

**[Melbourne
Writers Festival]**

visions &
~~revisions~~
~~REvisions~~
Revisions

FESTIVAL REPORT

2026

We respectfully acknowledge that Melbourne Writers Festival takes place on the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation, in particular the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung peoples.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the more than 65,000 years of storytelling that has taken place on the lands and waterways of this Country. Sovereignty was never ceded.

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

In 2026 Melbourne Writers Festival celebrated its 40th anniversary, welcoming **169 artists** and more than **25,000 attendees** to **91 events** across an extraordinary week. Inspired by the theme Visions & Revisions, MWF's special 40th anniversary program celebrated the visionary power of writers and storytellers to shape our world.

MWF brings writers and readers together to be inspired, challenged and thrilled by a creative and diverse program of events celebrating books and ideas.

Since 1986, we have entertained hundreds of thousands of readers as the flagship annual writers festival of our UNESCO City of Literature. MWF ignites conversations across Melbourne and inspires curiosity and connection.

“I had an incredible experience at the Melbourne Writers Festival. The readers brought such love and joy – it’s always delightful to discover that you have an audience all the way across the world. I left Melbourne exhausted and happy with new friends, new questions, and a list of reading recommendations a foot long. What more can you ask for from literary encounters?”

– **Rebecca F. Kuang**, 2026 Festival Author

“The entire experience: catching the train into the city, checking out local bookstores beforehand, sitting in a room and listening to people who love stories talk about stories, getting to meet an author I love ... There is nothing more fulfilling than the MWF to me. It’s my favourite event every year.”

– 2026 Festival Attendee

MESSAGE FROM THE FESTIVAL DIRECTOR/CEO



This year, Melbourne Writers Festival celebrated our 40th anniversary in style.

From poetry slams to thought-provoking addresses, game shows to children's storytimes, live podcasts to crossword workshops, and a world-premiere song cycle

bringing together poetry and music – MWF 2026 offered something for every reader as our City of Literature came alive.

Across **91 events** inspired by the 2026 Festival theme **Visions & Revisions**, more than **25,000 attendees** came together to explore books, storytelling and big ideas – a 17.5% year-on-year increase, with new customers accounting for 59% of all ticket buyers.

Thousands joined us at Melbourne Town Hall to hear from two inspiring women: memoirist and former

Aotearoa New Zealand Prime Minister **Jacinda Ardern**, and bestselling fantasy novelist and global phenomenon **Rebecca F. Kuang**.

First Nations Guest Curators **Anita Heiss** and **Daniel James** brought their remarkable insights into culture, community and storytelling to their curated events. We hosted a unique creative exchange co-curated by **Evelyn Araluen** and **Jessica Johns**, as the **Festival of Indigenous Stories** brought together Indigenous writers from Australia and Canada to celebrate the multiplicity of Indigenous and First Nations storytelling in both countries.

International stars including 2025 Booker Prize winner **David Szalay** and cult Japanese author **Mieko Kawakami** discussed their new novels, while Australian luminaries including **Stephanie Alexander**, **Antoinette Lattouf**, **Shaun Micallef** and **Bruce Pascoe** delighted audiences with generous insights into their latest works. Professor **Tony Birch** presented an extraordinary Closing Night Address on The Ethical Imagination, considering the ethics of being a reader, and of being a writer.

Part free interactive art installation, part bicycle-powered publishing house, **The Book Factory** took over the State Library Victoria forecourt across the Festival weekend, as readers and writers of all ages took part in the writing, printing, pressing and binding of original books!

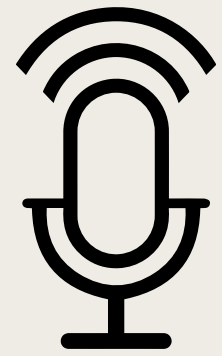
We doubled the number of free events at this year's Festival, while the **Local Libraries** program toured authors to meet over 1,500 eager readers in Melbourne's outer suburbs. **MWF Schools** expanded in response to high demand from teachers and educators – welcoming hundreds more Victorian students across the program, and presenting our first sold-out **VCE Day**.

