

Publication And One Thousand Euro Worth Of Prizes To Be Awarded In Ballea Writers Young Poets Of The Year Competition

Ballea Writers, who won 2nd in the thirty-two counties Writers Group of the Year Awards, give free poetry workshops to schools. We covered sixteen schools this week and have many more scheduled. If we missed your school and you want to be included then please contact us a.s.a.p. The poetry workshops close on March 14th and resume in September but from September we will also be running Creative Writing workshops on Wednesday afternoons in the Carrigaline Community School. We are getting hundreds, potentially thousands, of poetry entries for our competition. The teachers tell us that the huge response is directly related to the success of the workshops. They say the children are so inspired by our enthusiasm that they can't help but be inspired to write poetry. Wow, it's just great to hear this because the future of poetry, and the arts in general, lies with the youth. Many of the children will continue to write poetry long after our competition closes and an outstanding Irish Poet of the future may remember that his path to poetry began right here in one of our workshops.

In the schools we talk more about techniques of writing good poetry than about the competition but the children have a lot of questions about the competition so I will run through some of our answers.

The top twenty winners in each age group, sixty overall, will get their poems published in a book but every child who enters will get, at minimum, a certificate of merit. A pair, or a group of children can enter an individual poem, as long as they agree to share the prize. The poems that don't make the book of sixty winning poems will not be destroyed; they will be treasured in the Ballea Writers archives. Clean presentation does matter and it may be typed, A12, or handwritten. Do not decorate the entry with fancy fonts, coloured print, drawings or any other gimmicks that steal from the impact of the poem. Rap and text language can be included if they add to the atmosphere but be careful not to overdo this. The sixty winners will be notified individually and through the schools. If a winner cannot make the award ceremony on March 31st he can nominate someone to collect it. The awards are scheduled for Carrigaline library and Carrigaline Community School. Author Celia Ahern, along with our sponsors Maryville Equestrian Centre and Martin Walsh Chemist, have been invited to present the awards and several famous people will be attending.

Last week I detailed how the judges arrive at a short-list but many of you have asked us to detail the final stages of judging. Eight out of twenty marks are for originality, six out of twenty for form and six out of twenty for the ending. originality would be a title that grabs our attention and a theme that holds our attention. A nine-year old titled

his poem 'Hot and Cold' and wrote about a woman who visited his home and stripped off her clothes! He got full marks for originality. Another child gave us a superb first line: 'There is no man called Santa' and a boy, who wrote about his grandfather's funeral, revealed that the deceased was a hundred and four year old. Form means that the poem is written in an appropriate form and stays true to that form. If a line about drinking Fanta followed 'There is no man called Santa' the judges would cringe. Meaning is paramount so be careful where, if at all, you use rhyme. Rhyme comes and goes in fashion but this isn't a fashion show and we would be equally positive towards a rhyming poem as a non-rhyming poem. However, rhyming poems are more difficult to write because it can be difficult to think of a meaningful rhyme. We are not expecting the children to be writing sonnets etc but we are expecting them to stay with a pattern that is pleasing to the eye. There would be no point in having lines twelve words long followed by lines two words long followed by lines seven words long. This would look enormous shoulders on a minuscule waist and moderate hips!

Ending: An ending should be strong because it is the last thing that the reader experiences. For example 'They lived happily ever after' or 'must dash to catch the post' are weak endings. The workshops go into a lot of detail about endings because endings are where most points are lost. Poems tend to start with strength and get weaker so one of the tricks of writing strong poetry is to cut away the last verse or combine the last two verses into one verse. It is difficult for a child writer to discard part of what he has pained over and achieved but he needs to be ruthless about the ending or he could be discarding the prize. Although a forty-line poem is allowed a twenty-line poem has more chance of winning. The longer the poem the more time is available for it to run out of steam. Ideally an ending should resonate with the beginning. The following poem demonstrates this. Unfortunately the poem, written by eleven-year-old Sarah McCann, of Crosshaven, is ineligible for our competition because it has already won first place in a National competition but the ending shows you why it couldn't be beaten.

Could I

When I grow up
In a year or 10 or 23
I hope to be a Montessori teacher
With babies on my knee

Or perhaps I may become
A doctor, nurse or surgeon
Or maybe a daring zookeeper
Taking care of a scary lion.

Could I be an editor
Of a famous American Magazine?
Maybe I'd be a maintenance worker
Keeping an office fresh and clean.



An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern pictured with Cllr Michael McGrath and Elaine Rhys Davies with Kate Sheehy of the Ballea Writers Group during his recent visit to Carrigaline. . Ballea Writers won 2nd place in the thirty-two counties Writers Group of the Year Awards. (Pic Howard Crowdy)

Perhaps I'd be a pilot
Of the Queen's private jet
Or take lots of pictures
Of families on a white set

Could I be a taxi driver?
Somebody has to be one of them
Maybe a balloon man
Or a dressmaker sewing hems.

