

OZ KIDS IN PRINT

Issue 3, 2023

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Welcome to Edition 3 of the OzKids magazine.

Our Author/Illustrators headed to the York Peninsula for workshops in Hopevale, Weipa and Mapoon. Metro Mining sponsored the workshops at the schools.

We are so grateful to our sponsors, for giving our Authors & Illustrators the opportunity to give workshops in remote schools around Australia. Both teachers and students enjoy this experience.

There is only one more Edition for 2023

Don't put off getting your entries in before the closing date. Only entries published, qualify for the Award. Entries close 30 September 2023.

- Carol

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Carol Dick
Managing Editor

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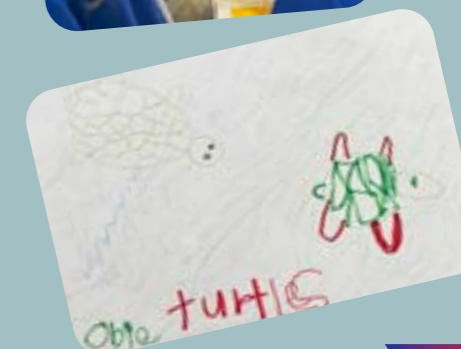
Workshops by Meredith Costain & Andrew Plant

In late July and early August 2023, Meredith Costain and Andrew Plant travelled to Cape York Peninsula, in far north Queensland, to run writing and illustration workshops at Hope Vale, Weipa and Mapoon.

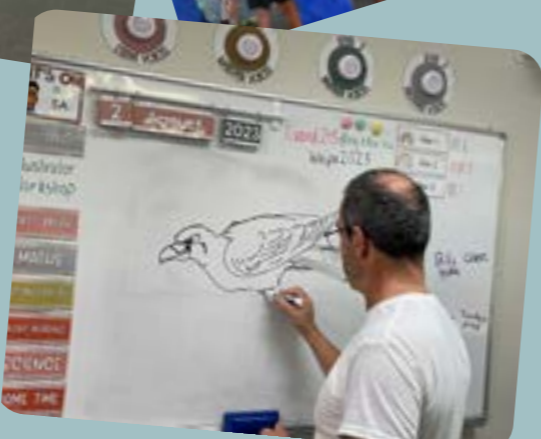
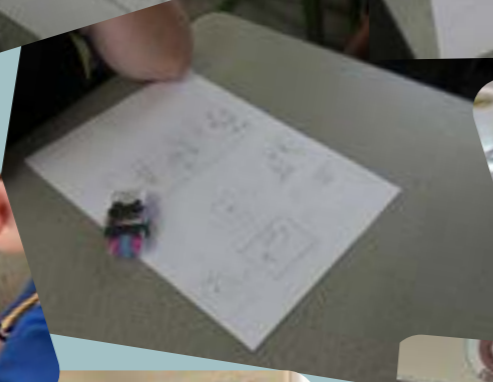
These workshops were proudly supported and funded by METRO MINING, and we appreciate their generous assistance.



Hopevale Campus



*Western Cape College
Weipa Campus*



The Smock

It lies, folded over a chair
Hanging limply on the top rail.
Bathed in the orange rays of the setting sun,
Spotted with strokes of paint.

Every dash, every stroke
A reminder of each mistake.
Every flaw, every fault
Turned into something wonderful.

Each new opportunity
Opens with the smock –
Each new painting
Leads to an unexpected result.

The memories flood back,
To once what occurred with the smock.
In the same small room
Piled with books and brushes.

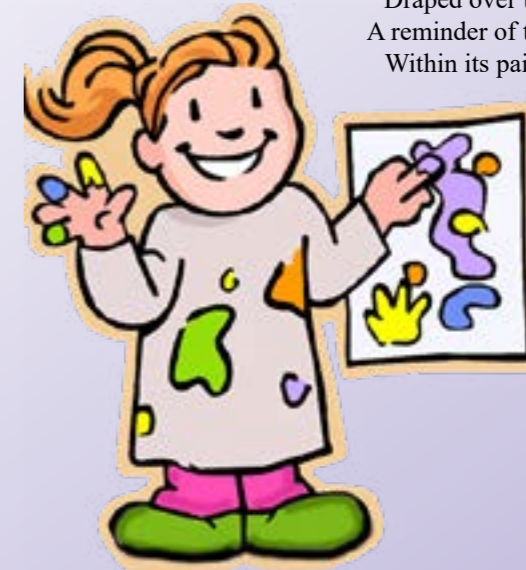
Frustration, head in my hands
Racking my brain for ideas.
The feeling of disappointment
When things don't go my way.

Happiness, the joyful sensation
Rejuvenating my body with delight.

The sudden gasp of excitement
When a new idea comes to mind.

Sorrow, the sadness that comes creeping,
When art is a constant reminder
Of the moments you had. Happy and sad
That slowly disappeared with time.

The smock still lies to this day,
Draped over the wooden chair.
A reminder of the moments I had
Within its paint-covered folds.



*By Nicia Zhang
Grade Category: middle
Ravenswood School for Girls
Gordon, N.S.W.*

What a wonderful world

A palette of life is the world we hold,
A kingdom of kaleidoscopic colours, both bright
and bold,
Secrets untold and stories to share,
A thriving palace of nature is eternally there.

Viridescent jungles flourish around,
Trees swaying to the melody of the morning's
sound,
Parrots and Lorikeets sing songs galore,
Trumpets of elephants ring through the forest floor.

Like ballerinas, the winds twirl and dance,
Travelling across the stage-like world, with an
elegant prance,
Rivers sparkle with fragments of sun at every
glance,
Earth's beauty radiates at any chance.

But a shadow is cast across our wondrous land,
Outstretched like a withered, battered hand,
a labyrinth of darkness, a swirl of terror,
A symbol of mankind's treacherous error.

From field of palm, golden flesh escapes,
Seeping through the soil, the chaos it creates,
Trees fall down with every single touch,
Our verdant forests disappear with an axe's punch.

Earth's beauty is erasing, faster and faster,
So lift our voices, higher and higher,
When all fades into darkness, there is still hope for
sure,
Let's take this chance and wait no more!

*By Claire Ping
Grade Category: middle
Artarmon public school
Artarmon, N.S.W.*

HISTORY UNCOVERED

“What do you think you’re doing?”

Poppy and Penelope spun around. A man was lurking in the corridor, staring at them dangerously. The sisters gulped as they recognised his slim body, brown overcoat and well-oiled hair. He was the security guard, and he would almost certainly stop them from completing their mission. Poppy remembered all too well the despairing shouts of her Grandfather as he was carried away by the police. He’d wanted the sisters to uncover their family history, stolen from them by the family of this very man who stood before them.

The man repeated the question, not politely. “What do you think you’re doing?” he snarled dangerously. “This is private property.”

Poppy shoved her grandfather’s key into the rusty keyhole, and she and Penelope raced inside, paranoid. They looked around. Stone pillars with strange codes etched into them loomed above, leering. Wooden crates were piled high up, and seemed like easy hiding places, but intelligent Poppy knew they were just as easy to find. She dragged Penelope into the dark end of the enormous room, and they listened to the man limp in. It was hard to think about anything but the man, but Poppy forced herself to do just that. If they could just find the parchment that contained all that had been lost to them, then they wouldn’t have to hide. They could just dash out when the man became distracted. That would be much easier. So what had Grandfather said about the mysterious piece of parchment?

She closed her eyes as she remembered the last time she had been with her Grandfather. It had been a friendly, fire-lit evening, sitting by the fire as her Grandfather told her and Penelope about their family.

“Someday, we shall recover what has been lost to us, and the thieves shall pay,” he had told them, gritting his teeth in his persuasion. “But I would like that day to come soon. So I will tell you what to look for.” Penelope had been wide-eyed, as if her Grandfather was telling another one of his much-loved yarns, but wise Poppy had known that this was much, much more important. And so she had listened closely. “The parchment is half-ancient. The pages are crackly and yellowed, and maybe some words that were written in stylus have faded or been rubbed out a little. But

that won’t be much of a trouble, because I know you two are smart and can figure out almost anything. Every spare inch of space will be covered in tiny, curly handwriting. The handwriting is important, because many members of that terrible thieving family tried to replicate a similar parchment, just to raise false hopes. But the real handwriting was done by one of your great-great-great great – well, however many greats – grandmothers and for generations her descendants have always written in the same style. So if you know your grandmother’s handwriting, then you know what to look for. No one can replicate that handwriting except for true kin. Poppy, I do believe that when you are older, your handwriting will also be the same – I have seen enough of your work to believe that.”

At this point, Penelope had cuddled up with her sister, thinking that this conversation did not require her participation.

“Unfortunately, my little Penny, you are too young to consider handwriting genetically just yet, but you know more than anyone what your Grandmother’s handwriting looks like. I’ve seen you watch her write letters to her sister, and you’ve helped her to write the shopping list whenever we forget. You are a vital part of this mission.” Grandfather was hasty to add this belief on, as he did not want his littler granddaughter to feel left out in any way whatsoever.

“And Poppy, you are excellent at finding things. You always found my glasses whenever I lost them, and I know that your mother was very proud when you managed to find her own mother’s brass needle, which she had so faithfully kept in honour of the family. You are the key to our own family’s success.” All the praise that Grandfather had carefully waited to heap onto his granddaughters he finally lavished on them now. He had felt that they deserved it, if they were going to complete this mission.

Thinking back on this recollection, Poppy wished that she’d said more in reply than she actually had. Grandfather had faith in her, but she had not seemed as interested in the project as she should have. It was the last time she would ever speak with him, would ever listen to his comforting voice, would ever gaze at the kind face that always greeted her in the mornings and when she came back from school. Never again

would she chatter to him about her day, or be soothed by him when she fell over and hurt herself, or watch him make excuses about not being present at Grandmother’s sewing classes. She would never wake up to find some happy Grandfather tickling her, or have a reliable homework helper when she fell behind in her schoolwork, or play games with him and Penelope until dinnertime. Never again would any of those things happen, and Poppy was saddened about it. Her Grandfather had trusted her to make things happen, and all she had said was “I’ll try, Grandfather, I’ll try.” Even little Penelope had assured him that he could consider their family history returned. Now Grandfather was shut up in some cold, dark prison, to suffer a dreadful fate that he did not deserve. Why hadn’t she said more? Why hadn’t she shown what she had really thought about the mission? Why hadn’t she looked into his eyes with trust, and promised him that she would do exactly what he wished?

Poppy silently sighed and turned to her fretful sister. It was the least she could do at present. Even if Grandfather never knew it, she could still try to fulfil his wish. So she held her distraught sister’s little pink hand, and comforted her.

“Don’t worry Penny, we’ll get out of here in no time. We’ll find the parchment, and then we can run away as if the man’s after us. We’ve just got to try, that’s all,” she whispered quietly to her sister, who contemplated this for a second, and then nodded fearfully.

They prowled the back of the room in search of sanctuary like wolves prowling a forest in search of prey. Of course, no safety could be guaranteed while the man was still here, but it made them feel better. Besides, it kept them safe from the shuffling figure for most of the time, which was good, even though the ‘most of the time’ was not ‘always’.