To every reader, writer, attendee, donor and partner who made MWF 2026 possible: thank you for your visionary support of Melbourne Writers Festival. Here's to the next forty years.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'VS', representing Veronica Sullivan.

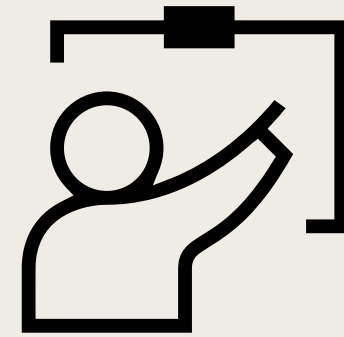
Veronica Sullivan
Festival Director/CEO

2026 IN NUMBERS



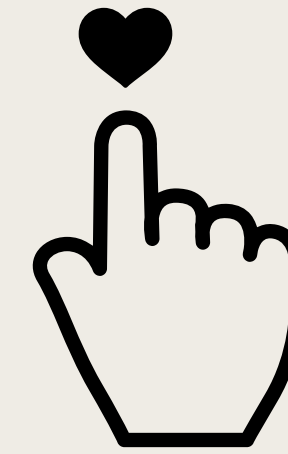
91

Events



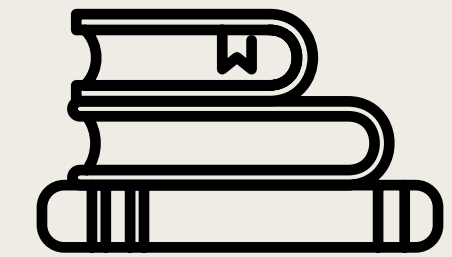
169

Writers and Speakers
(+21.5% Year on Year)



160

Volunteers
(+93% Year on Year)



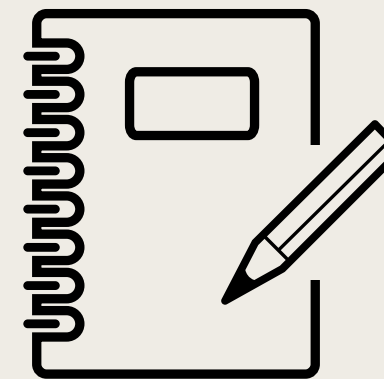
4,843

Books Sold
(+30% Year on Year)



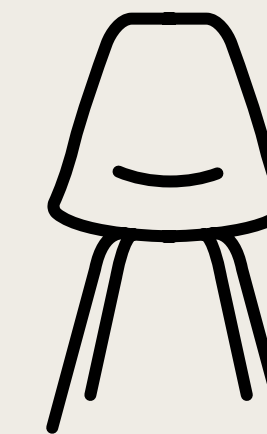
50

Sold Out Events
(55% of program)



