



# CALL FOR ENTRIES 2026

The New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults promote excellence in, and provide recognition for, the best books for children and young adults published annually in New Zealand.

They are governed by the New Zealand Book Awards Trust Te Ohu Tiaki i Te Rau Hiringa, and supported by Creative New Zealand, HELL Pizza, Wright Family Foundation, LIANZA Te Rau Herenga o Aotearoa, Wellington City Council, The New Zealand Society of Authors Te Puni Kaituhi o Aotearoa (NZSA) and NielsenIQ BookData.

Publishers and authors are now invited to submit entries, online, for the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults 2026.

**Eligibility criteria and conditions of entry are reviewed each year.  
Please read the following information carefully  
before completing your online submission form.  
(Note new clause 11 on page 2 regarding use of AI.)**

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## Introduction to the Awards

The New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults recognise excellence in New Zealand children's books. Entries are invited in six subject categories plus one Best First Book Award (chosen across all categories). Each year the judges will shortlist the best five books submitted in that year in each category, based on the judging criteria. If the judges feel the number or quality of the entrants is not sufficient to nominate five titles, then they have sole discretion to reduce the number of shortlisted books in that category.

The Awards presented in 2026 are as follows:

- Picture Book Award
- Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award for Junior Fiction
- Young Adult Fiction Award
- Elsie Locke Award for Non-Fiction
- Russell Clark Award for Illustration
- Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Awards for te reo Māori
  - For originally written books, and
  - For translated books
- NZSA Best First Book Award
- Margaret Mahy Book of the Year Award

All category awards carry prize money of \$8,500. In addition, the judges will award the NZSA Best First Book prize of \$2,500 to a previously unpublished author or illustrator. The overall prize, the Margaret Mahy Book of the Year award, carries a prize of \$8,500.

For the Picture Book Award, the prize money will be split evenly between the author and illustrator, if they are two separate people. Te Kura Pounamu prize money should also be split between author, illustrator and translator (as applicable). If there are multiple contributors to books in other categories, their publishers will decide how the prize money is to be distributed amongst the contributors. In the case of the NZSA Best First Book Award, where in the opinion of the judges the book is jointly created by an author and illustrator, each of whom is previously unpublished, the prize money may be shared.

# Eligibility

1. Entries are open to books on first publication in New Zealand. The New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults 2025 are open to books published between **1 April 2025** and **31 March 2026**.
2. Principal authors, illustrators and translators must be New Zealand citizens (by birth, naturalisation, or immigration) or be permanently residing in New Zealand. Evidence of permanent residency is required to confirm that all principal contributors meet this requirement. The work of New Zealand citizens living overseas is eligible if the book meets other criteria (below) and has been published during the period stipulated for eligibility.
3. The works of deceased authors or illustrators are not eligible for entry unless the author or illustrator died after the book's manuscript, translation or illustrations were submitted to and accepted by its publisher.
4. A book entered for the Awards must be a single, stand-alone entry and must contain at least 16 pages of text and/or illustration. Series or boxed sets are not considered as single, stand-alone book entries, and are therefore not eligible, unless submitted as individual titles.
5. Books published exclusively for an educational market (e.g. textbooks, resource kits, literacy texts, reading schemes etc.) are not eligible. However books created for the educational market that are also marketed to a general readership and available via bookstores will be considered.
6. Reprints and re-issues of previously published works are not eligible. New editions which contain substantial revision and reinterpretation, adding a minimum of 50% new content (of both text and illustrations), are eligible. Where a new edition is submitted, the publisher must supply a copy of the previous edition of the book, with an explanation of the degree of revision. Selections or collections of previously published work by a single author are eligible if they offer a new view of the author's past work, and if the new work they contain would meet the criteria for a book in its own right, in the relevant category. Publishers are required to declare all related editions for each book submitted (e.g. previous editions, other languages, overseas editions etc).
7. Anthologies of work by more than three authors are not eligible.
8. Where a book with an attachment (e.g. a CD) is submitted, the book will be considered the primary vehicle to be judged.
9. An author or illustrator is eligible for the NZSA Best First Book award as long as the entry is a complete, first-published book of at least 16 pages for which the author or illustrator is a major contributor with at least 50% input. If an author or illustrator has previously published a book/s of at least 16 pages in any genre, they are not eligible for entry into this award. If a previously published book is less than 16 pages, or if the author or illustrator has contributed less than 50% to a previously published book/s, they are eligible to be considered for the Award.
10. E-books may be entered where titles are available as e-books only, and are not available in print form. E-books should be entered into one of the genre categories, where the title will compete against print books. There is not a separate award for e-books.
11. Works containing AI-authored text, in part or in whole, are not eligible for entry in any category of the awards. Use of AI for research and minor editorial or formatting support is permitted. Submitters should clarify any queries they have with the awards administrator before entering. If, after submission, a work is found to include ineligible AI-generated text, it will be disallowed. Entry fees will not be refunded and submitted materials will not be returned.

