

**The Rotary Club of Richmond
presents**

The Slade Literary Award

Sponsored by Mark Slade
in memory of his uncle, Rotarian Henry Slade

Winning Entries 2016

Winning Entry

'Everyone except Stevie'

Lilian Gonzales

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College

Runner Up

'Human Spirit'

Myafi Chowdhury

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College

3rd Prize

'Blue Flame'

Natasha Fleming

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College

EAL Prize

'What really is it to be Human?'

Alex Pierrot-Zago

Year 9 student at Auburn High School

Certificate of Merit

'The new family', Claudia Crowe, Year 11 Student at Melbourne Girls' College

EAL Certificate of Merit

'My own way of interpreting this term', Julia Pierrot-Zago, Year 9 Student at Auburn High School

Certificates of Encouragement

'Harm', Patrick Widdop, Year 9 Student at Princess Hill Secondary College

'Who are we, as human Beings', Marion Doerig, Year 9 Student at Auburn High School

Welcome to the Slade Literary Awards 2016

The Slade Awards are named in honour of the late Henry Slade who founded the competition in 1993 and sponsored it until his death in 2005. These awards aim to encourage the literary skills and offer the opportunity to showcase the creative talents of secondary students from Year 9 to Year 11 within the City of Yarra and neighbouring municipalities.

All participants are required to submit a piece of original prose or poetry up to 1,000 words on the topic "A Gift". This work is then read and evaluated by a panel of judges who are looking for creativity, originality, fluency, conviction, enthusiasm and appeal.

Award Prizes

Winner: *A cash prize of \$400*

Runner-Up: *A Cash prize of \$300*

3rd Prize: *Cash prize of \$100*

EAL Winner: *Cash prize of \$150*

[The EAL prize is awarded to the best entry (other than the winner or runner-up) to a student who qualifies as an 'English as an Alternative Language' (EAL) student.]

The Slade Criteria

We use five main criteria to reach our conclusions. These are:

Creativity - the treatment of the subject in a fresh, lively and interesting way. The subject itself does not need to be novel.

Originality - the novelty of the subject. Is the work about an unusual subject or new idea?

Fluency - how well was the English language handled? How well was the piece structured? A good writer has to have a grasp of grammar and vocabulary that raises the text above the tedious, jumbled and mundane. The author must also have a good grasp of the importance of structure and variety of style.

Conviction - did it sound convincing? Did the author make the reader believe in them? If the author is talking about their emotions, the reader needs to be convinced the emotion is genuine to be swept along.

Appeal - more than an enjoyable experience: did it hook the judges? Did we want to keep reading? We don't mean just a feel-good experience: the writer had to keep us wanting to know what is coming next. This is the most difficult criterion to deal with as it is so subjective for the individual reader

'Everyone except Stevie'

Lilian Gonzales

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College
Winner

I always dread dinner with my family. It's not that I don't like spending time with them, I do. It would just be so much better if we could spend time together...in silence. My family insists on having political debates at the dinner table, which ordinarily I wouldn't mind, but my family are conservatives. Not just the low-key, 'Conservative because my father was', 'Republican because I live in Texas' kind of Conservatives. They're the campaigning for Trump, 'All lives matter', NRA supporting, 'Obama was born in Kenya' conspiracy theorists, 'Abortions are the new holocaust' and 'ISIS is coming to kill us' kind of Conservatives. If it's anything, my family really sticks to their convictions, the problem is that their convictions suck.

Now, I'd never admit this to them but ever since I moved schools and made friends with Francesca, Maria, Taylor and Mia, I've actually become quite progressive. It took me a while to unlearn a lot of the rhetoric that had been drilled into me by my family, but my friends were determined. They showed me the importance of tolerance and gave me a newfound appreciation for the differences in people that I had been taught to reject at home. I now find it much easier to be loving than to be judgmental. I think love comes much more naturally to people in general.

I take my place at the table next to my mum. My siblings file in and fill almost all the seats remaining. I'm one of six. My parents, like the good Christians they are, don't believe in birth control. We're all sitting down when my father walks in and assumes his place at the head of the table. The table is a lot like my father. Strong, stable, practical but ultimately, cold and unemotional. I love my father but sometimes I wonder just how much he loves me.

