



Judges' Commentaries on Finalists and Winners

11 August 2021

Ko te kakano o te wānanga ka whakatō ki te whenua haumako o te tangata. Ka tupu mā te wai o te kukune, ka hihiri, ka hinengaro, ka manako, ka ngākau aroha. Ka puāwai, hei hua mō te ao!

The seed of knowledge is sown to the fertile earth of a person. It grows with sustenance gained from the water of conception to become thought, to grow into consciousness, to desire, to empathy. It then blooms to yield the fruit of knowledge for all!

This beautiful whakatauaikī was specially conceived for the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults and gifted to us by its creator Ruki Tobin, Poutiaki Rauemi with the National Library's Services to Schools. It was first narrated by Jase Te Patu at the start of the 2020 virtual awards presentation, and we requested Ruki to read it himself again during his welcome to our 2021 awards ceremony at the National Library in Wellington.

In presenting the whakatauaikī to the New Zealand Book Awards Trust, Ruki provided this background:

“The symbolic idea of a seed being sown in the earth, is like an idea, a concept, a thought from an author being sown into the mind of a reader. That seed grows with the reader and develops and shapes their thinking. It gives them information, and with their experiences they gain the power to share that knowledge to another and continue that link from author to reader to the next generation. It highlights the power of knowledge and its use. In my mind, I felt that this encapsulated the kaupapa of the awards.”

Kia ora Ruki!

Opening remarks by convenor of judges Alan Dingley

Kia ora koutou

I feel really blessed to be the Convenor of Judges for the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults for 2021.

Neil Gaiman once said: “I went away in my head, into a book. That was where I went whenever real life was too hard, or too inflexible.”

How lucky we all are to have had books to escape into, in times where we may have felt a little imprisoned. Books open our world up, even as it shrank for a while there.

As a school librarian I hope we can all continue to work together to make access to books as easy as possible, regardless of community, background, or socio-economic situation. It is our

responsibility, all of ours, to ensure the passion for books that has bought us all here tonight, is passed on....and on....and on.

So thank you to all of the authors, illustrators, publishers, booksellers, teachers, educators, parents, and anyone who has put a book into the hands, hearts and minds of children in Aotearoa New Zealand this year. The panel and I have been blessed to immerse ourselves in the works submitted in this year's awards.

And what a panel it is. We have Associate Professor in Children's Literature at the University of Waikato, Nicola Daly; award-winning author, activist and educationalist, Pauline (Vaeluaga) Smith; long-time respected children's bookseller, Mary Sangster; and public librarian, composer and performer, Stephen Clothier.

The esteemed Anahera Morehu has convened the panel judging the Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Award. Alongside her are national manager Māori for Services to Schools at Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa National Library of New Zealand, Ruki Tobin, and library manager at the University of Canterbury, Te Paea Paringatai.

It has been a privilege to collaborate with judges of this calibre.

Thanks to the New Zealand Book Awards Trust, and to the lovely Gemma Finlay, publicist extraordinaire.

And special thanks to Joy Sellen, the Awards Administrator. She has been our lighthouse, showing patience and grace under pressure at all times.

So welcome again everyone, and without further ado let us charge ahead and celebrate some amazing offerings. Thank you.

Picture Book Award

Speech by Nicola Daly

Underestimate a picture book at your peril. At their peak they can deliver great excitement, mystery, and wisdom, and this year's finalists do exactly that. The protagonists range from a detective dog to an environmental heroine; themes include looking for peace, remembering war and honouring the grief of losing a loved one.

The successful combination of image and text is at the heart of the picture book. Images mean that a viewer can follow the words before they can read; images mean a viewer can make connection between words and story.

To be successful, the text of a picture book needs to be succinct – space needs to be left for the illustrations to make their contribution. Creating a story with a perfect arc, with engaging characters is challenging at the best of times, but picture book writing and illustration take incredible talent, and this was fully evident in this year’s entries.

The picture book category is the biggest in the Awards. This year we had 60 entries covering a huge range of topics; reading them all was a delight – choosing the finalists involved robust and enjoyable discussion.

