

# Reading the Stella Prize

*'I am living proof that a women-only prize can be career changing ... Yes, a prize for women's writing wouldn't be necessary in an ideal world, but that isn't the world we live in.'*

Kate Grenville

This section is a basic resource that can be used across all secondary-school levels. It provides information about the Stella Prize and other literary prizes, as well as a set of general reading questions that can be applied to any text.

The appendix includes:

- ◆ The Stella Prize
- ◆ Core values of the Stella Prize
- ◆ The Stella Prize books
- ◆ Relevant statistics
- ◆ Women in time
- ◆ References

## THE STELLA PRIZE

### About

The Stella Prize is a major literary award celebrating Australian women's writing.

The prize is named after one of Australia's iconic female authors, Stella Maria Sarah 'Miles' Franklin, and was awarded for the first time in 2013. Both nonfiction and fiction books by Australian women are eligible for entry.

The Stella Prize seeks to:

- ◆ recognise and celebrate Australian women writers' contribution to literature
- ◆ bring more readers to books by women and thus increase their sales
- ◆ provide role models for girls and opportunities for emerging female writers
- ◆ reward one writer with a \$50,000 prize – money that buys a writer some measure of

financial independence and thus time to focus on their writing

- ◆ combat unconscious bias and generate cultural change so that women's writing, stories and voices are valued as highly as those of men

The Stella Prize runs events and lectures at bookshops, festivals and universities around Australia, and compiles the annual Stella Count, tracking the number of books by men and women reviewed in our major newspapers and literary magazines.

### Why have a prize just for women?

Women-only literary prizes can be seen as part and parcel of broader efforts to promote greater equality between men and women. It was not much more than 100 years ago, in 1902, that women received the right to vote in Australia. While things have changed a lot in the intervening years, many inequalities persist. Consider that:

- ◆ Australia voted in its first female prime minister only 4 years ago
- ◆ In the 100 highest-grossing films of 2013 in the US, females comprised just 30% of all speaking characters and 15% of main protagonists<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2013\\_It's\\_a\\_Man's\\_World\\_Report.pdf](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2013_It's_a_Man's_World_Report.pdf)

- ◆ Women still do more unpaid work<sup>2</sup> in carer or volunteer positions and are routinely paid less<sup>3</sup> than men for doing the exact same work

This inequality exists in literature as well. As the list of statistics provided at the end of this section reveals, women tend to win our major literary awards far less frequently than men, and their books are also reviewed less often in our major newspapers and literary journals.

This inequality isn't stopping women from writing, but prizes and reviews can make a huge difference to a writer. They boost book sales and enhance a writer's reputation; they can provide much-needed financial support, and often lead to other offers of paid work, including invitations to attend writers' festivals both within Australia and overseas. For a writer to have a financially viable career and be taken seriously, this fiscal and critical recognition can make all the difference.

In 1991 the all-male shortlist for the prestigious Man Booker Prize acted as the catalyst for the establishment of the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction (originally called the Orange Prize). A similar desire to address inequality in the literary world was the basis for the foundation of the Stella Prize.

### The Stella Prize Story

Dreams of the Stella Prize emerged in early 2011 out of a panel held on International Women's Day. The panel was partly a discussion about the under-representation of women on the literary pages of the major Australian newspapers, both as reviewers and as authors of the books reviewed. For example, in 2011, 70% of the books reviewed in *The Weekend Australian's* books pages were written by men.

The panel also discussed the under-representation of women as winners of literary prizes. In early 2011, only 9 individual women had ever won the Miles Franklin Literary Award over its 54-year history. This under-representation is evident across all the major prizes. Women have won the fiction division of the various state premiers' literary awards about

a third of the time; the statistics for nonfiction are even worse.

After the panel, a group of women met to discuss what to do next. They decided to do something positive to raise the profile of women writers and address their under-representation in the literary world, and so plans for the Stella Prize were born. Two years later, in April 2013, the Stella Prize was awarded for the first time to Carrie Tiffany for her novel *Mateship with Birds*.

### Why does gender inequality matter?

Entrenched gender inequality in the literary world is more than a problem just for female writers, or even just for women and girls. In her TED talk<sup>4</sup>, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie talks about the danger of a single story. By this she means the presentation of a person or group of people that is so narrow in its vision that we are unable to distinguish their human complexities from the single story that we have come to associate with them. Maybe they're poor. Maybe they're black. Maybe they're a woman.