He picks up the Bible my mother laid out on the table for him and says 'Kids, are we ready to give thanks?'. We all join hands as my dad begins to lead the prayer. I don't listen to a word he says. Even though my dad is a pastor and my whole family is religious, I don't think I believe in God. At school, my friend Mia always says 'Being an Atheist has made me an active participant in my life, rather than a bleating victim of it.' and I sure as hell have no interest in being a bleating victim. My thoughts are interrupted by the chorus of 'Amen' ringing out from the table. My mother squeezes my hand as if to prompt me to say it. I croak out the most half-hearted 'Amen' and my family begins to tuck into the food my mother made.

The first ten minutes of dinner goes relatively smoothly. My father is talking to my little sisters Esther and Rebecca about their day at school and Mum, Caleb and another one of my brothers, Jacob is discussing Friday night's game. Feeling satisfied, I reach over the table to get some more salad when my father's voice rings across the table. 'I was thinking of doing Sunday's sermon on resisting the devils' temptation'. I groan. My fathers' 'resisting the devil' sermons are just a guise for his thinly veiled homophobia. Usually, I can tolerate my father's sermons but the ones like these I just can't reconcile. My father has always told me that the bible preaches love, acceptance and justice. He taught me that to be a good Christian was to 'love thy neighbour' and that god loves all his children. So I just don't understand why he insists on alienating people, preaching intolerance and judgement. Surely any god worth believing in would not support his followers in their blind hatred of others. After all, we're all humans.

My Dad clears his throat and says 'I thought I would start with 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites will inherit the kingdom of God.' I look around the table and see everyone in my family nodding in agreement. Everyone except Stevie. My brother Stevie never really fit right in our family. He's quiet, shy and super smart. The day you see Stevie without a book in his hand is the day the earth ends. Stevie's not really into politics but sometimes I wonder if he disagrees with the rest of the family like I do. I look directly at him and notice him wringing his hands. Before I can think anything else, my train of thought is interrupted.

'Exactly Sir, we have no place for perverts in god's kingdom' Jacob adds.

Before I can think, I blurt out 'I don't think homosexuals are interested in going to god's kingdom if bigots like you are going to be there'

I hear my mother gasp beside me. My father turns red and everyone else shifts uncomfortably in their seats. Everyone except Stevie. I glance over to him and he smiles.

'She didn't mean it Bob' my Mum says. But I do. She knows I do and so does my father. In an attempt to diffuse the tension, my sister Rebecca asks 'Did you guys see what happened in Orlando? The mass shooting. Apparently, it was a Homosexual club'

I cringe. The word homosexual is said with such disgust behind it. I remember asking my dad one day why we used the word Homosexual instead of gay. He told me it was because the word Gay used to mean happy and carefree and the 'homosexuals' had perverted it like they do with everything else. My family is a perfect example of the saying 'Fear of the word only increases fear of the thing itself'.

Caleb chimes in with 'I mean it's tragic what happened in Orlando but perhaps this is God's way of punishing them for their sinful, perverted lifestyle'. To my dismay, his 'revelation' is met with thoughtful nods.

Enraged, I yell 'You're all hypocrites, you act all pious and holier than thou but you're all hateful bigots'. I stand up and begin to walk out of the room as I see Stevie rise from his chair as if he was going to join me. My father shoots him a look that pierces him like a dagger. He sits back down in his seat as I storm off to my room.

About an hour later, I hear a knock on my door and Stevie walks in. That's what I love about Stevie, he knocks but walks in anyway, because he knows he's always welcome.

'Abi' He comes and sits next to me on my bed. I look up at him and say 'Stevie'. He takes a deep breath and blurts out 'Abi, I'm gay.' The words race out of his mouth so fast I can barely catch them. I'm not sure how to react. Partly because I'm surprised and partly because I think I've always known. I want to let him know that it will be okay and that I'm on his side. But I've never been good with words and all that I can think to say is 'Don't you mean Homosexual'?

He looks at me for a moment, puzzled. I go to apologise but before I can he bursts out laughing. 'You're terrible' he says with a smile. I breathe out and hug him. 'Do you believe in God, Stevie?' I ask. He thinks for a moment and says in almost a whisper 'I don't think so Abs, I believe in people, I believe people are good and loving, or at least those who are, outweigh those who aren't'.

