



BEST NZ BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS 2025



MEET BLAKE, GEORGE AND JANNAT, OUR CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD AMBASSADORS

Our 2025 awards ambassadors are all keen readers who attend Manchester Street School in Feilding, in the heart of the Manawātū.

Six-year-old Blake likes graphic novels and picture books, especially ones about Māori legends and animals. His grandad and dad often read with him at home.

He reckons it's important to read lots because that's how you get better at it.

If someone told him they found it difficult he'd say, "You can do it!"

George, who is nine, often reads to find out about other countries and his favourite books are about Greek and Egyptian legends. He enjoys being a school librarian because he gets to help out at his favourite place in the school, and he finds it interesting to see what other students are reading.

Jannat's current most-loved book is one about zebras, which she reads to her little sister. The six-year-old feels really happy when she visits the school library.

If a friend said they found reading difficult, she would say,

"Try new books, you can be happy in new books."



KIA ORA TAMARIKI!

IF YOU ARE LIKE OUR AMBASSADORS AND LOVE BOOKS, WE'VE GOT THE PERFECT READING LIST FOR YOU IN THE PAGES THAT FOLLOW. CHOSEN BY OUR JUDGES AS THE 2025 FINALISTS IN THE NEW ZEALAND BOOK AWARDS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS, THESE 32 FANTASTIC BOOKS HAVE BEEN CREATED BY TALENTED NEW ZEALAND AUTHORS AND ILLUSTRATORS FOR KEEN READERS JUST LIKE YOU. WE GUARANTEE THEY WILL EXPAND YOUR IMAGINATION AND YOUR KNOWLEDGE, SO SEEK THEM OUT IN YOUR FAVOURITE BOOKSHOP, LOCAL LIBRARY, OR AT YOUR SCHOOL, AND GET READING!

PICTURE BOOK

BOOKHUB AWARD

BEDTIME HIJINKS, SĀMOAN
MATARIKI, CURIOUS WEKA,
FABULOUS FIRST WORDS,
AND FUN WITH FISH



BEDDY-BYE TIME IN THE KŌWHAI TREE

BY JULIETTE MACIVER, ILLUSTRATED BY LILY UIVEL

PUBLISHED BY SCHOLASTIC NEW ZEALAND

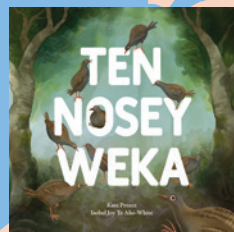
This quintessentially Kiwi romp captures the fun and chaos of getting a wee one to bed. The whimsical tale, told using clever rhyme, counting in threes, and with a sprinkling of kupu Māori, is complemented by detailed, witty illustrations in a beautifully calm colourway. A funny, engaging and magical bedtime read.

MATAALI'I

BY DAHLIA MALAEULU, ILLUSTRATED BY DARCY SOLIA

PUBLISHED BY MILA'S BOOKS

Fetū is the youngest sister of heavenly-appointed guardians, and her only job is to be the heart of the family. But what good is her love, when her siblings keep turning into stars? Deftly interwoven with Sāmoan cultural values and evocative illustrations, this deeply moving tale brings Mataali'i to life in a new and powerful way.



TEN NOSEY WEKA

BY KATE PREECE, ILLUSTRATED BY ISOBEL JOY TE AHO-WHITE

PUBLISHED BY BATEMAN BOOKS

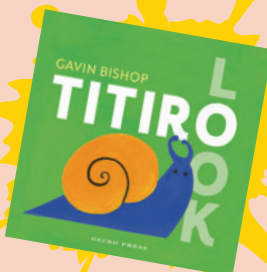
This charmingly illustrated and playful trilingual counting rhyme follows a bunch of cheeky weka on their Rēkohu adventures. Numbers and simple nouns in tā rē Moriori, te reo Māori and English are followed by information about the Chatham Islands and their creatures. An entertaining and informative introduction to Aotearoa's ancient languages.

TITIRO LOOK

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY GAVIN BISHOP, TRANSLATED BY DARRYN JOSEPH

PUBLISHED BY GECKO PRESS, LERNER PUBLISHING GROUP

A deceptively simple bilingual reo Māori-English board book, where carefully chosen kupu and vibrant, meticulously crafted illustrations create complex layers of meaning and connection. Words reappear in new contexts and combinations, and illustrations pair a diverse range of whānau members with cherished childhood belongings. Perfect for sharing, exploring and learning.



