

# What is IBBY Australia?

By Dr Robin Morrow

## IBBY Australia, a unique organisation

IBBY Australia is the only Australian children's literature organisation that is part of an international organisation. It has a unique role, working to promote Australian authors and illustrators and their books at an international level; and also raising awareness of books from other countries and cultures – and Australian books that feature other cultures too.



## The international organisation

IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People, was born in the time of rebuilding and hopes for a better world after the destruction of World War II. Jella Lepman, a woman of vision and energy, returned to postwar Germany and realised that the surviving children had many needs: as well as the obvious physical needs of food, medicine, clothes and shelter, they were also hungry for books. Jella Lepman appealed to other countries to send books, and the books she collected in this way formed the beginnings of the International Youth Library in Munich. Lepman believed that books could build bridges of understanding and peace between people, and she with other enthusiasts started IBBY in 1953 as an international organisation that would bring children together by means of books.

Gradually this organisation that was Europe-centred has spread until IBBY now thrives in seventy countries right across the globe. The [IBBY website](#) has news from places as diverse as Malaysia, Ghana, Nicaragua, Cambodia, Palestine and Haiti . . .

IBBY goals include: promoting international understanding through children's books; giving children everywhere the opportunity to have access to books with high literary and artistic standards, and; encouraging the publication and distribution of quality children's books, including those in their own languages.

It is not surprising that those who work with children's and youth literature should be concerned with human rights, including *the right of every child to be a reader*, so IBBY supports many practical projects to work towards that goal. The

vision and drive of Jella Lepman continue to be relevant and necessary in the world today. My own personal commitment to IBBY is based on a lifetime of experience, witnessing the vital role that access to

**Lepman believed that books could build bridges of understanding and peace between people . . .**

the right books can play in young lives, and knowing that IBBY is a powerful force for good as it works towards such access for all children, everywhere.

## IBBY Australia: some history

IBBY Australia was founded in the 1960s, under the leadership of Mrs Ena Noël. The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) had already begun to encourage quality in children's books, through the Book of the Year Award and other initiatives. Whereas in other countries such tasks were undertaken by the IBBY section, in Australia IBBY concentrated from the start on the international scene. Activities have included:

- Celebrating International Children's Book Day;
- Nominating Australian writers and illustrators for international awards and booklists;
- Spreading information about our literature at congresses and in journal articles and presentations;
- Promoting books from other countries throughout Australia;
- Encouraging knowledge and discussion of international books through conferences, forums and booklists.

## Presidents of IBBY Australia

Ena Noël OAM (1966 – 1990)

Juliana Bayfield (1990 – 2001)

Dr John Foster (2001 – 2006)

Dr Margaret Zeegers (2006 – 2008)

Dr Robin Morrow (2009 – current)

## Recent changes

From the 1990s IBBY Australia was included as a subsidiary group of ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association). A disadvantage of this status was that it did not encourage a diverse membership: while librarians and teacher-librarians are vital members and contributors to IBBY, so also are others committed to children's literature, such as illustrators, authors, teachers, editors, parents, storytellers and booksellers. Since 2011, IBBY Australia has become an incorporated association, with a constitution and a committee of management. At the present time, the committee consists of members from WA, NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

The new status as an independent body means IBBY must work to maintain financial independence, which is a challenge.

## Present activities of IBBY Australia

Regular electronic newsletters are sent to members, and these can be read at our [archive](#). There you can read of activities such as the following:

### International Children's Book Day

This is a day to focus on IBBY and the goal of international understanding through children's books. It is commemorated throughout the world on or about 2nd April, the birthday of Hans Christian Andersen. In recent years seminars with prominent speakers have been held in NSW and celebratory dinners in Western Australia. Speakers have included: illustrator Jeannie Baker and author Nadia Wheatley; illustrator Bob Graham and author Christobel Mattingley (HCA candidates for 2012); author Anna Fienberg and illustrator Kim Gamble; Professor Robyn Ewing, Sydney University.

A celebration in your school or library or community could raise awareness of books and their value.

