**Judge's Report - Term 2, 2023**

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**Theme: Mask**

Term 2’s competition with the theme of MASK has been run and won, leaving us once again marvelling at the breadth and depth of talent of Australia’s young writers.

Before we move into the winners and judge’s comments, we would like to say a big thank you to [Bing Lee](https://www.binglee.com.au/), our newest sponsor who are generously donating to the Little Stories, Big Ideas prize pool. Welcome, Bing Lee! We know winning scribes will love receiving their gift vouchers!

Submissions for ‘mask’ covered a broad range of issues, themes, and genres. Some surprised and delighted with their originality and refreshing spin on the theme. Others moved us with their heart and humanity, and some had us applauding their ingenuity when it came to provoking thought and eliciting emotion.

As well as our winners, we have a large number of entries in on our Honourable Mentions list. We hope you’ll take the time to read and celebrate them all…you’re in for a real treat! We post all our winners and honourable mentions on our social media platforms over the coming term, so if you haven’t already, why not give us a follow and enjoy the teen talent:

* Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/littlestoriesbigideascomp/>
* Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/littlestoriesbigideascomp>

**Two more things, before we let you enjoy the winning entries**. We want to send a special high five to the teachers, parents, and educators who encourage their school to get involved with Little Stories, Big Ideas. We do take note of who’s entering and which schools entries come from. As writers ourselves, we know what it means to have a teacher take a special interest in creative writing and pass it on to their students. *We* were once those students.

**Lastly, if you’re reading this from the Mornington Peninsula**, we now have a new category for Peninsula-based students and surrounds. Why just the Mornington Peninsula, we hear you ask? Well, it’s the grassroots headquarters of Little Stories, Big Ideas, where we were founded three years ago when two local authors decided Generation Next needed a platform to share their creativity and voice their ideas through the power of story. You can find more details about the Local Writer’s Award [here](https://littlestoriesbigideas.com.au/prizes/).

The theme for Term 3 **VOICE** has now opened for entries. We’re looking forward to the various ways students will interpret this multifaceted theme!



Please spread the word to your students, membership base, children, social networks, and anyone you think would be interested in submitting their work for the chance to win terrific prizes while flexing their creative muscle. We’d love to read their entries!

Thanks as always for your ongoing support, and all the very best for Term 3 and beyond.

Joe and Rebecca

**Year 10 - 12 Winners**

**First Place**

***White Face / Red Face***  by Anne Fo, Mount Waverley Secondary College, VIC

She loved white Paint on her face-  
For purity, for beauty, for grace-  
Assimilated the socialite’s call from the womb,  
Brushing saccharine lead in every pore,  
But why was her white skin melting?  
She’s hideous, she’s hideous, she’s  
  
This Paint loves to slip; Like the soft, breaking blush of a dove-  
(Pretty with its dripping neck snapped in her hands)  
Like the screams at its red on her lips-  
(Pretty how the colour was, dripping down her chin)  
She could meet the coffin early, curl into a foetus-ball,  
Her mating call was lovely- with her fresh scarlet face  
So pretty

***Judge’s Comment:*** *In some cultures (including ancient China and Greece), the use of heavy white makeup was used to symbolise beauty and elegance along with status. The most common facial paint unfortunately contained lead. Queen Elizabeth I also used ‘venetian ceruse’ a concoction of vinegar and lead as symbol of youth and fertility as her signature porcelain look (and to cover scars from smallpox!). We couldn’t go past Anne Fo’s unique take on the theme of ‘mask’, which explores with its beautiful prose and imagery, the impossible standards of beauty that to this day still disfigure, maim, and in some cases kill.*

**Second Place**

***The Masquerade***  by Saskia de Leeuw Kyle, Fitzroy High School, VIC

The mask slipped low on Madeline's face, and she pushed it up so that the lace-covered hem hid her face. Prowling around the edge of the dance floor, she made sure she was hidden in the shadows. She had one job and one job only, and she could not afford to be distracted.  
  
There he was.  
  
Madeline raised her wrist to her lips and whispered into the concealed microphone that she had hidden in her bracelet.  
  
"I can see him."  
  
Then she raised her glass and stalked towards him, the knife in her pocket resting against her hip.

***Judge’s Comment:*** *At Little Stories, Big Ideas we’re absolute suckers for story!* The Masquerade *might not be as lyrically lofty as some other entries, but when you’re delivering a page turner in under 100 words, we sit up and take notice. Saskia has used the theme to craft a snapshot of genre and suspense – Madeline, a female assassin who, with her actions and her insights, lets us know in this glimpse into her mission that the stakes are high!*

**Third Place**

***Green Nostalgia***  by Fire Chicken Noodles, Shalom Catholic College, QLD

What should be a vibrant harmony,  
Embroidered with earthy tones, mighty oaks,  
Smothered by a choking white silence.  
  
The deep chartreuse within the leaves that  
leaked golden puddles on the moss floor,  
reduced to a blank, bleached canvas.  
  
The chitters between the castleton branches,  
The rustles behind the trees, long vacant,  
The lonely wind howling for their return.  
  
Such a serene, tranquil scene,  
Masked by the resentful, unforgiving winter.  
  
Oh, raging white, return me my chartreuse, my castleton  
Oh, relentless white, return me my memory, my nostalgia  
Oh, rancorous white, return me my beloved green.

