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Foreword

There are few things better in the world than stories. When I was a kid I loved them. It didn't matter if it was a book, a film or a song, I couldn't get enough, I still can't. At Primary School, I loved Roald Dahl. By Secondary School, I was reading Lord of the Rings. Now in my forties, I love horror.



My inspiration for writing my debut novel, Izzy and the Tumble Thunder, came after reading all the Harry Potter books to my own daughter, Izzy, at bedtime. It took three years, but the brilliance of J.K. Rowling's storytelling inspired me to try.

I was 38 when I started. I didn't have a clue what to do and it took me six years before I was finished and I was published. Now, on school visits as part of my book tour, I see it coming to life.

The whole process is tough but joyous. I can feel that same joy in writing you've all done here. You should be proud of the stories you've told. The language is vivid and the stories come to life through your passion.

Anyone who writes a story is an author. That's certainly all of you now.

Stuart Rowson

Author - 'Tilly and the Tumble Thunder'



Introduction

Due to the success of the first two writing competitions (Trafford 500 Words), in 2021 and 2022, we decided that we would run this competition for a third year. This year we expanded and opened the competition to schools across Greater Manchester.

Thank you to everyone who joined in. It was amazing to see so many children come together and share their work in on-line creative writing sessions, where there was an enormous excitement and appreciation for each other's work. Thank you so much to Rebecca, for stirring all our 'creative juices' once again!

You all had the same starting point. An image of a deserted cottage, in the woods. Your imaginations took hold and your unique pieces of writing were created.

Our imaginative ideas and writing needs to be shared and published, which is the reason for this anthology. I am sure that you will all enjoy reading and sharing these special stories.

Well done to all the schools, teachers and especially the children involved.

Best wishes

Wendi

Competition Winner - and Year 5 Winner

All Alone

Cane Erdemli

The screams of delighted children burst the creature's ears. Reaching for the basket which was once brimming with berries, the animal sighed. Only yesterday had he gone to collect some.

'Children, I'm going to collect berries,' the stout man warned, 'Do not leave the hut, it's hunting month.' The father of 3 crawled out of the tiny hole which was under the old cottage.

'What are we going to do?' asked the youngest, Dolly. Her beautiful khaki eyes shone in the eerie light. Crash! The hyperactive being's lengthy ears hastily twitched. What was that?

'I'm going to check,' Dolly said excitedly; it would be her first time outside!

Crawling through the minuscule slit, she stared at the shabby shack; her father's words silently echoed in her mind. The sun luminously lit up the emerald grass. Why had Dad warned her about this magnificent place? Bzz! The sound of buzzing bees made the creature lick her lips. The beehive - which was hanging from the tree branch - was overflowed by oozing honey which dropped to the floor.

'Maybe I should get some for Papa,' the young child thought. Cupping her hands to catch the golden syrup, she was enticed by the sweet smell of honeydew and lavender coming from a nearby burrow.

She whispered, 'It wouldn't hurt to get some,' It was as quiet as quiet could be; there was no one there to distract her from her daily dose of daydreaming. Plucking the flowers from the woodland floor, the girl smiled. The elegant tulips danced in the blazing light of the sun.

The infant turned her attention to a pack of scarlet foxes who were blissfully playing on the musty, muddy moor. Weeny violet butterflies fluttered majestically through the teal sky. She was mesmerized. Toddling toward the vivid creatures, she realized the teal sky was now all shades of pink, blue orange, and red. The dainty butterflies were really just moths trying to

grasp the daylight back. The low hum of fireflies startled the child. A faint smell of gunpowder mysteriously loomed through the forest. Maybe Papa was right! She should have never left their cozy hollow. Her anxiety had already crept upon her.

Bang! A singular bullet shot out of the gun. The warnings her father gave her echoed loudly; louder than before.

'Don't leave the hut.' How stupid she had been! The click of the second bullet petrified her- she couldn't outrun it this time. Bang! The bullet scuttled past her face like a spider. She ran faster than a cheetah, she ran faster than an eagle, she ran faster than light, but there was no point. She couldn't escape. The hunter was too determined.

Bang! A singular drop of blood fell from her pale skin. She sat down, knowing her time was nearly up. A small tear dropped from the creature. Thud! The innocent creature fell. She lay dead innocently on the forest floor. The only trace left was her woven crown of thorns...

1st tier Judge's comment:

Cane, this is such a clever story - it starts off in an almost-fairytale genre, and by the end, has shifted dramatically to something far darker. Manipulating language and plot in this way shows a real writing mastery. Well done!

2nd tier Judges comment:

This story is full of mystery. What kind of creature is Dolly? I was full of trepidation right from the beginning, and even throughout the beautiful sensory description of the setting I could sense that Cane had a twist in store for us. The echoes of the father's warning as the shots ring out fill the end of the story with regret and tragedy. Well done on a powerful and unique piece of writing.

Year 3 Winner

Dragons and Dark Deeds

Eloise Harrison

Moorlands

As the fine mist swirls around the sleek, white snow, as lightning cuts into the rotting trees, as thunder rages down on the forbidden forest, two friends, a moose and a beaver, take a walk in the woods. In the freezing conditions of Canada, it is perfect weather for a walk for these two animals...

BANG!!!

Suddenly, the sound of gunshots and a faint whiff of smoke almost choked them as it surged up their nostrils.

They followed the smoke trail and gasped at the sight. They were in a marshy clearing, overgrown plants writhing and wriggling to get through the barricading trees that surrounded them. In the middle of the clearing was a house. A house with flames rising up the burning walls. A house with slimy moss wrapping it in a fern blanket. A house with vines climbing up the wooden walls. A house with poachers carrying a dead dragon out of it...

The two friends looked at each other, they knew they had to get into that house. Suddenly, the ground opened up beneath them and they dropped plop! in to a toilet [random] and then it flushed on its own [very random] and then they ended up in the house [this is a bit too weird now.] A baby dragon was in the house. The dragon told them that her Father had fallen down a trapdoor and the poachers had killed her Mother. They heaved her Father out the rusty trapdoor then ran through the forest to shadow the poachers and send them far away, deep into the depths of the unknown...

They sprinted through the forest, setting tripwires and other traps for the cunning poachers. When they came into sight, both dragons bravely darted in front of the poachers, who immediately gave chase. They zipped through the forest, and led them to one of the traps and the poachers rolled down the rocky hill, never to be seen again...

