

The Victorian Writer

Doing It For The Kids

| Feb-Mar 2019



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Editorial

Children's publishing is flourishing. Bookshops are heaving under the weight of irresistible offerings, exquisitely illustrated and designed, with punchy, poignant stories and vibrant, quick-witted characters.

It's a great time for writers of books for kids and young adults. There has been a surge in sales in this segment, most notably for middle-grade fiction, driven in large part by adult readers embracing their inner children in defiance of the times. And, although competition is fierce, there are more opportunities for early and emerging writers than ever before through prizes, competitions and online pitching frenzies.

In this issue, we have curated advice and reflection from new and established voices writing for young (and not so young) readers: Ailsa Wild breaks the rules and finds excellent lessons in mistakes, Katya de Becerra shares her experience of launching a YA debut on the global market, Amabelin Kwaymullina looks at kids' literary labels from Western story traditions and Sharon Kernot explores the narrative potential of the verse novel.

Chrissie Perry wonders why the boys get all the laughs, Sasha Beekman reflects on the publication of her first picture book, Alison Evans explores the experience of writing and editing the second time around, Alex Fairhill has advice for writers looking online for kids' and YA publishing opportunities and Gabriella Muñoz explores the importance – and celebrates the joy – of sharing books with children. Also in this issue, we have new work by Kathleen Humble and Michelle Vasiliu. 

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Making Mistakes

Ailsa Wild speaks to Amy Adeney about writing for kids, breaking the rules and finding the excellent lessons in mistakes.

Ailsa Wild is the author of the ‘Squishy Taylor’ series, first published in 2016 and beloved by girls and boys alike. Three years on and Squishy’s tenth adventure is about to go to print. Ailsa spoke to Amy Adeney about her Squishy’s instant appeal, learning from kids and embracing your mistakes.

Amy Adeney: You have a background in circus performance and physical theatre – what drew you to move into writing for children?

Ailsa Wild: I’ve wanted to be a writer since I was about seven. I remember reading CS Lewis’s dedication in ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’. In that moment I realised there was a human who had written the book with a whole other life outside the story world. I wanted that for a long time – to be the person who made the story. It just took me longer to write a book than it did for me to get up on stage! I think I’m particularly drawn to children’s fiction because I was at my most prolific as a reader between the ages of seven and thirteen. I read several novels

a week in those years so I think children’s fiction is deeply embedded in my psyche.

AA: Your first junior fiction series ‘Squishy Taylor’ is already up to its tenth instalment – what is it about Squishy that you think has captured the imagination of young readers?

AW: Squishy is sneaky and cheeky and adventuresome but she’s got a heart of gold. She puts herself into ridiculous amounts of danger – like ending up in the city stormwater drains as they’re about to flood, or climbing out a thirteenth story window – so there’s always an edge-of-your-seat kind of feeling. The narrative structures are modelled off classic crime, so they’re designed to be compelling. The books are also really contemporary in terms of how the step-family negotiates their relationships – very much loving and striving to be ethical, yet busy and chaotic – so the parents are totally exhausted! I think the family dynamic rings true for readers, and creates a safe place for the mystery adventures to launch from.

AA: Your workshop series will focus on the processes of redrafting, editing and refining a middle-grade novel. Can you give us any insight into the most important steps in polishing a manuscript to prepare it for submission?

AW: While I’m writing, I go through a process of distillation where I articulate to myself the kernel and message of the story I’m trying to tell. Once I have a draft I use a few different tools for analysing my work, mapping it against various theoretical story structures – like the hero’s journey or the three-act structure or the beats of a rom com. I don’t do this to stick rigidly with a formula, but because looking at the work from different angles means I often get new insights from it. I will often do several rewrites at this stage. I aim to reach a really clear sense of the story arc so I know what’s serving the story and then can ruthlessly cut away the rest.



Then there's a point where I need to show the story to outside eyes – to people who always help me see whether I've actually done what I thought I had. Sometimes whole swathes of the story are still in my head and not on paper as I'd thought, and there's a lot more writing to be done. Reading out loud is good at this stage. Reading out loud to the target audience is even better. Within the redrafting process, I often rest a manuscript several times and then come back to it. Finally, of course, comes a serious copy edit.

But even this isn't final, because once the manuscript in the hands of a publisher, there may be a long redrafting and editing process. I'm in the middle of several right now!

AA: What do you think are some of the biggest mistakes writers make in analysing and refining their own work?

AW: I think the trickiest things at this point are judgment calls about process. When is the work ready to show someone? Who to show it to? Do you keep on doing more and more edits and changes? Or is it time to rest a manuscript and work on something else? Are you going to go with that person's feedback? Or do you need to stick to your guns? These are tough decisions. It's all about how you can get the clearest, sharpest thinking about your own work.

For me, it's often a time when I'm navigating my big feelings, seeing what a huge job I still have ahead, maybe looking with fresh eyes and feeling disappointed that my beautiful vision isn't as beautiful now it's in paragraphs and pages. I'm frightened of ruining all my hard work if I do this editing bit wrong.

I think it's really important not to be paralysed by the fear of making mistakes, but jump in, be brave, try things, persist, and then persist some more. 'Mistakes' are often excellent lessons if you stick around long enough.


AA: In addition to teaching adults to write for children, you also facilitate writing and illustrating workshops for children themselves. What role do you think creating stories plays for this technology-driven generation?

AW: Children make stories. All the time. Children are making stories with their creative play for an exhausting number of hours a day. One of my favourite things about human development is children's pleasure and absorption in story-making. It's something as adults I think we can learn from. I don't think being technology-driven

makes people any less story-driven. Current technology means there are more mediums with which to tell stories and more platforms for young people to put their stories out into the world. But I do still think some of the best story-making technology we have is paper and pen – closely followed by collage and glue and whiteboards and the voice of a person who loves stories – which is what my workshops usually involve.

AA: And finally, how does working with children inform your own writing process?

AW: Working with children reminds me that children aren't just abstract characters, they are whole complex humans with rich lives that I want to respect when I put them in stories. I love having opportunities to read my work to children. They don't even have to say anything – I just read out loud and watch their faces and that gives me so much information. They also have the most brilliant, wacky, ridiculous and sometimes very poignant plot ideas – ideas that 'shouldn't' work but are amazing. Making stories with children reminds me that there's something excellent about breaking the writing rules. 📖



Ailsa Wild is an acrobat, whip-cracker and teaching artist who ran away from the circus to do a Masters in Creative Writing at RMIT. Her 'Squishy Taylor' series, published by Hardie Grant Egmont, was her first foray into the world of junior fiction. Ailsa has also collaborated on the graphic novel 'The Invisible War', which was nominated by the Children's Book Council of Australia as a 'Notable Book of 2017' and won two categories in the 2017 Educational Publishing Awards Australia.

Ailsa's workshop series, Refine Your Children's Middle-Grade Novel, starts 23 March. Visit writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/events for details.

Image (left): Squishy Taylor by Ben Wood.

Before the Storm

Katya de Berra's YA novel, 'What the Woods Keep', is an international bestseller. Here, she shares the experience of launching her debut on the global market.

It is early 2016 and, after being 'on submission' for eight months, my first book for young adults, 'What the Woods Keep', finally has a home with a publisher: Imprint, part of Macmillan in the US. 'It takes about two years to launch a YA debut', my agent warns me once we receive the interested publisher's long-awaited formal offer. Responding to my numerous 'is this really happening?' follow-up queries, the agent assures me that this is indeed very much happening, and then reminds me for the thousandth time that 'publishing is slow'.

And slow it is. And then fast. And then slow again. As 2016 comes to a close, I remain mostly unaware of what's to come. Trade reviews – what's that? Foreign rights? Movie rights? Filing my US taxes? All of those things are abstract ideas. I'm trying not to think about it too much and focus instead on other projects. But then my editorial letter arrives, eventually followed by copy edits, then proofs, and everything is suddenly happening at once. I have to keep up.

My book fast morphs from an abstract idea into a tangible thing, and before I know it, 2018 rolls in. Now I can answer the dreaded question 'when's your book coming?' with 'this year!'

The year is off to a great start! Allen & Unwin is interested in publishing my book in Australia, and as I take a tram to meet the team, I'm trying to wrap my head around the fact that my book will be on the shelves of bookstores I've been frequenting as a reader ever since I moved to Melbourne in 2008.

Meanwhile, as the realisation of my impending publication kicks in, my anxiety spirals out of control. After I'm introduced to my publicists and we discuss my online presence, or lack thereof, I resurrect my Twitter account and transition my

bookish blog into a temporary author website of sorts. I need a proper author photo. I need a bio that states I'm in fact an author. A part of me resists all that because it means change and change can be scary.

I push myself outside of my comfort zone and go to book events where I meet other authors. Luckily, my adopted hometown of Melbourne has plenty of both. I discover my debut year's online group and join in, immediately welcomed. This is easily among the smartest things I've done all year. Comprising more than 200 members, the group includes YA and middle-grade debut authors. Most members are US-based, but there are a few Australians. The support I receive as a member is invaluable. The group is a trove of debut-related information and shared knowledge. But while it's a great resource, it's also anxiety-provoking to be exposed to so much information at once. Now that I can see what my fellow 2018 debuts have been doing to promote their work while I was setting up my Twitter account I realise that I'm way behind.

I try to catch up. I boost my social media presence. I plan my promotional activities for what's left of my debut year. I send one of my advanced reader copies on a 'tour' so my fellow debuts can read it and possibly review it. I reach out to book bloggers and set up various giveaways with my remaining advanced copies. Suddenly, I obsess over my online stats like Goodreads 'adds' and early reviews. I develop an unhealthy habit of comparing my book to other debut releases of similar genre. Deep down, I know these latter habits are unhealthy, but I can't help it. It'll be many months after I'm published before I even begin to rewire my restless brain, curbing its craving for countless online check-ups.

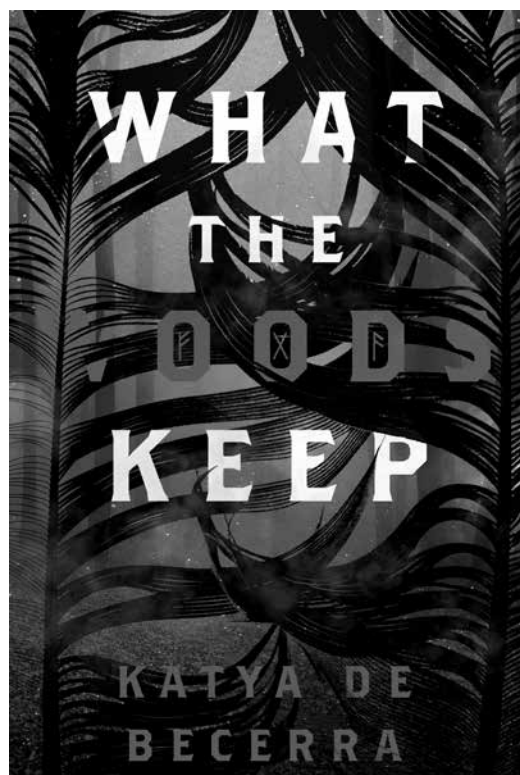
A disaster hits! Only a few months before my publication date, my agent leaves the agenting biz, meaning I have to query agents again. The only thing that helps me keep my head above water is that my experience is not unique. Quite a few of my fellow debut authors have gone through a similar experience. It's not unheard of agents and editors changing jobs. But my luck turns around before I fall too deep into the querying despair: a wonderful agent I've been friendly with for a while reaches out to me and expresses interest in representing me. Crisis averted just in time for my biggest debut year task yet – preorder campaign.

