



HOUSE POETRY COMPETITION

King Edwards School / Summer Term 2024

FROM LUSAKA TO BIRMINGHAM

Earlier this year, Mukwashi Trust School in Zambia asked members of the KES English Department to judge a competition their school had held to mark World Poetry Day. Inspired by their example, we invited our students to submit their own poems on the theme of change. This time we sent our poems to Lusaka, where the teachers and upper school students of Mukwashi Trust School read our poetry and chose their favourites. Inside is a copy of each of our students' winning poems and a detailed explanation of how the judges came to their decisions. KES English Department would like to thank our Heads of House, our House Tutors and our students for their help in making the event such a success. Above all, we would like to say "zikomo" to the students and especially the teachers at Mukwashi Trust School for their careful judgments and their inspiring example.

Head Judge's Comments

Zikomo kwa mbili bonse aphumzitisu na bana baskulu ku King Edwards School. Tituma moni Kucholeka ku Mukwashi Trust School kuno ku Lusaka mu chalo cha Zambia.

(Thank you to all the teachers and students of King Edwards School. We send greetings from Mukwashi Trust School, Lusaka, Zambia).

It has been a great honour to read all the poems written by the King Edward's School students. The poets were all assiduous in elaborating the theme of 'Change'. It has not been an easy task, as we believe all the poems were written with great thought and insight.

The theme 'change' takes me back to a childhood memory when my family had to move to the UK for three years. We had left a hot, wet Africa with lavish green trees to arrive in a freezing cold country with trees that were simply bare sticks. I can still remember the stinging cold on my skin and the constant trembling of my lips. I had to learn to speak English and adapt to being the only black girl in most of my classes. I have never liked the cold since. The best that came out of this temporary change was the opportunity to be exposed to a different culture, different food, different language and different weather. It was a change which I had to embrace and adapt to, and which now I greatly appreciate having known.

It was wonderful to read how the KES students described change from so many different points of view — ranging from the weather and mind-sets to landscapes and emotional states. They presented the theme in all aspects of life as well as some cross-cutting world issues. Their poems presented clear evidence to us that the KES students know the world around them, and they have educated us at Mukwashi about some of their experiences which were new to us.

The judges, who had a tough time selecting the winners, were all Mukwashi's Grade 11 & 12 learners (unlike you, we have boys and girls) and their English Language teachers— Ms Mutinta Mwanamwambwa, Ms Luyando Sikamikami and myself.

Our choice as overall winner (and also the Year 7 winner) is '**These words**', by **Anand Toon**, a delightful poem which truly depicts the unique power that lies in words. 'Well done', Anand, I hope you are proud of your achievement— please keep writing and reciting poetry, and come and visit us in Zambia one day.

A close overall second, which we have designated as 'highly commended', is '**Suicidal thoughts**' by **Oscar Tait** — a deeply moving poem which should resonate with every man across Africa.

Words possess great power to build and to destroy. Here in southern Africa, we have learnt through history that words can lead to terrible events: in my life-time, in Rwanda, a nearby land-locked country, in South Africa and in our two neighbour countries, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo. We know how words, when not well-selected, can cause hurt, disappointment and even death. *Anand's* poem powerfully reminds us how small words can cause big changes.

Oscar Tait wrote an engrossing poem about those deepest inner thoughts which are unspoken in Africa, especially by men. He narrates the thoughts of a troubled mind which many never hear. Oscar's topic is avoided here, yet it causes so much sorrow and sadness to those who lose a loved one through suicide.

Examination period (November for us) is the most stressful time in our learners' lives. In Zambia, every year, there are always reports of learners committing suicide, especially if they failed their exams when their parents expected them to pass. We need more poetry like Oscar's to help address this problem.

Aryan-Sebastien Barry's Year 7 poem 'Change' was especially relevant to us at Mukwashi. Zambia, like much of the rest of the world, is currently experiencing some dramatic effects of climate change. Last year's terrible drought here has left many of our families in a desperate state. Most of us depend on maize as our staple

food, but, nationally, vast hectares of this crop have been lost due to the drought, resulting in many families not having food this year.

We are seeing long queues of people trying to obtain a cheap bag of poor-quality food as maize prices are now beyond what someone on a minimum wage can afford to sustain their families. *Aryan's* message needs to be disseminated amongst the young, as they are the ones who will be most affected by climate change as they grow older.

In contrast, *Vidur Doger's* Y7 poem, '*The resentment of change*', reminded me of Shakespeare's play '*As you like it*' with its seven ages of man. Changes in life are inevitable: no matter how we may fear or resent the changes which come with life's stages, we need to be brave enough to face them.

The Year Eight poems were all eloquently written. Choosing the best from thirty remarkable poems was hard. Here, the theme change was mostly symbolised in seasons. Having different seasons here in Africa to you in England, the poems brought our imaginations to life with their imagery.

Vrishank Kodi wins first prize in this age group with his excellent twist to the theme of change in an emotional sonnet reflecting how a broken heart inflicts unwanted change on one's life. Heartbreak is a universal experience which affects everyone, no matter their continent: our Grade 11 & 12 boys all voted for *Vrishank's* poem!

Shane Sundralingham's poem '*Change is here*' encapsulates the whole theme in one short poem. It simply defines change and how it can be embraced, both good and bad. The description of the seasons in *Haoyang Sun's* poem provides a full insight into the change seasons bring. His vivid metaphors were especially memorable and gripping for those of us unfamiliar with snow and leaf-fall.