The dragons, the Moose and the beaver lived together in peace for many years to come. The poachers had run far away, as far as where the sea roars in the raging wind, as far as where tornadoes whirl and crash, as far as where monkeys howl and parrots shriek, as far as the centre of the earth...

Judge's comment:

A really well written story.. The magical and mystical elements of the story are very intriguing. The imagery used to conjure a vivid description is so mature. Well done!

Judge's comment:

I love the descriptive nature of this writing and the picture you paint Eloise. It's really, really vivid and I love the use of language. It's evocative - and the story itself bonkers...which I love.

Year 4 Winner

My Dream

Arthur Leach

Bowdon Church School

It is terrifying. I know it is just a dream and dreams aren't real but it feels real because, strangely, mine are. I take a quick glance out of my window and see that the storm is still raging on tempestuously like the roaring of an angry lion. The outside world is just like my dream: scary and frightening. By the way my name is Jack which I like because it is quite a common name and I don't like to be different. My dreams are very unusual though. Most people's dreams are pretend but mine are real. I know that sounds preposterously absurd but even I only found it out a few days ago and this is how it happened.

I tiptoed through my bedroom door and slammed my head onto my soft pillow so that my devastating dreams would end sooner. At first, I just stared up at the ceiling but then out of nowhere a thick cloud of purple smoke swirled around my head faster and faster until it opened some kind of magical gateway to the unknown. My head started to spin and my eyes began to close.

When I woke up, I was lying on the ground in some mysterious valley and in the distance I could see a shack with orange windows glowing like eyes of a furious dragon. The sky was still a dark moody grey which silhouetted the colossal trees that towered high above me. The shack was as jet black and as unwelcoming as a shadow lurking about the woods unnervingly. The delicate, elegant branches clung onto the thin trees and the shack walls were drenched from the murky rainwater. I slowly got up. My head felt slightly dizzy but I managed to stagger through the sludge towards the empty, deserted shack.

Suddenly, the ground started to rumble, grumble and shake as if the ground was a huge monstrous beast. I swiftly started to sprint at the door of the shack and managed to slam it shut. My heart was pounding like a million drums all banging at the same time. What was that thing? I finally decided to investigate around the house to see if there were any clues to what the rumbling sound was. As I turned around to explore, I took a quick glance at the floor and saw claw prints marking the dusty surfaces. They were gigantic! Just then, the same rumbling happened but this time it was so

thunderous that it knocked me straight off my feet and sent me tumbling to the ground. I realised what was happening. I darted towards the door and pushed it open. And there in the centre of the valley was a giant blood red dragon with a very hot temper. She was swinging her tail round and round causing pandemonium and havoc, releasing destruction everywhere. She let out an ear-piercing roar.

Then I fell out of bed, panting, gazing at the raging storm with my eyes bulging.

1st tier Judge's comment:

Super story Arthur! This contains all of the essential elements of an exciting short story: dramatic vocabulary? TICK! gothic setting? TICK! dragon? TICK! earthquake? TICK!

2nd tier Judge's comment:

What a descriptive tale Arthur. I was so drawn into reading this. Your choice of words, sentence structure and the structure of the narrative as a whole, ensures that the reader is carried along with your exemplary imagery.

Year 6 Winner

Just a Fly by

Jessica Soo

Oldfield Brow

I rush through masses of thick foliage and tear through the murky forest losing my sense of direction until suddenly I emerge out onto a narrow precarious path. I've lost the fox but now... now where am I?

Slowly, I try to make sense of my eerie surroundings. Skeletal trees loom over me like bodyguards, with their claw-like branches. Beside me lies a colossal glistening lake; the small walkway the only thing preventing me from plunging down in to certain death. Warily, I heave myself up and along the trail which can barely be seen, concealed under a mass of deadened mossy brown leaves. Suddenly out of the dense crowd of skyscraper oaks, a glowing wooden house reveals itself to me, peeking shyly out between the barren branches. It looks so warm and comfortable and smells like home. Without thinking, I pick up my pace, darting towards the front door in a flash. Only then do I take in the immense size of it. It towers above me, with glinting amber eyes for windows which echo in to the lake below. Scaly tiles on its rickety roof clatter in the breeze and a gentle whoosh of smokes poofs out from the chimney like a ghost emerging from its coffin. However intimidating this place may look though, I can't wait any longer for hospitality. Not with cold hungry shivers dancing around me. I need rest. I need safety. Without a second thought, I rush through the open door, gliding towards the enticing warmth from a crackling, bright fireplace.

BAM!! I leap away just in time as a huge sort of baton descends with frightening force towards me. I try to beg mercy, pleading whatever this strange thing is to take pity on me. Maybe they don't understand, maybe they are just ignoring me. Either way, I'm not safe. My fight or flight response kicks in and the clear option is RUN!!! "Please! Don't hurt me!! I come in peace!" I scream, darting frantically away from the beast. My heart hammers against my chest as I dodge cupboards, chairs, tables and then... THUMP!! I smash in to the cold hard glass of a jug and reflect straight off in to a pot of succulent, ambrosial, shimmering gold liquid: honey. I'm not stuck in it. If I really wanted to, I could fly away. However, I haven't eaten for many days and the sweet open jar of honey is almost as hypnotic

as the warm fireplace was. As if in a trance, I lie still in the jar, opening my mouth to digest the sweet liquid... And then realise too late. It happens in an instance. The rolled-up newspaper slams down on me in triumph and I let out one more pathetic buzz "Why do you have to kill me?" But I already know the answer. It's because I'm a pest, unwanted. Just a fly. "At least I'll die happily in honey," I murmur. Then, everything goes black.

1st tier Judge's comment:

What a fantastic story! The use of language here is very sophisticated and created a vivid image in my head as a reader. I loved the build up of suspense and the final twist at the end was very clever! An absolute joy to read, well done!

2nd tier Judge's comment:

This was a really clever story. It started with an engaging and vivid description of the character's movement through the setting, providing tiny clues to the protagonist's identity. Tension built up towards the end as the character faced jeopardy and its true nature was revealed in an amusing twist. Well done!



Year 3

Commended
Writers

2 vs the dark forest

Soraya Rajakulendran
Oldfield Brow

Once there was a girl called Ava, she lived with her dad in a dark forest. The only friend she had was a boy called Milo. Her dad's job was to save people in the forest but not many people went to the forest because it was so dark and gloomy. Ava always wanted to know all the secrets of the forest, but her dad never told her. Now I am going to tell a story that might freak you out a bit.

