NATIONAL CENTRE for AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE Inc

BEHIND THE IMAGINED

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THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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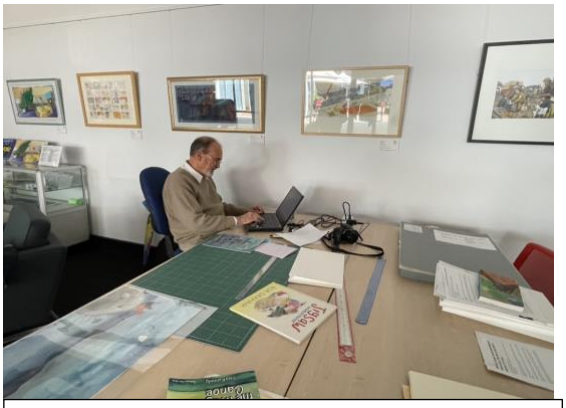
Table of Contents

Welcome from the Editor

Our last edition was published during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This double edition is the result of the aftermath where lockdowns came and went, masks came and went, we were finally able to travel nationally and internationally again with few restrictions, and social distancing now seems a distant memory. Through all that our centre was travelling, but just across the University of Canberra (UC) campus. The exciting news is that after three moves we are now settled into our new home at The Hub.



Max Brown working in his new space at The Hub

We've not just been moving around the UC campus! Our Centre has been working on a major project and we finally launched a database of children's books by and about Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. How this came about is the main subject of this edition and includes the wonderful essay by Margaret Bromley.

We hope you enjoy this edition and join with us in celebrating this milestone in documenting and sharing Australian children's literature.

Jane Carstens
Editor

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Our Big Move(s)

Emeritus Professor Belle Alderman outside the new shopfront

While everyone else was staying put in lockdown, we were on the move. We moved out of our home on the top floor of the library into Training Room 1 in the library basement. Then we moved down the hallway to Training Room 3. Both were very small spaces hidden away from the world, but they were not going to be our final move. We eventually moved a third time into The Hub where we now occupy the large space that used to be the Commonwealth Bank.

Rose Howes working in her new space

"We are so fortunate that the University of Canberra (UC) gave us this space. It used to be the Commonwealth Bank and we initially had no idea of the size of it as so much was hidden when the bank was here. We didn't even know it had a kitchen before we moved in. Being able to finally have a place where we can all work together is a first. Having a shopfront is simply wonderful. We are so visible now. Everyday

people knock on our door, and some of them donate to us. People are also amazed that we have so many books in translation. This is a culturally diverse campus so that feels so important," said Emeritus Professor Belle Alderman, Director of NCACL.

Some of the ephemera on display

Prof Alderman was especially grateful for the help given to the NCACL by UC staff during the moves.

"The general work people on the campus were so generous and kind. They just pitched in and helped. The university staff also told us they have a warehouse full of furniture and that they will furnish our new space for us. They gave us cabinets and matching shelves. We can also see out into the courtyard and have so much natural light. People come in and look and ask to see all of it. We still have most of our artwork in the basement of the library and 55,000 books in Training Room 1, but we also have wonderful art pieces on display that our staff who work and volunteer here chose for their spaces. We also have room to display some of our ephemera."

If you are on the UC campus, please come and say hello and see our wonderful new space. You can't miss us! We've even got a hippo by the door.

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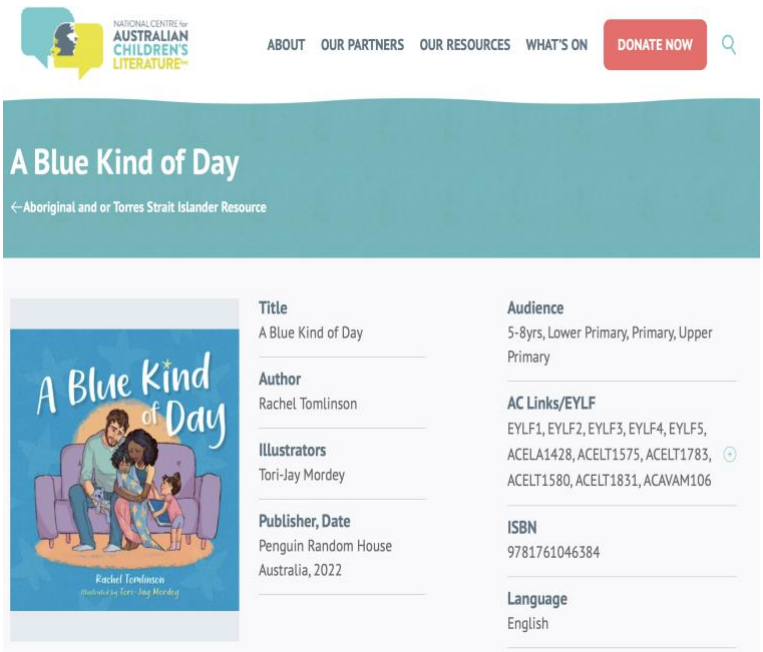
The Background for Margaret Bromley's Essay

The NCACL launched a database of children's books by and about Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples in July 2020. That has now grown to over 542 books included for young people from 0-secondary age.

There was also a lot of positive response to this database which the NCACL canvassed and published on their website.

When the NCACL began this project, they had a researcher, Margaret Bromley, whose job it was to research every potential book, which the NCACL then methodically examined and decided whether to include in the database. It also needed to be culturally sensitive and the Centre was fortunate to have an Aboriginal education leader, Dr Kaye Price AM, who advised us as we journeyed through these books.



A screenshot of a book in the database

"During the process of writing up the books (there were 20 people involved) we decided that Margaret Bromley would write a bibliographic essay to trace seminal books and an overview of the publishing scene to provide an historical perspective. This essay took a long and circuitous route because we wanted to highlight books over time, and we were identifying these as the project proceeded. The essay was revised several times because of Margaret's and my availability, and also the almost 'flood' of books now being published," explained Professor Belle Alderman.

"When we were both 'happy' with this essay, I asked Aboriginal academic Assoc Prof Robert (Bob) Somerville AM, Kurongkurl Katitjin Centre for Australian Indigenous Education and Research at Edith Cowan University to give me his views on the essay. Here is a link to his original comments which we posted on our website. I asked Bob to read and comment on it to ensure it was culturally sensitive. Once he had done this, Bob suggested a few minor changes and approved the content. The flyer promoting this database is also an interesting snapshot into its heritage.

Before you read the article, here is some information about the author Margaret Bromley.

Margaret Bromley

Margaret Bromley's passion for children's literature was fuelled by her own childhood reading, and eventually sharing literature with her own children and grandchildren. As a teacher in the secondary and tertiary sectors Margaret taught children's literature to college and university students. For several years she was a reviewer of Literature for Younger Readers for The Canberra Times. She is a former CBCA Eve Pownall Award Judge and enjoyed the interdisciplinary approach which informs this Award.

Margaret is a researcher on the *Our Mythical Childhood; The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges (OMC) Survey*, developing a database of children's and young adult literature from around the world. A European Research Council Project, in collaboration with the University of Warsaw, Poland, and, in Australia, the University of New England, it gathers stories inspired by the Classical Antiquity of Greece and Rome, and stories inspired by the ancient past of many cultures.

Living in Canberra, Margaret is a volunteer guide at the National Gallery of Australia where she meets children from all over Australia, including Indigenous communities and children who have been home schooled, and The School of the Air.

Margaret's 2012 doctoral thesis "Lost and Invisible: The Representation of Indigeneity in Children's Literature in Tasmania, 1950-2001" examines the ways in which Tasmanian Aboriginality was represented by white writers for their readers.

Margaret continues to be a researcher and contributor to the Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Resource where her contribution is highly valued.

Now you know the background for the essay, and some information about the author, you can read it in full. Enjoy!

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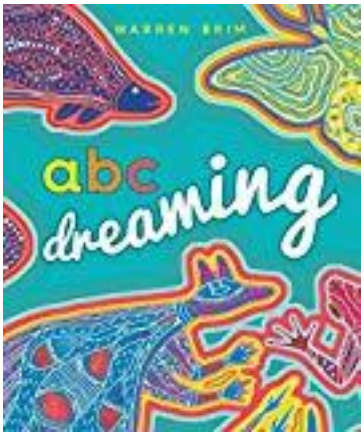
An Overview of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature (NCACL) Database of Books for Young People by or about Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples

By Margaret Bromley



The NCACL database reflects the great diversity of children's books by and about Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Whilst the database covers literature targeted at children from birth through secondary school age, this essay covers books primarily aimed at children from birth through upper primary. However, the classification of age appropriateness is quite fluid. Babies' board books, picture books, school readers and illustrated chapter books as well as longer forms of literature such as novels and graphic novels, are all included. Titles cited in this overview are hyperlinked to the database.

