

2008



Special forever

An environmental
communications project

Role of Special Forever Regional Coordinator

Welcome to the Special Forever Regional Coordination team and thank you for taking on the role as regional coordinator for *Special Forever*. We understand that this role is additional to your normal professional and personal responsibilities. We ask only that you carry out any essential tasks and that you do as much of the promotional/liaison work as you can manage. Support is readily available from the Primary English Teaching Association (PETA) and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC).

There are 23 Regional Coordinators located in the following geographic locations across the Basin:

● **Victoria:**

- Bendigo
- Mildura
- Swan Hill
- Horsham (vacant)
- Wodonga/Wangaratta
- Shepparton/Benalla

● **South Australia:**

- The Riverland
- Murraylands

● **New South Wales:**

- Albury
- Inverell
- Dubbo
- Bourke
- Orange/Bathurst
- Broken Hill
- Tamworth
- Wagga Wagga
- Griffith
- Goulburn/Yass

● **Queensland:**

- Toowoomba
- Charleville
- Chinchilla (vacant)
- St George/Roma

● **Australian Capital Territory**

You have joined this team of dedicated professionals, all who are willing to assist you in your tasks as regional coordinator. Each year you will also be provided with Professional Development; all expenses paid.

The role can be categorised into 5 sections:

1. Promotion of the project (Feb-April)
2. Support and liaising with participating schools (April-June)
3. Regional Selection process (June)
4. Regional Display (July-October)
5. Anthology and Future Planning (Nov-Dec)

Special Forever is an environmental communications project for all primary school students in the Murray-Darling Basin. It is managed by the Primary English Teaching Association, in partnership with the Murray Darling Basin Commission.

The objectives of the project are:

- to involve students in becoming critically aware of their environments locally, and across the Murray-Darling Basin;
- to assist teachers in developing programs that enable students to communicate their understanding of environmental issues effectively;
- to document a coherent professional learning program for teachers, school coordinators and regional coordinators linked to professional teaching outcomes or standards;
- to foster school participation in community environmental education programs and local action;
- to produce and publish a range of student texts focusing on local environmental issues for a range of audiences;
- to ensure project sustainability by assisting tertiary institutions within the Murray-Darling Basin include *Special Forever* resources and project in undergraduate programs.

The outcomes are:

- continued development of the *Special Forever* website to deliver and manage the project effectively and cost efficiently;
- development of teaching strategies and units of work that integrate environmental education and literacy outcomes;
- implementation of *Special Forever* units of work and associated activities in schools;
- paper publication of collection of writings and artwork arising from regional activities;
- publication of a multimedia digital text collection of student texts arising from regional activities;
- display and promotion of *Special Forever* materials arising from regional activities;
- development and documentation of a coherent professional learning program for teachers, school coordinators and regional coordinators linked to professional teaching outcomes or standards;
- use of *Special Forever* program objectives and materials within undergraduate teaching programs across the MDB.

The content of the project is built around three curriculum-based themes which connect closely to national and state outcomes. These themes are:

Living Together

Students are part of a community of living things that interact with one another and with the natural and built environments. Students explore these interactions when they undertake units around this theme, uncovering interrelationships, causes and effects. In the process, they come to understand more deeply that, just as their actions have an impact on their environment and its inhabitants, so too do their surroundings shape their lives.

Time and Change

'Time' and 'Change' are difficult concepts for children to understand, yet they are central to appreciating the environment. A further challenge is for young students to recognise that 'change' need not be something that they passively receive, but something that they can bring about intentionally. Units around this theme enable students to examine ways in which individuals and groups have modified their interactions with their environments in order to repair past damage and achieve sustainable development. They offer the perfect opportunity for students to learn about the past and the present, and to create a vision for the future.

Managing Resources

The natural environment supplies the resources needed for a healthy world. Because these resources are finite and susceptible to damage, students must understand the importance of using them wisely, valuing the skills and experience of the people who live in their communities, and co-operating so that everyone gets a fair share. Units around this theme explore the sustainable use of resources with a focus on water management. They look at current land and water management issues, and the ways in which individuals and communities are responding.

Evaluation and publications

Evaluations conducted on the project have shown that teachers recognise that *Special Forever* can be integrated readily into any classroom program.

It is an opportunity for schools to focus on their local community and to attend to normal curriculum requirements in an authentic and stimulating context.

As a culmination to each years project, a selection of writing and artwork is published in a high-quality anthology which is sent to all schools in the Murray-Darling Catchment.

The following titles have been published:

- 1993 Special Places
- 1994 Portraits of our Land
- 1995 Special People
- 1996 Special Together
- 1997 Links with the Land
- 1998 Our Places, Our Futures *
- 1999 Where we Live *
- 2000 Rivers Forever
- 2001 Where I Belong
- 2002 Water=Life
- 2003 Spirit of place
- 2004 Footprints by the River
- 2005 Living Landscapes
- 2006 River dreams
- 2007 Liquid gold

*Shortlisted, Australian Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing

Regional Coordinator's Role

1. PROMOTION OF THE PROJECT: encouraging schools to participate

A Special Forever initial mailout and invitation is sent by PETA to all schools in the Murray Darling Basin. This is addressed to Principals. It is your job to encourage principals to show teachers the information or to get teachers to ask for it.

