saturday evening
meat pies
stubbies
aussie rules
barrack for your team
hurling abuse

people
some have open arms
welcoming

heartening

some cold and haughty
rejecting
spurning

some indifferent
couldn't care less

I have brought with me
Many gifts
Richness of my roots
Brightness of my culture
Burning desire to excel
Commitment to give back

I have brought with me
The greatest gift of all
HOPE

I am a migrant
Foreign
Different
Unique

I am Australian

Contrast
Compare
Conundrum
Melbourne

Home

Judges' comments:

Friyana has made every word work to provide us with a rich and sensory tapestry of what it is like to come from another culture to multicultural Melbourne. As judges we particularly enjoyed such lines as 'raucous bollywood music from ancient radios/slums and shanties as welcome as weeds'. From such sharp words come instant word pictures. A true hallmark of great writing.

In the first section of Friyana's poem we are in the slums of Bombay, we smell the 'greasy fried pakoras, spicy samoas' our eyes take in 'the naked babies with swollen bellies', our ears hear 'car horns blaring/ road rage explosions/ street vendors hawking their wares.' Then suddenly we are 'high rises blossoming/society penthouse parties/shining swarovski/Chanel and Versace'. We are invited to 'contrast, compare, conundrum/Bombay.'

But Friyana's poem begins another evolution: the cultural shock of a new country, a new city, Melbourne. This next image is a real poetic gem 'brightest colour denim

blue/in the train/ mum shines like a butterfly/colourful saris, rainbow hues'. This poem stood out just like that butterfly. Its colour through the rich details, the use of cultural contrasts, the underlying emotion, the sensory word pictures have all worked superbly to produce an outstanding poem. Well done Friyana!

Runner-up, Junior Secondary

Victoria Bartley, Age 14
SCEGGS Darlinghurst, NSW

The locker room

Silent and bare, a parched river bed
Is the locker room.
Listening to the sound of distant rain
Ringing through the air like a bell.

The water returns, flooding and crashing
On dirty cream tiles
It is deep and dark like winter sky, waves crested with white,
Top button undone.

Small crafts bobbing, carried by the strong current
Shunted along crowded tributaries
By white-capped
Blue dresses.

The river flows with restless energy
Scrambling hands pushing
Until finally, the tide turns,
Leaving.

As the last drop leaks away
Through the door,
The walls echo the splash of footsteps,
Then are silent.

Judges' comments:

Victoria has produced a very tight and striking poem. Again the language used is sparing and works with every syllable to produce a poem different in tone and purpose.

We were blown away with the creative use of the Locker room as a parched river bed. Here in masterly execution is one of the greatest tools of poetry, metaphor, of operating on two levels- building an emotion physique for a natural phenomenon.

'The water returns, flooding and crashing
On dirty cream tiles
It is deep and dark like winter sky, waves crested with white,

Top button undone.'

Keeping the two images in constant force was an issue of consistency- this was often an area where many other poems faltered. But not Victoria's poem. Each stanza builds up the tempo and subtleties of why there might be a parched river bed. Until the last stanza, where the noise and 'restless energy' of both the Locker Room and the turbulent river are silent.

Winner, Senior Secondary

Emma Hannam, Age 16
Alstonville High School, Alstonville NSW

Sudden Rain

And there I am.
Brickle-backed and sparkle-necked,
Skirt-soaked and hair-roped and live.
Feet fizzing into the earth – wet and warm –
In this temple I take root,
And tangle with the long, soft worms.
Lacing-intricate through the heaving loam.
Silent, we drink the rain – sweet
And quiver with each manna drop our leaves.
Slowly, slowly in the taupe light

I unfurl.

Quiet and moist-green,
Syrup prickles through my veins and

I extend

Into the Ruwenzori mists my
Tendrils awkward and elegant
Clasping sodden bark. Entwine.
Skin to skin tree to vine
And through this gypsy hold I feel
The humming of clam recall –
A thousand star strokes and wind hours and
Scrawl-footed bird shrills.
Babylon dawns and jasmine dusks
And May showers just like this...
Only,
Long gone now...

Each moment lingers but
Within this year-puckered wood
Time and memory

Throbbing beneath my fleeting palm
My shiver is wanting
Before this Saena tree.

As this great world shifts
With dimness rising,
And cloud-haze breaking
It falls away, now and now
Gone.

Just the smashed egg sky.
The feasting sun.
And
The quiet trees.

Judges' comments:

There is such energy and play in this poem. It was a joy to read. We were delighted and inspired to know that poetry of this calibre is being written and that poetry is in such masterly hands. We have no doubt that this poem would hold its own in literary company.

What impressed us most, besides meeting many of the judging criteria we had set up, was the emotional feel, the rhythm and depth that can only be accomplished when a poet truly uses all the innate tools at his or her disposal. The rhythm is sounded inside that part of your mind that works at a poetic level. It is poetry of the mind, body and soul.

Words are used in the most striking of ways, 'A thousand star strokes and wind hours/scrawl-footed bird shrills' and 'within this year-puckered wood'.

There are many word feasts for the reader here, many changes of tempo, many images to explore, many underlying meanings to unravel, many sensory pricklings, and beneath it all that urgent message of contemporary Australia; water, trees, environment.

Well done Emma! We look forward to seeing more of your work as you evolve and grow as a poet.

Runner-up, Senior Secondary

**Zenobia Frost, Age 16
Clayfield College, Clayfield QLD**

Park Bench

The subtle claws of winter
beckon, stroking my bare skin,
reaching out through autumn into
this patchwork clouded green.

