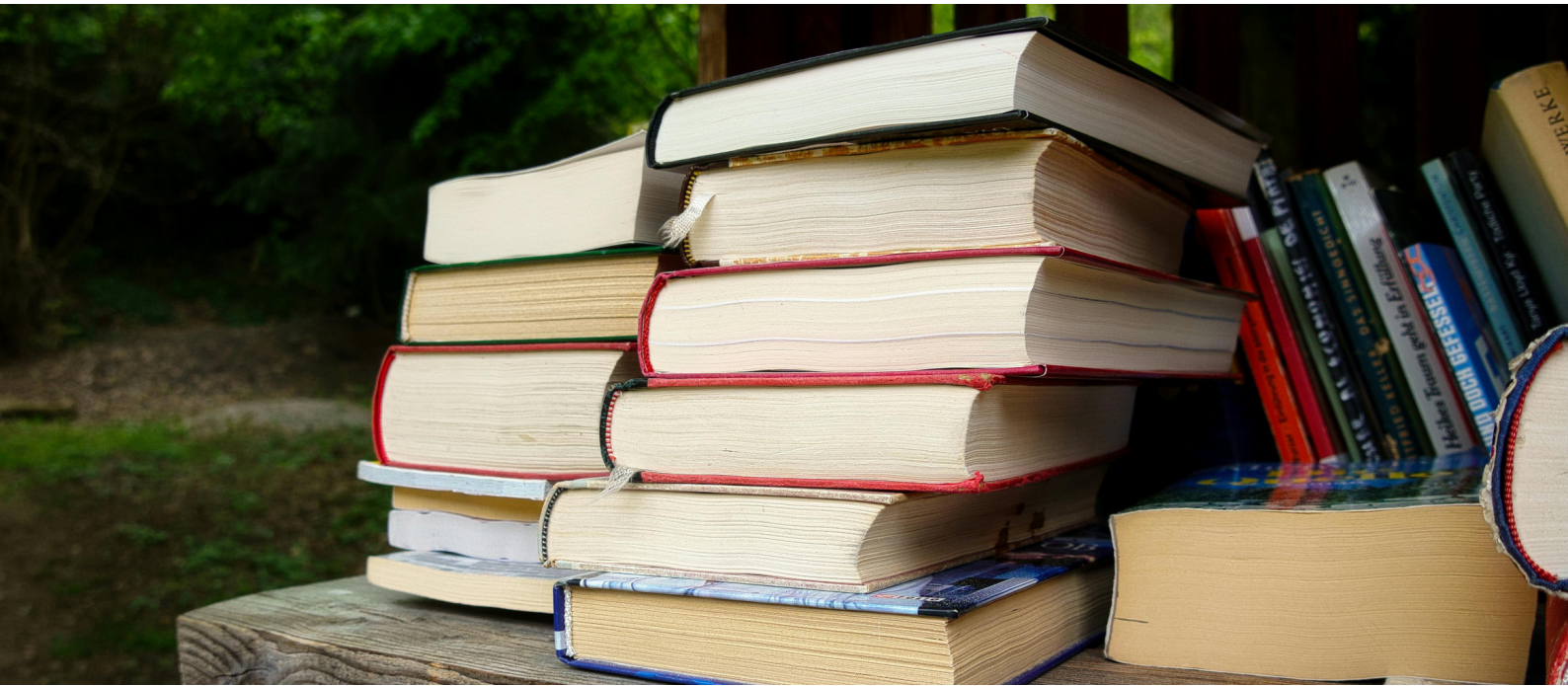




VIC BRANCH: Book Club 2026



The inaugural book club focussed on ***Gum*** by *Ashley Hay*, first published in 2002 and then updated in 2021.

