

# Reading and Writing Ethically for Young Australians

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**Abstract** Mitzi Myers, commenting on the pedagogical philosophy of Maria Edgeworth, writes that Edgeworth wanted to empower the child, using adult authority to teach children to think for themselves and to reflect on issues. (Myers 133). This philosophy is implied in many of the books discussed in this chapter, where the “adult authority” is the author (as well as, on some occasions, adult authority figures within the book), whose story, with the ideology contained therein, is designed to enable and encourage the readers to think for themselves. Perhaps paradoxically, however, the role of the child is also, as Robert Pattison points out, constructed in such a way as to reveal faults in the surrounding world. (Pattison 110), a construction of the child which is not new, echoing as it does Dickens’s use of the child as a moral and social way of judging adult actions (Hollindale 100). This article will discuss a range of writing for young Australians which deals with ethical and moral issues as well as consider how we can bring an ethical perspective in our examination of such books.

**Key words** ethical literary criticism; Australian literature for young people; Indigenous Australians; poetry

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*England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915*. Hillel, M.(2013) “Iconic Australia in Alison Lester’s *Are We There Yet?*” in A.M. Ommundsen (ed) *Looking Out and Looking In: National identity in Picturebooks of the New Millennium*. Hillel, M. (2012) “She faded and drooped as a flower”: Constructing the Child in the Child-rescue Literature of Late Victorian England in A. Gavin (ed) *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood Medieval to Contemporary*.

Speaking at the Sydney Writers’ Festival in 2015, author Kathryn Heyman claimed that “the act of fiction is an intrinsically ethical act because it requires me to question my own beliefs and to engage deeply with the world” (“How Novelists Engage with the World’ Sydney Writers’ Festival”)<sup>1</sup>. In a similar vein, children’s author Brian Caswell has said that he feels books “can help provide a pointer to the sorts of coping strategies which young people need to develop if they are to deal successfully with the complex and daunting society we have bequeathed to them” (qtd. in Nieuwenhuizen 276). Part of developing these strategies is to think about issues, and to formulate a moral and ethical code of their own. In an article in the major newspaper in Melbourne, Australia, the *Age*, revealed that the Humanist Society of Victoria was arguing for an innovative approach to studying ethics in primary schools, claiming that: “It’s never too early to tackle life’s big questions” and lobbying for children “to be given the opportunity to unpick moral and ethical dilemmas in a way which encourages deeper thinking” (Evans 15). However, it is important to realise that, in the context of discussions about literature and ethics, that children’s literature has, across its history, given young readers the stimulation to consider ethical and moral dilemmas.<sup>2</sup>

What Maureen Whitebrook has claimed for adult novels is also applicable to children’s literature: “many modern novels pose basic questions about human existence, including its political aspects, and depict the dilemmas which make moral and political demands on human beings ... novels are particularly good at showing the necessity of making choices, the psychological pressures on the individuals who face them, the moral dilemmas involved and the consequences, the political effects of reactions to those problems”(47). This article will consider how a range of writing for young readers in Australia deals with a number of ethical issues. In particular, I want to focus on a number of areas which might appear to challenge what has traditionally been seen to be suitable for books for young reader — refugees and family violence, leading to homelessness and the Aboriginal “stolen generations” in Australia. It should be pointed out, however, that social issues — including family violence and homelessness — were common topics in children’s

literature in the nineteenth century, so the books I want to consider here can be seen as part of a continuum.

