

**BNZ SHORT STORY AWARDS
YOUTH CATEGORY
Judge: Emily Perkins**

WINNER

Thirteen Toadstools by Brittany Rorrison

I am delighted to select *Thirteen Toadstools* as the Youth Category winner of the BNZ Short Story competition. In just two and a half pages, Brittany Rorrison draws us into the emotional world of a loving solo dad and his young daughter, and takes us on a journey. The characterization of the father, a fruit picker, is highly effective, using low-key language to express his pride in his daughter and his fears for her. The narration shifts to the daughter's point of view, and back, with graceful transitions.

Through the point of view shifts the story deftly illustrates the child's agency – her view of the world and her place in it – and in the end, not only the father's, but the reader's fears are beautifully allayed.

The structure of this short piece is deceptively simple. There is no unnecessary withholding of information. The reader is let into the story but also given the space to build his or her own attitude to the situation. Back-story and exposition are handled in a straightforward way. Lovely details illuminate the characters' world – '...Todd had cut an apple in half once or twice to show her the star inside' – and are nicely juxtaposed with more prosaic language and lively imagery.

This story, which could easily have become sentimental, achieves real emotional resonance. Mature and unassuming, it is an impressive piece of fiction from this young writer, and I look forward to reading more of her work.

RUNNERS UP

Crying Woman by Ryan See

An exciting meta-story about reading, reviewing and subjectivity, using the form of an Amazon book review page, and playing with different voices, attitudes and ways of talking about writing. This intelligent, humorous story really thrilled me and I hope to see more from Ryan.

Shelling Peas at Christmas by Gwen Smart

An extended moment in time. Lovely, patient attention to detail. The pace and atmosphere combine to create a resonant mood.

Film by Lockie Marx,

A series of vivid images around a first experience of death generate an intense atmosphere and mood of nostalgia. Pretty powerful stuff for a 13 year old.

Missing by Rebecca Jamieson

Painstakingly imagines a day in the life of a bereaved man, artfully avoiding over-explanation.

Cold Feet by Meghan Harris

An admirable story, in which the narrator is made aware of a world beyond herself.

Get Over It by Timothy Clyde McGiven

A story told nearly entirely in dialogue. Energy and irony crackle over the surface, and the plot reveals an unexpected vulnerability. This story gets at what it is like to be young and facing adulthood.

Emoticons by Stephen Clothier

Cleverly uses contemporary forms of communication, as well as dramatic irony, to illustrate the difficulty of expressing intimate truths.

A Photo Worth a Thousand Memories by Jenna Louise Ross

This story tackles characterization of an elderly woman, memory and reconsideration of the past to illustrate a meaningful emotional change.

The pace and tension in *Burnt* by Julia Holden should also be commended.

Making the final decisions has been very hard. Some of the stories work well in one aspect but not in others. Some have chosen subjects that are clichéd or which really require longer treatment – a couple of these stories could be explored as novella length pieces. But on the whole, the writers' good intentions, and the care that has gone into the crafting of these stories, shine through. It's heartening to see so many young people really engaging with fiction to express not only their own worlds, but the lives of others.

Emily Perkins
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