



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

Australian Verse Novels for Young Adults

An annotated bibliography
including themes, readership,
awards and additional
resources.

May 2025

Australian Verse Novel Resource

The Australian Verse Novels Resource offers an insight into verse novels for children and young adults. As well as an extensive listing of verse novel titles: each title's entry provides an annotation, themes, relevant awards, curriculum links and listings of additional resources. The Resource is intended to help educators, librarians, readers and academics identify and explore verse novels

Verse novels (also called novels in verse) are extended narratives usually told in free verse. Some verse novels are made up of short, individual poems. Others are longer, chapter-length poems. Always, the poems work to tell a story and, as such, the verse novel is a narrative rather than a collection of stand-alone poems.

Verse novels often explore emotive issues, cutting to the heart and soul of an issue with few words. They provide the reader with a subtle yet clear access to the story in age-appropriate ways, often including humour or the use of multiple viewpoints.

Because of their poetic techniques, narrative structure and white space, verse novels are accessible to readers of all abilities. They are suited to both classroom and individual reading for enjoyment, and their readership is therefore determined more by the book's theme and content, than by readability. The Australian Verse Novels Resource aims to assist readers of all ages to discover this diverse genre.

Verse novelist Sherryl Clark's has kindly given permission to link to her paper *How to Read a Verse Novel*

<https://poetry4kids.net/how-to-read-a-verse-novel/>

Children's Literature blogger and reviewer, Ashleigh Meikle has written a comprehensive blog on Verse Novels with particular reference to the NCACL Verse Novel Resource and kindly given permission to provide a link to her paper.

<https://ashleighmeikle.com.au/2023/06/07/ncacl-australian-verse-novels/>

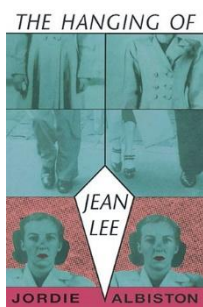
The link below provides brief bibliographic details of books in the Australian Verse Novels Resource

<https://ncacl.org.au/resources/bibliographies/australian-verse-novels-resource>

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CURRICULUM CODES

Curriculum Code Version 8.4 has been superseded and has been removed from the Verse Novel Resource entries.



The Hanging of Jean Lee

ALBISTON, Jordie

The hanging of Jean Lee. Black Pepper, 1998. ISBN: 9781876044251

Jean Lee was the last woman hanged in Australia, in 1951, for her part in a murder. This story traces her life from a child through to her hanging, using individual poems. Some are written from the third person, others from Lee's perspective, and one each from her mother and the executioner, using a variety of poetic

techniques, including found poems drawn from headlines and reporting. Making use of facts drawn largely from historical documents, including newspaper reportage, the novel is also broken into parts mirroring newspaper sections: Personal Pages, Entertainment Section, Crime Supplement and Death Notices, and, while it does away with author notes on the event, it is prefaced by a chronology of Lee's life.

The novel offers an insight into the mind of a murderer, without glossing over the brutality of the crime, and makes deft use of the poetic form. The book has also been adapted into a music theatre version, with the 30 poems set to music.

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Capital punishment, Crime, History, Language, Literary techniques, Memories, Murder, Religion

Additional resources:

[Samples from book and several reviews available from the publisher's website](#)

[Australian Music Centre, purchase page for the musical score and CD, including sample](#)

[Axon 'Beyond Facts and Accuracies: Long Form Poetry as Biographical Method' by Jessica L Wilkinson 2014](#)



In Hades

ALEXANDER, Goldie

In Hades. Celapene Press, 2014. ISBN: : 9780975074268

Seventeen-year-old Kai lives on the streets. One night his 12-year-old autistic brother, Rod, comes looking for him. They steal a car, crash, and both are killed—dramatically told in the brief opening verse. Desperately searching for

Rod, Kai finds himself in a strange world populated by mystical characters and creatures, very like those his late Greek grandmother had described to him in her stories.

Along the way Kai meets Bilby G, a dead anorexic girl, and they encounter an Old Man in a chapter entitled 'Old Blind Git,' a character strongly suggestive of the blind prophet, Tiresius in *The Odyssey*, who not only provides Odysseus with information but also a reason to continue on his journey in the Underworld. From the Old Man, Kai and Billy G learn that they are in Hades,

the Isle of the Dead ‘where anything can happen’ and that to be at peace they must seek forgiveness.

In Hades is magic realism and is loosely based on Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*. It brings together aspects of modern life and intertwines them with ancient stories where monsters threaten not just the hero’s journey but their very existence.

The book is made up of 49 separate poems, each with its own voice, structure and shape which trace the hero’s, in this case Kai and Billy G’s journey. The book operates on several levels, presenting a variety of approaches to study the text. It is an interesting option for introducing poetry.

Awards:

2014 *shortlisted* Aurealis Awards for Excellence in Australian Speculative Fiction - Young Adult Division - Best Short Story

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Death, Eating disorders, Family relationships, Forgiveness, Literary techniques, Siblings

Additional resources:

[Teacher’s notes written by the author, Goldie Alexander](#)

[Goldie Alexander’s website with several reviews of *In Hades*](#)

[Chris Mackie ‘Guide to the Classics: Homer’s *Odyssey*’ The Conversation 5 September 2017](#)



A Dangerous Girl

BATESON, Catherine

A dangerous girl. University of Queensland Press, 2000. ISBN: 9780702231681

Merri is delighted when the new girl, Leigh, befriends her. Leigh is beautiful and confident, and makes Merri feel confident too. Perhaps she’ll even develop the confidence to tell Nick how she feels about him.

Merri’s brother John, meanwhile, is struggling with figuring out where his life is heading. He plays Dungeons and Dragons, loves cooking, and dreams of building a boat. When Merri introduces him to Leigh, his dreams change—all he wants is life with Leigh.

While Merri and John love having Leigh in their lives, Nick is unsure. He doesn’t trust her with his best friend or his girlfriend.

The book explores friendships, identity and relationships, both romantic and familial, using the voices of all four characters and a variety of forms

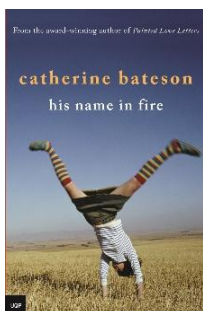
Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Adolescence, Friendship, Games, Identity, Interpersonal relationships, Siblings

Additional resources:

[Catherine Bateson Biography – Sidelights](#)

[Allen & Unwin Book Publisher author profile for Catherine Bateson](#)



His Name is Fire

BATESON, Catherine

His name in fire. University of Queensland Press, 2006. ISBN: 9780702234788

Three points of view are explored in this story set in a small country town. Youths here have few employment opportunities and the adults likewise. Their lives are complicated by drought and poverty. Molly, a circus worker, is employed to bring the town's youth together by creating a community circus, a work for the dole project. Matthew is a teenager deeply in love with Emma, the snake man's daughter. Each circus member has a life story, told through their individual voices. Molly writes to her lost lover Seb, providing insight into her character. Other members of the circus likewise reveal their life struggles. Particularly interesting are the song lyrics by Matthew's father TJ for his band 'TJ and the Runners.' These provide another portrayal of life.

Rather like a kaleidoscope, each person's story, some in verse, others in free verse, offer different perspectives on how they face their trials and insecurities while pursuing their dreams and aspirations. The novel moves at a leisurely pace, perhaps reflecting the town itself, then gains momentum when the circus rehearsals begin. The circus performance finale gives several characters a sense of achievement and also a sense of satisfaction for the reader.

Awards:

2007 *notable* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Older Readers

2007 *shortlist* Queensland Premier's Award

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Circuses, Interpersonal relationships, Music, Performance, Resilience, Rural life, Self-esteem

Additional resources:

[‘Inside Me, My Voice Struggles to Get Out: Voice in Catherine Bateson’s verse novel, His Name in Fire’ by Rhiannan Hall. Axon: Creative Explorations, Vol 10, No 1, May 2020](#)

[University of Queensland Press Teacher's Notes written by Catherine Bateson](#)

[Bateson, Catherine \('CattyRox'\) 'Verse Novels,' 25 June 2012 and Missing...PDA...Missing poems...Missing time....Missing photos 20 June 2005](#)

[Emerging Scholars and New Voices: Subcategories Within the Emerging Genre of the Verse Novel by Vikki Van Sickle in The Looking Glass, vol 10, no 3, 2 September 2006](#)



The Year it all Happened

BATESON, Catherine

The year it all happened. University of Queensland Press, 2001. ISBN: 9780702232299

Sad that her friendship with Leigh is over and her much loved brother John has moved away, Merri is at least happy that she still has her boyfriend Nick and has been accepted at university to study costume design. Her first year at university will be exciting, following her passions. Leigh too is preparing for her first year at university but misses the friendship she had with Merri. Off in Daylesford, John is slowly piecing his life back together, working out what he will do there and what it is that he really wants from life.

When Merri realises, she is pregnant, she doesn't know how she will cope, but she does know she wants to keep the baby. Nick tries to be supportive, but he has to face the painful scars his own father's cruelty left on him.

A sequel to *A Dangerous Girl*, following a turbulent, eventful year in the four lives, this book also works as a stand-alone.

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Adolescence, Family, Friendship, Identity, Interpersonal relationships, Pregnancy, Siblings, University study

Additional resources:

[Catherine Bateson \(1960-\) Biography includes brief biographical details, bibliography and awards](#)

[University of Queensland Press biographical profile of Catherine Bateson](#)

[StoryLinks 'Verse Novels for Younger Readers' includes Bateson's novels plus other Australian and overseas authors](#)



Little Bones

BIGNA, Sandy. Illustrated by Tamlyn Teow

Little Bones. University of Queensland Press, 2025. ISBN: 9780702268878

At an age where her peers are interested in friendship bracelets, fashion and matching everything, eleven-year-old 'Bones' prefers to spend her time collecting dead things and drawing animal skeletons. As far as she is concerned, there is beauty and intrigue in her growing collection, and this surpasses her need for friendship. But then Tenny moves into the empty unit in the apartment complex Bones calls home with her Nonna. They are also a little bit different and won't take no for an answer when it comes to bonding with Bones over a shared passion for 'odd' hobbies. As it turns out, Tenny's timing is perfect because Bones has somehow managed to bring a bird skeleton back to life and must now find a reversing spell to return it to its dead state.