This article comes at a time when the reading matter for young people — the ethics of such writing and the public’s ethical response to it — is under scrutiny in New Zealand and elsewhere following the banning of Ted Dawe’s *Into the River* in that country. The book was banned following a protest from a conservative lobby group called Family First who objected to some of the language and the depictions of drug use and sexual activity. The reactions of many writers around the world to this ban was interesting and revealing of attitudes to what is regarded as acceptable in writing for young readers: Scot Gardner, an Australian writer, said: “Books, especially those for adolescents, need to be true to the world. With due diligence, anything present in the world we inhabit is fair game for an author.” Paula Boock, and award-winning New Zealand writer wrote: “When my daughter was young we guided her choices at the library. Now she’s older, we trust her to make her own. If she reads something that confuses or even shocks her, well, that’s like a scraped knee. That’s how we grow. Family First don’t trust parents like me. They don’t trust the writers, the libraries or the schools, and most of all, they don’t trust the children” and a final quote from Man Booker prize winner Eleanor Catton: “When I was a young adult I cherished those books that took me seriously, that acknowledged the world was a complicated and often troubled place.”<sup>3</sup>

All these responses embrace the idea that literature can — and should — both challenge and support young people in their interaction with the world around them and the development of their own social and ethical stance on the issues confronting them.

One of the ethical issues for us as critics and reviewers of books is to consider how well such books present the ethical dilemma to their readers so that the readers can question the issues around them. The works I want to consider in this paper have all had a widespread readership and a number have been winners in a variety of awards. As T.A. Faunce has argued, “Most would agree that great literature provides problematic and engaging situations in which people can vicariously experience their ethical views being tested”(881). Furthermore, as Faunce also points out, there is a long tradition of “the literary author as social critic and reformer” (882). Faunce is considering what he calls canonical literature for adults. I would argue that literature for young readers can pose similar ethical dilemmas, asking the reader to test their views on these matters. Indeed as a web resource for teachers dealing with the issue of refugees puts it: “Sometimes, the media misrepresents refugees and asylum seekers, creating stereotypes and fuelling

myths and misunderstandings. Education is incredibly important in combating this. At a time where one in every 100 people in the world has been forced to flee persecution, violence or war, it is crucial for students to understand the contemporary issues affecting refugees.”<sup>4</sup>

Books and other forms of literature for young readers can play a vital part in this education, developing understanding and empathy. Morris Gleitzman, an award-winning Australian writer for young people, has said of his work that he’s “always reminded, no matter how different one of my characters is from me on the surface, how we’re all pretty much the same underneath. It’s a way of pointing out that even when a character seems to be totally different to us that we’re sharing the same feelings. And that’s what we do when we read, we share the emotions that the characters have. That reminds us how similar we are. As well as being very entertaining, it’s also very useful when there’s a lot of fear and suspicion around about people who appear to be different.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, he has written, his stories “are always told through the eyes and heart of my main characters.”<sup>6</sup> In his *Boy Overboard*, this means that we read through the point-of-view of Jamal, an Afghan boy forced to flee his country with his family to try to reach safety in Australia. They have to leave all they know because Jamal’s mother has, with the support of her husband, been running a school in their house, a school which educates girls, something that is forbidden by the government. The danger of this occupation is highlighted when their house is blown up. Gleitzman is thus raising an ethical question very early on in the book — that of gender equality and the importance of education for all. Jamal and his family face many dangers in their bid for safety using all the money they have to buy tickets from people smugglers on boats which are overcrowded and far from seaworthy. Jamal and his younger sister Bibi are separated from their parents and their plight is exacerbated when, in the middle of the ocean, the smugglers refuse to travel any further until each person on the boat gives them more money or valuables equivalent to the sum they are demanding. Their journey is a perilous one altogether and even when they arrive at the safety of land, the freedom they longed for is not as they imagined.<sup>7</sup>

David Findlay in his review of *Boy Overboard*, picking up Gleitzman’s own point about stories and other forms of writing allowing us to see that people are essentially the same, remarked about this book: “it raises questions of gender discrimination, human rights, cultural difference — concluding that we are basically the same. Jamal and Bibi may eat different food, speak a different language, wear different clothes, but in the end, like us, they want a happy, unhassled life... in

other words to use a term much abused by politicians and commentators ‘a fair go’.<sup>8</sup> Australians have always prided themselves on allowing everyone a “fair go” but Gleitzman is asking us if this is now more myth than reality.<sup>9</sup>

Gleitzman also considers the moral responsibility of the writer. In the same interview I quoted from earlier, he says that he always makes sure his young characters are equipped with things which help them to cope with the problems with which they are confronted — personality traits such as optimism, for example — otherwise it wouldn’t be fair to put them in that position.

