



# Judges' Commentaries on Finalists and Winners

10 August 2022

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## Opening remarks by convenor of judges Pauline Smith

Tēnā Koutou Katoa, Talofa Lava,

Margaret Mahy was once quoted as saying: "Reading is very creative - it's not just a passive thing. I write a story; it goes out into the world; somebody reads it and, by reading it, completes it."

Thank you all for creating such stunning work, to be completed by eager readers.

On behalf of the judges, I would like to thank the New Zealand Book Awards Trust and its sponsors for their investment in these awards. They truly are a vehicle for uplifting and supporting writers, illustrators, publishers, booksellers, and anyone else who believes in celebrating the power of quality literature for children and young adults.

I have felt  excited and harikoa  to be convenor of Judges for the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults 2022.

And there was a powerhouse of expertise across the judging panels...


**Anahera Morehu** returned for a second year as convenor of the Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu panel. Joining Anahera on the panel were: **Horowaitai Roberts-Tuahine**, Online Content Service and Rauemi Developer – Te Ao Māori at Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa; **Te Amohaere Morehu** a communications specialist, and a mother of several avid young readers; **Ruki Tobin**, Kaihautū / Director Ratonga Māori Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, Ruki was a judge for Te Kura Pounamu in 2021, and for 2022 he had a unique position on both the English language and Te Kura Pounamu panels, providing cohesion and communication.

As convenor of the English Language Panel, I am an author, educationalist, and Polynesian Panther. I have admiration and respect for the expertise of this panel: **Adele Broadbent**, a children's bookseller, reviewer, author and self-confessed book nut; **Kyle Mewburn**, one of New Zealand's most eclectic and prolific multi award-winning writers; and **Laura Caygill**, Community Experiences and Diversity Team Leader for Waimakariri Libraries and book reviewer on RNZ's Nine to Noon.

See, I told you they were a powerhouse. It has been a wonderful privilege to learn from you all.

Publicist Gemma Finlay, you continue to elevate the mana of the awards with your publicity superpowers.

A very special thank you Joy Sellen, Awards Administrator. Joy, the breadth of knowledge and expertise you have across the awards process would require you to wear several superhero capes. Thank you for your manaakitanga.

But, tonight is about celebrating  the successes of our finalists, so a huge congratulations to you all and haere tonu let's go!

Kia ora, fa'afetai tele lava,  Thank you.

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## Picture Book Award

### Speech by Kyle Mewburn

The picture book category had by far the most entries – with 73 books entered – and it was certainly the most hotly contested.

Judges' deliberations covered some more abstract notions around the role and nature of picture books. To what degree, for example, do New Zealand picture books have a duty to reflect life in Aotearoa? Are picture books a form of visual storytelling; or a distinct artform? Are picture books, in effect, more windows or mirrors? Illustrated story, or Art with a capital A?

A good picture book is a symbiosis of story and illustration. Each element is required to perform unique yet complementary tasks, while also allowing sufficient room for each other to breathe.

And it is in that tenuous space; that fine, quivering balance between oral and visual storytelling, that the magic happens.

Each of the five finalists created different kinds of magic.

***Bumblebee Grumblebee*** dabbled in the gentle magic of anthropomorphic wordplay to create a treasure of quintessential cuteness.

***Lion Guards the Cake*** wove its mischievous wand over its dubious hero to produce a masterpiece of mayhem... and cake.

***My Cat Can See Ghosts***, with its enchantment of observational humour and edgy depictions of feline quirkiness, cast a spell which left the judges in thrall.

***The Eight Gifts of Te Wheke*** wove a darker magic, with links to Māori mythology and lushly detailed illustrations, to produce a gift of a story.

And ***The Greatest Haka Festival on Earth*** invited readers to share the rambunctious magic of Matatini with a loving, extended whānau.

Each of these finalists will surely find readers to beguile and bedazzle with their unique kinds of magic.

### **Citation for winner:**

#### ***Lion Guards the Cake***

Written and illustrated by Ruth Paul  
Published by Scholastic New Zealand

If a good picture book is a symbiosis of story and illustration, a stand-out picture book is one which includes that all-important third symbiotic element – the reader. *Lion Guards the Cake* is a sweetly irresistible story that invites readers to be both witness and accomplice to lion's furtive adventures and faux heroism as he upends the notion of duty. Its faultless, inventive rhyme, complemented by rich, silhouetted illustrations, engages the reader with effortless ease and a twinkle in its eye. This is confident storytelling of the highest calibre – a joyful read-out-loud which also rewards a more intimate and leisurely reading.

