



Poetry

Competition

Teens & Adults

Shortlist & Winners 2026



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Teens Shortlist & Winners

(aged 12-17)

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Teens Shortlist & Winners

(aged 12-17)



Where the Maps End

by Pearl Winkworth

There is a place
The maps stopped caring about.

Only a track
pressed into the grass
by people who have forgotten
what they were searching for.

The old shed remains.
Its roof has learned
the language of rain.

Its windows hold
the pale reflection
of the sky
but nothing inside.

The paddock beyond
grows taller each year.

Not wild enough
to be a forest
Not tame enough
to belong to anyone.

A halfway place.
where wind moves
without permission.
Where birds nest
in the bones of machines.

Where the fence posts lean together
like old men sharing secrets.

Nobody owns this place anymore.

The grass does.
The moss does.
The roots beneath the soil
waiting longer than we have.

We leave behind
what we thought was permanent.
But every abandoned thing
eventually becomes a doorway.

Every empty place
eventually
grows a wilderness.

And There It Was

by Harshika Sharma

And there it was
With your Snarling teeth
And my righteous glare
Bloody leg in your mouth
Gunmetal meeting callused skin
Your ears pinned back like a dog.
But you could never be a dog, not with your viciousness and bulk..
Not with the blood still dripping from your maw.
Drip
Drip
Drip.
Run
Long dried stalks whipping thin lines on my legs.
as I gave chase.
And where the meadow ends and the woods begin I followed
And I saw the scratches on the trees
Too low and gossamer.
And there was a squeak and you looked back
Stumbling
Trapped at last
And as I stood over you
Glinting barrel still
Because you were hungry
Starved
The still warm body of an underfed pup
And My Teeth bared in a triumphant snarl
I pointed it at you.
And they wouldn't survive the winter, would they.
And under all of it
Under the bloody limb you clutched
For don't we all have to feel our children?
You were a mother.
So were you the wild monster or was I?

3 **The Wind** by Eloise Vaatstra

Wind drives the clouds across the pearly sky
Grey heather blows in waves
Trees bend before it, shedding their leaves
And they dance to the music of the wind

A gray ballroom full of dancers and music
A twig in a suit of black and gold
A shy leaf in her first gossamer dress
And they dance to the music of the wind

The last song plays, the music dies down
The last couple takes a bow
Pearly-white clouds, grey moor grass
And they dance to the music of the wind

Time in the Wilderness

by Russell Leenders

The green grass on the rolling hills,

When the sun is as hot as grills.

After your big long walk,

You sit down and talk.

Although the pegs are bent,

You set up your tent.

You go for a swim in the river,

Then you come out with a shiver.

The trees moan and mourn,

Then after a sleep you wake up at dawn.

We watch the beautiful sunrise,

As we undo the tent's tangled ties.

I love the native birds,

The deer that come and go with their herds.

And then as we walk back,

Along the long gravel track,

We think of how much fun we've had,

That overnighter was rad.

Wilderness

by Aisha Hamideh

I stand in a land untouched by human hands, staring at my surroundings.

The sun, its hues of yellows, oranges, reds, its warmth, its light, shines down on the earth below, giving life to not only animals, but plants as well.

The trees, the greens, the browns, the wash of colours flowing freely through the leaves, its life, its oxygen, all given to those with limbs and lungs.

The bushes, the ferns, the grass, the greenery, bearing fruits and nuts to feed those around it, providing a place of safety and shelter.

The ground, the sea, the heart of the earth, glistening with carmine and crimson, giving a place for those to rest, live and stay.

The moon, its light, its power, its life, helping illuminate the paths created by the darkness the sun left.

The ocean, the lakes, the rivers, the life that flows within and all that hides in it, everything in perfect harmony, living, breathing, bleeding, dying.

The stars, its glow, its heart, its purpose, leading creatures through the night.

The spirits, the sea, the blood, the shadow, the fire, all giving, all welcoming, all free.

The sun will go down, fading into the forever blues, and setting the sky ablaze once more, everything untainted, untamed.

Our Wilderness

by Chanug Daldeniya

Ivy vines creep over great pines, whilst large Mooses shelter under
tall spruce, honey bees buzz around tall tree canopies, while the hiss
of snake, will keep you awake, a lion roars, while a falcon soars, the
hunting Bobcat, chases a fleeing bush rat, clouds of mist surround mountain cliffs,
ancient Sequoia trees grow tall and free, this is our wilderness.

