



## Deborah Abela honoured with the 2026 Lady Cutler Award for Distinguished Service to Children's Literature

The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) NSW Branch is proud to announce that Deborah Abela, one of Australia's most passionate and dedicated advocates of children's literature, is the recipient of the prestigious 2026 Lady Cutler Award. This biennial award recognises distinguished service rendered well beyond the professional sphere to elevate and enrich the landscape of children's literature in Australia.

The Lady Cutler Award celebrates individuals who have made significant contributions by raising the standards of children's literature, promoting its value within the wider community, supporting writers and illustrators, and serving as trusted champions of literacy and storytelling. Deborah Abela embodies this spirit with a career that spans over two decades of tireless commitment, advocacy, and leadership.

### A Lifetime Devoted to Children's Literature

Deborah's involvement with the CBCA over the past twenty years has been prolific and multifaceted. She has been a dynamic presence at CBCA conferences, Book Week celebrations, literary lunches, and fairs, and been a long-time judge of the Collide Book Week celebrations. Through these activities, Deborah has played a vital role in not only entertaining but inspiring young readers and fostering a lifelong love of books. As co-regional adviser and committee member for the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators (SCBWI), Australia East, Deborah's voluntary leadership connects authors, illustrators, and the broader children's book community through events such as conferences, professional development days, retreats and manuscript assessments, where, as part of the





leadership team, she helps connect creators with some of Australia's best publishing professionals. Her advocacy extends to festivals and educational conferences such as the Australian Schools Librarians Association Conference, Sydney Writers' Festival, Newington Festival Literature and the Kids and YA Festival, where she champions the art and power of storytelling.

## **Extending Reach Beyond Professional Boundaries**

Deborah's influence radiates beyond the traditional literary scene. She has been an inaugural supporter of WestWords, the children's literature centre of Western Sydney, contributing as a speaker, workshop leader, and mentor. Her residencies and mentorships in schools demonstrate her dedication to nurturing young writers and fostering creativity at the grassroots level. Her collaboration with the Primary English Teachers Association Australia (PETAA) has helped enrich writing programs for teachers and students across New South Wales and the country, strengthening literacy education in classrooms. Deborah's outreach is extensive and she travels widely, from remote regions to urban centres, as evidenced by her participation in the Australia Reads LitUp Program, the Penguin Kids Australia KOALA Awards tour bus and visits to western Sydney schools on Russ the Bus. Her books are studied widely in schools in reading circles and as part of the curriculum and her author visits ignite enthusiasm for reading, often leaving classrooms abuzz with students eager to read and write their own stories.

## **Advocacy Rooted in Experience and Passion**

With a background in television scriptwriting and production, including seven years as producer/writer on Channel Ten's Cheez TV, Deborah has championed children's literature through innovative media platforms since the beginning of her career. Her dual experience as a writer and educator fortifies her as an advocate for literacy, education, and equitable access to books. Her commitment has been recognised through numerous ambassadorial roles, including being an ambassador for the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge, NSW Spelling Bee, and as a National Literacy Ambassador. She dedicated ten years to the Books in Homes committee, supporting the distribution of literature to indigenous and disadvantaged children, while also actively advocating for global literacy initiatives through her ambassadorship with Room to Read. In 2013, she was the recipient of the Maurice Saxby Award for services to Children's Literature.



## A Force of Nature for Children's Literature

Deborah Abela's contributions have profoundly enriched the Australian children's literature community. She has championed literacy, elevated awareness of the power of storytelling, generously supported author and illustrator communities, and brought literature to life for children across diverse regions and backgrounds. Her boundless energy, integrity, and generosity have made her an indispensable pillar of this vibrant sector. In recognition of her extraordinary service and ongoing leadership, Deborah is a highly deserving recipient of the 2026 Lady Cutler Award—a testament to her enduring impact on children's literature in Australia and beyond.