I read up all I can find about what works in terms of inspiring readers to pre-order a debut novel by an unknown author. My findings are inconclusive. Besides, my Australian location means shipping costs would be high. I settle on digital-only items, like query critiques and book-themed art. My top prize though is a gorgeous brooch sourced from Etsy. Much to my surprise, pre-orders do come in. I have no idea how to judge the impact of my preorder efforts, but at least it wasn't a total fail.

Somehow September is here, and my book is finally out in the US! I spend the day on Twitter. I watch my Amazon ratings like an obsessed hawk. I manage to stress myself out to the point that I forget to mention my actual publisher in a series of tweets thanking everyone who made it possible for my debut novel to see the light of day.

Leading up to my publication day, I'm warned repeatedly that it's totally normal to feel down around the release date. But I don't have time to feel anything because my Australian release date is looming. I need to finalise my launch, liaise with the hosting bookstore staff and with my publicist to promote the event. Another lucky break comes when I ask an author friend to be my celebrity moderator at the launch and she says yes. Fifty or so people show up on the day. I exhale in relief.

That's it. I'm a published author now. My work here is done. Right? Wrong. The author's work never stops. Social media. Self-promotion. Giveaways. Bookstore signings and other events, like panels at festivals. And of course, writing one's next book.



In retrospect, I was completely unprepared for what releasing my YA debut really meant. Perhaps one's first book contract should come with some kind of manual, designed to inform the author-to-be of what to expect, what to do (and not to do), and how to best prepare oneself. Or maybe ignorance is not such a bad thing after all. You can't fear what you can't see coming, right? And everyone's debut experience is different, so there's that. Seriously though, if I had to pick one key thing that I learned from my debut experience and pass it forward to all the future first-time authors, I'd say: find your community and build each other up. One's debut year is so anxious – and wondrous! – and forthcoming authors need all the support they can get. Besides, it's more fun to go through it all together. ⑩

Katya de Becerra was born in Russia, immigrated to Australia in 2006, and now lives in Melbourne, where she writes young adult fiction set in some peculiar place with a mercurial atmosphere where strange things go bump in the night. 'What the Woods Keep' is her debut novel.

On Labels

Amebelin Kwaymullina looks at labels from Western story traditions and asks what they mean to her as an Aboriginal writer.

I am a Palyku woman who comes from generations rich in story. Many of those stories were carried on the inside. Many had to be; for in a colonised land, it was not safe for Indigenous voices to speak. We had much taken from us, including our stories, which continue to be appropriated still. My work is given many labels, such as 'young adult', 'speculative fiction' and 'literature'. But all these words come from Western story traditions. What do they mean to me, an Aboriginal writer?

To begin with, the categories of 'young adult' and indeed 'children's literature' raise particular difficulties when applied to Indigenous-authored stories. For example, many of our most complex and profound narratives – Dreaming stories – have been told by Aboriginal people in picture book form. It is wonderful that children are engaging with these stories, as the storytellers intended – but these narratives are not only for children. Moreover, many adult readers come to Indigenous-authored texts with little understanding of Indigenous cultures, histories, and experiences, and thus, their knowledge is akin to that of a child encountering worlds new to them. In fact, to the extent that adults are likely to have absorbed harmful and inaccurate stereotypes over the course of their lifetime that provide a false context for understanding Indigenous peoples, they will know far less than children do.

When I want to know about worlds not my own, I begin with books for children and teenagers written by Own Voices storytellers ('Own Voices' is shorthand in kids lit for stories about marginalised peoples written by

someone from that same marginalised group). I know the writers of such stories will have taken time and care to convey the complexities and contradictions of their existence with simplicity and clarity. I try to approach such texts with the curiosity and openness that is the great gift of the young; to welcome having my assumptions challenged. And my own bookshelves are filled with profound works by Indigenous storytellers that I believe offer insights for all ages, such as 'Alfred's War', 'Ruby Moonlight' and 'Tjarany Roughtail'.

“What is speculative and what is not depends on how the real is defined. Many things within the realm of the speculative – time travel, cross-species communication and multidimensionality – are aspects of Indigenous realities.”

What of the label speculative fiction – or fantasy, or science fiction, or some variation thereof? The genre of spec fic can be an uncomfortable and distressing space for Indigenous peoples. It is rife with tales of white saviours rescuing 'primitive' peoples; of alien (Indigenous) savages whose territory is rightfully seized by 'civilised' (usually white) human invaders; of offensive stereotypes of Indigenous and other non-white peoples; and of 'exotic' cultures that are appropriated from the Indigenous and non-Western peoples of this earth. Speculative fiction has both sustained the oppression of Indigenous peoples through the telling of stories that

support the assumed superiority of Western life-ways over all others) and has itself been an oppressor through, for example, the appropriation of Indigenous cultures, knowledges, and identities.

In addition, the very notion of what is speculative and what is not depends on how the real is defined. Many things viewed as being within the realm of the speculative – such as time travel, cross-species communication, and multidimensionality – are aspects of Indigenous realities. To the extent that Indigenous stories present a view of reality at odds with what Eurocentric traditions define as ‘the real’ – and to the extent that our stories challenge settler-colonial myths regarding Indigenous peoples – all of our narratives might be characterised as speculative. To the extent that our narratives embody Indigenous truths, none of them are.

I describe myself as a writer of Indigenous Futurisms, a term coined by Anishinaabe academic Grace Dillon to describe a form of storytelling whereby Indigenous peoples use the speculative fiction genre to challenge colonialism and imagine Indigenous futures. Indigenous Futurisms includes many different ways of storytelling, such as visual art, film, games and graphic novels, and I find all these stories to be a source of inspiration.

Finally, what is literature? Generally when this term is used it references stories told in written forms. My rich-in-story ancestors are thus labelled illiterate, as are many other Aboriginal people. And those who name Aboriginal peoples illiterate rarely qualify the term with an acknowledgement that there is more than one kind of literacy. This is not to say that there should not be conversations about Aboriginal literacy in Western forms; we need to raise literacy levels in these forms because we certainly cannot escape using them. But these conversations should also recognise the profound and multiple literacies of Aboriginal peoples. This is especially so since one of the keys to raising written literacy is to present Aboriginal children and teenagers with books that speak to their realities – which is to say books that, while expressed in Western forms, are the product of Aboriginal literacies.

One of the Aboriginal literacies that underlies my most recent book, ‘Catching Teller Crow’, is that of non-linear time. In a non-linear view of time, distance from traumatic events is measured not by the progress of linear years but by the extent to which affected relationships have been healed. So this is a book told through cycles of connections and relationships where, as one character puts it, ‘life doesn’t move through time. Time moves through life.’ And it is a book which is itself the product of a brother/sister connection, written by myself and my brother Zeke.

And whatever labels are applied to the novel, we would ourselves describe ‘Catching Teller Crow’ as a tale of strength and hope – or to put it another way: it is a story about Aboriginal girls. ⑩

Ambelin Kwaymullina is an Aboriginal writer and illustrator from the Palyku people. The homeland of her people is located in the dry, vivid beauty of the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Ambelin is the author/illustrator of many picture books as well as a number of young adult books. When not writing or illustrating, Ambelin teaches law and spends time with her family and her dogs.

ambelin-kwaymullina.com.au

In Verse

Sharon Kernot explores the popularity and potential of the verse novel.

When I tell people that I've written a verse novel they often look at me blankly and ask what that means exactly. I explain that it's a novel written in verse, in poetry. According to the Australian Poetry Library, 'A verse novel tells a long and complex story with many characters, much as a prose novel would, through the medium of narrative verse. The verse may be blank verse in the manner of Shakespeare, or free verse, or (less often) formal rhymed verse of any type.'

In short, verse novels are novels written in the form of poetry. They're narratives that have all the complexities of the novel – plots, subplots, a variety of characters, dialogue, and setting. The author must consider pace, tension and tone to keep the reader interested as the story unfolds. And so, poetic elements must be balanced with narrative techniques to move the story forward.

Some writers have said that they struggle with the competing demands of the two forms. They find it difficult to move the story forward because poems are generally static. They invite stillness, encourage us to pause and reflect, whereas a narrative requires momentum to carry it forward. I'm not sure if this helps, but I like to think of my poems as short scenes that fit together and eventually create a long narrative.

The next question people often ask is, why write a novel in verse? Why not write it in prose?

I explain that my YA novel, 'The Art of Taxidermy', actually began as a short story in prose. Friends, early readers, thought the character in the story was intriguing and they wanted to know more. They suggested I write a novel, but having just completed one I felt like doing something different and decided to try writing it in verse instead. I'd wanted to write a verse novel for many years. I fell in love with the genre after reading Steven Herrick's 'The Simple Gift' and Dorothy Porter's 'Wild Surmise' and 'What a Piece of Work'.

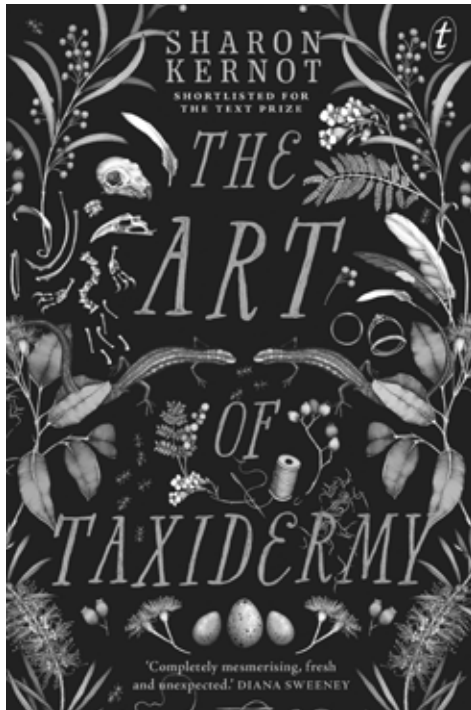
And so I worked on the short story. I pared back scenes and rewrote them in a poetic style, and the story seemed more alive somehow, more amplified. In a poem every word is important, every word has to earn its place, make its mark, add weight, and so when I took away all the word-clutter, all the distractions, it left me with something stronger, weightier, more emotive, which I felt was perfect for the subject matter.

