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## Children's Lessons in Compassion

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Year 6 and 7 section of the Australia IS Refugees! Competition The Years 6 and 7 section of the competition ran from February to June 2002. High Schools students submitted their essays for judging by Tom Shapcott, Phillip Adams and Helen Garner on 30th September. Dr Eva Sallis from the University of Adelaide reports.

In the midst of what has become a human rights crisis for Australia, this project has been extraordinarily uplifting. It has had a very creative, inventive and enterprising response from children, who sought out, interviewed and wrote the stories of refugees from more than 30 different countries. Their harrowing stories are told through the words and imaginative recreation of the young authors. What inspired those who read the entries was the clarity of the children's sense of justice and their embracing warmth for their subjects.

The winning stories and the names for the shortlist of 65 will be published in the event booklet, together with the list of those who donated time and gifts to make the project possible. The prize giving event will be on Monday December 2nd in Melbourne. The judges' report on the winning story, For the Love of a Child, Mai's Story by Khazmira Bashah (Perth College Primary, WA) states that the -writer displays great empathy with her subject and insight into the refugee situation.

"The opening image of Mai's arrival in Perth, Valentine's Day, 1982, is startling as are many other references to the details of the family's escape. The narrative deals with tragedy, bravery, determination and chance until resettlement in Australia. Mai's words may be a fitting comment for so many in this project:

'A person who becomes a refugee does not always come with the hope of a better life, they come for survival, because they cannot continue to live and be alive in the country

they are fleeing from.

It takes desperate steps to leave in small boats to set off for a place that may never let you stay, but none of that matters because you leave your country for Freedom.'"

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## Schoolgirl Tells PM: Time For Us to Say Sorry

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By: Jemma Chapman  
The Advertiser ( 27 August 2002)  
<http://www.theadvertiser.news.com.au/printpage/0,5942,4977701,00.html>

AT the age of 12, Lauren Clark won the state secondary section of the 2002 Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards, putting her ahead of students up to five years her senior. Her poem, *How did it get so bad?*, focuses on the need for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

*How did it get so bad we can't say sorry  
Sorry for the way we worked you  
Sorry for the way we hurt you  
For the hatred we grew  
For the way we ignored you.*

Lauren said she was inspired by media debate on reconciliation and refugee issues. "I don't know anybody who is Aboriginal but there's been a lot of coverage in the media of Aboriginal issues and also the treatment of refugees," Lauren said. Lauren said she thought it was imperative Prime Minister John Howard issue a formal apology to Aboriginal people.

*"I think that everybody should be treated fairly and given a chance.  
"We need to accept the differences of other cultures and learn from them.  
"We all live in Australia and should get along."*