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### **Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award for Junior Fiction**

#### **Speech by Adele Broadbent (read by Kyle Mewburn)**

Junior fiction is a place where imaginations can blossom, discover, soar and want more. And this is what the Junior Fiction Finalists have given to New Zealand children in 2022.

With 26 entries to read, this section took the judges through the New Zealand Bush, back in time and up icy mountains. We met amazing characters both young and old, and magical creatures which awed and inspired. Choosing the finalists was difficult but five treasures stood out from our junior fiction reading journey.

***Amorangi and Millie's Trip through Time*** not only gives the reader a window into New Zealand's past, both thrilling and terrifying, it draws them into the narrative itself as time ticks away for the characters.

***Spark Hunter*** plunges readers into a riveting story of an imaginative world, where ancient creatures are woven into the very real world of impenetrable, beautiful and dangerous Fiordland bush.

***The Memory Thief*** is an imaginative, thought-provoking novel with a bit of creepy stirred in. The opposing natures of the characters draw in the reader. Friendships are formed, then tested in a nail-biting conclusion.

In *The Tomo*, tension builds steadily in a crescendo of danger, gripping readers who will wince, then fear and cheer for more than one life. Characters are authentically portrayed and will resonate with readers.

*The Uprising* takes the reader on a fantastical adventure as two brave siblings use their practical and magical skills to find a missing father. With a touch of steampunk and a ton of action, this is an exciting read.

## Citation for winner:

### *The Memory Thief*

Written by Leonie Agnew

Published by Puffin, Penguin Random House

From its eye-catching cover to the final conclusion, *The Memory Thief* is a stunning story that captures the reader early and holds them in an embrace of wonder, intrigue and imagination. The judges all agreed on the skill and writing craft of the author, sharing an extra depth and quality of language in this novel.

Unique but perfectly believable at the same time, *The Memory Thief* steps into another world whilst still inside our own. Memories themselves are both villains and heroes as they are taken or returned. The handling of a common illness, with its thought-provoking and original twist, is deftly handled and beautifully written.

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## Young Adult Fiction Award

### Speech by Laura Caygill

Young Adult Fiction offers an entry into the adult world, an adventure, an exploration, a challenge to be taken up. A bumper crop of 27 entries took on this challenge in this year's awards.

Judges admired the breadth of the books submitted, featuring strong characters in local and global settings, across timelines and cultures.

This year's shortlisted titles all drew the judges into their worlds with deftness, clear writing, well-developed plots and expertly built tension.

*Coastwatcher* takes us to the Solomon Islands in World War Two, where Frank Benson must use his wits and humanity to stay alive and fulfil his mission. Tension and friendship reign supreme.

***Displaced*** impressed the judges with its lyrical writing that draws you into Eloise’s emotional journey as she travels from 19<sup>th</sup> century Cornwall to Napier, finding greater hardship and triumph than she could have foreseen.

In the action-packed ***Katipo Joe: Wolf's Lair***, Aotearoa’s favourite spy must navigate Hitler’s inner circle. This novel is both historically fascinating and tightly written to keep you turning the pages.

***Learning to Love Blue*** is a novel of striking out alone, navigating relationships, and finding one’s feet in a new city. It’s an emotional and always relatable read.

***Violet Black*** begins Eileen Merriman’s high octane and gripping trilogy of deadly M-fever. The judges loved the slow burn beginning to this series with themes of loyalty, betrayal, and standing up for what you believe in.

These five shortlisted books combine themes of family, betrayal, love, adventure, and gaining independence. Whether in a historical setting, the present day, or an imagined present of science fiction, they all show a flair for that wonderful feature of young adult writing – drama.

## **Citation for winner:**

### ***Learning to Love Blue***

Written by Saradha Koirala

Published by Record Press

*Learning to Love Blue* is a celebration of finding independence in a new city. As Paige moves from Wellington and the comfort of friends and family to Melbourne, she must navigate new friendships and romantic relationships, all the while navigating her complicated feelings about her absent Mum. Saradha Koirala conveys all the mixed emotion of this setting in a way that is realistic, compassionate, and firmly placed in the journey into adulthood. Relatable at every turn, *Learning to Love Blue* draws you into Paige’s journey through Melbourne’s streets, bands, record and coffee shops, and has you rooting for her to the very end.

