

**Standing on
a book**

**Stories from classrooms
around Australia**



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Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA)
Laura St, Newtown, NSW 2042, Australia
PO Box 3106, Marrickville Metro, NSW 2204
Tel: (02) 8020 3900
Fax: (02) 8020 3933
Email: info@petaa.edu.au
Website: www.petaa.edu.au

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Foreword

What a wonderful thing – the human imagination. It is where stories originate, in the imagination of the writer, and where they conclude, in the imagination of the reader. I love the thrill of a new story idea seeding itself in my imagination. It is a tantalising moment of infinite possibilities. And as the initial idea sprouts, characters emerge, and before long my imagination is screening a vivid story–movie in my mind.

The challenge for writers though – both professional and student – is getting those imagined stories to make the great leap to the page. This is no easy feat; writing is indeed a complex craft. And in order for students to develop this craft and, in doing so, find their own voices, students need regular opportunities to write freely and with purpose and ownership, and to be supported by quality scaffolding in the classroom.

Standing on a book: Stories from classrooms around Australia is a celebration of forty-four young voices, showcasing an abundance of compelling stories, varied experiences and unique perspectives. Divided into three parts – loosely themed around identity and belonging, fun and fantasy, place and environment – these stories provide a window into the hopes and dreams, worries and fears of Australian youth. The stories have been drawn from writers with diverse interests, experiences and backgrounds, and from across the country: from the remote Kimberley, to rural and farming districts, to sprawling western Sydney. Together, as a collection, they create a rare story collage of youth perspectives.

This resource for teachers demonstrates the depth and breadth of stories being created in the classroom. The collection is intended to be used as a professional learning tool, to inform teaching practice, aid in lesson planning and support literacy programs. Some stories contain challenging material and may not be suitable for use in all classrooms, but with careful selection, excerpts from the collected stories could provide powerful mentor texts, with their relatable content and voice, making the exploration of the writer's craft especially meaningful.

The stories cast a wide net, being both inclusive and diverse. Some stories, such as "Wolfie's mystery" by Benjamin (page 65) aim to delight and amuse, while others, are suffused with poignancy, evoking deep emotions. The carefully observed account of an echidna's trauma in "Bushfire" by Siobhan (page 92) is tense and taut, the raw grief in "The pain" by Ray Ray (page 36), palpable and affecting. Lana in "A panic" (page 52) makes returning a library book a nail-biting adventure, while Javon in the terrifying horror of "An evil night" (page 59) subtly alludes to historical trauma. And the gut-wrenching impact of drought is literally put in the spotlight in "A day too late" by Paul (page 84).

The stories also provide excellent examples of narrative devices and structures. Amy in "Winter escape" (page 66) hooks the reader expertly with her intriguing opening: "It wasn't always like this. Before the invasion there were banquets and feasts." The surprise twist, a useful device for the short story genre, is well covered in "The plumber and the cattle dog" by Casey (page 80), "Victory" by Sarah (page 48) and "The unexpected visitor" by Magenta (page 78). Innovative use of perspective is demonstrated with dual viewpoints in "<2>" by Thomas (page 22) and in Michael's comical tale of a marauding kookaburra in "Kooka's lunch" (page 74). The stories are brimming with exquisite language choices, strong verbs, delicious use of detail and imagery. Lines such as "fir pines shot up from a barren, gravel landscape like sharp, pointing fingers" in "Running unleashed" by Sean (page 16) cannot fail to inspire future young writers.

Humans are hungry for story. And we all have stories to tell. It is, in fact, our inherited right as human beings to be the teller and receiver of stories. And it is our responsibility as educators to provide opportunities that allow our young charges to draw on rich literary resources, engage their imaginations, find their own voices, tell their own stories and put their ideas to the world. *Standing on a book* gives voice to a unique gathering of young storytellers and provides teachers with an outstanding resource to aid in the development and planning of effective and inspiring classroom writing programs.

Sue Whiting

Children's author and editor

Acknowledgements

PETAA would like to thank the schools and staff who have helped to compile this collection of student writing, and especially the talented student authors featured in it for granting permission to publish their work.

Some stories were drawn from an earlier anthology published by PETAA, titled *Brain storms*. Others were the result of workshops and residencies conducted by WestWords, Western Sydney's Literature Development Organisation. Yet more were submitted by individual teachers.

All stories have received a light edit to standardise spelling, grammar and punctuation throughout the book, and to ensure currency and clarify meaning where needed.

Although every effort has been made to contact all student authors in advance, it was not possible to reach everyone before going to print. If your story has been included in this book without your direct consent, please contact PETAA (info@petaa.edu.au or 02 8020 3900).