## The Hans Christian Andersen Award

This is the highest international recognition given to an author and an illustrator of children's books. Often called 'the little Nobel Prize,' this award is made to a living author and illustrator whose complete works have made a lasting contribution to children's literature. The candidates' books are displayed at the Bologna Children's Book Fair and at the IBBY biennial international Congress. It can be seen from the list below that for a long period nominations were not made by Australia. Nominations require a high degree of commitment, in funding the nomination fees and working to prepare the dossiers for each nominee. IBBY Australia is determined to continue nominating for this important award.

Australian nominations for HCA:

- 1976, 1978: Ivan Southall
- 1986: Patricia Wrightson and Robert Ingpen (both were award winners that year)
- 2008: Jackie French and Shaun Tan
- 2012: Christobel Mattingley and Bob Graham
- 2014: Nadia Wheatley and Ron Brooks



*IBBY Australia Hans Christian Andersen Medal Award Nominees for 2012 Christobel Mattingley and Bob Graham.*

## IBBY Congresses

Attending an international congress is a certain way of catching the IBBY enthusiasm. There is something inspirational about exchanging ideas with people from every corner of the world, both in the formal sessions and of course at coffee breaks and in small group get-togethers. Australian delegates have attended many of these biennial congresses; a large contingent went to Tokyo in 1986 to see Robert Ingpen and Patricia Wrightson receive their Hans Christian Andersen Awards and to listen to their acceptance speeches. At the most recent, the 33rd International IBBY Congress in London in August 2012, five members of IBBY Australia delivered papers which highlighted the work of Australian authors and illustrators, while Shaun Tan was a keynote speaker.



*The 2012 London Congress: (left to right) Susanne Gervay, Robin Morrow, Shaun Tan and Frane Lessac.*

IBBY New Zealand is to host the 35th IBBY International Congress in Auckland in August 2016, with the theme *Literature in a Multi-linguistic Society*.

Regional conferences are becoming a feature of IBBY's calendar, and an inaugural regional conference for Asia-Oceania was held in May 2012 in Indonesia. This is the region to which Australia belongs, and it was represented by WA writer Dianne Wolfer. Our involvement in the region is growing. This year I and Jenni Woodroffe, Vice President and Secretary of IBBY Australia, have been involved in editing the regional newsletter, which reflects the diversity of IBBY in countries of such varied opportunities and challenges.

## **IBBY Honour Books**

The Honour Books list is issued biennially in recognition of individual books of the highest standard, one for writing and one for illustration. We continue to ensure that Australians are represented on the Honour Book Lists. In 2010 the Australian Honour Books were *The Ghost's Child* by Sonya Hartnett (Penguin) and *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (Lothian Books); in 2012 they were *A Small Free Kiss in the Dark* by Glenda Millard (Allen & Unwin) and *Hero of Little Street* by Gregory Rogers (Allen & Unwin).

## **The Ena Noël Award**

This award, named in honour of the founding president of IBBY Australia, is an encouragement award and is presented to a young developing Australian writer or illustrator, who must be under the age of 35 at the time of publication of the nominated book. Most recent winners are: in 2010, Lili Wilkinson for *Scatterheart* (black dog books) and in 2012, Amy Barker for *Omega Park* (UQP).



*Lili Wilkinson being presented with the Ena Noël Award medal by Dr Robin Morrow.*

## **Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities**

This prestigious IBBY international list is chosen by experts. In 2011, these Australian titles were selected:

- *I've Got a Feeling* by Stephanie Owen Reeder (National Library of Australia)
- *White Crane* by Sandy Fussell, illus Rhian Nest James (Walker Books Australia)
- *My Silent World* by Nette Hilton and Vincent Agostino (Lothian, Hachette Australia)
- *The Glasshouse* by Paul Collins, illus Jo Thompson (Ford Street Publishing)

In 2013, these Australian titles were selected:

- *The Invisible Hero* by Elizabeth Fensham (UQP)
- *Two Mates* by Melanie Prewett, illustrated by Maggie Prewett (Magabala Books)
- *Whisper* by Chrissie Keighery (Hardie Grant Egmont)

## **Silent books: from the world to Lampedusa and back**

This international project, to promote the value of illustrated textless books as crossing the boundaries of culture, geography and language, was launched by IBBY Italy. Australian books, Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (named an Honour Book for this list), and Jeannie Baker's *Mirror* have been selected for this travelling exhibition, and inclusion in the public library in Lampedusa.

