

The impact of Childrens' Book Awards

Times have certainly changed. When the first children's book awards administered by the Children's Book Council of Australia began in 1946 they would have attracted little attention. Not so today. Even being included on the Short List of finalists, announced some 4 months prior to the awards, carries great significance. It's possible to watch the impact of the Short List as these titles appear on the monthly 'Australian Bestsellers' list featuring monthly in the *Australian Bookseller and Publisher*.

Once the awards are announced, even the sales of the runner-ups (or Honour books as they are now called) are increased two or three times and their success in paperback is assured, according to Rosalind

children's lists and three publishers — Omnibus Books, Walter McVitty and Margaret Hamilton — producing only children's books. Each of the three now has an award winner to their credit. For the publisher, an award generates self-esteem and professional credibility.

For the booksellers, the awards mean a big boost to their livelihood. Other than the Christmas book-buying season, it is the Children's Book Awards which engender large sales to the general public, school and public librarians who look to the Children's Book Council to highlight quality books from among the bewildering array of the 40,000 or so available. Then begins the massive promotion of these books with the



Price, children's book editor for Allen and Unwin's Little Ark Books. And the impact of being selected for the top award? Three-time award winner Emily Rodda puts it this way: 'They have an enormous and immediate effect on your popularity as a writer.'

It is obvious these awards have credibility, but reputations are not made overnight. It is worth examining how these awards have achieved their standing. Now in their 44th year, the awards represent established standards of literary and artistic quality. Wisely, these standards have been appropriately modified to reflect changes in the incredible quantity and quality of Australian children's books.

For 8 years now more children's books have been published than any other category. This is not so surprising, since there are some thirty publishers in Australia with

young readers, from storytelling, booktalks, booklists to a host of festive activities. Here is an involved readership, immersed in children's books.

More children avidly reading and more publishers producing more books: these factors prodded the Children's Book Council to spread the impact of the awards further. The advent in 1982 of the Short Lists — the 'best books' in different age categories — has been enormously successful in this regard. Here can be promoted a greater diversity of genres, writing styles, themes and formats. With wider choices now available, the Short Lists have been instrumental in spotting new talent as well as encouraging those already established. Robin Klein, this year's winner of the Book of the Year for Older Readers has had no less than eleven titles Short Listed; Margaret

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Wild and Julie Vivas, creators of the Picture Book of the Year have earned three and four Short Listed titles respectively. Jeanie Adams' Book of the Year for Younger Readers represents the recognition of new talent.

Also in 1982, the Children's Book Council diversified the awards further with the creation of a new award for younger readers designed to highlight quality books for the newly independent reader. One unexpected side-benefit of this award has been new developments in novels for older readers. All three of this year's books for the older reader offer youth greater depth than previously possible within the single 'children's' book award.

Changes at the top end of the awards were similarly reflected in those made to picture books at the lower end. The 1980s heralded an increasing number of sophisticated picture books. No longer were picture books primarily for 'younger children'. The way was open for such highly original picture books as *Animalia* and *The Eleventh Hour*, enjoyed by 'children' from 2 to 82, to receive awards. Where quality, origi-

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nality and appeal about the Children's Book Awards have been there, signalling the best.

Recognising the expansion of all aspects of the children's book world, the Children's Book Council began a new phase of accountability. Their annual Judges' report expanded to include general comments on the books entered for the awards with extended reviews of the winning and Short Listed titles. Not only were decisions made explicit but such comments raised the standard of debate about quality children's books.

Even more importantly, the Judges' reports have become valuable documents in their own right. They provide an assessment of trends, developments and changes in direction; and encourage publishers to maintain high quality and to identify overall weaknesses and gaps in publishing for children.

So far the awards have been presented as having a major impact on the creators, publishers, booksellers, those who work with children and the children themselves, but the impact of these awards travels farther afield. Winning an award increases the likelihood of being selected for a foreign edition.

Other bonuses attached to the awards include the increased possibility of receiving a Literature Board grant to subsidise writing and larger returns from the Public Lending Right program as award winners make their way to public library collections. There can be no doubt about the impact of the Children's Book Awards. Just how important these awards are can be summed in a single word, *very*.

Dr Belle Alderman
University of Canberra

InCite Deadline Dates				
Issue		Ad Bookings		Cover date
All copy		Events		
			10.30am	
15	24 Aug	27 Aug	3 Sept	24 Sept
16	7 Sept	10 Sept	17 Sept	15 Oct
17	21 Sept	24 Sept	1 Oct	29 Oct
18	12 Oct	15 Oct	22 Oct	12 Nov
19	26 Oct	29 Oct	5 Nov	26 Nov
20	9 Nov	12 Nov	19 Nov	10 Dec

VALA AWARD

The VALA Award, now made biennially, is presented to the Australian library or information centre judged to have made the most innovative use of currently available computer technology during the previous two years.

Nominations are now invited for the 1990 Award for systems installed between January 1988 and December 1989 inclusive.

All libraries and information centres in Australia are eligible for nomination by staff, users or other interested persons.

Guidelines and nomination forms can be obtained from:

The Secretary
VALA
GPO Box 2342V
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Nominations close 12th October, 1990.

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Monash Information Service (MONINFO) HYPERTEXT FOR LIBRARIANS

SHORT COURSE

Monash University, 20 - 21 Sept 1990

Hypertext is a powerful new technology with the potential to revolutionise the effectiveness of library guidance systems, reader education and information management. This intensive two day short course with hands-on experience gives librarians the skills needed to take full advantage of this technology.

Objective: To introduce the basic concepts of hypertext using the HyperCard system and to encourage the use of hypertext for library purposes.

Outcomes: At the end of the course participants should be able to,
* use HyperCard as an information organiser and for the management of personal information
* develop simple library guidance or CAL systems
* utilise HyperCard for reader education purposes

Course Leader: Mr Edward Lim (Monash University Librarian) is experienced in the use of hypertext for library purposes. He has lectured on the use of microcomputers in libraries and conducted courses on database management and information retrieval using software such as INMAGIC and CD/ISIS.

Cost: \$300.00 (by 14th Sept) includes refreshments, lunch and materials.

Send registration form to: Mr Leigh Oldmeadow
Monash Information Service
Wellington Road
Clayton VIC 3168

Enquiries: (03) 565 2690, Fax (03) 565 2610

REGISTRATION FORM

NAME:

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\$ in payment of participants.

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