PIOUS TALES AND DIRTY STORIES

The Young Australians Best Book Award (YABBA)

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According to his powers each may give;
Only on varied diet can we live.
The pious fable and the dirty story
Share in the total literary glory.

(W. H. Auden)

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DECLARATION

I Susan Gaye La Marca declare that the work contained herein is not knowingly plagiarised. The material is original and has not presented for another degree or at another institution for examination or credit.
ABBREVIATIONS

BILBY - Books I Love Best Yearly (Queensland)

CBC - Children's Book Council

COOL - Canberra's Own Outstanding List (Australian Capital Territory)

CROW - Children Rate Outstanding Writers and Illustrators (South Australia)

KOALA - Kids Own Australian Literature Award (New South Wales)

KROC - Kids Reading Oz Choice (Northern Territory)

YABBA - Young Australians Best Book Award (Victoria)

WAYBRA - West Australian Young Readers' Book Award (West Australia)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge a great debt to the YABBA council, in particular its founding members for having the foresight to save the YABBA voting forms and deposit them with the University for the purpose of future analysis.

I am indebted to Pam Macintyre for her excellent advice, supervision and support throughout the period of my research.

And also, most importantly, to my family and friends for their support and encouragement.
ABSTRACT

A study of the older readers' section of Young Australians Best Book Award (YABBA) from 1986 to 1991, based on analysis of 21,351 voting forms from this period. Through analysis of the data from these voting forms, ranking authors and titles, comparing gender preferences, the source of the book voted for, school type and school location were all compiled into graphs and tables. Appropriate comparisons have been made between variables across the six year period, to give some idea of the voting population involved in the older readers' section of YABBA and their preferences and motivations. A follow up survey of voters and YABBA organisers in 1992 attempted to further enhance this data by collecting information on voter preferences, opinions and possible influences on the voting process.

The study attempts to place YABBA in the context of the wider children's literature community and discuss briefly its historical development with reference to other children's choice awards, their strengths and weaknesses. A relevant discussion on popularity versus literary merit is related to the ongoing discussion of YABBA in comparison to the Children's Book Council awards.

Later chapters include a discussion of the most popular YABBA titles (seven highest rating titles) with particular emphasis given to YABBA's two most popular authors - Paul Jennings and Robin Klein. Humour is an important factor in the popularity of many YABBA titles and this is discussed as are developments since 1991 and the long-term future of YABBA.
INTRODUCTION

What do children like to read and why? And what do adults think they should be reading? Discussion and debate surrounds the whole issue of what is best for our children to read; allowing them their own choices does not always please everyone. YABBA, the Young Australians Best Book Award, is a measure of what is most popular with young readers and in this respect it can give us access to data that can help us to pose and answer, many questions about what young people are reading.

This study is an attempt to shed some light on the place of children's choice awards, such as YABBA, within the realm of children's literature, with particular emphasis on the Older Readers' section of YABBA from 1986 to 1991. The major part of the study is an analysis and presentation of statistics based on the voting information for that six year period. (Section Two) Through these statistics, and the analysis of a small follow up survey of voters (Section Three) I hope to show something of the reading patterns of young readers, their preferences and what factors may affect these preferences.

Within the framework of this analysis I have also attempted to place the statistical analysis in the context of the wider literary community and the debates and discussions that abound regarding the nature of children's choice awards in general. (Section One) YABBA is one of many such awards that have sprung up in the last few decades as a response to the changing view of children and their relationship with what they read. The emergence of these
awards is also in line with major changes in society as to how we treat our children and the role that adults play in their lives. As more attention is paid to the opinions of children, it was felt by some within the children's literature community that an award should be instigated that enabled children to have a voice about what they thought were the best books.

Much of the argument surrounding children and their relationship with what they read is dependent on whether one sees young readers as capable critics. This is an integral question when discussing the emergence of children's choice awards and their future in the world of literature. I have endeavoured to look at this issue in relation to YABBA, and to also consider whether an award for popularity, such as YABBA, is in anyway comparable with judgements passed on literary merit. (Section Four - Chapter Eleven). I have endeavoured to discuss YABBA's most popular authors and their role (Section Five), and analyse the top seven YABBA titles (Section Four - Chapter Ten) in an attempt to discover why they are so popular.

A study such as this, primarily involved with analysis of such a large data base - over 21,000 voting forms from 1986 to 1991, throws up many points of great interest to the children's literature community. Ultimately though it will create more questions and information for dispersion than it can ever hope to answer.
SECTION ONE

CHAPTER ONE - The baby and the bath water

"Children's literature" has always been something of a misnomer. Writing, selection and publishing are, after all, almost inevitably tasks undertaken by an adult "literary-industrial complex". (Haigh, 1991, p. 1)

A true literary world for children was not created until the society of the 1700's began to see childhood as a separate stage of development. John Rowe Townsend (1965, p.28) sees the beginnings of the development of work for children as: "connected not only with new ways of thought but also with the rise and growing refinement of the middle classes." He goes on to say:

Children were coming into their own; ceasing to be dressed like little adults, calling their parents 'Papa' and 'Mamma', and leading more sheltered and perhaps more innocent lives. (Townsend, 1965, p. 28)

Until this time children were not catered for as a distinct developmental stage, they were seen as mini-adults with no peculiarly child-like characteristics. Children read what they could. Novels such as Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719), and The Swiss family Robinson (1812) came to be associated with children, yet they began their lives as adult works.
The early material for children, when it did begin to appear, was chiefly of a didactic nature, promoting well-mannered behaviour and religious adherence. Carpenter (1985) said:

The greater number of children's books published in England between the 1740's and the 1820's were sternly moral, using simple stories to convey whatever ethical message was then in fashion (p.1).

Children, once they were recognised, were considered inferior, in need of education and of guidance by their betters. Leeson (1985a, p. 104) describes their condition as one of: "segregation, dependence and protection".

The children were vessels to be filled, and played no part in the production, or the criticism, of books written for them. This is not to suggest that books for children were given any consideration as noteworthy pieces of literature, as this was not the case for some time. Leeson, (1985a, p. 104) in a discussion of the attitude of this period has said:

How can it be worthwhile or valuable for mature adults to concern themselves with a literature devoted to the inferior and immature?

The domain of children's literature was deemed unimportant and unworthy of close attention by serious literary critics until well into the twentieth century.

When childhood, as a developmental stage, began to be taken more seriously, so too did literary material for this age group begin to be
seen as more acceptable. With the Golden Age of Children's Literature at the end of the nineteenth century, and the proliferation of new, exciting material for children, children's literature, as an area of study, became more acceptable.

It took only a short time for analysis to become serious and literary, possibly as a reaction to the perception that criticism and analysis of children's material was work of lower standing. This zeal to take children's literature "seriously" came to a head in the 1950's. Leeson (1985a, p. 105) describes the attitude of critics towards books during this period as: "The bath water was to be kept clean by throwing out the baby."

The relationship between the child reader and the book was not seen as a valuable or credible connection, in fact, it was felt necessary by some to divorce the two in order to maintain the purity essential for any analysis. This was an attempt to give credence and a greater literary standing to the field of children's literature. Critics such as Brian Alderson and Peter Hunt both argued that the child was irrelevant to any serious critical discussion of children's literature. (Leeson 1985a)

Peter Hunt (1974) has said:

Whatever critical theory we produce for children's literature, it will have little or nothing to do with children. Thus we must say Book X is literature (as opposed to reading matter) or Book Y is good literature (as opposed to not so good)
regardless of whether children actually read it, or like it, or buy it. (p. 119)

Leeson claims that it is with such arguments about the irrelevance of children to the field of the literary criticism that there came to be a "separation of popularity from literary merit" (Leeson, 1985a, p. 107.) Literary standards, ideas of excellence in children's writing, were to be kept the sole domain of the literary critic or academic. Books that were overtly popular, many even holding a somewhat avid cult following among young readers, were to be seen as second class - popular but not quality literature of merit.

It is out of the reaction to this viewpoint that the reader response approach to literary criticism, and the reader's choice book award phenomena were born. As innovations, they are related responses to the changing face of literary criticism and the subsequent role of the reader. A number of critics began to argue for the place of the child and their opinions in the whole process of reading. Children's responses were being seen as valuable, their opinions and criticisms as valid.

'The reader becomes the book' - yes; but the book only comes into being as the reader's reading interacts with the writer's writing. Perversely, in schools, and elsewhere, we often discuss books as though they only had writers. (Fry 1985, p. 71)

The study in schools of set texts has often been blamed for stifling any spontaneous enjoyment in reading that exists in students. The emphasis on studying the author in detail, and dissecting the book, in an effort to understand all of its inner workings, can often
destroy any fun to be had from reading itself. If we are to rekindle the joy that can be had from reading a good book in the classroom environment, greater emphasis must be placed upon readers themselves, their responses, and their interpretations and views. Thomson (1987) notes that this view was notably expressed by Wolfgang Iser in his account of the reading process:

(Reception theory) .... Literature is not an object but an experience, and readers are not 'consumers' but active performers who bring texts to life in their minds. (p. 112)

We must have the strength to trust our students' responses, and to enable them to become interactive with the texts we present to them. All readers can be credible critics within their own milieu.

The reader's interaction with the book has been recognised in the last few decades by many critics as an important connection that needs to be studied and understood. The readers' responses to what they read, and their ability to effectively appreciate, and constructively criticise, has gained value amongst many of those who work with children and books. Evans (1987, p. 37), in an article discussing the changes that have come about in the field of literary criticism, suggests that the "more recent critics...have been concerned less with the text and more with the reader." Readers opinions are being sought and listened to. Chambers (1985) has said;

If there is deep interest in a subject, and the facilities are provided for its expression, children are, it seems to us self-
Leeson (1985b) is also enthusiastic on the role of the child in the world of criticism:

I see little future for the academic critic making an exhaustive study of angst in the writings of William Mayne, while I see an ever expanding future of the librarian, the teacher, the parent, above all, the child as critics. (p. 13)

Both Leeson and Chambers talk of critics, does this mean we expect our students, or YABBA voters, to become experts in the practice of textual criticism in the academic sense? Thomson (1987) describes how the reader response approach to literary criticism is concerned with creating a critic who is concerned with the book in relation to themselves.

Contemporary reader-response literary criticism tells us that literature should be conceived as an activity, an experience rather than as an object of study; and reading and responding to literature should be conceived of as processes of making and sharing meanings, as ways of exploring and understanding what it means to live, as well as ways of understanding one's own and authors' meaning-making processes. (p. 13)

Probst (1988), in a study on the teaching of literature has said:

Literature, in other words, is written for readers. That does not mean that specialists cannot study it, but if they neglect to consider the fact that they are not the primary or intended audience, they stray from center. (p. 7)
The child reader as a critic, or commentator, on what they have read, has a right to a response; the message, or experience to be found within a book is for them to discover in their own way. Each reader brings a different background and ideas to their reading and this creates the possibility of many varied interpretations of the one text. Probst (1988) argues that:

Students read literature to know themselves, and - insofar as they each are a composite of their ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions - to create themselves, for reading will enable them to refine and sharpen their conceptions of the world and the people in it. (p. 5)

In doing so we each take from any given text what we need at the time, those truths or ideas that we read and can assimilate and accept as our own. The reading of a novel, seen in this light, can be a very personal and individual experience that is different for each reader who encounters the book. Each reader's responses or criticisms are valid, be they child or adult. It was views such as these that nurtured an environment conducive to the growth of the children's choice awards - they blossomed.

Reader's Choice Awards have had a relatively short, yet vibrant history. Initially a peculiarly American phenomenon, the first award was the Pacific Northwest Library Association's Young Reader's Choice Award, first given in 1940. For many years this award carried the flag, being joined by only a handful of awards during the next few decades until the great influx began in the 1970's and 1980's.
Interest in Reader's Choice Awards was not great during the early period. A 1969 article titled "Children's book awards - How and Why?" (Wighton 1969), outlined a number of different award formats from seven countries. Almost no space is given to Reader's Choice Awards. In a run down of the American Award scene, Rosemary Wighton failed to mention Reader's Choice Awards at all, despite the fact that there were some half a dozen in existence at the time the article appeared. Wighton did note that France has an award with an interesting difference - "the jury is composed of children." (p. 174). At this point in history, in the somewhat sedate world of Children's Literature, Reader's Choice Awards held little credence.

Adult participation in these awards was, and continues to be, influential, most awards being sponsored by Library Associations or Colleges, and enabling adult input at various stages. In most cases, a committee of adult organizers was largely responsible for compiling the initial short lists from which the children then voted.

All of the awards, both past and present, share several common stated aims and objectives. Put broadly these are:

To give children a voice in an area often inaccessible to them.

To encourage reading for pleasure.

To bring a variety of titles to the attention of the reading public.

To encourage the use of library facilities.
To recognise quality fiction of literary merit written specifically for children.
To recognise popular fiction written specifically for children.
To recognise the efforts and expertise of children's authors.

These aims appear again and again in the outlines for each award, the only differences being the order in which they are ranked and the emphasis given to each point. In essence then, the awards all share common ground.

The Reader's Choice Awards phenomena continued to grow steadily until there was an enormous increase in interest and participation during the 1980's. As Kathy Latrobe and Carol Casey (1990) have observed:

Interest in state sponsored Reader's Choice Awards was never stronger than at the close of the 1980's, a decade that produced more state-organised children's and young adult Reader's Choice Awards than the previous three decades combined. (p. 227)

Latrobe and Casey (1990) go on to say:

Approximately three fifths of all state-sponsored children's and young adult Reader's Choice Awards were developed or reorganised in the 1980's. Reader's Choice awards were unstoppable. (p. 227)
Little changed in the basic structure of the Reader's Choice Awards as a whole - they largely remained adult influenced and controlled by sponsor groups. During the eighties there was an increase in the provision of awards for the young adult market, and a tighter restructuring of existing awards to allow for a more specific targeting of particular age groups for each award.

Many of the individual awards also experienced a growth spurt during the eighties. The Iowa Children's Choice Award recorded 5,427 votes in 1985, and a phenomenal jump to 39,845 votes only two years later in 1987 (Latrobe & Casey 1990, p.228). Interest and participation in the awards grew - they prospered and multiplied across the North American continent.

It was out of this inspiring, busy environment in the United States that the first Australian Readers' Choice Award was born - WAYBRA. Begun in 1980, it was based on the American state of Georgia's Readers' Choice Award format, somewhat refined though to suit new guidelines. The major changes included a lower profile for the adult organising committee and a broader reading list for children to choose from. Further, a rating system was instituted so that voters could give a clear indication about how good they thought the book was, thus exercising critical discrimination beyond a mere first-past-the-post vote. It was also decided that, with WAYBRA, the children must read the books they vote for, whereas in most American awards they may have had the book read to them. The WAYBRA organising group endeavoured to create an award which was both credible in its counting procedures
and also encouraging of the critical assessment of material by the participants.

In celebration of WAYBRA Tobin (1986a) has said:

An outstanding feature of the WAYBRA is its high level of reader participation, which is greater than that of many American Children's Choice Awards. The Western Australian award is truly child centred, from the first stage where nominations are solicited from the readers themselves, to the final stage of the presentation ceremony. (p. 98)

WAYBRA is certainly a great deal more child centred than most American awards, but it is an adult selection panel that draws up the final voting list of fifty titles from those books nominated by children. This is explained as being necessary to: "achieve the best selection from the child-nominated books that combine both literary merit and potential reader appeal." (Tobin 1986a, p.98). Subjective adult judgement is, therefore, intentional on the part of the adult selection panel.

WAYBRA has also enjoyed phenomenal growth in a very short period of time - paralleling the American boom. In 1983, 17,769 votes were recorded, 28,243 votes in 1984, and an amazing jump to 48,458 votes for WAYBRA in 1985. (Tobin 1986a, p. 99). WAYBRA has been incredibly successful in bringing to the attention of the Children's Literature community in Australia an opinion that previously went largely unnoticed - what children would choose as the award winners if they had a voice.
opinion that previously went largely unnoticed - what children would choose as the award winners if they had a voice.

Following on the heels of WAYBRA was the Victorian version of a Children's or Readers' Choice Award - YABBA, appearing in 1986. The Young Australians Best Book Award endeavoured to open up Readers' Choice Awards to the reader even further, ensuring that at all stages of the selection process it was the voters who made the decisions. This has been achieved through nominations being received from the reading public, tallied, and then ranked strictly according to the number of nominations each title has received. The top ten or so books then become the section voting list for that year. Votes are then called for and counted. Once again, a first-past-the-post system decides the eventual winner. (This was the system of voting from 1986 to 1991, 1992 has seen a new era for YABBA, with a somewhat simplified one-step voting process - no nominations were called for.)

The convenor of the YABBA council, Beatrice Fincher, (1987, p. 25) has said: "The key element in YABBA is the provision of the opportunity for young Victorian readers to have their opinions of their reading heard." YABBA, in its simple, straightforward format, with the absence of direct adult input in voting, certainly achieves this aim in a way many other awards have failed to.

YABBA differs from most other awards in one of its main aims or objectives of the organisation, which reads: "(c) to develop an awareness and appreciation of Australian children's fiction." (Fincher 1987, p.25). This stipulation of exclusively Australian
material sets YABBA apart and makes for vastly different voting lists, promotions, etc., in comparison with WAYBRA. It is interesting to note that the only British Reader's Choice Award to date - the Children's Book Award, begun in 1988, considers only British Books published in the last five years.

WAYBRA has found that by leaving the award open to fiction from elsewhere, Australian material has been virtually ignored. Tobin (1987a) noted:

A less heartening trend in the rating results is the persistently low ranking of most Australian authors. Very few have gained a place in the five top ranking books. (p. 99)

Tobin goes on to outline those authors who have achieved recognition in WAYBRA. Most interesting is the fact that Robin Klein and Paul Jennings, by far the most popular authors in YABBA do not receive a mention amongst the most popular Australian authors in WAYBRA. This is perhaps an indication of the popularity of these two authors in Victoria, a fact that may have been encouraged by their continued success in the YABBA voting. This appears to be a self-perpetuating occurrence. The continuing appearance of overseas material at the top of the WAYBRA voting lists is a testament to the successful promotion and broad exposure many of these authors enjoy. It is hoped that awards such as YABBA, which help promote our own Australian authors, may help to redress this imbalance.

Since the establishment of WAYBRA and YABBA, every other state and territory in Australia has followed with a form of
appears Australia may be as fertile a breeding ground for children's choice awards as America.
CHAPTER TWO - Power to the People

"....everyone is born with a critical faculty which we must then learn how to use with consciously ordered attention."

(Chambers, 1985, p. 148 -9)

Children's choice awards have enabled young readers to voice an opinion which would otherwise go unheard. This is one of their greatest strengths as an increase in the diversity of opinion available to the reading community can only serve to foster and promote lively discussion. The addition of young readers' opinions to the melting pot of debate will broaden our knowledge of their reading habits, likes and dislikes, and, ultimately, aid our ability to serve them as a reading community. YABBA's beginnings are described in an article by its founder, Beatrice Fincher (1987):

The interest generated through activities during children's book weeks and the discussion which regularly followed the awards made by the Children's Book Council had created a climate ready for the introduction of a children's choice book award, to compliment the awards already existing. (p. 25)

Despite continued comparison between the awards, it is openly stated that YABBA is meant to compliment pre-existing awards. It does this well by adding an extra dimension - a knowledge of the children's opinions.

In another article entitled "YABBA: the children's choice" Fincher (1986, p. 107) has stated: "The key element in YABBA is the
provision of the opportunity for young Victorian readers to have their opinions of their reading heard." With approximately 21,000 votes in the older readers section from 1986 to 1991, the YABBA council can certainly claim to have opened up this opportunity to many young readers. The viewpoint of young readers should be seen as valid, and as such valued along with the opinions of others - teachers, librarians, parents, and booksellers. The child is, after all, the end user, the target audience - we cannot always presume to know their minds. Differing literary criteria, experiences, and interests mean that all readers, be they adult or child, will not always agree on the positive and negative merits of a particular title. This does not, of course, mean that the child's opinion is any less heartfelt or considered.

YABBA generates an interest in fiction that can be difficult to foster within the traditional award structure of the Australian Children's Book Council and its overseas counterparts. Children, whose favourite book may be overlooked for commendation by the traditional mainstream, are given a chance to vote for their choice through YABBA, and to further influence the process by encouraging their peers to vote as well. This voting process, if it takes place within an environment that encourages healthy debate over the positive merits and shortfalls of all types of fiction, may be the beginning of a lifelong critical interest in reading. Awards such as YABBA open up opportunities, encouraging positive participation, and it is hoped, stimulate further interaction with fiction of all kinds. As was said in the editorial of Primary Education (1987)
Because everyone responds to books and other works of art in different ways, there will always be disagreements when awards are made (p. 4).

We should always expect and encourage discussion and debate. Too often the awards with greater adult input lend themselves to vigorous, negative debate focusing on literary merit, doing little to enthuse the reader to pursue these books. This critical literary debate is most often of interest to adults working in the field of children's literature. Margaret Aitken (1993) in *The Age* review of the 1993 CBC awards said:

That a book has won an award for "literary merit" may cut no ice with children, but often influences the perceptions of adults who buy and recommend books for children, leading to the inevitable privileging of some titles and the possible disappearances of others. (p. 7)

It is YABBA, with its emphasis on fun and participation, that can often "cut more ice" with young readers.

It has been noted that YABBA, and other similar children's choice awards world-wide, continue to come up with "popular" novels at the top of their lists despite what adults have chosen or recommended that particular year.

Bauer in the article "*Best of both worlds*" (1981) noted that:

As surely as the earth rotates around the sun there will be discussions or the various aspects of children's book awards. The two distinct categories represent two worlds. The adult-selected awards signify the world of literary judgement
of professionals, the readers-choice awards that of popularity with children. (p. 53)

Authors with an almost fanatical cult-following feature heavily in the results of all children's choice awards. Robin Klein and Paul Jennings command the vast majority of YABBA votes in the older readers section, (11,511 votes between them), some 53.9% of the total vote for the period from 1986 to 1991.

YABBA is an award for Australian children's fiction only and, in this respect, it differs from its main Australian counterpart WAYBRA. Consequently, YABBA has significantly different results and a divergent impact on the child reading community. This constraint compels children to identify specifically Australian books amongst those that they read. Many are not aware of where authors come from, and may be pleasantly surprised to find that some of their favourite authors live on their very doorstep. To other children, encouraged to participate in YABBA, reading Australian authors for the first time can open up a new and otherwise undiscovered world. Often, our young readers are beset by advertising encouraging American material and trends in reading taste, and Children's Book Council promotions can seem remote, leaving YABBA to carry the flag for Australian material in a way that can be understood by children and which encourages their participation.

YABBA has been accepted by many teachers and librarians as a tool for the further promotion of Australian material in particular, and reading in general. Promoting the critical evaluation of each
year's short-listed books and the participation in the voting process has become an integral part of many library and reading programs throughout Victoria. One obvious advantage, given that an award such as YABBA encourages and thrives on participation and enthusiastic involvement, is that it is an event that many facets of the children's book community can become involved in. The more traditional, adult-judged awards do not lend themselves to such active participation, they are the domain of a select few, with the majority of the community reading the results in the newspaper. As part of a structured reading promotion program YABBA works well - it encourages reading for fun, as well as for critical evaluation.