At one stage in the boat journey, Jamal notes that “this area here under the deck is awash with water. It’s up to our knees. I hope the boat isn’t leaking. I’ve asked the sailors, but they don’t seem to know what I mean. I don’t think I’ll say anything to Bibi [his little sister] and the others. I don’t want to make them anxious” (Gleitzman 128). Even in this brief section we see Jamal’s essential compassion and goodness — an implied contrast to the people smugglers manning the boat. It also reveals something of his naivety too, though — his expectation of receiving an answer from the sailors is child-like and reminds us that he is actually a child. He and his sister are children who are entitled to protection and even this short extract encodes the lack of ethics of the adults who exploit them.

Jacob Buganza, in his work on education, ethics and literature, reminds us that in literature, “the reader is invited to imagine him/herself in the place of the characters in the novel. Empathy has a clear ethical function ... an interpretative, passionate-intellective exercise, based on which one tries to comprehend the situation of another human being” (130).

This is precisely what world-renowned Australian illustrator Shaun Tan is doing in his wordless picture book, *The Arrival*. One of the essentials for all humans in a quest for happiness is the need for a sense of belonging. Sometimes, as Tan points out, this has to be reinvented. For migrants and refugees, this reimagining may be required across a broad range of experiences in their lives. Not only do they have to leave their homeland and reinvent themselves in the culture of the new homeland, but in order to do so, they need to reinvent themselves in terms of a new school, a new job, a new house and new relationships with those around them. Thinking about the way he conceived of this book, Tan reflects on the essential humanity of us all and indicates his thoughtful and ethical approach to a subject which has often engaged him, that of a “stranger in a strange land” and how that affects a person’s sense of self when even the most ordinary, everyday action becomes strange (Tan, “Strangers in Strange Lands” 38). The full discussion of Tan’s research for this book and his own family background on which he drew,

makes fascinating reading and can be found at “Strangers in Strange Lands” in *Storylines: the Inside Story*.

This strangeness and uncertainty which Tan discusses in *Storylines*, is reflected in the illustrations of the book. Furthermore, Tan describes how he rejected the idea of a conventional picture book, instead deciding “that a longer, more fragmented visual sequence without any words would best capture a certain feeling of uncertainty and discovery” that is so much part of the migrant experience (Tan, “Strangers in Strange Lands” 39). One large illustration provides a striking example of how this can be achieved pictorially. With its towering and threatening imagery, dwarfing the two refugees, encodes the fear and uncertainty very strongly and the vectors formed by the towering, windowless blocks, enclose and threaten the two tiny figures cowering in the middle.

Helping us to understand the uncertainty further, is the sepia tone of the illustrations and the mysterious creatures which appear in some. These encode both fear and anxiety — and at the same time how a child can sometimes be more adaptable than adults, as a child sometimes appears in the illustrations, apparently quite accepting of these creatures. Furthermore, there is, as Tan himself has said, no real “guidance as to how the images might be interpreted” (Tan, “Strangers in Strange Lands” 40). We, like the migrants depicted, have to try to make sense of the unfamiliar and search for meaning where this is not clear. This book deals with every migrant/refugee who is a stranger in a strange land. No-one is named so the experience Tan is depicting could be that of anyone who has had to leave their homeland. The endpapers give us images of many different people of all nationalities, often denoted by items of dress. Anyone, it is saying, might be displaced from their home at some stage.

Why are these people fleeing? We are given no definite answer, but there are depictions of escape, of the devastation of war, of forced labour in factories among other things, all of which highlight the multitude of reasons why there are so many displaced people in the world today.

