Includes commissioned poems by poets from The Red Room Company’s Poems and Poets Archive http://redroomcompany.org/poets/

Poets who participate in the Papercuts national poetry education program are commissioned to compose a poem for their allocated school community.

All these poems are available on The Red Room Company website on the Poems and Poets page.

http://redroomcompany.org/poets/

The Poems and Poets page of The Red Room Company’s website was included (for illustrative purposes) as a suggested text for study for Units 3 (Perspectives) and 4 (Making Connections) of the National Curriculum Senior Literature Course (Draft Consultation Version 1.10).

A number of Papercuts poets have composed poems about objects that are special to them.

Judith Bishop worked with students at Sunning Hill School in 2010. Sunning Hill Education and Training Centre is situated within Juniperina Juvenile Justice Centre. Juniperina is the only Juvenile Justice facility that caters specifically for the needs of young female offenders in New South Wales.

Judith’s talismanic object was a piece of music that is important to her: Tchaikovsky’s ballet score for Swan Lake.

joanne burns worked with students at Abbotsleigh School in 2007. Many of the girls at this school chose to write about dolls that were special to them. joanne wrote a poem
about dolls from her childhood and some Guatemalan worry dolls she owned as an adult.

Gareth Jenkins shared special objects and the place he kept them with students at Killara High School. This moment of sharing was then transformed into his commissioned poem.

In 2011 Blue Mountains poet Craig Billingham visited Adelaide as a Papercuts poet and worked with students from Pedare Christian College. An object held in the collection of The Art Gallery of South Australia inspired his poem: a painting from early in the career of Jeffrey Smart. His poem Holiday Resort is a response to the small oil painting of the same name.

Louella Pleffer is the illustrator and animator who designed the logo for The Poetry Object. She chose a boot for the logo for a deliberate reason.

“"The idea behind is that collage itself symbolises a collection of memories surrounding my own talismanic object; my boot. The collage forms fragments or a patchwork of my experiences and senses associated with the object.

I chose orange as my central colour as I believe it reflects the idea of a treasure box and how the objects inside are glorified and often almost kept in a shrine like fashion.”
Swan Lake

As music curves through the body, the swing of it
lifting mind’s invisible feet, so it happened

a ballet I’d gone to in the days after breaking up
with someone who had found me rather clumsy

left behind a troupe of swans in my heart.
Now the inner band played on, a waltz as searing

as a light too brightly shining in a room that should be dark,
and the swans, pirouetting through the dark

and joyful moments of the plot, took my heart
dancing, till the grief that remained

turned to a mood of gentle swanning
through the fine, vacated ballroom of the mind;

till the swans evaporated with a cry.

Judith Bishop

Sunning Hill School NSW 2010
It's not about display

I have this special spot: it's a secret.  
I will tell you though, now we know each other, a little.  
There's this space  
at the back of my kitchen cupboard  
above greased-up tiles,  
above scarred glass elements.

It's dusty dark but dry enough  
to store precious objects: a volcanic rock  
from the top of Africa's Kilimanjaro  
and a tiny cup  
with which I was fed poison, sold jewels and almost died.

The jewels are here too, Aquamarines in a little box with a cat on the lid.  
In their oblique surface I see his reptilian face,  
eyes without lashes  
long fingers spooning liquid,  
rapping the table like impatient spider’s legs.

There are other things here too – amid them I place  
a blue book and its formulas.  
I close the cupboard door. My cabinet is a secret one –  
it’s not about display, it’s about keeping things safe.

You won’t tell any one –  
will you?

Gareth Jenkins

Killara High NSW 2010
sand

did i leave them or did they leave me; i don’t remember any farewells, i didn’t ask about their futures or dream we were re-united; i can still glimpse joan, i dropped her on the dirt at the bottom of the toddlers’ slippery dip as i ran off to climb the high ladder of the bigger dip, the silver coated letters of its rungs calling up up higher higher, for that thrill of whooshing down, airborne – i didn’t need a doll’s hand then, joan the felt doll, did she feel anything – her mouth smitten with dark sand as i flew down, my mouth wide open to adventure’s wind

margaret and sharon stuffed together in their blue white pram for a day at the beach in the big front garden, swimming lessons through the bindi-eyed tormented grass they didn’t understand you had to kick your
legs, they stared at you in doll
solemnity their thick eyelashes
didn’t seem to care as they filled
up with ants –

dinah my china doll
was the one who seemed
alive, or was it more my
guilt that thrived, at not
being able to restore her
black forehead’s lacquered
gloss, chipped when she and
i fell down the back porch
steps the scribbled greyblack
pencil marks across the gap
where black paint had chipped
to pink – an early moment of
a buried sense of failure to get
things exactly right

like a large almond
the miniature box of worry
dolls, each smaller than a
match, sits there on a bookshelf
fading in the sunlight like all my
good intentions down the multiplying
years; these dolls stay pristine, bright
inside like cocktail onions – i do all
the worrying, bleached of any colour,
while individually unnamed they bide
their time -

joanne burns

Abbotsleigh School for Girls NSW 2007
Holiday Resort
(after the painting by Jeffrey Smart)

Winter morning, the moon
shocked by sunrise. Seabirds, salt-breeze,
the sand as yet unbroken

by human feet. Are we the first
to walk here? No, such early thoughts
are foolish. Like us,

the beach
has been washed
by a second language,

by the slow
nocturnal rhythms of black water –
see how they recede

and what they’ve left
of us.

