



NATIONAL CENTRE for
**AUSTRALIAN
CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE**^{Inc}

BEHIND THE IMAGINED

I S S U E

06

2023

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Editor: Jane Carstens

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Behind the imagined: The Journal of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature is indexed in APAIS (Australian Public Affairs Information Service), ALISA (Australian Library and Information Science Abstracts) and in Children's Literature Abstracts (Austin TX 78757).

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Welcome from the Editor

The articles in this edition reflect the diversity of our Centre as a dynamic place where magic happens every week.

Our Centre launched a Database of Picture Books for Older Readers on July 1, and we are delighted to publish Dr Stephanie Owen Reeder's article about this latest milestone. We are also proud of the impact this resource has already had, and our second article gives a few snippets of what people have been saying about it.

We also welcomed two researchers for a week who examined another of our databases, this time the Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander resource. A Brisbane-based Spanish playgroup also formed a connection with us, and we were able to help them find Spanish translations of Australian children's books. We also expanded in other ways, and you will have to read our new snippets section to find out more.

Looking ahead, it's our 50th birthday next year and we are looking forward to having a party in March. Watch our website from January for more information!



And finally, our Centre has joined the blogging world. You can read our latest blogs and catch up on previous ones through our [website](#).

Enjoy!

Jane Carstens
Editor

A treasure trove of picture books for older readers

Dr Stephanie Owen Reeder



Dr Stephanie Owen Reeder

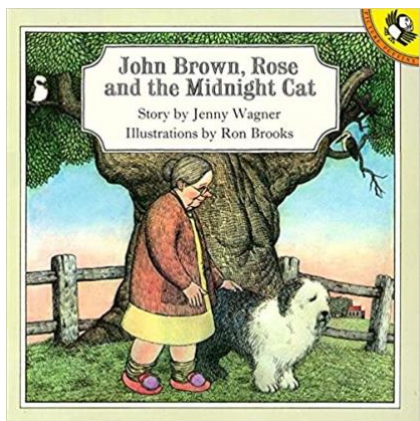
The National Centre for Australian Children’s Literature (NCACL), based at the University of Canberra, is a treasure trove of over 55,000 books many of these in translation, author and illustrator research files and creators’ papers, artworks, and so much more. The Centre’s Verse Novels Resource and their databases—which include Cultural Diversity and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples—are invaluable resources for anyone interested in Australian children’s literature.

NCACL’s latest database is Picture Books for Older Readers. It is designed to be used by teachers, librarians, parents, home schoolers, students in primary and secondary schools, students in tertiary institutions and researchers. Each entry in the database provides bibliographical information about the book, along with links to the Australian Curriculum Version 9, the suggested audience, a list of the subject areas covered, a comprehensive and insightful annotation written by an expert in the field, plus a list of free online teaching resources.

The picture books selected for the older readers database are more sophisticated than picture books for younger readers. They often integrate multiple narratives, deal with complex issues or emotions, and cover difficult topics such as death and dying, mental health, the effects of war, the treatment of refugees, and the state of our environment. Exploring such topics encourages in-depth conversations that can help shape children’s understanding of who they are and the world they inhabit.

Young people today are bombarded with visual messaging. With their sophisticated literary texts and sometimes highly complex visual cues, picture books for older readers can help students learn how to decode words and pictures, and to understand the ways in which these two language systems interact on the page or the screen. With their rich literary devices, intertextual references, and sophisticated and symbolic imagery, these picture books are also an excellent resource for encouraging students to experiment with complex language constructs and develop high-level visual literacy skills.

Almost 400 Picture Book for Older Readers books have been identified for this database, covering titles from the 1970s to the present. Some of these are yet to be added and new ones will continue to be published and considered for inclusion. While picture books were originally aimed at younger children, with simple rhyming texts and accompanying complementary narrative illustrations, more complex stories have been published in Australia since the 1970s.



