

Red
Room
Poetry

POETRY OBJECT

2020

WINNING &
HIGHLY COMMENDED
POEMS

JUDGE'S REPORT (AUS)

Let my shoes walk me back.
Blue socks white -
Rain the in,
umbrella the under.
Let it unravel, shatter and
crumble. There is a beating.

'Untie the Shoes'
Scout, Year II
Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner
School



"It goes without saying that these are strange times: 2020 has presented new challenges for all of us, but particularly for students, teachers and families trying to make sense of the new not-very-normal.

In that context, it has been an absolute delight to inhabit the worlds of so many incredible young and not-so-young poets. From two- to three-dimensional objects, from the abstract to concrete, whether personified, disembodied or human, the range of subjects explored by the Poetry Object participants was a refreshing insight into the role of material culture beyond the financial value of goods to a deeper understanding of how people and objects are linked through memory, social connection and feeling.

I looked for works that explored the object with vivid descriptors and creative literary devices.

I was engaged by those works that brought the reader into the environment and the social context that gave rise to meaning, and was pleased to see writers trying different structures to convey the emotional and symbolic connections between people and things.

I was reminded of Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons, and the way that an object is reshaped completely by the specific kind of attention that comes from poetry. All of the winning and highly commended poems selected here, with their diverse qualities and varying technical merits, presented a particular kind of "new attention", which I found deeply satisfying.

Selecting a winner and highly commended list was a formidable task, but the maturity of voices, the sensitivity of feeling and the power of writing made it a delight to be a part of this years' Poetry Object. Within this group of poets are talented new voices ready to share the heart of their experiences."

~ Eleanor Jackson, Head Australian Judge,
Poetry Object 2020



THE GRAVESTONE OUTBACK

FIRST PLACE (AUS)
PRIMARY

Ruby, Year 6
Woollahra Public School, NSW

A hole is dug out and a coffin laid inside,
I sit above, cemented in the soil, guarding the beloved soul,
They think I can not see, cannot feel,
Every day she comes to visit,
Kneeling in front of me, she whispers,
"If you can hear me mum, I love you" and she leaves a single daisy,
I watch her walk away, a child of about 6,
I feel it when she cries, and when she's angry,
I see her into her soul, she's disappearing, fading away,
Slowly the years pass and I watch her grow older, taller, more distant,
I grow old too,
Moss creeps up my sides and ivy tangles itself around my body,
Suddenly I'm ripped out of the ground and taken to a shop,
It burns when they engrave a second epitaph into my skin,
When I'm placed back I'm sitting on top of two souls instead of one,
I see her once more but this time it's different, I'm dreaming,
I watch her become reunited with her mum, shes a little girl again,
She's in the second coffin, I know she is,
I trace the words engraved into me,
Loved by many, our dear daughter Madison was taken too soon. She is laid to
rest.

JUDGE'S NOTES

This beautifully emotive work was a worthy winner of the Primary category. Both in subject matter and voice, we felt the poem demonstrated outstanding maturity and control, progressing through the lyric narrative with powerful imagery. The personified gravestone brings us vividly into the emotional landscape of loss captured by the work and stayed with us long after the poem itself had concluded. The imagery is rich and highly visual, which enables the written message to work with the drawn elements captured in words. The integrated dialogue, 'If you can hear me mum, I love you' is a tool that has a wider impact in communicating meaning and emotion in and beyond death. The way in which such mature and confronting content is dealt with in such a mature and poignant way gives due recognition to the final words 'She is laid to rest.'

~ Eleanor Jackson, Head Judge, Poetry Object 2020

FIRST PLACE (AUS)
PRIMARY

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WALKER
BOOKS

HIGHLY COMMENDED (AUS)
PRIMARY

Alex, Year 5
Annandale North Public School,
NSW

OLD SHOES

Frayed, worn, battered. Surrendered to the null, grit and void buried inside.

Though they still hold.

Soles scraping on the cold concrete.

Though they do not tear.

