

Mr Archimedes and friends move into NSW State Library

24/8/2020

The State Library of NSW is now the proud custodian of Pamela Allen's extraordinary archive, having just acquired over 460 of the celebrated author/illustrator's original drawings and working notes from her most famous and little-known children's books spanning 40 years.

According to State Librarian John Vallance: "Pamela Allen's picture books have delighted generations of Australians since 1980 when her first book, *Mr Archimedes' Bath*, won a NSW Premier's Literary Award. It was an overnight success and hasn't been out of print since!"

"This Library jumped at the chance to acquire this most unusual archive of one of modern Australia's best loved authors whose award-winning books like *Who Sank the Boat?* and *Grandpa and Thomas* are ever popular storytime picks in homes and libraries across the country."

The archive includes over 460 original book illustrations – published and unpublished – for 56 of Allen's titles. Each work has a corresponding box of letters, licensing agreements and reviews, as well as a dummy book (sometimes several) which meticulously document Allen's creative process.

A small selection of drawings and material from Allen's most famous and lesser known titles will go on public display in the State Library Galleries from today until 23 October 2020.

"It's incredibly rare in the world of children's picture books that an archive as complete as this one is kept intact," said State Library curator Sarah Morley, who found preliminary pencil sketches for Mr McGee that show Allen was considering calling him Mr Me.

Ms Morley also discovered the inspiration for *Alexander's Outing* – a reference to an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* about members of the public (including then Opposition leader Bob Carr) contacting Column 8 with reports of a wayward mother duck and her ducklings from the Royal Botanic Garden wandering around the city.

Media Release



“Her work is timeless. There’s a rhythm and musicality to her work that makes them perfect for reading aloud, said Ms Morley, who has spent endless hours animating Allen’s words for readers young and old.

Allen has a string of awards and commendations to her name. She is the first illustrator to have won the Children’s Book Council of Australia Award in the Picture Book of the Year category for two years running; for *Who Sank the Boat?* (1983) and *Bertie and the Bear* (1984).

Her books have sold more than 6.5 million copies worldwide (excluding the 16 titles translated in other languages). Thirty-six of her books are still in print today, and *Mr Archimedes’ Bath* has never been out of print in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Pamela Allen burst onto the literary scene during the golden age of the Australian picture books (1970 to 1990). She got her first start in New Zealand illustrating her friend Jan Farr’s education books. In 1978 she moved to Sydney with her husband and two children where started writing and illustrating her own books after meeting with Collins children’s editor Anne Bower Ingram.

The Pamela Allen archive will sit alongside other 20th and 21st children’s literary greats in the State Library’s collection, including May Gibbs, Norman Lindsay, Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, Alison Lester, Bronwyn Bancroft and Jeannie Baker.

Sarah Morley is available for interviews

MEDIA INQUIRIES:

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communications Manager, State Library of NSW
0411 259 898, vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au