



awc AUSTRALIAN
WRITERS'
CENTRE



MAGIC & MAYHEM

**Discover the secrets
to creating
magnificent books
for kids and teens.**

Children are a notoriously tough group of readers to please. But get it right as an author and you'll create fans for life!

In this ebook, we share the journeys of nearly 40 published children's authors along with valuable insights from them about their writing experiences and advice for aspiring authors. It has been created to accompany the **Magic & Mayhem** podcast series – brought to you by the Australian Writers' Centre.

The structure of this ebook is very simple. It begins with picture book authors, before progressing to early chapter books, middle grade and young adult – just as a young reader would! Finally it is rounded out by insights from publishing industry experts – sharing the sorts of things they look for in a book.

We hope you enjoy this collection!

awc AUSTRALIAN
WRITERS'
CENTRE





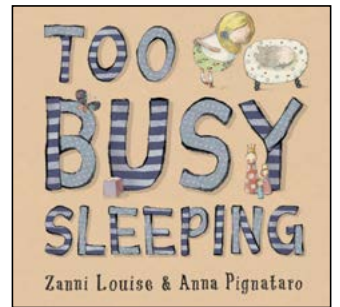
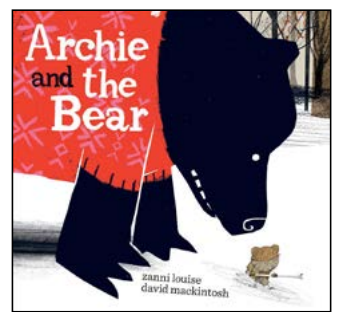
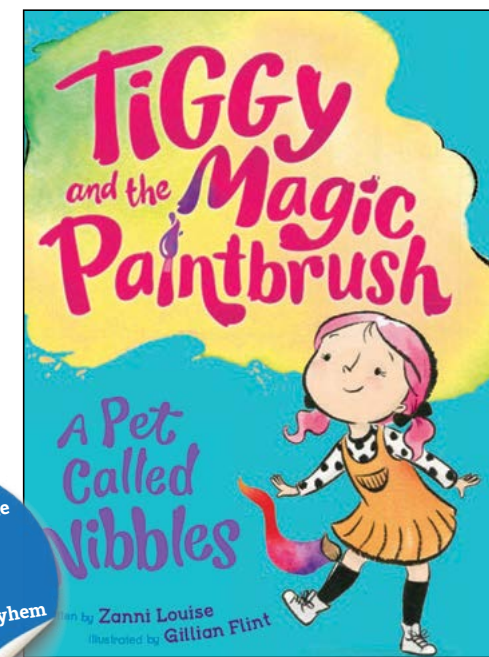
picture books

Zanni Louise

Zanni Louise is an Australian writer of books for children. Her first picture book, *Too Busy Sleeping*, was named a Notable Book of the Year by the Children's Book Council of Australia in 2016. Since then she has published several more books, including her popular *Tiggy and the Magic Paintbrush* series for newly independent readers.



Listen to this chat at episode 1 of the Magic & Mayhem podcast



After the birth of her children, Zanni Louise found that she finally had time to pursue her writing dreams. She wasn't entirely sure what she wanted to do, so she started a blog about her parenting journey and reviewing picture books. Soon, Zanni drew the attention of a publisher at Hardie Grant Egmont who sent along some books and a business card.

"It gave me that little incentive to write stories," Zanni says. And when her first manuscript was ready, she knew exactly who to contact.

Picture books are hard work

How much work goes into making a picture book? For Zanni, her first published manuscript had three rounds of edits before it even went to the acquisitions meeting. And it was another two and a half years before it was illustrated and published!

"Then I waited another couple of months to find out what the result of that was," says Zanni. "Patience is definitely a virtue."

Working alongside seasoned editors and illustrators, Zanni quickly learned that there are times when drawings can take the place of words, and a good picture book text will leave space for illustrations. When you only have a few hundred words,

sometimes you need to be ruthless about cutting text.

"That is a big part of the editing, is definitely leaving room for the images," Zanni says.

Keeping busy

During the waiting process, Zanni realised that she had to keep working even when it seemed like nothing was happening.

"That was two and a half years of me developing other stories," she says. "And I can honestly say I wrote over a hundred manuscripts. It doesn't mean any of them are worth publishing, but I wrote many, many stories in that time."

Zanni kept sending these stories to her publisher, but they weren't all met with great enthusiasm.

"I was getting a little bit worried about my ability to make this a purposeful career," Zanni admits about those quiet periods. "But then I just kept on going. And I thought, well, look, I enjoy writing, stories are coming to me constantly, I'm just going to keep writing them down."

And her persistence has paid off. Zanni has now published seven books and has another five coming out in 2019.

"No matter how busy you are or no matter what you're doing in your life, keep being creative in any way you can."

Build a community

Because Zanni already had a strong online presence through her blog, she was able to use her community to help when her books came out.

"I was already connected with Australian blogging groups, and so I put out messages in there and said would anyone be interested in reviewing my books? And I got many, many, many replies," Zanni says. "I

think most of them reviewed it on their blogs or various platforms. And that was very helpful."

Zanni hasn't been afraid to put herself out there. She takes every opportunity to visit bookstores, preschools, schools, and conferences. There's more to being a successful author than just doing the writing. As Zanni says, you need to find your comrades.

"Nurturing your relationships and your community is very important. And giving back to that community. So what I do on my blog, I like sharing writing tips, I like sharing my experiences, and hope that helps other people. So really being an active member of those communities will benefit you to no end." 

Got a picture book idea?

Bring it to life!

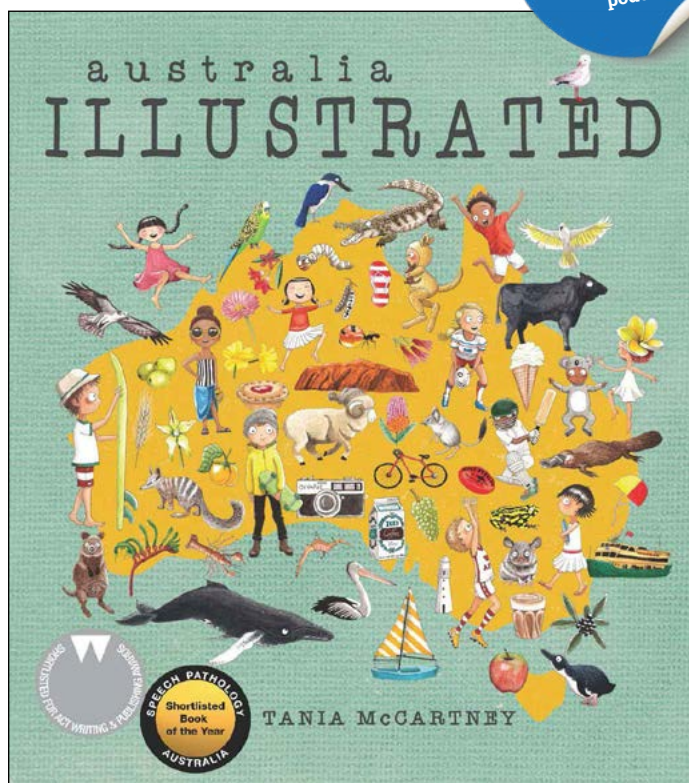
CLICK TO FIND OUT MORE



awc AUSTRALIAN WRITERS' CENTRE
World-class writing courses



Listen to
this chat at episode
2
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast



Tania McCartney

Tania McCartney thinks she might have started writing in utero. For as long as she can remember, she has been writing but it wasn't until she moved to China with her family that she started writing for children. Since then she has written dozens of books, focusing on nonfiction for kids, some of which she has illustrated herself.

Find your niche

When it comes to picture books, we don't usually think of nonfiction. But that's exactly where Tania's passion lies, and she has made this niche very much her own.

"I'm a really non-fiction person," Tania says. "I read stacks of fiction, but I just love facts and figures and non-fiction and history."

Tania has channeled this love into fact-based stories for very young children. She has written historical biographies of Banjo Paterson and Captain Cook, published by the National Library of Australia, and her other books cover diverse topics such as senses, the environment, stories of children living all over the world, and illustrated maps.

But it's not something that can be forced. You can't try to fill a market gap if you don't have any interest in it. "Listen to your heart. Write from your heart," Tania says. "Write your passion and what you love."

Learning to draw again

Although Tania had been a prolific illustrator up until her 20s, at some point she stopped drawing and then believed that she had forgotten how. At the urging of her friends, she picked up her

paintbrushes again and started practising. She also created a Facebook group - The 52-week illustration challenge - where community members can learn and share together.

"I was someone that committed," Tania says of her illustration journey. "And after two and a half years, I was drawing to a level where I thought I could approach a publisher. And I did. And I got a contract a week later. And that was Australia Illustrated."

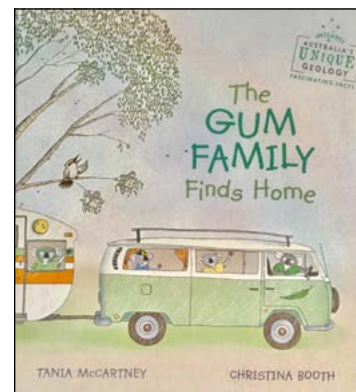
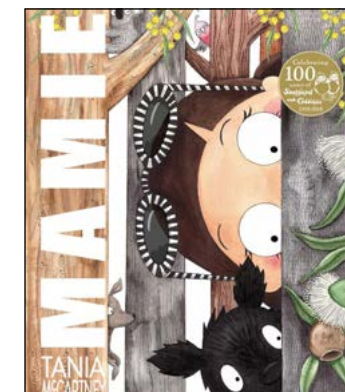
"Share what you know. Share your knowledge with others and they will share it with you. You will grow so rapidly and you will have outstanding opportunities if you can do that."

Working with limitations

A lot of people mistakenly think that writing for kids is easy. But as Tania explains, there are so many more limitations when it comes to children's publishing.

"Children are so open and honest and critical," Tania says. "And you have gatekeepers, and you have word counts, and you have so many limitations that you need to work around while providing magic and comprehension and educational properties. It's a real balancing act."

Tania McCartney has over 30 years' experience in the publishing industry and is the author of more than 40 books for children and adults. She both illustrates her own books and works with artists to create beautiful nonfiction picture books and maps for little kids, a niche she has made her own. Tania is also the founder of Kids' Book Review and the 52-Week Illustration Challenge.



Giving back to the community

Tania firmly believes in nurturing relationships within the creative industries. She is generous with her advice and is always trying to help emerging writers and illustrators.

"Industry is your support," Tania says. "If you've got a brand-new book that you've written and you throw it into an ocean it's going to go plip and sink. If you have a 10,000-strong industry behind you that you've developed genuine relationships with over ten years, who rub your back when you rub theirs, who love and support your work, you throw that book in that ocean it's going to make a splash." 

Shelly Unwin

Shelly Unwin is a children's picture book author. Her first series of books was the You're series, published by Allen & Unwin in 2017. Shelly released Blast Off the following year, and There's a Baddie Running Through This Book is due out soon.

Deciding to be an author came as something of a shock to Shelly Unwin. She was reading an incy wincy spider book when the idea of writing picture books hit her.

"I suddenly went, oh! This is it! This is what I want to do," she recalls.

100% commitment

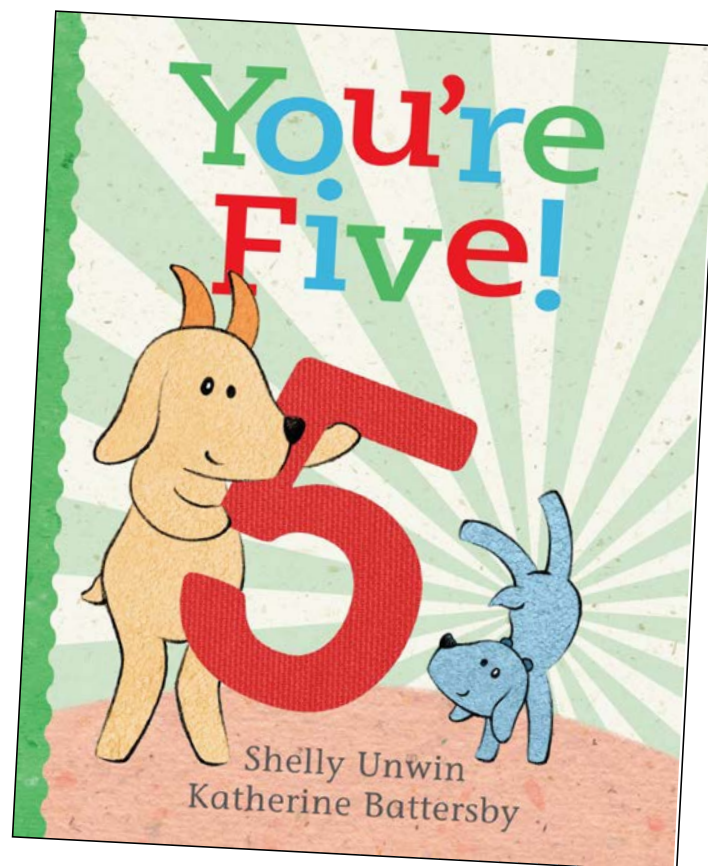
In Shelly's own words, her journey became an obsession. She took courses, joined critiquing groups, borrowed books from the library - everything she could do to learn about writing picture books.

"I would grab a coffee and race back to my laptop and chain myself to my desk and work at it as if it was any other sort of business," Shelly says. "I really did throw myself at it with complete conviction and I never really wavered."

Finding a commercial hook

Shelly was getting good feedback on her manuscripts but the one thing she heard over and over again was that her stories were too 'quiet'. That is, they didn't have a commercial hook. That was until she came up with the idea for the You're books.

"I was like, this is commercial," Shelly recalls. "And on my way back from one of the critiquing meetings I was like, oh my



goodness. It's a series! I've got to write You're One, You're Two, You're Three, You're Four. And they all flowed beautifully on to the page. They wanted to be written. They were so willing to go on."

Visionary

After securing an agent, Shelly had to wait for the long process of actually seeing her books come to fruition. But through

Listen to
this chat at episode
3
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

"Often you go into things and you don't know what you don't know. It's only when you start to do a course or speak to experts that you find that there are so many layers. The more years you're at it, the more you uncover. And then you forget that you've learned it. It's just then there to use."

it all, she had her vision board that she'd created early on in the process. "A great publishing contract" her vision had said. And that's exactly what she got.

"It took a long, long time. And there were days, I'm sure, when I opened the cupboard and didn't even notice the vision board. But then there were days where I did, I would stand and look at it and go, yep, this is what I'm aiming for." 

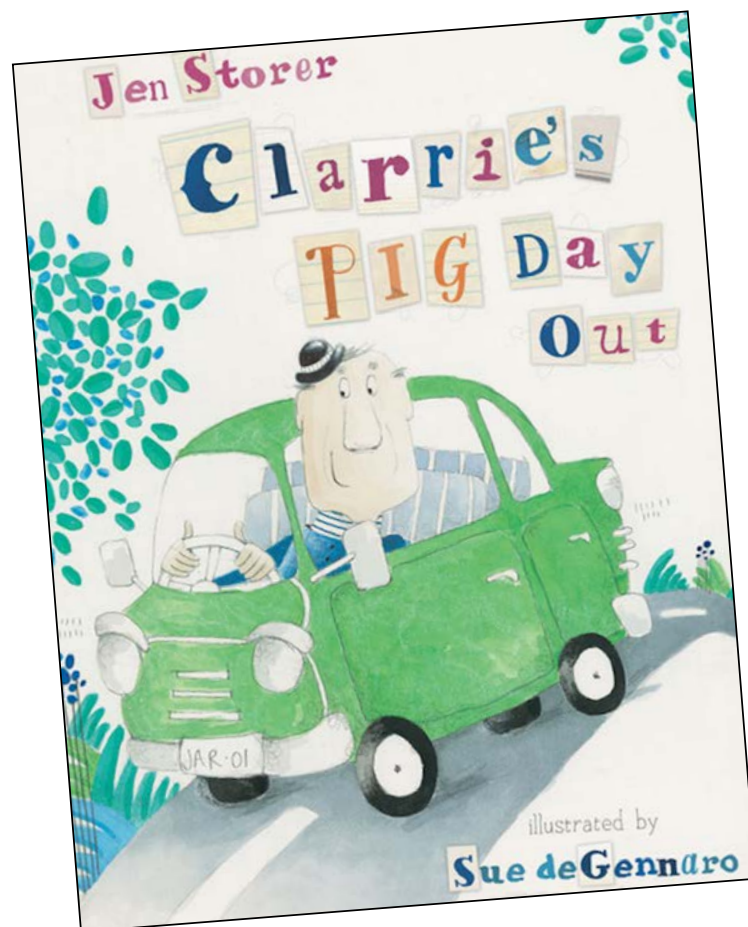


Jen Storer

Jen Storer is an Australian writer of books for children. She is the author of the popular chapter book series Truly Tan and Danny Best, as well as numerous standalone books. More recently, Jen moved into picture books with the publication of *Clarrie's Pig Day Out* and *Blue, The Builder's Dog*.



"Keep fueling your passion. Be mindful of it and do it regularly, not just every six months. I think every week you should be immersing yourself in something that reminds you about why you love literature."



An early midlife crisis sent Jen Storer out of her practical life and on to a path of creativity. After finishing a degree in literature, Jen landed various jobs at publishing houses and eventually found the courage to start her own writing journey.

Don't give up

Although she is well-established now, Jen has had many ups and downs along her writing career. Back when she was working as a nurse, Jen was already writing picture books, sending them to publishers, and receiving her fair share of rejections. Her first published book, *I Hate Sport* (written from the heart), received a rejection and an acceptance on the same day, six months after she'd sent it out. The publishing industry is a fickle beast, indeed.

Jen went on to publish her popular Truly Tan series, as well as several other middle grade books. But even as an established author, Jen couldn't quite crack a picture book.

"Even though I was writing all these novels over the years, every time I sat down to write a picture book, that inner critic just got really savage," Jen says. "And so I just kept giving up."

After a few years of trying, the muse finally arrived in the form of a farmer named Clarrie. "I lost my fear, and I just wrote from the heart," Jen says, of her first picture book *Clarrie's Pig Day Out*. "Don't worry about critics, judges or the market. Just write from the heart, and then your heart will respond to somebody else's heart."

Design matters

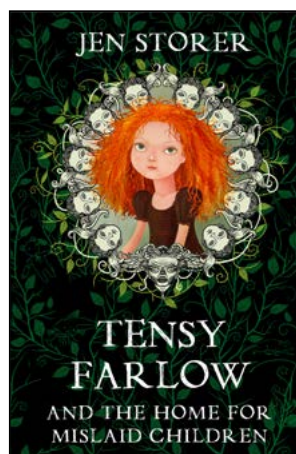
Even Jen's popular Truly Tan series had a bumpy start. When it was originally published, it didn't do very well. After the copyright reverted back to Jen, she sold it to Harper Collins where it has gone on to become hugely successful, with book 8 in the series is due out in 2019. Jen puts the book's later success down to a redesign.

"The way it was all designed and put together didn't showcase it properly and it didn't make Tan stand out as an iconic figure," Jen says. However, the new design changed the whole feel. "Claire Robertson, her illustration and her approach, it's very iconic. Like, you just know Tan straight away. She's very accessible."

Kids are the best audience

One of the things Jen loves about writing for kids is the way they connect with stories.

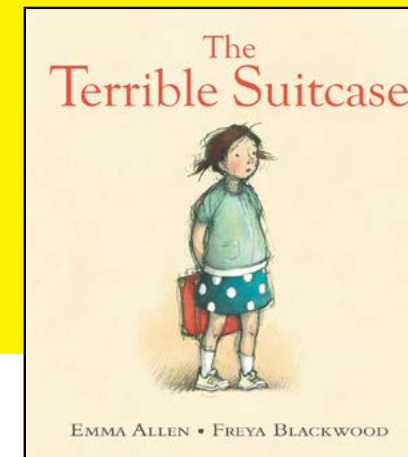
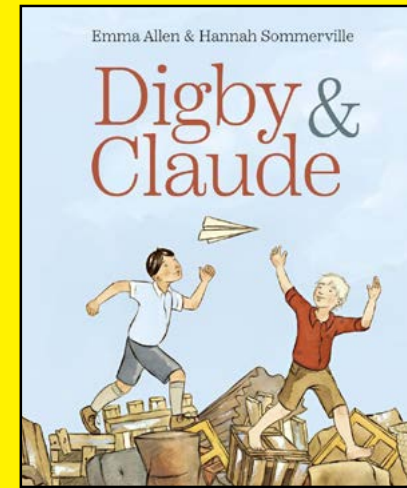
"They really live in the stories that you write. I just get it from the kids that write to me, they read my books repeatedly," Jen says. "It's beautiful. It's just the best feedback any writer can have, that kids just live in the stories." 