Tenny is fully prepared to help Bones locate this spell and enact it. The problem is to do this requires Bones to return to the forest – a place she hasn't visited since her younger brother Nico's death. Tamlyn Teow's pencil sketches are nestled throughout the pages, representing the items in Bones' collection and adding to the haunting and magical atmosphere of the story. They speak to the illustrator's personal love of the detail in fungi, animals and other small objects – one shared by Bones.

A beautifully lyrical verse novel, this story, its themes and characters are a little outside the box in a very refreshing way that speaks to the sensibilities and maturity of its audience.

Readership: Upper Primary, Lower Secondary

Themes: Accidents, Animals, Art, Birds, Creativity, Death, Empathy, Emotions, Family relationships, Friendship, Grandparents, Grief, Kindness, Magic Self-confidence, Siblings, Taxidermy

Additional resources:

[University of Queensland Press. Teaching Notes by Christine Wheeler for 'Little Bones' by Sandy Bigna](#)

[UQP Books' Little Bones' by Sandy Bigna](#)

[Story Links 2 March 2025 Mla Macrossan reviews 'Little Bones' by Sandy Bigna](#)

[ReadPlus 4 March 2025 Carolyn Hull reviews 'Little Bones' by Sandy Bigna](#)

[The Book Muse.4 March 2025. Ashliegh Meickle reviews 'Little Bones' by Sandy Bigna](#)

[Reading Time 12 March 2025 Review by Suzanne Ingelbrecht of 'Little Bones' by Sandy Bigna.](#)



Picnic at Mount Disappointment

BRUCE, Melissa

Picnic at Mount Disappointment. Ginninderra Press, 2017. ISBN: 9781760413033

After the divorce of their parents, 15-year-old Lucinda (Lucy) and her younger brother, Pip, are torn from their Toorak home and private schools to live on a farm at rural Wandong with their new stepfamily. Wandong hosts the second

largest truck and country music festival in the southern hemisphere ... and nothing else.

Lucy's first-person narration is a great insight into the many challenges she has adjusting to this new life. Lucy is feisty, an independent spirit who at first seems unsuited to rural life and particularly to her new rural high school. She misses her Mum who lives overseas, so we are told, in some tropical paradise, and her doctor father who works in Melbourne during the week. He is only home on weekends and, as time passes, not always home then, something that doesn't improve her relationship with her stepmother.

Slowly she comes to terms with her new life, making a good friend, Jess, and discovering horses, boys and sex, in that order, but not without causing more hurdles and confusion in her already

stressed life. While she does manage to pass her HSC (just), Lucy's long-held dream is to get a place at acting school; but is this an achievable goal or just a misdirected career aspiration?

Awards:

2018 *highly commended* Society of Women Writers NSW — Fiction

2017 *winner* The Woollahra Digital Literary Award — Fiction

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

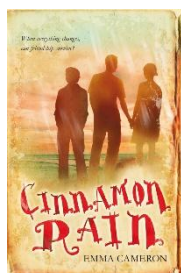
Themes: Divorce, Family relationships, Friendship, Interpersonal relationships, Moving, Performance, Rural life, School, Siblings

Additional resources:

[Melissa Bruce author's website includes awards, commentary and synopsis of novel](#)

[Wandong Victoria – setting of the novel](#)

['Picnic at Mount Disappointment' by Melissa Bruce – Book Launch, 22 May 2017](#)



Cinnamon Rain

CAMERON, Emma

Cinnamon Rain. Walker Books, 2012. ISBN: 9781921720451

Luke is drifting through the final years of high school, unsure of where he's heading. He works at the local supermarket to save up money but doesn't really know what he wants to do after school. The only thing he is sure of is his feelings for Casey. His mate Bongo is drifting too, but in a different way. He's often drifting in a dope-filled haze as he struggles to see a way forward. He has a violent stepdad and an addicted mother, as well as a little brother who's been taken away by welfare, meaning Bongo hardly gets to see him. He likes Casey too but isn't sure he has anything to offer her. Casey, meanwhile, is stuck, unsure what she wants but pretty sure of what she doesn't want: to be in this town, being told everything she can and can't do by her controlling father. She wants to move on and be free, and neither boy can have a place in those plans.

The story is told from first person viewpoint of each of the three characters in turn – so that we first hear from Luke, then Casey and finally Bongo. While in places the story overlaps so that we get two versions of the same event, the result is cumulative rather than repetitive, and the timelines of each narrative stretch differently so that we come in and leave at different times, meaning that in each section we get more of the total story, with the three stories, and characters, coming together in the final pages. This differs from the more common use of alternating viewpoints in multi-viewpoint novels and is effective.

Dealing with a range of issues, the novel uses the verse form to deftly weave together the different elements.

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Drugs, Domestic violence, Dysfunctional families, Friendship, Homelessness, Identity, Kindness, Loneliness, Love, Pregnancy, Resilience, Runaways

Additional resources:

[Walker Books Classroom Ideas Cinnamon Rain](#)

[Horn Book Magazine 'The Sand in the Oyster Vetting the Verse Novel' by Patty Campbell, Sept/Oct 2004](#)

[Review of Cinnamon Rain reviewed by Anastasia Gonis in Buzz Words Books 19 April 2012](#)



Runaways

CLARK, Sherryl

Runaways. Puffin Books, 2013. ISBN: 9780143307150

Cassie and her brother Jack are very close, partly because their mother finds dealing with hyperactive and emotionally troubled Jack difficult and partly because their father has left. Mum refers to Jack as 'stupid, brainless, and bane of my life' and brings Jack's father in as respite. Jack and his father leave for faraway Perth, but that relationship has problems too. Jack runs away, calls Cassie and they meet up in Adelaide. An estranged grandad enters this troubled family, and a semblance of a more satisfying life, at least for a while, seems possible.

The relentless pace, the seething anger and lack of future prospects make this novel challenging to read, while the resilience of the two youths is admirable. Cassie's and Jack's perspectives alternate throughout, their dialogue and thoughts reflected through words and the shapes these make on the page. Changes in fonts and small iconic illustrations reflect the current emotional state of the characters. The finale has a sense of moving ahead for a while with sympathetic Grandad.

Readership: Upper primary, Lower secondary

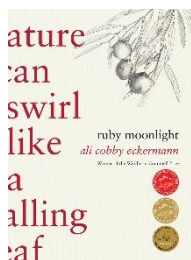
Themes: Bush fires, Emotions, Family relationships, Kindness, Grandparents, Runaways, Siblings, Travel

Additional resources:

[Sherryl Clark, 'Teacher's Notes: How to Read a Verse Novel' by Sherry; Clark, n.d](#)

[Kids' Book Review review of Runaways by Sherryl Clarke, 27 March 2013](#)

[Alpha reader, Danielle Binks reviews Runaways by Sherryl Clark 1 May 2013](#)



Ruby Moonlight

COBBY ECKERMANN, Ali

Ruby Moonlight: a novel of the impact of colonisation in mid-north South Australia around 1880. Magabala Books, 2012. ISBN: 9781921248511

Ruby Moonlight opens in 1880 in a bush area in South Australia. An Aboriginal group goes about their daily lives when suddenly they are set upon and massacred. Only a 16-year-old girl, later known as Ruby Moonlight, survives. She is clearly traumatised. The succinct poetic form captures her emotions and reactions as well as her connection with the environment and her culture. She comes across Miner Jack, an Irishman, who lives alone, collecting and selling animal pelts for a living. Although lacking language to communicate, the two soon live and love together, giving each other comfort. An Aboriginal tracker is attracted to Ruby Moonlight, creating further tragedy.

Readers are immersed in a haunting tragedy that is revealed in lyrical language and deeply felt emotion through a third-person present tense point of view. To capture the full intent of this novel a few reads are ideal and reading it aloud offers greater understanding. Readers will gain a deeper understanding of this tragic time and will be rewarded by learning about the author's own life experiences.

Ali Cobby Eckermann is an Australian poet of Aboriginal Australian ancestry. She is a Yankunytjatjara / Kokatha woman born on Kurna land in South Australia.

Awards:

2014 *shortlisted* Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature — John Bray Poetry Award

2013 *winner* New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards — Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry

2013 *winner* New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards — Book of the Year

2012 *joint recipient* black&write! Indigenous Writing Fellowships

2012 *winner* Deadly Sounds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music, Sport, Entertainment and Community Awards — Outstanding Achievement in Literature

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Cultural traditions, Death, Emotions, First Nations people, Grief, History, Interpersonal relationships, Literary techniques, Loneliness, Massacres, Racism

Additional resources:

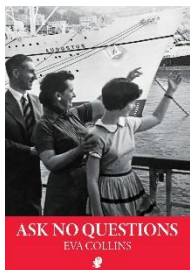
[Magabala Books Teacher Notes by Christina Wheeler for Ruby Moonlight by Ali Cobby Eckermann](#)

[Copyright Agency, Reading Australia, guide to Ruby Moonlight by Ali Cobby Eckermann](#)

[Indigenous poet Ali Cobby Eckermann turns life of pain into poetry success' 11 July 2017](#)

['About Ali Cobby Eckermann,' author talks about her experiences with poetry, YouTube Red Room](#)

[Poetry 22 May 2108](#)



Ask No Questions

COLLINS, Eva

Ask No Questions (a migrants tale). Puncher & Wattan, 2022. ISBN: 9781922571342

Leaving the only life you know and love to move to the other side of the world is difficult for most people even more so when you are not allowed to ask why?