Everyone in my family is wrong. They're too full of hate, bigotry and fear. Everyone except Stevie.

'Human Spirit'

Myafi Chowdhury

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College
2nd Prize

“The human spirit lives on creativity and dies in conformity and routine.” – Unknown

I would describe my life as a never ending loop I am constantly racing around. I've driven on this same narrow windy road for the past 11 years. Driven the same grey Toyota, to the same nine to five office job. Sat in the same tiny desk staring at the same four white walls. Then as the clock hits 5 o'clock exactly, I leave to go drive home to my white picket fence house. The dreary grey clouds were a perfect reflection on my current mood. As I slowed down to stop at the red light, I secretly wished I would somehow be delayed from getting home.

As I drove around the small bend in the road, I saw the faint outline of a figure on the side of the road. My first thought was that this must be a broken down car. But as I approached, to my surprise there was no car in sight. Instead standing there was just a man who looked to be in his early thirties with messy brown curls, dressed in just shorts and a blue t shirt with a large grin on his face. He had his arm sticking out onto the road with his thumb up. My immediate reaction was to avoid eye contact and drive away as soon as possible. But I found myself pitying the hitchhiker standing out in the freezing cold.

He looked up at me with hopeful eyes. I told myself I was just going to ask where he was going so I slowly pulled over and rolled down my window. “So, where are you off to?” I asked tentatively keeping in mind he could be dangerous. He looked down at me, his face frozen in surprise. “Um...my mum's house, it's on Pandora Avenue? Do you know where that is?” he asked. I carefully examined his expression and appearance and decided that he didn't look too dangerous. “Sure, get in” I answered with a small smile. A small part of my brain was yelling at me to stop everything, kick him out and drive back home like I routinely did. But that part of my brain had been on overdrive for the past 11 years.

“My name's Adam” he said turning to me. “Thank you for doing this, I wasn't really expecting this from someone like you”. It was his turn to assess my appearance. I suddenly became highly self-conscious. Painfully aware of how I was dressed. A white blouse, black pencil skirt and grey cardigan. I realised how strange it must have looked to him. He immediately apologised looking embarrassed. “I'm sorry I didn't mean it like that”. “No it's alright” I replied.

As I drove I began to notice things about him that gave me an uneasy feeling. The first thing that I realised about him that really shocked me was how well put together he was. Every part of me was telling me that something wasn't right and I should just kick him out. But I couldn't. I had to break the cycle of routine in my life. Spontaneity is good. It's something I desperately need right now.

We sat in silence for a few minutes while I tried figure out why on earth I decided to let a stranger into my car. This was such a stupid idea. “So, Grace, how was your day?” he asked breaking the silence. My heart began to pound. How did this complete stranger know my name? “Uhm...” I said quietly unsure of how to react. Noticing my reluctance he answered my unasked question. “Don't look so worried, I saw your nametag when I got in” he smiled. I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck rise but I shrugged off the uneasy feeling washing over me.

“So what are you doing out here in this part of town” I asked quickly. “Oh you know, I haven’t seen my mother in ages it was time I paid her a visit” he replied suddenly not smiling anymore. The car fell into silence again. I went to turn the radio on and apparently he had the same idea. Our hands brushed against each other and I immediately flinched back. It was ice cold. The poor guy must have been out in the freezing cold for ages before I showed up. Why was he waiting out there for so long?

As I drove into the neighbourhood, I could feel the knot in my stomach growing. Something was off but I couldn’t quite put my finger on it. As I looked over to Adam, he seemed to look quite pale.

“The street is just up ahead” he said quietly his eyes wide. I turn left around the corner where he pointed. But there wasn’t a house in sight. Just an empty street and a field with metal fence surrounding it. As I drove up the road, a large rusty iron gate stood looming in the shadows. The field behind the gate had hundreds and hundreds of arched concrete slabs protruding from the ground. Flowers resting in front of some of them. “There’s no house here...” A shiver went down my spine. Suddenly I felt numb, I could feel my heart beating out of my chest and my mind racing a million miles an hour trying to make sense of it all. “Don’t be scared, just drop me off here” he said quietly. The car slowed to a halt as he opened the door. “Thanks for the ride” he said with a small smile. I turned around just for a second to see if anyone else was around, when I turned back, Adam had vanished. I realised two things at that moment. First, the temperature in the car had returned to normal, even gone up a few degrees. And second, I remembered that I had forgotten to bring my nametag with me this morning.