Could I be an agent
Or a person cutting down trees
But I don't know
I'll find out in a year or 10 or 23

Sarah McCann aged 11
Scoil Breda Crosshaven.



Sarah McCann

So lets mark the above poem out of twenty and see what we get. Originality: Well OK, it was possibly inspired by the Shirley Temple song 'When I grow up' but in principal there's nothing wrong with that because everything we ever create is inspired by something. So the theme may not be totally original but the way that Sarah has dealt with the theme is original. I would give this 7/8

Form: It looks pleasing enough on the page and keeps to a regular four lines per verse and the 2nd and 4th lines of each verse rhyme. However, some of the rhymes don't work very well e.g. magazine having three syllables and clean having only one syllable makes it awkward to recite. With material as good as this is I would like Sarah to have edited it more thoroughly i.e. counted the

syllables and remodelled it until it held to a rhythm. I would give this 3/6 Ending: The ending comes full circle to the beginning and reminds the reader of what the whole poem is about. It is a perfect ending and gets 6/6

Sarah, by my marking, scored 16/20 and an exceedingly high score for poetry where a top mark in a National poetry competition rarely exceeds 14/20. Congratulations to Sarah on her poetry win and also for her recent win in the National Photographic Competition where she got oodles of techno prizes for herself and her school.

I asked Sarah how she came to be so good at poetry and she told me that her mom, who loves Shakespeare, gave Sarah a poetry book when she was very young. Apparently Sarah started writing very short poems and with time they grew in length. Sarah, like myself, says that the drive to write poetry comes and goes and is not consistent and cannot be commanded to appear. Ah the elusive Muse, if only we knew what it was we would trap it in a bottle like a magic potion and take a nip when necessary but it doesn't work like that and isn't that its true magic? We cannot catch the muse but we can be ready for it when it visits and that availability is what Elizabeth McCann gave to her daughter Sarah and what Ballea Writers are giving to the youth of this area.

The Taoiseach supported the writing of his daughter Celia and look where her writing has taken her at such a young age. All successful writers have a school and/or parent that has stimulated them to write and supported their vision of becoming a writer. Ballea Writers met with the Taoiseach during his recent visit to Carrigaline. We talked about his daughter's writing success, our own writing success and the success of our young poets competition. It was a very successful meeting. We also talked about genre writing and I suggested that his natural wit could make him an excellent writer.

The young poets competition is divided into three categories; Junior i.e. 4th to 6th class, Intermediate i.e. 1st to 3rd year and Senior i.e. 4th to

6th year. Each category will have awards for 1st, 2nd and 3rd, three Highly Commended and 14 runners up. There will thus be twenty winners per age range and sixty winners overall.

Prizes

Sponsored by Maryville Equestrian Centre and Martin Walsh Pharmacy All sixty winners will be photographed for the Carrighoun newspaper, get a certificate and a rosette and have their poetry published in a book. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd placed entrants and the Highly Commended will get additional publications and public recitals of their poetry at the awards ceremony on March 31st and again at the launch of the book. The cash prizes are: Euro 75 for firsts, Euro 50 for seconds, Euro 25 for thirds and Euro 10 for Highly Commendeds.

The 1st prize winners will also get a Euro 25, lesson in show jumping at Maryville, the new Equestrian Centre of Carrigaline. The book of sixty poems will be named by the title of the winning poem i.e. the submission from the overall winner: 'Ballea Writers Young Poet of the Year' and a selection of the poems in the book will be illustrated by a professional.

Rules

- 1/ Spelling will Not be taken into consideration
- 2/ Entries must be typed, or neatly handwritten, on white single-sided A4 papers and contain nothing other than the Poem, it's Title and page number.
- 3/ The author's date of birth, name, address, telephone, e-mail, school, class, contact teacher, and a cross-reference to the Title should appear on a cover page only.
- 4/ Poems may be up to a maximum of forty lines in length
- 5/ Poems may be on any theme or subject.
- 6/ The entry fee is a Euro 2 coin per poem. Individuals may enter as many poems as they wish but each poem and its entry fee must be submitted in a separate envelope, marked 'Ballea Writers Young Poets of the Year Competition'
- 7/ Entry is accepted on the understanding that, while copyright remains with the authors, Ballea Writers are granted the publication rights to the poems for a one-year period i.e. until March 31st 2008.
- 8/ Be sure to make your own copies because submissions cannot be returned.
- 9/ The decisions of the judges are final.
- 10/ Poems must reach the collection points, the Carrighoun newspaper, Carrigaline Library, Maryville Equestrian Centre, Martin Walsh Pharmacy, The Carrigaline Court Hotel or a participating School by 5pm on March 16th 2007.

Contact

Ballea Writers, who meet in the Ballea Suite of the Carrigaline Court Hotel from 7.30-9.30 most Mondays, can be contacted at balleawriters@gmail.com