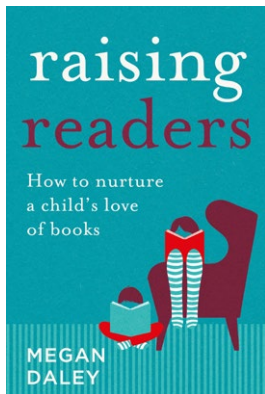


# IDIOM [idiōma]

Volume 55 | Number 2, 2019

## Book reviews





## Raising Readers: How to nurture a child's love of books

**AUTHOR:**

Megan Daley

**PUBLISHER:**

University of Queensland Press  
2019,  
256 pages

**RRP:**

\$27.95

**REVIEWED BY:**

Karen Malbon,  
Manager of Library  
Services (Teacher Librarian),  
Melbourne Girls Grammar

**Megan Daley's passion for books and enthusiasm for raising readers shines through in this excellent resource for educators and parents.**

Drawing on her extensive experience as a primary teacher, teacher librarian, children's literature blogger and parent, the author shares her own knowledge and practical advice in this engaging text. Daley illustrates and supports her views on raising readers with the inclusion of expert commentary and research.

This book does not need to be read from cover-to-cover, as it is divided into descriptively titled chapters, which can be read in any order depending on the interest of the reader. The book opens with Daley sharing her own experiences of reading to her new-born children so she could expose them to as many words as possible. She comments that while her reading choices might not have been age appropriate 'they were hearing language that was far more complex and diverse than if I was just having a casual chat with them'. Daley explains the importance of physical engagement with books as babies grow and the social nature of reading with toddlers. The opening chapter and subsequent chapters include practical tips listed in easy to read dot points and shaded boxes that highlight book recommendations and additional resources.

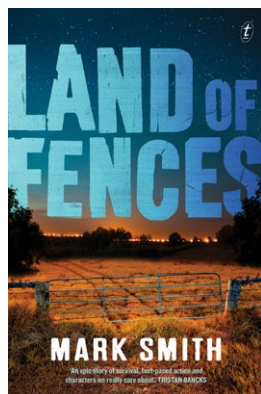
The mechanics of reading, the importance of literacy, the methods that schools use to teach reading and the role of the school library are explained to the reader without assuming any prior knowledge. Daley eloquently weaves observations, research and examples of her own children's experiences into the text. I encourage readers with experience of the education system not to skip these sections because you will find some great advice from Daley and the experts she has assembled. I know

I did, and I have been a teacher librarian for over twenty years.

Daley does not shy away from the challenges and difficulties that literacy and books present for many children and young adults. In chapter six, Daley acknowledges the battle some parents and educators face 'whether a young person has diagnosed literacy issues or is a hardcore reluctant reader, it is just plain hard to be the adult watching from the side lines and feeling quite helpless'. Much of this chapter is wisely deferred to a range of experts and the perspectives of a parent and child who have difficulty in learning to read. Novelist Allison Rushby's story of how she helped her daughter, who was diagnosed with a developmental delay, enjoy books through graphic novels is an important one for parents and educators to read (pp. 84-85).

From a professional perspective, I really enjoyed Chapter 7 that looked at the social aspect of books and reading and the part libraries can play in promoting this. While there are recommended reading lists throughout the book, the recommendations by Daley and other experts, go up a notch in Chapters 8 to 14. These chapters cover book genres, multi-modal and digital reading, picture books and visual literacy, reading mindfully, diversity in books and bibliotherapy. Books by marginalised communities (Indigenous authors, refugees and #ownvoices) are explored and listed. *Raising Readers* concludes with a series of instructional how-to guides on the many ideas and strategies mentioned throughout the book.

As Daley says in the introduction, 'we all have an invaluable part to play in ensuring the young people in our lives fall in love with books'. *Raising Readers: How to nurture a child's love of books* can help teachers do this in so many ways. An informative, engaging and practical teacher resource for all year levels.



## Land of Fences

**AUTHOR:**

Mark Smith

**PUBLISHER:**

Text Publishing  
2019  
256 pages

**RRP:**

\$19.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Jan May,  
Firbank Grammar School

I had been waiting a year to find out what would happen to Finn, his Siley girlfriend Kas, and of course, Rowdy the loyal dog. Would they track down baby Hope? Encounter young Willow again? Overcome the brutality of Ramage and his gang of Wilders? If you are going to read any further, be warned. There are spoilers!

Back in the first novel of Mark Smith's Winter Trilogy, *The Road to Winter*, the first words Rose says to Finn when he encounters her on the beach at Angowie, are 'You gotta help me'. This message continues to resonate in *Land of Fences* as reader admiration aligns with those characters whose moral compasses ensure their willingness to help others, often at great risk to their own safety. And part of the attraction of this trilogy for YA readers is that it is the younger characters who serve up the strongest lessons in resilience, compassion, resourcefulness and bravery in this dystopia where the adults, who should be protecting the children, fail to do so – except for wise old Ray, Harry and two new characters introduced in this final instalment, Angela and Winston.

*Land of Fences* opens back in Angowie (imagine somewhere like Anglesea along the Great Ocean Road) where Finn, Kas, Ray and Rowdy have enjoyed a relaxing summer reprieve from the Wilders and No-landers. Finn and Kas, now a firm couple, share a house with Ray, making the most of being a 'family' unit with some semblance of life before the virus. They are the only residents of quarantined Angowie, a town where summer holiday-makers once flocked. Now, Finn and Kas have the beach to themselves where Kas has learned to surf under Finn's tuition. But this peace is to be short lived as the

town streetlights start to flicker and the tracker in Kas's hand reminds them of the dangers if power is restored. (For those of you yet to read the trilogy, the Sileys or asylum seekers are used for slave labour in Smith's reimagined Australia. They have trackers implanted so that their whereabouts can be monitored by the government – although we are never clear about who exactly governs the country now.)

