

About Alison Lester (2012)

I began illustrating children's books about thirty years ago. I trained as a secondary art teacher, and although I loved teaching art I hated the routine of school.

When my first baby was born I knew I wanted to work from home, so I got out the Yellow Pages, found Oxford University Press under Publishers, rang up, and asked for a job. I was lucky enough to be interviewed by three lovely women who could see potential in my scrappy folio and gave me a book to illustrate.



After five years of illustrating other people's stories I found myself getting picky with their texts and had a go at writing my own. "Clive Eats Alligators" was the result, and I have been writing and illustrating my own stories since then.

In 1997 my first children's novel, "The Quicksand Pony" was published and the "The Snow Pony" followed in 1999. I hope I can continue to write both "chapter books" and picture books. My heart is always with the little kids, but as my own children get older I find myself more and more interested in the novels.

Over the last fifteen years I have visited and worked in many remote indigenous schools and it's been a real treat.

Helping children and adults make books from their stories has been hugely rewarding. The hardest thing about my job is getting time to do it. A large part of each year is spent giving talks and running workshops on writing and illustrating, and although I love travelling and meeting people, it takes me away from my family and work.

Biography

Alison Lester was born on the 17/11/1952 at Foster in Victoria, Australia.

She grew up on a farm overlooking the sea and first rode a horse as a baby in her father's arms. She still lives in the country and rides her horse whenever she can.

After training as an art teacher and teaching for one year, Alison began illustrating books in 1979 and five years later, wrote her first book.

Her picture books mix imaginary worlds with everyday life, encouraging children to believe in themselves and celebrate the differences that make them special.

Alison lives and works at Nar Nar Goon North in rural Victoria.

She is involved in many community art projects and spends part of every year travelling to remote indigenous communities, using her books to help children and adults write and draw about their own lives.

In 2011 Alison, along with Boori Prior, was appointed Australia's first Children's Laureate, a position they shared for two years. She was also an ambassador for the 2012 National Year of Reading. She is currently an ambassador for the Indigenous Literacy Foundation.



List of Alison Lester's Books

"Clive Eats Alligators", Oxford University Press, 1985 .

(Now published with Hachette.)

Commended picture book, C.B.C. awards, 1986.

"Ruby", Oxford University Press, 1987.

(Now with Lothian.)

"Rosie Sips Spiders", Oxford University Press, 1988.

Winner A.B.P.A. design award, 1989.

The Australian Baby Books.

"Bibs and Boots", "Happy and Sad", "Crashing and Splashing", "Bumping and Bouncing",
Penguin Books, 1989.
(Now with Allen and Unwin.)

"Imagine", Allen and Unwin, 1989.
Commended A.B.P.A. design award, 1989.

"The Journey Home", Oxford University Press, 1989.
(Now with Lothian.)
Honour book C.B.C. awards, 1990.

"Magic Beach", Allen and Unwin, 1990.
Shortlisted book C.B.C. awards, 1991.
Winner ABPA design award, 1990.

"Tessa Snaps Snakes", Oxford University Press, 1990.
(Now with Hachette.)

"Isabella's Bed", Oxford University Press, 1991.
(Now with Lothian.)
Shortlisted book, multi-cultural awards, 1992.

"My Farm", Allen and Unwin, 1992.

"I'm Green and I'm Grumpy", Penguin, 1993.
"Monsters are Knocking", Penguin, 1993.
(Now titled "Who's that Knocking?")

"Yikes!", Allen and Unwin, 1993.

"When Frank was Four", Hodder, 1994.
(Now with Hachette.)

"Alice and Aldo", Allen and Unwin, 1996.
(Now titled "Alison Lester's ABC")

"Celeste Sails to Spain", Hodder, 1997.

"The Quicksand Pony", Allen and Unwin, 1997.
Winner, West Australian Young Readers Book, 1999
Shortlisted 1998 Festival Awards for Literature National Children's Award.
Shortlisted 1998 Book Data Australian Booksellers' Association Book of the Year.

"Ernie Dances to the Didgeridoo", Hodder, 2000.
Shortlisted 2001 CBC awards.

"The Snow Pony", Allen and Unwin, 2001.

"Are We There Yet? A Journey Around Australia", Penguin, 2004.



Winner, picture book of the year 2005 CBC awards.
Flagship book for Australia's National Year of Reading

"Moo; Talk to the farm animals with Alison Lester", ABC Books, 2006.

"Purr; Talk to the pet animals with Alison Lester", ABC Books, 2006.

"Roar"; Talk to the wild animals with Alison Lester", ABC Books, 2006

"Bonnie and Sam; The Shadow Brumby", Allen and Unwin, 2007.

"Bonnie and Sam. The Circus Pony", Allen and Unwin, 2007.

"Bonnie and Sam; Racing the Tide", Allen and Unwin, 2008.

"Bonnie and Sam; Saving Mr Pinto", Allen and Unwin, 2008.

"Horse Crazy, the complete adventures of Bonnie and Sam", Allen and Unwin, 2010

"Running with the Horses", Penguin, 2009.

