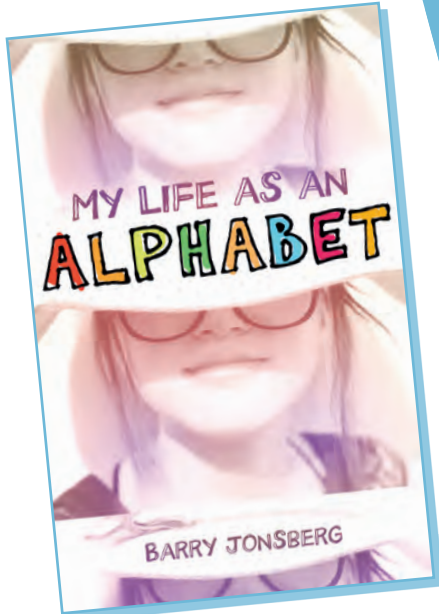




[www.australianstandingorders.com.au](http://www.australianstandingorders.com.au)

JUNIOR FICTION NO. 1 2013

# FICTION STANDING ORDER



## FEATURED BOOK: **MY LIFE AS AN ALPHABET**

For information about our featured book, please visit our website:  
[australianstandingorders.com.au](http://australianstandingorders.com.au)

Happy New Year and welcome to our first Fiction standing order for 2013! I hope the new year has started well for you and that you had a relaxing break over Christmas.

It seems that 2013 is the year of junior fiction – so many books to choose from for the first few months of this year and there are some very strong titles this month.

My personal favourite is Barry Jonsberg's **My Life as an Alphabet**, which is our featured book for February. It's laugh-out-loud funny, cleverly constructed and also very moving. It's about Candice Phee, twelve years old and quirky in her attitude to life and people. Her aim is to bring light and laughter to those around her – no matter how she has to achieve it. Wonderful stuff. Suitable for Upper Primary.

**The Treasure Box** is a more sophisticated picture book for Mid to Upper Primary. Written by Margaret Wild and illustrated by Freya Blackwood, it's about war, words, stories and the resilience of the human spirit. As you would expect from Freya, the illustrations are magnificent.

There's a new character to meet in the **Our Australian Girl** series. Her name is Lina and she's a young Italian girl living in 1956. Lina dreams of being a writer, but her strict Italian parents have other plans for her. **Meet Lina** is suitable for Mid Primary.

**Drongoes** is a new title in the popular **Mates** series – chapter novels with full-colour illustrations. This one contains a powerful message about friendship and how winning isn't everything. Suitable for Lower to Mid Primary.

**A Very Unusual Pursuit** is the first book in a new and fabulous (fabulous!) series by award-winning author Catherine Jinks. It's a terrific read about a young girl called Birdie, who is apprentice to a bogle hunter. It's full of action, adventure and mystery and will appeal to both boys and girls in Upper Primary.

**Escape from Cockatoo Island** is a new title in the **My Australian Story** series, suitable for Mid to Upper Primary. Told in diary format, it's set in 1879 on Sydney Harbour's infamous Cockatoo Island at the time it housed the Biloela Industrial and Reformatory School for Girls. Eleven-year-old orphan Olivia dreams of escaping her days of sewing, washing and bullying and finding a new life in the city.

Don't forget to look out for your free ASO compendium (for subscribers) in the March standing orders. Perfect for filing the 2013 Teacher Notes.

Happy reading.

### SCIS

Don't forget that all ASO selections have been allocated SCIS numbers. These can be found on our website:

[www.australianstandingorders.com.au](http://www.australianstandingorders.com.au)

## COMING NEXT ISSUE

**THE QUEEN AND THE NOBODY BOY**  
– Barbara Else

**JAKE'S COOKING CRAZE**  
– Ken Spillman and Chris Nixon

**JANDAMARRA**  
– Mark Greenwood and Terry Denton

**AN ANZAC TALE**  
– Ruth Starke and Greg Holfeld

**DEFINITELY NO DUCKS**  
– Meg McKinlay and Leila Rudge

**MY AUSTRALIAN STORY:  
GALLIPOLI**  
– Alan Tucker

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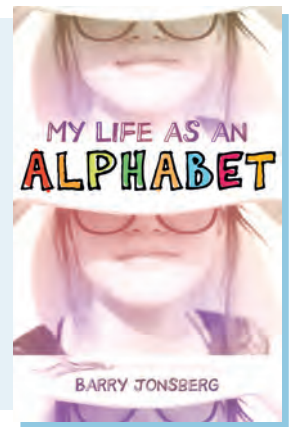
## MY LIFE AS AN ALPHABET

BARRY JONSBURG

Candice Phee is different to other twelve-year-olds. To her teachers and classmates she appears borderline autistic because she prefers to communicate via notes, read the dictionary and the complete works of Charles Dickens (in alphabetical order) and to sit alone in the school library every lunchtime. When Candice does speak, she insists on absolute honesty and literal correctness, to the point where she often offends those around her. But Candice is the epitome of kindness. She recognises the unhappiness around her and wants to bring light and laughter to everyone...even those who bully her.