Been ran on, dropped on, even thrown across the child's room a few times.

Though they are still there.

Had to listen to the other kids gloating about their new kicks.

But, they still serve.

Had to hear you complaining to your parents about wanting new ones.

But, they still do their jobs.

Why?

They have no choice.

JUDGE'S NOTES

Beautifully spare, 'Old Shoes', demonstrates a clear poetic style, where meaning and significance were powerfully conveyed through word choice and description. The persistence of the shoes is a testament to the persistence of the narrator, evoking a strength and resilience in the face (or is that foot?) of adversity. These old shoes may have not had a choice, but they certainly have agency and personality. Their survival and use despite being 'Frayed, worn, battered' serve as a powerful symbol and reminder into the past and how shoes are key elements that hold individuals up. The objectified nature of the shoes is reflective of their use and purpose, both of which are emphasised in the consistent two line stanza poem.

~ Eleanor Jackson, Head Judge, Poetry Object 2020

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WALKER
BOOKS

HIGHLY COMMENDED (AUS)
PRIMARY

Harriet, Year I
Encounter Lutheran College, SA

THINGS IN MY GARDEN

Look closely and you will see a garden is a mystery
A blue trampoline, bouncing bouncing
A swing that makes me feel like I am flying like a bird
A squeaky slide, Waving trees
Fruit to eat whenever I please
Dribbling balls, Posts and poles
Step drop kick, Shots and goals
The chooks walk around all day
Then they dig in the hay
Eggs to eat, and a puppy to play
The door waves in the wind
A banging clanging shed
Sometimes we build cubbies
With a soft and comfy bed
From the balcony, we see the ocean wide, and we see the ocean's tide
Sometimes it's shiny, sometimes it's grey, Sometimes storms don't go away
We climb on the fence and talk to our friends
Garden adventures, Never end.

JUDGE'S NOTES

This poem takes you straight to the wonderful cornucopia of life. It is uplifting! We were immediately struck by the opening line. It is a wonderful declaration of how the enigmatic can be discovered in the ordinary. The fast pace of the poem translates to an authentic excitement about the subject matter. The rhyme scheme adds a musicality and nursery playfulness to the work, which is irresistible! The imagery in the poem combines a heartbreaking innocence with a light, breezy, unaffected yet at times quite sophisticated technique. There is a delightful diversity in the objects, creatures and feelings explored. This poem conveys the sheer exuberance and excitement of being a child. One of the most appealing aspects of this work is the sense of darting movement from one delight to the next. I particularly enjoyed the treasure of a line, "Dribbling balls, Posts and poles/ Step drop kick, Shots and goals". The dual use of assonance and truncated sentences adds a spontaneity and gently prodding humour to the piece. Wonderful!

~ Eleanor Jackson, Head Judge, Poetry Object 2020

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WALKER
BOOKS

HIGHLY COMMENDED (AUS)
PRIMARY

Levi, Year 5
Morphett Vale East School R-7, SA

LEVI'S BIKE

I feel the wind rush past me.
I zoom down the street on my great oversized bike.
I watch the trees pass by as I move faster and faster,
And the world around me is all drowned out.
I almost touch the sunset as the early stars start to appear.
I don't want this amazing feeling to go,
The one that makes me feel like I can do anything.
I watch the cars become fewer and fewer, as the moon starts to light up
the glittery night sky.
I see the fast-moving shadows of the sleek, stray, black cats moving
discreetly behind the street lights.
I love my bike,
It helps me think,
I don't ever want it to depart from me.
As I ride my bike up the road,
I watch the street lights slowly flicker on.
It's time to go home but I don't mind,
I've had a great day,
And now it's time to put my bike away.

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JUDGE'S NOTES

Another strong work that felt direct and energetic with a narrative momentum, reminding readers of the sensory experience of riding a bike, the heightened awareness that comes with the freedom afforded by mobility. The use of the first person puts the reader in the driver's seat, experiencing all that Levi does, including the sense of ownership and pride associated with a bike. The sense in which the bike is a vehicle to opportunities and time passing is gently conveyed as the ride and poem draw to a close at the end of the poem. The strong sense of connection conveyed between the bike and the persona serves as a powerful symbol for the way in which individuals can connect with highly personal objects and attach memories to them in this way.