I should add that this was my second attempt at writing a verse novel. I tried to rewrite my previous novel, 'Underground Road', in verse after I'd completed the first draft. But it soon became apparent that it worked just as well, if not better, in prose and so I reverted to the original draft.

'The Art of Taxidermy' deals with death and dying, with grief and grieving, and writing in verse felt right. That's not to say verse novels can't be humorous. They can. They can cover the whole range of emotions, like all writing. But some projects lend themselves to verse more so than others. From my observations, verse novels often deal with difficult subject matter; they are generally character-driven rather than plot-driven; they closely explore the emotions of their main characters; and many, though not all, have multiple narrators. Due to their brevity, there's less backstory, less description and explanation, and consequently more gaps and silences than in a regular novel.

As mentioned above, to write a verse novel you have to have the skills of the novelist and the poet. You have to be able to tell a story in a long form, go the distance, develop characters, plot, sub-plots, setting, and there has to be a compelling story that unfolds over two-hundred or so pages. You have to juggle all the elements of fiction while using the tools of poetry. It's a considerable balancing act.

My verse novel is written in free verse, which is poetry that doesn't rhyme and doesn't follow a strict metrical pattern but uses the



natural rhythms of speech. Line breaks, similes, metaphor, alliteration and rhythm are important aspects of the poems. There's some word play, and imagery is immensely important because the main character has a strong connection with the landscape.

The verse novel lends itself to experimentation. Some verse novelists, such as Catherine Bateson and Helen Frost use a variety of traditional forms in their novels such as sonnets, haiku, tanka, pantoums and sestinas. Others, such as KA Holt, use more contemporary poetic forms including prose poems, concrete poems, and found poetry. They play with the typography (have multiple font changes or words floating down the page), sometimes there's no punctuation, and strange spellings. Some writers, writing from multiple viewpoints, change the style of poetry to suit each character. For example, they might use prose poetry for one character, haiku for another. This enables the reader to identify who is speaking, but perhaps more importantly, it reflects the personality of that character.

'The Long Take' by Robin Robertson, recently shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, includes photographs and uses font changes in the form of italics and bold type to indicate flashbacks and excerpts from postcards and diaries. Kwame Alexander's YA novel 'Rebound' includes elements of the graphic novel. Clearly, writing in verse provides more tools to play and experiment with compared to a regular prose novel.

Another question I'm often asked is, who reads verse novels and why? The appeal of verse novels is great, especially, but not only, in the classroom because teachers can explore both the poetic elements as well as the narrative techniques. They're an interesting way to introduce poetry to students. Verse novels are particularly appealing to reluctant readers because they are relatively short and easy to read. The white space is visually appealing and inviting and offers plenty of resting places. Advanced readers will love them, too.

Having said that, verse novels can be difficult to classify. Booksellers aren't always sure whether to place them in the poetry or fiction section. And when readers open to the first page and see words set out in the form of poetry, they might conclude the book is a collection of poems. Unfortunately, some may then put the book back on the shelf. But those who persist are often surprised that they enjoyed reading the poems, they're mesmerised by the ease with which the story moves forward, and they're excited to have found a new genre to explore.

Here are some recommendations for those who'd like to explore them further: Steven Herrick – I highly recommend reading anything he has written. Other excellent Australian YA verse novelists include Jeri Kroll, Tim Sinclair, Catherine Bateson, Ali Cobby Eckerman, and Margaret Wild. Sarah Crossan, KA Holt, Elizabeth Acevedo, Sonya Sones, Kwame Alexander, Nikki Grimes, and Ellen Hopkins from the UK and US are currently popular. And if you'd also like to explore Australian verse novels for adults, check out Lisa Jacobson's award-winning 'The Sunlit Zone', Bel Schenk's 'Every Time You Close Your Eyes', and absolutely everything by Dorothy Porter. 📖

Sharon Kernot writes fiction and poetry. Her verse novel 'The Art of Taxidermy' was shortlisted for the 2017 Text Prize and published by Text in 2018. Her first novel, 'Underground Road', was published by Wakefield Press. Sharon's work has appeared in a variety of journals, magazines and anthologies including 'Island', 'Mascara', 'Southerly', 'Best Australian Poems' and 'Australian Love Stories'. She is currently working as publishing assistant at Garron Publishing. More info: sharonkernot.com.au

Funny Girls

Chrissie Perry wonders why the boys get all the laughs.

Girls are funny. I say that because my female pals can lighten up even the heaviest of days. I say that because, when I teach and visit schools, I witness girls making each other laugh until they cry.

Children's literature is peppered with hapless and hilarious boy characters we know children love to read about. The commercial success of series like 'Diary of a Wimpy Kid' by Jeff Kinney or the home-grown 'WeirDo' by Anh Do and 'Funny Kid' by Matt Stanton are the stuff of legend in middle-grade fiction. But the overtly funny, hapless girl character is a rarer beast.

All kids love to be amused, and they're choosing funny books in droves. Both competent and reluctant readers are lured by the promise of a laugh and this can only be a good thing.

My children's books to date have largely been realistic fiction, exploring issues around social and emotional intelligence. Humour has often been a key ingredient. But as the first book in my new series, 'Blabbermouth', evolved, it became apparent that humour should be front and centre. Not a bit player, but the main act.

The protagonist of 'Blabbermouth' (for readers 6+) is Amelie Anderson. She's not a bad kid, she's just so bubbly that sometimes words fizz out of her mouth. And then things go wrong. Terribly wrong. To counter the multitude of mistakes Amelie makes due to her verbose nature, she takes on the anonymous role as advice columnist in the school magazine. This gives her an opportunity to practice being wise and tactful through drafting her responses. Her ultimate hope is that she will eventually reveal her identity and erase her reputation as a blabbermouth.

Much of the hilarity comes from the juxtaposition of Amelie's kooky, haphazard daily

knee-jerk comments compared with her crafted and considered responses as an advice columnist.

The first book had the working title 'Reputation Makeover' and was developed in conjunction with my long-term editor and now publisher at Interrobang, Hilary Rogers, who sent the manuscript off to Scholastic Australia late in January 2018.

The response came within a week. Scholastic Australia thought the manuscript was 'fresh, funny and funky' and wanted to commission the series, starting with four titles.

As we tweaked book one, the extraordinary Pete Petrovic added illustrations that made us all laugh out loud and take even more delight in this fun project. At this point, Andrew Berkhut, head of publishing at Scholastic Australia, suggested the title should give a stronger indication of the personality of this increasingly humorous series. He proposed a refrain from the text become the book title: "Oops, I've Done it Again" resonated for us. While 'Reputation Makeover' suggested a journey that may or may not be funny, this title made the humour immediately apparent. 'Oops' – used to express mild apology or surprise – was a key indicator that, first and foremost, kids were about to choose a funny book.

Also, having 'Oops' at the title helm meant we could develop other titles that would be immediately recognisable for kids as part of the 'Blabbermouth' series.

Addressing a Scholastic Australia sales conference in mid 2018, Hilary Rogers and business partner Josh Lefers gave a snappy introduction to the 'Blabbermouth' series which was met with thunderous applause. The overwhelming feedback from sales representatives was that an overtly funny series with an overtly funny girl protagonist was

overdue and incredibly welcome. There was much talk about the cover looking bright, bold and super-appealing. They were confident that a series like this could find traction in the marketplace. Pre-sales have, so far, supported this optimism.

It seems to be one of those cases where we didn't really notice the gap in the market because the status quo was so ingrained. Maybe part of that is the embedded (and quite ridiculous) notion that boys are, historically, funnier than girls? More likely to have no filter, or to be naughty or incompetent in ways that make us laugh? But that's a whole other hornet's nest.

I've spoken to many booksellers and librarians who echo the enthusiasm for 'Blabbermouth'. Many have referenced 'Dork Diaries' by Rachel Renee Russell as the closest counterpart, albeit being intended for a slightly older readership (9+ years). This series is an international phenomenon and, of course, I'm more than happy to encourage this comparison.

Funny books are popular with all kids. But we do know that reluctant readers are particularly drawn to humour where the text is pared back, the layout user-friendly and illustrations provide both relief from the work of deciphering words and pure entertainment.

Where there is a discussion on reluctant readers, it mostly centres on boys. Roy Morgan research (2016) states that 81.9% of girls said they enjoyed reading compared with 67.5% of boys. So the ongoing discussion is warranted. But, in a world of screens, it's clear that many girls find reading a chore. We need to nurture their joy in the written word too.

As we move towards the publication date of 'Oops, I've Done it Again', I have questions I'm eager for answers to:

Q. Will boys read the 'Blabbermouth' series?

A. I don't know. We do know that girls are devouring funny books with male protagonists, and that the series mentioned at the beginning of this article are very popular with girls. We also know there's a cultural reluctance in boys picking up books they perceive as being 'for girls'. Anecdotally, I've showed the cover of book one to many groups of boys with mixed responses from: 'No way, I wouldn't read that.

It's for girls' to 'Yeah for sure, it looks funny.' My guesstimate would be that the series will have a mostly female readership but I would be delighted to be proven wrong.

Q. Would it matter if the readership was almost entirely girls?

A. There would be a level of disappointment there, but that would mainly be because it saddens me that boys may still be missing out on diverse reading experiences. Tapping into a female market can be hugely rewarding though. The 'Go Girl' series, for which I wrote thirteen titles, has sold more than three million copies to date, criss-crossing generations. I teach young adults who grew up with the 'Go Girl' books and still feel incredibly nostalgic and attached to the stories that validated and celebrated their experiences in childhood. Many of the titles are still in print. Overall, that's not a bad result some twelve years after the first 'Go Girl' books were published.

As with all my work – funny, serious or somewhere in between – story begins with character. So far, it's been wonderful seeing Amelie and her friends (plus one frenemy) come to life in this collaboration with Interrobang and Scholastic Australia. Ultimately, though, the readers will judge.

I hope they love our Funny Girl as much as we do. 📖

Chrissie Perry is the author of more than 35 books for children and young adults, including thirteen books in the blockbuster 'Go Girl!' series, the award-winning 'Whisper' and the delightful 'Penelope Perfect' series. Her work has been published in twelve countries. 'Oops I Did it Again', the first book in her brand new series, 'Blabbermouth' (Scholastic Australia), has just been published and is all set to delight and entertain young readers.

chrissieperry.com

From Dream to Debut

Sasha Beekman reflects on the publication of her first picture book, 'When You're Going to the Moon'.

Before you are a debut author, you spend all your time hoping that you'll become one – that all your toiling away, locked in a little room with your paper and pen, or your laptop, will finally produce a work of art that a publisher will read and think, 'yes, we simply must to publish this'.

