



THE CHILDREN'S
BOOK COUNCIL
OF AUSTRALIA

SINCE 1945 — YOUR CONNECTION TO STORY

THE CBCA BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2023

JUDGES' CRITQUES: WINNER & HONOUR BOOKS



Older Readers Category



Neverlanders

Tom Taylor (text), Jon Sommariva (illustrations)

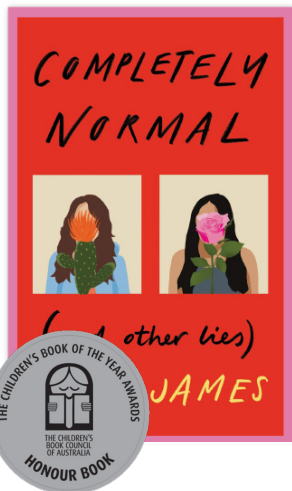
Published by Penguin Random House Australia - ISBN 9781761049071

A beautifully presented work, with dark, funny, insightful writing supported by dynamic and powerful images. The story is well-paced, chronicling the journey of a contemporary "found family" tale embedded within the metatextuality of a fantastical Peter Pan narrative. Readers of all ages will appreciate the clever, action-oriented storyline and gloriously rich illustrations, while discerning readers will unpack the hints of the adults' destruction of the world, parental failure, gun violence and domestic violence to add a more serious dimension to the fantasy plot. The characters are believable, and thematic elements of belonging and forgiveness are presented authentically and skillfully. A stunning book with a potent message wrapped up in a ripping good yarn package.

Completely Normal (and Other Lies)

Biffy James

Published by Hardie Grant Children's Publishing - ISBN 9781760508746

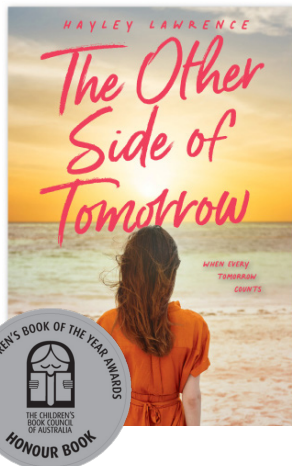


An authentic, sensitive story of love and grief in all types of relationships, and the power of true friendship. This story feels utterly real in so many ways, whether it's the cavalier and off-the-cuff humour in the face of despair, or the genuine friendship and family interactions in their swings and roundabouts. The conceit of the situation is unusual but authentically explored, and the characters are presented through their thoughts and actions, not coarse language or extreme behaviours - they are all very normal and believable. The inclusion of social media as a plot element provides a realistic atmosphere without overshadowing the main themes. The positive representation of counseling for not just major issues but just general "life" is extremely valuable, and not something often seen in young adult fiction. It was gratifying to see characters come to understand how the behaviour of themselves and others has an impact, even in the face of such strong emotions (which are never dismissed).

The Other Side of Tomorrow

Hayley Lawrence

Published by Scholastic Australia - ISBN 9781760976453



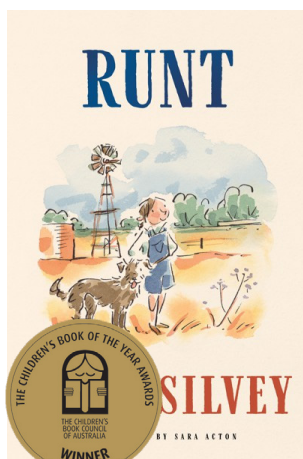
This beautifully written novel manages to perfectly balance ongoing grief and sadness with the ordinary everyday-ness of life in a positive way. Authentic characters and character development support a storyline that feels genuine and realistic in its arc, with its rapid pace mirroring the onset of the disease and deterioration of the main character. The themes of family, love, loss, grief, death, and life after death are gently explored without preaching, and these serious elements are set against the aspects of first love, adventure and friendship. The author handles the intense emotions of the story deftly and without artifice - every laugh and tear the reader experiences is earned. While the story is told almost entirely through Abby's eyes, voice and feelings, it is flagged quite early on that the outcome of the book is inevitable. Absolutely heartbreaking and real.