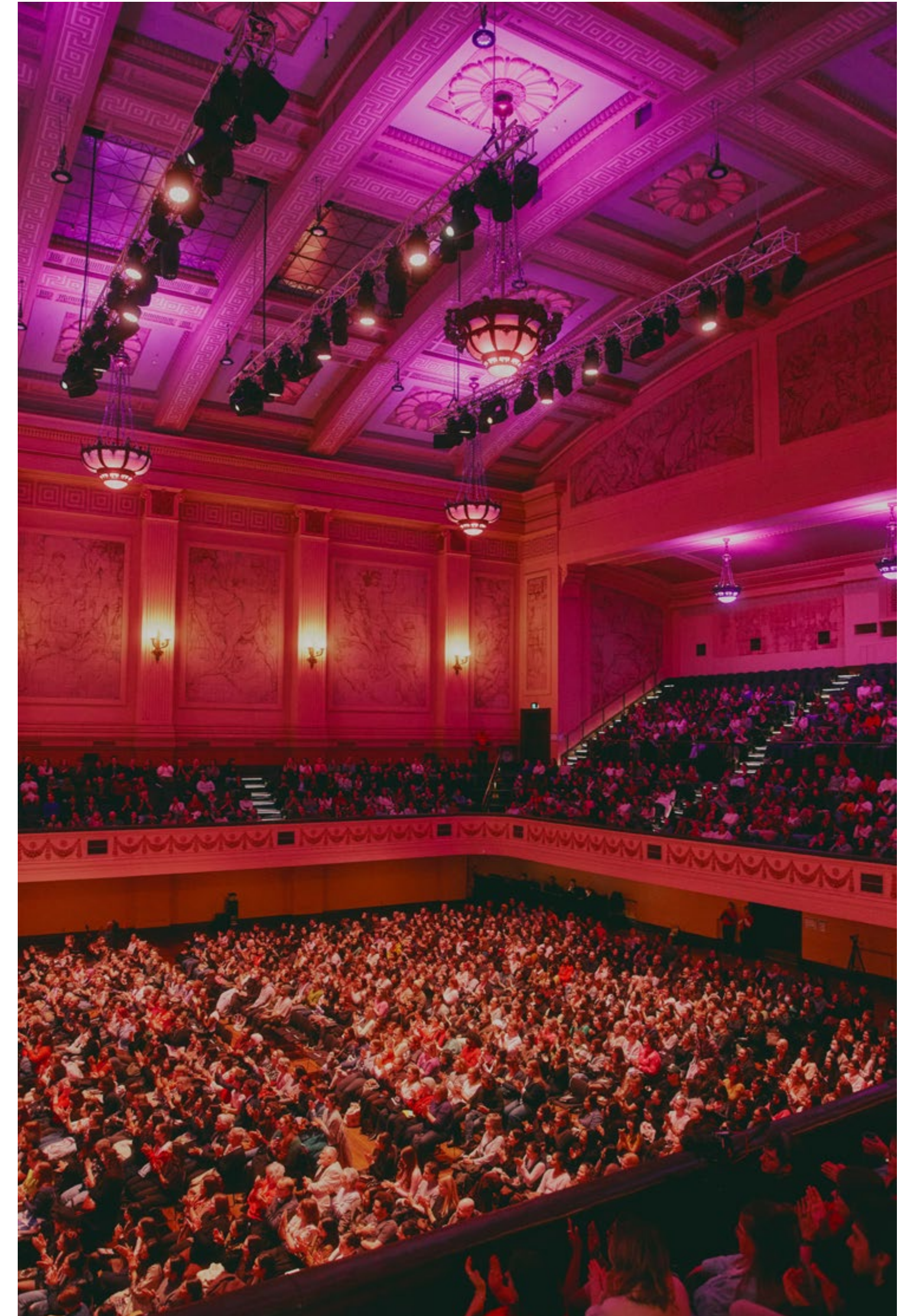
1,996

MWF Schools Student Attendance
(+51% Year on Year)



25,173

Total Attendance
(+17.5% Year on Year)



AUDIENCE IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT

15%

Increase in Box Office Revenue
Year on Year

59%

New ticket buyers

50%

Average eDM Open Rate

17%

Increase in Instagram Followers
Year on Year

100,300+

Total Social Media Followers
and eNews Subscribers
(+11% Year on Year)

**Data as at 18 May 2026*

AUDIENCES



GENDER

85%

Female

AGE

18-44

Core growth audience
via social advertising

(Share of purchases
+44% Year on Year)

45-74

Core audience via
post-event survey data

EXPERIENCE

93%

Plan to attend
MWF again

91%

Would recommend
MWF to friends
and family

92%

Gained new insights
or knowledge at MWF

FESTIVAL ARTISTS

At this year's Festival, acclaimed Australian and international writers shared their stories and unique insights with audiences.

169

Writers

33%

Emerging Writers

14%

First Nations
Writers

34%

LGBTQIA+
Writers

13%

Writers with
Disability

83%

Australian Writers

17%

International
Writers





Clockwise from left: Omar Musa, Stephanie Alexander, Dame Jacinda Ardern, Yann Martel, Antoinette Lattouf.

TOP-SELLING EVENTS

MWF 2026's diverse and accessible program resonated with audiences.
55% of the program sold out and attendance increased by 17.5% year on year.