For me, that toiling culminated in studying an Associate Degree in Professional Writing and Editing at RMIT University to hone my skills. Never having been one to think about the practicalities of supporting myself in my seemingly far-off twenties, and with the support of my amazing mother who never laughed when I said I wanted to be an author, I decided I would study, and if I couldn't find a job or get anything published in the year after I finished, I would go back and study something else. Two years in the scheme of things didn't seem very much at all.

It turns out that those two years led to everything. I would not have achieved what I have so far – at least in such a short amount of time – without this program. The things I learned and the people I met ended up being so valuable and ultimately life-changing. I gained genuine, practical skills that I applied step by step when submitting my book. And I found, having also been on the receiving end of unsolicited manuscript submissions as an intern, and then in my current role as a publishing assistant, these are things that distinguish your work from everything else in the 'slush pile', or 'treasure trove' as a colleague of mine likes to call it. Having a synopsis and an author bio goes a long way, as well as being sure you read the submission guidelines of your chosen publishing house(s) closely. It is very obvious when people don't. It makes everyone's life easier when you follow simple instructions, and I made sure that's what I did.

I've been on both sides of the publishing process now, so I know the terminology and things like when a book would be expected at the warehouse if it's printing offshore in May, or how much a standard print run for a picture book is, or what the advance for a debut picture book author is likely to be. And I think that because the team at Affirm know that I have this background knowledge, there's a lot of transparency with my book. I ask questions of my editor that maybe a different debut author might not know to ask. I know what I can and should expect from my publisher and it's really set me up for the way I will move forward with future books. There are things I will do differently from what I've learned through the process of first getting published, and there are things I would never change.

The manuscript for 'When You're Going to the Moon' was written in a children's writing subject at university. To be quite honest, I had always thought of myself as someone who would one day end up writing a serious collection of brooding short stories for adults, or a novel. I only chose this subject because it fit into my optimum course timetable and it seemed like the most fun of the options. Then my thinking quickly shifted. I was introduced to the world of picture books – these beautiful things I hadn't interacted with since childhood. The intricacies of the picture book world were something I never truly understood. They contain so few words, but those words have to be honed and crafted, and have to resonate with everyone who consumes them – children and the adults reading to them. It's so much harder than it seems. And it was when our teacher, Sue deGennaro, read to us 'If You Want to See a Whale' by Julie Fogliano and Erin E Stead that I thought, 'I want to create something as beautiful and timeless as this. I want to publish a picture book.'



'When You're Going to the Moon' was written for my final assessment. The story went through a few different phases and a couple of rounds of workshopping. Part of the assessment was to create and illustrate a dummy of the book. I know I still have it somewhere, and it truly makes me laugh. The image I had in my mind for this story was pretty different to how it turned out, and that is the beauty of working with an illustrator. It's also why I will always leave illustrating to the pros. I finished that class feeling that this was a story a lot of people would be able to identify with and gain something from, but I didn't quite know where to go from here. So I did something that Sue had suggested. I put the story away in a drawer for three months and then come back to it with fresh eyes.

This was around that time that I had undertaken an internship with Affirm. Half of my degree was editing, after all. During that period, they were just starting to accept submissions for their new children's list and it was one of my tasks to monitor the inbox and read through the unsolicited submissions. That's where I learned what to do and what not to do when sending a manuscript submission, and I actually got to see what kind of competition was out there. In my opinion, the book that I had put in a drawer stood a pretty good chance against some of the submissions coming through. I told my colleagues that I had written a picture book and asked if I could submit it once my internship was over. And luckily for me, this is how I avoided the slush pile and sent my manuscript straight to the commissioning

editor. Out of everything that I had ever written, be it for children or adults, this manuscript was the one that I thought most deserved to see the world as a fully-formed book. I'm glad the folks at Affirm thought so too.

The strangest thing about picture book creation is that I've never actually met Vivienne To, the illustrator. Everything was communicated through our editor, Davina Bell. The only time we've actually spoken is through Instagram comments. We're lucky we had such an amazing editor. Davina would always show me Vivienne's work as soon as it was available, and I got to choose from maybe five different character roughs. Any queries or thoughts I had were relayed by Davina to Vivienne, so even though we weren't directly communicating, it was a very collaborative process and I think that's a sign it was done right. Our visions for the book were well aligned, which made it really fun, but it also felt like together we were doing something important – that the world needed to see. And we've done more than I could've dreamed. 🌙

Sasha Beekman is a Thai-born writer who grew up in Darwin. As a kid, she spent one too many nights watching the moon from under the mango tree in her backyard. She won two Young Territory Author awards and spent her gap year in Japan. Once she'd finally had enough matcha and Hello Kitty, she moved to Melbourne to study writing and editing at RMIT. 'When You're Going to the Moon' is her first picture book.

The New Pathways

Alex Fairhill has advice for writers looking online for kids' and YA publishing opportunities.

The recent increase in online mentoring and pitching events has opened new pathways for Australian writers to gain exposure to overseas industry contacts and expand their writing community. But, as with all opportunities, it's important to ensure it's right for you and your work.

Pitch Wars (pitchwars.org) and Author Mentor Match, or AMM, (authormentormatch.com), both US-based programs, are two of the largest for unagented and unpublished writers. AMM holds a couple of rounds each year and is solely for middle grade and young adult writers, while Pitch Wars is an annual event also open to new adult and adult manuscripts. Both programs invite writers to submit an excerpt and supporting material to up to four mentors, who are agented or published authors or other industry professionals, and each mentor chooses one mentee. AMM's next round opens for submission from 1-5 March, with matches announced a few weeks later. Pitch Wars opens its submission window for less than 48 hours, announces the mentees about six weeks later, and holds an online showcase through which agents can request partial or full manuscripts. The program's 2019 dates will be announced in February.

Smaller events throughout the year, such as #PitMad (run by Pitch Wars), #RevPit (reviseresub.com) and #DVPit (dvpit.com) for marginalised authors and illustrators, vary from tweet-length manuscript pitches to offering full manuscript edits.

Australian writers Sophie Gonzales and Cass Frances both gained representation with US agents through online events, and have

mentored through AMM to pay forward the support they received as new writers.

Query Kombat and Twitter pitch contests introduced Sophie to people who would become some of her closest writing friends and critique partners – and US agent Moe Ferrara clicking 'like' on Sophie's #KidPit pitch in 2015 led to an offer of representation. Sophie's contemporary YA novel 'The Law of Inertia' was released in the US in October, with 'Only Mostly Devastated' scheduled for 2020.

'While we do have some excellent events in Australia within the literary world, my aim was to be published with an American house initially,' Sophie says. 'A lot of the people I met who were querying the same agents as me were based internationally.'

Cass entered her southern gothic YA manuscript into Pitch Wars in 2017, was selected by mentor Cole Gibson, and picked up by US agent Hillary Jacobson.

'I knew that YA in the US was such a huge market, and community, and Pitch Wars seemed like a good entry point into that environment,' Cass says. 'It's exposed me to a lot of the broader discussions in publishing, such as how best to support marginalised writers in our community.'

First, research

It's important to ensure any opportunity is reputable, isn't a competition with an entry fee masquerading as a mentoring program, and has strong industry connections.

'Anybody can start an online competition, mentorship, journal, etc. New ones are

popping up all the time,' Cass says. 'Thoroughly read the website, the websites of organisers and anybody involved. Make sure you're comfortable sharing your work with them. You can check them against websites like QueryTracker (querytracker.net) or Absolute Write (absolutewrite.com), and read through the tweets on the various hashtags.'

Selection criteria is crucial

Research the mentors well ahead of the submission period. Most will list their strengths, what they're looking for, and what they don't want.

Cass says AMM receives between 500 and 600 entries per round, and writers are improving at checking the selection criteria. 'But I still received several that featured elements that I'd stated "were not for me", which means they wasted an entry by not reading the website properly. Anecdotally, this is still a problem with a lot of submissions to agents and publishers.'

Following submission and other guidelines is a must – including harassment or bullying clauses – and be aware of international time zones, especially for short submission windows.

Prepare to work

Utilise online resources or information sessions on pitching and querying, and ensure your manuscript is complete. Pitch Wars Founding Director Brenda Drake says submitting to a mentor who didn't fit the manuscript was the most common mistake of the 3400 writers who entered in 2018. 'I do notice that many writers make errors in their opening pages or are confused about what goes in a query letter,' she says.

Sophie says characters need to have clear stakes, and while it's valid for a writer to be confident in their work, an unwillingness to edit or work with someone is problematic.

Cass agrees. 'Mentorship programs are exactly that: mentorship. Only enter if you're prepared to really work on your manuscript, which means being prepared to rewrite significant portions. It's not a shortcut to getting an agent or getting published.'

Find a happy social medium

Highly visible online events can create a false sense of overnight success in which a request will automatically lead to publication. Online teasers designed to build excitement around writing competitions aren't uncommon, but the anxiety they can cause writers is real. Pitch Wars mentors use the Twitter hashtag #pwteaser to post comments while they're reading submissions. Last year the angst from writers waiting for manuscript requests was so high that the Pitch Wars team tweeted – only three days after submissions closed – that 'Most mentors haven't even made it through their initial read-through. The ones who have are the exceptions, not the rule.'

If this hype is likely to cause stress you can mute the hashtag – or submit to mentors who are less active on social media. Complaints, including those about not receiving a manuscript request or the 'slowness' of the process, are best kept to private groups or offline altogether.

Facebook groups, Twitter chats and forums for participants are a great way to meet other writers, and one of the biggest advantages of these programs.

Handle it like a pro

The mentees are announced and ... you're not on the list. Rejection is tough, especially when it's public. Some mentors will offer feedback, some won't – but don't demand answers as to why you weren't selected. It's rare that unsuccessful applicants cross the line, but trolling, posting in online groups, and abusive emails have been reported.

Sophie says it's disappointing to see people handling rejection in an unprofessional manner, but if an action wouldn't be appropriate in the workplace, it's not appropriate in the online writing community.

'We've all been rejected, and we know how much it hurts and how personal it can feel,' she says. 'However, publishing is a smaller business than many realise, and you have to be aware that authors, agents and editors can see your behaviour in public forums, and that can have an effect on who would like to work with you in the future.'

Live and learn

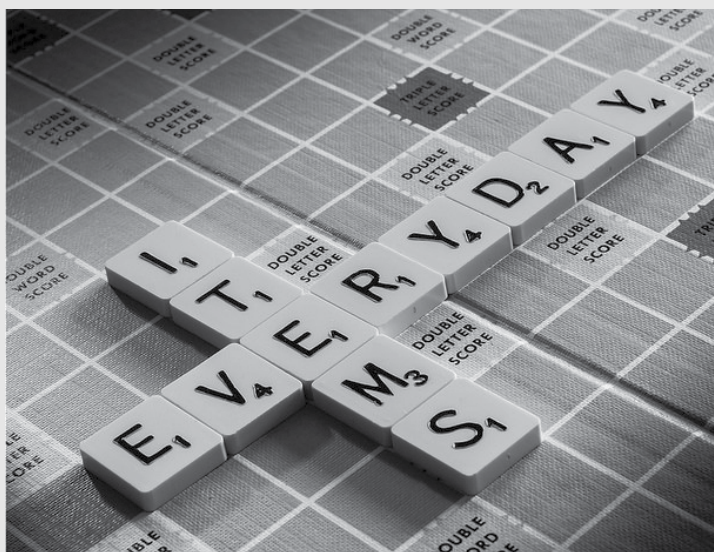
Like any slush pile, publishing house or competition, the decisions are subjective and mentors select manuscripts they believe they can help improve. Use blog posts about what appealed to mentors, or common mistakes in submissions, synopses or query letters to improve your work.