THE CHILDREN'S
BOOK COUNCIL
OF AUSTRALIA

SINCE 1945 — YOUR CONNECTION TO STORY

Younger Readers Category



Runt

Craig Silvey

Published by Allen & Unwin - ISBN 9781761067846

The plot and characters are presented simply, yet they are complex, strong, witty, and evoke a reflection on life's meaning, purpose and what is truly important. This book is about the struggles of country life but also about community and how it rallies around a girl and her dog. Annie's attempts to fix everything are good natured and her eventual realization that not everything needs to be fixed is heartfelt and well earned. The use of language and humorously named villains have the reader cheering for Annie and Runt's success. This delightful story of human spirit, family love and communal support is perfect for the Younger Readers age group. The beautiful hard-cover, dust jacket, endpapers and delightful illustrations make this an instant favourite



Evie and Rhino

Neridah McMullin

Published by Walker Books Australia - ISBN 9781760654207

Inspired by true events, Evie and Rhino is a moving and entertaining story about love, friendship, grief and how making connections can bring about change and healing. The characterisation is strong and builds as the story is told from the interchanging perspectives of Evie and Rhino. The small illustrations that indicated a change in perspective were subtle and refined, matching the style of the prose perfectly. A real strength in the book is how the plot develops, and the story grows seamlessly across the characters. The author's notes and historical details included provide background knowledge of the events.



The Raven's Song

Zana Fraillon & Bren MacDibble

Published by Allen & Unwin - ISBN - 9781761065798

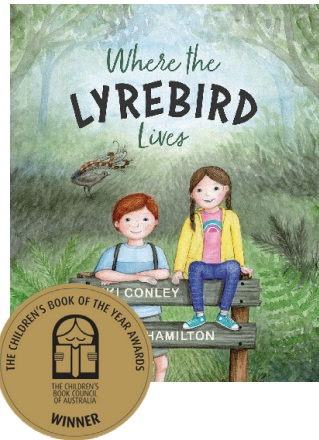
A stunning novel set in both the near and distant futures linked by the ancient motifs of the raven, the land and bog bodies preservation being the theme that ties everything together but never overshadows the characters' emotional journeys: Phoenix's loss and world in pieces, and Shel's discovery challenging everything she ever knew. Masterfully written and engaging, each object, action and word choice is purposeful. Pandemics, climate change and conservation, are the backdrop for this story, told in a way that never intrudes on the reader's journey and desire to explore the world. It provides parallels between our own reality and the resulting in an engaging and thought-provoking read.



THE CHILDREN'S
BOOK COUNCIL
OF AUSTRALIA

SINCE 1945 — YOUR CONNECTION TO STORY

Early Childhood Category



Where the Lyrebird Lives

Vikki Conley (text), Max Hamilton (illustrations)

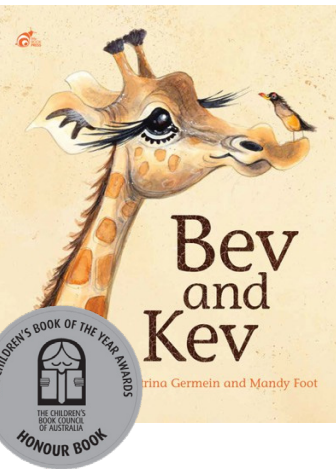
Published by Windy Hollow Books - ISBN 9780645323566

This book delights and entices the reader from beginning to end. Lush green spreads fill the pages, beautifully capturing the setting of cool climate forests in watercolour and pencil. The sparse descriptive narrative sets a gentle pace and reads aloud well, drawing the audience in with questions and facts. Readers are encouraged to slow down, listen and look, for every now and then there is a sign of the hidden lyrebird. Metaphors and similes add richness, and the enlarged text for action words and onomatopoeia will increase participation and engagement. A well-crafted narrative that will encourage children to read aloud themselves.

Bev and Kev

Katrina Germein (text), Mandy Foot (illustrations)

Published by Little Book Press - ISBN 9780645027051



Themes of friendship, acceptance and finding one's place and tribe are explored as Bev the giraffe moves through the African landscape, experiencing social rejection from animals that cannot relate to her due to her size. Using the theme 'opposites attract', readers may empathise with Bev's loneliness and her joy at finding a non-judgmental companion. Interesting synonyms for 'big' provide rich language, while important messages are imparted, such as body image, the comfort found in companionship and how our words may affect others. The pencil and watercolour illustrations shift in perspectives, emphasising Bev's great height and perfectly matching her mood as seen in the bird's eye view of her solitary walk. The southern African setting is clearly defined in these outstanding watercolour and pencil illustrations which are placed onto digitally rendered backgrounds, capturing the mood of the story to perfection. Illustrations and text harmonise well, and the spectacularly eye-catching final fold-out page creates a lovely resolution, told wordlessly.

Snap!

