

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA JUDGES' REPORT, 1982

The 1982 panel of judges considers the Australian children's book awards serve the following purposes:

1. To focus attention on children's books
2. To emphasize literary and artistic qualities
3. To direct positive attention to standards and criteria of excellence
4. To take account of the child as reader
5. To encourage new talent
6. To reward outstanding achievement likely to be of lasting merit.

The conditions of entry direct them to consider books entered in two classes:

CLASS A—BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

(to be awarded the Book of the Year Medal)

- 1.1 This Award is primarily for literary merit. However, the quality and design of the book as a whole are part of the standard, so the

Judges will consider:

- (i) appeal to children;
- (ii) book design, production and quality of printing, having regard to the price at which it is published;
- (iii) general literary merit;
- (iv) quality of illustrations.

CLASS B—PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

(to be awarded the Picture Book of the Year Medal/s)

- 1.2 This Award is for books intended primarily for younger children. Obviously, in this class the quality of the pictures largely determines the appeal. However, where it is a picture story book, the text, however slight, must be complementary. Traditional material may be used for the text. Artist and author may be one and the same person. As in Class A, the award-winning book in Class B should reach a high standard of production and design, and must have appeal to children.

In addition they have been instructed to:

1. Award a medal for a category of junior readers if there is a book entered which in their opinion deserves recognition.
2. Draw up a short list of the best eight titles in either category to be released immediately to the press.

101 entries, suitable for a wide age and ability range of readers, were received and evaluated, a significant numerical increase over previous years. Of these, a total of 36 titles from both classes were selected for further consideration.

The panel commends the higher overall standard of entries, not only for their literary and artistic quality, but also for the greater attention obviously being paid to accepted standards of production and format, for example *Everlasting Circle* by Ted Greenwood.

There was also, unfortunately, a small proportion of titles which gave evidence of poor proof reading and lack of editorial direction.

The panel was also pleased to see entries from not only new authors and illustrators, several of whom appear on the short list, but also from recently established publishing houses such as Era Publications (*There's a Dinosaur in the Park* by Rodney Martin) and Ballantrae Press (*Perkins Street* by Susan Prior).

The wide range of subjects and themes examined reflects the broadening and deepening field of Australian children's literature and the judges were interested to note the new directions being explored by well-established authors—for example *Solomon's Child* by Mavis Thorpe Clark, which echoes the increased urbanization of Australian society. Contemporary social and political issues such as conservation (*Car Tracks* by Gordon Aalborg) and the plight of refugees (*Voyage of the Lucky Dragon* by Jack Bennett) were considered by the judges to have been treated with a commendable degree of unparochial literary assurance.

Awareness of young readers' enjoyment and response to both visual and verbal humour was demonstrated in titles such as *How to Demolish a Monster* by Quentin Hole and *In the Garden of Bad Things* by Doug McLeod. A more sophisticated level of satirical humour was presented in *Praise the Egg* by Mary Gage.

While non-fiction was not represented in the final short list, the panel commends the stimulating approach of John Archer's *Building for Kids*.

A medal for a category of junior readers was awarded to *Rummage* by Christobel Mattingley, which in the opinion of the judges was worthy of recognition.

CLASS A—BOOK OF THE YEAR

The winning entries for the Book of the Year displayed the authors' obvious feel for and familiarity with their subjects: Thiele's childhood sense of place; Wrightson's evocation of Aboriginal land spirits; French's personal teaching experiences; and Mattingley's lovingly detailed market stalls and characters. In these cases, the reader is doubly rewarded by each author's astute insight and strength in communicating the theme.

The winners, spread over a wide range of appeal and narrative sophistication, demonstrate that quality is inherent both in the simplest and in the most complex creations.

Amongst the entire field of entries, new topics emerged, such as the issue of young people's rights, juvenile courts, a range of adolescent traumas, and terrorism.

