

WORDS' WORTH

Schools celebrate world of reading

HEATHER ZUBEK

Thousands of Harry Potters, a sprinkling of Zac Powers and maybe a few vampires will invade school playgrounds this week in celebration of reading and imagination. It is Children's Book Week, co-ordinated by the Children's Book Council of Australia, just one of the organisations intent on opening the world of books for children.

Each year the WA branch of the Children's Book Council — the majority of whose 300 members are school librarians and teachers — dispenses \$60,000 in funding to public libraries across the State for their Book Week activities.

"We're the only branch in Australia to do so," Jan Nicholls, the WA branch president, says. "This year we have 19 applicants from the metro area and 13 from country centres stretching from Albany to One Arm Point in the far north."

One of the aims of the council is to celebrate the contributions to Australian children's literature through the annual CBCA Book of the Year Awards, which were announced last Friday. Ms Nicholls sees this as a positive step in supporting Australian writers and illustrators of children's books.

"It's important for young people to have creative role models as well as the sporting ones we often see," she says.

Helping parents to be good reading role models and showing them how to teach their children about literacy is one of the aims of The Place, the State Library of WA's child and family centre.

"This was a reference library for many years," Hilary Hatfield, community liaison librarian for children and families and co-ordinator of The Place, says. "Children weren't really welcome. We wanted to change all that, so four years ago we developed The Place."

On the mezzanine level of the library, The Place has an area where children can read the huge collection of children's books, access literary games on computers, play with puppets and dress up.

"We wanted an area where kids could get comfortable with books and learn from the very beginning that books are wonderful things to share."

Lesley Reece, director of The Literature Centre (formerly the Fremantle Children's Literature Centre), believes it's not enough just to teach our children to read.

"We want them itching to read another book, write their own story or illustrate a picture book," she says.

In 1991 when the Fremantle Prison was closing and a committee was formed to decide what to do with the building, Lesley Reece knew exactly what she wanted.

"I wanted to establish a centre that celebrated, promoted and nurtured Australian children's literature. I wanted a centre that nurtured young people's creativity helping them to believe that they could be part of the creative process."

Today The Literature Centre provides quality student workshops and writing programs across the State. It conducts professional development for teachers as well as supporting Australia's talented authors and illustrators of literature for children and young adults.

Promoting Australian literature on the world stage as well as encouraging every child to learn to read in their mother tongue are just two of the aims of The International Board on Books for Young People. Founded in Switzerland in 1953, the IBBY was created out of the belief that the world's children could be brought together through books.

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA 2012 BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNERS

Book of the Year: Older Readers

The Dead I Know, by **Scot Gardner**

Book of the Year: Younger Readers

Crow Country, by **Kate Constable**

Book of the Year: Early Childhood

The Runaway Hug, by **Nick Bland** and **Freya Blackwood**

Picture Book of the Year

A Bus Called Heaven, by **Bob Graham**

Eve Pownall Award for Information Books

One Small Island: The Story of Macquarie Island, by **Alison Lester** and **Coral Tulloch**

Crichton Award for New Illustrators

Ben & Duck, by **Sara Acton**

For the full list of winners, including Honour Books, visit cbca.org.au



ROLE MODELS Jan Nicholls.

It's little things that count



DIFFERENT VIEW An illustration from Ten Tiny Things by Kyle Hughes-Odgers, who teamed up with writer Meg McKinlay to create the book. Inset, the cover.

In Children's Book Week, **William Yeoman** hails Ten Tiny Things, the combined effort of a writer and a street artist

One day Meg and Creepy made a book. It was about two children who had to walk to school after their mother's car broke down. It was about other things, too. It whispered secrets about the world.

Yes, acclaimed children's author and poet Meg McKinlay has now collaborated with internationally recognised street artist and illustrator, Kyle Hughes-Odgers, aka Creepy. The result is Ten Tiny Things, a masterpiece of understated storytelling and retro design.

"I sent my manuscript to Fremantle Press," says McKinlay, whose other titles include Surface Tension, Duck for a Day, The Truth About Penguins, and No Bears.

