

MELBOURNE  
WRITERS  
FESTIVAL  
SCHOOLS  
4—8 MAY  
2026

[ **Melbourne  
Writers Festival** ]

We respectfully acknowledge that Melbourne Writers Festival takes place on the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation, in particular the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

## THANK YOU

Melbourne Writers Festival thanks its partners and supporters for their generous support.

### Government Partners



### Major Venue Partner



### MWF Schools Partner



### Supported by



# WELCOME TO MWF SCHOOLS

[ MWF ]

## Join us in May for an action-packed day of learning at State Library Victoria!

Our 2026 program features a remarkable lineup of authors, graphic novelists and storytellers who will guide students through a day of informative sessions.

Over the course of one captivating day, students will explore the artist's journey, partake in insightful discussions on technology and climate change, hear deeply engaging stories from diverse voices, and much more.

MWF Schools promises to enhance students' comprehension of literature and provide them with a set of tools they can carry throughout their educational journey.

Students will also have the opportunity to meet the presenters for book signings. A selection of titles will be available for purchase at the Readings pop-up bookstore on the day (card payments only).

This year, we're excited to offer our new VCE program for English, English as an Additional Language, and English Literature students studying Units 1 to 4. This program is specifically crafted in line with the Victorian curriculum to support students' VCE studies.

We look forward to welcoming your students to another unmissable year of MWF Schools!

### Dates and location

MWF Schools will be held at State Library Victoria.

### Primary Schools Program (Years 3 to 6)

- Monday 4 May
- Tuesday 5 May

### Secondary Schools Program (Years 7 to 10)

- Wednesday 6 May
- Thursday 7 May

### VCE Program (Years 11 and 12)

- Friday 8 May

### Booking

Book tickets online at [mwf.com.au/schools](http://mwf.com.au/schools) using a bank card or request to pay via invoice at the time of booking. If you have any enquiries or would like to discuss other payment options, please email [ticketing@mwf.com.au](mailto:ticketing@mwf.com.au).

### Teacher resources

Dedicated teacher resources are available to inform your lessons in the lead-up to MWF Schools. Each activity is clearly linked to the Victorian school curriculum. You can access teacher resources at [mwf.com.au/schools](http://mwf.com.au/schools).

### More information

Visit our website for frequently asked questions and more information at [mwf.com.au/schools](http://mwf.com.au/schools). You can also email our ticketing team at [ticketing@mwf.com.au](mailto:ticketing@mwf.com.au).

Disclaimer: Details in this brochure are correct at time of printing. Melbourne Writers Festival reserves the right to add, withdraw, or substitute artists, and to vary the program should the need arise.

## 4—7 MAY SCHEDULE For Primary and Secondary Schools

SESSION 1 10.00–10.45am

SESSION 2 10.45–11.30am

BREAK + BOOK SIGNINGS 11.30am–12.30pm

SESSION 3 12.30–1.15pm

SESSION 4 1.15–2.00pm

BOOK SIGNINGS 2.00–2.30pm

## ALL TICKETS

**\$35**

per student

**\$35**

per (additional) teacher\*

\*Teachers receive one complimentary ticket per 20 student tickets. When you purchase a ticket to attend MWF Schools, you are booking to attend the full day (four sessions). All tickets are exempt from GST.

## 8 MAY SCHEDULE VCE Program

[ MWF ]

SESSION 1 10:00–11:30am

BREAK + BOOK SIGNINGS 11:30–12:15pm

SESSION 2 12:15–12:50pm

SESSION 3 1:00–1:30pm

SESSION 4 1:30–2:00pm

BOOK SIGNINGS 2:00–2:30pm

## SUBSIDISED TICKETS

Thanks to the generous support of The Readings Foundation and the University of Melbourne, we are pleased to offer a limited number of fully subsidised tickets to this year's MWF Schools Program.

Ticket subsidies are available exclusively to schools in Victoria that are regional and/or have a published ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) of less than 1000.

