

Poems OutLoud 2019 Australian Poetry



OutLoud 2019 Poems

Australian Poetry

This special e-chapbook presents the five finalist poems in the 2019 Secondary Schools Slam competition, OutLoud Eco!Slam 2019, including the winning poem. It is also a kind of bespoke sampler of all the extraordinary poems produced by 29 Secondary teams, and four Primary teams who participated this year. Along with partnerships for OutLoud 2019 with the City of Melbourne Arts Grants Program 2019, Melbourne Writers Festival, Red Room Poetry, Express Media and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, AP is also grateful for our publications and festivals funding supporters at the Cultural Fund, Australia Council for the Arts and Creative Victoria. Most of all we would like to deeply thank Creative Director, Emilie Zoey Baker, whose exciting vision founded OutLoud nine years ago, and all the inspiring poets and their teachers who participated in 2019. Slam!!!

Creative Director: Emilie Zoey Baker
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Cover page: Emilie Zoey Baker with the winning team from Nossal High School
Second image: Emilie with 2019 Secondary finalists, judges and Auslan translator

Australian Poetry, based at The Wheeler Centre in Naarm/Melbourne, acknowledges the custodians and owners of the land, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.



I'm so very proud of the students that participated in the OutLoud Eco!Slam this year. All the newborn poets you are about to read stepped up to the microphone shaking with urgency, anger and passion (and nervousness). It was an electric final – one of the best slam events I have ever attended. To now see them published here is an extra delight. It's wonderful to see young artists valued as writers and performers, and to know their words are not only going to be heard now but read by poets and readers in the future. Spoken word is more popular than ever and it's a brilliant tool to help young people express themselves, to coax them to open up and let their imaginations and intellects fly, and more and more, adults are listening. The youth on these next few pages are passionate, wry, intelligent, furious and funny; they see through the lies they are being sold, they get to the point, and they're not only ready to take action but they inspire all of us to join them.

—*Emilie Zoey Baker*



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HEADSTART

Finalist poem, Melbourne High School

By Aaron More and Scott Zhou

This young girl feels lucky to survive;
Shivering against the cold breeze she strives for her life.
Greatly deprived of food and education,
Hand stretched out, seeking for a donation,
Passer-bys don't even make eye contact as if she was some sort of mutation.
She lives life tough in an uncompassionate society.

“Why do you ignore me?” she asks in her head.
You go about your luxurious lives while leaving me to my concrete bed.
Never accepted or respected
Humans have perfected the art of turning a shoulder on their own species
Whether that's because of their ethnicity, ill-health or gender
Is it even on their agenda to show some support?
I am deprived because of how society is organised.
It was constructed to build up the wealthy but tear down the poor,
Till we're down on the floor,
Our possessions no more.

A skyscraper towered above her
Owned by a man with stature; he had been born with a silver spoon in hand,
Money and accommodation were never really in demand.
With his many years of education and just a little bit of dedication
He was provided with everything he needed for a joyous life and so he thrived.
He knew that he was fortunate to be inside a cosy, heated room,
Fortunate to consume nutritious food whenever he decided to,
Fortunate to never be booed or cause a feud because of the way he was.
But deep down he was aware, that when he became wealthier, he was taking
from the poor.
He was a bystander, observing all the destruction occur but his actions were
obscure
Why wasn't he taking action?

poem continued on next page

On his walk home that day, he spotted a young girl on the street.
She wore torn pieces of cloth, her head down and tears flowing down her cheeks.
The man knew that he couldn't be a bystander any longer,
He started up a conversation with her and offered her some food.
They may've lived their lives apart, but they were still the same at heart
Both chasing after a happy life, but he was given a head start.

DEAR PRIME MINISTER

Finalist poem, Lowther Hall

By Ella Capewell, Lily-Rose Dean, Yanan Chai

Mummy, what did coral look like?
Did polar bears really exist?
Was the sky ever blue?
Mummy, where are all the stars?
When did all the trees die?
Why can't I see past the smog?

