



2012 Annual Seminar

Bookrapt celebrated another sold out seminar thanks to our excellent speakers, Nikki-Slade Robinson, Anna Mackenzie, and Penny Scown. The day started with a minute's silence to honour the passing of Margaret Mahy.

The seminar provided a great opportunity to launch the new novel from one of Bookrapt's founding members Sherryl Jordan, [Ransomwood](#).



Penny Scown from Scholastic (L) congratulates Sherryl Jordan on the launch of her latest novel *Ransomwood*.

Anna Mackenzie

Anna is a full-time writer and editor. Anna's first story was "published" when she was seven – a story she wrote and hand-bound herself with a cover she illustrated. Her Mum kept this story and gave it back to Anna as an adult when her first "real" novel was published.

Her first novel, *High Tide*, was featured in the Children's Literature Foundation List of Notable Books of 2003. Her second novel, *Out on the Edge*, for young adults, was published by Longacre Press in 2005. The first book in Anna's highly acclaimed trilogy of the same name, *The Sea-Wreck Stranger*, was a finalist for the 2008 New Zealand Post Children's and Young Adults' Book Awards, joint winner of the [2008 Sir Julius Vogel Award](#), and was also awarded a prestigious [White Ravens Award](#) for outstanding children's literature, an honour she shares with the likes of Dame



Lynley Dodd, Jack Lasenby, David Hill, Fleur Beale, and Joy Cowley. After *Ebony Hill*, the second volume, Anna published *Shadow of the Mountain*, before finishing the trilogy off with *Finder's Shore*.

Growing up surrounded by words, thanks to the oral story-telling skills of her father, Anna and her four siblings featured as the main characters in his stories, a tactic that Anna says lulled them into good behaviour while educating them at the same time. Works of literature that played particularly important parts in Anna's upbringing included classics such as *Wind in the Willows*, *Winnie the Pooh*, and *Beatrix Potter*, as well as the somewhat darker [Bishop Hatto and the Rats](#). Other strong influences included stories by [Mollie Hunter](#), [Beverly Cleary](#), and [Joyce West](#).

Anna spoke of the difference between novels of our youth, and novels for today's children. 21st century kids grow up in the fast paced and highly visual world of instant action TV, movies, and DVDs. As such, today's stories for children and young adults need to happen fast – there is no place for long mellow discourses or side-tracking. Kids want instant. Anna's background means she has an intuitive understanding of story arc, and of the importance of "but". She believes stories are all about the "but" - this great thing happened, but ... Everything was going fine, but ... Anna also strongly believes in "what if ..." as a guide to writing.

A career in non-fiction (PR, marketing, in-house promotions) gave Anna the skills she needed to "keep it tight" when she returned to fiction writing. Anna's writing can deal with darker aspects of being a teenager, such as domestic violence, but Anna disagrees with those who say she should avoid this subject matter. Anna said it is like reading as an adult a story you loved as a child, and saying "Oh, I never knew that was going on in the story." She believes the subject matter she writes about is the same - only kids who know what you're talking about get it. Others will gloss over it.

As with all of our author speakers from past years, Anna says the real work in writing is in editing. The story flows out ... and then the hard work begins. Anna always leaves a first draft for a few weeks, before returning to it and reading it as if it is someone else's novel. She prints the story out, as it reads differently on paper compared to on-screen, and also reads sections aloud, which sound different again. She then passes the manuscript on to a close group of readers before sending it to her publisher. Anna says she is fortunate to have a very good relationship with her editor and publisher, and pointed out that an author needs to be receptive to their editor. One thing Anna does not do is read her published novels ... since she can no longer change anything.

Briefly touching on the e-publishing phenomena, Anna believes comparing with e-books with hard books is like comparing stairs with escalators. They serve the same purpose, but in different ways. Some books, she says, are better as hard copies, some as e-books. For New Zealand authors, e-books can be a great way of improving their reach onto the international market. In the United States the move towards e-books has resulted in the pressure for authors to be more visible – to go on tour, tweet, have a Facebook page and website, and interact more with their readers.

Anna currently has one book heading to her publisher, one ready to go to her readers, and one in her head ready to come out.

[Anna's Facebook page](#)

[Anna's blog](#)

Nikki Slade Robinson

After graduating from Wellington's Visual Communication and Design course, Nikki set up as a freelance illustrator in 1989. Since then she has produced thousands of illustrations for clients such as Telecom, BP, New Zealand Post, BNZ, and Scholastic NZ. Nikki has illustrated over 60 books, including the award-winning *The Puriri Tree/Te Puriri*, a finalist in the Sir Julius Vogel Awards, *The Seven Stars of Matariki*, and *That's not Junk!*, one of three titles Penguin chose to release internationally as a Q-Book in 2010. Much of Nikki's publishing work has been for Huia (NZ), New Zealand's premier Maori publishing company.



Growing up in very rural New Zealand Nikki learnt to draw on and with whatever was available, and developed a fascination for the natural world. Using icicles as a stylus, observing textures in the dirt on a river bank, and noting the shapes in clouds captured Nikki's imagination from an early age. In the 21st century Nikki combines nature with technology – scanning in images such as butterfly wings and nuts and bolts, using her extensive library of photographic images, and then incorporating them with her beautiful hand drawings.

Nikki gets her ideas from ... everywhere. She often writes down notes in events that have happened around her that may, or may not, turn into a story or a drawing. A stick insect that she had to extract from her daughter's hair eventually became Hannah Bandanna's Hair.