YOU CAN'T PAT A FISH

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY RUTH PAUL

PUBLISHED BY WALKER BOOKS AUSTRALIA

After a disappointing visit to the pet shop, an unimpressed child has to come to terms with her new, wet pet. Skilfully rhymed, with playful humour and modern, dynamic illustrations, the story highlights the joy to be found in *not* getting what you want. Fresh, funny and an absolute delight to read aloud.



BROWN BIRD

BY JANE ARTHUR

PUBLISHED BY PUFFIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

Eleven-year-old Rebecca is a shy introvert, desperate to go unnoticed. All that changes when a new friend comes to stay for the summer. A gentle and poignant examination of finding friendship, family and the seldom-explored joys of being the quiet one. Each sentence is a poem in itself, thoughtful, resonant and artfully restrained.

DETECTIVE BEANS AND THE CASE OF THE MISSING HAT

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY LI CHEN

PUBLISHED BY PUFFIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

A crime-solving kitten, an elusive hat and a diamond heist oil the wheels of this adorable comic caper. Detective Beans is on the case, even if his mum does want him back by dinner time. Li Chen's sweet graphic novella artfully blends humour and adventure in a twisty tale of an intrepid young gumshoe cat.



THE APPRENTICE WITNESSER

BY BREN MACDIBBLE

PUBLISHED BY ALLEN & UNWIN

In a post-apocalyptic world, plagues have swept away everything that was once familiar and knowledge is being reborn in the hands of 'witnessers'. Hoping to join their ranks is twelve-year-old apprentice witnesser Lodyma Darsey, a plucky survivor in search of her place. An immersive, environmentally profound vision of a possible future.

THE RAVEN'S EYE RUNAWAYS

BY CLAIRE MABEY

PUBLISHED BY ALLEN & UNWIN

With her friends and a one-eyed raven as accomplices, Getwin is on a wild mission, determined to uncover truths about the world they live in – a world where writing and reading is restricted to the elites. Rich, atmospheric prose propels this fantasy quest, and the power of words is explored with magical enthusiasm.



VIOLET AND THE VELVETS: THE CASE OF THE MISSING STUFF

BY RACHAEL KING, ILLUSTRATED BY PHOEBE MORRIS

PUBLISHED BY ALLEN & UNWIN

Violet Grumble is putting aside her performance (and social) anxiety, picking up a guitar and starting a band. But when stuff starts to go missing, band rivalry tensions reach a new high. A riotously fun and brilliantly constructed adventure that incorporates a heartfelt and accurate depiction of the ADHD girl-brain in action.

JUNIOR FICTION
WRIGHT FAMILY FOUNDATION
ESTHER GLEN AWARD

THE QUIET ONES, A KITTEN
DETECTIVE, POST-APOCALYPTIC
MIRACLES, RUNAWAYS AND A
RAVEN, AND ROCK GIRLS

YOUNG ADULT FICTION AWARD

INNER MONSTERS, AFTERSHOCKS OF FAMILY SECRETS, A SPACE ODYSSEY, THE MESS MADE BY OTHERS, & A WORLD BASED ON LIES



BEAR

BY KIRI LIGHTFOOT, ILLUSTRATED BY PIPPA KEEL SITU
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN & UNWIN

The world seems determined to test Jasper Robinson-Woods. There's his too-long name, his mum's stupid boyfriend, his glaringly absent Dad, and his dying goldfish. Worst of all, there's a creature lurking in his nightmares, threatening to tear everything apart. A moving novel of adolescent rage, humour, kindness, and the pain of finding yourself.

GRACEHOPPER

BY MANDY HAGER
PUBLISHED BY ONE TREE HOUSE

Grace's life has been a series of earthquakes, right from the day she was born. Grace is trying to navigate these tremors when her best friend Charlie returns, and secrets of the past are finally confronted. A cleverly crafted, poignant examination of identity, loss, acceptance and resilience in an unstable world.



MIGRATION

BY STEPH MATUKU
PUBLISHED BY HUIA PUBLISHERS

Desperate to escape both her planet and her Mum, Farah's chosen destiny is Western Wānanga interplanetary military school. But Farah will have to test herself, and explore who she really is and what she wants to become. Te Ao Mārama is woven into this striking dystopian space odyssey set 3,000 years into our possible future.

THE MESS OF OUR LIVES

BY MARY-ANNE SCOTT
PUBLISHED BY ONE TREE HOUSE

How do you make sense of your own life when you are drowning in someone else's mess? Jordan Baxter's mum is an extreme hoarder, and he and his sister Tabitha are trapped by her affliction and neglect. This immersive and visceral novel powerfully portrays the trauma of their lives, yet beneath its grim morass, hope can still be found.



