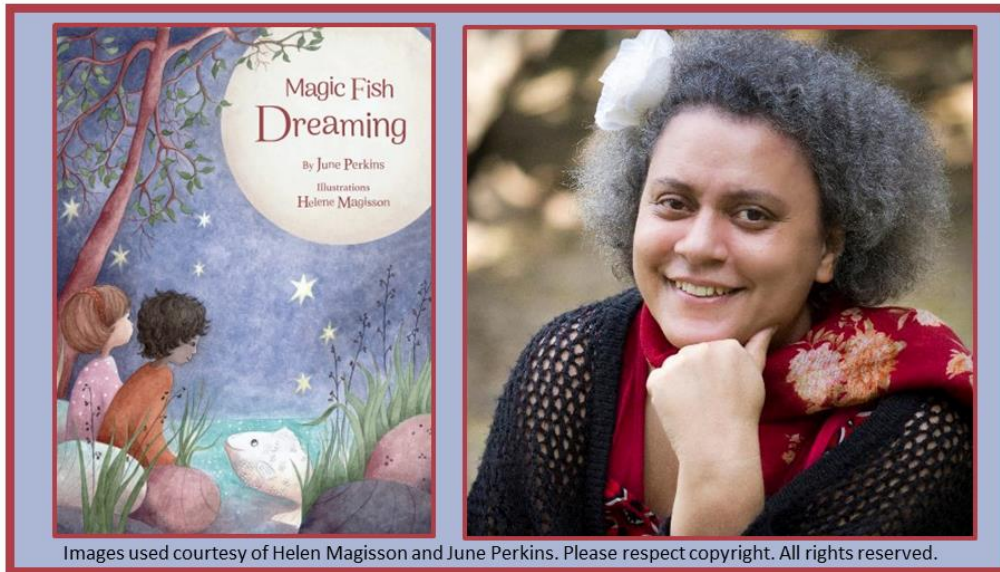


Author Spotlight: June Perkins



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June Perkins: author, poet, storyteller, blogger, educator

June, when did you know you wanted to be a writer?

I knew from the moment I started writing June's Journal, my school journal, at the New Community School in Launceston when I was about eight years old. But I didn't know what kind of writer or how to go about it.

I took a liking to reading and writing poetry very early, as my Dad used to read a lot to us, especially A. A. Milne and the picture books of Dr. Seuss.

Where do you write? Do you like to be by yourself in the quiet, or do you like to write in a noisy space?

This depends on what kind of writing I am doing. If I am trying to hear the beat of a poem, I like it be pretty quiet, just so as I can hear the music of the beat. Other times when I am brain storming I don't mind noise, and it can be incorporated into my writing.

I like early morning writing, when there is a stillness that one can contemplate in.

What do you use to write – pencil and paper or computer?

I use all of them.

When I was a teenager I was obsessed with different kinds of ink and stationary. I loved different kinds of notebooks, and perfumed and coloured pens, and filling my notebooks as quickly as I could and, then as soon as I could afford it, fill another one.

I love that when you write with ink and straight away put thoughts down on paper, that you don't hit delete, and edit, but keep going and going; and then you edit.

But I also like the power of being able to delete and start again when working on the computer.

When do you write?

I write every day – but not always creative stuff. I find myself writing emails, tutoring plans, messages to friends, answers to administrative questions, Facebook posts, and blogs; and I must make sure that I make special creative writing time and not be distracted by all the other kinds of writing.

When do you get your ideas?

I can find an idea at any moment. It can be on a walk, a phrase I heard someone say on a bus, a television article, an online image or quote, a conversation with a family member or friend. It can be through observation and mindfulness, and meditation. I like to write down ideas in notebooks.

How much planning do you do in your head before you write?

I tend to plan by writing to find shape, or writing a skeleton plan or framework to work in. But when I am between drafts there are a lot of ideas going on in my head about how to shape and edit something.

What gave you the idea for this collection of poems?

Living in Far North Queensland with a young family inspired much of the poetry in this book. It is a brilliant place to explore, and be close to nature, but has challenges like storms, cyclones, rains and challenging times.

