

# POSTSCRIPT

Day Two | 29 April

## *“26 Letters, Infinite Possibilities”*



The boys from Helen Chebatte's Year 10 "drama class" (Courtesy: William Turner)

### Day Two Overview

The second day of the 10th Newington Literature Festival was jam-packed with excitement and rapt interest from both the students and authors. Christopher Richardson gave a phenomenal talk about how fiction books in North Korea are used to control young people. Helen Chebatte presented a

drama-themed lesson for Year 10, which managed to grab more than a few laughs, Rock on the Steps gave lunchtime some entertainment, and a sausage sizzle capped it all off.

# Essays Made Creative

By Stylianos Vasili and William Fuller



Felicity Castagna giving an acting lesson (Courtesy: Hamish Ingham)

Felicity Castagna dispelled the common myth that essays are long, arduous and boring.

There is only so much you can do with essays and the art of essay writing, but as a group of keen Year 11's listened attentively, Ms Castagna offered a different perspective on essay writing.

She introduced the discursive essay, often known as the creative nonfiction essay. This essay is where the writer and the reader connect through a common idea, presented emotively by the writer.

"Essays can be just as creative as story-writing," Ms Castagna said.

Ms Castagna also offered an insight into her favourite essay *A World of Bald White Days*. This discursive essay explored themes of eating disorders, the process of diagnosing and dealing with them.

Another key theme expressed during the talk was the importance of a personal voice in a creative nonfiction essay and how it can aid to more effectively illustrate ideas and emotions.

"I use different personal voices to invoke and manipulate the emotions I want the reader to feel," Castagna said. "A personal discursive essay is a contract between the reader and the writer."

Veering from the traditional essay structure makes the discursive essay more difficult to write effectively, but more emotive.

Ms Castagna also gave an insight into a creative, non-fiction essay as one that conveys emotion, feeling and meaning.



Felicity Castagna talking to Year 10 (Courtesy: Hamish Ingham)

# The Art of the Disguise

By Preston Zhang and Lukas Yee

Bestselling author, Jack Heath, revealed his recipe for the perfect anti-hero on the second day of Litfest.

Mr Heath has written more than 30 thrillers including the *300 Minutes of Danger* series, *The Truth App* and the *Scream* series.

The focus of Mr Heath's presentation was "disguising a good character as a bad one".

Mr Heath dissected Timothy Blake (essentially Hannibal Lecter with taste) from one of his most known crime novels, *Hangman*. He discussed the details of the exotic cannibal-turned-detective character, from his inspiration (a combination of zombies, veganism and the Texan death penalty) to his long history of procrastination.

The Year 10 class learned the formula for creating such an effective anti-hero, as well as how to manipulate language to create powerful and relatable writing.

Mr Heath also revealed his editing process. Clear, short and specific were the three key words of his career. He told the class to ask themselves, "is it possible to shorten this without losing information?"

"Could you use a synonym here?" and "how exactly does the law work in Texas?" were other questions that bounced around the classroom. He mentioned editing was the most important part of writing and occupied much of his time.

His greatest tip for writing was to show the text to a wide range of people. For *Hangman*, he stayed in Texas, and talked to a retired FBI dispatcher to gather insights for his plot. This allowed for a greater degree of realism in his fictional writing.

P.S. Eating people is generally a bad thing.



Jack Heath presenting to Year 8 (Courtesy: Dexter Young)



Jack Heath reading his book *200 Minutes of Danger* (Courtesy: Dexter Young)





Tristan Banks (Courtesy: William Turner)

# Bro - Don't Format Yet

By Toby Eastway and Benjamin Firth

"What does it mean to be Australian?" This was the question Helen Chebatte posed to a Year 10 English Class. Mrs Chebatte has been acting for more than 20 years and published her award-winning debut novel *Bro* in 2016.

*Bro* explores the racial tensions in an Australian high school's fight club. The novel was a big hit, even before it was published, winning the Children's Book Council of Australia's Aspiring Mentorship Program Award and the inaugural Charlotte Waring Barton Award. She used her novel to discuss her big question of what it means to be Australian.

Mrs Chebatte didn't always want to be a writer. "Writing came for me much later," she reflected. "I wanted to be an actor for most of my life."

"Give a why behind every character," Mrs Chebatte said, giving advice to the class. "Give him or her a reason for every statement." She then went on to teach the class about the 'Apple Theory'.