The under-representation of women in the Australian literary world means that:

- ◆ women and girls are likely to have access to fewer stories of where they have come from and fewer images of what their future might be
- ◆ women and girls may feel that their experiences and views are less important than those of men and boys and, as a consequence, may be less inclined to share them
- ◆ the story of what it means to be Australian that we tell ourselves, and the rest of the world, is the story of only some of us

### Does inequality exist even in YA literature?

The gender bias is there in YA (young adult) literature, and it's there in picture books. One large-scale study<sup>5</sup> showed that children's books were almost twice as likely to contain a male central character

2 [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/14/australian-women-still-75-years-behind-on-pay-equality-says-oxfam](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/14/australian-women-still-75-years-behind-on-pay-equality-says-oxfam)

3 [www.crikey.com.au/2014/03/07/get-fact-do-men-make-much-more-than-women-for-the-same-job/](http://www.crikey.com.au/2014/03/07/get-fact-do-men-make-much-more-than-women-for-the-same-job/)

4 [www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story) - t-1101468

5 [www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/8494392/Childrens-books-are-sexist-and-enforce-gender-inequality.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/8494392/Childrens-books-are-sexist-and-enforce-gender-inequality.html)

than a female one and twice as likely to include a male character's name in their title as a female name.

Women writers often use initials or a pseudonym rather than their full or real name. JK Rowling is an obvious example here. And there are still compilations of 'boy' stories and 'girl' stories, and books are often packaged in a way intended to appeal to specific genders.

The gender issues with the writers themselves aren't as obvious, however. Female writers easily outnumber male writers in YA, and the major prizes in Australia (Inky Awards and CBCA) and America (Printz and Newberry) show a fairly even split between male and female winners over the last 10 years. Given the much higher number of female YA writers, these results do still suggest a bias in favour of male writers.

Gender inequality might not be as obvious in fiction for young adults. But it can have a huge impact beyond the walls of school libraries. When you step out of high school, what kind of world do you want to see reflected back at you? One with complex, authentic depictions of women, and one that offers an equal number of opportunities to female writers? Or one that reduces women to stereotypes, if it shows them at all?

## GENERAL READING QUESTIONS

- ◆ How many male characters are in the book?
- ◆ How many women are in the book?
- ◆ What gender roles do they fulfil (e.g. wife, mother, servant etc.)?
- ◆ What are the relationships between men and women like?
- ◆ Is the author male or female? Do they go by their full name, initials or a pseudonym?
- ◆ How is the book marketed (consider the cover, blurb etc.)? Is it pitched as a 'boys'/men's book' or a 'girls'/women's book'?
- ◆ Has the book been nominated/shortlisted/won any prizes?
- ◆ If love is mentioned in the book, how is it discussed?

- ◆ Is emotion displayed by the characters? Is showing emotion seen as a weakness or a strength?
- ◆ Is the book set in Australia or elsewhere?
- ◆ Is the author Australian?
- ◆ How is Australia portrayed in the book?

## APPENDIX

### The Stella Prize

The Stella Prize is a major literary award celebrating Australian women's writing. Both nonfiction and fiction books by Australian women are eligible for entry.

The inaugural Stella Prize was awarded in 2013 to Carrie Tiffany for her second novel, *Mateship with Birds*.

The winner of the 2014 Stella Prize was Clare Wright for her nonfiction book *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*.

### Why fiction and nonfiction?

The Stella Prize is committed to recognising the best books by Australian women each year, both fiction and nonfiction. Our judging terms are that the winning book be excellent, original and engaging. By raising the profile of women writers and celebrating their achievements, we hope to erode the self-perpetuating cycle of under-representation that confronts all women writers – not least nonfiction writers. We believe that the best way to achieve this is to seek out and popularise excellence in women's writing. We want the full range of women's stories and women's ideas to be valued and heard. We want women's commentary on politics and their historical research rewarded.

In recent years, the boundary between fiction and nonfiction has become more permeable. Indeed, women's writing is often distinguished by a refusal to fall into neat categories. We want to embrace this. Our decision to judge fiction and nonfiction together is informed by the tradition of Australian women writers who use both these techniques in their work: Helen Garner, Drusilla Modjeska, Anna Funder, Chloe Hooper and Anna Krien, to name just a few. One of those authors, Stella Prize Ambassador Helen Garner, says: 'I hope that the Stella Prize, with

its graceful flexibility about genre, will encourage women writers to work in the forms they feel truly at home in, instead of having to squeeze themselves into the old traditional corsets.'