Penelope’s round black eyes widened as she heard the man limping nearby. Unfortunately, they had neared the brighter part of the darkness, and the man was getting closer and closer, ‘closer than ever before’, as Penelope said it. In chagrin and bleak despair Poppy drew Penelope close, and turned to the etchings on the pillars. At second glance, they seemed to be instructions, with dots and dashes after

the numbers. Not just any dots and dashes, Poppy realised. Morse code!

Both sisters were prefficient with Morse code, even Penelope, and decrypted the code almost instantly. Penelope nodded to her sister, gesturing wildly at the tiny wooden switch before them. Poppy nodded back in agreement. They threw back the small switch, and immediately a sort of wooden drawer slid out an almost infinitesimal amount. But it was an amount, and now they could lug back the cumbersome object. Penelope tried her best not to breathe too hard, in case the pursuer was close. Poppy pushed her fingers into some notches in the mostly well-carved wood, finding it easier to tug with the tiny finger-holds. Upon doing so, she shoved her younger sister in first. Then she crawled in herself. There was not at all a swathe of space and the sisters had to stand upright with their arms held up. The drawer slid shut silently, leaving the two girls – their



minutes trying to edge away without pressing against her sister Poppy, while the spider performed a large amount of territorial dances.

But Poppy was elated. Her nimble fingers had caught something. Something crackly. Something yellow. Something covered in neat, tiny, curly handwriting.

An ancient parchment of history.

*By Nethya Wijesekera
Grade Category: middle
Gordon East Public School
Gordon, N.S.W.*

fingers quietly scrabbling on the stone as they trembled – panting in the pitch blackness.

They heard the man frantically shine a torch around. Then he stormed out, violently and vehemently. They waited for several tedious and nerve-racking minutes, those two plucky girls, and then crawled out feeling understandably claustrophobic. Penelope groaned and stretched her legs, trembling in fear at the same time. In little Penny’s side of the drawer there had been a tiny but rather fierce spider that had been quite defensive and angry with the invader, and Penelope had spent the uncomfortable

My Dad came to dance class

My dad came to dance class
And marched right through the door,
He pulled on tights and leg warmers
And then he hit the floor.

First he twirled and then he leaped,
And then he tried the splits.
I nearly died of embarrassment
My class mates were in fits.

It was a joke the first week,
But it became more than that,
It turned into a serious passion,
There was no denying that.

I thought the phase would end
The minute we found out.
Our school would have a recital
But dad became even more devout.

He tried the barre and pirouettes
Our teacher was very stoic
Demi pliés, jazz and hip hop
His mastery was heroic.

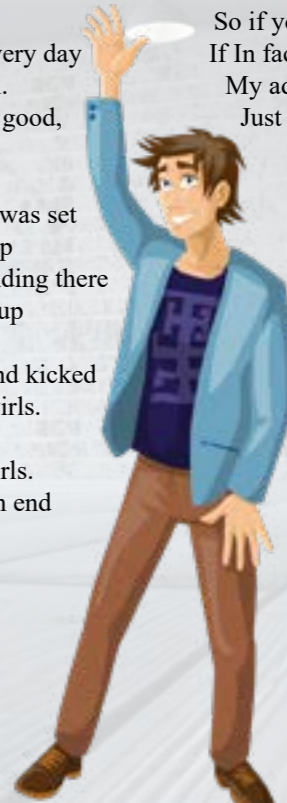
He worked hard, each and every day
Right up to the recital.
Our teacher said that to be good,
Practising was vital.

The big day came, the stage was set
The big curtain went up
And there was My dad was standing there
In a tutu and full make up

He arabesqu-ed and jumped and kicked
And then he did some twirls.
I really have to say it
He was better than us girls.
When the show came to an end

All the audience stood and yelled.
My dad did 13 curtain calls,
He truly had excelled.

So if you’ve ever wondered,
If In fact your dad can dance
My advice to all of you is
Just give him a chance.



*By Paige Duncan-Rainbird
Grade Category: middle
Miss B’s Student Services
Riverside, Tas.*

Defective Detective

There was a new crime, a new murder in town,
To solve the case, a detective whose briefcase was brown.
He was renowned for the ways which he could always find the killer,
Cases so intriguing, like an edge-of-your-seat thriller.

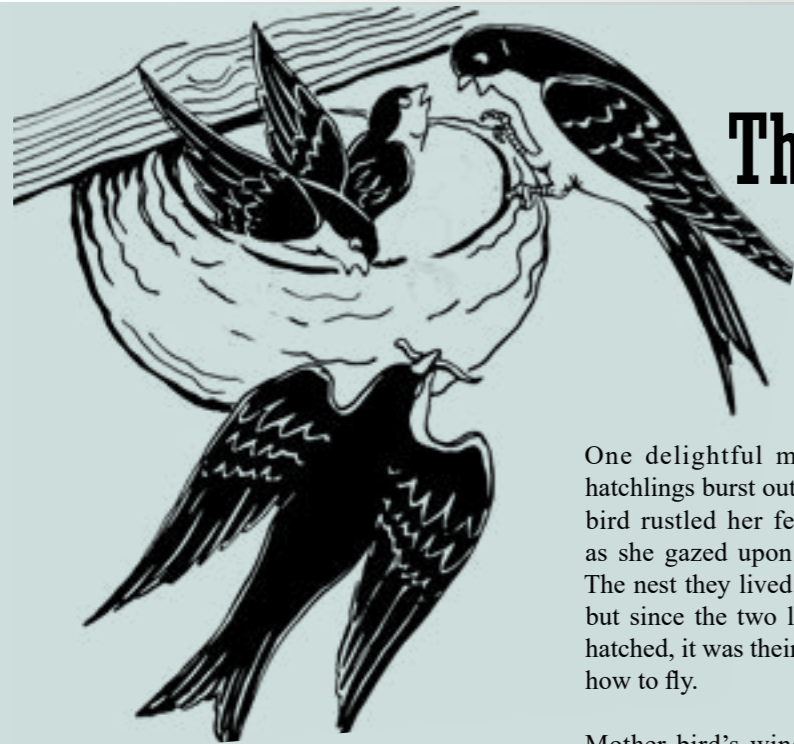
He always wore black, just plain black glasses,
But today was different, he wore the pair for his classes.
Arriving at the crime scene, he seemed to know his way,
But when we followed him to the body, he had told us to stay.
With a loud crash and a bang, he rushed out to berate.
‘Why didn’t you warn me! I hit my head on the slate!’

He seemed unprofessional, having much trouble today,
He couldn’t solve the murder, his mind in utter disarray.
He promptly left the crime scene, and determined the case to be cold,
He saw the reporters were not happy, with the situation they’d been told.
He had never given up, not on any case before,
If he failed to solve the case, the issue wouldn’t be ignored.

A policeman came up and asked with aggression:
‘Whose glasses are these?’ Then came the confession.
The only case which was deemed to be a mystery,
Had of course been done, by the greatest detective in history.



By Brendan Teoh
Grade category: senior
Scotch College
Hawthorn, Vic.



The Two Hatchlings and Mother Bird

One delightful morning, three baby hatchlings burst out of their eggs, mother bird rustled her feathers in excitement as she gazed upon her beautiful babies. The nest they lived in was in a high tree, but since the two little birds had finally hatched, it was their time to start learning how to fly.

Mother bird’s wings opened up as she started to flap and started to lift off into the air. Hatchling 1 followed her into the wind, “try to keep flapping, it keeps you in the air!” advised mother bird, and soon enough, Hatchling 1 began to dance in the wind as it had gotten used to how to fly. Hatchling 2, however, would prefer to stay in the nest, where it thought was safer.

Mother bird encouraged hatchling 2 to try, however upon seeing its sibling flying and having a great time, gave an urge for hatchling 2 to try. With a leap, hatchling 2 leaped into the air flapping and trying to keep itself up, soon enough, it began to fly like mother bird.

Have confidence in what you do, you’ll never know if you’d be able to accomplish it.

By Jelina Wang
Grade Category: middle
Pedare Christian College
Golden Grove, S.A.

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Pictured: Marjory Gardner, Meredith Costain, Phil Kettle,
Marc McBride, Paul Collins and George Ivanoff.



Left to Write

Unloved children.
Left to write.
Under the cover.
Of the night.

Holding torches.
Between their knees.
Underneath.
Their bed sheets.

Poetry.
Written by the hour.
Teardrops caught.
By fictional towers.

Unloved children.
Left to write.
The stories that.
Give them their fight.

*By Angelina Hemsworth
Grade Category: senior
Brisbane School of Distance Education
Coorparoo, Qld.*

The Black Rose

Hailey walked out onto her front yard and noticed something absurd. A black rose with a letter was on her door step. She cautiously picked up the letter and read it. It said:

Plant this rose and something good or bad will happen. This good or bad luck will stay with you all the way. Until... death. Time is running out...

- Whispers

She was worried, nervous and felt... a funny feeling about this. She was thinking about this all night. Soon she decided to go to bed. This worried her so much that she had a nightmare about it that night. Her nightmare replayed this morning but instead she picked up the rose, everything went black and she started falling in an endless black hole. As soon as she woke up from that horrible dream.

Hailey walked down to her kitchen and made herself a coffee. All of what was going on was confusing. As her coffee machine was making her coffee, the plug started twitching, sparks started flicking out of the power point. SPARK! Hailey used her arms to prevent the hot sparks

from flicking on her. Then the tv turned on. Hailey tip-toed towards the TV. The channel was the news. Then it was a grey screen on the TV, a creaky voice spoke.

“Hello Hailey... time is ticking...” then an image of a black rose appeared.

Hailey shuddered. There she stood frozen in her spot. Then the TV turned off. She heard whispers gasping in her head, then... she fell and everything went black. She found herself in a hospital bed with her neighbour, Kathrine. She was an elderly woman... Hailey’s only friend.

Kathrine would usually come over on Fridays. Kathrine found Hailey on the floor when she came to visit. “Are you alright?” Questioned Kathrine. “I-I don’t feel well” Hailey muttered. “Ok well you get some rest.” said Kathrine. The next day, Hailey had a major headache and didn’t feel very well. She felt really light headed and nearly fainted again.

Hailey stuck to Kathrine’s words and went back to bed. All she could think about was the black rose. All that was in her head was those loud whispers and, “The Black Rose,” repeating over and over again.

Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months. Hailey felt better in the time being. She decided to go for a walk and noticed that Kathrine was planting... black roses.

*By Harper Oakes
Grade Category: middle
Burnside State School
Burnside, Qld.*



Sunlight Glories

*By Lena Takahashi
Grade Category: junior
Waitara Public School
Waitara, N.S.W.*

It shines onto me,
Spreads its warmth
Over
My withered soul.

It dries up
My pain.
Drains the sorrow
Inside me.

It burns
My wickedness
Into charred
Ashes.

Every scrap of
Corruption, sin
Becomes as wilted
As my old heart.

The glory
Beaming onto me.
I stand
In the sunlight

The sunlight glories.

Vise Of Liberation

In the labyrinthine corridors of existence, where shadows dance and the air thickens with stifling tendrils, the tale of “In the Vise of Liberation” unravels, ensnaring its protagonist in a web of confinement and yearning. This intricately woven narrative delves into the profound struggle of a soul trapped, suffocated, and desperate for emancipation.

Our protagonist, a nameless figure, finds themselves entangled in the constricting tendrils of a life they never desired. Every breath feels like a gasp for air, suffocated by societal expectations, responsibilities, and the weight of their own choices. They navigate a world where the walls close in, where conformity becomes a prison, and where the yearning for freedom grows insatiable.

