

July 2026
TOOWOOMBA
EISTEDDFOD

SET PIECES
(VERSE)

selected
by
Stephen Robinson
(Adjudicator)

CHAMPIONSHIP POEMS

'The ARRIVAL of the BEE BOX'

by Sylvia Plath

1. I ordered this, clean wood box
2. Square as a chair and almost too heavy to lift.
3. I would say it was the coffin of a midget
4. Or a square baby
5. Were there not such a din in it.

6. The box is locked, it is dangerous.
7. I have to live with it overnight
8. And I can't keep away from it.
9. There are no windows, so I can't see what is in there.
10. There is only a little grid, no exit.

11. I put my eye to the grid.
12. It is dark, dark,
13. With the swarmy feeling of African hands
14. Minute and shrunk for export,
15. Black on black, angrily clambering.

16. How can I let them out?
17. It is the noise that appals me most of all,
18. The unintelligible syllables.
19. It is like a Roman mob,
20. Small, taken one by one, but my god, together!

21. I lay my ear to furious Latin.
22. I am not a Caesar.
23. I have simply ordered a box of maniacs.
24. They can be sent back.
25. They can die, I need feed them nothing, I am the owner.

26. I wonder how hungry they are.
27. I wonder if they would forget me
28. If I just undid the locks and stood back and turned into a tree.
29. There is the laburnum, its blond colonnades,
30. And the petticoats of the cherry.
31. They might ignore me immediately
32. In my moon suit and funeral veil.
33. I am no source of honey
34. So why should they turn on me?
35. Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free.
36. The box is only temporary.

'The YOUNG DEAD SOLDIERS DO NOT SPEAK'

by Archibald MacLeish

1 The young dead soldiers do not speak.
2 Nevertheless, they are heard in the still houses:
3 who has not heard them?
4 They have a silence that speaks for them at night
5 and when the clock counts.
6 They say: We were young. We have died.
7 Remember us.
8 They say: We have done what we could
9 but until it is finished it is not done.
10 They say: We have given our lives but until it is finished
11 no one can know what our lives gave.
12 They say: Our deaths are not ours: they are yours,
13 they will mean what you make them.
14 They say: Whether our lives and our deaths were for
15 peace and a new hope or for nothing we cannot say,
16 it is you who must say this.
17 We leave you our deaths. Give them their meaning.
18 We were young, they say. We have died; remember us

231 VERSE SPEAKING SOLO – Years 11 & 12

'The SHARK' by Judith Beveridge

1 We heard the creaking clutch of the crank
2 as they drew it up by cable and wheel
3 and hung it sleek as a hull from the roof.
4 Grennan jammed open the great jaws
5 and we saw how the upper jaw hung from
6 the skull. We flinched at the stench of blood
7 that dripped on the fish-house floor, and
8 even Davey—when Grennan reached in
9 past the scowl and the steel prop for the
10 stump—just about passed out. The limb's
11 skin had already blanched, a sight none
12 of us could stomach, and we retched
13 though Grennan, cool, began cutting off
14 the flesh in knots, slashing off the flesh
15 in strips; and then Davey, flensing and
16 flanching, opened up the stomach and
17 the steaming bowels. Gulls circled like
18 ghouls. Still, they taunt us with their cries
19 and our hearts still burn inside us when
20 we remember, how Grennan with a tool
21 took out what was left of the child.

'The NET-MENDERS' by Sylvia Plath

1 Halfway up from the little harbour of sardine boats,
2 Halfway down from groves where the thin, bitter almond pips
3 Fatten in green-pocked pods, the three net-menders sit out,
4 Dressed in black, everybody in mourning for someone.
5 They set their stout chairs back to the road and face the dark
6 Dominoes of their doorways.
7 Sun grains their crow-colours,
8 Purples the fig in the leaf's shadow, turns the dust pink.
9 On the road named for Tomas Ortunio, mica
10 Winks like money under the ringed toes of the chickens.
11 The houses are white as sea-salt goats lick from the rocks.
12 While their fingers work with the coarse mesh and the fine
13 Their eyes revolve the whole town like a blue and green ball.
14 Nobody dies or is born without their knowing it.
15 They talk of bride-lace, of lovers spunky as gamecocks.
16 The moon leans, a stone madonna, over the lead sea
17 And the iron hills that enclose them. Earthen fingers
18 Twist old words into the web-threads:
19 *Tonight may the fish*
20 *Be a harvest of silver in the nets, and the lamps*
21 *Of our husbands and sons move sure among the low stars.*

