



Chris Anderson is the curator of TED.
Robyn Kershaw makes movies.
Fouad Hady is a reporter.
Ati Citron is a clowning academic.
Michael Hohnen & Gurrumul make music together.

Behind extraordinary ideas,
there are extraordinary people.

Dumbo Feather

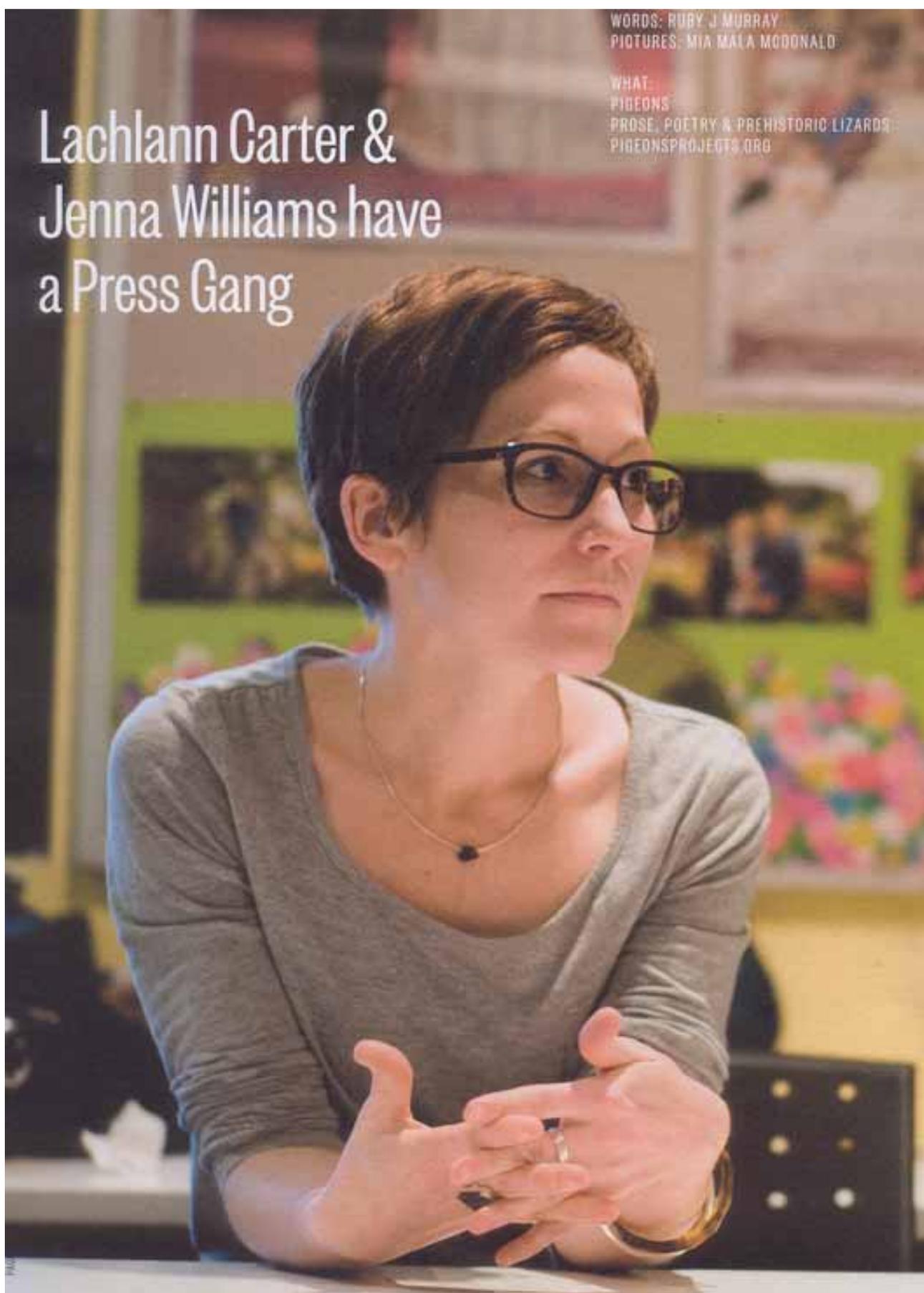
is a magazine about these people.

