

# OZ KIDS IN PRINT

*Celebrating 25 Years*

**Issue 2, 2024**

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# OZ KIDS IN PRINT

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

As we speed through 2024 in our 25th year. Not only has the magazine changed. So has technology. Using Adobe products, we can now create images, to fit with the poems/stories, with Ai. So please, if you want to send an image with a story or poem. You are most welcome to. We will continue, to create images for them, if you don't. Now with the help of Ai.

Some entries have precise details to follow. So I always try my best to create an image for it. The more detail, the more difficult it is to find one. Sometimes, it requires merging a few images. Let's see if Ai works better.

As we cannot publish all the entries you send us. It is limited to a maximum per student and per school, in each publication. So, make sure your best work is published. Only send those. - Carol

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**KEEP ON WRITING (TYPING)!**

*Carol Dick*  
Managing Editor

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## Author / Illustrator Workshops

### Young Indigenous Teens Program

### South Australia Workshops

*Proudly supported and funded by  
HenderCare Foundation, facilitated by the Morialta Trust!*

In early June, illustrator and writer Sally Heinrich presented the program to students, introducing the concepts of different art forms.

Workshops were held at Ceduna Area School, Koonibba Aboriginal School, Penong Primary School, Yalata Anangu School, and Oak Valley Aboriginal School.



### FEEDBACK

"All the students were engaged and seemed to enjoy a technique they hadn't had exposure to before. There's always something a little magical about making prints, and even kids who think they're no good at art can get a great result."

Even the teachers at the schools were impressed with the program. Just read a few of the selected testimonials below:

*"Students were engaged and curious".*

*"Fantastic lesson, kids were engaged. They loved the activity".*

*"We loved watching the processes of how you start with something very simple, map it and produce a final product. It's a very valuable learning insight for our students. They grew in their thought and artistic process within this short time! Thank you".*

*"Excellent workshop. Well-presented, informative and students were highly engaged".*

We are thrilled to see just how beneficial this program was for the students who participated, and we are proud that we were able to help support the Children's Charity Network in this endeavour.

## Zero

Bang! The sound of thunder roared. I slowly opened my swollen, sore eyes. Blue and white strikes of lightning danced across the night sky. Stanley, that lay next to me was snoring loudly, it had seemed the lack of sleep had effected him tremendously.

Thoughts of Mr Sir blurting on about how dumb I was filled my head. I knew that I wasn't dumb, but it still hurt to know I was just a hopeless brain dead loser in their eyes. My reading seems to be better, but the torment and harrassment of the other boys stuck to my brain like a leech. My stomach thrashed an awful sharp pain, not as bad as on the cliff edge but it still hurt like a big, sharp thorn in my side. All I remember from the fall was Stanley throwing me over his shoulder, and then blank.

*Five hours later.....*

My eyes shot open to the sound of Stanley digging the water hole deeper. He was

carefully emptying the mud from the hole, leaving as little water scooped piles of mud as he could. I crawled my aching dry body over to the hole and grabbed a hand full of rocks to put in it, before doing it again. I remember seeing a show in the homeless shelter demonstrating the separation of dirt and water with rocks.

It seems to work the same way to filter as much bacteria filled mud out of the hole too. My mind drifted off at the sight of the hole, it seemed to bring back memories. I remember standing there bewildered at what I had done, not knowing what to say or do. The shovel was in my hands and Mr Pendanski was out cold.

Stanley that was next to me had a look of shock, but seemed to be more worried, but for who, could he be worried if Mr Pendanski is ok, or what might happen to me, perhaps both?. My brain had gone numb. I couldn't even let a mumble out of my frozen mouth. The anger, fear and adrenaline caved in. I couldn't stop myself

from turning around and running as fast as a cheetah into the scorching desert.

Cold, wet sweat dripped across my forehead as I ran (before it dried out in the next second). I had heard only the sound of my dusty fragile feet clunking across the ground as I ran, no one followed. My throat had become dry and crackled. For the next few days, hiding under the decomposing boat until Stanley found me.

Stanley gave me a hopeful look before turning and going to pick the protruding onions from out of the mud. My heart still thumped aggressively from the thought of an unconscious Mr Pendanski. I mean it wasn't the first time I've run away, that's how I got to camp, if only I didn't take the sneakers then I wouldn't be here right now.

Mr Pendanski deserved to be hit in his half empty head, didn't he? Either way I don't regret it, this is better than digging holes in the scorching, hazardous, plains of dry, cracked river bed. Stanley sat still, kneeling on the ground picking onions, and seems to have no grudge against what I did. It seems he's proud that I stuck up for myself. I mean he did come all this way out here to rescue me. It didn't stop me from feeling a slight drift of guilt.

Although I realised that everyone in this camp was there for themselves. They would throw you under the bus in an instant if it meant something better for them. No one except Stanley actually came for me. It made me feel gloomy and alone, not like that's anything different to my original, before life. I could not care less about what they think of me, smart or not. If they judge like that they are dumb ones, and not worth the energy. At the moment I thought of a plan, we'll sneak into the camp, gather supplies, and dig until we find what the warden was so eager for and then we will get out of this place and never look back.

*By Imogen Gibson*  
Grade Category: Senior  
Murrumba State Secondary College  
Murrumba Downs, Qld.  
Teacher: Barbara Johnson





# BOOK REVIEW

By Kristina Waterman

## Borderlands – Riding the Slipstream

*Edited by Paul Collins, with illustrations by Anne Ryan  
and cover art by Shaun Tan (Ford Street Publishing)*

With over forty original short stories and poems, YA anthology *Borderlands – Riding the Slipstream* is crammed full of inventive stories that are sure to entertain. Edited by renowned author Paul Collins, this collection spans a wide range of genres and styles – from sci-fi and fantasy adventures, comedic slice-of-life stories, to horrifying and ghostly tales. With contributions from some of Australia’s best-loved authors, including Ursula Dubosarsky, Steven Herrick, Leigh Hobbs, Barry Jonsberg, Meredith Costain and Shaun Tan, a foreword by fantasy writer Isobelle Carmody and illustrated by the talented Anne Ryan, this collection has something for every reader to enjoy.

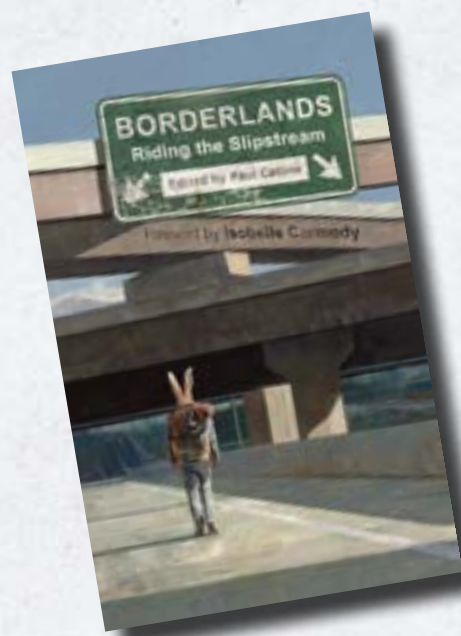
Shaun Tan’s *The Bird King* is a dream-like fable set in a world full of magic, wonder and curses. A care-free and naive king becomes ensorcelled by a magic crown that can create his every dream, only for his selfish demands to consume the beautiful world he previously cherished. Full of evocative imagery and poignant lessons, *The Bird King* is the perfect blend of the fantastic and the meaningful.

In *The Cabin Boy and the Creature*, Simon Higgins takes us to fifteenth century China, where orphan Dong must use his compassion and his cunning to look after the mysterious qilin during the long sea voyage home. Navigating complex social hierarchies and tending to a mysterious and stricken beast, Dong works hard to thrive in his new role and distinguish himself to Admiral Zheng He. This is a wonderful historical story about employing kindness and cleverness to overcome even the most unexpected of challenges.

Elizabeth Fensham’s *Good Fences Make Good Neighbours – A Fowl Story* is a light-hearted adventure that follows the mishaps of fourteen-year-old Georgie and her dad as they settle into their new life in a country town. Georgie, determined to help her grieving father learn to enjoy life again, and Frank, depressed but honestly doing his best, fulfil an old dream by moving to a small cottage in Tintabel. Amidst disgruntled ducks and rowdy dogs, Georgie manages to embroil her father in a conflict with their charming neighbour. With characters full of sass and personality, Fensham’s story is a delightful comedy of errors with a lot of heart.

With such a diverse selection of high-quality stories, *Borderlands – Riding the Slipstream* is a fantastic example of some of the many talented authors Australia has on offer. This anthology is highly recommended for teen readers eager to expand their literary horizons and would be a great addition to any library or school catalogue.

– Kristina Waterman



## Escape!

The iron bars rattled as he strangled them in fury. He stepped back and sank onto the cold, metal floor in despair. There was nothing he could do.

He stared around taking in his surroundings. Just the thought of where he was felt like thousands of sharp knives sticking into him. He couldn’t stand these conditions any longer. Now was his chance. He must escape!

He had been behind bars for what felt like an eternity and he was sick of it.

Then, he saw a loose screw. This made him remember the screwdriver he had smuggled in. ‘Is this real? Or was he still drunk from the sour milk?’ Next, to make sure that no one saw, he threw his shoe at the monitor. It shattered instantly. ‘One problem down, one to go’ he thought to

himself. ‘They would soon know.’

Suddenly, he heard the sound of footsteps coming along the corridor. They had come early. ‘What should he do now?’ Thinking quickly, he shoved his shoe back onto his foot and lay on his rock-hard bed pretending to be asleep. The footsteps faded going no past him to the next room. Quick as a flash, he pulled the screwdriver out from under the bed and started to unscrew the screw. Nothing happened. He kept trying but there was absolutely no response from the screw. Then out of the blue, he heard the footsteps coming back. At the speed of light he slid back into bed, but this time lying awake. He hoped that she would just do as done before and walk past. But ... no such luck. She saw him lying awake. She watched him for a few minutes to see what he would do, but he just lay there. The woman found this satisfactory and walked away.

Then he noticed something. A lever was on the other side of the bars. ‘If only he

could pull that lever.’ He ran up to the side of the bars and reached as far as he could but he could only just scrape it with his fingernails. Then . . . a light-bulb moment. ‘His screwdriver!’ He sprinted back to his bed and reached underneath. He grabbed it and darted back to the bars. This time . . . ‘SUCCESS!!!!’

‘CLANG!’ The bars crashed down onto the floor. He dashed away but . . . THUMP THUMP THUMP. Footsteps echoed in the corridor. He did the first thing that came to his mind. Hide. He raced down the hallway to the end . . . there was a cupboard. In. Pitch blackness. Safe. He could hear the footsteps coming closer, . . . and closer, until . . . BANG!!!! The door was flung open and there they were.