Books in this database are drawn from a range of publishers. They are produced by well-known, as well as small and new publishing houses. Many are available to national and international markets. Some works are self-published and many are designed specifically for local communities, including school readers. All are written and illustrated by Australians.

All database entries offer links to the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework, annotations for the works, as well as teaching resources for each book. The annotations for each entry will facilitate educators and parents and others interested to understand the content and potential audience for the work, as well as appreciate multiple perspectives and explore layers of meaning. The comprehensive curriculum links show how the stories in these books are an entrée into so many disciplines, embracing geography, astronomy, mathematics, history, archaeology, anthropology, spiritual beliefs, social life, bush medicine, linguistics and language as well as art, dance and drama. As an introduction to subject areas later on in a child's life, these books are a celebration of the diversity of Indigenous cultures. Offering Indigenous literature as cross-cultural resources, they are non-gendered and reach out to a wide audience of children and adults, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

The teaching resources collate the rich material produced by publishers and State Education Departments for classroom study as well as academic and popular references to the books' subjects. These annotations and teaching resources take adults and students into another learning space, offering a particular avenue of interest for an audience of adult researchers.

The NCACL database was funded by a grant from the Australian Government, Department of Education, Skills and Employment in 2019. Around this time saw the publication of

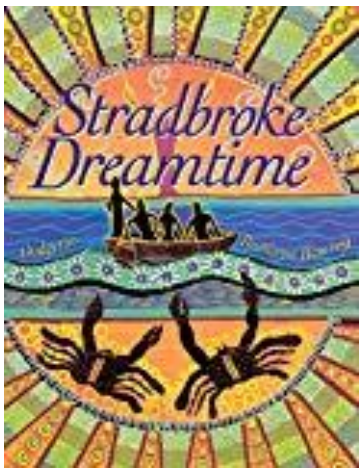
several outstanding writers and illustrators, writing about their people for child readers. Particularly noticeable over the decades is the increasing number of beautifully produced bilingual texts in English and Indigenous languages for children.

Children's books have the power to change attitudes and motivate our curiosity to find out more about the place in which we live. Collectively, books in this database offer the potential to elicit respect and pride in our Indigenous heritage, whilst being a powerful tool in the construction of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples' identity. The stories in these books will resonate worldwide to other readers of literature written by and about First Nations Peoples. It is crucial that our children grow up with a sound knowledge of Indigenous storytelling. This database facilitates access to these stories and ideas; publications which are increasing every year.

Acknowledging an Indigenous world view: creation stories and cultural responsibility

For over 65,000 years Indigenous People have been living on Australia's vast, diverse continent. At the turn of the eighteenth century there were at least 300 nations of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia. Stories of Australia's First Peoples reflect that they have been on this land since the beginning of time; that their Ancestor spirits created the land, seas, rivers, sky and the cosmos, the peoples, languages, animals, plants, seasons, the weather patterns and all the elements of the landscape. Central to this ethos is the belief that the Ancestors provided a clear ethical and moral code: lore that was fundamental to each language group or nation.

There is no standardised orthography of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages throughout Australia. Hence the variations of, for example, Tjukurpa, Tjukurrpa, and Tjakamarra, Jakamarra, Jagamarra are employed in different regions and within one language.i



Different Aboriginal nations have different names for their Dreaming, its meanings and rituals. In Central Australia, Dreaming is called Tjukurpa, and in Broome, Bugar. "The word Dreamtime tends to be used by non-Indigenous people".ii However, we can see that many publications by Indigenous authors also referred to the Dreamtime, such as Oodgeroo's *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (Angus and Robertson, 1972) and, in the Scholastic series, *When the Snake Bites the Sun* (Ashton Scholastic, 1984). David Mowalijari's attribution affirms the intention of this publication: "We want our children

to see the daylight and the sun go down on our land, the home of the Dreamtime, and to live there to their old age and really understand their culture".iii, 1

Tjarany Roughtail (Magabala, 1992), is a bilingual book that explicitly explores and describes Tjukurrpa, through the journey of the Roughtail Lizard. As well as explaining diagrammatically the symbolic language of Lucille Gill's paintings and drawings, it tells the important Dreaming story of the Seven Sisters and the creation of the Pleiades constellation. An encyclopaedic reference book, originally conceived by Magabala Books as support for teachers, this landmark publication presents detailed diagrams of kinship organisation, notes and a comprehensive word list of the Kukatja language.

In his *Kulinmaya! Keep Listening Everybody!* (Allen and Unwin, 2019), Anangu Pitjantjara Yankuntatjara (APY) lands artist and activist Kumanara Williams explains Tjukurpa as "an ongoing, eternal life-giving transformative power that accounts for every aspect of existence. It also refers to the creation ancestors, the country where spirit resides, and to ceremonial designs and songs that represent those beings. The Law that governs daily and ceremonial life emanates from Tjukurpa. There is no word in English that properly conveys the complex concept of Tjukurpa, which is sometimes simplified to 'Dreaming'".iv

Creation stories, or Dreaming stories, are vital to teaching Indigenous children their culture and responsibilities. Dreaming stories tell people how to interact with their environment, with animals and plants. Stories are told at different levels, accessible to different people; sometimes teaching children and adults the consequences of a mistake, eating the wrong food or drinking bad or salty water. Respecting the natural environment also means teaching about its dangers. Dreaming stories also make sure that children obey their parents and elders. Aboriginal paintings express these narratives visually.v "The Dreaming is also the 'everywhen', embracing the past, present and future".vi

Indigenous publisher Magabala Books explains that "Dreamtime stories are different for all the various Aboriginal language groups. No two Creation or Dreamtime stories are the same. They may share similarities but due to belief systems and religious significance, these stories will differ. Landscape and country differ, so will the reason why these features came into being and how they were created. There is no one creation story that fits Australia … any Dreaming story must be attributed to the language group it comes from. That's its precedent. Every story has context. And this context needs to be understood by the education specialists teaching our children. As this will allow the correct information to be passed on and taught".vii

[1] Associate Professor Robert Somerville suggests that the use of the terminology Dreamtime by Aboriginal writers in the 1970s and 1980s was imposed on Aboriginal writers by non-Indigenous publishers who assumed that Aboriginal people were comfortable with this usage. Pers comm, 20/12/21.

Indigenous people have different connections to particular Dreamings, including Dreaming tracks. Dreaming tracks are also called songlines, which mark the route followed by creator beings during the Dreaming. Songline paths are reflected in song cycles, stories, dance, art and ceremonies. Darug woman Jasmine Seymour, author of *Cooee Mittigar: A Story on Darug Songlines* (Magabala, 2019) explains that "A songline is a map of country and helps one feel like they belong".viii

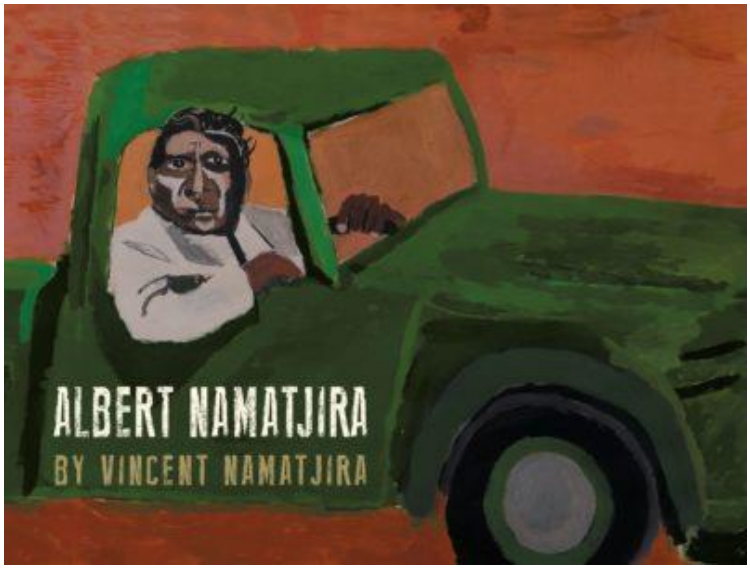
Reading and appreciating illustration and Aboriginal art styles

Books have been many children's first introduction to Aboriginal culture in printed story form. Even young children appreciate that a book is from an Aboriginal source because they recognise the illustration style. Through bilingual Aboriginal/English productions readers are introduced to the aesthetics of modern Indigenous art styles, symbolic and realistic.