Deep in the Bush

by Binon Bobin

In the bush I am
the birds and trees stare at me
Deep here in the bush.

Lost

by Dave Mathew

No place to go

No place to hide

No friends or foe to find, I know.

Dark and gloomy, the woods I see.

Trees cover the starry night,

Silence fills the night.

Vines and mushrooms cover the earth.

No moon light in sight.

No feeling, no life.

No place to hide.

No place to be.

Into the wilderness I go.

Define Wild and Cruel

by Luisa Joseph

I've always been an animal of the sun,
I basked in its warmth
and would watch the light cover the fields
the mountains
the beaches and the forests in its embrace
I would wander around in peace and serenity. I had no fears,
No enemies,
No predators.
Then one day
the darkness came rushing in
and ran through our grass fields,
through our mountains,
through our beaches,
and flooded our forest,
My eyes stayed frozen in horror as it consumed and killed nature's creatures.
My family and friends were killed by the dark's greed.
Their habitats were erased.
and it wanted to kill me too.
I wasn't ready for moments like this.
It didn't matter how far I ran for it was already everywhere.
Surrounding me.
I could not see past the dark.
as I slowly lost consciousness I saw the darkness that destroyed my home take
start changing shape
It first turned into suburban houses
then it turned into huge towering buildings
it switched into roads bustling with cars,
and it fell into the form of smoke.
The smoke filled my lungs and it filled my nostrils, burning my nose.
Then just for a moment, the smoke turned into a man with a smile.
and he killed me.
They'll call me a wild endangered animal that died from unfortunate circumstances
And I'll call them the Predator that turned me into its prey.

The Wilderness of Taupo

by Mataya Donaldson

A large body of ice-cold water filled with tarauta swimming gently in the trickling stream.

A giant, strong kauri tree as tall as a skyscraper, stretching up to the bright blue sky.

A nesting, cheeky, olive-brown kaka, laying eggs and dipping her head in the messy brown dirt

Trying to capture slimy worms poking their heads up towards the nice, warm sun.

At the top of Mount Ruapehu lays piles of thick, pure, fluffy white snow, covering the tall maunga like a blanket.

If you're lucky, you will be able to spot the large, cold, Lake Taupo peaking through the clouds in the distance.

And when the sun goes down and the moon rises, you can hear the loud call of the ruru from a distance.

Adults Shortlist & Winners

(aged 18+)

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Adults Shortlist & Winners

(aged 18+)



Ruru

by Samantha Keenan-Woodward

Stirring buds

Kōwhai bells

Crisp

Morepork

Twilight hours

Smoky fires

Balmy

Morepork

Rustling leaves

Evergreens

Brisk

Morepork

Silent nights

Milky-way

Biting

Morepork

2 **Best Gifts** by Rosa Swann

Incendiary
My temper crackles
Snaps and hitches
Upon your brambles
Words and laughter
Life that I'm encouraged to
Embrace
You leave traces
Of sparkling praise
A hundred stars
Studded into this dark heart
More than beating
Breathing
Writhing
Curling
Wild!
No admonishment towards
The wildness in me
No urge to tame
Only to understand
A calm hand
On twisted vines
Compassion towards
The overgrown jungle
Of my mind
And patience
And patience
Patience and time
Is what you give
The best gifts of them all.



The Cave of Wonders by Adam Williamson

the
cave
of
won
ders

un
pred
ictable
tempting
wild, forbidden
the secret place
untamed and sacred
tantalising and alluring
a hidden treasure
waiting to be found
by anyone patient
enough to delve
deep into its
moist
core

High Country

by Johannes Knol

Mountains split and grasp and weave
their magic on the land
like no other —
a thousand wrinkles in this new country,
a thousand thoughts and memories.

And over it all I fly,
making the most of my advantage —
like some disembodied petty thief,
or celestial farmer
stealing glances and casting them back again.

What do I make of this greeny-brown,
cloud-smothered, newly old terrain?
It stirs, and so do I,
and we gaze at each other like strangers
with our own secrets to keep.

Some say the sea is deep,
but there is a greater depth
to this high country —
one that can't be seen from here.

I know.

I tried.

