

CHAMPIONSHIP POEM AGE 15-18

The Year of the Foxes by David Malouf

When I was ten my mother, having sold
her old fox-fur (a ginger red bone-jawed
Magda Lupescu
of a fox that on her arm played
dead, cunningly dangled
a lean and tufted paw)

decided there was money to be made
from foxes, and brought via
the columns of the Courier-Mail a whole
pack of them; they hung from penny hooks
in our paneled sitting-room, trailed from the backs
of chairs; and Brisbane ladies, rather
the worse for war, drove up in taxis wearing
a G.I. on their arm
and rang at our front door.

I slept across the hall, at night hearing
their thin cold cry. I dreamed the dangerous spark
of their eyes, brushes aflame
in our fur-hung, nomadic
tent in the suburbs, the dark fox-stink of them
cornered in their holes
and turning.

Among my mother's show pieces —
Noritake teacups, tall hock glasses
with stems like barley-sugar,
goldleaf demitasses —
the foxes, row upon row, thin-nosed, prick-eared,
dead.

The cry of hounds
was lost behind mirror glass,
where ladies with silken snoods and fingernails
of Chinese laquer red
fastened a limp paw;
went down in their high heels
to the warm soft bitumen, wearing at throat
and elbow the rare spoils
of '44; old foxes, rusty red like dried-up wounds,
and a G.I. escort.

POEM Age 15

Nocturne in the Corner Phonebox by Andrew Taylor

Someone is playing a trombone
In the telephone box outside my room.
It's 1 a.m.
And he's removed the globe.
He's playing a melancholy cadenza
Probably over the S.T.D.
To his girl in Sydney.

I can imagine...
She's curled to the telephone
Listening to that impossible music
A smile curving her face.
I wonder if he has enough change
For those extensions.
Could he reverse the charge?

Somebody called Hugh Adamson
Blares out a nocturne in a phonebox.
His father's old and dying,
His mother's dead, his girl's away;
He's very sad, his nocturne's very sad,
His trombone blares and flares and says
'He's very sad, yair yair, he's very sad.'

Maybe he's only playing to a friend
In East St Kilda.
Maybe he hasn't any change.
Someone is playing a trombone -impossible-
In the phonebox with the door shut.
I've no idea who he is. I'm waiting
For my phone to ring. I like this music.

Caged Bird by Maya Angelou

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing
trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright
lawn
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of
dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

POEM AGE 14

Rabbiting by RF Brissenden

Nobody lives in the valley any more:
The fox cries and the granite boulder cracks
Unheard in the frosty night; and the long light
of yellow afternoons washes unseen
across grey stone and ring-barked tree to spill
down red eroded gullies. Sometimes a boy
in autumn breaks the quiet with a shot,
And then forgets his rabbit as he stands
listening to the distant calls of birds
drift back into that pool of windless air.
Belts of dead thistles, higher than his face,
Stand razor-spiked between him and the stone
chimney and the crumbled roofless walls
of clay that glow clear orange in the flat
late sun. If now he turns and pushes through
the thistles he will find beyond the house
a vagrant orchard. On the broken trees
or rotting in the grass there may be fruit –
Apples, bitter quinces, woody pears,
Sweet nectarines pecked to pieces by the
birds,
And pale soft loquats. On one tree he knows
small plums in dusky blue tight bunches hang
along the branches, silver now against
the fading sky. Under his fingers they will feel
heavy, alive and hard; the skin become
black-purple beneath its bloom. And as he
bites
into the tart clean flesh he wonders why
sour fruit should taste so good; and who they
were
who built the house and planted all the trees.

Bird in the Classroom by Colin Thiele

The students drowsed and drowned
in the Teacher's ponderous monotone -
limp bodies loping in the wordy heat,
melted and run together, desk and flesh as
one.
swooning and swimming in a sea of drone.
Each one asleep, swayed and vaguely drifted
with lidded eyes and lolling weighted heads,
were caught on heavy waves and dimly lifted,
sunk slowly, ears ringing in the syrup of his
sound,
or borne from the room on a heaving
wilderness of beds.
And then on a sudden, a bird's cool voice
punched out song. Crisp and spare
on the startled air,
beak-beamed
or idly tossed,
each note gleamed
like a bead of frost.
A bird's cool voice from a neighbour's tree
with five clear calls - mere grains of sound
rare and neat
repeated twice
but they sprang from the heat
like drops of ice.
Ears cocked, before the comment ran
fading and chuckling where a wattle stirred,
the students wondered how they could have
heard
such dreary monotone from a man, and
such wisdom from a bird.