The Year 9-12 poems are mature, varied and enthralling: they portray cross cutting issues from around the world. There is, however, a clear and worthy winner in this group: the poem '*Choices*' by *Bobby Brunning*, is an excellent narrative poem which describes a common and serious school situation in an entertaining and humorous manner. Bobby outlines the struggles most learners face when making career choices. Few of us expected to become what we are today, even if our teacher gave us good advice.

Ke Chen Yu's poem '*Waves by the sea*' is another gripping poem which highlights the human destruction of our planet. His poem is filled with intense emotion which made us all want to take immediate action on the factors causing climate change. Fortunately, as a school, we had stopped using charcoal to cook our 600 daily school dinners only three weeks ago!

Henry Templer-Coates describes the water-cycle in ways I could never have begun to imagine. I was very impressed by his poetic creativity and ingenuity. His poem explicates the different stages in the water cycle with aesthetic imagery. '*The life of water*' should be appreciated by everyone learning in school about the water-cycle.

Finally, *Tiyamikila* (we are grateful) to all the talented students of King Edwards school for sharing their experience through these amazing poems which have opened our eyes to the world beyond Zambia. Their poems have encouraged our Mukwashi learners to explore and expand in their own writing. I hope the KES students continue to produce more masterpieces.

With best wishes,

Mulemba Sakuwaha

Head Teacher
Mukwashi Trust School
Chilanga District, Zambia



Overall



First Prize

Anand Toon

RMF (Prince Lee)

'These Words'



Second Prize

Oscar Tait

SHF (Gifford)

'Suicidal Thoughts'



Judges

Ms Mutinta Mwanamwambwa

Ms Luyando Sikamikami

Ms Mulemba Sakuwaha

Mukwashi Upper Secondary

Learners

First Prize

These Words

by

Anand Toon

Judges' Comment: Poetry is the perfect medium to highlight the unique power of words, and Anand's short rondel reminds us that words can do good and they can do harm. Positive words boost confidence and self-esteem, and can help people pursue dreams; while harsh words erode self-worth and self-belief, and can lead to distress and self-harm.

This skilful and mature poem encourages us to choose our words with great care, as Anand demonstrates with huge aplomb in every line that he writes.

It was such a clever idea to construct a poem on this theme that Anand almost wins for his poetic idea. But good ideas do not make great poetry. Anand wins because he has executed his original idea with elegance and precision. We think this is a remarkable poem by a learner who is still only in Year 8 and the deserving overall winner (with apologies to all the excellent poets in Year 12).

Everything could change you,
These words that I write,
The ideas that I plant,
Even your reaction could make your life different,
A speck of dust moving,
Could create a movement for a revolution,
A slight gust of wind might make you drop out of school,
These words could win you the lottery,
But these words could murder a man,
These words could elect a dictator,
So be careful, with these words.

Second Prize

Suicidal Thoughts

by

Oscar Tait

Judges' Comment: This is a very relatable poem, especially in African homes. It is taboo here to talk about certain things which affect us mentally— especially for a boy child who is told not to cry out his emotions because it is believed that a man must not cry.

But keeping painful thoughts hidden to shun away from emotion can cause turmoil and harm, even thoughts of suicide. Oscar's poem depicts how a 'change' in mind can make a significant difference to an outcome which might have a disastrous ending and cause more pain to the unsuspecting family and community.

This mature and insightful poem describes the unspoken revealing, the true symbolisation which literature shares with the world, of thoughts on paper.

Suffer in silence,
Anxiety in the night,
Causes fear in the light,
Suffer in silence,

Suffer in silence,
Constant pain,
Activates the inner chimp in the brain,
Suffer in silence,

Suffer in silence,
Alone in the rain,
Causes your mental health to spiral
down the drain,
Suffer in silence,

Suffer in silence,
A solider enduring it all,
Will eventually begin to fall,
Suffer in silence,

Suffer in silence,
They are told to suck it up after all,
It's the usual protocol,
Suffer in silence,

Suffer in silence,
Takes it all in,
As they drop their chin,
And think whether death could win,
As they say,
Suicide makes all things grey,
Suffer in silence,

Suffer in silence,
A now faceless man,
Could've had a longer lifespan,
Suffer in silence,

Suffers in silence?
In fact he DID have a long life,
As he opened up and was convinced
not to use the knife,
Now doesn't suffer.



Shells



First Prize

Oscar Tait

SHF (Gifford)

'Suicidal Thoughts'



Second Prize

Aryan-Sebastien Barry

SHB (Evans)

'Change'



Third Prize

Vidur Doger

SHF (Evans)

'Resentment of Change'

Second Prize

Change

by

Aryan-Sebastien Barry

Judges' Comment: This well-crafted, fast-paced poem begins with the message, *'if we are united, our target will be met'*, then takes us on a quick tour of punchy vital actions with the urgent refrain: *'People unite to protect the earth! People unite to protect our worth!'*

Aryan has written an important poem for today, for all people, for everywhere: if we unite and change our ways, we can stop global warming; perhaps, like us at Mukwashi, by installing solar energy, planting hundreds of fruit trees and saying goodbye to charcoal.

