

It was once again a pleasure to judge the My Brother Jack Primary School Short Story Award. It's delightful to get an insight into the imaginations, the humour, the hopes and fears of local youth. Some common threads and themes were: home, school, travel, war, supernatural and otherworldly creatures, and baked goods.

The winning story struck me as being thoughtful and philosophical. 'What if?' is essentially about a person coming to terms with ambition and disappointment. In the end, the baker's wife who loves to write decides that the most important thing was that she had a go. I was impressed with the gentle structure of the story, leading to a mature epiphany. It's a story that makes you feel grateful for what you have, and encourages you to do what makes you happy for the sake of it, not for any end goal.

Second place goes to 'Imagination'. What impressed me about this story was the rhythm of its sentences and its poetic qualities: the way it seems to effortlessly take us inside the imagination of a child. The reader becomes the child playing, but also the tiger and the crane of the child's imagination. It's a story that celebrates the power of imagination.

Third place goes to 'Lucy and the Snowflake'. This story reminded me of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, where a character is encouraged to not be quick-tempered and bitter and instead learns to be grateful for things they cannot immediately see or have not considered. A snowflake takes the place of Dickens' ghosts, showing Lucy the role that winter plays in the cycle of life and the environment.

The runner-up stories are:

'Too Many Pets', an incredibly good-natured story about a man who ends up with too many pets and so comes up with a way to share them.

'The Nightmare of New York', a fantastical story about a child's glamorous travelling life, which I chose for its psychological twist of an ending, wherein the main character reveals her dark side.

'The Plague of the Horseflies', a vivid story about a horse skeleton and some literal 'horse'-flies, with a scary ending. I enjoyed the imaginative absurdity of this story.