One night Ava called Milo and said that they were going on an adventure in the forest. You see, Milo is not really an adventurous guy but he came. They slipped out into the ghostly forest. Ava had a map to help them from getting lost. They felt scared because they didn't like being alone. They started hearing wolves howling and they felt a shiver through their bodies. They both felt very cold, so they grabbed some leaves that were on the floor and filled their coats with them. One thing they didn't know was that the leaves were toxic to humans, so Ava and Milo started shrinking.

Smaller and smaller they got until they were no bigger than a ladybird. They both screamed 'Arghhhh'. They were devastated!!!!!!!!!!!!!! They ran to see if there was anybody to help but they were too small. Then suddenly they saw a tall castle. They were just about the right size to fit underneath the castle door. When they were inside, they turned around to see what it said on the door. It said 'The Evil King'. They shivered again. They walked towards a room that said kitchen. They walked in and they could smell roast chicken. After smelling it they felt very hungry so they walked carefully to a table where the roast chicken was. Okay, here comes the scary bit. When you touch something hot after you have shrunk you banish into thin air and your soul is kept in the leaves you had touched. So that is what happened to Milo and Ava, so they have technically died.

At home Ava's dad was searching everywhere for them but he couldn't find them. He felt heart broken. Then Ava's dad remembered about the leaves so he got a net and scooped as many leaves as he could. He heard Milo and Ava's scream and the only way to get them out was to rip the leaves. He ripped the leaves then there they were, Milo and Ava. Ava's dad hugged

them both and said, 'never go anywhere without my permission'. Ava said, 'I just really wanted to know about all the secrets in the forest but you never let me know'. Ava's dad said, 'I will let you know all the secrets from now on'. That is a lesson for all of you reading this. Never go out without a parent or make sure you ask for permission first.

Judge's comment:

Soraya – Well done, you used your descriptive powers to create wonderful sensations and senses that made the world of your story come to life. You have some really advanced writing skills for your age.

Ultimate Fluffybunny

Jasmine Price.

Tyntesfield

"Ameeeeliaaaa, come back I'm not as fast as you!"

"Tough" called a voice back. The voices belonged to 10-year-old girls called Amelia and Rose. At that moment they were running around the playground at school. Suddenly, Amelia skidded to a stop at the fence where she found a hole.

Rose gasped in shock, "You're not going in there are you?" With that, Amelia crawled right through the hole and Rosa followed. The two friends ventured forward for what seemed like an eternity until they reached the end of a tunnel, revealing a mysterious enchanted wood. They cautiously walked on when, suddenly, out of the mist came the outline of a haunted house. Rosa froze.

"What's up?" asked Amelia.

"I heard a noise." whispered Rosa. There was a faint, ghostly wailing sound coming from the spooky house. Rosa whimpered and hugged Amelia. The mist parted to reveal a shadow. It stepped into the light. It was a rabbit floating in the air!

Amelia giggled "We're supposed to be scared of a flying, talking rabbit?"

"You should be," said the rabbit who was called Ultimate Fluffybum "I will take over the world with my psychic powers, laser eyes and my army of hypnotised rabbits." He cackled and disappeared. His evil laughter echoed around the woods.

"Dssstt," a voice suddenly said, "over here." The girls saw a fairy in a pink and purple dress. "I can help you by transporting you to another world where you can build an army to defeat Ultimate Fluffybum." They jumped into the portal. They fell down, down down through a swirling vortex of purple, pink and blue. Then, with a thump they hit the ground. Amelia looked up and saw lots of tigers and flamingos surrounding them in a big circle. Some of them looked curious, the smaller ones looked nervous, some of the bigger ones looked

angry. The biggest tiger made its way to the front and glared at the girls.

"Why are you here and what do you want?" he growled.

"We're here to ask if you might help us on a mission to defeat an evil rabbit." said Rosa.

"Well if there is one thing I hate, it's evil rabbits." said the big tiger, and with that they all dived into the portal. They appeared back in the woods and started looking for Ultimate Fluffybum. They eventually found him. Ultimate Fluffybum raised his hand and hundreds of hypnotised rabbits appeared in the shadows. All the rabbits rushed forwards and leaped at the girls and their army. The tigers and flamingos ran forward and the battle began. It raged on for hours on end until finally all the rabbits were knocked out leaving just Ultimate Fluffybum.

"Well, I'm going home." said Ultimate Fluffybum sulkily and he disappeared into the sky.

The girls thanked the tigers and flamingos and crawled back through the hole. When they arrived back at school, they gasped in astonishment as the playground was as if they had never left.

1st tier Judge's comment:

Excellent use of imagery and 'show not tell,' to reveal your characters' emotion. I loved your description of Ultimate Fluffybum and the gang of evil rabbits. This is such an imaginative piece of writing.

A Night to Remember

Kevin Gilbert
St. Joseph's

Jack, Max, Tom, and Peter are in the same school. They are very different from each other but are best friends. Tom is a famous prankster, Jack is calm and intelligent. Max is a bookworm and carries a book everywhere. Peter gets scared easily and prefers staying away from the unknowns. But no matter what they always have each other's back.

They decide to go on a fieldtrip to the Longleat forest. Tom liked to call it "The Forbidden Forest" just to make it more interesting. Their bus was very close to the village. When suddenly, it crashed. "What is wrong?" cried Peter. The Bus driver said, "Nothing to worry! Please stay in the bus. Let me fix this and we will get back on the road soon".

We are very close to "The Haunted Village" said Tom with wide eyes. He added, "It is just another normal village, but a curse turned all the people into ghosts in the Haunted House!" "Should we go and explore?" asked Max. "STAY HERE!" yelled Peter. "Do you not want to see the Haunted House?" asked Tom. "Are there real ghosts?" asked Peter. While the driver was busy on a call asking for help. Tom, Jack and Max sneaked out of the bus and Peter followed unwillingly.

It was a full moon night. They started walking towards the haunted house. Suddenly, a dark shape loomed over them. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagh! they all screamed. Max replied, "Just Bats!".

A green wisp of smoke swiped their faces. "W-W-What was that?" shivered Peter. Jack held out a packet of green smoke pellets. "Ha-ha!" Max and Tom laughed.