**Note:** Ahead of the 2027 awards, the awards organisers are consulting with the children's book sector, including with illustrators and designers, to provide clarity around the use of AI for illustrations. Potential

submitters who are currently working on books that will publish during the eligibility period for the 2027 awards (1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027) should bear in mind the potential for restrictions on its use for illustrations.

**NOTE REGARDING ILLUSTRATION ENTRIES:** The only exception to the general criteria 1 to 10 listed above will be in consideration of the Russell Clark Award for Illustration, which considers and rewards the work of the illustrator/s alone. Publishers wishing to enter books in the Russell Clark Award that might not otherwise meet the general criteria should contact the awards administrator for clarification before completing the online entry form. All illustration entries do however need to adhere to the restrictions regarding the use of AI-authored text outlined in clause 11.

## Category Definitions and Entry Form Details

Please read the category definitions and other entry form information below before selecting the category that best suits each book being entered. Only one category should be selected for each title, except when you would like a book already entered in a subject category to also be considered for the Russell Clark Award for Illustration. In this case you should also select the Illustration box (and will be required to pay an additional entry fee).

### Picture Book

- A picture book is defined as one in which the illustrations, with the text, carry the impact of the story. Except in exceptional circumstances, there should be an appropriate balance between text and illustrations (which does not need to be 50/50.)
- Books entered in the Picture Book category are generally aimed at pre-school and primary levels, but may include intermediate school level.
- New editions of previously published books must have a minimum of 50% new content (both text and illustrations) to be considered for this award.
- Reprinted illustrations compiled from other sources are not eligible.
- Bilingual books are eligible for entry in this category.
- The winning book will be chosen from a shortlist of up to five books.

### Junior Fiction (Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award)

- Single works of fiction, written collaboratively by up to three authors and/or illustrators, are eligible.
- Junior Fiction books should be considered as being suitable for primary or intermediate school level.
- Entries may be graphic novels.
- Entries may include books whose stories are traditional in origin if the retelling and interpretation are the author's own.
- Bilingual books are eligible for entry in this category.
- The winning book will be chosen from a shortlist of up to five books.

### Young Adult Fiction

- Single works of fiction, written collaboratively by up to three authors and/or illustrators, are eligible.
- Young Adult Fiction books should be considered as being suitable for secondary school students.
- Entries may include books whose stories are traditional in origin if the retelling and interpretation are the author's own.
- Entries may be graphic novels.
- Bilingual books are eligible for entry in this category.
- The winning book will be chosen from a shortlist of up to five books.

## Non-Fiction (Elsie Locke Award)

- The award is for books which present well-authenticated data, with consideration given to imaginative presentation, interpretation and style. Books that are not considered fiction according to library classification may be entered in this category (including poetry, folklore and retellings of pūrākau, myths or legends).
- Non-fiction books with intended audiences ranging from children through to young adults may be entered in this category.
- Textbooks and resource kits are not eligible. Books created for the educational market that are also suitable for a general readership and available via bookstores will be considered.
- Bilingual books are eligible for entry in this category.
- The winning book will be chosen from a shortlist of up to five books.

## Illustration (Russell Clark Award)

- The award is for the illustrator/s of a book which best exemplifies the craft and skill of illustration.
- The winning book will demonstrate a high quality of draughtsmanship, and (where relevant) will develop and sustain character successfully. It will feature illustration that is credible and consistent, of a style that is appropriate to the readership, that supports and complements the text, and that reflects the text accurately in detail where it needs to and also enhances it and brings it to life visually.
- Reprinted illustrations compiled from other sources are not eligible.
- A reprint or new edition of a text may be considered only if the illustrations are being published for the first time.
- Textbooks and resource kits are not eligible. Books created for the educational market that are also suitable for a general readership and available via bookstores will be considered.
- Entries may be graphic novels.
- **If a book has been entered in another category, it must be entered again in the Illustration category, and an additional fee paid, to be eligible to be considered for the Russell Clark Award for Illustration.**
- Bilingual books and books written entirely in te reo Māori are eligible for entry in this category.
- The winning book will be chosen from a shortlist of up to five books.

