



Judges' Commentaries on Finalists and Winners

8 August 2018

Opening remarks by convenor of judges Jeannie Skinner

Kia ora, ngā mihi nui ki a koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

It has been a great privilege and rewarding experience to have been a judge this year for the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults, and it is such a pleasure to be here tonight in the company of talented creators and avid readers and supporters of children's literature.

I'd like to acknowledge Moana Munro, fellow Convenor, and her panel of judges, Anahera Morehu and Jacqueline Joyce Snee for Te Kura Pounamu Award, and also to thank my fellow judges

- Darryn Joseph, for bringing an essential and welcome Māori and male perspective to the judging process, along with your great sense of humour
- Crissi Blair, for sharing your deep knowledge of children's literature, and bringing an eye for detail and an artist's perspective
- Maureen Crisp, for your expertise in the children's literature writing scene, and your resolve to make sure children's voices were a big part of the judging process,
- and Bridget Schaumann, for your passion for making a difference in all students' reading lives, and your trademark sense of fun.

I'd also like to acknowledge the many champions and cheerleaders who promote the Awards through their daily work, whether in bookshops, libraries, schools, in the media and online. In particular, thanks to the team at *The Sapling*, who have given the Awards finalists such lively, comprehensive, and insightful coverage.

The 2018 New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults saw an increase in the number of titles submitted in some categories from previous years, our first e-book fiction nominations, and a burgeoning number of self-published titles.

The capacity of fiction to develop empathy was a notable aspect with a number of titles at both junior and senior level exploring themes around well-being and resilience, "making hearts large through story" as Kate Di Camillo put it.

The Non-fiction category was particularly strong this year and was one of the most difficult shortlists to finalise.

Three of the five finalist titles in the Best First Book Award were also finalists in their Award category which indicates the launch of some brilliant new writing talent.

And now, on with the Awards, as we celebrate these fabulous additions to New Zealand children's and young adult literature.

Best First Book Award

Speech by Darryn Joseph

Gripping. Funny. Sad. Rip-roaring. Heart-breaking. This year's group of freshly minted writers bravely tackled some very challenging subjects. From the ravages of teenage mental health to developing political awareness to imagining life as an Antarctic explorer, to a pickpocket in a steampunk Victorian era, our new writers have produced some outstanding books.

Character voice came to the fore in all their stories; the dialogue and rhythm felt authentic from the teenage girls and boys, to the teacher talk, to the grunts of the burly, frozen men. These books were fast-paced and full of action but also at times pensive and very thought provoking. It was difficult, to say the least, to choose a shortlist with so many great and thoughtful books submitted.

Some writers dove straight in to serious issues. Teenage mental health is a difficult topic to write well and our writers made sensitive choices that reflected thoughtfulness and attention to detail. Their writing was assured, with careful description, without going overboard. These are important books for our society and publishers are to be commended for bringing these challenging stories to the forefront. With New Zealand's woe-filled history of mental health support for teenagers, these stories bring issues out into the open where they can be discussed.

With stories ranging through political growth, personal mental health challenges to physical danger in harsh conditions or imaginary worlds, our debut writers stride bravely forth onto New Zealand's writing stage. Erin, Joanna, Pauline, Eileen and Gareth can all stand proud at their truly astounding first offering to the reading public. It is possibly clichéd to say, but every book in this category was fantastic.

Ka mutu pea ngā pukapuka rerehua!

Citation

Dawn Raid is a vividly drawn snapshot of the 1970s, packed full of laugh-out-loud Pacifica humour. From the quest to find white go-go boots that fit, to life on the milk run and avoiding boiled cabbage, Sofia navigates life in the 1970s with style. Issues of Pacifica identity and activism run throughout this book but are lightly woven into the story. Sofia's growing political awareness of the Dawn Raids and their injustice and impact are sensitively told. This is a great story, and hugely relevant in our current geopolitical climate, to help children understand how political decisions around immigration that affect one group of people can have far reaching implications in society.