"The skin of the apple is the physical aspects of the character, like how tall they are, their eye colour or their hair," she explained. The flesh of the apple is the backstory of the character, where he or she comes from. The core of the apple is the psychology of the character, their mindset."

Mrs Chebatte then ran the class through some exercises, having them envision a character who fit the brief of a typical Australian, before having them act the roles in pairs to the class. She explained that she does similar things herself, finding it helps her understand the motives of the characters. The scenes that ensued were those of alcohol, gambling and the stereotyping of our beautiful nation, a great way to teach high school boys how to write.



Helen Chebatte presenting to a Year 10 class (Courtesy: Dexter Young)

# Oliver Phommavanh Q&A

Interviewer: Preston Zhang

Oliver Phommavanh is a Thai-Australian children's author and comedian. He has appeared in a range of writer and speaker festivals throughout his career, and his books, including *Thai-riffic!*, were shortlisted for a range of awards including Young Australia's Best Book Awards. As a comedian, Mr Phommavanh has appeared on multiple stages and TV shows.

## ***What inspired you to start writing?***

When I was a kid, I always wanted to be a writer. I loved reading books. I wanted to be a funny writer in particular, so I read a lot of humour - Paul Jennings and the like. I was a bit of a class clown at school as well. Overall I think I knew there and then I wanted to be a writer.

## ***Where do you find ideas to write?***

Initially, a lot of my ideas came from my own childhood; experiences from when I was a kid, just growing up at school. As the years went on, my ideas came from things that I saw, inspiration came from kids that I taught when I was a teacher, or just from being out and about in general - even from kids at events like Litfest. If some lines or characters stood out, I might write it down.

## ***As a writer, there are times where you get stuck. How would you deal with writer's block?***

Personally, when I get writer's block, I just get up and walk away from it. I try to forget about it and do something else. Usually, as a writer, I'm always thinking of new ideas, and I trust that my brain will work out a solution given time. Then when I'm driving, or stuck in traffic, or brushing my teeth, I'll go "oh yeah, that's how I solve it," and then run and write it down. I trust that eventually I'll work it out.

## ***What's your most important tip for writing?***

It would have to be to read lots of books. The more books you read, the more ideas you get. You don't have to memorise a passage word for word, but after reading enough books, I believe that something will click, and you'll think of better ideas of your own.

## ***Is there anything else you want to say about writing?***

Honestly, the single most important tip is to write about what you love. When times are tough and you get stuck, perhaps writing the same draft 17 times in a row, the love for writing about the content is what kicks in and gets you through.



Oliver Phommavanh speaking to Year 8 (Courtesy: Dexter Young)



# Passion for Life

By Peter Koumoulas and William Fuller



James Knight (Courtesy: William Turner)

He began his talk by showing a video about his curious, unique personality. With 30 years of media experience he has learnt an incredible amount and he is still learning.

He told the story of how he asked an underprivileged teenage boy ‘if you could give everyone in the world a present, what would it be?’

James Knight greeted the Year 9 class with a simple requirement - “tell us something interesting”.

Mr Knight, journalist, author and traveller described himself as a ‘Student of Life’. When Mr Knight posed the question to the class it left the student baffled.

No-one put their hand up so he picked students randomly.

The boy replied - a rock. Mr Knight indicated the answer showed the importance of differing perspectives.

He said when it comes to writing you must bring context. The reader and writer have to go together on a journey. He gave an example by showing an image of a plain license plate. He asked the class “what does this license plate mean?”

The class struggled to give an answer, so Mr Knight took it upon himself to reply to his question with ease.

“This licence plate was made by one of my mates in jail,” Mr Knight said. “This was the last plate he had ever pressed in jail. He was allowed to keep it to remember a significant part of his life”.

Mr Knight then proceeded to tell the class, he had just made all of that up. This was used as an example to show you can build on anything, even a license plate if you just give it context and combine it with your own knowledge.

“It’s not bad writing, it’s your individual writing,” was Mr Knight’s final message.



James Knight’s Year 9 visit (Courtesy: William Turner)



Litfest Author's wall (Courtesy: Dexter Young)



# Secrets of Short Stories

By Richard Bai and Minh Nguyen

*Postscript* had exclusive access to a one on one session with Australian author, TV and film writer, J. C. Burke. During this session with Year 12 students, she explored how to write a short story effectively.