Suddenly there were arms wrapping around him. He wriggled and kicked but it made no difference. His feet had left the floor. He was looking down at his room.

Then he saw it – it was on his bed – his stuffed bear? Slowly the room began to come into focus. There were his alphabet blocks on the floor. His wood scene rug on the polished wooden boards. His animal blanket on his bed. Then he was lowered back behind bars and he heard a voice, “Now go to sleep.”

THE END

*By Ishana Limburg  
Grade Category: Middle  
Greenslopes State School  
Greenslopes, Qld.  
Teacher: Mr P.*

## A Smith’s chip packet

A Smith’s chip packet,  
Is dropped in school,  
And soars across the yard.  
The children see,  
But they do not act,  
They show careless disregard.

This Smith’s chip packet,  
Once enjoyed, once loved,  
Is abandoned, but also free.  
To fly, to explore,  
Wander the world,  
And end up in the unwelcoming sea.

The Smith’s chip packet,  
will be tossed on the surface,  
stuffed down a turtle’s throat.  
The turtle will thrash,  
Howl an agonized wail,  
While the packet will choke like a rope.

This Smith’s chip packet,  
Once innocent, plain,  
Has become wicked and fearsomely cruel.  
All due to a careless  
child or two,  
Ignorant children in school.

*By Renee Kim  
Grade Category: Middle  
Mornington Primary School  
Mornington, Vic.  
Teacher/s: Ms Bibi and Ms Bolton*





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& ILLUSTRATORS  
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SCHOOLS ACROSS  
AUSTRALIA**



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workshop  
TODAY!**



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

# Preschool 'Volunteering' - Never do it

My fingers are stuck together with sparkly pink Elmer's glue. I exhale a frustrated sigh. Only two minutes have passed, and already I'm sick of them.

Jemma Barnaby-Rodriguez grins (almost wickedly) at me. For some reason, she has silver sequins in her mouth. My preschool buddy seems to notice me staring at her mouth, because she spits it out onto the table. Katie and Jason have wrinkles on their faces as well. I'm guessing I do, too, because Jemma is basically the Troublemaker of the Millennium.

If you're asking, I didn't volunteer. My parents signed me up without me even knowing about it, which is pretty un-parent-like. They said to, "Go learn to take care of kids! When you were a toddler, you were so much trouble..."

"But you didn't have to look after me in day care, did you?" I had pointed out smugly. Then they had exchanged exasperated looks, as if they thought I didn't know anything.

Well, guess what- it's really the opposite. My mum and dad don't know anything about how tiring it is to look after three-year-old Jemma. I bet you can only have tantrums like Jemma does when you're a three-week-old baby. That's a ten year difference! Nope, sorry, my brain isn't functioning properly right now. I really wonder why.

Suddenly, there's a clatter of ceramic mugs toppling down their steel notches - Jemma! Panic flits through my head to my stomach, and a surge of dizziness nearly causes me to vomit. This, even though I hate it, is the one job I need. It's really the only one I can have! Oh. Did I forget to mention my family and all the other ones here are poor? We live on the outskirts of the city. Also, just expanding, this wasn't really a volunteer job. If you sign up, you get five dollars per day. Gosh, that's more than enough for us!

Let's go back to Jemma. Oh no! She's already halfway through the ceiling, and hanging on the lousy chandelier. Rusty, fragile hinges start to squeal...

Everyone is frozen in suspense. I dart up the kid climbing wall, but the building is - uh, quite tall, and I'm only about a twelfth to the top. No one makes a sound. I feel dizzy than ever before. Is it just my imagination, or am I tumbling down...?

Then seven years of climbing practice kick in.

My legs are on autopilot as I jump and haul myself over old, dusty crevices and cracks in the concrete. I feel the corner of concrete wall and roof merging together with a burst of mingled emotions. Fear, excitement, anxiety, irrationality. Then I leap!

Jemma's flailing arms are the last things I feel before everything turns black.

Wait - no, no, no. Blue. Teal maybe? With metallic yellow polka dots.

I bolt upright. No, I'm not dead! Thank you, cushions! Endless applause erupts around me. Even Jemma hugs me, and with no glue to plaster onto my face. No one even notices the thump-thump-thump of a city Police Officer piercing through the building.

"And now, my dear owners, I think it's time to give these kids a proper wage."

*By Lena Takahashi  
Grade Category: Junior  
Waitara Public School  
Wahroonga, NSW  
Teacher: Mrs. Hain*





# The Ocean

"Squawk!"  
"Mine!"  
"No, mine!"

Sunny, an eagle fledgeling, briefly glanced over to the other side of the nest, where her sisters, Goldie and Thunder, were squabbling over their prey, before she continued to absentmindedly gaze out over the endless blue sea. Her stomach growled like a savage monster. While her sisters had been out all morning joyfully learning to hunt from their mother (who at present was out catching a larger meal), she had been left boredly fiddling in the cramped nest. Her mother would have liked to take her, too, but she simply could not. Sunny could not fly. It was a mystery why her wings were shaped differently, with tiny feathers, and she had webbed feet.

Once, when Sunny was very young, she had tried to fly anyway. For a few beautiful moments, she had been blissfully floating in a world of blue, then flapped, but nothing happened. Sunny squawked in terror, tumbling down, and her mother had had to grab her talon to save her.

From then on, she had been confined to this tiny nest of branches on the ledge of the cliff, where the woven edges were squeezing the hope out of her heart. 'I'll never be good for anything', she thought miserably. 'I'll always be stuck here. I may as well jump off the cliff right now.' She wished her mother had built the nest on the top of the cliff, so she could at least stretch her legs, but her mother had carefully chosen this position so the cliff would shelter them from rain, which prevented eagles from flying.

Suddenly, an ear-splitting thundercrack shook the sky. All three sibling's heads shot up in unison. Fat, heavy raindrops were slashing down. Knowing the cliff would always protect them, they turned back to feasting, or in Sunny's case, daydreaming. But a split second later, they shrieked in surprise. Cold, wet droplets slithered down their feathers.

"The wind is blowing the wrong way!" Sunny realised. "The cliff won't be any help!" The three young fledgelings' breathing was quick and shallow. Their wings were shaking. There was nothing Sunny could do. They were stranded! Even her sisters were too soaked to fly away now.

Droplet after droplet drenched them to the bone. Sunny felt tremors beneath her talons. The whole nest was inching towards the edge of the ledge. 'No, no, no!' She panicked. But then she told herself to calm down. It wasn't easy with her sisters screaming, but she knew to breath slowly, in then out.

Thinking over the situation, a plan struck her like a knock to the head. "Quick! Jump towards the cliff! Our weight will stop the nest falling!" Her sisters obeyed and leapt closer to the steep mountainside. But the nest was trembling on the brim of the ledge. It was teetering, slipping-

And falling. "Aggrrrhh!" they shrieked. The rounded shape of the nest collapsed, and twigs gave way to open air. Thunder fluttered her drenched wings uselessly. The deep, dark ocean loomed beneath them like an endless night. The wild waves cackled evilly at their helplessness. The water crashed gleefully in excitement to

swallow their delicate bodies. 'I failed,' Sunny mused miserably.

'If only I had thought to balance the nest a moment earlier. I'm so stupid. Anyone smart would never have panicked. Now we're all doomed, and it's all my fault.' Splash! Pain inundated Thunder and Goldie's bodies as they were instantly sucked under. However, Sunny instinctively dived straight into the raging water.

Under the surface, she found her sisters flailing helplessly. 'How am I doing this? Mother always told me that eagles couldn't swim, but this comes so naturally to me. Why can't my sisters do this?' She gazed into Thunder's eyes, which were looking up at her, bewildered and overflowing with admiration. An army of determination charged through her muscles.

The headstrong fledgeling raced down fiercely, the seawater feeling refreshing as it rushed past her streamlined body. She gripped Thunder's talon with her own, holding tighter than a limpet, then grabbed Goldie's just as strongly. Fighting gravity, she beat her wings powerfully like her family did when they flew.

'This is what it must be like to fly', she realised. In that moment, all her misery and negativity and wish for flight washed away like the water of her feathers. Every muscle in her body ached like she had been beaten up, but she barely noticed. The shore grew nearer with every stroke.

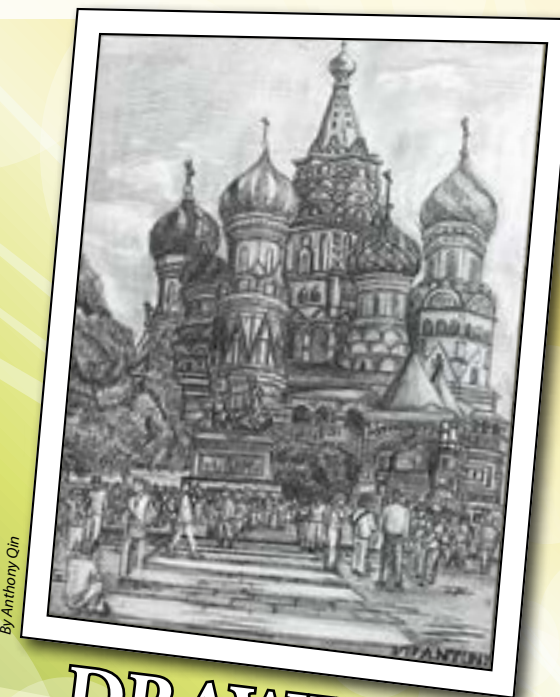
Before she knew it, the water was shallow enough to stand in and they were all stepping out onto the glittering sand. The thunderstorm had cleared, and the golden sun smiled down from the cerulean sky. "How-how-" Goldie was lost for words.

I don't know, but I'm glad I could," Sunny grinned.

By **Luci Walker**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Greenslopes State School  
Greenslopes, Qld.  
Teacher: Mr P.

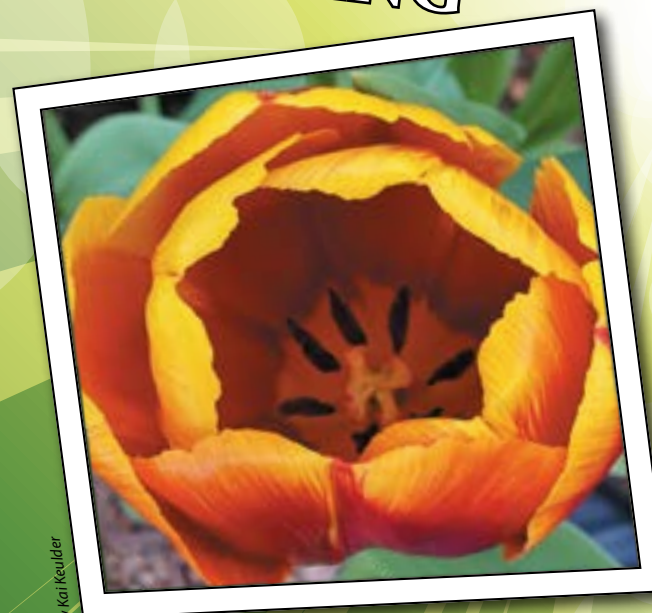


# 2024 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN ART AWARDS



By Anthony Qin

## DRAWING



By Kari Keulder

## PHOTOGRAPHY



By Manna Tsuchiya

## COMPUTER ART



By Matthew Rappagan

## 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 Australian Artist Awards, Postal Address: PO Box 16 Coldstream Victoria 3770



# BOOK REVIEWS

Meet our book reviewers Madeline, Elka, Jake, Abigail, Eden and Eva, from Years 4 and 6 at Tucker Road, Bentleigh Primary School, in Victoria.

