

Career profile

Children's book publisher

Children's author Narelle Oliver at work.

Unsolicited manuscripts pour into the offices of Lothian Books at the rate of around 100 per week and, of those, most would be aimed at the children's market.

'Everyone thinks they can write for children – parents, teachers, everyone,' says Helen Chamberlin, Lothian's publisher of children's books. 'But it's not easy at all.'

Being a good storyteller is the ultimate and perhaps the only, qualification, but it isn't necessarily something that's easy to learn. Creative writing courses, Chamberlin explains, can impart some shortcuts and tricks, but writers have to be born with a particular skill. 'You need to love language, and working with language.'

Those aiming to carve out a niche in picture books will find a talent for illustration a useful springboard, but even then it's critical to hone one's writing skills and 'it's fairly rare to find people who can do both', adds Chamberlin.

Narelle Oliver is one of those rare people equally at ease in front of a keyboard or a drawing board. Her colourful books feature the linoprint medium, used in different ways and combined with other media such as watercolours, pastels, coloured pencils and collage materials.

Ironically, though, art and creative writing were two activities she avoided at school.

'I didn't do art at high school, because it wasn't taken seriously academically and I wasn't a confident drawer. I used to freeze and panic, as you either could do it or you couldn't, and I was never happy with what I did. It was all a bit too scary.'

However, at teacher's college she worked hard at improving her drawing skills and discovered print-making in many forms – etching, lino-printing, and screen-printing.

One of her lecturers also introduced her to children's classic *The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek* by Jenny Wagner and Rob Brooks (originally published by Longman Young Books/Childers Pty Ltd 1973).

A short course with Irena Sibley, a fine artist and author-illustrator of several popular picture books, inspired Oliver to create her first book, *Leaf Tail*, which was published in 1989.

www.home.gil.com.au/-cbcqld/crew/crew.htm

www.bookedout.com.au/ (Click on Queensland speakers, then Narelle Oliver)

<http://www.lothian.com.au/>

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