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## **Elsie Locke Award for Non-Fiction**

### **Speech by Kyle Mewburn**

When almost limitless knowledge is available with a few swipes of a finger, the role of non-fiction has by necessity evolved. Dusty tomes of dry facts told with all the aplomb of an ancient, ailing school master no longer cut it. Engaging contemporary young readers requires more than extensive knowledge and a wealth of experience. It demands narrative flair, with a storyteller's eye for detail.

Many of this year's 26 entries, which covered the gamut from real-life stories of derring-do to DIY manuals, could have comfortably sat beside the novels or picture books in the other categories.

What made this year's finalists stand out was the quality of the storytelling and, equally importantly, the personality of the narrative voice. There was passion and personality aplenty.

***Atua***, with its warm palette and gentle intimacy, felt like sitting alongside a favourite uncle as he unravels the mysteries of the gods.

***Draw Some Awesome*** gave us a self-effacing (even self-erasing) illustrator sharing his personal drawing journey to inspire and motivate budding artists of any age.

***How Do I Feel?*** offered an empathy-rich exploration of the complex emotional world, leaving a well-flagged trail that anyone could follow.

***Kia Kaha*** wove a complex narrative tapestry from the personal journeys and heartfelt stories of Māori who have changed the world.

And in ***Why is this Spider Dancing?***, unabashed arachnophiles shared their passion for all things eight-legged.

The shortlisted books were all well-considered from both content and design perspectives, with the creators' obvious expertise wielded lightly and unobtrusively throughout.

The result is a collection of comprehensive and timeless compendiums that should be essential additions to every family library.

### **Citation for winner:**

#### ***Atua: Māori Gods and Heroes***

Written and illustrated by Gavin Bishop

Published by Puffin, Penguin Random House

Variously described by the judges as a taonga, an instant classic and a 'must have' for every Kiwi household, *Atua* is a family tree for all New Zealanders. These tales of gods and heroes, both familiar and unfamiliar, are richly and emotively told with a novelist's eye for potent detail and the gentle authority of a master storyteller. It is a book designed to be treasured, with stunning production values and a mind-boggling attention to design detail that perfectly complement and enhance the powerfully emotive illustrations. A work of undoubted mastery, *Atua* is a rare gem indeed.

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## Russell Clark Award for Illustration

### Speech by Ruki Tobin (read by Laura Caygill)

The Russell Clark Award for Illustration is for a book which best demonstrates the craft and skill of illustration. This year there were 31 entries into this category.

Each of the shortlisted books featured illustrations that were creditable and consistent to the needs of their stories and the characters. The skill and artistry of these illustrators supported and complemented the text and gave life to the stories visually.

The finalists for this category epitomise the highest standards. We commend them for their pursuit of excellence.

***Atua: Māori Gods and Heroes*** is an authentic and guided journey that gives people the opportunity to learn more about te ao Māori. The hand of the artist can be seen on every page, giving life and meaning to the storytelling.

***Mokopuna Matatini*** provides an opportunity to experience the intensity and emotions of Matatini, “the greatest haka festival on earth”. A loose drawing style adds to the immediacy and sense of action, while the personalities of Nan and her whānau are emphasised.

***Moose the Pilot*** is a fun filled adventure, with Moose flying to beautiful destinations and helping his friends along the way. Vast, colourful illustrations are filled with clues and layers of complexity, and enhance the reader’s experience of the story.

***My Cat Can See Ghosts*** is a quirky story about a CAT and FEAR. The deceptively simple illustrations capture the invisible – the ghosts that can only be seen in the cat’s response, in its movements and in its eyes.

***The Eight Gifts of Te Wheke*** is the story of a brother and sister confronting a mythological Wheke. Action-packed and detailed images capture the tension and courage of our protagonists, and will keep readers engaged and add to their enjoyment of this exciting story.

### Citation for winner:

#### ***Atua: Māori Gods and Heroes***

Written and illustrated by Gavin Bishop

Published by Puffin, Penguin Random House

*Atua* is connected through time and place. Every page and section reveals more about the Māori world.



The artwork of *Atua* is exceptional, with watercolours that mimic elements seen in the taiao or environment, and a use of shapes and traditional Māori patterns and motifs that elevates it to a class of its own. These illustrations create a mauri or life force unique to this book. Even the cover reveals a deliberate intention to reflect pūrākau Māori, with overglossed atua figures on a velvety blackness that connects us to te pō, the beginning of time and existence.

