

## Teaching units on Magabala books: Useful resources from Reading Australia’s website

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### Abstract

This article discusses the useful resources that are available for teachers from the Reading Australia website that was set up by the Copyright Agency. In particular, it highlights the teaching units developed around books published by Magabala Books. These units are linked to the *Australian Curriculum: English* and the *NSW English K–10 Syllabus* and introduce the work of Indigenous authors and illustrators to middle years students.

### Introduction

The *Australian Curriculum: English* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2018b) has highlighted the place of Literature as one of the three strands in the English curriculum, alongside Language and Literacy. With that has come a great deal of discussion about literature and about what will enthuse students and provide teaching opportunities for teachers. The Reading Australia website provides teachers with many resources, to ensure good quality literature is read by students and good quality units are implemented by teachers.

Reading Australia was set up by the Copyright Agency, which is a not-for-profit organisation that ‘has been standing up for creators for more than 40 years’ (see Copyright Agency, 2018). The Reading Australia (2018) website explains that:

We believe that every society needs to tell their own stories and the best way we can achieve this is to provide quality and insightful resources to support all teachers of English in bringing Australia’s rich and unique literature into classrooms.

Reading Australia is in its fifth year and now has more than 350 books, 95 essays and over 140 teaching resources available to Australian teachers. In fact you would have to say that the site is a treasure trove for teachers. It began as a list of 200 books, which had been selected by a panel from the Australian Society of Authors, as a way of celebrating the work of leading Australian authors and illustrators. However, the site has continued to expand.

### Using books created by Indigenous authors and illustrators

One of the exciting moves that is very evident on the Reading Australia website is advocacy for books written and illustrated by Indigenous authors and illustrators. It is these books that have provided us with a focus for our discussion here. In conjunction with Magabala Books (see Magabala Books, 2018), Reading Australia presents a wide range of books for both primary school and secondary school. Our very own ALEA, along with the Primary English Teaching Association Australia and the Australian Association for Teachers of English, has been involved in the writing of teaching units that teachers may access freely from the Reading Australia website.

The input of the teacher professional associations has ensured the units’ suitability for Australian teaching needs, as well as their alignment with the *Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2018b) and other curricula, such as the *NSW English K–10 Syllabus* (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2012). The Australian Curriculum’s General Capabilities

(ACARA, 2018c) and Cross-curriculum Priorities (ACARA, 2018a) have also been considered.

Units are currently available on the Reading Australia website and more will be added over time. As explained by Edie Wright, Chairperson of Magabala Books, the books ‘were chosen for their educational and literary value and appropriateness for different primary year levels’ (see Readings, 2017). She goes on to explain that:

In a space where so much has been written about Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people, Magabala Books gave people the opportunity to tell their own stories, to ensure that cultural protocols were observed and the benefits flowed back to the right people.

Edie Wright also explained that a common focus of the books’ storytellers is ‘the hope that their books will sow the seeds of understanding and respect in the hearts and minds of children and adults around Australia and overseas. Reading Australia is helping us do just that’ (Clark, 2017).

Several ALEA members have been involved in the writing of teaching units, under the stewardship of Wendy Bean from ALEA and funding from CAL. All of the teaching activities in each unit are linked to the Australian Curriculum and the NSW K–10 Syllabus. The website presents some preliminary information about each book and its author/s and illustrator/s. It also presents a four-step process that involves Literature, Responding, Examining and Creating. The content of each unit is organised under a set of major headings:

1. Connecting to prior knowledge;
2. Responding to the text;
3. Examining text structure and organisation;
4. Creating
5. More resources.

