

## My Brother Jack Senior Secondary School Poetry

It is always an exciting and enjoyable experience to be asked to judge a poetry competition, so I was delighted to be asked to judge the 2016 Glen Eira Council's My Brother Jack Senior Secondary School Poetry Competition.

Life can get pretty tough for students in their senior school years as they grapple with the demands of part-time work, growing independence, new relationships, and of course, the increasing pressure of the VCE workload. Teachers and parents too, may believe that the pressures of the exam years leave no time for anything not directly related to the curriculum. So a big thank you to those teachers who encouraged their students to enter this competition, knowing that the time spent reading, thinking about and writing poetry is never wasted.

Popular themes in this category included, finding one's place in the world, family life, the importance of friendships, body image and the contrast between how we see ourselves and others see us. Other themes this year included the beauty of the natural world, (and the urban landscape!) and the tension between hopes and dreams for the future, and fears about what the reality may be.

Some general comments: Poetry is a condensed, intense creative form where every word counts, so make every word work for you. Reading your work out aloud is an excellent way to check the rhythms of the poem. Use punctuation effectively to guide the reader through the pauses and stops. Not all poetry needs to rhyme. And most importantly, make sure you proof-read your work to avoid confusing grammar, spelling and punctuation errors

I have awarded two prize in this category. For its originality, simplicity and very strong rhythm the first prize goes to *Then*. In a lovely fusion of subject and form, this poem about a frightening experience, effectively left me breathless.

For its empathy and imagery second prize goes to *The Man Who Plays All Day*, a work where the poet asks us what would happen if we stopped and paid attention to someone we would usually just pass by.

Thank you to all the entrants and their teachers. Hope you all continue to enjoy reading and writing poetry and enter again next year.