

## GOLDEN APPLE WRITING COMPETITION

### 2012 COMPOSITION RESULTS

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Place “Aspirations and Memories” Margaret Saltau, VIC

Poet Robert Browning wrote,

*A man's reach should exceed his grasp*

*Else what's a heaven for?*

I think he's encapsulated why we all teach. We want to enable our students to outreach themselves, never to be satisfied or content to rest on their laurels, to be hungry to know more, to do more.

Oddly enough, in terms of career, I had no aspirations. No career advice. No choice of university course. Women in my family taught. And talked. And wrote. Even my non-teacher aunts spent hours discussing books, reciting poems, mulling over incorrect grammar in the neighbours' conversations, and generally behaving as though they lived in an English classroom. I never stood a chance. My grandmother, herself descended from one of the founders of Scotch College, was a schoolteacher. During her seven-year engagement, while my grandfather was saving enough money to buy a farm, Grandma taught in little rural one-teacher schools in remote Victoria. My mother, her eldest daughter, began her teaching career in her teens, as a pupil-teacher in equally remote country Victoria.

My own educational career had a rocky start. When I started school, teachers were scarce. The situation was so bad that on my first day of Prep, I, with all the other preppies, was sent home at 9 AM. No prep teacher. Six months later, I did start school – and my mother was my teacher. The only way her daughter could start school was by her agreeing to take the preps. My mother and I always had different memories of my six months in Prep. Let's just say I'm glad it's over. She never allowed me to answer a question in class, in case she appeared to be favouring me.

The first time that I actually stood up in front of a class, I loved it. I loved excavating ideas and knowledge, and passing all this on. I'm an addict – of the excitement of discovery and shared achievement. The tired old cliché that we are all life-long learners is especially true for teachers, and it is what makes every class new and exhilarating. Learning is an active, participatory sport.

It's impossible to untangle memories and aspirations, career and life. I remember a teacher simply saying 'Thank you' when she met me at a conference because I'd taught her in Year 12. That's all she said. I remember an entire class standing up and cheering when I returned a huge assignment the day after they'd submitted it. I remember that they never had occasion to do this again. I remember the long, cruel hours of correction that every teacher endures. I remember the scratchy attempts at essay writing of a class at the beginning of a year and I remember the long, allusive sentences coiling into evocative analysis that the same students wrote six months later. I remember Merve saying, 'I can't do this', and then doing it.

I remember my Literature girls asking, again and again, what study score I think they'll achieve at the end of the year, and I remember what I always say. 'Just do the task and do your best. Aim for full marks, for perfection.'

That's what we all aspire to: perfection; heaven. That's why teachers and students reach beyond their grasp.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Place “40 Cents For Teacher” Bilge Abdioglu, NSW**

The year was 1992 and I had just graduated as a teacher. I was enthusiastic and very determined and quite naive. I attended the University of Sydney, so most of my practicums were completed in the schools surrounding the university. As a practicum student, teaching was exciting and easy. The students often came from upper class families, they all spoke English and they all seemed to learn effortlessly.

My first teaching position was at a school called Cabramatta West Public school-very different from my practicum schools. In the 80s and 90s, Cabramatta was infamous for drugs, gangs and refugees. John Newman, State MP was gunned down only a few blocks from the school. Not exactly your upper class area. When I started teaching, I thought I was prepared for anything-after all I did go to a great university and did well on my practicums. My experiences were so removed from what I had expected.

Every morning the executive staff walked around the playground looking for syringes left over from drugs users throughout the night, 97% of the school come from non-English speaking backgrounds, most the children were either newly arrived refugees or their parents were. The school provided the students with breakfast so they wouldn't go hungry all day. They all lived in high density living, they had very little personal possessions but they all knew education was important and they valued the time they spent at school each day.

Every morning I would arrive at school to find students waiting for me at my door. They loved being at school. Teaching these students how to speak English was a school priority. They appreciated everything I did for them. They were always polite and respectful. So when the year was finally over, I realised how attached I had become to my very first class.

On the last day, many students came to school with cakes they had baked, cards they had drawn and flowers they had picked on their way to school. They were so pleased with themselves as they handed me the gifts. One of the students handed me a small gift wrapped in a page ripped out of one of his books. It was taped so tightly with sticky-tape, it took me a while to open it. When I finally unwrapped it, I noticed it was two twenty cents coins. Confused, I looked up at him. "It's my present, Miss, for teaching me." he said. I was overwhelmed with emotion.

Fifteen years later, now a mother of two boys myself, I was sitting in a waiting room at medical practice, when a young man approached me and asked, "Miss, do you remember me?" Looking up, I recognised this young man to be the little boy who had given me a gift of forty cents all those years ago. When I smiled at him, he realised that I knew exactly who he was. His next response was, "Miss, I loved you because you taught me how to speak English." Again, I was overwhelmed with emotion.

The person I am, the teacher I am, was not shaped at University, but the five years I taught at a disadvantaged school, where the students had nothing but their love and respect to give you.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Place “Art of Teaching” Michael Kulkevch, VIC**

It is that moment just before you step into the classroom, you have all the tools required to paint that perfect picture for your students in the form of an exciting lesson. Your heart is beating and you are hoping so is theirs in anticipation of the magic which is about to unfold in the classroom. Your creative flair to engage the students is at the forefront of what you are about to do and your head is planning, thinking and dreaming of how this masterpiece will come to life.

I am the paintbrush and their minds are my canvas. What picture will I paint for my students today? How will I teach them what I know and what they need to know? This is like an artist asking what mediums will I use and what colours will I choose? It takes careful thought and planning just like any great lesson and if it is not right, just like the critics who comment about what art should be, your students become your critics who know what they want. Therefore, the lesson needs careful consideration, planning and goals so that the delivery of that lesson is pleasing to the mind just like art that should be pleasing to the eye.

When the students respond to what I have created, it is like the perfect picture or the uniquely shaped sculpture that stands out from all the rest and this you can see in the twinkle of a student's eye or in their confident smile which clearly indicates they understand. This is when you know your work is done and now you can eagerly prepare for your next masterpiece. You clean your brushes and let them dry because you know tomorrow brings another exciting day.

I paint vivid images for my students. I sculpt their minds and assist in shaping their thoughts like any great artist would do. And just like art, my lessons can be conventional or even abstract but they always cause my students to think. I am the Picasso of education. My lessons are my masterpieces that provoke thought, inspire and invite participation but most importantly impart knowledge on my students. I am an artist of education and this is why I teach.