Anna Walker Lawrence

Published by Scribble Kids' Books - ISBN 9781922585387



Anna Walker has cleverly created a humorous, energetic, and playful tale of a frog's adventure through the jungle and the unexpected creatures it meets along the way. It is immediately relatable to young children, with its minimal, simple and direct language that perfectly evokes the sensory world of the frog and the other creatures in it. The tactile front cover is bright and engaging, with the little frog literally leaping off the front and into the narrative. The endpapers extend the storyline, and the text is creatively positioned on the page, like the movement of text mirroring the animals' actions, which adds interest and catches the eye. The story's pace is maintained by the illustrations and humour introduced by the near misses of the frog as it narrowly escapes the dangers around it. While the predominantly green pages immerse the reader into the setting of a jungle, the illustrations are varied in design and colour and are offset by a clever use of texture using collage techniques on such things as tree trunks, water, and birds' feathers. This is a picture book that will bring joy and demand repeated rereading, whilst also offering the opportunity to join in with the story.



THE CHILDREN'S
BOOK COUNCIL
OF AUSTRALIA

SINCE 1945 — YOUR CONNECTION TO STORY

Picture Book Category

My Strange Shrinking Parents

Zeno Sworder

Published by Thames & Hudson Australia - ISBN 9781760761233

This book is a celebration and fresh perspective on love and self-denial, which many children of immigrant families may recognise, and for other children should help build empathy. Every part of this book design has been crafted with enormous care. The portrait shaped cover is tactile and contains an intriguing image. The end papers, filled with teapots, help to set the mood. There are muted backgrounds which imply hazy or slightly unreliable memories. Small objects appear extra-large helping the reader see the world from both perspectives. The sublime artwork situates itself within an Eastern aesthetic, making nods to the Willow Pattern story, while still giving voice to a surreal reality of immigrant life. The illustrations use light and shadow to great effect and the metaphor of size is repeated in the images beautifully reflecting the sacrifices the parents have made so that their child can grow in a new place, with new opportunities.

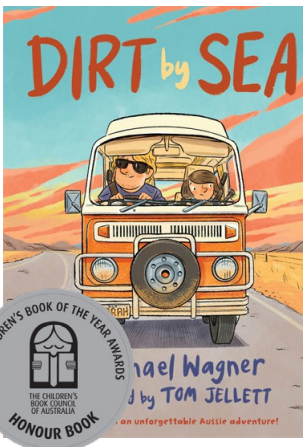


Dirt by Sea

Michael Wagner (text), Tom Jellett (illustrations)

Published by Penguin Random House Australia - ISBN 9781760894061

Daisy lives in inland Australia with her dad and her grandparents. It's home, and she loves the red dirt land around her. But when her dad realises that she's never seen the beach and thinks the Australian anthem is about a country 'dirt by sea', he sets off to show her the ocean in a once-in-a-lifetime father-daughter trip along the Australian coast, inspired by the first holiday he took with Daisy's mum. Along the way they will learn about Australia and much, much more . . .



Paradise Sands: A Story of Enchantment

Levi Pinfold

Published by Walker Books Australia - ISBN 9781406383942

Right from the beginning, the young girl, in her pale blue dress, shows she has a higher level of responsibility. The characters have clearly heard the opening six-line rhyme many times, but instead of recognising they are a warning, the words have become a jingle they sing along to in their car. This is a story of enchantment, entrapment, courage, wisdom, patience, belief, temptation and, above all, love. The young girl will rescue her brothers no matter what the personal cost. An almost unbearable sense of bleakness is created through the dry barren landscapes and even the starkness of the house and hospital room. The landscape in this book becomes a character. Older readers will be eager to revisit the story and the exquisite, masterful illustrations. This book has the look and feel of a classic.



THE CHILDREN'S
BOOK COUNCIL
OF AUSTRALIA

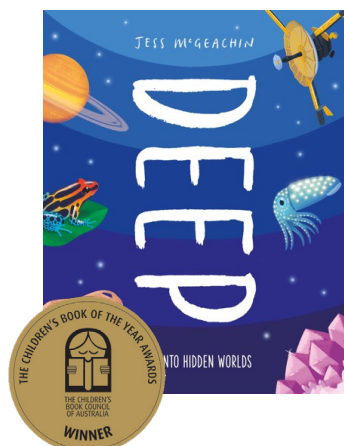
SINCE 1945 — YOUR CONNECTION TO STORY

Eve Pownall Category

DEEP: Dive Into Hidden Worlds

Jess McGeachin

Published by Welbeck Publishing - ISBN 9781913519483



This imaginatively presented hardback reference book seamlessly brings together a large variety of information about the unseen elements of Earth's sea and land life, outer space and the human body. Contemporary issues are also included making the information very relatable to readers. The integration of text and illustrations is very cleverly managed, and the layout of the content works both as a dip-in-dip-out resource, as well as a read-through narrative. The information is interesting and the language is clear and presented in accessible small chunks, with a bit of humour. The full colour, detailed illustrations are gracefully accompanied by descriptive labels (including some scientific names). The final couple of pages around connection and survival bring together all the information in an accessible flowchart and draw on the topic of adaptability that readers can explore further. The inclusion of contents, index and glossary are very useful; and a timeline titled 'Deep Time' is great for providing context. The front cover is incredibly appealing, and overall, this non-stereotypical information book is of a very high quality that will sustain readers' interest throughout.

