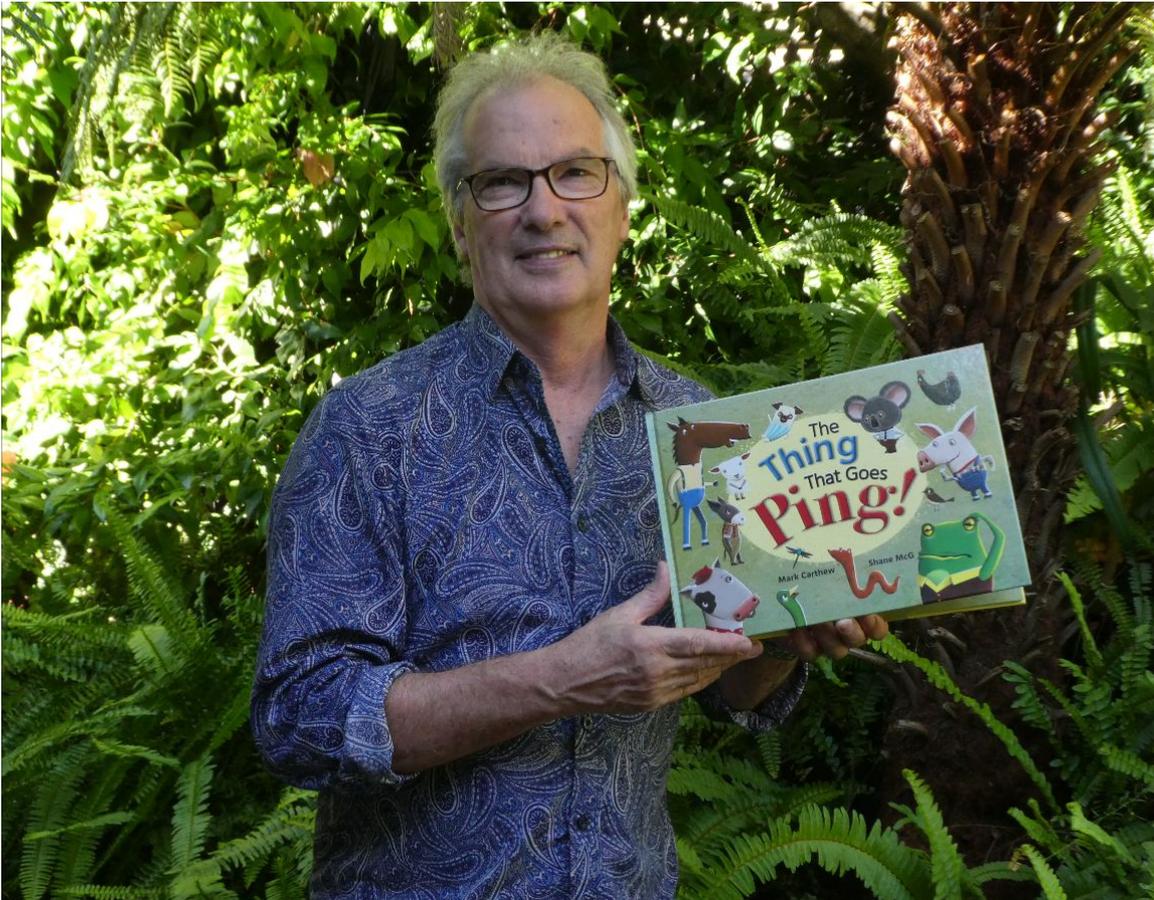


# MEET THE CREATOR



## Mark Carthew

**Hi Mark - thanks for taking the time to chat to us today!**

**What is your name?** Mark Carthew

**Are you a children's book writer, an illustrator or both?**

Children's author, editor, poet and musician... and primary teacher.

**Have you recently or are you expecting to release a new book that you would like to talk**

**about today?**

*The Thing That Goes Ping!* illustrated by Shane McGowan (Shane McG), published by Ford Street Publishing.

Released Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021.