Our planet is in danger
From many different threats
But if we are united
Our targets will be met

Climate change, disease, and war
A myriad of problems, more.

This is our final warning; do take heed
To save our planet, change we need

Fly fewer planes
Drive fewer cars
Stop dreaming about living on Mars!

Reuse, recycle, minimize waste
Think before purchasing; don't do it in haste.

Support our farmers, plant more trees,
Protect the endangered, from pandas to bees
Doing these things protects our home
And prevents one enormous desert biome

People unite to protect the earth!
People unite to protect our worth!

Stop the wars; Gaza, Myanmar, Ukraine
Make our world safe for all again!

Cultural arrogance is a destructive stance
Vive la difference; "give peace a chance"

Allow people to thrive with food and without
fear
Let the rules of kindness be crystal clear

People unite to protect the earth!
People unite to protect what's worth
Protecting.

Third Prize

The Resentment of Change

by

Vidur Doger

Judges' Comment: This highly original and enjoyable poem stood out from the others by describing the inevitability of change itself. Vidur's opening tercet hinted at a gloomy poem to follow, but his words were surprisingly jaunty, realistic and self-aware. Change is inevitable; something else is bound to happen; but Vidur shows us that change can be for 'better or worse'. He took a risk with this poem — and it worked.

I live, I die
I breathe, I die
I enjoy, I die

I am young, and old;
I am carefree, and paranoid;
I am playful, and studying.

I used to be so young
I used to be so unaware
I used to be so energetic.

Yet the only thing, The only thing,
The only constant thing is change.
It could go either way
For better or worse,
Yet I am willing to take the risk.

Are you?



Removes



First Prize
Anand Toon
RMF (Prince Lee)
'These Words'



Second Prize
Vrishank Kodi
RMC (Heath)
'Broken Change'



Joint Third Prize
Shane Sundralingham
RMG (Gifford)
'Change is Here'

William Steele
RMG (Levett)
'Seasons'

Second Prize

Broken Change

by

Vrishank Kodi

Judges' Comment: Reading this, we could feel Vrishank's pain in life and his hard work in shaping and polishing his excellent poem. Somehow, '*Broken change*' almost drips with tears and sweat without lapsing into parody or self-pity. Every boy at Mukwashi identified with this poem! The girls less so.

Vrishank focuses on the solemn genre of change he calls '*broken change*' and carries this through the poem. Simply, but oh so cleverly, his first and final tercets are the same whilst also describing the biggest change of the poem, '*she broke me*'.

His central stanza tells the age-old tale of heartbreak wrought by someone only referred to as 'she'. Vrishank describes the heartbreak with beautiful rhyme schemes and perfectly captures everything associated with heartbreak: the self-pity, the wishful thinking, the struggle to convince oneself the love has died, the blaming of other, and so on.

This poem is instantly relatable to anyone who has experienced such an event — which was all the judges!

She broke me,
She broke me,
She broke me.

How may I love anymore?
The change in my heart made me
cold.
The time just starts to fly,
I'm so tired of hearing her lie.

I get rejected all the time,
It just feels like a crime.
She made me feel lonely inside,
Now my love for her has died.

She brought colours to my life,
But it felt like,
She stabbed my heart with a knife.

I can't deal with this heartbreak,
My love for her wasn't fake.
I thought she was the one,
But I see my love for her is done.

If only she gave me a changing
chance,
I would most likely start to dance.
Now it's too late for that,
My love line has gone flat.

My friends say I changed a lot,
But a lot has just changed me.
Now I stay silent and quiet,
And it's all because.

She broke me,
She broke me,
She broke me.

Joint Third Prize

Change is Here
by
Shane Sundralingham

Judges' Comment: This is a neat and confident poem which enthralled the judges with its world of change.

In the beginning, Shane is sure and bold. He starts with strong sentences about change, reflecting on how he experiences change as something authoritarian, but – after making the decision to '*put up a fight*' – he finds that change can work to his advantage.

By the end, however, Shane is more hesitant and his language has changed from 'change is' to change can be'. With these subtle adjustments, Shane cleverly changes the mood of the poem. This is a clever poem.

Change is unpredictable,
It's not a hurried force,
Change is a river
Deciding its course.
Change is a new beginning,
Cleansing my mind,
Change is a fresh start but it's not always kind,
It's a blessing and a curse to bear,
A double edged sword bringing love and care.
Change pushes me down with all its might,
But I have no choice but to put up a fight,
I'd rather some things stay the same,
But I must play by the rules,
Life is a challenging game,
But change can be good,
A journey of tales yet to be told,
A change for the better starts to unfold.

Joint Third Prize

Seasons
by
William Steele

Judges' Comment: William does an excellent job of helping his readers experience the four seasons. His words took the judges to the North European 'Spring, Summer, Winter and Autumn' seasons which are so different to our southern African 'Rainy, Cool, Dusty and Hot' seasons, and they portray all four 'far north' (as we call it) seasons in a positive way.

Poems about the seasons are often heavy-handed and over-descriptive, but William has been delightfully restrained (one adjective — well done, William). He has shaped a thoughtful and reflective poem which uses the seasons as positive metaphors for our journey through life.

Whilst the wind blows through blades of grass,
And the sun rises high in the sky,
People watch from day to day,
As the seasons are passing by.