They tiptoed towards the house. The door was unlocked so they went inside for shelter from the storm that had just arrived in the midnight sky. The house was empty and covered in cobwebs. The floorboards were creaking, and the walls were all cracked.

"Let's get out of here." cried Peter. Tom went to the cupboard in the next

room and opened it. When he returned, he wore a mask and made scary noises to scare Peter.

While they were just about to leave, the door got locked. "It will not open!" cried Tom. The lights started flickering too. This time everyone was really terrified. They managed to open it finally.

Luckily, the bus was just fixed, and the driver was about to start the bus. They went back to the bus and all the kids started asking about their whereabouts.

"We are never doing that again in our life!" said Tom. As everyone else nodded. They were so tired and nodded off quickly. The bus was moving smoothly when there was a sudden break.

Tom woke up and sat on his bed realizing it was just a dream! His smart phone beeped, and he received a message from Max- "Want to go to Longleat forest?". "No thanks." Tom replied as he had a sigh of relief.

1st tier Judge's comment:

What an imaginative piece of writing Kevin. I love your descriptive imagery and especially liked the inclusion of the green mist. You made me ask questions and want to read on and find the answer. This is the key skill that a good writer uses. Well done!



Year 4

Commended
Writers

The Message on the Map

Lyla Davies
Cloverlea

I was looking at the piercing lights gleaming out of the old wooden cottage. A cold shiver of nervousness climbed down through my spine. I felt like I was about to walk into a horror movie.

Were we expected? Or would we be unwelcome?

My brother Calum squeezed my hand until it was bright red. I knew he was as scared as me. "On the map it says this is where we should be, Lyla," said Calum, checking the brown piece of paper one more time.

It was three days ago that we had found the scruffy, ripped, hand drawn map in the attic of our new house, with the strange message written at the bottom reading: "PLEASE HELP ME!"

At first, we'd just ignored it, but later that night Calum went sleep walking into the attic and brought it back to his room. When we found it the next morning we were really spooked. I had dreamed during the night that a scared little girl was asking me to help her, and Calum said he dreamed a girl was calling him to the attic. We told mummy and daddy, but they didn't believe us. "Stop playing around," they said, but we knew we had to help the girl.

So here we are, slowly walking up to the old cottage. Scared and trembling we grab each other's hand as knock on the door.

The door slowly swings open but there is nobody there. The wooden floor creaks as we shuffle inside. We both gasp at the same time. "This looks exactly like our old house," I whispered. "I know," says Calum. Then he says he feels like the girl is nearby and so we climb up the staircase. "Help!" cries a girl's voice.

Now we are running towards the attic, desperate to help the little girl we'd seen in our dreams. We kick the door open and there she is, a girl all in white with a bright glow behind her. She has large feather wings and a sort of ring above her head like a halo. She is locked up in a cage.

"Let me out," says the girl. "He will be back soon, and I need to escape."

"Are you an angel?" we ask. She nods and says she had been waiting for 100 years for someone to find her message on the map. She explains that she had spoken to us in our dreams and says the key for the cage is on the desk in the corner. We help her out of the cage, and she thanks us.

"Now we must get back to your house, quickly," says the angel. "Hold my hands and I will carry you over the swamps."

Back in our real attic the angel says: "I am only one of the angels who needs your help. Will you help them?"

"Yes," we say.

Ist tier Judge's comment:

What a creepy tale. Lyla, you really drew me into your world of imagination. I can see that you are a reader - this is such an imaginative story. I love your use of the present tense to make your writing more exciting. Really well done!

April Osborne

Benchill Primary
Strange Noises

"Oh My Gosh mum" "Be quiet!" I shouted as I ran outside. Frustrated, I stomped into the forest. Trudging, across the soft, wet ground, I noticed dark gloomy shadows everywhere.

I carried on talking to myself going deeper and deeper in the forest. Just then I noticed there were no animals or people. Not just hiding. None at all. No animals or people. Just me.

I looked up to the sky. It was getting dark still no animals but I could hear birds and Bunnies until I heard something I've never heard before. It was going "Bang Bang Rattle Rattle" all over the place. The sound came closer and closer until it was right behind me. Then silent. I could feel panic rising in me. I felt dizzy. I needed to get out of here. As soon as I said that, the clouds started letting out a rainstorm like a tsunami in the sky.

Crawling slowly, I looked up and saw mysterious, terrifying shadows. The grey suffocating mist was like a big heavy blanket. Suddenly, I saw a damaged cottage standing like a lonely, sad kid at a park. I peeped into the door window.

I peeped in. What I saw made my jaw drop. Flying slowly, in the middle of a messy room was a witch. She flew across the room leaving a trail of acid and she was staring directly at me with bloodshot eyes.

I tried to move but I was stuck. I tried to scream but my mouth was stuck. I started to panic. My head was dizzy. I felt like I was going to faint. In a flash she started pouring a poison on me. Help!

Suddenly, I remembered that I had a hat. Quickly I grabbed my hat. Yes! I quickly caught the poison in my hat before I disintegrated and poured it all over the witch. I watched her disintegrate as I came out full of her blood. It left a red gooey puddle on the floor.

"Hello!!!" A loud scream. My mum was here." Mum!!!" Suddenly, she ran to me. She was whipping her tears away. "Mum you won't believe what happened to me"

1st tier Judge's comment:

What an exciting story April! You have created suspense and atmosphere really well here, and I love your use of varied sentence structures and lengths to keep your reader interested. Such fantastic descriptions, especially of the setting. I really felt as though I was in the forest! Well done!

The Fearful Beast

Jack Hall
Benchill Primary

"Go away!" Dan screamed at his mum, running from her while she was running down the stairs and so was I while I was heading out.

Stomping madly across the wet, slimy mud he spotted an abandoned, dark cabin that looked like a monster that'll eat me whole. But he still walked on deeper and deeper into the dark woods muttering to himself. All of a sudden, he realises that there was not a sound anywhere. Not even just no sound, it was pitch black! No owls tooting, no people around. It was dead silent everywhere!

Dan stared up at the sky. It was dark and gloomy, plus there were no animals and sunlight around. He caught his eyes on dark, misty trees. Thank goodness! There was a family of squirrels. He gave a little kissing sound but then they started eating each other. Only their red, blazing eyes stared back at him. Dan felt absolutely sick. As soon as he saw that, Dan ran to some light but the heavy rain stopped him.