'Blue Flame'

Natasha Fleming

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College
3rd Prize

One could call tonight a success seeing as guests had in fact arrived for my exhibition in Sydney and that several of my pieces had already been sold despite the earliness of the evening. The room was dim and tenebrous, and through the chattering of guests a dull tune whispered softly, allowing for the art to catch as much attention as possible. All of the selected individuals were peacocks; fluffing their feathers and flaunting their finest whilst parading through the gallery as though they were interested in my art when really they were critiquing each other's choice on fashion. I too was taking part in the unintentional fashion show, taking note of who my agents had invited as being worthy of purchasing one of Elijah Gray's acclaimed pieces. *Typical*, I thought to myself, having noticed the wealth pouring off each gown and suit. Irritation filled me, as I knew that they would hold little appreciation or understanding for my art and only wanted me for my name. My blank face revealed little of my inner thoughts as I knew that the moment one of my agents saw any sign of exasperation I would be lectured on proper behaviour and how important my clients were.

If anyone from my hometown were to see me here they'd be shocked, not that any of them could ever hope to be worthy enough of an invite to a critically acclaimed exhibition of a once deadbeat delinquent. No one from my past could recognise me and as I looked into one of my pieces, a mirror of sorts titled *Reflection*, I could not even recognise myself. I was no longer the young teen running away from the black hole that was Arduus to chase my dreams of painting, but I was the man stuck in a suit worth thousands drowning my frustrations and anger in champagne with gold flakes floating amongst the pockets of air rising to the surface. Injustice and displeasure bubbled up inside me much like the drink I held in my hand. Everyone here was quite literally born with a silver spoon in their mouth and would spend their lives attending black-tie events like every other trust fund baby. If I had been born into one of these families, my art would've been on display the moment I exited the womb instead of gathering dust in a warehouse for years before finally making a breakthrough like I had had to do.

In the corner of my eye I noticed a lady intently observing one of my pieces, tilting her head in order to fully capture it. The light danced delicately across her silk dress, and the melody in the background was one that I found comfort in. She stood out from the crowd much like a diamond in the rough as she religiously scribbled in a Moleskine and it was only then that I realised that I had crossed the room feeling drawn to her. I took a step to stand by her side and the lady quickly turned her head acknowledging my presence, her icy blue eyes darted around wildly until they stilled for a moment into my own.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" her soft, lilting voice fluttered into my ear, I only hummed in reply, my deep voice rumbled through my chest like thunder rolling across hills.

"I've been told it's named *Blue Flame*, yet it's full of reds and yellows. I don't really understand, but I guess that's art." She murmured, clearly wanting my input.

"Flames are red, are they not? And blue may not be referring to the colours at all. There's more to the artwork than just the name and the paint." I told her, interested to see what she thought of *Blue Flame* – my favourite piece.

"I suppose. I mean, blue has connotations with trust, peace and loyalty and a flame could be referring to a love of some sorts or divinity..." She continued on connecting the piece to two lovers, the passion between artist and canvas, and the knowledge of a safe haven within God's arms. My only input was a smattering of nods and hums throughout her pondering, as I took into account what she interpreted it as.

“Well, what do you think?” she asked me, a look of curiosity flashed across her face.

“Blue for loss and struggles, and the flame representing a cleansing or burning. The colours used are ones associated with anger, a need for survival, agitation and challenges. The brush strokes here, “I said whilst gently brushing my fingers over the canvas, “are strong and powerful, the artist is releasing his anger into the painting, don’t you see that?”

“See? No, but I can feel a passion and an energy behind each stroke that can be sensed. I know you’re aware of it, I can hear it in your voice.” She responded, chestnut locks frazzled and cheeks flushed crimson. I smiled to myself, as she was so determined for me to find the positives that she had found within my own artwork. I shook my head as I realised that the art critics and paparazzi would have a field day if the brooding, dark Elijah Gray were caught smiling next to a woman.

