

Book reviews

Before the storm



by Sean McMullen
Ford Street Press
ISBN: 978-1-876462-50-5
RRP: \$19.95

Fox and BC travel through time from the future to the distant 1901. Elite cadets in the Imperial Army, they are young, handsome, well-mannered – and now, mutineers. They have journeyed into the past to save the opening ceremony of Australia's first parliament from being bombed. If the cadets fail, thousands will die, sparking a century of total war. However, to change the destiny of the world, the young warriors will need the help of three ordinary teenagers ...

Penning by Sean McMullen, one of Australia's leading SF and fantasy authors, the work is a mixture of romance, invention, and adventure, littered with dynamic, strange, and often hilarious characters.

McMullen uses language to differentiate character. Fox speaks in a more colloquial tone and he sounds less intelligent than BC who can speak Courtly – or ordinary English. McMullen also uses fiction to illustrate historical and cultural change. The early part of the story has examples of sexism (girls excluded from a wide range of activities), racism (comments against Chinese and Indians), and even misguided sex education (babies supposedly arriving in suitcases) that seem quite extreme or even ludicrous today, but were prevalent in 1901.

This is an interesting read and one way of highlighting how our society has changed to a teen audience.

Outside beauty



by Cynthia Kadohata
Simon and Schuster Australia
ISBN: 9781847382665
RRP: \$16.95

Is it considered kidnapping if you kidnap your own sister?

'My mother had four daughters by four different men.' This is a line I had repeated many times in my life. I love my sisters more than I loved anyone, maybe even more than my mother. They were not just sisters to me, they were extensions of myself.

When a late-night car crash shatters everything, Shelby's family is scattered, and each sister is sent to live with her respective father. As the girls try to adjust to life without each other, the youngest, Maddie, starts to withdraw from her sisters and even from herself. Shelby knows she must find a way to reunite her family – but how?

Outside beauty is funny and thought-provoking, and Kadohata has an amazing ability to explore the bonds that bind the meaning of friendship and sisterhood.

Shelby, who is 13, is an engaging narrator, wiser and more insightful than her mother and her voice lifts off the page in a matter-of-fact tone and she is likeable in her role as the hero figure.

This is a novel that will appeal across ages for different reasons, with some of the younger readers missing the subtleties of family relations – taking what is written at face value. It is definitely a book that generates a female voice and thus may not appeal so much to the men.

The conclusion ties up the tale rather abruptly, but grown-up readers, at least, will wonder if returning the girls to their old life is really such a happy ending.

Cynthia Kadohata is a Newbery Medal-winning novelist and her previous books include *Kira-Kira*, *Weedflower*, and *Cracker! The best dog in Vietnam*.

Growing up Asian in Australia




edited by Alice Pung
Penguin
ISBN: 9781863951913
RRP: \$27.95

Asian-Australians have often been written about by outsiders, as outsiders. In this collection, compiled by award-winning author Alice Pung, they tell their own stories with verve, courage, and a large dose of humour.

They tell tales of leaving home, falling in love, coming out, and finding one's feet. A young Cindy Pan vows to win every single category of Nobel Prize. Tony Ayres blows a kiss to a skinhead and lives to tell the tale. Benjamin Law has a close encounter with some angry Australian fauna, and Kylie Kwong makes a moving pilgrimage to her great-grandfather's Chinese village.

Here are well-known authors and exciting new voices, spanning several generations and drawn from all over Australia. In sharing their stories, they show us what it is really like to grow up Asian, and Australian.

Contributors include: Shaun Tan, Jenny Kee, Annette Shun Wah, Anh Do, Khoa Do, John So, Simone Lazaroo, Christopher Cyril, Jason Yat-Sen Li, Sunil Badami, Hoa Pham, Quan Yeomans, Caroline Tran, Tom Cho, Vanessa Woods, and many more.




CROSSING THE LINE
DIANNE BATES

Being abandoned is nothing new for Sophie. But things look up when she moves in with Amy and Matt.

So how come she ends up in a psych ward? And aren't therapists supposed to help?

RRP \$16.95



CROSSING THE LINE
DIANNE BATES

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Book reviews

Unsettling the land



by Suzanne Bellamy and Susan Hawthorne

Spinifex Press

ISBN: 9781876756703

RRP: \$10.00

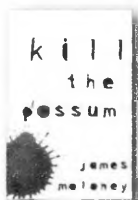
Unsettling the land blends the genres of illustration and poetry into an expression about the dilemma that the land is facing in these drought-addled times, conjuring through both text and illustration, the complex relationships that create and sustain our unique Australian landscape in all its magnificence, tranquillity, and its suffering.

Unsettling the land is a celebration of a thirty-year friendship between Suzanne Bellamy and Susan Hawthorne. They have produced many combined performance works in Australia and overseas, combining image, music, circus, and text. While never living in the same city, they draw inspiration from similar intellectual and creative traditions. Suzanne has created book covers for Susan – *The falling woman* – and references to Suzanne's art can be found in Susan's poetic texts – in *The butterfly effect*.

Unsettling the land opens a new way of joint production with Susan's poem taking visual form in Suzanne's art which in turn created additional poetic text.

In this time of greater environmental awareness, *Unsettling the land* encourages the reader to value nature and the planet upon which we live and question how to what extent we have left our ecological footprint upon its surface.

Kill the possum



by James Moloney

Penguin Australia

ISBN: 9780143004202

RRP: \$19.95

This tough novel explores how adolescents deal with some of the big issues and human motivations and emotions that inspire Greek tragedy and Shakespearean drama.