When I was little I dreamed of growing up, where I would travel, who I would meet and what I would be. Now I lay awake at night wondering... Do I have a future on this planet? How can we stop this? Is anyone doing anything? Should I be scared? These thoughts are so overwhelming and scary I want to curl up in the corner and block the world out, but I can't because everyone else already is. Even our world leaders refuse to take action, some even denying its existence at all "Fake news"

Hold UP

Dear Prime Minister
Students stream onto the streets
Crying for the change they seek
We cannot go on like this they say
The coal mining industry must be held at bay
We must convince those worried workers
That coal is not their future
Coal is not our future
Because if we continue to exploit coal
We have no future

We are no longer observers of change
It is occurring
Winds are stirring
Hurricanes rage
Fires rampage

poem continued on next page

Through the streets
Across the plains
The polar bears moan in pain
As they drown in a sea
A sea that is rising,
A sea that's becoming more and more sinister
But
What would we know Mr Prime Minister?

After all, we are just stupid, ignorant little kids
We know nothing about politics
That's where you're wrong Scott
Don't think we don't notice
The coal on your hands
And the gleam in your eye
Screw renewables, they can go die
Because they don't make you the
Money money money
To satisfy
You and your buds back at Adani

Dearest Mr Morrison,
You better get this through your head
We won't back down
We won't drown
Denial and self-interest is your position
But we need to hear more about transition
We will scream until our throats bleed
Until the warning that none will heed
Falls upon someone who feels it is a necessary deed

Yours Truly,
A generation that is struggling to understand

How we are still human if we destroy our home

poem continued on next page

We keep blaming others for using too much plastic.
We keep calling out our neighbours for littering along the roads.
And yes, a polluted earth is no joke.
But the earth is what we all have in common.

Four months ago Paris's iconic cathedral was engulfed in flames, sending plumes of black smoke across Paris's skyline. The world was thrown into chaos, a media storm erupted. Every newspaper, TV and headline was consumed with the devastating news. But if we care about a building that's 800 years old, shouldn't we care at least as much about saving our 4.5 billion-year-old planet? Our planet is burning just as Notre Dame was and there are not enough firefighters trying to put it out.

That was then. Today is now. And tomorrow will be too late.
Too late to save the nourishing green from burning to a crisp.
Too late to conserve the mighty oceans from leaving behind dry cracks of
the ground.
As the wind blows, sawdust fills our lungs with despair. Our reality.
The earth satisfies our needs but not our greed.
Only until we see the last tree collapsing,
The last breath of air turning black, a puff of poison.
The last fish caught in a prison of wire.
We realise that we can't breathe money. We can't live off rolling digits.
They are meaningless when there's nothing left.

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I HAVE A DREAM

Finalist poem, Haileybury City

By Genevieve Gray, Emma Niggl, Aimee Lee, Chiara Sgroi

I have a dream
That I will swim with coloured coral
For I dived into the cool embrace of the brilliance of the largest arms of nature,
But the Great Barrier Reef was sickly pale, it's fever forever worsening as we feed
its temperature.
The absence of pigment
Was equivalent to the absence of dollars in a banker's wallet.
Once back on the boat, my Mum wiped her wet hair from her face to look at me.
"I wish you could of seen the coral like I have seen,"
she said
I nodded, me too.
I feared my dream would never come true,
So I joined the crusade to rescue
Our planet
I wrote a sign to make my thoughts loud enough for people to remember, shouted
words and punched my fists.
But still my voice was too quiet over the noise of a booming economy.
I had a dream.