A fax to the school Environmental Education, SOSE/HISE, English or Literacy coordinators has worked for some coordinators.

In some regions the local district office will include a flyer or notice in their newsletters. Some others will send out a fax or e-mail to all schools through district office.

Maybe your Principal, or Librarian, could distribute an information sheet, prepared by you, at a meeting.

Maybe someone you know in another education system in your area can help you encourage registrations.

Some coordinators have also run after school meetings or informal PD sessions to inform teachers.

Promote *Special Forever* whenever possible, encourage schools and teachers to register and to begin planning and collecting work.

It is amazing how much work is already being done in schools which is highly suitable for inclusion in *Special Forever*.

2. SUPPORTING AND LIAISING WITH PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

You can support schools simply by sounding enthusiastic, suggesting ideas, suggesting resources, or by putting schools with similar projects in touch with each other. You may even like to run some PD sessions providing ideas for teachers. Discuss this with the Project manager at PETA as some funding may be available.

3. SELECTION PROCESS

Selection of work for the anthology is a staged process. Work is selected at each of the participating schools and sent to you as regional coordinator. You form a panel which then meets to select work for possible inclusion in the published anthology. This is then sent to Sydney where the central selection process takes place.

It is important to send out a newsletter/fax to remind schools of the closing date for submission of work, and address of where to send the work, usually about a month before it is due.

Organise your panel and a date when you'll meet.

Make sure you keep a record of all student work selected, for certificate purposes.

Please forward names and contact details for the members of your panel to PETA so that they can receive a thank you and copy of the

anthology.

Have a fun time with selection, organise some yummy nibbles! Parcel up work and post to Sydney.

Your panel:

The composition of your panel (minimum 3) is up to you. It should comprise:

- yourself as chair
- three others, if possible, one from each of the following areas of expertise
 - another teacher or an executive staff member in your locality, with an interest in and knowledge of children's writing
 - a local person working in an environmental or natural resource management
 - a community member who is a writer (a local journalist, for example) a local artist or secondary art teacher

Final submission date

A deadline for submission of work to regional coordinator is provided in the project timeline. However depending upon your anticipated time for the panel to meet, you may wish to negotiate a different deadline from that published. Please keep in mind if you do this that work must be received by the PETA office on the specified date. Work not received on time is excluded from selection.

Guidelines for the selection process

The way you and your panel members go about your task is almost entirely in your and their hands. There are only four conditions to be observed:

1. Every piece of writing or artwork submitted to you is read/considered (though not necessarily by every member of the panel).
2. You apply the published criteria.
3. You meet the deadline for your selections to reach PETA.
4. You maintain careful records of what is submitted to you and what is sent on to PETA. (These records are crucial both for the purposes of editing and for preparing certificates).

To assist you a guide is provided by PETA which can be given to each member of your panel prior to selection.

The writing, artwork and multimedia texts sent to coordinators should have been through a selection process at the school level.

Each school is entitled to send up to 20 pieces of writing and 20 pieces of artwork plus multimedia texts to the local regional coordinator. This means selection is likely to have been more rigorous in big rural schools than it was in the many one, two or three teachers schools in the Basin. It is the task of the Regional Selection Panel to assess each piece of work submitted by these schools and choose 25 to 30 written texts and 25 to 30 pieces of artwork and a similar number of multimedia texts to be sent

to Sydney to be included in the final selection process prior to publication of the annual *Special Forever* Anthology.

Writing

There are different types of writing created by students for different purposes as a consequence of this project. Please try and include a range of different text types in the final 25 to 30 pieces of writing. Writing by an individual, group or class effort can be selected with the latter counting as a single piece of work.

Artwork

There are different types of artwork that you need to consider:

- black and white drawings
- colour photographs (may be of whole-school efforts)
- coloured artwork
- artwork accompanying writing
- group-produced art

Artwork can be selected on the basis of that it will be a single image or that it could be used for design purposes and to accompany pieces of writing (perhaps written by someone else). Please look for the following qualities when selecting the final 25 to 30 pieces of artwork:

- vibrancy of colour
- clarity of line or shape
- representation of place/environment, animal or plant
- some relationship with written texts (by the same student or others) or themes
- its design potential if abstract.

Multimedia Texts

From 2006 multimedia texts have been published in the *Special Forever* website.

The following files can be uploaded: .ppt, .pps, .wmv, .swf, .mp3, .mpeg, .avi, .zip, .sit. Any illustrations included should be original eg photos or drawings. Images downloaded from the internet cannot be used unless copyright free or permission has been given for their use.

A maximum file size of 2 MG limits the texts that can be uploaded. Images need to be low resolution or they will make the file too big to upload. We are investigating ways to allow us to upload larger files.

Guidelines for submitting multimedia texts can be downloaded from the website.

Multimedia texts can be submitted with a printout (if appropriate) to regional coordinators in June along with writing and artwork. PowerPoint texts may be selected for publication in the anthology as well as or instead of on the website.