As for this particular collection a lot of the poems were inspired by working on a project called 'Ripple', which was about combining poetry and photography to celebrate national poetry week in my local community. The council gave me a regional arts development fund grant to do this.

What do you like best about the book? Do you have a favourite poem?

I love the way the art and poetry work together. I don't think I can have a favourite poem as that is like having a favourite child. I like them for different moods, so if you want to have fun, try 'Giggle Poems', and if you want to inspire children to change the world, try 'Discovering Magic', and if you want to almost lull them to sleep, try 'River Song.'

What can you tell us about the illustrations? Do they convey the essence of your poems?

I love the way the illustrations help the book connect together. The same characters appear in more than one illustration and become like friends, and then they are all together in 'Rain Song'.

I love the humour of the illustrations of 'Pond Pests', 'Discovering Magic', and 'Wishing for A Fish'.

How did you feel when you wrote the poems?

Depends on the poem. Some I just wanted to make children laugh. Other times I wanted to transport them to the land of giant ancient trees and cassowaries.

How do you hope readers will feel?

I hope they will feel like they have been on a fun, magical and interesting quest, and that they will want to know more about the natural world and will want to care for it more. I don't want to do that in a didactic way at all, but rather through looking at the enchantment that such a beautiful place can play in the lives of children and families. The country to me feels like a place for the soul to grow and develop.

How would you like teachers to present your book to children?

I think if they can present it like a quest it would be fun. On this quest, children might discover animals and habitats they don't know yet, their own creative powers and dreaming, and maybe even their own ability to write a story or a poem.

I think also it is series of poems that are about encouraging children to ask their own questions about the world we see, and the worlds we can't see, or the world we can make through the power of our imagination and actions.

Are there any messages you would like them to discuss?

Well less messages, and more what they feel about the illustrations and how they work with the poems.

They could talk about things like the wildlife in it and learn more about them, and issues, like how we control animals considered pests in habitats, through using poems like 'Pond Pests'. 'Lost at Sea' could be an interesting one for older children, and I would love to know how children might interpret that one.

Do you have any advice for teachers in their role as writing guides?

Teaching children the power of observation and the magic of beat and metaphor can do much for making their writing come from their own unique cultures and personality. We all see the world slightly differently, and respecting the beauty of each child and their capacity regardless of their background I think is essential in giving them the confidence to write.

Do you have any advice for children as writers?

The main thing I would say to children is to carry a notebook with you everywhere and learn to observe what you see, whether you live in the city or the country; or whether you are travelling overseas in a new place, or around a place you think you know very well.

Another handy tool is a camera, or a phone you take pictures on and record sounds with. And well of course, just WRITE! Don't be scared of doing it; just have a go and keep working at it, and learn different things you can try, whether it is a haiku, a limerick or some trickier form.

When you have mastered lots of different poetry forms then you can change them and challenge them. But learning to write in forms builds your poetry muscles and gives you more techniques to draw upon.

What is your favourite picture book?

I like Shaun Tan's *Arrival* a lot, as it is just so innovative, and not really just for children at all, his work is clever for its 'wordless' format. I am learning about more and more children's book authors and particularly like those who come from diverse backgrounds.

I've taken a liking to the work of Peter Carnavas, as it can appeal to many age groups regardless of it being a picture book.

And of course I love the picture books that Helene Magisson my illustrator is part of.

Who is your favourite author? What do you like about his or her work?

There are many writers that I love. Not all of them write for children, but they influence my writing in some respects and many of them have nature, diversity, cultural identity, or humour as a major aspect of their work.

I especially love authors who give children optimism and hope in their work, such as Morris Gleitzman.

Maya Angelou I just love for her heart felt poetry in a jazz like spoken word style that is so attractive when she reads it herself. I could listen to her read for hours.

To find out more about **June Perkins** and her writing, visit her website [Pearlz Dreaming](#).

To discover more about her book, visit [Magic Fish Dreaming](#).

