

the Committee for International Children's Book Week had become the Children's Book Council. Dedicated workers carried the banner through the hard-sleeping pioneer years that followed. They notched up a formidable total of man- and woman-hours as the number of annual Awards mounted, and Opening Days and Exhibitions came and went. Councils were formed in other States, not always permanently, but continuity was maintained by the original body and Children's Book Week became widely recognised and accepted, the Committee's work extended.

Now we have come to 1971 and the Children's Book Council looks back at a quarter-century's campaigning in the fields of children's books. The years between have been rewarding; exciting, often exhilarating, but always good. Names of many who toiled devotedly to make the years fruitful are too numerous to list in this short memorial, but will be recorded in a fuller account to be compiled* that here and now we can acknowledge our indebtedness to those who went before and established the basis on which the Children's Book Council stands today. Especially we can remember those very early trail blazers who in 1945, as the gunn cannon trump in the Pacific, came together at that dinner party in Kings Cross, Sydney, to give and receive the message of Children's Book Week and begin the work whose purpose is to enrich the lives of our children.

We are planning a history of the Children's Book Council of Australia and would appreciate any background material, from all States, to be sent to the editor.

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CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA 1971 JUDGES' REPORT

(SLIGHTLY ABRIDGED)

CLASS A

BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

Bread and Honey, by Ivan Southall. Published by Angus & Robertson.

In many ways this book is ahead of its time, both in the depth of psychological portrayal and in its presentation to children of contentious issues and attitudes in an unresolved form leaving readers to make their own judgements. For this reason the book may not meet with wide approval amongst those who feel that children's books should present simplified portraits and unequivocal values and attitudes. But for the thoughtful, questioning child there is much here to digest and reflect upon.

The psychological progress from childhood to maturity is subtle and complex. Mr Southall's story brilliantly follows this involved progress through each acute turn and twist of a 13-year-old boy's mind as the child moves from a world of fantasy and fear to an adult acceptance of experience.

Although the work depicts a child's thoughts, there is a clear balance between the internal action in the mind and the external happenings to the boy on Anzac Day. Michael Cameron, a lonely child, brought up in an atmosphere of conflicting values, is caught between his father's scientific, materialistic attitude to life and his grandma's more spiritual view that anything is possible. He is confused by people's opinion of him and has not escaped the guilt associated with prudish admonition (e.g. the Farlows disapprove because he enjoys rolling naked in the grass). For Michael it is a period of awakening and uncertainty. His thoughts turn to conflicting views on Anzac Day, adult views on nudity, wonderings about God and Death.

The external action examines three encounters: the first with the people next door; the second with a nine-year-old girl on the beach; and the third with Bully Boy's mate.

Mr Southall's understatement lends poignancy to Michael's loneliness and sense of loss, especially after he has taken a stand against Bully Boy's mate; and the author's sharp parallel between Michael's motives for fighting and those of the Anzacs gives the incident of his personal battle a symbolic significance. Michael returns home and showers, "... Grains of sand, sea-water salt, sweat and blood, all swirled away like bread-and-honey crumbs washed off". Bread and honey—the staff of life and the sweetening. But experience cannot be washed off. Michael has begun to grow up.

The book is deceptively simple and can be read on many levels. For the child who still requires a story there is sufficient action and immediacy to retain interest. For the teenager there is imagery and metaphor to stimulate

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the imagination and ideas to challenge prejudices. Mr Southall's style occasionally lapses into over-emphasis and slick journalism, but there are also many brilliant passages where his ideas are perfectly captured in concise, vivid prose.

The dust-jacket, by Wolfgang Itrasse, excellently conveys the haunting quality of the story.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

The Story of China, by Lo Hui-Min. Illustrated by Elaine Haxton.
Published by Angus & Robertson.

