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TE KORERO PANUI TUHITUHI O AOTEAROA

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Cover photograph;

The team of superheroes, from Waikato Literacy Association, who organised the POWer of Words roadshow conference in three different venues in 2017.

From the President

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

Dear Colleagues

Welcome to the first issue of Literacy Forum NZ for 2018. I hope you have all had a relaxing summer break and that 2018 will be a happy, healthy and successful year for each of you.

This edition of Literacy Forum NZ contains a range of quality articles from our 2017 conference roadshow "The POWer of Words", held in Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch in September/October last year. Many thanks go to Joan Gibbons and the other committee members from the Waikato Literacy Association for collating this material. I hope you will find some new ideas to inspire you as you get your literacy programmes under way for the year.

This year NZLA's 41st National Conference is being organised by Manawatu Literacy Association and will be held in Palmerston North from Wednesday 3rd October to Friday 5th October 2018. The conference planning committee have organised a wonderful line-up of keynote speakers for their "Literacy Landscapes" Conference and will soon be calling for workshop presenters. Details about the conference are on the NZLA website http://nzla.org.nz/events/2018-conference-mla-literacy-landscapes/

The NZLA Executive is very grateful that the extremely generous Marie Clay Literacy Trust has given us $15,000 for the 2018 Conference Awards. $12,000 of this is for Early Career teachers (up to and including six years teaching experience) and $3000 is for Experienced teachers. Every Council will be awarding 1 x $1000 MCLT Conference Award for Early Career teachers and NZLA will be awarding 6 x $500 MCLT Conference Awards for Experienced Teachers across New Zealand to attend the NZLA 41st National Conference in Palmerston North. To apply for either of these awards please contact your local Literacy Council for more information. Contact details for Literacy Councils are on the back cover of this Literacy Forum NZ or on the NZLA website.

The next Regional Leadership Workshop will be held in Invercargill on March 10th for Councils in the South Island. Leadership workshops held in previous years have been very well received with participants gaining a lot from the sharing and discussions.

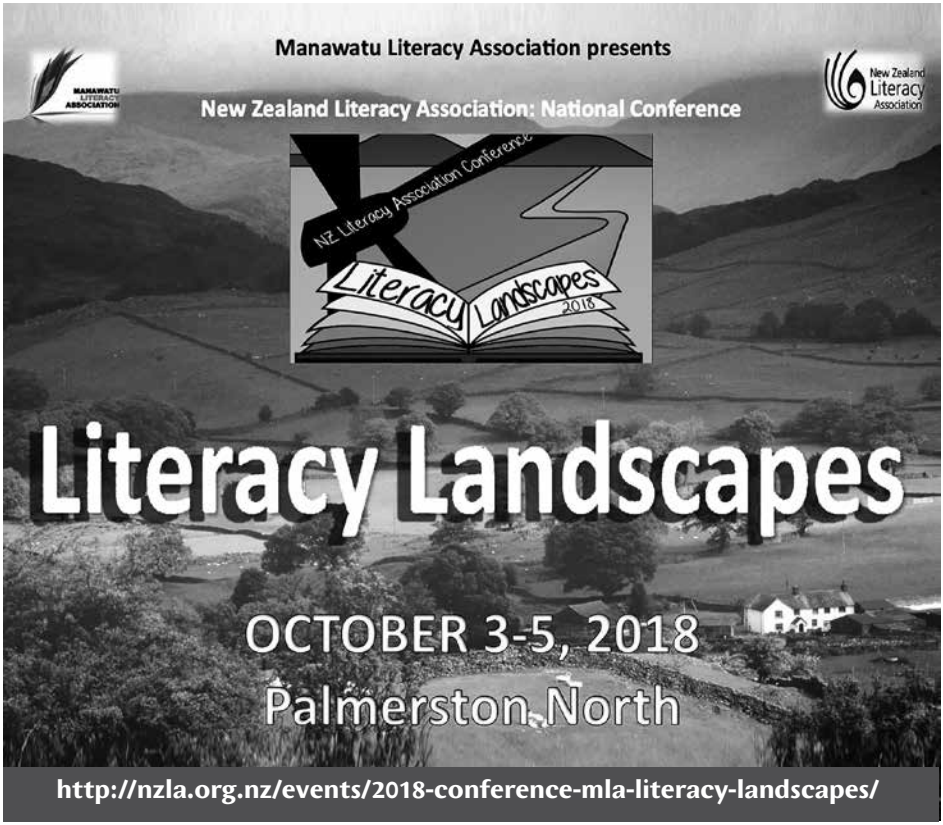
This is the time of the year when most Literacy Associations are holding their Annual General Meetings. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank those members who put up their hand and help on their local Association's committee. Your work is very much appreciated. If you are not a member of a local Literacy Association committee, maybe this is the time you could consider joining. The old saying "Many hands make light work" very much applies to our committees - the more active committee members you have the less work it should be for everyone. Belonging to a well-run committee can

be very rewarding and many life time friends have been made from being on committees with your colleagues. Please consider joining your local Literacy Association if you are not currently a committee member.

All the best for a wonderful 2018.

Yours in literacy

Glenice Andrews
NZLA President



Helping boys find their stride as writers

Ralph Fletcher

In addition to my books for teachers of writing I have also written books (novels, poems, picture books, memoir) for students. Recently I made an author visit to an elementary school. I let the principal know that I would be happy to have lunch with students who are passionate about writing. The principal asked his teachers to identify kids to have lunch with me. At noon I went to the library and there they were—a dozen girls. Not a single boy was included. I felt dismayed. I have nothing against girl writers but… couldn't the school find a single boy who might be excited about writing?

There's a prevailing notion in schools that writing is "girl thing." Other educators have joined me to push back against this idea.

Jen Allen is a literacy teacher at Albert S. Hall elementary school in rural Maine, United States. A few years ago she set up a Boys' Writing Club for kids in grade four (ten years old). They met once a week, at lunch, and gave up their recess for the opportunity to write and share their writing. I had a chance to visit the club, and experience the dynamics for myself. Some of the pieces the boys had written were realistic, while others had elements of fantasy. Some were quite poignant. One boy wrote a poem with this line: "Why is my dad not here at my basketball game?" The other boys didn't try to answer this question, but honoured it with a long moment of respectful silence. Boys at any age can be quite competitive, so I was struck by how positive and supportive they were with each other. I mentioned this to Jen.

"Yes, they are their own fan club," Jen said with a smile.

"Read it again!" the kids urged one boy, even though they had already heard his story, *The Attack of the Toilet*. The boy smiled shyly and obliged them. The boys' enthusiasm was not limited to the very best pieces, either, but included the work of some less-strong writers in the club.

Spending time with the Boys Writing Club reminded me that boys do enjoy writing, if the conditions are right. This runs counter to the data about boys' attitudes toward writing. In the US, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) asked students to respond to this statement: "Writing is one of my favourite activities." 53% of girls reported that they "strongly agree" or "agree" with this statement. By contrast, only 35% of boys responded that they would strongly agree or agree.

Common sense would suggest that you have a better chance at being successful at any activity if you enjoy it. We must take concrete steps to create boy-friendly classrooms where boys might enjoy writing, and discover for themselves its power in the world.

But empirical and anecdotal data tell us that boy writers are not flourishing. The NAEP data showed girls outperforming boys by a whopping 20% on proficiency tests in the US. Similar results have been

found in Great Britain and Australia. Why are boys struggling in the writing classroom? This nagging question fuelled my research in writing *Boy Writers: Reclaiming Their Voices* (Stenhouse Publishers). My thinking continues to evolve on this issue. I believe any honest exploration will not be complete unless we look at these issues: the disappearance of choice, the thorny issue of violent boy writing, and a better understanding of boy humour and the role it plays in their writing.

Vanishing choice

When students go to the library we encourage them to choose a book by a favourite author, or about a subject that interests them. Student choice ensures that their interest will be high. That increases the likelihood that they will actually read the book.

The same principle should operate in the writing classroom. Kids must be allowed to choose what to write about. This is one of my core values. John Poeton put it like this: "Choice in writing leads to voice in writing."

Alas, choice has gotten squeezed out of many writing classrooms. Students typically have far more choice in reading than they do in writing. Today we find that academic genres (persuasion, exposition) have sprouted up like invasive species… pushing out genres such as narrative, poetry, and memoir. Many schools have adopted modular units or genre cycles that are heavily based on writing standards. These units not only direct the students in **what kind** of writing to do, they also tell the students **how** to write. Argument writing must start with an organizing sentence, followed by at least three paragraphs, each beginning with its own topic sentence.

I have two objections this. First, such a lock-step approach will lead to formulaic writing (something most readers want to avoid in the larger world). Second, these rigid recipes banish the student's creativity, and prevent any opportunity for play. Play is an essential element in growing strong writers.

Boys will create strong writing if we give them more choice. And indeed, it is one of the thing they crave. One boy told me: "When I have to follow an anchor text, like the teacher makes us, I feel limited and don't do very good on it."

I surveyed nearly 800 boy writers. In the final item on my survey, I asked boys to complete this sentence: "When we write in school I really wish we could…" By an overwhelming margin the most prevalent response was: "When we write in school I really wish we could **write what we want.**"

In *Joy Write* (2017), I explore the increasingly restrictive environment in the writing classroom. I suggest educators create "writing greenbelts", where students can exercise complete choice in writing. A writing greenbelt creates ideal conditions for boy writers to flourish.

Violent writing

Writing workshop = choice of topic. That's one of the things I found so appealing about writing workshops. Alas, when boys begin to exercise this choice they quickly discover that this contract has some important small print. You can write whatever you want, however…

- No guns
- No weapons
- No explosions
- No war
- No blood.

This leads to a dynamic where boys are discouraged from writing what they are interested in. I met a kindergarten teacher who admitted she didn't want her students to write about war.

"Why not?" I asked.

"I don't want to get a call from parents complaining that their kids learned about war in my class," she told me.

We live in tense times. The numerous shootings in the US and terrorist attacks abroad have only made things worse. This feeling has filtered into the classroom where, not surprisingly, many teachers are suspicious of violent boy writing. I met a junior high teacher who had a boy in class named David DelaGardelle. This teacher admitted he was concerned about David.

"David first drew my attention by making a chain mail shirt, one link at a time, in 7th AND 8th grades. He was identified as being learning disabled. School bored him, but he loved to draw weapons in class."

In many schools these indicators—learning disabled, bored, drawing weapons in class—would create alarm, and likely prompt a phone call to the school psychologist. But in this case David followed his passion without interference. Upon graduation he established the Mad Dwarf Workshops to create ornamental weapons. They created the weapon used in the movie *Thor*.

Enduring literature is the highest form of writing. It must be said that many great works of literature (*All Quiet on the Western Front, War and Peace, For Whom the Bell Tolls, Slaughter-House Five*, etc.) have war as their subject. I suggest we allow boys to try this kind of writing, with commonsense limits. Tom Newkirk, author of *Misreading Masculinity*, cautions: "I don't think there should be violent boy writing in a class where another student is the object of that violence."

I agree. But if we eliminate this kind of writing entirely the writing classroom suddenly feels sterile to boys, and a lot less engaging.

Boy humour

I recently received a letter from an eleven year-old boy named Reid.

> "I really liked your book *Flying Solo.* I have an idea for a book you should write, Mr. Fletcher. My whole idea: put me inside your book. I'm a VERY interesting person. Just ask my friends! I'm so weird, funny, and nice. Imagine REID on the front cover. That could be your title! Just think about it, okay? Sleep on it."

The sheer chutzpah in Reid's letter made me laugh out loud. And it's typical of boy writing we often see. Because boys are acutely aware of hierarchy, they are drawn to subversive humour and like to use it in their writing. For example, when my son

Joseph was in 8th grade he put together a Christmas list that began:

Dear Santa/Dad,

This is the time of year when I pillage the village that is your wallet…

Schools value a no-nonsense, straight-ahead approach to a writing topic. Boys often prefer to find a creative angle that will make us chuckle. Unfortunately, it's my experience that these pieces often do not score well. Why? This may partly be that they are out-of-the box, and don't include the items listed on the rubric. I believe we need to reopen the question of what makes good writing. If a piece of student writing makes us laugh, makes us want to share it with a friend, shouldn't that writing receive a high grade?

In *Misreading Masculinity*, Newkirk identifies parody and satire as boys' favourite genres. Parody and satire have a distinguished history, practiced by iconic writers like Jonathan Swift. Such writing requires high-level skills such as cleverness and tongue-in-cheek humour. Boys should be praised, not penalized, for experimenting with it.

The elephant in the living room? The disparity between the number of female and male teachers. 95% of elementary school teachers are female. Female teachers may have trouble (or in some cases be unwilling) to cross the gender bridge and embrace the boy sensibility, including boy humour. I've had many female teachers who confided that they didn't "get" boy writers until they had a son of their own.

A few final thoughts for engaging boy writers.