In this complex tapestry of longing, the protagonist’s desire for liberation manifests in multifaceted ways. It is not merely the yearning for physical escape, but a profound thirst for self-discovery and breaking free from the shackles of societal norms. They yearn to transcend the boundaries imposed upon them, to shatter the constraints of their own fears and limitations, and to breathe freely in a world of infinite possibilities.

Each step forward becomes an arduous journey, as they confront the suffocating grip of their own doubts and insecurities. The entanglement is not just external, but internal, as they grapple with the voices that whisper failure and restraint. Yet, in the depths of their spirit, an unyielding flame burns, refusing to be extinguished. It drives them to seek liberation, to confront their demons, and to break through the barriers that bind them.

Throughout the narrative, the protagonist encounters catalysts and moments of revelation that illuminate the path to liberation. These encounters come in the form of unexpected friendships, unconventional mentors, or moments of transcendence that challenge their preconceptions and offer glimpses of a reality unburdened by the chains of conformity. These encounters become beacons of hope, guiding them towards the liberation they so desperately crave.

Yet, liberation is not without its sacrifices. It demands the relinquishment of comfort zones, the dismantling of self-imposed limitations, and the audacity to embrace the



unknown. The protagonist must summon courage from the depths of their being, forging their own path amidst the clamour of conformity. They confront their fears, their doubts, and the expectations of others, embracing the vulnerability that comes with stepping into the uncharted territories of personal freedom.

It serves as a poignant reminder that liberation is not merely an external journey, but an internal revolution that requires a steadfast commitment to self-discovery and the relentless pursuit of authenticity. It beckons us to confront the suffocating forces that bind us, to dare to break free, and to embark on a transformative odyssey towards the liberation of our own souls.

*By Anushka Mishra
Grade Category: middle
Our Lady of Mercy College
Parramatta, N.S.W.*

Of Butterflies and Memories

In the midst of a bustling metropolis, one crafted of concrete and steel, a particular maestro would hone his craft atop a sixty-floor skyscraper. Perched against the cage-iron fences that bounded the highest peak of the city, the maestro would draw on a canvas, one of the few remaining hand-made objects within the city itself. From the grey morning glow of an artificial sun until the moment the cold blue streetlamps would turn on, the maestro's right arm carved swift strokes across the canvas, his mind empty bar constant drone to 'paint from memory'.

What he painted was not the cold, cruel and calculating precision that the city was built on, but rather a more human touch, one of nature. The artist's canvas was filled with a flurry of warm hues, perhaps memories of a world distant from urbanisation. His feeble, slim hands traced a single, monarch butterfly, its deep orange wings fluttering in a verdant, dewy paddock. His artwork bore no mathematical pattern, plan or technical prowess. Rather, he captured the true, unpredictable solace in nature, a force so rare in this mechanical, lumbering city.

With time, news of the artist's work permeated through society. People, dressed in their dreary clothes, made the pilgrimage

to the top of the apartment complex. They all eagerly gazed at the artist's canvas, hoping to escape the city's mechanical austerity. In the midst of the maestro's ascent to fame, a plain white letter arrived on top of the skyscraper. The artist, oblivious to the letter, was spurned by the single mantra, to 'paint from memory'. It was only when the visitors trickled away that the artist noticed the single letter leaning against his painting. Gingerly opening it, right arm shaking with euphoria, the maestro was triumphant. The monochrome sheet of paper was his golden ticket, his invitation to the prestigious 'Banksy Awards'.

The artist stepped through the grand double doors of the presentation theatre, bathed in an atmosphere of anticipation. The venue emanated an air of cold, calculating architecture, with its sleek, modern design adorned in muted tones of silver and black. Rows of steel seats stretched out before a towering stage. The walls themselves were embellished with artwork. Each one of them was mathematically perfect, protruding no imperfections. There was an unnatural discomfort from such talented precision for the maestro.

The artist walked onto the domineering stage, carrying his magnum opus alongside, as if right next to the field of glowing green grass. There was a hush as he came on, followed by dreamy sighs as the audience was entranced by the monarch butterfly, a reminder of their individuality in a metropolis of mechanical conformity.

A man wearing a flawless, black suit walked up on stage. He nodded at the artist, a face that masked any satisfaction or excitement. And so, from there the bidding began.

'Five hundred.'

'Six hundred.'

In his mind, it was hollow numbers, assigning financial value to beauty.

The air crackled with electricity as the gavel made a final third swoop down, a palpable sense of tension among the crowd. The buyer, an unscrupulous man

with eyes filled with glee, approached the maestro ready to shake his hand. Smiling faintly, the artist's world transformed into a desolate void, his eyes rolling back, body stiffening.

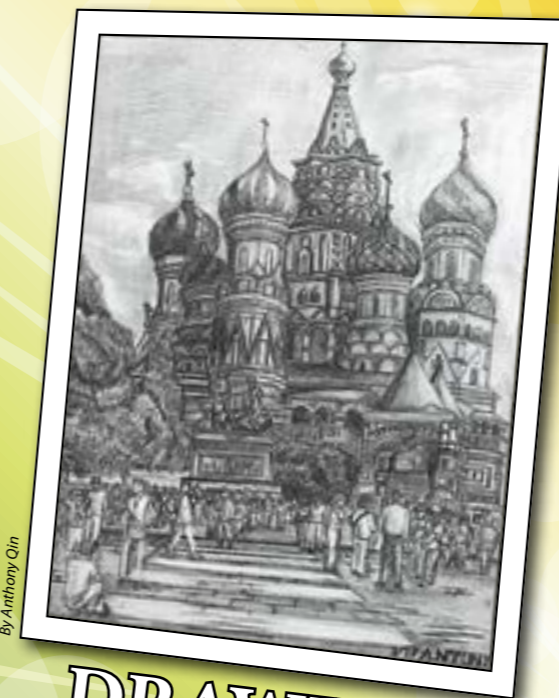
A group of engineers loomed in on the artist with calculated efficiency. Their hands deftly inserted a complex tubular device into the back of the artist's head, extracting the memories and objectives implanted inside. In a matter of seconds, the artist's eyes lost their spark, fading into dim shadows. The intricate mechanics that once animated the artist's arm being ground to a halt. The memories were not his, nor was the right arm. He was a novelty, a living memorabilia that carried humanity's history within, to bring nostalgic hope to those who could not escape the sprawling mechanical city.

With an air of detachment, the men meticulously dismantled the artist's body, isolating the artist's famed right arm from the rest of its creaking form. The buyer lifted up his right arm, intending to mould the hand into his own human skin. Upon that stage, the delicate remembrance of the prodigy's fleeting greatness ebbed into silent oblivion. Humanity sought the irretrievable memories of the natural world, pursuing it with great passion, yet the fragile union between nature and machine only served as a bittersweet foreshadowing of humanity's longing; it was not the memories they cherished, but rather the meritocratic talent which painted them.

*By Gevin Kankanamalage
Grade Category: senior
Scotch College
Hawthorn, Vic.*



2023 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN ART AWARDS



By Anthony Qin

DRAWING



By Marina Tsuchiya

COMPUTER ART



By Kai Neulder

PHOTOGRAPHY



By Matthew Hoppeyann

PAINTING

www.ozkids.com.au

The YoungAtArt website and the Young Australian Art Awards are an initiative of the Children's Charity Network. All entrants must be no older than 18 years of age or attending either a primary or secondary college. There are 4 categories: Painting, Drawing, Photography, Computer Art. There are three age groups: Junior (Prep to Grade 4), Middle (Grade 5 to Year 8), Senior (Year 9 to Year 12).

To enter your Artwork you will need to obtain a digital image of your piece of work and submit this image on-line through our website at www.ozkids.com.au.

To do this you will be required to sign up in order for you to have the access to submit artwork. If you or your school do not have access to digital imaging, you may send a copy of your artwork to Young at Art, PO Box 267, Lara, Victoria 3212. Further information is available online.

Examination

Pencils scratching papers at a rapid speed. Tables neatly aligned, facing the front of the room. Numbers flipped over every second to announce the end of time. Two adults pacing the front of the room in anticipation of the end. The numbers rapidly growing smaller and smaller, until there is only one number left. Only too soon, does that number disappear.

Left with nothing, the pencils have ceased their scratching. Papers filled with scribbles, numerical equations and algorithms scattered across the paper. Sighs echoing across the room, signified that it was over. The two adults walked up and down the aisles; collecting the papers to be marked. Stacked at the front of the room, waiting to be mailed away.

One by one, the students walked out of the room, each whispering to another about their answers. Some were gasping in shock at what others had gotten. While some were utterly disappointed upon hearing different answers to their own. However, there were

some who, despite hearing the others held their head high. Knowing they had given it their all and there was nothing more they could do.

Reaching the end of the gates, parents could be seen waving to their children. They had bright smiles on their faces knowing that it was finally over for their children. The students raced out of the gates and into their cars, yearning to leave this place. They didn't want to stay here any longer. Soon, all the cars had cleared, leaving an empty road. A road which had once been filled, was now barren. The gates closed and were locked. It was now a matter of time, but it was finally over.

Students running to the front of their house, peeking through the holes of the box. This box held what they had been working so hard for. What they spent endless nights sacrificing sleep for. They had taken a load



of stress and nervousness for the contents of this box. Bringing this box inside their home through the front door and into the living room. Parents were sitting against the sofa, in anticipation with their child.

*By Anushka Mishra
Grade Category: middle
Our Lady of Mercy College
Parramatta, N.S.W.*

*By Kaylee Jesnoewski
Grade Category: senior
Mindarie Senior College
Mindarie, W.A.*



Bullying and obesity, two worlds collide,
A cruel combination that cannot be denied.
The taunts and jeers, the laughter and sneers,
Chipping away at a soul, leaving it in tears.

The weight on the body and the weight on the heart,
An unbearable burden tearing lives apart.
The judgmental eyes and the pointing of fingers,
A painful reminder that negativity lingers.

Too heavy to run away, too fragile to stand,
The victim of bullying, a lonely island in a cruel land.
Choking on tears, struggling to breathe,
A lifeless body, ready to leave.

The world can be a cold and cruel place,
A place where bullies hide their face.
Obesity may be a battle that can be won,
But the scars from bullying leave a lifetime undone.

Robinson Haters

If you are a kid who hates vegetables and you never eat them, you should! Not convinced? I should get on with this story about a kid who hated vegetables, just like you. So get comfortable and let's begin.

Most kids in the world hate vegetables. But not as much as this little boy did. Meet Robinson Haters. He would never lay a finger on vegetables after one terrible frightening incident. One time, he was having some salad, he took a bite, but then he felt something squishy. When he spat it out, there was the largest and slimiest slug he had ever seen! After that horrid day, Robinson decided to never eat vegetables ever again. Whenever his parents tried to sneak in a single bit of vegetable in his treats, he would always find out.

One day, Robinson was in his room, like a lion devouring his secret stash of sweets. He was enjoying himself until his mother barged into his room looking disgusted when she saw what he was doing. When his mother tried to snatch away the chocolate and sweets, Robinson growled like an angry dog.

"Who taught you to speak like that?" snapped his mother, "Anyways, I have some salad for you." The boy glared at the bowl in silence and complained to his mother that he wanted meat. His mother glared at him.