Hare & Ruru: A Quiet Moment delivers an important message about taking time out from a noisy busy world, and uses a calm palette of blues and browns and a range of interesting perspectives.

In ***Hound the Detective*** we follow an intrepid and dedicated detective, using clues and checklists to solve a mystery which turns out to be a beautiful surprise.

Kōwhai and the Giants is a beautiful and inspiring environmental tale featuring Kōwhai, a heroine, who strives to save the giant Kauri.

The Hug Blanket shares the loving relationship between a grandchild and her Nana, and, when Nana dies, offers beautiful warmth and comfort through the hug blanket.

This Is Where I Stand presents perspectives on war and contemporary remembrance through the eyes of a war memorial statue.

As judges we were agreed that these five finalists stood out from other entries because of the stories they told, the characters they introduced, the perspectives they offered, and the quality of their illustrations.

Citation for winner:

Kōwhai and the Giants

Written and illustrated by Kate Parker

Published by Little Love, Mary Egan Publishing

Based on a shadow box exhibition at the Arataki Visitor Centre in 2016/17, Kate Parker’s illustrations capture a sense of their original three dimensions, using a palette from kauri browns to kōwhai golds. These accompany a poetic text, which tells us of Kōwhai’s attempt to carry a message from the threatened kauri giants to the people. This gentle environmental story captured the judges’ hearts, both for its message and the original illustrations. Judges described this book as a classic in the making, delivering an important message for future generations in an engaging manner.

Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award for Junior Fiction

Speech by Mary Sangster

Junior Fiction should build on a child's love of reading, stimulating the imagination and leading the reader through worlds recognisable or wondrous, with characters who are well-developed and evolve throughout the story.

Reading the entries in the junior fiction category was a joy for the judges as, like the younger independent readers, we solved mysteries, embarked on adventures and delved into mythical and magical worlds, all wonderfully crafted and populated with characters who we could wonder at, empathise with, or even dislike.

We explored a variety of themes, from the future after sea levels have risen due to global warming, monsters from the deep and mythical gods, to the illegal export of insects and animals.

Across the Risen Sea shows us a version of what life might be like post global warming and has an underlying environmental theme. The protagonists embark on a quest, daring and dangerous, but peppered with humour.

Charlie Tangaroa and the Creature from the Sea is a well-crafted story of a modern-day boy who interacts with the gods of Māori mythology. With beautifully descriptive language, the reader is immersed in this world and cannot help but appreciate the depths of emotion on all sides.

Red Edge has Cassi dealing with complex issues while her natural curiosity draws her into an eco-adventure/mystery. In a recognisable setting, the reader becomes involved in the lives of a diverse group of characters and their interactions.

The Inkberg Enigma uses a graphic novel format, and is a fast-paced adventure that combines a mystery and a monster. Cleverly thought out, the story even draws in those readers not usually comfortable with the graphic format.

The Tunnel of Dreams allows the reader's imagination to soar. Is there really a parallel world full of magic, but no twins? This is a story of friendship, loyalty and determination.

We judges were presented with a wealth of good books in this category, but these five stood out as being well-written and very appealing to the reader. The use of language and the standard of penmanship is stunning.

Citation for winner:

Charlie Tangaroa and the Creature from the Sea

Written by T K Roxborough

Published by Huia Publishers

It's the beginning of the summer holidays in Tolaga Bay and Charlie is soon to find out that "things are never, ever as they first appear to be'. Māori mythology is woven into the story as Charlie draws on the pūrākau and waiata that his Grandad has taught him, as well as the down-to-earth lessons from family life, to mediate between battling, sibling gods. The judges were impressed by the diversity of characters and their authenticity, and also by the inclusion of a character with a disability. They felt that this added depth to the story while not being the focal point, as did the underlying issue of humans disturbing the natural environment.