Some prefer the summer,
Some prefer the winter.
Some prefer it warmer,
Some prefer it cooler,
But all the seasons share one thing:
They make life more enjoyable.

So as summer transitions to autumn,
And the leaves flutter to the ground,
We realise the wonderful world we live in,
And all the joy that is around.

Without change, life is boring;
Change creates new possibilities,
Even though the world is changing,
It allows for more opportunities.



Upper Middles to Divisions



First Prize
Bobby Brunning
DIV MRF (Prince Lee)
'Choices'



Second Prize
Ke Chen Yu
4D (Vardy)
'Waves by the Sea'



Third Prize
Henry Templar-Coates
UMH (Gifford)
'Life of Water'

First Prize

Choices

by

Bobby Brunning

Judges' Comment: All the judges enjoyed this mature, well-written, affectionate and humorous poem— and the teachers made a quick note to review their career advice to their Grade 11s & Grade 12s!

Bobby is clearly a talented poet, and he has handled his choice of material exceptionally well. It is sometimes hard in our day-to-day lives to make these big choices. We may have good plans for our lives, but then reach a point where we start questioning our choices. In this amusing poem, Bobby puts the struggle of making choices (and giving teacherly advice) into perspective. If he keeps writing (and performing his poetry in public, as we do in Zambia), Bobby could become an exceptional poet.

i stare blankly at the career advisor
But what do you enjoy? Cmon, don't be shy!
i look down, up, beside her
Science? Maths? Nothing? Oh my!

i like sport, for sure, but no athlete am i
i play viola, not well, but i do try
science is alright, and im good at it
art is rubbish and anyway- im ----

Oh science, that's wonderful!
So which of the three?
well i don't know, none of them are awful
i really can't tell you, so don't ask me

And then: the comment we all dread to hear
But that gets said, year after year
"It's fine to not know what you want to do!
I didn't either, 'til I was twenty-two!"

She gazes eagerly
Expects a gasp of relief, me to collapse in the
chair
but I just stare back emptily
and slump in despair

because i still need to decide.
right now, to choose, this very year
uni or not, apprenticeship, ive tried
but whatever i choose i will regret, i fear

Right. Well, thank you for coming, cheers
Could you please think about something for
me?

Where do you see yourself in ten years?
Working? Married? Abroad? All three?

i consider these options as i walk out
and come to an epiphany so great i could
shout

Eureka! I've got it! I think I recall
That what I want to do is: nothing at all.

Second Prize

Waves by the Sea

by

Ke Chen Yu

Judges' Comment: This is a profound and bleak metaphor of life which reminds us to embrace the ups and downs, to flow with the currents and to find peace in the depths.

Zambia is a land-locked country, so none of us have seen the sea (the nearest coast is 1,000 miles away in Mozambique) or know what a wave looks like. Even so, we were drawn to this lyrical poem: Ke Chen's words of poverty, gross inequality and suffering describe a world we know very well.

Ke Chen writes movingly about the greed and selfish desire of power-driven humans, polluting and destroying the lands where they live. He uses words to paint a bleak picture of the beautiful Earth where we live, and suggests, pessimistically, that all we can do is watch and find peace in the depths.

I sit motionless
Gazing longingly
At the sea which longs
For eternal peace and calmness
To happen gradually
And slowly
(It longs)

It seeks a rest
From the relentless hellfire
That slays the Earth's best
In a fit of blind fury and ire
Stirred up by merciless maelstroms
Concocted from desire and greed
(It longs)

The sky is in torment too
Akin to its watery brethren
Stoic, emotionless darts
Choking the sky with gas and fume
Pierce men violently apart
The sky sighs, severely beaten
(It longs, too)

Only if our lovely leaders
Could see the prosperity
And the poverty
They have created for us
To admire

And to weep at.

There is no escape from nature
Primality is what we are in truth
Yet we act so sure
We are above all

Man filled with immaturity cannot, after
all,
Stand the test of time
(We long)

Gas, pain, suffering
Mass slaughter and gagging
All figments of our own doing
Our revered leaders
Driving their idyllic ideals
And careless calamity
(We long)

I still sit
Watching the gentle motion
Of the calm sea.
I wonder, after all
It is only a matter of time
Before the waves stir up
And engulf us all.
(We long, we long, we long)

Third Prize

Life of Water
by
Henry Templar-Coates

Judges' Comment: Henry's interesting poem is different to the other entries. The inter-connection of rivers, rain and ocean is a powerful metaphor for many aspects of life, but a difficult challenge for any young poet to handle.

We especially liked his brave attempt in the penultimate stanza: *in a trickling stream, the water promptly flows; as it's nearing the ocean, the river it grows; the water gets cold as it enters the sea; where it will flow, forever free.*

It's not perfect poetry, but we felt Henry deserved to be commended for his technical bravery and poetic sensitivity with such challenging material.

The water in the waves lap over each other,
Pushing hard, back, and forth, against one another,
The beaming sun radiates, and the steaming water begins to rise,
Up, up, up it'll go, shooting up to the clear skies,

The water reaches a most soaring height,
Just as the day slowly turns to night,
The steam starts to cool and congeal,
And in the sky above it begins to reveal,
A cloud,

Drifting along a far distant horizon it,
Grows white and majestic minute by minute,
Now a great grey mountain it has become,
Casting its shadow, blocking the sun,

Suddenly millions of tiny soldiers appear all around,
And then millions more start to hit the ground,
But now the flurry of droplets has ended,
Just as the cloud is gone and fully expended.