Eva Collins tells the story of her family's move from Communist Poland to Melbourne in the late 1950s. Eva was twelve when they moved, and her tale is from inside that young girl who is confused and heartbroken at leaving.

The simple blank verse is restrained, and spare which Collins describes as mirroring 'the caution and fear my parents felt living under a surveillance regime and amid anti-Semitism.' We learn of her mother's sadness and depression, her father's work in Melbourne unrelated to his former career and Eva's bullying at school and the relentless heat.

While there is pathos, there is also humour such as when she discovers her father is Jewish or accidentally dancing wildly to Israel's national anthem. Many of Eva's experiences are explored through the senses, both visceral and sensual, such as the aroma of cheesecake and bagels in Poland but later the smell of trees and foods in Australia.

She visits Poland in the 1960s, which she loves, but finds herself torn between an old life that is different and the life she has grown into. As is often found, it is impossible to go back and much of the story is built around nostalgia and the tension between the old and the new.

'Ask no question' tells a story familiar to many migrants, of cultural confusion and missing the comforts and familiarity of 'home.'

Awards:

2023 CBCA Book of the Year Older Readers – Shortlisted

Readership: Lower Secondary, Upper Secondary

Themes: Acceptance, Adolescence, Bullying, Childhood, Cultural traditions, Depression, Emotions, Families, Friendship, History, Humour, Identity, Loneliness, Migration, Social life and customs

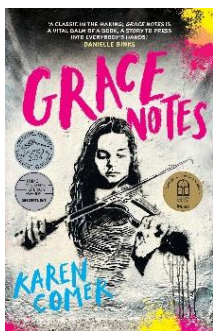
Additional resources:

[ABC Conversations. 1 December 2022 'Eva's arrested development' Conversations with Eva Collins 'Ask No Questions'](#)

[Compulsive Reader 17 December 2022. Magdalena Ball reviews 'Ask No Questions' by Eva Collins](#)

[Australian Institute of Polish Affairs. 19 July 2022. Book launch 'Ask No Questions' by Eva Collins](#)

[SBS Podcast 10 July 2022 Dariusz Buchowiecki interviews Eva Collins about the book 'Ask No Questions'. \(In Polish\)](#)



Grace Notes

COMER, Karen

Grace Notes. Lothian, 2023. ISBN: 9780734421722

Grace Notes is set in Melbourne during COVID lockdown times. We view life through the viewpoints of teenagers Grace, an accomplished and aspiring violinist and Crux, an equally talented street artist. Both struggle with their parents who have different aspirations for their children. There are very realistic confrontations within these families along with resolutions that demonstrate compromises can be made.

At times, the novel is punctuated by stark statistical COVID reports and people's responses to them. These 'Corona chorus' pages interrupt the lives of all living in Melbourne. Readers will feel the direct impact on young people especially. Our two adolescents find each other and develop a deep affinity. They take comfort in each other's aspirations in the arts, another parallel to the real-life atmosphere where the arts suffered during COVID.

Throughout the novel, social media messages intrude on their lives but also keep these young people communicating with each other. There are some adjacent, but important, plots featuring humanity at its bleakest including domestic violence and the isolation and death of Grace's grandmother in aged care. These disturb the main story, which is about these youths, but also demonstrate the impact of COVID on every aspect of their lives. The characters and the setting are unforgettable.

Awards:

2024 shortlisted [New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards — UTS Glenda Adams Award for New Writing](#)

2024 shortlisted [New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards — Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's Literature](#)

2024 Winner [CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Older Readers](#)

Readership: Lower Secondary, Upper Secondary

Themes: Acceptance, Adolescence, Ambition, Empathy, Family relationships, Friendship, Grief, Kindness, Loneliness, Resilience, Sadness, School, Self-esteem, Siblings, Teachers, Violence

Additional resources:

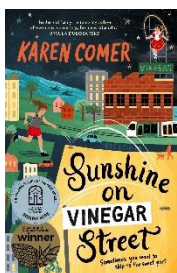
[Karen Comer - Teacher notes for 'Grace Notes'](#)

[Karen Comer website with an autobiographical note](#)

[Hachette Teachers Resources by Ernest Price for 'Grace Notes'](#)

[ReadPlus review 1 Feb 2023 by Helen Eddy of 'Grace Notes'](#)

[Kids' Book Review 7 Feb 2023 '12 Curly Questions with author Karen Comer'](#)



Sunshine on Vinegar Street

COMER, Karen

Sunshine on Vinegar Street. Allen & Unwin, 2023. ISBN: 9781761180312

Freya is 12 years old, and it's not the best time to experience major life changes.

These include her mum and dad now living in separate places—mum in the inner-city Melbourne suburb of Abbotsford and dad in Broome for the next 18 months. Plus, Freya is leaving her two best friends and moving into a 14th floor apartment, which presents a big challenge because she's afraid of lifts. Then there is her drive to be the best basketball player on a new team, where there's stiff competition. She's also an IVF baby and that challenges others' views.

Sunshine on Vinegar Street, runs a relentless gamut of emotions including anger, fear and frustration, but there is 'sunshine' too as Freya is determined and resilient. Others eventually welcome Freya while we as readers, experience her trials and triumphs. There is a steady revelation of Freya's emotional highs and lows expertly reflected in this book's line spacing, page layout and chat messages which reflect the story's action and each character's feelings.

Awards:

Notable Book, Book of the Year: Younger Readers, CBCA Awards, 2024

Longlisted, Best Designed Children's/Young Adult Cover, Australian Book Design Awards, 2024

Readership: Upper primary, Lower secondary

Themes: Acceptance, Bullying, Empathy, Family relationships, Fathers, Friendship, Games, Interpersonal relationships, Kindness, Literary techniques, Mothers, Moving, Resilience, Self-esteem, Sports

Additional resources:

[Allen & Unwin Publisher's Teaching Notes](#)

[The Book Muse 30 May 2023 review by Ashleigh Meikle](#)

[Karen Comer's website](#)

[StoryLinks 7 June 2023 review by Sarah Custance of 'Sunshine on Vinegar Street'](#)

[Poetry Box: A New Zealand PoPage for Children, 26 June 2023 review by Paula Green of 'Sunshine on Vinegar Street'](#)

[ReadPlus 30 May 2023 review by Kathryn Beilby of 'Sunshine on Vinegar Street'](#)



What Does Blue Feel Like?

DAVIDSON, Jessica

What does blue feel like? Pan Macmillan, 2007. ISBN: 9780330423076

What Does Blue Feel Like? is a free verse novel that presents a confronting, often raw account of depression and the self-destructive lifestyle that can sometimes accompany it.

Char is 17, just starting Year 12, and from the opening lines we are drawn into her darkness and pain. As she spirals downwards, we see the same pain and confusion through the alternate voices of her family, her friends, teachers and a boyfriend. Binge drinking, drugs, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, anorexia, abortion and a refusal to ask for, or even acknowledge the need for help are part of the story that ultimately does have a positive if understated ending.

Mental illness amongst teenagers is a major health challenge in Australia and this book would be a useful tool to have in any discussion about the issues involved.

Awards:

2008 *joint winner* The Sydney Morning Herald Best Young Novelist of the Year

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Depression, Family, Friendship, Literary techniques, Mental illness, School, Self-harm, Teachers

Additional resources:

[Pan Macmillan Australia, teaching notes and biographical information about the author](#)

[Black Dog Institute, Depression in adolescents in young people](#)

[headspace - National Youth Mental Health Foundation](#)

[Kids' Helpline](#)



Crossed Oars

DELLER-EVANS, Kate

Crossed oars. Ginninderra Press, 2015. ISBN: 9781740279253

As year 9 comes to a close, TC looks forward to a summer on the beach. But her mother has other plans. She's got a new job, and with it, a new house. Now TC is busy preparing for the move, and for a new school. Enrolled into the school's rowing program, she also has a new sport to come to grips with.

As she settles into the new school, TC must juggle the demands and pressures of competing friendship groups, and the pressure to perform as part of a team, watched on by the whole school community, which desperately wants to beat the team from the nearby private school.

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Emotions, Family, Friendship, Mothers, Moving, Schools, Sports

Additional resources:

[INDAILY Adelaide Independent News, 'A tribute to Kathryn \(Kate\) Deller-Evans,' 17 August 2016 \(obituary about the author and her work\)](#)



Sink, Drift or Swim

EVANS, Michelle Dennis

Sink, drift, or swim. Breath of Fresh Air Press, 2017. ISBN: 9781922135377

Rina, short for Valerina is the eldest in a large boisterous family and there's another baby on the way. Rina loves her family but Josh, a sometimes neighbour over the years is starting to dominate her thoughts not helped by his job at the local café where Rina goes to feed her coffee addiction.

Rina's Dad is a great believer in spending one-on-one time with his children and asks Rina to go out on the boat fishing. Although not overly keen on the prospect, fishing and slimy creatures are not appealing, however there will be other people, so Rina agrees to go. After all there won't be much free time once the baby comes. They set off very early as there are storm warnings for later in the day not before calling at the café for coffee. There Rina has an interesting interaction with Josh- 'Did he really just ask her to hang out?'

The day is going well, fish are being caught, and Rina is lazing on the deck when suddenly the boat is swamped by an enormous king wave and sinks. Rina and her dad are thrown into the water with only Rina's pink lifejacket to keep them afloat. Rina is terrified especially when the search helicopter flies over them and leaves. Her thoughts flow from worry about her family to fear that she will not see Josh again and will she get to hang out with him.

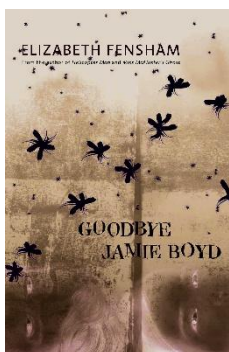
Her Dad however is sustained by his Christian faith telling her that if you 'have faith as small as a mustard seed... nothing is impossible' (Matthew 17:20). Rina begins to hallucinate falling in and out of strange scenes involving her father and mustard seeds and woven into these scenes is their safe return.