Young Adult Fiction Award

Speech by Stephen Clothier

To read the best, most highly crafted young adult fiction is to stand before a sheet of glass infinitely high and infinitely wide. The glass can be a mirror where readers see themselves reflected through lines of familiarity, memory, and lived experience. It can also be a window that opens to the wideness of the world and invites readers to pay attention, to notice, to understand and empathise with an experience that is *not* their own.

The finalists in this category this year understand that to really get to the vital core of the percipient, discerning, and increasingly concerned young adult readership, that sheet of glass has to do all of that at once and more.

Their windows show us what needs to be changed in the world – environmental devastation, destruction of local knowledge and memory, historical currents of oppression and injustice, societal pressures that warp our human experiences of love and connection.

And their mirrors reflect back to the reader the power they have to reach out and profoundly influence what they see in themselves and in the world.

Draw Me A Hero blurs the lines between fantasy and reality in a tightly-constructed exploration of art, friendship, love, and how we all make ourselves up in the end.

Fire's Caress is a brilliant collision of personal and global conflicts against a backdrop of Samoan mythology, and crackles with intensity and life.

Katipo Joe: Spycraft is a masterfully paced and unputdownable tale of war and infiltration, anchored around the very real historical core of oppression in Nazi Germany.

The King's Nightingale's dynamic storytelling and intricate world-building navigates us through a mythical world, whose structures of injustice are firmly rooted in our own.

The Pōrangī Boy's deftly crafted dialogue brings a cast of small-town New Zealand characters to life, as we learn the value and hardship of standing up for our ideals.

Citation for winner:

The Pōrangī Boy

Written by Shilo Kino

Published by Huia Publishers

In *The Pōrangī Boy*, Shilo Kino has crafted, through hard edges and deftness of touch, a story that will endure. Niko's intensely personal story is woven through with threads of issues that permeate the lives of young people in Aotearoa – environmental damage, neocolonialism, bullying, poverty – but never slips into didacticism or preachiness. Where this book shines the brightest is in Shilo Kino's uncontestable genius for crafting believable, authentic voices that are thoroughly rooted in this place, these times. You feel the shapes of the words in your mouth, hear the resonance they leave in your ears – and the resonance of these words and this book is clear and long-lasting.

Elsie Locke Award for Non-Fiction

Speech by Nicola Daly

In an age of the world wide web, when we can google facts at the tap of a smartphone, non-fiction children's books continue to have particular importance and appeal. They curate the mind-boggling abundance of information available for our young readers (and adults), using design and layout in exciting and dramatic ways; they step us through new ideas and facts as we develop new knowledge and skills; and they allow us into people's lives in enlightening ways.

This year's finalists showcase a range of non-fiction forms including a memoir, a cook book, how to tell a joke, and factual books about animals and disasters. All use layout in ways which enhance our experience of the information they present – by using illustration and colour to direct our attention, and to pack detail into each page; or by playfully combining handwritten texts and image in unconventional patterns across each page.

There may not have been as many non-fiction entries this year as in some previous years, but the overall standard was very high and it was difficult to choose a shortlist of only five books.

Egg and Spoon: An Illustrated Cookbook presents a range of recipes for the young cook, beautifully laid out and accompanied by humorous illustrations.

Mophead Tu: The Queen's Poem gives the reader insight into the writing of a poem for the Queen, along the way exploring colonial histories.

New Zealand Disasters uses a myriad of non-fiction features to present a huge range of information about disasters in Aotearoa.

North and South introduces the reader to animals from the Northern and Southern hemispheres with informative text, and delicate and detailed watercolour illustrations.

You're Joking: Become an Expert Joke-Teller takes the reader through a range of skills and exercises to learn how to tell jokes.

These five non-fiction titles stood out because of the quality of the text and layout, presenting information which we believe will engage children, feeding their thirst for new skills, knowledge and perspectives on the world.

Citation for winner:

Egg and Spoon: An Illustrated Cookbook

Written by Alexandra Tylee and illustrated by Giselle Clarkson

Published by Gecko Press

The pages of this beautifully designed and illustrated cookbook await the splatters of eager young cooks as they learn essential life skills while creating simple meals or celebratory dishes. From basic cooking skills such as boiling an egg, chopping an onion and knowing when a cake is cooked, the novice home chef can go on to produce complete meals and desserts. The judges praised the varied and thoughtful content of the book, with recipes presented methodically and spaciouly, accompanied by luscious illustrations, often with humour.

