

2010 *What Matters?* Competition

YEAR 5/6 WINNER

Caitlin Howlett, Waitara Public School

Poverty, it Matters to Me

I bend down to pick up the roughly made container which I have just filled with muddy water from the trickle of water running through the dry river bed. After I have cooked with it, the germ-filled water will serve as my seven siblings' washing water. We will also drink it but who knows what is in it. Two of my brothers and my father died of diarrhoea from contaminated water. We all think jealously of others in richer countries who have warm, clean running water but we can do nothing about it. Here, in my poor country, a black cloud of despair rests over us. We know we will never have the opportunities that others have. Because nobody cares, it doesn't matter to them.

When I get home I rub my blisters on my swollen feet. The walk to and from the water is long and sharp stones litter the way there. I get sore and swollen feet because we can't afford shoes. I make a meagre dish, barely enough to feed a child let alone eight plus our mother. The little ones don't understand how poor we are and they always ask for more, so us older children usually end up giving our share of food to them. But all of us are constantly hungry. We all yearn for bigger and better food like others, but we know we will never have better quality or quantity food because nobody cares, it doesn't matter to them.

When it is time for sleep, we all curl up against each other. There is not enough room for everyone in our house so our mother usually sleeps outside. There are no blankets either. Instead we use our itchy, worn clothes. We all desire a mattress all to ourselves, somewhere to stretch out and relax. But there is no time to relax. I have to get up before dawn every morning to do countless numbers of chores. Our mother has worked ever since our father died so I, at seven, look after everyone and most of everyone else's chores. But I'm not that bad off. I know a boy of eight works with the adults because both his parents are dead. He also looks after his four siblings. But no one cares about his family or my family or anyone else who is poor. It doesn't matter to them.

I long to go to school. We all do. There is no school within walking distance of where I live. I crave to learn to read and to write and to add and subtract figures, School could be an amazing new world where I would be too busy concentrating to worry about where our next meal would come from, it would be a totally safe haven. But my course is struck. No one cares about my wishes of school it doesn't matter to anyone.

This is just one example of someone a lot less fortunate than you or I. The chances are, you're probably sitting down in a very comfortable armchair drinking a steaming hot cup of coffee and eating a freshly baked muffin when, on the other side of the world, there are billions of people who couldn't afford that snack in a week! Don't you feel guilty? Doesn't it matter to you? It matters to me.