## Te reo Māori (Wright Family Foundation Te Kura Pounamu Awards)

- These two awards are for books across all genres that are written *entirely* in, or translated entirely into, te reo Māori. Bilingual books are not eligible.
- Separate prizes will be awarded within this category, one for the best book originally (and entirely) written in te reo Māori, and a second for the best translated work.
- There are no limitations on the character of the book except that it is original work, or if traditional in origin, the re-telling and interpretation of pūrākau or stories are the author's own.
- Textbooks and resource kits are not eligible. Books created for the educational market that are also suitable for a general readership and available via bookstores will be considered.
- The two winning books within Te Kura Pounamu category will be chosen from a combined shortlist of five, unless otherwise advised by the judges.

### NOTES:

- Titles published in both English and te reo Māori editions and entered into the awards will be assessed as stand-alone works in their relevant categories.
- Publishers must specify the age group for which each submission has been primarily published.
- Publishers should categorise their fiction entries as either 'Young Adult' Fiction or 'Junior' Fiction. Publishers cannot enter the same book in both these categories.
- Graphic novels should be entered in the category befitting the target age group. Please select the appropriate category on the entry form and indicate the target age group.
- A separate entry must be completed (and entry fee paid) for a book entered in another category to also be considered for the Russell Clark Award for Illustration.
- If the judges believe a book has been submitted in the wrong category, or if they believe it would be better judged in a different category, the Awards Administrator will be directed to discuss this change with the

- publisher. The final decision on the category in which a book is considered will rest with the judges.
- The final decision on the eligibility of any submission rests with the Awards Administrator, to be determined in consultation with the Book Awards Trust. The administrator will confirm eligibility prior to submitting to the judges.

**In completing a submission for the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults, the responsibility for clarifying the interpretation of eligibility criteria and conditions of entry lies with the publisher. Where a book is accepted as eligible by the Awards Administrator, and it is subsequently determined that the book is ineligible due to the publisher's misinterpretation of eligibility criteria and/or conditions of entry, and/or failure to disclose relevant information, the publisher will be liable for any costs associated with rectifying the situation.**

## Conditions of Entry and Entry Dates

1. Eligible books must have been published between **1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026**.
2. Entries are to be made in accordance with the following dates:
  - Titles published between **1 April 2025 and 30 November 2025** should be submitted no later than **5pm on Friday 12 December 2025**.
  - Titles published between **1 December 2025 and 31 March 2026** should be submitted online no later than **5pm on Tuesday 10 February 2026**.
  - For titles scheduled to be released after **10 February**, the entry forms must be submitted by **10 February**, and publishers must supply page proofs in lieu of the book if the printed book is not yet available by 10 February. In these cases, physical copies of the book must be supplied no later than **5pm on Monday 9 March 2026**.
  - **Late submissions will NOT be considered.**
3. Authors, illustrators or publishers may enter books, but authors/illustrators are requested to ask publishers to submit their work whenever possible. It will be assumed that all books submitted by publishers have been entered with the knowledge and agreement of the authors/illustrators concerned.
4. **Physical copies/e-book access as appropriate must be provided at time of submission.** No entry will be deemed to be eligible until copies/e-book links are received.
5. **Eight (8) copies of each title should be sent for every entry.** Copies of each title will be sent to each of the judges and to school panels that provide judges with reviews to assist in the shortlisting process. Any remaining copies will be provided to specialist advisors and/or used for display and promotional purposes as necessary.
6. All entries must be accompanied by the following materials which should be uploaded with your entry:
  - A detailed Title Information (TI) sheet
  - Separate hi-res digital colour head and shoulders images (JPEG at 300 dpi) of the author, illustrator and/or translator where applicable
  - A hi-res print quality digital image (JPEG at 300 dpi) of the book cover
  - For e-books, metadata proof of the publication date, and advice on download expiry dates

Unless these requirements are met, the entry will not be considered eligible.
7. **Entry fees: A flat fee of NZ\$100.00 plus GST (total \$115.00) will apply for all entries. If one book is submitted in two categories, then two entry fees must be paid.** The same entry fee is payable for print books and e-books.
8. All entries must have been allocated an International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and must have the title's data registered with NielsenIQ BookData before publication (making the book visible to potential customers such as bookstores and libraries, see more at <https://www.nielsentitleeditor.com/titleeditor/>).

