



# The Storylines Joy Cowley Award 2010

## GUIDELINES

The Storylines Joy Cowley Award is for a text of not more than 1000 words with the potential to become an outstanding picture book for children of any age group up to 13 years.

Entries will be judged under the following criteria:

- The quality of the idea first
- Illustrative possibilities
- Consideration for the restrictions of the 32-page picture book format
- Commercial viability of the resulting book

On the whole we are looking for that certain indefinable something that lifts a story out of the usual. We hope that the following observations from both the judging panel and children's literature experts will assist you in assessing your own work prior to submitting to this award.

### **A picture is worth a thousand words**

A picture book is not a short story with pictures. Picture books must have the story and the imagery working together, each complementing the other. Although you won't be supplying the images, what will be happening in the illustrations and how much of the 'story' could be captured in the images, should be considered. Some authors include briefing notes for the artist. These can help the editor/judge to visualise elements of the story that have been left to the pictures to tell.

### **Write what you know**

You are advised to spend some time studying a wide range of successful picture books, analysing their strengths and how the illustrations complement the written words. Remember, every picture book starts with the story.

### **Rhyme and rhythm**

This is an extremely difficult genre to handle well. Bad verse can spoil what would otherwise be a good story idea simply because the action is forced to fit the rhyme of the verse. Stay with the good idea. Work in rhyme only if it can capture that idea well and if you can ensure that the rhythm maintains its regularity. Check your work by asking someone to read it aloud. If they stumble or lose the rhythm, then the text needs more work.

### **The idea**

Picture book writing, especially for the preschool age group, is usually based on one simple idea. Don't make the story too complex, even if your intention is to produce a sophisticated picture book. If you wish to model your submission on a proven story formula, you must have a novel twist, one that is as good, if not better than, the original.

### **Style / Structure**

- Avoid anthropomorphism. This can work but requires special care.
- Always ensure the theme is empowering to the child reader, even if humorous.
- Keep in mind that your story will need to fit within 32 pages.

The judges will be looking for freshness of idea and language, a good sense of narrative structure, clever use of dialogue, strong characterisation, and appropriateness to the age group.

## **CHECK YOUR WORK BY READING IT OUT LOUD**

*Entries must be postmarked in NZ no later than 31 October 2009*

## **Storylines Joy Cowley Award**

is proudly administered by

Storylines Children's Literature Charitable Trust of New Zealand  
and sponsored by SCHOLASTIC NZ LTD



# The Storylines Joy Cowley Award 2010

## JUDGES' COMMENTS FROM PREVIOUS STORYLINES JOY COWLEY AWARDS

The following points taken from judges' reports of previous Joy Cowley Awards may be helpful to intending entrants.

- Previous entries for this award have indicated that many writers assume (incorrectly) that picture books should be, or need to be, in rhyming verse. By writing in verse, you have actually **doubled** the challenge; the judges discard many good stories simply because the authors had written in less-than-perfect verse form, rather than straightforward prose. Any verse for children which is going to be sight-read by parents needs to be rhythmically **flawless**. A.A. Milne, Dr Seuss or Lynley Dodd are good examples of the standard required.
- Cat and dog stories - pet stories generally - make up a large proportion of submitted stories, and usually cover well-worn ground. Even to get as far as the judges' shortlist, any cat or dog story must have a freshness of approach and characterisation. The same applies to stories about such New Zealand icons as tui or fantails or kiwis.
- Stories generally need to be within a young child's world view and understanding, and ultimately to empower the young child in some way. Stories about singing vegetables or talking volcanoes (sic) are unlikely to get far.
- We often see strong adult characters but few strong child characters for the reader to connect with.
- Entries are sometimes modelled on verse forms used in already-published books. The judges recommend that this be avoided. Do not try to retell remembered stories.
- 'Artists' briefs' are written suggestions to the artist, particularly included where the author wishes significant elements of the story be represented visually, not in the text. These are not obligatory, but if entrants decide to include them, the judges recommend that the artist's brief is kept simple and straightforward, to one page if possible, and laid out in
- clearly understandable format.
- Submitted stories have so far shown a general lack of awareness of the particular qualities and demands of the picture book genre overall. Entrants are advised to spend time in a library or bookshop studying successful books for their ideas, structure and language.
- If a manuscript has been submitted twice and not been shortlisted the judges recommend seeking the advice of a manuscript assessor.

## CHECK YOUR WORK BY READING IT OUT LOUD

*Entries must be postmarked in NZ no later than 31 October 2009*

### Storylines Joy Cowley Award

is proudly administered by

Storylines Children's Literature Charitable Trust of New Zealand

and sponsored by

SCHOLASTIC NZ LTD