POEM AGE 13

The Bull by Judith Wright

In the olive darkness of the sally-trees
silently moved the air from night to day.
The summer-grass was thick with honey daisies
where he, a curled god, a red Jupiter,
heavy with power among his women lay.

But summer's bubble-sound of sweet creek-
water
dwindles and is silent, the seeding grasses
grow harsh, and wind and frost in the black
sallies
roughen the sleek-haired slopes. Seek him out,
then,
the angry god betrayed, whose godhead
passes,

and down the hillsides drive him from his mob.
What enemy steals his strength - what rival
steals
his mastered cows? His thunders powerless,
the red storm of his body shrunk with fear,
runs the great bull, the dogs upon his heels.

Matilda Who told Lies, and was Burned to Death by Hilaire Belloc

Matilda told such Dreadful Lies,
It made one Gasp and Stretch one's Eyes;
Her Aunt, who, from her Earliest Youth,
Had kept a Strict Regard for Truth,
Attempted to Believe Matilda:
The effort very nearly killed her,
And would have done so, had not She
Discovered this Infirmity.
For once, towards the Close of Day,
Matilda, growing tired of play,
And finding she was left alone,
Went tiptoe to the Telephone
And summoned the Immediate Aid
Of London's Noble Fire-Brigade.
Within an hour the Gallant Band
Were pouring in on every hand,
From Putney, Hackney Downs, and Bow.
With Courage high and Hearts a-glow,
They galloped, roaring through the Town,
'Matilda's House is Burning Down!'
Inspired by British Cheers and Loud
Proceeding from the Frenzied Crowd,
They ran their ladders through a score
Of windows on the Ball Room Floor;
And took Peculiar Pains to Souse
The Pictures up and down the House,
Until Matilda's Aunt succeeded
In showing them they were not needed;
And even then she had to pay
To get the Men to go away,
It happened that a few Weeks later
Her Aunt was off to the Theatre
To see that Interesting Play
The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.
She had refused to take her Niece
To hear this Entertaining Piece:
A Deprivation Just and Wise
To Punish her for Telling Lies.
That Night a Fire did break out--
You should have heard Matilda Shout!
You should have heard her Scream and Bawl,
And throw the window up and call
To People passing in the Street--
(The rapidly increasing Heat
Encouraging her to obtain
Their confidence) -- but all in vain!
For every time she shouted 'Fire!'
They only answered 'Little Liar!'
And therefore when her Aunt returned,
Matilda, and the House, were Burned.

POEM AGE 12

A Bird Came Down the Walk by Emily Dickinson

A Bird came down the Walk—
He did not know I saw—
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass—
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass—

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around—
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought—
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home—

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam—
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, plashless as they swim.

The Armpit of Doom by Kenn Nesbitt

Today I walked into my big brother's room,
and that's when I saw it: The Armpit of Doom.
I wasn't expecting The Armpit at all.
I shrieked and fell backward and grabbed for
the wall.
The Armpit was smelly. The Armpit was hairy.
The Armpit was truly disgusting and scary.
I wanted to vomit. I wanted to cry.
I wanted to flee from its all-seeing eye.
My skin started crawling with goose bumps and
chills.
My brain began screaming to head for the hills.
I tried to escape but I knew I could not.
In horror, I found I was glued to the spot.
"Will somebody help me!?" I started to shout,
till fumes overcame me and made me pass
out.
And that's why I'm here in this hospital room;
it's all on account of The Armpit of Doom.
I'm still feeling shaken. I'm queasy and pale,
but lucky I lived and can tell you my tale.
So take my advice... If you ever go near
your big brother's room, bring a whole lot of
gear:
A gas mask and goggles, a helmet and shield,
or maybe a space suit that's perfectly sealed.
And then, only then, when you're fully
prepared,
step in very slowly and hope you'll be spared.
But, if you're afraid of the Armpit of Doom,
stay far, far away from your big brother's room.