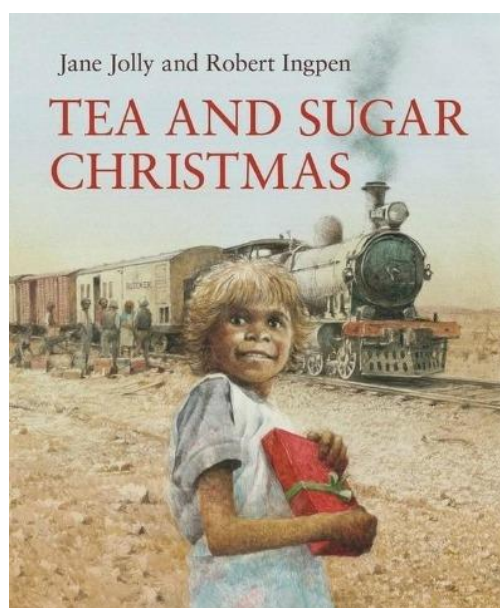
Two standout early examples are *John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat*, written by Jenny Wagner and illustrated by Ron Brooks, and *The Watertower*, written by Gary Crew and illustrated by Steven Woolman. In *John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat*, Wagner has crafted what at first glance is a simple but engaging story about an old lady, a dog and a cat. However, this book runs far deeper, as it also deals with jealousy, ageing and coming to terms with the death of a loved one. *The Watertower* is also a complex and multi-layered picture book. It is a

haunting gothic tale with sci-fi overtones that will appeal to those who enjoy speculative fiction.

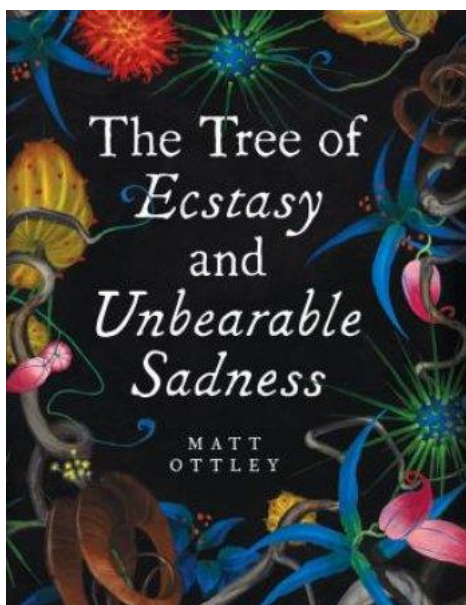
More recent titles such as *Where?* by Jordan Collins and Phil Lesnie take a more philosophical approach. This book was written originally as a slam poem by gifted teenager Collins. It explores the idea of 'other' through the question, 'Where do you come from?'—which is often asked of those whose appearance is perceived as differing from the 'norm'. Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins also dealt with this question in their 1987 title *My Place*, but their emphasis was on Australia's multicultural heritage and the important role played by our First Nations people. An Australian illustrator notable for his realistic art yet delivered with a romantic flair is Robert Ingpen. His many titles include

Tea and Sugar Christmas written by Jane Jolly and telling the story of the Tea and Sugar Train which travelled from Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie once a week, from 1915 to 1996 serving the settlements along the transcontinental railway and the Nullabor Plain.

The plight of refugees has also been an ongoing theme in picture books for older children. *The Little Refugee* by well-known celebrity, Anh Do and Bruce Whatley provides insights into Anh's experiences escaping from war-torn Vietnam as a young boy and then making the perilous trip by boat to a new life in Australia. The story of parents arriving in a new country and making sacrifices to ensure their children achieve is told in the moving and original *My Strange Shrinking Parents* by Zeno Swords.



War is another topic Australian authors confront, often with startling illustrations and texts that explore deep emotions. *My Dog* by John Heffernan and Andrew McLean explores how one small boy copes with life during the war in Bosnia. Mark Wilson specialises in researching real people involved in Australian conflicts. He harnesses his research skills to create accurate texts, often told from a first person perspective. These are then coupled with realistic illustrations from the time period. Among Wilson's books are stories of women nurses in World War 1 featured in *Rachel's War: The Story of an Australian WW1 Nurse* and soldiers as young as fifteen years in *My Mother's Eyes*.



Many other titles in this database also explore these topics, including Armin Greder's powerful and confronting exploration of the refugee experience in *The Island* and Margo Lanagan's *Tintinnabula*, with haunting artwork by Rovina Cai. Mental health is also a recurring theme in the challenging and thought-provoking books created by Matt Ottley, including *The Tree of Ecstasy and Unbearable Sadness* and *Requiem for a Beast*. He also illustrated *The Incredible Freedom Machines*, poetically written by Gunai woman Kirli Saunders.