ISBN: 9781743310977

RRP: \$14.99



### TEACHER NOTES

- Rich Uncle Brian says of Candice, 'You sing your own song, Pumpkin, and you dance your own dance. You see the world differently from the rest of us. And you know? Sometimes I think I wish everyone saw it the same way you do. I know the world would be a better place.' (p 35). Ask students to find examples in the story of Candice making the world a better place for one of the other characters.
- Much of the humour in the book is derived from how Candice perceives others and how we, the reader, perceive them. Have students read the scene where Candice presents a speech about Jen Marshall (p 213). How does the way Candice sees Jen differ from the way we, the reader, see her? Ask students to discuss in groups which version (Candice's or our initial impression) is likely to be the more correct. Have them give reasons to support their argument.
- Candice says of herself that she 'is addicted to the truth... which occasionally causes problems' (p 152). Read the scene between Candice and Rich Uncle Brian, when they are returning after a boat trip (pp 80-81). Ask students why this scene is humorous. Then ask them to think about whether there are any circumstances where lying is preferable to the truth.
- One of the reasons Candice's thoughts and speech are funny is that she can only understand the 'literal' meaning of words. Ask students to research what 'literal' means and to find examples in the book that illustrate this aspect of her personality.
- Most of the main characters have been changed by some experience in their lives. Have students break into groups to explain possible reasons for Candice's 'obsessions', her mother's depressive state and Jen Marshall's behaviour.
- Essay Topic: Denille says in her letter that Candice is 'either one cool chick or ... completely and utterly mad. Who knows? Maybe a bit of both' (p 255). What do you think? Use examples from the story to support your argument.
- Essay Topic: 'The main message of the novel is that being different is okay. That being strange is okay,' says the author, Barry Jonsberg. Do you agree with this statement? Support your opinion with examples from the novel.

## THE TREASURE BOX

MARGARET WILD AND FREYA BLACKWOOD (ILLUSTRATOR)

When the enemy bombs the library, all the books in Peter's town are burned – all except the one his father has taken home to study. It's a book about their people. He puts the book in a treasure box to keep it safe. As the war progresses, Peter and his father must leave their home and join the throng of people who are journeying over the mountains to escape the conflict. But as they march through the winter, Peter's father becomes ill. On his deathbed, he begs Peter to take care of the special book so that their story can live on. When Peter can no longer carry the treasure box, he buries it under a linden tree, safe from bombs and fire. But as he survives the war and grows up overseas, he never forgets about it, and he returns as an adult to dig it up. He returns to his village, where a new library has been built. He places the book back on a shelf, where once more it can be found, and read, and loved.

ISBN: 9780670073658

RRP: \$24.99



### TEACHER NOTES

- Look at the images on the imprint page. What can you tell about the story from these images? When is it set? What ideas are being foregrounded?
- Consider the illustrator's use of colour. What is the effect of the sepia tones? What colour is used on the page? What might this tell us about the significance of this item?
- 'When the enemy bombed the library, everything burned.' Consider this statement. What is destroyed when a library burns? Consider both the literal and metaphoric meaning. Is it just the building and the books that are lost?
- Many times in war, dictatorial leaders will intentionally burn books. Why might they do this?
- What is contained in our stories? Why are they such a significant part of our culture?
- What do you think the book was? Why did the illustrator choose never to illustrate the actual book?
- Does it matter what the book was about?
- How does this help to make the story more universal?
- How have words been used throughout the story?
- Look carefully at the text used in the illustrations. There are many different languages used. Why might the illustrator have done this?
- What is your greatest treasure?
- Most people think of treasure in terms of wealth or financial benefits. In what way can words and books actually be seen to be our greatest treasure?
- Consider the statement 'If you give a boy a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a boy to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.' How does this statement reflect the ideas in this story?

