

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS

JUDGES' REPORT 2012

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JUDGES' REPORT 2012

INTRODUCTION

This year there were 365 fiction titles and 54 in the Eve Pownall Award for Information Books. The number of entries this year was 41 fewer than last year but the judges' task was no less complex. A larger panel of eight (as opposed to six last year) created vigorous debate and ensured varied input. Overall a high standard was maintained across all categories, so that reaching an agreement on outstanding entries was an invigorating and rewarding process.

OLDER READERS

In 2012, 77 books were presented from which 22 Notables were chosen. There were 8 self-published titles. The consistent quality of entries is reflected in the fact that 33 books were nominated by the judges in their top 10 selections. The Older Readers category was a contentious category with well-established and new authors in close competition for final consideration.

This year the categories included 21 social realism, 2 mystery/detective, 3 steampunk, 2 adventure, 12 paranormal, 8 speculative fiction, 13 fantasy, 13 historical fiction and 3 picture books, with several books covering more than one of these categories.

Well-established authors featured strongly in the social realism section. The themes explored here included trauma, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, school relationships, coming of age, sibling rivalry, death, deafness, heroes and heroines, escaping a social milieu, ageing, outsiders and people with a disability, and courage. While many books handled such themes delicately, a few titles were weighed down by their issues.

Family concerns continued to be a popular theme with the notion of family structure expanded. The trend was to explore contemporary issues, such as children in foster care, homelessness, single parenting, changing family circumstances, dislocation and gay lifestyles. The characters presented a picture of the amazing human resilience that teens often display in surviving difficulties found in our society. These were dealt with in an absorbingly honest way suitable for this age group.

Books which explored historical themes were again well represented. This group was influenced by Ancient Greece, Medieval England and Europe, 19th Century Sydney, 17th and 18th centuries in England, early Australian explorers, the Gold Rush and early 20th Century Australia.

The sci-fi/adventure/futuristic speculative books proved to be difficult for the judges. They attracted reputable authors but some of the books were part of a series, and were not seen by a majority of judges as standing alone in terms of their plot cohesion. They were therefore deemed ineligible. Steampunk was a small but strong

section, and the popular paranormal fantasy genre attracted a larger, but less competitive, field.

Picture books for older readers were of note. Themes varied from the journey of a vampire into the light to an exploration by a teenager experiencing authority.

It was pleasing to see the arrival of quality mystery stories for teenagers and a few strong adventure stories for readers who enjoy 'who-dunnits'.

While over half of the Notables were written by women, 5 of the 6 shortlisted books were written by men and had male protagonists. Only *The Golden Day* from the Short List featured predominantly female characters.

From the quality of the Notables list and the number of books that provoked passionate discussion among the judges, it is clear that the Older Readers' category continues to produce excellence in variety.

YOUNGER READERS

This category attracted the largest number of entries with 168 submissions, which was slightly more than in 2011. The outstanding titles were showcased in the strong list of 24 Notables. Themes and writing styles continued to expand and the judges were often quite surprised and impressed with the quality of writing, the range of subjects and the excellence of design and production.

However, as is often the case, this proved to be a difficult area in which to find outstanding entries meeting the literary criteria. This category covers a wide age range, from beginning independent readers to those approaching secondary school. Determining the appropriate category for some books (Younger Readers or Older Readers) proved to be significant. Some books straddled the divide, with young protagonists, but themes that would engage older readers; while others dealt with their topics in depth and with detail more suited to older readers. Such titles included *Pirate X*, *Nanberry: Black Brother White*, *Father's Day*, *Crow Country*, *The Golden Day*, *Brotherband: the Outcasts*, *The Coming of the Whirlpool* and *When We Were Two*. The last two were submitted in the Younger Readers' category but were moved to Older Readers by the judges. Although they are still much in demand, excellent books for newly independent readers were elusive.

Mention must be made of the *Our Australian Girl* series, in which there were four groups, totalling sixteen books published in 2011. These were written as continuous stories, depicting various eras in Australian history. Although each contained a synopsis of the story so far, it was arguable as to whether each title worked as a 'stand-alone' story. The judges decided that titles in the collection were best treated as a series and thus were rendered ineligible to be singled out for individual awards. Nevertheless, these books were of a high standard of production and writing and deserved recognition.

Series books, in fact, posed a problem for judges, as it was difficult to obtain agreement on whether a particular book did or did not fulfil the criteria of a 'stand-alone' story. Inevitably worthy books missed out on recognition as they were deemed to assume too much prior knowledge or were left inconclusive.

The judges found that several books entered in this category did not suit the age range. There were some 15 books entered by self-publishers and most of these would have benefited from professional editorial input.

Humour and comedy are notoriously difficult to write and there were 10 entries with varying degrees of success; for example, *Abacus Aardvark*, *Buzz Off*, *Mr Eight*, *My Life and other Stuff I Made Up*, *The Dog Stole my Brain*, *Fart-ionary*, *Kung Phew!*, *My Brother's an Egghead* and *The Not-So Goblin Boy*. Only a couple of books could be described as 'laugh out loud' and these demonstrated that good humour is usually intelligent rather than coarse.

