



CBCA BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2016 JUDGES' REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The total number of entries for the 2016 Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year was 402. This includes 360 fiction entries and 42 non-fiction. There were many 'jewel entries' in the CBCA 70th birthday crown.

The judges noted that it was refreshing to see the breadth of entries from poetry, verse novels, fiction and non-fiction, with outstanding writers and illustrators opting to use new voices and explore the boundaries with new stories and mediums. First time authors and illustrators combined to produce Notables and Shortlisted books in all categories.

It was also noted that short story collections were abundant with endearing and intriguing characters and exquisite writing. While there was debut novels and titles, many fiction series continued in all categories where writing, plot, setting and characters combined to tell an individual narrative. Graphic novels featured in the Younger Readers section with supernatural threads in others genres along with romance and adventure. War as a theme still appeared in every category, however it was refreshing to see differing perspectives and narratives being told with writers and illustrators opting to use new voices and explore other stories. Refugees, fantasy, humour, animals, bullying, family and relationships all featured prominently.

Of interest to the judges was the need for publishers to specify media used by illustrators as with the advent of digital media, it is extremely hard to differentiate. One or two book design flaws like typography detracted from some otherwise outstanding entries. Cover design was often a disappointment showing little imagination or in some cases, even less connection with the content. There seems to be a trend towards tactile covers with embossing, texture and spot varnishing. A lack of cultural diversity and social change, a true indication that reflects Australian society was missing. A good look at the 'slice of life' is needed in all categories. All in all, it is extremely pleasing to see publishers taking a risk with the content of books in all categories.

It was encouraging to see the abundance of good quality humour and relevant to each category. First-time authors and illustrators continue to be represented in the Notables across all categories and combined with the depth

of experienced writers this bodes well for the future of Australian Children's Literature.

BOOK OF THE YEAR: OLDER READERS

This year there were 62 books entered in the Older Reader category and 16 of these were listed as Notable. The novels covered the breadth of the category with some of the fantasy series satisfying the lower end, but the majority sat firmly with the upper end, relating to readers in their last few years of school and beyond. This is a trend we have seen over the last few years with many of the books focusing on the teenage experience, seeing the world through their eyes.

Many of these books had contemporary themes, focusing on young adults finding their place in the world, dealing with bullying and dysfunctional families to youth suicide. All concluded with a sense of hope or a way to tackle the future. *The Pause* and *A Small Madness* were key examples of the need to allow discussion of mental health issues within this age group. Books exploring displaced people and refugees were also prominent, as were novels dealing with disability and gender.

This year we also saw quality short stories including poetry and verse novels. *Rich and Rare* was an anthology that contained poetry, short stories and illustrations that will hopefully entice readers to seek out further reading from these authors.

Historical fiction, sagas and fables were there with magical realism to involve readers with other worlds, times and lives. The sense of place evident in many of the novels also resonated with the Judges, making the location and timing of the narrative immediately identifiable and, in some cases, uniquely Australian, *Freedom Ride*, *One True Thing* and *Talk Under Water* being good examples.

Fantasy and science fiction books challenged the readers with their different writing techniques and experimental formats. *Illuminae* was such an example.

Cover design and presentation was generally of a very high standard, however, some lacked the visual appeal and sophistication needed to attract older readers.

Our authors wrote with clear and strong Australian voices that spoke strongly to our YA readers.

BOOK OF THE YEAR: YOUNGER READERS

There were 122 entries in the Younger Reader's Category this year. Styles and genres were diverse and in the main, the quality of the publications was good. A large number of the books for the younger, newly-confident readers were highly illustrated, many using simple pencil and line drawings, although some were in colour. The use of different fonts and typeface sizes added interest to these stories. Many of the stories for the younger readers were irreverent and humorous.

Many of the books in this category featured older protagonists, often one single person in a position of danger or insecurity. There were a number of complex, many-layered stories, some with dark and confronting themes. There is a growing interest in detective-style novels and thrillers. These are often fast-paced page-turners with cliff-hangers adding to the excitement.

