

OXFORD CHILDREN'S
WORD OF THE YEAR 2018

Name:.....

Age:.....

Year level:.....

School:.....

Teacher's name:.....

SUMMARY REPORT

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ABOUT OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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 [Oxford Australian Children's Word of the Year](#) was announced Thursday 8 November, 2018.



AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S WORD OF THE YEAR THE PROCESS

OUP invited primary school students from their Foundation 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 500 entries completed in September 2018, 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, 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.

MEET OUR EXPERT JUDGING PANEL

LEE WALKER

Lee Walker is Director of School Publishing for Oxford University Press in Australia. She is also President of the Australian Publishers Association. Lee has worked in the Australian educational publishing industry for 27 years, and has extensive publishing experience in primary literacy and mathematics.

MARK GWYNN

Mark Gwynn is a researcher and editor at 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. Mark is the editor of numerous dictionaries including the Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary and the Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary.

JAMES ARVANITAKIS

Professor James Arvanitakis is Pro Vice-Chancellor 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.

DAVID ASTLE

David Astle is a full-time word nerd, making crosswords, columns and over 12 books, including Wordburger and The Gargantuan Book of Words. David is a regular presenter on ABC Radio Melbourne, as well as the language guru on ABC's News Breakfast. You may also recognise David as the dictionary man on SBS's Letters and Numbers.

OXFORD AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S WORD OF THE YEAR 2018



CREATIVITY

In their entries, children referenced **CREATIVITY**
in relation to:

Drawing &
writing

Music

Games

Make-
believe

Woodwork

Play

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN ON 'CREATIVITY'

"Creativity is important to me because it makes me feel like I can do anything. When I draw it feels like I'm free because I can draw whatever I want. Writing is good too because I can write whatever is going on in my head and it won't bother me anymore."

Harper, Year 6

"My life is full of creativity like building lego cities from scratch! Doing experiments and failing at building rafts and getting drenched in the river!"

Callan, Year 5

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN ON 'CREATIVITY'



“Courage is provided
Remember to always believe in creating
things
Every day you will find something to create
Always think you can do it
Take risks and you’ll get better
I know it can be hard
Very hard to believe
In everything you do on creativity
Turns out to be amazing
You know if it doesn’t work try again”
Zoe, Year 3



“Being creative can mean lots of different
things to different people. Creative should
be the word of the year because you can
always make mistakes and turn those
mistakes into your amazing artwork.”
Lexie, Year 2

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN ON 'CREATIVITY'

"My life is about creativity. It is because there are so many places you can see creativity. You see it on the street when they do paintings on the walls on the streets. Also when you go to the playgrounds at school and you see creativity in games people play. You see creativity in stories children write."

Chloe, Year 5



To be creative means to me to be full of ideas and to think outside the box ... When I am being creative I feel like there are no rules holding me back, and the possibilities and ideas flow freely. There is no one there to judge or criticise my work, so there is no pressure to get it right the first try."

Harper, Year 6



CREATIVITY ACROSS THEMES

Creativity was also present in entries in which other words were nominated, from the pieces on dance and ballet to one on artistic ("Art calms me down and I become silent. Art inspired me to illustrate books," Jenna, Year 4) and another on imagination ("Imagination is part of being creative! People use it to make movies, food, drinks and buildings ... imagination is the beauty of being creative. It is two brains stuck together. It brightens up my day," Grace Year 1).

Creativity was also expressed in the wildly imaginative works of fiction the students produced.

