

Judges overall report:

It was an honour to judge this year's short story competition, which attracted a broad range of writers, genres and many high quality entries. While some writers explored the theme of home in the most basic sense, others delved deeper or wrote from a unique perspective such as that of a cat, a vagrant, a prisoner and a vampire. Even a dismantled barbecue endured a journey to find a home! The winning stories, however, explored the theme in more than just a physical sense by considering emotional, spiritual and cultural connections to home also. This and the high level of skill shown in crafting believable worlds (whether that be contemporary or fantasy), protagonists with depth and full story arcs is what set them apart from the rest.

Winner: Children in the House.

Judges comments:

'This story had a poetic yet simple tone that made it a joy to read. It explored the theme in both a physical and spiritual sense, delivering first a goosebump twist then a sad but fulfilling ending.'

'Strong opening. Beautifully crafted dialogue, underpinned with close description of inner and outer observations. I thought the ending was a bit forced but apart from that last line this was excellent!'

Second: Self Care

Judges comments:

'This train-of-thought narrative flowed well and brought the reader into the story. The thoughts and emotions were relatable and current. The author showed skill in showing the character's journey through action, reaction and thought.'

'Nice slice of life, with clever observations. Good voice. Very contemporary.'

Third: Peace

Judges comments:

'Hats off to this writer for establishing a vivid fantasy world and telling a story that came full-circle in such a short space. I feel the character's voice could have been strengthened by giving some lyricism over to character building instead. Regardless, this was an all-round excellent effort.'

'Good opening. A good sense of clash of cultures, with a fantasy vibe. Setting as home is well imagined.'

Highly commended:

Finding Home:

Judges comments:

'This story kept me guessing initially about who this character was - a cowboy? a busker? a homeless person? This ambiguity and the simple, pared back style of writing kept me reading. I appreciated the unique interpretation of home as an idea rather than a physical building or place of sentiment.'

'Starts with a strong sense of identity, even with reactions from other characters. Good build up of character. Powerful sense of home.'

You Can't Go Home:

Judges comments:

'I enjoyed the simple, succinct style of this piece, which delivered a fully formed story in under 400 words. The author did an excellent job of showing us the protagonist's story, rather than telling. They also built tension well to the point I was quite relieved when the story took a sudden turn and there was no bloodshed!'

'A sliver of a vampire story that doesn't really offer up a satisfying resolution, or hint of a resolution. There's too much left to the readers' guess work.'