

Indigenous peoples: Junior Primary English, Years 3 & 4

Stories to unite us

This unit of work, *Stories to unite us*, allows students to explore aspects of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, using the picture books *You and Me: Our Place* and *Stories from the Billabong*.

You and Me: Our Place written by Leonie Norrington and illustrated by Dee Huxley highlights the connections between young and old Aboriginal Australians, and between cultures. *Stories from the Billabong* is a collection of traditional Aboriginal stories from the Yorta Yorta people, retold by James Vance Marshall and illustrated by Francis Firebrace.

Focus

This unit provides opportunities to explore the ideas that:

- People are precious and unique.
- Aboriginal Australians have an oral story telling tradition.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are represented throughout Australia.

Australian Curriculum links

The general capabilities emphasised in the unit of work, *Stories to unite us* are literacy, information and communication technology (ICT) competence, critical and creative thinking and intercultural understanding. This unit addresses the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

The Australian Curriculum: English is built around the three interrelated strands of Language, Literature and Literacy. This unit of work is based on the premise that literacy knowledge underpins the success of all learning areas across the curriculum. This unit of work has an emphasis on creative work and the strands of Language and Literature.

Content

Students will be provided opportunities through the activities to engage with aspects of the following content descriptions.

Language Language variation and change	Understand that languages have different written and visual communication systems, different oral traditions and different ways of constructing meaning (ACELA1475)
Language for interaction	Understand that social interactions influence the way people engage with ideas and respond to others for example when exploring and clarifying the ideas of others, summarising students' own views and reporting them to a larger group (ACELA1488)
Literature Literature and context	Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways, and speculate on the authors' reasons (ACELT1594) Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships (ACELT1602)

<p>Examining literature</p>	<p>Discuss the nature and effects of some language devices used to enhance meaning and shape the reader's reaction, including rhythm and onomatopoeia in poetry and prose (ACELT1600)</p>
<p>Interpreting, analysing and evaluating</p>	<p>Identify the audience and purpose of imaginative, informative and persuasive texts (ACELY1678)</p>
<p>Creating literature</p>	<p>Create texts that adapt language features and patterns encountered in literary texts, for example characterisation, rhyme, rhythm, mood, music, sound effects and dialogue (ACELT1791)</p>
<p>Literacy Texts in context</p>	<p>Identify the point of view in a text and suggest alternative points of view (ACELY1675)</p>

NSW K–6 English Syllabus

Syllabus outcomes	Syllabus indicators
TS 2.2 Interacts effectively in groups and pairs, adopting a range of roles, uses a variety of media and uses listening strategies for different situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listens to oral stories and responds appropriately • Recognises and responds to different viewpoints in a discussion • Recognises use of voice tone and gesture in adding meaning to storytelling
TS2.3 Identifies the effect of purpose and audience on spoken texts and distinguishes between different varieties of English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises different purposes for using oral language • Discusses differences between spoken and written language
RS2.5 Reads independently a wide range of texts of increasingly challenging topics and justifies own interpretation of ideas, information and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes predictions about a story based on the cover • Contributes to a class discussion about ideas in a text • Interprets images • Gathers literal information from a text • Shows understanding of meanings embedded in texts • Makes inferences about ideas implicit in a text • Discusses interpretation of texts read and viewed, with attention to relationship between written text and illustrations • Finds information for specific purposes in texts

Syllabus outcomes	Syllabus indicators
<p>RS2.7 Discusses how writers relate to their readers in different ways, how they create a variety of worlds through language and how they use language to achieve a wide range of purposes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies symbolic language in a text • Talks about different interpretations of written and visual texts • Identifies a writer's viewpoint
<p>WS2.9 Drafts, revises, proofreads and publishes well-structured texts that are more demanding in terms of topic, audience and written language features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses other texts as models for aspects of their own writing • Identifies key words and phrases • Uses a range of media including print, images and digital media to create texts

Teaching & learning activities

1. Introduce the unit with *You and Me: Our Place*

Leonie Norrington grew up at Barunga Aboriginal community, south of Katherine and central to the story is the portrayal of the long grass people who sleep out on foreshore reserves on the outskirts of Darwin.