"Young man, you must at least have a few vegetables or you will have constipation!" Robinson didn't care, but then, he had an idea. When his mother left, the naughty boy went to his window and threw all of the vegetables down into his mother's garden.

Night arose, and Robinson was tucked into bed, ready to sleep. But suddenly, he heard a variety of growls. He rolled out of bed and followed the sounds. It came from his mother's garden. 'Perhaps the neighbour's dog is growling.' He went down to the garden and only found deep silence. It was so silent that he could hear his heart beat.

Soon the growls returned and became roars like lions. And then, it was revealed. Or should I say... they. An army of vegetables arose and became bigger every second. They were as huge as boulders. Robinson was frozen in fear. One of the vegetables boomed, "Oh, hello Robinson. Glad to see you at last. Did you think that we wouldn't feel anything whenever you did something to us?" Robinson gulped and shook his head.

The other vegetables gasped. The vegetable laughed, "We're more than that. And do you know

what happens to kids who don't eat their vegetables?" The poor boy frowned. "They get eaten!" It shouted. Robinson ran but he was too slow for the vegetables. The vegetables blocked every exit. The leader grabbed Robinson and ate him whole!

After that horrific night, Robinson's parents realized that their son was missing. They put missing posters all around the town, but he was never found. If you're reading this, eat your vegetables!

*By Katie Park
Grade Category: middle
St Therese's Catholic Primary School
Denistone, N.S.W.*



*By Meg Allen
Grade Category: senior
Genesis Christian College
Brisbane, Qld.*

Growing Up

The seed is planted, as my little girl is welcomed into the world.

The seed sprouts, as my little girl starts her first day of school.

The seed is now a seedling, as my little girl no longer fits into her uniform.

The seedling gets its first leaves, as my little girl passes by the playground emotionless.

The seedling is now a beautiful oak tree, as my little girl decided she is not little enough to love me.

The oak tree grows taller and taller, as my little girl gets behind the wheel.

The oak tree prepares for winter, as my little girl has her last day of high school.

The oak tree leaves have now all fallen, as my little girl is not so little anymore.



Champagne White

Through the quivering tears in her eyes, the city lights seemed to blur together into a champagne white expanse. The sharp edges and cutting towers of the urban skyline was replaced by dancing spots of light in her iris which seemed to stretch onto the distance to where it melded into a brilliant white. There – now here – now everywhere and nowhere at once – there were objects, indistinguishable through the liquid. Something with and without shape.

She studied the tear-blurred expanse, wanting to call out to someone – for anyone. Everything had gone right – just as she had hoped. But it was only when she had made it that she had realised, alone, that the elevation only made it colder.

She was the sister of an Olympic swimmer – her brother, someone she was enviously proud of, had always been the showpiece of the family's pride. Looking at her own lack of achievement, contrasted with her brother's certainty, she had sought to find a central axis around which her life would rotate. So, she had plunged into her budding career as a lawyer. She stayed up studying instead of sleeping. She stayed home instead of going out. Where her friends went out every Friday, she pushed her aching mind to its absolute limit to fine-tune the smallest expanses of her essay. She skipped her daughter's piano recital to pursue an internship opportunity at a conference which ultimately turned out fruitless. She searched endlessly for that career boost, cancelling countless family dinners for the endless excuse of 'work', neglecting her partner, the father of her daughter, who would soon leave her as she pushed him away.

And what a load of good that had done her, she thought, as she sat on the couch with the bottle of 2012 Moët as her only companion for the cold winter night. It was her graduation night as valedictorian. On the table, her honours certificate lay on the right, an internship offer from the top law firm she had thought she always wanted on her left. On the couch, regret sat on her right. Loneliness on her left.

Burnout was what her doctor had called it – failure, she had translated.

The tears were still shivering in her eyes.

She refused to let them fall. It was her last stand. The city lights began to stretch then fade, then coalesce and disperse. They almost looked like little stars, as if something new was about to be born in her eyes.

The universe began, in those tears, as large clouds of hydrogen and helium, before gravity created the stars in a supernova explosion of whirling colour and heat and energy. Slowly, in a delicate dance, molecules began to collect before Meredith's eyes, and there came the first, fragile living organisms.

The conditions for life needed the right amount of energy and diverse chemicals. She saw it all come together. She saw the perfect template – our DNA – the formula for life appear. She saw it replicated before her eyes, saw its infinite complexity and perfect beauty.

But a billion copies later, there was a mistake. An imperfection.

A random mutation, which seemed deadly, destroying the functioning of organisms.



The mistakes seemed to be a disease – threatening to destroy the rapid progress of billions of years churning before her.

But every once and a while, something different happened.

As Meredith watched, she saw that some of these mutations were useful. They gave individuals characteristics which helped them survive. And with that, came multi-cellular organisms, then plants, then animals.

The mutations – the mistakes – began to add up until at last, 200,000 years ago,

the mistakes created her. And then, in a flashing brief millisecond, as the tear trembled ever more precariously on her lashes, she saw herself. A whole life played out before her, whirling in flashes of colour and laughter and tears. But a different one. Of future dinners with family, of soon-to-come drinks with friends, watching her partner twirl her daughter around amongst the balloons – the life she had missed so far, but the life she could still have now.

The tear slipped onto her cheek.

Her vision cleared. She saw a single, warmly lit living room. An empty bottle of Moët sat on the table. A fallen glass on the floor. A sleeping person lying on the couch. Meredith.

Looking down at her sleeping self, Meredith felt something different. It wasn't pity or sadness, or regret or hate.

It was relief. Because in that instance, she realised that our history is made from mistakes. That me, you, him, and her – we are all the accumulation of billions of years of mistakes.

And we still make mistakes – we all do.

But that's okay.

Because maybe – just maybe – one day, one of those mutations in Meredith's life would change everything.

After all, we are all imperfectly perfect. Life isn't meant to be smooth, Meredith realised. It's the mistakes which help us build our character and learn who we are.

She lay there, happy at last. Stared at her bottle of Moët. Stared at its label.

By Ronan Ahl
Grade Category: senior
Scotch College
Hawthorn, Vic..

Ambassadors



Paul Collins has written many books for younger readers. He is best known for his fantasy and science fiction titles: The Jelindel Chronicles (*Dragonlinks, Dragonfang, Dragonsight and Wardragon*), and The Quentaris Chronicles – co-edited with Michael Pryor – (*Swords of Quentaris, Slaves of Quentaris, Dragonlords of Quentaris, Princess of Shadows, The Forgotten Prince, Vampires of Quentaris and The Spell of Undoing*). His trade books published in America are *The Earthborn, The Skyborn and The Hiveborn*.

Paul has edited many anthologies which include *Trust Me!, Rich & Rare* and Australia's first fantasy anthology, *Dream Weavers*. He also edited *The MUP Encyclopaedia of Australian SF&F*.

His last fantasy series was *The Warlock's Child*, written in collaboration with Sean McMullen. His book, *Slaves of Quentaris*, was listed in *1001 Children's Books You Must Read Before You Die* (UK, 2009). His latest books are *James Gong – The Chinese Dragon* and *Tarni's Chance* illustrated by Jules Ober.

Paul has been short-listed for many awards and has won the Inaugural Peter McNamara A Bertram Chandler, Aurealis and William Atheling awards. In 2022 he was awarded the CBCA's Leila St John Award for services to Victorian children.

Other than his writing, Paul is the publisher at Ford Street Publishing, a children's specialist publishing everything from picture books through to young adult literature. Two books, *Pool*, by Justin D'Ath and *Crossing the Line*, by Dianne Bates, were short-listed for the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. A third, Shane Thamm's *My Private Pectus*, was short-listed in the Territory Read Award. Ford Street won Picture Book of the Year with Chris McKimmie's *I NEED a Parrot*.

Paul spends much of his time travelling around Australia giving writing workshops to students from grade four to Year 12.

Paul's websites are: www.paulcollins.com.au, www.fordstreetpublishing.com and www.creativenetspeakers.com.

Anna Ciddor says she can't imagine a better job than being an author and illustrator. She gets to spend all day sitting around daydreaming, sketching, making up stories, and indulging her obsession for research and history – except when her smart watch tells her get up and run around, or her grandchildren need looking after! While indulging her passion, she has created nearly 60 books on all sorts of topics that have taken her fancy, and won many accolades, including the Nance Donkin Award for Children's Literature, a grant from the Australia Council, three Notable Book awards from the Children's Book Council of Australia and shortlistings for numerous other awards.

Anna's latest novels, *The Boy Who Stepped Through Time* (Allen and Unwin 2021) and *A Message Through Time* (Allen and Unwin April 2023 release) are time-slip adventures that carry the main characters (and the readers) back to Roman times. You can find out more about Anna Ciddor and her books, and get some tips for your own writing and illustrating, at www.annaciddor.com. If you would like Anna to visit your school you can book her through www.creativenetspeakers.com



Meredith Costain is a versatile writer whose work ranges from picture books through to poetry, series fiction and narrative non-fiction. Her latest books include the quirky *Ella Diaries* – which has been shortlisted many times in the YABBA and KOALA children's choice awards – and its sister series, *Olivia's Secret Scribbles*. Other titles include CBCA Honour Book *Doodledum Dancing, Musical Harriet*, nature series *My Life in the Wild*, and novelisations of the TV shows *Dance Academy* and *The PM's Daughter*. She was recently honoured to receive the KOALA Legend Award.

Meredith lives in inner-city Melbourne with a menagerie of pets, who frequently wrangle their way into her stories and poems. She enjoys presenting writing workshops for children and adults around Australia and overseas, and loves helping writers to create stories based on their own experiences. To find out more about her books, pets and early writing years, visit www.meredithcostain.com

THE GRACEFUL BIRD AND THE TALL GIRAFFE

The Journey of the Ants

It all started in Fairy Kiss,
When everyone's life was full of bliss,
Pretty honeysuckle and roses blue,
A frozen fjord was never true.

But then, a cyclone blew the bugs,
'Meant no kisses, nor any hugs,
Delicate joy was out of sight,
The tiny insects used all their might.

The small ants would have to flee,
Otherwise, their lives couldn't be,
Across the seas they had to travel,
Otherwise, their hearts were gravel.

But then, the journey was ever so much fun,
Lots of fun in the rainbows and the sun,
Splashing in the bright blue sea,
Astonishing as an ancient family tree.

By Suwan Liu
Grade Category: junior
Christ Church Grammar School
South Yarra, Vic.

Giraffe roamed the savannah, looking for food and noticed a purple spot on the horizon. Hoping it was food she continued in that direction. The spot grew bigger, when she heard "Squawk!". She could see a lilac bird flapping towards her.

"Hello, you're so graceful!" Giraffe called.

"Thankyou," Bird replied, landing gently nearby.

"How I wish I could fly like you," Giraffe spoke wistfully.

"Oh, my wings are useless, you're tall, you see danger from anywhere!"

"Yes, but I cannot find food!" replied Giraffe.

"I can show you, follow me!" called Bird, and off they went, travelling together.

As a tree came into view, they heard a voice call, "Help!". They hurried along and found Frog stuck in a tree. "Please help, I'm stuck between the branches!"

"Bird, can you fly to help?" Giraffe asked,
"Sorry, I can't carry anything while flying, surely you could reach him?"

