

The School Magazine CONTRIBUTOR GUIDE



CONTENTS

1. Magazine Age Guide	3
2. Alumni corner	5
3. Writing advice	7
Stories	7
Articles	13
Poetry	14
Plays	15
Persuasives	16
Activities	17
Comic Serials	18
Cartoons	19



1. MAGAZINE AGE GUIDE

The School Magazine produces four magazines catering to different ages and reading levels. Familiarising yourself with these can help you confirm where your piece might fit best.

COUNTDOWN - YEAR 3

- · Ages 7-9
- Inspires and captivates newly independent readers.



BLAST OFF - YEAR 4

- · Ages 9-10
- Delights independent readers, consolidating their knowledge of English.



ORBIT - YEAR 5

- · Ages 10-11
- Captures the imagination of skilled readers through crafted texts and engaging illustrations.



TOUCHDOWN - YEAR 6

- Ages 11+
- Delivers a rich array of texts, allowing capable readers to explore the world of literature.



Factors that impact the suitability of a piece for each magazine level include:

Length and difficulty

In general, *Countdown* and *Blast Off* feature shorter fiction pieces under 1200 words. As readers become more independent and confident, they can tackle longer pieces in *Orbit* and *Touchdown*.

Our younger levels also tend to feature simpler words and sentence structure.

Content

Ensure the content of your piece is age appropriate. Children often enjoy reading about protagonists their own age or a few years older. For example, pieces set in high school won't resonate with *Countdown* readers. Similarly, pieces that are too simple or better suited to a picture book are too young for our readership.

While difficult or complex topics can be written about with sensitivity and deftness, it is always worth keeping the age of the reader in mind and considering whether or not your work could confidently be read and appreciated in a primary classroom.

As a general rule, topics that would require a content warning are not suitable for *The School Magazine*.

Novelty

We are always looking for novel and original ideas to present in the magazine. Reading through recent issues, including the free issues offered online, will give you a feel for the type of topics we cover.

However, age suitability does factor into these decisions. For example, if we've covered a particular topic at a *Touchdown* level, but you have approached it in a way more accessible for younger audiences, we may consider running the piece despite its similarities to previously published material.

Relevance

Write for our readers: most are Australian children between the ages of 8 and 12. Remember that *The School Magazine* aims to reflect the diversity and inclusivity of Australian society.

While we are always interested in stories that portray and reflect other cultures, be sure these ideas are still accessible and relevant for an Australian audience—particularly if your story is set in a school.

'Ensuring your work has been written and edited with audience in mind

will help the editorial team place your piece.'



2. ALUMNI CORNER

Over the years, *The School Magazine* has hosted a wealth of talented writers, including Anna Fienberg, Geoffrey McSkimming, Ursula Dubosarsky and Pamela Freeman. Some of our most prolific contributors have kindly offered some advice for new and emerging writers.

BILL CONDON is an Australian writer, playwright and poet. His books have been CBCA short-listed and he's won numerous awards, including the Australian Prime Minister's Literary Award for Youth Literature.

'If you're an aspiring writer, read what's being published in the magazine, and when you're ready, send your very best work.'

DARCY-LEE TINDALE is an Australian writer, actor, theatre director and performing arts teacher. She has won many awards, including the CBCA Frustrated Writers and Varuna Writers House.

'It's a joy knowing students are engaging with your creative plays and stories.

Submitting to TSM
boosts a writer's body
of published work,
and exercises the
creative muscle.'

JACKIE HOSKING

is a Nigerianborn Cornish Australian children's picture book writer and poet. In 2019 she was awarded a May Gibbs Creative Time Fellowship.

'Every Australian publisher is familiar with this iconic publication and I believe being published with *The School Magazine* has shown them that I take my writing seriously.'

KATIE FURZE is a writer of children's fiction and non-fiction based in Auckland, New Zealand. Her recent book '*Tuatara: A Living Treasure*' was a finalist in the 2024 NZ Book Awards for Children & Young Adults.

'Being published in *The School Magazine* has considerably strengthened my writing CV. My author bio mentions that I am a regular contributor.'

DAVID HILL is a prolific writer, playwright and poet. In November 2021, he was awarded the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement—Fiction in recognition of his outstanding contribution to New Zealand Literature.

'Writing for *The School*Magazine has let me share bits of my life, my friends' lives, my imagination and my hobbies with so many people. That's a great pleasure for any author.'