Complete a **colour, symbol and image**¹ (CSI) chart for the word 'Indigenous'. Collect these to ascertain the student's initial beliefs and knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Record student's ideas in one colour so that at the end of unit, when you return to this same chart, responses can be in a different colour to provide students with a visual sense of the growth.

Before reading *You and Me: Our Place*

As a class, look at the cover, title and end notes of *You and Me: Our Place*. Ask students to suggest what clues about the story the cover gives to the reader.

- **What else is on the cover? Why have these symbols or images been included?**
- **Can we see different ways of looking at the world in the images the artist has chosen to use?**
- **What clues do we get about the story by looking at the cover?**

Use on the following activities as pre-reading strategies. Complete a predict-o-gram (see more below) based on the front cover. Use key vocabulary and names such as Uncle Tobias, Auntie Ruby, beach, fishing, park, sand, stingray, prawns and mangrove worms. Or provide students with four or five images from the text and ask them to work in groups to put the images in an order of their own choosing, to provide a predictive telling of the story.

A 'predict-o-gram' is used to activate a student's background and vocabulary knowledge before reading a piece of text. The teacher gives students words from the text and a chart with categories,

¹ Notes on CSI charts from the Visible Thinking website:

http://pzweb.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03d_UnderstandingRoutines/ColourSymbolImage/ColourSymbolImage_Routine.html

such as setting, characters, action, problem, and resolution. The students then put the words into the categories, making predictions about how the terms will be used in the reading. This strategy can be easily adapted for expository text by using content specific categories. Here the vocabulary and names suggested are Uncle Tobias, Auntie Ruby, beach, fishing, park, sand, stingray, prawns and mangrove worms. After the students place the words into categories, but before reading, the teacher may also ask the students to write a summary statement with the words.

Source: Adapted from [Before reading strategies](#)².

During reading *You and Me: Our Place*

Refer to the predict-o-gram or group predictions of the story, as *You and Me: Our Place* is read. Discuss why certain predictions may have been made and whether existing knowledge of ATSI cultures has an influence on the predictions.

Ask students to comment on the illustrations and layout in the book.

- **Do they consider that the artist's illustrations enhance the story? How is this achieved?**
- **Did the ending surprise the students?**
- **What were they expecting to happen as the story progressed?**
- **What are we being persuaded to infer about this specific Aboriginal culture, or about ATSI cultures in general based on the illustrations in this text?**
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Jointly construct a table with the headings *Information from the Text* and *Thoughts and Reactions*. Under the first heading list is happening in the story sequentially as well as interesting language and sentences. Under the second heading place matching information from the text that explains how the characters may be feeling, the reaction of the reader, or motivation of the author.

Refer to the language devices used in the text.

'The sand crunches with newness under our feet'

'Uncle Tobias sends the silver lure far out to sea to call the fish in'

'His basket smells of salt and darkness'

Encourage students to visualise the images being described and suggest reasons for the author's language choice.

Ask students to record similes that describe the setting and character in the story.

² Slideshare link to text on before reading strategies: <http://www.slideshare.net/bensucot/before-reading-strategies>

After reading *You and Me: Our Place*

Ask students to record their reaction to the story.

Introduce the idea of contemporary and traditional Indigenous cultures. Jointly construct a definition of both 'Indigenous' and 'cultures' and display within the classroom.

Have children write questions for each of the characters in the story and perform 'hot seat' in small groups. Introduce the idea of point of view. Place thought bubbles over the top of the artwork in *You and Me: Our Place*, to help describe the point of view of characters. Discuss why various characters may answer the same questions differently. Which characters represent Aboriginal Indigenous cultures and which characters represent traditional Aboriginal cultures?