For information on how to apply, please visit  
[mwf.com.au/schools/subsidised-tickets](http://mwf.com.au/schools/subsidised-tickets)

*The MWF Schools 2026 Primary and Secondary Program is proudly supported by The Readings Foundation.*

*The MWF Schools 2026 VCE Program is proudly supported by the Melbourne Public Humanities Initiative, Faculty of Arts, the University of Melbourne.*



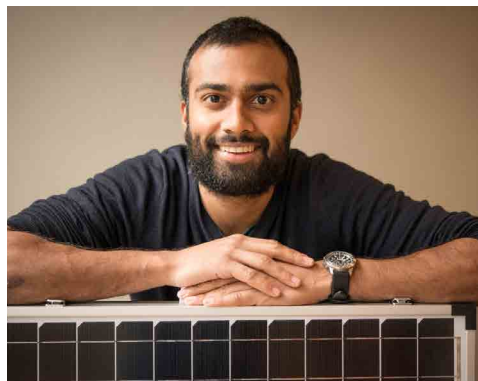
## James Foley: What's That Noise?

Join James Foley for an exciting adventure through writing and illustration! In this interactive presentation, he will share some of the books he made as a child, read from his latest story *Oh No!*, and invite students to join him for a creative challenge.

Together, you'll explore the world of strange and random sound effects known as onomatopoeia, which James will turn into a strange and random drawing. Expect laughter, creativity, and plenty of surprises along the way!

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

**Learning areas:** The Arts/ Visual Arts.  
**Capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability.  
**Foundational Skills:** Literacy.



## Dr Niraj Lal: Behind the Screens

In this eye-opening session, scientist, podcaster and author of *Behind the Screens* Dr Niraj Lal lifts the lid on our favourite apps, games and videos – and how young people can stay smart in a digital world that influences what we click, think and believe.

Lal will unpack the big questions: Why is it so hard to stop scrolling? What happens to all the data we leave behind? How can we tell what's true?

From gaming to algorithms, online privacy, AI, misinformation and more, this session gives young people the tools to understand the digital world and make better online decisions.

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

**Learning areas:** English, Technologies / Digital Technologies, Health and Physical Education, Humanities / Civics and Citizenship, The Arts / Media Arts.  
**Capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social, Ethical.



## Olivia Muscat: Finding My Voice

During this special event, blind writer, performer and activist Olivia Muscat will take students through her creative journey and her new middle-grade novel, *Annie and Maeve are Definitely Not Friends*. Discover how Muscat found her artistic voice, how her disability shapes her writing process, and how she created the book she longed for as a child.

This lively session leads participants to explore disability, representation and difference with fresh eyes and open hearts. Bringing her signature love of colour, joy and music, Muscat will encourage students to celebrate their identities and use their own experiences to fuel their creativity.

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

**Learning areas:** English, Health and Physical Education.  
**Capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social, Ethical.



## Penny Tangey: Music Camp

Everyone deserves a chance to follow their passion – even if you're not the best in the room! Join award-winning author Penny Tangey for a heartfelt look behind the scenes of her latest book *Music Camp*, including a peek at her own childhood diaries about her experiences at music camp.

Tangey will discuss why we need spaces like camps (and writers' festivals!) to come together, build communities, and create change for each other and our planet. This funny and inspiring event celebrates the power of standing strong, telling stories and facing the music.

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

**Learning areas:** English, The Arts / Music, Health and Physical Education, Humanities.  
**Capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social, Ethical.  
**Cross-curriculum priorities:** Sustainability.

The MWF Schools 2026 Primary and Secondary Program is proudly supported by The Readings Foundation.



## Karen Comer: Once Upon Tomorrow

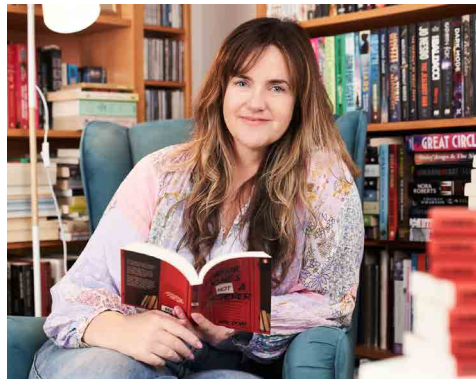
Are our paths already forged for us? How can we make our own way in a world of impossible choices? Can fairytales help us understand ourselves and the choices we make?