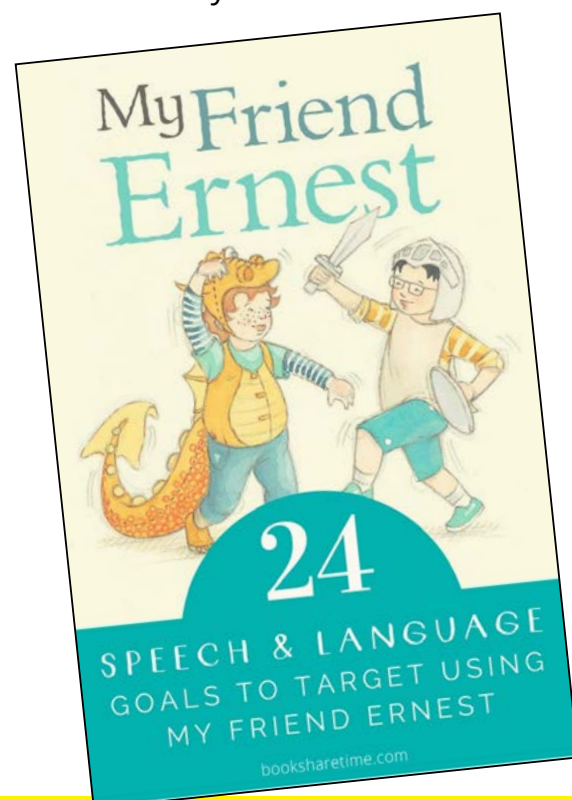
Emma Allen



Emma Allen is an Australian picture book writer. Her very first published book, *The Terrible Suitcase*, illustrated by Freya Blackwood, won the CBCA Book of the Year and was shortlisted for the Western Australia Premier's Literary Awards. Her latest picture book, *Digby and Claude*, was published by the National Library of Australia in 2018.



Emma Allen always loved writing as a child. But she was also good at science and maths, so she ended up merging her two loves and became a pediatric speech therapist. Eventually, though, her creative spirit prevailed. Emma's debut picture book, *The Terrible Suitcase*, won the CBCA Book of the Year in 2013 and was shortlisted for the Western Australia Premier's Literary Awards.



It grows and grows

Emma reached the stage where she knew she wanted to be 'in the literary scene somehow' but didn't actually think she could be a writer. She went back to university to do a masters in literature to develop her skills. The positive responses she received, not just from friends and family, gave her the confidence to think, "yes, I can do this."

But even now, with several successful published books out on the shelves, Emma still feels doubt.

"I've got to the point where every time I start something I think, 'I'm not sure I can do this,'" Emma admits. "Then the other part of me says, 'But, I love this. I've got the background, why don't you have a go?' So, I have a go and then it just grows and grows, and by the end I feel really good about it."

Studying for freedom

Emma's main stumbling block has always been confidence. But by going back to

"Stay authentic. Find what you think your own voice is first and then explore that. I think that gives you a lot of confidence."

university, she learned the skills she needed to approach her writing in a professional way.

"What I needed to do was to get some confidence that what I was writing had some merit," Emma says. "For me, I really did have to go back and study literature and do it the long way. But it's given me such a great freedom now, because I feel that when people ask me what I'm doing with the book or with the story or with the words, I can really respond in a professional way." 

Have a ball
learning how
to create your
own picture
book

FIND OUT
MORE

Listen to
this chat at episode
5
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

Danny Parker

Danny Parker is a writer of picture books and books for early readers. When he's not writing, he's the Director of Drama and Youth Theatre at Hale School, Perth. Danny's first picture book, *The Tree*, came out in 2012 and his second book, *Parachute*, was shortlisted for CBCA's 2014 Picture Book of the Year award.

When Danny Parker wrote his first picture book manuscript, he didn't even realise what it was. It wasn't until he showed it to his friend, the illustrator Matt Otley, that he realised that he had the potential to be a picture book writer.

"Matt picked me up and mentored me through the process," Danny says. "So, I realized then that I wasn't writing poetry, I was actually writing little picture books."

Picture books are not illustrated stories

One lesson Danny learned early on is that a picture book is more than just a story with illustrations.

"The picture book model itself seems to allow two very distinctly different creative

souls, the writer and the illustrator, to get together to create that third thing, that other place, the sort of space between the words and the pictures where another story can happen," Danny says.

After the sudden death of his father, Danny wrote a short story as response. This is the story that Matt Otley would help him to turn into his first picture book, *Tree*.

"I didn't realize then that illustration in a picture book world was an art form in itself," Danny says. "It wasn't really a matter of just simply drawing the pictures of the words, but of finding another story inside the text and helping the book become deeper and more significant. Matt, obviously, saw immediately that this was a text that he could do other stories within."

Picture books are team work

Of course, when an illustrator sees the stories within a text, that often means words get cut and replaced with drawings. This can be surprisingly hard for a writer.

"Writers love writing, don't they? And they love the words," Danny says.

It can be sad to let go of your carefully crafted descriptions or beautiful sentences. But it's important to remember that a writer, illustrator and editor are all working together for the same goal.

"You are a part of a team of creative people who are all kind of marching in the same direction," Danny says. "Very often if you read a text without showing the pictures you won't have a full idea of the story at all. And equally if you just saw the pictures and didn't read the text you'd think, 'Crikey, what's going on?'"

"Be really, really brutal with your own edits. Don't hold onto your words like they're your children. You've got to be prepared sometimes to tell the story in another way if you want someone to read it."

Editing is brutal

All of which is to say that sometimes you need to kill your darlings. A picture book doesn't leave a lot of room for flowery verse. You have to be insanely concise. And working as part of a team, you also have to be prepared for brutal honesty.

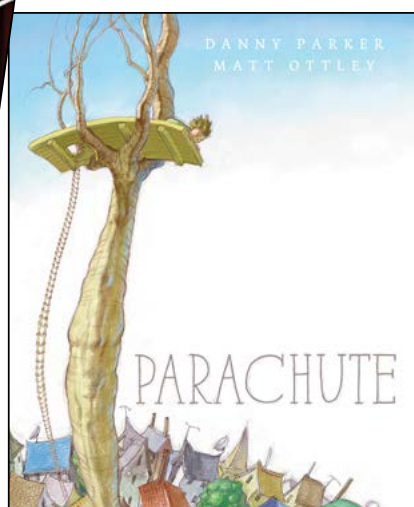
Danny shares this anecdote. "I was told once, and I think it's brilliant, when *Tree* was published, the conversation sort of



went like this: 'Danny, I really love your story, I just want to change one thing: the words.'"

Of course you have to hang on to your creative vision and tell the story that you need to tell. But writing a picture book means staying open-minded and receptive. It's not easy, but it is rewarding.

"The point is you've got to keep going and you've got to be prepared to change it and change and change it," Danny says. "And, persistence and resilience is very important."



Sue

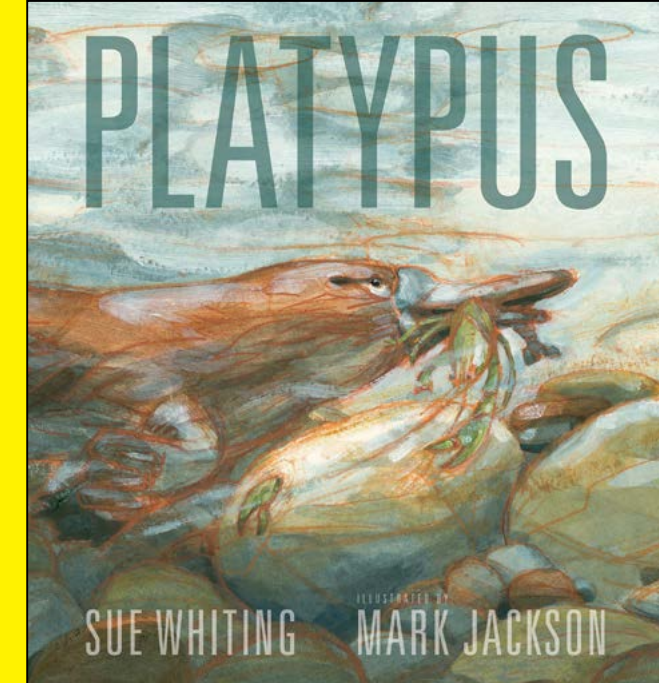
Whiting

Sue Whiting has written numerous books in a variety of genres: fiction and nonfiction, picture books through to YA. Her books include the CBCA Notable Book Platypus and the award-winning *A Swim in the Sea*. Her latest picture book is *Beware the Deep Dark Forest*, illustrated by Annie White. Sue previously worked in publishing and as a teacher.

Listen to
this chat at episode

7

of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast



When it comes to writing, Sue Whiting has done it all. After leaving her teaching role, Sue had a successful career as a publisher and writer in the education market. However, she also dreamed of publishing her own original writing, which she finally did in 2004. Since then she has written picture books, middle grade, YA, fiction, nonfiction, and everything in between.

Balancing editing and writing

Sue didn't actually intend to get into publishing. She had been working happily as a teacher and was doing some contract writing on the side. But an ad for an editing role with Walker Books seemed too good an opportunity to resist. Sue applied, got the job, and her new life in publishing began.

Her experience both as a contract writer and in publishing has been invaluable for her own writing. But it wasn't always easy to balance her professional life with her creative one.

"It is difficult," Sue admits. "There were times when I couldn't write and there were times when I was able to write. But it was a real struggle because you had to find the creative space in your head for your own work, alongside the creative space for all of the other books that you're working on with other authors."

Daily practice

One thing that helped, however, was writing every day. Sue managed to write her YA novel, *Portrait of Selena*, during a quiet part of her work commute, just 20 minutes a day.

"If I wrote daily I found that I was able to have my work fit in my brain alongside all of the other books I was working on in the same kind of way. So, I could just pull it out and work on it at will."

"Read as a writer. Go back and look and say, 'How did the writer achieve that?' Thinking like a writer as you're reading so you can see the ways that the writer solved the problems."

Staying diverse

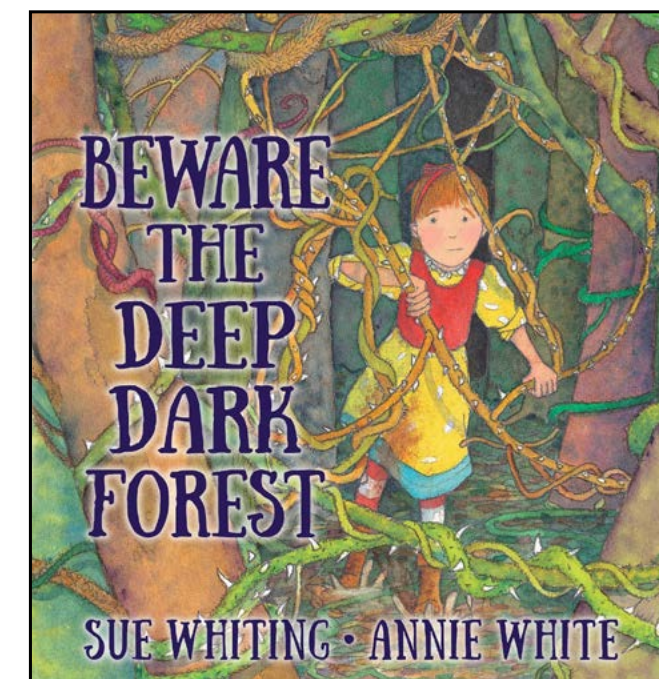
Sue took the plunge and left her publishing career to pursue writing full time. She hasn't focused on any particular genre or age group, but has stayed diverse.

"I follow wherever the ideas take me," Sue says. "So I have a couple of picture

books in the works. And I know that I'll just forever be doing different age groups, because I think that's just how my brain works."

Picture books, however, remain her first love, although they are uniquely challenging to write.

"I fell in love with picture books first and they're a wonderful art form, but they are very hard to get right," Sue says. "There's only about 500-600 words, and you have to tell a complete story. It has to have a particular rhythm and a particular voice and you have to think about the illustration and the page turn. Every word has to earn its keep."



How to Write for Children and Young Adults

Pave the way for your success as an author

SEE COURSE DETAILS NOW

awc AUSTRALIAN
WRITERS'
CENTRE



chapter books

Lesley Gibbes

Lesley Gibbes spent 16 years as a primary school teacher before turning her hand to writing children's books. Her first picture book, *Scary Night*, was picked out of the slush pile in 2012 and since then she has gone on to publish several more picture books and a young readers series, *Fizz*. Lesley has also scored a swag of awards, most notably the Early Childhood Book of the Year, Honour Book by the Children's Book Council of Australia for *Scary Night*.



People always say that in order to be a writer, you have to read. Well, Lesley Gibbes spent 16 years as a primary school teacher, reading books to kids almost every day. There was no better apprenticeship for her to start her career as a children's author.

"Through sixteen years of teaching, just reading and reading so many picture books, so many chapter books to children," Lesley says. "I don't think I could have written before I had done that sixteen years of teaching. I think that was the real background for me to learn how to write."

Embrace your fear

Writing is hard and it's also scary. Maybe nobody ever admits that, but it's true! When you make the decision to commit to your writing, you might have to make sacrifices and you might be in for some hard truths. But you have to feel the fear and do it anyway, just like Lesley did.

"I thought, well, you're going to have to be

brave. Because I might actually find out that although I can write school assembly items and things like that, maybe my skills just weren't good enough for publication. So I did have to be very brave and take that leap knowing that I might find that out. And that would be disappointing. But I think it would be more disappointing if I didn't try."

"Give yourself permission to write badly. It's okay. Don't think that everything has to be perfect or you'll never do anything."

Just keep going

If you want to make a career as a writer, you need to keep writing. After her initial success, Lesley didn't sit back and think, well, great, I've had one book accepted. Job done. Instead, she kept writing and writing and writing. She took courses. She kept

sending out manuscripts.

"Some of those have now been published, and others are just sitting in the drawer. I went on to do lots of courses in all sorts of different places," Lesley says. "I just did that constantly. Lots and lots of courses, lots and lots of writing lots of manuscripts, sending all sorts of things out, getting lots and lots of rejections."

And always finish what you start

As well as picture books, Lesley now has a successful series for young readers about called *Fizz*. The *Fizz* of the title is a fluffy dog who wants to a career with the police but of course he faces obstacles. The text is quite a bit longer than a picture book, but Lesley worked on it until she felt that the story had been told.

"I just let it come out, just as it wanted to, naturally. And it ended up around the 5,000 word mark, and it just really worked for this story," Lesley says.

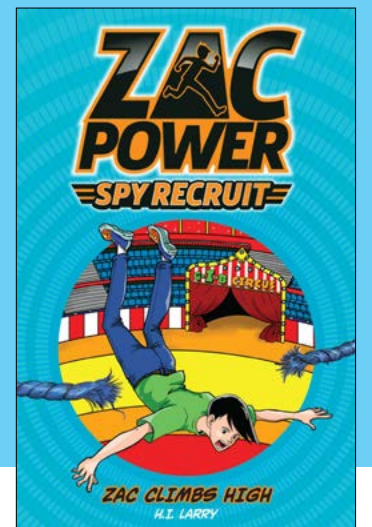
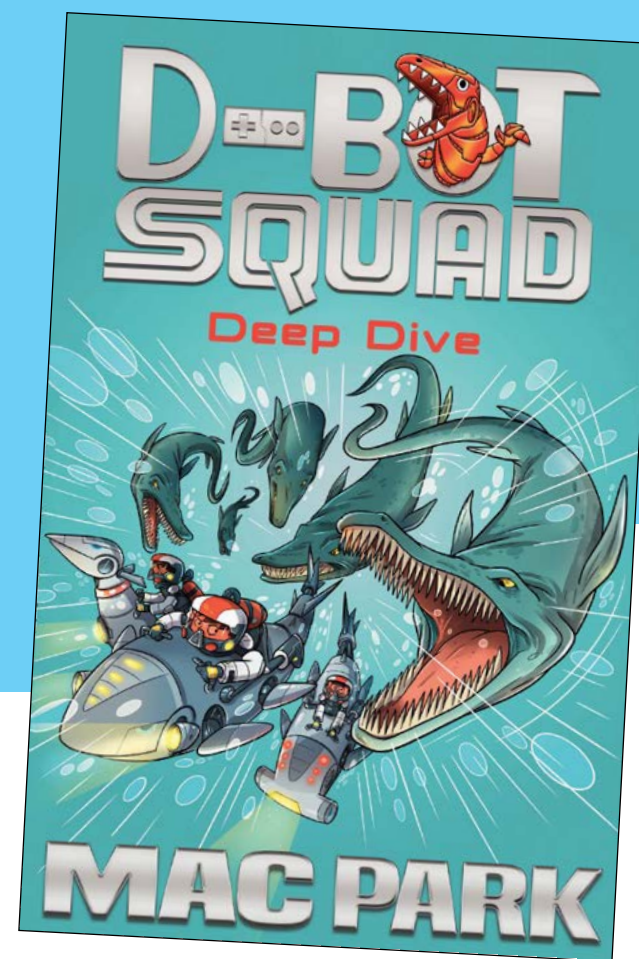
And this comes to Lesley's work ethos, which is to always finish every story.

"I always complete a manuscript beginning to end," Lesley says. "If you only write the beginning of the story ... you're only going to get good at writing beginnings. You won't get good at writing middles. And you certainly are not going to have the practice of writing endings." 



Louise Park

Louise Park is one of Australia's most successful writers for kids. Her popular series include Harriet Clare, Zac Power Test Drives, Boy vs Beast, and D-Bot. With her background in education and publishing, Louise has become a powerhouse among chapter book writers. She publishes under the names H.I. Larry, Mac Park, and Poppy Rose.



Louise Park won her first writing competition when she was just seven years old. However, her writing career took a detour through teaching and education before she wound up in publishing. These days, she's a full time children's author, writing popular chapter books for early readers.

Muesli and Coco Pops

Louise's strong background in education has certainly helped her writing career. Chapter books are only a few thousand words long, and the vocabulary needs to be pitched at a level so that kids find them enjoyable and challenging at the same time. They are adventure stories, but they do have education thrown in.

"It's muesli dressed up as Coco Pops," Louise says.

As one part of the writing duo Mac Park, it falls to Louise to be the muesli, while her writing partner Susanna MacFarlane gets to be the crunchy chocolate milkshake.

"I get to be the muesli. So I'm in there secretly laying all the groundwork to make sure that this grand yummy Coco Pops delivers, so that they have reading success."

Working with constraints

Louise's first concern is for her readers. She wants these young humans to acquire all the skills they need to develop their literacy.

"When kids are learning to read and acquiring literacy it is so critical, it is so important," Louise says. "You've got to get what's going on between those covers exactly right or it just falls over. It doesn't work."

"Know your audience. Get in there and be with them. It's not enough just to think that I want to write for ten-year-olds and I remember what being a ten-year-old was like. It won't cut it. You need to get in amongst your target audience."

For that reason, Louise is careful to map out the entire arc of her stories. Chapter books are usually several books long, and she knows what will happen in each and

how the whole series will resolve.

But it's not just about the adventure. The complexity of the stories and the vocabulary have to be just right.

"I know people will pick up the books and think, gosh these are easy, I could do these," Louise says. "And it is surprisingly hard. Because the constraints are just about crippling."

Know your target market

The best thing aspiring authors can do, Louise says, is to do some heavy duty reconnaissance.

"Get yourself into as many bookshops and sit on the floor of those bookshops for as long as you can, going through all of the series fiction that really works," she says. "Have a good look at what is there, what is claiming the space, why it's claiming the space, and where the holes are. And come up with something to fill the hole. And read a lot of successful series fiction to see how it goes." 



Listen to
this chat at episode
9
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast



Andy Griffiths

A lot of children's authors have always just wanted to make kids laugh, and that's exactly what Andy Griffiths wanted to do. As a child, he made up stories for his friends. And then as a teacher, he started writing because his students couldn't find any funny stories.

"I discovered all of these kids in early high school who wanted something funny to read, but couldn't find it on the library shelves. I started writing little pieces for them ... Involving runaway bums and things that made them laugh and gasp, and go, 'Wow, writing is fun, can we do some of that?'"

Find your own voice

For a while, Andy was hamstrung by his idea of what a 'real' writer should be. He had left his job to focus on writing, and felt that he should be writing literary short stories.

"I encourage a spirit of being experimental in your approach and trying everything and see what works and then see what feels comfortable and then committing to that."

"But my heart wasn't it," Andy says. "There was always this lunatic tone that kept coming through and breaking it, and wrecking everything that I tried to do. At that point I went, 'Yeah, I get it. I'm a stirrer and a comedian at heart, and

somebody that just likes, in its purest form, entertaining my reader.' That was kind of news to me after trying lots of different styles."