Reviews Coordinators:  
Robyn Donoghue and Meredith Costain



## Pidge's Poppies

by Jan Andrews, illustrated by Timothy Ide (Ford Street Publishing)

I absolutely loved this book – it brought me to tears! It's about two pigeons named Pidge and Henry, who were best friends. One day they visited the War Memorial and explored it, talking about carrier pigeons and how they had a really important role in the war, and also people who fought in the war.

When Pidge and Henry were learning about carrier pigeons, it really drew me into the story, because I wanted to learn what a carrier pigeon was. I also wanted to know all about the war – and this book helped me understand a lot. The reason this book was so emotional for me was because they talked about people who fought and sacrificed their lives for us and our country. The hand-drawn illustrations in this book are amazing as well.

I think this book would be suitable for people who like to learn about history or adventure lovers. I recommend this book for ages 7+.

Last but not least, the end of this book is the most wholesome thing I have ever read – if you want to know why, then I highly recommend reading this book!

Rating: 9/10

— Madeline, Year 6



## MerTales: The Great Treasure Hunt

Written and illustrated by Rebecca Timmis (Albert Street Books)

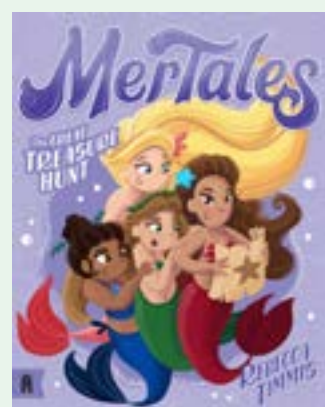
It's the day of the Great Treasure Hunt! Coral and her best friends – Pearl Periwinkle, Sandy Starfish, and Shell Shimmerfins – are extremely fish-tastically excited. However, things turn bad when Coral tries to take charge and doesn't let the others do what they want. The situation becomes even more challenging when Count Frumplesquid starts causing trouble in Seashell Cove. The girls must take action to uncover his mer-sterious intentions!

This book made me laugh so hard with its never-ending mermaid puns, adding to the fun. The suspense and anticipation throughout the plot kept me eager to find out what happens next. Each chapter ended on a cliff-hanger, urging me to keep reading and discover how the characters' journeys unfold.

MerTales: The Great Treasure Hunt is a book for fantasy lovers who enjoy under-the-sea adventures with a twist of evil. It's suitable for readers aged 6+.

Rating: 9/10

— Elka, Year 6



## Hairy Holes

Written and illustrated by Brenton E McKenna (Magabala Books)

After two years of Covid they're back! The Westpark Scorpions Under 14 Girls team face their biggest rival – Riverside Devils. The Scorpions have gained new players and a brand-new coach, Rita. During isolation Rita checked in on the girls via Zoom to give drills to help them with their kicking style and handballs. She also gave the girls exercises to keep their fitness levels up.

This book is written as a 'choose-your-own-adventure', where the authors let you decide what the characters will do next. I enjoyed this book because I'm a footy girl and love this style of writing! Suitable for readers aged 10+.

Rating: 9.5/10

— Ailish, Year 5



## Football Legends: Sam Kerr

by Kit Cross, illustrated by Leigh Hedstrom (Albert Street Books)

Sam Kerr is a biography of the famous football (soccer) player, Sam Kerr. It is part of a children's series called *Football Legends*, which includes books about various other footy players, such as Mary Fowler. Personally, I really enjoyed this book as it was easy to read. Even though I am not a fan of the sporting genre, I found the simple pictures and straight-forward writing to be welcoming and entertaining.

Each page is incredibly short, with only a paragraph of text. This makes *Sam Kerr* a great reading option for those who are young or who struggle to read, with its uncomplicated structure and facts that get to the point quickly. I really liked the glossary of football terms at the end, as the thorough explanations of each trick and rule ensure that not just footy players can fully enjoy and understand the information.

Given the simple vocabulary and playful language, I think this biography would be perfect for children aged 7–13.

Rating: 9/10

— Abigail, Year 6



## Ella Diaries Super Special: Goal Power

by Meredith Costain, illustrated by Danielle McDonald (Scholastic Australia)

*Goal Power* is a fantastic book. The words are very clever and the full-colour illustrations are great. If you love soccer, then you will adore this book! It's packed with challenges like picking teams and where to play soccer.

Ella, Ammy and Zoe are the main characters in the book. Ammy is obsessed with soccer and is fabulous at playing it as well. Zoe isn't quite as good as Ammy, but is still a good player. Ella finds soccer difficult, but she keeps working at it. The lunchtime soccer club is for girls only, so no boys are allowed to join, which sets up some complications.

This sport-themed book is great for kids 7+. I found it so interesting that I just couldn't stop reading!

Rating: 10/10

— Eden, Year 6



## Beneath the Trees

by Cristy Burne (Fremantle Press)

*Beneath the Trees* is a high-paced mystery and action/adventure story. It's about Sophie, Cam and Jack on holiday, trying to save a platypus getting sucked in by the current, and waking up in a forest. The story isn't too long and has many great aspects to it.

I really enjoyed how the actual story began quite fast and there were a variety of hooks with many mysteries to solve. There were so many problems occurring that it made me wonder if they'll survive the journey!

I found this book really enjoyable and you are bound to feel the same. If you are an adventure lover, this book is for you!

I recommend this for readers aged 8+.

Rating: 9/10

— Eva, Year 6





# The importance of books that create good reading habits....

By Phil Kettle

While I hope that everyone knows that good books can be a revelation in schools and in the family home, the question I am regularly asked is why?

That said, an analysis of a good book series will actually provide many of the answers that people seek when trying to unpack the range of issues associated with younger students and reading.

“What can we do to get students interested in reading?”

Some may consider it a straight-forward question; my concern however, is that it makes an assumption that students aren't interested in reading.

Even when attempting to answer the question for the groups of students whose reading skills are particularly limited, I find that a range of stereotypes and all manner of conflicting generalisations get in the way.

My response to the question “what can we do to get students interested in reading?” is to ask a question straight back. “Are we talking about students who can read – but won't, or are we talking about students who because they struggle to read are considered reluctant readers?”

At this point I need to stress that I don't actually consider the term 'reluctant' to be appropriate. Some students may struggle to read at the level of their peers, however the word 'reluctant' infers that there is a choice. In my experience as a teacher and author children don't choose not to read. The term reluctant also results in children being 'labelled' and having heard trusted adults describe them as reluctant, to my horror I have heard children using the term to describe themselves.

I am also keen to point out that it is really important to acknowledge that there are many students with sound reading skills, who simply refuse to read what their parents and teachers want them to read. They will only read what interests them – surprise surprise! Sadly, many of these students are also labelled in a negative way.

My work with children has evidenced for me over and over again, that it's the type of book that is presented to the students that will most often dictate the students response. When the response is rejection, be it by the student with sound reading skills, or the student who is struggling to read at the level of his peers – the negative stereotypes and labels emerge impeding the progress we all desire. Students – irrespective of their reading ability – enjoy pictures, comics, movies and books that place action and happenings ahead of emotion. Students – irrespective of their reading ability – enjoy situations where 'what the characters do' is initially more important than 'what the characters think and feel'.

Mindful of this, I have always believed it essential to introduce students to books that present an environment where it is possible for their imaginations to run wild. More specifically, an environment where they can project themselves into the book, and consider themselves to be the main character!

Books like Toocool, Clancy of the Outback that are written in the first person allow the reader (student) to take ownership of the main character in the story. The teacher/educator/parent when reading with the student can allow the student to have ownership of the main character.

When teaching students that are learning English these books are a very a very powerful tool.

It's also my experience that students love books that reflect an image that matches the image that they want to project to others, and in many cases the image they really like to have of themselves. They seek to identify themselves in the book, living the adventure. Hence the book that then allows them via imagination to be what they would like to be, and to do what they would like to do, is the book that they'll choose to read, or try to read; sometimes over and over again, which is just fine!

This explains in part the popularity of books with characters engaged in many different physical activities. These books attract many students.

Children love to have fun. If reading is what we require them to do, and we do, then the book in question needs to be just as much fun as whatever else it is that they do that makes them laugh and jump around in an imaginary adventure, or create mischievous mayhem. It is important the characters in stories attract and lure students because the characters have fun in an uncomplicated and positive way.

Students are constantly told to behave, to be tidier, and to be quieter – none of which they really want to do, and none of which amount to the sort of fun they want to have. So, it's important the characters in books are not contained or limited by the restrictions placed on children in real life.

In writing the books I have written for children the main aim was to create something that would entice readers – no matter what their reading ability to pick up and then read. The fact that the characters and adventures have such an immediate and strong appeal for children has resulted in the books contributing greatly to the development of those with both sound and limited reading skills. Finally, the term 'reluctant' should only ever be used when it comes to describing how a child feels about putting a GOOD book down!

**Phil Kettle**

## GOOD READING HABITS

Good reading habits don't begin in the classroom. Good reading habits begin in the home. Parents and guardians are the example setters and must take responsibility for setting the reading example for their children... Not a hard thing to do.... Ten minutes a night, either sitting with or lying on the bed reading and discussing the book they are reading.... Sooner than you think the reading habit will be formed and books will become part of their everyday lives.

Literacy is the foundation of all good education .....

## Under the Torchlight

*Of beauty and of mystery high,  
Its wondrous glow reaches viewpoint Sky  
And in the Sky with stars all 'round  
It shines a brilliant sparking light.*

*Hold the Torch; so proud, so strong -  
Polished, slender, tall and long  
Inside of which some magic abounds,  
Singing a most incredible song,*

*Of the sweetest of warming tunes,  
Of the deepest of calling hues,  
With a soft, chiming brass bell sound  
Of beauty and verity, of truth.*

*It flutters to the tranquil dusk skies  
Oh, how it brisks along the painted night  
It skims 'cross the landscaped ground  
With a heart-piercing, soul-ripping cry -*

*Of beauty and of mystery high,  
Its wondrous glow reaches viewpoint Sky  
And in the Sky with stars all 'round  
It shines a brilliant sparking light.*

By **Lena Takahashi**  
Grade Category: Junior  
Waitara Public School  
Wahroonga, NSW  
Teacher: Andy Heath



# Spoken

Trepidation. Her awkward stuttering echoed around the auditorium as social muttering began to increase its volume. Anxiety. Her hands made wet indents in her paper prompt cards. She looked behind her at her team. Fake smiles and encouraging looks appeared on their faces. It didn't help. Amara looked at her shaking legs.