Craig Billingham

Pedar Christian College 2011
Object Poems By Other Poets

The objects in my room

My eyes fall sometimes on the objects in my room
A stolid desk the cabinet that holds my music’s breath
The bookshelves colorful and slim an Afghan rug still
Clinging to its rhythmic red the busy reproductions
On the walls the table buried under scribbles much
like these
All familiar housemates co-conspirators of dreams
Who in their kind restraint ask nothing that I do not
ask of them
These gentle things enablers of my living
Neither unforgiving nor forgiving but in a state
Of readiness when in my need
I turn to lean on them

Maurice Leiter

http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2008/08/friday-poem-the.html

Grandma’s Teacup

Grandma’s favourite teacup
sits on the kitchen shelf
she gave it to me to remember
our tea parties—
  the two of us sipping
  cinnamon apple tea
  eating oatmeal raisin cookies
  and playing card games
But every year that passes
I remember less and less
So now and then
I take her teacup down
and make cinnamon apple tea
just the way she showed me
and all the sweet memories
of Grandma
float back
with every sip

Linda Kulp

Camels

Hidden behind dusty trophies
carved wooden camels linked together by a rusty chain,
A paperclip replaces a broken chain,
One leading another
traveling to an unexpected place.
At times seeming stiff and serious
at others alive and carefree.
Not perfect like me,
delicate like my mother.
Holding a mystery inside.
Not knowing where they are going,
where they came from,
passed from mother to daughter,
than grandmother to grandchild.
Traveling through each generation
capturing a new memory,
my wooden camels.

By Stephanie T.

http://home.earthlink.net/~jesmith/Treas.obj.501.html
My Ring

On the sandy sun-kissed beaches,
I found my golden band of luck.
Small, round, and glimmering,
a special imprint of a shell at it’s center.
Looking much like a fossil,
Resting on my finger
Telling a story of its journey to sea.

Like my mother,
sparkling with wisdom.
Bits of jewels shimmer in the sun,
Staring out to sea,
Making me realize,
how big the world really is.
My golden ring.

By Laura W.

http://home.earthlink.net/~jesmith/Treas.obj.501.html
The Thimble

It came in a tiny blue bag, resting in a churning ocean of pale wrinkles. Trapped in a cage of brittle bone and fragile membranes.

Tauntingly ageless it waited, hidden behind azure satin. The drawstring seemed to be made of iron. A noose around a vein.

A sky bag filled with clouds I thought, tugging out the cotton balls. Where is the sun, I asked? Where is the sun?

At first I thought it was bone: slick slither of bone. It wasn’t though. Filled with hollow ice and tipped with gold.

But not made of bone.

Heady blossoms permeate the white. Sparrow’s cries pierce the quiet gold. Rendered silent as snow. Ceramic, not bone.
Ancient wisdom of dried out powdery hair. Eyes blue and red and yellow. And white of course. These things are gone now. But the colours don’t die.

by Lillian C-G
Under the bedside table

Under the bedside table
a sleek
smooth
round
child’s gold bracelet lies.

For seven years
it has lain
under the bedside table,
not ever seeing
the outside world.

Yet
it has seen
what very few have seen:
the true delight
in a child’s eyes.

by Josephine D
The Swingset

Wood rots, 
ropes fray, 
metal rusts, 
memories stay.

It stands there 
deserted in the midst 
of many times climbed 
and swung from.

Sometimes it was a ship 
escaping from the storm. 
Other times, many times, 
it was the Saab convertible a friend and I 
drove to McDonald’s.

Now years of playing cease. 
It’s just the goal for flashlight tag, 
where people sulk after losing 
or 
preen after winning.

At times I want to shed 
my childhood, 
but somehow I can’t cart it away 
to the dump, where 
swingsets are shredded, where 
times past 
can’t ever 
return.

by Grace W.
AN OBJECT POEM AND ACCOMPANYING ESSAY

A Coal Necklace

My father gave me a piece
of solidified night.

Remember me,
he said, then coughed
with black lungs,
climbing up from the deep basement.
I was eight years old.
I clutched the stone. T
here was fire within
its lake of smoothness.
A fellow coalman designed
the pendant—
a teardrop crowned with silver filigree—
it embraced the stone
with a hard lace.

My father and others
fed the earth,
extracted somebody else’s plunder,
loved their wives in furious silence,
gave kids mule rides on angry backs.

Now their offspring recycle luck
or leave behind a scarred map.

But for some, the Earth is a jewel box.
I’ve searched for years
but still cannot find that fossil tear—
my father’s half century of night,
congealed.

