

Children's book scam

There is a scam aimed at a child's desire to be a published writer—usually as a poet, in a book of poems.

How does the scam work?

Keen teachers are unwittingly caught up in the promotion but are completely unaware of the dodgy side of the scheme.

There are plenty of honest opportunities for children's writing that don't cost their parents a small fortune and provide a poor-quality product. Most books in scams are badly set out. They tend to be huge volumes, squashing in as many writers' efforts as possible to make as much money as possible.

They're an embarrassment for the young poets.

These competitions to 'discover hidden talent' sound great in the glossy flyers. Schools too are offered a prize if a winner is from their school. Schools become unpaid 'agents' in promotion of the competitions. Parents are happy to pay a small entry fee.

Each child hopes to get an 'honourable mention' with the possibility of being selected to be included in a book. The price of the book is not given. Naturally, if a child's work were published, parents would want a copy of the book. In one such scheme the pre-order price was \$67 with an extra \$26 if the child's photo was included. That's nearly \$100! Strangely, awards are given to those who pre-order a book!

The books are not attractive. A copy at a market sold for \$2. There were three to five kids' poems squashed on a page, with over 3000 poems jammed into that one book. Clip Art was used to illustrate the poor publication. Look at the maths. 3000 kids multiplied by \$100 equals \$300 000. Now add the entry fees of, say, \$2—add another \$6000! Enough to cover publicity!

One 'place winner' was upset when the parents realised this was a con to buy a book, but not buying the book made the parents feel guilty. Genuine competitions that publish books give a free copy to any 'winner'.