Matagorda Island Lighthouse

by Jen Erceg

On a windswept coast
more water than land
Chewed by the sea
pinned to the sands,
Stacked far out
from sheltered dunes
and every soul
except the ones in ships -
Is a black lighthouse,
in the white of the storm

From the very top stair
where the sea blast
scours the air with sand
One revolving Fresnel lens
makes a bee-wing whirl of gold —
Filling the inner white core
with the warmth of light
Casting a line outside
of hope —
of hope —
of hope —

The keeper snuffs his hurricane lamp
and clings to the stair in the hurricane blow
and breathes with the light and waits for the eye,
and the calm inside the wild.

Kakanui

by Mike Mckeon

The sea,
An aria,
Rising up the beach.
Takes the familiar place
Of the Traffic hum,
My urban ears re-calibrating,
For peace and birdsong.

My booted tread to the ridge,
Turns gravel and a vista blue.
Over these grazed green fields
The wind plays tricks in the trees
Mimicking a crowd,
A roaring spectacle.

Then the bay runs ahead of me,
Now I have scored!
What a view.
Near infinity,
The beach at Kakanui.

Wilderness of Mine

by Terry Burn

The youth of a rising sun unveils the warmth
Of a day begun to promise reward of rigour
And vigour will provide means to suffice desire
And satisfy this wilderness of mine

So forth under the noon day sun which beats
Eternal drums as heat so does temptation come
And entangle blue skies without exemption
For want of green grass and redemption

Twilight is the beauty of the suns last kiss
A time for reflection of another day I exist
To be thankful for the beauty of life defined
And find comfort in the wilderness of my mind

My Time in the Wilderness

by Hannah Tysoe

My wilderness is a perilous place
Where devils do not dare to tread
Dirt encrusted in every space
Echoes of screams in my head

A mountain of clothes I survey
Dirty or clean? It's hard to know
My heart sinks heavy in dismay
As I see a tundra of craft snow

Carpeted wasteland before my sight
Remnants of playtimes past
Countless Lego, weapon of night
Cascade of plates, food stuck fast

Their hunger gnaws every hour
These impulsive beasts are wild
For food they constantly scour
The creature that inhabits my child

In their fort of pillows they sleep
Dormant in their catacomb
Natives that I myself do keep
This wilderness, their home

I look upon my wild things
Tribal marks of vegemite
Matted hair, blanket wings
Angelic in my sight

I remember wild things are not forever
This time will come, this time will go
This wilderness may not return, never
Replaced with order and cleanliness, I know

And I will miss this wilderness time
Smiling laughter, cries of glee
Chatters of innocence, stories in rhyme
When the wild things at home were truly free

It's a Beautiful World

by Rose Biggs

It's a beautiful world upon Earth, a spinning ball.
The Land of the Long White Cloud,
A wilderness, the most beautiful place of all.

Untouched and unspoiled by human hand,
Constantly evolving as Mother Nature planned.
A landscape sculptured over years
By earthquake, storm and rain,
Where silver streams and rivers run
Through the rough terrain.

Sometimes calm and peaceful,
And others time insane,
The lifeline of the wilderness,
Like blood flowing through its veins.

Mother Nature's mirrors are lakes,
Cold and still like glass,
Surrounded by rich green ferns,
Ancient trees and vibrant wild grass.

Emerald hills where sheep graze
Like distant cotton balls,
As majestic mountains stand like guards
Over cascading waterfalls.

Under the starlit sky
As night-time gently falls,
Our little national treasure, the kiwi,
Softly calls.

There are no fences here,
No need for lock or key.
The wildlife of the wilderness
Roam and fly here free.

Just as nature intended,
Its wonderful sight to see.
No poet could do it justice,
Not artist could capture the scene,
Of the wilderness in in all its beauty,
Rugged and serene.

Oh, it's a beautiful world out there upon Earth,
A spinning ball,
And the wilderness in the Land of the Long White Cloud
Is the most beautiful of them all.

The Great Unheard

by Oliver Dean

Breakers grind at the cliff of life,
Carrying off grains of moment to sink beneath
Its raging surface and settle far below in the calm sands
Of memory to crystallise into glass balls,
Finely tinted marbles that roll over the glistening shore,
Soliciting attention as the waves crash on and on,
The sand refining and unwinding unaligned fragments
Until, small as dust, they reline and redefine the ageing mind.

As the Tui who deigns to lower its song for a moment
Before spinning off once more into the great unheard,
The unseen echoes from behind a portrait,
A surrogate for the lost late
That vibrate and gyrate in and out of sight
Until the ocean breaches
The final cliff face
Unwinding the gilded mind
In a finale of light and sound
For the now unbound.



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