



**ORAN PARK  
ANGLICAN COLLEGE**

OF GREATER WORTH THAN GOLD

# 2024 **MORE HOPE AS WE GROW**

ARRANGED BY THE  
OPAC CREATIVE  
WRITING GROUP

**POEMS,  
STORIES,  
PICTURES**





**Western Sydney International – November 2024**



**OPAC today – part of urban explosion to the south.**



**March 2024 – foundations of new buildings laid.**



**November 2024 – beautiful new footprints completed.**

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The massive growth of the South West, symbolised in the almost completed new Sydney International Nancy Bird Walton Airport just to the north of us, has been replicated at OPAC, which has seen two new buildings take shape this year – a sport complex and music centre. Student creativity has also grown markedly to match. Its source is from our Lord who teaches us that out of little things, big things can grow - if we have faith and build on a solid foundation of Christian Hope.

We were encouraged to receive very positive recognition in Southern Cross magazine this year for our first issue - *Of Hope as we Grow*, distributed at the end of 2023. Students remarked that they were keen to experience more poetry, short stories and interesting photography in an expanded issue this year. Well, here it is!

Many have contributed using a wide variety of skills. Inspiration, hard work and persistence are rewarded here in what we hope you will agree is another fascinating insight into the imaginative minds that enrich our community.

Apart from the aerial images, most of the photographs included here were taken at College by students. Their eye for intriguing detail is most impressive. The poetry and prose works from different year groups cover a wide range of topics close to our hearts, with also some unusual multi-cultural touches.

It was very helpful to have the encouragement of Mr J Williams this year who assisted with some editorial functions.

We thank God again for helping us and pray that you have a blessed Christmas getting to experience more of the love of Jesus that makes this season so special.

We hope that you enjoy *More Hope as we Grow*.

Mr J Ward. December 2024.





## MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

It is with great joy and pride that we present to you the second volume of our creative anthology, *More Hope as We Grow*. This edition builds upon the heartfelt stories, evocative poems, and compelling artwork of our previous volume, while also introducing a new dimension—student photography. Together, these creative expressions weave a rich tapestry of imagination and resilience, underscoring the beauty and strength found in hope as we continue to grow.

This collection reflects the evolving talents of our students, capturing not only their words and ideas but also their ability to see the world through a lens that highlights the extraordinary in the ordinary. The addition of photography allows us to step into their perspectives and see how hope manifests in the details of daily life—the light that filters through the trees, a smile shared among friends, or the quiet beauty of a fleeting moment.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the students who have courageously shared their creative work, offering us a glimpse into their unique experiences and dreams. I also wish to thank our dedicated teachers, particularly Mr Ward and Mr Williams for nurturing these young talents and providing a platform for their voices to be heard and celebrated.

*More Hope as We Grow* is a testament to the power of creativity to inspire and unite. As you explore this collection, may you be reminded of the profound impact of hope—how it shapes our perspective, fuels our determination, and inspires us to grow. For our College community, hope is deeply intertwined with the Christian hope we hold in Christ—a hope that is steadfast, eternal, and unshakable. It is this hope that aligns with our College motto, "Of greater worth than gold", reminding us that faith, perseverance, and love are treasures far more valuable than anything material. May these creative works inspire you to reflect on the enduring hope that sustains us and points us toward a future full of promise and purpose.

Mrs N Wilkins, Principal.

## THANKS TO THE MANY STUDENTS AND STAFF WHO HAVE HELPED WITH THIS BOOKLET.

A big thankyou to all the students in the 2024 Creative Writing Service Group and Creative Co-Curricular club, who have worked hard composing, taking photographs, proof reading and editing. Well done: **Year 7** – Olivia, Gillian, Lwandie, Aleksis, Micah, Lily; **Year 8** - Austin, Sienna, Lydia, Josh; **Year 9** – Archer, Eroni, Cassie, Hadi, Zainab; **Year 10** – Michelle, Indie; **Year 11** – Emmanuel, John, Sanja, Isabella, Benham, Ethan.

Many of the imaginative stories in this booklet were initially completed as part of English assessment. Some were done under test conditions after careful preparation. Thanks to the English staff who marked them, gave detailed feedback and recommended them for consideration for this booklet.

Mr J Williams and Mr J Ward have assisted students with proof reading, editing and page layout.

Thanks to **Curtis Aviation** at Camden Airport for the use of their Piper Warrior aircraft for Mr J Ward, who is a pilot, to use in aerial photography. This was accomplished with zoom lenses from a safe height. Nearly all of the ground pictures were taken on OPAC campus by students using two Olympus Digital SLR Cameras.



### ETHOS BEHIND MORE HOPE AS WE GROW

At OPAC in order to find the Hope that lasts and really transforms us such that we experience eternal joy, we commend to all in our community that they should seek for truth and base this on Jesus, who said “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6).

Christian Hope is much celebrated, especially each Christmas, for very good reason. It is for real. With it we can be empowered for great good. Most wonderful of all – it lasts forever.

How do we become a Christian though, and obtain this amazing gift? **Rev Stuart Starr** explains. He is the minister of NewLife Anglican Church, which is co- located with our campus. There is always a warm welcome for seekers there.



**Tower of NewLife Anglican**

To become a Christian is to become a follower of the ‘Christ’ or anointed one - Jesus.  
How does one do that?

It starts with acknowledging that Jesus is indeed the King to whom we owe our allegiance, loyalty, and love. We’ll get there when we see that our lives have fallen short of His holy standard and when we acknowledge that we sin.

Not only do we sin but the Christian is the one who humbly turns from what they have done and **places their trust in the work of Jesus** on their behalf. This ‘work’ was Jesus’s willingness to take the place of our deserved punishment and pay the price for our sins on the cross.

The Christian begins the journey in this way by **repenting, and trusting**, and continues to live it out by **asking God to transform us** more and more into the likeness of Jesus, the one we are following. This means living a life loving God and loving our neighbour as ourselves - it is God’s work from first to last.



## IN THE BEGINNING

The morning bell, then a frantic chase  
Echoes through the schoolyard floors.  
Heavy bags, but a hurried pace,  
And we make it to the classes' space.  
No time to stop, no time to stray,  
On time once more, now to learn and play.

**Lwandile** – Year 7



## TECH

Saw blades screech and hammers tap  
Drawings spread across each lap;  
Projects rise from grain and glue,  
Skills and sweat seen from each view

**Michelle** – Year 10



## THE RIGHT PERSON THE WRONG TIME -

The right person, the wrong time  
The right script, the wrong line  
The right poem, the wrong rhyme  
And a piece of you,  
Was never mine

**Gillian** - Year 7



## CHRISTMAS EVE

Children running through the streets  
From window to window, looking at toys;  
Presents stacked from stall to stall;  
People watch as the snow falls.

**Austin** – Year 8

## INSTRUMENT OF BEAUTY



I hold up a hollow piece of wood, curved on the edges in an artistic manner. The wood slowly narrows thin, turns a slow corner, then stops. It continuously stretches out in a narrow path, sheltered by four metallic cords, descending in size from left to right.

The wood continues on its journey, then starts to curve upwards, twisting itself into a scroll. Finally, it reaches its resting place, cushioned by its former self, spiralling around it.

I brush my fingers over the intricate holes embedded in the wooden surface. As rigid, stubborn fibres sweep the rough metal strings, I feel a vibration resonating from the hole into my fingertips, a tremor, a gentle hum, a melodic buzz. A beautiful, unique sound. I can't allow anything else to make this sound, ever, never.

I lift my hand to curl over the strings. Each finger, having a mind of its own, finds its starting position, gets ready and, as I briefly glance upwards at the sheet music, begins to dash independently over the neck, arriving at one place, staying for less than a second, then beginning their journey towards the next destination.

Every so often, as a finger arrives, it will do a little dance, a little salsa, swaying back and forth in lightning motion. They lean back, those irritable fibres stop, start gliding in the other direction, then the fingers lean forward again.

Forward.

Backward.

Forward.

Backward.



I pause, listening to my accompanist, looking up at the sheet music with its messy annotations. Every note on the page is like a letter, every bar a sentence, the score a story, treble a language.

I close my eyes, make my fingers dance and dash about once again, force the stubborn fibres along the metallic strings. I allow the melody to seep into my mind, it tells a beautiful, heartfelt story in a magical way. The vibrations give me a sense of peace, of belonging. They make me feel warm, safe, justified. How can I describe this brief moment of utter delight? How can I let anybody take this from me? How can I possibly live without my violin?