The radio that Ray has managed to make work again, unexpectedly crackles out a repeating message; a critical service announcement by the government will be made by the Regional Director that evening. They learn that Wentworth is the hub for their zone and Longley (a nearby town holding bad memories) is a satellite town. Angowrie is quarantined; no one can enter and survivors cannot leave. Despite no mention of the Sileys in the broadcast, Kas still fears being hunted down and is convinced their Wilder enemies, Ramage or Tusker, will be put in charge of Longley. Miraculously, Daymu and JT manage to make their way to Angowrie, having escaped from the No-landers after a Wilders' attack but bring bad news about Danka – and also confirm Kas's prediction. Ramage is now Longley's commissioner and Tusker is his deputy. The stage is set for the author to continue his exploration of the key themes that underpinned the first two novels of the trilogy; greed, power, corruption, brutality and prejudice – but also hope, love, kindness and compassion. Yet again, Finn and his friends will need to draw on every ounce of their resilience and resourcefulness to survive.

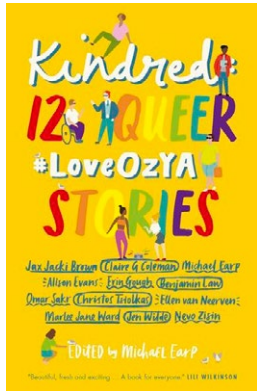
One of the triumphs of *Land of Fences* is Mark Smith's ability to keep his readers engaged and on edge, always wondering what will happen next, but also encouraging us to think about

issues that face young people as well as the wider community. Climate change is hinted at, as is the treatment of asylum seekers. The virus that has killed many, including Finn's mother, is blamed on the Sileys, just as scapegoats are found to blame for contemporary problems. The novel's title is a powerful reflection of a society riddled by conflict and division. Fences have been built to keep the unwanted out and protect the privileged within. (Doesn't this remind you of some other places in the world?) The imagery of the landscape is also cleverly captured; it is both beautiful and harsh. It nourishes and protects

Finn and his friends by providing food and cover. But the land is also difficult in places as the teens work their way to Longley, then Wentworth. It has been brutalised by man; evidenced by the overwhelming ugliness of the fence isolating Wentworth, the intensely bright spotlights and the sounds of guns and machines. If you are thinking all of this sounds rather bleak reading for students, *Land of Fences* is balanced through Mark Smith's intricate portrayal of love, friendship and moral courage. These young characters maintain hope for a better future and their respect, loyalty, care and tolerance for each other,

no matter their background, juxtaposes the dreadful behaviour of some of the adult characters.

Mark Smith's first novel, *The Road to Winter*, is already being taught in a range of Victorian schools, mostly at the Years 9 and 10 levels. He is an author whose teaching background, and intuitive understanding of what makes an excellent YA read, have given him the power to speak directly to his young readers – and some not so young ones as well!



## Kindred: 12 Queer #LoveOzYA Stories

**EDITOR:**

Michael Earp

**PUBLISHER:**

Walker Books  
2019  
320 pages

**RRP:**

\$24.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Melanie Van Langenberg  
Sacré Cœur

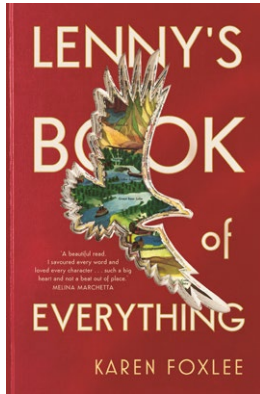
**“Kindred” is an encapsulating word that places “me” next to “you” and “us” next to “them” in such a wonderful way. It speaks to the connections between us and ignites a sense of community.’**

A sense of community is certainly instilled through Michael Earp’s anthology of short stories, stories that break down perceived differences and barriers. With contributions from writers such as Alison Evans (award-winning author of *Ida*), Jax Jacki Brown, Erin Gough (author of *Amelia Westlake*) and Nevo Zisin, it was refreshing to read stories about LGBTQIA+ youth where their sexuality was a mere passing fact in a bigger story. In many of these stories, the protagonists are not defined just by their sexuality, but rather by their connection to broad social justice topics ranging from homelessness, environmental activism, disability advocacy, and refugees. As it is, *Kindred* seems, broadly, like an addition to the great #LoveOzYA literature than to queer literature. More stories that covered the angst, heartache or joy of being an LGBTQIA+ youth would have made this a book that achieves Earp’s intention of addressing the imbalances that exist between minorities and those who oppress with their unchecked privilege, as Earp states in his introduction. There are stories in this anthology that focus on struggle, and others that affirm the identities of LGBTQIA+ youth, however I had expected the messages of affirmation, inclusivity and shared lived experiences to be more overt and plentiful. Notable stories within this anthology were ‘Waiting’ by Jen Wilde, a sweet story set in the waiting line at PrideCon, and ‘Sweet’ by Claire G Coleman, that cleverly inverts the experience of ‘coming out’.

*Kindred: 12 Queer #LoveOzYA Stories* would best serve as a recommendation for wide reading, appropriate for any student in Year 10 or above. The anthology covers mature themes, including some sexual references, as well as an array of social justice issues that are likely to be more appealing, accessible and relevant to a young adult audience. The two stories I enjoyed most in the anthology, however, seem more appropriate for an adult audience. Christos Tsiolkas’ ‘Laura Nyro at the Wedding’ is a beautiful, complicated, poignant story about a same-sex couple in their thirties who make the decision to get married. Emotions heighten when the narrator decides that he wants to invite his estranged father, who served time for having sex with a minor, to the wedding. ‘Questions to Ask Straight Relatives’ by Benjamin Law, an excellent close to the anthology, bridges the gap between generations, cultures and ideologies in a humorous and respectful manner.

Michael Earp’s introduction shares his conviction that ‘now’s the time, now’s the time’ for ‘an #AusQueerYA anthology of short stories’ and this anthology could be that very book for those who need it most.

