



BEST NZ BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS 2026

NEW ZEALAND
BOOK AWARDS
FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG ADULTS

KIA ORA TAMARIKI!

Get ready to dive into some amazing stories! The pages ahead feature the 30 finalists for the 2026 New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults. Created by talented New Zealand authors and illustrators, these incredible books are guaranteed to spark your imagination and expand your knowledge. Track them down at your school, library, or favourite bookshop, and let your reading adventure begin!

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PICTURE BOOK BOOKHUB AWARD

ROCKY JOURNEYS, WĒTĀ
WORRIES, BRASH BALLOON
BURSTING, PLAYFUL
PŪKEKO, AND CLASSROOM
CREATURES



A GUIDE TO ROCKS

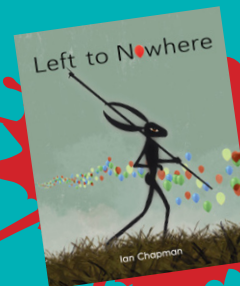
BY SACHA COTTER, ILLUSTRATED BY JOSH MORGAN
PUBLISHED BY HUIA PUBLISHERS

When Charlie approaches Dad for help with his rapidly growing rock, all Dad has is a dusty old rule book, which is no use at all. This poignant yet humorous tale opens up space to begin conversations about emotional health, and shows that it can be empowering to share vulnerabilities.

KORO WĒTĀ

BY HEATHER HAYLOCK, ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH TROLLE,
TRANSLATED BY NGAIRO ERUERA
PUBLISHED BY ORATIA BOOKS

A battle of wills plays out between an old wētā searching for a new home and a youngster defending their favourite pair of gumboots. This charmingly illustrated bilingual story offers a perfect mix of hilarity combined with a touch of horror, and will delight young readers while also encouraging curiosity about the world around them.



LEFT TO NOWHERE

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY IAN CHAPMAN
PUBLISHED BY ONE TREE HOUSE

The citizens of Nowhere in Particular have two hobbies: watching television and popping every one of the thousands of balloons that fill their skies. What they don't realise is that their actions have consequences. The skilfully layered narrative is accompanied by striking illustrations to create a thought-provoking book that highlights the importance of cherishing what we have.

PŪKEKO WHO-KEKO?

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY TOBY MORRIS
PUBLISHED BY PICTURE PUFFIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

What do you call a pūkeko solving a mystery? Clue-keko! So begins Detective Pūkeko's investigation to find out who spilled a tin of paint. Playful illustrations and tongue-twisting wordplay draw the reader into the search. Tamariki will love this interactive book that is pure fun, and perfect to read aloud.



THE ONLY DINOSAUR IN SCHOOL

BY LEOMIE AGNEW, ILLUSTRATED BY JULIA HEGETUSCH
PUBLISHED BY SCHOLASTIC NEW ZEALAND

Theo, a dinosaur born to human parents, is worried about fitting in on his first day of school. Dressed in a human disguise sewn by his mother, he struggles to remain in character. Warm and whimsical illustrations accompany this heartwarming and imaginative story of inclusivity, which anyone who has ever felt different will relate to.



DETECTIVE STANLEY AND THE MYSTERY AT THE MUSEUM

BY HANNAH TUNNICLIFFE, ILLUSTRATED BY ERICA HARRISON
PUBLISHED BY FLYING EYE BOOKS

Recently retired Detective Stanley is asked to help solve one final case. With a clever plot, detailed illustrations, and humorous wordplay, this art-themed graphic novel mystery will appeal to emerging and reluctant readers. A case file provides a chance to learn more about the art featured in the crime solving romp.

DREAMSLINGER

BY GRACI KIM
PUBLISHED BY PENGUIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

Dreamslingers are viewed with suspicion, and hated by many – and Aria Loveridge is a carrier of the dreamslinger genetic mutation. Aria lives at the Resthaven Academy, where students learn to curb their abilities, until a surprising opportunity leads her to the Royal trials. There she uncovers hidden truths and family secrets in this well-formed fantasy that explores marginalisation, grief, and self-acceptance.