EXAMPLES OF CHARACTERS CREATED BY STUDENTS

- The hen who does magic when she sneezes
- Jeffrey, the psycho who was plotting world domination, and his arch-nemesis, Zook
- Valkyrie who has magic in her blood
- Intergalactic Boy who shoots lasers from his hand
- The El Corsair gang, living on the outskirts of Los Angeles in 2020
- A fox named Jeff who lives with a panther named Madox
- An adventurous snail in New York
- Grumpy Gerald from Happyland
- Competitors in the 2099 Gymnastics Galaxy Games, a mermaid called Ava, Cassidy Comet and Princess SnaggyPuss
- The Box who lives in Toy Galaxy
- Breeze, the son of Windy and Wind
- Phoena the phoenix who brings laughter to the jungle
- Pink unicorns
- The heroic children of Hercules, who sailed from Olympus to bring back Poseidon's Trident from the Island of Happiness
- And spies, aliens, ninjas, skeletons and vampires

THE JUDGES COMMENTS ON 'CREATIVITY'

LEE WALKER, DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL PUBLISHING, OUP ANZ

The theme creativity came through strongly in children's writing samples from all over Australia. Children wrote about 'a ticking mind of ideas ready to come out to the real world', attributed 'creative thinking' to becoming a times table master in year 3, and writing about how 'being creative can mean a lot of different things to different people'. The children's writing submissions show us how motivated they are to think about the world and how best to express their individuality

JAMES ARVANITAKIS, PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR, THE GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL, WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

Creativity has become the skill that we are all speaking about. It can be used to confront some of the world's greatest challenges in new ways – and this is our hope for this generation.

MARK GWYNN, EDITOR, AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DICTIONARY CENTRE

It was pleasing to see the words creativity and creative feature so prominently in children's responses this year. The responses reveal the absolute joy that children find in all manner of creative endeavours—writing stories, making things, inventing games, drawing and painting, dancing, and playing music. The words the children used to describe creativity show a deep understanding of the role the imagination plays in both artistic and physical expression. The responses also reveal an appreciation of the role of creativity in the experience of learning and education more generally.

DAVID ASTLE, AUTHOR AND ABC MELBOURNE PRESENTER

Creativity is strongly linked to fun and beauty, whether that's drawing, music or Lego-play. One writer coined the term 'sand building', which seems a more imaginative label for the old-school phrase of making sandcastles. Using words in different ways is also found under the creative umbrella.

THE SHORTLISTED WORDS

ENVIRONMENT

“Stop! We are killing nature. We are killing it because: 1. We are throwing out plastic. 2. Littering. 3. Hunting ...We need to protect our nature and environment!” Lilly, Year 2

“Bobo Bushbanger had felt that had finally done something in his life. He had contributed to saving marine life, an achievement that many could not complete. Bobo drifted into sleep dreaming of the lives he saved.” Sai, Year 5

“There are delightful waterfalls and amazing sights to see. There is the smell of freshness, tropical fruit and destruction of trees. That is depressing. We need to stop for the lives of us and other animals. Go enjoy rainforests while they’re still there!” Scarlett, Year 3

THE JUDGES COMMENTS ON 'ENVIRONMENT'

LEE WALKER

It is not surprising to see a lot of children’s writing focussed on the environment, and while this theme was approached by many kids within the context of how we need to do better to look after our world (including a very strong opinion piece about hunting protected species), it also inspired a lot of children to write imaginative stories, including a fabulous adventure story set in the Amazon Rainforest and being bitten by an anaconda while lying on a leaf that was as big as an elephant’s ear.

JAMES ARVANITAKIS

The environment remains the major challenge of our time! It is amazing that young people see the vulnerability of the planet in a way the rest of us do not – maybe it is because they themselves are vulnerable!

MARK GWYNN

The environment has once again featured prominently in the words that Australian children choose to write about. This is not a surprise given the ongoing debate over tackling climate change. This year has also seen severe drought in eastern Australia, as well as vocal opposition to the introduction of bans on plastic shopping bags in a number of states. In the meantime Australian children continue to voice their love of nature and the need to reduce waste and pollution. A number of the stories written by children this year not only demonstrate their understanding of environmental issues, but a desire to become part of the solution. One young writer’s story on the topic of pollution included an invention for cleaning up plastic from the world’s oceans.

DAVID ASTLE

The environment is foremost the home of animals, from lions to eagles to turtles. Living in the same space – the forest and oceans – is the human animal, the culprit behind pollution, most notably plastic. We all need to be more responsible, from picking up litter to preparing nude food (food with next to no packaging).