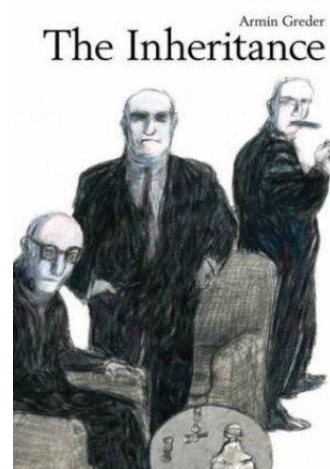
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues such as the Stolen Generation are also covered in this database through books such as *Took the Children Away* by the late Archie Roach and his wife Ruby Hunter, or *Sorry*

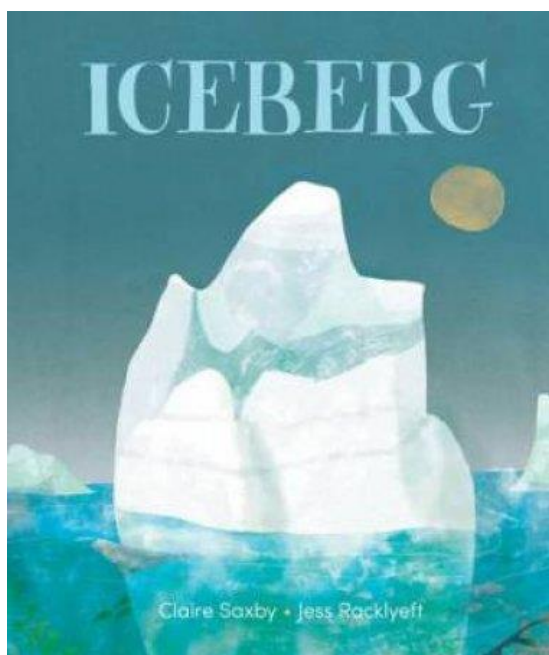
Day by Coral Vass and Dub Leffler. Such books can engender a range of meaningful and important conversations about the treatment of our First Nations people.

As well as covering a wide range of subject areas, many of the books in the database contain multiple layers of verbal and visual narrative. An example from the 1980s is *Drac and the Gremlin* by Allan Baillie and Jane Tanner, in which the text relates a high fantasy adventure while the illustrations show two young children playing in their overgrown backyard.

The 2020 title *How to Make a Bird* by Meg McKinlay and Matt Ottley takes a similar but more sophisticated approach. The sensory text is embedded with real-life information about the anatomy of birds, while Ottley's illustrations juxtapose technical diagrams with luminous landscapes that show a young girl exercising her vivid imagination. This is a book where philosophy meets reality, and an excellent example of how seemingly simple narratives can contain multiple layers of meaning. *How to Make a Bird* is also available as a multimodal experience combining music, art and words.

The Centre's Picture Books for Older Readers database also highlights multiple works by many doyens of Australian children's literature who have created complex books that deserve a close reading. These include Jeannie Baker's stunning collage creations with strong environmental themes, such as *Belonging* and *Where the Forest Meets the Sea*; the sophisticated artistry of Graeme Base in books such as *Animalia* and *Moonfish*; Gary Crew's darkly atmospheric titles such as *The Viewer*, illustrated by Shaun Tan; Jackie French and Bruce Whatley's atmospheric natural disaster series that includes *Flood* and *Fire*; and Armin Greder's starkly illustrated and thought-provoking books like *The Inheritance*.