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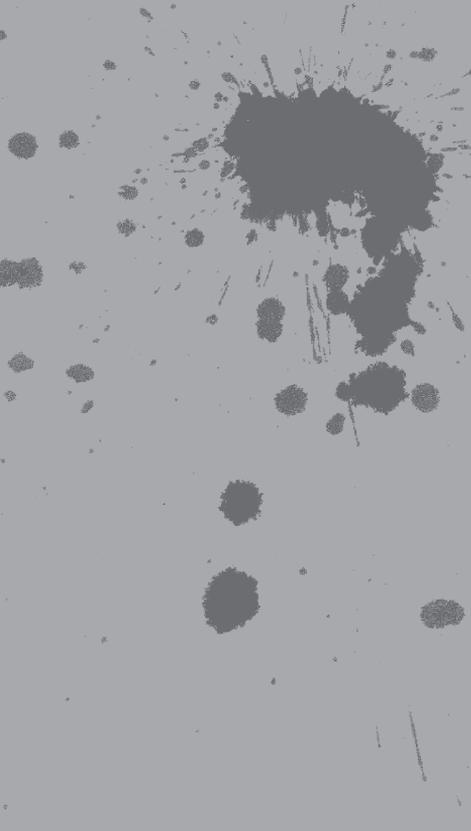




Part 1

IDENTITY AND BELONGING

**My heart is
booming**





I read

Alexandra, Year 6

I jump in. Suddenly I am whooshed through an enormous, pitch-dark tunnel. I speed through it without using any of my energy, like on a water slide at Wet 'n' Wild. Then I stop abruptly in front of a large, sandy-coloured sign. I read it. EXIT is engraved on it in a big and bold font. Exit to where? Then the whooshing starts again, and before I know it, I am squeezed through a miniscule hole and hurled through the air, landing smack down on a ... what? The ground is soft and spongy and has a familiar smell. An old woodsy, paper kind of smell. "I read" is written in gigantic letters daintily across the top. Suddenly I realise. I am standing on a book! Then the ground starts to wobble, like a paper bag being filled up with air, like a bouncing castle. Then I find myself jumping from one huge book to another. As I leap graciously over them, I rapidly read their labels. Roald Dahl, CS Lewis, HG Wells, JRR Tolkien. I steady myself as I land clumsily on a Roald Dahl. I grin as I bound over a JK Rowling. Where am I? Suddenly I see a swirl of liquid, shiny and a very dark marine-blue. It's ink! I flap my arms pathetically, trying to elude the dark whirlpool. Too late. I am sucked in, but instead of feeling wet, I feel something soft and silky. I open my eyes. I am sitting on a comfortable, pale-blue chair. As pins and needles creep up my arm, I notice that I am clutching a book. Engraved daintily on the cover are two words, "I read". There is a big blotch of ink soaking through a page. I glance at the cover again. "I read" ... and I do read. I read and read and read. I let my eyes absorb the words and my brain paint the image. I bounce through books and leap through the air. I let every single word get pictured in my mind. I breathe in every detail and I read. I read, I read, and I read.



A writer's wisdom

Marian, Year 6

In a line of 567 kids, eagerly waiting for the famous author to sign their books, I was 223rd. But I wasn't there for just a silly autograph, I was there for WISDOM. If I were a football player, I would have muscled my way to the front. But I was a writer. So I waited with dignity for my turn.

Four hours later, my moment came.

"How can I get to be an author like you?" I asked.

"Write about your life," she replied.

Was this wisdom? I couldn't write about my life. It had to be something extraordinary. Time to brainstorm!

My pencil was a blur as I crouched at my desk. Suddenly my baby brother appeared. While he gnawed on his toes, I wrote ... and wrote.

"Slurp ... slurp."

"Stop drooling on my socks, Howie," I said between lines.

Finally, I pronounced it. "Finito!" I reached for my story pile ... but
WHERE WAS IT?

Crunch, crunch ...

"Oh no."

Surrounded by soggy bits of MY STORY, sat Howie ... grinning and gooey.

If I were a musician, I would have banged my head on the piano keys. But I was a writer. So I picked up my pencil, and started again.

I was on a roll, and almost done, when the refrigerator called my name. One vegemite-cheese sandwich later, I returned ... but MY STORY was gone! I smelt a rat. To my brother's room and his pet rodent's cage I rushed. On the bottom lay the remains of my ticket to fame and fortune ... in 500 itsy-bitsy pieces.

If I were a chef, I would have beaten more than eggs! But I was a writer. So I picked up my pencil and began again. After 3 hours and 49 minutes, I proudly plopped my masterpiece onto my sister Athena's bed.

"Read it!" I said, as I trotted downstairs to a well-deserved kiwi fruit and chocolate syrup milkshake. Moments later came my sister's ear-piercing shriek. Expecting to find something like a Tyrannosaurus rex coming through her window, the family sprinted to the bedroom. Instead of a dinosaur, we found Athena flattened against the wall, pointing up at a helpless little spider.