Shortlisted, Prime Minister's prize, 2010.

Shortlisted, CBCA awards, 2010.

Highly Commended, APA Book Design Awards, 2010.

"Noni the Pony", Allen and Unwin, 2010.

Winner, book of the year for younger children, ABIA awards, 2011.

Shortlisted, CBC awards, 2011.

"One Small Island", with Coral Tulloch, Penguin, 2011

Winner, Wilderness Society's Environment Award, 2012

Winner, CBCA Eve Pownell Award, 2012

Whitely certificate of commendation, children's literature category from the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales.

"Sophie Scott Goes South", Penguin, 2012

A White Raven selected book, 2013.

Shortlisted APA design awards, 2013.

Shortlisted, Picture Book of the Year, CBCA, 2013.

2014 United States Board of Books for Young People (USBYP) list of Outstanding International Books for children and young adults.

"Kissed by the Moon", Penguin, 2013

My books are published in many countries and I am happy to say that they are all still in print.

CV

1970. Finished secondary education at St Margaret's School, Berwick, Victoria, Australia. Primary schooling at Foster Consolidated School and first two years of Secondary at Foster High School.
1971. First Year Arts at Melbourne University
- 1972-1975. Higher Diploma of Teaching, Secondary Arts and Crafts, Melbourne State College.
1976. Art teacher, Alexandra High School.
1979. Began illustrating children's books.
1985. "Clive Eats Alligators", first picture book.
- 1985 - Writing and illustrating, see list.
1993. Guest speaker at IBBY conference, Manilla.
1996. Writers Project Grant from the Australia Council to the Spanish Riding School in Vienna.
1999. Writer in residence at Tanglin Trust School, Singapore.
2001. Guest speaker at Story Lines Festival, Auckland.
2002. Visiting author at the Bologna Book Fair, sponsored by the Australia Council.
2004. Guest speaker, Simmons College, Boston, USA.
2004. Visiting author to Seoul, Korea for Children's Book Week.
2004. Visiting author, schools in Tokyo.
2005. Australian Antarctic Arts Fellowship. Six week voyage to Antarctica and beginning of Kids Antarctic Art project.
2005. Workshops and exhibition in Japan as part of the Asialink literature touring program with the Aichi expo.
2005. Kimberley Writer's Festival.
2005. Byron Bay Writer's Festival.
2005. Expedition Photographer on Quark voyage to Ross Sea, Antarctica.
2006. Wordstorm Writer's Festival, Darwin.
2006. Expedition Artist on Quark Voyage to Antarctic Peninsula.
2007. Artist for Fire Up, Community Dance project.
2007. Sydney Writer's Festival.
2007. Mid-Winter Festival, Hobart.
2007. Writer in Residence, Aurora Expeditions voyage to Spitsbergen.
2007. Albany Writer's Festival.
2008. Children's Literature in the Centre, Alice Springs.
2009. Visiting author, schools in Tokyo.
2009. Eye of the Storm writer's festival, Alice Springs.
2009. Ubud Writer's Festival, Bali.
2009. Author tour to three Indian cities, with DFAT. First drawings for Kids India Art project.
2010. Bologna Book Fair.
2011. All Saints Literature Festival, Perth.
2011. visiting author, schools in Kiev.
2011. Swimming with Stories, tour of China.
2011. Byron Bay Writer's Festival.
2011. appointed first Australian Children's Laureate, with Boori Prior, for two years.
2012. Ambassador for National Year of Reading, including National Tour of Are We There Yet? exhibition.
2012. Expedition artist on Aurora Expeditions voyage to Commonwealth Bay, Antarctica.
2012. Victorian Laureate tour.
2012. CBCA conference, Adelaide.
2012. South Australian Laureate tour.
2012. Tasmanian Laureate tour.
2013. The Big Draw, Newcastle.
2013. Perth Writer's festival.
2013. Beijing Writers Festival.
2013. Bologna Children's book fair. Summit with Children's Laureate's from Sweden and Ireland.

2013. Children's laureate tour of Ireland.

Every year, from 1985 onwards, workshops in schools around Australia.

From 1994, visits and workshops in remote indigenous communities, in Central Australia, Arnhem Land, the Kimberley and North Queensland.

Exhibitions at:

Books Illustrated, Fremantle Childrens Literature Centre, Des Bunyon Gallery, Dromkeen, Season's Gallery, McClelland Gallery, Walker Street Gallery, Melbourne Style, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Melbourne State Library, Parliament House, Canberra, Melbourne Aquarium, Children's Castle, Tokyo.

School Visits and Workshops

Most of my school visits are a type of show and tell.

I have most of my work as digital files and an hour long slide show seems to work well. That's about 45 minutes of slides and 15 minutes of questions.

Preps and Grade Ones get a bit twitchy with this long, and thirty or forty minutes is usually enough for them.

I have one talk about my work and one about Antarctica.

