

## **Elize Henry-Jones – My Brother Jack Awards Judge's selection and report 2025**

Firstly, thank you to everyone who submitted stories to the two primary sections of this year's My Brother Jack Literary Awards. There were a whopping 240 entries in the grade 4 – 6 section and 90 entries in the Foundation–Grade 3 section. Reading your stories was an absolute pleasure. This year, there were strong themes of social justice, treasure hunting, sports games, and dystopian landscapes. There were stories set in Iceland, Belgium, New York and on the Titanic. There were fairytale and mythological retellings. There were stories from the perspective of food, raindrops, cats and dogs. There was time travel, kings and dragons, and robots.

Many stories had strong voices, great openings and middles, but trailed off towards the end. Be sure to give your story endings as much room on the page as your openings – they're just as important and are what will really stay with your reader. Endings are what set apart some of the placegetters for both sections from other strongly written entries where the story trailed off.

It was a privilege to be taken to so many places and stand in the shoes of so many different characters. With so many wonderful and diverse stories, it was a very, very tough job deciding who the placegetters would be. The standard was high, and there were some extremely talented writers who I unfortunately didn't have the room to place. So please, keep writing!

When judging, I consider the originality, message, technical expression, form and flow, and overall impact of each story, giving a score for each. Once I have a shortlist, I once again dragged my school-librarian mother out of retirement to help me decide the placegetters. We were both knocked flat by this year's entries, so well done everyone!

### **Grade 4 – 6 Section: Highly Commended (In no particular order)**

#### **Windsurfer (G230)**

This charming story follows a nameless raindrop being released from a cloud and earning a name when they land. The voice is lively, the story well-paced with clear beats and a satisfying ending that ties delightfully to the beginning.

#### **The Red Storm (G3)**

A captivating and lyrical fantasy tale about a girl who rebels against her father's expectations and takes to the sea. I was impressed by the sophisticated use of language and the assured story arc.

### **The Land at the Bottom (G4)**

This lively and original story, told in verse, follows a curious boy who goes on a voyage to see what the 'land at the bottom' is all about. I was impressed by the structure, voice and originality.

### **First Prize**

#### **How many steps (G235)**

'How many steps' is an intriguing and eerie tale about a person who finds themselves in a wasteland with mysterious numbers over everyone's heads. The story is atmospheric and well-paced and pulls the reader in immediately. I was impressed with how the writer evoked intrigue and built suspense towards a climactic ending.

### **Foundation – Grade 3 Section: Highly Commended (In no particular order)**

#### **Churchill the Dragon (F116)**

This fun, rollicking tale follows a dog who's actually a dragon who's actually a knight. I was impressed by the twists and turns and voice.

#### **I need a drink! (F100)**

This vibrant story follows a girl who has lost her drink bottle and is on a mission to reclaim it. I was impressed by the humour, the originality and the way the ending harked back to the beginning.

#### **The Mystery Book (F28)**

A young boy discovers an unusual book, which kicks off an adventure with a wizard. I was impressed by the voice, plot and the reveal at the end of this story.

### **First Prize**

#### **Chocolate Surprise (F96)**

A highly entertaining story about a boy trapped in a toilet cubicle with no toilet paper, in a world where people can't exceed their word counts. Vibrant, quick-paced and extremely original, it won't be a story I'll forget any time soon!