

2022 My Brother Jack Awards

Senior Secondary School Short Story Award

Judge's Report

Thank you for entering the short story competition. As always, it's a pleasure to read your stories. Each year I see a different set of characters, ideas and themes in the stories.

This year's stories had a diversity of characters including an adored beauty facing the truth of her reality, a character witnessing the town's admiration of his brother going to war, a maiden racked with guilt, a character who found herself in an unexpected destination or did she, and a character lost in a train of thought.

All the stories had something to say. All the stories had tension—the art of story-telling is to maintain tension so the reader will want to read on to see what will happen next.

In a story, I look for:

- a point that matters
- a flawed or troubled character who wants something that's hard to get
- action in scenes I can picture
- a well-controlled structure
- a consistent tone
- clear and visual sentences
- precise and relevant detail and action
- a nugget of emotional truth
- a crisis/low point that forces the character to act and to change
- a satisfying resolution linked to the beginning

Short stories show us how a character copes at a point of change in their lives. The character experiences a crisis. This low point forces the character to act and to realise something new about themselves or their situation. The character has to earn this new understanding and with it, is irreversibly changed.

Write as close as you can to the way you talk rather than how you imagine a writer should write. You can do this even if you set the story in a previous century or in an alternative world.

My biggest tip is to read your sentences out loud. It's an invaluable editing device to find typos and repetition and to hear the voice in the story.

Verbs give life to a story. Too many adjectives and adverbs can be distracting. The expression 'show, don't tell' means to show the actions and reactions of the

characters. Show what happens in the story and how these events and interactions affect the character's actions and thoughts. Let the reader 'see' the story.

Varied sentence lengths add liveliness to writing too. Short sentences can pack an emotional punch.

If you like humour – use it in your stories. Have fun. Story telling is about connecting with a reader and letting the reader see, through your characters, your take on the world. Trust you have something to say, because you all do. I saw that in your stories.

Congratulations for writing your short stories and submitting them to the competition.

Commended

The Macbeth maiden

The story is set in the 11th century, in an asylum in Scotland where the patient, Macbeth's maiden is racked with guilt for the crimes she was involved in, to put Macbeth in power. She longs to be free of her imprisonment. She longs to return to what she believes is rightly hers – the throne. The story's attention to detail lets us picture her guilt and her decision to act.

First Place

My Brother Jack

The story is about two brothers and is written from the point of view of the brother who chose not to go to World War 1. The story opens in the present, when Jack returns from war. The story moves back in time and sets up who Jack was before war. We see everyone's admiration especially their father's, for Jack's charisma and courage. The main character is conflicted. He carries the shame of choosing not to go to war yet is envious of Jack's fraternity with his battalion.

The writing is clear and visual and therefore memorable. The structure works well. The refrain at the beginning repeated at the end carries punch as it brings home the truth of the consequences of war.

- **Annette Trevitt**