## CORE VALUES

Equality  
Fairness  
Respect  
Celebration  
Inclusivity  
Diversity

## THE BOOKS

### 2014

#### Winner

*The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* by Clare Wright (Text)

#### Shortlist

*The Swan Book* by Alexis Wright (Giramondo)

*Burial Rites* by Hannah Kent (Picador)

*Night Games: Sex, Power and Sport* by Anna Krien (Black Inc.)

*The Night Guest* by Fiona McFarlane (Penguin)

*Boy, Lost: A Family Memoir* by Kristina Olsson (UQP)

#### Longlist

*Letters to George Clooney* by Debra Adelaide (Picador)

*Moving Among Strangers: Randolph Stow and My Family* by Gabrielle Carey (UQP)

*Mullumbimby* by Melissa Lucashenko (UQP)

*The Misogyny Factor* by Anne Summers (NewSouth)

*Madeleine: A Life of Madeleine St John* by Helen Trinca (Text)

*All the Birds, Singing* by Evie Wyld (Random House)

### 2013

#### Winner

*Mateship with Birds* by Carrie Tiffany (Picador)

#### Shortlist

*The Burial* by Courtney Collins (Allen & Unwin)

*Questions of Travel* by Michelle de Kretser (Allen & Unwin)

*The Sunlit Zone* by Lisa Jacobson (Five Islands Press)

*Like a House on Fire* by Cate Kennedy (Scribe)

*Sea Hearts* by Margo Lanagan (Allen & Unwin)

#### Longlist

*Floundering* by Romy Ash (Text)

*Mazin Grace* by Dylan Coleman (UQP)

*The People Smuggler* by Robin de Crespigny (Penguin)

*Sufficient Grace* by Amy Espeseth (Scribe)

*The Mind of a Thief* by Patti Miller (UQP)

*An Opening* by Stephanie Radok (Wakefield)

## STATISTICS

### Literary Prizes – Australian

Over its 57-year history, the Miles Franklin Literary Award been won only 16 times by a woman. And if we look at other Australian literary prizes, the statistics are similarly skewed, with prizes being won by women only about one-third of the time:

- ◆ the NSW Premier's Literary Award for Fiction has been won by a woman 14 out of 34 times
- ◆ the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Fiction has been won by a woman 9 out of 29 times
- ◆ the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Fiction (now defunct) was won by a woman only 5 out of 13 times

That's just for fiction too – the statistics for nonfiction are even more skewed.

### Literary Prizes – International

With the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, 16 out of 46 winners have been female, including Eleanor Catton in 2013 and Hilary Mantel in 2012. In 1991, the all-male Booker shortlist was the catalyst for the Orange Prize (established in 1996, and now called the Baileys

Women's Prize for Fiction). By 1992, only 10% of Booker shortlistees had been women.

The Nobel Prize for Literature has had only 13 female winners out of 106 awards, including Alice Munro in 2013.

### Reviews – Australian – 2013

Some statistics on the number of books by women reviewed in our major newspapers and literary journals in 2013:

	Books by Women	Books by Men
<i>Australian Financial Review</i>	20%	80%
<i>The Weekend Australian</i>	35%	65%
<i>The Monthly</i>	41%	59%
<i>The Age</i>	42%	58%
<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>	43%	57%
<i>Australian Book Review</i>	47%	53%
<i>Books+Publishing</i>	61%	39%

### Reviews – International – 2013

In *Harper's Magazine* in 2013, 72% of the books reviewed were by male authors, 28% by female authors; this was an increase of 10% from 2012, but still shows a significant disparity

In *The London Review of Books*, 72% of the books reviewed were by men, 22% by women (down from 2012)

In *The New York Review of Books*, 79% by men, 21% by women (again down from 2012)

In the *Times Literary Supplement*, 74% by men and 26% by women (on par with 2012)