Russell Clark Award for Illustration

Speech by Alan Dingley

“Art is not what you see, but what you make others see,” said Degas

The entries in this year's Russell Clark Award for Illustration have done just that, and then some. They have taken the text and given it, not just wings but roller skates, jetpacks and more ... we dig deep into the earth, and we are sent up into the stars.

Our finalists are spread across very different mediums and moods, but they all evoke wonder and joy in equal measure. We explore that universe, take a powerful mythical journey, watch celestial envy grow, see our forests fall and rise again, and, as most of us know, sometimes we're just searching for a quiet moment.

In ***Hare & Ruru: A Quiet Moment***, cross sections and 'hare-level' views allow us to connect with Hare, and negative space is used delightfully to illustrate moments of stillness and sound.

I am the Universe's kaleidoscopic illustrations bring the universe here to Earth, with judicious labelling of the solar systems elements adding a delightful non-fiction aspect.

Kōwhai and the Giants began as a shadow box exhibition, and the palette of kauri browns and kōwhai golds used here beautifully capture the sense of the original three dimensions.

Watercolours of deep blues and bright yellows show us ***Moon & Sun*** in each of their glory. Curved lines flow across vibrant spreads carrying the reader through the story.

The vibrant oranges and reds of ***Te Uruuru Whenua o Ngātoroirangi*** show the power of volcanoes, while rippling waters full of sinking deep blues all work together, whether presenting spiritual elements, or strong human characters.

These books all offer so much individually, but when looked at as a whole you can see what astounding talent and depth that we have in our New Zealand bank of illustrators and artists. With a record 40 entries this year, the future looks bright for the field.

Citation for winner:

Hare and Ruru: A Quiet Moment

Written and illustrated by Laura Shallcrass

Published by Beatnik Publishing

Laura Shallcrass has crafted a beautiful book, full of incredible spreads that are highlighted through the sparse texts, and ever-changing views, from Hare's full face to a star-speckled sky that spells out a message for us all. Browns and blues create Hare's earthy environment, and Ruru is coloured a delicious dark that melts into the night-time background.

Hare & Ruru: A Quiet Moment is a book with a relevant, modern message, which takes us up high into its branches yet keeps us safe and warm in Hare's burrow. It is a gorgeous book, with a beautifully delivered world and message.

Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Award

Speech by Anahera Morehu

A ha ka ma na pa ra ta wa ngā whā

E ngā manu taupua kua topa iho mai i te tīkokekoketanga o te wā nei, tēnā koutou katoa.

E te hau kāinga, ā, ko te Tāhuna ā Tara, nā koutou mātou i tiaki i te whenua ātaahua e hora ake nei, tēnā koutou.

Ka mahara ahau i a rātou o ngā marae maha he mangō pare i tau ki te tāhuna. Ko koutou e taukapokapo ana mai rā, haere, haere, haere atu rā.

Hoki ki a tātou o te ao hurihuri nei. Mā koutou ko ngā kaituhituhi rātou e marotiritiri ai te māra o te mātauranga, ka maea ngā hua. E tika ana tēnei kōrero, hei whakapakari ngā tamariki, ngā mokopuna hoki. Ka tū ai, hei māngai mō te whānau, mō te iwi, mō te ao katoa. Ko te kōrero hoki i korowaitia te kaupapa o te pānui me te tuhituhi. Mai i te mata o te pene ki te mata o te arero. E mihi kau ana ki ngā tāngata i hangaia rawatia ngā kōrero-a-pukapuka nei.