Alternatively, multimedia texts can be submitted directly to the project manager at PETA in September. Multimedia texts that meet the criteria listed

in the guidelines will be published on the *Special Forever* website in November to coincide with the release of the anthology.

The selection criteria

Each year we endeavour to ensure inclusion of a range of pieces across categories and criteria which take in as many aspects of the project as possible. There must be a representative balance of ages, genders, regions and schools. Also consider the following:

- communication of one or more themes
- features of literary text-types
- features of factual text-types
- the purpose and audience of authentic texts.

Age

All 'Consideration for Publication' forms should indicate whether the writer/artist is:

- lower primary (under 7)
- middle primary (7-9)
- upper primary (10+)

A balance between work produced by students in each age group is desirable.

Gender

The 'Consideration for Publication' forms indicate the gender of the student. There is generally a similar representation of boys and girls in the lower (under 7) and middle primary (8-11) across the submitted entries. However, there is more likely to be greater representation by girls at upper primary (10+). Be aware of this when reading.

Group entries

A group entry may have been produced by small groups, a whole class or even a whole school. These entries are often very close to the "spirit" of this project and where possible we favour selecting at least some part of the entry (eg. part of an illustration, a page of a classbook).

School

While there is no 'rule' that one school can not have more than one piece of writing and one piece of artwork in the anthology, to encourage schools to commit to this project in the future, the more schools represented in the anthology the better.

Themes

There are no directives as to which themes to favour or which will necessarily produce the best writing. A degree of balance is all we seek. However, we don't want a book only about 'Living Together' or 'Time and Change' or 'Managing Resources'! Please try to take the three themes listed above into consideration when making your selections. It is worth noting that some themes will inevitably favour certain text-types.

Forms

- Ensure that Consideration for Publication forms are filled in correctly for each piece of work to be forwarded to PETA

- Check names off on Student Writing/Artwork sent to Regional Coordinator Form. Highlight names of students whose work has been selected for possible inclusion in the anthology. Keep a copy of forms yourself and send one copy back to schools and another copy to PETA.

Send names and addresses of your panel members to PETA so that they can receive a copy of the anthology too.

The selection process is not an easy one. The 300 (approx) pieces eventually published each year represent a tiny fraction of the writing done in the name of the project. They also represent a great deal of planning and effort by coordinators, teachers and students—some schools and students have gone to enormous trouble. School selection panels have taken time to make very difficult judgements—the regional panels' job is even more difficult.

4. REGIONAL DISPLAY

We try to emphasise the importance of local publications and display, especially as only a small proportion of children will have their work published in the anthology. The regional displays are therefore important in recognising what schools have done. The display can be held any time between July and October.

While it is your task to choose a time and venue (maybe at a school, district or regional education office, shopping centre, local art gallery, etc) it is a good idea to enlist the help of participating schools in organising and mounting the displays. We would hope your display could be organised in such a way that schools can come and see what each other has done, that parents can come along, and that members of the local community can also view the work.

Take some photos, or if you get press coverage please send copies of these articles to the PETA office. These can then be used for the final report to the MDBC.

5. ANTHOLOGY AND FUTURE

Enjoy the excitement of the students when they see their work published. Some coordinators have arranged special presentations of the anthologies and certificates.

It is important that *Special Forever* has experienced and enthusiastic support-on-the ground. If you are not able to continue as Regional Coordinator please contact the project manager at PETA and think about people who may be interested in taking on this role.

Regional Coordinator's Calendar

January/February

- SF mailout sent to all schools early February by PETA; this is done centrally but a follow up fax or e-mail (maybe through Regional Office) is a good idea. May send introductory letter to schools introducing yourself and offering support.

February/March/April/

- Attend SF coordinators conference
- Promote SF whenever possible, encourage schools, teachers to register and collect work to submit in June. Make personal contact with other teachers whenever possible
- Liaise with local environmental groups who are working with schools
- Consider organising some PD for teachers in the area.
- Send a reminder to register fax to schools

May

- Seek opportunities to promote and encourage participation
- Send reminder to schools of closing date for submission of work and address of where to send the work. This should be sent about 4 weeks before the work is due.

June

- Work is sent to Regional Coordinator late second term.
- Contact schools that registered but have not submitted work.
- Form regional selection panel, select work to be sent to Sydney, record work, post off to Sydney.
- Send names and addresses of panel members to PETA to enable thank you and anthology to be sent.

July/October

- Organise a regional display of student work

November

- Enjoy the anthology
- Plan for next year
- Send feedback on the project to project manager at PETA.

Addendum

The forms and guidelines listed below with an * are available on the website. Other forms will be emailed to you so you can add your contact details and adapt as required.

1. *Special Forever* Timeline for Regional Coordinators
2. *Registration form
3. Letter of introduction
4. Reminder to register (all schools)
5. Reminder of when and where to submit work (registered schools)
6. *Submission of writing guidelines
7. *Submission of art work guidelines
8. Submission of multi media text guidelines
9. *Consideration for publication form
10. *Student Artwork/Writing sent to Regional Coordinator Forms
11. *Permission to reproduce artwork
12. Thank you letter to participating schools