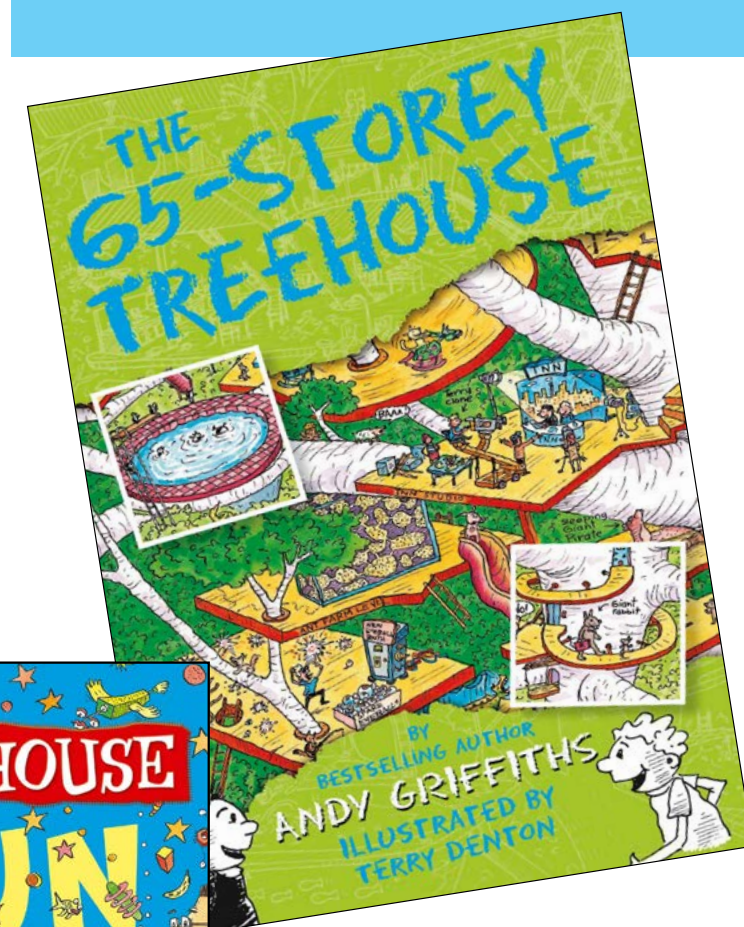
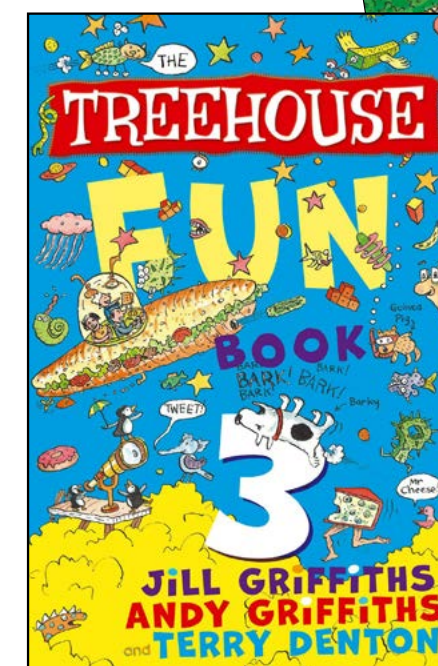
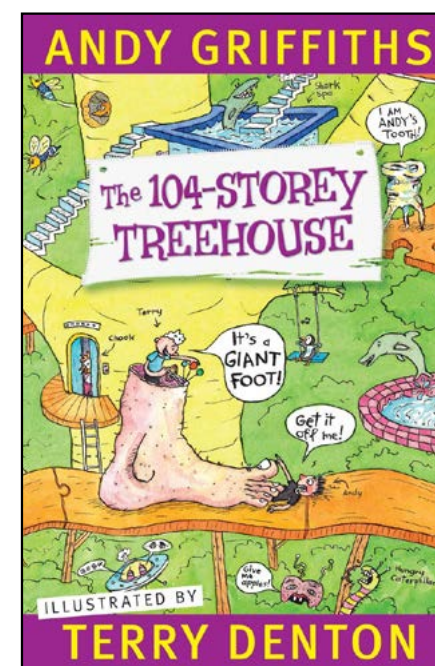
When Andy finally embraced his inner comedian, he quickly found success. His first book, *Just Tricking*, came out in 1997, and he has been publishing relentlessly ever since.

Write every day

Like a lot of writers, Andy is a fan of regular writing. It can help you to focus, find your voice, and explore new ideas. Most importantly, you can escape the voice of your inner critic while you commit to just getting the words down.

"You need to escape that voice when you're getting the raw material on the page. You bring it in later to edit what you've done and to tidy it up. But, too often it's fused at the creation stage, so people are very timid and very restricted in what they feel they can write." 

Andy Griffiths is one of Australia's most popular children's authors. He is the author of more than 30 books and has won just about every award in children's publishing. His books have been international best sellers, and even adapted for TV. Andy is best known as the author of the *JUST!* series, *The Day My Bum Went Psycho* and, the bestselling *Treehouse* series.



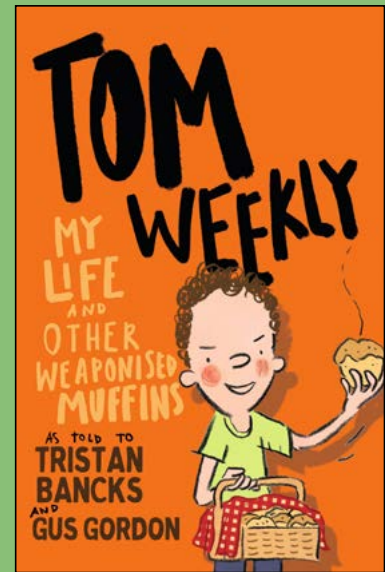
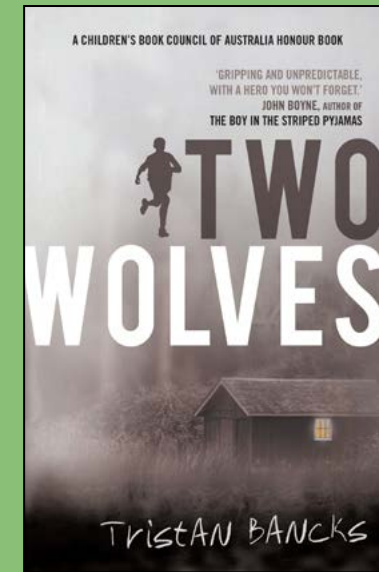


**middle
grade**

Tristan Banks



Tristan Banks is a children's and teen author with a background in acting and filmmaking. His books include the Tom Weekly series, Mac Slater, and the award-winning *Two Wolves*, a crime-mystery novel for middle-graders. His latest books are *The Fall*, a middle grade thriller, and *Tom Weekly: My Life and Other Failed Experiments*.



After a successful career in television, both as an actor and writer, Tristan Banks decided to start writing for kids. His books fall loosely into three categories: crime, mystery & suspense; weird, funny & gross; and action & adventure. Most important for Tristan is that he puts a sense of fun at the centre of all his books. And it's all done with a healthy dose of chaos.

Embrace chaos

When he first started writing books, Tristan's writing practice was quite structured. He had outlines that he stuck to quite strictly, a hangover from his script writing experience. But as he's built his confidence, Tristan now enjoys the freedom to dive into his manuscript when and where he wants to, following whatever lead seems most interesting.

"I used to be much more structured and organised, and I was much more afraid of having a messy first draft," Tristan says. "Whereas now, I tend to just dive in. And so you end up with a really messy first draft, but I can cope with a greater level of chaos in the manuscript now than I used to be able to."

The zero draft

Tristan has written enough books now that he knows he will make it to the end of each story. He doesn't feel the need to have outlines anymore as he has a bit more trust in himself. And so he uses that first draft to just explore the story and see where it takes him. In fact, he doesn't even call it a first draft, but rather a 'zero draft'. He alternates between handwriting, printed pages, even using a typewriter, in order to stop himself from getting bored.

"It really is consistent, that fourth draft is the time when the characters actually start to feel a bit more human and you know who they are."

"I got the typewriter because I get incredibly stale and bored opening up the laptop every day and staring into this bright screen that kind of glows back at me. And I'll do anything to avoid months

and months of doing that," Tristan says. "And so the zero draft manuscript, my first crack at it, is this Frankenstein's monster of laptop, handwritten, and typewritten pages."

Getting out there

Somehow, in between all that writing and editing, Tristan manages to get out to do school visits. He does between 90 - 100 visits every year!

"It is a lot. But you know what? There's no point writing a book and then nobody knowing it exists," Tristan says.

Tristan thinks it's important to connect to his readers, not just to get them interested in his books, but also to test out ideas. He decided to read out the first chapter of *The Fall* to a bunch of ninth graders when it was still in development and was surprised when it was well received.

"It was the reading of that first chapter that actually gave me confidence in the rest of the book. I thought, all right, okay, if I can capture that notoriously difficult group then perhaps I'm on to something and I should dig in and keep on writing this book. So it's a useful thing." 



Deborah Abela

Deborah Abela is the award-winning bestselling author of 25 books for children including popular series such as Ghost Club and Max Remy, picture books such as Wolfie: An Unlikely Hero, and thoughtful books such as the Grimsdon novels and Teresa: A New Australian. Among Deb's latest books are The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee and its sequel, The Most Marvellous Spelling Bee Mystery.



"Write with your heart out in front. Go with that idea that you dream about, you wake up, you think about it, with the characters who won't leave you alone."

In fact, it was two girls at the school who told her to write a sequel to The Stupendously Spectacular Spelling Bee. When Deb told them that there couldn't be a sequel, there was a winner at the end, the girls were unimpressed.

"They looked at me like I was the least smart adult they'd ever met in their life. 'Um, the international competition!'" Deb recounts. "And then they literally went away and came back with an A4 piece of paper. They'd really thought about it, the characters they could meet and the skulduggery that could happen."

Of course, that inspiration goes both ways. Deb thinks it's important to foster a love of reading in kids.

"I genuinely believe that kids love stories," Deb says. "We know that there's reluctant readers out there, we know that there are kids out there with not one book in their home. So when they're at school, particularly in primary school, I think it's all of our jobs, for those of us who write for kids, or parents, aunts, uncles, whatever, to try and get them while they're young to have a love of books. Because I think it's there. They just haven't found the right book yet." 



As a producer on kids TV show Cheez TV, Deborah Abela did everything from organising flights to managing llamas. But she also had to make sure the show went to air six days a week, every week of the year, and that meant coming up with story after story after story. This was the perfect apprenticeship for a

children's author, and she has since gone on to write 25 books for kids.

Nothing but Vegemite

When Deb finally got her writing break, with a book deal with Random House, she made the scary decision to quit her TV job and committed to writing full time.

"I knew I had to actually dedicate myself to writing. I gave myself two years and thought, I will live on Vegemite sandwiches. But if I don't treat this seriously, I'm going to blow it," Deb says of that first opportunity. "I thought, no, no, this has to be the main thing. And everything else has to now squeeze around it."

Just do it

The gamble paid off, and Deb quickly became a successful author. Part of that was down to the discipline she had learned in television.

"Crews are organised, flights, cars, actors, props, guests are organised. You need



to present something to all these people waiting for you," Deb says. "So just sit down and do it. Stop talking about it. Just sit down. Because this has to happen."

Kids and inspiration

Although she's been writing full time since she left her TV career behind, Deb still works one day a week at a school library. This gives her the opportunity to stay connected to her readers and to be inspired by them.



Allison Tait

Allison Tait (A.L. Tait) is the internationally published bestselling author of middle-grade adventure series The Mapmaker Chronicles and the new Ateban Cipher. Allison is a multi-genre writer, teacher and speaker with more than 25 years' experience in magazines, newspapers and online publishing, and is the co-host of the popular So You Want To Be A Writer podcast.

From photocopying back issues of an electronics magazine, to chatting with heavy metal bands, and the glamour of editing a fashion magazine, Allison Tait's career spanned it all. After deciding she no longer wanted to edit other people's bad copy, Allison moved into a successful career in features writing. To keep herself sane, she would write fiction in the evenings and after a conversation with her son she was inspired to write the popular The Mapmaker Chronicles.

Safety first

In the past few years, Allison's focus has shifted to children's literature, but she still does freelance writing, workshops for aspiring authors (for both kids and adults), courses, school visits and presentations. Like a lot of writers, Allison likes to keep her days busy and diverse.

Back when she was starting on her freelance career, Allison held on to her part-time work, partly for the security but also to allow her to take chances.

"You can never underestimate the absolute bonus that a two or three day week job can be while building a freelance career," Allison says.

Find your motivation

Allison had published a few short stories, and had tried her hand at writing romance and commercial women's fiction. But her real fiction breakthrough came with The Mapmaker Chronicles, an adventure novel for kids aged 9 years plus.

Allison says the difference between The Mapmakers and her earlier work was her internal motivation. Her romance manuscripts had been trying to mimic other romance novels, rather than having their own spark.

"I couldn't not write that idea," Allison says of The Mapmakers. "It was so interesting to me that I couldn't not write it. You have to look for those ideas, you have to look for the ones that give you little goose bumps."

"You have to look for those ideas, you have to look for the ones that give you little goose bumps and make you go, "Oh, that could be really good," those ones are the ones you look for."

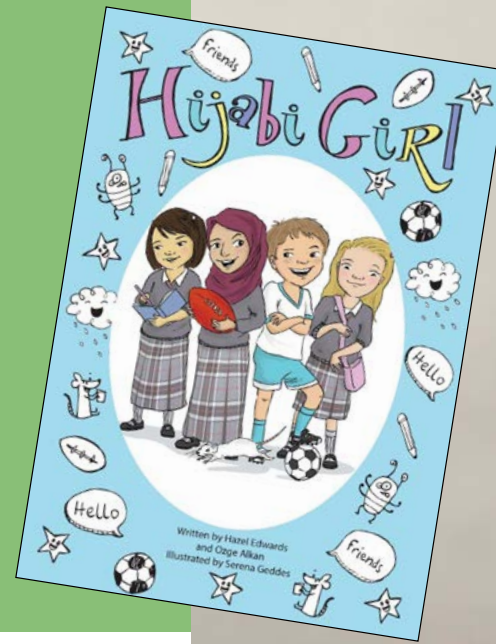
Ideas are everywhere

And those ideas are not hard to find, if you know how. In her creative writing workshops, Allison tells participants that it's a skill that can be learned.

"I think ideas are around you," Allison says. "Ideas come from conversations that you have or from things that you're going through. They're all around you and it's a matter of training yourself to see them, that's what it is." 



Hazel Edwards



Hazel Edwards writes for children, teenagers and adults and is best known for her classic children's series *There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake*. Hazel has published more than 200 books and runs writing workshops for aspiring authors. Her latest book for children is *Hijabi Girl*, co-written with Ozge Alkan.

It was a leaky roof that led to Hazel Edwards writing her most famous book, *There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake*, and she has gone on to publish hundreds more. Hazel writes across genres, creating beautiful stories for children and adults of all ages. Her memoir about writing is *Not Just a Piece of Cake: Being an Author*.

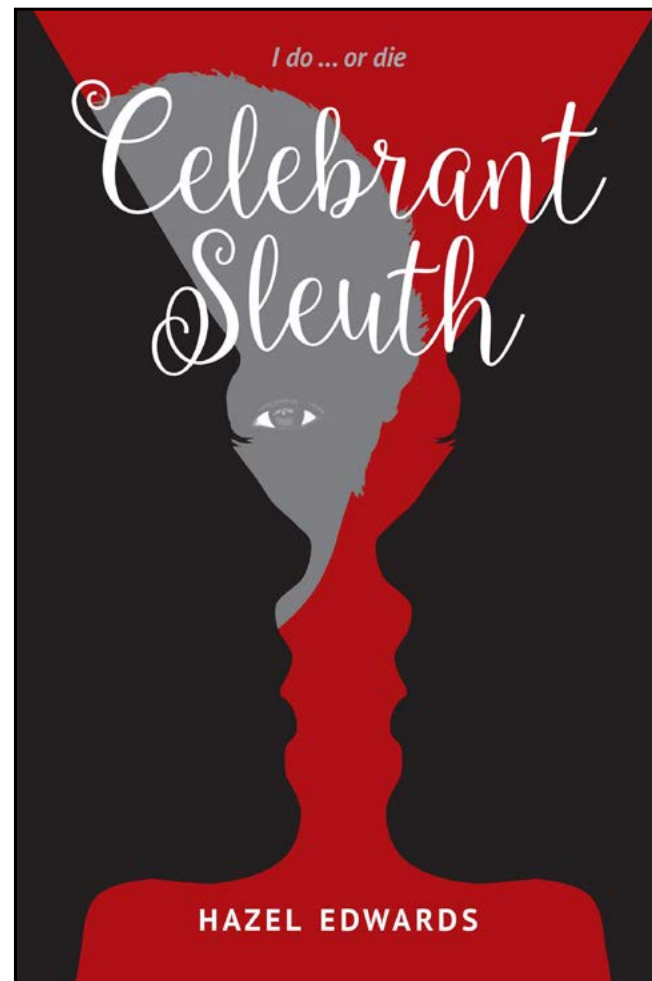
Not a piece of cake

There's a perception that writing for children is easy or means that the author is not very clever. Hazel is quick to dispel any such notions.

"Writing for children is not just a piece of cake. I don't say defensively, 'Oh, I write for adults too,' because it sounds like a put-down, and that's not so," Hazel says. "Every form of writing has its own challenges, but, for me, writing for children is like the *Rolls Royce* in the sense of the books that you write and you read when you're very young have a much longer impact."

Tackling issues

Hazel hasn't shied away from topics that might be considered controversial for young readers. Her book *F2M: the boy within*, co-authored with Ryan Kennedy, is about gender fluidity. And *Hijabi Girl*, co-authored with Ozge Alkan, came from Ozge's desire for a fun story of a girl in a



hijab. Hazel thinks fiction is the perfect medium for kids to be introduced to these topics.

"Because a work of fiction is a way of distancing a little from your situation, and looking from the point of view of living as that character for the length of that book

"Rewrite. Don't assume that the first version is good enough. Expect to have to write it many times to get it right."

and maybe beyond. And a little more tolerance," Hazel says. "We don't write propaganda, we write stories. There's a big difference."

Continuing to grow

Hazel has been writing and publishing for more than 40 years, but she has never

stopped learning and growing. As part of her writing journey, Hazel has collaborated and co-authored with other people that she can learn from, and she recommends other long-term writers to do the same.

"The importance of continuing to grow in terms of ideas and experiences and not being totally introspective. And so that's another reason why, for a long-term writer, collaborations are important, because you're forced to learn new things in new areas," she says. "Continue to be open to other possibilities. So I try to have at least one project a year which is a new area for me, so I'm learning new skills and new worlds and writing about it." 

Richard Roxburgh

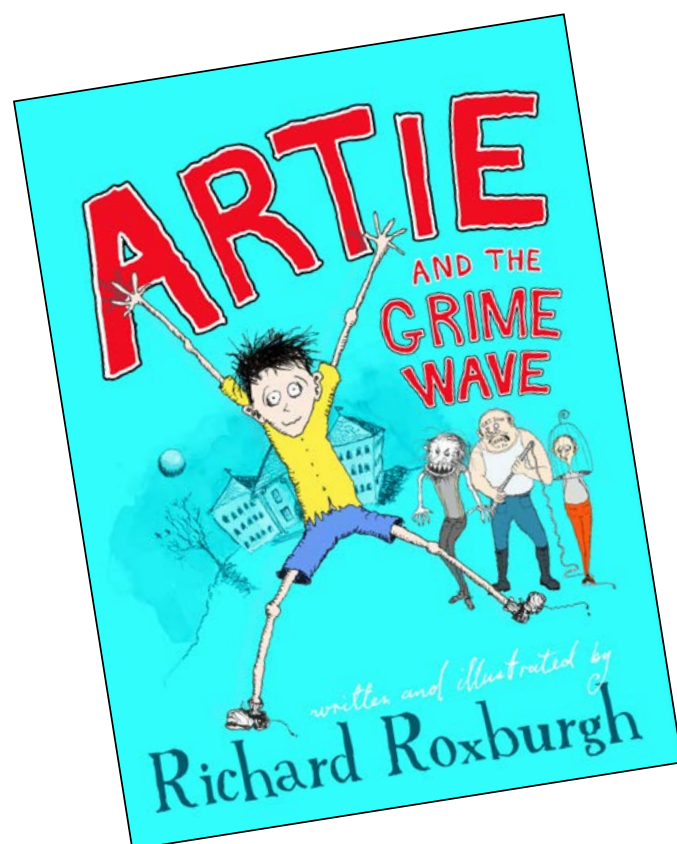
Listen to
this chat at episode
15
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

Richard Roxburgh is a well-known actor who has appeared in movies, television and on the stage. Not satisfied to be a famous thespian, Richard can now add successful children's author to his CV.

Richard Roxburgh is a well-known actor who has appeared on film, stage and screen, both in Australia and internationally. He has worked as a director and columnist, and in 2016 Richard published his first book, *Artie and the Grime Wave*, an adventure novel for young readers, which he also illustrated.

Putting the architecture in place

As a first time novelist, Richard thought it was important to have a strong structure before he even began writing. Once he had that in place, the writing was quite enjoyable.



"For me it was having that really solid piece of architecture in place. It was absolutely critical. And I felt very comfortable then. So the writing itself became really kind of a delicious thing," Richard says. "Just luxuriating it and savouring all of the sort of details and all of the fun bits."

His writer friends, however, were skeptical of his process. "I have writer friends who assure me that's almost completely insane, that they would never work like that."

"Creativity is a very broad-range, expansive, wonderful friend that you have with you in your life and it can come out in an abundant variety of ways."

A funny balancing act

It was important to Richard that the book strike the right balance between humour and emotional strength. Writing humour can be difficult, especially writing humour for kids, but Richard's book is definitely funny (just ask any 9 year old boy).

"I knew I wanted it to be funny. The fun of it is the kind of narrative life raft in a way that kids will be going down this river on. They will be carried along on a tide of

chuckles, I'm hoping, because there's other things in it," Richard says. "There was a very important emotional component to the work that I needed to make sure was in place. It was important to try and create a balancing act of quite a lot of different flavours."

Doodles not descriptions

Richard had a steeper learning curve when it came to the illustrations. He has always been a keen caricaturist, and wondered if his doodles would ever find a home some day. When it came time to put them into his book, however, he found the process more difficult than he had expected.

