

Winning Entry in the 'Primary School' Category.

'The Triumph of the Whale'

by

Michaela Agyei (St Edmund's Primary School).

Nobody knows, where he goes
Nor what he does in the deep
Nor why he sings,
Like a bird without wings,
Nor where he sleeps and eats.

Their size is tremendous
Their length is fantastic,
Their weight is stupendous.
Yet they think they can fly!
They leap from the water into blue sky
As if they are birds and their flippers are wings,
As if they are bouncing on some hidden springs.

Winning entry in the 'Secondary School' Category.

'A Birthday Thought'

by

Rwan Asde (Edmonton County Secondary School).

Disconsolate candles weep onto the cake
as their flames flicker in and out of consciousness
barely grasping onto the claps of euphoria around them.

Much like him,
who sits torpid in his torn rocking chair
alongside the layers of forsaken shadows
all seeking refuge in this colourless corner.

Hibernating much like a bear,
he sits impassive and restrained by the depression
that tugs on his elderly heart.
His shrivelled hands simply unwilling to clap in congratulations.

Why must I celebrate the day of my birth?
When I am imprisoned by humanity's doom?
Chains who confine me to this very room
pierce into my stretched skin until there's nothing but bone.

Tears scurry as balloons glide around the stage
hands entwined with the children free of plague
and the abominable, unspoken terrors of old age.
This daunting disease that has left me with nothing but bone.

Why must I celebrate the day of my birth?
When everyone I once loved has died?
My mother.
My siblings.
My wife.

The lucky few who celebrated the day of death...

Joint Winning entry in the 'Open' Category.
'Mary Lamb: A Birthday Thought'
by
Julian Bishop.

I thread and release

A bent finger and a thumb can only
hold so much pain between them -
the past is a single heart-sewn line,
it cannot be unpicked with a nick of a pin.

It holds together on flimsy stitches,
frays on your birthday, unravels
on every anniversary, it runs
a jagged cord through everyday life.

I thread and release

My mother taught me that a tear
should never be made along a seam;
it must appear as a purposeful scar
in the fabric, not an accidental

unthreading. But sometimes a tangled end
becomes distant from the mother strand -
only a kiss can coax the unwilling
to pass through the eye of a needle.

I thread and release

Hands are like scissors - joined together
they splice through tissue, they subject red
plush to a blade; maybe we too stitch
the earth when we fade, going under

and coming back up to entwine the living.
What the dead would give to grip a sliver
of steel and straighten the ragged line,
to unpick the destruction sewn by others.

(Note: Charles Lamb's sister Mary killed her mother with a knife during an altercation in 1796 when she was 32. She was committed to an asylum and became a renowned seamstress.)

Joint Winning entry in the 'Open' Category.

'A Birthday Thought'

by

Jennifer Wiltshire.

Another birthday looms, grim harbinger.
It is time to look the truth straight in the eye;
No more evasions or sidelong glances:
It is far too late to equivocate, now.
Like quicksilver, slipping and slithering away,
My youth has eluded all attempts at re-capture.

Old age has ambushed me, the sinister stalker
Lurking just outside my peripheral vision.
The trick of advancing, unscathed, through life's minefields
Cannot be learned or taught, has nothing to do
With cowardice or courage; it's just luck.
This year sees me notch up the allotted span.

If only life could be like *Groundhog Day*,
Endlessly repeating itself, until
The longed-for happy ending is achieved.
Instead, we blunder on, under-rehearsed,
Forgetting our lines, extemporising,
Making all the wrong moves: trying not to corpse.

Be careful what you wish for; Tithonus found
Longevity a cruel disappointment:
Cursed with the blessing of eternal life,
Trapped in the limbo of perpetual senescence.
Always better to slip away, early,
Dignity intact, than outstay your welcome.
The milestones, marking our progress, might suggest
The route had been well-plotted in advance,
Not undertaken without map or compass,
Improvised, lacking a destination.
Unless we find out where we're travelling to,
How can we tell if we are nearly there?

We'll probably know when we have had enough:
No longer able to keep up the pace;
Time to call it a day, while we await
The coming of the Celestial Omnibus?
But I have breath enough to soldier on:
There *is* something to celebrate, after all.