Both the illustrator and the publisher should be very proud of the taonga that they have created.

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## **Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Award**

### **Speech by Anahera Morehu**

E aku whakateitei ki te whenua, e aku whakatamarahi ki te rangi tēnā koutou e rāmenemene mai nei i raro i te maru o te kaupapa ko tō tātou reo rerehua. Koutou hei kanohi kitea o rātou kua wehe atu, ā, ko ngā tāngata rongonui kua heke noa rā i te Tāhekeroa, e kore ā muri e hokia, nō reira, okioki pai koutou. Whakahoki mai ki te kaupapa nei, tēnā rā koutou katoa.

Ka tū honore ahau hei māngai o mātou o te tohu Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu i te Reo Māori. Ia te tau, he uua te mahi o ngā kaiwhiriwhiri, hei whiti kōrero, whiri whakaaro, ā, ka tae ki te kōrero i toa ai. Ahakoa te aha, ka kitea e mātou te reo, hei tauira o ngā tāngata i whai ai. He reo, hei āwhina ngā tamariki i ako te reo, mai te mata o te pene ki te arero. He reo, e whakapakari ana te mahi pānui o ngā tamariki ahakoa nō hea.

E te Tāhuna a Tara hei tohutohu, hei āwhina, hei whakatika te mahi a tātou katoa, ko te tino toa ko tō tātou reo rangatira. E hiahia ana tātou ki te kitea ngā pukapuka maha i te reo, erangi, ahakoa he iti he pounamu rawa mō tātou, mō ngā rangatira mō āpōpō. E kore e mutu te kōrero i tā koutou mahi rangatira nei.

Kua nawhe tēnā, ka huri ahau i te reo pihikete hei whakamārama atu, ko tēhea te pukapuka i toa ai.

Each year, the judges of Te Kura Pounamu hope to see a rise in the number of entries received in te reo Māori, while appreciating the challenges publishers face in making these wonderful books available.

We want to recognise te reo Māori experts and authors who create these works, and we continue to hope for an increase in those who want to publish their stories of their ao. We also welcome those who take the opportunity to translate into te reo Māori during this decade of indigenous languages.

We also thank the New Zealand Book Awards Trust for supporting the initiative of judging te reo Māori writings as part of the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults, and for promoting these pukapuka to the world.

E ngā manu taupua e tuhi ana i ngā kōrero, ngā pūrākau o te ao, tēnā koutou.

Now turning to the books up for this year's Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Award: The judges found the reo in all five finalists beautiful, with a depth and breadth that will advance te reo abilities of tamariki of all ages.

***He Wheke Wai Mamangu Au*** presents educational facts about te wheke in an engaging and colourful way that will appeal to young readers' imaginations.

The lovely flow of the reo in ***I Waho, i te Moana***, and its illustrations, bring to life the authenticity of this story about the many taniwha that act as guardians in the moana.

***Ki te Moe Aotearoa*** presents a colourful interpretation of what happens at bedtime, with a storyline that provides parents an opportunity to help their young ones expand and elevate their reo.

***Mokopuna Matatini*** reveals an insider knowledge of the world of kapa haka, with illustrations that are excellent caricatures of real life kaihaka, and reo that captures the essence of Te Matatini.

***Te Hipo Huna*** is a quirky story about the innocence and haututu of children on a school trip, with reo that reads with the rhythmic flow of a jingle.

### **Citation for winner:**

#### ***I Waho, i te Moana***

Written by Yvonne Morrison, illustrated by Jenny Cooper and translated by Pānia Papa  
Published by Scholastic New Zealand

In ***I Waho, i te Moana***, the many sea creatures of the moana of Aotearoa are brought to life, with beautiful illustrations that highlight the interactions between sea creatures and their world. The story allows children to relate to these creatures, and understand their roles as kaitiaki within the realm of Tangaroa. There is a beautiful flow to te reo, which reflects the expertise of the translator. Te reo Māori will transcend the imagination and encourage interactions between tamariki and parents who read this wonderful story. This will support growth in te reo Māori capacity of both tamariki and parents who are at the conversational level.

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### **NZSA Best First Book Award**

## Speech by Laura Caygill

Among the 199 entries into this year's awards, some of the most exciting for the judges to read were those from new voices.

Over 30 titles were eligible for this year's NZSA Best First Book Award, and with many making shortlists in other categories, the calibre of this year's new authors and illustrators is encouragingly high.

