

Should the children choose?

Is it not time that children throughout Australia had the opportunity to make their choice for awards in Children's Book Week? As well as having selections by experts in children's literature, let the children have their say . . .

Mary Kate Trim has strong views on the subject; in Western Australia there has been a highly successful scheme for Book Awards with selection by young people themselves. Some of the reviews by children in *InCite* special childrens book issues have uncovered some interesting reactions. What do you think?

Mary Kate Trim tells what happened with the children in her class:

Thirty pairs of bright eyes gazed at me as I asked Class 2W at St Charles School, Ryde, which picture book was their favourite from those short-listed for Children's Book Week, 1985. For several weeks preceding book week they had experienced the following stories:

There's a Sea in my Bedroom by Margaret Wild, illustrations by Jane Tanner, published by Thomas Nelson.

Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge by Mem Fox, illustrated by Julie Vivas, published by Omnibus Books.

Arthur by Amanda Graham, illustrated by Donna Gynell, published by Era Publications.

The Inch Boy by Junko Morimoto, published by William Collins.

The Angel with a Mouth-Organ by Christobel Mattingley, illustrated by Astra Laxis, published by Hodder and Stoughton.

The Tree Witches by Gwenda Turner, published by Kestrel Books.



THE INFORMATION PROFESSIONAL Proceedings of an LAA EDLIB Conference

Edited by James Henri and Roy Sanders

As a result of a conference organised by the Education for Librarianship Section of the Library Association of Australia, in late 1984 information professionals gathered together in Melbourne to share ideas.

The nineteen papers included in the proceedings of that conference discuss trends and developments in the information sector both in Australia and overseas, in education for information professionals, and in new applications of information handling. The keynote address by Dr. Anthony Debons, Professor of Information Science, University of Pittsburgh, should be of particular interest to all those working in the information sector.

The proceedings are available from:

The Co-ordinator
Centre for Library Studies
Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education
P.O. Box 588
WAGGA WAGGA, NSW 2650

Price (including postage): \$20, LAA member; \$23, non-LAA member.
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Ayu and the Perfect Moon by David Cox, published by Bodley Head, distributed by the Australasian Publishing Company.

Home in the Sky by Jeannie Baker, published by Franklin Watts.

Each book had been presented to the 120 children in Years 1, 2 and 3 with equal enthusiasm by the teacher-librarian, Sandra Drayton, and myself, on study leave from the Catholic College of Education, Sydney. Now it was time to find the children's favourite. Class 2W would vote first and also give individual reasons for their choice. From their attentive response — eagerness, bright eyes and focus on the display of picture stories — which I had briefly reviewed, again with equal enthusiasm, I saw the seven-year-old's response to my gesture of trust and interest in their judgement.

Many of the children identified their favourite quickly. Others handled the books, checking and rechecking. Some compared decisions with a friend but would not be swayed when their friend's favourite differed from their own.

Then they recorded one vote only per child, giving reasons for their choice.

A clear majority selected *Home in the Sky*. Several said, 'The pictures look real and it was a nice story.' One pronounced with earnest conviction, 'I liked it because it wasn't copying other books.' Others expressed recognition that much time had gone into the book's crafting. All the children said they liked the collage constructions.

One shy little boy said, 'I liked the brown lady on the train.' Another, 'I liked the part where he built a house for pigeons.' And many heads nodded and lips mouthed 'yes'!

Second favourite with Year 2W was *The Tree Witches*, selected by the articulate, imaginative extroverts. They responded to the mischievous tricks of the 'witches', Annie, Shirley and Pam; they chortled briefly about rubber spiders and face masks for frightening friends

iness of their own experience.

For example, one boy who had recently returned from a visit to the United States preferred *Home in the Sky* because 'You can see a bit of what it's like in New York'. Those children who referred to the use of 'material pictures, newspapers, feathers and clay', revealed their own attention to fine detail and their artistic bent toward creative art.

Several of the supporters of *The Tree*

Territory and the ACT have run similar schemes and tabulated hundreds of children's choices.

Certainly children should be consulted about what they like and why. In New South Wales, too! After all, children's books are primarily for children, not for we Peter-Pans who are in the minority!

Mary-Kate Trim
Lecturer in English



and enemies. They identified with the clear, bright illustrations that reinforce and extend the narrative. Their eyes sparkled as they spoke of the disguises worn by the three witches and the boy who became their friend. (The boys seemed glad that a boy was included.)

They told me with glee that they really liked the tree house where the witches played; that they LOVED 'What's-his-name All Balla Whisky Chinese Salt' and the 'chocolate marshmallow fish!' 'An' the fizzy orange drink feast and sp-ooOoky stories!

The Angel with a Mouth-Organ pleased other children. It moved some to tears, or the need to sit close to the teacher. Although the story was long, it held their interest to the last word. Some sighed as the story ended and they had to return to present time. Several said, 'My Mummy (or Daddy or Grandma or Grandpa) knows about that. They came to Australia from Germany.' To such, the moving story by Christobel Mattingley gave special appeal.

During this research I observed what I already believed: that a reading audience interacts with text, bringing to story the read-

Witches described their personal tree houses. The shy little boy who related to 'the brown lady on the train', was dark-eyed and olive-skinned himself.

When the rest of the children voted — average age, seven years — the poll confirmed *Home in the Sky* as first favourite and reversed Year 2W's results so that *The Angel with a Mouth-Organ* moved into second favourite and *The Tree Witches* became third.

Neither the teacher-librarian nor I had interfered or influenced in any way. Actually the results and the responsible reasoning that accompanied them astounded us! We were both particularly impressed with the mature way in which the young children responded. We felt that regular library experience and daily exposure to literature was shaping them into connoisseurs whose opinion was worthy; opinions that should be sought and considered far more.

It is pleasing to know that the Children's Book Council sees value in children's choice contests. In Western Australia they run the WA Young Reader's Award which has been running for several years. Several thousand school children are surveyed. The Northern

WA YOUNG READERS' BOOK AWARD

After a record breaking year for participation in 1984, the WA Young Readers' Book Award looks set for another bumper year in this its 6th year of operation. There are currently over 260 school and public libraries involved in the programme. From these centres it is anticipated that over 30,000 evaluation forms, which rate books on the Award lists, will be submitted by young readers in 1985.

The scheme, which was the first of its kind in Australia, is a readers' choice fiction book award organised on a statewide basis for young readers from 9-15 years. Its underlying aim is to promote the reading of quality fiction. By offering young people the chance to select their own prize winning literature, this award represents an alternative to the more prestigious adult selected awards, which are not always popular with young readers.

The initial stimulus for the WAYRBA was the Georgia Children's Book Award, which is one of the strongest of about 25 statewide awards in the USA. A unique scheme was designed to maximise the validity of the West Australian award. Following its successful implementation, several other Australian bodies have emulated its design. In 1983 the Northern Territory set up a very similar programme. The School Libraries Section of Victoria is currently investigating the feasibility of establishing its own award scheme. At a regional level Coventry Memorial Library in Stirling, South Australia, uses the WAYRBA book lists each year for their summer holiday reading programme.

A revised edition of the booklet giving full details of the WAYRBA is now available from P.O. Box 421, Midland, W.A. 6056.

Barbara J. Tobin
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