"Australia's traditional Indigenous art is now recognised as the oldest continuing artistic art movement in the world. For traditionally oriented Indigenous Australians art is a part of their broader system of religious beliefs that is grounded in the earth itself".ix Aboriginal art pre-dates European figurative art by thousands of years, in the form of cave paintings, rock art, funeral poles, bark painting, sand painting and body painting, all of which are linked to patterns of belief and ritual. Materials used include white, yellow, red and brown coloured ochres and charcoals, mixed with goanna, kangaroo or emu fat, or kangaroo or even human blood. Plant sap was also used.x

Traditional iconography included dot and circle paintings from the Central Desert and Western Desert, paintings that are like maps, as if seen from above, and rarrk paintings, or cross hatching, from Western Arnhem Land at the top end of the Northern Territory.

The works of Albert Namatjira (1902-1959), who painted in a western style, represents the genesis of modern Aboriginal art as he "paved the way for acceptance of Aboriginal art by non-Indigenous Australians".xi Albert Namatjira's artistic legacy has been passed on to his family and his Hermansburg community.



In *Albert Namatjira* (Magabala Books, 2021) writer and artist Vincent Namatjira captures the bewilderment and sadness of his

Haasts Bluff by Albert Namatjira

great-grandfather as a man caught between two worlds, whilst acknowledging him as "one of Australia's most important artists who changed the face of Australia".xii

Albert Namatjira's bright purple and orange watercolour landscapes preceded the Papunya movement in 1971-1972, the Western Desert art movement, whereby senior men invented a new art form. The Papunya artists were making an important statement, striving to regain control of their children's education, and pass on their religion and their land. Here began a "New Wave" of Aboriginal Art, recognisable for its visionary use of colour by Indigenous artists throughout Australia, using the new media of acrylic and enamel paints, a radical departure from the traditional colours of brown, red, and white ochres and charcoal black.

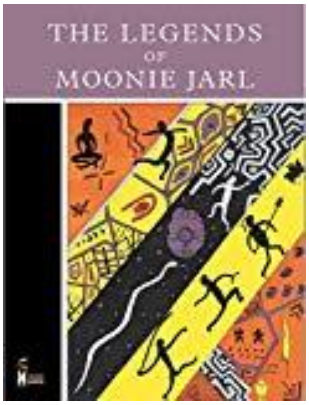
Since the 1970s and 1980s, Aboriginal women have been recognised as artists, initially through Batik making, but also through their traditional work in weaving and necklace making. From 1988 Aboriginal women began to work on canvas as well as printmaking. For example, Sally Morgan, a printmaker of the late 1980s and early 1990s, introduced readers to the iconography of body painting through her book illustration of the 1980s.xiii

The context of writing and publishing in Australia 1950 to 1970s

From the 1950s improvements in post-war standards of living in Australia enhanced educational opportunities and library services, stimulating the production of children's literature. This included a boom in nonfiction books such as popular history, natural history and junior encyclopaedias. During the 1960s and 1970s Australian school curriculum reform began to incorporate history in a social education framework. However, Indigenous people throughout Australia did not have equal access to education and this evolving post-war curriculum.xiv Consequently, the majority of books written and published which embraced Indigeneity for younger readers from the 1950s to the late 1970s were largely written by non-Indigenous writers and produced by large mainstream publishers, often UK based. There was an implicit assumption that the audience of this literature was non-Indigenous.

The year 1960 marked a new era in the depiction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australian Children's literature.xv Under an official state government policies of protection, the earliest being The Aboriginal Protection Act of Victoria, 1869, Aboriginal people were isolated from their communities and forced to assimilate into European

society.xvi Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families and placed with white foster parents or in institutions. Social, political and philosophical changes of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in important and lasting socio-political changes to the lives of Indigenous people. Aboriginal people who had been assimilated into white society argued for Aboriginal land rights and a greater degree of self-management. The granting of citizenship to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 1967 stimulated a new wave of activism by Indigenous people in the 1970s, embracing the modern land rights movement.



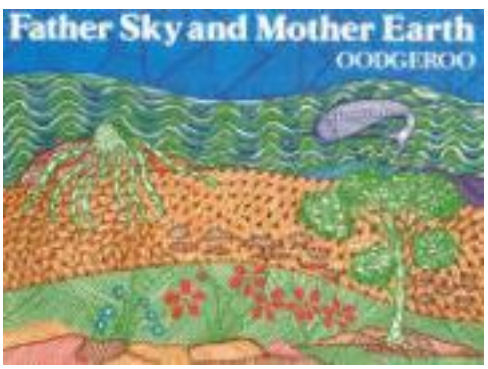
The 1960s saw a noticeable increase in Indigenous authors which filtered through to children's literature. In 1964 the first Indigenous produced book for children, *The Legends of Moonie Jarl*, was produced by educational publisher Jacaranda Press, a small independent publishing house. It was the first Aboriginal children's book in school classrooms. Written by Butchulla siblings Moonie Jarl (Wilf Reeves) and Wandi (Olga Miller) it explains Butchulla culture to their local community, as well as to a wider readership.

Culturally, this publication indicates a significant shift in the reception of traditional Aboriginal story. Publication of *The Legends of Moonie Jarl* empowered "Indigenous Australians to change reader perception of the story genre".xvii Reeves's and Miller's legends are presented through a combination of verbal and visual texts, including story-map and explanatory keys, modes which are iconic to Indigenous children's storytelling.

At the time of publication of *The Legends of Moonie Jarl*, publications of traditional stories were dominated by non-Indigenous retellings, most often without acknowledgement of the original owners of the story, sometimes inappropriately retelling sacred stories. Recognising the significance of this book, the Indigenous Literacy Foundation republished it in 2014.

1970s to 1990s

In 1972, the first published Aboriginal Australian poet, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, published *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (Angus and Robertson, 1972), depicting her Stradbroke Island childhood, accompanied by the traditional stories of her elders. Angus and Robertson's 1992 republication with Bronwyn Bancroft's exquisite illustrations ensured that this book has become a classic of Australian children's literature, as, by then, poet, writer, teacher and activist, Oodgeroo had become an innovator and leader in the Aboriginal community, a role model of success for her people. In 1981, at the height of her environmental activism, Oodgeroo published *Father Sky and Mother Earth* (Jacaranda Press, 1981), a modern creation story that tells of the environmental impact of the arrival of the "first



Human Animals" (Oodgeroo, 1981). Oodgeroo's story demonstrates an evolving environmental conscience as the Human Animals recognise their mistakes.

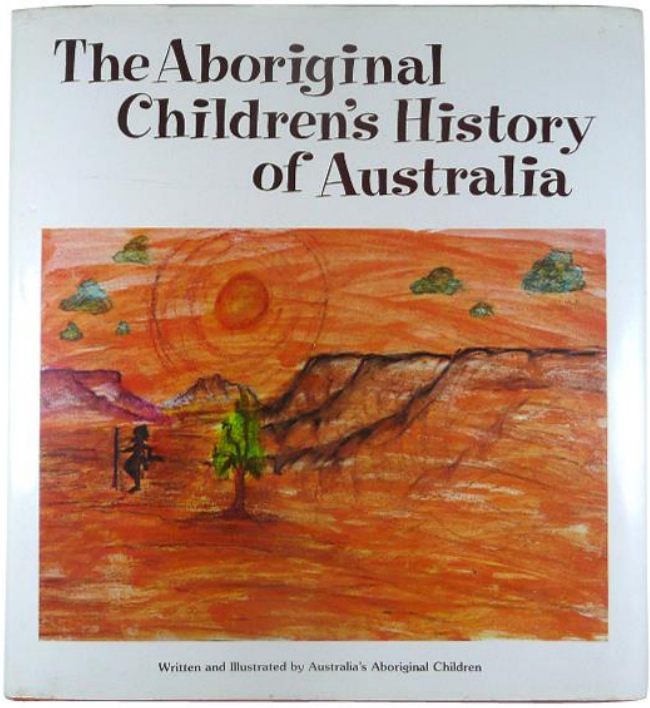
However, in mainstream society Torres Strait Islanders were even more invisible than mainland Aboriginal People. At the request of the Islanders themselves, Margaret Lawrie, a non-Indigenous health worker and teacher collected and translated *Myths and Legends of Torres Strait* (University of Queensland Press, 1970), which was subsequently rewritten for children as *Tales from Torres Strait* (University of Queensland Press, 1972). Lawrie commissioned watercolours from several Torres Strait Islander men for this book. Motivated by a desire to "help present an accurate picture of the culture of Torres Strait Islanders and foster a pride in their own identity", this publication addresses "a fading knowledge of the old traditional tales, a lack of a written language, increasing contact with the outside world, dispersal of many islanders to mainland Australia, all were making it difficult for the old myths to survive".xviii