POEM AGE 11

The Bunyips by Doug MacLeod

At Murray Bridge the bunyips wait
For visitors from interstate
Then up they leap, a sight so strange
And always out of camera range.

The tourists in their mad despair
Start seeing bunyips everywhere
And all the locals join the fun
Saying, "Bunyips? Pull the other one!"

"What rubbish! Bunyips don't exist!
You must be going round the twist!"
And sure enough, the tourists flee
For fear they've lost their sanity.

While Murray Bridge is all aglow
With cries of "Thought they'd never go!"
And all along the Murray sands
Are men and bunyips shaking hands.

One That Got Away by Julie Holder

Write a poem
About a lion they said,
So from memories
Of lions in my head
I wrote about
Tawny eyes and slashing claws,
Lashing tail and sabred jaws –
Didn't like what I had written
And began to cross it out –
Suddenly with a roar of rage
It sprang from the cage of lines
On the page
And rushed away into the blue,
A wounded lion poem
Half crossed through!
It's one that got away
Haven't seen it to this day
But I carefully look,
In case it's crouching, growling,
Licking its wounds and waiting,
Under cover in the leaves
Inside some other book.

And here I sit
After all this time,
Still not having written
A poem about a lion.

POEM AGE 10

A Small Dragon by Brian Patten

I've found a small dragon in the woodshed.
Think it must have come from deep inside a forest
Because it's damp and green and leaves
Are still reflecting in its eyes.

I fed it on many things, tried grass,
The roots of stars, hazel-nut and dandelion,
But it stared up at me as if to say, I need
Foods you can't provide.

It made a nest among the coal,
Not unlike a bird's but larger,
It is out of place here
And is mosttimes silent.

If you believed in it I would come
Hurrying to your house to let you share this wonder,
But I want instead to see
If you yourself will pass this way.

OR

Applause by Erin Hanson

Have you ever heard the planet
Hold its breath before a storm?
Like an audience in wait
Before the curtains are withdrawn.
It's the gentle buzz of wild things,
Straining leaves toward the sky,
The steady strum of their wings
Taking their owners somewhere dry.
Then for a second it's nothing
But the beat of nature's heart,
Until as though its lungs have burst
The grey sky rips itself apart.
And just like that the earth's alive
As it collectively exhales,
The wind whips through the trees
Whilst they all bend beneath its wails.
Then as the first drop falls
There is a gasp, and then a pause,
Before it seems the whole world breaks
Into a deafening applause.

The People Upstairs by Ogden Nash

The people upstairs all practise ballet
Their living room is a bowling alley
Their bedroom is full of conducted tours.
Their radio is louder than yours,
They celebrate weekends all the week.
When they take a shower, your ceilings leak.
They try to get their parties to mix
By supplying their guests with Pogo sticks,
And when their fun at last abates,
They go to the bathroom on roller skates.
I might love the people upstairs more
If only they lived on another floor.

OR

Why is it? By Max Fatchen

Why is it,
That,
In our bathroom,
It's not the dirtiest
Or the strongest
Who stays longest?
BUT
It always seems to be
The one who gets there
Just ahead
Of me.

Why is it
That people fret
When they're wet,
With loud cries
And soap in their eyes
And agonized howls,
Because they forget
Their towels?

Why is it that –
When I'm in the bath,
Steaming and dreaming,
My toes just showing
And the hot water flowing,
That other people
Yell and say,
"Are you in there to stay
Or just on a visit?"

Why is it?

POEM AGE 8

About the Teeth of Sharks by John Ciardi

The thing about a shark is—teeth,
One row above, one row beneath.

Now take a close look. Do you find
It has another row behind?

Still closer—here, I'll hold your hat:
Has it a third row behind that?

Now look in and...Look out! Oh my,
I'll never know now! Well, goodbye.

OR

Storm by Eleana Turner Hurd

The waves are racing
Towards the shore.
Booming, crashing... more, more, more.
The sand is crunching beneath my feet,
Boom, crash, crunch.
Sandcastles toppling,
Umbrellas whisking by.
Storm clouds brewing,
Lands meets sky.
Booming waves,
Biting wind,
Full grey clouds,
Let the storm begin.