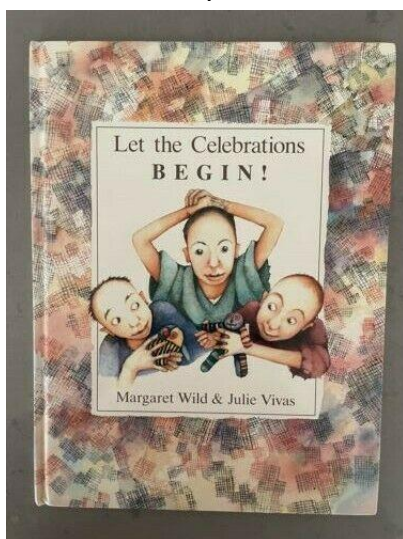




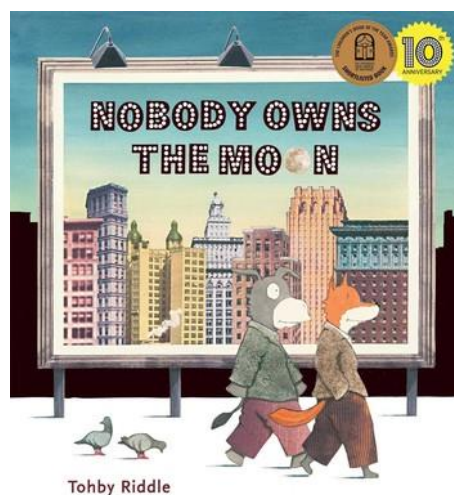
The database also features an array of authors and illustrators who tackle difficult subjects with great aplomb, allowing readers to walk in the shoes of others and encouraging them to have meaningful conversations about the world around them. These include books about homelessness like *Way Home* by Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers or Bruce Whatley's Ruben set in a stark and threatening dystopian world; Junko Morimoto's very personal and moving *My Hiroshima*; Narelle Oliver's detailed and textural linocut explorations of the natural world in *Fox and Fine Feathers* and *Home*; Claire Saxby and Jess Racklyeft's ode to the environment in *Iceberg*; and the exquisitely created and intellectually challenging books of Shaun Tan, including *The Arrival* and *Cicada*.

Picture book creator Tohby Riddle has also produced an impressive body of work that explores human existence in a unique and often humorous way in books such as *The Great Escape from City Zoo* and *Nobody Owns the Moon*.

The multi-award-winning author Margaret Wild has created a plethora of stunning picture books that cover everything from the environment in *The Dream of the Thylacine* which can be compared with Christina Booth's heart-felt story of the same animal in *One Careless Night*.



Margaret Wild explores complex relationships in *Fox*, coming to terms with the death of a loved one in *Jenny Angel* and *Old Pig*, or the holocaust in *Let the Celebrations Begin*.



This is just a taste of the smorgasbord of books for older readers laid out for your delectation in the Centre's latest comprehensive database of books for use in your home, school or library. This resource, which will be continuously updated, can be found at on our [website](#).

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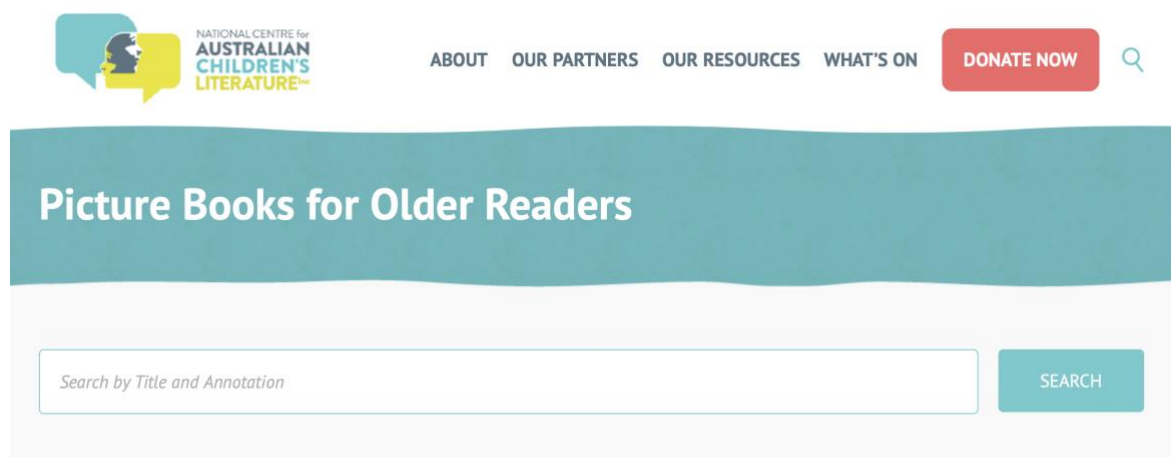
Wild, Margaret *Old Pig* illus Ron Brooks. Allen & Unwin, 1995

Wilson, Mark *My Mother's Eyes: the Story of a Boy Soldier* Lothian, 2009

Wilson, Mark *Rachel's War: the Story of an Australian WW1 Nurse* Lothian, 2021

What people have said about the PBOR database!

