

Claire Cawthorne, Primary schools section judge

It was a real honour and a surprise, if I'm honest, to be asked to be a judge for the primary section of the competition. It is an even greater privilege to have some of the talented young writers here this afternoon.

I think I speak for all my fellow judges when I say that it was really difficult to come up with a final decision as all the entries deserved merit.

After reading and re-reading the entries, we all became very attached to 'our' own short-lists and after much deliberation we finally came to our conclusion.

So, without further ado I will get on with the job in-hand and announce the awards. These will be done in reverse order with the Commendeds and Highly Commendeds in alphabetical order.

39: A shockingly intense and horrific portrayal of the senseless and devastating impact on a young, impressionable life. You believe you are reading the true story of a child refugee, identifying with their feelings of loss, helpless confusion, and alienation. **Commended goes to "The Land of Silence" by Rachel Forbes.**

8: This allegorical piece on self-acceptance shows how being different is not something to be hidden away but celebrated. Sympathetically written and with the strong message: "*You can't blend in if you were born to be different*". **Commended is "The Two Spotted Ladybird" by Hannah Wemyss.**

12: A clever use of emotions and the building sense of trepidation draws the reader in to identifying with the subject, climaxing in self-realization and a sense of self confidence... "*I think to myself, you can do it... Mother would be so proud*". **Commended is "Spread Your Wings" by Eilidh Will.**

149: This piece shows a clever use of facts to create a story of great sympathy and feeling. The opening line: "*It had taken James a few hours to die,*" grabs the reader from the start and questions are immediately thrown into the air. The reality of tragedy is sensitively dealt with right until the poignant use of the prompt at the very end: "*...on the evening of 6th May, at Drumore Farm, everything was quiet and still*". **Highly Commended goes to Angus Kelly.**

90: This story has been told with a mature and clever use of language ("*hard... harder... impossible*") and it takes you on a journey from despair, through elation and awe, to the silent desolation of release. **Highly commended goes to "Silent night" by Rebekah MacPherson.**

46: This narrative makes use of repetition and very clever word choice to illustrate the despair our main character feels and the destruction she is facing – *blurred*

corpses sprawled, scattered like unwanted toys. Trepidation filled her as tears burned like acid down her cheeks... The final line very effectively leaves the reader wanting to know more. **Highly Commended goes to “The Only Survivors” by Olivia Price**

94: This piece of work plays with the emotions, beginning very gently as *Bird song filled the air with the smell of summer blossoms*, but developing into a thrilling crescendo amid a *burning maze of death and destruction*, cleverly gripping the reader. Finally the pace changes again, to an optimistic, happy ending and the reader can relax in a sense of peace and hope. **Third place goes to “Forest of ash” by Cara McFarlane.** Well done!

35: Powerful, poignant and sensitively handled this short poem illustrates the power of well-chosen words. The already emotive title is given strength by a clever re-write of the prompt to give an even greater depth of emotion: “...*my life was quiet, silent and still*”. **Second place, and very well deserved, goes to “Sorrow” by Rudi Charteris.**

34: This magical poem is set towards the end of the day and evokes a wonderful image of nature settling down for the night. *The glistening loch reflected the sparkle of starlight. Capturing the shimmering moon and filtering it through the clouds.* It's a poem of contrasts, however, as *Fingers of darkness clawed at the night* and *Wolves slunk behind trees*. The poet has cleverly given the reader a sense of being there, alone, while the sun is setting – that feeling of eeriness, mixed with wonder. With images of... *underneath the shining surface of the water a world of life beneath the waves. Microscopic creatures flashed in the light, their nimble bodies danced amidst the soft seaweed....and ... The silent sunset drifted into thousands of beautiful colours wine red, golden yellow, lavender, lilac...* **Lyrical and complex, dazzling and utterly unique, the judges were unanimous in our decision to award first place to “The loch, trees, and the sky”, by Pollaidh Astley**

Finally I am delighted to announce the winner of the **Lydia Michael Award for the primary school with the best entries overall.**

This year the cheque and the brand new Highlife Highland shiny, silver salver go to Cawdor Primary.