Dr Lo's text is a remarkable achievement. It is a masterpiece of compression and economy of expression—though scholarly it is simple enough for a child to read and enjoy. The scholarship of the author is reflected in the breadth of his survey and the simplicity with which he has been able to reduce his material to essentials. In a few lines he puts the great ages of Han, Tang, Sung and Ming into the context of their time, speaks of the evolution of writing and painting, building the Great Wall and the Grand Canal and of the contact between East and West. Against the background of China's cultural heritage and former struggles for unity and security, today's events are given a deeper significance and understanding.

Elaine Haxton's outstanding illustrations offer a parallel visual record of China's history. They reflect the art of the dynasties in mood and style, and show Miss Haxton to be equally at home with a concise, simple line as she is with a strong sweeping one. Her variety of styles and dramatic use of colour not merely present but interpret both the dramatic as well as the contemplative aspects of China's history.

Attractive and informative maps and an index are included.

Text, illustrations and production are all highly commended. This is an excellent contribution to Australian children's non-fiction.

COMMENDED

James Cook, Royal Navy, by George Finkel. Decorations by Amnon Sadubin. Published by Angus & Robertson.

In the profusion of contemporary writing about Captain Cook, Mr Finkel's book stands out as offering new and interesting aspects of Cook, the man, not merely the historical personage. Cook has often appeared as a shadowy figure, but in this account of his boyhood and journey in the "Endeavour" he emerges as a flesh and blood person, an inspired cartographer and a meticulous organizer. Mr Finkel's thorough research and love of the sea are evident in his scrupulous attention to authentic detail and splendid evocation of the sea, ships and naval life.

The historical background and the excerpts from Cook's diary are on the whole well integrated into the narrative and there is plenty of realism and action in the battle scenes and life on board ship. However, the account would have even more successful had Mr Finkel been a little more selective in the background material.

The small type and the unimaginative, dull dust jacket do not do justice to the story.

Climb a Lonely Hill, by Lilith Norman. Published by Collins.

Miss Norman has made good use of the survival theme in her story of two children's struggle in the outback. Her plot is well controlled and the conflicts are handled with realism and a down-to-earth humour. The theme of self-realization is convincingly developed and there is a well observed, natural relationship between the two children. Miss Norman writes well. Technically this is a good novel but it suffers from being too clinical, particularly in the characterization and construction. Jack dominates the book, Sue is a foil. Yet for all the author's careful attention, Jack is a type, the working out of an idea rather than a real boy.

The pervading feeling of loneliness, heat, dust and sand in the story is well caught in the dust packet by Jillian Willett.

The remaining books entered this year in Class A again showed a wide diversity of subject matter. The proportion of fiction to non-fiction was roughly three to one. The presentation of much of the non-fiction showed an improvement on recent years and several of the works of fiction dealt with interesting and important social questions, though, with a few exceptions, the literary style of these books was uneven.

CLASS B

PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

Walzing Matilda, by A. B. Paterson. Illustrated by Desmond Digby.
Published by Collins.

An outstanding picture book, comparable with the best in the field.

Desmond Digby's paintings are as alive and as Australian in flavour as Banjo Paterson's ballad. The artist brings a superb sense of drama and of changing light to his scenes of sweeping countryside and tree-shaded billabong together with an understanding, touched with imagination, in his interpretation of each line of the old ballad.

Each successive double-spread opening builds a mounting feeling of suspense as the illustrations follow the swagman and the troopers. The sudden change from bright sunlit hills to dark murky billabong and the focus on the solitary floating hat suspend the action in a climax tinged with pathos and rich in poetic inevitability. The final opening expresses the legendary character of the ballad. The trees themselves seem full of the ghostly spirit of the swagman, the changing type echoes his ghostly cry and the sunlit grass beyond the trees gives reality to the scene—a perfect meeting of the actual and the myth.

The popular words of the song have not been used, but Paterson's original version with its magnificent illustrations will add new meaning to the better known version.

Every feature of the production is excellent.

A large number of the picture books entered had little artistic merit and many of the stories were trite and meaningless. Some of their publishers showed an inclination to promote cheap and glossy package deals.