The sound, like a wave of cool, refreshing water that sweeps over you when you're dying of thirst. The feeling, a surge of joy, of harmony. No worries, troubles, hardships. All joyfulness, liveliness, even cheekiness. No mistakes, wrongdoing, judgement. Every note has a purpose, every sound an ambition.

But before you can completely lose yourself in it, the score ends. The playing stops. My goosebumps cease. The world comes back into reality. My burdens cumber me, I'm reminded of my mistakes.

So I take a deep breath.

And start playing again.

**Kyah** – Year 7

## THERAPY DOGS



### Dog Delight

Whiskers in the night,  
Paws so soft, a graceful sight,  
Purrs guide, pure delight.

**Hadi** – Year 9



### KAI AND SAGE

At Oran Park, where students roam,  
Two loyal dogs make school a home.  
Kai, with eyes so soft and bright,  
Brings peace with just his gentle sight.

Sage, the wise with fur so sleek,  
Comforts hearts when life feels weak.  
Together they walk through halls with grace,  
A quiet presence in every space.

While many dogs may visit to care,  
Kai and Sage are always there.  
Their tails wagging, calm and true,  
A friendly face to see you through.

When stress and worries crowd your mind,  
They're by your side, so kind, so kind.  
A sniff, a nudge, a wag, a stare,  
Remind you that you're not alone, they're there.

In classrooms bright, on grassy lawns,  
Their love is felt from early dawn.  
Kai and Sage, the heart and soul,  
Of Oran Park, they make us whole.

For in their paws, we find our peace,  
A moment's calm, a sweet release.  
And though more dogs may walk this way,  
It's Kai and Sage who brighten the day.

**Sienna** – Year 8

### DOGS

At Oran Park, schoolyards overflow with cheer,  
Cute puppies curiously wander near;  
With their wagging tails and playful eyes  
They are our joy, which we all prize.

**Michelle** – Year 10



## THE SANDS OF DANG

The man raises a shackled hand to strike the metal ore, when he is stopped by a swarthy figure dressed in billowing black robes lined in silver thread. The chained worker grimaces. Ever since the barbaric southern invaders seized the weakened capitol of Dang, native men had been taken to remote caves to mine invaluable iron ore. The worker, whose name is Jave, slowly slips a metal dagger into a concealed pocket on the inside of his tunic, as he is unchained by the stranger.



He is led out from the dim cave into the piercing rays of the blistering hot afternoon sun of Dang. He is overcome by momentary blindness from the sudden excess of light reflecting off the scorching yellow sand. The stranger, named Zavac, leads him to a tethered caravan of camels guarded by two brawny, tattooed soldiers armed with iron scimitars and heavy, worked leather shields. Jave is chained to a camel. It had been a long week; too long he thinks. He pulls out part of the metal dagger he took from the cave. A brief spark of fury flickers in his eyes. His three captors move over to the shade of a palm tree and talk. Zavac gestures to him several times.

Zavac mounts one of the camels at the start of the caravan. The long train slowly moves across the scorching desert sand, which feels as hot as the roasting coals Jave's mother used in her cooking. Wearing only a tunic and breeches, Jave is not given the luxury of riding a camel; rather he must walk bare footed on the merciless desert sand. Jave endures this tortuous journey for a few hours but then he can no longer stand. He falls to his knees and is hauled across the bitter desert. Yellow sand fills his dry mouth and nostrils; it seems to infiltrate every pore and opening of his battered body. Jave feels a hand drag him from the sand, before everything goes black.



He awakes in the middle of the night. The cool breeze whispers its secrets to the surrounding desert. His three captors are hunched around a small fire. Both soldiers appear to be asleep. Jave draws out his sharp iron dagger from his pocket. Is this my chance he thinks? Slowly, he crawls across the sand a few metres away from Zavac. Suddenly Zavac is awake. The crunching sand is what he hears but as his head whips around, he never sees Jave's swift dagger pierce



his heart. Apart from a fierce burning sensation, the last thing he is aware of is the unquenchable fire of fury, burning bright in Jave's eyes.

Later there is a cruel ringing sound of steel that fills the warm air. A guard faces Jave defiantly in the morning sun. His companion and also his leader Zavac both lie silent in the red-streaked sand. Jave grips his newly acquired scimitar tightly. The soldier swings his scimitar toward Jave's neck. Jave ducks down, narrowly missing the cut that would have claimed his head.

*This ends now!*

He thrusts forward with the scimitar which is skilfully parried by his opponent's blade. Jave recovers quickly and brings his scimitar in a sweeping downward arc and meets flesh. The soldier slumps silently to the soft sand.

After a brief rest and some water Jave begins his journey back to Dang. He seems to travel for days. His throat is sandpaper. His eyelids are caked in sand. A mirage taunts him with the promise of a nearby oasis but then it vanishes. Finally, fatigue, and the fact he has had nothing to eat in the past three days get the better of him. The sharp blade of his scimitar seems so inviting. Relief? But at what price? Oh make all this pain go away!

Then he sees it. The blurred outline of the capitol just visible on the horizon. Something finally ignites within him. Something that has longed to burn bright. Now he strides forward. The injustice done to his country screams to be addressed. A terrible debt must be repaid.

A furious fire burns ferociously in Jave's eyes.

**Rohan – Year 8**



## MY FRIEND

Autumn lingers as leaves paint the sky,  
A friendship fades, "Goodbye my old ally."  
The cold settles where warmth used to lie.

I yearned to escape the web in which I was caught,  
But the wicked winter's chill mocked my every thought  
For she was flown south to frolic in a summer port.

Across quiet hills,  
a breeze stirs with whispered songs,  
Spring's smile blooms anew.

The glistening sun thaws my skin,  
A past friend returns, "welcome back old kin."  
Ah-h-h-h summer is finally here!



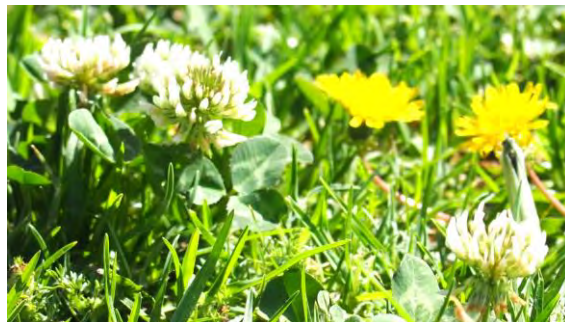
**Benham – Year 11**

## DISTANT STORIES

Stark, the branches wait,  
Not dead, but in quiet song.  
Blossom's kiss to come.

Out of mountain mist, birds  
Emerge like shadow poems.  
Trees listen quietly.

The breeze caresses the grass  
So gently beside the fire;  
Blowing its stories to a distant heavenly star.



**Lydia – Year 8**





## Sweet Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe, a name that sings with grace,  
a quiet strength, a tender place,  
where dreams are born in colours bright  
and hopes take wing in the morning light.

In every curve, in every line,  
stories are whispered, pure, divine;  
a dance of thought, crafts so pure,  
The heart beats strong in Zimbabwe.

A beauty deep, both soft and strong,  
A rhythm like a timeless song,  
it holds the past, the yet to be  
a bridge between the sky and sea.  
In moments still, or in the storm,  
Zimbabwe's friendship will keep you warm.

A guiding star, a friend so firm  
In every trouble, it shines for you.  
So, hold it close, this precious gem,  
For in its glow, you'll find the stem  
Of a bloom that's rare, both bold and fair;  
So forever cherish, sweet Zimbabwe.



**Ayie – Yr 7**

## MIRACLE AT MECCA

Travelling through the windy turbulence of the barren Arabian desert, exhaustion sapped all my energy. My camel struggled away from Medina through the blazing heat of 1756. I was on a quest to Mecca with my son Hakeem. As the scorching sun sank beneath the far horizon, a breathtaking transformation took place. A luminous moon cast rivers of silver through the dunes before me.



On making camp, we devoured the sweet plump dates and pita bread on a hay woven rug, under rustling palm trees of a refreshing oasis. The next day we explored the bazaars bustling with the chaos of local markets, and camels loaded as high as if they were the sultan's palace. The marketplace was filled with soft veiled women in stark contrast to the men smoking sheesha, wearing checkered keffiyeh and bargaining over Arabian goods.

Soft tunes were recited from nearby mosques. The magnanimity of Allah's name soothed the young Hakeem's grief-stricken heart from the loss of his mother. It was a rich mixture of senses, both of us were bewildered.

