

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS

1973

Class A
THE BOOK OF THE YEAR

Winner:

FAMILY AT THE LOOKOUT

by

NOREEN SHELLEY
(Oxford University Press)



Highly Commended:
AN OLDER KIND OF MAGIC

by

PATRICIA WRIGHTSON
(Hutchinson)

Commended:
EVERYDAY INVENTIONS

by

MEREDITH HOOPER
(Angus & Robertson)

Class B: PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR
Winner: NO AWARD MADE

Highly Commended:

**JOSEPH AND LULU AND THE PRINDIVILLE
HOUSE PIGEONS**

by

TED GREENWOOD
(Angus & Robertson)

Commended:

BARNABY AND THE ROCKET
Text by LYDIA PENDER
Illus. by JUDY COWELL
(Collins)

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA
JUDGES' REPORT 1973

Half the books entered for the awards were considered in the final stages of the judging. However, despite the overall competence of much of the writing, the judges found that many entries lacked originality and vitality. The experimental writing entered, although welcome as an interesting development in Australian children's literature, was considered to have failed in communicating effectively with children.

CLASS A—BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

SHELLEY, NOREEN *Family at the Lookout* (Oxford University Press)

From the child's point of view, *Family at the Lookout* is a most satisfying literary experience. The plot is intriguing and eventful enough to keep the reader constantly interested; the mystery surrounding Miss Hatch's behaviour is tenaciously pursued and only gradually apprehended; the characters are interesting, likeable and human; the style fresh and lucid; the themes are fittingly universal and their treatment is positive, warm and never superficial. Identification is likely to be strong for both girls and boys. Described in isolation, the plot of *Family at the Lookout*, with such ingredients as a family inheritance, an injured ankle, a sustained mystery and a bushfire would seem to add up to an enormous cliché. A major achievement is the way in which the book emerges as being greater than its parts. The writing is unforced, events occurring naturally, sometimes merely as a result of the characters being the people they are.

The main characters are varied and individual, having weaknesses as well as strengths. Mark and Joss have the seriousness of early adolescents who have to shoulder some adult responsibility. Mark, the gifted young narrator, is appropriately perceptive about human behaviour and is capable of insight into the characters of people like the Major or Miss Hatch (e.g., see p. 113).

As in many successful children's books, the adults have not been conventionally removed or treated as inconsequential, and yet the children dominate the action. Appropriately, the adults have strong supportive roles and are always interesting in their own right. The minor characters enrich the picture of small town life, never overstated, for all their individuality, the directness of the prose, appealing and approachable for a wide range of children, is distinguished by an admirable warmth and vitality, although there is a tendency towards didacticism, with quite explicit moralising. This need not necessarily be deplored where such adult comment arises naturally from the action, reinforcing the themes.

Format is pleasing, design and production being of high standard, and Robert Micklewright's line drawings giving the setting a satisfying visual form and flavour.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

WRIGHTSON, PATRICIA *An Older Kind of Magic* (Hutchinson)

An Older Kind of Magic is an interesting attempt to create a literary rarity—a modern fantasy in an Australian setting. The attempt is an admirable one, although the achievement is not fully satisfying. That the book has an apologetic afterword is an indication of the tentative nature of the attempt. It is, however, a welcome addition to the *genre* and has commendable features.

The best feature of the writing is its absorption in, and feeling for, its Sydney setting. This comes to life through sure knowledge and affection for urban activity, making the appearance of aboriginal dreamtime creatures all the more intriguing, yet incongruous. There is nothing sensational or superficial in the evocation of this setting which is, in fact, rather quietly observed through the actions of the children as they move about the streets and roof-tops of the financial hub of Sydney and the nearby Botanical Gardens.

With poetic vision, the author sets the modern sorts of magic (sleight of hand in high finance and politics, television advertising, shop-window displays, spells and puzzles in trick shops, etc.), by implication, against the older and more effectual kind of Aboriginal folk magic, more deeply rooted in this ancient land. The interplay of both these forces, with their contrasting values, is not fully successful, since one is an imposition on the other.

The writing seems to lack concentration towards the end, allowing the growing interest, deliberately and slowly built up in the first half, to fall away. Not even the unifying idea of the comet's impending arrival can save the plot from its final confusion.

COMMENDED

HOOPER, MEREDITH *Everyday Inventions* (Angus and Robertson)

Although one may have misgivings about the typography, this book is an outstanding literary achievement in the field of non-fiction writing for children. It is a well-researched account of the origins of ordinary manufactured objects such as chewing gum and cornflakes. Through the author's remarkably clear, concise and spirited prose, such mundane objects are revealed to be inherently interesting and in some cases fascinating. At no stage does the simplification result in distortion, the author avoiding any temptation to talk down to children on technical subjects.

CLASS B—PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR

The judges considered no entry in this class met the requirements for both pictorial quality and complementary text, so no Award was made. Two titles, however, received commendation.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

GREENWOOD, TED *Joseph and Lulu and the Prindville House Pigeons* (Angus and Robertson)

This is a highly original visualisation of a modern problem, expressed in images which challenge the reader's imagination, inviting him to actively

participate in the experience because of the way in which they are stated. The concepts and their realisation are rather sophisticated and presuppose some maturity on the part of the reader. The judges are, however, fully aware that modern picture books can and do appeal to a wide age range. The book contains some exceptional art, designed in what could be called cinematic terms, making its points by focusing on visually essential details, using unusual angles and allowing the pictures to do much of the work. The stark, sharp pen lines do not harmonise well with the colour work but the general printing, production and format are excellent.

COMMENDED

PENDER, LYDIA (text) and COWELL, JUDY (illustrations)

Barnaby and the Rocket (Collins)

Judy Cowell's warm and atmospheric paintings show that she has the potential to become a leading picture book artist. In this first book, her work is not consistent and is sometimes at variance with the text. Each picture remains merely a picture in its own right and so falls as illustration. The text is laboured and self-conscious, with its wearisome and patronising asides striving for effect.

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It was thought by all judges that although Paul Milton's *Art Folio No. 1* (Heinemann Educational Books) did not fall into either category of award, special mention should be made of this excellent production. Its concept is good—the teaching of basic art tenets, techniques and media through analysis and experimentation, related to notable paintings by distinguished Australian artists. The quality of reproduction and printing is very high, although the binding is poor.