- Widen the circle. Let's see what happens if we say "yes" instead of automatically "no."
- Give them real choice in what to write about, and to write it.
- Build on their strengths.

Often, in our efforts to be helpful, we give boy writers so many suggestions they get overwhelmed. They feel like: "I can never do all this." It's important to find what the student is doing well and name it for that student. Then, if appropriate, make one suggestion.

*Look for the humour. It's there, but we may have to tune in to it.

*Take the long view. Everything we do should be in the service of creating lifelong writers. We need to create classrooms where boys can develop a love of writing.

*Enjoy their writing. Boys really do

Words	Drawings
Solitary	Social
For Teacher	For Peers
Sincere/Serious	Sarcastic/Funny
Realistic	Fanciful
Nice	Violent
Rubric	Goof-Around
Prompt	Choice
School Language	Kid Language

Figure 1: Various continuum for the writing students do in school writng

bring something unique to the table; we need to find ways to celebrate it.

Engaging boy writers

Figure 1 shows various continuum for the writing students do in school writing. At the left-hand we find the writing kids are typically asked to do in school. Boy writers live on the right-hand side of the page. You'll get more engagement from boys if you let them move toward the right-hand side of the page.

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Author

Ralph Fletcher is an American writer of children's picture books, young adult fiction, and poetry. He is also an educational consultant, and author of books for both children and professional educators on the art of writing

Eating my words

Kyle Mewburn

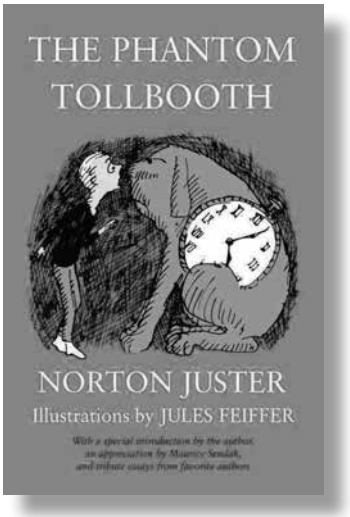
I'm a word-aholic. I've been devouring words most of my life. I'm not at all selective in my wordy habits. Any complex, meaty, inventive word or phrase will do. I've SPLASHed and CRASHed on onomatopoeia. I allegedly alliterate at an alarming rate. I have a particular penchant for puns. And I've never metaphor I didn't like.

I'm not sure when my addiction started. My parents certainly can't take any blame. They weren't exactly word peddlers. To this day, my father proudly declares - "I never read a book I didn't have to."

As for my mother... having married at 16, with four kids by the time she was 21, I suspect she didn't have much time or energy for reading. There were certainly

no bedtime stories in our house. Or even books. So I can't recall reading anything before I went to school. But I took to it like a giraffe takes to cycling.

It's impossible to pinpoint when my love of reading transmogrified into something else altogether. A love of words which would ultimately turn into full-blown addiction.



For me, words always amplified a story's potency and resonance. A story without a full regalia of sparkly, glittery words was like the *Emperor's New Clothes*. Words were the souvenirs by which the story was remembered. Without them, it would be quickly forgotten. Though stories were useful distractions, words were powerful talismans against the everyday. Antidotes to mundanity - the drab greyness of suburbia.

My word addiction was necessarily surreptitious. Its only everyday outlet was in puns. I developed a reputation for being sharp, quick on the punny draw or, as my father would prefer - a smartarse.

My words were largely reserved for the page. At every opportunity they poured out in torrents of florid prose. Meanwhile, my active vocabulary shrank to mirror the lowest-common-denominator of my peers. Simple syntax ring-fenced by everyday words.

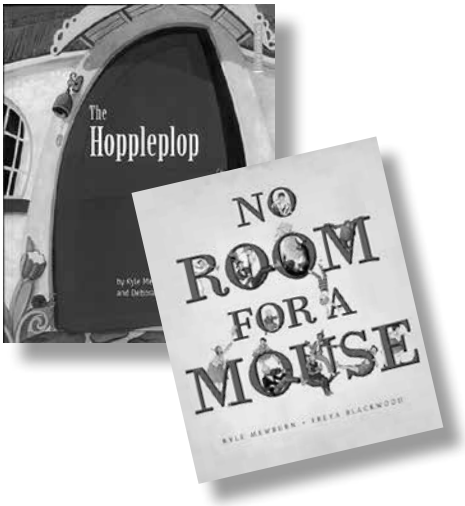
I churned through Willard Price, Jules Verne, *The Three Investigators*. Exciting, engaging stories, yet largely bereft of the kind of meaty wordiness I craved. After a single reading they were consigned to my bookshelf to gather dust.

But on the last day of primary school, my journey took an unexpected twist. As I prepared to depart for the final time, my teacher presented me with a book, *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster. It wasn't just any old book, either. It was his personal copy, inscribed with his name.

I don't know why he felt compelled to give me his book. I like to believe it was because he was an insightful and gifted teacher. Though no teacher could fail to notice I was an avid reader and an enthusiastic - possibly *over*-enthusiastic - writer, Mister Staib discerned something else. Something crucial, that is all too often overlooked or undervalued - my love of words.

Unlike every other book I'd read, *The Phantom Tollbooth* wasn't driven by story, but by an unabashed love of words. Milo's adventures to rescue the princesses *Rhyme* and *Reason* were little more than excuses to showcase verbal gymnastics of every ilk. A tenuous thread holding together a rambunctious celebration of words in all their glorious complexity. A handbook for aspiring linguistic gymnasts like myself.

When I finally decided to take my writing seriously, it never occurred to me to try my hand at children's literature. A purely pragmatic explanation might be that I didn't have children, so there was simply no impetus. But perhaps I was



simply too awed by the notion of entering the same word universe as *The Phantom Tollbooth*. How could my words possibly compare?

After years dabbling in all manner of literary genres, I awoke one morning with *The Hoppleplop* glimmering in my head. Three hours later, the story was done and dusted. The next day, it was in the mail on its way to every children's publisher listed in *The Writer's Handbook*. One month later, my story was accepted. And in 2004 I was, at last, finally, a published author.

An early review of *The Hoppleplop* waxed lyrical about the imaginative prose, concluding with: "*This is a good introduction for the middle school child to begin to acquire new skills in decoding picture books using such ideas as intertextuality, irony and double coding.*" If only I knew what double coding or intertextuality were...

In picture books, I'd found a voice at last. But it wasn't yet *my* voice. Though imaginatively engaging, conceptually intriguing and efficiently written, my first picture books were, linguistically, pretty standard fare. Yet it's also possible to see the first seeds of my peculiar style of word wizardry taking root.

In *The Hoppleplop*, for example, the Ooblangitan from next door is "always climbing the fence and squashing my sand-witches". In *The Bear in the Room Next Door*, Josh hears "a loud, grumbling, growling sound rumbling through the wall" and "creeps extra-super-sneakily on his fluffy-pillow slippers". While in *Kiss! Kiss! Yuck! Yuck!* Auntie Elsie greets Andy with: "Hi-de-hi, Andy apple-pie!" or "Howdy dumble, Andy apple-crumble!" and so on.

But my word-addicted soul craved more.

No Room for a Mouse significantly ratcheted up the level of wordplay. It also offered the first glimpse of several linguistic foibles which would, over time, become what I consider to be my literary signatures. Elements which tie my work together, no matter how diverse my stories or themes.

It was the first introduction, for example, of rhyming dialogue. Why my characters should break into rhyme when they speak is anyone's guess. Perhaps it was a kneejerk response to my own rather passive vocabulary. Or was it also, subconsciously at least, a call to arms directed at those young readers who, like me, felt stifled by the dull utilitarianism of everyday words.

It was during the editing process that I had my first real inkling that not everyone in the publishing world was as enamoured with words as I was. In fact, in some quarters, words were considered mere accompaniments to the images. Children and parents don't have time to really read

a story - to linger over ludicrously lyrical sentences, swishing them around on their palates like expensive wine. Illustrations can tell the story far better, and quicker. A picture paints a thousand words, after all.

So when Christopher finds Mrs Fizzletum sitting on the park bench, the editors suggested the reader didn't need to read: "*But what a crinkled, crumpled Mrs Fizzletum it was. She looked like she'd been whirled round in a tornado."* Because the illustration *showed* them that, surely?

Normally I accepted editorial input with a shrug and moved on. But this time I protested. Why was I writing if it was simply to supply captions to illustrations? The illustration certainly did *NOT* show a crinkled, crumpled Mrs Fizzletum. It showed a dishevelled, messy or unkempt Mrs Fizzletum, perhaps. But crinkled, crumpled? Unless the child's parents were descriptively gifted readers, any description would be limited by their everyday vocabulary. As a writer, it was my task, my duty, my calling, to offer my readers new ways of expressing themselves.

Ultimately I won the day and Mrs Fizzletum remained decidedly crinkled and crumpled. Yet the incident raised the first warning flags in my word-addicted worldview.

For me, a story is the basic ingredient. Like a fish caught in my stream. In my world, stories are neither rare nor especially difficult to catch. *How* the story is told is what makes the difference between bland gruel and a memorable, gourmet banquet. Like Colonel Sanders, I firmly believe words are the secret herbs and spices that make a story finger-lickin' good. More importantly, it leaves the reader wanting more.

When I was growing up, the only spices in everyday use were salt and pepper. Meat was generally fried. Vegetables were boiled. Palates have certainly become more sophisticated over the last fifty years. Yet in the world of children's literature, I sometimes fear we're going in the opposite direction - back to meat-and-three-veg stories sprinkled with salt and pepper. The spotlight has shifted from the quality of the words, focussing instead solely on the narrative. I like a good story as much as anyone. But I believe we are failing our kids, and society as a whole, by undervaluing words. Is there any reason we shouldn't have both?

The key question is, I suppose, what is the purpose of literacy? Is it merely a skill that everyone requires to fulfil their societal function? Then words are, indeed, mere tools to carry a story. As long as the story is told efficiently, kids will finish it. And it is the simple act of reading which builds comprehension.

For me, literacy serves a much deeper purpose. There are enormous social and psychological benefits to be gained from reading for pleasure. Yet too many kids, like my father, only read when they must. Sure, some kids just aren't interested in reading. They have way more interesting things to do with their time. And why should they value reading when their parents don't model positive reading habits?

Yet there are wider issues to address. I believe many kids don't read for pleasure because they exist in a world where words are prosaic and utilitarian. Crucially, many of the stories offered to them reflect and reinforce this sad state of affairs. Writers sometimes forget our task is to conjure

castles out of snowflakes. We are not in the business of building ablution blocks.

In picture books, it's important the text has some rhythmic resonance. You often hear kids singing snatches of their favourite songs - so why aren't they spouting words or phrases from their favourite books? I put a lot of thought and effort into generating a rhythmic thread. It's also important that every word does something more than just move the story along. With 500 words to work with, there's no place for freeloaders.

When I moved into writing junior fiction, targeting the so-called reluctant reader, I saw no reason to abandon my principles. The skills and thought required were the same. The stakes were, if anything, much higher.

Unlike picture books, where the writer must, to some degree, appeal to the adults who are going to buy and read the story, junior fiction places the reader front and centre. The writer must now speak directly to the reader's heart if the reading experience is to be pleasurable and memorable.

Many people misguidedly imagine hooking young readers, especially boys, is a simple formula - action + fart jokes + gross elements = satisfied reader. If only it was that easy. Interestingly, nobody suggests hooking girls is quite so simple, or that we should add fart jokes to a pony or fairy story.

Young readers have quite sophisticated palates. Or perhaps *distinctly individual* might be a better description. The last thing they need to have dished up is the literary equivalent of boiled-to-death spinach.

So my recipe for a mouth-watering story:

1. Action-packed, fast-paced narrative

Kids have busy lives. So my story has to repay tenfold their investment of time. It has to be *way more* exciting than the alternatives because it must compete against the *theoretical* value of other activities. Kids often imagine an activity is going to be *x times* more exciting than the likely reality. If the pace of my story wavers a moment, readers' minds can wander and begin to imagine better ways to spend their time.

2. Super-charged subject matter

I often hear people say things like: You can't really go wrong with dinosaurs. Yes, you can. A dull story with dinosaurs is still a dull story. The key to hooking young readers is to leverage the subject matter in interesting ways, or cast them in an original light. The stories need to broaden the reader's knowledge or, conversely, distort "facts" into unimagined shapes.

I suspect kids, especially boys, are partly interested in dinosaurs and knights for the complex and archaic vocabulary - whether it's dinosaur species or medieval weaponry. Kids also like learning new facts - ideally gruesome or gross facts. By playing on this I can extend their vocabularies and tickle their funny bones at the same time. There's no point using tantalising bait if it fails the taste test.

