

SPECIAL FEATURES

JUDGES' REPORT 1986

The Children's Book Council of Australia wishes to acknowledge the generous support of the Literature and Visual Arts Boards of the Australia Council.

The 1986 panel of judges considers that the Australian Children's Book Awards serve the following purposes:

1. To focus attention on children's books.
2. To emphasise literary and artistic qualities.
3. To direct positive attention to standards and criteria of excellence.
4. To take account of the child as reader.
5. To encourage new talent.
6. To recognise outstanding achievement likely to be of lasting merit.

GENERAL COMMENTS

There were 91 books entered for the awards this year, and the most noteworthy feature was the increase in quality books in Class C. Many books featured strongly Australian themes; there were many with Australian animals, but also those that featured Australian history and sociology. Courage in adversity was a theme in many books, and life-affirming values were much in evidence. A pleasing number of books depicted warm family relationships, particularly between fathers and daughters (however, the orphan is still with us). Some books demonstrated an awareness of the current world problems; and a few were set in other countries. Very welcome were the "lap books", small square books by Jan Ormerod and Pamela Allen, just right for sharing with a very young child. It was also pleasing to see picture books for older children. In all three classes there were a welcome number of humorous titles, and there was also, as one person put it, "a return of the good read".

Four books which are not on the Short Lists need special mention:

Religious Worlds, Max Charlesworth (text), Robert Ingpen (illus.), Hill of Content, is an introduction to many of the world's religions. The great glory of this book is Robert Ingpen's paintings. The book is a delight to look at, and the best of the artwork is stunning in its power and imagery.

The Key and the Fountain, John Pinkney (text), Sandra Laroche (illus.), Walter McVitty Books. It is a pleasure to welcome this finely-produced book from a new children's publisher. Sandra Laroche's illustrations add greatly to what is otherwise a conventional time-slip story.

Ship Rock, Ted Greenwood, Hutchinson. Another beautifully produced book, this is a philosophical work, and although for the most part it is simply written, its appeal is mostly to adults. The book is difficult to classify, and it is not for everyone, but its advocates find it a moving statement about mutability.

The Miracle Tree, Christobel Mattingley (text), Marianne Yamaguchi (illus.), Hodder and Stoughton, is set in post-Hiroshima Japan. Every detail of cover, endpapers, illustration and ornament add to the overall sombre atmosphere. This book is an important statement of the human longing for completeness, despite some improbabilities in the text.

Finally, a few general remarks: there seems to be some misapprehension that paperback will not be considered for the CBC awards. This is not so; books are judged on their merits. Many entries had obviously benefited from strong editorial control, and these were a pleasure to read and to look at. However, beautiful production and fine writing are not enough; award winners should engage the emotions — power and truth are qualities the judges looked for.

CLASS A — BOOK OF THE YEAR

There was the usual great diversity in this Class — diversity in regard to theme, to treatment and to quality. It is noteworthy that both the winning and highly commended books are beautifully but simply written, accessible to a wide range of readers. The two commended titles both have flaws and weaknesses, but it is their strengths that we remember: they grow in recollection, whereas many more consistent entries fade from the mind.

BOOK OF THE YEAR

FWOLLER, Thurley *The Green Wind Rigby*
Literature Board Award \$1500

This family story set on a farm in the 1940s is a gem of a book. A fine piece of craftsmanship, the characters, plot and language interact to stunning effect. It is simple to read, deceptively simple, for the themes and the characters linger in the mind.

In the best Australian literary tradition this is a "Rites of Passage" novel, especially for Jennifer, the narrator; but in fact all the characters grow and change as they cope with life. One judge described it as "A glorious celebration of overcoming adversity at many levels, without being tragic".

Effortlessly set in time and place, the novel is of such a sustained excellence that it is hard to single out features to mention. However, the father is a particularly impressive piece of characterisation; his effect on his family is so well conveyed that the descriptions of psychological problems in other books seem clumsy and overdrawn in comparison.