## ESCAPE FROM COCKATOO ISLAND

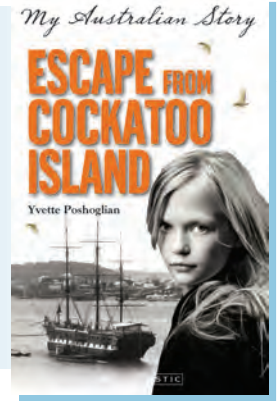
### MY AUSTRALIAN STORY

YVETTE POSHOGLIAN

This is the fictional diary of 11-year-old orphan Olivia Markham, who feels she is a virtual prisoner in the Biloela Industrial School on Cockatoo Island in 1879. As Olivia surveys her new home, she is aware of its history as a gaol and although it is now a school, the conditions don't seem to have changed much. Olivia dreams of getting off the island and making a new life for herself in the city. Through her courage, intelligence and kindness, her dreams finally come true.

ISBN: 9781742832456

RRP: \$16.99



#### TEACHER NOTES

- Locate Cockatoo Island on a map of Sydney Harbour. Research its history on the internet at <http://www.cockatooisland.gov.au/>
- Divide the class into small groups and get each group to select an envelope. Inside the envelope is a secret instruction. The group is to research the topic and make a presentation to the whole class on one of the following:
  - What People Wore**
    - o What kinds of clothes and shoes did children and adults wear in Sydney in 1879? Create a slide show that contrasts wealthy citizens with those living in poor conditions. What do we learn about the appearance of the characters in **Escape from Cockatoo Island**?
  - Food and Drink**
    - o What do we learn about food and drink by reading the book? Compare the food and drink of an 11-year-old in 1879 with what an 11-year-old might have today.
    - o Look at some old recipes and tell the class about one dish that you would enjoy and one that you would hate.
  - Health and Misadventure**
    - o What do we learn about health and misadventure in **Escape from Cockatoo Island**? What diseases and treatments are mentioned in the novel? What other

- diseases were common?
  - o What are some of the main health problems and misadventures that might be experienced by an 11-year-old Australian today?

#### Sydney in 1879

- o Using old photographs and illustrations, create a slide show of the scenes that Olivia enjoys when she goes to Sydney with Miss Godfrey.

#### Bullying

- o What forms of bullying do we read about in the book? What do you know about bullying today? What might be the reasons that some people bully others?
- Ask your students whether they learnt anything about words and their meanings or whether they noticed any unfamiliar words in **Escape from Cockatoo Island** [Biloela, verra, didna]. Using Bronwyn Bancroft's **Possum and Wattle** for inspiration or the list of Eora words on the State Library of NSW's Indigenous Collections site, make a list of ten other Indigenous words and their meanings to go with 'Biloela' [http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover\\_collections/history\\_nation/indigenous/vocabularies/documenting/index.html](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/history_nation/indigenous/vocabularies/documenting/index.html)

## MEET LINA: OUR AUSTRALIAN GIRL BOOK 1

SALLY RIPPIN

It's 1956. Lina Gattuso is living in a terrace house in Carlton with her parents, her Nonna, uncle and three brothers. Lina attends an expensive private girls school on a scholarship, and so far it hasn't been easy. St Brigid's students are nothing like her friends from primary school and Lina is the only Italian girl. Compared to everyone else, Lina is poor, and she knows it. Her father wants her to be a doctor or a lawyer, but Lina dreams of being a writer. On a visit to her best friend Mary's house after school, where it hits home just how different Lina's home life is from her classmates', Lina resolves to prove that she's worthy of her place at St Brigid's.

ISBN: 9780143307006

RRP: \$14.99



#### TEACHER NOTES

##### Pre-reading:

- Research Italy – environment, produce, lifestyle etc.
- What problems were there in Italy after WWII?
- Where is Lygon Street? What is it famous for now?
- Where is Carlton? What reputation did it have in the 1950s?
- Find illustrations of the cultural icons referred to in the story: Dawn Fraser; Jackie Kennedy; Grace Kelly; the pillbox hat; Audrey Hepburn in **Roman Holiday**; Elvis Presley.

##### Discussion and activities:

- Read the description of Lina's neighbourhood on pp 16-17. What does this tell you about the area in which she lives?
- Where in most big cities do the migrant areas tend to be?
- Why do migrant families all tend to move to the same area? How are these neighbourhoods regarded by the non-migrants?
- Lina wants to be a writer, but her father hopes that she will be a doctor or a lawyer. How would this affect Lina's life?

- Why do migrant parents often have high expectations for their children?
- Lina is expected to go straight home after school and look after her baby brother, even though her older brothers are allowed to go to their friends' houses. What does this suggest about gender expectations in Italian society?
- What is meant by the term xenophobia?
- Create a Venn diagram that compares Lina's life to that of a non-migrant Australian girl of the 1950s.
- Lina loves the stars as she says they are there for everyone. What does she mean by this?
- Lina proves to be a marvellous writer and through her writing she gains acceptance and praise from her peers. Why do many migrants often become great storytellers?
- Why are stories so important?