E te ringa tuhi, Pauline, ka nui rā te mihi ki a koe. Tēnā rā koe.

Picture Book Award

Speech by Maureen Crisp

This year we had almost 50 books entered in the Picture Book section. It is heartening to see such a wide range of good picture books being published in New Zealand. Picture books that especially stood out were ones with high production values that matched the care and attention paid to the selection of their words and images.

It was wonderful to see what newer writers and illustrators were doing in this most challenging of mediums.

With so many fine books published, it was difficult to settle on a shortlist. Everybody had a long list of favourites and they were all different.

I took all the picture books out to a school and watched and listened to groups of children throughout the day as they carefully examined the books and selected what would go on their own shortlists. The discussions about the books echoed the ones we were having as judges.

The books that made the most impact with the children all had a strong story. It wasn't all about the pictures.

The judging panel compared notes with the children's selections, discovered some of them were the same and finally arrived at a shortlist.

Each of our shortlisted books represent a range of illustration and narrative styles. From the selection of the right family monster to the complex emotions of grief and loss and their impact in the family... there is a New Zealand picture book for every facet of the human condition.

Opening a good picture book is like lifting the lid on a box of chocolates. The aroma and bright coloured wrappers promise so much sensory pleasure. The feel of the pages and the delicious use of words partnering with eye catching images convey a rich feast of ideas ... how knitting can save an oil covered penguin, the life changing impact of a jelly fish sting, the triumph of finally understanding an urgent message about breakfast.

A good picture book has something to offer the reader and the listener as much on the tenth retelling as it does on the first. Many people in this room have had to stifle a sigh when faced with reading, yet again, a much-loved picture book. It is the mark of a great picture book that both the reader and the listener are happy to read and read the story again.

Our shortlisted books can all fit into this category but our winner was the book enthusiastically picked up and shared by every child and adult who saw it.

Citation

The text and illustration in *I am Jellyfish* perfectly complement each other in this humour filled tale of small but mighty. The layout of each page has been carefully thought out drawing the reader in and down through clever page orientation into the perilous deep where our luminous hero shines brightly. The colour palette and attention to detail in the production invite the reader to linger over the pages and reflect the emotions of the main characters as they descend into peril and the strong pink arms of the giant squid. The humorous sting in the tail by the unlikely hero of Jellyfish who saves and admonishes Swordfish is a delightful and satisfying rescue. This is a book for all the unsung small heroes that will be giggled over and read again and again.

Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award for Junior Fiction

Speech by Crissi Blair

We received 22 entries to this Junior Fiction category - stories aimed at primary and intermediate age children, which we know encompasses wide-ranging reading abilities from the early chapter book to complex novels and our entries ran the gamut from humorous easy-to-read adventures, often incorporating illustrations, to complex stories based on important events in our New Zealand history, and others to make us think about what our future will hold. There were only a few new authors submitted here, and the experience of many writers was evident in the high quality of the books we received.

As I am lucky enough to work as librarian in an Intermediate School, I was keen to get the students' view of the submitted books so gathered a group together who shared their reading experiences with me, which I then passed on to our group of judges.

Our young readers loved stories with a sense of humour, those which surprised them and made them laugh out loud were invariably popular, but for many, those which had the most impact, and created the most discussion, were based on real events, linking the readers to our past and our present in a way they hadn't experienced before, and adding to their understanding of what our future world might be like.

We were looking for, and finding, strong, genuine voices in these stories. Characters who ring true to the reader, who take them along on their challenging journeys, changing and growing as they confront each difficult circumstance. Humour is a very strong element, seen not just in the comedic tales, but in the way characters interact, and cheer one another along in times of trouble.