3. Relatable characters

In general, young readers have to have an immediate empathy for the hero. It's also important they recognise the hero in an everyday kind of way. No matter whether my hero is an evolved cave-boy or a shape-shifting dragon, ideally they will

have familiar personality traits, or be facing familiar challenges. This allows the reader to see them as being just like themselves, or someone they know. If they can't relate to my hero, they won't truly understand or become invested in my hero's journey.

My characters generally wish to prove something. To someone - if only themselves. They also tend to have slightly complicated friendships.

In *Dinosaur Rescue*, Arg's friendship with Shlok is limited and superficial... and often rather frustrating. Though Shlok is a loyal, albeit rather dangerous friend, he is also as thick as a plank. Arg's intellectually satisfying friendship with Skeet is complicated by the simple fact Skeet is a T-rex. So it must be a secret, private friendship. Arg can't really invite Skeet back to his cave to play.

In *Dragon Knight,* there are numerous hurdles in the way of Merek's friendship with Breena. Like the simple fact she is a girl and he is a dragon. It's further complicated by class divides and societal pressures. Merek's parents are living as ordinary citizens, while Breena's father, Sir Bragalot, is a luminary knight. It's simply not the done thing for a young lady to be seen in the peasant quarter.

3. Humour in all shapes and forms

For me it's crucial the humour, especially the scatological variety, is never forced. It has to occur naturally within the context of the story. For example, Arg's mum is always sticking her finger up her nose or eating her ear wax. A few mothers have complained it's rather unsettling and suggest I could so easily cut it out. But I can't. It's an element of Arg's mum's character. That's simply what she does when she is thinking. She doesn't do it any other time, so it's not at all gratuitous.

Being a word addict, I never let an opportunity pass for some linguistic fun. I particularly like puns, so my stories are loaded with them.

Of course, not all readers will get all my jokes. That's more than fine with me. I don't *want* them to understand every joke at the first reading. I suspect some of my jokes won't ever be discovered or understood in their genius entirety. It warms my cockles to imagine my grown-up readers reading the story to *their* child and having a quiet chuckle because they finally understand a joke that had eluded *them* years before.

4. Gross elements

My books certainly contain gross elements. But, for me, the crucial point is, again, that the grossness is not gratuitous. It is merely a reflection of the world in which the story unfolds. It just so happens prehistoric or mediaeval times were pretty gross. While I certainly make the most of the grosser aspects, it's vital the story only contains as much grossness as it warrants.

5. Lists. Lots of lists

Once, while a friend and her son were visiting, I gave him my first draft of *Dragon Knight*, so he might while away the time. He was, I knew, an avid fan of *Dinosaur rescue*, so I was hoping for a rave review while secretly fretting he might give it the thumbs down. Or, worse, a yawning *Ho-hum*. But I needn't have worried. Within an hour he'd polished it off and was suitably excited. Albeit with one minor caveat - it needed more lists.

Getting a young reader to voluntarily read a story to the end is just the first part of the equation. For me, building comprehension and reading fluency is given an enormous boost if I can get them to *re-read* the story. The more times the better. This is especially true for emergent and so-called reluctant readers.

Getting kids to re-read a story requires a much more sophisticated, subtle and deviously complex array of weaponry. The story must, firstly, be engaging and engrossing - not just gross. Every page, every sentence, must give my reader sufficient inducement to continue turning the pages. I respect my readers, so never dumb down my writing or my jokes. Crucially, I try to ensure my stories are not completely digestible in a single reading. My readers should finish satisfied but not sated, and *know* a second, or third, reading will amply reward them.

My secret ingredients for a re-readable story:

1. Strong, yet subtle themes

Themes seem to have fallen out of favour - or perhaps fallen into disrepute, might be more apt. If you've read any of my picture books, you'll know I like my themes. Why should writing for emergent readers be any different? I believe themes are hugely undervalued when it comes to hooking young readers. Young kids are often moralistic, so they respond instinctively to positive messages - as long as it doesn't hit them in the face like a rotten fish.

Most of my stories include some environmental or social commentary. I believe kids are idealists with an inherent sense of justice, so I often try to sneak in little titbits to help explain the world's injustices. Or generally explain the world... at least the world as I see it from an eco-socialist perspective.

A lot of people laugh when I say *Dinosaur Rescue* has a strong sustainability message. How could stories containing so much snot and vomit have any message whatsoever? But if you wipe (or peel) away the snot and vomit, you're left with a simple message - evolved people protect the environment, Neanderthals destroy it.

My stories often contain a diversity thread. It may not be the standard view of diversity but the message is the same - acceptance of those who are different. From just being a whole lot smarter than everyone else, to a shape-shifting dragon, my heroes struggle with loneliness, isolation and bigotry. The joy when they find acceptance and friendship is almost palpable.

2. Complex interpersonal relationships

For kids, the world is a bewildering spider-web of interpersonal relationships. Once they leave the family bubble they have to figure out their place in relationship to everyone around them. Friends, authority figures and the heaving mass of humanity.

Most of my stories are heavily relationship based. My heroes generally grapple with how, and where, they fit in. And the impact their relationships have upon their destiny.

In *Dinosaur Rescue*, Arg's parents offer unconditional love. But they simply don't understand him and secretly wish he was like all the other boys. Arg is often torn between pleasing his parents and satisfying the demands of his over-active

mind and adventurous spirit. During the course of the series their relationships shift and grow as events offer both parents and child opportunities to develop a deeper understanding and love.

Meanwhile, Arg's sister, Hng, is rather jealous of her brainy little brother and would be quite content if he had a tragic accident... even if she has to arrange it herself.

In *Dragon Knight,* Merek's mother is determined to keep him from harm. Even if that means preventing him from pursuing his dream to become a knight. She is partly motivated by a simple urge to mollycoddle him. But there is also an underlying fear that Merek's dragon identity will be uncovered because of his propensity to accidentally shape-shift at the most inopportune moments.

Meanwhile, Merek's father is rather proud of his son's desire to become a knight and happily turns a blind eye, or conspires to keep Merek's faux pas from his over-protective mother.

Breena has a similar relationship with her parents - which strengthens their friendship. Torn between pursuing her dream to become a knight, like her father, or fulfilling societal expectations (not to mention pleasing her mother) and becoming a Lady.

My stories seek to undermine societal rules and expectations. To encourage kids to be themselves and follow their dreams. I also like to poke subtle fun at authority figures and adults in general.

3. Language that stretches vocabularies and comprehension

Young readers deserve to be treated with respect. Too often stories intended for this reader are over-simplified to the point where the writing becomes dull. One-dimensional. Drab and colourless.

I appreciate there are limits. Over-complex sentences and a barrage of unfamiliar words can defy comprehension. But given my stories are illustrated, rather graphically, there is no reason to imagine readers can't discern meaning from complex sentences and unfamiliar vocabulary - *if* (and it's a very important if) the context is crystal clear *and* the words are sufficiently vibrant to warrant scrutiny.

I strive to write sentences with the power of incantations. Sentences and phrases that deserve to be read out loud. If I want my readers to re-read my stories and, equally importantly, strive for comprehension, it's vital that I use every writer's tool at my disposal - powerful verbs, evocative adjectives, similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia and alliteration - to ensure every scene, every sentence, every word, packs a punch.

So that's my general philosophy. But wouldn't it be lovely if we didn't have to work so hard to hook young readers? How much easier if all kids came to reading with an open heart and hungry mind.

There is, of course, no magic bullet. But there are a few ways we might help grow a more reading-positive attitude utilising the power of words.

1. Words as taonga

Words should be prized for their unique essence rather than simply their utilitarian value as communication tools. Kids should be encouraged to grow their own treasury of favourite words. Words which fizz and crackle on their tongues, tickle

their funny bones, or simply resonate for whatever reason.

2. Words as building blocks

Building vocabularies is a key to growing confidence. Reluctant readers are often unconfident readers because they worry comprehension will inevitably elude them. So perhaps we need to start building vocabularies in everyday activities. Encourage kids to discover archaic or technical words, and use them in everyday situations. Words need to be freed from the page at every opportunity.

3. Words as magic

Finally, I think it's high time we dispatched concrete prose to the waste bin. There's plenty of time to learn the technical skills required to write instruction manuals. As any writer will tell you, it's much easier to pare back florid, overwrought prose than to add them later. We should celebrate linguistic inventiveness and verbal dexterity at every turn. Every communication - whether oral or written - should be sprinkled with similes and basted in metaphor.

It took me a while to realise word addiction wasn't something to be ashamed of or hidden away. It is, in fact, something I've learned to be proud of.

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Kyle Mewburn titles have been published in a dozen countries and won numerous awards including Children's Book of the Year, Picture book of the Year, two Children's Choice awards and a Flicker Tale award in North Dakota. His stories are noted for being multi-layered, funny and linguistically creative. He has been a frequent finalist at the New Zealand Children's Book Awards and many of his titles have been included on Notable Books Lists in both New Zealand and Australia. As well as picture books, he has published numerous School Readers and junior fiction titles. He is currently President of the New Zealand Society of Authors.

Increasing student talk during shared reading to enhance comprehension

Sheena Cameron and Louise Dempsey

Educator and author Jill Eggleton (2010) reminds us of the importance of practising oral language skills within a balanced literacy programme:

> Proficient language skills are not acquired if they aren't used. Just as students need to learn the skills of reading and writing, they also need to express themselves orally, in a fluent manner. When students have mastered good oral language skills, they become more fluent readers and writers.

In this article, we will discuss the shared reading approach and the opportunities it provides to teach and practise oral language skills in order to develop comprehension. We will also review a range of strategies that increase the quality and quantity of student talk, allowing students to discuss texts in more detail.

The benefits of shared reading

There are many reasons why shared reading is an important component of a balanced literacy programme. It is an effective use of teacher time that provides instructional time for all students. Decoding and comprehension strategies can be modelled in shared reading, which allows the focus in guided reading to shift from teaching new skills and strategies to practising them. It is also a valuable time to explicitly teach new vocabulary.

Shared reading exposes all students to a wide range of texts and provides the opportunity to engage in quality reading discussions. This is especially important for our less able readers who are not able to access texts at higher levels and can miss opportunities for rich discussions.

What does shared reading look like for fluent readers?

During our work in schools, we have noticed that while junior teachers include shared reading in their programmes regularly, teachers of older students are sometimes unsure of what it looks like with fluent readers. Shared reading often seems to drop off at the senior end of the school and teachers focus teaching on guided reading or just 'reading to learn' across the curriculum.

Projecting the text engages all students during shared reading.

The approach is the same as for junior students, with the teacher providing a high degree of support and all students having access to the text. Texts can be projected and/or students could have their own copy. A variety of reading material can be used, depending on the reading level of the students. Some examples are big books, poems, song lyrics, text selections from picture books, novels or articles, and visual texts such as comics, graphic novels and videos with subtitles. There is also a number of websites that have good-quality articles and stories that can easily be projected: www.wonderopolis.com and www.dogonews.com are good examples of these.

Developing a 'talk friendly' classroom for shared reading

The 'think, pair, share' strategy encourages participation from all students and is vital to engage all students during shared reading lessons. Developing clear criteria for speaking and listening, and using role play to model how to be an effective partner, can help to build confidence. Having set 'talk partners' can make the management of 'think, pair, share' easier for the teacher.

An important component of 'think, pair, share' is 'think time'. This gives students time to process information and formulate ideas before talking. If teachers don't build in thinking time, lower-achieving students will tend to lean on their partner. Explicitly telling the students about 'thinking time' and giving clear guidance about what they need to think about will help to get the most out of 'think, pair, share'. For example: 'What advice would you give the character? Think of at least one idea.'

A silent five-second countdown (using the five fingers on one hand) works well to indicate to the students when the 'thinking time' is over.

Variations such as 'think, pair, record', 'think, pair, square' and 'think, pair, walk and talk' can increase student talk and variety to a lesson. (Refer to pages 40–41, *The Oral Language Book,* Cameron & Dempsey, 2016.)

Students participate in 'think, pair, record' and note down their partner's ideas.

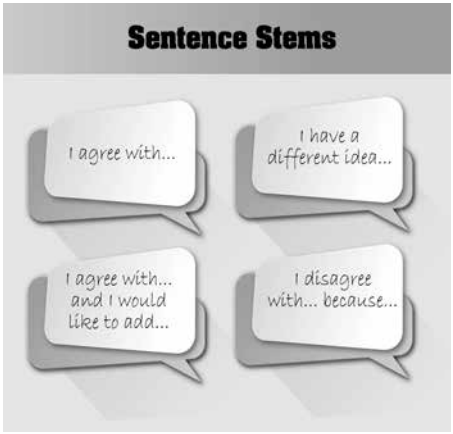
Grouping for talk

Providing opportunities for students to work in a variety of groupings enriches discussion and increases student talk time. Taking the time to explicitly teach students a range of groupings can help to make the management of talk during shared reading a more manageable task. A triad is a nice change from working with a partner and adds more perspectives to the discussion. Role cards can help to focus the talk and can encourage students to explore different reading strategies and develop deeper understanding. For example, students could take on roles such as summariser, connector, questioner. (Refer to Role cards PM29 and PM30, *The Oral Language Book,* Cameron & Dempsey, 2016.)

