



The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas

176 Little Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
+61 3 9094 7809

**SUSAN ORLEAN, ANDREW O'HAGAN, LI CUNXIN, ARIARNE TITMUS AND JOSH FRYDENBERG
LEAD THE WHEELER CENTRE'S FIFTH EDITION**

Thursday 6 August



The Wheeler Centre today announces its Fifth Edition of new events with a wide-ranging program of conversations bringing together major international writers, celebrated Australian voices and exciting new talent.

Spanning literature, politics, memoir, sport, family programming and graphic storytelling, the program explores the connections that shape our lives, the stories nations tell about themselves, and the forces transforming contemporary culture and public life.

QUOTE ATTRIBUTABLE TO ERIN VINCENT, THE WHEELER CENTRE CEO: 'This upcoming edition of our 2026 program reflects The Wheeler Centre's enduring commitment to creating a public space where curiosity and complexity thrive. These events bring together acclaimed writers, compelling leaders and exciting new voices, inviting audiences to explore the issues and ideas shaping contemporary life.'

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Trading as Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas
ABN 97 134 682 189





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From acclaimed novelists and biographers to an Olympian, a former politician and a cultural icon, this program brings together remarkable people whose stories help connect us and deepen our understanding of the world around us.'

Leading this edition's literary program, acclaimed writers from Australia and abroad explore friendship, ambition, memory and the ethics of storytelling.

Scottish author **Andrew O'Hagan** joins **Marieke Hardy** to celebrate the connections that give life meaning. Drawing on his new essay collection, *On Friendship*, described by critics as 'joyous' and 'heartfelt but intelligent', the bestselling author of *Mayflies* and *Caledonian Road* will reflect on a lifetime of relationships with writers, artists, strangers and even those on four legs, exploring how friendships can make us better humans.

Acclaimed US writer **Susan Orlean** returns to Melbourne to reflect on a remarkable career shaped by curiosity, observation and an enduring fascination with the people and world around her. In conversation with **Jaclyn Crupi**, the celebrated *New Yorker* staff writer and bestselling author of *The Orchid Thief* and *The Library Book* will discuss her memoir *Joyride*, the art of finding stories in unexpected places and the creative possibilities that come from paying close attention.

Two-time *Survivor* contestant **Stephen Fishbach** brings an insider's perspective to a conversation about ambition, survival and second chances. Drawing on his sharp, suspenseful debut novel *Escape!*, Fishbach and **Veronica Sullivan** discuss the blurred boundaries between performance and authenticity, the machinery behind reality television and what our appetite for spectacle reveals about contemporary culture.

British novelist **Josh Silver** joins **Michael Sun** to discuss *Fruit Fly*, Silver's darkly funny novel that has everyone talking. When a writer facing career collapse decides the formula for a bestseller is to 'go gay, go sad and go dark', she turns a vulnerable young man's life into potential literary material. Through alternating perspectives, *Fruit Fly* raises urgent questions about authenticity, identity and the commodification of other people's experiences.

One of Australia's most celebrated authors, **Kate Grenville**, with host **Santilla Chingaibe**, will lift the lid on a century-old mystery unearthed in the archives. *The Country Schoolmaster: A Mystery in 88 Letters* begins with an unassuming bundle of correspondence about a teacher in country New South Wales and develops into a complex tale of victims, villains and small-town secrets. Part colonial cold case and part exploration of the blurred boundaries between fact and possibility, Grenville's new work examines both the seductive power and dangerous limitations of storytelling.

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Several of Australia's most recognisable figures will reflect on lives shaped by ambition, transformation and reinvention.

Li Cunxin, one of the world's most acclaimed ballet dancers and cultural leaders, shares what happened after *Mao's Last Dancer* in his long-awaited second memoir, *The Lucky Son*. Born into poverty in rural China and selected to train at the Beijing Dance Academy before defecting to the United States and later making Australia home, Li reflects on migration, family, belonging and the responsibilities of good fortune. In conversation with **Tim Byrne**, Cunxin will explore his remarkable Australian career and the enduring power of the arts to transform lives.