"Of course!" cried Giraffe, as she reached up. She used her nose to carefully nudge the frog free, who then slid down Giraffe's back.

"Thankyou, you're my hero, I was hopping around and bounced too high. Oh, I wish I was tall like you!"

"Nonsense, you're wonderful just as you are!" responded Giraffe.



By Allegra Barnes
Grade Category: middle
Pedare Christian College
Greenwith, S.A.

The Seedling

One cold night came a seedling,
Through the dry cracked earth, it popped.
So tiny, so small, compared to the world,
As if it had been cropped.

When summer comes days are harder,
Struggling to grow and thrive.
No moisture, no minerals, a slim hope of life,
Struggling to stay alive.

The seasons change and now comes autumn,
Dead leaves showering the terrain.
A reminder of struggle and tough times,
A reminder of sadness and of pain.

Now comes winter, dark and cold,
Wispy clouds hung up high.
Snow falling covering the sprout,
Falling, falling from the sky.

Spring brings with it the wettest of days,
Cold hard water pummeling the ground.
Shards of ice drop from the clouds,
Leaving the little seed drowned.

By Ava Nammuni
Grade Category: middle
Ravenswood School for Girls
Gordon, N.S.W.



Magpies

A silhouette of a svelte body swathed in a coat of monochrome arrives.

Beak of ivory dipped in ink, clucking, while those talons are rigid scythes under the Australian sun.

With amber eyes, beady and unwavering,
Like sympathetic wet stones out in a paradisiacal garden.
Flourishing with roses and daisies and tinkling with wind charms.

Claws tightly gripping a rusted wire.

As it, jerking its head,
Is inquisitively at the porch, its hooked feet on the painted, peeling wood.
Wings extended, feathers delicately caressing.

The wind as it stands, like an intricate work of a sculptor,
As it is a masterpiece of Mother Nature.
The pulse of rain is rhythmic on the tin roof,
Solacing in the way like a melody is played out.

And I sink into the rocking chair swaying to the tempo.
A cock of those intelligent pupils, cavernous with age, glossy with petrichor,

Murmur a faint goodbye but a genuine one.

Its feathers gleam, ensnared in the pearls of water
Is a cloak of Stygian and alabaster
Embellished with graphite-gray.
The rush and roar of the rain, swelling with those

Globules nacreous as the afternoon sun peeks around.

The fringed cotton sweaters lining the sky that mute out the farewell.
It flies away.

Away to shelter from the needle-like prickles of the rain.
Now only a speck seeking refuge in the gum trees.
As a crescent of hues is like a suppressed baleen smile.
Chortling with the magpies.



By Lily Zhang
Grade Category: middle
Pymble Ladies' College
Pymble, N.S.W.

The Hiding Place

Cleaning up is one thing every child dreads. Picking up each t-shirt and placing it on a hanger one by one. Folding tracksuits takes forever. It's making my eyes roll into the back of my head. You see I'm more into the relaxed lifestyle, taking long hot showers, lazing in bed listening to music. However, I recently discovered that I love ironing, so that's new. So, when my mum announced 'we are going to have a cleanup' a certain reflex, panic mode, kicked in.

If you are unsure what panic mode is, I will explain. Panic mode is a natural reflex the brain has developed to send it into overdrive. You can use this to come up with every way possible to avoid things.

As my mum spoke the world seemed to stop and what was being said turned into slow motion. The clock ticked so slowly I thought I would be forever trapped in this terrible moment.

I had to find a space to hide until it was over. I am sort of known for being able to fit into the most unlikely places and can stay there for a long time. I once broke a record for the longest time hidden in hide and seek, but that's a story for another day. I had prepared a special hiding spot that would use this skill perfectly. Carefully, and without anyone noticing, I grabbed some snacks and things to entertain myself and moved to my special hiding spot. I had

discovered this spot about a week before mum's cleaning announcement, so I knew exactly where to go.

The spot is a cupboard up on the bench, so it's a challenge getting up there without making noise. Luckily for me, everyone else was already busy cleaning. My mum was sorting clothes into piles, my dad was putting things away and making the bed, my little brother was busy stuffing clothes into all spots known to humankind. Though he can be found out when mum goes into inspect and an avalanche of clothes comes out of the wardrobe. So, with these distractions, I was able to get into the safe zone without anyone knowing.

Someone must have come in to see how I was going because a while later I heard 'Where's Kieran?'. I knew it would only be a matter of time before they found me. I stayed hidden and peeked out and saw someone looking around the room. In cupboards, behind chairs and calling my name 'Kieran, KIERAN!'.

Then my mum came into the Kitchen. Luckily, I had discovered a secret compartment above me. I had been sitting in their playing candy crush with the cha Ching noise ringing in my ear, when a board fell and hit me on the head, and I discovered a secret passage to the cupboards above. I went up there and

hid. I made it just as my original spot was discovered. I was safe! Unfortunately, as they were leaving the cupboard floor broke. Snap! And I was found out and that was the end of that, and I was forced to join the cleaning mission.

I was sent to my room only to discover that the pile of clean clothes had doubled and although I still just added them back into the washing basket, it's probably just better to do the cleaning in the first place. All in all, it just goes to show that everything comes at a price, having fun has the price of doing some work sometimes, but when you do it you can have a whole lot of fun.

*By Kieran Talbot
Grade Category: middle
Scotch College
Hawthorn, Vic.*

When the Clock ends

Cold. I feel cold. My body's warmth has been evicted; replaced by fear and dread. This icy sensation explores my body; its new home. And it slivers down my back, tightening its chilling grasp around my neck. Never before had I noticed how time is so much like water; that it can pass slowly, a drop at a time, even freeze, or rush by in a blink.

The clock says that it is measured and constant. The clock says that it is a part of an orderly world. The clock lies. The past few hours have passed like thousands of camera frames shown one at a time. In this slow time-bubble the birdsong is louder, the coldness is colder, and the colours are brighter. All while my insides feel as if there is nothing left. Nothing to need feeding. Nothing to have need of anything at all.

Just a few hours ago, I had sat at ease, resting upon the couch; like a sponge, soaking in all the wonders of a warm Sunday afternoon. Until the phone rang. Now I sit here in a freezing, putrid hospital room; my porous mind no longer soaking in positivity, but dread. Even as I picked up the phone, I had felt joyous. How stupid was I to suspect a potential friendly chat with a colleague or family member. How stupid was I to feel joy at answering that ringing.

Through the device, a woman spoke back to me, her voice slowly trailing off as if her words were unwilling to take flight. And an impenetrable sense of fear glazed over me, blocking my airways, and tightening my joints. And here I am now, in this windowless room, my heart racing as I try to resist the urge to break down. I need to stay strong. But my mental glass of feelings is slowly filling, and I don't know how much more it can hold.

I am encountered by a doctor whose limbs move as if some inexperienced person is controlling them remotely. His wide eyes look right at me. No, right through me. My cold and clammy hands grasp either side of my shirt as I try to suppress a shiver and fight my rising panic. He tells me that my husband has been in an accident and has suffered severe head trauma. He is in a coma.

As time flows around me, constantly moving and everchanging, it has stopped for him. His clock has stopped ticking and he, like a rock in a river, remains idle as his surroundings grow and change around him. And from my eyes, tears flow like rivers down my quivering cheeks. I have broken. My cup is full. And I collapse to the ground, numb and void of all feelings but pain.

As the days turn into months, I remain by my husband's side, praying that some day his clock will tick once more. I talk to him, read to him, sing to him, hoping that he can



still hear my voice and feel my love. But as these weeks turn into months, I begin to lose hope. All around us, the other patients recover and head home. But we remain and my husband remains inactive and silent. Will he ever wake up? But then I question, if he did wake, what kind of life would he live?

Seated on the plastic chair beside his bed, I hear a gut-wrenching noise similar to scratching on a window. But this room has no windows. So, I hesitantly rise from my seat and check the hallway only to realise that the sound is coming from inside the room. I experience a familiar chill down my backside. Like a cold drip of water travelling down my spine, leaping from one vertebrae to the next. One step at a time, I walk back to my husband. My gaze travels up his body from his blanket-covered legs to his cold, motionless arms, all the way to his eyes. His open eyes.

But these are not his eyes. These eyes are dark and empty, filled with a sense of malice. My fear is intensified. Something is wrong. I step back, slowly moving away from the bed. But something cold touches my wrist and pulls me back. He's got me.

His arm is out at reach now and stronger than ever, pulling me ever so closer to him with every second that passes. I scream and try to fight back but I am simply too weak. I have been smacked in the face by the harsh truth. My husband is gone. And whatever is in his body now is something evil.

And his body starts to contort like some monster from a horror film, twisting and transforming into something inhuman. And with his hand grasped tight on my wrist, I feel every crack and crunch of his bones as they rub against each other like nails on a chalkboard. I scream for help, but nobody comes. It is as if he has been possessed by some dark force using his body as a vessel.

Then his other arm reaches out and grabs my shoulder and before I even have a chance to comprehend, I am hoisted into the air above his mangled body. Now, his head is cocked at a low angle below his shoulder which is folded across his back. And above this arm, his left leg hangs backwards, rocking side to side with each movement as if it is completely dislocated.

He pulls me close, wrapping his cold body against mine before I feel a crunch in my neck and my body becomes even colder. I am numb and my vision begins to blur as he holds me up by my neck and launches me down onto the floor where I succumb to my injuries.

My clock has stopped. And my time has come to an end.

*By Kaylee Jesnoewski
Grade Category: senior
Mindarie Senior College
Mindarie, W.A..*

MY BEING IS MADE OF THE CORPSES

OF ABANDONED DREAMS

My body resides in the grave that is my bed. I am stuck to its sheets, the mattress sucking my limbs and muscles like the earth drawing the colour from my dry dead flesh. Once bright with colour and vibrance it held up the universe, the potential to apotheosis. Now it is rotting and putrid, it ferments in the casket I lie in.

I don't want to hear you scream useless words into my face, I hang onto the hope that one day you will have more to say than just constant criticisms, insults spewed at my tombstone. But the world reacts with silence and ignorance to my defamation. Its response is that of nonchalance and neglect.

I am the orange peel no one eats, forever left on the side of the plate to be thrown away. I am the expired fruit that sits spoiling and decaying in the bowl. And it is ever so lonely. And empty. The horizon I so desperately want to touch is blurred by the presence of you and your wrath. I am left in ambiguity and uncertainty.

I stare blankly out the window, I watch the clouds float and drift across the sky. They disappear behind the buildings. Time passes, it keeps going. Constantly, continuously, inevitably. Forever plagued, hindered and debilitated by my insignificance in this

universe.

I am but one in 8 billion. The trillions of stars and galaxies in the sky that I ponder about. Meaningless and intangible, I reach out to grab onto the thread of hope that is my existence. I clutch ever so tightly. My knuckles turn white and my fingernails pierce the skin of my palms.

I call out to the heavens to help me hold on. I plead them to save me. But the universe reacts with nonchalance and ignorance to my suffering. The billions of trillions of stars and galaxies that stretch to the bounds of time reject my screams. The thread slicing the skin on my fingers. Silence from Mercury, abandoned by Venus. No one. The flesh rips and tears. I have fallen into the sea.

*By Smita Rajbangsh
Grade Category: senior
St George Girls High School
Kogarah N.S.W.*



Autumn Leaves

Leaves change from green to gold,
As the playful wind sets in.
They hum and they shiver and dance in the breeze,
As the song of wonder begins.