STEPHEN WHITESIDE is an Australian writer and poet who has received awards from the Grenfell Henry Lawson competition, Nimbin Poetry Competition and Bronze Swagman Competition, among others.

'I am quite sure my collection of poems for children would never have been published by Walker Books if so many of the poems included in the book had not already been published in *The School Magazine*.'

JANEEN BRIAN is an award-winning children's author and poet with over 100 books published in both trade and educational publishing. Many of her books have been translated and distributed worldwide.

'Because I love writing for children and because I value the integrity of the magazine and the team behind it, to have a piece of writing accepted is always a joy.'

ZOË DISHER is an Australian children's writer who has had over 100 manuscripts of quirky and factual articles, poems and short stories published with *The School Magazine*.

'Being published with *The School Magazine* has definitely helped me gain confidence as a writer. I love that *The School Magazine* always accepts submissions. It feels like an open invitation when you are otherwise surrounded by closed doors.'

WENDY GRAHAM is an Australian children's and YA writer who has published numerous books and is also a prolific writer in the educational market.

'I urge all writers, established or those never published, to submit to *The School Magazine* ... As Australia's most highly respected literary magazine for children, it's a wonderful opportunity to showcase your writing, especially if yours is a fresh, compelling voice.'

SIMON COOKE is a New Zealand children's writer who has been published with *The School Magazine* and the *School Journal* in New Zealand for many years.

'Spend time finding the right voice to tell your story. The wrong voice will mute a story, the right voice will let it sing. And there's no better place to let it sing than in an issue of *The School Magazine*, right?'

URSULA DUBOSARSKY is an Australian writer, playwright and poet who has published over 60 books for children and young adults and has won many national prizes, including the NSW,

Victorian, South Australian and Queensland Premier's Literary Awards. She was also Australia's Children's Laureate for 2020-2021.

'My advice to writers is to keep a light touch, but don't be frightened of big emotions, and always bring the children with you on the adventure.'

3. WRITING ADVICE

The School Magazine publishes short stories, articles, plays, poems, persuasives, comics and activities that have literary and academic merit. Our readers are primary school children who respond well to texts that delight, intrigue, challenge and inspire them—texts written especially for them. In this next section you'll find the requirements for each text type, as well as tips from our editorial team.

STORIES

Submission guidelines

- · All genres welcome.
- · Maximum ~1500 words (shorter stories are encouraged).
- Stories should demonstrate clear, intriguing prose, originality of characters and fresh storylines.
- Occasionally a longer story may be considered for serialisation. If proposing a two-part story, clearly indicate where the break would sit.

General writing tips

1. Remember child voice and agency

The child reader is at the heart of what we do. They want to see themselves within the pages of our magazines.

2. Choose your angle and setting

Our readers live in a multicultural, diverse society and our magazines reflect this. Our readers are exploring their identities and



appreciate insights into the world around them. Genres are also great gateways into other worlds..

3. Cut to the chase

Get to the action, drama or tension as quickly as you can. Pacing and structure are important, so make sure every word counts. Make use of the unexpected, twists and turns to keep young readers eager to turn the pages.

4. Authenticity is key

We want authentic representation. Think about the sights, sounds and flavours you are surrounded by every day. Think about authentic expressions, traditions, and community. No stereotypes or clichés, please!

Watchouts

1. Too didactic

We all learn lessons from stories, but if these lessons are too forced or on-the-nose, they can read more like lectures than fiction. Trust young readers to interpret their own meaning from a story.

2. Read the room

Have a clear idea in mind of the age you're writing for and avoid themes or imagery that's too mature, violent or inappropriate. You should also have a clear understanding of a publication's guidelines before you submit.

3. Choose your words

Word choice and correct grammar usage can have a huge impact on young readers' understanding. Familarise yourself with the language used in books aimed at your target audience and proofread for clarity.

Contemporary fiction

1. Colloquial quirks

Use realistic dialogue. And use words that will stay powerful and still pack a punch years later.

2. Living realistically in the now

Chat to kids about their interests and what their life is like. Kids are more outspoken these days about world issues.

3. Read contemporary fiction

Do some research. Read widely. Watch kid shows. Collect ideas and experiences to better reflect the world around you.

4. Popular culture

Be mindful about music, technology and social media and downplay them if you can. They can outdate your work. The focus is on universal **8**human experiences and feelings.