We continued with our discussion, her captivating voice and thoughts found their way into my head making me second-guess my art and the meaning behind it.

“Art and any other form of expression are open to interpretation. I suppose our perspectives and our personalities impact the way we see this painting. Though your interpretation of *Blue Flame* is nothing like the emotions I was feeling whilst painting it, I think I can understand your reasoning behind it.” I told her, having come to the conclusion that though I wasn’t aware of it my eyes were shrouded in a veil of greys and blacks whilst hers were lit in a world of colour; as I came to this realisation the music reached a crescendo and it seemed as though the room was not as dull as it had once been.

“Wait so you’re the elusive Elijah Gray?” she asked slowly turning towards me, and it was then that I noticed the “Low Vision” badge securely pinned onto her dress.

“Yes, the bad boy of the art world at your service.” I smirked in reply.

“A pleasure to meet you, I’m Célia Clairemont an aspiring art aficionado,” her lips gently pulled up, “Would you mind discussing *Red Smoke* with me?” She hesitantly asked and with thoughts of further exchanges of our views running through my mind I took her arm and led her throughout the gallery for the remainder of the evening.

‘What really is it to be Human?’

Alex Pierrot-Zago

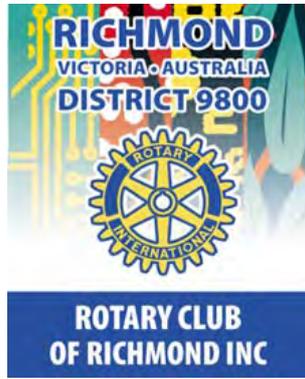
Year 9 student at Auburn High School
EAL Prize

Being human

What really is it to be human?

- Mmmh maybe it is to have two arms and two feet.
- Well we are not the only ones who have two arms and two feet.
- Well then, it is to be smart.
- We are not the only ones to be smart too.
- All right but we are the only ones who can build cities and rockets.
- So being human is to build cities and rockets?
- Yes
- I disagree
- Well it is not only that, being human is much more
- Like what?
- Like creating, doing amazing things all around the world.
- Oh you mean destroying nature
- No
- Killing animals, polluting the atmosphere
- No, but without thinking about that
- What do you really find amazing about being human?
- We create our own world!
- Not very convincing
- We invent alphabet, language, we have history...
- And what fantastic things can you tell me about history?
- Well it reminds us what happened in the past and prevents us from making the same mistakes
- Oh really and what mistake are you talking about?
- Nothing much but the essential thing is to not do them again
- You want to say for example war?
- Yes
- But tell me, there were two world wars no?
- Yes, but in the past
- But there are still wars in the world
- Yes but the human being still evolves
- They evolve by killing each other
- They are progressing

- They are not. For example with racism now, that is when it is almost gone they seek a new and different opportunity to fight each other.
- Don't be that negative, we have intelligence to do whatever we want
- Yes that's true, but without using it intelligently, and create good things, we use it to create atomic bombs, arms, violence, destruction....
- You're right
- Really?
- Yes I'm giving up
- Seriously?
- Yes, then it's true... look now with terrorism, there is violence and attacks almost every day in the world
- But...
- We all are going to die, well we already start to die, look all the cities destroyed, all those people without a house, all those children who can't access education, to their future because they have nowhere to go. All that is because of people who have no conscience, who have no mercy, who ...
- Can you please stop, how you can say that? You can't give up! If you give up what is going to happen? If we all give up they are going to win, we have to be together, fight together!
- You know what
- What?
- I think that I understand what being human really means.
- What does it mean?
- Being Human means protecting each other, helping each other, support, beings sets, knowledge to make sacrifices for others, beings united but especially being human means to love and be strong all together.
- You're definitely right, well that's going to be my meaning of being human and you know what!
- What?
- I'm not going to give up, I promise
- Yes!
- We're going to win this war!
- Yeah let's fight together!
- << Honey dinner, it's ready!
- << I'm coming mum! >>



WINNER Lilian Gonzales with SLADE CHAIR Maria Makris



The Finalists



The Committee & Finalists