Dashing madly through the heavy rain, fighting off the wrinkly bushes, Dan saw a load of light in the thick, grey mist. He ran towards it. It was an abandoned, dark cabin standing in the rain like a poor kid sitting on the side of a pavement with no family. He stared through the window into the dark cabin.

Dan walked in. What he saw made Dan's colour drain down his face. Running quickly in the middle of an empty, blank room, was a middle-aged beast. He ran across the room leaving a red, sticky trail behind and the beast looked at me anxiously.

Dan tried to run but his legs wouldn't budge. Dan tried to scream but nothing came out. He was scared. His heart raced everywhere, he was sweating. In a blink of an eye, the beast dragged me with its mouth biting into Dan's legs. He tried to breathe in and out. its eyes turned red like lava balls. "Why me?!"

But then he remembered a knife that Dan's dad gave him. He got his hands

out of his pockets and grabbed the knife. Kaboosh! Dan got it. He took the knife out of the leather holder and he stabbed the beast in the eyes. His blood blinded me. SCREECH! Fur covered Dan. He saw nothing. There was blood all over the floor.

"Dan!!!" A scream. His mum's voice came. "Mum!" She was in front of him wiping her tears away. He said to her, "The only reason I have cuts is because of a terrific beast!"

1st tier Judge's comment:

Jack, I really enjoyed reading this, and the reason I enjoyed it so much is because you defied conventions - you have got sentences that seemingly run out of control and really interesting vocabulary usage. This story is different and I think different is good. I loved it!



Year 5

Commended
Writers

Ava

Amy Wang
Oldfield Brow

"Don't go to the Haunted House, Ava!" called sister Maple as Ava happily skipped out the door. Ava stood on the doorstep, gazing longingly at the Haunted House. She tore her eyes away and walked down the track that lead to the main road. Bluebells, lavenders, daffodils, buttercups and daisies were cheerfully bobbing about. To Ava's right, there was the Haunted House. Ava suddenly stopped. She thought hard. Then, reaching a decision, raced off the track. She fought through weeds and nettles to get to the lake separating her and Mother.

Maple's words were now rapidly growing fainter as Mother's voice flooded Ava's head. Ava's mother had ventured to the Haunted House and not been seen since. But Ava's hopeful heart had always believed her mother was still alive, waiting to welcome Ava with open arms. Ava thought lovingly of her dear mother when her confidence dropped. And so did her body.

Ava tumbled down a hidden valley, landing in a cloud of butterflies. Ava stood up and looked around with wonder. There were crowds of rabbits, seas of flowers, fields of butterflies. This valley was beautiful. Ava wanted to stay, but wanted to see Mother even more, so, with a heavy heart, moved to climb the hill. When she finally reached the hill, one single tear escaped Ava's eyes and fell onto a primrose. Then she turned to leave.

Ava toiled up the grassy hill, sweat beading on her forehead, muscles aching. As thorns pricked Ava and nettles stung her, the grass receded. It was now muddy and stony, scraping Ava's legs and stabbing her sweaty hands.

Ava's energy was almost out when she reached the top. Ava swayed there, eyes flickering; was she going to faint? She grabbed a tree to steady herself. Thorns pricked her so mercilessly Ava howled. There was another howl. Not from Ava. Not an echo. So, what was it? Gleaming red eyes glared at Ava from between the trees, a hair-raising howl emitting from the creature. More red-eyed things prowled towards Ava, a malevolent look in their eyes.

Ava was frozen to the spot in terror. As one of the creatures stepped closer,

Ava unfroze her shaking legs and ran. Her heart full of dread, she heard her sister's soft voice reverberating around her head. "Don't go to the Haunted House, Ava!" Ava sniffed. Oh, how foolish she had been! She had walked into danger, just for a feeble hope of seeing Mother again after years! Ava skidded to a halt beside the lake. No, she wouldn't cross, but, after hearing the creature's eerie howls, she edged closer to the lake. What she saw next made her scramble into a boat and row, faster than wind.

Ava reached the Haunted house. She gingerly pushed open the door. "Ava!"

Ava gasped. It was Mother!

1st tier Judge's comment:

This is such a lovely story Amy! You have created atmosphere so skillfully and I loved the shock ending. Very well done - accomplished writing!

The Haunted Doll

Erin Sowerby Smith

Wellfield Juniors

The eerie woods gave a chill down my spine. - I shivered - hearing sudden snaps and creaks. The misty sky was murky silver enveloping me with the dark, leafless trees. I gazed around, as rain poured down heavily, soaking me to the bone. I imagined myself at home by the cosy, fire place, but deafening rumbles began from the sky. A mysterious orange glow pulled me further...

Cautiously, I walked to where the amber glow led. I started to spot a faint outline of a house. Mist surrounded me, and my vision blurred as I came closer. More thunder began from the dappled sky, making me jump. I knocked on the door, which was covered with crimson, red, blood.

Quickly, yet carefully, with my trembling hand, I opened the bloody, oak door. "Hello?" I called softly. Nobody answered. The door shut with a slam, and a loud crack of lightning split through the sky. All I could hear was the noisy pattering of the rain and thunder. I looked around, the whole house was covered in that gory red everywhere. A black shadow caught my eye. My heart started pounding a trillion beats, and felt like it would come right out of my chest. My breath stopped.

I was now shaking violently. The face of the figure came into the dim, flickering light, covered in garnet, dripping constantly down their chin. They had bloodshot eyes, pale skin grasping a large, silver axe, smothered in scarlet, red blood. A smile creased across their face showing a set of gruesome yellow teeth slowly came up to me.

"Will you play with me?"

"Ummm," I stuttered, not finding my words.

"I said, will you play with me?"

"I - I'm sorry b - b - but I'm afraid n - not" I ran to the bloody attempting to open it.

"Too late! He he he!" came the voice again, then the axe swung at me.

"Bye bye!"

1st tier Judge's comment:

Ooooooh Erin - what an exciting story! You have created suspense and threat in such a clever way. I am impressed (and scared!)

The Whispering Shadows

Usman Ahmed
Seymour Park

Deep within a mysterious forest stood an old, dilapidated house that had been abandoned for years. The locals whispered stories of strange noises and eerie lights coming from the house, but nobody dared to investigate.

