



OXFORD
CHILDREN'S
WORD OF THE YEAR

Oxford Children's Word of the Year Summary

Based on the findings from the Oxford Children's
Word of the Year Primary School Writing Competition
2017

Report prepared by
Oxford University Press Australia & New Zealand



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Introduction

Oxford University Press (OUP) is dedicated to improving communication through an understanding of, and a passion for, language around the globe.

As experts in children's language, OUP is constantly listening to Australian children and reflecting on their use of language in order to develop an understanding of the challenges they are facing.

The Oxford Children's Word of the Year competition is one of the ways OUP engages with the ever changing language of Australian children.

The release of the Oxford Children's Word of the Year coincides with Children's Week, between October 21 and 29.

The process

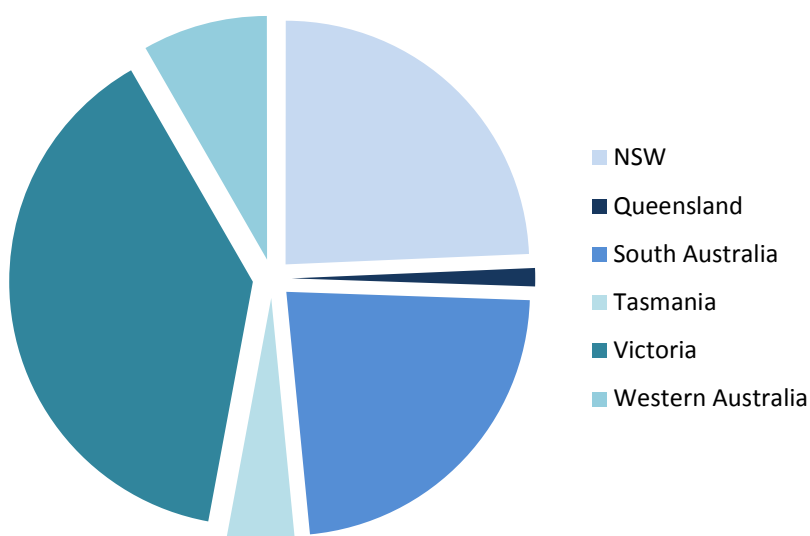
OUP invited primary school students from their Foundation/Prep year to Grade 6 to write about a word that best reflected their lives and interests today, whether in the playground or wider community.

Students from primary schools in rural, regional and metropolitan Australia provided their entries, informing OUP of the words and themes that interested, inspired and concerned them in their everyday lives.

From over 700 entries completed in September 2017, the shortlist and Australian Children's Word of the Year were chosen.

The judges of the competition represented the Australian National Dictionary Centre, Oxford University Press, teachers and academics. They were presented with lists of the most common words and themes from all of the entries, and after reading the entries, they provided their feedback on the most significant words used by the children.

Entries by state





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The Judges

Lee Walker

Lee Walker is Director of School Publishing for Oxford University Press in Australia. She is also a Director on the Board of the Australian Publishers Association and Convenor of its Schools Educational Publishers Committee. Lee has worked in the Australian educational publishing industry for 26 years, and has extensive publishing experience in primary literacy and mathematics.

Amanda Laugesen

Associate Professor Amanda Laugesen is the Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre at the Australian National University. The ANDC edits Australian Oxford dictionaries for Primary and Secondary schools, and is Australia's premier research centre on the Australian English lexicon. Amanda is the author of numerous books and articles, and was the Managing Editor of the *Australian National Dictionary* (second edition).

James Arvanitakis

Professor James Arvanitakis is the Dean of the Graduate Research School at Western Sydney University. He is also a lecturer in Humanities and a member of the University's Institute for Cultural and Society. James was the founding Head of The Academy at Western Sydney University that received an Australian Financial Review higher education excellence award (2016) and the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue Excellence in Education Award (2017).

He is internationally recognised for his innovative teaching style and was the recipient of the Prime Minister's University Teacher of the Year Award in 2012 and an Eminent Researcher Award from the Australia India Education Council in 2015. His research areas include citizenship, resilience, trust and the future of universities and James has authored over 100 articles and several books. He is a regular media commentator appearing on ABC TV.

Anita Green

Anita Green is a teacher at Berwick Fields Primary School, and has been a teacher for 15 years. She is also a published author, a former lecturer at Monash University and works for Swinburne Online as an eLearning Advisor and for the Teacher Learning Network.

The Oxford Children's Word of the Year 2017

Equality

In their entries, children referred to 'equality' in:

- Gender
- Marriage
- Race
- Sport
- Pay
- Disability rights
- Sibling, and even
- Ice cream scoops

Australian children on 'equality'

"I strongly believe that the Children's Word of the Year should be EQUALITY, because people should always be fair to others and treat people how they would want to be treated. Equality means that you are equal and strive to be a fair minded individual in society."

"Equality is the most important word in society today."

"Everyone should feel accepted, included, safe, happy, joyful, equal, peaceful and together we need to find equal rights."