I watched in horror as my dad picked up the nearest piece of paper ... MY STORY!

"Kill it! *KILL IT!*" screamed Athena.

"I'll save you sweetheart!" cried Dad. *Whack, whack, whack.*

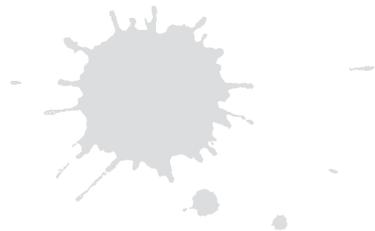
"HURRY, HURRY!"

Whack, WHACK, WHACK ... Smoosh.

If I were an actor, I would have flung myself on the bed and sobbed. But I was a writer. So I picked up my stubby pencil, and started again. But this time, I remembered the words "Write about your life". So I did.

It began, "In a line of 567 kids ..."

"And first prize goes to ..." I heard her say. If I were a ballet dancer, I would have leapt into my teacher's arms. But I was a writer ... and a good one.



Part 2

FUN AND FANTASY

**The unicorn's
colours**

The spider

Aashna, Year 4

A black-and-brown figure dangled in front of me. I blinked once ...
Still there.

I blinked twice ...
Still there.

It was huge! A million eyes stared me down. It was locked onto my nose. Then it leapt onto my face!

My heart pounded. It felt like a hammer hitting my chest from the inside. *What's it going to do? Was it going to kill me? Was it going to build a web on me?* My whole body was shaking.

Then a little voice said, "Hello."

"Am I dreaming? Is this real?" I said out loud.

"Yes," it said.

"Oh wow!" I said. I still didn't know who was talking and how.

"Where are you?"

"Down here on your nose. I'll move so you can see me."

So I looked down. You wouldn't believe ... it was the spider. I was talking to a spider. A spider!

When the spider waved at me, everything turned black.

I came to and opened my eyes, sat up, then ... saw that a spider was on my lap, waving at me.

"ARGH!" I screamed.

Then I ran down the stairs and hid behind the couch, and stayed there for a year.

Imagination

Kahli, Year 7

Alexandra felt exultant and deliriously free as she sprang energetically across the lush, fertile plain. In reality, it was merely her tedious and somewhat confined backyard, but she ignored the thought, and returned to her imaginary realm, where she was the beloved and valiant Great Warrior.

She scanned the smoky horizon prudently. Her gallant heart thumped against her chest, as the shaggy silhouette of a wolf appeared. It was the brutal Wolf Beast, whom the people of the Kingdom of Rahl feared beyond all other creatures. It was gaining on her, and although it was a fair distance away, the Great Warrior could see its hungry fangs gleaming.

She inhaled, and retrieved a resplendent dagger from the bulky belt that swung from her waist. The blade shone as gaily as the vibrant sun that was winking in the distant sky. The warrior's lips were set unwaveringly – she had no pity for the beast. It was soon to meet its end.

It was a violent battle. Fur flew and teeth gnashed. The dagger clanged against the wolf's solid fangs ...

Finally, with a victorious sigh, Alex hurled the plastic butterknife to the lawn and patted the petite Maltese Terrier on its velvety head. "You make a great wolf, Scooper," she cooed, "but you don't have to play pretend with me anymore, if you don't want. I think Mummy might have some meaty treats for you in the kitchen, if you hurry."

The Great Warrior chuckled as the defeated beast scampered away, scarred by the wounds from the warrior's razor-sharp dagger. Yet another atrocious fiend defeated and, yet again, a kingdom would eternally praise her.

Encouraged by the wolf's cowardice, she turned, her leather-bound boots pounding on the emerald grass, and headed towards the ostentatious Kingdom of Rahl.

The Queen was there to welcome her, azure eyes brimming with tears. “You have rid my kingdom of the Wolf Beast” she chimed. “It is my utmost pleasure to award you with a tribute from the grateful people of Rahl. The Declaration of Respect, and the Hero’s Sword.”

The Great Warrior accepted the bulky parchment scroll and grasped the dazzling sword, embedded with the finest of jewels. The colours winked up at her, varying from cherry to sky-blue.

“A notebook and pencil,” Alex said slowly, holding her mother’s gifts. “Thanks, but ...”

“I know it seems odd,” her mother chuckled, “but you have such a vivid imagination. If you start writing your adventures down, then you’d have some fairly superior stories.”

“I thank you favourably,” the Great Warrior said, “though you shouldn’t have. It is my life to save people from the clutches of evil creatures. I will depart now. There are still devilish beasts lurking in the shadows of Rahl and other kingdoms.”

So the Great Warrior did retreat ... to spend her night writing prodigious stories about her countless adventures. With Scooper, the menacing Wolf Beast, dozing serenely at her feet.