The writers included in this anthology are Jax Jacki Brown, Claire G Coleman, Michael Earp, Alison Evans, Erin Gough, Benjamin Law, Omar Sakr, Christos Tsiolkas, Ellen van Neerven, Marlee Jane Ward, Jen Wilde and Nevo Zisin.



## Lenny's Book of Everything

**AUTHOR:**

Karen Foxlee

**PUBLISHER:**

Allen & Unwin  
2018  
352 pages

**RRP:**

\$19.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Lydia Darcy,  
Mercy Regional College

**Lenny's Book of Everything** by Karen Foxlee is a beautifully written novel about childhood, love and loss.

The narrative follows spunky protagonist Lenny Spink, and her younger brother Davey, who simply won't stop growing. Following the departure of their father, the pair are being raised by their hardworking and proud mother, Cynthia, with help from their eccentric, Hungarian neighbour, Mrs Gaspar.

The novel opens in Grayford, Ohio, as Lenny remembers the story of her brother's birth, and with it an acknowledgement that Davey is no ordinary boy. As the years continue, so too does Davey's growth, and by age 6 he is already as tall as a third grader. The challenge of the family's day-to-day life, plus the foreboding of Davey's incessant growth is brightened when the family wins a competition; the prize, a subscription to the *Burrell's Build-It-at-Home Encyclopaedia*. Lenny and Davey are delightfully curious, oft found watching the comings and goings at the Greyhound Bus Station across from their apartment. Through each delivery of volumes of the encyclopaedia, the pair are able to experience the wonders of the wider world – alphabetically, issue by issue. From beetles, to birds, to quasars and quartz, the children learn about the wider world and yearn for a life of freedom and adventure together, dreaming of running away north to Great Bear Lake.

Contrasting the excitement of the encyclopaedia deliveries, Davey's massive growth continues, and his health deteriorates. Now seven years old and at school, Davey is 6 feet tall, his kind heart as large as his stature. As the children pour over each issue of Burrell's, readers are drawn further into Lenny's

world, mesmerised as she attempts to navigate her unusual childhood, and hopeful Davey will be around to see the final volumes delivered. Throughout the novel, the children are surrounded by a supporting cast of delightfully flawed adults: their harried and pessimistic mother Cynthia, chain-smoking, prophetic neighbour Mrs Gaspar, the mysterious Great Aunt Em, would-be Lothario Mr King, Burrell's General Sales Manager Martha Brent, and their absent father, Peter Lenard Spink.

There is much to love about this novel. The prose is simply beautiful; Australian author Karen Foxlee's attention to descriptive detail keeps readers absorbed from the first page until the very end. The cleverly constructed plot, set against the arrival of each issue of *Burrell's Build-It-at-Home Encyclopaedia*, builds layers of complexity and tension. Lenny bridges the gap between her brother's childish optimism, and her mother's 'dark heart feelings', with her own tenacity, yet also with a tender innocence. This is the kind of book you will devour in one sitting, the characters staying with you for days to come.

The novel features themes of familial love, loss and grief, childhood, physical difference, and hope. The plot and language are accessible for readers from age 10, however the heavier themes may make it more appropriate for study in Years 8 or 9. The novel is suitable to be used as a class text, in literature circles, or for wider reading. Foxlee's use of dramatic irony, metaphor and rich language make the novel perfect as a springboard for creative writing. Overall, *Lenny's Book of Everything* is a delightful read for adults and older children alike, managing to be both poignant and heartening all at once.



## The White Girl

**AUTHOR:**

Tony Birch

**PUBLISHER:**

University of Queensland Press

2019

272 pages

**RRP:**

\$29.95

**REVIEWED BY:**

Angela Pane,

Our Lady of Sacred Heart College

Set against the backdrop of Robert Menzies' government, and the Freedom Rides of the 1960s, Tony Birch writes of Odette Brown and her granddaughter, the pale-skinned, Cecily (Sissy).

Our students need to be aware of these stories – of the Aboriginal children torn from loving families and raised by the whites who often believed themselves superior and omniscient.

It's post-WW II in the rural Australian town of Deane. From the onset of the story, Birch does not shy away from 'the blood of so many Aboriginal people' soaked into Deane's Line. While the mission no longer stands, the atrocities of separation, degradation and humiliation will forever live in the mind of kind and loving grandmother, Odette Brown.

Odette's story is one of tragedy, yet she does not allow this to overwhelm her. She is a strong Aboriginal woman determined to defy the authorities and hold onto her granddaughter.

The establishment of the mine at Quarrytown caused the old people to despair, 'convinced that the cutting into the ground ... would do great harm'. And they were right. Odette loses her father, Ruben, and her husband, Daniel, in an explosion at the mine. Left to raise her daughter, Lila, alone in a hostile community, Odette works for the Kane family, but leaves after the death of Mrs Kane as she cannot trust the leering Joe Kane.

Lila becomes pregnant and gives birth to Sissy and it is obvious that Sissy's father is white. When the child is just twelve months old, Lila leaves her in the care of Odette who continues to search for her daughter, convinced that she would not abandon her own child. Many years later Sissy does find her mother, but Lila does not want a relationship with her daughter.

Odette's childhood friend, Henry Lamb is somewhat simple. He had been 'thrown in with the Aboriginal children' at school and was bullied mercilessly by the white boys. Owner of the junkyard, his dog, Rowdy, is his only family, and he continues to be treated badly by the violent, overbearing Kane boy, Aaron. Joe Kane's younger son, George, is more gentle yet unable to stand up to his brother.

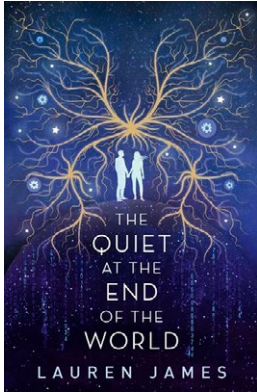
Bill Shea is the policeman in Deane and is quite ineffective, but does not intimidate the Aboriginal people, despite the Aborigines Protection Act. However, it is when the menacing Sergeant Lowe comes to take over the police station that Odette's relatively peaceful life with her granddaughter is threatened. Lowe is determined to 'bring about change' to Deane, and more importantly, to remove Sissy from Odette's care.