9. All **print entries** must have been widely offered nationally to retail bookshops by the time of their submission, with in-store release intended no later than 31 March 2026.
10. All **e-book entries** must be widely available online at the time of submission, including at least one of these major online retailers: Amazon, Apple iBooks, Google Play and Kobo.
11. Publishers must guarantee that all books submitted will be readily available to the public, and can easily be obtained by all booksellers at standard trade terms. These terms would generally include a standard wholesale discount to bookshops of no less than 35 percent off the retail price, prompt delivery to store (small order surcharges may apply), and advance agreement on sale or return, or firm sale terms. If a publisher does not have established relationships with bookstores, they must provide clear contact details and the offer of trade discounts for retailers on their website.
12. In submitting books in the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults, publishers agree to manage stock at a level sufficient to meet the increase in demand to be expected if a submitted title is announced as a finalist. **Stock levels of any titles selected as finalists should be monitored, and where this necessitates a reprint, this should occur in sufficient time so as not to detract from potential sales. Finalists must be nationally available for sale through all retail bookshops at standard trade terms throughout the period of the promotion (June-September 2026).**

## **Conditions of Entry – Finalists and Winning Titles**

1. Publishers will be advised by mid-April 2026, in confidence, if any of their entries has been selected as a finalist and will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement at that time. Award finalists will be publicly announced on Wednesday 10 June 2026. Publishers of finalist titles are advised of their selection in advance of the public announcement, so that there is sufficient time to reprint finalist titles to meet demand.
2. Publishers may, during the Awards period, publish a paperback edition of a book selected as a finalist in a hardback edition. This must be managed in such a way as to ensure that no booksellers are disadvantaged. Full details of the paperback edition (ISBN, RRP, release date etc) must be provided to the Awards Administrator and loaded with NielsenIQ BookData as soon as these are available.
3. **By mid-late April 2026, the following are to be supplied on request for each finalist title:**
  - Up to 20 additional copies of each title, to be used for various publicity and marketing promotions;
  - Comprehensive background information about the book, author/illustrator and publisher;
  - All relevant press clippings and, where possible, a summary of all major interviews and feature articles conducted with the author/illustrator about their work in the past two years.
4. Authors/illustrators of finalist titles must be available for interviews, readings and promotions. Advance notice of their schedule will be provided. Publishers are expected to maximise the opportunity to promote, and obtain publicity for, finalist titles. The Awards Publicist will liaise directly with publishers.
5. **Publishers must guarantee that, with the exception of extreme unforeseen circumstances, finalist authors/illustrators/translators will be present at the awards ceremony in Wellington on 19 August 2026.**
6. **Airfares and accommodation for finalist authors/illustrators/translators attending the awards ceremony are the responsibility of the publisher.**
7. Publishers and distributors of finalist and winning titles must ensure that books supplied to bookstores carry the appropriate stickers if their books are announced on the shortlist. Any subsequent reprint should include an appropriate reference on the jacket (current sticker artwork is available on request, and cover artwork should be submitted to the Awards Administrator for approval before printing).

8. Books entered in the awards will not be returned under any circumstances.
9. Publishers must in all instances refer to the category awards by their full names, including any sponsor names, e.g. the Wright Family Foundation Esther Glen Award for Junior Fiction.
10. The decision of the judges is final. No correspondence will be entered into between publishers or authors and the judges.

## Definitions

The following notes are provided to clarify some of the terms used in the eligibility criteria and conditions of entry for the 2026 New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults.

- **“first publication in New Zealand”**  
Printed books are considered published when first made available for distribution in New Zealand. E-books are considered published when widely available via major online retailers.
- **“reprint”**  
A new print run of a previously published book, without alteration, is considered a reprint.
- **“reissue”**  
A new issue of a previously published book, where minimal alteration has been made (e.g. jacket design, format, imprint etc), is considered a reissue.
- **“edition”**  
Each issue of a book which includes extensive alteration of a previous version of the same work is considered a new edition.
- **“widely offered nationally to retail bookshops”**  
Books should have been widely and actively presented to bookshops for on-sale to members of the public (i.e. through agency or rep visits to a wide range of bookstores and/or advertising on publisher website and in book trade publications such as The Read etc.)
- **“leading online retailers”**  
Major mainstream online e-book retailers are defined by the 2026 Awards as Amazon, Apple iBooks, Google Play and Kobo. These are reviewed annually.
- **“nationally available for sale through all retail bookshops”**  
Books should be available on demand for purchase by all bookshops throughout New Zealand (i.e. sufficient stock on hand to meet demand; no restrictions on supply)
- **“standard trade terms”**  
Trade terms should be agreed in advance between the publisher/distributor and bookshops, and these would generally include the following:
  - **A standard wholesale discount to bookshops** of no less than 35% off the retail price, negotiated with individual bookshops or chains as relevant;
  - **Prompt delivery** to store (a small order surcharge may apply);
  - **Sale or Return, or Firm Sale** terms agreed in advance.
- **“Title Information (TI) sheet”**  
A Title Information sheet is a document generally used to present a book to retailers, which at the very least contains:
  - Cover image of book



- Title (and sub-title, where applicable)
- ISBN
- Format of book (size, pages, binding, e.g. HB or PB)
- Retail Price
- Publisher imprint
- Publication date
- Short description about book
- Information on author/illustrator

An example of a TI sheet can be provided by the administrator on request.