I have a dream,
To finish my schooling, and to travel the world.
I was going to wait.
But now time is ticking down,
The hour glass has been flipped, and it's counting down the seconds till our
demise,
Sand is falling, and for every grain that falls...
An ice-cap melts
A tree collapses
A fire breaks out,
And in the flames I see the faces of my grandchildren.
Asking me why, why our generation never did something.

poem continued on next page

I flew on a metal bird to Paris, one magical Christmas,
My sister wrote a note, enclosed with the yearnings of an innocent child,
She sent her wish to the heavens and it weighs heavy on my hollow,
helpless heart that I couldn't make it come true.
She wished for it to snow on Christmas Day,
But not even Santa Claus could summon snow that year.
It's a torturous thing, watching your wishes drown under mother nature's
 angry tide
Because we are too selfish to abide, when will this ignorance subside?
I had a dream.

I have a dream,
That one day my children can still live the farmer lifestyle that my
ancestors lead for generations,
I pray that the soil
We toil over
Will not go to waste under grey building blocks,
I hope that the seeds we planted,
You will not take for granted when you eat your next meal,
Too hard to swallow?
I cry, hoping the tears I create will sink into the ground to feed one more animal,
One more,
Because these creatures are my home,
My family,
The fuel for my future,
I have a dream that the growing food bowl won't shrink the size of our food.
Will this path lead us down to our grassy green grave?
I had a dream.

I have a dream.
To leave this wasteland now labelled home.
I dream to see Amsterdam, Miami, Rio de Janeiro and London.
They are all long gone now except for the weary faces of people from
 cities submerged underwater.
Bodies on top of each other, echoes of the life we once led.
I dream of eating wholesome food grown from roots below.
Artificial machinery leaves us with our only food source.

poem continued on next page

Our roots have been cut off, I may never bear children, never start a family.
I dream of working as an astronaut; this world's too destroyed to discover.
No one's working on a dying planet.
Those deluded politicians, the journalists in denial from decades ago
Too focused on today to care about tomorrow
Their actions, their words
Are my consequences
I had a dream.

We have a dream
To live in a world where the facts of our childhood won't become the fantasies of
our children's future
The side quest humanity is taking is too long to outlast our devastation
How are we to survive when everything else is dying?
How long will it take for us to wrap our minds around the fact that there is a
solution,
Like a math equation, the degradation of a civilization lies in the palms of a
world full of miscommunication

We had a dream.

ANTIDOTE

Finalist poem, Carey Grammar

By Mia Kendall and Rheanna Senn

Hey!

My name is Rheanna

And I'm Mia.

At school I'd play footy with the boys,

Instead of playing with the classic girly toys.

And if I was too good for their masculine pride,

They'd point and yell,

Saying piss off you dyke,

Until I'd run off with my fists all tight,

Saying to myself it's ok, you're alright,

They're lucky you're not in the mood for a fight,

But inside I was scared,

Because out there I didn't think anyone cared,

As though at night there was no one to hand me the light,

And as though every minute of every day I was suffering from stage fright,

Because in a world where everything is seen as black and white,

I felt like my heart was painted too many colours to be right.

In primary school, I was in the minority.

A small brown girl of 6, I believed I was inferiority

I had two best friends, blue eyes, skin as fair as snow

I saw them as gods of perfection, but little did I know

Consumed by the need to become 'beautiful', I was so attached

So I began to itch and scratch

My arms, my legs, my face and hands

Thinking that it was the answer, it was my plan

To peel away my brown pigment

Seeing the brown replaced by white replaced by red

I knew that perfection was just a figment

I needed to stop before I bled

poem continued on next page

Innocent girl of 6,
Believing that if I did it enough
I would become fixed
For the past few years my pa hasn't really been "around",
To be honest I'm surprised that by now he hasn't drowned,
In a pool of alcohol, drugs and depression,
But don't worry, I say, it's just an expression,
Just my mind denying that it needs confession,
To admit to the aggression,
That I feel towards him,
I'd rather treat my mind to suppression,

But I still beg to you the question,
Are we so different?