## Tips:

### *One Main Character*

When you have one main character, it allows readers to fully understand and have empathy for the character. Thus, readers can be more into the world of where this character is set.

### *One Goal/Quest*

One goal will keep the story simple and straightforward. It will be less confusing for readers to understand the plot too. This is important to remember for tests, especially when there is a time limit.

### *One To Two Secondary Characters*

The purpose of these characters are to either help or hinder the main character's quest. The setting should be in real-time and it should be set in a simple and easy to understand area.

### *Know What The Ending Is*

Ms Burke said: "If you don't know what the ending is, you'll never get there".

### *Map Out Your Story*

Having a sense of where the story is going will help make it engaging with the readers.

### *Use Senses To Trigger Memories*

Senses such as touch, smell, sight, taste and hearing can be used in short stories to trigger a certain memory. Memories allow readers to have more empathy for the character, which engages the reader to continue reading and allows them to be emotionally attached to the character.



J.C. Burke (Courtesy: William Turner)

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# Author, Poet, but most importantly, Comedic Musician

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By Stylianos Vasili

Harry Laing. Author. Poet. But for the Year 7 cohort, he presented as Mr Laing the comedian. In the barrage of comical songs, raps, and poems, Harry Laing left the Year 7's with a better idea of empathetic and emotional writing.

Immediately Mr Laing broke out into song, singing melodically about the streets, detailing a story that had the Year 7 crowd dying in laughter.

Mr Laing introduced one of his latest works, the chronicles of a chair, in which he succinctly detailed what he thought a chair would imagine, think, wonder, how it would feel. After reading this out, the class had a chance to do the same.

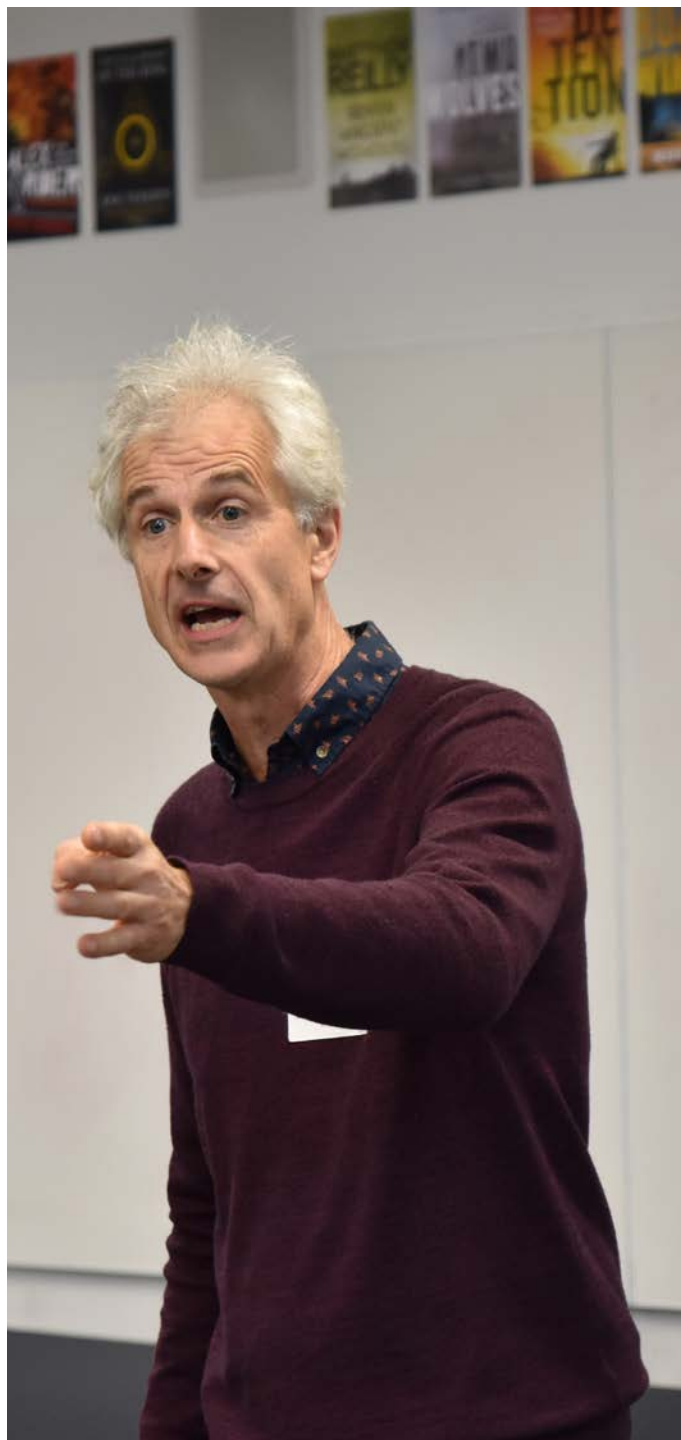
Mr Laing introduced the structure of a sound and entertaining poem.