5. Realistic vs magical realism

The essential experience of being a kid hasn't changed. You can add whimsical elements to your story or keep it realistic. Either way, unexpected moments in your story will drive the reader to read more.



Historical fiction

1. Imagined history vs real history

At the end of the day, it's all fiction. Establish your own set of rules for when to bend history for the sake of the story.

2. Hook your reader

Pick your historical time, event or person and go with it. Young readers also love learning about whacky historical facts, it's what intrigues them!

3. Building and researching

Know what to include and what not to include. Don't cram explanations and details—show the historical period by your character moving through it. Weave the history seamlessly into the story.

4. Relatable characters

The misfit. The geek. The joker. The noble one. All of these types of personalities have lived throughout time. They are timeless and universal.

5. How art thou?

Accessible writing is key. Don't write in old English or Latin for dialogue, but, if a word or phrase needs to be featured as an element of the story, than use it. Just don't overdo it!

Fantasy fiction

1. Build a world

Fantasy is known for its worldbuilding and every aspect of the world—geography, economy, religion, history, magic—is a chance to add creativity or intrigue. Think through how each feature might impact your story and the way your characters behave.

2. Play by the rules

Establish rules for your fantastical world and stick to them. Apply them in creative ways and use them to solve problems—it's more satisfying than fixing everything with a magical wave of the hand that seemingly comes out of nowhere.

3. Avoid discombobulation

You might know the King's fourth cousin's favourite spell of invisibility, but your reader

probably doesn't need to. Avoid overloading readers with details that aren't relevant to the story you're telling and make your fantastical elements as clear as possible. Younger readers may struggle if things get too complex.

4. Find the magic

There are many types of fantasy stories—steampunk, sword and sorcery, urban fantasy etc. Explore the different options available to you and don't be afraid to try something new. A story set in the contemporary world with one fantastical difference can be just as compelling as a story set in a fantasyland.

5. Cast a spell

One of fantasy's great strengths is not being bound by the rules of the real world, or of fantasy works that have come before. Steer clear of clichés and explore an idea you've never seen before, something that makes you feel a sense of wonder. That feeling will come through to the reader.

Science fiction

1. Have laser focus

Be selective with the sci-fi elements you include. Particularly in short fiction, concentrating on one theme, idea or element allows you to flesh them out and make them feel real.



2. Calculate complexity

Don't get bogged down in scientific detail, mathematical madness or theoretical positing. Keep the science of your sci-fi approachable for young readers—tell only as much as you need to make the story work and use simple language.

3. Test the familiar

When brainstorming ideas for your sci-fi story, try putting a spin on ideas or situations kids may encounter in everyday life: primary-level science, sporting events, walking the dog. What's the futuristic version of that look like? What are the implications?

4. Check the data

Inspiration can be found anywhere, but you may find documentaries, non-fiction books, and speciality hobby websites interesting places to start searching for ideas. If you're writing hard sci-fi, be sure to double-check your facts and figures!

5. Leave space

Don't feel pressured to explain everything completely—mystery, intrigue and the unknown are key draws of science fiction and not every question in the universe needs an easy answer.

Sport fiction

1. Know your stuff

If a sports fan picks up your story and the soccer players jog onto the 'court', it can be enough to get your story benched. Research the sport you're writing about: watch games online, read articles from players and put your passion into the piece.

2. Avoid the play by play

You don't need to recount every move made in

the game. Focus on the important moments, the parts that push the story forward or that cause the characters to change or act.

3. Kick the clichés

There can still be a false notion that sports, and stories about sports, are for boys, even when girls participate in organised sport just as frequently. All kids can enjoy and succeed at sports. Avoid singling out girls who are 'unusually' good, or leaving them out of stories altogether.



4. Go for gold

Stories that feature sport still need to be engaging stories in their own right. Highlight big, significant moments, show why a character is invested, or have something unusual happen. A relay race becomes more interesting when it's between nemeses and the baton is covered in glue ...

5. Dive deep

Mix things up with your writing by exploring a sport you don't know much about.
Underwater rugby, dressage, ultimate frisbee—the world of sport is vast and so are the stories you can tell.

Mystery fiction

1. Pick the perfect crime

Your central mystery doesn't have to be a horrific, illegal act. A museum theft, strange lights at night, missing homework—choose something suitable for the age you're writing for.

2. Find the right detective

While not a hard and fast rule, having the main character in your story be a similar age to the reader can make the work more engaging for them.