Issue 28

Lachlann Carter & Jenna Williams have a Press Gang

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WHAT:
PIGEONS
PROSE, POETRY & PREHISTORIC LIZARDS
PIGEONSPROJECTS.ORG



It's rude to read other peoples' letters, at least while they're still alive, but the kids at Pigeons have jumped the gun on Fitzgerald, Salinger and Woolf, and are letting you pick through their creative guts right from the get-go.

For the last two years, Pigeons has been pairing ten-and eleven-year-old students across Melbourne's Western suburbs with 'grown-up' writers including the likes of Michael Pryor, Gabrielle Wang, and Andrew McDonald. The students and their mentors spend six months exchanging letters and developing a story together, the results of which are published in an anthology, along with excerpts of the letters that show their developing creative processes.

Co-founded in 2009 by Lachlann Carter and Jenna Williams after completing internships at Dave Eggers' 826 Valencia project in San Francisco, Pigeons is a not-for-profit organisation that works alongside teachers to

provide literacy programs where children can take the lead creatively, and explore new ways of storytelling. "We want to involve whole communities in our literacy programs," explains Carter.

And they do. Their board includes members of the publishing glitterati from all over Melbourne, and as soon as the Pigeons walk into a classroom, everyone wants to be writing.

Part of the organisation's success lies in the fact that the Pigeons aren't interested in pressing schools and communities to 'do' more than they already are. "Schools and teachers are already under so much pressure," says Carter, who is also a teacher. "It's especially true in the inner West, which is economically and socially a very diverse area. Organisations are always approaching schools saying 'let us do something to help, we want to run this idea,' but in the end there are no curriculum outcomes,





and it just creates more pressure on the teachers and staff. Pigeons' programs fit in with the curriculum; they're not in competition, and we're clear about the fact we're there to support and inspire."

The Pigeons' anthologies make for great reading, whether the stories are set in World War II or a land of lollies gone mad. The kids are in charge of the creative process, and they know it. Ari Boyd, in his first letter to mentor Michael Pryor, lays out the ground rules for their story, *The Sword of Rodithal*, which opens the *Pigeons 2* anthology. "I don't know what we should call the character of our story, although I know we should probably put a big lizard-like monster in. For example, a dragon. Maybe in a rainforest some 100 million years ago? The character's problem could be getting eaten."

After two years of furious scribbling, the Pigeons are flying for new horizons. After school on Wednesday afternoons, 14 Grade Five-Sixers from across the West meet around a long table in a neighbourhood house to plan, editorialise, and strategise. In November this year, in conjunction with the literary journal *Harvest*, they're going

to be releasing their first magazine, *Early Harvest*, and the clock is a-ticking.

Every aspect of the magazine's development is being coordinated by the young editorial board, who are a decade off owning their own credit cards, but who are handling packaging, placement in bookstores, audience targets, content, and taking advice from experts in each area. "The Call for Submissions process is going to be a challenge," says Carter. "They're sending out the call to schools across the entire area, but still, they're going to receive a lot of submissions from their classmates and friends.¹ So it's going to be their first time engaging in a constructive way with feedback for the pieces that they can't accept, and that will be tricky."

The grown-ups at Pigeons have nothing to worry about, though. These Grade Five-Sixers might be calling the shots, but they've already shown themselves extremely attuned to the sensitive sensibilities of authors. "I'm reading your first book," writes Toni-Sue Montana Pivac to her mentor-author Andrew McDonald in an earlier project. "...[It's a great book for a first book.]"

¹Just to be clear, the author of this profile *has* actually met your esteemed editor Mr Pittman at various social gatherings. However, no nepotism was involved in the commissioning of

this article. Rumour has it that Mr Pittman finds the author fairly awful, frequently tipsy, and altogether badly turned out. It's suspected that, in passing this article her way, the esteemed

editor hoped that she would learn a little decorum from the eleven-year-olds. She is mortified, and pledges to improve, Pigeons-style.