"A great poem always has a strong start and end," Mr Laing said. He encouraged the class to produce poems of their own.

The boys were instructed to invoke emotion into their work and convey the feelings and thoughts of whatever they were writing about. Mr Laing was highly impressed as he gave constructive criticism to each boy who shared.

Mr Laing then read out his poem 'Dog Language', in which he recited his fast-paced, frantic piece of writing that follows the ever-changing life of a dog and all of their ridiculous thoughts. Then, the boys had a go at writing a similar poem, much to their excitement.

Abruptly, in typical Mr Laing fashion, he channelled his inner rapper, as he started beatboxing and rapping about the many choices of cheese, which left some boys laughing on the floor.



Harry Laing presenting to Year 7 (Courtesy: Dexter Young)

# Will the mouse get the cheese?

By Rupert Gillies and Christian Ishak



Kim Ho posing for the camera (Courtesy: Dexter Young)

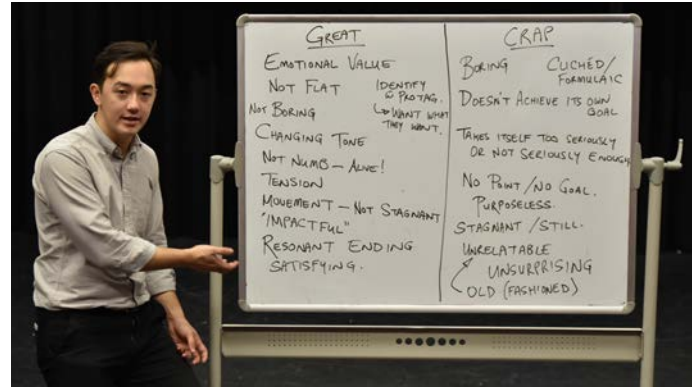
Screenwriter Kim Ho explained the relationship between the viewers and actors within a story.

Mr Ho is well known for his success in screenwriting and performing. He gave his audience a clear understanding of how, in theatre, there is development through time. You can also slowly watch the characters within the story venture to get what they want.

He also mentioned how it didn't matter how long it took for them to get what they wanted, it mattered who would be the one to do so.

He referred to an analogy which involves a mouse, a piece of cheese and as he developed the analogy, a cat.

If the mouse and the cheese are alone without the cat, you know that the mouse will get what he wants, but if you add a cat there is a conflict.



Mr Ho teaching Year 9 drama students (Courtesy: Dexter Young)

There is a cat who wants the mouse and a mouse who wants the cheese. If the cat gets the mouse, the mouse can't get the cheese and the cat will get what it wants.

Or, if the mouse gets the cheese, the mouse gets what it wants and the cat no longer can.

So, ultimately, creating a screenplay in relation to character(s) is about: Will the mouse get the cheese?

He also went on to describe how the audience sees and understands things that the character cannot.

Writers use this, as it makes the audience invest emotionally into the scene. When something dramatic happens people can scream for the characters to do the one and obvious thing, but they won't as it creates a thrill.

He ended the presentation by describing how investing emotionally helps you understand the character more. The dialogue can be the tip of the iceberg and what the conflict is actually about is underneath the surface.



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# Helen Chebatte Q&A

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Interviewer: Toby Eastway

## **What was your inspiration for your book, *Bro*?**

My inspiration was the fact that I could never come across a story where it depicted diversity. Even as a child when I read books, I could never find anything where I would see myself in those pages. The life I was living, as the daughter of immigrants, wasn't depicted by anything.