Thirteen year old Sissy is devoted to her grandmother, and on the few occasions that she defies her, it is more out of curiosity than lack of respect or love. She soon learns, however, that to remain together as a family, she must abide by her grandmother's cautions.

I would recommend this novel for students in Year 10 as a class text (text response). The historical reference would lend itself to an interdisciplinary unit with History, but it would be ideal to study on its own. While a work of fiction, there is much for our students to learn and understand about the Stolen Generations.

The third person narration allows Birch to craft his characters as people who have been greatly impacted by a completely misguided sense of 'what is best'. He speaks of the power of family and the importance of friendship.

This novel should be in every school library.



## The Quiet at the End of the World

**AUTHOR:**

Lauren James

**PUBLISHER:**

Walker Books  
2019  
304 pages

**RRP:**

\$16.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Christine Davey-White,  
Cranbourne East  
Secondary College

### What is it to be human? What is humanity? What legacy does one want to leave?

Set one hundred years into our future, these are questions the protagonist, Lowrie, faces as she and best friend Shen come to terms with the world in which they live. There are only 300 humans left on Earth, all of them elderly except for Lowrie and Shen, who know that one day they will be the only people left on the planet. The days are filled learning about the technicalities of living, and mud-larking throughout London, scavenging pieces of humanity as they go. They come to realise that the pieces of human life they find represent the trajectory of humankind as a species, and one small piece sets them seeking out more information in the internet archives.

A sense of secrecy and impending doom fills the first half of the novel, and it is soon evident that the character found in the internet archives will teach Lowrie and Shen more than what their parents ever shared with them. There is a sense of mirroring as both timelines struggle with their infertility, and how they can find meaning in their lives. This is not the only problem to solve, as a crisis soon forces Lowrie and Shen to put their life's learning to use, and save themselves and everyone they love.

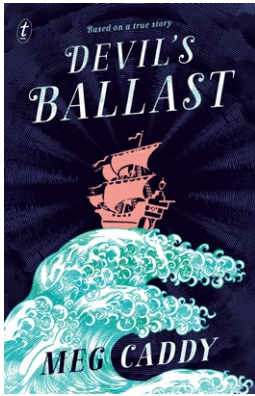
The novel is a sci-fi exploration of our future world, and delves into the way humans prioritise themselves and their desires. By integrating the archival social media discussions from the 2020s, James is able to comment on the way myriad politicians and societies struggle to address the needs of the human race in a way that will safeguard our future.

It is a disturbing parallel to our modern world. There is also an investigative aspect; the reader journeys with Lowrie and Shen as they try to piece together the clues left behind, hoping to know what it is that will solve the emergency they face.

James is an innovative writer in relation to both character and plot. There is a seamless integration of diverse characters, as well as themes such as sexuality, gender, disability and race. It is a refreshing take on the world we live in, and to see multiple variants of the human experience reflected in the novel makes it all the more authentic. It is an encyclopaedia of everything humankind values, and it prompts the reader to reflect on what it is they value, and how they too might react if this was to happen to them. It can be a confronting read, and this is what makes the read so worthwhile; it's a chance to admit what truly gives us worth, both as individuals and as a species.

Due to the existential nature of the story, it is recommended for mature students in Years 9 and 10. It has challenging concepts so many students would struggle with it as a set text, but it would be an excellent addition in the school collection as a wide reading or literature circle text. The novel would also suit a thematic unit based on 'The Human Condition', and students should be given the opportunity to discuss their reactions, thoughts, and fears. Admittedly, this is a text made just for young people – the social media and world view of politics, economy and environmentalism suits the climate they are making, and it is clear old ways of thinking will soon be abandoned.





## Devil's Ballast

**AUTHOR:**

Meg Caddy

**PUBLISHER:**

Text Publishing  
2019  
320 pages

**RRP:**

\$19.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Michael E Daniel,  
Camberwell Grammar School

Two of the more intriguing characters from the pages of history are Anne Bonny and Mary Read. They have fascinated historians and readers for almost 300 years since the publication of *A General History of the Pyrates* in 1724, primarily because they were female pirates, and are generally portrayed as being more ruthless than their male counterparts.

Virtually every modern work dealing with eighteenth century Caribbean pirates makes some reference to these intriguing historical characters, and they have also been the subject of numerous modern works of fiction. *Devil's Ballast* is the first modern Australian work of teenage fiction on this subject. This is author Meg Caddy's second book, the first being the novel *Waer* which was shortlisted for the 2013 Text Prize and 2017 CBCA Children's Book Awards.

Caddy's tale is recounted from the perspectives of Anne Bonny and her pursuer Jonathan Barnet. In her Author's Note at the end of the work, Caddy acknowledges that although her tale of Anne Bonny has a basis in history, her tale is largely fictional. *Devil's Ballast* begins with Anne Bonny, disguised as a male pirate, insisting to pirate captain 'Calico' Jack Rackham that they pursue and seize a ship called the *Kingston*. Reluctantly agreeing, they seize their prize, and early in the novel the influence Bonny has over Rackham, as well as her determined ruthlessness, are established. Bonny's decision to disguise herself as a man was largely to prevent herself from being taken advantage of by members of the crew. Following this incident, Rackham reproves and disciplines her in front of the other pirates, as he does not want to appear weak in front of them. Rackham

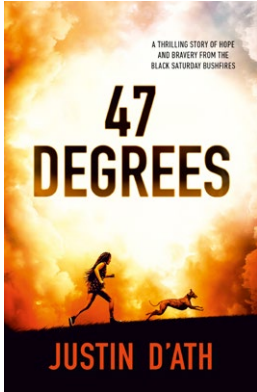
and Bonny carry on a secret relationship, with the other crew members unsuspecting of her real identity. It is gradually revealed that Bonny ran away with Rackham to escape from her abusive husband, James Bonny. Falling pregnant to Rackham, Bonny is captured by Barnet, who hopes to receive a bounty for captured pirates, particularly Anne Bonny.