History was well represented in the Younger Readers' category with *Taj and the Great Camel Trek*, about Ernest Giles' explorations; *My Father's War*, set on the Western Front in France during the First World War; and *Vinnie's War*, about child evacuees in England during the Second World War. Fighting in the jungles of Asia featured in *Harry's War*. Vikings and Pirates and colonial Sydney also featured.

Childhood problems of bullying and friendship were sensitively treated in such books as *On Orchard Road*, *Angel Creek*, *Give Me Four Reasons*, *The Friendship Matchmaker*, *Father's Day*, *Con-Nerd* and *Darius Bell and the Crystal Bees*.

There were 30 speculative fiction books – fantasy, science-fiction, fairy-tale or time travel. The traditional adventure books were few. They included *The Secret of the Lonely Isles*, *Conspiracy 365 Revenge*, and *Paradise Trap*, which was a welcome blend of fantasy, adventure and satire. Heroism featured *Birdie in the Sky* and *Raven's Mountain*, *Pirate X*, *Samurai Kids* and *Kumiko and the Shadow Catchers*.

Animals, particularly dogs and horses, featured in 10 books. Mystery stories appeared to be dwindling with only a few, including *Surface Tension* and *The Truth about Verity Sparks*.

Favourite characters such as Mr Badger, Violet Mackerel and Kumiko re-emerged.

While there was only one book of poetry, *Note on the Door*, by Lorraine Marwood, the quality of the verse, with its distinctive imagery, placed it in the Notables collection.

More graphic novels were entered this year and these varied from simple 'comic book' type stories to lengthy works of art with detailed plot lines.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Early Childhood Award, which recognises books for children at the pre-reading or early reading stages, from about age one to seven, had 116 entries this year. From these entries six books were shortlisted and 23 were chosen as Notables. The judging of these books focussed on whether the books reflected the early childhood phases of children's development, had the ability to engage the very youngest readers through excellent design and child-appeal and whether or not they explored, expanded and enriched the literary and virtual experience of the young child. Because many of the books entered in this category were picture books the illustrative style, placement of text, appropriateness of layout and unity of text and illustration were all part of the judges' consideration. Only one board book and a small number of concept books were entered this year.

The production quality of many of the Notables was outstanding. Two of the books, *Come Down, Cat!* and *My Country* had dust jackets and some books had embossed covers or other aesthetic detail. Judges commented frequently on the high production values. Vibrant colour, distinctive, illustrative style and quintessentially Australian themes were evident in *Ten Blue Wrens and What a Lot of Wattle*, *Savannah Dreams* and *My Country* while night-time routines was a theme for many books, including the shortlisted *The Runaway Hug*, *Rudie Nudie* and the Notable Book *Goodnight, Mice!* All three books celebrated the joyous nature of children, the warmth of loving parents and the familiar family routines of bed and bath times. Caring parents also featured in *No Kind of Superman*, *Some Dads*, *My Mum's the Best* and *He's my Dad*.

New illustrators, two of whom were shortlisted for the Critchon Award, were represented in the Notables list. Sara Acton's illustrations in *Ben & Duck* were noted by the judges as being traditional and expressive; alive with mischief and emotion. The illustrations of Katherine Battersby in *Squish Rabbit* were simple yet effective, with strong graphic design qualities.

Soft covered novels appropriate for early readers were represented in the Notables with *Lollylegs*, *Ready, Set, Boris* and *Crusher Kevin*. All three books were fine examples of literature that supported a young reader but also told important stories that provoked emotional responses. Both *Lollylegs* and *Crusher Kevin* had the notion of empathy at their core and *Ready, Set, Boris* explored the idea of winning or giving it your best shot.

It was good to see books for very young children such as *You are My Special Baby*, *Some Dad*, *My Mum's the Best*, *Nana's Colours* and *Let's Go Baby-O!* which encouraged adults to share books with children from babyhood.

Blatantly didactic titles dealing with such themes as child abuse and healthy eating had difficulty competing in this category as their educational purpose overwhelmed their literary merit.

The judges were delighted to see books of a high standard by and/or about Indigenous peoples and lifestyles entered for this age group; for example, *Hey Brother*, *Dingoes are not Dogs*, *Merindah and Lucky* and *The Snake and the Boy*.

PICTURE BOOKS

The overall decrease in the number of books entered this year was also reflected in the number of picture book entries. Only 130 were considered compared to 169 in 2011. However, the judges were impressed that publishers continued to produce high quality texts in the light of the industry's rapid technological changes.