Homelessness of a different kind is another ethical issue tackled in a number of Australian books for young people. Both Steven Herrick’s *The Simple Gift* and Libby Hathorn and Greg Rogers’s *Way Home* deal with the issue of youth homelessness; Herrick’s book is a verse novel, an interesting medium to choose. Poetry can transform and shape people’s thinking and understanding and help the reader to stand in the shoes of another. Herrick’s poetic novel is told from the point-of-view of three characters, Billy a sixteen year-old escaping from family violence. Caitlin, a middle-class girl who befriends him and Old Bill, an alcoholic grieving

the death of his beloved wife and daughter. The focalising of the book moves between the three and we learn that Billy is homeless as a result of his father's violence 10 year-old Billy is knocked to the ground by a punch from his father, a violation of the protective relationship which should have existed between the two; the violence escalates and Billy spends days in his bedroom avoiding his father. The starkness of the analogy which comes to Billy's mind signifies how impossible his home life had become:

The wind and rain  
Hits you in the face  
With the force of a father's punch. (10)

In a few, well-chosen words, Herrick makes us understand the violence of Billy's home life and that the violence undercuts any real notion of home as a place of safety and warmth. Unlike his father, however, Billy is an essentially good young man who helps Old Bill drink less, who allows him to share his bitter memories and who makes sure he eats properly. In other words, he offers Old Bill the simple gift of friendship, caring for and about him when society doesn't, seeing beyond the dirty, drunken exterior to the real man beneath and refusing to label Old Bill as a no-hoper as he himself had been labelled.

Herrick has described what he regards as heroism and how his characters display that trait — “within the story they do something of great value, that is a *little* thing - give friendship and hope to an old hobo [as in *The Simple Gift* ] or bring a father and grandfather together (in *Tom Jones*) ... These simple little things ... are done by ordinary people, in a quiet unobtrusive way, and ... requires[s] compassion and love and respect ... they are far more heroic and necessary than any world-record sporting achievement. And ... cannot be measured in dollars and cents.” On his imagery he writes: “Maybe the secret to writing an effective and striking image is empathy — putting yourself in the place of each character.”<sup>10</sup>

Once again we have an author emphasising that both the writer and reader need to respond in an empathetic and ethical way to the characters using literature to understand ethical issues not, as Brynhildsvoll points out, “in the light of rational arguments, but in the light of narrative and stories”(249), which, as he further argues, is a very effective medium.

Another book which deals with youth homelessness, this time a picturebook for older readers, is *Way Home* by the award-winning combination of Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers, first published in 1994 but reprinted several times,

including in a paperback edition in 2003. In writing this work, Hathorn said she undertook a lot of research about homeless young people and was distressed by the stories. She “wanted to create a work ... which might go towards changing things for some of those kids at least. This book is not for street kids so much as it is for the middle class kids who know all the comforts of home” (Roberts and Nicoll *Teacher’s notes* No pagination ). So once again, we have a book designed as a consciousness-raising document, almost a protest document. The book follows Shane and his cat through the streets — menacing and dark — to the place he calls home. Not surprisingly, interviews with homeless young people suggest they often feel unsafe. The menace for Shane is exacerbated by another group of street boys who chase him past piles of rubbish and whose shadows loom large and sinister on the wall behind him. Home is a kind of cave constructed in the middle of a rubbish-strewn gap between derelict buildings. The book is thus challenging readers to consider what constitutes a “home.” The child clearly has no adults in his life, so has none of the nurturing and warmth which are usually associated with notions of “home” but he has tried to decorate his space, a concept which is both admirable and pathetic. The pathos is emphasised by the boy in his turn giving comfort and shelter to the stray cat he has found. Why, we must consider, is society not offering the same to him?