Students talk in a triad during shared reading, using the role cards Questioner and Summariser.

Sentence stems

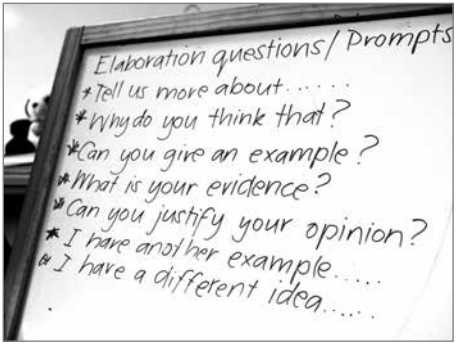
Sentence stems support students to articulate their ideas and improve the quality of talk. Teaching students to say 'I agree with Lia' is better than saying nothing or 'Pass' in a discussion. This validates what the previous speaker has said and demonstrates active listening. Although sentence stems can sound somewhat forced when students start to use them, they very quickly become part of natural conversation.



Examples of sentence stems a teacher gradually introduced to her class.

Questioning

When initiating talk, teachers often defer to asking questions (Alexander, 2008). While questioning is an important strategy, it can be overused and responses from students tend to be short. Instead of moving on to another response or a new question, the teacher and/or students can ask an elaboration question that will encourage the speaker to justify his or her answer and add detail. Even a simple elaboration question like 'Why do you think that?' will encourage students to justify their answers. When teachers and students use the elaboration prompt 'What is your evidence?', it reminds students to refer to the text to justify their ideas.



An example of elaboration prompts a Year 5 teacher developed with her students.

Drama

Using drama in shared reading can increase student talk and support comprehension (Güngor, 2008). Students use their imagination and experiences to understand what it is like to be someone or something else. This develops deeper understanding of situations and texts, as well as empathy for characters. Drama is multisensory and therefore memorable for

students. Students can also independently engage in drama activities after the shared reading lesson in pairs or small groups once they have been introduced and scaffolded by the teacher.

Henry Martin, who teaches Years 3 and 4 at Bairds Mainfreight Primary in Auckland, is very committed to shared reading and includes it most days in his reading programme. Once students are familiar with the text, he incorporates drama strategies into his shared reading to further develop their comprehension. Below are some of the activities he uses.

Act it out

Henry reads the text and a group of students or the whole class act it out. The students also use this activity as a follow-up after guided reading. One student reads the text and the other students mime the story.

Hot seating

One or more students take on the role/s of characters in the text and the class asks them questions. He extends this activity by asking the characters to move to different places in the room and the other class members visit and ask the characters more questions.

Freeze frame

Students make a group 'freeze frame' from a particular point in the story.

Henry's students enjoy the drama activities and he has also witnessed real improvements in his students' reading:

> Drama really helps my lower readers. Before I used to ask them questions and they wouldn't know but now they are 'acting it out', it is really improving their recall. They are also starting to understand characters' thoughts and feelings.

Creating regular opportunities for students to talk in a range of groupings, and encouraging students to elaborate on their answers, will increase the quality and quantity of student talk and deepen reading comprehension.

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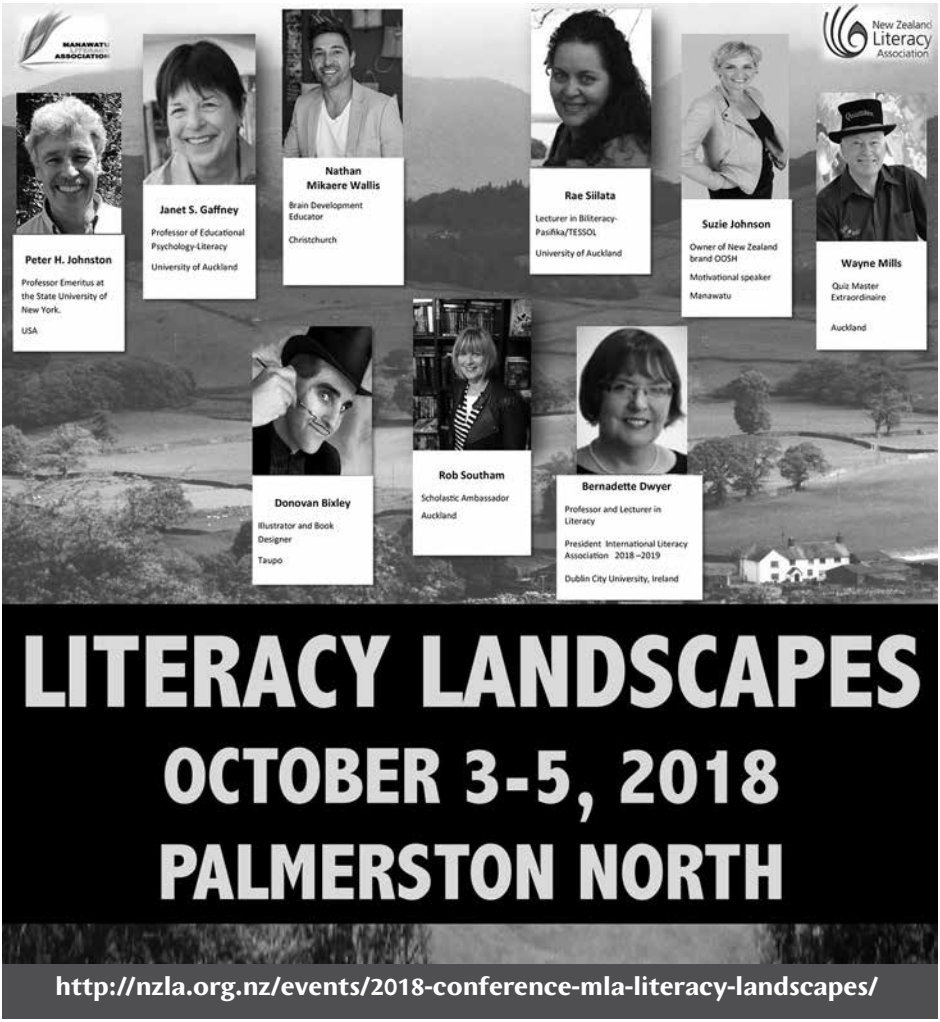

Raymond Briggs and the postmodern picture book

Joan Gibbons

Introduction

Features of postmodernism include uses of narrative fragmentation, frame breaking, metanarrative, metafiction, parody, intertextuality, self-referentiality, excess, pastiche, ambiguity, illusion, indeterminacy, lack of closure, manipulation (Lewis, 1996; McDonald, 2018; Nel, 2011). Postmodern books are boundary breaking, often being both playful and subversive. They engender a critical awareness of the constructedness of texts in their audience, however young, and encourage thoughtful reading.

Raymond Briggs is seldom overlooked when sophisticated picture books are being discussed, but may remain unnoticed when postmodernism is the main focus. This should not be so, because Briggs's work displays many indicators of postmodern literature. He was one of the early manipulators of the fairy tale; his pictures jump out of their frames; he uses excess to excess; he tells the reader how to read. He has been praised for his "sheer diversity of graphic and communicational technique, as well as for a thematic gamut that range from the innocence of *Snowman* to the black spread with which *WYWB [When the Wind Blows]* concludes" (Martin, 1989, p. 235).

Intertextuality with early work

Briggs started as an illustrator, and his own earliest writing was in the form of novels for younger readers. Hahn (2015), in *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, calls these three early novels "adventure stories of a very conventional kind" (p. 93), although Martin (1989) said they "show him as a natural writer, well able to strike the reading tempo and interest of a specific age-group". In *The Strange House* (Briggs, 1961b), Tim and Gerry flee from Golf Club members who object to them fishing in a Golf Club river. In *Midnight Adventure* (Briggs, 1961a), we see the same boys being rewarded with new fishing rods for preventing the burglary of the Golf Club's cups and furniture. *Ethel and Ernest* (Briggs, 1998), the biography of Briggs' parents, tells a different story to these novels. Here Raymond, a grammar school boy, as his mother proudly protests, is seen being brought home by police after attempting to steal billiard cues from the Golf Club, and is threatened by the police with Borstal if it occurs again. The rewritten history in the early novels is more akin to the story told by Ethel to a nosy neighbour, that Raymond has been helping police with their inquiries. The Golf Club indicates the class tensions evident in Briggs' biography

Raymond Briggs

of his parents. Golf Clubs in England in the 1960s, and probably still today, are the preserve of the middle and upper classes. Brigg's mother, Edith, a former lady's maid, consistently claims they are not working class, but Raymond and his father clearly know that they are.

Briggs' fondness for his parents, while appreciating their shortcomings, comes through in several different books. As early as 1963, in *Sledges to the Rescue*, we see the first appearance of Briggs' father, Ernie the milkman. Early on Christmas morning, Tim and Mary are taking their sledges out when they come across Ernie, sick and unable to move his milk barrow. He still has his Christmas deliveries to do. Tim and Mary seek help from neighbourhood children. Although Alma, "dressed in all her Sunday best" and "going to church in a minute" is unable to help, plenty of other children do. They deliver the milk from their sledges, completing Ernie's round. Ernie the milkman also appears in *The Bear* (1994), and in *Father Christmas* (Briggs, 1973), both as the milkman who talks to Father Christmas when they pass each other during their Christmas deliveries, and in the whole concept of Father Christmas as a working man doing Christmas deliveries. Father Christmas had never before been working class, and a lot of people found this persona hard to accept. On the other hand, lots of people loved it, and Father Christmas has not been the same since. This self-referencing intertextuality is an indicator of postmodernism which occurs constantly in Briggs' work.

Nursery rhymes and fairy tales

Even in his early work illustrating fairy tales and nursery rhymes, Briggs used postmodernist features such as excess, ambiguity, indeterminacy, parody and self referentiality. He illustrated several nursery rhyme and fairy tale collections with a vigour which startled some critics but delighted others, culminating in his winning the Kate Greenaway medal for *The Mother Goose Treasury* (Briggs, 1968). Although one American comment was that it "appeared crammed with many vivid little scenes, objects, and comic people", giving "a feeling of clutter" (Huck, 1979, p. 97), others recognised the vitality that Briggs brought to a field which was not being well served by the current tendency toward prettification. His unusually rough and tough characters can be seen as an aspect of post-modernism. Briggs commented that nursery rhymes "contain quite rude, quite tough, quite gutsy material abut money and marriage and work and laziness and theft – not sweet innocent and blue baby stuff" (Martin, 1989, p. 234). He expected children to "have the open-mindedness and stamina to take in the realism of folk material and his own unsentimental gloss on it" (p. 234), and this comes through in later books.

In 1969 Briggs illustrated Elfrida Vipont's *The Elephant and the Bad Baby,* the classic story of the elephant who steals food for a baby who never once says please. Multiple perspectives are a feature of post-modernism (McDonald, 2018; Pantaleo, 2015), and here the illustrations have dual viewpoints, from above, where the baby sits on the elephant, and from below, where the vendors who are chasing them are running. From above, we can see the ladies' hats resembling their purchases – a pork pie, a cake, a chocolate. The colour pictures show the stalls and shops; the

(Continued on page 28)


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(Continued from page 25)

black and white illustrations show the mad scramble of the chase. When the American publisher wanted the fish and chip shop that Briggs had painted changed to a snack bar, Briggs painted over half of it, indicating a change of ownership, but not changing the overall Englishness of the scene. This might be seen as representing the narrative fragmentation, pastiche and indeteminacy which characterise post-modern texts, and adds, rather than detracts from the overall old-fashioned look that Briggs brings to the book. Briggs' illustrations interact with Vipont's text to provide a complete picture of what is going on. If a young child does not immediately grasp all the implications of what is happening, this does not matter. There can always be another reading.

Next came *Jim and the Beanstalk* (Briggs, 1970), not so much an alternative fairy tale as a parody and sequel to *Jack and the Beanstalk* which adds to its meaning while giving an alternative reading. There is an important difference in theme. Jim does not steal things from the giant, he gives him things he needs, including glasses, which enable him to read Briggs' own books (an aspect of intertextuality and self referentiality), teeth which would enable him to eat Jim, and a wig which makes him look younger. Jim is an altogether kinder visitor than was Jack.