There was a significant number of excellent narrative non-fiction texts entered this year. Memoirs such as *The Road to Goonong* and *The Little Refugee* emphasised retaining personal, cultural and family memories, whereas historical texts such as *Sam, Grace and the Shipwreck* and *No Return: Captain Scott's Race to Antarctica* were more factual in style. Other non-fiction texts focussed on environmental issues (*One Small Island* and *Flood*), art (*Ben & Gracie's Art Adventure* and *The Bicycle*) and threatened animals (*The Dream of the Thylacine* and *Warambi*).

Some titles incorporated both factual information and a narrative stream; for example, *Bilby Secrets*, *My Little World* and *Tick Tock What's Up Croc?* Animals featured predominantly in a number of narrative stories, including *For All Creatures*, *Christmas Wombat*, *Ben & Duck*, *Come Down, Cat!* and Graeme Base's impressive allegory *The Jewel Fish of Karnak*.

It was pleasing to see many amusing, quirky books, such as *Good Morning Mr Pancakes*, *Mozzie and Midgie* and *The Aunties Three*. We also saw mature texts composed for older picture book readers, depicting teenage angst and search for identity, including *I am Thomas*, *Vamypre* and *Damon*; and a range of indigenous productions – *Savannah Dreams*, *Playground*, *Dingoes are Not Dogs*, *My Country* and the graphic novel, *Ubbly's Underdogs*.

Other strong offerings were beautifully designed books about other cultures; for example, *The Red Bridge* depicted a stylised Hanoi, and *Chase through Venice* gave us an action-packed adventure through the canals of Venice. We had ghosts, *Sounds Spooky* and *The Ghost of Miss Annabel Spoon* and stories with music and song: *Bom! Went the Bear*; *Song of the Dove*; *The Bush Concert* and *Song for Lorkie*.

The graphic novels entered in the Picture Book category varied greatly in style, intended audience and sophistication.

Appropriately, in this National Year of Reading, two of the strongest titles were books about books. Libby Gleeson and Freya Blackwood explored the power of reading in *Look, a Book!* and Meg McKinlay and Leila Rudge collaborated on the sophisticated, intertextual multi-layered *No Bears*.

Despite the fewer entries here, the Picture Book category furnished a broader and deeper range than last year and was a pleasure to judge.

INFORMATION BOOKS

The Eve Pownall Awards panel read and appraised 54 books for the 2012 Awards. As in previous years, there was a broad range of titles submitted from small, independent publishers through to established publishing houses.

There were 30 titles entirely focussed upon, or linked to, Australian content. Subjects covered included travel, art and cultures, biography and memoir, cookery and mapping, social issues, self-help and special needs guides, animals, history and war. Apart from books about animals and environmental issues, there was a notable absence of texts dealing with scientific topics. The majority of books submitted, with information presented in visual formats, were directed to younger audiences or those with developing literacy skills, and very few for teen and young adult readers.

Biographical texts presented the life and/or achievements of Christina MacPherson (the original composer of the tune for *Waltzing Matilda*), Nancy Bentley, Graham Laycock, Grace Bussell, Anh Do, David Cox, Ellis Rowan, CY O'Connor, Captain Robert Scott, Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, and popular singers Hayley Williams and Cody Simpson. Historical information books addressed the experiences of young survivors of the Kinglake bushfires and of ongoing war in Afghanistan, the Great Depression in Australia, the battles at Fromelles in World War 1 and Kokoda in World War 11, exploration of Antarctica, the building of the pipeline to Kalgoorlie, and colonial family life in Western Australia. Primary sources were used effectively to present people and events of earlier eras, specifically theatres of war.

A welcome number of high quality publications dealing with art and artists were offered for consideration this year, featuring the 19th Century Impressionism of Frederick McCubbin, Ellis Rowan's botanical and bird paintings, the ideas of the European Surrealists, and an inspirational creative arts activity book.

Animals and the environment continue to be a prime focus for children's information books. Featured creatures included *Muttaborrasaurus*, the Little Bent-wing Bat, Bottlenose Dolphins, worms, barramundi, bilbies, beef cattle, a Terek Sandpiper, crocodiles and a whole ABC of Australian animals. The exploration of other geographical worlds remains an important sector for information book publishing. Environments spanned many regions, from the central desert, the tropical north, Macquarie Island and the South Pole.

Also offered were self-help or advice books, dealing with Bipolar disorder, protective behaviours, and Parkinson's disease.

The judges were pleased to see some very imaginative and thoughtful presentations that enabled fact-gathering and the understanding of concepts by a range of readers with varying skills. Almost all of the main text types or genres were explored. The shortlisted titles were indicative of quality children's non-fiction titles published in Australia over the past year. The titles on the Notables list ably demonstrated the features described by the criteria for judging this award. However, the judges recommended that some publishers look carefully at the Notable Books in order to maintain the quality of publication that young people deserve.