As the night approached, a small fire whispered and crackled amidst the crowd. I quietly escaped onto the terrace gazing upon the stars while reciting the melodious Quran. I begged for a sign from the Lord, hoping he could hear my supplication and despair.

Opening the Quran to a random page, a letter emerged with a strange message – "found what you were looking for?" It was a note from my late wife, Yasmin. A surreal, spiritual energy shocked me into the presence of my Lord.

The slow camel ride ended my perilous journey. Suddenly, I found myself only minutes away from Mecca. Here was the home to the Holy Kaaba. Everyone was chanting, "Ya Allah". As they entered the sanctified city.



The roads began to clear, and the breathtaking aroma of thick Arabian perfumes uplifted my mood poignantly. The flaming sun slowly began to vanish, and the city took on the cloak of darkness. A crisp breeze obliterated the sweat of Medina. I relaxed into the calming serenity of Mecca. Locals were eager to celebrate the crazy sparkle of Ramadan.

Anticipation and excitement were evident in the faces of all the pilgrims except for one, Hakeem. His optimism seemed to have been buried alongside his mother. Nothing brought him happiness like she did.

One of the aims of this journey was to repair our fragmented relationship. A mystifying wind momentarily plucked us from our inner despair as we sipped the sweet chai from a local cafe. The transformation that I was expecting in Hakeem heightened my senses as I gazed at his face that appeared to be afflicted by a vacant trance. Oh, how long I had dreamt of this moment hoping to see a spirited spark in his glistening eyes. Tears clouded my vision. All at once, there was a flicker of his eyelids and then the jewels of two glistening eyes beamed back at me.

It was at this moment that I was going to lift the veil of darkness from our wounded lives. I was determined to be refreshed with a new zest for life.

As my sleeves wiped away the tears I saw Hakeem in a state of sheer exhilaration as he dismounted from his camel and embraced this moment of paradise in Mecca. I was paralyzed with joy, beguiled by the absolute beauty of the scenery.

Hakeem excitedly raised his arm and pointed. "We have arrived and look – there is mother – so happy!"

Hakeem impatiently grabbed my hand and dashed towards the floating vision of what was unmistakably Yasmin. She smiled at both of us and gestured for us to be at peace and then slowly, she faded away.

We both felt it at once – all the old tension had gone and a wondrous calm filled our hearts. We were a family again.



**Hadi** – Year 9

## VENDING MACHINES AND ORIGAMI HEARTS

A vending machine is a portal to the heart,  
It stands dormant, a glass wall of liquid inspiration that guards coke, squash and tea,  
like a samurai watching dawn break over Tokyo Bay.

Insulated by only our fears,  
its metallic hum lures all who dare to test the sweet fizz of cola, lemon or grape.

Venturing into its lair, the victor reaches for a bottle that sweats tears of condensation  
and triggers an excited sensation,  
when the first hiss escapes.

For some, our hearts have long lay forgotten, like the ample sets of blazers, jumpers, hats, socks, tracksuits..... that  
pollute Student Services.  
Like the endless sea of rubbish in the playground.

Yet today, like the thud of a bottle escaping the clutches of its vending machine prison,  
we too experienced the joy of origami friendship.

Today in the cafeteria  
our origami hearts, made with precision according to marking criteria-  
Flew like doves and found love in new quarters.

Nothing, not even a vending machine,  
can quench our yearning for learning or the skip our heart feels with every new friendship.

**Mr J Little – leader on the 2024 OPAC Japanese trip.**





## HOPE FOR TOMORROW

“There is no greater agony then a story that has not been told” is what I tell myself as I sit here in the dimly lit corner of my small, cramped apartment in Berlin, my heart racing with a mixture of fear and determination. I glance nervously at my sleeping son, David, curled up on the makeshift bed we share.



He is the light of my life and the reason I cling to hope in this dark and unforgiving world. But with each passing day, the danger grows more palpable, threatening to tear us apart. My husband, Ernst, feels like a world away fighting in a war that seems to have no end. His absence is affecting us in many ways. I feel alone and unsafe, and it is a huge strain having me to fend for myself and David in a country that sees us as nothing more than targets for their hatred.

Desperation courses through my veins as I count the little stack of old coins in my hand—a small offering, but I hope it is enough to buy us a lifeline or bit of safety from the horrors that look for us outside our door. With trembling hands, I venture out into the streets where Nazi soldiers loom like a presence of death.

Each encounter is a certainty of turmoil and danger, as I plead with the very men who would see me and my son shipped off to a concentration camp. I offer them what little I have in exchange for our freedom and pray that they see us as human beings worthy of mercy. But the soldiers are merciless, their eyes cold and indifferent as they push me down. I am their sport - like a cat with a mouse.



I take my little shred of pride and beg them to let me go, knowing that our lives hang in the balance with each passing moment. Meanwhile news of Ernest's fate reaches me - a casualty of war. His life has been taken out on a distant battlefield. Grief slowly overtakes me, but I have a son now. I have to make a plan and see it through. I push Ernest's memory aside, focusing instead on the task at hand - getting David and myself out of this hellish nightmare before it's too late.

Finally, after countless sleepless nights and terrifying encounters, I secure passage out of Germany. With David clutching my hand tightly we board a train bound for freedom, leaving behind the trauma and pain of our past and the shadows that once threatened to hurt us.

As the train chugs along, carrying us farther and farther away from the horrors we've endured, I think about how now I am able to tell my story of fighting for freedom. It must not go untold and hidden away.



At long last I allow myself to breathe a sigh of relief. The road ahead will be fraught with uncertainty, but for the first time in what feels like an eternity I allow myself to believe that there might be hope for a better tomorrow.

**Phoebe** -Year 10

## THE SACRED SHADOWS – a business trip to Iraq becomes a doorway to Islamic faith.

This 'story' is a different multicultural experience for many of us and is useful in building empathy with those of Islamic faith. Some attend our College. This piece is more a vision which attempts to explore what the attraction is of communal veneration of Allah, for refugees from individualistic, lonely capitalism.

Intoxicated by the suffocating particles of Iraqi air, a gulp of uncertainty courses through me. Descending the airplane's steps on the sun-kissed tarmac of Najaf International Airport, a torment of sensations overwhelms me. The heavy scent of sandalwood is oppressive in the air and mingles with the typical cacophonous stampede of an Arabian crowd. The prospect of hidden dangers assaults my senses, immediately tempting me once again to panic with a paranoia that sees a tsunami of ninjas in every shadow. Hijabs are relentless



in their frenzied attempts to control their offspring. I remember the advice -

'Stay clear of those terrorists, remain conscious of those covered up ones.' I am petrified with all the doubts about this trip and continue to wrestle with the concerned mantras and whispered truths given to me from many back home; in particular the bluntness of the Australian embassy chanting 'DO NOT TRAVEL!'



Amidst the flood of Arabs pirouetting around baggage claim, I stand paralysed by the weight of my own uncertainty. I am the silent architect of my suffering, and the distraught fabric of my brain is suffocating. Doubt stalks the corridors of my mind as I draw closer to the gates of the airport.

A voice cuts through the noise like a beacon in the darkness. Then there is a disturbing sight of a man approaching me with a patient smile. He seems to slice through the chaotic tension like a knife slicing a mango. His features soften and offer a semblance of solace. Hesitant, my unease compounds with each



passing moment. Despite his welcoming demeanour my distrust for him intensifies. "Salam Alaykum, Ana Ismi Yousef, peace be with You, my name is Yousef" he says, but all I could think of were the travel warnings from home. Yet, his attentiveness gradually calms me down. The taxi journey unravels my shadows of doubt and genuine kindness begins to look possible.



\*\*\*

Soon I am engulfed by the burning flame of Arabian perfume, and my bewildered heart begins to consider what it would be like learning all together about being a beloved disciple. The duties of my business trip are incomplete, and quite frankly now they will probably remain that way. I am entranced by the happy diversion of immersing myself in a cultural heaven where a whole civilisation has learned to live harmoniously together, embracing the fruits of worshipping Allah as one united people. Realising such beauty suddenly makes my business task redundant. Now, instead, my need to embrace this culture becomes my first priority.



Yousef begins enlightening me about the beauty of devotion which is the beauty of Najaf. I seem to feel adopted by the love of Imam Ali, the brother of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). I am embraced by the alluring scent of the Arabian oud mixed with devotion and sincerity, that is affirmed by going to the local shrine of Imam Ali, where his body remains. I observe the Iraqis harmoniously attending to their religious duties. It is most impressive to experience the sincerity of women and men all maintaining an honest devotion to Allah.