Margaret Lawrie's documentation of the history, language and culture of Torres Strait Islanders in *Tales from Torres Strait* is a seminal work of Indigenous literature for children and adults alike, exemplifying cultural authenticity through collaboration with Indigenous storytellers and artists.xix Margaret Lawrie's documentation of Torres Strait Islander genealogies of the 17 families she visited from the 1950s to 1970s are used extensively for family history research and Native Title claims.xx

***Kiuyku Mabigal Waii & Sobai* as it appears in the database**

Two decades later, Aidan Laza, Elder of the Wakaid people on Badu Island, retells the story of warrior brothers Waii and Sobai in *Kuiyku Mabaigal Waii & Sobai* (Magabala Books, 1998) in bilingual Kala Lagaw Ya language and English, translated and illustrated by renowned artist Alick Tipoti. Depicting the violent warfare before the arrival of the London Missionaries, Tipoti's lino prints portray legendary heroes in their traditional ceremonial feathered dari/dhoeri headdresses and masks, brandishing weapons of war and various traditional artifacts, all used in Badu dance and ceremony.

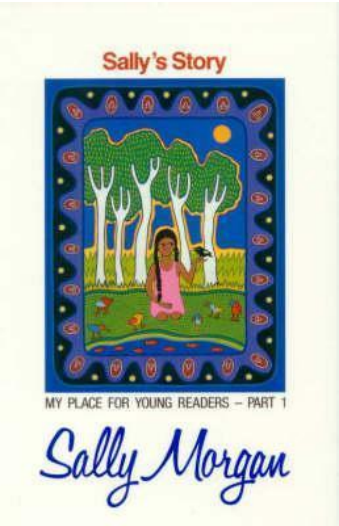
Djugurba: Tales from the Spirit Time (Australian National University Press, 1974) represents the first time a group of young Aboriginal people, all trainee teachers at Kormilda College in Darwin, wrote and illustrated some of their own stories. As well as promoting Indigenous writing and illustration, speech patterns and value systems, these publications offer authentic coverage of issues acceptable to Aboriginal communities.



Many of the books in this NCACL database broke new ground, giving voice to Aboriginal children and with children as artists and authors. They are authentic children's narratives.

The Aboriginal Children's History of Australia (Rigby, 1977), written and illustrated by Aboriginal children from remote communities, encompasses their Dreamtime stories, while simultaneously coming to terms with colonisation, their traditional lands being taken over by missions and cattle stations. It represents children who now live in diverse areas. "They are going to school, and learning and playing just like other Australian children but they are conscious of being Aboriginal. They are inheritors of a rich cultural past that lives on today and that determines the way they see and think about the happenings around them".xxi

In the 1970s the production of children's books with Indigenous content underwent a dramatic change. From books written by non-Indigenous people who lived in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to teachers inspired by their experiences of teaching in remote communities, there emerged deeper cultural exchanges between writer and illustrator, and greater collaboration with community members, especially the children. Examples of this are the works produced by the Maningrida Literature Production Centre, written in parallel English and Ndjebban text, which are now available online in the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages. In the mid-1970s, at the request of the Papunya people, whilst teaching at Papunya High School, Billy Marshall Stoneking collected and collaborated in the writing of Pintupi/Luritja language stories told or written by local people in a bilingual reading programme for children and adults. *Stories of Obed Raggett* (Alternative Publishing Cooperative, 1980) is written, translated and illustrated by Aranda storyteller Obed Raggett, and edited by Stoneking who describes the origin of the stories as well as Obed Raggett's role in his community.



Meanwhile, with changing societal attitudes in the 1970s and the rise of land rights movements, city based Indigenous artists confronted the issues of dispossession, dislocation and genocide, all of which had a significant influence on children's book publishing.

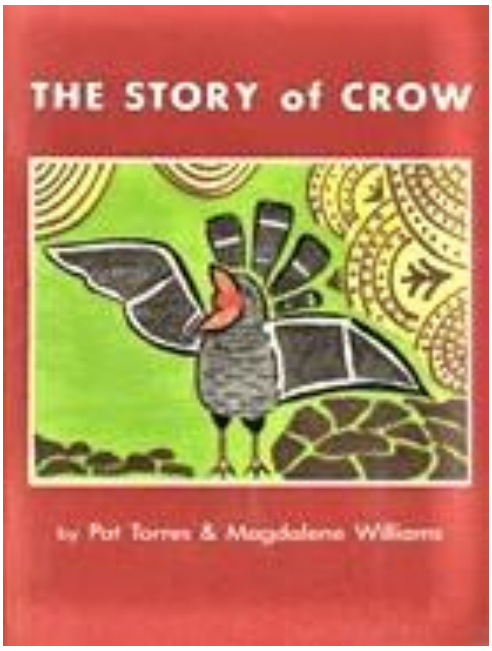
The publication of Perth based Palku/Nyamal artist/writer Sally Morgan's *My Place* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987),

subsequently adapted for children as *Sally's Story* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990), unearths the hidden story of the author's Aboriginal heritage, and her consequent reconnection and identification with her Aboriginal culture and community. This work provided a new voice for Indigenous writers for children and adults alike.

1980s – 1990s, landmark changes in publishing

In the 1980s the precedent of children's book illustrator artists such as Jimmy Pike, Bronwyn Bancroft, Sally Morgan and Arone Meeks, all printmakers, showed Aboriginal communities that their art could provide a sustainable income. The success of Jimmy Pike's artwork represented an important step in the recognition of traditional cultural imagery within mainstream Australia.xxii Through children's book illustration, Indigenous artists are telling their stories.

Australia's leading Indigenous publishing house Magabala Books, based in Broome, Western Australia, began in 1984 with the objective of "restoring, preserving and maintaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures … to keep culture strong and protect cultural and intellectual property",xxiii thereby assuming that Indigenous People control their own stories, and that the benefits are realised by their own people.

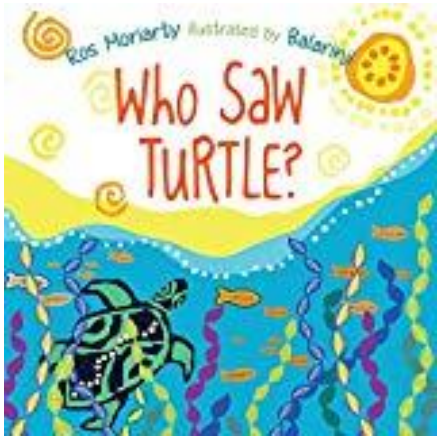


"Magabala's beginnings were part of the wider movement of Aboriginal self-determination occurring in the 1980s - a time when the nation was only just beginning to reveal its interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture".xxiv An early contributor to Magabala's publishing list is Pat Torres - a writer, illustrator, educator and community leader, from three Indigenous groups, the Jabirr Jabirr from the north of Broome, the Nyul Nyul from the Beagle Bay area, and the Yawaru people from Broome. Motivated by a desire to create books for local children, community and story, she argues that previous material was essentially aimed at adults, suggesting that she was inspired by "a great gap in materials for children about Aboriginal people, about Aboriginal culture and education … It helps to strengthen your identity more if you have your language intact".xxv Pat Torres' and Magdalene Williams' *The Story of Crow: A Nyul Nyul Story* (Magabala Books, 1988) is a Ngarlen West Australian Dreaming story written in a parallel text of Nyul Nyul and English rhyming verse.

