

# Your Centre for Australian Children's Literature

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## Biographies



*Dr Belle Alderman is Emeritus Professor of Children's Literature at the University of Canberra. She is currently the Director of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc, an internationally known research collection. Dr Alderman was a teacher librarian in the US for many years. Her academic career at the University of Canberra began in 1973 where she has taught children's literature, school libraries, and related subjects. She has served as a CBCA National Judge, and reviewed children's books for Reading Time, The Canberra Times and ABC radio. Most recently, she served as a judge for the Prime Minister's Awards for Children's and Young Adult books.*



*Dr Trish Milne is the volunteer Project Manager at the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature. She co-authored Showcasing Treasures to celebrate the Centre's first 40 years. Before retirement, she was the Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor, Education, at the University of Canberra.*

## Abstract

The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature is the nation's most comprehensive collection of material relating to Australian children's literature. Begun as the inspiration of one woman, Lu Rees, in 1974, the collection is now valued at over nine million dollars. It has a firm reputation among researchers, academics, teachers, students, bibliographers, librarians and the general public and forms

a significant part of the nation's cultural heritage.

The Centre's mission is not just to collect, document and preserve the collection. Our aim is to share it with as many people as possible through our outreach activities. Most importantly, we seek to share it with teachers and teacher librarians whose task it is to inspire new generations of children.

*Translations of Fox by  
Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks*



This article introduces readers to the collection and to our activities and events. We invite readers to share our vision for the future and join with us in achieving a national centre of Australian children's literature for posterity.

### Planning a Centre

In 1974 the Federal Government gave \$500 to each branch of the Children's Book Council of Australia. Lu Rees, then President of the ACT branch, suggested it should be used to commence a national collection of Australian children's books. She particularly wanted the collection to be available to teachers and teacher librarians, who are at the forefront of inspiring new generations of children to read and enjoy literature.

To complement the book collection, Lu Rees also began files of information about Australian authors and illustrators and their works. As the collection grew in size and people requested access, it moved from private homes to the University of Canberra in 1980. The collection then became known as the Lu Rees Archives. To support future development and provide strong leadership, the Archives became an incorporated body in 2012. The Board agreed in 2015 that the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature should be our name, to reflect the

Centre's collection as well as its purpose and vision.

The Centre is now Australia's most comprehensive collection of material relating to Australian children's literature. We have books, papers and manuscripts, artworks, two publishers' archives, audio recordings, photographs, theses, reference material and ephemera.

### Building the Collection

Publishers have been donating their books since Lu Rees invited them to support her vision of a national collection in 1981. In the



*Inspiration for Honey Sandwich from Elizabeth Honey's papers*



Artwork from Rodney McRae's *Cry Me a River*

last two years, donations from publishers, authors, illustrators and private donors have added over 4,000 books. Today there are almost 30,000 books in 55 languages, and the post-1960 collection is almost complete. The Centre uses the Lifeline Book Fair to build the retrospective collection. The Centre's 'Wish Lists', published on the website, bring in donations to fill particular gaps in the collection.

In 2011 an external expert assessed the significance of the collection. He noted, 'it has established a firm reputation among researchers, students, bibliographers, librarians and the general public as one of the most important collections of children's literature in Australia' (Powell, 2011, p. 1). He judged it 'unique and significant' (Milne & Alderman, 2014, p. 18). Today the collection is valued at over nine million dollars.

### Exploring the Collection

Tania McCartney, her reviewers and bloggers for *Kids Book Review*, visited the Centre in 2015 and [posted images and an interview](#). Here our special collections of sketches, original artworks, rare books and examples of how we manage these can be seen.

The significant strength of the Centre is its diversity, comprehensiveness and interrelated resources. Complementing the published works are the pre-publication materials, including manuscripts, galleys, proofs, dummies and original artwork. These often feature multiple developmental phases that are important for those interested in the creative process. Correspondence between authors, illustrators, publishers, book designers and others reveal the teamwork that underpins each book's creation.

Similarly, we collect resources on editing and publishing to understand the production process. The Centre has two publishers' archives, the Walter McVitty Publisher Archive, acquired in 2000 and the Omnibus Books Publisher Archive, acquired in 2004. These two independent publishers have created some of our most iconic children's books. Omnibus Books produced *Possum Magic* (1983) and *One Woolly Wombat* (1982). Walter McVitty published *So Much to Tell You* (1987).