In a trickling stream the water promptly flows,
As it's nearing the ocean the river it grows,
The water gets cold as it enters the sea,
Where it will flow forever free,

Then the water in the waves lap over each other,
Pushing hard, back, and forth, against one another.



Honourable Mentions



Haoyang Sun
RMG (Cary Gilson)
'Change'



Hasan Alam
SHF (Levett)
'Transition'



Matthias Von Malaisé
SHA (Heath)
'Ringtone'

Change
by
Haoyang Sun

Spring, a lively bundle of joy,
spreading life and delight
A vibrant figure wandering through the vast field,
casting blooming flowers and melting the ice sheet of snow.

Summer, a ray of radiance,
dancing and twirling like a ballerina.
Warmth spreading the world,
Lush green leaves sprouting, robins soaring.

Autumn, a wise aging man,
wandering through his abode of trees.
Leaves declining, turning into a bright fiery blossom.
The air rapidly cooling, the squirrels rapidly hiding.

Winter, a tranquil serene girl,
ambling along the freezing river.
Skeletal trees are being coated with frosty flakes.
Silence piercing through the air, animals slumbering in their
homes.

Transition
by
Hasan Alam

Now this is it
A new chapter in life
A chapter of change I chose

Before I was amongst the smartest
Now I am average
Before I was the quickest
Now I am average

Before I was the big fish in a small pond
Now I am a small fish in a vast ocean
Before I never cherished being the best
Now I must deal with all the rest

Now I hang up my primary school's boots
Before I put on my secondary school blazer

Ringtone
by
Matthias Von Malaisé

I sat down one hour ago
With the thing I despise most,
Yet I can't live without it.
When I am engaged with it,
I cannot escape from it.
When I am away from it,
I want to smash it to pieces
And free myself from its clutches.

I lay down two hours ago
With this thing in my hand.
I can find out anything I want to know;
And lots of things I don't want to
know.
I can find out anything I dream of;
I can find out all my nightmares.

I was sucked into this vortex three
hours ago.
It demands my focus,
Yet it steals my attention.
It pretends to be significant
But important things,
Friends,
And family,
Are left neglected.

It wasn't always like this:

Four hours ago,
We all went to the park.
We swung on monkey bars,
We swooped down slides,
We swooshed on swings,
And felt free.

Five hours ago,
We were still chattering about
everything and nothing.
We agreed about pizza,
We disagreed about mushrooms,
We joked about bananas,
And felt together.

But now it is like this:

Six hours of my life wasted.
I check the comments on my
masterpiece.
Sup guys, what do you think of my new
post?
It sucks bro, you're not gonna get any
likes.
I have had enough. I hurl it.
The ear-splitting shatter rings through
the room.
I stare down at splinters and
fragments.

Our best poems for World Poetry Day



Mukwashí Trust School
21st March 2024

Following the success last year of five Upper Secondary learners in an international poetry competition, we invited more learners to write a poem for World Poetry Day.

Ms Mutinta Mwanamwambwa, Ms Nelia Nkhoma & Ms Luyando Sikamikami studied all the learners' submissions and picked the best in each grade to include in this booklet.

Our colleagues in the English department at King Edward's School in Birmingham, UK, then selected the three overall prize-winners.

Later this year, we will reciprocate when King Edward's School organises a poetry competition for its secondary learners and we will have the privilege of choosing, and commenting on, their best poems.

Ms Mulemba Sakuwaha
Headteacher

The Head Judge's comments:

Thank you to all the staff and students at Mukwashi Trust School for their hard work in writing and sharing these wonderful poems.

I begin with a story about a poet. When he was six, *Kayo Chingonyi's* world changed. His father died and he left Zambia. After the death of her husband, Kayo's mother decided they should move from the North-West of Zambia to the North-East of England.

Kayo Chingonyi is now a successful writer in England. His poetry has won numerous international awards and he is now a Professor of Creative Writing at Durham University. His writing explores the connections between his Zambian and English identity in such a careful and beautiful way that I used his words to help me decide the overall winner of this competition.

Here is why Kayo Chingonyi thinks poetry is so important. *'There is something about the compression of poems, and songs, that encourages you to memorise them and take them with you into the world. The best become wonderful travel companions for life.'*

Every poem the teachers at Mukwashi Trust School have sent to us at King Edward's School shows clear evidence that you are all taking poetry and song with you into the world. As you grow older, you will find out which of your favourite poems and songs make the best travelling companions and which poems will become lifelong friends. If you are lucky, some of these poems and songs will be your own.

Kayo Chingonyi's thinking about poetry is more truthful and accurate than any prize or award. A poem has great value if it gives somebody a rhyme, a rhythm, an image, a feeling or a thought to remember. A poem is great if somebody can take a memory from it that keeps them company as they go through life. The very best poems help us make sense of the world and help us when the world does not make sense.

The three winning poems share a memory which will keep us company for a long time. *Universe Phiri* gives us words to express the pain of captivity, the strength we need to survive, and the courage to speak against it. *Maliwa Kuntepa* gives us wisdom to see the mistakes of our ancestors and vision to look to a better future. And *Tina-Mwabi Zulu* gives us the perception and intelligence to find happiness and confidence in our search for a path through life. This is the very best that poetry can give us.

