THE LITTLE BIG BOOK CLUB
EMERGING INDIGENOUS WRITER AND ILLUSTRATOR PROJECT

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Background
The Little Big Book Club’s primary goal is to promote the love of and importance of reading to children from a very early age. We aim to support parents and carers in providing children with a crucial early base for lifelong literacy, success in formal schooling and improved life chances.

Since 2006, The Big Book Club Inc through The Little Big Book Club project has developed and produced a number of early childhood programs and resources.

We provide continued engagement with both families and professionals through our Monthly Selection Program. Each month we select and feature three of the best picture books available based upon our theme. The three books meet the specific needs of the following age groups: Birth – 2 years, 2 and 3 years and 4 and 5 years.

This program has been in place nationally since 2005. In that time we have noticed a shortage in the availability of quality picture books that represent Indigenous culture and books that are created by Indigenous people.

Concept
• Engage 3–6 emerging Indigenous authors and illustrators to write and illustrate the picture books.
• Engage established authors and illustrators to act as mentors to support the professional development of the emerging artists.
• To produce three quality, commercially viable, picture books suitable for children up to 5 years of age.

Funding
The Big Book Club Inc sought funding from Australia Council for the Arts to project manage the development and production of three Picture Books written and illustrated by emerging Indigenous writers and emerging Indigenous illustrators. The books will be published and distributed nationally by leading Australian publisher Allen & Unwin.

The funding we received is part of the Australia Council for the Arts OYEA (Opportunities for Young and Emerging Artists) Grants. The aims of these grants are to:
• Build skills and experience for young and emerging artists.
• Offer mentoring opportunities to enable artistic and professional skill development.
• Facilitate the dialogue amongst emerging and established artists.
• Assist emerging artists in establishing a professional career in The Arts.

The project
An Advisory Group was established that included people with a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Authors, illustrators, publishers and teachers of both Indigenous and non Indigenous background came together to brainstorm ideas for implementing the project.

LBBC developed a series of posters and flyers that advised of the project and called for submissions. Over 1000 promotional materials were sent to a variety of organisations in metropolitan, regional and remote communities across Australia.

We received more than 40 applications from emerging Indigneous writers and illustrators from each State and Territory.

From the submissions, a selection committee chose a small group of writers and illustrators to attend a Mentoring Workshop Weekend in Sydney. Over the weekend the emerging artists heard from and worked alongside some of Australia’s most highly regarded authors and illustrators, including:

Bronwyn Bancroft
Bronwyn Bancroft has spent her life making art. As a practicing artist and illustrator, she utilises many mediums in the pursuit of her work.

Bronwyn is committed to advancing the rights of Australia’s Indigenous people and the protection of artists’ rights. She has been an active participant on national committees, including the National Gallery of Australia and the National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association.

Another of Bronwyn’s passions is education. She firmly believes that education is imperative to individual development and confidence; enabling
Indigenous people to participate with equity in an often inequitable society.

Bronwyn is the author and illustrator of many children’s picture books including W Is For Wombat, Possum and Wattle, An Australian 1 2 3 of Animals, An Australian ABC of Animals and most recently Why I Love Australia which was shortlisted for the CBCA Early Childhood Book Of the Year 2011.

**Nick Bland**

Nick was born on a farm in Victoria’s Yarra Valley in 1973. He always told family and friends he was going to be a cartoonist and a writer. It wasn’t until 1996, when he stumbled into a bookshop job, that he finally found the medium that would bring those two loves together.

Untrained, he spent the next couple of years reading every picture book that hit the shelves and began honing his style as a storyteller and illustrator.

He illustrated several readers before sending A Monster Wrote Me a Letter to Scholastic Australia in 2001.

He now lives in Darwin where he has started working full time as an author illustrator. On weekends he works as a guardian for 120 aboriginal boys from around Northern Australia who are boarding in Darwin.