Madison, Grade 4

"Equality is a diverse word with many meanings and many ways of being used in a sentence. Equality can mean being paid the same as a co-worker of the opposite gender or even cutting gender stereotypes out of Australian culture."

"For me as a young Australian equality means fairness between Indigenous Australians and people of all races and religions."

"Equality can be as simple as siblings getting the same amount of ice cream at the beach."

Evie, Grade 6



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*“Tall, short, big, small; equal rights should be for all.
Fat, skinny, young, old, a story with pictures but yet untold.
Black, white, every single race; should feel accepted with a smile on their face.”*

Savannah, Grade 5

“In many ways society gives equal opportunities to everyone ... or so it seems. There are so many things that aren't equal such as lower wages for women, racism/racist stereotypes and gay marriage still being illegal.”

“Equality is acceptance. Acceptance of everything and everyone. All I have to say to everyone who disagrees is oops, we're all human.”

Nicholas, Grade 5

“In many ways society gives equal opportunities to everyone ... or so it seems.” **Nicholas, Grade 5**

“I have two mums and a stepmum, my family is quite different to most families ... I would love to go to my mums' wedding to celebrate their love.”

“Why can't same-sex couples have the fairy-tale wedding and live happily ever after?”

“I have never thought of my family as being abnormal or strange and no one has ever said that to me... I have to clean my room, feed our pets, do my homework and eat my vegetables just like all kids my age.”

Evita, Grade 5/6

“The beach is a wondrous place, we are all equal here. I watched small aliens walk across the beach. They looked happy, but underneath al the smiling, I knew that they would not like to live in small cottages forever.”

Jacinda, Grade 6



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The judges on 'equality'

Lee Walker, director, School of Publishing, Oxford University Press ANZ

It was illuminating – maybe even surprising – for me to discover how many children referenced 'equality' in their submissions. While we could assume it's because the timing of the competition coincides with the current debate about equal marriage, kids' writing about equality traversed a spectrum of contexts for why equality is an important word to them: culture, marriage, pay, gender, disability, race, religion, sport, the arts. From one child: 'Why can't same-sex couples have the fairy-tale wedding and live happily ever after?' And from another child: 'Equality can be as simple as siblings getting the same amount of ice-cream at the beach.' But while we're in the thick of the marriage equality debate, it would be remiss of me not to quote one entry who referenced her two mums and step-mum, and wrote: 'Why should heterosexual people get a say as to whether same sex people can marry or not? It is the right thing to do, so do we actually need to vote on it? It makes me sad for people like my parents. If someone loves someone they should be able to marry them, no matter what gender they are.'

James Arvanitakis, dean, the Graduate Research School at Western Sydney University.

The issue of what is fair emerges very early in our lives: who gets to cut the cake and who gets to pick which half to eat; what is our bed time in comparison to our brothers and sisters – all these things play out as we try and work out how to make things fair around us. Current debates about equality – from same sex marriage to racism, discrimination against their Muslim friends and gender – are quickly understood by young people and raised in the stories shared.

Amanda Laugesen, director, Australian National Dictionary Centre

For older age groups (children aged 10 to 12), terms that had some prominence included equality, diversity, war, freedom, and bullying. The concern with these terms provides a useful insight into some of the issues that children are engaging with. The interest in equality also resonates with the Australian tradition of the 'fair go', an Australian term that dates to 1891.

Anita Green, teacher, Berwick Fields Primary School

The word equality has come up a lot recently and has sparked many classroom discussions. One of the first big talking points was the girls AFL teams and it was great to see the students so excited about this. More recently I have heard conversations between students around the same sex couples and marriage equality. Such a huge topic. It has been interesting to see the reactions to what they read and see in the media.



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Other shortlisted words

Friends/friendship/family

"We had a really big day of fun and friendship. We headed home after our adventures with many happy memories."

Meah, Grade 5

"Friendship is vital for everyone's health and well-being. The reasons are, having friends to play and talk with can make you less lonely and sad, friends take care of each other and that anyone can become amazing and great people if they have a group of friends around them."

Emilia, Grade 5

James Arvanitakis

It is unsurprising that family and friendship emerges as the top of mind of most young people. This is where they draw their values, social networks and learn. Family and friends shape us from a young age and this creates the frame of reference in which we try and make sense of the world. Overwhelmingly, research has found that the shape of family and friendship does not matter – it is key that they experience loving and caring relationship. In fact, in 2010 American researchers published results from a meta-analysis of 33 studies comparing different family groupings and found no evidence of variations in a range of behavioural, educational, emotional or social outcomes. Family and friends count – and this is the clear message here.

Lee Walker

When I was in primary school (and that was a very long time ago), the most important things in my life (other than deciding what was going to be in my lunch order, scribbling it on the front of a brown paper bag while forcing down a piece of cold vegemite toast as I was running out the door to catch the local bus to school) were (1) having friends, (2) being with my friends (with the first meeting being on the school bus), and (3) being the best friend I could be. Reading the entries for the *Children's Word of the Year* made me happy that friendship is still one of the most important things in kids' lives.