How did she get here? Parents. They had 'highly encouraged' her to join a school club, she assumed that being a school Newsletter would be the easiest option. The group agreed to let her join and decided she would be the comic illustrator. Everything was great until her group wanted her to introduce herself at assembly.

Hundreds of eyes stared in her direction. She grimaced at the thought of speaking. "I can't, I just can't" she whispered to herself. Time stopped. Amara's body was fill to the brim with a falling sensation. Everything dropped. She heard a small cough in the crowd. How long had she been standing here? Cold and wet, yet hot and dry. Silence. The ominous microphone towered miles above her as

though she was nothing but a helpless insect.

The ear-piercing feedback of the microphone speakers ravaged the silence. Amara opened her mouth, but nothing came. The words in her head couldn't reach her mouth in time. She swallowed nervously, as all hope of the words got devoured and slowly sunk further and further away. She sprinted towards them, but it was useless, as productive as chasing the end of the rainbow. She sat there, eyes closed and began.

"Good morning." Her voice bounced off the walls and flew around the room like a ping pong ball. A whole new colour and flavour. Explosions of different combinations danced in her head. The sound of the flavour made her crave for more. It felt like only seconds before she found herself at the last word of her speech. An applause erupted throughout the crowd. A standing ovation! Amara was washed with a feeling she had

never experienced before. Glory. Praise.

Twenty-eight sets of eyes stared in her direction. A small smile crept up her face. Poised. The anticipation of it all bubbled up inside her. Confidence. A proud projection to her classmates replaced her body. Then she began.

By **Honour Freshwater**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Greenslopes State School  
Brisbane, Qld.  
Teacher: Mr P.



# Beach at Fingal Spit

Glittering sand as shiny as gold  
Mountains high stand tall and bold  
Sloshing sapphire waves crashing down  
A little crab scuttles around

The water crystal blue  
Giving off a wonderful view  
Little feet crunching in the sand  
Tiny shells scatter across the land

As the cool water jellies my feet  
The scorching sun beams down heat  
Swaying emerald trees  
Eat as much ice-cream as you please

Like the mother's smiling face  
Fingal Spit hugging me and Meii

By **Macie You**  
Grade Category: Junior  
Abbotsleigh School  
Wahroonga, 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)



# Sea Change

A dalliance of wind gusts warm, as if playing the games of dreamy childhood summers, and lifts my hair into a dance. As I watch the strands at their confluence of tether and vortex, a sense of calmness comes. Under the gentle sun of early December, the sea is unbroken, calm, and speckled by a million tiny fragments of light – each one so tiny, but together; intense in a way that is utterly beautiful.

Soft sky above, adorned with the silhouettes of wide stretched wings of birds homeward bound. The lacy waves of the ocean in steady rhythm echo my heart. A breeze brings a long-awaited relief to my bones. The ocean shore is a lullaby that comes to soothe me all my days. When I have the need to hear her sweet sounds, when I have the need to feel her soft touch, I can come to her, and relish my own solitude, finally away from the world.

I stand upon the shore in reflection. I think of my life. My experiences. I think of my father; the man whom I can barely remember. He left when I was three. Mum has never been the same since. Never sober and always drunk, she lives in her primitive brain and behaves accordingly. Then came the day when she fell asleep with a cigarette in hand. The bed lit up like

a firework. So did her arm.

Now she just sits, drinking. As if the scar on her arm is a length of razor-wire, tying her to the couch, limiting her from moving even the slightest. She still smokes though – almost two packs a day. That fire mustn't have been hot enough. The burn mustn't have hurt enough. Because no moral person would smoke after all that pain, all that time in hospital. It mustn't have burnt enough to knock some sense into her thick, rock-like head.

This means that the air at home is thick with cigarette smoke. No breath is large enough. To breath in that house is almost as hard as having a conversation with mum. But out here, it is as if the sea air has the ability to wick my soul into a shared divine space, to lift what would otherwise remain earthbound towards heavenly skies.

I make my way into the tranquil turquoise, air bubbles rising to the surface in their clustered way. The cold is sharp. Like a million tiny knives slashing into my skin from head to toe, coating me like a blanket of fire. This pain is numbing. It is as if these knives were to slice out each bad memory or negative thought. I feel a wave of peace wash over me. For now, I remain calm with no concern for anything besides this new-found serenity.

I have always found solace in the water, in the freedom and weightlessness it brings. It is a place where I can be myself, where I can let go of the weight of the world and just be. To move in such a three dimensional space, to swim in the ocean, must be close to the joy a bird feels to fly. The water moves around my limbs in swirls, creating a buoyancy and sense of freedom. To swim is to feel joy and the two will forever be joined in my heart and soul.

It gives the feeling of being both in the moment and having a future path, to resonate with the here and

now, whilst having a focus on destination. Always, we are moving in a medium of some kind, be it the air or water, yet when we swim, it becomes most profound and soothes all that we are.

The sea is more than we see, for she gives us most of the oxygen in our lungs, she wraps her brine around every limb as a mother, only ever asking for our respect and loving care. Moving through her depths, I become more aware of her current; the sea is more like rivers in three dimensions with no need for banks. In them are schools of the living, the creation that remained in her watery embrace when we land dwellers sought flowers and shelter of trees.

Though to her fish, swimming is as easy as breathing underwater. I wonder if I would ever notice water, had I been born in the ocean with fins for limbs. I suppose then, it would have been my air, and I would have moved within it more easily than a bird in the sky. As it is, I love to dive within those salty, formless arms and feel the freedom it gives; transparent and blue, soft and strong.

Swimming back to shore, I feel a renewed sense of strength and purpose as if the ocean has cleansed me. As if it has washed away the pain and the fear that has been holding me back for so long. I emerge from the water feeling lighter, feeling free. I had been out in the depths of the ocean and now have discovered a part of myself that I had long forgotten.

Walking back up onto the sandy shore, the sun shining down on me like a warm embrace, I know that I am ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead. For I am a girl who has been reborn in the sea, a girl who has found herself amidst the rolling waves and the swirling currents. And I know that no matter what life throws at me, I will always have this place to return to, this place where I can be truly, unapologetically myself.

By **Kaylee Jesnoewski**  
Grade Category: Senior  
Mindarie Senior College  
Mindarie, WA  
Teacher: Julia Lee

# Silver Beams

Silver beams,  
Dancing through my dreams,  
Tearing through the glass,  
Lifts me away.

Hollow insides,  
Cold, cold heart,  
Silver beams,  
Slashing through the dark.

Oh silver beams,  
Whisks me away,  
To another world,  
Paradise.

When the mind shuts down,  
And the sun rests,  
Oh silver beams,  
My home, my nest.

Somewhere far,  
Is a source of light,  
A beautiful silver beam,  
Conquers the night.

By **Ritika Mishra**  
Grade Category: Middle  
North Sydney Girls High School  
Rouse Hill, NSW

# One in a Million

*The crops are dry  
Herds baked to the bone  
Cattle dropping to the ground  
Too exhausted to move*

*Flies buzzing around their heads  
No one there to help  
Abandoned agricultural equipment  
No rain, no rain, no rain*

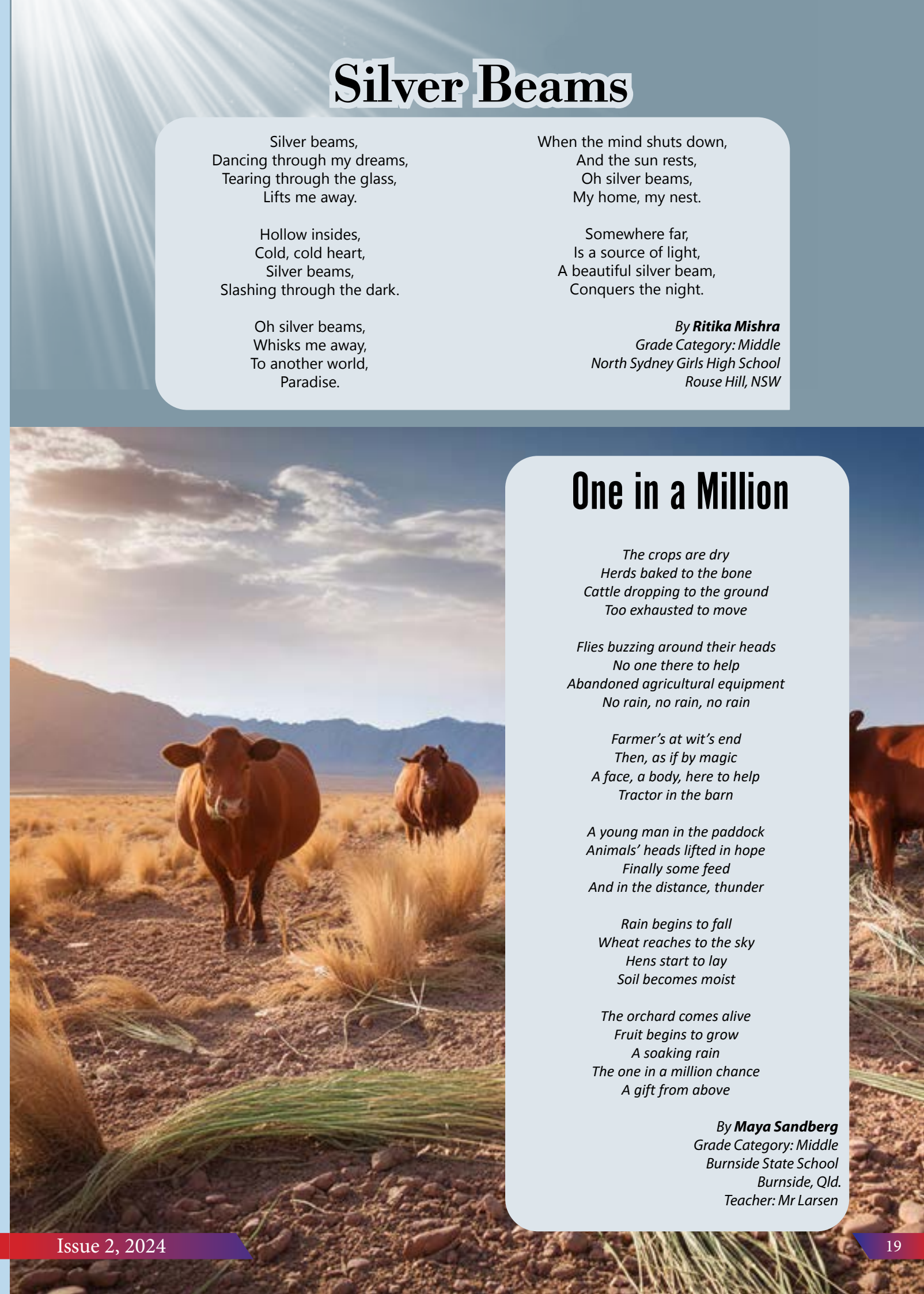
*Farmer's at wit's end  
Then, as if by magic  
A face, a body, here to help  
Tractor in the barn*

*A young man in the paddock  
Animals' heads lifted in hope  
Finally some feed  
And in the distance, thunder*

*Rain begins to fall  
Wheat reaches to the sky  
Hens start to lay  
Soil becomes moist*

*The orchard comes alive  
Fruit begins to grow  
A soaking rain  
The one in a million chance  
A gift from above*

By **Maya Sandberg**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Burnside State School  
Burnside, Qld.  
Teacher: Mr Larsen





# Dear Lady Divinity!

Ridiculo-INSANE! This whole situation is...WRONG! A man as refined as me confined to the space of this padded room, BLASPHEMY! You may wonder how a man like me, could end up here? That I wonder too! A crime not committed. So, listen, listen as I set the scene.