KIMI THE KEKENO'S BIG ADVENTURE

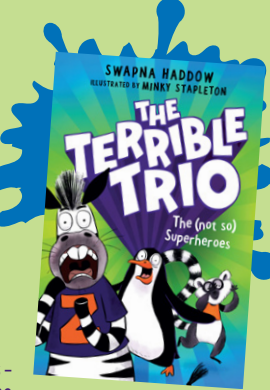
BY SHELLEY BURNE-FIELD
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN AND UNWIN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Every kekeno must follow the ocean currents to the Stone Circle to find their dream, but when his māma is injured, Kimi's journey is delayed. As Kimi and his friend Rata make the journey, they discover new friends, and face many challenges together. Themes of friendship, kindness, and finding your path are woven into this exciting adventure.

THE TERRIBLE TRIO 1: THE (NOT SO) SUPERHEROES

BY SWAPNA HADDOW, ILLUSTRATED BY MINKY STAPLETON
PUBLISHED BY SCHOLASTIC NEW ZEALAND

When the Ministry of Superpowers invites every animal in the world to receive a superpower, Zeb the Zebra, Margarine the Penguin and Barry the Lemur find themselves at the end of a VERY long line. A hilarious romp, full of wordplay and expressive comic illustrations that will have young readers keen to read the entire series.



VIOLET AND THE VELVETS 2: THE CASE OF THE ANGRY GHOST

BY RACHAEL KING
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN AND UNWIN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Violet and her band are off to the regional heats of BandChamps – but there are ghostly goings-on from the outset, and it is up to the band to find out what is going on. A mystery set to the backdrop of an exciting school musical competition, this is a well-paced story with loveable characters.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

WHEELERS BOOKS AWARD

DANCING BETWEEN WORLDS, MESSY RELATIONSHIPS, ESPIONAGE, TIME-SHIFTING ADVENTURES, AND THE COST OF SAFETY



HIVA & HEARTBEATS

BY SELINA ALESANA ALEFOSIO
PUBLISHED BY MILA'S BOOKS

Epi is a Tokelau teenager navigating the delicate balance between family legacy and R&B slow jams. Through her diary, she shares sister-cousin secrets and first crushes – but it is the rhythm of hiva (traditional dance) that grounds her. Interweaving to Gagana Tokelau with nineties nostalgia, this is a vibrant celebration of Pacific identity, and finding your own beat.

IT'S A BIT MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT

BY HANNAH MARSHALL
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN AND UNWIN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Three years after a tragedy tore them apart, Zelle and Callum are forced to face the grief they've been running from. Set against a rugged Central Otago backdrop, this debut novel follows two prickly, messy characters struggling with alcohol use, guilt, and shattered futures. A deeply human examination of the complicated journey toward forgiveness.



SPIDER GAMES: IN THE CITY OF SPIES

BY BRIAN FALKNER
PUBLISHED BY BATEMAN BOOKS

It's December 1999, and fifteen-year-old Nick is in Berlin to help his grandfather. But when Grandpa Joe vanishes, Nick is thrust into a world of intrigue and ex-Stasi shadows. A neurodivergent hero discovers his own hidden strengths in this suspenseful, high-octane spy thriller where survival means mastering the game.

THE LOST SAINT

BY RACHAEL CRAW
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN AND UNWIN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

A summer trip in Germany turns treacherous when a solstice meteor thrusts Ana back to the 14th century. Caught between warring Northmen and suspicious saints, Ana must navigate a brutal medieval landscape where no character is safe. A cinematic and evocative time-shift journey that masterfully explores sacrifice, identity, and the weight of being out of time.



THE RETREAT

BY HELEN VIVIANNE FLETCHER
PUBLISHED BY HVF PUBLISHING

Seeking refuge from grief, Finn's father moves them to The Retreat, a 'safe haven' where protection feels increasingly like a prison. To save Aria, a girl trapped by the cult's suffocating rules, Finn must navigate a world of hidden dangers and visceral trauma. This tense, unsettling thriller powerfully explores the fine line between safety and control.