"I had to reach an understanding of the purpose of an illustration," Richard says. "It sounds so obvious when you think about it, but what I was in fact probably guilty of was doubling up. So, there would be a passage that was quite descriptive and then I would draw it, you know? And that's not really the point." awc



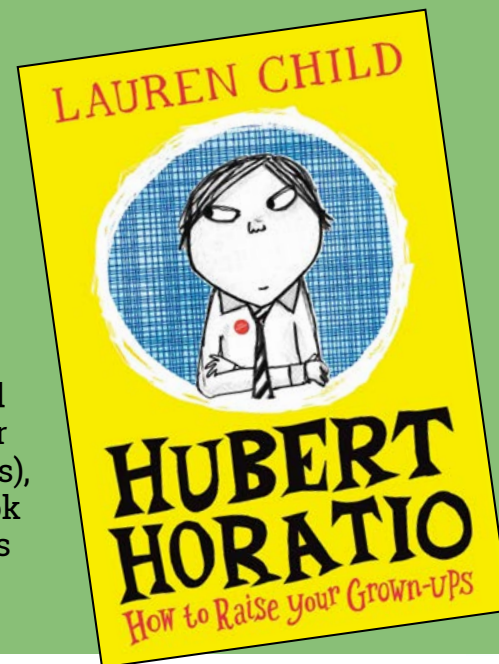
Reinvent Yourself

The inspiring workbook and audio program to help you start your new career as a writer

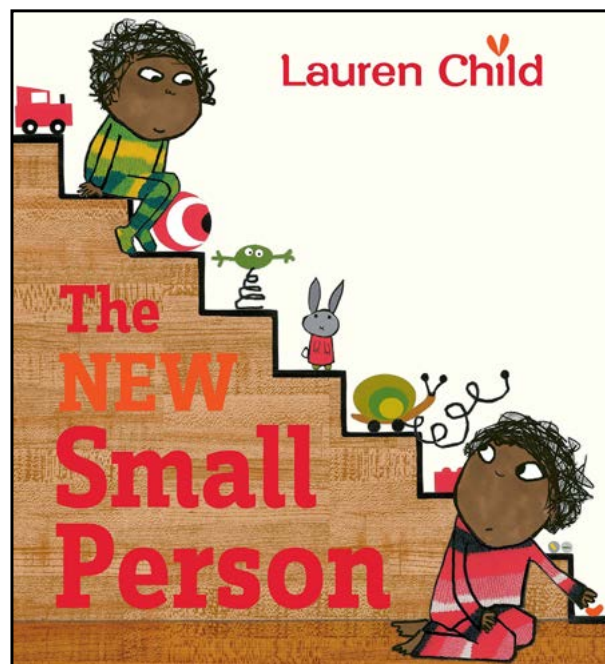
**CLICK HERE TO
LEARN MORE**

Lauren Child

Lauren Child is the author of the phenomenally successful Charlie and Lola picture book series, which has been adapted for TV, as well as the Clarice Bean and Ruby Redfort series for young readers. Lauren has won the Smarties Prize (four times), the Kate Greenaway Medal and the Red House Children's Book Award, among others, and she is currently the UK's Children's Laureate.



Lauren Child's books have been international successes. Her picture book series, Charlie and Lola, was a smash hit and has been made into a television show. Her series for young readers, Clarice Bean, is another bestseller, and spawned her next adventure series, Ruby Redfort.



Feeling her way

With such a successful career, surely Lauren plans and organises everything? Well, not exactly. Even for her complicated adventure series, Lauren likes to see where the story takes her, constantly working and refining until the plot appears. But it does mean having to erase huge chunks of work when it finally takes shape.

"You have to be quite brutal if you work without a plot," Lauren says. "Because it's about letting the plot appear. A plot sort of evolves in its own way."

But be prepared

That's not to say that Lauren doesn't do a lot of research for her books. Her character, Ruby Redfort, is a parkour practitioner and Lauren spoke to experts and watched videos to get a sense of its beauty and strength.

"It's about mind and body. And that really interested me, because it's almost about not taking risks," Lauren says. "It's

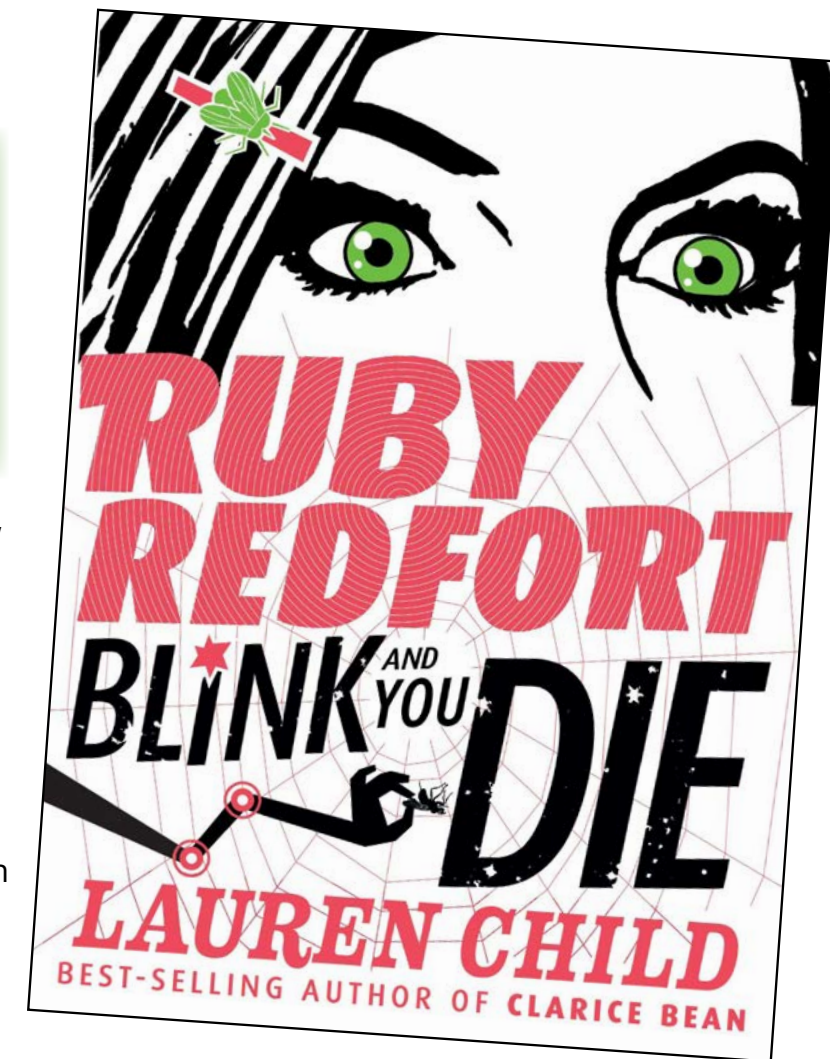


about doing something and being utterly prepared for it."

"Don't be trapped into thinking you can't write just because a particular way you've tried doesn't suit you. There are so many different ways of telling a story."

This could actually be a metaphor for how Lauren herself writes. She is constantly pushing herself and seeing where the story will go, but she also does a lot of preparation, and a lot of research.

"It doesn't necessarily mean everything gets used," Lauren says. "Lots and lots of ideas all start to weave together without me consciously thinking about it. And then you look at your piece of paper and you think, oh those things join up." 



Oliver Phommavanh

Oliver Phommavanh is a comedian, educator and author. He has written several bestselling kids books, including *Thai-riffic*, *Con-nerd*, and *The Other Christy*, and has appeared in a number of anthologies and writers festivals.

Oliver Phommavanh has always loved making people laugh. After a brief stint as a primary school teacher, he decided to pursue his first love and started writing funny stories for kids.

Throwing himself in wholeheartedly

When Oliver made the decision to be kids writer, he went all in. He read every children's book he could, joined industry associations, went to conferences, and sought advice from every corner.



"In my first year of starting writing I read about maybe 350 books. I just went to the library and just smashed anything and everything that was a kid's book, especially Australian books and especially funny books," he says.

And it was by attending festivals that he met his agent, who helped him get his first book published.

"I started to get involved with the Children's Book Council of Australia and other sort of groups where I could meet other kids authors and kids writers," Oliver says. "I attended a whole lot of festivals. And then I managed to bump into someone who is now my agent. And so we were just having a conversation and he liked what I was doing and I gave him my work. And *Thai-riffic* was sort of born from there."

The joy of being a nerd

In *Thai-riffic*, Oliver decided to make fun of Asian stereotypes, something he admits he can do because of his Thai background. He does something similar in his *Con Nerd* books, creating an environment where he can both be a nerd and make fun of them at the same time.

"I find that I've got a heart of a 15-year-old gawkish nerdish kid still. And that hasn't changed," Oliver says. "I haven't really grown up in that sense. I'm just being myself. And even though nerds could be



cool now, I always find a way to really make nerds uncool."

"Be serious for some of the time, but other times just play, have fun. There needs to be a sense of playfulness with your writing, no matter what genre you're writing."

The hardest working man in kids publishing?

One place Oliver is both himself and a total nerd is on the stage. He loves to do school visits, and spends as much as seven or eight months a year on the road. His goal is to entertain kids and hope that they love his style.

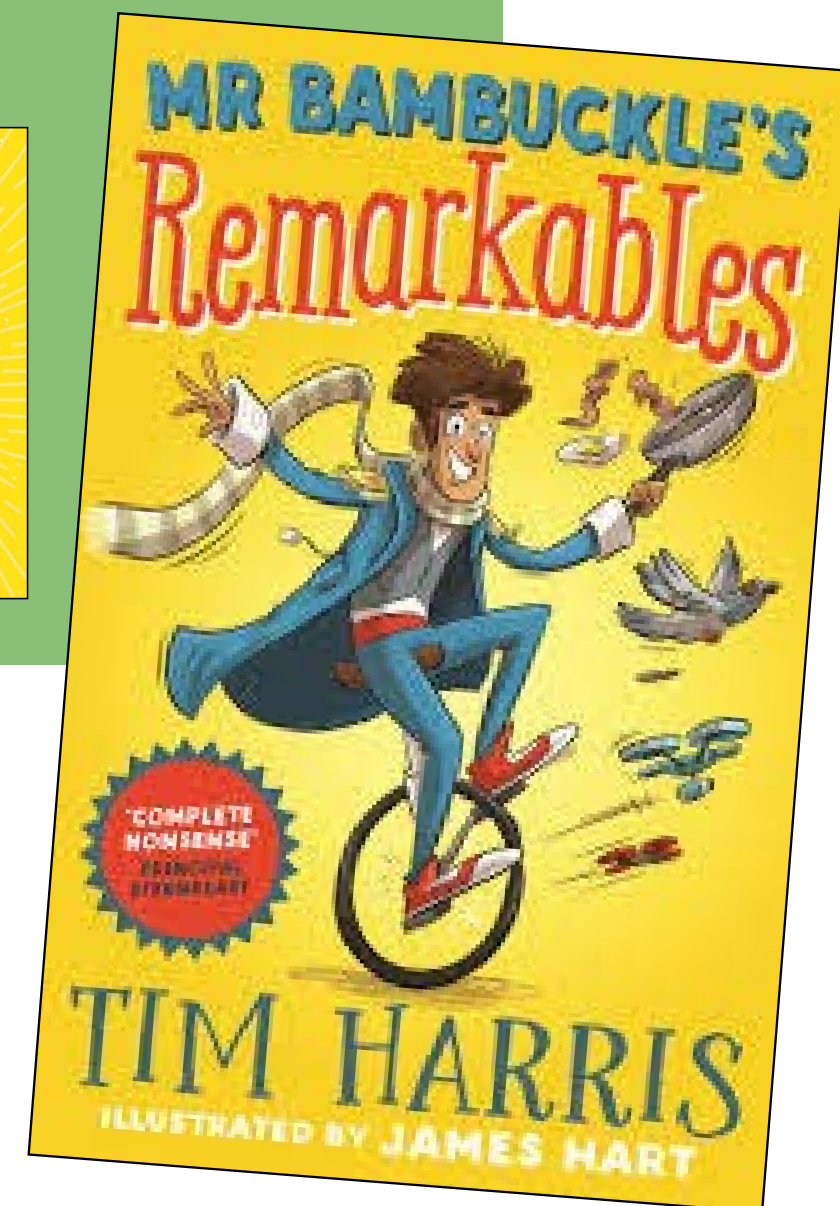
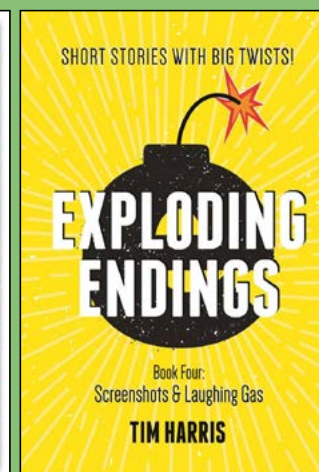
"I always go into places thinking that nobody knows me and I've got to win them over. So by that, I try to get them hyped up about the book," Oliver says. "And if they like my talk and they like laughing at my jokes then maybe they'll pick up my books." 



Tim Harris

Tim Harris is the author of the popular short story collections Exploding Endings, which is up to number four in the series, and Mr Bambuckle's Remarkables, the third of which came out in late 2018. A former primary school teacher, Tim loves to entertain and inspire creativity in kids.

Listen to
this chat at episode
18
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast



From that scary start, Tim went on to write many more stories, and finally had his first collection, Exploding Endings, published with Harbour Publishing.

A different format

After the third Exploding Endings was published, Tim was asked by Penguin Random House to write a character series, rather than a collection of short stories. He tweaked his format, and Mr Bambuckle was born.

"If you give up television, it's amazing what you can get done."

"I wanted to write a very happy positive school story with a teacher who saw the best in all of his students and the uniqueness. And that way, the short stories could get involved," Tim says. "Because there were all these unique little short stories that could be completely separate or self-contained. But if you suddenly put them into this classroom with this one teacher, then there was the chance for an overarching storyline as well."

Getting in front of his audience

Like a lot of middle grade authors, Tim finds it essential to go out and do school visits. But he warns aspiring authors that it's not as easy as just turning up.

"It can be a lot of hard work beforehand," Tim says. "I think people often think it's just those three times one-hour sessions or whatever it is that you're doing. They think that's the only work involved. But of course, there is a lot of preparation and research that goes into it beforehand." 

It was a shaky beginning for Tim Harris - literally. Having read dozens of Paul Jennings' stories over and over again, Tim decided to try writing his own. Reading that story out to his class of school kids was terrifying - but four short story collections and three novels later, he hasn't looked back.

A shaky start

When Tim got up to read his story out to his class, he was terrified.

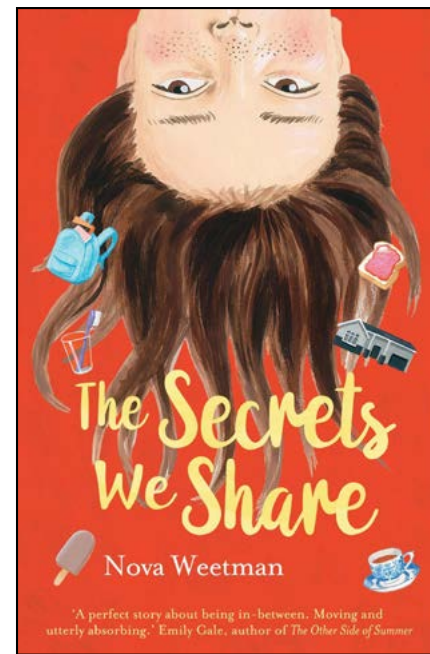
"I'll never forget it because I was so nervous reading this story. It was a bunch of year one boys. And I even folded up the story and put it inside a Paul Jennings, so they wouldn't know that I wrote it," he says. "Anyway, I read the story, and the book was shaking, and my voice was very quivery, but I got through it. And I had fun."

Make Time to Write



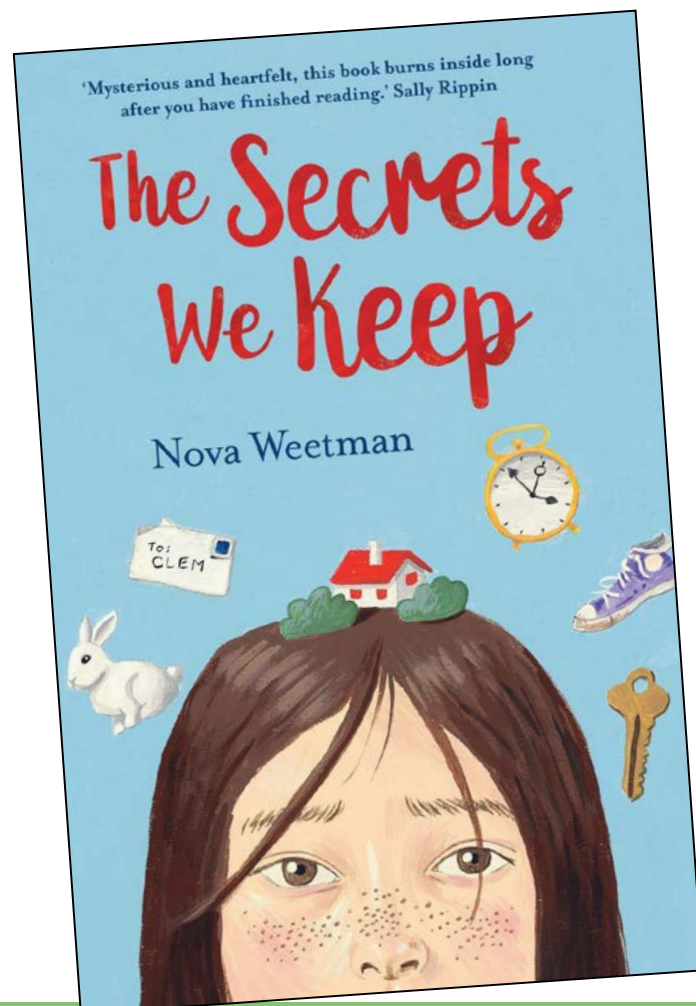
Nova Weetman

Nova Weetman has been writing professionally for 20 years, writing for film and television, short stories, and nonfiction. She also writes books for middle grade and young adults. Her latest novel is *Everything is Changed*.



Nova Weetman had been writing for screen for many years, but was frustrated that she wasn't able to make a television series that was dark and real for kids. So she decided to turn it into a book.

"I decided I would write a book instead, because then I could explore whatever I liked," Nova says. "So, I wrote *The Haunting of Lily Frost*."



Elements of a screenplay

Although Nova had tried writing novels for adults before, she hadn't quite managed to get published. She found writing a YA novel challenging, and her first draft was, as she says, boring. So she turned to her screenwriting skills.

"I took all of the elements and wrote it the way I would write a film and plotted it the way I would write a plotted film. And then it suddenly had a sort of structure that worked as a ghost story."

"Don't be afraid. Try and be fearless. Don't think about who's going to read it. Just write the best story that you can and don't be afraid of reviews or readers or anything. Just write it for you."

Nothing to be precious about

Nova's screenwriting background helped in other ways, too. Having written for film and television, Nova was used to having her work pored over and changed.

"I think it makes you really appealing to publishers, because you're really used to editing, you're really used to rewriting, you're really used to having other people have a say over your work," she says. "And, so you're not possibly as precious as you would be had you not come through that."

Revise, revise, revise

Nova likes to get her first draft out quickly, but of course that means doing lots of revisions later. But as she says, you have to accept that as part of the process.

"Understand that you will write and that you will rewrite and rewrite and rewrite and rewrite and that is OK. That's not a bad thing, that's a good thing because it's just going to get better and better." 



Tamsin Janu

Tamsin Janu is an award-winning author of children's fiction. Her first book, *Figgy in the World*, was inspired by a trip to Ghana, and Figgy has now appeared in two more books. Tamsin's latest novel is *Blossom*, a junior adventure story.

Imagine opening your front door and finding a strange person waiting for you there. That's the image that inspired Tamsin Janu to write her junior novel, *Blossom*. It follows on from three books in her Figgy series for young readers. Not bad for just writing one day a week!

Time to percolate

Time is not something that Tamsin has a lot of. She still works part time and commits just one day a week to writing. When she's working on a project, she can write quite quickly. But she likes to take her time thinking about a story before she starts.

"I find that stories sit in my head for a long time before I actually write them," she says. "And so that really helps with the planning process, because I'm just

thinking about them all the time, often for a number of months before I actually write anything."

"Don't get disheartened. I think writing can sometimes be hard, and you spend a lot of time by yourself in your own head, and there's sometimes a bit of disappointment when you don't get it right. But when you do get it right, it feels really great. So just keep working at it."

Time to breathe

Tamsin applies that same sense of time to fixing problems that arise in her manuscripts. There's no point staring at a page, bashing away at it, or struggling through a complex situation. Sometimes you just need to let the manuscript breathe.

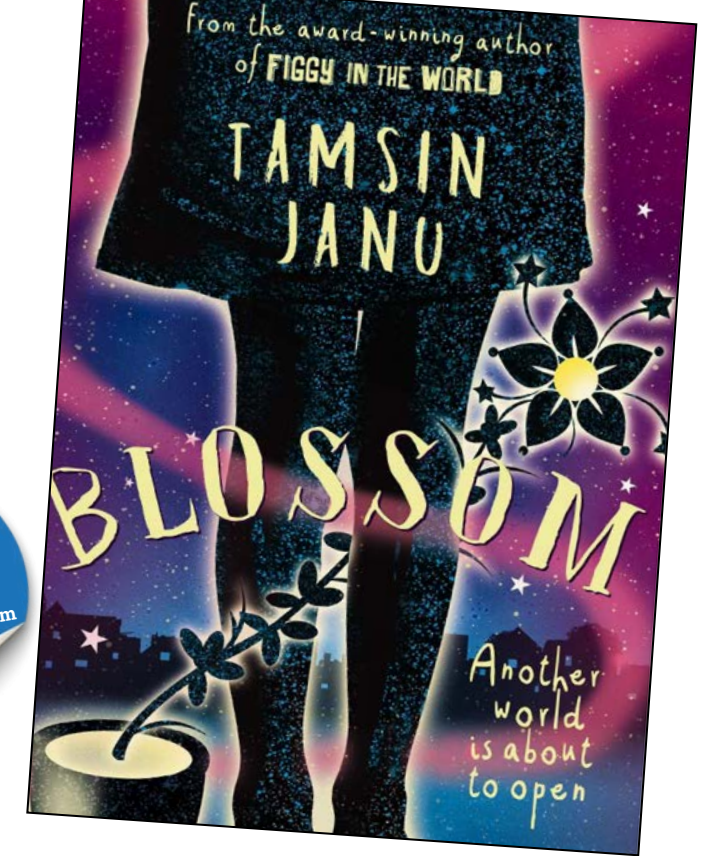
"You get to a point where you're like, I think there's a problem, but I don't know what it is," Tamsin says. "I just leave it for a couple of months. And generally coming



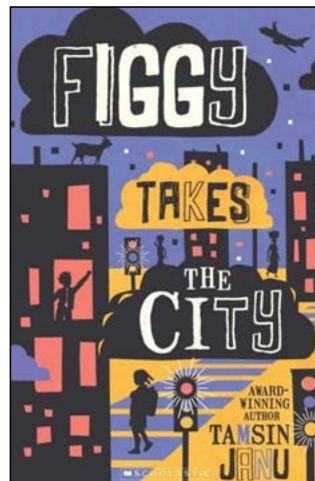
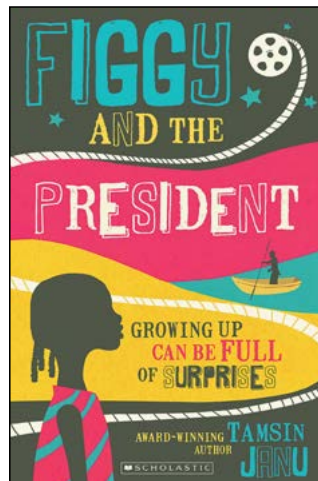
back to it with fresh eyes, you kind of see it in a different light and can solve the problem."

