

Aurealis Awards 2009
Children's Novel & Children's Illustrated Work/Picture Book
Judges' Report

Panel members

John Blahusiak (convenor), Lynne Green, Kerry Neary, Katia Nizic, Alix Rohner

Judging criteria

The children's category encompasses published works of relevance to the 8-12 age range in the science fiction, fantasy and horror genres. Judges considered entries against five criteria: characterization; story/plot; world building; literary/artistic skill, and themes. These were applied by judges in light of their own response to the literary merits of entries in the long and short fiction sections. Numerical ratings at the first stage were collated and formed the basis for subsequent discussion of works.

Overview of entries

We have had very lively and engaged discussion and debate. The judges were encouraged by the fine range of texts that were entered this year, with many excellently crafted, moving and imaginative works in contention. This made the selection of the shortlist difficult, as the quality of the books was so high.

Finalists

Novel

Gabrielle Wang, *A Ghost in My Suitcase*, Puffin Books **WINNER**
Deborah Abela, *The Remarkable Secret of Aurelie Bonhoffen*, Random House Australia
Kate Constable, *Cicada Summer*, Allen & Unwin
Jen Storer, *Tensy Farlow and the Home for Mislaid Children*, Penguin/Viking

Review of finalists

Gabrielle Wang, *A Ghost in My Suitcase*, Puffin Books **WINNER**
Gabrielle Wang's book, *A Ghost in My Suitcase*, contrasts the cultures of Asia and Australia, with particular reference to the varying perceptions of the paranormal within these cultures. What made this stand out book was the premise that no culture is better or worse, just different, in how it perceives and defines reality and the supernatural. It used the idea of the 'Other' on more than one level, without ever demonising or valorising one culture over the other. As well, the clarity and style of the prose is well suited to the plot and theme. Wang uses beautifully depicted characters and intricate settings to flesh out this elegant tale about memory, cultural identity, and how these relate to your sense of belonging.

This book was chosen as the winner because it rated highly in all the judging criteria. However, a winning book is greater than the sum of its parts. All the necessary elements are well balanced in *A Ghost in My Suitcase*, but the book transcends those elements and rises into stellar brilliance.

Deborah Abela, *The Remarkable Secret of Aurelie Bonhoffen*, Random House Australia

Deborah Abela's *The Remarkable Secret of Aurelie Bonhoffen* explores the themes that are important for proper working of the plot. The main character, Aurelie, is extremely likeable, and her family are both exciting and supportive. The setting is unusual, but made completely believable by the skill of the author. This book has a real sense of fun, even in the parts tense with conflict.

Kate Constable, *Cicada Summer*, Allen & Unwin

Kate Constable's *Cicada Summer* creates a wonderful atmosphere of suspense and intrigue in this story about time travel. The novel's Australian setting is admirably created, and its remoteness cleverly supports the plot and psychology of the text. This is a well-crafted book, with strong prose that has the ability to capture the intellect and emotions of its audience.

Jen Storer, *Tensy Farlow and the Home for Mislaid Children*, Penguin/Viking

Tensy Farlow and the Home for Mislaid Children by Jen Storer uses a rich tapestry drawn from the genre of traditional religious mythology to create and colour the characterisations and setting. The prose is tailored to suit the fable-like story, without the language ever becoming stilted or too formal for the target audience. This is a clever book with a warm heart.

Finalists

Childrens' Illustrated Work/Picture Book

Pamela Freeman, Kim Gamble, *Victor's Challenge*, Walker Books Australia

WINNER

Graeme Base, *Enigma*, Penguin/Viking

Anna Fienberg, Kim Gamble, *Tashi and the Golem*, Allen & Unwin

Dan McGuiness, *Pilot and Huxley*, Omnibus Books

Gregory Rogers, *The Hero of Little Street*, Allen & Unwin

Review of finalists

Pamela Freeman, Kim Gamble, *Victor's Challenge*, Walker Books Australia

WINNER

Author Pamela Freeman and illustrator Kim Gamble can be very proud of *Victor's Challenge*. It is an excellently crafted tale, freely borrowing characters, themes and concepts from genre of traditional fairytales. However, these traditions of the fairytale have been turned on their heads, to conform to the expectations of its more modern audience and to generate tension.

The grey scale illustrations are attractive and complement the text. *Victor's Challenge* rejoices in a strong, engaging plot, with a logical progression that still manages to turn up some fresh insights and surprises. The prose is lyrical without being florid or sentimental. It is the artistry of word and line that make this the winner in this category.

Graeme Base, *Enigma*, Penguin/Viking

Enigma is a beautifully illustrated work, with the vibrant imagery that we have come to expect from author and illustrator, Graeme Base. The illustrations are intricate,

with the hidden imagery and codes worked in with the main theme of the book. Characterisation and storytelling are achieved through the fabulous illustrations rather than the written text.

Anna Fienberg, Kim Gamble, *Tashi and the Golem*, Allen & Unwin

Anna Fienberg and Kim Gamble's joint creation is *Tashi and the Golem*. Each tale has the capacity to surprise and delight, with the use of charming illustrations to complement the clarity and the deceptive simplicity of the prose. The prose is carefully crafted to engage the reader with the characters and events of this book.

Dan McGuinness, *Pilot and Huxley*, Omnibus Books

Dan McGuinness's *Pilot and Huxley* portrays the interests and concerns relevant to its audience. It is its comic timing that won this book its spot on the shortlist; there is a great sense of fun. As well, all the elements of this text are subversive and distinctive.

Gregory Rogers, *The Hero of Little Street*, Allen & Unwin

The Hero of Little Street was the second book to tell its tale with images, and there is no written text. It is still a beautiful narrative by author/illustrator Gregory Rogers. The old 'masters' set within the action is a clever device, well utilised without ever seeming contrived or trite. The masterful use of this structure creates wonderful settings and characters.