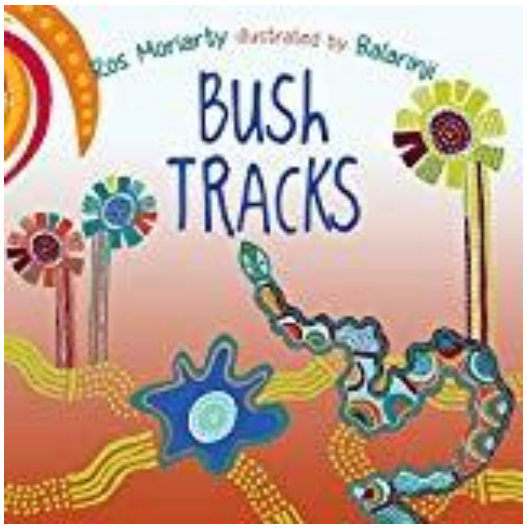
Going for Oysters (Omnibus, 1991) by Jeanie Adams, also published in Wik Mungan language, is gleaned from the author's long term residence in the Aurukun community on Cape York. Recognising that Indigenous children need books in which they could see themselves and their communities reflected, Jeanie Adams founded Black Ink Press in 2000,

to show “the everyday adventures of ordinary black kids … They need to find a hero to identify with, someone who encourages obedience with the skills and laws of those societies … They need books that look cool, the right shape, that are good to hold, not too conspicuous, fit in the school bag or jean’s pocket”xxvi. Celebrating ten years of Black Ink press, Jeanie Adams states, “We … turn stories into books and artists into illustrators”.xxvii

Embracing Yanyuwa culture through marriage, Ros Moriarty and her husband John established Balarinji in 1983, a Sydney based design studio and small publishing house. Ros Moriarty’s enterprise demonstrates how art work leads to appreciating a culture and facilitates crossing cultures, thereby incorporating Aboriginal art into our conscience. Balarinji’s work is visible in its decoration of Qantas Airplanes. Aboriginal art has become integral to Australian national identity.xxviii



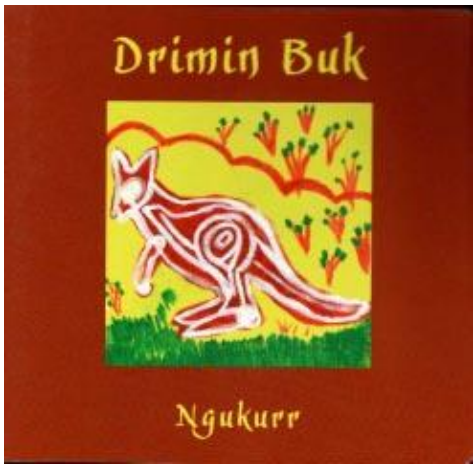
Ros Moriarty also founded Indi Kindi in 2011, an early learning programme, integrating health and wellbeing. Her publications include *Who Saw Turtle?* (Allen and Unwin, 2017) with its repetitive sentences of “Who saw Turtle?”, and *Bush Tracks* (Allen and Unwin, 2017) a bilingual story in Yanyuwa language spoken by families in Borroloola, N.T., comprising conversational and everyday language. Thematically the book shows the ways our native plants and animals can sustain us, demonstrating the value of looking after our environment. *Bush Tracks* highlights “the importance of preserving Aboriginal language and the power of story across all languages and culture”.xxix



Other smaller Indigenous publishing houses that have made a difference to the publishing scene are Working Title Press, founded in 1997, which later transferred to HarperCollins in 2017, after publishing some important works. More recently, Children’s Ground was established in 2011, specialising in bilingual works. Mainstream publishing houses, Penguin, Scholastic, Fremantle Press and Allen & Unwin are long term promoters of children’s books by and about Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The 2020 Children’s Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards included seven books for young readers by or in collaboration with Indigenous writers. This is strong recognition of the quality of works published as well as the excellent outcomes of community and organisations offering mentorships and mentoring programs.

Early literacy programs

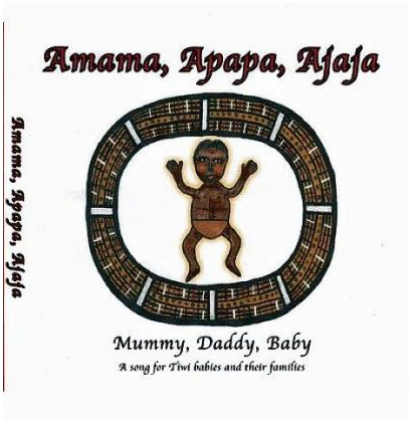
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have always known the importance of storytelling and singing to their babies and children. Recognising the significance of acknowledging parents as the first teachers of their children, in 2009, educators in the Northern Territory working with a group of mothers established Families as First Teachers. This program strives to make reading and literacy a culturally relevant experience for Indigenous children. Young mothers in play groups are the authors of a lively series of board books. As well as encouraging parents to read to their children from a very young age, these board books depicting unique Australian animals are interactive and informative. They appeal to a wide audience, including the more advanced reader who is reading to a very young child.



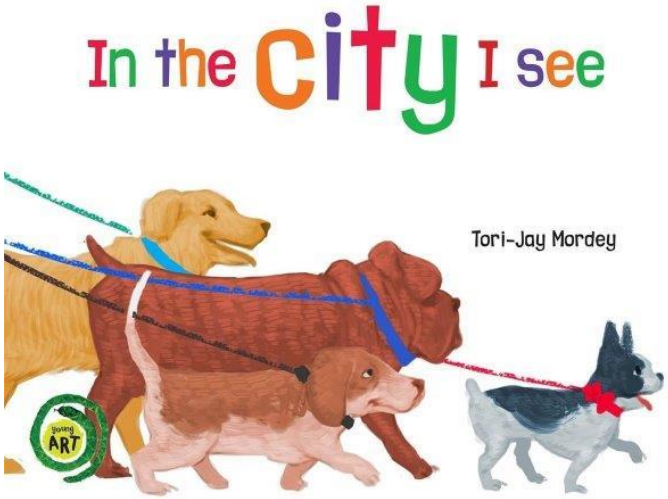
Board books can offer multiple layers of complexity. Some include CDs, and a mirror so that the young reader can see themselves reflected and thereby feel included in the story.

Introducing children to the alphabet and diverse Australian wildlife, *Drimin Buk: Ngukurr* (Northern Territory Government, 2013) incorporates seven Aboriginal languages, as well as Kriol, "the lingua franca of thousands of people across the Roper River Region".xxx *Let's Go Hunting in Alekarenge* (Northern Territory Library, Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2012) describes foods in multiple languages.

Established in 2010, the Indigenous Literacy Foundation publications are specifically designed to encourage understanding of Indigenous culture and community life, as well as "the responsibilities that come with our work in these areas".xxxi Stories in group story time encourage physical activity. *Can You Dance?* (Indigenous Literacy Foundation, 2018) is one of many innovative books, offering kinaesthetic reading opportunities, through dance and song, inviting children to imitate certain animals and iconic movements of traditional Aboriginal dance, bringing their Dreamtime to life. Accompanied by a CD, *Amama, Apapa, Ajaja = Mummy, Daddy, Baby A Song for Tiwi Babies and Their Families* (Northern Territory



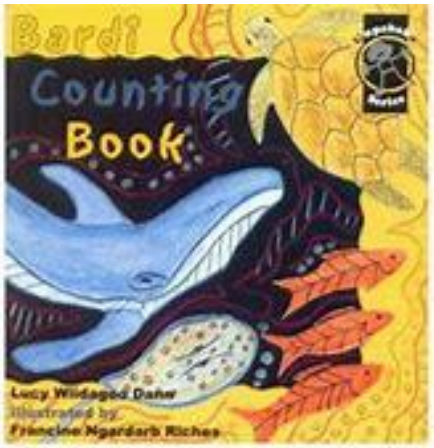
Government, 2010) introduces Tiwi Culture including singing, dancing and storytelling, while promoting the importance of language and reading in the early years. Community activities such as smoking ceremonies, welcoming new babies onto country, and bush medicine knowledge are incorporated into stories, simultaneously espousing community values of kindness and selflessness.



A board book with a city setting is *In the City I See* (Magabala Books, 2018), depicting inner city bustle and diversity of people, activities and architectural features. Aboriginal buskers perform against tall buildings sporting three flags, Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait, together with an illuminated sign for Bangarra Dance, Australia's premier Indigenous dance company. All entice young readers to engage with simple text and lively illustration.

