

# Children's book awards: are they effective?

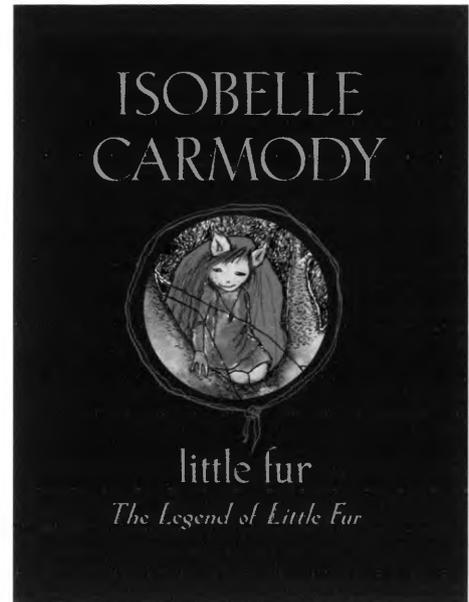
Heather Fisher, Teacher-librarian, New England Girls' School, Armidale

I was the NSW judge for the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBC) for a fascinating two years. It was an exhausting experience, but a growth opportunity: I gained deeper and broader knowledge of children's books, participated in intense literary debate and rigorous analysis of literature. In my two-year term I read and reviewed over 700 titles, culminating in the annual national judge's conference to decide the CBC short lists and the Books of the Year. For those two years, daytime work used the daylight hours and CBC reading used the night-time hours – any other life was out of the question as the deadlines loomed regularly and midnight oil burned constantly. During the course of this very special and privileged experience, significant questions occurred to me and in searching for answers, there seemed to be a gap in the body of knowledge.

Do book awards make a difference? Who do book awards benefit? What kinds of benefits do book awards bring? How long do the benefits of book awards last? Exactly what do book awards tell us? Are book awards' criteria appropriate for the contemporary children's literature scene?

Despite yearning for a long period of sleep, and a deep desire to read something adult after a two-year diet of children's and YA literature, these important questions were insistent. And so, immediately my term as a judge was finished, I began to plan the research to find answers.

I want to identify the children's book awards that affect the Australian literary scene. Awards encompass not only the CBC Awards in

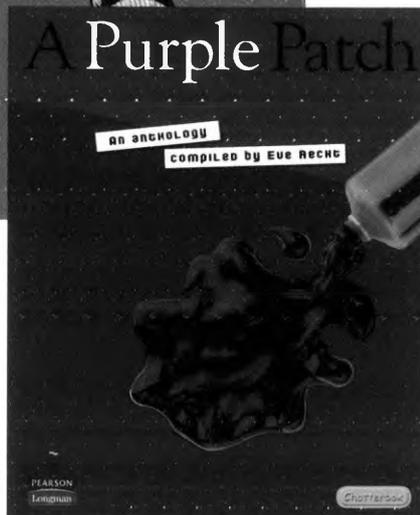
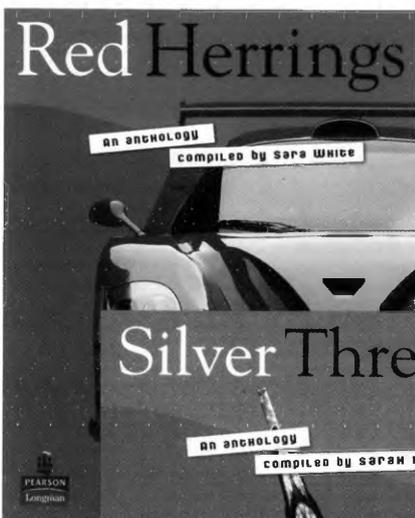


2006 APA 54<sup>th</sup> Book Design Awards  
Best Designed Children's Fiction Book  
**Little Fur: The Legend of Little Fur**,  
designer: Marina Messiha

Australia but also the very active grass-roots 'children's choice' awards and there are overseas awards which public libraries in particular respect. Given the huge number of book awards globally, I'm focussing on those that are influential in Australia.