Rich assessment tasks are provided for sections 1–4. Teachers may access units on books that include the following:

<b>Year level</b>	<b>Title and publisher’s synopsis</b>	<b>Author, illustrator and unit author</b>	<b>Themes</b>
AC Year 4 (NSW Stage 2)	<i>Mrs Whitlam</i>  Marnie Clark of Curdie Vale can ride but she doesn’t have a horse. She dreams of owning one and having the whole world to ride it in. Before too long, she is gifted Mrs Margaret ‘Maggie’ Whitlam, a beautiful, big Clydesdale – bold, fearless and able to jump anything. From the very first ride, Marnie and Maggie get more adventure than they	Written by Bruce Pascoe  Unit written by Wendy Bean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• courage</li> <li>• family</li> <li>• friendship</li> <li>• identity</li> <li>• prejudice</li> <li>• racism</li> </ul>

	bargained for.		
AC Year 4 (NSW Stage 2)	<p><i>Stolen Girl</i></p> <p>This is a fictionalised account of the Stolen Generation that tells of an Aboriginal girl taken from her family by the government and sent to a children's home. She sings and dreams of her mother and the life they once shared, but each morning she is woken by the bell to the harsh reality of the children's home. Finally, one day she unlocks the door and takes her first step toward home.</p>	<p>Written by Trina Saffioti</p> <p>Illustrated by Norma MacDonald</p> <p>Unit written by Carmel Turner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stolen Generation</li> <li>• home</li> <li>• family</li> <li>• loss</li> <li>• country</li> <li>• belonging</li> </ul>
AC Year 5 (NSW Stage 3)	<p><i>The Girl from the Great Sandy Desert</i></p> <p>This is a first-hand account of growing up in a traditional Indigenous Australian family and community in the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia. The area was so dry European settlement had barely touched the life of the Walmajarri people. The collection of stories covers many aspects of the life of Mana and her family. Each story is accompanied by cultural information.</p>	<p>Written by Jukuna Mona Chuguna and Pat Lowe</p> <p>Illustrated by Mervyn Street</p> <p>Unit written by Kay Chaffey</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginality</li> <li>• Australian identity</li> <li>• connection to place</li> <li>• family</li> <li>• history</li> <li>• Indigenous language</li> <li>• relationships</li> <li>• resilience</li> </ul>
AC Year 5 (NSW Stage 3)	<p><i>Tjarany Roughtail</i></p> <p>This beautifully produced book includes magnificent paintings, maps, kinship diagrams, exercises and language notes. The Dreaming stories are told in English and Kukatja accompanied by art from various Indigenous artists.</p>	<p>Written by Gracie Greene</p> <p>Illustrated by Lucille Gill</p> <p>Assistance with translation into English from Joe Tramacchi</p> <p>Unit written by Nicola Azzopardi</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginality</li> <li>• animals</li> <li>• bullying</li> <li>• identity</li> <li>• jealousy</li> <li>• kinship</li> <li>• language</li> <li>• morality</li> <li>• revenge</li> </ul>
AC Year 5 (NSW)	<p><i>Free Diving</i></p>	<p>Written by Lorrae Coffin</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal slavery</li> </ul>

Stage 3)	An engaging book about the pearling industry across the north of Australia in the mid-1800s, showing the reader the perils encountered by the Indigenous men and women who worked as free divers. While this is a fictional story of one man lost at sea, it is based on the history of the pearl diving industry at that time. This lyrical text exposes Lorrae Coffin's musical background. This is her first book.	Illustrated by Bronwyn Houston  Unit written by Julia Johnson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exploitation</li> <li>• loss of home</li> <li>• Aboriginal history</li> </ul>
AC Year 6 (NSW Stage 3)	<i>Alfred's War</i>  From the Boer War onwards, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have fought in all the wars in which Australia has taken part. They faced many challenges on their return. This carefully written book is about one soldier, Alfred, who fought in the Great War, and what happened to him when he returned home to Australia.	Written by Rachel Bin Salleh  Illustrated by Samantha Fry  Unit written by Bev White	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders</li> <li>• history</li> <li>• war</li> <li>• identity and belonging</li> <li>• remembrance</li> </ul>
AC Year 6 (NSW Stage 3)	<i>Fog a Dox</i>  This is a gentle book about difference, history, culture and country and, ultimately, about courage, acceptance and respect. It is simply a wonderful read for any primary school student to learn a little about the Australian bush through some memorable characters whose stories are expertly intertwined by a great storyteller. Readers will discover a lot about true friendship at many different points in this story.	Written by Bruce Pascoe  Unit written by Wendy Bean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• friendship</li> <li>• Indigenous culture</li> <li>• loneliness</li> <li>• nature</li> <li>• prejudice</li> </ul>