Time for rewards

Tamsin has managed to find a balance between her working and writing lives and has published four books for children. She obviously keeps very busy, but it's all worth it when she knows that she's connected with her readers.



"It's just really lovely to get emails and letters from kids who really enjoy your books," she says. "And particularly now *Figgy in the World* is studied in quite a few schools. And so I get lovely, lovely, lovely letters and emails from kids. So that's been I think the most rewarding and the nicest thing about it. Just knowing that kids enjoy it." 



How to Write for Children and Young Adults

"On the second day of the course I remember that's when I came up with the idea for my first book!"

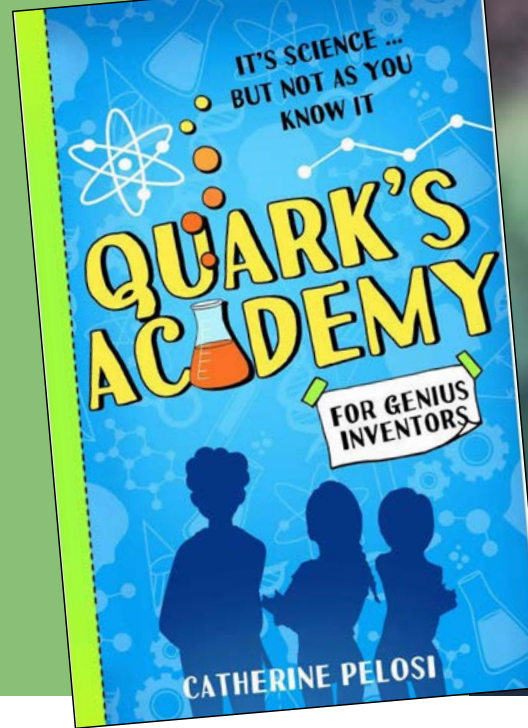
- Tamsin Janu



[CLICK TO LEARN MORE](#)

Catherine Pelosi

Catherine Pelosi is a children's book author. Her debut middle grade novel, *Quark's Academy*, came out in February 2018. She has also published a picture book, and her next junior novel is due out in 2019.



Catherine Pelosi had always tinkered away at writing, but it was a trip to the Sydney Observatory that led to her first published book, *Quark's Academy*, about three science whizz kids. Since then, she's published a picture book, with another junior fiction novel due out in 2019.

The big themes

Part of what drew Catherine to writing for kids was the ability to tackle big themes but in new and interesting ways.

"I love trying to stretch the imagination and seeing how I can address different topics and themes that are relevant to children, but in a bit of a fun and creative fast paced

way," Catherine says. "That's the sort of books I like to read."

Think before you leap

Catherine admits that she used to be a bit of a 'pantser' when writing, but now prefers to work to a loose plot. A book takes a lot of time, and she likes to make sure the idea is ready.

"I spend a lot of time thinking before I actually put the words on the page. I have to be really sure that I'm confident and happy with the idea," she says. "It's so much of a commitment to write a book, and takes up so much time, that I don't like the idea of getting into it and then scrapping it."

Finding community

Something that really helped Catherine on her writing journey was joining a writing group and finding her community. But she was initially hesitant at the idea.

"Rejection and criticism, it's just part of being a writer. Every writer has rejections and it can be a bit of a blow to your confidence. But you just have to pick yourself up and keep going."

"I honestly thought it was the worst idea ever," she says. "I thought the idea of sitting around with strangers and sharing your work and having them tell you whether it was any good or not, it was terrifying! But I dragged myself there because I knew I needed that community support."

It was a great decision, of course, and she found the support that she needed.

"I got so much benefit out of it," Catherine says. "Getting people's feedback and also me giving feedback. Because you need to critique other people's work, and that's a great experience as well." 

"During the course there were many opportunities to write and share our work. Receiving feedback from peers and the presenter was incredibly helpful in figuring out what I was doing well and what areas I needed to work on."

– Catherine Pelosi

awc AUSTRALIAN
WRITERS'
CENTRE
World-class writing courses

SEE
COURSE
DETAILS

Jacqueline Harvey

After winning a picture book competition, Jacqueline Harvey got one teeny tiny toe in the door of publishing. But it wasn't until the publication of her hugely successful Alice-Miranda series that her career really took off. Alice-Miranda is now on her 17th adventure, and neither she nor Jacqueline show any signs of slowing down yet.

Plotting for success

In fact, Jacqueline is currently writing about five books a year, between her three different series. She can only manage this

prodigious output because she is most definitely a planner.

"A lot of has got to do with the fact that you know the characters so intimately," Jacqueline says. "But I do sit and I plan out the big ideas for the story. So I know the major plot twists and turns. And I always start with a good idea of the ending. Because I don't like surging towards nothing."

"Fall in love with your characters. If you don't love them, then it's going to be hard for your audience to love them."

Being an inspiration

It's not enough for Jacqueline just to entertain her readers. As a former teacher and a steadfast literacy advocate, she wants to inspire children and let them know that they can be writers too.

"I never met an author when I was growing up," Jacqueline says. "So I want kids to understand that this is not a pie in the sky kind of a career. That if you really want it, you can do it. And I'm living proof that that can happen."



**CLICK HERE
TO LISTEN TO
THE FULL CHAT**



Jacqueline Harvey has sold more than a million books internationally, mostly through her best-selling Alice-Miranda and Clementine Rose series, which have also been shortlisted for children's book awards in Australia. Jacqueline's latest series, Kensy and Max, was released in 2018.



Listen to
this chat at episode
22
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast



Meg McKinlay

No one was more surprised than Meg McKinlay when her first poem was published. But once that creative flip was switched, she couldn't turn it off. After dozens of manuscripts for everything from picture books to YA novels, Meg's first published book was Annabell, Again, for junior readers.

Finding her voice

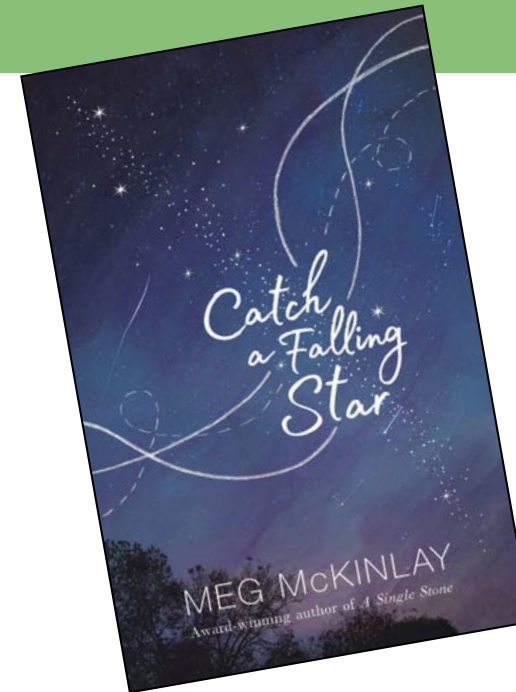
Meg says that success came once she found her voice.

"I feel like my first few books I was trying to do something that wasn't quite me and I hadn't quite found the voice that I needed to write in. But, there was something about this particular book that I was able to find the voice of the character more easily," Meg says.

Revelling in mess

Even with 20 books to her name, Meg still works, and needs to fit her writing time around the rest of her life. There are days where she can't find the time to write, but thinks it's important to engage with her current project every day.

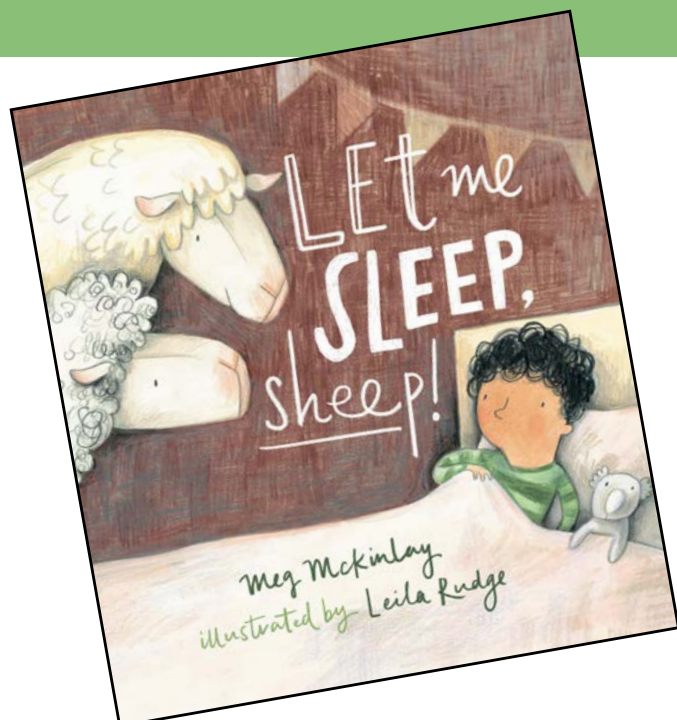
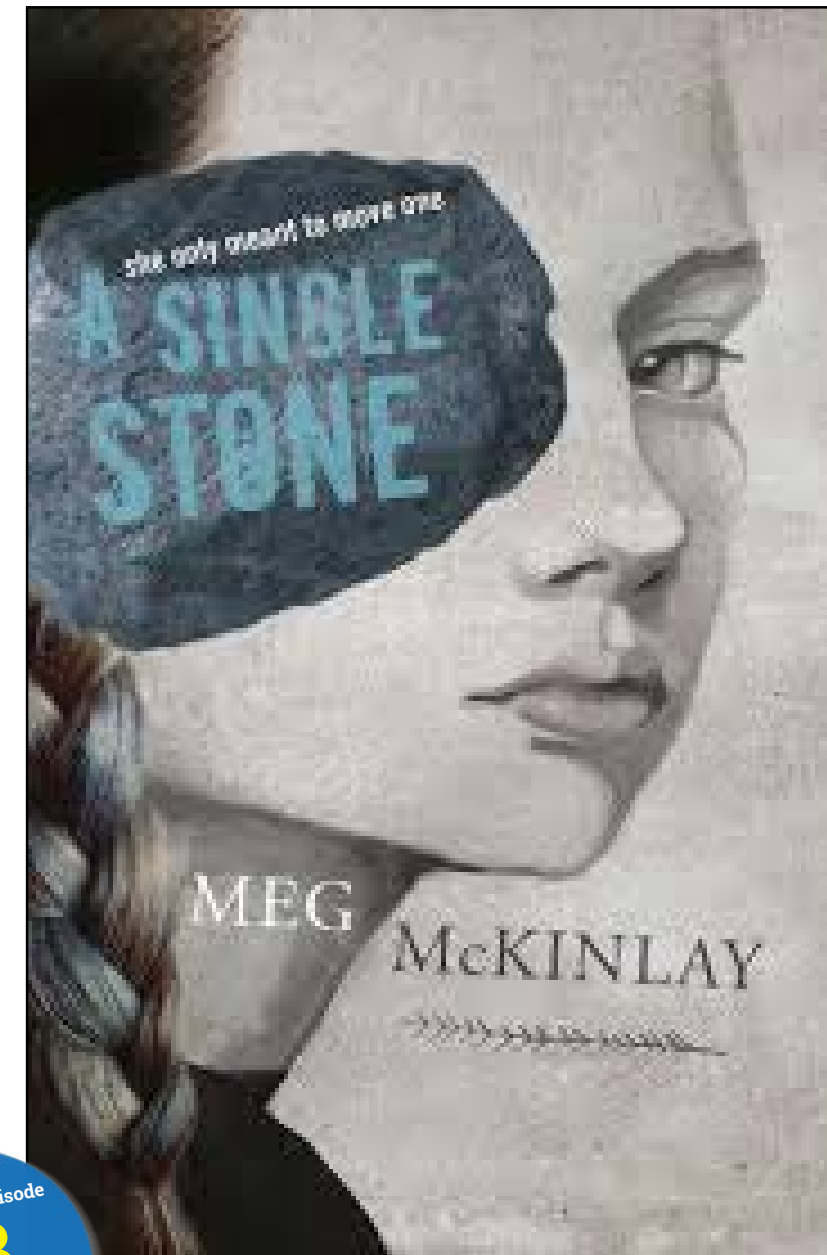
"If I'm going through a period when I can't actually put words on the page, I still try to connect with the work in some way," Meg says. "Even if that's just to sit down in front of it and revel in the mess of it for fifteen minutes or so, just to remind myself that this is what I'm doing and not to lose touch with it too much."



Ideas are everywhere

Meg's stories usually start as unconnected ideas that swirl around for a while before they start to connect up and form something coherent. Like most successful authors, Meg doesn't suffer from a lack of ideas. In fact, the opposite is true!

"I find it hilarious when people say, 'Where do you get your ideas?' Because my problem is too many ideas. They are just absolutely everywhere," she says. 



"Be in the world. Unplug yourself, let yourself be bored, stare out the window of buses, don't be looking at screens all of the time. Have that space for ideas to fall into."

Judith Rossell

Judith Rossell is a full-time writer and illustrator of children's books. Before embarking on her successful writing career, Judith was a scientist. She has written 13 books and illustrated more than 80. Her latest novel is *Wakestone Hall*, the third and final installment in the Stella Montgomery Intrigue series.



Judith Rossell likes to think that she is the children's illustrator in Australia who knows the most about early stage fiber processing. That's because she started off as a scientist working with cotton before pursuing her passion of being an illustrator. She had a successful career as a book illustrator before deciding to 'take charge' and write the books herself.

Branching out

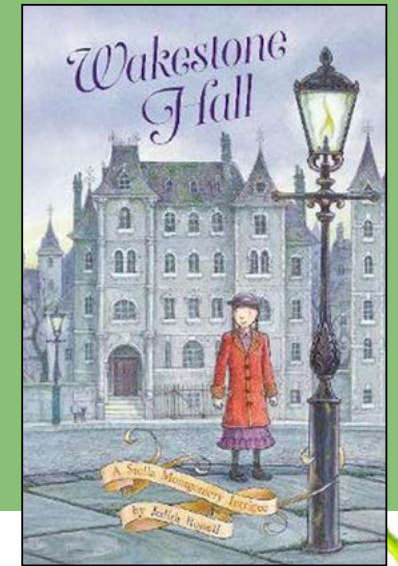
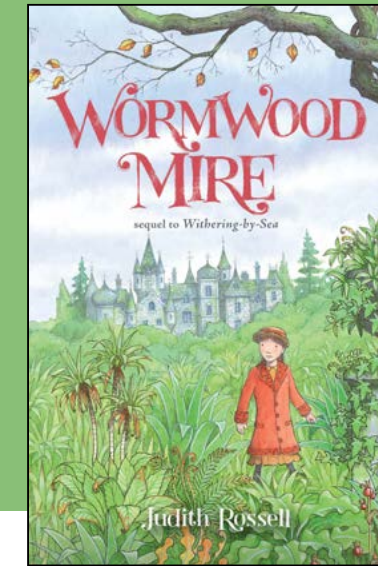
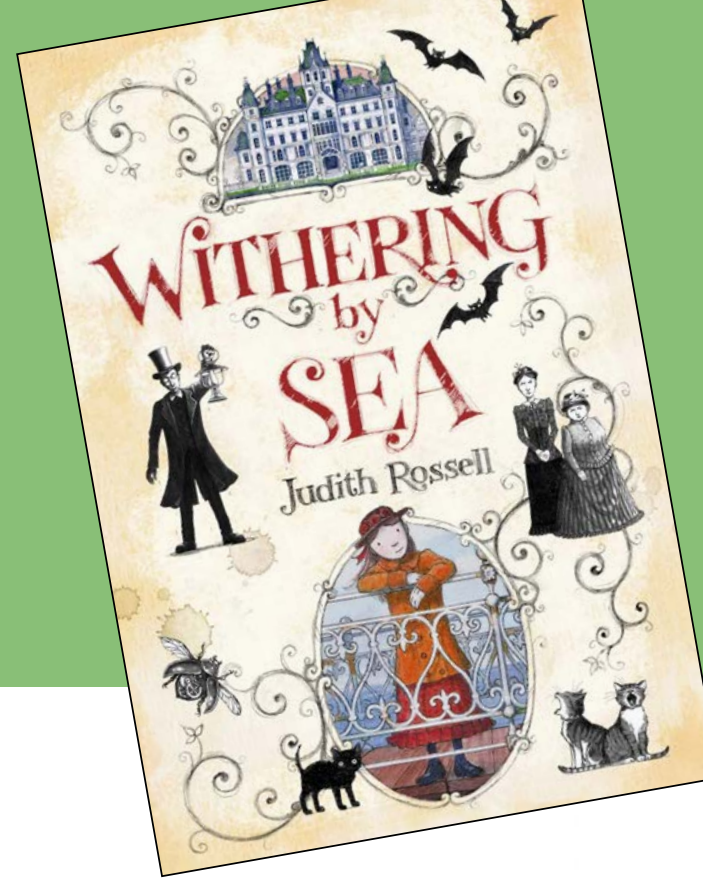
But rather than writing picture books, Judith branched out into junior fiction.

"I had an editor once that said that everyone has an age group they write the best for. And I think for me I really like writing for that age, 8-12, the classic age of children's books," she says. "I enjoy the humour, I think. I like that you can write quite an elaborate story, it can be quite complicated. They're good readers at that age."

A grand adventure

Judith has never considered writing for adults, as she likes the sheer breadth of topics you can write about for children.

"If you want to write the story about the harrowing reality of terrible life you can certainly do that for a kids' book, but you can also write the story about the dinosaur



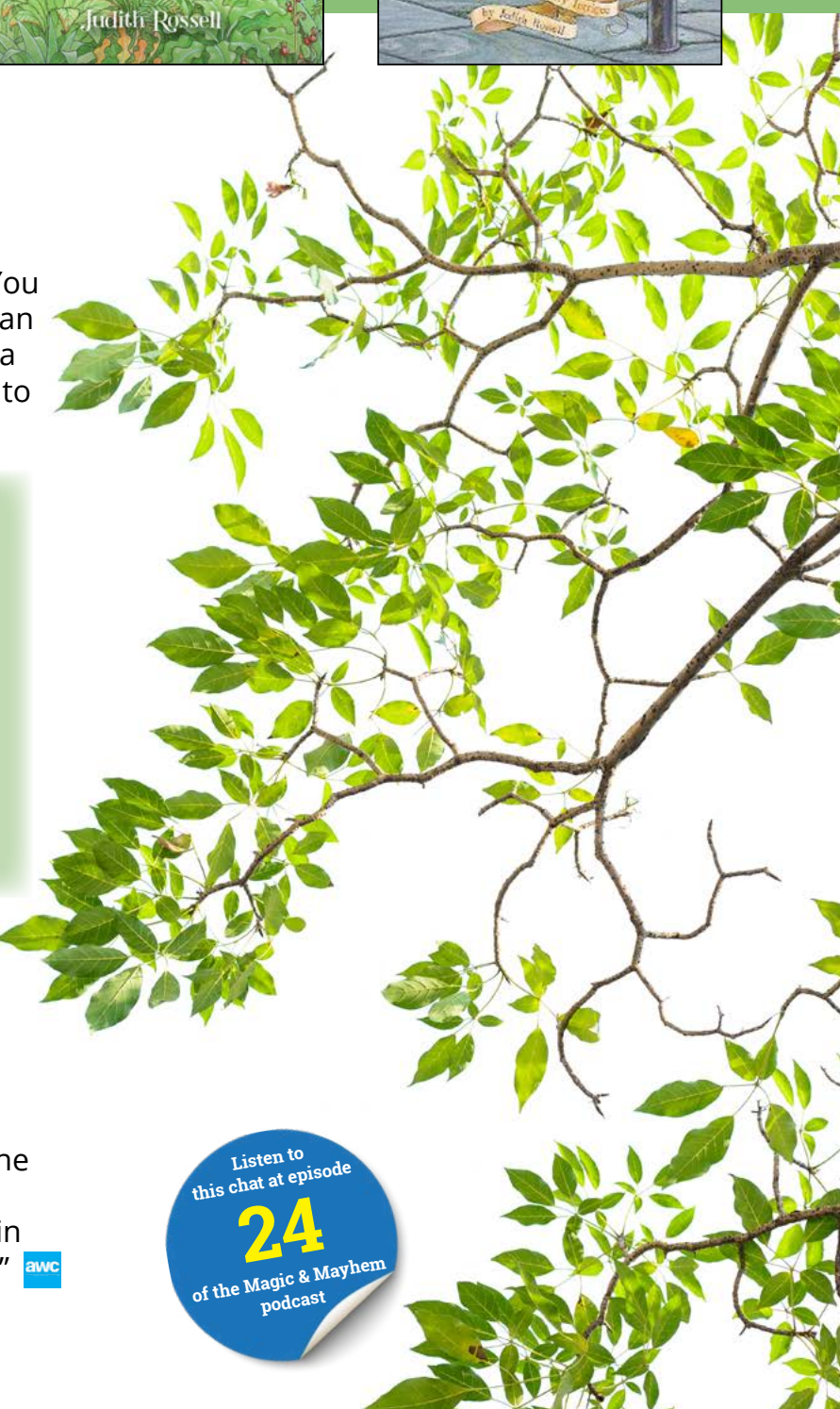
who wanted do ballet," Judith says. "You can have a dragon appear, if you want. You have an enormous range of things you can write about. I enjoy that. You can create a world and send off your little characters to have their adventures."

