



## Winning Entries 2017

### First Prize

#### *'Birds of a Feather'*

Sarah Kinch

Year 11 student at Melbourne Girls' College

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### Second Prize

#### *'The Guest List'*

Greta Chadwick

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College

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### Third Prize

#### *'Behind the Veil'*

Leyla Yücel

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College

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### EAL Prize

#### *'To My Beloved Winnie Mandela'*

Filbert Christone

Year 8 student at Auburn High School

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### Certificates of Merit

*"Second Chance Fairy"* Hoangan Le, Year 9, Melbourne High School

*"Names and Souls"* Milena Werner, Year 8, Auburn High School

*"How the Internet Changed the World"* Vladislav Monakhov, Year 9, Melbourne High School

*"Quantum Computing"* Henry Mann, Year 9, Melbourne High School

*"Everyone can see it, but nothing is being done"* Jessica Morton, Year 11, Camberwell High School

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### EAL Certificate of Merit

*"What am I Craving Today?"* Yingqi Huang, Year 11, Balwyn High School

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### Certificates of Encouragement

*"Why Go Zero Waste?"* Ella Howarth-Carpenter, Year 8, Auburn High School

*"Waiting for Icecream"* Michaela Tan, Year 11, Balwyn High School

*"Ask Me"* Zadie McCracken, Year 10 Collingwood College

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### EAL Certificate of Encouragement

*"Nonviolent Protest"* Darshil Shah, Year 11, Auburn High School

# Welcome to the Slade Literary Awards 2017

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 "Making a Difference". 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:** *A Cash prize of \$100*

**EAL Winner:** *A 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 six 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.

**Grammar / Punctuation** - the student crafts grammar, spelling and sentence structure to achieve clarity of meaning.

# *'Birds of a Feather'*

Sarah Kinch

Year 11 student at Melbourne Girls' College  
Winner

Homelessness is a prevalent issue in our world today, affecting around 105,230 individuals in Australia alone. People without a home are left not only without the basic right to shelter, but with no hope, no job, no one to turn to and often not enough money for food, clothes and other items taken for granted by a consumer driven first world society such as our own. This is unacceptable, especially given that 28% of displaced people are under the age of 18. Without adequate provision of the basics, how can these children be expected to get an education? How can they learn the skills necessary to chase their dreams and receive the opportunity to better their lot in life? Put simply, they can't.

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The icy wind ruffled her feathers, ripping out the last of her baby-bird down. She watched it drift away past the trees and out over the river. She was perched at the base of a tree, huddled against the trunk to scrounge any semblance of warmth from the rough bark and attempt to block out the freezing wind, at least on one side. She shivered. The chill that had come up from the South a few days ago was settling into her bones, making her feel as if she would never be warm again. She shivered again, rattling her little bird bones. No, they were big bird bones, she was a big bird now, had had to be ever since her mumma's spirit had left to join the bright lights in the night sky. "Don't worry" her mumma used to chirp to her, filling the snug space of the nest with her warm body. "I'll be here to bring you worms and keep you warm until you're big and strong enough to do it yourself." She wished her mumma bird could bring her some worms now, wished she could go back to that cosy nest in the treetops. Left all alone she had tried and tried to build a new nest and find herself food like a big strong bird, but it was difficult. The bugs and beetles blended into the colours of the forest floor, hid themselves under the leaves and twigs littering the ground, buried into the soft, damp earth. They skittered away when they heard her coming, usually long before she could get near enough to grab them. Perhaps they would be easier to catch if she could fly.

For a moment she pictured herself, soaring through the air high above the forest, feeling the rush of the wind through her feathers as it gently buffeted her outstretched wings to push her higher, higher. She flew higher than the great eagle, straighter than the sprightly sparrow and even faster than the hawk. From this great height she scanned the ground and her keen eyes immediately picked out a large juicy worm. She tucked her wings in tight to her small body and let herself plummet downwards. The ground rushed towards her, the colours of the forest blurred together, greens and browns of every hue streaked against the brilliant blue of the sky above. Down she plunged, getting closer and closer, until the worm was so close she could almost touch it. Her wings shot out, the delicate muscles straining against the force of gravity as she levelled out to glide smoothly over the ground. Her wing tips skimmed the tops of the bushes as she felt the fat worm squirming in her grasp.