Australian-based mentorship programs are also extremely competitive, but if you'd prefer to work with someone local, check out the Australian Society of Authors, Varuna, the Maurice Saxby Professional Development Program through the CBCA, ACT Writers Centre's HARDCOPY program, or other opportunities through Writers Victoria and Australian publishers. [@](#)

Alex Fairhill is an emerging children's and YA author. She posts writing-related thoughts on her blog and Twitter (@AlexFairhill).

Nitpicker

Your regular editing lesson, brought to you by Penny Johnson, Program Manager of Professional Writing and Editing at RMIT.



CC image courtesy of John Bugg on Flickr.

1. (Children's/Childrens) authors often have strong memories of what it's like to be child.
2. They may also draw inspiration from the children with (who/whom) they live or work.
3. Morality tales with a heavy hand hardly (never/ever) appeal to children.
4. A light touch, as well as a dose of quirky humour, (is/are) preferable.
5. And it helps knowing how to craft an ending that a child will anticipate with (baited/bated) breath.

Answers on page 34

Remembering Women



PEN Melbourne celebrates Women's Day 2019 and the life of beloved colleague Judith Rodriguez.

International Women's Day 2019: Remembering Women Who Speak Out

'For women to have free speech, the right to read, the right to write, they need to have the right to roam physically, socially and intellectually. There are few social systems that do not regard with hostility a woman who walks by herself.'

PEN International Women's Manifesto.

A major step in PEN's effort to combat the silencing of female authors the PEN International Women's Manifesto was launched on International Women's Day 2017. The first and founding principle of the PEN Charter asserts that 'literature knows no frontiers'. These frontiers were traditionally thought of as borders between countries and peoples. For many women in the world – and for almost all women until relatively recently – the first and the last and perhaps the most powerful frontier was the door of the house she lived in: her parents' or her husband's home.

PEN believes that the act of silencing a person is to deny their existence. It is a kind of death. Humanity is both wanting and bereft without the full and free expression of women's creativity and knowledge.

PEN believes that violence against women, in all its many forms, both within the walls of a home or in the public sphere, creates dangerous forms of censorship. Across the globe, culture, religion and tradition are repeatedly valued above human rights and are used as arguments to encourage or defend harm against women and girls.

Vale Judith Rodriguez AO, 1936 – 2018

PEN Melbourne remembers Judith Rodriguez as a beloved friend, poet, artist, teacher and publisher; a generous woman who travelled widely reading her poetry and teaching and especially supporting emerging writers. Judith taught at universities on several continents since the sixties.



A passionate defender of human rights for decades Judith inspired and led in many roles in PEN International. She joined PEN Melbourne in 1984 where she served as President and then Vice-President for fifteen years and represented PEN Melbourne at Congress most years from 1995. Judith was elected a Member-at-Large of the PEN International Board 2001-2004, 2004-2006; a member of the Search Committee from 2006, and its Chair 2008-2009, and re-elected Chair 2009-2012. In 2017 she was elected an International Vice-President of PEN. Judith was dedicated to the work of the Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee and translation held a special place in her heart.

Judith Rodriguez: always the humane activist, always warm-hearted and wise, quick to pinpoint the farcical and call-out the false. 📖

Join PEN Melbourne: penmelbourne.org

Freedom of expression is not a crime.

Novel Differences

Alison Evans reflects on the experiences of writing and editing a YA novel the second time around.

The years between writing my books and having them published are quite far apart. The first draft of 'Ida' was written in 2011 and the book was published in 2017; 'Highway Bodies' was written in 2013 and has just been published. The writing of both first drafts was very similar, but the editing processes were very different.

When I was writing the first draft of 'Ida', I was working seven days a week at a fruit farm. Generally, I use NaNoWriMo to write a first draft. For those who aren't familiar, NaNoWriMo is where you aim to write fifty thousand words in the month of November. I rewrote the manuscript a few times with only myself in mind: the idea of choices making parallel universes was something I just wanted to explore. Sure, I wanted to get something published one day, but this was for me. This was the third manuscript I'd completed and I was getting more confident in myself, and I thought that maybe one day I'd have a pretty good shot at being an author.

I wrote the first 'Highway Bodies' draft during NaNoWriMo as well. I had just finished a gruelling honours year at uni and was in the middle of developing depression (which would be diagnosed a couple of years later), and I remember how freeing it felt to write something that again, only had myself in mind. I had submitted 'Ida' to a few publishers and had been rejected, so I didn't have anything out in the world except for a few short stories.

I had only been writing coursework and my thesis during my honours year, so everything I had written had to be seen by my supervisor or my tutors. Writing 'Highway Bodies', something that would be frowned upon by my university (genre fiction was seen as a waste

of time, especially in undergraduate studies), was incredibly liberating. This was something only for me, and I could do whatever I wanted. It could be written sloppily; it didn't have to make sense.

Whenever I'm writing the first draft of anything, I can't let the audience in. The story I'm writing is for myself first, because otherwise I get too caught up in worrying about what other people think. I have to care about the story first and foremost, because otherwise how can I ask other people to care about it?

My first drafts are really just me telling myself the story. I'm trying to figure out who the characters are exactly, and although I usually have the plot marked out roughly, this is where I figure out what I actually want and need to happen.

So when I get to the second draft stage, I always know that something huge is missing. There's usually more than one thing that I need to add, but with 'Ida' and 'Highway Bodies', there was a major component missing – something glaring out at me that I could see almost as soon as the first drafts were done.

'Ida' was in third person. I wanted the story to convey some of the vibe of the Dandenong Ranges: the closeness, the way the trees and the mist can hide anything. Having that step back from her narration didn't convey the tone I wanted. After rewriting everything into first person, immediately the story was closer to what I wanted it to be.

'Highway Bodies' had two narrators in the first draft. The manuscript had started out as a 5000-word short story with an unnamed protagonist, and so her narrative was one. The other narrator was Dee, a girl who

plays drums in a band. And while the two narrations worked well, once I added in Jojo's, the story all came together much nicer. Jojo adds a humour and a lightness that the other narrators don't have. The balance between the narrators felt much more natural once Jojo's storyline was added and the novel as a whole was much brighter and hopeful than it was in the previous draft.

The editing process for the two books was quite different. For one, 'Ida' is 45,000 thousand words and 'Highway Bodies' is around 80,000. With 'Ida', keeping track of the different universes and timelines was tricky, but achievable. 'Highway Bodies' was a whole other beast. While the timelines of each narrator were pretty straight forward, whenever I had to change something in the plot I had to make sure the narrations were all in order. It was incredibly frustrating when something would work in one of the narrations, but then the chapters around it had to be shifted or deleted. Making changes but keeping everything else in order was trickier than with 'Ida', it was a balancing act that I felt would fall apart at any second.

The biggest changes in 'Highway Bodies' during the editing process with Echo were to do with finding an antagonist, and this was something that helped me balance everything. While there were several groups of miscellaneous scary people in previous drafts, I combined them all into a cultish group that is led by one man. By having a clear antagonist, I could then focus on what I wanted to say. Why is he the antagonist? Why do I disagree with what he's saying?

I wanted to write a zombie story because I had been watching/reading a few zombie series, and none of them really spoke to my experience as a queer person, especially as a non-binary person. The antagonist group in 'Highway Bodies' is basically a cult, where men and women are separated into two distinct groups, no-one knows what a non-binary person is and heterosexuality and gender roles must be strictly adhered to.

By creating this one cult from the smaller miscellaneous groups I focused in on what I wanted to say. The three groups of teens that feature in the book are all queer, and in their pre-zombie lives had problems directly stemming from the systems the cult is trying

“For me, writing is really just figuring out what I think, and publishing a book is making a statement.”

to re-establish. By making this cult represent what the teens are trying to leave behind, I realised what I wanted for their future: a world where they can be who they are.

And really honing in on that, giving the ideas focus, makes the story stronger. My voice becomes more confident because I know what I am trying to achieve. And because you know what the characters want, readers care about the characters more – they can root for them.

I'm sure this is true for a lot of people, but I do find my strength as a writer doesn't lie in writing but in rewriting. The first draft is not so much a manuscript as it is a big glob of not-quite-understandable ideas. By redrafting and really figuring out what I want to say, the manuscript becomes legible, and eventually something to be proud of.

For me, writing is really just figuring out what I think, and publishing a book is making a statement. Sometimes the editing process is incredibly draining and difficult, but I find that rigorous edits are always worth it. While 'Ida' and 'Highway Bodies' are very different books, they are both vehicles for what I want to say and how I want to leave a positive impact on the world. ⑩

Alison Evans is a non-binary author from Melbourne. They are co-editor of 'Concrete Queers', a maker of zines and a lover of bad movies. Their work has been published in various Australian and international magazines, lit journals and zines, and their novel, 'Ida' (Echo), was the winner of the People's Choice Award at the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. You can find them on twitter @_budgie or their website, alisonwritesthings.com.

A Shared Adventure

Gabriella Muñoz celebrates the joy of sharing books with children.

The ritual of reading books to my son before going to bed started a week after we left the hospital following a C-section for me and a few nights in the ICU for him. He was fourteen days old, and I was still taking painkillers.

Our first days at home are a haze. I remember his tiny feet kicking my wound every time he tried to latch on, as well as the crying, the dirty nappies, and the sound the pump made when I expressed milk. And it was in this endless loop of sleep, play, eat, change nappies, clean, pump and repeat that I started reading Philip Pullman's 'Grimm Tales for Young and Old' out loud to my son. My voice seemed to calm him and the stories soothed me. We read my favourites, 'Briar Rose' and 'The Donkey Cabbage', almost every day. We ventured into the lives of witches and wizards. We went to the woods, bought magic seeds and battled wicked stepmothers. When we were reading we were invincible and the characters we met along the way strengthened our nascent relationship. It was when he was about fifteen weeks old, when we read the gory description of Cinderella's stepsister cutting her little toe to fit into the infamous shoe, that I decided it was time to go to the local bookshop and explore the children's section.

