

Judge's Report — Grace Yee

Junior Primary Poetry Category

It was such a pleasure to read these poems by very young students giving poetry a go! I hope they enjoyed writing them as much as I enjoyed reading them.

I appreciated the range of approaches and forms engaged with, including haiku, cinquain and kennings, and personification and anthropomorphism (attributing human characteristics to e.g., planets and sharks). It was wonderful to see poems that demonstrated great facility with sounds, rhythm, rhyme, word play and sensory detail.

The topics covered were diverse: there were observations on places (e.g., libraries, classrooms), sunsets, games, food (candy, fruit), the seasons, landscapes and the natural world (planets, the Great Barrier Reef), animals (sharks, bunnies, guinea pigs, cats), and reflections on life, special people and relationships.

My usual approach when judging poetry competitions is to read each poem twice: the first time, silently, the second, out loud. I encourage all poets to read their work out loud when drafting, and on completion. A poem read aloud is very different from a poem read silently: you get a clearer sense of its rhythm – or lack thereof, and it's easier to determine whether clusters of words work well together. In my readings, I consider how a poem appears on the page – for example, whether the lines are short or long, how they are spaced and paced, and whether these choices suit the poem's content or subject matter and narrative voice. I listen carefully to the narrative voice and look for a sense of play, flair, adventure, clarity, and whether it offers an original perspective.

The winning and highly commended poems go beyond generalising and abstract descriptions to include fine details and images, and are confidently narrated.

Congratulations to all who wrote and submitted their poems!

First Prize — *The Traveller*

The Traveller is immediately striking for its exuberant voice, sense of adventure and imagery - the tall buildings described as 'giant silver ladders to the sky' is stunning.

A spirited, light-hearted poem.

Highly Commended — *Parliament House*

Parliament House is remarkable for its clarity and attention to detail. Each line gives pause as the narrator takes the reader through the building. A well-paced, clear-eyed poem.

Senior Primary Poetry Category

The senior primary poems were a delight to read. Congratulations to all who took the time to write and submit to the competition.

Entries covered broad terrain: similar to the Junior category, there were poems on food (including sweets, and a cake heist!), animals (bees, butterflies, spiders, moles, and of course, beloved pets), home, family relationships and friendships, sport (tennis, and soccer, of course!), the natural world (skies, waves, a lunar eclipse). In addition, there were several poems on the state of the planet and climate change, a poem about silence, and a few about history (the goldrush, Anzac poppies, colonisation), as well as personal reflections, contemplations, dreams, memories, dilemmas and philosophical questions.

Several poems involved anthropomorphism and personification, bringing to life nonhuman life and artefacts: for example, forests, sand, a laptop. Formally, there were acrostic poems, prose poems, and much rhyming throughout.

(Please see comments on the Junior category for my approach to reading and assessing poems.)

The process of deciding on the shortlist and settling on the winner and highly commended was challenging. Of note, there were a handful of poems, the cadences, imageries, voices and forms of which were well-structured, 'poetic' and aesthetically pleasing. However, both the winning and highly commended poems stood out for their imaginative and fearlessly original approaches.

As with the Junior category poems, I looked for attention to detail, play, flair, arresting imagery, and most of all, a unique voice and lens to the world.

First Prize – *The Big Top Dog*

This poem is replete with striking images (*'My legs feel electric as I swim within the pages'* is stunning). The extended metaphor – 'life is a circus' - works brilliantly in this animated, confidently narrated poem.

Highly Commended — *Flying Plastic Bag*

This poem offers an original take on sighting the lunar eclipse. In the first stanza, the narrator offers fine detail: a floating plastic bag, possum wisp; in the second, there is a shift, a zooming out, to frame 'the moon so beautiful'. A wonderfully cinematic poem.