A twig snapped nearby, jolting her from her reverie. She listened intently, barely breathing, straining to hear any more sounds or see any signs as to what had made the noise. Fear sank its claws into her. Should she run? Should she hide or should she just stay still? Then something rustled in the bush beside her. She was off and moving in an instant, her little feet pitter-pattering over the ground, her heart trying to burst through her chest. She hopped wildly from foot to foot, stretched out her wings and fluttered them as hard as she could. They were so heavy. She fell back to the ground, panic clouding her senses. She was stuck. She did not know how to start to fly.

“Look mumma I can do it!” she had squawked, jumping and hopping around the nest flapping her wings as her mumma watched and chuckled. “You can’t fly yet. You are still too young, but I’ll teach you how to fly one day” her mumma had twittered. Sadly that day had never come.

She turned to look at her attacker, ready to feel the sharp sting of teeth or talons biting into her. There was a stag watching her quizzically. His majestic head tilted slightly to the side, so that his great sweeping antlers looked as if they might topple him over were it not for the thick corded muscles of his neck. There had been no predators chasing her, no feral cats half mad with hunger ready to pounce on her like they had on her mumma. The stag was still looking at her, his velvety nose flaring slightly with each breath. She cheeped to him “Can you help me?” The stag stared at her for a moment, his big brown eyes filled with sorrow, then slowly lowered his head and wandered away, carefully lifting his hooves over the rotting leaves and sharp sticks coating the ground. Perhaps he didn’t understand her. Perhaps he just didn’t care. After all, winter was a hard time for everybody and what was the life of one little bird to a king of the forest like him?

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On any given night in Australia, roughly 1 in every 200 people is homeless and forced to either seek supported accommodation, sleep in an overcrowded boarding house or sleep rough on the streets. These people deserve better than to be ignored, marginalised and overlooked by our society. Take responsibility, reach out, open your wallet and connect to a fellow human being.

## *'The Guest List'*

Greta Chadwick

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College  
Second Prize

Weddings never cease to intrigue me. It's not the vows nor is it the colour arrangements, but the guest list.

I walked through the purposefully placed tables, each one emitting a floral and soft ambiance. In an empty room, they are all the same, none grander or lesser than the other, but as the guests slowly filed in and seated themselves in their designated areas, each table changed. Person by person the surrounding atmosphere became unique, less about uniformity and more about segregation. My eyes caught my name, written carefully and ever so daintily on a pastel pink name tag. I glanced at the empty chair to the right of me, reserved for the bride.

I've known Mary since our first day in kinder, she simply threw a ball of snow at me, and our friendship escalated just as quickly as the snowball fight that commenced seconds after. Mary was an outgoing type. She had the kind of confidence everyone envied, she was intelligent like a squirrel, single-minded and persistent. The groom Mr Hammington came across as the complete opposite, he reminded me of a dormouse. Although he was tall, his posture alluded him as reserved and logical. He was lucky squirrels don't eat mice. They couldn't have been more different just like the arrangement of guest personalities that paraded the room. Now they at least have one thing in common, their last names.

The tables separated everyone like cages in a zoo, each one surrounded by a translucent wall fuelled by the stereotypes of its members and built thick by the contradiction of its neighbours.

The bridesmaids gossiped and giggled like a tightly squeezed pack of hummingbirds, each same in colour but slightly different in stature. My eyes moved to a table on the left where bounds of laughter were erupting as each groomsman played off another's previous pretentious joke. When the ladies walked by they all sat straight like meerkats, heads up with darting eyes and smiling clumsily in the hope of a little attention from a hummingbird. Closer to the back lay a table of old owls, who hooted the same old marriage jokes back and forth at each other. Even through humour, they spoke wisely. As I searched deeper, the walls became thicker.

Mr Hammington worked in accounting. Therefore, a small group of work colleagues were invited to sit near the back corner. They slightly resembled a pack of foxes, cunning and sly, their hair slicked back to reveal their ears, perfect for eavesdropping. These creatures were smarter than the meerkats, they scanned, they eyed, and they took. I followed their gaze to some tall beauties sitting on a table to the right of me. The women on this table were dressed in the most beautiful robes, folds flowed around them as if they were swans gliding through different coloured glistening lakes.

The opposing families were separated by a raging river that no one could cross.

The groom's family table was the most conservative of all, they sat like cats, stern and judgemental. Their eyes showed their disapproval and hissed at the thought of an interfaith marriage. On the other side, Mary's family was hard to miss, they were loud and didn't hide it. Each member cackled and spread infectious cheeky smiles. I could only describe them as a pack of hyenas, outgoing and wild. It amazes me how such a wild jungle of personalities can be masked by something as simple as formal attire and a pastel background.

