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# OZ KIDS IN PRINT

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Front page cover image  
**'Determined'**  
 Kaniya Li  
 2022 Bic Australia Art Award MiddleG

Images:  
 pixabay.com / freepik.com

#### Published by:

**Australian Children's Literary Board**  
 (an initiative of the Children's Charity Network)  
 ABN 58 109 336 245  
 174 Victoria Road, Yering 3770  
 Postal Address:  
 PO Box 16 Coldstream Victoria 3770

#### The Selection Committee:

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 Pre-Press Printing: TenderPrint Au - Geelong  
 Website Production: The Media Warehouse  
 www.mediawarehouse.com.

# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Here at Children's Charity Network, we are not just about the OzKidsInPrint magazine. Established in 1998 the magazine was the main focus.

In 2007, the Young Artists Awards were born. Which has become a very popular choice of medium for students.

From 2024, Children's Charity Network will be showcasing Art entries in our OzKidsInPrint publication. The entries chosen at the time of each publication. They may not be final winners. However, they will be given a chance to be seen here.

We receive an abundance of brilliant entries. But we are unable to provide awards for all entries received. This is a way to show Australia the creative works we receive.

Congratulations to the 2023 Literary & Art Award Winners. We cannot wait to meet you all.

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**KEEP ON WRITING  
(TYPING)!**

*Carol Dick*  
Managing Editor

Find us on 

CHILDREN'S CHARITY NETWORK  
SUPPORTS CHARITIES  
AND ORGANISATIONS  
WHO SUPPORT US!

## Letter from our new CEO - Jason Woods



Hello all,

I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Jason Woods and I have joined the wonderful team of directors, authors, illustrators web design and magazine editors as the CEO of the Children's Charity Network (CCN). Together, we will continue to improve an already amazing magazine and organisation. My role as CEO is to oversee the daily running of the organisation, which arranges the OzKids in Print and other smaller sub-branches.

I have a wonderful family, my wife of 28 years, Belinda and 2 daughters, Emily, 21 and Yuki, 19 all who have some involvement in the charity too, and my beautiful newfoundland dog, Moo.

In my previous working life, I have been a farrier for almost 35 years. In that time I worked at Flemington racecourse shoeing lots of big race winners and then I went to Japan for a 4-year period to work on a racing farm. Upon returning, I started my own company in the Yarra Valley.

This year I was approached by Mr Rob Leonard, asking to take over the running of the Charity. I of course accepted the offer - having been somewhat involved for many years attending the gala dinner, this organisation has held a special place in my heart. I look forward to the challenges ahead for both the charity and I, and strive to see our workshops flourish and prosper.

Next year is the Children's Charity Networks 25th anniversary. We have some grand plans to expand and to celebrate this amazing milestone with all our donors, Patrons and author/illustrator families who have helped over the past 25 years.

Until next time, happy reading, writing, painting, drawing and all other creative media of choice, and I look forward to seeing more of your work in future editions.

Regards,

Jason Woods - CEO



**More News**

We have changed to Travel Bug - Travel Agent in Wantirna Victoria.

If you are looking to travel. Then please check out Travel Bug.

Travel Bug – Helping to get our Winners to Melbourne and all our Workshop Travellers to their destination.

# A COUNTRY FAIR

As the morning sun rises early,  
And happiness fills the air,  
A sleepy town between the hills,  
Wakes ready for the fair.

The town has waited months  
For this early autumn day.  
The fair will go ahead,  
With skies bright blue or grey.

The sun now on the rise,  
All fears of weather drowned.  
The townsfolk pack in readiness  
And head to the showground.

The fair is filled with wonder,  
With games and shows and food.  
Plush toys as big as beach balls  
Set up a cheery mood.

The smell of ham and toasted cheese,  
Will always get attention.  
The patrons fill their bellies,  
With the tastiest invention.

There are comedies and shows,  
All forms of entertainment.  
The drama starts with spotlights  
Shining down in pure amazement.

Waves of children ride the ponies,  
And brush their silky hair.  
And toddlers stroke white rabbits,  
Their fingers taking care.

Roller-coasters, carousels...  
The fair is filled with rides.  
Merry-go-rounds and bumper cars,  
Drop towers and slip-slides.

Giant pumpkins make the townsfolk gasp,  
Iced cakes and gourmet pies.  
The winners all on proud display,  
Blue ribbons as the prize.

The laughter fades to farewells,  
And the sun now starts to set.  
A day of wonder fizzles out,  
But no one will forget!

*By Gabrielle Guo  
Grade Category: middle  
Pymble Ladies' College  
Carlingford, NSW*



## *The Land of Candy*

Pink milkshake swaying in the wind,  
Their little smiles on the chin,  
Yummy chips driving a car,  
They have met in candy land with a chocolate bar.

Candies fill the land,  
And chips full for the sand.  
Ice cream grows on the hot dog museum,  
Chocolate man stands on top of jelly colosseum.

Who is swimming in the burger fountain?  
Who is falling down from the chewing gum mountain?  
Since we met in the candy land,  
Our tummies start a band.

*By Macie You  
Grade Category: junior  
Abbotsleigh Junior School  
Galston, NSW*

# Emily

The summer days are gone too soon, and Emily is gone on the day when heat is displaced by an expected autumn chill. The sun, a blistering bruise bandaged by scuttling altocumulous clouds, dapples the detritus, its aureole soft, cloaked in a tapestry of cerulean. The foliage, once eau de nil, is crinkled like sepia photographs that gather dust on a mantelpiece, draped in the aroma of long-gone petrichor that rises from the dirt.

The labyrinthine roots of oak trees riddle the thickets. The medley of songbirds, in the early morning, is mellifluous, and the forest is enveloped in a sullen silence that comes with the alabaster mantilla that drapes the undergrowth.

The sun becomes a sanguine wound, vermillion as it seeps into the ivory canvas, the cirrus clouds camouflaged in the sky. In the autumn haze, motes of dust pirouette like moths. A squirrel, a daube of burgundy, hastened itself as it skirted into the shadows, trotting upon the forest floor, bathed in the striations of light.

The sad earth borrows its mirth from the moon, who lowers her head upon the gilded forest, and gently pulsates with light, as Emily's grave, unmarked with flowers at

her head nor stone at her feet, is hidden where none can see. Stars emerge, in their waltz, leaving evanescent traces of blanched dust.

Who has taken Emily? Time.

"No. It is I who has taken her. She was taken by Alzheimer's who has broken her heart, muddled her mind." Swathed in an ebony robe, Death emerges from the thickets, his skeletal hands grasping an hourglass as the forest holds its breath, settling into the gloam.

Death touches the grave, before closing his eyes, his heart a sagging bag of melancholy. He stood up again, before gazing up. "Emily disappeared into the throngs of oblivion, and Life has caused me to come here." He sighed, hushing the forest, before walking back to his chariot as the moon disappeared behind the thickets.

*By Lily Zhang  
Grade Category: middle  
Pymble Ladies College  
Pymble, NSW*



## Successful or Not?

I forge a path to success,  
To prove I am the very best.  
I pull out clothes from my drawer,  
A lot of underwear, that's for sure.

I scan my room up and down,  
Soon I begin to form a frown.  
My essay was due today,  
I've gone and lost it, I'm going to pay.

Sudden doom is at my door,  
Which I decided to ignore.  
Something was under my bed,  
I looked under and then I said,  
"There you are!" I scream with pride,  
I ran to school and slowly cried.  
Responsibility I need,  
If I truly want to succeed!

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

# The Human Sized Paper Plane

“Ow! Your leg is digging into me! Move!” Lilah squeezed and squirmed, trying to move into a more comfortable position. “Oi! You’re blocking the TV! Dad, who has the ball?! Quick, tell me!” Josh, who was yelling at her and dad, was not helping Lilah’s squashed position at all. She squinted, averting her eyes from the blaring TV screen, where the commentators were exclaiming loudly. “Try! Woohoo! That’s Cellar over the line! And he’ll convert it too.”

Now dad was jumping on the couch, overjoyed at his favourite player scoring the first try. Grumbling, Lilah moved to the floor, hoping to get a glimpse of the replay. “Boo! He missed it! Not fair!” Now dad was whining like a little toddler, thought Lilah



miserably. “Half time!?! Noooooo!!!” More fun whining from dad, Lilah thought sarcastically. As her parents got up to get food in the half time break, Lilah fiddled with a piece of paper, folding it into an intricate paper plane. Launching it swiftly, Lilah watched as the plane curved and twisted, spinning in three perfect loop-da-loops and landed softly on the carpet floor on the other side of the room.

“Lilah, be a dear and run and get the post. Maybe your membership has come in.” Lilah sighed, fighting the urge to talk back. She knew the only reason her mother had asked her to get the post was because she wanted Lilah of the house. Turning her back on the rugby half-time ads, she trudged out the door, paper plane in hand.

Grasping the mail firmly in her hand, she slotted it through her house’s cat flap. They didn’t actually have a cat, but the flap had come with the house, and

her parents were too lazy to get it removed. Really, the only thing it was useful for was what she had just used it for.

Wandering out into the wind, Lilah launched her paper plane once again. This time, it flew straight, ducking under Josh’s swing, and on the road. Lilah ran, but as she leaped to grab the plane, it enlarged, unfolding and refolding into her original design right before her eyes.

Glancing around, Lilah scrambled on top of her plane, sitting neatly in the middle fold. Realising what she needed to do, Lilah deftly jumped off the plane and pushed it forward, climbing on just as it soared into the sky.

Winking, Lilah waved goodbye to her house, and flew off, headed for the unknown.

*By Madeleine Miller  
Grade Category: middle  
John XXIII College  
Mount Claremont, WA*

## The falcon’s fight



Mum had warned me to stay between the nest and the edge of the forest. She warned me of high-flying eagles, snakes that coiled up small birds and ate them, and foxes who would feast on us for breakfast. But she mostly warned me of silver birds.

“They fly high in the sky, really high, and could mow you down with a bat of its wings. Stay away from them, got it?”

I wanted to see for myself. I was craving adventure, and now that I could fly, I searched for it.

Whirr.

A silver bird, flying in the distance. It was big, and loud, and its grey surface reflected the rising moon. It didn’t look really imposing at all. I bet I could have beaten it. I flew towards it, staring at the smooth nose, getting closer and closer. It rammed into me without stopping. I was knocked out of the sky, the world a blur of blue, then white.

I spread my wings, halting my fall, and glanced up to see the silver bird over my head. Anger bubbled over and I launched myself at it, at one of its huge, unmoving wings, at that huge ulcer near its armpit.

I smashed into it and bounced off harmlessly. Attacking again and again, I scraped my claws along the area where I could see inside the silver bird and dug my claws in, but couldn’t get a hold. I have to fight, fight this monster for ambling into my territory, fight for my pride and dignity.

I threw myself at it, feeling the sharp pain as I slammed into cold metal. Flapping forwards, I dove at the ulcer again, but I was getting sucked in. The feathers covering my body were all straining for the ulcer, and only then did I see a huge fan, rotating inside. Pushing with all my might, I struggled against the pull, but it was no use. I tumbled into the deep, dark chasm of the churning fan.

The plane wobbled slightly, tilted towards the left.