JUNIOR FICTION

WRIGHT FAMILY FOUNDATION ESTHER GLEN AWARD

AN ART CRIME SOLVING ROMP, DREAM-FUELLED FANTASY, A SEA ADVENTURE, NOT SO SUPERHEROES, AND A SCHOOL BAND WITH A MYSTERY

NON-FICTION

ELSIE LOCKE AWARD



HOOKED: LEARNING TO FISH

BY AL BROWN, ILLUSTRATED BY HOPE McCONNELL
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN AND UNWIN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

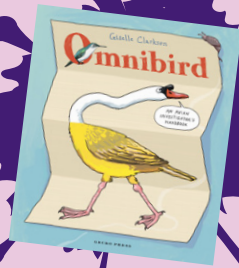
A quirky, colourful and wide-ranging guide for young fishers in Aotearoa New Zealand, in which Al Brown ties together childhood stories, kit lists, how to's, and recipes. Each page is vividly illustrated, and through the easy-to-read, engaging text readers will gain an understanding of the importance of sustainability and connections to place.

OMNIBIRD: AN AVIAN INVESTIGATOR'S HANDBOOK

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY GISELLE CLARKSON
PUBLISHED BY GECKO PRESS, LERNER PUBLISHING GROUP

Part guide, part comic, part ode to the glory of birds, this beautiful large format book is filled to the brim with observations about avian life. Readers are invited to explore and enjoy birds in a fun manner that is part science and part laugh out loud absurdity. *Omnibird* is detailed with facts, doodles and breathtaking watercolour bird portraits.

FUN WITH FISH, BEAUTIFUL BIRDS, SURVIVING THE WILD, TERRIFYING TANIWHA, AND STORIES THAT SHAPED OUR LAND



SURVIVE AOTEAROA

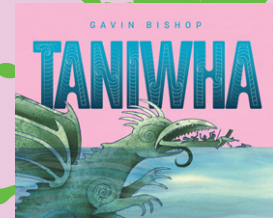
BY BRONWEN WALL AND JONATHAN KENNETT, ILLUSTRATED BY KIMBERLY ANDREWS
PUBLISHED BY KENNETT BROTHERS

Bronwen Wall and Jonathan Kennett have deftly researched survival stories from all corners of wild Aotearoa, and packaged them up into a detailed collection of thrilling true tales. *Survive Aotearoa* will give curious teen readers an insight into the tenacity and resilience of New Zealanders through history who have survived dangerous situations.

TANIWHA

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY GAVIN BISHOP
PUBLISHED BY PENGUIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE NEW ZEALAND

The secretive worlds of taniwha are revealed in a super-sized book that is quintessentially Gavin Bishop, holding works of art on each page. Words wrap around the illustrations and introduce young readers to folkloric stories of mythical creatures we hold dear, and tales that reflect how our landscape and values were shaped.



WHENUA: MĀORI PŪRĀKAU OF AOTEAROA

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY ISOBEL JOY TE AHO-WHITE
PUBLISHED BY LITTLE MOA, HACHETTE AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

In eleven pūrākau, *Whenua* tells the stories of how Aotearoa came to be and how its geography was formed. On each page Isobel Joy Te Aho-White gently weaves tales and detailed illustrations of explorers, curious children and mystical creatures to create a delightfully calm and grounded book about the land we live on.



AT HOME ON THE FARM

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY NED BARRAUD
PUBLISHED BY SCHOLASTIC NEW ZEALAND

Well-loved author and illustrator Ned Barraud presents a stunning take on farm life in Aotearoa, with every single page full of details that give readers of all ages much to look at. As drought hits the land, Ned's illustrations have an evocative New Zealand gothic feel to them, reflective of the challenges of rural life.

FOLK REMEDY 1: THE HIDDEN WORLD OF THE YŌKAI

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY JEM YOSHIOKA
PUBLISHED BY ANDREWS McMEEL

In this delightful graphic novel based on Japanese folklore, readers follow Maple on her travels through a world filled with strange characters, both human and yōkai. Jem Yoshioka's dynamic illustrations and the way the characters interact on the page give a sense of movement throughout the book, and the careful selection of colours adds to the mysterious atmosphere.