Moloney refuses to give readers clear cut explanations for behaviour and events and neither does he take a clear moral stance. Rather he leaves it up to the reader to question and interpret events.

Kill the possum throws together a group of young people who have serious issues in their lives in relation to family.

Now read in the year 10 and 11 classroom, *Kill the possum* can be explored in relation to its engagement of complex and

compelling issues. This story is real and definitely not for the faint hearted. But it is evocative, brash, emotive, sensitive, and gritty. A great read.

3 Willows: A new sisterhood grows



by Ann Brashares

Random House Australia

ISBN: 9781741664096

RRP: \$17.95

A fun and uplifting novel from the author of *The sisterhood of the travelling pants*!

It is a new summer. And a new sisterhood. Meet Polly, Jo and Ama – they've got plenty of fun to have and problems to work through over their summer holidays.

Polly has an idea that she can't stop thinking about, one that involves changing a few things about herself. She's setting her sights on a more glamorous life.

Jo is spending the summer at her family's beach house, working as a busgirl and bonding with the older, cooler girls she'll see at high school come September. She didn't count on a brief fling with a cute boy changing her entire summer.

Ama is not an outdoorsy girl. She wanted to be at an academic camp, doing research in an air-conditioned library, earning As. Instead her summer scholarship lands her on a wilderness trip full of flirting teenagers, blisters, impossible hiking trails, and a sad lack of hair products.

A light read!

All reviews written by Fiona Edwards
fiona.edwards@infrastructure.gov.au

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Unsettling the Land Suzanne Bellamy and Susan Hawthorne

SPINIFEX PRESS

Unsettling the Land is a reflection on the plight of the land in these drought-addled times, conjuring through both text and illustration the complex relationships that create and sustain our unique Australian landscape in all its majesty, tranquillity, and its present suffering.

www.spinifexpress.com.au



Libraries become harmony hub in March

The 21st of March is Harmony Day, and libraries across the country are planning to use it to welcome new settlers, introduce more people to their diversity-related services, and celebrate the languages and cultures in their communities. Harmony Day, managed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, promotes the benefits of cultural diversity. It also celebrates the cohesive and inclusive nature of Australia and is part of the Department's *Diverse Australia* program which helps communities address cultural, racial, and religious intolerance.

A group of libraries likely to be particularly active on Harmony Day are those involved in the Living Libraries project.



Speaking with a 'book'

A 'Living Library' provides a safe and non-threatening environment where people from different heritages act as 'books'. Through one-on-one conversations, they share their personal stories with 'readers' or

other community members. In the familiar surroundings of the local library, 'readers' can catch up with 'books' from different religions, cultures, or language backgrounds or other people they may not otherwise meet.

These personal conversations break down barriers and lead to better understanding and respect between those who take part. Conversation by conversation, they build stronger communities.

Lismore City Council started the Australian Living Library concept three years ago. In 2008 the Council was funded, under the forerunner of the *Diverse Australia* program, to produce a guide to help other libraries establish similar programs. The funding also involved setting up a national website (<http://www.livinglibraries.org.au/>), a network for on-going support and promotion, and an implementation strategy.

The Lismore experience has had a strong and positive local impact. The General Manager of Lismore City Council, Paul O'Sullivan, reports:

"the Living Library project has had a positive ripple effect in the local community. This has been brought about by fostering dialogue among people whose paths may not have ordinarily crossed. From evaluations of the Living Library, it is very clear that the level of engagement and understanding between

otherwise polarised sectors of the Lismore community has improved, and that it is a particularly effective tool for dispelling negative stereotypes associated with many minority groups."

So far 70 Living Libraries have been set up around Australia. Many are connected to Councils, reinforcing the strong tradition of local government involvement in grass roots community relations programs.

This March make Harmony happen. Make your library the place where the cultures of your community connect and where everyone belongs. Visit <http://www.harmony.gov.au> for more information, to register events, and to order free promotional items.

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Victorian bushfire update

The horrific bushfires across Victoria over the last weeks have devastated the lives of many Victorians. Every Victorian community has been impacted in some way by these tragic events. What's happened to public libraries?

The Mitchell, Yarra Plenty, Murrindindi, West Gippsland, Eastern Regional, La Trobe City, Upper Murray, High Country, Wellington, Wimmera, and Goldfields libraries are all serving bushfire affected communities.

Many people have expressed particular concern about the Murrindindi Library Service. Our most recent information is that the libraries in Kinglake, Yea, and Alexandra are still standing. The devastated township of Marysville was served by a mobile library.

At this stage it appears that there has been no loss of library buildings across the State and that no Victorian public library staff have lost their lives. Sadly a number have lost their homes and many have lost stock. The majority of services continue to operate, although some mobile library services have been curtailed until it is safe to venture into the area. Several libraries are helping with the provision of relief services in their areas.

Public libraries across the state stand ready to support their local communities during the recovery process in whatever way is most helpful to individual communities. Local Government Victoria is working with affected councils on a range of resourcing, service, and infrastructure issues, including libraries. There have been many helpful suggestions for ways that libraries can assist in community recovery, once the immediate issues of loss of life and property have been addressed. We will be taking these up at the appropriate time.

If you wish to help the most effective way is to donate to the Red Cross Appeal. Details are at http://www.redcross.org.au/howyoucanhelp_donationopt.htm

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