Backing up what Anna said, Nikki told a rapt audience that Hannah Bandanna's Hair was written in a day ... and then was very laboriously edited. Nikki runs first drafts past a few friends, her husband (a copywriter and freelance journalist), and her 14 year old daughter. She said it is important when selecting friends or family for readers that they will be critical if needed, and not just say "Oh, it's lovely."

When illustrating someone else's work, Nikki reads the story several times until she "sees a DVD" in her head, and the characters come to life. She starts with the front of the head, then the body, and then works the character as a three dimensional image. She says it is important to know how that character looks from all angles, and how they display different emotions and poses.

Nikki storybooks an entire book first using small black and white thumbnails, one spread (i.e. two adjoining pages) at a time. The thumbnails are run past the publisher before the

final work begins. Nikki uses a mix of digital media and hand-drawn images, whether that be ink and wash (to which she adds salt to get an amazing crystal effect), coloured pencil, chalky pastels, or other media.

Website: www.penandink.co.nz
[Nikki's Portfolio](#)

Penny Scown

For over thirty years, Penny Scown has worked with Scholastic authors and illustrators creating children's books, picture books, junior fiction, novels, and nonfiction. She has had a hand in almost every one of the many hundreds of books that have been produced in that time, including a multitude of award-winning titles. During this time she has worked with most of the traditional names of NZ children's literature such as Margaret Mahy, Joy Cowley, Bill Taylor, Tessa Duder, Gavin Bishop, Fleur Beale, Robyn Belton, Jenny Cooper, to name a few, and has been proud to be involved in helping launch the careers of such people as Sherryl Jordan, Vince Ford, Kyle Mewburn, Lucy Davey, and Nikki Slade Robinson, among many others. She has also worked for Scholastic in the UK and these days works closely with Scholastic counterparts in Australia. A mother of two, Penny has found her children very useful for research purposes over the years whether it be getting opinions on cover designs, or current popular slang.



Penny ([Rebecca Scown](#)'s cousin she proudly pointed out!) took the audience on a journey through the publishing process for a children's picture book, which begins with a manuscript being received, read and considered by one – two people, and then passed to the acquisition's team if suitable. The team then reads and considers the manuscript, and if accepted, an illustrator is approached for roughs. Once a suitable author/illustrator match is found, contracts are offered, with the author and illustrator receiving royalties on a 50/50 split. The publishing process is a long one. Penny is currently editing picture books for a March 2013 release date. The timing between a manuscript being accepted and publication of that book is around 18 months.

he manuscript for a children's picture book needs to be imaginative, unique, and believable. It needs a beginning, a middle, and an end, and to flow nicely. Owing to the way [picture books are constructed](#), the story also needs to be suitable for a 24 or 32 page format. Penny said some of the best ways to interest young children in reading are through the use of rhythm and rhyme, [familiar sequence](#) (such as you find in *Grandpa's Slippers*), repetition, [cumulative structure](#) (as per *The House That Jack Built*), or [cyclic structure](#) (also called chain or circular story: *There's a Hole in My Bucket*).

With illustrations Scholastic needs to ensure that the style of the illustrator suits the story, and that the pictures support the story. Sometimes an entirely different story can be told

with the pictures, with Phoebe Gilman's *Something From Nothing* being a classic example. Something that has to be carefully checked is continuity, both from picture to picture (is the clock on the wall constant on all pages?), and from text to picture (is the blue dressing gown from the text blue, or has it been drawn red by mistake?)

Giving advice to novel writers, Penny said a manuscript must have a strong plot with a credible climax, and that the reader must actually care about the main character. Dialogue needs to flow naturally, something Penny said many authors struggle with. Backing up what Anna spoke of, there can't be too many long descriptions, and the story needs a fast pace, especially in the opening chapters. A writer's characters needs to be three dimensional – the writer needs to know what their characters likes and dislikes are. Equally important is conveying what the characters look like.

Despite the old adage, everybody does, in fact, judge a book by its cover. Penny put up a slide display of three x rows of different cover designs for the same book, and then asked the audience which row their favourite cover was in. The split was about a third/a third/ a third, perfectly demonstrating the difficulty a publisher has in choosing a cover design.

The printing process was interesting, as Penny showed proofs for an upcoming picture book with 12 pages printed on each side of a large sheet of glossy paper. Scholastic's picture books are printed in Singapore or China, as are the majority of their novels, with only a few being printed here or in Australia. Picture books are all printed on a CMYK format, which involves the use of four different coloured printing plates. It is for this reason that the text in picture books is almost always in black. If the book is translated into another language, only one plate has to be changed.

Offering some parting advice for prospective authors, Penny said that Scholastic currently works on a closed submissions policy, meaning they only accept manuscripts from published authors or agents; they do not accept unsolicited manuscripts. For unpublished authors, Penny suggests the [Joy Cowley Award](#) or the [Tom Fitzgibbon Award](#). Both are sponsored by Scholastic, and together they mean that Penny spends her Christmas holidays every year reading around 200 manuscripts. While the winning manuscripts in each award are guaranteed publication, Scholastic sometimes publishes other entries as well.

Website: www.scholastic.co.nz



2012 seminar speakers Anna Mackenzie, Penny Scown, and Nikki Slade Robinson.



Thank, as always, to Chris from [Books a Plenty](http://www.bookrapt.org.nz) for her amazing display and book stall.