## **How did you start writing?**

Many years ago, I lost my father and I had a very hard time dealing with that. A friend of mine told me to write it down on a piece of paper, which I did, and that made me feel a lot better. They turned into letters to my father and I would write letters telling him what my day was like. I felt much better when I stopped, but I felt that I wanted to continue writing.

Then I plucked up the courage I entered my stories into competitions. When I found they were getting shortlisted, it gave me more confidence to keep writing and eventually I wrote my first young adult book. I entered it into another competition with the Children's Book Council of Australia, because the prize was a mentorship in writing. I liked the idea of someone to help me hone the story and give me feedback, so I entered this manuscript and to my surprise it won and I got a mentorship. We honed the book, finished it and even further to my surprise I was offered publication. That was my first book *Bro*.

## **What were those original stories, those short little anecdotes about?**

The stories were usually picture book texts, so they usually include animals, or trees that came to life and that sort of thing.

I found myself writing more about diversity which were always for little kids to read. Then I went into short stories that were always young adult. These were based on things that I did at school and *Bro* evolved from that.

## **Do you have a process that you go through when you write?**

Nothing hard and fast, it depends on how I'm feeling. What I do is that I bring my performance background into my work. I will often refer to my training as an actor to flesh out characters, to improvise scenes physically in order to understand how my characters will react or what might happen in this particular situation. Often I start with the character and then I build the world around that character. I say to myself what kind of world would this particular character be living in. I tend to have a character in mind when doing this.

## **What was the biggest challenge you faced when writing *Bro*?**

The biggest challenge was accessing the truth, while *Bro* is a fictional story, it did come from my childhood. The experiences that the protagonist Romeo has in *Bro* were very similar to the experiences I was having as a young adult. The school that I went to had a similar kind of school yard, where there was ethnic division. When I researched the book I found that there was still a lot of ethnic division, so I think accessing that truth was difficult as I remembered the sadness and the hatred and the violence that took place there.

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# Helen Chebatte Q&A

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## **Do you have any advice for aspiring writers?**

Yes. Write because it's in your heart to write - this is what you like to do, this is what you want to do and when you do write, be honest about what you're writing. Don't write something because it sounds good, because someone told you to. Access your own truth and write that. That goes back to what an author once said to me: write what you know, and Bro was what I knew. If you are a person who's into fantasy, write that, but whatever you do always write from your heart.

## **What's next? Do you have any more books in the works?**

Yes! I'm working on another book right now which is completely and utterly different to Bro and that goes back again to writing from my heart. Bro was this one off thing that I really wanted to share and I did and now I am writing a fantasy novel.



Helen Chebatte (Courtesy: Dexter Young)

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# Hope, Passion and Vampires

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By Toby Eastway and Benjamin Firth



“Stories were safe”, she reflected. “I had books that I would read over and over again.”

Mrs Eager studied economics at university although she found that she did not love it. After moving to England, she desired a new challenge. That is when Mrs Eager decided that she was going to become an author.

Mrs Eager’s first novel was accepted by an agent in England, but the publishers decided that there was not an audience for the book. Her second novel was rejected by the agent, who told her that the story was too Australian.

“It was about four or five years of failing”, she reflected. “So I thought ‘you know what, I might never get published, but I will continue writing.’”

Mrs Eager tried one more time and her award winning *Raw Blue* was finally published in 2009. With this success she has gone on to write three more novels, with a fourth in the works.

Kirsty Eager (Courtesy: bookedout.com)

A main character who wants something is how you know Kirsty Eager is telling you a story.

Mrs Eager quickly spun a tale of hope, passion and commitment with her questions to the Year 7 and 8 classes.

As a child, Mrs Eager found comfort in books, moving between her mothers cattle estate and her fathers home.



# Litfest Goes To Wyvern

By Harry Board and James Fulton

## ***Year 5 Workshop***

To open the second day of Wyvern Litfest, we visited the Year 5 writing workshops. Authors Tim Harris and Deborah Abela guided the Year 5 classes through the intricacies of storytelling.

Mr Harris explained that switching two or three verbs in a paragraph can completely change the emotions felt during that paragraph. He put a paragraph up on screen and asked the rapt Year 5 students to change the verbs to make the emotions differ.

Next door, Ms Abela guided the students in how to set a scene and place the reader into your imaginary world. A key to keeping the reader inside your world is to engage all five senses, not just one or two.



