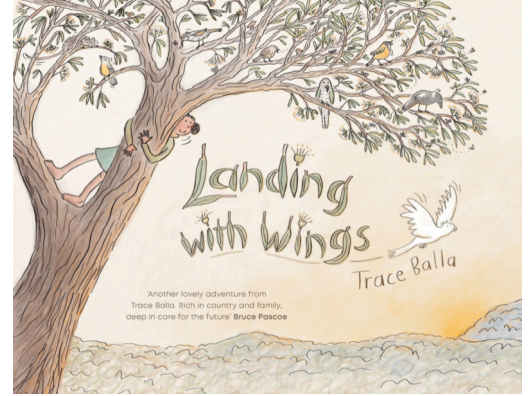


# Landing with Wings

By Trace Balla



April 2020 ISBN 9781760296957  
Hardback picture book  
Recommended for 8-12-year-olds

## Summary

Miri's been on the move and now she's finding her feet, her freedom, her community and her home, treading lightly all the way.

A story about spreading your wings and putting down roots in an ancient land.

'Another lovely adventure from Trace Balla. Rich in country and family, deep in care for the future.' **Bruce Pascoe**

'A beautiful book about being connected to the world at ground level. I feel like I've made a new friend through Trace's exquisitely accessible drawings and gentle prose.'  
**Alison Lester**



It is said the best children's writers manage to find their inner child, and that is certainly what Trace Balla has done in her previous books, *Rivertime* (WINNER: Readings Prize and Wilderness Society Award) and *Rockhopping* (WINNER: CBCA Awards), and has continued to do here in *Landing with Wings*. Her naive, child-like drawings are instantly accessible, yet rich in detail. The cartoon-style text is likewise simple and fast-moving, yet filled with revelations about the characters, local wildlife and landscape.

The strong interplay between words and illustrations allows Balla to tell a great deal of the story solely in dialogue. Interspersed with this is the quirky voice of Miri Blossom writing to her much-missed tea-tree-by-the-sea, the frog in her backyard and far-off Liang-a-nhuk (Mount Alexander), adding pathos and humour, as well as warmth, to this charming story.

## Use in the curriculum

*Landing with Wings* suits upper primary school classes and, in the right context, lower secondary classes. It suits a number of learning areas, including English, Humanities and Social Sciences, Civics and Citizenship, Science, Maths, and Health and PE. There is great potential to consolidate Cross Curriculum Priorities referred to in this story such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Sustainability. The story's themes can also be explored with General Capabilities in mind such as Information and Communication Technology, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding, and Personal and Social Capability.

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## Themes

- Seasons • ecology • Aboriginal culture • bird and animal life • coping with change
- connecting with country and nature

## Discussion questions and activities

- Before reading *Landing with Wings*, ask students to consider the title, illustration and Bruce Pascoe quote, then answer the following questions:
  - To whom might the title *Landing with Wings* refer: the birds on the cover, or the girl in the tree, or maybe both?
  - What might the title mean? If birds fly with wings, why might the author have chosen the word *Landing* in the title?
  - What does the title's font tell us about what sort of book this might be? [Hint: look closely to see what each letter is made from.]
  - Why do you think the quote from Bruce Pascoe is on the cover?
- Divide students into small groups to research the land of the Dja Dja Wurrung people, including the Victorian Goldfields and surrounds. Some useful websites include:

<https://achris.vic.gov.au/weave/wca.html>

<http://www.djadjawurrung.com.au/>

<https://www.nma.gov.au/learn/kspace/victorian-goldfields-1854/kids>

<https://www.goldfieldsguide.com.au/blog/12/the-victorian-goldfields>

Ask students to find out:

- Where on a map of Victoria are the Goldfields?
  - Why are they called the Goldfields?
  - What are some of the names given to this land by its First Australians, the Dja Dja Wurrung people?
  - What is this land's history – its Dja Dja Wurrung history, and its European settler history?
- Class discussion: after reading the book through, ask students why they think Trace Balla has dedicated the story of Miri to a 'Syrian girl seeking asylum who I saw in a video not so long ago...' Encourage discussion by asking questions such as:
    - How did Miri's feelings about home change over the course of the story?
    - How might a Syrian refugee feel about home after coming to a new country?
    - What are the things that make Miri feel like she is really home at the end of the story?
    - Do you think these things are special to Miri, or does everyone (and maybe everything alive) seek them?