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Accidents, Adolescence, Death, Family relationships, Interpersonal relationships, Religion

Additional resources:

[Interviews and Reviews 28 May 2017 Mary Hosmar reviewed Sink, Drift or Swim.](#)



Goodbye Jamie Boyd

FENSHAM, Elizabeth

Goodbye Jamie Boyd. University of Queensland Press, 2008. ISBN: 9780702236716

The opening chapter title, 'R.I.P. Jamie Boyd,' immediately shocks the reader and reveals Anna's close relationship with her older brother, Jamie. As the first-person narrator, Anna reveals that Jamie is encouraging her to self-harm, smoke weed, avoid relationships, drive dangerously and hurt others. All is not as it seems though. Chapter titles provide clues, with astute readers sensing that there is more to this story. Gradually,

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her mother, acquaintances and teachers' sense that Anna is troubled and encourage her to seek help, which she does. In a moving resolution, she reveals her troubles during a class presentation. Classmates and her teacher offer support, and we as readers are relieved.

The economical verse form allows time to pass quickly and the first-person narration by Anna cleverly controls how much we readers know. The conclusion is satisfying and moving, although perhaps it arrives too swiftly.

Awards:

2008 *selected* International Awards — White Ravens

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Art, Drugs, Family, Mental illness, Rural life, Siblings

Additional resources:

[University of Queensland Press Teachers' Notes written by Elizabeth Fensham](#)

[Education Resource Materials developed by Rachel Perry for Goodbye Jamie Boyd. The novel was adapted by Monkey Baa Theatre as a play with dance in association with Buzz Dance Theatre.](#)

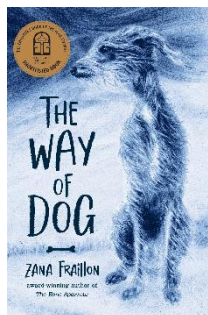
[Education Resource Materials for this presentation could be adapted for classroom use.](#)

[Transition Films Goodbye Jamie Boyd – Preview' – short excerpt from one-woman performance](#)

[Boomerang Books Blog interview with the author about several of her books, 'Meet Elizabeth Fensham, author of My Dog Doesn't Like Me](#)

[Kids Helpline](#)

[headspace - National Youth Mental Health Foundation](#)



The Way of Dog

FRAILLON, Zana. Illustrated by Sean Buckingham

The Way of Dog. University of Queensland Press, 2022. ISBN: 9780702265563

Scruffity is a pup, born on a puppy farm. Dogs like him are destined for the 'DeadDogBin' if not chosen by humans. Scruffity bonds with a young boy, his 'Manpup,' who works there. He too is without hope, home or family. Together

they escape and form a strong bond. Then tragedy strikes and runs the course of the novel.

First person narratives, like this one, 'talk' with their readers thus ensuring both thoughts and emotions are vicariously experienced. But what if the character speaking is a dog? Is it possible to experience what a dog thinks and feels? 'Yes' is the answer and here's why.

Scruffity stars in heart-warming acts of kindness, for example, when 'OldOne' collapses and Scruffity brings a doctor to her rescue or in protecting a family against domestic violence or teaching a frightened young girl how to swim. Readers gain enormous insight into a dog's point of view, for example, by experiencing Scruffity's fears of the 'SnakingMetalMuncher' (train) and the 'FlashingMetalBeast' (ambulance).

Does Zana Fraillon know how dogs feel? It seems so. She is a master of figurative language and uses a rich array of metaphors, similes, alliteration and onomatopoeia along with rhythm and rhyme. Her language reflects each scene's mood and tone. Readers are rewarded with a happy ending, perhaps a tiny bit implausible yet we are deeply satisfied and ready to read this novel, sure to be a classic, again.

Shortlisted, 2023 CBCA Book of the Year: Younger Readers

Readership: Primary, Upper primary, Secondary

Additional resources:

University of Queensland Press Teachers' Notes by Christina Wheeler for 'The Way of Dog'

Scholastic Teaching Notes: 'The Way of Dog'

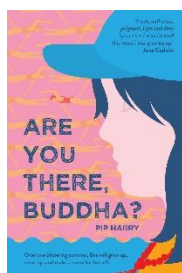
Aussiekidsbooks.com May 2022 Review by Sandy Bigna of 'The Way of Dog' by Zana Frallion

Zana Fraillon 'About Me,' author's website

'Coffee with a canine: Zana Fraillon & Tishkin and Moomin,' 8 Dec 2016


[‘Frequently \(and some not so frequently\) Asked Questions ...’ Zana Fraillon’s website](#)

[‘Writing for the Young’: Q&A with PM Literary Awards Shortlisted Author Zana Fraillon, general interview about her writing](#)



HARRY, Pip

Are you there, Buddha? Lothian, 2021. ISBN: 9780734420305



Bridget (Bee) is starting her first year of high school. A member of the local swimming squad, she is desperately hoping to qualify for the approaching State Championships, but this doesn't impress her nemesis, the Piranha. And Bee has another worry—her first period. She isn't ready to be a woman, and certainly not during the swimming season. If this wasn't enough to worry about, Bee misses her absentee mother, who has joined an ashram in India, and her best friend Leo has started to act weirdly towards her.

The title is a nod to Judy Blume's *Are you there God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970), which Bee reads and explores similar themes in a contemporary Australian setting.

Readership: Upper primary, Lower secondary

Themes: Bullying, Friendship, Literary techniques, Menstruation, Mothers, Religion, Swimming

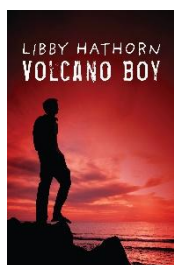
Additional resources:

[Joy Lawn interviews Pip Harry 30 June 2021](#)

[Article by Pip Harry 'From Playboy to periods: I reread Judy Blume with my tween. She found it perplexing' 28 July 2021](#)

[Pip Harry's website](#)

[Booktopia Blog 'Pip Harry answers the Ten Terrifying Questions' 27 May 2019](#)



Volcano Boy

HATHORN, Libby

Volcano boy: a novel in verse. Lothian Books, 2001. ISBN: 9780734416117

This novel's Preface tells us that we are reading the journal of young Alexander, 'Volcano Boy.' He is grieving over his mother's death and his sister's suicide. Now living with his Uncle Frank, Volcano Boy finds it difficult to understand his uncle, a humourless, authoritarian minister determined to bring Alexander into a strict religious environment. Together they go to live in volcano-circled Rabaul in Papua New Guinea. Alexander's feelings are in a state of turmoil, reflecting the eventual eruption of the volcano.

Throughout Alexander's story, and positioned alongside the text, are Biblical and Shakespearean references as well as popular quotes from Dorothea Mackellar and children's poetry. These reflect the story's emotional content and events, adding a somewhat complex dimension to the novel. Ultimately, Alexander gains peace and happiness through a physical relationship with Alice who lives and works in the town. Published in Canadian, American and Australian editions.

Awards:

2003 *commended* Society of Women Writers of New South Wales

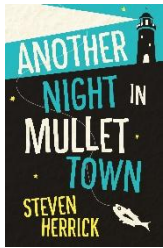
Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Death, Emotions, Family, Grief, Interpersonal relationships, Literary techniques, Mental illness, Religion, Suicide

Additional resources:

[Mallan, Kerry and Roderick McGillis. 'Textual aporias: Exploring the Perplexities of Form and Absence in Australian Verse Novels' In The Looking Glass : New Perspectives on Children's Literature, vol 7, no 2, 2003](#)

[Kiddle Encyclopedia 'Libby Hathorn facts for kids' includes information about her early life, career, and bibliography of works](#)



Another Night in Mullet Town

HERRICK, Steven

Another night in mullet town. University of Queensland Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780702253959

Jonah and Manx love fishing for mullet at the local lake which, until a storm a few years ago, was connected to the sea. They've been mates since they were kids, and their loyalty perseveres through the challenges of first love, family breakdowns and bullying. For Jonah, seeing his parents' marriage fall apart is hard but, as his romance with Ella grows, he finds some comfort. Manx's relationship with Rachel is more complicated, yet when he's implicated in petty crime, his loyalty to her overrides his ability to use his alibi.

The novel is set in a rural town which, though close to the coast, has been cut off from the ocean after a storm shifted a sandbar, and is thus down on its luck, in contrast to the area across the lake. It focuses on two likeable boys, told through the viewpoint of Jonah, as well as the lives of the families in the town more broadly and the challenges of the economic downturn in rural towns.

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

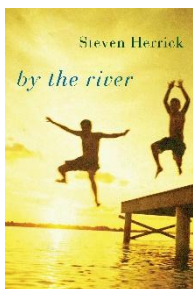
Themes: Adolescence, Bullying, Crime, Dysfunctional families, Fishing, Friendship, Interpersonal relationships, Poverty, Rural life, School

Additional resources:

[University of Queensland Press Teachers' Notes written by a practising teacher librarian in context with the Australian curriculum \(English\)](#)

[Review by Mem Capp of Another Night in Mullet Town 1 September 2016](#)

[OZ Books 4 Teachers \(& their students\) Review of Another Night in Mullet Town](#)



By the river

HERRICK, Steven

by the river. Allen & Unwin, 2004. ISBN: 9781932425727

Steven Herrick has introduced many Australian young people to the verse novel. This is a form in which he excels, giving us memorable stories for both younger and older young people. *by the river* is gut-wrenchingly real, so real that you miss the characters you come to know after closing this coming-of-age novel. Harry, the main character, journeys from childhood through adolescence. Along the way, he interacts with the important people in his life. We gain insights into Harry, his friends, teachers, family, enemies, and the townspeople too.