These are cross generational reading experiences. Many of these books highlight the role of grandparents and elders in imparting knowledge of Family, Culture and Land to their grandchildren. Activities such as tool making, hunting, cooking and camping are all linked to Aboriginal Australians' interpretation of astronomy, science and maths. On the surface, *Bardi Counting Book* (Magabala Books, 2000) is a counting book for babies, but combined with teaching resources, it shows how the Aboriginal counting system works. Cumulatively these books for the very young have resulted in a reflection of new approaches to support early learning for young Indigenous children.

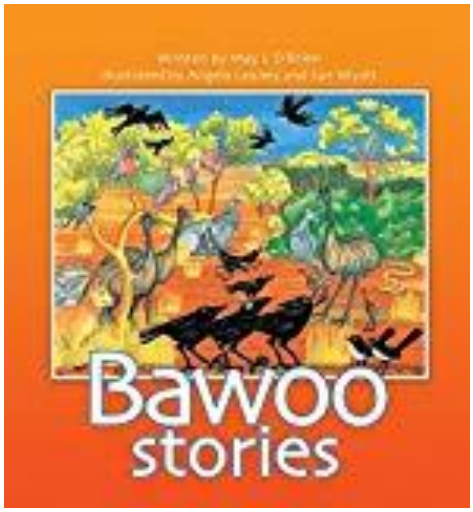
The geography of Australia is widely varied as are the cultures and communities of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Stories, art and community languages are embraced by bilingual and multilingual texts. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attend school in diverse environments across Australia, including remote, rural and urban communities. Many Torres Strait Islander People now live outside of the islands. Indigenous children can now find their own languages included in school classrooms and libraries, which demonstrates their value in the curriculum content of their school. The NCACL database often profiles these various communities through the teaching resources.



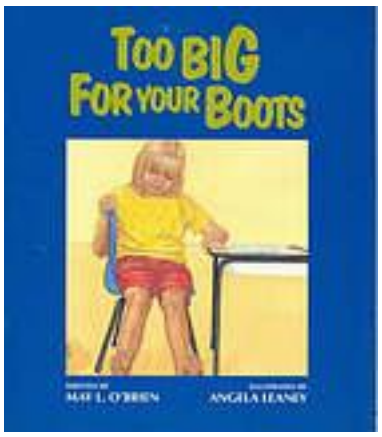
Keeping Languages and Culture alive

"Language tells us who we are. Language reminds us of our responsibilities within our society and the proper way to do things. Language reminds us of where we have come from. Language makes us feel proud and strong and helps us to understand, so we can know." *Jilinya: Spirit Woman from the Sea*, Introduction. (Kimberley Language Resources Centre, 2003).

Apart from direct translations and bilingual or multilingual texts, there are many innovative ways of incorporating Indigenous Languages into story. Full sentences in Aboriginal language, followed by an English translation, are common. In some books, Language is incorporated throughout, as well as in a glossary. Incorporating a word reference section on the page, or an index of word meanings at the back of the book, reflect some of the creative ways that Indigenous languages are being represented and taught through children's literature, especially when combined with colourful illustration.



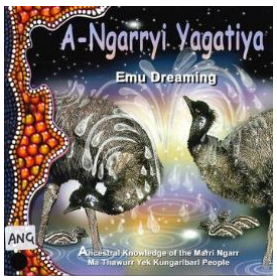
May L O' Brien (1933-2020) was the first Aboriginal woman in Western Australia to gain a tertiary qualification in 1953. From her lived experience as a child removed from her family and raised in a mission, and subsequently as a teacher, she instigated the establishment of Aboriginal committees on education throughout Western Australia. From 1990 she published stories for children, "unique to this location" that help "today's children understand and appreciate the Aboriginal past as well as the present".xxxii *The Kangaroos Who Wanted to Be People* and *Why The Emu Can't Fly* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1992) are examples of her *Bawoo Stories*, traditional teaching stories written in bi-lingual text. Whereas her Badudu series which include *Smartie Pants* and *Too Big For Your Boots* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1994) are based on her own and others' experience of growing up on a mission, yet the themes explored are quite contemporary. In all her stories Wongutha language is used naturalistically in conversation and translated in the glossary of pronunciation at the end of the book. May L. O'Brien's 2009 republished edition of *The Legend of The Seven Sisters: A traditional Aboriginal Story from Western Australia* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2009) also footnotes the topography of the landscape on which this important creation story takes place.



Written in the tradition of Aboriginal teaching stories, *Dalba Larrakia Baby* (Northern Territory Library, 2010) aims to "tell stories through pictures to keep Larrakia language strong and culture alive".xxxiii The book is targeted at both Larrakia and non-Larrakia speakers, as the opening page features a language and phonetics table for the animals, plants and relationships that are depicted through images and words throughout the book.

CDs and talking books have become integral to communicating stories in language. Batchelor Press were pioneers in the production of books primarily for Indigenous Australian students living in remote communities for whom English is their second or third language. A lively example is *Muli Kanybubi Tjikjuk Kawuny Na Yagatiya: The Two Mermaids Dreaming Place* (Batchelor Press, 2003), a bilingual book in Marri Ngarr and English, with an accompanying CD in Marri Ngarr. The Foreword of the book suggests that "The information

in this story relates directly to the law and spirituality of the Marr Ngarr people and carries many levels of meaning" and that the translations are not direct translations, "but are intended to allow readers an understanding of the story's open meaning".xxxiv



Another bilingual Marri Ngarr/ English story, *A-Ngarryi Yagatiya Emu Dreaming: Ancestral Knowledge of the Marri Ngarr Ma Thawurr Yek Kungarlbal People* (Bachelor Press, 2003) also embraces these different layers of meaning as the Emu family moves through Country, finding and sharing bush tucker, until they reach their Dreaming place, Ngarnmarriyanga.

Older children can be engaged in the ways that books contribute to the preservation of Australian Indigenous languages for future generations and appreciate why this is important in helping foster connections to Culture. *Winin: Why the Emu Cannot Fly* (Magabala Books, 1993) is a bilingual story written by Nyul Nyul woman, Mary Carmel Charles. Aged 82 when she wrote this, she was the oldest Nyul Nyul speaker at the time. Aboriginal elders are becoming actively involved in the preservation and publication of Indigenous languages.

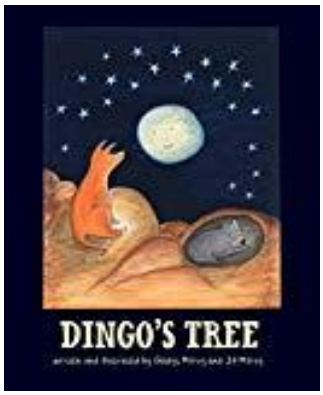
The revitalisation of Indigenous languages, including Aboriginal English, are integral to the strengthening of identity and Culture, associations with country and the recuperation of traditional stories. Jeanie Adams of Black Ink Press argues strongly that the revitalisation and retention of Indigenous languages in a written form is essential for the next generation as well as "strengthening Australia's cultural identity as a multi-lingual nation".xxxv

Indigenous ways of looking at the environment

Australian Indigenous culture encompasses a deep spirituality that embraces an abiding relationship with the land. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples view a person as belonging to or being owned by the land. Indigenous People need to travel over the land at regular intervals, to revitalise their cultural connections. Aboriginal peoples' symbiotic relationship with the environment includes the importance of caring for Country, which in turn will care for us. Throughout their stories there is a sense of hope that incorporates ideals of nurturing, maintaining and re-establishment of the environment.

Over the decades, the books in this NCACL database present topics pertinent to Australia's diverse and dramatic climatic variations; those of severe drought, bushfires, pollution and endangered species. Understanding the climate, reading the seasons, and knowing when rains and floods are coming are all important information told through stories such as *Big Rain Coming* (Roland Harvey Books, 1999) and *Big Fella Rain* (Magabala Books, 2017).

Sea Country (Magabala Books, 2021) reveals the respect and connection to Country of Aunty Patsy Cameron's and her family as descendants of the Pairebeene /Trawlwoolway clan in Tasmania. Aboriginal seasons and weather patterns are important information for the children, telling them when it is time for the mutton birds, *yolla*, to fly home, when to find wild fruits and how to collect nautilus shells to make necklaces on Flinders Island.