Whilst a prisoner, she befriends Martin Read, and the pair of them escape to Havana, Cuba, where they are taken in by the Cunninghams, old friends of Rackham, who adopt Anne's baby. Rackham and Anne are briefly reunited in the Cunninghams' house, before Rackham departs, soon to be captured by Barnet. Determined to return to Nassau, Bonny is apprehended, and handed back to her husband. The climax – particularly for those who know Rackham's fate as recorded by history – is unexpected.

The Anne Bonny portrayed by Caddy is a complex character. Although on many levels she is portrayed as a victim, particularly of a society that assigns women to a second class status, the portrait of her in *Devil's Ballast* is of a strong individual who overcomes adversity, and who is extremely loyal to her friends. The portrait of Read is more interesting and arguably from an historical perspective, more controversial. Caddy suggests that Read's gender identity is complex. It is only later in the novel that Read reveals to Bonny that she was born female; however, Read was from an early age raised as a male. After serving as a soldier Read identified as a female whilst being married to an inn-keeper. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that it is a challenging task to re-create historical characters from worlds so different from those of young modern readers, there is the sense that some of the main

characters, namely Bonny and Read, are twenty-first century individuals who have been cast back into the early eighteenth century.

*Devil's Ballast* is an engaging read that would appeal to many younger readers. Caddy maintains the suspense well. The issues it explores include the role and status of women, relationships, loyalty, as well as law and order. The level of complexity is such that this book would be appropriate for students in about Year 10. However, teachers are advised that as his book deals explicitly with ideas related to gender theory, prudent judgements would need to be made by teachers as to how these concepts would be discussed within their educational context if this book were to be set for study or wider reading.



## 47 Degrees

**AUTHOR:**

Justin D'Ath

**PUBLISHER:**

Penguin Random House Australia  
2019  
256 pages

**RRP:**

\$16.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Kendall Aglinskis,  
Assumption College

**47 Degrees is a thrilling narrative which follows Zeelie, a 12 year old girl from Flowerdale, and her family as they fight for survival during the Black Saturday Bushfires which took place at several locations in Victoria in 2009.**

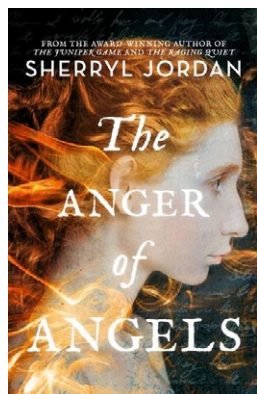
Zeelie and her father, Dan, are getting the house prepared to protect their home from the fires, with their bushfire plan outlining that they will follow the 'stay and defend' approach. Whilst this is happening, Zeelie's mother and brother are safe at a hospital due to her brother breaking his arm that morning.

Zeelie and her father are preparing their house in Flowerdale, a small town in northern Victoria, against the oncoming fire they are already fighting against the 47 degree heat, as well as the threat to their property. There are many moments of uncertainty for Zeelie, and therefore the reader, as well as fear and questions – many of which go unanswered. After several hours of preparing the house, Dan realises that they can no longer stay and defend and they need to do all that they can to protect themselves and their dogs. As Zeelie realises that they will be leaving their home, and therefore her beloved horse, she faces her first moral conflict and the difficulty of not knowing whether Rimu will be safe from the imminent danger.

The story is divided into three parts – stay and defend, refugees, and Koru. These three sections outline the various struggles that Zeelie faces as she transitions from being a part of the Black Saturday bushfires to the aftermath of becoming a refugee.

Justin D'Ath's narrative is an important and poignant story which will help readers to understand what it was like to experience the Black Saturday Bushfires from the perspective of a 12 year old student who has just begun secondary school. Whilst the writing is accessible to all age groups, the content at times can be confronting as Zeelie both faces and hears about the devastating impact of the bushfires. It captures the immense loss, as well as the amazing community spirit, in a way that is accessible and relatable for young people. As well as this, there is a series of photographs at the conclusion of the novel, allowing students to visualise the impact of the fires.

This novel is suitable for middle-school students between 11-14 years of age. It would be beneficial as a text study in junior secondary, as it explores the important and relevant themes of coming of age and individual reactions to conflict. This text would be appropriate for both male and female students. *47 Degrees* is a recommended book for an upper primary or early secondary school library, and a Years 7-8 wide reading list.



## The Anger of Angels

**AUTHOR:**

Sherryl Jordan

**PUBLISHER:**

Walker Books  
2018  
336 pages

**RRP:**

\$19.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Rachel Towns,  
St John's Regional College

Sherryl Jordan's *The Anger of Angels* is an historical fantasy novel aimed at a young adult audience. It is set in Renaissance Italy, a time of changes in thinking and scientific investigation during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. She also seems to have paired it with the Roman Inquisition, which occurred in Italy during the 16th century, a time of persecution of any ideas and views that appeared heretical to the Catholic Church.

It is at this juxtaposition of alternate worldviews that the story of Giovanna, the daughter of Ennio, a jester, is set. As a woman, Giovanna has little control over her own future. But unlike most girls at this time, like her friend Calandra who is chaperoned everywhere by her brother, and Tullia who has been married off by her father to a sixty-year-old man, Giovanna has a little more freedom. This allows her to dream of a future where she is employed creatively, where she is able to continue the work she already does for her father, creating his elaborate costumes. This freedom also allows her to develop a friendship with Raffaele, a newcomer to the town of Valenzio with his artist brother Santo. When her father Ennio performs a play for his patron, the generous and free-minded Duke Ubertini, that parodies the nearby Prince Savernola of Goretti, Ennio is suddenly the target of the Prince's violent fury. When the Prince cannot directly attack the Jester, he instead chooses to attack nearby settlements in the hopes of guiltting Ennio into going to Goretti and allow the Prince to punish him in whatever manner he wishes. Ennio suffers from a heart attack after he finds out what the Prince has done and is unable to leave his sickbed to go and suffer

the intended punishment. Ultimately, Giovanna, his daughter, takes Ennio's place in her father's play to Goretti in her father's place in the hope of establishing peace in the region, even though she knows that what she is doing is highly dangerous.