Blooming Christmas

In 1973, *Father Christmas* appeared. Shirley Hughes (1986) described it as "a near perfect blend of text and a strong illustrative style" (p. 52). Ever since, it has been a Christmas classic. One of Briggs's "books satirizing aspects of modern society" (Watkins & Sutherland, 1995, p. 311), it changed the cosy perception of a rich man's Christmas popularised in Victorian times, by the Coca Cola advertisement, and by *The Night Before Christmas*. *Father Christmas* is highly complex and sophisticated, and yet can be understood by pre-schoolers (Gibbons, 1999). On its first page, Father Christmas wakes up on Christmas Eve, his dream of lying sunbathing fractured, and says, "Blooming Christmas here again!" "The highly coloured bubble pictures emanating from Father Christmas must be interpreted as dreams. The alarm clock ringing loudly in capital letters with jagged lines and exclamation marks makes the dream pop" (Gibbons, 1999, p. 55). Playing with the frames of the book and the size and shape of the text are features of postmodernism (McDonald, 2018).

This working class Father Christmas has no elves or gnomes to help, as does de Brunoff's (1940) Father Christmas; he does his own work. He grumbles about snow and the cold; not surprising considering he has an outside toilet. He feeds his deers, heard as 'dears', grumbling as he pushes his sledge about. He dresses in his conventional Christmas outfit, farewells his pets, and sets off into the "blooming snow", rain, lightning and fog. He parks his sledge diagonally across the steep roof of a house. As he climbs down the chimney, the front outside wall is removed and we see inside the house. This opening up of things in order to view them more closely is a frequent aspect of post-modernism. In one house, the cola left out for Father Christmas, identifiable from the shape of the bottle, is "better than nothing", but cognac, in another house, is "lovely". Father Christmas parks his sleigh in the beam of a lighthouse; a visual joke. He meets fellow-worker Ernie, doing his

milk rounds, and then his final call is to Buckingham Palace. He drives back into better weather, sees to his deers, feeds his pets, cooks his own Christmas dinner, has a bath and a beer, then sleeps in front of the fire before opening his own presents, watching TV, putting out the milk and going to bed. "Happy blooming Christmas to you, too!" Father Christmas was never quite the same after that.

The sequel, *Father Christmas Goes on Holiday* (Briggs, 1975), is an ageless book in terms of readership. It shows scenes from the exotic places that Father Christmas visits, including Scotland, Paris and Las Vegas. He is not a very sophisticated traveller. The way he is sitting slightly outside the frame during the cancan portrays his discomfort. He tires of the excesses of Las Vegas, and returns home for a rest. Post-modern writers and illustrators often use the frame in this subversive way, causing the picture to step outside of its frame to make a point. The constructedness of texts is highlighted by such techniques (McDonald, 2018).

The Snowman (Briggs, 1978), a wordless picture book, has a fluidity of style which makes words unnecessary. It was even more popular than *Father Christmas*, especially after the film was made. It is the film that gives it a Christmas setting – the book just shows snow, more a January feature where Briggs lived (Jones, 2003). There are subtle leadership changes in the book (May, 1995). When the snowman comes to life and goes inside, the boy leads. The snowman reacts badly to the heat of oven and lamps, but loves the fridge. He delights in the roller towel, but is puzzled by Dad's false teeth sitting in a glass of water. The angle from which Briggs approaches the scenes varies greatly, and his dynamic framing varies in size according to impact required. The reader is reintroduced to the extraordinary nature of ordinary objects. Leadership roles are reversed when they go outside. They fly! "The shading lines that depict the darkness of the sky slant in a direction that implies the characters' flight" (Nodelman, 1988, p. 161). They visit several places, but on the approach of dawn must go home.

When the boy wakes again, the Snowman is gone, melted in the sun. We see the figure of the boy from behind, hunched in sadness, a scene shown by Briggs several times when depicting death, e.g. in *The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman* (Briggs, 1984). The use of coloured pencils with a crayon-like graininess "achieving a subtle luminosity more suggestive of impressionist painting than of childlike art" (Nodelman, 1988, p. 75) gives the story a soft focus, creating an atmosphere well suited to it. Briggs uses the blue and green shades often associated with tenderness, as well as the soft browns of security (Nodelman, 1988, p. 64). Using colour to create mood or illusion is common in art, but is especially a feature of post-modernism. *The Snowman* has been extolled as a "tightly controlled" wordless picture book (Egoff, 1981; Nodelman, 1988) that "make[s] full use of this difficult medium" (Nodelman, p. 192). Wordless books demand from the reader greater knowledge of how stories work, pointing towards an awareness of the constructedness of text that is part of post-modern work.

Excess

Briggs' training as a painter is often evident. *Fungus the Bogeyman* (Briggs, 1977) used watercolours which provide a gooier texture (Jones, 2003). "In combination, green and brown, the colors of earth and

foliage, often create an atmosphere of organic richness. They predominate in the dank but undeniably fertile world of... *Fungus*" (Nodelman, 1988, p. 61), the "extraordinary creation of an alternative culture" (Watkins & Sutherland, 1995, p. 312). Although the popular film about the ogre, *Shrek,* was based on William Steig's picture book of the same name, you have to feel that much of the filthy detail of Shrek's life at the beginning of the film comes from *Fungus.* Briggs provides an excessive amount of detail regarding the filthy life of Fungus. He has said he was reacting to the prissiness of children's books at the time: "I wanted to show the petty nastiness of life – slime and spit and dandruff, all this awful stuff which is slightly funny because it detracts from human dignity and our pretensions" (cited in Jones, 2003, p. 167). In talking about this, Briggs referred to the *Monty Python* television show; that it is the unbridled nature of the excessive quantity of vomiting that makes Mr Creosote's scene in *The Meaning of Life* funny. *Fungus* is excessive like this. "No popular work had ever progressed so far along the path of the playground fascination with all things yucky. Such excess arrives at a point when squeamishness gives way to fascination and admiration" (Jones, 2003, p. 168).

Fungus also has some admirable beliefs. Bogeymen are "kind and compassionate" (Watkins & Sutherland, 1995, p. 312), as well as pacifist. Their guns are made of wood so that they don't harm anyone and eventually rot. They speak quietly to one another at home, are polite to one another and don't lose their temper. They also read a lot, and have free libraries.

Briggs commented that many critics "couldn't see that all the so-called nastiness

is very much on the surface" (Martin, 1989, p, 235). The next time Briggs did a 'disgusting' book, *Unlucky Wally* (1987), these critics panned it. The Wally books have never been as popular as his others. *Unlucky Wally Twenty Years On* (Briggs, 1989) contains a scene we see again in *Ernest and Ethel*, where a packet of Vim cleaner and tissues stand beside the trolley with his mother's body in the hospital where she dies. Some of the excesses of postmodernism come from life.

Social Excess and Devastation

The 1980s brought what we might think of as Briggs' "social" stories, where satire once more comes into play. These are introduced by *Gentleman Jim* (Briggs, 1980), the story of a toilet cleaner who wants a more adventurous career. Unfortunately, Jim is cut off from many jobs because he lacks the necessary school qualifications even to be an artist . "They give them these things at school nowadays. All we got was a Bible and a thick ear." Breaking into the comic strip are larger scale paintings of the options Jim considers– a Commando raid on Nazis, a Bomber raid, paintings of nudes, after Ingres and Corregio, an "exec-tive" with long hair, a cowboy. All have problems. To be a cowboy he needs a hat, boots, a gun, tickets to Texas. So he decides to become a highwayman. He can't afford a horse, so he gets a donkey. An Official in Authority orders him to remove the animal illegally parked on yellow lines. A RSPCA chap, reminiscent of the Golf Club official, threatens him with prosecution because the donkey is inadequately fed and housed. When he builds a stable the neighbours complain. The faceless Borough Council Inspector orders, "Necessary dis-erect immediately or Council forced prosecute. Heavy fine plus enforced dis-erection." Jim's short career as a highwayman ends when the second car he holds up is a police car. His judge would love to hang him – "Those were the days", but he is imprisoned, and put to cleaning the toilets, at which he is expert . In this story we see the use of narrative fragmentation in the words of the official, pastiche in the use of great art works, ambiguity both caused by and leading to Jim's lack of understanding of how things work, and the playful use of excess.

Idiotic and contradictory officials and instructions abound in *Gentleman Jim*, but are more devastating in its sequel, *When the Wind Blows* (Briggs, 1982). This is a demanding book as far as visual cues are concerned (Gibbons, 1999). Jim's powerlessness is emphasised by his determination to act responsibly. When nuclear war threatens, Jim and Hilda receive instructions on how to erect a

shelter. Jim closely follows the preposterous instructions and builds a totally inadequate shelter in their house. There is intertextuality with the World War II shelters in *Ethel and Ernest* (Briggs, 1998). Jim and Hilda collect together provisions, such as bottles of water, but it doesn't occur to them to seal them. The instructions in the book were from real government documents distributed by the British government or contained in a television documentary on preparing for a nuclear strike. Briggs merely parodies the advice in an excessive way which shows how ludicrous it is.

Approaching horror is signified in full page paintings of a missile on a distant plain, shadowy aeroplanes in a distant sky, a submarine in distant waters, all huge and anonymous. These full-page monsters of war contrast with the tiny frames depicting the life of Jim and Hilda.

Tension builds as an official government announcement says: "An enemy missile attack has been launched against this country. In just over three minutes…". Hilda gets up to bring the washing in. Jim shouts at her to get into the shelter, and she wants to argue about being bossed around. He drags her into the shelter, just as the bomb falls. As it does, she worries about her cake being burned, rather than about their lives being shattered.

Then, there is what at first seems to be a blank page: what you see when a nuclear bomb has exploded; the nothing that results from a strike by a nuclear warhead; a nothing with ironically rose-tinged edges.

The next page takes a while to recover. Nothing dispersing. Fragmentation. Utter devastation. Then gradual recovery as the blast passes over. But reality has changed forever. "Blimey!" is Jim's inadequate comment.

From there we see Jim and Hilda's gradual disintegration as the fallout takes its effect. Their naivety about the effects of the bomb is devastating. Hilda wants to wash her plates "properly and dry them on a nice clean tea towel", rather than use the government directive earth tray which she has at first mistaken for a makeshift toilet. They are surprised that the water and electric have been cut off. Hilda's ambiguous comment, "All dead…" comes in relation to the television, rather than a realisation of widespread disaster. Jim collects the contaminated rain in kitchen containers, and Hilda boils it "to be on the safe side". "There's nothing purer than rainwater," says Jim.

Then the colour in the pictures takes on a sickly hue, and the pictures become blotchy as the condition of Jim and Hilda deteriorates more rapidly. They hide their faces from the viewer, "protecting" themselves in paper bags. Jim maintains his optimism – a rat in the lavatory reassures him that the drains aren't blocked. But he coughs up blood as he sings *Smile, Smile Smile.* Jim and Hilda become less individual, more anonymous shapes, representative of all who are dying. At the end, they try to pray, but can't quite remember how. They remember some words from childhood. Hilda likes the bit about lying in green pastures. But Jim's last words are "Into the Valley of The Shadow of Death... rode the Six Hundred…".

Briggs was showing an increasing disregard for the age of his readers, leaving that to the publishers and critics. *When the Wind Blows* is an emotionally overwhelming book, not meant for young children, and read by many adults. Jim and Hilda do not understand what is happening

to them. Our greater understanding of their situation warns us that our own reactions to such a situation could not be other than completely inadequate. The ending would be similar for us all. It is probably in this book that Briggs uses features of postmodernism such as narrative fragmentation and excess to greatest effect.

The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman followed in 1983, after the Falklands crisis. This "powerful political statement about the human costs of war, and the arrogant self-interest of national leaders" (Jones, 2003, p. 226), led to Briggs getting abusive phone calls and letters, but he was surprised by how few. His book was found by many to be very moving. It has an enduring strength; despite its topicality there are universals in it. It appeared in a collection of "best war comics" in the 2000s.

Some readers have found the nastiness of the treatment of Margaret Thatcher in *The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman* (Briggs, 1984) objectionable, particularly the sexism of the satirical savagery as she literally shoots from the breast. But there are moments of tenderness in it as well, including the soft pencilled drawings of "the soldiers with bits of their bodies missing" and the poignant painting of the shepherds and their dead sheep left on the small island. "Three of them were killed in the battle, but no one was to blame." They were killed by "friendly fire". Few books have the "clear-sightedness into what was actually taking place" (Martin, 1989, p. 239) shown by Briggs .

The open savagery of the tin clad woman and general is presented cartoon style, paradying their roles as political leaders of their nations. The deaths, allegiance unidentified, are black and white pencil drawings, although just as vicious, as "Some men were burned alive. Some men were blown to bits." It is true that injured men were not invited to the victory parade. The book is a powerful anti-war statement, as well as a fine example of a postmodern picture book. It contains parody, narrative fragmentation, pastiche, excess, ambiguity, whilst being both subversive and playful in a vicious kind of way.

Excess and personal relationships

Another example of 'over the top' excess comes in *The Man* (Briggs, 1992). Here Briggs was reined in by his publisher, but the overdone nature of Briggs' original invective may have been more acceptable than is the sanitised version (Jones, 2003). The original had the Man's tirade about foreigners listing "Pakis, chinks, fuzziwuzzies, eyeties, krauts, wops, wogs, paddies, sambos, jewboys, polacks, nignogs, gringos" (p. 199). Jones suggests the final version was more pernicious because of the removal of the original excess.