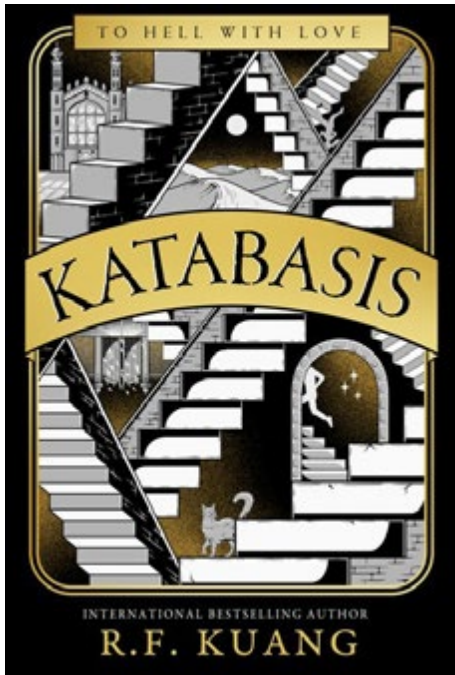
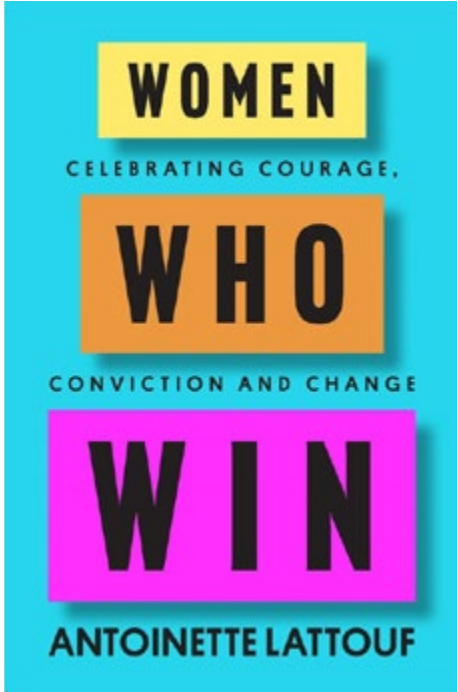
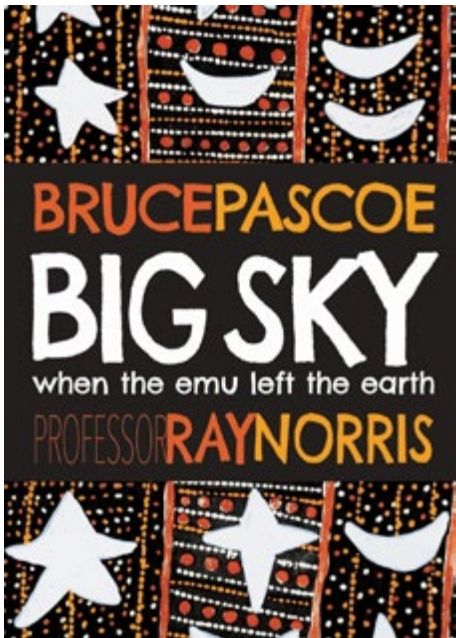
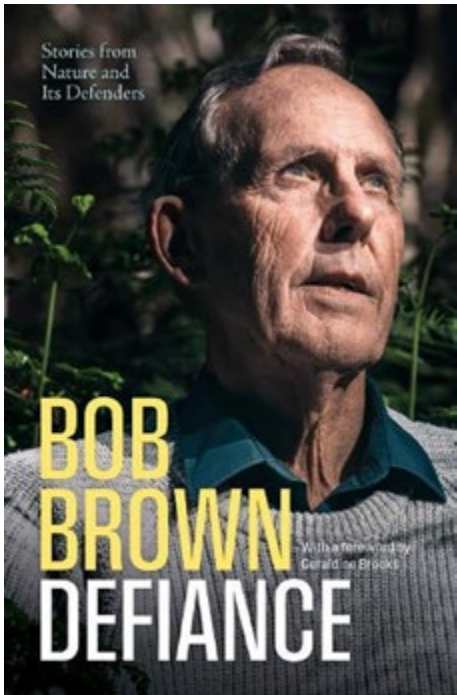
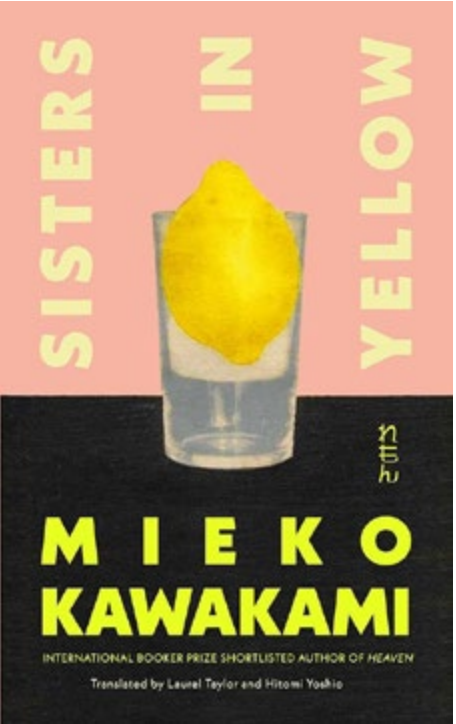
TOP TEN BESTSELLING EVENTS