He tohu rangatira, ko te Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu tohu mō Te Reo Māori nei. Kia whiri ngā whakaaro, ngā kōrero o ngā pūrākau ia te iwi, ia te hāpori, ia te whānau puta atu i te ao. E whanake ana ngā pūkenga a o tātou taiohi, hei hāpai te reo rangatira o Aotearoa nei. E kore e warewaretia mātou e koutou ngā kaitā, hei pupuke te ia o ngā kōrero i te ao kikokiko nei, nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

This is an auspicious occasion, acknowledging the treasures which have been created this past year for the benefit of literacy, learning and nurturing the knowledge of our future leaders. It is an honour to be convenor of judges for the Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Award for Books in Te Reo Māori. This award celebrates the breadth, depth and thought of authors and illustrators alike. These writings play an important role in lifting the ideals and dreams of our youth through the written word, and helping our future leaders to verbalise their aspirations.

In ***Aroha Te Whai Ora*** we are taken on a journey with Aroha as she deals with her worries and fears, and learns techniques to manage her emotions. Te reo Māori has an ebb and flow, with a rhythmic beat that would work well as a waiata.

Mihi introduces concepts of whānau and place in the world, the starting point for everyone learning te reo Māori. The simplicity of illustrations and reo in make this board book both beautiful and accessible.

Pīpī Kiwi is a story that shows the inquisitiveness of children through the eyes of Kiwi Iti, and how they react to the prospect of new additions to their families, and also teaches important lessons about patience.

Ngake me Whātaimai brings the traditional story of the two taniwha of Te Whanganui-a-Tara to life with its graphic novel illustrations, to explain how the landscape of areas surrounding Wellington harbour came about, and the origins of different Māori names for the city's well-known landmarks.

Te Uruuru Whenua o Ngātoroirangi follows in the footsteps of the tohunga Ngātoroirangi (Ngātoro) as he journeys through Aotearoa and overcomes challenges from demons and the many exotic guardians he encounters. Te reo Māori highlights the mita of tangata whenua of the Central Plateau region.

It is a huge goal to lift te reo to new heights, and one that we expect to grow for both written and spoken te reo. Sharing our stories in the many forms of tukutuku, whakairo and other forms of media is key for our taiohi. These te reo Māori writings will help them to learn the skillsets that will take them beyond normal dimensions and open their eyes to universes.

Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro, nōna te ngahere.

Ko te manu e kai ana te mātauranga, nōna te ao.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, huri noa i te whare nei, tēnā tātou katoa.

Citation for winner:

Ngake me Whātaimai

Written by Ben Ngaia and illustrated by Laya Mutton-Rogers

Published by Huia Publishers

He kōrero ātaahua nei o ngā taniwha e rua, ko Ngake me Whātaimai. This is a wonderful journey for the reader in acknowledging the formation of Te Whanganui a Tara. Through storytelling, children learn about the pūtaiao of the hidden movements within Papatūānuku, and how these beautiful Māori placenames were given – “Ka tapaina ko Te Whatu Wai Moana.”

This book encourages youth to aspire to new heights through the art of reading, literacy and writing. Ko te reo kia rere, ko te reo kia tika, ko te reo kia Māori. The author personifies this through the use of the tangata whenua mita, and the illustrator's graphic interpretation lifts the quality of the kupu and kōrero to new horizons.

Best First Book Award

Speech by Pauline Smith

The judges faced an enormous challenge to create a shortlist from the thirty-two well crafted, rich and engaging eligible entries. There truly is something for everyone in this selection of first books by clever, competent authors and illustrators – a number of whom are also shortlisted in other categories. Readers will be treated to action and adventure, beautiful design, rich images, meaningful and heart-warming themes, and messages of hope and fun. “Kiwiness” is alive and evident through recognisable New Zealand slang and humour, and te reo and te ao Māori themes, which are accessible in this wonderfully fresh collection.

Kōwhai and the Giants

A whimsical tale of Kōwhai, who reflects on colonisation, greed and waste. This beautifully crafted story is complemented by soft layered soulful images that create mood and feeling.

The Pōrangī Boy

Issues faced by young people are woven throughout Niko’s story. The fight to protect his kainga through protest and his strength of character is told through a highly engaging story line.