3. Invest-igate

It can add intrigue and raise the stakes if your main character has a personal investment in the mystery—is it their missing homework? Their father's murdered tomato plant? Their best friend being haunted?

4. Set the scene

Is your story set in a spooky manor? Or a zany carnival? Maybe something is afoot in the cosy old library ... Atmosphere can play a huge part in engaging the reader. Think about how the setting can help set the tone of the mystery and where clues might emerge.

5. Retrace your steps

Sometimes it's easiest to start at the end. Plan your big reveal and work backwards, laying the clues (and red herrings) that would make your ending make sense.

Spooky fiction

1. Keep secrets

Don't tell everything. Set up just enough of the story for the reader to be able to flesh out the experience with their own imagination—that way the spookiness will be more personal to the reader.

2. A creeping feeling

Creepiness should be creeping, not a fullin-your-face bloodbath (especially for young readers!). Avoid gore and bloodshed in favour of spooks that build slowly.

3. Choose a fright

Pick something that you know people are scared of: spiders, bats, the unknown, the dark etc. Then include these in your stories, subtly at first, but building the tension and the spookiness steadily ...

4. The End?

You can pull the rug out at the end and have a perfectly logical solution for the scariness, or you can choose to have the story open-ended, without any explanation. Either way, you should leave the reader either gasping or wondering.

5. Full of possibility

Be original. Of course, use what's out there: ghosts, werewolves, darkness, skeletons, etc.
But infuse all those things with your own ideas.
Make your horror strong enough that readers will think, 'Well perhaps this COULD happen!'



Action fiction

1. Swing into action

Get the readers engaged and on side quickly by starting in the middle of the action or introducing the most exciting element as quickly as possible.

2. Make it sensational

Immerse the reader by focusing on sensations beyond what a character can see. What does the shark tank smell like? How hot is the laser beam? Where is the scream coming from?

3. Let them lead

Make the child character the hero—let them solve the puzzle, beat the baddie and save the day.

4. Turn it up to eleven

The written word is not constrained by television budgets and realism, so go big with your action scenes! Offer them the sort of action you can literally only dream about.

5. Clarity over chaos

A million things can be happening at once but if your reader can't follow the story, all that action won't do you any good.

Funny fiction

1. Respect the audience

Kids are more switched on than they're often given credit for. Respect their intelligence and ability to make connections—you don't need to spell out every joke in big capital letters.

2. Vary the laughs

A children's comedic writer has more in their arsenal than toilet humour. Dramatic irony, hyperbole, slapstick— all the tools of comedy writing are available when writing for kids.



3. Read the room

If you are writing for a particular age group, do your research! Chat to nieces or neighbours, read comedic books and check out social media to understand what's popular and what kind of jokes or comedy resonates with them.

4. Sounds funny

Don't underestimate the humour that can be found in reading funny words and twisty sentences out loud, especially when reading with friends.

5. With, not at

Kids should feel good reading the story, not like something they enjoy or someone like them is being made the butt of the joke.

ARTICLES

Submission guidelines

- All forms of soundly researched non-fiction texts are accepted, including articles, procedural texts, reports, profiles, interviews, short features and non-fiction narratives.
- · Maximum ~2000 words (shorter articles are also accepted).

General writing tips

1. Super subs

Subheadings can be useful in any non-fiction piece, but especially those written for kids. They can help them scan, process and better follow the flow of information.

2. Short and sharp

You can make your pieces more approachable and engaging for young readers by keeping them succinct and using a strong voice. Also remember we feature a mix of one-page articles and longer pieces.

3. Fresh and evergreen

Differentiate your piece from a dry textbook excerpt by taking a fresh angle on a familiar topic or looking at one that's a little quirky. Try to avoid topics that may quickly become dated.

4. Format fun

Have some fun with the format and choose something that makes your information shine. Is it a recipe? A police report? An interview done under the sea? Creativity is always welcome.

5. Researched and ready

Make sure your information is as correct and up-to-date as possible, and feel free to include your sources in your submission so the editorial team can validate them.

Watchouts

1. Well-worn topics

Keep in mind topics we've covered recently and be aware that some topics (e.g. a profile on an animal or very famous figure from history) may be something we've covered extensively before.

2. Too dry

Avoid overly complex writing that is difficult to parse or includes extraneous detail that detracts from the pace and energy of the piece. Try reading your article aloud to catch these sections during your edits.