Book of the Year: Older Readers

WINNER

GARDNER, Scot

THE DEAD I KNOW

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742373843

208 pages

Damaged teen Aaron starts work with a compassionate funeral director, in an effort to help him regain some normality. He tackles the realities of life and death at work, but at home he cannot face Mam's mental condition enough to seek a diagnosis. It is a confronting story on many levels, but Gardner balances the violence and desolation of Aaron's life in the caravan park with the routine and studied peacefulness of the funeral parlour in exquisite counterpoint. Aaron's nightmares and dangerous sleep-walking reflect his repressed anxiety about his past. Through his interactions with his new employer's family, he comes to self-acceptance and is able to move on from his brutal past into a hopeful future.

HONOUR BOOK

CONDON, Bill

A STRAIGHT LINE TO MY HEART

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742377308

216 pages

This compelling, honest and heart-warming book explores love and relationships, old and new, in a 'family' related only by love. Unsophisticated Tiff has just finished school and wants to be a journalist. Her perceptive reflections engage readers skilfully in the characters' relationships and confusions. Much of the story centres on 'Grandad' Reggie's struggle with illness and Tiff's hope for his recovery, capturing the eternal problem of dealing with mortality. Amid realistic glimpses into the chaos of contemporary family life, the plot moves smoothly, using authentic dialogue written with brevity and wit.

HONOUR BOOK

NEWTON, Robert

WHEN WE WERE TWO

Penguin Books, Penguin Group (Australia)

ISBN 9780143566830

192 pages

In 1916 Dan and his impaired young brother Eddie leave an abusive father at Gunnedah to walk to the coast and fall in with a group of men marching to enlist in World War 1. The journey and its challenges reveal Dan's emotional issues and act as the catalyst for his growth from an abused son and guilt-ridden brother to an autonomous young man. The mentoring and mateship of the older men facilitate this process. Cleanly written and beautifully crafted, poignant and haunting, this book offers much to like: the setting and dialogue; the realistic portrayal of the realities for rural men of the time; and the convincing minor characters. Eddie is unforgettable in his innocence and trust.

SHORT LIST

BAUER, Michael Gerard

ISHMAEL AND THE HOOPS OF STEEL

Omnibus Books, Scholastic Australia

ISBN 9781862919174

327 pages

The third book in the trilogy about Ishmael and his four friends, 'The Fab Five' is a humorous and poignant portrayal of their last two years at St Daniel's School. The mates face challenges of coping with the stresses of family, school and their nascent sexuality. The boys experience the usual teenage insecurities trying to find their place in the world. The lovable, believable larrikins display disparate personalities as they cause amusing mayhem but in the end they give a positive view of the trials, joys, tribulations and successes, both academic and personal of young men. This fast-paced novel is an absorbing read.

DUBOSARSKY, Ursula

THE GOLDEN DAY

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742374710

152 pages

It is 1967 and eleven little schoolgirls find the world mysterious and threatening. Then their eccentric teacher leads them to a cave in a harbour side park and mysteriously disappears, eventually assumed murdered. In 1975, as they complete school, the teacher reappears. Is she alive or an apparition? This superbly executed, magical, haunting tale, seen mostly through one girl's eyes and active imagination, has the quality of a dream, of summers past, of loss on many levels. The author sets scene and time impeccably and creates a sense of nostalgia, camaraderie and shared experiences as the girls complete their school years. The uncertain ending has many possibilities.

MCGAHAN, Andrew

SHIP KINGS: THE COMING OF THE WHIRLPOOL

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742376479

288 pages

McGahan creates a swash-buckling, almost Gothic, action adventure story with fine descriptive language and memorable images. It is a coming-of-age tale where Dow, a young boy from a family of timber-cutters announces that even though he is expected to follow his father's trade, he is drawn to the sea. After tragedy, death, horrendous weather, much soul searching and personal development, he finally goes to sea on a ship belonging to the powerful colonial overlords of his island. The intriguing characters are beautifully crafted with their faults and strengths plainly displayed. The plot is exciting and clearly developed as it moves towards an emotionally satisfying conclusion.

Book of the Year: Younger Readers

WINNER

CONSTABLE, Kate

CROW COUNTRY

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742373959

238 pages

This is an important story. It voices historical and contemporary attitudes to sacred sites, the Dreaming and returning to one's own country for burial. Sadie has been uprooted in a move from city to country and is feeling lonely, sad and out of place. But the town of Boort has shadows and secrets and Sadie finds herself caught up in strange happenings, which challenge her to discover a long hidden truth. Strongly Australian, *Crow Country* sensitively handles difficult subject matter in a narrative that is engaging and powerful. With an unusual time-slip plot, combined with characters that are well written and interesting, Constable has written an outstanding story.

HONOUR BOOK

FRENCH, Jackie

NANBERRY: BLACK BROTHER WHITE

Angus & Robertson, HarperCollins Publishers

ISBN 9780732290221

309 pages

This well researched, beautifully written, sustained novel is based on real people, their lives and experiences. French embeds historical detail very successfully, taking us to the depressing shores of Sydney Cove in 1788. The story is told from the viewpoints of Nanberry, an Aboriginal boy; surgeon, John White; and two convicts, Maria and Rachel. The devastating results of the clash of cultures unfold without hyperbole. The author does not shirk from revealing barbarity and yet leaves the reader with a sense of optimism for individuals and for the colony.

