

# Kāpiti Independent

## Author Linda Hansen Empowers Girls

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Local author Linda Hansen found completing *The Fire Keeper's Girls*, her third activist novel for teenagers, her greatest writing challenge. In the story, two troubled teenagers encounter a mysterious game involving real-life women. It took Linda months to locate and research the 25 women from 25 countries whose brief biographies appear at the back of the book, making it an ideal Suffrage Commemoration story.

She depicts a community able to embrace the gifts that every girl brings with her at birth, a real community, not fantasy, where girls are not family property to trade or blank pages to be etched with cultural demands. In this community, strong, unrestricted women already enjoy the best of themselves so girls can easily recognise where they belong. But where were all these wild and wonderful role models to be found, since the advent of the nuclear family and a society that selects which occupations and gender get the most recognition and reward? That is why some women had to be borrowed – real women from other countries and other eras.

Linda is aware that in order to survive in the current workplace, many women are unconsciously socialised to please and to defer to men. Careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM fields), stereotypically assumed to be masculine, are extra daunting for young women who rarely see themselves reflected in these areas. Women who excel in such work are still written out of history yet female mentors offer an important perspective that girls can't get from male colleagues.

The Game in *The Fire Keeper's Girls* explores some mischievous remedies for this predicament.

The book succeeds *Bad Oil and the Animals*, a tale of teenage friends aiming a spotlight at illegal palm oil production and animal welfare in New Zealand and elsewhere, and *An Unexpected Hero*, an adventure introducing New Zealand's WW1 Pacifist Archie Baxter to young readers. *Socks*, a story on homelessness, won the author the Jack Lasenby Senior Award for children's writing.



Left: The author with Dawn Sanders, founder of the Shakespeare Globe centre of NZ, whose endorsement appears on the book's cover.



Right: The author with her new book.