Although *The Anger of Angels* is set in an historical time period with a clear depiction of the society and concerns at the time, many of the characters are fictional, as are the specific events of the story. It is hard to tell whether this novel is intended to be historical fiction or an alternative history. The historical elements may be challenging or unfamiliar to students, however, the novel itself is quite accessible. There are explanations of many unfamiliar elements and the use of the first person perspective allows the readers to gain a deeper understanding of and connection with the main character, Giovanna. The names have the potential to be confusing, however, they are introduced slowly allowing the reader to gain a clear understanding of who each character is as a distinct individual. This is a clear, easy to understand text, with a strong plot to drive the story along, allowing different types of readers to be engaged. Jordan uses great descriptive language which really helps to create a sense of person and place. I particularly liked the inclusion of the disabled characters, Pagolo (who is a dwarf) and Raffaele (who has a hunchback), as I feel that so often such characters are not included or if included are not given such prominent roles – Pagolo is one of Giovanna's first friends and Raffaele is a love interest.

This has the potential to be a class text, particularly for Years 9-10. It is also suitable for study with Year 8 students, depending on the cohort, and it might help to connect with the historical context that they may be studying in History (if the Renaissance is a focus). This text allows for good discussion

and analysis of the historical context of Renaissance Italy and also the Roman Inquisition, as these form a backdrop to the story. The novel also has a focus on key ideas such as: class issues (the difference between the poor and the wealthy); the place of women; family issues; the role of religion in society; different types/styles of leadership; the power of words; the concept of guilt and innocence; and the treatment of the disabled in society. There is a particular opportunity to use this text to consider the concept of censorship and what words deserve to be said and how people should be treated on the basis of those words. This could then be extended to discussions of

censorship in contemporary society and who we allow or don't permit to speak in our society. I also feel that this text, because of its accessible nature, could easily be utilised for literature circles or wide reading, particularly for those who are interested in stories about women or history or unusual figures (jesters or magicians). There is violence in the story and references to mutilation and torture, though often more implied than specifically outlined. This may be something that might engage the student or it may potentially have a negative impact on them; something important to consider.



## On the Come Up

**AUTHOR:**

Angie Thomas

**PUBLISHER:**

Walker Books  
2019  
448 pages

**RRP:**

\$17.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Lisa Worthy,  
Haileybury College

Angie Thomas' debut novel, *The Hate U Give*, presented a searing account of the daily lived experience of American teens caught up in contemporary issues – issues that too often only reach the awareness of the community through the most tragic of news headlines.

The central character was fierce and honest, unforgiving in her search for justice for herself and for those she loved. The recent film captured this truth and energy, inspiring some deep conversation with the teen and tween I dragged along to the cinema with me.

In her second novel, *On the Come Up*, Thomas returns to the setting of Garden Heights, as sixteen year old Bri and her family and friends fight to survive after the events of *The Hate U Give*. Although reference to the police shooting is the only connection to the previous story, Thomas has once again created a contemporary world full of prejudice in all areas; racial, gender and economic.

Bri's greatest desire is to be a rapper who stands out in the world of hip hop. But she lives in the shadow of her famous dead father, and is weighed down by the burden of potential homelessness. Her brother has put on hold his own dreams of a career in academia as her Mum struggles to find work; a former drug addict whose greatest fear is losing the children she fought so hard to return to.

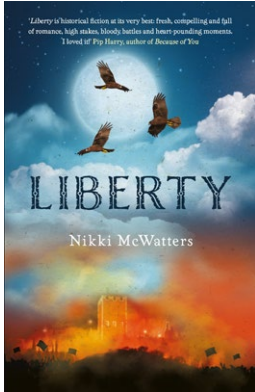
Due to her talent and determination, Bri grabs every opportunity to make a name for herself. Yet she finds that, along with her friends, she is blocked at every turn – blocked by those who think they know better, by those who should know better, and indeed by those who will do everything to silence her and keep her from her 'come up'. In the classic turn of

a coming of age journey, Bri learns the hard way the consequences of her own and others' actions.

As the subject matter unapologetically addresses the reality of child poverty in a rich world, this is a novel more suited to senior secondary students. Years 9 and 10 presents a sweet spot, as readers would have the maturity to grasp the complexity of the dynamics in a story that is so much more than a teen rapper winning a record deal. The first-person narrative voice (with language to match) rips through challenge after challenge, mixing authentic teenage emotion with thoughtful commentary, without preaching to readers. And it wouldn't be a novel about an up-and-coming hip hop star without lyrics:

...Number eight, never keep no profits in my pockets and wallets. Deposit. Or buy a safe and lock it. Number nine is just as bad as number one to me: No matter where I'm at, keep an eye for police...

Despite the heavy subject matter, equal to any social realist book of the times, Thomas has achieved a lightness and energy with the continuous stream of teenage banter, navigating through family and church politics. Bri's lyrics are inspired, if challengingly colloquial for a reader far beyond first-hand experience of this world. Thomas draws upon her own experience, including time as a teen rapper: 'Buildings are burned, and a struggling community is left in the ashes. Hip hop was birthed from similar conditions in the Bronx ... [when] young people used their creativity to make themselves heard and so created one of the most influential cultures of modern history.' But as a lesson in empathy, which is the beauty and benefit of fiction, *On the Come Up* offers a story of hope and inspiration.



## Liberty

**AUTHOR:**

Nikki McWatters

**PUBLISHER:**

University of Queensland Press  
2018  
376 pages

**RRP:**

\$19.95

**REVIEWED BY:**

Kendall Aglinskis,  
Assumption College

“Well, Fiona from the Darling Downs,” he said, looking at me seriously, “when I look at you now, I see a girl who might just change the world.”