Publishers' archives give us unique insights. They reveal how manuscripts are chosen, books are marketed, translations occur and finances negotiated. Guides to these are available on our website so that those interested can easily discover their content.

The Centre's in-depth information about Australian children's literature can truly be appreciated when examining the 460 research files. Their contents are categorised into 30 different types of material such as reviews, critical articles, biographical information and resources for teachers. Also included are ephemeral items including bookmarks, posters, calendars, badges, games and toys. These constantly growing research files occupy 32 linear metres.



Most Australian authors, illustrators, publishers and critics are represented in these research files, with new ones constantly developed and established files continuously updated. Powell noted that the files constitute a major body of research material that, in its comprehensiveness, is almost certainly unmatched anywhere in Australia (Powell, 2011, p. 11).

The Australian Government encourages artists to donate their works to eligible institutions so they can be preserved, documented and shared with present and future generations. Since 1988, when the Centre qualified for the Government's Cultural Gifts Program, over 50 donations have been accepted. Many of these include hundreds of individual items. The Centre has received significant formed collections of artwork.

The first was Rodney McRae's donation in 1998 of 157 artworks from 10 of his picture books. We also hold artworks by Graeme Base, Shaun Tan and Peter Gouldthorpe, as well as the world's largest collection of artwork by Bob Graham. Similarly, we have accepted authors' papers and manuscripts including such creators as Emily Rodda, Margaret Wild, Gary Crew, Jackie French and many others.

Other treasures include Pixie O'Harris's original artwork from the 1983 edition of Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows* (Rigby). The O'Harris family generously gifted this to us, along with the copyright, in 1998. Owning the copyright has enabled us to create a beautiful range of etched glassware featuring some of this classic's much-loved characters. The [glassware can be purchased](#) through our website.

Through the Australian Government's Community Heritage Grants, the Centre has digitised its photographs plus over 100 audiotapes of speakers appearing at the *Writing and Illustrating for Children* seminars held between 1975 and 1998. There is no comparable collection that covers these years, this range of speakers and breadth of topics as 'just about everyone with prestige, influence or notoriety in the Australian children's book world has attended as a speaker' (White, 1994, p. 39).

### Reaching out

We not only collect, preserve and document Australian children's literature, but actively promote it through our [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [e-newsletter](#). Each is easily accessible, constantly updated and freely available. Sharing is encouraged. We aim to connect with people and organisations the world over.

During the last 10 years, we have created festivals, exhibitions and events to promote Australian children's literature. We have worked collaboratively with organisations with similar aims and diverse expertise to maximise what we can offer. We curated a modest exhibition of Bob Graham's creative process for his book, *A Bus Called Heaven* in 2012, which featured activities and a layout designed to engage children at Canberra's Civic Public Library. The ABC [filmed the exhibition and conducted an interview](#) with Bob Graham, discussing his technique.

By 2014, we became more ambitious when working with Melbourne's Books Illustrated, which promotes Australian picture books and book illustration. This collaboration resulted in *A Bird in the Hand! Bob Graham A Retrospective*, covering Graham's 30-year career. Ann James and Ann Haddon



*Showcase Festival Dinosaurs Love Cheese exhibit and activities*

as curators **described the creative process** of putting such an exhibition together. The exhibition at the Canberra Museum and Gallery coincided with The Children's Book Council of Australia's National Conference in Canberra. The 12,000 people who viewed this exhibition over four months experienced three-dimensional elements, including the reconstruction of Bob Graham's workspace and interactive activities such as the pigeonhole quiz where children identified book characters. We are seeking funding to travel *A Bird in the Hand!* to regional and remote galleries around Australia.

In 2012 and 2013 we ran two large festivals, *Boundless* and *Showcase*. These featured over 20 events and 20 speakers. The booked-out events spread across Canberra at national institutions and specialist venues like the Writers Centre, public libraries and schools. Over the past seven years, more than 16,500 people have attended our events.

We also showcase iconic creators such as Pixie O'Harris, Colin Thiele and May Gibbs. Currently the Centre is offering a modest exhibition of May Gibbs' books and ephemera at the Canberra Museum

## Pigeon holes

WRITE THE CORRECT BOOK NUMBER  
ON THE CIRCLE IN EACH  
PIGEON HOLE BELOW

**PICTURE BOOK ACTIVITY**  
Each pigeon hole features characters or a scene from one of Bob Graham's books, (and there's also a book character on the pigeon holes roof!)