- Turn to the book's front endpapers [the double-page spread just inside the book]. Why do you think the author decided to include both the Dja Dja Wurrung and English language names here? Turn to page 56 of the story, and in your own words, explain why Miri, Wingo and Holly-Rose prefer the local language name. [Bonus exercise: Listen to how 'Dja Dja Wurrung' and other Koorie (Victorian) language names are pronounced: <https://museumsvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka/about-us/first-peoples/victorian-aboriginal-languages/>]
- Sometimes words don't need to be used to express themes in a story. One example of this starts on page 12 of the story, when Miri's mum and another woman are both admiring fabric in the op shop. After you read the story, could you tell who this other woman turned out to be, and what happens to that fabric as the story progresses? What are the themes that Trace Balla might be communicating here? [Answer: the two women are happy to share the fabric and use it sustainably. Miri's mum makes curtains, a doona cover, pockets for Miri's skirt, a scarf and tote bags with it, while Layla makes a new dress, curtains and a tablecloth for her caravan.]
- Sometimes artists repeat an illustration as a way to communicate information. Look at the images of Miri's school playground on pages 10, 22, 31, 58 and 63 and see if you can spot the differences between each image, which show how the seasons change over the year, and how Miri slowly makes friends over the same time.
- Trace Balla sometimes shows time passing in the same illustration. Turn to page 69 to see an example of this. Can you spot the design technique she has used here to show that what we are looking at is happening over an extended period of time? [Answer: vertical lines dividing similar but different images.]
- Much of *Landing with Wings* is written in the first person and present tense. We see the story through Miri's eyes, and it is as though we are right there with her. Why do you think Trace Balla wrote the story like this?
- How has Trace Balla shown the difference between words characters speak out loud and their thoughts in *Landing with Wings*? Why do you think she thought it was important to include both in the story? Give examples of other ways information is presented in the story. [Hint: discuss narration, letter-writing, journal-writing and labelling.]
- Read page 65 and write a paragraph about sharing different cultural traditions, such as recipes, music, dance, song, clothes. What benefits do you think people get from sharing their own traditions and learning about others' traditions? Can you think of an experience of your own where you have shared or received something cultural?
- List five things you learned about the Bibron's toadlet in this story. In your own words, can you describe its lifecycle, as shown on the book's back endpapers?
- What genre of book would you describe *Landing with Wings* as being? In what ways does it fit this genre?
- Storyboarding: Try storyboarding a sequence of events from *Landing with Wings*. Draw stick figures to rough each scene out. Where would you use a narrator and where would you use dialogue boxes, to tell the story in the best way? Should you use lots of images, or keep it simple with just a few?
- Nature journaling: Try sketching your garden, balcony or a section of your local park at different times of the year. Think carefully about the way changes in the weather might create changes in the location. Include the sounds you might hear at different times (cicadas in the summer, for instance) and the types of creatures that appear in particular seasons (or how the same creature might change between seasons).



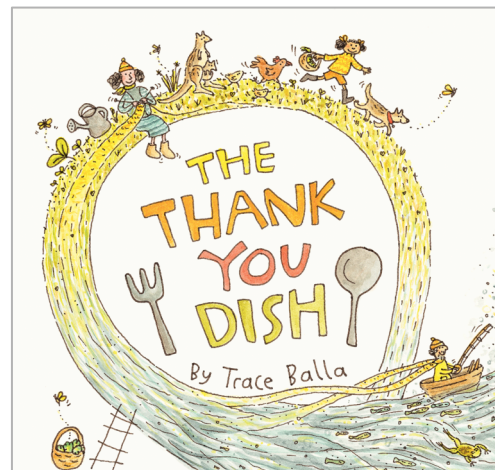
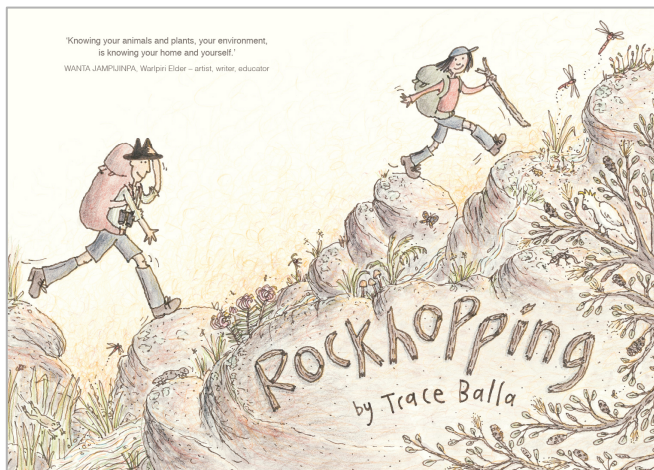
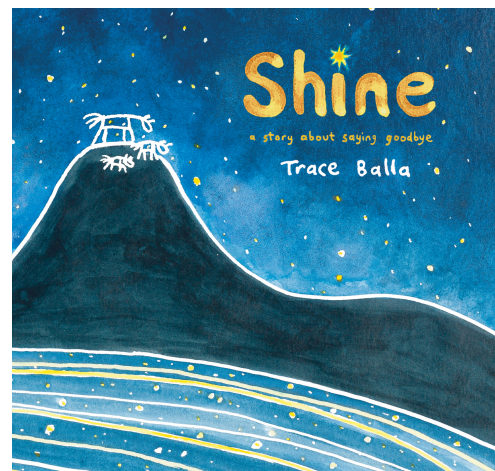
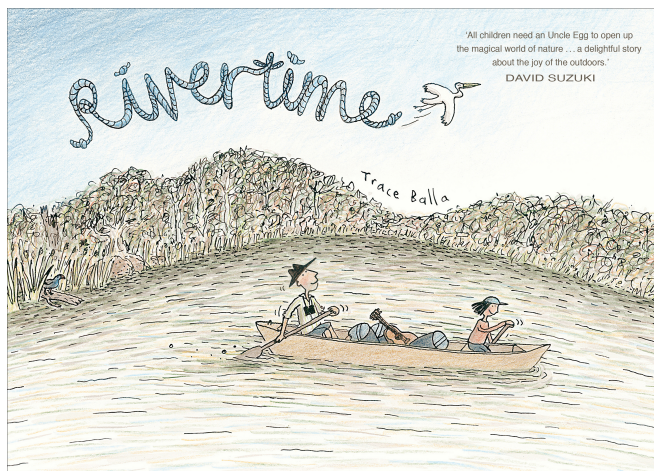
## Other books by Trace Balla