**Ann James**

Ann James was an art teacher and moved into designing and illustrating education publications while establishing herself as a children’s book illustrator. Ann is co-owner of Books Illustrated.

Ann continues to illustrate and write in her studio upstairs at Books Illustrated. Some of the books she has illustrated include, The Penny Pollard series; the Hannah series; The Midnight Gang; Shutting the Chooks in; Little Humpty; The Way I Love You; Lucy Goosy; Sadie & Ratz, the Audrey of the Outback series and Chester and Gil.

**Boori Monty Pryor**

Boori has recently been named one of the first Australian Children’s Laureates.

Boori Monty Pryor was born in North Queensland. His father is from the Birrigubba of the Bowen region and his mother from Yarrabah (near Cairns), a descendant of the Kungkanji and Kukuimudji. Boori has worked in film, television, modeling, sport, music and theatre-in-education. He has written several award-winning books with Meme McDonald including Maybe Tomorrow, My Girragundji, The Binna Binna Man and Njunjul the Sun. His picture book collaboration with Jan Ormerod, Shake a Leg, won the Prime Minister’s Literary Award for Children’s Fiction in 2011.

Boori’s stories are about finding strength within

**Boori Monty Pryor demonstrating how to engage your audience**

to deal with the challenges without, and his skill is to create positive visions of the future for both Indigenous and all Australians.

**Nadia Wheatley and Ken Searle**

Nadia is an award-winning author and historian whose books over some thirty years reflect a commitment to issues of Reconciliation, social justice and the conservation of the environment.

Nadia’s first book, Five Times Dizzy, was often described as the first multicultural children’s book in this country.

Ken Searle grew up around the Cooks River, in the south-west suburbs of Sydney, where he still lives. He is best known for his large paintings in oil on canvas, depicting the suburban and industrial areas of a number of Australian cities. As well, he has painted the landscapes of the Western Desert and of the southern coastline.

Nadia and Ken worked as consultants at Papunya School (Northern Territory) during the late 1990s, when the school was developing its own two-way model of education. At this time, they were privileged to experience Indigenous principles of learning in action. As part of their work, they assisted forty Anangu staff and students with the production of the Papunya School Book of Country and History, which in 2002 won the New South Wales Premier’s History for Young People Award as well as the award given by the Children’s Book Council of Australia for the best information book of the year.

**Julie Vivas**

We were absolutely delighted when Julie Vivas, upon hearing about our Project, asked if she could also attend the workshop.

Julie Vivas was born in Adelaide and moved to Melbourne and then to Sydney with her family, where she studied interior design at the National Art School. Libby Hathorn saw an exhibition of Julie’s work and suggested that Julie might illustrate
a story she had written, *The Tram to Bondi Beach*. This was Julie's debut in the world of Australian picture books. *The Tram to Bondi Beach* was Highly Commended in the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Picture Book of the Year Award of 1981.

Julie's second picture book was *Possum Magic*, a story that started life as a manuscript by Mem Fox called 'Hush the Invisible Mouse'. Since *Possum Magic*, Julie has brought her particular style to many other picture books, tackling a broad range of subjects with great skill and sensitivity. *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*, another text by Mem Fox, appeared in 1984, and Julie's own interpretation of the Christmas story, *The Nativity*, was first published in 1986.

**What Next**

We received some wonderful feedback from the emerging writers and illustrators. By the end of the weekend they had a greater appreciation of what makes a high quality picture book, and understanding of how the publishing industry works and the experience of sharing their work with some of the best in the industry. As one participant said: 'Having Ann James and Julie Vivas in the same room is like going to a Rolling Stones and Beatles joint concert.'!

We are now in the exciting stage of editing manuscripts and the hard task of choosing the best artist for each manuscript. Allen & Unwin are publishing the first picture book at the end of 2012 and the next two books during 2013.

We see this project as a unique opportunity for all involved to produce three outstanding children's picture books and hopefully it will provide encouragement and inspiration to both the Australian Book Industry and anyone who dreams of a career in picture books.