POETRY

Submission guidelines

- · Poems can be in any contemporary or traditional genre.
- · Maximum of thirty lines.
- · Each poem should be submitted as an individual contribution.
- If using traditional metre and rhyme, ensure that the metre is consistent and the rhyme unforced.
- · When punctuating, keep in mind the developing skills of the young poetry reading audience.

General writing tips

1. More than rhyme

We love a good rhyming poem, but we also love the full range of poetry forms available. Shape poems, free verse, haiku—all poetry types are welcome.

2. Watch your length

Your poem should only be as long as it needs to be. Beware the saggy middle or dragging a poem out longer than it needs to be, particularly when you're using repetition.

3. Feel the rhythm

Read your work aloud before submitting.

Listen closely for metre, cadence and rhythm—
especially when using rhyme. It can be easy to
sneak in a few too many syllables by accident!

4. Be bold!

The ocean, sunsets and the wind through the trees inspire many a poem, but we're interested in all topics! Try something new, ruminate on something strange, make us think!

Watchouts

1. Age appropriate

Ensure your topics and ideas have appeal for our target audience. This isn't just limited to avoiding overtly adult themes; our readers are often looking for something more complicated than simple picture-book style rhymes.

2. Huh?

We love all the techniques utilised to make poetry the beautiful art form that it is, but keep in mind many of our readers are new to the form. Avoid anything too complex or esoteric.



PLAYS

Submission guidelines

- Plays should be easy-to-stage scripts for large groups of students to perform, although plays for smaller casts are also welcome.
- · Maximum of ~1500 words (fewer for younger readers).
- · Scripts should have literary qualities in characterisation, language and plot.

General writing tips

1. Everybody in!

Plays are often used in classrooms, so consider including some roles that can be played by multiple kids. It involves more of the class and can encourage less confident children to participate.

2. Support staging

Make your plays easy to stage in classrooms by considering safety concerns and the difficulty to source or make props. You can also help by offering creative ideas or solutions for staging in the text.

3. Story first

Even though a play is a different format to a story, it should still have a clear beginning, middle and end. Avoid scenes that don't contain any change to characters or plot.

4. First timers

Plays with multiple Acts or Scenes may be overwhelming for our youngest performers! Keep



in mind the age you're writing for when considering the length and complexity of your text.

Watchouts

1. Retellings

Retellings can be a lot of fun but over the years we've received an influx of fractured fairytales! For your best chance at publication, original stories work best or, if you are retelling a classic, make sure it has a fun new twist!

2. How do you say ...?

If there are any words in your play that may be difficult for young readers to pronounce, think about including them phonetically in the text to help children when they're performing.

PERSUASIVES

Submission guidelines

- · Persuasives can be in any format or genre so long as they exhibit elements of persuasion (credibility, emotional appeal and logical argument).
- · Shorter lengths are encouraged.

General writing tips

1. Show off your expertise

Spend time considering what you might call yourself an expert in. Write a logical and analytical piece about your topic using your expertise and insight to strengthen your argument.

2. Think outside the box

Persuasive texts don't have to be essays. Explore the full range of text types available: political speeches, letters, keynotes, reviews, advertising campaigns etc.

3. Have a dynamo discussion

Perhaps you prefer a pleasant discussion, exploring all the avenues and perspectives. Discussions are a great way to create thought-provoking persuasive texts.

4. Explore new perspectives

Think about presenting the unheard voice or a previously unconsidered perspective. Make us think about a topic from a point of view that we've never considered before.

5. Know thy audience

Being young doesn't mean primary-aged children aren't prepared and interested in discussing hard-hitting topics. Analyse, argue and discuss the world they live in, in a considered and thoughtful way.

Watchouts

1. Same old

Beware the kind of standard persuasives given to students in class, for example 'Should students wear uniforms?'. Search online to find the topics students are probably already wellversed in.

2. Suitability

Remember these texts are being used in classrooms across the country. Topics should be relatable to all students and cater to diversity in culture, interest and maturity.



ACTIVITIES

Submission guidelines

• The majority of activities and puzzles are generated in-house, but texts are also accepted from external writers.

General writing tips

1. Paired works

Activities that are paired with other submitted work, such as an article or story, are easier to place. For example, if you wrote an article about code-breaking, a code-writing activity might be appropriate.

2. Fun formats

Activities that are particularly creative or novel have a higher chance of being selected. We have a talented stable of illustrators who can help bring any format to life.

3. Relevant and accessible

Our readers are primary-aged students.