The leaves frolic and dance,
To the wind's soothing song.
They whirl, they float, they rustle,
They circle and fly along.

The wind's gentle embrace,
Leaves waltzing along.
The melody comes to fade,
Sweet, and everlong.

The fallen leaves crunch and crackle,
Blue haze hangs from the dimmed evening sky.
The fields are filled with thousands of stalks,
As cool wind brushes them by.

The last red berries hang from the thorn tree,
The last vivid orange leaves fall to the ground.
Bleakness, through the trees and bushes,
Comes, without a sound.

*By Rohan Cali
Grade Category: middle
Scotch College
Hawthorn, Vic.*

Cast in Stone

The town square was dark and quiet. Grey clouds dotted the midnight sky.

Ambrose stumbled into the square. The haggard man shivered and wrapped the ragged blanket closer around his body. Age had carved a starved wolf from his marred face.

Posters peeled off the buildings. An unceasing wind tormented those cowering inside. Ambrose limped slowly towards the centre where a lone man waited.

They stared at each other for several moments before one of them spoke. Alexander's voice was coarse and grating, like the barrel of a cannon.

'You came.'

Ambrose looked up to the pedestal.

'It took a long time... to find you,' he said, gesturing around, 'Especially in this place.' Alexander looked down at Ambrose, silent, unmoving, until he met his gaze.

'You always knew where I stood,' Alexander said, 'I haven't exactly been moving around.'

'Fine, fine. I... I couldn't come back. Not after what I did.'

Ambrose touched Alexander's knee. It was weathered, and cold to the core.

'I missed you once, I thought you would always have my back, just like I had yours. That we'd stand together in this war just like we'd always promised. I loathed the long hours in the trenches without you, unsure where you were, if you were even

alive,' said Alexander, voice cracking like gunfire.

Ambrose stumbled back into the darkness. 'I never forgot our promise,' he breathed.

From a young age they had vowed to fight together as brothers, back-to-back, bringing peace to their country. But as the years passed by, the distance between them had grown. A chasm that couldn't be bridged by mere words. The family was slowly fractured by the different visions the brothers held for the future of their homeland.

When the war arrived at their doorstep, the young revolutionaries suddenly found themselves on opposite sides of the fighting. They would quickly learn that behind those grand idealistic dreams was simply death, devastation, and the defeated faces of those they could not save.

That last night, they had stood and watched a city burn to ashes. The last insurgents had been somewhere within. The army did not hesitate. The first plane came within minutes, shooting stars across the city. Then came the second, the third, the fifth, the eighth plane. Fireballs lit up the sky, revealing beasts of smoke and dust. Their red wrath illuminated the ribs of metal skyscrapers as they clawed towards the heavens in their last moments. Screams were swallowed up by the crash of raining rubble as the bones of proud concrete blocks were reduced to dust.

Hours later, no remnant of life remained. The two soldiers had watched, one with a face of cold stone, the other crumpled in anguish.

'No more,' Alexander had said as he surveyed the destruction.

'No more,' Ambrose had said as his eyes spilled silent tears.

There would be no more fighting. For Ambrose, the war and the cause were more than lost. His brothers and sisters in arms, and the thousands they had fought for, erased from existence, not a single soul spared, except perhaps his.

From brothers to enemies, Ambrose had silently

turned towards Alexander, a gun raised in his clenched fist. Beneath the veil was a raging battle for control of the trigger as Alexander turned to meet his haunted gaze. But then Ambrose squeezed tight and blood bloomed on Alexander's chest. Ambrose's heart broke.

The days of toy soldiers in the living room would never last. It was never meant to be. If only they had stayed together, listened and tried to understand, maybe they would have left behind more than ruins.

Ambrose returned to the present underneath the ghostly glow of the waning moon.

'Why have you come?' Alexander's voice was granite.

'Because my end is near, and I know there will be no forgiveness,' Ambrose whispered feebly.

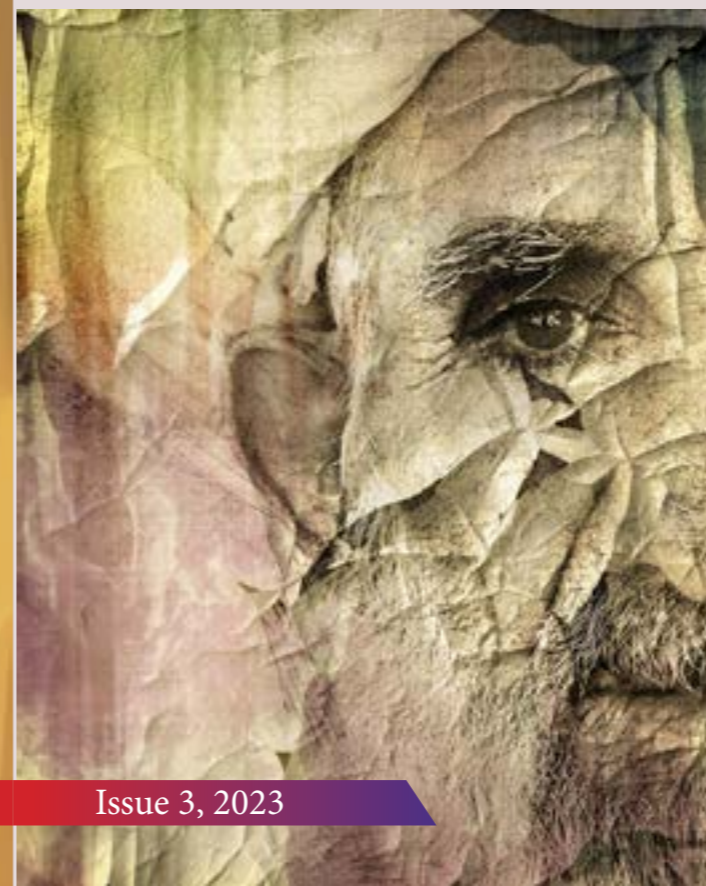
His brother was silent.

Ambrose looked back at Alexander one final time before turning away. No one saw him fade into the shadows as dawn's delicate light revealed the carcass of the world.

Shining across the horizon, a fiery sun gilded the time-worn soldier standing on the pedestal. A polished medal gleamed on Alexander's chest. He stood frozen in time, hands resting on his gun. Underneath lay a single plaque.

'In memory of the man who gave everything for the peace we know today.'

*By Jeremy Li
Grade category: senior
Scotch College
Hawthorn, Vic.*



BOOK REVIEWS

Meet our book reviewers:

Elka, Ari, Lily, Anika, Ella and Lachlan from Years 5 and 6 at Tucker Road, Bentleigh Primary School, in Victoria.

Reviews Coordinators
Robyn Donoghue and Meredith Costain



Meet Me at the Moon Tree

by Shivaun Plozza (UQP)

Meet Me at the Moon Tree follows a girl named Carina and her dad – who share a love of dendrology (the study of trees). Both are endlessly fascinated by the idea of finding a Moon Tree, one of hundreds of trees planted across the world from seeds carried from the Apollo 14 Space Mission. When Carina’s family move to regional Victoria, Carina is sure she will find a Moon Tree in the ancient Otway Forest, hoping its stardust will help her family to become whole after a tragedy.

Meet Me at the Moon Tree was a very engaging book that entertained me for the whole read, particularly the relationship between father and daughter. The book gave me the magical gift of feeling what Carina was experiencing in the story. I loved how even though the storyline seemed to be finished, the author spun you around with a new twist.

Although I thought that parts of the story went on for too long, it was nevertheless a captivating read.

I think this book would be suitable for children aged 9+ but some may require an adult to read it to them to help the child understand its more mature passages.

Rating: 9.5/10

— Elka, Year 5



Star Diving

written and illustrated by Andrew Plant (Ford Street Publishing)

Stardiving is a picture book with a message about looking for beauty in the world. The main character, Fluke, is a whale who wants to look at the beautiful stars in the sky. It was a cloudy night so Fluke couldn’t see the stars. His wise old friend Cachalot told him that there are stars at the bottom of the ocean. Fluke wanted to explore!

Andrew Plant’s story tells us that there is beauty everywhere – and his illustrations show this in great detail.

I strongly recommend this picture book for young children aged 5–8, because it has a good message to teach kids about what you can find when you spend time looking.

Rating: 8/10 stars

— Ari, Year 5



Bella and the Voyaging House

by Meg McKinlay, illustrated by Nicholas Schafer (Fremantle Press)

This book is about a girl named Bella who has a wonderful relationship with her grandad, who is an inventor. He has a workshop full of recycled materials that he sees as treasure. Bella loves being in the shed helping him to repair discarded objects.

In order to give her grandad the best birthday present ever, Bella sets sail on the Voyaging House to find his most prized possession, which is missing.

What could go wrong?

This book was really imaginative and creative, and I loved the fantasy and adventure. I recommend this book to readers 10+.

Rating: 8/10 stars.

— Lily, Year 6



Jawsome

written and Illustrated by R J Timmis (Albert Street Books)

The main characters in Jawsome are Finley and his friends: Hunter, Gilleon and Gnash. They are on a hunt to find out why Chumville is running out of Chum and why it is closing down.

I really enjoyed this book because it was very funny. One of its strengths was that it really pulled me into the story and I could not stop reading it! It also had some hilarious jokes.

Read this book to discover the cause of all the chaos in Chumville.

This book would suit readers aged 8–12 who love fantasy, mystery and humorous stories.

Rating: 8.5/10

— Anika, Year 6



Downtown Sewertown

written and illustrated by Tull Suwannakit (Ford Street Publishing)

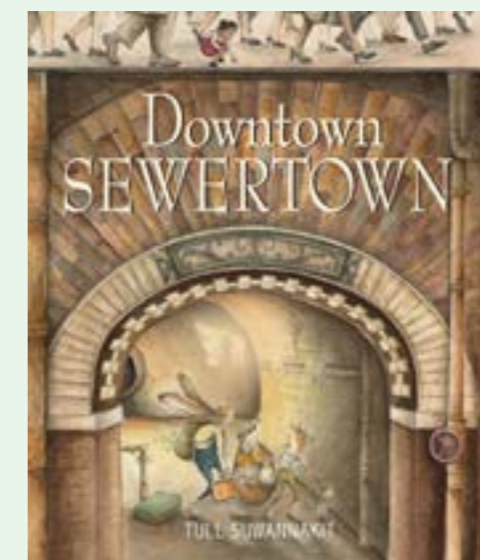
Downtown Sewertown is a picture story book. The engaging illustrations are stunning and picturesque. They have tons of detail and talent put into them.

It’s about a large group of animals forced out of their homes by folk building homes and knocking down all the trees. The animals flee to the city, but it is similar there. The animals, feeling unwanted and scared, head to the sewers. And even though this area is dirty and smelly, they still find a way to make it home. However, there is one problem: What will the townspeople think when they discover Sewertown?

With a fantasy genre, I recommend this book to readers aged 4-8.

Rating: 8/10 stars

— Ella, Year 5



The Quest for the Galleon of Time

by Tanya Hunter (Midnight Sun Publishing)

11-year-old Tobias goes on a journey over dangerous seas on a time travelling ship – through past, present and future – on a mission to get home to his dad.