The illustrations in this book are crucial to the construction of the story. The illustrator, Gregory Rogers, had something of an ethical dilemma in deciding how to illustrate this book. In a conference presentation he remarked:

Can an illustrator make the story of a young street kid acceptable to an audience that probably hasn’t and may never have any experience of homelessness — an audience that can afford to buy the book? I had to consider that if I softened the visual impact it could misrepresent the intentions of both author and illustrator. But if I was totally uncompromising I could risk alienating and outraging the audience, therefore destroying any hope of communication and empathy for them. (Rogers 204)

In fact his illustrations form a major part of eliciting our response to the homeless hero of the book and our questioning of a society which allows a child to live in these conditions. The jagged edges which cross each page are reminiscent of torn paper and of the litter which surrounds the boy. Furthermore, the tearing signifies a metaphoric tearing away of the cover with which society likes to shield itself from the unpleasant truth of youth homelessness. In addition, the frequent depictions

of rubbish encode society's willingness to abandon such a child, to throw him on the metaphorical scrapheap. In a way which reflects nineteenth-century waif novels, *Way Home* is also about class. There is a marked contrast between the affluence denoted by the high-rise buildings, clean streets and restaurants Shane runs past and the area of slums, rubbish and makeshift shelters in which he lives. We know nothing of Shane's background or why he has become homeless, but his homelessness reduces him to the class of the poor and socially disadvantaged. On occasion, like the children in nineteenth-century waif novels, the boy looks through brightly-lit windows which denote the wealth and social interaction from which he is excluded.

Exclusion is a word also applicable to the "Stolen Generations," a term used to describe the many, many Aboriginal children excluded from their families, indeed often forcibly removed from their families

and placed in institutions and foster homes, often not knowing their parents were alive or searching for them. They were taught to reject their Aboriginality, and often experienced abuse and deprivation. In 1997 the Commonwealth Government undertook an inquiry into the Stolen Generations as these children had come to be known. Hundreds of Survivors gave evidence of their experiences and a report of the extent of these practices was made public.<sup>11</sup>

Eventually, in 2008, in a highly symbolic and moving gesture, the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, apologised to the Stolen Generations, an apology which reads, in part:

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry. (1)

The Prime Minister's apology makes clear that the practice of child removal was unethical, even though it was lawful under Australian law at the time.

Somewhat earlier than this, children were given the opportunity to reflect on the ethics of the issue through their literature. The Australian Screen website describes the film adaptation of Doris Pilkington Garimara's *Rabbit-Proof*

*Fence*, as being, for “many white Australians, this popular film was the first direct emotional experience of what it meant to be one of the ‘stolen generations’.”<sup>12</sup>

However, readers of *The Burnt Stick* by Anthony Hill, first published in 1995, were being asked to reflect on the pain of separation and to consider what a child would feel in the circumstances when he was taken from his family. The book is a fictional account of one such incident of a child being removed from his mother and the heartache and devastation felt by both. John Jagamarra, the child in the story, is taken from his mother and brought up in a Mission, a place, which the reader is told, is “very beautiful” (Hill 1). Beauty does not, however, compensate for the fact that this place is not home. The phrase “it was not like home” (Hill 3) is repeated several times throughout the book. At the Mission, John and the other children are not taught the song, dance and traditions of their people; they are not told of their Dreaming stories and they did not learn how to find yams and other edible plants or how to hunt a kangaroo. Their culture was lost as was their language as the people in the Mission did not know the Aboriginal languages and the children were not allowed to speak them. And perhaps, most devastatingly for the children kept at the Mission station, they do not have their families there — their mothers, grandmothers, siblings, cousins. They are not on their own country, the land they know and love.

In a scene particularly designed to make the reader consider the ethical issues of taking the children and the ethical issue of the law that allowed this to happen, we are told of two policeman and the “Big Man from Welfare” arriving at the Aboriginal camp with a truck which “had a kind of wire cage on the back, with a gate that padlocked and canvas blinds that rolled down if the sun got too hot, or if they didn’t want you to see if anyone were locked inside” (Hill 29). The choice of words is important here. The description of the truck is reminiscent of that of a dog-catcher, rounding up unwanted strays. The truck is also prison-like with a padlock, suggesting that the authorities knew that the children taken would try to get out and return to their mothers, despite the stated belief that “they would soon forget” (Hill 9).