Second, who are the main players? There are publishers, booksellers, authors, teachers and their classes, teacher-librarians and their students and public librarians and their clients and parents of children and young adults. Each group responds differently to awards; some appreciating the economic benefits, while others simply enjoy the reading pleasure, and some are passionate about the educational value of high quality children's literature. So I am asking a wide range of publishers, booksellers, authors, teachers, teacher-librarians and their clients to respond to a questionnaire. A sample from each group will be asked to be case studies, to add particular, specific detail to the more general picture. Hopefully it will be possible to build up a profile of responses that answer my questions.

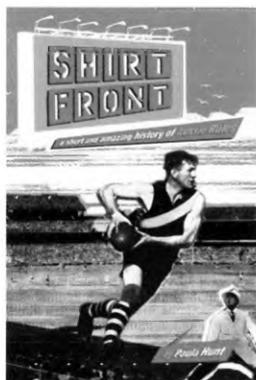
It is assumed that book awards are a 'good thing'. Months ahead of the date, anticipation, publicity and hype focus on the announcement of an award-winning title. Authors will experience a mix of intense pleasure and pride at winning a book award; there is also pleasure and relief at the pros-



2006 APA 54<sup>th</sup> Book Design Awards  
Best Designed Primary Education Book:  
**Chatterbox anthologies**;  
designer: Anita Adams

pect of economic benefits. The publisher of the winning title enjoys the reputation boost and contemplates the expected economic benefits. This is not to deny the genuine pleasure publishers enjoy at the success of one of their titles.

This is in contrast with the market end of the spectrum, the adults and children who 'consume' the winning titles. Aside from the purchase price, there are no economic factors. The primary effects are more matters of



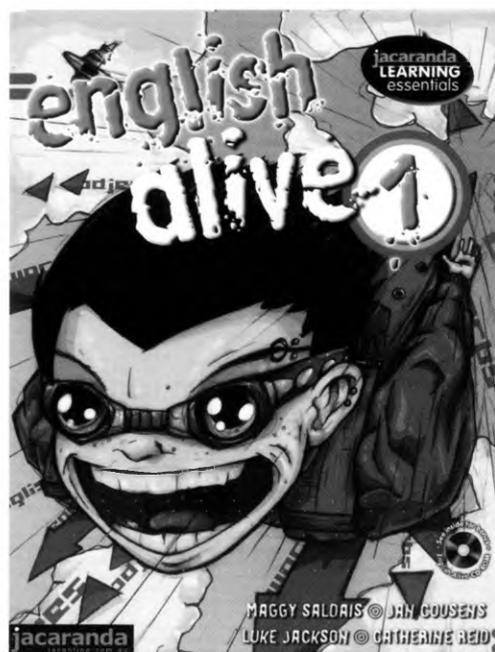
2006 APA 54<sup>th</sup> Book Design Awards  
Best designed children's non-fiction book: *Shirtfront*;  
designer: Blue Boat Design

engagement, interest, enjoyment and satisfaction. Teachers may focus on winning titles for classroom activities. Public librarians and teacher-librarians may add these titles to their collections, create competitions, devise attractive displays to focus on the winning titles and introduce them

to their classes. Parents may seek these titles out and make the titles accessible to their children. For these custodians of children, these promoters of literature, the focus is on interest, engagement, passion, educational benefit and the pursuit of high quality literature.

In all these cohorts, it will be interesting to investigate how long the benefits of awards, with all their by-products and multiplier effects, last.

This research is being undertaken as the project for a professional doctorate and results will be circulated in literary and professional librarian circles. My investigations will fill gaps in the current knowledge and provide an informed framework around the process of book awards, whether they be Australian or originate overseas and whether they have an economic or cultural outcome. ■



2006 APA 54<sup>th</sup> Book Design Awards  
Best Designed Secondary Education Book  
*English Alive 1* (series); designer: Delia Sala

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