“No need to worry, passengers, we’ve hit a bit of a bump. Some poor soul’s gone and got themselves sucked in left fan. We’ll be fine shortly.” The radio crackled. A woman peered, unsettled, out of the window, and saw a terrible sight. The engine had flung the body of a tiny falcon out. The falcon was cut in hundreds of places and blood was oozing onto its feathers. She remembered seeing the flurry of feathers out her window.

Poor thing, she thought and turned her attention away.

*By Meii You  
Grade Category: middle  
Abbotsleigh Junior School  
Galston, NSW*

# Moonrun

The monster jumped up and held a tree and 'Ah!'

Moon woke up panting and sweating. This was another dream she had been woken up to. All this started two days ago when Moon was getting ready to sleep. And again, exactly at 6:23am in the morning it happened AGAIN!

"Honey, we have to take you to the medical centre!"

As Moon walked up her school corridor she froze.....

"How dare you speak to me like that!" "I'm sorry but we cannot accept this!"

"Ha ha, "Moon is in trouble....." "Pst.... "Moon""Moon."

"I'm sorry I was having a vision." And that's the worst thing that happened in school. I don't know why it only happens to me. Mum says that I am special. As I walked home kicking a pebble on my way, I was thinking about my vision.

Could they be telling me my future? Was I in trouble? My thoughts got to me. I felt like I was all alone, and no one cared about me.

I felt like I was asleep, thinking about all this. That night it felt very off. The sky was all dusty, and I felt like I was trapped.

Eventually being scared I dozed off. "It is Saturday!" My pitch-black hair smacked my face and I woke up to reality. It was all dark. I was all alone with just me and my teddy. The silence frightened me, and I felt worried. Where was my family? Did they go on a trip and forget me?

I figured out that I had this dream a few days ago. I gulped. I walked down stairs tugging on to my teddy and squeezing my sweaty palms. Maybe they are pranking me? Or not. Before I could move I heard an awful noise that just

got to me. It sounded like a ghost banging for freedom. It was from the attic! I ran up until I lost my breath. I peeked through the slanted door and saw..... "A-a-are you a dragon?"

I stood outside as the red dragon looked at me and huffed. It opened its mouth and..... Oh no, was it going to eat me I thought. "You can't see me, but I am there, what am I?" I thought unknowingly and blankly.

"The-ff- the future!" "Correct!" "Go to the door where you will see, an enchanted castle ." An enchanted castle? I thought..... I walked deep through the woods as a fairy led me the way.

"Where to dear?"

"The enchanted castle that seems to be real!" As I reached the castle I was huffing. The fairy had disappeared! This was my imagination! I forgot all my thoughts and went inside..... I looked at the humongous doors and stepped to my victory. Well..... I THOUGHT. Inside, there were rocks and stones that looked like they were from the mediaeval times.

"WHO ARE YOU?" "HOW HAVE YOU COME INTO MY PALACE!"

"Guards!"

"How many times have I told you not to sleep!"

The awful and silly looking lady leapt on one of her guards and started scolding them. "Mum, dad!"

"Shhhhh!" They whispered in a loud way and shushed me.

I went over to hug them but they disappeared..... "NO!" I sobbed as tears rolled down. I put my hand in my pockets and found a locket!

I opened the locket and a little fairy appeared. "Hello!" she said in a squeaky voice. "You are the new chosen girl."

The fairy disappeared and.... "Open me up when you see another dream!"

*By Ira Khare  
Grade Category: junior  
Trinity Catholic Primary  
Narre Warren South, Vic.*





# Guinea Pig Time: The Doctor Is In!

It was a normal day in the world of guinea pigs, when a guinea pig named Time woke up from his dream and did his regular routine.

## Time's Routine

1. Run to the kitchen and drink strong coffee and eat buttered toast.
2. Run to the gym and try to beat weight record from previous day. (No need to worry about skipping because Chad works out at his house and no one knows where he lives).
3. Go to Bean's house to pick her up and then go to Chad's house after he's finished his workout.
4. Do lots of stuff with them! (It's impossible to tell what's going to happen!)

Time's routine was different every time something interrupted it, and this time, he hoped that he wouldn't have to change it again. Another thing about him was that he loved running and people barely saw him staying in the same spot for more than 30 seconds. Time had set a new record for gulping his buttered toast and coffee, but ran out the door before he could realise it.

At the gym, Time ran to the weights before anybody else could touch it and started lifting. 4-kilogram kettle bell, 6-kilogram kettle bell, 8-kilogram kettle bell, 10-kilogram kettle bell and 12-kilogram kettle bell. No one at the gym took him seriously when he lifted the kettle bells, so Time decided to lift the barbells today. He started with the light 12-kilogram barbell and then moved up to the medium 16-kilogram barbell and when he lifted that, he saw that he was being watched by the other people at the gym.

He smiled and grabbed the heaviest barbell, 18-kilograms and lifted it up with no difficulty at all. The people cheered, and Time put the weight on the gym mat and sped off to Bean's house.

Bean was waiting outside her house and decided to look at her GuineaPhone2000 but couldn't find anything good to watch. When she took her eyes off the screen, she jumped in fright. 'Aiiiiieeee!' she screamed. Time was standing right in front of her.

'You really need to stop scaring me like that.'

she said and then jumped up and walked with him to Chad's house. Chad was a body builder and because of his six-pack, he was the tallest guinea pig in Cavy. They had to make sure they didn't stand out and had to go into crowds so they couldn't be seen.

The reason why they were being so stealthy was because Chad was the most popular guinea pig (even more popular than the mayor!) and he always had a lot of fans and paparazzi following him and it was super hard for him to not stand out because of his height.

Chad had only recently quit his gym membership and had bought plenty of gym equipment so he wouldn't have to go outside and get swarmed by his fans.

Anyway, when they arrived at his house, they realised something was weird. The sky had gotten a lot darker and they felt the presence of someone following them. Crash! The ground shook and Time's furry coat was standing up. 'Ha! Ha! Ha! The doctor is in! Ha!' They knew that voice.

It was... Dr Stiflens! 'I have gotten stronger little piggies! You stand no chance, even with your power to control time!' he cackled. 'You may think that, but I don't!' a voice shouted. Time and Bean looked and saw that Chad was standing next to them and they could tell he had buffed up from the last time they saw him. 'Come on, Time! Do your thing!' And just then, everybody was moving very slowly and Time became more aware of his surroundings.

Dr Stiflen's megabot was about to crush him. Chad was in the air about to jump on its arm, and Bean was holding her long stick, ready to hit it.

He decided to move out of the way. When he did, he saw an orange blur in the distance. He smiled and continued the time zone.

Before he knew it, the megabot smashed the ground, where he was standing before. Chad landed on the megabot, and it struggled to lift its arm. When Bean hit it, it

got a dent on its face.

The orange blur that Time saw before crashed into the robot's back. Kaboom! The robot exploded and in the heap of debris, a brown guinea pig that looked like it was covered in static, a ginger hamster, a tan guinea pig wearing a robot suit, and a guinea pig with goofy goggles were lying in the heap.

'Skittles, Bullet and Shock!' Bean exclaimed, 'You guys were helping too!' 'Time called us and said that you guys were in deep doodoo again.' Skittles, the one in the robot suit said. 'So, I got shot out of the electric cannon again and Shock and Skittles went inside the hole I created and short-circuited the robot!' Bullet, the hamster explained. That was another day in the life of Time.

*By Abraham Renji  
Grade Category: middle  
Burnside State School  
Burnside, Qld.*



# Behind the Hidden Door

What could it be, a simple room, a secret room or who knows?

The heavy, metal door creaked slowly as me and my brother, Dave, curiously glanced through the little gap which looked like a wondrous meadow. Bright, green grass, colourful, vibrant flowers and beautiful, warm rays of sun was what we expected.

As soon as the door flung open, the sights we observed was shocking and unexpected. How could this be? The happiness and curiosity seemed to be suddenly sucked out of our minds and darkness with sorrow seemed to be hovering over our despairing thoughts.

The sun was gone, no where to be found, and the chilly winds darted past us like knives. The door sharply shut behind us with a loud crash and the path way back, no matter how many times you tried, will never open.

Now stuck in the ghostly, dark forest, me and Dave slowly wandered off into the inevitable peril of the darkness after being petrified in one spot for a couple of hours.

“Well, we got nothing left to do.” I relaxed my brother who was still misbelieving this unfortunate situation.

I glanced through the snapped branch and saw this rather enormous, sharp-toothed beast walking. It really looked dumb. I chuckled and turned back to my brother.

“Nothing so scary, see that thing over there, it looks really ugly.” I cheered my brother.

“Still it’s a monster!” stuttered my cowardly brother.

“We’ll be fine, let’s get past it and see what else there are!” I exclaimed, feeling a little excited.

As slow and stealthy as a soldier, we

crawled past the beast who didn’t have a clue that we’ve just crossed its territory.

“See, nothing to worry about.” I said.

Suddenly, my brother screamed as though he had been caught or something. I turned around to see him dangling like a fly caught in a spider web. The beast was back, holding my brothers helpless leg.

“Ahhhhhhhhhh!” I squealed.

The beast has caught both of us, by our legs. Slowly, he began to lower his arm into his wide-opened, stinky mouth, head first. I prayed and prayed that it will let us go. I was first to be released into his rotten mouth.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!” I squealed harder.

Sun light shone through the gap of my curtains. Light breeze smoothly crept in through the gap of my window. My aching head rested on my soft, cotton pillow. Where’s the monster?

Was it a dream? I hope so. Looking around, I felt so safe and calm. The dream was just like the movie I watched yesterday night. I pinched myself to double check that I’m awake.

“Ow!” I yelled.

I felt so relieved to feel pain for the first time. Never felt such joy of waking up from a dream. I felt... happy. That nightmare was not pleasant, I should never watch a horror movie before bed time again. That day, I realized how grateful I am for a normal day.



By Yui Shim  
Grade Category: middle  
Broadbeach State School  
Broadbeach, Qld.