One night, a group of young friends decided to explore the haunted house. They were thrill-seekers, looking for a new adventure, and had heard the rumours of the haunted house in the forest. As they approached the house, they felt a chill run down their spines, but they ignored it and ventured inside.

The house was in complete disarray, with cobwebs covering every corner and the floorboards creaking beneath their feet. The friends began to explore the different rooms, but as they did, they heard strange noises coming from the walls. At first, they thought it was just their imaginations, but the sounds grew louder and more sinister as they explored further.

As they entered a room on the second floor, they found an old mirror hanging on the wall. One of the friends looked into the mirror and saw a ghostly figure staring back at her. She screamed and the others rushed to her side, but as they looked into the mirror, they saw their own faces distorted and twisted, as if they were being possessed.

Suddenly, the room grew colder and they heard a low, ominous, humming sound. The door slammed shut and they were trapped inside. They tried to open the door, but it wouldn't budge. Panic set in as they realised they were trapped in the haunted house, with no way out.

As they searched for a way out, they found themselves in a room with a large, old-fashioned wardrobe. They opened the wardrobe, hoping to find a way out, but instead found a secret passage leading down into the basement. They reluctantly entered the passage and found themselves in a dark, musty room.

As they looked around, they saw an old woman sitting in a rocking chair, staring at them with hollow eyes. They tried to talk to her, but she didn't

respond. Suddenly, they heard footsteps coming from the hallway and they knew they had to escape.

As they ran back up the stairs, they heard the old woman's voice calling out to them, telling them to stay and never leave. They ignored her and continued to run, but the door leading out of the house wouldn't open. They were trapped once again, and the old woman's laughter echoed through the halls.

Just as they thought all was lost, they heard a loud banging on the front door. They ran to the door and opened it, revealing a group of local villagers who had heard their screams. The villagers explained that the old woman was a ghost who haunted the house and that she had trapped many people inside over the years.

The friends were relieved to have made it out alive, but they knew they would never forget the horrors they experienced in that haunted house in the mysterious forest. From that day on, they never dared to venture into the forest again, for fear of what other terrors might lurk within its depths.

Judge's comment:

What a spooky tale, Usman. You had me gripping the edge of my seat! Excellent imagery and use of sentence structure to build suspense make this a story not to be forgotten. Well done!



Year 6

Commended
Writers

Tormented Echoes

Alex Brittain
Moorlands

Deep within the heart of a forest, shrouded in mist and legends stood a forgotten house. Its facade was a memento to years of neglect and abandonment. It was said that the house was cursed, home to a banshee seeking revenge for the wrongs inflicted upon her.

On a moonlight night, three adventurous friends gathered for a sleepover. The attraction of the haunted house had enticed them to embark on a daring adventure. Armed with flashlights and nerves of steel they entered the household.

As they tiptoed through the desolate rooms, their laughter and excitement echoed off the crumbling walls. Shadows danced ominously, and the air grew heavier with an unsettling presence. Unknown to the girls, the banshee watched from the darkness, her ethereal form filled with wrath and sorrow.

Lily's heart skipped a beat as a mournful wail pierced the silence; freezing them in their tracks. The banshee's harrowing cry reverberated through the house, sending chills down their spines. Panic gripped their hearts as they desperately searched for an escape route.

But the banshee had other plans. With each step the girls took, the house seemed to morph, its hallways twisting and turning like a labyrinth. The girls

found themselves trapped, their only company was the ghostly whispers of the banshee that grew louder and more menacing. Lily's voice quivered as she pleaded "Please, let us go! We mean no harm!"

The banshee, fuelled by anger and sadness, emerged from the darkness. Her ghostly skeleton cast an otherworldly glow. Eyes filled with primordial grief locked onto the terrified girls. With a wave of her spectral hand, she summoned a mystical wind that bound them in invisible shackles.

Jessica's voice trembled, "What do you want from us?"

The banshee's voice echoed through the house filled with a mix of melancholy

and fury, "You dare trespass upon my domain, awakening the pain that has consumed me for centuries! You shall pay the price for your audacity!"

The banshee's cold, skeletal fingers caressed their faces, draining their vitality with each touch. The girls could feel their energy waning, their bodies growing weaker under her relentless grip. Desperation consumed them as they struggled against their inevitable fate.

With a final chilling cry, the banshee captured their life essence, consuming it to fuel her eternal torment. The house grew silent once more, its dark corners devouring the captive souls of Lily, Jessica and Charlotte. They were forever bound to the house, their spirits trapped in a state of perpetual torment.

Outside the forest, the world remained oblivious to the fate of the girls. Their families, friends and the passing of time would become mere echoes of lives stolen by the banshee's wrath.

The house in the middle of the woods stood as a grim reminder of the dangers lurking within its walls. Its decrepit exterior and haunting legends served as a deterrent for the curious, a sombre mnemonic of those who dared to challenge the supernatural force that governed the abode.

1st tier Judge's comment:

Wow! What excellent use of imagery, vocabulary and sentence structure. This is a tale that makes the reader ask questions and want to read on. Perfect use of cohesive devices, make this tale flow and brings your story to life in the reader's mind.

The Night Lands

Hannah Gothard
Highfield

Dark, towering trees loomed ominously over the uneven dirt path; murky water flooded the way through the gloomy forest. A small, dark figure crept quietly along the long-abandoned trail wearing a long, black cloak, her mahogany hair framed her shadowed face.

She was heading towards an eerie house in the distance, lit softly by the glow of amber lights in the windows, cracked and stained by age. As she reached the mossy, wooden door, she hesitated, she knew no one had been in there for a long time.

She reached out and tapped the door, it opened slowly. The lights went off, nobody was there. Squinting through the gloom, the only thing that appeared to be there was a black cat perched on a table. All black apart from a small white dot on its nose, wearing a small collar covered in gems - emeralds, rubies and diamonds.

Wealthy owners, she thought, as she crept over slowly, not wanting to scare it away. The floorboards creaked when stepped on. The cat's eyes were a startling amber, they seemed to draw her closer, like pools of glowing light, it was silent until... **BANG!** She felt like she was being swallowed by a giant swirling monster, blinding her until she finally landed on top of a building.

Looking to the left there was dark and red lava flowing like a deathly river and charred black clouds floating across the scarlet sky. To the right, the sky was azure with fluffy white clouds, vibrant rainbows did loop the loops in the sky and a variety of animals danced on the grass.