The merits of YABBA are many and varied - it has become many things to many different members of the reading public. During its brief history, it has given voice to opinions that would have otherwise gone unheard, and, in so doing, it has created and fuelled discussion and debate about children's book awards - the popularity race as opposed to selection on literary grounds alone. YABBA has helped increase reader awareness of Australian authors, some of whom have held little standing within the traditional framework of other awards. YABBA encourages participation and, in so doing, has enabled libraries and their reading communities to become involved in making considered choices, and in voicing these opinions to the wider community in what must be ultimately to everyone's benefit.
"Participation in YABBA is meant to be joyous..."

(Fincher, 1987, p. 25)

As an award that may be seen as a measure of a work's critical worth in the world of literature for the young, YABBA may hold little credence amongst many of those qualified to judge. YABBA can be seen to be a popularity poll, merely measuring which author, or work, is the most popular in a given year with the readers - not which book is the "best". Whether a pure measure of a book's popularity is a bad thing, though, is debatable. Possibly, it is not that YABBA is any less important or valuable than the more structured literary awards in what it measures and conveys. More appropriately, it is just a different measure, offering the reading public an alternative view, a different perspective to the view presented by awards such as the Children's Book Councils Book of the Year. Comparison, though, is inevitable, and this can lead to debate over which approach is valid. YABBA is simply a measure of popularity amongst young readers and it is when this point is misunderstood that differences of opinion can arise. Beatrice Fincher (1986) has said:

The Young Australian's Best Book Awards are part of an attempt by some Victorians to make and keep the cultural environment for young people as interesting and stimulating as possible (p. 107).

YABBA aims to encourage the creation of a stimulating environment within which young readers can explore Australian
fiction. It does not pretend, or aim to be, an award assessing literary excellence.

There are criticisms that can be levelled at YABBA that must be considered when analysing the data resulting from the YABBA voting process. The most intractable of the questions which arise are those concerning the inclination of the voter at the moment they make their decision and the knowledge and influences that have affected this decision.

Initially, one must consider whether it is possible for young readers to make an informed decision. It is unlikely that many readers will have read widely from Australian children's literature, and thus be able to choose what they feel to be the best from a vast field. It is more likely that the majority of children will vote for one of the few Australian books they have read recently. One could argue that such an uninformed choice may unknowingly, ignore the vast majority of fiction that may have been considered for their vote.

How informed or competent do we expect our young readers to be? What criteria do most of these young voters employ when making a decision? Do we anticipate that they think carefully, considering each book and choosing the one which they feel has lasting literary merit and appeal? Do they choose the latest book by their favourite author, or the book that their best friend said was funny, even if they haven't read it?

Readers who do attempt to make a sensible, informed YABBA vote, may find that external limitations may affect the process,
limitations that are beyond their control. Not all readers will have ready access to a large range of material upon which to base their decision. This might be the result of a limited school or public library collection, due to either a small collection or limited stock due to heavy usage. Hoffman (1981) said in a discussion of the problems of awards and their voting systems;

Another was related to the relative availability of the various titles in the participating schools and libraries. Clearly there would be a bias in favour of a book that was widely available as compared with a book that was not. (p. 97)

This form of restriction could mean that the child who endeavours to read widely will be curtailed in their activities by the sheer impossibility of gaining access to books. Many students will also be limited by their lack of knowledge, simply knowing which books to read. In most cases, the young reader will be relying on an adult to ascertain whether a book is Australian or not, to bring to their attention new material, and to ensure availability in many cases. There are many helpful and enthusiastic librarians at work with our children, but there are also many that choose not to spend quality time fostering young readers’ attempts to be YABBA voters. Limitations such as these can make it extremely difficult for a YABBA voter to cast a vote that is considered and informed.

The opinions and ideas that children voice as their own may often be those that they have heard from family, friends, or school. The influences on their thoughts are myriad and come from every facet of their lives and the extent to which these influences could affect a child's vote is immeasurable, though unquestionably present.
Parents and relatives may influence a child's reading from the very beginning of that child's life. "Children learn about literature from what the adults around them do about it." (Zahnleiter 1985, p. 187).

Which books relatives purchase for the child, the importance that is placed on books in the household, and whether they introduce the child to the public library or not, these habits and attitudes learned at home are carried throughout life. The influence of friends, or peer group, on attitudes and opinions is also far reaching. To many children, fitting in is of vital importance, and this means conforming with a group's ideas and outlooks. When it comes to YABBA voting all of these influences come into play, ensuring that, on many occasions, a vote may have been influenced strongly by family background or ideas, or the current fad within the friendship group.

School is another significant influence on ideas of young people. It is also often the vehicle that provides access to books for many. The skills and interest of teachers and librarians can have an immense influence on a child's reading habits, an influence that can affect everything from a simple YABBA vote to how that child perceives books and reading for the rest of their lives. Even the most conscientious librarians and teachers may influence the vote of a reader simply by the way they conduct themselves - the authors they purchase and recommend, the opinions they voice to the students, the novels they choose to study in class, the movies they show. Grieve (1986.) has said in an introduction to an analysis of an early YABBA list:
To be realistic, it must be acknowledged that any children's choice is influenced by adults starting with the books that are actually chosen for publication and including the selection policy of librarians and the books they themselves enjoy and promote. (p. 18)

In part of her analysis of the 1986 voting list for YABBA Grieve (1986) perceives a pattern that she believes indicates teacher influence:

The first pattern to emerge is the group whose selection has obviously been influenced by teachers - in particular award winning books or those on the Children's Book Council short list. (p. 18)

Through this immense power over what the students are exposed to, school may have a lasting effect on the ideas of its pupils regarding reading and their attitudes towards it, especially to those students whose exposure to books is limited at home.

Advertising, television, movies are all media that affect young people tremendously - they have a power to influence opinions that is the envy of many a parent or teacher. Attitudes to books, trends in style, ideas about what is fashionable are all gleaned from the media. Dunlevy (1989) discussed this point:

Much of the success of youth books may be attributed to effective marketing. To the marketers of clothes, cars, cosmetics and other lifestyle goods, teenagers are an identifiable - and lucrative - group. A good deal of the new, individually focused youth literature helps reinforce the young people's self-perceptions as a group separate from the
rest of society. Enter the age of the book as a lifestyle accessory. (p. 4)

The tremendous popularity of much American pulp fiction such as The Baby Sitters Club and Point series, amongst young readers is a direct result of the power of the media's influence. The tie-in of books with the media is also important, and evident, in the results of YABBA voting. Amongst those books short listed for the awards over the six year period under consideration, are many that have been made into movies or television programs. The most notable being Playing Beatie Bow (Park, 1980), The Man from Snowy River (Mitchell, 1982) and Round the twist (Jennings, 1990c). This gives many children a reason to read the book as they can come to the story from another medium. Having already seen the film they can read the book with ease, the imagining has been done for them. As fiction competes with video games, television, and cinema, and the associated advertising, it is no wonder that "book of the movie" holds greater appeal than just a "great read".

There are many strong influences that mould the attitudes and ideas of young people, influences that will ultimately affect the choices they make. Casting a YABBA vote is a simple and harmless activity for children, designed to increase their interest in reading and their knowledge about the cultural world that they inhabit. The actual vote, though, can tell us a great deal about their preferences, their likes and dislikes, and their reading habits, as well as a little about the different influences that are at play in their lives.
CHAPTER FOUR - Methodology

TYPE OF STUDY

This study presents two types of information, the analysis of statistical data collated, graphed, and tabled from the information volunteered on the 21,351 voting forms in the older readers' section of the YABBA awards from 1986 to 1991. In addition to this, in an endeavour to extend and enhance the information gleaned from the voting form data, a small survey of YABBA voters' and organisers' opinions was carried out after the 1992 voting process was completed. This survey took the form of a brief, self-administered questionnaire.

The remainder of this study attempts to analyse the findings from both of these information gathering exercises and shed some light on the theoretical and critical background to YABBA and the children's literature environment of which it is a part.

SOURCE OF DATA - VOTING STATISTICS

The bulk of the data analysed for this study are the 21,351 voting forms from the older readers' section of YABBA from the year of the award's inception 1986 to 1991. The decision was made at the outset of the study to work with only the older readers' section as the total number of votes from all three sections of YABBA (approximately another 50,000 voting forms) was too unwieldy for a study of this size. Therefore, there are still the voting forms
for the picture book and younger readers' section from 1986 to 1991, and all of the data from 1992 onwards, still left to be analysed.

The voting forms themselves were first studied in an effort to decide what information could be determined from them, and to develop a possible coding format that could be used to record this information. It was decided to code and compare any information at all that could be taken from the information on the forms. This led to the following variables being chosen. These variables were recorded and coded for entry into the computer based statistical analysis package - SAS.

Variable one - Year in which the vote was cast.
Variable Two - Title of the book voted for.
Variable Three - Author of the book voted for.
Variable Four - The source of the book voted for.
Variable Five - The year at school of the voter.
Variable Six - The school the voter attended.
Variable Seven - The type of school - state or private, which the voter attended.
Variable Eight - The location of school - suburban or country, which the voter attended.
Variable Nine - The gender of the voter.
Variable Ten - The role of the supervising adult who authorised the vote.
Variable Eleven - Breakdown of schools into primary and secondary. (This information was sought
further into the study and was not taken straight from the voting form, it was collected through information compiled during the initial coding.)

Each vote was manually read and coded accordingly. With the use of the SAS program a large selection of graphs and tables were created for analysis purposes from the raw data for each variable and for comparison amongst variables. The analysis of the data has led to a wealth of statistical information regarding the reading habits of young people, much of which has been offered in Section Six for examination. Not all SAS tables were converted to graphs for analysis, only those that had useful or interesting information are examined, those not included were uninformative.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation encountered in compiling the raw data was the difficulty in finding the information for every variable on all voting forms. At times voters failed to fill in all sections of the form, whilst others had illegible handwriting. Difficulties in successfully determining the information being sought at times led to "unknown" being keyed in for one or other of the variables. This has meant that "unknown" has been recorded as a category in relation to all variables. In most cases it has shown itself to be only a minor problem, with the exception of the variable "gender". Only in the voting forms for 1986 were all voters asked to stipulate gender; for the remaining five years of this study, the gender of the voter was determined subjectively by analysis of other areas of the
voting form, in particular the area where the voter recorded their name. Such an approach has many difficulties; illegible handwriting, an unusual name, or a name that could be used by either sex, were all cases where gender could not be positively determined. It is for this reason that in relation to this variable alone, the "unknown" figure is 4,540 votes or 21.3% of the total vote for the six year period. Fortunately, though, a high proportion, well over three quarters of the total votes, was able to be coded, resulting in well over 16,500 coded votes to work with in the analysis of gender preferences.

SOURCE OF DATA - SURVEY

To further strengthen and highlight the information from the voting forms a small survey of voters and organisers was undertaken subsequent to the completion of the voting process in 1992. It was decided that a greater insight into why voters choose certain titles and the influences that came into play upon their choices could be further understood through asking a selection of participants to fill in questionnaires.

The questionnaires, one for voters, one for YABBA organisers, were formulated with certain physical criteria in mind. It was imperative they be kept short and easy to complete with a minimum number of open-ended responses. The main aim was to collect opinions regarding possible influences on the voting procedure, thereby further enhancing the data already available on student opinion, and reading preferences. These two questionnaires are attached in appendices one and two respectively.
The student questionnaire established the students' year level, gender, and school, and which title they had voted for in 1992. The main open ended question asked of them was to "Explain why you have voted for this book". It was envisaged that this would result in a broad range of responses; information on reader preference and choice, it was felt, would be best collected using this format.

The student was then required to tick "yes" or "no" to determine whether they had participated in YABBA prior to 1992, and to list any books they may recall having voted for in the past. An indication was then sought of how often they read, by asking them to tick a box from a choice of four categorical options ranging from "At least one book a month" to "Less than one book a term".

The last question asked the student to give a ranking for how influential they felt the listed factors were on their voting decision. The rankings used were "Not at all", "Some" and "A great deal". Influences they were asked to rank included Advertising, parents, friends and librarians. (see Appendix one for full list) This questionnaire allowed only one open ended response that needed extensive analysis, all other sections yielded categorical responses that were easily collated into a workable format for expression as a graph.

The organisers' questionnaire included three open ended, reasonably straightforward, questions. The first asked for a brief description of how YABBA was physically organised in that particular school, the second asked whether any particular promotional activities were run in relation to YABBA. And the third asked for the organisers to outline why they participated in
YABBA - what "value" they saw in it for their students. These questions were asked to try and broaden the known knowledge of the YABBA process and how it operated within a school community. The last question on the form asked the organiser to rank the same influences as those listed on the student form with the idea in mind of how they thought these might have influenced the voting of their students. This different perspective has led to some very interesting comparisons with the similar question on the student questionnaire.

The survey was kept to a relatively small number due mainly to time constraints and the need for permission from authorities and access to individual students. 207 student responses were received and thirteen organisers' responses, this is in relation to a total voter population being analysed of 21,351 responses over the six year period. On average one year of voting responses numbered between three and four thousand in the older readers' section only. Each school was sent a bundle of 25 student questionnaires and 3 organisers' questionnaires. The schools were asked to make copies of either questionnaire if they found the need. The number of questionnaires filled in in any one school depended entirely on the organiser within that school and how many they chose to distribute amongst their students and then collect for posting. The 207 student responses were taken from the total voting population of 1992 (all three sections). These voting forms have as yet not been analysed, but it could be estimated that around 10,000 readers probably voted during 1992. Therefore the 207 voters' responses are taken from a possible voting population of approximately 10,000; they then represent approximately 2% of the total voting
population for 1992. The material gathered from these questionnaires enhances the data already gathered from the voting forms by giving an extra insight into the motivations of some of the voters.

An endeavour was made though to collect responses from a variety of school locations and types, and from a cross section of year levels. These schools were chosen from previous voting years information in an attempt to collect a cross section of the types of communities available to form the stratified sample. The questionnaire was filled in by 207 students and thirteen organisers from eleven different schools; two private, secondary, girls' colleges in the suburbs, one private secondary boys' college in the suburbs, one private, secondary boys college in a country area, one private co-educational primary school in a country area, and one private co-educational primary school in the suburbs. Two state co-educational primary schools in the suburbs, one state co-educational primary school in a country area, one state co-educational secondary college in the suburbs, and one state co-ed secondary college in a country area.

Once the target schools were chosen permission was requested from the appropriate bodies - Ministry of Education and its regional bodies, the Catholic Education Office, and the individual school administrations. The likely organisers within each school were then contacted by phone, the study explained and their cooperation requested. All of those approached agreed to take part in the survey and the questionnaires were duly posted. The questionnaires were then self administered within the school, with
problems they may have had. Responses were then posted back from all of those schools that had agreed to participate, that is the initial eleven schools approached all returned questionnaires - a hundred percent response rate.

The survey data was collated manually and graphic displays were produced to illustrate data. Much of the more interesting material has been used in the form of quotes from the long answer questions. These are quoted at some length in the analysis of the survey data in Section Five.

LIMITATIONS

The schools chosen for the survey were approached because they had all been active within the YABBA voting system for at least two to three years. It was assumed that due to their interest and participation they would be more likely to agree to internally organise the distribution and return of questionnaires for the survey. This is a limitation of this data as no approach was made to any of the vast number of schools that had shown a lack of interest in continued participation in YABBA. This may mean that some negative viewpoints regarding YABBA, or at least a different perspective, may have been instantly lost to the survey. Unfortunate as this may be, it also may have been difficult to question voters and organisers who had ceased to be involved in the YABBA voting process and may not have interested in participating.
YABBA voting process and may not have interested in participating.
SECTION TWO

CHAPTER FIVE - Analysis of general data

1.1 Vote frequency 1986 to 1991

Since YABBA’s inception in 1986 it is evident that a steady decline has taken place in the number of votes cast. The award may have found it difficult to encourage again the first wave of enthusiasm that was apparent in 1986.

Not having access to the figures for the picture book and younger readers’ sections means that conclusions can only be drawn regarding the older readers’ section. It is possible that participation only fell in the older readers’ section - it may have grown in the other two sections, possibly even at the expense of the older readers' section. Much of this can only be conjecture.
What other reasons could explain the steady decline? There have been suggestions that the voting process for YABBA was cumbersome with students being asked to nominate books and then vote later on in the year. Did this system turn away children who found the two step system confusing and unnecessarily lengthy? The voting system was changed to a much simpler first past the post system for the voting of 1992, with the nomination step being done away with completely. Unfortunately though this change did not bring about a sudden rise in the number of voters, in fact numbers continued to decline (Fincher, 1993 YABBA Council Annual Report)

The YABBA voting list may be growing steadily older in book appeal, thus losing the participation of the younger voters. In 1986 the list of books in the older readers' section was decidedly junior in its orientation. Books such as *Blue fin* (Thiele, 1969), *Midnite* (Stow, 1967), the Penny Pollard series and *Going bananas* (Dann, 1983) are all books that could be considered most appropriate to a primary school library. It is worth noting that for the 1989 voting lists both *Going bananas* (Dann, 1983) and *Midnite* (Stow, 1967) appeared in the junior readers' section. As the easier titles disappeared from the older readers' section some more sophisticated titles did begin to enter it. This change begins in earnest in 1989 with titles such as *My sister Sif* (Park, 1986), *So much to tell you* (Marsden, 1987) and especially *Taronga* (Kelleher, 1986) finding their way on to the voting lists. These three novels are noticeably longer, feature older protagonists than some of the previously mentioned works and are more sophisticated in the understanding and reading ability they expect from their
readers. In 1990 and 1991 other more appropriately listed older reader titles were added to the lists notably *Beyond the labyrinth* (Rubinstein, 1988) and *Come back to show you I could fly* (Klein, 1989). One could argue that the voting list has become slightly more sophisticated and hopefully more akin to what is being read by students in years seven to nine.

This may be one of the reasons why voting numbers have fallen, as it is upper primary students that are YABBA's largest voting community. As the list becomes more out of their range of discernment so we lose them as voters, to the older readers' section at least.

It must be remembered in a discussion of the makeup of the voting lists that these lists during the years in question were constructed from nominations received from students. In 1992 this process was done away with, but in 1993 nominations were reintroduced but were only called for from member schools and those who expressed an interest in participating. In the YABBA newsletter Number 16, October, 1993 an article asked for opinions on this whole issue as the YABBA committee attempted to decide how to run the voting process for 1994. It appears there is support for both procedures.

From 1986 to 1991 nominations were called for from school children and these were the basis for the final lists - ranked strictly in order of number of nominations received. As there is no reason to assume that the same children who nominated books inevitably went on to vote later in the process we must remember that the final
list did not necessarily contain exactly what the voters may have wished to vote for. As there was some time lapse (a few months) between nominating and voting there could even have been new books read by nominators that they would rather have included given the chance. With this in mind it is difficult to regard the voting lists used between 1986 and 1991 as the entire responsibility of the voting population.

It is often difficult to sustain the interest of students in any process that goes for a considerable period of time. Possibly YABBA is finding it difficult to keep the attention of all of its young voters. As the YABBA process from 1986 to 1991 with nominations and later voting ran for a number of months, students could have lost interest during the long wait. But as mentioned this process has been simplified and since 1992 there has only been one voting step. Yet votes continue to decline. Possibly it is difficult to re-enthuse voters, and organisers, who have lost interest in YABBA.

Do involved adults suffer from burnout? Possibly librarians and teachers who organise YABBA have dropped out of the process due to an inability to maintain their own interest in organising the event for their school or library. There is little reward or recognition, save personal satisfaction in doing what should be seen to be a valuable job. Maybe this is not enough.

Once a novel has won YABBA it is no longer eligible to stand for the award and possibly this stipulation is also losing YABBA participants. If students find that their favourite book has won in a
previous year and not able to be voted for maybe they lose interest in the concept of YABBA and do not vote at all.

It is possible that the 'Australian only' stipulation is also losing YABBA votes. Many young people find it difficult to name an Australian book that they have liked, as they have either not read any or are not aware of the nationalities of the authors that they read. Some students may refuse to participate if they cannot vote for their favourite overseas author. This attitude might explain low voting rates but may not be a sound reason for the steady decline in voting numbers.

1990 shows the lowest voting numbers of all of the six years. It may not be coincidental that this is the only year out of the six from 1986 to 1991 when there was no title from Paul Jennings in the final voting list for the older readers' section. Jennings has been such a popular and successful YABBA author that his absence from the list may have lost some intended votes from the prospective pool of voters.

Many of other children's choice awards (that figures are available for) - WAYBRA and the many American awards - all record healthy increases in the number of votes cast as the years go by. WAYBRA is the oldest Australian award having commenced in 1983. Its overall statistics are very impressive and display a healthy growth rate.

The participation of young Western Australian readers has increased dramatically over the past few years. The total
number of individual ratings cast in 1983 was 17,769. In 1984 this rose to 28,243 and in 1985 to 48,458. (Tobin, 1986a, p. 99)

WAYBRA more than doubled its participation rate in only two years. Yet YABBA, in the older readers' section, has not been able to repeat, or even match, the initial number of votes cast in 1986, the first year. Why has YABBA been unable to sustain interest and build on its excellent beginning? The American awards appear to have enjoyed a similar growth rate to that of WAYBRA. After a discussion of how difficult it is to store and maintain numerical records pertaining to readers' choice awards due to a variety of factors Latrobe and Casey, (1990) go on to say:

However, many states recorded phenomenal growth; for example; Iowa's 1985 young adult award, the state's first, was based on 5,427 votes, but its 1987 award was based on 39,845 votes. (p. 228)

Why not YABBA? The reasons for YABBA’s lack of growth, in fact its steady decline, are many and varied, some of the data supplied by the voting forms does give a small glimpse into a few of the possible causes.
1.2 Gender frequency 1986 to 1991

The reasonably high unknown factor relating to this variable is because the information was not easily extracted from the voting form. Only in recent years have voters been asked to stipulate their gender on the form. As it was not stated from 1986 to 1991 the only way of discerning this information was by examination of the form. The name of the voter was most frequently used to ascertain gender. The other most useful indicator was if the voter came from a single sex school. Where gender was unclear due to no reliable indicators on the voting form "unknown" was recorded. This has meant 4540, or twenty-one percent, are unknown responses out of the 21,351 voters over the six year period. Despite this problem we are still left with seventy-nine percent of the votes displaying a clear indication of gender.

The figures show that nearly double the amount of females compared to males, participate in YABBA voting. Is it because girls are keener readers than boys? Particularly around the adolescent years commitments to sport and friends can become
demanding on any young life. Or is it because girls are more likely to respond to the invitation to vote, more interested in the concept of YABBA. It is difficult to ascertain exactly why there is such a marked difference, but the interpretation that it is due to the marked difference in the number of books read is supported by some quarters. Dunlevy (1989) by an article in The Age said:

According to people in the publishing industry, most readers of teen literature are female. There are suggestions that if more teenage boys are to be attracted, the subjects covered by young people's books would probably have to be far more tasteless. (p. 4)

This is an interesting comment when you consider it is Paul Jennings who has received a substantial portion of the male vote and it is his stories of bad smells and the like that have at times been considered slightly tasteless.
1.3 Year by Gender %

Key
First column (red) - Female
Second column (green) - Male
Third column (blue) - Unknown

A breakdown of gender by year serves to show us that the differences between the sexes remains fairly constant throughout the six year period. Girls continue to participate at greater levels than do the boys. The high unknown factor (previously explained in 1.2) does detract slightly from the figures particularly in the later years where the unknown factor is higher.

