

Dear Editor

Teachers may be surprised to learn that many New Zealand writers have teaching backgrounds and know which books children will enjoy, what they find interesting and how the books relate to the school curriculum. Some authors come from interesting backgrounds such as librarians, journalists, scientists and artists – and they bring with them their wealth of knowledge from those fields.

Quite a few of our excellent New Zealand books come with lesson plans giving teachers the opportunities to use them in their reading, language, social studies, science or health curriculum areas. You can find them on the publishers' websites or on the author's own webpage.

In 2008, approximately one hundred books written by New Zealand authors were published but how many of those new books are in your schools? The majority of the books in your library or resource rooms would most likely come from overseas.

Paid librarians have time to pore over publishers' brochures when choosing books for their school, but today many schools only have volunteers or teachers trying to manage the library on top of their classroom responsibilities. Teachers in charge of both curriculum areas and the purse strings often only have contact with educational publishers and unfortunately; many of these publishers don't even publish New Zealand books. Sadly, many classroom teachers have not kept up to date with New Zealand literature because of their busy schedules.

As a writer and mother I have an invested interest in promoting New Zealand books. It is such a waste of talent and resources when excellent fiction and non-fiction books written by our authors are pulped because the publishers couldn't sell them.

Publishers are now reducing both the quantity of books written by New Zealand authors and the number of copies they print. Just last week I had a meeting with my editor and I asked her what she was publishing in 2009. She told me they were really struggling to sell New Zealand non-fiction and they weren't going to print a well-known chapter book series for children targeting ages 7-9 years any more because schools weren't buying them. They had expected schools to buy class sets and had written lesson plans to go with them.

The editor said she was looking for picture books but wanted authors to think international themes rather than New Zealand flavour. What a travesty if New Zealand stories were no longer printed. When I was at school most books were written overseas. It would be awful if we reverted back to that and that was all our children could read. It means a lot to children to read books with New Zealand place names, animals and sayings.

So how do we make it easy for teachers, heads of curriculum areas and librarians (unpaid or paid) to find relevant books by New Zealand authors?

Your school could subscribe to the following magazines and keep them in the staff room so all teachers can peruse them:

'Around the Bookshops' www.marigold.co.nz;

'Magpie Magazine' order from Jabberwocky Bookshop www.jabberwocky.co.nz,

'The Talespinner' find it on: www.education.canterbury.ac.nz

You could join up with the New Zealand Book Council www.bookcouncil.org.nz and get their 'Booknotes' plus if you join their 'Writers in School' scheme you get a monthly ezine about what is happening in New Zealand literature as well as getting a free half day visit from a New Zealand author. Also, join up with Storylines (aka Children's Literature Foundation of NZ) www.storylines.org.nz and order their 'What's the Story' newsletter. Then bring your class to the Storylines Festival in June of each year – and meet the authors in person.

You could read a weekly blog:
<http://kidsbooksnz.blogspot.com> (Five teachers/librarians review New Zealand books). Encourage your students to submit reviews of their own in the comments.

Look up websites:
www.story-go-round.net.nz (Lorraine Orman reviews her favourite NZ and international books)

Download free lesson plans for New Zealand books from these publishing houses:
www.penguin.co.nz
www.harpercollins.co.nz
www.randomhouse.co.nz
www.scholastic.co.nz

From tales of spies, sabotage and secrets; to working dogs, ponies, dinosaurs, dragons and beasts; to climbing mountains, riding skateboards, eating huhu grubs; to understanding art, writing, atoms; to learning about boating skills, organic gardening, nutrition; to really big stuff and fast stuff, fire engines, road works; to scary nanas, pirates and dragons – New Zealand authors have written them specially for you to read to, with and by children.

Maria Gill reviews New Zealand children's books on <http://kidsbooksnz.blogspot.com>, is an ex teacher (so she really does know how busy teachers get) and has authored four+ books see www.mariagill.co.nz