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## ***The Curioseum: collected stories of the odd and marvellous***

- edited by Adrienne Jansen, illustrated by Sarah Laing

**Publisher: Te Papa Press**

**RRP \$29.99**

What a wonderful idea! This brilliant collection of 22 stories is the result of sending a bunch of New Zealand writers to wander around Te Papa in search of inspiration. It's surprising what they found, and it's vastly entertaining how they chose to write about their discoveries.

Joy Cowley, Margaret Mahy, Tusiata Avia, Bill Manhire, and Ant Sang, are just a few of the explorers who put their imaginations to work. The writers are an eclectic blend of cultures who reflect the origins of many of the artefacts held in New Zealand's national museum. The 'Curious People and Curious Objects' section at the back of the book gives brief biographical information about each writer and an explanation of why they focused on a particular object.

Paora Tibble wrote about the kiore (pacific rat) because it is his family's kaitiaki (guardian/totem). Mandy Hager chose a beaded purse because it belonged to her Austrian grandmother who escaped from Vienna after its occupation and annexation into Nazi Germany in 1938, later she arrived in New Zealand with other family members. Barbara Else learned that a castaway suit was part of supplies left for shipwrecked sailors in the cold Snares Islands. These writers' stories, and many others, accentuate how New Zealanders have been drawn from faraway places to populate these southern islands.

Detailed black-and-white illustrations by Sarah Laing enliven the stories with a touch of whimsical humour. The art-deco embossed cover with flaps is superbly designed and a delight to hold.

The collection is a mix of fantabulous and fantastical stories, true tales, and some that stretch reality like a rubber band. However, all the stories have their inspiration in the objects found within Te Papa's walls. The book is suitable for all ages and should spark many discussions about family backgrounds and treasures.

**Reviewed by children's author, Jean Bennett**

**Illustrator's website:**

<http://sarahelaing.wordpress.com/>