The setting, a 1960s Australian country town by a river, is a character too where swimming and drowning reflect the story itself. Landscape thus becomes a powerful actor in Harry's story. Herrick is a mastery of figurative language with his choice of words creating vivid, potent and unforgettable images.

Not much happens, although a lot happens, depending on one's perspective. Harry's mum dies when he is only seven, with Harry's dad and Aunt Alice the important adults in his life. There are

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school classroom scenes, bullying on the playground, vendettas in the town, peering into others' lives through windows and more. So universal are the actions and emotions portrayed that even city-bred readers will feel emotionally involved with these characters. Reading *By the River* is immensely rewarding for all mature readers. Its words, thoughts and images leave an indelible impression and create a desire for more such reading experiences

Awards:

2019 Katholischer Kindedrund-Jungenbuch Preis

2019 Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis awarded at the Frankfurt Book Fair

2005 *honour book* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Older Readers

2005 *winner* New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards — Ethel Turner Prize for Books for Young adults

2005 *winner* Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards — Best Language Development Book for Upper Primary Children (2003-2013)

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Accidents, Adolescence, Death, Family, Fathers, Friendship, Grief, Identity, Literary techniques, Love, Memories, Rural life, Siblings

Additional resources:

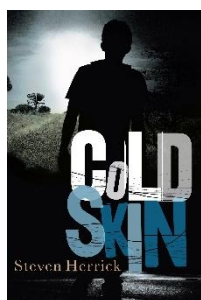
[Teachers Notes \(Secondary\) by Wendy Michaels for by the river available from the Allen & Unwin](#)

[Publisher website](#)

[Reading Australia Teacher Resource - 'by the river'](#)

[Pass It On the networking e-zine for children's writers & illustrators. Interview with Steven Herrick, 10 February, 2011](#)

[Essay by Felicity Plunkett about by the river in Australian Book Review 2 November 2016](#)



Cold Skin

HERRICK, Steven

Cold skin. Allen & Unwin, 2007. ISBN: 9781741751291

The setting for this story is Burruga, a rural coal-mining town in Australia. The time period is shortly after World War II. There is not much for the young people to do, and the adults make their way to the local pub on Fridays. Yet this novel touches on big themes: first love, sexual awakening, cowardice, justice, vengeance, personal responsibility and forgiveness—all surrounding the violent death of a young girl occurring halfway through the novel.

Nine perspectives on life in Burruga are conveyed through first-person, present tense voices. These perspectives include the Holden family—brothers Eddie and Larry and their dad—Eddie's girlfriend, the mayor, the schoolteacher, the newspaper editor, the police sergeant and the victim. Like a play, each character has personal views, secrets and perspectives on the town's characters. The pace of the story is relentless. The mystery, finally unravelled, is fascinating and unexpected.

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Ambition, Cowardice, Crime, Family relationships, Fathers, Interpersonal relationships, Literary techniques, Murder, Mystery, School, Social life and customs, Teachers, Violence, War

Addition resources:

[Teachers Notes by Wendy Michaels for Cold Skin](#)

[Australian Writers' Centre Blog, Author interview: Steven Herrick 31 August 2017](#)

[Kids' Book Review interview with Steven Herrick 30 April 2014](#)



Lonesome Howl

HERRICK, Steven

Lonesome howl. Allen & Unwin. ISBN: 9781741146561

Lucy and Jake live on neighbouring farms, close to Wolli Creek, but their families are very different. Lucy lives with a violent, abusive father and a cowed, ineffectual mother, as well as an annoying little brother. Jake is an only child, close to his parents. They have both heard stories of a wolf that roams the country around their homes. Lucy is sure it is just a wild dog, but Jake's father swears he saw the wolf for himself, before Jake was born, and Jake would love to see it too and prove his father right. Lucy sees a chance. She tells Jake she knows where the wolf hides and plans to use their excursion as a way of running away. But the mountain is full of challenges—physical and emotional—and their journey changes them both.

Told in the alternating voices of the two characters and exploring issues of family, friendship and courage, *Lonesome Howl* is accessible and provides room to explore various issues, including that of domestic violence.

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

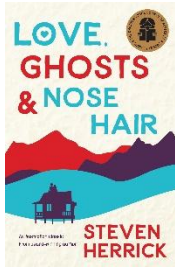
Themes: Accidents, Animals, Domestic violence, Dysfunctional families, Farming, Fathers, Friendship, Mothers Siblings

Additional resources:

[Allen & Unwin Publisher, teacher's notes](#)

[January Magazine A Cry in the Dark reviewed by Sue Bursztynski](#)

[TeachingBooks Seven resources about Lonesome Howl including author information, activities and lessons](#)



Love, Ghosts & Nose Hair

HERRICK, Steven

Love, ghosts & nose hair. University of Queensland Press, 1996. ISBN: 9780702228780

Jack is a pretty average sixteen-year-old. He's obsessed with girls – well, one girl anyway, sport (and how to get out of playing it) and nose hair. But he also writes poetry and talks to a ghost – the ghost of his mother. As his remaining family – Jack, his sister and their father – navigate life with grief, which is not new, but still ever-present, Jack also finds hope in his blossoming relationship with Annabel and in his love of words.

Suitable for secondary readers, the voice of Jack is complemented by occasional poems from other characters. Accessible for reluctant readers, and lots of room for individual poems to be used as mentor texts in the writing classroom.

Awards:

1997 *shortlisted* New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards

1997 *shortlisted* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Older Readers

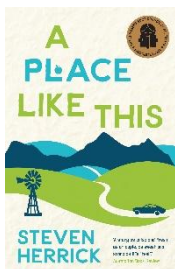
Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Death, Family, Fathers, Grief, Humour Interpersonal relationships, Poetry, School

Additional resources:

[Kids' Book Review of Love, Ghosts and Nose Hair 28 May 2017](#)

[UPLIT WordPlay 'The Poetic Voice with Steven Herrick Education Resources: Grade 10-12 includes classroom exercises and activities designed to reflect the Australian Curriculum and QCAA English Syllabus](#)



A Place like This

HERRICK, Steven

A place like this. University of Queensland Press, 1998. ISBN: 9780702229848

'Annabel and I make love most afternoons, / which, as you can imagine, passes the time / but / I don't think you can earn money out of it, / or learn much, although, we have learnt something ...'

Jack is not working. He's not studying. School is a distant shame. He buys an old car and heads off on a year of adventures with his girlfriend, Annabel. When the car stops working, they end up picking apples, bathing in the irrigation channel and sleeping in a hayshed. Their lives intertwine with the apple farmer and his family. Emma the teenage daughter is pregnant, following drunken sex which she has no recollection of. With the baby's arrival fast approaching, Emma is still dealing with the desertion of her mum and finding her place in the world. Does she even want to stay on the apple orchard? There are frequent sexual references.

Awards:

1999 *shortlisted* New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards — Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's Literature

1999 *shortlisted* CBCA Book of the Year Awards: Older Readers

1998 *commended* Victorian Premier's Literary Award — Sheaffer Pen Prize for Young Adult Fiction

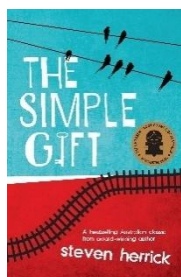
Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Family, Farming, Interpersonal relationships, Pregnancy, Rural life, Sexual assault, Travel

Additional resources:

[A-Z Quotes, Top 10 quotes by Steven Herrick, a collection from the author's books](#)

[Australian Book Review 'Steven Herrick' 2 November 2016 includes references to further article](#)



The Simple Gift

HERRICK, Steven

The simple gift: a novel. University of Queensland Press, 2000. ISBN: 9780702231339

Billy is 16 and escaping from an abusive relationship with his father. He hops on a freight train and lands in Bendarat, an old railway town. He makes a home in a disused railway carriage and befriends his railway carriage neighbour, Old Bill, a homeless man whose overwhelming grief has caused him to turn his back on his former life. Scrounging for food at McDonald's, Billy meets Caitlin, a 17-year-old rich girl who mops floors to escape the impersonal excesses of her family.

As their lives become intertwined, we learn, through their three narrative voices, how the simple gifts of time, friendship and kindness can connect the most unlikely of people, changing and enriching their lives. Beyond the rebellious runaway, the drunk old hobo and Daddy's princess, there is much more than meets the eye and the text presents in a beautifully crafted form the enduring value of kindness, generosity, genuine interaction and listening to another's story.

Awards:

2001 *shortlisted* New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards

2001 *shortlisted* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Older Readers

2001 *highly commended* Children's Peace Literature Award

2017 *nominated* International Awards — Deutscher Jugendliteratur Preis — Preis der Jugendjury for German translation

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Adolescence, Dysfunctional families, Friendship, Homelessness, Humour, Kindness, Literary techniques, Redemption, Runaways

Additional resources:

[University of Queensland Press Teachers' Notes written by a practising teacher librarian in context with the Australian curriculum \(English\)](#)

[Notes by Steven Herrick for his novel 'the simple gift'](#)

[Prezi 'The Simple Gift – Exploring Transitions HSC, includes a transcript](#)



Gap

JESSEN, Rebecca

Gap. University of Queensland Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780702253201

Ana is not a murderer, but she has killed a man. When you are young, trying desperately to survive and to protect your little sister, you will do almost anything. Now, though, the police are onto her and her conscience is giving her no rest. As she tries desperately to see a way out of this mess for herself and for her sister, Indie, she finds an unlikely ally. Sawyer is a police officer, but Ana knew her before she was a cop, and reconnecting now forces Ana to confront her past, at the same time as she must confront her present. Perhaps she should just run away from it all.

A gritty novel in verse for young adult and adult readers, set on the streets of Brisbane. Ana is a survivor, tough, independent and caring, but some things are too hard even for the toughest of young people. The use of the verse form gives us snapshots of moments of dark and light, reminiscent of film and, while the viewpoint of the character is the supposed criminal, there is still a sense that this is a kind of detective novel, as readers are invited to piece together what has brought Ana to this point and what the solution might be.