- 1 Jacinda Ardern: A Different Kind of Power
- 2 R.F. Kuang: Katabasis [Friday]
- 3 Antoinette Lattouf and Grace Tame: Women Who Win
- 4 Secret Histories: Tales of Dark Academia
- 5 David Szalay: Flesh
- 6 Opening Night: Visions & Revisions
- 7 R.F. Kuang: Katabasis [Sunday]
- 8 Political Year in Review
- 9 Breaking News: The Rise of Independent Media
- 10 Closing Night Address: Tony Birch on The Ethical Imagination



BOOK SALES

In 2026, more than 4,800 books were sold at Festival events.
The top ten bestsellers through our official bookseller, Readings, were:

									
Katabasis R.F. Kuang	Women Who Win Antoinette Lattouf	A Different Kind of Power Jacinda Ardern	Son of Nobody Yann Martel	Hekate: The Witch Nikita Gill	Big Sky: When the Emu Left the Earth Bruce Pascoe, Professor Ray Norris	Immortal Dark Tigist Girma	Endling Maria Reva	Defiance Bob Brown	Sisters in Yellow Mieke Kawakami, Laurel Taylor (trans.), Hitomi Yoshio (trans.)



Left to right: Amie Kaufman, Tigest Girma, Lili Wilkinson, R.F. Kuang



MWF was a dreamy swirl of bookish brilliance – the shows soared, the books flew like cruising comets, and the connections forged and fomented are sprouting still.

– **Michael Pedersen**



The Melbourne Writers Festival 2026 was such a fantastic experience. For me, this year's festival connected me with community and culture. As a First Nations author I felt heard, seen and uplifted... The festival captured truth telling from around Australia and beyond, leaving me enriched and inspired.

– **Jasmin McGaughey**



It was an absolute joy being part of the MWF. A celebration of books and a reminder of the urgency and necessity of turning to literature at a time of extreme uncertainty and chaos. It was a real pleasure to witness the range and brilliance of the writers platformed.

– **Tareq Baconi**



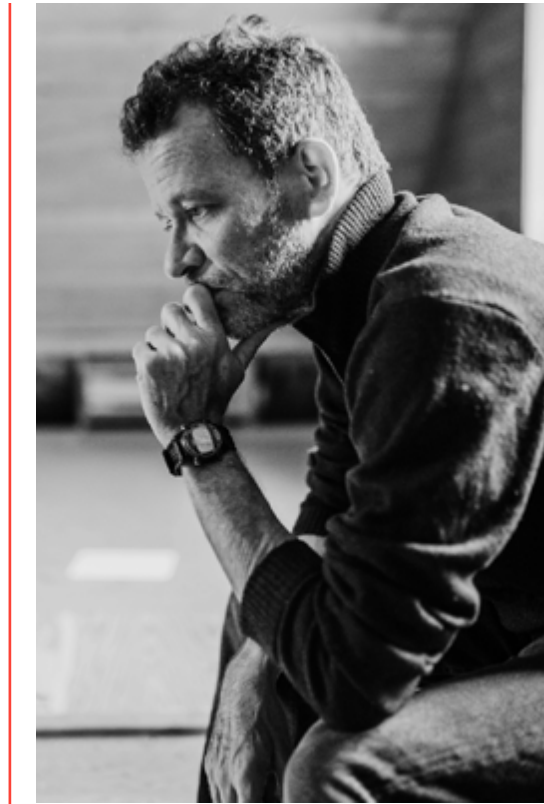
My experience at MWF reminded me of a Japanese proverb, “Fortune comes in by a merry gate.” The “gate” is the festival welcoming everyone from all over the world to let us celebrate what we love: books.