BOOK OF THE YEAR

THIELE, COLIN *The Valley Between* Rigby

Colin Thiele's boyhood in a close-knit community has once again provided him with the material for a delightful story. He has brought to his memories the hindsight of experience and wisdom, so that he is able to bring alive for his readers the characters, incidents, and atmosphere of the valley which gave him happiness and helped to shape him and his work. Just as appealing as the other books with this setting, *The Valley Between* is even more skilfully crafted.

Here we have more than a loosely connected series of incidents. With skill the author has selected the sequence of events which gradually builds up character and presents a logical development. The narrative strands of family, feuding, and social change are deftly interwoven with that of the thirteen-year-old boy taking his first tentative steps towards manhood and

responsibility. The conclusion is satisfying and the final sentence is philosophically and artistically pleasing.

Characterization is completely convincing. Writing shows sharp observation tempered with warm and affectionate understanding. Without striving for effect the setting is subtly realized, and the humour, a significant element in the book, grows naturally out of time, place and people.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

WRIGHTSON, PATRICIA *Behind the Wind* Hutchinson

The final novel of the Wirrun trilogy satisfyingly concludes a unique creation in the fantasy quest genre. Wirrun again assumes his role as reluctant hero, more human and endearing than previously. With a powerful command of language and a carefully built structure, Wrightson follows Wirrun's difficult tasks of adjusting to the loss of his beloved water-spirit, Murra, and his battle with the harbringer of death, Wulgarru.

The memorable qualities of *Behind the Wind* are bound in the complexity of Wrightson's profound themes—responsibility to one's people and to one's land and the exploration of a relationship in which love entails the lost communion with one's fellow creatures.

COMMENDED

FRENCH, SIMON *Cannily, Cannily* Angus & Robertson

Cannily, Cannily is the portrait of a boy condemned by circumstances to be a loner. The book speaks relentlessly and infuriatingly of his frustration when faced with unexplainable cruelty.

The story is a satisfying one, well-structured, with sufficient action and appeal to keep children involved. French captures the school-yard dialogue and small-town atmosphere exceptionally well.

While Trevor is a thoroughly explored central character, and his alternative life-style parents delicately drawn, other characters tend to be one-dimensional.

The book production is pleasing: being slightly squat and chunky it is inviting and comfortable to hold, and the print is clear and well-spaced. It is a good example of the quality that can be produced at a reasonable price.

COMMENDED

MATTINGLEY, CHRISTOBEL *Rummage* Angus & Robertson

Illustrated by Patricia Mullins

This is a simple story enlivened by interesting characters and settings, with sufficient conflict to satisfy the demands of narrative. The battle for Mr Portwine's individuality, waged by immediately recognizable but not very ferocious villains with appropriate names, takes place in the kind of surroundings fascinating for most people—a market.

It is a very good example of a picture-story book with substantial text which, while appealing to younger readers, will also have much to offer older children. The writing is rhythmic and humorous; the story reads aloud well and will also repay thoughtful re-reading.

The part-collage illustrations contain those qualities which are appropriate for the story and the setting. Colourful, detailed, full of humour, they have the element of caricature without too much distortion that gives them the liveliness of idiosyncratic people and of a bustling market. Page design

has effectively combined large blocks of text with carefully complex illustrative material.

A book offering delight to eye, ear and mind, it will attract repeated visits.

CLASS B—PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR

The judges were extremely pleased with the number, overall quality and range of subject matter, style, technique and age appeal of entries in the picture book class. In the final judgement the winners were those where story and artwork achieved complete integration. In these books both atmosphere and feeling arose spontaneously from excellence of technique.

In some entries with high-quality artwork, the judges were disappointed with the weakness of the storyline and inadequacies in the actual text. There was lack of cohesion between illustrations and text. It was exciting to see the emergence of new illustrators and new picture book teams who have brought fresh emphases in presentation. The judges were most gratified at the high standard of book production in most entries despite the myriad problems confronting publishers in a cost-conscious time.

PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR

ORMEROD, JAN *Sunshine* Kestrel

Sunshine was the judges' choice for the Picture Book of the Year. It is a story which needs no words and embodies all the positive criteria of judgement. It is a warm and charming evocation of family life truly reflected in this artist's ability to achieve atmosphere by change of palette range and variation of movement from the static to the dynamic. The story occupies the first hour of a little girl's morning progress. It has humour and realism. Within the book there is much for the young child to discover visually and emotionally. The sense of mutual affection and respect between child and parents is beautifully conveyed. The design of the book is aesthetically tasteful. Variation in the size, shape and arrangement of picture units not only avoids monotony, but also plays an integral part in the shaping and pace of the story as does the changing colour scheme.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

HATHORN, ELIZABETH *The Tram to Bondi Beach* Methuen

Illustrated by Julie Vivas

Well-executed illustrations in *The Tram to Bondi Beach* match and extend the story which is not only of a young boy's wish to assert his independence, but also captures a bygone era and yet has timeless appeal. The sensitive pastel water-colour illustrations are entirely appropriate to the action of the text. The illustrations' swirling, sometimes elongated line create the swaying animation of a typical tram ride. Atmosphere and mood have been particularly well achieved. Scenes on the tram and at Bondi Beach convey the characters' feelings and emotions. The story was not of the same sheer quality as the illustrations which indeed make *Tram to Bondi Beach* an outstanding picture book and worthy of Highly Commended.

COMMENDED

HUNT, NAN *Whistle up the Chimney* Collins

Illustrated by Craig Smith

A picture book with a wide age appeal, this book is one in which text and illustrations are successfully integrated. The text itself is excellent in

style, with good use of language and an infectious sense of fun, and the artist's work extends the story with imaginative flair. His slightly macabre and sophisticated style is an excellent choice for the down-to-earth fantasy of living-room rail-traffic, and blends elements of the real and the magical with almost complete smoothness. A well-judged use of colour, authoritative line and areas of fine-hatching all contribute to the distinctive mood of the illustrations. The central character, an independent middle-aged woman, is a memorable creation and her home with its lovingly detailed clutter of Australiana is equally solid and real. The pictures are absorbing and satisfying, and the book's overall design is carefully and fully integrated with the text and illustrations.

COMMENDED

TRELOAR, BRUCE *Bumble's Dream* Bodley Head

Bumble's Dream, written prior to last year's Highly Commended *Mary Moves to the Country*, shows Bruce Trelor as an author-illustrator of exciting promise and quality.

The story is a comment on friendship and ambition, and it allows the reader's imagination to follow Mr Bumble's progress from his seemingly improbable dream and his monumental collection of junk to his final zany fight, with ease and freedom.

The illustrations are strongly individualistic but the apparent clutter of line is underpinned by order and discipline, and a very careful design. Bruce Trelor is skilled at conveying the amalgam of reality and fantasy through the spectrum of his colour, and the delicacy of Mr Bumble's dream emerges from the suggestive medium of his wash and line illustrations. Here is a picture book where both story and illustration achieve a warm and enchanting whole.

ORIGINS AND ODYSSEYS

by COLIN THEILE

It has been said often enough that writers, like all people, are the products of their own childhoods. It has also been said, somewhat more precariously I believe, that each writer really knows only one child—the one he or she once was.

Without noodling yet again over that old heap of potch I can say quite unequivocally that my own childhood in its fullest sense—social, educational, linguistic, environmental—had a profound effect on me. For good or ill *The Valley Between* is one of the consequences.

The sensory experiences of childhood seem to live in us for ever with unbelievable sharpness and clarity. (By contrast the events of adulthood often blur overnight.) After fifty years one can still taste the tang of childhood fruit or herb on the tongue, see the rich colour of gum blossom or flashing feather on the inner eye, recognize the sharp individuality of bird calls on the inward ear. Children of my origin moved in the aura of a vast and friendly landscape. The daily silhouette of hilltop and redgum, the stirring of windmills at dusk like big gentle sunflowers, the clinging