I continued analysing the room, one particular person stood out and fascinated me. The woman's façade flickered, I could not categorise her like I could the others, she was something different, she was something rare. A wave of curiosity ran through me, she had a unique sense about her that no one else in the room possessed. Throughout the night I had seen her around, hopping from table to table like a rabbit, squeezing through and defying each fence. I was entranced by how easily she rebelled against the social norms. I but still could not categorise her. It was almost as if she was a mix of every creature there.

My stare was interrupted by a swift flick of her spoon to the frail champagne glass in front of her. I prepared for the sound of shattering glass, but the sound that emitted seemed to only shatter the incoherent conversation around the room, silencing each and every table. She stood up, making herself apparent and started to speak, "Mr Hammington, you better love my baklava just as much as you love my niece young man." Laughter similar to that of a 90's TV show interrupted her. She turned, this time addressing the guests: "We are all here because we share the belief that this couple is meant to be. Now, we should all share this celebration together." She moved her hands in quick and swift upward actions, her mouth did not move, but the whole room could understand. The sound of moving chairs filled the room causing visible fractures in each table's wall. When the music began, it just brought fuel to the fire, as each and every barrier broke.

We were no longer segregated animals in a zoo but unique beings dancing together in a jungle. We danced the Zorba, arms and minds connected, no sense of discrimination, or coordination for that matter. Our laughs rose up in unison surrounding the aunt who twirled in the centre. I met her eyes once again, and this time their flecks of strength brought me back to reality, to the realisation that everyone in the room was connected, that these tables were not separating us by our differences but grouping us in terms of our similarities. Unlike myself, she didn't judge the apparent isolation in the room but acted on altering it. Unlike the others, she was a leader, not a follower. This woman was a maker of change, a destroyer of obstacles. She had no animal façade.

# *'Behind the Veil'*

Leyla Yücel

Year 10 student at Melbourne Girls' College  
Third Prize

Walking to work, I see them. They're half-people; ghosts; hidden behind the veil. They walk amongst all the other commuters but no one really sees them. They sit on park benches on sidewalks or lean against buildings. They mostly keep their eyes down to seem like less of a threat I suppose, but every once in a while, they look up. Eyes meet through the fast-moving crowd and I can see the hunger that lingers in their eyes and the weariness that lines their faces. I can tell by the slump in their shoulders, by the greasiness of their hair and by the rips in their clothes how long they've been stuck behind the veil.

Over time, I've started to see them but they are still "other" to me.

I see the woman on the corner with her deck of red cards who flips through them while glaring at the passers-by. While her skin has faded and left her blending into the background like all the other ghosts, her lips are a bright red - angry and aggressive - that matches the deck she slices.

I see the tired old man who mutters to himself as he reads yesterday's paper. His fingers are thick and worn, his nails long and filthy. When I make my way home late at night, it's those fingers that I imagine crushing my throat. Whenever I pass him by, I try to hear what he mutters, but none of it makes sense; they're all nonsensical whispers of what he should have done - could have, should have, would have. He's been here since I was a little girl and I fear that this is what happens to all the ghosts trapped behind the veil.

I see the bright young child who plays at the park. His mother is nothing more than a pale figure standing in the shadows with her flesh bruised dark purple. The boy is incredibly vibrant and his laughter reaches me from where he plays, but some days, his skin too is a mottled pattern of deep violets and sickly yellow.

They all have a tale of how they passed into the veil and how they came to be trapped on the streets. How they came to sleep during the day while it's warm, lightly dozing, waking up at the rush hours, and how they come to life at night. Some of them prowl the streets, waiting and trying to find the living, stealing their wallets and food to get them through one more day. However, most of them wait out the cold and the night, hoping that those who hunt for victims won't turn against their own kind.

Society has taught us to see them as an "other," they see what the cruel, prowling hunters do and cry out that they're all monsters, that there's something wrong with them, that we must keep distance between our children and them. They're not monsters, they're just the shadows of humans. I've come to see that. Many of those that do are like me and do nothing. Others see these shadows and try to bring them back. They donate their time, their food, and their money. They finish work and then keep working to help, going back home exhausted, and, while it does help, it is just not enough.

I've wanted to help, there's always been the words in my throat, trying to come out, but my lips are firmly sealed. With so many other people around, some of them must see through the veil as well. Surely, they could do something. It doesn't have to be me. So, I keep walking past them.

