



The CBCA  
Book of the Year Awards

# JUDGES' REPORT 2018



## THE CBCA JUDGES' REPORT 2018

Category Reports written by the Judges of the CBCA Book of the Year Awards:

Book of the Year: Older Readers

Michelle Worthington (Qld), Katharine England (SA), Joy Lawn (NSW)

Book of the Year: Younger Readers

Margaret (Nette) Hilton (NSW), Dianne Elson (NT), Anne-Marie Strother (WA)

Book of the Year: Early Childhood

Julie Long OAM (ACT), Amanda Cooper (Vic), Ruth Campbell-Hicks (WA)

Picture Book of the Year

Karen MacPherson (Tas), Jo Panckridge (Vic), Julian Laffan (ACT)

Eve Pownall Award

Helen Rothwell (Tas), Heather Zubek (Vic), Kerry Neary (Qld)

Edited by Margaret Hamilton AM

Awards Administrators: Justine Power, Rosemary Thomas

Original illustrations by Anna Walker.

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The Children's Book Council of Australia is a voluntary organisation established in 1945 to promote children's literature and to encourage children to read. Membership of the eight state and territory branches is open to those interested in children's books: parents, teachers, librarians, students, publishers, authors, illustrators, booksellers and journalists.

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## CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>CATEGORIES .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>JUDGING PROCESS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>THE JUDGES .....</b>	<b>8</b>
CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers .....	8
MICHELLE WORTHINGTON (QLD) .....	8
KATHARINE ENGLAND (SA) .....	8
JOY LAWN (NSW) .....	8
CBCA Book of the Year: Younger Readers .....	9
MARGARET (NETTE) HILTON (NSW) .....	9
DIANNE ELSON (NT) .....	9
ANNE MARIE STROTHER (WA) .....	9
CBCA Book of the Year: Early Childhood .....	9
JULIE LONG OAM (ACT) .....	9
AMANDA COOPER (VIC) .....	10
RUTH CAMPBELL-HICKS (WA) .....	10
CBCA Picture Book of the Year .....	10
KAREN MACPHERSON (TAS) .....	10
JO PANCKRIDGE (VIC) .....	10
JULIAN LAFFAN (ACT) .....	11
Eve Pownall Information Book Judges .....	11
HELEN ROTHWELL (TAS) .....	11
HEATHER ZUBEK (VIC) .....	11
KERRY NEARY (QLD) .....	11
<b>Older Readers Judges' Report.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Winner.....	13
TAKE THREE GIRLS .....	13
Honour Books.....	13
IN THE DARK SPACES .....	14
Cally Black .....	14
Hardie Grant Egmont .....	14
Other Shortlisted Books .....	14
Pip Harry .....	14
UQP .....	14
THE SECRET SCIENCE OF MAGIC .....	15
Melissa Keil .....	15
Hardie Grant Egmont .....	15
BALLAD FOR A MAD GIRL.....	15
Vikki Wakefield .....	15
Text Publishing.....	15
<b>Younger Readers Judges' Report.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Winner.....	18
HOW TO BEE .....	18
Bren MacDibble .....	18
Allen & Unwin .....	18
Honour Books.....	18
HENRIETTA AND THE PERFECT NIGHT .....	18
Martine Murray .....	18
Allen & Unwin .....	18
MARSH AND ME.....	19
Martine Murray .....	19
Text Publishing.....	19
Other Shortlisted Books .....	19
THE ELEPHANT .....	19
Peter Carnavas.....	19
UQP .....	19
THE SHOP AT HOOPERS BEND .....	19

Emily Rodda .....	19
HarperCollins Publishers - Angus & Robertson .....	19
THE GRAND GENIUS SUMMER OF HENRY HOOBLER .....	20
Lisa Shanahan .....	20
Allen & Unwin .....	20
<b>Early Childhood Judges' Report .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Winner.....	22
RODNEY LOSES IT .....	22
Michael Gerard Bauer .....	22
Omnibus Books .....	22
Honour Books.....	23
THE VERY NOISY BABY .....	23
Alison Lester .....	23
Affirm Press.....	23
HARK IT'S ME, RUBY LEE! .....	24
Lisa Shanahan, illustrated by Binny .....	24
Lothian Children's Books .....	24
Other Shortlisted Books .....	25
BOY .....	25
Phil Cummings, Illustrated by Shane DeVries .....	25
Scholastic Australia - Scholastic Press.....	25
I'M AUSTRALIAN TOO .....	25
Mem Fox, Illustrated by Ronojoy Ghosh.....	25
Omnibus Books - Scholastic Australia .....	25
THE SECOND SKY .....	25
Patrick Guest, Illustrated by Jonathan Bentley .....	25
Little Hare - Hardie Grant Egmont .....	25
<b>Picture Books Judges' Report .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Winner.....	26
A WALK IN THE BUSH .....	26
Gwyn Perkins .....	26
Affirm Press.....	26
Honour Books.....	27
THE GREAT RABBIT CHASE .....	27
Freya Blackwood .....	27
Scholastic Australia .....	27
MOPOKE .....	27
Philip Bunting .....	27
Omnibus Books .....	27
Other Shortlisted Titles .....	28
TEN POUND POM.....	28
Liz Anelli, Text by Carole Wilkinson .....	28
Walker Books .....	28
SWAN LAKE .....	28
Anne Spudvilas.....	28
Allen & Unwin .....	28
FLORETTE .....	29
Anna Walker .....	29
Penguin Random House Australia .....	29
<b>Eve Pownall Judges' Report .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Winner.....	31
DO NOT LICK THIS BOOK.....	31
Idan Ben-Barak, Illustrated by Julian Frost .....	31
Allen & Unwin .....	31
Honour Books.....	32
LEFT & RIGHT .....	32
Lorna Hendry .....	32
Wild Dog Books .....	32
KOALA .....	33
Claire Saxby, Illustrated by Julie Vivas .....	33

Walker Books .....	33
Other Shortlisted Books .....	33
M IS FOR MUTINY! HISTORY BY ALPHABET .....	33
John Dickon, Illustrations by Bern Emmerichs .....	33
Berbay Publishing .....	33
THE BIG BOOK OF ANTARCTICA .....	34
Charles Hope .....	34
Wild Dog Books .....	34
AMAZING AUSTRALIAN IN THEIR FLYING MACHINES .....	34
Prue & Kerry Mason, Illustrations by Tom Jellett .....	34
Walker Books .....	34

## INTRODUCTION

The Children's Book Council of Australia administers and presents the annual Children's Book of the Year Awards. Each year publishers enter books in the Awards and judges read, review and exchange reports on every title accepted for entry. The judging process is guided by the Awards titles and criteria as stated in the Children's Book Council of Australia Awards policy and procedures and set out in this publication. This book contains the judges' report on over 400 titles published in the year 2017 and submitted by publishers for the 2018 CBCA Book of the Year Awards.

The 2018 Notable Books List was announced on 27 February with 'Night of the Notables' hosted by CBCA Branches in many capital cities. The 2018 Short List was announced on 27 March. The official announcement was held in Brisbane but was also celebrated by CBCA branches throughout Australia with special events.

The 72nd CBCA Book of the Year Awards, consisting of a Winner and up to two Honour Books in each category, was announced in Brisbane on 17 August. This marked the beginning of CBCA Book Week 2018. The theme was 'Find Your Treasure'. Access to the online Short List Judges' Presentation are available from each state and territory branch of The Children's Book Council of Australia or from <http://store.cbca.org.au/>

## CATEGORIES

There are five categories in the CBCA Book of the Year Awards:

**a. CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers.** Entries in this category are for outstanding books for young people aged between 13 and 18 years (secondary school level). Readers require a degree of maturity to appreciate the themes and scope of emotional involvement. Books in this category may be fiction, drama, illustrated text, poetry or graphic novels. Judging considers the literary qualities of the text, editing and book production.

**b. CBCA Book of the Year: Younger Readers.** Entries in this category are for outstanding books published for children in the age range from 8 to 12 years (primary school level). Books in the category may be fiction, drama, graphic novels, illustrated text or poetry. Judging considers the literary qualities of the text, editing and book production.

**c. CBCA Book of the Year: Early Childhood.** Entries in this category are for outstanding books suitable in content and style for pre-and beginning readers (pre-school and infants level). These include works of fiction, poetry, wordless, board and concept books. The illustrations reflect all the text on the page and often do not add extra meaning to the storyline. The font size and style, rhythm and meter of the text are important. Clear design, layout and editing are also important.

**d. CBCA Picture Book of the Year.** Entries in this category should be outstanding books of the genre in which the text and illustrations achieve artistic and literary unity and the story, theme or concept is enhanced and unified through the illustrations. Picture Books can be for any age. A picture book can be written and illustrated by a sole creator or a collaborative effort between two or more creators. The text and illustrations work cohesively. The illustrations are an integral part of, or extend the action on the page. The illustrations are either as important as the text or more important and can be enjoyed separately from the text. Illustrators who have taken an existing piece of work and produced new illustrations that enhance that text can only be entered in this category.

**e. The Eve Pownall Award.** Entries in this category should be books with the prime purpose of documenting factual material. Consideration should be given to imaginative presentation, interpretation and variation of style. Books are judged on the balance and harmony of language style and presentation, graphic excellence, clarity, appropriateness and aesthetic appeal of illustrations, and the overall design of the book. Referencing of sources are important; books may include a contents page, index, bibliography

and glossary which enhance the reader's experience. Autobiographies and biographies are entered in this category. The age range for this category is 0 to 18 years.

## JUDGING PROCESS

Judges are required to read all books entered in their category during the judging period and to discuss then write preliminary critiques on each entry using the judging criteria, for books with an implied readership under the age of eighteen. Entered books are assessed primarily for: - outstanding literary merit, including cohesiveness in significant literary elements; - language chosen for its appropriateness to the theme and style of the work with proper regard to the aesthetic qualities of language; and - originality in the treatment of literary elements as they apply to the form of the work. Consideration is given to the quality of illustrations, book design, editing, production, printing and binding. An entered book will be judged only in the nominated category against the category criteria.

Judges for these Awards commenced the judging process in April 2017 and finalised their deliberations in April 2018. This year the judging panels met via teleconference and participated in on-line forums and came together for final discussion and report preparation in Canberra.

## THE JUDGES

### CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers



#### MICHELLE WORTHINGTON (QLD)

Michelle holds a Master of Arts (Writing and Literature), Master of Education (Learning Innovation), Graduate Diploma of Education (Teacher Librarian) and a Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary). As a librarian at an all boys' school, she feels the most important part of her job is to get the boys to read and to be excited about books. Michelle believes that reading books for enjoyment and pleasure are the most important things one can do. She reads widely within the field of children's literature.



#### KATHARINE ENGLAND (SA)

Katharine has had a lifelong relationship with children's books. As a teenager, she worked weekends and holidays in a bookshop in Sydney's Kings Cross. She has an honours degree in English Literature from the University of Sydney and started her professional life as a high school English teacher. She spent three years teaching in Papua New Guinea and 35 teaching English as a Second Language at TAFE SA. Katharine has been a freelance book reviewer ever since arriving in Adelaide and currently reviews Australian and overseas fiction and children's books regularly. She

teaches a course in writing reviews as part of Adelaide TAFE's Diploma in Professional Writing. Katharine was the SA CBCA judge in 1993/4 and an Eve Pownall judge in 1997/8. She also judges the fiction and children's sections of the SA Festival Literary Awards and continues the judging panel for the Biennial Children's Peace Literature Award.



#### JOY LAWN (NSW)

Joy has an MA in Children's Literature and Literacy and has been a specialist in children's and young adult literature for two decades. Formerly a teacher, Joy has wide experience in presenting at state, national and international conferences and advising teachers and others on literature. She reviews for a range of newspapers and specialist journals. Joy has written teacher notes for National Literacy & Numeracy Week (ALEA/AATE), Reading Australia (ALEA) and other professional organisations. She has chaired the children's book judging panels in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and Queensland Literary Awards, judged the Aurealis Awards and was a CBCA

fiction judge in 2009/10. She has taught a children's/YA literature course at the University of Southern Queensland and blogs about children's and young adult literature and literary fiction at Boomerang Books. Some of her favourite times in the year are spent chairing author sessions at the Sydney and



Brisbane Writers' Festivals. Joy is fascinated by ideas and images and how authors and illustrators express these with truth and originality.