THE PARADISE GENERATION

BY SANNA THOMPSON
PUBLISHED BY UMOP APISDN PRESS

When the girl of his dreams is an epic fail as a genome match, Kieran won't accept the options that fate hands him. As the fabric of his world begins to unravel, Kieran questions everything – but discovering the truth could get him killed. A pacey, sophisticated and thought-provoking dystopian vision of a future Wellington.



NON-FICTION ELSIE LOCKE AWARD

SPORTING PRIDE, WHAKATAUKI WISDOM, NOCTURNAL HUNTER, EXPLAINING TE TIRITI, AND TONGAN POETRY



BLACK MAGIC

BY DAVID RILEY, ILLUSTRATED BY MUNRO TE WHATA
PUBLISHED BY READING WARRIOR

The fascinating history behind the black uniforms with silver ferns that are worn by Aotearoa's sportspeople is told in an engaging narrative, which will capture the interest of sports lovers and non-sports lovers alike. Crisp and dynamic illustrations provide a perfect accompaniment for this tale of heroes, national identity, pride and determination.

DEAR MOKO: MĀORI WISDOM FOR OUR YOUNG ONES

BY HINEMOA ELDER
PUBLISHED BY PENGUIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

A stunning collection of whakatauki that explains their meanings and links them to everyday life. Speaking directly to readers with warmth and kindness, this pukapuka suggests ways of building connections and aroha and makes it clear that there are many ways to be Māori, while also being inclusive of readers of all backgrounds.



RURU, NIGHT HUNTER

BY KATIE FURZE, ILLUSTRATED BY NED BARRAUGH
PUBLISHED BY SCHOLASTIC NEW ZEALAND

This beautifully illustrated creative non-fiction picture book tells the story of a night in the life of a ruru, from hunting, to evading human threats and mammalian predators, to feeding its young. The writing is poetic and well-paced, and is enhanced by expertly rendered illustrations washed in a dark blue-grey palette.

THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

BY ROSS CALMAN
PUBLISHED BY ORATIA BOOKS

An in-depth and concise overview of Te Tiriti o Waitangi that is a must-have for every home, library and classroom. The complexity of our founding document is successfully explained from an authentic perspective, in a way that will be accessible to younger readers without simplifying or leaving out critical aspects, or seeking to elicit guilt.



TUI PEA LUVA

BY MELE TONGA-GRANT, ILLUSTRATED BY LUCA WALTON
PUBLISHED BY MILA'S BOOKS

Tui Pea Luva shares Pasifika perspectives through a wonderful collection of poems that are rich in descriptive language and identity, and reflect the realities of Tongan families. The layout and illustrations holding the text together are a visual delight and give room for the poems, and the reader, to breathe.

Alice and the Strange Bird



Alice and the Strange Bird

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY ISAAC DU TOIT
PUBLISHED BY ISAAC DU TOIT

Seven-year-old Alice McKenzie and her brother were the last people to see a living moa. Isaac du Toit's use of diorama takes the reader back to 1880, and his arresting illustrations are quirky, eerie, haunting, and strange. Are you brave enough to follow Alice into the Martins Bay sandhills of 145 years ago?

HINERAUKATAURI ME TE ARA PŪORO

BY ELIZABETH GRAY, ILLUSTRATED BY REHUA WILSON
PUBLISHED BY HUIA PUBLISHERS

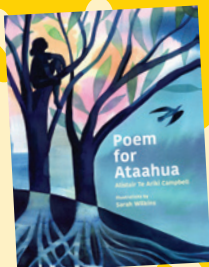
The journey of Hineraukauri, a chrysalis who enters the human world without a voice, is shown through a stunning mixture of darkness and light, abstract imagery, and powerful and realistic figure drawing. The beautiful images convey a waiata-like sense of movement, reflecting the progress of Hineraukauri as she is gifted different elements of music.



POEM FOR ATAAHUA

BY ALISTAIR TE ARIKI CAMPBELL, ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH WILKINS
PUBLISHED BY READING WARRIOR

Cook Islands Māori poet Alistair Te Ariki Campbell wrote this poem for his great-granddaughter Ataahua, and Sarah Wilkins shares her vision of it through her illustrations. Changes in perspective offer deep insights into the magic of the words, and the beautiful drawings of Ataahua are visual treasures in themselves.



