



Lots to say: Alix Keynes, 8, and Thomas Simpson, 12, and Caitlyn Rayney, 13, show their books to author Doug MacLeod.

# Way with words spans ages

## MICHAEL BENNETT

A successful career creating some of Australian television's most risqué humour may seem incongruous with equal success in writing children's books but Doug MacLeod says the two go hand in hand.

The award-winning children's author is in Perth this week for Children's Book Week and to spend some time with schoolchildren around the State workshopping and discussing fiction and its wonders.

Although an established author, MacLeod was sidetracked into the wacky world of TV skit shows in the 1980s and spent 16 years at the helm of some very popular comedies.

"It wasn't terribly adult humour," MacLeod jokes in explaining the ease with which he made the transition from child fiction to adult comedy. "But some of the themes wouldn't be appropriate for children."

The Victorian was head writer on the hugely successful Comedy Company, as well as Tonight Live with Steve Vizard, and worked as a script editor for Big Girl's Blouse and Kath & Kim.

But his true passion was always books and, though he dabbles in TV writing from time to time, it is writing books that gets his creative juices flowing.

"I look forward so much to my books being published. I don't think I can say the same thing about TV shows," he says. "Books are a little more special."

The 47-year-old St Kilda resident says the blurb of his latest kids' book, Kevin the Troll, describes him best. "It

music, I am of very average looks and of Norse descent. So that makes me a hiking, biking, music-liking, not-so-striking former Viking."

MacLeod penned Sister Madge's Book of Nuns, published in 1986 and updated in 2002. It became one of the best-known children's books in Australia. Tumble Turn, a book for teenagers, followed in 2002 and then comic poetry titled On the Cards. Spikey Spunky, My Pet Monkey was next, described as a collection of weird and wicked rhymes, then Leon Stumbles Book of Stupid Fairytales with Craig Smith.

Last year his teen novel, I'm Being Stalked by a Moonshadow, was released and MacLeod describes it as a "shameless rip-off of a play called Romeo and Juliet by an author called Shakespeare".

Earlier this week MacLeod headlined the launch of the children's book festival that aims to inspire children, young and old, to step away from the computer screen and read books beyond the adventures of Harry Potter.

The Alexander Library event included the announcement of the winners of the State-wide Make your own Storybook competition.

MacLeod was blown away by the quality of entrants.

"There are some very talented kids here who have come up with their own original story books," he says. "I was gobsmacked by some of the creativity of the books and some of them are rather serious too. One in particular was a very moving piece of work.

"You think children tend to write about lighter things but some of them are books that deal with issues like racism."

Last week MacLeod also spent time in Karratha and Port Hedland, working with indigenous students in story-telling workshops.

"There was more chatting than writing," he says. "But the kids have got very good story skills. They are very good at constructing stories and that comes from the strong tradition of it in this State."

MacLeod believes reading is important for children of all ages.

"It gives you so many options in life. I think that stories are important and I think they are the one thing that's not going to be, or never going to be, overtaken by technology. The human being's ability to create stories is never going to be mimicked by a computer."