

NOMINATIONS FOR THE 2023 NANCE DONKIN AWARD

Judges Report by Meredith Costain and Caz Goodwin

Introduction

Thank you for inviting us (Meredith Costain and Caz Goodwin) to judge the Nance Donkin Award for Children's Literature this year. Nance wanted the award to highlight a writer for children deserving of more recognition, as well as to validate authors of books for children more broadly. We've both enjoyed reviewing the work of the shortlisted authors.

I think we would all agree that books for children are important. They can help children to recognise and learn to navigate problems, large and small. They can provide hope, comfort, adventure and joy. They can also provide a window into the lives of others, helping develop empathy, compassion and tolerance, which are such important, valuable qualities.

Those in the industry know that writers of children's books don't write for awards or acknowledgement. They certainly don't write for money as Anna pointed out. Children's authors want to bring their characters and stories to young people, often in the hope that they inspire a child's love of reading and books. What a wonderful gift to offer children.

Before we announce the winner of the award, we'd like to briefly mention each nominee, in alphabetical order, and tell you a little about their work.

Susanne Gervay OAM (NSW)

Susanne Gervay writes for children of all ages, from picture books for the very young through to longer works for young adults. She also spends countless hours supporting and promoting Australian authors and illustrators. She is the co-regional advisor of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), an ambassador for the Premier's Reading Challenge NSW and actively involved in other organisations that promote literacy, including Books in Homes and Room to Read.

*Susanne's **I am Jack** series is a wonderful resource which explores the issue of bullying and was turned into an award-winning play. The first book was originally published in 2000, and is still highly relevant. The books will be distributed to Scouts in NSW as part of their anti-bullying focus this year.*

Susanne is passionate about social justice for children, and this is reflected in her books. She has received the Lifetime Social Justice Literature Award from the International Literacy Association, and was nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award in 2019. In 2011, Susanne was awarded the Order of Australia medal for services to literature, an award which highlighted her enormous contribution to children's literature in this country over several decades.

Alison Lester (Victoria)

Originally an art teacher, Alison Lester has written and illustrated nearly 50 children's books over almost four decades. Her books – all of which are still in print – have been published worldwide and received a number of awards, both in Australia and internationally.

She co-shared the position of Australia's first Children's Laureate with Boori Pryor in 2012.

Alison's picture books – which include *Clive Eats Alligators*, *Magic Beach* and *Kissed by the Moon* – mix imaginary worlds with everyday life, encouraging children to believe in themselves and celebrate the differences that make them special.

Family and nature are important themes in her work, showing care and compassion for the world and its people. She is involved in several community art projects throughout Australia and often travels to remote Indigenous communities where she uses her books to help children and adults write and draw about their own lives.

Teena Raffa-Mulligan (WA)

Teena Raffa-Mulligan is a high-profile children's writer based in Western Australia. She is well recognised for not only her children's books but also her tireless efforts in encouraging others to write for children through mentoring and by facilitating workshops, which she also runs at schools. Teena's contributions to children's literature have been long and varied and she has inspired many Western Australian children's authors and guided them through the challenges of becoming published.

*Teena's quirky, whimsical books for children are full of warmth, gentle humour, heart and hope. They also contain important messages, such as *You Don't Know Me?*, her first published book about stranger danger, which was endorsed by the West Australian police and education departments and used in schools around the country.*

Pamela Rushby (QLD)

Pamela Rushby has made a significant contribution to children's literature, especially in the fields of historical fiction and writing for the education market. She has written over 200 books for children and young adults.

Pamela has written many educational books and has the ability to take everyday topics and give them interesting, fresh twists in order to engage young minds. She puts her teaching background to good use in her historical fiction, using in-depth research to uncover forgotten parts of Australian history and highlighting fascinating and unusual facts, with books like *When the Hipchicks Went to War*, *The Rat-catcher's Daughter* and *Sing a Rebel Song* bringing Australia's past to life for young readers.

Sharon Yaxley (TAS)

Sharon Yaxley is not only a writer of children's books —she also illustrates her own stories. Her picture books are a delight to read aloud and feature beautiful pastel illustrations that add to the narrative. There are currently five books in Sharon's Dunstan and Theodore series, which feature a cute bear and lovable puppy.

*Sharon has also produced a photographic picture book, *Sea Monsters*, with stunning images taken on the east coast of Tasmania. The book contains photos of the beautiful, natural surrounds at Shelly Point. What makes the book unique is the way the photos depict 'sea monsters' within the natural landscape. Sharon's experience as a children's*

educator has no doubt helped her to appreciate the language, stories and topics that engage young minds.

And it's now time to announce the winner of the 2023 Nance Donkin Award

All the authors nominated for this year's Nance Donkin Award would be worthy recipients.

This year, we are delighted to announce that the winner of the 2023 Nance Donkin Award for Children's Literature is Pamela Rushby.

Pamela's books are often long listed and sometimes short listed for awards, but as her nominator pointed out, she rarely wins them. As we mentioned earlier, Nance wanted the award to highlight a writer for children deserving of more recognition. We believe her large body of work is important and we're thrilled to recognise her with this award tonight, as I'm sure you all will be as well.

It's often the fascinating small details, which are historically accurate, that help to bring Pamela's books alive. We were enchanted to discover that at a recent film festival in Iran, Pamela was awarded a small bag of gold coins. This is just the sort of detail she would have unearthed in her research.

Congratulations Pamela, and we look forward to reading more of your books in the future.

Judges Meredith Costain and Caz Goodwin