– **Hiroko Yoda**



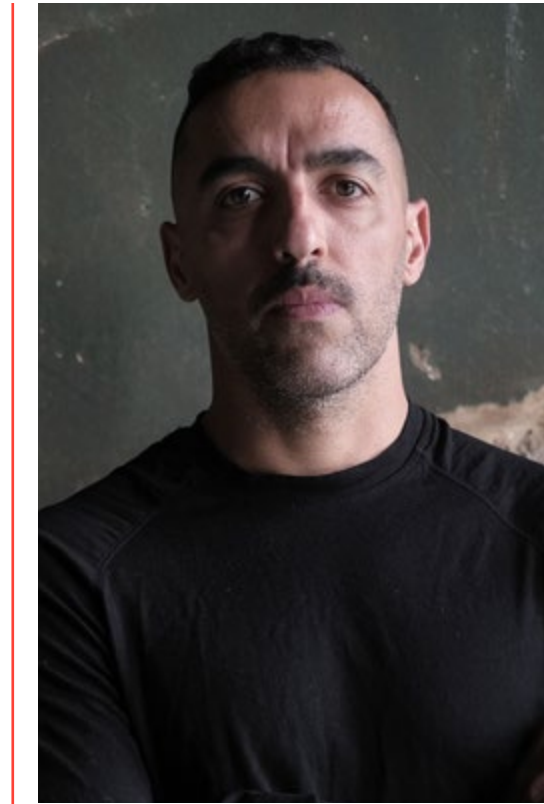
The Melbourne Writers Festival hosts of some of the most important conversations we need to have as a nation.

– **Toby Walsh**



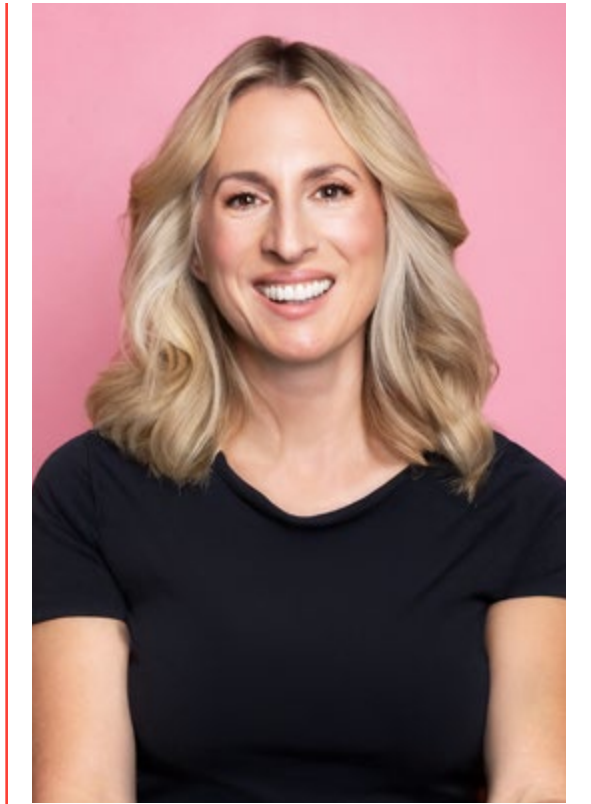
This is how we remain smart and caring in today's crazy world: by being open to dialogue and the exchange of ideas. I loved coming to the MWF and will happily come again.

