

MEDIA RELEASE



Embargoed until 7am, Friday 22 August

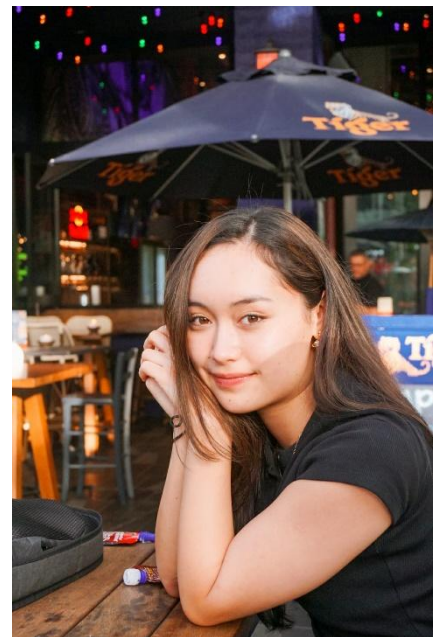
Poem acknowledging unspoken loss wins 2025 National Schools Poetry Award

Keiko Bruce, a year 13 student from One Tree Hill College in Auckland, is the winner of the 2025 National Schools Poetry Award. Her poem 'Guilt Tank' (see below) reflects on the words we frequently don't say.

"Originally, I titled this poem *Grief Diary* because it felt like an intimate reflection of sorrow," Keiko (pictured), says. "I later renamed it to *Guilt Tank* to better capture the sharp, piercing emotions tied to bottling up tears that others might dismiss as trivial."

She describes *Guilt Tank* as a memoir not only to her childhood pets, but to emotional repression, helplessness, and the quiet weight of what so often goes unspoken. "I wanted to capture how even the smallest losses can leave people aching," Keiko says.

"This poem is a reminder that personal grief, no matter how small or unseen, is still grief. And it deserves to be heard."



The National Schools Poetry Award is run by Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington's International Institute of Modern Letters (IIML) with funding from Creative New Zealand, and sponsorship and promotional support from Wonderlab.

Judge Ruby Solly says this prose poem feels like an entire film captured in a single, carefully laid-out paragraph of poetry.

"There's something of a psychological thriller effect to it with its parallels between physical events and family relationships, all held within intergenerational traumas and understandings.

"I think this poem says so much about our rhetoric in New Zealand and how we often speak without speaking, there is something dark and alive within this work. It's a poem that will stay with you for months after reading it." Keiko's poem will feature as [The Spinoff's Friday Poem](#) on National Poetry Day, Friday 22 August.

As the winner of the 2025 National Schools Poetry Award, Keiko receives a \$500 cash prize, a \$500 book grant for her school library, a year's membership of Read NZ Te Pou Muramura, a year's membership of the New Zealand Society of Authors (NZSA), and a year's subscription to leading New Zealand literary journal *Landfall*.

“I must say it was extremely challenging to choose a winner, and I truly loved all of the top ten,” Ruby Solly says.

The other nine finalists are: Isla Partridge (Yr 12, Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu), Mohammad Nazif Islam (Year 12, Timaru Boys’ High School), Maia Hills (Yr 13, Wellington High School), Penny Dai (Yr 13, St Andrews’ College), Thomas Rowe Palmer (Yr 12, St Andrews’ College), Cameron Lewes Murray (Yr 13, Wellington College), Alexandria Farrington (Yr 12, St Mary’s College, Wellington), Jasmine Liu (Yr13, Rangitoto College) and Aidan Clarke (Yr 13, Westlake Boys’ High School). Poems by all the finalists are available on the [Schools Poetry Award](#) website.

Keiko and the other nine finalists will attend a one-day poetry masterclass with poets Ruby Solly and essa may ranapiri at the International Institute of Modern Letters.

Read Keiko’s winning poem here <https://schoolspoetryaward.co.nz/>

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