When John is taken he “struggled and wept for his mother, but the Big Man held him tight and would not let go”(Hill 49). Like any child he cried “I want my mother” (Hill 49). The loss is as devastating as a death and John and his mother grieve for each other and, as an adult, having not seen his mother again, John vows to try to find her “no matter how many years it took” (Hill 53). Hill’s depiction of the dictatorial way the children were taken is corroborated by first-hand accounts from the people who were taken both in recorded interviews and

in books such as *Jinangga* by Monty Walgar, a book published by Aboriginal publishing company, Magabala Books. In this book Walgar writes: “When I was brought out there [to the Mission school], in 1954, it was definitely against my will, and against my mother’s will. ... Native Welfare ruled our lives. ... They ruled and ruined our lives ... when they came to get me they came with a policeman ...” (29).

The impact of Hill’s book is strengthened by the black and white illustrations by Mark Sofilas. There is a full-page illustration, for example, when John is taken of sinister and menacing booted feet approaching across the dry earth of the Aboriginal camp and the prison aspect of the truck is heightened by another full-page illustration which emphasises the ominous looming cage.

Other writers have used poetry to bring the matter of the Stolen Generations to young readers. Speaking at a celebration in honour of American poet Robert Frost, President John F. Kennedy said: “When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man’s concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses. For art establishes the basic human truth which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment” (qtd in Wolfe 8). Poetry can thus be seen as a powerful medium of social comment and for questioning those in power and the laws they make.

Lorraine Mafi-Williams, compiler of a collection of Aboriginal poetry for young readers entitled *Spirit Song*, wrote in her introduction: “Written words have enabled us to lay bare the truth, to reveal the anger, the frustration and the determination of our people” (Mafi-Williams xiv). The poems deal with a range of subjects such as celebrating an Aboriginal person’s closeness to the land, culture, Aboriginal identity and the Stolen Generations. Rex Marshall’s poem called “Defining Colour” asks us all to recognise the essential humanity of each other in a poem which is somewhat reminiscent of Shylock’s speech in Act 3, Scene 1 of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* when, as a Jew, he asks:

Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?  
fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject  
to the same diseases, healed by the same means,  
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as  
a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?<sup>13</sup>

Expressing some of the same sentiments, Marshall’s short poem reads:

Colour is only skin deep  
 Cut the flesh and the blood will seep  
 From black, white, brown and yellow  
 Or even some ordinary kind of fellow  
 Whose blood may be shed  
 With the end results being red. (Marshall 49)

There are a number of powerful poems reflecting on the issue of the Stolen Generations in this book such as Eva Johnson's "Protection" "Gone were our children to missionary/Gone was our land and the power to be free" (Johnson 29). Seamus Heaney has described the way that people can recognise "that some part of the meaning of their lives is lodged in the words and cadences of cherished passages of verse" (Heaney xiii). Aboriginal poets, in the Mafi-Williams collection, have written poems which give meaning and provide understanding for readers on the issue of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

Bob Randall, an elder of the Yankunytjatjara people and therefore one of the traditional owners of Uluru is himself a member of the Stolen Generations. He has written a song called "My Brown Skin Baby They Takem Away" which has been described as "an anthem for the Aboriginal people,"<sup>14</sup> becoming what Heaney has described as a cherished piece of verse.

The lyrics of the song are reproduced as one of the poems in Mafi-Williams book. The story is narrated by a "young preacher" who recounts his encounter with "A young black mother/Her cheeks all wet" (Randall 30). The anguish of the woman and the powerlessness of women in her situation are strikingly depicted in a stanza which reads:

Between her sobs  
 I heard her say  
 Police bin takem  
 My baby away  
 From white man boss  
 That baby I have  
 Why he lettum  
 Take baby away. (Randall 30)

This verse perfectly captures the woman's feelings and debunks the idea that

women whose babies were taken would “get over it.” She has been exploited by her boss who, when it comes to the removal of the child, does nothing to protect her.