– **Yann Martel**



MWF 2026 arrived at a pivotal moment. It gave the city what it craved – a space for unhindered critical thinking at a time when such spaces are shrinking... MWF went for four days, but all that it generated will shape our conversations for the year ahead, until it returns in 2027.

– **Antoun Issa**

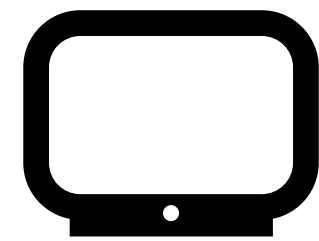


I had a brilliant time at the Melbourne Writers Festival. It gave me such a burst of life to be involved. Sharing ideas with other writers onstage and getting to connect with readers and audiences in the festival was both deeply meaningful to me and the most fun I'd had in a long time!

– **Lally Katz**

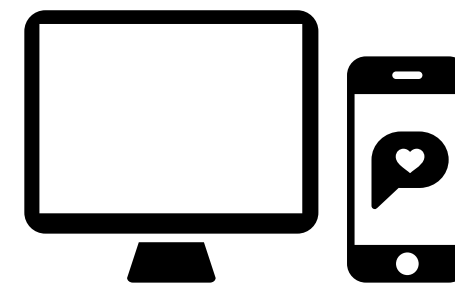
PR AND MEDIA

A total of 1,109 media mentions were secured across the Festival campaign period, with extensive coverage across print, online and broadcast (radio, podcast, TV).



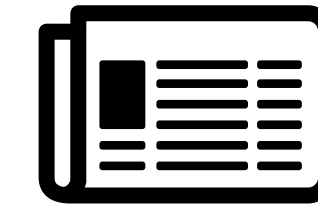
859

Broadcast Mentions



180

Online Media Mentions



70

Print Mentions

Total Potential Reach

62,376,332

Over 88 days

MWF SCHOOLS

The 2026 MWF Schools program connected Victorian students with some of Australia’s leading writers, storytellers and thinkers. Across five inspiring days of events, students explored a range of texts and ideas that sparked learning and curiosity. This year, due to the generous support of our partners, The Readings Foundation and the University of Melbourne, we were able to expand the program in both reach and scope – through launching our new VCE Program and providing subsidised tickets and travel assistance for regional and low-SES schools.

Primary students enjoyed lively sessions from beloved storyteller **James Foley**, scientist and presenter **Dr Niraj Lal**, performer and activist **Oliva Muscat**, and award-winning author **Penny Tangey**.