### **The unit on *The Girl from the Great Sandy Desert***

Written by Jukuna Mona Chuguna and Pat Lowe and illustrated by Mervyn Street, *The Girl from the Great Sandy Desert* tells about the life of a young Walmajarri girl and her family, who lived in the desert country of north-west Australia. The book is a collection of stories about the rich cultural lives of pre-contact Aboriginal Australians. The teaching unit to accompany the book was written by Kay Chaffey, who describes Magabala Books as:

beautiful books ... either written by, or sanctioned by, Indigenous Australians and the activities are designed to help students respect, appreciate and celebrate the ancient cultures and the people whose land we now inhabit and share.

INSERT COVER OF THE GIRL FROM THE GREAT SANDY DESERT  
APPROXIMATELY HERE

Kay goes on to explain that:

I loved the stories in *The Girl from the Great Sandy Desert*. So often we are offered two versions of Indigenous Australia: Dreamtime stories and the accompanying art forms, and the Stolen Generation. Both are important to know. This beautiful, raw, honest book told stories about how life was, simply and openly. It shows us people rather than myth or tragedy. It lets us into the realities of the connection with the land. For the people of the desert, the connection is survival – having water and food, or not.

In writing the unit, Kay says that she ‘cited several other texts to support this concept and perhaps soften some of the occasionally harsh realities mentioned.’ She draws on well-known teaching strategies, such as ‘think-pair-share’ and ‘think aloud’, to engage students, but she also includes more recent technological strategies, such as the use of a wiki to provide a collaborative working space for students. The teaching unit offers extensive ideas for teachers to use in their classrooms.

### **The unit on *Alfred’s War***

*Alfred’s War* is a must read for Anzac Day. Written by Rachel Bin Salleh and illustrated by Samantha Fry, the book tells what happened to Indigenous soldiers when they returned from the war. The story is beautifully told, with some explanatory notes at the end.

INSERT COVER OF ALFRED’S WAR APPROXIMATELY HERE

The unit on *Alfred’s War* was written by Bev White. She explains:

In this unit, I want students to develop a deep sense of empathy and understanding for Aboriginal ex-servicemen. I want them to question our history and feel a sense of dismay at what has been allowed to happen. I believe that students need the opportunity to think deeply and to talk a lot about their thinking. The activities in this unit are designed to enable this process. Through setting a context in which current knowledge is revealed, shared and developed with the addition of local research, the book then becomes a springboard into another perspective.

While the students develop their skills in language and visual literacy, they learn how meanings are construed through a composition of words and images. The deeper their understanding of the text, the more they have the opportunity to grow their empathy. They then have the chance to express their own views in the way they use text and image themselves to represent the life of another Aboriginal ex-servicemen.

The study of literature provides the opportunity to develop language and literacy skills, understanding and knowledge in a deeply rich and meaningful context which can have a lasting impact beyond achieving a curriculum standard.

### **Conclusion**

The Reading Australia website contains a large number of resources and we recommend that you check out what is on offer there. In this short article, we have only considered the teaching units on Magabala Books in the primary section, but middle years teachers might also like to explore the other tabs on the website: secondary, tertiary, essays, books, authors, and teachers' corner. Go to <https://readingaustralia.com.au/about/> or scan the QR code with your mobile phone.

INSERT QR CODE HERE

### **Acknowledgement**

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**Kay Chaffey** and **Bev White** have both written teaching units on Magabala Books. Kay, a teacher at Girraween Primary School in the Northern Territory, is a passionate advocate of the use of quality literature at the heart of good teaching. She has recently returned to an upper primary classroom after several years as a teacher librarian. Bev is Manager: EALD and Literacy programs for the Department of Education in South Australia. Previously she has been Leader of Learning at Kurna Plains Aboriginal School, a Curriculum Implementation Officer, an EALD consultant with Catholic Education, and an ESL teacher in primary and secondary contexts.