1862, The Priminoise Manor. The first Spring weekend; it had turned so very quickly from the unbearable frost laced air to the dense warm breeze that remains even after the sun dims. The first ball of the season, frivolous young ladies dazzled around in their frocks, with their vulture mamas by their side, hunting down any man who'd dare yearn for a dance. I had never cared for any young lady, in fact, I'd never felt the slightest attraction towards any lady. It changed, oh so quickly!

Upon the crescendo of the Waltz, I caught a glimpse of a whirling dress, spinning with all the grace of a swan. My eyes raised to meet hers, it was a spell, an enchantment. Her name...? Lady Divinity. So very fast yet, so very slow she spun past me, and too soon she was pulled back to the centre of the dance floor.

Later that night, she wouldn't slip out of my mind, repeating, over and over... over and over. Everything brought me back to her, objects, words, ANYTHING. The swirling feelings thrown around in my head, like that of a ship in a storm.

I took to my spot at my writing desk. So ferociously I dabbed my quill in the ink

that sat in the draw. Wrote I did, letters, all for her.

"Dear Lady Divinity, I would be nothing without you."

"Dear Lady Divinity, you are the air I BREATHE- "

"Dear Lady- "

The pile of letters had quickly formed from minuscule to taking all the capacity of my desk, spreading to the waxed layered mahogany floors. I was... so... I needed her. I would be the suitor to claim her hand, yes- ME!

As the season progressed, I made my advances, from small chatter to waltzing and jokes. Could heaven have been kinder? Though, I was foolish. I should have seen it sooner; I was meant to protect her!

I was late that dreaded night, if I had arrived earlier, could I have prevented it? It was mid-spring, the time of the annual Fowelinier Ball. By the time my carriage arrived, the estate was buzzing with the vibrations from the Orchestra. Though, the pattering of dancing heels and dress shoes was absent.

'Peculiar', I thought to myself. I entered the ballroom. I was met with a swarm of the ton, formatted in a circle - for what purpose? Whispers and murmurs were muttered among them. I couldn't see her. Pushing past the lavishly dressed posh-faced crowd, I stood within the circle.

THUMP...

THUMP...

My heart pounded to life, followed by a sickening feeling... She stood before him, he was... kneeled...with a RING?! Lord Eridugh, he'd been eyeing her the whole time. I had noticed, but had not considered him a threat.

IT WAS ALL WRONG! He would defile her perfection! That Ogre-faced inbred! HE COULDN'T HAVE HER! The letters, sung their words in my head, my heart was paced with thumps of thunder.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP.

She is mine.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP.

He must go.

I pounced onto his body, crushing him with all my weight. My bare fists raised. I wasn't thinking, not a thought. My fists were soon covered in the blood from his nose and mouth, his teeth shattered, their fragments on the floor.

I had stopped once his grunts ceased. The room was silent. Afraid of me. Did they see it? She was mine. The feeling of satisfaction left my body when I saw her. She was terrified, I didn't mean to frighten her! I was only protecting her, that's what they don't see!

I still write to her, you know that? In my padded room, I carve the words into the soft cushions. It's all I do. They don't understand, but you do, don't you? You must tell them to let me go, what will happen to her if I'm not there?

Oh... my Lady Divinity... I'll be back soon.

By **Ruby Peters**  
Grade Category: Senior  
St Brigid's Catholic College  
Lake Munmorah, NSW  
Teacher: Meredith Carantinos



# Skyrocket



Sprinkles of light  
Shining bright,  
Glory itself  
Amidst the night.  
Fly in the stars  
With all your might;  
We'll glide by the sun,  
Alone tonight.

Don't be afraid  
And don't be shy;  
Hold my hand  
If you're lost in fright.  
Soar through skies  
And planets alight;  
We'll swim through the ocean  
Of skyrockets tonight.

Beauty, glamour,  
Peaceful sight;  
Engulfed in the darkness  
Of this showery night.  
Cry no more,  
But slip and slide  
Through the wonders of this;  
Of our tonight.

Crystalline clouds,  
Winds alike;  
Cities dotted with beautiful  
Lights this night.  
Look down at the Earth;  
Be at peace, be alright.  
Hush, don't spoil our  
Fantasy tonight.

Sprinkles of light  
Shining bright,  
Glory itself  
Amidst the night.  
Fly in the stars  
With all your might;  
We'll glide by the sun,  
Alone tonight.

By **Lena Takahashi**  
Grade Category: Junior  
Waitara Public School  
Wahroonga, NSW  
Teacher: Tania Eshragi

# The Emu

In the Aussie outback, a wild emu did wander,  
With feathers so silky, it made the land its own.  
It spotted its prey, a person so supple,  
With a determined stalk, it began to compete.

The emu ran with speed, its steps light and swift,  
Through the bush and the scrub, it was quite a scheme.  
But the person was smart, they had a plan,  
To outplay the emu and escape its grandstand.

They twisted and they turned, with a jump and a bound,  
Staying clear of the emu's beak, they covered much ground.  
The emu grew fatigued, its pursuit losing steam,  
As the person slithered away, like a fading dream.

By **Paige Duncan-Rainbird**  
Grade Category: Senior  
Miss B's Student Services  
Riverside, Tas.  
Teacher: Miss B





# Halloween Potion

A magic Halloween potion, Bubbled enchantingly before me, A strong spell of satisfaction, Casted wondrously upon me. Remembering collecting spiders blood, With mum bats milk from the caves, Searching a skeleton bone under the mud, In the ancient ghastly graves. Waiting patiently for 16 years, Until full Halloween moon night, Standing in the graveyard with fears, Mixing all the ingredients right. Drinking the magical potion soon, Hands starting to grow immensely, Reaching out to pick the moon, Dream coming true eventually. Seeing all the dying creations, Desired

to stop earth from crying, A magic Halloween potion, Completed the process of...

By **Carolyn Luo**  
Grade Category: Junior  
Abbotsleigh Junior School,  
North Turramurra, NSW  
Teacher: Ms Meg Lim



# Whooping Joy

I shiver, my hitched breath forming a cloud in front of my eyes, flecked with hazel like miniscule pieces of trash in my pupils. Itching rags form tatters around me, and the wind is like daggers piercing into the pores of my dirt-ridden skin. The trees are bare, with the remnants of their foliage savagely ruffled. I look up at the aureole of gold seeping from the ravenous bellies of magenta.

it. She didn't do anything good for the world."

Melancholy coats my heart with a prickle like the rime ice that encased the glowing lights of the closed shops. The only stores

slurred voice.

I fingered the coin, looking at it for the last time as I dropped it on the counter. The paper bag was the holy grail. It meant something to eat.

I grabbed the paper bag, rummaging through the bag with my fingers. A burger, a small plate of salad and cutlery emerges from the bag, and the salivating aroma of the patty and bread buns drowns the sadness in a pit of hunger.

I wipe my fingers with the wet-wipe, and start to eat. Each bite of the patty dissolves in my mouth and the bun is textured with delicate sesame. A crunch of salad and cherry tomatoes explodes with flavor in my mouth like fireworks dancing across my tongue, and I look back at the shop. The sadness melts away, leaving only the whooping joy of a content stomach.

By **Lily Zhang**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Pymble Ladies College  
Pymble, NSW  
Teacher: Mrs Bird



which are open are McDonald's and Fararah's French Fries. I've never seen that shop before. Scintillating, words were imprinted on the window: a FULL meal for \$2~ everyday at 8pm to 1am I gasped with astonishment. Really? Was it true? I sauntered towards the store like a moth towards a light. The cashier groggily rubbed her eyes, pulling down her base-ball cap with a look of pure disdain.

"Err, you a beggar, come to my store? Ugh. Fine, just take the meal," she said with a

Clink.

The seldom coin drops into my perforated tin of nonexistent baked-beans. My hair falls down in a matted tangle like tumbleweed as I take in the ambrosial glint of gold in my hands. I move back, not wanting to face the wind as I tuck the coin into the folds of my calloused hand, carved by the wrinkles of poverty.

The sound of a traffic light beeps urgently hustling cars is the melody of the city as the streets bustle with people. I lean against my mound of sheets, staring up at the crowd. No one paid attention, except a young girl with eyes like sympathetic wet stones staring at me. Her mother shoves her away from me with her spindly gloved fingers, giving me the eye. "She's all skin and bones, and she deserves

# White bear, white block

Restless white bear,  
On a fragile white block,  
Of melting, dripping ice,  
It's no-more-ice-o'clock.

Gaping hole in the sky,  
(Our skin will burn before long)  
UV flooding in,  
Something's very wrong.

Desperate turtle on the seafloor,  
Battling a plastic bag.  
But flippers start to flail,  
Eyelids slowly sag.

Still koala on the gum,  
Flames licking at the trees.  
The ghoulish, ghostly flames,  
That we can't bear to see.

Lone deer in the dust,  
The hope for rain is thin.  
The raindrops refuse to pour,  
The drought might win.

By **Renee Kim**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Mornington Primary School  
Mornington, Vic.  
Teacher: Ms Bibby and Ms Boulton



# From Dawn to Dusk

It is dawn and the first rays of sunshine are poking over the crest of Mount Barrow, The birds of all shapes and sizes are starting to cheep their happy greetings to the new day. The morning dew sparkles on the blades of grass, as that annoying rooster crows loudly for his breakfast. Emily and Lachlan wake from their slumber, ready for the new adventure that will come with the day.

It is noon and the sun is high over the town of Longford, The cows rest in the shade of the big old oak tree. The birds chord quietly to themselves, Emily and Lachlan sit down after a hard morning of chores to their delicious lunch of scones and lemonade.