Series are still popular and many familiar authors are represented. Family drama and social realism are popular themes and other genres represented include humour, and historical fiction, much of the latter taking place in Australia. The few horror stories were alleviated by subtle humour. Other genres represented include collections of poetry and short stories. Fantasy and magic realism is strongly represented and threads through many of the novels of adventure and drama.

It was notable to see that the reading age of the books and the age of featured protagonists seems to be becoming older each year. Judges would appreciate more books entered for younger and newly confident readers. We feel that these readers are at an important transition in their reading development and it is important to encourage them by providing the best literature possible.

BOOK OF THE YEAR: EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Early Childhood category focuses on books for young children who are at the pre-reading or early emergent stages of reading. This year there were 89 books entered in the category from which 23 were chosen as Notables, with 6 of those shortlisted. The Early Childhood category contained 25% of the total entries to the CBCA Book of the Year Awards. Of particular note was that 30 more books were entered in this category this year.

The judging of these books concentrates on the appeal of the story and illustrations, especially their suitability for early readers. An emphasis was also placed on the quality of layout, design and production. The illustrations extend the meaning and emotion in the text.

Entries this year included heart-warming stories of family life such as *My Dad is a Giraffe*, *Thunderstorm Dancing*, *Fly-In, Fly-Out Dad* and *Too Busy Sleeping*. A range of concept books such as counting and alphabet development for example; *Numerical Street* and *Meep*, were noted. Continuation of rhyming text featured with *The Cow Tripped Over the Moon*. Childhood feelings were highlighted with entries such as *Mr Huff* and *Perfect*. A recurring thread through this category was humour, with *Underneath the Cow*, *Piranhas Don't Eat Bananas* and *Pig the Fibber*. Indigenous books such as *Our Little Yuen* and *Splosh* featured.

Other themes included friendship, loneliness, bullying, bravery, love, independence, animals and their habitats, individual differences, music, school, self-esteem and of course, the imagination. It was rewarding to note that many books had large clear double-page spreads and good use of white space e.g. *As Big As You Are*. Encores were represented by *Pig the Fibber*, *The Very Noisy Bear* and *I'm a Hungry Dinosaur*.

The illustrations used a range of styles and media, with some being created entirely digitally, while others used a mix of digital and hand-drawn illustrations. Illustrators also used collage, gouache, acrylic, pen and ink, watercolour and photography. Judges noted that publishers need to acknowledge the media used by the illustrator, as it is valuable information for students and reviewers, and the task of defining this is becoming more difficult. Endpapers were again brilliant, adding another layer of dimension and understanding.

The judges deemed that 25% of the entries were of an extremely high quality. The list featured many familiar names: Stephen Michael King, Mem Fox, Alison Lester, Aaron Blabey, Nick Bland, Bob Graham, Margaret Wild and triple-illustrator winner Freya Blackwood.

PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

The Picture Book of the Year award is presented to an outstanding book of the picture book genre, in which the author and the illustrator achieve artistic and literary unity. Books entered in this category are not limited to a specific age range and may be suited to older readers. This year there were 129 entries from which twenty-two were chosen as Notables and six were Shortlisted.

Illustrative styles varied, including digital artwork (*Eye to Eye*), linocuts (*One Step at a Time*), oil paintings (*Adelaide's Secret World*), watercolours (*And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*), collage (*Numerical Street*) and avant-garde styles such as *What's up Mumu?* and *Lara of Newtown*. Some books made extensive use of black and white, with a judicious use of colour highlighting aspects of the narrative as in *Flight* and *My Dead Bunny*.

With 2015 being the year of the centenary of the landing at Gallipoli, there were many books on the theme of war - and not just World War I. Titles include *My Gallipoli; Ride, Ricardo, Ride!* and an illustrated version of the song *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*. Associated themes such as refugees (*Flight* and *Teacup*) and imprisonment (*Suri's Wall*) also featured. Ongoing consequences of war were also highlighted, such as *One Step at a Time* about the devastation caused by landmines.

Producing accomplished funny books is not easy and it was pleasing to see a number of quality entries, some with decidedly quirky senses of humour. Books such as *My Dead Bunny*, *What's up MuMu* and *Lara of Newtown* displayed fine senses of the absurd in both text and illustration.