Amanda Laugesen

The prominence of *friends* and *friendship* in the CWOTY entries attests to the value of friends in the social and emotional life of Australian children. These terms were represented in the competition entries across the widest number of schools and widest number of years.

Anita Green

Friends - Amongst primary school age children this topic is so important. The title of BFF's is big amongst the girls with lots of friendship necklaces and bracelets that are very important to them. Their friendship groups have a huge impact on their attitudes to school and their engagement and enjoyment levels at school.

Family – This has been a topic I hear at school in discussing what makes a family and sharing the different kinds of families we all have. Big families, small families, single parent families, step families, extended families, blended families... the list could go on!



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Soccer/sport

"In past history, people didn't always get treated fairly. Now that's changed. In AFL football, women are now able to play and umpire, just as men have done for the last 150 years. It's okay if girls play footy and boys play netball."

Madison, Grade 4

"Boom!" went the ball as it bolted towards the soccer net. "Beep! Beep! Beep!" went the timer. "Time's up," said the referee as our coach grabbed us and dragged us towards him."

Edward, Grade 5

James Arvanitakis

The excitement of sport is everywhere. We are surrounded by all kinds of sport and our family and friends often use sport as a way to connect us with our community. Sport remains a dominant way that we engage, fulfil our dreams and become socialised to community expectations – often with positive results and sometimes with negative connotations.

Lee Walker

For me, and what I know about what kids like to write about, it is not surprising that 'sport' is one of the most popular words. As one entry referenced: 'Sport is very good for you. It is very important. There are lots of sports, like soccer, basketball, netball and footy. Sport keeps you healthy. It is soooo fun.' What was most revealing for me is that more girls are writing about sport. One girl wrote a stellar piece of writing about equality in sport: 'In past history, people didn't always get treated fairly. Now that's changed. In AFL football, women are now able to play and umpire, just as men have done for the last 150 years. It's okay if girls play footy and boys play netball.' The word 'soccer' was also a popular word and boys, especially, wrote imaginative narratives about soccer stardom. One boy wrote: 'I slip on my boots and step out onto Barcelona's freshly trimmed turf. Excitement fills my body as I warm up. Socks above my knees, shirt tucked in, ready for the most important 90 minutes of my life.'

Amanda Laugesen

Sport was a major concern, with many individual sports, such as soccer, AFL, football, and basketball named as children's preferred words. This is unsurprising, given Australia's ongoing love of sport and its centrality to our culture.

Anita Green

Sport stood out to me as I find it is a massive part of many children's lives. It is something that is talked about a lot at school and written about in their daily writing. The students' outside successes in sport is celebrated in school in assemblies etc. It is part of their structure in routines and they have to plan homework and other activities around them. Many friendship groups are also formed through outside sporting clubs.



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Adventure/space/magic

“Once there was a man who had a crazy dream of being controlled by a magic fountain. This magic fountain could read his mind.”

Cora, Grade 2/3

“The three girls hopped into the rocket, then they started the countdown. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 ... Blast off!”

Indi, Grade 3

James Arvanitakis

Adventure dominates the minds of many young people and so again it is not surprising that words such as space and magic emerge as being top of mind. Internationally renowned educator, Sir Ken Livingston, argues that imagination is at its highest before young people start school and the need for routine begins to undermine it. But this is changing as creativity and innovation are appreciated by educational institutes as never before. Imagination is at the core of the world of many young people as they dream of adventures across the universe filled with magic.

Amanda Laugesen

Adventure and Space featured prominently through the competition entries. These terms attest to the rich imaginative life of children. It is perhaps particularly interesting to see space being well-represented. This perhaps reflects the current interest in the space program (including Australia's interest in space exploration), as well as the fascination with space that has traditionally excited so many children.



Other common themes:

Animals
Technology
Violence
Adventure/holidays
Outdoors/nature
Food

Social justice and current affairs had a strong presence, including:

Refugees
Freedom
War
Terrorist
Pollution
Multicultural
Diversity
Loyalty

There was also the whimsical:

Princess
Unicorn
Mermaid
Magic
Fairy

There were some regional differences in the words children used.

In rural schools, words such as fishing, cows, farm, water, weather and calves emerged, while students from coastal schools were more likely to write about the beach.

Trends by age group

- Students in their first year of school and Grade One tended to write fiction, concentrating on animals, princesses and mermaids.
- By Grade 2, there were more non-fiction pieces, with 'nature' and 'friends' emerging as popular themes.
- In Grade 3, entries reflected feelings and attitudes, with 'kindness', 'peace', 'passion' and 'positivity' all appearing.
- In Grade 4, students wrote fiction and non-fiction stories about topics including equality and sport.
- In Grade 5, bullying, equality, friendship and human rights were popular.
- Social issues were a clear area of interest in Grade 6 entries, with 'equality', 'refugee' and 'asylum' all topics of interest.