As the first light of dawn gently kisses the golden domes of the shrine, a quiet pulse of activity stirs within its sanctified courtyards. Women are draped in elegant *abayas* and men are dressed in white *dish dashas*. They display a reverence I had never seen before. Their hearts are devoted to the sacred serving of the *Imam*. The children follow the meticulous behest of their elders to bless this sanctified area by sweeping away the dust of yesterday and adorning the space with fragrant flowers and intricately woven prayer rugs. The fluidity and grace of their actions, speaks volumes concerning their humble service and devotion. Within the heart of the shrine, heads bow and hands are raised in supplication. Through rivers of tears, and with the melodious sounds of *nasheeds* all recite the beautiful name of *ALI*. Witnessing this outpouring of souls to the Divine and their seeking solace and wisdom in the presence of their beloved Imam, sends shivers down my spine. The sudden thawing of the deathly freeze of my own disbelief takes me by surprise.



Tea is served, and *zolbias* dance frantically to release my saliva. Now the rising sun sheds more light on my own blindness. The *athan* echoing in my spirit brings the remembrance of Allah and I vibrate with the devotion shown in this sacred site.

A group of men tend the sprawling gardens surrounding the shrine; their hands nurture the vibrant blooms that flourish beneath the desert sun when watered. With each whispered prayer in every stroke from the humble service of the watering, beautiful plants rise in reverence for the Imam. The atmosphere is alive with the soft murmur of recited prayers and amidst the marble pillars and gilded arches, worship and devotion mask the longing Yousef has to see his late mother. He returns to her resting place in *Wadi-us-Salam*, where his dedication and love for her as his dearest reminds me of the truth of this religion, that personifies allegiance to the Imam through deep respect for your mother. Yousef's words echo through my mind: *'heaven lies beneath the mother's feet.'*



As the sun begins to reach its zenith, the midday prayer call echoes out loudly for all. The *Masjid* are witnesses to life running in unison to worship the Almighty Allah. Together their voices bow before the Most Merciful as the presence of Imam Ali comforts me and embraces me with the promise of a glorious affinity with this new palace of dreams.

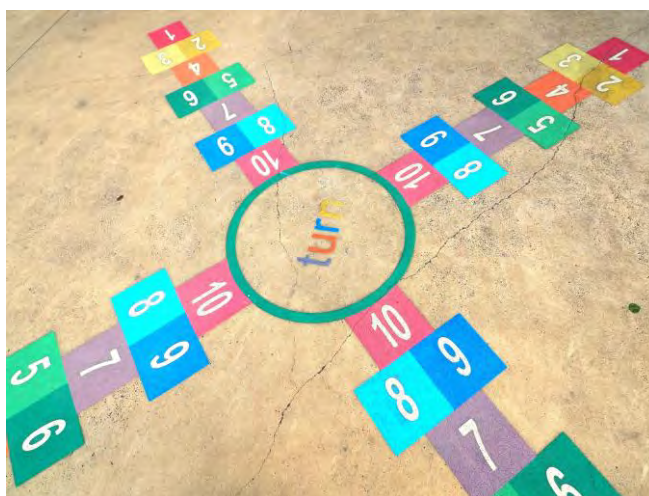
I know now. This is the place I will call *home*.

***\*PBUH- Peace Be Upon Him***

***\*Allah- God of Islamic Faith***

***\*Adhan- Call to prayer***

**Mahdi – Yr 12**





## STAFF

Safe hands and kind hearts,  
Wisdom blooms in every word;  
Teachers light our way.

## STUDYING

Books open, night still;  
Young minds shine like stars;  
Wisdom overflows.

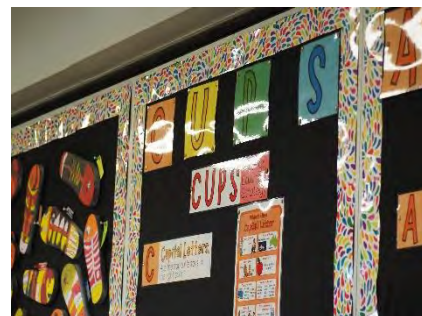
## EXAMS

Our nerves are tight but our focus is strong,  
We've studied hard, the journey was long.  
Each answer written, clear and concise -  
We strive for the best, no matter the price.

### Michelle – Year 10

**LITTLE BLUE BERRY BOY** – this is our very first contribution from the Junior School: **Riya** in Year 6!

It all commenced on a tragic, gloomy day when sweeping the luminous entresol above the metal gates of the soaring chateau. There dwelt a young, magnanimous boy who went by the name of Little Blue Berry Boy. He had a soul of pure gold. The creatures who lived in the dusky forest from the vermin of the land to the terrified timid insects, all adored Little Blue Berry Boy.



“Go right this instant and convey this basket of berries to your loving grandma!” shrieked the queen.

Little Blue Berry Boy's parents were the king and the queen, and they were tremendously spiteful and never supported him in anything. Petrified, startled and shaken, he had no choice but to offer to take the basket of fresh berries to his unwell grandma. The queen did a grizzly grin, thinking her plan to remove him was terrific. He was viciously thrown outside the gate on his errand into the deep arboretum, or so he thought. The towering oak trees waved left and right fighting against the wind, shooting gusts of past his ears. He stepped on a pile of brown, shrivelled-up leaves that gave an ear-splitting noise. A windy, rocky path led him to an elderly lady.

She was as old as a tortoise. Little Blue Berry Boy shuffled closer to get a better sight of her. Her walking stick was made from a dark oak wood, like the ones from the trees next to him and it was stripping horribly. The lady's hair was grey, and she was as pale as a ghost. Then he realised that this elderly lady was his grandma. Although she looked all hideous, her heart was warm like his. Grandma never shared her life, though, so it was full of secrets.

“Grandma!” He shouted. Little Blue Berry Boy sprinted towards her and opened his arms wide to give her a hug, full of love and joy. They gradually walked to her place. Once they were at Grandma's house, she opened the front doorway and slam! The door was violently closed and latched with Little Blue Berry Boy inside...

The dark shadowy room was cramped, and he could only walk a couple of steps to the end of the room and back. With faith, Little Blue Berry Boy thought that maybe grandma was fetching something and would be back soon; maybe the door accidentally closed, but after a while, all hope was lost.

Little Blue Berry Boy waits soundlessly, but no one comes. His first attempt to escape was banging the door as hard as he could. He first ran to the back of the room, which was only a couple of steps away from the doorway and rapidly slammed his left shoulder against the door. Little Blue Berry Boy did this repeatedly, but still - no hope. After a while he began to think, even if he got out, he wouldn't know where to go. His second attempt to escape was yelling for help.

“Help, help I’m stuck!” he screamed continuously till he scraped his throat. He gulped down his saliva, but still no hope. Little Blue Berry Boy lay on the hard uncomfortable floor with his neck leaning against the wooden wall and slowly knocked on the door. As his stomach grumbled, a tiny tear streamed down his eye falling on the dirty floor.

Among the statuesque trees resided a depressed, lonely wolf. This wolf wasn’t a big bad wolf but more of a generous, gracious wolf. He was on his daily patrol past the castle, over the lake, beside the beehive and was coming up the windy path where Little Blue Berry Boy was. The wolf whistled his favourite song as he came up the path with his tail lazily dangling behind him.

The wolf’s whistling alarmed Little Blue Berry Boy! He pulled himself from the ground, and ran to the back of the room, and gave the door one last push. Crash! The door broke into millions of pieces on the hairy wolf. “What in the world?” squealed the wolf.

Little Blue Berry Boys heart tensed up and sweat began forming on his head. Although he was saved, he didn’t want to be saved by a wolf. Without saying a word, the wolf grabbed his wrist and dragged him down the path, beside the beehive, over the lake and past the castle.

Little Blue Berry Boy got his last look of the castle but kept silent as he thought he was the wolf’s dinner. His wrist began to turn into a radiant red colour. They started entering a rocky dark cave, where Little Blue Berry Boy squinted to see. He took slow steps and was trying to escape to save his life. Inside was totally different to what he thought; there were posters of kind messages. One had a stunning sunset that read, “you shine!”



On the left side, the den had a cosy couch with a cream white bean bag and on the right side it had the bedroom, which had a warm fluffy blanket that rested on the bed. The Wolf’s house had warm yellow lights everywhere. Little Blue stared. It smelt like sweet vanilla as he took an enormous breath to get a better smell.