Awards:

2015 *shortlisted* Davitt Award — Best Debut

2015 *longlisted* Davitt Award — Best Adult Crime Novel

2013 *winner* Queensland Literary Awards — Emerging Queensland Author — Manuscript Award

Readership: Upper secondary

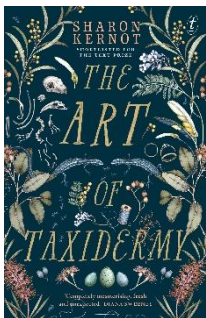
Themes: Crime, Interpersonal relationships, Love, Literary techniques, Memories, Mothers, Murder, Siblings

Additional resources:

[Cordite Poetry Review by Autumn Royal of Rebecca Jessen's Gap 12 December 2014](#)

[Mascara Literary Review by Linda Weste of Gap 6 April 2015](#)

[Arts Queensland Happy Monday interview with Rebecca Jensen](#)



The Art of Taxidermy

KERNOT, Sharon

The art of taxidermy. Text Publishing, 2018. ISBN: 9781925603743

Kernot's verse novel features lyrical expression and emotional intensity. The story includes unexpected twists, including a slow, stunning reveal. Lottie is eleven when she develops a passion for taxidermy. She collects dead creatures, hoping to preserve their beauty. Her father sees this as a natural scientific interest. For Lottie, taxidermy

helps her come to terms with the death of her mother and her sister Annie. Her Aunt Hilda views this interest as unnatural.

The novel's second slow reveal is that Lottie's mother and father left Germany and came to Australia for a better life. When World War II broke out between Germany and Australia, Lottie's father was interned while her mother was sent to work on a farm. Internment was Australian Government policy at the time. Lottie did not know this history which resulted in unfortunate misunderstandings. Although this novel is often sad and harrowing, it is life affirming in covering various ways humans deal with grief.

Awards:

2021 *shortlisted* YABBA — Fiction Years 7-9

2019 *winner* APA Book Design Awards — Best Designed Young Adult Book

2019 *shortlisted* Prime Minister's Literary Awards — Young Adults' Fiction

2019 *longlisted* Inky Awards — Gold Inky

2019 *shortlisted* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Older Readers

2019 *shortlisted* Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's Literature

2017 *shortlist* Text Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Animals, Death, Depression, Fathers, Families, Friendship, Grandparents, Grief, Literary techniques, Loneliness, Memories, Mothers, Sadness, Taxidermy.

Additional resources:

[Text Publishing Teaching Notes for the Australian Curriculum](#)

[Reading Time 14 November 2018 Review by Mia Macrossan of 'The Art of Taxidermy' by Sharon](#)

[Kernot by Sharon](#)

[Sharon Kernot website](#)

[Australian Government Prime Minister's Awards, Young Adult Literature 2019, book and author profile plus Judges' comments](#)

[Australian Museum. "What is Taxidermy?"](#)



Birdy

KERNOT, Sharon

Birdy. Text Publishing, 2024. ISBN: 9781922790606

Maddy, her mum and younger brother have moved to the country and hopefully Maddy will recover. In this first-person narrative, Maddy slowly reveals a traumatic event and its aftermath which leaves her anxious and mute. She avoids relationships beyond her supportive family but eventually makes two pivotal ones. Elderly Alice lives with her cat in a house full of things that never move. Her life stopped short 45 years ago when her

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daughter, Birdy, failed to return home. Maddy's second relationship is with Levi who works in the local food store. Levi quietly offers friendship and support with no questions asked. Maddy also has teleconferences with her psychologist. Everyone offers patience and understanding.

Alice waits for her daughter's return meanwhile her household surroundings are frozen in time, including her daughter's bedroom. There Maddy discovers the missing daughter's diary which triggers a special connection for Maddy. There are allusions to an assault that parallels Maddy's own sexual exploitation.

Birdy is filled with positive examples of people supporting each other through words and deeds. It touches on some of the different ways of dealing with anxiety. It addresses the harm that social media can do. The serious issues shaping Maddy and Alice, including implied sexual assault, anxiety, hoarding and depression, are dealt with sensitively and some resolution.

Some of graphic novels' special features add to the reader's understanding of this story. Page titles concentrate the attention and suggest meaning. The layout of words on the page resembles action and suggests emotion. *Birdy* should be read more than once to capture this highly nuanced story written with immense power.

Readership: Secondary

Themes: Bullying, Depression, Emotions, Empathy, Family relationships, Forgiveness, Friendship, Grief, Hope, Kindness, Literary techniques, Memories, Mystery, Murder, Resilience, Self-esteem, Sexual assault, Violence

Additional resources:

[Paperbarkwords 21 May 2024 Guest author post by Sharon Kernot commenting on the impetus for her verse novel 'Birdy'](#)

[Autobiographical note by the author, Sharon Kernot, retrieved June 2024](#)

[ReadPlus 27 Feb 2024 review by Margaret Crohn of 'Birdy'](#)

[Books+Publishing 28 Nov 2023 review by Alida Galati of 'Birdy'](#)

[Scholastic Teaching Notes for 'Birdy'](#)



Footprints on the Moon

MARWOOD, Lorraine

Footprints on the moon. University of Queensland Press, 2021. ISBN: 9780702262838

Footprints on the Moon is set in 1969, capturing two momentous world events. These influence the story. Humans are soon to land on the moon, while on earth the Vietnam War causes division in society. This time period also highlights

strongly held and different views within families. Avoiding didacticism, characters succinctly reveal their views for the reader's consideration. The first-person, present tense is used here as a way of revealing additional insights into characters' private thoughts and emotions, also showing how views can change depending on circumstances.

Sharnie is starting high school, Grandma's forgetting things, the Vietnam War is causing conflict at home and abroad, and humans are set to take one giant leap into space. As Sharnie navigates change—at school and within family dynamics—she finds a friend, a voice, and a way to help heal their family rift, whilst also remembering those who have been lost.

Awards:

2021 shortlisted New South Wales Premier's History Prize

Readership: Upper primary, Lower secondary

Themes: Art, Bullying, Conscription, Death, Family relationships, Friendships, Grandparents, Grief, History, Literary techniques, Memories, Moon, Protests, School, War

Additional resources:

[University of Queensland Press Teachers' Notes written by a practising teacher librarian in context with the Australian curriculum \(English\) for Footprints on the Moon](#)

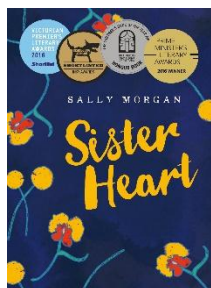
[Interview by Joy Lawn with Lorraine Marwood, Paperbark 13 June 2021](#)

[About Lorraine Marwood from the author's website](#)

[Kids' Book Review interview with Lorraine Marwood on 'How to Make a Fun Start with Poetry' 12 March 2015](#)

[Kids' Book Review 'Look what I'm reading! Lorraine Marwood' interview 26 March 2021](#)

[Allison Tait Blog 'Five Tips for Writing Verse Novels for Children' by Lorraine Marwood 9 April 2021](#)



Sister Heart

MORGAN, Sally

Sister heart. Fremantle Press, 2015. ISBN: 9781925163131

Sister Heart offers a first-person perspective of the vicarious experience of a young Aboriginal girl forcibly taken from her family and culture and placed in an institution. Removing Aboriginal children in this way was once Australian government policy. Now contemporary generations of Australians face the resulting emotional and physical harm. Stories are one way to share this period of history and to gain understanding.

Sally Morgan is best known for her book, *My Place*, where she reveals her own family history and discovery of her Aboriginal identity. In *My Place* she reveals her Aboriginal identity through a story based on her great-grandmother's experience. *Sister Heart* is for younger readers. The loss of family and of shared cultural practices, the trauma of an alien environment and being forbidden to speak language are experienced through this novel. Interspersed are moments of enjoying the Australian environment and a friendship formed with another young girl also stolen from her people.

The story is unrelenting in presenting the dire loss of culture and its impact on these young people. Even though Annie's new friend Janey is a sou'wester and Annie is a nor'wester, Janey shares her laughing stones, crying tree and other ways of practising culture as they draw strength together from the natural world. The story also offers sharing of images and stories from homeland: freshwater and saltwater, warmth and cold, siblings, family gatherings and so much more.

Sally Morgan is an Aboriginal writer and artist who comes from the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia

Awards:

2018 *shortlisted* Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature — Award for Children's Literature

2017 *shortlisted* West Australian Young Readers' Book Award — Younger Readers

2016 *honours* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Younger Readers

2016 *notable book* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Younger Readers

2016 *shortlisted* Inky Awards — Gold Inky

2016 *shortlisted* Victorian Premier's Literary Awards — Prize for Young Adult Fiction

2016 *winner* Prime Minister's Literary Awards — Children's Fiction

Readership: Upper primary, Lower secondary

Themes: Country, Cultural traditions, Family, First Nations people, Friendship, Literary techniques, Memories, Missions, Stolen generations

Additional resources:

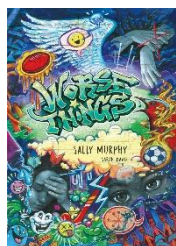
[Fremantle Press Teaching notes for 'Sister Heart' by Sally Morgan](#)

[Book People: Interview with Sally Morgan by Megan Daley, 3 August 2015](#)

[The Sydney Morning Herald review by Joy Lawn of books by Bruce Pascoe & Sally Morgan](#)

['Indigenous families and a sense of community' 6 November 2015](#)

[Aussie Reviews a review by Sally Murphy of Sister Heart 4 November 2015](#)



Worse Things

MURPHY, Sally. Illustrated by Sarah Davis

***Worse things*.** Walker Books, 2020. ISBN: 9781760651657

Sally Murphy is one of Australia's best verse novelists for young people. This, her fourth verse novel, features three main characters, each alienated in different ways.