Citation

In these days of climate change and worry about the future, Bren MacDibble brings us the dystopian vision of a future without bees; instead, agile children perform the bees' tasks. The feisty heroine in *How to Bee*, 10-year-old Peony, lives and works on an orchard with her sister and Gramps, and longs to be promoted to bee, an ambition that's nearly destroyed when Ma decides she must work in the city. Peony has many terrific qualities – kindness, bravery, loyalty and tenacity. She is fierce and determined, with a passion for her family and the importance of her life in the country. This is a tale to fire young readers with awareness and with courage for the future.

Copyright Licensing NZ Award for Young Adult Fiction

Speech by Bridget Schaumann

What a pleasure it has been to see the quality of the books submitted for this award. Young adult writing and publishing in New Zealand is certainly in good heart.

Every category is difficult to judge, and these books were no exception with such a range of strong entries. An excellent mix of experienced and new writers submitted works and that makes us incredibly happy.

Certain themes were prevalent in the entries in this section. courage, survival, family dynamics, underdogs, resilience and mental health issues, many of the protagonists had massive struggles in their lives but the sense of hope and the resourcefulness of the characters made their stories moving, and sometimes an uncomfortable read as the characters rallied against challenges. We loved the tension in all of the finalists. The stories swept the reader up in drama, sometimes in terrible sadness, other times a whirl of action and thrilling adventure.

We noted that the authors were able to put personal experiences into the realm of young adults and make a story which resonated. Such personal stories moved into the now, give a reader a sense of authenticity. There are also readers who want to escape this world and head into an imaginary realm and these readers were well taken care of whether they were headed into deepest space or into a Steampunk fantasy.

The finalists are exceptional, every one of them is a wonderful read for young and old. Amongst so many fine books our finalists should be incredibly proud of their work and all of them are to be heartily congratulated.

Citation

In the Dark Spaces is a high-concept science fiction novel which hums with character and bravery, a strong sense of family and aliens - big feathery aliens who communicate in whistles. The author cleverly constructs a world which is engrossing, tense and irresistible; her skill at drawing the reader into an unfamiliar world is extraordinary. For a young adult audience this book has so much to offer, the sheer brilliance of its construction and the imagined world within the pages is stunning. Readers of any age will find a story they will relate to, but also an impressive tale of world class calibre. Such thrilling writing is indeed deserving of the highest award for its category.

Elsie Locke Award for Non-Fiction

Speech by Jeannie Skinner

The Non-Fiction Award is named in honour of author and activist Elsie Locke who was a remarkable woman, full of integrity and principle and a determination to make the world a fairer place for all. I like to think that she'd be delighted and impressed by the range of marvellous titles shortlisted for this Award in her name.

There were 22 non-fiction category entries this year, with very many at an exceptionally high standard, which was both a gift and an enormous challenge for the judges. The five non-fiction finalists stand out for their particular strength in telling the New Zealand story, in an informative and engaging way, as they variously explore and explain our history, biography, landscape and natural world.

These finalist books are superbly written – they shine with their author's expertise and passion for their subject. Their high-quality illustrations, in a range of media, capture the imagination and extend the reading experience. Superb book design is worth mentioning too, with judges appreciating interesting covers, appropriate choice of font, appealing endpapers, excellent information organisation and page layout, and paratextual features such as clear contents and index, glossary and sources, further reading or ideas for action.

It was fascinating to observe students engage with and evaluate all the nominations against the judging criteria and, more informally, what appealed and spoke to their interests and concerns, what surprised or charmed, and the titles that created personal connections. All of these responses were factored into the judging process.

These non-fiction books are eye-openers and mind-openers. Their subjects exemplify some of our strongest qualities, such as courage and curiosity, wonder and adventure, resilience and determination, and they help us develop our sense of identity and of place. The books explore diverse and sometimes complex subjects, and manage to capture and distil the essence, clearly and honestly, for their young audience, of what makes our world so interesting, so wonderful, and in the words of poet Louis MacNeice, “so incorrigibly plural”.