SAD SUSHI

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY ANNA ALDRIDGE
PUBLISHED BY ANNA ALDRIDGE

Sad Sushi is a powerful yet accessible exploration of the experience of depression, with illustrations that convey complicated emotions and mood shifts in a way that young readers might otherwise struggle to identify or understand. Complex, dreamy and at times almost ukiyo-e-like in its composition, this is a beautifully crafted picture book.



YOU CAN'T PAT A FISH



YOU CAN'T PAT A FISH

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY RUTH PAUL
PUBLISHED BY WALKER BOOKS AUSTRALIA

A little girl wants a pet – but isn't at all impressed when the pet that she is given is a fish. What's wrong with a fish, you ask? Ruth Paul's delightful combination of zany images and quirky rhyming text will convince every young child that, actually, they would absolutely love to have a pet fish!

ILLUSTRATION
RUSSELL CLARK AWARD

SEEING A MOA, THE MUSIC
OF HINERAUKATAURI, POETIC
MAGIC, COMPLEX EMOTIONS,
AND THE FUN OF A NEW PET

TE REO MĀORI WRIGHT FAMILY FOUNDATION TE KURA POUNAMU AWARDS

★ ORIGINALLY WRITTEN IN TE REO MĀORI

A ARIĀ ME TE ATUA O TE KŪMARA

BY WITI IHIMAERA, ILLUSTRATED BY ISOBEL JOY TE AHO-WHITE, AND TRANSLATED BY HĒNI JACOB
PUBLISHED BY PUFFIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

An inspirational tale of a long and difficult journey to the sky by Ariā and her friends, as they try to save the world's dying kūmara – and the world itself. Hēni Jacobs' excellent translation of Witi Ihimaera's original words has the feel of a story from long ago. The reo flows easily, and is supported by the beautiful illustrations.



★ HINERAUKATAURI ME TE ARA PŪORO

BY ELIZABETH GRAY, ILLUSTRATED BY REHUA WILSON
PUBLISHED BY HUIA PUBLISHERS

Hineraukauri me Te Ara Pūoro uses lyrical language and evocative illustrations to tell the pūrākau of how Hineraukauri brought music into the world. This book is a taonga that brings the essence of te ao Māori to the wider reading world, through an authentically Māori representation of atua Māori and wairua Māori.



KA MĀTORO A WHETŪ RĀUA KO KOHU I ROTORUA

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY HAYLEY ELLIOTT-KERNOT, AND TRANSLATED BY TE INGO NGAIA
PUBLISHED BY ROUND DOOR DESIGN

The significant places and stories of Rotorua area are showcased here as Whetū and Kohu, a kea and a kererū, explore the area. A map and some fun facts about the mānu of Aotearoa add informative value. Tamariki will be engaged by the questions this book asks of its readers, and by its whimsical, bright and colourful illustrations.



KO NGĀ WHETŪ KAI O MATARIKI, KO TUPUĀNUKU RĀUA KO TUPUĀRANGI

BY MIRIAM KAMO, ILLUSTRATED BY ZAK WAIPARA, AND TRANSLATED BY ARIANA STEVENS
PUBLISHED BY SCHOLASTIC NEW ZEALAND

The importance of the Matariki stars Tupuānuku and Tupuārangi to food growing and gathering, and to the land itself, is displayed in this playful tale. The stories and tikanga surrounding the Matariki season are highlighted, giving this book considerable value as an accessible way for tamariki to learn about these aspects of Matariki.

★ NGĀ KUPENGA A NANNY RINA

BY QIANE MATATA-SIPU, ILLUSTRATED BY ISOBEL JOY TE AHO-WHITE
PUBLISHED BY PUFFIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

Nanny Rina teaches the intricacies of weaving to her moko in a fun and enjoyable story that comes authentically from te ao Māori. The depiction of the wonderful way in which grandmother and grandchild work together is a celebration of the way tikanga is handed down from one generation to the next in whānau Māori.



KEI WWW.NZBOOKAWARDS.NZ ĒNEI WHAKAAHUA I ROTO I TE REO MĀORI.

BEST FIRST BOOK NZSA AWARD

A BRAVE BIRD, OUTDOOR
FUN, A BATTLE FOR
BOOKS, AN OUTWITTED
WITCH, AND
SETTLER STORIES



BRAVE KĀHU AND THE PŌRANGI MAGPIE

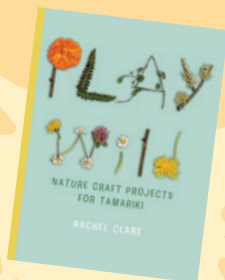
BY SHELLEY BURNE-FIELD
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN & UNWIN

While still navigating her own grief following the tragic loss of her mother, brave kāhu Poto rises to lead her whānau through looming threats and adventures. Told using original and poetic language with te reo Māori interwoven throughout, this is a story of resilience, inclusion, and aroha – a true celebration of the magic of Aotearoa.