Above all, this is a novel of family warmth; there is pain as well as humour, but it is a joyous book. As one judge said, "This is it!"

HIGHLY COMMENDED

BAILLIE, Allan *Little Brother Nelson*
Literature Board Award \$1000

Set in war-torn Kampuchea, *Little Brother* is a powerful account of one boy's struggle to survive and to find his older brother. It is an extremely well-written novel with a strong straightforward narrative. The background, the invasion of Kampuchea, is deftly sketched in without the need for long explanatory passages. The spareness and simplicity of the writing are impressive; the atrocities are dealt with implicitly without diminishing the feeling of threat and danger. The language is well controlled and never strives for effect.

Vithy, the main character, is most convincing as he develops and becomes aware of his growing ability to make decisions and to act on them. The author handles Vithy's grief well: the boy buries it until he has the stability and the support to face it.

There are some weaknesses: Vithy's English improves remarkably quickly, and the ending appears rather fortuitous. But then stranger things have happened, and perhaps for the child reader the somewhat contrived ending is necessary.

A gripping book, *Little Brother* breaks new ground for an Australian children's novel, and is an important contribution to our knowledge and understanding of a situation which is very close to us.

COMMENDED

WHEATLEY, Nadia *The House that was Eureka Viking Kestrel*
Literature Board Award \$500

This is a significant work. In drawing links between unemployment today and in the 1930s the author is making a powerful statement about political action, and the possible involvement of young people in such action. The book is noteworthy for the literary quality of the writing, which is well sustained throughout. "Nadia Wheatley is a word craftsman", as one judge remarked. This is a complex book and demands much from its readers; however, the effort is well rewarded. In focusing on real events, including tenant evictions and police action, the author shows her commitment to the working-class values, particularly through Lizzie's fight for justice. In addition, she uses dialogue skilfully to reveal the very real tensions between individuals and classes.

The book's main weaknesses are the very complex middle section, when the time-links occur very rapidly and without the typographical markers of the dream sequences. The conclusion is "all too pat"; there are just too many problems and puzzles neatly resolved and tucked away.

There was serious discussion as to whether this title fitted into the Class A guidelines; however, all the judges agreed to its inclusion and that this was an important book whose considerable achievements outweigh its weaknesses.

LAKE, David *The Changelings of Chuan Hyland House*
Literature Board Award \$500

Set in the mythical kingdom of Chuan, somewhere in South East Asia, this is a metaphysical book which demands much of those readers who enjoy high fantasy. The narrative, however, is straightforward, a great deal of thought has gone into the plotting, and the writing has excellent imagery and colour, and develops a sense of exuberance and sensuality.

The device of twins from different cultures and races gives a dual perspective which greatly appealed to some judges. Unfortunately, the adults are rather two-dimensional, necessary to the plot rather than fully-realised characters, and mother's total conversion to Chaanish ways is far too rapid.

Some younger readers enjoyed it as straightforward adventure, but philosophy is at the core of the book and does seem to preoccupy the author. Readers occasionally felt subjected to sermons — "It could have been less instructive".

CLASS B — PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR

The best in this year's Class B achieved an international standard of production, and were a pleasure to read. Many titles used colour subtly to reinforce theme and mood, but unfortunately others were let down by texts that were too wordy or which strived too hard for effect.

Again the judges noted a great range in subject, treatment and production.

PICTURE BOOK OF THE YEAR

DENTON, Terry *Felix & Alexander* Oxford University Press
Visual Arts Board Award \$1200

This is a poignant story of a little boy lost in a city whose special toy comes to rescue him. A simple story, yet it has great emotional power. Whilst text and illustrations form a harmonious whole, it is the illustrations which linger in the mind. Terry Denton's use of colour is outstanding; coloured papers subtly convey the changing moods throughout the book — sombre when Felix and Alexander are lost in a nightmarish cityscape, sunny yellow when they reach safety.