"Why are you here?" The cat purred

In her confusion she jumped and spun round, causing her to wobble over the edge and drop a few inches down onto a pile of rainbow hay. Dazed, she gazed up and staring back at her where two giant amber eyes.

"Where is here anyway? Talking... cat?!" Queried the girl.

"The Night Lands, of course - any dreams or nightmares have to go somewhere - where do you think all those random things end up?"

"Well, how do I leave?"

"Just follow me." Assured the cat.

Heading towards a giant rainbow mountain, a shining crystal caught her eye. "Keep it as a souvenir" the cat purred and she happily slipped it into her pocket.

As they reached the summit, the cat said "Goodbye" and nodding its head signalled for the girl to step off into a bright orange and yellow portal. As she stepped though, the crystal slipped out of her pocket, the cat expertly caught it in its mouth and jumped after her into the swirling gateway.

With a start she awoke in her room, everything appeared as though it was just as she had never left.

She wandered over to the window, down on the sun-scorched grass below was a small rainbow crystal. A tiny pointed cat face poked out from some bushes, before it slunk silently into the shadows.

Judge's Comment:

This is a well told tale, with such fabulous imagery. I was particularly impressed with the mysterious ending. Well done Hannah!

A Very Modern Witch

Stanley Naylor
Oldfield Brow

An old, crooked witch sat at a midnight black cauldron boiling up a mystery potion ready to brutally murder another innocent hero. The witch's house was at the bottom of a valley with a dirty, boggy lake encircled by mud. Surrounding the lake were gargantuan trees with dark crooked branches.

Back in her evil lair, the witch sat on her hard, uncomfortable wooden stool picking her ugly wart and scratching her dry, dirty and wrinkled scalp pondering her next victim. Looking through her special blue and milky white crystal ball, faces swirled in front of her evil eyes. Then she found her perfect victim...

After watching the young handsome hero for a while, she recognised him. It was the very person who had made her a witch many years before. After pondering what to do she decided to go into her old dusty cupboard to find her strongest luring potion. After a decade of clinks and clanks, bangs and crashes she finally found it. She turned around and walked back to her cauldron and slowly poured the yellow liquid in. She also put a locket of the hero's hair into the liquid, but rather than bubbling and fizzing nothing happened! In a state of panic, she whipped out her new iPhone 14, Googled ChatGPT and asked the AI how to create the strongest luring potion ever created - she then set about making the recipe. When she had finally finished, she poured the yellow liquid into the cauldron and this time it did bubble and fizz which made her smile, showing gnarled, brown teeth.

After a long day she sat back, rested her head and in the blink of an eye she was asleep. In her dream she remembered how she had fallen in love with the hero, Alexander, but she didn't realise that he had also loved her. In desperation she had used witchcraft to make him fall in love with her, but her evil backfired and accidentally turned her into an old, wrinkly, warty witch. She was snapped out of her peaceful sleep because her special powers meant that she could smell Alexander approaching. Just as she was fully awake the door burst open, and Alexander strode in. Just as his back foot was across the threshold the door slammed shut with a loud boom.

The hero shook his head and looked around the room dazed. Then the witch said, "I loved you, but because of you I am a witch!"

"Who are you?" the hero replied.

"I am Florence. I loved you and used magic to guarantee your love. Now I am forever cursed."

"I loved you too. Why did you not tell me? I am sorry for your cursed life. I forgive you..."

The witch's body started to twitch and jerk and suddenly she was a modern, beautiful woman again. But after all this hassle instead of living with the hero Alexander she decided to be single. Life is easier that way!

1st tier Judge's comment:

A fabulous story, with excellent characterisation. It is so well-structured and it moves effortlessly across different time frames. Well done!

Grandma's Cottage

Erin Woods
St Joseph's

As our midnight-black car rolled down the country lane, I sprang up in my seat and pressed my nose against the glass. We turned and a thatched cottage appeared. Swallows were nesting in the crevices of the wall, darting down to bathe in the abandoned birdbath. A figure dressed in a whirlwind of scarves and shawls, bangles and brooches was standing on a ladder with missing steps.

"Grandma!" I cried, as I leapt out of the car. Grandma climbed - no, floated - down. "The roof never stays fixed for long, it's because my potions -"

Dad gave her a look.

"Potions?" I asked, intrigued.

"Orla, you've grown a foot since I last saw you!" Grandma remarked, patting me. Beaming, she herded us inside.

Spiders scuttled along the wooden floor, whilst prisoner flies struggled against the cobwebs. An oak broom leaned against a pewter cooking pot as a fire blazed in a corner, feasting on coal. Clara the cat was curled up on the hearth rug, catching the inferno's warmth.

"Orla, it's time for bed, I have business with Grandma," Dad ordered.

"But..." I began.

"No buts."

"Fine." I grumbled, rolling my eyes. Grudgingly I ascended the creaky staircase and climbed into bed. I pulled out a battered book and began to read. But it had been a long day. I found myself reading the same sentence again, reading the same sentence again, reading the same sentence again...

Cauldrons...

Spells...

Broomsticks...

I woke up, palms thick with sweat and my heart pounding against my ribcage.

"Don't be silly, Orla," I told myself, "Witches don't exist."

But I couldn't stop the cold feeling of dread that slithered up my spine. I jumped out of bed and drew back the lavender curtains, gasping in horror. The swallows had turned into bats - no, vampires. Roses were Venus flytraps; the cherry blossom tree was crooked and wrinkled with age. What was happening? Lightning quick, a bat landed on my frizzy hair and for a split second that was it: a bat on my head. Suddenly it took off, scraping my skin: blood oozed out. I swayed: everything went fuzzy...

The room went dark.

"Orla?"

"Wake up!"

Slowly, I forced one eye open. The other eye decided to follow. Where was I? Shelves upon shelves lined the room, holding countless jars and books.

"Grandma?"

"Yes? Oh, you're awake!"

She was dressed in black, with a pointed hat and a flowing cape. One thousand questions swam through my brain, but the one I chose to ask was: "What are you eating?"

"Liquidised dragon liver. Deadly poisonous except when spread on toast." She chewed thoughtfully, adding, "Needs more moonberry."

"Are you a witch?" I asked. "Does Dad know?"

"Yes to both."

"Am I a witch too? Can I do magic?" Magic: the word fizzed on my tongue.