The PBOR database has received a lot of positive commentary since its launch in July this year. It's filled a gap for older readers and reinforced that picture books are not just for the very young. If that wasn't enough, it has also provided a useful tool for teaching and learning. Here are snippets of just some of the comments and reviews we have received (so far).



One of the best things about this database is that it is AUSTRALIAN! How many times have you searched for picture books on specific topics, only to discover (usually) American resources, which are not entirely relevant to the Australian context and/or are incredibly expensive to order. The NCACL are providing us with a fabulous and free (although donations are always welcome!) resource that you can be assured is relevant to our Australian context.

Anna Davidson, Junior Teacher Librarian, Hutchins School.

<https://cbcatas.blogspot.com/2023/08/reading-pictures-drawing-words-database.html>

With the enormous popularity of graphic novels, we know our students respond to illustrated books that do not present as a wall of daunting text, particularly in a world dominated by screens, so the perception that picture books are for very young children who are not yet reading independently is, thankfully, disappearing and the power of the picture book to explore and explain difficult concepts, especially those that are not the common lived experience, is being acknowledged for what it is.

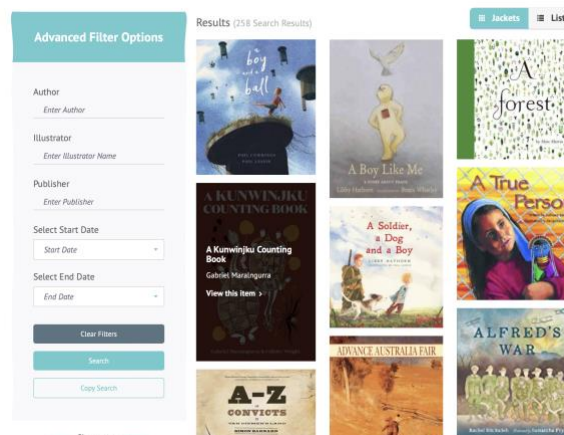
Barbara Braxton, Teacher Librarian, The Bottom Shelf.

<https://thebottomshelf.edublogs.org/2023/07/03/picture-books-for-older-readers/>

For Parents, Teachers, Librarians, Caregivers; for anyone young or old who is searching for picture books THIS is the database to access. Containing publishing details with links to the Australian Curriculum, as well as subject guides, and annotations, this thoughtfully combined, and continually expanding database demonstrates that picture books are for everyone!

**Christopher Cheng, Author, Co-chair SCBWI International Advisory Council Ambassador
National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc.**

... the themes are more nuanced than a general picture book database, so the books in the database might be longer, or deal with issues that are easier to explain to older children – issues and topics that older children might want to know more about, and if these topics are part of the curriculum, then these picture books aimed at older readers can introduce children in safe, accessible, and educational ways without talking down to them or having a dry presentation that might be present in text books.



Ashleigh Meikle, The Book Muse.

<https://ashleighmeikle.com.au/2023/07/13/ncacl-picture-books-for-older-readers-reading-pictures-drawing-words-a-database-of-picture-books-for-older-readers/>

This is a brilliant database, that is not only incredibly useful for educators, but can be accessed by parents and other individuals interested in picture books that cover a wide spectrum of issues, ranging from wars, to First Nations Peoples' stories, the experience of refugees, navigating death and loss, finding courage and facing fear, finding friendship and holding hope, understanding mental health and wellbeing, exploring issues pertaining to the environment, seeking the joy in life, and so much more.

Dr Helen Edwards, Author.

<https://www.helenedwardswrites.com/reading-pictures-drawing-words-database-of-picture-books-for-older-readers/>

The books selected are more sophisticated in their use of literary techniques and in the way visual imagery is presented and integrates with the text. Many deal with complex issues or emotions. Every title has bibliographic information, recommended age levels, extensive subject headings, an annotation providing information about the book, Australian Curriculum (Version 9) links and a list of additional resources to expand the book and its subject matter.

Mia McCrossin, Story Links.