“This is my house, and you can stay if you like!” Wolf exclaimed excitedly. He ran to his kitchen and started talking out some milk from his tiny fridge, pouring the last drops into an old cup and placing it in the microwave. He then added some hot chocolate and handed it to Little Blue Berry Boy. Little Blue watched the steam blow up and took his first sip and his face lit up like a sunbeam.



“I’ll stay, I’ll stay!” he cried happy tears.

Little Blue Berry Boy started thinking about his miserable life at the castle. He knew he had been deserted, even, it seemed, by grandma. The wolf opened his arms widely and wrapped his tail around their legs. Together they both sat down and told each about their lives. Little Blue Berry Boy explained how he was being mistreated, and the Wolf complained that he has always been alone.

After this, the Wolf and his new friend did everything together, especially morning patrols. Little Blue Berry Boy went to school and the wolf stayed home and prepared food for them. Little Blue Berry Boy’s favourite activities were going fishing with a friend and playing hide and seek. They shared all these things now. Best of all though, they had come to love each other as very good friends.

**Riya – Yr 6**



## CANDLE OF TRUTH

Crystals of water dripped from the soles of Rosa's heels as they rose and fell, gathering and releasing the liquid that swirled over the asphalt, riddled with oil. Stray ringlets of white hair that glistened from the drizzle hung over her face. How long it would be before walking in the rain became dangerous? Before each shower became a storm of nitric acid, droplets burrowing deep into skin. She'd never gotten used to the smell, either. A nauseating concoction of excrement, rotting food scraps and chemicals. Since the occupation, she'd endured chronic headaches. As if the fumes were tiny needles splintering the interior of her skull.

Hopefully the several plastic bags lining the inside of her threadbare backpack would protect their contents. A glance over her shoulder told her that she was alone on the street.



The edge of the city was in sight now, thank heaven. A sharp click was amplified by the muffled silence of the street- a corridor more like. A ceiling of clouds, like rancid, spilled ink and ashen walls of skyscrapers barely far enough apart to walk between. The sharp inhalation of smog as her hip clicked buffeted her lungs. She doubled over, wracked by coughs.

A thin stretch of muddy wasteland encircled the patchwork of crumbling buildings and potholed roads. Mud oozing through the sides of her rubber gum boots, Rosa grimaced as sludge suctioned her feet. She grimaced as mud oozed through the sides of them. The rubber was dry and cracked, the shoes lifting away from the soles in places. They were the best she had.

Sparse vegetation gradually thickened, and the ground became more solid. Squelching as Rosa's feet pressed pine needles further into the ground, globs of water rolled from marcescent leaves, and finally an empty hunting shed. The old rifles that once called it home were long gone. Guns were illegal... like all weapons, and most remnants of the Old World. Even words. The tree of the English language had been ring barked when they'd banned books, and it died when they'd introduced the List. Two hundred government-approved words considered safe for civilisation.

Despite Rosa's efforts, the shed was slowly rotting away. The lock on the splintered wooden door was rusted, weakened by time, yet clinging shut as it resisted the turn of the key. Vibrations shook the structure as Rosa eased the door closed.

Beneath a faded rug against one of the walls, a trap door opened. Stairs led down moulded from concrete, smooth and dry. Sweat stung the underside of Rosa's arms, all the more unpleasant in the frigid air. A small oil lamp sat on the second step down, presently lit to illuminate the cabin as Rosa began her descent. Her arthritic feet ached from the walk, but the closer she grew to the bottom of the stairs, the less weight she seemed to carry. In an age of electricity, Rosa remembered the first time she had lit a candle at night. It had been brighter than she'd expected, illuminating an entire room. How could such a tiny flame produce so much light?



Now her flame revealed books. Multitudes of them. Yellow, dusty, covers beginning to flake, and yet here they were. Years ago, she and her husband had commissioned the bunker; A time capsule of sorts, and a retreat to seclusion. The eye of the storm. Books had been their shared love. Obsession. Faded, a photograph of Samuel was perched on the accent table. He would be proud. Rosa extracted the plastic bags from her pack then peeled them away to examine their contents. “The Indispensable Dictionary of Unusual Words” and “Animal Farm”. Crevices in her lips cracked as Rosa smiled, her eyes crinkled like the plastic scrunched on the table.

Her little library was a candle. A reservoir of light that once released would infuse the world. They could destroy memory, but Rosa would guard history.

**Katelin - Yr 12**

## **SANTA EXPECTED SOON**

It is Christmas time

And the church bells are ringing.

All of us are here together

With Santa expected soon,

So the kids are full of joy;

Excited, they make a mess I must clean up

Ready for old Saint Nick’s arrival;

We leave out milk and cookies...



Next morning, they will wake early  
to look under the tree.

Quickly, they will see the presents –  
All different sizes, covered so carefully.

Then smiles will widen as brightly

They pounce like little cheetahs,

And tear all the wrapping apart.

**Archer – Year 9**





## THE LAST BUSHFIRE

The scent of eucalyptus mingled with the dry heat of the outback had added warmth that seeped into Ruby's bones as the sun dipped below the red horizon. She watched the orange glow spread like fingers across the sky. It wasn't the sunset, it was fire.

Growing up on a cattle station in far Northern Queensland, Ruby had learned the language of the land. The cracked soil whispered of droughts, the crows cawed warnings of rainless storms, and the gum trees stood as silent sentinels, rooted in ancient history. Her father called the station their home; her mother called it their curse. But to Ruby, it was life - a mix of dust, laughter, and tests to her resilience.



This summer was different. The fires came early, swallowing acres in minutes, leaving behind blackened earth and ghostly remains. Everyone felt the sting, but none more than her family. Their cousins lost their homestead; neighbours had to abandon their cattle. And now, her own backyard was at risk.

"It's coming closer," her father muttered, eyes fixed on the horizon as the flames danced in the distance. His weathered face, marked by years of sunburn and stubborn pride, wore a grim expression. "We'll have to fight it, just like the others."

Ruby nodded but said nothing. The fire wasn't a stranger. She'd grown up watching the bush burn and regrow in endless cycles of destruction and rebirth. But now, as she stared into the blaze, it felt different, as if the land was weary, tired of the fight. She could almost hear it sigh beneath the weight of the smoke.

That night, the world turned orange. Ruby stood on the veranda, the old screen door creaking behind her as her mother ushered the cattle inside. Their low bellows added to the fire's crackling roar. The air was thick with ash, each breath felt like she was swallowing a desert. She closed her eyes, remembering her grandfather's stories of Dreamtime spirits who had once protected this land, shielding it from the wrath of nature. Maybe they had left, or maybe they were watching, just testing the strength of those who remained.

Ruby opened her eyes. The fire might take their land, but it would never take their spirit. With a sharp whistle, she signalled the dogs, and they followed her into the yard. The heat from the approaching flames tingled her skin, but she did not flinch.

Together, as a family, they fought the flames, hoses in hand, sweat mixing with ash as they pushed forward.



It wasn't just a battle for their station, but for their history, their memories, and their future. Although only hours passed, they felt like days. Slowly the fire began to retreat, leaving behind scorched earth and smouldering remnants of their former life.

As dawn broke, Ruby stood in the charred remains of what had once been her home. The landscape was still smouldering, but in the early light, she saw a single green shoot emerging from the soot. Ruby smiled, knowing the land was resilient and so were they.

**Rayna – Year 9**

## MATILDA'S DISCOVERY

As the sun dipped low on the horizon, it cast a warm, golden glow, making the dry, cracked soil shimmer like a bed of crushed garnet beneath her feet. Each step sent dust rising around her toes, a sensation as comforting as the whisper of the wind brushing against the grass and towering, white eucalyptus trees. Usually vibrant with the distant calls of galahs and the scurrying of lizards, she felt like a blank canvas. The dust swirled around like ghosts in the wind, the sun sank like an ember fading in a dying fire, and the air hung heavy like the silence before a whispered secret.



She remembered her adolescence near the rocky shores with the crushing waves when she stood with her feet sinking into the sand. The stones rose sharply, their surfaces etched by centuries of weather, contrasting with the burnt orange of the ground. As she scrambled over the rocks, a rush of exhilaration reminded her of her first solo hike, when she stumbled upon a waterfall, just as breathtaking. Her heart raced with excitement. For a second time, another sudden, fierce gust of wind swept across the land. The stones shifted ominously, revealing a hidden entrance to what appeared to be a dark cave. On a sagging wooden sign wrote was the inscription DO NOT ENTER.