Briggs said he saw the Man

> ...as one of the borderline people in our society, the very old, the mentally ill or handicapped, as dependent on others for virtually everything, who have to get by through the love of someone if they are lucky enough or are dependent on the more successful of society. They are forced to be parasitic. Dependence makes the Man truculent.... (Jones, 2003, p. 192)

The text is entirely dialogue, with different fonts distinguishing who is talking, another characteristic of postmodernism. "It considers society's attitudes to outsiders

and oddballs, and deliberately raises more questions than it answers, sending out ripples like a stone thrown into water', as Roger Woddis of the *New Statesman* put it" (Jones, p. 199).

In spite of the Man's raving about foreigners, *The Man* was considered "a gentler satirical exploitation of aspects of ourselves" (Watkins & Sutherland, 1995, p. 312). The dialogue between the boy and the tiny Man exploits the role change necessary as the boy cares for the Man. More than other size-difference books, such as *The Borrowers* (Norton, 1952), *The Twelve and the Genii* (Clarke, 1962), and *The Indian in the Cupboard* (Banks, 1980), it demonstrates the anger and frustration that occurs in their unequal relationship.

This book allows for a debate "between classes, between the educated and the uneducated, between the privileged and the disadvantaged, the able-bodied and the handicapped, the young and the aging" (Jones, 2003, p. 199). It has provoked a lot of classroom discussions (Jones, 2003).

Briggs has claimed to dislike families (Jones, 2003), but both his actions and his writing show this to be untrue. He cared for a schizophrenic wife, and later a partner with dementia and Parkinson's disease. In *The Puddleman* (Briggs, 2004) we get a glimpse into how Briggs' sometimes saw family life. He is both absurdly tolerant of and terrified by the game of the small boy. This may be why he continued to live in his own house in the country rather than with his partner of many years and her children and grandchildren.

The parents in *Ug* (Briggs, 2001) are less tolerant. Ug is a somewhat anachronistic caveman with ideas which his society rejects as stupid, making him another outsider. His suggestions for improvements, such as fur trousers instead of stone ones, and keeping animals in enclosed spaces rather than chasing them are dismissed without proper consideration. Although it employs parody and excess, it is some ways the least substantial of Briggs' books.

Metafiction for the young

Raymond Briggs was asked by Allan Ahlberg to illustrate *The Adventures of Bert* (2001) and *A Bit More Bert* (2002), books for beginner readers. Again, excess plays a role. Everyone associated with Bert is called Bert. The dog's kennel says "Bert", although the dog's bowl says "Dog". They are interactive books. In introducing the dog, the text asks, "Do you like him?" Ahlberg had pictured a small book, but Puffin decided on a large format that does give Briggs' illustrations more scope. Like many of his characters, Bert is a round-faced redhead. The chapters are short, suited to a new reader. The reader is invited to give Bert a haircut; the result is an almost bald Bert, with lots of red hairs at the bottom of the page. Bert's mother looks out at us and calls "Hallo!" The reader is invited to join in the conspiracy of hiding Bert's uneaten cabbage. Chapter four asks which of some really nasty sounding flavours of crisps Bert should choose. He selects the "new" potato favour, information available only visually. The joke behind the horrible flavours was the European Union's ban on certain English crisp flavours which contained no such ingredient. Bert shares his crisps, throwing one to the reader. At the beginning of the next chapter, Bert the dog has his head in a packet of "Joy crisps". When the dog runs off, the reader is urged to "Turn the page!" to find out where he

has gone, a metafictive device. Bert inquires at the police station, where everyone is called Bert or has pets called Bert. His dog is waiting on the doorstep when Bert gets home. The policeman, guinea pig and six goldfish called Bert all appear in the next chapter to say Goodnight! This kind of interactivity is common in postmodern picture-books.

Conclusion

In Briggs's books, as in other postmodern literature, we find "…the nature of the fictional mode being undermined and subverted by the metafictive…" (Lewis, 1996, p. 262). Post-modern picture books "deviate in significant ways from some kind of fictional norm" (Lewis, p. 263). "Picture books of all kinds are inescapably plural. They always require a command of two different forms of signification, the verbal or textual and the pictorial or iconic. Meaning is always generated in at least two different ways" (p. 271). They require different kinds of reading techniques to continuous prose, even when that is illustrated, and attention must always be directed from one area to another. The distinction between the words and the pictures is blurred, as "metafictive picture books prise open the gap between the words and the pictures, pushing them apart and forcing the reader/viewer to work hard to forge a relationship between them. Sometimes the gap is wide enough for the relationship to remain wholly indeterminate" (Lewis, p. 271).

Briggs' books may at first appear not to be as clearly post-modern as those by Macaulay (*Black and White*), David Weisner *(The Three Pigs),* or some of John Burningham's books (*Stay Away from the Water, Shirley* onwards), but they show early examples of what other author/illustrators did later, and none of these authors beat him on the use of *excess.* Raymond Briggs' books deserve continued use by children and the adults who work with them, and are particularly useful for working with older children and younger sophisticated readers.

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Author

Joan Gibbons is a retired librarian with a lifetime interest in children's literature, literacy and education. This paper is based on a presentation to the Postmodern Picture Books Seminar run by the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Research Education at the University of Waikato in December 2017.

Citations of Merit: Wendy Carss and Rob Southam

Robyn Southam and Wendy Carss

Wendy Carss

Wendy has been a valued member of the Waikato Literacy Association since the 1990's and has provided outstanding service to NZLA. She has held many positions of responsibility, including local President, NZLA National President, and Chair of the Oceania Committee of ILA. During this time Wendy has been a key organiser of NZLA conferences hosted by the Waikato Council and the World Congress in Auckland in 2010. She has represented NZLA and Oceania, and presented, at both ILA and ALEA conferences.

Wendy draws upon her work as a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato, where she has produced several articles and presentations since the publication of her Masters' thesis in 2007. Wendy is currently working on her doctoral thesis.

Rob Southam – a literacy hero!

Robyn Southam is passionate about bringing literacy, children and educators together, and her professional life has been dedicated to facilitating this. For 22 years Robyn has been a member of the Auckland Literacy Association, holding such executive positions as president and delegate to the New Zealand Literacy Association. She has been an active team member in successfully organising local, national and international conferences. Robyn's initiative in establishing the International Literacy Association's International Development in Oceania Committee's Books for Oceania project has resulted in thousands of children in the Pacific receiving many thousands of books. Robyn's involvement with many different literacy organisations and associations is indicative of her commitment, competence and enthusiasm, and demonstrate her particular skill in strategic thinking to enable goals to be successfully achieved.

We are indebted to Wendy for her leadership, her calmness, her willingness to be involved in any activity, her thoughtfulness and focus on the work of the wider association for educators. This award recognises the countless hours she has freely given to support the New Zealand Literacy Association and the many friendships she has made and people she has influenced. Wendy, we owe you a great debt of thanks.

CONFERENC REPORTS

Power of Words NZLA Roadshow 2017

Hayley Williams, Marie Clay award winner, Waikato

Where to start? As a teacher of only 3 years, I'm still fairly new to the profession so am always looking to add to my teaching kēte. The *Power of Words* conference empowered me with more ideas and strategies and inspiration that I could have wished for.

My favourite speaker had to be Ralph Fletcher. His metaphor laden session was the most engaging professional development I have ever been to. Not only did he hook my interests as a teacher, but also the writer within. His suggestion of giving students a notebook to write and record in, was simple yet powerful. The notebook becomes a suitcase of ideas, good, bad or to be worked on. Ralph described notebooks as " a high comfort, low risk place to write". This idea was one that stuck with me as it could be adapted across all year levels.

Hayley Williams

Even with my new entrants I could think of a way to use this. As well as this gold nugget of inspiration, Ralph stressed the importance of giving the writer time and the power of their own voice. Too often we confine writers to 'standards,' accidentally creating a fear and dread towards writing – let them think and write outside the box.

Ralph later spoke about engaging boy writers – something that stuck a chord, as my current class is ninety percent boys. He spoke of how inspirational writing comes from boys. When they have a choice of topic, they are able to use their own voice and their writing is based on their own experiences. Too often I find myself 'telling' my class what to write, how to write it and how I want it to look. So after the conference I went back and let my class go for it. At first they were hesitant with the amount of freedom, so we used dress ups as a stimulant. They then tore around the classroom as gorillas, baddies and super heroes. Their writing was not great, it was amazing! Some only had a sentence or two,

a few were physically written by me, but at the end of that lesson – it was their voice that shone through and that was when I felt like I truly had a class of writers. The ball was rolling! For me the conference was a huge success, why? Because not only was I inspired to go and try so many of the easily implemented ideas, but I remembered why I became a teacher – to share the love of learning.

Sandra Neil on behalf of the Waikato Literacy Association conference committee

When we were asked to step in a year or two early to host the 40th NZLA conference, we thought YES! We had a strong local council and I knew within that group we could find a core group of five or six talented people to make it happen. And so it was! We really wanted to 'think outside the square" and hold a really different event to those that had gone before. Our conference roadshow theme "The POWer of Words" reflected our passion for written and spoken words that really pack a punch. We think our superhero outfits complimented this as well!

We would really like to sincerely thank the NZLA executive who supported our attempt to try something new. Providing the same daily format for three days in three cities was quite an undertaking. It meant an extended conference week focus for the core committee, travelling between cities adding extra complications and excitement! We are indebted to Margaret Paterson in Wellington and Joy Hawke in Christchurch, who were hugely supportive and helped in many practical ways. Thank you.

Our four wonderful speakers; Ralph Fletcher, Sheena Cameron, Louise Dempsey and Kyle Mewburn all embraced the conference theme and spoke passionately about the POWer of words in their own lives, as authors and as teachers. They were absolute troopers during the five days we worked together, turning up really early at airports, staying in multiple accommodation sites and delivering their presentations three times in as many days. Ralph in particular shared his vast experience at least nine times to different groups of delegates.

We were particularly proud to be able to bring these great speakers to a total of over 500 educators for a very reasonable cost. This was one of our key drivers for organising the conference roadshow as we did. My last thank you goes to the conference roadshow

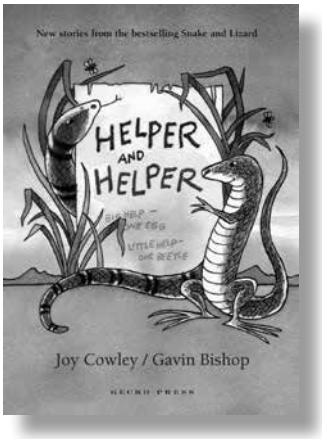
committee. It was an absolute pleasure to spend many Friday nights sorting out the next detail so that others would experience a smoothly organised day. Very soon after the conference we had reports back from teachers who were trying new things in their classrooms as a result of attending The POWer of Words conference roadshow. For us, that's what made it all worthwhile. We wish the 2018 team from Manawatu all the very best for a successful conference. We will see you there!

Author

Sandra Neil

Sandra Neil has been a member of the Waikato Literacy Association for about 15 years. She was one of the team of superheroes that organised the POWer of Words roadshow conference 2017. She is an Assistant Principal at Hillcrest Normal school in Hamilton.

BOOK REVIEWS



Helper and Helper

Joy Cowley, illustrated by Gavin Bishop

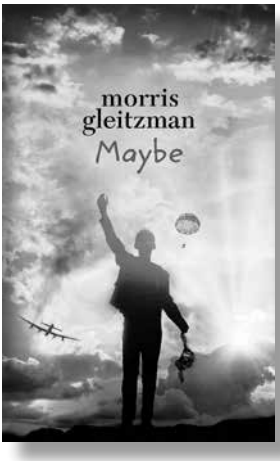
Gecko Press, Wellington, 2017
isbn9781776571055

Reviewed by Joan Gibbons

This is the third volume about the friends, Snake and Lizard. Like the others, it is a series of short stories which provide opportunities for class discussion. Snake and Lizard have little squabbles between themselves, but they manage to stay friends. Snake cannot be entirely trusted not to eat the natural prey that comes his way; although he does not eat customers to their helping service, there is a problem with a frog whom Lizard has befriended, and when Lizard's aunts invade their home and make known their intentions to stay, not quite as many leave as arrived.

This book can be enjoyed independently, but the stories are short enough to be read and then discussed by groups. There are plenty of puzzles to be solved after reading, and most children will be able to form their own questions for each chapter. Best for Year 3 to 6, but enjoyable at any age.

For more reviews of Joy Cowley books, see "Joy Cowley ONZ" which you can find on page 25 of this edition of Forum.