## CBCA Book of the Year: Younger Readers



### MARGARET (NETTE) HILTON (NSW)

Nette Hilton has been an author of children's and YA Literature for the past twenty-eight years. During this time, she has been recognised for her work with shortlisting in CBCA awards, Notable books in CBCA list, shortlisted for NSW Premier's Awards, Queensland Premier's Awards and long listed for the Prime Minister's Awards. Her books have been translated and are available worldwide with two titles still in print after twenty-six years. In 2014-2015 she was the Judge for senior poetry in the Dorothea MacKellar National Poetry Competition. She continues to write and, more recently, has attempted storyboarding her own picture books. Her latest novels are in the final stages of publication. Nette fills her days with books, stories and music.



### DIANNE ELSON (NT)

Dianne has a BSc at the University of WA. She attended the Royal Military College, Duntroon in 1987 and was commissioned into the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps. Dianne subsequently completed her Master's in Public Administration 1997 and attended the Royal Australian Navy Staff College in 2000. Throughout her time as an Army Office, Dianne held several health planning, health administration and staff officer positions and has lived in Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Darwin. Growing up in country WA first fostered her love of reading. She continues to read widely; and constantly seeks out new books for her children and family to read. Dianne has achieved a good understanding of books and having three sons who read prolifically, she is now challenged by the array of books available for nine-year-old girls.



### ANNE MARIE STROTHER (WA)

Anne-Marie has a BEd majoring in English from Edith Cowan University. She has spent most of her adult life teaching in one capacity or another, whether it be in education: secondary primary and early childhood or in the fitness industry. Her English teaching career spans over 30 years and has stretched far across the wide expanses of WA. Her love of reading was fostered at an early age and especially by her mother's consistent and much valued gift of a book each Christmas – a tradition that continues in her family through to present day.

In addition to English teaching Anne-Marie spent 4 years as a teacher-librarian in a K-12 school learning the depth and breadth of children's literature. Anne-Marie was also a CBCA Judge in 2014-2015 as well as the YR/OR Judge in 2016.

Anne-Marie revels in the judging process and the delightful prospect of discovering wonderful pieces of literature that she can then enthuse and inspire others to read and devour.

## CBCA Book of the Year: Early Childhood



### JULIE LONG OAM (ACT)

Julie has a Bachelor of Education, majoring in Children's Literature. She has taught in various schools in Victoria, England and Canberra for twenty-five years amidst time spent parenting and travelling. Julie is an active member of the CBCA ACT Branch and held numerous roles. In 2006 Julie was granted Life Membership of CBCA ACT. She has been a reviewer for Reading Time for over thirty years and spent three years as Assistant Editor. Julie was a CBCA Awards Co-ordinator for two years. She is a passionate reader and loves to share this with children in classrooms as well as young members of Scouts ACT in her role as Arts Commissioner. Julie is an honorary Life member of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature.



#### AMANDA COOPER (VIC)

Amanda Cooper is a primary teacher with 35 years' experience, specialising in Art, Library and Music. She has a Graduate Diploma in Teaching and Children's Literature. Amanda has extensive experience working at Books Illustrated Gallery assisting with exhibitions, book sales and story-time. She is committed to providing quality literature activities to students from lower socio economic areas. Amanda is also founder of 'Gallery for a Day' which is a travelling exhibition of original illustrations from many well-known Australian picture books. Artworks from her collection are exhibited together with the books forming the basis of an engaging interactive workshop incursion for primary aged students. Amanda loves introducing children to picture books, their illustrations and the creative process involved in their making.



#### RUTH CAMPBELL-HICKS (WA)

Ruth has lived in Australia since 1975. She obtained a Graduate Degree in Library and Information Studies, after teaching at all levels from High School to Education Support. Ruth has been Principal Librarian for the Shire of Harvey for more than twenty years, managing four busy public libraries. Ruth views libraries as hubs of the community, offering learning resources for all ages, social spaces for all members of the community, displays and events, author talks, book clubs, children's activities. Her personal interest is in the early childhood years, this is when the foundations of literacy are laid down. Ruth is a keen traveller and often spends time doing overseas voluntary work. These experiences have given Ruth a broad understanding of the immense value of literature and being able to read.

### CBCA Picture Book of the Year



#### KAREN MACPHERSON (TAS)

Karen has a BA (Modern Asian Studies), Graduate Diploma Education (Early Childhood) and a MA Human Resources (Change Management). For ten years, she worked for a children's publishing company, in various areas of management, developing a knowledge of illustration, design, editing and production. This also enabled Karen to pass on her love of books to children and adults. Karen has worked as a teacher in the areas of early-childhood, primary and special education. In her work within public libraries she was responsible for organising various children's activities. Karen now runs her own Education Consulting and Coaching business



#### JO PANCKRIDGE (VIC)

Jo holds a Bachelor of Education and a Master's Degree in Literacy and is currently the Head Teacher Librarian of the Campbell House Library, in the Junior School of The Geelong College. She has held this position for 16 years. Her chief role being that of immersing students from 3 to 9 years of age in literature and fostering reading. Jo is also the Literacy Coordinator at the Junior School, supporting literature and literacy in classroom contexts from Early Learning to Year 3. The role enables her to highlight the value of rich literature as the foundation for literacy teaching and learning. Jo has contributed articles and papers to several publications highlighting the power of reading and quality literature for children.



#### **JULIAN LAFFAN (ACT)**

Julian is an artist, educator and curator living in Braidwood, New South Wales. He graduated from the School of Art, ANU in Canberra and has a Bachelor of Education from ACU. He specialises in contemporary woodcuts and drawings, using these mediums to create sculptural objects and works on paper that explore themes of history and identity. Julian has produced a series of exhibitions that developed mentorship partnerships between emerging and established artists from across Australia. He is a member of The Culture Kitchen, a Canberra-based cross-cultural collaborative print group. He has also worked on cross-cultural print-based projects in East Timor, Indonesia and on the Thai-Burma border. His works are in the collection of the Australian Print Council, Canberra Museum and Gallery, and significant private collections.

### **Eve Pownall Information Book Judges**



#### **HELEN ROTHWELL (TAS)**

Helen's qualifications include a Master of Education, a Master of Teaching and she has commenced a Professional Honours in Digital Technologies. She has been a teacher for nine years. Helen is the senior staff member responsible for library liaison at her school and this involves being part of the process that purchases new and highlights existing books in response to the interests, abilities and needs of her students. She has been the Vice President of the CBCA Tasmanian Branch since 2014. Helen has reviewed books and in 2015 she was awarded the Tasmanian Department of Education's Excellence Award as the 'ECE and Primary Teacher of the Year'. She has an interest in information books as a stimulus for reluctant readers.



#### **HEATHER ZUBEK (VIC)**

Heather holds a Diploma of Teaching (Primary) and Bachelor of Education. She has spent time working in education, business, newspapers and full-time motherhood. Heather has lived and worked in Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne. As a freelance writer, she submits work to The West Australian newspaper as their Children's Literature specialist as well as for the paper's ED! Magazine. Heather is also a regular contributor for Magpies Magazine, the Yarra Valley & Ranges Country Life Magazine and Signpost Magazine. An avid reader, Heather is conscious of the fact that early readers make life-long readers and takes every opportunity to play matchmaker with books and children. She delights in reading good books to children and adults of all ages and in helping parents turn their children into enthusiastic readers.



#### **KERRY NEARY (QLD)**

Kerry Neary has been a member of the CBCA Qld Branch for over thirty years. He is now a life member. He has served as a judge for the CBCA Book of the Year Awards on several occasions including twice for the Eve Pownall Award. He has reviewed children's books for many years. This includes a reviewing segment on radio 4MBS in Brisbane which has reached its twenty-year milestone. Though retired from Teacher Librarianship for over a decade now, he remains committed to the promotion of children's literature and family reading.

## Older Readers Judges' Report

Seventy-four books were entered in the Older Reader category in 2018 and were generally of such a high standard that the judges deemed twenty-five of them worthy to make the Notables list, more than twice as many as last year. These are books that tackle some substantial issues — particularly young people's relationships, sexuality and the challenge of social media — with considerable insight, grace and humour.

The strength of the Notable list made it particularly hard this year to separate out six books for the Short List, but the judges are confident that those chosen represent the very best of the year's entries and that they cater not only for a wide range of this category's 13 to 18-year-old readership but also for a good variety of tastes and interests. In spite of the fact that, quite coincidentally, all the Shortlisted novels are written by women, there is an interesting breadth, too, in the authors' range of experience, from two debut novels to a highly successful experiment in which three individually skilled YA authors have cooperated to voice three main characters in seamless combination.

Contemporary realism is the prevalent genre across the Notables and Short List. *Ballad for a Mad Girl* incorporates supernatural ghost elements into the realism. *In the Dark Spaces* is sci-fi. Reflecting recent trends, there has been a lack of male characters in books submitted in the OR category. However, one Honour book, *Mallee Boys*, epitomises masculinity. Far from being stereotypical, these are emotionally vulnerable characters, men who work the land.

A situation from the past when teens were ashamed of their parents and reluctant to spend time with them has changed. Affirming, involved parents are pivotal in a number of the Notable titles such as *Mallee Boys*, *Take Three Girls*, *A Semi-Definitive List of Worst Nightmares* and *Night Swimming*.

Australia's multicultural society is represented in books which include *The Secret Science of Magic*, *Night Swimming* and *Because of You*. Gay protagonists or major characters appear in *Night Swimming*, *The Things We Promise* and *My Lovely Frankie*. LGBTQI minor characters are represented throughout the Short List and Notables.

While the judges are confident that these six are the cream of this year's crop, they want to remind readers that the standard was very high and the choice difficult, so that there are many books on the Notable list that are highly crafted and readers will find much beyond the Shortlisted books to entertain, inform and reward them. At the same time, they would remind authors and publishers that when fine distinctions have to be made, editing issues may come into play and an accumulation of mistakes in grammar, proof reading and word choice or spelling — 'bare' for 'bear', 'pouring' where 'poring' is needed — may make the difference between inclusion and exclusion.

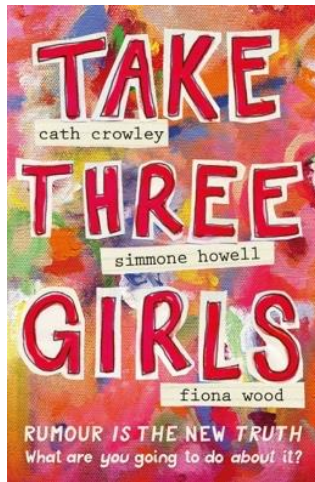
An issue that disturbs the judges concerns middle-grade novels that may be lost between the Older Reader and Younger Reader categories. The OR judges were impressed with *The Blue Cat*.

A number of the OR books have generic titles which don't necessarily represent the contents. Some covers were also not representative, e.g. *Because of You* and *Remind Me How This Ends*. Teens are less likely to select novels with vague titles and wishy-washy covers. A connect between the title, cover and contents is essential. For example, a title and cover such as *The Secret Science of Magic* reflects the contents and is appealing and the title and cover of *My Life as a Hashtag* generates a buzz amongst teen browsers and buyers.

Some books did not receive as high an accolade as possible because it seemed as though the author felt obliged to tie up loose ends even though the style and tone of the narrative would suggest an open or suggested ending be more appropriate. An example is *Ballad for a Mad Girl* which lost the finely crafted atmosphere that was building throughout the story towards the end. Narratives can be left open-ended without neatly tidying up resolutions. Some books lost the opportunity of being listed as a Notable title because they appeared to be rushed.



## Winner



### *TAKE THREE GIRLS*

*Cath Crowley, Simone Howell & Fiona Wood*  
*Pan Macmillan Australia*

Seamlessly, yet with three distinct voices, three prominent Australian writers, Cath Crowley, Simone Howell and Fiona Wood have each conceived a three-dimensional character in *Take Three Girls*. Each author has shaped a story around their own character but a whole narrative world evolves as their characters also respond and react to the creations of the other writers. The authors use their own writing styles but perhaps unconsciously, or even mischievously, employ some of their colleague's signature traits. Readers may wish to guess which author has written which character before knowing that Simone Howell wrote Clem, Cath Crowley wrote Kate and Fiona Wood wrote Ady.

The three girls are randomly put into the same group of their prestigious private school's Wellness Program because they have the longest thumbs. This program is the school's way of dealing with nasty, sexually explicit online trolling and cyber bullying. The students are given regular group tasks and encouraged to demonstrate 'curiosity, openness, interest in others, suspension of judgement, suspension of preconceived ideas'.

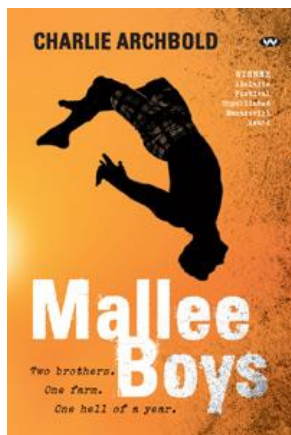
Clem is giving up her identity as an elite swimmer, losing her friends along with her lithe physique and wrangling with her twin, Iris. She is infatuated with older Stu who mistreats her sexually and emotionally. Howell names her Clementine from the traditional song *Oh My Darling Clementine* — the girl who drowned — but Clem's is a metaphorical drowning.