Intrigued with a mix of trepidation and curiosity, Matilda crawled inside. The wind began to blow violently. As her eyes adjusted to the dim light, she began to see markings far more detailed than those outside. The cave walls were adorned with depictions of Dreamtime stories and figures of kangaroos and emus, all woven into a mural. Last month, it was just a distant thought. Last week, it was an idea she debated over. Today, it was real, and she felt the weight of thousands of years of history pressing in.



Then she noticed a low rumbling. The walls were shedding loose dust and soil. Panic gripped her heart as the shifting ground threatened to trap her inside.

Matilda's instincts kicked in. She spotted a narrow tunnel with faint handprints. The memory of her mother's voice telling her about the land's stories where danger seemed far away rushed back to her. Taking a deep breath, she followed the tunnel. Her path was almost blocked by the cascading dust and crumbling rock. After what felt like an eternity of struggle, she found herself emerging through a small opening. Gasping for air, Matilda turned to see the cave entrance now completely covered by scattered rocks.

Matilda stood quietly on the high ground. The cool, refreshing breeze whispered ancient secrets through her hair, reminding her of a childhood camping trip when her mother had pointed out constellations in the vast outback sky. The rhythmic hum of cicadas and the earthy scent of rain-soaked gum leaves made the moment feel right. She gazed over the rugged terrain, now illuminated by the silvery glow of the moon. She felt at one with this beautiful wilderness.

**Channie – Year 9.**

## WAY OF THE APPLE

The sky was grey, blanketing the earth in eternal despair. Ashen smoke clouds drifted by, a reminder of the hulking new machines manned constantly by tiny figures. The rain, icy and cruel, wept from the heavens, flooding earth in sorrow. The thick stench of pollution wafted into my mansion; I wrinkled my nose in disdain.



I jerked. The sound of soft tapping pulled me from my thoughts. I glanced up from the window and redirected my attention to the front door. I rolled my sage-green eyes and heaved myself up, pacing to the door. I twisted the brass doorknob to see a young girl staring at me. Her small face was streaked with dirt, her body a twig, her umber eyes large, pleading. A shiver of Deja-vu ran through me. I glared ahead, my eyes shooting daggers.

"Please, food..." she whispered, her eyes a turbulent storm. A flare of anger raged within me, my blood boiling. What right did this child have to disturb me? I turned red, clenching my fists. Cheeks smouldering, I slammed the door.

Then I gazed around the drawing room, admiring the bold hues of red and gold. An intricate rug lay beneath me, and soft rays of pale moonlight slipped through the pleated curtains, spilling onto the carpet like liquid silver.

I closed my eyes as a memory washed over me.



I was ten, alone, homeless, nothing to call my own. My only possessions were the rags on my back. Filth cluttered my face, and dirt invaded my fingernails.

Life was torture.

One misty evening, I decided to seek aid. Blood pumping, I raced through the filthy cobbled streets of London, dashing through the quotidian traffic of people vying to receive some handout of food. An innocent child, I stepped towards the door of a mansion, my heart racing. I raised my fist and knocked, eyes wide.

Immediately, a middle-aged woman, seemingly cloaked in ominous shadow, whipped the door open. I smiled, preparing to speak, but paused. The woman waited, her gaze seething.

My eyes rounded in fear, revealing pools of murky green. "F-food..?" I asked, trembling. The woman recoiled. "Out of the question!" she roared, eyes alight with fury. That night, I sat alone, shivering and suffering from a starving belly.





Now a strangled groan escaped my lips. Guilt flooded my insides. I was so cruel. Tears pricked my eyes. Hatred for myself bubbled within. I felt like slamming my head against the wall. I did not deserve to live.

Sobbing, I rushed to the door, snatching a green apple on my way. I stumbled outside, blinded by streaks of rain. Clouds covered the midnight sky. I had to find the child. I needed to repent.



My concerned gaze scanned the dark alleyway desperately, spotting her immediately. I exhaled shakily. Clearing my throat, I held out the apple. The girl gazed up at me; her jaws parted. Tentatively, she closed her muddy hand around it. Her jaw dropped.

"Thank you..." she whispered, her eyes deep with the emotion that her voice could not convey.

Warmth blossomed in my chest as I turned away. I stood, drenched, in the pouring rain, and then I laughed. Maybe life was worth it, after all.

**Bianca** - Year 10

## **SOCCER**

Under the blazing summer sky  
The pitch is set, and the players fly.  
Back and forth the players go  
As the ball dances and dreams flow.  
With every pass and joyful cheer  
The summer air is crisp and clear.  
Boots on the grass, the crowd's delight  
In summer's glow, we play all night.  
The world may burn, and heat shall rise.  
But soccer is cool beneath the skies.



**Austin** – Year 8



## **NETBALL**

On the court, where echoes sing,  
Netball's pattern takes to wing,  
Swift and sharp, the players dance,  
In a game of skill and chance.

Passes quick, like lightning's flash,  
Through the air, the balls do dash,  
Teamwork flows, a seamless stream,  
Chasing victory's bright gleam.

**Rubie** - Year 8

## GARDEN CITY OF SINGAPORE

In Singapore's bright, buzzing air,  
Rising sun lights gardens everywhere.  
The flowers bloom, the water gleams,  
Reflecting softly, like moonlit dreams.

**Olivia — Year 7**

## GREAT DREAMS ARE MADE

In blissful sun the fear is gone,  
And now when waves crash,  
A calm settles in me.  
Vacation has come and as I rest,  
Sweet holiday makes my head so clear.  
As the worries fade,  
Great dreams are made.

**John — Year 11**



## CRY OF THE STEAM TRAIN

I remember the day he left more vividly than any other. The fear of him not making it back was constant. Oh what if it was to be me without a husband, and my children without a father? But today is the day that steam train will arrive back at the station with him. I'll see the love of my life for the first time in two years!

We all ran on the uneven cobblestone pavement to the station. My heels caught on protruding edges. The breeze ran through my hair, and my heart was about to pump out of my chest. The apples of my cheeks, rosy from the wind, began aching as my smile continued to widen.

The station looked as if there was a parade happening. In fact, it was something even better—women and children, as if dressed for a ball in such an assortment of fabrics, colours, and accessories. As we neared the station, we started hearing the cheers. Also there was clapping and tears, as well as something I have been waiting on for years - the deafening cry of the steam train. Our pace quickened.

We entered the station, but it was as if we had entered a hedge maze. Such a crowd! Heads and hats littered the whole view. It looked impossible to continue, but we held hands and sneaked through to the edge of the platform.

As the familiar army of green uniforms exited the train they were enthusiastically attacked by those they loved.

Patiently we waited for my dearest to exit. Every second was like torture.

Then I saw him.

My love!

Finally, home!



**Lia — Year 10**



## A SYMPHONY OF THE SEA

The ocean is like a boundless mirror,  
The cries of seagulls echo through the sea,  
The fish are caught by the bitter fisher.  
The rolling waves are tranquil and serene,  
A tapestry of blue beneath the sky,  
The sun reflects its golden light with grace,  
The tide will shift, yet never will they lie,  
Eternal rhythms in their steady pace.  
A world of wonder, vast and full of might,  
Where dreams are tossed like driftwood on the shore.  
The moon's soft glow brings secrets to the night,  
As currents whisper tales of ancient lore.  
In every crest and trough, a story flows,  
The ocean's heart in endless motion grows.

**Mia** – Year 8



## THE LOST FINGER

My grandfather had a particular way of telling stories that had always caught my ears. This story was no different. It highlights his struggles, his hardships and his pain.

He told me that once a poor but intelligent young orphan boy had to breathe the thick pollution of endless fumes pouring out from the various factories of industrial Britain. All alone, he was forced to sleep rough. Raspy, low voices of overworked citizens passed by this poor boy's spot every day. He knew he could not depend on this way of life for too much longer.



Most of the factories would shut off at night and the blanket of smog would thin out and he could find a place to sleep. People did not mind the smog. They would say that it was a sign of the prosperity that provided them with work, but the boy knew better. The toxic gases afflicted all men, women, and children. The factories were destroying their lives, although none seemed to realise.

One morning the young orphan smelt burning wood - perhaps another house fire? Then screaming children ran from the fire's direction. Miserably, they stopped and turned to watch just another domestic tragedy. Then it was time to head sorrowfully to work.

Looming high above all of them was a barren factory. A stocky figure stood at the small entry door for workers. The man was scarred and had to bend down to get through the door himself. With a grunt he was through and then the children squeezed themselves through as well. The orphan boy followed them.

