State Library of South Australia

Media Release

6 NOVEMBER 2026

2026 South Australian Literary Awards winners announced including inaugural Young Writers prizes

Award winning Australian poet, Eileen Chong has taken out the **Premier's Award**, the top honour at the 2026 South Australian Literary Awards, for *We Speak of Flowers,* a moving and meditative exploration of grief.

The biennial awards were presented by the State Library of South Australia on Thursday 5 November, with winners announced across 6 national published awards and 10 South Australian awards and fellowships, including the new **Carclew Young Writers Awards** and **Carclew Max Fatchen Fellowship**.

It was a double win for Chong. *We Speak of Flowers* took out the **John Bray Poetry Award** before being named the best overall published work, earning her the **Premier's Award**, presented by Assistant Minister for Arts, Sarah Andrews MP.

A richly layered and deeply intimate collection, *We Speak of Flowers* weaves together memory, history and possibility to explore grief and reflect on the lives of Chong and her grandmother. Its 101 pieces can be read in any order, so each reader shapes their own path through the work.

The judges said: "We selected *We Speak of Flowers* for its literary excellence, emotional depth and societal relevance. Exploring grief, loss, past heartaches and new challenges, the work reflects the need to rethink and reimagine even the past we hold dear."

This year also saw the introduction of the **Carclew Young Writers Awards**, recognising four young writers across two age categories. In the 8 to 12 category, Benjamin B was recognised for *Mad About Elements by Gold AU* and Eusoph J for *The Ngaltiga Chronicles: Frostfall*. In the 13 to 17 category, Katharina G was recognised for *Achilles, Come Down* and Lourdes C for *Like Ribbons in Your Hair*.

State Library of South Australia Director, Megan Berghuis paid tribute to this year's winners and finalists.

"Congratulations to all our winners and shortlisted finalists. This year's awards have been a joy, showcasing incredible writing talent from South Australia and beyond. And for the first time, we've celebrated some of our youngest storytellers. Their imagination and courage on the page give us so much to look forward to.

"Stories shape who we are, and the State Library is so proud to celebrate and champion the wonderfully diverse voices and creative minds that make our literary community so vibrant. Literature allows us to see the world through someone else's eyes, deepening our understanding of ourselves, each other and the world around us."

Other key categories presented saw the **Fiction Award** go to Michelle de Kretser for *Theory & Practice*, a compelling read, set in 1980's Melbourne that follows a young woman navigating postgraduate study, complicated relationships and questions of identity and belonging.

Micaela Sahhar was awarded the **Non-Fiction Award** for *Find Me at the Jaffa Gate*, a powerful perspective on family, displacement and belonging that offers an intimate exploration of family love and care within the Palestinian diaspora.

The **Young Adult Award** was presented to South Australian author Sharon Kernot for *Birdy*, a beautifully crafted, lyrical novel about healing and hope that handles an intense subject matter with humour, tenderness and emotional honesty.

Peter Carnavas was awarded the **Children's Literature Award** for *Leo and Ralph*, a tender and reassuring story exploring friendship, family and belonging.

In other key categories for South Australian writers, Jamie Hornsby won the **Jill Blewett Playwright's Award** for *Python*, a bold and immersive work that explores online toxicity, gendered abuse and creative exploitation with dark humour and psychological tension.

Lara Saunders won the **CreateSA Wakefield Press Unpublished Manuscript Award** for *Wash Dirt, Burn Water,* an inventive historical novel that stood out for its fresh perspective, assured voice and creative storytelling.

2026 South Australian Fellowships were awarded to Aimee Knight for *Heart of Felt,* Dominic Guerrera for *Pelican's Bill*, and Kate Strutton for *Honeycrisp.*

Matthew Russell received the inaugural **Friends of the State Library of South Australia Deane Miller Fellowship** for *South Australia React*. The project invites children to explore and react to the State Library's collections, sharing their curiosity and humour through short-form digital format.

"Contemporary, accessible and imaginative, the project reveals the collections as a rich source for creative interpretation and offers an enduring platform for young people to encounter, respond to and reimagine South Australia's stories," the judges said.

The 2026 South Australian Literary Awards received 766 entries from across Australia, plus an additional 60 entries for the Deane Miller Fellowship. The independent judging panel shortlisted 55 writers and works across the national and South Australian categories, with $185,000 in prizes awarded.

The South Australian Literary Awards are proudly supported by the Government of South Australia through CreateSA. The State Library also thanks its partners Writers SA, Wakefield Press, Carclew, State Theatre South Australia and the Friends of the State Library of South Australia.

For more information, please visit saliteraryawards.com.au

-ENDS-

FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

Natalia Gagliardi
CALLIE
0431 022 655
natalia@callie.com.au

Isabel Ezis
CALLIE
0466 598 240
isabel@callie.com.au

2026 SOUTH AUSTRALIAN LITERARY AWARD WINNERS:

NATIONAL AWARDS

Premier's Award ($25,000)
Winner: Eileen Chong, We Speak of Flowers

Fiction Award ($15,000)
Winner: Michelle de Kretser, Theory & Practice

Non-Fiction Award ($15,000)
Winner: Micaela Sahhar, Find Me at the Jaffa Gate: An Encyclopaedia of a Palestinian Family

Young Adult Award ($15,000)
Winner: Sharon Kernot, Birdy

Children's Literature Award ($15,000)
Winner: Peter Carnavas, Leo and Ralph

John Bray Poetry Award ($15,000)
Winner: Eileen Chong, We Speak of Flowers

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Jill Blewett Playwright's Award supported by State Theatre Company SA ($12,500)
Winner: Jamie Hornsby, Python
Honourable mention: Mali Harkin-Noack, Tell Me Something

CreateSA Wakefield Press Unpublished Manuscript Award ($10,000)
Winner: Lara Saunders, Wash Dirt, Burn Water

Carclew Young Writers Award ages 13-17 ($750 per winner)
Winner: Katharina G, Achilles, Come Down
Winner: Lourdes C, Like Ribbons in Your Hair

Carclew Young Writers Award ages 8-12 ($500 per winner)
Winner: Benjamin B, Mad About Elements by Gold AU
Winner: Eusoph J, The Ngaltiga Chronicles: Frostfall

Tangkanungku Pintyanthi Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fellowship ($15,000)
Winner: Dominic Guerra, Pelican's Bill

Barbara Hanrahan Fellowship ($15,000)
Winner: Aimee Knight, Heart of Felt

Carclew Max Fatchen Fellowship ($12,500)
Winner: Kate Strutton, Honeycrisp

Friends of the State Library of South Australia Deane Miller Fellowship ($15,000)
Winner: Matthew Russell, South Australia React!