

Judges' comments on the Neil Gunn competition stories

First Prize

Flying Crooked

The author does not waste a single word in this story. The writing is measured and paced, reflecting the restraint and care that lie between the two characters as they cope with the implications of illness and the possibilities of recovery and renewal. A beautiful story and a worthy winner.

Joint runner-up

Swept Away

The author approaches a well-known historical event, the Tay Bridge Disaster of 1879, from the perspective of somebody who knew Sir Thomas Bouch, the engineer who designed and built the bridge. The story successfully maintains a Victorian tone throughout, but some of the horror of the event, and the subsequent despair and guilt, break through the surface of the telling.

Joint runner-up

The Seal

An ambitious take on the 'selkie' legend, this story focuses on the occasion when two individuals swap skins, one becoming human and one returning as seal to the sea. There is an unresolved mystery in this process: the reader is not given the full context of what is going on, which only enhances the uncanniness of the whole episode.

Commended

Get Me a Stinking Goosefoot

This author is commended for their bold, experimental use of language and narrative. Although the judges felt it was not wholly successful, it was encouraging to read a story pushing the boundaries in terms of style and narrative voice.

Commended

The Way Home

This is a story of a particular type, with a twist that is revealed at the very end. Often such stories fail because the reader feels they have been the victim of a poor joke. But in this case, the 'trick' was so skilfully accomplished that the judges thought the story worthy of a commendation (although they also felt that it would have been more successful without the final 'explanatory' paragraph).