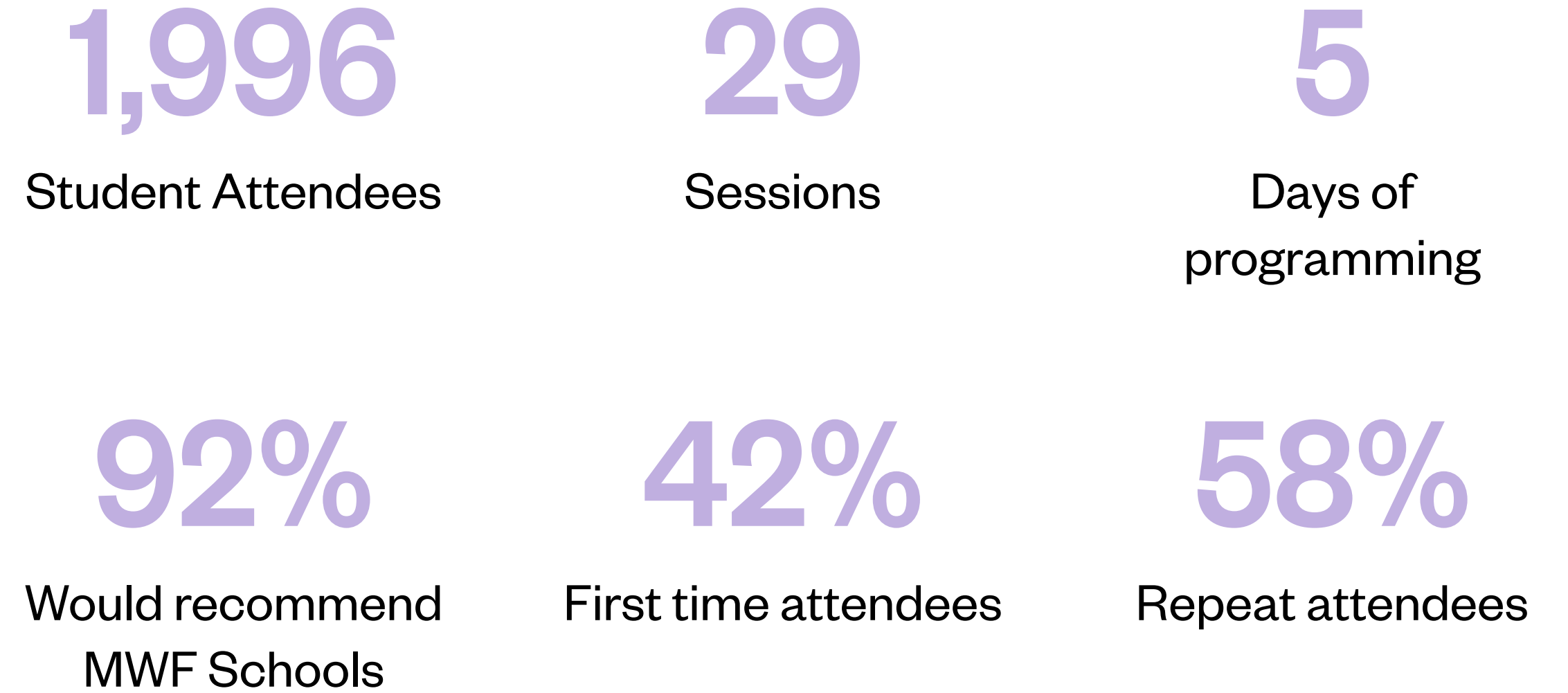
Secondary students unlocked creative insights from acclaimed authors **Karen Comer**, **Amy Doak**, **Tigest Girma** and **Jasmin McGaughey**, and *The Guardian* cartoonist **First Dog on the Moon**.

VCE students experienced powerful sessions with award-winning author and activist **Tony Birch**, poet and short story writer **Maxine Beneba Clarke**, and memoirist **Alice Pung**.

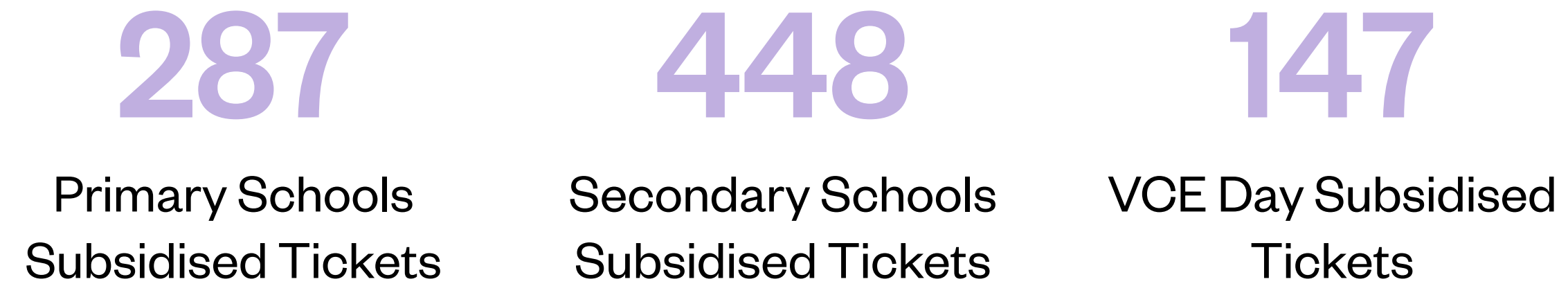
The MWF Schools 2026 Primary and Secondary Programs are proudly supported by The Readings Foundation.

The MWF Schools 2026 VCE Program is proudly supported by the Melbourne Public Humanities Initiative, Faculty of Arts, the University of Melbourne.

ATTENDANCE & AUDIENCE FEEDBACK



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Thank you

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