232 VERSE SPEAKING SOLO – Year 10

'DEATH of a WHALE' by John Blight

1 When the mouse died, there was a sort of pity;
2 The tiny, delicate creature made for grief.
3 Yesterday, instead, the dead whale on the reef
4 Drew an excited multitude to the jetty.
5 How must a whale die to wring a tear?
6 Lugubrious death of a whale; the big
7 Feast for the gulls and sharks; the tug
8 Of the tide simulating life still there,
9 Until the air, polluted, swings this way
10 Like a door ajar from a slaughterhouse.
11 Pooh! pooh! spare us, give us the death of a mouse
12 By its tiny hole; not this in our lovely bay.
13 — Sorry, we are, too, when a child dies:
14 But at the immolation of a race, who cries?

'LIFESAVER' by Elizabeth Riddell

1 He was brought up out of the sea,
2 His tall body dead.
3 He was carried shoulder high
4 Between the sea and the sky.
5 The sun and the water trembled down
6 From his fingers and from the brown
7 Valley between his shoulders; and the spray
8 Fell before him as he passed on his way.
9 His eyes were dead, and his lips
10 Closed on death, and his feet
11 Chained with death, and his hands
12 Cold with death. He is one now with ships
13 And the bones of pirate bands
14 Steeped in salt and knavery.
15 One with fish and weed and pearl
16 And the long, lonely beat
17 Of the waves that curl
18 On shell and rock and sand
19 Of a deep drowned land.
20 He was carried shoulder high
21 Up the alleys of the sun.
22 And the heat
23 Washed him over from his head to his feet,
24 But you cannot give the body back breath
25 With a flagon full of sun.
26 He is drowned, the tall one.
27 Thin brother Death
28 Has him by the throat
29 On the sand, in the sun.

233 VERSE SPEAKING SOLO – Year 9

'BIRD in the CLASSROOM'

by Colin Thiele

1 The students drowsed and drowned
2 in the teacher's ponderous monotone -
3 limp bodies loping in the wordy heat,
4 melted and run together, desk and flesh as one.
5 swooning and swimming in a sea of drone.

6 Each one asleep, swayed and vaguely drifted
7 with lidded eyes and lolling weighted heads,
8 were caught on heavy waves and dimly lifted,
9 sunk slowly, ears ringing in the syrup of his sound,

10 or borne from the room on a heaving wilderness of beds.
11 And then on a sudden, a bird's cool voice
12 punched out song. Crisp and spare
13 on the startled air,

14 beak-beamed
15 or idly tossed,
16 each note gleamed
17 like a bead of frost.

18 A bird's cool voice from a neighbour's tree
19 with five clear calls - mere grains of sound
20 rare and neat
21 repeated twice
22 but they sprang from the heat
23 like drops of ice.

24 Ears cocked, before the comment ran
25 fading and chuckling where a wattle stirred,
26 the students wondered how they could have heard
27 such dreary monotone from a man, and
28 such wisdom from a bird.

'MUSHROOMS' by Sylvia Plath

1 Overnight, very
2 Whitely, discreetly,
3 Very quietly

4 Our toes, our noses
5 Take hold on the loam,
6 Acquire the air.

7 Nobody sees us,
8 Stops us, betrays us;
9 The small grains make room.

10 Soft fists insist on
11 Heaving the needles,
12 The leafy bedding,

13 Even the paving.
14 Our hammers, our rams,
15 Earless and eyeless,

16 Perfectly voiceless,
17 Widen the crannies,
18 Shoulder through holes. We

19 Diet on water,
20 On crumbs of shadow,
21 Bland-mannered, asking

22 Little or nothing.
23 So many of us!
24 So many of us!

25 We are shelves, we are
26 Tables, we are meek,
27 We are edible,

28 Nudgers and shovers
29 In spite of ourselves.
30 Our kind multiplies:

31 We shall by morning
32 Inherit the earth.
33 Our foot's in the door.

234 VERSE SPEAKING SOLO – Year 8

‘CURRY’ by Steven Herrick

1 Auntie and I are having dinner
2 in her studio,
3 in front of her newest painting
4 titled “Curry Sandwich”.
5 It’s all brown and orange paint splotches
6 in between a white border
7 flecked with grey dots.
8 Auntie’s paintings are getting weirder.
9 We’re eating a chicken curry
10 from Auntie’s favourite big bowls.
11 I tell Auntie about school.
12 She listens and says,
13 “School is like curry,
14 hot and fierce,
15 and dangerous,
16 smelly too,
17 but good for you.”
18 I change the subject to soccer
19 and sure enough
20 Auntie says,
21 “Soccer reminds me of curry,
22 unpredictable, passionate,
23 some people can’t keep away from it,
24 others never go near.”
25 I tell Auntie that the holidays are coming up,
26 maybe we could go to the beach?
27 Auntie says,
28 “I once went to a beach in India,
29 there was a restaurant,
30 built right on the water.
31 I had a curry,
32 a huge, delicious vegetable curry.”