## DRONGOES (MATES)

CHRISTINE BONGERS  
AND DAN MCGUINNESS (ILLUSTRATOR)

Jack ('Drongo') is tired of being second best. With the help of his best mate Eric, he hatches a plan to defeat Rocket Robson once and for all. The cross-country event is coming up and it's his last chance at victory. But things don't always go to plan and Jack learns that sometimes winning doesn't mean crossing the line first. A funny and warm-hearted tale about the special bond of mateship.

ISBN: 9781862919822

RRP: \$11.99



### TEACHER NOTES

- What do you think the story is about? What is the message or moral of the story?
- How is Jack a good friend to Eric?
- Choose a page of **Drongoes** to design your own illustrations. Make sure to design your own border, just as in the book.
- Can you tell a story with just illustrations? Look over **Drongoes** and pay attention to the pictures only – try to ignore the words. Can the pictures in **Drongoes** tell the story without words?
- In small groups, adapt a chapter of the book for the stage. You can add new scenes and extra characters if you think they will add to the story.
- Design a cross-country running outfit.
- Find out what you can about Spangled Drongoes. Research their feeding habits, habitats, characteristics, etc. Write up your findings on an information pamphlet such as you might find at a zoo or conservation park.
- Design your own cross-country route in your neighbourhood and test it out with your family and friends.
- The creek is a haven for Jack when he is feeling low. Have a look at the chapter to see what is so appealing about the place. Design your own outdoor sanctuary.
- Research the racehorse Drongo.
- What other famous underdogs or underachievers could inspire a story? See if you can find one that you might like to write about.

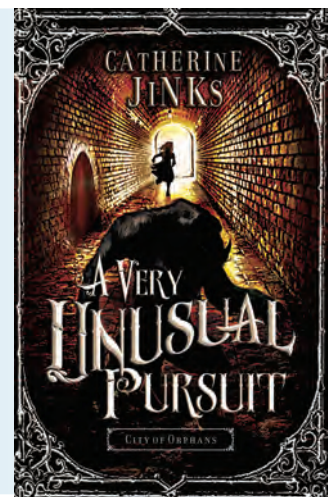
## A VERY UNUSUAL PURSUIT: CITY OF ORPHANS BOOK 1

CATHERINE JINKS

Mysterious monsters have been living in Great Britain for thousands of years. They all have one thing in common – their insatiable appetite for small children. That's why Alfred Bunce, the bogler, has a ten-year-old apprentice to help him. Birdie McAdam has been fighting bogles since she was three. With her beautiful voice and dainty appearance, she acts as the bait that draws bogles from their lairs so that Alfred can kill them. Then one life-changing day, they're approached by two very different women: Sarah Pickles and Edith Eames. Birdie soon realises that her livelihood is under threat. But it is only with Miss Eames's help that Birdie and Alfred finally manage to defeat Sarah, the treacherous Doctor Morton, and a deadly bogle that emerges, unexpectedly, from a dumb-waiter.

ISBN: 9781743313060

RRP: \$14.99



### TEACHER NOTES

- Before starting this book have your class watch the movie of the musical, **Oliver!** It beautifully captures what it was like for a poor child trying to survive in Victorian London and depicts the huge division between social classes during that era. Students will have a much better understanding of why Birdie is so fearful of being sent to a workhouse if she becomes too old to lure the bogles. Once they have read **A Very Unusual Pursuit** they will begin to see similarities between Jinks's Sarah Pickles and Dickens's Fagin, and Jem Barbary and the Artful Dodger. Have students answer the following questions after viewing the film: What is an orphan? What sort of things did poor orphans have to do to survive in Victorian England? Would you like to have been rich or poor in Victorian England? Would you like to live in a workhouse?
- The lyrics of Birdie's songs are often dark, violent and end tragically. Look at the first song in Chapter Two and ask students to think about how the song makes them feel. Introduce the concept of mood and its use in the story and talk to the class about what the song's lyrics have added to the scene.
- In Chapter Three Birdie considers herself fortunate (p 19). Ask students to work in pairs to discuss why she feels fortunate and whether, by today's standards, she is indeed fortunate.
- Have students break into small groups to research one of the following topics:
  - o Workhouses
  - o Child labour – chimney sweeps, factory work, mining, sewer scavengers
  - o Stealing in Victorian London and what happened if you were caught
  - o Mental asylums in Victorian England
  - o The English class system.Once completed, have groups present their findings to the rest of the class.
- The author says that the book is concerned with 'the decline of the "old ways" and the rise of new technology and scientific attitudes'. Use examples from the book to show how Alfred Bunce embodies the old world and Miss Eames embodies the modern world.