Kate shares a boarding room with Iris. She sneaks out of school to play her cello in an empty pool before sunrise. Her second love is computers, which she uses to loop and layer the sounds of her cello. She is passionate but not competitive, torn between music and a future in medicine to help support her parents' farm. Kate's voice is lyrical.

Artist Ady's voice is sensory. According to school folklore, she is 'Queen Bitch' but, like the other girls, she is multifaceted and perceptive about people and beauty. The author crafts a dislocation between her thoughts and how others perceive her. Her affinity for fabrics and clothes is juxtaposed against her father's addictions, which are destroying her family.

The three girls become friends. Their interplay of voices through the main narrative and in their Wellness journals offers changing insights into and revelations about each other and themselves. The characterisation and plot spin threads which lead to the uplifting, unexpected denouement.

## Honour Books



### *MALLEE BOYS*

*Charlie Archbold*  
*Wakefield Press*

This debut novel by a writer who has lived and taught in the Murray Mallee region of SA has a wonderful sense of place and a believable cast of mostly male characters. The story is told chapter and chapter about in the very different voices of two brothers, sons of a hard-slog Mallee wheat farmer. Volatile, impatient, 18 year-old Josh, known as Red, is happy to have left school and to be working the farm with his beloved dog Ringer, while dreamy, academic, 15 year-old Sandy is looking forward to spending the next two years studying in Adelaide, provided he can ace the college scholarship exams.

A year after the boys' mother died on a Melbourne street the three are still trying to come to terms with her loss. Red feels personally responsible for his

mother's death and tries to assuage his guilt with risky behaviour, often involving dirt bikes, drinking and fist-fights; anxious Sandy goes around with his head in the clouds and is nearly wiped out by a floating dead cow in the first chapter, so that their practical, loving, gruffly grieving father is constantly haunted by the spectre of losing his sons as well as his wife.

Country-town pastimes — weekend footy, the pub and the annual play — make an authentic background for initially embarrassing experiments with girls and a suspenseful and potentially deadly mystery that is played out right to the end. The great strength of the book, however, is the sense of complex authenticity it brings both to its characters and to its distinctive, vividly realised setting.



### *IN THE DARK SPACES*

*Cally Black*

*Hardie Grant Egmont*

This riveting read, with a mesmerising narrator, takes hold of the reader's heart and doesn't let go. The book is set in future space-time when the poor are enslaved to freight companies for their survival and forced to subsist in debt to the consumerist machine.

Tamara lives illegally on one of the freighters with her aunt and nephew, until their freighter is attacked by the Crowpeople and she witnesses the slaughter of everyone on board. Tamara herself is kidnapped because she mimics the Crowpeople's language and they see that she may be useful in communicating with humans.

Initially, the Crowpeople seem inordinately ruthless, but readers soon realise that they must stop the invaders at any cost because they are systematically pillaging the minerals that the Crowpeople need to survive, to feed the ship that in turn feeds them, nurtures them and keeps them warm.

There is no money or trade in the Crowpeople's world: they distribute resources according to need, unlike human society where the rich get richer and the poor are less and less able to survive. While aliens only take what they need to feed the ship, humans come in and take the lot. At its deepest level, the novel can be read as a blueprint for the failure of western societies.

Cally Black is a remarkable author because she makes readers think, showing a fascinating, intricately imagined and infinitely more sustainable alternative world. While she never reveals that Tamara is strong, intelligent and resilient, a smart, savvy quick-thinker, she chooses to show, through fine, empathetic writing, that Tamara has all these traits. Cally Black's is an original voice — raw, strong, and captivating. This is a heartfelt book.

## Other Shortlisted Books



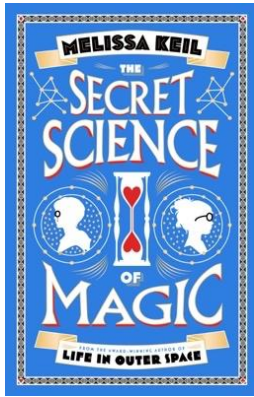
### *BECAUSE OF YOU*

*Pip Harry*

*UQP*

Everyone has a story. Tiny is an eighteen-year-old girl living on the streets in Sydney, running from her small-town past. At a temporary homeless shelter, she meets Nola, a high school student on volunteer placement. Both girls share their love of words through the Hope Lane writing group. Can they share their secrets, too? Told through the eyes of both Tiny and Nola, as they negotiate their way through homelessness, shifting friendships, betrayals, addiction and a little bit of romance, *Because of You* explores the vastly different coming-of-age stories of two girls who are learning to find their individual strengths. A realistic, intelligent novel that shines light on homelessness, addiction, teen motherhood and the

experiences of those who work with the homeless, should awaken understanding and empathy in young Australians. Along with Meredith who runs a Street Library and believes that 'books can save anyone, if they're the right ones', the two girls believe in the power of words to give hope.

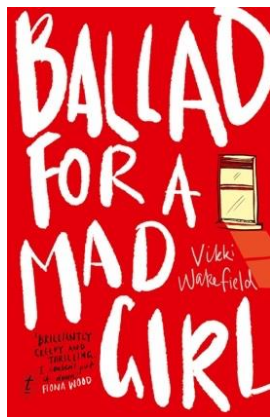


### *THE SECRET SCIENCE OF MAGIC*

*Melissa Keil*

*Hardie Grant Egmont*

Sophia is smart, but there are some things no amount of genius can prepare you for and the messiness of real life is one of them. When everything she knows is falling apart, how can she crack the puzzle of what to do with her life? Joshua spends his time honing magic tricks and planning how to win Sophia's heart. But when your best trick is making schoolwork disappear, how do you possibly romance a genius? Sophia is a brittle, perpetually anxious genius saved from daily implosion by her sane, supportive friend Elsie. Equally geeky Joshua, in love from afar, plans to win her by his facility for meticulous magic. His tricks, on the page, are spectacular and original: under their influence Sophia starts to unwind, although not in time to recognise her immense debt to and lack of comparable interest in self-sacrificing Elsie. One of several current novels to explore the often-unpaid debt to school-age friendship. An innovative, well-crafted love story.



### *BALLAD FOR A MAD GIRL*

*Vikki Wakefield*

*Text Publishing*

Everyone knows seventeen-year-old Grace Foley is a bit mad. She's a prankster and a risk-taker, and she's not afraid of anything — except losing. As part of the long-running feud between two local schools in Swanston, Grace accepts a challenge to walk the pipe. That night she experiences something she can't explain. The funny girl isn't laughing anymore. She's haunted by voices and visions, but nobody believes a girl who cries wolf. As she's drawn deeper into a twenty-year-old mystery surrounding missing girl Hannah Holt, the thin veil between this world and the next begins to slip. She can no longer tell what's real or imagined — all she knows is the ghosts of Swanston, including that of her own mother, are restless. It seems one of them has granted her an extraordinary gift at a terrible price. Everything about her is changing — her body, her thoughts, even her actions seem to belong to a stranger. Grace is losing herself, and her friends don't understand. Is she moving closer to the truth? Or is she heading for madness? In this brilliant and disturbing novel, Wakefield writes complicated and honest characters. Grace, the protagonist, is a tough, exciting, intricate anti-heroine. A captivating narrative that delves beautifully into the blacker parts of the adolescent mind, this is a spine-tingling supernatural mystery with enough twists and turns to keep the reader mesmerised until the last page. Wakefield has written a book that is fearless and unsettling, but one that is also tender, caring, and melancholic.

## Younger Readers Judges' Report

This year's Younger Readers category did not lack a quantity of books to choose from with entries being the highest for some time. However, this did not necessarily mean that the quality was enhanced. Whilst those books that made the Notables list were deserving, many books were the ordinary standard fare, with stereotyped characters, predictable plots and often dull, uninteresting writing. Almost bland fast food for an audience we wish to introduce to a more exotic and flavoursome cuisine. Many books were pandering to the less capable reader with populist (and often gross) subjects. These books have their place in encouraging the reluctant reader, but struggle in an award such as this, as do unsophisticated comic strip and graphics style books.

Another challenge for the author in this category is the age range, and social maturity of the intended readership. Pitching books of quality and substance to the younger end, which includes 8 – 10 year-old children, calls for an understanding of this new age into which these readers are heading. Not only are they often tech savvy but also they flounder with new self-awareness problems and the developing skill of reading comprehensive texts. Books that are supported by chapter headings, illustrations that are subtly revealing when the text needs clarification assist these readers, but it is the author's commitment to their own purpose that makes well-written books shine such as *Fox and Bear*. For a work to be literary it does not have to be a difficult read. It must be engaging and provide keys that peel back the seen but not understood layers of a young child's existence and success in their world.

The inclusion of adventure series-based books continues to be problematic for the judges as the stand-alone story criteria does not lend itself to this genre. Each work needs to lead out with new narratives that are completed even though they may be contained within a series. The driving force that brings the series into being should be invisible while the new narrative becomes the focus of the work. 'Jimmy Cook' in *Captain Jimmy Cook Discovers X Marks The Spot* is an excellent example, as he has already been a successful character in a previous story. His second story is totally unrelated other than the characters within it - the situation is new, the problem is new, the reveal of another aspect of childhood is new. Many works were well written, demonstrating literary skill, yet the open-ended conclusion or the extended exposition providing context often voided the criteria of stand-alone. It is hugely disappointing to read a great book that brings delight and joy and a whole range of experiences to the reader to have it collapse in the final construct of serialising the work. However, *The Exile*, *Accidental Heroes* and *Lingtang and the Pirate Queen*, as the first in their series avoid this pitfall.

Both natural disaster stories and historical fiction were two genres that featured more highly this year. Many of these were well-researched and written, providing readers with an interesting and engaging view of a specific time and event. Books such as *Shaozhen* and *Hotaka* immersed readers in events such as the Japanese tsunami and Chinese drought. *Jehan and the Quest of the Lost Dog* set in the Pakistan flood cleverly entwines two stories. Both World Wars were brought to life too, through the portrayal of a pilot's life above the trenches of the Western Front and his sister's experience back in Australia, in *1917*, the adventurous boys in *The Fighting Stingrays*, and the continuation of Felix's story in *Maybe*. This genre has great value to the younger reader audience providing not only a window into history but real characters and authentic storylines.

Magical realism was another genre that was well represented, especially among the quality literary works. This genre is flourishing, especially for this age group, as it provides that touch of reality blended with magical elements. There are wonderful hooks to open creative and imaginative minds. *Blossom* and *Trouble and the New Kid*, both allow their readers to believe in the magic in their own lives through the realism of their characters and the believability of the writing. *The Shop at Hoopers Bend* also fitted nicely into the upper end of the younger reader audience.

There was also a good balance of realism and fantasy, with many of the Notable books dealing with the real life issues of this audience but in a compassionate and sensitive manner. *The Blue Cat*, told through the experiences and observations of a child during the Second World War, provides many questions that the reader can search through to find answers. A superbly written work which is so cleverly knitted together to be seamless, exposes many aspects of living during this time as well as truly engaging



characters. *The Elephant*, a work that takes on very difficult concepts for very young readers is truly successful in involving readers in the sadder side of life. The characters are engaging and the setting easily grasped by these readers who have delightful illustrations to support their journey. Protagonists and their families that resonate with the audience enabled many writers to discuss contemporary family life and today's challenges with a sense of humour, delightfulness and wit notably *The Grand Genius Summer of Henry Hoobler* and *Henrietta and the Perfect Night*.

In the works that successfully embrace the fantasy/realism and mystery structure, the authors spoke first to the concerns and narrative interests of their readers. Magic, fantastic lands and exotic settings were not the driving force with a story written within them. The stories pitched their protagonists forward with problems and concerns that are rooted in reality. The rules of magic were used to enhance the journey to resolution — they stopped short of being the resolution in themselves. This blend is showcased best across *The Extremely Inconvenient Adventures of Bronte Mettlestone*, *Nevermoor*, and *The Wayward Witch And The Feelings Monster*. Additionally, these three novels beautifully span the Younger Readers age category and readily capture the imagination of the reader. The protagonists and ensuing events within these three novels are also shaped by familial loss — orphaned, dead mother, dead father respectively.