The major themes are making connections, experiencing new friendships, overcoming loneliness, grieving and isolation. Sounds heavy? Not at all! Each theme is treated with sensitivity and lightness, leading readers to understand others' perspectives while gaining insights into themselves. The line and grey wash graphics by illustrator, Sarah Davis, effectively reflect emotions and content.

Blake, Jolene and Amed alternate in revealing their personal lives and thoughts. Blake is an Aussie Rules football player, but now with a broken arm he feels isolated from the game and his friends. Jolene reluctantly plays hockey due to her mother's insistence. The recent death of her father causes her great grief. Amed is a recent arrival to Australia from a refugee camp. An Australian aunt, whom he has just met, sponsors his coming to Australia and is keen to offer him a new life. But for Amed, who knows little English and misses his homeland's familiar football game, his new life is confusing and lonely.

Murphy cleverly interweaves these three lives, enabling each to see the others' challenges and gently offer support. Their strong emotions are very cleverly revealed through the story's 'resting points'—dictionary-style word definitions tinged with emotions such as *watch*, *belong*, *lonely*, *worry* and *togetherness*. These propel the story along, provide thoughtful points to consider, and reveal how Blake, Jolene and Amed are feeling and changing. This is a verse novel that snares and satisfies the reader.

Awards:

2021 *winner* BILBY Award for Younger Readers

2021 *honour book* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Younger Readers

2021 *notable book* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Younger Readers

Readership: Upper primary, Lower secondary

Themes: Death, Empathy, Family, Friendship, Grief, Kindness, Language, Literary techniques, Loneliness, Refugees, School, Sports

Additional resources:

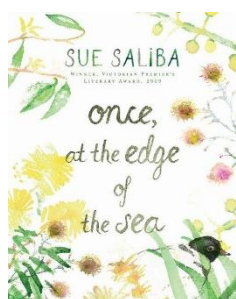
[Walker Books Teacher Notes by Leonie Jordan for *Worse Things*](#)

[Worse Things, chapter one, read by Sally Murphy 29 April 2020](#)

[Joy Lawn interviews Sally Murphy about *Worse Things* 7 May 2020](#)

[Alphabet Soup Interview. 'Meet the Author: Sally Murphy,' 3 June 2020](#)

[City of Greater Dandenong Libraries Review by Donyy of 'Worse Things' by Sally Murphy](#)



once, at the edge of the sea

SALIBA, Sue. Illustrated by Ann Shenfield

once, at the edge of the sea. Sue Saliba (Australia)/2021. ISBN: 9780648919001

Alice is 15 years old and determined to be a writer. Everything she experiences is deeply meaningful to her. A series of seminal experiences involve her watching over the hatching of three plovers on the Philip Island beach where she lives. She swears the impossible—to protect them. When Alice leaves for Melbourne to start a writing course, she takes with her a keepsake of this commitment which is pivotal to the story. At her writing course, Alice meets Esmeralda, who is likewise obsessed with writing. We, the readers, experience their private, inner imaginative worlds. There are moments of mystery, passion and enlightenment. The pacing is deliberately slow with the focus on inner emotions. All features of this book contribute to our experiencing these inner worlds. Scattered throughout are small, sketchy

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watercolour images that reflect the lyrical text. There is a mystical feeling which provokes strong emotional responses. This is the introspective, imaginative world of these young people who view everything through a lens of their own making.

The text is often breathtaking, inviting the reader to ponder multiple possible meanings. Without capitalisation, the text flows with the occasional line in bold to focus attention. The softly textured paper, light font and illustrations all work together to invite us into this imaginative, inner world of two emerging writers

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Creativity, Emotions, Friendship, Happiness, Identity, Imagination, Literary techniques, Nature

Additional resources:

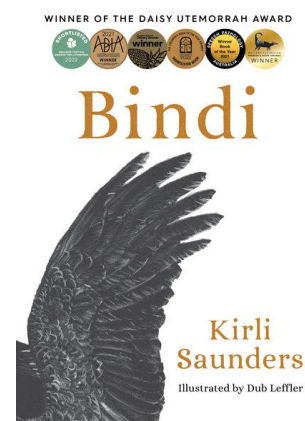
[Review of 'once, at the edge of the sea' in Buzz Words 1 June 2021](#)

['Spotlight on YA' interview with Sue Saliba about her works in Buzz Words 15 May 2019](#)

[Sue Saliba's website features several articles about her works](#)

[Danielle Binks in Stella Schools Blog guest post examines 'Mothers in YA' 27 September 2016](#)

[Q&A: Sue Saliba, ACT Writers Centre Magazine](#)



Bindi

SAUNDERS, Kirli. Illustrated by Dub Leffler

Bindi. Magabala Books, 2020. ISBN:9781925936667

Readers will immediately inhabit Bindi's world of friends, family and school through her deep love of family and country. When fire reaches her community, life feels dark, threatening and scary. Saunders reveals that in many ways 'Bindi' is autobiographical where the sounds, smells and sights of her own childhood environment feature. She seamlessly interweaves her Gundungurra language throughout, adding a personal

experience for the reader. While there is a glossary at the back, readers can guess the meaning of the majority of the language used and feel richer for this insight into another's culture.

Dub Leffler's evocative lead pencil and charcoal illustrations randomly punctuate the text. They are not an exact replica of words but serve as reflections of Bindi's life. Rather like a camera closing in on experienced moments, we see feathers, ants, horse heads, chickens, cicadas, rockmelon, leaves, hard-baked land—random images from Bindi's very rich personal life experiences. Even without colour, they evoke readers' own memories of colour, thus personalising a visual experience. There are chapter titles throughout which reflect life's simple progression, such as 'Groceries,' and 'Potato Bake.' These also capture Bindi's special artistic talent featured in 'Bedroom Wall Mural III.' The chapter headings also gradually foretell the devastating bushfire and its impact on the community, with such chapter titles as 'Evacuation I,' 'Day 5,' 'Returning,' 'The Horses Are Home,' 'Community' and 'Rebuild'. Early on in the story, Bindi rescues an injured garrall, a black cockatoo.

The significance of this rescue features at the conclusion of the novel, when the garrall, now recovered, returns to its family. Rescue and renewal of the environment is also a theme in 'Bindi.' Kirli Saunders is a proud Gunai woman, teacher, artist, cultural consultant and writer of poetry, plays, picture books and verse novels. Dub Leffler is descended from the Bigambul people of Southwest Queensland. He both writes and illustrates picture books and other works

Awards:

2021 *winner* Queensland Literary Awards — Children's Book Award

2021 *shortlisted* Speech Pathology Australian Book of the Year Award — Indigenous Children

2021 *shortlisted* Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards — Eight to 10 Years

2021 *longlisted* Colin Roderick Award

2021 *shortlisted* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Younger Readers

2021 *shortlisted* The Readings Children's Book Prize

2021 *notable book* CBCA Book of the Year Awards —Younger Readers

2021 *shortlisted* APA Book Design Awards — Best Designed Children's Fiction Book designed by Joanna Hunt

2021 *winner* Australian Book Industry Awards (ABIA) — Small Publishers' Children's Book of the Year

2018 *inaugural winner* Western Australian Premier's Book Awards — Daisy Utemorrhah Award as 'Mother Speaks'

Readership: Upper primary, Lower secondary

Themes: Art, Birds, Bushfires, Cultural traditions, Environment, Family, First Nations people, Friendship, Literary techniques, Schools, Social life and customs

Additional resources:

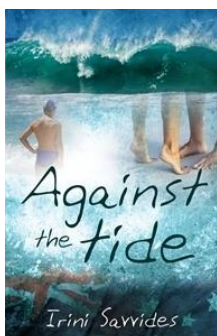
[Kirli Saunders gives a 'Sneak Peak' at Bindi and talks about poetry writing](#)

[Dub Leffler talks about his illustrations for 'Bindi' to Joy Lawn in PaperbarkWords, 24 November 2020](#)

['Kirli Saunders debuts junior fiction about caring for Country' by Rachael Knowles, 13 November 2020](#)

[Red Room Poetry's digital workshop on poetic devices featuring Kirli Saunders](#)

[Oh Creative Day: Meet Kirli Saunders, 24 November 2020](#)



Against the Tide

SAVVIDES, Irini

Against the tide. ABC Books, 2008. ISBN: 9780733322907

Three families feature, offering strong cultural contrasts. The Kyriagos are Greek Cypriot Australians. Their daughter, Effi, is 16 years of age. They live in Sydney's western suburbs. The Smith family features Katie and Matt, cousins, both champion ocean swimmers from South Sydney. The Anastapoulis family features Christie, a 16-year-old Greek Australian, who lives and breathes rap and rhyme. Effi and Christie both live in Western Sydney, and they are immigrants from Greece while Effi is from Cyprus. Parental and cultural expectations differ and occasionally create tension.

Each year Effi and her family return to the beach where her younger brother drowned. Occasionally the parents' perspectives feature when personal events in their lives are important to their teenage children. There are friendships and budding romance. An underlying theme is racism with a brief insight into the historic Cronulla Riots. Strong relationships abound throughout, and the budding romance is handled with intensity and believability. Young adult readers will experience many of these emotional highs and lows in this verse novel with a large cast of interesting characters.

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Accidents, Cultural traditions, Death, Family relationships, Friendship, Grief, Interpersonal relationships, Literary techniques, Memories, Sea, Social unrest, Swimming

Additional resources:

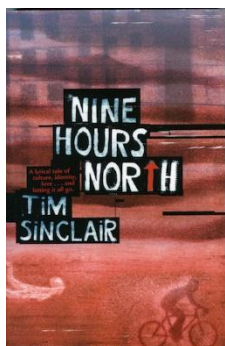
[Irini Savvides speaks about her work on the occasion of winning the Children's Literature Peace](#)

[Award 2003 for her novel Sky Legs](#)

[Moosey McMaster. 'Top Notch Book Bites' - links between Against the Tide and Homer's Odyssey, 26 April 2019](#)

[Penguin Books Australia profile of Irini Savvides](#)

['The Verse Novel in Young Adult Literature' by Brenna Friesner, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017 \(sample pages of this book\)](#)



Nine Hours North

SINCLAIR, Tim

Nine hours north. Penguin, 2006. ISBN: 9780143003762

Adam's life in Japan isn't as he imagined. The early excitement of living in Nagoya has gone and now he feels fenced in by his conservative job teaching English to company executives, by the shoebox size flat he shares with girlfriend Sarah, and the growing weight and expectations of their relationship. They've been together now for four years but, despite their ambitious travel plans for Japan and Europe, the cracks, at least for Adam, are starting to show.