"The children's book publisher there is very clever at finding good people who haven't illustrated books before.

She said, 'We're thinking of approaching this guy' and sent me a link to Kyle's website. I thought, 'Amazing'."

"Meg's story really resonated with me, just seeing the city or any environment in a creative way," Hughes-Odgers says. "I'd never done anything like this before and that really appealed to me, too."

He adds that hand-painting everything was important. "There's a lot of digitally produced children's books out there. I just love seeing handmade things. I treated this as an exhibition: planned it, laid it all out and just got stuck into it."

We're sitting in Hughes-Odgers' studio in The Ward, a former maternity hospital built in Leederville in 1913 and now an artists' studio complex. The morning sun sings through a single window, softly illuminating the book's original paintings hanging on the wall while imploring us to come outside and play.

But there's play enough in Hughes-Odgers' art, the eyes dancing over the desaturated colours and insect-like figures that clamber over patterned landscapes.

There's play enough too in the story, which originated in a real-life outdoor game.

"I grew up without a car in the family and if I

wanted to go somewhere I had to use slower modes of transport like walking or riding a bike," says McKinlay, who shares with Hughes-Odgers a slight distaste for modern technology.

"I probably appreciate those more consciously lived modes more now than I did then, and I wanted my daughter to appreciate them as well," she continues. "So we'd go out walking and one day we just started playing this game. We called it Things We Wouldn't Have Seen If We Had Been Driving."

McKinlay stresses that Ten Tiny Things isn't just a walk-to-school book. "It can be used in that way — that's an important message in itself — but I don't see it like that. I don't even see it as a walking book."

"I see it as a book whose key message is mindfulness, just being in a space and conscious of what's around you. I think that makes the book really versatile and I hope people will look under the literal story."

Hughes-Odgers agrees. "It's about slowing down and appreciating the little things," he says. "That's why it didn't speak to me as a super-bright book."

"I really liked that about Kyle's pictures," McKinlay says. "The world is beautiful in all its tones and you don't need bright colours for kids to wake up. This encourages them to see things in the world that aren't blaring away at them."

Which, she says, connects with her way of writing.

"People often say you need to hook the reader straight away, open with action, draw them in. Well, there are people who like to read quieter books, who like a slow burn. You don't need someone hanging off a cliff on the first page."

One day Meg and Creepy made a book. It whispered secrets about the world.



RETRO Perth author Meg McKinlay and Perth graffiti artist and illustrator Kyle Hughes-Odgers, aka Creepy.

Ten Tiny Things is published by Fremantle Press (\$24.99). See fremantlepress.com.au, megmckinlay.com and kylehughesodgers.com.

Words and pictures tell stories of talented WA duos

HEATHER ZUBEK

There are a number of really talented WA writers and illustrators producing great children's books. Many are introduced through publishers but fate also has a hand in bringing imaginative minds together.

Norman Jorgensen and James Foley met on a beach during a writers' retreat on Rottnest Island. Together they have produced the award-winning picture book, The Last Viking. And there's more to come.

The secret of their successful relationship is Jorgensen and Foley seeing a fellow 12-year-old in each other. "We have the same sense of humour," illustrator Foley says, "and we both love British comedies and often riff off the same pop culture references."

Writer Jorgensen was amazed at the computer-assisted illustrations Foley used and with the "way he set up our special blog and the brilliant job he did on the book trailer. He achieved all that while I



VIKING TALE Norman Jorgensen and James Foley with their award-winning book and Year 2 children from Tranby primary school.

was still working out how to remove the cap from my fountain pen."

Mutual respect and a solid friendship are the backbone of another talented pair,

Danny Parker and Matt Ottley. The writer and artist have produced No Kind of Superman and Tree, two picture books of subtle poetic elegance.



SUPER EFFORT Danny Parker and Matt Ottley have created two picture books.

"I think we share a desire to create work which is aesthetically pleasing, that offers children and adults the opportunity to open up about issues," Parker says



FAMILY AFFAIR Mark Greenwood and Frane Lessac talk about their ideas constantly.