"It doesn't matter how busy your life is, and it might be incredibly busy, like unbelievably busy, but if you can't squeeze ten minutes into the day you just don't want it enough."

Keep their interest

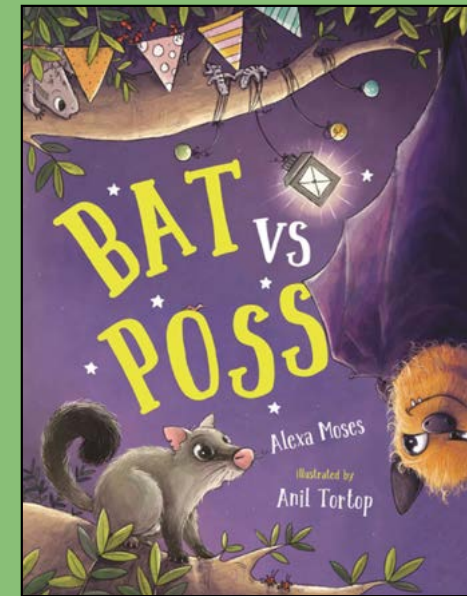
Those adventures are not just for fun - Judith thinks they are crucial to keeping kids interested in the story.

"You've got to hold children's interest," she says. "You really need stuff to happen in every scene. And you have to have a main character that the children can relate to."



Alexa Moses

Alexa Moses is a journalist, screenwriter and author of the Jenna Bookallil-Brown series about Ancient Egypt for tweens. Alexa's first picture book, *Bat versus Poss*, comes out in January 2019.



The idea for Alexa's first novel was lurking around in her head for many years before she finally felt ready to tell the story. *Slave Girl*, and its sequel *Talk Like an Ancient Egyptian*, are about an Australian teenage girl who mysteriously winds up back in Ancient Egypt.

The right mix

Alexa's first book, *Slave Girl*, is a mix of history, adventure, and humour, and she thinks that that mix of elements is what made it appealing to publishers.



"It hits a history angle, which is educational, and people like that," she says. "Publishers like that, schools like that, and yet it's funny. It seems easier to sell when things are funny."

Alexa pauses before adding, "I don't think you win awards for funny, let's be honest."

Keep the action going

During the day, Alexa is a screenwriter for kids television, and she has definitely found this helpful when writing her novels.

"You've got to have something happening in the story moving forward in every single scene," she says. "There's no dead air, there's no time for people to think and stare at a wall. That skill you learn, where you know that you've got to fill that screen and you've got to get the story moving is so useful for writing fiction, particularly children's fiction."

A deliberate plotter

Part of Alexa's technique in keeping the story moving is to carefully plot out the whole book before she starts writing. She can think about the characters and world-building for years before sitting down in front of her computer.

"I'll love the characters and I'll hear their voices before I start plotting. I have to

"Sometimes it really sucks and it's no fun, but you've just got to do it. If you want to finish the book, finish the book."

know who they are, what they want, where I'm going, and then I'll plot," Alexa says. "Plotting takes me at least a month, maybe more. And then the actual writing, that will be six months, I'd say, even seven or eight."

Working this way means that Alexa produces a pretty tight first manuscript that needs a lot less revision. "A lot of people talk about 20 drafts; that doesn't happen for me. By the time that I've got to the story and I'm writing it, it has to be pretty well locked down. " 

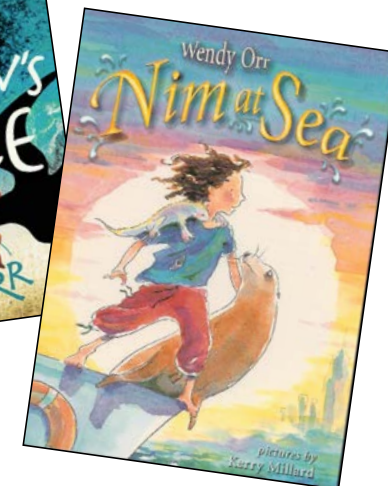
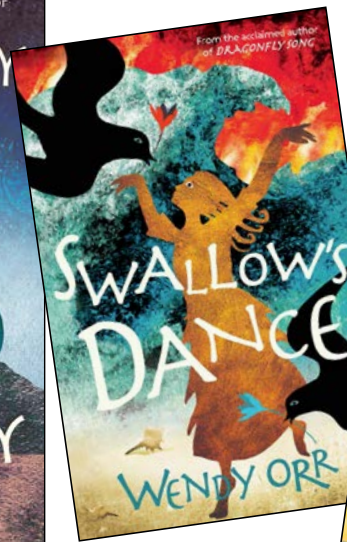


Listen to
this chat at episode
25
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

Wendy Orr

Listen to
this chat at episode
26
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

Wendy Orr is the author of the hugely popular Nim's Island books, which have been turned into films starring Jodie Foster and Bindi Irwin. She has also published more than 40 other books for children and adults. Her latest novel, *Swallow's Dance*, is middle grade adventure set in ancient Crete.



Wendy Orr is best known for her children's books, especially the hugely successful Nim's Island series. But when the writing bug bit her, she was writing everything under the sun, even attempting a Mills & Boon book. Discovering that romance wasn't for her, Wendy turned to kids books, and hasn't looked back since.

First break

After jointly winning a picture book competition, Wendy's first book, *Amanda's Dinosaur*, was published by Scholastic. Wendy remembers the day very well.

"I don't think that anybody would ever forget that first acceptance and first book,"

she says. Her husband drove down the driveway clutching the letter and waving it at the neighbours.

It wasn't entirely straightforward however. The judges revealed that the book had only won because the general standard was pretty poor!

The birth of Nim

This slightly inauspicious beginning was more than enough to start Wendy off on her successful publishing career. She sent in manuscripts to various publishers, meeting with many bumps along the way. But her next published book, *Ark in the Park*, won Book of the Year in 1995 for junior fiction. Following its success, she

"If you can work part-time and have some form of outside income, I think that can actually help your writing. Because to write anything really good, you have to be prepared to fail badly. You have to experiment."

received many letters from children, and it was two of these that led her to come up with the idea for *Nim's Island*, which was based on a book she had written when she was a child.

"It must have been about the twelfth draft, I went back and I wrote it as it starts now. 'In a palm tree, on an island, in the middle of the wide blue sea, lived a girl.'"

Foray into film

Both *Nim's Island* and its sequel *Nim at Sea* have been turned into films. Just like in the publishing world, approving a movie takes time, and it was a complicated process to get it off the ground. *Nim at Sea* was renamed *Return to Nim's Island*, and the story was different to the one that Wendy had written, but she was happy with the result.

"When I read the final script I said, 'look, I know it's not a script really from the book I wrote, but it's absolutely a story I could have written.' It's so Nim. I was really pleased with it."

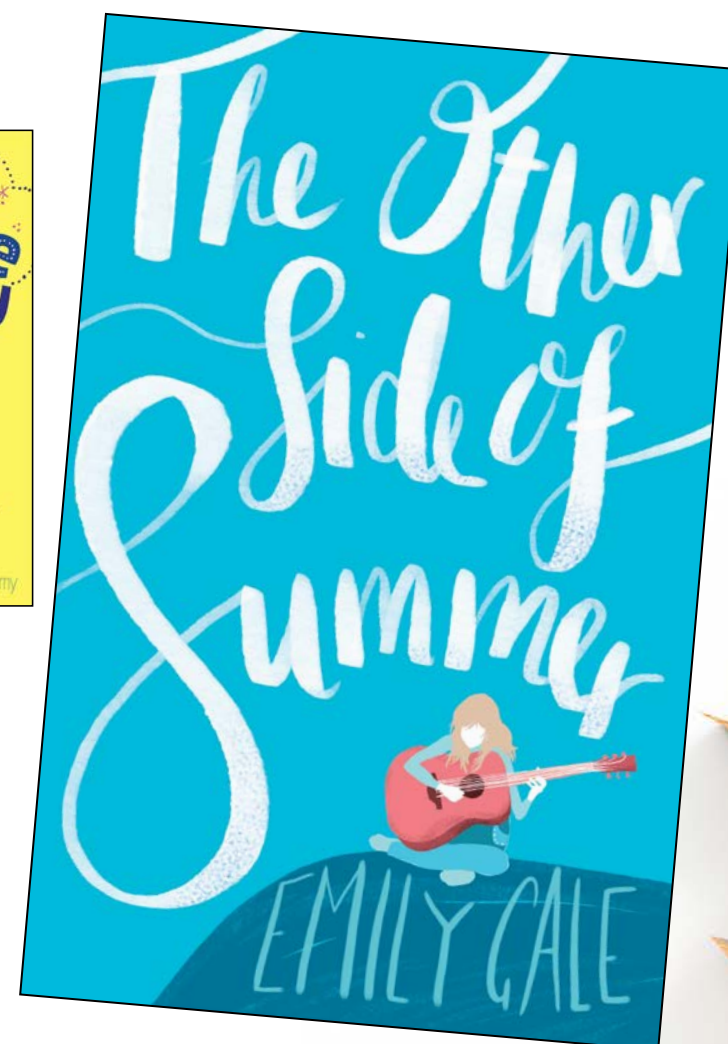
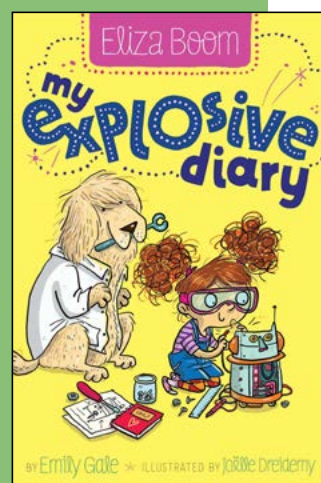
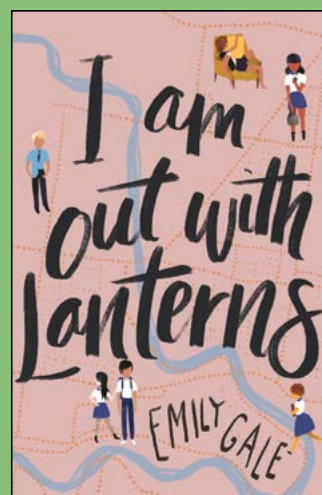


Inside Publishing

What you need to know to
get a book deal

Emily Gale

Emily Gale has been involved in the children's book industry for nearly twenty years, working as an editor, consultant, reviewer and book buyer. She published her first book in 2009, and now has two junior fiction and four young adult novels to her name. Her latest book is *I Am Out With Lanterns*.



Emily Gale started out in the publishing industry, editing manuscripts and writing Peter Rabbit books. She yearned to write her own books, but was nervous about leaving behind what she knew to enter the great unknown of writing.

First book

With the publication of Emily's first book, *Girl, Aloud*, it wasn't the usual fireworks and celebrations you might expect. She moved from the UK to Australia, and felt separated from the whole process. And then with her next manuscript, Emily felt that it should be similar to her first, even though it wasn't what she wanted to write creatively.

"I'd written a whole manuscript because I thought they wanted that sort of book and it ended up that they didn't," she says, reflecting on that period. "So that was a big lesson for me, to always write the book that you want to write, and not the book that you think somebody wants you to write."

Writing with emotion

With that experience behind her, Emily's next book was *Steal My Sunshine*, published by Random House in 2013. She then tapped in to her own feelings of

homesickness to write *The Other Side of Summer*.

"If you can just set yourself those small goals, you will find yourself with a first draft after not very long at all. So they work. Chocolate works too."

"I think people are going to get that this is a really heartfelt story. I think that's going to come across," Emily says. "And it has come across, which is exactly what I wanted. It's wonderful. I've had more of a response to this book than to any previous book, so that feels good. It feels like it was worth plunging into my emotions to create it."



Belinda Murrell

Listen to
this chat at episode
28
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

Belinda Murrell is a bestselling, internationally published children's author. She has written more than 20 books, including The Sun Sword fantasy trilogy and the Lulu Bell series for younger readers. Belinda's Timeslip series has been shortlisted for numerous awards and her latest series Pippa's Island is out now.

When Belinda Murrell was offered a three-book deal for her children's fantasy series, Sun Sword, she promptly quit her life as a freelance journalist and jumped at the chance. Her accountant thought she was mad, but Belinda is from a family of writers and knew that she could make it work.

Striking a chord

After the success of her Sun Sword trilogy, Belinda went on to write the first of her Timeslip books, The Locket of Dreams. The book proved so popular that she decided to turn it into a series.

"I started getting all of these letters from kids and I decided I obviously struck some chord with children with this particular idea of timeslip," Belinda says. "I decided I was going to write a couple more and make it like a series, but each book was standalone with different characters and a different period of history."

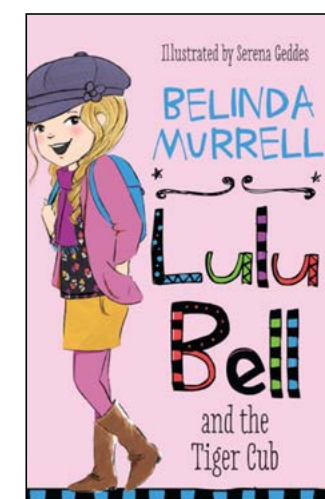
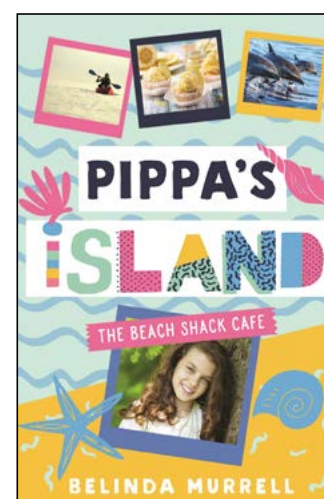
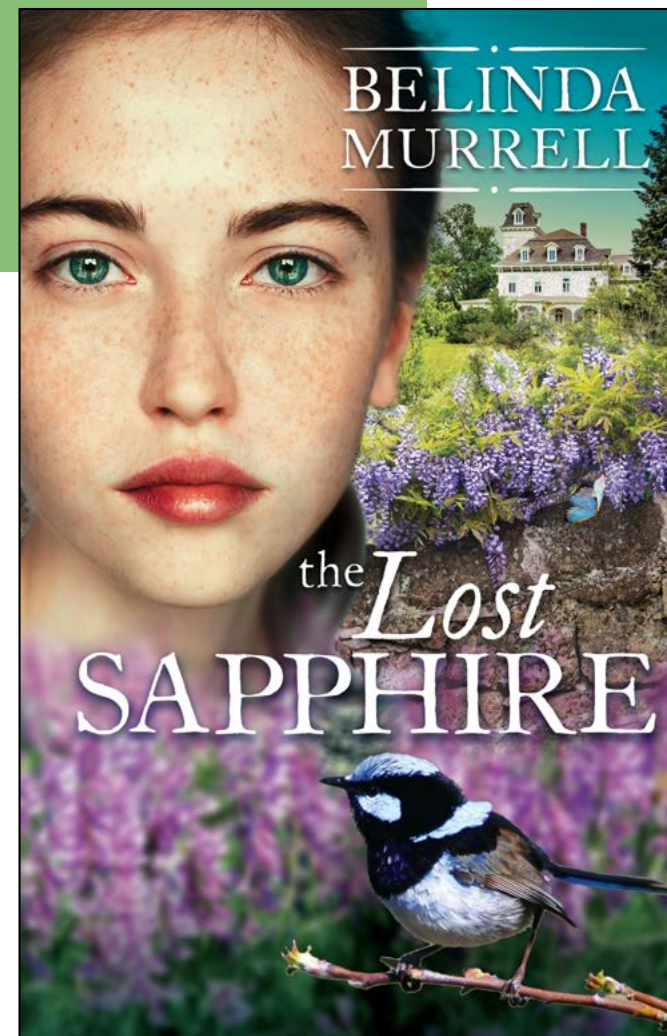
Getting the historical detail right

Because the books are set in the past, Belinda likes to ensure the details are right,

even down to the phase of the moon on a particular night! But it's about finding the balance, so that Belinda has confidence in her facts but kids don't feel like they're being lectured.

"I've been to historic kitchens, and I've cooked in old aga fuel stoves, to just make sure my process is as accurate as possible," Belinda says. "Not that I want to beat kids over the head with historical detail, but just so that I know it's right." 

"You have to have bucket loads of tenacity. I don't think people realize it does take years and years of writing to actually be good enough to be published. And then once you've been published it's just the beginning of the journey. It's still lots and lots of hard work."

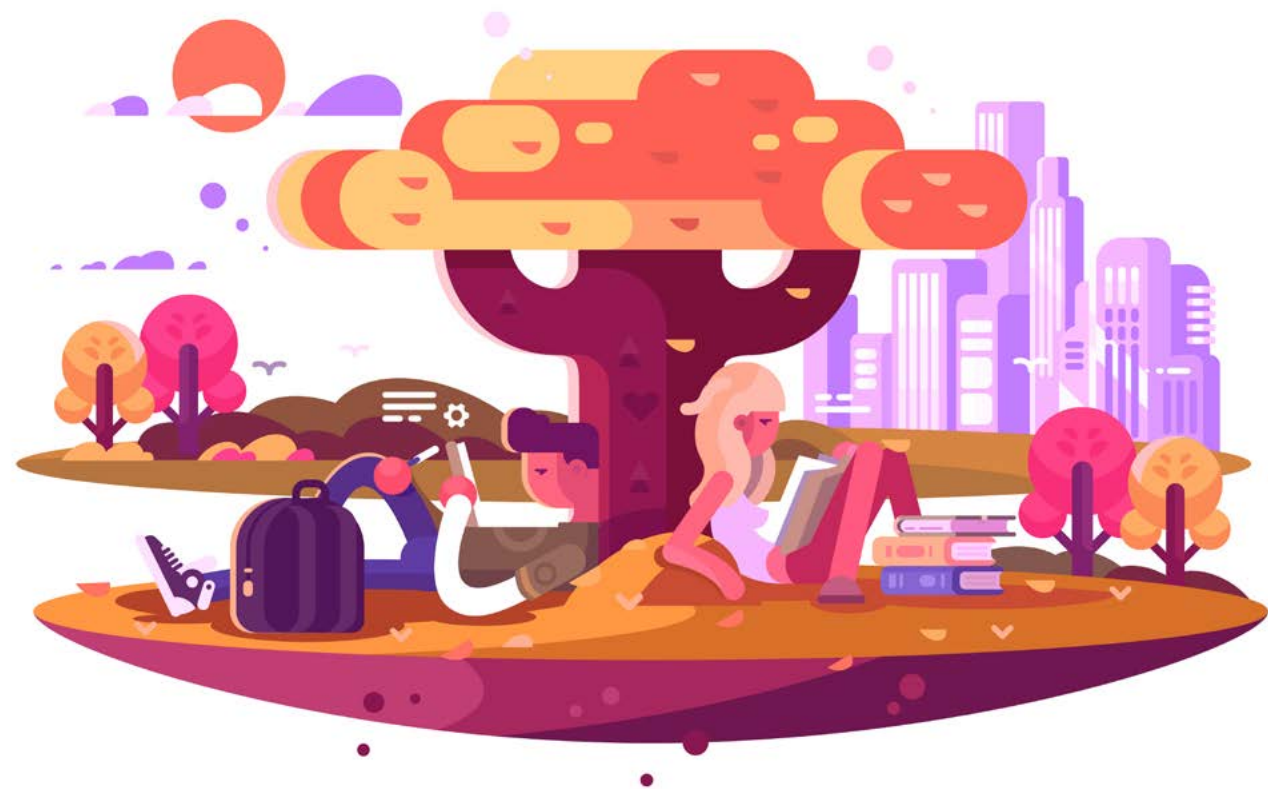


awc AUSTRALIAN
WRITERS' CENTRE
World-class writing courses



Learn how
to write
little books
that 6-9
year olds
will love

**CLICK
HERE**



young
adult

Veronica Roth

Veronica Roth is an internationally best-selling author. Her debut series, *Divergent*, was hugely successful and has been turned into a Hollywood film franchise.

Listen to
this chat at episode
29
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast



Veronica Roth was crouched beside a dumpster when she got the call from her agent that her first manuscript, *Divergent*, had been picked up by an editor. From there, everything happened quickly. The *Divergent* trilogy has gone on to sell millions of copies and been adapted into a Hollywood franchise.

Staying grounded

When the rights were originally sold, Veronica knew not to be too excited. These things can take a long time.

“Even when the rights sold I didn’t let myself be that excited. I was like, yeah, that’s great. And it will certainly be good in certain ways, but that doesn’t mean anything,” Veronica recalls. “Pouya [my film rights manager] and I had a joke the whole way through, which was we would

only let ourselves celebrate on the way to the premiere, because up until that point anything could happen.”

“It’s all about having this tension of humility and like self-advocacy. You have to believe in your story, but you also have to believe that it can be better.”

The appeal of YA

Both *Divergent* and Veronica’s latest series are firmly YA. When asked about the appeal of this genre, Veronica has a lot of ideas.