During his first visit to the bookshop my son snatched an abridged edition of 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar'. The tiny book was designed as a toy for prams and it hung in his until he was two and the book started to fall apart. That same day we got Mem Fox's 'Where is the Green Sheep?', Maurice Sendak's 'Where the Wild Things Are', and Sue Hendra's 'Upsy Down Town'. My son's first paper cut came courtesy of Max's journey into the land of the wild things.

We read about dragons who loved baking, spider sandwiches and magic puddings in our visits to the local library, and his personal collection expanded thanks to generous friends and some great finds at our local op shop. Soon my house was filled with children's books. We read in the morning, after lunch and before bed. The pictures transfixed my son; turning pages gave him great joy, and when he learned the power of the word 'no' and used it to select the books he wanted to read, he discovered his agency in the world.

Children learn through repetition. Each reading granting new opportunities to find hidden treasures in the words and illustrations. One day, my son realised that one creature in 'Where the Wild Things Are' had a beard reminiscent of his father's. With gusto he said, 'papa, papa' every time the wild thing appeared in the book. He also noticed that one of them had bright red hair, like mine at the time, and would giggle when 'mamma and papa' appeared in the book, roaring their terrible roars, gnarling their terrible teeth – and he had discovered what the book was all about.

As the years have gone by and his language skills have exploded, we have ventured into new territories. One of his favourite books, 'Three Little Monkeys', is a collaboration between the wonderful Quentin Blake and Emma Chichester Clark. It tells the story of Hilda Snibbs and the cheeky little primates, Tim, Sam and Lulu, who wreak havoc in her life. The book is an analogy of toddlerhood – the years of messes, tantrums and unexplained mischief. I know how Hilda feels when she discovers the monkeys have poured her shampoo into the toilet and have unrolled the toilet paper again. But I've also silently cried with her at the sheer idea of thinking the monkeys have disappeared. My son knows I get as upset

as Hilda when he destroys my things but he laughs with delight in every read.

Science has proven that children who read have better language skills and fare better at school. Just last year an Australian study found that kids whose parents read to them frequently had better knowledge of words and numbers. Libraries have created special programs, such as 1000 Books Before School or the Australian Reading Hour, to make sure children become active readers in adulthood. Schools also try to instil a love of books from an early age.

All the hours spent reading to our children also profoundly influence parents, transforming our lives and giving us another chance to fall in love with books. Children's books remind us, among many other things, about the importance of belonging and family. When we read 'The Lines in Nana's Face', my son wanted to learn more about his grandmother and felt the need to call her often. I, however, found myself in tears. After putting him in bed, I cried because my grandmother, the one who smelt like roses, didn't get to meet my son. The book, written and illustrated by Simona Ciraolo, can be considered an illustrated essay about memory, loss and family ties, is as poignant as Siri Hustvedt's essays on memory and family.

Reading these books triggers adult nostalgia for childhood. Julia Donaldson's 'The Paper Dolls' is a beautiful exploration of early life and memories and how our first experiences shape our future selves. Nostalgia permeates every page of this book, showing us how children's imaginations work and how we, as adults, get to engage with and explore ours again, reigniting our capacity to marvel at little things and to create.

Now that my son is fast approaching four and knows his ABC, he reads in his very own magical way. He has memorised a few sentences of his favourite books and asks me to sit down because he wants to read me a book before bed. His renditions are hilarious yet always uncover new layers of meaning.

This deconstruction process reminds me of Henry James' house of fiction in his preface to 'The Portrait of a Lady', 'which has ... not one window, but a million'. Children who read from an early age can see the bricks, layers and paint. They glimpse through the windows and are not hesitant in taking their parents for a ride along the house, seeing things adults won't and making adults reassess their

relationship with books. In these readings and re-readings both child and adult will find something about themselves in the characters. These books are windows to our own infancy and the myriad things we may have forgotten about ourselves. They give us a glimpse of who we were, what we once dreamt about and the power of an active imagination.

For about three years, children's books were the only books I had time to read. As a migrant mother of two children too close in age, reading fiction became a rare luxury. Our night ritual, which includes a glass of milk for them and about five books (sometimes just one book that we read five or six times), became my reading time too. I guide my children as much as I can and help them find what's hidden in the pictures, but I also let them guide me in discovering their nascent literary world, one which has taught me so much about poetry. Reading out loud to my children has made me a better, more engaged reader.

My son's latest obsession is the book 'Bananas in My Ears' by Micheal Rosen and illustrated by Quentin Blake. He finds great joy in each poem but there is one spread in particular that has captured his imagination. In it Blake drew a bed with wings, flying. My son, in his almost-four-year-old voice, wanted to know how his bed could grow wings. I didn't hesitate to tell him that his bed grow wings when he reads books. He, satisfied with the answer, believes that each night before we go to sleep his bed is growing wings. I often go to Art Riot to get a bag of feathers, and when he's at childcare, I stick them to the mattress and base. When he goes to bed, he can see his bed is growing wings, just like his imagination – and mine. ⑩

Gabriella Muñoz is a Mexican-Australian writer and editor. She has published feature articles and essays on a wide variety of topics. Her literary work focuses on motherhood, exile and the mysteries of blood and origin. Gabriella is the inaugural recipient of the Writers Victoria Digital Writers in Residence program, supported by the Loula Rodopoulos Sub-Fund of the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust.

Cloud & the Blue Whale

An extract by Kathleen Humble

Cloud Jones loved holidays. This year her mum, Darci, had picked a cute wooden cottage, painted bright blue right on a long sandy beach. The beach even had rockpools full of funny fish.

Cloud bounced up and down impatiently as Darci packed their beach bag.

'Come on, Mum! I don't want to miss anything!' she said, with a worried little frown. Darci smiled. Cloud wasn't very good at waiting.

Cloud tucked her frizzy hair behind her ears. She had long curly hair that was forever falling out of her ponytail. She was even wearing her favourite rainbow shirt and proper beach shorts.

Finally, Darci was ready. Cloud raced down the path to the beach.

'Can you smell the sea, Mum?' she exclaimed. Smelling the sea always made her happy. Darci laughed. She loved the sea too.

The beach was beautiful. It had super yellow sand, and sparkling blue water. The far end of the beach was covered in dark slimy rocks. In the distance, a small rocky island sat in the middle of the bay.

Cloud ran along the shoreline. She loved how the sand pushed against her feet and rubbed between her toes. When she looked back, Darci was a small speck in the distance. Cloud waved and clambered up onto the rocks in the middle of the beach.

Cloud gazed out at the water. The waves bobbed in and out of the shore with little white caps.

That's when she saw a big wave skitter sideways.

Cloud leaned her head to the side and scrunched up her face. That was odd, she thought. Waves don't do that.

The wave sped up, and a foamy white hand formed, beckoning her forward.

Cloud clambered down the rocks and raced along the waters edge, splashing through the shallows. The breeze whipped around her legs, and the sand stung a little.

She let out a gasp of surprise. The wave had formed into a dark green watery face! The foamy wave tops had become a wild hair-do, with snowy white foam eyebrows.

The face turned and looked at Cloud with deep, dark-liquid eyes.

'Help me,' it sighed. Then it crashed backwards.

Cloud stopped. She couldn't believe it. Had the wave spoken?

She looked out at the water, glistening jewel-like in the bay. And then, the waves started to grow again.

That was when Cloud saw the boy.

He had long black hair and was dressed in dark blue. His feet were bare, and the water lapped around his ankles as he too stared out at the vanishing face.

The waves roared forward towards the boy. Cloud scrambled over the wet sand towards him.

'Stop!' she cried.

The boy turned towards her and looked at her with deep brown surprised eyes. His eyebrows rose. He didn't look worried at all.

The wave raced forward and covered him, and dragged him into the bay. Cloud didn't know

what to do, so she kept running along the shore.

The wave washed back up high, and deep seaweed eyes looked right at her.

'Yesss,' the waves hissed. Then the wave opened its mouth and swallowed her whole!

She was surrounded by green water – and bubbles! So many bubbles.

The water pulled at her feet, and she tumbled along the bottom, the sand scraping her legs.

But it only touched her feet. Around her head and body was a large air bubble. The water looked like glass. She reached out to touch it, and a drop of water stuck to her finger.

What was happening? Seaweed swirled around the water just outside the bubble. She was being pulled deeper into the bay.

Cloud wrapped her arms around her tummy. She was dry, and the bubble was warm. It was very strange.

The water swooshed around her. 'Come,' it murmured.

Round and round the bubble she could see fish swimming, even jellyfish wobbling. Were they creating the bubble?

They approached a deep shadow. The waves pushed her forwards and she fell onto a sandy bank.

She rolled onto her back and sat up. The waves lapped playfully at her feet.

She was in a cave! It stretched above her. The only light was from a tiny opening way up in the roof. All the walls glistened, and stalactites dripped and reached downward. At the edge of the sand, small stalagmites poked out, shiny and sparkling in the light.

The water filled half the cave. There was no other exit or entrance. Where was she?

Cloud looked around. Perched high on the edge of the sand was the boy. He had his arms wrapped around his knees. He looked very thoughtful.

'It's a limestone cave,' he said. 'They happen sometimes. The water drips through the rocks and grows the stalactites.'

Cloud stared at the boy. He was dry too.

'Who are you?' she asked.

The boy glanced at her and then turned to look at the water.

'Wraxton. Wraxton Nguyen. I'm ten,' he said.

Cloud scrunched her face up, confused.

'Why are we here? What happened?'

The boy shook his head. 'I'm not sure,' he said. 'The water man asked me to help him. I always wanted to see a limestone cave.'

'But who is the water man?' asked Cloud. The boy shrugged his shoulders. He didn't know.

'Maybe we should ask him,' he said.

Cloud turned and looked back at the water.

An old man was walking out of the waves. He had a scraggly beard, and thick white hair. His eyes were the colour of seaweed and his skin the deep colour of the sea at midnight.

He was leaning on an old twisted piece of driftwood, and his body was draped in water. The water clung to his body, changing colour with every step from the dark, stormy grey of clouds banked over the bay, to the jewel green and sky blue of a calm lagoon. It sparkled and glittered like stars.

Cloud had never seen anything like him before. But she recognised his face. It was the face in the water! 🐳

Kathleen Humble is a writer and homeschooling mum to two twice-exceptional special-needs children and has also been diagnosed with ADHD. She writes about her experiences at yellowreadis.com.

Kathleen has also had articles published in 'The Mighty' and 'Otherways' magazines, and has a book, 'Gifted Myths' on the history, science and experiences of twice-exceptional families, which she is hoping to have released soon. In a past life, Kathleen was also a mathematician, computer programmer, and a children's entertainer.

This is an extract from Kathleen's middle-grade novel, 'Cloud and the Blue Whale', developed in part during her 2018 Write-ability Fellowship.

To Plan or Not to Plan

By Michelle Vasiliu

I'm a published children's author writing my first middle grade novel. And to be honest, I'm struggling. Big time. But more of that later on.