In my work talk I tell how the books evolved from the first idea. A lot of my books grew out of things that really happened and telling these tales makes kids aware of the value of their own stories. I really believe and stress to classes that you need to know what you are writing about, and that so often, truth is stranger than fiction.

I can't do days of talks however. One talk combined with workshops seems to be the best way to go. Any more than that finds me rabbiting on with no idea of what I'm saying or where (or who) I am.

Murals

I am very happy to run writing and drawing workshops for smaller numbers, but my favourite school activity is to do a drawing project that involves the whole school. I have art-directed murals at several schools and each one has been a delightful experience. It really needs a week, though I have done them in less time. Every grade in the school gets a bit of a talk and a drawing lesson, then we choose our subject and start drawing. I collect all the drawings, photocopy them, then act as God, choose the best and design them into one large artwork. I then photocopy the design on to acetate and we use the overhead projector to enlarge the images on to a wall or boards of weathertex. The students do the tracing and painting, working off a scaled-down colour guide, and it's done. It's a wonderful way to get the whole school working together. The little kids draw beautifully but don't have the skills to trace and paint, and the older kids, often unhappy to draw, love doing the tracing and colouring in. There's a job for everyone.

Group Books

Another workshop I love is to make a group book. I start by reading a book from the Clive Eats Alligators series. These books are about individuals and laid out like a photo album, so the design lends itself beautifully to a co-operative effort.

After discussing what our book might be about, we usually decide to do it about the kid's lives, and then we talk about categories: sport, family, pets, fun, games, fears, adventures etc. Then people volunteer their stories for the categories, and I write it them on the white board. For example, the Pets category might go something like this: Marty rides his pinto pony through the swamp, Connie chases her runaway rabbit, Billy loves his fluffy yellow cat etc. I try to make sure the kids use their name in the text so their involvement is recorded. I also encourage them to think about the sentence and how to make it interesting and specific, and sound good, ie, not just, Jim has a dog. You can fit six stories to a page, if the book is made of A3 sheets, with the illustration on a $\frac{1}{4}$ A4 size paper, portrait

(up and down), and the text on a piece of $\frac{1}{8}$ A4, landscape (sideways) below the picture.

The A3 pages can be coloured or black paper; the kids drawings on white, pasted onto the colour looks great.

The book can be extended by including a "punchline" page, as in the "Clive" books, where a second page for each category shows one of the kids doing something funny or unusual.

Kids who finish early can do more illustrations for the cover or headings, so the workshop accommodates a wide variety of abilities and work speeds.

With a couple of adult helpers (there's a lot of pasting involved), a book can be finished in an hour, or it can be stretched out over a longer period.

The book can be bound by hand, rings or plastic spirals, depending on what's available.

Reading the book at the end of the session is always great fun, and it's very rewarding to see even the most uninvolved kid get a kick out of their contribution.

Class Sets

I have recently started travelling with an A3 printer, a camera and a laptop and this means we can make sets of A5 books on the spot, with laminated covers and stapled spines. They look terrific.

Individual Books

A couple of pieces of A4 photocopy paper, folded longways, then shortways, then trimmed along the long side foldline and secured with a string or ribbon along the short fold, makes a sweet little book.

I've often prepared these for kids in advance and got them to make simple counting books based on Imagine, an animal book of mine.

I read the book and we talk about the various animal worlds; the rainforest, the ocean, farms, etc. After they choose a category, the kids start making up their texts; Imagine one whopping whale, imagine two tiny turtles, imagine three silent sharks etc.

After they pencil their text into the little book they start drawing and as they draw I talk about how to draw animals, what makes a horse look like horse, how long a dog's neck is, the body shape of a cow, etc etc.

I like to use art techniques other than simply drawing to make these pictures. Stencils, wax resist, mono prints and collage all give fabulous results.

I did a workshop with parents recently, on getting children to read, and I did this exercise with them.

I gave them little books, prepared earlier and coached them through a story for their child or children. It was called I Love You, or A Gift For You (or they could call it whatever) and it started off with; You were born on the...

(date). The day/night you were born...(it was pouring with rain, the car wouldn't start, the leaves were turning red.. whatever their memory). You were born at ...

(time). When you arrived... (your hair was sticking straight up, you cried and cried, your dad couldn't stop smiling..).

It continued like this for about eight pages, with the framework established but the parents writing in their own specific memories about getting their baby home and those first days.

It ended with; We were so happy when you arrived. You made us a family.

Materials for all these projects are very simple, pencils, paper, scissors, glue, string.

This project can be done as a group project by using a photocopier and combining pages to make multiple copies for everyone.

With more time it would be possible to include book-binding and make individual books for everyone, with marbled endpapers and cloth covered boards.

It's very exciting help people tell their stories.

It goes without saying that the students will get heaps more out of a workshop if they are familiar with my books, and I am happy to communicate with classes before and after a visit

I hope this outline is helpful. More information can be found at www.alisonlester.com.

I can be contacted on the net at alisonlester@bigpond.com or at PO Box 237, Nar Nar Goon North, Victoria, 3812.
best wishes, Alison Lester