~ Eleanor Jackson, Head Judge, Poetry Object 2020

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WALKER
BOOKS

THERE IS A PAINTING IN AN ANTIQUE SHOP THAT REMINDED ME OF YOU

No bigger than a walnut,
Framed in a tiny slice of weathered glass
Cork back pressing it to the screen
I look at you through the pane.

Sugar cube fence stacked
Beside a blotchy mushroom forest,
Cold apples
Cold sheep nose minty grass
Along a thin black fence
In the pale afternoon,
Red roofed castle hides
Its secrets among the
Trees reaching
Across the watery sky.

I see your eyes in the blue bicycle.

Your teeth in the gate cackling laughter and
Sweet apple stains from forest adventures.
Pale sheep, your soft side
Guarded by a thin black fence
I hop over it and touch their fur
Cold fingertips nervous across you in the pale
afternoon
Breaking down the castle
I lift the red roof and peak at the secrets
Hidden in the attic
I reach for you
Your tears
The watery sky.

FIRST PLACE (AUS)
SECONDARY

Grace, Year II
Ormiston College, QLD

JUDGE'S NOTES

This precise portrait of a portrait draws the reader into rich detail and emotional resonance that can be held in even the smallest of objects. Here, in the painted scene, is an entire recreation of a life, a person unknown to the reader but conveyed with powerful specificity and meaning. The imagery and references were outstanding and supported by a sense of control and rhythm in the language. The sensitivity and delicacy captured makes this poem very relatable and instantly forms a connection with the reader. It is personal and the layers that are applied with aspects of portraits and portraiture emphasise the multilayered nature of the writing and work.

~ Eleanor Jackson, Head Judge, Poetry Object 2020

FIRST PLACE (AUS)
SECONDARY

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WALKER
BOOKS

PS4

Geometric white rhombus
Fresh new plastic skin
A jet engine roaring to life
Hot and rough
Under my feverish fingertips

Time disappears
Flying away
Grinding a thousand different worlds
Silver portal disks to unknown worlds
A perfect escape

HIGHLY COMMENDED (AUS)
SECONDARY

Byron, Year 9
Lake Illawarra High School, NSW

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JUDGE'S NOTES

Another seemingly simple poem but one that, in its minimalist choices and stripped back language, gave a strong description of the object and its emotional impact. This is a concentrated engagement with an inert, electronic virtual landscape. Fresh new plastic skin' produces 'feverish fingertips'. It's light years from Wordsworth's 'Wandering lonely as a Cloud'. Blissful escape into nature is overtaken by 'A perfect escape' into 'Grinding a thousand different worlds/ Silver portal disks of unknown worlds'. The minimalist language reinforces the power of the 'white rhombus' and the diction transcends the object itself. The mature language and imagery juxtaposes the the traditional connotations of a gaming console, to be one that has a rather profound impact, with the relatable 'time disappears' lingering on the lips.

~ Eleanor Jackson, Head Judge, Poetry Object 2020

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WALKER
BOOKS

AN ODE TO MY GRADUATION DRESS

This is an ode to my graduation dress
Pretty and pristine
Locked inside my closet
Since two thousand and sixteen
Folded up so neatly
And put away brand new
I'm sorry I didn't love you
Like everyone wanted me to
I'm sure you'd look quite pretty
That I cannot dispute
There's really only one problem

I wanted a suit.