Across the thirty-seven Younger Reader Notables, twenty-four of the books leveraged off the death or 'absence' of one or both parents. Of these, six sensitively explored the relationship between child and grandparent and how, on occasion, the balance of responsibility changes; yet still there is mutual love and respect. There was also the underlying theme of family and community, and loss, most beautifully portrayed in *How to Bee* as Peony straddles the disparate worlds of the farm and the upper end of the Urbs. Free from the constraints of parents and grandparents, many other protagonists in the Notables undertake wondrous adventures in past or future worlds. In contrast, *Marsh and Me* is contemporary and does not rely on magic or the mystery of ancient times. Rather, words in this work are so well chosen their relevance catches readers by surprise as powerful imagery brings new meaning to everyday things.

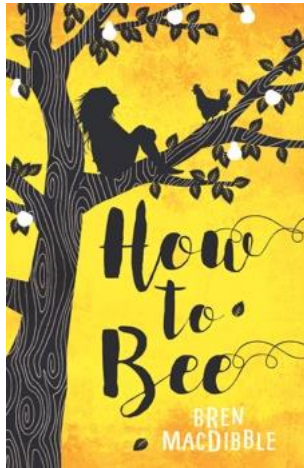
As Judges, there have been several disappointments. The whole book — look, feel, design and production — are important considerations, and regrettably a number of books were poorly proofed and edited. Typographical and other errors including knight/night; where/were; then/than; and changes in character gender should be avoided. Additionally, there appeared to be a trend of similar covers, using Disney-like characters, muted background colours, and the female protagonist front and centre. The intent behind this artifice can only be guessed at, particularly when juxtaposed against a predominantly female authorship and protagonist.

Only five of the Notable authors are male. Readers need to see more male narrative voices, and boys need better male role models. Boys like high adventure, rollicking humour and writing styles that are more direct. It seems a shame that not more are featured. Books for this age range could be defined by those qualities but, again, they need to be well written and literary, rather than simply madness, bums and farts. No one is better placed to create strong male characters than male authors.

The Younger Readers category is most at risk from books where depth has been sacrificed for mayhem and random events. It needs to be stressed that this is a literary competition and the books are judged against criteria that includes insightful reveals, quick captures of situations and images. These, of course, can be graphic novels or picture books which are a quality read with insightful reveals, quick economic capture of situations and images and deep commitment to a literary merit. Standout books appealed to girls and boys, with books such as Ursula Dubosarsky's *The Blue Cat* and Emily Rodda's *The Shop at Hoopers Bend* appealing to good readers, regardless of their gender.

The Short List reflects the age breadth of the Younger Readers category. Each of the books invites the reader to share the main characters' journey of big and little fears, gaining understanding and acceptance. The Short List continues to showcase wonderful Australian literary talent and encourage the next generations of book lovers.

## Winner



*HOW TO BEE*

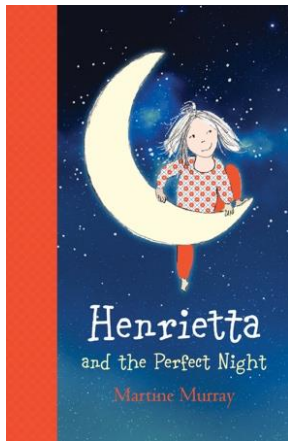
*Bren MacDibble*

*Allen & Unwin*

This is a powerful and multi-dimensional novel. Set in a dystopian future, Peony, the protagonist and narrator bursts into life with the here and now. It is courageous in its backdrop and the challenges which Peony overcomes; and inspirational. The author uses a combination of simple words and short phrases to make the action fast and close. She uses detail brilliantly, sharp, vivid, not overloaded, just enough to let the reader see the scenes, sense being there, and feel anxious about what will happen. There is also a pervading sense of optimism, despite the circumstances surrounding Peony. The language is vibrant and strong, and in sync with the characters, which are so well crafted, they leap off the page, evoking a myriad of emotions from the reader. There

are no superfluous characters, each has meaning and a place within their community. Such is the power of this narrative, writing and characters, and their relationships that it will resonate with the reader and provide a genesis for wide ranging discussion.

## Honour Books



*HENRIETTA AND THE PERFECT NIGHT*

*Martine Murray*

*Allen & Unwin*

Delightfully written and illustrated this is an impressive hard cover book. The red and orange patterned spine draws the prospective reader — both adult and child — and the ensuing little vignettes do not disappoint.

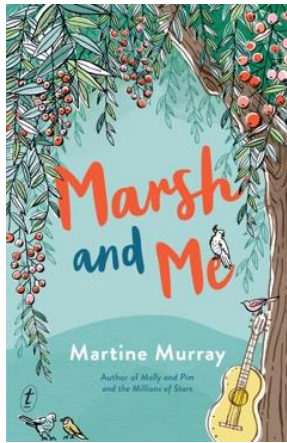
Henrietta leaps off the first page with her self-introduction in blue italics, *Hello, I'm Henrietta the Great Go-Getter*. This is the reader's first meeting with the tools that the author employs throughout the book. She has captured through language, illustrations and the clever use of colour, the myriad of emotions, observations and responses of a child to quite ordinary events. The excitement of a sleep over, but the fear that you will be served brussels sprouts; the school

play. Resonating themes, things that many can relate to.

Opportunities for gentle discussion permeate the vignettes. Be it about the seasons which Henrietta's father explains so she can understand patience while she waits for the baby to arrive; or so honestly facing her fears about her 1st day at school.

Her voice is so authentic and strong. Henrietta expresses her fears honestly, the insight of good manners and sometimes with humour — certainly there is humour for the adult reader. Her interactions with others provide depth and a wonderful platform for discussion and sharing of memories. Each chapter is a stand-alone story, making it readily accessible. The different coloured phrases and patterned outfits also act to contain each story.

Those who have not yet had the pleasure of meeting Henrietta will soon be in her thrall. She quickly develops a rapport with her audience, be it the early independent reader, or an adult sharing this wonderful book. Meeting Henrietta for the first time is a delight.



## *MARSH AND ME*

*Martine Murray*

*Text Publishing*

This is a glorious book. It's a work that feels as if it has been written from the heart of a talented author who works between the intellect of situations using words that bring insight and rapport immediately to the reader. Words in this work are so well chosen their relevance catches readers by surprise. The arrival of Marsh, a mysterious, complex character who gives little away of herself to Joey but, through clever writing construction, informs a great deal about herself to the reader. And so the journey begins and Joey is taken from feeling invaded in a space that he cherishes, to growing into his true strengths. His secret desires are realised in the way he nurtures and begins to seek to unravel the mystery of

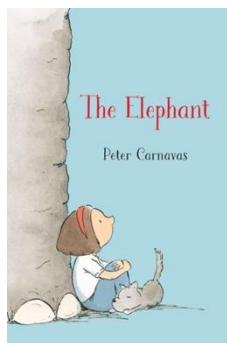
this strange girl.

There are beautiful lines that so aptly describe a feeling or idea. Marsh is such a great character and so well devised and created that she seems so odd when she is revealed as another. This revelation begins the story of her strange games and reveals the strength that she shows to overcome her loss. Here historical and cultural differences are encountered and the clever construct and development of the family plays well into supporting this part of the text. Even though the story is told by Joey, a boy, the construct of all family members, including young and old, male and female have been developed so this part of the story is well supported and is well portrayed.

The work is divided into chapters, each of which is named to support the younger reader who can make predictions about the following text. Black and white line work provide a frivolity and celebration at having completed one chapter and beginning another.

The storytelling is deepened as it is told through Joey's voice. Consequently, readers only know as much as he knows, and feel the frustrations and misery of not knowing along with him. The ending is well structured and brings the reader down to an earth where the possibility of creating and succeeding in your life's ambitions become so much more possible. Murray is a master of delivering wonderful writing when it means most.

## Other Shortlisted Books



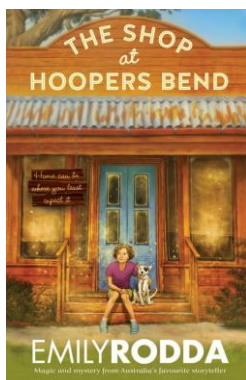
## *THE ELEPHANT*

*Peter Carnavas*

*UQP*

Olive's father has a sadness so big that she imagines it as an enormous elephant following him around. Every day Olive sees the elephant, and every day she wishes it would go. With the help of Granddad and her best friend, Arthur, Olive sets out to chase the elephant away. Sensitive, yet forthright, *The Elephant*, delicately unpacks a child's interpretation of grief and its legacy. The language is calm, poignant and underpinned by hope. The author uses powerful imagery and symbols — the omnipresence of the elephant, the slow tortoise; and supportive

Freddie juxtaposed against flashes of colour, light and movement — to develop each of the characters. There is triumph as the grey is coloured and danced away.



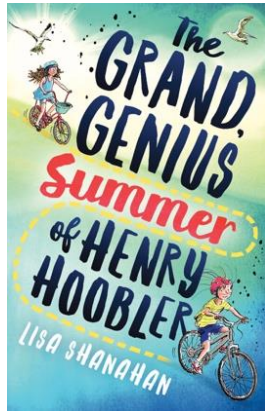
## *THE SHOP AT HOOPERS BEND*

*Emily Rodda*

*HarperCollins Publishers - Angus & Robertson*

Eleven-year-old Jonquil (known as Quil) Medway is a girl with more than an unusual name. Quil's parents died in a car accident when she was a baby and she now attends boarding school, but spends her holidays with an aunt — or at camp, which is where Quil is heading when she decides to get off early at a train station called Hoopers Bend. It is there that Quil meets Pirate, a chunky little white dog with black spots who immediately adopts her, and Bailey, a crabby older lady who has gone to Hoopers Bend to check out the shop that has been left to her by an uncle. There is something magical about the shop at Hoopers Bend though. It

casts its spell on Quil and Bailey and they are drawn together in an unlikely friendship and fight to save the shop from developers. A lovely stand-alone novel from Rodda about acceptance, tolerance, communication and people finding their place in the world, Quil is such a well-developed character, engaging, believable and complex. Her unique identification and classifications of people works well with the assumptions her Aunt and others make. Rodda's description of setting and place is palpable and detailed with excellent word choice and style.



### *THE GRAND GENIUS SUMMER OF HENRY HOOBLER*

*Lisa Shanahan*

*Allen & Unwin*

It struck Henry that perhaps he was waiting for the moment to be daring and brave, the exact right moment where he felt no worry at all, not one tiny flicker. But what if that moment never came? Henry is a reluctant adventurer worried about his summer holiday: camping at the beach, bugs, spiders, snakes, stingers, blue-ringed octopi and sharks. Worst of all, his family and friends are pushing him to ride his new silver bike without training wheels. When Henry meets Cassie, he discovers that courage is there to be found when you have a friend who is straight up and true. A well-written, gentle narrative that captures the very heart and soul of its main character, Henry Hoobler and his wonderful

family. It is a story that accurately portrays childhood fears and anxiety with grace and respect. Henry is delightful in his nature and his world view and will enter the hearts of each reader. The setting of a family camping holiday will be comfortably familiar to readers and the antics and adventures are easily relatable. Some delightful and emotional moments as Henry learns to live in his world.

## Early Childhood Judges' Report

For the 2018 Awards one hundred and two were entered in the Early Childhood category. Of these, forty-five were chosen as Notable. The judges were able to decide on quite a large Notable list because of the consistently high quality of books entered. There was a pleasing number of books with Aboriginal themes and traditional outback settings. It was interesting to note that there were two high quality books with deaf children as their central characters. Food was also a popular theme, often presented in an amusing context. Family and extended family, as usual, appeared in many books, including one title where non-identical twins played a major role.

As these books are written for the youngest children, their main purpose is to be read aloud. Quality entries showed a good use of rhythm, meter and some rhyming, as well as interesting and challenging vocabulary. Words need to be chosen for their rhythm and cadence when being read aloud as this is the primary way in which young children 'receive' the story. Since picture books are stories told in words and pictures, the illustrations are equally important, and must reflect and enhance the text. Illustrations can be bright and bold, or calm and composed, or active and amusing. In 2018 the entries showed a diversity of style and media.

Content needs to be appropriate to the age group of birth to six years and should engage the children emotionally and intellectually. The Judges were interested to note that many titles had punctuation in the title, generally either question mark: *Can You Find Me?*, *What's Up Top?*, *Why Can't I be a Dinosaur?*, *Is Bear Here?* — or an exclamation mark: *The Great Zoo Hullabaloo!* *Butterfly We're Expecting You!* *Stanley's Playing the Trumpet!* *You're One!* *Ponk!*, *Don't Wake the Dingo!*, *Hark It's Me Ruby Lee!*, *Rodney Loses it!* *Jump and Shout!*, *Great Goal!* *Marvellous Mark!* *Look Out, Pink Piglet!* *Busting!* *No Max!* *Ready, Steady, Hatch!*

Another popular theme was food. Titles include *1, 2 Pirate Stew*, *The Thank You Dish*, *Koalas Eat Gum Leaves*, *Our Last Trip to the Market*, *A Tangled Tale of Tagliatelle*, *A Fearsome Beast and a Dumpling Feast*, and *Enough Apples*. Titles with school as their theme were *Mrs White and the Red Desert*, *One Keen Koala*, *Hark it's me Ruby Lee!* *The Naughtiest Reindeer Takes a Bow*, and *Olivia's Voice*.

