



The CLPE Poetry Award 2007

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Fiona Waters reveals the judges' thinking.

The CLPE Poetry Award, for a book of poetry for children, was launched by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education in 2003. What do the titles submitted for this year's award tell us about the state of poetry publishing for young people? Award judge **Fiona Waters** explains.

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Choosing the winner of this year's CLPE Poetry Award was not the work of five minutes. Sadly, dismissing some of the submitted titles was the work of a great deal less than five minutes. Tired ideas, hackneyed selections of poems and dreadful jackets did the work for us really. With a few honourable exceptions, this year's crop was depressing and the judges were loud in their lamentations about the state of poetry publishing. Without naming names, some mainstream publishers really do need to look at their poetry lists and feel ashamed. Poetry is alive and well; ask any of the poets who regularly visit schools, and ask Macmillan whose poetry list is flourishing.

But what about those titles that were the honourable exceptions? The standard of the six books to reach the shortlist was exceptionally high and every single one is a book to be bought and read from cover to cover by the aficionado.

The winning title

[image:The Thing that Mattered Most.JPG:left]Our 2007 winner is Julie Johnstone for **The Thing that Mattered Most: Scottish poems for children**. This is such an imaginative and exciting collection of new poems, and you don't need to Parliamo Glesca to understand them either, for while this is an intensely Scottish selection, and justly proud to be so, the poems reach out far beyond the borders of that nation. Full of the sights and smells of the countryside, the hustle and bustle of the city and the tumultuous tumble of thoughts in the reader's mind, this is a unique and compelling selection.

The shortlisted titles

Gaby Morgan's **Fairy Poems** elicited a loud cheer from the judges for it is *really* about fairies, not those fluffy pink things that are currently rampaging through every retail outlet – and that includes Halfords. These are wild and mysterious and fey creatures and they have a dark side as well as a benevolent one. This is a beautifully judged selection from an expert anthologist.

I Don't Want an Avocado for an Uncle – well you wouldn't, would you? Hard as a rock one moment and all squishy the next. Poet Chrissie Gittins has a brilliant sense of humour and her quirkiness gallops across every page of this most original collection which is stuffed with daft moments and some serious ones too.

John Siddique's **Don't Wear It on Your Head, Don't Stick It Down Your Pants** is subtitled 'Poems for Young People'. Make that young people of all ages, any person whose mind is open to a different view. This is a book which biffs you round the ear one moment and takes your breath away the next. There are poems here to challenge and poems to make the reader laugh out loud.

Tony Mitton's **My Hat and All That** reads out loud exceptionally well. Tony Mitton has a very deft touch with words, he is a real wordsmith. And he knows where to put these words to gain most effect. Deceptively simply, his poems always get a response from his young audience.

Jackie Morris's **The Barefoot Book of Classic Poems** really is what it says it is ? a classic collection. All the poems that ought to be in a collection calling itself classic are here, and it is not a roll call of Victorian stalwarts either, the twentieth century is well represented. The glorious illustrations add to the magic of the poetry, and truly fortunate is the child who begins a lifetime of poetry reading with this book.

The CLPE Poetry Award is sponsored by Mr and Mrs Pye's Charitable Foundation. The judges were Ian McMillan and Fiona Waters, and the judging panel was chaired by Margaret Meek Spencer.

Fiona Waters is a writer and anthologist, and Editorial Director of Troubadour, the Travelling Book Company.

Books discussed

The Thing that Mattered Most, edited by Julie Johnstone, ill. Iain McIntosh, Scottish Poetry Library/Black & White Publishing, 978 1 84502 095 8, £6.99 pbk

Fairy Poems, chosen by Gaby Morgan, ill. Matilda Harrison, Macmillan, 978 1 4050 8855 8, £5.99 hbk

I Don't Want an Avocado for an Uncle, Chrissie Gittins, ill. Kev Adamson, Rabbit Hole Publications, 978 0 9543288 1 8, £5.99 pbk

Don't Wear It on Your Head, Don't Stick It Down Your Pants, John Siddique, Inscribe, an imprint of Peepal Tree Press, 978 1 84523 056 2, £4.95 pbk

My Hat and All That, Tony Mitton, ill. Sue Heap, Random House, 978 0 440 86725 8, £3.99 pbk

The Barefoot Book of Classic Poems, compiled and illustrated by Jackie Morris, Barefoot Books, 978 1 90523 655 8, £14.99 hbk



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