Felix & Alexander is a magical picture book. The one minor quibble might be with the slightly overlong last page of text. But this is a wonderful book, its appeal is to all ages, and its haunting images remain with the reader.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

MORMOTO, Junko *A Piece of Straw* Adapted by Helen Smith. Collins
Visual Arts Board Award \$800

A Piece of Straw is a traditional story of a poor peasant who achieves success through his kindness to others. It is a beautifully integrated picture book, unified and harmonious. As the pages are turned the traditional scroll unrolls, and the subtle colour range enhances the aesthetic quality of the whole. The text is just right, and is beautifully set on the page.

While there is no doubt that the book is superbly produced, it lacks that capacity to engage the emotions found in the winning title.

COMMENDED

LESTER, Alison *Clive Eats Alligators* Oxford University Press
Visual Arts Board Award \$500

Seven children, distinct individuals, are shown to us engaged in their favourite pursuits. The presentation is lively, with every detail carefully thought out. The alternating layouts of six small pictures followed by a full-page spread, generate a sense of expectation in the reader. There is a wonderful blend of reality and absurdity: in "Shopping" "Nicky likes the hardware shop ... but Ernie loves to visit the taxidermist".

This is undoubtedly a child-centred book. Children return to it again and again, and it leads to considerable discussion, as well as encouraging the acceptance of differences. The gentle colours contribute to the warm atmosphere generated by the book.

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GRAHAM, Bob *First There was Frances* Lohian
Visual Arts Board Award \$500

This must be the ultimate backyard pet book! Frances lives alone to begin with, but finishes up with a gradually acquired tribe consisting not only of husband, kids and grandma but also fifteen assorted pets.

The illustrations are delightful, and convey a great feeling of warmth and fun. Energy and action are communicated as well (how on earth does Frances cope?), but readers heave a sigh of relief, along with the characters, when the whole lot (plus horses now) move to the country.

Although the book is a trifle long, the exuberance and warmth are well sustained and memorable.

CLASS C — JUNIOR BOOK OF THE YEAR

For many years junior readers seemed to be neglected — no longer. The number of good entries received this year prompted the judges to draw up a full Class C Short List for the first time. Again there was a range of theme and treatment, from picture story book to chapter novel, and from humour to seriousness. The child-centredness of many entries is highly praiseworthy.

JUNIOR BOOK OF THE YEAR

STEELE, Mary *Arkwright* Hyland House
Literature Board Award \$1000

Arkwright, a giant South American ant eater, is chosen by Captain Chiblain as his retirement companion. The Captain brings Arkwright to Australia, a country which is "teeming with termites and swarming with sugar ants and bulging with bull ants and allergic to Argentine ants".

This book succeeds as a total production. The format is just right, and although it is long for a Class C book the text is not only broken into chapters, but there is an illustration of some sort on every page. There are maps and diagrams to involve the reader, plenty of drawings, and above all ANTS — trails of them march through many of the pages. The excitement and variety of the layouts add greatly to the book's appeal.

Arkwright is well written and has plenty of jokes and puns. It is an extremely accomplished first book, has great child appeal, and is a jolly good read.

CLIFTON PUGH AWARD \$500

HARVEY, Roland. *Burke and Wills* The Five Mile Press

Roland Harvey's version of the well-known story of Burke and Wills is a great achievement. Those familiar with his somewhat quirky view of Australian history cannot fail to be impressed with his treatment of the tragedy. The opening pages are enlivened by the characteristic Harvey jokes — joggers, a Horgan Hand Bank, an inflatable camel and

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many more. However, in this book the humour is under firm control, and as the expedition gets under way the visual puns begin to disappear.