PLAY WILD

BY RACHEL CLARE
PUBLISHED BY BATEMAN BOOKS

A joyful, hands-on celebration of nature, creativity and the magic of play, bursting with ideas to explore, create and connect with te taiao. Clear, easy-to-follow instructions for nature-based craft activities will inspire confidence and imagination. *Play Wild* offers more than crafts: it's an invitation to slow down, get outside, and find wonder in the everyday world.



THE RAVEN'S EYE RUNAWAYS

BY CLAIRE MABEY
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN & UNWIN

In a society where reading and writing are privileges reserved for an elite few, Getwin hides a dangerous truth: she can do both. Lyrically written, *The Raven's Eye Runaways* is lush with sensory detail – earthy, vibrant, and steeped in the natural and the magical. A tale of resilience, secrecy, and the quiet power of knowledge.

THE WITCH OF MAKETU AND THE BLEATING LAMBS

BY ANIKA MOA, ILLUSTRATED BY REBECCA TER BORG
PUBLISHED BY PUFFIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

A bleatingly brilliant picture book packed with classic Aotearoa humour, quirky charm, and a dash of evil. This laugh-out-loud adventure follows a sleep-deprived witch and her noisy, rebellious lambs, who are plotting their escape. Tamariki will giggle at the chaos and cheeky humour in this creepy, creative delight that is perfect for read-alouds.



THE WRITING DESK

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY DI MORRIS
PUBLISHED BY BATEMAN BOOKS

One Pākehā family's whakapapa in Aotearoa is explored in a visually stunning graphic novel. Personal stories are woven into broader currents of 19th and 20th century history, showing the complexities of identity, belonging, and colonisation. *The Writing Desk* doesn't shy away from uncomfortable truths, but is also a celebration of aroha and resilience.



MEET OUR FINALISTS AT BOOKS ALIVE!

BOOKS ALIVE is one of the highlights of the annual awards programme.

The large-scale events in different centres across Aotearoa bring hundreds of kids up close with their favourite authors and illustrators in the weeks leading up to the **NEW ZEALAND BOOK AWARDS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS** ceremony.

This year, tamariki and rangatahi in Palmerston North, Invercargill, Christchurch and Wellington, and the surrounding regions, will get the chance to engage directly with our 2025 finalists in sessions programmed especially for them by literature experts.

This is all thanks to funding from the Mātātuhi Foundation and support from our regional partners, Palmerston North City Library, Invercargill City Libraries and Archives, WORD Christchurch, Wellington City Libraries and the National Library, plus the generous organisations whose logos are also featured below.

School groups can register for Books Alive events in central city locations on the following dates:

PALMERSTON NORTH: TUESDAY 22 JULY

INVERCARGILL: WEDNESDAY 30 JULY

CHRISTCHURCH: THURSDAY 7 AUGUST

WELLINGTON: WEDNESDAY 13 AUGUST

To find out more, email booksalive@nzbookawards.org.nz.



HAVE FUN – AND LEARN – WITH OUR **ACTIVITY BOOKLET!**

Look out for our **NZCYA FINALISTS ACTIVITY BOOKLET**, packed with fun projects that will help you discover more about some of the 2025 shortlisted books, and learn some cool, new things along the way!

The 20-page booklet will be available for download from the resources page on www.nzbookawards.nz, or if you are attending a Books Alive event, you'll be lucky enough to receive a printed copy.

Ngā mihi mahana to the team from the National Library of New Zealand Services to Schools who created the activities in the booklet.



THE LOST SAINT BY RACHAEL CRAW



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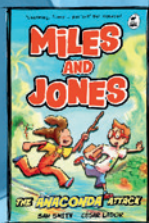
AUTHOR OF
MULTIPLE KIDS'
BOOKS

WRITER FOR 7 DAYS,
TASKMASTER NZ & AUS,
THE PROJECT AND MORE

COMEDIAN

PERFECT FOR
AUDIENCES OF ALL AGES

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Catch a sneak peek at Donovan Bixley's new book,
Leonardo's Dragon, coming September 2025!