Maybe

Morris Gleitzman

Penguin Random House Australia, 2017,
isbn 9780670079377

Reviewed by Joan Gibbons

Maybe continues the story of Felix Salinger, who is now 14, starting in Poland in 1946 and travelling to Australia. He and Anya go there to escape from the thug Zliv, who wants to avenge the death of his brother, and in the hope of providing a better life for themselves and for Anya's baby. But Australia is no Promised Land. It provides as much hardship, hatred and prejudice as the Europe they have left. Felix makes the best of things, and remains optimistic, using the skills he has learned in the past to remove himself and Anya from situations that cause them distress. Gleitzman manages to present the most terrible situations with a touch of humour.

This is the sixth book in the series that began with *Once,* and will end with a forthcoming volume, *Always*. Every time I read a new book in the series I want to go back and reread the others (*Once, Then, Now, After, Soon*). Gleitzman has written them so that it doesn't matter where you start but I suspect that each one tempts keen readers back to earlier books. Most of the books deal with World War II in Poland, and its aftermath; *Now* presents Felix as a grandparent helping his granddaughter Zelda through an Australian bushfire in the present. Each volume is complete in itself, and has proper closure.

Morris Gleitzman's books read aloud well and deal with serious issues. This one is best for classroom reading at Year 7-9 level. It has some tough moments which should provide some good discussion. For example, the similarity that Felix finds between throwing a hand grenade and a cricket ball provides a good example of black humour. Mature readers in Year 6 will be able to read it alone, especially if they have read the others in the series. Less able readers at Year 9 will find it not too difficult and of reasonable length. Those who have already read all of this series should try Gleitzman's *Boy Overboard*, which has interesting points of comparison. In both books, the treatment of refugees is a topical issue to explore.

Joy Cowley ONZ

Joan Gibbons

Joy Cowley

Joy Cowley was made a Member of the Order of New Zealand – ONZ – on the 2018 New Year Honours list. She is the second children's author to be made a Member of this exclusive group, the first being Margaret Mahy. It is New Zealand's top honour, and there are only 20 Ordinary Members at any one time. Joy Cowley has long been a friend of the New Zealand Literacy Association, and we send her our hearty congratulations. It seems like a good time to remember some of her successes.

Joy Cowley started off as a novelist for adults, although as a teenager she had edited the children's page for the Palmerston North *Daily Times* (Cowley, 1993). Like most New Zealand writers, Joy wrote stories for the *School Journal*, and then started writing school readers. She became one of the most successful writers of school readers in the world. Her simple books sell internationally, and many children have become successful readers because of them. Joy herself has spoken of being an unsuccessful reader herself until she was eight years old, and was given *The Story of Ping* by Marjorie Flack, to read. She read it through, then started it again. She found it was the same, and so discovered the constancy of text! This story had appeal, unlike most of what she had been presented with at school up to that time. So when School Publications (later Learning Media), encouraged by the success of the *School Journal*, became interested in making school readers of higher quality, more like picturebooks, she embraced this idea immediately and encouraged commercial publishers to follow through by writing for them as well (Cowley, 2010).

One of her best-known books, *Greedy Cat*, started life as a Ready To Read book, and is still available only through schools. Robyn Belton had illustrated Joy Cowley's story, *My Tiger*, for the *School Journal* (if you used school dental clinics in the 1970s, you probably saw a poster version), and it was decided to use Robyn Belton to illustrate *Greedy Cat*. This was a very successful writer/illustrator pairing. Several Learning Media books followed, and later the series was extended by Scholastic. Another favourite of many children, *Mrs Wishy-washy* (1980), also started life as a school reader, co-written by June Melser and illustrated by Elizabeth Fuller for The Story Box. Mrs Wishy-washy's adventures have since been made available in hardback through Reading Alive, with *Wishy-Washy World* (2012), illustrated by Philip Webb. Here eight short stories, ideal for beginner readers, are joined together in one volume. Other than *Greedy Cat*, my favourite Cowley reader is *The Hungry Giant* (1980), also written with June Melser, and illustrated by Jenny Cochrane for the Story Box. The giant threatens the villagers with his bommy-knocker, but gets his just desserts

from the bees when he smashes their hive. My youngest child brought it home, but all of my children learned its threat, "…or I'll hit you with my bommy-knocker". Joy Cowley wrote hundreds of readers, most of them excellent.

One of Joy's early successes as a children's writer was *The Silent One* (1981), illustrated by Sherryl Jordan, who later became a novelist herself. It is a novel about a deaf Pasifika boy who befriends a rare white sea turtle. Joy's knowledge of deafness came from growing up with a father who was deaf (Cowley, 1993, 2010). This story was successfully filmed in 1984. Joy won the Aim Children's Book Award with *Bow Down Shadrach*, the story of an old Clydesdale horse which three siblings save from death in the knacker's yard. Set in the Marlborough Sounds area which was Joy Cowley's home for several years, this story was the first in a trilogy, the second and third book (*Gladly, Here I Come* and *Shadrach* Girl) involving Shadrach's offspring as well as an at-risk distant cousin of the original three children.

Later novels for primary and intermediate school children include *Snake and Lizard* (2007), *Snake and Lizard: Friends* (2010), *Dunger* (2013), and *Road to Ratenburg* (2016), all published by Gecko Press. Joy Cowley has been a frequent winner of New Zealand children's book awards, and these novels are all recommended.

My favourite Joy Cowley picturebook is one of her earliest, *The Duck in the Gun*, Illustrated by Robyn Belton. It won awards when first published in 1969, and again when published with Belton's illustrations in 1983. It is still recognised as a book with an important "peace" theme. Other favourites of mine include *The Fierce Little Woman and the Wicked Pirate* which was republished in 2010 by Gecko with new illustrations, and the *Greedy Cat* series, also with illustrations by Robyn Belton. Joy Cowley has also worked frequently with Gavin Bishop, who as well as illustrating the *Snake and Lizard* series, and *The Road to Ratenburg,* illustrated picturebooks like *Cowshed Christmas, The Little Tractor* (2004) and *The Video Shop Sparrow* (1999).

Joy Cowley has been a frequent speaker at New Zealand Literacy Association conferences and regional seminars. I first heard her speak in the 1980s, about her work on creating readers with June Melser and Wendy Pye. At the Whangarei Conference on 2006, local members thanked her by making her a beautiful *Greedy Cat* quilt. Joy has been consistently generous with her time in helping new authors, and encouraging of the creative efforts of others. She thoroughly deserves this honour.

Think about having a Joy Cowley reading week at school to celebrate her New Year's honour. You can do this at any level, because the youngest children can share her readers, the picturebooks spread in interest from 3 years old to 11, and older children, even Year 7-8, will enjoy rereading her readers and picturebooks, as well as her novels. She has written non-fiction too, such as *Red-eyed Tree Frog* (1999), or those with a preference for non-fiction might explore the Honours system.

References

Cowley, J. (1993). *Influences: The 1993 Margaret Mahy Award lecture.* Auckland, NZ: New Zealand Children's Book Foundation.

Cowley, J. (2010). *Navigation: A memoir.* North Shore, NZ: Penguin.

Some of Joy Cowley's books

(There are hundreds more. The older ones may be available only from libraries now. Check with the School Library Service if they are not available locally. If you are a frugal school, some will be in your collection of Readers.)

Cowley, J., & Belton, R. (first pub. 1969; 1984; 2009). *The duck in the gun*. Newtown, Australia: Walker Books.

The Duck in the Gun came out of Joy Cowley's concern about the Vietnam war in the 1960s, a news story about a duck halting work on the building site in Chicago, and a competition run by Price Milburn. It was first published in 1969 by Doubleday in the USA. It was issued with Robyn Belton's illustrations in 1984, as a Shortland hardback school publication. It then won Robyn Belton the NZ Library Association's Russell Clark Award for illustration. It was one of ten children's books selected for the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. The Walker 2009 publication celebrated the 25th anniversary of the edition with Robyn Belton's illustrations.

It is the story of some soldiers who are about to attack a town. Robyn Belton was instructed to set it in Europe in the 19th century. She reports researching how many soldiers it took to load and fire a gun. When the soldiers arrive outside the town, the General orders his soldiers to fire on it. A duck has entered their gun, and they don't want to fire it whilst the duck is there, sitting on its eggs. Running out of provisions, the General approaches the Prime Minister of the town to see if he can exchange his soldiers' labour for provisions. Having tidied up the town, when the duck leaves the gun, along with her ducklings, the soldiers do not want to destroy the work they have recently carried out in the town. So peace is made, and the General marries the daughter of the Prime Minister. It's a great story that can be enjoyed at any age. (Picturebook.)

Cowley, J., Melser, J., & Cochrane, J. (1980). *The hungry giant*. (The Story Box). Auckland, NZ: Shortland.

The giant demands that the people bring him food, "or I'll hit you with my bommy-knocker". So the people ran and got him what he wanted. But when he wants honey, they find a beehive. The giant, saying "That's not honey!" hits it with his bommy-knocker, and the bees chase him, stinging furiously. A reader for Year 1, and a wonderful picturebook for everyone else. A great opportunity to talk about bullying. (Reader.)

Cowley, J., Melser, J., & Fuller, E. (1980). *Mrs Wishywashy*. (The Story Box). Auckland, NZ: Shortland.

The animals love the mud, jumping, rolling and paddling in it. Mrs Wishy-washy is less keen, and orders the animals into the tub. Then they immediately head back to the tub. With 5-year-olds, discuss the nature of animals, and the futility of trying to change their habits. The same with older children, but perhaps more of an ethical viewpoint pertaining to humans. (Reader.)

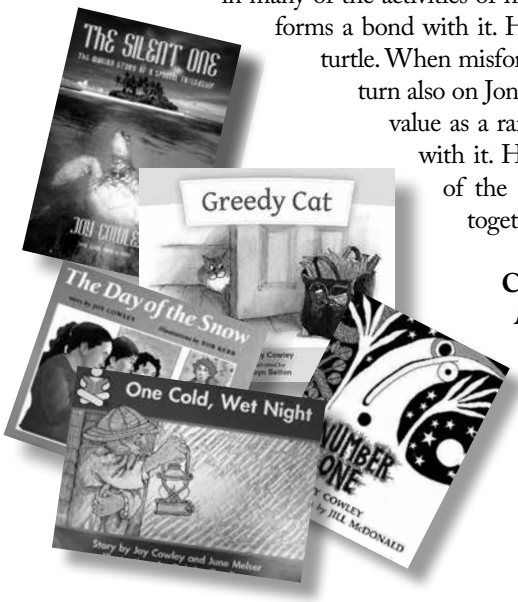
The 2012 commercially produced hardback, *Wishy-Washy World* (Clean Slate Press), has 8 stories in it and is illustrated by Philip Webb. It is an excellent introduction to reading for 4 or 5 year olds. (Reader/ picturebook.)

Cowley, J., Melser, J., & Gardiner, D. (1980). *One cold wet night*. (The Story Box). Auckland, NZ: Shortland.

When the farmer goes outside on a cold, wet night, his bed is invaded by a horse, cow, sheep, dog, and a giant weta. The farmer returns and orders them all out. They leave one by one, but the weta stays. The farmer decides to sleep on the couch. There is a life-sized illustration of a weta, with some scientific description. Interesting from Year 1 upwards to any age, with the possibility of discussing not just the animals and the simple plot, but also of using as an aid in teaching the use of punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, quotation marks, exclamation marks, ellipsis and hyphens, as well as differences between picturebook illustration and scientific drawings. (Reader.)

Cowley, J. (1981). *The silent one*. (Ill. S. Jordan). Christchurch, NZ: Whitcoulls Publishers.

Twelve year old Pacific Islander, Jonasi, is deaf, so he is barred from participation in many of the activities of his village. He finds a rare white turtle, and forms a bond with it. His family are fearful, and want to kill the turtle. When misfortune hits the village, superstitious villagers turn also on Jonasi. Foreigners want the white turtle for its value as a rarity. Jonasi protects the turtle, diving away with it. He is not seen again, but reports are made of the sighting of two white turtles, swimming together. Year 7 and 8. (Novel.)



Cowley, J., & McDonald, J. (1982). *Number one*. (Ready to Read). Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.

At night, a ghost comes out and boos people, but the witch is not scared! Designed for shared reading from the beginning of school, and independent reading in Year 2. Try the blown-up version with all ages if your school still has a copy. (Reader.)

Cowley, J., & Belton, R. (1983). *Greedy Cat.* (Ready to Read). Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.
A brilliant reader and picturebook, easy to read because of its repetitive word pattern. Mum eventually gets smart and buys some pepper: "Gobble, gobble- YOW! And that was the end of that!"

Greedy Cat is Hungry (1988) is easier, but children should be introduced to *Greedy Cat* as a shared book first. In *Lunch for Greedy Cat* (2000) he shares the lunches of school children after Aunty feeds him cat biscuits and broccoli. The Ready to Read series was followed by longer stories published by Scholastic. (Readers and picturebooks.)