Themes of grit and determination and being an individual were evident in *Lucy's Book*, *Eric the Postie*, *The Second Sky*, *Koalas Eat Gum Leaves*, *Why Can't I Be a Dinosaur?*, *Hark It's Me Ruby Lee!*, *Clare's Goodbye*, *Once Upon a Small Rhinoceros*, *Sarah and the Steep Slope*, *Stanley's Playing the Trumpet*, *Tintinnabula*, and *I'm Australian Too*.

The popular theme of family and extended family was a feature of the following titles: *Me and You*, *Boy*, *I'm Australian Too*, *The Cat Wants Cuddles*, *The Thank you Dish*, *Our Last Trip to the Market*, *Nanna's Button Tin*, *Why Can't I Be the Dinosaur?*, *That Christmas Feeling*, *The Very Noisy Baby*, *Stitches and Stuffing*, *Road Trip*, *On the Way to Nana's*, *Clare's Goodbye*, *Wilbur*, *Grace and Jo*, and *The Perfect Thing*.

Titles exploring imaginative play included *Molly the Pirate*, *Why Can't I Be the Dinosaur?*, *The Lion in our Living Room*, *The Scared Book*, *Hark It's Me Ruby Lee!*, *1,2 Pirate Stew*, *The Magic in Dress-Ups*, and *Building Site Zoo*. The judges were pleased to note that once again there was a pleasing representation of books with an Aboriginal theme or design, namely *Shapes of Australia*, *The Rabbit-Hole Golf Course*, *On the Way to Nana's*, *Mrs White and the Red Desert*, *The Perfect Thing*, and *Big Fella Rain*.

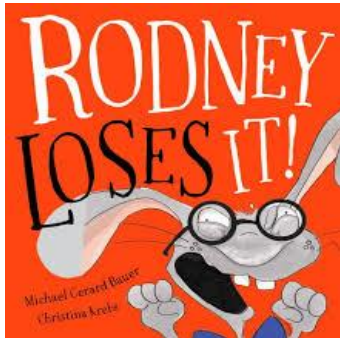
Interesting interpretations of the theme of journey was explored on two levels. Vehicular/physical journey titles included *On the Way to Nana's*, *Once upon a Small Rhinoceros*, *Tintinnabula*, *The Rabbit-Hole Golf Course*, *Papa Sky*, *The Very Sleepy Bear*, *The Great Zoo Hullabaloo!*, *Our Last Trip to the Market*, *I'm Australian Too*, *Little Dog and the Summer Holiday*, *Hark, It's Me, Ruby Lee!*, *Road Trip*, *Jump and Shout!* *Ready, Steady, Hatch!*, *Look Out, Pink Piglet!*, *Is Bear Here?*, and *The Naughtiest Reindeer Takes a Bow*. Life journey titles were *Sarah and the Steep Slope*, *Koala's Eat Gum Leaves*, *Stubborn Stanley*, *Eric the Postie*, *Boy*, *Two Rainbows*, *Clare's Goodbye*, *Wilbur*, *Grace and Joe*, *The Thank You Dish*, *Me and You*, *Stitches and Stuffing*, *Nanna's Button Tin* and *The Second Sky*.



The majority of entries were good quality hardback books, with high gsm paper, interesting endpapers that contributed to the story and professional illustrations of a high standard. The judges noted instances of high-quality construction and production of books, which was reflected in binding, endpapers, printing, font size, type-face and style. The importance of layout was seen as integral in contributing to the success of a book. The style chosen for the illustrations often influenced the emotional quality of the work, creating atmosphere and tension to move the plot forward.

A book is judged on its literary merit with full engagement of the reader in mind. The quality of writing was of a high standard and showed clear development of characterisation, plot and themes. The books on the Notable list in the Early Childhood category are diverse and each one stands on its merits. It is a rich list and each book is a tribute to the talents and work of their creative teams.

## Winner



### *RODNEY LOSES IT*

*Michael Gerard Bauer*

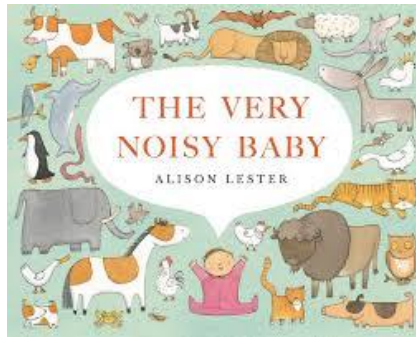
*Omnibus Books*

Rodney is a long-eared goofy kind of rabbit with glasses, a purple bow tie and a passion for drawing. As any child in the early childhood age range knows, losing your favourite pen when wanting to do a drawing is a drama of major proportions. After the crisis of losing his pen, Rodney then loses his cool. The story builds on this crisis in a hilarious sequence of possibilities, familiar to anyone who has lost something and spends more energy being cross about it than they do trying to find what they have lost. Children will delight in actually noticing that the pen is behind Rodney's ear all the time! Whilst the illustrator has drawn Rodney in a simple fashion, the crazy rabbit nevertheless has a full and engaging character, showing a range of expressions from despair, to anger, to ear-pulling frustration. There is a chaotic and vast amount of energy in each double page spread, with a mid-book disaster point when Rodney 'lost it'. Even if the play on words is not understood by the youngest children, it will be appreciated by the adults reading to them, making this a book that can be joyously returned to many times. To complement the words, the illustrations have some further jokes that will be enjoyed by young listeners — Rodney unintentionally knocking over a tea pot, Rodney swinging from a chandelier, Rodney upside down in a rubbish basket, Rodney even *kissing* his pen!

The text, which is large and well placed with plenty of clear space around it, is in rhyme, with a regular rhythm that makes the story a great read-aloud opportunity. As well as covering two important aspects of learning to read — being read to aloud and enjoying reading — the book offers an opportunity to discuss how to manage when things go wrong in your life. Does Rodney do things the right way, such as looking in sensible places, or does he do things that are not particularly helpful, such as pounding on the desk and shouting at the ceiling? This is a question that the upper end of the age group will be able to engage with, and which will develop their thinking and language skills, especially when they realise that Rodney's tantrum was entirely unnecessary, and he finds the missing pen on his desk. Children may even have some suggestions after the final page of the book when Rodney loses (or *thinks* he loses) his glasses, which are actually on top of his head.

Throughout the book there are pages and pages of colourful child-like drawings that Rodney has completed, and some of these are delightfully replicated on the final endpaper. The book is high quality, well produced and sure to be a hit with children for its zany and slightly naughty fun, and because learning self-regulation is a large part of their day every day.

## Honour Books



### *THE VERY NOISY BABY*

*Alison Lester*

*Affirm Press*

The plethora of animals on the front cover immediately sets the scene for what follows. Very young children can be encouraged to engage with identifying as many animals as they can. Although there are around 34 types of animals on the cover (allowing for multiple birds), it does not seem cluttered. The title stands out very clearly in its white speech bubble, created with Lester's trademark oval which

became a feature of the covers of *Clive Eats Alligators*, *Tessa Snaps Snakes* and others in that series. The inspiration for the story came from one of Alison Lester's grandchildren who was a very noisy baby.

There are effectively two structures built into the book — the opening scenes at the house where the animals are reported lost and later in the park when the animals re-appear. Both structures are centred round the noises made by the baby.

The repeated illustration format of the first section of the book includes the little pink house, the family member who answers the knock at the door and the character who is looking for a lost animal. As that page is turned we see a page that makes excellent use of white space to bring focus on to the baby and the sound she has just made. In each instance there is a visual clue that has prompted the baby to make that particular sound — for the tiger growl she is wearing a stripy sleep suit, for the neigh of the horse she is on a rocking horse, for the hoot she is playing with a toy stuffed owl, and so on. This shows the reader that there is no randomness to the sounds the baby is making and becomes another point of engagement for very young children.

The first double page spread brings all the key characters together. It shows them all heading to the park, following the sister who is carrying the baby. The illustration lines up perfectly along the central gutter, as does the second one near the end of the book, which is indicative of very careful design. The expressions on the people's faces are achieved very effectively with minimal line work and the delicate tones of the watercolour illustrations throughout suit the gentle themes of the story. There is movement and action in the illustrations, achieved quite artistically through the placement of hands and heads, as seen in the baby facing the viewer and waving as she rides her rocking horse, the sister pointing when she wants everyone to follow her out the door to the park. Also, on this double page there is interaction between the characters, again represented by hand gestures, foot positions and head placement. The sense of purpose is effectively portrayed, yet at this stage the reader has no idea what is about to happen.

At the park, the baby is placed on the ground and the second structure begins. The baby makes her noisy sound and the reader is invited to guess who would come creeping/galloping/swooping and so on into the scene. This encourages a more direct interaction with the text. Suspense is achieved by needing to turn the page to see which animal appears and gives time for the reader to have their guess. Again the illustrations make excellent use of white space to bring the baby and the simple text into focus.

The premise of this story will keep EC children engaged. Many of them may have a baby at home or younger cousins or neighbours and identify with the exploration of sounds at the beginning of the book and the later occurrence of 'The baby gurgled and the baby goood'. The story is told with well-flowing rhythm and rhyme. Alliteration occurs in the names of the characters 'Coco the keeper', 'Professor Tom Twitchy' and 'Frances the Farmer' and with a few simple well-chosen words readers know how each animal was lost (escaped from the zoo, strayed from his field, gone in the night).

The theme of repetition flows through the text as well as through the illustrations. The repeated 'Knock knock knock, he/she/they tapped at the door', 'the little pink house', 'We just have a very noisy baby', 'The baby gurgled and the baby goood' and 'guess who came creeping/galloping/swooping', all invite anticipation and participation from young children. The different characters of zoo keeper, farmer, pony club girls, professor, and so on, as well as the different members of the family on each page, indicate how well thought out this story is and how effectively it balances the themes of family and community.

The ending brings all the characters and animals visually back into focus and the text reminds readers of all the sounds that the baby has made throughout the story before the final reveal. The ending suits the story perfectly.



## *HARK IT'S ME, RUBY LEE!*

*Lisa Shanahan, illustrated by Binny*

*Lothian Children's Books*

The cheerful, colourful anime style image of Ruby Lee beaming out at the reader from the front cover with her stand out orange hair, in a school uniform, holding English, Maths, Spelling and French books, gives definite clues about a school setting. But what about the cute little birds, white crocodile, snake and clawed monster lurking in the lush jungle that frames the scene? How it invites readers to enter the book and explore further.

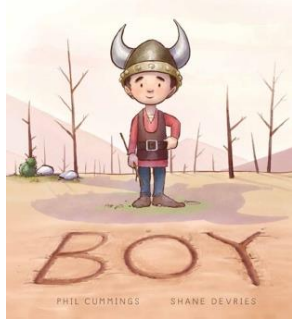
These cute pigeons on the endpapers find their way into the action further on in this imaginative story. Looking closely, readers can see that there are 2 ladybugs amongst the birds and looking even closer, will find that some pigeons are facing the opposite way to the others. This is subtly introducing the theme that is built on throughout the story, that it is okay to be different and original. This is where the reader gets to know Ruby Lee really well and about the things she likes to do. There's George Papadopoulos, her best friend who is genuine and supportive. A visual and literary feature of this book is introduced here — the fabulous sounding names of all the school characters. Mrs Majestic-Jones the teacher and Siena, Vienna and Adelaide-Kiev, the other students involved in the action. These names counter balance with the titles of the outrageous imaginary creatures that Ruby Lee invents — the Spockled Frocklewockle, the Squinkler and the Shlurgle. The language is rich, inventive and playful, so much so that it reinforces and extends the imaginary settings that Ruby Lee and George briefly become part of. The focus here is on the students and this is effectively portrayed in the illustration by the use of white space and the fact that the teacher is present only in a faint outline form. Ruby Lee stands out as the only student not waving her hand and as the only pupil with a completely full jar of pencils. Following George's suggestion to 'try being very quiet and very still', Ruby Lee is chosen to take a message to the office. George is chosen to go with her.