Citation

Aotearoa: The New Zealand Story is a bold and abundant book, large in format and in scope, and visually stunning. It takes us from Aotearoa’s prehistory to the modern day with stories of the people, places and events that have shaped us. The illustrations are dramatic and detailed, full of colour and pattern, with mātauranga Māori integrated throughout. The map illustrations are complemented by minimal text providing snippets of information which provide context and inspiration to find out more. The large size format gives generous scope for innovative and varied page design, leading us through a wealth of facts, ideas and details which inform, intrigue and entertain. This is a book for every home, school and library, a book for reading, re-reading and sharing with all ages.

Russell Clark Award for Illustration

Speech by Darryn Joseph

How fabulous, and privileged to have time to focus and admire the works of our talented illustrators. Twenty-four books were entered in this category, celebrating the best of illustration in books for children. The five that were shortlisted resonated with us all and formed the visual backdrop for our robust discussion.

As we go hunting for the award-winning illustrator let’s first address the elephant in the room - how do you compare these five styles? Hyperrealism, to watercolour, to comic art, to glow-in-the-dark pictures to flat, subtle, clean, line art? Well, we did it respectfully, and with a lot of discussion and consideration of the criteria. Did the illustrations convey the spirit of the book? In each case there was a resounding yes and we then trekked back and forth over these beautiful works.

Our eyes were treated to a visual feast. We had images of a finely textured Abel Tasman and a Māori warrior with beads of sweat holding a translucent chipped mere. Luminous jellyfish and cartoon-like ocean denizens playfully darted along the page. Fluid figures tunnelling and making haste showed subtle, and deft drafting skills. The heady task of hundreds of panels sequenced

into a comic format was superbly done. The humble nature of Jean Batten was magically conveyed in simple lines with flat colour. We were treated to such a range of palettes, tones, styles and fine details, and yet each book always stayed true to the mauri of the story.

Each book was so well resolved. Keeping in mind the subjects ranged from: canaries and soldiers; dragons and beasties; jellyfish and sea creatures; to historical explorers and flying heroines. With such high production values, the publishers and designers are all to be commended but the illustrators: Marco Ivančić, Jenny Cooper, Craig Phillips, Ruth Paul and Phoebe Morris are all to be congratulated for their hours, and hours of illustrative toil. Kei ngā ringa rehe, tēnā rā koutou katoa.

Citation

Craig Phillips has brought to life ten fantastical stories drawn from mythology and fairy tales from around the globe. They are made new in Phillips' superb sequential art or comic stylings – an individual drawing style and colour palette appropriate to each tale. The volume and quality of work is staggering. In the first story alone we view 139 panels, small, medium, and large, all lovingly rendered to propel the story along. The skilful diversity of frame and layout, stroke and point of view bring a freshness to the familiar, and delight to the previously unknown. The stylistic complexity of sustaining a character's giss (general impression of size and shape) over so many frames is handled superbly by Phillips from the tiny to the double A4 splash pages. The comic format is executed masterfully in this excellent publication and will be cherished by young and old.

E te kaitā pakiwaituhi, Craig, tēnei te mihi nui rawa. Tēnā rā koe.

Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Award

Speech by Moana Munro

The Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Award recognizes childrens books that are written entirely in (or translated entirely into) te reo Māori. This year The Wright Family Foundation has kindly sponsored Te Kura Pounamu Awards – Kia ū ki te pai, he mihi maioha. Te Kura Pounamu received eight entries. The three finalists excelled in the art of storytelling, encouraging excellence in te reo, identifying whakapapa and whakaaro Māori characteristics. Ahakoa he iti he pounamu: although the numbers were small they are precious like greenstone.

- **Hineahuone:** The te reo Māori in Hineahuone invites the reader to keep on reading, each sentence moulding this ancient pūrākau (legend) into the imagination. Bright, eye-catching illustrations work alongside a strong storyline.

