

2024 My Brother Jack Awards Junior and Senior Primary Poetry Awards

Junior Primary

What an absolute JOY to get to read through all the beautiful poetry submitted in the junior category of the My Brother Jack awards. With each of these poems I did what I always do when a poem is sitting in front of me to read. I read it out loud. This is always my first step. I think it should be the first thing any of us do when we come to a poem. Great poetry for me is all about the musicality of the piece. The rhythm and the way the words roll off the tongue. And, my goodness, did the words roll and the rhythm sway.

What I loved most about all of these poems was the diversity of them, how different each was. How many different themes were explored, and styles of poetry used. From couplets, to limericks, to acrostics, to free verse. From footy to fishing to reading to teddy bears. Some that were all about the rhythm. Some were all about the sounds. Some that were all about the imagery and description. In fact, the winner and the highly commended pieces show this breadth of styles. Each totally different from the other. And it was SO hard to choose a winner between them.

Of the poems I shortlisted and then eventually chose to be the winner and the highly commended I also read them out loud to my two children who are in primary school too. My children are my final test of my own writing for kids and a final great test for the poems I was liking too. And, what was nice, is they agreed with each of my choices. They loved them. Poetry written by a child, that an adult and other children can write. Now that is something special.

So congratulations to the winner and the highly commended pieces. But for everyone, you should be proud that you wrote something and were brave enough to submit that piece. Well done and keep on writing!

The Toy – First Place

A poem that I don't think anyone could read without immediately being taken back to their own childhood, to the 'bedraggled toy' that they LOVED as a child and then forgot about and then found again. If the job of poetry is to make people feel something, then nostalgia is one of the strongest feelings that we can have. I could remember my own bear growing up. I could imagine a child sitting with a well-loved

teddy bear. And this nostalgic moment, I love that the writer called it a BOLD sign of love and care. What a strong word to describe the affection we have with our childhood toys. Brilliant little moments of rhyming. Great choice of words. Excellent in its invocation of feeling. Thanks writer! Well deserved!

***Fun at the Gunn* – Highly Commended**

A highly descriptive piece about night-time on the footy field.

***Pitter Patter of the Rain* – Highly Commended**

This poem is all about the pitter patter of rain whose use of onomatopoeia made me feel like I was right there in the splash splash and the plit plat.

***Garden* – Highly Commended**

A beautiful poem about planting in the garden that was in an acrostic style, but also was sublime as a free-verse poem.

Senior Primary

Thank you to everyone who submitted poetry for the senior poetry competition. Once again, with any poetry that I read, I always begin by reading it out loud. This, I suggest everyone doing as their first step in engaging with a poem. The feel of a poem is best felt in the way it comes out of the mouth. I love the layout of poetry and I love the way that it can look on the page. But the best poetry will always rhythmically flow too. And this musicality was especially the case with the winner of the Senior Primary competition. Which we will get to in a bit.

Overall, I loved reading the many different poems that were submitted. For those who didn't win or get a commendation. My advice would be to make sure you read the poem back to yourself once you have finished writing it and see if you get tripped up on the way you have written certain words, this will help you make sentence structure changes until it feels smooth as you say it; see if you have used anything cliché, this will help you choose something more unique, my rule of thumb is that if I have heard that saying or that metaphor before, then choose something different; also, in your editing, see if there is any rhyming that feels forced. Often, we think that

poetry HAS to rhyme, like in the case of couplets or limericks, but I love poetry that uses a whole lot less rhyme. Poetry that brings in just a little bit of rhyme, can really make those lines POP, rather than trying to rhyme all the time. Or bringing in a scattered rhymes throughout the lines of the poetry, rather than as the final word on each line.

Asides from these pointers, I think you all did so well capturing so many different topics and especially in beginning to connect CONCRETE descriptive things in the world around you with more reflective and themes. This is where you might want to head in your poetry to make it more powerful. Start with something in the concrete world, but make sure you connect it to something reflective. Once again, this is what the winner of this category did so well.

Piano Fingers – First Place

An incredible musical piece threaded around the imagery of playing piano as just like a leaf blowing in the wind. This image anchors the piece as the fingers *run and hop and gallop* and the leaf of the music *swirls* and is *carried away* until it finds itself in the movement of the ocean and the ink of the squid. And then the writer brings in the other hand playing piano, another leaf, hands now in sync. It is some STUNNING metaphor work that beautifully captures what poetry can do by showing us what music can do and all anchored in the metaphor. Fantastic work that the writer should be so proud of!

One of Many – Highly Commended

A heart-aching poem about the effect of racism. A child made to feel *little* in a *big* world through the taunts of others. But a child that, through the poem, starts to reclaim their own story, to choose who they want to be even in the face of their bullies. HUGELY powerful!”

The Lake of Ocean Tides – Highly Commended

The simple back and forth of the waves lapping on a pebble beach. The simplicity of the movement is beautifully captured and then connected to the rhythm, the metronome, the song. And suddenly we are not just seeing a wave lap the beach, we are hearing the music of it.

***Unknown Waters* – Highly Commended**

We have a stone that is thrown into the water and the poem describes the sinking of the poem, but then beautifully makes the reflection: *'The unknown waters hold many things you don't know'* and with that they take a physical observation and move us into a reflective space about all the unknown things in our lives. Brilliant!"

Well done everybody!