Every year, I'd just accepted that they would be there, every day as I walked to and from work. In their corners, tucked away in alleys, sleeping on benches. For all the awful things they suffered through, they were still always there the next day.

But then the old man started coughing, first it was just a few cleared throats, then a rough cough, and then came the deep breath-rattling wheezing. Weeks of this and every time I passed I would think that someone should do something, someone should stop and help, but no one did. I never did.

He didn't appear the next day.

I may not have known him at all, he was nothing but a stranger to me, but I hadn't done anything. The veil had fallen for me. I had held all the power in my hands - I had had the ability to make a difference, the ability to help his life. I wouldn't have been able to fix it but I could have made it easier for him - and I had done nothing. I was just as bad as those other commuters who couldn't see these ghosts. I was worse actually, for I could see them but did nothing. For what was worse: to be oblivious or to see the problem and not do anything?

They may drift like ghosts but they are still human and still carried labels as the rest of us did. *Homeless*, I reminded myself as I walked to the red woman with her cards and gave her a twenty and a sandwich. It seemed like such a minute thing to do, it seemed so insubstantial but from the smile she gave me - her red lips seemed warm and familiar - it had made a difference for the red woman - Rita.

But it wasn't enough. A short-term solution wouldn't be enough to make up for all that I haven't done. Over the next few weeks I started talking to my co-workers, to other commuters on the trams, to my friends; to anyone who would listen. I may not be able to even help a single person by myself, but if I raise awareness, if I help lift the veil that hides these ghosts from everyone else, maybe together we could make a difference.

# *'To My Beloved Winnie Mandela'*

Filbert Christone

Year 8 student at Auburn High School  
EAL Prize

Darling,

First of all, I want you to know that I will always love you. I sit here writing this letter as droplets fall from the ceiling. I was shocked to hear that you have suffered blackouts yet I am glad to hear that your health is improving.

I do hope that Zendiswa and Zenani are doing just fine. How is their education? I hope they are still ambitious for politics, just like I was when I was at their age. I apologise deeply that I cannot be there for you and the girls but please do not dwell on this. Our life can only get better from here. I am halfway through my sentence and soon we will reach that triumph.

Here in Robben Island, sleep is simply quite impossible. Thinking of my people, my children and my beloved wife, how could I sleep in times like this? You know, I've been thinking about my taste of music lately. Every day, they would play horrifying music on their old broken speakers clinging on to the ceiling of the corridors, corroded with rust, and surprisingly enough I've learnt to adapt to it. Just like how you learnt to enjoy your worst type of music. Although, do not be wary of me.

I would like to share something with you. For the past few weeks, I had set my attention on a book. Though I have forgotten the name during my time in this inhumane cell and it focused on how your attitude affects your future and actions. If only I can recall the name, then I would definitely recommend you to read it. Positivity was the highlight of that text. "Never see the negative side of any issue, or we'll never advance forward." He gave me an imagery of two people who were in the same desperate condition with their debts for their business. Same issue, same business, different attitudes. The first, lost hope in his business and threw himself in an endless hole of depression. Not long after he was found dead, hung from the ceiling of his lounge room. But the other saw that he's in the worst possible situation and everything can only improve from there. His strong entrepreneurship ambitions weren't ready to simply walk away from his company. In the end, with sheer determination and hard work his business became an internationally recognized establishment.

Similar to our position, the choices are there for us, what aspect of this situation will we appreciate and what will we ignore. The closer we are to that sweet glory, the tougher our path becomes as not everyone is fond of change, even for what is right. It breaks my heart to hear that you've been jailed on various occasions, but you do understand that a punishment for rebelling against something so unruly, so demeaning as them, is a sentence worth going through. I hope that the fire is still burning within you and let it not die out no matter what. I want you to continue on my work as I lie helpless but not hopeless in this rotting cubicle. Keep the fire ignited throughout our people and awaken even more. The wars waged and the blood shed by our brave patriots fighting for equal rights for all people shall not be in vain and we shall do our part in continuing on their efforts.

## **Brief Explanation:**

I have researched Nelson's letters and his style of writing during his time in prison and created my own take on his style. I took on his perspective and attempted to adapt his way of writing letters. In this fictional letter, he is writing to his wife about her health, her conditions and asking her to continue his work for him. He also, quite surprisingly, enjoys reading and sharing his experience reading and relating it to his own situations. I believe that this suits the topic "Making a difference" because Mandela is an influential individual in the history of humanity, and even when he is in jail.