"I see in Danny what I can remember feeling," Ottley adds. "That childlike excitement about creativity and new ideas."

Husband and wife team Mark Greenwood and Frane Lessac have created numerous award-winning children's books such as Simpson and His Donkey, The Greatest Liar on Earth and Ned Kelly and The Green Sash as well as a family.

"I admire Frane's naive style," writer Greenwood says. "We constantly talk about ideas, right from the beginning, so we can visualise an initial concept and then see it through to the finished book."

"Mark's compelling passion for his project is contagious," Lessac says. "When he pitches an idea for a book, I immediately visualise the paintings."

Greenwood adds: "We're lucky that we're able to share a passion for travel with our work while enjoying each other's company."

These creators continue to produce work as individuals but it's when they work closely with their creative soulmates, imagining and supporting each other's ideas, that they make WA a real force in children's literature.

SHELF LIFE

CHILDREN Big Yellow Digger

By **Julia Jarman**, illustrated by **Adrian Reynolds**
Orchard books, \$16.99

REVIEW **HEATHER ZUBEK**



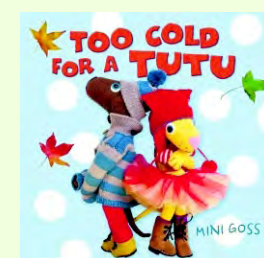
From the team who made young children's imaginations soar with a Big Red Bath and Big Blue Train comes another episode, this time in a Big Yellow Digger. Ben and Bella create a wild adventure turning an armchair

and boxes into a big yellow digger that digs, digs, digs its way right through to Australia (the book was written in the UK). All sorts of animals are collected along the way, even a dinosaur. With such wonderful use of language, rhyme and lively illustrations, the Big Yellow Digger is perfect to read to your little adventurer.

CHILDREN Too Cold for a Tutu

By **Mini Goss**
Allen & Unwin, \$19.99

REVIEW **HEATHER ZUBEK**



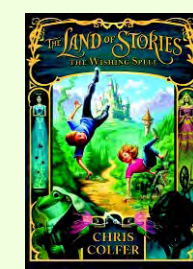
Author and artist Mini Goss loves to knit. She is knitting a life-sized elephant for the Melbourne Zoo's 150th Anniversary and she has knitted the illustrations for her picture book Too Cold for a Tutu. Stella and Barry are going

outside to play but it is so cold. What to wear? Stella wants to wear her tutu but we find there are so many wonderful ways to wear things if we just have the imagination. The illustrations are bright and fun, reminiscent of P.B. Bear, and the storyline is perfect for launching little ones on dress-up adventures of their own.

TWEEN The Land of Stories: The Wishing Spell

Chris Colfer
Hachette, \$24.99

REVIEW **JENNIFER PETERSON-WARD**



Actor Chris Colfer has channelled his fame from the hit musical show Glee into a unique new career as an author of novels aimed at the tween market. His first publication features 12-year-old twins who find themselves with an old storybook whose cover turns out to be a dimensional

gateway in the tradition of C.S. Lewis' passage to Narnia. The twins give new meaning to the idea of getting lost in a good book as they land in a kingdom where Goldilocks is an infamous outlaw and Red Riding Hood is a queen who'd rather pose for portraits in pretty dresses than run her kingdom. Great fun.

YOUNG ADULT The Forsaken

Lisa M. Stasse

Orchard Books, \$16.99

REVIEW **JENNIFER PETERSON-WARD**



The Forsaken is being mentioned in the same breath as The Hunger Games. They are both dystopian coming-of-age tales in which hunting is crucial, but Stasse's novel is more immediately plausible and closer to home. Set in the wake of a global economic crisis, it follows Alenna, a 16-year-old

orphan growing up in a police state formed from the ashes of the US, Mexico, and Canada. When Alenna fails a government-mandated test, she's sent to a remote island reserved for the criminally insane. Desperate to flee the dirty and violent conditions, she concocts a potentially fatal plan. Grim and thought-provoking.