33 Auntie is always like this
34 when she’s painting –
35 ‘obsessed’ is the word.

36 I give in.
37 I say, “It’s a good curry Auntie.”
38 And what does she say?
39 “Oh Sam,
40 let’s not talk about curry.
41 How was your day at school?”

42 We eat
43 and look at her painting,
44 Curry.

‘SCUBA SCOUT’ by Colin Thiele

1 Under the sea
2 there is strange magic:
3 pearls of air in wavering strands and loops
4 above your head, coral flowers in bloom,
5 shells more perfect than porcelain,
6 and long lazy flags of kelp.

7 On land you can’t move horizontally like that,
8 can’t travel head first down corridors and streets,
9 can’t board the bus like a long shark,
10 swim through the doorway, down the aisle,
11 and ride lying gently up against the roof.

12 But at sea, you are one with the fish,
13 fluid and free,
14 drifting over sea-wrack and weed,
15 past rock-holes, grottoes, caverns,
16 where great rays flap off like ancient birds
17 with leathery wings;
18 where things unseen escape in a puff
19 of seabed sand,
20 small creatures skitter and dart,
21 and hermit crabs labour under the burden
22 of their houses.

23 But there is something to remember
24 in that soft and liquid hush:
25 when your air tank is empty
26 you return in a rush.

235 VERSE SPEAKING SOLO – Year 7

'THUNDERSTORM'

by Peter Skrzynecki

1 Nearly every afternoon that summer
2 a thunderstorm broke
3 like a battle in the sky –
4 where heroes and villains
5 clashed in combat and hurled down
6 their clamour of deafening cries.

7 First the wind, then the thunder;
8 then the lightning that split
9 huge clouds apart –
10 then jagged hailstones
11 and rain like nails
12 that ripped open the forest
13 and tore up the shelters in tufts of grass.

14 Birds grew silent.
15 Cows and horses herded themselves
16 under willows and pines.
17 Dogs hid under the house.
18 Chickens left the yard.

19 We stayed like prisoners in the house
20 And watched the tumult
21 Wash against our castle of weatherboard
22 And corrugated iron –
23 pressing our faces against the glass –
24 and heard the fear in each other's heart.

25 Afterwards we walked
26 like heroes ourselves, barefooted,
27 through paddocks strewn with leaves and ice –
28 threw handfuls of it
29 into the sky like diamonds
30 and pretended we hadn't been afraid.

31 A rainbow would form
32 Over the land
33 And hang like a magic charm –

34 And we believed
35 As long as it always happened
36 Nothing bad would ever happen to the farm.

'CHILDMEMORY' by Michael Dugan

1 Down past Macartney's farm
2 beyond a wilderness of waist high thistles,
3 willow trees caressed the creek.
4 We would come to the willows
5 along a secret path of our own making,
6 to leap into their feathered greenness
7 and, clutching handfuls of whiplike branches,
8 would swing, eyes closed, above the stream,
9 rejoicing in motion,
10 with the bitter taste of willow leaves in our mouths.
11 Later we tied a rope to the highest branch,
12 and riding its arc like a pendulum,
13 would pause at the point of timelessness; to drop,
14 breaking the pool's glass surface
15 into ever widening sculptured circles.
16 One summer night I crept silent to the willows
17 and swung for hours, feeling the cool sweet air on
my face,
18 watching stars reflecting in the pool,
19 like trolls' eyes staring from the black water.

20 Returning fifteen years later,
21 factories pour waste into the creek,
22 no one remembers willow trees.

'MY DANCING GRAN'

by Brian Patten

- 1 People are talking rubbish
- 2 Especially if they say
- 3 At a hundred and one my old Gran
- 4 Can't dance the night away.

- 5 You want to see her Charleston,
- 6 You want to see her romp,
- 7 She'll leap around the furniture,
- 8 Or simply stand and stomp.

- 9 She's no jumbo at the mambo,
- 10 She can shimmy with the best,
- 11 She can samba on till midnight
- 12 Without a moment's rest.

- 13 A tea dance or a hoedown,
- 14 A fan dance or the twist,
- 15 A tango or flamenco –
- 16 (She'll do them all if asked).