ISBN: 9781925804652

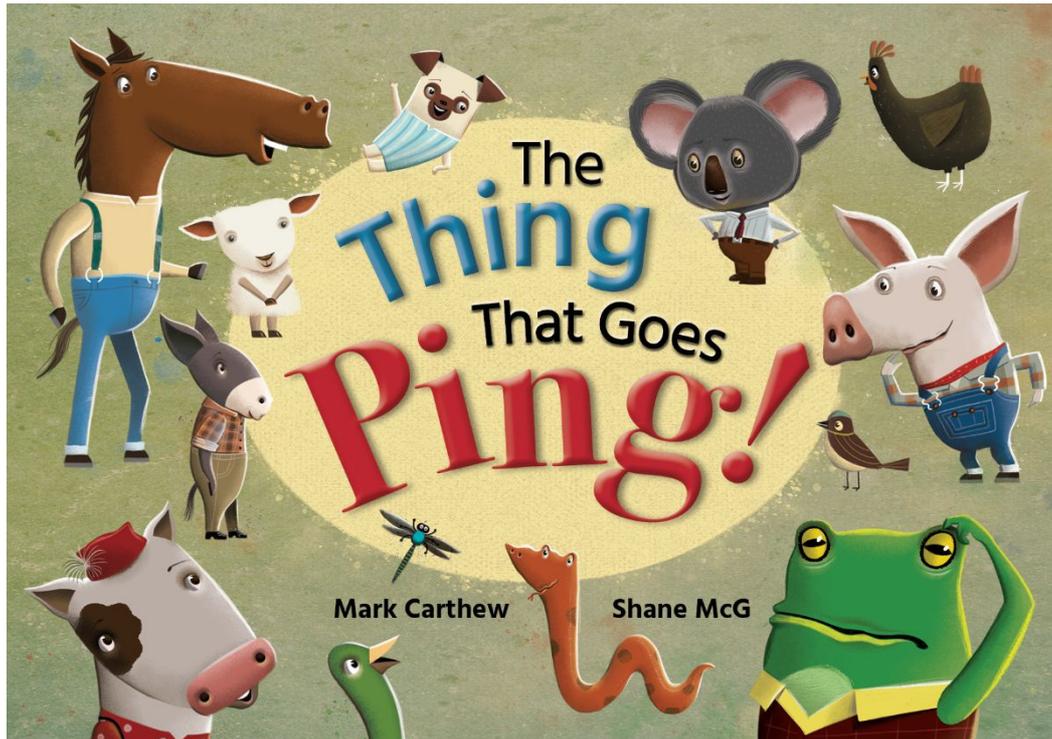
You can purchase the book at book stores, online and also through the publisher at <https://fordstreetpublishing.com/book/the-thing-that-goes-ping/>

In the faraway town of Figgy-tra-ling,  
you may hear the faint ring of a thing that goes ping!  
Join in the quest for the thing that goes ping –  
and meet some fun animals along the way!

As blurb suggests, this story is set in the imaginary, yet familiar land of Figgy-tra-ling. Carthew's trademark use of alliterative wordplay and musical lyricism is evident right from the beginning; setting up a quirky quest for the unknown thing that goes ping!

Engaging and lyrical rhyming text, along with onomatopoeic sounds matched to anthropomorphic characters combines to create a fun filled romp to find out the source of mysterious PING!

AGE GROUP 3 - 8+



**Can you share the book's publication journey?**

After releasing my 2020 picture book *The Dingle Dangle Jungle* with publisher Paul Collins at Ford Street Publishing in Melbourne, I was keen to come up with another title as quickly as possible in order to keep some momentum going with Ford Street – as I hadn't published with them before.

I love playing with words and this time I wanted to create a fun narrative that utilized onomatopoeia. I also wanted to place the mysterious quest in an imaginary, yet familiar world.

I had received Barbara Lasserre's academic work, *Words That Go Ping: The ridiculously wonderful world of onomatopoeia* as a delightful Christmas present – and that further fuelled my desire to do something with onomatopoeic hooks for younger readers.