***Judge’s Comment:*** *This stunning ode to season and nature conveys emotion reminiscent of the Romantic Era of poetry and literature. It’s a form that evokes and invokes the human condition through its reading (and re-reading). For maximum enjoyment, read out loud, like all good poetry should be😊*

**Honourable Mention**:

* ***The Empress’s Golden Veil*** by Tahj Dimmer, Batemans Bay High School, NSW
* ***Wearing the Willow (my wooden mask of ignorance)*** by Amelia Tu, Shalom College, QLD
* ***M for Mask*** by Alexia Kavellaris, Loreto Mandeville Hall Toorak, VIC
* ***Masked for Eternity*** by Taanvi Deenadayaalu, St Monica's College, QLD
* ***Broken Plasterine*** by Kiro Vanderwacht, Alta-1 Merriwa, WA
* ***Helter Skelter*** by Syazwana Saifudin, Suzanne Cory High School, VIC
* ***The Anxious Android Affair*** by Eliott Bidstrup, Birchip School, VIC
* ***A Photon in Double Split*** by Ria Saini, James Ruse Agricultural High School, VIC
* ***Floating Message*** by Alicia Warhurst, Bray Park High School, QLD
* ***What Am I?*** by Molly Menzies, Loreto Kirribilli, NSW
* ***Untitled by Ian Cao,*** Hurlstone Agricultural School, NSW
* ***Progression*** by James Crowle, Waverley College, VIC
* ***Concealed*** by Anonymous, Mount Waverley Secondary College, VIC
* ***Together til the End*** by Maulee Jain, James Ruse Agricultural School, VIC

**Year 7 – 9 Winners**

**First Place**

***A Masked Man*** by Yihan Zhang, Meridien School, NSW

Through the gaps of the curtain, I could see a masked man knocking on my window.

I live on the 25th floor.

***Judge’s Comment:*** *This absolute banger of a story exemplifies how powerful micro fiction can be. Yihan has used the art of brevity to give us twenty-two well-placed words that hit hard with their power and impact. Within these tight parameters, she has gifted to the reader: two characters, a setting, and a plot twist all wrapped up in a memorable micro story that poses more questions than it answers. Bravo!*

**Second Place**

***Broken Glass*** by Adrita Saha, James Ruse Agricultural School, NSW

touch the silhouette of your past  
let it thread through your fingers  
and tell me-  
is it soft like woven silk?  
memories in a complex pattern  
or is it rough  
with stitches falling apart, greased with dirt  
holding it with nothing but a thread?

of course  
you shy away, for what will meet you  
broken glass embedded like spikes  
waiting to rip apart your mask  
the one you’ve worked so hard to maintain.  
now tell me-  
which you fear more  
the cut or the blood?  
  
broken glass  
so innocent  
standing unassuming, invisible  
in a mass of thread and mud.  
but Once  
a beautiful sculpture, one of beauty  
of trust and contentment.  
but today, the dagger cutting through your façade

with ease

***Judge’s Comment:*** *The dreamlike spell this piece casts cleverly escalates with each stanza. The narrator hints of a past that has been sullied by misdeed, and now the time has come for the subject’s self-reflection, regret, or reckoning. Poetic use of simile and metaphor add to its evocative execution.*

**Third Place**

***Sugar and Spice***  by Anonymous, Lyneham High School, ACT

Sickly sweet, everything about her. Syrupy and honeyed, unable to spit out even if you wanted to. A candied tongue, an artificial aftertaste, sticking to every surface when without her garish and misleading wrapper, an illusory facade. Coated with veneer, concealing the rotting truth of a caramelized masquerade.  
  
She was like benzene, luring you in with acidic bait that you would never escape from, another lost planet revolving around her. Only when you were too addicted to her sugar would you reach the core, the bitter, bitter, truth.  
  
But by then, it was already too late.  
  
You were caught.

***Judge’s Comment:*** *The use of metaphor and simile in this piece worked beautifully to elevate the juxtaposition of the subject’s falsehoods and truth, while providing a lyrical and impactful read.*

**Honourable Mentions:**

* ***Behind Closed Doors (Your Mask Falls Off)*** by Ivanka Welsh, Shalom College, QLD
* ***Breaking News*** by Tyler Pitt, Shalom College, QLD
* ***Woman In a Man’s Ring*** by Jess Cooling, Kinross College, WA
* ***Light of Hope*** by Nicholas Jorgensen, Bendigo south East College, VIC
* ***Day of My Diagnosis*** by Neve Welsh, Tombolo Academy, VIC
* ***Veiled Essence*** by Benedict Akbarzadeh-Haendel, Tombolo Academy, VIC
* ***A House in Flames*** by Isla Attard, Magdalene Catholic College, NSW
* ***The Worm Within*** by Harper Baker, Maryborough State High School, QLD
* ***I Just Want to Fit In*** by Amy Jochheim, ACEN Chanel College, QLD
* ***Free*** by Manaia Bolger, Trinity College, Beenleigh QLD
* ***I Want the Mask to Fall*** by Kaavya Gupta, Abbotsleigh Anglican School for Girls, NSW
* ***Loud Laughter by Katherine Lam***, Presbyterian Ladies' College, VIC
* ***Spotlight*** by Aiden McCaffrey, Sandringham College, VIC
* ***Two Eyes*** by Lincoln Brown, Mansfield State High School, QLD

**MORNINGTON PENINSULA LOCAL WRITERS’ AWARD**

***Manners*** by Anonymous, Woodleigh School, VIC

i use my manners in poetry  
like i need to be forgiven  
a bright word makes music  
and I write it down  
it’s some peculiar things  
to which i connect this sound  
but fake i love you’s  
although rare  
do exist  
but don’t compare  
what if melted thoughts I trust  
and then my mini worlds are crushed  
so I use manners in my poetry  
so i can fake what I don’t see  
pretend that’s what I want to be  
but while im thankful  
for all you do  
my words should be for me