The high male vote in 1987 is worth remarking upon as this was the only year the boys came close to equalling the vote made by the girls and the only year that their vote was well over thirty percent of the total votes for that year. What caused this effort from the male population? Notably this was the year that the winning book won by the greatest margin. *Unreal* (1985) by Paul Jennings received 1133 votes, 30.6% of the votes cast for 1987. Over forty-
eight percent of the votes for *Unreal* (Jennings, 1985) (over the two years that it was eligible, 1986 and 1987) were cast by boys. Possibly the large participation by males in the YABBA voting of 1987 was due to the enormous popularity of *Unreal* (Jennings, 1985) at that time.
1.4 Source of Book 1986 to 1991

This graph highlights the fact that YABBA is a program that has been most successfully integrated into school library programs. As voting takes place in the most part in school libraries and this is where the main impetus and enthusiasm stems from, and it is obviously then the major source of books. The relatively high level of ownership is probably related to the popularity of the authors receiving YABBA votes, and that many of these authors are well known and given as presents etc., by family and friends, or bought by the readers themselves. Books such as the Jennings' short stories and those that have been made into television series or movies such as Playing Beatie Bow (Park, 1980), one could suggest, are often seen as suitable, and popular, presents by family.

The low public library vote is worth commenting on as it is probably related to the difficulty librarians in a public library would have in talking with and encouraging their readers to vote. Whereas a school librarian has a captive audience, the public librarian would have to rely on visiting school groups or any one to one relationship they may have with visiting borrowers. One must
also consider how many young people actually use their local library. Watson (1978, p. 75) in his analysis of the reading habits of students asked students in years seven to ten how often they borrowed books from their municipal or shire library. The results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Never %</th>
<th>Sometimes %</th>
<th>Often %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>41.45</td>
<td>42.48</td>
<td>16.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>18.67</td>
<td>10.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With high percentages of students never using their local library and many using it only sometimes it is probably not unusual that so few YABBA votes have been received from this area.
1.5 School Type Frequency 1986 to 1991

The number of votes registered from state schools was almost double that received from private schools. Are, or were, state schools better informed, better staffed? That is, with better staffing it would be assumed that libraries would offer more extensive programs that might be more likely to include YABBA promotions. Is it a difference in attitude towards what a school library program is there to achieve? Possibly library programs in some of the larger more academic schools tend to emphasise study and research rather than reading for pleasure as a priority. All of these possible reasons for the difference in school type participation can only be conjecture. It would be difficult without a major lengthy survey and investigation to ascertain exactly why there is such difference. The results remain though an interesting discussion point.

There is a case for pleading lack of communication as a reason for poor participation by some schools in the YABBA voting process. For example, all Catholic schools received journals such as School Library Bulletin (no longer in publication) from the Catholic Education Office in a bulk mail out. This journal was often used by YABBA as its main forum for distributing news and dates,
particularly to those schools that participated in YABBA but were not members. On many occasions the bulk mail out arrived at my own school of employment much too late to enable me to organise participation. The problem of receiving information that was centrally distributed was a constant problem often discussed amongst librarians working in Catholic schools in my region. I can only guess that similar problems of communication and distribution may plague many schools. Possibly communication lines are better in the State system and this contributes to their higher voting numbers.
1.6 Year by School Type %

Key
First column (red) - Private schools
Second column (green) - State schools
Third column (blue) - Unknown

The high unknown factor in the year 1986 is unfortunate, but unavoidable, due to the fact that in this year the voters were not asked to record their school on the voting form.

It is interesting to note that the year of YABBA's lowest recorded vote between 1986 and 1991, 1990, is the year that private schools recorded their highest number of votes. Why? Is it the nature of the voting list that year? More challenging material? (This point is discussed in Figure 1.1) Conversely what happened in 1988? When the lowest vote was registered by private schools yet the highest for State schools by a considerable number.
1.7 Primary Vs Secondary School

This graph highlights the reality that the vast majority of votes in
the older readers' section of YABBA has come from primary
schools - more than double those from secondary schools. This is
a disappointing realisation if we assume that YABBA is trying to
reach and encourage all readers from years one to nine in schools.
Considering YABBA's breakdown into three separate sections one
would assume that the older readers section would be dominated by
secondary schools. As this is not the case we must look to the
reasons why YABBA is failing to attract and retain readers in the
secondary years of schooling - particularly year nine.

It could be suggested that the different environments of the two
types of schools play a part in whether they become and remain
avid YABBA voters. In most primary school settings the students
spend the majority of their day with one person who no doubt has
an enormous influence over their lives and all of their decisions and
thoughts. Separate library classes are either run by the classroom
teacher or a librarian who may have even known the upper primary
students (those we are most concerned with) since grade one. This
protective environment is conducive to the operation of YABBA if
the primary school teacher or librarian was keen and able to transfer their enthusiasm to their young students. YABBA in a primary school would also be able to run across the whole school curriculum as the lower sections are applicable to the junior grades - every child in the school could vote in theory. Within a secondary school any teacher expecting to influence and encourage students has to share time, interest and enthusiasm with at least half a dozen other subject areas. In many school libraries, classes as such, do not even exist. YABBA is not open to students above year nine, and possibly to many students who have participated throughout their primary school years seen is a primary school activity. In light of many of these comments it is understandable that participation in YABBA begins to fall off in the secondary years.
The demarcation line for school location was a difficult one, and subsequently it is difficult to give a cut and dried picture of what the school is actually like. Any school with an STD phone number has been classified as 'country'. This does not really allow for a true division of country and city schools as many large schools in big cities such as Bendigo or Ballarat will be classified as country with this system but have a great deal more in common with a city school than they would with some of the smaller rural country schools who are also voters.

Despite this drawback the figures are fairly straightforward with almost double the number of votes coming from suburban schools as compared to country. Are city schools better informed? One could argue that the majority of YABBA activities have taken place within the metropolitan area, that is YABBA launches, ceremonies etc. Does information regarding voting lists and promotions have difficulty finding its way to some of the country schools,
particularly if they are not YABBA members and rely on journals for their information? This may be the case. Are their suburban staff more enthusiastic, better trained in the city? One would think this unlikely, but it is one other possible reason to be considered in light of the figures graphed.
1.9 Year by Location %

Key

First column (red) - Country schools (STD area code)
Second column (green) - Suburban schools
Third column (blue) - Unknown

Figures remain basically stable over the years from 1986 to 1991 with very little difference worthy of remark. There is some apparent increase in the vote registered from the country area and a decrease in that from suburban schools, yet this is probably not a significant enough increase to comment upon.
This fascinating graph shows the apparent lack of staying power amongst schools that participate in YABBA with only one school voting every six years from 1986 to 1991, and the majority of schools, well over half, voting for one year only and not participating in the older readers section again. This data must be linked to the first frequency graph which showed that general YABBA voting is on the decline. Obviously this would not be the case if schools stayed with YABBA. Possibly this lack of steady participation is the key to the declining YABBA vote.

Why do schools choose not to continue participating? Do the organisers find the process difficult or onerous? Is it not well received enough amongst students? Do they have difficulty fitting it into their school program? Do school staff find it better suited as a one off program rather than a program to be used year after year? Do staff changes have a major impact on the programs operation? It is extremely difficult to determine why schools are so fleeting in
their interest in YABBA. Without extensive questioning of those who have not returned to the program in subsequent years it would be difficult to draw any conclusions. It is likely though that such questioning would reveal a vast number of reasons.

The only school to vote every year from 1986 to 1991 is a small Catholic country school, Our Lady Help of Christians. The fact that this is the only school to remain consistently involved for the period of six years covered in the study is probably the result of a combination of unusual factors, not the result of something particularly special or significant about this one little country school. It is more likely that one can generalise that the normal participation by school is at times fleeting, and often inconsistent, especially when we consider that well over half of the schools participated only once and then not again.
1.11 School Voting Frequency by School Type%

Key
First column (red) - State schools
Second column (green) - Private schools

This further breakdown of the figures on school voting frequency over the six year period shows us that there is very little difference between state and private schools and the frequency with which they have voted.
1.12 School Voting Frequency by School Area %

![Bar chart showing school voting frequency by area.]

**Key**

First column (red) - Suburban schools
Second column (green) - Country schools (STD area code)

This graph further breaks down the frequency table by school area shows that there is little difference between suburban and country schools and the number of years they have participated in YABBA. There is a slight indication that the country schools did manage to hold their own and participate at slightly higher rates than suburban schools. The only school to have voted in all six years was a country catholic primary school. It is astonishing that it was the only one to have followed the program so consistently. One would imagine that a greater ongoing participation from a larger number of schools would be more likely.
Over fifty percent (11,679) of votes come from years five and six. Only just over ten percent (2420) of the vote comes from years eight and nine. Why is the older readers' section of YABBA failing to attract votes from the older year levels. It would seem that votes in the older reader section should be coming mainly from years seven, eight and nine. This is not the case at all. Watson (1978, p. 68-9) in his study on the reading habits of secondary school students has shown an obvious decline in the number of books read by young people very much in line with experience highlighted in the YABBA figures. He showed that in a secondary school not operating a reading program the number of books read ranged as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Books read during one month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows a steady decline in the number of books read by students as they move through the school system and would support the argument that children in general do read less as they progress through secondary school. This factor could go some way towards explaining why participation in YABBA decreases so dramatically in years eighth and nine. It is interesting to note that in classrooms where a reading program operated the figures were slightly different:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Books read during one month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It appears that the majority of intensive library programs, and therefore often YABBA programs, are taking place with primary school students and possibly lower secondary, particularly year seven. As it provides the perfect base for librarians and teachers to introduce YABBA and work it into their program, previous data has shown that YABBA is obviously linked in most cases to the school library. How many schools have active reading programs for their year nine students? Is this the period when we begin to lose young people as library users, and keen readers? Why? Possibly it is due to peer pressure to become involved in other activities, or involvement in other extra curricula activities and the stresses of increased academic study; all or any of these things may play a part in the decline in reading as students progress through secondary school.
Year by Year Level at School %

Key
First column (unrecognisable) - Prep. year
Second column (unrecognisable) - Year one
Third column (unrecognisable) - Year two
Fourth column (yellow) - Year three
Fifth column (mauve) - Year Four
Sixth column (light blue) - Year Five
Seventh column (brown) - Year six
Eighth column (green) - Year seven
Ninth column (dark blue) - Year Eight
Tenth column (olive) - Year nine

Why are the votes in years seven, eight and nine so markedly low in 1987? There appears to be a small but steady increase in participation from the upper year levels, and a steady decrease in participation at the younger year levels. Are these changes significant enough to comment upon? It is possible that these slight changes fall into line with the slow changes to the short list for voting? That is, that the list of most nominated books from which to vote each year has become slightly more challenging with the disappearance of some of the more "junior" material. This point is further discussed in Figure 1.1.
1.15 Vote Signing Frequency 1986 to 1991

![Bar Chart]

This graph reinforces the data displayed early indicating that it is the librarian who is the major driving force behind YABBA voting.

The previous fifteen graphs hold a wealth of information about the voting population that has participated in the older readers' section of YABBA from 1986 to 1991. Many of the graphs reinforce knowledge already held - that recreational reading tends to fall off as children progress through secondary school, and the fact that teachers and librarians play a very influential role in what young people read. Facts like these could already be guessed at by many who work in the field the voting from data goes some way towards establishing these points as fact. More unusual were the suggestions that most school do not remain constant YABBA voters - the voting population is made up of an ever changing list of schools. Suggestions like these require further study and research.
as they are an interesting comment on the nature of school involvement in a voluntary program of YABBA's kind.

The following two chapters take the analysis of the data a step further by looking in detail at the breakdown of the voting population in relation to specific authors and titles. Material that gives a greater insight into the opinions and interests of the voters themselves.
CHAPTER SIX - Author analysis

2.1 Author - Raw Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Raw Vote</th>
<th>Percent of total vote</th>
<th>Number of books all years.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul Jennings</td>
<td>5782</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin Klein</td>
<td>5729</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Park</td>
<td>2241</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin Thiele</td>
<td>1742</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian Rubinstein</td>
<td>1736</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Marsden</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elyne Mitchell</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug McLeod</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurley Fowler</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethel Turner</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor Kelleher</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randolph Stow</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max Dann</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Hepworth</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Dugan</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libby Hathorn</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maureen Stewart</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor Spence</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Winton</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Aldridge</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan Baillie</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel Edwards</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between them Jennings and Klein make up over 50% of the vote. There is no doubt that they are by far the most popular authors involved with the YABBA voting process. Seventeen of the forty-five titles in the voting lists from 1986 to 1991 were by either Jennings or Klein. They are both prolific authors, a fact that
must help them win YABBA votes. Having a new book out, being constantly under media scrutiny must help these authors maintain a high profile. Also having more books means you are able to attract more votes through the sheer weight of numbers. It does not follow though that the most prolific authors will then do best with YABBA because the books must still be nominated and voted for by the children. Authors such as Colin Thiele, Eleanor Spence and Maureen Stewart have written countless titles that do not appear on the YABBA listings - so just writing quantity will not win you YABBA votes.

One of the traits Jennings and Klein do share is their ability to write zany, appealing humour that is entertaining, a factor that must contribute to their amazing popularity amongst YABBA voters. It is interesting to note that these, the two top YABBA authors, are both Victorian. YABBA is after all a Victorian award first and foremost. Maybe there is something to be said for living in, and promoting your own work in your own area. Despite the ever increasing popularity of overseas material possibly the accessibility of Klein and Jennings to their readers does something to boost their popularity. An analysis of the these two authors and their YABBA shortlisted titles is undertaken in greater detail in chapters twelve and thirteen.

Over eighty percent of the vote is shared by the top five authors - Jennings, Klein, Park, Thiele and Rubinstein. This is a most interesting list of authors for the five Australian authors most popular with YABBA voters, being a combination of the newer authors of the eighties in Klein, Jennings and Rubinstein standing
alongside the stalwarts of the seventies and early eighties - Thiele and Park, two authors who would be on any list of classic Australian children's authors of this century. Often YABBA is seen as a popularity race with no consideration for merit or true worth, yet authors of a high calibre consistently rate highly in the YABBA awards. The winner may be the most popular of choices but the classics still make an appearance that cannot go unremarked.
### 2.2 Author - School type and Level popularity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>Most Popular Levels</th>
<th>% of Votes at these Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>75.58</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klein</td>
<td>34.12</td>
<td>51.44</td>
<td>14.44</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park</td>
<td>38.60</td>
<td>51.32</td>
<td>10.08</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiele</td>
<td>33.12</td>
<td>58.73</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubinstein</td>
<td>36.69</td>
<td>63.19</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsden</td>
<td>50.55</td>
<td>48.49</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>23.24</td>
<td>39.41</td>
<td>37.35</td>
<td>5/6/7</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLeod</td>
<td>20.88</td>
<td>79.12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fowler</td>
<td>42.18</td>
<td>57.44</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>5/6/7</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner</td>
<td>43.89</td>
<td>43.89</td>
<td>12.22</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelleher</td>
<td>47.90</td>
<td>43.28</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>6/7/8</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stow</td>
<td>34.59</td>
<td>23.24</td>
<td>42.16</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dann</td>
<td>10.46</td>
<td>51.63</td>
<td>37.91</td>
<td>3/4/5</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepworth</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>28.97</td>
<td>51.03</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duian</td>
<td>17.89</td>
<td>77.24</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4/5/6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hathorn</td>
<td>38.84</td>
<td>59.50</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>81.82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spence</td>
<td>39.08</td>
<td>60.92</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winton</td>
<td>55.32</td>
<td>36.17</td>
<td>8.51</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldridge</td>
<td>47.73</td>
<td>52.27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baillie</td>
<td>31.71</td>
<td>68.29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>39.47</td>
<td>57.89</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table there is a high unknown factor listed for some of the authors, for example fifty-one percent for John Hepworth and fifty-seven percent for Hazel Edwards. There are two possible explanations for this problem. As the school code was discerned from the voting form according to what was written in the space
provided, it can only be assumed that for an unknown reason a number of children who voted for these authors, from one or various schools, failed to fill in this section resulting in a school unknown code. The other possibility, in this case, is that a small number of schools did not supply sufficient information for it to be possible to determine whether they were private or state run. They would therefore appear as unknown in a breakdown analysis of school type.

The table does show that there is a high private school vote, over forty percent, for authors such as Marsden, Fowler, Turner, Kelleher, and Aldridge, a group of authors that could possibly be classed as the more serious in style of those nominated for YABBA. That is they tackle some of the more involved issue-based stories, at times in a longer and more complex style of writing. There is an obvious difference between these and the more readable, easily accessible authors found dominating in the state school schools' column, authors such as Jennings, Klein, Dann, Dugan, McLeod and Stewart are definitely less challenging in style than those most popular in the private system. But probably more important is the striking similarity this group all share with a great emphasis in their books being placed on humour. The popularity of "funny" books amongst young people cannot be underestimated, books with a humorous element abound among the YABBA lists. (For further discussion see Chapter Fourteen)

The state system also has a high voting percentage, over 50%, for some of the classic authors, and those that extend our young readers, authors such as Park, Thiele, Rubinstein, Fowler, Spence,
Spence, Aldridge and Baillie. The state system seems to display a spread of authors from the very popular, easily read to the challenging Australian classic amongst their most popular authors, while the private system displays an obvious bent towards the more literary in style.

In the final two columns an analysis has been made of from where that particular author is receiving the majority of their vote - that is the levels that they are the most popular, and what percentage of their vote is to be found at these levels. It is obvious at a glance that no author receives the majority of their vote from year nine and very few from year eight. This fact further highlights the difficulty of YABBA in reaching and maintaining an interest among students at this level. The majority of voters for each author are clustered around the upper primary, lower secondary area - the source of YABBA's strength.
2.3 Author - Source of Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Owned Book %</th>
<th>Borrowed from Friend %</th>
<th>Public Library %</th>
<th>School Library %</th>
<th>Unknown %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>20.63</td>
<td>9.49</td>
<td>9.89</td>
<td>55.67</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klein</td>
<td>16.44</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>62.12</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park</td>
<td>30.08</td>
<td>9.37</td>
<td>16.29</td>
<td>40.70</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiele</td>
<td>21.24</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>15.50</td>
<td>53.44</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubinstein</td>
<td>24.02</td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>14.52</td>
<td>49.25</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsden</td>
<td>26.71</td>
<td>10.55</td>
<td>10.41</td>
<td>50.41</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>35.63</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>19.62</td>
<td>36.49</td>
<td>8.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLeod</td>
<td>15.20</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>8.42</td>
<td>65.02</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fowler</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>62.34</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner</td>
<td>37.91</td>
<td>10.97</td>
<td>16.96</td>
<td>31.17</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelleher</td>
<td>24.79</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>58.40</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stow</td>
<td>17.84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>71.35</td>
<td>7.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dann</td>
<td>13.73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.46</td>
<td>63.40</td>
<td>12.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepworth</td>
<td>27.59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19.31</td>
<td>51.03</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
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<td>Dugan</td>
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<td>4.07</td>
<td>14.63</td>
<td>64.23</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hathorn</td>
<td>22.31</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>12.40</td>
<td>53.72</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>60.91</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spence</td>
<td>13.79</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>19.54</td>
<td>55.17</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winton</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>8.51</td>
<td>10.64</td>
<td>63.83</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldridge</td>
<td>47.73</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>38.64</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baillie</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>21.95</td>
<td>70.73</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards</td>
<td>10.53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>76.32</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It appears that seventeen of these, the top twenty two authors received more than fifty percent of their votes from books borrowed from the school library. This is indicative of the fact that the school library has a major role to play in YABBA promotion, support and voting. It must be noted that this figure may often include books borrowed from the school that not are not strictly library books -
library books - that is, those books that are from class sets or classroom book collections. As there is no space for indicating these sources on the form it is likely that most children would opt for the school library as their source - the closest to reality. As other collections of books within the school are often controlled by classroom or subject teachers these figures may be hiding a relatively powerful source of influence over YABBA voting, particularly if the child has read the book as part of a class set chosen and recommended by the teacher. How many of these 'other' school book collections are involved though is impossible to tell from the information available.

The highest figures for other sources are interesting. The highest personal ownership is for Aldridge (by some ten percent), with other authors with a high ownership rate being Turner and Mitchell. All three writers probably well-known to older relatives for their work and its adaptation into movies and theatre. Authors such as Turner would have even been read by previous generations. Authors with this type of profile might have been given to the child as gifts holding some nostalgic memories for the giver. In some cases the book might be owned by the family, and be a community read copy of a family classic.

Jennings, Park, Marsden and Turner were borrowed most from friends. Those most borrowed from a public library were Mitchell, Stewart, Spence and Baillie. There does not appear to be any obvious links between these groups of authors.
2.4 Author - Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Female Vote as %</th>
<th>Male Vote %</th>
<th>Gender Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>34.83</td>
<td>44.71</td>
<td>20.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klein</td>
<td>63.47</td>
<td>15.71</td>
<td>20.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park</td>
<td>69.75</td>
<td>9.68</td>
<td>20.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiele</td>
<td>41.10</td>
<td>39.55</td>
<td>19.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubinstein</td>
<td>24.94</td>
<td>46.20</td>
<td>28.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsden</td>
<td>73.84</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>22.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>41.48</td>
<td>41.14</td>
<td>17.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLeod</td>
<td>27.11</td>
<td>50.92</td>
<td>21.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fowler</td>
<td>64.60</td>
<td>14.12</td>
<td>21.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner</td>
<td>71.82</td>
<td>8.23</td>
<td>19.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelleher</td>
<td>23.53</td>
<td>50.84</td>
<td>25.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stow</td>
<td>27.03</td>
<td>56.76</td>
<td>16.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dann</td>
<td>39.87</td>
<td>43.14</td>
<td>16.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepworth</td>
<td>42.07</td>
<td>46.90</td>
<td>11.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dugan</td>
<td>43.90</td>
<td>27.64</td>
<td>28.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hathorn</td>
<td>62.81</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>28.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart</td>
<td>68.18</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>24.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spence</td>
<td>29.89</td>
<td>49.43</td>
<td>20.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winton</td>
<td>27.66</td>
<td>51.06</td>
<td>21.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldridge</td>
<td>54.55.</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>22.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baillie</td>
<td>21.95</td>
<td>48.78</td>
<td>29.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards</td>
<td>60.53</td>
<td>26.32</td>
<td>13.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The high incidence of unknown in this graph is because the gender of the voter was not a question asked on the voting form. Therefore gender had to be determined by a combination of other factors - usually the name of the voter. If it was impossible to determine, "gender unknown" was recorded. The high incidence of unknown is due to the obvious difficulty encountered with this approach.
This table shows that there is a high female vote, over sixty percent, for the authors Edwards, Stewart, Hathorn, Fowler, Marsden, Park and Klein, all female themselves except for Marsden who nevertheless writes from the female perspective in the book he has been nominated for *So much to tell you* (Marsden, 1987). There was a high male vote, over forty-five percent, for the following authors Baillie, Winton, Spence, Hepworth, Stow, Kelleher, Mc Leod and Rubinstein, all male except for Rubinstein and Spence. Spence is nominated for her book *Deezle bay* (Spence, 1987) Rubinstein for her works *Space demons* (1986), *Skymaze* (1989) and *Beyond the labyrinth* (1988) all books that have strong males and often a male as the main protagonist.

Tucker (1976) has said in *How children respond to fiction* that "The child needs somebody in a book with whom he can identify as a child." (p. 181). The figures from the above table obviously strengthen this viewpoint that many young people like books written from their own perspective and enjoy a story more if the protagonist is one they can identify with - and this identification is made easier if the gender featured is the same as their own.

