

## MEM FOX

*At the 2018 CBCA SA Book Week dinner, Mem Fox was presented with inaugural Honorary Membership of The CBCA (SA Branch). This citation was spoken on the night.*

We often say, “This person needs no introduction.”  
In Mem’s case it is absolutely true.

Everyone identifies Mem just by the title, plot or characters in her books – old or new and probably has a favourite! We all know that bush magic makes Hush invisible and that a piece of pavlova, a vegemite sandwich and a lamington make her visible. We probably know where the green sheep is. (fast asleep), and we resonate with Wilfred Gordon Macdonald Partridge’s search for a beautiful memory for Miss Nancy as we get older.

Most of us will have given a Mem Fox book as a gift to a child or prospective parent. Most of us will have read aloud many Mem Fox stories to a child or children either in our work or in families – and perhaps both. If you have, you will recall that moment of seeing a young child delighted with the magic of story and sweet language and yearning for more. Mem’s stories have helped many children start on their reading journey

We sometimes forget that Mem has been a published children’s author since 1983 – that’s 35 years - and has written more than 40 books (including books for adults about reading), and have been translated into 19 languages and sold around the world. Possum Magic may still be the best-selling children’s book in Australia, having sold more than 5 million copies.

Mem delights in celebrating and acknowledging **her** ‘treasures’ - the illustrators of her stories, as she did to the delight of the audience at our Book Week dinner. In a year of ‘Finding your Treasure’, we, (The Children’s Book Council of Australia, South Australian Branch) wanted to acknowledge Mem’s contribution as a ‘living treasure’ in the field of children’s literature and literacy, too.

Mem approaches the task of writing for the very young with the insights of the careful observer of children. She shows the habits of the patient wordsmith, and the performance skills of the trained actor. Something at which Mem excels is ensuring the book reads aloud well. As she puts it, the ideal is ‘not a word out of place, not a word too many’. And of course her ‘just right’ use of rhyme and rhythm just help the words flow from the page.

Mem has often emphasized that the fact that picture books are short does not make them easy to write. The absolute maximum number of words is 600. So every word must count, and anything redundant must be cut. The essentials, Mem has said, are talk and action. But getting a story completely right takes many, many hours of patient work. *Koala Lou* took two years and forty-nine drafts.

As Mem has said “*Writing a picture book is like writing 'War and Peace' in Haiku.*” I’m sure our members who are authors of picture books can resonate with that!

Mem continues to produce wonderful books for young children creating stories that inspire, uplift, and teach important messages about love, friendship, acceptance, and joy as evidence by her latest shortlisted book ‘I’m an Australian too’. She continues to inspire adults with her passionate advocacy for reading aloud and literacy through her books, projects and voice in the media. She gives voice to the power of the picture book read aloud. As she says in Reading Magic her book for adults “*The fire of literacy is created by the emotional sparks between a child, a book, and the person reading*

Last year Mem was awarded the prestigious Children’s Book Council Nan Chauncy Award for outstanding contribution to Australian children’s literature. Her nominator had this to say about her which captures Mem. *‘I doubt that we could ever quantify the impact of Mem on educators, parents and*

*children. I do know that every time she shares a book, she leaves the audience, regardless of age or experience, wanting just one more story’.*

As a Branch we have already recognised Mem as one our South Australian Luminaries on the SA Greats page of our website and are about to begin a project of adding to and improving content on Wikipedia on our noted South Australian authors and illustrators, including Mem, to showcase their achievements to the world.

It is for her long term achievements as a ‘living treasure’ in creating wonderful stories that are not only award winning but engage young children and their parents and educators, and her passion for the power of the read-aloud story in developing children as readers, that we honoured Mem at the dinner by presenting her with the inaugural Honorary Membership of The Children’s Book Council (South Australian Branch).