HONOUR BOOK

GREEN, Susan

THE TRUTH ABOUT VERITY SPARKS

Walker Books Australia

ISBN 9781921720277

297 pages

Verity Sparks has itchy fingers. With them she can find missing things, which is a handy talent for an orphan girl in Victorian London. When Verity loses her job and her home, her talent brings her to the attention of a secret group of special agents, the Confidential Inquiry Agency, who invite her to join their ranks. But Verity's past is a mystery, which leads to problems in her present. Can they discover who she is and why nefarious types are showing such an interest in her? An excellent introduction to gaslamp fantasy, *The Truth about Verity Sparks* is a delightful romp through the Victorian era, with engaging characters and a twisty plot that is sure to entertain.

SHORT LIST

FLANAGAN, John

BROTHERBAND: THE OUTCASTS

Random House Australia

ISBN 9781741664492

440 pages

Set in fictional Skandia, this novel tells of a group of Viking boys who are misfits amongst their peers. The book explores their development in Brotherband where they learn to act as an effective team of warriors by facing tests and challenges. The protagonist, Hal is thrust into a leadership role. He is mentored by an older, wiser adult figure who guides and advises him through his journey to manhood. Hal proves his worth and leads by example, rising to challenges and demonstrating ingenuity and quick thinking. The characterisation is strong and there are clear messages about leadership, bullying, teamwork and dealing with defeat. The writing style in this new series is confident and assured; the action scenes are riveting.

RODDA, Emily

THE GOLDEN DOOR

Omnibus Books, Scholastic Australia

ISBN 9781862919129

264 pages

Rodda displays her expertise in the fantasy genre as she weaves magical powers and talismans into this novel. The story follows the quest of Rye, a reluctant hero, to find his brothers, who are lost in shadowy, faraway lands. He must also locate the truly terrible flying monsters, the Skimmers. Rye's naivety is used to advantage so that his knowledge evolves and accrues along with that of the reader. He gradually gains maturity, insight and depth as a character, and with the help of the feisty Sonia and some powerful magic, he soon discovers unimaginable evil. His strength is tested in the terrifying climax.

RODDA, Emily,

BUNGAWITTA

Illustrated by Craig SMITH

Omnibus Books, Scholastic Australia

ISBN 9781862918337

122 pages

Drought has ravaged the small rural town of Bungawitta, leaving only a dozen inhabitants. These are no ordinary country folk. They are resourceful, energetic and cooperative, although slightly eccentric. Struggling to survive, their only remaining resource is dirt, which inspires the idea of an Earth Sculpture Festival to raise money. It's a great success but where are the TV weatherman and the ABC crew who were to televise and judge the festival? The hilarious characters are as entertaining as Smith's exuberant pencil illustrations in appropriate shades of dusty grey. Stoicism and community resourcefulness are celebrated in this delightful tale.

Book of the Year: Early Childhood

WINNER

BLAND, Nick

THE RUNAWAY HUG

Illustrated by Freya BLACKWOOD

Scholastic Press, Scholastic Australia

ISBN 9781865044057

unpaged

When Lucy is ready for bed she asks her mother for a hug. Her mother says it's her very last one, and Lucy must look after the hug. Lucy then proceeds to share it with all her family. But what will happen if the dog runs away with it? How will Lucy be able to return the hug to her mother? The gentle repetition and warm interaction of ordinary people going about their lives in an untidy home depicts an authentic family. It is a picture book to ponder and appreciate, being deceptively simple, yet marvellously harmonious in concept. The lively detailed illustrations and lyrical text work closely together to add humour and pathos.

HONOUR BOOK

HARTNETT, Sonya

COME DOWN, CAT!

Illustrated by Lucia MASCIULLO

Puffin Books, Penguin Group (Australia)

ISBN 9780670074754

unpaged

In this compelling story, Nicholas's cat gets stranded on the roof and Nicholas is too fearful to rescue it. Crisis develops when the cat becomes terrified by rain, and Nicholas realises he must overcome his fear. The touching empathy between Nicholas and the cat is cleverly reinforced through the sophisticated use of visual perspective. Masciullo's deco-gothic, European-style illustrations make effective use of strong colour and emotive imagery. A skilful use of irony has Nicholas and cat admiring each other's bravery. This is a very satisfying story about the bond between owner and pet, the power of imagination and the nature of courage, with just the right amount of scariness.

HONOUR BOOK

HONEY, Elizabeth

THAT'S NOT A DAFFODIL!