In this thought-provoking presentation, award-winning author Karen Comer reveals the sparks behind her expansive new verse novel *Once Upon Tomorrow*, and considers the paradoxes shaping our modern lives – when we should choose ourselves or choose others; and how to lean into nature when artificial intelligence is determined to tempt us.

Weaving together identity, family and climate, Comer encourages readers to embrace creativity in the face of evolving technology.

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

**Learning areas:** English, Humanities / Civics and Citizenship, Technology / Digital Technologies.  
**Capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical.  
**Cross-curriculum priorities:** Sustainability.



## Amy Doak: The Puzzle of Writing

How do you create a story, and how do you have fun doing so?

Award-winning YA mystery author Amy Doak (*What Have They Done to Liza McLean?*, the Eleanor Jones series) explores how the process of writing novels can be broken down into easy to enjoy stages and reveals the surprising similarities between the key elements of writing and your favourite puzzles.

From generating ideas, to outlining the story, to making your way through all of those many words, Doak shares her intriguing secrets and shows how the game of being a writer can be fantastic fun.

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

**Learning areas:** English.  
**Capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social, Ethical.



## First Dog on the Moon: Revenge of the Toxic Space Potato

Join award-winning *Guardian* cartoonist First Dog on the Moon for this creative and delightfully chaotic session. Stripped of their powers and stranded on Mars, the Indefatigable Enviro Teens must stop the sinister Baron Kartuffelpoffen from siphoning all of Earth's water. Along the way, they'll navigate a galaxy of absurd villains, unexpected allies, and interstellar challenges.

Come for the wacky intergalactic adventures, stay for the sharp environmental satire that will fire you up to protect our planet!

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

**Learning areas:** English, Humanities / Civics and Citizenship, The Arts / Visual Arts, Science.  
**Capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social, Ethical.  
**Cross-curriculum priorities:** Sustainability.



## Tigest Girma and Jasmin McGaughey: Genre, Culture and Power

Join Tigest Girma (*Immortal Dark* and *Eternal Ruin*) and Jasmin McGaughey (*Moonlight and Dust*) for a conversation about writing immersive stories and centring diverse voices. From Black vampires to illicit magic, Girma and McGaughey write unique stories that share themes of identity, belonging, and power.

In this session, they'll explore how they craft universes where culture and myth blend together, how their personal experiences have informed their world-building, the challenges and rewards of writing diverse characters in fantasy books, and why representation in fiction matters. Hear from two bold new voices in genre fiction in this special joint conversation with host Erin Wamala.

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

**Learning areas:** English, Humanities / Civics and Citizenship.  
**Capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social, Ethical, Intercultural.  
**Cross-curriculum priorities:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

The MWF Schools 2026 Primary and Secondary Program is proudly supported by The Readings Foundation.



## Tony Birch: The Ethical Imagination

With a particular focus on First Nations texts, this interactive presentation by beloved Australian author, poet and activist Tony Birch (*The White Girl, Ghost River*) will explore how lived experience and cultural background shape textual meaning. Fostering deeper engagement, this session will encourage students to develop a curious and critical approach to reading and interpreting texts by authors whose perspectives differ from their own.



## Reading and Writing Poetry with Maxine Beneba Clarke

Acclaimed poet, fiction writer and memoirist Maxine Beneba Clarke (*The Hate Race, Foreign Soil, How Decent Folk Behave, Carrying the World*) shares her approach to crafting poems, and offers tips for how students can interpret, analyse and engage with poetry on the curriculum, and cultivate a strong poetic voice of their own.