The poem goes on to tell how the child was taken to a children’s home and given a new name but would cry each night “Mummy – Mummy/Why they take me away” (Randall 31). Given that Randall was taken from his mother in just the way this poem describes, one can imagine that writing this was very emotional. For the reader it raises many ethical questions on belonging, the right of a government to remove children, the ethics of changing a child’s name and therefore his identity and inflicting loss and devastation on the child and his family. Another question which arises from these narratives about the Stolen Generations is whether the promised “better life,” bringing up the “children as white as could be” (Johnson 29) was in fact a reality. If we consider it important for contemporary Australian young people to be aware of this aspect of our history, the literature written for them can play an important part in developing that understanding.

Looking at a library catalogue after one puts in “literature and ethics” as a research term, reveals a multitude of entries on a range of topics including literature, ethics and the law, ethics and business through literature, cultural identity, literature and ethics and using literature to teach ethics. The books and poetry which I have considered in this paper all deal with ethical issues which we, as readers, are required to respond to. Martha Nussbaum has said that “storytelling in childhood teaches us to ... ask questions about the life behind the mask” (qtd. in Kingwell 26). All of these books contribute to that broader understanding of their readers. All of the authors have displayed what Hitoshi Oshima gives as his definition of an ethical author “one who cares for the ethical dimension in life, and who expresses it in one way or another” (192). His definition of an ethical critic is “one who takes care to find such value which makes a literary work ethical, the one who appreciates it in a way that allows readers to share it”(192). I have discussed a range of books and poetry written for young Australians in the last thirty years that deal with topical, ethical issues — refugees homelessness Stolen Generations — and deal with these through prose, verse and illustration. I hope I have done so in a way which lived up to Oshima’s definition and which has given the readers of this paper insights into the way the creators of the books and poetry have dealt with the ethical issues they chose to tackle.

## Notes

1. See <https://www.themonthly.com.au/video/2014/july/24/1406172243/christos-tsiolkas-alexis-wright-kathryn-heyman-how-do-novelists-engage?>
2. I considered the way selected books for children could do this in *Unlocking Ideas: Thinking with Picture Books*.
3. See <http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/books/71989528/into-the-river-eleanor-catton-john-boyne-john-marsden-and-more-speak-out> where all of these authors, and others, expressed their views.
4. See [http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/resources/2012\\_RW\\_ResourceKit\\_Ch5.pdf](http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/resources/2012_RW_ResourceKit_Ch5.pdf).
5. See <http://www.abc.net.au/rollercoaster/therap/interviews/s1451055.htm>.
6. See <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=morris+gleitzman+boy+overboard+interview>.
7. I have discussed the image of the sea in Australian books including the image of a dangerous sea journey for a refugee family in “Befriending Sea Creatures and Journeying Through Life: Images of the Ocean in Australian Children’s Literature”.
8. See <http://www.startts.org.au/media/Refugee-Transitions/Refugee-Transitions-Issue-13-book-review.pdf>.
9. I have written elsewhere on the representation of refugees in Australian picturebooks in “Welcoming strangers: the Politics of Othering in Three Australian Picturebooks.”
10. See <http://www.stevenherrick.com.au/notes.htm>.
11. See [http://stolengenerationstestimonies.com/index.php/about\\_stolen\\_generations.html](http://stolengenerationstestimonies.com/index.php/about_stolen_generations.html).
12. See <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/rabbit-proof-fence>.
13. This can be found in any edition of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. I used the New Penguin Shakespeare edition (1967). The quotation in this edition can be found on p.111.
14. See <http://www.globalonenessproject.org/library/interviews/song-brown-skin-baby-they-took-me-away>.

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