There were a few authors who displayed an almost equal following of both male and female voters. These were Jennings, Thiele, Mitchell, Dann, Hepworth. Do these authors have strong characters of both genders or is there another reason for their popularity with both sexes? Jennings, Thiele and Hepworth are all listed for titles that feature mainly male characters, Mitchell and Dann are listed for titles that feature a fairly evenly spread cast of
characters. No conclusive viewpoint is likely from a brief look at only the gender of the main characters. Possibly the style of each author, the promotion surrounding each book, their appeal with adults, and other such factors, need to be considered in determining why certain titles appear to have been equally popular with both sexes. More extensive examination of the texts could shed further light on this interesting question.
### 2.5 Author - School Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Country %</th>
<th>Suburban %</th>
<th>Unknown %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennings</td>
<td>41.54</td>
<td>57.44</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klein</td>
<td>31.49</td>
<td>67.32</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park</td>
<td>27.13</td>
<td>71.84</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiele</td>
<td>38.17</td>
<td>59.47</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubinstein</td>
<td>29.03</td>
<td>70.10</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsden</td>
<td>34.93</td>
<td>63.56</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>35.80</td>
<td>64.20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLeod</td>
<td>55.13</td>
<td>44.51</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fowler</td>
<td>33.15</td>
<td>65.73</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner</td>
<td>32.42</td>
<td>66.58</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelleher</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>64.29</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stow</td>
<td>41.08</td>
<td>58.92</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dann</td>
<td>35.95</td>
<td>64.05</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepworth</td>
<td>12.41</td>
<td>87.59</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dugan</td>
<td>31.71</td>
<td>68.29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hathorn</td>
<td>44.63</td>
<td>51.24</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart</td>
<td>42.73</td>
<td>57.27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spence</td>
<td>42.53</td>
<td>57.47</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winton</td>
<td>53.19</td>
<td>34.04</td>
<td>12.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldridge</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>77.27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baillie</td>
<td>51.22</td>
<td>46.34</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards</td>
<td>47.37</td>
<td>52.63</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table indicates that most authors are more popular in the suburban schools. Those authors receiving more votes from country schools were McLeod, Winton, and Baillie. Possibly these authors travelled extensively in country areas, or made particular visits to the areas from which their votes have come. As each of these three authors received only a small number of YABBA votes, it is possible that they were all from the one area. This may indicate a bias towards a particular author brought about
by one teacher or librarian and their promotions and not be an indication of a major difference between suburban and country schools in particular. Closer analysis of these particular authors and the source of their votes may shed some light on this occurrence.

Though many young readers do have a particular favourite author that they vote for year after year, the main thrust of YABBA is as an award for a particular title. The following chapter looks at the individual titles that have been listed for the YABBA award using the same breakdown - raw vote, school type, and level popularity, the source of the book, gender, and school area, as used for the author analysis. In many cases the analysis by title is the most revealing as one cannot generalise about an author by the preceding tables, as the figures only relate to the particular title/s that the author had listed in YABBA and not his/her entire output.
CHAPTER SEVEN - Title analysis

The titles in this chapter are only the top twenty-six of the YABBA list from 1986 to 1991. During this period a total of forty-five titles made the final voting lists. I have chosen to discuss the books that received over 200 votes as I feel those below this cut off figure are insignificant in relation to this study.
### 3.1 Title - Raw Vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Raw Vote</th>
<th>Percentage Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playing Beatie Bow</td>
<td>2072</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreal</td>
<td>1610</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Pollard's Diary</td>
<td>1439</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbelievable</td>
<td>1355</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Might Hear You</td>
<td>1244</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hating Alison Ashley</td>
<td>1075</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space Demons</td>
<td>1028</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncanny</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm Boy</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round the Twist</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So Much To Tell You</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbearable</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man From Snowy River</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Boulderbuster</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Wind</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quirky Tales</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skymaze</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Little Australians</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Pollard's Letters</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jodie's Journey</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond the Labyrinth</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halfway Across the Galaxy and Turn Left</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Came Back to Show you</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Could Fly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Kid</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is not necessarily the YABBA winners that are highest on the list of those with the most votes. As YABBA winners cannot stand again, it is those books that do not win but are consistently popular over a number of years that manage to remain high on the list. *Playing Beatie Bow* (Park, 1980) is a most interesting book to have as the one with the most votes as it is an award winning book that would be on many recommended reading lists and is often used as a junior secondary class text. Possibly it is an Australian classic of the future, a little different to the generally accepted idea of a popular YABBA title, that is, a simpler, shorter book that is often not considered of literary merit. Jennings' collections of short stories would be considered the most typical examples of a YABBA title.

As with the tables of data relating to the authors it is the minority of titles grouped at the top of the table that share the majority of the votes, the top ten titles share over fifty-eight percent of the vote, well over half, with the remainder of the titles sharing what is left.
### 3.2 Title - Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Female Vote %</th>
<th>Male Vote %</th>
<th>Unknown %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playing Beatie Bow</td>
<td>69.45</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>20.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreal</td>
<td>36.02</td>
<td>48.76</td>
<td>15.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Pollard's Diary</td>
<td>63.17</td>
<td>16.82</td>
<td>20.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbelievable</td>
<td>34.91</td>
<td>45.46</td>
<td>19.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Might Hear You</td>
<td>71.06</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>20.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hating Alison Ashley</td>
<td>65.77</td>
<td>19.16</td>
<td>15.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space Demons</td>
<td>24.12</td>
<td>48.44</td>
<td>27.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncanny</td>
<td>33.88</td>
<td>44.35</td>
<td>21.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm Boy</td>
<td>37.16</td>
<td>42.09</td>
<td>20.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>58.75</td>
<td>15.95</td>
<td>25.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round the Twist</td>
<td>36.90</td>
<td>35.98</td>
<td>27.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So Much To Tell You</td>
<td>73.84</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>22.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbearable</td>
<td>31.77</td>
<td>43.23</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man From Snowy River</td>
<td>41.48</td>
<td>41.14</td>
<td>17.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Boulderbuster</td>
<td>27.11</td>
<td>50.92</td>
<td>21.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Wind</td>
<td>64.46</td>
<td>14.18</td>
<td>21.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quirky Tales</td>
<td>33.26</td>
<td>45.30</td>
<td>21.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skymaze</td>
<td>19.91</td>
<td>50.23</td>
<td>29.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Little Australians</td>
<td>71.89</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>19.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Pollard's Letters</td>
<td>65.71</td>
<td>15.85</td>
<td>18.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jodie's Journey</td>
<td>75.47</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>18.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Fin</td>
<td>17.76</td>
<td>62.93</td>
<td>19.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond the Labyrinth</td>
<td>36.60</td>
<td>30.57</td>
<td>32.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halfway Across the Galaxy and Turn Left</td>
<td>42.80</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>19.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Came Back to Show</td>
<td>53.75</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>36.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You I Could Fly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Kid</td>
<td>39.44</td>
<td>44.60</td>
<td>15.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The high incidence in the category of unknown gender is due to the difficulty in ascertaining the gender of some voters. In many cases the gender had to be determined by careful consideration of the voters' name and any other indication they may have given on their voting form. When it was impossible to decide what gender to allocate to a particular vote unknown was entered for that voter. The high rate of unknown gender in some cases is due to the obvious difficulty inherent in this method.

It is worth noting that all of Jennings' titles have a relatively equal number of votes between sexes. Other titles that appear to be equally popular are *Storm boy* (Thiele, 1963), *The man from Snowy River* (Mitchell, 1982), *Top kid* (Hepworth, 1985), *Beyond the labyrinth* (Rubinstein, 1988) and *Halfway across the galaxy and turn left* (Klein, 1985). It does not seem likely that one could draw any conclusions about this group of books and why they are all equally popular with males and females as they are such a diverse group in style and subject matter. Further detailed analysis of each text may shed some light, this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The remaining titles were all most popular with the female readers, except for the following titles - *Space demons* (Rubinstein, 1986), *Skymaze* (Rubinstein, 1989), *Frank Boulderbuster* (McLeod, 1985) and *Blue fin* (Thiele, 1969). These four titles were most popular with boys. They are four books that would probably be considered books likely to appeal to the male reading population in most libraries, if one wishes to differentiate. These four books also
share strong male leads in their stories whereas the majority of books hugely popular with girls have female protagonists, books such as *Playing Beatie Bow* (Park, 1980), *People might hear you* (Klein, 1983b) and *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a) all fit into this category.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Owned Book %</th>
<th>Borrow from a friend %</th>
<th>Public Library %</th>
<th>School Library %</th>
<th>Unkn %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playing Beatie Bow</td>
<td>30.74</td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>16.31</td>
<td>39.96</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreal</td>
<td>18.07</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>65.47</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Pollard's Diary</td>
<td>13.27</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>12.16</td>
<td>64.28</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbelievable</td>
<td>16.75</td>
<td>9.45</td>
<td>7.97</td>
<td>59.11</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Might Hear You</td>
<td>17.12</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>12.54</td>
<td>62.30</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hating Alison Ashley</td>
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<td>0.28</td>
<td>8.37</td>
<td>68.93</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space Demons</td>
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<td>7.10</td>
<td>12.26</td>
<td>52.72</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncanny</td>
<td>26.25</td>
<td>13.22</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>48.93</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm Boy</td>
<td>22.94</td>
<td>7.91</td>
<td>16.17</td>
<td>48.39</td>
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<td>14.27</td>
<td>58.63</td>
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<td>5.5</td>
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<td>11.77</td>
<td>44.19</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>19.62</td>
<td>36.49</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.84</td>
<td>9.83</td>
<td>62.19</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
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<td>7.22</td>
<td>11.60</td>
<td>57.99</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
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<td>6.11</td>
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<td>52.94</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Little Australians</td>
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<td>10.95</td>
<td>16.92</td>
<td>31.34</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Pollard's Letters</td>
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<td>2.59</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>63.40</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Jodie's Journey</td>
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<td>11.18</td>
<td>66.46</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.25</td>
<td>18.07</td>
<td>50.16</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond the Labyrinth</td>
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<td>15.09</td>
<td>23.40</td>
<td>29.81</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halfway Across the Galaxy</td>
<td>23.20</td>
<td>9.20</td>
<td>15.20</td>
<td>47.60</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galaxy and Turn Left</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Came back to Show You</td>
<td>26.25</td>
<td>14.58</td>
<td>13.75</td>
<td>42.08</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Could Fly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Kid</td>
<td>24.88</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>18.78</td>
<td>53.05</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The books that have been found to have high ownership rates, that is over thirty percent - *Playing Beatie Bow* (Park, 1980) *Unbearable* (Jennings, 1990b), *Man from Snowy River* (Mitchell, 1982), and *Seven little Australians* (Turner, 1894) are an interesting group. Many of these would be most likely to be given as presents. They are well known titles, three of which have been made into movies. Titles such as *Seven little Australians* (Turner, 1894) would hold great memories for many parents and relatives and would be an obvious choice as a present.

High school library figures for particular titles in many cases could be connected to their status as class sets for English class use, and it is also likely that many YABBA shortlisted titles, especially those by well known authors, would be widely held in libraries and heavily promoted.

As would be expected many of the more popular titles such as those by Klein and Jennings have very high rates, over sixty percent, of their books being from a public library. As these are extremely well known authors their books would be bought in multiple by many public libraries whenever a new title was released. As they are also very popular with young people many will have gone out of their way to borrow or buy, consequently resulting in high borrowing rates from all kinds of libraries.
### 3.4 Title - School Type and Level Popularity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Private School %</th>
<th>State School %</th>
<th>Unknown %</th>
<th>Most popular levels..</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playing Beatie Bow</td>
<td>37.36</td>
<td>51.74</td>
<td>10.91</td>
<td>6/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreal</td>
<td>20.25</td>
<td>74.60</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Pollard's Diary</td>
<td>30.51</td>
<td>57.47</td>
<td>12.02</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbelievable</td>
<td>16.68</td>
<td>83.32</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Might Hear You</td>
<td>42.44</td>
<td>47.03</td>
<td>10.53</td>
<td>6/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hating Alison Ashley</td>
<td>21.86</td>
<td>36.09</td>
<td>42.05</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space Demons</td>
<td>35.12</td>
<td>64.88</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncanny</td>
<td>21.97</td>
<td>78.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm Boy</td>
<td>33.37</td>
<td>66.63</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>43.41</td>
<td>56.35</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>6/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round the Twist</td>
<td>29.89</td>
<td>69.97</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So Much To Tell You</td>
<td>50.55</td>
<td>48.49</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>6/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbearable</td>
<td>37.10</td>
<td>61.94</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man From Snowy River</td>
<td>23.24</td>
<td>39.41</td>
<td>37.35</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Boulderbuster</td>
<td>20.88</td>
<td>79.12</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Wind</td>
<td>42.16</td>
<td>57.47</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>6/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quirky Tales</td>
<td>21.44</td>
<td>78.56</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skymaze</td>
<td>41.40</td>
<td>58.37</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Little Australians</td>
<td>44.03</td>
<td>43.78</td>
<td>12.19</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Pollard's Letters</td>
<td>22.48</td>
<td>58.21</td>
<td>19.31</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jodie's Journey</td>
<td>47.52</td>
<td>51.55</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Fin</td>
<td>23.68</td>
<td>57.63</td>
<td>18.69</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond the Labyrinth</td>
<td>34.73</td>
<td>64.91</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halfway Across the Galaxy and Turn Left</td>
<td>31.20</td>
<td>68.80</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Came Back to Show You that I Could Fly</td>
<td>52.92</td>
<td>46.25</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>6/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Kid</td>
<td>18.78</td>
<td>43.66</td>
<td>37.56</td>
<td>5/6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Titles by Jennings and Klein titles are most popular in state system, from where the majority of YABBA votes have come, obviously explaining the continued success of the titles written by these two authors.

The most popular in a private school was *Come back to show you I could fly* (Klein, 1989) with fifty-two percent of its vote coming from schools in this system. This may reflect its winning of the CBC award in 1990, as many schools would have then heavily promoted it as a novel worthy of attention. The title with the largest percentage of its vote coming from the State system was *Unbelievable* (Jennings, 1986) with eighty-three percent of its vote coming from this quarter, another demonstration of Jennings' immense popularity, strongest amongst suburban, state school children.

It is disappointing to find that no title appears to be most popular at the year levels eight or nine, despite the appearance of some more complex titles on the YABBA lists. Even a novel such as *Beyond the labyrinth* (Rubinstein, 1988) is listed as being most popular amongst YABBA voters in grades five and six. This is a comment most likely on the general age of YABBA's voters, not a true indication of the most likely readership for some of the novels to appear on the list. It is likely that many older children are reading a number of these novels, they are just not YABBA voters.
### 3.5 Title - School Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Country %</th>
<th>Suburban %</th>
<th>Unknown %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playing Beatie Bow</td>
<td>26.98</td>
<td>72.01</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreal</td>
<td>39.32</td>
<td>60.06</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Pollard's Diary</td>
<td>35.44</td>
<td>63.59</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbelievable</td>
<td>42.21</td>
<td>57.64</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Might Hear You</td>
<td>30.63</td>
<td>68.65</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
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<td>Hating Alison Ashley</td>
<td>24.47</td>
<td>75.53</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space Demons</td>
<td>24.81</td>
<td>74.61</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncanny</td>
<td>42.22</td>
<td>56.66</td>
<td>1.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Storm Boy</td>
<td>37.27</td>
<td>60.21</td>
<td>2.52</td>
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<td>Games</td>
<td>29.26</td>
<td>69.90</td>
<td>0.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Round the Twist</td>
<td>43.78</td>
<td>53.84</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So Much To Tell You</td>
<td>34.93</td>
<td>63.56</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbearable</td>
<td>42.58</td>
<td>54.68</td>
<td>2.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Man From Snowy River</td>
<td>35.80</td>
<td>64.20</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Boulderbuster</td>
<td>55.13</td>
<td>44.51</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Wind</td>
<td>33.27</td>
<td>65.60</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quirky Tales</td>
<td>40.92</td>
<td>58.86</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skymaze</td>
<td>35.07</td>
<td>63.80</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Little Australians</td>
<td>32.34</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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<td>43.30</td>
<td>52.96</td>
<td>3.74</td>
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<td>35.47</td>
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<td>Halfway Across the Galaxy and Turn Left</td>
<td>41.60</td>
<td>54.80</td>
<td>3.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Came Back to Show</td>
<td>35.83</td>
<td>55.42</td>
<td>8.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You that I Could Fly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Kid</td>
<td>15.96</td>
<td>84.04</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The most popular title amongst country voters was *Frank Boulderbuster* (McLeod, 1985). In the suburbs the most popular title appears to have been *Top kid* (Hepworth, 1985), or at least both of these books were not widely read in the suburbs and the country respectively.

Why a particular book is popular more in one area than another is difficult, almost impossible to discern. It may be due to distribution of the book, and therefore its availability, an author's visit, the influence of an enthusiastic teacher or librarian.

A number of things could cause a book to be more popular in one area than another, only further investigation, in many cases now impossible, would shed further light on this factor. Closer analysis of the statistics though, as is the case for many of these tables, might release further findings or trends worthy of consideration and discussion.
SECTION THREE

CHAPTER EIGHT - Survey data - Voters

In an attempt to further enhance the statistical data already gathered from voting forms in the older readers' section from 1986 to 1991. A survey of a selected group of schools was undertaken after the 1992 YABBA voting. Questions were asked of both YABBA organisers (Librarians and teachers) (see chapter nine) and of voters. It was hoped that their responses would led to a better understanding of voter motivation and give greater insight into their opinions and interests.

The following graph is the result of one of the questions asked of the 207 YABBA voters that participated after the 1992 voting process was over, converted to percentages for the purpose of analysis and comparison. These voters were from schools of various types that have participated regularly in YABBA. The students were asked "How much has each of the following influenced your YABBA voting?" and were given a table with boxes for the following responses - "Not at all", "Some", and "A great deal". See appendix one for questionnaire in full.
4.1 Students - What factors do you feel influenced your choice?

Key
First column (red) - no response
Second column (green) - Not at all
Third column (blue) - Some
Fourth column (yellow) - A great deal

The resulting graph appears to indicate that the influences recognised as strong by earlier YABBA voting form responses are also recognised as markedly important by the students themselves. That is, the librarian is seen as the most influential of all of the factors suggested. The role the librarian has to play in publicising and promoting YABBA has already been identified in earlier analysis. This graph emphasises the fact that the voters see the librarian as having the greatest influence over how they actually voted. In reading programs in school it is obvious that those books recommended by librarians, the focuses librarians give to book
talks, and book promotions have an effect on students' reading habits in relation to YABBA. This fact is recognised and stated by the readers themselves.

Following closely behind librarians are teachers and friends, identified as the other two main influences on how these children voted in the 1992 YABBA voting year. Teachers are an obvious choice for influence as they have a great power over what children read, especially in terms of classroom texts for study. Many also play active parts in wider reading programs, discussing and influencing books chosen for recreational reading. Friends, the child's peer group, are an obvious influence, and in this case the other group to rate highly in the survey. Many readers hear about books from friends, and swap good books amongst themselves. A craze on a particular author, or series of titles can often start after the enthusiastic interest from a small group of friends spreads to engulf the whole peer group level.

Most other areas - Advertising, Parents, Television and Movies were seen as having some influence by most students but not many indicated that these factors played a large part in their choices. The section indicating "other" was interesting in that some of the students who saw influences other than those listed, actually wrote down what these influences were. A few mentioned the cover of the book as playing a major part in their choice of it, initially to read, and then to vote for. Another wrote that they were reading all of the books from the series. The response most given was that they had read other books by the author and the major influence on their reading another title was the enjoyment they had got from
reading the first. The authors mentioned were Paul Jennings and Robin Klein.

One voter indicated that none of the given areas had any influence over his vote and then wrote - "It was my own decision!" in the box given for other influences. The strength of YABBA probably lies in this very fact - that the final choice is that of the young reader despite what the teachers, librarians, parents or friends may do or say. This highlights the tension apparent between YABBA being first and foremost a child centred award and the fact that adult input and influence is apparent at all stages of the award process. At least we can say the voters themselves feel YABBA gives them a voice that is otherwise unheard.
Further Questionnaire Responses

*Explain why you voted for this book*

When faced with this statement on the questionnaire many of the voters slipped into the stock response of 'it was good', or 'I liked it', 'it was my favorite book'. Seventy three of the two hundred and seven forms had something like this as all or part of the answer. But this was not all, many students attempted to better describe their feeling, or identify more clearly exactly what it was in the book that had affected them so.

I have separated the voters' remarks into male and female in an effort to detect any differences in their remarks. On the surface they are in most cases similar. That is, both genders feel similar things about the books that they read, or at least describe them in similar ways. More telling may be the remarks that were not said; not one girl mentioned romance or love as a theme that drew them to the book; only one boy mentioned adventure as the reason why he liked the book and voted for it. So much for the stereotypical idea of what young boys and girls read - little mention of either stereotype. What did feature heavily was the style of writing appreciated by the respondents. They liked most of all books that made them laugh. Forty-four responses (twenty-one percent), twenty-four girls and twenty boys, mentioned that the book they chose was funny. Responses like those following were by far the most common.
Because it was funny and I like the author.
(Sara, Year seven. *Quirky Tales* - Jennings, 1987)

I like the book *Misery Guts* because it is a very funny book and I like funny books.
(Stephanie, Year six - Gleitzman, 1991)

I voted for this book because it is full of humour I must have laughed one time every page.
(Melissa, Year six. *Hating Alison Ashley* - Klein, 1984a)

Some of the other more interesting responses were shared by a number of voters:

Eighteen voters "could not put the book down".

It was different and exciting. It was something that was imaginative and got you hooked so that you didn't want to put it down.
(Caitlin, Year nine. *Mandragora* - Mc Robbie, 1991)

It was a book that I had to keep reading, because it was interesting I couldn't stop reading it.
(Kristy, Year seven. *Shatterbelt* - Thiele, 1987)

Sixteen voters liked the author (had read others of theirs etc.).

Because it was written by Paul Jennings and he writes fantastic books. It was full of surprises and fun and once I picked it up I COULDN'T PUT IT DOWN!!
(Wil, Year six. *Unmentionable* - Jennings, 1991)
Fifteen voters felt they could identify with or liked the characters.

I think it deserves an award for I could feel and experience each character through her [sic] writing.  (Nadia, Year nine.  China coin - Baillie, 1991)

Thirteen voters thought the book was well written.

I think that it is extremely well written and a great fantasy book.   (Ilana, Year eight. Mandragora - Mc Robbie, 1991)

A ingenious [sic] piece of brilliant literature...
(Adrian, Year eight. Lockie Leonard, human torpedo - Winton, 1990)

Thirteen voters though the book was different or original.

The book was very original, I've never read a book like it. The book was unique. I reaaly [sic] enjoyed it and couldn't stop reading even when I was supposed to be sleep.  (Kelvin, Year eight. Peter - Walker, 1991)

Nine voters liked the thrilling, suspenseful aspects of the book they chose.

I voted for this book because it was thrilling, emotional and you never knew quite what was going to happen.  (Osman, Year eight. Mandragora - Mc Robbie, 1991)

Because it kept me in spence [sic] to the end.  
(Diana, Year seven. My secret guy - Dolly Fiction)
Eight voters thought the book was never boring.

It gets into the story quickly and it is never boring.
(James, Year six. *Skymaze* - Rubinstein, 1989)

I voted for this book because Penny is very funny and cheeky [sic] she is fun to read about and she doesn't bore you with heaps of information. (Shelley, Year six. *Penny Pollard's guide to modern manners* - Klein, 1989)

Six voters thought their book made you think about life, people etc.