## Reading and Writing Fiction and Non-Fiction with Alice Pung

In this presentation, award-winning memoirist and novelist Alice Pung (*Unpolished Gem, Laurinda, One Hundred Days*) will discuss her creative career writing prose stories – both fictional and drawn from her own life. Pung will guide students on how to engage with fiction and non-fiction texts on the curriculum and share inspiration about how to generate ideas and get them onto the page.



## Ask Me Anything with Maxine Beneba Clarke and Alice Pung

VCE Day concludes with a no-holds-barred Ask Me Anything session bringing together the afternoon's keynote speakers, Maxine Beneba Clarke and Alice Pung. Students will have the rare opportunity to speak directly with both writers and ask them any burning questions about their books, respective processes and extraordinary creative careers.

### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS – All VCE Program Events

Subject areas: English and English as an Additional Language, Literature.

Areas of Study: Reading and Exploring Texts, Crafting Texts, Reading and Responding to Texts, Creating Texts (English and EAL), Reading Practices, Exploration of Literary Movements and Genres, Voices of Country,

The Text in its Context, Developing Interpretations, Creative Responses to Texts, Close Analysis of Texts (Literature).

The MWF Schools 2026 VCE Program is proudly supported by the Melbourne Public Humanities Initiative, Faculty of Arts, the University of Melbourne.

### SPECIAL EVENT

## OutLoud Slam Final

Tuesday 5 May 12.30–2.00pm

The Wheeler Centre

Hosted by Emilie Zoey Baker, the OutLoud Slam is a vibrant celebration of young voices and original storytelling. Secondary students from across Victoria will take the stage to compete live in front of a panel of esteemed judges.

**Free, bookings required.**

*In partnership with Australian Poetry and The Wheeler Centre*



# ARTISTS

## PRIMARY SCHOOLS PROGRAM

### James Foley

James Foley makes children's books for children who read books. If you're a child and you're eating his books, you're doing it wrong. He is the author and illustrator of many picture books and graphic novels, including *Stellarphant*, *Bigfoot vs Yeti: A Love Story*, *Happy Barry Capybara*, *Secret Agent Mole*, *Brobot* and *Chickensaurus*. A bunch of his books have won awards from the Children's Book Council of Australia and the International Youth Library; more importantly they also have some pretty funny fart jokes in them. He lives near Fremantle/Walyalup in Western Australia with his wife Renae Hayward (also an author), their 2 kids (wannabe authors), and a labrador called Frankie (not an author). He comes from a long line of queuing enthusiasts.

### Dr Niraj Lal

Dr Niraj (Nij) Lal is an ANU Visiting Fellow and host of the ABC Kids podcast *Imagine This*. He has a PhD in physics from the University of Cambridge and has appeared on *Play School*, *Catalyst*, and heaps more. His awards include the Eureka Prize for Promoting Understanding of Science and the Royal Societies of Australia and NZ Piasecki Prize for Outstanding Writing on Social Change. His latest book is *Behind the Screens*.

### Olivia Muscat

Olivia Muscat is a totally blind writer, actor, performer and disability activist. She lives in Naarm/Melbourne (Wurundjeri Country), Australia with her guide dog, Jemima. Muscat uses her love for colour, joy and music to tell stories that make people want to examine their attitudes towards disabled people and difference in general. When she's not writing, Muscat teaches children and occasionally performs on stage. Her latest book, *Annie and Maeve are Definitely Not Friends*, will be out in May 2026.

### Penny Tangey

Penny Tangey writes humorous books for young people. Her middle-grade novel *As Fast As I Can* won the Readings Children's Book Prize and the Queensland Literary Awards Children's Book Award. Her most recent book, *Music Camp*, is about kids finding camaraderie through music in the climate crisis. Tangey has worked as a researcher for television quiz shows *Hard Quiz* and *The Chase*, but she's still terrible at trivia. She now works as a librarian.

## SECONDARY SCHOOLS PROGRAM

### Karen Comer

Karen Comer is a verse novelist and freelance editor. *Grace Notes* won the 2024 CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers, and was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. *Sunshine on Vinegar Street* won the Queensland Literary Awards for the Children's Book Award and was a 2024 CBCA Notable for Younger Readers. Her third book, *Once Upon Tomorrow*, is out in May.