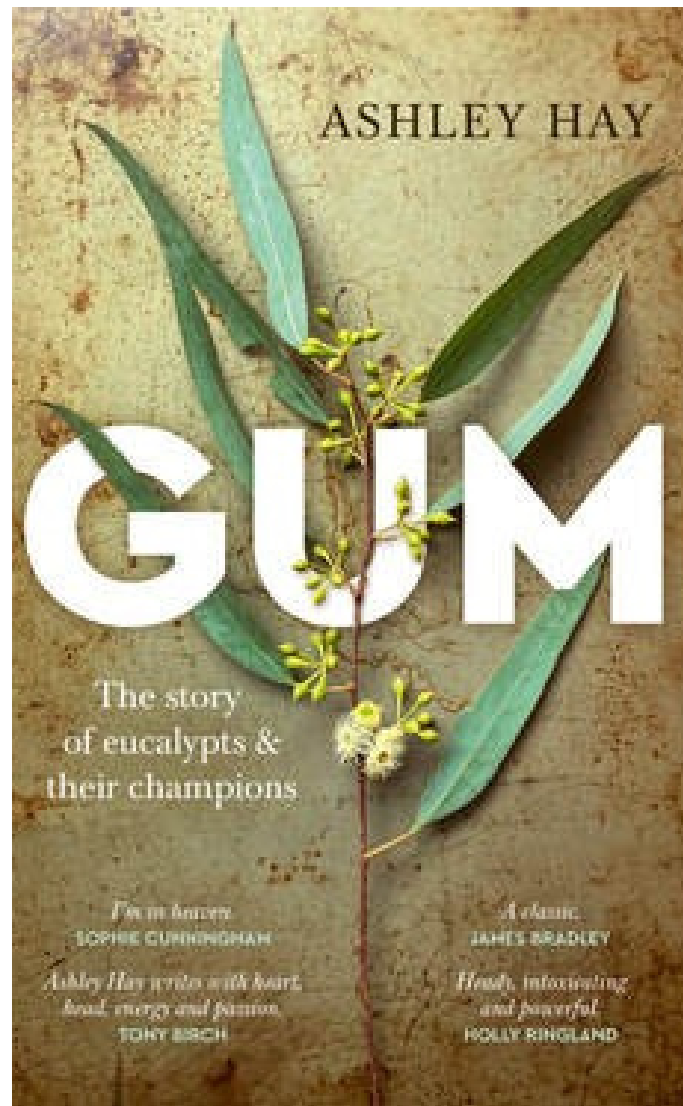
It contains stories of Australia's relationship with eucalypts and the struggles of the early taxonomists. It also profiles some of the great enthusiasts, notably Ferdinand von Mueller and Max Jacobs, and their contribution to science and industry.

The book introduces how eucalypts have been captured in art and literature from the time of European settlement through to the present. In particular, the book features May Gibbs and the cultural significance of *Snugglypot & Cuddlepip* in shaping gum trees as an icon of Australia's national identity during WWI.

There are also chapters on fire ecology and the environmental conflicts that emerged over native forest management in Tasmania following the Franklin Dam controversy. There are interesting sections on the relationship between eucalypts, fire and climate change, including reference to long-running climate change experiments such as EucFACE (the Free Air CO2 Enrichment). Hay bookends the narrative with stories from First Peoples. She evokes the spirit of the humble “gum” tree and handles a range of complex topics with sensitivity and balance.

Reading this book reminds us that everyone in Australia has a connection with eucalypts – and they have inspired some of our greatest art, writing and environmental philosophy. And because of the likes of Mueller and Jacobs, people all over the world have a connection with eucalypts too. Gum is a very readable book that seamlessly marries history, science and art – anyone with an interest in trees, plants, art and people will enjoy it.

Ashley Hay received the 2025 Bjarne K Dahl Medal from Eucalypt Australia, which “publicly recognises and rewards those who have made a significant and sustained contribution to eucalypts”.



The next book club meeting on **9 July** will look at Richard Powers’ monumental book *The Overstory*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2019. This book was described by Ann Patchett as “the best novel ever written about trees, and really, just one of the best novels, period.”

Get reading!!