

21 October 2009

## The Children's Peace Literature Award – 2009

The winners of the 2009 Children's Peace Literature Award were announced on 21 October 2009 by The Minister for Education, Hon Jane Lomax-Smith MP at the launch of the Human Rights Learning in Action Showcase.

### Winning Entries

***Audrey Goes to Town*** by Christine Harris (Little Hare Books)

***Winter of Grace*** by Kate Constable (Allen & Unwin)

***Audrey Goes to Town*** and ***Winter of Grace*** were selected from seven short-listed books and from more than 100 entries of books for children published between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2009. The judges felt that these two books, one for primary readers (7 – 11 years) and one for teenagers, best met the criteria for the award.

Every two years for the last 22 years Psychologists for Peace (SA), a special interest group of the Australian Psychological Society, has raised \$2000 dollars to offer as a prize to the author of a book for children that encourages the non-violent resolution of conflict or promotes peace at the global, local or interpersonal level.

The award particularly focuses on books in which the main character resolves conflict through actively choosing constructive non-violent methods.

The inaugural winner in 1987 was SA author Gillian Rubinstein for her first novel *Space Demons*.

Psychologists for Peace aims to recognise authors who promote peaceful resolution of conflict in their books and to encourage and publicise these books so that children have peaceful models on which to base their own behaviour.

Award winners and shortlisted authors are selected by a combined panel of psychologists and children's literature experts. The 2009 shortlist contains books appealing to a wide range of ages from pre-school to young adult.

The winning and short-listed books were selected by a combined panel of psychologists and children's literature experts for their literary merit and for demonstrating a constructive, non-violent approach towards the resolution of conflict.

### Shortlist

***Audrey Goes to Town*** by Christine Harris (Little Hare Books)

***Cassie*** by Barry Jonsberg (Allen and Unwin)

***Finding Darcy*** by Sue Lawson (Black Dog Books)

***Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs*** by Michael G Bauer (Omnibus)

***Josie and the Michael Street Kids*** by Penni Russo (Penguin)

***Pearl Barley and Charlie Parsley*** by Aaron Blabey (Penguin)

***Winter of Grace*** by Kate Constable (Allen and Unwin)

## 2009 CHILDRENS PEACE LITERATURE AWARD - SUMMARIES

### Winners

#### ***Audrey goes to town*** by Christine Harris (Little Hare Books)

Audrey and her family temporarily relocate to Beltana when Audrey's mother is expecting another baby. They board with Mrs. Patterson, known locally as Patterson's Curse (a noxious weed). She is a prickly woman who has strict rules and a list of dos and don'ts for the children. When Audrey's mother is taken suddenly to hospital, Mrs. Patterson declares that Audrey has become her "project". She wants to ensure that Audrey learns good manners, how to knit and how to behave like a lady. However she does not anticipate Audrey's perceptive response, "And you're mine. I'm looking for your good side."

A situation which could have developed into unpleasantness is slowly changed by Audrey's beguilingly honest, direct, humorous and compassionate approach to her carer. Audrey makes an effort to please. She is kind and thoughtful but does not allow herself to become a victim. Audrey acknowledges Mrs. Patterson's kind gestures and is prompt to express her gratitude. Indeed warmth and generosity are modeled by the Beltana community. Audrey's perseverance is rewarded when she realizes that Mrs. Patterson's grimness is mainly due to the sorrows she has experienced in her life. Mutual trust and appreciation develop. As Audrey says, "At first it was hard to find things on your good side. But then it got easier. You've got one, all right".

#### ***Winter of Grace*** by Kate Constable (Allen & Unwin)

This book deals with the unusual but important theme of the role of religious affiliations for young people trying to understand the world and human relationships. Readers are gripped by an engaging story about two Year 11 girls who keep us intrigued with action and controversy and what might happen next.

The main character Bridie is searching for a set of beliefs or ideas to make sense of life. Her encounter with Christian fundamentalism brings her into conflict with her mother and her best friend Stella, who each have reasons for rejecting organised religion. A variety of religious beliefs is portrayed, and Bridie's quest is not over by the end of the book. The underlying message is that people with different religious beliefs including atheism can all be sincere seekers after truth and an honorable code of behaviour. Bridie comes to realise she needs to think and explore for herself. Her reconciliation with Stella is based on recognising that friendship and trust allow people to disagree about religious beliefs without damaging their relationship. The model of respect for diverse belief systems and their adherents is a timely one in our age.