**CAN YOU MATCH THEM?**  
Here is a list of the 17 books they come from. Each book has a number:

1. Grandad's Magic
2. The Adventures of Charlotte and Henry
3. The Red Woollen Blanket
4. Zoltan the Magnificent
5. Rose Meets Mr Wintergarten
6. April Underhill, Tooth Fairy
7. Oscar's Half Birthday
8. Jack's Little Party
9. Buffy: An Adventure Story
10. The Trouble with Dogs!
11. How to Heal a Broken Wing
12. Jethro Byrde Fairy Child
13. Brand New Baby
14. Dimity Dumpty
15. Silver Buttons
16. Has Anyone Here Seen William?
17. Number One

**LUCKY DRAW**  
**ENTER THE LUCKY DRAW TO WIN A SIGNED BOOK BY BOB GRAHAM**

Write the correct book number on the circle inside each pigeon hole in this photo! (and beside the ram on the roof)

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You'll find all the books in the storybook boxes beside the couch in the exhibition.

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Write your name and a contact phone number or email address below. Fold your sheet and post it here in MAX's nappy!

**GOOD LUCK!!**

★ My name is: \_\_\_\_\_

★ My email or phone number is: \_\_\_\_\_

*Pigeonholes activity sheet*





*Showcase Festival with Morris Gleitzman, Garth Nix and panel participants*



*Father and son hunt for Bob Graham hidden in his artwork*



*May Gibbs exhibition*

and Gallery, which runs from 17 July to 11 September 2016. This exhibition is linked to the Monkey Baa Theatre production of May Gibbs' Snugglypot and Cuddlepie stories presently touring Australia.

Who uses the Centre's collections? Over the last several years, 3,500 people have visited and used the resources. Young people from secondary schools, tertiary students, researchers worldwide, teachers, librarians, writers, illustrators, publishers — virtually anyone connected with, or interested in, the children's book world, finds the Centre.

Although Australia's population is relatively small and our publishing program for children is modest, we are big achievers. Our creators win international recognition

such as Academy Awards, Astrid Lindgren and Hans Christian Andersen Medals and many other awards worldwide. With these international strengths come responsibilities.

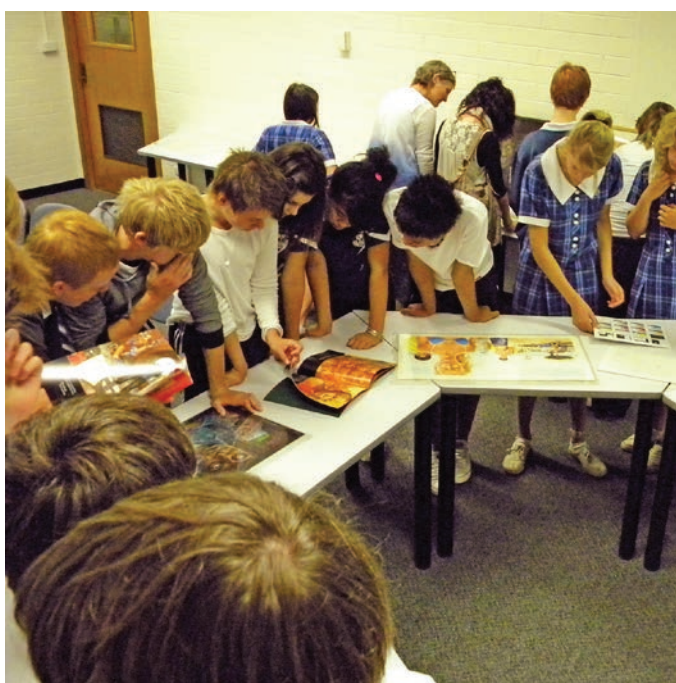
The Centre aims to be the national collection, which offers opportunities to connect Australia's creative materials with all interested. We have designed professional development sessions for teachers and librarians, featured sessions for the Australian Society of Archivists, Primary English Teaching Association Australia, Australian Literacy Educators' Association, and created workshops for young people.