## How to Enter

1. All entries must be submitted online at <http://www.nzbookawards.nz/new-zealand-book-awards-for-children-and-young-adults/>
2. Submissions may be made singly or you can submit several titles at once. The maximum number of online entries in one session is five.
3. You must complete both the Entered Title details for each book and the Declaration for each online session. At any time you can finish submissions and move to the payment screen.
4. For both print and e-book titles, a Title Information (TI) sheet and hi-res author and book cover images must be uploaded at the time an entry is submitted. If for any reason you are unable to complete this upload, you may email the required files to [childrensawards@nzbookawards.org.nz](mailto:childrensawards@nzbookawards.org.nz) no later than 24 hours after submitting. Your entry will not be considered valid unless these files are received within the allotted timeframe.
5. For e-books: metadata proof of publication date and details on download expiry dates are also required.
6. Payments will only be accepted online by credit card.
7. For **print** titles, **eight (8) copies** of each title being submitted must be forwarded to the Awards Administrator at the same time as online entry is completed. For titles scheduled to be released after 10 February where printed copies are not yet available, PDF proofs should be submitted at the time of entry; in these cases, physical copies of the book must be with the Administrator no later than 9 March 2026.

The delivery address for physical books is:

**New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults**  
 Attn: Joy Sellen  
 72 Te Wharepōuri Street  
 Wellington 6023

*The Awards Administrator will acknowledge receipt - please keep your tracking number in case of any issues.*

8. For **e-books**, please email to [childrensawards@nzbookawards.org.nz](mailto:childrensawards@nzbookawards.org.nz). Please submit as .epub or .mobi file types or the file type applicable for an e-reader. Please also submit links to the websites where the book is for sale to the New Zealand public to demonstrate the e-book meets the distribution criteria.

## Queries & Assistance



Submission and eligibility queries should be directed to the Awards Administrator, email [childrensawards@nzbookawards.org.nz](mailto:childrensawards@nzbookawards.org.nz)

# Judging Process and Criteria

## The Judging Process

Judging of the titles submitted in the English language and bilingual categories and the Illustration category will be undertaken by a team of five judges, appointed to the panel by the New Zealand Book Awards Trust Te Ohu Tiaki i Te Rau Hiringa.

The Trust will also separately appoint three fluent te reo Māori speakers to judge Te Kura Pounamu category for books written entirely in, or translated entirely into, te reo Māori.

Judges are empowered to request additional expert assistance in the judging process if, in their opinion, the skills of the judging panel are not sufficient to give all submissions full and fair assessment.

Both panels will share the task of selecting the Margaret Mahy Book of the Year from the main category winners (excluding Best First Book).

## General Judging criteria – All Categories

- *Appeal*: Does the book have magic, charm, impact (appeal for its intended readership)?
- *Use of Language (and illustration where appropriate)*: Does it have freshness, imagination, style? Is the language (illustration) appropriate?
- *Integrity*: Is the author writing a children's/ young adults' book (i.e. a book written that demonstrates insight into the world of the child/young person)? Is it culturally appropriate? Does it avoid condescension and stereotyping?
- *Plot/Storyline*: Is there a strong unifying story, theme or concept which holds the work together?
- *Character*: Is character established and maintained successfully?
- *Design/Production*: Considering the book as a complete package, does it have strong 'pick up' appeal? Does it have a professional look? What is the overall quality of the design, production and printing of the book with regard to its published price?
- What lasting qualities does it have?

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

The judges will announce up to five finalists and award a prize for the Best First Book by a previously unpublished author and/or illustrator (see eligibility criteria). The NZSA Best First Book Award supports new and emerging talent in authors and/or illustrators. The Award will be presented to an author and/or illustrator who demonstrates excellence in all general judging criteria and whose work stands out as exceptional amongst that from other new authors and illustrators.

### **Margaret Mahy Book of the Year Award**

All category winners (excluding the Best First Book Award winner, unless that book has also won one of the subject categories) will be considered for this award. The Margaret Mahy Book of the Year will, in the opinion of the judges, have achieved outstanding excellence in all general judging criteria. The judges will consider the impact of the book on children or young readers, its contribution to New Zealand's national literature for children and young adults, and the extent to which it will encourage further exploration of books and reading.