There was a strong theme of friendship in this year's entries, with several books exploring overcoming shyness to enter new relationships. *Adelaide's Secret World* and *In the Evening* are notable examples. In addition to dealing with shyness, other books explored coping with moods and feelings, such as *Mr Huff* and *The Eagle Inside*.

The judges were pleased to see a number of information books in picture book format entered into this category of the awards. A strong narrative combined with excellent illustrations and accurate facts led to a number of these being listed as Notable. Included are *Platypus*, *My Gallipoli* and *Bob the Railway Dog*, with other books having a strong factual background to support a more

fictionalised plot. Examples include *Where's Jessie?*, *How the Sun Got to Coco's House* and *Why I Love Footy*. Animals featured strongly not only in non-fiction works but also in fiction and as anthropomorphised main characters. For example, Lara in *Lara of Newtown* is a cat and Mumu and her friend Lox seem to be a rabbit and an elephant.

Overall this was a strong category offering books of appeal to a wide variety of readers.

EVE POWNALL AWARDS FOR INFORMATION BOOKS

The Eve Pownall Awards for Information Books state that: *the awards will be made to outstanding books which have the prime intention of documenting factual material with consideration given to imaginative presentation, interpretation and variation of style. Judges are guided to consider the relative success of the book in balancing and harmonising the following elements: Style of language and presentation; Graphic excellence; Clarity, appropriateness and aesthetic appeal of illustration; Integration of text, graphic and illustration to engage interest and enhance understanding; Overall design of book to facilitate the presentation of information, and Accuracy with regard to the current state of knowledge.*

In 2016, 51 books were received across a wide range of topics incorporating many imaginative ways to blend factual texts and illustration while employing creatively engaging approaches to design and narrative. Books this year have reflected current interests in our society, given insights into the past, and explored 'ways of being' through multiple perspectives and viewpoints. Authors and illustrators have not only presented information, they have invited readers to reflect, to learn, and to act.

With focus on the centenary year of World War I moving from Gallipoli to the Western Front, books on a range of 'war' topics were again presented, including texts covering combatants in both World Wars and Afghanistan. Several titles presented points of view from both 'sides' of these conflicts as well as exploring social and multicultural backgrounds of Australians in the armed forces.

Historical aspects of early colonial times in Australia (four diverse narratives) and the complex events of the Eureka Stockade were explored. Biographies, aimed at a range of reading levels, explored the lives of Captain Cook, Weary Dunlop, Banjo Paterson, Sidney Nolan and the exploits of nine-year-old Lennie the Legend. Social, cultural and geographical experiences of Australian life were depicted in topics as diverse as Australian landscapes, children's toys, cookery, art and several engaging aspects of word play and grammar. Books with indigenous themes included historical characters and past times, as well as dramatic artworks, and explanations to young children of modern political/social issues. Titles for early childhood included information about sheep farming, the care of pets, the life of tree-frogs and parrots. There were several books embodying the trend of 'emotional intelligence' for younger readers, while other engaging titles discussed social relationship issues for teens. Two titles raised concerns about, and encouraged social engagement

with, the topics of environmental and climate change. Scientific texts included prehistoric marine mammals, the natural worlds of insects and animals, the human brain, and human reproduction.

There was a marked increase in the number of titles published by national institutions such as the National Library of Australia, The Australian War Memorial and Department of Veteran's Affairs, CSIRO and Museum Victoria, while there were strong entries from established publishers such as Magabala Books, Omnibus/Scholastic, Working Title Press, Allen & Unwin, Windy Hollow, Walker Books, Penguin, ABC Books, Black Dog Books and Text Publishing, all of whom are to be congratulated for continuing to strongly support this category of the CBCA Book of the Year Awards.

While a few books, despite their interesting texts, suffered from poor publication values and flimsy construction, it is clear from the high quality and broad range of topics in the majority of books received, that information texts are alive and well in the computer age. They offer relevant, vibrantly illustrated and creatively designed works which encourage children to explore social and scientific facts of the world around them through insightful, imaginatively interpreted and highly engaging information books.