Having achieved her desire to be the messenger, Ruby Lee and George set off for the office. Using the same colour palette as the previous page, the world created is vastly different and contrasts perfectly to the calm of the classroom. The sandpit becomes a desert in Ruby Lee's imagination and it is inhabited by the gloriously named Spockled Frocklewockle seen lurking amid the black and grey cacti. The refrain 'Hark' says Ruby Lee, 'Fear not!' invites engagement from the audience. From here on the tension builds and the increasing frustration of Mrs Majestic-Jones is beautifully portrayed as successive dramas see the message muddled, lost and eventually George gets temporarily lost. The classroom scenes are full of items that readers will easily identify and relate to, such as the detris of bag area, interesting wall posters, shelves of classroom items all neatly stacked, labelled and sorted. These scenes neatly juxtapose Ruby Lee's imaginary places where the stairs become wintry mountains and the play equipment (jungle gym) becomes a lush, productive jungle.

Now the tension ramps up more, with 'Then one afternoon, a pigeon flies into the classroom. Siena squeals and squeals'. Finally Ruby Lee gets another chance to save the day and impress the teacher and the class. This is where the story relates directly back to the endpapers as the pigeon flies randomly around the classroom creating havoc — 'the pigeon swoops and loops (and even poops!)'. Ruby Lee faces yet another challenge and this time she triumphs. This book is a lovely exploration of friendship, persistence and a heroine who doubts herself but doesn't give up, all delivered with humorous, carefully designed quirky illustrations and inventive text that reads well aloud and is sure to appeal to this age group.



## Other Shortlisted Books



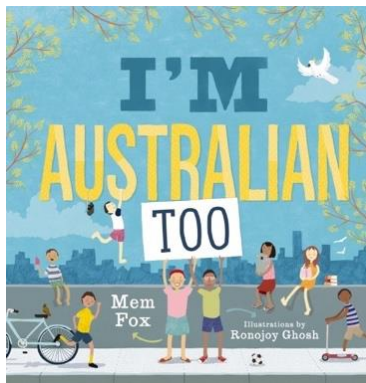
### *BOY*

*Phil Cummings, Illustrated by Shane DeVries*

*Scholastic Australia - Scholastic Press*

The king's battles with the dragon were always mighty and loud — CLING CLANG CLONG! ROAR! Boy lived in a silent world and couldn't hear the fighting. Boy could see the fear around him and how everyone could be much happier.

*Boy* is a beautiful, deceptively simple story about understanding each other, communicating properly and living in harmony. Its powerful message comes across through the story of a young deaf boy who brings peace to his village by showing the adults a way other than violence of resolving conflict. From the tactile front cover though to the last endpaper, the mauve/brown/blue toned digital illustrations complement and enhance the skilfully crafted text. This thought provoking story will promote a lot of discussion.



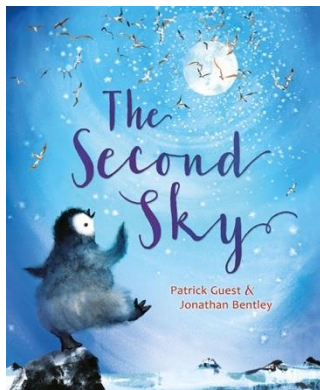
### *I'M AUSTRALIAN TOO*

*Mem Fox, Illustrated by Ronojoy Ghosh*

*Omnibus Books - Scholastic Australia*

*I'm Australian! How about you? Many people from many places have come across the seas, to make Australia their home. How Australian is that?* From countries near and far, many have made their home in Australia, sharing it with the original inhabitants, and living in peace beneath the Southern Star. The energy in this book is palpable. It's a colourful, thoughtful, positive 'Welcome to Australia'. Clearly aimed at younger readers, it is a simplified history of immigration to Australia with a wonderful message of belonging and the chance to prosper and to be

safe. The text has rhythm and repetition that will engage and delight readers. There is a variety and richness in the illustrations to suit the country that is referred to. Each double page of illustrations will invite exploration and discussion. A fabulous book to read aloud.



### *THE SECOND SKY*

*Patrick Guest, Illustrated by Jonathan Bentley*

*Little Hare - Hardie Grant Egmont*

The first thing Gilbert sees when he hatches from his egg is the sky. It is love at first sight and from that moment on Gilbert longs to fly like other birds. But penguins don't fly, they waddle. So begins Gilbert's quest to find his place in the world. Great things happen when you reach for the sky. Gilbert the penguin is an unforgettable character, infused with relatability, wisdom and humour. He shows the power of persistence in a delightfully whimsical way. The text is laugh out loud in places while still delivering a powerful message. The illustrator has used line and colour to create a wonderful sense of

movement, especially in the underwater images. The character illustrations are animated and full of expression.

## Picture Books Judges' Report

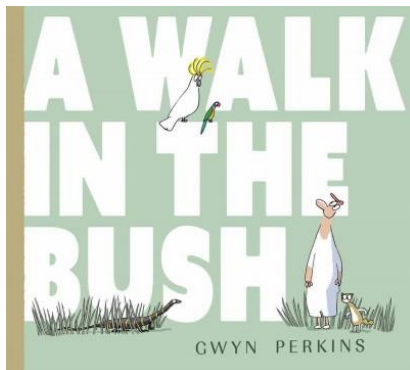
The task of narrowing our Notable list of forty-eight highly original and diverse picture books to a Short List of six titles was gruelling, with each of us saddened to see a personal favourite falling off the list. As judges, we collectively acknowledged that this year, with a stellar list of potential winners, we struggled with our final eight or nine titles to reduce the list to six. The discussion was robust, the passion evident, as we critiqued each picture book from various perspectives. We found ourselves challenged to consider the shifting parameters in how language and image are being used by authors and illustrators to reimagine and reconstruct contemporary picture books, who our readership is, and how books are being consumed.

This year's list offers a range of stunning illustrative and writing styles demonstrating strong relationships between text and image, a broad appeal for readers and an openness to interpretation that should invite discussion and reflection. The quality of the Short List demonstrates the ability of these books to invite multiple reads.

The broad variety of mediums; traditional watercolour, print media, digital and hand-rendering and those spaces in between, demonstrate a breadth of creative practice in Australian illustration today.

Of those just missing final selection, *Swan Lake*, *Gus Dog Goes To Work*, *Ruben* and *What's Up Top?*, we acknowledge their importance. *Swan Lake* for its evocative sumptuousness and superb textural images, *Gus Dog Goes To Work*, for its quintessentially Australian flavour and the outstanding humorous illustrations by Craig Smith we simply couldn't get enough of, *Ruben*, for Bruce Whatley's masterfully executed and brilliant drawings and intriguing narrative, and *What's Up Top?*, for its universal appeal, its ability to position the reader to question and wonder and for Marc Martin's stunning hand rendered and coloured images.

### Winner



*A WALK IN THE BUSH*

Gwyn Perkins

Affirm Press

This quirky and original story of a magical journey through the bush is a delight. Granddad is dragging a reluctant child, Iggy, on a walk in the bush, introducing him to a glorious array of wildlife, from birds and goannas to wallabies. The subtle humour typical of an enthusiastic adult sharing time with one who is less enthusiastic is glorious as is the inclusion of some interesting lessons in how to crush eucalyptus leaves for their rich scent, identifying the creatures who make the scribbles on gum trees and how trees sprout new growth after a fire,

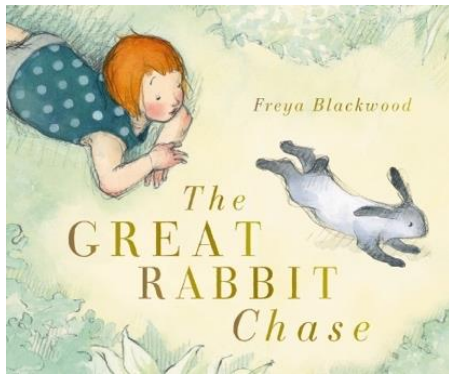
referencing, without preaching, an important environmental message, of noticing the world around you. The reader always feels a part of this journey as Granddad shares his enthusiasm, while Iggy, a cat, looks imploringly but silently at us for deliverance. Iggy is reluctantly educated on the importance of the environment, the birds and the sensory experiences felt through gullies, escarpments and bush tracks. The bush teems with life that the observant reader's eye catches as the birds and animals busily observe Granddad and Iggy.

The soft treatment of colour and the rich detail of the illustrations enhances the text and the sub-message beautifully and readers are privy to a range of emotions in all the characters despite the simplicity of the images. Note the interplay between the crow and Iggy.

This is a text that subtly demonstrates the different nature cultures of the domestic garden and the bush and valuing experiences in the natural environment. *A Walk in the Bush* will have the reader wondering, making connections and leaves readers thinking about how integral the 'bush' is to our Australian identity.

This is a joyous story, beautifully produced and a treat for young and older readers alike.

## Honour Books



### *THE GREAT RABBIT CHASE*

*Freya Blackwood*

*Scholastic Australia*

*The Great Rabbit Chase* is another exquisitely simple and beautifully executed book, and the second for Freya Blackwood as both author and illustrator.

Best known for her gentle, life-filled watercolour illustrations, Blackwood shows that her creative talents extend to writing with a similar touch of gentle whimsy. She wrote how she enjoyed the freedom and ownership that came with both writing and

illustrating this book and of her strong connections with the characters she alone created.

The story was inspired by her own community of Orange in NSW and how integral to her life the people have become; in raising her daughter Ivy and assisting with the ongoing issue of her own rabbit escaping, the hilarious attempts to catch it and the people around her who Blackwood turns to for help. The idea about slowing down and enjoying the people and places in our lives was further inspiration.

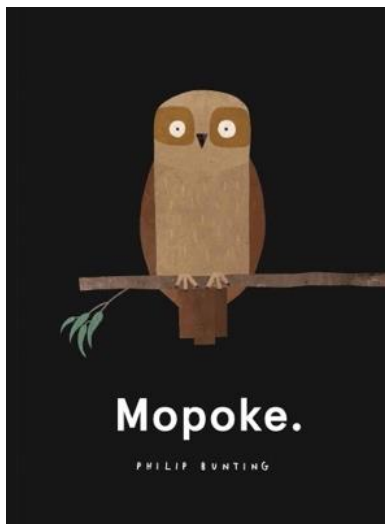
There is a hint of Bob Graham and Andrew McLean about this book; with its gentle, appealing and familiar characters and its focus on the small but important everyday moments.

The softly muted cover and wonderful endpapers, that double as a directional board game to re-enact the 'The Great Rabbit Chase', gives this book immediate reader-appeal.

The story is gentle and deceptively simple, conveying a warmth and delight, told through the eyes of a young girl trying to catch her mischievous rabbit, Gumboots, who has escaped out the front door.

With this highly relatable issue of a missing pet, Blackwood has created a layered tale that will resonate with young children who have also suffered at the hands of a wily pet. In the race to catch the rabbit, the reader is introduced to a delightful set of diverse characters who gather along the way: John, the lonely zebra-crossing man who enjoys an afternoon chat, a busy man in a suit who takes a moment to wade barefoot in the creek, Mrs Finkel, who finds her 'crinkles unwrinkle' when her baby finally nods off for a nap, and, with glorious but subtle humour, Mum, who races around town fresh out of the shower and still wrapped in a towel.

This is a beautiful story celebrating what it means to live in a community and a reminder that life is full of surprises.



### *MOPOKE*

*Philip Bunting*

*Omnibus Books*

*This is a Mopoke.*

From a humble opening line readers are taken on an unpredictable journey through the night time to discover many variants of these quiet owls who live across Australia and nearby countries.

The images and text simultaneously reflect the behavioural intensity of a Southern Boobook, commonly known as a Mopoke. Text interrupts the peace and quiet of the evening sky with a perfect rhythm that matches that of a calling Southern Boobook owl. Standing patiently out on a limb, Bunting plays on words and riffs on popular culture to explore how language can be interpreted, misinterpreted and played with to entertain. Connections can be made in multiple ways as the text challenges the reader to locate the reference points.

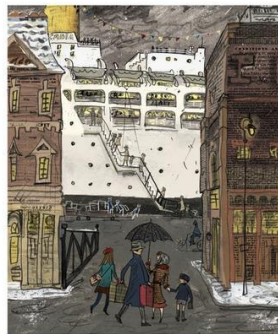
Subtle additions and characters amplify each meaning convincingly, whilst the even pace and seeming predictability of the text are cleverly interrupted in a crafted but playful way.

This is a book that will appeal to every age and is entertaining on multiple reads.

Children, parents and teachers will delight in the bold, striking illustrations that echo aspects of current graphic movements in design and art and the expressive nature of the 'Mopoke' in different locations. Featuring a bird who is often heard and seldom seen, this book plays perfectly to the imagination of the reader who can finally know what really occurs in the tree-tops.