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

# Rippled Moonlight

The sky appeared as if it were a large canvas, a milky mix of blue, black, and deep purple paint splattered over an endless inky background, with so many small, white sprays for glittering stars; too many to count. It was quiet tonight, but you could just hear the soft crashing of the waves, and the light chirping of the crickets. A full moon was reflected in the distance; a glass-like sheet of water mirroring a perfectly round glowing orb. A fish broke the surface, then went under once more, leaving large ripples originating from where it had been. I stood up from where I sat: a large bamboo straw mat that I had placed over the dry, sandy beach area. My bare feet sunk into the soft sand, that felt warm, despite the cold breeze that was coming in from the ocean. Foot after foot, and then I could feel the cool water, the gentle waves lapping at my toes. I started to run. The wind ripped at my cheeks, and my flowing red hair flapped in the breeze of the night. The water splashed around as if it were making way for me, the foam spraying at my eyes. When I had run deep enough as so the water was up to my neck, and I couldn't feel the sandy seabed below me, I dove. Here, the colourful fish swim in large clusters, drifting in and out of the vibrant rocks and untouched corals through the sparkling water. Spotted seahorses, popping saturated hues of pink and blue remained camouflaged with the thick kelp, while tiny crabs and starfish stuck to the reef like beautiful magnets, giving the underwater world an astonishing glow. This was a place the other humans were unaware of; most likely the only place left untouched and unharmed by the rest of our species. Sparkling and shimmering, everything around me was alive; water that felt cool against my skin, and the soft brush of the kelp against my feet as I swam through. It all felt reassuring, because though fish and plants cannot speak... I knew I was welcome here. My fingers slowly brushed the seabed floor, searching for fallen shells. I picked up a few cone shells, then a flat purple shell with a pearl-coated inside. I made sure to leave the closed shells untouched; it would be intruding the wall that divided nature from human hands, for those shells were clams that contained one of the many small forms of life. The reef was home to these creatures, and to pry open the shell would be just as much as taking away their home, along with their life. After I had collected

enough, I slipped them into my bag and swam to the surface, taking in a breath of air before I paddled back to shore. Once I had rinsed the shells, I dried them with a small cotton cloth and placed them onto the straw mat, viewing them solemnly as I dipped the soft bread into the container of soup in my hand, taking slow bites to savour the rich taste. I gazed up at the moon, then the many stars, recalling what my mother had once said to me. "Always remember, Adela, that even when I am gone, I will protect you. Through wind, sand, storm, and rain; the moon is always there, hidden at day, but visible at night. Just as I am." A tear pricked at my eye, but I hastily wiped it away, shaking my head at myself, "There is no use being stuck in the past. What's lost is lost. It won't come back." After finishing my late-night meal, I packed away the dried shells and my things, then folded up my mat and stuffed everything into my bag. I headed for the sandstone steps that were carved into the cliff edge, that were the only entry and exit to the beach. Just as my toes touched the steps, however, a loud splash caught my attention, and I abruptly turned around. I spotted something thrashing around in the water near the middle of the old jetty, the movement rippling the moonlight that was reflected on the glass-like surface. I dropped my bag at the foot of the stairs and began to walk toward the jetty, and soon enough my pace quickened to a run. The wind threw my hair behind me, and I sprinted down the jetty, halting to a stop as I spotted something dangling into the water. "A... fishing net?" I gasped, enraged, "All the fishing nets had been removed ages ago. Who installed a new one!?" I huffed, then dove into the water, not bothering to tie my hair up. I waited for the bubbles to clear, and to my surprise, they cleared quite fast; the animal had stopped thrashing around. I paddled up towards it, and as the moon shone through the surface once more, the light reflected on the surface and brought the animal into view. My eyes widened as I saw the beautiful creature before me. It was a dolphin, with sparkling purple eyes, and a vibrant mix of blue and white swirls decorating its body. It had a long, lavish tail and well-defined features. Its lower body was tangled in a thick fishing net, made of hard iron strings which were cutting into its delicate skin; I could see the angry red marks that were welling up on

the surface. I carefully reached out, holding the dolphin's beak in my arms. It looked at me, those sorrowful purple eyes shining with hope. It gazed at me with affection, which was unusual. It didn't look afraid at all. Gently slipping my fingers beneath the net, I loosened the knots and slowly pulled it off the dolphin's flipper. The last knot came undone, and the dolphin broke free, its long tail propelling it to the surface. I swam up alongside it and gasped as I broke the surface, the air refilling my lungs once more. I watched, astonished, as the dolphin jumped in the air, spinning in a circle and falling into the water with a great SPLASH! I covered my eyes as the foam sprayed at my face, then chuckled as it swam up to me and nudged me on the arm. "You're welcome. We're all friends here," I smiled, gazing into its dazzling eyes, "This beach is safe." It made a loud chirping noise, and it spun around in the water again, splashing water in my face. I realised that it was larger than most dolphins, but it was definitely a female; female dolphins are actually smaller than males, but they have a white spot on their dorsal fin, as this one did: a unique mark that only female dolphins living in these waters had. "I have to go now. Swim safe," I waved to the dolphin, then paddled back to shore. I climbed up onto the sand, shivering from the cold. I peered back across the ocean, guessing that the dolphin had followed me, but to my surprise it had not. Not only that; it was nowhere to be seen. I spotted something glowing, washed ashore near the cliff; the tide was coming in. I stumbled over, clawing at the wet sand as I lifted it to the moonlight. It was a stone: a beautiful, glowing stone, smoothed out like a pebble. It felt warm against my frozen skin, and it was a magnificent shade of deep blue, with slight hues of purple. I slipped it in with my other belongings, then peered across the ocean once more. I sighed, not sure of what I was expecting. The familiar yet distant feeling within those sparkling purple eyes left me overcome with an odd sense of déjà vu. What was I expecting? It was just another dolphin, like the many that lived in the reef. I headed up the sandstone steps, walking up into my garden, with rows of strawberries and beautiful flowers. My family had owned this beach for centuries, but as the city held more opportunities for them, they all left; one by one, even my father. He abandoned us

when I was seven, and I'd been living alone with my sick mother since then. After my mother passed away two years ago, I inherited the land, though I was still a teenager. I've been guarding the beach since that day, chasing off the loan sharks and scaring off any fishing boats who dared to enter. The reef has survived that long thanks to that. I've lived by the sea all my life, and the one thing I learned from living on the beach was that you must give as much as you take, or nature will be unbalanced. FWISH! Something whizzed through the air, piercing through my clothes and hitting my left shoulder. I paused, dropping my bags by the back door of my house and reaching up to my arm. I pulled out a small red dart, smudged with my blood. I could feel my head spinning, and I collapsed into the garden, unable to move. "Was I just tranquillised?" I thought, feeling oddly sleepy. The numbness was starting to take over, and I could feel myself slowly slipping out of consciousness. In the darkness, I saw two shadows before me. They looked like hunters, with guns strapped over their shoulders, and bullets inside their belts. "What's this? It's not a deer," one grumbled, grabbing me by the arm as my body flopped sleepily. "You missed the target again, Cesare. Remove the evidence," the other one said, and Cesare nodded. The two of them grabbed me by the arms and began to drag me to the other side of the cliff, where the tide had already come in, and where there was no beach. My body was screaming at me, telling me to move, but I couldn't; I had lost all the feeling in my muscles, and I had gone completely numb. They threw me over the edge, and for a second, I was in mid-air, my arms and legs limply dangling behind me. Tears were flying out of my eyes, and my body plummeted into the ocean with a sickening splash. I held my breath. I knew I could hold it for at least

two minutes, because I'd been practicing since I could crawl. But after that? If I lost consciousness now, that would be the end. Without the ability to move, I couldn't swim; I would just sink to the depths of the ocean floor like a pebble. And I was. Sinking, slowly, painfully. I could see the blurry faces of the men, satisfied as they walked away from the cliff edge. "No! I need to protect the reef," I thought desperately, and I didn't know if I was crying now, or if it were just the bubbles of oxygen flowing up beneath my face, "I promised... I promised mother I would..." "I can't die like this." The waves turned me over, and I was staring at the near-approaching ocean floor. I could feel my lungs tightening as the air began to squeeze out, and I knew if I took a breath now, I would drown. I looked at the reef. The beautiful, colourful reef, with the many shells and corals, ornate stones, and unique creatures. "My home," I thought, watching sadly as my vision blurred, "Goodbye." Through the tiny cracks of my vision, I spotted something nearing. The schools of fish parted as the creature swam through, awed by its magnificence. That shimmering, sparkling body, swirled with white, blue and purple, and those glittering galaxy eyes... it was her. The dolphin swam up to me, then nudged me slightly. I remained numb, cold, and lifeless. I knew this was it. I was hanging on to the last breath of life. A voice whispered in my ear, and my eyes widened. It was a soft, melodic voice, a familiar vocal that I would recognise anywhere. "Remember, Adela. I promised you." I blinked, staring hazily at the magnificent creature before me. "Mother?" I thought, gazing into the distant moonlight, rippled by the waves. The dolphin suddenly swam beneath me, then bobbed up, so I was secured onto its back. It paddled towards the surface, taking me further and further away from the drowning depths.

Just as my lungs were about to burst, it broke the surface, and I coughed, sputtering as I threw up the seawater I had swallowed. I remained still on the dolphin's back, pondering on whether it was actually my mother's voice I had heard. The dolphin began to swim once more, headed for the beach. I peered towards the familiar sandy shores, the rippled water, and the sandstone steps as it neared the other side. I was on the dolphin's back, and its smooth skin felt warm and welcoming. I lay there for a while, even after it stopped swimming, gazing up at the twinkling stars and the glowing moonlight. "Friend," I coughed, taking in grateful gulps of air, "Thank you." The dolphin chirped in response, then swam closer to the shore, slowly slipping me off its back and onto the sandy beach. I lay there, the tranquilliser slowly wearing off. After a few minutes, I regained control over my body, and sat up on the sand, watching the gentle waves lap at my toes. I looked up at the woman who stood before me, silvery white hair, tinged with dark red, fluttering in the chilly night breeze, and sparkling purple eyes, staring down at me. "Mother?" I gasped, watching the beautiful woman, wearing a dress like the distant galaxy, and a shimmering, blue and purple stone, slightly hued with pink, clasped around her neck with a silver chain. She smiled, then her lips parted, whispering silent words to me. "Go now, Adela. Show them that you are the guardian of the reef," she unclipped her necklace, then leaned down towards me, reaching behind my neck, "And to beware, for the spirit of your mother guards these waters." I reached down to my neck, where the stone I had found earlier today was hanging by a silver chain, dangling over my shivering heart. The stone now had the outline of a dolphin, carved into its surface with threads of white. I looked up once more, but the woman was gone. But this time, I saw it; just as it slipped below the surface. The long, shimmering tail of the dolphin, the moonlight rippled as it disappeared into the black water, hidden again amongst the safety of the reef. I felt my heartbeat against the warm stone and smiled to myself. Gazing up at the moon, I reached out, holding my frozen hand to the welcoming light. "You kept your promise."

*By Zaina Mohamed Fahim  
Grade Category: middle  
Werribee Secondary College,  
Werribee, Vic.*



# Ductus Exemplo

For the previous, few thousand days, three thousand, six hundred and forty-nine to be exact, I have been waiting. Waiting my entire existence for the Walk. And now, I am eligible.

The Walk is reserved only for those who exclusively receive an invitation. I reminisce upon the jubilant moment, as if a fresh memory uploaded. Even my Owner, who ran the local steel mill, was excited, unable to restrain her oily grin. For almost every moment of my operational existence, I have been programmed to faithfully serve her, for as long as my warranty would allow. Receiving the printed invitation, I was pleasantly greeted by some palatial accoutrement, many of which, I doubt other Walkers held privileges to. Neatly folded, lay a red armband, which perfectly reflected the livid red smog smouldering from the nearby factories, to replace my diminishing green one. While I never truly understood the harsh effects of weather, pain, nor the functionality of garments, the ecstasy to be granted such a prerogative has left me invigorated.

The venue, a disparaged courtyard beyond disrepair, presents its bellowing personality as it sought to reap all our attention. It was late, nine past seven, an ashen miasma manifested in anticipation above. I find

myself within a crowd of serried steel faces, waiting in perfectly assembled pairs amongst lambent fluorescence which dances around the corners of my receptors. The line of Walkers glittered with an entropic sparkle of our reddish armbands, mesmerising exuberant onlookers as the annual march commences.