Inside the ashen building lay various large, silk making machines. Uttering rough English oaths, the burly man escorted the children to their various workplaces. Most of the children had predictable safe spots and worked in a repetitive but orderly fashion. It was not the same for the orphan boy. The burly man ordered him to come with him for a special task. The new boy was tasked with maintenance duty. Overhearing this, one of the children shot the boy a look, not of anger or malice, but of warning. The child held up her hand to reveal the index and middle fingers without fingertips.

The orphan boy severely underestimated the job. He shot the man a cheeky grin and gathered the weapons he had to use for this fight - a slimy oil can in one hand and a large cloth in the other.

He clambered down on all fours to oil the silk machines from their underside. The hardwood floor showed no respect for the poor boy's knees. Hours passed and the boy was soon knackered from squirming around with a lack of breathable air.

He only twisted his body position for a second to get comfortable but that was enough. His hand went out to steady himself and the relentless cutting wheel at the foot of the loom instantly severed two segments of his index finger.

Immense burning filled the boy's entire body. He was crippled by pain and yelled horribly. Hearing the screams, the burly man ran to investigate and managed to quickly staunch the wound and patch up the bloody stump. 'Go home!' was the order. But the orphan boy had no home ...

My grandfather reassured me that I would hear the rest of the story tomorrow. Full of wonderment and awe, I could not wait. He placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder as I headed for the door.

"Gruesome, eh?" he said, and I nodded in mute agreement. Then I saw it.

His index finger was missing the top two segments.

**On 31 October 2024 the very first western area inter-school senior public speaking competition was held for Year 11 students. OPAC had two competitors in this – Lara and MJ. They acquitted themselves very well with most thoughtful speeches that were commended by the judges. These stirring and insightful addresses are reproduced below for you to enjoy.**

### **WALKING THE TALK**

During lunchtime, a young Year 3 boy comes up to the teacher on duty, tears streaming down his little face. The teacher asks, “Oh what’s wrong” and the little boy sobs: “someone came up to me, grabbed the ball out of my hand and slapped me in the face!” Oh, the heartbreak on his swollen red face. “Did you see who it was?” the teacher asks, and the boy just shakes his head. He is in too much distress and shock to seek justice, but then he looks up at the teacher with bloodshot eyes and pouting lips and says confidently “Sir, I didn’t hit him back...”

This is maturity. Understanding the difference between right and wrong, and making a deliberate choice to act not on impulse, but to exhibit a behaviour that aligns with the forgiving values that have been instilled in us through decent socialisation. Maturity is often mistaken as being when an individual has lived long or is “full-grown physically”. However, I strongly believe that individuals mature through significant experiences of life, not age.

There is a false stigma on teenagers in our generation that they lack not only maturity, but the potential to harness it. Young people of today are characterised as greedy, selfish, silly, and unable to make smart choices, but this is the fault of our role models ladies and gentlemen! The highly digitised world we live in gives our children a flawed understanding of what success looks like, and we begin striving towards the wrong goals. Politicians in the world’s biggest nations like Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin give today’s children the wrong idea of power, and for some they grow up not being able to develop a true sense of maturity because of this.

So, we have a problem which lies in the fact that parents, teachers and the older generations of today see only a microscopic portion of the children for whom they care, because talent and potential is obscured by the struggle to combat constant exposure to wrong ideals of maturity. There is hope, however, for what often goes unseen, ladies and gentlemen, is a pool of young adults who defy the flawed stigma. These young people hold the potential to exercise an advanced wisdom and intelligence that could be of great benefit to the rest of the world.

We are the generation expected to lead Australia into much uncertainty in the future. Within this group of students here today are fellow competitors who might now compete against me, but really they are my upcoming co-workers. They will be the future lawyers, politicians, engineers and doctors. They will be crucial in vital roles for the prosperous maintenance of our society. Why, then are we being educated in an environment that so often tries to operate with a flawed understanding of maturity?

Malala Yousafzai, an incredible Pakistani advocate for the right of girl’s to education, was shot by the Taliban at just 15 years old for her outspoken beliefs - and yet she survived. At just 11 years old she delivered her first speech publicised to the nation entitled “How dare the Taliban take my basic right to education.” Much of her thinking and courage is strongly attributed to the role of her father in her life. Children are products of



their parents, and parents are tasked with igniting an endless world of possibilities within the generations of the young. Malala was undoubtedly wise beyond her years and utilised her advanced maturity to fight on a platform for change, but the support and belief of Malala's family in her potential for success, gives us four key takeaway principles from this young world changer:

1. **Focus** – we can't achieve anything without an end goal in mind, and when that goal is clear, encouragement from our parents is absolutely pivotal in determining whether we stay on the right path.
2. **Moral purpose** – why are we actually on this earth? How do we justify and achieve positive change?
3. **Courage** – Malala spoke out to the nation at just eleven years of age; she needed to have great courage to do this. She said, "my father made me realise my voice was powerful."
4. **Persistence**. This is crucial to meet set back upon set back. The difference between a mature and an immature person, often comes down to whether one will always fight to overcome challenges.

The people of my day are probably the unluckiest of generations. We are infiltrated by the negative effects of social media, which disillusion us 24/7 and create the damaging perception that teenagers of today are lazy, screen-obsessed, and always make silly choices online. I know this first hand - my Pop sits on the couch scrolling on his recently downloaded Instagram yelling: "look what these hooligans are up to". On the outside, we possess a care-free mentality, which is seen as an exhibition of reckless experimentation. Underneath there are huge role model learning curves that need to be addressed with much better guidance for the good of society.

So, this is where we come to a fork in the road. There are two paths for us as a society to take.

Imagine!

On one side, there are teenagers living their lives sheltered and stigmatised by elders who fail to see their potential and then sacrifice for it. They are blind to the fact that we too hold a wealth of insight into a brave new world, for which we just need to be properly led and equipped to make a positive change for the future.

The other side is where we prioritize a human condition where each values the other and recognises the precious potential of working together to create clever and effective platforms for change. We need the realistic support of parents who will guide and encourage us to take leaps of faith and go out into the big world and exhibit our own secret weapon – an honest maturity such as Malala has.

Choose this path! Choose this path because there is hope for a world brave enough to put trust in today's young people, when they are properly guided. Choose this path, and as Malala's story teaches us:

- **Focus** on the end goal
- **Hold** a moral purpose
- **Take** courage to combat the fear of failure
- **Persist**, no matter how many challenges get in the way

We need the right version of maturity for the future. Without this vision our people will perish.

Malala has taught us to speak out sensibly and truthfully.

We need to walk this talk for the future.

Lara – Year 11



## YOU AREN'T LAZY, JUST BURNT OUT!



Ladies and gentlemen, what lurid vision is conjured up before you, if I ask that you consider the character and situation of the modern HSC student?

Most likely, you will think of endless days of students complaining about tests and having to be repeatedly called to account for under-performance. But what if this was very far from the truth?

More simply, I submit that most of my generation, are actually just burnt out.

How will this affect our future? All I can think of every day now are the impending HSC examinations. Even my parents and friends alike also stress, not only for me but for themselves. This is the end of a 13 year rigid schedule that does not change:

**8 hour shifts for five days a week and then overtime activity with “no pay”, followed by homework and study for endless tests.**

Consider how we must balance our commitments - school; often working a part time job; studying for upcoming tests; being a good friend, and then there are all the family requirements involved with being a good daughter or son in a world with very high expectations.

Ladies and Gentlemen all this is really a RECIPE for BURNOUT at a time when we need to be operating at PEAK performance!

The situation is even MORE SERIOUS than this. Invariably today when we try to do good as an individual, we are not praised but rather met with REPUGNANT neutral tones of status quo expectation. But on the other hand, when we do bad, we encounter judgement and detestable frowns for our slightest misdemeanor.



How am I supposed to feel pride in myself when others are always looking to display feelings of distaste for me? After all, we are just teenagers trying to find a fulfilling path through a chaotic world. This mental torment is a no win-win situation no matter **what** we do. (Long Pause)

One of my friends who recently just finished their HSC Examination in English, came up to me, looking relieved but cautious at the same time. He explained to me the weight that had been lifted off his shoulders. A huge achievement, and yet he still felt saddened and incomplete. But why? Well, he explained that although he felt pride within himself, there was no peace or even jubilation, as now he feared how his parents would react to his mark no matter what he got. Australians, are infamous for the great phenomenon of the Tall Poppy Syndrome, that denies success in others who work hard. This is out there EVERYWHERE! So I ask you- why is my generation expected to make the impossible possible?