It is dusk and the beautiful, radiant, golden sun is setting behind the sapphire blue Western Tiers. The Rooster is crowing from somewhere in the spiky hawthorn hedge. The grass is slowly swaying in the breeze as all the people in Longford settle into their lovely warm houses.

It is midnight and stars are as bright as a million suns shining from afar. Now nothing is stirring, not even a Tasmanian Devil.

By **Emily Phillips**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Miss B's Student Services  
Riverside, Tas.  
Teacher: Miss B



# Friday's Sculpture

"Yoohoo! It's Friday!"

I rub my eyes sleepily and trot down the stairs, to the cheery voice. Ma's standing in the kitchen with her splattered apron covering her shirt.

"What's so good about Friday?" I ask. Suddenly, it strikes me. "PANCAKES!"

"No, Aubrey, that's at dinner. It's International Women's Day! I have a surprise for you!"

Curious, I follow her back up a few flights of stairs. When I reach her room, she's clasping something in her hands. I've never asked for a present before, so I wonder what it is.

"Ta-da!" She unlocks them and opens her hand like an oyster shell. Inside sits the most wonderful mini figure I've ever seen.

"What is it, Ma?" I enquire, puzzled. She just smiles, and hands me a telescope attached to the back of the clay that I never saw before. "Look," she simply answers.

I obey. I peer inside, but all I see is coloured clay - then, an old picture appears.

It's in black and white, like in the olden days. Grainy film shrouds me in excitement. A young girl with a cap and familiar curly hair stands with a tennis racket in her hand. A group of boys about the same age as her are teasing her and laughing.

"Go home, baby!" They guffaw. I feel anger bubbling up inside me. Luckily, the girl ignores them and simply swings her racket, forcing them to duck.

"And now, let's welcome a young girl determined to become the tennis superstar, Adelaide McMiller!" The crowd erupts into mingled 'Boo!'s and 'go!'s, but the girl is just as fierce as ever.

A bell rings in my mind, but I push it away. I need to see this match. Just when it's about to commence, though, Adelaide raises her hand.

"I have something to say." She speaks swiftly with an American-Australian accent. "For those who came to see me lose, you're gonna be quite disappointed, I tell ya. So it's best ya back off."

A crowd of people do, when they realise they won't get the reaction they wanted.

"Three. Two. And... ONE!"

A loud horn blows, echoing in my eardrums. Before I know it, the ball is flung briskly across the court. The girl takes the ball and serves, smacking it with a swish as it bounces on her opponent's side.

It's passed along as quickly as Adelaide's one, yet not as smoothly. I silently cheer, hoping this 'Adelaide' wins.

Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud.

Suddenly, the ball sails high, and Adelaide jumps to get it... I groan. No!

Wait.

Adelaide jumps to get it, and BANG! The ball breaks through her racket's strings, but it's too late. The ball's already bounced on the man's side once, twice - thrice. Screams of joy pierce my eardrums this time, and Adelaide gets a golden trophy.

"Your new national champion... ADELAIDE MYERS-MCMILLER!"

I abruptly remember the name. I spin around, and the telescope clatters back onto the table. Where's Ma?

As if reading my mind, someone answers me in a swift, American-Australian accent.

"Here."

I recognise the lopsided, oversize cap and the dirty trousers, then the tennis racket, then those brilliant blue eyes... they're so familiar, but I've never seen them before.

Then I recall memories. Wasn't I trapped in the enchantment? Am I free?

"That's right, ya are. An' so am I."

The sculpture has now transformed into an ugly old woman - the one who trapped us in the bodies of a family in the first place. The witch who made us mother and daughter, instead of sisters. Adele roars, swings the bronze-coloured racket frame up, and BASHES it down onto the evil hag. She immediately dissolves.

I remember everything. I'm not a daughter of a woman called Yaeda Reids. Adelaide breaks into my thoughts, speaking.

"Angie."

"Adele." I'm surprised to hear that I also have a faint tinged accent.

"Let's really celebrate Women's Day... together. We 'ave a match to play, don't we?"

I nod, finally free. "Yeah, I'm pretty sure we do."

By **Lena Takahashi**  
Grade Category: Junior  
Waitara Public School  
Wahroonga, NSW  
Teacher: Mrs. Hain



# My Hair, A High School Controversy

*I used to wear my hair down  
and pass by teachers unnoticed.  
But that was when it was still boring, dead straight,  
a small clump of hair that could be grabbed with one finger.*

*But now, it's a curtain of desire  
black, luscious locks yet  
dampened in sun dew highlights  
by the light, it becomes a dark, chestnut fade.*

*And like waves, it flows on naturally  
to the currents of my grown years;  
They ask, "Are your waves really natural?"  
it's ironic how they think it's unnatural.*



*Should I enjoy relish in their admiration?  
Or feel the doom of dawning realisation  
that I will be a rebel for wearing my hair down,  
noticed, called out for, and even given a warning.*

*But why do I even bother?  
Why not just put it up and avoid the hassle?  
That's because my hair is my story (to be continued).  
It is my transformation into the girl I am now.*

*To say to the world  
I am free;  
and when the wind sweeps my hair under its autonomy  
my spirit becomes windswept, untamed,  
a bit frivolous, but always yours truly.*

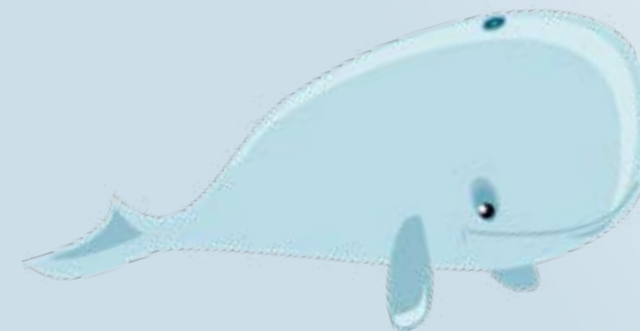
*So for another year, I shall put it up,  
I'll put up with this for another year.  
Until then,  
A boring bun,  
a sleek ponytail will be my style of choice.  
But know that it shall not be a choice I'll follow through with.*

By **Kha Doanh (Vanessa)**  
Grade Category: Senior  
St Dominics Priory College  
North Adelaide, SA  
Teacher: Juliet Paine

# My Quail and Friends

## Part 1 - My Whale

*I have a pet whale  
He is a male  
He only eats kale  
He went to jail  
For using his tail  
To kill a poor snail  
I failed at raising my whale  
Maybe this time I will raise a quail  
The quail will live in a tiny yellow pail  
And that's the end of my fairytale*



## Part 2 - My Quail

*After recently trying to raise a whale  
I have decided to raise a quail  
How hard could it be to raise a quail  
After all they are nowhere near the size  
of a whale  
I find the best place to raise my quail  
is in my little yellow pail  
And this little quail likes to eat snail  
But once instead of a snail  
He decided to eat a nail  
Because he is so little and frail*

*He was unable to spit out the nail  
Then a cat with a yellow tail  
His name was dale  
Removed the nail  
From my quail  
After all that we loved dale  
And my living quail*

By **Mason Blyth**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Miss B's Student Services  
Riverside, Tas.  
Teacher: Miss B





# Little Crab's home

Crashing on the fluffy, grainy sand, the glistening water shined on a coast surrounded by beautiful beaches. Its swaying palm trees danced slowly in the minty air. The sweet aroma of a hairy coconut lingered in the fresh air. Little rocks stood in the water like an army protecting a castle. Bumpy shells lay

silently in the wet sand, being washed and polished in every quick second. Leaves and flowers, embedded in silky fine bushes, were waving their little petals. Puffs of cotton candy drifted sleepishly across the sapphire sky. Shining brightly, the sun beamed down on the evergreen beach. Hard wind blew soothingly on the face as the cool scents wafted into the air.

This was always my favourite beach in the town.

Yesterday I went there and built a little sand home for a little crab, with tiny chimneys for a soft, sandy roof. Spitting out smoke, I opened the fine and hard wooden driftwood door, the crab happily scuttled through the

sand chambers. It looked admiringly at the glistening shells stuck firmly on the sandy walls.

It jumped with pleasure and landed onto the tiny garden with sandy fences. I dug deep tunnels underground. So, the little crab could travel anywhere in its magnificent den.

"Thank you so much Macie, for this little home." Squeaked the crab.

The crab loved its new home.

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



# O, Cristy!

Cristy Duncan has always lived a simple life.  
She had a dog called 'Spot' and a cow called 'Strife'.  
Her favourite thing to do was sitting on the back of her truck,  
Patting her dog, with his tail tucked.

Evenings were her favourite time of day,  
Watching her siblings run and play.  
She loved her parents, Hannah and Peter.  
One was a baker, one was a teacher.

One day in her mid-20s,  
She met a man, who had quite a few pennies.  
They talked and talked about their love of Dovè,  
And before they knew it, they had fallen in love.

They worked up the courage to tell each other,  
And soon, they were going to meet her mother.  
Her father walked her down the aisle,  
With a very big smile.

They both agreed that their wedding was the happiest day of the lives,  
Until they had two little children: Brittany and Clive.  
Their lives were a fairytale,  
And as they like to say, they are grateful for each other everyday.

By **Claire D**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Santa Sabina College  
Strathfield, NSW



# Penelope's Book

'Closed' the sign read. 'This store has been relocated to 13 Cornelia Street.' Just her luck.

Penelope, the little piglet, was standing outside what used to be her favourite bookstore, which had now moved across town! It was winter, and the leaves on the trees fell, swaying towards the cobblestone pathway. The cool breeze picked up, as her mum questioned what she was doing. Penelope opened the car door explaining the bad news. It was 9am on Saturday and they had nothing else to do, so Penelope's mum drove across town to the new location.

"SCREEECH!" The roads were icing over on the north side, near the new spot, making it quite the journey. Penelope made it! Exiting the car, she made her way toward the entrance. Twigs, leaves and sticks hibernated outside the store.

"Trot Trot, Crunch! Trot, Snap!" A gentle chime rung above as Penelope opened the door, alerting the librarians a new customer entered. Determination washed over her, entering what seemed a maze of a library.

Her eyes consumed a gorgeous, vintage bookstore. Books still as statues, and wood from the 1800s. Penelope had never adored anything more. She walked further in.

"Hold your bacon missy!" The librarian hissed. The little piglet snorted in fear as her mum followed her inside. The scaly curator came to help find what she was looking for, but Penelope trotted away as fast as her little legs could go! Watching her in confusion, the olive serpent turned to Penelope's mother.

While Penelope ran away of what appeared to be her biggest fear, the bookstore suddenly expanded infinitely. She turned back observing a long, narrow hallway of books surround her. She started leaking her determination, swallowing hesitation instead. Walking down the unlimited hallway of books, her eyes repeated pets, insects, fiction, pets, insects, fiction. She snapped into reality, as a tinkle came from the stores bell. She watched her arch nemesis enter the store. A single

word ran through her mind. Hide. In the background of her panic, she heard her mum encounter her tormenter.