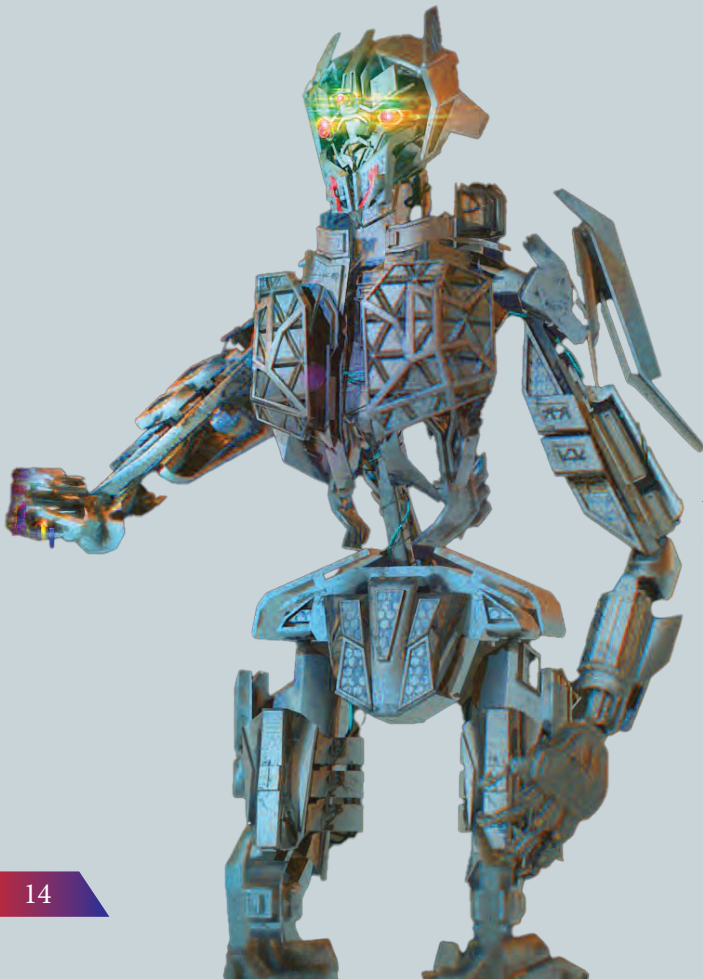
The mass is situated next to the place where I was born and educated. Now repurposed to be an assembly-line. The Walk is a cyclical loop, which surrounds the weathered brick-and-mortar foundations. We were to Walk as many laps as we could, for as long as we could endure. The arena was found in the rust-belt of the nation, where we ceaselessly worked for most of our lives. In all honesty, I am truly grateful for the opportunity to play such a vital role. It is within those thoughts which drift to the illusions of the past, I receive a chasmic sensation of vacancy brewing within the depths of my microprocessors. The circadian, vexatious fascination which replays over and over leaves me puzzled by the foreign kindness of my Owner. Her mouth, plumper than most, subtly quivered at the rhythmic vibrations of her words. She told me she felt a little sorry, which was strange, because I couldn't recall her committing any crimes that day, until she handed me the invitation. We had heard rumours of what happens when Walkers refuse to Walk, I prefer not to entertain the idea.

Lap one. A roaring clamour containing both the monotonous drone of soulless pistons reactivating from the factory, as well as from the ebullient human spectators, suspends my thoughts. At once, the Walkers are compelled to stumble forward at the sound of a silencing whistle. As we begin our circular journey around the factory, amongst the ubiquitous shrieks of grinding metal, I am unable to restrain my view from escaping to the contemptuous expressions from the spectators above. I note their furrowing brows, tensed jaw, red eyes, all effervescently lachrymose

as Walkers begin to fall, their rusted limbs unable to strain past the first lap. I smile. I am truly grateful for the support. And even more so when I see my Owner. Her fleshy pigment emphasised under the achromatic clouds above brought a stirring calm. I feel her coarse voice swindle my core as she urged me to 'keep moving, the rain-' I ignore the rest. Clenched in her fist, I cower under the plastic umbrella, which provides me with temporary relief from the unforgiving tempest. And in that moment, all I can think is that she really does care. I gaze up towards the delicate tears of turbid droplets which whisper the tainted whimpers of an agonising earth. Observing the morose gloom of thundering clouds that overwhelm the polarising blue, it's a pitiful sight. By only the dawn of lap six, the Walkers beside me thin. As another Walker drops, the thundering cheer of amusement illuminates the crowds. As if their soul has been reaped from their mind, disparaged Walkers plunge into the ground, as the shallow pitter-patter of tears continue to fall upon us.

Lap nine, the path, was now ridden by the corpses of fallen Walkers. Each lap becomes more arduous than the last. The footprints of forgotten vestiges now serve as a fatiguing obstacle as the mud seems to only get heavier. Yet, only a futile sigh was all that escaped as I realise the fate of my Walk has already been sealed. Nonetheless, despite the acidulous petrichor, slowly corroding my circuits, I would continue... At only the eleventh lap, when my sensors were starting to fail, did I notice the presence of humans nearby. They were dragging the bodies of the fallen back into the depths of the factory. The rumours were true. Those who did not walk were repurposed for the following generation. The sporadic stumble of my failing limbs buckled at the sight of the twelfth lap. However, amongst the lethargic reflections of dejected Walkers, we must continue to Walk. We Walk, not for the fame nor the fear which follows failure. But most importantly, to defy the quotidian taunts, jeers and heckling from those that cower in the penumbra of their authority.

*By Lachlan Li  
Grade Category: senior  
Scotch College  
Hawthorn, Vic..*



# 2023 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN ART AWARDS



By Anthony Qin

## DRAWING



By Manna Tsuchiya

## COMPUTER ART



By Kai Keulder

## PHOTOGRAPHY



By Matthew Ropeyam

## PAINTING

[www.ozkids.com.au](http://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](http://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.

# What's a Million



What's A Million  
The times I've played Minecraft Pvp  
The times I have listened to music on a DVD

All the pages I've flipped through books  
The times I've seen my mum and dad cook

The drops of water that are needed to fill the lake  
The times I have seen people chomp on cake.

The times that the grains of sand have touched my feet.  
All the areas that I can't reach.

That's a million.....

*By Jasper Wang  
Grade Category: junior  
Cherrybrook Public School  
Cherrybrook, NSW*



## VIVID

Radiant beams of vivid light,  
Painting the blaring cityscape.  
A spectrum of aureate colours.  
Luminous light rays leaping from tower to tower.

The grand sails of the Opera House,  
Stand proudly in the crowded harbour.  
Ochre shades of brown and red,  
Clothe the clear canvas like a blanket.

The bustling, lively energy of the city,  
Racing down the jammed streets.  
Endless queues hastily formed,  
Awaiting the delectable refreshments.

The frigid air bites everyone's skin,  
Yet, the excitement and thrill continue.  
Praises and cheers for this dazzling winter night,  
Of true memories and brilliant colours.

*By Carissa Lu  
Grade Category: middle  
Ravenswood School for Girls  
Gordon, NSW.*



# How to Make a Fruit Salad

Patiently, consider which fruits you would want to have in your fruit salad.

Preferably, the misfits.

Like the quirky kiwi, daring dragon fruit, seldomly seen star fruit, lonely lychee, and the reluctant rock melon.

Now, gently combine all your fruits together, make them mingle.

Your fruits might try to jump or fall out of the bowl at first refusing to mix.

Like oil with water. Though after a while your fruits will be happy to mix.

On top of that, add other ingredients. The more the merrier.

Add honey for its sweetness and purity, add lemon for its ruthlessness and bitterness.

They will work together harmoniously.

You should also add the pompous pomegranate, the ringleader. Every fruit salad needs a star of the show.

After you have lovingly marvelled upon your mouth-watering fruit salad.

You will notice that your fruit salad is happy as Larry.

You will gradually notice that you are the bowl.

The glue that is holding this mismatched bunch of unlikely ingredients and strange fruits that somehow work so well together.

They need you and you need them.



*By Cacia Charles  
Grade Category: middle  
East Launceston Primary School  
East Launceston, Tas.*

## Camel

Riding on while munching hay  
Over the muddy squelchy bay  
Camels are tired they huff and puff  
Dropping bits of fluff

Hauling very heavy loads  
Walking down the long steep road  
The man walks on  
Night till dawn

Not caring about the camels  
Even so unbearable  
In line the camels trot  
So many the man has got

Bushes flutter  
As smooth as butter  
The wind howls  
Like a giant growls

The man walks on  
Morning far away gone  
Thunderclouds rumble  
And yet they trudge on.

The baby camel shouts and cries  
Looking for mother it can recognise

Asking when it's finished  
Mother says nothing  
Tears have diminished

The man walks on  
January all the way to June  
Finally the man stops  
Old with messy gray hair

Baby camel is old  
Ears flop down  
His nose is wrinkled

Looks back and thinks about his mother  
Lying there  
Middle of nowhere.

*By Macie You  
Grade Category: junior  
Abbotsleigh Junior School  
Galston, NSW*





# AUTUMN

Frills of white  
 splash the pale  
 depths of sky  
 gently  
 like dandelions  
 fluttering  
 their silver wings  
 gracefully,  
 peacefully,  
 in the crisp golden  
 haze;  
 glazed yellow hilltops  
 looming like  
 carved statues  
 of glamour  
 in the distance,  
 the faint aroma  
 of cinnamon tea  
 spiced with nutmeg  
 breezing gently,  
 warmly,  
 briskly,  
 into the forsaken fields.

*By Lena Takahashi  
 Grade Category: junior  
 Waitara Public School  
 Waitara, NSW*

## I am a little genius! - Computer-

I am a little genius,  
 But I think I'm under-rated,  
 I've traveled around the entire world;  
 Pictures of Paris, England and Iceland,

To cities, beds and schools!  
 I make a clicky sound, as you tap on my  
 keys,  
 I search here and there for the answer to  
 your needs.  
 I am a little genius,

I can see your search history,  
 You ask this, you ask that!  
 'How do I make a smoothie?'  
 Well, I can answer that!  
 A cup of fruit, four spoons of milk,  
 And add a blender to that.  
 I am a little genius,

You talk to me every day, I have to listen  
 to you.

The most boring conversations, am I  
 nothing to you?!  
 I need a bit of drama, I do nothing but sit.  
 You ask: 'How do I do my homework?'  
 I can't really answer that!  
 First, you need some brains but you have  
 none of that!  
 I am a little genius,

Remember, I see your search history,  
 You ask this! You ask that!  
 Trust me I've seen the oddest questions,  
 But I had never seen one as odd as this  
 when you asked me:  
 "How do I eat a Banana?".  
 Oh, silly you, how did you get through  
 Uni?

You simply peel the fruit and take a bite!  
 I am a little genius.

At the end of the day even I get tired too,  
 I'm exhausted from all your questions,  
 You ask this! You ask that!  
 When I run out of energy you feed me  
 some good stuff.  
 And then I wake fresh the next day,  
 (not the wrong side of bed!).  
 When I stay at your house don't make a  
 mistake and give me a break!

*By Hana Lee  
 Grade Category: middle  
 Castlecove Public School  
 Castle Cove, NSW*



# 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](http://www.paulcollins.com.au), [www.fordstreetpublishing.com](http://www.fordstreetpublishing.com) and [www.creativenetspeakers.com](http://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](http://www.annaciddor.com). If you would like Anna to visit your school you can book her through [www.creativenetspeakers.com](http://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](http://www.meredithcostain.com)

# Tears in a Bottle

The following narrative is based on true events.

Onyx.