I was hoping to publicise and promote that *The Thing That Goes Ping!* along with *The Dingle Dangle Jungle* during my LWOP 'gap' year, but unfortunately COVID 19 border and school closures, along with other restrictions put an end to many of those plans. On the positives side of things, I spent considerable time during Melbourne's lockdown creating lots of free, high quality learning games and activities including a downloadable, matching song / mp3 - '**Ping Ting-a Ling**' all available through [www.markcarthew.com.au](http://www.markcarthew.com.au) or <https://fordstreetpublishing.com/book/the-thing-that-goes-ping/>

For better or for worse, I don't have a literary agent as I have generally approached publishers directly. Interestingly, I sometimes reflect back and wish I had connected with an agent when I first started out. However, I do have some wonderful booking agents who act as advocates for my library, school and literary event sessions and across Australia, I am actively represented for bookings by the lovely folks @:-

- **Booked Out Speakers Agency** <http://bookedout.com.au/find-a-speaker/author/mark-carthew/>
- **Creative Net** <https://creativenetspeakers.com/creative/mark-carthew/>
- **Speaker's Ink (Qld)** <https://www.speakers-ink.com.au/speakers/mark-carthew>
- **Becky's Literary Bookings (SA)** <http://www.beckysliterary.com.au/mark-carthew.php>.

A number of my recent titles have gained media attention including *The Great Zoo Hullabaloo!* on Channel 7 National News. <http://markcarthew.com.au/channel-seven.mp4>

### **If this is an illustrated book - how much collaboration was there between the writer and the artist?**

The final design and illustration process for *The Thing That Goes Ping!* took place during one of Melbourne's extended lockdowns in 2020. While the base text had already been written and refined through the edit process; Shane and I worked very closely with the editor Nan McNab and designer Joanne Marchese on the pre-production design and layout during this period.

It was such a pleasure (and relief) to have a fun and positive project to work on during lockdown. Shane's illustrations match the book perfectly and it was one of the most enjoyable and collaborative projects I have experienced. Interestingly my other title with Ford Street, *The Dingle Dangle Jungle*, illustrated by Dave Atze in South Australia - was equally enjoyable and part of that enjoyment for both projects was due to the respectful communication between everyone involved, including the publishers Paul Collins and Meredith Costain at Ford Street Publishing.

Little pieces of 'magic' often occur when the author, illustrator, editor and designer have such respectful conversations, while understanding each other's creative role.

I also love working with graphic designers, as they sometimes don't get the acknowledgement they deserve.

**How did the illustrator bring your words to life and enhance the narrative?**

Shane McG was marvellous to work with, as he was happy to embrace some of the ideas and 'little things' that came up as positive suggestions. I'm generally very careful not to get too involved in the illustration side of things, as illustrators always bring their own special interpretation and ideas to any narrative.

I love the quirky and humorous way Shane brought the anthropomorphic characters to life and his subtle inclusion of mini-beasts and other features in the background.

**What sort of stories are you inspired to write for children?**

I have always loved myths, legends and fairy tales and I even imported a rare rice paper edition of JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of Rings* into Australia from England in my first year of university. Along with a large collection of picture books from Australia and across the world; rollicking verse from the likes of Dr Suess, Margaret Mahy, CJ Dennis, Julia Donaldson, Michael Rosen and illustrated anthologies of traditional nursery rhymes also feature strongly in my bulging bookshelves.

While picture books, songs, plays and poetry have been my focus in recent years and will likely remain so... I am also keen to pen something completely different for middle to older primary, YA & possibly adult readers.

**How many hours do you commit to your craft each day? Do you have a regular routine?**

While I'm always thinking of new ideas, I am also focused on how to bring some of my many projects, tucked away in drawers and folders to life. These ideas will find their space and moment, but the demands of teaching and preparation make a regular routine almost impossible. So I simply try to squeeze in some creativity and project focus whenever and wherever I can.

Good ideas never go away, they simply percolate and await the right time and place... and a burst of energy.

Work-life balance, other interests and the need for income etc means a day job for most writers. I have been a teacher and involved in education most of my adult life. Education is my base profession and my writing has evolved from that passion.

In 2020, I took the entire year off on LWOP from my primary teaching position, with a view to having some creative space and work-life balance. I was also awarded a 2020 May Gibbs Children's Literature

Trust Residential Fellowship in Adelaide and of course was really looking forward to some dedicated writing time. With forward planning like so many other authors and illustrators, I was also booked to do various school visits and events around Victoria & Australia, along with talks about my 2020 picture book release *The Dingle Dangle Jungle*, illustrated by Dave Atze.

The pandemic of course resulted in nearly all those school bookings and events being cancelled or postponed. Luckily I managed to have a wonderful book launch in the wonderful library at Camberwell Girls Grammar School and a tour of the Wimmera early in the year. Unfortunately, as Scottish poet Robert Burns noted in his poem 'The Mouse' - '*The best laid plans of mice and men, oft go awry.*' However on a brighter note, *The Dingle Dangle Jungle* was shortlisted for the Educational Publishing Awards Australia, which was a significant honour for a trade picture book.