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Mary-Anne Scott and Mandy Hager
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NEW ZEALAND, WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL,
NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF AUTHORS, MĀTĀTUHI FOUNDATION,
THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, AND NIELSENIQ BOOKDATA.

NGĀ MIHI NUNUI KI A KOUTOU!

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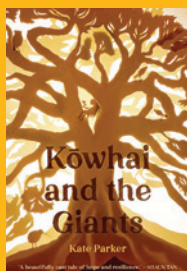
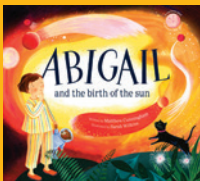
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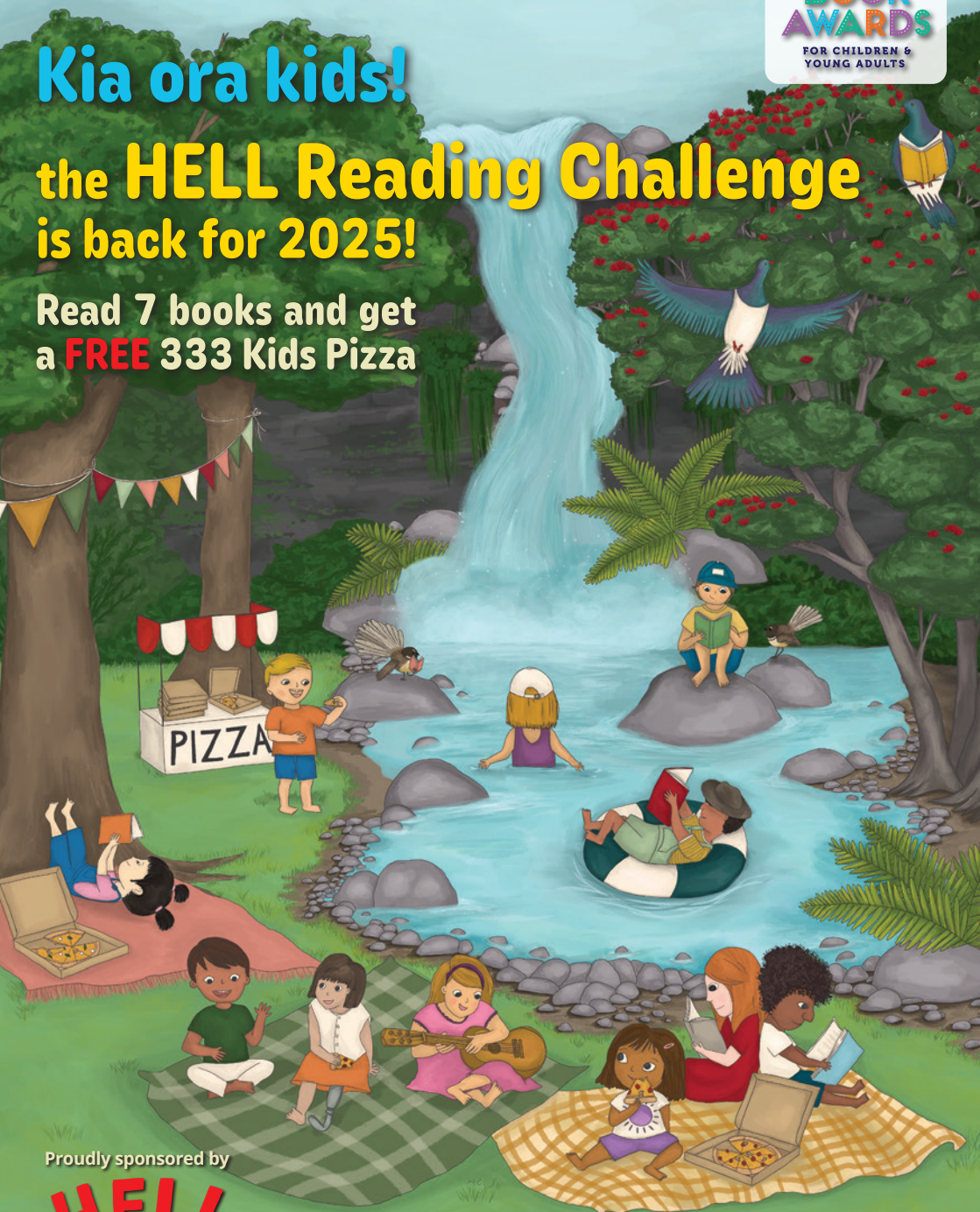
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