Evette caresses my fur, murmuring softly. Her unseeing eyes gaze at me unknowingly, dull and shaded. I weave through her pale legs and mew in pure content. A minute passes, Evette sighing in serenity, and me, purring. After a few moments of tranquillity, Evette sighs and ceases stroking my lustrous fur.

I tilt my head questioningly and meow curiously. Why did you stop? Evette exhales again, and I push myself against her heart. Her pulse is rhythmic and lulling and it bathes me in comfort.

I breath in her scent of pinecones and chamomile, easily distinguishable from others. Reclining in Evette's arms, I rub myself against her, savouring the warmth of her skin. She begins to speak, and although I cannot comprehend her words, I know they mean graciousness and love. But I instantly recognise my name - Onyx.

Evette releases me of her welcoming grasp and I leap from her shoulder, arching gracefully through the air. Her brilliantly green eyes stare at me blankly, and I guide her through the fire-lit corridors. The fire dances on the candlestick, so alive, yet not. It casts flickering shadows which I spiritedly pounce on, rolling about playfully.

I wind carefully around Evette's legs, guiding her towards the pinewood door. I swiftly nudge her hand towards the golden, radiant doorknob, and she enters the room. A stick of incense is burning by the Carrera Marble countertop, the smoke serenely drifting and dancing through the air. It weaves through Evette's fingers, and resembles the path of a tranquil butterfly.

I gracefully arc through the air and position myself on Evette's shoulder, as she collapses onto the orchid-embellished eiderdown. I follow her footsteps, cocooning her in a shroud of beautifully-patterned duvets, silken sheets, and comforting quilts. Her dull eyes flicker, darting around the room, then she closes them and her breathing steadies. She is asleep. I quietly exit the

room, and leave Evette in peace.

Evette.

Onyx is gone, and the darkness of the room envelopes me. It is silent-too silent-as I adjust the comforting cocoon of blankets, burying my head in the pure white pillow. My eyes flicker, and although all I can see is darkness, I remember.

My mind is flooded with memories of the past-a different past, one that is not in existence anymore. The past I don't want to remember. But it is still there, alive and unwelcome, concealed in the depths of my mind. I brush my unraveled braid aside, and examine my memory.

It dances before my eyes, and I swallow. I don't want to remember, but I must. And then, as sleep gains a hold of me, I drift into a turbulent memory of my past.

7th April, 2023. 6:47pm LA Metro, Santa Monica Station.

The train seat is stained with an unknown red substance. It could be raspberry cordial, or it could be blood. I try to avoid it, inching towards the almost-transparent window. I lean my head against the glass, admiring the freedom of the raindrops as they cascade downwards. Looking away for a brief moment, I see her. The woman. I know her, but do I really? Do I want to know her? Do I actually know her? She looks at me piercingly, a glare threaded with venom. I do know her.

I can see it in those eyes, green and malicious, that she realises who I am. I am Evette. She strides forward, grasping the bars overhead. And then she speaks, her words full of fury, spite, and anger. Every word is destined to penetrate my soul.

I pretend I don't know who she is, but I do. And I can't hide it. I hear her, I hear the furiousness she is experiencing.

And then I know. I know who she really is, and I know who I really am. I am Evette Rodriguez. I am the woman's daughter.

"I thought I would never see you again. I hoped I would never see you again. God made you to make me suffer. You are

nothing. God wants to test me. He hasn't a single care for you. People like you, they will die in this world before they see light. And because of you, even though I haven't sinned, all I see is darkness. There is no hope. Get out of my life. Die on your own, then you can see what I have suffered. Get out."

My mouth is numb. My breath is furious, and I can't speak back anymore. I have no hope of defending myself. All I can do is stare at her, stare into those striking green eyes. All I can do is believe her words, believe that I am nothing.

And I am.

The woman straightens herself, curses violently, and strides out of the open train doors. I bury my quivering head in the creases of my checkered scarf, and a tear leaks out of my eye, dissolving in the threads of the scarf. It reminds me of the raindrops, except they are free. I am not. Another tear wells up, transparent and laced with melancholy.

I see the eyes of other people, staring, and I retrieve the glass bottle from my coat pocket. I look through it, and I see my mother, her face twisted into a malicious sneer. Then I see myself, my pitch-black braid shielding my face from view.

Unscrewing the cork, I let myself cry. My chest heaves and I struggle to breathe, swallowing in pain. Sadness blankets me in an inescapable web. The tears gather in the bottle, until it overflows. I cork it, then hurl it viciously on the floor of the train, and it explodes with an ear-piercing crack. The eyes of others instantly scrutinise me, and I swiftly wipe my eyes with my vermilion sleeve, removing any trace of my emotions.

The tears trickle serenely across the train floor, and the glass shards separate as the train's movement ceases. Santa Monica Pier. But there is no radiant sun rising over the sky. Instead, it is dark. There are no people in the metro station.

Then, I conceal myself within the shadows, and I am gone.

As I nestle myself within my threadbare blanket, a desperate mewling sounds from the rotting stack of wood. I instantly



straighten myself, removing logs until I see a flicker of grey. Then white. Until, I see an adorable Maine Coon kitten, which I gather into my arms, smothering with love.

Somebody certainly abandoned him here, carelessly trying to kill him, trapped in a bundle of wood. Onyx. The name flashes up, and I roll it across my tongue. It means strength, protection, and willpower. My Onyx.

3rd February, 2042. 7:31pm. Evette's cottage.

Evette.

I am blind. Sometimes it's good to be

blind. You never see death, nor sadness, nor horror. Then again, you never see life, nor happiness, nor joy. But at least Onyx is there to guide my footsteps.

I live in my mother's abandoned house. Previously, she'd been a student counsellor, with a life and an education, but that had all dissolved into nothingness when I was born. You see, I was destined to be blind. I wasn't blind before, when my mother loved me, but when she realised that the cost of my surgery to remove blindness, she abandoned me. And that was the end.

17 October, 2043.

Onyx.

Evette is crying. I sprint to her room, and

I see tears streaking down her face. I curl into her chest, and, as if she realises that I am there, the last sob pulses through her body, and then she is silent. I knead the duvet, trying to comfort her. She must've been dreaming of a sorrowful time.

Evette is silent for a long time. She doesn't stir as I affectionately knead her chest, head-butting her cheeks. They are full of pallor. Then, as I mewl, her eyes open instantly.

"Onyx" she murmurs hoarsely, and I mewl once more. "I love you". My blue-and-green eyes widen. I understand her every word. And then, she collapses. I gasp, immediately checking her for a pulse. There is none.

As I nestle my head into her frigid, cold hands, a shard of glass rolls out of her grasp and onto the floor.

*By Lakshi Rajeev  
Grade Category: junior  
Pymble Ladies' College  
Pymble, NSW*

## The Lonesome Tree

A gumtree stands alone, its roots intertwined with the ground  
Searching for something that cannot be found  
The rustle and shaking of its glossy green leaves  
This barren land, naked for the eye to see

What once used to be crowded with trunks growing tall  
Now nothing is here, nothing at all  
Where are the trees, where have they gone?  
This they wondered as they carry the saw

To build a home, you take a home  
This we do not care  
Animals now forced to roam  
They're taking our air

We are a parasite, a disease without a cure  
The chainsaws we carry are hungry for more  
That lonely gumtree stands in my front yard  
Our great southern land, eternally scarred



*By Ava Moynihan  
Grade Category: senior  
St Brigids Catholic College  
Lake Munmorah, NSW*

# The Paintbrush

Pitter, patter, pitter, patter, pitter, patter. Over all the noise in the New York City streets, all I could focus on was these footsteps. They sounded like they were following me. They sounded so soft, like they weren't holding much weight.

I was so focused on these steps that I didn't even feel the light taps on my shoulder! The taps were made by the same lady making the echoed footsteps! As soon as I turned around, I heard, "Hi darling!" I soon realised the voice and taps were coming from none other than an elderly lady!

"I think you dropped this. "She announced. She was holding a brown wooden paint brush that looked old and smelt like used paint close to my face. "Sorry ma'am but I don't think that's mine." I stated with a smile. The elderly lady handed it to me in a hurry and uttered, "Oh well, I think you should keep it!" "You would put it to good use, am I right?" I agreed nervously then she quickly fled.

I walked to my luxurious villa wondering about what had just happened! I had never met this woman in my life and yet she gave me a paintbrush? As I was walking, I had a look at the paintbrush and thought about what the lady said- I would put it to good use.

I then decided to head down to my local arts and crafts store. There, I bought a two hundred blank page book and walked home.

I eventually got home and darted straight to my room. As soon as I walked in,

"AURORA, GET HERE RIGHT THIS INSTANT YOUNG LADY!!"

My cursed stepmother screeched. I ran downstairs after hiding my brush and book because who knows what this crazy lady would do with it if she found them! I was wondering what I did wrong now but really it was what I didn't do...

"HOW DARE YOU WALK INTO THIS HOUSE WITHOUT GREETING YOUR SISTER NOVA OR I!!" My self-centred stepmother fumed. "YOU AND NOVA EVER ACKNOWLEDGE ME WHEN I

TAKE A STEP INTO THIS HOUSE!"

I hissed. "Did you just backchat me?" She yelled. I knew I was going to get in trouble and grounded but that means more time to experiment with this brush! Not like I have any other plans anyway. I was listening to my stepmother's babble about me not listening until I heard the words I wanted to hear, "YOUR GROUNDED FOR A MONTH!" And I giggled because that's the shortest and easiest time I have ever been grounded. "TWO MONTHS FOR GIGGLING!"

My stepmother howled but I smiled even more. From then on, I walked up to my room and started my time being grounded. For the second time today, I walked up to my room. I was so happy that I forgot why I was happy to be grounded! I looked under my bed because I remembered I put something under there, but I didn't know what. I looked and saw the paintbrush and the book in perfect condition.

I knew I wasn't a very good painter, but I tried my best and drew a brown puppy!

When I was done, "OMG THE DOG CAME TO LIFE!!" I yelled! "IT'S THE DOG I ALWAYS WANTED!" I cried.

My step mum heard all of my excited yelling and started furiously banging on my locked door.

I hid my puppy in my closet praying Mr. Stallion wouldn't bark. I nervously opened the door, my stepmother started sniffing and searching suspiciously. I was so confused-did she know about Mr. Stallion or my brush?! I've only had Mr. Stallion for not even 10 minutes and I never showed her my brush! She kept looking until she walked into my closet and

chuckled, "I knew there was trouble happening in here.

I guess the cameras are working!" I stood in the middle of my room in disbelief! "CAMERAS?" I questioned and blurted out at the same time. "Well, I think it's time I let you know, I have had cameras on you all these years because who knows what a

sneaky girl your age would do!? Now, you can keep the dog BUT... I have to have the brush!" My step mum growled like how Mr. Stallion would.

"I was hesitant at first, but I had a quick look at my new ball of fur and decided to go on with the plan. "YES I'M GOING TO BE RICH I CAN DRAW STACKS AND STACKS ON MONEY!!! HELLO VEGAS!"

I used to loathe this lady, now I loathe her more! Why won't she let me be happy and succeed in life?

After the witch (my stepmother) left, I heard a loud scream and a bang. I wanted to go and investigate, I saw my stepmother had fallen down the stairs!