### Amy Doak

Amy Doak writes thrilling mystery novels for teens that are filled with action, adventure, humour and heart. Her latest novel, *What Have They Done To Liza McLean?*, combines dark academia with speculative secrecy and, as with her best-selling, award-winning Eleanor Jones series, offers fast-paced and fun crime fiction that encourages readers to enjoy 'just one more chapter'. Doak lives in Central Victoria with her husband, two teens, and a very grumpy cat.

### Tigest Girma

Tigest Girma is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Immortal Dark* and *Eternal Ruin*. After graduating with a Bachelor of Education, she splits her time between writing and teaching. Passionate about exploring East African characters and myths, her work weaves Black stories with the dark and fantastical. In her free time, she can be found rewatching her comfort shows where the villain gets the girl. Originally from Ethiopia, she is now based in Melbourne.

### Andrew Marlton AKA

#### First Dog on the Moon

Walkley award-winning editorial cartoonist for *The Guardian*, National Treasure and bestselling author *First Dog on the Moon*, has written and/or illustrated numerous books. *First Dog's* latest book is *Revenge of the Toxic Space Potato* – unless you count the one with Annabel Crabb about the democracy prawn. *First Dog* lives at the First Dog On The Moon Institute in Southern Tasmania among the pademelons and silver wattles.

### Jasmin McGaughey

Jasmin McGaughey is a Torres Strait Islander and African American writer working at *Books+Publishing*. She is the author of *Moonlight and Dust* and Ash Barty's *Little Ash* series (illustrated by Jade Goodwin). In 2023, she won a Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award. She is a blackxwrite! editor alum, and has written for *Overland*, *Kill Your Darlings*, *SBS Voices* and *Griffith Review* and recently co-edited *Words to Sing the World Alive*.

## VCE PROGRAM

### Tony Birch

Tony Birch is an activist, historian, essayist, and the award-winning author of novels, short story collections and books of poetry, including *Women & Children*, *The White Girl*, *Blood*, *Common People*, *Shadowboxing*, *Ghost River*, and *Dark as Last Night*. In 2017 he was awarded the Patrick White Literary Award. *Pictures of You: Collected Stories* is his latest book.

### Maxine Beneba Clarke

Maxine Beneba Clarke is the author of *Foreign Soil*, *The Hate Race*, *When We Say Black Lives Matter*, and *The Patchwork Bike*. Her poetry collections include *Beautiful Changelings*, *Carrying the World*, *How Decent Folk Behave*, *It's the Sound of the Thing*, *100 new poems for young people*, and *Stuff I'm (NOT) Sorry For: 99 more poems for young people*. Clarke was the inaugural Peter Steele Poet in Residence at the University of Melbourne (2023–2025).

### Alice Pung

Alice Pung OAM is the award-winning author of the memoirs *Unpolished Gem* and *Her Father's Daughter*, the essay collection *Close to Home*, and the novel *Laurinda*, as well as the editor of the anthologies *Growing Up Asian in Australia* and *My First Lesson*. Her most recent novel, *One Hundred Days*, was shortlisted for the 2022 Miles Franklin Award. Pung was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for services to literature in 2022.

## MWF SCHOOLS HOSTS

### Karys McEwen

Karys McEwen is a school librarian, author, and education advisor for the Melbourne Writers Festival. She is passionate about the role libraries and books can play in the wellbeing of young people, and she writes the Substack newsletter 'I Read A Lot'. She is the author of two middle grade novels, *All the Little Tricky Things* and *The Paperbark Tree Committee*.

### Bec Kavanagh

Bec Kavanagh is a writer, literary critic and academic living in Naarm whose work examines the representation of women's bodies in literature. Kavanagh's work can be found in *The Guardian*, *Overland*, *The Big Issue* and the anthology *Resilience*. Kavanagh has worked for the Stella Prize, The Wheeler Centre, Faber Academy and Australia Reads. She is currently Senior Tutor in Creative Writing and Publishing at the University of Melbourne.