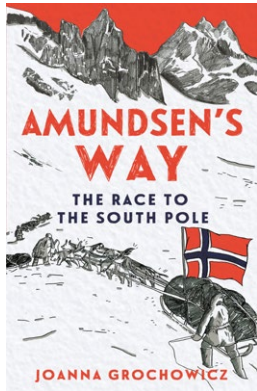
The story weaves together the story of three powerful women from different periods in history – fifteenth century France, nineteenth century Ireland, and 1960’s Australia – who are each facing battles significant to their time. While this is a work of historical fiction, it cleverly blends fact with fiction. It details the heroine Jeanne Hachette’s famous resistance during the siege of Beauvais by Charles the Bold; and the life of Betsy Gray and the Battle of Ballynahinch during the Irish rebellion. It also explores and examines the student led protests against Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War, as well as the conscription laws.

McWatters utilises these three alternating perspectives to examine the ideas at the heart of the narrative, connecting each character not only across time, but also through a sense of solidarity and sisterhood that becomes a timeless message to all readers engaging with the text. The core ideas explored within all the stories are: freedom; standing up for what is right regardless of the consequences; the perils of tyranny; the cruelty of war; and the importance of breaking out of traditional gender norms present within each of the time periods.

Interwoven throughout the narrative are the challenges that these three women face and the circumstances

they fought against. As well as this, McWatters emphasises the constraints placed upon them based on their race, social status and gender, and the ways they defied expectations at the time. An underpinning notion of empowerment, determination and rebellion allows for this narrative to be both engaging and fascinating to young readers. The author’s note at the conclusion of the novel discusses the historical figures that the narrative is based on and provides some extra information to students about their lives as McWatters details how she has taken elements of their story and incorporated them in her writing.

The novel is suitable for secondary school students, with the length and content more accessible to female students aged 13-15 years. It would be beneficial as a text study, particularly with a cross-curricular link to history, which encompasses the concepts of: coming of age; individual reactions to challenging situations; and the breaking of traditional gender norms across history. As well as this, *Liberty* is recommended for a secondary school library, and a Years 8-10 wide reading list. Students who enjoy historical fiction will be drawn to the three women within this narrative, and female readers will respond particularly positively to the strong female characters narrating their stories.



## Amundsen's Way: The Race to the South Pole

**AUTHOR:**

Joanna Grochowicz

**PUBLISHER:**

Allen & Unwin  
2019  
320 pages

**RRP:**

\$16.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Michael E Daniel,  
Camberwell Grammar School

As a teenager I eagerly read works that recounted the exploits of explorers that were easily available. However, in recent years, there appears to have been a dearth of such works published, and *Amundsen's Way* is thus a welcome addition to the corpus of Australian teenage fiction.

Early in the twentieth century, just prior to WWI, a number of expeditions to Antarctica were mounted, one of the most significant being that of Roald Amundsen. On 14 December 1911 he was the first explorer to reach the South Pole successfully. Joanna Grochowicz recounts the expedition as a novel. It forms a companion volume to her previously published teenage novel *Into the White: Scott's Antarctic Odyssey*.

Grochowicz begins her novel with Amundsen arriving at a Hobart hotel in March 1912. Bedraggled in appearance, he is relegated to the worst room in the hotel before the Norwegian consul makes his appearance, and then organises a more luxurious room. Their dialogue suggests that he has successfully completed his mission. The narrative then shifts back to September 1910, with Amundsen's ship docking at Madeira en route to Antarctica. His journey south is briefly recounted by the author who establishes key facets of Amundsen's character, and his relationships with other members of the expedition.

Upon arrival in Antarctica, Amundsen establishes his base, before leading expeditions off to establish supply dumps strategically placed along the route to the South Pole at latitudes 80, 81 and 82 degrees prior to the onset of winter. Aware of Scott's presence, Amundsen begins his trek south after hearing Scott's motorised sledges

depart. Although he and his party left earlier than anticipated, he did not want to be beaten by Scott.

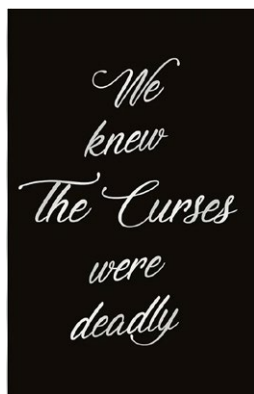
Amundsen not only successfully reached the South Pole before Scott, but also survived the return journey. The main reason generally given by historians, which is reflected in Grochowicz's portrait of Amundsen, is that he was a meticulous planner, and was effective at adapting to changed circumstances. Throughout the novel, there are frequent flashbacks which provide readers with insights into Amundsen's complex character. One significant trait, established in a flashback relatively early in the novel, is that a near death experience in the frozen wilderness taught Amundsen not only the value of learning from mistakes, but also the more significant lesson of planning for a worst case scenario. It was this trait, in particular, that facilitated Amundsen's party's survival.

However, perhaps the final success that Grochowicz recounts is the strategic manner in which Amundsen broke the news of his success. The nature of the debts he had accrued to finance his expedition was such that he was relying on the money from newspapers to obtain the 'scoop' to his story. Grochowicz recounts in one of the flashbacks that Amundsen had lost money when news of him successfully navigating the Northwest Passage had been leaked by an unscrupulous telegraph clerk to a local newspaper. This explains Amundsen's reticence in revealing himself when reaching the hotel in Hobart, and his insistence on making contact with the Norwegian consul.

*Amundsen's Way* has been thoroughly researched. Whilst certain parts of the novel are hard to put down, particularly the section that details the final leg of



the journey to the South Pole, it is this reviewer's perception that many readers may find earlier parts of the novel somewhat dry. There is the sense that readers would want to have an intrinsic interest in explorers prior to reading this work. Hence, this work would be more appropriate as a wider reading book rather than a set text for close study. It is a book that would be accessible for students from Years 7 to 10, but particularly for Year 9 students in terms of the complexity of writing and ideas.