These books are a gateway for discussion on climate change, protecting the environment and wildlife, as well as the history and culture of peoples, and the impact of colonisation. *Dingo's Tree* (Magabala Books, 2011) depicts the impacts of lands decimated by mining, drought and cyclone. A cautionary tale, it also tells of "how mining destroys the land, but has ongoing and wide ranging repercussions".xxxvi

The past and the present are entwined in *Wilam: A Birrarung Story* (Black Dog Books, 2019) that seamlessly integrates Woiwurrung language into the English text, depicting the journey of the Birrarung, the Yarra River. *Wilam: A Birrarung Story* sends a message of hope that the river is reclaimable, that children can do something to help save the environment, and that they can take their parents along with them.

Traditional cautionary tales depicting the transformation of animals and the landscape also offer an appreciation of the natural world. *Gurangatch and Mirragan* (Macmillan Australia, 1991) is a Dreaming story of the Gandangarra people of NSW. Adapted from a 1908 retelling by surveyor K.H. Mathews, this story was cited in the Gandangarra land claims, enacting their Native Title Legislation.

Previously hidden histories

The meanings of Acknowledgement of Country, Stolen Generations, and concepts such as discrimination, racism and reconciliation are all complex issues surrounding Aboriginal identity. These are given voice and understanding through storytelling. Indigenous People across Australia continue to experience the ongoing consequences of colonisation. Breaking the silence of the past and exposing previously hidden histories means understanding that the subjects of these stories are also living descendants. They are child and adult readers who are interested in "stories of their past that help them gain a sense of self, belonging and a sense of history".xxxvii These narratives, often non-linear, incorporating maps, artwork, poetry with biography or autobiography, introduce new ways of reading history in the classroom.

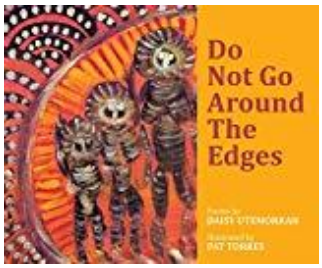
Since the 1970s and 1980s the hidden histories of frontier conflict have begun to be more widely told. Two stories for young readers that recognise the strength of Aboriginal resistance fighters who avenged the coloniser land grabbers and white bosses are those of *Multuggerah and the Sacred Mountain* (Boolarong Press, 2019) and *Jandamarra* (Allen and Unwin, 2013). In the 1840s Multuggerah, a noted warrior and resistance fighter of the Jagerra Nation in Queensland's Lockyer Valley, united a force of 1,200 warriors against the white squatters. His heroic efforts exemplified the ongoing victories of Aboriginal people in repossessing their land and resources. Fifty years later, in the 1890s Jandamarra was a young warrior caught between two worlds, working with the whites while choosing to remain loyal to his people. The story of his engagement in the violent frontier wars over land and property opens up discussion of his complex role and the decisions he made. Jandamarra died as a hero defending his country, and for the Bunuba people, his spirit lives on.

Affirmation of the Indigenous presence on the Australian continent and, by extension, the traditional rights to land ownership thematically percolate through many of the entries in the database. Personal stories become entwined with political activism, often through autobiographical picture books that cross all ages.

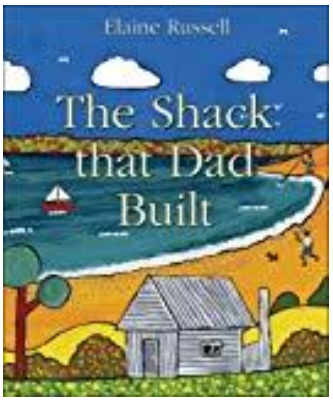
Singer-songwriters Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody, with illustrator Peter Hudson, celebrate the political history of Aboriginal land rights in *From Little Things Big Things Grow* (One Day Hill, 2013). This is the story of the Wave Hill walk-off in 1966, when Aboriginal stockmen, led by Gurindji man Vincent Lingari, resulted in the granting of Native Title to the Gurindji people after eight years of strike action. Gurindji language is spoken only by older people in the community, and is therefore endangered. The inclusion of a Gurindji interpretation of the song is a reminder to young people of the significance of keeping the language and history alive.

History and injustice has permeated all aspects of Aboriginal people's lives. *Boomerang and Bat: The Story of the Real First Eleven* (Allen and Unwin, 2016) reveals the racism faced by the Indigenous Australian cricket team, both within Australia and in the United Kingdom, including renaming the players with paternalistic nicknames such as Mosquito and King Cole. The protagonist in *Alfred's War* (Magabala Books, 2018) tells how he and his fellow

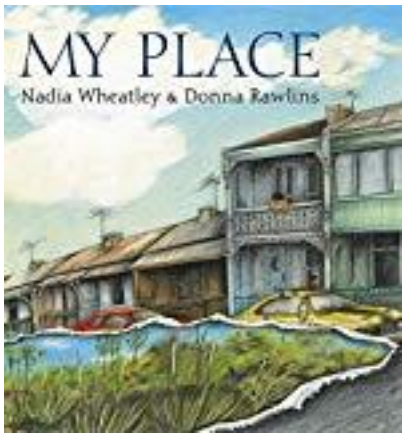
Indigenous World War 1 veterans are denied the rights accorded to their white Australian counterparts, resulting in destitution and homelessness for many of them.



The Policy of Protection and its consequences on the Stolen Generations are commonly integrated in Aboriginal elders' retellings of their childhoods. Historical contexts depict the displacement and damage to family structures. As an example, Daisy Utemorrah's *Do Not Go Around the Edges* (Magabala Books, 1990) shows the influence of the mission and Christian ideology on her childhood and family members. This picture book presents Daisy's personal story, intertwined with her poetry of Dreaming stories, and visualised through Pat Torres' rich illustrations, prompting the reader to look for multiple perspectives.



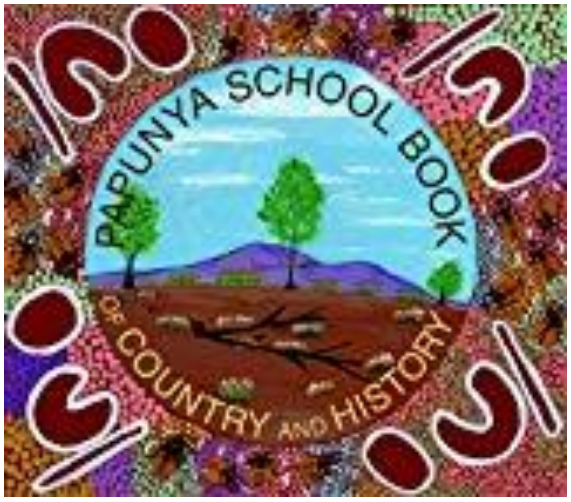
Too Big for Your Boots (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1994) is another book depicting the challenges and humiliations faced by Aboriginal children growing up on remote missions in the 1930s and 1940s. Living alongside the La Perouse Mission, in *The Shack That Dad Built* (Little Hare Books, 2004) Elaine Russell describes urban Indigenous life by the coast in the 1950s through her childhood memories at La Perouse where her father built a dirt floor shack out of bits of tin from rubbish tips.



Nadia Wheatley's *My Place* (Walker Books, 1987) presents an exploration of Australian history from 1788 to 1988. Focussing on an inner west Sydney street, the narrative is told through the eyes of the culturally diverse children who inhabited the street over the two hundred years of white coloniser settlement. The story opens with Laura, a ten-year-old Aboriginal girl, pointing out "Our house is the one with the flag in the window. Tony says it shows we're on Aboriginal land, but I think it means the colour of the earth back home". The book's exploration of "my place" as integral to Aboriginal identity concludes by returning to 1788 with young Barangaroo who tells us that, "I belong to this place…my grandmother says we've always belonged to this place … For ever and ever". As the 1998 Winner of The Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers this book has become a classic of Australian children's literature, inviting multilayered readings of text, maps and illustration. Recognising "Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of Australia", the 2008 republication references the Mabo and Wik judgements, through a timeline of historical events.