When Marianne, an old acquaintance of Sarah arrives, everything changes for Adam. For him she is a breath of fresh air throwing into stark relief the confines of his life and relationship and ultimately his future.

The novel looks at relationships growing and changing against the backdrop of a foreign country and its customs.

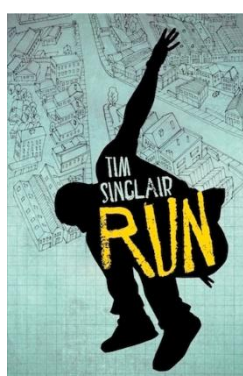
Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Identity, Interpersonal relationships, Loneliness, Social life and customs, Travel

Additional resources:

[Hypable 'Author interview: Novelist and poet Tim Sinclair is making poetry cool'](#)

[Cordite Poetry Review 'Ali Alizadeh Reviews Ian McBryde and Tim Sinclair' 12 July 2006](#)



Run

SINCLAIR, Tim

Run. Penguin, 2013. ISBN: 9788174363749

Dee is a university student living in Sydney who escapes his ho-hum life through the sport of parkour. Originating in France, parkour combines street gymnastics and free running based on a philosophy of movement and a lifestyle that emphasises freedom and creativity. Sinclair's novel captures parkour's speed and visual movement with its experimental placement of text,

varying font and word choice. Here the verse novel excels and offers an unexpected, dual genre—possibly that of a paranoid thriller, sketchily outlined, but all the more interesting for that.

The story loosely suggests surveillance by an unknown group, and Dee and his friends create a clever ruse to thwart their intention. Perhaps the entire story is a figment of Dee's imagination, conjured up through the tense excitement that drives parkour. Waves, brambles, pedestrians and other objects are reflected in a font called Road Art Regular, as Dee's narrative voice moves across the page.

Awards:

2014 *notable book* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Younger Readers

2014 *longlisted* Inky Awards

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Literary techniques, Mystery, Parkour, Sports, Suspense

Additional resources:

[Penguin Australia. Teacher's notes for Run](#)

[Penguin Australia book trailer two-minute demonstration of parkour](#)

[Whyte, Marama. 'Author Interview: Novelist and Poet Tim Sinclair is making poetry cool' 20 June 2013](#)



It's Your World

SWIFT, Kristy-Lee

It's your world. Guillotine Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780995399136

'It's your world, everyone else just lives in it.' That's what Gina says but Evie doesn't see it that way. At 15, she is questioning the world and what she believes. She struggles against the strict home she shares with her father and knowing virtually nothing about her mother, who, she's been told, died when Evie was very young. Was it suicide, as she has overheard, or what? She has never been told the real reason she has no Mum, and she wants to know and to try and make sense of her life.

When her brother moves out, Evie is scared of what her life will become now she is left with her controlling father and her stridently religious gran. In hope she contacts her Aunt Ruth in search of help, but she lives far away. When Evie's dad suffers a brain aneurysm, she feels even more lost and alone.

Into this mix there are the usual issues with friends, boys (even if he is called Nigel), music, alcohol and you have a story that's both heavy and light.

Readership: Upper secondary

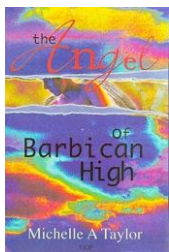
Themes: Adolescence, Family relationships, Friendship, Loneliness, Physical Illness, Religion, Siblings

Additional resources:

[Melbourne Herald Sun article by Chris Jackson, 'Rosebud author Kristy-Lee Swift launches her debut novel It's Your World' 18 May 2017](#)

[Swift of Pen review of It's Your World](#)

[Rebecca Fraser: Writing and Moonlighting: An Interview with Verse Novelist, Kristy-Lee Swift 25 May 2017](#)



The Angel of Barbican High

TAYLOR, Michelle A

The angel of Barbican high. University of Queensland Press, 2001. ISBN: 978070223

When Jez moves to Brisbane and starts at a new school, she feels like finally her life is on track, especially when she meets and falls in love with Nick. But when Nick dies in a terrible accident, things go backwards, spiralling out of control as she deals with grief and the guilt of knowing the part she played in his death. Her relationships with her friends and family are strained and her schoolwork suffers. An unlikely friendship with nerdy Tommy, an outsider who helps her with her maths, may be her only salvation. She also communicates, through journaling, with an imaginary angel, who she believes may hold the answer. Even these two brighter spots are barely enough to stop her from taking her own life and joining Nick.

Written mostly from Jez's viewpoint, with some poems from the viewpoint of Tommy, the raw grief and subject matter make this potentially a challenging read, but the use of first-person poetry creates accessibility and builds empathy.

Awards:

2000 *shortlisted* Queensland Premier's Literary Awards

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Death, Depression, Emotions, Family, Friendship, Grief, Interpersonal relationships, Literary techniques, Sports, Suicide

Additional resources:

[Author's website with biographical profile](#)



Jinx

WILD, Margaret

Jinx. Allen & Unwin, 2001. ISBN: 9781865082646

The narrator begins this tale by telling us her name is Jinx and warning the reader not to love her. But we quickly find out that she was once called Jen, a good girl who loved her mother and sister, her friends, even school. The death of one boyfriend to suicide and then a second through a tragic accident sees her life spiralling out of control, and she becomes convinced she is jinxed. The ending is satisfying, with Jen finding some resolution, but not falsely neat. With most poems from Jen's perspective, we also hear from other characters such as her mother, her father (The Rat, because he left the family when Jen's younger sister was born with Down's Syndrome), her stepmother and several of her friends, who have lives and problems of their own.

Awards:

2004 *shortlisted* Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis, Germany's premier children's book awards

2002 *shortlisted* Victorian Premier's Literary Awards — Prize for Young Adult Fiction 2002

2002 *shortlisted* CBCA Book of the Year Awards — Book of the Year: Older Readers

2002 *shortlisted* New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards — Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's Literature

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Adolescence, Death, Disability, Emotions, Family relationships, Friendship, Grief, Mental illness, Self-harm, Suicide

Additional resources:

[Teaching Books includes author interviews and resources for various Margaret Wild books](#)

[Review of Jinx in US review journal Publishers Weekly](#)

[Review of Jinx in US review journal Kirkus 1 August 2002](#)

[Review of Jinx by Sally Murphy 20 August 2002](#)



One Night

WILD, Margaret

One night. Allen & Unwin, 2003. ISBN: 9780375829208

Three young adult males, Bram, Al and Gabe, are totally self-absorbed. Together they arrange parties while parents are away. Each has a role to play. Good-looking Gabe invites the girls. Bram sets up the houses for the party and Al brings the alcohol. Just one night has enormous consequences for two young adults and their circle. Gabe and Helen are opposites, but attracted to each other on this one night, resulting in a baby. Helen manages alone as her mother offers no support and her father rejects her. She struggles with pregnancy, poverty, study and fulltime work, with only the kindness of empathetic people at the boarding house where she copes alone.

The characters are slightly one-dimensional at times, possibly intentional to drive this story. The multiple voices, sometimes first and sometimes third person, guide readers as chapter headings. *One Night* is an intense 'unputdownable' read with a complex cast of interacting characters. The ending is a satisfying 'new start' for most of the characters, perhaps more optimistic than plausible, but nonetheless enjoyable.

Awards:

2004 *shortlisted* New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards — Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's Literature

Readership: Upper secondary

Themes: Adolescence, Ambition, Drugs, Dysfunctional families, Emotions, Fathers, Maturity, Mothers, Pregnancy, Resilience, Self-esteem

Additional resources:

[Kids' Book Review Interview with Margaret Wild 30 April 2011](#)

[The Ludic Reader review of One Night 14 October 2011](#)

[American review of 'One Night' in Publisher's Weekly](#)

[Perry, Kezia Shadow of The Archers and Finding the Contemporary Reader. A novel and exegesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing Department of English and Creative Writing School of Humanities, University of Adelaide, December 2018, pp35-40](#)



Drink the Air

YAXLEY, Richard

Drink the air. R.W. Yaxley, 2010. ISBN: 9780646529554

Tom lives in Hervey Bay and Zooey lives in Kingaroy. Both have lost much-loved family members in tragic circumstances. Tom has lost his father in a sea rescue

and Zooey has lost her sister through suicide. Finding ways to resolve their grief underlies this story. These lost characters are so closely intertwined in the family that their loss is deeply felt.

While each character reveals their own story initially, these merge when their school play, *The Tempest*, brings them together through the parts that they act. Slowly Tom and Zooey together find ways to understand their loss and move ahead in life. Verse novels, like this one, can have a hypnotic way of slowly snaring readers as characters experience deeply felt emotions. The novels' brevity often means they are read in a single sitting which heightens emotions.

Awards:

2010 *winner* Queensland Premier's Literary Award — Best Young Adult Book

Readership: Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Themes: Death, Emotions, Families, Grief, Literary techniques, Performance, Self-harm, Shakespeare, Teachers

Additional resources:

[Society of Children's Book Writers and Speaker Profile about the writer and a statement as an artist](#)

[– Richard Yaxley](#)

['Drink the Air': Teacher Notes written by Richard Yaxley](#)

['Teen Fiction: A Success Story' article by Tracey Joynson in 'Brisbane Today' 4 September 2010](#)