"Yes. Orla, you are a witch," she replied.

"Magic! When can I start?"

Grandma smiled, a sunshine ray that lit up the world: "Now!"

1st tier Judge's comment:

What a lovely story to read. The use of vocabulary in the first paragraph immediately had me hooked, and the use of dialogue to build up the character and plot was fantastic. Well done Erin!

2nd tier Judge's comment:

I loved reading this story! It is beautifully crafted and the use of vocabulary to paint a picture with words is exceptional. Erin, you are a rare talent!

The Dream Witch

Lyla Thompson
Seymour Park

Muffled and quiet, the talking trees whispered to one another, their branches interlinking as if holding hands. The rivers gushed against the great boulders beside them. Inside of the one and only cottage in the enchanted forest was the lonely witch, Jade Calipso. Unlike other witches, Jade was young and had soft, light brown skin instead of pasty green. Her nose wasn't hooked or warty, but a cute button and her hair was curly and the colour of chocolate.

Despite being a witch, Jade had quite the job that you wouldn't suspect. She made dreams. These dreams, once made, would be delivered by Jade's friendly familiars, her trusted animal allies, sort of like her pets. They were like a magical postal service and the best thing is, you'd never expect that cat in the street, or the pigeon from the park to be the one who delivers your dreams.

It was barely dusk when all of Jade's familiars grabbed one dream each from her cauldron (which was lit up by the glowing light of the lanterns hung above it). Some dreams were held in beaks, pouches, claws, paws and jaws. Setting off into the amber and coral-pink skies, leaving behind Jade's enchanted cottage for yet another night, her familiars went everywhere, the cats to England, the raccoons to New York, the frogs leaped to Brazil and the rest of the creatures, like beavers, owls and geckos set off over the seven seas and to every corner of the world.

In London, where the bustling streets were full of busy people, even in the evening, the black cats and pigeons swiftly slid into the houses, through open windows, chimneys and doors. The glowing essence of the dreams would drift over to the children (who were tucked away in their cozy beds) lighting up their faces with a colourful brightness as they smiled warmly.

Each night, goodness knows how, the young witch's furry, feathery, scaly and slimy friends would visit India, Poland, South Africa, everywhere until every child had a dream. And Jade's mission of conjuring up a pot full of potions each night became more of a hobby than a chore to the young witch as

over time, her love for making dreams grew.

And when another dream of hers was delivered, another tree grew in Jade's forest. Some stumpy, some gnarly, some tall and some scrawny, it really didn't matter, a tree would pop out of the muddy forest ground and emerge into the sky. And another tree meant another tale to be told, another conversation to be had amongst the talking trees of the forest and another one of Jade's magnificent dreams to be remembered.

So next time you have a dream, remember Jade Calipso, the Dream Witch and remember the tree that is growing right then and there, ready to tell the dream she has made. Remember the frog or the squirrel, the owl or the fox who delivered it to you and remember to be thankful it wasn't a nightmare from the Nightmare Wizard...

1st tier Judge's comment:

What a fabulous tale. I really enjoyed your 'myth-like' style of writing. You have created pictures in my mind and genuinely entertained me with this story. Thank you!

The Horror of Nightingale Mansion

Roddy Baty
Bowdon

1786

Nightingale Mansion, Transylvania, Romania

It was a dreadfully stormy night. Flash! Crash! The rain was rushing like rivers down the roof.

It was the night of the annual masked ball at the Nightingale mansion, which was grand yet spooky, surrounded by creepy, looming trees. All the Lords and Ladies of the town were there, looking elegant in their extravagant garments and masks, but they did not know the terror that would come that night.

The first dance had just finished. But then suddenly - the lights went out. "Ahhhhh!" screamed Lord Obrovský Zadek. People were confused. A man struck a match and lit some candles to illuminate the room. By the flickering candlelight, they peered down to see their fancy clothes were stained red with liquid that dripped down. Lord Zadek was lying on the ground with a bloody argent knife in his back.

Lord Velké Kalhotky exclaimed "There is an imposter amongst us". He harked the noise of iron chains rattling. As he peered up, he saw the sparkling already huge chandelier was getting bigger and bigger - it was collapsing on him! Another one dead.

Many of the guests decided to leave trudging out the door. They thought their lives mattered more than a ball. But some did not have any common sense and stayed to try and detect the killer.

Lady Amanda Huggenkisová went downstairs to get herself a stiff alcoholic drink to calm her terrified nerves, but when she got there, she saw a hooded man sat on a barrel. That was the last thing she ever saw and the last time she was ever seen. Her screams could be heard from the next village!

By now there were only five people left in the ballroom, huddled together in the centre of the room, clinging to each other and shaking with fear. They

didn't even know who they were with, because their faces were covered by their jewel-coated masks. Lady Anastasia Debil's lips trembled as she exclaimed "but...but..but the killer must be among us!" Everyone sprung back in surprise as they realised that they had just been cuddling a MURDERER!

Cries of "it's not me", "I'm not a killer", "I am a good person" filled the room. Then all five fingers raised up and were pointed to other people screaming "IT MUST BE YOU!" They all ran away in different directions of the ginormous pentagon-shaped ballroom and hid cowering in the corners.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! Four loud gunshots ricocheted off the walls. The smell of smoke and gunpowder filled the room. THUD! THUD! THUD! THUD! Four bodies collapsed to the ground. Five had become one. And that one was the killer.

He strolled out of the room casually, ripping off his mask as he walked. "Too easy" he muttered to himself, "too easy". And with that, he was gone.

The End Sleep Tight

1st tier Judge's comment:

My goodness! What an eerie and atmospheric tale. Your vocabulary is so well chosen and mature, your imagery is fabulous. This is an amazing piece of writing and you should be very proud.



Thanks
and
acknowledgements

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As always, this competition could not have gone ahead without people kindly agreeing to give up their time to judge the entries. I would therefore like to thank all of the second tier Judges:

Zoe Davies	Sam Thompson
Jennifer Dutton	Amy Whittaker
Victoria Johnson	Vicky Johnson

You have all been brilliant and so supportive. I would especially like to thank Sam, who has (again) been incredibly supportive. I'm so grateful!

I would also like to thank the first tier Judges, Rebecca Grant and Stuart Rowson for agreeing to judge the final winning entries.

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Best Wishes

Wendi