- 17 She'll bossa nova over
- 18 To the youngest in the room
- 19 And rumba till her lumbar
- 20 Feels a twinge of gloom,

- 21 Then Gran'll do the cancan
- 22 And if the guests are still awake
- 23 She'll lead them in a conga line
- 24 And break-dance on a cake.

- 25 After a tot of sherry,
- 26 After wine with Sunday lunch,
- 27 After a nip of brandy
- 28 She's the wildest of the bunch.

'TEA LEAVES'

by Roger McGough

- 1 Some people read papers and magazines;
- 2 Others prefer cartoons and comics.
- 3 Some read manuals about how things work;
- 4 A few study Home Economics.

- 5 Some eagerly devour those I-Spy books
- 6 That classify flowers and birds,
- 7 While others, big, fat dictionaries
- 8 That give the meanings of words.

- 9 But old Mrs Lee, when she wants to read,
- 10 Then this is what she'll do –
- 11 Boil the kettle, warm the pot
- 12 And make a nice fresh brew.

- 13 For old Mrs Lee reads tea leaves,
- 14 And as soon as she gets up,
- 15 It's toast and a chair by the window,
- 16 Then cup after cup after cup

- 17 Of fables, folklore and legends,
- 18 Of memoirs and novels of course,
- 19 Of sci-fi, thrillers, romances,
- 20 Of sagas from Aga to Norse.

- 21 All the tales that have ever been written;
- 22 All the characters, places and plots.
- 23 The information stored away
- 24 In the leaves like microdots.

- 25 And so late into the evening,
- 26 While her neighbours are watching TV,
- 27 Mrs Lee is still there, cat on her lap,
- 28 With a book in a nice cup of tea.

237 VERSE SPEAKING SOLO – Year 5

'when mum planted zucchinis'

by Jenny Boulton

1. when mum planted zucchinis
2. she didn't expect them to grow
3. but they did
4. every few days
5. we picked them before
6. they grew too big
7. we ate them
8. steamed stewed
9. baked boiled
10. barbecued
11. we ate them raw
12. we pickled them
13. & chutneyed them
14. we gave them to everyone
15. w5ho came to the door
16. instead of
17. 'would you like something to drink?'
18. we asked,
19. 'would you like a few zucchinis?'
20. this went on for several weeks
21. three months later
22. we were still eating frozen zucchini casseroles
23. we were asking, 'would you like a jar of pickles?'
24. i never liked zucchinis much anyway
25. next year, i'm going to plant watermelons
26. i don't expect them to grow either

'RADIO TELESCOPE'

by Colin Thiele

1. Ghostly and silent
2. this vast round ear
3. strains to catch the whisperings of space.
4. Tilted slightly like a head held on one side,
5. intense with concentration,
6. it hears, faint and far,
7. the stupendous secrets of the universe:
8. strange hints, stories, mysteries,
9. the voices of ancient stars,
10. conversations of galaxies
11. that ended a million years ago –
12. sagas of creation, miraculous and awesome,
13. of holocausts, collisions,
14. catastrophes beyond belief,
15. the agonies of giants and dwarfs,
16. the menace of black holes . . .
17. No wonder that the people are uneasy
18. watching its studied stance –
19. ear cupped, responding with a slow nod
20. to messages beyond the reach of reason –
21. assuming the right, it seems,
22. to eavesdrop on the thoughts of God.

'The ROCK POOL ROCK'

by Patricia Leighton

- 1 There's a riot in the rock pool,
- 2 The crabs are linking claws,
- 3 Throwing up their legs and dancing
- 4 Can-cans with the prawns.
- 5 An ancient purple lobster
- 6 Is deejaying the affair
- 7 But no-one takes much notice
- 8 - it's as if he isn't there!

- 9 The tentacled anemones
- 10 Are swinging to the beat
- 11 Of all the little winkles
- 12 Stamping all their little feet;
- 13 The cockle shells and limpets
- 14 Pull apart and then collide,
- 15 And a row of flirty seaworms
- 16 Does the slinky 'Rock Pool Glide'.

- 17 The mussel boys are posing
- 18 In tuxedos, shiny blue,
- 19 A snazzy razor shell pops up
- 20 And yells, "Hi, lads, what's new?"
- 21 Yeh, it's rocking in the rock pool,
- 22 It's a swinging seashore jam.
- 23 Hey, don't take off your shoes
- 24 And put your toes in –
cool it, man!

'VAMPIRE'

by Steve Turner

- 1 As a vampire, Victor
- 2 Was a bit of a dud.
- 3 He liked having sharp teeth
- 4 But he couldn't stand blood.