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742372488

unpaged

Mr Yilmaz and little Tom are neighbours and friends who together watch the wondrous growth of a daffodil from bulb to plant. Tom is full of expectation and his observations are beautiful metaphors as the daffodil's changes are revealed. This simple story captures the beauty of nature, the curiosity and imagination of the young and the wisdom and patience of the elderly. The spanning of generation and culture imbues richness and depth to this delightful picture book. The gentle, expressive illustrations bathe this tale in a warm glow.

SHORT LIST

JORGENSEN, Norman

THE LAST VIKING

Illustrated by James FOLEY

Fremantle Press

ISBN 9781921888106

unpaged

Josh is a brave little boy, not afraid of anything except ghosts, pirates, dinosaurs... When sent to stay with Nan and Pop he is inspired by a book on fearless Viking warriors and decides to become one. With Pop's help, he creates his own Viking armour. When Josh is bullied in the park, he needs allies and the Vikings come to his aid. In this blend of reality and fantasy, the coloured full-page Viking pictures, framed by messages in rune-code, are contrasted with the white daily-life pages. Wordless pages also convey the story, juxtaposing text and action. This is a most satisfying read with a perfect marriage of text and illustrations.

MCKINLAY, Meg

NO BEARS

Illustrated by Leila RUDGE

Walker Books Australia

ISBN 9781921529924

unpaged

Our narrator Ruby has decided she is tired of reading about bears in books and makes her own fairytale story – with no bears. In a delightful juxtaposition of text and illustration, Ruby's story unfolds along slightly left-of-centre fairytale tropes, with definitely no bears. The intricate design and complex illustrations of this book make it special, and children will love examining the artwork for clues, not given in the text, that tell rather a different story from Ruby's narration. The meta-textual nature of the book is a lot of fun and invites multiple readings of the story.

QUAY, Emma

RUDIE NUDIE

ABC Books, HarperCollins Publishers

ISBN 9780733323355

unpaged

Rudie Nudie is a deceptively simple book which will be popular with very young children and their families. Quay captures the joyous freedom and sense of daring that young children feel when dancing around naked at bath time. The warmth and support of the adults in the background allow the youngsters to run and explore and feel safe. The casual crayon drawings convey movement, laughter and exuberance, while the use of alliteration and rhyme provides an infectious narrative that carries the story forward with momentum.

Picture Book of the Year

WINNER

GRAHAM, Bob

A BUS CALLED HEAVEN

Walker Books

ISBN 9781406334197

unpaged

Graham makes an abandoned bus called Heaven the central character in a story about the power of a shared vision that unites races, religions and ethnic groups in an ugly industrial city. Young Stella is determined to save the bus, inspiring the whole neighbourhood to pull together, first to make the bus a community hub, then to rescue it from heartless bureaucrats. Graham has impressive control over both the visual and the linguistic, and uses lyrical phrasing and telling perspective. Overall, this is a heart-warming and inspiring work that amply demonstrates the expertise of its creator, his capacity for subtle inclusion and his strong affection for ordinary people. With his characteristic sagacity, humour and hope, he displays an understanding of what sustains the human spirit.

HONOUR BOOK

BROOKS, Ron

THE DREAM OF THE THYLACINE

Written by Margaret WILD

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742373836

unpaged

Wild and Brooks have successfully collaborated with this powerful and poignant book. The contrast between the harsh sepia-toned pages that frame the poetry of the thylacine in captivity and the bold, vibrant wordless colour of the creature in its beautiful bush setting is extremely effective. The tiger finally at rest dreaming in its habitat is comforting, but also chilling in that conservation comes too late. The cover summarises the concept, which the endpapers also complement. A perfectly realised picture book, its superb production values showcase exquisite art and invite lingering, thoughtful engagement with the text. *The Dream of the Thylacine* speaks to all ages, demanding multiple readings and stimulating debate.

HONOUR BOOK

WHATLEY, Bruce

FLOOD

Written by Jackie FRENCH

Scholastic Press, Scholastic Australia

ISBN 9781742830728

unpaged

There is a perfect marriage of words and illustrations in this moving tribute to the volunteers in the Queensland 2011 flood. French's sparse poetic text highlights poignant moments, immortalising the heartbreaking and inspiring events of the time. Whatley's acrylic wash and pencil artwork palpably conveys the saturated landscape and the chaos of the flood. The resilience and community spirit of Australians in the face of disaster shines through, resonating across time and place.

SHORT LIST

BLACKWOOD, Freya

LOOK, A BOOK!

Written by Libby GLEESON

Little Hare Books, Hardie Grant Egmont

ISBN 9781921541803

unpaged

Look, a Book! celebrates the reward of reading and the joy of sharing story in a subtle, metaphorical tale, which challenges the reader to make their own interpretations. Playing with perspective and using an unusual balance in her double-page spreads, Blackwood's restrained palette ensures that the red book remains central to each picture, conveying the power of a book to evoke magic, awe and imagination. The setting is gritty, urban and poor, while the pared-back text leaves gaps for readers to imbue with their own story.