The contrasting black and white pages reflect the two tone call of the species and are activated with bursts of soft colour and surprises making this an outstanding book for 2018.

## Other Shortlisted Titles



### *TEN POUND POM*

*Liz Anelli, Text by Carole Wilkinson*

*Walker Books*

This is a highly successful production, communicating an important narrative in the story of Australia and showcasing the written and illustrated artistry of two accomplished book creators. It is an excellent example of great synergy between image and text.

The 1962 story of the journey of the author's family as migrants will connect to the experiences of many others who have made their way from all over the world to start a new life in Australia.

The attention to detail, reflecting the events and observations, through the observant eye of Wilkinson and Anelli have created an excellent synergy in

the space between image and text, enabling the reader to reflect and make personal connections along the way. The authenticity of the text relates to Wilkinson's own journey and it is this convincing believability and a relatable writing style that will engage readers.

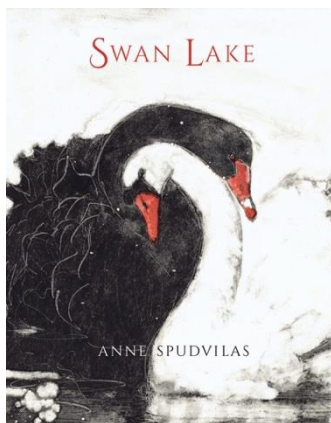
The emotive and sensory details of the travels and discoveries are amplified with Anelli's rich illustrations that use energetic line work and saturated colour to evoke feeling and the fragility of life.

The emotions of leaving, the excitement of new places and sights and the very journey itself communicate a child's view of being in the present and every aspect of the experience is treated equally. It is this approach that forms an egalitarian picture of life, people, nature and experiences.

The scope of the illustrations and the shifting perspectives enable readers to share both a bird's eye view and the intimate thoughts of the protagonist. The reader at once can experience the churning coast line matching a feeling of fear and change, a close-range scene of colour and energy and a detailed diagram mapping the current location in their cabin.

The changing moods and colours reflect the changing experiences and locations and is an engaging and rich story of a snapshot of time, but is one that can be connected to the present time and journeys of migrants.

With the final pages outlining valuable information on the Ten Pound Pom migration scheme, this book reflects how an author and illustrator can work effortlessly together to make a memorable story and a valuable contribution to Australian Picture Books.



### *SWAN LAKE*

*Anne Spudvilas*

*Allen & Unwin*

With this book, Anne Spudvilas has presented a visually stunning retelling of the classic and much-loved ballet, inspired by the madrigal 'The Silver Swan' from 1612. The three-act, tragic love story of a princess transformed into a swan by an evil sorcerer, is told on just three pages of the book, allowing the story to unfold visually through the wonderfully evocative and haunting charcoal drawings and printed images. The graphic tonal quality echoes the dualism of light and dark evident in this dramatic tale.

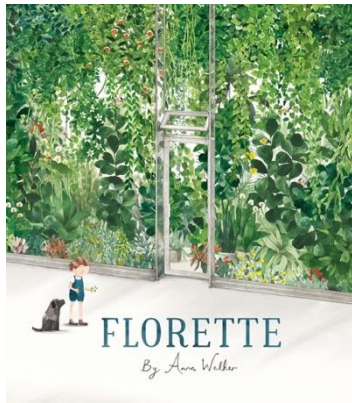
From the brooding endpapers to the subtle splash of colour in an otherwise dark and haunting series of double page spreads, she has created a

mesmerizing account that draws the reader in and will no doubt bring a whole new generation of admirers along with it. The production quality is high, from the cover and binding to the luxuriousness of the double page spreads, all effectively communicating the dramatic story of love and loss.

The pared down text is presented prior to each Act of the ballet and gives just enough information to set the scene and invite wondering before entering the enchanted world depicted on the following pages.



This is a moving and emotional book and readers will be swept away in the tragic love story of the prince and the Swan Queen. Spudvilas' attention to the graphic mark is poetic and carries an intense energy that reflects the rhythm of the ballet yet takes place in the very Australian context of the Murray-Darling basin.



## *FLORETTE*

*Anna Walker*

*Penguin Random House Australia*

This is a stunning produced picture book. Its success lies in the combination of deceptively simple watercolour illustrations and an economy of words to explore a powerful message; that of a small child's quiet determination and resilience in adapting to change, the transience of contemporary living and a universal need to belong.

The idea for *Florette* came to Walker on a trip with her family to Paris. On the way to the Louvre, she came across a florist's window full of plants.

This image remained in her mind and became the seed for this book.

From the first page, readers are drawn into the young character's emotional landscape through the beautifully evocative art work, her deep sense of separation and disconnection from her familiar life and the natural world, as the family move from the country to the city.

Mae struggles to recreate the natural beauty she has enjoyed in this new, but very grey city environment. Readers share her struggles and disappointments as the impromptu trees and flowers created among the package boxes are ceremoniously removed as her new home is 'unpacked'.

It's only when Mae, with her faithful sidekick, realises she needs to let go of her old life and venture further afield to find something new, that this inspiring and creative young character discovers a world of possibilities. Following an 'apple-tree' bird, Mae discovers a magnificent florist's window, dense with lush, verdant foliage. The illustration for this is visually startling, having become used, on previous pages, to the muted tones of the cityscape. A small tendril of a plant is rescued from nearby to begin a new garden, one that grows and, little by little, draws in new friends and new beginnings.

Walker's stunningly beautiful, softly muted full-page watercolour illustrations, with smaller vignettes on white backgrounds, capture the charm of the city, the children who inhabit this new space and the 'greening' of Mae's world. Colour is used cleverly to suggest this emotional awakening and new beginning.

The story references, without preaching, the impact the environment can have on our lives and our emotional well-being. The beautiful images illustrate convincingly how limited this relationship with nature has become and the effect this has, either consciously or unconsciously, on us. *Florette* is a beautiful celebration of the power of nature, and the creative possibilities of a small child. It will, no doubt, encourage lots of conversation in young readers about change, persistence and finding solutions to problems and will provoke many meaningful artistic and written responses to its reading.

## Eve Pownall Judges' Report

There were fifty books considered for this year's Eve Pownall Award. While this was slightly fewer than the entries considered in 2017, the judges felt that overall the standard of the books selected at each stage of the judging process were commendable to excellent against the judging criteria. Of those fifty books, five were considered ineligible as they were not specifically written for an under eighteen-year readership and four books were moved to other categories, for more favourable consideration against their criteria.

The quality of the books made the judging of this category a deeply reflective and challenging process due to the wide range of topics, themes and approaches used by the publishers, who have produced books that present facts coupled with illustrations, which are bold and often interactive. The ways that our readers take in information are also reflected in how it is placed within the text. This year there were more entries where the facts were placed clearly on the page with the narrative rather than at the end of the book, where it sometimes seems to be an afterthought. The hybridization of imaginary storytelling with factual end notes also calls into question the prime intention of the book. In *Tears in the Jungle: Fight for Survival* the use of QR codes takes the reader to further information about the plight and fight for the survival of the Orangutan.

Traditionally, the Eve Pownall category fields the smallest number of entries out of the five categories in the CBCA Book of the Year Awards. To select a Short List from the eighteen outstanding Notable books, the judges had to closely examine the criteria for this award against each book. These criteria were: the writing style, structure and storytelling skills are consistent; the integration of text and illustrations through style and positioning; the graphic style, clarity, aesthetic appeal and suitability of the illustrations; the correct use of writing conventions; the accuracy of content and references; and the overall design of the book.

The topics this year included Australian history, the environment, animal conservation, flora and fauna, art, geography, geology, biology, the unrecognised heroes of aviation, microbiology, architecture, psychology, self-help and mental health. Books for very young readers made a welcome appearance, as did publications of scientific concepts and ideas.

The judges were pleased to see that publishers are still searching for inventive ways to present factual material in an entertaining manner for a readership under 18 years of age. Amongst those that excelled in the documentation of factual material, coupled with imaginative presentation and interpretation, is *Do Not Lick This Book*, which used electron microscope images with simple text and dialogue spoken by the graphic microbes; and *The Big Book of Antarctica*, which used stunning close-up photography to create an impressive immediacy and intimacy. The alphabet format was again a popular device used in *M is for Mutiny* and *A is for Australian Animals*.

The parallel text technique of factual narrative and exposition featured in *Koala* and the alternate writing styles embedded in illustration created an overall strong impact on the reader. *Exploring Soils* used a narrative style combined with some of the more traditional features of a reference book. The mixtures of narrative and science magazine styles were evident in *Animal Eco-Warriors*. The *Baby Animal Book* used captions, while *Robyn Boid: Architect* took readers on the journey of a bird through architectural landscapes as Robyn seeks a perfect form for a functional nest.

Australia's cultural centres are value-adding to visitors' experiences with the publication of books complementing their exhibitions. *My Contemporary Art Book* and *Van Gogh and the Seasons*, by the National Gallery of Victoria, are superb in their production and presentation of art history for young readers. *Comradeship: Stories of Friendship* and *Decision: Stories of Leadership in the Services* continues the Australian War Memorial's publication of the highly valued series Century of Service.

Simple science concepts were explored for younger readers in several entries. In *Left & Right*, a familiar concept is explored in an historical, social and cultural context. On the other hand, *Do Not Lick This Book* took the rather complex issue of microbiology and reduced it to a humorous book for all ages. Scientific

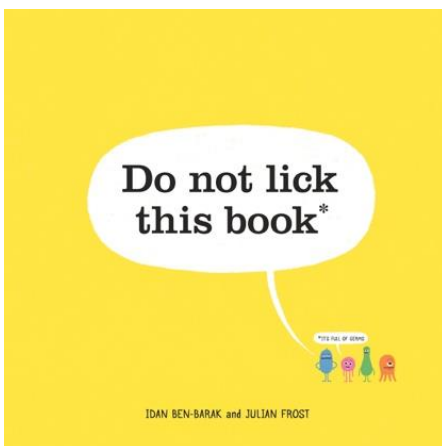
facts are also to the fore in *Animal Eco-Warriors* with each chapter filled with scientific facts to engage readers through animal stories where humans and animals work together to save species and the environment.

The books *Tears in the Jungle: Fight for Survival* and *Amazing Australians in their Flying Machines* were books driven by the passion of their authors rather than the publishers' feel of the general public's pulse. *The Story of Australia* demonstrated extraordinary persistence and patience in detailed research. This year the judges saw some other entries as being driven by media bites rather than social discourse.

There were challenges faced by the judges that they would like noted by publishers. The judges can only analyse what they receive and while there are many excellent books in the marketplace, a very small percentage find their way into judges' hands. The bulk of the entries arrived in October and five publishers dominated the category with their entries. While the quality of the judging is unaffected by the date of book arrivals, an early entry allows judges to revisit books regularly and consider their attributes for a longer period of time.

The Eve Pownall category is often seen as the non-fiction category of these Awards. This is not entirely true and the judges feel that this point should be clarified. The definitive criterion is '*prime intention of documenting factual material*'; that is, employing factual writing types and validated by reliable research. A lot of non-fiction does not set out to do this, yet it is still not fiction. Opinion, beliefs, personal advice, activity and puzzle books, course work — these are just some of the writing types that may not qualify as factual and books of these kinds are generally not eligible for this category. The judges hope that, to avoid disappointment, publishers take account of this distinction when entering books for the Eve Pownall Award in the future.

## Winner



### *DO NOT LICK THIS BOOK*

*Idan Ben-Barak, Illustrated by Julian Frost*

*Allen & Unwin*

Who would have thought that the word *charming* could be used to describe a book about the agents of decay, decomposition and disease? Who would have thought that this theme could be made so accessible to an early childhood readership without resorting to the east pathway of scatology or *yucky-ness*. Well, this book does both: *Do not lick this book* is a gem of a book that shows a little touch of genius, with highly credentialled Science writer, Dr Idan Ben-Barak; illustrator Julian Frost, creator of YouTube clip sensation *Dumb ways to die*, with over 164 million hits; and electron micrography specialist Linnea Rundgren, whose working

philosophy is: *Words are only half the story; images bring the Science to life*.

The charm offensive begins at the title, prominent in a white speech bubble on a bright yellow cover, not at all modestly attracting attention. It's in the style of the contradictory invitation title popular with celebrity-authors these days; but it is closer in intention to the incongruent titles of Beck and Matt Stanton or B J Novak, or the interactive ones of Herve Tullet. These are serious and the creators of this book seriously do not want the reader to lick it! There's a hint in the vignette of characters in the bottom right-hand corner, which is just enough to stimulate initial curiosity. This accrues with a turn to the front endpapers. What could these green noodly things be and where do they fit in? From this very early stage, the reader is hooked. The urge to continue is compulsive.

