

The 2026 Melbourne Writers Festival for schools showcased a wonderful variety of authors. From mystery to vampires to space potatoes, it was an action-packed day full of excitement and inspiration for students who love to read, write, and speak.

The first author to speak was writer and editor Karen Comer. Karen started off her speech by talking about fate. Her questions puzzled the audience. “Can we determine our own fate?” She referred to her new book - ‘Once Upon Tomorrow’ – as an expansive verse novel about the parallel journeys of 3 girls carving out their own histories – and each other’s. She talks about fairytales “lasting for centuries because they represent all parts of us.” Her new novel took inspiration from the future library in Norway. She was intrigued by the thought of writing a story with characters in separate times, but somehow making it all line up. At the end of her speech, she said to the audience, “spin your own string”.

The second speaker we heard from, Amy Doak, spoke not only about the challenges of writing mystery novels, but also about the beauty and complexity of approaching them as if it were a puzzle. She used an interesting analogy to describe the writing process, explaining that authors often begin with the easier pieces, such as: character building, developing a good plot twist, or simply getting lost in the description of the environment. She compared this process to starting with the border pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, gradually building the story from a clear foundation. Amy’s discussion highlighted how mystery crime writing is both a careful craft and an imaginative journey, where every small piece gradually connects in the authors mind to create a thrilling story.

After the MESC students had lunch, came back into the library for the author talk with Tigest Girma and Jasmine McGaughey. From the beginning we were hooked. As they were asked questions, they shared processes of writing and formulating ideas, as well as inspirations. They also shared stories of the editing and publishing

process. Tigest and Jasmine engaged well with the audience and always gave a clear answer, and it was a great opportunity to learn about the process of being an author.

Finally, we heard from award-winning Australian cartoonist Andrew Marlton, also known as First Dog on the Moon. He talked all about his newest book, *Revenge of the Toxic Space Potato*, which is a humorous novel that features the 'EnviroTeens' who must stop the evil Baron from stealing all of earth's water. The book is a funny spin on a real issue, being climate change. It showcases real aspects of life while also keeping a comical vibe to appeal to younger readers. The book proves that environmentalism can be both engaging and amusing.

All in all, the festival was a lot of fun, and everyone enjoyed listening and talking to the authors as they shared their stories and wisdom. It was an inspiring day for many young authors or readers looking to pursue their passion.