COOL, Rebecca

FOR ALL CREATURES

Written by Glenda MILLARD

Walker Books

ISBN 9781921529818

unpaged

For all creatures, the great and the small, the winged and the walking, the singing and the silent – we are thankful. This collaboration by the award-winning team of Millard and Cool is a celebration of the beauty and the mystery of life, and an expression of thankfulness. The playful, poetic language, rich with alliteration, assonance and rhythm is a joy and makes effective use of creative phrases such as 'humptiness' and 'loop-the-loopers'. The mixed-media illustrations are colourful and detailed and resonate dramatically with the text. This vibrant book, with its repetition of the phrase 'we are thankful', is wonderful.

RUDGE, Leila

NO BEARS

Written by Meg MCKINLAY

Walker Books

ISBN 9781921529924

unpaged

Our narrator Ruby has decided she is tired of reading about bears in books and makes her own fairytale story – with 'no bears'. In a delightful juxtaposition of text and illustration, Ruby's story unfolds along slightly left-of-centre fairytale tropes, definitely without bears. The intricate design and complex illustrations of this book make it special, and children will love examining the artwork for clues, not given in the text, that tell rather a different story from Ruby's narration. The meta-textual nature of the book is a lot of fun and invites multiple readings of the story.

Eve Pownall Award for Information Books

WINNER

LESTER, Alison & TULLOCH, Coral

ONE SMALL ISLAND: THE STORY OF MACQUARIE ISLAND

Penguin Group (Australia)

ISBN 9780670072361

unpaged

This remarkable collaboration presents the history of Macquarie Island in the Southern Ocean from its geological beginnings to the present day. It is a tragic story of the degradation of flora and fauna. The story alternates between two formats – a picture book with double-page spreads and limited text plus historical journals, maps, newspaper articles, a timeline, and climate statistics with original sketches. The stunning illustrations reinforce the unique characteristics, the isolation and the beauty of this small island. The final landscape that we view is Macquarie Island's sunrise, accompanied by words of environmental hope.

HONOUR BOOK

DO, Anh & DO, Suzanne

Illustrated by Bruce WHATLEY

THE LITTLE REFUGEE

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742378329

unpaged

This biography for young readers is sympathetically illustrated by Whatley. Simple sentence structures make this book most accessible; however there is much to be drawn from Do's complex and harrowing experiences. The illustrations reflect the tension, fear and danger – beginning in drab sepia tones and slowly evolving into more relaxing colours. There is a real sense of coming home to a new land, expressing the hope for a positive future. This outstanding book provides much material for reflection on, and discussion of, migration experiences and issues.

SHORT LIST

Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art

SURREALISM FOR KIDS

ISBN 9781921503344

60 pages

This book introduces eight European surrealist artists with black and white portraits of each artist. There is an activity or game using words and pictures for children to explore the style of each artist. The sentences are constructed in simple language and make the topic quite accessible. The designer has chosen unusual, but strikingly effective, colours for a children's book – black, red, white and grey. This quality publication from the Queensland Art Gallery has an innovative approach to art education for young children.

WHEATLEY, Nadia (Ed)

PLAYGROUND

Illustrated by Ken SEARLE

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742370972

85 pages

Wheatley has done an exceptional job in collecting, compiling and introducing the simple stories and excellent illustrations in this book. They detail the childhood experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Both elders and adolescents relate true stories of growing up in traditional country. Various aspects up are highlighted such as family relationships, language, learning, journeys, gathering food, play and ceremonies. The stories are succinct, highly personal and moving. There is a good mixture of quality illustrations, photographs, maps, paintings and sketches of flora and fauna.

WIGNELL, Edel

BILBY SECRETS

Illustrated by Mark JACKSON

Walker Books Australia

ISBN 9781921529320

28 pages

This narrative follows the life cycle of the Greater Bilby and is set in the Pilbara (Western Australia). Along with the narrative, there are specific facts about the Greater Bilby. These facts provide information about predators, birth and early life of a baby bilby, its diet and habitat. The story is beautifully complemented with eye-catching illustrations. Subtle hues bring the outback animals – the fox, the wedge-tailed eagle and the goanna – and Australian landscape to life.

WILKINSON, Carole

FROMELLES: AUSTRALIA'S BLOODIEST DAY AT WAR

Black Dog Books

ISBN 9781742031767

182 pages

Meticulous research and writing describe the 24-hour World War I battle at Fromelles, which resulted in over 5,000 Australian casualties. Structured on the chronology of the event, each chapter begins with a fictionalised journal excerpt or letter, based on selected first-hand accounts, followed by information text in easy-to-read segments. Margin quotes from service personnel and historians, 'tear-off memo' fact boxes, maps, statistical tables, diagrams, and historical photographs, posters and news clippings enhance the information text. At the conclusion, the consequences of poor planning and leadership are examined.