The moment that travels furthest with me is from Maliwa Kuntepa's poem 'Civil War'. When I was 18 years old, I worked at a school in East Africa for six months. At break-time, students threw stones into mango trees to bring down the fruits before they were ripe. I'd listen to them talk in Kiswahili as they sucked all the sour sweetness they could from the shiny green pockets that fell to earth.

Kuntepa's poem reminded me of those students and those days and how quickly the sweetness in our lives can be lost if we don't look after it. But this is not why I have selected 'Civil War'.

The imagery in Maliwa's poem was something that felt unique to your school. Where I live, poetry can often be personal in a way that makes the world seem small, so I found it inspiring to read a poem that imagined the world on a huge scale. What Maliwa's poem shows me, and what all your writing has taught me, is that World Literature needs you to keep writing.

World Literature will grow stronger from the knowledge you bring to it from your own experiences. Please keep writing about the languages, families, communities, cities and landscapes that make the students of Mukwashi special. You have so much to add to the world of poetry. Your stories will help to make the world we share, and the poetry we write, bigger than music and wider than pictures.

'Civil War' is a fantastic piece of writing and contains my favourite moment in all your poems, but the best poem I read, the poem that works best as a whole, and this year's overall winning poem, is 'Free Me' by *Universe Phiri*.

This is an unforgettable poem which handles extremely difficult subject matter with an uncompromising emotional clarity that will stay with me for a very long time. What this poem shares with us, above all, is strength.

Universe shares the psychological strength that her poem's young woman needs to endure the abuse that she suffers, the literary strength required to compress all that vulnerability, anger and sorrow into twenty-nine lines, and the moral strength we can all take from the end of the poem where the speaker confronts her captor and yearns, without shame, for a better life without him.

The different strengths we find in 'Free Me' will stay with us all as we travel through our lives. We can call up its fearless spirit on days when we must be brave, and we can celebrate its power and self-assurance on the days when it brings us together. Today is one of those days.

Enjoy the celebrations and please don't forget to thank the teachers who believe in you so fiercely and who have worked so hard to make this happen.

Congratulations, Universe, and congratulations to all the writers at Mukwashi Trust School. Thank you for trusting us with your poems.

Dr Angus Connell Brown

English Department, King Edward's School, Birmingham, UK



First Prize

Universe Phiri

Grade 9

'Free Me'

Second Prize

Maliwa Kuntepa

Grade 11

'Civil War'

Third Prize

Tina-Mwabi Zulu

Grade 12

'A hollow shell'

First Prize

free me

Universe Phiri, Grade 9

Judges' comments

This is an incredibly powerful and poignant poem about oppression and injustice. The way Universe uses end-stopped lines in the second half of stanza three reflects the barriers and restrictions she captures so movingly in the second half of the poem. As judges, we found this poem so powerful we could not help but feel outraged, distressed and heart-broken after reading it.

*I am a child and too young to be jailed in your hell.
I need books, I need love,
Yet you harass me day and night.
My childhood has come to an end.*

*Free me from your hell.
Free me from your jail.
Free me from all you have planned.
You have trapped me in hell.*

*There is no escape.
I need salvation from this awful situation,
Doors are closed.
The way is blocked.
My world is on hold.*

*I was a girl with many dreams.
I hoped to be a pilot.
I wished to be an astronaut.
I wanted to be a soldier...
Oh, how I longed to be a soldier.
But you, you who is older than my father,
Struck me like thunder
And crushed my dreams like a pile of trash.*

*You took me in and made me your wife.
A marriage not fully seen in public sight.
Mmmm, do you love me?
Oh yes, you want to use me.*

*You harass me by day and abuse me by night.
I beg you, by day, and I beg you by night,
Free me from the hell of your might,
But you have too much pride!*

Second Prize

civil war

Maliwa Kuntepa, Grade 11

Judges' comments

The echoes of carefully chosen elongated vowel sounds and breathy internal rhymes convey some of the yearning that drives this sweeping epic.

Maliwa's skill with poetic structure develops a panoramic vision which overwhelms the listener's senses and imagination as images pile on top of sounds. The final line sums up the universal hope of humanity.

*Everything lies in ruins, like the pits of Tartarus.
Living in the war of a century,
Driven like children by the foolishness of their ancestors,
Enslaved by the false truth of the past.*

*Heavy is the breath of death and fear,
Filling the lungs like mango wood smoke
Streets laden with the corpses of a thousand innocent souls,
Piled like haystacks in a summer's field.*

*Mother nature cries as her children wail,
engulfed in great flames of fury.
Rivers of blood flow endlessly, like the mighty Styx of Hades,
blinded by rage and anger, taking the gift of life
Like the warriors of Ares, ruthlessly killing our sisters and brothers.*

*What was once a civilised empire, lies in terminal despair.
One can only hope for liberation from this barbaric realm,
and dream of a paradise which seems impossible to attain.
The reign of darkness now seems boundless.*

*The breath of our life is now at its lowest.
Will we ever live in a world of real harmony,
Will we ever fulfil what our hearts desire?
We yearn, we ache, for a peaceful, prosperous new world.*

Third Prize

a hollow shell

Tina-Mwabi Zulu, Grade 12

Judges' comments

This is an elegant and lucid poem which helps us think about the uncertainty of the future. The voice that Tina-Mwabi explores in this poem grows more assured with each line. This means the poem tells a story of growing up.