KUPE AND THE GREAT OCTOPUS OF MUTURANGI

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY MAT TAIT
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN AND UNWIN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

A fresh, vivid depiction of the journey of Kupe and his crew as they navigate the ocean in pursuit of Muturangi's giant octopus. Mat Tait's use of bold colours and combinations of patterns and figurative drawing bring the tale to life, while also paying homage to designs used in books of Māori legends from decades ago.

TANIWHA

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY GAVIN BISHOP
PUBLISHED BY PENGUIN, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE NEW ZEALAND

In Gavin Bishop's oversize, beautifully designed book about taniwha, every detail feels intentional, from the range of styles to the composition of each page and the flow of text. Careful choices in colour palette and design give fresh life to familiar stories, bringing these mythical creatures into the present, and reminding us that Māori culture is alive and evolving.



WHENUA: MĀORI PŪRĀKAU OF AOTEAROA

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY ISOBEL JOY TE AHO-WHITE
PUBLISHED BY LITTLE MOA, HACHETTE AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Whenua lovingly shares a range of pūrākau, beginning at the bottom of our country and moving north. Details in Isobel Joy Te Aho-White's illustrations relate beautifully to the stories being told, helping to draw readers in, and a map makes it easy to locate where local tales are set.

ILLUSTRATION

RUSSELL CLARK AWARD

FARM LIFE, CHEEKY YŌKAI, A GIANT OCTOPUS, MYTHICAL CREATURES, AND FASCINATING PŪRĀKAU

TE REO MĀORI

WRIGHT FAMILY FOUNDATION TE KURA POUNAMU AWARDS

* ORIGINALLY WRITTEN IN TE REO MĀORI

HE TAONGA TE TOKA

BY SACHA COTTER, ILLUSTRATED BY JOSH MORGAN, TRANSLATED BY KAWATA TEEPA
PUBLISHED BY HUIA PUBLISHERS

A clever story that shows how adults can talk about difficult topics with tamariki and mokopuna in a meaningful way, by revealing the depth of 'rock wisdom'. Engaging illustrations enhance the story throughout, and the translation into te reo Māori is impressive. The thoughtful storytelling of *He Taonga te Toka* rewards readers with humour and insight.

ROCK WISDOM, A JOURNEY
OF DISCOVERY, MARVELS
OF MATARIKI, SACRED
WOMANHOOD, AND A
TIME TRAVEL TWIST



* KUPE ME TE WHEKE NUI A MUTURANGI

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY MAT TAIT
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN AND UNWIN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

This modern retelling of the pūrākau of Kupe and Maturangi's enormous pet octopus is brought to life through engaging storytelling and vivid, striking illustrations. The narrative is enriched by thoughtful use of Māori literary devices, making it accessible and meaningful for children. A book that appeals to both the eyes and the ears.

MATARIKI KI TE AO

WRITTEN BY MIRIAMA KAMO AND RANGI MATAMUA, ILLUSTRATED BY ISOBEL JOY TE AHO-WHITE,
TRANSLATED BY PĀNIA PAPA AND LEON BLAKE
PUBLISHED BY SCHOLASTIC NEW ZEALAND

Matariki ki te Ao brings together rich knowledge and histories from around the world, which are thoughtfully woven with the Māori story of Matariki. Informative and engaging, and translated using strong and authentic te reo Māori, this is a valuable and accessible resource for readers who want to learn more about Matariki and explore its meaning.



TAKU IKURA TUATAHI

BY QIANE MATATA-SIPU, ILLUSTRATED BY ISOBEL JOY TE AHO-WHITE,
TRANSLATED BY STACEY MORRISON
PUBLISHED BY QIANE+CO

This picture book provides a clear, accessible guide to practices related to ikura (menstruation), and their important cultural significance. The role of women as life-givers is explored in a respectful and empowering way that will be both informative and valuable for young readers, with strong connections to their world today.