Two years back, I was yelled at
Public space, on a tram
I was called 'a curry munching idiot', yes that
But no one else gave a damn
And that killed me inside
When he yelled 'go back to where you came from'
'We don't want you here', I swear part of me died
Not that his screaming hate was far from done
But that no one came to stand by my side
See all these stories are facts of my past
And I'd be lying if I said that I don't love my battle scars
Because look at me, I've made it this far
I look out to everyone here, knowing that despite how we appear,
We're all just suffocating in the same atmosphere,
We're all just trying to ignore the fact that within these walls,
There's enough mental illness to fill these halls,
We're all in the same rickety boat, all trying to stay afloat
Because unlike most diseases, the stuff in our heads has no antidote
So maybe rather than trying to intoxicate each other with judgement and hate
Let's look behind the masks, since we're all really just a part of the same race

I HAVE A QUESTION

Winning poem, Nossal High School

By Zhoujing Amy Chu, Neha De Alwis, Ruth Jarra, Upani Perera

I have a question.

When you say, 'go back to your country', what do you mean?

Because I was born here but my parents weren't and I wasn't born in Ethiopia,

so-

Where is my country?

Would you have me box myself away? Send it with a letter sealed with my blood,
my pain, Saying 'you don't belong here, go home, would you just leave'

With Australia's bruising grip holding me down, and

Africa aching in my bones

How can I go back to a home I have never known

I have a question.

If you want to box me up, what goes and what remains? My heritage stripped
away

And my white, fairy bread-eating, Andy Griffiths-reading, ABC3-watching ass
stays

I have a question,

When you say 'speak proper English', what do you mean?

I'm five years old, and it's my first day at school

My uniform is too big, and my skin is too brown

The teacher can't say my name properly because there are too many twists and
turns in it that She can't fit her tongue around

So she cuts it down to a size that she can swallow.

It's funny because whenever my mother cannot fit her own tongue around

English words

You are allowed to point your finger at her and build a wall with the way you
speak

And each time you stack another brick,

She has to break her tongue all over again just so you will listen to her

They call it broken English

poem continued on next page

I have a question

When you say 'you don't belong here', what do you mean?

Because if you mean, 'nativity is a necessity I don't possess",

Then doesn't that mean you don't belong here either?

Because it looks like you've blindly written those history books, eyes shut and
turned away from What's true

This land was built on the graves of those who don't look like me or you,

The streets we walk have Indigenous blood seeping through every crevice and
crack

Looking back, those colonisers were the instigators of an extinction - But now
you're just Writing history into fiction. Wait-

I have a question

Did they never teach you what the price of white Australia was? Mate?

I have a question

When you call it 'whitewashing' what do you mean?

Because it sounds like you're cleansing my skin

Of its melanin, of its culture, of its history

Because it sounds like you decided to bleach away my representation

Like you wanted to purge an entire nation

Of its forced diversity

Because it sounds like a purification,

Like there's no difference between the darkness of skin

And the darkness of sin

I have a question

Why do you say one thing when you mean another?

I can hear you picking apart your words and rearranging them like a puzzle so
that you don't sound racist.

I can feel you cushioning your intention with the way you speak in white riddles.

I can see you wrapping up your words like roses,

Only so that when my skin is torn from the thorns

They can't see that underneath, I bleed red too

Australian Poetry, established to bring together state-based poetry collectives, publishes the country's national poetry journal, the Australian Poetry Journal. The Journal, published six-monthly, is guest-edited each issue by different voices, to ensure excellence and inclusivity. It also publishes insightful, curious articles. AP publishes an annual anthology, along with a digital volume showcasing U30s and emerging voices. Based at Melbourne's The Wheeler Centre, alongside the UNESCO City of Literature Office, AP also partners with the major capital city literary festivals around the country each year, producing our own events. Annually, AP presents, commissions or publishes new works by 350+ Australian poets. We run local and international residencies and mentorships, and sit at record subscriptions.

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