Cowley, J., & Perham, D. (1983); Cowley, J., & Pye, T. (2002). *Our teacher, Miss Pool.* (Ready to Read). Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.
I mention both versions because the 1983 version takes more seriously the exciting ways devised by Miss Pool to get to school when her car breaks down: hang glider, motor bike, balloon, etc. The revised 2002 illustrations depict a more comic atmosphere throughout. If you can get hold of both versions it is worth discussing the impact that this has on the text. This book had already had a change of its original illustrations because of schools objecting to the graffiti on the school fence! Sequels include *Where is Miss Pool?* (1987/2002) and *Miss Pool is Cool* (2002), where the class has a visit to the fire station. (Readers.)

Cowley, J., & Davis, S. (2010; 1st pub. 1984). *The fierce little woman and the wicked pirate.* Wellington, NZ: Gecko Press.
The 2010 illustrations are great, but it is sometimes hard to see the text through the blue-green of the sea. This makes it a book for an older age group to tackle, but this is anyway a good book for Years 3-5, who will appreciate the romantic aspects of the story. If you can get hold of the older edition, you can compare the effect of the illustrations on the story. (Picturebook.)

Cowley, J. (1991; Ill. R. Belton). *Bow down Shadrach.* Auckland, NZ: Hodder & Stoughton.
Hannah, Mikey and Sky own an old Clydesdale horse called Shadrach. Hannah boasts about his tricks to a child at school,

but Shadrach is too old to perform, and collapses. Their parents plan to send him to the knackers, telling the children he is going to a new home. The children discover their perfidy, and set out to rescue Shadrach. They travel across the Sounds, and, after some difficulties, reach Nelson, where they manage to get Shadrach out of the factory, but Shadrach, felling old and unwell, dies before reaching home. Months later, they discover that Shadrach has mated with a thoroughbred mare whilst on their journeys, and they can have his foal. This book is both funny and sad, and is worth reading to a class (Year 5-6 usually, but it would work with some Y 7-8 as well) that has children who cannot manage it themselves.

Cowley, J. (1994) *Gladly Here I Come* **Auckland: Viking.**
Gladly Here I Come follows the story of this foal, but also involves a distant cousin of the children who comes to live with them after getting into trouble with his Social Welfare guardians. Eden is a challenge to the family but gets on well with the horse. In *Shadrach Girl* (2000, Puffin) the children are teenagers but their mother is ill, having a difficult late pregnancy. Whilst *Bow Down Shadrach* is suitable for 8 -12-year olds, I would suggest that the second is for 10-13 year-olds and the third for 11-14 year olds, although children who read them as a series might read them sooner. (Novels.)

Cowley, J., & Kerr, B. (1993). ***The day of the rain*****. Wellington, NZ: Mallison Rendel.**
The first of a series of three picturebooks written for older children, *The Day of the Rain* is set in a school where the children appear to be about Year 5 -8. Bob Kerr is good at indicating older children in his illustrations. The rain continues until it laps at the schoolroom door, and then the school is afloat, and sails down the Auckland motorway, down Queen Street, and into Auckland Harbour. At home time, they put up a SOS sign, and a helicopter drops them a rope and tows them home. Others in this series are *The Day of the Snow* (1994) and *The Day of the Wind* (Illustrated by Trevor Pye, 1995).

Cowley, J., & Galloway, T. (1994). ***The water boatman*****. (Ready to Read). Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.**
Simple non-fiction for Year 0-1 onwards describes the

life of the pond-dwelling water boatman. An accurate scientific drawing at the back shows details of its body as well as its actual size. (Reader, non-fiction.)

Cowley, J., & McClelland, L. (1995). *The cheese trap*. Auckland, NZ: Scholastic.
Two mice aim to get the cheese but their efforts to lift the glass cheese dish lid wake up the cat. They get away, but the cat sets a trap with a large lump of cheese in its mouth. Just as the mice are about to enter the trap, the cat sneezes. The mice get the cheese, but can't eat it: it smells of cat! This won the Aim Picture Book of the Year Award and the Russell Clark Medal in 1996. It can be read to junior classes but will be enjoyed by independent readers of 7 to 9 as well. Older children might discuss how well the illustrations match and enhance the text. (Picturebook.)

Cowley, J., & Bishop, N. (1999). *Red-eyed tree frog*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
Wonderful photographs of rain forest animals are given a simple text with a cohesive plot by Joy Cowley. There is a longer factual text at the end of the book. When I took my grandchildren to the zoo, and they saw all sorts of exotic animals, including a close-up view of a ferocious tiger, I admit to being surprised that what captivated one grandson was the small tree frog. (Reader, non-fiction.)

Cowley, J., & Bishop, G. (1999). *The video shop sparrow*. Wellington, NZ: Mallinson Rendel.
On New Year's Day, George and Harry skateboard through town and see a sparrow flying around a video shop. The shop reopens on 13 January, and the boys think the bird will die before then. The owner is on holiday, so the boys ask various people for help, but no one is willing to put themselves out for a sparrow. So they try the mayor. She is having a press conference, and sees a story. She finds a security guard with a bundle of keys, and they are able to rescue the sparrow. This story has several points for discussion with any age group, including ethics and use of the press by politics. (Picturebook.)

Cowley, J., & Bishop, G. (2004). *The little tractor*. Gosford, Australia: Scholastic.
A farm tractor grows old, its farm is swallowed by a town. It spends time in a car yard, as a boat puller, a firewood trailer puller, and a Santa float puller, but each time the job is too great and it collapses. Then the boy with sticky-up hair who has watched him as a child (red-headed because Bishop is the illustrator) comes to the car yard and buys him for his farm, and the tractor works as a tractor should. Other books you might introduce along with this one include Virginia Lee Burton's *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* and *Little House*. Best with 5-8 year olds. (Picturebook.)

Cowley, J. (2009; ill. By G. Bishop). *Friends: Snake and Lizard*. Wellington, NZ: Gecko Press.
Junior fiction, Year 3-7. The series begins with *Snake and Lizard* (2007), and continues with *Helper and Helper* (2016). Snake and Lizard are unlikely companions, but stick together, although they have their disagreements. Compromises are necessary, but sometimes difficult.

You might use these books in relationship to Health syllabus topics such as Making and keeping friends. (Novels.)
Related books include: Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad* series*; My Happy Life* series by Rose Lagercrantz (Gecko Press).

Cowley, J. (20; ill. G. Bishop). ***Dunger.*** **Wellington, NZ: Gecko Press.**
A novel where two children go to stay with their grandparents. They are unhappy because the grandparents live where there is no cell phone reception, and there are few modern conveniences. Gradually they come to appreciate some aspects of their grandparents' lifestyle. When their grandfather has an accident, the boy is able to drive him to the nearest medical help. Winner of children's book awards. Best with Year 5 to 8, and worth reading it aloud to a class as here are several issues to discuss.

Other good books where underage children drive include *Driving a Bargain* by Fleur Beale, and *Benjamin Dickinson Carr and His (George)* (1970/UK 1974) by E. L. Konigsburg.

Cowley, J. (2016; ill. G. Bishop). ***The road to Ratenburg.*** **Wellington, NZ: Gecko Press.**
An epic journey story for Year 5-8, although younger good readers will enjoy it too. Spinnaker, a ship's rat, tells the story of his family's journey to the mythical Ratenburg. Like all Utopias, this turns out to be not what they were expecting.

When the humans leave the building, the rats have to leave too. They partly travel by train, although this method of travel is different for rats. Encounters with humans are inevitably difficult. On the way, they also meet other rats and mice with different perspectives. Sometimes, this leads to them gaining in wisdom, learning a great deal about how to look after themselves and about their own prejudices.

There is much joking that might be discussed, e.g. why do humans call where they live apart-ments when they are so close together? The rats' names; play on peace and piece; a cat called Barker, who is told to "take care of the rats and mice", so he does!

Other books that this might lead to: *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (e.g. the poem by Robert Browning)*; Rats* by Gavin Bishop (2011), a picturebook; novels: *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIHM* by R. C. O'Brien (1971)*; Watership Down* by Richard Adams (1972)*; Rohan of Rin* by Emily Rodda (1993 – start of a series); *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien (1937).

Tribute to Raewyn Maher, Canterbury Literacy Association

Raewyn Maher

Sadly Raewyn Maher, Chairperson and Delegate of Canterbury Literacy Association (CLA) until shortly before her death, passed away on 16 December 2017. Raewyn will be missed by her family and many others, in Christchurch and around New Zealand.

Raewyn spent six years on the CLA council and was a vibrant and enthusiastic member, who always showed a passion for all things literacy: this was particularly evident in her love for "reading to". She taught for many years at Woolston School which, after the earthquake, merged to become Te Waka Unua. This is when Raewyn joined the committee of the CLA.

She made many friends within CLA and NZLA. She held the role of President Elect for a year and then President for 3 years up until her death. She attended NZLA Annual Meeting for a number of years as observer, and then as delegate, and made many friends across the country. She was passionate and outspoken about NZLA, advocating for positive changes.

Raewyn positively supported young teachers to join CLA committee and she hosted many committee meetings at her new rebuild home, where she would throw together a meal for any wanting to stay on.

Although Raewyn was fun to be with at conferences, she always kept the focus on what we could take back to our own council. She always lived for the moment and didn't sweat the small stuff! She loved clothes and was an enthusiastic shopper! She was terrible at texting - her messages were full of errors. Fortunately, you mostly understood the intended message!

We honour her contribution, hard work and dedication to our organisation and will miss her humour, love and friendship.

Karen Amyes (CLA President) and Joy Hawke

Our special thoughts are with all Canterbury Literacy Association Committee members. In memory of Raewyn and to acknowledge the work that Raewyn did for both Canterbury Literacy Association and for NZLA, the Executive have made a donation to the Cancer Society.

News from the Councils

Otago

2017 provided OLA members with a varied fare:

Term 1: Dr Alison Davis began our year with a day workshop on Accelerating achievement in reading and what that would look like in the classroom. She talked about teaching approaches and explicit instruction to make that difference. Her workshop focused on key factors in developing motivation and engagement, and the principles related to acceleration in reading. Research based practices were described and Alison demonstrated how these could be implemented effectively and with ease. It was a jam-packed day and teachers enjoyed working with her.

Mere Whaanga

As well as the day workshop. Alison also launched her new publication: *Teaching Reading Comprehension* (2nd Ed.), which is full of practical ideas and new 'reproducibles' which have not been used before. Alison linked this to the work she has led in South Auckland and with other clusters. This was a popular session with teachers and teachers left buzzing with ideas.

OLA invited teachers and librarians to a session with the University of Otago College of Education Creative NZ Children's Writer in Residence, Mere Whaanga. Mere is Ngati Rongomaiwahine and Ngati Kahungunu, an author, an illustrator, and translator of her latest bilingual publication *The Singing Dolphin Te Aihe i Wai.* The session gave participants the opportunity to learn more about bilingual picturebooks. This was a wonderful session and teachers rated it highly, as it gave them practical ideas on how to motivate children to write.

Later in June, schools were invited to submit entries for our biennial writing competition, and a prizegiving was held

in early August, where Mere Whaanga presented the awards to a number of early childhood and primary students. This was one of the most successful competitions with quite a number of entries from early childhoods round the region and it would appear that there are a number of talented writers both heading to school and already there. Scholastic NZ was very generous supporting OLA with book prizes which brought a lot of smiles to students' faces as they had sent a number of books for each age group. Thank you, Scholastic!

In Term 3 we held a 'Speed Dating' event with a focus on the early years' teachers. This was carried out in a 'pecha kucha' style presentation and offered 'ideas to practice'. Topics included: Resources to promote story-telling; How the environment talks to children and using the environment as literacy; What Te ao Māori looks like at one EC place; A Lilliput library and literacy; Story-writing; Tuning into sounds; Using apps as tools for literacy; Art as literacy; and Sign Language. Truly a feast of ideas and practice in our early years' learning places, and it was much appreciated by the teachers who attended who said they enjoyed a different approach to PLD and were happy to listen and be inspired after a busy day teaching.

Our last event of the year was to support Nathan Mikaere-Wallis with his presentation "The First 1000 Days", along with our local bookshop, University Bookshop. This was well attended by teachers (over 300) and his narrative was well received – Nathan reflected on the latest neuroscience discoveries, and he focused on how we, as individuals and a society as a whole, can use this knowledge to create better outcomes for our young people in the future.

OLA is delighted with the response from local teachers, librarians and practitioners to the events we have offered in 2017 and we look forward to offering further opportunities to reflect on literacy issues in our schools and how to support our young learners. Our membership is stable and we hope to continue to boost our membership in 2018. The committee has worked hard over the past year to support literacy in schools and we are beginning our year with Philippa Duffy from University Bookshop and teacher practitioners offering bite size sessions from both early childhood and primary settings.

Heidi Newman
Delegate

In the case of good books,
the point is not to see how many of them you can get through,
but rather how many can get through to you.

Mortimer J. Adler