

Ms Nadia Wheatley

The honorary degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred upon Nadia Wheatley by the Deputy Chancellor Alan Cameron AO at the Faculty of Education and Social Work graduation ceremony held in the Great Hall at 4.00pm on Friday 14 March 2014.

A full-time professional writer since 1976, Nadia, BA(Hons) Sydney MA Macquarie, has made considerable contributions in the field of children's and adult literature, as an historian and to Indigenous issues, equity and social justice.

Citation

Deputy Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to commend Nadia Wheatley to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) for her exceptional creative achievements in the field of children's and adult literature, her work as an historian and her distinguished contribution to our understanding of Indigenous issues, cultural diversity, equity and social justice and the environment through story.

Nadia Wheatley graduated from the University of Sydney in 1970 with an honours degree in history, and was awarded a master's degree from Macquarie University in 1975.

A full-time professional writer since 1976, Wheatley has written a number of award-winning books for children, young adults and adults, in a variety of genres including novels, picture books, short stories, biography and history. It is rare for an author to be at once an engaging and imaginative storyteller and an expert historian. Her biography *The Life and Myth of Charmian Clift* was described by critic Peter Craven as "one of the greatest Australian biographies", was the Age Non-Fiction Book of the Year (2001) and won the New South Wales Premier's Award for Australian History (2002).

Wheatley's books for children and young adults reflect her strong commitment to supporting cultural diversity, environmental understanding, and reconciliation with the First Peoples of Australia. While nine of these books have been recognised in the annual awards of the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA), Wheatley is perhaps best known for the picture book *My Place*, produced in collaboration with illustrator, Donna Rawlins. Nadia was also history consultant and script consultant for the 26-part television adaptation of *My Place*, released on the ABC in 2009 and 2011 and acknowledged as Most Outstanding Children's Series in the 2012 Logie Awards.

Wheatley also has a particular commitment to Indigenous education. During the period 1998 to 2001 she and artist Ken Searle worked as consultants at the school at Papunya (an Aboriginal community in the Western Desert, Northern Territory). While assisting the Anangu staff and students to develop resources for the Indigenous curriculum that the school had developed, Nadia and Ken helped produce the multi-award-winning *Papunya School Book of Country and History* – a collaborative account of the history of this internationally-famous Western Desert community, told from an Indigenous perspective. In 2005 Nadia and Ken used the Papunya Model of Education as their inspiration when they ran an innovative harmony project with 16 children from Muslim, Catholic and state schools in Sydney's south-west. The resulting picture book, *Going Bush*, showcases the poetry and art of the students in the project.

Wheatley's most recent publication *Australians All: A History of Growing Up from the Ice Age to the Apology* (2013) is also remarkable. Meticulously researched, it shares the meta-narrative of Australia's history for the last fifty thousand years through brief biographies of individual children and young people and is also illustrated and designed by Ken Searle.

As well as writing for children and young adults, Wheatley is committed to helping them develop literacy skills and a love for literature. For the past 30 years she has run countless workshops in primary and secondary schools across Australia, and has lectured at tertiary level to students and professional colleagues. She is currently an Honorary Associate of the Faculty of Education and Social Work and was its Artist-in-Residence in 2012 with artist Ken Searle. She frequently provides guest lectures and workshops to pre-service and postgraduate teachers in the faculty.

Last year the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), Australia nominated Nadia Wheatley for the 2014 prestigious Hans Christian Anderson Award for writing. The Hans Christian Anderson Award is the highest international recognition given to a living author and illustrator whose complete works have made a lasting contribution to children's literature.

Deputy Chancellor I present Nadia Wheatley for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa), and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.