

Neil Gunn Writing Competition 2022 – Shortlist and Winners/Primary School Category

First Place – The World Behind the Door

Judge One Feedback:

This is a really lovely piece of writing. The idea in the story of the 'secret' is well thought-out and creative - average girl discovers something extraordinary she can't share because she knows no-one will believe her. It doesn't try to be overly complex and, in its simplicity, strikes a careful balance between maintaining the interest of the reader without being overwhelming and having a fully executed story-arc within the allowable word count. Technically, this is a difficult thing for any writer to do and for a young writer, demonstrated considerable writing skill. The imagery is enchanting and the relationships with both Roxy and the Unicorn are warm and inviting. Spelling, punctuation, and structure were all excellent. Congratulations on producing an award-winning piece!

Judge Two Feedback:

This is a well-structured story with a beginning, middle and end. There is a great use of descriptive language to set the scene. I like the way the author references the book, *The Secret Garden*, which is set in a real garden, to show the contrast between the real world and this enchanted one. The author adds drama with the loss of Roxy the dog. The introduction of the unicorn provides another enchanted element and also moves the story along with the rescue of Roxy. The ending is clear, but leaves the reader wondering – will the door appear again? Will anyone believe her secret?

Second Place – The Secret Plane Ride

Judge One Feedback:

This was the only submission we received in this category that attempted to use an alternative format, and poetry specifically. This showed willingness to take a huge creative risk, one that was very well executed by the writer. The rhyme worked well and the imagery was lovely and drew the reader in. I would have liked to know more about the voice from the plane though and what they saw during their ride; why it was important it was kept secret? Were they an alien? Lovely choice of words and an excellent attempt at a different style of writing. Congratulations on producing an award-winning piece!

Judge Two Feedback:

The writer clearly has a flair for poetry. It's quite long, and yet the lines flow and rhyme well, without feeling forced. I like the use of language and the way the beginning and ending lines mirror and echo each other. I would have liked to have found out a bit more about the boy and his reactions to what he saw.

Third Place – Quinn's Secret

Judge One Feedback:

Nicely written piece, well-structured and uses some lovely imagery. I really liked the concept of a 'secret' pet and can imagine the difficulty of keeping that secret! Spelling, punctuation, and word use all very good, and I enjoyed reading about the relationship developed between Mark and Quinn and their obvious love of animals. Quinn musing about why 'blue cheese was blue' also made me smile. A lovely piece of writing. Congratulations on producing an award-winning piece!

Judge Two Feedback:

I liked the opening with Quinn's internal monologue as she is wandering home thinking about cheese. The descriptive writing about the sounds, sights and smells of the pet shop is very vivid and very well done. We get a good idea of what the shopkeeper is like from their short interaction. I like the dialogue between Quinn and her Mum at the end – and the twist where she lets the secret out so quickly. I found that funny!

Highly Commended – Maple

Judge One Feedback:

This piece was very well written and of a high technical standard. Spelling, punctuation and formatting was top-notch. There was a warmth about this piece and planning a surprise for a loved one that I really enjoyed. There was also a problem that needed resolution that created necessary tension in the story that was well resolved. A strong piece of work; well done!

Judge Two Feedback:

This is a well-structured story which really captures the fun, intrigue and joy of keeping an exciting secret. I liked the funny scene of lowering Maple from the window to go for a walk. I would have maybe liked a bit more description of Maple, and of Archie's reaction when he saw him, to include the reader more in the final reveal.

Highly Commended – The Dragon Summoner

Judge One Feedback:

This piece lovingly combines elements of realistic fiction with high fantasy to a high technical standard. Spelling, punctuation, and word choice was excellent. There was lots of dramatic tension that left the reader wanting to know more about this dragon world and why Tom's Mum seemed to know something about it. A strong piece of work; well done!

Judge Two Feedback:

This is an exciting story. I like the opening paragraph which takes really sets the scene very well, bringing the focus finally onto the necklace. We don't really find out what Mum's reaction was, as she was there the second time the portal opened. Did she know what to expect? I was left with a lot of questions!

Commended – Humans, Warriors and Wizards

Judge One Feedback:

This was an ambitious piece executed to a high technical standard. Spelling, punctuation and word choice was excellent. It may have benefitted from a slightly tighter dramatic structure as there was a great deal happening in such a short piece, but it is clear the author is highly imaginative and enjoys producing fantasy writing. A strong piece of work; well done!

Judge Two Feedback:

This was a really ambitious piece of writing and the writer should be commended for attempting so much in a single page! They are clearly a lover of high-fantasy and their affection for the genre shows. It would be interesting to see this story developed into a longer story. A strong piece of work; well done!

Commended – The Prehistoric Predicament

Judge One Feedback:

This was a really fun piece; a joy to read. A dragon egg would be a difficult secret to keep, indeed! I especially enjoyed the characterisation of the protagonist and his friends and the dramatic tension created around the open ending. A strong piece of work; well done!

Judge Two Feedback:

This is a fun story which I can see inspiring a movie about a gang of friends getting up to adventures! It goes along at a fast pace, and leaves us guessing at the end. I felt the first section wasn't as relevant to the story and that it would have been fun to explore the friends' characters a bit more.

Commended - Matt's Secret

Judge One Feedback:

The writer clearly enjoys videogames and brings the excitement they feel around gaming into a creative and well-crafted story in such a small amount of carefully chosen words. I was proud of Matt for facing and overcoming something that was always difficult for him before. A strong piece of work; well done!

Judge Two Feedback:

This is quite a simple story but the writer has given us a different perspective on gaming within a short few paragraphs. I would have liked the writer to have spent a bit more time describing what the world inside the game was like.

Entry of Merit - The Half Birds

Judge One Feedback:

I really enjoyed the way the writer developed the idea of the story; both the reunion with Brodie's long-lost twin and the concept of the half-birds. It would be fantastic to see this story developed further and to find out what happened to the hunters! A strong piece of work; well done!

Judge Two Feedback:

The idea for this story is imaginative and original. I liked the idea that he shapeshifted into a human and pretended he had just been climbing a tree! I would have liked a bit more about the brothers being reunited, and how they both felt.

Commended – Untitled Zombie Story

Judge One Feedback:

This was a really ambitious piece of writing and a fantastic development of an idea where a boy who is always late for school saves the world! I loved the ingredients in the potion and the ingenuity of how they used it to save humanity. A strong piece of work; well done!

Judge Two Feedback:

This has all the elements of a horror adventure and packs a lot into a short story! Lots of gruesome detail but a happy ending for all the characters.