## The Curses

**AUTHOR:**

Laure Eve

**PUBLISHER:**

Allen & Unwin  
(Imprint – Faber Children PB)  
2018  
416 pages

**RRP:**

\$19.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Fauve Grady,  
Cranbourne East  
Secondary College

The Grace children are reeling from not only the loss of a treasured friend, but also... his resurrection. In the first instalment of this series (*The Graces*), Wolf, long-time family friend and partner of elder twin, Fenrin Grace, is killed under terrifying circumstances and then miraculously bought back to life by the very person who caused his death. In *The Curses*, it is clear that Wolf is not the person he used to be and his condition seems to be worsening. Fenrin is desperate to have Wolf back the way he was, whilst his twin sister Thalia is desperate to be with the one she loves – if only the Grace curse didn't put both their lives in peril. But who can the teenagers confide in?

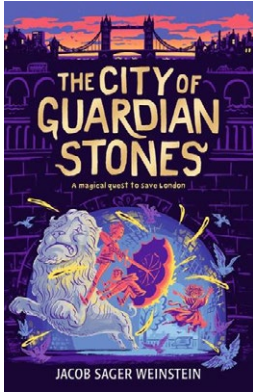
Not their friends who are all too keen to believe the strange rumours about the Grace family and imitate their dangerous craft, and certainly not their parents who have built a life based on secrets and spurning emotional connections. So the Grace teenagers have to solve the problem of Wolf on their own. Unfortunately, they seek help with a mysterious and intriguing stranger who, they discover all too late, holds a bitter grudge against their parents. Together with the Machiavellian Nathaniel and the very witch who took Wolf's life to begin with, the three Grace teenagers embark on a terrifying journey to simultaneously restore the real Wolf and save their family from a long-established curse that has plagued their parents and now threatens all that the teenagers hold dear. But what if the real Wolf is no

longer there to be saved?

The first thing that attracted me to this novel was the cover and let's face it, most students these days take a look at the cover and if it looks 'boring' then back on the shelf it goes. The particular edition I acquired had an entirely black cover with the title in silver across the front, no traditional information such as blurb, author, spine details; just the silver writing. Definitely eye catching.

My first recommendation is that these books be read in order; this is the sequel. I had not read the first and was thrown straight into a collection of characters and pre-established information (such as the main characters being a family of witches) which was disorientating and even as an avid reader, very nearly put me off after the first few pages.

Young people who like mystery, intrigue and all things supernatural will love this book. It is a bit dark and does have adult concepts such as sex (not explicit, just mentioned in passing and joked about between characters), drugs, possession and resurrection. The text would therefore be suited to 15+ readers or those with the maturity to handle such concepts. This would be perfect as a reading circle text or as a wider reading option but not necessarily as a Reading and responding/Analytical text.



## The City of Guardian Stones

**AUTHOR:**

Jacob Sager Weinstein

**PUBLISHER:**

Walker Books  
2018  
352 pages

**RRP:**

\$16.99

**REVIEWED BY:**

Rachel Towns,  
St John's Regional College

**The City of Guardian Stones** is a rollicking adventure about Hyacinth Hayward, a young girl with a mysterious family and magical powers of some kind. This is a sequel to Weinstein's initial novel about the same protagonist, *The City of Secret Rivers*, and her adventures.

This book can be read on its own, (as I had not read the first one and was still able to understand the characters, context, and events), but I do get the impression that this book would be better understood and appreciated if read after the first in the series. Hyacinth lives with her mother, an extremely forgetful and suggestible woman, in a version of England. This is a world where beneath the ordinary and everyday live magical creatures and fantastic wonders. Stone creatures come to life, magical figures can move stones without touching them, and soldiers made out of cork protect humans from those who use magic improperly. With the help of her friends Ben and a magical pig in a swimsuit called Oaroboarus, Hyacinth searches through the sewers and markets of London, trying to find out who is stealing powerful stones and why they are doing this. This novel is both a fantasy with its many magical creatures and enchantments, and also a mystery, as Hyacinth and her friends search for the true villains in order to clear their names.

One of the things that really drew me into this novel was the interesting premise. Although it is a fantasy story aimed at a younger audience, it moves away from the trope of the orphan hero, instead focusing on a young protagonist who has to look after her mother, making her both very young and very old at the same time. It is full of a range of exciting adventures,

taking the audience of 8-12 along with them with its plot driven nature, rather than focusing on the motivations of characters – quite engaging for a younger audience. I also liked how Weinstein moved away from the focus on traditional monsters and fantastical creatures, instead using saltpetre men as jailors in the magical prison, cork men as soldiers, Oaroboarus as an intelligent pig, and tattooed villains with unusual and strong powers, to create a more interesting and unique world. These made a sometimes simple story more powerful by encouraging a wider fantastic imagination for its readers. Another element that made this text stronger for me, as an adult, was its references to historical events often from Victorian England and historical figures such as Eleanor Coade and William Shakespeare. It made it both an engaging text, but also an unexpectedly educational one as well.

If this was used as a class text for study it would probably suit younger year levels such as Grade 5 – Year 7. Generally fantasy novels with young heroes/heroines are intended for audiences that are younger, however, the length might turn off those in Grades 3 or 4 who are not already engaged readers. It would be interesting to use this text to introduce ideas about context – facilitating a discussion of the elements referenced from the Industrial Revolution/Victorian period in England. It would also support a discussion about genre and how it conforms to or transforms our expectations of genre texts; both fantasy and mystery texts. Without many of the internal motivations of characters, this book tends to be quite plot driven which may make more challenging to identify themes for discussion and analysis. Themes for study could include: choices, transformation, destiny, family, magic,

salvation, identity, connections and sacrifice. This would be a great text to suggest to students for private reading, particularly those who are interested in fantasy, Victorian English history, or mysteries. It is not a complex text, though it does have some references to England and British history/geography that may need to be explained and could easily be aimed at students aged 8-14 years, depending on their reading ability and interests.



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