"WHY DO I HAVE A RED X ON MY HEAD? WHY WOULD YOU DO WITCHCRAFT ON ME? I LET YOU KEEP THE DOG! YOU BETTER GET IT OFF, IT'S AN UGLY RED IT ISN'T EVEN SHINY IT'S MATTE!" She kept going on and on and on. It was funny to see my stepmother be so hopeless and start yelling at a red X that cannot talk or speak but I was still confused!

How could she possibly get an X? I asked her immediately what she drew and my two ears were flabbergasted!

My own greedy stepmother drew more than, "FOUR MILLION DOLLARS?" I wailed! Even I knew to not draw THAT MUCH money like who does she think she is? "Maybe you're going to get punished if you draw any more money! You're already rich enough from my father..." I ranted. But that greedy lady still decided to not listen and drew another stack of money right in front of my face! To my surprise, my stepmother had a quick and loud fall! Her scream vastly faded and my eyes saw that she was gone!

"MY STEPMOTHER HAS DISAPPEARED!" I was so happy but my happiness quickly faded when I realised Nova was soon to come

home from shopping with her gold digger friends. I wish I was allowed to go out... If Nova saw that her mother was gone, I don't know what she would do! All I know is that the whole world would know about it, and I sure didn't want that to happen,

so I picked up the brush and notepad and started drawing, and drawing, and drawing until I was teleported to this green fantasy!

I saw nothing but green! Well, almost nothing. I soon saw this cheerful lady pleasantly roaming around petting her green animals and looking after her garden. She walked up to me and introduced herself saying, “Hi! I’m Wish and this Darland! If you cannot tell, I have made this place for all the people who have taken advantage of my brushes in the past! This must be your first time here! Let me show you around!” Wish exclaimed.

She showed me around and I was surprised with how good of condition this place is until we got to the cells, jail cells to be exact. Wish vocalised that she knew I was here to get my stepmother out of this green abyss. Wish rapidly led me to my stepmother’s cell and saw her crying because she didn’t want to leave Nova all by herself... It was funny to see my stepmother crying because she got teleported out of her home to the green abyss called Darland and it was run by only one woman named Wish.

But I had to get over the funniness and I had to realise I was on a mission to get my stepmother back home in time before Nova gets back and steals Mr. Stallion from my room like what she does with all of my nice clothes, so I had to hurry! I couldn’t let him go after all of this, so I got my last laughs out and started negotiating with Wish.

After negotiating with Wish, my stepmother would be coming out of this prison tomorrow and I will tell Nova she is staying at a hotel. With my stepmom coming out tomorrow, she will also have memory loss of the last 24 hours, so she won’t know about my book, brush or the abyss. I felt I had a pretty good deal with Wish.

I thanked her and she teleported me back to my home. I was happy until, “OH NO!! How am I supposed to tell her about Mr. Stallion and that I have a dog now...!?”

*By Taylor Cervasio  
Grade Category: middle  
Trinity Catholic Primary  
Narre Warren South, Vic.*



## Ode to Lost Stars

It starts during the twelfth hour  
when dusk melts into darkness like  
candle wax,  
draping a rich tapestry of dark blues.  
Crispy leaves caught on a tenor of  
wind  
embrace tides of bitterness.

There, under the flickering streetlamp  
Can you hear me?  
Cloaked in so many layers  
I am here. I exist.  
Baked in exhaust-fume pollution.  
Frosted with soot.  
Help me.  
A boy yearns for warmth never felt.

With the twelfth chime comes the  
midnight symphony:  
a silken whisper of perfect black  
grows to the vicious roar of thunder.  
A timeless melody of snowflakes  
caress the ice-kissed air.

In the bleak midwinter,  
words forsaken to the eddying winds,  
the cold soul sings.

He encloses the tattered quilt  
ever so tightly around his frigid body,  
staring into the wrathful night.

Through the frosted window,  
a hearth fire flickers  
as bright as sunshine after a winter  
storm.  
Red, blue and yellow lights  
twinkle from a tree.

Dawn comes as a promise kept,  
presents were unwrapped with cheers.  
In that wonderland of white  
the young boy’s body is stiff.  
Snow-stroked cheeks  
with a smile upon his lips,  
forever in newfound eternal  
happiness.

*By Farha Fahim  
Grade Category: senior  
Werribee Secondary College  
Werribee, Vic.*

# BOOK REVIEWS

## Meet our book reviewers:

Meet our book reviewers Charlotte, Willow, Natalie, Evah, Addison, Gracey and Mackenzie, from Monteagle Public School in New South Wales.

## Reviews Coordinators

Amanda Butt and Meredith Costain



### Charlie's Swim

by Edith Wright, illustrated by Charmaine Ledden-Lewis (Magabala Books)

Charlie's Swim is an inspiring tale based on a true story. Charlie, a young adult and part of the local Aboriginal group in Broome, is unlucky enough to be caught in World War II. Dutch refugees escape to Broome on seaplanes, so Charlie's job is to make sure that the planes are working. But enemy bombers appear above, the sound of explosions ring across the surface of the ocean, screams fill the air. Dutch families are torn apart. What will Charlie do? What can he do?

Perfect for readers aged 5–10 who love exciting stories.

Rating: 10/10

— Charlotte Sell, Year 5



### Hope is a Spark

by Colin Buchanan, illustrated by Serena Geddes (Scholastic Australia)

*Where does your hope lie? Colin Buchanan finds hope in lots of places. I feel hope is love whenever you are sad. When it is dark, sunrise will always come again. When you just can't wait for the cake to be cooked, you know it will be ready soon and it will be worth it. When reading this book, my heart started warming up with love.*

It was interesting to read a book without a main character. This beautifully written and illustrated book is for readers aged 4 and up.

Rating: 10/10

— Willow Hewson, Year 1



### Crumbs

by Phil Cummins, illustrated by Shane Devries (Scholastic Australia)

As I read this book, I knew it would have a great ending that taught me a lesson. There are three main characters: Ella, a bird and a homeless man. Sound interesting? The homeless man had almost nothing, but he still shared what little he had. I loved this book because the girl, even though she was only young, knew how to do the right thing too. This would be a great book for a teacher to read to the class so everyone could talk about the great adjectives used by Phil Cummins.

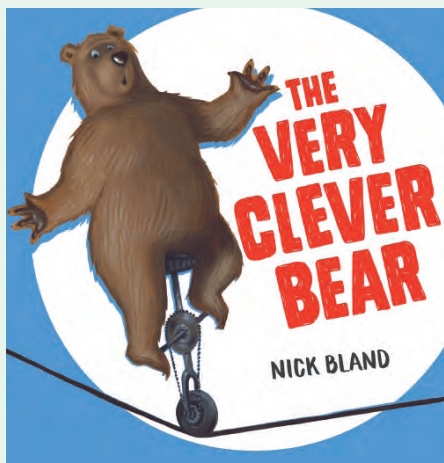
Ella and her dad saw the kindness of the homeless man. What will they do themselves? A beautiful story for children aged 7 years and up.

Rating: 10/10

— Natalie Adams, Year 2







### *The Very Clever Bear*

Written and illustrated by Nick Bland  
(Scholastic Australia)

This is a great book for people who like happy endings. I chose to review this book because the other books in this series are so good. The pictures in this book are beautiful.

Bear joined the circus but he was not good at anything. He made a bike out of sticks, string and glue and could do tricks on it. But the circus already had a bear and did not want another one. Bear noticed that the circus was not a nice or fair place to work. Will Bear save his friends? What will Bear do?

Suitable for readers from 4–10 years, this is another great book in a popular series.

Rating: 9/10

Evah Lamont, Year 2

### *My Tooth is Looth!*

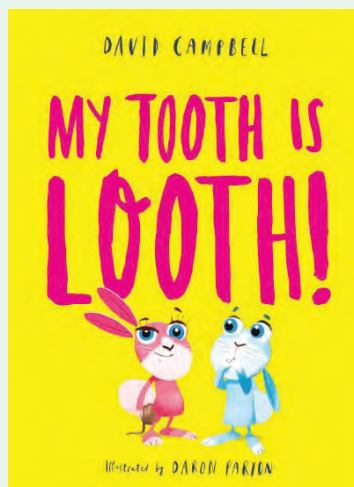
by David Campbell, illustrated by Daron Parton  
(Scholastic Australia)

A bright, happy tale of an energetic and excitable sister Betty, her careful and cautious brother Billy, and their feelings about losing their first tooth. I picked this book to review because I've had a wobbly tooth myself. The illustrations, choice of font and punctuation really support the story delivery and I found myself laughing as I read it. As Betty screams with joy, Billy does not share her enthusiasm. Will Betty have a trick up her sleeve to pull out Billy's tooth? Will Billy turn up for his school photos?

Perfect for readers 4 years and up who are about to get their first loose tooth.

Rating: 10/10

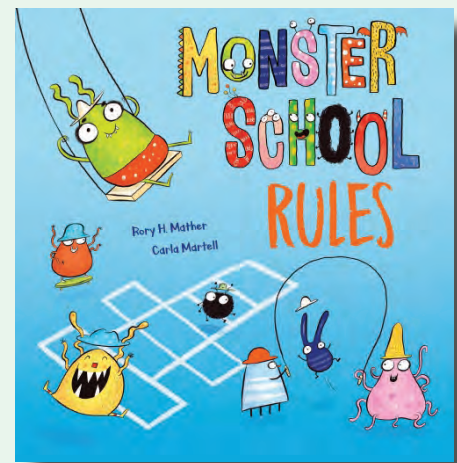
— Addison Dunwell and Charlotte Sell,  
Year 5



### *Who's a Goose?*

Written and illustrated by Scott Stuart  
(Scholastic Australia)

Bill the Goose and Bruce the Teacher are the two main characters in the story. Bruce is trying to teach Bill the collective noun groups for many different animals. Do you think Bill will understand what Bruce is trying to teach him? This is a great story and I know my friends will laugh out loud when they read it. This book is for everyone who loves funny stories.



### *Monster School Rules*

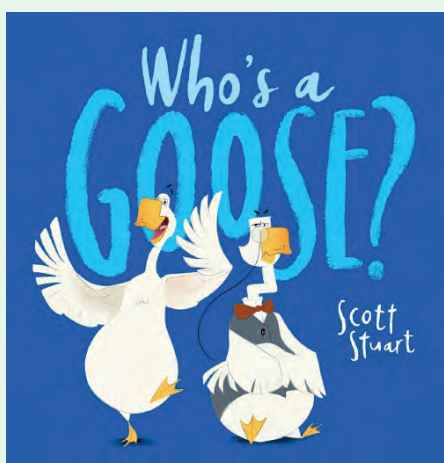
by Rory H. Mather, illustrated by Carla Martell  
(Scholastic Australia)

Monster School Rules is a bright and creatively presented book. Monsters need to follow school rules, just like we do, but are the rules the same or is there a slight twist? During sport, music, lunch and playtime, monsters have a set of seven rules to follow. Will they have fun following the school rules?

A rhythmic rhyming book with bold backgrounds and fun characters I wanted to draw myself later. This book would suit ages 4 and up and is a great book to read to children who are starting school.

Rating: 10/10

— Gracey Rose, Year 4  
and Charlotte Sell, Year 5



The pictures really show the characters' feelings in the story.

Rating: 10/10

— Mackenzie Fogg, Year 2



# Lest We Forget

Dad had built the little tire swing onto the tree before it was full-grown. I was around four then, watching his fingers twist the ropes together in so many intricate ways to keep the tire hanging in the air.

