

The Inverawe Outdoors Poetry Competition 2008 Judge's Report

Student Edition: Nature Poetry

Judge: Liz Winfield

It is an honour and a privilege to judge any poetry competition, but especially one for our young people, and with a nature theme. Reading these poems has given me hope and courage with which to face our joint futures, and the futures our children and grandchildren will inherit.

The lower primary and upper primary section place-getters are from Sapphire Coast Anglican College, and looked at some aspect of nature, such as star fish, the weather, a shark, and the beach. Each poem was an imaginative journey on the part of the poet where all of the senses were used when observing their chosen subject. The most successful poems chose and ordered the details describing their subject so it came to life for the reader of the poem as a lived experience. The poems also added an extra piece of information which gave depth, or different levels on which the poem could be appreciated. The winner in the lower primary section did this by describing butterflies, and then in the last three lines listing the butterflies' life cycle. The winner of the upper primary section made the beach experience a metaphor for 'fun', by simply adding that one little word 'fun' at the end of their poem. It is by such seemingly simple devices that the reader of these poems is left with such a strong imprint on their minds and the ongoing internal niggling questions and dialogue that good poetry engenders in its readers.

I award years seven to nine two equal winners. 'Redbill Sandpiper' is a beautifully crafted poem which uses metre and rhyme well. The words in this poem are chosen with such care, especially the verbs. The adjectives are also sparing and well chosen; the poem begins with a 'silent sandpiper', the silence sets the tone of the poem right from the first word, as well as encouraging us to listen. The poem opens out at the end with a sense of connectedness to places unknown and the possibilities of being free.

'Smokey Haze' is a free verse poem with an easy, staccato, playful couplet structure. This poem is courageous in its free-flowing associations and it pays off by being a very original and memorable poem.

The winner of the senior secondary section has an unusual poem called 'Pot-Plant'. I read this poem as a disquieting morality tale for our times. The free verse structure suits the poem well, the observational skills of the poet are remarkable, and more remarkable is the way the language choices lure the reader to engage with the poem. The comic aside nearly halfway through the poem is wonderfully placed.

'Mt Ossa' receives an encouragement award. This brought back, for me, a similar experience I had on Ben Lomond with a kangaroo, and I had the 'ah yes, that's it' experience when reading this poem, a sure sign of one person's experience being the experience of everyman. The other encouragement award goes to a sonnet which starts, 'As I sit in my garden, silent,' the form suits the soliloquy and the voice is convincing, as is the 'turn' from the ninth

line. This sonnet contrasts the nature of the 'I' of the poem with external nature to great effect. Like all of the above poems, this poem deserves re-reading many times.

It has been a rewarding experience for me as a poet and a person to have been able to read all the student entries. I'd like to thank Margaret and Bill Chestnut of Inverawe Native Gardens for making this competition possible; with the support, of course, of the Kingborough Council, and the schools and teachers who encouraged the students to enter. I'd especially like to thank the students who have entered for the privilege of reading your poems.

Liz Winfield