Through recent talks with groups of authors, illustrators and publishers across Australia, we have found that they want, as we do, a permanent, thriving and outgoing Centre, which supports and promotes Australian children's literature. Bob Graham, whose body of work we have held for over 30 years, commented when donating his collection to the Centre:

*My prime motivation was that my work be held in a secure environment and be readily available to anyone with curiosity. I*



*Margrete Lamond researches picture books*



*Secondary school students study artwork*

*suspect that many authors and illustrators still feel the same (Graham, 2010).*

It is now time to build on the Centre's existing rich collection and ensure that there is the space, staff and resources to collect, document, preserve and share more widely.

Just imagine a bustling and dynamic centre where people of all ages mingle and interact with Centre resources. Exhibitions, festivals, seminars, creators in residence, workshops and performances abound.



*Primary school children view artwork created for Dinosaurs Love Cheese*

School and tertiary students excitedly create educational, archival, artistic and literary projects. Indigenous and ethnic groups, artists, writers, conservators and researchers investigate resources and share insights. Expert staff work alongside dedicated volunteers designing and delivering inspirational programs.

The Centre's website, blog, Facebook and Twitter share information with people worldwide. Collaborative partnerships with cultural institutions attract diverse audiences and increase interactions. The Centre is on visitors' tourist maps, drawing people from around the world.

### **Accessing the Collections**

Our collections are described as 'unique' and 'significant'. An obvious question is,





*Cultural Heritage students involved with Seeing Stories exhibition*

how are these shared? There are a number of ways. There is an online catalogue of our book collection, journals, reference material and theses. Our catalogue is web-based and freely available. Print materials can be borrowed on interlibrary loan. The majority of our [artworks](#) and [authors' papers and manuscripts](#) are described in detail and these can be downloaded from our website. Our photographic and audio recordings have been digitised, and these are presently being catalogued to enable access. Our 460 [research files](#) on authors and illustrators are paper-based, but could be photocopied and provided through our fee-for-service. Each exhibition we have curated includes interactive elements for young people and materials for teachers, wherever possible. With funding, we anticipate travelling exhibitions and resource kits with teaching and learning resources.

### **Supporting new professionals**

For over 15 years we have offered professional experiences for Australia's emerging professionals. Our aim is to inspire and educate the next generation of those who

will be working with young people. We offer internships to students as part of their TAFE and university requirements and community service projects for secondary schools. Our practice is to identify experiences that provide reciprocal benefits for both the Centre and new professionals. The following examples illustrate this. Interns have:

- created guides to authors' papers and manuscripts;
- monitored environmental conditions to safeguard our collections;
- documented and described our photograph collection;
- researched Australian publishers and enhanced their research files;
- created new and updated research files on our authors and illustrators;
- documented, preserved and rehoused artworks;
- created [educational resources](#) for teachers and librarians; and
- designed and delivered public exhibitions using the Centre's collections of artwork by Pixie O'Harris





Jackie French opens *Seeing Stories*

for *The Wind in the Willows* (1983), Rodney McRae's artwork for *Cry Me a River* (1991) and Andrew McLean's artwork for *My Dog* (2001) by John Heffernan.

In 2016 the Centre pursued its most complex learning project. We worked with a dozen Cultural Heritage students at the University of Canberra, their lecturer, University art collection manager and an expert teacher. Over an eight-month period, students worked through all aspects of curating a major exhibition involving 48 artworks by Australian children's book illustrators.

The *Seeing Stories* exhibition included managing a Gantt chart, budgeting,

investigating hanging methods and labelling, mounting artworks, selecting material and designing displays, participating in marketing, publicity, catering, celebrating on opening night event and staffing the exhibition over its four months' showing. Over 400 people of all ages have visited and enjoyed *Seeing Stories* so far.

### Sharing our heritage

At the very core of all the Centre's activities is the goal to share our culture and heritage with the next generation and to actively encourage new creations. The Centre has the collections to achieve these goals. We will continue to build and share resources. Those in touch with young people through classrooms and libraries play an essential role in connecting youth with their existing culture and heritage and also encouraging new creations. Through the Centre's collection and outreach initiatives, there are rich possibilities.

Our cultural products for children are rich and varied. As the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature, we are the guardians of this our cultural heritage for both present and future generations.

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Image 20 Artworks by Andrew McLean, Julie Vivas and Alison Lester at Seeing Stories

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