I voted for it because it was the kind of book that makes you think about life and how lucky you are to be alive.
(Amanda, Year eight. *Came back to show you I could fly* - Klein, 1989)

Six voters (all girls) thought the book was imaginative.

I chose this book because it is imaginative. A lot of work has gone into it and obviously the author is trying to show how quickly things change. (Priscilla, Year seven. *Window* -Baker, 1991)

Amongst all of the responses were some sophisticated comments about what makes a book readable and popular with young people. I considered the following comments to be of interest for varied reasons. The students appeared to put some thought into their answers.
I have read many books that have made me feel like the person but in *The Farseekers* (Carmody, 1990) I felt more like an onlooker. The book made me feel compasion [sic] for Elspeth (the main character) but also made me look at the view of all the other characters. It was the first book I have read that didn't just portray the main characters view. (Ben, Year eight.)

This book was a great book if you just wanted to read! It really involves you, and you can relate to some of the feelings and emotions that the book has mentioned. I thought the blurb was very well written, it captured my attention. (Georgia, Year eight. *So much to tell you* - Marsden, 1987)

I voted for this book because I think it explains how two very different people can have so much in common. (Nathan, Year eight. *Letters from the inside* - Marsden, 1991)

I voted for this book this year because after reading the book I marvelled at how it related to several people my age. Pugwall is virtually my age, has all the characteristics of a 12-15 year old, and is described in a very likeable way. (unreadable) with the summer goals, I know that I and several other friends and associates set goals for the summer. Also a lot of other goals of Pugwalls relate to our goals which shows the relations to the readers. (Marcus, Year eight *Pugwall's summer* Clark, 1989)

Other comments made on the questionnaire by voters were all given by less than four respondents, but are still nevertheless interesting as they show some insight and thought about what students are reading and why. The following comments were made:

Liked the setting
Liked the setting
Liked short story format
Liked the layout, illustrations, cover, title or blurb.
Book was popular with their friends
"I thought I was in it"
Believable
Easy to read
Part of a series
Emotional
Teacher read it in class
Scary
Exciting
It had everything in it
Saw it on TV or at Movies.
Wanted to vote for American book but couldn't.

The ultimate comment of praise was from a Year seven student for his favorite book *Unbearable* by Paul Jennings (1990). It is no wonder that his books rate so highly if he has the ability to drag them away from television!!

I voted for this because I think his short stories are not only funny but very entertaining, I think reading his books is better than watching TV.

A few of the comments made by some voters highlighted the extent to which they see popularity as the main reason for any book's success, and therefore in their eyes the appropriate measure for awarding commendation. With this in mind one student implied the students' apparent lack of agreement with the earlier CBC awards for 1992, on the grounds that the 'popular' book was not chosen.
I voted for this book because I think it has a fair chance of winning. This is because the Author is extremely popular and nearly everyone likes his books. (Idris?, Year 8. Lists a number of titles - Jennings)

I voted for *Mandragora* (Mc Robbie, 1991) because I believed it should have won Book of the year award. David Mc Robbie should be given a prize for his book since everyone liked it. It was very popular so I think it deserves to win. (Clare, Year 9)

It is interesting to note that these students see the main criteria as being the book's popularity. In their minds literary quality does not come into it. It is probably either a term they do not understand, or at least do not fully appreciate yet. This would explain the disbelief that Children's Book Council award results are often met with among sections of the children's reading population.
CHAPTER NINE - Survey data - Teachers, Librarians and organisers.

In figure 4.1 the factors that influenced a student’s vote were analysed, as seen from the perspective of the student. The same question was asked of the organising teachers and librarians in the various schools surveyed. This has resulted in a relatively small sample of thirteen responses, but they are still responses worthy of consideration. Nearly all of the respondents have participated in YABBA for a number of years, and in this time overseen many hundreds of YABBA votes made by their students. Their ideas about the influences at play upon their students are valid and noteworthy. A larger sample from a wider range of YABBA participants would obviously be desirable, but this data nevertheless provides useful insights into the opinions of our YABBA organisers.
5.1 *Teachers, Librarians and Organisers* - *What factors do you feel influenced student choice?*

![Bar chart showing factors influencing student choice](image)

**Key**
- First column (red) - no response
- Second column (green) - Not at all
- Third column (blue) - Some
- Fourth column (yellow) - A great deal

In comparing the responses made by Teachers and Librarians to those of their students it is interesting to note the most glaring difference. That is, that whereas the students identify the librarian as having the greatest influence on their vote, the librarians while seeing themselves as having some influence do not see themselves as having the largest influence. Librarians felt that the major influence is the voters' friends they also felt that advertising, Television and teachers had a great deal more influence than the voters themselves thought they had. Why the discrepancy? I feel it is likely that the librarians are selling themselves slightly short, as every other indicator points to the enormous influence the librarian wields over YABBA. Through initial organisation, promotion,
display, right down to the collection of votes the librarian is vital to YABBA. This appears to be justly recognised by the voters if not by the librarians themselves

Other influences are difficult to compare and judge. Voting lists seem to indicate that a book that has received greater publicity such as the Jennings' titles, or one that has been made into a movie or television series is often more successful in YABBA. There are a number of books that are movies, series, plays etc., on the YABBA lists - *Playing Beatie Bow* (Park, 1980), *Seven little Australians* (Turner, 1984), *Round the twist* (Jennings, 1990c), *Blue fin* (Thiele, 1969), *Space demons* (Rubinstein, 1986) and *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a). Many of these books are YABBA winners, and extremely popular. In this light possibly the librarians are more aware of the influences of the media as they indicate a greater influence for these factors than do the voters.

Perhaps librarians are indicating influences they see at play in the students' lives continually - affecting many of their choices, including their YABBA vote. Possibly these are influences not noticed or recognised by the student themselves, particularly those who wish to think that all of their decisions are their own despite the ways in which they probably fold before peer or advertising pressure. It must also be said though, that the students' interpretations of the influences at play may be closer to the mark, and in this case it is the teachers and librarians who have misread the situation. There seems to be some strength to either case if one looks at each variable factor separately. More extensive
questioning, or possibly a larger sample may shed more light on the issue.

The librarians and teachers who filled in the questionnaires as a whole were much more likely to answer that a factor had a "great deal" of influence. They very rarely responded that something had "some" influence. Whereas voters were more likely to answer that a factor had some influence only - possibly a safer, more non committal answer, that many young people felt more comfortable with.
Further Questionnaire responses

Of the thirteen librarians, teachers and teacher librarians who filled in the response forms, twelve had participated in YABBA before. The one librarian who had not was a new staff member in a long standing YABBA school. Of these, ten were solely library based librarians or teacher librarians, two were a combination of library and classroom teacher, and one was a classroom teacher.

Twelve of the thirteen described YABBA in their school as a library based activity centred around wider reading classes for primary school and junior secondary students. One school ran YABBA through their active student book club at the year eight level. These types of responses reinforce findings from the voting forms themselves, that is, that YABBA is a library based activity in most situations and that it is the librarian who in most cases takes responsibility for its implementation and promotion as part of a wider reading programme.

When questioned on special promotional activities run to promote, or in relation to YABBA, there were a few interesting responses and ideas. The standard approach appears to have been posters around the library and school and discussions or book talks within the library wider reading classes. Some schools also mounted displays of books and voting lists, kept records of their school votes to compare with YABBA’s overall results, or announced the YABBA winners at school assembly. Other ideas included running an in school YABBA competition with prizes, the setting up of 'official' polling booths in the library for the students to
properly cast their vote, and dress up days to promote YABBA titles, all interesting ideas that could probably be expanded upon and shared with other participating schools.

When asked why they were participating in YABBA the responses in most cases were as expected. Nine of the thirteen organisers saw the award as a means of promoting the reading of Australian authors. Seven respondents mentioned the opportunity to allow students’ opinions to be heard, and four mentioned YABBA as an indication of what was popular amongst students, some of these also remarked on YABBA as being both popular and child centred in comparison with the Children's Book Council Book of the Year Awards.

Also mentioned was that YABBA promotes discussion. It is also seen as a good way of introducing new books to potential voters. One librarian felt that YABBA introduced the concept of voting procedures to students. In criticism of YABBA one respondent stated that YABBA can be a predictable popularity race, but she went on to say that at times this added balance as a comparison with the Children's Book Council awards.

The survey data for both groups of respondents revealed something more of their motivations than is available from straightforward analysis of the voting form material analysed in section two. It is interesting to note the differences in the perceived influences on voting as stated by the organisers and the voters. Most importantly though the written responses made by voters show us the insightful and
knowledgeable remarks that they can make about their reading and they obvious pleasure they derive from being able to vote for a book that they treasure.
SECTION FOUR

CHAPTER TEN - Top seven YABBA titles

*When one says that a writer is fashionable, one practically always means that he is admired by people under thirty.*  
*(George Orwell - Collected Essays.)*

YABBA's popularity and the niche that it has filled within the world of awards can be further explored through an analysis of the books that have been the most popular with voters. I have chosen to look at the books that have received the most votes in the older readers' section during the period from 1986 to 1991. From the list of forty-five titles, I have chosen the top seven as they have all received over 1000 votes, and amongst them are four YABBA winners; the other three titles have been consistently popular throughout the time period, but have never gained the most votes in any one year.

It is also interesting to note that these seven titles are also amongst the most popular in the children's choice awards, that stipulate Australian material only, from other Australian states. *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a), *Unreal* (Jennings, 1985), and *Unbelievable* (Jennings, 1986) have all won one section of the New South Wales award KOALA. *People might hear you* (Klein, 1985) has one the COOL award in the Australian Capital Territory. *Unbelievable* (Jennings, 1986) has also won the KROC award in the Northern Territory. Other titles placed in the YABBA listings
especially others by Jennings and Klein have also won these and other Children's choice awards from around Australia. There is little doubt that these top seven YABBA titles are also popular with many other children across Australia.

These seven titles have much in common. They are at the very heart, stories about people; human dramas centred around the family and the way that each family functions. As each novel is told from the point of view of a young adolescent in most cases, their view of their family, and the interaction within this group, is central to the action. As each story progresses the child grows and discovers their own identity, and place within the family, and the world around them.

Many of the stories also share their use of humour to convey the feelings of the characters and lighten what might otherwise be serious topics, a device that appears to be most popular with young people. Suspense and romance are also heavily featured, in stories such as *Space demons* (Rubinstein, 1986) and *Playing Beatie Bow* (Park, 1980), both novels that certainly make you feel a pressing need to find out what happens to the characters, how it will all turn out in the end. It is interesting to note that it is probably suspense, romance and humour that are also very popular in the adult book market. It is not only children who favour these approaches in the books that they read.

All of the authors share the ability to create real, believable characters whom young readers find it easy to relate to, as they are often so like themselves.
All of the books also share a creation of place and time by the author that allows the young reader to easily understand, and enter the world that they are reading about. Many of the stories have school or family life as the setting, places familiar to many young readers. Fry (1985) in his discussion of readers and how they interact with books says:

If building images is, as Iser suggests, an essential part of the act of reading, then that act is made easier if some of those images are provided in advance: the reader works from what is familiar and her picturing begins from what is already in her memory. (p. 67)

The seven novels to be discussed here all begin in the known world, a computer, the school room, a safe family, and then the author includes a twist, a confrontation, a time slip or a computer game beyond imagination. This is the skill in both making the child comfortable in world they can understand, but then taking them beyond this and entering them into the unknown world of change and excitement.
**Hating Alison Ashley** by Robin Klein

*Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a) was the first YABBA winner of the older readers' section in 1986. It rated a very respectable 1074 votes, over twenty-three percent of the vote for that year in this section. The book almost doubled the voting numbers of its nearest rival - *Man from Snowy River* (Mitchell, 1982) with over twelve percent of the vote. A Children's Book Council short listed book in 1985, the novel was no doubt stocked in libraries and recommended to children because of its critical acceptance within the adult literary field. Constantly popular with children, and adapted for the theatre, *Hating Alison Ashley* has gone on to become a popular standard class text with upper primary and junior secondary English classes.

*Hating Alison Ashley* is a story brimming with all of the ingredients for a popular book - a friendly, easy style with a plot centred around the two things central to any young person - school and family. Baringa East primary school is a setting that rings true to all readers, child and adult alike. The classroom and the humour with which it is treated remind everyone of their time at school, be it happening now or in the past. To make it even more appealing the central character is different, an outsider, and having difficulties relating to all of those around her. The majority of the books found to be most popular amongst YABBA voters seem to share the trait of a strong central character who engages the reader, often with their humour and obvious differences from the crowd. With the major parts of the action set in the classroom and at the annual school camp *Hating Alison Ashley* is guaranteed to attract young
voters in the upper primary area. Klein has a skill for entering the young person's world, picking up expertly on their ideas and attitudes and expressing these thoughts through her characters. The opening lines of *Hating Alison Ashley* are an example of the ease with which she creates an immediate image of her character and draws the young reader in to their world.

I will never forgive my mother for calling me Erica with a surname like Yurken.
When an emergency teacher was taking our grade (we got a lot of emergency teachers at our school because the ordinary ones were often away with nervous problems), the emergency teacher would say something like, 'Girl in the end row with the dark hair, what's your name,' But before I could answer, kids would screech out 'Erk!' Or 'Yuk!' Or Gherkin!' Except Barry Hollis who always yelled out something worse..... (Klein, 1984a, p.1)

Klein is also adept at creating a number of peripheral characters, who help the action along and aid in the creation of humorous scenes. Barry Hollis, the class clown and bully, the members of Erica's family, each one a story in their own right, even the not seen but sensed presence of Alison Ashley's mother expertly dealt with by Klein's skilful use of characterisation, gesture and humour.

Like most successful books for young people *Hating Alison Ashley* is a journey of self discovery for its main character, detailing her growth and development from a self centred young child to a young adult with a greater understanding of those around her and an acceptance of their differences; a process that all children must travel through in varying degrees, so therefore a topic that makes
fascinating reading. In conjunction with Klein's humour it is a winning combination.
Unreal and Unbelievable by Paul Jennings

Unreal (Jennings, 1985) was the winner of the YABBA award in 1987, after polling a respectable ten percent (477 votes) in 1986 and being placed third behind the eventual winner Hating Alison Ashley (Klein, 1984a) and Man from Snowy River (Mitchell, 1982). With 1133 votes it holds the honor of having won YABBA with the highest number of votes and the highest percentage of the vote in any one year - over thirty percent. Unreal was the first collection of Paul Jennings's short stories to hit the market of children's books, and hit it did, having an enormous impact. He very quickly built a dedicated following for his style.

Unbelievable (Jennings, 1986) the incredibly successful sequel to Unreal, was published in 1986, only a year after the release of Unreal. This second book of short stories appeared before the interest and excitement over the first book had even had a chance to dissipate slightly. Jennings was certainly riding on a high.

Unbelievable was runner up to Unreal when it won YABBA in 1987. With Unbelievable receiving a respectable twelve and a half percent of the vote to come second in that year, Jennings total vote percentage for 1987 was a staggering forty-three percent, over 1600 votes. Unbelievable went on to win the older readers section of YABBA in the next year, 1988, with 890 votes - over twenty-two percent of the vote.

Jennings' short stories appear to follow a very successful formula that works for him and his readers. They always have endings with
a twist, if sometimes slightly predictable; they are told in the first
person in a relaxed style as if someone were recounting a tale to an
old friend. They are often action packed with the reader given
immediate entry into the story with no preliminary introductions or
long winded explanations. The often implausible, impossible plot
lines are tempered with the feeling that no one is taking anything
too seriously here. Despite some occasional morally correct
outcomes there is no deep soul searching, no attempts to get at any
underlying meaning. All emotions are simple and unencumbered -
characters are happy or sad, frightened or angry and have most in
common with the straightforward characters from fairy tales and
legends that feel comfortable as they are so much apart of our
cultural background.

Jennings does an excellent job of creating a story world where
young readers can feel safe as well as have fun with his surprising
tales and strange events in an easy to handle story with nothing
over twenty pages in length. His writing style is accessible to
those students who may have trouble with more complex writing
styles. yet his wit, humour and unusual twists can appeal to even
the most accomplished readers. Dempsey (1991) in The Age,
describes Jenning's viewpoint:

Jennings says the first point about a children's book should
be to entertain. "As an author, you want children to love
books. When a child has finished reading a book of mine I
want him or her to want to read more. I try to make my
books accessible to as many children as possible. I want the
reluctant readers but I want the good readers as well. There
is no such thing as a book that will appeal to reluctant
readers and not good readers." (p. 11)
Jennings keeps his descriptive passages to a minimum which keeps the story moving. His short, crisp sentence structure and short sentence length ensures an ease of understanding. For example this passage from "The strap box flyer", (Unreal Jennings, 1985) it is not unusual in its construction or sentence length, a perfect example of the Jennings style:

There was a lot of smoke and noise. A crowd started to gather. Everyone thought that the glue would break. But it didn't. The wheels on the tractor sent up blue smoke. The engine roared. But still the glue held. (page 21)

Jennings's other great strength is his ability to write stories centred around themes that have great interest to young people - particularly those in the upper primary early secondary years. Skeletons, punk ghosts, school bullies, super heroes, treasure, toilets and bad smells are all topics used by Jennings in his stories. Matthew Ricketson (1992b) in his Australian Magazine article says of Jennings:

His sales are a barometer of his remarkable ability to write, without a trace of condescension, about what preoccupies 10 to 14 year olds. (p. 22)

His topics are probably those found most amongst the conversations and written stories of those real life children who find his books the most appealing. In an Age interview with Doug Aiton (1992), Paul Jennings has said of his own work:
I think the secret, or what I try to do, is present childhood the way it really is, and the way it isn't at the same time....... What you do is empower them. Children are so powerless. A lot of people view childhood as a preparation for life. I totally reject that. It is life. I make them enjoy reading. And I give them a good time. It is enough to simply enjoy a book. You don't have to justify that. (p. 4)

If Jennings' aim is to have children simply enjoy his books his immense, long-standing popularity amongst YABBA voters is a perfect testimony to his success.
*Penny Pollard's diary* by Robin Klein

With 1439 votes *Penny Pollard's diary* (Klein, 1983a) is the third most popular book if all votes are combined for the six year period. Yet, it has never won YABBA. It is a consistent performer being present in the voting list in the older reader's section for five of the six years under consideration. The book's accumulated vote for this period makes it one of the most popular, yet in each individual year it hovers around the middle of the pack, generally the fourth or fifth most popular book, with eight to nine percent of the vote. This is still no mean feat, to remain consistently well loved enough to be nominated and then voted for above many hundreds of other books each year.

One of the main attractions of this book is probably that it is not really a novel. Arranged in a diary format with illustrations on almost every page, only fifty-five pages in length and large format, it has more in common with an extended picture book than a full length novel. Yet you will find it on the shelves of almost every secondary school library, and it would be considered acceptable if somewhat light reading for year seven students. It is easy, entertaining read that would appeal to many young people.

Understandably the majority of the votes for this title came from years four, five and six. Seventy year eights and twenty year nines also voted for the book at some stage during its many years in the voting lists. More students in years eight and nine voted for *Penny Pollard's diary* than for *Master of the grove* (Kelleher, 1982), *My sister Sif* (Park, 1986), *Beyond the labyrinth* (Rubinstein, 1988) or
Unreal! (Jennings, 1985). This indicates that it was not only the younger students that found something to like in this simple tale.

Penny Pollard's diary is written in the short sharp style that one might use when writing in a diary. The tomboyish, humorous attitude of the horse crazy central character is oversimplified yet realistic in many respects. In an analysis of the 1986 YABBA voting list Grieve discussed Klein's impact and popularity as she had seven books across all three sections in the year of YABBA's inception. Grieve (1986) said of her apparent popularity with Victoria's young readers:

..... in Robin Klein's favour is her sense of humour. She has a knack of getting into a child's mind and of presenting a child's point of view in a child's language. (p. 19)

Penny Pollard's diary does touch on the serious topic of ageing and institutionalisation yet does not dwell on this at length, glossing over the loneliness and regimentation with humour. She shows us two people with apparently little in common, save their love of life and adventure, two people that need and relate to each other despite their age difference. A happy ending is given without any real insight into what the future might really be for any of the story's characters. Like Jennings, Klein makes simple moral judgements in this case about how we institutionalise our aged, and without delving too deeply or employing any complex emotions or difficult interactions she manages to create a entertaining tale that could become a learning experience for many young readers.
Space demons by Gillian Rubinstein

This novel was the winner of the YABBA award for the older readers section in 1990. It won with only a small number of votes - 346, in the year of YABBA's lowest turn out between the years 1986 and 1991, in this section. Space demons (Rubinstein, 1986) was runner up to Paul Jennings Uncanny (1988) the previous year with 393 votes, more than it received in 1990 when it managed to win. Space demons first appearance on the YABBA voting list was in 1988 when it polled 289 votes to put it in fourth place. In 1990, the year that it did win YABBA the sequel Skymaze (Rubinstein, 1989) was its runner up with 258 votes. Space demons obviously managed a consistent voting population over the three years that it appeared in the lists but it was not an outstandingly popular book as it never achieved a high percentage of the vote. In the year that it won it attracted thirteen percent of the vote. Most winners from other years polled in the high twenty's.

Space demons was a Children's Book Council Book of the year award honor book in 1987. Like others in this section, Hating Alison Ashley (Klein, 1984a) and Playing Beatie Bow (Park, 1980) that have also been represented in the Children's Book Council awards, it is likely that Space demons was widely purchased by librarians, recommended by teachers and librarians and in many cases put onto recommended reading lists and set as a class novel.

Like many of the other novels in this section, that is those most popular with YABBA voters, Space demons shares the common characteristic of an engaging beginning to the action. As the story
opens the two central characters Ben and Andrew, are bored with their computer game, they have played it too many times - everything seems boring. Every child can identify with this hunger for something new and exciting to happen. In the second chapter Elaine, the new girl at school, is introduced, Elaine is different and has trouble fitting in. As with *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a) this combination of school happenings and misfit children has instant appeal with young readers. Rubinstein goes on to create a scenario complete with problem parents, friction and friendships. The emotional interplays combined with an amazing computer game plot have proved to be popular with many readers. This is the kind of book it is difficult to put down.

Alongside the Jennings titles this is one of the most popular books with male readers, almost half of those voting for it were male, and it is the only novel in this group of popular books with strong male protagonists. *Space demons* success is linked to its fast moving plot and the excellent characters Rubinstein creates. With a number of sub plots operating in conjunction with the main story line Rubinstein maintains the interest of her readers without sacrificing the depth of her characters or giving to many easy options. Serious life choices and extremes of emotion are inter linked with the running of the computer game which forces all of the participants to a better understanding of themselves and their families. Yet again this is a novel of self discovery, but this time interwoven with a high tech helper who forces the children to face their innermost selves in order to win back their lives. Frightening concepts of self hatred and almost animalistic power and violence are handled deftly by Rubinstein as she allows her readers to view just enough.
are handled deftly by Rubinstein as she allows her readers to view just enough.