#### More statistics

<http://www.vidaweb.org/the-count-2013>

### ONLY RECENTLY: A TIMELINE

**1902–3** Australian women get the vote (although Indigenous women do not receive the vote until 1962)

**1903** Suffragettes movement founded in Britain

**1914–18** World War I

**1918** British women over 30 granted the vote (full suffrage was achieved in 1928)

**1920** Susan B Anthony Amendment accepted in the United States, and women receive the right to vote

**1922** Founding of the Country Women's Association in Australia

**1933** Founding of the *Australian Women's Weekly*

**1939–42** World War II. Women finally able to enter the workforce in roles generally performed by men; this era included the formation of:  
– the Australian Women's Land Army  
– the Australian Women's Army Service

**1957** First Miles Franklin Literary Award

**1960** Mini skirts in fashion

**1961** The contraceptive pill introduced

**1963** Women began fighting to be given general admission into bars, rather than just entry into the ladies lounge

**1976** First Reclaim the Night marches held in Europe to protest violence and sexual assault against women

**1979** Margaret Thatcher elected first female British prime minister

**1984** The Deadly Awards established in Australia (not specific to women but have recognised the work of many Indigenous women writers)

**1988** Benazir Bhutto becomes the first woman elected to lead a Muslim state (Pakistan)

**1992** Orange Prize (now Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction) established

**2010** Julia Gillard sworn in as Australia's first female prime minister

## REFERENCES

### Gender, women and health

[www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/](http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/)

### History of the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction

[www.womensprizeforfiction.co.uk/about/history](http://www.womensprizeforfiction.co.uk/about/history)

### History of the Stella Prize

[www.thestellaprize.com.au/about-us/about-the-stella-prize/](http://www.thestellaprize.com.au/about-us/about-the-stella-prize/)

### History of the Miles Franklin Literary Award

[www.milesfranklin.com.au/about\\_history](http://www.milesfranklin.com.au/about_history)

### History of the Deadly Awards

[www.deadlys.com.au/about/](http://www.deadlys.com.au/about/)

### A brief history of women's rights movements

[www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/brief-history-womens-rights-movements](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/brief-history-womens-rights-movements)

### Australian women's history forum timeline

[www.womenshistory.net.au/timeline/](http://www.womenshistory.net.au/timeline/)

## Women in wartime

### Women in wartime

[www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/women-in-wartime](http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/women-in-wartime)

### Roles for women in World War II

[www.ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/australia-wwii/home-wii/roles-women-wwii](http://www.ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/australia-wwii/home-wii/roles-women-wwii)

### Women in World War II

[www.historylearningsite.co.uk/women\\_WW2.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/women_WW2.htm)

### Women at war

[www.electricpictures.com.au/documentaries/the-war-that-changed-us/](http://www.electricpictures.com.au/documentaries/the-war-that-changed-us/)

## Unconscious bias

### How unconscious bias holds us back

[www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2014/may/01/unconscious-bias-women-holding-back-work](http://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2014/may/01/unconscious-bias-women-holding-back-work)

### Not missing in action: the enduring penalty of 'being female'

[www.theconversation.com/not-missing-in-action-the-enduring-penalty-of-being-female-28503](http://www.theconversation.com/not-missing-in-action-the-enduring-penalty-of-being-female-28503)

### The myth of merit and unconscious bias

[www.theconversation.com/the-myth-of-merit-and-unconscious-bias-18876](http://www.theconversation.com/the-myth-of-merit-and-unconscious-bias-18876)

### An interview with Cordelia Fine

[www.americanscientist.org/bookshelf/pub/an-interview-with-cordelia-fine](http://www.americanscientist.org/bookshelf/pub/an-interview-with-cordelia-fine)

## Other sites of interest

### Bechdel test (women in films)

[www.bechdeltest.com](http://www.bechdeltest.com)

### Finkbeiner test (on women in science)

[www.doublexscience.org/the-finkbeiner-test/](http://www.doublexscience.org/the-finkbeiner-test/)

### The Stella Count

[www.thestellaprize.com.au/resources/the-stella-count/](http://www.thestellaprize.com.au/resources/the-stella-count/)

### A Mighty Girl

[www.amightygirl.com/blog](http://www.amightygirl.com/blog)

### VIDA (Women in Literary Arts)

[www.vidaweb.org/](http://www.vidaweb.org/)

### Pitch Bitch (designed to encourage women writers to submit their work)

[www.yeahpitchbitch.tumblr.com](http://www.yeahpitchbitch.tumblr.com)

### Feminist Frequency

<http://www.feministfrequency.com>

### Rosie Respect

<http://rosierespect.org.au>

### The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media

<http://seejane.org/education/>