



## Author Spotlight — Diana Harley

Meet author Diana Harley and her springtime picture books



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Author: Diana Harley

**Diana, can you tell us what gave you the idea for writing these lovely springtime books?**

I was actually out in my garden with one of my children and we were following a butterfly flit from flower to flower. It was so engrossing and almost mesmerising! It started me thinking about movement and “doing words” and the idea of using our beautiful Australian butterflies in a book for children about movement was born.

**Butterflies and Beetles and Bugs are both word books. Butterflies is a series of ‘ing’ words and Beetles and Bugs is a series of positional words. Why did you decide to write them that way?**

With “Beetles and Bugs”, I felt that these little creatures could help explain to children what we mean when we say “up” or “around” or “behind” because the children can see the pictures and the reader can explain to the children the position of the creatures in relation to their environment and in light of the explanatory word.

With “Butterflies”, the “ing” words or verbs were so easily adapted to the movement of the butterflies - and once again, I wanted to show the butterflies moving in the way that children sometimes do and have a bit of fun with that!

**How would you like teachers to present the books to children?**

My books are highlighting Australian Beetles, insects (bugs) and butterflies. I felt it was important to showcase these creatures because they are very important to our environment and sometimes they are neglected.

So, I would like teachers to explain to children that the creatures in my books are all Australian. I would also like them to really engage with the pictures and trace the positions and movements of the creatures whilst explaining the text. In “Butterflies”, I have used fonts relevant to the movements depicted.

**How do you hope children will react when they read your books?**

I hope children have fun with my books and enjoy what I have presented. “Underneath the Apple Tree” is a book that can be used to wind down, engage in mindfulness and appreciate our natural world. I also hope children will learn to be inquisitive about our beautiful wildlife and to become protectors of our unique fauna and flora.

**All of the books have been illustrated by Sue-Ellen Yates. What do you think is most appealing about the way she has illustrated them?**

*Sue-Ellen spent many hours in the library and on the computer researching each individual "creature" so that her illustrations would be true-to-life and anatomically correct. She also took her camera out into the bush and garden to photograph the settings for our illustrations. Her illustrations are appealing because they are truly based on the creatures and their environments. I also love her use of colour and her connection with the manuscript.*

**Now for a few questions about you as a writer. Did you have another job before you were a writer?**

*When I worked full-time, I was a legal researcher. Before that, I was a legal editor.*

**When did you know you wanted to be a writer?**

*I can't say that I knew I wanted to be a writer but I always had a vivid imagination as a child and my Year 3 teacher told my mother I would write a book one day so perhaps she planted the seed!*

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

*I definitely like to write by myself in a quiet atmosphere so that I can really think and tap into my emotions and feelings. However, I often take my pen and paper with me when my family goes fishing or to the beach and I use that time to flesh-out ideas or note the environment for future use.*

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

*If I am at home, I use my iPad to write but if I am out and about, I use pencil and paper or the nearest paper serviette or supermarket docket!!*

**When do you write? When do you get your ideas?**

*I write when I am motivated by my environment or by something that has happened. When I have a good idea, I use that to trigger my writing.*

*With "Butterflies", I mentioned that being out in my garden and watching a beautiful butterfly triggered my writing of that book.*

*I then thought about other creatures like ladybugs and ants and so "Beetles and Bugs" was born.*

*I have always loved watching the clouds, so it was easy for me to put that love into "Underneath the Apple Tree".*

*And with "Fantastic Gymnastics", that book came about from taking my young sons to kindergym and seeing what a great time they had there learning new skills and using their bodies in new ways.*

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

*My belief is that everyone has a story to tell, no matter how small or brief it might seem. For children to become writers, they need to be exposed to reading and the spoken word. And they don't just have to read books - read magazines, blogs, recipes, letters to relatives, pantry items - just read, read, read!!! And the writing will come!!*

**Do you have any advice for children as writers?**

*To become a good writer, you have to read - and read a lot! And read different things so that you can determine how YOU want to write.*