This a strong, powerful book that probably benefits from close attention as a class novel. The subplots involving the family lives of the main characters are a fascinating window into family life. With interactive dialogue and analysis of complex relationships between the characters *Space demons* is one of the more difficult of the YABBA books that have proved most popular with young people. Its length and subject matter make it a more complicated read than *Penny Pollard's diary* (Klein, 1983a) or *Unreal* (Jennings, 1985). Like others such as *Playing Beatie Bow* (Park, 1980) and *People might hear you* (Klein, 1983b), *Space demons* is a title that has achieved both popularity amongst children and literary acceptance with adults.
People might hear you by Robin Klein

One of few titles to have appeared in the voting list all six years People might hear you (Klein, 1983b) is a consistent performer that has accumulated over 1000 votes for the six years from 1986 to 1991 through a consistent if not dazzling performance. Placed sixth for four of the six years and ninth for the other two, the novel has hovered at around five percent of the vote. The highest percentage of the vote was given to People might hear you in 1990 when it attracted over seven percent, each year around 200 votes have been cast in its favour. This is by no means a high number, yet its consistent performance has placed it as the fifth most popular book amongst YABBA voters for the six year period from 1986 to 1991, an achievement worthy of note.

Published in 1983 and short listed for the Children's Book Council Book of the Year Awards in 1984, like many of the other books under discussion, People might hear you has done extremely well to remain popular with young children nearly ten years after its first appearance. Like Playing Beatie Bow (Park, 1980) and Space demons (Rubinstein, 1986) this novel has managed to stay in constant reprint and is consequently well read by YABBA voters. This situation has much to do with the standing of such novels within the adult literary community. Once short listed a novel becomes well known, bought by almost every library, and recommended to young people as a book worth reading. There are though novels that receive the literary acclaim but that do not go on to become firm favourites with young readers. It is many of
the novels discussed here that have received YABBA recognition that have managed to find admirers in both camps.

*People might hear you* has obviously had it admirers over the many years that it has remained popular and part of the YABBA line up. It also contain the almost mandatory excellent beginning that manages to attract the interest of reader and makes them keen to continue reading.

It was while they were living in the tiny flat above the take-away food shop that Auntie Loris began to change. Frances, preoccupied with the problem of having started at a new school half-way through a term, noticed her aunt's strangeness, but didn't worry about it very much. Aunt Loris quite often was discontented. Frances was skilled at gauging her uncertain moods before asking for things. (Klein, 1983b, page 1)

Popular authors such as Klein have an amazing skill for condensing a great deal into a simple, straightforward paragraph, whetting the readers appetite. In this example we learn of Frances's unusual life with her aunt, the fact that she is at a new school once again. We also learn of her aunt's apparent strange behaviour and that their relationship is not always relaxed. Klein implies a great deal about their life together and makes the reader want to discover more about their relationship and how it will evolve. At the very outset the mysterious behaviour of Aunt Loris is also given to us as a tantalising introduction of what may be to come. This ability to involve the reader quickly in the life of the story is a key element in much of the fiction that appears to be popular with young readers.
In Frances, Klein gives us a character to empathise with. We understand her need to belong, her longing for acceptance, but then revel in her defiant stance against the Temple and her need to remain free from constraint. Young readers would find it easy to feel themselves in her place, experience her desolation, her loneliness and terror. To identify with a character is to become part of a book. The story can then become a growth experience for the reader too as the story progresses. One of the final paragraphs of the story plunges us headlong into the acute panic and mindless terror felt by Frances:

> It was as though all the goblins and terrors of everyone's childhood were at her heels, lurched, grinning, in every shadow to pluck at her skirt as she sped by. She ran in irrational panic, and when Helen stumbled and fell, the terror plunged into cruelty. She used her nails to dig into flesh.....(Klein 1983b. p.198)

All reader at times value being taken to extremes of emotion, Klein does this with Frances at the culmination of the story after having built the tension slowly and carefully. Any criticism of the story would have to be levelled at how little some of the characters are developed and how vaguely much of the background detail is presented. We learn nothing of the feelings of many other characters, and small facts like the whereabouts of any of Frances's other family are left unanswered. This leaves the focus of the story clearly on Frances, her thoughts and feelings, a device that is at times unsatisfactory but does add to the creation of tension and the sense of foreboding.
Playing Beatie Bow by Ruth Park

Playing Beatie Bow (Park, 1980) is the most popular book to remain constantly well placed in the voting list yet never win. Playing Beatie Bow has never been placed lower than sixth during all of the six years under consideration, and with 2072 votes over the combined six years it has the most votes of any title. As those books that have won YABBA are not able to stand again it is impossible to say whether they would prove more popular if allowed to remain. Nevertheless, it is still a remarkable feat to remain consistently well liked over a period of six years, particularly when the book was first published as early as 1980, six years before YABBA even began. Playing Beatie Bow’s peak in popularity occurred in 1988 when the book polled 549 votes, nearly fourteen percent of the vote, to be the runner up to the eventual winner Unbelievable (1986) by Paul Jennings. Except for a low vote, only 165 votes - just over five percent in 1991, Playing Beatie Bow has managed over eight percent of the votes in every other year.

Playing Beatie Bow is a Children's Book Council Book of the Year Award winner from 1981. Published in 1980 it must certainly be on its way to becoming an Australian classic. Being the highest vote holder with over nine percent of all of the votes cast in this section over a six year period it is difficult to dismiss YABBA voters as merely children with no critical literary taste, that is, unable to select a book that meets with adult selection panel approval. It may be true that many of those books that have won YABBA win on the popular vote, but the long standing popularity
and consistency of a book like *Playing Beatie Bow* goes to show that many voters chose to give their vote to a book of lasting appeal with children that has also attained literary acclaim from adults. With other books such as *Space demons* (Rubinstein, 1986) and *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a) being short listed for the Children's Book Council awards, it is obvious that many of the most popular books with children are also those that have achieved literary acclaim.

What explains the long-standing popularity of *Playing Beatie Bow*? The novel is one of the longest of those that have polled well. It also has sections of difficult language as the Orkney accent of the characters from *The Rocks* in 1873 is written phonetically and not translated into a more understandable English. The accent adds to the flavour and colour of the story, but may be off putting for many a young reader who is perhaps not yet confident in their own language. Yet it is a book of adventure and romance that cannot help but keep the reader engrossed. The novels discussed in this analysis all have some critical points in common that are crucial in enveloping a reader and encouraging them to become part of the story with a need to read on. One of these is the opening lines, the point where a child either decides to continue or rejects the book outright. *Playing Beatie Bow* begins:

In the first place, Abigail Kirk was not Abigail at all. She had been christened Lynette.

Her mother apologised, 'It must have been the anaesthetic. I felt as tight as a tick for days. And Daddy was so thrilled to have a daughter that he wouldn't have minded if I'd called you Ophelia.' (Park (1980, page 1.))
In a few opening lines Park manages to introduce three of the characters and make you want to know more about all of them and their lives together. The opening has humour and a touch of mystery with the concept of Abigail being not quite herself but somebody else totally different. What young person has never considered the idea of being someone different, of changing one's name, or even one's family for another.

The other factor that appears crucial in any popular book with the young is the creation of a central character with whom the reader can identify, or sympathise with, a trait that many of these novels share. In Abby we have a young person in inner turmoil over her parents' separation yet outwardly cold and uncaring.

Her chief concern was that no one, not even her mother, should know what she was like inside. Because maybe to adults the turmoil of uncertainties, extravagant glooms, and sudden blisses, might present some kind of pattern or map, so that they could say, 'Ah, so that's the real Abigail, it it?" (Park 1980. page 4)

She has created a mask for herself, and is awkward and unsure of her feelings and her looks. Nothing seems to fit. The child who has yet to become an adult, Abigail is in the process of change, and the author chooses to send her back in time to do her growing up. The realistic life of The Rocks in the 1870's may as well be fairy land as Abby must endure hardship, love and loss if she is to grow.
Playing Beatie Bow is a novel about a journey, like so many books that remain with us as favourites, it tells of a journey through hardship and pain towards a form of self understanding. For readers who are experiencing their own real life journey of self discovery Park's created world - exciting, adventurous and romantic is bound to engulf the young reader. Tucker (1976.) in his discussion of how children respond to fiction states:

If you accept this preparatory role of fiction for the child it is easy to understand why there is, for example, the perpetual theme of a journey in children's books. The picaresque is pervasive from Ulysses to Tolkein. The journey gives the child a chance of escaping from being a dependent child to being independent. (p. 183)

Playing Beatie Bow is one of the most popular books with YABBA voters, it is popular because it is a romantic adventure with a happy ending, a story outline that appeals to the need in all people for an entertaining, satisfying story.
CHAPTER ELEVEN - Reconciliation - Popularity and literary merit

All normal people need both Classics and trash.

George Bernard Shaw

Leeson (1985a) has said;

Is reconciling quality with popularity an impossibility or simply a complex possibility which needs to be explored? Popularity can be measured. Quality is subjective, and when 'merit' is seen as a thing in itself, then it becomes more subjective still. (p. 109)

YABBA and its results have long been seen as a measure of popularity, the winners of YABBA are held high as being those books the children have chosen for themselves without adult intervention. In this light YABBA is often compared to the traditional, long standing literary award - the Children's Book Council Book of the Year awards. It is questionable whether such a comparison is justified, or even relevant to the aims and objectives of either award.

It is essential to realise that the Children's Book Council awards, and YABBA, do not share all of the same aims, and therefore their results should in some ways be markedly different. While their basic aims are similar they are vastly different on a few crucial points that make all the difference to the end result. From the "Judges Report 1986":

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The 1986 panel of judges considers the Australian Children's Book Awards serve the following purposes:
1. To focus attention of Children's Books.
2. To emphasize literary and artistic qualities.
3. To direct positive attention to standards and criteria of excellence.
4. To take account of the child as reader.
5. To encourage new talent.
6. To recognize outstanding achievement likely to be of lasting merit.

(1986, p. 28)

Whereas the two awards both consider the promotion of literature for children important they both go about promoting, of focusing attention upon, this branch of literature, in entirely different ways. The council attempts to emphasis the promotion of material that it feels is of lasting quality, whereas YABBA's aim first and foremost is to promote reading through allowing children to have a vehicle for their opinions without overt adult judgement or intervention.

It would seem that the two awards could, and should complement each other. In an ideal world they would feed off each others publicity, look to each other for ideas, and inspiration, and work together to achieve their common aims. But: "In the children's book world a topic guaranteed to generate more heat than light is Book Awards." (McVitty; 1980, p.4) Some of the disagreement, and constant critical comparison may be the result of media hype that in itself may serve to publicise each award. As Grieve(1987) has said in an article on awards:
It is the nature of the beast: a Book Award feeds on contention and it is certainly a beast that those concerned with children's book would prefer to see grow plump than fade away through lack of nourishment. (p.1)

If one takes Grieve's point of view as likely then possibly the differences between the two awards are to be encouraged and promoted. The differences are their strengths and it is these strengths that must be emphasised if awards of this kind are to remain relevant and interesting.

The Children's Book Council choose to recognise quality and literary merit above, or instead, of the straightforward measure of popularity. In any attempt to further properly understand each of the awards and how they interact can, or should, these basic differences be compared? In many ways they are such totally different approaches that comparing the two may be pointless. Bauer (1981) has said on this point:

As surely as the Earth rotates around the sun there will be discussions of the various aspects of children's book awards. The two distinct categories represent two worlds. The adult - selected awards signify the world of literary judgement of professionals, the readers' - choice awards that of popularity with children. (p.53)

Discussions over the differences between YABBA and the traditional adult centred awards will continue as long as both types of awards exist. Comparison of the two worlds is necessary if both award types are to be effective in the marketplace of children's literature, and evolve to the fill the niche expected of them. Comparison may throw up areas of similarity and difference, but does not point towards one award structure being superior. On the
contrary, it seems healthy differences lead to further discussion and interest in children's books.

The majority of media attention, and the discussion most heard amongst people involved in the children's book community, emphasises the obvious differences between the books that win the CBC Book of the Year Award and those books that win YABBA. Jennings has been a constant winner of the YABBA and much has been made of the fact that he has never won, or even been nominated for the Children's Book Council awards (discussed in greater detail in Chapter Twelve) But, it cannot be ignored that the results of the two awards show more common ground than is observed at first glance. It is apparent that many of the titles that are short listed for the CBC awards do not make it to the lists for YABBA voting, and alternately many extremely popular YABBA titles are never nominated for the CBC award. Despite these obvious differences there are still many similarities between the awards that cannot go unremarked.

Amongst the top seven books from 1986 to 1991 are four titles that were also shortlisted for the Children's Book Awards, one of these actually winning the award in 1981 - Playing Beatie Bow (Park, 1980). The other titles to share recognition from both awards are People might hear you (Klein, 1983b), Hating Alison Ashley (Klein, 1984a) and Space demons (Rubinstein, 1986). If one looks at an expanded list of YABBA titles, the top twenty six titles (all those with over 200 votes), one finds ten titles that have appeared both on YABBA and CBC short lists, and four winners of
the CBC awards represented on the YABBA lists. These were 1981 CBC winner *Playing Beatie Bow* (Park, 1980), 1988 winner *So much to tell you* (Marsden, 1987), 1986 winner *Green wind* (Fowler, 1985) and 1989 winner *Beyond the labyrinth* (Rubinstein, 1988).

Unfortunately when winners of either award are announced much is made of this eventual winner but the often consistently popular also rans often barely rate a mention. Because of this YABBA is associated with Paul Jennings. Subsequently the popularity of other authors, and the wide variety of titles that find their way to the YABBA lists are often ignored, or unknown. The two awards have more titles in common than is realised. This is primarily due to how results are reported or discussed. Most people find it more interesting to report and argue over disagreements and differences than to comment on where the awards acquiesce. Further extensive comparison of all YABBA short lists and CBC short lists and recommended reading lists would probably show even greater similarity.

This partial agreement between the two awards is in line with the experience of other similar awards systems overseas. In an article titled *The Best of Both Worlds; children's books acclaimed by both adults and young readers*, Bauer (1981) found that in comparing 193 reader choice awards with the then current adult selected awards there were thirty-nine instances of agreement, that is twenty percent of the books chosen by both types of award were the same. (p. 53)
Both YABBA and Children's Book Council awards do share a few titles in common, an interesting point that may give further credence among some adults to the children’s choices. But does this mean that the other odd eighty percent of titles that the children have chosen are not worthy of being read, popular but of little value? A book being 'popular' can mean different things in different circles, to most children it signals a must read book that has been enjoyed by their peers. To some working with children and books it can mean a trashy title to be discouraged, a fad to be ignored, while other more acceptable literature is recommended. Jennings (1990a) has said;

'Child appeal' is not a dirty phrase. Experts who value books on a set of adult criteria alone must take some of the responsibility for the shortage of easily read, high interest volumes which may attract our less able, older readers.....child appeal is the first requirement for any children's book. (p. 8)

Struggling to get children to read an uninteresting book is a no win situation that should be ignored, possibly many people working with books are coming to see the value in working with the popularity of certain titles. Banning or censoring titles often leads to them becoming even more sought after, but encouraging children to read widely amongst all books will hopefully bring young people around to books as a life time leisure activity.

In any discussion of popularity versus an adult perception of literary merit one must also consider the opinion that adults may
not necessarily have an accurate grasp of exactly what is worthy of any readers attention. Dickinson (1973) has said;

...it may not be rubbish after all. There adult eye is not necessarily a perfect instrument for discerning certain values. (p. 103)

Different books bring, and give varied things to each reader. This point is as valid for the child reader as it is the adult. No one can be sure what a child gains from the reading of anything be it comic or classic.

YABBA is a vehicle for recording what is popular with children, but is it also an indication of other factors that are involved in helping a book to become popular with children. Mc Vitty (1983) has said;

Are popular children's books rubbish? Not necessarily. Where they are available and promoted, books like Charlotte's Web, Playing Beatie Bow, Bottersnikes and gumbles, and the works of Judy Blume, Betsy Byars and Morris Lurie are very popular indeed, yet one could hardly call them rubbish. The key may well be availability and promotion. (p. 322)

All of the findings presented from the analysis of the YABBA voting forms stresses the importance played in all facets of the YABBA process by the school organisers, generally the librarian. A book's popularity may in some respects rely on this very person. It is they who select, purchase, display and promote all of the fiction that many students will utilise as their only source of reading material. It is they who make these books available to the
students, their opinions on censorship, or appropriate reading material can, and will, affect what the students are able to access and therefore what is in the position to become popular. If one believes that the librarians wield such power over the reading matter of their students it must be recognised that many librarians must be making widely available many titles deemed not of literary quality by the establishment. Fifty four percent of all votes in the older reader section of YABBA from 1986 to 1991 were cast for books that were obtained from the school library. A further twelve and a half percent were obtained from the public library. Well over half of all votes were cast under the influence of a librarian. If they did not directly recommend the book, at the least they were in some way responsible for the book being available, and on the shelf at that library.

Obviously there are librarians who are making available and promoting books by popular authors such as Jennings and Klein. Should they only be promoting books of literary merit and ignoring these more popular titles? If we only promote the often more difficult titles from the CBC shortlist, and nothing else, are we creating an inaccessible world for many readers? Leeson (1985a) has said; "Filling the shelves with the best may simply be placing books in a time capsule for future archaeologists." (p. 107)

I am sure this is not the aim of librarians in general, to create a library of books that are never read, surely this implies that the healthy, sensible approach is that of the middle road, providing a balanced mixture of all types of books. With a balanced fiction collection, and the encouragement of a critical appreciation of
variety of titles, hopefully discerning, widely read readers will be the result. Mc Vitty (1983) has said;

The rich reader is one who has experienced the lot and has learned to discriminate. He can exercise his freedom because he knows what the choices are - and he may sometimes choose to read rubbish. (p. 327)

Dickinson (1973) in his article "In defense of Rubbish" did a great deal to defend this approach to children's reading matter. He said;

I have always believed that children ought to be allowed to read a certain amount of rubbish. Sometimes quite a high proportion of their reading matter can healthfully consist of things that no sane adult would actually encourage them to read. (p. 101)

What then, if anything, can books that are classified by some as 'rubbish' bring to the reader? Or are they merely entertainment? Can it be argued that they serve any valid purpose at all? For many readers stories that receive no critical acclaim can often be their gateway in to the world of books. A story that is loved and understood can often be the catalyst for a lifelong interest in reading as a pleasurable activity. In many cases it is 'trashy' series that are the hook that gets the reader in. A few decades ago it was Enid Blyton, today possibly the Baby-sitters Club series or formula romance fiction. Evans (1987), in a discussion of quality, has said;

Here is Blyton's potential, now recognised by the majority of teachers and librarians, for encouraging children in the act of
reading and persuading them to persist in it for the pleasure it can offer. (p. 37)

For many these 'rubbish' titles may be their first introduction to a novel. It may be the first novel length book they have finished, a triumph in itself. In many cases they are read over and over as the characters become well loved friends and the story lines become comfortably familiar. How many young readers seem always to be chasing the next in the series or awaiting the next publication of their favourite author. Fry (1985) argues that this type of reading can often be an introduction to the conventions of the craft, and perhaps the beginning of a love of books hopefully goes with this.

......from the practice of reading trash a reader can still derive experience of fiction applicable in later reading. It is often in popular fiction that we see most plainly the conventions that writers handle and readers learn, and where literary competence begins to be developed. (p. 83)

Any reading must never be undervalued. Each story speaks to each reader differently, some of what we experience from reading can depend on what we contribute. For this reason a book of no apparent value to adults can be an important experience for a child, this interaction should never be undervalued. This does not mean that we should not strive and search for literary merit in the books that we give to our children, but we should recognise that a balance of all kinds of literature is a healthy, achievable aim.

In a perfect world YABBA and the more traditional awards for literary merit would co exist together providing our children with a wide variety of opinions of books a collection of books of varied
tastes and abilities. In reality this does happen and many people working with children and books use both awards to benefit and extend the reading circle of their students. Leeson (1985a) has said:

A literature which exists in despite of its readers, which cannot attempt to reconcile quality with popularity, is asking to be discarded. (p. 108)

Reconciling both the CBC Book of the Year awards and YABBA to the continued existence of each other, and an eventual acceptance of the role each has to play, can only enrich the reading environment and ensure the growth of both awards.
SECTION FIVE

CHAPTER TWELVE - The popular champion - Jennings

By allowing all students the freedom of choice in a setting where many difficulty levels are provided, we remove the adult imposed stigmas previously associated with some reading material and allow all children to be real readers. (Jennings. (1990a. p. 7.)

(See also Chapter Ten - Top seven YABBA titles)

Paul Jennings is the most popular YABBA author with over twenty-seven percent of the vote and six books on the voting lists in the older readers' section over the six years from 1986 to 1991. He has won the older readers' section of YABBA four times, during this time period. The only author that comes any where close is Robin Klein. Everyone else almost pales into insignificance against the sheer weight of voting numbers he commands. He is overwhelmingly the author most connected with the Young Australians Best Book Award, arguably one of the most popular authors in Australia, having sold well over a million copies of his books. His work has translated well to television with successful series being sold overseas. In the popularity stakes he has swept all before him. But, he has not been able to break into the exclusive world of the Children's Book Council Awards, never
even been shortlisted. This is one domain that does not appear to be his for the taking.

Nobody, it seems, has a bad word to say about him; the only blot on the horizon is an apparent lack of acceptance by the CBC of his idiosyncratic blend of fantastical whimsy and gross comedy - although he has dominated awards decided by young readers. Jennings says the lack of CBC awards does not bother him, that the kids' awards are more important. (Ricketson. 1992b, p. 24)

Jennings' lack of acceptance amongst the literary community that decides the CBC awards may not bother him, but it certainly generates a great deal of discussion, and at times consternation among young people viewing the awards as a judgement of excellence and literary tastes. Many young YABBA voters (see Chapter Eight: Survey data - voters) feel he is the most popular author and therefore worthy of untold accolades. Glover (1991) in an article for The Age says of Jennings;

Despite never achieving even a short listing in the children's book awards, Jennings is a huge success. As Robin Klein puts it: 'Paul could run out of petrol anywhere in Australia, and all he'd have to do would be to find the nearest 12 year old and he'd have help.' (p. 38)

Jennings' work is widely available, and obviously well read in schools. Though often promoted as an author for those with reading difficulties, or a lack of interest in reading, his popularity encompasses a range of reader backgrounds, ages and skill levels. He is very popular with both sexes. Jennings is one of a handful of authors who appear to be evenly popular between the sexes. With
over thirty-four percent of Jennings' vote from girls, and over forty-four percent of his vote from boys, he manages to appeal to both groups of readers. Most other YABBA shortlisted authors appear to have votes skewed significantly towards one gender. (see Chapter Six. Table 2.4)

In a response to difficulties being experienced by his own son, Jennings set out to create a story that would appeal to a wide range of readers, yet his first aim has always been to entertain. (Dempsey, 1991. p. 11) In an article entitled "Keep the magic going", Jennings (1990a) said of his work and its appeal:

My aim is to make my books accessible to as many children as possible. I want the reluctant readers. But I want the good readers too. There is no such thing as a book which will appeal to reluctant readers and not good readers. (p.9)

Jennings' approach to his writing, and the style he has worked to achieve, appears to have been totally premeditated and planned to achieve set results. He has created a style that is easy to read yet entertaining, never boring yet familiar. Mappin (1988) discusses Jennings' style and his goals in a short study of the author.

At that time linguistic studies were showing that you could have natural language and unrestricted vocabulary so long as it was used in a way that made it predictable for the reader. Paul came up with between thirty to forty different strategies, some related to syntax, some to story structure, and a lot of predictability factors. (p. 10)
Despite their apparent simplicity Jennings' stories are written with clear aims and guidelines in mind. His short sharp style, with sentences of few words is designed to engage the reader, keep them reading, and entertain them along the way. Jennings' YABBA success attests to his ability to do just this. Many young readers wait anxiously for his next collection of short stories, and have as yet not been disappointed.