The beloved cook, writer and broadcaster **Adam Liaw** shares his extraordinary story, from MasterChef Australia to his new book, *Asian Home Cooking*. In conversation with **Benjamin Law**, Liaw will reflect on the years of travel and research behind his new book, his prolific career and the role food plays in shaping family, identity and belonging.

World champion swimmer **Ariarne Titmus** shares the full story behind her extraordinary rise, the sacrifices and resilience that shaped her success, and the difficult decisions that came with choosing herself. Drawing on her eye-opening memoir *Relentless*, Titmus will reflect on the determination that took her from Tasmania to Olympic triumph, her decision to step away from the spotlight at the height of her career and the new chapter that has followed.

Politics, identity and Australia's place in a rapidly changing world are at the centre of four timely conversations in the series.

As debate over Australia's identity intensifies, three leading thinkers ask: *Who Gets to Define Australian Culture?* Former chief economist of the Department of Immigration **Mark Cully**, constitutional lawyer and leading advocate for the Indigenous Voice to Parliament **Megan Davis**, and Grattan Institute CEO **Aruna Sathanapally** examine how debates about multiculturalism, immigration and national identity intersect with democracy, inequality and First Nations justice.

Former Australian Treasurer **Josh Frydenberg** joins **Sally Warhaft** for a candid edition of *The Fifth Estate* examining family, leadership, public life and the changing nature of political discourse. A formative figure in the Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison governments, Frydenberg stood at the centre of Australian politics during a period of significant economic upheaval. Drawing on his book *A Grateful Son*, he reflects on governing through a global crisis, his transition to life after politics and his advocacy against antisemitism.

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In a rare public appearance, former Australian Ambassador to the United States and former Minister for Defence **Kim Beazley** brings decades of diplomatic and political insight to one of the most consequential moments in modern American history. Speaking with **Sally Warhaft** for an October edition of ***The Fifth Estate***, Beazley will reflect on the American experiment, examine the forces reshaping its politics and culture ahead of the pivotal 2026 midterm elections, and consider what this new era means for Australia's security, influence and relationship with its most significant ally.

In ***China and the New World Order***, journalist **Cheng Lei** and University of Melbourne scholar **Anthony J. Spires** examine the domestic and global tensions shaping China's future. Drawing on Cheng's experiences reporting from inside the country and Spires' research into Chinese politics and society, the pair will explore China's growing influence, the forces shaping its domestic and global trajectory, and what a new world order might mean for Australia. The conversation marks the inaugural event in the new **Scholarship to Society** series, presented in partnership with the Melbourne Public Humanities Initiative, Faculty of Arts, the University of Melbourne.

The Wheeler Centre's September school holiday program brings two beloved Australian creators to Wheeler Kids for interactive celebrations of storytelling, imagination and family.

Former Australian Children's Laureate **Sally Rippin** brings her funny and heartfelt new adventure *Lottie, Pog and the Runaway Ghost* to life in an interactive Wheeler Kids event. Through storytelling and creative activities, young readers will meet ten-year-old Lottie, her dog Pog and Martha May Claringbold, a runaway ghost determined to escape her dark, smelly and terribly dull graveyard. Along the way, Rippin will reveal some of the magic behind creating unforgettable characters – even ghosts. Recommended for ages seven and above.

Author **Angie Cui** invites young readers into a glittering winter wonderland with *The Festival of Ice and Snow*. Inspired by treasured childhood memories, Cui's new picture book follows two children and their grandfather through one of the world's most spectacular winter celebrations, filled with ice palaces, towering sculptures and colourful lights. The interactive Wheeler Kids sessions combine storytelling and creative activities, with one session presented in Mandarin. Recommended for ages five and above.