Come Together: Things Every Aussie Kid Should Know about the First Peoples

Isaiah Firebrace (text), Jaelyn Biunaiwai (illustrations)

Published by Hardie Grant Explore - ISBN 9781741178166



This strikingly gorgeous book by pop artist Isaiah Firebrace, introduces the basics of First Nations customs, beliefs and history. From the attractive cover showing hands coming together, and simple endpapers, the reader is drawn into learning about the oldest continuous civilization on earth. Isaiah shares important insight into aspects of Indigenous culture that all people, not just the young, should know – from caring for Country and Dreaming stories to the importance of Elders and even the Indigenous origins of AFL. Language is easily accessible to the younger reader, and while it does not delve into some of the more complex aspects of First Peoples culture, there is sufficient information to provide an overview and the knowledge to inspire the reader to look further. The accompanying colourful illustrations by Jaelyn Biunaiwai dominate each double-page spread, enhancing the written text and having maximum impact. This is a powerful book that would appeal to a wide ranging audience and holds significant enduring value.

Wild Australian Life

Leonard Cronin (text), Chris Nixon (illustrations)

Published by Allen and Unwin - ISBN 9781760637224



From the appealing cover and bright contents page, this compendium of fascinating facts about various species of the Australian animal kingdom ensures maximum engagement. Shadowed endpapers work well with this production of high-quality paper printing, using colours and highly engaging, visually vibrant animals to connect with different aspects of the Australian ecosystem. Providing clear and detailed information about the Australian animal kingdom, it explores its diversity in a creative manner. Layout and format are varied throughout, and the non-stereotypical illustrations in a muted full-colour palette genuinely integrate with the text, enhancing the reading experience. Young readers will enjoy looking, exploring and following the 'paths' that are being described. The variety of species and ecosystems is impressive, and the language and labels are clear and detailed. The pages related to navigating by sound and night animals are particularly captivating.



THE CHILDREN'S
BOOK COUNCIL
OF AUSTRALIA

SINCE 1945 — YOUR CONNECTION TO STORY

New Illustrator Category

Tiny Wonders

Sally Soweol Han

Published by University of Queensland Press - ISBN 9780702263477



The choice of artistic medium is perfect for the topic and intended audience and demonstrates skilful illustrative technique. The visible pencil lines create a sense of life, and the opening page is instantly engaging. Colour is used purposefully and symbolically throughout to portray character, setting, mood and themes of life, vibrancy and nature. There are many different layouts and framings used and images are fully entwined with text. There are life-like depictions of flowers in the information pages at the back and the beautiful endpapers reveal the central message of spreading wishes, joy and hope to the world through nature.

Australia: From Dawn to Dusk

Brentos

Published by Affirm Press - ISBN 9781922806321



The front cover is instantly arresting. Fantastic use of a close shot and gaze to entice readers in. The colour of the eyes is replicated in the end papers. The plastic trinkets shown on two palms take the words "we have responsibilities" to a whole new level. The white, sans serif text printed on saturated black adds to the gravitas of the message. There's a wonderful sense of connection and emotion between people created in each image through gaze, proximity and touch. The juxtaposition of the hyper-realistic images against the saturated black of the pages, and the dot painting depictions of the figurative and abstract landscapes is so engaging. The design quickens and slows the pace. Many of the images and words will lead to deeper discussions with students.

The Best Hiding Place

Sylvia Morris

Published by Affirm Press - ISBN 9781922848086



The colour palette in *The Best Hiding Place* creates a lovely retro and nostalgic quality. Each and every image allows the reader to peek inside different parts of the house, often showing multiple points of action on one page. Archie's claustrophobia in his hiding spot is conveyed effectively to create a sustained moment of tension that readers will identify with. Distinct characters and relationships are shown, and some humorous details invite readers to re-visit and examine earlier illustrations. The illustrations perfectly capture those mixed feelings of playing hide and seek as a child, which will appeal to readers of all ages.



THE CHILDREN'S
BOOK COUNCIL
OF AUSTRALIA

SINCE 1945 — YOUR CONNECTION TO STORY