*Rivertime*, Allen & Unwin, 2014 (hardback picture book)

*Shine*, Allen & Unwin, 2015 (hardback picture book)

*Rockhopping*, Allen & Unwin, 2016 (hardback picture book)

*The Thank You Dish*, Allen & Unwin, 2017 (hardback picture book) & 2020 (paperback picture book)





## Author's inspiration

'I wrote *Landing with Wings* in many ways for a girl from Syria I saw in a documentary, a girl sitting in a detention centre. I wrote it as a story of hope – a sort of map of a way forward into a new homeland – a story of crossing boundaries, fences, finding a way into belonging, to community and country. A story of welcome, of home. This book took a few years to make, and I hope in that time that girl found her way to her own landing, with roots and wings of freedom. ('Give your child roots and wings' was a Chinese proverb shared with me when my son was born.)

The story follows a year in which to land; a year of changing seasons. Making this book inspired me to observe the seasons more closely, and in doing so find delight in each seasonal signal – the call of the first cuckoo, coinciding with the first golden wattle flowers, and my most favourite of all, the song of the golden whistler.

It was crucial for me from the very beginning to work with local Dja Dja Wurrung people on this book. Elder Uncle Rick Nelson, in particular, was involved in the story's Aboriginal content. I wish to also mention Aunty Julie McHale, Aunty Kath Coff, Aunty Kerry Douglas and Shiralee, from all of whom I learn so much. I see how stretched, hard-working, proud and grounded the Elders here are. I can barely begin to imagine the struggles they and the generations before them have gone through in the last 230 odd years – which is why I am so deeply humbled by their generosity, courage and commitment to sharing culture. I spent time very early on working through ideas, especially with Uncle Rick, but also with the children of the Meeting Place Aboriginal culture school, where I volunteer, and with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation in Bendigo to go through the protocols when using cultural content. I feel any further cultural content is not for me to include in my books at this time. But I am glad to make a book that I'd have really appreciated as a child, for at that time I had zero idea there were any Aboriginal people living in our state! Let alone people with ongoing connection to country, keeping cultural practices alive and growing. Times are changing, and it is an honour to take a small part in this cultural revival, and to witness the huge generosity and buzz of the turning of the tide.'

— Trace Balla

## The author

Trace Balla is often found sketching in nature, riding her bike, dancing, and growing vegies in her garden in central Victoria. Her background is in illustration, community arts, art therapy, animation, and writing songs and stories, and she enjoys visiting schools and festivals to talk about her work. Trace's previous books have been highly acclaimed, winning the CBCA Book of the Year Award, Readings Children's Book Prize, and Wilderness Society's Environment Award for Children's Literature, as well as being shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Speech Pathology Book of the Year Awards and Adelaide Festival Awards for Children's Literature.