The Inkberg Enigma

An inviting graphic novel that follows Miro and Zia in a quest to solve a gripping sea monster mystery in a small seaside town. This is the stuff that great adventures are made of.

The Midnight Adventures of Ruru and Kiwi

A story of friendship, sharing and fun are captured in delightful images. Clever use of light and dark, and wispy lines and dots, gives movement and charisma to each of the creatures of Aotearoa.

Hare & Ruru: A Quiet Moment

A gently packaged story, that follows Hare’s pursuit of conscious wellbeing. The original creative design spreads are packed with personality that won’t disappoint.

Publishers have given us confidence that strong new talent is being supported and nurtured, and this is fantastic for the future of authors, illustrators and readers.

Citation for winner:

Kōwhai and the Giants

Written and illustrated by Kate Parker

Published by Little Love, Mary Egan Publishing

It is symbolic when the giant trees tell Kōwhai “each tiny seed holds the promise of great hope”. This is a call to action for Kōwhai to nurture each important seed, and leaves readers with hope for a positive future. This story has a poetic quality, and is threaded with themes of kaitiakitanga. Subtle images in a limited colour palette of browns and golds add to the stirring, deep feelings portrayed on each page. These connect the past and the present with sincerity and gentleness. Through *Kōwhai and the Giants*, we are led to believe in our personal power to effect change. A promising new talent is discovered.

Margaret Mahy Book of the Year Award

Speech by Alan Dingley

And then there was one... the supreme award. The Margaret Mahy Book of the Year.

Again, congratulations to all of the shortlisted authors, and to the winners so far. You all presented the judges with a monumentally difficult task, one which we took incredibly seriously. I believe I can speak for my fellow judges when I tell you that the process, though difficult, brought us great joy. The smorgasbord of literature that was laid in front of us was a feast, with something for every palate and appetite, and we unashamedly gorged ourselves.

Margaret Mahy always told us never to underestimate children and young people, and that no book was complete until it had found its way into the hands of a reader.

I believe the books presented tonight will create a whole new army of readers, as they will see themselves between these pages — and that, to this humble librarian, is what a good book should be. Either a mirror or a doorway. You can see yourself in it, or you can escape into it.

All of our finalists have shown us the world we live in, how that world came to be, and worlds beyond this one, and we thank you all so much for that.

Hare & Ruru paints us a beautiful, quiet moment and tells to just breathe; *Egg & Spoon* is a visually delicious, tasty non-fiction treat; *The Pōrangī Boy* shows us we need to stand our ground, wherever that may be; *Charlie Tangaroa and the Creature from the Sea* lets us know that we are the sum of all of our parts; *Kōwhai and the Giants* reminds us to plant our seed deep, if we wish to grow; and *Ngake me Whātaītai* breathes life into the Wellington cityscape, with Māori placenames and powerful illustrations. The taniwha of Te Whanganui-a-Tara are definitely alive and well.

I mentioned before of the difficulty of the judges’ task, and as you can see, these category winners are all astounding books. For the Supreme Winner, the judges were looking for the book that not only stood out to us, but would appeal to as many readers as possible. We were looking for the Swiss Army knife of books, if you will.

It gives me immense pleasure to announce that the winner of the Margaret Mahy Book of the Year for 2021 is ***Charlie Tangaroa and the Creature from the Sea***, written by Tania Roxborough, and published by Huia Publishers.

Citation for Margaret Mahy Book of the Year:

Charlie Tangaroa and the Creature from the Sea

Written by T K Roxborough

Published by Huia Publishers

Charlie Tangaroa is not defined by his disability, he is not defined by his place in the world, he defines himself through his family. This is a book that has so many themes that resonate in today's culture. Disability, whanaungatanga, Charlie's whakapapa, the environment – all are all dealt with a sure hand, and a gentle heart. Charlie's fractured family is reflected in the warring brothers, and we are taken along at pace, with assured handling, and although so many issues are raised, they are never shoved in the reader's face – rather they are presented as they are, as just another step in Charlie's journey.

This is a uniquely New Zealand story, and one in which so many of us can see ourselves.