TECHNOLOGY

“One day there was an iPad that was always played and a computer that was never played. The computer was sad and lonely. Everybody said, “Computers are gross!” William, Year 2

“Bam! Billy stared at the technology and he could not take his eyes off it. He was hypnotised and the technology switched on and Billy played it but he was still hypnotised. Billy was so addicted to it” Blake, Year 2

THE JUDGES COMMENTS ON 'TECHNOLOGY'

LEE WALKER

Technology pervades Australian children’s lives, and based on the writing submissions, is especially appealing to boys of all ages, but also interests girls. I learned that a ‘pixel laser is a massive plasma canon’ (Jesse, Year 1); that there is a camera that spies use that has very special powers (Ella, Year 3); and that time travel is possible if you mix ‘thrilloxide’, ‘dioxide’, ‘comboxide’ and, most importantly, demonoxide (Jensen, Year 3).

JAMES ARVANITAKIS

Technology is everywhere – in everything we touch. Our lives are almost impossible to envisage without technology and these words capture how this plays out.

DAVID ASTLE

Technology is often bundled up with games. Pixels and lasers pop up a few times, but the underlying action is to play, where videos and computers offer the escape of games. Colours and sound effects, as well as numbers and exclamation marks, are all prominent across this topic.

MARK GWYNN

Many of the responses relating to the theme of technology demonstrate how the world of computing and the Internet have become integrated into the lives of Australian children today. The choice of the word gaming comes as no surprise – as a child of the 70s and 80s I loved the escape and entertainment provided by video game consoles like Atari, and arcade games at the local shops. But let's face it—the dazzling graphics, diversity, and sophistication of games today, combined with their accessibility, make them even more ubiquitous in the lives of children. Many of the responses relating to technology reveal an interest in the imaginative possibilities of this field: cameras that destroy, a pixelated universe, and memes that have agency. My favourite story is of a sad underutilised computer and popular iPad who live together in a 'boring office' in Sydney.

RESILIENCE (INCLUDES BRAVERY, CONFIDENCE & PERSISTENCE)

"Confidence is a feeling inside of you, your confidence helps you achieve things. Your confidence is also a part of you, you need your confidence otherwise you would not be able to do much." Erin, Year 3

"Bravery lets you be free and do what you want to do, not letting other people tell you all the time. Bravery can help you with your courage with writing, sports and other things you do." Goldie, Year 3

"Lucy grins at me with delight and we bounce over to join the other girls playing chasey. I feel like I will enjoy school I lot more now I'm growing my resilience!" Matilda, Year 4

THE JUDGES COMMENTS ON 'RESILIENCE'

LEE WALKER

Resilience: My favourite submission was an acrostic story called Be Brave, Gillian Wong! And is about the character's experience of being bullied and how her resilience pulled her through. Its opening paragraph hooked me straight in: 'Being different is hard. My name and where I'm from is the hardest part. Gillian Wong: I hate that name because people call me names'.

Confidence: I read a terrific narrative illustrating that just because you're not the most popular kid in school doesn't mean that you should have the confidence to express yourself, and that you should never give up on your dreams. A classic story about school and friendships, and how to confidently express your individuality.

MARK GWYNN

The words associated with resilience that were chosen by children this year – persistence, courage, bravery, and confidence— certainly resonated with some of my experiences growing up: the persistence required to reach your goals, the courage and bravery to stand up to bullies and to face your fears, and the confidence that can develop as a result of these. The resilience expressed in the children's responses often hints at very personal experiences in overcoming adversity and fear. The words persistence, courage, bravery, and confidence are used in the stories to encourage and motivate, and denote qualities that children aspire to.

DAVID ASTLE

Resilience and confidence and bravery (or courage) are all about facing challenges, the secret ingredients to coping, to growing. Dreams are mentioned, those things we desire, and how we need to find that inner strength to reach them. That dream might be claiming a trophy, making the dance team, or reaching the safety of home when surrounded by the unfamiliar.