<https://storylinks.booklinks.org.au/2023/07/01/reading-pictures-drawing-words-a-database-of-picture-books-for-older-readers/>

You can read more reviews on our [website!](#)

Researchers make good use of our resources

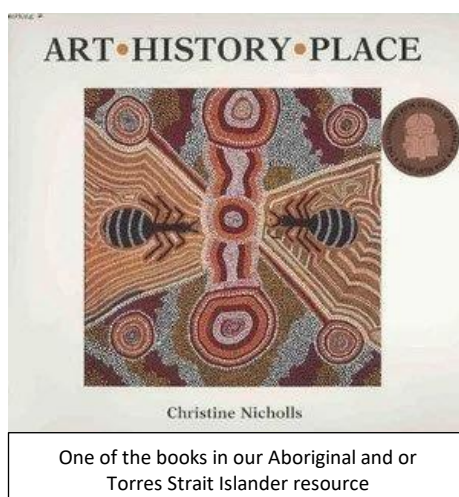


Dr Helen Adam and Dr Libby Jackson-Barrett making good use of our resources

Our centre is a dynamic place with world-leading resources, so we were delighted to welcome Dr Helen Adam and Dr Libby Jackson-Barrett from Edith Cowan University for a week in October. They were studying all of the 560 plus books in our Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander resource for a project focussing on the dualistic role of children's literature in both perpetuating historical wrongs and promoting positive understanding of the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

Dr Libby Jackson-Barrett is Associate Dean, Senior Researcher for Kurongkurl Katitjin, Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research and the School of Education at Edith Cowan University. As an interdisciplinary scholar, Libby's research interests and teachings include exploring factors that promote students understanding of Country with a particular interest in culturally responsive pedagogy in Initial Teacher Education.

Dr Helen Adam is Course Coordinator for the Master of Teaching (Primary) in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University. Helen believes to achieve equitable outcomes we need to challenge systemic inequities and support educators as they work for better futures for young Australians. Helen advocates for research to investigate culturally responsive use of authentically diverse and inclusive literature as one vehicle to break down barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding and contribute to equitable outcomes.



One of the books in our Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander resource



Brisbane Spanish playgroup offers to help

Our Centre received an email from the Group Facilitator of a Babies and Toddlers Spanish Playgroup in Brisbane. She wanted to learn more about what we do and how their Spanish Playgroup could help with our mission. The facilitator said that their group of babies, toddlers and families meet every Friday where they read, sing, play and talk in Spanish. She asked if there might be a way our organisations could partner with them! They also wanted to read Australian books in Spanish to their Spanish/Australian babies and toddlers.



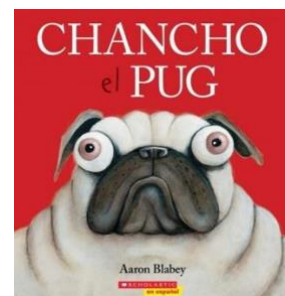
“Are their such books?” she asked.



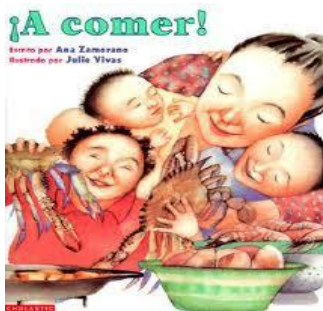
“Everyone at our Centre was thrilled to be discovered by this Brisbane group,” said Belle Alderman AM, Emeritus Professor of Children's Literature and Director of NCACL.

“We wondered how we might help. The challenge was that our Centre is not a lending library, so we couldn't loan our books. We might have found Spanish speaking folk in Canberra to read some of our picture books in Spanish to this group, but Brisbane was a bit too far away for such a visit!”

Emeritus Professor Alderman said she knew NCACL had many Spanish language translations in Australian children's books in its collection.



“We begin tossing around titles and creators that would be wonderful to share with this group when we had an idea,” she said.

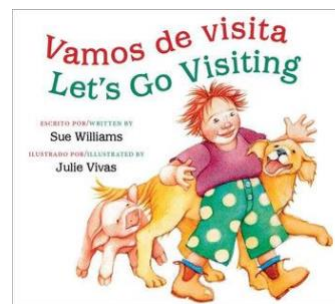


“We promptly emailed this group and told them we could send them an annotated list of 10 Australian children's books we think might be highly enjoyable based on the group's favourite books and stories. ‘Perhaps a few of them would be available in your public library for you to share?’, we suggested.”