Storytelling at its most powerful can offer the reader more than just a guidebook into other worlds and other world views, it can beckon, reach out a safe hand, and take you there directly.

These finalists all show exceptional promise as new tour guides for young New Zealand readers.

***Hine and the Tohunga Portal*** takes readers through a portal to an Aotearoa where taniwha, fearsome atua, and patupaiarehe roam the land. This striking, action-packed story is steeped in the spirit of whānau and Māoritanga.

***I am Autistic*** is a guidebook for readers of all ages to understand the world of autism. Empathetic, informative, affirming and inspirational, this book leads readers along a path of appreciation of neurodiversity.

***Mokopuna Matatini*** invites you to pack up the car and take a trip with the whānau to see iconic Te Matatini. A cast of characters always doing something interesting in this book's vibrant illustrations keeps readers turning the page in this instant classic.

***My Cat Can See Ghosts*** explores a question many people may have asked: Do cats have supernatural powers? This delightfully spunky entry sees a kung-fu fighting cat dance across the pages before curling up to sleep after a hard day's ghost hunting.

***Spark Hunter*** invites readers to trek into the mysterious depths of the Fiordland Forest, where powerful creatures struggle to preserve their ancient world. It's an adventure story with tenderness, tension and humour that will encourage young conservationists and explorers across Aotearoa.

Whether opening your mind to a new lived experience, or offering an imagined adventure, these five shortlisted titles provide inspiration for writers and readers across the languages and cultures of Aotearoa.

### Citation for winner:

#### ***Spark Hunter***

Written by Sonya Wilson

Published by The Cuba Press

Perfectly pitched for middle fiction readers, *Spark Hunter* weaves history, culture, conservation, humour, tension and adventure into her story of Nissa Marshall, who has always known there is more to the Fiordland Bush than meets the eye. While leaning into the fantastic just enough to encourage the imagination, the inclusion of archival excerpts will spark keen readers to hunt out their own discoveries within the mysterious history of this corner of Aotearoa. Making this story's light shine bright is te reo Māori blended throughout and a cast of supporting characters that are easily recognisable as classmates, teachers, and friends.

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## Margaret Mahy Book of the Year Award

### Speech by Pauline Smith (read by Anahera Morehu)

Our warmest congratulations once again to all the shortlisted finalists, publishers, and the category winners.

And now for the ONE!

The Margaret Mahy Book of the Year recognises a supreme winner that demonstrates outstanding overall excellence.

A book that achieves highest industry standards and provides aspirational incentives for authors, illustrators, and publishers.

A book that transcends time and will be as appealing in 50 years from now.

The following category winners are all in contention for tonight's supreme prize.

In alphabetical order they are:

***Atua***: Sends out a big haere mai as it welcomes us to validate matauranga and te ao Māori truths.

***I Waho, I te Moana***: Delivers whakapapa and fun woven together with te reo Māori and visually beautiful images.

***Learning to Love Blue***: Empowers us to believe that it's never too early to strike out in your own strength and shape your pathway.

***Lion Guards the Cake***: Offers masterfully blended words and images that give a cheeky, sneaky reminder of the value of hilarious mischief and mayhem.

***The Memory Thief***: Lets us journey into a magical gothic fable where the challenge of Alzheimers is merged respectfully.

Our category winners have shown us reflections of our world, lives and realities. It is comforting that the value of our own unique Aotearoa flavour is rich and embedded within these books.

They have also given us windows into new and imagined spaces.

## **Citation for Margaret Mahy Book of the Year:**

### ***Atua: Māori Gods and Heroes***

Written and illustrated by Gavin Bishop

Published by Puffin, Penguin Random House

*Atua* is an instant classic, a ‘must have’ for every Kiwi household and library, that is packaged in stunning production values.

Every element of the generously sized masterpiece is carefully considered. With impeccable illustrations in Gavin Bishop’s unmistakable style, it captures the personalities of the many gods and heroes. Each section has a fresh look, from the dense matte blackness of the first pages reflecting Te Kore, nothingness, to the startling blue backgrounds of the migration, with the glorious Te Rā – the sun, between.

*Atua* is much more than a list of Gods and legendary heroes – it’s a family tree, presented with power and simplicity. The text is never overstated, with the glory of the illustrations as the primary mode of storytelling, rewarding the reader who closely examines them.

There is a sense of magic about this book, right from the front cover. *Atua* is a taonga for this generation and the next.

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