The trees shiver with its presence,
clinging to their leaves.
Morning light refracts through canopy;
luminous, crisp, serene.
'Tis the most complex act of nature
that ever there has been
With a painter's mind I trace
their paths and shadows on the breeze,
and my hands echo verbosely what
the artist's eyes have gleaned.
Crows preach their observations
from atop a soapbox green,
and kookaburras mock them,
hidden deftly from the scene;
heckling and cackling like old men,
and I sit in-between,
beneath the flight of whistling kite
and others yet unseen.

Judges' comments:

Again here is a poem that uses every word, pulls us into the atmosphere of the poem in the spare title and the first line. This is what great poetry should do.

Zenobia has used rhyme to its maximum effect - it does not interfere with the meaning and tone of the poem but enhances and embellishes the flow and impact of every line. The structure of the poem is different to a traditional rhyming poem also- it is complete in one stanza, not broken into couplets. There is a wonderful wildness, 'like a crow', 'like a whistling kite' through the flow of the poem. With an economy of words, Zenobia shows us the contrasts in life, from the 'subtle claws of winter' to 'stroking my bare skin', to 'morning light refracts through canopy, luminous, crisp, serene'. What a delicious choice of words.

Not only does the poet reflect the painterly images seen from a park bench, but nature itself verifies and 'crows preach their observations/from atop a soapbox green/and kookaburras mock them'.

This is a poem that rewards re-reading, another hallmark of a great poem. We can find ourselves on that park bench shivering through the seasons, 'heckling and cackling with the old men', taking in the view 'with a painter's mind', and waiting, 'sitting in between for others yet unseen.' A wonderful, rich poem. Well done Zenobia!

Winner, Special Education Secondary

Patrick Thomas, Age 12
Mackillop Catholic College, Warnervale NSW

Mother

Who is it loves you even before you are born.
Cuddles and nurtures you evening and morn.
Teaches kind words, good manners and to walk without fear.
Your hurts, she'll kiss better every time there's a tear.
She accompanies you proudly on your first day of school
Because only she knows about your high I.Q.
She teaches you morality of wrong and right.
Tolerates your view point, your friends and poor diet.
When you thoughtlessly hurt her, she always forgives with a smile.
For deep in her heart she knows you are worthwhile.
When adulthood brings a life of your own
she hopes you will gain from the seeds she has sown
She'll always love you, encourage you, her prays will not end
And continue in heaven because she is a true friend
Your mother

Judges' comments:

Patrick has chosen a favourite topic to write about but has brought to the subject, his own individualized touches. We especially enjoyed the line 'When we thoughtlessly hurt her, she always forgives with a smile'. He also used rhyme as the structure for his poem and did it with ease and consistency.

Patrick used original details to show the reader the depth of his appreciation for his mother, 'tolerates your view point, your friends and poor diet.' The poem aptly encompasses his early learning life and finishes with a hope for future continued encouragement. Well done Patrick!

Runner-up, Special Education Secondary

Michelle Mico, Age 13
Mowbray College, Melton VIC

In My House

In this house there is no
Drinking,
Joking
Or Smoking,
And I won't put up with
Jabbing,
Stabbing
Or Slapping,
There'll be a punishment for
Wriggling,
Giggling
Or Jiggling,
You'll be sent to your room for
Spitting,
Hitting

Or Quitting,
You'll be informed of your
Bleeding,
Speeding
Or Breeding,
And I don't want to know about your
Steeling,
Peeling
Or Feeling.

Judges' comments:

Michelle has used an unusual stanza formation for this poem which follows a formula for leading sentence and a refrain of action words. The result is a fast moving rhythmical poem. Well done Michelle!

Winner, Community Relations Commission (NSW) Award

Samuel Allender, Age 13
The Hutchins School, Sandy Bay TAS

Roll Call at Bondi Beach

Summer holidays
On Bondi Beach
Like a jar
Of marbles
Emptied on the sand
Rolling into the ocean

A sea
Of multi-coloured bodies
Side by side
On the sand
Surfing, swimming, sunbaking
Mingling as one
Laughing, smiling
Enjoying life
Emancipated

Arabs in hijabs, braving the sea
Americans in baseball hats, voices echoing
Japanese tourists clicking cameras
Chinese and Vietnamese mastering martial arts
English bodies once ghostly, now crimson
Irish jovial and joking in long shorts
New Zealand neighbours, near their second home
French fashionable, stylish and eloquent
Germans wearing Addidas
Greeks and Italians dribbling soccer balls

Africans suntanned with sparkling smiles
Scandinavians chatting in sing-song accents
Aussies bronzed with rippling muscles
Lifeguards in charge

Languages, culture, and race
No barrier for unity
Everyone relaxing
Conversing together
Like the sunlight reflecting
A microcosm of
Our rainbow nation
Through a prism

Judges' comments:

To write a poem that highlights the value of multi-cultural diversity within the Australian community is indeed a challenging task. But Samuel has achieved this effortlessly. The opening image of a jar of marbles rolled on the summer beach is used throughout the poem to highlight the wide range of nationalities that contribute to the 'microcosm of our rainbow nation'.

Samuel adds another layer of complexity to his imagery when the freedom of the beach and summer sun is seen as a symbol of emancipation. For each nationality Samuel gives us one-liners that encapsulate a cultural aspect and its contribution to Australian life. For example: 'Arabs in hijabs, braving the sea', 'Chinese and Vietnamese mastering martial arts'.

The short introductory stanzas widen like a beach scene, to detailed multicultural aspects which then share the common umbrella of 'surfing, swimming, sunbaking, enjoying life'. The construction of the poem, the sustained imagery and the choice of beach setting, all point to a well written, enjoyable and sensitive poem. Well done Samuel!