



CBCA National Cultural Policy submission

Introduction

The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next National Cultural Policy. We commend the Australian Government's ongoing commitment to the arts through Revive and its recognition of stories as central to Australia's cultural life.

For over 80 years, the CBCA has championed Australian children's literature and fostered a love of reading through Book Week, the Book of the Year Awards, Shadow Judging, and a national network of programs and partnerships.

Our core position is clear: a strong reading culture in childhood underpins lifelong cultural participation, creative engagement and social connection.

Building a national reading culture through shared experiences

CBCA creates nationally recognised moments that connect children, families, schools, libraries and communities through books.

Book Week is one of Australia's most visible and inclusive cultural celebrations, engaging children across all regions and backgrounds. Children actively participate in storytelling through parades, costumes, learning activities, school and library events – dressing up as favourite characters, sharing books and celebrating Australian stories together.

Book Week also provides an opportunity for children, their teachers and families to connect with, and celebrate excellence in, Australian children's books through the CBCA Book of the Year Award winners.

These shared reading and storytelling experiences are critical in the early years. They support connection and neurodevelopment, helping children develop a sense of being, belonging and becoming.

These experiences:

- make reading visible, social and joyful
- create early, positive reading identities
- connect families, schools and communities through a shared cultural moment.

A national cultural policy can support and amplify these shared experiences by:

- recognising major national reading initiatives as key cultural infrastructure
- investing in campaigns that promote reading as a participatory, community-based activity
- supporting schools and libraries to fully engage in national reading events.
- enabling cross-departmental cooperation and investment – recognising the crucial role that children’s literature (alongside all artforms) has on children’s wellbeing, social cohesion and as a social determinant of health.

Supporting access to books and participation

CBCA programs highlight both the appetite for reading and the barriers that still exist.

Through Shadow Judging, young people engage deeply with shortlisted books – discussing, evaluating and responding to literature as active participants rather than passive readers.

With this program, and supported by strategic partnerships, we help address access challenges by:

- providing digital access to shortlisted titles
- supporting a positive youth reading culture
- enabling participation for regional, remote and under-resourced schools
- supporting flexible and inclusive reading environments.

However, gaps remain where schools and communities lack:

- funding for books and collections
- access to library services
- digital infrastructure or subscriptions.

A reading-focused cultural policy can:

- invest in equitable access to books across all schools and communities
- support hybrid access models (physical and digital)
- fund programs that ensure national participation in reading initiatives is not determined by postcode.

Connecting children with stories beyond the page

CBCA’s work demonstrates that reading engagement is strongest when it extends beyond the book itself. Children engage deeply with stories through:

- creative expression, including Book Week costumes, Shadow Judging creative responses, writing, drawing and dramatic play
- performance and adaptation e.g. music, theatre, film and television.
- multimedia storytelling platforms e.g. podcasts, video storytelling, fan-fiction sites

These experiences:

- help children interpret and internalise stories
- support diverse learning styles
- reinforce the connection between literature and the broader arts ecosystem.

Policy opportunities:

- Support cross-artform initiatives that bring children's literature into performance, digital and creative practice.
- Recognise reading as part of a broader cultural engagement continuum, not an isolated activity.
- Invest in programs that link literature with theatre, storytelling and digital creativity.

Sustaining Australian children's literature and creators

CBCA's annual Book of the Year Awards play a critical role in:

- elevating Australian authors and illustrators
- guiding library, school and family purchasing decisions
- ensuring visibility of Australian stories in a globalised market.

Through this work, CBCA supports a pipeline between: **creators → books → readers → lifelong cultural engagement**

However, this ecosystem depends on:

- sustainable careers for authors and illustrators
- strong publishing and distribution networks
- continued discovery of Australian content by young readers.

Policy opportunity:

- greater investment in Writing Australia so that it can support individuals and organisations in the sector
- invest in Australian children's creators and ensure fair remuneration
- support visibility and discoverability of Australian books for young audiences
- protect creator rights in an evolving digital and AI environment.

Conclusion

Reading is a cultural foundation. It shapes identity, builds empathy and connects children to Australian stories. Reading is not only an educational outcome, but a gateway to cultural participation.

The CBCA urges the Australian Government to place children's reading at the centre of the next National Cultural Policy, ensuring that every child has the opportunity not only to access books, but to experience the joy, creativity and community that reading makes possible.

The CBCA Awards Foundation: Proudly funding prizes for the Children's Book of the Year Awards

BENEFACTORS: Allen & Unwin • CBCA NSW Branch Inc • Eddie and Dina Coffey • Laurie Copping OAM • Margaret Hamilton AM • Myra Doris Lee • Maurice Saxby AM • Scholastic Australia • Thyne Reid Trust No. 1

<https://cbca.org.au/awards-foundation/>