- 5 'You've got to drink up son,'
- 6 Said his father one night.
- 7 'You won't grow up strong
- 8 If you're frightened to bite.'

- 9 So out Victor ventured
- 10 On the lookout for skin
- 11 And found something smooth
- 12 To sink his fangs in.

- 13 Victor snapped and he snapped
- 14 Like a wolf on the loose
- 15 And his mouth filled with bits
- 16 While his chin ran with juice.

- 17 'I've done it dear father,'
- 18 Shouted Victor with pride.
- 19 'I'm a vampire tonight!
- 20 My victim has died.'

- 21 A vampire he was, but
- 22 Not such a scary 'un.
- 23 He'd bitten a tomato
- 24 So remained, vegetarian.

239 VERSE SPEAKING SOLO – Year 3

'There's a hippo in the swimming pool' by John Foster

1. There's a hippo in the swimming pool
2. Splashing and thrashing about,
3. Whenever he gets near them,
4. The children scream and shout.

5. There's a hippo in the swimming pool.
6. He's like a wave machine.
7. He plunges down and then pops up.
8. He's like a submarine.

9. There's a hippo in the swimming pool.
10. He's driving us all mad,
11. 'Cause the hippo in the swimming pool
12. Is Jason Johnson's dad!

'BOYS ARE BIG EXPERTS' by Jack Prelutsky

1. Boys are big experts
2. At looking for trouble,
3. they climb over fences,
4. they tunnel through rubble.
5. Boys take their time
6. when they're called to the table;
7. boys love to eat
8. like they live in a stable.

9. Boys tend to throw things
10. and get into tussles,
11. make nasty noises,
12. and show off their muscles,
13. lots of stuff leading
14. to bruises and bleeding –
15. why don't they stop a while ...
16. and, instead, start READING?

240 VERSE SPEAKING SOLO – Year 2

'JOLLY POLLY PENNYWICK' by Colin Thiele

1. Jolly Polly Pennywick
2. By day or night was very quick
3. At eating chocolate Toblerone
4. Or chocolate ice-cream in a cone.

5. She gorged on chocolate biscuits too
6. And glugging topping-mix like glue,
7. Then finished off a chocolate brick –
8. Jolly Polly Pennywick.

9. Chocolate fudge and flake she ate,
10. Gobbling at a reckless rate,
11. Till jolly Polly Pennywick
12. Was sorry Polly plenty sick.

'LAUNDERETTE' by Gareth Owen

1. Wishy, washy, there's my shirt
2. Swirling squirming round my vest.
3. Splashy, dashy, two red socks
4. In a sandwich with the rest.
5. A football scarf, a bright-red hat
6. A pillow-slip, blue jeans, a sheet.
7. Oh, my goodness, what was that?
8. A hand, a face, a pair of feet
9. Someone swirling round quite bare –
10. *How did Granny get in there?*

241 VERSE SPEAKING SOLO – Year 1 and under

'The SLUG'S HOPE' by Gordon Snell

1. Who believes the slimy slug
2. When he says he needs a hug?
3. In the basin! Pull the plug!
4. Down he slithers, glug-glug-glug.
5. Who knows? – down there, his ugly mug
6. Might delight some other slug
7. And the slug will get his hug
8. Down where the waters glug-glug-glug.

'WOMBAT' by Ann Coleridge

1. Wombat portly, wombat plump,
2. Lives beneath a gum tree stump.
3. Wombat podgy, wombat round,
4. Has a den beneath the ground.
5. Wombat dumpy, wombat stout,
6. Keeps the mice and possums out.
7. Wombat cosy, wombat dry,
8. Watches as the world goes by.

'A DAD REMOTE CONTROL'

by Brian Moses

- 1 Our mum's got a dad remote control
- 2 that she points in his direction
- 3 whenever he slumps down on the settee
- 4 or starts to raise an objection.
- 5 She presses one button for 'walk the dog'
- 6 another for 'cook the tea'
- 7 and when she feels a little low
- 8 there's one labelled 'pamper me'.
- 9 Then there's 'run my bath' and 'pour my drink'
- 10 And 'time to stop lounging about'.
- 11 She presses a button for 'go and wash up'
- 12 and then 'take the rubbish out'.
- 13 And when she feels he should pay her attention
- 14 she operates 'please adore me'.
- 15 But when he goes on about football scores,
- 16 she switches him off with 'you bore me'.
- 17 But when our mum goes out with her friends
- 18 and at last, it's Dad's turn to choose
- 19 he points the remote control at himself
- 20 and presses the button marked 'snooze'.