Crichton Award

INTRODUCTION

The Crichton Award is administered by the Victorian branch of the CBCA. Its aim is to recognise and encourage new talent in the field of Australian children's book illustration hence the winning artist must be an emerging talent or new to the field of children's book illustration. The entry must be the artist's first illustrated book published by a trade publisher in which the illustrations form a significant part of the book's narrative or information content.

This year 18 books were entered, less than in previous years which may be indicative of the economic situation in Australia. Animals were once again a popular theme amongst the books with a number featuring uniquely Australian animals but also rabbits and birds of different varieties. A number of the books explored different aspects of the human condition with loneliness, greed and jealousy featuring. Some played with language in a very engaging way. The judges also commented it was nice to see the whole of the book being used to convey the story including the front cover and endpapers.

The judges enjoyed a variety of artistic styles, with pencil, collage, watercolours, pen and ink, woodcuts to name a few. Some illustrations utilised a limited colour palette whilst others exploded onto the page with a number of bright, vibrant colours. The target audience for each book varied greatly from young toddlers to older readers. All these variations presented a challenge to the judges of whittling 18 down to a Short List of 6 and then to one ultimate winner. The shortlist is an indication of the robustness of the children's books illustration field in Australia.

WINNER

ACTON, Sara

BEN & DUCK

Scholastic Press, Scholastic Australia

ISBN 9781741699142

unpaged

Ben and Duck is a charming book, engaging in its simplicity and humour. The sketches of the duck waddling off in the endpapers are enticing, beckoning us to follow duck in the story that ensues. There is so much expression with a few pencil lines. Acton uses white space to great effect evoking humour, sadness and a sense of wonder. The style draws on the tradition of classic story book illustration in a contemporary way using simple line work and a muted colour palette giving the book a gentle light feel. The placement of the illustrations within the layout is clever and adds to the amusement of the coming and going of the duck. Less is more in this book and though deceptively simple the detail that is in the book is heart-warming and funny. This picture book is a delight.

SHORT LIST

BATTERSBY, Katherine

SQUISH RABBIT

University of Queensland Press

ISBN 9780702239250

unpaged

Squish Rabbit is a friendly adventure in which the illustrator explores an interesting mixture of media with bold watercolours and different textures to heighten interest. The change in scale of the characters in the various page spreads is a delightful surprise that adds to the reader's experience of the tale. The illustrations are clean, clear and crisp with simple lines and fun textures used to great effect, Squish has barely any detail in his face but the few that he has are able to convey many emotions including anger. The endpapers are an engaging example of the use of texture and colour by Battersby which surprise and delight. The hidden characters peeking out from behind the strips offering an extra point of connection for the young child and the book itself is actually quite squishy!

BOWEN, Dean

A SONG FOR LORKIE

Written by Jenifer CASTLES

Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781742377186

unpaged

A Song for Lorkie is illustrated with beautiful rich paintings that use colour and perspective in a highly original way to create an appealing and lively feel. The illustrations are created with a varied and unusual mix of media from woodcut to stylised images incorporating rich and textured paint which help to change the pace within the book. Colours used are earthy but vibrant with bold lines mainly on dark backgrounds. The endpapers are attractive, childlike and inviting. The detail in the book is thoughtful and gives the reader much to explore.

GOH, Heidi

YORK'S UNIVERSE

Windy Hollow Books

ISBN 9781921136801

unpaged

York's Universe is a curious, beguiling and challenging book that peaks interest from the beginning with the beautiful colours of the spinning planet, shifting perspectives and action. Through its interesting use of line and perspective the reader's view moves gradually from wide overhead shots in to close ups and once more out in an ever widening view that take us on a journey and extends our imagination. The patterns and detail in the beautiful painting of the Universe is a treasure to behold. The open ending of the book leaves the reader to ponder where they have been taken and where they have been.

OKALYI, Sandy
MOZZIE AND MIDGIE
Written by Doug MACLEOD
Working Title Press
ISBN 9781921504310
unpaged

Okalyi offers colourful and energetic characters that have amusing personalities and leap off the page. The black and white cubes of the Royal spoonbills provide a unique and almost eccentric contrast to the highly coloured, round creatures surrounding them. The book plays with geometric shapes and forms to convey impressions of various animals. The highly stylised crabs and fish offer a unique and imaginative view of these creatures, celebrating their essence. Amongst the beautiful painted colours there is much to explore. Reading the book is like swimming happily in a brightly coloured pool with friendly imaginative creatures.

STREICH, Michel
GRUMPY LITTLE KING
Allen & Unwin
ISBN 9781742375724
unpaged

Grumpy Little King is illustrated in a confident, simple yet sophisticated style. The pared back colour palette and simple line work adds to the charm and humour of the story allowing the reader to concentrate on the witty expressions and movements of the characters. The use of colour, both within and outside the line, smudged and intense, and the bold and untidy line create a sense of movement and pace. The hard lines, particularly those used to create the grumpy little king, appear quickly done contributing to both the emotion of the drawings and the comic feel of the picture book.

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