Jennings' writing is certainly distinctive, fast and funny. But is there more to what he writes than slapstick? Ricketson(1992a), in his article titled "The Great Children's Book Debate" argued that there is more to Jennings than just humour:

(...) Jennings, consciously or otherwise, shows us that life is funny and sad and cruel and inspiring - sometimes all at once. It just so happens that his standard ball is the comic leg-break. (p. 7)

Jennings is certainly often more than just funny. Stories like "The Busker", from Unbelievable (Jennings, 1986, p. 40) about the life long devotion of a dog and the busker's inability to see his true value, is both very sad, and extremely didactic in the style of a moral fairy tale. His stories are also not short of nasty characters who often get their just deserts in the end. Mr Brown the sadistic, nasty school teacher in "Unhappily ever after" from Quirky tails (Jennings, 1987, p. 43) or the unprincipled greedy Mr. Griffin in "The strap box flyer" from Unreal (Jennings, 1985, p. 16), are good examples of characters that no reader could like. Jennings is never afraid to show us the worst side of human nature. Greedy, self centred characters are prevalent in his stories. These stories
have much in common with the simple fairy tale, or traditional oral
tale, that Jennings style and subject matter often resemble.

Dempsey (1991) in his article titled "What do kids want?" outlines
Jennings own view on story:

For Jennings there are broadly two types of stories - those
that explain the world 'that is', and help children to cope with
it, and those that offer a world that 'could be', a world of
fantasy and fairy stories. "These stories teach children to
aim for the stars. They create imaginings and longings
which have no limits and ultimately may lead to new ways
of viewing the universe," says Jennings..." (p.11)

Jennings does offer a fantasy world to his readers, but it is not like
the fantasy world of Tolkien or Carroll. His fantasy is in the form
of extraordinary events that take place in an otherwise real world.
This gives the young reader an easy, known world to start from, as
the lives of his characters are like that of any young Australian.
His characters speak with the voice of a friend and are easy to listen
to and understand. The unusual events that take place and often
gulp the hero / heroine are often supernatural - ghosts, magical
potions or impossible events. Or strange happenings often centred
around mundane things such as bad smells, toilets and dung.
Perfect examples of this are his stories "Licked", about dead flies,
in Unbearable (Jennings, 1990b, p. 1) and "Cow dung custard",
about a disgusting fly attracting compost, in Unreal (Jennings,
1985, p. 51) His stories are more fantastical than fantasy. This
may be one of the reasons Jennings finds little support amongst the
literary community, the fantasy style of other worlds and heroic
journeys may be more appealing to many adult readers. These
books of the fantasy genre, deeply descriptive, and involved with the creation of many faceted characters and a fully functional other world, may lend themselves more to be judged as a work of literature considered to be of literary merit. This leaves Jennings more accessible, fantastical style as the poor sibling in the literary award stakes.

Many of the recent arguments surrounding Jennings, his popularity and inability to break into the CBC award structure have centred around the development of two vastly different approaches towards what should be expected in books for young people. Within this argument is another possible reason for Jennings' lack of CBC success. Haigh (1991) in an article on the subject described the essence of this argument:

Jennings' stories captivate and amuse young people around the world, and he is in the vanguard of internationally-acclaimed Australian children's writers fostered during the 1980's. But that he has never been recognised by the industry "establishment" - as centred on the CBC and its annual gongs - illuminates a gap that threatens to widen: academics, teachers and critics foisting "worthy", and often weighty literature, on a readership mostly craving entertainment. (p.1)

Ricketson (1992a) also outlines this obvious separation of opinion over what is of most value. He says:

Paul Jennings, Robin Klein, Graeme Base, John Marsden and a host of others may be winning popular and critical acclaim here and abroad but the murmurs have started: "But are all these books good for the children?" Various
commentators are pitching their tents in two camps: at one end of the field looms The Definitive Didactic Novel about Incest, while from the other comes a plaintive cry, Where Have All the Funny Books Gone? (p.7)

Jennings is obviously in the camp of funny, entertaining material, and unless he drastically changes his style and subject matter, he is unlikely to move suddenly to take a place within the adult realm of literary excellence and acclaim, particularly whilst it is the more serious, issue based novels that consistently appear on the CBC short lists. Those that are concerned about the disappearance of Funny books need only to look beyond the CBC short lists to see a surprising number of very humorous novels written in the past few years. Such authors as David Mc Robbie, (The Wayne series) Judith Clarke (The Al Capsella series) Tim Winton (Lockie Leonard, human torpedo Winton, 1990), Geoffrey Mc Skimming (Cairo Jim series) are out there and writing. It is just that their funny books are not to be found on the CBC shortlists.

It seems unfortunate that Jennings, an author who has made so many laugh and encouraged so many to read, and keep reading, may never formally receive recognition from adults working within the field of his own endeavour. Literary excellence need not be abandoned, but neither should we denigrate a legitimate and worthwhile style of expression because it does not immediately suit adult tastes.

Surely a balanced literature should contain all forms of approach and style. As long as the book is written with integrity, it should have a place, especially those that make us laugh. "....I am fairly
sure in my own mind that a diet of plums is bad for you" (Dickson, 1973, p. 102) A diet of only books that immersed us totally in the real world and its problems would certainly benefit no one. Jennings' humour and ridiculous view of the world should be encouraged as an escape, a release, from what could otherwise be a bleak view of the world in much of literature today.

Moira Robinson, interviewed in Haigh's (1991) article says: "In Australia we do take ourselves so seriously that a book that's funny and positive is always going to have trouble." (p.1) It seems that this approach by some is causing a division between books of supposed literary merit and those deemed popular by children. Putting entertaining and funny books into a not to be touched basket can only cause an alienation of all of those people who find much to enjoy in tales that entertain and make us laugh.

Part of the disagreement stems from the apparent different perspectives each reader may approach a book from. Haigh (1991) quotes a former CBC judge:

Ms Tyrell insists that the CBC's decision to judge books by "adult" criteria is necessary. "Obviously you do look at them differently to the way a child would read them," she says. "There is a whole life experience that you bring to the book. These are literary awards, and we've quite clear guidelines: it's got to work as a piece of literature. (p.1)

If we consider then that judging any book is a subjective matter, the reason for disagreement is apparent, many children and adults look for different things in books they value. Unfortunately, books that
children value are for some reason then considered of lesser value than those lauded by adults. They are not intrinsically of lesser value, just different. We must be aware that needs differ at different times throughout a person's emotional and intellectual development. Even a book read at different points in the same person's life will receive a different reaction as that person's views and experience may have changed. Fry (1985) said;

Children are their own best judges of what to read and when; growth in literary competence is a by-product of a process of consumption fuelled by more urgent personal needs. (p. 104)

The way a child reads, and the developmental process they go through as they become more critical, and thoughtful about what they have read may also play a part in explaining the obvious differences between what children and adults choose. Evans(1987) in a discussion of quality explains:

(...) the "disposition" a child, or adolescent, brings to his or her reading is much more flexible. It knows less of the nature of human beings and the world than the adult does, and so can tolerate and enjoy greater imaginative demands, such as are made by fairy stories, fantasies and time slip novels. It is also more receptive to imaginative novelty, and much less sceptical - at least compared with the disposition of a fairly sophisticated adult who is a habitual reader. (p. 39)

A child more "receptive to imaginative novelty" as found in Jennings' wacky short stories will always find more to marvel at and relish than will an adult reader on the search for literary
excellence. This may partly explain why Jennings will continue to be a member of that group of authors who are always outside the establishment. Haigh (1991) quotes Jennings on this subject:

Then we've got this middle group. They still like Dr. Seuss a bit, and they like Roald Dahl. But when adults look at their books, it's not quite as appealing. It hasn't the whimsical innocence of the picture book, or the didactic power of a serious novel. You look at it: it's easy to read, it's funny, it moves along quickly, it's simple. It's less worthy somehow than dealing with someone's divorce. (p. 1)

With the majority of Jenning's support coming from upper primary, fifty-nine percent of his vote being from years five and six, (see Chapter Seven, Table 2.2) he is certainly an author supported predominately by this middle group, pre-adolescents.

Most awards in recent years introduced junior, or middle sections to their makeup in an effort to cater for this in between group, those that have left picture books behind but are not yet always reading full-length novels. Possibly the marginalising of humorous authors such as Jennings would indicate these sections are not highlighting the most popular novels at this age group. This is not to suggest that standards of literary merit should be set aside, but the whole culture of a group of young people should also not go totally unrecognised. Dickinson (1973) said:

I believe that it is very important that a child, or anybody for that matter, should have a whole culture - at least one whole culture - at his fingertips. (...) it is also especially important that a child should belong, and feel he belongs to
the group of children among whom he finds himself and he should feel that he shares in their culture. (p. 101 - 2)

To deny the part of that culture that is closest to the child's heart must be of detriment to all concerned.

Possibly adults have difficulty finding literary merit in many simple tales. If a book is not a beautiful picture storybook or a difficult, introspective novel it may find itself in the category of difficult to competently judge as it has no obvious literary value or instant adult appeal. Perhaps this is where the value of YABBA can best be seen as a constant reminder of what the children are often really reading, and therefore an indication of what titles perhaps deserve a second look.

There is also a danger that certain types of books that exist on the outer will cease to be written. The traditional, adult centred awards hold a great deal of power. A shortlisted novel will experience an instant increase in sales, a winner is guaranteed big national sales as every school and public library is likely to purchase at least one copy. Glover (1991) has said:

Even a shortlisting adds 10,000 copies to a typical book's sales; a win gives continuing sales and a leg-up to the author's backlist. But there's a tyranny in such power: it can spell bookshop death for the 150 books that don't make it. (p. 41)

Catering to the styles and ideals that appear to be most appreciated by the Children's Book Council could be a trap that some authors may fall into. It may be difficult to maintain an unappreciated style
against overt pressure to conform to set ideals, particularly if there are obvious monetary rewards to be had. Jennings, in Haigh's (1991) article, has said on this problem:

"The awards have a huge influence," he says. "So all the guys who aren't getting short-listed are downcast, and those who are pop champagne corks. That's an enormous amount of power, and there could be a temptation to write books that will be approved, rather than ones that come from the heart."

(p.1)

Successful, popular authors such as Jennings will probably continue to write in the style they feel is theirs, ignoring other influence. What of young, new authors, will they be as brave? One can only hope so if we are to have a range of material available - all styles and levels for all children to read and enjoy.
Robin Klein is one of Australia's most popular writers perhaps even the most popular.... She makes rich use of irony and her characters are always skilfully sketched in, then the outlines are filled in. (Masson, 1993 p. 5.)

(See also Chapter Ten - Top seven YABBA titles)

Robin Klein shares the honor with Paul Jennings of being one of the authors who dominates YABBA. There is a vast gap between these two and the other forty-three authors in almost every respect. Jennings and Klein stand apart from the others and share many similarities in their place at the top. The voting numbers for the six year period from 1986 to 1991 in the older readers' section show that Klein with 5729 votes is only fifty-three votes behind Jennings total of 5782. Jennings though is by far more famous for his YABBA success, because he has won the top prize more often and receives the majority of the publicity. Possibly his work is also considered slightly more controversial amongst some of those concerned with the literary merit of material for children.

With over twenty-six percent of the total vote over the six year period it is obvious that Klein's influence over children's reading habits and her place in their hearts is undisputed. Despite winning only once, in the year of YABBA's inception, 1986, with Hating Alison Ashley (Klein, 1984a), she has had more books in the older readers' section of YABBA from 1986 to 1991 than any other
author. In fact with eleven books during this period she has almost twice the number of titles of her nearest rivals in this regard - Jennings with six titles and Thiele with five.

Klein's highest number of votes was recorded for *Penny Pollard's diary* (Klein, 1988), 1439 votes, or over six percent of the total vote, this is a combined vote over a number of years as this title has never won but been a consistent performer regularly amongst the top titles each year. (see Chapter Ten -Top seven YABBA titles). This title and all of the others in the Penny Pollard series have been present on the YABBA short lists on many occasions. With this series Klein has definitely created a winning, popular and lasting style.

Klein, like Jennings, is most popular with the voters from years five and six with fifty-three percent of her vote coming from these two years of school. As the majority of YABBA votes are centred around the upper primary and lower secondary school years these figures are to be expected. Klein also has a quite respectable number of votes coming from years seven, eight and nine. Over thirty-two percent of Klein's vote comes from years seven, eight and nine, whereas Jennings received only fifteen percent of his vote from these upper years. Klein's diversity is the key to her spread of votes across year levels. She is one of YABBA's more successful authors at appealing across a broad range of age groups. Whereas Jennings is most well known for his collections of short stories, that make up the bulk of his output, Klein's work is much more varied in length, style and approach. With titles ranging in difficulty from the Penny Pollard series to *Came to show you!*
It is no wonder her popularity is far reaching. She has also always been well represented in the other two sections - Junior Readers and Picture Books. Grieve (1986) in her analysis of the 1986 YABBA voting list said:

Another interesting pattern to emerge is the preponderance of Robin Klein's books on the short list - seven titles in all, followed not very closely by three by Ruth Park and three by Colin Thiele. (p. 19)

The majority of Robin Klein's votes, in the older readers' section over the six year period, have come from girls, over sixty-three percent female and over fifteen percent male with the remaining vote unknown. (see table 2.4 - Chapter Six - Author analysis)

Her strong appeal to girls may be due to her immense skill in creating a number of lasting, strong female characters in many of her works that have become well loved by many readers. Alison Ashley and Erica Yurken from *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984), Penny from the Penny Pollard series of books, and Frances from *People might hear you* (Klein, 1985), are all powerful female characters who take control of their own lives in varied ways. They are interesting people in their own right, and no doubt very attractive to young female readers.

Klein is a prolific author, her amazing number of titles represented in YABBA over the six year period (eleven titles), is testament to that. In an article on Australian children's authors Glover (1991) said of her:
Now aged 55, she began publishing a little over a decade ago. In that time, she has produced 36 books - up to six in one year. (p. 32)

Over a quarter of these have appeared in the YABBA shortlists.

She is also capable of writing books of different length and structure, and has tackled a variety of styles; from the humorous school antics of *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a) to the more serious drug dependence and family breakdown dealt with in *Come back to show you I could fly* (Klein, 1989), or even the thriller suspense of *People might hear you* (Klein, 1985) all different approaches, their main link being the excellent character development in each of them. She is also able to create very realistic situations, creating families and friendship groups that may be unusual but are still believable and accessible. Erica Yurken's family are strange but are always there for her, her home life may be often a little topsy turvy but her family are the first to be supportive of her efforts in the school play, and there for her when things do not go as expected. They are genuinely proud of all of her achievements and accept her as she is despite her many fabrications of the truth. This loving family atmosphere is contrasted deftly by Klein with the stifling, neatness of Alison Ashley's family home and the attitude of Alison's family to her activities, they fail to even turn up to the school camps final performance night. Alison Ashley's perfect exterior is a fragile attempt to appear cover up the many underlying emotional problems in a life that appears to be often lonely and isolating. Compared to the busy, calamitous hustle and bustle of Erica's existence Alison Ashley's life does not remain alluring for the
duration of the novel, her sterile, quiet life may be outwardly appealing but is at heart empty. It is Erica's family with their supportive simple appeal that will be taken to the readers hearts, Klein gives is an interesting, down to earth Australian family with ease.

Klein creates these natural, comfortable groups of characters with ease. Leeson (1985a) in a discussion of character says that "Identification lies at the heart of the popular story" (p. 108) It is Klein's skill that her readers can easily feel comfortable with her characters, her family groups, school room, even strange situations, seem real. She does this by making her situations not unusual or spectacular, they could be taking place in any classroom - we all know, or remember a Barry Hollis from school. Klein's ability to subtly make the reader very much a part of the story through identification with her characters helps to keep the readers reading. Accessible characters, like a fast moving plot, are at the centre of any popular story. Leeson (1985a) has said:

The most popular stories in folk tradition, comic, or television series are those which base themselves on one or more clearly delineated characters. In these, the great creative effort has gone into shaping the character before the action starts. But it is in action, rather than static introspective examination, that this sort of character shows itself. (p.108)

Klein does take her characters, and like Jennings envelopes them in a world of action and possibilities. Her most popular YABBA titles, _Hating Alison Ashley_ (Klein, 1984a), _People might hear you_ (Klein, 1985), have fast moving plots that never stop, the reader is
compelled to continue. The action moves them along and their concern for and interest in the life of the character keeps them interested. Being able to have children easily identify with a story is a skill found in all of the more successful children's writers.

Klein has said:

"I think all the children's writers share one thing," she says. "We all have this ability to think ourselves back into our emotions as children". (Glover, 1991, p. 32)

The ease with which Klein enters the world of the child is and is able to so easily give us as readers a view of the world from their perspective in is one of the central factors in the success of her writing style and approach.

Klein unlike Jennings has managed to walk the fine line of being extremely popular but also gaining literary acceptance for much of her work. *People might hear you* (Klein, 1985) was shortlisted for the CBC awards in 1984, *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a) and *Penny Pollard's letters* (Klein, 1984b) were similarly shortlisted in 1985, with *Halfway across the galaxy and turn left* (Klein, 1985) being shortlisted the following year in 1986. *Come back to show you I could fly* (Klein, 1989) received one of her highest commendations winning the older readers' section of the CBC awards in 1990. I refer here only to those books of Klein's that have appeared in the older readers' section of YABBA between 1986 and 1991; some of her other novels, etc., have been similarly commended by the Children's Book Council. How can an author
manage to straddle both worlds - that of popularity with children, and literary acclaim?

As Sophie Masson (1993) says of Klein: "Her work is always easy to read, yet never easy." (p. 5) This fine line of being accessible yet not simple or condescending within the text is a skill of Klein that merits further attention as it is one of the keys to her success in both award structures. What appears at first to be a simple fast moving story is often in Klein's hands also littered with fine descriptive pieces of writing that evoke the people she describes and set the feeling for her stories. Yet these pieces are not laboured or over worked, the fast moving pace is never sacrificed. In *People might hear you* (1983) Klein creates characters quickly, giving us easy insights into their motivations, personality and possible futures. Helen, the daughter of Mr. Tyrell, who will later in the story be brave enough to leave the constraints of her strict religious upbringing is described soon after Frances has first meet her:

> She was drawn to the other sister, Helen, who like herself, clearly didn't enjoy sitting still and not talking. Helen fidgeted, and kept glancing at the window, as though she were anxious to get outside and make the most of the sunshine while it lasted. She had an arresting, broad- planed face, and hair the colour of Autumn, but the beautiful hair was clipped back from her face with ugly pins. (Klein 1983b, p. 40)

In only a few lines we can see Helen is not reconciled to her life in the Tyrell house, her life constrains her as do the ugly pins in her wonderful hair. Klein is practised at placing us with the character
quickly, giving us instant understanding. She can also create a scene that envelops the reader, in *People might hear you* (Klein, 1983b) as she builds the tension within Frances and the reader her descriptive skills come to the fore. At the point in the story where Frances has become frightened of the outside world herself through the teachings of the Tyrells, there is the following description of the front porch:

There was a heavy screen door that also had to be unlocked from the inside, and then cold, dark air slashed in at them, causing Frances to plunge her hands deep into the coat pockets. There was a porch; a small yard rippling with wind-tossed, spiky bushes; a path glossy as fur with rain under light cast by a street lamp outside the front gate. It looked like an ordinary suburban front garden. (Klein 1983b. p. 79)

At first we register the panic and fear in Frances as she surveys the outside world that she has been told is doomed. Air "slashed" and the path is "glossy as fur" but then Klein plunges us back into reality as it is really only an "ordinary suburban front garden". Klein works effectively with language and her readers imaginations, using words to create in the reader a feeling of dread and foreboding for what may be to come and its effect on Frances.

Klein has managed to remain in the spotlight with her material in both the CBC and the YABBA awards. She has, through her ability to create character and place, been able to satisfy some of what adults look for in books for children, whilst still managing to met the needs of young readers. The thirst of young readers for exciting page turners that stretch and activate the imagination is
forever with us. Klein's ability to fulfill the needs of two such diverse groups is something of an unusual phenomena in the world of children's literature.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN - An age for laughter

"Laugh and the World laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone,"

Ella Wheeler Wilcox - Solitude

Humorous stories more than any other genre appear to often be a shared experience for many young people. This may be one of the reasons why so many humorous books are a part of YABBA. Of the top twenty-five titles in the older readers' section from 1986 to 1991 approximately half could be considered funny. Of the winners over the six years in this section, all of them except for Space demons (Rubinstein, 1986) in 1990 are humorous stories. Grieve (1986) in her analysis of the list of 1986 nominations said:

Looking at the range of books in the short list one is struck by the number of books which display the element of humour. (p. 20.)

The main reason given by students in response to the survey question regarding why they voted for a particular title was because it was funny (see Chapter Eight - Survey data - voters). Humorous stories are by far the most popular style of story with YABBA voters. Why?

I would suggest that part of the reason why this style of story is most popular relates to the age of the majority of the YABBA voters and what they are looking for in a book at this point in their reading lives.
Funny stories are easily shared amongst groups of people. It is natural to want to share something funny that you have read, to pass the experience on to a friend, and laugh about it together. With no other genre can one share so easily the central, most important experience of the book. With romance, adventure, thrillers or mysteries, you might discuss the novel and whether you liked it or not, perhaps mentioning some of the key scenes that affected you most. But with humour you find yourself reading pieces aloud, reliving the experience, and laughing over them again together. In a section titled "Young Readers' Comments on Humour" in Viewpoint: on books for young adults (1994) David Burns from Eltham High School said:

I and many of my friends read humorous books to have a good laugh and enjoy ourselves. If we are reading a funny story from a class set, after we have read it we can have a good talk and a laugh about it. (p. 9)

This may be one of the keys to the success of humour with the majority of YABBA voters, year six and seven students. They are at an age when shared experience is important. They have not yet reached the adolescent stage when they tend to become more introspective and analytical, reading for self discovery. At this younger age they probably read primarily for fun, and if the book can be shared it is an added plus. Books such as Jennings' short stories and Hating Alison Ashley (1984) by Robin Klein are perfect for sharing particular scenes, or funny characters, reading aloud, even being shared by an entire class. The children can retell the funny parts of the story, or read it together and appreciate the
humour and fun in a group. Laughing together can and does form, and strengthen friendship bonds, bringing a group together.

Stories that make young people laugh are the backbone of the YABBA shortlists in the older readers' section from 1986 to 1991. Further analysis of lists in the other sections, and possibly even those from more recent years (1992 to 1994) would probably also show a large component of humorous titles. Yet despite their obvious popularity books that are funny tend not to appear on the award lists of the Children's Book Council. In recent years such titles as *The heroic life of Al Capsella* (1988) by Judith Clarke, *Lockie Leonard, human torpedo* (1990) by Tim Winton, the Wayne series by David Mc Robbie or the Cairo Jim stories by Geoffrey Mc Skimming have been some of the humorous titles so obvious in their absence from any of the traditional award lists. Is it that these books and many of the others that have appeared on YABBA are merely not worthy, or are they penalised before they even begin by being books that aim first to make their readers laugh? As previously discussed in Chapters Twelve and Thirteen, there does seem to be a tendency for award panels to look for more complex, serious issue based novels above those that deal with often similar themes but in a humorous vein. Jenning's (1990a) has discussed in detail the power of humour and its possible lack of acceptance amongst some adults.