HIGHLY COMMENDED (AUS)
SECONDARY

Lani, Year II
Seaton High School, SA

JUDGE'S NOTES

This short work nevertheless packs an emotional punch of “exalted feeling”. Rites of passage continue to hold power and importance for all people: every culture, every generation, brings their own symbols to those rites. In this work, a dress, stored for years yet not forgotten, holds the weight of social expectation which is made even heavier by the poem’s final line. In one short phrase, we recognise the individual struggle and our collective burden to understand how we all find a place to belong. The structure and flow is smooth and the final line smoother. The symbolism of the dress is connected with appearance and aesthetics. The storytelling nature of the writing envelopes the reader to be on a journey of attention toward the dress, and the desire of the persona becomes the mouthpiece for others.

~ Eleanor Jackson, Head Judge, Poetry Object 2020

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BOOKS

UNTIE THE SHOES

There is a beating against what was
Sit still in silence. In silence!

It shatters, falls apart, crumbles at your touch.

My sneakers the blue ones. Yes. You know the pair

Under the umbrella in the rain - white socks blue

I remember each moment each day. Mind a memory, memory a map. There is a beat,
in time with shoes against the concrete

And the mess of flesh in this hollow body

Like waves tearing at the shore shoes tearing at the gravel words tearing at the
heart.

Against the concrete against it all. Pushing and pulling and pushing away.

I'll retreat raise my flag, white. Taunt with the wind.

So many lost so many drowned, we walk on, beaten back by time. TIME! Undo it
please.

Untie the flimsy laces of the clock. Let it unravel,

Let my shoes walk me back. Blue socks white -

Rain the in, umbrella the under.

Let it unravel, shatter and crumble. There is a beating.

HIGHLY COMMENDED (AUS)
SECONDARY

Scout, Year II
Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School, NSW

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JUDGE'S NOTES

While ostensibly about shoes, this poem — with its dislocated, rhythmic beat and explosive phrasing — communicated effectively to us the emotional urgency of time passing, its ineluctable intensity and sensation. Memory, while somewhat map-like, is also a map that has been torn, used and worn; we push and pull against fixed recollections, and we are all still trying to navigate where we have been and where we are going. The assonance used throughout the poem draws out some key sounds to really emphasise the past, as well as the alliterative m 'Mind a memory, memory a map' to reinforce the rhythmic flow of the object in time.

— Eleanor Jackson, Head Judge, Poetry Object 2020

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WALKER
BOOKS

STICKER DOT DOXOLOGY

I have this reel of golden stickers
And I place them like God, the galaxies.

When I was a boy
Making delicate, deliberate offerings
I had to wait on them. Work for them.
As my teacher
Like summer skin from the shoulder,
Would peel with approval,
The shimmering circle of my becoming,
And press it upon the page, to say,
"I see you."

In my lunch break,
Avoiding eye contact with the cashier,
I tap \$3.50 for a roll of IOO.

As offerings come to me,
Full of hope and expectation,
I mark them as I see things.

Crowned Elizabeth, her wax and signet,
My power, a planet.

FIRST PLACE
TEACHER

Blake Nuto
St. Michael's Collegiate, TAS

JUDGE'S NOTES

In this playful yet serious metaphor for childhood and achievement, we relished the sense of grandeur and intentionality used to express the very relatable need to “become” and to be seen. The dense, Latinate quality of the language plays up the contrast between the power of recognition and the quotidian simplicity of childhood reward stickers, while the reinforcement of language choices (‘I see you’ compared with ‘avoiding eye contact with the cashier’) added further layers of tension and meaning. This poem is relatable, for the universal symbolism of a ‘golden sticker’ and its divine associations with the impact and message it conveys. The cyclic nature of feedback and affirmation is captured tenderly and thoughtfully with the wider metaphor of ‘peel with approval’. Gold stickers all round for this wonderful, divine piece!

