

More than *words*

Four well-known Australian children's authors talk about creativity in their writing and the inspiration they give to the children who read their books

"Creativity is the defeat of habit by originality."

Arthur Koestler



Hazel Edwards, author of *There's a Hippopotamus on the Roof Eating Cake*

MY BOOKS

My books have characters that are different from me so

I've had to listen, watch, ask "what if?", and "become" someone else. Some of my characters are animals with special abilities like Sleuth Astrid the Mind- Reading Chook who rides a Harley motorcycle and finds a lost sense of humour. Or Kyle the Antarctic explorer in *Antarctica's Frozen Chosen*. I went to Antarctica to research this book.

Usually I do adventurous research in interesting places like Nepal or Asia to make my characters believable. Yet I'm more interested in adventures of the mind.

INSPIRING CHILDREN

My stories offer reassurance. The cake-eating hippo on the roof is the BIG friend with answers to all problems especially when you have to do something for the first time,

like going to hospital or starting school. I have had some fabulous fan mail, some of which is addressed to the character and has to be answered in character. One poignant fan mail read: "I haven't got a friend, will you come and sit on my roof?"

CREATIVITY

Children who have been read to regularly can anticipate a plot and become better problem solvers. They also have longer attention spans. Going inside a book's world and using the clues of the words and pictures enables you to see things from another's viewpoint. You can be someone else. And after the book is finished, you may look differently at your ordinary world or be a bit more tolerant of those who are different.

WHY I WRITE

I became a writer because I wanted to experience a varied life and see things from others' viewpoints. Creativity is putting together two things that have not been in that combination before. It's quirky, fun and satisfying. I've recently finished my memoir, *Not Just a Piece of Cake; Being an Author*.

More information at hazeledwards.com



Deborah Abela, author of *Grimsdon and New City*

MY BOOKS

Grimsdon and New City are my cranky novels and were

the result of my frustration at governments around the world not taking enough care of the planet.

I wondered what would happen if this lack of care caused something big to go wrong, so I flooded a city, added flying machines, sea monsters and girls who are good with swords.

INSPIRING CHILDREN

Children feel passionately about the environment and justice, and I think my novels have both those issues at their hearts, as well as good old-fashioned adventure, humour and feisty girls in the lead roles.

There are spies, soccer players, bullies, evil harbour lords, softly spoken dictators and kids always leading the way whether they think they can or not.

We need our future leaders to be wide readers. We need them to feel empathy, to have a broad reach of understanding the human condition,

to be able to think creatively, to have a love of words and to be able to grasp concepts, big and small.

CREATIVITY

I love writing fast-paced novels with loads of action and also heart, so there are sea monsters, flooded cities and criminals, but friendship, betrayal and family are always paramount.

WHY I WRITE

From the moment I worked out what the scribbles were all about on the pages of my earliest book, I was in love. When I was young, however, all the action and adventure was for the boys and I always wondered why the girls were never the ones leading the way, getting muddy and fighting the bad guys – that is a major reason many of my main characters are girls. Keeping in touch with my creativity is about asking questions, challenging myself as a writer and a reader.

More information at deborahabela.com



Meredith Costain, author of the *Ella Diaries*

MY BOOKS

One of my favourites is *Doodledum Dancing*, which is a

collection of rhyming verse for the very young, illustrated by Pamela Allen. I've always loved rhythm and rhyme – I've been writing poems since I was six – and this book has given me the chance to share the joy of language with children when I present sessions in schools.

INSPIRING CHILDREN

I recently received an email from a girl thanking me for writing my series *A Year in Girl Hell* (which follows the stories of four girls moving up from primary school to secondary school, and the perils of making new friends and "fitting in"). She said one of the characters was "just like her" and it had helped her to cope with a similar situation at her school. I've received similar emails from readers and parents.

CREATIVITY

Reading allows children to put themselves into the hearts and minds of other people whose lives

might be different from their own. It opens up new worlds for them, which they can explore further in their own thoughts and writing. Seeing different word patterns and ways of expressing things will hopefully encourage them to take risks with their writing that they may not otherwise have taken.

WHY I WRITE

I was lucky enough to grow up in a house full of books. We told stories around the dinner table, wrote and acted out our own plays and recited lots of poems by writers such as A.A. Milne and C.J. Dennis.

I also had a wonderful rural primary school teacher who read to us once a week and we also recited lots of classic poetry from the Victorian school readers. My head was full of words and rhythms so it seemed natural to write my own stories and poems as well.

When I was eight I had a poem published in the children's section of a newspaper and that made me determined to become a writer when I "grew up".

More information at meredithcostain.com



Susanne Gervay, author of the *I Am Jack* books

MY BOOKS

Being Jack is the end of a 15-year journey that began when my

son was bullied at school, at a time when bullying was not recognised. In the *I Am Jack* journey, I invite kids and everyone into my home with all its humour, quirkiness, challenges, love, family, community.

These books take young people and families into not only Jack's life but into their own lives. I always tread lightly, with humour and a familiarity that makes them know this is their world. Softly I weave in big issues, which they have little or no experience to handle.

INSPIRING CHILDREN

My recent Lifetime Social Justice Literature Award from the International Reading Association for my body of work was deeply moving and validated my life as a children's author.

The emails, letters, cards I receive from young people and adults are the greatest gift.

CREATIVITY

Young people are very different readers to adults. If they love a book, they will read and re-read it. Children's and young adult books travel with young people on their journey of self discovery. It provides them with validation, a sense of place, pathways to creating their own worlds and understanding the one they are in. It is a place to explore new ideas safely without judgement by others and delight in who they are and what they can do.

WHY I WRITE

It was not one book that inspired me. It was many books. I read endlessly. Books provided an amazing place to explore ideas, imagination, other lives, have adventures and create amazing places. It also allowed me to escape from parents who struggled coping with their refugee past, worked too hard, argued, but who also brought me great love and believed in me. I wrote for those same reasons too.

More information at sgervay.com