My regular routine of walks in Mt Dandenong National Park opposite our house, often inspires my creative thought processes and it also provides a quiet time for reflection. A number of writing projects and songs have been born on those tracks and moments.

**Did you have a standout teacher who helped with your writing and what did they do to inspire you?**

I had two wonderful High School English teachers who gave me confidence to express myself through poetry and writing during my teenage years, Ms Stainsbury & Mrs O'Lauchlan. I loved high school and maybe that's part of the reason I became a teacher. Having someone who believes in you is just so important, as it also helps you believe in yourself.

**Why did you decide to become a children's author?**

In many ways I fell into it after writing songs and plays for primary schools I taught at early in my teaching career. I also became involved in various collaborations, writing lyrics and songs with music teacher and recording artist Rob Fairbairn for Bushfire Press. When I was awarded a one year Victorian government Teacher Release to Industry Program (TRIP) placement as a Development Editor with Pearson Education Australia; my passion for the publishing industry, along with writing opportunities and my joy of working with illustrators and all those involved in book production grew exponentially.

My wonderful mentor and publisher Denise Ryan and I worked closely together on developing the award-winning illustrated playscript series *VoiceWorks* and a number of other international literacy projects designed for primary schools.

Developing those projects involved working closely with some amazing authors and illustrators from Australia and all around world. That editorial role helped hone my editorial and writing skills, as well as establishing many publishing industry links and connections.

I was also inspired by my friends and colleagues, as a number of my wife's and my friends are writers, musicians and artists. Looking back, our friendship with Graeme & Robyn Base provided enormous creative inspiration. I found watching some of Graeme's artwork come together in his studio just magical and his artistic determination to action ideas truly inspiring.

**Would you like to share something unique about yourself?**

I'm actually Dr Carthew... but don't come to me if you are sick. I'm not that sort of doctor.

In 2007, I was awarded a Swinburne *University* Postgraduate Research Award (*SUPRA*) scholarship to complete my PhD in writing. That break from primary teaching also took me into the university system, where I worked as a tutor and lecturer in creative writing, literacy and teacher education. I also love photography and that hobby is becoming a strong part of my creative life, as it is focusing my attention on different ways of seeing.

**Do you have any advice for people hoping to become a children's author?**

Sure have... as it seems many people have a children's book idea in them that they would like to publish. All published authors and illustrators, including myself were exactly the same, once upon a time. But there are some cautionary tales worth noting.

Here are some common myths.

1. Authors and illustrators are rich.

Most aren't - that is simply not true. The vast majority have other paid jobs and / or their partners do. If you want to get rich, do something else.

2. Children's picture books are short and easy.

False. Less sometimes means more and the writing craft is a learned one. Hard work, research, practice, skill and talent is required. Writing a well-crafted 300 – 500 word picture book with a marketable, engaging and original story arc takes serious skill to attract acquisitions interest or publisher. High quality rhyming books can be even harder to produce.

3. Publishers are always looking out for talent.

True... but increasingly it seems that a number of the 'big' publishers are defaulting their marketing and acquisition strategies to 'celebrity publishing' or established authors already on an 'A' list somewhere - making it harder for new voices to cut through.

However, all is not lost and there are still opportunities, especially with some of the smaller presses. The most important advice I can give is to be persistent, believe in yourself and crucially - get to know the industry and the strength of your manuscript / idea. Creatives need to be pragmatic and do lots of research on who is publishing and what.

The five W's are a useful mantra – Who? What? Why? Where? and When?

The Australian Small Press Network <https://smallpressnetwork.com.au/> is a good place to start and keeping up with industry news through children's literary networks and organisations like the Society of Children's Book Writers and illustrators (SCBWI) <https://www.scbwi.org/>; CBCA <https://cbca.org.au/> ; IBBY <https://www.ibby.org/> ; the ASA <https://www.asauthors.org/>; Thorpe Bowker's Books and Publishing <https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/> newsletters etc and of course PASS IT ON, are also really important sources of information and industry news.

### **Where can we find you?**

[www.markcarthew.com.au](http://www.markcarthew.com.au) or simply google me!

*Thanks so much Mark for sharing your creative journey with us!*