Maria Jacketti

Published in Etchings Issue 1

http://www.ilurapress.com/E1-Sample.htm

Objects of Poetry

Maria Jacketti

How do I write a poem? I’ve often wondered about that one, especially when the poems materialize elusively, and I think that I may never write another. But even after a very dry spell, the psyche, which at its core level really wants to sing, finds trigger for the poetic experience. Maybe, it is an object crystallized in memory, some sense-luscious thing from childhood.

From the archives of my young days, I remember many treasured objects: dolls, books,
models, gadgets. In particular, I adored a red and black plaid jug. Now this was not your basic curvy moonshine jug, but something cylindrical, fat, and very space-age in appearance, except for its decoration, which also made it look quite parochial and familiar. Back then, I called it the “Scotch jug” because its plastic plaid jacket resembled the familiar roll of Scotch Tape, and my school uniform. Everything about the jug said 1960—something: something old, something dreadfully new. Now, entrenched in memory, it seems this jug could have contained nectar. However, I remember well the refreshments it held—nothing as mystical as the memories which have grown around it—but mostly lemonade prepared by my mother—sometimes tinted pink with maraschino cherries—and iced tea, and once in a while neon Kool-Aid. It was a manifestation of a flagrantly innocent time—nobody seemed to care about artificial colors, flavors, fragrances, or their underlying ideas. In fact, my generation thrived on myriad artificial things as we played Vietnam in our backyards.

Today, my precious jug may exist somewhere: in someone else’s garage or deep in a landfill; but wherever it is, it carries the energetic imprint of the lost refreshment it gave me. It is after all, a perfect poetry seed, something which connects me both spiritually and archeologically to a childhood which swirled and vanished into the great past. It’s fascinating the way linear time can become a molten thing in poetry. And so when I retrieve objects like the Scotch jug from the depths of memory, I become molten, too, and less a prisoner of time.

These days, I am trying to recover more of those seeds, mostly lost things. I want to try to preserve them for my daughter who will grow up in a much different age. It is not that I am interested so much in passing on heirlooms, but I would like to give her a sense of what my past was like. The things we take for granted, household objects, the junk artifacts of our lives, are extremely absorbent. They hold time, emotions, events, extinct music. And when they speak, I pray to be ready for them. Sometimes they chatter, moan, weep, curse, or holler like the unascended dead. Then they keep me up at night trying to find forms to fit their stories.
These objects, however, don’t always make poetry. Some are more comfortable in essays or vignettes or in some genre-less form. In fact, as I look over the notebook which currently holds all the poems I’ve decided to keep because they whisper some small truth, very few seem to have direct connection to objects; but one of my favorite early poems, “A Coal Necklace,” was generated from just such an object-seed.

To a certain extent, we are all by-products of our native geographies, channeling the vital chi of place, time and live object; sometimes in moments of raw awareness, I’ve sensed the geopathic wounds of maternal soil, and I am sure that my blood must contain molecules of coal dust. It was hard to grow up in Hazleton, Pennsylvania without some overt bond to coal. My Italian immigrant family quickly made deep roots in this cold, mountainous town at the beginning of the century. They were from Foggia, an agrarian blip in Italy’s solar plexus, and no doubt they were accustomed to lavish sun, olives, green winters. And of course, they were farmers, not miners, but coal was the only stratagem for survival around these unglamorous Alps. They were not special; it didn’t take very long for the family to experience Earth’s wrath. Within a dozen or so years, my grandfather Jacketti was crushed by a large rock in the mines and instantly killed, leaving a house of orphans wondering what kind of future might rise out of the great black holes gouged out around them.

My father ended up working at the breaker, where he stayed for forty-eight years. When I was eight, he gave me a coal necklace, a charm of sorts made by a co-worker. It was tear-shaped, polished to a high gloss and tipped with a bit of silver-filigree. I remember my father telling me—or perhaps my mother—that I should use it to remember him. At that moment, I realized that this touchstone contained a message: his lungs were mineralizing; he couldn’t inhale without pain; in fact, he was going away breath by breath. I felt this in my bones; it had no articulation, but even then I sensed that my father had lived a life of small hope—one of unvoiced lamentations, and fury. This nugget of anthracite, which I lost, then found many years later, became the seed for this poem which explores our bitter legacy, and I believe, the legacy of many others.
Hazleton today is a much different place, and coal has become a rather antique topic. The anthracite souvenirs that sometimes find their way into gift shops here look mass produced and soulless, compared to the small coal necklace, a shard from our deep wound in the planet. A single solidified black breath of God, it continues to embody my father’s burdens and our crushed dreams.

Now I’m not so sure that “A Coal Necklace” is such a great poem by the standards of the powers-of-poetry-that-be. It still remains unpublished more than a decade after I wrote it. But I treasure it because of its ontological connection to my daily bread, the energy behind the words: a text of texts. Hindus call this substantive record akash, the finest, imperishable substance of the universe; and I hope, that above all things, the objects of my poetry when translated into words may reflect those akashic records. It is a funny business—being a poet. Almost any other vocation or avocation must be simpler, and outwardly more rewarding. But the deep lessons I’ve learned continue to sustain my breath, and I suppose that as long as I am writing, I’ll continue to search for poetry in the ruins of the simple things we leave behind.

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http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/jacketti.htm