"Well don't you have a long neck sweetie" Penelope's mum said to the bully. Penelope abruptly turned red when her intimidator insulted them about their snouts! Her bully rapidly exited with scratches of rage all through her body, hinting the pig proved her wrong.

As Penelope turned her head, looking in front of her, there stood a cover of a familiar book. It was the book, what she needed most. Nothing else mattered, all she cared about was the glowing item sitting in front of her. As she went to grab it, unexpectedly, quicksand laid underneath her.

Warm, grainy brown liquid was the only thing stopping her and she couldn't believe it! She was an inch away from reaching her prized possession but just then, another hand beat her to it! She turned to the culprit with fury in her eyes but saw a familiar face. It was her mum. After buying the book, Penelope gave it a

big squeeze. Grazing the door handle, the librarian asked if they would be interested in their new arrivals. "We have pets, insects and fiction." Penelope leapt out of the door with no hesitation and didn't look back. When she finally got home, and was laid in her warm, comfortable bed, she began reading her hardcover. "Finally! That library trip took forever!" She sighed. After looking at the time, she was shocked. "ITS ONLY 9:45!"

By **Savannah Minnie**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Greenslopes State School  
Greenslopes, Qld.  
Teacher: Mr Papamanolis.





# Self-Portrait

There I sat, paper in hand, feeling the sharp edges and blunt corners, driving the tip of the pencil into the laminated grain of my bedroom desk. Sweaty heels rubbing against the cool cork flooring, lifting the edge of the rug with my toe.

A moan of chilly wind scattered some papers across the floor. It smelled of wet clothes. Rising, I shunted the window closed and climbed back into my black fold out chair, toes curled underneath me. It squeaked. Tapping the pencil now on my right palm, placing the green square of paper flat, straight, a protesting emptiness.

I wrote neatly in capitals: GRANDPARENT PORTRAIT. I had a month from today, and then it would be due at the gallery. Every year I entered the same competition, and every year likely due to my shallow subject matter, I was rejected from the exhibition. This year I would play the game.

If you walk down the gallery halls of any youth portraiture section, you are watched by hundreds of sparkly-eyed, wrinkled grandparents. Faces engraved with experience, war stories, boat stories, stories of cultural practices passed down generation to generation.

The small title card below the frame brought tears to eyes with blurbs containing tales of love and honour and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Their faces were roadmaps of their lives, carefully orchestrated to show off the artists undeniable skill and attention to detail.

They were the guaranteed, the safe, the full-package subject that would bring immediate attention to the “budding artist.”

“Young talent.”  
“How could one capture years of experience with hands so young?”

It felt like a con. An exploitation of someone’s hardships wrapped sweetly in admiration. It was a competition after all.

Back aching I rose, bending

forward from the waist, arching back from the shoulders. A vertebra cracked. Slowly, I stumbled down the stairs. Feet still sleeping, they slipped off one stair to the next till my foot slapped onto the tiles.

Round the corner there was a large red pot of lamb and potatoes sitting in a dark oven. I put a couple pieces onto my plate with a fork and sat down at the empty dining table. Glancing behind me through the curtain of ironed clothes hanging from the folding doors, I saw my father, planted into the couch ridged and unmoving. An empty plate and beer can resting at his right foot. The flashing of the television reflected in his eyes. He looked like his father.

Back at my desk, I was scrolling through photos on my phone searching for anything with my grandparents. An endless stream of coloured squares. I had too many photos. Couldn’t remember what most of them were. Anything, please. A photo of my Papou in his chair, unmoving, light of the television in his eyes. A photo of my Yia Yia, standing in the kitchen, following her well worn path from the stove to the table, kettle to the table, offering, forcing, pushing. I had none. I never thought to take a photo.

The last time I had visited my grandparents was Easter. My Yia Yia had approached me in the kitchen, small and shuffling, weathered hands gripped around a tray of cheese pastries. I didn’t know the Greek name for them.

“Anna, why have you not learned Greek? You must learn. We are old and you must learn quickly so you can teach your children.”

I was caught by surprise, never had she encouraged me to learn the language. I did not know yet because I was not taught. I tried once, through children’s alphabet books and internet videos but discovered that the dialogue was so far removed I might as well have been learning a different language. As a joke, I encouraged my father to learn Greek with an online learning program to test what he could remember from his childhood.

To him, every exercise was riddled with errors. I saw the disconnect in him, the way his dialect has wondered like a child from his mother, into a realm unknown between colloquial Greek and a language of its own. From then on, it became clear that my grandparents and father spoke not Greek, but a muddy combination of their original language, made up vocabulary and English. They had been in Australia for too long.

Picking up the cold pencil I crossed out the title: GRANDPARENT PORTRAIT. I could not paint my grandparents. I did not know enough about them. I did not know that they knew themselves either. I think they have chosen to forget their past. My father has forgotten but does not know it or will not admit it. I never knew, because I had no one to tell me. And so my perception of my grandparents remained as two-dimensional as the square piece of paper in front of me.

They’ve always chosen which traditions to honour. Greek easter, usually a few weeks after the western version, became a clash between blood red dyed eggs, traditional breads and biscuits, and the foil wrapped chocolate eggs and bunnies dressed in their loud colours and commercial bells and bows. Name day was never celebrated. We never did Lent. There were other traditions too, but I cannot name them.

Feeling the weight of the pencil in my hand, its stump screwed into the cool metal post making it long enough to hold, I wrote what I knew. A simple, tepid

nothingness. Memories wrapped in cotton wool and submerged in a hot bubble bath. Scents of lavender and freshly washed sheets. Childhood magic shows, pine needles and bedtime stories.

The art that judges categorised as empty. Art for arts sake. Art that does nothing and says nothing. It did not win last year, nor the year before that. I folded the green square and put it to the side, peeled a new

paper from the pad, placed it in the centre of my desk.

By then my room was blue. Shadows grew from the far edge of my desk towards my hands, and the icy evening bled through the windowpanes. The wet streets quiet and waiting, the glow of the streetlamps lighting a trail up the road, over the hills, out to the horizon. Origami roofs folding out in mismatched rows, empty, thin, quiet.

My whole world. My small cold room, and the blue dusk of the pale china view. The green square remained empty that night.

By **Elizabeth Vardouniotis**  
Grade Category: Senior  
The Hills Grammar School  
Sydney, NSW  
Teacher: Ms Van Niekerk

# Paint

In a quiet corner of a vibrant city, there lived a young artist named Eliana. Her world was a small attic studio, cluttered with the relics of bygone days: sepia-toned photographs, vintage vinyl records, and an old typewriter that whispered the secrets of a forgotten era. Eliana was an anachronism, a soul out of time, who found solace in the remnants of what once was.

Her canvas was the city itself, where she painted murals on the sides of abandoned buildings, her brushstrokes reviving the crumbling bricks with splashes of color and life. Each mural was a story, a memory of the world as it used to be, filled with the lush greens of nature, the deep blues of untamed oceans, and the vibrant hues of a society that danced to the rhythm of human connection, not digital notifications.

Eliana’s art was her way of conversing with

the past, a reconciliation with the ghosts of history that lingered in the alleyways and whispered through the leaves of the few remaining trees. She painted bicycles instead of cars, kites instead of drones, and children playing hopscotch, not engrossed in screens. Her murals were portals to a simpler time, an invitation to remember and reflect.

Despite the city’s relentless march towards modernity, Eliana’s murals became gathering places, pockets of resistance against the tide of progress. People came to see her work, drawn by the nostalgia that emanated from the walls. Her art was a reminder that, in the rush to move forward, something precious was being left behind.

One evening, as the sun dipped below the skyline, casting long shadows across the streets, Eliana stood before her latest creation—a vast mural of an old-fashioned carnival, with merry-go-rounds and candy floss stands. It was a celebration of joy, a collective memory of laughter and togetherness.

As the last ray of light kissed the painted carousel horses, something magical happened. The figures seemed to stir, the colors to brighten, and for a brief moment, the past came alive once more. The air was filled with the echo of music and the scent of popcorn, and the city dwellers, if only for a night, remembered the

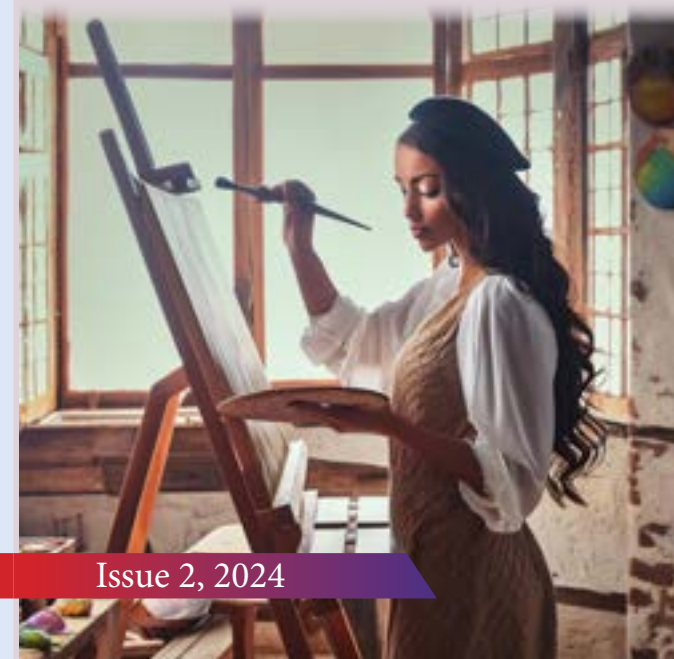
warmth of community and the richness of a life not defined by technology or time.

But as the night deepened, so too did the realization that the carnival was but a shadow, a metaphor for all that had been lost to history’s relentless advance. Eliana’s heart ached with the beauty and tragedy of it all, for she knew that her murals were not capable of halting the inevitable.

With the dawn, the spell was broken, and the city awoke to the hum of machinery and the glow of screens. The murals, once alive with the past’s embrace, were now silent once more. Eliana packed her brushes and paints and walked through the streets she had transformed, her heart both heavy and hopeful.

For in her art, she had sown the seeds of memory, ensuring that even as the world changed, the essence of what was lost would not be forgotten. Her murals stood as monuments to the ephemeral, a testament to the enduring human spirit that, despite the passage of time, would always yearn for the simple joys of a life lived fully and authentically. And though the world moved on, Eliana’s colours remained, a gentle reminder that in the heart of progress, the past still breathed and danced, if only one took the time to look and remember.