## Shortlisted Books

### ***Cassie*** by Barry Jonsberg – (Allen & Unwin - Girlfriend Fiction)

Life is not fair for Holly Holley. As if her name wasn't enough to cope with, she is displaced from her comfortable bedroom to a small, unpleasant, smelly spare room to make way for the arrival of her cousin Cassie who has cerebral palsy and needs the space of the bigger room. Cassie's parents have separated and Cassie and her mum, Aunt Fern, are coming to stay with Holly and her mother, Ivy. Holly is in love with Raph McDonald who hardly acknowledges her existence and she is desperate for acceptance by Demi Larson, the coolest girl in her school. Holly has much to deal with.

The story is told in a diary format and at various times from the perspective of all the main characters. The viewpoints are very realistic for teenagers and are raised with compassion and empathy. The conflicts as they occur for Holly are mostly related to her relationships with Ivy and Cassie but she is also confronted with decisions around shoplifting, wagging school, rejection, friendship, peer group pressure, trust and the self-deprecation that is familiar to many young teenagers.

Holly deals with conflict with sensitivity, humour and a sophistication that grows as do Holly's understanding and acceptance of what constitute honest and meaningful relationships. A well written book that will appeal to Upper Primary and Lower Secondary readers.

### ***Finding Darcy*** by Sue Lawson (Black Dog Books)

When her mother travels to the city for further study, Darcy is dislocated from her comfortable life and has to persevere through bullying, racism and family secrets whilst staying with her grandmother and great grandmother.

Darcy must research the war experience of her great grandfather for her high school project but her family refuse to talk about anything to do with the war. Because of the unusual circumstances of her great grandfather's death as a prisoner of war on the Japanese ship Montevideo Maru her mother, grandmother and great grandmother insist on silence. The situation is compounded by the fact that Darcy's best friend, Laura Tanaka, is researching her great-grandfather who is Japanese.

With the support of friends, her uncle and her great grandmother, Darcy's research promotes the non-violent resolution of conflict caused by secrets and mystery and the easing of major tensions that have been in the family for four generations. Finally the long-lasting impact of war is acknowledged and understood.

This is an engaging book that could have been improved by tighter copy- editing.

***Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs*** by Michael G Bauer (Omnibus)

This sequel to the 2007 Children's Peace Literature Award winner *Don't Call Me Ishmael* continues to model effective and non-violent ways of dealing with conflict, including bullying and all the painful misunderstandings that can occur between emotionally awkward and vulnerable boys and the equally tentative girls they so desperately want to attract.

Ishmael Leseur and his friends at St Daniel's Boys College have graduated to Year 10 where the beautiful Miss Tarango is bravely introducing them to poetry. Ishmael is working seriously on his accident-prone relationship with Kelly Faulkner, discovers the positive results of responding to bully Barry Bagsley's aggression with humanity and is instrumental in getting his depressed father's old band together for a rousing anniversary performance. The characters, including the adults, are drawn with admirable depth and affection, the repartee is as clever and witty as in the first book and the embarrassments are nearly, if not quite as cringe-makingly hilarious.

***Josie and the Michael Street Gang*** by Penni Russon (Puffin - Aussie Chomps - Penguin Group)

Moving house is a stressful experience as 11 year old Josie discovers. Not only must she leave behind her best friend from primary school, but she also faces the problem of making friends in the new suburb where she will be starting high school, a challenge in itself. To her surprise she finds that Becca, the girl whose bedroom she now occupies, has left a 'treasure map' which provides her with information about life in Michael Street. Following the clues and finding the treasure helps her to overcome the grief of leaving Ellerslie and find some new friends, while looking forward to the future in Preston Heights. Importantly it helps her to build a bridge with Ella, a prickly neighbour who is sad that Becca, her best friend has moved away. The peaceful resolution is achieved through an understanding family, frank speech, acknowledgement of the grief process and the creative action of the girl who has moved away.

***Pearl Barley and Charlie Parsley*** by Aaron Blabey (Puffin Books, Penguin Group)

Pearl Barley is loud and brash. Charlie Parsley is quiet and shy. They are very different in all manner of ways but despite this they support each other in difficult situations and are the best of friends.

This delightful early childhood picture book contains no conflict but demonstrates how drawing on natural skills and qualities with goodwill and in cooperation with and concern for another person can produce concord and harmonious relationships. A wonderful model for young children.