Readers are drawn into the text early with an introduction to Min, featured microbe of the story, by an unknown narrator. Then, in a moment of metafictional magic, readers become even more involved when the narrator invites them to help develop the plot, by picking Min up with a touch to the page, and moving her from location to location.

Finally, when readers enter these locations, they are met with the closest involvement of all — scanning electron micrographs which will no doubt amaze them, as this young readership probably hasn't seen

many images like these before. Other types of microbes are met here and those green noodly things reappear in all of this, together with a brief explanation of what they are.

There are shades of fiction to some of these devices — talking microbes, cartooned figures, and gendered germs — but this is just literary licence for another purpose: to teach youngsters about personal hygiene. Min's dialogue and the narrator's expository delivery are always factual; even the ironic banter between the microbes in situ, is there to reinforce facts. If other methods haven't worked, this ingenious book could be used to charm children into keeping themselves clean.

## Honour Books



*LEFT & RIGHT*

Lorna Hendry

Wild Dog Books

This is the same team that produced *The Gigantic Book of Genes*, an Honour Book in the Eve Pownall category in the 2017 Book of the Year Awards. With these books the publishers are certainly meeting their expressed aim of 'delivering accurate and interesting information that is pitched perfectly for the target reading age' (quoted from their website).

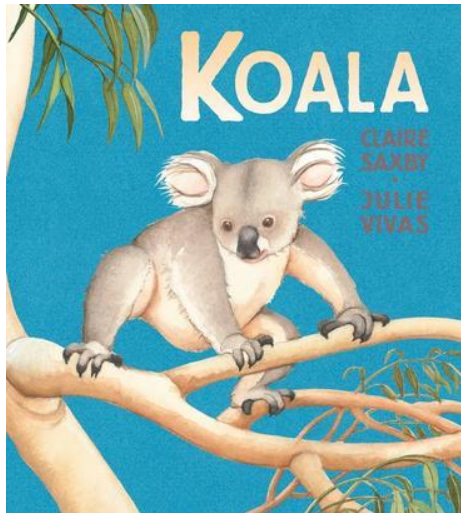
One of the more interesting features of *Left & Right* is the surprise turn that the development of the topic takes around

page 15 of the book. To that point the reader is taken through personal psycho-physical aspects of the topic, including eye and ear preferences, enlivened by clear and colourful graphics and photographs. Then, the text takes, well, a left turn into history, via Ancient Greek and China, into metaphysical aspects of left and right; the sinister side of the sinistral. Young readers may be surprised that left-handedness was once almost a death sentence; they will surely be surprised that, until fairly recently, it could mean a rap over the knuckles — left knuckles — in school.

A second outstanding feature of this book is the use of graphics and photography. The attributions reveal that none of these were created specifically for the book; they were taken from Shutterstock sources. Imagine the patience it must have taken to select images so perfect for the text. It's easy to sense, though, the determination to make this an exciting reading and learning experience for the young. The colours of the graphics pop as they explain the statistical place of the reader in this dualistic world. The striking photography ranges in subject from a chilling reaction to sinistrophobia; to the happy playfulness of a kitten chasing a goldfish; and the dramatic standoff between a knight and a castle. Each in its own way represents how left-right sidedness pervades our daily world.

The larger size lettering in a clean font makes the text easy to read. This readability extends the readership of the book beyond middle to late primary years, as the bigger print could be shared with groups of early readers; and its fluency will encourage older readers to indulge their curiosity. And while the content is developed in unexpected directions, it retains continuity, in fact, looping back through symmetry and stereo senses, to brain studies which are helping to explain the left-right phenomenon. Leaving the human world, the text refers to a number of observations from the animal world and finally, after gathering spirals and spinning into this left-right dynamic leaves the reader pondering whether the Earth provided us with a naturally better way to define direction. Bouquets go to the creators of this outstandingly original book.





## KOALA

Claire Saxby, Illustrated by Julie Vivas

Walker Books

Everything about this book is designed to make readers wonder and enquire. The inside sleeve has a solitary cluster of eucalyptus leaves that draw readers to want to grab them, and then at the end of the book they are there again, but reluctantly readers won't want to let them go.

From the first page, looking up to see the Koalas high in the eucalyptus trees, sleeping peacefully, well out of reach of the hustle and bustle of life on the ground, to the end of the book, when time has been spent up close during their trials and tribulations away from their lofty security, readers are hooked and genuinely wishing the very best for our marsupial friends.

'Koala' is a collaboration between celebrated author, Claire Saxby

and beloved illustrator, Julie Vivas. Between them, these creators have a slew of CBCA notable and short-list nominations.

Claire is the author of the four books in the Nature Storybook series:

*Big Red Kangaroo* (a 2013 CBCA Notable), *Emu* (a 2014 Eve Pownall shortlisted book) and

*Dingo* (released in April 2018). Vivas is well recognised for her collaborations with authors, such as Mem Fox in *Possum Magic*, and her own Picture Book productions over the past 28 years.

When readers think about young native animals, it is too easy to picture them having a safe and happy life; to trivialise the events, both natural and man-made, that challenge their existence.

Claire Saxby has cleverly set out her text in both poetic prose, to draw readers into the drama of the joey's journey, and factual content on each page, to explain the context of the prose.

This is a factual book with a story to personalise and engage the reader. What a lovely way to introduce a young audience to a factual account; a non-information book with a story.

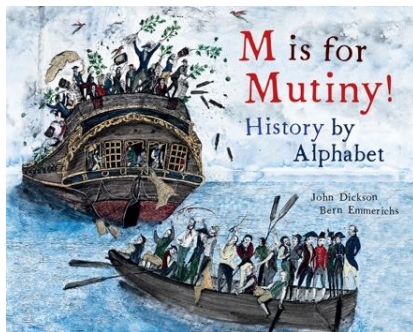
'Koala' is a book that aims the information artfully at its target audience, the young reader. The story is in a large font that enables the reader to connect with the picture and then the factual content is in a different font, creating a choice in how to read the book. Each page can be read as prose and facts together, or the prose all the way through, then the factual information separately. Either preference will initiate many conversations about how the eating and living habits of the koala influence its reactions to the threats to its survival.

The prose makes readers feel as though they are there, clinging onto the swaying branch, struck by stinging drops of rain, huddling down to minimise exposing themselves to the wind.

A simple index is provided to introduce young readers to the features of a non-fiction book on a page where the illustration puts the koalas into the background, as they prepare to leave this jewel of a book.

A child who reads 'Koala', or enjoys it with an adult reading to them, will come away feeling they understand what the joey and koala's day looks like and how it involves much more than dozing in a tree and eating gum leaves.

## Other Shortlisted Books



### M IS FOR MUTINY! HISTORY BY ALPHABET

John Dickson, Illustrations by Bern Emmerichs

Berbay Publishing

This is an intelligent and sophisticated look at the people, places and concepts found in Australian history. Unlike other history or geography alphabets on the market, this book takes its reader further than mere places and times. It spreads its magic into commentary, extending its audience.

What a stroke of genius to begin the book with A is for

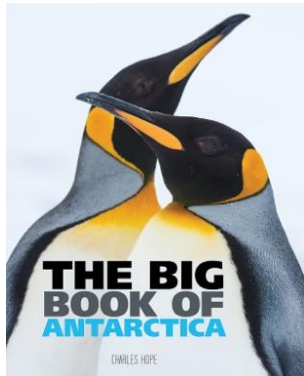
Acknowledgement to Country and how respectful for the author to add his own acknowledgement of country on the very first page. There are the usual suspects such as C for Cook, as in Captain, E for Endeavour and K for Kangaroo but the readers are also treated to such complex issues as I for Island

introducing the idea of Terra Australis IN-COG-NITA or T for Terra NULL-IUS – the land belonging to no one or N for Nurture which explores Caroline Chisholm's fight to help female convicts.

The book can be looked at as an introduction to Australia's past and how it will affect its future, but each letter can be used as a discussion point whether in the classroom or around the dining-room table.

The artwork by Bern Emmerichs is again superb. Bern created large hand painted porcelain tiles which were then photographed for the illustrations. Some of them have been overlaid with the text from the author. The overall effect is mesmerising. Captain Cook is spectre like, a Dickens character perhaps, with the shadow of a shark behind him. What are those gold chains he wears and why does the flag drip with blood? So many references for discussion. Also, on the endpapers, Bern has given such detail to each figure portrayed. She seems to have created a personality and story for each one.

This is a thought-provoking book, confronting and a work of art.



### *THE BIG BOOK OF ANTARCTICA*

*Charles Hope*

*Wild Dog Books*

Charles Hope, an author with an impressive catalogue of books about animals and habitats, has compiled a book of magnificent photographs and facts about our southern neighbour, Antarctica.

While the book has an extensive glossary and index, it is the stunning photographs that draw in the viewer, from the intricacies of a penguin's coat, to the warts and all appearance of the male elephant's nose, mid yawn.

This book has high production values. The distinctiveness, close range and clarity of the photography is unusually exquisite. There is a plethora of

photographs about Antarctica used to educate, inform and entice a viewer to enquire deeper into the subject matter. It offers photographic material ranging from the historical to the modern. One photograph in particular strikes a chord with its vivid composition. The factual page on the Crabeater Seal (page 36) captivates and holds the reader's attention.

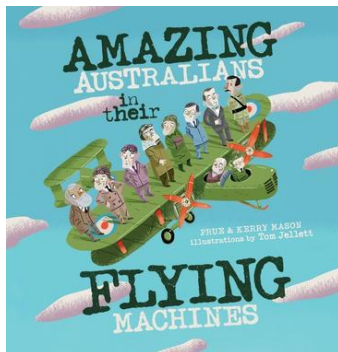
From the flat icy foreground to the rising snow cliffs and rocky mountain in the distance, one's eye is drawn to the forlorn looking seal lying on its belly, alone in this icy wasteland.

The book notes the different habitats in Antarctica; ranging from desert to sea ice. But this book doesn't just give a nod to landscapes, flora and fauna on the planet's southernmost continent, it also provides information about the explorers who made their 'mark', discovering the vast reaches of Antarctica, often at their own peril.

The darker aspects of human activity, in this stunning landscape, is evidenced by the facts provided on the whaling industry and global warming. Although, it's pleasing to know that after the Port Lockroy base was abandoned after World War II, a population of Gentoo penguins made it their home.

Perhaps the positive aspects of tourism and scientific research will help to protect the vulnerability of the place that is home to 90% of the world's ice, over 14 million square kms.

There are so many themes and talking points about Antarctica; its changing shape and size, the notion of adaptation to an environment, and the interactivity of ecosystems. The messages conveyed by this excellent book range far and wide.



### *AMAZING AUSTRALIANS IN THEIR FLYING MACHINES*

*Prue & Kerry Mason, Illustrations by Tom Jellett*

*Walker Books*

At the time of writing, QANTAS had just taken its first nonstop flight between Perth and London. It took just 17 hours. What a perfect time to be reading the *Amazing Australians in their Flying Machines*. Perth is considered to be the most isolated city in the world but when Australia was first colonised, 'back 'ome' in England would have seemed light years away. It was then, it took around 3 months of sailing rough and dangerous seas.

This book provides the reader with an overview of Australia's pioneers of

aviation. It begins with Dr William Bland who arrived in Australia as a convict in 1814. He went on to become Australia's first doctor. But he was also an inventor and he patented his idea for an Atmotic Ship that he believed would cut the journey between Australia and England to four or five days.

The book uses such clever ideas to grab the readers' attention. Each aviator's life is divided into four panels, each with a different look and font. The first panel is an introduction to the aviator given in first person, their aircraft is pictured — even if it is just a man trying to fly with the use of feathers — and the opposite page gives an overview of the aviator's life and death.

Nothing is too overwhelming for the young readership. The *Did You Know* sections provide fascinating scientific and historical tidbits and the *Amazing Facts* add interesting trivia. The book is perfect for a good read on the history of aviation or just something to dip into.

The illustrations are clever and humorous. Tom Jellet lightens the mood of history and this, combined with archival photographs, really bring the book to life.

The authors, husband and wife team Prue and Kerry Mason, are pilots themselves and their passion for flight is evident in their writing. Prue, author of books for young readers such as *Camel Rider* and *Through My Eyes: Zafir* is a private pilot and her husband Kerry is professional. In 2000 the couple bought a vintage plane and after researching its history they were intrigued by what they uncovered.

We are at an exciting time in air travel. In a hundred years or children may be marvelling that it once took seventeen hours to fly from Australia to England. That long! We're lucky to have such a book to reveal stories of these pioneers.