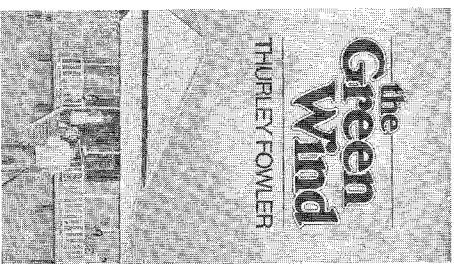
From the maps on the endpapers, and the setting of the historical context, readers are led into a story which should engage and move them. As the trek continues the landscape changes, colour varies with mood, and the foldout pages present a vista of great emotional impact. Roland Harvey's treatment is subtle, and the art diminishes in detail as the situation deteriorates. However, despite the tragedy, the book ends on a note of hope: benefits accrue, other explorers succeed, and there is a sense of life continuing.

Visually most exciting, *Burke and Wills* is a wonderful way to present history and to involve readers.

THE JUDGES:

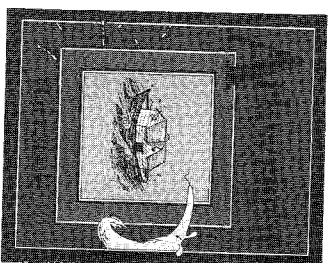
Jo Goodman (Victoria) Marie McGowan (Western Australia)
John Shelton (Tasmania) Elizabeth O'Loughlin (South Australia)
Michele Dwyer (Queensland) Maurice Saxby (New South Wales)
Lynne Babbage (Australian Capital Territory)

THE WINNING ILLUSTRATORS AND AUTHORS: PROFILES



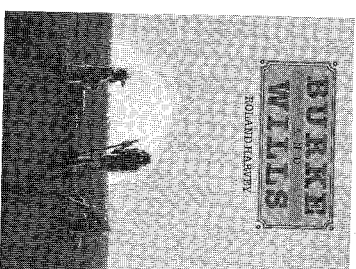
THURLEY FOWLER, winner of the Book of the Year Award 1986 for the book *The Green Wind*, was born in Griffith, New South Wales, where she lived on a farm, with her parents, sister and two brothers. She left school after sitting for the Intermediate Certificate and studied shorthand and typing. However, she also pursued her love of writing, and her first story was published in a Sydney newspaper. Since then she has had many stories published in Australian women's magazines, as well as stories and novels for children.

TERRY DENTON, winner of the Picture Book of the Year Award for *Felix & Alexander*, has been a dedicated drawer for many years, despite lack of encouragement at a Catholic boys' school — as they say: "Talent will out!". Much of his inspiration comes from the colour, use of line and characterisation in cartoons. His great love is drawing, and, as well as *Felix & Alexander*, he has also illustrated Max Dann's 'Going Bananas' and Morris Lurie's *The Story of Imelda Who Was Small*. Look out for his next book, *A Teddy Bear's Picnic*. Terry Denton will be one of the guest speakers at the 1986 Children's Book Seminar in Canberra in September.



MARY STEELE, author and illustrator of *Arkwright*, and winner of the Junior Book of the Year Award, was born in Newcastle, NSW. She has worked as a reviewer, librarian, freelance writer, tutor and researcher. *Arkwright* is her first book, and it began with a trip to the Melbourne Zoo, during which she was enchanted by a pair of South American anteaters. Their pet quality was confirmed by the books of that eminent animal author Gerald Durrell, who had one as a pet, and the story grew from there.

ROLAND HARVEY, writer and illustrator of *Burke and Wills* and winner of the Clifton Pugh Award, needs very little introduction to an Australian audience which has grown to know and love his humorous, lively and endearing portrayals of Australiana and Australian history, as well as his other forays into illustrating for children — especially the unforgettable Emily Culpepper and her bottled friends. Roland Harvey began his studies as an architect, turned his obvious talents to illustration, firstly of greeting cards and then of children's books. He ran his own greeting cards studio and also set up the publishing company The Five Mile Press.



Grateful acknowledgement is made to the publishers of the award-winning books and to the Lu Rees Archives for the material included in the above profiles.