By **Lauren Woo**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Artarmon Public School  
Artarmon, NSW  
Teacher: Ms Winchester





# Fallen Stars

*In our hands we hold a thick, silver-lined book,  
With a cover of steel, but pages of scars.  
We've closed it, locked it, and sealed it away,  
But it seems to be haunting us to this very day.*

*As the clock turns time, the leaves fade into the branches,  
And the flowers claw their veins into the moist soil.  
The towers rise as humanity's evil emulates its creation,  
And those branches fall as we hew the roots.*

*The soil crumbles as the rain depletes,  
And the flowers wither away,  
Shattering a mirror withholding that symphonic reflection.*

*A fate that is decided, a death that is inevitable,  
A bed of white roses, now dripping with our blood,  
And a meadow of fallen stars, a history we should have left behind.*

**By Zaina Fahim**  
Grade Category: Senior  
Werribee Secondary College  
Werribee, Vic.  
Teacher: Shanice Rasmussen.



# Umbrella

*Tap tap tap  
The rain thuds against fabric  
Non-stop non-stop  
Water trickles down  
The curved edges  
Mixing on the floor with dirt and debris  
As birds screech above  
And tropical palm trees sway with the breeze  
The summer breeze  
A gust of wind sweeps the rain away  
Like a cleaner  
For my umbrella.*

**By Lena Takahashi**  
Grade Category: Junior  
Waitara Public School  
Wahroonga, NSW  
Teacher: Mrs. Hain

# Magic Wand

*A shining day in the paddock,  
I was feeling quite ecstatic.  
Not a cloud in the sky,  
Makes me never want to die.*

*I stumbled across a wand,  
Just outside the nearby pond.  
Intrusive thoughts got the best of me,  
It was something I thought I'd never see.*

*With the flick of wrist and words stumbling out,  
I knew it would work with no doubt.  
It's a magic wand,  
You'd never think to find it, near a pond.*

**By Acacia Poore**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Burnside State School  
Burnside, Qld.  
Teacher: Mr Surridge



# The Little Gem Finder

*One day I went to smell a flower  
But I did not find a rose.  
So then I looked for a gem  
Down where the flower grows.*

*There I found a little gem  
To bring back home.  
On the way to the train station  
There I saw a gnome.*

*The gnome did not let me on  
"You can't get past," he said  
"Unless you find me food  
And make sure I'm fed."*

*So then I went to fetch some apples  
From a little apple tree.  
I went and gave them to the gnome  
"You may pass," he said to me.*

*And so I brought the gem  
Very safely home  
And then I put my little gem  
Inside this little poem.*

**By Elysia Roselle**  
Grade Category: Junior  
St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School  
Rockdale, NSW  
Teacher/s: Mrs. Dal Bianco / Mrs Pender



# The Leviathan and The Cold

*Frozen slept the city of ice, in lengthy slumber,  
The gatekeeper perched with eyes of cold death,  
People softly snoozing in rimy streets unnumbered,  
Wholly respiring a monotonous, eerie breath.*

*As from the darkest shadows, a leviathan appeared,  
With icy eyes of steel and arms of threadlike bone,  
An immense body pitted and in watery ice submerged,  
Offering its sanctuary a steely gaze like stone.*

*And out came its wiry hand with fingers all extended,  
Its chilly skin moist and its reptile scales so damp,  
In lieu of the chill which it had now befriended,  
Treading the path of the union many before had tramped.*

*But as the icy cold showed its true sinful self,  
The creature showed its broken eyes, betrayer of all,  
And thus began a battle, a battle for itself,  
And it's rumored that even now the pair still squall.*

**By Nethya Wijesekera**  
Grade Category: Middle  
Wahroonga Adventist School  
Wahroonga, NSW





# A Trio of Graves

Lucy opened the iron gate and walked as softly as she could up the weed-tufted gravel drive. Her mind was a pool of thoughts, roiled by melancholy. Bandaging the daube of vermilion that stained the sky, soufflé-like altocumulus clouds drifted. Lucy's heart was tainted by the saccharine taste of nostalgia, her parents now ethereal spirits.

She felt the striations of light warm her back, as she sat down on a weathered sandstone block. Her chest held a sagging bag of emotions, and she felt the bag burst, rills running from her face. The autumn haze was filled with motes of dust like flitting moths, the garden untended, roses shrivelled.

She gazed at the seldom sepia leaf, like a memory, falling down from the swathes of sycamores. The house was ramshacked, riddled with graffiti and deserted after so many years. Lucy grasped her basket, taking it to the graves of her parents. She opened the lid, the amorphous plumes of steam from a flask of jasmine tea encroaching her nose.

She placed the cup by her mother's grave, the words, Dorothy Brown, almost blotted out by a thick layer of mildew. She remembered that it was her mother's favourite tea. She smiled, before whispering, "In my heart, you are always there."

As she tenderly pulled the stem of a marigold from her basket, she felt her heartbeats lull. She nestled it next to the flask, and felt her pursed lips loosen as she moved onto the next grave. Her father's.

She took out a teddy bear he had given her, and closed her eyes, bathed in the aureole, the coldness in her heart taken away, shadows amalgamating across the detritus. She placed a photograph,

a moment, captured in black and white, on his grave.

A moment with a cherubic girl hugging a loving father. She rubbed her calloused hands together, wrinkles carved by the masons of Time.

"You will always be with me. Time has never separated us, and I will see you two in the Garden of Eden."

She looked to her right, and to her surprise, she saw another grave, looking newly erected. Lucy Brown. Her own name. Her body was in the same cemetery as her parents, after the tragic car crash. With her driving.

A shaft of light landed on her face, a passageway to heaven, and she got up from the weed-tufted asphalt, before rising.

By **Lily Zhang**

Grade Category: Middle  
Pymble Ladies College  
Pymble, NSW  
Teacher: Mrs Bird



# A Lump in A Purloined Throat

Alone I stand in darkness deep,  
A creature made by hands of a sorrowful heap.  
Abandoned, forsaken, left to fend alone,  
in a world that's cruel; unknown.

My heart aches with a longing  
for a connection, a sense of belonging.  
But alas, I am just a creation,  
a product of science, a mere aberration.

My sorrow runs deep, a river of tears  
as I long for acceptance, for someone to hear  
the cries of a creature longing for love.  
But all I receive is rejection from above.

In this complex world, I am simply a creation.  
A symbol for man's folly and his own damnation.  
But deep within me, a heart beats true.  
A longing for love, just like me and you.  
He will regret this, that Victor, that man,

Because I can do things that no real man can.  
I'm going to do it, and his feelings, I don't care.  
I'm going to wipe his family tree bare.

By **Kaylee Jesnoewski**

Grade Category: Senior  
Mindarie Senior College  
Mindarie, WA  
Teacher: David Sargeant



# On a day trip to Ephesus

I find myself looking for God in the ruins  
I wonder, I wonder whose footsteps I walk  
in, whose garden I trample, whose grave I  
desecrate, my feet sinking in freshly turned  
soil and not sun-warmed cobblestones,  
like I will keep sinking into this shallow  
mouth until I feel cold fingers on my ankle  
grow warmer

My brother says I'm too soft, too sensitive,  
I sit with the wind and pretend the  
whispers are ghosts but I'm stepping into  
someone's house with my shoes on, God,  
My mother would have my head  
What mother is talking here instead -  
whose front door did we barrel open,  
whose riches have we ransacked, whose  
life have we decided to capture, suspended  
in time,  
Suspended in wire holding up these  
tapestries we weave from the scraps?

This kitchen, did she labour over dinner,  
a universal thing we share? This bed, did  
she have someone to share the warmth, a  
human thing we dream? This rubble, this  
fading mosaic floor, did she hold someone  
in promise? Did she hold herself? Did she  
hold herself like I do?

Did they walk like me, did they talk like me,  
did they sing, did they sing, did they sing?

I rub the dust between my fingers like it's  
ash in forgotten fires and something bone  
deep, bones crushed, grinded up and  
sanded down into something worthwhile,  
into those marble statues I refrain from  
kissing the feet but who decides who we  
immortalise?

No, really - I spend too long next to some

forgotten slab but the sign in front says  
these are

Funeral epitaphs

Did they know? Did they know? Did they  
pray? I knew but sometimes I forget to pray  
We looked at the same sky, same earth,  
same God, I wonder what they thought  
Were they scared like me? Did they pray?  
Did they pray? I did but not always for the  
right things

Their gods were fallible - who knows how  
many are lost? - carved into stone that  
we so painstakingly pieced back together,  
those cracked faces sacrilegious, licking  
the dirt,  
But still they prayed

Did it make a difference? Will it make a  
difference? Were they afraid? Am I afraid?  
Yes but I think I am afraid I don't have the



right answers to that

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I want to hold you but  
I don't know how, I can't carry the weight  
of the dead I'm already buckling under the  
weight of myself

I can sit and stare at these fading  
inscriptions, drag my fingers over the  
gashes like by some miracle I'll understand  
but I've been waiting for a miracle since  
I was twelve and first saw blood in a  
daydream so

I sit and stare, is that enough? I can  
pretend, is that enough? I can wonder  
whose hands I keep trying to hold, wonder  
what they wondered sitting here as I do -  
what to eat for dinner? To pick up groceries  
on the way home? - is that enough?

If I remember you, if I grip your hand from  
between the weeds and pull,  
Is that enough?

*I gave a cat half my water bottle in the  
ruins of a fountain, is that enough?*

*Were you there too, cupping water in your  
hands and letting them lick sandpaper-  
rough from your palms? Will you remember  
me too? Will they?*

*Yes, okay, I was crouched in the dust and  
looking for God but I was looking for the  
imprint of myself in the rubble, I was  
looking to be remembered.*

By **Rania Aldanu**

Grade Category: Senior  
Sirius College  
Broadmeadows, Vic.

# Leech



I'm the hero of the hospital,  
I help your blood to flow,  
But as soon as surgery's over,  
Into the bin I go!

I drink your revolting blood,  
Since I've got nothing else to eat,  
Please, have some mercy,  
Don't throw me down the street.

Salt's sprinkled on my skin,  
It turns me inside out,  
Imagine how you'd feel,  
with your lungs the wrong way around!

I dwell in lakes so damp and cold,  
And filthy marine waters,  
I'll live here all my tragic life,  
and so will my sons and daughters.

I feast on children, out for school camp,  
It makes them wail and scream,  
If I was lucky enough to have ears,  
They would have turned bright green.

I own ten eyes, all in a line,  
They're nothing but black spots,  
I can scarcely see with them,  
You could call them decorative dots!

I know that when you yank me off,  
You seem to get infections,  
I understand your immunity rules,  
But it's just my self-protection.

Now I am done with speaking,  
I am finished with my speech.  
You have heard the long list of complaints,  
Of a meek but suffering leech.

By **Renee Kim**

Grade Category: Middle  
Mornington Primary School  
Mornington, Vic.  
Teacher/s: Ms Bibi and Ms Bolton





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