This book jumped straight into the action and continued to keep me on the edge of my seat until the page-turning end. I could not put it down. I loved the description of life at sea and different times. I recommend this book for lovers of adventure and sailing.

Recommended for readers aged 9–15.

Rating: 10/10 stars

— Lachlan, Year 5



Our teapot of life



Our earth is a teapot,
We fight to stop it's fall,
Just a single swerve,
We are lost, once and for all.

It has already begun,
The fear, the guns.
We hide from this sight,
But nothing seems right,

As we search for hope,
To end perilous fights.
The cup is despair,
Waiting mockingly for end,

For us to close our eyes,
And slip 'round the bend
If we do not end these times,
If we are not wise,

We must stop tipping, Otherwise...

By Renee Kim
Grade Category: junior
Mornington Primary School,
Mornington, Vic.

Haunted House

Amelia crept into the abandoned house, cobwebs were hanging from the corners and the door was old and creaky. She heard a ghostly groan enter the atmosphere. A chill darted up her neck; her feet hooked into the chipped wooden floor.

Amelia felt something close in around her, she couldn't make out the ghostly groan that came from inside the dusty, wooden panels.

"Do I detect a flicker of fear?" cackled the voice, lifting objects so high they were unreachable. Amelia stood dumbfounded, let out a shriek and whizzed up the ash-coloured stairs and into a bedroom.

The sheets were untucked, and the pillow

laid cold on the crinkled bed sheets. Crash! Amelia briskly turned around to find the ghost holding something. She couldn't make out what it was. She shivered like an earthquake and glanced with disbelief. Crash! The dust fogged her eyes like smoke. When she opened them, she found ghosts surrounding her wearing her old mauve cape.

"Why do you have...my...cape?" Amelia stuttered, taking a slight step back. The ghost didn't reply, only stayed fixated on her. "Hold on," she thought. "Something looks familiar." She looked back at the ghost and immediately recognised the pastel blue eyes. It can't possibly be him.

"Charlie?" Amelia asked, her feet relaxing at the thought that bubbled around the dark room. The ghost nodded, threw back the cape to meet each other's glaze once more. "So," Charlie smiled. "You found me."

Amelia wasn't sure whether to run or to hide. 'He has ghost powers' she wondered. 'Means whether I go, he will know!' With no surprise, Amelia rushed towards the oak door, given the circumstances and twisted

the ochre handle. It didn't budge.

"Looks like you forgot Amelia, I control this house." The thunder roared loudly. Amelia panted and as quick as the wind, she met her untimely death.

"So, what happened next," begged the boy, eating his marshmallows by the glowing campfire.

"Well, she died," said the lady. "Oh," mumbles the boy wiping the marshmallow of his chin. Extremely quickly, he went to bed as the lady muttered, "I didn't tell him one slight detail, my name is Amelia, and I am very much alive."

On a stormy day, Charlie will arrive at your house, and you will meet the same untimely death. Just you wait and see.

By Jessica Brimson
Grade Category: middle
Greenslopes State School
Greenslopes, Qld.



The Long Nose Pirates on Their Adventure to Water 7

One gloomy dark night... BOOM! A ship had appeared in the distance.

The crew randomly started to shoot their bombs in the air but the bombs came from the ocean and almost hit our ship. So God D U-sopp (the name of the Captain of the Long Nosed Pirates) uses his EMP Rifle to scope and hit one of the Red Haired Pirates into the ocean. So, the Red Haired Pirates use all of their bombs but miss and they retreat.

The Red-Haired Pirates retreated to Middle Town. They gather all their resources to recover and go back and have a war with the Long Nose Pirates. Soon they travelled around the Grand Line trying to find the Long Nose Pirates and gain their bounty.

Meanwhile, the Long Nosed Pirates purchased some ammo. After they buy ammo, they hide from the Red Haired Pirates attacking them.

The Red Haired Pirates arrived....

The Red-Haired Pirates scattered around Middle Town. They check around every building in the town. "Hahaha, we found you!" exclaimed the Red Haired Pirates as they punched God D U-sopp. But.... He used an impact dial and reversed the damage back to the Red Haired Pirates.

Soon they left Middle Town to go to Water 7. They came across the legendary sea beast.

They struggled to defeat the legendary sea beast. As they struggled to defeat the sea beast, the sea beast roared out his bright orange fire.

Then God D U-sopp used his explosive bomb that defeats the sea beast.

Then as they sailed, they sang peacefully till it was sunset and reached Water 7.

As they entered Water 7 they found some meat and gobbled it all up.

By Aiden Noronha
Grade Category: middle
Trinity Catholic Primary School
Narre Warren South, Vic.

Artwork By Aiden Noronha



The Special Treasure

Gentleness sounds like the soft murmuring of the waves lapping at the seashore,
It is a delicate cockatoo's feather drifting slowly to the floor.
It tastes like a sweet sponge cake, melting in my mouth,
Gentleness is a soft silk, so light you cannot feel it.

Gentleness is like a soft and fluffy feather brushing against my skin,
The smell of eucalyptus skimming across my nose.
It is cobalt blue so bright and merry, a pearly white, shining in the sun,
Gentleness is a minty green, so calm and relaxing.

Gentleness is a downy duckling, jumping into the water,
A sleeping puppy, snoring gently in her bed.
Gentleness is round and smooth,
Like an egg that has just been laid.

Gentleness is the feeling of relaxation and calmness,
A feeling you can only have when you are at peace.
It is something that should be treasured, not taken for granted,
So, take gentleness as a gift and accept it. May its' peace be with you.

By Sophie Humburg
Grade Category: middle
Ravenswood School for Girls
Gordon, N.S.W.

The Magic Wish

“Hi, I’m Mara. I go to school at Fallon College and the girls dormitory is so old and destroyed, it’s hard to live there! Lucky I’m not staying there for the night anymore”. Mara was very intelligent and clever, but she got bullied so much.

“Hey nightmare,” chimed Piper. Phoebe crudely said, “OMG you look like a nightmare, ha-ha!” Sadie yelled sarcastically, “Noooo, please don’t haunt me in my nightmares!”

Mara was super kind when she wasn’t feeling annoyed. Mara was always depressed and miserable because of the mean girls at college. Mara, means nightmare and everyone knew that.

“I wish people would be nice to me. . .”

The next day, Mara was walking to Fallon College and for some reason she felt lovely and upbeat. The streetlights felt brighter and the sidewalk looked unusually, nicely paved. There were lots of lit up houses and tall buildings that had beautiful views, interesting architectural elements and tiled roofing.

The trees swayed in the wind like graceful ballet dancers. The wind gushed past Mara and the clouds looked fluffier than ever. Mara felt different. Mara felt cheerful! She skipped towards the roundabout and ran through the silver school gates. She waved to people she didn’t normally wave to, and she spoke to people, she would dodge in the hallway.

What was wrong with Mara?

Before Mara knew it, the day was over with no homework from Mrs Vassar, no detentions from Mr Zinc and lastly no bullying from the mean girls. Mara felt ecstatic and thrilled for having such a jubilant day! As Mara was walking home, her friend from school came with her. Adria got bullied as well. Adria means darkness so Mara and Adria are a match made in heaven!

“What’s that sound?” Adria screamed. Mara trembled as she replied “I don’t know!” “Aaarrggghh!” they both howled. The two girls felt like running away but they froze in fear as the mysterious figure walked



towards them.

Adria started sprinting away towards her house with large leaps and bounds with her short bob of hair swishing in the wind. “What do you want?” Mara mumbled. “Can you help me?” It said evilly. “How?” she whispered. “Get me home! Now!” it yelled. Mara asked, “Where do you live?” “5 Elizabeth Street.” It shouted. “Follow me,” Mara told it.

The figure looked like an old man that had ripped clothes on and wore a violet shawl. He had white hair and an elongated beard. His voice was rough and raspy and sounded very old. Mara walked him home.

“There you go. Have a nice day!” “Wait, let me reward you with something.” “What do you wish for?” “Ummmm, I don’t know.” Mara knew what she wanted to wish for, but when she spoke, no words came out. “I-I-wi-sh for my family and I to have wealth...”

“Place your hands on my hands and I will grant your wish,” he said firmly. Mara placed her hands on his hands and stated her wish. She put her left hand on his chest as commanded and the figure spoke.

“Go to sleep and your wish will come true!” “Ahhhhh- haaaaaa,” yawned Mara. “Here are your slippers, breakfast and large cup, 7 vanilla pumps, caramel drizzle, organic chocolate sprinkle, iced matcha tea and a drizzle coffee espresso.”

“Thank you,” Mara said confused. “Who are you?” “I am your family butler and this is your maid.” A tall, skinny red-haired male beamed.

“Can you go out while I get ready?” Mara questioned. The maid totally ignored Mara and got clothes out for her, turned the shower on and got her face care out. “I will wait for you out there and drive you to school in my Lamborghini!” insisted the butler.

“Broom, Brrroooooom, Broooooommm,” the lamborghini went. Mara got out of the car and strolled through the pot-hole filled concrete. She walked through the old hallway and Piper stopped her before she opened her locker.

“Ha ha ha, you got a maid, it’s probs just like a parent or something, right Sadie?” Mara’s maid followed Mara around school and helped her with everything. Mara didn’t feel cheerful anymore, she felt mad and flustered. What did the wish do to her?...

On the way to school, the maid followed Mara. It was a dark and gloomy day on Burtaline Street. It was a foggy day, so it was hard to see in the distance. All of a sudden, a bold and bright bolt of thunder crashed in the sky and the strange figure appeared in the middle of nowhere.

He walked up to Mara and asked her, “Do you like the wish I granted?” “No, I hate it!” “What did you do? I asked for wealth, not a maid and butler!” Mara fumed. She had a very angry temper this morning!

“Do you want me to cancel out this wish and grant you another?” “Yes, I wish to” . . .

“I wish to be pretty!” “Your wish is my command Mara.” “Go to sleep and your wish will come true.” “Mara, wake up, you are late to school!” “We have 15 minutes!” Mara’s mother ranted. Mara’s mirror must’ve seen the wrong person because it tipped over in laughter so Mara couldn’t see herself. “Look in the mirror you monster!” giggled Phoebe. “Oh sorry, it’ll probably shatter!” Mara thought.

“Oh what were they talking about?” Mara flushed the toilet and walked to wash her hands, “Aaaahhhh!” “What happened to my eyelashes and hair?” “Now I look even more ugly!” “What do I do now?” cried Mara. Adria picked up the scissors. “Are you sure you want me to do this?” “As sure as can be!” replied Mara.

“Crrric, Crrricc, Crrricc.” The scissors went. The scissors cut Mara’s hair and eyelashes to their normal length.

“I don’t hate it, it looks fabulous!” Mara said excitedly. “That chit that granted my

wish is a complete fruit loop: Worst genie ever!” Mara sobbed.

For a change, Mara rode her bike peacefully home. “Hey wait up!” “Let me grant you your last wish!” Mara kept riding extra speedily to get away from the old man. She thought the man didn’t know her address, little did she know, the old man was like Albert Einstein!”

“Hey wait up!” called his voice. “I’ve done my homework, Dad.” responded Mara. “I’m not your father, I’m here to grant your wish!” He said with his hands out. “I know what I want to wish for.”

“I wish to unwish all my wishes and wish for people to be nice to me!” “DON’T MESS IT UP! Do you understand?” “Yes dear, I will try not to.” Then he vanished out of sight. Mara knew she had to go to sleep overnight to fulfil the wish.