Make text-to-text connections between *You and Me: Our Place* and *Stories from the Billabong*. Are these stories connected at all? How is the oral story telling tradition of Aboriginal Australians represented in *You and Me: Our Place*?

As a class, use sticky notes to label pictures *You and Me: Our Place* that represent either contemporary or traditional Aboriginal cultures. Allow students to justify their point of view if they don't agree with the group. Pay special attention to images that reflect both contemporary and traditional cultures simultaneously.

Select a page from the text to explore the use of colour in the illustration. Guide discussion on what colours Huxley used and how these colours represent the earth and the sea. Observe any distinctive aspects about how the characters have been painted.

Display only the text from a different page and ask students to create an image to illustrate the text based on some of the same painting techniques.

2. Activities for *Stories from the Billabong*

Before reading *Stories from the Billabong*

Ask students if they have heard any Dreaming stories, or if so, to identify different ways they first heard these stories. They may be by written word, spoken or sung word, by pictures or in movies.

Read the prelude to *Stories from the Billabong*. Highlight that the story they are about to hear has been translated from spoken Yorta Yorta language and that Aboriginal Australians traditionally told stories using spoken word (oral tales); through performance music, dance and song; and pictorially through art, such as sand or body art, but no Indigenous culture had a writing system. Explain that

these stories are a key part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander belief systems.

During reading *Stories from the Billabong*

As a class, look at the cover, title and image on the front page. Refer students to a picture of a billabong.



Photo: Fishing — Yellow Water Billabong, Kakadu National Park. Source: [Tourism NT](#)³

List all the ideas that that students associate with the image of the billabong. Add the new information to the class chart.

Make text-to-text connections between *You and Me: Our Place* and *Stories from the Billabong*. Are these stories connected at all?

³ Link to NT Tourism website from where Billabong image was sourced: <http://www.tourismnt.com.au/>

3. Activities for the story ‘Why the platypus is such a special animal’

Have students view and listen to the story *The Special Platypus*⁴, told by an Australian Aboriginal woman. Now read the story ‘Why the platypus is such a special animal’ in *Stories from the Billabong*. Ask students to consider the following questions as they are reading.

- **Who do you imagine is telling this story?**
- **Why might someone tell this story?**
- **What is the meaning of this story? Is it meant to teach the proper ways of behaving, to entertain? ... to warn against dangerous things? ... to explain the origins of something? ... to be responsible custodians of ‘country’?**

The very specific way stories relate to a particular landscape should be conveyed. The concept of ‘country’ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians being ‘custodians’ and having responsibility to the land should be conveyed. The stories are a way of learning about country and caring for it in the proper way.

After reading and viewing versions of ‘Why the platypus is such a special animal’

Encourage the students to look at similarities and differences between the oral and written versions of this story. Draw up a chart to display the similarities and differences between the two versions. Ensure students note the bush setting, the storyteller’s gestures and variation in voice tone, the insertion of cartoon images and the use of background music.

Have students in pairs recall the main points of the story verbally using a basic narrative structure. Ask students to suggest reasons for differences between the two versions.

Refer to the Aboriginal symbols (see more below) and their meanings, found at the back of *Stories from the Billabong*. Have students use these symbols to communicate part of the story of the platypus using pictures.

⁴ YouTube video telling of ‘Why the platypus is such a special animal’: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djH5M5ToW_I

Symbols

Explain that a symbol is a visual sign or shape and ask the students to identify symbols in the story and what they represent. Mention that the circle is an ancient symbol of unity and wholeness and ask if the students can give an explanation as to why.

Discuss with class symbols that are associated with other qualities and list them on the board, for example the peace sign, X for kisses, flags, sun, stars, the smiley face.

Learn more about traditional Aboriginal art symbols⁵.