Which is easier to elicit - a tear or a chuckle? The answer is that both are difficult. Both tug on the emotions. But how are the two genres valued by adults? Is humour seen to be easier and therefore of less value? And how does this
line up with children's perceptions? Children like to laugh. (p. 7.)

The perception that humour is easier is a fallacy. Perhaps it is easier to read, but this is an indication of the skill of the author and his/her ability to create a readable, entertaining story, it is not true to therefore suggest that funny stories are then easier to write. Moira Robinson (1994) in a discussion of humour for young adults suggests that:

...there are no clearly marked buttons to press at secondary level. Responses will depend on mood, on personality, or background, on all those factors that make humour generally the most difficult of genres" (p.3)

Robinson (1994) goes on to say:

...that humour constantly treads a tightrope between laughter and disgust, between pleasure and contempt. (p. 3)

This is very true of many of the titles very popular with YABBA voters. Many of the Jennings short stories tread the fine line between laughter and disgust that Robinson refers to. It seems though that in many cases it is the child reader that laughs, the adult reader that puts the story aside in disgust. Jennings like other extremely popular authors of funny books, (Roald Dahl is a perfect example), can find that the reaction his humour brings is reliant on the age of the reader. What is funny to a twelve year old can be merely senseless and slightly disgusting to the sophisticated adult reader. (discussed further in Chapter Twelve)
There is the viewpoint that books written from the humorous perspective cannot be considered of literary merit because they fail to deal with reality, or serious issues, and due to the constraint of being funny often fail to develop plot or character to any extent. Such a view ignores some of the excellent characters such as Erica Yurken from *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a) who manage to make the reader laugh while making at times extremely sad and serious comments about the nature of peer relationships, loneliness and families. Judith Clarke (1994) in a discussion about writing comedy has said:

I think that comic detail, in life, isn't simply 'funny' in itself. Rather it intensifies, illuminates the serious and sadder aspects of life, and the task of the comic writer is to work towards this combination of elements, this illumination, in fiction. (p. 11)

Not only can some funny stories bring to the reader many observations about life and relationships in an accessible style they can also allow the reader to experience difficult and sometimes sad situations without being grim and doom laden. *Penny Pollard's diary* (Klein, 1983a) deals with old age and loss, *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a) with peer pressure, and the difficulty of being an outsider, yet both of these examples are considered funny books first and foremost.

Robinson (1994) also suggests that many funny titles can be more difficult to read than is first thought. She says:
We tend to dismiss humour as lightweight, but it makes far greater demands on a reader's mental agility and general cultural background than most 'D and M' books. (p. 4)

Robinson gives as example The Adrian Mole series which requires the reader to understand many different references to a variety of things and events. She suggests that "So much humour is referential" (p. 4). This is often the case as many funny scenes remind us of something similar in our own life - the school room in *Hating Alison Ashley* (Klein, 1984a) is something everyone can identify with and find funny. If not reminding us of our own lives humorous stories often stretch our imaginations and knowledge of the known world by asking us to grapple with fantastical and very unusual plots. It is here that the "mental agility" (p. 4) mentioned by Robinson (1994) comes into play. From the YABBA list all of the Jennings short stories, and novels such as *Halfway across the galaxy and turn left* (Klein, 1985) ask the reader to suspend reality and make jumps and connections in their present understanding of the world when reading these books.

Humorous stories can offer the reader varied worlds and different viewpoints in a light and accessible format that can at times encourage non readers to keep on reading. There is much to offer here in what appears to be an often untapped, unrecognised field by many adults. Alongside other more serious texts they can offer a balance to a bleak and depressing view of our existence. Balance and variety is the key to any healthy reading habit. Ricketson (1992a) in a discussion of whether humorous and more serious literature can co-exist says:
Look, for a moment, at literature for the grown-ups: does anyone seriously believe adults should partake of an unchanging literary diet? One day they will tuck into a bowl of Jane Austen; the next, Vaclav Havel. On the weekend it might be Amy Tan, and late at night they might succumb to a Peter Corris. And good luck to them. Are children any different? Sometimes they feel like laughing, sometimes like crying and often they want to fly to the moon. So let them. (p.7)

YABBA, as a forum for the opinions of young people has enabled them to bring humorous stories to the forefront, it has awarded stories that otherwise have gone unrecognised. The tastes of young people are varied and many, as Ricketson (1992a) states, YABBA appreciates, and recognises the popularity of variety, in an environment that is not always conducive to variety - particularly humour.
SECTION SIX

CHAPTER FIFTEEN - YABBA 1992 to 1994 and beyond

The award is now in place and its future depends on the extent to which it is recognised as a significant influence on young Victorian readers. (Fincher 1987. p. 25)

The voting form data for the older readers' section of YABBA from 1992 onwards has not been coded or analysed, (this Thesis deals only with 1986 to 1991). There is a great deal of information still to be gathered from this as yet untapped source. Future analysis of voting trends in the picture book and younger readers' sections from 1986 onwards and the material for the older readers' section since 1991 should give rise to data that will further enlighten us as to the reading patterns and preferences of many young readers.

This work though is yet to be done, but despite this information not being available it is still possible to make some suggestions about the known trends. In an endeavour to further understand the period of voting in the older readers' section since 1991 I interviewed Kordula Danscombe from the YABBA council on the 7th of July, 1994 (for the transcript of this interview see Appendix three). Some general information can also be gleaned from analysis of the nomination lists for each year and YABBA council newsletters and annual reports.
The most striking factor about the lists post 1991 is the extent to which Paul Jennings has continued to remain YABBA's most loved author. Consistent with the results in the older readers' section from 1986 to 1991 Jennings has continued to remain extremely popular winning both the younger and older reader sections in 1992 and the older readers' section in 1993. It is evident that his following is still strong as he continues to dominate the older readers' section and win each year. With voting so far he has won six of the eight older readers' section prizes from 1986 to 1993.

Yet in the lists of nominations for 1994 (voting has not yet taken place) Paul Jennings' latest title *Undone* (1993) appears in the younger readers' section. For the first time since YABBA's inception Jennings has no title in the older readers' section. According to Danscombe (1994) this is the result of where the teachers and voters listed Jennings on their nomination forms. As to what part was played in this listing by each party little is known, but the YABBA council (Danscombe, 1994) asserts that intervention by adults involved in the counting procedures and those on the YABBA council was not a factor. The list for 1994 is also considerably more sophisticated, at least there is no evidence of some of the younger titles that have appeared on the list over the years. *Going bananas* (Dann, 1983), *Frank Boulderbuster* (McLeod, 1985) and the Penny Pollard series are examples of books that have been listed in the older readers' section in past years; some might argue this was not where they truly belonged. In the 1994 list there is certainly a greater number of books that would be more likely to be read by older, at least lower secondary students. This is interesting when much of YABBA's vote from
1986 to 1991 in the older readers' section came from upper primary school children. (see Chapter five - Figure 1.13) Danscombe (1994) suggested that this may be partially the result of a greater number of secondary schools being involved in the nomination procedures this year. Danscombe also thought that YABBA had had a greater number of secondary schools subscribing this year as members, than in previous years. Perhaps we are seeing long overdue interest from the secondary school libraries and voters. In the past they have definitely not shown the same interest in YABBA as have the lower year levels. Closer analysis of the voting statistics is the only way to shed more light on this trend.

Throughout its short history YABBA has stuck to its core of ideals but within this framework changes have been made to improve many areas of operation and attract new devotees. Over the years a variety of nomination procedures have been tried in an attempt to improve the awards, their appeal and operation. In 1992 no nominations were called for, all potential voters were invited to vote for any Australian book with no reference to a short list. In 1993 the nomination stage was reinstated as feedback indicated that voters and organisers felt the need for a list to refer to and to use as a stimulus for promotions. (see Danscombe, 1994) Instead of open nominations though, as was the procedure from 1986 to 1991, in 1993 and 1994 nominations were invited through the newsletter from members of YABBA and other interested parties. This has meant a simpler nomination process with organisers submitting a list to YABBA not individual nomination slips as in previous years. It has also meant fewer schools participating in this part of the process, (Danscombe, 1994) and subsequently some
concern as to how representative the list is of views and opinions across the state. It is this decrease in the number of children nominating books that has also led to the council's decision to have fewer books on the final list of nominations, ten titles in 1994, down from as many as fifteen in other years. It was felt that so few students had nominated the books at the tail of the list that it was best not to include them - it was unlikely that they were representative of current opinion. This is a difficult problem, when is a list large enough to be considered representative, a group of nominating children ten times the size of that used may still have come up with a similar list. To ensure the representation of a number of opinions though it would seem necessary to garner nominations from a variety of types of schools and libraries, all areas and types, to attempt to include all reading interests and tastes. With only members and invited parties nominating a representation of opinions may not be being received.

On analysing the lists from 1992 to 1994 it is worth noting that the solid consistent mainstays of the older readers' list from 1986 to 1991 have faded away. Penny Pollard series titles were always represented during these first six years but fail to appear after 1991. *Playing Beatie Bow* (Park, 1980) the consistent, and most popular overall performer from 1986 to 1991 fails to reappear after 1992. *People might hear you* (Klein, 1985) interestingly one of the other mainstays of the first six years, shortlisted every year from 1986 to 1991, is also present on the lists in 1992 and 1993, but fails to appear in 1994. Still being shortlisted for eight years running is an amazing record.
To replace those that have dimmed in popularity there is an emergence of a new elite core of books that remain on the lists for a number of years, without winning but consistently drawing votes. Similar to books such as *Penny Pollard's diary* (Klein, 1983a) and *Playing Beatie Bow* (Park, 1980), from the period 1986 to 1991, these titles have managed to stay popular for a number of years. Most of them were just emerging as popular stayers during the first years of the nineties. *So much to tell you* (Marsden, 1987) has been shortlisted for six straight years from 1989 to 1994. * Came back to show you I could fly* (Klein, 1989) from 1991 through to 1994, and *Jodie's journey* (Thiele, 1988) from 1990 through to 1994. *Skymaze* (Rubinstein, 1989) from 1990 through to 1993. Any book that can remain on the lists for a consecutive five years deserves close attention by anyone interested in books popular with young people.

It is interesting to see a number of titles that have reappeared or are listed for the first time after 1991 that were published some time ago. This is explained partially in some cases if the books are classics e.g. *Man from Snowy River* (Mitchell, 1982) or *Seven little Australians* (Turner, 1894). The production of movies and television series may also affect the popularity of some of these older titles. What of *Det det* (1991) by Victor Kelleher though, published in 1991, and never appeared before on the YABBA lists - why now in 1994? Also interesting is the reappearance of titles such as *Lockie Leonard, human torpedo* (Winton, 1990), the new popularity for this title probably coincides with the release of it sequel. Another example of this would be *Three way street (*, in the younger readers section for the first time in 1994, it may have
been published some years ago (1982) but the release of a new revised edition has obviously seen its re-emergence as a popular title.

The most worrying element of YABBA continues to be the drop in voting numbers; the figures from 1986 to 1991 showed a steady decline in numbers, and all reports indicate that for 1992 and 1993 the steady decline continues unabated. (Fincher, 1993) As to why this decline continues it is difficult to say. Analysis of the voting population in earlier chapters showed that many schools are fleeting YABBA participants (see Section two - Chapter five - figure 1.10), this may be one factor, but this only poses further questions as to why people do not continue to participate.

In discussing this problem in relation to YABBA's future it could be suggested that other avenues need to be extensively explored in an effort to renew interest in YABBA - to re-enthuse previous YABBA voters and establish new devotees. It appears that this problem of falling numbers is of serious concern to YABBA organisers, and a constant topic of discussion. I would suggest that the journal *School Library Bulletin* played an important role early in YABBA's life publishing regular YABBA news and short articles by Beatrice Fincher (YABBA President 1986 to 1993) in 1986 and 1987. These short articles and constant reminders in a journal of high circulation amongst working school librarians probably did much to keep the YABBA profile high. To my knowledge there has been no such article in any similar journal since Ms. Fincher's in 1987. It is a terrible shame that *School
Library Bulletin no longer exists, but other forums need to be found for similar regular short articles to keep YABBA in the public eye.

YABBA's ideals and objectives are admirable. As an organisation it has already done much to lift the image of many of Australia's authors and to encourage young readers to see their own opinions as valuable. A confidence in its own worth is necessary if it is to work cohesively and enthusiastically towards promoting YABBA and its program. Constant changes and continual questioning may only serve to disconcert a public that would probably prefer the ease of knowing how the system operates from year to year without change. It is certainly wise to review and revise procedures, but not at the cost of maintaining popular support. For above all YABBA must maintain its voting numbers if it is to remain a viable figure in the world of children's choice awards.
CONCLUSIONS

Despite YABBA's apparent decrease in voting participants it is still the only Victorian award giving young people a chance to voice opinions about the Australian books that they have read. As a powerful source of young people's opinions it is still a force to be reckoned with within the world of children's literature. YABBA encourages discussion, as it continues to bring to wider attention titles that are otherwise only appreciated by children. YABBA has done much to highlight the power of the popular choice and the underlying factor that children do not always agree with the choices that are made for them by the traditional adult chosen award structure.

With ongoing analysis the YABBA voting data will hopefully continue to be an excellent source of information about the reading habits and preferences of young people. Analysis of the remaining data can only add to, and enhance, what has already been discovered and presented in this Thesis. The factors that influence young people, and those that obviously play an important part in influencing their voting choices, are also discussed in this study. Further research into the role of various influences - the media, advertising, voters' peers, the availability of the texts, and the important influence of YABBA organisers (librarians and teachers) would also help us to further understand the motivations and reading preferences of YABBA voters.

The data included in this study alone could also benefit from closer analysis and more refined study of particular texts and authors in an
effort to further explain and understand some of the statistical data presented in the graphs and tables. The popularity of particular authors and titles, gender preferences, the influence of school type and area, and the initial source of the book that was voted for, are all areas where the data displayed could be better understood with more detailed analysis and possibly even expanded through follow up research projects.

The following questions discussed briefly in this study would also benefit from closer analysis:

Why does YABBA appear to be basically a suburban, state school centred award?

Over fifty percent of voters were from years five and six. Why?

YABBA has always appeared to be a very primary school centred activity, is this changing?

Why do the majority of schools participate in YABBA once and then not again? Only one school voted for all six years from 1986 to 1991 in the older readers' section.

The majority of YABBA votes lie with a small number of authors. Only five authors share over eighty percent of the vote for the six year period in the older readers' section. Why?

Since YABBA's beginning in 1986 the voting numbers have steadily declined. Whereas the trend with other children's choice
awards, overseas and in other Australian states, appears to be steady growth. Why?

All of these points are discussed within the body of this thesis yet they all deserve closer attention, in many cases the results could be both interesting and revealing.

YABBA has done much in its short life to voice the opinions of young people, to bring these opinions to the notice of the book reading public. In so doing it may have lifted the profile of books that were considered popular but not part of the traditional world of awards and therefore possibly discounted by adults. Paul Jennings has won the YABBA award many times and in so doing has brought to the attention of many adults one type of reading experience that children enjoy. Jennings has come to be associated with YABBA, receiving the majority of publicity and attention. In many respects though this does a disservice to the many other novels that have nominated for YABBA. Unfortunately while many focus on Jennings' continued popularity in the older readers' section little is made of the other titles that obviously have a strong following. The books on the YABBA list in the older readers' section over the six years have been varied in topic, length, complexity and style. There have been titles such as Playing Beatie Bow (Park, 1980) and Beyond the Labyrinth (Rubinstein, 1988) CBC award winners, and books on their way to becoming Australian classics; there have been books of the movie, and books with illustrations, and those that would never appear of the Children's Book Council lists for a variety of reasons. All of those nominated, particularly those that place highly in the voting,
deserve greater publicity and emphasis as YABBA titles. More attention should be paid by everyone to the entire nomination list not just the eventual winner.

By nominating a wide variety of material for the YABBA award our young readers show us the extent of their varied tastes. The comments made by students, and quoted in Chapter eight (Survey data - voters), show that not only are our students' tastes varied but their comments about their own reading can be insightful and knowledgeable. Their remarks show that some understand much about the reading process, and hold strong opinions on what makes a book work for them. The standard of the opinions and ideas expressed by these young readers make it clear that they can be credible critics when given a voice.

YABBA, as an encouraging supporter of the expression of these valuable opinions, needs to survive in what can be a hostile environment. YABBA must compete for teacher / librarian time, student interest, advertising space and sponsorship dollar. Surely though the work is worthwhile when one realises that YABBA encourages a critical, thoughtful approach to reading, promotes Australian material and gives young people the chance to have their thoughts and opinions heard and discussed.
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APPENDIX ONE

YABBA - Older Readers' Section 1992

Response Questionnaire - Students

Name ________________________________

Year Level ____________________ SEX Male

(please tick) Female

School ______________________________

Which novel did you vote for this year?

____________________________________

____________________________________

Explain why you voted for this book.

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________
Have you participated in the YABBA voting process in previous years?

(please tick)

YES

NO

Please list any of the books that you voted for in the past, giving reasons for your choices.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How many books do you read?

(please tick)

At least one book per week

One book per month

One book per term

Less than one book per term
How much has each of the following influenced your YABBA voting?

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APPENDIX TWO

YABBA older readers section

Response questionnaire

Teachers / Librarians / YABBA organisers

School__________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Year Levels and subjects taught:

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Have you participated in the YABBA voting process before?
(please tick)

YES

NO

Give a brief explanation of how YABBA is organised within your school. (Eg. Is it based in the library, or a classroom teacher initiative.)

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________
Are there any special promotional activities run in relation to YABBA within your school community?

Why have you/are you participating in YABBA? What value do you see in promoting this award to your students?
What factors do you feel influence student choice?

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APPENDIX THREE

Transcript of interview with Kordula Danscombe - member of YABBA council, involved with the counting procedures for YABBA in past years. 7th July 1994.

S - Explain the changes from how they arrived at the nominations list for 1993 and 1994, if I am correct in 1992 it was just open slather?

K - There was no nominations

S - Did that not work?

K - We got a lot of feedback saying that is was much easier to have a list to work from and there were people that were concerned about being able to identify Australian books apart from the well known ones. Generally the feedback was that it was better for the teachers to have a list.

S - In 93 and 94 they went back to nominations. Was it open nominations in 1993 like 86 to 91?

K - No in 93 we advertised in the newsletter that anybody who wanted to take part could, and we sent out invitations to nominate to anybody who voted the year before, and all the members, and other people that we thought would be interested in taking part. We got some response back from the newsletter.

S - Was it a big response in 93?

K - It wasn't huge, I can't remember,
The secretary is away in Sydney so I can't get all of the stuff..
S - It doesn't matter. Certainly you think its less in 94.?

K - Yes.

S - Did you do the same thing.

K - We picked out all the schools who had voted, all the previous years voters again, and advertised in the newsletter again. ..........

S - Did everyone use these forms? (see enclosed) ........

........

(Quicker and easier for everyone)

S - Who decided where a book went. The difference between younger and older reader fascinates me, so how did you decide did teachers, librarians, decide whether a book went in younger or older readers, or the voters were meant to stipulate that?

K - I think the teachers went on the age group of their children and they filled out the relevant section. So the high school teachers just filled out the older readers. Their were quite a few high schools this time. ..........

So that's what we used to guide us in putting them into each section.

S - Does the Council have an age limit here, do they see a difference between younger and older readers as being age. Has it ever been said.?

K - No they don't specify the age. I suppose, how do you define younger is it maturity or is it age. .......

...........................................(discussion of age in relation to Thesis)
S - In the 94 list it seems to have changed considerably. .....It's the first year that Paul Jennings has not appeared in the older readers section. Every other year he has always been there....... I am just wondering. How it came about that this year his book *Undone* is in the younger readers not the older readers.

K - Well, Again it was because when the school s sent the form back that was where they put him. from our side of things if that were teachers see their reader groups as being for those books then that is where we put it.

S - So it was entirely up to the forms, there was no decision made by anybody?

K - No

K - Actually possibly there might have been one form back with him in the older readers but the overwhelming majority was for the other section

S - So where there is a decision like that the Council goes with the majority?

K - Yes.

(Talk of *Featherby* - also possibly divided over section in the 1994 vote.)

S - It is interesting that for so many years he's been in that section......I wonder whether its something to do with the sort of schools you had nominating do you think, perhaps they had more sophisticated readers or?

K - Yes I think there were more high schools nominating, I think that about fifty percent of them were high schools.
S - That's interesting because the overall figures for YABBA are overwhelmingly primary

(Discussion of primary and secondary figures in the statistics)

K - We have had more high schools joining this year than before, and we were quite surprised at the returns that came in at high schools that were taking part (referring to 93 vote)

S - Alright, the overall list...... the 94 list is certainly more sophisticated than it has been in previous years, if you compare it to 86 the difference is just amazing...... this 94 list is much more what it should be for an older readers list. Do you think the YABBA council have done anything to effect the change or is it just something that happened, have the made any decisions that might have made that happen?

K - No I don't think so. The only thing I can possibly think of is there have been a couple of really huge mail outs in the last couple of years where we have tried to reach as many people as possibly... an possibly because the stuff is getting into high schools a bit more people are starting to pick it up. Whereas it is the sort of thing that might attract primary school teachers who might go out a pick up something like this.

Primary school teachers are more looking for things maybe, secondary teachers a waiting for it to come to them. ...

S - Its also shorter the 94 list, there is only 10.

K - I'm just trying to remember the exact reason for that. .... we had a not terrific response last year and we felt that with a list of fifteen books it was starting to get a bit dicey towards the end there were books appearing on the list with so few nominations it wasn't really justifying putting them on. So we cut it back to ten...
(Discussion of the gradual decline in numbers that is obviously still taking place beyond the 1991 figures.)

K - Some people wonder whether the nominations is inhibiting it (the award growth) and some people argue that it is not.

S - But then the year without nominations didn't see any great increase did it?

K - No........
.....Bea sort of wonders whether the time was just right for something like that but now its just not totally what people want.
..........  

(Discussion of other awards and there voting figures and differences compared to YABBA, discussed ways of promoting YABBA - talks given by various librarians)

S - Do you have any opinions as to why the YABBA numbers are dropping?

K - We talk about this all the time. People are quite concerned about it. I think the dissemination of information is part of the problem now that SLB no longer goes out. ....  

(discussion of schools that voted once and never again - possible target)

S - Have they decided to stay with this format or will they change again.?
K - The only other thing that we thought we should look into is looking at the numbers from the public lending right, the figures that showed the books most borrowed from Public libraries and somehow combing them with the nominations process to reach some type of broader list of books that seem to be popular. Because we seem to be getting quite a small group of children selecting the list that are then voted on.

(Brief discussion)

K - I've just had a thought about this categories question. In the early years I wasn't there but I would gather that they just got everything, all the nomination slips in and then they would have had to decide themselves which section to put it in. So the committee would have made that decision.

(discussion of the list and how it comes about).

K. - ........If you give this to a primary school teacher they may put their prep one and two in there, (picture book) their grade three and four in there (younger reader's section) and their grade five and six in the older.

S - They do, that is probably exactly what they do do, because all of the grades five and sixes tend to be in the older readers section.

(discussion of constraints on YABBA information getting out to people - money constraints on mail outs, difficulty of disseminating information - SLB no longer exists therefore no longer is there a tool for disseminating information that goes to all schools.)
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LA MARCA, SUSAN GAYE

Title:
Pious tales and dirty stories : the Young Australians Best Book Award (YABBA)

Date:
1995

Citation:

Publication Status:
Unpublished

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/39408

File Description:
Pious tales and dirty stories

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