Last year I was awarded a Write-ability Fellowship. When I was asked how I would like to use my Fellowship, I chose to be mentored. I was subsequently paired up with a mentor and an agreement was entered into whereby we would meet up for six one-hour sessions, over the course of half a year.

In my everyday life I'm a list maker, a 'to-do' person, a stickler for planning and organisation. When I took on the challenge of writing the first draft of my novel I threw this part of myself aside and made a conscious decision not to read my work back or edit along the way. I would simply 'go with the flow.' This other me scoffed at the idea of structure and plot points, inciting incidents and a clearly defined climax. My novel would be an exploration of the characters' inner lives. Story would come second. I would write without a clear plan in place and see where the characters and story could lead me.

With this in mind, I put pen to paper.

The words came easily.

It was liberating and exhilarating.

I was fully in the moment.

And then came crunch time. I was nearing completion (or so I thought) and the words were no longer flowing. I didn't know where my story was going. My 30,000-word manuscript was at a halt at 26,000 words.

I tried not to analyse my predicament too much. I had experienced lulls in my writing

before and the situation had always resolved itself. I decided to put my manuscript aside for the time being and come back to it at a later date.

I regret to say that date never translated into an actual day. My time-frame for completing the first draft was similarly vague (sometime before meeting with my mentor) and my plans for how I would get there were non-existent. I had truly embraced the pantsier in me. To be frank, it was a refreshing break from my usual obsessively organised, pedantic self. I was, in fact, rather proud of my newly found lackadaisical approach to problem solving. I was confident my subconscious mind would present me with a way forward when it was ready to do so.

In the meantime, I busied myself with everyday life. My writing was put squarely on the backburner. As the meeting with my mentor drew closer, it became increasingly apparent that I was not going to have a first draft completed by then. I decided to accept the situation for what it was, or at least what I thought it was at that time: writer's block, clear and simple. I shifted my expectations and changed focus. Where I had previously hoped to be in a position to move straight onto the redrafting stage after the first meeting, I now needed help just finishing the first draft.

I imagined now that I would come away from that first meeting with ideas brewing, my enthusiasm reignited and write those 4000 words. 4000 words that would tie the loose ends of my story together, culminating in a tender, poignant ending. Thereafter, we would meet each month, me with chai latte at the ready, to edit and refine subsequent

drafts. Feedback would be glowing and ego-building, and I would lap it up. With a few considered tweaks here and there, I envisioned my completed manuscript. I imagined the accolades and public recognition to come and I was content.

Fast track to now – post-first meeting with my mentor.

I rummage through my in-tray. My manuscript is dug out from the pile, where it has been hidden and ignored for the past two weeks. There are notes penned in red ink in the margins and sentences highlighted in fluorescent yellow and frosty pink. As I skim through the pages my heart sinks ... red ink and highlighter blur before my eyes.

It is becoming increasingly clear to me what needs to be done before I can move forward with my story.

I need to go back and PLAN.

But I don't want to.

After feeling the exhilaration of writing without any clear direction, I am loathe to plan and nut out the hard questions.

As I struggle with my desire to hang onto the pantsier in me, I am torn between this desire and the realisation that my story as it stands, without any real structure, is not working.

Resisting the urge to tear my manuscript into shreds I place it back in the in-tray.

I am having serious doubts about my skills as a novelist and my ability to deliver the finished product to a standard I will be happy with.

It is time for a chai latte break.

Fuelled with sugar and caffeine, I am ready to go forth. Across the top of the page I write, 'Plan for my Novel'. The words are short, simple and to the point. In contrast, the task ahead is difficult and most likely, time-consuming. I envisage it will also be somewhat tedious, even boring. Nevertheless, as I have discovered 26,000 words down the track, it is a task I must complete if I want to do my novel justice.

Hopefully, purposefully working out the hard stuff won't stop my story 'free-flowing' from my subconscious. If I find a way through all the mess I've created, then maybe I'll have a clearer sense of where I'm going.

I don't want to over-think things, though, because I've discovered that when I do, my writing tends to suffer. What I've also discovered is that both approaches to my writing can coexist happily; that is, it is possible to both embrace the pantsier and plotter in me.

No matter how difficult the process from here proves, I will not give up.

I will see this project through, with all the challenges that lay ahead.

I will celebrate two very different approaches to writing and I will use them both and mesh them into one. I will do so and see where it leads. ⑩

Michelle Vasiliu is a children's author. Sometimes she writes funny stuff just because she can. She also writes sad stories because reading and talking about serious stuff helps her readers make sense of their world.

Michelle is the author of the award-winning picture book, 'My Happy Sad Mummy'. Her second children's book about mental illness, 'Together Things', will be published by EK Books in 2020. In 2018, Michelle won a Writers Victoria Write-ability Fellowship. She is currently writing her first middle-grade novel.

Workshops and Courses

See more courses and book online at writersvictoria.org.au, phone (03) 9094 7840 or email program@writersvictoria.org.au. All events are held at The Wheeler Centre unless stated otherwise.

Online

Intermediate Short Story Clinic

with Laurie Steed

Writing requires commitment, experimentation in voice, and selective support as one begins to master one's craft. The Intermediate Clinic is all about finding your feet, and your voice, as a writer and is a safe, supportive space in which to learn and grow.

Stories of up to 1500 words due Wednesdays 13 Feb, 13 Mar, 10 Apr, 8 May, 12 Jun

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: Emerging

The Business End – Session 2: Time Management (webinar)

with Amanda Apthorpe

You've found time to write? Excellent. As a writer who seeks to be published, or who's recently signed on the dotted line, you're becoming a small business and if you want that business (you) to flourish, you've got some work to do – marketing, checking the fine print of a contract, ensuring you've complied with copyright restrictions. Join this webinar as we negotiate time to handle the business end of writing.

When: Mon 18 Feb, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$20/\$35

Non-member price: \$45

Level: All

Beginner Short Story Clinic

with Laura Jean McKay

Every story begins with a messy first draft. This beginners' clinic will help you identify the strengths and weaknesses of your story, learn the elements of your craft and provide direction for your next draft. Receive feedback from your tutor and fellow course participants with this email correspondence course.

Stories of up to 1500 words due Wednesdays 20 Feb, 20 Mar, 17 Apr, 22 May, 19 Jun

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: Early

Advanced Short Story Clinic

with Josephine Rowe

Whether you're an emerging writer or deep into your craft, this five-month course aims to meet each story on its own terms while exploring non-traditional narratives and sharpening your narrative intuition as both writer and editor. Participants are welcome to table work at any stage of development – early drafts still finding their shape, or late-edit stories in need of forensic attention.

Stories of up to 1500 words due Wednesdays 20 Feb, 20 Mar, 17 Apr, 22 May, 19 Jun

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: Established

Poetry Clinic

with Terry Jaensch

Receive direct feedback from your tutor and fellow course participants with this online course for early and emerging poets.

Poems of up to 1500 words due Wednesdays 20 Feb, 20 Mar, 17 Apr, 22 May, 19 Jun

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: Early and emerging

Write-ability: How to Write Crap (webinar)

with Scot Gardner

It's healthy for writers to collect snippets of great writing. These mentor texts and exemplars give us something to aspire to and help us define our style, but reading and collecting bad writing can be helpful, too. Half an hour spent on online writing platforms is like an aerobic workout for your crapometer. Join YA writer and cyber tour guide Scot Gardner on a journey through the gnarled forests of teen drama. Learn to think like a troll and write like an angel in one tragi-comic webinar!

When: Wed 20 Feb, 11.15am-12.30pm

Where: Webinar

Price: This is a free event. However, online registration is required.

Level: All

**The Business End –
Session 3: Marketing
Your Work (webinar)**
with Marian Blythe

So you've published a book – now what? This course will provide you with the skills to promote your own work through both traditional publicity avenues and digital media. You will learn basic audience research, how to present your work to the media, and how to bring your best game to interviews and events. With the right preparation, you don't need a big budget to get your book in the hands of the people that matter.

When: Mon 4 Mar, 6-7.30pm
Member price: \$20/\$35
Non-member price: \$45
Level: All

**The Business End –
Session 4: Copyright**
with Jennifer Tutty.
(Studio Legal)

As a creator of literary (written) works, it is important to understand what is protected by copyright, who owns copyright in the work you are creating, and how to stop others from using your copyright. Join Studio Legal Principal, Jennifer Tutty, as she explains how copyright protection laws in Australia work and what you should know.

When: Mon 18 Mar, 6-7.30pm
Member price: \$20/\$35
Non-member price: \$45
Level: All

In-person

Creating Interactive Fiction
with George Ivanoff

Interactive fiction has been popular with children ever since the 'Choose Your Own Adventure' novels hit bookshelves in the 1970s. Their popularity continues today with series such as 'Countdown to Danger'. Writing a piece of interactive fiction, with its multiple, intertwining plotlines, may seem like a daunting task but it all comes down to planning and structure. Learn all about the planning and pitfalls of writing interactive fiction.

When: Sat 2 Feb, 10am-1pm
Member price: \$80/\$90
Non-member price: \$120
Level: All

Licensed Writing
with George Ivanoff

Licensed writing is any sort of writing that involves a copyrighted property, where the author is given permission (a licence) to use that property. This includes work based on franchises such as Star Wars, Doctor Who or Warhammer. But it also includes fiction and non-fiction based around real-life organisations such as sports leagues or the Royal Flying Doctor Service. What does it take to write material like this, and how does one go about even getting a license?

When: Sat 2 Feb, 2-5pm
Member price: \$80/\$90
Non-member price: \$120
Level: All

YA Realism
with Catherine Crowley

In this workshop we'll use high points of tension to explore and develop young adult characters. Through written activities, examples and discussion, we'll examine dialogue, setting, conflict, and voice in YA realistic fiction, and troubleshoot your problems with plot and character.

When: Sun 3 Feb, 10am-4pm
Member price: \$135/\$145
Non-member price: \$195
Level: Early and emerging

YA Day
In partnership with
the YA Room

YA Day is back in 2019 with an even bigger program! Come along to hear from 15 amazing Aussie YA authors about everything from how to create suspense in a novel, to things they wish they knew before they had their first book published. Want to learn more about what agents are looking for and how to get your book into the world? With an event bookseller, merch and giveaways, it's going to be an unmissable day.

When: Sat 9 Feb, 10am-4pm
Price: \$30
Level: Early and emerging

**Plotting and Structure for
Beginners**
with Anna George

In this jam-packed workshop, you'll discover what makes a story compulsive reading, and why a flabby mid-section is a sure sign of plot troubles. Whether you're starting out or have a manuscript underway, you can take your writing to the next level by honing your plot. Join Anna George to

learn how to turn your story idea into a structured narrative, how to keep your writing tight and your readers reading.

When: Sun 10 Feb, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early

CSI: Crime Story Investigation – Session 1
with Robert Gott

James M Cain's novel 'Double Indemnity' is a classic piece of noir fiction. It is tough and, given the date of its publication (1936), surprisingly frank and uncompromising. Cain is one of the masters of noir and we'll examine why.

