

BACKYARD Footy



Carl Merrison illustrated by Samantha Campbell

TEACHERS RESOURCES

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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INTRODUCTION

Backyard Footy is a picture book written by Carl Merrison, and illustrated by Samantha Campbell. The story follows Jy, who plays football alone in his backyard in the Kimberley. As the day progresses, Jy collects friends from around town to play, because playing with mates is even better than playing alone!

Backyard Footy explores the importance of sport, the role of joy and adventure, and the inescapable importance of mateship. Merrison and Campbell showcase the rich diversity of First Nations communities, encouraging readers to see beyond dominant stereotypes.

Educators can find connections to the Australian Curriculum embedded throughout these notes. The discussions and activities referenced can also be easily mapped to state-based curriculum documents.

BEFORE READING

Activity: Ask students to bring in an item that they use to play with their friends. This task can be scaffolded to ensure that students do not feel any pressure—provide them with examples of accessible items that would be within reach for students of any socio-economic background, such as a pet rock or a tennis ball. Have students sit in a circle, and explain why their object is important to them. Allow them to ask questions about each item. Ask them to consider how they came to own the item, and how long it has been important to them. Ask students to consider the similarities and differences between the items that they chose. What patterns can they discern? Where do they use their items? (Australian Curriculum - Personal and Social Capability - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/personal-and-social-capability/>)

Discussion: Ask students to think of characters from books or movies that play games with their friends. Are they sports-based games, or games that use other parts of their imagination? What kind of spaces do they play in? How might this be different depending on where the characters live? (Australian Curriculum - English - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>)

Discussion: Begin by showing students the front cover of the book, and reading the title aloud. What can they notice about the colours and patterns on the cover? Using the context clues provided by the title and the cover art, what predictions can students make about the story? (Australian Curriculum - English - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>)

Discussion: Ask students what they know about 'backyard footy'. What kind of football do the students play? Scaffold students' understanding about the different types of football that are played by people in different geographic regions and by people of different cultural backgrounds. (Australian Curriculum - Health and Physical Education - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/health-and-physical-education/>)

AFTER READING

Discussion: Ask students to share any experience they might have of going on an adventure with their friends. Scaffold the discussion with a range of examples that would be accessible for all students. Have they been on a school camp with their friends? Have they stayed over and played with their cousins? What kind of things did they do, and how did they spend their time away from adults? Why do they think that 'playing with mates is better'? (Australian Curriculum - Personal and Social Capability - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/personal-and-social-capability/>)

Activity: Ask students to consider Jy's movement throughout his community. Discuss how the text uses verbs to chart his movement, and his connections with his friends. Identify each part of speech that AJ uses as he unboxes his new boots. What verbs are repeated throughout the text? What are some other ways that students could describe the interactions Jy has with his friends? Students could construct a similar description for their own backyard activities, following the pattern used in the text. Have students share their examples with each other. How do they compare to the original text? (Australian Curriculum - English - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>)

Activity: Place students in pairs or small groups and assign each group a two-page spread from the text. What do they notice about the characters on their assigned pages? Are they football superstars, or do they play for fun? What is in their backyards? What about their clothes and their friends? Have students share these and any other observations with the class. Guide students to discuss the similarities and differences between the characters, deepening their understanding of the rich diversity within First Nations communities. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>)

Discussion: Point students' attention to the colour palette of the text. What do they notice about the words that are in black and white? How does this colour change shape the reader's understanding of the text? (Australian Curriculum - Visual Arts - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>)

Activity: Review each page of writing with the students, focusing on how Jy engages with his friends. Have students consider how he gathers his mates as he moves through town. Have them fill in a chart to track how many people are involved in each game of footy. Can they notice any patterns? Are there any disruptions to the patterns? (Australian Curriculum - Mathematics - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/mathematics/>)

Game	Number of people involved
Marking practice	1
Kick-to-kick	2
Going for goal	
Two-on-two	
Handball drills	
Speckies	
Kicking bananas	
Playing with mates on the oval	

Activity: Reread the book with students, focusing on the use of the conjunction 'but'. Ask them to count how many times the conjunction is used in the text. Explore the role of but in a sentence, considering how it can be used to change the direction of a sentence and to provide balance. Ask students to consider individual examples of the use of the conjunction. Why might Merrison believe that 'kick-to-kick is fun but going for goal is better'? Have students craft their own sentences using the conjunction 'but' in Merrison's style. Begin by providing them with a sentence stem to develop their skill and understanding. (Australian Curriculum - English - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>)

Discussion: One of the central themes of *Backyard Footy* is mateship. Unpack the term with students. Ask them when they feel connected to their friends, and when they do not. What is similar and different in their responses? What activities do they like doing with their friends, and what activities do they like doing alone? What activities do they enjoy doing alone that are even better when their friends join in? (Australian Curriculum - Personal and Social Capability - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/personal-and-social-capability/>)

Discussion: Ask students to consider where the book might be set. You may provide them with some examples of communities in the Kimberley such as Halls Creek. Have them look at the book's illustrations. What do they notice about Jy's town that is similar, or different to Halls Creek? What is different about Jy's community and their own? Do people have backyards where they live? Are children allowed to leave their house and join their friends for adventures? (Australian Curriculum - Humanities and Social Sciences - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>)

Activity: Have students consider the animals that feature in the book's illustrations. What do they notice about the animals? Are they pets, farm animals or wild animals? How do Jy and his friends interact with the animals? What animals do their friends and family have? (Australian Curriculum - Humanities and Social Sciences - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>)

Activity: Ask students to consider the landscape where Jy and his mates kick bananas. How do they think the illustrator created the trees and creek? What do they notice about the colours used on these pages? Have students create a picture of their backyard, local park or school playground using Campbell's style. Ask them to consider what colours they would use to represent the places that they play with their friends. (Australian Curriculum - Visual Arts - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>)

Discussion: One of the central themes of the book is adventure. Ask students to list all of the places that Jy visits with his friends. What are some of the students' favourite places to explore with their friends? Are there parts of the school or local parts that they have explored? What are some of the feelings that they associate with going on an adventure? (Australian Curriculum - Personal and Social Capability - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/personal-and-social-capability/>)

Activity: Each of Jy's friends has something new and different to offer the children's game of backyard footy. What do each of them bring to Jy's adventure? The chart below can help shape students' responses. (Australian Curriculum - English - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>)

Child	Contribution
Kitara	Good at footy
Cedric	Has better goals
Krystal	
Francis	
Samo	
Irving	
Shane	
Isiah	

Discussion: How do students include other people in their games? What strategies can they use when they feel lonely, or need to approach someone to play a game with them? What can students do if they notice that someone is struggling to join in with a game? (<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/health-and-physical-education/>)

Activity: Ask students to consider the punctuation of the dialogue used throughout the book. What rules and patterns can they notice? Explicitly teach students the roles of exclamation marks and inverted commas. Have students repunctuate blank dialogue from text, and then write exclamatory dialogue of their own. (Australian Curriculum - English - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>)

Activity: Ask students to consider each page of the book again. How much time do they think has passed during Jy's day? What clues do they have about the passing of time throughout the book? (Australian Curriculum - Mathematics - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/mathematics/>)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THESE NOTES

Ernest Price is an experienced English teacher who has led English faculties in a range of secondary settings. He has worked with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, as well as the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, to develop curriculum and resources for teachers. Ernest has written teachers notes for numerous publications, including *The Hate Race* and *Foreign Soil* by Maxine Beneba Clarke. He is the author of a forthcoming novel, to be published in 2024.