Tina-Mwabi shows us how our all too human desire for clear and certain answers to impossible questions can transform into an attitude which shows us how to live with the complexities, contradictions and uncertainties of the real world. Her poem reminds us that life can be sorrowful and yet sweet, and that the people who we meet can be saints and yet sinners.

*I simply want to know
Where does my path lead?
Where must I go?
For how long must I bleed?*

*I'm exhausted from all the torture.
On and on I soldier.
Stone heart turned to dust.
Final breath at morning dusk.*

*Mis-fortuned fate
And fake smiles from all those sinner saints.
They want to listen on a path I don't know.
Oh! Sweet sorrow for tomorrow I'm no more.*

The best poems from Grade 7

my experience

Dorcas Chokwiro

*I'm staying up late to refresh my brain,
Yet all this ever gives me is pure pain.
I wake in the morning to prepare for the day ahead,
And all that surrounds me are the books on my bed.*

*I need to survive today, without my sky turning grey,
But I feel like a mess, from pressure, anxiety and stress.
I'm expected to know a plan for my future,
I'm only a teen, not some sort of machine,
Yet I'm determined to make it.*

*I'm told, 'exams don't define you', but I know that they do.
Sitting in the exam hall, my eyes fill with tears,
Failing is always my biggest fear,
Yet I will resist and face them.*

*School is the great equaliser, even though it's full of peer pressure.
Under the friendship disguise, dark shadows lie.
Which is why my best friends are now books,
They're friends who'll never give weird looks.*

*My books are the golden door
That lead to places I've not been before.
They tell me tales of fairies from lands filled with merry
Though some books are boring, like history, such a mystery.*

*Books, books, books are my source of enlightenment
Like education, like school, they're full of excitement.*

I shall shine

Kunachi Moleshi

*I shall shine above the sky,
Those who seek to destroy me will be sorry,
Those who appreciate me will be driven,
Those who have ears for me will listen,
When I shine above the sky.*

*I shall shine above my emotions,
above my deep sorrows,
above my dark shadows
above the world's commotions
When I shine above the sky*

*You want to see me shaken,
My shattered heart broken
With tears like tall fountains
But I will be above the mountains
When I shine above the sky.*

*You give me strength
You give me power
You give me hope, despite your hurtful thoughts
My glory will upset you,
When I shine above the sky.*

*I am bold, strong, courageous
I know my aim, my strength and my weakness
You will not stay on your feet
You will know nothing but defeat,
When I shine above the sky.*

alone

Selene Otter

*I look into the sky,
I see the sun shining brightly.
I seem so quiet and happy,
Yet I am all alone.
I may talk to people,
But I am all alone.*

*Late at night,
My feelings drift towards you.
When I am all alone,
In the darkness with no one to smile at,
I see only my shadow,
And sit alone in the corner.*

*Then, a new friend comes to me.
And all my loneliness flees away.*

banned

Kunachi Moleshi

*Banned for life, not a place to go.
All alone, just one lonely soul.
Nothing to do, my hope is gone.
Banned for life, I must stay 'home'.*

*Banned for life, nothing to do.
Banned for life, nowhere to go.
My only place, stolen away.
The one who banned me, shouts hooray.*

*I guess someone gets lucky, every now and then.
Better make this right before I'm banned again.
I'd Better be careful,
Or I'll be banned more often.*

The best poems from Grade 8

the beauty of nature

Joy Dowati

*Oh! nature, that sweet and beautiful gift to us all.
The blooming flowers of spring,
The warm atmosphere around.
They make my happiness.*

*Birds sing in perfect harmony,
Strong winds shake leaves as they pass,
A rushing river ripples over rocks,
They soothe my mind and calm my soul.*

*Humanity and wildlife, they both love nature.
Oh, nature, nature, it is the most beautiful.*

awake

Phillip Shawa

*Awake from sleep,
Oh! brothers of mine.
With a promise to keep,
and a light to shine.*

*Faraway places,
Together, we travel,
Meeting new faces,
Mysteries to unravel.*

*Awake from slumber,
Be glad, not sorry
You are a wonder,
Be free from worry.*

Awake!

education

Esther Mutale

*Education is a world of wonder,
The place where dreams can come alive,
Where children learn and grow,
Where imaginations thrive.*

*Education, the light of life, the key to life, the gift of better life.
Education, what a great thing!
The best, the path to success,
the help to write like a book.*

*Education is an important tool which imparts knowledge to improve lives
and help with the achievement of all things.
Education, a process which plays a significant role in moulding the ethics
and culture of society.
Education, it begins at birth and ends at death.
Education, it improves knowledge and skills, and develops personality and
attitude.*

*Education, for some, a privilege; for others, a right.
Education, the difference between darkness and a bright future.*

Education, thank you.