To our delight, the Group Facilitator promptly responded that this would be a great idea.

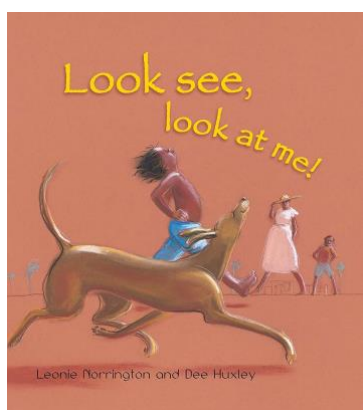
“What a challenge! We picked our books, annotated them, added jacket covers and emailed our list of 10 Spanish books by Aussie creators we thought they might like. Will they be able to find the books in Brisbane? Will the kids like them? Which ones will be their favourites? Might they be available to purchase? Who knows? We will keep you posted on what happens,” said Emeritus Professor Alderman.

Meanwhile, here’s a [link](#) to the bibliography we sent them with our annotations and jacket covers. Disfrutar (enjoy)!



Snippets of other things we did this year ...

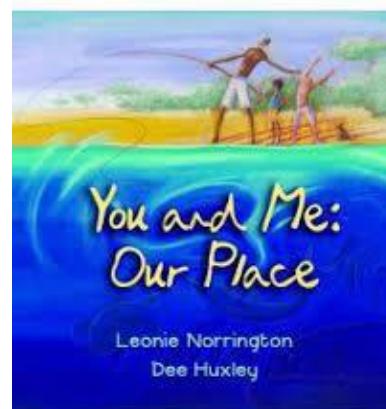
New venture for the Centre—an online teaching resource: Collaborations between Leonie Norrington and Dee Huxley



The Australian Children’s Television Foundation approached our Centre last year to ask whether we might be interested in promoting a television series under production by the NITV. Late last year, NITV screened a 10-part television series based on Leonie Norrington’s three children’s novels in the ‘Barrumbi Kids’ series for upper primary school aged children. The Centre features these novels in their Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples database. We also hold the artwork created by Dee Huxley for Leonie Norrington’s two picture books, *Look See, Look at Me!* and *You and Me Our Place*. Both picture books are set in Northern Territory

Aboriginal communities. We created picture galleries of the artwork and Rowan Simpkin, a Centre volunteer, created the teaching resources available from our [website](#). We also benefitted from an excellent work placement student, Sally Allen, who was completing her Masters of Teacher Librarianship at Charles Sturt University. Sally Allen provided expert advice and assisted with the development of these teaching resources.

Permissions were sought from the creators and their publishers to reproduce the artwork on the Centre’s website. So, another new venture for us!



Our Centre is involved in a nation-wide symposium, #We All Like a Good Story. We, along with a dozen other organisations, are presenting our involvement in children’s stories. The Symposium is organised by the Foundation for Learning and Literacy, based at the University of Sydney. The Centre produced an introductory set of slides and talk about the Centre late last year. This year we presented on ‘Visual Literacy’ featured in our Picture Book for Older Readers database. Here’s the [link](#) to our 14-minute presentation entitled *Picture Books for Older Readers: Exploring Visual Literacy*.

We are turning 50!



Lu Rees, who started our collection in 1974

The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature (formerly the Lu Rees Archives) is celebrating its 50th birthday in 2024.

Mark the week of 11-15 March 2024 in your diary to help us celebrate. We are planning:

- A gala opening on March 12 where we will be displaying our treasures. We will also have some special guests present.
- An evening for University of Canberra alumni.
- Openings during the week for the community.
- Chats by Centre volunteers featuring their favourite items.

We have started a [birthday page](#) on our website so keep checking back from late January for updates.

Donations to the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc are tax deductible. Since the early 1990s, the Centre (formerly the Lu Rees Archives) has been endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office as a deductible gift recipient under Subdivision 30-BA of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997, item in Subdivision 30-B, 12.1.2 public library.

Under this program, the Archives has received the papers, manuscripts and artwork of many leading Australian authors, illustrators and publishers.

Enquiries about this program should be directed to:

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A guide to donating to the Centre is available on our [website](#).

Endorsement as a deductible gift recipient means that the Centre is eligible to receive monetary donations of two dollars or more. Donors are able to claim these donations on their income tax returns.