Ralph and I used to play with it, each taking turns to swing from it while the other person pushes. We didn't play with it much afterwards, when we were ten. Too childish. The years trickled by and the tire grew old and mottled grey and green.

Then Ralph went to war.

He had signed up, quietly, without any of us knowing. Departing quietly too, he had only left a small note left on the kitchen table before he'd vanished. We mourned for him quietly, hoping for him to join us, hoping against all hope that he would return. Some things we just cannot control.

The tire swing swayed gently in the wind.

More years passed. Names appeared on newspapers. Faces, already gone, in them too. The dead. Father and I pursued them, searching anxiously through the pages. Ralph was never there. We clung onto the hope that he would live.

The tree turned green, then yellow, then

as red as blood and then the leaves would quietly fall onto the ground. The tree was bare, then it filled with life again. Spring came and went. The war continued.

We heard stories of brave men sacrificing their lives for their country. We heard of the harsh times in the trenches. We heard of dying comrades and friendships torn apart. We thought of Ralph. We hoped and prayed for Ralph.

The swing rocked back and forth in a lullaby. The tree rustled its leaves. The roots grew long and appeared above the ground. The trunk lengthened and strove towards the sun. Birds sometimes came to nestle in the tree. They went when clouds covered the sky and the landscape was white.

As spring approached, flowers shyly unfurling their petals into the sun, there were rumours, only rumours, that the war was ceasing. That occasional fights were breaking out but the mass deaths had stopped. The hope we had nursed year after year blossomed with the flowers into a sort of knowing. Soon the war would stop. Soon the soldiers would come home. Soon Ralph would be back.

As we combed through the newspaper on a bright, warm March, we found him. That

dream we had shattered into a million pieces. We wept and mourned for the loss. As twilight descended quietly, I stood beside the tree and the swing and watched the sun dip into darkness.

I climbed onto the tire. It was getting a little small and cobwebs dotted the inside. I pushed with my feet, then let go. The wind whistled through my face as the swing arced upwards, paused, and began to drift back down. I could hear him in the wind, the cicadas, the birds.

I'm okay. I'll always be with you.

Lest We Forget.

*By Meii You  
Grade Category: middle  
Abbotsleigh Junior School  
Galston, NSW*

# The Journey through the outback

The twisting terrain guided me, as I clambered up the steadily ascending road with my camels. Behind me in a straight line, they carried my baggage and equipment, as we slowly trekked on. It felt like we have been walking for all eternity, through the endless sea of undeveloped land.

The Sun dimmed as it was covered by the shifting clouds, that seemed to have shuddered in the wind. The dry, barren trail seemed to taunt at me while I continued my journey. Hours past, as birds sang melodies while the heat was engraved into my skin.

For many countless times, I wanted to stop and pause because of the sweltering heat. I decided to trudge on though, enduring the arid climate. The camels didn't even need to pause for a break, or for water. Finally, in what seemed like a day, I made it to a waterhole. I was almost dying of thirst, craving for a drink. The water nourished me, like the sensational taste of a refreshing ice cream on a boiling day.



After that, I kept on going. The outskirts of the countryside unraveled before my eyes. Eagles plummeted down, swooped in the air and sailed through the ocean of clouds, daunting me. The unknown earth spread out on the surface, like butter on bread, and I continued on.

*By Loriah Zhang  
Grade Category: junior  
Pymble Ladies' College  
Pymble, NSW*

## Magical Multiverses

It's surprising how much meaning a single book can hold in its shell. I gently buff the dull grey cover, revealing a crimson leather hue as dust flies everywhere.

I look behind myself, half-expecting that Anna dragged Josh off to think of a prank to play on me first — we're playing this random game. Yep, I'm probably right.

I'm alone in the solitude of my refuge, and you're sure to think I'm crazy, but my so-called 'refuge' is really just the library. And I'm not kidding about that, for those who think I am.

Abruptly, a small tingle sparks into my spine, snapping my mind back to reality. A small voice in my head tells me; 'Open the book... open it...' I stare down longingly at the entrancing leather, studded with pure citrine shards and glazed with smooth black silk — but reluctantly, very reluctantly. 'Why be so hesitant to open the book you were so excited about just a few moments ago?' The voice sneers mockingly.

I shut my eyes and think. Only a few seconds later, I find myself, trembling, prising open the old, fragile object and gazing down at a brown-beige, partly burnt and crisp piece of parchment, cut (or I would say delicately ripped) into a page. A

large blot of dark spruce ink is positioned at the corner, with a neat and thin number stamped down in the core.

As I take it all in, my eyes are dragged to the rather untidy scrawl; supposedly writing, and misty — as if a thousand colours are revolting around the dark brown ink.

Suddenly, a tremor shakes the old-fashioned, hand-knitted carpet underneath my feet, and the next thing I know, I'm standing in a swirling pattern of black and white circling the floor. I nervously bite my lip and fix my gaze on the walls. At first, the newspaper-like wallpaper is fine — until it starts to wobble and become steady again repeatedly. I whirl around as the tingle comes again, forcing my feet towards the pale white staircase leading to a door with the same soft hue and blink with curiosity, but the door and staircase don't change; they don't even wiggle!

Moving carelessly towards the door with my back facing it, I explore the strange patterns with my eyes. Expecting some shapes to swirl up when I touch the door with my back, I lean against it and tumble back onto a delicate, soft hill, lush, green and grassy.

The door is gone. I look up at the turquoise

sky and, as abruptly as the tremor, a kaleidoscope of colours consumes me.

Raspberry red, apricot, neon yellow, dark blue, shamrock, sage, ivory, white, shadow grey and violet swirl around me. I observe rainbow zigzags, green and orange curves, black and white spots... and a small black machine apparently hanging from the sky?

Squinting at the minute protruding machine, I realise it's just a projector — and the hill's been made! I feel the walls and ceiling, the floor and even the door.

Wait.  
No.  
It can't be.  
I thought it was an illusion...  
Two figures zoomed past me...  
Two figures...  
Two figures...  
Anna and Josh!

"Tricked ya!"

*By Lena Takahashi  
Grade Category: junior  
Waitara Public School  
Waitara, NSW*

As the sun shone through a gap through the dense coverage of the forest, a small figure trotted amidst the undergrowth, ears alert, and eyes scanning the surroundings. This dog, Scout, who was owned by a firefighter called Liam, had the crucial task of checking for forest fires daily.

On this day, however, something unusual occurred. As Scout was taking his usual stroll through the forest, he spotted a wisp of smoke snaking its way through the sky. Scrutinising his surroundings an unfamiliar smell reached him. Gazing in the direction of the smell, he heard the shrill screeching of birds against a cacophony of sounds as a bright flame of fiery reds and oranges shot into the darkening sky.

Sweat trickled down his face, stinging his eyes, but Scout kept on running. The ferocious beast spat out fiery embers, igniting a scorching path that devoured everything in its wake. Scout's marmalade fur caught aflame but with each desperate yet determined stride he took, the sparks extinguished.

A glimmer of daylight beckoned through a gap in the trees — if only he could reach it. A thunderous roar brought him back to reality; a molten wall of fire enclosed him, a searing inferno ablaze on a charred tree stump, devoid of any greenery.

He pivoted, ears drooping, a high-pitched whimper escaping from his scorched throat. The escalating flames danced in the sky as if revelling in triumph, malevolently laughing as he snarled, their fiery projectiles singeing his coat. Thoughts of all his loved ones awaiting him at the forest's edge fuelled

his determination.

He spun around, leaped over the burning log and sprinted, sprinted until the pads of his paws split open, exposing raw, bleeding flush to the rugged terrain. With a final surge, he burst into the open, the concerned faces of his firefighters greeting his vision. Fading from consciousness, he believed he saw a woman trapped, her arms flailing in the perfect imitation of 'The Scream'. He let out a sharp, urgent bark.

Scout sprang up, pain spasming through his body as his paws met gravel. Through a haze of agony, he continued barking, conveying an issue to the unaware firefighters.

Pointing his snout towards the smoke-filled forest, long enough to show the firefighters something was wrong. They gasped in unison, aware that Scout was their only hope. They managed to spot the woman, who was waving her arms through the air, distressed.

No human would be able to see through the smoke, let alone survive. So, they secured his boots and oxygen pack and sent him the command, "Go Boy!" With that Scout darted through the forest, deftly navigating, recalling every hidden obstacle. Amidst smoke and fiery flames, he reached the woman — her knight in shining armour had arrived.

The woman breathed a sigh of relief, coughing up smoke. An animal-like whimper escaped her throat. But Scout nosed her gently, offering his oxygen pack. Doubt flickered in her eyes, but Scout edged her on, after a previous minute of

contemplating, she accepted, securing it cautiously before trailing the loyal dog's path through the woods.

Emerging from the last strip of dead land, they burst through the foliage, met by the alarmed gazes of the firefighters. Suddenly, Scout collapsed, chest heaving. Each breath mingled with smoke, Liam fell to his knees, cradling Scout's head in his lap. Liam gave a sharp bark, calling to his comrades. They started immediately, rushing to carry out his request. As Scout coughed, a trickle of blood slid to the ground.

A bowl of water was laid near his head. Slowly he moved his head and started to lap up the water with ravis. Lying back down, his eyes closed, and his chest slowed. Liam sobbed, tears streaming down his soot-covered face as he whispered words of gratitude and love to his loyal companion.

Suddenly, Liam felt a gentle nudge on his forehead, as he opened his eyes, reflected in his tears he saw the emerald, green eyes of Scout gazing up at him. In that fiery crucible, their souls had been tested and found unyielding.

And as they gazed into each other's eyes, it was not just the flames that burned bright, but the profound love and connection that bound them together, a beacon of hope amidst the chaos and destruction.

*By Athena Wu  
Grade Category: middle  
Pymble Ladies College  
Pymble, NSW*

# Through Fire and Smoke

# *The Lines Which I See in My Sleep*

The lines which I see in my sleep.

Upon the shore, where the waves embrace the land,  
A surfer seeks a dance with liquid grace,  
Where the golden flecks of dashing sand,  
Guide his feet to nature's chaotic embrace.

Stroke by stroke he carves a passage familiar yet untold,  
Merging with the depths, a realm so vast, hidden  
Under the thunderous clamour of tempests past,  
Of foamy white relics five-hundred miles old.

Below an amethyst canvas tinged with a final flicker of blazing light,  
Fractal imperfections, now distorted mirrors,  
Reflect misty hills, as they crash into the surf, growing dimmer,  
Amidst the swell's terrifying might.

Surrendering to momentum's surging grip,  
Harnessing a potent heft,  
He is thrown and pummelled and spun and left  
A ragdoll, condemned by the strike of a darkened lip.

Yet when I emerge from the roaring deep,  
I yearn for the place where sky and ocean meet:  
Indistinguishable horizon, a paradoxical union of danger and the divine,  
I yearn for my purple cathedral, and the lines  
Which I see in my sleep.

*By Christopher O'Connell  
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Scotch College  
Hawthorn, Vic.*

# Latin Keys

Suddenly the lights flicked on. As my eyes desperately tried to adjust to the light, the glimpse of many different coloured frogs caught my attention almost admittedly, followed by narrow broken windows that lined the top of the dark cream coloured basement walls. My mind pointed out how the frogs probably got in through the windows, but why so many?