* TE ONEHAUMAKO

BY ZEB TAMIHANA NICKLIN
PUBLISHED BY HUIA PUBLISHERS

Te Onehaumako is an imaginative time travel adventure with an engaging plotline that will keep readers wanting to know what happens next. Debut author Zeb Tamihana Nicklin shows a gift for storytelling and has crafted an exciting narrative with strong and confident writing, and effective use of structure and te reo Māori.



BEST FIRST BOOK

NZSA AWARD

YŌKAI ADVENTURES,
SLOW JAMS, HUNTING
FOR COCONUTS, MEETING
ANCESTORS, AND
DISCOVERING LOST WORDS



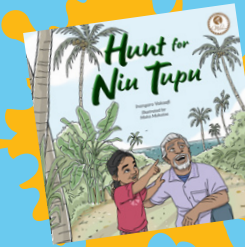
FOLK REMEDY 1:
THE HIDDEN WORLD OF THE YŌKAI
WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY JEM YOSHIOKA
PUBLISHED BY ANDREWS MCMEEL

A dynamic graphic novel about Maple, an apprentice apothecary in 1920s Japan. Maple wants to distance herself from her stuffy family history and superstitions, but in trying to do this, unwittingly finds herself on an adventure with a yōkai. Jem Yoshioka excels at capturing the movement and energy of her characters, and drawing readers into Maple's mysterious world.

HIVA & HEARTBEATS

BY SELINA ALESANA ALEFOSIO
PUBLISHED BY MILA'S BOOKS

Epi, a Tokelau girl living in suburban 1990s New Zealand, spills the secrets of her first crush, her heartfelt love for her family and friends, her obsessions with Jane Austen and R&B – and her desire to be a champion hiva dancer. An accessible diary format novel that expertly captures the teen voice.



HUNT FOR NIU TUPU

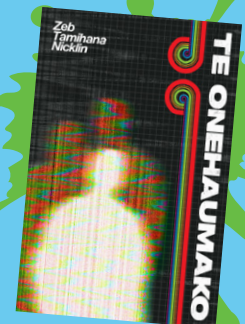
BY INANGARO VAKAAFI, ILLUSTRATED BY MAKĀ MAKĀTOA
PUBLISHED BY MILA'S BOOKS

Hunt for Niu Tupu tells the story of a child looking for the right coconut with their grandfather. Readers are taken along on the hunt, learning about coconuts, meeting people going about their lives, and becoming immersed in the setting. A quiet story with a lot of heart that illustrates the importance of intergenerational family connections.

TE ONEHAUMAKO

BY ZEB TAMIHANA NICKLIN
PUBLISHED BY HUIA PUBLISHERS

Tawa, a teenage boy, travels through time, meeting his ancestors and learning about practices and connections that impact on his world today. Written in te reo Māori, the assured storytelling evident in this imaginative young adult adventure novella will hold readers' interest throughout the many twists and turns of the exciting plot.



THE LOST WORDS

BY KIMBERLEY KEARNEY, ILLUSTRATED BY TAYLOR TEREWAI TIAVE
PUBLISHED BY LITTLE MOA, HACHETTE AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

A young girl tells the story of her mother's quest to find and collect forgotten words of te reo Māori, gathering them safely in a kete so they are never lost again. Readers are taken on the journey too, and encouraged to hunt for words which are cleverly integrated into the text and illustrations.

MAT TAIT
BRINGS CLASSIC MĀORI
STORIES TO A NEW GENERATION



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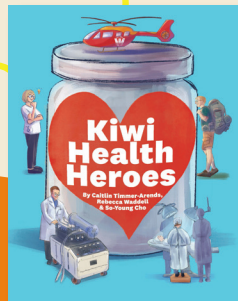
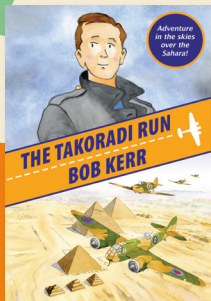
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