OTHER COMMON THEMES

Family &
friends

Sport &
activity

Love,
happiness,
hope & joy

Fantasy

Adventures

School &
learning

WORDS ABOUT VALUES THAT STUDENTS SEE AS IMPORTANT

INTEGRITY

“There was a girl, one day she met a stranger who wanted her to do the wrong thing! She did the right thing which was integrity by saying no.” Ava, Year 1

RESPECT

“Definition of respect: a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements. Are you born with respect? I question that every day of the week.” Ryan, Year 6

KINDNESS

“Kindness is more than a thing. Kindness is an action that can start with just one person picking up someone else’s rubbish.” Niamh, Year 3

CARING

“Caring to me is being kind to each other and not being a bully ... Caring is also getting along with each other.” Timothy, Year 3

HOPE

“Hope makes a good mood in me. For me hope is caring, connecting, being courageous to the world. When you have hope in your heart you will never give up.” Thom, Year 3

TRENDS BY AGE GROUP

- Many younger students wrote about animals, including dogs, rabbits, orangutans and horses.
- Students in the younger years also used many words of resilience and empowerment, including persistent, resilience, confidence, motivation, bravery and aspiration.
- Middle year students wrote about family and friendship, with some more creative themes of aliens, magic, fairies, mermaids, unicorns and pirates.
- Gaming emerged as a significant interest in the middle years.
- Words on the theme of the environment and the natural world commonly appeared in this age group's writing.
- In the older age group, sport appeared prominently in writing samples. Some of the most popular sports mentioned included gymnastics, football, soccer, dance and basketball.
- The older students used more dramatic words, which point to a preference for fictional writing. These included unexpected, unpredictable, surprised, spontaneous, amazing, awesome, fantastic and chaos.

ENDS



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



Introduction

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

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

The process

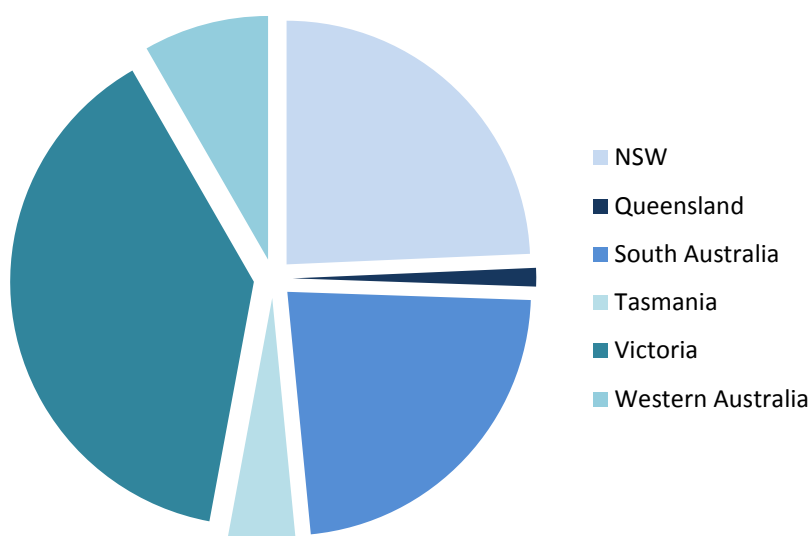
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From over 700 entries completed in September 2017, the shortlist and Australian Children's Word of the Year were chosen.

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





OXFORD
**CHILDREN'S
WORD OF THE YEAR**

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).

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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



OXFORD
CHILDREN'S
WORD OF THE YEAR

*“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



OXFORD
**CHILDREN'S
WORD OF THE YEAR**

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.



OXFORD
**CHILDREN'S
WORD OF THE YEAR**

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!



OXFORD
**CHILDREN'S
WORD OF THE YEAR**

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.



OXFORD
CHILDREN'S
WORD OF THE YEAR

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.



OXFORD
CHILDREN'S
WORD OF THE YEAR

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.