- ***Te Tamaiti me te Aihe:*** Like a dolphin surfing on a surging wave the strength of te reo throughout this narrative continuously grows embodies kaitiakitanga taking care of the environments creatures.
- ***Tu Meke Tūī!***: The skillful use of kīwaha and playful huarite all in Te Reo Māori plaits a courageous tale, balanced by stylishly detailed illustrations of native wildlife and fauna within Aotearoa.

It was a privilege to judge Te Kura Pounamu te reo Awards alongside Anahera Morehu and Jacque Snee, He mihi aku rahi, aku rangatira.

Citation

Me whakanui ka tika i te tohungatanga o te kaiwhakamāori, ā kupu, ā hā nei kia tino rongō i te wāirua, i tiro ā-Māori ki tōna ake ao. Ko te kīwaha ***Tu meke Tūī!***, tētehi te tū ohorere, tērā atu he whakamiha mō tētehi mahi i whakamiharo.

Tu Meke Tūī! showcases the expertise of translator Evelyn Tobin, who captures the breath and spirit of this story by Malcolm Clarke skillfully, locating it within a Māori viewpoint. With exquisite illustrations by FLOX, this is a feel-good story that encourages its young readers to appreciate each other's differences and to see that helping out in times of trouble can end up better than expected.

Margaret Mahy Book of the Year Award

Speech by Jeannie Skinner

And so we come to the final award of the evening, the supreme award, the Margaret Mahy Book of the Year. Before talking about the finalists, shall we just take a moment of fond recollection about the extraordinary, gifted, inimitable person that was Margaret Mahy.

Many of us here had the good fortune to meet Margaret in person and experience first-hand her intelligence, sense of humour, kindness, felicity with language, and her fascination with new ideas, surprising juxtapositions, and the endless scope of imagination.

And if we didn't meet her face to face, or see her in storytelling action, we can know Margaret through her books as we read and re-read them, and share them with new generations of young listeners and readers.

By remembering and reflecting on Margaret's enormous talent and legacy, we bring honour to this Award in her name.

And so to the finalists ...

In each of the six main category winners the judges identified qualities of excellence and creativity, with engaging and inspiring narratives that give us memorable characters, settings and storylines. They entertain and delight us, inform us, and show us how we can make the world a better place through empathy and understanding.

- ***I am Jellyfish*** takes us on a swimmingly zen, luminous journey to ocean depths and demonstrates kindness and altruism in action.
- ***How to Bee*** shows us a world in peril ecologically but the enduring power of love and family, resilience and optimism.
- ***In the Dark Spaces*** takes us to alien worlds, vividly imagined, and speaks to us about the importance of making connections and building bridges of communication.
- ***Aotearoa*** offers through its richly illustrated maps a smorgasbord of delights to explore about our country, ourselves, our past, present and future.
- ***Giants, Trolls, Witches, Beasts*** brings to life tried and true traditional tales from around the world in a dynamic, colourful and hugely popular comic book form.
- ***Tu Meke Tūi!*** has been given fresh perspective with its lively Māori translation, bringing this tale to a new audience.

Citation

Aotearoa: The New Zealand Story is a splendid and memorable book, showing us the landscapes, events, and personalities that have built our country's culture and identity. This book encourages us to ask questions, explore ideas, and celebrate our unique place in the world.

Aotearoa stood out for the judges for its innovative concept and format – we've seen nothing quite like it in New Zealand children's publishing. It is masterful in its execution – a work of art that bears repeated and thoughtful viewing and reading of its vibrant and informative illustrations, and it is a book of enduring significance in the canon of New Zealand children's literature – a landmark title which will stand the test of time.

It is a book to read, to dip into, to revisit, and to share. It deserves a place on every home, school and public library bookshelf. It is a treasure chest of colour, words, people and story. It is a book for all ages, a bountiful celebration of Aotearoa New Zealand, and a worthy recipient of the Margaret Mahy Book of the Year Award.