Take suggestions from the class as to symbols that could be used instead of words. List them on the board. Ask students to write a sentence using symbols to replace words in some places. Share the students' sentences.

Use percussion instruments or GarageBand software to create a 'soundscape' for their story. Encourage students to justify their choices of sound, speed and volume and discuss the mood they are attempting to create.

4. Conclude the unit by completing the CSI chart

Revisit initial responses that went into the introductory CSI chart. Have children now brainstorm all the things they think of when they hear the word 'Indigenous'. Record on the class chart and begin to categorise responses into common areas, such as food, work, family, laws and rules, education, spiritual beliefs and stories. These will include responses that emerge as a result of reading. Have children complete the CSI chart to reflect their new understanding of the word 'Indigenous'.

Jointly construct some sentences that describe contemporary and traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australia.

As an extension students could apply the video techniques they noted in the telling of the 'The Special Platypus' and present a video of their readers' theatre version of *You and Me: Our Place* as a multimodal digital text, using print, image and sound (voice and music).

Find resources to help teachers in early years guide and help students in using ICT to [create digital stories](#)⁶.

⁵ Information on the Aboriginal Art Online website: <http://www.aboriginalartonline.com/culture/symbols.php>

⁶ Sites2See: Digital storytelling in the early years:

For the teacher

Find [teacher notes](#)⁷ (.doc 76.5 kB), a [cloze passage](#)⁸ and [crossword puzzle](#)⁹ for *You and Me: Our Place*. Find animated dreamtime stories at [Dust Echoes](#)¹⁰.

Guided by young Danaja and his djarda (grandfather) Wala Wala, students can interactively learn about the close relationship of the Burarra people to their land, near Maningrida in Arnhem Land, through [Burrara Gathering](#)¹¹. Listen to Aboriginal stories about [bunyips](#)¹² and read Aboriginal stories from [astronomy](#)¹³. [Message Stick](#) is a half hour TV program about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lifestyles, culture and issues.

The [Indigenous Resources](#)¹⁴ section at Aussie Educator has extensive links. Learn more about embedding Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into classroom practice using the [8ways framework](#)¹⁵. Consider consulting with and involving your local Aboriginal community, perhaps inviting a storyteller into the classroom. If your school has one, approach your Aboriginal Education Officer for community contacts. Useful publications include [Working With Aboriginal Communities: A guide to Community Consultation and Protocols](#)¹⁶ (.pdf 1.7 MB).

<http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Cli/Download.aspx?resID=7398&v=1&preview=true&target=PUBLIC>

⁷ Teacher notes for *You and Me: Our Place*, URL: [http://www.workingtitlepress.com.au/teachers_notes/TeacherNotes You and Me OurPlace.doc](http://www.workingtitlepress.com.au/teachers_notes/TeacherNotes%20You%20and%20Me%20OurPlace.doc)

⁸ Cloze passage activity for *You and Me: Our Place*:
http://members.ozemail.com.au/~irenelesley/public_html/YouMeOurPlaceCloze.htm

⁹ Crossword puzzle for *You and Me: Our Place*:
http://members.ozemail.com.au/~irenelesley/public_html/YouMeOurPlaceCWord.htm

¹⁰ The ABC website Dust Echoes: <http://www.abc.net.au/dustechoes/>

¹¹ Burrara Gathering: <http://burarra.questacon.edu.au/home.html>

¹² National Library Bunyips website: <http://www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/bunyips/flash-site/index-flash.html>

¹³ Questacon's Aboriginal Stories arising from astronomy: http://www.questacon.edu.au/starlab/aboriginal_astronomy.html

¹⁴ Aussie Educator Indigenous resources for teachers:
<http://www.aussieeducator.org.au/resources/teaching/indigenousresources.html>

¹⁵ The 8ways framework for classroom practice: <http://8ways.wikispaces.com/>

¹⁶ *Working with Aboriginal Communities*: <http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/files/working-with-aboriginal-communities.pdf>