~ Eleanor Jackson, Head Judge, Poetry Object 2020

FIRST PLACE
TEACHER

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WALKER
BOOKS

THE USHA

Black and gold, wooden and bold
Four steel legs pressed up against the window sill
Sepia sunlight streams onto the lacquered surfaces
Of my grandmother's sewing machine
Silvery slices made by thick metal scissors
Fabric falls onto the red polished floors
There was once a queen who lived far away...
A 70 year old eye threads the needle
She spins the rhythmic wheel
Her small, smooth, bare feet peddle the beast
As she coaxes the cloth through the gates of formation
The drawer of buttons raucously rattles
Her mind is peaceful and wonderous
Faithful fingers affix each round in place
Tiny snips to tidy the frays
That bit in the story
The one between the cut of the cloth and the tugging of sewn thread
How the queen sits on her throne
Weaves in and weaves out
Of my memories

HIGHLY COMMENDED
TEACHER

Kumudu Stewart
Clarence High School, TAS

JUDGE'S NOTES

The detailed observation and rendering of a sewing machine in *The Usha* gives the reader a strong sense of intimacy, familial closeness and tender remembrance. The vocabulary and even the act itself — so few people know how to sew any more — portray a sense of history and time travel that is magical and warmly evocative of the powerful relationships between grandparents and children. Like the physical thread, the reader is pulled in multiple directions, from childhood to adulthood and back. Sensitivity peppers the poems language, structure, and meaning as the sewing process is careful, so too is the thought behind it. The writing is tender and focussed, as is the imagery of culture and life, preserved in a wider tapestry of time.

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WALKER
BOOKS

1X4 BRICK

They don't know it yet,
they think they're only building
spaceships and castles.
They don't realise this is the way
memories are made.
They tell themselves stories
as they connect plastic brick to plastic brick,
much like I did when I was their age:
the entire family knelt over a box,
sifting through a jumbled mess
of bric-à-brac
trying to find that one piece
to complete a model
that would be destroyed soon after,
the frustrations when my father
would use wheels instead of legs,
the anticipation of opening a new set.
I add my stories to theirs,
connect them like plastic bricks.

HIGHLY COMMENDED
TEACHER

Ron Barton
Comet Bay College, SA

JUDGE'S NOTES

This poem clearly communicates the relationships between play and memory, the way the plasticity of play (both children's and adults') solidifies into memory, connecting the reader to the poet's experiences as a child and as a parent. We are all formed by memory and connection, time passes and we are able to reflect back on those acts of formation, but in their happening there is a beautiful, jumbled mess of stories past, present and future. The layered structural elements of the poem reinforce the brick-like connotations of a world symbolised by the childhood experience. The way in which time passes so seamlessly is a reflection of the power of words and memory to have a long-lasting impact in conjunction with the object, in this instance, the humble Lego brick.

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WALKER
BOOKS

BARBED WIRE

Does barbed wire resent its role
eternally racked between two posts
or does it relish the thought
of scorpion tails poised to strike?
Does it smirk when the wet-nosed calf is slapped,
or curse as a child might curse to see another spoil its fun?

Does barbed wire dream?
In dreams does it untwist, drop strands like fine, combed hair
strain to snap spring to a ball then t u m b l e weed away?
Reaching Bass Strait does it untangle there - eel into... surf?
Does it explore, then return or dissolve with a sigh?

My father tells me wire makes cattle of men.
He tells me this sharp eyes taut with the things that still
flap there.

But wire is practical too,
keeps sheep from trees, separates cow from bull;
protects crops dissuades sheep obstructs kangaroos.

As I spool out new bought wire
shake loose cat claw barbs
my father's hands superimpose.

HIGHLY COMMENDED
TEACHER

Joy Reid
Gippsland Grammar, VIC

JUDGE'S NOTES

We enjoyed this poem very much, with its shape-shifting emotional perspectives, testing the feeling and dreaming of barbed wire and drawing us back to the everyday roles of “protection” and the more insidious possibilities of vicious containment. Are we inside or outside the boundaries imposed, are we reinforcing them, are we the “cattle-men” or the wire? Either way, the final line from this perceptive work conveys the poet’s intimate connection with this unlikely object. The ongoing rhetorical questions are jarring and sharp cutting, just as the wire is. The jargon associated with the object itself, ‘sharp, ‘separates’ further connotes the way in which this poem cuts to the heart of its messaging.

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