“I think it’s a really exciting period of life,” she says. “I mean it’s high drama. Everything you experience feels like the biggest thing on Earth, because for you it really is. You feel like an adult, but you’re not quite an adult yet. You have a lot of first time things, a lot of very intense struggles in friendships and in relationships. So it feels like really fertile ground for stories.”

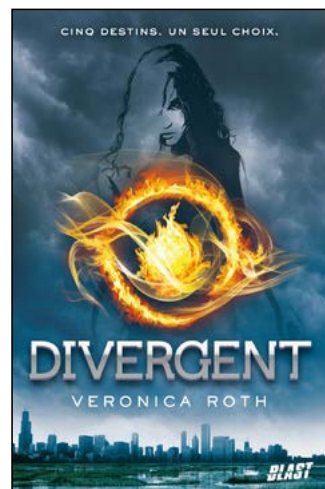
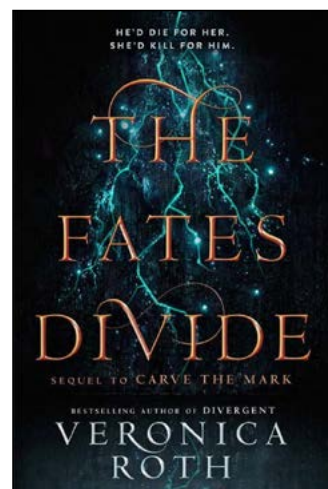
Becoming a plotter

Although, the first *Divergent* book was not intensely plotted, Veronica finds that she

needs to be more structured now that she is writing for deadlines.

“When you’re writing to a deadline, you can’t just like wander around for four months while you’re figuring out what comes next,” she says. “But, now, you know, you’ve got to get it done and it’s work. So, I’ve let it become like more practical, more of a job for me.”

She doesn’t entirely love working to an outline, as there are fewer opportunities for discovery. “But I’ve been able to find it inside of the outline,” she says. “Sometimes things still surprise you, you have to change the outline or something turns out differently than you expected.” 



Want to write your own YA masterpiece?

Get stellar storytelling skills with the
How to Write for Children and Young Adults course

[CLICK TO DISCOVER MORE](#)

Kim Wilkins

Writing under two names really does mean that Kim Wilkins has twice the workload! With a young family, and a job as a university professor, it can be hard for Kim to fit in all her work. But for her, writing is her hobby so it never feels like a chore.

"Writing is my hobby, it's the thing I like to do best in the world," Kim says. "It's not sort of another thing to fit into my day."

Tried and true path

Kim puts her success down to the tried and true method that has worked for so many authors.

"I kept writing until I was good enough," she says. "Then I met someone who was a good contact and created goodwill within that network. And then an agent who knew that person picked up my work and liked it and sold it on."

"Do your best work, maintain good relationships and that's how you get published."

Adapting to change

Another aspect to Kim's success is that she has stayed flexible. When the market was no longer hungry for fantasy books, she started writing commercial women's fiction.

"When the market hasn't supported my work, I've changed the work that I do," she says. "The Kimberley Freeman books were born of the fact that I felt that I said all I could say in the other genre I was writing in, at least for awhile. Kimberley Freeman

Kim Wilkins is an award-winning writer of children's, historical and speculative fiction. Under her pen name, Kimberley Freeman, she also writes commercial women's fiction. Her latest book is *Sisters of the Fire*, the second in her *Blood and Gold* series, with the third due out in 2019.

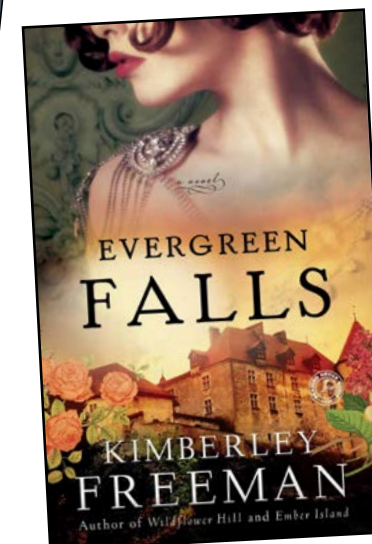


basically reinvigorated my career and kept me going for several more years until I could get another fantasy book published."

Definitely a plotter!

With more than 25 books to her name, Kim knows a thing or two about getting a good book out quickly. And for her, that means plotting.

"I'm a plotter," she says adamantly. "That's how a book is written quickly and that's how they come out the right shape. They don't require much structural feedback, and you can just get on with the line edit and publish the damn thing." 



Carole Wilkinson

Carole Wilkinson was nearly 40 when she decided to go to University and study creative writing... and Mandarin. She tried her hand at all different types of writing, including screenplays, newspaper articles and educational handbooks. So when Carole was offered the opportunity to write a novel for the teen educational market she immediately said yes.

"This will probably be on my list of tips. Never say no to anything," Carole says.

A surprising series

Carole's first novel, Stagefright, came out in 1996. She followed it up with several more books before publishing her breakout series, Dragonkeeper, in 2003. Carole had always had an interest in China - hence learning Mandarin - and that helped her with her research for the series.

Initially, Carole didn't realise the novel would become the six-book series that it is now.

"I wrote the first book and in the synopsis I had material, too much material for one book," she says. "And so, when it came to the end, with my publisher's help deciding when was a good place to end it, I had a bit of story left over for the beginning of the next book."

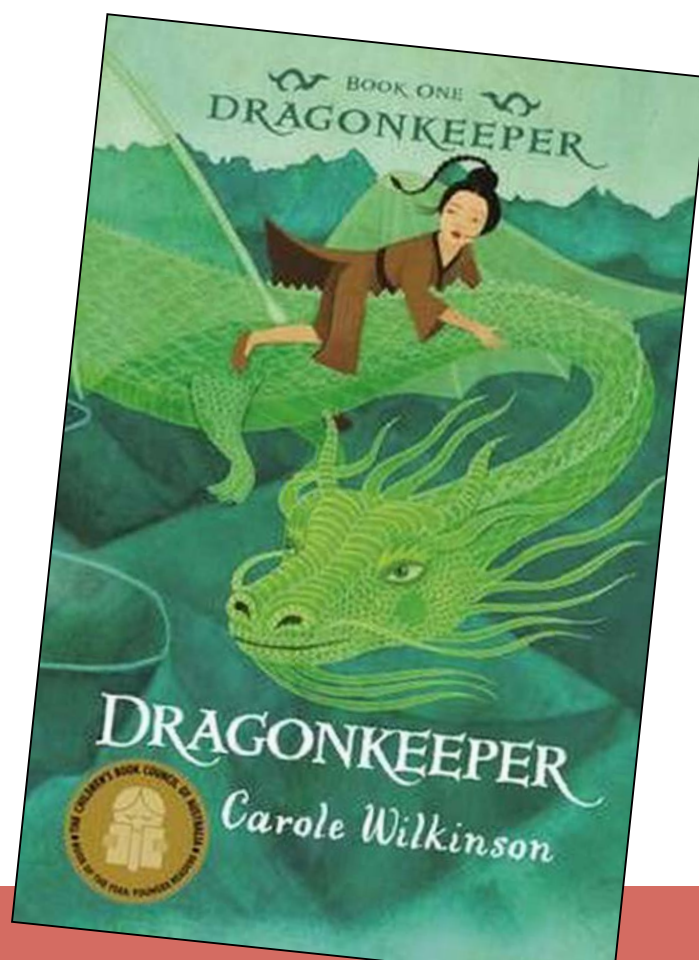
Feeling a way forward

In the age old question of plot versus pants, Carole sits firmly in the middle.

"I have an idea of the journey that he or she is going to make. And I pretty much

always know what is going to happen at the end. But there is not a lot of detail there," Carole says. "A lot of my best ideas are those little ideas that make it a bit different, a bit special, that come during the writing process. I have tried doing the full plot on cards, but it just changes as I'm writing so it's a waste of time."

"What you have just written down is never going to make it into the book as is. It needs work, it needs honing. It possibly needs deleting."



Non-fiction stories

Even when she's writing non-fiction, Carole thinks it's important to find the story. Because her non-fiction books are for kids, she can afford to be less didactic and choose the most interesting versions of history.

"Obviously, you have got to stick to the facts," Carole adds. "But a lot of the non-fiction I have done is in The Drum series for Black Dog, where at the beginning of each chapter there is a bit of fiction. You put your reader in the time and the place so that they can imagine the past." 

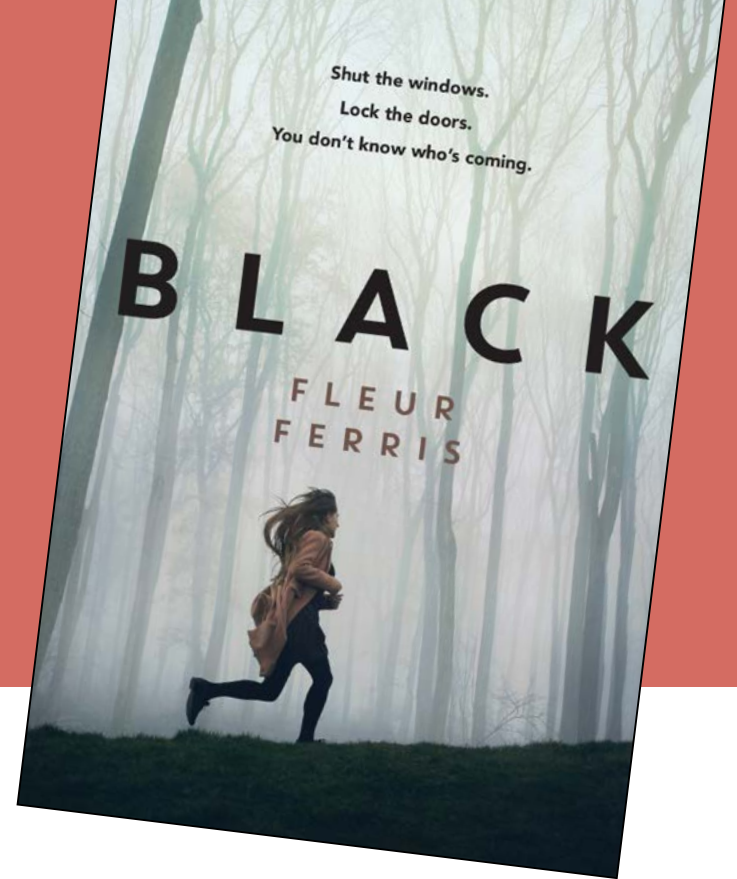


Carole Wilkinson is the internationally award-winning and bestselling author of the Dragonkeeper series. Carole has written more than 30 books for young people in both both fiction and non-fiction. Her latest book is Atmospheric: The burning story of climate change.



Fleur Ferris

Fleur Ferris is an award-winning author of YA and middle grade novels. Before her writing career took off, Fleur worked for a number of years as a police officer and a paramedic. Her latest novel is *Found*, a crime thriller for young adults.



While working as a police officer and paramedic, Fleur Ferris would go home and write novels for her own entertainment. She finally reached a point where she thought, now is my time to be a writer. And that's exactly what she did.

Lucky number 5

It was Fleur's fifth novel that she decided was good enough to start sending out.

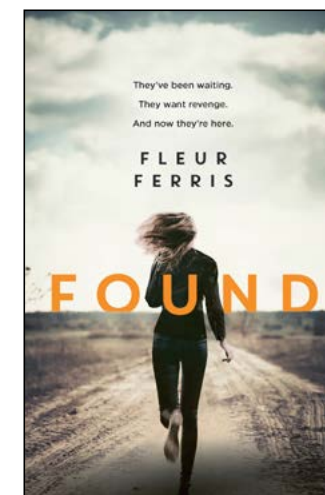
"I basically wrote every chapter thinking it was for a competition and that every chapter would have to be read by somebody," Fleur says of her approach to writing that novel.

At the time, she was also having her work critiqued in an online group. Fleur felt that that gave her the confidence in her writing that she needed to apply to a pitch session at the Write Around the Murray Festival, which is where she scored her agent.

Police experience

Having had experience as both a police officer and a paramedic does make certain elements of writing her crime thrillers easier. But for Fleur, the main thing she draws on is her compassion and understanding.

"Even if it's not something that I would



agree with or that I would do myself, it doesn't mean that you can't understand it, Fleur says. "And so that is a huge thing in my novels, that I would always hope to achieve that sort of understanding of why people are behaving the way they are." 

"Do courses, speak to people, and follow the careers of people who are already achieving what you hope to achieve."

"Doing a course with AWC will improve your craft, provide opportunities to meet and make friends with other writers and you will receive invaluable advice and feedback from experienced industry professionals."

– Fleur Ferris

**CLICK
HERE
TO SEE
COURSE
DETAILS**



Allison Rushby

Listen to
this chat at episode
33
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

Allison Rushby is an author of books for kids and adults, from junior fiction to young adult and commercial women's fiction. She has published more than 20 books and her latest novel is *The Mulberry Tree*, a middle grade thriller.

a lot of different experiences. And, that's helped me to see what I wanted to do when I had more control over my books."

And although she thinks self-publishing in the adult space can be rewarding, she would not recommend it for middle-grade fiction.

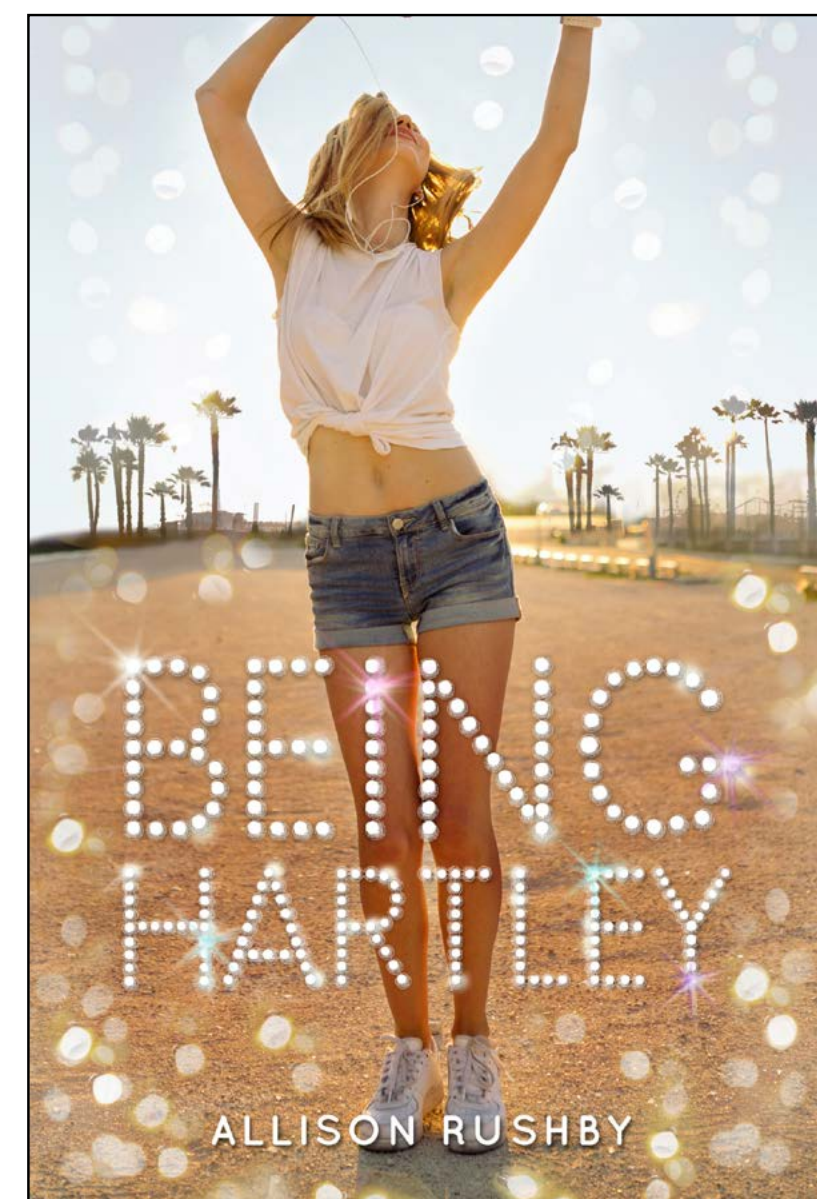
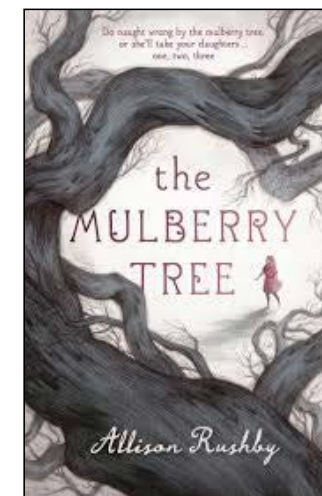
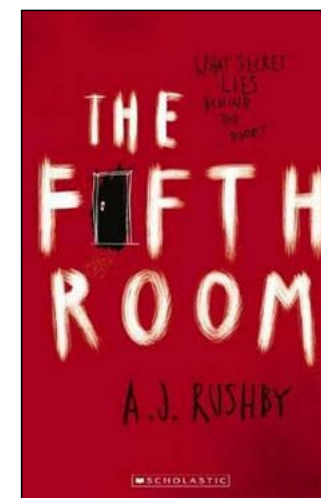
"Just write a really good book that people cannot put down. At the end of the day that is all that matters, is this fantastic book."

And a broad offering

For Allison, the key to successful self-publishing isn't how many Twitter followers you have but how many books you can offer.

"When it comes to self-publishing I think your author platform is more about how many books you have to offer than it is about how many Facebook friends you have," she says. "You really have to have that larger volume of work where you can bounce the books off of each other and lead one book into the next."

awc



Allison Rushby had a successful writing career with traditional publishers when she made the unconventional move to switch to self-publishing some of her books. For her, though, it was a no-brainer.

"I had a lot of backlist reverted to me," she explains. "I had four books where the rights had been reverted to me and because I was still actively publishing young adult I decided it would be a good move to self-publish those."

A diverse range

Allison has worked with a number of different publishing houses in different countries and also writes for different age groups. That breadth of knowledge meant that when she did choose to self-publish, she had a lot of knowledge about the industry.

"It's helped a lot," Allison says about her experience. "It has helped in the way that I've seen a lot of different things, and had

INSIDE PUBLISHING

Understand the nuts and bolts of publishing

– and how to make it work for you



CLICK HERE TO
LEARN MORE

awc AUSTRALIAN
WRITERS' CENTRE
World-class writing courses

Gabrielle Tozer

Gabrielle Tozer is an internationally-published award-winning author and freelance journalist, editor, social media specialist and copywriter. She has published three YA novels and her first picture book came out in 2018. Gabrielle's debut middle-grade novel will be released in 2019.

Gabrielle Tozer always dreamt of being a journalist and an author. She had already established herself as a successful journalist when she met a publisher at a conference. Gabrielle pitched the idea of what would become her debut YA novel *The Intern*, about a young woman interning at a magazine, and her author journey began.

"I think for my first novel I jumped into that whole cliché of write what you know," Gabrielle says. "But then I wanted to

exaggerate that and have a lot of fun with it. So, it was a good place to start."

Being a publicist

Part of Gabrielle's success is down to her marketing knowledge. She knew what she would want to publish as a magazine editor and tailored the publicity around her novel to that. That meant a professional website and good high-quality photos.

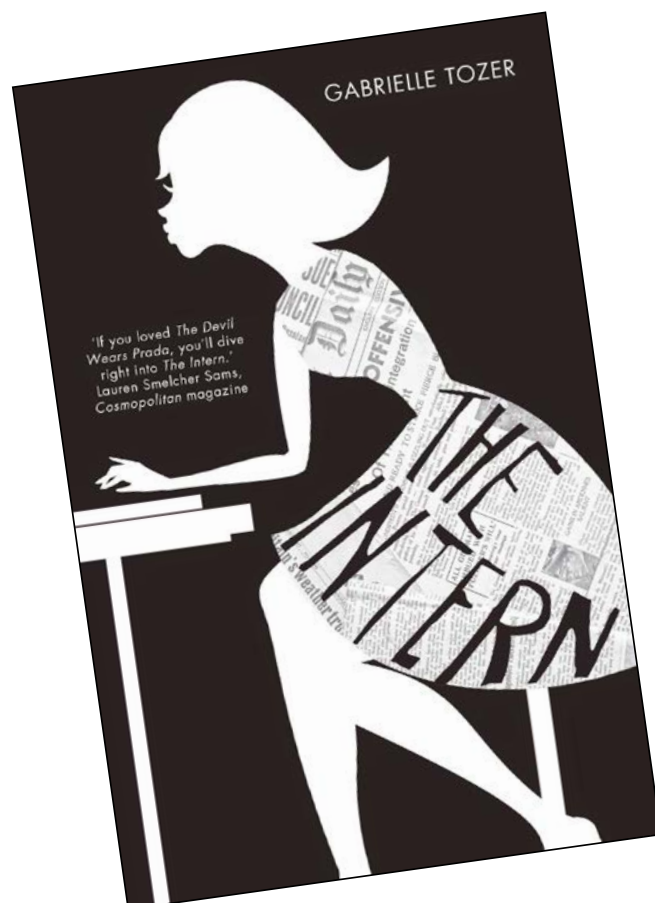
"You want to be able to send people to your website to find out more about you," Gabrielle says. "Include a press kit with all of the information, whether it's down to the synopsis of your book to the price, with more photos of you, pictures of your cover. Just basically make it as easy for the media to write about you as possible."

"It's easy just to throw your everything into this one project, but you need to remember that you've still got to look after yourself. You have to eat well, give yourself energy, exercise. And keep living your life."

Fitting it all in

Gabrielle has managed to fit writing in around a fulltime job, but it isn't always easy. She recommends having a routine and sticking to it.

