

How to grow poets

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Students
Newlands College

Two questions I want to explore

- What are the keys to starting and maintaining a successful creative writing group within a school?
- How can schools encourage students to find their own voices as poets?



Newlands College



Newlands College

- A decile 9 co-educational state secondary school in Newlands, a suburb of Wellington with a roll of 1050. The ethnic mix of the student population reflects the diverse nature of the community. A learning support centre attached to the college caters for 40 students. Approximately 50 international students attend during each year.



Our Gifted and Talented Programme

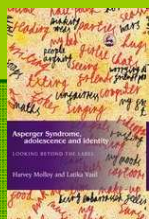
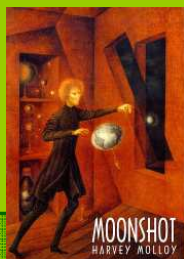
- We have an orientation workshop for all students identified as gifted.
- We 'shoulder tap' students for specific extension activities.
- We provided extension activities aimed towards the gifted which are open to **all** students.
- We try to keep 'under the radar' to avoid elitism but we're not afraid to stand out when necessary.



Our Gifted and Talented Programme

- Competitions.
- Scholarship (senior).
- Clubs.
- Trips.
- CREST. (Run through Science Department).
- Seminars and Workshops.
- Personal Learning Conferences.

I love to write . . .



. . . and I'd like to encourage students to find their own ways—outside the classroom and outside assessment.

My group's first year



A little poetry.
A little song writing.
An attempt to have students write for the College Herald.
Small group—never more than four regulars.
A rushed effort for National Poetry Day.

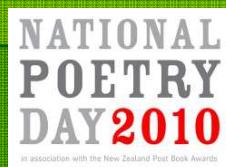
Meanwhile . . .

In my second year at the school I was roped into being a stage manager in the school production of Les Misérables. I loved getting the props on and off and helping to change the sets. We all have this focus on the show.



We needed a focus ...

I chose National Poetry day. I decided to run a poetry competition and have the winners announced at a poetry reading in the school library on Poetry Day. My focus for the year would be poetry.

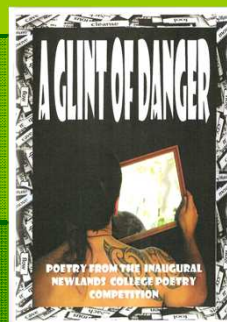


Our competition...

Newlands College
Poetry Competition
\$50 Senior Prize
\$50 Junior Prize
Runners-up receive \$25 each.
Tim Jones Judge.
I had 60-odd entries.



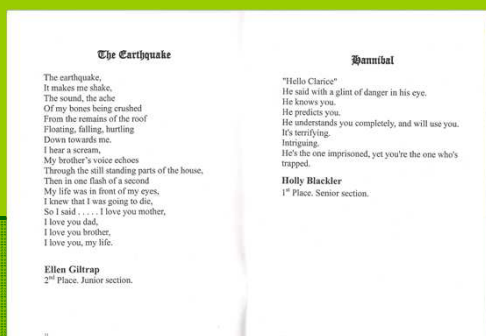
A glint of danger



Cover photo
Taken by a level 2 photography student.

Designed by a year 11 student.

A glint of danger



2011 competition...

\$50 Senior Prize

\$50 Junior Prize

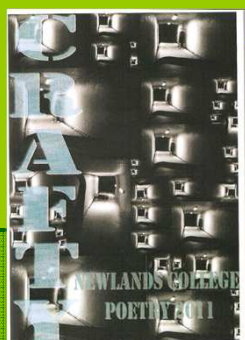
Runners-up receive \$25 each.

Books donated by Steele
Roberts.

I had 76 entries.

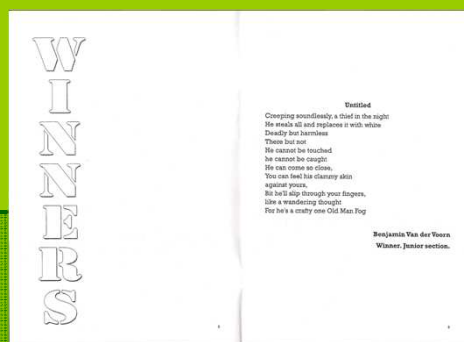


Crafty



Cover
photograph
and design
by a year 10
student.

Crafty

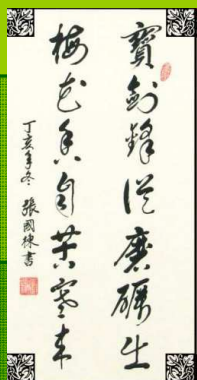


NZ Poetry Society competition...

In both years students also
entered poems into the National
Competitions.

NZ Poetry Anthologies





Tips for student poets

One

Tips for student poets

1. All poems are not brush paintings

It's OK to go back, rethink, rework, revise, chop and add. 'First thought best thought' is essential for capturing the flash. But the poem can be more than the flash.



Tips for student poets

Two

Tips for student poets

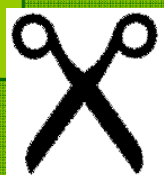
2. Read with your ear.

Listen to the poem. Read it aloud. What parts stand out? Does it sound smooth or lumpy? Is too soft or loud? Are any words clunky?



Tips for student poets

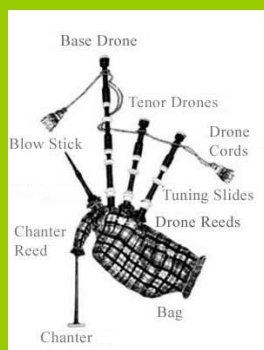
Three



Tips for student poets

3. More or less?

Have you said all that needs to be said? Have you said too much? Any filler? Any flat lines? Can you clarify?



Tips for student poets

Four

Tips for student poets

4. Be unusual

Write about dog breeding, or your uncle Sam's beermat collection, or Linux, or your sister's obsession with the bagpipes, or carburetors and stock car engines. Use the words you find there.



Tips for student poets

Five

Tips for student poets

5. Titles are tricky.

Have another think. Is it OK? What else could it be? What else could it say?



Tips for student poets

Six

Tips for student poets

6. Let it lie in the drawer.

It won't run away if you close the drawer tightly. When you come back you might see it differently once the enthusiasm of creation has passed. Drawer time can really help your poetry grow and mature.

Tips for student poets

Seven



Tips for student poets

7. Proofread your work.

Use spellcheck. Double-check. Many writers are terrible copy editors. If you see a tweak during proofreading save the original and make the teak. Save multiple copies. The doublecheck the final version. (OK: it should be proofread.)

What I would have liked more of . . .

More peer review. More workshops.
I've not pushed this on students. I'd like the quality to be better.

"Go into the arts. I'm not kidding.
The arts are not a way to make a living.
They are a very human way of making life more bearable.
Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly,
is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake.
Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories.
Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem.
Do it as well as you possibly can.
You will get an enormous reward,
You will have created something."

Kurt Vonnegut



What's next . . .

Peer review. More workshops.
More time for fiction.
Perhaps a short story competition . . .

Resources



Juicy Writing by
Brigid Lowry

Google 'Poetry
writing exercises.'

etc.

Let's write!

Alliteration Exercise

Make a list of twelve phrases that use alliteration, such as *the sun settled on the south hill with sudden colour*.

Extension: Pick two or three of these phrases and try to build images around them. Use at least one of these images in a poem.

Let's write!



Body Part Exercise

Write a poem addressed to a particular body part. Make sure you maintain a consistent tone and focus.