When: Wed 13 Feb, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-member price: \$60

Level: All

Sex: Writing It
with Toni Jordan

Sex scenes have all the same challenges as other fictional scenes, plus additional complexities. 'Will readers laugh? What will my parents think?' In this post-'Fifty Shades' world, authentic sex scenes are more important than ever because of their unequalled ability to reveal character. If your fiction is about yearning, fear, pain, hope, vulnerability, power or loneliness, a beautiful sex scene will make your story better.

When: Sat 16 Feb, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Self-publishing Bootcamp
with Ellie Marney

An intensive two-day workshop to help you navigate self-publishing and hybrid publishing – from essential steps to more advanced skills. As Beth Revis said, 'Welcome to the world of publishing. BYOB.'

When: Sat 23 and Sun 24 Feb, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$270/\$290

Non-member price: \$400

Level: All

Ask ... About Collaboration
with Cath Crowley, Simmone Howell and Fiona Wood

Between them, Fiona Wood, Cath Crowley and Simmone Howell have been shortlisted for and won more than twenty literary awards. In 2017, their collaborative novel 'Take Three Girls' was released. Join Fiona, Cath and Simmone in a conversation about the rewards and challenges of collaborative writing.

When: Tue 26 Feb, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$18/\$25

Non-member price: \$40

Level: All

Plotting with Character
with Lili Wilkinson

Have a great idea, but not sure how to start? Have you started the same story over and over, but it keeps falling apart or grinding to a halt? Chances are the problem is with the development of your plot or the creation of your characters. By the end of this workshop, you will have a fully plotted, strongly populated story, ready to write!

When: Sat 2 Mar, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and emerging

Creative Structures: Beyond the Three Acts
with PD Martin

There are many different ways to plot and structure a novel. While many authors do follow the 'standard' three-act structure, other tools and methods are also available. In this workshop we'll look at some of these options, and you may find that one of these tools is the best fit for you and your project.

When: Sun 3 Mar, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Picture Book and Early Chapter Book Intensive
with Jane Godwin

While picture books and chapter books need to reflect the vocab level of their readers, they often follow the same narrative structure as fiction for older readers. Topics covered include important aspects of writing for children, plot and structure, language and voice, character, conflict and setting and an overview of Australian children's publishing today.

When: Sun 3 Mar, Sat 11 May (face-to-face assessment), Sat 1 June

Member price: \$340 /\$360

Non-member price: \$460

Level: All

CSI: Crime Story Investigation – Session 2
with Anna Snoekstra

Anna Snoekstra dissects Joyce Carol Oates's 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?', which follows Connie, a self-absorbed teenager, who meets a stranger when home alone one summer afternoon.

When: Wed 13 Mar, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-member price: \$60

Level: All

Own Voices: Why Writing Matters Forum (Shepparton)
with Jax Jacki Brown

This forum explores how language, writing and telling our own stories helps transform ways of thinking about the self, disability and community. Developed by people with disability, the forum also provides professional development on the Social Model of Disability and best-practice language for organisations.

When: Wed 13 Mar, 10am-3pm

Where: Riverlinks Eastbank Centre, 70 Welsford St, Shepparton

Price: Free – online registration is required.

Level: All

Applying for Writing Retreats and Residencies
with Laurie Steed

Retreats and residencies offer time to write and contemplate, and the opportunity to see new countries and cultures. But how does one secure such opportunities? Laurie Steed discusses innovation, authenticity and best practice in relation to finding and applying for your dream writing residency, retreat, or fellowship.

When: Sat 16 Mar, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Refine Your Children's Middle Grade Novel

with Ailsa Wild

Your first draft middle-grade novel is complete. Now you need to redraft, edit and refine. This series of hands-on workshops will take you through an analysis of your work and give you direction for polishing your manuscript. Typical length for your MG draft manuscript will be between 25,000 and 60,000 words approximately.

Workshops: Saturdays

23 March, 18 May, 13 Jul,
10 Aug, 10am-4pm

Webinars: Saturdays 4 May, 27 Jul

Member price: \$530/\$580

Non-member price: \$800

Level: Emerging and established

Managing the Sad, Bad and Mad Bits in Your Memoir

with Sarah Vincent

The mad, bad and sad bits of a memoir, if well-written, are often the best, and a memoir that only deals with the happy parts of a life would be dull to read. But readers of memoir hate it when the writer wallows in self-pity and bitterness. So how then do we write about the sad, bad and mad without alienating our readers? In this workshop we will explore writing techniques you can use to help you portray these difficult parts of your life to make them moving and vivid.

When: Sun 24 Mar, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and emerging

Writing Stand-Up Comedy

with Nelly Thomas

Ever wanted to try stand-up comedy? Or have you started but want to progress more? Nelly Thomas was a stand-up comedian for 16 years. Join her for tips and tricks on writing,

performing and handling The Biz. A unique opportunity to work with this award-winning comedian and author.

When: Sat 30 Mar, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Masterclass: Writing in the Age of Extinction

with Jane Rawson and
James Bradley

Catastrophic climate change, mass extinction and the de-wilding of the world are all inescapable facts of life, so why are they so rarely seen in novels? James Bradley and Jane Rawson provide exercises, guidance and research tips for how to write environmentally-aware fiction of your own, and not die of despair while you're doing it.

This masterclass is for established writers only and is exclusive to Writers Victoria members.

When: Sun 31 Mar, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$205/\$245

Level: Established

Writing Historical Fiction

with Kelly Gardiner

How do we bring history to life through fiction? We'll look at why we choose to set stories in the past and the challenges involved: how and what to research, how to investigate and interpret real people in history, and different approaches to voice and character. We'll discuss the all-important questions of how to build a world that is based in reality and also imagined, and techniques for presenting the past in a way that appeals to modern readers.

When: Sun 31 Mar, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Milestones

Lee Kofman has two books forthcoming in 2019. Her work of creative nonfiction 'Imperfect: How our bodies shape the people we become' will be out in January via Affirm Press. And the anthology she edited, 'Split: True stories of leaving, loss and new beginnings', featuring personal essays by prominent Australian authors, will be out in June via Ventura Press.

Fiona Lowe is excited about her latest release, 'Home Fires', published by HQ Fiction. A slight departure from her family sagas, Daughter of Mine and Birthright, this novel explores the complex issues facing a community as they work on rebuilding their lives after a devastating bushfire. Set in the beautiful Victorian Otway Ranges and written from the point of view of four women and one man, secrets are exposed as they each face the damage that day wrought, and shocking truth emerges that shakes the town to its newly rebuilt foundations.

Scott McKernan's new novella 'Breaking Religion: Touching Real' is now available with all major online retailers in print and digital forms. Be prepared for a mindful read: Skelter Valentine, a man without hope or purpose, dies and meets God. The message heard: "Only believe and your time will come." When he returns to life, he discovers the mystery of believing and the simplicity of receiving God's treasures. Will he overcome his troubled past and come to know the God who he thought was not worth knowing?

Mary Jones was shortlisted in this year's 'Aesthetica Magazine' Creative Writing Award. Her poem 'You Are ...' appears in the 2019 Annual, which is now available to pre-order from the website aestheticamagazine.com. Her fourth poetry collection, 'Cast of Supporting Characters', is

now published in the Ginninderra Press Pocket Poets Series. For information on her published works, visit her website at maryjonesthewriter.com.

Classifieds

Love travelling? Love writing?

Join award-winning travel writer Rob McFarland for a writing workshop in Melbourne on Feb 17. Learn expert writing and pitching techniques plus get detailed feedback on your work. Join students who've been published in The Australian, The Age, National Geographic, International Traveller and more. See robmcfarland.org

Write your life story

If your New Year's resolution is to write your life story, take a full day out to get the skills and confidence to do just that. Memoirist Spiri Tsintziras (Afternoons in Ithaka, My Ikaria) helps you honour your life story, push through hurdles and get the words on the page. Delicious wood-fired Greek feast and boundless support guaranteed. Sunday 24 Feb, Box Hill. Find out more at tribaltomato.com

Comps & Opps

The Text Prize

Submissions for the 2019 Text Prize will open Monday 7 January. The entry form is available for download now.

The Text Prize aims to discover incredible new books for young adults and children by Australian and New Zealand writers. Awarded annually to the best manuscript written for young readers, the prize has unearthed extraordinary, multi-award-winning books and launched international publishing careers.

Published and unpublished writers of all ages are eligible to enter with works of fiction or non-fiction.

The winner receives a publishing contract with Text and a \$10,000 advance against royalties.

Submissions close 8 February. textpublishing.com.au/text-prize

Submit to Gargouille

Gargouille is open for submissions. For Issue 10, the editors are seeking poetry, scripts, short stories, aesthetic essays and any literary tidbits that are hard to classify.

They are also on the hunt for black-and-white artwork and a striking illustration for the front cover.

Entries close 28 Feb. gargouille.com.au

2019 Liminal Fiction Prize

The Liminal Fiction Prize is a new literary prize for Australian Writers of Colour. With a theme of 'the future', we're looking for fiction of a new world: a future that pulls against or weaves together Australia's many fabricated histories. With this prize, we seek to promote fiction by writers whose voices are often ignored or elided— for the future of Australian fiction is here.

First prize of \$2500 + publication in 'The Lifted Brow' magazine. And all shortlisted pieces will be published in an anthology by Brow Books.

Entries close 1 Apr. liminalmag.com/prize

Send your opp, comp, milestone or classified to
editor@writersvictoria.org.au

Nitpicker (from page 20)

1. Children's 2. whom 3. ever 4. is 5. bated

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To renew
online, visit
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Organisation or writers group

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State

Gender

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Other

Date of birth

(optional)

/ /

At what stage of writing are you?

☐ Early (just begun) ☐ Emerging (some publication) ☐ Established (published a full-length work)

What do you write, or what would you like to write?

☐ Academic ☐ Crime ☐ Literary fiction ☐ Radio ☐ Web content
☐ Biography/Memoir ☐ Essays/Reviews ☐ Lyrics ☐ Romance ☐ Young adult
☐ Blog ☐ Family history ☐ Non-fiction ☐ Screenwriting
☐ Business/Technical ☐ Feature writing ☐ Playwriting ☐ Short stories
☐ Childrens ☐ Graphic novels ☐ Poetry ☐ Speculative fiction
☐ Copywriting ☐ Journalism ☐ Popular fiction ☐ Travel

Other

Do you identify as:

☐ Culturally and Linguistically Diverse ☐ Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander ☐ Person with Disability

Join for two years and save

☐ Individual \$135 ☐ Writers groups and organisations \$260
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Find out more about what it means to be part of an association on our website at <http://bit.ly/1MQAcQt>

2019 Season 1



True Grit

Program online at writersvictoria.org.au

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