Mara didn’t have a good feeling about that wish because of all the mishaps that happened with the first and second wish. After school, Mara usually did her

homework, had a shower, and spent time with her family. But that day, she wanted to go to sleep so bad that she closed her eyes and put soundproof ear- muffs on. I wonder what happened next?

The next day Mara felt excited to see no butler, maid and lastly no more weird, old man figure! But she didn’t know what would happen at school that day. As soon as she stepped through the silver gate the mean girls carried her schoolbooks for her, she was walking on a scarlet carpet and her hair was getting brushed by Mr Zinc; The principal.

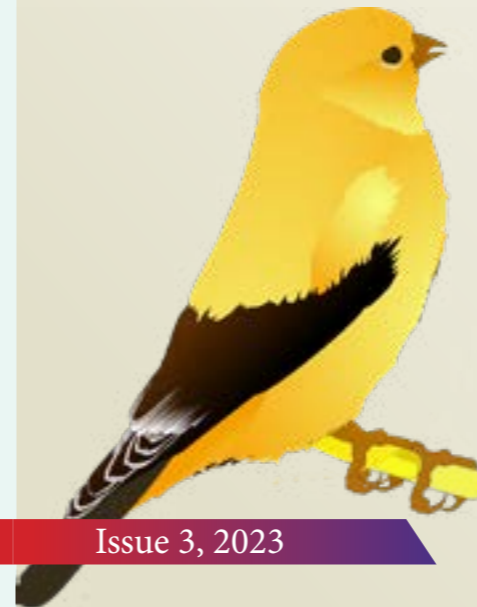
Mara walked up to Adria to tell her the bizarre thing that just happened but Adria knelt down on one knee and raised her arms to praise Mara. Mara didn’t know what was going on through her head. Mara pinched herself until she realised that her wish was to make people be too nice to her!

By Ava Marcolongo
Grade Category: middle
Trinity Catholic Primary School
Narre Warren South Vic.

Winter’s Relent

Time so cruel yet so forgiving,
Winter frosting over forgotten souls,
It claims it has not taken,
Covering evidence of unidentifiable
remains,
Struggling for survival.
Abandoned.

Northern goshawk,
Elegant and powerful,
Wings sweeping and lethal,
Talons poised and unforgiving,
Ready to dive and kill.
Predator.



Snow bunting birds,
Hiding under stone,
Nests filled with moss,
Huddling together,
Warmth from small bodies,
Unity.

Common redpolls swoop,
Flitting delicately,
Burrowing in snow,
Mottled feathers blurring,
Finding sun where it does not shine,
Hopeful.
Many species,
Hunting,
Ending,
Surviving,
Scavenging,
Deadly.

First flowers bloom,
Green peeking from under frost,
Snow dusted like icing sugar,
Trees’ leaves unfurl,
Reaching for light,
The kind touch,

The longing,
The lust,
Filling branches,
Granting strength,
Bitter cold departing,
Finally.

Flora thrives,
New life on a desolate planet,
Future bright,
Goldfinches returning from migration,
Back where they belong,
Familiar land, welcoming, lethal,
But it’s still home.

By Elsie Liem
Grade Category: middle
Ravenswood School for Girls
Gordon, N.S.W.

Mourning Mejiro

Fluffy. Warm. Safe.
The carpet of my bedroom comforts me.
Ten minutes.
The glowing phone screen hurts my red eyes.
Sakura season passes me by like the rest of the world.

Haiku. Sakura. The things I used to love,
Three lines of blissful freedom lifting me up above,
Above the clouds and over the rain,
Plummeting down to the ground.
It is so hard down on the ground.

Long-awaited spring.
Sakura replace the snow.
New beginnings sprout.

The captivating glow of the Sakura's silhouette seen outside,
Blocking out the sun.
Oh, I wish I could hide from the sun.
Eight minutes.
What I used to think was lucky has quickly turned to agony.

Minutes ticking by.
Seeming like hours they slowly pass,
My clock is ticking over.
My happiness is over.
Why do I even try?

Sakura falling
I will view them tomorrow.
Petals slowly swirl.

Blissful summer, pleasant rain,

Every season that arrives brings me pain.
Or maybe I am bringing myself pain.
Five minutes.
Oh, so long, though it used to be a breeze.

Heavy. Cold. Insecure,
The carpet of my bedroom has become uncomfortable.
Or maybe I am uncomfortable.
Shivers down my back, red eyes and soreness.
Maybe I should stop this now.

No more petals fall.
The last sweet drops of the Spring
Mejiro mourns it.

Two minutes.
I pick myself up and head to the door.
The still warm and welcoming door.
On a chair I serenely rest,
Though my mind would say otherwise.

I check my phone.
It should be here soon.
I wish happiness would come soon.
I can't even feed myself anymore.
What can I do?

By Alexandra Pitman
Grade Category: middle
Ravenswood School for Girls
Gordon, N.S.W.



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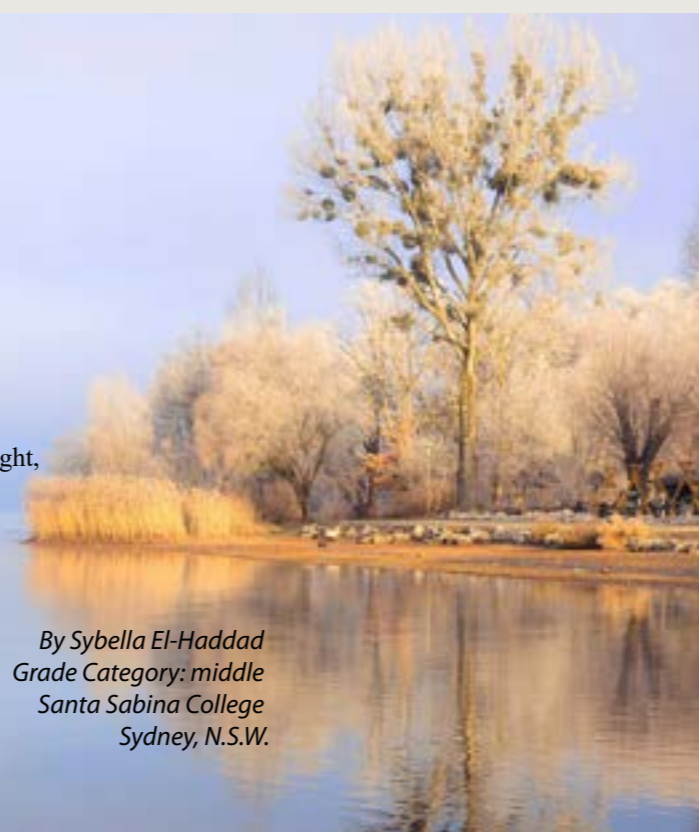
Crystal Lake

Crystal lake is pure perfection,
Soft greens and blues mirroring my reflection,
The placid serene waters are clear as glass,
Offering my eternal charm.

With tranquil trees that surround,
Lovey bloom that do abound,
Creating a dream of magic and wonder only out in plain sight,
The beauty to regard shines so bright.

A beauteous place to sit & ponder,
A Infatuation place that draws me in,
Euphoria crystal so thin.
Beauty as wonderfull as Opalescence,
What a ebullience essence.

By Sybella El-Haddad
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Beautifully Flawed

It has always been quite ironic that a male with such revulsion for society, was born into a world full of shortcomings. The first cry in the delivery room was not only a sign of life but a symbol of disgust, it was almost like he was born into the wrong species.

Potentially if he had some fur or sharper teeth, he would indeed be happier, all he needed was a world where he could run free. So, in this human form he awakens, unsure of his location. Laying against an abnormally large rock, the wild is where he sat. Grass at knee-length and air unsoiled. Looking around, observing... he wasn't just sitting in the wild, he felt as though he were a part of it. He was drawn to it, born for it.

The coldness quickly drifted as the morning heat set in, this world became abundantly clear. He could now see the muted trees in the distance, and the birds notes that beautifully pierced his ears. He began to think about his whereabouts, realizing this was unknown land.

Nevertheless, these thoughts were swiftly interrupted by the herd of animals charging from the depths of the far-away plants; an oblique line they ran, the grains of clouded dust, flying as they rushed, quickly pushing through the deepest parts of the grass coming straight towards his fragile body. Yet he didn't seem bothered by this tease, instead he simply watched as their legs moved faster than he could think.

Standing on his resting spot, he examined the area. Everything around him was tinted with a warm hue and the most brilliant circle of hills formed the perimeter of this vista. Rapidly their slanted line was now in direct eyesight. Swarms of fear in his stomach approached and his heart beat to the rhythm of their stomp.

Putting foot in front of foot, toe behind heel, elbows rotating from front to back, speed was now with him. However, no speed of his was compatible with the animals who were more robust than his foolish body could ever be. Behind him, he felt the charge of large creatures push against gravity, leaping from the rock he laid on only instants ago.

It felt as though he was part of a pointless

human race, the kind they film for television to give the cynical world some distraction from their miserable headspace. Still, this race seemed like the race of his life, death's shadow prowling his every footstep.

They charged.

Nothing.

He felt absolutely nothing.

Nor was he hurt or dead, but still running, running with the crowd. A flair of relief covered his stomach, butterflies flew away and the fireflies set in. The brightest feeling of happiness overwhelmed him. This emotion possessed memories of his daughter, the only child the despicable universe privileged him to receive. So now, with the thought of her in his heart, where was he? Why was he here? He questioned all the impossible.

Escaping the crowd without any harm, this mystery of new life began to drive him insane, but the prediction that he may only have a second deemed him to be a fool to waste.

Glancing up one of the many hills, he felt drawn to the climb. Contemplating, he reminisced the last time he was challenged to this degree, his daughter was to his side.

Determination exploded within him, his entire body fizzed with ambition. With his face cherry tinted and his pores crying tired tears, he prepared his drained legs for take-off. Using a stick to balance he marched up the uneven grass. The air became cooler, and the sky appeared warmer.

His weary legs trembled as he briskly reached the top. It was slightly slanted, bold green grass covered the dirt as sunflowers spread their yellow petals towards him. The scent of his own garden aroused his nose, combined with the crispy breeze made him feel like he was on top of the world.

Walking towards the peak of the hill, he saw the animals playing, and birds soaring. The sun was the most vivid orange, smearing the skies blue in purple, pink and yellows. A view only seen through perfectly painted pictures presented in major art galleries.

His heart was full... full of happiness, the kind that make you so excited, shivers swim through your spine and to your eyes. The universe didn't seem as horrendous as it traditionally would.

His two brittle feet aching from the climb, forced him to lay down. Now tilted on his back, he chuckled. He thought about his life. Birthdays, Christmases, streetlights, and late nights. Warm baths, loud laughs, babies crying and pancakes frying. The sweet voice of his mother, the touch of his finger through an incubator where his daughter laid unsteady.

The birds he would talk to for hours, a surprise trip he got to Africa, the garden where he spent days reading and the sweet flavour of apple juice that he craved every evening. Perhaps he was overlooking this flawed society. Perhaps all he did was make a mockery of the one life he got.

His hand befell comfort by another's grasp.

The animals let out a familiar, feminine cry.

And his ears heard the final beat, the high-pitched silence of goodbye.

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