The Wheeler Centre will host the opening gala of the inaugural **Melbourne Alternative Comics Expo** with **Speaking to Pictures**, an evening of live readings accompanied by projected artwork. Host **Aaron Billings** welcomes acclaimed and experimental graphic storytellers **Rachel Ang, Eloise Grills, Mandy Ord, Joshua Santospirito, Bailey Sharp** and **Shaun Tan**, each bringing their work vividly to life before the Expo unfolds across Melbourne over the weekend.

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The second cohort of **The Wheeler Centre's 2026 Hot Desk Fellows** share exclusive excerpts from works in progress at a special edition of **The Next Big Thing**. Host **Pranati Narayan Visweswaran** introduces **Nicola Bryant, Michael Earp, Grace Hall, Nalini Jacob-Roussety, Shahrin Shamim** and **Annie Zhang** for an evening spanning memoir, dark academia and coming-of-age drama, alongside insights into their developing creative practices.

For those looking to put words on the page, **Shut Up and Write!** returns in October and November, in partnership with Writers Victoria. Hosted by **Xanthea O'Connor**, the sessions offer novelists, poets, academics, journalists and writers of all kinds a welcoming space to set aside distractions and dedicate protected time to their work, without critique, comparison or pressure to share.

– ENDS –

Media contact

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Media centre: Images available [here](#)

The full list of events and dates are listed below. For more information, please visit wheelercentre.com/events

Lottie, Pog and the Runaway Ghost with Sally Rippin

Sally Rippin
10.00 am, Saturday 19 September
The Wheeler Centre

The Next Big Thing: Hot Desk 2026 Edition #2

Nicola Bryant, Michael Earp, Grace Hall, Nalini Jacob-Roussety,
Shahrin Shamim, Annie Zhang, Pranati Narayan Visweswaran
6.30pm, Monday 21 September
The Wheeler Centre

Who Gets to Define Australian Culture?

Mark Cully, Scientia Professor Megan Davis AC,

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Aruna Sathanapally, Tasneem Chopra
6.30pm, Tuesday 22 September
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Kate Grenville: A Mystery in 88 Letters

Kate Grenville, Santilla Chingaipe
6.30pm, Thursday 1 October
The Wheeler Centre

The Festival of Ice and Snow with Angie Cui

Angie Cui
10.00am, Saturday 3 October
The Wheeler Centre

Andrew O'Hagan: On Friendship

Andrew O'Hagan, Marieke Hardy
7.00pm, Tuesday 6 October
The Capitol

Speaking to Pictures

Rachel Ang, Eloise Grills, Mandy Ord, Joshua Santospirito
Bailey Sharp, Shaun Tan, Aaron Billings
8.00pm, Friday 9 October
The Wheeler Centre

Stephen Fishbach: Escape!

Stephen Fishbach, Veronica Sullivan
6.30pm, Wednesday 14 October
The Wheeler Centre

Susan Orlean: Joyride

Susan Orlean, Jaclyn Crupi
6.30pm, Thursday 15 October
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Li Cunxin: The Lucky Son

Li Cunxin, Tim Byrne
6.30pm, Tuesday 20 October

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The Wheeler Centre

An Evening with Adam Liaw

Adam Liaw, Benjamin Law
7.00pm, Wednesday 21 October
The Capitol

Josh Frydenberg in Conversation

Josh Frydenberg, Sally Warhaft
6.30pm, Thursday 22 October
The Wheeler Centre

China and the New World Order

Cheng Lei, Anthony J. Spires, Louisa Lim
6.30pm, Tuesday 27 October
The Wheeler Centre

Kim Beazley on the American Moment

The Honourable Kim Beazley AC, Sally Warhaft
7.00pm, Wednesday 28 October
The Edge, Fed Square

Josh Silver: Fruit Fly

Josh Silver, Michael Sun
6.30pm, Thursday 29 October
The Wheeler Centre

Ariarne Titmus: Relentless

Ariarne Titmus
7.00pm, Wednesday 4 November
The Capitol

The Wheeler Centre is Australia's only dedicated hub for Books, Writing and Ideas – a place where audiences connect with leading writers and thinkers from across Australia and the world.

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