Activities that are too difficult or require too much money or labour to complete are unlikely to be selected.

Watchouts

1. Not school

Our magazine is a support for classrooms, but its primary goal is to encourage a love of reading. We don't publish worksheets or activities that aim to cover literacy lessons.





COMIC SERIALS

Submission guidelines

- · We call for comic serial submissions once a year, usually around April/May.
- We accept either a single-page serial in ten parts or a double-page serial in ten parts.
- Submissions should include a written synopsis of the comic serial, including episode breakdowns, episode 1 to finished art stage (page dimensions are 185mm x 240mm) and a character sheet with rough or finished art, introducing key characters.

General writing tips

1. All genres welcome

We publish comic serials that cover fantasy, humour, folktales, historical drama, sci-fi and a mixture of these genres.

2. Keep readers hooked

There's a month between issues, so every episode of your serial should end in a way that leaves the reader wanting more and eager for their next instalment.

3. Polished art

Familiarise yourself with past examples of our comics. We have high expectations of polish and formatting for our comics as they're often what readers will see first on the back cover.

4. Action and whimsy

We're after dynamic, fun stories that utilise and benefit from being in a visual medium. Have fun with it!

5. Teams welcome

You don't have to do it all alone! We accept writer/artist duo submissions as well.

Watchouts

1. Appropriate visuals

Our magazines are used in classrooms and should contain visuals that are suitable for readers between 7-12. Keep this in mind when portraying violence, romance etc.

2. Open to feedback

Our editorial team may have feedback on the arc of your serial or some of the portrayals.

While the creative vision is ultimately yours, being open to feedback and communication is a highly-desirable quality.



CARTOONS

Submission guidelines

- We are open to single-panel cartoons but have limited spots available each year.
- They must be original work, created in a square format (120mm x 120mm minimum size) in CMYK (300 dpi minimum).

General writing tips

1. Wordplay welcome

We encourage the use of puns and wordplay to appeal to children and be easily understandable within such small real estate.

2. Show, don't tell

We've found that the most successful cartoons have more 'showing' than 'telling'. Avoid jokes that need to be overexplained or contextualised.

3. Bite-sized beauty

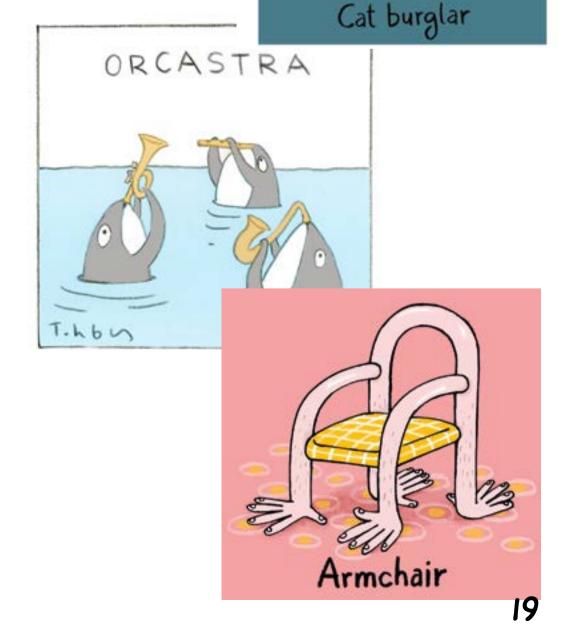
Our cartoons are small inserts in the magazine that pack a punch. Try to ensure your work either makes a reader laugh or think.

Watchouts

1. This is not the New Yorker

Our readers are in primary school. Sometimes we get submissions that, while undeniably clever, are written for an adult audience. Make sure your work is accessible and fun for kids!





OUR THANKS

To the contributors who submit their pieces to our magazine, and to the writers and artists who let us feature their work in this guide. In order of appearance:

Writers featured

- Bill Condon
- Darcy-Lee Tindale
- Jackie Hosking
- Katie Furze
- Stephen Whiteside
- Janeen Brian
- David Hill
- Zoë Disher
- Wendy Graham
- Simon Cooke
- Ursula Dubosarsky

Illustrators featured

- Douglas Holgate
- Gabriel Evans
- Anna Bron
- Greg Holfeld
- Christopher Nielsen
- Jake A Minton
- Dante Hookey
- David Legge
- Fifi Colston
- Sylvia Morris
- Cheryl Orsini
- Aśka
- Tony Colley
- Tohby Riddle
- Michel Streich