With the rise of conflicts between competing values and unrealistic expectations we simply cannot allow this Tall Poppy Syndrome to exist. As Australians, we must grow and develop together to benefit the wider society and not put down those who light the way to success.

Now, let us play the Devil's advocate, by saying that the current HSC and future generations to come are simply just growing lazy. That their academic endeavor is decreasing and their work ethic is poor.

Fortunately, I do have an answer to all these accusations. Such perceived laziness, where it is manifested is simply a symptom of burnout. What does that mean? Just as anxiety is a symptom of stress, laziness is a symptom of burnout. Burnout is the cause, and laziness is the effect.

Ladies and gentlemen, what **drives** this burnout?

It's not just others' expectations on us but rather our own expectations of ourselves.

What can we do about this? Some might say to delete social media, or toughen up with more focus so that we neglect everything around us but our HSC success.

I completely disagree. Let's explore 3 areas:

1) **Denial of failure** is more dangerous than social media. As humans we make mistakes, we aren't perfect. And this culture of perfection has caused more damage to our own expectations in us rather than those from around us. Learning to accept our failures and learn from them, will enable not only my generation to rapidly develop but future generations to come.

2) **Perspective.** Some people might view a 70 ATAR as complete failure; others may only need a 70 ATAR to pursue their dream career. Our own criticism of ourselves is harsher than any other critique from anyone else. Just when it seems all is lost, like every NRL team against the Panthers, we need to be like the Melbourne Storms in 2020, and beat our own perspective of self doubt. And finally,

3) **Lack of understanding of ourselves.** The ability to understand ourselves will enable us to reach our full potential. For if we know our limits, we can negate any negative effects of our self-doubt and instead, learn address them.

Australians are impressive for showing an unwavering discipline to achieve a common goal. Do you think that Adam Goodes would back down after being called "lazy"? No! (clenched fist) Do you think our brave World War One and Two warriors would back down after being called "lazy"? No! (clenched fist)

As Australians, we inherit this deep sense of valour, and through this, we can overcome just about anything.

A famous academic leader and podcaster, Brene Brown, once said "What we know does matter, but who we are matters more."

What we know does matter! Our academic abilities, our social skills and our athleticism are all areas to work on, but who we are as balanced people matters much more! Learning this will help us inherit the deep courage and perseverance which is certainly the precious legacy of this nation.



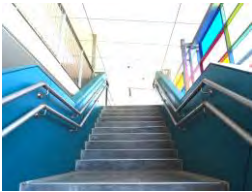
**MJ** – Year 11

## THE OUTBACK TRAGEDY

The setting sun cast an eerie red glow through the Outback. Over Alice Springs, in the Northern Territory a crimson-gold oval planet soared. In this heart of a one-of-a-kind landscape, lived the Anderson family. The household of four is multicultural. Joey the Aboriginal and Isabella the Spanish lady have proudly raised two kids – Elijah and Grace. Both were instilled with respect, kindness, and love from a young age. However, Elijah found fun in being rebellious and causing mayhem, which would lead to his parents to having to get him out of much trouble. Grace, on the other hand, consistently excelled at everything she did.



The Anderson family had just finished their evening meal on the day of the fire; the room was filled with laughter and joy as Elijah and Grace helped clean up the table whilst Mum and Dad were doing the dishes. Water splashed around the kitchen with a bit of family fun. Then, as Elijah decided to go upstairs and take a short nap, he noticed something bizarre from his window.



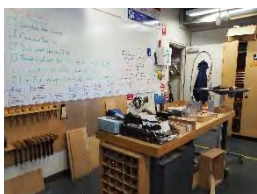
The once breathtaking view was dominated by a roaring, ferocious bushfire. Its flames were dancing high, creating dark, inky smoke that totally filled up the outback ocean of sky. Elijah's heart tightened, and chills went down his spine. Tears rapidly welled up in his eyes, aching for release. Elijah felt as if this was just a nightmare, and he could wake up and flee from this disaster. His voice crackled with fear and quivered. It didn't take long for his yell to boom through the thin walls of the house. A second later his family bolted up the stairs. They didn't utter a word, but the horrified look on their faces said everything.

Tears started to spill down Mum's cheeks like a river in full flood. As a young girl she had witnessed her Dad pass away and had lost everything. Now she was anxious for her young ones but she knew for their sake that she must show resilience. Grace noticed an acrid scent flowing through the house. It didn't take long before all four of them could feel it going into their lungs.

Suddenly Elijah decided that if he didn't act this could end horribly. He started packing a few necessities whilst Grace, Dad and Mum ran to escape and get help. The thick choking smoke suffocated Elijah, each time he spluttered for a breath. He spotted Otto their family dog struggling and whining and without any hesitation, he went further into the smoke and collected him. Only then did he rush out of their house gasping for air.

As Elijah stumbled out into the choking haze, gripping Otto with all his remaining strength, a sense of relief and joy went through him. He fell onto his dad for support as he had no power left in his body whatsoever.

Elijah's family was beyond proud of how he had sacrificed himself for those he loved. Despite the murky smoke and massive orange flames continuing on to challenge others, there was a spark of hope now in the Anderson family's heart.



Their house may have been destroyed by this monstrous firestorm, but Elijah had shown the right spirit and they knew now that they could remain unbroken and be determined to meet whatever problems life would throw at them next.

**Luca** - Year 7



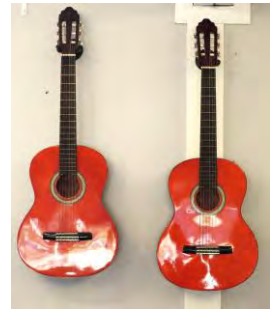
## WISDOM BEFORE BIRDSONG



Before birdsong the stillness under lowering clouds  
Is as deep as a mid-winter freeze anticipating the Spring.  
In the companionable distance, a doorbell rings -  
Descant to the base growl of the bus climbing the far away hills,  
And the contralto snarl of the sports car searching its Saturday thrills.



Of the world that is not people, there is no sound,  
But expectancy of symphony is all around,  
And the tall, leafy tree, dark beside my house  
Is home to owls, fast asleep after their midnight mouse.  
This calm is exhilarating - a happy prologue to my summer holiday.

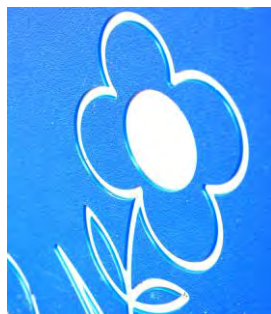
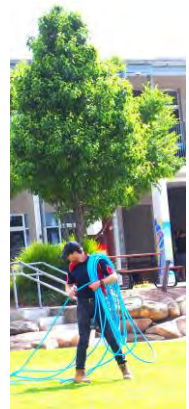


What shall be done in this precious time?



I can choose from many potential pleasures, all mine,  
But perhaps there is a task to complete; a service that will need all my might,  
A project to progress and bring others delight -  
Always there is this choice between self or mission.

Decision ticks close and then suddenly the first morning "cheep"  
Heralds the joy of what good sowers might reap.



**Mr J Ward**

## THE GHOSTS OF ORAN PARK



Today, we see it as a school.

Back then, it was a race track.

Back through the ages to 1962,

Those races were much more than a mere flashback.

Opened in the summers of the 1960s, it saw such action for many years.

Cars like cartoon critters raced upon the strip, while the crowds yelled and cheered,

Competitions, Grand Prix Championships, all for the honour of forgotten rewards.

Contending for any prize, both big or small.

Aussies and Canucks went head to head,

All driving hard one against another,

But with checkered flag down, each was a brother.



Cars from the old era have now evolved to a calmer modern stage.

Yet, it did feel like this strip would never age.

Many competitors came and went so very fast, chasing success, but often knowing failure.

Yet, no one was ready for this future -

Government buys it out, housing development begins.

And thus, the racetrack saw its final run.

Now, the beauty of a new school covers that track.

And the races are remembered in writing that takes us way back.

OPAC has opened, with new stories to tell.

But the ghosts of Oran Park, continue there to dwell.



**Eroni** - Year 9





## Another New Year

The old year fades tonight,  
But Hope ignites with the fireworks' light.  
Resolutions are told and dreams renewed-  
On a canvas blank, with a sky so blue.

Memories are made, new lessons learned,  
With every day, another heart has yearned.  
Laughter, love, and stars above  
Greet the new year, as the world moves on.

**Austin** – Year 8