The best poems from Grade 9

african freedom

Faith Chingagu

*We are told not to speak our mother-tongue in class.
We are told not to use any African language at school.
We forget our language, we know not our tribe,
And our grand-parents watch and cry:*

*'They have confused and spoilt our grand-children.
This is not the freedom for which we fought.
Do not hinder our grand-children from using their mother-tongue.
How will they learn to love themselves if you keep telling them, "take off
those beads and tie your hair – it is not smart".*

*How will our grand-children grow if you admire white people?
Tell our grand-children, "Black is beautiful,
Be proud of who you are,
Show off your talents,
Love yourself,
And remember we are the black people".'*

fearless

Keyshia Ponga

*In a school full of students,
I may not be the smartest.
In a world full of voices,
I may not be the loudest.
But so long as I keep going,
There is nothing I cannot do.*

*All these things, like meeting someone,
Help me start over,
Encourage me to improve,
Give me something to prove.*

*I may be pressured, mocked, discouraged,
But, while I have courage,
I will stand tall,
I will stand strong,
I will stand fearless.*

hope despite bad things

Mirriam Musonda

We can't delay.

We can't even wait.

Let us stay clean or things will worsen.

Wash your hands; don't forget, hygiene is the way.

Things are bad, we daren't describe them.

We can prevent, but there is no cure.

Much death has been witnessed.

We must stand and stay steady in the dark.

With love, we will prosper;

With care, we will aid;

With faith, we will conquer;

With hope, we will endure.

With unity, we will survive.

The best poems from Grade 11

about early marriage

Ivy Shamabanga

*Her voice is silenced. Her dreams lie shattered.
Her future is stolen. Her spirit down-trodden.
They see her as a good, to be sold without caring.
But she is a person, a cousin and a sister.*

*Her life is not for sale.
She is too young to be married.
They want to create an illusion of wife.
But she is her own person, much more than that.*

*Tears of grief and pain. Tears of anger in vain.
Her sobs can be heard at a distance as she drowns in her tears,
Deprived of her rights, her education and freedom.
Let her lead her life. Let her complete her education.*

*They want to keep her locked away,
A prisoner in another's home.
But she is much more than that,
She's a warrior and a force.*

*They want to steal her worth,
But she is more than that.
She has a voice which should be heard,
She's not a price, she's a blessing in Christ.*

*Save her from this fate.
Save her from the shame.
Save her mental and her physical state.
Save our sister and our cousin.*

education

Chembo Chikoti

*Education, education, education.
It's the light for our lives.*

*Education, education, salvation.
Nobody can do anything without education.*

*Education, education, no discrimination.
It's the most powerful weapon for our nation.*

*No education, no education, no illumination.
It's like living in a land without sunlight.*

*Educated, educated, get educated, while we still have a chance.
Let's be the light and the salvation for our family and nation,*

tears

Jessica Mutukwa

*Tears drop from her eyes as she cries.
The sound is heard across Africa.
She is to be married OFF.*

*Never again can she plan her own future.
Her dreams lie shattered in a pile of tiny broken pieces.
Her confidence is laid to rest in a tub of SHAME.*

my sickness

Hellen Kunda

*I have been suffering from a sickness called pain.
It's like living in a house wrecked by rain.
I'm tired of these sicknesses here on earth,
I've been living with them since my birth.*

*I wish my life had a teacher,
But people ignore me like the street preacher.
My heart is always beating far too fast,
Slowly breaking into small pieces of glass.*

*I want to live happy with real joy,
But people treat me like a useless small toy.
God, will I ever see heaven's morning glory.
I'm sick of telling everyone my story.*

The best poems from Grade 12

the night

Hajira Hassan

*Now that it's gone, I miss the night.
Now that the only thing left is light,
And something else neither night nor day.
Maybe everyone cheers, 'Hooray',
But I miss the night because it's like me,
For when it's dark, is when I best see.
Too loud, too selfish and ready to fight,
And the one that is quiet never gets heard,
And the ones that are awkward dismissed as mere nerds.
I once thought quiet the absence of sound,
but learned it's the space where small sounds can be heard.
I once thought dark was the absence of light,
But it's the place where starlight shines bright.
The quiet, the dark, the dreams once embraced me
They let me feel safe in a world that erased me.
Now that it's gone, I miss the night;
Now that the only thing left is light.*

the school promise

Lydia Mulundika

*The capacity to learn is a gift.
Each day I will do my best and won't do less.
Let no-one steal your dreams.
Let no-one tear your strong burnings of ambition.*

*The ability to learn is a skill.
My work will always please me and I won't accept a mess.
Let no-one tell you what to do.
Let no-one hold you back.*

*The willingness to learn is a choice.
I won't forget my promise until my work is done.
Set your sight and keep it fixed.
Follow your heart and follow your soul,
For only then will you be truly whole.*

*Education is the only thing
that no-one can take from you.
I will not forget my promise to do my best,
Until my work is done.*

in the end

Hajira Hassan

*There is life in the most deserted places.
There is love in hate.
There is light in the darkest alley,
Friend to all but to all a friend is none.
Surrounded by so many people and yet I feel alone.
People deceive and lie at all times,
And I hear your words like a morning chime.
Try to tell the truth, but I end up ending lives.
Try to mend bonds, but I end up breaking ties.
Try to save the world, but I end up bringing ruin.
Fake fame we desire, tell me what does this mean?
I had to leave my life behind and begin to compromise.*

a message for parents

Thank you for buying this booklet and reading our
learners' poetry.

I hope you have found their poems as stimulating,
challenging and enjoyable as I have.

Please encourage your children to use our school
library and read at home as much as possible.

Good books improve us all.

Mulemba Sakumaha

Mukwashi Trust School
<https://mukwashi-school.org>