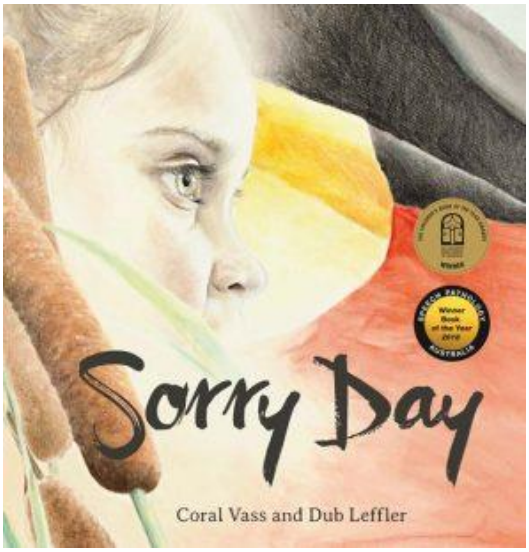
The 1992 High Court's Mabo land rights decision overruled the myth of terra nullius and has irrevocably changed the meaning of landscape and identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Bruce Pascoe's multi award winning *Young Dark Emu* (Magabala Books, 2019) presents a powerful argument debunking the notion of terra nullius that positions

Aboriginal people as nomadic hunter gatherers. This book offers another way of looking at history, landscape, environment and culture that is accessible to young readers.



The publication of *Papunya School Book of Country and History* (Allen and Unwin, 2001) reflects over a decade of activism on the part of the Papunya community who became so dissatisfied with their children's western-based education that they boycotted the school. This is the story of how Anangu from five different language groups of the central desert region of Australia came together to live at Papunya. The community's insistence on 'two way learning: Anangu way and western way' is "an exemplary story of resistance and change"xxxviii that demonstrates the need for revisiting history books as a dynamic segue to reconciliation.

The impact of colonisation on the people of the Maralinga Tjaruta lands is explored in *Maralinga : The Anangu Story* (Allen & Unwin, 2009). Their culture was ravaged by white invasion, and ultimately, the British testing of nuclear bombs from 1956 to 1963. This sensitively curated story graphically depicts the effects of nuclear fallout on Anangu people who were forcibly removed from their traditional lands and re-settled at Yalata. It is a story of survival and renewal: "We have told it for our children, our grandchildren and their children. We have told it for you".xxxix

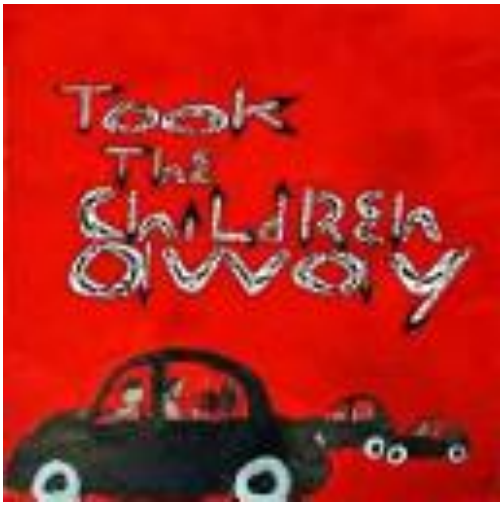


Many of the books in the Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Peoples database challenge previous ways of thinking about land, identity and belonging. They promote robust conversations within our communities as well as foster awareness of Reconciliation. One book which introduces very young children to the journey and meaning of Reconciliation in Australia, including the 2008 National Apology to the Stolen Generations, is *Sorry Day* (National Library of Australia, 2018). The multimodal narrative interweaves the stories of real people and their participation in real events while explaining Indigenous history to a young audience.

Teaching resilience: completing the circle of life

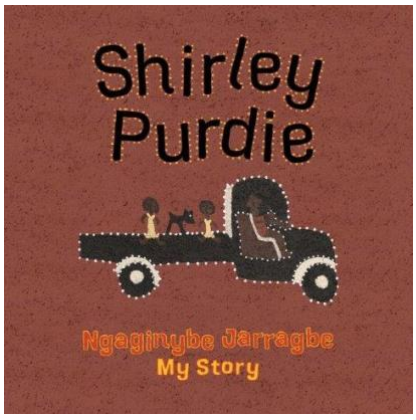
"**People like me think in circles. If that circle gets broken people don't know what to do, people get confused"** (Archie Roach, 2020, *Took the Children Away*).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are constantly reminded that their people have been dispossessed of their land, their languages, their culture, their families, through a form of genocide.

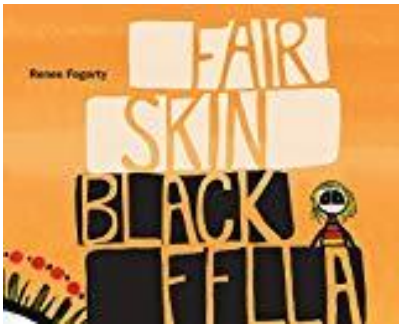


Took the Children Away (Simon and Schuster, 2020) is the picture book version of Archie Roach's moving and powerful song, telling his personal story as a member of the Stolen Generations who were forcibly removed from their Aboriginal families, a legacy that lasted until the 1980s. It is a story of healing that evokes the healing power of music. Archie tells, "I didn't know my mother and father, but I have stories about them. That is why we have stories, to let us know who we are and where we came from, to join us up, connect us, to complete the circle".xl Ruby Hunter's naïve illustrations dramatise the events for younger readers. Finally, "One sweet day all the children came back" offers the promise of reconnection and renewal. Archie Roach pertinently reminds us that the experience of taking children away from their families is also shared by other First Nations People.

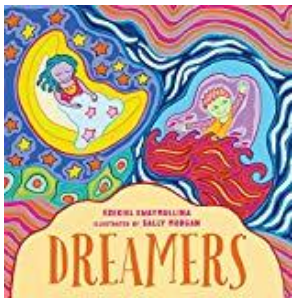
Archie Roach's experience of his stolen childhood and lost identity is shared by many Indigenous people whose stories are represented in this database. Kunyi June Anne McInerney's *Kunyi* (Magabala Books, 2021), tells of the cruel treatment meted out by the missionaries at the Oodnadatta Children's Home after she and her siblings were taken from her Yakuntajara people when she was four years old in 1955. Kunyi's honest and detailed narrative is uplifted by her lavish illustrations in bright purples, oranges and reds. Sent to a foster home at the age of nine to seventeen, Kunyi subsequently studied to become a nurse and a midwife. Kunyi's artistic talents offer a pathway to healing and reconciliation, as do the works of Gija woman, Shirley Purdie.



Renowned artist, Shirley Purdie, in her *Ngaginybe Jarragbe : My Story* (Magabala Books, 2020) paints her Country through her childhood stories of hunting, food gathering and family relationships. Translated into Gija, Shirley Purdie's story is a simple conversational telling. Shirley's voice could have remained marginalised, as she tells of her teenage experience as an overworked maid on Mabel Downs Station. But through the encouragement of family and Warmun community role models, she became an artist.



The NCACL database reflects the ongoing recuperation of lost histories and difficult pasts. They include thematic treatments of complex issues about identity. Society's preconceived ideas regarding the use of skin colour to determine Aboriginal identity is interrogated through the perspectives of Aboriginal children's experiences. *Tell Me Why* (Magabala Books, 2004) is narrated by a fair skinned child in an Aboriginal family. *Fair Skin Black Fella* (Magabala Books, 2010) also opens up discussion of prejudice, of how it can occur, not only between but within cultures.



Artists' realistic depictions of a variety of people of diverse physical appearances, based on lived experience, are important to cultural identity. *Dreamers* (Fremantle Press, 2014) offers a celebration of inclusiveness through the children's appearances. Here is another story to be read aloud as an interactive performance.

Collectively, these books reflect the knowledge of Aboriginality as based on connection to Family, Country, and spirituality, that there are different ways of being Aboriginal. Aboriginality is also constructed through interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.xli The NCACL database offers a variety of teaching resources to support discussion about race, as well as enhancing self-esteem in children. Stories of *Just a Little Brown Dog* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2014), about a puppy who feels he is being excluded, and *My Girragundji* (Allen & Unwin, 2018), told from the perspective of a boy who is being bullied at school, are multilayered and transcend the boundaries of the younger reading audience.

Conclusion, disturbing the silence, breaking new ground

Overall, the NCACL database reflects the evolving genre of Indigenous literature into mainstream reading cultures for children and adults. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples these books offer an entrée for children and young people re-connecting with their community and cultural practices, learning and affirming their cultural heritage. Collectively they contribute towards an understanding and deeper appreciation of Indigenous spiritual values, particularly connection to the land and Country. They are cultural and political commentaries that encourage non-Indigenous children and adults to read in new and different ways, offering new ways of looking at history, landscape, environment and Culture. Learning through children's books provides a dynamic avenue to Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems.

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