My eyes turned towards the spotted blue box that I had barely seen earlier. I slowly approached the unknown crate, carefully avoiding all the still frogs that still lay beneath me. On behalf of examining the strange case, I found a golden label attached to the front of it, that read, 'Robbin Lumber'.

My memories seem fumbled, I can't even remember my name, maybe I am Robbin Lumber or would it be a coincidence. I

while dust and derby covered every inch of the floor. I came across a photo that kinda looked like me, I was standing with a taller guy, that looked like he could be a relative. My attention fell to a destroyed wall that hanged a large cross on it. I ran my fragile hands across the cross, it felt textured, crumbly and burnt, I reached for the top of the defected cross were I discovered a small necklace shaped like a key. I eagerly awaited to find the contents of the box as I galloped down the stairs.

I inserted the key into the dry old whole before opening, a nasty gas filled the room as the box revealed multiple photos of me and the tall man, although all of them had my face crossed out with red marker, next to these was a note that wrote:

"Dear Brother, Robbin"  
If you have not died yet from the fire I

luck has run out.

Like a true Italian says it, 'Che i peccati siano bruciati da te fratello.'  
'Let your sins be burnt with you brother'  
Regards Tom Lumber"

I dropped the letter in a pit of shock and grief, memory's started to flood back to me like a bluet train. I remember Susie's face the day she died, and Toms fear the day he was served. I felt my lungs start to cave in as the toxins entered my blood stream. As my head deteriorated of all life I had left, my final thoughts consisted of the deep sorriness that haunted me. As my body passed, my last glimpse of light was of the frog's jumping away, just like my source of hope, luck and dignity I no longer have.

My weakened eyes wearily forced them self's open, it seemed a cold wet droplet had woken me from my slumber, I could faintly make out a spotted blue box in the corner of what seemed to be a basement, concreting the pitch black surroundings and what I thought was leaky pipes.

My mind seemed numb, and my vision blurry, I could only recall a odd sentence that popped up in my head, "Che i peccati siano bruciati da te fratello." Could it be some sort of code, or just my mind playing tricks on me. I tried to move my hands, but only to be stopped by what I assumed was a rope, I started to shack my hands to loosen the rope, surprisingly it slid right off.

A bolt of fear crackled down my back when I felt what lay beneath my bare feet. What I had predicted to be a bumpy wet rug moved under my toes, it seemed there was thousands of small individual rock shaped like creatures roaming around me. My mouth that carried a blood-curdling scream for help halted, before a thrash of lighting attacked what must have had to be a near by object outside.

*By Imogen Gibson  
Grade Category: middle  
Murrumba State Secondary Collage  
Murrumba Downs, Qld.*

tried to jolt the lid open but it was stuck, it needed a key. As I gave the frog filled room another glance, my eyes fell on what looked to be a staircase leading to a tall, skinny door with several tiny holes in it.

I managed to drag my drowsy, sore body up what seemed was never ending stairs until I reached the door. I gave the brown wooden rectangle a soft push, before it gradually creaked open, it seemed some time had passed because the storm looked to have cleared leaving little bits of light to seal through gaps of boarded windows.

The house looked wrecked, ash filled the air

had set, you shall soon, as toxic gas has released from this box.

Your memory may be wiped right now so I will remind you of what cruel inhuman things you've done to deserve such a death. Police file 234 investigates the murder of 5 year old Susie Lumber, your cousin 3/4/2017. She was stabbed at a family meet and greet, police arrested your uncle Bob for murder, but everyone knows it wasn't him, he loved the family so much. I saw the murder and looked him in the eyes before you brutally killed Susie. You were lucky getting away with it for this long, but your



# Charred Cigarettes

Pass me the lighter, you say.  
You hold a gun to your head and ask me to feed you the bullets.  
Ignorance is sweet bliss, as sweet as the smoke you inhale it seems.  
How are you so unwavering in the face of death?

Or perhaps it is something you've welcomed in these fifteen years.  
My childhood reeks of smoke like burnt sugar,  
of birthdays blurred in a haze of ash.  
I've watched you light that infernal poison a hundred times over.



The ends of your cigarette burning red as hellfire,  
a torch that leads the way to your demise.  
It sits between your teeth, between your fingers,  
an ivory extension of yourself that eats away at you –  
a tumour.  
And you let it.

You coax its flame as if it isn't the very thing that destroys you.  
And what to your conscience?  
Or is it so easily swayed when you exchange your life for a moment of sickening pleasure,  
a year with each candied puff.

You indulge yourself in such knowing one day it will steal away a parent from your children.  
How can you be so selfish, so cruel,  
as to wish that on them.  
On me.

Spent a sweet sixteenth  
counting the days I have left with you,  
until you seize up in bloodied fits of coughing.  
Until you murmur, I love you in croaked tones.  
Pass me the lighter.

With soot-stained fingertips you pull me into a suffocating embrace  
and leave me choking on the fumes.  
Each passing day invites wheezes that scrape against my ears,  
taunting and ticking away at the time you have left,  
at time you gave away for the pretty price of breath.

Coughs that rip flesh and leave sandpapered skin at the back of your throat,  
a trail that blazes like fire from your lips to your scorched lungs.  
Ash trays decorate our home like unwelcome weeds,  
threading themselves into our lives,  
filled to the brim with  
remainders and reminders of your disgusting habit.

One day you will turn into that very poison, to ash,  
preserved as the weapon that led you into death's hands.  
And when the smoke clears  
I will be there,  
picking up the shattered pieces of a family you left  
for a charred cigarette.

*By Alexandra May Calica-Chavez  
Grade Category: senior  
St Dominic's Priory College  
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# SUNSET

The sun's shining, glistening rays streamed through the trees on a red brick cottage where a girl named Silvia and her parents lived. Silvia's mum always woke up early every day to make porridge with berries, but on that particular day, she found that she had no berries, so she told Silvia to go into the woods and pick some.

Silvia happily went skipping into the woods. She found a big bush of blueberries and started picking them. When her bucket was full, she turned to go back home, but she didn't know which way to go.

She sat down on a rock and wept. Just then, the now empty blueberry bush began to tremble, and to Silvia's surprise, a hedgehog appeared and looked her in the eyes. "Dry your tears my dear. Why are you crying?" "I...I can't find my way home," sobbed Silvia. Then she stiffened. "Did you just talk?"

"I certainly did." Replied the hedgehog. Silvia gaped. "Now you're lost, I can help, but we have to get you home before sunset," explained the hedgehog. "And by the way, my name is Rial."

Silvia asked Rial, "What do you mean by we?" "Us," he said, and this time five hedgehogs, three fairies, four foxes and two elves appeared at Rial's side. "Us," Rial repeated. Even though Silvia was flabbergasted, she pretended not to be and calmly asked, "So, what happens if I'm not home by sunset?"

"Aaahh," said one of the fairies. "Your spirit will be trapped inside a tree forever. "So, we better get moving," said Rial. "I will tell you my friends' names. The foxes' names are Ben, Bell, Sammy and Anny. The fairies' names are Sillky, Milla and Ella. The hedgehogs' names are Fred, Harper, Phoebe, William and Jack. The elves' names are Steev and Max."

Silvia was overwhelmed with all the names, but she was determined to remember them all. She shot to her feet. "Which way do we go?" She asked. "Well," said Bell the fox. "You have a scent and that scent is connected to your home." So they set off with the foxes

sniffing the ground, the fairies above, the hedgehogs tottering along and the elves in sync.

They walked for a bit, then they found a stream blocking the way. "That wasn't here when I skipped through the woods," said Silvia, looking very puzzled. "That is the forest trick. He likes to move things around. One minute there's a river and the next there's just grass. Annoying, really," said Max the elf in a gruff voice.

"Well, how do we cross? I guess we have to swim," Silvia said. "No!!!" yelled everyone else. "The water is enchanted. If you touch it, you will turn into a statue made of gold," Milla said. "Well, how do you drink water?" asked Silvia. "There are two streams, one for drinking and one is a trap for the unwary," said Jack the hedgehog. "How do you tell them apart?" asked Silvia, astonished.

"You can tell them apart because one has a sparkly glow like fizzy mineral water. That is bad water. And the other one is just plain old clear water," explained Sammy. "So, how do we get across?" Repeated Silvia in an exasperated voice. "Do we have to go around?"

"We can't go around. It goes on until the end of the world," said Phoebe, sighing. Silvia looked at the tops of the trees, pondering a way to solve the problem. There was little time left. The sun was slowly setting in the west.

Silvia saw stars dancing around her. "Oh no," said Harper. "We're too late. But the good thing is, Silvia will get to join us as one of our forest friends." And within seconds,

she was a wonderful maple tree.

*By Maya Sandberg  
Grade Category: middle  
Burnside State School  
Burnside, Qld.*







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# SHADOW MY SHADOW

At dusk, in the front yard,  
my shadow and I are bored.  
The shadow is lazy,  
it won't move until I do.

The shadow seemed deaf, or is it just mean?  
I try to talk to it, but it doesn't answer me.  
I try to play tag, but it's always a step behind.  
We played scissor, paper, rock.

On and on we played.  
No winners, no losers.  
In the front yard,  
the shadow and I are frustrated.

Night has greeted us and still mum hasn't returned from work.  
The isolated cars vroom, here and there.  
The shadow's afraid of the dark, it hid somewhere,  
I got scared too, with no one now near.

We will meet again when the sun rises,  
what a coward you are, my friend shadow.

*By Yui Shim  
Grade Category: middle  
Broadbeach State School  
Broadbeach, Qld.*

# THE HAUNTED MANSION

Theodore found a haunted mansion, so he thought it would be a good idea if he went inside. He tries to find the gold that he thinks is inside the haunted mansion, but when he went inside, he got the goosebumps and started to have second thoughts.

He did a 180° turn to face the front door. But when he was about to leave, the front door slammed shut.

Theodore whispered. "Hello, hello." "Is anyone here?"

"If there is someone here can you please open the front door." "Please."

But nobody answered. He went upstairs and Theodore found a random hole in the ceiling. He found a ladder and when he went to go grab the ladder, he heard his

little brother calling out for him.

The brothers name is Leo.

He is a nice and friendly brave kid and would do anything for his family. Leo found the haunted mansion, and his older brother Theodore told his little brother everything that happened and told him to stay at the front door, so he can hear if the door unlocks. When he grabbed the ladder he put the ladder against the wall, so he could see what was in the hole.

It is a lever that was hidden in plain sight and Theodore didn't know about it until then, so he didn't hesitate to pull the lever. When he pulled the lever there was a sound of a door unlocking and Theodore assumed that it was the front door.

Theodore's little brother answered. "Hey, Theodore, the door is unlocked for you so you can escape from the haunted mansion. Theodore got down from the ladder and sprinted outside away from the haunted mansion.

Theodore ran off into the sunset and Leo caught back up to Theodore. They both ran off into the sunset together.

They wouldn't dare to turn around and go back there again. Or would they?...

*By Benjamin Scott  
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Trinity Catholic Primary  
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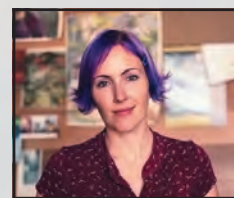
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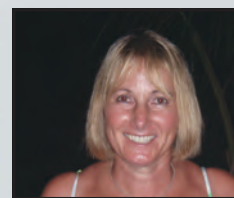
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