Tim Harris' Year 5 writing workshop (Courtesy: James Fulton)



Deborah Abela telling a story to the ELC kids (Courtesy: James Fulton)

## ***George Ivanoff***

George Ivanoff is an esteemed author, who in recent years has taken stride in the writing of 'you choose' books, where he engages younger readers by allowing them to guide the plot of the story.

Today he returned to LitFest, this time presenting to the Wyvern Years 3 and 4 cohort. The audience was engaged as Mr Ivanoff read *Extreme Machine Challenge* especially by the sheer comedic brilliance of a section called "Barfmania". Here, the audience guides the character through a cacophony of poor decisions and messy endings at an expo filled with "everything that goes fast."



George Ivanoff speaking to Year 7 (Courtesy: Dexter Young)

# Propaganda & Fiction

By Richard Bai

Christopher Richardson, an Australian author, came into one of Year 11's classes to talk about how fictional stories can manipulate young people to think a certain way. He talked about how this was occurring in many countries, especially North Korea. Mr Richardson also spoke about how difficult it is to write a book - his first one took him 12 years!

Mr Richardson went on many journeys across the world. He has reported on North Korea and he is globally recognised for his works. Mr Richardson was first curious about whether people could enter North Korea. This interest then led him there. He told the class that when he was in North Korea, people there treated him very differently to how they would treat one of their own. He was given good food and taken care of. However, Mr Richardson noted that almost every conversation he had was scripted.



Christopher's academic advice to Year 12 (Courtesy: Dexter Young)

One of the reasons why the North Korean people treated him well was because they wanted him to report that North Korea is really good, and isn't as bad as most people say it is. Mr Richardson grew curious about the topic and asked to speak to a more diverse group of people.

After leaving North Korea, he had multiple opportunities to speak with North Koreans who had escaped their oppressive homeland, which helped him understand more about North Korea. Mr Richardson spoke about how it is impossible for him to go back to North Korea, as he is getting more well known as a researcher.

For those boys wondering if it's still possible to go to North Korea, it's not.

North Korea has used many different stories to influence kids to believe things in a certain way. One example is the North Korean fairytale, "The Butterfly and the Rooster". The virtuous and brave butterflies stand up against the mean and destructive rooster. The rooster represents the Americans who are dressed up in red, white and blue. It influences the children that the Americans are the 'enemy'.

Mr Richardson continues talking about the purpose of fiction and how these stories can help us understand the world around us. They can also shape our perspectives and personalities, for good or for bad.

While Mr Richardson is interested in the topic of North Korea, he thoroughly enjoys being able to write fictional stories for younger audiences. Look out for his new book which is coming out soon!





The underappreciated, hard-working blokes that create the incredible Postscript of Litfest

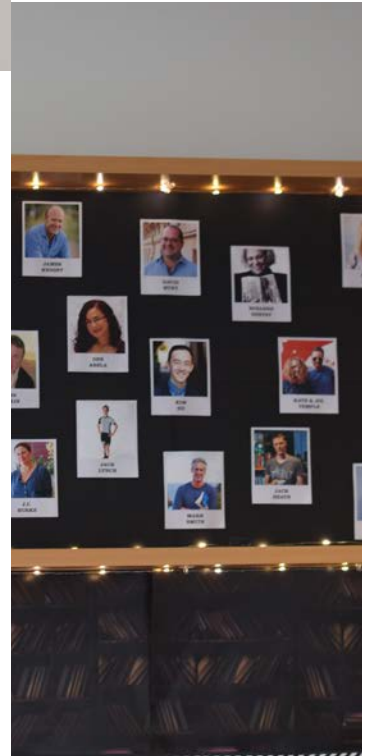


# The Postscript Team



## Journalists:

Richard Bai  
Harry Board  
Toby Eastway  
Benjamin Firth  
William Fuller  
James Fulton  
Rupert Gillies  
Christian Ishak  
Peter Koumoulas  
Minh Nguyen  
Stylianios Vasili  
Lukas Yee  
Preston Zhang



## Graphics and Formatting:

Lukas Yee

## Photographers:

Hamish Ingham  
William Turner  
Dexter Young

## Staff:

Mr Jack Lynch  
Mr Michael Carayannis  
Mrs Ann Jagger  
Ms Sabine Tanase  
The Library Staff