## **Children in Crisis Appeal**

Throughout the world IBBY work to help with book provision and bibliotherapy programs for children who are in need because of poverty, war and natural disasters. As a result of specific fund-raising events in Perth and Sydney, IBBY Australia sent over \$4000 to IBBY Japan to assist in the vital work of book delivery to child survivors of the recent earthquake and tsunami. We would like to extend this area of our work.

## IBBY international journal Bookbird

*Bookbird: a journal of International Children's Literature* is a refereed journal published quarterly by IBBY. Australia contributes actively to this journal, as can be seen from the contents of two recent editions.

Bookbird 4/2012 includes:

- 'International Children's Book Day in Australia' by Robin Morrow

Bookbird 1/2013 was guest-edited by Alice Curry (a member of IBBY Australia) and Lydia Kokkola; and contents include:

- 'Our Common Earth: The Local and Global Flow of Narrative in A River of Stories' by Alice Curry
- "'She flings her elfin dreams of mystery": The Child-Poet Gwen Cope in the Land of "Australian Faery" 1931-1939' by Nicole Anae
- 'Paranoid Prizing: Mapping Australia's Eve Pownall Award for Information Books, 2001-2010' by Erica Hateley
- 'Flying to pick blueberries: Two Preschoolers' Literary Encounters with Other Cultures' by Virginia Lowe

Bookbird 2/2013 includes:

- 'Similarity or Difference: The Problem of Race in Australian Picture Books' by Victoria Flanagan
- "'The books we've had forever": The Parent-Observer Diary' by Virginia Lowe

## Membership

IBBY encourages a wide membership of people committed to children's literature. The membership fees are the main source of income for IBBY Australia. Individual membership costs \$25 p.a., and institutional membership \$100 p.a. We are especially keen to build membership in Victoria, a state under-represented at present in IBBY affairs.

## Limited Edition Prints

Shaun Tan donated his artwork, *Furnace Reader*, for a special edition, limited to 200 prints, each numbered and signed by the illustrator. The cost is \$150 (see order form) for this exclusive and beautiful artwork on a reading theme. This is the second in the IBBY Limited Edition series, of which the first is a Bob Graham print (a very small quantity remains of the BG print). Contact Merchandise Convenor Tina Price on [ibbysales@gmail.com](mailto:ibbysales@gmail.com) to purchase.

**IBBY Australia offers a Limited Edition Print  
Story Furnace by Shaun Tan**



**2008 HC Andersen Australian Illustrator Nominee  
The perfect gift to celebrate a special occasion  
Birthday, Anniversary, Retirement, Thank You or Farewell**

Shaun Tan's *Story Furnace* is a fine art print in a limited edition run of 200, signed and numbered by the artist.

The print is 210mm (w) x 270 mm (h) and the original medium was Gouache on paper.

Cost is \$150 (unframed) \$20 postage in Australia/overseas on request.

Contact Merchandise Convenor Tina Price on [ibbysales@gmail.com](mailto:ibbysales@gmail.com) to purchase and enquiries using PayPal.

<http://ibbyaustralia.wordpress.com>

## IBBY Australia's future

It seems to me that IBBY Australia will continue to play a vital role in the world of culture, literature, education and international understanding. In an era of increasing globalisation, there will be an even greater need to showcase our best books to the wider world. And Jella Lepman's dream, that books could build bridges of understanding from one country to another, will continue to inspire many to work towards enriching the lives of the world's children.

**Dr Robin Morrow** is the National President of IBBY Australia. She has worked as a children's bookseller, as a publisher, and as a reviewer and teacher of youth literature. Her doctoral thesis was an examination of nostalgia in Australian picture books. She currently teaches (online) for Simmons College, Boston, a postgraduate course in Australian children's and YA books.