"For me, it was in the mornings," Gabrielle says. "5:30am I'd get up, put in about an hour or two before work and then I'd go and do a full day of work. I'd have my nights off and work chunks of time on the weekends, but still have my breaks. The alarm would go off at the same time everyday. That was tough, but it got it done." 



Nicole Hayes

“Write something that you love or that matters deeply to you. Because it’s a long process, if you’re going to try and write a book, so you need to have something you connect with in a really powerful way to push through those tough lonely days.”

Nicole Hayes is an award-winning author, podcaster, and writing teacher. She has published three young adult novels, and has written and contributed to nonfiction books about Australian Rules football.

Nicole Hayes first two YA novels dealt with the sanctuary of home. But after talking to lots of kids and teenagers, she felt that for some of them, home was not a safe haven. She wanted to tell their stories, which became the basis for her latest novel *A Shadow’s Breath*.

“There are a whole lot of kids who aren’t safe going home,” Nicole says. “Places that we take for granted like school, or

the footy, or whatever it is they go to, that’s actually their escape. It was really important to me, I wanted to make sure that kids who felt like that were hearing their stories being told as well.”

Changing gears

It’s not the only way that Nicole’s latest book differs from her previous work. The setting has moved from Melbourne to a small country town, and she has shifted from first to third person.

“As soon as I did that, I knew that this was going to be different,” Nicole says about the change in point of view. “And then I was just having so much fun writing in this voice, and I was having so much fun really exploring language and challenging myself in presenting things in this different style.”

Breaking through

There was a part that Nicole found challenging while writing her novel. Around about the second act, she felt bogged down. She tried her usual techniques of writing out loose outlines, trying to find the direction of the story, but nothing was working. She decided to join a friend’s workshop and wound up doing nothing but writing for a whole day.

“I think it was from ten til five, and we wrote with breaks every two hours,” Nicole

Listen to
this chat at episode
35
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

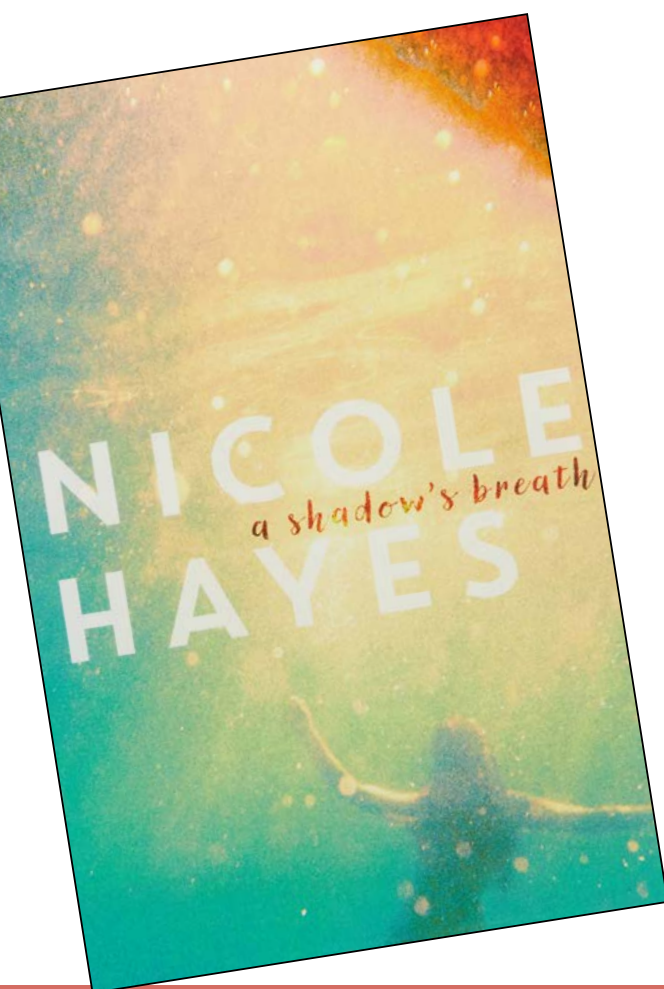
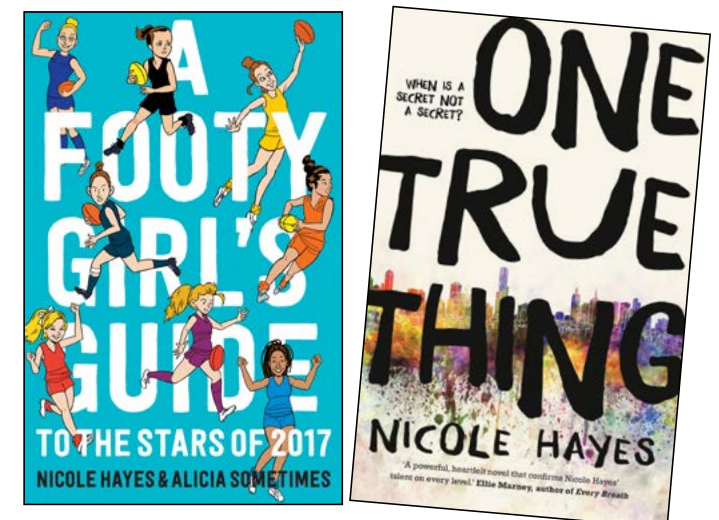
says. “And I knocked out 13,000 words, 13,500 words. Probably half of it, I threw out. But I absolutely broke the spine of the story in that time. It was simply by pushing through and forcing myself to just keep writing, even if what I was writing was really bad.”

Learning from teaching

When she’s not writing, Nicole podcasts about AFL and also presents workshops at the Australian Writers’ Centre. She loves meeting the people and helping them to find their creativity. But she finds it also helps her with her own writing.

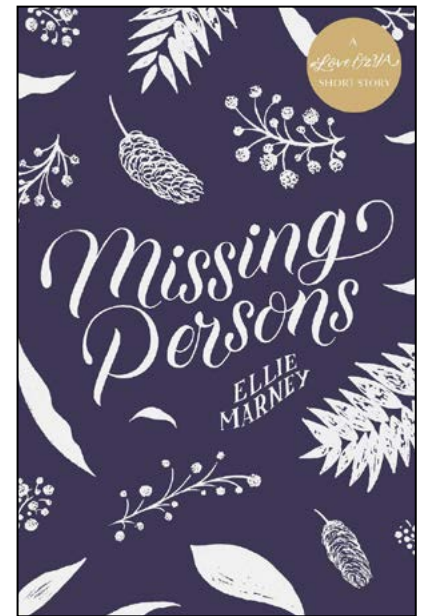
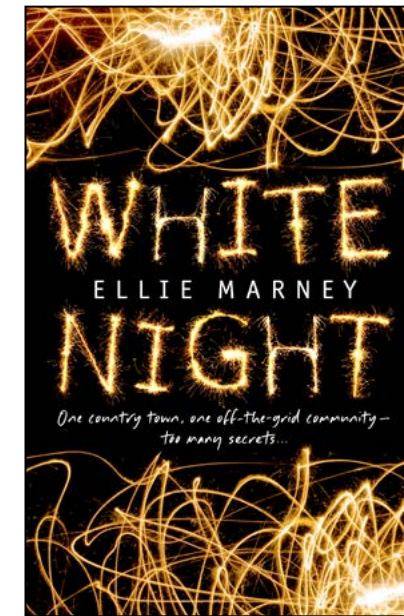
“It forces me to think about my own writing practice more consciously,” Nicole says.

“It’s like when you’re teaching somebody to drive, and you remember all these bad habits that you’ve developed. I really find it’s very useful in making me a better writer.” 



Ellie Marney

Ellie Marney is an internationally-published author of YA fiction, whose work has been shortlisted for numerous awards. She is a proud advocate of the #LoveOZYA movement and hosts the popular #LoveOZYAbookclub online. Ellie's latest book is *All Aces*, the third in her *Circus Hearts* series.



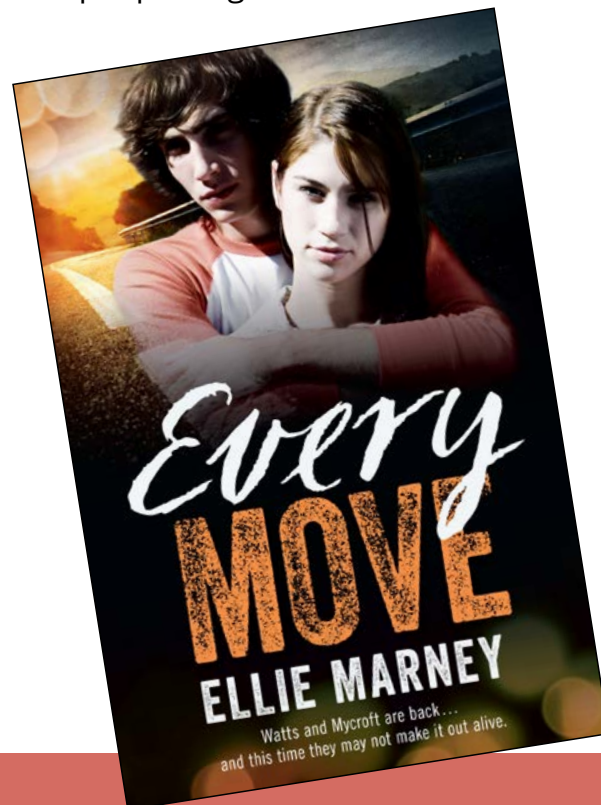
Ellie Marney discovered that she had a knack for crime and decided to pursue it - crime writing that is! She had experimented with all of the genres, writing in science-fiction, literary fiction and horror. After winning the The Sisters in Crime Australia 2010 Scarlett Stiletto Award, she decided to focus on crime writing for young adults.

"I thought, OK, well, I'm doing OK in crime. I seem to have a bit of a knack for it," Ellie says.

Watch your language?

Writing for a young adult audience, Ellie admits that she needs to keep the age of her readers in mind. But she feels that YA authors are generally very aware of their audience.

"There's varying opinions about how much you have to self-censor for a YA audience," Ellie says. "My feeling is that you have to be a bit more aware of your language and a bit more aware of how much is too much in terms of violence and gore and things like that. But to be honest, I think high school students, or teenagers in general are not as afraid of delving into crime as most people might think."



Whodunnit?

Although she writes crime, Ellie often doesn't know 'who did it' until she's deep into the story. It means a lot of backtracking and rewriting and pulling characters out of corners. But for Ellie, the story comes through naturally by knowing her characters. She often reaches a point half way through the story where she wonders how it will all end?

"Or rather, how is the character going to find their way out?" Ellie says. "That for me is more the question. Not so much how can I direct things but what would the characters do in this situation? What would they really do?"

"I'm of the Stephen King school of writing. Which is just bum on seat, just work, and don't get up until you're finished. And finish what you start. Like a bricklayer or a plumber."

#LoveOzYA

Ellie is a proud advocate for the #LoveOzYA movement, which advocates for Australian YA fiction. It started when

authors, publishers, booksellers and librarians came together to promote local writing. They noticed that for every one Australian YA book on the shelves there were nine foreign ones. Obviously, Australian publishers don't have the budget to promote in that environment.

"So, we figured, look, it's time to take matters into our own hands," Ellis says. "As a way of developing a community of YA writers and readers and publishers and so on. So people who love Australian YA got together to form that community, Love OZ YA, which has been fantastic." 



Rachael Craw

Rachael Craw is an award-winning author of YA fiction. Her Spark trilogy has been hugely popular and even has its own #sparkarmy hashtag. Rachel also teaches drama, and her latest book *The Rift*, is out now.



Rachael Craw started her writing career as a poet and playwright. But after the birth of her third child, she decided to try writing a full-length novel manuscript. And so Spark was born.

A spark of an idea

Rachael knew she wanted to write something for young adults, and something with a supernatural element,

but didn't know exactly what. So she prayed for some inspiration and that night dreamt the prologue of what would become Spark.

"I just woke up and I knew that that was my idea," Rachael recalls. "So the dream is actually the prologue of Spark, which is literally the dream that I had of running through the forest, being super fast, having these crazy reflexes and stamina and senses."

Working through the questions

It wasn't enough just to have an idea. Rachael started to methodically ask herself questions. Where did the character's strength and speed come from?

"And I knew in that moment that it was actually a decision I was making about the

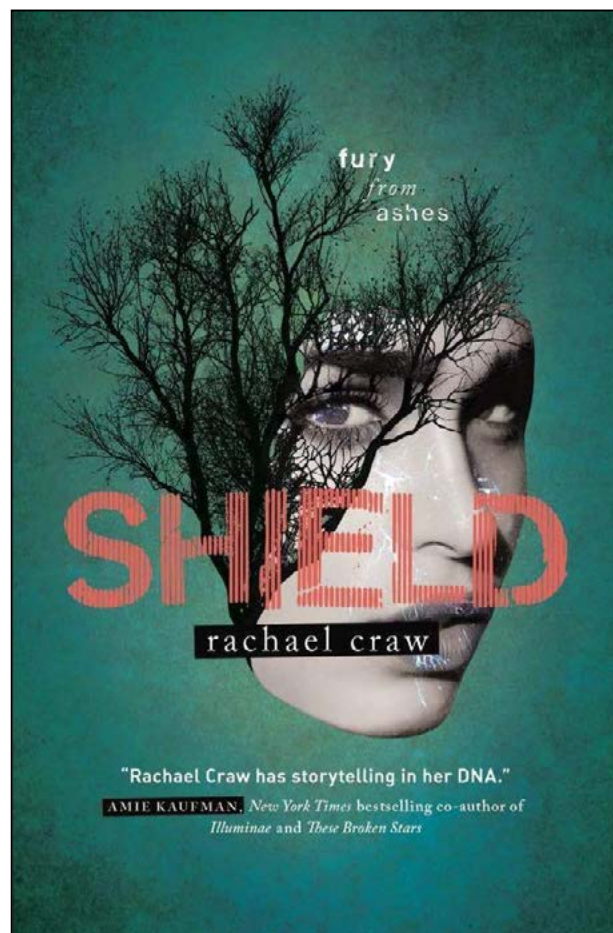
"The linchpin for actually developing your craft is learning to receive criticism and letting it make you better, rather than destroying you and rolling up in a ball and running away."

story," Rachael says. "This is either magic, or it's science. Either a wizard has tapped me on the head, or I don't know, maybe I'm a vampire. Or maybe it's something that's been cooked up in a lab."

Unfiltered feedback

Now that she has released several successful books, Rachael loves the feedback she gets from her readers.

"I love it. I looove it. I totally love it," she says. "When you're writing for young adults, the reaction is so natural and so visceral. And it's not filtered. People give you unfiltered reactions, and they engage with you really honestly. And so I love it. I absolutely love it. It's very, very fun."



Build Your Author Platform

Learn how to
create an engaged
flock of fans



CLICK
HERE

Listen to
this chat at episode
37
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

Kimberly McCreight

Kimberly McCreight says she got lucky by not finding a job. Having taken a leave of absence from her law profession, she gave herself a deadline to try to publish a novel. The deadline came and went, but without a job in sight, she decided she had to really push herself to finish a publishable manuscript.

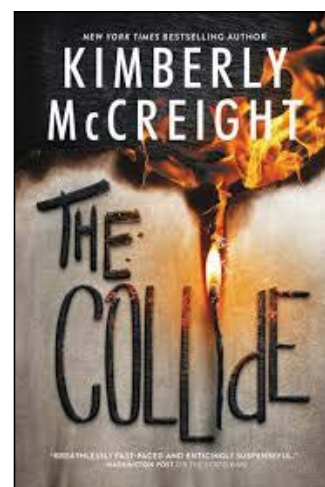
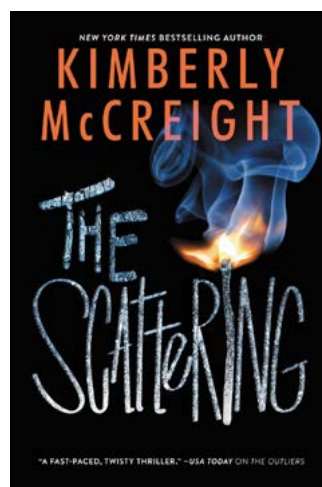
"Reconstructing Amelia was the first book that ended up getting published, but it was my fifth completed book," Kimberly recalls. "I really was thinking I was going to

find another job. But, it was the fact that I didn't find a job that led me to actually finish Reconstructing Amelia. So, I was one of those lucky people who got lucky by not finding a job."

"Lower your standards for yourself, so you can get something finished. No one is going to read that. That's between you and your computer. Just get it finished and then you can worry about turning it into something great."

Living off encouragement

Those years when Kimberly was working on the four unpublished novels were tough. She had a supportive husband, but it wasn't easy to face rejection after rejection.



Kimberly McCreight is a bestselling author, whose debut Reconstructing Amelia was nominated for a number of awards. She has since gone on to publish the popular The Outliers trilogy, and the final instalment was released in July 2018.

Listen to
this chat at episode
38
of the Magic & Mayhem
podcast

"I got an agent in that first year. I think that was extremely fortunate, because that was extremely encouraging," Kimberly says. "I think as most writers know you can live on rejections for years.. I held on because I got an agent."

The dark side

Fortunately, Reconstructing Amelia went to auction and was picked up by Harper Collins. It is a dark book and her Outliers

trilogy also has themes of mystery and crime. Kimberly admits she's drawn to the difficult questions of life.

"I think I write books to kind of answer a question for myself," she says. Questions like children keeping secrets, and how we deal with history with our own parents. "I think the mysteries I explore are those really kind of emotionally layered questions." 



publisher insights

Marisa Pintado

Marisa Pintado is an experienced publisher for Hardie Grant Egmont. She launched and manages the Ampersand Prize for debut novelists and has recently published the brilliant 2018 Reading Young Adult Book Prize winning rom-com *Amelia Westlake* by Erin Gough.



Marisa Pintado has been involved with Hardie Grant Egmont ever since the hugely successful *Zac Power* series and feels a strong pull to help aspiring writers fulfil their publishing dreams.

“Look, it really depends on the manuscript. I always aim to read a whole manuscript, even if I know halfway through that it’s not for us,” Marisa says. “Because I feel like if there’s something in there that I can take — some takeaway that I can give to the author as feedback to kind of help them on their journey towards finding another publisher then I will do that.”

What are publishers looking for?

With so much variety to choose from Marisa outlines that she, like every publisher, has things that she’s looking for that tick all her boxes for new manuscripts.

“At the moment I am actually really hungry for YA. I feel like I’m not getting sent nearly enough YA,” Marisa says. “I love humour. I think there’s a real lack of humour in Australian YA publishing. I think we can all afford to kind of let loose a little. And I also want books both middle grade and YA that are really fun. I feel like more now than ever before we need books that are fun and give us a kind of escape route, basically.”

“I’m looking for meatier stories... readers want more value, more bang for their buck.”

Find the gap in the market

With so many manuscripts coming to her every year Marisa stresses how it’s really important to look for that gap in the market to set your manuscript apart.

“When *Twilight* was huge, we were really only receiving manuscripts for paranormal and dystopian fiction,” Marisa says. “And, it was honestly a bit frustrating, because it wasn’t the sort of fiction we wanted to publish. We sort of pride ourselves in looking for the gaps in the market, trying to publish what’s not currently there.”

Working with new authors

Marisa talks about working with Cally Black, the 2017 Ampersand Prize winner and author of *In the Dark Spaces*, and forging a good author-publisher relationship.

“I think [in the editing process] we really put Cally through her paces,” Marisa says. “And she was up for it. I mean that’s the kind of amazing thing, that she was as harsh and close a critic of her own work as anyone else could be. And so Cally was completely up for the process of redrafting and redrafting until the manuscript was as good as it could possibly be.” 



Suzanne O'Sullivan

Suzanne started out as a passionate uni student working in a bookstore, then slowly transitioned from a dry career in legal publishing into her now hugely successful roles as editor for Lothian Children's Books and Associate Publisher at Hachette Australia.

What does a publisher look for in a manuscript?

When you've been in the industry as long as Suzanne, reading the same thing over and over again really gets publishers looking for a fresh and original voice.

"I would say what I'm looking for primarily is really good writing with a really strong voice, something that just speaks to me very directly and feels new in some way," Suzanne says. "It doesn't necessarily mean that it has to be a completely brand new genre that the author's invented, but the voice is a voice that feels fresh to me, you know? I get a bit tired of reading things and going, 'Oh, yes, I recognize exactly who your influences are.'"

What genre should you be writing to get published?

Suzanne is a prolific publisher who has viewed all manner of children's and YA fiction and everything in between but she's always looking to publish more middle grade fiction.

"We get a lot of YA, even though I don't publish a great deal of YA," Suzanne says. "The next biggest area that I receive is probably picture books, which is good, because I publish a lot of picture books. I

don't see as much middle grade as I would like to, I think a lot of people are really keen to get into the YA area that I think could maybe give a bit more thought to where the middle grade might be better for them. It would be better for me."

Advice for budding picture book authors

Suzanne emphasises that with picture books the author and the illustrator are equal creators of the final book.

"This is something that I see quite a bit from people who haven't had a book published before," Suzanne says. "In submissions where they're really saying, 'This is exactly what the pictures should look like.' But, the illustrator is basically an equal creator of the book with the author, so there needs to be space for them to interpret the story themselves." AWC



Suzanne O'Sullivan is the commissioning editor for Lothian Children's books and the Associate Publisher of Children's Books for Hachette Australia. She's a prolific publisher with over a decade of experience in the publishing industry.



Pitch Your Novel:
How to Attract Agents and Publishers
Make your manuscript a flying success

[CLICK TO VIEW COURSE DETAILS](#)



awc AUSTRALIAN
WRITERS'
CENTRE

Listen to the complete podcast series at:
magicandmayhem.com.au